

## 48 Hours 821

### Chapter 821: Visitor

Since the previous strategy did not work, the priestess' attitude towards Zhang Heng had changed drastically. Even her tone had softened down. Although it still sounded emotionless, she was at least not as aggressive and rude as before. Now, it looked like she was trying to negotiate, and her offer seemed like it would benefit Zhang Heng a lot.

However, Zhang Heng did not immediately agree to it. Since they were negotiating now, Zhang Heng wanted to bargain with her. He paused for a while and said, "One more thing. After I complete this task, I don't want to be chosen as the executor of the oracle anymore."

"That's impossible." The priestess shook her head. "First thing, it's against the rules. Secondly, even if I am willing to promise you, this is still something that I can't control. Although I issue the oracle, the executor is selected by the Assassin Council. If everyone thinks you are suitable to execute the oracle, you will be selected to become the executor. Under normal circumstances, the same person will not be allowed to execute the oracle twice in a row."

However, an answer as such did not satisfy Zhang Heng. So he continued, "Then, you can choose not to issue an oracle. Dadatis says there have been cases where no oracle appeared for more than 40 years."

"..."

The priestess was speechless, "What do you think of me? I'm just the spokesperson of Kreis. I can't decide when Kreis will issue an oracle. And you heard about the Hound from Dadatis, right? This is not a peaceful time for us. Even if there is no oracle, you may not be able to sit there and enjoy your life."

"Then what else can you offer me?" Zhang Heng asked.

The priestess bit her lip, "If you must take advantage of this transaction, what about me?"

Zhang Heng was quite surprised. He did not expect this ice-cold woman would offer herself to him.

"Aren't you a priestess?"

"I am not the saint of Vesta. Kreis's priestess does not need to keep their virginity. In fact, our doctrine also involves relationships between men and women. Kreis encourages such a thing. It is part of the balance."

"Thank you... for your love. Unfortunately, I am not interested in freezing ice," Zhang Heng said. Since there was a black cloth blocking his vision, he could not see the sorrow that flashed through the priestess' eyes. This was probably the biggest insult for a woman.

But the latter's expression quickly returned to normal, and she said coldly, "Then you should name your offer."

"Forget it. I don't want to make this difficult for you. Besides letting me go to the library, I want you to let Dadatis retire early." Zhang Heng changed his terms.

"Huh?" This time it was the priestess' turn to be surprised by Zhang Heng. She did not expect his second condition to be actually related to Dadatis.

“That man is old. Even though he refuses to admit it, his skills and movement speed are slow as a frozen earthworm. He can only rely on his wittiness to survive. In other words, he is no longer useful to the Balance Blade. Besides, now that you have me, you can let that man go on his retirement,” Zhang Heng said.

“You are worried that our war with the Hounds will affect him, aren’t you,” the priestess suddenly chipped in. “I didn’t expect him to mean so much to you. Unless he asks to retire and pass his position to you, no one can force him to leave the Balance Blade. I think I have an idea. My relationship with him is quite good. I can find an excuse to deceive him into traveling somewhere remote for a trip. It will be at least a year before he comes back here. By that time, you should have taken his place. What do you think?”

“Deal,” Zhang Heng said.

The priestess finally breathed a sigh of relief when she heard this. This meeting was completely different from what she had imagined. From the very beginning, she was never in control of the negotiation. Neither the prison-like carriage nor her subsequent threats allowed her to take the reins of the situation. In the end, she had to pay a higher price to convince Zhang Heng to work for her.

“How can I inform you when I find Altrus?” Zhang Heng asked afterward.

“Go to the Perfume Shop Street, find a perfume shop with iris flowers outside, and tell the owner that you want to buy a bottle of unscented perfume. After that, pay one Sestertius to the person who welcomes you, and he will take you to my people.”

After they came to an agreement, the priestess’s attitude towards Zhang Heng became ice-cold again, as if she had completely lost interest in him.

So Zhang Heng was smart enough not to stay here any longer. He laid down in the carriage. The priestess then lowered the cover, summoned the slaves from outside to come in, and sent Zhang Heng back to the small bridge from which he came. When he arrived there, Dadatis and his boat were gone.

The priestess was very cautious. She did not disclose any location-related information to him. Through the black cloth, Zhang Heng figured out that he was in a small room. Most of the time, he spent his time in that small and damp carriage.

However, if the other party thought they could hide the information from him, they had clearly underestimated him. Zhang Heng then looked at the watch in his hand. This watch had gone through several quests with him, and the most magical part was no matter what era it was or how cautious the people were, they tended to ignore the existence of this watch.

It is as if the watch was the blind spot of the world. Although the watch displayed the time in the real world, as long as Zhang Heng multiplied it by the time-flow-rate of the copy, he would get the exact time of the dungeon. When Zhang Heng entered the carriage, he placed the watch beside his ear. He divided the route into equal parts from the tick interval of the second hand.

He also memorized the time whenever the driver steered the carriage. Through the degree of the bumpiness that he experienced on the road earlier, he remembered the path that he had gone through.

Considering that the priestess might hide somewhere to observe him after sending him to the bridge, Zhang Heng did not immediately turn around to look for the room where he been to just now. For now, he returned to his residence first.

Zhang Heng went to bed and slept until the following afternoon. On the other hand, the slave girl got up early and prepared a meal for Zhang Heng. Her master, however, had no intention to wake up. So she could only put the breakfast on the table and wait for Zhang Heng to wake up. At the same time, she put her chin on her palm and stared into blank space.

In the end, the breakfast on the table became Zhang Heng's lunch. Zhang Heng got up from the bed and yawned. The slave girl expressed concern about his current situation. "Although we still have half of the money we used to have, I don't think we can last another two months if we don't work. How about I go to the laundry house to take up a job."

"Now you remember that there are other jobs available? Don't worry. Money is not a problem. Someone will send us money soon," Zhang Heng said as he picked up a piece of bread.

Speak of the devil. They heard a knock on the door almost instantly.

### **Chapter 822: New Job**

The slave girl went and opened the door. Instead of seeing the person who would send them money, she saw heavily armed guards, making her a little nervous.

"You... Who are you looking for?"

"Oh, does the champion of Amphitheatrum Flavium live here?" A young man who did not look much older than Zhang Heng squeezed himself through the four guards and came to the front.

"Yes, that's right." Zhang Heng's voice came from behind the slave girl. He then walked toward the young man.

The slave girl did not want to cause any trouble, so she quickly walked away from the entrance and retreated to a corner.

Zhang Heng then shook hands with the young man before allowing him to enter the house.

There was a smile on the young man's face, "Hello! I also watched your gladiatorial performance at Amphitheatrum Flavium. It was indeed exhilarating, especially the battle between you and the Giant. Words can no longer describe how epic the battle was. That was definitely the greatest battle I have ever watched. Maybe I can tell my grandson about it in thirty years... Oh, I haven't introduced myself to you yet. I'm Clint, the emperor's advisor."

Zhang Heng's eyes moved slightly when he heard who the young man was. He knew about Clint. According to the information given by Dadatis, Clint, and his target, Altrus, were the most trusted advisors of Commodus. Known as the Commodus's right-hand men, one of them worked behind the curtain, and the other one worked in the light. Both of them helped Commodus to govern the country and respond to threats from all sides.

Earlier, Zhang Heng had figured that Commodus could not wait to recruit him. However, he did not expect him to send Clint.

With Clint's current position, there had to be many things that he had to attend to daily. He could have sent his foot soldiers to come and look for Zhang Heng. However, he insisted on meeting Zhang Heng personally. This was obviously a sign of goodwill.

Once he entered the house, Zhang Heng asked Clint politely to sit by the table. That was the only spot in the house where Zhang Heng could talk to his guests. After that, Zhang Heng asked the slave girl to pour two glasses of water for them.

