



Malta
Classics
Association

MELITA CLASSICA

Vol. 9
2023

*Journal of the
Malta Classics Association*

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Melita Classica

Vol. 9, 2023

Text © Malta Classics Association
Design and layout © Book Distributors Limited

ISBN: 978-9918-21-249-1

Malta Classics Association,

The Department of Classics and Archaeology,
Archaeology Farmhouse, Car park 6,
University of Malta, Msida

info@classicsmalta.org

www.classicsmalta.org

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Editorial

The finished product is not always indicative of all the work that goes into its production, and academic journals such as this *Melita Classica* are no different. The papers contained within this year's volume are, no different to others in previous editions of the *Melita Classica* and those in other works and publications, the product of hours of research, study and hard work by authors dedicated to producing a work representative of their broader dedication to their subject and craft, through which they hope to introduce a broader public to an area of study they have found to be interesting and of value.

To this work by the authors is added the commitment and work of my colleagues on the Editorial Board, our blind reviewers (whom I thank especially for their selfless service since they must remain nameless and unrecognised) and all those who have contributed in small or great ways to the publication of this work, including our returning and generous sponsors, the Farsons Foundation.

The *Melita Classica* remains the most tangible proof of the MCA's commitment to fostering and promoting the study of Classics in Malta and abroad, and of making it as widely accessible to as many people as possible.

This ninth volume of the *Melita Classica* is once again representative of the broad scope of Classics as a field of study. The papers contained within are concerned with the study of history, literary study and criticism, translation and transmission of texts, and reception. We hope that you will find them intriguing and informative. Our hope is that reading through these pages may quicken your own passion for Classics and set your mind alight with inspiration, ideas, and insights.

Samuel Azzopardi

Editor

The Tropicification of Hollywood Heroes Thrown Into the Arena

Alexandra Sills¹

The 1960 movie *Spartacus* itself follows a long tradition of Spartacus reception that includes a ballet, novels and earlier films, but he is arguably a gladiator in Hollywood so iconic, homages to him became a trope.² Gladiators are firmly embedded in modern popular culture, and nowhere more extensively than on screen. Kirk Douglas' *Spartacus* left an indelible mark on cinematic gladiatorial stories, with Roman spectacle becoming a stock story arc for protagonists across genres. The stories share repeated commonalities that serve as narrative shorthand for audiences. The standardisation of the trope signposts the story 'beats,' creating a sense of familiarity with the audience whilst allowing for novelty. The role of gladiator is one that protagonists assume, almost as a costume, to evoke ancient ideals whilst adapting brutality for modern sensibilities. As the external audience, our act of watching events on screen is not only as witnesses to the violence, but as partakers of the pleasure in doing so.³ The gladiator trope has been designed to provide us with narrative structure, exempting us from the taboo of enjoying violence for its own sake.

For the purposes of this paper I have studied twenty-six examples of a protagonist being thrown into the arena to fight as a gladiator. Ten are movies, of which nearly half are standalone stories (*Spartacus*, *Barabbas*, *Pompeii* and the *Playmobil Movie*.) A sequel to *Gladiator* is in pre-production at time of writing, heralding a franchise. *The Hunger Games* trilogy of novels were adapted into a quartet of films, wherein the ideology of the arena is the overarching theme.⁴ Two films, *Thor: Ragnarok* and *Star Wars Episode II: Attack of the Clones* feature

1 Alexandra is currently a postgraduate at the University of Leicester

2 This article was developed from a conference paper given at Antiquity In Media Studies Conference 2022. I am indebted to the organisers Meredith Safran and Dan Curley, my fellow panellists Hebe Barlow and Miriam Kamil and the many people who made the subsequent panel discussion so engaging and thought-provoking, helping the development of this paper immensely. Thanks also to Daniel McGregor and Peter Miller for sharing their invaluable thoughts, allowing me to better organise my own.

3 Berti (2020)

4 The film adaptations changed or omitted details from the novels. For my purposes here I will be discussing events and characters as depicted in the films only.

gladiatorial subplots; the events in the arena influence the wider narrative of each film but are minor incidents in each franchise's wider 'universe.' Similarly, fifteen of the gladiator plots are single episodes within wider television series. These shows mostly fall into the category of 'story-of-the-week', and if a season story arc is present, the gladiatorial event does not affect it; the arena exists to locate the villain/monster-of-the-week. The shortest example is an episode of *Archer*, at 22 minutes in length. The longest is Starz' *Spartacus* series, totalling 36 hours of television spread across 39 episodes. In total, twenty-two are American productions, *Barabbas* is Italian but performed in English, the remaining three are British (*Dr Who*, *The Saint*, *Being Human*.)⁵

Of the twenty-six examples, twenty-one fall into the broad category of drama. Despite the enormous influence of *Spartacus* (1960) and *Gladiator* on the historical movie genre, only six of the examples fit into the 'Swords and Sandals' category proper: *Spartacus*, both movie and series, *Barabbas*, *Gladiator*, *Pompeii* and *Hercules: Legendary Journeys*. The forthcoming releases of *Gladiator 2* and Roland Emmerich's series *Those About to Die* look to redress this imbalance. *The Hunger Games* franchise, due to its adaptation from Young Adult (YA) novels, is an outlier, fitting into the dystopian genre prevalent in YA literature. Of the five 'non-dramas', one is a children's movie (*The Playmobil Movie*,) three are parodies of the swords-and-sandals genre (*The Simpsons*, *Futurama*, *Archer*) and *Thor: Ragnarok* is best described as comedic action/adventure. Across the twenty-six examples, science fiction dominates as the prevalent genre, with nine examples (*Star Trek* x3, *Star Wars*, *Dr Who*, *Planet of the Apes*, *Futurama*, *Smallville* and *Archer*,) with fantasy also a popular choice for gladiatorial story arcs (*Game of Thrones*, *Van Helsing*, *Being Human*, *Angel* and the upcoming *Dungeons&Dragons*.)

The twenty-six examples feature forty-four protagonists who fit this gladiatorial trope. Spartacus is the only historical figure, appearing both in the 1960 movie and the Starz series. Extended careers amongst the characters are rare; and few receive something akin to formal training in a *ludus*. Even this does not lead to extended careers, *Barabbas* fights in an official match only once. Only Spartacus, Maximus, Milo and Obeseus have prolonged, professional careers, which in Hollywood equates to three or more bouts in an official arena, many of which are implied but not depicted. Subsequently 86% of Hollywood gladiators will fight no more than twice, despite 61% belonging to the 'story-of-the-week' format. Only *Star Trek's* Captain Kirk becomes a gladiator on more than one occasion (*Bread and Circuses*, *Gamesters of Triskelion*.) Gladiatorial careers in Hollywood are short and usually with little or no training as preparation.

5 Over a dozen Italian 'peplum' movies are gladiatorial stories, many featuring Spartacus. I shall be focussing on Anglophone productions, the Italian examples are summarised by Pomeroy (2017) 153-5.

