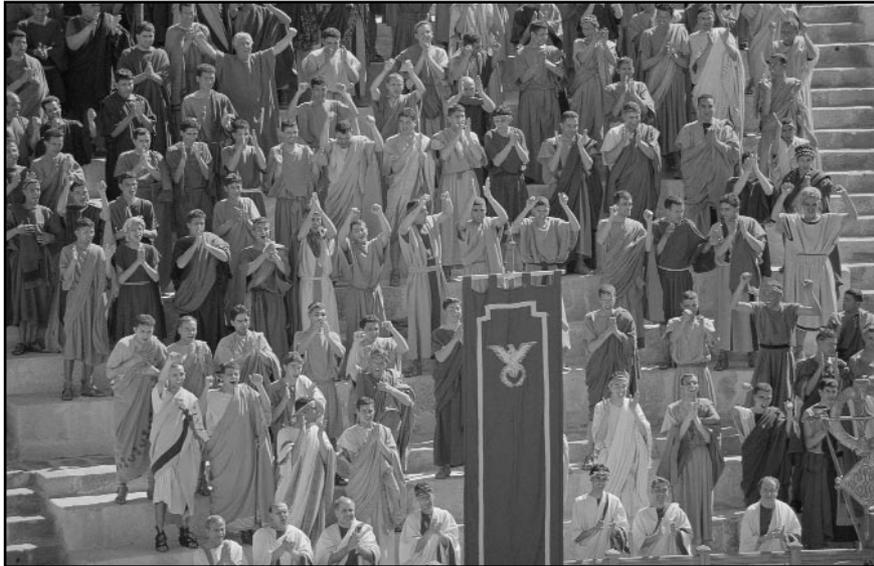


Colosseum – Rome’s Arena Of Death



The Colosseum in Rome is one of the world’s most amazing buildings. Built over a 10-year period during the reign of Emperor Vespasian and completed in AD80, this immense oval stadium – bigger than Wembley Arena – was home to the most violent and deadly spectator sport in history; gladiatorial combat.

Gladiators thrilled and titillated the 55,000 spectators who regularly filled the Colosseum. They were literally the life-blood of the arena. One of the greatest of them all was Verus, whose story is told in *Colosseum – Rome’s Arena Of Death*. Like the fictional character Maximus in the blockbuster movie *Gladiator*, Verus was a slave who rose through the ranks of gladiatorial combat to win his freedom. Unlike Maximus, he really existed and is one of the only gladiators to have had one of his fights recorded in history.

Escaping the relentless grind of slave labour in the stone quarries, Verus is taken on as a trainee fighter and learns the complex and highly skilled techniques of the gladiator. He

forges friendships with other trainee gladiators and learns that life as a gladiator can be nasty, brutish and short. But he also learns that, with luck, skill and sheer courage, a star gladiator can become rich, attract admiring hordes of women and, ultimately, earn his freedom.

“Only if you understand the Roman arena can you understand what ancient Rome was all about,” says producer Tilman Remme. “For hundreds of years, gladiatorial games were right at the heart of Roman society. Romans couldn’t get enough of it.

“Yet, amazingly, the image we have of gladiators as victims of Roman blood lust simply doesn’t stand up. Gladiators were the celebrities of their age. Not only were they tempted by the thrills of the fight, but there were also huge winnings to be had if they succeeded. For a slave destined to die in one of Rome’s cruel quarries or mines, the chance to become a gladiator was his only hope of ever regaining freedom.



Colosseum – Rome’s Arena Of Death

“Gladiators still strike a chord today because they were the ultimate warriors. Not only were their skills as fighters without parallel, they were also known as ‘netters of women at night’ – a heady combination.”

Colosseum – Rome’s Arena Of Death follows Verus’s rise to fame and relives his dramatic fight during the inaugural games at the Colosseum when he faces a new and terrible challenge. Can Verus’s performance on the day earn him a wooden sword and his freedom, or is he destined for a glorious but bloody death?

The film also explores the building of the Colosseum and reveals the beauty and ambition of its design. With corridors and staircases leading from 76 public entrances to convey 55,000 spectators to their seats in minutes, the Colosseum also had a maze of subterranean passages and chambers which kept gladiators and wild animals in readiness below. Platforms raised by pulleys to concealed trap doors in the arena floor provided additional excitement.

Using drama reconstruction, choreographed fight sequences and state-of-the-art special effects, *Colosseum – Rome’s Arena Of Death* takes viewers back to a time and a place where fights to the death, not penalty shoot-outs, made spectators’ pulses race.

The main characters

Verus



He was born a free man but, in AD76, Verus was captured on the north east frontier of the Roman Empire. Verus was brought back to Italy and forced into slavery. He worked for a year in a quarry, before seizing his chance to train as a gladiator. He rose through the ranks to become a star gladiator.

The character of Verus is based on an historic figure, described by the Court poet, Martial, as having fought one of the most momentous fights in the history of gladiatorial games.

Priscus

A slave from Gaul (now France) and recorded by the poet Martial as having



fought against Verus in the inaugural games of the Colosseum.