"Presumably, you already know what I'm here for. Yes, our emperor admires you very much, and he hopes you can consider working for us." Clint wasted no time talking nonsense. Once he sat down, he started to explain his intentions.

However, Zhang Heng did not immediately agree to it. Instead, he said, "Of course, I also hope that I can help lighten the emperor's burden. But as you can see, I am just a gladiator who has just regained his freedom. I come from a distant, foreign land, and I don't know much about the political situation. I am worried..."

"I can understand your worries. Don't you worry, my friend. The place that you will work in will be different from the Senate, surrounded by a corrupted atmosphere. There, you find greedy old men everywhere. I am only a commoner, and I used to wander in the streets as well. However, I was lucky enough to be recruited by an open-minded and unorthodox emperor. He is willing to make use of people like you and me and give us the opportunities to grow further." Clint patted Zhang Heng's shoulder, "There's nothing you need to worry about. So there's nothing for you to worry about. As long as you are capable, there will always be a position here for you to fill in."

"Then where should I start?" Zhang Heng asked.

"Very well, it seems like you are readied for the new job. Next, let me tell you what we need you to do." Clint was still polite and enthusiastic, and it took him a pretty long time to explain in detail his given tasks. He was very patient. Considering that this was Zhang Heng's first task, his job was not that complicated. And it had something to do with his previous job as a gladiator.

In the second century, there were no surveillance cameras and criminal investigation equipment. It was a problem for every ruler to maintain law and order in the city. And the population of Rome had exceeded one million. Most of them who lived at the bottom rungs of the society were thieves, crooks, killers. They were very active in every street, and crime took place almost every minute.

The job of the patrol team was to stop the crime in time and catch the criminal as quickly as possible after the crime happened. The first job Zhang Heng received from Commodus was to assist the patrol team in maintaining law and order.

"Of course, you can't take care of such a big city by yourself. So, you just need to pick an area," Clint said as he took out the map of Rome and spread it out on the table.

But at that moment, a man dressed as a servant walked in from outside and whispered something to Clint. And Clint's face changed slightly. When he looked at Zhang Heng again, he showed a touch of embarrassment.

Upon seeing this, Zhang Heng took the initiative to speak, "Almost everything has been explained clearly. If you have anything urgent to attend to, you should make a move first."

Clint seemed to feel bad about it.

"His Majesty is very concerned about your affairs. I pushed all the morning arrangements to meet you in person. Initially, I wanted you to personally check out your workplace, but a sudden emergency requires my attention. I have to deal with it right away. I have an idea," Clint thought about it for a while and beckoned a guard into the house, "This is Pannonax from the Janissary Guard. He has dealt with the patrol gang before. Regarding picking the area, you can ask for his advice. Don't worry."

Clint lowered his voice a little, "...It doesn't matter if you don't achieve too much. As long as there are no major mistakes, I will speak good things of you to the emperor."

"Thank you so much," Zhang Heng replied in kind.

"Welcome to join us. It is always exciting to see the team grow," Clint smiled again. This sunny and cheerful young man seemed to like to smile a lot. "Let's join hands to take on senators that look down on people with an ordinary background."

After speaking, Clint and left with his servant hurriedly, and three of the four guards he brought with him quickly followed behind him. And the guard with a knife wound between his eyebrows stayed behind. He should be Pannonax.

As a result, before Zhang Heng greeted him, Pannonax's face was darkened. He walked toward the table, pointed to an area on the map, and said rudely, "The area you are responsible for is here. Go and report there before dark."

"Wait, but the master said that he's free to choose the area he wants to patrol?"

Before Zhang Heng could speak his mind, the slave girl in the corner started to fight for Zhang Heng's right.

Pannonax sneered, glared at Zhang Heng, like a vulture staring at its prey, "Are you here to work or recruit others to work? How about we let you guard the palace?"

Zhang Heng waved his hand to stop the slave girl from speaking again. He then nodded and said, "Fine. I will head there."

Pannonax was a little surprised when he heard Zhang Heng's reply. According to his expectation, Zhang Heng should be fuming right now, and he might even attempt to beat him up. After all, he was the champion of the gladiatorial performance that was held recently in Rome. Although Pannonax did not watch the performance, he figured that Zhang Heng's strength should be outstanding.

People like him usually could not resist the desire to use their strength whenever they encountered trouble since this was the easiest way for them to solve the problem. However, Zhang Heng seemed to have no intention to do so.

Pannonax did not even see that Zhang Heng was holding on to his anger. The latter seemed calm as if he had foreseen that such a thing would happen. This made Pannonax a little uncomfortable, but it did not

matter to him. He had set more than one trap for Zhang Heng to step on. He assumed that there was no way Zhang Heng could avoid the next trap.

Chapter 823: Working For The Emperor Is Perilous

The slave girl was still irritated after Pannonax left.

“What kind of person is that? We didn’t owe him any money. Why would he put on such a stinking look when he talked to us? Look at Clint. He could be so polite.”

“Hmm.”

“Clint told you that you could choose the area you liked. Why did Pannonax arrange it for you then?”

“Ok.”

“I think he has bad intentions. He didn’t find a good place for you, and he doesn’t look like a good guy. Don’t let him...”

“Plot against me?”

“Yes, I’m pretty sure that he is plotting against you. I heard that the people in the palace are not that simple. They cook up plans to eliminate the people they don’t like.” The slave girl felt that she performed rather well this time. She could not believe that she could see through Pannonax’s evil plan with a single glance. She thought that no one else could see through him except for her. At least for that moment, she was standing on the pinnacle of truth.

“Hmm.”

“Don’t you have anything else to say except hmm?” The slave girl was speechless.

“Then what do you expect me to do?” Zhang Heng asked rhetorically.

“At least go and look for Clint and tell him what Pannonax has done to you. Clint would not let him off the hook.”

“Hmm.”

“What do you mean by hmm?”

“Do you think Clint would not know what Pannonax had just done?”

“What do you mean?” The slave girl was a little at a loss when she heard what Zhang Heng said, “But Clint wasn’t present at the time, right? He left in a hurry.”

“What you said is quite right. We have no grievances with Pannonax, and we didn’t owe him any money either. So, why did he mistreat me? He even risked getting being beaten by me just to irritate me? Especially considering that I will probably become an important person to the emperor in the future.”

“Yes, why?” The slave girl was puzzled.

“Because Clint asked him to do so.” Zhang Heng smiled.

“Huh?” The slave girl felt that something was not right. After thinking about it, she finally grasped the key point, “But we have no grudges with Clint, and we don’t owe him money.”

“But I might be blocking his path,” Zhang Heng said lightly. “A small group like this gets all the authority from the emperor. And although the emperor is the supreme ruler of the empire, he does not possess unlimited power. In other words, if one more person joins the group, the new member will receive part of the power. Of course, it won’t be enough to make Clint target me. It is probably because the emperor visited me privately some time ago. And Clint feels threatened by it.”

The slave girl opened her mouth wide. She felt like she was listening to a story from another world.

Zhang Heng decided to explain everything clearly to the slave girl, “If he goes against me personally, everything will go smoothly for him if he wins. However, if he fails to bring me down, he would be putting himself in a dangerous situation. That’s because he’ll be adding another enemy to his list. For a mature politician, it’s unworthy to take the risk. Due to all these reasons, he chooses to smile at me and act like a good guy.

“On the other hand, he lets Pannonax be the bad guy. If things go wrong, he can abandon Pannonax. And I won’t bother him if I turn out to be the winner. On the contrary, he might think that I’ll have a good impression on him because he reaches out to help me in difficult times. At worst, he would get himself an extra political ally.”

“Is th- that... the case?” the slave girl stammered. “So Pannonax is willing to be a shield for others?”

“Of course, he’s not happy about it. It is common for a person like him to become their superior’s shield if they want to be promoted to a higher rank. If he helps Clint get rid of me, Clint will naturally take good care of him in the future. This is something consensual. With his current position, it is necessary for him to take a little risk if he wants to reap the benefits,” Zhang Heng said as he picked up his unfinished slice of bread.

