



# ÁSATRÚ BARBARIANS

Iron Age Germanic, Celtic and Scythian Re-enactment Group

## GLADIATOR KIT GUIDE

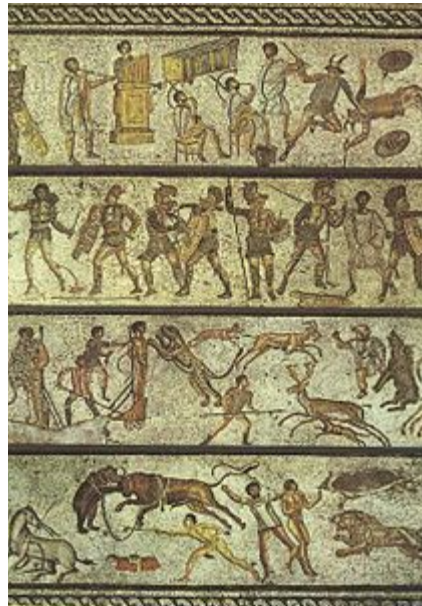
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### INDEX

Historical background.....	3
Gladiator Meaning.....	3
Gladiator Oath.....	3
History of Gladiators.....	3
Outline of the Gladiator Games.....	4
Gladiator Types.....	6
Andabatae.....	6
Arbelas.....	6
Bestiarius.....	7
Bustiarius.....	7
Cestus.....	7
Contraretiarius.....	7
Crupellarius.....	7
Dimachaerus.....	8
Eques.....	8
Essedarius.....	9
Gallus.....	9
Gladiatrix.....	10
Hoplomachus.....	10
Laquearius.....	11
Murmillo.....	11
Noxius.....	12
Oplomachus.....	12
Paegniarius.....	12
Provocator.....	13
Retiarius.....	13
Retiarius tunicatus.....	14

## Gladiator Kit Guide

Rudiarius.....	15
Sagittarius.....	16
Samnite.....	16
Scissor.....	16
Secutor.....	16
Tertiarius.....	17
Thraex.....	17
Veles.....	18
Venator.....	18
Non-Combat Roles.....	19
Arena Officials.....	19
Arena Slaves.....	19
Damnatio ad bestias.....	19
Editor.....	19
Imaginers.....	19
Lanista.....	19
Lictors.....	19
Lorarius.....	20
Rudis.....	20
Summa rudis.....	20
Sources.....	20



The Zliten mosaic depicts some of the entertainments that would have been offered at the games.

## Historical background

### **Gladiator Meaning**

A gladiator (Latin *gladiator*, “swordsmen”, from *gladius*, “sword”) was an armed combatant who entertained audiences in the Roman Republic and Roman Empire in violent confrontations with other gladiators, wild animals, and condemned criminals. Some gladiators were paid volunteers (*auctorati*) who risked their lives and their legal and social standing by appearing in the arena. Most were despised as slaves, schooled under harsh conditions, socially marginalized, and segregated even in death. A condemned bankrupt or debtor accepted as novice (*novicius*) could negotiate with his *lanista* or *editor* for the partial or complete payment of his debt.

The average height of Roman men and women was 5'4" and 5' respectively, but gladiators averaged 5'7" tall.

Research shows that they may have fought barefoot (Wikipedia under diet and medical care).

### **Gladiator Oath**

According to Petronius (*Satyricon*, 117) all prospective gladiators, whether volunteer or condemned, were bound to service by a sacred oath (*sacramentum*) of service: *Uri, vinciri, verberari, ferroque necari* (“I will endure, to be burned, to be bound, to be beaten, and to be killed by the sword”).

### **History of Gladiators**

The gladiator games lasted for nearly a thousand years, reaching their peak between the 1st century BC and the 2nd century AD. The games finally declined during the early 5th century after the adoption of Christianity in 380 AD, although beast hunts (*venationes*) continued into the 6th century.

Tomb frescoes from Paestum (350 BC) show paired-fighters in a propitiatory funeral blood-rite that anticipates early Roman gladiator games. Livy dates the first Roman games to 264 BC, during the First Punic War against Carthage, when Decimus Brutus had three pairs fight to the death in Rome's Forum Boarium (cattle market) to honour his dead father as a *Munus* (a commemorative duty owed to the Manes (spirits) of a dead ancestor). In 216 BC, Aemilius Lepidus was honoured by his sons with three days of *gladiatora munera* in the Forum Romanum, using 22 pairs of gladiators.

Samnium's support of Hannibal saw the Samnite-style gladiator become popular at Roman banquets to celebrate the victory over their defeated foe. As Roman conquests continued they added more gladiator types such as the Greek hoplomachus, Thracian Thraex, and the Gaul. *Munus*, or Munificence, gladiator games could celebrate military victory or the religious expiation of military disaster in order to help lift Roman morale. In 183 BC, three days of funeral games for Publius Licinius included 120 gladiators and a public feast. By 174 BC, small Roman *munera* provided by local editors had become common. In 105 BC, the ruling consuls provided state-sponsored "barbarian combat" demonstrated by gladiators from Capua, as part of a training program for the military that proved immensely popular.

