

Colosseum: Road to Freedom Notes

Topics

- History/Story: Rome 192AD / The colosseum / Gladiators / Commodus
- Story / Minimal / Choice *driven*
- Combat
 - Unique control set/weapon & stance variety/stamina/defence/adrenaline/skills & passive slabs
 - Different match types: battle royale/team battle (deathmatch & general attack and defence)
 - survival/duel/hunting/mock battle
 - Stance level ups healing player
 - Human opponents/bosses/animal opponents/worst of all: team mates
 - Note: Roughly 140 battles over the course of my game, likely 130-135 being technically optional arena bouts*
- Gear
 - Weapons/stances/styles (one sword/shield/duel weapons/striker)
 - Armour
 - Blue & Gold Items / Buffs
 - Econ Rounds & Gear Loss
 - The Cleaner!
- Money
 - Arma/healing/upgrading gear
- Arenas: Only two arenas (Atillius and Colosseum (Flavian Ampitheatre))
 - Arma/healing (no arma at the Colosseum)
 - Crowds to talk to chance money and upgrades at the risk of getting stoned
 - Arena days
 - Bronze/silver/gold/death ranked fights /difficulty curve
 - Risk and Reward / Playing for points
 - Pleasing the Crowd for bonus rewards
- Training: Different training types
 - Exercise/dodge & throw/dummy & sparring
 - Stat growth & Eating / Offering food to gods (I think for a chance at having a do over)
 - Stat cap (need to fight)
 - can reject some arena days to get more training in
 - Very awkwardly balanced, two of the three trainers needed more going on.
- The Slave Market
- Multiple Endings / Earning Freedom

Joke Thoughts

(of having to walk through several load screens to get to the shop) You could argue this design is a little antiquated but hey, this game takes place during antiquity so, when in Rome!

- I love how he says we'll meet again, usually in a story this means after some big event or great amount of time. But we're going to see him again in ten minutes under not especially auspicious circumstances. It'd be like turning up for work and the receptionist says "our paths will cross in the future" then says "as the prophecy foretold!" as you head out for lunch.

- This is a game where you can single handedly take down 20 men, or like, 5 lions, and the crowd will be pretty blasé about it. Granted that may not be so bad. Commodus once killed 100 of the big furry bastards in a day and people weren't exactly lionising him!
- They also changed O and X as they do, oh this is gonna mess me up. And of course this changes around the positive and negative interactions. Flipping this around made me essentially flip off the audience.
- It's funny how part of what I like about Colosseum is how the mechanics were a bit of a black box, it added to the vibe of survival and working things out. This version makes information far, far more easily available, but I can't understand any of it!
- I looked up the Atillius arena to see if that was a historical site and while I couldn't find an arena named as such. I did find out about the arena at Fidnae designed by the entrepreneur Atillius, what's notable about this place is that after the ban on gladiators was lifted by Tiberius, the place was filled to bursting, which it did. Resulting in the greatest stadium disaster in history with 20,000 fatalities.
- **(when offered retirement)** We could go back to the farm, but I feel like our fate has been sown and I wanna keep reaping.

Mid-Play Notes

CRF Note - So the story of this game is that we just insert ourselves into history

The hilarious thing is that if we reject the conspiracy, just keep our head down and get out. The lesser ending is history just proceeding as it more or less did. Commodus is assassinated by Marcia and Narcissus. The good ending is us injecting ourselves into this while making Narcissus the fall guy and climbing the ladder while Marcia takes her leave.

Colosseum Note - Crixus Joke

Well years ago I played a celebrity Gladiator named Crixus in a tabletop campaign. He was a born and bred show fighter who one day fled his school hoping to make his name as an actual hero. This didn't go well. He died fighting b-balling mountain trolls while high on pixie dust, having lost a limb, his livelihood, and a lot of his sense of self after a boat he was on burned down killing his original party with him as the sole survivor.

Hopefully things go better for this one. (opening as a slave) Well, they don't start much better.

(Meeting "Crixus") Hey I'm Crixus

(Chef introduces himself as Crixus (Ki-ri-cos) Ah, oh, well anyway I'm Crixus.

CRF 002 NOTES

- Do a bit of squatting around the gladiator school **(training)**
- keep healing systems in mind. **(structure)**
- Cool gear system. Taking good gear into the arena which you either pillage or purchase gives you better odds, but if you lose the bout your stuff goes with it. It also means you can't really loot which can be a source of extra money. Or if you spot something decent you're trading. If you leave it in the arena it's gone. **(gear/shop/money)**
- Training is interesting. Each day you can do two of a variety of activities. Each individual activity has unique bonuses, but depending on how well you do you'll also earn points, which through Crixus's cooking are turned into stats. So do you do something easy to get points or risk doing

harder stuff which has a specific benefit you might need to sure up. It's cool and lends some strategy to the minigames between the big games. **(training)**

- The mid fight level up of skill systems is cool. It totally refilling health lends great moments of drama to fights. It adds a thought that even when the chips are down you're not totally hopeless and may get saved, it pushes aggressive play and to keep the player in the bout.

