

48 Hours 781

Chapter 781: Total Victory

When Zhang Heng charged at Nasika, his partner did not help him fight off Zhang Heng.

The reason why he made such a decision was that he was too frightened. After a while, he calmed himself down and started to assess the situation. In his opinion, if Zhang Heng had concealed his strength earlier, he should not be much stronger than Nasika. In other words, even if Nasika could not defeat him, he should at least be able to hang in there for a while.

Thus, he chose this opportunity to kill Varo, the weakest gladiator in the arena. After that, he planned to work together with Nasika to attack Zhang Heng.

There shouldn't be any problem with this strategy. It was true that Varo was weak as he thought he was. As soon as he approached him, Varo started to lose his calm. Besides, retiarius was a profession that focused more on offense instead of defense. Once Varo lost his calm and began to focus on defense, it was equivalent to revealing his opponents' weakness.

In this way, he would become more and more passive in the fight. All he could do was to back-off from his opponent, which was very risky for him.

But at this moment, a familiar voice came to Varo's ear, "Don't be afraid. He is just bluffing. Just go all out and fight with him. He may not be able to defeat you."

Nasika's partner was shocked when he heard Zhang Heng's advice to Varo. Since he had the time to give advice, it meant his battle with Nasika had ended.

Everything happened way too quickly. Nasika's partner had considered the possibility that Nasika would lose to Zhang Heng, but he would have never expected the battle to be a one-sided slaughter. To his horror, Nasika couldn't even last a short while. And now he had to fight two opponents at the same time.

He disagreed with Zhang Heng's statement about him not being able to defeat Varo. However, when he knew that Nasika was defeated, his fighting spirit had been greatly affected. And with Zhang Heng watching from behind, he could not help but begin to act clumsily.

On the contrary, Varo, on the opposite, found out that Zhang Heng had killed Nasika and began to advise him. Suddenly, he could feel a surge of energy flowed within his body. Maybe he felt that someone was nearby him to help him if he failed to defeat Nasika's partner. So Varo was able to fight his opponent confidently, showcasing everything that he learned from the training camp and his recent training results.

As the battle raged on, Nasika's partner was beginning to get overwhelmed. He was, after all, a veteran gladiator, and although his talent was not too outstanding, he did not expect to be suppressed by a newcomer who had just stepped into the arena. Until now, he still could not figure out how the experienced Nasika lost the twelve-man mixed battle so quickly. And how ridiculously powerful could Zhang Heng have been that he managed to defeat Nasika in such a short time?

This was the main reason why he still could focus on his battle right now.

However, even though he knew that there was no hope of winning even if he defeated Varo, he still did not immediately admit defeat. This was the most basic professional quality of a veteran gladiator. It was not until Varo's fishing net trapped him when he was distracted that he put down his weapon and surrendered.

On the other side, only two teams were left in the loser group. The battle had also reached its climax. Trying their best to fight for the only chance to redeem themselves, the fighting scene remained brutal and bloody.

In the end, only one group barely claimed the victory. After examining their wounds, however, the judge ruled that they could not continue fighting. Hence, the final winner of the twelve-man mixed fight was born. When Varo heard the audience cheering for them, he felt surreal, feeling as though he were in a dream. He did contribute to the final victory and, for the first time, defeated a strong opponent one-on-one. This had significantly boosted his confidence.

Of course, he also knew that most screams and cheers were actually dedicated to Zhang Heng, next to him. Simultaneously, the cheers were mixed with curses from those who bet on Nasika's group.

In the end, though, those voices were suppressed by one, and that was Zhang Heng's name.

There was no doubt that a new star was rising in the Victor Arena at this moment.

There was an ear-to-ear smile on Mark Reuss's face. He lost Rufus and Nasika, who could earn him a lot of money. Technically speaking, Nasika only lost his reputation and not his life. Only an experienced man like Gaby knew how ruthless Zhang Heng was. By destroying the thing that Nasika was most proud of, Zhang Heng had basically destroyed his mental state.

During the battle, Zhang Heng had him overpowered entirely. It would not be easy for him to get out of this frustration. In a worst-case scenario, his strength would decline sharply, and he would live under the shadows of this lost battle for the rest of his life.

But even if this tragedy happened to Nasika, Mark Reuss wouldn't be too bothered. The reason was simple—he had found himself a new gold mine. Not only was it enough to make up for the loss of Nasika, but it also seemed that Zhang Heng would be making him heaps of money.

"Who do you think is more powerful?" Mark Reuss asked Gaby enthusiastically.

The latter, of course, knew that Mark Reuss was not talking about Zhang Heng and Nasika because the answer to that question was obvious. Nasika had lost the fight in the worst possible way. Zhang Heng used this battle to prove that the two were not on the same level, so it was easy to guess who Mark Reuss was talking about now.

Although Gaby was displeased by the fact that Zhang Heng concealed his strength, he had to put that thought away. "He had almost the same strength as Sethnets when he was at the peak of his career," he said.

Mark Reuss's eyes lit up when he heard what Gaby said. But then Gaby reminded him, "But he is more difficult to control than Sethnets. We may not be able to control him fully."

"It doesn't matter. Your job is to keep discovering talented gladiators for the school. Leave the rest for me to handle." Mark Reuss did not take Gaby's concern seriously. He then rubbed the emerald ring on his index finger and proclaimed with pride, "Everyone has their weakness. It could be money, beauty, honor, freedom... The key to controlling the people like them is to know what they want. You're nowhere as good as me when it comes to these things."

"How can I compare with you, my master." Gaby bowed respectfully.

"Wait until the gladiatorial performance... No, bring him to see me after this match is over." After Mark Reuss spoke, he stood up and had no intention to watch the performance anymore. He was now thinking about how to package Zhang Heng into a star gladiator. Since he had found the new successor for the throne, the rest of the performance was now incredibly boring to him. So, he stood up and left.

On the other hand, the celebration continued. Female slaves holding plates walked around the arena, where spectators would throw their gifts for the gladiators onto the plates. Most of the gifts were coins. Among them were some feminine items that represented their love for their favorite gladiator.

Zhang Heng waved his hand to thank the audience. Suddenly, he felt that someone was watching him amidst the crowd in a hostile manner. When he looked at the person, he only saw the person fully covered in clothes.

Chapter 782: Ally

Zhang Heng did not expect Gaby to bring him to Mark Reuss's residence. The latter's Domus was not in the gladiator school but was instead located diagonally across the street, which was a good location.

The Domus referred to the mansions of the wealthy. Unlike the modern villas, a Domus looked more like a small fortress, with a shape of a shell. There were almost no windows in this building. Unlike the kind of apartment that the ordinary people inhabited, the Domus had no balcony as well.

Zhang Heng then followed Gaby into the gate, through the entrance, and came to the front hall. Although there were no windows, it was bright enough inside the building. This is because the front hall did not have a roof. Such a design allowed the sunlight to pour into the hall and rainwater collection.

When it rained, the rainwater would flow out from the statues' mouths on the edge of the roof, and it would fall into a square rain-bearing pond. Not only could the rain-bearing pond be used as a decoration where water would be reflected on the surrounding walls to improve the atmosphere, but it was also connected to the underground water storage tank. It would ensure that the Domus would have a water supply at any given time, unlike civilians that lived in the apartments, where they had to go out to fetch water from the wells and fountains in the city.

Zhang Heng did not expect Mark Reuss to stand in the front hall to wait for his arrival. Seeing him show up, he immediately walked over with enthusiasm and put his hands on Zhang Heng's shoulders.

In the eyes of other Romans, this was a shocking move. It was unprecedented that the master would come out personally to greet the slave. And he just made a move that a friend would do to another friend. And the best part was there was not a hint of reluctance on Mark Reuss's face. It meant that everything he did to Zhang Heng was natural, and it came from the bottom of his heart.