“He deliberately tried to annoy me earlier. He probably expected me to beat him up. If I did as he wished, he could use that against me. Commodore has a good first impression of me. However, I’m still a gladiator to him, and he didn’t know whether I can take on the big task. The first task given to me was actually more like a test.”

The slave girl could not help but shudder. She had never thought that humans could be so complicated.

The person who smiles at you on the surface might want to stab you in the back. What surprised the slave girl more, was that Zhang Heng was still in the mood to finish his breakfast.

“Working for the emperor turns out to be very dangerous. Better don’t take the job. At most, I can go and work at the laundry house. We can make some money easily if we want,” the slave girl blurted anxiously, “Or we can leave Rome and settle down in Syria? I met a friend when I was in the gladiator school. She comes from the Syrian province. She told me about the scenery there.”

“If I wanted to make money, I can earn a lot from performing in the Victor Arena.” Zhang Heng finished eating bread and peeled a fig. “Ah, this is just a small matter. I can handle it. We will stay in Rome.”

“But... According to what you said, the man named Clint has already started to plot against you. Even if he fails this time, he will not stop until he succeeds in eliminating you.”

“Of course, the area that he asked Pannonax to choose for me is definitely a high-risk zone.”

“What should I do then?” The slave girl looked sad.

“Let’s check it out first,” Zhang Heng finally finished his breakfast and wiped his mouth.

He did not wait until dark to report to the patrol team.

It was mainly because of Zhang Heng’s unfamiliarity with the city of Rome. Hence, he needed to do some preparations in advance. It could prevent the patrol team from giving him the wrong information. Besides, he did not know if the patrol team was controlled by Clint.

However, Zhang Heng was a little worried this time. That was because the patrol team in charge of this area was desperate to make it a better place. But the problem was that they lacked the ability to do so.

The area that Zhang Heng assigned to was the most chaotic place in the whole of Rome, with most living in the area being Jews. Other than that, many other ethnic minorities called the place home as well. They looked different in appearance, but they shared a common characteristic, and that was poverty. Due to poverty, this area was infested with criminal activities.

Almost more than one homicide took place every night. The crisscrossed alleys were extremely dark at night. They were the perfect places to kill someone. After the murder, the murderer could look for a nook to hide, and the authorities would never locate them. With the patrol team’s manpower, it was impossible to figure out this place altogether. In fact, once darkness befell, the patrol team members would not dare to go out alone.

#### **Chapter 824: Let Skinny Monkey Go!**

After the slave girl checked out the place with Zhang Heng, she finally experienced how chaotic it was. While walking on the street, someone snatched the bag of money that she held tightly and ran away.

Immediately, the thief ran into the crowd. When the slave girl shouted at him, no onlooker responded to her cries for help. It was as if they were deliberately ignoring the crime that happened right before their very eyes. Everyone’s face seemed plastered by layers of numbness and indifference.

In the end, the slave girl had to stop shouting and could only stand furiously by the roadside. She then asked Zhang Heng, who witnessed the crime happening right beside her. “Why didn’t you stop him?”

“There’s not much money in the bag, is there?” Zhang Heng asked in reply.

There was a division of labor between the two when they went out. Zhang Heng was the one who carried all the valuable items and gold coins. On the other hand, the slave girl only had some change inside her purse, which amounted to about thirty Sestertius.

“But that’s our money too,” protested the slave girl sullenly. Apart from losing money, she was also worried about Zhang Heng’s new job. If the security here was so bad during broad daylight, she could not imagine what would happen here when night came.

After that, she heard Zhang Heng leisurely say, “We can get our money back if you want.”

“He is gone now. How are we supposed to catch him?” The slave girl opened her eyes wide.



“Although the person who stole your money ran away, his accomplices are still there,” Zhang Heng said. “Generally, those who steal money would work in a group or pair. They are given different roles after they select their targets. One would be responsible for stealing the money, and the others would pretend to be passersby on the side. Through that, they can easily support their partner in crime in case of an emergency.”

While talking, Zhang Heng pointed at one of the youths in the crowd. He was not that tall, and he looked to be about eleven or twelve years old.

“Hey, you, don’t run.”

The latter saw Zhang Heng pointing at him, and he panicked. Especially when he heard the words “don’t run.” Without any hesitation, he turned around and ran away. However, he was still a step late. He did not know how Zhang Heng could appear behind him in such a short time.

He had just taken a half-step with his right foot when he was lifted off the ground.

However, he had no intention to give up on running away. He wanted to take off his clothes and run away topless. Zhang Heng knew he was going to use this little trick to escape, though. Immediately, Zhang Heng used the shirt that the kid just took off and tied it around his neck. If he tried to run again, the shirt would become tighter and tighter, and his breathing would become more and more difficult.

“Where are your accomplices? Take us to them,” Zhang Heng said lightly.

But he soon discovered it was pointless asking the question. Perhaps his accomplices saw that Zhang Heng had caught their companion, the person who robbed the slave girl’s purse earlier. And he brought two more companions with him, standing not far away from them.

The oldest among them was estimated to be around sixteen years of age, while the youngest seemed to be only ten. They were carrying weapons in their hands, and it frightened the slave girl a little.

“Let Skinny Monkey go,” the boy who snatched the slave girl’s purse shouted. He was also the oldest member of the group.

“Sure. Return the money that you stole from us first,” Zhang Heng said calmly.

“What the hell are you thinking? We are not negotiating with you. If you don’t let him go, we will attack you!” The boy raised the dagger in his hand and said viciously.

The slave girl quickly hid behind Zhang Heng and poked her head out after hearing the boy’s threats.

“How dare you rob us in the street during broad daylight? After being found out, you even started to threaten the victims. Aren’t you afraid that we will tell the patrol about it?”

“It’s useless. They don’t give a sh\*t about this place,” the boy sneered. “If you don’t want to get hurt, you better hand him over to us. Otherwise, don’t blame us for being rude.”

“Oh yeah, what are you going to do?” Zhang Heng kicked the captured young man’s calf and made him kneel on the ground. The leader considered it as a provocation, and he could not stand it anymore. So, he let out a loud roar and charged at Zhang Heng with a dagger.

It was a pity that their fighting skills were not as proficient as their thievery. Coupled with their young age, their combat effectiveness was minimal, and they picked the wrong opponent as well. Zhang Heng put them all on the ground with almost no effort. During the fight, Zhang Heng did not even need to use his weapon.

After that, he squatted down and searched the boy who snatched the slave girl's purse. Once Zhang Heng found the purse, he returned it to the owner. "Count it. Is all the money in there?"

The slave girl happily took over the purse and stuck her tongue out at the group of teenagers that Zhang Heng had just beaten up. She then counted the copper coins in it and nodded at Zhang Heng.

"It's all in there."

The smile on her face did not last long. She froze when she saw another group of men appearing on the street next to them.

Earlier, the passersby ignored her cries for help, but now, they quickly moved to the side when they saw the group of men walking toward Zhang Heng. Those who moved slightly slower than others were pushed to the ground. However, they did not dare to complain. Immediately, they got up, lowered down their bodies, and moved to the side of the street. Zhang Heng also noticed fear flashing through the teenager's eye when he saw the group of men approached him.

"What's the matter? Someone here needs help?" asked the tall but slightly feminine Jewish man that was leading, with a hint of frivolousness in his voice.

"No, nothing happened," the teenager lowered his head and said. "We are just playing around."

"Having fun?" The feminine-looking Jewish man smiled. "Why not do something productive? Better stop fooling around. Have you collected all the money that I wanted this week? Tonight is the deadline."

"We are still trying to figure a way to collect the money."