(healing/skills/levelling)

- But it also works well to ease the early game a little, these become less frequent as the game goes along and levels climb and with that the number of stairs to climb them grows greater. So as you hopefully get better at the game you're dependence on these lessens in accordances with skill, it's solid.

- It ALSO incentivises trying out different weapon types in a cool way, maybe in a tough spot it could be worth trading off your main means of attack to fish for a total refill. There's just a lot going on here.

- The dodge system to rebuild stamina is great as well. It incentivises exciting play by rewarding players willing to take risk. You can run away and stand idle, or dodge an attack and keep the pressure on enemies. Or refill really quick to let off a special attack.

- Dual sword style is interesting, high DPS and ability to pressure and overwhelm slow enemies but high risk of running low on stamina, plus your defence is much lesser than a shield. One hander and shield is safer, but dual wielding impresses more while requiring more work to stay alive.

- This is why an audience system is so good for combat games sometimes. It's an incentive to take greater risks for greater rewards.

CRF 004 NOTE – Entertainment

In one round I slaughtered 7 men in quick succession, but in doing so I acquired a lesser crowd reaction and bonus payout than in a prior round where I killed less opponents, but took out the ones I did in more skilled fashion. Dodging, baiting parries, playing with them.

I love this, there's a semi-mechanical tension that runs through this games already tricky and deliberate combat. An amazing new factor in risk reward. You can play to survive, be brutal, be efficient. Why dodge opponents and parry when you can run behind them or bait your allies to get easy kills?

Well the audience isn't as receptive compared to a fighter who's entertaining to watch, who turns the fights into a spectacle. Obviously your aim is to survive but ironically to do that you need to pay off your debts and that'll come sooner if you can earn the bonuses risking that life rewards.

It gives the combat more considerations and is a great way to subtly entice the player into not being boring.

CRF 006 NOTES - Silver tough

- Use the lower paid games to loot gear, use your own to raise your odds in the much tougher and higher paying bouts!

- Lose in the survival, very intense, very scary!

- Joke: The crowd has absurd standards. I can kill 15 men single handedly, but if I wasn't being stylish enough they'll tell me I "have potential." I think any man who has killed 15 people has likely far surpassed their potential regardless of whether it was S rank or not. **(moment)**

CRF 009 NOTE - I get rolled and spend the day bankrolling the gods who look down in laughter

CRF 010 NOTE - I feel myself getting better at this game!

This is one of those games where I genuinely feel myself becoming more dangerous as I go on, not just in terms of equipment and raw damage, but the dodge mechanics and parry systems have a timing and rhythm and utility that is at first hard to get to grips with. I felt myself flailing against the systems Panicking like a man tossed into the arena, but those instincts get sharper and sharper until eventually you're an untouchable beast denying all attempts to get an attack off and it feels so cool.

The feel of this game is rigid and heavy. It feels counter to the entire genre where typically action has trended towards smoother controls. With difficult and clunky combat mechanics becoming the domain of survival horror and stealth where easy combat undercuts the core gameplay. The thing is with Colosseum is that this does work to its benefit. This gameplay is pick up and play but it's a heavy weight you're lifting. At first it's gonna feel slow and awkward but as you work the muscle it starts to feel smooth in its own way.

it makes each interaction deliberate and special when it comes together. You're never gonna get Colosseum Combo Mad videos... At least I think I should look that up, but this game made me feel just as slick as a Triple S combo when I had my opponents on the ropes

CRF 011 NOTE - The Pain of Death

The most painful part of loss isn't the loss of life, but of my stuff. After losing a match and being relieved of my gear, I'm dependent on the loaner gear which by this point of the game is bringing a knife to a pike fight, I'm severely overstepping my reach. So it's a death spiral for the rest of the day, ending with my actual death! Which sent me back to the start of the day!

So, another shot but man I'm kinda terrified about going on, I feel really outclassed. My opponents aren't just better statted, they're downright more dangerous in a way where I do feel like my controls no longer quite keep up, this could be a cope mind.

- One definite issue is the way dodging is handled, in the abstract this is fine. You can't mash dodge, it's timed in a way that is clearly made to counteract mashing and if you go too early or too late that's it. I have noticed however that if an opponent whiffs and I go to dodge that whiff, the game counts it and I am left open for an attack, which means in group fights you can get punished for the enemy's mistake.