Now he looked kind and friendly. As compared to the person who looked at the slaves under his feet condescendingly on the second floor's balcony, he was a completely different person now. But just when everyone has emerged in a harmonious atmosphere, a cold snort destroyed it.

Zhang Heng noticed the girl standing on the second floor earlier. When he walked into the front hall, her face was darkened. And when Mark Reuss placed his hands on Zhang Heng's shoulder, the girl stomped, turned her head, and returned to her room.

"Oh, that's my second daughter, Domar." Mark Reuss introduced, "Don't mind her. I have been very busy with the gladiator school and had no time to look after her. That is why she is so rude. Let's go to the reception room."

Gaby seemed to be a little worried about Mark Reuss's safety. So, he said, master... Do you want to find a few more people to go with you?"

"It's okay," Mark Reuss waved his hand, "Zhang Heng is with us. Besides, if he really wants to kill me, with his skill, I'm afraid there's no one here can stop him."

Gaby bowed and said nothing after that.

Mark Reuss then smiled again, "Come. Let's go to the reception room."

Compared to the front hall, the lighting in the reception room was dimmer. Once Zhang Heng's eyes adjusted to the dark surroundings, he could see the wall's murals and the mosaic floor tiles under his feet, which were quite colorful.

Of course, the reception room's most attractive item was the sizeable magnificent table and the chair studded with jewels. Mark Reuss was sitting on it now. He then pointed at the other stool on the opposite side.

Zhang Heng then sat on it without saying much.

"Interestingly, when I asked Gaby and slave traders, none of them remember who bought you." Mark Reuss said as he looked towards Zhang Heng.

"So?" Zhang Heng raised his eyebrows.

"So I guess this is a good thing because it means that no one knows your past. We can work to make you look more mysterious to the audience. This is a good thing. Most women would be attracted to a man like you. However, I think you are not mysterious enough. I can ask someone to spread some rumors about you. For example, I can tell them that you are a prince from a country in the east or a general or something. After that, someone conspired against you, and you were forced to flee to Rome. Unfortunately, you became a slave later and were sold to the arena. Every woman likes this kind of story. And they would sympathize with you..."

Mark Reuss was utterly immersed in the story that he made for Zhang Heng. Halfway through, he realized that Zhang Heng wasn't reacting. He then slapped his head and said, "Oh, did I not tell you that I wanted you to become the new trump card of Victor Arena? Do you know about Sethnets? He was the most popular and admired person in Rome when he was still in gladiator school. I can give you

everything he once had. No, I can give you more than what he had and make you more famous than him.”

“And what do you want me to do?” Zhang Heng asked.

“Victories, many victories, non-stop victories,” Mark Reuss leaned back, “I have nothing to ask from you except for victory, my friend. Of course, sometimes, we will need you to cooperate with us to do some necessary promotion.”

“I am your slave. You can just order me to do those things. If it doesn’t work, you can threaten me with death,” replied Zhang Heng.

“No, no, no. I don’t treat you as a slave. You are different from those guys,” Mark Reuss said while taking out a bottle of wine and two glasses from under the table. “Anyone who knows me knows that I am very different from other masters. I respect talented people. As long as you are capable of doing something really well, I will respect you from the bottom of my heart. Not to mention, I felt how you were a little special when I saw you for the first time. I am not talking about your appearance. It’s more towards your soul. I do like you, and that is the truth. And I think we can definitely do something big together. Couple with your strength and my operation, the whole of Rome will be crazy for you.”

Mark Reuss then poured the wine into two glasses and said enthusiastically, “Try it, this is wine from Persia.”

After Zhang Heng took the cup from him and drank the wine, he continued, “Now that we are friends, you can tell me what you want and need. Women, fine wines... or anything else. As long as it is within my reach, I can satisfy you.”

Zhang Heng put down the wine glass and said, “I want to go out and get some air.”

“No problem, you can leave the gladiator school whenever you want, as long as you inform Gaby about it.” Mark Reuss nodded without hesitation. He was not worried that Zhang Heng might run away from the gladiator school. The latter had no other relatives in Rome and coupled with his unique looks and popularity, it was even more difficult for him to escape.

For now, Zhang Heng had no intention to leave this place. He wanted to get back his game items that were stored in one of the shops in Rome. At least, something good happened to him after he became famous. It seemed that Mark Reuss wanted to maintain a good relationship with him. In other words, the latter would not desire to take away what he had. Besides, Zhang Heng was getting bored in the gladiator school. After so many days, he wanted to walk around the ancient city of Rome.

“Is there anything else?” Mark Reuss asked thoughtfully.

“Also, I don’t want to date anyone.” Zhang Heng said.

Mark Reuss gradually put away his smile when he heard what Zhang Heng said. A look of embarrassment appeared on his face.

Chapter 783: Private Talk

The gladiators were the super idols of this era.

Hence, in reference to later generations' celebrity idols, it would be difficult for Zhang Heng to run away from crony capitalism. No matter how famous a gladiator was, he still could not get rid of his slave status. That was the one unfavorable thing for him. As long as someone paid enough money, the school would ask the particular gladiator to secretly meet up with the generous lady.

When a man and a woman spent some time alone, it was apparent that something intimate would happen between them. This was also an extra income for the gladiator school. Most of the gladiators would usually not resist this kind of thing. Besides, they were not allowed to disobey their masters as well. Such a matter would further enrich their legendary tales. And it would also become something that the other people talked about on the street.

The love story between Sergio Louis and Aibia was well-known in the entire Rome. The former was a famous gladiator at that time, while the latter was the senator's wife. Aibia would always go on a date with him after his performance. This was something that everyone knew about in Rome.

But no one would have thought that Aibia would abandon her husband and family for Sergio Louis. The couples who were tortured by love finally eloped and left Rome together one night.

Their stories had since become the bards' favorite subjects when they wrote love poems.

Mark Reuss did not expect that Zhang Heng would reject something that seemed innocuous, not to mention how this would earn him way lesser money. If it were someone else, Ruess's face would have darkened now. However, he did not do so because his relationship with Zhang Heng was still in its honeymoon stage.

And he did not want to let the friendly atmosphere that he created with great effort vanish because of this matter. So he thought for a while and said, "I can help you reject some people you don't like, but I can't afford to offend those with high authority. Hence, I can't give you any promises, but I can promise you that from now on, no one will bother you until you complete your performance at the Amphitheatrum Flavium."

"Amphitheatrum Flavium?" Zhang Heng pretended not to know about it.

"Yes, that's right. I won't hide it from you anymore. The war between the Germanic and us is over. Our new emperor will return from the battlefield soon. At that time, there will be a grand gladiatorial show to mark the beginning of his reign. We are not the only gladiator school that will participate in this grand performance. Several other famous gladiator schools in Rome will also send their gladiators to join the battle. I heard that there are many powerful gladiators in other gladiator schools. Are you confident enough to defeat them?"

Mark Reuss looked at Zhang Heng expectantly. He was patient and friendly towards him because the upcoming gladiatorial performance would reshuffle the rankings of the gladiator schools.

Zhang Heng did not disappoint him. He nodded and said, "Of course, I will claim the victory for you."

"Very good!" Mark Reuss seemed overjoyed when he heard that.

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And earlier, Dadatis, on the other side, had also quietly left the gladiator school. No one paid attention to him. He came to a small market, passed by the alleys with clothes poles, and went to a wooden loggia where a man was selling spices. His stall was filled with saffron, pepper, cloves, mint, and rosemary.

Dadatis squatted down and started to pick the herbs that he wanted. Suddenly, he felt a sharp blade pointing at his back.

