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Ancient Rome provides the setting for the gripping story of the champion gladiator Pavo, trained to kill, and a pawn in the games of the powerful and ambitious.

Pavo's journey begins when he encounters the Roman soldier Macro, who has been charged with his training. Bonds of friendship develop between the two men, both aware that their fates depend not only on Pavo's skills in the arena but also on the whims of powerful and ruthless senators. Can Pavo survive to fulfil his most cherished goal - revenge for the murder of his father at the hands of a champion gladiator?

Arena Details

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From Reader Review Arena for online ebook

Samuel Tyler says

Jobs in history that I would not want; chimney sweep, Victorian latrine cleaner, gladiator. I suppose that the advantage of chimney sweep and latrine cleaner over gladiator is that at least they kill you slowly. Once you become a gladiator your life is a short one, painful and unfair. Only the lucky few will go onto retire and become free men. The vast majority are like Pavo, a man sent to the arena for a reason. That reason is to be killed.

When Pavo's father decided to lead a failed revolt on Rome he not only forfeited his own life, but that of his family. His son Pavo was once an up and coming soldier, but now he is nothing but a lowly gladiator sent into the arena with the instruction to be killed within the year. However, the Gods have strange plans for men and Pavo finds himself an unlikely saviour of the new Caesar as he must stand against a particularly fearsome British Warlord who remains embarrassing unbeaten in the ring. Shanghaied to aid Pavo is a grizzled war hero Marco. All he wants is his reward and to be sent back to the front line as a Centurion, but there are other plans in mind for both Pavo and Marco.

'Arena' by Simon Scarrow and T J Andrews is another cobbled together book by the pairing that takes five e-novellas and combines them. This outing features a younger version of Marco that gives fans of Scarrow a touchstone to his other work. However, even with the added benefit of one of best characters in Roman Historic fiction, this book suffers from its original formatting.

Things start off well. The initial storyline of Pavo having to fight in the ring against a British Warlord is edgy and builds to a nice finale. There is also hints of a larger motive for Pavo as he seeks to kill the gladiator that slayed his father. However, as you pass the first section you start to notice that the book is being delivered piecemeal. The original five stories all have a mini beginning, middle and end. The book keeps rising and falling, more like a computer game where you fight a series of mini bosses along the way before fighting the end boss.

The individual combats are grisly and well written if you like your history gory and this collection is certainly better than 'Invader' their other novella collection. However, the reasons why Marco cannot leave the book become increasingly contrived as things move along. I would have assumed after being treated so badly throughout that Marco would have eventually snapped and just waited until a quiet moment to kill his tormentors. Instead, he is crowbarred into all five novellas, when he should have left Pavo to it.

There is still plenty of entertainment to be had in 'Arena' as the action comes thick and fast. It would have been a more rounded experience had the five stories been edited more to feel more like one narrative. However, for fans of Scarrow looking for another quick fix from the author, this book does the job, just not brilliantly.

Tyler Cowart says

Seriously obnoxious. Main characters whined over and over about the same thing. There was no character or plot progression throughout the entire book. Protagonist fights some person/thing in the arena hoping to

escape his situation and (surprise surprise) doesn't. Then he get roped into another scheme with the promise of freedom, whines about it, wins, and doesn't get what he was promised. Not worth the time.

Kenny says

I'm a huge fan of Simon Scarrow's Roman novels - this is actually a collection of five short stories (up to 100 pages) all together around the (over?)familiar theme of the deposed nobleman sentenced to fight as a Gladiator (so far so Spartacus, although our hero is a Roman). This has the added fun of bringing in Macro from his main series (with some fun nods to the introductions or fates of other characters in his world). That said, there's bugger all in the way of character development, but then, ah, you don't read these for that do you? Plenty of fun and well described fast paced fighting and things.

It's not as much fun as his full length stuff due to the short and episodic almost repetitive nature of the stories (beat one enemy, get screwed by evil politicals, retrain for next fight working way to ultimate bad boss (I swear I had a game on the Spectrum that had a similar backstory). But it clips along, I'd give it 3.5 quite happily

Ruth says

c2013: FWFTB: Macro, secretary, avenge, nemesis, survival. Having had a bit of a bad run of DNFs, I went back to a favourite writer. Dash! I struggled to finish this one and have to say that I don't think that this is one of the author's best. There was something missing - perhaps the banter that normally lightens up Scarrow's stories or perhaps it just went over my head in this book. The first couple of chapters really reminded me of the latest TV show about Spartacus - including the gladiator trainee who is there voluntarily to pay off his debts with his wife and child held hostage. Hmmm. I couldn't shake that impression even after the plot did divert from that of the TV series. This seems to be a stand alone so I would recommend that you pick up another of Scarrow's books for a good historical story. In line with my personal theory, the only blurb on the back of the book is that related to 'Simon Scarrow's novels of the Roman Empire.' *"Even in the dim glow of the candles, the expression on his face must have been visible to Macer, because he shifted awkwardly on his feet and swallowed hard."*

Paul Maxson says

I was not a fan of this book at all. The Roman era is one of my favorites but this book was 100% predictable. Every twist was very telegraphed and if it wasn't for the gruesome fight scenes I could have sworn it was a children's book.

Beorn says

As Scarrow books go, this is alright. Maybe the addition of the extra author served to actually make it a little less dull than his books have a tendency to be.