- Their reaction time is also absurd, I knocked a weapon out of an enemies hand and he instantly KOed me with a punch, since I was recovering from my parry meanwhile he was instantly gear shifted into the fastest attack type in the game.

- I still adore this game but it is testing me, as you get into the harder content the charming imperfection of the combat system now feel like unfair moves against me.

CRF 012 NOTE - Animal foes suck

Colosseum suffers from a common problem of games with deeply specialised combat systems, and that's that non-standard enemies suck. This combat is built around a ton of states to respond to and exploit. Knocking weapons, playing stamina, dodging, parrying. Tons of opportunities and approaches to your standard human enemy.

Animals are basic, they don't present many of the same opportunities and as such feel janky and awful to fight, it's like Pac-Man versus space invaders, it's a mis-match

CRF 016 NOTE - I fucking hate elephants

Get screwed over by the terrible boring elephant fight twice.

- My response to allies being near me should not be terror, I realise I'm just as bad to them but I'm the player. It's a horrendous state of affairs when I have to reposition continually because their swings are a bigger threat to me and my health than enemies.

- An actual note for something I like: I like how the lack of back armour does even add risk to trying to flee a fight, it's a calculated risk, trying to flee versus keeping your armoured front towards foes. Running costing or halting stamina recovery also pushes you to stay in the action.

CRF 021 NOTE - Boss fights

The duels against bespoke foes are interesting because they're just as modular as any normal opponent only with far greater access to skills and are far more likely to dodge and parry. While this is cool as it means you and the bosses are technically on equal footing (even if I feel they cheat their reactions) (and I know, it's AI, it's all kinda cheating)

What is cool about this is all of their equipment is useable, but they are already incredibly hard, even when I bring my greatest gear to bare. I shudder to think of challenging them with weak gear in the hopes of nabbing all of theirs as the battle closes. I doubt I could win if I didn't come overpowered at my skill level.

My boss strategy is dependent on using my flail to strip them of their gear (and with that, their unique moveset) then beat them to death before they can re-equip. Baiting them into rearming so I can hit them in the back.

CRF 021 NOTE - Spear thoughts

I don't think it'd be reaching to call spears overpowered, though they're more a very long crutch. In terms of balancing for this game they're quite interesting. They're amazing killing machines and incredibly safe thanks to their range, get spear with high damage and the world is yours to poke.

The first area they struggle is a key component of this game, they're boring. They barely generate excitement and so you ironically need to risk damage with dodging and parrying to generate hype. Other weapons can do criss-cross cuts which are the main offensive means of pleasing the crowd, the spear is incapable of doing this.

In combat terms, where it struggles is power. This thing is great for clearing up lightly armoured hordes and controlling weak crowds, but it falters hard against a well armoured foe. I can't say whether it's realistic that a spear lacks piercing power but it works for this game. Power weapons like maces and hammers while slow and of much weaker range can strip a foe clean making them easier to kill. Meanwhile a spear starts struggling as it requires precision strikes to wittle a powerful enemy down.

Still, as I enter the master rank bouts it is keeping me alive, allowing me to take on these challenges at far less risk to my character.

CRF 032 Joke - I thought it was meant to be said Caesar, but hey when in Rome

CRF 035 NOTE - ENDING THOUGHT - THE YES MAN ROUTE

The story in this game is, like everything else, a bit of a black box for much of it. Unlike everything else which is uncovered and understood through experience the story is a lot more distant in a way I kind of like.

You're a gladiator thrust into a world of survival and the puppet of political backstabbing going on at the top, the hilarious part is that part of getting a pretty happy ending for your character involve just agreeing to everything going on above you and focusing on surviving the next bout. I kind of love how we're left so in the dark but succeed best by not really questioning anything.

Still, the eerily similar text crawl winning message as the retirement ending leaves me feeling that maybe I did something wrong? Time to reload and discover if there's something better in rejecting the power plays that Marcia herself said she was tired of.

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Glad Remix 001 Note - New features, no new sound effects

- Far more info given to the player on training (unfortunately in Japanese)
- Player informed of stat boosts immediately

- New fist weapon type
- New character skins for several countries

- Moneybags thrown into arena post match as well as upgrade materials for the far more in depth upgrade system.

- Lower requirements in early game to raise stats paired with gating higher difficulty training at first, but also higher training point payouts as well as stronger gear introduced sooner
- Balanced by far more rapid increase in difficulty, basically this game gets going far quicker so keep up!

- Shop introduced at the Colosseum!

Note: Your speed raises so gradually over the course of the game I did not notice, returning to the beginning I felt how glacially slow I moved.

CRF 000 - Intro History Lesson

00:05 Published by Koei

- Odd amount of historical games under their belt. (**observation**)

00:10 Ertain, **ENTERTAINMENT FOR LIFE**

- Listed on wikipedia as a co-developer with Goshow, listed on Mobygames as a co-publisher with Koei.