"Are you thinking of a way to collect money, or are you thinking of a way to lie and fool around?" asked the Jewish man. "I, Black Mamba, am going to remind you again. I heard that you robbed a couple of rich people recently. I hope the numbers that you come up with can satisfy the iron handcuffs. Otherwise, you know what will happen to you. As for you..."

Black Mamba looked at Zhang Heng and said with a smile, "You hurt my men. What do you plan to do about it?"

They were different from the group of teenagers that they faced earlier. All the seven people in front of them were adults. And the weapons in their hands looked destructive, including gloves full of iron nails and maces. Some of them even had some combat experience. They used to work as an underground gladiator or bodyguard.

Upon seeing that, the slave girl could not help but say nervously, "What should we do? Did those people that ran away notify the patrol team about it?"

"Impossible. Besides, I am a member of the patrol team. I haven't reported for duty yet, though. I don't think I have a problem if I start work a few hours earlier." Zhang Heng looked like he was not in a rush.

He then tapped the teenager's cheek and reminded him, "Stay put. I have some questions for you, but I have to deal with them first."

### **Chapter 825: Villain**

Zhang Heng was about to face seven enemies on his own. To Black Mamba, there was no doubt that Zhang Heng was going to lose the fight. For the people that took advantage of the streets like them, bullying the weak and fearing those more powerful than them was a basic survival skill. When they had the advantage, they would magnify their victory as much as possible. And when the situation was unfavorable to them, they would run away.

Only those who had fully adapted to the environment and acted according to the circumstance could survive this land of insurmountable chaos and evil. If the area from Trajan's Square to the Royal Palace was a symbol of the light and prosperity of Rome, then this place represented its dark and dilapidated side. The poor people here were struggling to get enough food every day.

Being merciless in this place was not something negative. Instead, it was an essential trait to stay alive. Therefore, the enemy with the mace who charged at Zhang Heng had a clear goal in his mind. He wanted to cripple Zhang Heng's arm first. As long as his hands were destroyed, he would no longer be able to fight back. After that, they could do whatever they want to him.

The enemy with the mace thought he was merciful by avoiding the most vulnerable spots on Zhang Heng's body. It was daytime, after all. Although this place lacked effective security forces, they could still get into a lot of trouble if they killed someone.

The enemy saw Zhang Heng charging towards him instead of retreating. In the end, the two collided. Although they weren't very different in terms of body size, Zhang Heng still managed to send his opponent flying away.

Ever since Zhang Heng took part in this magical game, he had been actively working out. And he had double the time every day to train himself to become stronger. Now, his physical attributes were above average. Although he wasn't nearly as strong as Bach and Terufelos, his strength was still excellent compared to ordinary people. Those thugs on the street could never reach him. Besides, he had just completed Gaby's hellish training as well.

Zhang Heng knocked his opponent to the fruit stand on the side, and he crushed the fruit stand. Immediately, the second enemy charged at him. And this time, there was another person who helped him. Both were underground gladiators.

The underground gladiators were referring to gladiators who did not perform in the arena. They were generally men not strong enough to become official gladiators. For instance, Roman citizens who failed the final exams weren't allowed to continue staying in the gladiator school. The older gladiators forced to go on retirement would usually choose to become underground gladiators.

The venues for their performances were usually very casual. They could just set up a stage or find an alley to hold an underground gladiator show. The spectators were mostly poor civilians or even slaves. Like a formal gladiatorial show, the organizer would encourage the audience to bet on the gladiators, and at the same time, loosen some of the rules to make the fight more exciting.

The unspoken set of rules that the professional gladiators followed did not apply to them. And they were also allowed to use all kinds of weapons. From time to time, they would hold a death battle for the gladiator, fighting until one of them was dead. Therefore, underground gladiators that managed to stay alive throughout their careers were generally very skillful.

These two underground gladiators were Black Mamba's best fighters. They had won a lot of tough battles for Black Mamba before. That was why he had high hopes for them. However, what happened next made his jaw drop.

The two underground gladiators accustomed to fighting four or even five enemies had failed to live up to their previous toughness. One of them got a dagger planted in his arm as soon as he charged at Zhang Heng, and he could no longer hold on tight to the short sword in his hand.

But suddenly, Zhang Heng managed to catch the short sword that was about to fall to the ground, and he used it to block another person's attack. And finally, he kicked the person's chest, and it caused him to fall to the side.

Black Mamba panicked when he saw what happened to his men. Immediately, he waved his hand to ask the rest of the people to charge at Zhang Heng together. Zhang Heng quickly used his unique footwork to isolate his enemies. And in the end, he defeated them one after another.

Thus, the seven enemies were like the Calabash Brothers that attempted to save their grandfather. Not only did they fail to surround Zhang Heng, but they were also defeated and suffered different degrees of injuries. Black Mamba knew that he faced a very powerful enemy this time. Usually, it was impossible for the seven of them to fail in defeating a single enemy. Unfortunately, the enemy they faced this time was powerful enough to defeat all seven in one fell swoop. None of them managed to land a single hit on Zhang Heng. Even the two most powerful underground gladiators were defeated almost instantly. After the fight, Zhang Heng did not suffer any injuries on him.

"Who on earth are you...?" Black Mamba looked at Zhang Heng in surprise.

"Zhang Heng."

Zhang Heng had no intention to conceal his identity.

Black Mamba felt that the name sounded awfully familiar to him as if he had heard it from somewhere. The two underground gladiators reacted faster than Black Mamba. They were left in fear when they heard his name.

"You... Are you the easterner who claimed the championship at the Amphitheatrum Flavium?"

"That's right," Zhang Heng nodded.

"It's you!" Black Mamba took a deep breath. Although these people were not slaves, most were unqualified to go to the Amphitheatrum Flavium to watch the gladiatorial performance. He had never watched the performance, but almost everyone in Rome had heard of Zhang Heng's legendary tales in the Amphitheatrum Flavium after the final battle concluded.

Whether it was defeating the famous gladiators within ten moves or tame the bison empty-handed, all these glorious battles were unheard of, not to mention rumors about him being an incarnation of a god.

Black Mamba now regretted that he did not recognize Zhang Heng earlier. After all, Zhang Heng's appearance was quite unique in Rome. However, the place they were at right now was inhabited by people of different races, and many foreigners stayed there. That was why Black Mamba did not think much about Zhang Heng's appearance.

Besides, he was extremely unlucky to cross paths with the champion of the Amphitheatrum Flavium. After knowing Zhang Heng's identity, Black Mamba had given up the thoughts of fighting back. He realized that he could never defeat Zhang Heng. Although they had an advantage in numbers, it was still impossible for them to defeat the man that had single-handedly defeated a bison. So it would be wiser for them to admit defeat.

As expected, Zhang Heng did not embarrass him further. After asking for his address, he let them leave the place. Black Mamba sighed in relief and quickly asked his men to help out those who had problems returning home.

The slave girl felt a little dissatisfied after she watched Zhang Heng beat them up. She then asked Zhang Heng, "Why did you let those villains go?"

"Villain? According to the definition of 'villain,' everyone that lives in this place is some sort of villain. If we arrest all of them, the imperial prisons will not fit all of them. After that, no one will be willing to do those high-risk-low-return jobs," Zhang Heng shook his head. "Although there are ways to determine whether a person is good or bad, we should also refer to the environment that they live in. The situation here is more complicated, and it is difficult for a good person to survive here."

"But isn't it the patrol's job to eliminate crime?" the slave girl asked in confusion.

Zhang Heng laughed, "It is not the patrol's job to eliminate crime. We are supposed to make criminal activities more controllable. Don't worry. I've done this once before. And now I'm just doing the same thing again. Not to mention this time I'm working with the authorities. Well, that's it for checking the place out. You should go home. First, I have something to ask him."

Zhang Heng pointed at the teenager who snatched the slave girl's purse.

## **Chapter 826: Patrol Station**

As Zhang Heng wrapped up questioning the group of teenagers, the sky had begun to turn dark.