Sponsoring Gladiator games as free public entertainment became a prime way for senators running for public office to win votes. In 65 BC, Julius Caesar tried to sponsor huge games,

## Gladiator Kit Guide

but the alarmed senate passed a law limiting the total number of fighters he was allowed in Rome to 320 matched-pairs. Roman conquests continued to provide a huge supply of slaves to be trained as gladiators, and these were supplemented by free-men volunteers that fought to earn money and glory.

Augustus officially regulated the gladiator fights as *ludi* (state games) dedicated to deities such as Jupiter or the Emperor throughout the empire with the widespread construction of amphitheatres. Claudius made town magistrates personally fund the games in their local communities. In Rome this public entertainment ran for a good part of the year, that along with the free corn-dole became the “Bread and Circuses” keeping Rome's rowdy lower-class population content. Extravagant entertainment included wild beast shows, criminal executions, novelty acts (including dwarfs and left-handed fighters), historical and mythical re-enactments, and even flooding the arena to provide sea battles. Several Roman emperors, including Caligula, Caracalla and Commodus fought in the arena as gladiators. In 108 AD, Trajan celebrated his Dacian victories using 10,000 gladiators (and 11,000 animals) over 123 days.

Constantine banned the games in 325 AD as inimical to Christianity, but soon resumed the games. Their popularity was reduced but persisted until the very end of empire in 476 AD.

### **Outline of the Gladiator Games**

Games were advertised on billboards giving the reason for the event, its editor, and the number of paired gladiators (*ordinarii*). Other highlighted features could include details of *venationes*, executions, music and spectator luxuries provided, such as sun awnings and water sprinklers. Food, drink, sweets and occasionally "door prizes" were offered. A detailed program (*libellus*) listed the names, types and match records of gladiator pairs (of interest to gamblers) and their order of appearance.

A procession (*pompa*) entered the arena led by lictors bearing fasces (to signify the magistrate-editor's power over life and death), musicians playing a fanfare, imaginers carrying images of the gods to “witness” the proceedings, and the palm-carriers of the palm branch awarded to victors. The magistrate-editor entered among a retinue who carried the arms and armour, and finally the gladiators.

The official games usually began with *venationes* (beast-hunts) and *bestiarii* (beast-fighting) gladiators. Next came the *ludi meridiani*, of variable content but usually involving executions of *noxii* (sometimes as mythological re-enactments) or others condemned (*damnati*) to the arena. There were also comedy fights; some may have been lethal. A crude Pompeian graffito suggests a burlesque of musicians, dressed as animals named *Ursus tibicen* (flute-playing bear) and *Pullus cornicen* (horn-blowing chicken), perhaps as accompaniment to clowning by *paegniarii* during a “mock” contest.

Before the listed contests were fought, the gladiators may have held informal warm-up matches, using blunted weapons – some *munera*, however, may have used blunted weapons throughout. The editor, his representative or an honoured guest would check the weapons (*probatio armorum*) for the scheduled matches. These were the highlight of the day, and were as inventive, varied and novel as the editor could afford. Armatures could be very costly – some were flamboyantly decorated with exotic feathers, jewels and precious metals. In late Republican *munera*, a dozen pairs could fight one match at a time in the course of an afternoon. Fights were interspersed or accompanied by music to accentuate the action. Music

## Gladiator Kit Guide

may have heightened the suspense during a gladiator's appeal; blows may have been accompanied by trumpet-blasts.

In the earliest munera, death was considered the proper outcome of combat. During the Imperial era, matches were sometimes advertised *sine missione* (without release [from the sentence of death]), which suggests that *missio* (the sparing of a defeated gladiator's life) had become common. The contract between editor and lanista could include compensation for unexpected deaths. As the demand for gladiators began to exceed supply, matches *sine missione* were officially banned, a pragmatic Augustan decision to reflect popular demands for "natural justice". Refusals by Caligula and Claudius to spare popular but defeated fighters did nothing to boost their own popularity.

By common custom, the spectators decided whether or not a losing gladiator should be spared, and chose the winner in the rare event of a "standing tie". Most matches employed a senior referee (*summa rudis*) and an assistant, shown in mosaics with long staffs (*rudes*) to caution or separate opponents. A gladiator's self-acknowledged defeat, signaled by a raised finger (*ad digitum*), was an appeal for mercy. During the match, referees exercised judgement and could pause bouts to allow combatants rest, refreshment and a "rub-down".

Most gladiators fought about three munera annually. Many died in their first match, but a few fought in up to 150 combats. The average gladiator lifespan was short; few survived more than 10 matches or lived past the age of 30. A single bout probably lasted 10 minutes. Spectators preferred well matched *ordinarii* with complementary fighting styles but other combinations are found, such as several gladiators fighting together or the serial replacement of a match loser by a new gladiator, who would fight the winner.

Victors received the palm branch and an award from the editor, but for anyone originally condemned *ad ludum* the greatest reward was *manumission* (freedom), symbolised by the gift of a wooden training sword. The body of a gladiator who had died well was placed on a couch of Libitina and removed from the arena with dignity. But the disgraced had Dis Pater (god of the underworld) strike the corpse with a mallet, and Mercury test for life-signs with a heated "wand"; once confirmed as dead, the body was dragged away.