75% of the characters are male. Two thirds of the male characters have previous training in weaponry or martial arts. Only three are below the age of twenty; Charlie (*Playmobil Movie*) is aged ten, Peeta Mellark (*Hunger Games*) is 16 in the first film and Anakin Skywalker is 19 in *Star Wars Episode II*. There are a few examples of males in their early to mid-twenties (Finnick in *The Hunger Games*, Clark Kent in *Smallville*, Fry in *Futurama*) however the vast majority of male Hollywood gladiators are in their 30s and 40s. Of the mortal characters, Jorah Mormont (*Game of Thrones*) is perhaps the oldest, being in his early fifties. While 75% of the 33 males enter an official arena on only one or two occasions, 100% of the women are depicted as participating in these contests no more than twice.

Of those 11 women, only two enter the arena in two separate episodes and both are from the *Hunger Games*; Katniss is shown fighting in all instalments, twice in an official arena, whilst Johanna's first arena match is mentioned but not shown. The average age is lower for the female protagonists; Katniss is the youngest at 16 when the films begin, with Johanna, Padmé Amidala (*Star Wars*) and Marla (*Playmobil Movie*) all in their early twenties.⁶ No female protagonist is older than mid-thirties. Their gender does not preclude them from success in the arena; nine have prior training in martial skills or supernatural strength. Only Padmé and Marla are true novices.

The average Hollywood gladiator, then, would be a mature male in his mid-late thirties, with some pre-existing training or martial experience gained through a prominent and prestigious role in a large organisation.

A gladiatorial (sub)plot does not need a large amphitheatre filled with thousands of spectators to be recognisable. Fictional arenas come in many sizes and forms, and a visible audience is inessential. The fundamentals of fictional gladiatorial fights are minimal; the protagonist(s) must face at least one opponent in a designated location, in an organised bout, fighting for the entertainment of at least one spectator until a winner emerges. This much is a direct replication of ancient spectacle. However, unlike modern combat sports or WWE-style entertainment, modern gladiatorial fights are placed within a narrative which both influences and is in turn influenced by the events in the arena. The surveyed examples cover multiple genres and yet have more similarities than initially assumed; thirteen narratological elements are frequently repeated. Each example has a combination of at least seven elements, with four examples containing all thirteen (*Gladiator*, *Hunger Games*, *Hunger Games: Catching Fire* and *Starz' Spartacus*.)

6 cf. to the many female, teenage warriors present in YA fiction. I am indebted to Hebe Barlow for this comparison – 'A Gladiator By Any Other Name: The YA Dystopian Phenomenon and its Critique of Arena Spectacles' at Antiquity in Media Studies Annual Conference 2022.

1. Demotion

In Ancient Rome, a gladiator was classed as an *infamis*, for the profession automatically reduced its participants to *infamia*, a quasi-formal curtailment of reputation.⁷ The rapid loss of status is popular with screenwriters; only two stories omit this narratological element (in Kubrick's *Spartacus*, Spartacus is first shown enslaved and working in a quarry. *Mockingjay* omits this element only because the demotion occurred in previous instalments of *The Hunger Games*). Our protagonists lose titles, rank, and liberty. The bigger the reduction in status, the more dramatic the impact. With this demotion comes a loss of bodily autonomy as well as social status.

The key facet of this element is the humiliation that comes with this lack of status; exile, prison or standard execution are denied to the protagonist. Their role is to suffer and die for the entertainment of others. A swift, ignoble death does not serve this narrative, and is instead reserved for a weaker, terrified recruit (for instance the man who wets himself next to Maximus before being killed in seconds in *Gladiator*, or the defenceless small children quickly eliminated in the 'bloodbaths' typical of the opening minutes of each *Hunger Games*.) Our protagonists' demotion should involve a significant reduction in status, but their previous rank or role should also provide them with tools to aid them in their new circumstances to avoid the character's success in the arena being seen as inexplicable or unwarranted.

2. Reluctance

This demotion is frequently paired with a stubborn reluctance to accept fate and participate in spectacles. It is important to remember that the external audience in cinemas and on sofas have an entirely different relationship to blood sports than the internal audience. The protagonist must be reluctant to fight because we are reluctant to spectate; open, vocal approbation of blood sports now carries social stigma in a way that Romans would not comprehend. The external audience needs assurance that it is not witnessing violence for the sake of witnessing violence, but because it is a mere part of the heroic journey they signed on to observe. If we need to construct elaborate fictional scenarios in which we can sate

⁷ Wiedemann (1992) 28-29. The daily practicalities and ramifications of *infamia* on gladiatorial individuals is sorely under-studied. I am uncomfortable with a monolithic conception of *infamia* as a fixed status consistently applied across multiple professions, centuries, social strata, and wide geographical spread. This approach tends to exclude archaeological evidence in favour of a handful of literary texts, however its simplistic conclusions are often repeated uncontested in popular histories relating to Roman spectacle, leading to such assumptions being accepted by both screenwriters and audiences. For my purposes here, then, we shall play along with this facile definition.

our curiosity of violence, albeit acted out in pure simulation and aided by special effects, it makes sense that our protagonist should mirror our own reluctance.⁸

The protagonists are therefore either indifferent or openly averse to the idea of gladiatorial spectacle. There are no *auctorati* here.⁹ Similarly, the protagonist should take neither pleasure nor pride in killing. When Maximus (*Gladiator*) starts to make a reputation for himself as a fighter of note in Zucchabar, he is put into a fight against multiple opponents who are clearly established favourites with the crowd. He dispatches all of them remarkably quickly; it takes Maximus 38 seconds to kill six seasoned gladiators when it is estimated that one-on-one bouts ordinarily lasted ten to fifteen minutes.¹⁰ Maximus fulfils the obligations of his role but not in a manner that optimises spectator experience; he is too efficient and too fast, robbing the crowd of suspense. He is technically skilled but does not draw out any of the fights against his opponents to showcase his abilities with flair. He is fully aware that the internal audience wants a protracted duel with an uncertain outcome and dramatic tension. He refuses to oblige, rebelling against his circumstances in the only way he can. His roar of “Are you not entertained? Is this not why you are here?” is an act of defiance, yet his open contempt for the crowd actually earns him their approval.

Seven of Nine (*Star Trek: Voyager*) is a former Borg drone, deconditioned and working for Starfleet. When she is captured for the Tsunkatse arena, she struggles with retaining her recently re-acquired humanity. Her opponents willingly inflict damage and death as required, but Seven initially insists on acting in self-defence only. However, she realises that to survive long enough to be rescued by her crewmates, she must start participating more fully, and a Tsunkatse veteran advises her to feel no sympathy for opponents in order to succeed. By the time she faces a Pendari champion she has conditioned herself to view opponents as mere prey. If not rescued by a Starfleet *deus ex machina*, Seven was about to land a killing blow. This episode neatly demonstrates how somebody forced into extraordinary circumstances such as an arena fight, over time, adjust their thinking in order to mentally and physically survive. It is only once rescued that Seven begins to come to terms with what she has done. She discusses with a colleague:

“I have spent the last three years struggling to regain my Humanity. I’m afraid I may have lost it again in that arena.”

“You are experiencing difficult emotions.”

8 This reluctance is parodied in the episode of Archer, where the squabbling crew of the spaceship MV Seamus enthusiastically welcome the opportunity to fight to let off some steam.

9 Katniss is an exception only because she volunteers to save her sister Primrose

10 Potter (1999) 314

“Guilt, shame, remorse.”

“Then you haven’t lost your Humanity. You have reaffirmed it.”

