



Spartacus: The Gladiator (Spartacus Chronicles)

By Ben Kane

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"Gritty, passionate and violent, this thrilling book is a real page-turner and a damn good read. It brings Spartacus and ancient Rome to vivid, colorful life." ?Steven Pressfield, author of *Gates of Fire*

Long the stuff of legends, Spartacus is known to most modern readers through the classic Kubrick film version of Howard Fast's novel. Now bestselling historical novelist Ben Kane returns to the source material and presents a lively and compelling new vision of the man who was Spartacus?Roman army auxillary, slave, gladiator and ultimately the leader of an army of slaves who nearly brought Rome to its knees. Ben Kane's brilliant novel begins in the Thracian village to which Spartacus has returned after escaping from life as an auxiliary in the Roman army. Jealous of his attachment to Ariadne, a Dionysian priestess, the Thracian king betrays Spartacus to the Romans who take him, along with Ariadne, into captivity and to the school of gladiators at Capua.

Against the background of the unbelievable brutality of gladiatorial life, Spartacus and Crixus the Gaul plan the audacious overthrow of their Roman masters. They escape and flee to Vesuvius, where they recruit and train an army of escaped slaves that will have to face the conquerors of the known world, the most successful deadly army in all of history in a battle that will set in motion the legend that is Spartacus.

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Editorial Review

Review

“Powerful.” *Library Journal*

“A compulsive, if relentless story, vividly recounted in muscular prose.” *The Daily Telegraph (UK)*

About the Author

BEN KANE is the author of a trilogy set in ancient Rome that comprises *The Forgotten Legion*, *The Silver Eagle* and *The Road to Rome*. He has traveled widely and is a lifelong student of military history. He lives in North Somerset, England, with his family.

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I

SOUTHWESTERN THRACE, AUTUMN 74 BC

When the village came into sight at the top of a distant hill, a surging joy filled him. The road from Bithynia had been long. His feet were blistered, the muscles of his legs hurt and the weight of his mail shirt was making his back ache. The chill wind snapped around his ears, and he cursed himself for not buying a fur cap in the settlement he'd passed through two days prior. He had always made do with a felt liner and, when necessary, a bronze helmet, rather than a typical Thracian fox-skin *alopekis*. But in this bitter weather, maybe warm clothing was more important than war gear. Gods, but he was looking forward to sleeping under the comfort of a roof, out of reach of the elements. The journey from the Roman camp where he'd been released from service had taken more than six weeks, and winter was fast approaching. It should have been less than half that, but his horse had gone lame only two days after he'd left. Since then, riding had been out of the question. Carrying his shield and equipment was as much as he could ask the horse to do without worsening its limp.

“Any other mount, and I'd have sacrificed you to the gods long ago,” he said, tugging the lead rope that guided the white stallion ambling along behind him. “But you've served me well enough these last years, eh?” He grinned as it nickered back at him. “No, I've no apples left. But you'll get a feed soon enough. We're nearly home, thank the Rider.”

Home. The mere idea seemed unreal. What did that mean after so long? Seeing his father would be the best thing about it, although he'd be an old man by now. The traveler had been away for the guts of a decade, fighting for Rome. A power hated by all Thracians, yet one that many served nonetheless. He had done so for good reasons. *To learn their ways so that one day I can fight them again. Father's idea was a good one.* It had been the hardest act of his life to take orders from some of the very soldiers he had fought against—men who had perhaps killed his brother and who had certainly conquered his land. But it had been worth it. He had learned a wealth of information from those whoresons. How to train men mercilessly, until they fought as one unit. How vital it was to obey orders, even in the red heat of battle. How trained soldiers could be made to stand their ground in the most extreme situations. Discipline, he thought. Discipline and organization were two of the most vital keys.

It wasn't just the desire to learn their ways that had you leave your village, added his combative side. After

its last defeat by the legions, your tribe had been thoroughly cowed. There was no chance of fighting anyone, least of all Rome. You are a warrior, who follows the rider god. You love war. Bloodshed. Killing. Joining the Romans gave you the opportunity to take part in never-ending campaigns. Despite everything that they've done to your people, you still took pleasure from waging war alongside them.

I've had a bellyful of it for now. It's time to settle down. Find a woman. Start a family. He smiled. Once he would have scorned such ideas. Now they were appealing. During his service with the legions, he'd seen things that would turn a man's hair gray. He'd become used to them—in the red heat of battle, he had acted in much the same way, but sacking undefended camps and villages, and seeing women raped and children killed, were not things that sat especially well with him.

"Planning how to take the fight to Rome will do me for a while. The time for war will present itself again," he said to the stallion. "In the meantime I need a good Thracian woman to make lots of babies with."

It nibbled his elbow, ever hopeful for a treat.

"If you want some barley, get a move on," he said in an affectionate growl. "I'm not stopping to give you a nosebag this near to the village."

