

# ROMAN TIMES

THE SKINNY ON WHAT WENT DOWN IN ANCIENT ROME

## Who's Your Daddy? Or, how society was organized

Everyone in Rome and their families belong to one of the hierarchical social classes--with slaves at the bottom, freedmen above them, and free-born citizens at the top.

The free citizens are also divided by class. The Patriarch families, could trace their ancestry to one of the 100 Patriarchs who established ancient Rome in the 8th Century BC. The plebeians were the wealthy and successful class, but their ancestry could not be traced to the founding of the city. Established by the Patriarchs, the Senatorial class dominated politics and commanded the Roman military. As time went on, Plebeians were allowed to join the Senate if and when they could elevate themselves to a status where they were accepted. This class division became less important in the later Republic, as some plebeian families became wealthy and entered politics, and some patrician families fell on hard times.

## Let The Games Begin!

Adapted from an ancient Etruscan funeral ritual of sacrifice, the gladiator games became an exhibition of sport and battle. The games took place in amphitheaters where the combatants would fight one another – often to the death. Gladiators would be sent to the arena – where sand covered the ground and soaked up the blood – to fight publicly before the crowds.

Most gladiators were slaves who were despised by the public, trained under harsh conditions, socially marginalized and segregated even in death. Gladiators offered audiences an example of Rome's martial ethics. By fighting or dying well, they could inspire values such as respect for human life, moral principles and moral conduct, modesty, eagerness, self-discipline, and persistence, and in doing so gain public admiration and popular acclaim. The games were so popular that successful gladiators could become extremely rich and very famous. As a result, some gladiators were freedmen who chose to fight, either as a way to achieve fame and fortune, or simply because they enjoyed it.

## WHO IS REALLY IN CHARGE HERE?

The editor of a game (a senator, emperor or other politico) made the final decisions about the fates of the gladiators in the arena. However, since the games were to curry public favor, the editor paid much attention to the wishes of the audience. Much of the audience attended the brutal events for the single purpose of witnessing the bravery of a gladiator in the face of death.



**THUMBS UP!** If a gladiator fought well, a “thumbs up” signal from the editor was given and the gladiator's life was spared.

**THUMBS DOWN!** If an editor, and/or the crowd, were not satisfied by the battle, then a “thumbs down” signal was given by the editor and the defeated gladiator was killed.



Gladiatorial contests provided mass entertainment during the early Roman times. However, over time, some members of the upper classes grew unhappy with their brutality. Despite disapproval, the popularity of the games continued and, along with chariot races, would form the backbone of public Roman entertainment for centuries to come.

## Blessed By The Gods

Due to their strong belief that the divine was continually watching over them, any good fortune to that fell upon a Roman was looked upon as approval from their dieties.

This short profile of Roman life gives you a quick portrait of the cultural background for Terror in a Toga. For more resources and interesting tidbits of knowledge including: appropriate costume tips, amusing Roman verbage to use at the party, some appropriate weapons and costume accessories and more, please see:

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