Humanity is reluctance and contrition, traits that separate the protagonist from the other residents of the *ludus*, and the protagonist will need extraordinary fortitude to retain those traits in a situation designed to suppress them.

3. The True Opponent

Whether our protagonists face one opponent or many, it is quickly evident that other gladiators are not the antagonists. The villain is a personification of the oppressive state in which the characters live. In some cases the antagonist is the head of state, like Emperor Commodus (*Gladiator*), President Snow (*The Hunger Games*) and the Grandmaster of Sakaar in *Thor: Ragnarok*. Elsewhere the antagonist is a government official of considerable importance, such as Senator Corvus (*Pompeii*) or a nascent, ambitious man like *legatus* and later *praetor* Glaber in Starz’ *Spartacus*. In science fiction examples, the antagonist need not be human, as in *Star Trek’s Gamemasters of Triskelion* where the games are organised by a trio of disembodied brains known as the Providers.¹¹

In contrast to our impoverished protagonists, the antagonists live in excessive privilege, exercising control that extends over the gladiators in their role as *editores*. The more aristocratic they are, the greater the cruelty they exhibit.¹² Their wealth is significant and generational, in contrast to the protagonist. Our hero may resent having to kill blameless opponents, but the True Opponent is nonplussed when ordering executions or assassinations. It is rare, however, that the True Opponent displays any meaningful motivations beyond conserving power and is usually given cursory characterization.

4. Villainous Speech

It is frequently necessary for the villain to have a monologue or dialogue in which they can state their motives and ideology for some efficient yet comprehensive exposition. The most lucid example comes from an unexpected source; a musical number in *The Playmobil Movie* gives an excellent summary of *panem et circenses* ideology. The Emperor Maximus has captured various warriors from the diverse regions of the Playmobil world and brought them to his amphitheatre in Constantinopolis, where he performs a song explaining to them and the external

¹¹ Harrisson (2014) 328

¹² In keeping with other established Hollywood tropes, the villain frequently sports a RP accent.

audience why they have been assembled. The song, titled *'Give The People What They Want'*, details the transactional relationship between hereditary ruler and subjects.¹³ The internal spectators feel anxiety about hostile enemies at their borders, and demand protection from incursions from the emperor (echoing Polybius *Histories* 6.6). In response, Maximus rounds up exotic potential invaders and makes a spectacle of overpowering them. As the song continues, a medieval knight enters the arena and the crowds cheer as he is swallowed by a large dinosaur. The mob is placated, and thrills to see would-be invaders so weakened by the might of their leader. In return, the people idolise him and "keep him in St. Laurent."

5. Arena Adversaries

If the protagonist ever physically fights the antagonist, it is saved for the denouement. Most of the story arc is spent fighting normal gladiatorial opponents in a standard manner. These adversaries are fully institutionalised, unquestioning of the oppressive state. Here, as in the Colosseum, the arena is an Ideological State Apparatus.¹⁴

Here it is useful to consider Gunderson's appraisal of the amphitheatre in relation to Rome, which is a small location surrounded by a vast empire with foreign territories beyond.¹⁵ Inside the Colosseum, this is entirely inverted. The enormous *cavea* peopled with citizens of Rome encircles the arena, where the prisoners of war and fighters dressed as historic foes were: "...*contained, controlled and choreographed.*" We should consider the arena, then, as a tableaux of Roman imperial domination. Conversely, gladiators were the epitome of traditional masculinity, courage and excellence, the fundamental components of *virtus*. Gladiators were a form of 'edutainment,' teaching their Roman superiors in the *cavea* bravery by providing a practical paradigm. Pliny the Younger commends gladiators for "inspiring them to face honourable wounds and look scorn on death, by exhibiting love of glory and desire for victory even in the persons of criminals and slaves."¹⁶

Hollywood adversaries do not function in the same way for the external audience, that is for the purpose of the protagonist.¹⁷ Hollywood adversaries

13 The song is particularly charming and available on Youtube.

14 Driscoll and Heatwole (2018) 75-6. For further discussion about the Colosseum as an Ideological State Apparatus, see Gunderson (1996)

15 Gunderson (1996) 113

16 Pliny *Panegyricus* 33.1

17 Though this is not necessarily true for internal audiences. A resident of planet 892-IV explains: "The games have always strengthened us. Death becomes a familiar pattern. We don't fear it as you do."

exist solely as obstacles to be overcome and are the weapons that the antagonist wields as *editor*. Romans rarely saw the faces of their gladiators.¹⁸ Differing style of helmets helped the audience to recognise each class of fighter, such as the *thraex* with a griffin on his helmet's crest.¹⁹ Full visors protected the face whilst obscuring it. This had two benefits: minimal visibility made bouts harder and thus a greater display of skill, and fighters were mentally more able to attack an anonymised opponent without seeing their face, pitched as they frequently were against other members of their own *familia*.²⁰ In Hollywood, opponents wear helmets to minimise their characterization and discourage emotional connection with the external audience.

If we compare this to our protagonists, we see a stark contrast. Maximus (*Gladiator*) only wears a helmet once, and only to ensure that Commodus does not recognise him until Maximus chooses to reveal his identity. Thor and Hulk wear helmets, notably *sans visor*. In *Archer*, Cyril Figgis also wears a helmet that reveals his face, and Sterling Archer only puts on a full face helmet to conceal his identity. No other protagonists conceal their face as a gladiator should. One doesn't hire an internationally recognised face to obscure it during moments of high tension; an actor's face is, after all, their canvas. Visible emotion is required from a hero, but less than ideal from his adversaries, who are designed to be unsympathetic and expendable. Here, gladiators are more likely to wear appropriate headgear. Tigris of Gaul (*Gladiator*) is a *rudarius*, a champion brought out of retirement specifically to defeat Maximus. His unique visor, a human face with a single tear falling down the cheek, obscures grimaces as Maximus deals significant blows, and it is notable that his visor is only lifted when he is defeated and awaiting clemency or condemnation. Only then, when the threat he represents is removed, is the external audience invited to take pity upon him. In *Pompeii*, Milo stubbornly refuses to wear a helmet, though his opponents in Londinium wear helmets that appear to be direct replicas of those excavated in Pompeii.²¹

Gladiators fought under *noms de guerre*, favouring evocative names like Flamma ('Flame'), Pugnax ('Aggressive') and Ferox ('Fierce') in the West and Homeric and mythical pseudonyms such as Achilleos, Eteokles and Herakles in the East. Hollywood goes one step further, in that adversaries are rarely given any name, pseudonym or otherwise.

(*Star Trek: Bread and Circuses*),

18 Retiarii, or net-fighters, are the exception here; their bare heads and visible faces were a source of shame. See Hope (2000) 106

19 Junkelmann (2000) 51

20 Wiedemann (1999) 119

21 It is unexplained, however, why a *thraex* should be wielding the *retiarius'* trident.

It is also unusual for adversaries to be given any dialogue. A notable exception is the first *Hunger Games* film, when Katniss and Peeta have only one opponent remaining. Cato is a 'Career' Tribute, in that he comes from one of the few districts wealthy enough to train their children for the games. Careers are therefore the ultimate adversary; strong, skilled, aggressive and mentally conditioned to kill other children without compunction. The film shows that Cato is responsible for more deaths than any other Tribute. The movie allows him a moment of bitter realisation that the novel does not, where he laments that he was bred to kill and yet is "dead already. I always was, right? I didn't know that until now." He has realised that the Tributes, however superficially popular with Capitol spectators, are disposable. And yet, he is so conditioned that he wavers only momentarily. Such a crisis of confidence would not have won the approval of a Roman audience. Cato, with his momentary humanity, is in a definite minority. His demise in the novels, *sans* doubt, is more in keeping with both Roman expectations and the average modern adversary.

