


FIENDS, ROMANS, COUNTRYMEN...LEND ME YOUR WARPED LITTLE MINDS AND I'LL TAKE YOU BACK TO THE DAYS OF THE OLD ROMAN EMPIRE FOR SOME HYSTERICAL HISTORY...BACK TO THE BLOODY ARENAS WHERE A MAN'S LIFE DEPENDS ON THE SIMPLE GESTURE OF THUMBS UP OR...

# THUMBS DOWN!

WITH A ROAR OF SURPRISE AND EXCITEMENT, THE CROWD IN THE COLISEUM OF THE ROMAN CITY OF MITHRAS WAS ON ITS FEET... THE FAVORED GLADIATOR HAD FALLEN AND AN AIR OF BLOOD AND DEATH SWEEPED THE ARENA!



YOUR MAN, AGLIO, HAS FOUGHT WELL, BRACCHUS...SHALL I LET HIM LIVE?

AS GAMES MASTER OF THE ARENA, I'VE LEARNED ONE VERY IMPORTANT LESSON, YOUR HIGHNESS...

AL  
WILLIAMSON





...CROWDS COME HERE TO SEE ONE THING...(BURP) THE SPILLING OF BLOOD! AND A GOOD GAMES MASTER...



...NEVER DISAPPOINTS THEM!

AS THE CROWD STREAMED FROM THE ARENA AT THE GAMES' END, BRACCHUS RUSHED HAPPILY BELOW TO THE GLADIATORS' ROOMS, AS DRUNK WITH GREED AND POWER AS WITH THE STRONG RED WINE HE HAD SWILLED ALL AFTERNOON...

AND SO HE DOES! WHO CAN BE FREER THAN A DEAD MAN

WELL FOUGHT, CASSIUS! YOU'VE MADE YOURSELF CHAMPION AND ME A RICH MAN! EVERY FOOL IN THE CITY WAS BETTING ON AGLIO!

BUT YOU TOLD AGLIO HE COULD HAVE HIS FREEDOM IF HE LET ME WIN!

WHAT ABOUT ME, BRACCHUS? WILL YOU SOON GRANT ME SUCH 'FREEDOM'?

NOT YOU, CASSIUS! YOU SHARE MY SECRET, HAVE MY GRATITUDE... YOU, I'LL TAKE CARE OF!





SO BRACCHUS AND HIS ARENA PROSPERED... GROWING DAILY WITH THE INCREASED TRADE IN DEATH AND BRUTALITY...

SHUT UP, OLD FOOL! YOU CAN'T TALK THAT WAY TO ME!

SHAME! THE PEOPLE STARVE AND DIE IN THE STREETS AND SUPPLY SHIPS BRING ONLY ANIMALS AND SAND FOR THE ARENA! SHAME, BRACCHUS!

CONCERNED ABOUT FOOD, EH? WELL, TOMORROW YOU CAN HELP FEED SOME STARVING LIONS--WITH YOUR FLESH!

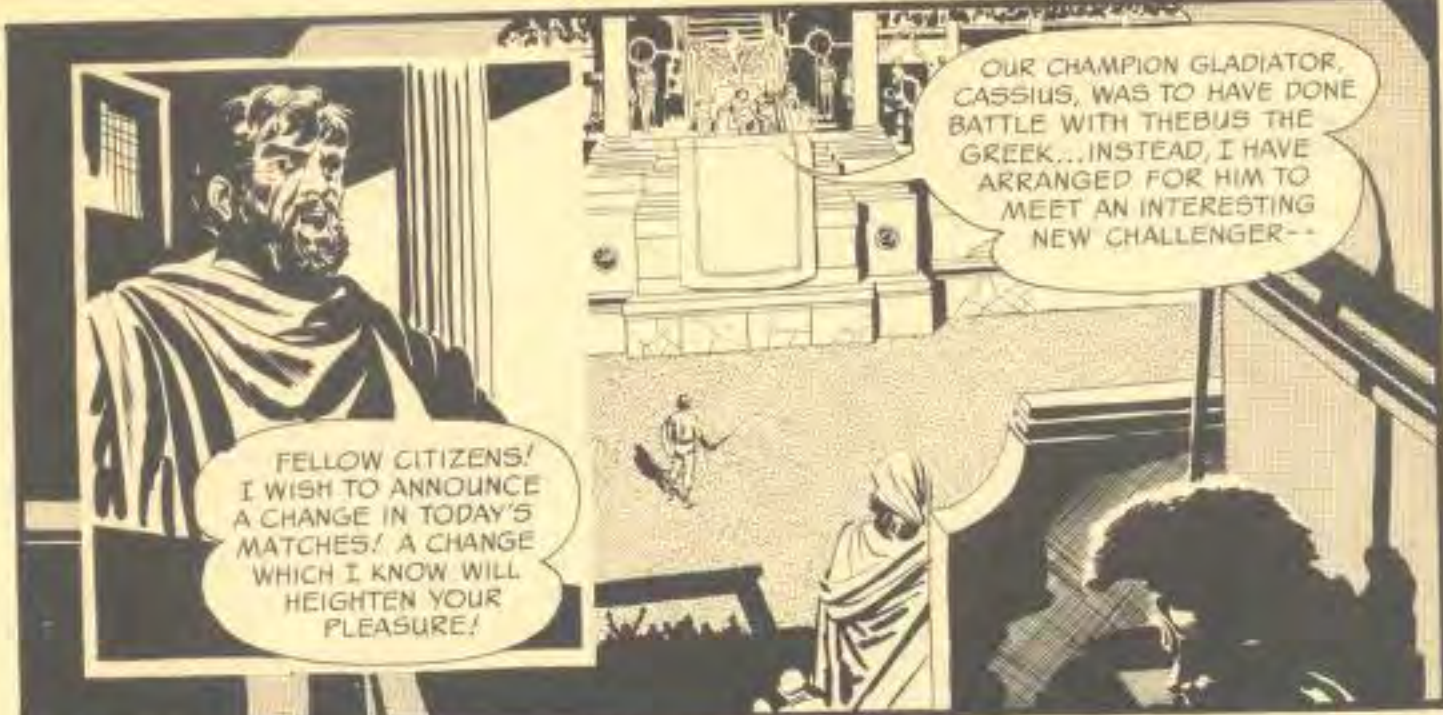
BUT ALL BRACCHUS'S PROBLEMS WERE NOT SO SIMPLE OR SO EASILY SOLVED...

