

Time passed. His life became unimportant to him, and he took long risks in the arena. Not caring whether he lived or died gave him a certain edge. He was popular, not because he killed quickly, but because he entertained. At the conclusion of each performance the crowd was on its feet cheering and applauding. The sound from thousands of people rose up like a living thing and washed over him, caressing him in waves of adoration. With both arms held high, he turned slowly in a circle, playing to the crowd's love affair with spectacle and death. Men craved his attention and women, even of the highborn aristocracy, flocked after him like groupies chasing a rock star.

Despite this, he was a slave, the property of the state. His fame reached epic proportions and hero status was accorded to him by the population. On four occasions he won his freedom and was pardoned from the arena, yet he remained. How could freedom improve his life? Howlette was beyond his reach, and he couldn't die. Actually, he could die, but it was the faintest of possibilities. He therefore reasoned that, if he couldn't have what he wanted, he would have nothing, and what he was doing was the next best thing. It occupied his time and gave him an outlet for his anger and frustration.

On many occasions his company had been requested by ladies of the "high born." It was permitted that he leave the lanista for private liaisons of conjugal nature to the rich and wealthy. Unfortunately, he was not received at social gatherings. One simply did not invite slaves, gladiators, embalmers, or actors to one's home openly, or dine with them. But it was okay to fuck them in private. The Demon Hand declined all offers, and his mystery grew to even larger proportions.

At the end of each killing in the arena he would dedicate the victory to Howlette by pointing his weapons at the Royal box and shouting, "for you." The Emperor thought these accolades were for him, and he was insufferably pleased. Animal had yet to meet the Savage Red Bull in the arena, and he chafed to do so. The Red Bull was the champion of a different lanista, and they were on a collision course. However, the primary was getting rich and was in no hurry to endanger his investments.

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