As an alternative to depersonalization, adversaries can be othered more explicitly by having the protagonist fight creatures instead of humans.²² In *Star Wars*, Obi-Wan, Anakin and Padmé must fight several alien beasts. Charlie and Marla (*The Playmobil Movie*) must survive a Tyrannosaurus Rex named Craig. The 'Gamesmakers' throughout the *Hunger Games* story employ genetically mutated animals called 'muttations' including large, poisonous wasps, baboons and humanoid lizards. The trailer for *Dungeons & Dragons: Honor Among Thieves* also shows monstrous opponents, including the iconic D&D staple, the Gelatinous Cube.

6. Recruiting Allies

It is unlikely that the hero will be able to escape unaided, but separated from his established friends, he must make allies within his *ludus*. These gladiators are not like the protagonist; they are acclimatised and institutionalised, compliant in the face of authority. They are far more willing to participate in the manner the *editores* require and spectators expect, and will usually need significant persuading to rebel against the system. This docility in the *ludus* is contrasted with well-drilled martial prowess in the area and an insouciant attitude towards their violent purpose. If time allows, we may see our protagonist join them in training, which hints at the rigid structure and discipline within the *ludus*. Deliberate bootcamp allusions suggest a parallel in military basic training, also a favourite montage in movies. In Proximo's *ludus* in *Gladiator*, recruits are dressed in a uniform of identical

²² This technically makes protagonists *venatores*, or beast-fighters, rather than gladiators proper. The distinction is nevertheless trivial.

tunics, the colour of which signals their rank.²³ Training in this manner doubles as indoctrination, mentally preparing the gladiators for the violence embedded in their profession as well as fostering physical strength. The implication is that training functions to desensitise gladiators, with a ‘break them down to build them back up’ methodology that results in fighters being conditioned not to question authority. Our protagonists, meanwhile, function to interrogate and ultimately defy authority. Maximus refuses to fight veteran Hagen during initial training, marking himself as separate from his colleagues. Recruitment of allies therefore requires tact, persuasion and assumption of a leadership role. In multiple instances, the new ally transfers obedience and subservience from the *lanista* to the protagonist, and is very much deferential to him. They also exist to educate the protagonist in the culture and workings of the *ludus*. An excellent example of this is Korg (*Thor: Ragnarok*), a Kronan humanoid with a comically blithe outlook toward *ludus* life.

7. Romance

The protagonist is forced to commit violent acts. Hollywood combat is as brutal as its ancient precedent, perhaps even more so as Hollywood rarely grants a reprieve for defeated gladiators.²⁴ He is sequestered with ultra-masculine fighters conditioned to suppress emotion. It is vital that the protagonist is shown to retain his humanity so that the external audience continues to invest in his story arc. A common way to allow our protagonist to display some prevailing sensibilities is to provide a love interest. This narratological element should not be dismissed as a cynical ploy to appeal to the female demographic, nor as a vehicle for gratuitous scenes of graphic sex, which rarely feature.²⁵ Rather than accentuate the eroticism and carnality that has always surrounded gladiators dating back to antiquity, the focus is very much on romantic love.²⁶ The love interest provides the protagonist with hope for a normal life outside of the arena, a potential future consisting of a happy marriage, children, and a home. Lovers offer a contrast to the violence of

23 It does however seem unlikely that the many diverse residents within a *ludus* were so homogenous, see Coleman (2005) for further discussion.

24 Odds of survival in antiquity are a matter of speculation. Ville suggests that a gladiator’s odds decreased from 9-1 in the 1st century CE to 4 or 5-1 in the 2nd and 3rd as spectators increasingly desired to witness and *editores* sought to provide a fatal result (1981) 318-21. Other factors naturally came into play, including skill, popularity and rank, as *editores* neither wished to dispatch fan favourites nor pay the compensation for premier fallen gladiators to their *lanista*, since higher ranking gladiators cost a higher fee. The data set available to scholars is limited to epitaphs recounting career statistics, however many gladiators likely died early in their careers before they amassed enough wealth to purchase such a memorial, see Dunkle (2008) 141. We can assume that a gladiator’s chances of survival increased in line with his experience and reputation as his career progressed.

25 Starz’ *Spartacus* is so far the sole exception.

26 Juvenal *Satires* VI.82-113

the arena and the emotional constipation of life in the *ludus*. Their reciprocation of the protagonist's love is an extra motivation to gain liberation whilst increasing the stakes, the protagonist may not be free, but they do have something left to lose.

So, a romantic partner provides an opportunity to demonstrate that our protagonist retains the capacity for such finer feelings. He has not succumbed to the brainwashing of the *ludus* training regimen, he has not lost his humanity as he is compelled to kill. He is still capable of gentleness and compassion. For this purpose, the love interest is depicted as warm, tender, and sympathetic. For instance, Katniss (*Hunger Games*) spends the entire franchise torn between her fellow Tribute Peeta, who is gentler and more supportive of her than her more volatile, angry friend Gale Hawthorne, who is increasingly shown to embrace militarism. Katniss is repeatedly drawn closer to Peeta as events unfold, and choosing him does much to emphasise her own humanity.

8. Bereavement

Another showcase of the protagonist's capacity for tender emotion is to depict them in mourning. Hurting or killing a secondary character to further the protagonist's arc is a common trope colloquially referred to as 'fridging'.²⁷ Extreme grief is included for multiple purposes; it generates sympathy and by extension emotional investment for external audience members on behalf of the protagonist. It can be used as a justification should the protagonist lose their temper in the arena. But also, a deceased loved one is the personification of the protagonist's past and a demarcation of the end of his life before the arena; they represent all that is lost when the hero enters the *ludus*.

This death or its immediate aftermath does not necessarily need to be depicted to have impact but is far more effective if shown on screen. In *Star Wars Episode II*, Anakin's mother Shmi died in his arms when he attempted to rescue her from Tusken raiders. Immediately afterwards he travelled with Padmé Amidala to Geonosis, where they were captured and condemned to the arena. Thor (*Thor: Ragnarok*) also witnesses the death of a parent when his father Odin dies at the beginning of the film. Before Thor can process this, he is sent via wormhole to Sakaar, where he too is captured and sent to the arena.

For extra emotional and narrative impact, the antagonist of the story will be directly responsible for the death of the loved one. A particularly memorable example is Maximus (*Gladiator*) who, having escaped Commodus' executioners

27 The trope was first identified as a common plot device in comic books, including one example when a superhero finds his murdered girlfriend stuffed inside his refrigerator.

and fled from Gaul to his Spanish homeland, arrives at his farm to find his property burned and his wife and young son beaten and crucified.²⁸ We see their dangling, scorched feet as the camera zooms in on Maximus' desolate sobs. Commodus' culpability is clear yet unspoken. Later, when Maximus has established himself in the arena, the combination of his demotion, romance and bereavement is brought together with devastating effect when he utters the iconic line "*My name is Maximus Decimus Meridius, commander of the Armies of the North, General of the Felix Legions and loyal servant to the true emperor, Marcus Aurelius. Father to a murdered son. Husband to a murdered wife. And I will have my vengeance, in this life or the next.*"

With one speech, the external audience is reminded of his cumulative losses and humiliations, and the sympathy it generates elicits a desire to see him get justice. Without the murder of his family, Maximus and Commodus merely have a quasi-sibling rivalry. Their murder justifies every one of Maximus' subsequent actions, as intended.

