

“Good evening ladies and gentlemen! We have a magnificent fight for you all. Who could forget the truly astounding battle that took place last night between our formidable Champion and green horned newcomer?!” The announcer bellowed. “But for tonight! They must work together to beat our Lord’s true and ultimate challenge, a fight which no one has ever been so lucky to see!” The announcer called to the crowd and introduced the pair like it was a normal fight. They both were shoved out into the ring, the audience a mix of cheers and jeers.

Rakash had recovered somewhat from the drain of the previous night, even if he felt a little lethargic. The pair were given no chance to come to pull themselves together as they were harried towards the arena gates.

Rakash tugged at his collar in frustration, although it had been damaged by the mysterious surge of power, hairline fractures running over it, the collar still refused to budge and hampered his magic.

“We may be healed,” Rakash muttered to Shijha, “but that doesn’t mean we stand much of a chance. We don’t even know what we will be up against, if I could summon another surge like last night then maybe I could cra-” he didn’t get to finish his sentence as they were pushed out the gates to booing, jeers and applause.

“I swear I will destroy this entire stadium if I ever get the chance to,” he muttered.

Solom meanwhile glared from his booth, leaning forward with an expression that was part shock, part annoyance as he saw the pair to be scarred, but otherwise seemed to be sporting only a fraction of their injuries.

“How...that isn’t possible,” he muttered to himself, then shrugged. It mattered not; these beasts would be no match for what his beast tamers had come up with.

“Yes, they put on quite the show the other day, and have made such a remarkable recovery considering their ordeal. With this fight, should they best my beast, I, Solom Braxxus, will grant them their freedom!”

This was met mostly by a series of boos from the crowd, the humans having long since believed them to be only slightly above animals and a dangerous threat.

“He’s lying, you know, he has no intention of giving us our freedom even should we succeed,” Rakash murmured.

“Oh, I know. I’ve been tricked by the glamour of his words once before.” Shijha grumbled before the silence took both of them and the crowds in the stand. “Never again,” the leopard growled and glared at Solom.

Silence suddenly descended among the stands as Solom held a hand up, then dropped his hand in a chopping motion.

“Release the Drakin!” He shouted as the gates on the other side began to rise up.

“No...he didn’t,” Rakash hissed through clenched teeth.

A shadowy form stomped through the gates, bound in chains and a series of runic collars encircling its head, body and limbs before it stood a few feet before them.

Shijha’s eyes grew to the size of dinner plates, his fur bristling under his armour as he took half a step backwards as it neared. Even several of the onlookers let out horrified gasps as the beast stepped out of the gate, exposing itself fully in the sunlight.

A towering monstrosity, looming at ten foot tall with hardened scales, a slightly deformed head and muzzle, and a pair of crooked dragon horns protruding from its head.

The beast stood there, slavering around the chain that bound the muzzle before Solom’s voice sounded from the stands.

“Now Drakin...Kill!” He shouted, the beast shattering the chains with a deafening roar as the stands erupted in excitement.

The beast lunged forward, longsword like claws reaching out for the pair, the frames of wings outstretched, showing that it was missing the membranes required for flight. Both of them dodged in opposite directions, rolling to avoid the pounce. Sand was kicked up by the force of the attack, the cloud obscuring each other from view, not doing nothing to hide the Drakin’s giant form.

Quickly, the leopard ran to the racks that held weapons and grabbed his usual; the axe and sword combo. He wrapped his tail instinctively around his waist and gripped his weapons tightly. “Hey! Beastie! This way!” he shouted to draw the Drakin’s attention.

The giant of a creature lifted its head, a snarl on its muzzle, the hint of flames bubbling at the gaps between teeth. Whipping its tail and turning to charge down the feline, the long whip-like tail almost hit Rakash as it went after Shijha, leaving the lizard to claim his own gear.

As the Drakin lunged after the leopard, Rakash went for the racks of weapons, only to see his two handed mace was no longer there. Cursing under his breath, he picked up a broad, two handed axe, whilst not being his preferred weapon, it would be better than the one handed mace. That would be akin to a bug bite to the beast.

“I swear I will tear Solom's eyes out for this sacrilege,” Rakash hissed out before charging the Drakin from behind. The very sight of humans toying with something that was meant to be one of wonder, having disfigured it so, made his cold, reptilian blood boil.