It occasionally falls into repetition and slightly convenient parts but for the most part, it's okay.

Shreyansh says

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Luis Sancho says

Disjointed, convoluted (unnecessarily so), repetitive and very basic, superficial characters, Macro appears as a "we gotta stick him here somehow" almost cameo appearance, in what seems to be a poor effort to take in

By far the worst of the lot - yes, story-wise, even worse than the one where Christians are mocked with nonsensical fictions.

It does so a good job of showing what must have been one of the dreariest jobs/punishments in the history of mankind and the fickle nature of the mob. As for the politics,

Thorsten says

great read. With some imagination, it gives an excellent insight to the techniques used by gladiators as well as their living conditions. I found it well paced and truly entertaining.

David Campton says

A prequel to the Macro/Cato stories, but not as good. Betrays its origins as a series of e-novellas stitched together

Milo (BOK) says

The Review: <http://thefoundingfields.com/2013/10/...>

“An awesome read that fans of Simon Scarrow’s previous works and the movie Gladiator should enjoy - Arena reminds readers why Simon Scarrow is right up there with the likes of Conn Iggulden and Bernard Cornwell for the best writers of historical fiction. This is a great read.” ~Bane of Kings, The Founding Fields

Ancient Rome provides the setting for the gripping story of the champion gladiator Pavo, trained to kill, and a pawn in the games of the powerful and ambitious.

Pavo’s journey begins when he encounters the Roman soldier Macro, who has been charged with his training. Bonds of friendship develop between the two men, both aware that their fates depend not only on Pavo’s skills in the arena but also on the whims of powerful and ruthless senators. Can Pavo survive to fulfil his most cherished goal – revenge for the murder of his father at the hands of a champion gladiator?

Right now, Conn Iggulden, Simon Scarrow and Bernard Cornwell are my three go-to authors for good historical fiction and each novel that I’ve read by them I’ve enjoyed, as they bring some experience and entertainment to each novel that isn’t always seen in other’s works. Whilst I may prefer Cornwell to Scarrow, the latter author is still one of my favourites when it comes to writing historical fiction, and I’m a massive fan of his Eagle series that got me invested in his work and as a result I’ve enjoyed many non-Eagle novels that he’s written since, including most recently *The Sword and the Scimitar*, which I read and reviewed last year. This year however sees Scarrow return to the Roman era and write a novel that interestingly, whilst featuring a character from the series, Macro, isn’t billed as an Eagle novel as the author, along with T.J. Andrews, who’s co-writing this book, weaves an interesting tale that explores many key themes as well as telling a compelling storyline that manages to be unpredictable and engrossing.

Arena Whilst Cato, Macro’s main companion for the majority of the Eagle books, isn’t present in Arena as it’s set before *Under the Eagle*, the replacement Pavo is more than capable of replacing Cato as a protagonist and does so very well. Pavo and Macro are both interesting and rootable characters, and Scarrow and Andrews manage to flesh them out a bit more as they drive the narrative forward at a strong pace. This once

again is a solid novel from the writer that proves that you can still tell a solid book when you're writing with somebody else (as for example it's pretty much a given now that anything that James Patterson writes with a co-author is going to be not as good as his original Alex Cross novels) – and it's very hard to tell when (and if) the writing has changed between the two as the narrative and ongoing plot unfolds.

Arena is a novel that I would have probably have purchased as individual novellas if I'd have known about their releases, but for some reason they completely escaped my notice until this point, and I think that I'm glad I waited for the full novel to be released as like Chris Wraight's serialized Scars, it seems to be meant for a novel format as opposed to a serialized one – I just don't think that the serialized format would have given me enough time to invest in the characters to continue the story, even though I am familiar with Macro – but reading this novel as a collective whole proved to be a good thing. It also means that I get to read the whole thing at once, because I could not put Arena down when I was reading it – Andrews and Scarrow did wonders with the pace as it seemed to get quicker and more engaging as the novel went on. It's great stuff, and what's more, it proves that Scarrow still manages to contain that strong level of consistency in his novels.

This then, comes certainly recommended. You don't have to read any of Scarrow's other works in order to know what goes on here as it's a great entry point. It's also something that will please old fans as much as new ones, for Arena still maintains that quality that got readers engaged in the series in the first place. It's an awesome read, and historical fiction fans won't want to miss out.

VERDICT: 4/5

Bill Ward says

Now that I have read all of the Macro and Cato books I have a good idea what to expect from A Simon Scarrow novel and I was not disappointed! This story is set in the days before Cato has joined Macro and he has a new young disgraced soldier - Pavo to train as a gladiator.

Once started, I find these books very difficult to put down, which means I become very unsociable and read this in about 2 days.

Although I am no expert on Roman history I always get a great sense of what it was like to live in those times. There is good political intrigue and a great deal of gladiator fighting in the arena, which makes me very happy not to have been around in 41AD.

If you like action and adventure in Roman times with little room for any romance, then you will enjoy Arena very much.

Jorge Carvalho says

I'm happy I've finished it, because it is ... so boring.

Agent_bugs says

There was a bit too much telling when it came to Macro's opinion of Pavo and the author seemed to like the word 'bowels' a bit too much, but this was a fun read. Nothing special or new, just kinda fun :)