9. Collateral Damage

Audiences expect death in a gladiatorial story. Character deaths away from the arena fit into the category of bereavement, but when the protagonist's allies in the *ludus* die as a direct result of their association with him, they are in a separate grouping; their deaths narratively function in a different way. The protagonist is in significant danger, and the more they resist the will of the State and villain, the more this danger extends to their allies and loved ones in and out of the arena. Allies are killed to make the threat to the protagonist feel palpable. Of the protagonists surveyed, only Maximus (*Gladiator*) dies in the arena. The hero is ordinarily protected by 'plot armour' inside the arena, even though there is no guarantee they will survive the story.²⁹ This 'plot armour' renders the arena innocuous. This is a direct contradiction of both audience expectations and how the arenas are described within the story. Some gladiators have to die, or the arena is not deadly. Furthermore, some of the deceased must be allies, or else the villain is shown to be impotent. For the external audience to believe the protagonist's death is at least a plausible possibility, a gladiator who has ceased to operate as a tool of the Ideological State Apparatus must be shown to die instead.

²⁸ Their importance to Maximus nevertheless does not warrant them having names.

²⁹ Kirk Douglas' *Spartacus* (1960) was crucified, Liam McIntyre's *Spartacus* in the Starz series succumbs to wounds sustained on the battlefield, Barabbas is crucified as a newly converted Christian, and Milo (*Pompeii*) dies in a pyroclastic flow during the Vesuvian eruption. Finnick Odair is mauled by Muttations whilst infiltrating the Capitol in *Mockingjay Part II*. Hollywood gladiators thus have an 97.7% survival rate inside the arena and 86.3% chance to survive the story.

This emphasises that whilst the protagonist and his allies are compelled to kill for a noble cause, the oppressive state and its representatives kill because they consider those below them expendable. An excellent example of this is seen in the Starz' *Spartacus* episode *Party Favors* (S1E10.) Spartacus is compelled to fight his colleague and friend Varro at a patrician dinner party in a private residence. It is supposed to be a mere showcase, until a magistrate's son demands that the bout ends in death (*sine missione*). The gladiators' *lanista* Batiatus is hesitant to offend the hosts by refusing, and Spartacus is forced to dispatch his friend on the whim of a teenage boy.

In *Hunger Games: Catching Fire*, Katniss begins her second stint in the arena immediately after watching her designated stylist (and rebel supporter) Cinna viciously beaten by Capitol soldiers. Katniss has largely had her network of allies recruited for her, without her knowledge, by her mentor and former Victor Haymitch Abernathy.³⁰ This is partly because Katniss is emotionally volatile, still suffering from the psychological trauma of her first Games the year before. At this point in the narrative, she lacks the consistent grim determination of some of the older protagonists surveyed, partly because of her adolescence and obvious PTSD, but also because her movie character is adapted from dystopian YA novels, where the trope of a teen heroine who nevertheless heavily relies on others is common.³¹ Of these allies, Johanna Mason and Finnick Odair should be considered protagonists themselves.³² Ten others were also recruited, swearing to ensure Katniss survives to become the rebellion's figurehead. Of these allies nine die, four specifically sacrificing themselves for Katniss and the other alliance members.³³

Allies cannot be considered safe by the external audience outside of the arena, either. Their association with the protagonist renders them at risk, and the death toll is often high. Previous bereavements provide some motive for subsequent rebellion, but this rebellion must be costly. In *Gladiator*, nearly all of Proximo's *ludus* are killed by soldiers as they try to give Maximus time to escape. We previously saw how institutionalised these men had become; Hagen, a veteran gladiator from Germania, had been characterised as blasé and politically unengaged. Earlier, in the arena, Maximus saved him from death after he'd been shot in the leg. When Maximus' planned rebellion begins, we see Hagen die, killed by half a

30 The *Hunger Games* novels refer to Haymitch's own arena experience twenty-five years previously. Should a prequel novel or movie ever be produced, his own story would align closely with the trope I describe here, as all elements bar no.4 are already in place.

31 For example, Tris Prior from the *Divergent* series and Saba from the *Dustlands* series

32 Like Haymitch, their previous arena experiences as well as their current status fit the Hollywood *Gladiator* trope closely, each character constructed with twelve of the thirteen elements each (Johanna has no love interest, and Finnick is not bereaved.)

33 Wiress, Mags, Chaff and an unnamed 'morphling' (drug addict) from District 6.

dozen arrows. Proximo, a freed champion, is introduced telling his recruits that he owns them, buying them not for their company but so that he could profit from their deaths. Weeks later, he sacrifices himself for one of them, clutching the wooden sword he was given to symbolise his freedom. Elaborate backstories or extensive characterisation are inessential for comrade's deaths to have dramatic impact. Poignancy is a by-product of their primary function, which is to remind the audience of the physical risk to the main character.

10. Far From Home

To modern audiences, the Roman culture of blood sports is temporally distant and therefore somewhat foreign and difficult to fully comprehend. Our protagonists all live in a world where blood sports are *de rigueur*. This creates an inadvisable experiential gap between the protagonist and external audience but can be fixed by replacing temporal distance with geographical distance. In this way, both participant and observer are simultaneously unfamiliar with spectacle. Maximus (*Gladiator*), despite growing up in 2nd century Hispania, shows no indication of having watched spectacle prior to his enslavement.³⁴ Maximus never fights in Hispania, his gladiatorial career begins in Mauretania Caesariensis and ends in Rome, both places he visits for the first time as a result of his gladiatorial profession.

Outside of historical fiction, geographic distance and subsequent foreignness are further exaggerated. Tyrion Lannister and Jorah Mormont (*Game of Thrones*) are Westerosi noblemen, but they find themselves enslaved for the arena on a neighbouring continent called Essos, neatly explaining the culture shock they experience in the fighting pits. In science fiction, many arenas are situated on alien planets (*Star Trek*, *Star Trek: Voyager*, *Archer*, *Futurama*, *Star Wars: Episode II*, and *Thor: Ragnarok*.) The amphitheatre of Constantinopolis is situated in an alternate, animated world to which the previously corporeal Marla and Charlie find themselves transported (*The Playmobil Movie*).

11. Impossible Odds

The villain, as statesman, should have access to seemingly infinite resources. Kirk Douglas' Spartacus is seen lamenting to his wife Varinia that the number of victories he wins is meaningless, Rome always has a new legion to march against

34 Most of Spain's twenty-six identified amphitheatres were complete or under construction by Marcus Aurelius' reign, see Cabello et al. (2009), and gladiatorial skills were introduced into Roman military training after the Battle of Arausio in 105 BCE, see Welch (1994) 63. Unfamiliarity on Maximus' part thus requires a suspension of disbelief.

him.³⁵ Perhaps most significantly, the Roman army shows organisation and discipline that the rebels simply cannot replicate.

