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Gladiator

By David Franzoni

FADE IN:

EXT. FOREST - DAY

Germania. The far reaches of the Roman Empire.

Winter 180 A.D.

Incongruously enough, the first sound we hear is a beautiful tenor voice. Singing. A boy's voice.

CREDITS as we hear the haunting song float through dense forests. We finally come to a rough, muddy road slashing through the forest. On the road a GERMAN PEASANT FATHER is herding along three sickly looking cows. His two SONS are with him. His youngest son sits on one of the cows and sings a soft, plaintive song.

They become aware of another sound behind them on the road -- the creak of wood, the slap of metal on leather. The Father immediately leads his cattle and his sons off the road. They stand-still, eyes down: the familiar posture of subjugated peoples throughout history.

A wagon train rumbles past them. Three ornate wagons followed by a mounted cohort of fifty heavily-armed PRAETORIAN GUARDS.

The young boy dares to glance up at the passing Romans. His eyes burn with hatred.

INT. WAGON - DAY

Mist momentarily obscures a man's face. Frozen breath. The man is in his 20's, imperious and handsome. He is swathed in fur, only his face exposed. He is COMMODUS. He glances up.

COMMODUS:

Do you think he's really dying?

The woman across from him returns his gaze evenly. She is slightly older, beautiful and patrician. A formidable woman.

She is LUCILLA.

LUCILLA:

He's been dying for ten years.

COMMODUS:

I think he's really dying this time.

A beat. Their breath turns instantly to mist.

COMMODUS:

He has to be bled every night now.

LUCILLA:

How do you know that?

COMMODUS:

I've been so informed.
She arches an eyebrow.

COMMODUS:

If he weren't really dying he
wouldn't have sent for us.

LUCILLA:

(a smile)
Maybe he just misses us.

COMMODUS:

And the Senators. He wouldn't have
summoned them if --

LUCILLA:

Peace, Commodus. After two weeks on
the road your incessant scheming is
hurting my head.
A beat.

COMMODUS:

The first thing I shall do is honor
him with games worthy of his
majesty.

LUCILLA:

The first thing I shall do is have a
hot bath.
The wagon rumbles to a halt. Voices are heard outside.
Commodus leaps out...

EXT. WAGON - OUTPOST - DAY

Three Roman SOLDIERS guard an outpost, a watchtower, on
the roadside.

COMMODUS:

Why have we stopped?
PRAETORIAN GUARD MEMBER

We're here, sir.

COMMODUS:

(to Soldier #1)

Where is my father?

SOLDIER #1

He's at the front, sir.

COMMODUS:

Is the battle won?

SOLDIER #1

Don't know, sir. They've been gone
for eight days.

Commodus tosses off his furs -- beneath them he wears a
beautiful set of Lorica Segmentata -- the traditional
formed armor of Rome. He moves to a horse as:

COMMODUS:

(to Soldier #1)

My sister wants a bath, take her to
the camp.

(to Soldier #2)

Take me to my father.

He leaps onto the horse and canters back to the Praetorian
Guard unit.

Soldier #2 climbs on his horse and leads them. Commodus
rides off with most of the Praetorian Guard unit.

Lucilla peeks her head from the wagon. She glances at the
remaining soldiers. Distinctly unpromising.

LUCILLA:

(dry)

Civilization at last. Gods preserve
us.

EXT. HILL - TWILIGHT

The mighty catapults dwarf the humans. Soldiers from the
elite Felix Regiment -- a legion of the Roman Army -- haul
the monstrous machines up a hill.

The commanding General of the Felix Regiment, MAXIMUS,
walks between two of the catapults. He is a striking and
intense man in his 30's. Like all the soldiers who
surround him, he is caked with mud and exhausted.

He trudges up the hill with his two lieutenants, TITUS and
QUINTUS.

TITUS:

You would do as well to read the mind of a rhinoceros.

QUINTUS:

These barbarians would rather drown in blood than yield an inch. If I didn't hate them so much I would admire them.