Zhang Heng did not rush to report to the patrol team for duty. Instead, he found a small restaurant and had dinner there since he still had some time left. He ordered pickled anchovy, grilled meat, and a small piece of goat cheese with a bowl of coarse oatmeal. In total, he spent less than six sestertii on his food.

As he ate, he learned about how much someone would spend on average at a place like this. The price of the food here was half of the cost of the food in the city. The portions here were smaller, however, and they tasted terrible. Zhang Heng felt that the grilled meat tasted weird, feeling neither like chicken nor rabbit.

Considering most people living in this area suffered from poverty, food flavor was never a priority. The main reason that prevented people from dining in restaurants was safety, especially after dark. It was only a matter of them before someone got mugged. Some might even lose their lives.

When Zhang Heng was eating, he saw two diners fighting over a waitress. The winner went to the second floor with the beautiful woman, while the loser left the restaurant while clutching the back of his head. Things like this happened at all kinds of places. Zhang Heng no longer had any interest in watching it.

After dinner, he went to the patrol station. Instead of looking like a patrol station, it looked more like a building about to collapse. The previous owner was killed by a tenant on the top floor when he attempted to collect rent. His body was hidden under the bed, and it took half a month before someone eventually discovered it. The assailant was ultimately arrested, and he was sent to the arena to be fed to the lions. Later, the authorities would find a way to deal with this building.

Since the dead landlord lived alone and had no wife or children, the building was eventually taken over by the patrol team and became its station. Not only did the members of the patrol team live here, but their families had also moved into this insulae without paying rent.

When Zhang Heng first arrived at the insulae, he thought he went to the wrong place because no signs indicated that this was the patrol team's station. And there were no facilities like the training grounds. The cramped area had turned into a place where the families dried laundry. And there were also two large jars of pickles and a half-repaired table.

"Stand there, don't move. I'll shoot your eyes if you get closer!"

The person that threatened Zhang Heng was a little boy. And Zhang Heng based his judgment on his clothes. He had short hair and wore a shirt that was too big for him. There were also bruises on his face. He must've gotten it from a recent fight.

He held a slingshot in hand, aiming at Zhang Heng vigilantly, with an old dog behind him as well. Zhang Heng raised his hand, indicating that he did not carry any weapons, and asked politely, "Is this the patrol station?"

"Yes, what happened to you? Did someone beat you, or did someone rob your money? Or both? Did you come here to report the crime?" The little boy continued to ask, and he did not let down his guard. "You don't look like you belong here. Why are you here?"

Before Zhang Heng spoke, a voice came from behind the little boy, "He is a new patrol team member. Put away your slingshot, Viya. A girl shouldn't play with this stuff all day long."

"But if I don't carry the slingshot with me, who will defend the patrol station when you leave?" Viya asked in an affronted tone.

"This is the patrol station. No bad guys will dare to come to his place."

"That's not true. We lost two clothes last week. We lost half a bag of wheat the week before that, and..."

"There is no way to solve the thefts," the man who appeared afterward said helplessly, "Half of the robbers and thieves in Rome live here."

Although Pannonax did not tell Zhang Heng about the situation here, he had almost learned everything that he needed to know about the patrol members in the afternoon. He knew that the man that looked like a typical Roman soldier in front of him was Aris. A man with a burly figure and bronzed skin, he once

fought the Marcomanni with Aurelius and did his best to fight off the enemies. Unfortunately, not too long after the war started, he was shot in the calf. Although the injuries were not life-threatening, he could no longer stay in the army to accumulate military merit points. So he returned to Rome and joined the patrol team to maintain the city's security.

It was said that he was good at fighting. However, due to his leg injury, he found it challenging to fight now.

Zhang Heng took the initiative and stretched out his hand. "Zhang Heng."

"Aris." Aris also shook hands with Zhang Heng.

This time it was Viya's turn to interrupt. She exclaimed, "Zhang Heng? Aren't you the Oriental man who won the championship at the arena?! Wait, are you a new member of the patrol team?" She turned her head to look at Aris, "Dad, why didn't you tell me that the legendary gladiator in Rome will be joining us?"

"Because this has nothing to do with children. Do I need to report every official business of mine to you? Don't be like your mother, asking questions all the time," Aris snorted impatiently.

"But this is big! Haven't you been complaining that nobody in the patrol team fights well? And it makes it difficult for you to enforce the law every time." Viya was full of excitement. "Now you have a legendary gladiator of Rome! No one can defeat us anymore."

"It is not as simple as you think. One person cannot solve the problem here," Aris said. "Your mother is making dinner. Why don't you help her? Other than that, go and ask those going on patrol tonight to gather downstairs. We are about to set off."

"The excuses you make to drive me away sucks."

Although she was complaining, she still took the old dog upstairs. She deliberately looked at Zhang Heng twice before she left, like looking at a monkey in a zoo.

"Sorry, my daughter is ill-mannered. Well, I guess manners do not apply to this place," Aris said.

"It's okay. Since I won the championship, I have become accustomed to such treatment," Zhang Heng replied. "Fortunately, I won't lose a piece of flesh just because I get stared at."

"That's good. To be honest, I didn't expect that a reputable man like you would be willing to join the patrol in this area."

"I'm just a gladiator who regained his freedom. I'm not a reputable man." Zhang Heng shook his head.

"But I heard that the emperor values you, right? I heard the people above say that you want to come here to accumulate some political capital. If that is true, I regret to tell you that you may have chosen the wrong place."

"Why do you say that?"

"You heard what I said to my daughter just now. Although this hell hole is in Rome, it is completely different from other places. This place is full of thieves, robbers, villains, and all kinds of criminals that

you can imagine. This place can't be changed by one person, even if you are the champion of the Amphitheatrum Flavium."

### **Chapter 827: Principle**

Zhang Heng smiled, and he did not dwell on this issue.

Five minutes later, those that were supposed to be on duty tonight had gathered downstairs. The entire patrol team had a total of twelve people. Usually, they were divided into two different teams, where one would be responsible for the day patrols and the other, the night. With such a clear division of labor, both teams should get enough rest every day.

However, the twelve-man patrol team was not enough to take care of such a large area, not to mention that they were divided into two teams. Even Black Mamba's gang had more people than them. Among the patrol team, some were young men, and some were older. Except for Aris, the captain who injured his leg and fought on the battlefield before, the other patrol members did not even have proper combat experience.

In fact, most of those assigned to this area had either made a huge mistake or offended someone powerful. Zhang Heng could also not rule out that some more unfortunate ones were sent here without knowing this place. Their roles were solely to fill up the shortage. And once they were stationed here, leaving this place would prove extremely difficult.

Aris and others had attempted escape before, but their attempts were all but futile. After all, no one wanted to stay in a place infested with criminals and chaos. Even if their welfare wasn't a priority, they had to think about their family members.

But for some well-known reasons, all of their efforts were in vain.

Aris was considered to be one of the more responsible captains. When he first came here, he thought about bringing sweeping changes to the place. He had written countless letters to the top until now, telling them about the area's problems, hoping that they would send more people and allocate more funds. Unfortunately, no one responded to his letters.

He even attempted to, within his power, try to influence the people around him a little by little, hoping to bring back the order to the chaotic streets. However, this whole place was like a vast quagmire. No matter who stood in it, moving forward would prove challenging. In the end, the person would only sink deeper and deeper until it engulfed them. Aris did not know how long he could hold on. To him, this was all but a hopeless place now.

"Your circumstance is not looking good," Zhang Heng said. He saw Aris taking out his armor and putting it on neatly before the patrol. This was the armor he wore when he last fought on the battlefield. After that, he brought it with him here, and it looked well maintained.

However, his five subordinates were not so lucky. Some were wearing rusty armor, some had incomplete armor, and some wore no protective gear at all.

