

Backstage at Cry Havoc! - Gladiatorial Games

Content Notes

- Violence & Injury; including murder, execution and suicide
- Enslavement
- Dehumanising treatment
- Animal Cruelty
- Discussions of: Prisoners of war, Blood, Weaponry inc. blades
- Mentions of: Executions, Crucifixion, Sacrifice
- SFX: Crowds

[Show Theme - Intro]

LOWRI

Hello everyone and welcome to this week's Backstage at Cry Havoc! I am your host Lowri Ann Davies, she / her. And today we are talking about Gladiatorial games. I'm so pleased that I got that out cause I've been struggling to say that word. Joining me today are Amani Zardoe and Dr. Emma Southon. Please would you introduce yourselves with your pronouns and give us context of how you were involved in Cry Havoc! Let's go with Amani first.

AMANI

Hey, I'm Amani she / her and I'm the director of Cry Havoc!

EMMA

And I am Dr. Emma Southon and I was the historical consultant on Cry Havoc!
Um, although I don't think anyone asked me any questions about gladiators, so
uh, I take no responsibility for any of this! [laugh]

LOWRI

Oh dear [laugh]

EMMA

That's all right.

LOWRI

I mean they don't feature that heavily in the show really, do they, Amani?

AMANI

No, they don't.

LOWRI

They're in one episode.

AMANI

Yeah.

LOWRI

It's just a bit of an exciting topic I think that I personally am curious about.

EMMA

It is one that you get asked about a lot, especially cause I wrote a book about Roman murder and Roman death and it is something that when people, I think, think of the Romans, like just the pure horror of the idea of Gladiatorial games means it's something that sticks in people head and plus everyone's seen gladiator.

AMANI

Yeah.

LOWRI

Yeah. Is it Gladiator, the film that cemented the connection between gladiatorial games and Rome in the public mind, do you think?

EMMA

I would say probably yes. That and the story of Spartacus, so the Kubrick film Spartacus, but since cinema and cinematic kind of displays of Rome, you get a lot more people talking about gladiators than you did before because they're really hard to put in books and have it sound exciting. But they look great on film. [laugh]

AMANI

Yeah, [laugh]

EMMA

So interest in them is kind of a product of the 20th century. But it's good cause they're fun to think with and they're such an interesting part of Roman culture that evolves really strangely and then is really a part of just the high Roman

culture that we think of. Like, it's not that ancient as far as a lot of Roman stuff goes. It is a thing that comes out of the Romans being really rich and having loads and loads of prisoners of wars. So...

LOWRI

Oh good. [sarcasm]. Well I was about to say until you said that was that I'm so excited about finding out about all of this. So [laugh], I guess the first question, what's their origin? Where did they come from? Do we know?

EMMA

We do, well we know what the Romans said was the origin of gladiatorial games, which is that they originate as a way of commemorating people at funerals. So they start as just two guys, like soldiers or prisoners or slaves fighting to death at a funeral [laugh].

LOWRI

Oh wow.

EMMA

And it possibly evolves out something much more ancient and Etruscan, but that's where it starts. And like original games and gladiatorial fighting comes as part of a funeral. You have the procession, you have somebody gives a, the speech and then, uh, then two lads have a fight. [laugh].

AMANI

I kind of love that. I think that's a wonderful way to like get all the angst out of a funeral just by like...

EMMA

Yeah.

AMANI

I mean if there was less, less death again, like that seems like funeral plus, uh,
plus extras. [laugh],

EMMA

But yeah, plus entertainment.

AMANI

Yeah.

LOWRI

Stage combat would be preferable I feel. But yeah.

AMANI

Yeah, just a good wrestle in the dust. Very nice [laugh].

EMMA

And then basically as Rome gets richer and expands its borders and there's more and more people becoming very, very rich in Rome and in High Roman culture, it starts being that they start trying to one up each other. So if that guy had two gladiators, um, and they fought for 45 minutes I'm gonna have four gladiators. And then if that, once somebody's had four gladiators, then somebody has to have eight pairs of gladiators, and then it just escalates

LOWRI

Oh no.

EMMA

Until you've got people who are putting on a whole thing that they're inviting half the city to and it's, there's gonna be 10 pairs of gladiators and two groups of gladiators and it's a whole afternoon event almost, and then it just escalates and escalates from there basically.