The infinite resources extend to the arena; as soon as one match is over another is scheduled. The villainous *editor* has an inexhaustible supply of gladiators and beasts to pit against the protagonists, and whilst the protagonist is incarcerated in the *ludus*, stakes for the villain are low. The protagonist cuts a small figure on the expanse of the arena floor, and a pathetic one in manacles.³⁶ Meanwhile the antagonist has guards and legions at his command, overwhelming numerically dominant.

Because the antagonist has an unlimited pool of expendable opponents to throw against the hero, he essentially can afford to sit back and spectate as the hero eventually tires. These soldiers and gladiators are worth little, and we have discussed how the external audience is similarly encouraged to devalue their lives. However, the antagonist is an impatient man, and weakens his control when he inevitably decides to become personally involved with destroying the protagonist, who despite being reduced in status is nevertheless a thorn in his side.

12. Spectators

Enjoying violence for its own sake is strictly limited to the internal audience. Modern audiences are perhaps as inured to violence than our ancient counterparts, if not more, enjoying violent spectacle across multiple platforms.³⁷ However, our fascination with violence and mortality is, largely, safely sated within the realms of fiction, with special effects replacing real injury and death.³⁸ We do this to absolve ourselves of guilt as we willingly spectate. Fagan suggests that through this universal propensity to use violence as a form of entertainment, the gap between an ancient amphitheatre attendee and a modern movie-goer is smaller than we care to admit, which is undoubtedly true.³⁹ However, cultural etiquette prevents us from admitting this. Consequently, Hollywood artificially widens that gap to alleviate any social anxiety we feel as spectacle spectators.

35 Cooper (2007a) 16

36 Science fiction allows for technological advancements, e.g. the ‘Collars of Obedience’ worn by Kirk, Uhura and Chekov in *Gamesters of Triskelion*, which paralyse the wearer if they behave in a noncompliant manner.

37 Consider the popularity of true-crime podcasts, murder mystery fiction, police procedurals, first-person-shooter video games et cetera.

38 The darker recesses of the internet cater to those who prefer authenticity.

39 Fagan (2011) 237

Spectators are anonymised, appearing in an homogenous mass, wherein no individual has any distinguishing features.⁴⁰ Spectators are not given names, dialogue or discernible characterisation. Hollywood has turned the tables; Romans needed to remove individuality and personhood from gladiators to assuage their guilt from watching them die, reducing them to *infamia*, stage names and warrior types. We have chosen instead to furnish our fighters with rich lives both internal and external, imbuing them with honourable personal ideology, whilst depersonalising internal spectators. Both internal and external audiences are still enjoying the same event, but the external audience is absolved because they have formed an emotional bond with a performer. Spectators can also be othered; the crowds in the Geonosis Arena (*Star Wars: Episode II*) are winged insectoids the size of humans. Similarly, the games on Garjek attracts a diverse audience of aliens in *Archer: Happy Birthday*. The audience of the games in *Star Trek: Bread and Circuses* are not depicted at all, as the fighting is televised.

13. Happily Never After

Nearly half of the gladiatorial story arcs have a tragic or poignant ending, a low figure influenced by the prevalence of ‘story-of-the-week’ examples that require characters to be relatively unscathed at the end of each episode, ready for the next adventure.

Of the stories that employ this element, including the most superficial gladiatorial examples, our protagonists rarely leave the arena happier or healthier than when they entered. As discussed above, five of the forty four protagonists do not survive at all. Even in gladiatorial parodies, we still see the devastating consequences of the arena; Fry (*Futurama*) loses an arm, Krieger (*Archer*) is bisected, surviving only because he is an android, and Obeseus and his son Emperor Bartigula (*The Simpsons’* Homer and Bart, respectively) die by each other’s hands mimicking the denouement of *Gladiator*.

Only seven gladiatorial stories end with the abolition of blood sports. After a successful rebellion, Katniss (*Hunger Games*) kills the rebel leader, President Coin, leading to the abolition of the Games and the installment of democracy. Simon Templar (*The Saint*) ends a modern iteration of the games by feeding the villain to his own lion. Games are similarly eradicated in *Planet of the Apes* and *Hercules: Legendary Journeys*. Despite the clear suggestion that the culture of spectacle should be viewed by the external audience as an aberration, the implication is

40 Roman spectators were anything but homogenous, with seating allocated by gender, class, and profession. As such, the *cavea* was a map of Roman society, and the location of each seat revealed a great deal of biographical information about its occupant. See Bomgardner (2000) 9-20 for further discussion.

that spectacle continues unabated in the majority of real and fictional locations. However abolition is rarely a motive; Maximus (*Gladiator*), Milo (*Pompeii*) and the two depictions of Spartacus display no intention to abolish spectacle, merely to survive it; something that they share with the historical Spartacus.⁴¹ Maximus does, however, succeed in killing Commodus, as his motivation is to restore the Republic and free Rome from tyranny.

The audience in the cinema is never told what actually happened next: a year of five emperors, multiple assassinations and civil war. The auction of the emperorship by the Praetorian Guard cheapened the prestige of the role. The Republic remained a distant memory, eventually replaced with a new imperial dynasty, of whom several members were arguably worse than Commodus. Such an epilogue would render Maximus' sacrifice meaningless, and so must be kept secret. Instead, the film ends with Maximus joining his wife and son in the afterlife, as his friend and fellow gladiator Juba proclaims that "now we are free." But who is 'we'? Maximus is shown in an idyllic Elysium, but what of the dozens of men who lay dead by his hand or for his cause? Juba is the sole survivor of Proximo's *ludus*, and in pragmatic terms his use of a plural is startlingly euphemistic. The Colosseum and amphitheatres across the Empire would continue to enslave and kill men for sport for a further two and a half centuries. Rome was not wrested from autocrats.

Similarly, both iterations of Spartacus depict his death, but not any meaningful ramifications of his sacrifice. Because the historical Spartacus' manner of death is not recorded in detail, screenwriters have exercised some creative licence to fill gaps in the historical record. The immediate aftermath of the Battle of Silarius River is treated in very different ways. Kubrick has Spartacus compete in one final bout, this time against his friend and surrogate son Antoninus. It is a fight *sine missione*, to the death, and the winner will be crucified. Trained gladiators had the knowledge and skill to kill quickly, but a swift death was not likely on a cross. Spartacus dispatches Antoninus cleanly to spare him such protracted agony, holding him as he dies, and is later crucified along the Appian Way in the same manner as the other rebels, as described by Appian.⁴² He does at least get to see his lover Varinia as she travels along the road, and meets his infant, freeborn son before he dies.