"Because every time we place last, we get very little funds. They are barely enough to make ends meet, so we have to get our own weapons and armor elsewhere," Aris said. "Do you have armor with you?"



“I don’t need that kind of thing,” replied Zhang Heng.

“Trust me. If you have it, you’d better wear it because you are going to need it,” Aris insisted. “I know you’re a good fighter, and although I never witnessed your heroic achievement in the arena, I guess you must have beaten up your opponents pretty well. You could even fight two enemies simultaneously, but trust me, this is different from the opponents you encounter in the gladiatorial performances. Gladiators value honor a lot and will never do anything that will make the audience despise them. These people here are different. You might not get to fight them face-to-face, and it can happen at any time, anywhere. The person next to you might just suddenly draw a knife and stab you. The worst part is you have no idea who the person is and why he wants to kill you.”

“Thank you, but I can handle an assassination without armor.” Zhang Heng raised his eyebrows.

Having learned and familiarized himself with an assassin’s methods for some time now, if he were stabbed by someone random here, Dadatis’s teaching would be in vain. After that, Aris did not try to persuade him anymore. After all, it was the first time that the two met. Aris had reminded Zhang Heng of the danger of this place only because they were colleagues. To him, Zhang Heng was an arrogant man, and he did not have high hopes for him.

Although there were rumors that the emperor attached great importance to Zhang Heng, being assigned here said a lot about him. Out of good intention, Aris reminded him again, “Have you offended someone recently?”

“Yes, for now.” Zhang Heng smiled again, but he seemed to not want to dwell on the issue. And soon enough, he changed the subject. “You mentioned the assessment just now. Can you tell me more about its rules?”

This part was something Zhang Heng could not inquire about earlier. Such information could only be received from the patrol team.

“Of course, this is also something that you should know.” Aris nodded, “As you can see, each team is responsible for patrolling different areas. Every two months, the higher-ups will send someone to conduct a statistical inspection. Mainly, they will check on the crime rate in different areas, for instance, the number of burglaries and homicides in each area. They need to know whether the cases have increased or decreased. They would also want to know how many cases we have solved. Finally, they will randomly select residents in the area and gauge their satisfaction on current public security.”

Aris paused when he said that, “We are in a special area. I believe you had checked this place out when you came here. We have a large number of Jews and some from the eastern provinces and immigrants from Egypt or Mauritania. We don’t even know where a number of them come from. In short, this is a very complicated place. With so many people from different places cramped altogether in such a small place, conflict inevitably breaks out every day.”

“Unsurprising,” Zhang Heng said.

“We see a robbery or street fights every day. Sometimes, people of the same race would fight among themselves. And in order not to be bullied, many choose to join a gang. In the end, countless armed gangs are born because of this reason. The smaller gangs have a dozen members, but as for those big gangs, they have at least hundreds of people. And many of them embark on the journey of becoming a

criminal once they acquire enough weapons. The small-time thugs and the gangsters on the street are backed up by the gangs here. Sometimes, you might offend the entire gang if you catch one of them. And it could cause a lot of trouble... The patrol team can't do anything about it. After all, the patrol team was led by a lame man, and they were abandoned by Rome as well. We don't even get a full salary."

When Aris first came here, he was worried about how the safety of the residents in this place. However, after he experienced living here for so many years, he had become a little numb by it. To him, no one could solve the problems in this place unless the government decided to bring in the armies to kill all the people here. Otherwise, this place would always be a paradise for the thieves, villains, and murderers.

"Fortunately, we are just a patrol team. We don't have much money with us. Under normal circumstances, the criminals will not target us. However, if you want to live here long enough, you have to remember a fundamental principle, that is, don't be nosy," warned Aris.

### **Chapter 828: Let's Make Money Together**

The first rule that the patrol team should be following was not to be nosy. Considering the terrible situation Aris and the others were facing. It was understandable that they behaved as such. Unfortunately, Aris did not know that Zhang Heng was about to be causing a lot of trouble to them. Earlier, Zhang Heng caused no problem because he was gathering information from everyone that he met and talked to. Now that he had enough information and had found the right time to take action, it was time for him to execute his plan.

Aris had a headache on how to deal with Zhang Heng, who had just joined the patrol.

The higher-ups had told him that Zhang Heng would assist him in maintaining law and order in this area, but they did not explain the man's identity and position to him in detail. It stood to reason that Aris could only treat Zhang Heng like an ordinary new member in this situation. However, Zhang Heng belonged to someone extremely powerful in the palace. It was rumored that Commodus valued him a lot. Although the two had only met for the first time and Zhang Heng had behaved politely, Aris could see that Zhang Heng was not the kind of person who fancied obeying orders.

"I don't know why you want to join the patrol. Are you going to help us with the night patrol, or do you want to maintain law and order during the day with deputy captain Spirata?"

Initially, Zhang Heng avoided a question like this, but since Aris took the initiative to ask, Zhang Heng replied, "Actually, I want to borrow your team."

"Borrow my squad?" Aris was stunned when he heard the words. "Are you saying that you want to be the captain?"

Zhang Heng's request undoubtedly came off as very rude. Since Aris had just returned from the army a few years ago, he had immediately made it clear to Zhang Heng that he was the patrol leader, and that was a fact that could not be changed. However, his temper had toned down a lot after staying in this place for a long time. To him, the position of patrol captain was not that important anymore. Anyone could sit in this position now. The replacement would need to carry a huge responsibility. Not only had the leader take care of the twelve patrol members, but he also needed to protect their families. That was why Aris was not going to hand over the position to someone that he barely knew.

“No, you are still going to be the captain. You can do what you usually do. As long as you are willing to listen to my command during a critical time.” Zhang Heng said.

“What do you mean by critical period?” Aris frowned.

“For example, tonight, I need you to accompany me to a tavern.” Zhang Heng said.

“Go to the tavern? What do you want to do there?”

“I have some business to be done with a few men over there. Didn’t you say that the funds given by the higher-ups are not good enough because of the low evaluation score?” Zhang Heng looked around and continued, “I noticed that many of your men don’t own a set of good armor. According to what you told me just now, it is not going to be safe for them to patrol the street if they don’t have decent protective gear. One of the major causes of these issues is because you don’t have enough money. In that case, let’s make more money first.”

“How can we make money in a tavern? Work as a waiter?” Someone could not help but interject.

“No, just be still,” Zhang Heng said, “I can handle the rest.”

“How can we make money by just standing still?” Another person expressed his doubts. In fact, this was the question that everyone wanted to ask.

They had stayed here for almost half a year. They knew how difficult it was to make money in this place. Even if they washed dishes in a restaurant, the gang in charge of the area would tax their hard-earned salary. And it might happen more than once. When they heard that they could earn money by just standing still, all of them thought that Zhang Heng must have lost his mind.

“It doesn’t make much sense for me to lie to you. My lie will be exposed once we get to the tavern. So, what do you think? Would you like to come with me tonight?” Zhang Heng’s eyes swept across the crowd.

When everyone heard the question, they all turned around and looked at Captain Aris. Clearly, they were more willing to trust their captain, Aris, rather than Zhang Heng, an outsider.

Aris knew this group of people too well. They had suffered from poverty for too long and had to tighten their belts every month. When they heard that there was a chance for them to make more money, they were almost instantly moved. Out of respect, however, they decided to let their captain determine for them. Even if he disagreed with it, it did make much sense for him to use his power to force them to say no to Zhang Heng.

If he said no this time, could he say no again for the second or third time? Zhang Heng did not have to do anything about it. All he needed to do was to ask this question once every day. Sooner or later, someone would be unable to resist and say yes to Zhang Heng. It was only a matter of time. After realizing it, it was not difficult to understand why Zhang Heng looked so calm on the other side. It seemed like he was not worried that Aris would say no to him.

So Aris decided not to stop him anymore, “Okay, then we will be under your command tonight.”

