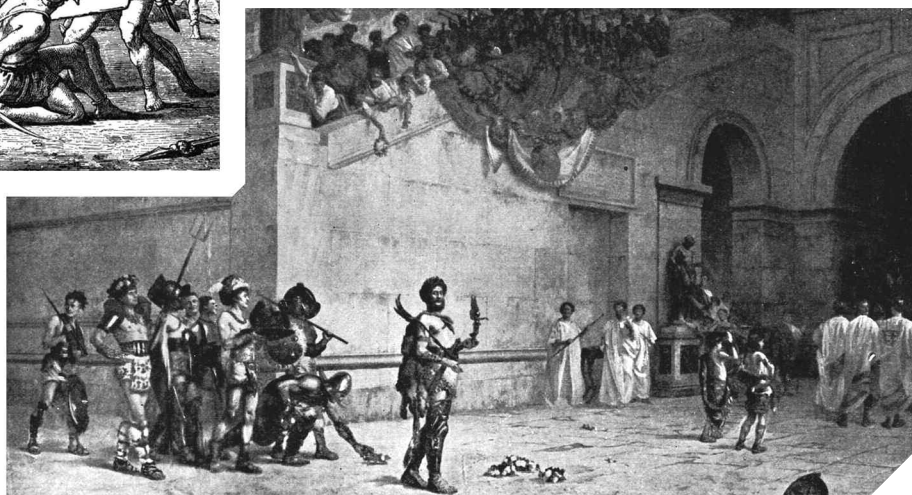


**GURPS**

Fourth Edition

# MARTIAL ARTS™

## GLADIATORS™



Written by **VOLKER BACH** and **PETER V. DELL'ORTO**

Edited by **NIKOLA VRTIS**

*An e23 Sourcebook for GURPS®*


**STEVE JACKSON GAMES**

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# INTRODUCTION

The word “gladiators” immediately conjures up a host of violent images. The net and trident. Fans screaming for blood. Patrician Romans sitting disdainful of the slaves who fight for the crowd’s amusement.

The world of the gladiator is more than just slaves, swords, and death. Gladiators were well-trained athletes competing in a most lethal sport. They were pampered and cared for like racehorses, driven mercilessly like boot-camp recruits, and then sent out to kill and die splendidly for the crowds.

**GURPS Martial Arts: Gladiators** takes you inside the world of the gladiator. You’ll enter the ludus, where raw slaves and desperate freemen were transformed into cunning and artful martial artists. You’ll go inside the arena, where they put on the show they trained for. You’ll travel to the Roman streets and beyond, where gladiators were famed for their fighting skills, envied for their physical prowess, and wooed by their social betters.

Now enter the arena, where the blood-soaked sand reveals the skills of some of the most renowned martial artists in history . . .

## GURPS MARTIAL ARTS AND THIS BOOK

This work is a supplement for **GURPS Martial Arts**. It expands on the descriptions of the gladiators from that book by offering a background history of the arena, several templates and template variations, and the equipment necessary for gladiators.

## PUBLICATION HISTORY

**Gladiators** drew on material in **GURPS Martial Arts** for **GURPS Fourth Edition** and **GURPS Imperial Rome** for **GURPS Third Edition**. Although **Imperial Rome** proved inspirational, the history, the styles, and the templates were generated from the latest research and archaeological data available. Where these books differ, it is intentional, revising out-of-date information about the arena.

## ABOUT THE AUTHORS

*Joey, do you like movies about gladiators?  
– Captain Oveur, **Airplane** (1980)*

Volker Bach is a relative latecomer to roleplaying, starting at age 24, though by now he has accumulated far more experience in it than he will admit to in polite company. He holds a degree in ancient history with a specialization in Roman studies. His personal experience in combat is limited to being bullied in school. Volker has written several articles for **Pyramid** magazine, but this is his first **GURPS** book. He lives in Hamburg, Germany, with numerous books, and he works as an English teacher and translator while pursuing an education degree. Aside from roleplaying, his interests include history (both real and counterfactual), reenacting, reading, and the culinary arts.

Peter V. Dell’Orto started roleplaying in 1981, with **Dungeons & Dragons**, and has played **GURPS** since **Man to Man**. He has been active as a **GURPS** playtester, editor, and contributing author since 1996, and he has written many **GURPS** articles for **Pyramid** magazine. He is also the co-author of **GURPS Martial Arts** with Sean Punch. Peter is an enthusiastic martial artist. He currently fights amateur MMA, holds a *shodan* rank in Kendo, and trains Kachin Bando. His other hobbies include fitness, reading, painting miniatures, Japanese culture, and music. Peter likes movies about gladiators.

## About GURPS

Steve Jackson Games is committed to full support of **GURPS** players. Our address is SJ Games, P.O. Box 18957, Austin, TX 78760. Please include a self-addressed, stamped envelope (SASE) any time you write us! We can also be reached by e-mail: [info@sjgames.com](mailto:info@sjgames.com). Resources include:

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*Bibliographies.* Many of our books have extensive bibliographies, and we’re putting them online – with links to let you buy the resources that interest you! Go to each book’s web page and look for the “Bibliography” link.

*Errata.* Everyone makes mistakes, including us – but we do our best to fix our errors. Up-to-date errata pages for all **GURPS** releases, including this book, are available on our website – see above.

Rules and statistics in this book are specifically for the **GURPS Basic Set, Fourth Edition**. Page references that begin with B refer to that book, not this one.

# CHAPTER ONE

# GLADIATORIAL GAMES

The myth and legends of the gladiatorial games intertwine with the facts of history. Whether the information is deduced from inscriptions, graffiti, drawings, or literature, all of it

makes for good gaming. (A glossary of terms found in this supplement is on pp. 48-49.)

## HISTORICAL OVERVIEW

Like most of the more baffling Roman customs, gladiatorial combat has its roots in religious practices. The Campanian tribes may have been the first in the region to force condemned men to fight to the death in funeral games, perhaps as a form of human sacrifice, and the Campanians are still remembered in Roman times as the most enthusiastic gladiatorial fans. It is most likely from them that Roman aristocrats adopted the habit of including ritual combat to the death in their funerals.

Initially, these games were rare and small scale, part of the elaborate ceremonies that accompanied the funeral of a powerful man. In addition to distributing gifts of food and holding a lavish feast in honor of the deceased, a handful of fighters – known as *bustuarii* (pyre men) – would kill each other before a

cheering crowd. As these events became politicized, their religious character increasingly fell behind their function as crowd-pleasers, and aristocrats vied with each other to provide the most spectacular entertainment. For example, at the funeral of Publius Licinius in 160 B.C., 60 pairs of gladiators fought in the Forum Romanum before huge crowds. By the first century B.C., the *munera* (literally “gifts,” originally referring to the ceremonial handouts at funeral feasts) were often held at arbitrarily chosen memorial days for long-dead relatives during election season and were regarded as something ambitious politicians had to provide the electorate with. Laws were passed intermittently to limit the expense permitted to candidates seeking office, but the upward spiral proved unstoppable.

## POLITICS OF THE ARENA

During the Late Republican period (about 200 B.C. to 50 B.C.), candidates for political office often took on huge debt to finance lavish gladiatorial games as parts of their campaigns. Providing fighters, gear, and the managerial and choreographic skills required was the task of a highly specialized private industry that sprang up in and around Rome. The cost of setting up training centers (*ludi*), armories, and menageries; buying suitable slaves; and employing trainers (*doctores*), physicians, and entertainers was huge. Nevertheless, the popularity of the games justified it: In 160 B.C., the mere rumor of nearby gladiator fighting emptied the seats of a theater premiere by Terence, an author of great stature.

The presence of a large number of armed and trained men so close to Rome, traditionally without any form of military presence, brought risks of its own. Gladiators were used as bodyguards, assassins, and foot soldiers in factional infighting. Spartacus’ revolt in 73 B.C. left no doubt that armed slaves also had revolutionary potential. There were some unexpected side benefits, too: In 105 B.C., the armies of

Marius drafted gladiatorial trainers to drill their unseasoned recruits in swordsmanship. Despite its risks, the business thrived and grew.

### ROME: IMPERIAL SPLENDOR

Aware of the potential political status and military muscle an unregulated ludus could place in the hands of potential rivals, Augustus took control of the major gladiatorial schools soon after he became emperor, and he regulated the number and size of shows that would be permitted in Rome. From now on, the right to hold munera was limited to praetors, and they were restricted a maximum of two a year and 60 pairs of gladiators. Private funeral games, still allowed by Augustus, petered out after his reign. By contrast, the emperors were free to hold games of any size they chose and used this privilege to the hilt. Augustus boasted of having held eight grand games at which 10,000 gladiators fought, and later emperors did their best to set new records.

At the same time, the haphazard system of Republican munera was brought under a system of strict rules. Games continued to be held in improvised or adapted venues until Titus opened the Colosseum in 79 A.D., but the audience was now allotted seats according to rank and status. Front rows were reserved for senators and knights (*equites*), while women were banished to the rear. Gladiator classes (known as *armatura*) were standardized, their armament regulated, and the pairings of fighters formally fixed. All this was probably simply the outcome of imperial control over the great gladiatorial schools (which independent provincial establishments copied). It eventually created an empire-wide gladiatorial culture with its own rules, traditions, and fan culture.

Gladiatorial shows were rare. No more than a handful occurred in a year – sometimes none at all. Despite this fact, an impressive capital outlay went into them. The Colosseum (properly called the Flavian Amphitheater after the dynasty that built it) was one of the largest buildings in the city and the greatest arena in the Roman world. The compounds of the imperial gladiatorial schools surrounded it, a permanent naval detachment was kept on hand to operate its canvas sunroof, and large numbers of wild animals were brought in from all over the Empire and kept in readiness for the great day. This was partly a display of imperial patronage, the kind of luxury only the greatest power in the world could offer its citizens, but it also reflected the immense popularity of the munera. For something this important, nothing less would do. Provincial cities that could easily have improvised a venue for the one or two small games they held each year often built expensive amphitheatres for much the same reason.

## PROVINCIAL GAMES

While the games in Rome turned from rowdy electioneering into imperial spectacle, gladiator fighting spread into the provinces. It had always been popular in Central Italy, but now arenas sprang up from Gaul to Syria. Wealthy town councilors and newly rich freedmen mostly financed these munera; the upper class used them to boost their prestige and electability. The scale of these games was far more modest than in Rome, with even a rich city like Pompeii considering 35 pairs of fighters a lavish display.

Provincial munera continued to be arranged by *lanistae*, private ludus entrepreneurs who rented out their gladiators and animals for pay. The lanistae purchased or hired and trained their troupes at their own risk and expense, and they often traveled long distances to their shows. Few provincial aristocrats would have had the money to maintain their own fighters, but when they hired in, they were prepared to spend large amounts. Being tight-fisted on such occasions was a major faux pas, and the lanistae would offer all manner of attractions to impress the public.

A gladiatorial munus was announced months in advance and drew spectators of people from the surrounding countryside and neighboring towns. If everything went well, the sponsor (known in Latin as the *editor*) could bask in the adoration of the cheering multitude. The memory of particularly successful games could buoy a political career for *decades*. This also meant that unsuccessful munera could seriously damage not only the sponsor, but also the reputation of a town.

## Spartacus and the Third Servile War

Large-scale slave revolts occasionally occurred in the Roman Republic (they were known as *bellum servile* – servile or slave wars). However, one revolt in particular was larger, closer to home, and more dangerous to Rome than any previous one had been.

At the height of the Late Republic's conquests in 73 B.C., when the life of a slave was cheap and regular supplies came to Rome from all over the world, a gang of around 70 slave gladiators escaped from the ludus of Lentulus Batiatus in Capua. They armed themselves with knives and cooking spits and plundered a consignment of gladiatorial weapons. Plutarch, a later historian, writes that they were unwilling prisoners of war from Gaul and Thrace who plotted to escape. The plot was discovered by their guards, which led to a desperate breakout. One of this band of fugitives was called Spartacus. His name would become legend.

The escaped gladiators took refuge at the summit of then-dormant Mt. Vesuvius. From this base, they managed to repel several attempts to recapture them and recruited more fugitive slaves into their force. The gladiators among them trained other escapees in combat. This turned a potential liability (masses of untrained slaves) into an asset (an army). Spartacus was either their leader or one of their co-leaders, along with two Gauls, Crixus and Oenomaus.

Early on, the rebels experienced success. Rome's most experienced troops and best generals were engaged in Spain

and Asia Minor at the time. The slave army defeated two Roman expeditionary forces, the first under Proprætor Claudius Glaber and the second under Prætor Publius Varinius. Besieged on the mountaintop by the hastily raised militia force of Claudius Glaber, they used improvised rope ladders to quietly slip behind his back and destroyed his army in a night attack. They overcame Publius Varinius's force in open battle by a quickly growing slave army then numbering in the tens of thousands. At this point, one part of the slave army, under the leadership of Crixus, decided to try to escape to Gaul. They were cut off and defeated by Roman troops. Spartacus' army was luckier. He ultimately became the leader of a vast rebel force. In 72 B.C., his followers defeated the armies of both Roman consuls. They may have come close to threatening the city of Rome itself.

The tide of war turned when Marcus Licinius Crassus took command of Rome's forces against the rebels. He brutally enforced discipline and led his legions south in a systematic effort to trap Spartacus' army. Eventually, he succeeded in bottling up the rebels in Bruttium, in the "toe" of Italy, by building a chain of field fortifications across the peninsula, and blocked efforts to escape to Sicily by sea. In a final attempt to break out, the slave army was annihilated by the legions. The survivors, some 6,000 men, were rounded up and crucified along the road between Capua and Rome. No further gladiator uprisings are recorded.

A particularly disastrous example took place in Pompeii in 59 A.D., when local rivalry with the nearby town of Nuceria triggered riots in which several spectators were killed. A less-than-amused emperor banned games in Pompeii for 10 years.

Nevertheless, even nonviolent urban crowds could be volatile and hard to please. Modern event and marketing managers would not find the world of the provincial arena strange.

## THE DECLINE AND FALL OF THE GAMES

Throughout the first and second centuries and well into the crisis-ridden third, emperors threw lavish munera featuring thousands of gladiators along with barbarian captives to be executed and wild beasts for the hunt. All of this reinforced the

image of the Roman as conquerors and civilizers, triumphing over wild animals and savage tribes alike. It also showed off the near limitless wealth of the Empire with hugely expensive novelties such as ivory fences to protect the audience, perfume dispensers, and raffles of valuable prizes for spectators. For the grandest kinds of games, artificial lakes were used to stage naval battles with hundreds of men fighting on shipboard. The arena of the Flavian Amphitheater could be flooded for this purpose.

Eventually, though, economic decline and political crisis caught up with the games. Emperors spent less and less time in the capital, and money was in ever-shorter supply. The munera dried up until, in the course of the fourth century, they disappeared from the Roman scene. Under Emperor Honorius, all gladiatorial games were prohibited throughout the Empire.

## TIMELINE

**4th century B.C.** – First depictions of gladiatorial fights in Campania.

**264 B.C.** – First recorded gladiatorial fight in Rome at the funeral of Didius Iunius Brutus Petra.

**206 B.C.** – Scipio Africanus has deserters killed by wild animals.

**186 B.C.** – First lion hunt in the arena in Rome organized by Fulvius Nobilior.

**166 B.C.** – First gladiatorial fights in Asia Minor under Antiochus IV.

**105 B.C.** – Marius recruits gladiatorial trainers to drill Roman levies for the war against the Cimbri and Teutones.

**80 B.C.** – Amphitheater in Pompeii is built.

**73-71 B.C.** – Spartacus' Rebellion.

**50 B.C.** – Pompey neutralizes Caesar's gladiatorial bodyguards; 5,000 men are disarmed and arrested.

**46 B.C.** – Caesar organizes the first *naumachia* (staged battle on an artificial lake).

**42 B.C.** – Gladiatorial fights are first organized by the state, not private donors.

**36 and 31 B.C.** – Augustus holds huge *naumachiae* to celebrate naval victories.

**c. 0-30 A.D.** – Development of the formal gladiator types (*armaturae*).

**14-37** – Reign of Tiberius; collapse of the wooden amphitheater at Fidenae said to kill 10,000 spectators.

**37-41** – Reign of Caligula; he causes a scandal by having wild animals fed on the meat of executed criminals.

**59** – Riots at gladiatorial games in Pompeii; the city is banned from holding munera for 10 years.

**80** – Emperor Titus opens the Flavian Amphitheater in Rome.

**109** – Emperor Trajan celebrates his victory over the Dacians by having 10,000 gladiators fight on 123 days of festivities, the largest such event ever.

**177** – The prices of gladiators are capped by Senate decree.

**180-192** – Reign of Commodus; the emperor fights personally.

**438** – Emperor Valentinian outlaws gladiatorial games.

## FAMOUS GLADIATORS

Little is known about the career of any gladiator, but a handful of them are commemorated in gravestones, depictions of fights, and fan graffiti. One even came from the ranks of the emperors of Rome.

### ALBANUS, SEASONED PROFESSIONAL

Albanus is one gladiator known from graffiti. His name is mentioned in an epigraph on a wall in Pompeii, where an eager devotee of the sport scratched a quick sketch of his idol in the process of defeating an opponent. It depicts him fighting as a *murmillo*, and his opponent in this particular fight was a

*thraex* named Severus (himself a veteran with 13 victories to his name); the bout ended in death.

Albanus' career likely began as a slave – young, in good physical shape, and with the necessary aggressiveness and drive – purchased by one Scaurus for Pomponius Faustinus, a local powerbroker who owned the Pompeii *ludus*. (As he was a freedman, he cannot have been a volunteer initially.) After rigorous physical training in the prison-like *ludus*, he must have proved himself in his early fights and repaid the (considerable) investment handsomely. Nineteen victories (the number of reprieves is not listed) represent a career spanning many years. It is likely he earned his liberty at some point. From then onward, he fought in the arena of his own volition, lured perhaps by the fame or the large premiums that could be won, or by the risk of death.

## Encountered

Fighting on the provincial circuit in south Italy, Albanus probably still works for Pomponius Faustinus and holds a high rank in his ludus. His 19 victories – one of the best records known – means his reputation is considerable. A match between Albanus and an equally seasoned veteran would almost certainly represent the high point of the day. Scurrilous graffiti found elsewhere in Pompeii suggest not everyone rooted for him, and some supporters of his opponent expressed their dislike in strong words. As a star, Albanus earns large sums for every fight and, now free, shares them with his lanista on an equitable basis. Soon enough – prompted by the onset of old age, an injury, or simply to enjoy his wealth – he may retire and become a doctor, training young gladiators. As of now, he enjoys his status and earning power. He is probably too old to move to Rome and play on the biggest stage, though a sufficiently large sum might tempt him to try a new venue. If he stays in Pompeii long enough, he may be unfortunate enough to be caught in the eruption of Mount Vesuvius . . .

## COMMODUS, IMPERIAL AMATEUR

Everybody remembers Commodus from the silver screen – the poster child for depravity and decadence. Unusually for Hollywood, this comes pretty close to being right. Commodus was one of the worst emperors Rome ever had. Unlike Nero, who fancied himself an artist, or Elagabalus, who was into religious mania, Commodus was crazy about the arena. This infatuation went so far that some contemporaries speculated his father was not emperor Marcus Aurelius, but a gladiator his mother had had an affair with.

Amateurs were nothing new to the world of the gladiator. Bored rich men trained with them and sometimes – scandalously – even fought in public. Nonetheless, most of them were relatively harmless. Commodus was far from that. He was known for training with real weapons and injuring or killing his sparring partners, and anyone facing him in the arena could only hope to survive by surrendering. Fighting as a secutor (left-handed, as he proudly emphasized), the emperor also favored this armatura in his games, often rigging contests against opponents. He also played the role of a venator, killing animals in inventive ways (often to the distaste of the audience). Fittingly, he eventually fell victim to a court intrigue, strangled by a wrestler he trained with.

The political career of Commodus was undistinguished: He rose to power in 180 A.D. at the young age of 19 by virtue of being the son of an emperor. He spent most of his reign indulging his bloodthirsty hobbies. In political matters, he was naive and depended on corrupt and sycophantic advisers, chief among them his freedman Cleander. His reign saw rebellions in the provinces and riots in the capital. In the last years before his death in 192 A.D., he developed into a megalomaniac, identifying himself with the demigod Hercules and renaming Rome in his own honor.

## Encountered

Physically – contrary to recent Hollywood depictions – Commodus is a very handsome, well-muscled young man, tall, blond, bearded, and supremely fit (he devotes much of his time to physical exercise and combat training). Vain, self-centered, and a coward, he overcompensates for his weakness by frightening people around him, and he enjoys being feared. With his friends, he is trusting to the point of naiveté, but vengeful and ruthless with real or perceived enemies.

## GALEN, GLADIATORIAL PHYSICIAN

Gladiators represented considerable investment and needed to be in peak form if they were to recoup the outlay by winning fights. The ancient world had a long tradition of sports medicine, developed mostly in Greece, that the Roman schools could tap into. Any ludus worth its salt had a medical professional to supervise training and diet, treat injuries, and keep the troupe healthy. Modern scholars do not know much about these men, but it so happens that one of the most influential physicians of antiquity worked in a gladiatorial school: Galen.

Born in 129 A.D. as the son of a Greek architect, Galen received an education in technical and mathematical subjects. He then went on to study medicine under teachers in Smyrna, Corinth, and Alexandria.

## Modern Gladiators

Although the gladiators of ancient Rome may seem distant from modern day, combat sports are alive and well. Modern fans flock to professional boxing, professional wrestling, and more recently, mixed martial arts events.

Much of the atmosphere of an ancient day at the games remains in these events. Fighters enter to fanfare and music, and wave, bow, or otherwise salute the crowd before they engage in combat. Rules emphasize safety, but not at the expense of a good choke, a bone-crunching body slam, or a bloody broken nose. Scantly clad ring-girls mark the rounds as they go by, corporations looking to sell to the crowds sponsor fighters, and teams eagerly show their best fighters to their advantage. The stretch from the trappings of a modern fight to the sandy Colosseum is not such a long one, after all.

Many modern fighters hearken back to the gladiators for inspiration, or consciously draw a parallel to their ancient counterparts. Unlike in the past, though, these fighters are not slaves fighting to the death. In fact, very few participants suffer serious or life-threatening injuries.

One current event has a close resemblance to ancient Roman gladiator fights: The Spanish bullfights replicate the atmosphere and challenge of the venatores, fighting trained animals for the entertainment of the crowd. The torero replaces the slave gladiator, but the spectacle and the bloody death of the bull are still the same.

In addition, some modern reenactment groups put on gladiator shows. The combat is not real, and there is controversy over how accurate they represent the real games. Nevertheless, for a GM, reenactors, bullfighters, and modern combat sports all provide a potential source of inspiration for their own munera.

After his return to his hometown of Pergamum at age 28, he became physician to the local gladiator school. A young medical man would not consider this a desirable position, but it seems to be an acceptable starting point, and it did not hinder his meteoric career later in life. After four years at the *ludus*, he left Pergamum to settle in Rome, where he became imperial physician to Marcus Aurelius and a medical writer whose texts shaped Western medical thought for many centuries. Much of the experimental work they are based on was done on gladiators.

### *Encountered*

Galen at the Pergamum *ludus* is a young man on the make, strikingly intelligent, well-read, inquisitive, and combative. His treatment of the gladiators is often unconventional – and usually effective. In keeping with the Hippocratic tradition, he pays particular attention to diet and lifestyle, but he is an equally competent surgeon and can suture wounds, set fractures, and restore patients to health and fitness.

## **SPARTACUS, REBEL GLADIATOR**

For a figure of such historical significance, very little is known about Spartacus. Ancient historians mention that he was a Thracian from the Maedi tribe. Modern scholars have cast this into doubt; they believe that he may, in fact, have been a condemned criminal fighting as a *thraex*. Others suggest he may have been of royal blood, a descendant of Spartokos V of the Bosporan kingdom (c. 160-150 B.C.). He may have served as a Roman auxiliary soldier before being either captured in war or sentenced to the arena for some unknown crime.

Historical records indicate that Spartacus was a gladiator in Capua in 73 B.C. when he was involved in plotting a mass breakout. On being discovered, about 70 men seized what weapons they could and made for the hills. See *Spartacus and the Third Servile War* (p. 5).

Over the coming three years, Spartacus would prove himself a skillful guerilla tactician, inspiring war leader, and ruler

of a ragtag army numbering tens of thousands of escaped slaves and disaffected paupers. He bested Roman armies in the field, and he besieged and took the city of Thurioi. He only went down in defeat to a vastly superior force of battle-hardened legionaries under the command of Crassus, one of Rome's most powerful men at the time. It is thought that he died in battle, but his body was never found.

### *Encountered*

Spartacus at the time of his rebellion is likely in his late 20s to late 30s, in good physical shape, and a competent fighter. If he were a Thracian, he would have looked like an average Greek or Roman. Early in the course of the war, he probably wears gladiatorial gear taken from Capua, but later, he could be equally dressed in captured military equipment or even the finery of Roman officers. He must have been an inspiring figure, easy to trust and like, and able to impress his authority on his followers. It is his personality above all that holds together a disparate assembly of angry men and instills in them the discipline, training, and *esprit de corps* that turned them into an army capable of defeating Rome's legions.

If he were indeed an enslaved Thracian nobleman, he would have military experience and a Greek education, be literate and numerate, and be able to organize a fighting force and develop and execute military plans. He speaks Greek and Latin along with his native language. He most likely commands his army in Greek (still widely spoken in southern Italy and the *lingua franca* of the eastern Mediterranean).

Plutarch mentions Spartacus' wife, a Thracian prophetess, joining him in his enslavement and being at his side as a rebel leader. This is not corroborated by other sources and too convenient a literary trope to be very trustworthy. Nonetheless, it may be true. In that case, Spartacus may be self-consciously Thracian, wearing Greek-style armor and long hair and a beard. Harsh self-discipline and austerity would be consistent with a soldierly ethos and inspire loyalty in his followers. Since Spartacus probably never was the sole and uncontested leader of his army, that would be a wise choice.

# **A DAY AT THE ARENA**

The spectacle of *munera* included far more than just gladiator fights, though they were at the center. It was a daylong display of power and luxury where the audience felt part of the world-conquering community of Romans. It was a lavish mix of the Superbowl and a Thanksgiving Day parade. At the same time, a dedicated fan culture carefully studied fighting techniques, eagerly followed the careers of star gladiators, and mercilessly criticized the weaknesses of any match. The *munera* would be preceded by weeks of advertising.

