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In this image, we see a bust of Commodus as he appeared during his youth. The actual work of art is maintained at the Roman-Germanic Museum in Cologne, Germany. Herodian, the ancient historian, writes that the future Roman Emperor had naturally blonde and curly hair. Image of bust by Naughtynimitz; online via Wikimedia Commons. License: [CC BY-SA 3.0](#)

When his father died, Commodus was 18 years old. Although intelligent and capable, the new Emperor squandered his talents. A contemporary historian, [Cassius Dio](#), describes what happened to Rome when Commodus took the throne:

*Our history now descends from a kingdom
of gold to one of iron and rust, as affairs
did for the Romans of that day.*

Vain beyond belief, Commodus officially renamed Rome after himself: "Colonia Commodiana." Not content with honors due him as Caesar, he gave himself more titles so the twelve months of the year could also be named for him.

The threat to Rome's frontiers continued after the death of [Marcus Aurelius](#), but [Commodus](#) did not carry out his father's plans to protect the borders.

In the winter of 170, when fighting against Germanic tribes had been especially fierce and men fought on the frozen Danube River, Marcus Aurelius still found time to run the battles and the government. Not his son. Commodus didn't care about running the government. He was more interested in the world of make-believe battles. He preferred the arena field to the battlefield.

Rome's arena, the [Colosseum](#) (initially called "The Flavian Amphitheater"), was eventually named for a colossal statue of Nero that once stood nearby, at the Domus Aurea. Holding fewer spectators (55,000) than the [nearby Circus Maximus](#) (which [accommodated](#) more than 200,000 people), the [Colosseum](#) had eighty arched entrances on the ground floor.

Originally made of wood, it was rebuilt of stone, brick, and marble. Its diameter was 620 feet (190 meters). [Under the floor](#) (explore this animation to learn how the whole structure was built) were a series of [labyrinth passageways](#). Even today it is an impressive structure, but during the reign of Commodus, it became a [place of shame](#). To use the words of Cassius Dio:

Commodus was a greater curse to the Romans than any pestilence or crime.

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

<http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/AcademicAlignment/COMMODUS-IN-CHARGE-Roman-Gladiators>

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

<http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/AcademicActivities/COMMODUS-IN-CHARGE-Roman-Gladiators>



Marcus Aurelius - Roman Emperor as a Young Boy

Image online, courtesy Wikimedia Commons.

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View this asset at:

<http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/view/Marcus-Aurelius-Roman-Emperor-as-a-Young-Boy>

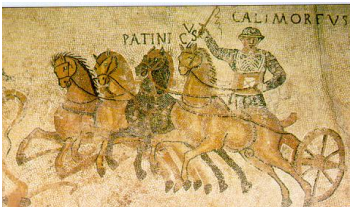


Commodus

Image online, courtesy Wikimedia Commons.

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Chariot Mosaic - Ancient Rome

Image online, courtesy the University of Wisconsin at Milwaukee website.

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Colosseum in Rome

Image online, courtesy Wikimedia Commons.

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Colosseum - A View of the Roman Arena at Night

Photo by DAVID ILIFF, online courtesy Wikimedia Commons.

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Labyrinth Passageways Under the Colosseum Floor

Image online, courtesy the historylink101.com website.

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COMMODUS - IN CHARGE

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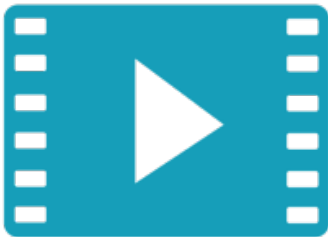


Roman Gladiators - How They Were Picked

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Colosseum - How it Was Engineered

Clip from *Engineering the Impossible: The Colosseum* - online, courtesy National Geographic Channel at YouTube. You can [purchase the documentary directly from Nat Geo](#). Copyright, National Geographic, all rights reserved. Clip provided here as fair use for educational purposes and to acquaint new viewers with the production.

Directed by Mike Ibeji and Melisa Akdogan

Studio: National Geographic

DVD Release: 2 October 2007

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