00:15 GOSHOW

- Developer, both Ertain and Goshow appear to be defunct, and were in their time budget developers. Making smaller or portable titles.

- The credits also list Goshow as the developers, with director Masafumi Horiuchi at the helm.

(**research/background**)

- Horiuchi has an unremarkable career with a bizarre beginning and end. First credited for program design on Ehrgeiz and ending with special thanks from Knack, and he seemed to have a knack for winding up on projects with atypical battle systems. Character designer on the fucking Bouncer!

(**observation/joke/background**)

“Aside from his work on Colosseum he didn’t Rome far (**joke/bad joke**)

01:10 Menu screen for a bit, waiting for historical text crawl

01:30 We pan across an embroidery of gladiatorial bouts as text on screen sets the scene.

(**story/background**)

“Uri, vinciri, verberari, ferroque, necari.

I will endure being burned,

being bound, being beaten,

and being killed by the sword

- Petronius Satyricon 117 -

- An excerpt from the Satyricon, a Menippean satirical Roman novel dated to the 1st century. Not a text I’m at all familiar with. Reading the chapter reveal the protagonist to be in a town of heir hunters, and him and his troupe pose as a master and slaves to take advantage of the situation.

01:40 The text goes on to lay out the situation in Rome (**backstory/history**)

“The Great Roman Empire

To uphold their strong political image and keep the public focus off their corruption and political failings, the Roman Empire staged a large number of gladiatorial tournaments. The main events of these tournaments were the death matches. Armed with sword and shield and skilled in combat, but without any real armour, the gladiators fought for honour and for freedom.

A.D. 180

The wise and respected Emperor Marcus Aurelius died. His son Commodus took control of the Roman Empire, whose strength had grown over the years. The powerful Empire soon started to falter under his control.

A.D. 192

Commodus declared himself to be the reincarnation of Hercules. He began to neglect his position as Emperor, becoming obsessed with fighting as a gladiator. His people began doubting him and Rome fell on troubled times

CRF 000 - Intro History Lesson CONT

By order of the Emperor, daily tournaments were held at Rome's biggest battlefield the Colosseum.
The need for many talented gladiator's grew tremendously..."

- Pax it in lads, the age of peace and prosperity is rapidly drawing to a close!

CRF 001 - INTRO (Fight for life) - Tutorial (in-depth) - meet crixus, loads of good bits (interview funny)

00:20 Opening video shows a Gladiator sitting in the pits before a match.

- Colosseum exterior
- Back to the gladiator, he grabs his gladius and dons his helmet
- He walks up towards the gates leading into the arena.
- The crowd roars as he approaches his opponent.
- The two crash, crossing blades until they're locked in a struggle, our hero breaks free with a headbutt.
- His opponent recoils and our hero immediately chases with a swipe which is deflected, but this was a faint, leaving his opponent wide open for an uppercut from the hero's shield
- A streak of blood falls on the arena sand, followed by the gladiator to which it belonged.
- The camera tilts up to our hero, he raises his sword to the sky as the crowd goes wild!

(cutscene/intro)

- Titlecard as the music crescendos

01:25 Cool main menu, a little arena office which each of the four options focusing on a different part of the room, go to the option option. **(menu/joke)**

01:30 The violence menu, I can turn bloodshed and blood skin off, I leave them on.

01:50 Hit new game and am tossed into a room with Magerius as he fills out a form for me.

- He tells us the answers we give him will determine what kind of gladiator we'll become.
- I don't think he's writing anything down because surely he'd get annoyed at how much we're messing up his papers, he writes down and responds to every answer and I can back out.

(joke/observation)

03:05 Pick nowhere "You're not from anywhere?"

- Okay I admit it: I'm from Eboracum, I wasn't lying when I said nowhere! It's still nowhere today!

(joke/menu)

Post-Note: Black Box Character Creation

The thing I love about this character creator is that it tells you nothing, these choices do determine your starting stats but you have no idea what influences what. This entire game is going to be a bit of a black box where it gives you the starting information and it's through experience you contextualise and understand what it all means.

This character creation is great because it already puts you in that headspace while making character creation more focused on backstory. So it focuses on your interpretation of your character and frames the game ahead, plus nationality question aside you can reason out what you'll be investing in via the jobs and gods. **(post-note/character creation)**

03:30 Ultimately I make Crixus, a Britannic farmer and believer in Amore.

