**Gladiators: Roman Entertainment**

**Gladiators, Chariots, and the Roman Games**

Two men ready their weapons. An excited crowd of Romans cheer loudly in anticipation. Both combatants realize that this day might be their last. They are gladiators, men who fight to the death for the enjoyment of others.

As the two gladiators circle each other, each knows that his objective is to injure or trap his opponent rather than to kill him quickly. What's more, the fight must last long enough to please the crowd.

The gladiators jab swords and swing clubs. They sweat in the hot sun. Sand and dirt fly. Suddenly, one gladiator traps the other with a net and is ready to kill him with a three-pronged trident. The victor waits for a sign from the crowd. If the losing gladiator has put up a good fight, the crowd might choose to spare his life — and the defeated gladiator will live to fight another day. But if the crowd is dissatisfied with the losing fighter — as was usually the case — the victorious gladiator kills the loser.

In ancient Rome, death had become a form of entertainment.

**Roman Warriors**

The Romans were known for having a fierce and strong army. Those in the army were kept to a strict standard, and disobeying orders or acting cowardly during a battle was not accepted. If a soldier did not obey orders, he was beaten to death by his fellow soldiers. This was to ensure that everyone knew the importance of following orders.   
  
It is no surprise, then, that the Roman government used the gladiator contests in the same way. The Romans held the gladiator games between 10 and 12 times a year. Paid for by the emperor, the games were used to keep the poor and unemployed entertained and occupied. The emperor hoped to distract the poor from their poverty (extreme poorness) in the hopes that they would not rebel. Roman citizens lived in a society wherein disobedience could easily lead to a gruesome and violent death.

The gladiators themselves were usually slaves, criminals, or prisoners of war. Occasionally, the gladiators were able to fight for their freedom. Criminals who were sentenced to death were sometimes thrown into the arena unarmed to serve their sentence. Some people, including women, actually volunteered to be gladiators. They were willing to risk death for the possibility of fame and glory. Many gladiators went to special schools that trained them how to fight.

Some gladiatorial contests included animals such as bears, rhinos, tigers, elephants, and giraffes. Most often, hungry animals fought other hungry animals. But sometimes hungry animals fought against gladiators in contests called *venationes* ("wild beast hunts"). On rare occasions, the animals were allowed to maul and eat a live human who was tied to a stake. Nearly 50% of gladiators died each show.

**Roman Medicine**

Doctors in Rome were quite advanced for the time period. There is evidence that Romans were able to perform cataract surgery. They used a thin needle to push through the eye and break up the cataract. Then with the small hole in the needle, the broken up pieces could be suctioned out. This procedure restored at least a moderate amount of sight for the patient.

Perhaps the most amazing operations were performed on the brain. Roman surgeons gave relief to those with incurable headaches and relieved pressure on the brain as a result of head injuries. Patients had a high survival rate.

The tools of surgery have given us an insight into the methods and advancement of surgery in Rome. Some of the best discoveries of these tools come from the remains of the city of Pompeii, the city buried in 79 AD after the eruption of the volcano, Mount Vesuvius. Archaeologists have uncovered the house of a surgeon. Within his house he had several tools including a scalpel, scissors, and bone forceps, giving clues to the process of surgery and treatment in Roman society.

Doctors also knew how to help relieve pain during surgery. Opium poppies, today an ingredient of morphine was used to limit movement and induce sleep during surgery. Because of this, surgery was less painful and harsh process for the patient.

Roman doctors did not, unfortunately, know much about curing diseases. Simple sickness was so difficult to determine by the average doctor, and many deaths in the ancient world were attributed to poisoning. This paranoia led to the development of many antidotes, some of which worked, and others that didn't, but much of the research provided valuable information for later doctors.

Any mineral, plant, liquid or animal part could be used in treatment of diseases. Combinations of exotic ingredients, with the blessings of the gods were made in widely diverse mixtures depending on the location. While some may have been helpful, others did nothing, or were even more harmful. In fact, Mercury, a known human toxin, was a common ingredient in many medical 'cures'. Still, the Romans understood that some natural products could help with illness and doctors worked tirelessly to help ill patients.

