A *munus* had a specific routine that casual and dedicated fans alike would be familiar with.

## **POMPE AND CENA LIBERA**

The *munera* traditionally began with the *pompe*, a big parade. The *pompe* included the gladiators, servants carrying

their weapons and armor, other performers, and whatever animals or machinery was deemed sufficiently impressive. It was led by civic officials and the donor, and it included statues of deities (especially if the games were in honor of a religious holiday), musicians, flowers, and shiny ornaments. The fans had the chance to look at their idols, comment on their physical shape and mental state, examine their weapons and horses, and marvel at the things the show held in store for them. For those who could not attend the games themselves, this was an opportunity to take in some of the atmosphere and join in the excitement with their luckier fellow citizens. At the time of the parade, the organizers also presented the program of the games, including which gladiators would be paired with each other. This *compositio* was studied attentively, especially by those who intended to bet on the fights.



The next occasion was the *cena libera*, the gladiators' pre-fight feast. The public was invited to watch. Spectators tried to pick up clues from the behavior of the men: too little appetite indicated fear, while a gladiator who ate and drank too heavily might already have despaired of his survival chances. Winners ate and drank sparingly, but sufficiently, it was believed, trying to avoid hunger, lethargy, or hangovers. In films and novels, the *cena libera* has been depicted as anything from a demeaning display with the gladiators behind bars and a gaping public outside, to an orgy where jaded noblewomen threw themselves into the arms of seasoned killers for animalistic sex. Very likely neither is true, but since there are no good sources on what the event *really* looked like, GMs are free to use either, both, or something in between.

## THE MORNING PROGRAM

The organizers of gladiatorial games were well aware of the value of good showmanship. Munera never began with the main event but slowly built up to a crescendo, starting the morning with lighter entertainment. The early show included several elements: the entrance of the fighters, the *prolusio* (mock combat), the *venatio* (wild animal fights), executions, and assorted other entertainment.

A typical show – and there were plenty of atypical ones – began with a procession of the gladiators. All fighters scheduled for the day marched into the arena to be inspected and admired. This was also the opportunity for a speech by the editor and cheering (or booing) by the populace. Wild animals, too, were paraded at this point if the organizers thought they would draw attention. Boars or wolves were too commonplace, but bears, lions, or beasts that are even more exotic generally qualified.

In the *prolusio*, the fighters would entertain the crowd with mock combat using wooden practice weapons. This gave them the opportunity to show off their skill and technique, impress the audience, and build up the popularity that could save a defeated gladiator's life in the real bouts. No doubt it was also used to develop their "stage personalities" – daring or cautious, vicious or chivalrous. Spectators often bet large sums on the outcome of fights based on their observations here.

During the *venatio*, exotic or aggressive beasts were made to fight against each other or against trained *venatores*, or simply slaughtered for the amusement of the public. The Roman stereotype has lions, leopards, and bears fill this role, and in the grand spectacles of the Flavian Amphitheater, they did. Smaller munera often had to make do with less exotic bulls, boars, wolves, and dogs. Inscriptions from Pompeii mention only bulls in one event, and bulls, boars, and bears in another.

The demand for wild animals was such that an entire industry dedicated to their supply sprang up. Bears and aurochs were brought from the forests of Germany. Lions, crocodiles, and elephants came from Africa. Even more exotic tigers, rhinoceroses, and polar bears were transported thousands of miles to be shown off and often killed. For more details, see *Animal Show: Venatio and Executions* (below).

Finally, along with the *prolusio* and *venatio*, there could be other acts. Just about *anything* that could wow the audience was possible – acrobats, trained animals, music, dance, even gladiator clowns and dwarves. Provincial arenas probably were a bit more intimate than the Flavian Amphitheater with its audience of 50,000, but the entertainment tended toward physical comedy and large-scale showmanship. Individual comedians, singers, or mimes would have seemed lost on a stage where many in the audience could barely see, let alone hear, the action, and the Romans had neither microphones nor cameras to bring them closer. This phase was also when public executions could be scheduled. Roman criminal justice believed in deterrence, and a delinquent sentenced to death *ad bestias* was executed publicly and spectacularly in the arena, usually being killed by wild animals.

### *Animal Show: Venatio and Executions*

Animal fights and the execution of convicted felons provided part of the entertainment of munera. Serious fans might deliberately miss it and only come for the gladiators.

Animal handlers and beast-fighting *venatores* took care of the animals used in the arena, trained them, and where the show called for it, killed them. No proper games were considered complete without the deaths of at least some animals.

## Gladiator Fandom

*All the girls sigh for Celadus the Thraex.*

– *Graffiti in Pompeii*

The Romans knew a business opportunity when they saw one. Archeologists have unearthed what can only be described as fan articles all over the Empire. Perfume flasks shaped like helmets; toy figures; lamps; water flasks; and tableware decorated with scenes of gladiatorial fights and arena hunts have all been found. On one oil lamp, the wick extended from the gladiator's oversized erect penis, neatly combining usefulness and smutty humor. As far as anyone knows, there were no restrictions on names or designs. Anybody could make and sell these items.

Gladiators, much like many modern athletes, also attracted a dedicated fan base that studied their sport in detail and enjoyed talking about it at length. The dividing

line among these fans was not along different troupes or individual fighters (though it appears some could attract a following), but by fighting styles. *Parmularii* fans preferred gladiator classes that used small shields, while *scutarii* supporters cheered for those who carried the *scutum*. Traditional pairings often pitted these types against each other, and the rumor that an editor favored one over the other could lead to angry outbursts.

The success of gladiators with women was a stock theme of Roman satire and humor. A great deal of exaggeration was likely involved, but no doubt, arena groupies did exist. Sometimes a wealthy and respectable woman actually eloped with a fighter. Popular culture certainly held up gladiators as symbols of virility and sexual prowess. The fact that a woman's skeleton was found in the gladiator barracks at Pompeii has only fuelled this particular stereotype.

Trainable ones often were deliberately made aggressive while less biddable ones were simply starved, hurt, and goaded into fighting. Often, they were tied together or penned into narrow confines to force them to fight. Much of this was not very different, except in scale, from medieval bear baiting or modern dog fighting. For the animal handlers involved, these fights were incredibly dangerous as their job was to control and goad the terrified, enraged, and often injured beasts into providing the best possible entertainment. Venatores armed with bows or spears were kept ready in case anything went wrong.

Not all beasts – especially expensive, exotic ones – were killed as part of the show. Roman audiences especially hated to see elephants harmed (trained ones were a staple of arena shows).

## Female Gladiators

Female gladiators – *gladiatrices* – are one option for female characters in a historical Roman gladiatorial campaign. Gladiatrices certainly existed – Roman authors who mention them usually profess themselves shocked and appalled at this offense against morality and tend to associate them with decadence and bad emperors. Juvenal even mentions – with disgust – wealthy women who practiced gladiatorial fighting as a hobby in the first century A.D. (though they probably did not perform in the arena).

What no one knows is whether gladiatrices were accorded the same status as men. Some historians believe that they were only part of the morning show, a curiosity like fighting dwarves or counting elephants. The only surviving image of gladiatrices (a relief from Ephesus) shows two of them – their stage names are Achillia and Amazon – in the pose of regular fighters. That makes it believable that women fought as regular contestants in the arena, although they were only paired with other women. The practice was hardly common, if an inscription from Ostia – in which an editor boasts that he had women fight for the first time since the founding of the town – can be believed.

In addition to animal-animal fighting, so-called hunts were arranged in which venatores battled with beasts. These fights – more slaughter than contest – symbolized the triumph of man over nature, but the risk to the fighters nonetheless was great. Some of them faced bears, wolves, or lions with nothing more than a sword or spear. Usually the chances were more unequal, and the show focused on the elegance and skill with which the gladiators dispatched wild creatures. In extreme cases, animals were simply run into the arena and killed by archers from the safety of the audience – a sport that Emperor Commodus (p. 7) is said to have enjoyed greatly. However, when the fighters were down in the arena, measures were taken to protect the men.

Naturally, the danger of working with animals specifically taught to maim, rape, and kill humans was considerable. Even so, the life of a venator was nowhere near as dangerous as that of a main-event gladiator, probably more akin to that of a modern torero.

Additionally, animals were used in executions. Some convicts were offered a slim chance by being armed and trained to

fight for their lives. These unfortunates could, by dint of skill and luck, sometimes win a reprieve and become gladiators. Most of them, though, did not survive their first fight. The rest of the delinquents were simply offered up to the animals to be killed. The lanista who received the prisoners would decide who was merely killed and who fought as venatores.

Arena executions were cruel and creative, with the aim of providing entertainment as much as deterrence. Far from the somber spectacle of the gallows or guillotine, they often relied on technological gadgets or decorative surroundings to create a sense of novelty. Prisoners were dressed as Orpheus to be torn to pieces by wild animals, dropped from cranes as Icarus, or raped to death by bulls as Pasiphae. Less imaginative settings included tying victims to stakes – sometimes on small carts ready to wheel into the arena – and having predators take bites out of their bodies. The handlers also had to cage the animals again after the last victim was finished – the training was too valuable to waste.

## THE MATCHES

At the heart of every arena show were the bouts between gladiators. These fights with actual weapons could end with participants being injured or killed (though that was far from always the case). Except in very large and extravagant shows (the kind that emperors could occasionally lay on), these matches were between individuals or small groups that followed specific rules; they were not the free-for-all melees shown in some movies. There were fixed pairings of gladiator types (murmillo fought thraex and hoplomachus, secutor fought retiarius, provocator fought provocator) and traditional setups for group combat.

Fights were scheduled in increasing order of importance. The later in the afternoon (and the closer to the great dramatic finish of the day) a fight was scheduled, the more prestige it brought. The more dangerous and experienced the opponent, the greater the rewards of victory. The larger the city and the grander the occasion, the more important the victory and the more damaging the defeat.

The summa rudis and his assistant, the secunda rudis, refereed all fights. Dressed in white tunics and equipped with long staves, they were easily recognizable in the arena and could stop bouts if any rules were broken. They stood close to fighting pairs, ready to intervene much like the referee in a modern boxing match. Before the beginning of each fight, the referees checked weapons and armor. The area within which the fighters were allowed to move was then designated (they could not roam around the arena at will) and the opponents announced. Refereeing was apparently not considered demeaning to the honor of good citizens the way actual fighting was, and some very respectable people worked as referees.

### Individual Fights

On a signal from the summa rudis, the fight began. This followed certain rules. Strikes to the groin were not allowed (excavated gladiator remains show no wounds there). Immediately lethal strikes were permitted, but they were discouraged. They cut short the fight without giving the audience a chance to judge.

Longer bouts were interrupted by breaks during which wounds were bandaged and drinks were provided to refresh the fighters. If a bout went on too long, though, the gladiators could have their shields taken away by the referees to produce a quick result. The crowds did not like overly defensive fighting, and the organizers aimed to give the people what they wanted.

If a gladiator was too badly injured or too exhausted to continue fighting, he surrendered to his opponent by throwing away his weapon and raising his hands or kneeling down. The winner now had to wait while the editor decided the fate of the loser. See *Asking for Mercy* (pp. 22-23). Killing a surrendering opponent outright was a severe breach of the rules (difficult to avoid for characters with Bloodlust), as was resuming the fight after surrendering. Traditionally, a thrust to the neck or chest ended the life of the loser mercifully quickly.

If the audience spared him, the loser was allowed to leave the arena to cheers and applause. The winner then received his due from the editor's servants: a palm frond as a sign of victory and a sum of money as his prize (much of which would eventually go to his lanista). If he fought particularly well, he also accepted a *corona* (laurel wreath, also called a victory crown) in recognition of skill and bravery. After a lap of victory through the arena, bathing in the roaring applause, he left the ring to the next fighters.

If both parties had fought well, the editor could end the fight during a break by declaring a draw – the Latin phrase for this was *stans missus* (dismissed while standing). It was a great boost to the reputation of both gladiators. See *Stans Missus* (p. 23).

The fate of a defeated gladiator rested in the hands of the editor who had paid for the games (and would have to fully reimburse the lanista for all gladiators who were killed). The audience would not be denied its say, though, and a sponsor would be a foolhardy to neglect their opinion. Traditionally, they signaled their preference by gestures, though it is unclear what they were. The “thumbs up, thumbs down” beloved of Hollywood is unlikely, given that the sign had to be unambiguous across a large arena. Stabbing the thumb toward the throat may have signaled death, and lifting the hand high, mercy, but all such reconstruction is speculation. However it was expressed, the public expected its decision to be respected, and the editor usually would prefer even financial ruin to countering them.

A loser who impressed the crowds was pardoned (*missus* – literally, “dismissed”). (The crowd's reaction would depend on his previous reputation, his showing during the *prolusio*, how well he had fought and how popular his opponent was.) He could leave the arena to fight another day. If he had displeased the audience, his life was forfeit, and the last test of his courage would be how he received the killing blow. It fell to the winner to slay him with a stab to his neck or chest. A man who could muster the strength to take the blade to his exposed neck without flinching could draw cheers. His body was carried out of the arena and buried respectfully – at least if he or his friends and family could afford the funeral.

Exactly how many fights ended in death is unknown, but it seems to have been less common than many writers and moviemakers think. Gladiators recorded their careers in the numbers of victories and pardons they received (much like modern win-loss records for professional fighters). A man could easily rack up as many of the latter as the former! Especially in the early Empire, professional gladiators could hope for reprieve regularly. Some academics think that as little as one in four los-

ers were killed. However, being too free with pardons opened the editor to the suspicion of parsimony. The death of a gladiator was expensive, but the audience expected it. Especially during the Late Republic, killing a large number of fighters was seen by some as a sign of generosity. Even in the much less competitive political atmosphere of the Empire, some fights were expressly *sine missione*, without the option of mercy. Emperor Augustus forbade the practice, but that didn't make a lasting impression.

## Defending the Bridge

In addition to regular bouts, organizers tried to offer the audience creative twists on the theme. The most popular and best documented of these was the *pons* (bridge). A *retiarius* was placed on a man-high platform (the *pons*) with two ramps leading up to it. Two *secutores* attacked him from below, trying to force their way onto the platform. The defender was given a supply of stones to throw at the attackers along with his regular weapons (the *secutores* were not allowed to throw them back). Some gladiators seem to have specifically trained for this scenario, and it is expressly mentioned in some inscriptions.

Some evidence exists of other variations. Gladiators could defend gates or hurdles or fight blindfolded, shieldless, or otherwise impeded. Inventive lanistae needed to remember, though, that the public expected primarily to see single combat matches.

## Mass Fights

If a sponsor wanted to give the public something truly spectacular (and he had the money for it), a mass fight could be laid on. These melees dispensed with many of the usual rules, pitting one group of fighters against another without referees or boundaries. They could be crowd-pleasers, though they were hugely more expensive than regular fights given that they used 10 or 20 (in extreme cases, hundreds of) gladiators in the time that a single fight would normally take. Established stars were unlikely to take part in such organized slaughter, but beginners had the opportunity to get their first taste of real combat, while convicted felons were sometimes sentenced to participate. The largest such events – held by the emperors in Rome – depended on a supply of prisoners of war that were effectively free.

## Naumachiae

The ultimate in extravagance was a *naumachia*, a staged sea battle. The cost and scale of such a show meant that this was out of reach of anyone but the likes of Caesar and Pompey or – after Augustus – the emperors. Even they could not afford them with anything approaching regularity. The first challenge was usually an engineering one – getting a body of water to where the audience was. Augustus had an artificial lake dug near Rome and facilities built for the audience to hold his games. Later, the Flavian Amphitheater could be flooded for the purpose. Ships had to be built (full-size warships were too big for these venues), and hundreds, sometimes thousands, of fighters kitted out. They usually represented historic sea battles. The sources mention 10 such events in over 200 years, so seeing a *naumachia* was a one-in-a-lifetime opportunity.

# CHAPTER TWO

# STYLES

Gladiator styles were specialized by a specific set of weapons, armor, and tactics. The origins of this tradition probably lie in the Roman habit of having prisoners of war fight in the arena in their native weapons and armor, as the names of the most traditional gladiator types – the *thraex* (Thracian) and *sammes* (Samnite) – suggest. It seems, though, that until the end of the Republic, a certain amount of leeway was allowed in the equipment of many arena fighters. The influence of the great imperial gladiator schools then led to the standardization of the *armaturae* that was to hold true, with only small variations, until the end of the *munera* in the fifth century.

The point to arming gladiators in different fashions was a sporting one – to pit fighters with different styles against each

other in as evenly balanced – and exciting – a match as possible. The traditional distinction of classes – probably going back far into Republican times – was between defensive, heavily armed *scutarii* (“large-shielders”) and aggressive, more mobile *parmularii* (“small-shielders”). Fans also roughly divided along those lines (it appears that the *scutarii* were usually more popular) and cheered for their favorite style. The Republican-era *sammes*, the *murmillo*, the *secutor*, and very likely the *essedarius* counted among the *scutarii*, while the *thraex*, the *hoplomachus*, and the *retiarius* (despite having no shield at all) were *parmularii*. *Provocatores*, *equites*, and the more exotic types are harder to class and may simply never have fit the scheme.

## ARMATURAE

The five most common types of gladiator styles are described here, as well as several versions that are more exotic. Fighters usually trained in one *armatura* only, though there are gravestones of rare individuals who fought professionally in two or three.

### HOPLOMACHUS

4 points

The name of the *hoplomachus* refers to the classical Greek fighting style of *Hoplomachia* (see *GURPS Martial Arts*, p. 161). This *armatura* likely goes back to Republican traditions and was already well established as an opponent for both the *thraex* and *murmillo* by the early Empire. The *hoplomachus*, like the *thraex*, was armored with a crested helmet, long greaves on both legs, and a *manica* on the sword arm. He carried a thrusting spear as his main weapon and a small, deeply dished round shield on his left arm. His secondary weapon was a dagger or very short sword.

The *hoplomachus*, like all *parmularii*, depends on superior mobility in his confrontation with *scutarii*. *Stylists* keep their small shield held chest high, ready for active blocks, and use their spears to exploit openings in their opponent’s defenses. This is best represented by Defensive Attacks with the spear, coupled with Deceptive Attack. *Hoplomachus* will use long, overhand stabs (Committed Attack or All-Out Attack (Long)), or try to lure his opponent into exposing himself in an unwise attack or shield strike (a Feint). The dagger is mainly intended for the deathblow, but it could also be used to defend the *hoplomachus* if he loses his main weapon.

There is no body of legend surrounding the *hoplomachus*. Therefore, cinematic *hoplomachi* should be much like realistic *stylists*, only more so. Higher skill, ST, and better movement will be their mainstays in combat.

*Skills:* Knife; Shield (Buckler); Spear.

*Techniques:* Feint (Spear).

*Cinematic Skills:* Immovable Stance; Power Blow.

*Perks:* Style Adaptation (any other gladiator style); Sure-Footed (Sand).

#### Optional Traits

*Secondary Characteristics:* Improved Basic Speed.

*Advantages:* See *Typical Gladiator Advantages* (p. 18).

*Disadvantages:* See *Typical Gladiator Disadvantages* (p. 19).

*Skills:* Brawling; Performance; Shield Art; Shortsword; Spear Art; Wrestling.

*Techniques:* Retain Weapon (Shield or Spear).

*Perks:* Naval Training; Off-Hand Weapon Training (Spear).

### MURMILLO

3 points

The *murmillo* was one of the most common *armaturae*, usually paired off against a *thraex*. His weapon was the short sword, and he wore a short metal greave on his left leg, a *manica* on his right arm, and a crested, broad-brimmed helmet with a fully enclosed faceplate. His shield was the large *scutum*. The *murmillo*, as a *scutarius*, was the more powerful and less agile part of his traditional pairings.

Murmillones rely on the cover of their large shield to protect themselves as they move near to their opponents. These scutarii prefer to use the shield offensively to block attacks and deliver shield bashes and Beats. Murmillones move aggressively behind a slam or shield bash, trying to punish their typically less-armored opponents with explosive strikes, charges, and sudden stabs of the sword using Attack maneuvers. These combatants often fight in a deep crouch. The strength of the murmillo is in superior defense and carefully timed, overwhelming attacks. The fighter uses Attacks, counting on his shield and armor to protect himself. Committed Attacks are used to finish opponents.

The murmillo style rewards a strong fighter; a successful murmillo will often be large and physically powerful. High ST and HP are very useful for practitioners. Cinematic Murmillones should emphasize high ST, HP, and Springing Attack. Power Blow will further enhance the murmillo's advantage.

*Skills:* Shield; Shortsword.

*Techniques:* Close Combat (Sword); Feint (Shield); Low Fighting (Shield or Shortsword).

*Cinematic Skills:* Immovable Stance; Kiai; Power Blow.

*Cinematic Techniques:* Dual-Weapon Defense (Shield); Springing Attack (Shield or Shortsword).

*Perks:* Shield-Wall Training; Shoves and Tackles (Shield); Special Exercises (Striking ST 1); Style Adaptation (any gladiator style); Sure-Footed (Sand); Technique Adaptation (Springing Attack).

### Optional Traits

*Secondary Characteristics:* Improved ST or HP.

*Advantages:* See *Typical Gladiator Advantages* (p. 18).

*Disadvantages:* See *Typical Gladiator Disadvantages* (p. 19).

*Skills:* Brawling; Knife; Performance; Shield Art; Shortsword Art; Wrestling.

*Techniques:* Counterattack (Sword).

*Perks:* Naval Training; Off-Hand Weapon Training (Sword).

## PROVOCATOR

**3 points**

The provocator, a traditional armatura known from Republican times, fought as a swordsman with the short sword and large scutum (though his was slightly smaller than that of the other scutum-wielding types). Along with a long greave on his left leg and a manica on his right arm, he was protected by a small breastplate (spongia) and a fully enclosed, crestless helmet with a wide neck guard.

Provocatores always fought other provocatores. A recent French publication assumes all gladiators started out as provocatores and graduated to the other armaturae, but this seems unlikely despite the multi-role aspect of this type.

Provocatores fight in a mobile style that emphasizes shield strikes and stabbing blows with the sword to probe and defeat their foe's defenses. They start their matches defensively, opening with Evaluate and Defensive Attacks. Stylists also rely on Deceptive Attacks heavily, and they make aggressive use of the shield for shield bashes and Beats.

## Murmillo Variations

There are two notable variations of the murmillo: the samnes and the secutor.

### Samnes (Samnite)

Evidence for the samnes is scanty. They seem to have been almost identical to murmillo except that they wore an open-faced helmet and some type of torso armor. A samnes was probably originally equipped like a Samnite warrior, with the scutum and gladius, and may be the ancestor of both murmillo and secutor. There is some evidence that, in Republican times, samnites were paired off against each other and used javelins before moving in for close combat.

Samnite gladiators will fight with the same tactics as a murmillo. Early representatives of the type may have Thrown Weapon (Spear), but even in the Late Republic, this is uncommon.

Skills, techniques, etc. are identical to the murmillo (pp. 12-13).

### Secutor

The secutor was a subtype of the murmillo who specialized in fighting the retiarius. He, too, used short sword and scutum and wore greave and manica, but his fully closed helmet had neither crest nor brim, giving his opponent's net nothing to catch on. Emperor Commodus (p. 7) fought as a secutor.

Skills, techniques, etc. are identical to the murmillo (pp. 12-13).

Unlike most other armaturae, provocatores fight with each other. Their weaponry and fighting style are balanced midway between those of the defensive, static scutarii and the aggressive, mobile parmularii. In a fight between two provocatores, neither has the advantage in speed, reach, or defense. Both fighters keep their distance, looking for an opening to strike home or go into close combat.

Cinematic provocatores will use the full versions of Dual-Weapon Attack, striking with both their shield and sword. They should develop Immovable Stance to resist charges, and Kiai and Power Blow to stun and then overwhelm their foes.

*Skills:* Shield; Shortsword.

*Techniques:* Counterattack (Sword); Feint (Shield or Shortsword).

*Cinematic Skills:* Immovable Stance; Kiai; Power Blow.

*Cinematic Techniques:* Dual-Weapon Attack (Shield or Shortsword); Dual-Weapon Defense (Shield).

*Perks:* Shield-Wall Training; Shoves and Tackles (Shield); Style Adaptation (any other gladiator style); Sure-Footed (Sand); Unusual Training (Dual-Weapon Attack; Both attacks must target the same foe).

### Optional Traits

*Advantages:* See *Typical Gladiator Advantages* (p. 18).

*Disadvantages:* See *Typical Gladiator Disadvantages* (p. 19).

*Skills:* Brawling; Performance; Shield Art; Shortsword Art; Wrestling.

*Techniques:* Retain Weapon (Sword).

*Perks:* Naval Training; Off-Hand Weapon Training (Sword).

# RETIARIUS

4 points

The retiarius appeared in the first century A.D. – possibly originally in naumachiae – and quickly became one of the most popular armaturae. He was unusual in being very lightly armored and wearing no helmet – retiarii had to rely on their agility and speed to fight better-protected opponents. Their main weapons were a throwing net and a heavy trident, with a dagger carried as a secondary weapon. The only protection they had was a long manica with a galerus metal plate mounted on the left shoulder that protected the face when it was turned toward the opponent.

Almost unarmored, the retiarius needs speed and reach to defeat his usual opponent, the secutor. Stylists use the net to tangle, trip, distract, or disarm their better-protected foe. The retiarius relies on the trident to deliver crippling blows whenever an opening presents itself. With the net, the fighter can entangle the opponent, Feint, or spread it out to deny the opponent a place to move unhindered. If the opponent *does* step on the net, the retiarius tries to trip up his foe; see *GURPS Martial Arts*, p. 221.

Once a foe is entangled or fainted out of position, the attacks the body or vitals with the trident.

Despite having a weapon in each hand, practitioners do not Dual-Weapon Attack – the pattern is to use the net to disadvantage the opponent and then strike with the trident, not to attack with both at once. The gladiator keeps his distance and avoids close combat where his lack of protection opens him to easy defeat. The dagger is held in reserve for a killing blow or as a last, desperate line of defense.

The retiarius uses the trident as the main weapon from the start of his career. Because of this training, practitioners may learn the Exotic Weapon Training perk as soon as they have a point in Spear (instead of the usual 10 points in skills and techniques).

Cinematic retiarii should emphasize their speed advantage. Increased Speed and Move are very useful to a retiarius, as are FP to keep up the fight. A *truly* cinematic retiarius may want to replicate the trident-throwing feat of Draba from *Spartacus*. This would require both Thrown Weapon (Spear) and the Exotic Weapon Training perk.

