

My original notes:

Von Bullet 7

Radal of Garrence is Von's hardest fought battle yet. He is a ferocious, relentless left handed human. In the very first point, Von takes a huge advantage, but Radal fights back to nearly get a double hit. The first point of the match takes five minutes by itself.

"Is he going to fight for every point like that?"

Von gets "Bout Point" at 4-1 when he uses his Heartbeat. Radal uses sheer grit to overcome the Winter Heartbeat. When Von calls for it, he bites his own lip so the pain will avoid the sudden chill, and manages to escape with pure determination. After that, he fights out the point like the first one, his sheer athleticism and energy beating out Von's, scoring him the point.

4-2, there is one minute left on the clock for the bout. Von assumes defensive position to try to hold him off. The moment Von eases off on presenting a threat, Radal scores a point within ten seconds. *If I don't give him a reason to slow down...he's going to kill me. 'I can defend better if I don't focus on attacking' is a pure fantasy.* He fights ferociously, but Radal manages to score a hit, leading the bout into a tiebreaker. It ends on a ferocious back and forth, but Radal takes it 9-7.

Von starts to question what Radal's Heartbeat is. It hasn't activated at all. The Lord of Dirt...

Von is exhausted, and he needs to win the next two bouts against this insane guy to make it to the next round. And he still needs to go up against Bravo, who might be the strongest opponent he ever faced. For a moment, he wants to despair.

No.

Forget winning. Forget losing. Forget Blade Valley. Forget Talla. Forget my future. Forget honor.

Something shouted inside of him, something more important than duty or honor—respect for the man across from him. Sportsmanship.

Forget about saving energy. It is no longer time to worry about anything. After seeing how much heart he put into that last exchange...I owe it to him to fight it with my all.

Von Bullet 8

Von abandons the concept of saving energy. He also tunes the Winter Heartbeat to two hits instead of one. *Ideally, three would make me confident. I'm not sure if two would be enough. But realistically, I need better hits to win.* Radal clearly prepared for fighting against Von, and trained to resist cold temperatures.

Von aims for his defensive style, but he remembers his fight with Lobo that he lost. Being defensive is not the same as being passive. He puts pressure on Radal.

How can I beat this man?

There was no single answer.

There was no simple response to this.

No single answer to unravel the mystery of the genius.

Nothing to slay the King of Dirt.

I will use everything I have. All the moves I practiced—I'll hit him with my best! Even if it's just by a little bit...I'll run away with the win!

Von uses the toe touch to score the first hit. Radal's blade misses his head by seconds.

1-0

Radal fights back, overwhelming Von and getting the point right back.

It took me so long to get that point...and he got it back within seconds.

Calm down. Don't let this get to you. It doesn't matter how long each of us spent to get the point. We are still even.

Von takes the lead again with another creative move, Radal displays his own move. 2-2. *Should I save it? No. There is no reason to be timid!* Von uses the Heartbeat and gets a free point. Radal fights back. 3-3. Radal uses a clever technique, 3-4.

Match Point.

Crowd is cheering from both sides. Von's heart feels more intense than his heartbeat. Von goes for a daredevil point, steals the tie. 4-4.

He thinks that he wants to save the Heartbeat so he can take this round.

Von starts to wonder what Radal's Heartbeat is. *Is it tuned to a high number? Or is he storing it? No...if he had it, he would have used it to win the match already. Is he preparing himself...for a three bout match? Has he been tuning his Heartbeat for something absurd from the start? Has he assumed I would take one of the bouts from the start?*

He decides it doesn't matter, but Radal's sudden resurgence makes him question if he can afford to wait to use his Heartbeat only after getting one more point. His exhaustion is catching up to him and Radal seems in much better shape than him. *SHIT.* He uses the Winter Heartbeat Tuned 2, and scores a point once again. But he has the horrible feeling Radal is getting used to it.

"First he takes your legs, then he takes your soul."