"Is the rumor true? Have you really become that old that you've lost your basic judgment?" spoke someone behind Dadatis.

Dadatis did not look back. Instead, he said lightly, "Maybe. But you don't seem to live up to your reputation as well. Otherwise, you wouldn't have taken the flowers handed to you by the girl at the previous intersection."

The mysterious person's expression changed when he heard what Dadatis said.

"Did you do something to the flowers? No, you are just bluffing."

"What do you think I'm here for then? I'm trying to make an antidote for you," Dadatis replied leisurely.

"You lie! How could some use spices be used to make an antidote?"

"No. I just know that you don't like things that taste bad. So I bought spices to make the antidote taste better," Dadatis said, inserting the mint in his hand into a small bottle.

The mysterious person behind him hesitated for a moment and finally took the vial, drank it, and at the same time, put away the dagger he held.

"Why are you not in the arena? Isn't he your most beloved student?"

"Because I don't watch a battle where I know who the winner is. I know you watched his gladiatorial performance, right? What do you think? He is good, yeah?" Dadatis clapped his hands and stood up.

"What an assassin needs are more stealthiness and patience. An excellent assassin would look for the perfect opportunity to kill the target with one blow, rather than fighting the opponent head-on," said the mysterious person said in an affronted tone. "He is more suitable to be a warrior and fight on the battlefield. Besides, he has already starting to be famous. Mark Reuss will use him as a trump card in the arena as long as he is smart enough. When he is used to living a comfortable and luxurious life, can he endure the loneliness, and will he be willing to become a nameless person like us?"

"You're making the same mistake I made when I first met him. And that is, you have underestimated him. Believe me, people like him can't be bought by Mark Reuss," Dadatis said. "As for his combat style, don't worry about it. I'm teaching him proper assassin skills right now."

"Oh, I see." The mysterious person chuckled. "You said that he couldn't be bought by Mark Reuss. Is it because you couldn't convince him to believe in Kreis and accept our beliefs?"

"I'm working hard on it. These things usually take time." Dadatis shrugged.

"Don't tell me that you forgot about the incident that happened two hundred years ago. At that time, the organization received the oracle, and we should have killed Octavius, just like how our people

assassinated Caesar. But Octavius managed to convince one of us to betray us. That traitor worked with Octavius and almost destroyed the Balance Blade. Many veteran assassins died because of this incident. And this was the result of recruiting people who did not believe in our belief.”

The mysterious person paused before continuing, “You know that the other members of the organization will not agree to let a person who does not believe in our beliefs.”

“I wish that the tragic incident did not happen two-hundred years ago. But like I said, it’s a process, and it takes time,” Dadatis replied calmly.

“A process? I don’t think you can get other members’ support except for your old friend, Faceless. And unlike the situation two hundred years ago, we are now surrounded by enemies.”

“Then, let’s stop turning other people into our enemies.”

“Why can’t you follow the previous plan and let Habitus assist us?” The mysterious person was a little angry.

“Because Habitus will not cooperate with us. I am his trainer. I know him far better than you. He is what you call the kind of person who most likely will betray us. We don’t know other options if we want to carry on with the plan smoothly.”

Chapter 784: Red Nose Blacksmith’s Shop

Zhang Heng did not know that the Balance Blade had an internal conflict on whether to accept him into the organization.

Of course, such things didn’t concern him too much. Now that he was finally standing on the ancient Roman city streets, he could see what this ancient empire was like with his own eyes.

Ancient Rome had many similarities to modern society, such as the amazing drainage system. Some of which could still be used in modern times. And for the outstanding contributions to architecture, many people might not imagine that all these buildings were built in the first century. There was a surge in population in Rome, and it caused the shortage of lands to build more houses. To solve the housing problem, they had to build a lot of tall buildings.

One of the most famous buildings was called the Happiness Building. Zhang Heng spotted it from where he stood because it is ten stories high. Of course, a ten-story tall building was nothing spectacular in the later generations. However, it was hard to imagine the residents living on the top floor going up and down every day without an elevator.

The Happiness Building was like the Oriental Pearl TV Tower in Rome, standing in the middle of the city. Of course, it was one of the few unique buildings in Rome. In contrast, the apartments where the commoners lived on the roadside were far less luxurious. Generally, these were only four or five stories high. Every floor added to the structure would yield the owners more income. They were usually enthusiastic about making their apartments taller. However, doing so could endanger the residents’ life.

Firstly, the building wasn’t nearly as stable as the high-rise building with reinforced concrete structure in the later generations. Therefore, it was often heard that the building here would collapse from time to time. Those who got buried under the collapsed building could only blame it on their bad luck. Besides,

there was no fire-fighting ladder in this era as well. Once a fire broke out, the people that lived on the upper floors would suffer the most. The gap between the rich and the poor in the apartment buildings was pronounced, where greedy apartment owners would build their apartments as high as possible. In the end, the empire had to come up with a corresponding law to limit the height of buildings.

Aside from the structural problem, once the building became taller, the frequency of someone tossing their garbage from the higher floors would increase tremendously. When Zhang Heng walked on the streets, he did see someone dumping their rubbish from the apartment's top floor. Fortunately, he was agile enough to dodge all of that.

He also encountered a group of kids who were having their classes on the roadside. This was how the students in Rome's elementary school studied. There were people coming and going on the streets, causing it to be constantly covered in dust. And the students were forced to listen to the vendors' shouts and the donkeys' braying.

Here, the teachers would teach their students basic spelling and arithmetic. After that, most commoners' children would start working to earn money. Only the children of the rich and nobles would continue to receive an education.

In all fairness, ancient Rome had a reasonable literacy rate among the people. It was better than the previous era. However, those that could not read and write were still more than those that were educated.

Zhang Heng asked for directions from the two locals, then continued to walk down the street. It did not take long for him to arrive at the Probus Bridge. After passing this bridge, Zhang Heng would come to the south of the River Tiber. This river passed through the city of Rome. And due to the relatively large amount of sediment, River Tiber's water would become golden when the afternoon sun shone on it. With the sycamore trees on both sides of the riverbank, it was indeed a unique scenery.

Zhang Heng walked across the Probus Bridge and finally saw the end of his trip.

The Red Nose Blacksmith's shop was located in the building on the southern river bank. According to the information that he retrieved from his character panel, the game items he brought with him to this dungeon were stored in that shop.

Zhang Heng then walked into the blacksmith's shop and saw the blacksmith crafting a dagger. The latter was a burly black man who was currently focusing on the work at hand and did not look back when he heard the footsteps behind him.

After a while, Zhang Heng said, "Vulkan."

Vulkan was the god of fire in Roman mythology, husband of Venus, and the password for Zhang Heng to retrieve his game items. However, when Zhang Heng uttered the word Vulkan, the black blacksmith did not respond to him. Zhang Heng waited patiently for about five minutes. Only after the blacksmith finished sharpening the blade and stood up did Zhang Heng realize how tall the blacksmith was. With a height far exceeding two meters, he was technically a giant.

"You are finally here." The blacksmith said, "Someone deposited something here two months ago and said that you might come and get it at any time, but I didn't expect to wait for so long."

While talking, he turned and walked into the back room, and after a while, he carried the package out.

With a quick glance, Zhang Heng knew the package was meant for him because there was a game organizing committee logo on it. Since he was in Rome, the logo was painted using some of the most commonly used dyes in Rome.

Zhang Heng opened the package and took out a few game items that could be used in this dungeon. After that, he put the remaining game items back in the package and asked the blacksmith, "Do you still provide storage services here?"

"Yes." The blacksmith nodded, "But it comes at a cost. One Sestertius every two days."