The exotic *laquearius* style uses a lasso, but otherwise is the same as a retiarius.

*Skills:* Knife; Net; Spear.

*Techniques:* Armed Grapple (Net); Counterattack (Net or Spear); Hook (Spear); Sweep (Net); Targeted Attack (Spear Thrust/Neck); Targeted Attack (Spear Thrust/Vitals).

*Cinematic Skills:* Power Blow.

*Perks:* Exotic Weapon Training (Trident); Grip Mastery (Spear); Off-Hand Weapon Training (Knife or Net); Technique Mastery (any Net-based technique).

## Optional Traits

*Secondary Characteristics:* Improved Basic Speed or Basic Move.

*Advantages:* See *Typical Gladiator Advantages* (p. 18).

*Disadvantages:* See *Typical Gladiator Disadvantages* (p. 19).

*Skills:* Brawling; Performance; Net Art; Spear Art; Wrestling.

*Perks:* Naval Training; Style Familiarity (Murmillo or Thraex).

# THRAEX (THRACIAN)

3 points

The thraex goes back to Republican traditions. He is usually paired off against the scutum-wielding murmillo as a more agile and aggressive opponent. The distinctive, small, square parma and curved sword (sica) make him easily recognizable. Thraeces wear long greaves on both legs (usually with fabric armor underneath), a manica on their sword arm, and a fully enclosed helmet with a high crest and broad brim.

The thraex depends on his speed and agility to exploit openings in the defense of his opponent. Unlike gladiators armed with long weapons, like the hoplomachus, he has to move in close to do so. A thraex tries to stab with his curved sword around the shield of his opponent (a Deceptive Attack). He moves into and out of range of his opponent's strikes, depending on quick footwork. The stylist tries to avoid staying in place, launching Attacks until the opponent leaves an opening for a finishing attack. When near the opposition, the thraex often drops into a low posture, such as crouching or kneeling.

Cinematic thraeces emphasize their speed and agility. Increased Basic Speed, Basic Move, and DX, and Extra Attacks, are more suited to the style than especially high ST or cinematic abilities.

*Skills:* Shield; Shortsword.

*Techniques:* Feint (Shield or Shortsword); Low Fighting (Shield or Shortsword).

*Cinematic Skills:* Power Blow.

*Perks:* Style Adaptation (any other gladiator style); Sure-footed (Sand).

## Optional Traits

*Secondary Characteristics:* Improved Basic Speed, Basic Move, and DX.

*Advantages:* Enhanced Dodge; also see *Typical Gladiator Advantages* (p. 18).

*Disadvantages:* See *Typical Gladiator Disadvantages* (p. 19).

*Skills:* Brawling; Shield Art; Shortsword Art; Wrestling.

*Techniques:* Retain Weapon (Shield or Shortsword).

*Perks:* Naval Training; Off-Hand Weapon Training (Shortsword); Style Familiarity (Murmillo).



## EXOTIC TYPES

In addition to the more common gladiator styles, a number of exotic ones also fought in the arena.

### Andabata

#### 2 points

Little is known about the equipment of this armatura except that they, uniquely, fought blind. Very likely, their helmets shut off all vision. Cicero mentions that andabatae used swords, but gives no further detail. They may have fought unarmored, for the bloody spectacle, or *heavily* armored, to encourage their wild swinging.

Andabatae are greatly handicapped by their helmets. Stylists move about, attempting to hear their opponent – a challenging prospect in a crowded arena – and probe the darkness with quick attacks, trying to locate a target. Defensive Attacks are the rule, and Wait, simultaneously listening with Hearing rolls (see p. B394 for details on combat Hearing rolls). Andabatae who sense their opponent go for a quick, hard, crippling strike to win their fights.

Cinematic andabatae are masters of Blind Fighting. Using their honed senses, they locate their opponents and then launch a spectacular Power Blow to finish them off. Unlike the realistic stylists, cinematic andabatae will be far from potentially bloody comic relief. Instead, they will be masters of a very specialized style.

*Skills:* Shortsword.

*Cinematic Skills:* Blind Fighting; Power Blow.

*Perks:* Style Adaptation (any gladiator style); Sure-Footed (Sand).

#### Optional Traits

*Secondary Characteristics:* Improved Per.

*Advantages:* Acute Hearing; also see *Typical Gladiator Advantages* (p. 18).

*Disadvantages:* See *Typical Gladiator Disadvantages* (p. 19).

*Skills:* Brawling; Performance; Wrestling.

*Perks:* Naval Training; Off-Hand Weapon Training (Shortsword).

### Crupellarius

#### 3 points

Crupellarii are mentioned in the first century A.D. as a specifically Gallic armatura, notorious for their extremely heavy armor. A statuette from France shows a pot-shaped helmet and what appears to be segmented metal armor over the upper torso, arms, and legs. The crupellarius probably carried a shield, though the type is unknown. Tacitus mentions crupellarii fighting in a Gallic revolt in 21 A.D. where Roman soldiers used pickaxes to break through their armor. He also writes that the soldiers pushed over their enemies to render them helpless, but that may be hyperbole. However, putting a crupellarius off balance, disarming him, or knocking him over to make him vulnerable to an attack in the abdomen seems a promising approach.

Crupellarii depend on their extremely heavy armor, which covers everything except the abdomen. Much like the Murmillo, stylists center their tactics on their overwhelming armor advantage. Fighters work to protect their vulnerable abdomen from opponents with longer-reach weapons or

lighter armor, but they use their heavy armor to allow them to attack with a degree of impunity. These strikes are typically Attacks and Committed Attacks.

Even cinematic crupellarii will be slow and ponderous, but they should make up for it with high ST and HP and by pouring points into Immovable Stance. Lifting ST is also useful to carry the extra weight of the armor!

*Skills:* Shield; Shortsword.

*Techniques:* Feint (Shield or Shortsword).

*Cinematic Skills:* Immovable Stance; Power Blow.

*Perks:* Special Exercises (Lifting ST 1); Style Adaptation (any gladiator style); Sure-Footed (Sand).

#### Optional Traits

*Secondary Characteristics:* Improved ST.

*Advantages:* Lifting ST; also see *Typical Gladiator Advantages* (p. 18).

*Disadvantages:* See *Typical Gladiator Disadvantages* (p. 19).

*Skills:* Brawling; Performance; Shield Art; Shortsword Art; Wrestling.

*Perks:* Naval Training; Off-Hand Weapon Training (Shortsword).

*You stab in the dark like an andabata!*

– Cicero, *Virgilio Maronis* 5.210

### Dimachaerus (“Two-Sword Fighter”)

#### 2 points

The dimachaerus is poorly documented and may not have been a specific type at all. A relief from Turkey that shows a fighter with a round, enclosed helmet, short greaves on both legs and curved short swords in both hands. Little is known about the fighting style of the dimachaerus.

Equipped with two swords but no shield, dimachaeri use both blades for attack and defense. Stylists emphasize mobility and seeking openings in an opponent’s defenses. Close-in combat with two blades and no torso armor is too lethal to be dramatically satisfying to the crowd! Instead, dimachaeri rely on Defensive Attacks and Evaluate. Feints are also popular, and fighters use retreats to move away from opponent’s attacks, only to try to sweep back into range and Counterattack. Cinematic stylists apply Dual-Weapon Attack to strike their foes, using one sword to Feint and the other to Attack!

*Skills:* Shortsword.

*Techniques:* Feint (Shortsword).

*Cinematic Skills:* Power Blow.

*Cinematic Techniques:* Dual-Weapon Attack (Shortsword).

*Perks:* Off-Hand Weapon Training (Shortsword); Style Adaptation (any other gladiator style); Sure-Footed (Sand); Unusual Training (Dual-Weapon Attack; Both attacks must target the *same* foe).

## Optional Traits

*Secondary Characteristics:* Improved Basic Speed or Basic Move.

*Advantages:* Enhanced Dodge; Enhanced Parry (Shortsword); see also *Typical Gladiator Advantages* (p. 18).

*Disadvantages:* See *Typical Gladiator Disadvantages* (p. 19).

*Skills:* Brawling; Performance; Shortsword Art; Wrestling.

*Techniques:* Spinning Strike (Shortsword).

*Perks:* Naval Training.

## The Venator

Venatores were no gladiatorial armatura and had no specific weapons or armor that made them recognizable. They specialized in fighting wild beasts in the arena. Some of them may have run great risks facing lions, bears, and wolves with nothing more than daggers or swords. Most of them had less dangerous tasks, going into the arena armed with shields and spears. Graffiti from Pompeii specifically mention taurarii and succursores, interpreted to mean specialized bullfighters on foot and horseback. It is not always clear whether depictions show professional venatores or condemned men.

Unlike gladiators, venatores were expected to win. The beast in the Roman arena was not an equal and respected opponent, but a representative of wild and dangerous nature and thus needed killing, either in fights against other beasts or at the hands of professionals. Their opponents were therefore given the possibility to escape if the situation got out of hand – a fourth-century ivory carving shows man-sized baskets bristling with spikes for the venatores to flee into – and the audience cheered at even senseless slaughter of defenseless animals by archers shooting from safe positions. The point was not a real contest but a spectacular show, a way of killing animals in the most impressive manner possible.

## Eques (“Horseman”)

### 5 points

The eques fought on horseback, though it is likely that most bouts ended on foot after one or both opponents were unhorsed (staying mounted after throwing the opponent may have been against the rules). Unlike most gladiators, equites wore tunics. During Republican times, they wore torso armor, but afterward, they went without protection. Their helmets were crestless and fully enclosed. A thrusting spear was their main weapon, and they carried a short sword for foot combat. Their shield was the traditional parma equestris, a small round leather shield.

When equites fight from horseback, they stabbed at their opponent (always another eques) with spears. Unlike later European knights, they do not depend on the momentum of their horses to drive home couched lance strikes. Rather, they wield the spear both over- and underhand to stab forward, sideways, down, and even backwards. Spear attacks are generally Attacks and Defensive Attacks; Deceptive Attacks are used to try to overcome the opponent’s defenses.

Seeking to keep the challenge equal, equites dismount once their opponent is unhorsed. Attacking the horses is against the rules. On foot, equites depend on deft footwork and agility. Stylists deflect blows with their small, light shield

while using Feint and Defensive Attacks to create an opening for a finishing shot.

Cinematic equites should be both masters of their weapons *and* masters of the horse. Animal Friend, which gives Riding bonuses, is certainly useful.

*Skills:* Shield; Shortsword; Spear; Riding (Horse).

*Techniques:* Back Strike (Spear); Combat Riding; Hands-Free Riding; Staying Seated.

*Cinematic Skills:* Power Blow.

*Perks:* Grip Mastery (Spear); Style Adaptation (any gladiator style).

## Optional Traits

*Advantages:* Animal Friend; see also *Typical Gladiator Advantages* (p. 18).

*Disadvantages:* See *Typical Gladiator Disadvantages* (p. 19).

*Skills:* Brawling; Performance; Shield Art; Shortsword Art; Spear Art; Wrestling.

## Essedarius (“Charioteer”)

### 5 points

Despite the name, no evidence exists that essedarii used chariots except possibly when this armatura was introduced in the first century A.D. (Some scholars think that this gladiator type was actually called *gallus*, with the essedarius undepicted.) The Britons, who used war chariots, may have inspired the equipment and fighting style. They wore no armor other than a manica on their sword arm and a round, crestless helmet (originally open-faced, later enclosed). Some images show them using javelins, but their main weapons were the short sword and large scutum. Essedarii mainly fought each other, though there is one depiction of a fight with a retiarius.

Whether fighting from chariots or on foot, essedarii open combat with an exchange of javelins, blocking and dodging their opponent’s missiles. The sword, not particularly suited to stabbing, is used to slash the opponent with Attacks and Committed Attacks. Blows are aimed at the face, neck, and skull. Shield bashes also feature prominently in their arsenal. Mobility plays a greater role than with the other scutarii.

Although it is unlikely the chariot was used in combat, it is possible essedarii still learned to control it. At the very least, it makes for a memorable entrance into the arena. The style below assumes the chariot is still used for combat; for foot-only essedarii, drop Teamster (Equines) from the list and reduce style cost to 4 points.

Whatever the truth of the matter historically, cinematic essedarii should drive a chariot. These larger-than-life gladiators should be able to maneuver their chariot and hurl their javelins on the run, as well as display exceptional defense skills (Enhanced Block and Enhanced Dodge).

*Skills:* Shield; Shortsword; Teamster (Equines); Thrown Weapon (Spear).

*Techniques:* Mounted Shooting (Thrown Spear/Chariot); Targeted Attack (Shortsword Swing/Face); Targeted Attack (Shortsword Swing/Neck); Targeted Attack (Shortsword Swing/Skull).



*Cinematic Skills:* Power Blow.  
*Perks:* Style Adaptation (any gladiator style).

### Optional Traits

*Advantages:* Enhanced Block; Enhanced Dodge; see also *Typical Gladiator Advantages* (p. 18).

*Disadvantages:* See *Typical Gladiator Disadvantages* (p. 19).

*Skills:* Brawling; Performance; Shield Art; Shortsword Art; Wrestling.

*Perks:* Off-Hand Weapon Training (Shortsword).



### Scissor (“Cutter”)

3 points

The scissor was one of the creative armaturae that showed up in the early Empire. Although not an absolute certainty, good evidence exists that his main weapons were a short sword

in the right hand and a metal tube that ended in a half-moon blade over the left hand. Unlike most traditional armaturae, scissores used no shields, but they were heavily armored. They wore mail on their torso; round, fully enclosed helmets; greaves on both legs; and a manica on their sword arm. Their usual opponent was the retiarius.

Heavily armored, but without the protection of the shield, the scissor’s tactics are hard to reconstruct. The left, encased in protective metal, is primarily used for defense, parrying with the bladed glove. The sword is used offensively to stab and cut. Outraged and without the superior defense of the scutarius, the scissor needs to keep his distance from the terrifying trident of his typical foe. The main road to victory of the scissor is a sudden, aggressive move into his opponent’s space. A scissor relies on Attacks, but when an opportunity presents itself, the stylist uses Committed Attack to try to launch a finishing blow.

Cinematic scissores should invest heavily in Power Blow and improved ST to make their sudden strike a telling one. Like most gladiator styles, there isn’t a body of cinematic legends to draw on. Cinematic scissores should do all of the same things realistic stylists do, only better and faster!

*Skills:* Boxing; Shortsword.

*Techniques:* Close Combat (Shortsword).

*Cinematic Skills:* Power Blow.

*Perks:* Style Adaptation (any other gladiator style); Sure-Footed (Sand).

### Optional Traits

*Secondary Characteristics:* Improved ST.

*Advantages:* Enhanced Dodge; Enhanced Parry (Shortsword); see also *Typical Gladiator Advantages* (p. 18).

*Disadvantages:* See *Typical Gladiator Disadvantages* (p. 19).

*Skills:* Boxing Art; Brawling; Performance; Shortsword Art; Wrestling.

*Perks:* Naval Training; Style Familiarity (Retiarius).

## ADVANTAGES, DISADVANTAGES, AND SKILLS

Some components of the martial-arts styles of the gladiators merit special discussion.

### ADVANTAGES

Certain advantages are especially common in a gladiatorial campaign.

#### Patron

see p. B72

Gladiators, whether slave or free, may have a Patron. In the Late Republic and into the Empire, a sufficiently wealthy owner or employer can get a gladiator out of a lot of trouble (as serious as assault, theft, or other crimes). Roman law occasionally makes direct reference to defendants being too rich to prosecute. However, even if a Patron saves a gladiator from

legal penalties, he may choose to administer his own punishment later. All slave gladiators will have an owner, of course, but that owner may not necessarily act as a Patron.

A typical lanista will be a 10-point Patron, with a frequency of appearance as high as 15 or less (for a game set almost entirely within a ludus) or as low as 6 or less (for a campaign with lots of activity outside the ludus). While the ludus provides equipment for a gladiator, it is only for use in the arena. Free gladiators who live and train outside a ludus, or former gladiators, are unlikely to have their lanista as a Patron. Doctores, with their greater duties and importance, are more likely than regular gladiators to have the lanista as a Patron.

A lanista also may have a Patron. During the Republic, this may be a rich benefactor willing to intercede on the lanista’s behalf. During the Empire, imperial lanistae are required to have a Patron – the emperor.

## Typical Gladiator Advantages

Certain advantages are typical or useful for gladiators and others associated with the ludus. To save space on each style, these are listed here. Advantages marked with a \* are exotic or cinematic advantages; GM approval is required to include these with a PC.

Luck is *especially* useful for a gladiator. Not all gladiators will have it, but those that do will have much longer careers than those that don't!

Appearance; Charisma; Combat Reflexes; Extra Attack\*; Fearlessness; Fit or Very Fit; Gladiator Rank; Hard to Kill; Hard to Subdue; High Pain Threshold; Lifting ST\*; Luck\*; Patron; Rapid Healing; Reputation; Striking ST\*; and Wealth (for successful gladiators!).

### Gladiator Rank

see p. B29

A special form of Rank is important in a *Gladiators* campaign.

*Gladiator Rank*: Gladiators, doctores, and lanista may have some level of Gladiator Rank. This is a form of Courtesy Title (see *GURPS Power-Ups 2: Perks*, p. 18). Characters may purchase up to 5 levels of Gladiator Rank. However, only a lanista can have Gladiator Rank 5; this is functionally equivalent to, and requires, Status 1. Gladiators generally cannot promote to Rank 5; gladiators do not become lanista during the course of a normal career. For details of these ranks, see *Ranking System* (p. 29). 1 point/level.

## PERKS

Certain perks are especially useful for gladiators. Perks marked with a † require specialization.

### Style Familiarity

see *GURPS Martial Arts*, p. 49

All gladiators will be familiar with a specific gladiatorial style (see pp. 12-17). Many also learn the Style Familiarity perk of their usual opponents. Such training is commonly available in the ludus. The lanista wants his gladiators to know the tricks of their opponents, in order that they may put on a better show!

Familiarity with a recognized gladiatorial style is enough for a Claim to Hospitality at your own particular ludus but not necessarily in another ludus. It all depends on the relationship of your owner to the owner of that ludus.

### Style Perks

see *GURPS Martial Arts*, pp. 49-52

Several style perks need further discussion for gladiator characters.

#### Exotic Weapon Training†

The retiarius uses the trident, which requires this perk to remove its inherent skill penalty.

#### Extra Option†

The rules are full of advanced and optional rules that change how the game works in particular situations. Usually, these don't cost points because they're *campaign* options – either everybody uses them or nobody does. However, the GM may allow certain rules that normally aren't used in the campaign on a PC-by-PC basis. Access to each of these is a perk.

Options that cost FP or character points to exercise are the fairest. For instance, each aspect of *Influencing Success Rolls* (p. B347) and *Extra Effort in Combat* (p. B357), as well as *Flesh Wounds* and *TV Action Violence* under *Cinematic Combat Rules* (p. B417), could be an Extra Option perk in a campaign where those rules don't universally apply.

Rules that inflict penalties are usually fine, too. For example, the GM may not want to use the complicated new hit locations in *GURPS Martial Arts* – or his campaign might be set before medicine *knows* about those locations! In this instance, an Extra Option could enable a warrior familiar with one of

those locations to target it at the standard penalty. Indeed, *many* optional rules in *Martial Arts* could work this way, with access to them becoming attractive special abilities for skilled fighters.

If either kind of rule expands the spectrum of an advantage, cinematic skill, or spell, the GM should require a separate Extra Option perk for *each* trait that can benefit from the added option. The same goes for cinematic or supernatural rules options available for mundane skills, like the most extreme cinematic rules in *Martial Arts*; specialization by skill is advisable.

For certain types of gladiators, individual rules make sense. For example, the minimally armored retiarius might acquire Extra Option (Bulletproof Nudity), while *any* cinematic gladiator might benefit from Extra Option (Cannon Fodder) to allow him or her to quickly overcome any no-name arena opponent.

#### Naval Training

Gladiators trained to fight in naval engagements (see p. 11) may acquire this perk. Note that not all combatants in such engagements have this perk. Gladiators deemed unlikely to survive might not be singled out for special training. Star gladiators and those with potential surely get it, to keep them alive through the action! Naval actions were sufficiently rare, however, to preclude this from being standard training.

#### Off-Hand Weapon Training†

Many gladiators learn to fight with their off-hand.

#### Shoves and Tackles†

You've trained at using a melee weapon to press and overbear the enemy. Whenever you make an armed shove or slam – whether a shield rush (p. B372) or one of the long-weapon options in *GURPS Martial Arts* – add a damage bonus similar to that which Sumo Wrestling gives unarmed shoves and slams: +1 per die at skill DX+1, or +2 per die at DX+2 or better. You must specialize by Melee Weapon skill.

#### Sure-Footed†

Gladiators who must regularly fight on unusual surfaces will benefit from this perk. Arena sand was likely hard packed (but see *Shifting Sands*, p. 22), making this perk unnecessary.

Nevertheless, gladiators may learn it anyway, to deal with improperly maintained sand, overly wet spots (from blood or water), or deliberately treacherous spots meant to spice up a fight.

## DISADVANTAGES

Several disadvantages need more discussion for a gladiatorial campaign.

### *Code of Honor*

see p. B127

While all free gladiators took an oath to be “whipped, burned, and killed with iron,” this was more of a waiver than a code. Slaves had little choice in the matter, and volunteers gave the oath to subject themselves to these acts normally forbidden by law. Some gladiators, however, may have felt bound by a personal code of showmanship and fair play. This would never have been common, but it is *especially* appropriate in heroic, cinematic gladiators.

*Code of Honor (Gladiator's)*: Never willingly show fear, pain, or pity; accept death with courage; and give a good show above all else. -5 points

### *Duty*

see p. B133

Almost all members of a ludus, from the lanista down to the lowliest tiro, have a Duty. Several modifiers apply to this duty.

*Extremely Hazardous*: Gladiators, guardsmen, and venatores are required to risk life and limb during the execution of their duty. It is not always combat to the death, but the risks are high and the consequences of error are steep.

*Involuntary*: Generally, slave gladiators have an *involuntary* duty. They do not choose their particular job, and the price of noncompliance with their duty is pain and death.

*Nonhazardous*: Only those characters who do not have any risk whatsoever in their job can claim this. This includes stagehands, musicians, and physicians, but *excludes* lanistae, animal trainers, and doctores. The former group never need to risk themselves as part of their job, while the latter group may risk injury or death at the hands of gladiators, wild animals, rivals, and even angry mobs unhappy over a poorly run munus. Those jobs do not qualify as nonhazardous!

### *Social Stigma*

see p. B155

All gladiators will have some form of Social Stigma. The rest of society looks down upon gladiators, whether slave or free. Individual gladiators may be respected or beloved, but as a class, they are below the average member of Roman society.

All slave gladiators have *Social Stigma (Valuable Property)*. They are no longer people but are valuable investments for a wealthy owner. Neither the owner, nor those who rent the gladiator from the owner, will risk them lightly. However, the gladiator's main value is his ability to kill or be killed in the arena.

Free gladiators have *Social Stigma (Second-Class Citizen)*. Other Roman citizens always feel superior to gladiators. Others associated with ludi may or may not have this disadvantage.

## Typical Gladiator Disadvantages

Gladiators were stereotyped; Roman literature paints them as vain, greedy, lecherous, arrogant, and violent bullies! All slave gladiators have Social Stigma (Valuable Property), and all free gladiators have Social Stigma (Second-Class Citizen) – this is a *required* disadvantage. This list offers common disadvantages for gladiators, free or slave, and others associated with ludi.

Appearance (from scars and battle injuries, if not actual natural ugliness!); Bully; Callous; Compulsive Behavior (Fighting); Compulsive Carousing; Duty (Extremely Hazardous; possibly with Involuntary – see below); Enemy (a rival gladiator); Greed; Lecherousness; Odious Personal Habit (Arrogance or Vanity); Overconfidence; Reputation; Social Stigma (optional for everyone except gladiators); Status; Stubbornness; Wealth (for poor; starting gladiators.)

*Former* gladiators who survived the arena may have any number of physical disabilities, such as Lame or One Eye. Many of those so injured, however, would have asked for (and been granted) a clean death in the arena.

In addition, many gladiators will have an additional stigma, over and above this required stigma. These commonly include *Minority Group* or *Subjugated*.

## SKILLS

Of course, combat skills are vital for gladiators. However, some noncombat skills are important, too.

### *Combat Art*

see p. B184

Gladiator styles included not just practical skills for combat but also some flashy techniques designed to impress the crowd. These techniques were intended to be both attractive and reasonably effective. Since matched pairs were common, a gladiator might learn a strike or block that not only displays his style to its best advantage, but gives his opponent a chance to do so as well! Ultimately, the business is show business, and gladiators who demonstrate potential to survive and fight again will be taught these more artistic techniques.

### *Current Affairs*

see p. B186

Current Affairs (Sports) is the appropriate specialty for gladiators, gladiator fans, and any ludus or arena professionals. The arena is *the* major sporting obsession in Rome, other than the chariot races. Just about no other sports matter half as much . . . to Romans. The -3 for lack of Cultural Familiarity (p. B23) is applicable in this setting. Non-Romans are at a distinct penalty to know about the latest events in the arena, and Romans are equally penalized to know what is going in sports in Greece or farther regions.

## Esoteric Medicine

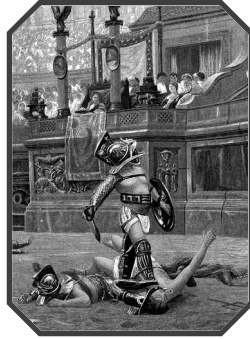
see p. B192

Gladiators were treated by physicians, who watched over their physical training and tended them after injury. This skill is used in place of Physician in low-tech societies for treatments not based on herbs or other medicinal substances. It's not magical or mystical; it includes purely physical methods such as bleeding and purging, dietary regimens, or massage. At the GM's discretion, these may have useful effects. In particular, massage can relieve pain from strained muscles; pain decreases by one level on a success (see p. B428) and by two levels on a critical success. Herbal preparations (prepared with Pharmacy skill) may count as good- or fine-quality equipment for massage.

## Games

see p. B197

The gladiatorial games have their own rules, ceremonies, and etiquette. All gladiators learn these basics in the ludus. The appropriate specialization is Games (Roman Gladiator).



## Performance

see p. B212

While combat skills are vital to survive the fight, Performance is essential to thrill the crowd before and after the match. The difference between successfully impressing the masses might be the difference between calls for mercy and calls for the sword.