They have reached the top of the hill. Stunning martial preparations are underway. The catapults join ten others. Archers are taking up position. Brutal "Scorpions" -- devices for firing multiple crossbow bolts -- are being loaded. Soldiers are also loading the catapults with enormous "Greek fire pots" -- large, round terra cotta pots.

Maximus and his lieutenants gaze down from the hilltop. Below them they can see a German encampment.

TITUS:

They simply will not surrender.
A beat as Maximus gazes down at the German position.

MAXIMUS:

(quietly)
A people should know when they are conquered.
A beat.

MAXIMUS:

At the first signal release the catapults. We'll use the cavalry to cut off the retreat.

QUINTUS:

General, I don't recommend that. Our cavalry might be caught in the flames.

MAXIMUS:

I hope not, because I'm going to be leading them.
A beat as he gazes down at the enemy.

MAXIMUS:

Why don't they know they're already
dead?

EXT. TREES - TWILIGHT

Maximus and Titus are on their horses, the cavalry of two
hundred Felix Regiment warriors surrounds them. Steam
flares from their horses' nostrils. They wait in a thick
stand of trees -- the German position can be seen across a
muddy plain.

A large wolf -- "The Wolf of Rome" -- waits at Maximus'
side.

Maximus nods to an archer. The archer lights the tip of
an arrow and sends it flaming into the night sky.

EXT. HILLTOP - TWILIGHT

Quintus waits. The catapults are loaded and waiting. So
too the Scorpions. So too the 200 archers of the Felix
Regiment.

He sees the flaming arrow flying up from below.

QUINTUS:

Now!

The mighty catapults are released. The Greek fire pots
arc dramatically through the air. A moment later soldiers
release the Scorpions and hundreds of bolts streak through
the sky. The archers fire a murderous barrage of flaming
arrows.

EXT. TREES - TWILIGHT

The screaming is almost immediate.

Maximus and his cavalry watch as the fire pots crash down
into the German encampment.

EXT. GERMAN CAMP - TWILIGHT

The fire pots shatter -- pitch splashes everywhere --
seconds later the bolts and flaming arrows slice down and
ignite the pitch -- FLAME EXPLODES -- it is a hellish,
napalm-like vision -- the conflagration illuminating the
twilight.

The deadly rain of flaming arrows spreads terror through
the German camp --

EXT. TREES - TWILIGHT

Maximus watches the German camp.

MAXIMUS:

(to his men)

Hold steady... steady...

He can see the nightmare destruction of the encampment continuing -- fire pots and Scorpion bolts and flaming arrows -- panic in the German encampment.

MAXIMUS:

Steady...

He sees the Germans begin fleeing across the plain. He quickly raises his sword and whispers a prayer, then turns

to his men:

MAXIMUS:

Brothers -- I salute you! For Rome!

He spurs his horse and races out of the trees to the plain...

EXT. PLAIN - BATTLEGROUND - TWILIGHT

Maximus leads the terrifying and relentless cavalry charge -- Titus at his side -- the Felix Regiment screams out fearsome war cries as they gallop across the muddy plain toward the Germans --

Fire pots and flaming arrows are crashing down everywhere around them --

The cavalry SLAMS into the Germans at full gallop --
It is carnage.

The Felix Regiment warriors slash ruthlessly with short swords -- slicing a path of sheer destruction through the Germans -- but the Germans fight with equal brutality -- and the Germans also fight with the desperation of a hopeless last chance -- they pull and spear Roman soldiers off horses whenever they can --

Maximus spins his horse and swings his sword with expert efficiency -- a spear stabs through the neck of his horse and it immediately collapses forward --

Maximus sails over the horse's head and crashes to the muddy ground -- he jumps up and is in the midst of the battle --

The flaming arrows and exploding fire pots create a ferocious inferno everywhere around the battle -- the flames silhouetting the fighting --

On the ground, Maximus proves his absolute worth as a warrior -- he hacks and dodges -- ghastly images of true ancient warfare -- Maximus' eyes burn with a zealous fire as he fights for his life --

He finds he is momentarily at a terrible disadvantage -- Germans are surrounding him from all sides -- as he fights he looks for an advantage -- for his soldiers -- for anything -- he is doomed --

Then -- an almost mystical image -- Maximus' wolf leaps through a wall of flame --

"The Wolf of Rome" savages several Germans around Maximus -- giving him the help he needed.

