

Battle of Both Worlds

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As I entered the arena, rows filled with supporters donning their Warrior's colours—the wave of red could not outmatch the sea of blue. Disappointment filled me as I faced the empty stand, the absence of the Emperor mocking me. I bowed at those who believed in me, they in return roared with pride. Their uplifting support fuelled the animal within, unleashing it. I growled at my opponent before posing a mighty warrior's stance in an attempt to intimidate her. She returned a bellowing scream. We stared each other down, awaiting the signal to begin.

Let the battle commence!

We charged at one another, like lions stalking their prey. Our swords collided, and the clash of the shields competed with the patriotic screams of the crowd. Adrenaline coursed through my veins, my fingers twitching with excitement. Although my opponent was large of girth, I possessed agility and speed. She ran at me, flames in her eyes. I sensed she was desperate for the win, but so was I. As the reigning champion, I would continue to uphold the victories I had achieved. This was a life or death battle and I hoped for the latter.

She swung her sword at me, but I was quick to react. Arching back, the blade of her sword narrowly missed my nose. I manoeuvred myself beneath her and with a swish of my sword I skilfully sliced her arm, the blade tearing through her futile armour. The shoulder pads frayed at the edges and her corset's stitching was poor, constricting her movements. Striking forward, I slashed my dagger behind her knee. She immediately clutched the wound and groaned in pain. I took advantage of her vulnerability and hammered home my win. A fresh cut, the bright red colour peeking from beneath her top.

Striding towards her, she cowered in defeat. Sweat trickled from my forehead. I raised my sword, though my muscles resisted its weight at first. I stared down at my opponent curled in pain beneath my feet. She lifted her hand and turned from me as she awaited the ultimate moment. But I couldn't bring myself to finish her. Whether it was her pleading eyes, the fear etched on her face or the realisation that she wouldn't return home to her family tonight; I couldn't bring myself to end her. My sword fell to the floor and I walked out of the arena without looking back.

My supporters paraded me out into the streets of Rome. As I marched outside, head held high, I saw in the near distance the grand Colosseum. Home of the gladiators, the male gladiators. With the win amplifying my emotions, I blame anger for my next decision. Walking down the mighty streets of Rome, I was unable to possess stoicism.

I strode towards the open gates of the amphitheatre. Storming inside, I'll never forget the faces of the stunned crowd surrounding me. Their mouths forming wide "o"s. I was prepared for this battle and, although he did not know it, my opponent was too. I knew this was not an easy battle to win, but I also knew I was prepared to fight.

'Who dares challenge the mighty male gladiator?' the Emperor demanded.

Raising my voice so it boomed throughout the amphitheatre, I replied, 'I, Achillea challenge a worthy opponent you present me with.'

Though he was furious at the sudden outburst, he could not decline the offer. It was a chance to prove his men to the world. In return, it was also a chance to prove myself to them. So, the Emperor chose an opponent he deemed fit for the challenge—Titus. Upon entering the battle grounds, the crowd's cheers had begun. But when Titus entered the volume rose to a roar. Titus glared, his invisible daggers advancing towards me. The battle began but it was a slow start. For such a "tough" guy there was a lot of toing and froing but not much doing.

Exasperated groans from the fans could be heard as they were obviously hungry for action. 'Bring out the tigers and bears!' They jeered, but I was determined to alone give them a show.

I charged forward as he snarled, scanning me up and down assessing my flaws. My face contorted in anger and my eyebrows creased as I, too, focused on his weak spots. I lashed out, the clash of our swords echoing through the arena. His fast reflexes were vastly better than those of my previous opponent. I could not contain my aggression and unfortunately that drained my energy. In a moment of weakness, I became susceptible to an attack. Attacked I was. His shield violently collided with the back of my head which throbbed in pain. The screams of the crowd rang through my mind. My vision blurred and Titus became a hallucinogenic vision. My heart thumped wildly, as he waved his sword in front of me. I willed myself to regain my senses, but it was no use. Abandoning tactics, I began thrashing my sword about, relying on brute pure luck. I prayed to Thor to aid in my present troubles. But I believe the gods wanted a laugh instead. Tripping over my own foot, I stumbled back and landed on the ground with a thump.

Using all the strength I could muster, I leapt to my feet and held a powerful stance. Holding my shield, I prepared for the incoming blow. I rebounded backwards. The dust rising

around me as my feet skidded into the clay. I dug my heel in the ground like spurs to steady myself before lunging at him again. This unfortunately only riled him up. Titus rose and ran at me like a bull. I was aware of his status and his need to uphold it; however my drive rivalled his desire for power.

Thor finally responded to my prayers and, at that moment, I felt a sharp pang in my hand. Lifting my hand from the floor, a large stone presented itself giving way to an idea. Grasping the sharp stone, I hid it behind my back. Waiting for the perfect moment, I patiently rested until Titus drew closer. As he charged towards me oblivious of my plan, I raised my arm and hurled the make-shift weapon. Seconds before impact, his realisation became clear but, for him, it was too late. He could not compete with the calculated shot that was certain to eliminate him. He collapsed to the ground; his limp limbs splayed out before me. Titus had been knocked out cold. The reigning champion had been defeated, but it was not over yet. The crowd, silent and eager, sat on the edge of their seats awaiting the final decision. Discreetly, I crossed my fingers behind my back knowing his decision would be revolutionary. If I were to win, it would change the way the men saw us, they would finally respect us. The word goddess could be finally on the lips of *all* Romans. But the Emperor did not agree. With a swish of his elegant cloak he stormed out the doors.

My heart sunk to the pit of my stomach and I picked my jaw up from the ground. The Emperor's blow was the worst. Though it was nothing I hadn't heard before. Dusting myself off, I walked over to my opponent I had *defeated* as he regained consciousness. Holding out my hand for him, he blinked in response. His eyes then lit up as he nodded at my presence. Smiling, he took my hand and I lifted him to his feet. Scanning the crowd, his brow arched as he noticed the Emperor's absence before looking back at me and spontaneously shaking my hand. Hand in hand, he announced to the crowd, 'Congratulations, to the champion... Achillea!'

All the sweat, blood and tears I had spent preparing for a moment like this was worth it. As my arm was raised, Titus cheered and elation expressed by my triumphant screams filled the stadium. We had re-written the history book and all the pages after us.