AMANI

Wow.

EMMA

And then it... [laugh] yeah. And then it becomes folded into um, public games.

LOWRI

Uh, I was gonna ask, was it ever public thing or were there leagues or, I don't know. I'm trying to like make a football analogy I think. But it started as private?

EMMA

So it starts as private and then it gets folded into like as Rome is becoming a big superpower, it gets folded into this idea of public games, which are a way of basically honouring the gods. And they are essentially, you have like beast fights in the morning. So that's basically like haunting in the arena. So that's when you get out an elephant and, and some people fight an elephant or bear

baiting or whatever. Basically they kill some animals and they do some nice theatrical killing. And then there's the lunchtime executions.

LOWRI

Oh my god.

EMMA

Which escalate in their own way that we won't go into.

LOWRI

Oh!

EMMA

And then after you don't want to know, I promise you.

LOWRI

Do we have to get your book to find out?

EMMA

Yeah, buy my book [laugh]. And then the afternoon is like the, the highlight which is the uh, gladiatorial games. And you will have several bouts and there'll be some which are one on one and then some which are groups. So five on five or seven on seven. And there's various different types of gladiator. So there's the light armed ones who have very little armour and small weapons. So like the guy with the net that you might have seen?

AMANI

Mm-hmm. [affirmative]

EMMA

Um, or a guy with just a sword of some kind. And then you have the heavily armed ones who are the ones who have lots of armour and bigger swords or javelins or the Trident and that kind of thing. And you will always have lightly armed against, lightly armed or heavily armed against, heavily armed.

LOWRI

I guess that's something.

EMMA

Yeah [laugh] because the point of the game is closer to like boxing or wrestling, but with horrible weaponry. In that what you want is a good matchup between two people who are of similar skill, level of similar stamina. Nobody wants to go and see, like I think in the book, I said no one wants to see Manchester United play the Renford rejects like...

OTHERS

[laugh]

EMMA

That's just not fun for anybody. It's not entertaining to watch someone gets stabbed to death. And so you wanted to watch two people who have a huge level of one-on-one combat skill who are gonna fight and there's gonna be suspense and they're gonna go back and forth until one of them basically is

either too injured to continue or surrenders at which point they may or may not die.

LOWRI

And is that the, you know, the famous thumbs up, thumbs down moment?

EMMA

That's the famous thumbs up, thumbs down.

LOWRI

Is that real [laugh]?

EMMA

It is real. We don't know which way is which cause the only reference that we have says the turning of the thumb. The person who runs it is called the editor.

And it was so hard when I was writing the book not to make just a series of jokes about editors

OTHERS

[laugh]

EMMA

Having power of life or death [laugh]. Yeah. So one way or another was life or death. And the person who was in charge of the games who would put it on would decide basically on the basis of what the crowd was saying and quite often the gladiator would live. Um, and they kind of estimated that only about 20% ish would end in them actually being kind of killed by their opponent. But

if they were killed by their opponent, then there it would be a knife through the neck and it would be quite bloody and spectacular. But the thing with gladiators are very expensive and take a lot of training and you can't just like grab a guy off the street and get them to do it. You own them, you feed them, you house them, you train them, they do get really famous. They can be worth huge amount of money. And so if you let them die all the time, [laugh].

LOWRI

Yeah.

EMMA

Or if you let a good one die every time you lost a match, then it would be a massive waste of an investment more than anything. So they do survive more than people think they do.

LOWRI

So they were owned by the people who are putting these things on.

EMMA

Yes.

LOWRI

Or would someone maybe have a gladiator and be like, oh, I'm going to enter you into this match that my friend over there is putting on?

EMMA

Sometimes there are gladiatorial schools, which is where most of them are. So they mostly exist in, so there's like, the Neronian Gladiatorial school is a really big one in Capua and people own them and they will own like a, large groups of them basically. And they will live and work in these schools and then they're hired out for occasions. So loads of what we know about like how gladiatorial stuff actually worked comes from Pompeii because you can't really emphasise how popular Gladiatorial games were. Like they really were sort of so hugely

[laugh]

OTHERS

Wow.