## Gladiator Types

Different gladiators specialized in different weapons and tactics. The following illustrates these various styles and equipment. Of these, *Thraeces*, *Murmillones*, *Retiarii*, and *Secutores* were four of the most common.

Non-combat roles are presented in the next section.



From left, a disarmed and surrendering *retiarius* and his *secutor* opponent, a *thraex* and *murmillo*, a *hoplomachus* and *murmillo* (who is signalling his surrender), and the referee (detail from the Zliten mosaic from Libya (Leptis Magna), 200 AD).

### Andabatae



The *andabatae* (“the eye restricted one”, pl. *andabata*; 1st cent. BC), fought wearing a helmet with no eye-holes, herded towards the fight for the amusement of the crowd. Cicero makes a joking reference to the *andabata* in a letter he wrote to his friend Trebatius Testa, who was stationed in Gaul. The passage associates the *andabata* loosely with *essedarii*, chariot fighters. Sometimes these gladiators fought on horseback, charging blindly at one another as an ancient precursor of the medieval joust. Generally, they were hapless criminals who provided comic relief to the spectators. The *Oxford Latin Dictionary* regards the word as of dubious origin. Some have argued that it is a Latin borrowing from Gaulish.

### Arbelas



The *arbelas* is mentioned in only one source, a list of gladiators of the lanista C. Salvius Capito in the 1st century BC. The name *arbelas* comes from the *arbelai*, a crescent shaped knife that shoemakers used to cut leather. There are six known images that show a crescent shaped knife and they are only fighting against *retiarii* or against each other. It may be the same as the *scissor*.

## Bestiarius

*Bestiarius* (pl. *bestiarii*) were those who went into combat with beasts, or were exposed to them. There were two types. The first were those condemned to death via the beasts (see *damnatio ad bestias* under non-combat roles) and the second were those who faced them voluntarily, for pay or glory (*venatores* – see below). The latter are sometimes erroneously called gladiators to their contemporaries; however, the term *gladiator* referred specifically to one who fought other men. In later times, the *bestiarii* were highly trained, specializing in various types of exotic, imported beasts. They were armed with a spear or knife.



## Bustiarius



The *bustuarius* was literally a "tomb fighter," from *bustum*, "tomb". The term points toward the association of gladiatorial combat with funeral games (*munera*), rather than a particular fighting style. Servius notes that it had once been the custom to put captives to death at the graves of strong men, which later seemed a bit cruel, so it was decided to have gladiators fight at the tombs.

## Cestus



The *cestus* was a fist-fighter or boxer who wore the *cestus*, a brutal forerunner of the boxing glove, normally based in the Colosseum.

## Contraretiarius

See *secutor*.

## Crupellarius



A *crupellarius* ("buckethead", pl. *crupellarii*) was a type of heavy armoured gladiator during the Roman Imperial Age, whose origin was Gaul. A small figurine found at Versigny, France, fits the description of a *crupellarius*; it shows a 'robotic' looking gladiator clad almost entirely in plate armour from head to foot. The helmet has a perforated bucket appearance.

The standard *crupellarius* was clad almost entirely from head to foot in *lorica segmentata* and *manica*, and fought with *scutum* and *gladius*. They wore a helmet resembling a perforated bucket, with only very small openings for the eyes and mouth, similar to a medieval great helm.

### Dimachaerus

The *dimachaerus* (Greek διμάχαιρος, “bearing two knives”, pl. *dimachaeri*) used a sword in each hand. *Dimachaeri* were popular during the 2nd-4th centuries AD, and were probably considered to be “insidious” by many Romans. Both written and pictorial records on *dimachaeri* are scant and rather indeterminate. An inscription from Lyon, France, mentions such a type of gladiator, here misspelled *dymacherus*.

Depictions of *dimachaeri* and their equipment vary in pictorial sources, so it is difficult to say exactly how, and how uniformly, they were equipped. Some pictorial sources depict *dimachaeri* wearing extremely minimal armour such as a *balteus* and leather wrappings or none at all, save a *subligaculum*. Others show a slightly more heavily armoured *dimachaerus*, variously equipped with scale armour, mail shirts, visored helmets in the fashion of *murmillones*, greaves and leg wrappings, both barefoot and in sandals. It is a mistake to suppose that *dimachaeri* were always identically equipped, or even similarly equipped, apart from wielding two blades. It is also entirely possible that the *dimachaerus* was not a separate class of gladiator at all, but a sub-discipline within a class, or even a cross-discipline practiced by multiple classes. In the late Roman Empire, when references to *dimachaeri* first appear, many novelties and new gladiator types were being introduced to the arena, and sub-classes had appeared within many gladiator types.



The *dimachaeri* were equipped for close-combat fighting. A *dimachaerus* used a pair of *siccae* (curved scimitar) or *gladii* and used a fighting style adapted to both attack and defend with his weapons rather than a shield, as he was not equipped with one. Little else is known about this class of gladiator, but due to the difficulty of wielding two swords it can be inferred that *dimachaeri* were highly skilled and experienced fighters, and were probably relatively exalted as a class of gladiator. *Dimachaeri* would have been ideally suited to fight heavily armoured opponents and they may have fought other *dimachaeri*, as well. They are known to have been paired against the *hoplomachus* and are also referred to as fighting against a gladiator class called an *oplomachus*, which, according to Justus Lipsius, was a putative variant of the Samnite.

