Title: 3v3n the r0man5 ta1lgat3d. cook-off starts 2 hours before the gates open. kickoff attendance is mandatory. no bonds accepted as payment.
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Like many authors, Pliny frames his critique in terms of social status, which places it within a long-standing tradition of social criticism of the games (see further Chapters 27 and 41). Rather than devoting their leisure time (*otium*) to pursuing the same learned (i.e., literary and philosophical) pursuits that Pliny and his peers do, spectators indulge their "childish passion" in the circus. Worse still, they allow themselves to become emotional and violent, and generally lose all self-control, even though seemingly nothing is at stake. Despite their inherent biases, some of these critiques hit on a central truth: that from the perspective of the invested spectator, *everything* was at stake. Ammianus Marcellinus, writing three centuries after Pliny about "the idle and slothful commons," notes, "Their temple, their dwelling, their assembly, and the height of all their hopes is the Circus Maximus" (28.4.29, trans. J. Rolfe).

The fact that the real target of Pliny's letter was "respectable men" who forgot their proper social station in attending the races points to a larger reality: the passion for chariot racing touched Romans of *every* age, sex, and social class. The so-called *furor circensis* is said to have developed early, as if etched into Romans' very DNA: "Again, there are the peculiar and characteristic vices of this metropolis of ours, taken on, it seems to me, almost in the mother's womb – the passion for play actors, and the mania for gladiatorial shows and horse-racing" (Tacitus *Dialogues* 29.3–4, trans. W. Peterson). Children are recorded not only as passionate about the sport but also as partisans of particular charioteers, horses, and factions, such as young Nero's support for the Greens (Suetonius *Nero* 22.1). Nor were such passions limited to boys; archaeological evidence from girls' tombs (e.g., game tokens, inscriptions) suggests their shared interest as well. More than any other venue for spectacles, the circus was a microcosm of Roman society that embraced young and old, male and female, rich and poor, slave and free, native and foreign, even members of the intelligentsia such as the historian Tacitus, who had a learned exchange with a Roman knight in the circus stands (Pliny the Younger *Letters* 9.23).

What was the appeal? A day at the circus could be hot, noisy, and dirty, but it held many attractions besides the thrill of the races themselves and their accompanying spectacles. The lack of a *velarium* (fabric canopy), in contrast to the Colosseum, meant that spectators were exposed to the sun's blinding glare and sweltering heat, especially uncomfortable for those observing its code of dress (a toga without a coat). While the glare of the sun made it difficult to see, the roar of the crowd made it difficult to hear,