As the great beast charged after Shijha, the ground vibrating with every huge step, it opened its maw and let loose a billowing pillar of flame that came close to scorching the leopard warrior. “Hey, why not pick on someone close to your own species!” Rakash shouted from behind, leaping up and swinging the broad, double headed axe down onto the tail.

Dodging the spout of flame, just barely thanks to Rakash's attack on the giant of a creature, the flames arcing up and climbing the wall dangerously. Spinning, it turned on Rakash, roaring in a mixture of pain and rage.

The axe bit through the hard scales, piercing the flesh and then got wedged in, the beast letting forth a bellowing cry of pain as its tail whipped, yanking the axe from his grip and tail whipped him upside the face, dazing the lizardman and leaving him vulnerable.

Shijha didn't even wait for a second before charging forward, axe and sword raised to go for the Drakin's thigh, swinging the axe sideways and buried it in the dragon's thigh. It roared in pain once again, and with the briefest look back, he kicked backwards with a strength that would put a stallion to shame.

Skidding across the floor, his ears were ringing as he sat up. He was coughing and wheezing to catch his breath again, the Drakin's attention was still fully on Rakash despite his attack. Squeezing his paw tightly around the axe handle, feeling the distinct lack of weight it usually had at the front of the weapon. He looked down, and noticed the head had snapped off, buried in the monster's thigh. He growled, stood up, and threw the wooden handle as hard as he could, bouncing it uselessly against the beast's scales. “Oi! Beastie!”

As Rakash tried to regain his senses, blood trickling down his scaled face from the wound the tail left, he was aware of Shijha trying to get the monster's attention, to no avail it would seem. However, he had succeeded in distracting the Drakin long enough for him to shake the daze off. And just in time as he saw a large maw coming at him in an attempt to bite his head off.

Just managing to dodge the shortsword sized fangs, followed by a massive claw, he whipped around to grab the handle of his axe, yanking in determination, he managed to pull the axe free with a bellow

of rage from the beast in a spray of blood.

“If we can manage to get your axe free from its thigh, we’ll have two vulnerable spots to focus on, I fear if we try to make any more we might not live through this,” Rakash hissed to Shijha, the pair working to ward off claw, fang and flame. “If there was another surge of mana like from before I could use my magic and help create an opening, but our options as they stand are limited. Suggestions?!”

“I’d love to get my axe back,” he gave a low growl as they worked together to fend off a swipe of the claws, the sword clanging off the thick scales on the Drakin’s arm, the sword was dulled and chipped, this tip bent from his attacks on the Drakin. Hissing, he shifted it to his dominant hand. “The head is still buried in his leg, we can use that, maybe cut an artery if we force it deeper.” He said back to the lizard’s question for suggestions.

“Ohh it looked like they were actually standing a chance against our lord’s monster, but it would seem our former champion and newcomer are once again on the back foot,” boomed the announcer over the roar of the crowd and Drakin.

“I’ll keep it distracted.” he finally said with a growl, launching himself forward towards the beast, throwing his sword like a javelin, the steel blade ringing uselessly off of the dragon’s tough head scales, but it did the job he wanted. The Drakin roared at the feline before giving chase, Shijha made to the weapon racks that lined the far walls, pulling the Drakin’s attention away from Rakash.

Shijha was barely halfway to the racks when the claws jabbed roughly into his back, making the feline scream in pain as the sharp talons tore into his pelt, slicing through his armour, and knocked him to the ground, the giant monstrosity roared before the jaws came down this time. The dragon’s hot breath blasted sand up all around him, obscuring him, and the beast’s head from view.

“Oh! Our Champion is down! After years, Shijha has finally...” The announcer was cut off as the Drakin gave a pained roar and lifted its head up and in its jaws was Shijha. But the leopard hadn’t been devoured as they thought. His strong paws were wrapped around the longer fangs in the front and his foot paws wedged against the front of the Drakin’s jaw, keeping them open. The tongue was smacking against the feline’s chest, trying to push him out. “I can’t believe this! Shijha’s beaten the odds and is still putting up a fight!

Blood trailed from his head and hands, the sharp fangs cutting into them as he held on, but he wasn’t giving up. Growling as he fought to keep the jaws from clamping down for real. “Rakash!” He roared, heard even above the Drakin’s roars.

“Shijha!” Rakash hissed before barreling towards leopard and drakin, leaping into the air before slinging his axe downward, the spinning axe slicing down on the tongue and just missing Shijha.