Von remembers what they spoke of him, yet, it feels as though it would better fit Radal right now. He can feel his level of fencing dropping with his exhaustion. 5-4. Bout point for Von. He takes a deep breath.

He acknowledges all the pressure he's feeling...eliminates it, bit by bit...

And lands a confident stop-hit.

Von wins the second bout, 6-4.

Von Bullet 9

Von starts to wonder what he can do. He is more tired than Radal, and while he might know more techniques than the King of Dirt, he has less talent. *First he takes your legs, then he takes your soul.* The phrase bugs him. Then he thinks...

Radal is human.

The same as him.

There is no way he isn't tired.

Von might be more tired, but Radal's aggressive, cutting style requires more energy. Even if he's more tired right now, there is no guarantee that this will be the case in the end of the match. *There is no guarantee I will win this way...but there is a guarantee I will lose if I repeat the second bout. This is how I'll fight. I'll rely on it. My style!*

Keeping his blade tuned to 2, Von fights Radal with everything he has. His aggressive style from beforehand pays dividends and allows his defensive style to live once again. Every step forward becomes a feint that makes his opponent watch out. Radal has no idea how much energy Von has left, and he realizes this is his lifeline.

Yes...look at me with concern...Von forces himself to grin arrogantly. 'Maybe he can still go like that. Maybe he can still explode offensively like that. If I don't jump back, he'll get me.'

Yes...that's what I need you to think.

Hesitate.

Fear me.

Slow yourself down.

And when the doubt creeps into your soul...I'll have won.

Von scores one hit, then triggers his Heartbeat. It was tuned to one instead of two this time. Von is relying on the cold becoming more unbearable as it piles on. And it is. Radal drops his sword, shaking in cold. Von smiles. *I did it. He's down—*

Radal picks it up again. His body is weak, but his spirit hasn't given up. *You...you are still not down?*

Radal scores a point out of sheer grit. *Yeah...you're not going to let it go like this, huh?* Von triggers Heartbeat one more time.

3-1.

Radal scores a surprise attack. He roars. 3-2

Heartbeat, double hit. 4-3. Bout point. *First he takes your legs, then he takes your soul.*

Radal is trembling from the frequent uses of Winter. Von has 3 uses of the Heartbeat he hasn't used yet. He uses the Heartbeat once more, Radal powers through it to parry and riposte for 4-4, then falls to his feet in pain and damage from the freezing. *Is...is he done?*

Radal stands up. *WHY WON'T YOU STAY DOWN? SHIT!*

Von uses the Heartbeat to score another match point, 5-4. *One more. Just one more.*

Von uses the Heartbeat. There is no way Radal should be able to power through that impossible cold like that. Radal goes for a parry regardless, powering through the frozen heartbeat. *Yeah...there is no way a normal person could manage it. But you're not normal, Rada. You really are...a once in a century genius.*

THAT

IS

EXACTLY

WHY

Von starts his disengagement move. The one foreshadowed to be one he couldn't hit without knowing his opponent would parry—if they didn't parry he would be in trouble.

I COUNTED ON YOU DOING THE IMPOSSIBLE!

6-4

Von lets out a roar of victory. There is no acting anymore. He's euphoric and exhausted. He drops to his knees and almost throws up at the end, saved only by the fact there's nothing in his stomach. His head is pounding with dehydration from the intense match and he wants to do nothing but fall asleep. Still, as he sees Radel walking up to him, he knows he has one more duty to accomplish. He shakes his hand and then lifts Radel's hand up in the air as if he was the winner.

"Thank you. That was the greatest match of my life. It was an honor to share a piste with you."

"The honor is all mine, milord." Von doesn't care about the difference in rank in the moment. There is no acting in his body. He just hugs him. The crowd loves it. "We'll see each other in the future."

Radel leaves the arena.

When Von is signing the document, he sees that Radel has no Heartbeat at all.