Note: The image of the *dimachaerus* here is Theokoles from *Spartacus* the TV series.

### Eques



The *Eques* (Latin for horseman or cavalryman; pl. *equites*;) fought on horseback with a spear and *gladius*.

In early depictions, these lightly-armed gladiators wore scale armour, the traditional medium-sized round Republican cavalry shield (*parma equestris*), and a brimmed helmet without a crest, but with two decorative feathers on either side.



## Gladiator Kit Guide

In Imperial times, they sported a *manica* on their right arm and sleeveless, belted tunics, in contrast to other gladiators who usually fought bare-chested without greaves. They were the first gladiator type to not use a loin cloth. Depictions of Imperial *equites* usually portray them wearing capacious tunics, sometimes brightly coloured and decorated, with the very typical *clavus*, the two integral woven vertical stripes running the length of the garment from neck to hem. The two stripes are generally designated in the singular form *clavus* rather than the plural *clavi*. The stripes are quite narrow, perhaps an inch wide, and conform to the *angustus clavus*, which members of the equestrian class were allowed to wear, as opposed to the *latus clavus* (three inches wide) reserved for patrician senatorial rank.



At the time of Isidore of Seville, the *equites* rode white horses and opened a day's program of fights (*Origines* 18.53ff.).

In Roman times horses were no larger than today's ponies and as Romans did not use stirrups fighting on horseback was impractical. *Equites* fought in the style of Roman cavalry: after they had thrown their lance (*hasta*), they dismounted and continued to fight on foot with their *gladius*. Generally, *equites* fought only other *equities*. The *equities* entered the arena mounted on horses and began their combat on horseback. If one fell off his horse, the other had to fight on foot as well, or they would dismount after a time if neither man had won to continue their fight on foot.

### Essedarius

*Essedarius* (pl. *essedarii*) is from the Latin word for a Celtic war chariot (*essedum*) and was likely first brought to Rome from Britain by Julius Caesar. *Essedarii* appear as arena-fighters in many inscriptions after the 1st century AD. No pictorial representations exist.



The *essedarius* fought from a chariot. There may have been just one man in the chariot or two, a driver and a fighter. The word is also used of charioteers in other instances, such as in Caesar's Gallic War, in his campaign against Cassivellaunus in Britain. They normally fought with a spear and a sword as a side-arm but sometimes also had a small shield for defence. They charged their opponent with their chariot until the opposing gladiator was either impaled by the spear, trampled by the horses, or run over

by the wheels of the chariot. They were relatively hard to defeat due to the speed of the chariot, but once the wheels were taken out they were easy to kill, if they didn't know how to ride a horse. It was a common tactic that if their chariot was broken they used one of the horses from the chariot as a mount.

### Gallus

See *murmillo*.

### Gladiatrix



A *gladiatrix* (pl. *gladiatrices*) was a female gladiator of any type. They first appeared in the 60's AD. There are a few references to women fighters in the literary sources, and some evidence from inscriptions on monuments, but the actual word “*gladiatrix*” is a modern construction, there being no Latin term for a female gladiator. There is some debate as to whether the infrequency of their mention indicates their appearance was commonplace or just occasional novelty acts. It is known that they fought dwarves and other *gladiatrices*, and went topless, but it is not known whether they also fought men. This is covered more fully in the Gladiatrix Kit Guide.

Note: The image here is Saxa from the *Spartacus* TV series.

### Hoplomachus

The *hoplomachus* (Greek “armed fighter” pl. *hoplomachi*, based on Greek *hoplites*) wore woollen quilted leg wrappings, loincloth, a belt, a pair of long shin-guards or greaves, an arm guard (*manica*) on the sword-arm, and a helmet with a stylized griffin on the crest that could be adorned with a plume of feathers on top and a single feather on each side. He was equipped with a *gladius* and a very small, round shield. He also carried a spear in the Hoplite style, which the gladiator would have to cast before closing for hand-to-hand combat.



The *hoplomachi* were paired against *murmillones* or *thraeces*. They may have developed out of the earlier “Samnite” type after it became impolitic to use the names of now-allied peoples.

The primary weapon of this category seems to have been the spear; their other weapon, the sword, or perhaps a longer dagger, like the *pugio*, could be held in the left hand at the same time as the shield, ready for use once the spear was cast or lost.

The equipment of the *hoplomachus* was designed to blend speed with power. The *hoplomachus* is often confused with the *thraex*, and indeed they have many pieces of equipment in common. They both had the distinctive forward-curving crested visored helmet, though that of the *hoplomachus* did not appear to have the griffin's head on its crest. Both had the same high greaves, and padded leg wrappings (*fasciae*). They even shared the same opponent, the *murmillio*. But whereas the shield (*parmula*) of the *thraex* was small and square or rectangular, that of the *hoplomachus* was round, though still small in size. The shield was always round, convex, and made of a single sheet of metal, usually copper-alloy (bronze). The thickness of the sheet bronze was an important factor in determining the weight of the shield—too thick, and its defensive qualities would be negated by its unwieldiness.



