

0. GLADIATORS - Story Preface

**1. GLADIATORS**

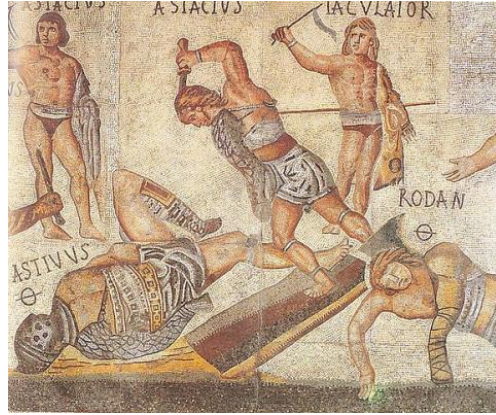
2. LEGACY of MARCUS AURELIUS

3. COMMODUS - IN CHARGE

4. THE ROMAN GAMES

5. COMMODUS IN THE ARENA

6. THUMBS DOWN FOR COMMODUS



This image depicts a 4th-century mosaic of gladiators fighting. Using the specific words, of the time, a *retarius* attacks his downed opponent (a *secutor*) with a dagger. The scene is from a mosaic in the Villa Borghese. Image online via Wikimedia Commons.

Gladiators were often slaves or captured foreigners who filled a unique role in ancient Rome. Their job was to entertain large crowds of spectators by fighting brilliantly and, if needed, to kill (or die) well. (Thanks to a BBC game, you can [dress a Roman gladiator](#).)

The first recorded gladiator games were introduced to Roman society in 264 B.C. by Marcus and Decimus Brutus. The brothers sponsored the event to honor their father. At the time, gladiator games were more about funeral rites than mass entertainment.

Over time, however, the games became less associated with funerals and more associated with brutal slayings. Some of the victims had virtually no chance to survive. As the crowds roared, the walking dead were easy prey to strong men and wild animals. It was not uncommon for an entire family to be killed.

Sometimes the people of Rome were sickened by excessive killings. One such event took place in 64 AD, during the reign of Nero (who was Emperor between 54 and 68).

When a terrible fire consumed much of Rome, citizens blamed their emperor. One ancient source - Tacitus - says that Nero was elsewhere when the fire broke out, but people blamed him anyway.

Nero, in turned, blamed the Christians of Rome. After "an immense multitude was convicted," the current Caesar "offered his gardens" as the place where those convicted people would die. Their death sentences, as reported by Tacitus, were carried-out in horrifying ways:

*Covered with the skins of beasts, they were torn by dogs and perished, or were nailed to crosses, or were doomed to the flames and burnt, to serve as a nightly illumination, when daylight had expired.* (Annals of Tacitus, Book XV, Section 44 - see Google eBook version, at [page 305](#).)

The spectacle of such cruelty, by their Emperor, sickened many Romans:

*...there arose a feeling of compassion; for it was not, as it seemed, for the public good [that the Christians were thus put to death], but to glut one man's cruelty, that they were being destroyed.* (Tacitus, [page 305](#) of the Google eBook version.)

Nero (who committed suicide in 68 AD) also used gladiators to entertain his subjects. Professionals were trained in special schools, mostly located near the great arenas. During the time of the Caesars, gladiator schools were controlled by the Emperor.

No one ever expected to see an Emperor fighting in the arena as a gladiator. One Caesar, however - Commodus, son of the still-studied writer and Emperor, Marcus Aurelius - decided he would do precisely that.

See [Alignments to State and Common Core standards for this story online at:](#)

<http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/AcademicAlignment/GLADIATORS-Roman-Gladiators>

See [Learning Tasks for this story online at:](#)

<http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/AcademicActivities/GLADIATORS-Roman-Gladiators>

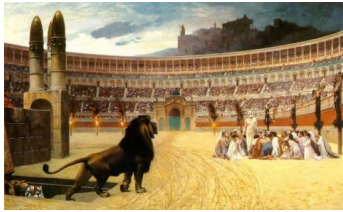


### Gladiators - Depicted in Mosaics

Image online, courtesy Wikimedia Commons.

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### Circus Maximus - Christian Martyrs and Lions

Painting by Jean-Léon Gérôme, currently maintained by the Walters Art Gallery in Baltimore, Maryland. Image online, courtesy Wikimedia Commons.

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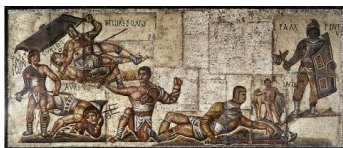
### Victims of the Roman Games - Illustration

Image online, courtesy [Vroma](#) (a virtual place to study the Roman Classics).

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### Mural - Ancient Mosaic of Roman Games

Image online, courtesy the [romans-latin.net](#) website.

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### Mosaic - Animals Attack Humans in the Roman Games

Image online, courtesy the-[colesseum.net](#) website.

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### Great Arena Ruins in Rome

Image online, courtesy [Vroma](#).

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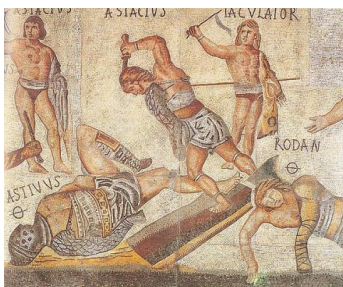
### Strong Men and Wild Animals - Mural of Roman Games

Image online, courtesy the [romans-latin.net](#) website.

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### GLADIATORS

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## Nero - Plot to Kill Nero

Clip from the BBC's *Ancient Rome: The Rise & Fall of an Empire*. Copyright, BBC, all rights reserved. Online, courtesy BBC WorldWide Channel at YouTube. Clip provided here as fair use for educational purposes.

The BBC first broadcast this [program about "Ancient Rome"](#) on the 21st of September, 2006. To purchase the dramatized documentary series, [click here](#).

### **Writer/director:**

Nick Murphy

### **Nero:**

Michael Sheen

### **Poppaea Sabina:**

Catherine McCormack

### **Tigellinus:**

James Wilby

### **Senator Piso:**

Hugh Ross

### **Seneca:**

Hugh Dickson

### **Narrator:**

Alisdair Simpson

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