Shijha held strong as the axe severed the tongue that was pushing against him. It, and the axe fell to the ground and he was sprayed by blood, soaking his already saliva matted fur and armour. With the beast roaring in pain, the jaws opened to give him a little bit of a reprieve from fighting to hold off death. Now he fought to remain in the Drakin’s mouth.

Reeling back, the Drakin gave a hideous, bellowing scream out as blood sprayed from its mouth, thrashing about in pain.

Rakash landed on its head and tried to claw at its eyes, but the scaled eyelids were enough to ward off his claws and shook him off, sending the lizard sprawling on the floor.

“N-now! Do what you must whilst you have the chance!” He cried out, winded but mostly whole.

He was in prime position. Balling his fist and punching upward, he aimed for the soft part of the Drakin’s mouth, the clawed points on his bracers penetrating and allowing his fist through. Roaring back into its maw, he punched again and broke through the thinner parts of the skull, sending shrapnel of bone into the Drakin’s brain.

It waived on the spot, its roar ceasing instantly as the whole body went rigid and then limp. Falling over onto its side, and causing Shijha to bounce out of its muzzle, a sticky, stinking mess.

“Unbelievable!” The commentator spoke again to the stunned crowd. “The newcomer and our Champion have bested Solom’s monster!” The crowd seemed simultaneously disappointed, but could not argue with the show that they’d put on, and so gave the pair applause. Solom Braxxus on the other hand was furious, face turning red with anger.

As the life faded from the poor creature, Rakash placed a matted, scaled hand to its head and whispered, “Be at peace, brethren, and find your real body in the next life.”

Before he could withdraw his hand from the poor creature’s body though, he felt something akin to another surge from the Drakin, the dragon horns embedded in his own skull pulsing gently and a hiss could be heard from his collar as it cracked further. The Drakin’s dragon side seemed to respond and provide a surge of energy needed to free him from his collar.

Meanwhile, Solom was seething inside with rage. His best beast had been won over; years of

breeding gone to waste. Now he was out for blood.

“Tell the guards to escort them to their cells,” he told his attendant, “once they are out of sight of the people, they will be ‘put down’ for trying to rebel.” He said to him, the slender man nodding before passing the venomous message to the guards.

Shijha grumbled and cleaned off the blood and saliva as best as he could. The crowd was mumbling among themselves, the ones nearest Solom telling the next and the next about what they were hearing from their leader.

“I know his type,” Rakash hissed with a good heaping of disgust as four guards came to escort them back to their cells, “they will kill us as soon as we are out of the arena, we need to make our escape now!” he said with his eyes darting about. “When we are back in the cells, I will create a diversion, you use your strength to make an opening and we make a break for it. It is do or die!”

“Yeah. I’ve seen it before when he has temper tantrums.” The male smirked. “Like a big cub.” He was prodded with a spear from the side, thankfully missing the claw marks he’d received from the Drakin, and was commanded to go towards the cell doors.

He nodded to Rakash and stayed silent, doing what he could with his paws to finish cleaning his fur, but it was already hardening and becoming stiff. They were taken back to their separate cells, dividing them when more guards came out and all had their weapons drawn. Glancing over to the lizard, he waited for his opportunity.

As they were brought to their dividing cells again, four more guards piled in, surrounding each of them.

“You two have outlived your purpose. Minister Solom does not like to have his toys broken after all,” one chuckled nastily.

“Wait, wait just one moment,” Rakash said as they forced him to bend over. “Please, one last request?”

“Hah, you can ask but we won’t grant it, but go ahead, speak your last words lizard!” One chuckled, drawing his sword back, ready for him to speak his last words.

What passed for a smile ran across his scaled muzzle before saying something in an ancient, rolling tongue.

“What are you doing, what are you up to?” The guard said, hesitating before noticing his collar was

damaged with shocked, wide eyes.

An angry buzzing started in Rakash's muzzle before a swarm of locusts erupted forth, swarming the men with cries, distracting the guards from Shijha's cell and giving the leopard the opening he needed.

Shijha looked on in horror, wondering if the shaman's plan had backfired. But the swarm of locusts yanked their attention to the cell beside, watching as their comrades fought with the bugs, swatting at them.

That split second was all Shijha needed. Slamming his shoulder into the one right in front of him, knocking him into the rest. They fell against the wall in a crumpled pile of armour. Before any of them had the chance to regain themselves, he slammed his foot hard against their heads, knocking each of them out cold.