## Laquearius

The *laquearius*, *laquerarius*, or *laqueator* (pl. *laquearii*, *laquerarii*, and *laqueatores*; literally “snarer”), appeared late in the history of the Roman games. The *laquearius* was probably a kind of *retiarius* who tried to catch his adversaries with a lasso (*laqueus*) instead of a net. The snarer's armour was probably similar to that of the *retiarius*; it consisted mainly of a *galerus* armguard worn over the left shoulder. He was equipped also with a dagger or *gladius* for use once he snared his opponent. Most gladiator types were based on real-world antecedents. Because the Romans did not use lassos on the battlefield, it is unlikely that the

*laquearius* was based on a Roman model. Instead, it may have been based on a barbarian tribe known to the Romans to use lassos in combat, such as the Sagartians. Another possibility is that the *laquearius* was a kind of *paegniarius*.

## Murmillio

The *murmillio* (pl. *murmillones*) or *myrmillo* got their name from a Mediterranean fish. The fish in question was the *mormyros* (Latin *murmo* or *murmuros*), the striped sea bream (*Lithognathus mormyrus*), which was very common in the Mediterranean then as now, and best caught by the age-old method of surf-casting, a fishing technique involving casting the net into the surf to trap the fish coming in from the sandy bottoms where they feed. It is in this technique that perhaps a clue to the origin of the *murmillio* may be found. Whatever the origin of the term *murmillio*, it is generally believed that they evolved from the earlier category known as the Gaul, or *gallus*, about which little is known.

The Emperor Vespasian's rhetorician, Quintilian, records a sing-song chant supposedly addressed to a *murmillio* by a pursuing *retiarius*: *Non te peto, pisces peto; cur me fugis, Galle?* — “It's not you I'm after, it's your fish; why are you running away from me, Gaul?”



The *Murmillio* wore a helmet with a stylised fish on the crest. The helmet had a broad brim, with a bulging faceplate that included grillwork eye-pieces; its distinctive appearance was partly due to the prominent visor, but also to the angular, sometimes hollow, box crest which was then able to take the insertion of a wooden plume-holder into which a further horsehair (or feathered) crest could be fixed. Single plume-holders for feathers were fixed on either side of the bowl.

He also wore a *manica* on his sword arm, a *subligaculum* and *balteus*. On his left leg he wore thick wrappings covering the tops of his feet, and a very short greave with an indentation for the padding at the top of the feet. Unlike the *thraex* or *hoplomachus*, the *murmillio*, having the almost complete cover of the *scutum*, did not need the high, thigh length greaves that they wore—so long as there was sufficient overlap

between the bottom of the shield and the top of the greave, his defence was maintained.

## Gladiator Kit Guide

He was armed with a *gladius* (64–81 cm long) and carried a tall, oblong semi-cylindrical wooden shield very similar in appearance and construction to the legionary *scutum*. *Murmillones* were typically paired with *thraeces*, but occasionally with the similar *hoplomachus*. A number of ancient authors, including Valerius Maximus and Quintillion assert that he also regularly fought the *retiarius*, but this pairing is disputed; visual depictions of *murmillones* usually show them fighting the *thraex* or *hoplomachus* rather than the *retiarius*.

### Noxius

The *noxius* (pl. *noxii*, “hurtful ones”) was not a type of gladiator as such, but was rather considered a class below all gladiators, even the *venator* (see below). They were simply the criminals that were sentenced to death, the scum of the city that were being used for entertainment, runaway slaves, even political prisoners being made example of. Sometimes they would face a well trained gladiator and sometimes they would face another *noxius*. It all depended on the editor of the games. Their weapons were whatever the editor of the games allowed them to have. It could be a sword, a spear, a dagger, maybe just a shield, and sometimes nothing at all. They wore the clothes that they had on when they were captured, nothing more.



In this image we have a *gladiatrix* versus a condemned criminal, a *noxius*, in a modern day re-enactment.

### Oplomachus

The *oplomachus* (pl. *oplomachi*) was a designation or possibly a class of Roman gladiator with relatively little mention in literary sources. They are often identified with the similarly named *hoplomachus* (see above), but literary mentions do not seem to relate the two, despite the similarity of the names. According to Justus Lipsius, an *oplomachus* was one of two designations of Samnite; he conjectures that Samnite variants were called *oplomachus* when matched against a *thraex*, and a *secutor* when facing a *retiarius*. Though historical accounts identify them primarily as an opponent of the *thraex*, they appear in a Pompeian list as fighting not only against *thraeces*, but against *murmillones* and *dimachaeri* as well.

This clay figurine of an *oplomachus* gladiator is from the house of Marcus Lucretius Fronto in Pompeii, 1st century AD.



### Paegniarius

The *paegniarius* (pl. *praegenarii*) did not engage in serious combat with lethal weapons, but was rather an entertainer who performed “duels” as an opening act to get the crowd in the mood or during breaks between more bloodthirsty parts of the programme, to hold the crowd’s



## Gladiator Kit Guide

interest and provide light relief. They have an ancient pedigree, more related to the Atellian farces from which they seem to have strayed.