The fees were quite expensive, but Zhang Heng has just made a fortune from the recent battle. Even after the gladiator school took a massive cut from it, he was still left with some money. He was no poor. After that, he took a gold coin from his pocket and tossed it to the blacksmith, "This is the money for the 200-day deposit. Keep my items safe."

The blacksmith was puzzled after he took the gold coin from Zhang Heng, "You don't know me, right? This is your first time coming to my shop. Why do you trust me so much? Aren't you afraid that I will sell your things to others secretly?"

"This is a good question," Zhang Heng said. "But fortunately, I can judge others quite well."

Of course, Zhang Heng was not the type of person who would trust someone he met for the first time. The one that he trusted was not the blacksmith but the game organizing committee. Since the game organizing committee chose to store his game items here, all his game items would be protected with the highest security. Hence, Zhang Heng did not bother to look for other places to store his game items.

After paying the money, he left the shop. With all those game items, Zhang Heng was more powerful, and it gave him the strength to take the initiative in any battle. Next, Zhang Heng was about to look at the temple, but he suddenly stopped moving.

That was because he found out that the person that had been following him reappeared again. At first, Zhang Heng thought it was someone sent by Mark Reuss to follow him secretly in case he tried to run away. But now, it seemed like that was not the case. Zhang Heng noticed something hiding around their waist. While Zhang Heng was in the shop, they had gone to look for some weapons instead of staying idle. In other words, once they found the right place, they would not hesitate to attack Zhang Heng.

As for now, Zhang Heng was extremely valuable to Mark Reuss. He still needed him to earn more money for him and win the gladiatorial show that would be held more than a month later. Logically speaking, it was impossible that Mark Reuss would send someone to attack him.

Chapter 785: Are You Guys Interested?

Zhang Heng did not stay at the same place for too long. After a while, he continued to move forward, pretending to not notice the person that was following him.

He strolled along the banks of the Tiber River. At a pace neither fast nor slow, he blended into the people around him. After walking for a while, he turned right into Perfume Shop Street.

As the name suggested, this street was full of perfume shops.

Perfume's origins were discovered to be earlier than what most people had thought. It was used in ancient Egypt more than 3,000 years ago, before finding wide use in ancient Greek and Rome. The advertisements that were painted on the walls at Victor Arena where Zhang Heng fought earlier informed the audience that they would be spraying perfume at the lower stands. This served as a means for the arena to attract more audiences.

Other than that, the ancient Romans had many creative ways of using perfume. For example, when building a house, some people would mix it into the mortar. By doing that, when the sun shone on the mortar, it would emit fragrance. And some people would spray perfume on their slaves and horses, making them feel refreshed and happy wherever they went.

Due to the ancient Romans' passion for perfumes, the business of perfume shops flourished. Many people walked around Perfume Shop Street every day. Those tailing Zhang Heng felt as if they were facing a wave of enemies, worried that he might slip away if they failed to pay attention to him for even one second.

After a while, they realized they did not need to worry about Zhang Heng getting away from them. That was because Zhang Heng did not speed up his pace or look for somewhere to hide. From the moment he turned into the Perfume Shop Street, he was always within their sights. Until he left the Perfume Shop Street and came to a group of apartments at the back of the street, it was quieter over there.

Zhang Heng then walked into an alley with clothes poles. The bright-colored clothes hanging on top of it gently surfed in the wind. The group of people following Zhang Heng secretly glanced at each other, feeling that the right time to attack Zhang Heng was almost upon them. So, they quickly drew their weapons, most of which were daggers, and among them, one short sword. The group of five then dashed into the alley.

Zhang Heng had just turned into the alley a few seconds ago, but they lost sight of him.

What happened to their target?

The five people rubbed their eyes and were shocked to find out that Zhang Heng had vanished into thin air. They had been following him around for the whole day without losing him, but just as they were about to attack, Zhang Heng was nowhere to be found. This was something that they could not accept.

How did someone disappear into thin air? If they had not seen it with their own eyes, they would have probably not believed it. Just when they were thinking about dealing with the person who hired them, a voice came from above their heads.

"Are you looking for me?"

Zhang Heng loosened the grip on his hand that was holding the wall and jumped off. And he landed right on the back of the last person, who lost balance and fell into the four people in front of him.

Immediately, Zhang Heng took advantage of the split second he had to pick up the opponent's short sword that fell on the ground. The four people in front of him also turned around to help their ally up.

The peace did not last very long. The next moment, the five people charged at Zhang Heng without saying a word.

And Zhang Heng had no intention to talk to them as well. Judging by their appearance, they looked to be street thugs that had committed all kinds of crimes. To make them talk, Zhang Heng had to give them a good beating first.

Fortunately, such a battle was a piece of cake for him.

Zhang Heng chose to fight them at this location because it was a relatively remote spot. It would also force the five thugs to attack him here. And the second reason was that the alley was very narrow. It could fit only a maximum of two people when they stood next to each other. If they made too much movement, they would definitely alert passers-by.

Although there were five people on the enemy's team, only two of them could attack Zhang Heng simultaneously. And they might interfere with each other's attack. So Zhang Heng went ahead and stabbed them. One wanted to move to the right, and the other tried to move left. In the end, none of them could dodge Zhang Heng's attack.

Since they were just a group of thugs, none possessed any notable fighting skills. All they could rely on was their brute force. Even Varo, who had only been trained for fifty days, could deal with the two of them at the same time.

And it took Zhang Heng less than three minutes to make them succumb to him. It meant none of them dared to get up from the ground after Zhang Heng beat them up.

Then Zhang Heng squatted in front of one of the thugs who seemed to be the leader, lifted his head with a short sword, and asked, "Come on, tell me, who sent you?"

"I can't say. Otherwise, I won't be able to live in Rome anymore," replied the young man with gritted teeth. Looking to be of only about sixteen or seventeen years old, he was one tough cookie.

"You should know that I'm not happy with this answer, right?" Zhang Heng looked into his eyes.

Although Zhang Heng spoke calmly, the young thug could not help but begin to tremble in fear. Before he could talk, the person next to him said, "Just tell him. Tell him everything. We are all in this together. We didn't make much money anyway. Each of us can only get seven Denarius. It is not worth risking your life for so little money."

Upon that, a look of hesitation appeared on the young thug's face.

"I think what your friend said is very reasonable. If I were you, I would take his advice," Zhang Heng said, driving his sword deeper into the thug's neck at the same time.

"Hunahpu, the people from Hunahpu Arena hired us. They paid us to follow you whenever you leave the arena alone. We did not expect that we would get the opportunity to execute our plan on the first day," the young man replied in a low voice, his words filled with bitterness.

"They asked you to kill me?" Zhang Heng raised his eyebrows.

"No. We just had to make sure that you stayed in bed for two months."

"I see now."

Zhang Heng knew that the Hunahpu Arena must have hired them to attack him because of the gladiatorial show that was going to be held at the Amphitheatrum Flavium in a month's time. After coming to Rome for some time, Zhang Heng now knew a thing or two about gladiator schools. He knew that Hunahpu Arena was the fourth-largest gladiator school in Rome and was considered one of Mark Reuss's competitors. Over the years, both gladiator schools were filled with conflict.

However, Zhang Heng did not expect that they would act on him so quickly. He had only gained fame a few hours ago after the twelve-man mixed fight ended. Even if the Hunahpu Arena wanted to mess with Mark Reuss, it was only logical that they would start with Habitus first.

Zhang Heng tapped the hilt with his fingers as he pondered over the matter.

The five gangsters looked at Zhang Heng nervously. Their faces were filled with anxiety because they did not know what would happen to them.

A moment later, Zhang Heng stretched out his hand, "Hand over the money you received."