## Savoir-Faire (Ludus)

see p. B218

The ludus is a place of training, pain, and preparation for death. It is also its own society, with a pecking order and standards of behavior. This skill covers knowledge of the written and unwritten rules of the ludus. While slight variations from ludus to ludus exist, the "rules" are similar enough to be covered with one skill.

## Sex Appeal

see p. B219

Roman gladiators were legendary figures of virility and sex appeal. Some gladiators may specifically develop this skill, both for out-of-arena use and for wooing the crowd in the arena.

## Surgery

see p. B223

Surgery is one of the main skills used by physicians employed by the ludus. In low-tech societies, Physician skill is normally unavailable. Surgeons are at -5 to effective skill for operations other than field-expedient surgery (setting broken bones, treating wounds, extracting arrowheads or bullets).

Many surgeons may make a virtue of necessity, with an optional specialty in trauma surgery that exactly covers the procedures of field-expedient surgery. Trauma surgeons are at -2 to effective skill for general surgery *and* have the standard -5 penalty. See **GURPS Low-Tech** for more detailed rules.

## TECHNIQUES

One technique is worth special discussion for gladiators.

### Targeted Attack

see **GURPS Martial Arts**, p. 68

Common Targeted Attacks are included for the various gladiator styles. Additionally, individual combatants may train in other specialties of this technique. GMs may consider allowing gladiators to develop almost any Targeted Attack for their style's weaponry. This will allow for much more efficient killing or crippling blows against new fighters . . . but any gladiator with a Targeted Attack will quickly have it recognized by the crowd and by any potential rivals! A Reputation for using that "signature attack" is thus appropriate for a fighter with more than a few matches. In such a case, the bonus to defend against the gladiator's Targeted Attack should apply from the *first* attempt, not just on the second and subsequent uses. For this reason, gladiators favor variety over specialized targeting.

*Men give them their hearts and women even their bodies. . . . At the same time, they are praised and humiliated, relegated to an inferior status . . . and yet they love the one they punish and disdain those they honor! The art is praised, but the artist is looked down upon.*

– Tertullian, **On Spectacles** 22

# CHAPTER THREE

# RULES OF THE GAMES

Gladiatorial games call for some additional rules for defending in combat, resolving matches, pleading for mercy,

advancement, and more. Many options in *GURPS Martial Arts* come in handy for replicating the gladiatorial experience.

## BLOOD ON THE SANDS

Central to the gladiatorial games is the fight. The *Detailed Method* for tournament combat (*Martial Arts*, p. 134) is especially useful for arena combats, with its methodical pace punctuated by flurries of violent action. Specific exchanges of blows should be resolved with the standard combat rules. Actions involving only NPCs may be simplified to announcing the resolution, or they can be determined with the *Quick Contest Method* (*Martial Arts*, p. 134). However, unless there is a clean victor, with one gladiator dead and the other alive, other rules are needed to determine the final score . . .

### *Sufficient Space to Die*

Each gladiatorial match took place in a space designated by the referee. The dimensions of this space depended on the size of the arena and the extent of the production. A matched pair in a small arena might fight in an area as little as 10 yards by 10 yards, while a group combat or animal hunt could fill the floor of the arena. Small fights in private homes might be in a spot as small as five yards by five yards. A space approximately 15 yards by 15 yards seems to have been sufficient for most gladiatorial matches.

### FOCUSED DEFENSE

Many gladiators wear armor on just one limb, and the retiarius wears a special piece of armor that protects his neck only from the left. Thus, fighters may wish to alter their stance or guard position to make it easier to defend their unarmored side. This comes at a cost, however: it's easier to attack the *opposite* side! This *optional* rule lets warriors attempt such a gambit.

A fighter may opt to present some hit locations and deny others. *Presented* locations are struck at +2 while *denied* ones

give -2, cumulative with standard hit location penalties. This cannot result in a net bonus. In addition, block and parries made with the presented side are at +1, while those made with the denied one are at -1. One-handed weapons and equipment are also struck at +2 in the presented hand or -2 in the denied one. As well, weapons in the denied hand – even long ones – lose a yard of maximum reach while away from the opponent (and weapons with Reach C only can't attack at all!). Armament held in two hands are unaffected – although they do not lose a yard of reach, the bearer attacks and parries with them normally.

There are three, mutually exclusive options.

*Neutral:* The default stance, used if you don't explicitly pick an option. It has no effect on attack rolls or defenses. It need not mean facing the opponent squarely – only that nothing is *prominently* presented or denied.

*Deny Left:* Deny your left side by turning your right side to the enemy. He hits your right arm and leg at *no* penalty, and your right hand and foot at a net -2. He attacks your left arm and leg at -4 total, though, and your left hand and foot at an overall -6. Your blocks and parries are at -1 with your left arm and +1 with your right arm.

*Deny Right:* As above, but now the *left* side is easier to hit and has a defense bonus, while the *right* side is harder to hit and has a defense penalty.

The above modifiers assume an opponent in your front arc. Rivals on your flanks attack all locations normally, while your defenses have the usual -2 from the side. Enemies to your rear hit the *denied* locations at +2 (and of course, you get *no* defense!).

You may choose a stance *once* on your turn, immediately before or after you select a maneuver. This is a free action. All-Out Attack (Long) using a weapon in your denied hand returns you to the neutral stance immediately.

*Note:* The classic sport-fencing stance often denies the non-weapon side, but this isn't automatic for weapons with a fencing parry. Apply these rules normally to fencers.

## Shifting Sands

The arena surface was sand. Whether it was hard-packed and solid like a bullfighting ring or shifting and treacherous like a desert is unknown. The former is more likely; the latter can make for an entertaining fight.

By default, *Martial Arts: Gladiators* assumes that the ground was hard-packed and/or damp sand, meant to give solid and sure footing to the gladiators. If the GM chooses, the area may be bad footing (see pp. B547-548), giving -2 to attack and -1 to defend. This penalty is eliminated by Sure-Footed (Sand) (see pp. 18-19). If every arena is like this, all gladiators who live to be veterans will have this perk! However, perhaps only poorly maintained arenas in the provinces have this problem . . . or the locals may consider it a feature.

In an ahistorical, fantasy, or science fiction gladiatorial campaign, the fighting surface may be much more bizarre or dangerous. Shifting surfaces, pits, slick floors . . . the possibilities are limitless.

## THE CROWD'S REACTION

The crowd is an important element in a gladiatorial match. It is fought for their entertainment, and fighters who don't make the crowd happy can pay for it in the end.

At the beginning of each match, make a reaction roll from the crowd for *each* fighter. Roll for the crowd as one entity. This is how the audience feels about each gladiator from the start of the match. During the fight, gladiators can attempt to influence the crowd through their actions. As the match progresses, modify the reaction roll for each fighter with the modifiers below and keep a running total. The GM may wish to calculate the final reaction roll only at the end of the match, but it's usually more fun to describe the cheers and boos of the mercurial crowd.

*Modifiers:* During the match, keep a running total of each gladiator's coups and fumbles. Each time an attack ultimately results in either warrior being disarmed, knocked down, or crippled (even only temporarily) – whether through injury, a noninjurious blow (e.g., a successful attempt to disarm or trip), a special critical hit or miss result, or a failed HT or DX roll – the *other* fighter gets +1 to the crowd's reactions for this fight. Should a combatant somehow manage to inflict such a result or any injury on *himself* when not engaged (e.g., he critically fails his Fast-Draw roll and disarms himself, or tries Jumping to get up on a piece of scenery and falls down), add -1 to the running total.

*Complementary Skills* (see p. 23) may be used to modify this roll. Gladiators may try to make an especially stirring plea for mercy (Performance), demonstrate their skill at arms during the fight to impress the crowd (by using Combat Art instead of the usual combat skill), or even draw on their powerful physicality to impress the crowd (Sex Appeal). These rolls can be made during combat; a success garners a +1 to the crowd's reactions for the fight, and a critical failure results in a -1 to the running total. Each skill can only be used once per fight, and the attempt is generally treated as a Concentrate maneuver. These rolls can also be done during lulls in the action (see *Detailed Method, Martial Arts*, p. 134).

The final reaction roll also helps determine if the crowd spares a defeated gladiator – see *Asking for Mercy* (below). Should the fight continue for too long, the crowd may ask for both fighters to be spared – see *Stans Missus* (p. 23).

If, at the end of the fight, the total reaction roll for any gladiator is 18 or more, the fighter may find his heroism has increased his reputation with the crowd. The gladiator will gain a temporary Reputation (+1, from all gladiator games fans) for 1d months. After that, the fighter must pay character points if he wishes to make it permanent. This applies to both winners *and* losers, if the loser is spared.

GMs who play out the pompe and prolusio for each fight may wish to allow the fighters to try to influence the crowd then. In that case, make the initial reaction roll during the pompe. The fighters may need to start warming the crowd up to them before the match starts.

## ASKING FOR MERCY

Some gladiatorial combats end with a clean kill – a fatal sword thrust, vitals pierced by a trident, a neck or skull broken from a blow. In many cases, one fighter is defeated without suffering a fatal injury. The defeated fighter may ask for a merciful death . . . or mercy.

First, the defeated fighter must pose with aplomb. Roll Will.

*Modifiers:* Fearlessness gives +1 per level; a fearless fighter is more likely to face death without flinching. Fearfulness gives -1 per level. Gladiators with Unfazeable still roll, but all results are a full step better: critical failure counts as a mere failure, failure as success, and any success as critical success.

On a success, the gladiator faces death bravely; there is no penalty or bonus to the crowd's reaction roll. On a failure, the gladiator flinches or otherwise betrays fear; this results in -1 to the reaction roll (see *The Crowd's Reaction*, above). On a critical failure, he shakes visibly, cries, breaks down, and begs for his life (or something similar) – crowds react at -2. On a critical success, he manages to project such bravery in the face of death that he gains +1 on the audience-reaction roll. An *unconscious* gladiator does not need to make this roll, but he still must consult the reaction roll results.

## Got You Covered

Gladiators usually fight alone, but teams of gladiators may wish to help one another. In a situation where some heroes lack a vital skill, skilled PCs can sometimes cover for unskilled ones. When making a single roll for the entire team, start with the group's best skill level, add a bonus equal to the number of people who *know* the skill (no defaults!), and subtract a penalty equal to group size. For example, a team of experienced gladiators could use their Combat Art skill to help a young tiro look good during a group melee. While it's possible for gladiators to do this for their opponents, it's not common.

Next, the GM determines the results of the reaction roll. The editor, not the crowd, has the final decision. Generally, the editor will side with the crowd. Editors must walk a fine line between sparing too many gladiators (and thus appearing cheap!) or calling for too many to be slain (and running up the cost of the games). Woe to the editor who chooses death in the face of a crowd demanding life, and vice versa!

On a *Good* or better reaction roll, the crowd cheers to spare the fighter. On a *Poor* or worse reaction roll, they call for the editor to let the gladiator die. On a *Neutral* reaction roll, they are evenly divided – the editor alone must decide. The GM makes a new reaction roll for the editor, with the modifiers listed under *The Crowd's Reaction* (p. 22).

If the editor chooses death, the victorious gladiator is expect to kill his condemned foe with a sword or knife thrust to the neck or vitals. This is usually an All-Out Attack (Determined or Strong) and a Telegraphic Attack. Failure to kill the opponent cleanly is embarrassing but not dangerous for the victorious gladiator.

A favorable reaction roll is its own reward – the fighter is spared. Spared and victorious fighters then leave the field. If they're too injured, they are carried off. All wounded fighters are given medical care – win or lose, they are still valuable property!

## STANS MISSUS

If a fight has gone on too long, the mood of the crowd may enter into the decision. Should both fighters perform well, the crowd may ask that both be spared in tribute to their skill and bravery. When both combatants offer little entertainment, the crowd may show their displeasure by calling for their death.

After a match has gone on for more than three minutes, if *both* gladiators could continue, the crowd may intervene. Should *both* fighters' running reaction roll be *Good* or better,

## Complementary Skills

Whenever it makes sense, the GM may allow one skill to aid another. The assisting skill is the *complementary skill* while the skill actually needed for the task is the *master skill*.

Teams of gladiators working together can help each other. The person using the complementary skill doesn't have to be the one using the master skill, unless splitting up these rolls would make no sense. For instance, a gladiator trying to impress the crowd using Combat Art might benefit from a teammate (or generous foe) applying his own Performance skill to make the other person look even better! This is more common during the prolusio than in bloody combat. (In this example, Performance would be complementary to Combat Art.)

To use a complementary skill, simply roll against it. The result gives a modifier to the master skill: +2 for critical success, +1 for success, -1 for failure, or -2 for critical failure. This modifier is cumulative with others, such as equipment bonuses.

If the GM agrees, a master skill might sometimes be able to benefit from several complementary skills! Additionally, in a team situation, someone may be able to use the same skill as both complementary and master skill. For example, one gladiator may use his own Performance skill to aid his partner's Performance skill. This can *only* be done with multiple characters; a participant cannot complement his own skill with the same skill (for example, using Performance to enhance your own Performance skill).

the crowd clamors for a draw. Both fighters leave *stans missus* – alive and to the accolades of the crowd. Should either receive a *Poor* or worse reaction, the crowd shouts for his death as under *Asking for Mercy*; generally, the editor lets the fight continue to achieve this result. If both have a *Poor* reaction, the crowd demands they have their shields taken away and the bout resumed. If both gladiators receive a *Disastrous* reaction, the crowd will demand that *both* die!

# OUTSIDE THE COLOSSEUM

Two rules address the considerations of a gladiator's advancement and his *price*. These help the lanista determine the fee he can command for each of his fighters' services.

## GLADIATORIAL ADVANCEMENT

In an arena-based campaign, the normal rewards for roleplaying and accomplishing missions may seem inadequate. Each individual match that gladiators fight is a career milestone and can result in fame and glory . . . or maiming or death.

This system is useful in a normal, GM-run campaign to determine appropriate awards for



individual arena matches. In a GM-less "arena battle" campaign, it could be the sole method of advancement for gladiators. It *can* "stack" with the normal rules for advancement. Simply add any points awarded for roleplaying on top of these awards. Don't provide any bonus for completing a mission or winning combats; that's what these rules already do!

*Example:* Furius the Thraex fights in the arena and survives. His opponent was an equal match, and Furius acquitted himself well and won the fight. He nets 2 point: 1 for surviving, 1 point for winning, and 0 for facing an equal opponent. His opponent, Maximus, however, did poorly.

While he fought well, he broke down when asking for mercy . . . and only the miserly editor's parsimony saved him! He gains 1 point for surviving the match, gets 0 points for an equal opponent, but *loses* 1 point for his cowardice at the end. He gets 0 points and likely the *opprobrium* (contempt) of the crowd!

### Arena Matches

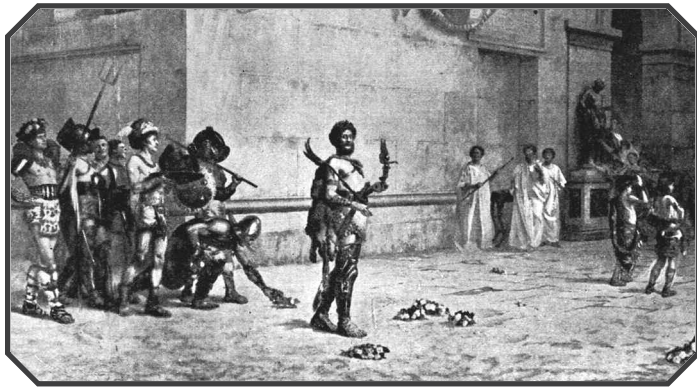
Surviving a match gives each gladiator 1 point, win or lose. In many cases, losing will result in death! In addition, the following modifiers apply.

- *Winning the match*: 1 point.
- *Weak opponent, a relatively easy kill for the gladiator*: -1 point.
- *Worthy opponent, about equal to the gladiator*: 0 points.
- *Exceptional opponent, clearly more powerful than the gladiator*: 1 point.

### Impressive Feats and Ignominious Failures

Accomplishing impressive deeds in the arena can result in additional points. Failures can result in fewer points.

- *Defeating a superior foe without any injury*: 1 point.
- *Defeating a multitude of foes in one match (one versus many)*: 1 point.
- *Showing cowardice in the arena (either by action, or a failed roll while asking for mercy!)*: -1 point.
- *Getting caught cheating (using poison, sabotaging the opposition – but if you're not caught, there is no penalty!)*: -1 point.



### Putting on a Good Show

For a lanista, rewards for fighting make little sense. After all, the lanista “merely” provides the gladiators! However, putting on a successful set of games is worth some points for the lanista.

- *Putting on a poor show (few gladiators, many Poor reactions from the crowd)*: 0 points.
- *Putting on a good show (at least a dozen gladiators and no reaction roll worse than Neutral from the crowd)*: 1 point.
- *Putting on an extravagant show (hundred of pairs of gladiators, or a smaller show with no reaction roll worse than Good from the crowd)*: 2 points.

*I spared many lives in the arena, but it was my fate to pay the price in my ninth fight.*

– Gravestone of Olympos from Larisa

## GLADIATOR PRICES

With many gladiators being slaves, eventually the question of purchase price will come up. In Rome, these prices could vary widely, depending on supply and demand, the abilities and prestige of a fighter, and (not least) the negotiating skills of buyer and seller. Should the price matter in a campaign, these guidelines can be used to calculate it.

All gladiators are high-value goods, with prices in the thousands or tens of thousands of **GURPS** \$. Their base price is calculated by adding all physical attribute levels above 10 and all combat skill levels for their armatura (martial-arts style) above 10, and multiplying the sum by \$100. Add \$100 for every level above 11 in Performance and Combat Art skills for their armatura and for each level of Fit, Charisma, and Appearance. Combat Reflexes and High Pain Threshold are worth \$200 each. If the campaign allows supernatural or exotic advantages, their price effects are entirely at the GM's discretion.

*Example*: Urbicus, a promising tiro at the beginning of his career, has ST 12, DX 11, and HT 11. He fights as a provocator with a Shortsword skill of 13, a Shield skill of 12, and a Brawling skill of 12. His training has also given him the Fit advantage. Nonetheless, he would sell for a mere \$1,200.

What makes a gladiator valuable is his pulling power as an attraction – his Reputation. As soon as a fighter attains either a positive Reputation with spectators or Rank, total the levels in both (reaction modifiers from Rank do not count separately), add 1, and *multiply* the base price by the result. Then add \$100 for every victory the fighter has earned in the course of his career or \$500 for every victory crown.

*Example*: Taurus, a freedman gladiator, has been fighting for several years and is by now a local star. He has ST 13, DX 12, HT 12, and the Fit advantage. His armatura is a thraex and he has the Shortsword skill at 14, Shield at 14, and Brawling at 13. This gives him a base price of \$1,900. However, he also has Gladiator Rank 2 (rudarius) and a Reputation +1 (arena star), for a ×4 multiplier to the base price. He also has won six bouts with two victory crowns for an addition of \$1,600 to the final price. Thus, anyone wanting to acquire him for his ludus would have to come up with  $(\$1,900 \times 4) + \$1,600 = \$9,200$ .

Prices calculated by this formula are always subject to market fluctuations at GM's discretion. Star gladiators can command prices far in excess of what would be considered “reasonable” – some are known to have sold for millions. The sky, and the treasure boxes of the rich, is the limit!

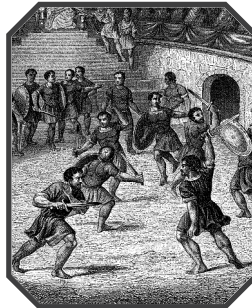


# CHAPTER FOUR

# WE WHO ARE ABOUT TO DIE

Vindex felt the urge to swallow despite the dust coating the inside of his dry mouth. The heat of the dazzling sun felt unbearable on his bare, oiled skin, and the sand under his feet suddenly appeared treacherous and slippery. Cold fear spread through his stomach as the applause washed around him. He wanted to turn and run, run back to the safety of the dark vault that he had left his comrades in. He bit his lip and kept walking, slowly, measured step by measured step, toward his waiting opponent at the center of the arena.

As the referee carefully checked the weapons, the young gladiator felt the time crawl, silently praying for the wait to be over. The words of the announcer still echoed through his mind: "Anthrax, thraex, once dismissed, one victory! Vindex, murmillo, tiro!" The swarthy fighter opposite him slipped on his helmet, and Vindex could have sworn he saw a wolfish grin. Harenarii fixed his own greaves and helmet and handed him the sword and the reassuringly large, deep scutum. The young man curled into the hollow as though trying to escape driving rain. Distant, nagging memories brought back the lessons of his doctor: You are a scutarius. The crowds love scutarii. The scutum is a weapon. Always keep a hand's breadth between you and your shield.



The servants were gone. The referees stepped back. Anthrax weighed the viciously curved sica in his hand and stepped back and forth with mocking nimbleness. Cold sweat ran into Vindex's eyes, and he blinked to clear his vision. His left held the weight of the scutum more easily now as he felt long-drilled reflexes take over. The Thracian recoiled as the sword flashed forward in a probing attack. Breathe – step – keep facing the opponent. This was easy. Oh, gods of the underworld, let him survive this!

Everybody knows the line "We who are about to die salute you!" Not a lot of people know prisoners sentenced to death, not professional gladiators, spoke it. Then again, Roman law itself was never quite sure whether the arena should be considered a career or a sentence. Life in the cramped quarters of the ludus had condemned criminals and rebellious slaves rub shoulders with the flamboyant, wealthy stars of the arena. A consummately professional support team – servants and cleaners; musicians and clowns; physicians, martial-arts trainers, animal handlers, and choreographers – put on the show. Even in the days of the Roman Empire, there was no business like show business.

## THE GLADIATORS

Gladiators could be either slaves or free men (*auctorati*). Most were slaves. Some of them, especially in Republican times, were prisoners taken in war. These were men deemed too dangerous for chattel slavery or too competent fighters to waste. Others were slaves sold to a lanista as punishment. (In the Empire, owners were forbidden from doing so without a proper court hearing.) Still others were prisoners sentenced to possible or certain death. A sentence *ad bestias* meant facing wild animals; see *The Morning Program* (pp. 9-10). A sentence *ad judos* meant gladiatorial training and the real chance of victory. Judges could specify that the delinquent should only be freed after a certain number of fights, or even never. Finally, free men (and women) voluntarily chose the life of a gladiator as a career in pursuit of fame and money. Upper-class writers often express shock at the thought, but the lower classes seem to have been much less discriminating. The gladiators themselves, whatever their origin, were united by their common status of *infamia*, the stigma that excluded them from public office for life.

## THE SELECTION PROCESS

Gladiator recruits were selected along much the same lines as military ones: young men aged between 16 and 25, well-built and without serious health problems, not over- or seriously underweight, and preferably from the countryside where they had been used to an active lifestyle. City-bred slaves usually had other marketable skills anyway, but a former athlete or upper-class youth might be considered suitable for the arena. The recruits were by definition above average physically (average slaves went into average jobs). Lanistae looked for different profiles to match different *armaturae* – especially strong men for *murmillones* or *secutores*; quick, mobile ones for *retiarii*; and small, agile fighters as *equites* – and candidates had no choice in the matter. Attractiveness played a role, too, but it was a secondary consideration – a breathtakingly handsome slave who could not fight was a better investment for a brothel keeper than a lanista.

Previous combat training was not *necessarily* an advantage – gladiators learned specific styles – but being athletic and used to strict training regimes was. Intelligence was not a major concern – indeed, the mental limits of gladiators and athletes in general was the theme of many a joke – but a genuinely stupid gladiator could cause more trouble than he was worth. The right kind of personality was much more important. A gladiator needed grit, discipline, ambition, and confidence to succeed, and an excess of scruples was a problem. This was the ideal. However, when the market was bad, all kinds of compromises had to be made . . .

## Built Like a Fighter

The body weight of gladiators is a matter of controversy among historians. Some claim – supported by ancient depictions – that the diet in the ludus deliberately aimed to give the men a layer of fat to cushion blows and mitigate the effects of superficial cuts. Gladiators have even been compared to sumo wrestlers. Gladiators fought without weight classes, so fighters who depended on explosive rushing (such as scutarii) could benefit from extra mass. Fights were usually intense but short, so endurance was less of a problem than it would be for soldiers. Add to this the fact that the Roman ideal of masculine beauty was bulky and muscular, and it's easy to see why it is quite likely gladiators looked much like modern mixed-martial arts fighters or heavyweight boxers. The arena was a ruthlessly competitive place where anything that interfered with performance would quickly be eliminated. They may not have been quite the lean, mean, fighting machines of modern imagination, but Overweight or Fat are inappropriate disadvantages for professional fighters.

## DAY-TO-DAY LIFE

A ludus was not a traveling circus. The organization needed permanent facilities for training, cells to hold prisoners, stabling and cages for animals, and storage for its equipment. In Rome, the buildings of the imperial schools after Augustus were grand affairs indeed. However, even a provincial outfit required sound financing and substantial premises, not least because some of their staff needed to be locked up at night.

Gladiators spent the greatest part of their time training. Munera were rare occasions and few men fought more than once or twice per event, but skills needed to be maintained. Multiple fights could occur – one fighter fought and won nine bouts in as many days, and he was freed in recognition of his exceptional achievement.

Actual duty rosters and training regimes have not survived to the present day, but the basic principles are known. New recruits (tirones) were confined to the premises and drilled under the supervision of their trainers (doctores). Physicians and experienced gladiators assisted with the lessons. Following Greek traditions, weapon training was accompanied by physical conditioning, speed and endurance training, and special exercises designed to strengthen specific muscles, improve reflexes, and heighten perception.

Basic combat moves were drilled using wooden posts before the men were considered ready for practice bouts.

Physicians directed training and diet, and they regularly checked their charges and treated any injuries or illnesses they contracted. The lessons for promising candidates would also include showmanship – how to display their bodies to the best effect, how to make their moves look elegant and flashy, and even how to allow an opponent to look his best without compromising defenses. The arena was above all about entertainment, and gladiators who did not give the audience what they wanted risked their lives in case of defeat.

Established gladiators enjoyed greater freedom than recruits did. They were still expected to train regularly, but they could leave the ludus and spend the money they made. Some had families – it is unknown whether their wives and children lived inside the school or outside – and others pursued the lifestyle popular legend ascribed to them – chasing skirts and living high. Especially in Late Republican times, gladiators were in demand as bodyguards and muscle in the often dirty and dangerous political machinations of that period. Politicians would simply buy one, or hire them from a lanista they trusted, for good pay! Another lucrative sideline was combat training for civilians. Upper-class Romans considered basic proficiency with shield, sword, and javelin part of any boy's education, and many young men prided themselves on their prowess. Individuals even came to practice with gladiators inside the ludi. Given that munera were relatively rare, most experienced gladiators had enough time on their hands for a second job.