“Ask the patrol team that is in charge of the daytime patrol to come together with us. They will have more time to rest later.” Zhang Heng said.

Aris knew that it was important for everyone to use this golden opportunity to make more money. Since he did not stop the first team, he certainly would not stop the second team. He nodded, "Spirata and the others should be back soon."

When Aris was talking, the five people led by Spirata came back from their street patrol. One of them held some wood in his hand. It seemed like he was going to repair the half-repaired table. When they heard their colleagues telling them that they were about to head to the tavern to make money just by standing still, their reaction was similar to that of Aris and others when they first heard the proposal. They found it hard to believe as well.

They had nothing to lose if Zhang Heng cheated them. It was just an extra trip to the tavern, which was why everyone was willing to join in.

In the end, Zhang Heng finally gathered all twelve members of the patrol team, and together they walked to the tavern called Blackwater Bay.

However, Zhang Heng did not enter Blackwater Bay when he arrived there. Instead, he waited for a while until the teenager and his three companions who robbed his money in the afternoon ran over from the alley.

Zhang Heng now knew that their leader is called Seceus, nicknamed Soap.

Zhang Heng did not know why he had such a nickname. Maybe it was because he was really good at stealing others' money, and every time he got away with it. It did not matter to Zhang Heng.

Zhang Heng asked Soap, "Are the Iron Handcuff and his people inside now?"

Soap nodded, "Yes, on the last day of the week, the thieves from the three nearby streets have to report to the Iron Handcuff. They have to hand in the money that they steal or rob to the big boss. The one who robs the most money will be rewarded. And those who robbed the least money will be punished."

Speaking of being punished, a look of fear appeared on the teenager's face, "The seven people you beat up this afternoon, their leader is Black Mamba, and he is the right-hand man of Iron Handcuff, And he also has a very powerful thug called Broken Finger. All the thieves from the three streets must obey them."

"Hmm. It seems that he is the person that I am looking for." Zhang Heng patted Soap on the shoulder and smiled, "Let's go in and meet this Iron Handcuff and his men. Don't be afraid. You are my men from now on. No one will dare to touch you."

## **Chapter 829: Big Business**

Soap trembled in fear right now because he hadn't brought a single copper coin to Iron Handcuff. Black Mamba was right. Soap and his companions had indeed earned a lot of money this week. However, Skinny Monkey had fallen sick, and they had to spend all the money they robbed to bring her to a doctor. The treatment fees depleted their funds, and that included the money they were supposed to give to Iron Handcuff this week.

In the afternoon, they tried to rob the slave-girl, but it was a failed attempt. Hence, they were forced to confront Iron Handcuff empty-handed. They could already foresee the tragic fate that awaited them.

Just when they thought they were about to fall into great despair, Zhang Heng expressed his willingness to save them. Soap did not know whether it was a blessing or a curse to follow Zhang Heng, but they seemed to have no other choice. So they bit the bullet and walked into the tavern.

Tonight, Iron Handcuff's men had almost entirely occupied Blackwater Bay. As for the rest of the people, they were burglars from the three nearby streets. Most of them were skinny teenagers like Soap and Skinny Monkey. They had come to report this week's work to Iron Handcuff, and would also need to hand over the money that they robbed to him.

Although they had always complained in private about this injustice, no one dared to actually disobey him. That was because they knew the consequences of angering Iron Handcuff. All those unfortunate ones that disobeyed him were nowhere to be seen. Hence, even though the rest were unhappy, they had no choice but to pay Iron Handcuff every week.

Fortunately, they had all grown up at this place and were accustomed to such things. After all, the strong preying on the weak was something that would never change in this world. Whoever had the power would get to rule the weak, and the weak could only learn how to obey orders.

Before this, Soap and four of his companions belonged to the bottom rungs of society. Many thieves knew about Skinny Monkey's sister's illness. Initially, they sympathized with Soap and his companions, but it did not last long, and now, it had disappeared completely. After that, some thieves even laughed at them.

After all, these thieves would usually hustle along these three streets. They would work with each other at times but were rivals at most. Besides, it was rare to see anyone loaded with money walking on these streets. Often, these burglars would go for the same target, making peaceful co-existence between them nearly impossible.

Nonetheless, they were about to be having one less rival group after tonight.

"Damn! You guys are finally here. I thought you and your friend were going to run from me. I was just about to settle my things here and pay a visit to your respective families."

The person talking to them was a dwarf, and his role in the gang was to manage Iron Handcuff's money. When Soap and four of his friends entered the tavern, he was sitting on a waitress's lap. They were chatting, and the waitress was laughing at his jokes. At the same time, she allowed the dwarf to feast his eyes on her body.

After that, he kissed the waitress on the cheek, jumped off her lap, walked to Soap, and stretched out one of his hands, "Excellent, since you are here, pay us the money."

"I... we have no money," Soap replied with a shudder, even hearing the sound of his own teeth chattering in his mouth.

"No money?" The smile on the dwarf's face gradually disappeared, "That does not sound right to me. I heard you guys had a good yield this week."

"Yes, but we used the money to take my sister to a doctor." Skinny Monkey did not want Soap to be burdened by the pressure alone. So, he gulped and blurted out the truth.

The dwarf sighed. "You have not been in this business for long enough. You are, however, considered a veteran now, and you should have known everything about the rules. Of course, it is important to treat your sister's illness, but you can't use other people's money to pay for her treatment. No matter how we look at it, you are at fault."

"I... we will find a way to repay you as soon as possible," Skinny Monkey hurriedly said, "...for the sake of the money that you've made for Iron Handcuff, please give us another chance to make up for it."

"Okay," the dwarf nodded. "We are not unreasonable. Even if you deceive us first, our boss, Iron Handcuff, is willing to trust you again. After all, you are the best thief in these three streets."

When Skinny Monkey and others heard this, they were overjoyed. They did not expect that Iron Handcuff, who had always been known for his cruelty and brutality, would show them mercy at a time like this. The thieves around them looked very surprised when they heard what he said.

After that, they saw the dwarf drew his dagger and stuck it on the wooden table.

"We have a small problem. Unfortunately, we are only allowed to forgive three people. It seems you guys will have to make a decision here." A vicious smile appeared on the dwarf's face.

Soap and his friends were left in shock. The other thieves, on the other hand, were relieved when they saw what had happened. That was the Iron Handcuff that they were familiar with. They would need to pay the price when they made a mistake.

Now, everyone in the tavern was looking at Soap and his friends. They wanted to know who they would choose in the end. After a while, Soap said, "Wait, we don't have any money, but we have to discuss with Iron Handcuff's boss about a business plan."

He finally made up his mind. He knew that he was about to cut ties with Iron Handcuffs and the gang when he said that. Even though Soap greatly doubted that Zhang Heng could to cut a deal with Iron Handcuff, he had no other options but to do what Zhang Heng asked him to do.

"Business?" A playful look spawned across the dwarf's face. "What business plan can four thieves come up with? Or are you trying to buy yourselves some time?"

The next moment, an unfamiliar voice came into his ears, "What he said is true. He wants to discuss a business plan with your boss."

The dwarf was a little surprised. He did not know where Zhang Heng had come from. In fact, he could not even remember when the Asian man had entered the tavern. And he had never seen him before. Hence, he had no idea why a stranger wanted to stick his nose in his business.

On the other side, Black Mamba and his men, drinking, had their expressions change drastically they saw Zhang Heng. He then asked, "Why are you here again?!"

"Why? Do you know him?" The dwarf was taken aback when he heard Black Mamba shouting.

The incident that had happened that afternoon was too embarrassing to be told by Black Mamba. Seven of his men were beaten up by a single person, and they were left with swollen noses and faces. Considering that Zhang Heng didn't belong here, and they had no way to defeat him, they decided not

to look for revenge. It was rare that they would make peace with a stranger that had just beaten them up.