Vespasian

After Nero’s death, four different emperors ruled Rome but, eventually, Vespasian took over in AD69. He wanted to forge a new dynasty for this family (the Flavians) and, as a symbol of his imperial power, he set in place a vast building programme, including the Colosseum. He died in AD79 and was succeeded by his son, Titus.

Titus

As a youth, Titus had briefly trained in a gladiator school and, on one occasion, had

Colosseum – Rome’s Arena Of Death



Titus was one of the most popular emperors in Roman history

To hold onto power, he decided to curry favour with the populace, by laying on extremely lavish inaugural games when the Colosseum was completed. His reign was far shorter than his father’s. He died of a mysterious illness only six months after the inaugural games. News of his death was greeted with spontaneous mourning. The games had turned Titus into one of the most popular emperors in Roman history.

even entered the arena for a mock fight against another nobleman. He was the general in charge of the successful Roman campaign against Judea in AD71. According to the historian, Josephus, Titus told his soldiers: “The Jews are inspired by audacity and desperation. We are inspired by disciplined courage and bravery. They face the dangers of war to defend their Liberty. What greater prize could we win, than Glory?”

According to another writer, Suetonius, Titus was well known in Rome as a lover of cruelty – in Judea he had regularly watched the crucifixion of captured prisoners. Even before his father’s death, Titus was a powerful man. He jointly held the Roman censorship with the emperor as well as seven consulships. He was also in command of the Praetorian Guards – the only armed force allowed inside Rome. He had a veritable army of informers, effectively turning Rome into a police state. He became Emperor in AD79 on his father’s death, having killed off many of his political enemies. In AD80, parts of Rome were struck by fire, and Pompeii and Herculaneum were destroyed by volcanic eruptions. Already unpopular as a ruler, this put further question marks over Titus’s right to rule.

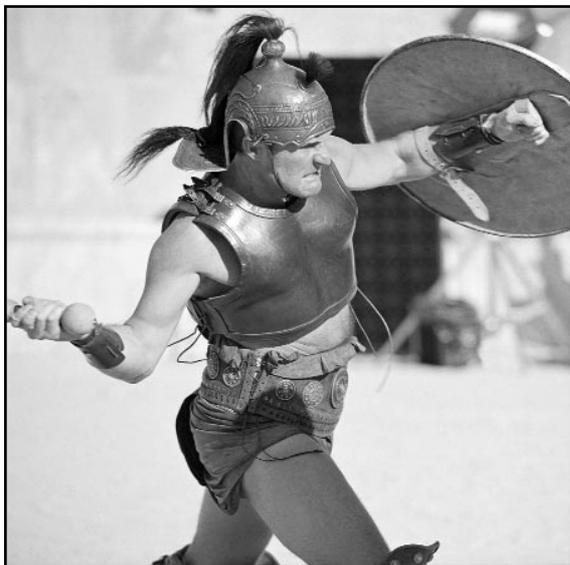
Fascinating facts

- The Colosseum is the largest and most expensive Roman arena ever built. It replaced a wooden arena which had been burned down under the emperor Nero.
- Booty from the Roman's successful capture of the Temple of Jerusalem paid for the building of the Colosseum. This included a golden table weighing several hundredweight and a lamp stand of solid gold.
- Concrete was a new invention that made building a huge structure like the Colosseum possible. Roman concrete was made with volcanic sand which gave extra strength to the material and even allowed it to set under water. The Colosseum stood at a staggering 160ft high.
- Gladiatorial fights started out as funeral rituals for wealthy citizens. Over the centuries, they evolved into popular entertainment.
- The inaugural games for the Colosseum lasted over 100 days.
- Gladiators were graded into 10 levels. A top level gladiator was worth 15 times the yearly salary of a legionnaire.
- Far from all being slaves, by the second century AD, over a third of all gladiators were volunteers.
- There were over 12 different types of gladiator, including Murmillos, who carried large shields and long swords; Thracians, who fought like Greeks; and the Retarius, who used a net and trident as weapons.
- Nemesis was the goddess of chance, fortune and revenge – and the patron of Roman gladiators.
- Contrary to popular myth, not every fight resulted in a fatality. Gladiators had a 90 per cent chance of surviving each fight. Many retired after successful careers.
- Gladiators formed burial clubs to pay for a dead gladiator's funeral. Without proper burial, the dead were cursed to roam the earth forever as ghosts.
- So many wild beasts were killed in gladiatorial games that some exotic animals became virtually extinct. Hippopotami were no longer seen in Egypt, elephants died out in northern Africa and lions disappeared from the near East.
- To make them attack humans, lions and tigers were fed on human flesh, and then starved before games. Even then, they didn't always attack.

Feature: Gladiators – Natural Trained Killers

Stunt/fight co-ordinator Andreas Petrides knows better than most exactly how tough Rome’s gladiators must have been. He, along with colleague Nick Powell, arranged all of the fights for the blockbuster film *Gladiator*, and trained Russell Crowe and Joachim Phoenix in the not-so-gentle art of sword play.

“Personally, I can’t comprehend what it must have been like walking into the arena with thousands of people cheering you on, knowing you’d got to kill someone or be killed. They must have been disciplined, highly motivated individuals. The pressure must have been unbelievable.”