EMMA

Popular with all people. And there's loads of graffiti in Pompeii of gladiatorial matches and their outcomes, uh, with little drawings of them and also posters that were put up. So it would say things like, um, you know, Spiculus from the Neronian school will be fighting here on Thursday [laugh].

AMANI

Wow.

EMMA

And you know, 14 never defeated that kind of thing.

AMANI

Wow.

EMMA

So if you are in a town and you are putting on some games for whatever reason to celebrate something or be for a part of a festival, then you go out and hire some good gladiators from somewhere. And in satires and stuff you get people complaining about bad gladiators, like two for the price of one Gladiators.

[laugh].

LOWRI

Oh god.

EMMA

Um, like elderly gladiators or gladiators who just won't put on a good show at the time.

LOWRI

I just, I feel the need to acknowledge... like it's so, oh my god it's, it's like so strange to me that we are talking about human lives and like it's...

EMMA

We are, yeah.

LOWRI

Oh my gosh. I can't quite get my head around it. And it's almost like a nervous laughter. Like, what..?!

EMMA

[laugh] it is, it's quite hideous. So the only you can either laugh or just weep into a bucket. Like when you start to think about Roman slavery, then you are looking into a terrible abyss and you do either just start weeping immediately or you have to start laughing at the sheer absurd size of it.

AMANI

Yeah.

EMMA

There were free gladiators. I will say that, more than written sources like you to believe, because being a gladiator could be quite cool. And you could get a certain amount of fame and rewards and you know, people called your name and loved you and you'd get free stuff when you went into shops and things like that.

AMANI

So like, kind of like a celebrity.

EMMA

Yeah, very much so. They are treated as celebrities to a certain, to like, you know, like sports stars, which is what they are.

AMANI

Yeah.

EMMA

And endorsing products and saying, you know, Marcus's hot food bar is the best place to go. It's the only place that I'll get my hot wine [laugh].

AMANI

I love it. I love it.

EMMA

Yeah. Like the most famous gladiator that we know is a guy called Spiculus who, see we know about his first ever match because he wins a fight against a 14 time undefeated champion on his first match and then kills him at Pompeii. And this is such a big deal. Like it's his first match and he comes out of nowhere and then he seems to get a bit of a reputation for not really letting people survive. Like when someone's losing, like he's gonna kill them [laugh]. And one of these things the Romans do is they have sports memorabilia. So one of the things for sports memorabilia that they have for gladiators is glasses with gladiators on them celebrating their most famous wins. And we have a bunch for Spiculus.

AMANI

Wow.

EMMA

Which will have pictures of him blown into the glass, like fighting and we'll show you like the killing blow...

LOWRI

That's so skillful as well, wow!

EMMA

Yeah, it is. It's really impressive. And eventually he became the Emperor Nero's like pet gladiator. He became so famous that Nero gave him a house and set him up with, you know, concubines and things and let him live in enormous luxury. And then when Nero was being overthrown and he wanted to die, he asked, sent a letter asking Spiculus to come and kill him. And Spiculus just pretended they didn't get it. [laugh].

LOWRI

Wow.

AMANI

Really?

EMMA

Yeah.

LOWRI

Yeah, I guess actually cause even if the emperor, like if he had asked you, there are gonna be people who are like, you've just killed...

EMMA

Yeah you can't just kill the emperor!

LOWRI

[laugh] Yeah,

EMMA

Exactly. So he just sort of pretended they didn't get it. He does not end well for him because he's so associated with Nero by that point that he does get executed. But he has his amazing career as a, as a gladiator who is just gets to live this life of insane luxury as a triumphant glorious sports star. Basically like the Lionel Messi of his day.

AMANI

Amazing.

LOWRI

Do we know how old he was when he died?

EMMA

We don't, unfortunately. We know how old some of them are cause we have quite a lot of tombstones, like epitaphs and they tend to live until they're in like their thirties or forties. They don't have hugely long lives.

LOWRI

That's short, even in Roman context, is it?

EMMA

That's short even in a Roman context, yeah. Cause it's a tough life. Um, and a lot of them die of like head injuries and things like that.

AMANI

Mmm.

LOWRI

I guess like, and at the time medicine isn't like as advanced as it is now. So even if you don't die in the field, you're gonna be left with some serious consequences.