The wolf and his master fight, side-by-side.

EXT. HILLTOP - TWILIGHT

We see an old man's face, staring down at the battle. The face is weather-beaten, ailing. The roaring flames from the battlefield below flicker in his sad eyes.

MARCUS AURELIUS, the Emperor of Rome, is on a horse. A metal brace extends from the back of his saddle. He is strapped to the brace with thick, leather straps.

He watches as the Felix Regiment below concludes the battle. The cheering of the Regiment can be heard as the final, isolated pockets of Germans are cut down.

Behind Marcus the sun is setting, painting the world blood red.

EXT. BATTLEFIELD - SUNSET

Maximus, bloody and spent, walks through the aftermath of the carnage. The Wolf of Rome is at his side. Dead and dying by the hundreds are scattered everywhere. Roman surgeons are attending to the wounded.

Marcus walks to him, embraces him warmly.

MAXIMUS:

Caesar.

MARCUS:

Maximus, you prove your valor again.

Let us hope for the final time here.

MAXIMUS:

I don't think there's anyone left to fight.

MARCUS:

There are always people left to fight...

Marcus takes Maximus' arm and they walk through the masses of bodies. Maximus holds Marcus' arm firmly, quietly

supporting him as they walk.

MARCUS:

But this night, at least, Germania is at last defeated... What will you do now, my friend?

MAXIMUS:

Should Caesar permit, I'll go home.

I've been away too long. I've forgotten my wife's face and I barely know my son.

Suddenly, a tethered GERMAN PRISONER they are passing calls out to them:

GERMAN PRISONER:

THIS BLOOD MEANS NOTHING, CONQUEROR!

Maximus and Marcus stop. A soldier moves quickly to silence the German Prisoner.

MARCUS:

(to Soldier)

Stop...

(to Prisoner)

... You speak our language?

GERMAN PRISONER:

You have been in my homeland for twelve years. Of course I speak your language. So did my son, who you murdered. So did my daughter, who you raped.

MAXIMUS:

(to Marcus)

Come, Caesar...

MARCUS:

No. Let him speak...

(to Prisoner)

... I am Rome, what would you say to me?

GERMAN PRISONER:

(points to sunset)

You are that sun, Rome, and your time is over... You can slit a thousand throats here, and you can put a thousand babies to the sword, but it will always be our home.

MARCUS:

Now it is Rome.

GERMAN PRISONER:

It will never be Rome. Not as long as one German breathes.

The soldier moves to kill the insolent Prisoner.

MARCUS:

No... Release him. Give him safe passage. Let him go to his family.

The soldier leads the German Prisoner away.

Maximus and Marcus continue walking in silence for a beat.

Then:

MARCUS:

Tell me again, Maximus, why are we here?

MAXIMUS:

For the glory of the empire, sire.

MARCUS:

(quietly)

Yes. I remember.

They continue walking through the mountains of bodies...

EXT. ROAD - SUNSET

Maximus and Marcus are now walking along a road through the dense forest. Slaves follow behind them, leading their horses.

Both sides of the road are filled with the men of the Felix Regiment. As Maximus and Marcus pass, the battered and bloody soldiers drag themselves to their feet, raising their swords, paying silent homage.

MAXIMUS:

They honor you, Caesar.

MARCUS:

I don't think they're standing for me, Maximus. They honor you.

Just then Commodus canters into view with his Praetorian Guard escort. He watches the army honor Maximus with rank envy as he nears.

He rides up to Maximus and Marcus.

COMMODUS:

Have I missed it?

He leaps from his horse.

COMMODUS:

Have I missed the battle?

MARCUS:

You've missed the war. We're done here.

Commodus embraces him, awkward.

