1. Provide me with a brief plot summary of your story.

Hadrian, a dispirited Roman gladiator, meets a young, new gladiator and refuses to offer him help. Shortly after, the boy dies, and Hadrian breaks even more as his body also grows more weary. Then he meets another boy in the Colosseum who reminds him of the one before. Pursuing a chance to fix his past mistakes, he saves the boy, but the boy dies the next day regardless of his efforts.

1. Tell me about your main character.
   1. Questions to consider (You do not have to answer each of these, nor are you limited to the following): What do they look like? Sound like? How do they feel internally? How are they perceived by other people?

Hadrian is of average build and his voice is gruff. Internally, Hadrian feels nothing. He just goes through the motions and feels what he feels. He’s perceived as heroic.

1. Which character received the most development or underwent the most change in your story? Was this intentional?

Hadrian received the most character development and this was intentional.

1. What role did dialogue play in your story? If you didn’t use it (or used it scarcely), please explain why?

Dialogue played a large role in my story, especially with characterization with the first boy and Hadrian as well. Although Hadrian doesn’t speak much, that choice of his still characterizes him.

1. What do you think is the biggest strength of your story that you want me to see?

I’m most proud of the plot.

1. Is there any element of your story that you want specific feedback on?

Imagery or the lack of it.

1. What kind of things are you most interested in receiving mini-lessons and direct instruction on?

How to incorporate more complex devices.

“It’s him, isn’t it?” a voice whispered.

“He’s much shorter than they say,” another remarked.

“His muscles are smaller too,” a third smirked.

“Look at the way he sits. Slouched. Lazy. He’ll die soon, I’d say.”

“And he deserves it. Straight to Tartarus for that murderer.”

“Unfortunately, Fortuna lay on his side.”

“Then let Mars strike him down.”

“Fortunatus!” Gaius called over the noise. The thick man stood by the iron gate to the Colosseum. He pointed at Hadrian with his scarred hand. “Your turn.”

The stone walls trembled and shook, kicking a cloud of dust from the ceiling. Men cried and ran up to their iron bars, begging for freedom before it slipped from their grasp. They could hear the mass outside, the shaking and booming of the Colosseum that ran in chaotic rhythm and chased after blood, a furious storm that turned flesh into sand, lives into laugh, reaping glory-chasers and the innocent indiscriminately. But those who simply existed in the arena, wading in the storm, floating forever into the bottomless dark-blue depths of Neptune’s great seas, survived.

Hadrian held his sword with both hands. Its edge was dull, and rust had claimed it many times over, yet Rome had put a mask atop it and made the fraud shimmer and gleam. Hadrian stared at himself in the sword’s reflection. A cold iron helmet wrapped around his skull, shielding him from the roars of beasts and Rome. Darkness had found its way into every corner, and the tunnel into the Colosseum was the darkest.

The gate lifted, and Hadrian entered the tunnel, waves of light gushing in. As waves and waves of Rome pounced and snarled above, hungry for blood and flesh, the tunnel trembled, drumming deep sounds like heartbeats over and over. The sun grew ever brighter like a spotlight. The voices wilted, and then there was only Hadrian and his blade.

Hadrian ate the evening bread slowly. Whether it was because he lost his appetite or to make the taste last longer, he could not tell.

“Fortunatus! That’s what they call you, right?” A boy hopped into a seat opposite Hadrian with his own bowl of food. “Is it alright if I sit here?”

The bread’s flavor rushed through Hadrian, and Hadrian relished every moment of it. A warm taste, albeit hard and rough at the first bite.

“What’s the secret?” The boy asked, ignoring his food and leaning across the table. His eyes were too bright. “I heard you’ve come back from the arena over fifty times.”

Hadrian rolled his tongue around in his mouth. The bread was gone, but Hadrian could feel it in his mouth like it was still there.

“I’ll pay you when I get out,” the boy whispered, glancing around. There was nobody else in the room. Was there anyone there that was still alive anyway? “Hell, I’ll be your servant forever. What do you say?”

“There’s no secret,” Hadrian muttered. He hadn’t spoken in a long time, his voice coming out rough and coarse. He almost didn’t recognize it.

“There must be something,” the boy continued relentlessly. “Something that you’re doing differently than all the other gladiators that try their hand.”

“I wait, Tartarus.”

“We’re slaves,” the boy chuckled, “You won’t be punished. If anything, you’d be honored in the great halls of Elysium, standing amongst gods and heroes. *Fortunatus is here,* they’ll say! And they’ll welcome you with open arms and glory beyond our imagination.”

Hadrian clasped his sword. “Surviving is no feat.” Hadrian stood, meeting the boy’s eyes for the last time. “The secret is to not care. The secret is to give up.”

Hadrian went and walked away.

The next day, the boy died. Dark-red blood pooled onto the arena’s sand like a slow stream. A fleshy, oozing hole lay in his stomach. His once vigorous eyes stared at the open blue sky in a shocked expression, eyebrows eternally raised. He will never settle. His soul shall never rest. The boy hadn’t even made it ten seconds, his corpse mere steps from the gate. The people of Rome were leaving the Colosseum in slow herds, filing out now that the entertainment was done, and eventually, Hadrian stood alone, corpses all around him. Death had claimed others, but it never claimed him.