The five thugs did not do what Zhang Heng asked right away. They were reluctant to hand over the money to Zhang Heng. Since they did not have a proper job, they would not have any source of income. It was not easy for them to come across an opportunity to make money. Although it was not much, handing over the money to Zhang Heng just like that was very much a painful affair. Moreover, they had to think about explaining to their employer after they failed the given task.

Seeing that the group of thugs wouldn't hand over the money to him, Zhang Heng said again, "I am always fair. You can choose between not getting out of bed for two months or giving me the money."

In the end, they had to hand over the money to Zhang Heng reluctantly. After Zhang Heng counted the coins, he did not put them into his pocket. Instead, he said, "Very well, I now have a profitable business to discuss with you guys. I'm not sure if you guys will be interested in it."

Chapter 786: Wise Choice

The thugs looked at each other when they heard what Zhang Heng said, not expecting that he would make such a proposal. He just robbed them of their money and used their money to hire them.

Was he planning to take advantage of them without breaking his wallet?

Since the five thugs required money now, the leader quickly responded. They would not be able to get the money back if they said no to Zhang Heng right now. The wisest thing they could do right now was to hear what Zhang Heng had to tell them first.

He then asked, "So, you want us to teach the people at Hunahpu Arena a lesson?"

"Oh, no. Rest assured. I won't make the task difficult for you guys," replied Zhang Heng. "It has nothing to do with the Hunahpu Arena. I just want you to help me to investigate something."

Zhang Heng briefly told them Varo's story, then went on, "With Varo's talent, it was a waste that he was sold and thrown into the gladiator school. Clearly, someone had spoken to Mark Reuss in advance. Varo's wife and his friend are just civilians. They shouldn't be powerful enough to do something like this. I need your help to find out who did such a thing to him. Let me give you a friendly tip. You can look for a slave trader called Chickpea and ask him about it. I will give you ten Denarius first. Once you are done

with this task, I will give you the rest of the money. What do you think? If you are pleased with this arrangement, maybe I will give you more jobs next time.”

The leader looked at his allies, one of them hesitated, and the remaining three nodded at him. So the leader then nodded at Zhang Heng, “Okay.”

“A wise decision. Come to the gladiator school to find me when you have what I want.” Zhang Heng counted ten silver coins and returned the daggers to the five thugs.

...

Zhang Heng would always help with Varo’s affairs. For example, he taught Varo how to pass the final assessment, and during the twelve-man mixed fight, he chose to give to support Varo mentally instead of helping him defeat his opponent. By doing that, he could help Varo to boost his confidence. If Zhang Heng were right, the two would not team up again.

Zhang Heng had always guessed that someone powerful must have wanted Varo to suffer. It would not be easy for him to regain his freedom. When they were at the training camp, Zhang Heng did not say much to Varo. He asked the five thugs who attacked him earlier to investigate this matter since he stumbled upon a good opportunity. If it went well, Varo would at least know who his real enemy was.

Besides, Zhang Heng was trying to recruit someone that could help him to complete specific tasks from time to time. After all, he was just an outsider in the city of Rome. When it came to the people he knew and how to deal with them, he was not as good as the five thugs in front of him. Besides, he was still a slave.

According to Dadatis’s statement, Balance Blade had a group of excellent peripheral members. However, Zhang Heng was still in the test period. In other words, he would not be able to make use of them for now. Besides, even if Zhang Heng finally passed the test and joined the Balance Blade, he figured he would not be able to trust the Balance Blade fully. In the end, he still needed to come up with his own trusted team. Those five thugs might not be his permanent team members, but it was good to start with them.

In short, whether it was the gladiator school or the Balance Blade, Zhang Heng had to be cautious of them. He had to prepare a way out for himself when things went south. After that, Zhang Heng did not go and visit the temple after those thugs attacked him. Not because he was worried that the people from Hunahpu Arena would attack him again, but because the sky had begun to turn dark.

So Zhang Heng had to return to the gladiator school. Mark Reuss seemed to have high hope on him. Earlier, he agreed to Zhang Heng’s request to change to a different place to stay. When Zhang Heng walked into the new room, he found out that the room was more than doubled his previous room size. And Zhang Heng did not need to listen to others’ snore anymore. Other than that, Mark Reuss also assigned a female slave to serve Zhang Heng. Not only would she take care of Zhang Heng’s daily life, but she was also asked to meet Zhang Heng’s sexual needs.

However, Zhang Heng was more accustomed to living alone. When he thought about how Mark Reuss might punish the girl if he drove her away, Zhang Heng decided not to say anything in the end. When the sky was completely dark, he did a simple wash-up and went to bed.

This time his senses were sharper. When he opened his eyes, he saw Dadatis standing in front of his bed. Dadatis then beckoned to him. After that, the two walked past the asleep slave girl lying on the floor and left the house.

For the past week, he had visited Zhang Heng several times in the middle of the night. It seemed like Dadatis wanted to keep this a secret. Such a problem, however, had never existed when he was dealing with Habitus.

"How's it going? Did you have a nice afternoon?" Dadatis asked.

"You found the people who attacked me?" Zhang Heng was a little surprised. He knew that those gangsters did not lie to him.

"You are only half right. Those people that attacked you are from the other arena. All I did was give your basic information in advance to them. Based on your performance in the twelve-man mixed fight, anyone smart enough would attack you. "Dadatis said leisurely, "Very well, you have asked Mark Reuss for the right to go out freely. Our next stage of training happens to be outside school."

"Hmm?"

"You've been practicing stealth for so long. Only actual combat can help you to digest the theories that you learned from me," Dadatis said, "You need to lose the person that is following you. And this time, you can't attack them."

"It doesn't sound difficult." Zhang Heng said, even if he did not learn how to be stealthy, he could get rid of people who were following him with his speed.

"No, no, you don't understand what I mean. I want you to stay around them without being discovered by them. This is what it means to be stealthy for an assassin," Dadatis said.

"Are you serious? I'm a foreigner. It's hard not to notice me in the crowd."

"That's why this is the exercise that best reflects the stealth ability of an assassin." Dadatis' assertive words made it difficult for Zhang Heng to refute.

Dadatis paused and continued, "You possess excellent combat skills. Whenever you have a problem, you will think about how to solve it with your skills. Usually, this is not a problem. However, it will hinder your progress on the road to becoming a great assassin. You need to overcome this if you want to be a great assassin."

Even though Dadatis's tone was similar to his usual tone, Zhang Heng still heard something wrong with his voice. He then asked, "Did you encounter any trouble recently?"

"Some of the members in the organization disagree with you joining the Balance Blade. But I am not worried about this." Dadatis hesitated and decided to tell Zhang Heng the truth. "About two hundred years ago, there was a traitor in our organization. He took refuge in Octavius, the Roman emperor at the time. With the help of Octavius, he formed an assassin organization to assassinate the members of the Balance Blade. This is why I don't want others to know that we are meeting each other constantly. Over the years, I have to make myself available and show my face to get certain things done. Although I have done some disguise, I still can't hide it from the veteran assassin."

Chapter 787: Mark Reuss's Gift

"So, there is an assassin organization going against your assassin organization?" Zhang Heng asked.

"Yes. And because the Balance Blade's traitor founded it, it had a very similar organizational structure. Except for the presence of the priest, his organization is a replica of the Balance Blade. They even had the same number of core members," Dadatis said helplessly.

"I see."

"Although they have only two hundred years of history, the ruler at that time supported them. Hence, they managed to grow their organization fairly quickly. From that time onwards, they have been coming up with different ways to go against us. Supposedly, I should have waited for you to pass the test and join the Balance Blade before I tell you all these things, but given your current situation, it is indeed possible for you to meet our rivals in the future. I think it's only right to let you know in advance," said Dadatis. "For the sake of your safety, you'd better not openly discuss Balance Blade with others."

