

SECRETS OF THE COLOSSEUM

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As the enduring icon of the Eternal City, the Colosseum was ancient Rome's architectural masterwork. Its graceful lines and harmonious proportions concealed a highly efficient design and advanced construction methods that made hundreds of arches out of 100,000 tons of stone. But this building is more than just an architectural giant—in its heyday it was filled with unbelievable spectacles and 50,000 cheering fans.

In the Colosseum's elliptical arena, tens of thousands of gladiators, slaves, prisoners, and wild animals met their deaths. Ancient texts report lions and elephants emerging from beneath the floor, as if by magic, to ravage gladiators and people condemned to death. Then, just as quickly, the Colosseum could be flooded with so much water that ships could engage in sea battles to the delight of the crowd. Could these legends be true, or are they just myth? Now, archaeologists and engineers are teaming up to recreate ancient Roman techniques to build a lifting machine and trap door system capable of releasing a wolf into the Colosseum's arena for the first time in 1500 years.

It took Emperor Vespasian just eight years to finish the arena, and although he never lived to see his creation finished, the Colosseum became a symbol of Roman design and ingenuity. Texts report that it was inaugurated with the slaughter of 9,000 animals in ceremonies, games, and spectacles, including the confounding *naumachiae*—the staging of naval battles as mass entertainment. Were the Romans really able to fill and drain the Colosseum arena to stage these mock sea battles?

Archaeologists think the answer may lie with another grand Roman construction—aqueducts. Following their path from the outskirts of Rome, the aqueducts lead to underground caves that end in the heart of the city, a short distance from the Colosseum. Scholars now estimate that using these aqueducts, the Romans could have filled and emptied the arena in mere hours.

As the team of engineers dig deeper into the Colosseum's history, they uncover how the Roman public's taste for gore and spectacle grew ever more extreme. *Secrets of the Colosseum* is a memorable exploration of the ancient Roman mind, tempered by recognition of the voyeurism and brutality that went hand-in-hand with innovation and ingenuity. Pressure rose for grander, more fast-paced shows packed with surprising and impressive effects. Using only the faintest clues from the past, can the team accurately recreate the typical spectacle that might have unfolded in the Colosseum's prime?

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CREDITS

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