The fight scenes in the film were choreographed by Andreas Petrides

Joining the cast and crew of *Colosseum – Rome’s Arena Of Death* as action director and stunt/fight co-ordinator, Andreas’s job was to make the BBC’s fight sequences exciting and riveting to watch, but historically accurate as well.

“I’d already done a lot of historical research when I worked on *Gladiator* and, due to the nature of the BBC documentary, we had to make sure we were as near to 100 per cent accurate as possible.”

Most people have an image of a typical gladiator but, in fact, there were many different kinds of gladiatorial combat, with over a dozen categories, each with their own costume and weaponry. Many of these were drawn from the tactics of real soldiers and barbarians from the regions within the Empire. Murmillo means fish-head, and these gladiators fought like the Gauls with a large shield and long swords.

Thracians fought like the Greeks, with small, square shields and short, straight swords, whilst the Retarius used his net both to disable his opponent and to lash out at him. Because he resembled a fisherman and fought an essentially defensive fight, he was considered the lowest category of gladiator. Other gladiators were trained to fight on horseback.

“A trainee gladiator would have been assessed right from the start, and either trained up for one-on-one fighting or, if he was less lucky, selected as a crowdsman – basically cannon fodder,” explains Andreas.

Andreas choreographed all the fight stunts, working closely with the director/producer, Tilman Remme, and he actually stood in for Verus during training sessions whilst waiting for Robert Shannon to be cast in the role. “I had about three weeks to train Rob for the fights, and I have to say he really shone.” Learning fight sequences is like learning a dance. First of all you learn the moves, then

Colosseum – Rome’s Arena Of Death

you learn the routines, and finally you work on the style. Style includes aggression, speed and the powerful body language of a gladiator. You have to look like an expert fighter.

“I watch people during their training, video them and then play the sequences back to them, so we can work on their faults. If you don’t have enough rehearsal time, or actors are slow to learn, the director has to go for close-up shots. The wider the shot the weaker the fight technique and style may look.”

So can actors have any real sense of what it was like to fight as a gladiator? “People do get injured in staged fights – you should see the state of my fingers after 14 years in the business. I usually start complete novices on rubber weapons, which they can knock around and do no damage with. Then you work up to a wooden sword and, eventually, get them onto metal swords. These are made from mild steel or aluminium, so they’re light and made without sharp edges. The problem starts after several takes, when the edges become serrated and jagged and need to be filed down. This may happen as often as 10 times during a day’s filming.”



Gladiators didn’t just fight in Rome. They could be found right across the Roman Empire, wherever there was an arena to pitch fights in. “We filmed in Tunisia for the BBC, in locations where real gladiators are known to have fought,” says Andreas. “The heat was intense. Those gladiators would have had to be super fit to survive. Every so often I’d become aware that I was standing in exactly the same place as real-life gladiators had actually fought and died – we were only separated by time. That really makes you think.”

Biographies

Laurence Rees **Co-executive producer**

Laurence Rees is currently Creative Director of BBC History. In 1994, he launched *Reputations*, the BBC’s historical biographical strand and went on to become editor of the award-winning *Timewatch* strand, for which he won three Emmy Awards. Laurence has a raft of acclaimed history series to his name, including the six-part series for BBC Two, *The Nazis – A Warning From History*, which won him a BAFTA award in 1998.

Jonathan Stamp **Executive producer**

Jonathan Stamp is currently Director of Development for BBC History. “*Pyramid* was such a huge success last year, gaining the highest-ever audience for a history programme on British television. We’re excited because we feel that we’re building on those successful techniques to bring history even more effectively and excitingly to the widest possible audience.”

His BBC production credits include *Pyramid; Behind Bars*, a six-part series about imprisonment, which won the Howard League Media Award; BBC Two’s *Reputations* about Coco Chanel; and several programmes for BBC Two’s *Timewatch*. He was nominated for an Emmy as Best Director and also Best Writer for *Timewatch: Kamikazi* and has won two Emmy Awards for *Allied To The Mafia* and *The True Story Of The Roman Arena*, as well as Special Jury Prizes at the New York and San Francisco Film Festivals for the same films. He has also received an Amnesty International

Special Jury Award for *On Behalf Of The State* – a film about capital punishment in Britain.

Tilman Remme **Writer, producer, director**

Tilman Remme is a producer/director with BBC History. His credits include numerous *Timewatch* documentaries, including the recent documentary on King Akhenaten of Egypt, as well as three films in a series on the history of crime investigation, *Catching The Killers*. He was series associate producer for the award-winning *Nazis – A Warning from History*.

Robert Shannon **(Verus)**

Robert Shannon’s film work includes *Charlotte Grey, Too Real* and *Love, Honour & Obey*. He has also appeared in *2.4children, The Bill* and *Night Life Legends*.

Derek Lea **(Priscus)**

A member of the British Stunt Register, Derek Lea has appeared in numerous TV productions and over 30 feature films, including *Captain Corelli’s Mandolin, Die Another Day, Gladiator, Titanic* and *Hamlet*.