"Understood," Zhang Heng said.

"Very well. Then I will teach you how to conceal yourself in the crowd. Hopefully, you know how to deal with them in the future," Dadatis said.

...

Zhang Heng's life was straightforward for the next month or so. Dadatis would come and look for him from time to time in the middle of the night and continue to teach him the combat skills of an assassin. He would then go out and play peekaboo with the people hired by other gladiator schools to attack him during the day.

Since Dadatis told him that he was not allowed to attack the people tailing him, Zhang Heng took a lot of effort to deal with them. As he had said, his looks were very special in the city of Rome, and concealing himself in the crowd wouldn't be easy. Besides the stealth skills that Dadatis taught him, Zhang Heng still had one more hidden trump card: his Lv2 makeup skills. What surprised Dadatis was how good Zhang Heng actually was even without anyone teaching him. Under the tremendous pressure he faced, he began to integrate his makeup and stealth skills to conceal himself better.

He even participated in four more gladiatorial performances, and as expected, won all four of them. And they were flawless victories. Coupled with the way Mark Reuss operated and packaged Zhang Heng, his popularity skyrocketed in a very short period.

Now, almost the entire city of Rome knew of a very powerful oriental man in the Victor Arena. And Zhang Heng also received the nickname Black Lightning. Over a couple of days, he received more than a hundred love letters. Ever since Sethnets retired, fewer spectators visited the Victor Arena. With Zhang Heng now its main anchor, the seats in the Victor Arena had filled up again. Mark Reuss could not be happier.

But soon, another matter quickly captured everyone's attention.

And that was the new emperor of Rome, His Royal Highness Emperor Commodus, finally returned from the front line.

Five Good Emperors ruled the Antonine dynasty, and Nerva was the first ruler. The interesting thing was that the first four of these five emperors had no heirs to inherit the throne. Hence, they all chose to adopt a son with an outstanding moral code to inherit the throne. When it was Aurelius's turn to rule, he had a son named Commodus.

Strictly speaking, Commodus was not the first son of Aurelius. Aurelius had four sons before him, but unfortunately, the oldest child only lived to about eleven years old. Hence Faustina bore a pair of twins for Aurelius. The older twin brother died at the age of four, and his younger twin brother was Commodus.

Later, Aurelius welcomed his seventh son, Marcus. Marcus was chosen as his heir at the age of four. Unfortunately, he died of illness at the age of seven. In the end, Commodus became the only surviving son of Aurelius.

This might sound a bit depressing, but considering that none of Aurelius's four predecessors had a son to inherit their thrones, he was in a definitely better situation. Moreover, Aurelius foresaw that he would die not long after he contracted the incurable illness. So, he began to train his only heir. When he went to fight the Germanic, he brought Commodus with him and had personally taught him how to handle government affairs and lead the soldiers to fight the war. In seeking other military support, Aurelius arranged a marriage between Commodus and Christina. The latter was born in a well-known Roman family. Her father was assigned twice as a consul, and he had considerable influence on the senate. In Aurelius's vision, Christina would become the link between Commodus and the senate, and the marriage would be vital in assisting Commodus to further stabilize his rule.

Aurelius's health, however, was worse than he thought. In the end, he failed to teach everything that Commodus was supposed to learn. When he passed away, Commodus was only nineteen years old.

And now, this young man who had just begun his sophomore year had to take the scepter from his father to become the new ruler of the entire Roman Empire.

With his father's saint-like image and the four previous four good emperors, the people of Rome were looking forward to what the new emperor would do, especially when he returned to take over the power.

And Commodus did not disappoint his people. On the second day of his return to Rome, he announced at the enthronement ceremony that a grand gladiatorial performance would be held in order to reward the army and gain the support of the people.

The young man who had just turned twenty had not forgotten his father's teachings. The bread and gladiatorial performances were vital to a king's ruling. His generous act immediately won the cheers and support of the people.

Simultaneously, the senate, which was responsible for preparing the gladiatorial performance, had also begun. All the important notices and documents were distributed to various gladiator schools in Rome and other cities.

There was no doubt that this would be a feast for those who joined the gladiator performance.

"Look, this is a new weapon that I had someone special look for you."

That afternoon, Mark Reuss visited Zhang Heng and brought him a gift—two Persian swords. Instead of swords, they looked more like a pair of blades. These could be considered as ancestors of the Damascus swords of later generations.

The two blades gifted to Zhang Heng by Mark Reuss were obviously better than the traditional standard weapons. In this era, most of the Roman weapons were made of iron and steel. However, since they were still not good at manipulating metal's carbon content, the quality of their swords wasn't that great.

However, the two Persian swords that Mark Reuss gifted him could be regarded as the ultimate weapons. Not only were they sharp enough, but they also came without the shortcomings of other bladed weapons. Other than that, the sword body was extremely tough. The craftsmanship was similar to the samurai swords from later generations, forged with high-carbon steel was wrapped around low-carbon steel. Hence, this pair of swords had almost no weakness.

The caster could have discovered this crafting method accidentally, or he might have mastered a unique crafting method.

Zhang Heng was more inclined to the former possibility. Otherwise, the quality of weapons in Rome would have improved tremendously.

Chapter 788: New Mission

"How did it go?" Mark Reuss rubbed his hands as he looked at Zhang Heng with eagerness.

The latter swung the two Persian swords in his hands and nodded. "Not bad."

"I'm glad you like it. I'm counting on you this time," said Mark Reuss. "For the honor of Victor Arena, we must win the championship of this gladiatorial show."

"I will do my best." Zhang Heng said.

"Very well. I know I can always count on you." Mark Reuss patted Zhang Heng's shoulder with satisfaction, "Other than you; we also plan to send Bach, Habitus, Carnero, Mulkazan, Paral, and Milo. All seven of you will compete with the gladiators from other schools. But of course, I place most of my faith in you. Other than that, I have also asked Gaby to find out about the gladiators from other arenas and mark out the ones you need paying attention to. However, the name list won't come out until tomorrow. Oh, yes, I need you to attend to a dinner tonight."

Zhang Heng raised his eyebrows.

"I know, I know, we had an agreement. But this time is different. The dinner will be held at the Dior Senate's house. He is one of the most powerful people in the entire senate. The entire empire's most influential people will be attending the dinner tonight, and that includes our new emperor. They want to know what the gladiators look like before the show. All the gladiators are required to attend this dinner. Later, I will get someone to get you a new set of clothes."

Mark Reuss turned and walked out of the house but stopped walking when he reached the door. He then paused and added, "You'd better use the remaining time to take a shower and spray some perfume on yourself. Believe me. It's never a bad thing to make yourself popular in front of these people. What you are about to face is the most powerful group of people in Rome."

...

Zhang Heng's slave girl was very diligent. Just as Mark Reuss left the house, she hurriedly headed to prepare items Zhang Heng needed for a good bath. But as soon as she opened the door with the wooden barrel in her arms, she could not help but yawn. And the next moment, the wooden barrel in her hand fell to the ground. Startled, she bent down to pick the barrel up, but she suddenly felt extremely sleepy. Unable to resist this drowsiness, she finally fell asleep on the ground while holding the wooden barrel.

Zhang Heng then looked at Dadatis, who walked in from the door. Surprised to see him, he said, "Did you just come to see me in broad daylight?"

"Don't worry. I'm very careful. No one sees me," said Dadatis. "You've kept to our previous agreement and earned the right to join the gladiatorial performance. I'm here to tell you your next goal."

"Hmm?"

"If everything goes according to plan, you should receive an invitation to the dinner tonight. This is a rare opportunity for you. We need you to approach someone there and impress him if possible."

"Who is that person?"

"Our new emperor, Commodus."