Hadrian was getting tired. He could feel it. Spears that he had once dodged effortlessly now threatened him. In the last match, a sword had slashed across his chest, leaving a nasty gash that haunted him day and night like a thousand bestial claws. His body was weakening, and sleep evaded him. Soon, perhaps Tartarus would finally take him.

“Fortunatus, you haven’t been the same as late,” Gaius whispered outside Hadrian’s cell. “You’re dying.”

Hadrian waded in the darkness. He couldn’t see two inches in front of him in the night.

“They’ll sing your name when you fall.” Hadrian could feel Gaius’s gaze on him, though he couldn’t see it. “They’ll parade the streets, telling half-truths of the *legendary* Fortunatus.”

Hadrian closed his eyes.

“It’s a shame for my best gladiator to die.” Gaius took a step away, foot echoing throughout the stone cells. “But coin is coin, friend,” he sneered as he left.

Hadrian marched out of the gate into a swarm of roars, the Colosseum quaking. “Fight!” The Roman people ordered, thirsting for blood, “Fortunatus, kill!”

The sand was as coarse as ever. A boy, no older than 17, entered the other side of the arena. Even from far away, Hadrian could see the boy’s anxiety. His grip on his sword was loose and weak. The wooden shield he wore on his left hand shook and trembled. He wouldn’t make it a minute. But the boy could. He could make it if Hadrian... The boy’s brown eyes met Hadrian’s, and Hadrian saw a terror that shouldn’t decorate the innocent, a punishment that shouldn’t become the young.

A horn sounded, and the arena erupted, fans clamoring and beasts loosing out of their confines. Hadrian dashed across, sand kicking up behind him with every stride. A bear had immediately reared on him, but he rolled under its sweeping paw. However, the boy had worse luck. An older gladiator seeking easy prey had approached him, holding a mace in his right hand. The boy stumbled, eyes wide, falling onto the sand. The gladiator brandished his mace, seeking to claim the lamb before him for Rome. The mace came down. The boy closed his eyes. And a glittering blade sprouted through the gladiator’s chest.

“Up, boy!” Hadrian roared, spinning back around to confront the other gladiators. “Up! On your feet!” Two gladiators approached, attracted by the weight of Fortunatus’s name. One brandished a short sword in each hand, his skin tan and dark, while the other held a great axe the size of a man, donning heavy steel armor that covered nearly every inch of skin. That one was as tall as a mountain. The boy hadn’t moved from his spot, his body still like a painting. Pleading, his eyes looked to Hadrian.

Hadrian struck first. His sword came onto the dual-wielding man in a wide arc. It returned to Hadrian’s side with blood all over its blade, yet the man still stood, a nasty wound across his shoulder. Leaving Hadrian no time to rest, the armored gladiator swung his axe down in an overhead arc, threatening to split Hadrian in two, but it met only the sand as Hadrian rolled, light armor clanking. Panicking, the armored gladiator spun his axe around and slashed at Hadrian’s head. A rushed movement. Hadrian ducked, and in the gap of the gladiator’s armor, where the shoulder met the chest, he thrusted his sword. The gladiator fell, and the living one scrambled, blood still dripping from the wound on his arm.

“Fortunatus!” The crowd screamed. The gladiator cowered. Fate and Rome were not on his side. Fortuna wasn’t. But Hadrian didn’t move to finish the gladiator. The bear did for him.

A single paw sent the gladiator flying across the arena, and the Roman people roared. The bear was the last one left. It had killed every other beast and being, its mouth dripping with blood, flesh stuck between its teeth. It roared, standing on its furry hind legs, a mass of darkness and despair, and then charged Hadrian in a mad dash on all fours.

Hadrian couldn’t dodge. The boy hid right behind him, pretending Hadrian was enough of a wall to stop a six-hundred-pound beast. Hadrian steadied his sword and tightened his grip, bear quickly approaching. He slashed its furry black chest, a trail of hot-red blood decorating the air in a beautiful arc as the sword met its goal. But his sword refused to budge out of the bear’s thick hide and return to Hadrian’s grasp.

*Roll.* Hadrian saw the move, yet his body wouldn’t listen, not in time, his legs dragging. Six-hundred-pounds rammed into Hadrian. His vision turned dark. The wind fled his lungs, and in a flash, Hadrian skidded across the arena, steel armor pressing into his skin, sword leaving his hand. His helmet went flying into the air, and his head slammed into the sand.

The crowd yelled with a sudden clarity. They weren’t there for him. They never had been. The bear roared behind him. The heart of the Colosseum pounded. But hadn’t it always been this way?

Hadrian stood. He felt the wind hit his hair, the sand brush his eyes. The sun warmed his naked face. The bear dashed towards the boy, roaring in feverish delight as it sought to claim innocence, its gaping maw held open in anticipation. The boy yelled, scrambling backwards. He backed up against the wall of the Colosseum. The boy had nowhere to go. He yelled again. He cried out over and over. Rome watched and ignored. Rome did not act. Rome turned away and laughed. Hadrian did not. Hadrian thrusted his sword into the back of the black bear. It went deep, the handle reaching the fur. The bear yelped in pain. It swayed, limping away from Fortunatus, and it fell, dropping onto the sand among the other lives it had claimed. The boy was safe.

The arena burst into a storm of yells and chants. “Fortunatus!” They sang to the rhythm of the Colosseum. Words flew by and so did cheers and hollers. The emperor arrived, chirping about the glory of Rome. Hadrian ate his evening bread.

The next day, the boy died.