The *paegniarius* had neither helmet nor shield, but wore protective wrappings on his lower legs and head, and used non-lethal weapons such as a *rudis* (wooden sword), whips and sticks. As they fought, they were accompanied by music (cymbals, trumpets, and hydraulis water organ). These comical contests would not have presented much danger to life and limb, as is indicated by the grave inscription of the *paegniarius* Secundus; it proudly states he was attached to the *familia* at the Ludus Magnus, the great imperial gladiator training school next to the Colosseum, that it was the *familia* who had set up the memorial, and that he lived to the ripe old age of annis XCVIII, mensibu(s) VIII, diebus XVIII. (98 years, 8 months, and 18 days).

A variant on the usual *paegniarius* was offered by Caligula, who, as Suetonius relates, “would stage comic duels between respectable householders who happened to be physically disabled in some way or other.”

### Provocator

The *provocator* (“challenger”; pl. *provocatores*) was first seen around AD 75. He was the most heavily armoured of the standard types of gladiator. This was the only gladiator to have armour over the chest. These fighters were difficult to injure, but could move only slowly and would become tired if a fight lasted a long time.



In the late Republican and early Imperial era, the armament of a *provocator* mirrored legionary armature. In the later Imperial period, their armament ceased to reflect its military origins, and changes in armament reflected the changing fashions in arena combat, and nothing more.

*Provocatores* have been shown wearing a loincloth, a belt, a long greave on the left leg, a *manica* on the lower right arm, and a legionary helmet without brim or crest, but with a feather on each side. In the later Imperial period the open helmet of legionary type became a visored one, as the cheek-pieces were expanded to meet in the middle, then hinged at the sides, and eye-grilles were added to enclose the face. They were the only gladiators protected by a rectangular breastplate (*cardiophylax*) which in the later Imperial period became crescent-shaped. They fought with a tall, rectangular shield and the *gladius*. Depictions of *provocatores* usually show them fighting each other and no other variety of gladiator.

### Retiarius

Of all the gladiator categories, the most instantly recognisable is that of the *retiarius* (“net fighter”; pl. *retiarii*). This category developed in the early Augustan period and was styled on a fisherman. He carried a trident, a dagger, and a net (*rete*). The *retiarius* wore a loincloth held in place by a wide belt, leather bindings on the leading leg, and a larger arm guard (*manica*) extending to the shoulder and left side of the chest. He fought without the protection of a helmet. Occasionally a metal shoulder shield (*galerus*) was added to protect the neck and

## Gladiator Kit Guide

lower face. A tombstone found in Romania shows a *retiarius* holding a dagger with four spikes (each at the corner of a square guard) instead of the usual bladed dagger. This was previously thought to be an artistic invention or perhaps a ceremonial weapon, but a recent discovery of a gladiator graveyard found that several of the remains had four odd-looking marks that form the outline of a square on their bones which is consistent with the use of such a weapon.



The *retiarius* relied on speed and skill to escape attacks from heavily equipped gladiators. This tactic meant that they were viewed as the least respected of the different kinds of gladiator. On rare occasions, gladiators would fight in teams. For instance, three *retiarum* might defend a pretend fishing boat against *secutores* (see below), playing the roles of sharks.

A variation to the normal combat was a *retiarius* facing two *secutores* at the same time. The *retiarus* stood on a bridge (*pons*) or raised platform with stairs and had a pile of fist-sized stones to throw at his adversaries. While the *retarius* tried to keep them at bay, the *secutores* tried to scale the structure to attack him. The platform may have been constructed over water. Apart from *secutores*, *retiarum* sometimes also fought *murmillones*.

All other categories of gladiator have an originating connection, however weak, with military or martial activities; the *retiarius*, with his obvious fishing and sea-related equipment, does not follow that pattern.

So many depictions of the *retiarius* show him holding the trident with both hands, with the left arm (as that is usually the leading arm for right-handers) forward and the right arm back at an angle, ready to thrust, that this is possibly the textbook stance for trident fighting. Of course, this presupposes that the *retiarius* was right-handed, and that he would therefore cast his net with his right hand, while gripping his trident and dagger in the left hand. However, in a fragment of relief, one of the very few representations of this gladiator to actually show him with a net (from Chester, Cheshire, and now in Saffron Walden Museum), he is holding it in his left hand.

### Retiarius tunicatus

There was an effeminate class of gladiator who fought as a *retiarius tunicatus*. They wore tunics to distinguish them from the usual *retiarius*, and were looked on as a social class even lower than *infamia*.

One very notable social renegade was an aristocratic descendant of the Gracchi, infamous for his marriage (as a bride) to a male horn player. He made a voluntary and “shameless” arena appearance not only as a lowly *retiarius tunicatus* but in woman's attire and a conical hat adorned with gold ribbon. In Juvenal's account, he seems to have relished the scandalous self-display, applause and the disgrace he inflicted on his sturdier opponent by repeatedly skipping away from the confrontation.

### Rudarius

A *rudarius* (pl. *rudarii*) is a gladiator who has earned freedom. His freedom could be obtained if a gladiator bravely distinguished himself in a particular fight or, at some periods during Roman history, had won five fights. He would be given a wooden sword (a *rudis*) or a wooden rod (a *rudem*, which was a “slender stick” used as a practice staff/sword). A wooden sword is widely assumed; however, Cicero in a letter speaks of a gladiator being awarded a rod in a context that suggests the latter: *Tam bonus gladiator, rudem tam cito accepisti?* (“Being so good a gladiator, have you so quickly accepted the rod?”).