"So your target is the new Roman emperor?" Zhang Heng wasn't too surprised when he heard the name. Perhaps he already knew that Commodus had been actually killed in an assassination. With Dadatis joining the gladiator school, many things had become self-explanatory.

Commodus was probably the Roman emperor that liked gladiatorial battles the most. And he also had a weird habit—watching the fight from the stands didn't seem enough for him. For him to fully enjoy the battle, he would descend into the battlefield and join the battle. Consequently, he died in a somewhat ironic way—death by strangulation in the bathtub by a gladiator.

"Maybe, maybe not." Dadatis's answer was ambiguous.

"You had better be honest with me. If my target is s Commodus, I am afraid I will quit the test," Zhang Heng said.

"Why?" Dadatis asked in a serious tone.

"I may be a foreigner, but I am not stupid. I know the consequences of assassinating a Roman emperor." Zhang Heng replied indifferently, "The conditions you offered aren't good enough for me to take this risk."

Dadatis looked into Zhang Heng's eyes, and after a while, he gave in. "Well, I can assure you that your target this time is not Commodus."

"Who is my target then?" Zhang Heng asked, "Are you still planning to hide it from me at this point?"

This time, Dadatis hesitated for a long time before finally replying. "Altrus, Commodus's most trusted advisor. He has royal blood flows in his body too. Before he met Commodus, he was a low-life in the city

of Rome. And now, his fate is changed completely. He and another young man named Clint are Commodus's right-hand man, and they are inseparable from Commodus. He is most likely going to be the second most powerful person of the empire in the future."

"Why do you want to assassinate him?"

"This is the oracle from Kreis. Our responsibility is only to execute it, not to ask why," said Dadatis. "The plan is simple. Altrus's whereabouts have always been a secret. He knows that many people have become very jealous of him, and he's paranoid at almost all times to prevent an assassination. Since he has to always execute Commodus's order, Commodus becomes the only person who knows his whereabouts."

"So you want me to get close to Commodus and get to know Altrus's whereabouts?"

"Yes, that's right," Dadatis said. "Commodus isn't like the other emperors. He likes to interact with commoners, especially with the gladiators. You can use this fact to your advantage to get close to him... gradually get to know him better. Consider it as making a new friend."

Zhang Heng thought for a while before asking, "If I complete this task, that would mean I pass the test, right? Can you promise me that you will not bother me again?"

"Yes. If you get it done, you will be my successor and become the Balance Blade's core member. As I said before, our management is actually very loose and free. Until the next oracle comes, the members of the organization can do whatever they want."

"Until the next oracle arrives?" Zhang Heng asked rhetorically.

Dadatis rolled his eyes and said, "I know what you are thinking. You don't have to worry about it. You are not the only core member of the Balance Blade. They will not necessarily call upon you to carry out the order. Although it is not a written rule, the same member will usually not perform two consecutive tasks under normal circumstances. However, I can't guarantee that it will not happen in the future."

Zhang Heng wasn't too worried about the future. Once he completed his main quest, he would get to leave this dungeon. Even if the Balance Blade were extremely powerful, they would not be able to cross over to the real world to hunt him down. Besides, Zhang Heng felt that Dadatis had given him his best to teach Zhang Heng everything he knew. It would not be ethical for him to ignore and abandon him. So, Zhang Heng considered it as a repayment for the combat knowledge that Dadatis taught him. He decided to help Balance Blade to find the whereabouts of Altrus.

After a while, Zhang Heng said, "Leave this matter to me."

Chapter 789: Sartonilos

Zhang Heng had been to Mark Reuss's domus before, and the interior decorations were a clear statement of luxury. When he compared Mark Reuss's domus with Dior's, however, he realized that it wasn't much different from roadside squatters.

This was the gap between the nouveau riche and the noble families.

Mark Reuss, master of a gladiator school, had to put on a smile when he came here. Since he was not qualified to enter for dinner, he could only wait in the front hall with his slaves. Apart from him, several

masters from other gladiator schools were here as well. Some gladiators had even come from far away from different parts of the empire.

The entire front hall looked like a mini ethnographic expo.

Needless to say, Zhang Heng's height was not prominent among all the other gladiators, and he would be buried among the crowd when he stood in the corner. Bach was considered the most muscular newcomer, but he did not look all that burly anymore standing among the veteran gladiators.

Zhang Heng even saw a taller guy than the black blacksmith in the Red Nose Smithy, standing there like the giant in the myth. All the gladiators here were extremely hot-blooded, which meant that they were not going just to stand there and not do anything about their opponents. After a while, the friction between them started to worsen.

Other than that, the masters of these gladiator schools were also divided into different factions. First of all, gladiator schools outside of Rome would never communicate with Roman schools. Clearly, the one inside the city of Rome was stronger, which had caused the schools outside Rome to unite and work together. Some of these, however, were friendly to other gladiator schools within the city of Rome. Still, it was inevitable that a tense relationship with the other gladiator schools would crop up. For example, the master of the Hunahpu Arena who wanted to hurt Zhang Heng had a very poor relationship with Mark Reuss. The moment they met, they started to ridicule each other.

Staccioli bought a group of powerful barbarians three months ago. He wanted to win a good ranking for his gladiator school in upcoming grand gladiatorial performances. When he looked at Bach and others, his eyes were filled with disdain. However, when he paused when he saw Zhang Heng. And his expression became gloomy.

"Let me remind you of something, Mark Reuss. You'd better keep a few good gladiators. Otherwise, if all your people are killed by my people, I am worried that no one will buy your arena tickets next time. By that time, your Victor Arena will be over."

When Mark Reuss heard what he said, he put on a smile. "Staccioli, you are still as stupid as ever. What's the matter? Afraid of me before the fight even begins? Are you trying to trick me into reserving my strength? Do you think you can fool me like this? After this performance, you should really think about the future of the Hunahpu Arena.

Mark Reuss then turned to Zhang Heng and others. "You don't need to show any mercy to the gladiators from Hunahpu Arena. Kill all of them if it is possible."

Staccioli let out a cold snort when he heard those words. He turned to his gladiator and said furiously, "Did you hear what our opponents just said? If you don't want to die, go all out to kill all of them."

"..."

Other than old rivals like Mark Reuss and Staccioli, both sides did have good relationships with some other gladiator schools. For example, after Mark Reuss and Staccioli had argued with each other, both sides talked to the smaller schools to exchange the latest information.

At the same time, a minor fight was happening on the other side.

A gladiator from a school outside Rome walked up to a bearded gladiator sitting on the steps and asked, "Are you Sartonilos?"

The bearded gladiator did not lift his head when he heard the question, saying instead, "Get lost."

The gladiator, however, did not leave just because Sartonilos asked him to get lost. Instead, he walked half a step further and said, "I heard that after Sethnets, you are the most famous gladiator in Rome. Do you know what I think?"

Sartonilos did not answer. He looked drunk and weak.

"That's because the people in this city have never seen what a real gladiator looks like. My school goes on a tour every year. We travel all over the country to fight with local gladiators, and we have seen all kinds of powerful gladiators. These men constantly hone their martial arts. We are different from you. We are not toys for the noble and young ladies. We are the real warriors," the gladiator proclaimed proudly.

It was apparent that many gladiators around him agreed with what he said. This was actually quite common. Although everyone here was a gladiator, those who lived in Rome were generally worth a lot more. They generally had better living conditions and were not short of admirers as well. If they were talented, the school's owner would not mind spending a vast sum of money to nurture them. On the contrary, the gladiators from outside the city of Rome, especially the ones who traveled to various places, not only lived in worse conditions but even received less reputation and gifts. It was understandable why they disliked any gladiator that came from the city of Rome.