## The Supporting Cast

However important the main attraction, a ludus was more than just gladiators. Around the arena where the fighters drilled their moves, engineers tinkered with stage machinery, smiths and armorers repaired and polished equipment, and venatores and bestiarii honed their aim with bow and spear. Animal trainers put warhorses through their motions, taught elephants to count, monkeys to dance, or bears to play the trumpet. Clowns practiced their routines, and the musicians that accompanied every show added to the din.

Not least, an organization this size needed to be serviced and administered, so there were a number of harenarii servants, clerks, cooks, sweepers, water carriers, and general roustabouts, along with security. The things that gave lanistae sleepless nights were above all espionage – training secrets – and sabotage. Fans trying to get in also must have been an annoyance, especially in the case of well-connected female ones whose husbands or fathers could cause serious problems. Technically, a ludus was also full of valuable property, but most thieves would have looked for softer targets. The idea of actually stealing the most valuable asset – slave gladiators – has a madcap quality to it, but it is hardly realistic.

## A Fighter's Progress

Typically, a gladiator started out as a slave purchased for the arena. A few free men volunteered for the career – some jaded kids drawn by a sense of adventure; others strictly for the money. For a poor Roman, the earnings of a professional gladiator could be temptation enough to risk life and limb.

They had to swear an oath to be “whipped, burned, and killed with iron” at the whim of their lanista and for all purposes belonged to him every bit as much as his chattel. A tiro could look forward to a grueling period of basic training, conditioning, and indoctrination to turn him into a man who would kill and die for other people’s entertainment. At this stage of their careers, gladiators were kept locked up in the ludus and guarded against suicide, and business-minded lanistae tried to separate those who were promising from those who would not survive their first bout. The latter could be used for group fights or pitted against renowned opponents without too great a loss, while a man with the right fighting spirit was something to be treasured.

The first fight was the deadliest. A gladiator who survived it could – at least statistically – hope for a career in the business. Two or three victories meant name recognition and a measure of financial independence. Traditionally, the winner of a fight received a significant sum as a premium – typically in the hundreds or even thousands of sesterces – the kind of money a laborer would make in a year or two. A slave could not technically own anything under Roman law, but there seems to have been an understanding that free gladiators got to keep around a quarter and slaves a fifth of these winnings. This way, a man could quickly gain a degree financial independence and afford small luxuries that made life in the ludus a lot more bearable. Once they had begun having a career, gladiators were also allowed greater freedom. They were hired out as bodyguards or trainers, and they were no longer locked up at night.

### *A Fighter’s Life*

The life of a professional gladiator could be a pleasant one. Wealth, fame, and a life surrounded by attentive trainers, physicians and servants must have been a powerful lure. However, part of the drama was that a moment of inattention or bad luck could bring it all to a bloody end in the arena. Additionally, stars were traded, sold as investments or status goods, even purchased by rich men who wanted to grace their household with a famous name even though they had no actual use for a fighter.

After several years of successful bouts, slaves could look forward to the crowning achievement of their career: They would be granted their freedom. It is unclear how (or whether) this was regulated, but it was customary at some point for a victor

## The Barley Crunchers

Gladiators, like other professional athletes, carefully regulated their diet. They were known as *hordearii* – barley crunchers – in colloquial Latin for eating a grain that many Romans considered inferior to wheat and fit only for slaves and animals. However, their food was hardly scanty or of poor quality. The daily fare was a porridge of grain and legumes, hardly appetizing, but nourishing and healthy. In a society as obsessed with good eating as the Romans were, vegetables, fruit, cheese, meat, and fish were probably added to the rations either as a matter of course or as private purchases by the men. Physicians of the time thought grain essential to the diet of an active man, and meat was traditionally served to fighters in large quantities. Wine was taken heavily watered; during the day, water or *posca* (a drink made with vinegar and water) were probably preferred. Drinks were always available, even served to fighters in the arena during breaks, to prevent dehydration.

to be ceremonially presented with a wooden sword – the *rudis* – and declared a freed man. (A similar ceremony probably existed for releasing voluntary fighters from their oaths.)

Once freed, he was under no obligation to fight, though he was permitted to do so for pay, and many continued. As a veteran with numerous victories to his name, he could command large fees for each fight.

Freed slaves had legal obligations to serve their former masters. Even though the obligation did not extend to fighting in the arena, the former master could insist that the former slaves take (nonhazardous) jobs and could forbid them going elsewhere. Likewise, voluntary fighters often continued working for the same lanista as combatants or trainers.

Retirement into comfortable obscurity must have been more common than the evidence suggests. There is no way to know how many gladiators survived their careers to live to a ripe old age, but at least some did. Many married and fathered children, as is evidenced by gravestones set by their surviving wives and offspring. Some must have opted to start businesses or pursue other careers with the money they earned, while others stayed in the ludus, becoming trainers or referees. Nonetheless, many – probably the majority of – gladiators died in the arena eventually.

## Security

Security at the ludus could vary widely, but it would never have been lax. The imperial gladiator schools most likely were guarded by regular soldiers, as were the prisons that housed condemned men. Private operations, on the other hand, might get help from the authorities in unusual circumstances, but otherwise they would have depended on their own arrangements. Having a private ludus guarded by soldiers would have been the high-prestige thing, securable most likely only with bribes or in exceptional cases.

A gladiator school would have no shortage of fighting men in an emergency, but it is unlikely the gladiators

themselves did day-to-day guard work. This would be the job of hired or slave guardsmen. These might be former gladiators or, especially during the Republic, ex-soldiers.

Most of the time, a lax routine would be sufficient to ensure no despairing prisoner or promising tiro escaped. Nevertheless, a large consignment of new slaves or delinquents might strain the system to the breaking point. Records exist of occasional group suicides and escapes, but only Spartacus (see p. 5) succeeded at staging a mass revolt. PCs trying to stage (or prevent) a breakout will need to find out if the guards can be distracted or bribed . . . or if they must be removed otherwise.

# CHARACTER TEMPLATES

The following templates describe the more interesting professions involved in the Roman arena.

## GLADIATOR

100 points

You are whom the arena is all about – a highly trained martial artist and showman dedicated to a demanding and dangerous profession. You may have had no choice in the matter, but nobody long survives this life without grit and ambition. You're no passive victim; you aim for a career and the opportunity for freedom, wealth, fame – even stardom. You are probably a young man in his prime, strong and fit, and often remarkably handsome (the crowds tend to reprove handsome men) – but women and older gladiators fight too.

Regularly facing death in the arena colors your outlook on life – some single-mindedly pursue pleasure, others try to build themselves an island of stability with savings or a family, others still turn to religion or gloomy fatalism. Some may still be young enough to be convinced they are immortal, but in this job, you grow up quickly. If you survive . . .

**Attributes:** ST 12 [20]; DX 12 [40]; IQ 10 [0]; HT 12 [20].

**Secondary Characteristics:** Damage 1d-1/1d+2; BL 29 lbs.; HP 12 [0]; Will 10 [0]; Per 10 [0]; FP 12 [0]; Basic Speed 6.00 [0]; Basic Move 6 [0].

**Advantages:** Combat Reflexes [15]. • 25 points chosen from among ST +1 or +2 [10 or 20], DX +1 [20], HT +1 or +2 [10 or 20], HP +1 to +3 [2/level], Will +1 to +4 [5/level], FP +1 to +3 [3/level], Style Familiarity (any other gladiator style) [1/style], Style Perks [1/perk], and *Typical Gladiator Advantages* (p. 18) or optional traits for your particular gladiator style.

**Perks:** Style Familiarity (own style) [1].

**Disadvantages:** Duty (Extremely Hazardous; 12 or less) [-15]; Social Stigma (Valuable Property) [-10]; and Status -2 [-10].  
• -20 points in traits chosen from *Typical Gladiator Disadvantages* (p. 19).

**Primary Skills:** Games (Roman Gladiator) (E) IQ [1]-10; Performance (A) IQ [2]-10; and Savoir-Faire (Ludus) (E) IQ [1]-10. • 20 points in the skills and techniques of a gladiator combat style.

**Secondary Skills:** 5 points in any optional skills for your gladiator combat style.

**Background Skills:** 5 points in Current Affairs/TL2 (Sports) or Games (any), both IQ/E; Gambling or Streetwise, both IQ/A; Carousing, HT/E; or Intimidation, Will/A.

### Lenses

**Cinematic** (+100 points): Add 80 points chosen from among the base template advantages, *Typical Gladiator Advantages* (p. 18), or Arm ST 1 or 2 [5 or 10], Enhanced Dodge 1-3 [15/level], Enhanced Parry 1-3 [5 or 10/level], Enhanced Time Sense [45], Extra Attack 1 or 2 (Multi-Strike, +20%) [30 or 60], Recovery [10], Striking ST 1 or 2 [5 or 10], Trained by a Master [30], or Weapon Master [20-45]. You *must* take either Trained by a Master or Weapon Master!

- Add 10 points in your style's cinematic skills (and prerequisites); Power Blow is excellent for "finishing moves."
- Add 10 points in Appearance, Charisma, and Reputation. Cinematic gladiators should be handsome, beloved of the crowds, and/or possessed of raw personal magnetism.

**Free Man** (+5 points): You are a freed slave or a citizen who chooses to work for a ludus. You have Social Stigma (Second-Class Citizen) [-5] instead of Social Stigma (Valuable Property).

**Tough Guy** (+100 points): You're a hulking brute! You have no "mystical" abilities, but your gifts are just as cinematic. Add +1 to ST [10] and 90 points chosen from among ST +1 to +9 [10/level], HT +1 to +9 [10/level], HP +1 to +10 [2/level], Will +1 to +10 [5/level], FP +1 to +10 [3/level], Arm ST 1 or 2 [5 or 10], Damage Resistance 1 or 2 (Tough Skin, -40%) [3 or 6], Extra Attack (Multi-Strike, +20%) 1-3 [30/level], Lifting ST 1 or 2 [3 or 6], Recovery [10], Resistant to Arm Injury (+3) [1], Resistant to Neck Injury (+3) [1], or Striking ST 1 or 2 [5 or 10].

### Customization Notes

A gladiator with at least one fight under his belt will have Gladiator Rank 1; more skilled and respected fighters may have more. In addition, each particular gladiatorial style contains suggestions of how to customize a fighter trained in it. Some rare gladiators will learn more than one full style – but more will learn the Style Familiarity for both their own style and that of their typical opponent. For example, murmillones will quickly learn Style Familiarity (Retiarius) and vice versa.

## DOCTOR

165 points

The doctor is a gladiatorial trainer. You are most likely a former gladiator yourself and intimately familiar with the combat style you teach. Along with a thorough understanding of the human body and its capabilities and limits, you know all kinds of tricks and tradecraft – from how to look your best in the arena to cheats that nobody notices. You may understand your charges better than anyone and can offer good advice, fatherly discipline, and a sympathetic ear. Alternatively, you may enjoy making them suffer and play off their rivalries and insecurities for the sake of the show.

**Attributes:** ST 11 [10]; DX 12 [40]; IQ 12 [40]; HT 12 [20].

**Secondary Characteristics:** Damage 1d-1/1d+1; BL 24 lbs.; HP 11 [0]; Will 12 [0]; Per 12 [0]; FP 12 [0]; Basic Speed 6.00 [0]; Basic Move 6 [0].

**Advantages:** Gladiatorial Rank 4 [4]. • 20 points chosen from among DX or IQ +1 [20], Will +1 to +4 [5/level], Charisma 1 or 2 [5 or 10], Style Familiarity (any) [1/style], Style Perks [1/perk], Wealth (Comfortable) [10], and *Typical Gladiator Advantages* (p. 18) or optional traits for your particular gladiator style.

**Perks:** Style Familiarity (own style) [1] and Style Familiarity (one other style) [1].

# The Champions

The life of the average gladiator could be brutal and short. The life of a *successful* gladiator could lead to respect, authority, and a good reputation.

## Ranking System

In the world of the gladiator, there were two distinct systems of rank – rank inside the ludus and fight statistics. Every major school had an internal system by which its leading gladiators were designated, probably by the decision of their trainers. Each armatura had its own top man, known as the *primus palus* (“first post,” after the wooden post used as a target in training), and the second and third runner-up (*secundus* and *tertius palus*, respectively). Competition for these ranks was fierce, and a lanista needed to be on his guard against foul play. A *primus palus* had duties in training promising candidates in his class, and he could command significantly higher fees for a fight. He would also have a good chance to be taken on as a trainer after retiring from the game.

Independent of the palus system, fans kept track of the career of a gladiator by totting up the number of fights and recording the number of victories (V for *vicit* – won), draws, and reprieves (M for *missus* – dismissed). Especially impressive fights could lead to the victor being awarded a

*corona* (victory crown), the number of which would also be duly recorded. Some gladiators had them depicted on their tombstones. Like a modern boxer’s record, these numbers summarized a career in shorthand. Since gladiators did not fight very often, 10 fights marked a veteran and a record of 20 or 30 bouts survived was exceptional.

## Titles and Reputation

Rank within a ludus was not as strictly a matter of chain of command as in the military, but there was a clear hierarchy that justifies the use of the Rank advantage in campaigns set mostly in the world of the arena. Gladiator Rank only conveys actual authority within a given ludus, although it carries a reaction bonus with everyone who follows the games – which, in ancient Rome, is just about everybody.

Rank	Description
5	Lanista
4	Doctor of a gladiator class
3	Primus palus of a gladiator class
2	Rudarius, secundus palus
1	Veteran gladiator
0	Tiro

**Disadvantages:** Duty (School; 12 or less) [-10]. • Either Bully (12) [-10], for a mean doctor, or any *two* of Code of Honor (“Fight fair”) [-5], Sense of Duty (Students) [-5], or Vow (Look after your gladiators) [-5], for a pleasant one. • A further -20 points chosen from among Bad Temper [-10\*], Enemy (Members of rival school; Rival; 9 or less) [-5], Stubbornness [-5], Workaholic [-5], and *Typical Gladiator Disadvantages* (p. 19).

**Primary Skills:** Games (Roman Gladiator) (E) IQ [1]-12; Savoir-Faire (Ludus) (E) IQ+2 [4]-14; and Teaching (A) IQ+2 [8]-14. • 40 points in the skills and techniques of *any* gladiator style or styles.

**Secondary Skills:** One of Diplomacy (H) IQ [4]-12, Intimidation (A) Will+1 [4]-13, or Leadership (A) IQ+1 [4]-13. • One of Body Language (A) Per+1 [4]-13 or Psychology (H) IQ [4]-12.

**Background Skills:** Any *three* of First Aid/TL2 (E) IQ+1 [2]-13; Administration, Public Speaking, or Writing, all (A) IQ [2]-12; Expert Skill (Hoplology) or Philosophy (Stoic), both (H) IQ-1 [2]-11. • One of Breath Control (H) HT-1 [2]-11, Lifting (A) HT [2]-12, or Running (A) HT [2]-12.

\* Multiplied for self-control number; see p. B120.

## Lens

**Cinematic** (+125 points): Add 85 points chosen from among Enhanced Block 1-3 [5/level], Enhanced Dodge 1-3 [15/level], Enhanced Parry 1-3 [5 or 10/level], Enhanced Time Sense [45], Extra Attack 1 or 2 (Multi-Strike, +20%) [30 or 60], Heroic Archer [20], Trained by a Master [30], Weapon Master [20-45], Wild Talent (Focused, Martial Arts, -20%) 1-4 [16/level], and traits from *Typical Gladiator*

*Advantages* (p. 18). You *must* take either Trained by a Master or Weapon Master! • Add 40 points in your style’s cinematic skills, optional skills, and prerequisites – preferably all of them.

## Customization Notes

*Every* style in a ludus has a doctor that teaches it. Some doctors may teach more than one style, but all of them will know at least two – their own style and the main style that opposes it in the arena! The doctor may not teach both styles, but he is certainly familiar enough with it to keep his charges alive against it.

## LANISTA

110 points

You are the owner and manager of a ludus, a gladiatorial entrepreneur. You manage its business, acquire contracts for games with editores, negotiate fees and premiums, and put together programs. You are very probably a rich, influential Roman from the upper classes (even of equestrian rank), although a rare few come from the ranks of the arena. You regard your ludus as business ventures to generate profit. You may be a fan and love the game for its own sake, or you may squeeze every sesterces out of their investment with little regard for the health and well-being of your animal and human property.

The emperor owns the great ludi in Rome during the Empire, and procurators run them on his behalf. Their tasks are similar to those of a lanista, but they are salaried employees rather than independent businessmen.

**Attributes:** ST 10 [0]; DX 10 [0]; IQ 12 [40]; HT 10 [0].

**Secondary Characteristics:** Damage 1d-2/1d; BL 20 lbs.; HP 10 [0]; Will 12 [0]; Per 12 [0]; FP 10 [0]; Basic Speed 5.00 [0]; Basic Move 5 [0].

**Advantages:** Gladiatorial Rank 5 [5]; Status 1 [0]\*; and Wealth (Filthy Rich) [50]. • 30 points chosen from among IQ +1 [20], Will +1 to +5 [5/level], Allies (Bodyguards, junior partners, especially competent staff) [varies], Business Acumen [10/level], Charisma 1 or 2 [5 or 10], Contacts (Other Lanista, slave merchants, or upper-class Romans) [varies], Multimillionaire 1 [25], Status [5/level], Reputation (Puts on good shows, +2, from potential customers, all the time) [5]. • The ludus itself may be purchased with starting wealth (see *The Ludus*, below), or it may be Signature Gear [varies]. Slaves may also be Signature Gear, especially if an otherwise middle-grade ludus has an especially valuable gladiator.

**Disadvantages:** Duty (Ludus; 9 or less) [-5]. • -30 points from Bad Temper [-10†], Bully [-10†], Debt [-1/level], Gluttony [-5†], Greed [-15†], Jealousy [-10], Lecherousness [-15†], Miserliness [-10†], Odious Personal Habit (Ostentatious display of wealth) [-5], Overweight [-1] or Fat [-3], Selfish [-5†], or Workaholic [-5].

**Primary Skills:** Administration (A) IQ [2]-12; Merchant (A) IQ+1 [4]-13; Savoir-Faire (High Society) (E) IQ [1]-12; and Savoir-Faire (Ludus) (E) IQ+1 [2]-13.

**Secondary Skills:** Current Affairs/TL2 (Sports) (E) IQ+1 [2]-13 and Games (Roman Gladiator) (E) IQ [1]-12. • One of Diplomacy (H) IQ-1 [2]-11, Intimidation (A) Will [2]-12, or Leadership (A) IQ [2]-12.

**Background Skills:** 6 points on any of Detect Lies (Per/H); Fast-Talk, Performance, Politics, Public Speaking, Streetwise, or Writing, all (IQ/A); Accounting, Finance, or Law (Roman), all (IQ/H).

\* From Gladiator Rank.

† Multiplied for self-control number; see p. B120.

## Lens

**Imperial Roman Lanista** (-20 points): You are an employee of the emperor, not a private owner. Reduce Wealth to Wealthy [20], add Patron (Emperor; 6 or less) [10], and change Duty to (Emperor; 9 or less).

## Customization Notes

A former gladiator-turned-lanista is a possibility. They were certainly rare, but in the wild-and-wooly days of the Republic, such things did happen. Former gladiators are likely to retain Social Stigma (Second-Class Citizen) [-5] because of their origins, but they also may keep much of their combat expertise. No average gladiator will survive long enough to become a lanista . . .

## The Ludus

Detailing the total cost of a ludus, from its buildings and equipment, to its staff and salaries, is beyond what's needed for most campaigns. Instead, it's more convenient to treat the ludus as representing the 80% of starting wealth normally tied up in fixed assets – see *Starting Wealth* (p. B26). This would include a normal complement of property, gladiator gear, trainers, etc. Gladiators themselves, and any *exceptional* gear (ornate or fine quality weapons, for example), should be

purchased with the 20% of starting wealth allowed for “adventuring gear.” In a game with competitive ludi (see p. 45), the real differences between ludi will be their gladiators, not the school itself.

*We swore the oath Eumolpus  
led us in: to be branded, chained,  
whipped, and killed with iron.*

– Petronius, *Satyricon* 117.5

## PUGILIST

see *Martial Arts*, p. 32

The Roman world had professional and semiprofessional boxers and wrestlers, and they regularly displayed their skills in the morning program in munera. You are one of these fighters. You aren't employed permanently by a ludus, but there are many other festivals and shows where you can perform in front of paying audiences. You are above all strong and tough – you fight without weight classes, rounds, or points. The match is over when you or your foe gives up or is knocked unconscious. In the arena, you'll often use cestus to land more devastating punches.

In the Roman world, boxers and pankrationists have a reputation as stupid, arrogant, and violent. The Greek-speaking East holds you in somewhat higher regard, but the days when you would be honored by the cream of society ended with the close of the Classical age. You may not have the respect and awe inspired by the gladiators, but your fights are not to the death, either!

Pugilists should be built with the Contender template (*Martial Arts*, p. 32). Obviously, high-tech skills like Bicycling or esoteric skills like Autohypnosis are not appropriate in a historical game. *Typical Gladiator Advantages* (p. 18) and *Typical Gladiator Disadvantages* (p. 19) are also appropriate for historical pugilists. None are slaves, but few are as rich or famous as successful gladiators are.

**Styles:** Pugilists usually specialize in one of Ancient Greek Boxing (*Martial Arts*, p. 153), Pankration (*Martial Arts*, p. 188), or Greco-Roman Wrestling (*Martial Arts*, p. 205). Well-rounded stylists may train in two or three of those styles. Pugilists who once served in the Roman military – possible for older fighters or pre-professional Republican-era Romans – or in the arena may also have an appropriate armed martial arts style.

## VENATOR

100 points

Unlike other gladiators, you fight animals for a living. You engage in combat more often and to less acclaim. Only the foolish underestimate your martial prowess, however – you, too, fight for your life – but when you go into battle, the odds are stacked in your favor. You assist in executions *ad bestias* where required.

You must be proficient in a variety of weapons – sword, spear, bow, and javelin are the most common – so that you can kill wild beasts as impressively as possible. You also need to be able to *move* – animals can be much faster than human foes. Experienced venatores will have intimate insight into the behavior of many dangerous animals and can often be callous and jaded people.

**Attributes:** ST 12 [20]; DX 12 [40]; IQ 10 [0]; HT 12 [20].

**Secondary Characteristics:** Damage 1d-1/1d+2; BL 29 lbs.; HP 12 [0]; Will 10 [0]; Per 10 [0]; FP 12 [0]; Basic Speed 6.00 [0]; Basic Move 7 [5].

**Advantages:** Combat Reflexes [15]. • 20 points chosen from among ST +1 or +2 [10 or 20], DX +1 [20], HT +1 or +2 [10 or 20], HP +1 to +3 [2/level], Will +1 to +4 [5/level], FP +1 to +3 [3/level], Animal Friend [5/level], Style Familiarity (any gladiator style) [1/style], Style Perks [1/perk], and *Typical Gladiator Advantages* (p. 18).

**Disadvantages:** Duty (Extremely Hazardous; 12 or less) [-15]; Social Stigma (Valuable Property) [-10]; and Status -2 [-10]. • -20 points chosen among Sadism [-15\*] and *Typical Gladiator Disadvantages* (p. 19).

**Primary Skills:** Animal Handling (any specialty) (A) IQ+2 [8]-12 and Games (Roman Gladiator) (E) IQ [1]-10. • *One of Bow* (A) DX+2 [8]-14 or *Thrown Weapon (Spear)* (E) DX+3 [8]-15. • *One of Shortsword* (A) DX+1 [4]-13 or *Spear* (A) DX+1 [4]-13.

**Secondary Skills:** Select the weapon skills not taken as primary skills: *One of Bow* (A) DX+1 [4]-13 or *Thrown Weapon (Spear)* (E) DX+2 [4]-14 • *One of Shortsword* (A) DX [2]-12 or *Spear* (A) DX [2]-12.

**Background Skills:** 8 points on additional specialties of Current Affairs/TL2 (Sports) or Games (any), both IQ/E; Animal Handling (any specialty), Gambling, or Streetwise, all IQ/A; Carousing, HT/E; or Intimidation, Will/A.

\* Multiplied for self-control number; see p. B120.

## Vindex the Murmillo (125 points)

Vindex is 21 years old, a tall, heavily muscled young man with short black hair and alert brown eyes who moves with surprising grace for someone of his size and bulk. His career is just beginning, and his lanista is optimistic about his young charge after he defeated Anthrax the thraex in his first bout. By now, Vindex has won two victories (his first and third bouts), and he was reprieved after losing a good fight against a veteran hoplomachus. He has set aside a few hundred sesterces for himself, lives in his own quarters at the ludus, and spends his newfound fortune sparingly on good food and nice clothing, saving most of it.

Coming from a rural home in Northern Italy, Vindex is still a bit out of his depth in the city with his rustic accent and simple country-boy ways. He is a volunteer auctoratus, having joined a ludus two years ago after his father was forced to sell his farm. Vindex hopes to earn enough money to settle down on land of his own. Personally good-natured and not yet hardened by years of arena life, he is easy to like and to get along with. Despite his victories, he remains insecure about his martial skills and trains obsessively to improve them. He is very much in love with the world of the arena, and he works hard to acquire the mannerisms and habits of a real gladiator, though the role of cynical killer does not suit him well. In fact, he has never killed a man (both his losing opponents were reprieved), and he does not look forward to it. While not a gentle soul, Vindex is no more bloodthirsty than the next man. Unfortunately, his first opponent is not so gentle, and still feels humiliated by losing to a tiro. Vindex will have to be careful of his rival, Anthrax, within the ludus. The life of a gladiator is never safe.

Vindex is suitable as a starting PC in a gladiator campaign, a member of a stable of fighters in a ludus campaign, or as an NPC in a Roman campaign featuring gladiators.

**ST 13 [30]; DX 12 [40]; IQ 10 [0]; HT 12 [20].**

Damage 1d/2d\*; BL 34 lbs.; HP 15 [4]; Will 11 [5]; Per 10 [0]; FP 12 [0].  
Basic Speed 6.00 [0]; Basic Move 7 [5]; Dodge 10†; Parry 11†; Block 12‡.  
5'10"; 210 lbs.

### Social Background

TL: 2 [0].  
CF: Rome [0].  
Languages: Latin (Native/None) [-3].