Starz handles Spartacus' death differently. He succumbs to wounds sustained in the battle, surviving long enough to die knowing the war was lost. His few surviving allies keep a vigil as he bleeds out, and the last line of the series is subsequently delivered by his fellow rebel Agron: "One day Rome shall fade and crumble. Yet

41 Urbainczyk (2014) 40

42 Appian *The Civil Wars* 1.120

you shall always be remembered in the hearts of all who yearn for freedom." Then, mirroring Kubrick, the camera zooms in on a surviving woman holding a baby, the tiny promise of a better future for the next generation. The young mother and the fellow survivors escape to the mountains and freedom. The final scene is one of hope and optimism, just as in Kubrick's *Spartacus* and *Gladiator*. Once again, the audience is kept ignorant of the immediate aftermath, in which the survivors were systematically hunted and executed by Pompey Magnus in their thousands.⁴³

Agron's prophecy rings true to a modern audience, to whom *Spartacus* is a folk-hero. To Romans, he seems to have been more often evoked as a boogeyman. Certainly, he did not inspire any subsequent servile uprisings amongst those who yearned for freedom. *Spartacus* was a warning from history, but he was certainly not a precedent.

The abolition of spectacle in Hollywood is rare, and full rebellion against the state even rarer. Rarest of all is a successful rebellion, with only *Star Trek's Gamemasters of Triskelion* and *The Hunger Games: Mockingjay* suggesting any subsequent meaningful anacyclosis. Even in this minority, the process of rebuilding is never demonstrated and the results never displayed. The *Starfleet* crew are content to fly away without a backward glance. In *Panem*, the vision of a brighter future is a single scene of Katniss and Peeta raising a young family having learned to manage their immense psychological scarring.

It could be argued that Kubrick's *Spartacus* was so iconic that the development of the Hollywood *Gladiator* as a stock character, one whose narrative has been formalised through constant repetition, is Hollywood's attempt to finally give the historical *Spartacus* an alternate, happier ending that historical biopics cannot. Audiences love an underdog. Again and again, his story is copied and pasted into fantasy realms and distant planets, fictional worlds in which such underdogs can win. It is noteworthy, though, that audiences are not left dissatisfied when spectacles persist. We are not disappointed when oppressive governments remain in place. We long to see our protagonists question authority and rail against tyranny, and yet we are entirely nonplussed when, on average, nothing meaningful has changed when the credits roll. If the dissident gladiator fails to affect the status quo in any meaningful way, what then is his purpose?

The Role of the Hollywood Gladiator

To try to unravel this, we should look to the cultural context in which the trope developed, which is far more conservative than the fervour for a radical underdog may suggest. The gladiator of Hollywood is an Americanisation borne from an

43 Plutarch *Life of Pompey* 21

American industry. The trope was forged in the Cold War in a country that had been anxious of the Red Scare since the end of the First World War.⁴⁴ And yet the protagonist is critical of imperialism and the flagrant excess of the ruling elite, in a world where intergenerational wealth equates power.

The protagonists criticise oppression, but only when they themselves experience oppression. They do not question oppression as a whole. As soon as the protagonists achieve liberty, they are content. The American ideal of individualism suggests that gaining one's own liberty should be the gladiator's ultimate goal, and it is not their responsibility to secure similar freedom for those not strong enough to earn it for themselves. Through the lens of individualism, the failure of the majority of Hollywood gladiators to achieve anything of political consequence outside their own immediate experience is quintessentially American. In a state as idolised by its own citizens as modern America, why would anything greater than achieving personal liberty be expected or required?

It could be suggested that the American revolution, for an American perspective, stands apart from other revolutions. Unlike the revolutions that so unnerved the United States, particularly in the twentieth century, their own revolution was not a rebellion against a class hierarchy, but against an oppressive tyranny. Whereas other revolutions were the wheels of anacyclosis turning toward 'malignant' forms of government, usually communist, the American revolution was a shift in the other direction: a glorious recreation of the mixed constitution of Republican Rome so admired by Polybius and Cicero, in which rigid hierarchies were still very much present, with a mild potential for social mobility. This was swiftly followed by the naked imperialism within the ideology of manifest destiny.

It seems strange, then, that modern Americans do not recognise or refuse to acknowledge their status as an imperial power.⁴⁵ After all, for a country founded on principles found in Polybius, who in the sixth book of *The Histories* both counselled that an educated people should recognise the current phase in their political life-cycle and also predicted that such a mixed constitution was still vulnerable to deterioration and corruption, 21st century neo-conservatives are stubbornly insistent that the American constitution is the picture of health.⁴⁶ If all Hollywood gladiators are avatars of Spartacus by association, they cannot overthrow representations of Rome without by extension alluding to overthrowing Rome's 'spiritual successor' Rome, and its facsimile, do not require anacyclosis, merely the occasional recalibration.

44 Radford (2017) 120

45 Solomon (2013) 28

46 Schofield compares this to Cicero's futile encomium of the mixed constitution, *De Republica*, even as he watched it crumble around him (2021) 123

1960's *Spartacus* was an adaptation of Fast's 1950 novel, written whilst incarcerated for his communist views.⁴⁷ The screenwriter, Trumbo, was similarly blacklisted from Hollywood for communist views, and was banned from set.⁴⁸ Their *Spartacus* was a Marxist hero, a left-wing ideal that was eroded during production by extensive rewrites, leading to a more conservative retelling that, in staying 'true to history,' Kubrick hoped would produce a protagonist idealised by neither left nor right. In *Gladiator*, Maximus' sacrifice to return Rome to its Republican 'true' form, as Marcus Aurelius would have it, from a tyranny clearly signposted as akin to twentieth century fascism, is rendered meaningless by an ill-judged sequel that will be forced to confront its 'pleasant fiction,' to borrow a phrase from its own script.⁴⁹

Gladiator II and *Those About to Die* will take Americanised gladiators into the new era, in which a President encouraged the storming of a Capitol, foreign children are placed in cages, the rights of women and minorities have been drastically eroded and America's own children are sacrificed on the altar of the Second Amendment. In the two decades in between *Gladiator* and its sequel, America has been irrevocably altered by terrorist attacks and civil unrest. The wealth gap is comparable, if not exceeding, those in pre-revolutionary France, Russia or China. Six decades after Kirk Douglas donned his armour, America is now, more blatantly than ever, an oppressive, corrupt, imperialist state. However there is a disconnect between reality and self-perception. Over the development of the trope, America has revelled in its own mythology of being a land of the free and home of the brave, in which political unrest has no justifiable cause. Future Hollywood gladiators will appear during a national reckoning with their failing state, and it will be interesting to see the influence of a post-January 6th political landscape on their narratives. But what of Katniss Everdeen, who also stormed a Capitol?

A New Panem – The Exception to the Rule?

Katniss leaves her second arena via an airlift to District 13, once bombed so extensively by the Capitol that it was assumed to be completely destroyed. Rather, its inhabitants became subterranean, working hard to one day overthrow President Snow. It is District 13 that is the heart of the rebellion. It could not be more different than the flamboyantly capitalist Capitol; its dim tunnels are

47 Winkler (2007) 1

48 Cooper (2007b) 56

49 For discussion on fascist imagery in *Gladiator*, see Pomeroy (2004). We may consider here the traditional American claim to be the liberators of Europe after the Second World War, despite the subsequent formation of the Soviet Bloc, making that assertion another 'pleasant fiction.'

monotonous in their complete lack of decoration. Its inhabitants, as heartbroken Capitol hostage Effie Trinket laments, are banned from cosmetics and limited to approved hairstyles. Men and women alike wear the same uniform of a plain grey jumpsuit. Everyone has assigned duties and chores. The juxtaposition of capitalist and communist urban centres and populations is hardly subtle, and Katniss is clearly unimpressed. The President of 13, Alma Coin, shares many similarities with President Snow; she controls her district with just as much dominance.