AMANI

Mm-hmm

EMMA

Yeah. But a lot of big old head injuries and broken bones that you have to wait to have healed and things like that. Yeah. Yeah. It's a tough life but some people do choose it. Like they do choose to go into it. Which baffles the people who write Roman sources who are like elite Roman men who are frightened of spiders. But

ALL

[laugh]

LOWRI

I'm imagining Lepidus writing, but...

AMANI

Or Gaius!

EMMA

Yeah, Gaius wouldn't, like Gaius never lifted a sword by himself.

ALL

[laugh]

EMMA

When people are writing about gladiators, they don't understand what they're getting out of being a gladiator. Which is something.

LOWRI

I guess if you've already got all the riches and the stuff without having to fight for your life, yeah you wouldn't understand, would you?

EMMA

Yeah.

LOWRI

Because I suppose compared to a lot of choices that people faced in Rome that might actually be worth the risk if the alternative was ...

EMMA

Yeah, if the alternative is destitution. And some people choose it as a punishment because a lot of gladiators are there because they are condemned to fight as a gladiator for X number of years or be executed.

LOWRI

Oh wow.

EMMA

So it has a possibility of survival, which crucifixion does not.

AMANI

Yeah.

LOWRI

Yeah. Would they sentence people who weren't fighters as well? Is it like, well
good luck fishermen, [laugh], you know.

EMMA

It's hard to know but probably what you want is a good game so you're
probably gonna be sentencing the guys who look like they are. Like that you
feel it would be a waste to crucify them.

LOWRI

God.

EMMA

It's so grim. The Romans are so awful.

LOWRI

Yeah.

EMMA

As a culture, they're terrible. Um, I, the idea that we looked up to them is baffling to me because they do do these things. But yeah. So they will send people that they think might maybe put on a good show if they can learn how to fight and do the training and learn how to wield a sword in the right way and to be entertaining.

AMANI

So for the schools, who were the teachers? Were they like famous gladiators or were they soldiers or generals or was was, I suppose gladiatorial fighting is quite different to like warfare.

EMMA

It is because you have to be entertaining, at the same time it's not just how quickly can I stab this guy? It is, how can we fight this in like the right way basically.

AMANI

Yeah.

EMMA

So it's gonna last longer than 30 seconds. And so it's going to be a show. You're given like your position as a gladiator and then you are trained by ex gladiators, ex soldiers, that kind of thing to fight defensively and entertainingly. Uh, against the person that you will almost always be, so Murmillos are always against Thraex for example. So you'll always be learning how to avoid the net, how to get underneath this, how do you do this in a manner that is going to be skillful but will make it so it's worth people's money.

AMANI

Yes, right, that was gonna be my other question. So people would pay tickets like for a football game or a boxing match or something?

EMMA

Actually they probably wouldn't because they're normally put on by a person. So they're either put on by the state as there's like five big games a year, which are religious festivals, but they're mostly put on by a person for a reason. So like Julius Caesar has a big one in memory of his father and stuff like that. Or there's like, people have triumphs and then have big gladiator games. They're the person paying for it,

AMANI

Right.

EMMA

So that's your client basically. But if you sell them, you know, I'll give you 10 pairs of gladiators and they'll give you two rounds each and then one of them comes over, falls over immediately and gets stabbed. Then they're gonna be like, why did you give me such a rubbish gladiator?

AMANI

Yes, yes, yes. Yeah, yeah, yeah. I see what you mean.

EMMA

Yeah. So it's, that's your client is the editor and the editor is going to be someone who has a lot of money and because it, all of this is political theatre as well, this is the bread and circuses that you are giving to the Roman populace to make them love you. And so if you put on a really good games for them, like if Gaius puts on a great games, then people are like, oh my god, he knows how to pick a gladiator. He knows how to stage an execution, he knows how to provide snacks. This is, I love him and I will support him in his effort to murder everyone around him.

AMANI

Love it.

LOWRI

Is there any documentation of people who weren't into it? Like in general society? Because it's like, I'm just trying to get my head around the mentality of a society that is like, this is an excellent pastime.

EMMA

Yeah.

AMANI

I feel like this is actually so not that different to boxing or even like something like American football. I mean I think last year there was an American football, I don't know that much about American football but my brother loves it, but I feel like last year there was a, an American footballer who had a horrific head injury where he went into a coma and they thought he might have died. I think actually his heart stopped or something.