The gladiator from outside of Rome felt a little strange when he saw so many people supporting him. However, none of them said a word about it. And a few gladiators that stood close to him had started taking a few steps back.

The gladiator named Sartonilos finally raised his head at this time.

"Then why the f*ck did you enter the city?"

"I'm here to teach you a good lesson and let you know who the greatest gladiator really is..." Before he could finish speaking, Sartonilos, who seemed drunk earlier, suddenly rose up and leaped toward him. The gladiator was paying attention to his hands, not expecting Sartonilos to tackle his face with his head.

And the people around him could hear the sound of his nose bone cracking. Soon after that, blood gushed out from his nostrils, and simultaneously, his body leaned back, and he fell to the ground. After that, Sartonilos jumped on him and raised his fist.

The last picture that the gladiator saw was the smirk of Sartonilos.

"Don't worry about your nose because I can guarantee that you won't get to use it again." After Sartonilos finished speaking, he landed his fist on the gladiator's face. And the latter immediately passed out.

But Sartonilos did not stop there. He continued to punch him until the gladiator's head turned into a pile of mush. Sartonilos then raised his head again and tidied his hair with his blood-covered hands. And at

the same time, he used his hand to wipe off the sweat from his face. This action made his face looked even more hideous.

Afterward, Sartonilos patted the dust off his body and stood up from the ground, "Now, it's finally quiet." His gaze swept across the foreign gladiators around him before he asked, "Anyone else wants to teach me a lesson in his place?"

All the foreign gladiators were silent after they heard the words. Among them, the strong man who looked like a giant seemed to be a little eager to fight with him, but his master quickly forbade him.

Chapter 790: Meeting Commodus For The First Time

Before the departure, Zhang Heng received some information provided by Mark Reuss. Among them, the opponent he needed to pay attention to was a man named Sartonilos.

The latter was a gladiator of the same age as Sethnets. When he began gaining fame, Sethnets happened to be at the peak of his career. Hence, Sartonilos's name was entirely overshadowed by Sethnets. Displeased by such injustice, he decided to challenge Sethnets.

However, the two belonged to different gladiator schools. In other words, they could not meet up to fight with each other. If Sartonilos wanted to challenge Sethnets, both gladiator schools needed to agree.

But at that time, Sethnets was already going downhill. Hence, Mark Reuss did not want him to lose his hard-earned reputation to other gladiators from different schools. Because of that, Sartonilos's school doubted if he was powerful enough to defeat their Sethnets. Besides, since they had already heard the rumor about Sethnets' impending retirement, they would let him do that first. By that time, Sartonilos would be able to claim the throne. It was the safest approach.

On the contrary, if the two fought against each other, and Sartonilos defeated Sethnets, his reputation would skyrocket. However, if he lost to Sethnets, who was about to go on retirement, it would significantly affect Sartonilos's reputation since he was in his prime. Besides, his school still expected that he would earn them a lot of money in the coming years.

Considering that the risks and returns were unproportional, the gladiator school did not agree to the battle in the end.

But it was undeniable that Sartonilos was indeed the most powerful gladiator after Sethnets. After Sethnets' retirement, some people thought that he was the greatest gladiator in Rome. Recently, however, some negative rumors revolvrf around Sartonilos. It seemed he had sprouted a new addiction to alcohol and had not participated in any gladiatorial performance for a month.

When the rest saw him today, it turned out that the rumor was true.

That said, his glorious battle record was something that would remain unchanged. Many gladiators in Rome were still very jealous of him. As for those hillbillies from the gladiator schools outside of Rome, they knew nothing about Sartonilos, which was why they dared to provoke him so recklessly.

The unfortunate gladiator that Sartonilos killed served as a lesson for everyone that they should not mess with him. Not only was his face destroyed, but it also seemed like he could no longer participate in

the subsequent gladiatorial performances. This was something that his gladiator school had to worry about.

After Sartonilos turned around and sat back on the steps, a slave immediately carried the dead gladiator on the ground out of the door. When the other gladiators looked at Sartonilos again, they were awe-inspired.

Because of this episode, the noisy front hall had become quieter, and the gladiators had become more cautious of him. After all, the grand gladiatorial performance was about to begin and it was only logical that one should avoid all possible conflicts at this time. Nobody wanted to be disqualified by the organizer before the battle began.

Not long after that, a servant walked out of the back room and walked directly to the place where all the gladiator school's owners were. After hearing what he said, Mark Reuss and the others put on their best look and immediately summoned their respective gladiators to stand in the front hall.

They had been waiting for quite some time tonight, and were growing impatient. After all, they were like emperors in their respective gladiator schools and waiting for others was uncommon for them. However, when they saw a group of men and women coming out of the dining hall, they had to try their best to squeeze out a smile.

As Mark Reuss said, the people who came here tonight represented the most powerful individuals in the entire Rome. Every single one of them was powerful to cause an impact on the political situation in Rome. For gladiator school owners like Mark Reuss, those were the people that they did not dare to offend.

And at the center of all those influential people were a young man and a middle-aged man.

Among them, the middle-aged man was the host of this dinner—Dior. The Senate was composed of more than six hundred people, and he controlled fifty seats. The other one-hundred seats had to show him great respect as well. In other words, before carrying out any proposal in the Senate, one had to seek his approval first. For those proposals that he objected to, they would never get to see the light again.

Such a well-respected and powerful figure was now treating a young man with respect.

Without the introduction by others, Zhang Heng already knew who the young man was.

Other than the emperor of the Ancient Roman Empire, no one could make Dior lower himself. Although the others were quite powerful, they could only humble themselves in front of the two of them.

"Your Majesty, this is the warrior I have found for tomorrow's gladiatorial show," Dior said.

A group of nobles walked down the steps, looking curiously at the gladiators in the front hall as if they were picking goods in a shop. From time to time, some of them would pat the gladiators' shoulders and pinch their chests.

"They all look very strong. There should be a good show tomorrow." A strange look flashed through the young emperor's eyes, especially when he saw the gladiator that looked like a giant. He reached out and wanted to touch his skin but before he could complete his action, something seemed to cross his mind.

So, he retracted his hand. He then coughed twice and put on a serious expression, "You have done well. The people will thank you, Dior."

"Thank you for your compliment, Your Majesty. What I have done here is nothing compared to your great achievements. You have solved the troubles caused by the barbarians at the border. You brought back the long-lost peace to Rome again. This is something that your father could not complete when he was still ruling. It is an honor for the Senate and me to complete these trivial matters for you. Rest assured, everything will be executed perfectly. Nothing will go wrong in the performance later. The people of the entire city of Rome will be grateful that they are able to enjoy such a high-quality gladiatorial performance."

"If that is the case, it's great then," said the young emperor. "I know that I still have a long way to go to become as good as my father. I'm just following his teachings and his example. My father always said that being with a wise man will also increase my wisdom. I think you and all the members in the Senate are the wise men that he talked about."

"You really flatter me." Dior bowed slightly, but seemed a little hesitant to speak.

"What's wrong?" the young emperor asked.

"I hope you don't get me wrong, Your Majesty. Your father is undoubtedly a great emperor. Losing him is the loss of the entire Rome. But, fortunately, we still have you here with us. Since you call me a wise man, then maybe I can also give you a small suggestion."

"I'm all ears."

"I heard that some people in the military do not support the truce that you made with the Germanic tribe. They think it goes against your father's will, but I hope you know that the Senate will always be on your side. You made the right choice. As I said, your father is great, but maybe it's time for us to look forward. You are the emperor of Rome. Sometimes you don't have to keep thinking about what your father will do in such a situation or what he expects you to do. You have done a good job about the armistice. The people of Rome are happy with the decision you've made. So, try to give yourself a break sometimes," said Dior.