### Advantages

Combat Reflexes [15]; Fit [5]; Gladiator Rank 1 [1]; Striking ST 1 [5].  
*Perks:* Special Exercises (Striking ST 1); Style Familiarity (Murmillo); Sure-Footed (Sand). [3]

### Disadvantages

Duty (To ludus; Extremely Hazardous; 12 or less) [-15]; Enemy (Anthrax the Thraex; Rival; 9 or less) [-5]; Obsession (12) (Succeed in the arena) [-5]; Social Stigma (Second-Class Citizen) [-5]; Status -2 [-10]; Workaholic [-5].  
*Quirks:* Prefers not to kill his opponents; Insecure about his skills and position in the ludus; Likes nice clothing and food. [-3]

### Skills

Brawling (E) DX+1 [2]-13; Carousing (E) HT+1 [2]-13; Current Affairs/TL2 (Sports) (E) IQ [1]-10; Farming (A) IQ [2]-10; Gambling (A) IQ-1 [1]-9; Performance (A) IQ [2]-10; Savoir-Faire (Ludus) (E) IQ [1]-10; Shield (E) DX+4 [12]-16; Shortsword (A) DX+3 [12]-15; Wrestling (A) DX [2]-12.  
*Techniques:* Close Combat (Shortsword) (H) [3]-13; Feint (Shield) (H) [3]-18.

\* Damage modified for Striking ST 1.  
† Includes +1 from Combat Reflexes.

## Lenses

*Cinematic* (+100 points): Add 80 points chosen from among the base template advantages, traits from *Typical Gladiator Advantages* (see p. 18), or from Arm ST 1 or 2 [5 or 10], Enhanced Dodge 1-3 [15/level], Enhanced Parry 1-3 [5 or 10/level], Enhanced Time Sense [45], Extra Attack 1 or 2 (Multi-Strike, +20%) [30 or 60], Recovery [10], Striking ST 1 or 2 [5 or 10], Heroic Archer [30], Trained by a Master [30], or Weapon Master [20-45]. You *must* take one of Heroic Archer, Trained by a Master, or Weapon Master!

- Add 20 points in the template's primary skills.

*Free Man* (+5 points): You are a freed slave or a citizen who chooses to work for a ludus. You have Social Stigma

(Second-Class Citizen) [-5] instead of Social Stigma (Valuable Property).

*Tough Guy* (+100 points): You're a hulking brute! You have no "mystical" abilities, but your gifts are just as cinematic. Add +1 to ST [10] and 90 points chosen from among ST +1 to +9 [10/level], HT +1 to +9 [10/level], HP +1 to +10 [2/level], Will +1 to +10 [5/level], FP +1 to +10 [3/level], Arm ST 1 or 2 [5 or 10], Damage Resistance 1 or 2 (Tough Skin, -40%) [3 or 6], Extra Attack (Multi-Strike, +20%) 1-3 [30/level], Lifting ST 1 or 2 [3 or 6], Recovery [10], Resistant to Arm Injury (+3) [1], Resistant to Neck Injury (+3) [1], or Striking ST 1 or 2 [5 or 10].

# SUPPORTING ROLES

There are also many supporting players in the drama of the arena. Some NPCs have stats expressed as a range. The GM should select an appropriate number.

## ANIMAL HANDLER/TRAINER

Most animal handlers are slaves or freedmen who receive their training on the job, in informal apprenticeships with skilled handlers and trainers. Their careers usually begin early in life, at the low end of the hierarchy, mucking out cages and fetching feed and water. Masters of their profession are on par with the trainers of modern-day circuses, and they command great respect and high salaries.

Roman methods of training animals are sophisticated but often cruel. While such men could be empathetic, patient, and loving with their charges, there is no guarantee that they will be. Bear in mind that managing wild animals for executions is no job for a sensitive soul.

**ST 11; DX 10; IQ 10; HT 10.**

Damage 1d-1/1d+1; BL 24 lbs.; HP 11; Will 10; Per 10; FP 10. Basic Speed 5.00; Basic Move 5; Dodge 8.

**Advantages/Disadvantages:** Animal Friend; Duty (Arena owner); Social Stigma (Valuable Property).

**Skills:** Animal Handling (specialize in a particular animal)-12; Running-10.

## HARENARIUS

The harenarius (arena-man) is the general gopher of the ludus. These servants carry weapons and armor for display in the pompe, bring cool drinks to the fighters in the arena, serve

their food, clean and repair their costumes and props, and haul out the dead and wounded on biers. It is a lowly job, but it's a way into show business.

**ST 10; DX 10; IQ 10; HT 10.**

Damage 1d-2/1d; BL 20 lbs.; HP 10; Will 10; Per 10; FP 10. Basic Speed 5.00; Basic Move 5; Dodge 8.

**Advantages/Disadvantages:** Duty (Arena owner; Nonhazardous).

**Skills:** Professional Skill (Stagehand)-10.

## LUDUS GUARD

Security at a private ludus fell to professional guards. These might be armed slaves, retired gladiators, or former soldiers, but all are skilled and experienced. No lanista would entrust his life and property to lower-quality guardsmen. The template below reflects a typical guard. Soldiers, who would be even more skilled and experienced, might guard imperial ludi.

**ST 11; DX 11; IQ 10; HT 11.**

Damage 1d-1/1d+1; BL 24 lbs.; HP 11; Will 10; Per 10; FP 11. Basic Speed 5.50; Basic Move 5; Dodge 8; Parry 9; Block 9.

**Advantages/Disadvantages:** Duty (Ludus).

**Skills:** Brawling-11; Shield-12; Shortsword-12 or Spear-12; Wrestling-10.

## MUSICIAN

The arena, like any good piece of drama, needs a musical score. Smaller ludi hire entertainers to supply the background music, while major establishments employ their own.

*The fearful trainers long goaded the rhinoceros and the great animal's anger was slow in coming . . . Then it tossed a heavy bear with its two horns like a bull tosses straw puppets.*

– Martial, *Book of Spectacles* 22



*Cornicines* (trumpeters), *tibicines* (flautists), and *hydraularii* (water organists – playing a high-tech attraction of their own, the hydraulic organ) musically accompany the gladiators into the arena and the fortunate ones back out. Certain melodies signal the stages of the fight and dramatically underscore its ebb and flow. Well-known fighters may even have their own scores!

Musicians are generally held in low esteem in Roman society, and arena musicians are no exception. The stereotype is effeminate, greedy, sensual, and amoral, and in the company of gladiators, even a perfectly average man cannot help looking less than manly.

**ST 10; DX 10; IQ 10-12; HT 11.**

Damage 1d-2/1d; BL 20 lbs.; HP 10; Will 10-12; Per 10-12; FP 11.  
Basic Speed 5.00; Basic Move 5; Dodge 8.

**Advantages/Disadvantages:** Attractive; Musical Ability 1-3; Reputation -1 (Amoral sensualist).

**Skills:** Musical Instrument at IQ+2; Savoir-Faire (Rome) at IQ+2.

## PAEGNARIUS

The paegnarius has a very specific job in the arena – that of combat clown. Paegnarii entertain the crowds during the morning program by imitating (and satirizing) gladiatorial fights using sticks, whips, and ropes. They do not enjoy the star status or bloody reputation of gladiators and venatores, and they live a relatively quiet life as show business professionals, which may blind some to the considerable demands their job makes of them. Anyone who can convincingly satirize the styles of different fighters while dodging blows with a stick or whip to his unarmored body must be a proficient martial artist. Despite the loss of face this would involve, some ex-gladiators may have become paegnarii.

**ST 10; DX 10; IQ 10; HT 10.**

Damage 1d-2/1d; BL 20 lbs.; HP 10; Will 10; Per 10; FP 10.  
Basic Speed 5.00; Basic Move 5; Dodge 8; Parry 9; Block 9.

**Advantages/Disadvantages:** Duty (Arena Owner).

**Skills:** Brawling-12; Brawling Art-12; Performance-10; Shield-12; Shortsword Art-12; Stage Combat-10; Whip Art-12.

## PHYSICIAN

Concern for the health and performance of the stable of gladiators is at the heart of a ludus' business, and the key man for this is the physician. Medicine in the Roman world is highly advanced, but training is largely through apprenticeships, so the quality of practitioners varies widely. A gladiatorial school can afford to pay well for competent services, though. Versed in what is now known as sports medicine, the physician regulates the gladiators' diet and training regime and the application of massages and baths. He treats their injuries and illnesses with the help of a staff of masseurs, cooks, and medics. Physicians are often middle class, with a literary education and the manners to mingle with respectable folk.

**ST 10; DX 10; IQ 11-13; HT 10.**

Damage 1d-2/1d; BL 20 lbs.; HP 10; Will 11-13; Per 11-13; FP 10.

Basic Speed 5.00; Basic Move 5; Dodge 8.

**Advantages/Disadvantages:** Code of Honor (Hippocratic Oath).

**Skills:** Esoteric Medicine (Humoral Medicine) at Per; First Aid/TL2 at IQ+1; Pharmacy (Herbal)/TL2 at IQ; Surgery (Trauma Surgery)/TL2 at IQ+1.

## STAGE ENGINEER

The arena offered its spectators state-of-the-art high-tech entertainment, and the ludus employed the men to make it run smoothly. This was a profession learned largely on the job – there were no engineering degrees in the Roman world.

It involved such tasks as putting up canvas sunroofs (the Flavian amphitheater in Rome had a navy detachment stationed near it to assist with this part), fetching equipment, painting elaborate scenery, and operating complex stage machinery. The technology to wow audiences with special effects had flowered in Greek theater, and the Romans used it to the hilt. There is even a report of two full-sized theaters that could turn to either face outward to stages (where plays were given in the morning) or inward to enclose an arena (where gladiators fought in the afternoon). Stage engineers, especially scarily enthusiastic Greeks with a background in natural philosophy, might make a good addition to a campaign.

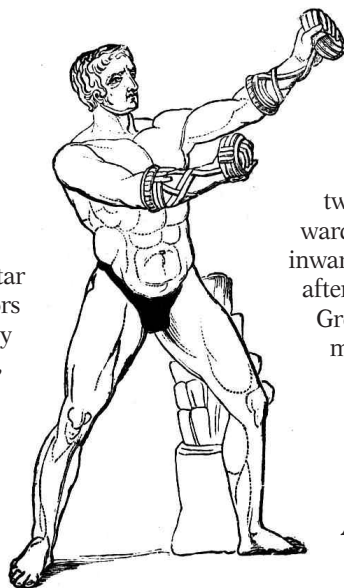
**ST 10; DX 11; IQ (1d/2)+9; HT 10.**

Damage 1d-2/1d; BL 20 lbs.; HP 10; Will (1d/2)+9; Per (1d/2)+9; FP 10.

Basic Speed 5.25; Basic Move 5; Dodge 8.

**Advantages/Disadvantages:** Code of Honor ("The show must go on!"); Duty (Arena owner; Nonhazardous).

**Skills:** Artist (Scene Design) at IQ+1; Engineer (Civil) at IQ; Professional Skill (Stagehand) at IQ+2.



## SUMMA RUDIS

The summa rudis is a gladiatorial referee. His job is to ensure that a bout is fought fairly and he has the power to interpose his staff – the rudis – between the opponents at any moment to stop any foul play. That gives him considerable power over the outcome of fights. A corrupt referee is a gladiator's nightmare! Inscriptions mention several summa rudes, but while many of them seem to have been respected citizens, it's unknown whether theirs was a profession or an honorary appointment. This template assumes it is a profession.

**ST 10-12; DX 10-11; IQ 10-12; HT 10-11.**

Damage Varies; BL 20 lbs.; HP 10-12; Will 10-12; Per 10-12; FP 10-11.

Basic Speed 5.00-5.50; Basic Move 5; Dodge 8.

**Advantages/Disadvantages:** Gladiator Rank 3 (Summa Rudis), plus one of Code of Honor (Referee fairly) or Secret (Corrupt).

**Skills:** Games (Gladiatorial Games)-12.

# CHAPTER FIVE

# EQUIPMENT

The gladiators relied on many unique sorts of equipment to fight and train. They had special weapons, armor, and other items to make their work look more spectacular.

Some weapons may be ornately decorated (see p. 39), although this is much more common for armor.

## WEAPONS

Gladiators used a variety of weapons. Some of these are the typical weapons of the Roman military (with the conspicuous absence of the pilum). Others are more unusual, giving the audience the treat of watching a real combat with exotic weaponry. Weaponry is listed along with the gladiators who used it most.

Page references marked MA refer to the appropriate page in *Martial Arts*; thus, MA225 is p. 225 of *Martial Arts*. Names in small caps refer to a functionally equivalent weapon that can be referenced for statistics.

**Bow** (pp. B275, MA213) – *Venatores*. Venatores (and sometimes gladiators, though not as a regular class) used composite recurve bows. Treat as a COMPOSITE BOW.

**Dagger** (pp. B272, B276, MA215) – *Hoplomachus*, *retiarius*. Short, doubled-edged daggers were used as secondary weapons. These were usually quite large. Gladiatorial knives are nonthrowable. Treat as a SMALL KNIFE or a LARGE KNIFE, depending on size.

**Gladius** (p. 34) – *Various*. The typical sword used by gladiators is the same sword used by contemporary soldiers. It is 20-25" long, double-edged, and designed to thrust and cut.

**Javelin** (pp. B273, B276, MA217) – *Essedari*, *venatores*. The javelins relied on by gladiators are the light variety typically used by the cavalry, ranging in length between 4' and 5', and tipped with iron heads. Treat as a JAVELIN.

**Lariat** (pp. B276, MA219) – *Laquearius*. Laquearii likely fought with lariats in the arena, and animal handlers certainly carried them.

**Net** (pp. B276, MA221) – *Retiarius*. A MELEE NET. The retiarius carries a small, lead-weighted throwing net to catch and

entangle his opponent. Striking with the weights can distract and confuse an opponent; treat this as a Beat or Feint. It can also be used to block at 3+(skill/2). It provides no DB, and as it is Diffuse (p. B380), it will only stop 1-2 points of damage if used to block a missile.

**Quadrens** (p. 34) – *Various*. An unusual four-spiked weapon that replaced the dagger at times. Instead of a single blade, it has four thin thrusting spikes arranged in a square pattern. Used with Jitte/Sai skill, it can disarm like a jutte (p. MA217). Larger quadrentes sometimes replaced the gladius (above) or sica (below) as the main weapon of sword-armed gladiators. It was long assumed to be a ceremonial device, but recent excavations prove it was used in the arena.

**Scissor Glove** (p. 34) – *Scissor*. The scissor's glove combines defense and attack. Its metal tube encloses the lower arm and can be used for parrying. The blade that protrudes from it is crescent-shaped and can be used to thrust or slice. The tube provides DR 5 to the forearm of the wielder.

**Sica** – *Thraex*. The sica is a sword blade about 20-25" in length and curved or angled. It is designed to thrust around the edge of the opponent's shield, but it can be used to cut and thrust like a regular sword blade. Treat it as a FALCHION (pp. MA215, MA227), or for smaller versions, as a KUKRI (pp. MA219, MA228).

**Spear** (pp. B276, MA225) – *Eques*, *hoplomachus*. A gladiator spear has a short thrusting point. They are designed for use with one hand.

**Trident** (pp. MA225, MA229) – *Retiarius*. The trident carried by the retiarius is about 6' in length and ends in three metal thrusting tips. They are designed to deliver thrusting blows, but they can also hook the top of a shield.

*Equal in the fight, the men ended the bout as equals. To both, the Caesar granted the wooden sword of freedom and the palm of victory. Thus were bravery and prowess rewarded. Under no emperor before you has this occurred: two men fought, and both were victorious!*

– *Martial, Epigrams 31 (with considerable hyperbole)*

## Melee Weapon Table

Each melee weapon in the table below appears once per skill that can be used to wield it. Weapons capable of several different attacks get one line per basic attack. In all cases, “-” means the statistic doesn’t apply. All other terms and notation are as defined in *Weapon Statistics* (pp. B268-271), but for quick reference:

*TL*: The tech level at which the weapon became widespread in the real world.

*Weapon*: The name of the specific weapon.

*Damage*: The ST-based damage that the weapon inflicts. Weapons that are poor at penetrating armor have an armor divisor of (0.5), which multiplies DR by 2.

*Reach*: The weapon’s reach in yards. “C” indicates a weapon for close combat (see p. B391). A weapon with multiple reaches (e.g., “C, 1”) can strike at any of those reaches.

*Parry*: The modifier to parry when using the weapon with the indicated skill.

*Cost*: The price of a new weapon, in \$.

*Weight*: The weight of the weapon, in lbs.

*ST*: The minimum ST needed to wield the weapon properly; fighters with lower ST are at -1 to skill per point of ST deficit. Effective ST for damage purposes can’t exceed triple the listed ST.

*Notes*: Any special notes, including applicable footnotes at the end of the table.

<i>TL</i>	<i>Weapon</i>	<i>Damage</i>	<i>Reach</i>	<i>Parry</i>	<i>Cost</i>	<i>Weight</i>	<i>ST</i>	<i>Notes</i>
<b>BOXING, BRAWLING, KARATE, or DX</b>								
2	Scissor Glove	thr-1 cut	C, 1	0	\$200	5	7	[1, 2]
	<i>or</i>		sw-1 cut	C, 1	0	-	7	-
<b>JITTE/SAI (DX-5, Force Sword-4, Main-Gauche-4, or Shortsword-3)</b>								
2	Quadrens	thr+1(0.5) imp	1	0	\$200	2	8	
<b>KNIFE (DX-4, Force Sword-3, Main-Gauche-3, or Shortsword-3)</b>								
2	Quadrens	thr+1(0.5) imp	1	0	\$200	2	8	
<b>SHORTSWORD (DX-5, Broadsword-2, Force Sword-4, Jitte/Sai-3, Knife-4, Saber-4, Smallsword-4, or Tonfa-3)</b>								
2	Gladius	sw cut	1	0	\$400	2	8	
	<i>or</i>	thr+1 imp	1	0	-	-	8	
2	Large Quadrens	thr+2(0.5) imp	1	0	\$400	3	9	

### Notes

[1] This attack receives Boxing, Brawling, or Karate damage bonuses.

[2] Gives the hand and lower arm DR 5. If the arm is struck, the armor protects on 1-3 on 1d. Gloves cannot be worn underneath.

# ARMOR

While gladiators during the Republic often wore the same types of armor that soldiers did, the transition to the Empire saw the development of specifically gladiatorial armor. Typically, it was designed with the specific needs of arena combat where the torso was often left bare, but the head and fighting arm heavily protected. Armor was often decorated (see p. 39).

See the *Armor Table* (p. 37) for statistics for helmets and other armor (except shields).

## HELMETS

Gladiator helmets typically were heavier and stronger than military examples. They didn’t need to be carried on

campaign, merely worn for a short and extremely dangerous arena combat.

**Andabatae Helmet** – This helmet covers the entire skull, face, and eyes. It completely lacks any slots for vision but leaves the ears open. Combatants wearing this helmet must fight blind. Treat this as a murmillio, provocator, or thraex helmet, but it also protects the eyes. Cost and weight are identical to the basic helmet.

**Crests and Plumes** – Most helmets were fitted to carry decorative crests or plumes or both. Being elaborate garb, they give -1 to break free from a hold. The secutor helmet (p. 36) deliberately omits the decoration to avoid getting it caught in the net of the retiarius. Cost \$20 or more; weight 1 lb.

**Crupellarius Helmet** – This is a cylindrical, flat-topped helmet enclosing the entire head, much like a medieval great helm. It has vision slits, and holes to ease breathing.

**Hellenistic Military Helmet** – This broad-brimmed helmet covers the skull and cheeks, leaving the face and neck unprotected. Republican combatants often wore this type of headgear.

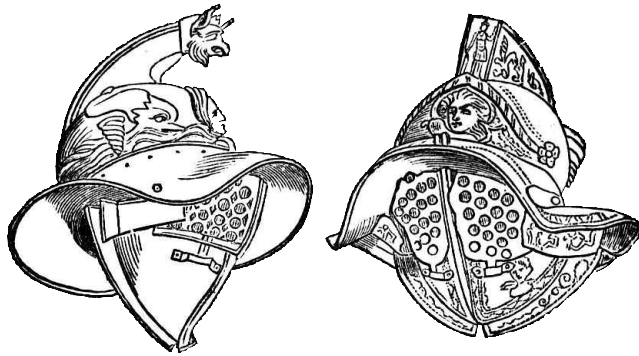
**Murmillio Helmet** – This helmet covers the entire head and face, with a broad brim. Includes a crest.

**Provocator Helmet** – This helmet covers the entire head and face. It has no brim, but a broad neck guard flares over the shoulders.

**Republican Military Helmet** – An open-faced helmet that protects the skull. Many variations existed, but this basic model was common in Republican times for gladiators and in Imperial times for venatores.

**Secutor Helmet** – This headgear covers the entire head and face. It features a shallow brim and small neck guard. The secutor helmet is undecorated and smooth to give the net of the retiarius no purchase.

**Thraex Helmet** – This helmet covers the entire head and face, with a broad brim. This helmet typically is fitted with a distinctive, large crest, included in the cost and weight.



## OTHER ARMOR

Like gladiator helmets, greaves, and other armor pieces were often heavier than military pieces and more decorated. Gladiatorial armor was often designed for only partial protection, covering one arm, part of the torso, and so on. Even vital areas were left unprotected, allowing for spectacular death strokes while shielding other parts of the body from minor wounds. This results in different weights and protectiveness than the armor in the *Basic Set* and requires additional die rolls. For GMs and players who do not wish to use partial covered rules, it is suggested that similar armor from the *Basic Set* be used instead. For more details, see *GURPS Low-Tech*.

**Galerus** – This piece covers the left shoulder with a metal plate projecting upward that protects the neck and face from blows from that direction. Protects against any attack to the face (5), torso (9-10), or neck (17-18) that a shield could aid against. On a battle map, this means blows from the front or shield side; otherwise, the GM must adjudicate. Roll 1d: On a 1-2, the armor's DR protects the face and neck; a 1 means it also protects the torso. Used in combination with a manica (p. 37).

**Greave, Long** – A long greave protects the front and sides of the lower leg to above the knee. Worn with a quilted fabric

defense reaching up the thigh (DR 1). If the leg is struck from the front, roll 1d: On a 1-4, the greave is hit; on a 5-6, it hits the DR 1 cloth. From the rear, no protection is provided. Cost and weight is for *one leg*.

**Greave, Short** – The short greave protects the front and sides of the lower leg to below the knee. The upper leg remains bare. If the leg is struck from the front, roll 1d: On a 1-3, the greave is hit; on a 4-6, the unarmored knee or thigh is struck. From the rear, no protection is provided. Cost and weight is for *one leg*.

**Linothorax** – A linothorax is a many-layered fabric body armor stylized in the Greek fashion. Sometimes it was reinforced with scales (treat as lorica squamata, p. 37). The double-breasted linothorax provides DR 3 from the front only and DR 2 from the flanks and rear; but it is heavier and more costly. Worn only in Republican times, the linothorax was not issued to any Imperial-era armatura.

**Lorica** – Includes the following armor types: mail (*lorica hamata*), scale (*lorica squamata*), segmented (*lorica segmentata*), and muscled breastplate (*lorica musculata*). Musculata is made of bronze and only protects the front of the torso (areas 9-10, 17-18). Hamata and squamata cover the entire torso including the stomach and groin (areas 9-11, 17-18). Segmentata only covers the upper torso (areas 9-10, 17-18) except for the version worn by the *crupellarius*, whose armor only covers the upper chest (areas 9, 17-18). On a strike to the torso, roll 1d: On a 1-2, the upper chest (area 9) is hit; on a 3-4, the blow hits the mid-section (area 10); on a 5-6, the strike hits the abdomen (area 11). This adds extra complication to combat, and GMs may wish to treat any strikes to the torso as hitting the armored portion. An attacker may specifically target an unprotected area, either of which has a hit location penalty of -1.

**Manica** – An armored sleeve that protects the weapon arm. Manicae were typically made of quilted fabric, but metal versions of overlapping bands existed and may have been used in the arena. Cost and weight is for *one arm*.

**Lorica Squamata Leggings** – Leggings of cloth or leather, covered with rows of small plates laced to each other in overlapping rows.

**Spongia** – The small metal breastplate of the provocator. It is a rounded metal plate that covers the upper chest and encloses the neck in a hinged, padded collar. It protects only the neck (5), upper torso (9), and vitals (17-18), from the front only. Use the rules for lorica (above).

*Maximus: "I am required to kill, so I kill. That is enough."*

*Proximo: "That's enough for the provinces, but not enough for Rome."*

– *Gladiator (2000)*

## Armor Table

The table gives the following information for each item of armor:

**TL:** The tech level at which the armor is commonly available.

**Armor:** The item's name.

**Location:** The area the armor protects on a humanoid wearer. Individual locations are *skull* (top of the head), *face* (the face, excluding the eyes), *neck*, *arm*, *torso* (the abdomen and chest), *groin*, and *leg*.

**DR:** The amount of Damage Resistance the item gives.

"\*" means the armor is *flexible*. Flexible armor is easier to conceal or wear under other armor, and quicker to don or remove, but it is more vulnerable to blunt trauma damage.

"F" means the DR only protects against attacks from the front.

**Cost:** The item's price, in \$.

**Weight:** The item's weight, in pounds.

**Notes:** Many items have special features or restrictions; see the notes at the end of the table.

TL	Armor	Location	DR	Cost	Weight	LC	Notes
<b>Helmets</b>							
2	Hellenistic Military Helmet	skull	4	\$250	3	3	
2	Crupellarius Helmet	skull, face, neck	6	\$400	7	3	[1]
2	Murmillio Helmet	skull, face	4	\$620	4.5	3	[1]
2	Provocator Helmet	skull, face, neck	4	\$250	6	3	[1]
2	Republican Military Helmet	skull	4	\$200	2.5	3	
2	Secutor Helmet	skull, face, neck	4	\$550	3.5	3	[1]
2	Thraex Helmet	skull, face	4	\$620	4.5	3	[1]
<b>Body Armor</b>							
2	Galerus	torso	3	\$40	2.5	3	[2]
2	Linothorax	torso	2*	\$120	8	3	[2]
2	Linothorax, Double Breasted	torso	3F	\$180	12	3	[2, 3]
2	Lorica Hamata	torso, groin	5/3*	\$550	15	3	[4]
2	Lorica Squamata	torso, groin	4*	\$525	28	3	
2	Lorica Segmentata, Crupellarius	torso	5	\$1000	24	3	[2]
2	Musculata	torso	4F	\$680	8	3	[2]
2	Spongia	torso	3F	\$50	1.5	3	[2]
<b>Limb Armor</b>							
1	Lorica Squamata Leggings	legs	4/3	\$900	30	3	[4]
2	Greave, Long	leg	3F	\$225	2.25	4	[2]
2	Greave, Short	leg	3F	\$150	1.5	4	[2]
2	Manica, Cloth	arm	1	\$12	1	4	[2]
2	Manica, Metal	arm	4	\$225	5.5	4	[2]

### Notes

[1] Helmet gives wearer the No Peripheral Vision disadvantage (p. B151) while worn.

