

Roman entertainment

By Michael Coleman

NARRATOR: Without television to watch, Romans went for the next-best thing: the theatre. Theatres were always in the open air. Some were very grand buildings. The audience sat on seats in a semi-circle, facing the stage.

ACTOR: Woe is me! I am doomed! Doomed!

NARRATOR: Roman plays were very long, so to stop the audience getting bored, performers would 'over-act', waving their arms about and shouting their lines loudly! Many of the plays were tragedies – very sad dramas. But the Romans also enjoyed a good laugh and watched plays a bit like our pantomimes. The actors often wore masks, so that the audience could tell the goodies from the baddies...

ACTOR: I'm a goodie, I am!

CROWD: Oh no you're not!

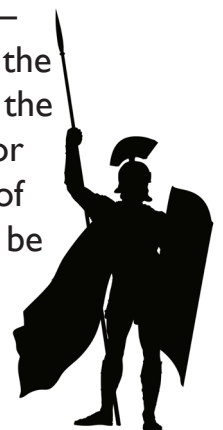
ACTOR: Oh, yes I am...

CROWD: Oh no you're not!

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CROWD: Oh no you're not!

NARRATOR: But the entertainment for which the Romans are best – or worst – known, featured the gladiators. These were the trained fighters who entertained crowds by fighting to the death. Many gladiators were slaves, bought especially for their size and strength. Others were men found guilty of committing a serious crime who'd been given a choice: be executed or killed in a fight!



- COMPERE: Introducing - Simplus Simonus, facing his first fight as a gladiator! So how about this amphitheatre, Simon?
- SIMONUS: Yeah, big ennit? Why's it round?
- COMPERE: So that everybody can see you clearly.
- SIMONUS: And why do the seats slope up towards the sky?
- COMPERE: Same reason. Your fans don't want the person in front's head spoiling their view, do they?
- SIMONUS: No – but them in the front row might get sand kicked up in their eyes. Why's there so much of it on the ground?
- COMPERE: It's perfect for soaking up blood.
- SIMONUS: Right! Er...whose blood?
- COMPERE: That lion's. Or yours. Good luck!
- NARRATOR: Gladiators would fight wild animals or, usually, each other. Often they would have different weapons – a sword and a shield or two swords and no shield, or perhaps a net and three-pronged trident. Sometimes there were fights between gladiators driving chariots. In some ways, the worst part came right at the end. And what happened depended on whether the spectators thought they'd seen a good fight or not...
- COMPERE: Giganticus wins! Wimpus submits! Time for the public vote then. If you think Giganticus should finish Wimpus off, put your thumb down. If you think Wimpus fought well deserves to live, put your thumb up. Ooh, looks pretty even. Let's see. One up, one down, two down... Giganticus! I'm still counting!
- GIGANTICUS: Oops. Sorree!



- NARRATOR: Amazingly, some gladiators survived until they were old enough to retire. When that happened they were given a present: a wooden sword!
- GIGANTICUS: I'd have preferred a nice clock!