None of them expected that Zhang Heng was still around and follow them to this tavern. Black Mamba suddenly felt aggrieved. He did not know why Zhang Heng had come to the tavern tonight. And he thought that he was here for him. After the fight, Black Mamba heard Zhang Heng say that he would let them go, and he thought the man was going to keep his promise. Zhang Heng's very presence made him believe that Zhang Heng broke the promise on purpose. A gladiatorial champion usually wouldn't be that perfidious. The ones he had beaten up did not seek him, but the ones who beat them up came knocking at their door.

### **Chapter 830: It's Not Our Business Once We Get Off Work**

"We had a good time earlier. I'm not here to meet you tonight, so take it easy," Zhang Heng told Black Mamba, whose glare was on Zhang Heng and was ready to fight him. After that, he looked around the tavern, and his attention eventually landed on a black man at the corner.

The black man looked like a regular customer of this tavern. He was neither surrounded by subordinates like Black Mamba nor surrounded by beautiful women like the dwarf. And the food on his table looked quite pathetic as well. He was only eating half a piece of bread and drinking a bottle of wine. From the way he looked, he definitely did not look like a man of power.

Zhang Heng then asked, "You appear to be Iron Handcuff."

"Why would you say that? I don't think we've met before," the black man asked rhetorically.

"In this tavern, you are the only one that sits the farthest from anyone else. On the other hand, no one dares to approach you. Obviously, they are afraid of you. And the dwarf just subconsciously looks at where you are sitting. Of course, the main reason is that Soap has told me about your appearance and other relevant information.

"You were a slave before, and you ran away from your master several times. Every time, they managed to catch you and put on iron handcuffs. I also know that you have suffered from great torture. This is where your nickname comes from. One day, your former master was found dead in his own barn. A pitchfork had pierced his heart. They suspected you were the murderer, but they stopped suspecting you due to the lack of evidence. After that, your former master's son sold you to other families. Two years later, your new master was also involved in an accident. However, he made a will before his death and decided to free twenty of his slaves. You are lucky to be one of them. After you regained your freedom, you moved here and worked as an apprentice in a blacksmith shop. With this job, it was difficult for you to make more money. So you worked with a group of people and controlled all the thieves that lived in the three streets nearby. At that time, you forced them to accept your protection and made them pay you on a regular basis. Am I right?"

"Since you know who I am, why do you dare to stand up for them?" Iron Handcuff glared at Soap and his friends. After living under his reign of terror for so many years, Soap and his friends suddenly felt it difficult to breathe.

"I'm not standing up for them. As he said earlier, we come to discuss a business plan with you."

Zhang Heng walked towards Iron Handcuff, pulled up a chair opposite him, and sat down.

“We?” Iron Handcuff caught the point.

“Yes, my twelve brothers and I. As a sign of courtesy, I came in to greet you first. They are still standing outside and waiting. If you have no objection, I will let them in now.” Zhang Heng then found an empty glass, blew away the dust inside it before picking up the wine bottle, and pouring himself a glass of wine.

“Twelve people? I am afraid that’s not going to be enough,” Iron Handcuff snorted.

“No, it is. After all, we are only here to discuss business.” Zhang Heng smiled and said to Skinny Monkey, “Let them come in.”

Skinny Monkey then took a quick peek at Iron Handcuff. He seemed to be in a bad mood now, and it looked like he was about to kill someone. However, Skinny Monkey was left with no other option even though he knew what he was about to do would further anger Iron Handcuff. He then ran out and notified Aris.

In fact, Aris felt very nervous now. Having been responsible for this area’s security for some time now, of course, he knew all about the small and large forces here. When he saw Blackwater Bay tavern, he knew that Iron Handcuff and his men were inside. Aris couldn’t understand why Zhang Heng would come here to make money.

If there was money to be made, Iron Handcuff and his men would have had taken advantage of it a long time ago. Fortunately, no sounds of fighting came out from the tavern after Zhang Heng talked to Iron Handcuff. When Skinny Monkey came out from the tavern, the other patrol members could not help but feel nervous. In the end, Aris made up his mind. “Come on. Since we are here, we can’t turn around and leave now. Anyway, we are the patrol team here, and we shouldn’t be afraid of the gangs.”

Some of them could not help but complain. If fear was not an issue, why did Aris tell them to not be nosy at all costs? Although they complained about it in their heart, they still followed Aris to enter the tavern.

When they appeared at the door, the atmosphere in the tavern was frozen.

The patrol team’s presence in this area had always been insignificant. Aris knew that they would never be powerful enough to solve the problems here. Hence, it was wise to keep a low profile. Still, they were the only armed force around the area responsible for enforcing law and order. Thus, everyone in the tavern had seen them before.

Iron Handcuff was surprised. “Did you report a crime here?”

“No, I am a patrol member,” Zhang Heng smiled.

“You are from the patrol team? But I haven’t seen you before. Are you a newcomer? What business plan do you want to discuss with me?” Iron Handcuff quickly calmed down after the initial shock. After all, this was still his turf. Although he was engaged in different kinds of crimes, he was not afraid of the patrol team. To them, the patrol team was no more than a mascot.

Without the help of local forces, these patrol teams could not carry out the investigations even if they received a report. That was because no one would cooperate with them. For a very long time, they



hadn't even caught a single thief. And the most embarrassing part was the thieves actually visited the patrol team's residence several times.

"Big business," said Zhang Heng as he finished drinking the wine and put down the glass. "A full 30% of your current income." He then looked at Soap. "You should tell him the details."

Ever since Zhang Heng sat opposite Iron Handcuff, Soap had been praying for the two to forget about him. But now, it seemed his prayers were not working. Seeing Iron Handcuff glaring at him again, Soap could only bite the bullet. "The business plan is very simple. The patrol team can help maintain the security of these three streets, and you, as local residents, only need to pay them 30% of your income."

"Are you kidding me? You want to take 30% of my income?" Iron Handcuff was so furious that he laughed hysterically. Initially, he thought that Zhang Heng had a big business plan to discuss with him. Technically speaking, Zhang Heng wasn't lying. It was indeed a big business that involved 30% of their current income. However, the only thing was they would be the party that would be paying the patrol team.

"Open your eyes and take a good look. Do you think you must maintain the security of these three streets? Your manpower is less than half of mine... and look at you. You don't even have a set of decent armor. You like the beggars on the roadside. Thank you, but we shall reject the patrol team's kind offer. We can manage the turf by ourselves. You should carry on with patrolling the place."

Iron Handcuff caused everyone in the tavern to burst out in laughter. The patrol team was a joke in this place. They were famous for being useless. In the past two months, they had not been able to solve a single case, forced to watch criminals walk free before their eyes since neither passersby nor the victim was willing to testify against them. And the evidence was destroyed as well.

The thing that Iron Handcuff said had deeply embarrassed all the patrol members. Although they had been living in vain here, they were still law enforcers. And they still had the dignity of law enforcers in them. They were furious when they heard Iron Handcuff insults but they could not refute him. And some people even started to blame Zhang Heng.

They all thought that Zhang Heng's plan was going to work. And now they were here standing there and letting Iron Handcuff embarrass them. Zhang Heng did not speak until the laughter in the tavern settle down, "Fine. Although you criticized us, as law enforcement officers, we don't care about these things. We will still do what should be done. You can count on us to maintain law and order around here."

"Why are you embarrassing yourself? Didn't you hear what I just said? I'm not paying you a single coin." Iron Handcuff sneered.

"I heard it, but I believe you will change your mind. From tomorrow, we will only patrol the three streets nearby us. You are right. This place is too big, and we have too few people. I think it's time to tell you the main points. We have twelve people, and we will only patrol three streets.

Other than that, we will only work during the day. Don't worry. We will definitely be able to take care of the three streets this time. I can guarantee that all crimes on these three streets will be eliminated. Of course, once we are off work, anything that happens after that is not our business anymore."