- He's a farmer who believes in love! **(joke/character creation)**

CRF 001 CONT - Intro

05:15 Name gladiator Crixus, mention how I played a gladiator named such in a tabletop campaign long ago, one of my favourite characters and every gladiator I've played since has picked up the moniker. **(joke set up/character)**

05:20 Finish char set up, Magerius says we will meet again, yeah, in five minutes.
(joke/observation)

05:35 Game opens on the Largus Arena, a grim and dusty arena out in some desert. In the dead of night a cart of slaves is processed into the depths of the arena to be its fighters. **(story)**

- Could not find any record of a Largus Arena

- Also damn I don't know how we farmed so crazy we got to where-ever this is. I'm a farmer from bloody York! **(joke/story/observation)**

05:55 Scenes of cruelty as we're processed, men in wooden cages, the owner of the arena (and now us) smacks a slave with a stick and kicks him when he's down. **(story)**

06:05 As the gate closes behind us our master lets us know. "You belong to me now! I'm in control of your lives now. You'll soon know the reason you've been brought here. Your job is to entertain the crowd and make me money..."

- The camera lands on us "... If you want to stay alive you'll do as I say! Now go to work!"

06:25 We're picked alongside another man and ushered out into an arena, our cuffs are unlocked, and from up top our master announces to the crowd... "Listen to me! These are the rules of combat in Rome! It's very simple! The winner is the last man standing!" **(story)**

- What follows are several bouts, first with wooden blades and growing in length. This is a strong opener to the game, thrust into a situation you have no control and only the barest understanding of and this is reflected mechanically. Tossing you into the fray with a control system so atypical is a brilliant move, but the sting is literally blunted by the wooden blades you have to work with, at least at first. **(gameplay/observation/Post-Note)**

- I like how this game throws you in the deep end and while it does get more difficult, it also feels like you're more and more getting your head above water. Coming to understand not just the combat mechanics and stats but how to apply them for the best outcomes.

(observation/post-note/game design/controls/gameplay)

07:10 The game does teach you how to pick up weapons at least, revealing that this is a game with shift functions! It needs them! **(controls/gameplay)**

07:30 In our cells post-match Memnon tries to make conversation. Another prisoner tells him to shut up, saying it's easier to kill someone you don't know. Memnon casually agrees. **(story)**

- Nice talking man. **(dialogue/joke)**

08:15 Second introductory fight, we beat down four opponents one after another

10:05 Cut to a few days later, we're told today will be a special day as we're once again forced out into the arena. **(story)**

- We're made to fight Memnon with real steel, a battle to the death. Memnon says not to go easy on him. It's fine, you strike me as a guy who doesn't try very hard. **(joke/dialogue/observation)**

- And I strike you **(bad joke)**

10:50 Rolling around, I didn't use rolling much, perhaps it would have been useful, but I preferred gambling the dodge or parry for stamina or disarming. Perhaps roll was safer?
(observation/gameplay/controls/defence)

11:05 Defeat Memnon and he drops his skill tablets, we're introduced to them.
- He gives us four tablets, one for each stance. **(skill slabs/inventory/stances)**

Post-Note: Cannot lose during intro

I went back to test if I could lose during the intro to lower my debt for a joke, and it turns out you cannot even lose, now sure the intro fight you basically have to throw because of how weak your opponent is but come on. **(game over/post-note)**

11:45 After our bout, we leave the arena only to find we've been bought for a princely sum by Magerius, he is our master now.

12:20 On a cart back to Rome Magerius says he'll teach us the true meaning of being a gladiator.
- Magerius turns and addresses Crixus, saying that if we can earn our price we're free to go
- Slaver was called Largus, which well, explains why that was his arena. **(observation/story)**

12:55 Big establishing shot as the cart wheels past a heavily compressed JPEG of Rome.
- "Rome" "Rome!" "Roam." It's only a Jpeg
- And we get our title card! Big lights big city big fights lets go. **(cutscene/story/joke)**

13:20 Arrive at Margerius Training Camp **(cutscene)**

- We're ushered off the cart as a sparring match goes on. Magerius hypes us up, tells us that those with the skill to survive have the chance to rise the ranks and gain our freedom, anything else, ask our trainers!

13:55 Magerius departs and an old man with a pegleg calls us over. Caladus is the chief trainer. He says the past doesn't matter, the training we go through today determines our future.
- He's here to evaluate our ability, so Gnaeus is called over to do the actual drilling.

Note: A leader of a school of Gladiator's is called a Lanista

14:20 The tutorial begins and we are ran through every move in the game.

- Basic attack / Power Attack / Jab Attack / Turn Attack / Chain attack / Counter / Skill Attack / Defence / Dodge / Parry / Slide / Pick up + Throw / Crouch + Jump / Roll / Adrenaline

(controls/attacks/combat)

- All this on a PS2 controller! **(observation/controls)**

14:30 Basic Attack: All face buttons can attack, with each corresponding to a direction. Triangle high, Cross low, square left, and circle right.