LOWRI

Yeah.

AMANI

And um,

EMMA

Yeah.

AMANI

And then he was right back up again cause he had a contractor to fulfil and he needs to provide for his family. It's, I I actually find it like actually not that different to what goes on today.

LOWRI

It's a more extreme version, I'd say.

AMANI

Yeah, for sure.

EMMA

Yeah. And it, it's the same impulse I think that that attracts you to it, which is that you watch American football not because it goes on for, alienate everyone who likes American football, but goes on for what feels like seven hours and it's only about 14 minutes of people running.

AMANI

Yeah. [laugh]

EMMA

Um, but during those 14 minutes, a lot of really big men are gonna bang into each other really hard.

AMANI

Yeah.

EMMA

And they're gonna like flip over and fly around or like wrestling, like, you know, that's managed to be safe. But a lot of it is people being thrown around on their heads and big men being skillful and hurting each other. Entertainingly.

AMANI

Yeah.

EMMA

And, and causing each other, you know, boxing, wrestling, American football, they all have problems with long-term brain damage.

AMANI

Yeah.

EMMA

But the people who do it. But yeah, what you have is philosophers who don't like it very much.

So Seneca writes a lot about how he finds it morally problematic and he writes a lot about the kind of grim downsides of being a gladiator. And so he tells us a lot about like gladiatorial suicides and things like that, which I wouldn't recommend reading to be honest. It's very depressing. But he, he does not love them. He's a stoic. So he's coming at it from a stoic philosophy and he thinks there's a lot of, you know, loss of control and screaming and shouting and blood and he finds it all very base and unpleasant. And so you do get kind of these intellectual, somewhat academic writing about how unpleasant that, but he also doesn't like, you know, people drinking in the streets and he thinks that they're all sort of very low class and immoral in that fact.

LOWRI

So he's not a great advocate really [laugh]

EMMA

He's not a great advocate.

LOWRI

I agree that it is very similar to boxing and American football in that sense.

EMMA

Yeah.

AMANI

Yeah.

LOWRI

But I guess, you know, there aren't executions at halftime.

EMMA

No. There are not executions at halftime and there are also not the expectation and possibility that someone will be cold blooded-ly stabbed.

LOWRI

Yeah.

AMANI

Yeah.

EMMA

And also regardless of what certain footballers like to say, they are not enslaved and some of these people are there against their will. A lot of them, like the reason that it expands so much and becomes such a hugely popular part of, uh, Roman culture and like a common thing that people can go and see is because they have prisoners of war. And so many of the gladiators that fight are people who are captured on the battlefield or taken from their homes around the Roman empire as Rome conquers places or in order to, you know, if someone has a rebellion somewhere, then they're gonna take all the eligible men as prisoners of war and a lot of those are gonna end up in gladiatorial schools.

AMANI

Gosh.

EMMA

You know, that's how Spartacus ends up as a gladiator or in a gladiatorial school. So a lot of them are not there by choice. And for the, you know, top much as with sports stars, the top, you know, 10% or 2% are getting huge benefits from it. But there are the bargain basement ones. There are the ones who are playing in the small leagues. There are the ones who can't command money or who just aren't very good at it, but are there anyway who are either expendable or not getting anything out of the fact that they're being sent out to fight over and over again, except that they just hope they're not gonna die, basically. And you do get Seneca writing about these, these suicides, these people who go to great lengths to end their own life. And the ways that people who own these men try to stop them from killing themselves.

AMANI

Gosh.

EMMA

For the ones that, there are ones that choose to do it, there are ones that get huge amounts out of it, but it's a very different experience. If you can choose to be there and you've signed a contract, but you can walk away, if you're not enjoying it, then if the only way out is to die.

AMANI

Yeah.

LOWRI

I, I keep thinking like, something that keeps popping into my head is that, um, like a republic that just keeps accruing lots of people, it's quite a good way of getting rid of them, isn't it? Like we've got all of these people that we've enslaved.

AMANI

It is.

LOWRI

All these people that we've taken as prisoners of war and it's like, well let's chuck em out the games.