[2] Partial coverage. For details, see individual descriptions.

[1] Listed DR is front only. Provides DR 2 from the flank and rear.

[4] Split DR; use the lower DR against *crushing* attacks.

## SHIELDS

Gladiator shields, or their lack of shields, help define their fighting style as much as their weaponry. Names in small caps indicate a functionally equivalent shield; see p. B287 for statistics.

**Hoplomachus Shield** – The Hoplomachus carries a round, deeply dished metal shield about 12" across. It is used for active parries and bashes like a buckler. Treat as a LIGHT SHIELD.

**Parma Equestris** – This is a round molded leather shield with concentric circles to get a corrugated strengthening effect. It was about 20" across. It is very light and used in a mobile fighting style to deflect javelins and thrusting attacks, but it will not stand up to much solid blocking. Treat as a SMALL SHIELD but with only 15 HP. Cost and weight are also halved.

**Scutum** – The scutum is a rectangular, curved plywood shield about 28" wide and 36" high, held by a central horizontal grip. It is used as a relatively static defense to the body, though it can deliver forceful blows with the metal-reinforced rim. Treat as a LARGE SHIELD; users suffer a -2 to hit (p. B547).

*Titus had the same theater flooded suddenly and had horses, bulls, and other domestic animals brought in who were trained to move in the water just like on land. He then had people enter on warships to stage a naval battle.*

– Cassius Dio, *History* 66.25

**Thraex Shield** – The thraex carries an odd shield: made of plywood and curved, it measures about 20" × 20" square and is used in a mobile, aggressive blocking style. Treat as a MEDIUM SHIELD.

**Venator Shield** – Venatores carry different types of gladiator shields, but they are also sometimes shown using a large (about 36" × 25"), flat, oval shield together with a spear or javelins. Treat as a LARGE SHIELD; users suffer a -2 to hit (p. B547).

## OTHER EQUIPMENT

A few other pieces of equipment made up the kits of some gladiator.

*Eques Tunic:* Unlike most other gladiators, the eques wore a thin cloth tunic. It is not heavy enough to provide DR, but it does cover the torso and groin. \$10, 0.5 lb.

*Loincloth:* A simple cloth to cover the groin. \$5, negligible.

*Gladiator Belt:* The symbol of the gladiator was the broad, metal-plated belt that all types wore in the arena. Often, this consisted of a single strip of decorated sheet bronze closed with hooks. It served no protective function, but distinguished the arena fighter from the civilian (who wore an undecorated cloth or leather belt) and the soldier (whose military belt was metal-studded, with pendants dangling from it). Most gladiators wore it over a loincloth when fighting, leaving the rest of the torso bare. \$50, 1 lb.

## MEDICAL GEAR

Surgeons' kits come in two sizes: small, portable kits; and larger kits kept in an infirmary or a surgeon's house. A surgical

kit with instruments of good or fine quality (p. B345) can grant additional bonuses to skill. Roman surgeons commonly had good instruments, and most ludi will have a large surgeon's kit on hand for treating injured gladiators.

*Small Surgeon's Kit* (TL1). A typical kit has forceps, hooks, needles, probes, scalpels, thread or sinew for stitching up wounds, and material for bandages. Basic equipment for Surgery skill. \$300, 15 lbs.

*Large Surgeon's Kit* (TL1). A typical kit includes the equivalent of two small kits, with more specialized forms of the basic instruments, plus specula, arrow spoons, bone chisels, small hammers, cauteries, and catheters. Good equipment for Surgery skill, giving +1. \$1,500, 40 lbs.

## FIGHTING KIT

Here is what each standard gladiator carries into the arena. This gear is *not* personal gear that the gladiator can use however he likes; it's provided for combat in the arena. That said, fictional gladiators always seem to find a way to acquire similar gear, and gladiator-like warriors may want to match their kit to the standard arena loadout.

These loadouts assume *ordinary* equipment. Higher-quality equipment costs extra, see *Custom Equipment* (p. 39).

### Andabata

Loincloth; metal gladiator belt; andabata helmet (provocator style); gladius. \$705, 9 lbs. Some andabatae may have some form of torso armor (cost and weight varies) and a manica (\$12, 1 lb.)

### Crupellarius

Loincloth; metal gladiator belt; crupellarius helmet; crupellarius lorica segmentata; metal manica (both arms); long greaves (both legs); hoplomachus shield; gladius. \$2,555, 47 lbs. Sometimes scale leggings were worn instead of long greaves; cost and weight changes to \$3,005 and 72.5 lbs.

### Dimachaerus

Loincloth; metal gladiator belt; provocator helmet; lorica hamata; short greaves (both legs); two gladii. \$1,905, 29 lbs.

### Eques

Eques tunic; metal gladiator belt; thraex or provocator helmet; cloth manica (weapon arm only); parma equestris shield; spear; gladius. With a thraex helmet, \$1,152, 17 lbs.; with a provocator helmet, \$782, 18.5 lbs.



## Essedarius

Loincloth; metal gladiator belt; provocator helmet; cloth manica (weapon arm only); scutum; two javelins; gladius. \$867, 37 lbs.

## Hoplomachus

Loincloth; metal gladiator belt; thraex helmet; cloth manica (weapon arm only); long greaves (both legs); hoplomachus shield; spear; dagger. \$1,222, 17.25 lbs.

## Murmillio

Loincloth; metal gladiator belt; murmillio helmet; cloth manica (weapon arm only); short greave (off leg); scutum; gladius. \$1,327, 35 lbs.

## Provocator

Loincloth; metal gladiator belt; provocator helmet; spongia; cloth manica (weapon arm only); long greave (off leg); scutum; gladius. \$1,082, 38.75 lbs.

## Retiarius

Loincloth; metal gladiator belt; cloth manica (weapon arm only); galerus (trident arm); melee net; trident. \$207, 14.5 lbs., plus either a dagger (+\$20, +0.25 lbs.) or quadrens (+\$200, +2 lbs.).

## Samnes

Loincloth; metal gladiator belt; Hellenistic military helmet; cloth manica (weapon arm only); short greave (off leg);

scutum; gladius. \$957, 33.5 lbs. Some samnes may have some form of torso armor (cost and weight varies) and/or two to three javelins (each +\$30, +2 lbs.).

## Scissor

Loincloth; metal gladiator belt; secutor helmet; lorica hamata; metal manica (weapon arm only); long greaves (both legs); scissor glove; gladius. \$2,430, 36.5 lbs.

## Secutor

Loincloth; metal gladiator belt; secutor helmet; cloth manica (weapon arm only); short greave (off leg); scutum; gladius. \$1,257, 34 lbs.

## Thraex

Loincloth; metal gladiator belt; thraex helmet; cloth manica (weapon arm only); long greaves (both legs); thraex shield; sica. \$1,597, 29 lbs.



## Venator

Loincloth; metal gladiator belt; helmet (a variety were worn); shield (any). \$55, 1 lb., plus the cost and weight of the helmet and shield. Include *one* weapon or set from each of the following groups:

- a gladius (+\$400, +2 lbs.) or spear (+\$40, +4 lbs.);
- javelins (at least 2, each +\$30 and +2 lbs.) or composite bow (+\$900, +4 lbs.) and a hip quiver with 20 arrows (+\$55, +3 lbs.).

## Custom Equipment

Unlike military gear, gladiatorial gear did not need to be created for routine battlefield use and portability. Exotic, attractive gear that would give interesting and spectacular shows was the order of the day. High-quality gear may appear in the hands of especially successful gladiators.

Better-than-usual gear is given an increased *cost factor*. Each modifier has a “cost factor” (CF); to find final cost, simply multiply list cost for a good-quality weapon by (1 + total CF). These are “stackable” unless noted otherwise, but some are restricted to specific weapon or armor types.

### Weapons

Gladiatorial weapons could be higher quality or especially ornate. This was less common than decorated armor; simply put, it’s more difficult to appreciate from up in stands!

*Fine*: -1 to odds of breakage, and +1 to damage for any cutting or impaling weapon, or +20% to range for a blowpipe, bow, or crossbow. Projectiles (arrows, bolts, etc.) and crushing- or impaling-only melee or thrown weapons: +2 CF. Fencing weapons, swords, blowpipes, bows, and crossbows: +3 CF. Other cutting melee or thrown weapons: +9 CF.

*Ornate*: Decorated with jewels, gold, etc. modifies reactions from buyers, gullible hirelings, and especially from the crowd! It *does* affect crowd reaction rolls when *Asking for Mercy* (pp. 22-23)! Applies to all weapons except improvised weapons, projectiles, and sticks: +1 to reactions for +1 CF, +2 for +4 CF, and +3 for +9 CF.

### Armor and Shields

Gladiatorial armor was often lavishly decorated. Helmets sported crests or plumes, ornate decorations, and bright colors.

*Fine*: Expertly fitted, with no waste material. Armor only, not shields. Offers full DR at 3/4 the usual weight. Only fits wearers whose height *and* weight match the original owner’s! Any armor: +9 CF. Very rare for gladiatorial armor, which is usually re-used once the previous wearer has been slain . . .

*Ornate*: Dress to impress, exactly as for the weapon modifier. Includes details like precious materials, scrollwork, and designs with visual impact. Affects reaction rolls exactly like ornate weapons. Any armor or shield: +1 to reactions for +1 CF, +2 for +4 CF, and +3 for +9 CF.

# CHAPTER SIX

# CAMPAIGNS

*Marcus Gavius Ferula sighed contentedly. His day was going well. His customer's day was going splendidly, which helped immensely. Right now, the quinquennialis Aulus Gavinius was standing up from his curule chair to receive the carefully coached cheers as servants handed the victorious provocator Maternus a bulging moneybag (filled with more sesterces than silver denarii to make it look bigger). "Glory to you! Glory to your Family!" the crowd cried. "This is true wealth! This is true generosity!" The audience was eating it up. Another day, another 15 pairs of fighters, and his position as first man in town would be secure for decades. Moreover, Myron, the loser, had been spared – Ferula had already resigned himself to losing one of his stars.*

*Slowly, almost surreptitiously, the lanista raised a roasted chickpea to his lips. A guilty pleasure, entirely unfitting food for a man of his standing and wealth. He dreaded the thought they*

*might one day fall out of his toga – damnably itchy, heavy, impractical thing – and embarrass him before all the councilmen, but he loved the taste of chickpeas at the games. The cheers subsided. Maternus ran the last of his victory lap and disappeared into the maw of the stage gate. Ferula turned and saw one of his harenarii, dressed in immaculate white tunic and Greek cloak, nervously fidgeting by the door. "What is it?" he asked the man, a bit more harshly than he had intended to. Ferula was a careful man and did not believe the Fates ever gave breaks. At least, not to Ferula. The messenger swallowed hard and whispered, "Sir, it's the tiger . . ."*

Gladiators are attractive PCs for a campaign set in Rome. They combine martial skills and mystique with a freedom of movement that soldiers do not enjoy. They lend themselves to adventures by virtue of their profession.

## THE GLADIATOR CAMPAIGN

The simplest way to use gladiators in a campaign is to base the entire campaign on gladiatorial combat. The typical adventure for a gladiator is his career, and as vocations go it is plenty challenging enough. Much like a typical adventurer, he trains hard to improve his abilities, fights for his life on various occasions, and accumulates money, rank, and reputation through his victories.

### THE GAMES

The dramatic arc of a gladiator campaign runs from match to match, with the time between munera offering the opportunity for training, preparations, and bonding in noncombat adventures. Bouts in the arena are the climactic resolutions of tensions built over long periods beforehand, decisive moments in which the fate of the PC is uncertain. They should never be played as "just another day," because for real gladiators, they never were. If a party contains several gladiator PCs, they should all have the opportunity to fight in a munus and earn their share of glory.

The experience should be played for all it is worth in dramatic tension and evocative descriptions: the music, the roar of applause, emerging from the claustrophobic darkness of the waiting room into the dazzling brightness of the arena, sunlight glinting off helmets, the announcer shouting out names and winning records, the endless seconds while weapons and armor are inspected and the opponents armed, and then, finally, the fights. The fight does not end with the winning blow. Victory is merely the beginning of an elaborate ritual that

decides the life or death of the loser, and it is here that Reputation and showmanship matter as much as martial skill. The munus is the pinnacle of professional excitement for a gladiator!

### FIRST BLOOD AND BEYOND

The first match should be unforgettable, no matter how dingy a provincial amphitheater it takes place in and no matter how undistinguished an opponent the PC faces. The first fight of a tiro is a vital rite of passage. The selection of the opponent, training and preparation, the cena libera, the first test of the prolusio with training weapons, trying to make a good impression with the roaring, thousand-headed audience, and, finally, the actual bout – these are all worth great detail. All manner of additional challenges and tasks can be built in: storylines about sabotage, training secrets passed on by a veteran fighter after completing his test or meeting his price, or a tale of revenge against the bully who tormented the PC throughout his training and now faces him in a life-and-death match.

Over the career of a gladiator PC, the opponents become more skilled as he rises through the ranks. The most important fight of all is his last, the match at the end of which he receives his freedom and the wooden sword that symbolizes his release from the arena . . . if he survives. A PC who reaches this point should be given his dramatic finish – a glorious victory or an honorable death. If the fight takes place in a major arena, in a big city, perhaps even in Rome, that will add to the grandeur of the occasion.



## BEYOND THE ARENA

Aside from the arena itself, many opportunities exist for sideline adventures that draw the PCs into amorous entanglements, criminal affairs, or the minefield of Roman politics. Munera were rare – even an unusually busy gladiator could not expect to perform more than once a month – and most fighters were happy to escape the tedium of drill and exercise that filled most of their days.

Slave gladiators, especially early in their career, were kept under lock and key. Veteran fighters had greater freedom of movement. They could easily embark on activities outside the ludus. This can include romantic affairs with wealthy women who showered their boy toys with gifts (while dodging their husbands and fathers), or a more respectable marriage and family. Training and sparring with young men of the upper crust offered opportunities to earn some regular extra money, while larger sums were available for more dangerous and sometimes illegal work as bodyguards and enforcers. During the Late Republic, gangs of gladiators fought for their political masters in the streets of Rome, leading mobs or picking off opposing musclemen (killing nobles was frowned upon except when public enemy lists were proclaimed). Of course, there were also odd jobs for the ludus – picking and training recruits, guarding shipments of wild animals, transporting money, trying out new routines, or making appearances in towns where games are scheduled.

## STARTING CHARACTERS

A typical PC will start as either a tiro or a veteran gladiator. Both are full of role-playing opportunities.

### *Tirones*

In this setup, the PCs start as tirones, recruits with potential but untrained and completely unknown. Tirones were typically young men (not boys – around age 20 is realistic) selected for excellent health, martial attributes, and (in the case of free men) their willingness to risk life and limb in the arena. In other words, ideal PCs! The power level of a tirones campaign could be as low as 25-50 points for realistic games or as high as 75-100 points for games with cinematic heroes-in-the-making.

A tirones campaign works well with PCs starting with their initial training. Each PC must work his way up through the training regime, improving his physical shape and learning the combat skills he needs to survive in the arena. The *Improvement Through Study* and *Quick Learning Under Pressure* rules on p. B292 are very helpful here! In a cinematic campaign, this can be compressed to a “training sequence” (*Martial Arts*, p. 147), although the training itself is often the focus of a tirones campaign.

Older gladiators and doctores provide teaching and comradeship to incoming tirones. However, the competition between gladiators of the same school is intense, and not all old hands like rising competitors. Intrigue and backstabbing

## Walk the Walk and Talk the Talk

Having gladiator character sound and act convincing is not difficult, though it may take some adjusting of modern sensibilities. Gladiators had a reputation as foul-mouthed, impertinent, and oversexed. Among the Romans, famous for their direct earthiness, that means a lot. It is also plausible. The arena was a world where manliness was at a premium. A gladiator had every reason to fear loss of reputation if he didn't play by its rules.

The Roman world was a great deal more cavalier about human life than modern society. To have somebody die in the arena was not shocking per se; it only was scandalous if he died badly. Many Latin authors even believed watching gladiatorial games was good for boys because they offered an object lesson in courage along with entertainment. Romans in general lived with the possibility of having their lives cut short by disease or violence. Some were fatalistic about it, some cynical and some defiant, but nobody could do anything about it. Enjoying life while it lasted was far preferable to troubling your conscience over the death of people you didn't know or care much about.

When it came to language, Roman culture did not have a taboo against obscene language like the modern world. Everyday Latin generally was crude anyway, so inventiveness and breadth of vocabulary rather than mere shock value distinguished the master of profanity. As today, obscenities were considered inappropriate by the upper classes but worn as a badge of machismo by many.

Generally, sex in the Roman world was a remarkably straightforward matter. Gladiators in this setting played the role of “manly men,” and many enjoyed trying to live up to the stereotype. Roman women enjoyed enough liberty in everyday life that a *discreet* affair with a gladiator was technically manageable. Scandalous elopements of patrician wives with arena stars were rare, but no famous gladiator would ever want for female company.

These aspects of a campaign can be played up or down to the degree the gaming group is comfortable with. Nonetheless, to the Romans, this was merely normal.

are just as possible as a backdrop as hard training and good camaraderie.

### *Veterans*

In this type of campaign, the gladiators are experienced. They've fought their first matches, and established a reputation and a following . . . or maybe built enough skills in the provinces to make a move to the big show in Rome. As experienced gladiators, starting points should be at least 75-100, but to use the templates on pp. 28-32 they'll be better off with at least 100-200 points. Cinematic gladiators may be worth many, many more points.

Adventures can focus on individual matches or on adventures during the downtime between the matches. The PCs may work together as a team, or they may be rivals for influence within the ludus! If the game is entirely centered on the ludus and the games, the potential lethality of the matches might be better suited for a ludus campaign (see pp. 44-45).

## ADVENTURE SEEDS

Here are a few adventure possibilities for gladiator adventures, both in and out of the arena.

### *The Great Escape*

It is the first century B.C., and the PCs find themselves in the cramped, stinking dungeons of a Capuan ludus. Gaulish and Iberian warriors, Anatolian and Greek prisoners of war, captured pirates, field hands sold off some nobleman's estate, or unlucky victims of slavers, they all face the same dreadful fate: the arena. Trained hard under close supervision, can they muster the resourcefulness and strength to escape their captors? Once they are out of the ludus, can they hope to make it home, out of Italy, unnoticed? Or should they think bigger and call on the slaves to rise up against their masters? If it worked for Spartacus . . .



### *Friends Like These*

The lanista has finally managed to break into the Apulian market. Granted, it is only a small-town munus, and he shares the contract with another school, but if this turns out well, bigger deals may follow. The problem is that things are not going well. The widely advertised tiger falls ill suspiciously close to the games. Sudden changes to the program pit valuable gladiators from your school against vastly superior stars from the other, while your own best men face rank beginners. A stage set collapses during rehearsals. Soon, it becomes clear that the other school's lanista is doing everything to defend his turf. The PCs will have their hands full stopping the saboteurs, finding out who in the ludus has already been bribed, and convincing the editor to rethink the schedule – not to mention winning rigged fights against opponents who are perfectly happy to use every dirty trick in the book.

### *Cock of the Walk*

No bones about it, the new secutor is good. Very good, in fact. However, he is making no friends with his arrogance and his cocksure talk of becoming *primus palus* in no time and making his school famous. He already angered half the ludus, treating sparring partners like dirt, refusing to play his assigned role in the choreography, and demanding star billing.

The kid is no bad seed, but he needs to be taught a lesson, and the PCs are just the people to set his head straight.

### *Justice Before Dawn*

It is night. The city is asleep, and so is a gladiator PC in the arms of the pretty, young wife of a jealous, rich, old husband. Unnoticed, a gang of thieves manages to enter the house through the same backdoor that admitted the lady's lover and rob valuable jewelry and silverware. A slave discovers the theft and alerts his mistress, who falls into deep despair. Her husband is due back tomorrow, and if he is alerted to the theft, he will bring the matter to the law. Her slaves are keeping silent about her affair, but they will tell the truth under torture in court. She faces divorce and ruin, and her lover may lose his head – or other valuable parts – to the cuckold. He and his friends have just one night to hunt down the thieves in a mad chase through dangerous back alleys and teeming slums. They need to recover the loot by force, stealth, or bribery, and keep the husband away long enough to return his valuables to their rightful place.

### *No Heart of Stone*

The gladiators are sent to collect outstanding payments for the patron of their lanista. Their first call is to a freedman artisan keeping a small shop; he is several months late paying rent to his former master. The man begs for mercy, explaining that he cannot meet the payments because two competing gangs are fighting over his street, so he has to come up with double protection money, suffers vandalism, and had to pay extra to protect his daughter from rape. What are the gladiators to do? There is little point beating up the unfortunate man or abducting his daughter as a warning. Getting involved in a local turf war might not be the brightest idea, but it could be unavoidable. Surely, one or the other of the underworld bosses can be persuaded to see reason by a judicious application of real fighting skill.

### *A Brawl Too Far*

A successful gladiator – either one of the PCs or a friend – allowed the celebration of his latest victory to get a little out of hand. Now a man lies dead in the streets outside a Roman tavern. He turns out to be the son of an influential equestrian banker who had been out “slumming” with his friends. His father will not be happy, and the courts aren't likely to side with a gladiator over a respectable banker. The culprit may have to cool his heels on the provincial circuit for a while. If it comes to trial, the heroes will need to persuade a good lawyer to take the case, track down witnesses, and thwart the plots and tricks of the opposition. Roman lawyers were masters of character assassination and playing the jury's emotions – but two can play that game.

### *Diabolus Ex Machina*

Artemidorus of Salamis is a smart man, a gifted engineer, and a smooth talker. The scheme he convinced the lanista about, though, has the PCs worried intensely. The engineer plans to set up an arena for a series of fights based on mythological stories, complete with hidden trapdoors, revolving stages, and cranes for flying furies, demons, and wild animals to emerge from. It may sound like a good idea in theory, but anyone who has to fight on this contraption wants to make sure it works.

First tests are disappointing, to put it mildly. Trapdoors suddenly open under fighters, pulleys get stuck, the creaking machinery scares the animals, and a bear gets seasick on the revolving stage. It will take a lot of effort to make sure this genius does not end up killing them, and the fight itself is liable to be interesting. This adventure can be played straight, but it has great potential for comic relief.

### *Meet Daddy at the Games*

Palumbus the Murmillo has it all: fame, money, success, a loving wife, and an adorable little son. He fights for large fees as a free *rudarius*, and he has signed on with the PCs' troupe as the main attraction, billed to face a rising star. On the day before the fight, he gets a letter informing him that his son has been kidnapped and will be released unharmed – provided he loses tomorrow's bout. Defeat against a weaker opponent will likely mean the crowd demanding his death, but a shaken Palumbus will sacrifice himself for his child – unless, of course, the heroes can get him back in time. The boy was abducted by the owner of Palumbus' opponent, a banker whose investments have gone sour and who faces bankruptcy unless he can sell his gladiator at a hugely inflated price. A victory against a star would do it. So tomorrow, Palumbus enters the arena to die – unless his son's face greets him in the crowd, safe in the company of his daddy's friends.

### *Bait and Switch*

How a senator's son came to fall madly in love with a slave girl should be clear to anyone who sees her. How she ended up sentenced to death *ad bestias* can be explained through the arcana of political intrigue – perhaps rivals wanted to punish his father through him, a competitor for her affection has turned vindictive, or the young man made a powerful enemy. Now, a desperate lover approaches the adventurers with a large sum of money and an impossible request – protecting his beloved. Protecting her in the dungeons should be easy enough – if all else fails, they can simply pretend to claim her for their own entertainment (no jailer will argue with gladiators). However, keeping her from being executed may require an entirely different level of deception, and smuggling her out of the *ludus* won't be easy.

### *New Kid on the Block*

It's auction time, and the lanista is out to recruit for the school. He takes along a few gladiator PCs to inspect the merchandise and advise him on who has potential. One young slave looks suitable, and he is bought at a reasonable price. On the way home, stumbling over broken Greek and rudimentary Latin, the young man manages to make his new owner understand that he is the son of a powerful Parthian noble and his father will reward them handsomely if they return him. He may manage to convince the lanista, but men like the *ludus*

owner are used to sob stories from slaves. Nonetheless, the lanista may seek to add some exotic excitement to the games and decide this might be a good way to get some bonus money out of such a venture. If they are sent, the heroes are looking at a long and dangerous journey across the sea to Antioch or Alexandria, through the tangled politics of the Levant and the mountains and deserts of Syria and Arabia, to the hostile frontier of the Parthian Empire. Their charge may try to give them the slip in the meantime – Rome is full of Greek con men trying to make money off gullible citizens. Even if they make it to his home safely and he told the truth about his parentage, the real story may be quite different. Should he really have been abducted and sold, powerful men want to prevent his return home, and the adventurers must now fight them on their turf. They may need all their strength and wits before the day is out.

### *Blacklist*

The civil wars of the Late Republic brought out the worst in people. Victorious parties proscribed their defeated enemies, declaring their property forfeit and putting a high price on their heads (delivery with the body attached was optional). Today, this fate has befallen the PCs' patron and owner, for whom they've fought many a street brawl in the past. They are now impounded property, to be auctioned off to the highest bidder and used as arena fodder, while their former master and his family face torture and death. The only chance is to get everyone out of Rome to Tuscany, where loyal clients are willing to hide the group or smuggle them out of Italy until the tides turn again. It is a mad venture – departing the city under cover of night in disguise, crossing a countryside teeming with informers and enemy soldiers, evading pursuers, and bribing their way past suspicious innkeepers and ferrymen. The heroes also need to shepherd through this nightmare a family of nobles used to soft living. If they succeed, the fighters will be made men. If they fail, they will die in shame.

### *Sergeant Whatsisname*

Gaul in the third century A.D. is a frightened place. Cities used to centuries of peace and prosperity suddenly face the prospect of marauding German war bands, with the armies of Rome far away and locked in fruitless civil war. The youth of the town have taken up arms to fight the invaders, but the defenses are woeful, their training is poor, and their discipline is hardly worth mentioning. The only able fighters around are the gladiators and trainers in the *ludus*. Now is the time for the PCs to test their mettle on a greater battlefield: train the townspeople, improvise defenses, and organize a fighting force from a frightened rabble before the column of Alamannic raiders descends on them. The reward is their freedom and the gratitude of the good people who used to look down on them; the price of defeat is death.