"Come on!" Shijha roared at Rakash. One of the guards tried to run away from the cloud of insects and was stopped with a clothesline from the leopard, his head smacking sickeningly against the stone floor. "We don't have time to play around!"

"Who said I was playing around?" Rakash grinned as the rest groaned and started turning pale from where his locusts had infected them, rummaging through their bodies until he found two swords for Shijha and a war hammer for himself.

"It won't be long before they realise something is wrong, we have to move. Search the guards for keys and release the rest of the prisoners. If they try to be clever, we kill them and take the ones that will try for freedom," he said, finding some on one of the guards before shooting towards the cells, trying various keys to a hyena's cell before finding one that opened it.

"I don't think it'd be hard to convince them" He said and took the blades, holding them both in a single hand as he ruffled through the guards, tossing them to the side when he didn't find the keys. Finally collecting them, he began opening doors without hesitation. "Collect a weapon and then we'll get out of here." He told them as they staggered out. "Don't do anything stupid and we'll all get out of here."

The hyena regarded Rakash, licking its muzzle as he opened the cell as if deciding on its chances to jump him.

That was until he held a clawed hand at its throat, dripping with venom. "Either work with us, or rot here. Your choice," he hissed out.

With a grin and a bark of laughter, the hyena pulled away and gave a mocking bow. “You’re alright lizard,” it said in a female voice, taking Rakash by surprise as he swore she had a cock under her loincloth.

“Okay, that’s the last of them.” He said to Rakash. “There’s no way we’re going to be getting out of here without a fight. Unless we go through a wall. There’s a Barracks on one side, then of course the arena down the other path.” Shijha said with a low growl as he clipped the keys on the belt of his leather leggings. “It’s a good thing we’ve plenty of fighters, I guess.” He said with a forced chuckle.

Rakash looked around at the motley crew they had, he couldn't help but wonder how long before one or more tried to backstab them, his thoughts mainly lingering on the hyena. There were few weapons to choose from so of the 12 other fighters, only 6 were armed with the other six sticking further back as they made their way towards the barracks. “Okay, we go on the count of three and bust out before they raise the alarm. Shijha, do you have the keys to the barracks?”

Rifling through the ring of keys, jingling lightly as he found a heavy iron one, it was smaller than the jail keys, but had some weight to it. “Yeah,” he answered simply as he pulled the last of his keys and put it in the door, and grinned as it turned smoothly in the lock.

“Come on, come oooon! I want to roll some of these pinks heads eheheheheh,” the hyena cackled, fingering a two handed sword with glee, tail beating and eyes glinting with a manic lust to kill.

The leopard could tell immediately that the Hyena very well would be the one that would get them in trouble, if not fully turn coat on them as soon as they were near the exit. He’d have to keep an eye on the female as he opened the door into the barracks

Glancing around the door, he saw no guard, they were all out keeping an eye on the fights, or unconscious in the cells. “Okay, let’s go.” He said and opened the door fully, leading everyone out of the dank cells and living quarters none of them had experienced in a long while. They all crossed the room, stepping carefully so as to not raise any alarms.

Reaching another door, he found it unlocked and swung it open to reveal a young bunny. Tattered clothes and patchy fur showed he was a servant, the humans only other ‘use’ for a beastman.

He gasped at the sight of all the fighters and looked like he was about to call for the guards. Shijha reached out and quickly grabbed him, covering his mouth with a single paw. He felt how skinny he was

as he pulled the boy in close to his form. Unlike the fighters, it seemed the servants were treated worse than anything. "Quiet now." Shijha whispered as the rabbit continued to fight, a small squeaking sounding from his throat. "We can help get you out, too." he added to the struggling lepus.

"Aw lookit the lovely bunny, you know I have had slop for so long here it would be nice for a change, even if it is skinny it would be fresh meEA!" The hyena cut off as Rakash's tail wrapped around her throat with the hyena scrabbling, trying to claw his tail off only to find mini dragon scales covering his tail now, collapsing on the floor as he cut off her oxygen.

"Fall out of line again," Rakash hissed right into the whimpering hyena's ear, "and I will paralyse you and pull out all of your teeth with your nerves still alive. Have I made myself...c-l-e-a-r?" He put as much venom into his voice as possible, seeming like his very words would be enough to poison her as she nodded frantically before he let go with the hyena giving a much welcome gasp of air and a scything look.