EMMA

Yeah. And, and we can do it in the most spectacular way like Julius Caesar because he is incredibly good at inventing ways to kill people. He invents the idea of having mock battles. So you get lots of like prisoners of war and gladiators and you dress 'em all up as you know, like people from legendary battles and then you made them run each other and then they introduced mock naval battles. So then you have, he builds like these pools and they're fighting each other on rafts. So you could, everybody can watch like great battles between Rome and Carthage, uh, because they genuinely, and this is what I'm saying about the, like the abyss of Roman slavery, it just is endless and horrific. Like they have so many, it's so normalised to them and they call it war commerce and it is a great perk, as far as the Romans are concerned of warfare, but they have to feed them now and they have to do something with them. And so there is just this kind of endless ways of trying to entertain free people by disposing of unfree people in various horrific ways.

LOWRI

Oh god. Um, I mean I don't think this is gonna be any less of a depressing question, but just, you know, we've taken it as given that it's all men.

EMMA

Yes.

LOWRI

Any female gladiators, are women watching it?

EMMA

Women are watching it. There are female gladiators. There was a lot of debate for a very long time about whether female gladiators are real, but I think everyone has generally come down on the idea that there were, but they're generally sent out as a kind of novelty act.

LOWRI

Yeah, I wondered that.

EMMA

Like, they'll do things like send out people with gigantism or people with dwarfism and women are considered within that as being effectively somebody with a physical disability, which is that they're not men and therefore they're kind of sent out as comic relief to a certain extent.

LOWRI

Yeah.

EMMA

You do get things like, cause the other thing that that is associated with gladiators is Roman free people do like to go to the gym and so you do get things like train like a gladiator kind of programmes at the baths.

LOWRI

[laugh] That's kind of funny.

AMANI

Amazing.

EMMA

And so you do get these kind of yeah, handbooks on and things where they've, you know, how to you build your strength by lifting in increasingly heavy stones and things like that.

LOWRI

Wow.

EMMA

And so there are people who are kind of looking at gladiators in that way as well as like a physical specimen to, to emulate.

AMANI

My gosh. It does... sometimes you just feel like nothing is new, like everything's been done before!

LOWRI

Yeah. I can imagine that there's probably a group of people alive now who may even already do that, like subscribe to the gladiator diet and -

EMMA

And they 100% are, although the physique of a gladiator is not one that is particularly fashionable now because they're not like lean and cut and like muscle where you can see every muscle, like you see in Marvel films now they are big men with pads of like fat and they're, they're quite carb heavy meat heavy diets to, so they're big strong me-

LOWRI

I'm trying not to be thirsty on this podcast, but I'm finding it's getting increasingly difficult... [laugh] Tell more about big strong men...

OTHERS

[laugh]

EMMA

Yeah. Like I, I kind of, I think that R.I.P. Ray Stevenson, who played Pullo in Rome who died a couple of weeks ago, uh, that kind of thing is what we're talking about. Like big men who are wide and have, you know, and are sturdy.

AMANI

Burly, yeah.

EMMA

Yeah.

AMANI

Yeah.

LOWRI

Lovely, lovely. [laugh]. Ok, I'm gonna move us on.

EMMA

And there are lots of things like, because like gladiator blood was used in magic
and things like that.

LOWRI

Oh wow. Of course it was.

EMMA

Yeah.

AMANI

Really.

EMMA

Yeah.

AMANI

Wow.

EMMA

Usually for aphrodisiacs and things like that. Like classic.

AMANI

Of course. Yeah, of course. I wanted to ask if there was any way that gladi, I mean you talked about gladiators sort of getting perks and also like endorsing products or um, restaurants or whatever. I was wondering if there's anything that like, I, I dunno, like I was reading an article about a list, um, musicians today doing like elite gigs.

EMMA

The private parties thing? Yes.

AMANI

Yeah. Private parties for billionaires. Like is there, is there a sort of equivalent where it wouldn't be for like the whole populace but like for a private party and I dunno, like would it be a fight or would it be [laugh] something else?

EMMA

So what you do is you hire gladiators as your bodyguards. So that's the version of the private for [laugh] for gladiators is that you get hired as a bodyguard by somebody famous during the late republic actually gladiators where like the period slightly before Cry Havoc when Julius Caesar is on the rise and you have, uh, all of the mobs around Milo and, and that, and they're kind of all of, they're

basically, they're all gladiators like, so all of the politicians are surrounded by gladiators partly to protect them because there's so many murders happening. But also it is a sign of wealth and status that you can hire these men to spend all of their time with you and that you can hire them to perform for you. so.

