

A Day in the Arena

Roman gladiator fiction by [squaddie John](#), continued from a beginning by [Dan](#)

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Wearing only skimpy loincloths, Gaius and Darius were fighting to the death with swords in the Arena. Gaius seemed to have the upper hand. His feet advanced while Darius's feet retreated. The crowd were already beginning to predict Darius's defeat and to cheer on Gaius. Then Darius noticed Gaius advance his manly foot as he launched a final parry. Deflecting Gaius's sword with his own, Darius jumped on Gaius's foot, bringing his foot down on top of Gaius's with all its weight. For a few seconds Gaius could not move and that was all the time Darius needed. He slid his sword effortlessly into Gaius's belly.

Blood gushed. "AAEEEEIIIiii!!!" cried Gaius his face contorted in agony as his knees buckled and he descended to his knees. Darius showed no mercy. He planted his foot on Gaius's shoulder and forced Gaius onto the sand on his back.

Darius did not want Gaius to recover and get to his feet, so he planted both his feet on Gaius's feet, rendering him totally immobile.

The mob loved this reversal of fortune and had no sympathy with Gaius in his defeat. They turned their thumbs down and a slave approached with a heavy blade for Darius to pass over Gaius's throat and send him to the next world to the cheers of the baying crowd.

Before delivering the death blow, Darius swaggered around Gaius, circling the defeated gladiator in a victory lap, bathing in the adulation of the mob. He victory-posed and raised the bloodied sword, smeared with Gaius's innards, above his head. Meanwhile Gaius was writhing in pain. It would be cruel not to bring his life to a swift end. Throwing aside the sword which had made the defeating blow, Darius took from the slave the heavy blade intended for death blows. Its clean steel glistened in the afternoon sun. He approached Gaius.

"You have defeated me Darius," said Gaius, "I deserve to die."

"You were a good man, Gaius" said Darius, "but I outsmarted you in the Arena today".

With that, Darius dragged the sword across Gaius's throat. Blood poured; within seconds his heart had ground to a halt. Arena attendants arrived to brand him with the initial of his conqueror. The iron hissed as it branded the letter "D" on his shoulder. The crowd cheered and Darius victory posed as Gaius's inertia confirmed his death. The attendants then bound his ankles with rope and dragged him out of the Arena by his feet. There could be no honour in defeat. Victory, however, brought great honour and the crowd continued to cheer Darius as Gaius's corpse was hauled out.

Just as Gaius exited through the Portal of Death, a new gladiator jumped into the Arena through the Portal of Life. A small, wiry, hairy-chested gladiator, bearing a net and a trident. Darius recognised this retiarius immediately. It was the feared Josephus, a retiarius gladiator from near Naples.

Josephus advanced threateningly, almost dancing towards Darius, brandishing his arms. He too wore only a skimpy loincloth... Josephus was nimble, Josephus was fast. He would be a tough man to defeat.

“You have taken the life of a great gladiator Darius,” he cried “You will die soon, as will we all. But first I will ensnare you with my net and my Master will decide your fate.”

Darius retrieved his bloodied sword and his shield from the hot sand. He feared for his life but he feared Josephus’s nets even more.

Josephus’s Master was businessman Haider who made much money importing slaves from lands conquered by Rome’s armies. The businessman supplied slaves for all purposes, from labouring brutes to beautiful bedboys for the Emperor. Darius’s success as a gladiator had made him a desirable male and latterly he could choose whom he bedded. He didn’t wish to die but he didn’t want to enslavement to Josephus’s Master either as he was sure Haider would make him his own bedslave.

They faced each other. The trumpets sounded. Their dance of death had begun!

Josephus threatened Darius with his net as he circled him on his nimble feet but did not throw it yet. Darius guarded himself with his rectangular shield ready to try to catch the net with his defence without risking being entangled. Josephus circled faster and Darius made smaller and faster circles as he struggled to keep a good position facing the retiarius with his menacing net and trident.

Circling fast was no problem for the retiarius; he always had the advantage at the beginning of the fight, he knew he had to tire out the heavier secutor before choosing his moment to attack. Josephus moved faster and faster. The crowd sensed the strategy and cheered him on “Faster, faster”. Darius began to get dizzy as he turned on his own feet and stumbled slightly, Josephus loosed his net and aimed it at the secutor’s exposed feet, expertly throwing it but without letting go and simultaneously distracting Darius with a lunge of his trident.

Darius jumped the net but in so doing he suffered a glancing blow from the tipped point of the retiarius’ trident. It was a glancing blow and no real damage was caused, but Darius felt shame as his was the first blood that had been spilled. The crowd roared approval as their favourite was forced off balance by the skill and speed of the fisherman gladiator from far away.

Darius regained his balance and defence position and tried to move in to close enough range to get an advantage. He parried several of the retiarius’ trident thrusts with his scutum in quick succession but Josephus the retiarius continued dancing around him. The secutor was tiring as the retiarius intended. Josephus drew out the fight making Darius move more and more, using the sun to both blind his opponent with its light and to wear him down with its heat as he was forced to exert himself in defence.