If he chose to remain a gladiator, he was called a *rudarius*. These were in great demand as they were very popular with the public and could be relied on to provide a good “show”.

The term *liberatio* referred to the freeing of a gladiator who had served his time as a gladiator and fulfilled his contract.

The decision as to whether a gladiator died, or was granted his freedom and became a *rudarius*, lay firmly with the mob of spectators. The spectators demonstrated their decisions by yelling and screaming but also by the *pollice verso* - gestures with “with thumb turned”. Therefore the initial decision on who should be granted the *rudis* and become a *rudarius* was the crowd and the *editor* had the authority to grant it.

The ceremony surrounding the granting of the *rudis* and therefore creating a *rudarius* was fairly unusual. It provided a diversion for the crowd and required due pomp and ceremony to be associated with it. The *munerarius* (*editor*), possibly the Emperor, would go to the centre of the arena and give the *rudis*, the symbol of freedom, to the brave gladiator, signalling that the gladiator was no longer a slave, but a freeman - a *rudarius*. The crowds would cheer and the *rudarius* would walk from the arena as a free man and one that was idolised by the “mob”.

As a free man the *rudarius* could choose one of the following roles:

- To retire from the gladiatorial games altogether, living on the proceeds he had earned as a gladiator.
- To work as a bodyguard, and status symbol, of a wealthy Roman.
- To work in one of the gladiator schools training new gladiators.
- To work in the arena taking on a role of an arbiter, or referee.
- To continue working as an elite, sought after and well paid *rudarius* gladiator and continue to receive the adulation from the fans and spectators, opting for fame and glory or death.

There are several stories about famous *rudarii* documented by Roman scholars and writers. The Roman Emperor Tiberius once offered 1,000 gold coins to retired gladiators (*rudarii*) who would agree to return to the arena. A famous *secutor* gladiator named Flamma, is known to have turned down retirement an incredible four times, and was eventually killed in his 34th gladiatorial combat. Two famous gladiators named Priscus and Verus fought so evenly and

## Gladiator Kit Guide

courageously for so long that when they both acknowledged defeat at the same instant, the Roman Emperor Titus awarded victory to both of them, presented them with the wooden swords (*rudes*) and they both walked from the through thr Gate of Life as *rudiarrii*. This type of fight was referred to as *stantes missi* - a draw, with both “sent away standing.”

*Rudiarrii* could never be Roman citizens, but their children could.

### Sagittarius



The *sagittarius* (pl. *sagittarii*) was a mounted archer armed with a reflex bow capable of propelling an arrow a great distance.

### Samnite



The Samnite was an early type of heavily armed fighter that disappeared in the early Imperial period. The Samnites were a powerful league of Italic tribes in Campania with whom the Romans fought three major wars between 326 and 291 BC. A "Samnite" gladiator was armed with a *scutum*, a plumed helmet, a short sword, and probably a greave on his left leg.

Under Augustan legislation, the Samnite type was renamed *secutor*.

### Scissor



Little is known about the *scissor* (“carver”; pl. *scissores*). They used a special short sword with two blades that looked like a pair of open scissors without a hinge. German historian and experimental archaeologist Marcus Junkelmann has propagated an idea, based on an unlabeled, unclear image that he decided might be a scissor, that this type of gladiator fought using a weapon consisting of a hardened steel tube that encased the gladiator's entire forearm, with the hand end capped off and a semicircular blade attached to it.

### Secutor

The *secutor* (“chaser”, “pursuer”, “follower” from *sequor* “I follow, come or go after”; pl. *secutores*) or *contraretiarius* developed to fight the retiarius. As a variant of the *murmillo*, he wore the same armour and weapons, including *scutum* and *gladius*. The helmet of the



## Gladiator Kit Guide

*secutor*, however, differed. It was brimless and had only a low, smooth, featureless crest following the curve of the bowl. The back of the helmet curled into a small neck-guard. Unlike other helmets with metal grilles forming the upper half of the visor, the *secutor* helmet enclosed the face completely; the visor had only two small eyeholes, each a scant inch (3 cm) in diameter, and although it was hinged to open from the side, it had a catch on the exterior to ‘lock’ the gladiator in it.

His shield had smooth, rounded edges so that the net thrown by the *retiarius* would not snag easily. His sword arm was encased in armour and he wore short leg armour on one leg.



### Tertiarius

In some games three men were matched against each other. The first two would fight, with the winner then fighting the third man, called the *tertiarius* (“third man”; pl. *tertiarii*). *Tertiarii* would also act as substitutes if an advertised gladiator was unable to fight.

### Thraex

The *thraex* (pl. *thraeces*, “Thracians”) first appeared in 78 BC and was equipped with weapons based on those used by the wild tribesmen of Thrace. Thracians were famous for being able to hit any target with their spears. Thracians were Emperor Caligula’s favourites so he allowed them to live even if they lost a fight.