- These are your bread and butterknife, useful for aiming at unarmoured points and not using up too much stamina.

14: 50 Power Attack: Only possible with Triangle, a heavy overhead. Slow to wind up but capable of dealing good damage, staggering an enemy, or shedding them of shields and armour.

15:15 Jab Attack: The first kinda different option, triggered by quickly hitting a direction and a face button. A quick, directional stab useful incase you're surrounded, also useful for countering. High speed, good reach, low damage.

15:40 Turn Attack: Hold a direction and face button to turn into an attack, makes me wonder if this game was meant to be heavier than it wound up as turning is pretty quick. Not without merit as it may be slightly quicker than pivoting and then doing a normal (plus moves your more armoured front towards enemy) but feels like the game needed a more cumbersome control mode.

(control/observation)

16:00 Chain Attack: Done by alternating left + right inputs rhythmically, this is the most useful tool in the game. It's an overwhelming, hype building attack but rapidly drains stamina. It can be pivoted into rhythmic low and high attacks by tapping X or Triangle. **(controls/observation)**

- Slight challenge to nailing attack timing, especially as you get faster when boosting Agility. High commitment bit of a risk, and you need greater focus to dodge cancel out. It's a cool move and your only real move with any combo potential. **(combat/observation)**

16:20 Counter: Not a dedicated move, if you interrupt an enemy mid attack you can deal greater damage. Jabs are advised as ideal counter moves for their speed. **(combat)**

- So in response to enemy attacks you have 5 options! counter, defend (block), dodge, parry, roll, technically 6 as just moving out of range and back in to punish whiffs is also viable and is arguably faster than dodging (plus you can move around foes to hit them in the back)

(combat/movement/controls/defence/observation)

17:25 Skill Attack: Special moves granted by skill tablets, consume a good amount of stamina but can have unique effects like forcing an opponent to turn, launching them into the air, disarming, a combo dodge/parry into attack motion. These really open the game up and may grant extra audience excitement?

- Only having four slots does add more long term questions, do you dedicate to one stance or spread skills around for versatility or to deal with equipment loss.

17:55 → Defence/Dodge/Parry/Slide: I love the defence key in this game both for the options it gives and the risk reward nature it contains. Blocking is the safest option but does still risk damage or having equipment knocked loose, it has no reward beyond buying time and maybe tiring an opponent.

- Dodge has arguably the roughest timing but builds hype and grants stamina, this encouraging staying in melee range, playing aggressively, risking an opponent letting off a strike so you can chain or skill attack in return. It also has no chance of damage.

CRF 001 CONT – CONTROL TUTORIAL CONT

- Parry: Riskier than dodge as a whiff will leave you momentarily open and unlike a dodge it you need to be facing the attack to deflect, but the timing is less difficult to read. Doesn't refund stamina but builds hype and opens up opponent, may even knock the weapon right out of their hands!
- I love the parry in this game, you need to capitalise on the window they create, though that's optional as you may just want to style on your opponent a bit or buy time. There is a funny downside as knocking an opponents weapon loose can mean it flies straight up, and pursuing the foe to capitalise can have it land on you! Whether you consider this a flaw depends on how warm your heart is at the given moment, this combat system lapses into slapstick at times and it's not entirely unwelcome. **(observation)**
- Slide: Essentially, you maintain facing when in guard mode, not much more to it, it's lock on movement which does make moves like the jab and turn attacks perhaps a bit more understandable.

Post-note: Gaps in Our Defence

For the most part the fact that all of your defence moves (besides rolling) being bound to and behind one shift function works surprisingly well. The timings are different and can be gotten to grips with. For a jank action game this could have gone very wrong and made defence clumsy which it skillfully avoids, but it does have some issues.

Because to parry I must hit what is also the dodge prompt I've hit defence, hit a face button, but then dodged out of the blow I wished to parry. This rarely left me open long enough for the opponent to capitalise but it could happen, and during boss fights where they're often faster, more aggressive, and often able to take out a player in a handful of hits this could be ruinous.

There are some more understandable problems I don't think could be resolved. The game was smart enough to not allow dodge spam spam, if you mistime the dodge prompt or hit it when no one was going to hit you there's an invisible cooldown before another dodge attempt is allowed. A very well considered one at that, despite not knowing how long it is, it felt fair and trustworthy. I could feel when it was back online and it never fooled me.

However, opponents can whiff. If I dodge an attack that would have missed the cooldown is still triggered. When attacked by multiple opponents the game can also misread what I want to dodge and it's then this becomes a problem. Another hilarious issue is that hitting a foe midswing can either cancel their attack or else stagger it for a frame before it continues.