COMMODUS:

Father. Congratulations. I shall sacrifice a thousand doves to honor your triumph.

MARCUS:

Spare the doves and honor Maximus, he won the battle.

Commodus embraces Maximus, even more awkward.

COMMODUS:

General, Rome salutes you and I embrace you as a brother.

MAXIMUS:

Highness.

They walk, Maximus still supporting Marcus, as:

COMMODUS:

Your Spaniards seem invincible. May the Gods favor the Felix Regiment now and always...

(to his father)

Here, Father, take my arm.

MARCUS:

(ignores this)

Where's your sister?

COMMODUS:

She's at the camp. She had no desire to see the gore of the battlefield.

MARCUS:

(smiles)

Lucilla would eat every corpse here if it brought her one step closer to the throne.

Maximus laughs.

MAXIMUS:

(smiles)

Caesar, you do the lady injustice.

MARCUS:

It's a foolish old cobra who doesn't recognize his own off-spring...

(he suddenly stops,
not feeling well)

I think... I should ride now.

Maximus waves for Marcus' horse. It is brought up. Several soldiers carefully help the old man into the saddle. He is then tethered to the brace on his saddle. It is a slow, graceful and embarrassing ordeal for the Emperor of Rome.

When at last he is strapped in, he looks to Maximus.

MARCUS:

So much for the glory of Rome.

Without a word to his son, Marcus nods and the horse is slowly lead away.

Commodus and Maximus watch him go.

COMMODUS:

(neutral)

He's dying.

A beat.

COMMODUS:

Poor old man.

MAXIMUS:

(terse)

If you'll excuse me, Highness.

He turns and stalks away.

EXT. TENT CITY - NIGHT

We see the Roman encampment, a sea of tents. Hundreds of campfires burn before the tents.

INT. HOSPITAL TENT - NIGHT

Maximus enters a large tent and is met by a spectacle of the dead and dying. Roman surgeons are working feverishly to save lives. Limbs are amputated, the bloody stumps quickly cauterized with hot irons. Leeches and bronze cups are employed for blood-letting to balance "humours." Anesthesia as we know it is nonexistent. Wine amphoras are passed around and orderlies fan narcotic smoke toward the patients. Mostly, though, they just hold down the writhing patients.

Maximus moves through the tent, offering a word of comfort here and there. All the wounded are delighted to see him. He goes to an older soldier, GALLUS, who has one wooden hand. His other hand is bandaged.

MAXIMUS:

What, Gallus, losing your other hand?

GALLUS:

Aye, General, they're going to make a bronze one for it. Long fingers this time.

MAXIMUS:

And the women of your village will crave your touch even more.

GALLUS:

Ah, then you know the women of my village.

Maximus smiles and moves on.

He stops at a young soldier, VALERIUS, whose head has been shaved. A hole has been bored into his skull to relieve the pressure on his brain. The young soldier is dying.

MAXIMUS:

What's your name, son?

VALERIUS:

Valerius, General.

MAXIMUS:

The name suits you.

VALERIUS:

Why am I dying?

A beat. Maximus sits by his cot. He takes Valerius' hand.

MAXIMUS:

You're dying because you love Rome,
as I do.

VALERIUS:

I've never been to Rome.

MAXIMUS:

Neither have I. Rome for us lives
here...

(he touches his
heart)

... it's a thing inside us that came
from our ancestors and that we give
to our children.

VALERIUS:

It must be glorious, Rome. I've
only seen pictures. Is it a
glorious place?

A beat.

MAXIMUS:

Yes, it's a glorious place.

VALERIUS:

It must be.

He smiles. And he is dead.

Maximus sits for a moment. He gently closes Valerius' eyes. And Maximus finds that he is weeping.

He is not ashamed of the tears.

INT. MESS TENT - NIGHT

An immediate swirl of noise. The grand mess tent is crowded with soldiers. They are still filthy with caked-on mud and blood. Wounds are bandaged and tankards are raised in celebration of the victory.

