

Gladiators of Rome



A visitor to Rome today would witness the remains of many landmarks of the ancient Roman Empire. There is the Roman Forum. It was where the Roman government would hold its public meetings. Another landmark relic is the Pantheon. It was a temple built to honor the Roman gods. There is the Coliseum. This amphitheater was built by the Emperor Titus in A.D. 80 to house public sporting events.

The Roman poet Juvenal once said that all the people wanted was bread and games. Roman officials tried to appeal to the people by making sure they had grain for bread. They also offered large public festivals and sporting events. Many of these festivals and events took place throughout the year. By far, the most popular of these events were the gladiator games, oftentimes called blood games. These games were of three types: man against man, man against animal, and animal against animal. In man-against-man events, two men fought each other with various weapons. In man-against-animal events, an animal was pitted against a man who may or may not be armed. In animal-against-animal events, two wild animals fought each other. These animals were often exotic species. In all three cases, the fight was to the death.

The gladiators were the superstars of these games. Gladiator combat had a religious origin. At first, gladiators fought each other upon the death of a prominent man. The death of one or both men served as a human sacrifice. Only later did gladiator combat become a sport.

Gladiators were often prisoners of war, people taken from the conquered enemies of Rome. Convicted criminals sometimes served out a sentence as gladiators. Other gladiators were poor men with little chance of a comfortable life. Sometimes slaves were rented to participate in this sport. This practice was eventually banned. Finally, other gladiators were just plain thrill-seekers who

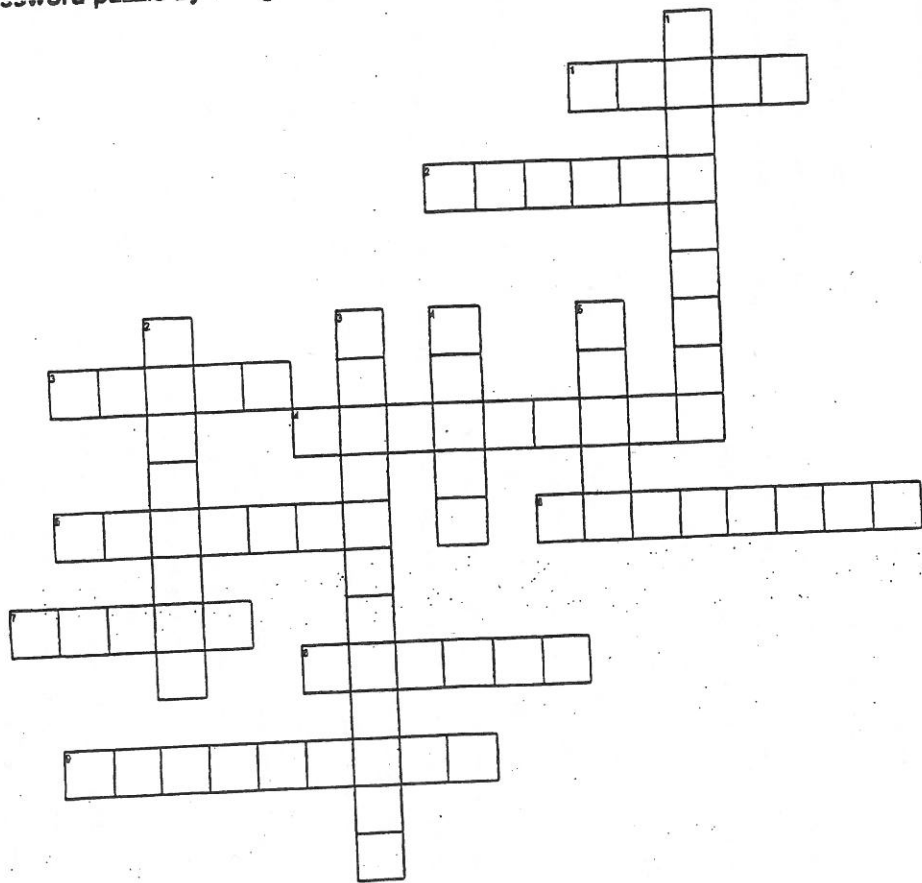
wanted adventure. There was always the promise of fame and fortune for a successful gladiator. Most often, gladiators met with a wretched death.

Gladiator schools were founded to turn these men into gladiators. These schools housed and fed the men as they prepared for the sports. Trainers, who were often former gladiators themselves, turned the men into fighting machines. The costumes and weapons of the gladiators were selected to add to the drama of the contests. Swords, tridents (3-pronged spears), nets, and body armor were used in various combinations. A heavily armed man fighting against a lightly armed man was always a favorite with the crowd.

When the contest began, the gladiators would enter and circle the arena. Once around, they would stop in front of the high official overseeing the event. The gladiators would then call out, "who are about to die, salute you." Then the first event would begin. When it became obvious that one of the gladiators would shortly be defeated, he would look to the emperor and the crowd for confirmation of his final fate. If the emperor gave him a thumbs-up, he was shown mercy and allowed to live. If he received a thumbs-down, it meant death. Sometimes the opinion of the crowd could influence the decision of the emperor. A successful gladiator was rewarded with money and great fame. Occasionally, he was set free after a series of wins. Sometimes a gladiator could buy his freedom. Some even would return to the arena to fight again.

To modern society, these games seem to be a barbaric practice. The Roman citizens did not feel this way. They felt that these were men who had been condemned to death anyway. They held no pity for them. They were even less concerned about the animals. Some of the Roman philosophers did question the value or the morality of this violence. However, they were in the minority. These events got bigger and more spectacular every year. It was not long before entire battle scenes were staged. This required even bigger arenas. It was becoming very expensive to stage these enormous events. Eventually, two things caused the gladiator games to disappear. One reason was the cost. It finally became too expensive to pay for the structures and costumes. The other reason was the influence of Christianity. Christianity was a new religion that was quickly gaining in popularity. It was opposed to the killing of other human beings and the spectacle of the sport.

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Across

1. The _____ was where the Roman government would hold its public meetings.
2. Some gladiators were _____ who were rented to participate in the games.
3. If the emperor gave a thumbs-down, this meant _____.
4. Sometimes gladiators were convicted _____ who were serving their sentence as gladiators.
5. Men went to gladiator _____ to prepare for the games.
6. If the emperor gave a _____, the gladiator was allowed to live.
7. Gladiator games were also called _____ games.
8. Before they fought Gladiators called out, "We who are about to die, _____ you."
9. One reason gladiator games disappeared is because they got too _____.

Down

1. Gladiators were often _____ of war.
2. The _____ was a temple built to honor the Roman gods.
3. Another reason gladiator games disappeared was because of the influence of _____.
4. A Roman poet once said that all people wanted was bread and _____.
5. In these games the fight was to the _____.