Darius the secutor was unable to control the fight as he would like. The agile retiarius played with him and the crowd roared their approval. The crowd particularly loved the way Josephus the retiarius used sweeping casts of his net

to force the armoured secutor to jump to avoid his feet being entangled. Darius was maddened and fatigued by this strategy, both because the crowd loved it (but at the secutor's expense), because he had lost the initiative and because the retiarius was exploiting the relative inagility of Darius's physique, laden with helmet, shield and sword. No matter that in the earlier contest the famous secutor's sword had killed yet again, he wasn't getting close enough to the retiarius to get a strike.

Josephus chanced his luck and drove Darius back against the arena wall, right in front of where the other gladiators known to Darius were seated. Josephus made his prey jump several times, he didn't have breath left for taunts either but his intention was clear: to humiliate his opponent right in front of his own companions.

The arena attendants had seen this before and moved the two fighters away from the seated gladiators. They didn't want to risk an unseemly brawl in case the seated fighters came in to the arena to defend their lanista's property.

Darius's mates changed from shouting Darius's name as encouragement to shouting "Charge him...Charge him", the classic attack of a sword and shield man against a net and trident man. Josephus heard first (unencumbered by a bronze helmet) and slashed the point of his trident repeatedly against Darius's helmet so he could not hear. But it was too late, Darius had heard the words of strategy and, although he was maddened by the metallic noise on his helmet, his arena instincts returned and he resolved to take the advantage.

As they fighters were moved away by the sticks of the attendants, Darius watched retiarius Josephus go further away. Darius chose his moment and feigned a limp on one foot. Josephus, as expected, moved in, but the secutor was ready and used the stance as the start of his charge with his gladius up in attack position and his left covered by his shield.

Classic attack and the crowd knew it. This fight was warming up in to a true grudge fight rather than a gory execution. Darius's supporters roared their encouragement in the last few steps as Darius closed on the retiarius,

Darius knocked Josephus's trident from the retiarius' right hand but the retiarius was undismayed. In the instant before the secutor's threatening gladius struck home, Josephus threw his net over the gladiator charging him, the net neatly falling over the secutor as if it had fallen from the sky. The retiarius still had hold of the net by thin ropes and toppled the secutor off balance. Darius tried in vain to make his sword connect with the body of the unarmed retiarius but was unable to unentangle from the net that surrounded him, pulled over him by the stones around the perimeter.

Darius's sword was tangled in the net, as were the points of his shield. Darius stumbled. In the moment of delay, Josephus regained his trident and pointed it direct at the fallen gladiator and gathered the other strings of his net.

"Mitte" he cried to the Emperor's box, where his Master Haider was sitting rather too close to the Emperor.

The crowd roared "Spare him... we want more". The Emperor looked around and acknowledged the crowd, the crowd roared louder in deference and appreciation of the sport they had witnessed; munificently the Emperor slowly gave the sign that Darius should be spared.

The secutor was almost unharmed from the fight but his heart was low; Darius knew the price of failure was that he would become the property of the winning gladiator's Master. Further, Darius knew his new Master would want to try out his new goods at the earliest opportunity, certainly before committing the famous gladiator to the arena again, in case he did not win his next fight.

The arena attendants disarmed the secutor, but Josephus gathered his net around his captured prey and tied the secutor's wrists behind his back. The retiarius pulled Darius to his feet, the net still entangled over his helmeted head. The retiarius led his former opponent out of the arena in this ignominious fashion as the crowd roared "More....more!"

The retiarius led Darius down the steps under the arena. Darius could see nothing. Slave shackles were placed on his feet and his wrists and he heard the familiar but dreaded blows as temporary rivets were hammered home. The entangling net was removed and the defeated secutor felt particularly vulnerable as his skimpy loincloth was scant protection to his genitals that he could not protect with his shackled hands.

Darius felt the point of a short dagger between his shoulders and a voice in a foreign accent said softly: "Secutor Darius: turn, kneel and show respect to your new Master."

Defeated Darius had no option but to do turn in his shackles and to go down on his knees as he was bidden. His new Master removed the gladiator's helmet, the leather straps still sweaty from today's fights in the heat of the arena.

Kneeling, Darius looked up at Haider. "Secutor Darius, you are now my property. I treat my gladiators well but they must obey my orders at all times without question. Secutor, kiss my feet".

Darius complied. He had no option. Haider would have no compunction in thrusting the dagger right in to his new slave at the slightest sign of truculence, probably a non-lethal wound but Haider would have no hesitation if it was necessary to demonstrate his power over his property; if Darius continued to resist he would be sold to one of the other gladiator owners who would bet heavily on the popular gladiator winning but put him up to fight drugged so Darius would surely lose.

"Stay in position, slave" said Haider as Darius kissed his new Master's feet. Darius felt the cool metal of a dagger at the side of his guts. Haider ripped the flimsy cloth protection away from his newly won gladiator's loins.

"Stand up and face me, slave", the metal shackles clanked as Darius changed position, now fully naked except for his fetters. Haider inspected the trophy Josephus had won for him.

“You will be taken to my villa and you will be cleaned up: the Emperor will be coming later and he will want first use of the famous gladiator whose throat he has saved today from the sword. Secutor: prepare yourself to be used by the Emperor.

“Josephus, you fought well. Take him and clean him up. See that the doctor attends that wound. This secutor will be your bounty for today’s work after the Emperor, my other guests and I have tasted his fruits and had our pleasure.

“Lanista Philipus will train you together and Darius will become your arena partner. Retiarius and secutor will make a good display that will bring much honour to my House.”

Darius’s new life had begun....

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