

I fought at the Coliseum, or My time as a gladiator (version 2)

By Joseph Varty

I moved off the wall, and worked my arms and legs. I had stood in this passageway for what seemed like hours. I had had lost count of the bodies that had been carried past me. Outside in the arena the crowd shouted and screamed. I could hear the clash of steel, and the two gladiators fought for their lives. The tunnel reaching to the arena was short and I could see the sand and the two marks where the dead bodies had been dragged and dumped on the cart, that when full would be taken out and the dead bodies would be dumped into the river Tiber. Over two hundred bodies had been thrown into the water in the last three days; an easy way to get rid of the dead.

Two long tables stood in the passageway, one near to me was covered in swords, blunt, marked and covered in blood, waiting to be cleaned and sharpened for the next day of games. The other tables was full of swords, sharp and deadly, waiting for us to take, shields of different sizes rested against the table, and rows of helmets waiting to be worn.

Suddenly, the crowd started yelling, "Kill! Kill! Kill!", forty to fifty thousand of them wanting blood. In my mind I could see the Emperor run his hand across his throat, a sign of death, and the crowd fell silent and I knew the deathblow had been done. A few seconds later, the victor came into the tunnel, throwing his sword onto the table, the blood still wet and running, the shield was next and the helmet followed. He walked past me and headed towards the gladiator rooms.

I turned and looked down the long passageway where twenty or so men waited for life or death. Into the short tunnel as slave came carrying the helmet, sword and shield belonging to the dead man. Then we waited – what happened next I will tell at a later time. After a while, the body was dragged in and dumped onto the cart. Now it was my turn, and my opponent and I moved towards the tables and collected our shield, sword and helmet. I picked a helmet with big eyelets to see through.

As we came out of the tunnel and into the arena, the sun was still warm and I could feel the sand running into the toes of my sandals. This was my ninth fight, and the gods willing, I will win. As we walked towards the Emperor we were joined by the stick man whose job it was to see fair play. As we drew near to where the Emperor sat, the stick man stopped and my fellow gladiator and I stood and looked up at the Emperor. We crossed our arms over our chests and shouted, "We, who are about to die, salute you." We then turned and made our way to where the stick man stood, his white stick lying in the sand. We stood at either side of the stick, our swords raised. My heart felt as if it was going to be burst, so fast was it beating. My mouth was dry and I ran my tongue over my lips.

Then the stick was removed and we clashed. For three to four minutes we hacked at one another. It seemed as if my spirit was working for me, my shield moved back and sideways, taking the blows of his sword. I knew this was his first fight; he had forgotten what he had been taught over his six months training. He was like a wild bull, wanting his first kill.

As he moved forward I moved aside and brought my sword down with all the power of my body. The blade of my sword stuck the side of his helmet, steel hitting steel sent tingles up my arm. He staggered to one side, his shield dropped down and exposed his shoulder. With a roar and gritting my teeth, I brought my sword down, cutting into the skin, down through the nerves and onto the bone. I twisted the blade sideways to open the cut and pulled the sword out, warm blood gushed out. His sword left his hand, the nerves lost to fold it, and he dropped onto his knees. I moved in and I brought the steel edge of my shield into the side of his neck, cutting the skin and making a large wound. Down he went, and I moved in for the kill.

The rules are the Emperor is the one to give the sign of life or death, but my fire, my lust to kill, drove me to a deft of madness, but it was not to be , My sword thrust was stopped by the pole of the stick man. “Stay your kill, Varticus”, he said. We looked at the Emperor, and I could hear the crowd – they were wild. Forty to fifty thousand of them shouting in one voice, “Kill! Kill! Kill!” I shook my head and thought, “I am a slave, the lowest of the low, yet the People of Rome were like wolves baying for blood. The Emperor rand his fingers over his throat and I shoved my sword into my opponent’s throat and out to the back of his neck, pulled my sword back to me and I walked back toward the tunnel. I was passed by a young salve who went to get the dead man’s armour and walked with the stick man into the tunnel.

For the next few minutes the crowd went silent, fear stopped their shouting, and the reason for their fear came out of the tunnel on the far side of the arena. A huge figure of man wearing a devil mask – this was the god of the underworld – came to collect the spirit of the dead man. On reaching the body, he sent the large hammer he was carrying crashing down to shatter the dead man’s skull, letting the brain and blood run into the sand. With a smile he turned and walked back into the tunnel. His job of sending the dead man’s spirit into the underworld was done. Two slaves ran and collected the body, dragging it into the tunnel and dumping it onto the car alongside the other bodies.

Two more gladiators collected their weapons and with the stickman walked into the arena. As for me, I walked though the passageway and into the training school and turned into where the swimming pool was. A few women slaves sat there and watched and I removed my leather garments and being naked, lowered my body into the cool water. I ran my hands over my head and body to wipe the blood and sweat away and spent a few moments floating about. After a time I cleared out and one of the girls rubbed be down with a large cover, and then on lying on a large table, warm oil was spread over my body and soft fingers worked their magic easing the stiffness away.

A gown was placed over me and I left and made my way to my den, one room. A thousand of these small rooms with had only a bed, a chair, and our leather gear hanging on the walls. I removed my ribe and lay on the straw covered mattress and then the shakes came at me, the aftershocks of my fight, and after a while my body settled down, and I lay there wondering how many more fights, how many more killings must I do to get my freedom, my wooden sword and be a free man again.

My thoughts were brought down to earth when the door opened and Katrina came in. She was eighteen to twenty years of age and worked in the kitchen cooking and serving the food to the gladiators. She was tall and slim, she said nothing, just smiling. She let her robe slip to the floor, and she was naked as the day she was born. She moved towards me and I thought, 'What the hell, I live to fight another day', and reached for her.

The End.