"I apologise for that show, but please trust me when I swear no harm will befall you with us around., You may have knowledge that would help us escape this damn place. Do you not also wish to escape these accursed human lands and be with your own?" Rakash said with a calm, even tone. "Help us escape, and we will help you back to your own home."

Shijha let the rabbit go just enough to speak, but held him so he wouldn't run off. The small frame shook as he seemed to calm down from the initial start, but the combination of the hyena threatening him and Rakash's whispered threat to said hyena didn't help him settle fully.

"I-I..This is my home." He said in a soft squeak. "I've been here my whole life."

Shijha looked up at Rakash with a bit of a soft, yet pained expression. "You were born into it. I'm sorry little one." He said softly.

"They take care of me, my family is here." He commented, his wording seeming a bit disjointed. "The guards praise me, call me a good boy," the rabbit added, though he never gave context; Shijha could figure what went on with the lepus boy. "Lord Solom..."

"But you must know the place. You can lead us to an exit!" Shijha said, a sudden firmness in his voice as he cut the rabbit off. "We can free you from this place. This isn't living, little one. It's surviving. If you let us out, we'll take you somewhere safe."

“I-I-” He stammered, wide eyed as he once again thought to holler for the guards.

“I apologise if I had frightened you rabbit, we mean you no harm. But surely you have seen what it is they are doing? Little by little the beast clans of the southern lands will be no more, we will just be their plaything. Both myself and my ally, Shijha here, we were both torn from our homes, our clan destroyed and made to fight for the humans' amusement. If you will not aid us, will you at least allow us by unhindered? We don't belong here, we deserve a right to live. You can stay here, or we can rescue you and your family from a lifetime of servitude and find the clan you Should have been part of,” Rakash put it as an alternative, hoping to spark something in the young rabbit's brain.

Shijha loosened his grip a bit more, the rabbit's ears stood straight up as he listened to Raskash's proposal. “I-I don't think you can...” He whispered. “I've got a big family, I can't just leave them...” The rabbit mumbled, glancing around at the group of warriors.

“We'll...” He paused and looked at the lizard, “We're not going to let Solom's reign take the remaining clans. When we take him down...” He grasped at straws to convince the boy.

The rabbit seemed to hold his breath for a minute, looking up into Rakash's eyes as well. “I can't leave my family, Warriors,” he said with a soft squeak. “I don't know any way out...but I will let you go. But you have to go quickly, the fights will be over soon and the guards will come back.” he squeaked

“You...” Rakash began as he was about to try one more time to convince the rabbit to let them help him, only to see in its eyes a look he recognised as one resigned and unknowing of any other way. He could no more make the rabbit follow them than he would a sheep think it was a lion.

“Spirits protect you, little one,” Rakash said softly as they made their way towards the front of the arena. There would be some guards but nothing they couldn't handle with their group.

The rabbit's ears fell and his eyes shifted down and away from them as Rakash made to move out. Shijha let him go fully, sensing no struggle from him, though he still shivered. “We'll get you out, all of you.” The leopard said to the boy as he headed to the far door.

But as they burst out of the barracks and to the front and into the open air...

“So good of you two to join us. And with the rest of my escaping gladiators I see. Tut, tut,” A fully armoured Solom taunted, his imperial silver mail glinting in the sun with a full gladius in one hand, shield in his other hand and about 20 of his personal, private knights by his side.

“Did you think you had any hope of escaping? Every man in my services is tagged with a link straight to me. Should one of them die, I will know of it. When I felt a number of my guards die, I knew exactly

what it meant.”

“Y-you...slime ball!” Shijha hissed. He glanced around, there were only eight of them armed with six unarmed.

“I’ll have to work quick then,” he hissed to Shijha, starting to conjure acid rain over the knights, only for the cloud to dispel and for him to suddenly find his shaman powers once again fail him.

“Fascinating isn’t it? My armour and shield are all inscribed with runes that dispel magic within 10 metres. You’ll never touch me, you filthy animals.”

Shijha growled, but smirked, his sharp fangs on view for all to see. “That’s adorable.” He said and gripped the swords tightly. “But now I’m interested in how well they protect you from my blades!?” He roared and pointed one of the blades at the humans.

With that, Solom thrust his gladius forward. “Slaughter them like the animals they are!” He shouted at his royal guards. “But no one touches the lizard and leopard, those two are mine!”