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Tiger, Tiger

Donna Cardon

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Banks, Lynne Reid. *Tiger, Tiger*. Delacorte, 2005. ISBN 0385732406. \$15.95. 195 p.

Reviewer: Donna Cardon

Reading Level: Young Adult

Rating: Excellent

Genre: Historical Fiction;

Subject: Tigers--Juvenile fiction; Rome--Juvenile fiction; Animals, treatment-- Juvenile fiction; Books--Reviews;

Aurelia is the daughter of the Emperor of Rome and Boots is her pet tiger. The emperor is proud of the way his young daughter handles the beautiful beast without fear. Julius, the tiger's handsome young handler, knows that even though Boots has had his fangs removed and wears leather covers on his claws he is still a wild beast and potentially dangerous to the young princess. He knows that he must be ever vigilant while Boots and Aurelia are together to keep the princess safe. Yet that is not the only reason he watches the beautiful princess. When Julius recognizes the growing affection between Aurelia and her younger cousin Marcus, he begins to feel jealous. He lets his guard down just long enough for the cousins to play a "harmless" trick on him. When Aurelia's and Marcus' trick goes terribly wrong, Julius is sentenced to face Boots' fierce brother, Brute, in the Coliseum.

This is the latest in a recent trend of books set in Imperial Rome. Like the Roman Mysteries series by Caroline Lawrence (e.g. *Thieves of Ostia*, Puffin 2004) it includes interesting historical detail about life as a Roman aristocrat. This book also includes graphic descriptions of the brutality of the Roman gladiatorial games. One passage describes the attack of the vicious tiger, Brute, "One (of the slaves) had his stomach ripped open and its contents spilled onto the sand...the disemboweled one was screaming" (p 90-91). This scene may be too violent for some young readers. Although this scene is graphic it is not gratuitous. The cruelty of the games plays an important part in the plot and helps to motivate the relationships between the characters in the story. The main characters, Aurelia, Julius, the Emperor and Marcus, are all fully developed and believable. The two tigers, which are also important characters, are intelligent but retain their animal nature. Banks weaves the human and animal characters into an interesting and plausible plot that leaves the reader pondering the true meaning and value of freedom.