Above him and to his left, something scraped off rock, and he cursed silently for letting his attention lapse. Just because he'd encountered no one on the rough track that day didn't mean that it was safe. Yet the gods had smiled on him for the whole journey from Bithynia. This was a time when most Thracians avoided the bitter weather in favor of oiling and storing their weapons in preparation for the following campaigning season. For a lone traveler, this was the best time to travel.

I've done well not to have run into any bandits thus far. These ones are damn close to my village. Let there not be too many of them. Pretending to stretch his shoulders and roll his neck, he stole a quick glance to either side. Three men, maybe four, were watching him from their hiding places on the rocky slopes that bordered the rough track. Unsurprisingly for Thrace, they seemed to be armed with javelins. He eyed the tinned bronze helmet that hung from the pack on the stallion's rump, and decided against making a grab for it. Few peltasts could hit a man in the head. As for his shield, well, he could reach that while their first javelins were still in the air. If he was hit, his mail shirt would probably protect him. Trying to untie his thrusting spear would take too much time. He'd carry the fight to them with his *sica*, the curved Thracian blade that hung from his gilded belt. They were acceptable odds, he decided. As long as the brigands weren't expert shots. *Great Rider, watch over me with a ready sword.*

"I know you're there," he called out. "You might as well show yourselves."

There was a burst of harsh laughter. About thirty paces away, one of the bandits stood up. Merciless eyes regarded the traveler from a narrow face pitted with scars. His embroidered woolen cloak swung open, revealing a threadbare, thigh-length tunic. A greasy fox-skin cap perched atop his head. He had scrawny legs, and his tall calfskin boots had seen better days. In his left hand, he carried a typical *pelte*, or crescent-shaped shield, and behind it a spare javelin; in his right, another light spear was cocked and ready to throw. No armor, and apart from his javelins, only a dagger in his belt, noted the traveler. Good. His friends will be no better armed.

"That's a fine stallion you have there," said the thug. "A pity that it's lame."

"It is. If it wasn't, you shitbags wouldn't have seen me for dust."

"But it is, so you're on foot, and alone," sneered a second voice.

The traveler looked up. The speaker was older than the first man, with a lined visage and graying hair. His hemp-woven clothing was equally ragged, but there was a fierce hunger in his brooding gaze. For all his poverty, his round shield was well made, and the javelin in his right fist looked to have seen good use. This was the most dangerous one. The leader. "You want the stallion, I suppose," the traveler said.

"Ha!" A third man stood up. He was larger than either of his companions; his arms and legs were heavily muscled, and instead of javelins, he carried a large *pelte* and a vicious-looking club. "We want it all. Your horse, your equipment and weapons. Your money, if you have any."

"We'll even take your food!" The fourth bandit was skeletally thin, with sunken cheeks and a sallow, unhealthy complexion. He had no shield, but three light spears.

“And if I give you all that, you’ll let me go on my way?” His breath plumed in the chill air.

“Of course,” promised the first man. His flat, dead eyes, and his comrades’ sniggers, gave the lie to his words.

The traveler didn’t bother answering. He spun around, muttering “Stay!” to the stallion. Even as he slid his hand under his large circular shield and snapped the thong that held it in place, he heard a javelin zipping over his head. Another followed behind on a lower arc. It struck the dust between the horse’s hooves, making it skitter to and fro. “Calmly,” he ordered. “You’ve been through this plenty of times before.” Reassured by his voice, it settled.

“Oeagrus, stop, you fool!” shouted the leader. “If you injure that beast, I’ll gut you myself.”

Good. No more javelins. The stallion is too valuable. Keeping his back to his mount and raising the shield, he turned. The skinny bandit was to his rear now, but he wouldn’t risk any more spears. Nor would the others. Drawing his sica, he smiled grimly. “You’ll have to come down and fight me.”

“Fair enough,” growled the first man. Using his heels as brakes, he skidded down the slope. His two comrades followed. Behind him, the traveler heard the thin brigand also descending. The stallion bared its teeth and screamed an angry challenge. *Let him even try to come close.*

When the trio reached the bottom, they conferred for a moment.

“Ready?” he asked mockingly.

“You whoreson,” snarled the leader. “Will you be so arrogant when I cut your balls off and stuff them down your neck?”

“At least you’d be able to find mine. I doubt that any of you scumbags have any.”

The big man’s face twisted with fury. Screaming at the top of his voice, he charged, pelted and club at the ready.

The traveler took a couple of steps forward. Placing his left leg behind the shield, he braced himself. He tightened his grip on his sica. *This has to be quick or the others will be on me as well.*

Fortunately, the thug was as unskilled as he was confident. Driving his shield into his opponent’s, he swung a wicked blow at his head. The traveler, rocking back slightly from the impact of the strike, ducked his head out of the way. Reaching around with his sica, he sliced ...

Users Review

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