A GLADIATOR'S LIFE IS A HARD ONE, BRACCHUS... EVEN IN YOUR FIXED CONTESTS! I WANT TO BE MADE A FREE MAN!

THE GAMES ARE IMPORTANT TO THE PEOPLE... YOU'D BE TORN APART IF WORD REACHED THEM YOUR CONTESTS ARE DISHONEST!


A GOOD POINT, WELL ARGUED, CASSIUS! I'LL SEE WHAT I CAN DO!






OUR CHAMPION GLADIATOR, CASSIUS, WAS TO HAVE DONE BATTLE WITH THEBUS THE GREEK... INSTEAD, I HAVE ARRANGED FOR HIM TO MEET AN INTERESTING NEW CHALLENGER--

FELLOW CITIZENS! I WISH TO ANNOUNCE A CHANGE IN TODAY'S MATCHES! A CHANGE WHICH I KNOW WILL HEIGHTEN YOUR PLEASURE!



-- JUST ARRIVED FROM SPAIN!

BRACCHUS!  
**NO!**



MARVELOUS, BRACCHUS! WHAT A SPECTACLE! TOMORROW IS THE FEAST OF APOLLO... HOW CAN YOU HOPE TO TOP THIS?

I BELIEVE YOUR HIGHNESS HAS RECENTLY ACQUIRED A NEW BATCH OF CHRISTIANS... BY A STRANGE COINCIDENCE, I HAVE RECENTLY ACQUIRED A NEW BATCH OF LIONS... AND TIGERS!

GAAAAAA!



NIGHT BROUGHT NO DESIRE FOR SLEEP TO BRACCHUS... IT WAS A TIME FOR CELEBRATION! THE FEAST OF APOLLO WOULD BRING THE BIGGEST CROWDS OF THE YEAR AND HE COULD NOT RESIST A LAST JUBILANT REVIEW TO MAKE SURE HIS DOMAIN WAS IN READINESS...

CHEER UP, BEASTS! TONIGH' I DINED WITH THE TERRITORIAL GOVERNOR! TOMORROW... YOU'RE GONNA FATTEN ON CHRISHANS!

HERE! YOU NEED THIS MOR'AN ME! YOU HEAR DOWN THERE? GONNA BE FOOD FOR THE BIG CATS... GONNA MAKE ME A BIG SUCCESS!

THIS IS ALL MINE! MAKIN' ME RICH... FAMOUS... POWERFUL!

WAIT! WHO'ZAT? WHAT'RE YOU DOIN' HERE? NO-BODY'S ALLOWED HERE TILL TOMORROW... GET OUT OF MY ARENA!

CLINK! CLANG!

THAT NOISE! SOUNDS LIKE ANIMALS BEING RELEASED FROM THEIR CAGES!

GROWRRRRR!





EVEN AS A WHIRLWIND OF HOT BREATH, FANGS AND CLAWS SPRAWLED HIM INTO THE ARENA SAND, BRACCHUS'S EYES LOOKED PLEADINGLY UP AT THE LAST SIGHT THEY WOULD EVER SEE... THE HAND FROM THE GRAVE FORMING THE HOPELESS GESTURE MORE FAMILIAR TO HIM THAN THE DEATH CRY WHICH EVEN NOW BURST FROM HIS MOUTH!

HEH, HEH! THAT ONE'S A REAL SCREAM! HOPE ALL YOU CATS DUG IT... WHAT CAN YOU EXPECT WHEN YOU GO ROAMIN' AROUND THE ARENA AT NIGHT? YOU'RE BOUND TO BUMP INTO SOMEONE WHO'S ALL THUMBS... DOWN!