*Thrust this [sword] into another man's flesh, and they will applaud and love you for that. You may even begin to love them.*

– Proximo, *Gladiator* (2000)

# THE LUDUS CAMPAIGN

Another way of structuring a gladiator campaign is by basing it on the ludus. Instead of centering the action on individual gladiators, the actor of the story is a gladiatorial school whose fighters are important but ultimately disposable figures. Given the lethality of their profession, this may well be a more satisfying approach for a realistic campaign.

The goal in a ludus campaign is to make the school profitable, keep its combat strength up, improve its repertoire, and gain patronage, reputation, and money. A ludus campaign can be run either cooperatively, with the players all running several characters belonging to the same organization, or adversarial, with each player running his own ludus.

The ludus campaign is also well suited for “troupe play,” where players will have several characters. One possibility is to allow each player one or two non-gladiator characters and several gladiator PCs. A player could, for example, run a doctor and several gladiators, or the lanista and several gladiators, or similar combinations. As gladiator PCs are slain, new PCs can be generated (in the game, purchased or recruited). This arrangement permits a more realistic callousness toward gladiators, while letting each player to participate in decisions that affect the ludus as a whole.

*In the ludus gladiatorius, you live  
together with the very men you fight against.*  
– Seneca, *On Anger* 2.8.2

## THE CUSTOMER IS EVERYTHING

One important part of the ludus campaign is customer relations – socializing, making contacts, and activating connections. The major ludi of the Empire (both the imperial ones in Rome and the stationary outfits in big cities like Ephesus or Antioch) were practically public enterprises and had a monopoly on local games, while provincial schools had to scramble for gigs. Getting venues involved maintaining good contacts with the local dignitaries who would be expected to provide munera after being elected to public office in their hometowns. The ludi also need to ensure that the politicians were aware what the school could bring to the shows.

The Roman upper classes were held together by a tight mesh of patronage relationships without which nobody would stand any chance of getting anywhere. An effective operator ensured he had a powerful patron to open doors for him. If a lanista was on the good side of a city councilor, the politician could introduce the ludus owner to his patron – maybe a senator. Should the lanista manage to impress him, he would recommend the school to other people under his patronage.

Managing such relationships was hard work: the clients (*clientes* in Latin) were expected to pay regular morning visits to their patron to greet him after rising, exchange small gifts, and sometimes accompany him on his business or on the way

to his patron. There would be invitations to dinner parties at which connections were created and business deals closed. Sometimes, a lanista might be asked to provide entertainment for such a party, perhaps in the form of trained animals, musicians, clowns, or even a private gladiator fight.

## NO BUSINESS LIKE SHOW BUSINESS

Ultimately, a ludus campaign is about putting on an entertaining show. To do so, a ludus must also be *balanced*. It is not enough for a school to have good fighters; it needs a quality mix of top performers to avoid boring the public. Having the best retiarius in the world but no good secutores would cause the outcome of his fights to be predictable. The only chance to survive in business might be to sell him to someone with a bigger stable, or buy a top-flight secutor, if the owner could afford one! At the same time, the trainers had to ensure a steady supply of gladiators in the pipeline to replace losses. The animal handlers must maintain the animals (and find exotic new ones). The musicians and stagehands must be kept happy and their needs met to ensure no mistakes. The show must go on!

For those who want to play the show out in that kind of detail, how the games are organized can matter significantly. The basic outline of morning program, noontime executions, and afternoon fights is fixed (see *The Morning Program*, pp. 9-10), but plenty of leeway exists for individual decisions. Not all audiences are the same: In some towns, the bear playing a flute and the clowns with wooden swords will go down well. In others, Greek boxers and shooting ostriches with arrows are sure-fire crowd-pleasers. If the weather is particularly hot, people may go home at midday or fall asleep, so a canopy is needed. Taking account of these things is important because it pleases the editor – who pays the bills – and it pleases the audience – who may be more merciful. Putting the crowds in a sour mood is gambling with the lives of your gladiators . . .

## THE COOPERATIVE LUDUS

A ludus campaign needs to keep track of many aspects that the individual-gladiator campaign can disregard. The goal is not just to give a good fight; it is to hold good games, keep your best fighters alive, and get the next contract. Historically, the business was not terribly competitive – there were not that many ludi – but the lanista could still lose contracts if the prices were too high or (more likely) the offerings not exciting enough.

Thus, the focus of the ludus campaign is not victories and reputation, it is money. To keep a successful school afloat, a lanista has to be willing to invest heavily in buying and training fighters, importing wild animals, hiring artists and entertainers, and buying props and gadgets. Gladiatorial shows were about conspicuous spending and it would not do to look poor. At the same time, the ludus owner had to negotiate fees for shows, promote his program, put together games for various occasions, and – especially in smaller provincial settings – cooperate with other ludi to stage big events (large outfits had everything under one roof).

When it comes time for the games, most of the gladiators fighting are from the same ludus. That meant that of all its fighters had to be ready to face – and, if it came to that, kill – each other. While rivalries with other ludi may occur, they will be business rivalries. Historical ludi do not function like sports teams. There are no fans of one or the other school, only of specific armaturae or individual gladiators. Furthermore, being part of the same ludus doesn't make everyone friends or eliminate rivalry. The post of primus palus, the respect of the doctores, the ear of the lanista . . . all are potential sources of rivalry. A good lanista will encourage some intra-ludus competition, to keep the fighters vying for prestige and the choicest outside jobs.

## COMPETITIVE LUDI

An ahistorical campaign might feature ludi that *do* compete like sports teams. In this type of campaign, each player (or

perhaps a small group of players, if the GM has many participants) controls a ludus. Instead of a single ludus organizing a munus, competing ludi are asked to contribute fighters. The event is run as a competition – anyone may enter, and the records of the surviving gladiators are compared to determine the standings. It may also involve maneuvering for the editor's favor in order to get the choicest slots. In such a campaign, the goal is to have the best ludus. Not only does the school need to be the wealthiest, but also the most renowned. Money is only one measure of success in a world where reputation, showmanship, and control of successful gladiators are more respected . . .

If multiple players control one ludus, each may take different roles within it. The owner, the lanista, the doctores, and the prime gladiators are all good choices. If players run multiple PCs, they may wish to control several gladiators, or a gladiator or two and one nonfighting character. That will allow for direct action in both planning munera and competing in them!

## No Expenses Spared: The Economics of Munera

The key feature of gladiatorial games was that they were ridiculously expensive and completely pointless. They represented more than anything an opportunity for the elite to shower the plebs – the true rules of Rome – with luxury.

For a ludus, being the most expensive in the business could be a competitive advantage. Editores often advertised the sums they spent, the victory prizes they awarded, and the numbers of animals slaughtered. (Most cities set aside a public budget for games, but not adding a multiple of it from your own pocket was political suicide.) Many games had additional gimmicks such as canvas sunroofs, perfumes sprinkled over the audience, or lotteries where chits for various prizes were tossed into the crowd. In Rome, some emperors went to ridiculous lengths, having a barrier to protect the audience from wild animals built from ivory or a lake dug for a mock sea battle.

Marcus Aurelius passed a law limiting the expenditures for provincial games. Despite the (generous) caps, if the ludus could offer a new or exotic thing, money was rarely an obstacle.

Nevertheless, munera were not simply free, although there is only one recorded instance of someone actually try-

ing to make money by charging admission for gladiatorial games. Most games – certainly those in Rome – had only a certain percentage of free seats (which tended to be the first filled, hours before the spectacle began). Admission was charged for the rest, presumably not a large sum, but money nonetheless. This went to the editor, who could use it to defray part of the cost of the games or for any other purpose. (One had a statue of himself built and set up in the town square from the proceeds.)

Editores paid the ludus they hired for each performer and animal, and for the use of each piece of equipment. Clowns, actors, dancers, or other acts could also be hired in from outside to round out the show. Animals to be killed in hunts or fights were purchased outright, while performing animals would only cost a rental fee. Gladiators cost a fee based on their skill, reputation, and fame. (If it matters, assume each fight costs 1/10th of a combatant's purchase price; see p. 24). Furthermore, the editor was contractually obliged to reimburse the lanista for the full value of each fighter killed. Some politicians – eager to demonstrate generosity – would insist on at least one high-value gladiator dying.

# TRANSPLANTING THE GAMES

Gladiators are almost a universal trope. Here are some settings where gladiators and arena combat are especially common occurrences.

## FANTASY

Fantasy games are a fertile field for gladiatorial combat. The Romans would have savored the possibilities of strange

racers, magical powers, and bizarre creatures to fight in their games. Most traditional fantasy worlds have something like a Roman Empire where gladiators from all over the world fight for the entertainment of decadent spectators. Campaigns combine urban refinement and low cunning with martial prowess the equal of any barbarian warrior. Gladiatorial games also offer a more standard adventuring party a way of earning money quickly by hiring on as fighters.

*Hermes – proud fighter with the warlike spear*  
*Hermes – threatening with the trident of Aquarius*  
*Hermes – fearsome even with his helmet drooping*  
*Hermes – glory of the warlike world*  
*Hermes – the only one to be three altogether*

– *Martial, Epigrams V 24*

In many fantasy settings, magic will be part of the games as a show element (mages can create spectacular scenery and fireworks) and in the hands of spell-slinging gladiators. Magic – in the form of Charm and Enslave spells – can go a long way to compelling reluctant gladiators to fight. Controlled animals can provide exciting elements – a human mind-controlling a hideous creature is a special challenge for even the best gladiators. Monsters and strange races, too, will be popular as opponents for the more normal (most likely human) fighters. Parties of hunters will set out to search for the last surviving cockatrice or an adult male mantichore to sell to their world's lanistae. The hunters could see this either as a high-risk business opportunity or as a source of enemies that ravage their pristine forests and peaceful villages. Not all gladiators are volunteers, and an unscrupulous hunter is not above kidnapping an unwilling candidate.

### **Roma Arcana**

The Roman civilization of Roma Arcana (detailed in *GURPS Fantasy*) has spread its love of the sport along with its borders. Rome, of course, has the Colosseum, but each outpost of civilization will have its own arena. The Games are much like those of historical Rome, but magic expands the possibilities of match-ups. Execution *ad bestias* can feature amphisbaenas, megalogryphons, or other strange beasts. Skin-turners might be prized captives for special exhibitions – they would provide an especially interesting challenge to a venator. Gladiator surgeons can use magic to heal the injuries of prized fighters, making each fight less of a financial risk to the owner. Mages might try to subtly aid gladiators they favor during a tight contest. Of course, such fight rigging is likely against the rules . . . requiring magistrates to investigate corruption and cheating among the ludi. Magical rituals to prevent such cheating would be customary for large and small games alike.

### **Banestorm**

Megalos, like the Roman empire it was patterned on, is a great supporter of the Games. Megalan arenas are briefly discussed in *GURPS Banestorm* (p. 87). Most of those who fight in the arena are slaves, but free men also participate, lured by the prize money and chance at fame.

Yrth is a fertile ground for interesting match-ups. Although the traditional gladiator types persist, modernized weaponry – larger swords, heavier armor – and a plethora of

fantastic races and beasts make for diverse games. Similarly, the arena may pull ideas from knightly jousts and melees, pitting mounted lancers against one another or encouraging winner-take-all massed battles. *Magical* gladiators are equally possible – although these are unlikely to be slaves, simply due to the danger and difficulty of keeping them. Mystical aid – using buffing spells, magical items, or elixirs – might be discouraged, allowed in certain duels, or forbidden outright, depending on the location or even the match. However, this is Megalos, and what the crowd likes, and the money-holders like, sets the rules. Magic will almost certainly be used to mark gladiators to prevent their escape, and to track them if they do.

### **Dungeon Fantasy**

Roman-style gladiators make an excellent addition to a group of delvers. Simply take the Gladiator template (p. 28) and apply either the Cinematic or Tough Guy lens, and then add another 50 points in the preferred martial arts style and *Typical Gladiator Advantages* (p. 18) to bring the template up to the 250-point *Dungeon Fantasy* starting total. Venatores also make superior critter-killers, especially with the option of Hidden Lore to cover knowledge of strange monsters.

Unlike their arena-based compatriots, dungeon-delving gladiators should wear better armor *or* use the Extra Option perk (p. 18) to access the Bulletproof Nudity rule.

Besides including gladiators themselves, groups may find great amusement subjecting a normal *Dungeon Fantasy* squad to some arena fighting. Some dungeons may feature arenas, tossing delvers into a team gladiator event. This is especially true for arenas created by mad wizards, lost civilizations, and forgotten gods of war. Opponents may be Roman-style gladiators, crazed monsters, or worse.

## **SCIENCE FICTION**

Science fiction universes sometimes feature a pseudo-Roman empire, so it's simple to bring in gladiators. The arena may broadcast live across the galaxy, the on-site spectators protected from wild beasts and stray shots by a force screen, and the retiarius may wield an energy net and a vibro-trident, but the action is much the same. In other science-fiction settings, mysterious alien races test the worthiness of other species by pitting their starship crewmen against one another in an arena.

## Post-Apocalyptic and Dystopian Futures

In the future, sports may become so violent they harken back to ancient gladiatorial games. Bloody kills are as important to the game's entertainment value as scoring points. Not all of these worlds feature the violent death of society before the blood sports arrive, but some do, leading to post-apocalypse gladiators. What these games lack of the refined opulence of the Colosseum and the classic murmillo vs. retiarius combat is made up for with a spike-lined pit and a foaming mutant foe.

The game *Car Wars* is a post-apocalypse gladiator game where the weapons used to fight in the arena are armed cars. The *Car Wars* setting shares a lot with ancient Rome. Poor people scramble to get by, while the wealthy entertain them with death sports. The "bread" is algae-based, the "circuses" are televised vehicular combat . . . and the gladiators themselves fight on the roads against marauding warriors.

The movie *Rollerball* (Norman Jewison, 1975, and John McTiernan, 2002) depicts one such violent sport. Other movies with gladiatorial-style arenas include the combative game of the Juggers in *The Blood of Heroes* (David Webb Peoples, 1989), the fighting ring of *Escape from New York* (John Carpenter, 1981), and the free-for-all Thunderdome from *Mad Max - Beyond Thunderdome* (George Miller and George Ogilvie, 1985).

## SUPERS

Comic books occasionally feature the plot device of the "super arena." Some alien race or ultra-powerful being tests superheroes, punishes villains, or entertains itself with exceptionally powerful gladiators. Robotic gladiators may provide the opposition, or supers may be forced to fight teammates. Superheroes may rely on their own powers, or they may be stripped of their powers by unknown abilities and forced to duke it out with net and trident instead of power blast and fist. Hugo Danner, from Philip Wylie's novel *Gladiator*, is a prototypical superhero who competes for a time as a professional fighter.

## HORROR

For those seeking a place where the restless dead haunt the living, where dark things from the dawn of time lurk in the shadows or humans warped by evil desires prey on their fellows, the arena is as promising a stage as anyone is likely to find. For all its show business glamour and martial professionalism, it is ultimately a place of pain and death equal to any dungeon. Imagine the possibilities that dying gladiators offer to a vampire, the feast that the despairing souls of the doomed prisoners are for a demon, or the joys a sadistic serial killer could find organizing executions

*ad bestias*. Unscrupulous lanistae or fighters could easily provide souls for powerful creatures from beyond in return for good fortune, success, and glory. If a real monster exists, an animal trainer could well try to capture and train it for display. If there is no such thing, turning captives into horribly disfigured freaks for the sideshow might still make a profitable sideline for an enterprising surgeon.

Playing horror inside the ludus could involve gladiator PCs finding out that something is amiss at their school. It could be the strange habits of the new physician, the inexplicable deaths of prisoners or new recruits, or the unsettling behavior of wild beasts. What terrors they uncover are up to the GM, but to scare men who kill for a living, they must be truly horrendous. Another option is to use the entire gladiatorial world as a monstrous entity: The ludus is a death factory, its gladiators, servants of evil. The doctores and lanistae are its high priests. Its executioners and physicians are twisted, sadistic fiends. The restless spirits of its numberless victims haunt its corridors. Freeing a friend or lover from the clutches of a ludus may be challenge enough for all but the most intrepid PCs. Furthermore, considering that the masses blindly stream into the amphitheaters to cheer this horror, the implications are staggering. What will arise from the Flavian Amphitheater when the stars are right?

## INFINITE WORLDS

Several of the timelines in *Infinite Worlds* have strong Roman themes, some with gladiatorial elements.

*Johnson's Rome*: In this timeline, the games still exist. The lethality has been toned down, featuring padded and often outlandish weaponry, while the spectacle has been ramped up. These games resemble more the pugnarius, professional wrestling, and a twisted version of mixed martial arts than the armatura of the Colosseum.

*Rome Aeterna*: The games are part of the tradition of Rome, but 1,500 years of drift have changed them. Traditional armatura co-exist with fighting styles based on Aerii (Plain Indians) cavalry tactics and Indian Kalaripayit . . . for a start.

*Rome-7*: The industrial revolution of 180 A.D. Rome has changed the games. Oil-driven TL(2+3) aeolicars battle in the Colosseum. The games feature as little regard for safety of the drivers as historical Romans had for that of the gladiators.



# GLOSSARY

- ad bestias:** “To the beasts”; court verdict sentencing the guilty party to be devoured by wild animals in the arena.
- ad judos:** “To the gladiator school”; court verdict sentencing the guilty party to become a gladiator.
- andabata** (pl. **andabatae**): Gladiator specializing in fighting blind.
- armatura** (pl. **armaturae**): Class of gladiator that fights with specific weapons.
- auctoratus** (pl. **auctorati**): Free volunteer gladiators bound to their employers by an oath.
- bestiarius** (pl. **bestiarii**): Another name for a venator (see p. 49).
- bustuarius** (pl. **bustuarii**): Early gladiator who fought in funeral games.
- cena libera:** Publicly held last meal of the gladiators before the games.
- cornicen** (pl. **cornicines**): Musician playing the cornu (a kind of trumpet).
- corona** (pl. **coronae**): Victory crown awarded to gladiators who proved themselves especially brave or skilled in the arena.
- crupellarius** (pl. **crupellarii**): Gladiator class that fights in especially heavy armor.
- dimachaerus** (pl. **dimachaeri**): Gladiator specializing in fighting with two swords.
- doctor** (pl. **doctores**): Gladiator trainer. Usually, there is one doctor for each gladiator class: *doctor secutorum*, *doctor retiariorum*, *doctor murmillorum*, etc.
- editor** (pl. **editores**): Wealthy sponsor of gladiatorial games.
- eques** (pl. **equites**): Gladiator class that fights mounted.
- essedarius** (pl. **essedarii**): Gladiator class that fights with javelins, a large shield, and a short sword. Essedarii may have fought riding in chariots.
- galerus** (pl. **galeri**): Metal plate mounted vertically on the shoulder to protect the head from sideways blows. Worn by the retiarius instead of a helmet.
- gladiatrix** (pl. **gladiatrices**): A woman gladiator.
- gladius** (pl. **gladii**): Roman short sword used by some gladiators.
- habet:** “He’s got it”; cheer of the audience when a blow strikes home.
- harenarius** (pl. **harenarii**): Servant in the arena.
- hoplomachus** (pl. **hoplomachi**): Gladiator class that fights with small shields and spears.
- hydraularius** (pl. **hydraularii**): Musician playing the hydraulis water organ.
- infamia:** Lesser legal status enforced on gladiators, performers, and other “dishonorable” professions.
- iugula:** “Cut his throat”; demand by the audience for the death of a defeated fighter.
- iuventus:** “The youth”; civic organization of young men. Membership often included basic weapons training provided by gladiator trainers or during militia duties.
- lanista** (pl. **lanistae**): Owner-manager of a gladiator stable.
- laquearius** (pl. **laquearii**): Gladiator specializing in the use of the lasso.
- ludus** (pl. **ludi**): Gladiator stable providing fighters and performers for games.
- manica** (pl. **manicae**): Arm armor, usually made from padded linen, though metal examples also existed.
- missio:** Reprieve for a defeated gladiator.
- missus:** Losing gladiator who received a reprieve.
- munus** (pl. **munera**): Gladiatorial games.
- murmillo** (pl. **murmillones**): Gladiator class that fights with a large shield and sword.
- naumachia** (pl. **naumachiae**): Staged sea battle with gladiators on ships.
- paegnarius** (pl. **paegnarii**): Arena clown who pretended to be a gladiator, armed with sticks and whips.
- palus:** The wooden post used for training fencing moves; also, a gladiator ranking.
- parma** (pl. **parmae**): A small shield.
- parma equestris:** Small round leather shield used by the eques.

## Pronouncing Latin: A Quick and Dirty Guide

There are several accepted pronunciation systems for Latin today, the most common one of which is the “Italian” form used by the Catholic Church, so-called ecclesiastical Latin. Since modern scholars do not know with certainty how Latin was pronounced in antiquity, no system is better than any other. However, it is likely that Classical Latin sounded different from modern Church style. To approximate it, you can follow these rules.

There are no silent consonants.  
C is always pronounced K, never S or CH.

S is always sharp (S), never Z.  
In SC, the S is always pronounced separately (S-K).  
R is rolled on the tongue, never soft.  
Vowels are open and usually spoken separate from each other (IU = I-U, AE = A-E, etc.)  
A, I, and U are always spoken as single sounds (A, I, U), never as diphthongs (Ei, Ai, or Iu).  
Words are usually stressed on the second-to-last syllable (reti-**a**-rius, la-**nis**-ta).



*[This is a form of entertainment that] is well suited to arouse admiration for honorable wounds and instructs people to view death with disdain when they see how even criminals and slaves demonstrate love of glory and desire for victory.*

*Pliny the Younger, Panegyric 33.1ff*

**parmularius** (pl. **parmularii**): General term for all gladiators that fight with a small shield.

**pompe**: Parade of the gladiators before the games.

**pons** (pl. **pontes**): Fighting platform defended by one gladiator against others.

**primus palus**: “First post”; highest-ranking gladiator in his class in a gladiator school.

**prolusio**: Display fight with wooden weapons before the actual bout. Usually part of the morning program, with real fights scheduled in the afternoon.

**provocator** (pl. **provocatores**): Gladiator class that fights with swords and large shields.

**pugilist**: Athlete trained in Greek-style boxing or pankration.

**quadrens** (pl. **quandrentes**): Four-pronged stabbing weapon.

**rete** (pl. **retae**): Weighted throwing net used by the retiarius.

**retiarius** (pl. **retiarum**): Gladiator class that fights with a trident and a net.

**rudarius** (pl. **rudarii**): Freed gladiator no longer under obligation to fight.

**rudis** (pl. **rudēs**): Wooden staff; also, the wooden sword that signifies a gladiator’s freedom.

**samnes** (pl. **samnites**): Republican-era gladiator class that fights with a large shield and sword, and possibly javelins.

**scissor** (pl. **scissores**): Gladiator class that fights with a sword and special armored bladed glove.

**scutarius** (pl. **scutarii**): General term for all gladiators that fight with a large shield.

**scutum** (pl. **scuta**): Large, curved, rectangular or oval shield used by some gladiators.

**secunda rudis**: Assistant referee in gladiatorial fights.

**secundus palus**: “Second post”; second-highest-ranking gladiator in his class in a gladiator school.

**secutor** (pl. **secutores**): Gladiator class that fights with a large shield and short sword.

**sica** (pl. **sicae**): Curved or angled sword used by the thraex.

**sine missione**: “Without reprieve”; fights where the loser is always killed.

**spongia** (pl. **spongiae**): Small metal breastplate worn by the provocator. It only covers the upper chest.

**stans missus**: “Dismissed while standing”; both gladiators are released from a fight without a loser. A particularly honorable event.

**summa rudis**: Senior referee in gladiatorial fights.

**tertius palus**: “Third post”; third-highest-ranking gladiator in his class in a gladiator school.

**thraex** (pl. **thraeces**): Gladiator class that fights with a small shield and a curved sword.

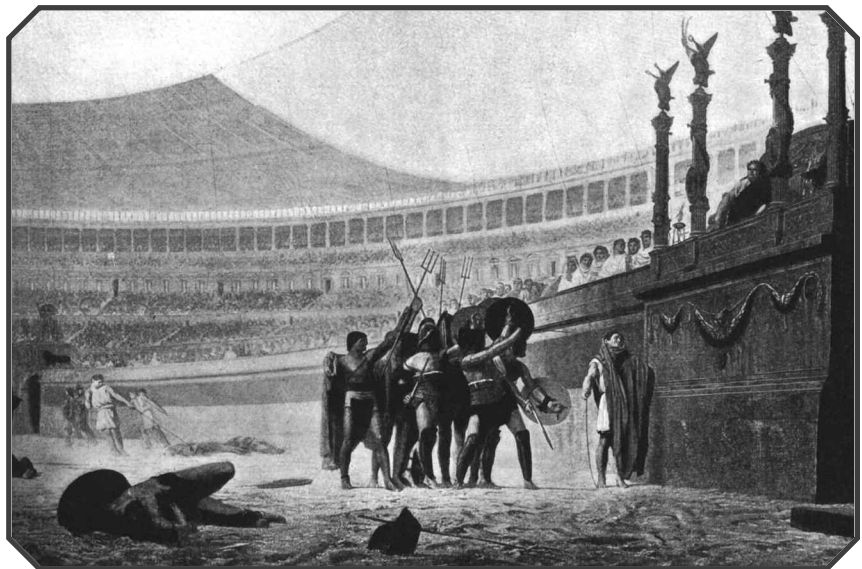
**tibicen** (pl. **tibicines**): Musician playing the tibia (a kind of flute).

**tiro** (pl. **tirones**): Recruit.

**trident** (Latin, **tridens**; pl. **tridentes**): Three-pronged spear used by the retiarius.

**venatio** (pl. **venationes**): Fight between wild animals or animals and humans in the arena.

**venator** (pl. **venatores**): Fighter who faces wild animals in the arena.



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*To the spirit of the secutor  
and primus palus Urbicus  
from Florence, who fought 13  
times and lived for 22 years.  
The stone was set by his  
daughter Olympias, aged 5  
months, and his daughter  
Fortunensis and his wife  
Lauricia, to her good husband  
of seven years. I admonish you  
that if you defeat someone, you  
must kill him.*

– Gravestone from Milan

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