AMANI

Right. Because they weren't allowed to have, like the army wasn't allowed to be in Rome itself, so I suppose that was a way of kind of circumventing that by having a pack of big burly men to protect you.

EMMA

Yeah. So you can't have soldiers but you can have gladiators and so big burly men walking around and everybody knows that they're good with a sword and they've seen them fight, then it's a good incentive to keep people away from you and also to beat your opposition into voting for you.

LOWRI

Would they be active in the arena as gladiators while they were working as bodyguards?

EMMA

Yeah, probably. Yeah.

LOWRI

So it's not like, oh well done, you've retired, you've graduated from being a gladiator, now you can just relax and be a bodyguard.

EMMA

No, cause it's still part of the job. Yours being hired out by the person who owns you or owns your contract. And also for most of Roman history, like Gladiatorial games are not something that're happening on a weekly basis or possibly even not on, even on a monthly basis. They are, um, definitely five times a year, but other than that they're fairly sporadic. So they probably are pretty big chunks of time when there's nothing that much on the horizon. So you may as well keep making money and keep your skills up by threatening some plebs.

AMANI

Would they have something like, um, I'm trying to relate this to like pop culture...

ALL

[laugh]

AMANI

Would they have things like autographs or like, I don't know, like some piece of armour that they fought in a famous game and and then is sold off?

EMMA

That we don't know unfortunately.

LOWRI

Oh I bet they did!

EMMA

I feel like if people were taking their blood and their hair and their sweat for stuff and were buying memorabilia for them then probably, but it is basically at its core it's a kind of capitalist enterprise. So it is gonna be whatever the person who is in charge of that person's contract, whether they're free or enslaved, whatever they think they can make the most money out of. Like, is it gonna be better for me to sell this person's breastplate or would it cost me more to have another one made? [laugh]

LOWRI

Mm, yeah.

AMANI

Yes. Yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah.

EMMA

Because you know, mass production does exist but it's still, everything is still handmade and so things cost money.

AMANI

Of course, yeah.

LOWRI

Maybe like after they died though.

EMMA

Yeah.

LOWRI

You know, cynically you'd be like, oh well might as well sell the breastplate they wore when they died. Or when they killed this other person.

AMANI

Yeah.

LOWRI

Wow.

AMANI

Fascinating. Fascinating.

LOWRI

We are coming to the end of the episode. So I guess appropriately, the final question that I'll ask is when did the games end? Do we know, like did they fizzle out? Was there one big final one? [laugh]

EMMA

No, they fizzle out basically along with a lot of like classical Roman stuff. As the empire becomes Christianized, they fizzle out. And they are mostly supposedly attached to Roman religious worship. So the big games are religious festivals and all of it is surrounded by this religious iconography and, and sentiment. And it's all supposed to be religious. And so as with a lot of stuff, as Christianity becomes the legal religion, then the dominant religion and then paganism polytheism gets outlawed, then things associated with it also become

outlawed. And as time goes on, because Christianity is so interested in the individual soul and individual kind of redemption, they don't love the idea of apart from Jesus, like the idea of people's being sacrificed for other people's entertainment. There's not something. And there's a lot of Christian writing about how the games are evil and so they hate the games like on a theological level.

And then when it comes, like somebody has to still be paying for it. And so gradually through like the, they're still going in like the fifth century, but on a much, much smaller scale. And then as the western empire kind of fizzles, they fizzle as well. And they're not something that carries over into the like post Roman kingdoms at all. And then the east of the empire loves chariot racing way more than they ever loved gladiators, uh, [laugh]. And so chariot racing in Byzantium and Constantinople is a huge thing to the extent that there are very famous like week-long riots that occur over the teams at their chariot racing and they become just like constant ridiculous levels of fandom occurring [laugh] over...

AMANI

Oh my gosh, that is amazing.

EMMA

Yeah. Technically the chariot racing is always like, that would be the premiership sport. Like that's the one that everybody loves the very most really. But gladiatorial games kind of come to equal it almost in the west, but they never have the same lasting joy that chariot racing has cause it's fast and exciting and people are falling all over the show.

