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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 was especially fierce, and men fought on the frozen Danube River, Marcus Aurelius still found time to run the battles and the government.

Commodus, on the other hand, did not seem to 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 ("Il Coliseo"), (initially called "The Flavian Amphitheater"), was ultimately named for a colossal statue of Nero which once stood nearby (at the Domus Aurea). Holding fewer spectators (50,000) than the nearby Circus Maximus (which accommodated more than 200,000 people), the Colosseum had 80 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Originally made of wood, it was rebuilt of stone, brick, and marble.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 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-Gladiator)

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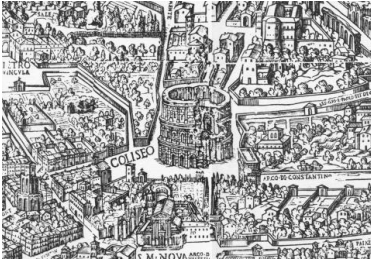


### Marcus Aurelius

Image online, courtesy Wikimedia Commons.

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### Il Coliseo Drawing

Image online, courtesy Wikimedia Commons.

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### Circus Maximus

Image online, courtesy the roman-empire.net website.

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### Entrances to Rome's Colosseum

The Colosseum, ancient Rome's majestic arena, has 80 arched entrances on the ground level.

This image, of a scene in modern Rome, depicts some of those arched Colosseum entrances.

Image online via Wikimedia Commons.

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### The Labyrinth Passageways of the Colosseum

Image online, courtesy the [historylink101.com](http://historylink101.com) website.

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### Rome's Colosseum - The Gladiators Fight

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### Rome's Colosseum - The Inaugural Games

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### Rome's Colosseum - Who are the Gladiators?

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