While I do like that uncertainty it could be seen as a problem. Do I dodge or gamble that a counter will stop the attack? It also means I've had my dodge timings fumbled when teammates hit an opponent swinging for me and delayed their strike. Team mates are a whole other kettle of fish mind. **(post-note/controls)**

20:45 Pick Up + Throw: Weapon turnover can be frequent and having gear knocked loose is a concern. You can also lob stuff at foes including your helmet. I was too attached to my gear to risk this but hey, it's another option, a very inaccurate and unreliable one mind.

21:35 Crouch/Jump: Jump attacks are possible, I really didn't use these and can't really envision how handy they'd be.

22:00 Roll: Same as above, it is another defense option but feels outclassed by the others, may have i-frames?

22:30 Adrenaline: Very unlikely to get this early on, a nice burst of slomo to absolutely lay into a foe, the funniest thing is that this will likely result in air juggles which knock them out of your range! **(observation)**

23:00 Tutorial over, Gneaus nails us with a Gladius and challenges us to a spar, he is a tough opponent when fresh, an utter cakewalk when you know what you're doing. **(joke)**

- We're given a minute to beat him. **(tutorial/battle)**

- Defeating him gets a passive skill tablet which does mean a little boost this early on.

24:10 I come pretty close but ultimately don't defeat Gneaus

24:20 Caladus says he's seen enough and tomorrow we'll join the same training as the rest of the gladiators. Our only job on training days is to train, eat, and sleep. Stepping out of line will be punished by the guards (not an empty threat)

- He calls Decimus, who is there. He made up about a tenth of the scene. **(joke/bad joke/going in)**

24:45 Decimus leads us to the mess hall and points us to the counter, behind which is a balding scottish guy!

- "Ah, you're the new guy! My name is Crixus."

- Pronounced Ki-Ri-Kos... Fuck, I was saying it wrong for years.

- Well uh, my names Crixus, lovely to meet ya! If there's any consolation, Crixus having his named mispronounced, even for years, is hardly the worst thing to happen to him, he died high on fantasy crack battling B-Balling hill giants while on a quest to regain his lost arm, and even that wasn't the worst thing to happen to him, it was a weird campaign. **(joke/observation)**

- I almost wish I could have picked a scot but then Hadrian built a wall for a reason.

(joke/observation)

- I mean come on this is a sports game, it's for jocks! **(bad joke)**

- We have our meal and our first day comes to a close.

25:25 A titlecard explains our situation.

"Crixus has been forced into Margerius's training school.

His hair is cut and clothes provided

for his new life as a slave.

Tomorrow, the training begins."

CRF 002 - Training - pushups and dodging (badly) - COLOSSEUM - First day plenty of drama, nick good stuff - big shield deflections (weapon falls back on enemy) - Cocky in survival but make it thanks to levels

00:35 Day 1: Lunae

- So roman days were named for planets, and they thought the sun was also a planet. **(research)**

00:40 As an apprentice rank we have an apprentice room in the basement. As we rank up we get more tablet slots and fancier rooms. I wish we also got more inventory space. **(observation/rank)**

00:45 On an indent on the wall we can set our tablets, check our stats and look at the calendar. **(menus)**

01:20 Set active skill tablets, one for each stance. **(stance/skills/tablets)**

02:00 Squatting around the dorm before I go train.

02:55 Do normal pushups

- Don't do great, get 8 points.

CRF 002 CONT – Training + First Arena Day

03:30 Look out the gate at a JPEG of Rome, my 2D compressed freedom is out there!
(joke/observation)

04:20 Do normal dodge training. **(training/dodge)**
- 12 dodges, 8 hits, 0 points. Failed. Gnaeus is not pleased.

05:15 Eating, points in strength, agility, and offer 2 portions to the gods.
- Not gonna track training from here as I know what I want to put down on this.

05:50 Squat on Table

06:15 Day 2 Martis

06:25 Examine skill tablet, levelling skill tablets raises damage and lowers stamina cost.
(skills/stamina)

06:40 Look at stats screen.

07:05 Magerius has us lined up and says today is the day of the bout at the Atilius Arena. As the new guys, we're being taken along. **(story)**
- "I can't let you die because of all the money I spent on you." **(dialogue)**

07:45 Arrival cutscene at Atilius arena.

07:55 Pop up tells us the following
"Guards are posted around the bailey.
Talk to the bailiff there to enter a bout." **(tutorial/pop-up)**

08:10 Follow my colleague into the bailey **(shot)**

08:20 The Bailiff is flagged up to us.

08:25 Followed by the item box next to a giant skill billboard, or skillboard. **(crap joke)**

08:30 And the healer "useful but costly." YEP! **(money)**

- Dying might be cheaper, or at least the ferry. Charon just wants a coin, this guy wants the whole purse. **(joke)**

08:35 Go and grab a Novacula from the tables, you gotta grab gear quick because your mates will filter in and might beat you to the gear you want! **(gameplay/funny)**

08:40 Last helmet gets taken! **(gameplay/gear/moment)**

- I quickly nab a shield!

