



The Gladiators: History's Most Deadly Sport

By Fik Meijer

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Superfit, muscled, and macho, gladiators were hero-worshipped for their skills and courage as they fought to the death, yet despised for their humble status. For over six cruel centuries, tens of thousands died in the blood soaked arenas of Rome and its colonies, watched by enthralled crowds screaming for violence. Professor Fik Meijer has ingeniously pieced together their true stories from contemporary evidence, describing the gladiators' origins, daily life, training, and the odds of their survival pitted against their legions of fans' lust for blood and spectacle.

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The Gladiators: History's Most Deadly Sport By Fik Meijer Bibliography

- Sales Rank: #404072 in Books
- Published on: 2007-03-06
- Released on: 2007-03-06
- Original language: English
- Number of items: 1
- Dimensions: 8.50" h x .65" w x 5.50" l, .56 pounds
- Binding: Paperback
- 288 pages

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Editorial Review

From Publishers Weekly

Locked in mortal combat before 50,000 cheering spectators in the Colosseum, the two gladiators thrust and parry until the crowd gets what it came for: one dead athlete and one living, victorious athlete. While the games themselves might have been exciting for the Roman crowds, Meijer's listless prose and superficial examination of the gladiator's life and work fails to capture any of the excitement, terror and pride that the gladiators and spectators must have felt. In pedantic fashion, he provides a survey of the different types of gladiators, the kinds of animals they fought, the dimensions of the Colosseum and other amphitheaters and the daily life of a gladiator. As many other books have pointed out, the gladiators themselves were slaves or prisoners of war who were rigorously trained in the sport. Meijer (*Emperors Don't Die in Bed*), a professor of ancient history at the University of Amsterdam, also describes a typical day at the Colosseum that featured hunters fighting animals, followed by executions of criminals during lunch and finally human combat. Apart from a tendentious and nitpicky critique of the historical accuracy of the films *Spartacus* and *The Gladiator*, Meijer adds nothing new to our knowledge about gladiators. 55 b&w illus. (Dec.)

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Review

“Forget Russell Crowe in a skirt and sandals, this is the real deal if you want to know about blood and guts in the arena. The author has pieced together thousands of documents, eyewitness testimonies, and engravings to tell in vivid detail the story of the gladiators of ancient Rome.” ?*The Daily Mail [UK]*

“Fik Meijer, a professor of ancient history in Amsterdam, gives fascinating insight into Ancient Rome's gladiators. ... An in-depth book....” ?*The Big Issue*

“[Meijer] has written a history that is at once interesting, informative, and fast-paced. Thumbs up or thumbs down? No contest.” ?*Leeds Guide*

About the Author

FIK MEIJER is a Professor of Ancient History at the University of Amsterdam and is the author of *Emperors Don't Die in Bed*. His next book will be a study of Rome's charioteers.

Users Review

From reader reviews:

Roger Cowen:

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