Coin is aware that Katniss is a figurehead, but is entirely open to allowing Katniss to die so that her death can be manipulated as a martyrdom. Worse, Coin drops bombs, disguised as Capitol gifts as used in the arenas, on Capitol refugee children. They have a delayed second detonation, to kill rebel and Capitol medics alike who rush to help the dying children.⁵⁰ The bombs are assumed to have been Snow's, and his last remaining support crumbles, ending the war. As the dust settles, Katniss visits Snow, imprisoned in his hothouse. He questions why even he, famous for killing children, would make such a misstep, and Katniss realises the truth. The rebellion has replaced one ruthless autocrat for another. Worse, Coin proposes that the reunited districts continue the Hunger Games, using Capitol children, to the horror of most of the surviving Victors.

Katniss is to be Snow's executioner, but at the last minute shoots Coin through the heart instead, as the crowds furiously tear a laughing Snow limb from limb. Katniss is the only Hollywood gladiator to see a successful revolution through, and yet immediately rejects the ideology of the victors. Only when Katniss eliminates the threat of communism can democracy be installed. After decades of American anxiety, even in a post-nuclear dystopia, communism must never be the solution.

Conclusion

As we have seen, the Hollywood Gladiator is the antithesis of his historical counterpart; he is imbued with apocryphal individuality, morality and a strong resistance to authority that would have been unacceptable in any Roman *ludus*. He is mentally strong enough to resist indoctrination, he finds no glory in success in the arena, and he resents his function in the Ideological State Apparatus, of which he is vocally critical. We know his real name, we see his life before the arena, we see his life outside of it. We know his family and friends, and the love and loyalty he has for them. We see his face and the emotions written upon it. He is much more than his *armature, nom de guerre* and fight statistics. The Hollywood gladiator is a Spartacus facsimile, turning the most anomalous gladiator in history into the modern paradigm.

⁵⁰ Katniss' sister Primrose is among the fatalities.

Given that audiences engage with Roman spectacle most often on screen, the Hollywood gladiator presents a dichotomy for the cinemagoer between the original inspiration and the modern representation. It is important that we keep the political aspect of the Hollywood Gladiator in mind, for he is a stock character created to question flaws in a modern political system and reinforce American values. The arena is used to interrogate the issues of contemporary America, but not to propose alternative forms of government. The gladiator is not an emancipator, but an exemplar of fighting for individual liberty. If Hollywood itself is a vehicle of Americanisation, it is crucial that we keep that context in mind when other gladiatorial imagery is consumed by members of the general public.⁵¹ Confusion can lead to misinterpretation, particularly when such imagery is weaponised.⁵² The gladiators of Rome and Hollywood are diametrically opposed, but to whom is that apparent? Reception studies of Roman spectacle should thus strive to disengage and demarcate the ancient and modern in works of public history.

Title	Year	Protagonist(s)	Episode (where applicable)	Trope elements present
Spartacus	1960	Spartacus		2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13
Barabbas	1961	Barabbas		1, 7, 8, 9, 10, 12, 13
Dr Who	1965	Ian Chesterton	S2E4 <i>'The Romans'</i>	1, 2, 3, 6, 7, 11, 12
The Saint	1966	Simon Templar	S5E8 <i>'The Man Who Liked Lions'</i>	1, 4, 5, 7, 8, 10, 11
Star Trek	1968	Captain Kirk, Lt. Spock, Dr. McCoy	S2E25 <i>'Bread and Circuses'</i>	1, 2, 3, 4, 6, 7, 9, 10, 12
Star Trek	1968	Captain Kirk, Lt. Uhura, Ensign Chekov	S2E16 <i>'Gamesters of Triskelion'</i>	1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 7, 10, 12
Planet of the Apes	1974	Galen, Virndon. Burke	S1E2 <i>'The Gladiators'</i>	1, 2, 3, 6, 9, 10, 12

51 Solomon (2013) 37

52 Sills, forthcoming.

Title	Year	Protagonist(s)	Episode (where applicable)	Trope elements present
Hercules: Legendary Journeys	1995	Hercules, Iolaus	S1E10 'Gladiator'	1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6,
Gladiator	2000	Maximus Decimus Meridius		1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13
Star Trek:Voyager	2000	Seven of Nine	S6E15 'Tsunatse'	1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 10, 12
Angel	2000	Angel	S1E16 'The Ring'	1, 2, 4, 5, 6, 11, 12
Futurama	2000	Dr. Zoidberg, Philip J. Fry	S2E5 'Why Must I Be a Crustacean in Love?'	1, 2, 5, 6, 7, 9, 10, 12, 13
Star Wars	2002	Obi-Wan Kenobi, Padmé Amidala, Anakin Skywalker	Episode II: Attack of the Clones	1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13
Spartacus (series)	2010-2013	Spartacus	39 Episodes	1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13
Being Human (UK)	2011	Nina Pickering, George Sands	S3E4 'The Pack'	1, 2, 4, 5, 6, 7, 11, 12
Smallville	2011	Clark Kent	S10E19 'Dominion'	1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 7, 10, 12
The Hunger Games	2012	Katniss Everdeen, Peeta Mellark	The Hunger Games	1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13
The Hunger Games	2013	Katniss Everdeen, Peeta Mellark, Johanna Mason, Finnick Odair	Catching Fire	1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13
Pompeii	2014	Milo		1, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13
The Hunger Games	2014–15	Katniss Everdeen, Peeta Mellark, Finnick Odair	Mockingjay Parts 1&2	3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 13

Title	Year	Protagonist(s)	Episode (where applicable)	Trope elements present
Game of Thrones	2015	Jorah Mormont, Tyrion Lannister	S5E9 'Dance with Dragons'	1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 7, 8, 10, 11, 12, 13
Thor: Ragnarok	2017	Thor, Hulk		1, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13
The Playmobil Movie	2019	Charlie and Marla		1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12
Van Helsing	2019	Violet Van Helsing	S4E10 'Together Forever'	1, 2, 3, 6, 10, 11, 12
Archer	2019	Sterling Archer, Cheryl Tunt, Pam Poovey, Cyril Figgis, Algernop Krieger, Lana Kane	S10E2 'Happy Borthday'	1, 5, 6, 7, 9, 10, 12
The Simpsons	2020	Obeseus (Homer Simpson)	S32E2 'I, Carumbus'	1, 2, 3, 4, 6, 7, 10, 13
Dungeons & Dragons: Honor Among Thieves ⁵³	2023	Edgin the Bard, Simon the Sorcerer, Holga the Barbarian, Doric the Tiefling Druid		As yet unknown
Gladiator 2	?			As yet unknown
Those About to Die	?			As yet unknown

⁵³ Since submission of this article, the movie has been released. The film includes trop elements 2, 3, 4, 6, 7, 8, 9, 11 and 12. Of particular interest is the recognisably Roman Neverwinter Arena for the Highsun Games, complete with not one but two colossi and a velarium, but also a moving arena floor that allows for elaborate obstacles, setting a new bar for fictional screen amphitheatres and the games therein. I have no doubt that filmmakers will be inspired to create ever more elaborate games and venues as CGI technology improves; because of modern innovations, Roman spectacle will continue on.

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