The *thraex* wore the same protective armour as the *hoplomachus*. He wore greaves (*ocreae*) on both legs, which reached up as far as mid-thigh. He is often depicted wearing a form of leg protectors above them, from at least knee to groin, which appear to be padded or quilted fabric wrappings around both legs. The leg armour had long metal guards. On the dominant arm a *manica* was worn

The most instantly recognizable feature of the *thraex* was his brimmed, crested helmet with its distinctive griffin’s head on the *protome* or front of the crest (the griffin was the companion of the avenging goddess Nemesis). The significance of this particular mythological creature in a gladiatorial context may stem from its role as a guardian of the dead, or from a reputed association with Nemesis; four griffins were said to draw her chariot. As a symbol, the griffin frequently occurs in Greek and Roman art, and particularly at tombs, as a protector of souls. It

can be seen on many Roman architectural features, usually as part of a pair. Herodotus told of griffins that guarded the gold of the Hyperboreans, who incidentally were geographically located near the Carpathian mountains, west of Thrace. Why exactly the creature should be thought appropriate for a Thracian helmet, apart from the link with Nemesis, cultic goddess of gladiators, is open to question; there is a suggestion it symbolizes arrogant pride (*superbia*) and that might be thought reason enough for a professional gladiator.

## Gladiator Kit Guide

The *thraex* carried a small square or rectangular shield (*parma* or its diminutive, *parmula*), of wooden construction, planking or ply with a covering of leather; from examples depicted, it appears to have been emphatically convex rather than flat, and tended not to have a boss. From this shield, the *thraeces* got their popular nickname, *parmularii*, just as their opponents with the curved rectilinear shields were called *scutarii*. The shield was small, about 24 inches by 20 inches, and offered little protection below groin level.

His primary weapon was the Thracian curved sword (*sica* or *falx*, c. 34 cm or 13 in long). Depictions of this vary from dagger to sword length.

The *thraex* were introduced as replacements for the Gauls (*gallus*, pl. *gallii*) after Gaul made peace with Rome. They commonly fought *murmillo*nes or *hoplomachi*. This older category of gladiator was so popular, it did not disappear or mutate into another named type; however, the *thraex* did acquire new elements as time went on. Fashions changed in the arena, but it is possible to recognise the distinct armature of the *thraex*, whatever the date.

### Veles



*Veles* (“skirmishers”; pl. *velites*) fought on foot, each holding a spear with attached thong in strap for throwing. Named for the early Republican army units of the same name.

### Venator



The *venator* (“hunter”; pl. *venatores*) specialized in wild animal hunts instead of fighting them as the *bestiarii* did (see above). As well as hunting they also performed tricks with animals such as putting an arm in a lion’s mouth, riding a camel while leading lions on a leash, and making an elephant walk a tightrope. Technically they were not gladiators.

See also *bestiarius*.

The image here shows *venatores* fighting a tiger (5th century AD mosaic in the Great Palace of Constantinople).

## Non-Combat Roles

Apart from gladiators there were various other roles that made up the gladiatorial games. This section lists general terms relating to gladiators, fighters associated with gladiatorial spectacles who were not strictly *gladiatores*, and personnel associated with training or presentation.

### Arena Officials

There were various officials who had duties in the arena. According to the Christian author Tertullian, arena officials confirmed the death of defeated gladiators. One arena official, dressed as the “brother of Jove”, *Dis Pater* (god of the underworld) struck the corpse with a mallet. Another, dressed as Mercury, tests for life-signs with a heated “wand”; once confirmed as dead, the body is dragged from the arena. Modern pathological examination confirms the probably fatal use of a mallet on some, but not all the gladiator skulls found in a gladiators’ cemetery. The title of Charon was given to an official who accompanied the dead from the gladiatorial arena.

### Arena Slaves

These helped clean up the arena and remove the bodies.

### Damnatio ad bestias

*Damnatio ad bestias* (“condemnation to beasts”) was a form of capital punishment in which the condemned were maimed on the circus arena or thrown to a cage with wild animals, often lions. It was brought to ancient Rome around the 2nd century BC. In Rome, *damnatio ad bestias* was used as entertainment and was part of the inaugural games of the Flavian Amphitheatre. From the 1st to 3rd centuries AD, this penalty was mainly applied to the worst criminals, slaves, and early Christians.

### Editor

The sponsor who financed gladiatorial spectacles was the *editor*, “producer.” Also called the *munerarius*.

### Imaginers

The imaginers carried images of the gods to “witness” the proceedings.

### Lanista

The *lanista* was an owner-trainer of a troop of gladiators. He traded in slave gladiators, and rented those he owned out to a producer (*editor*) who was organizing games. The profession was often remunerative, but socially the *lanista* was on a par with a pimp (*leno*) as a “vendor of human flesh.”

### Lictors

The lictors carried the fasces that signify the magistrate-editor's power over life and death.

## Lorarius



The *lorarius* (from *lorum*, “leather thong, whip,”) was an attendant “back-stage” who whipped reluctant combatants or animals into fighting.

## Musicians

These play a fanfare and accompany the games with music.

## Palm Carrier

The palm carrier awards the Palm of Victory to the winner.

## Patron of the Games

The Emperor, or a visiting dignitary, senator or wealthy noble matron.

## Roman Guards

The military policed the gladiator schools and the arena. They drag in prisoners.

## Rudis



An arena referee or his assistants, named after the wooden staff (*rudis*) used to direct or separate combatants.

## Summa rudis

The *summa* (high) *rudis* was senior referee or trainer and weapons-checker (see also *rudis*).

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