LOWRI

Yeah, I was gonna say, I'm sure people have died in that as well.

EMMA

Oh sure.

LOWRI

Did the animals ever win? Sorry, that's a really random one. [laugh].

EMMA

Uh,

LOWRI

Probably not. I imagine

EMMA

Actually I can think of at least one time when the animals won, but it was an attempted execution. Um, and this is in the life of St. Perpetua, which is in Carthage in North Africa. They attempted to get a boar to spear one of the Christians as part of his execution. And the boar turned around and speared his handler instead.

AMANI

Oh god.

LOWRI

Yes. Go that boar!

EMMA

Which was taken as a sign from God for obvious reasons, but so occasionally people definitely did like they would bite the wrong person [laugh]. But as a general rule, it would just keep going until, you know, the giraffe or the elephant or the rhinoceros or whatever...

LOWRI

[purposefully interrupting] Yeah. I, I want to end on the boar winning.

EMMA

Yeah. We'll end on the boar.

LOWRI

On that happy note, please...

EMMA

Sometimes the boar gets to win.

LOWRI

Sometimes [laugh], I dunno, maybe it's problematic that I'm like, let's just think about the one nice thing about that, shall we? [laugh]

AMANI

This was wonderful, so fun and fascinating.

LOWRI

Yeah.

EMMA

Yeah. It's um, it's one of those things where this, you start to think about like the implications for the entire culture are horrifying, but I think that's kind of what makes it interesting.

AMANI

Yeah.

EMMA

And also like it's simultaneously so relatable like you can imagine and I feel like you, you know, if we were alive in the Roman and empire you probably would go even if it was just once to see what was going on.

LOWRI

I dunno, I've never been to a boxing match and I have no desire to go to one either.

EMMA

No.

LOWRI

But maybe...

EMMA

There almost certainly were, you know, loads of people who weren't interested. Like yeah. [laugh] like recently having the coronation. Like I didn't watch the coronation, never really watched any royal stuff. I didn't watch a funeral or anything like that. Like got no particular interest. But what will be remembered in history is that the entire country came together and watched it.

LOWRI

Yeah.

EMMA

And the only thing that will be recorded is the people who were interested Really. And so there's probably, yeah. You know, solidly 50% of the population of Rome we've got never been to a triumph, not interested in anything that Augustus is doing. [laugh]

LOWRI

Yeah.

AMANI

Yeah. [laugh]

EMMA

Like not going to any games to be bribed by some bloody Praetor [laugh], but their opinion because it's an absence of opinion basically. It's just, it's gone.
[laugh]

LOWRI

Yeah.

AMANI

Mm-hmm.

EMMA

Yeah. So this is, you know, it's hugely popular but there are people who probably didn't give a damn.

LOWRI

Thank you so much Emma, for basically just talking as Amani and I fire questions and go, Ooh, wow. [laugh]

EMMA

My favourite thing to do, so.

LOWRI

Oh well this is excellent news. Anything that you would like to plug? We have mentioned your books and your podcast.

EMMA

That's true. I'm going to mention them fully by name. So my podcast is, History is Sexy with my colleague Janina. And we answer people's history questions that they don't wanna spend the time Googling or reading like looking through loads of academic papers themselves. And my book about Roman murder is called A Fatal Thing Happened on the Way to The Forum.

LOWRI

I feel like what Amani and I have done is it kind of a version of your podcast really, isn't it? But we just ask you all the questions.

AMANI

Yeah. Literally.

LOWRI

Um, Amani, anything you would like to plug?

AMANI

I've been working on this show called Cry Havoc! Everybody please listen to it.

It is out now!

LOWRI

You know what? It is out now. And my mum has listened to it and she loves it.

She's listened to the first two episodes and loves it. So if that isn't praise enough to make you go listen to a listener, I don't know what is.

AMANI

That is big. That is big praise!

LOWRI

It is, yeah, indeed. So...

AMANI

Thank you Lowri's mum!

LOWRI

[laugh]. Thanks Mammy! Thank you everyone for listening. Thank you for joining us. We hope you enjoyed, we hope you're enjoying Cry Havoc! Ask Questions Later and we will see you next week. Goodbye everyone. Bye.

AMANI

Goodbye. Thanks Emma. Thanks Lowri.

[Show Theme - Outro]

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