09:10 Battle One. Team Battle, one bronze coin, 2400s **(battle)**

- Unique speech intro for each battle type. As well as a tooltip briefly describing the event. Along with an enemy/time count and the base reward. **(battles/matches/UI)**

10:20 Immediately grouped up on by 2 foes, miss a dodge, hit the next, and then do a chain attack on one foe, a full stamina bar brings a foe to just under half health. **(combat/dodge/stamina/stats)**

10:35 Dodge strike, regain a ton of stamina **(stamina/defensive)**

10:40 Power attack

10:40 This is a team battle with an enemy general objective. Rushing the enemy general can end the match in moments, but bigger bonuses could be achieved by taking our time, killing foes, and showing off! **(combat/match type/objective)**

10:45 Jab attacks

10:50 Power attack on helmeted foe, do no damage, the helmet soaks it all!
(armour/gear/combat/damage)

10:55 Use of skill move: Bash, rotates opponent, opening their side. **(combat/skills)**

11:05 Use of left side attack and low attack, opponent has no leg armour. **(face button/standard attacks/armour)**

11:25 Practicing dodging on foe I've solo'd out. **(dodging)**
- I am trying and failing to learn parry timing.

11:30 Mistime parry

11:40 Level up One Sword Style and regain all of my health.

Post-Note: Style Level Ups

All four stances can be levelled individually, and on a level up for reasons known only to Mars, we recover all of our health. It's more than a little incongruous but is yet another feature I'm really fond of.

It leads to these really exciting moments where beaten and battered you get a surge of power and are right back in the fight. It pairs well with the very expensive healer and early game poverty. It gives the player a choice when low on health between rounds. Lose some of your very limited funds you may be saving for gear? Or get back in there and literally tough it out.

Besides this as the game goes on and the gap between levels rises these become more infrequent, making it an early game crutch to help you adapt to the combat and take some of the sting out of the learning process. This also encourages mixing up your play style time to time. Maybe having a reserve style you try to switch to in a jam, making you mix things up on the fly and adding an extra consideration to relying exclusively on one weapon set. It's a small addition that offers the player a lot of options. **(post-note/gameplay)**

11:40 Use of bash **(skill)**

11:50 Get slashed in the back. **(combat/armour/no armour/positioning)**
- AI is not above surrounding you, and in team fights they'll often take the opportunity to get behind you. Giving purpose to jab and turn attacks and forcing the player to try and manage groups.
(AI/observation)

11:50 Backwards jab

12:00 Fail parries and get hit in the back again! I was a flub machine early on!
(observation/combat/defence)

12:10 Block, blue numbers indicate negated damage, impact staggers my character. **(damage reaction/shield)**

12:15 chain attack pushes foe over, follow with low attack to hit downed foe.

- Knocking foes down is another of those weird risks that probably should be less risky. As the get up attack is both fast and highly damaging, hard to block. Making pushing advantage on a downed foe feel like a pretty big risk which defies common design, it can be done however, but following up on a downed foe feels like one of those things that shouldn't be a big risk?

(observation/combat/aimed attacks/chain attacks/physicality/post-note)

12:25 Chain attack, tire out, get punished by opponent I was attempting to once again break with a chain attack. **(combat/stamina)**

12:40 Standing on skill tablet for ages, struggling to remember pick up key? I doubt it? Maybe just to show off, either way, useful footage. **(skill tablet)**

12:50 Throw shield away, not sure why, possibly related to above. **(throw/gear)**

12:55 Charge foe, jab attack, chain attack knocks shield out of their hand.
- fail dodge, then kill foe, take his better helmet.

13:20 Use teammate to stab foe in the back. **(AI/mate)**

13:35 Counter jab, enemy does attack with long windup, use jab to hit faster, counter provides bonus damage and lands the killing blow. **(counter/defence/moment)**

13:40 Grab 2nd sword, now in two sword style! **(gear/stance)**

13:40 Dodge low attack, refills stamina. **(dodge/stamina)**

13:50 Enemy general has a spear and large shield, a defensive powerhouse, and the spear grants plentiful fast damage, he attacks low a lot, attacking unshielded legs. **(AI/stance)**

13:55 Attempt to approach general, using ally as bait, the general fucking instant shifts and hits me with a spear jab as I approach his back **(AI/combat)**

14:20 Grab shield and approach slowly in defence mode

- Take some blows, but make him tire himself out on my shield while dodging some blows. **(enemy stamina/combat)**

- Tiring foes also a valid tactic for opening which is pretty awesome, they're just as constrained to stamina **(combat/observation/tactic/stamina)**