Marcus sits in a central position and receives visitors. Currently two Senators, FALCO and GAIUS, are bowing before him.

FALCO:

Hail, Marcus Aurelius.

MARCUS:

Stand up, Senators. That unfamiliar posture doesn't suit you.

GAIUS:

We live in supplication to your glory.

MARCUS:

All the while conspiring with that fat man in Rome. How is the old monster?

GAIUS:

Senator Gracchus is hale, sire.

MARCUS:

Still damning me to the four winds?

GAIUS:

Still eager for your triumphant return to Rome, Caesar.

MARCUS:

I would have silenced him decades ago -- but I just like him too much.

Meanwhile, Maximus stands with his lieutenants, Titus and Quintus. A wound on Maximus' arm has been bound.

MAXIMUS:

(to Titus)

If you want to stay on, I support you. So do the men. I'll ask the Emperor to appoint you in my place.

TITUS:

It won't be the Felix Regiment without you.

MAXIMUS:

I'll return after a season at home. Maybe two.

QUINTUS:

That means after three or four more babies.

TITUS:

And you'll be too fat from Vibia's cooking to get on your horse by then.

MAXIMUS:

Should the Gods so bless me. I would be thankful. Commodus perambulates up to them.

COMMODUS:

Hail, warriors. My congratulations.

TITUS AND QUINTUS

(bowing)

Highness.

COMMODUS:

(to Maximus)

My old friend, my father tells me you're returning to Spain?

MAXIMUS:

Yes.

COMMODUS:

A pity. I'll need men like you in my army...

An awkward glance between the soldiers. This sort of talk is offensively premature.

COMMODUS:

There are larger division that might appeal to you. Even the Praetorian Guard. You've never been to Rome. Imagine arriving as head of the Praetorians! They have really splendid uniforms.

MAXIMUS:

(cold)

I'm going home.

Senators Gaius and Falco join them.

GAIUS:

(to Maximus)

... And why not apply for entry to the Senate?

FALCO:

A war hero with a handsome face and a strong heart could go far.

COMMODUS:

General Maximus, may I present Senators Gaius and Falco. Beware of this Gaius, he'll pour a honeyed potion in your ear and you'll wake up one day and all you'll say is "Republic, Republic, Republic..."
Laughter.

FALCO:

Have you never considered Rome?

MAXIMUS:

No.

COMMODUS:

You've had my ear since we were children. You could be a valuable ally in the Senate.

GAIUS:

Are you a believer in Republicanism?

COMMODUS:

(laughs)

There -- I warned you.

MAXIMUS:

I'm a soldier, not a politician.

Meanwhile, a dark eye is studying the men through a hidden slit in the tent wall. The eye is particularly drawn to Maximus.

GAIUS:

If your heart lies with the people, I would back you for the Senate. I'm sure Gracchus would as well.

COMMODUS:

Not a word about that sodomite bastard.

GAIUS:

(smiles to Maximus)

The august Senator Gracchus has been rather a gadfly on the flesh of the imperial family.

FALCO:

He's a damned provocateur.

GAIUS:

He lives under the antiquated assumption that the Senate should represent the people with vigor.

COMMODUS:

I won't tolerate it. His incessant criticism exhausts me. The man can

speaking for five hours without taking a breath.

GAIUS:

He serves Rome best when he serves it with honesty.

COMMODUS:

(sharply)

Enough... Maximus, I would like to inspect the Felix Regiment at dawn. Please arrange it.

MAXIMUS:

I can't do that.

COMMODUS:

Excuse me?

MAXIMUS:

My men have been fighting for five solid days. They're too busy dying to go on dress parade.

A beat. Commodus' eyes flash fire at this public rebuke. He very quickly gets control.

COMMODUS:

(smiles)

Of course, how foolish of me. Some other time...

He notes his father being helped out of the tent by several body slaves.

COMMODUS:

Caesar retires early tonight.

INT. TENT CORRIDOR - NIGHT

Marcus is helped out of the mess tent into a tent corridor attached.

He sees his daughter Lucilla in the corridor, spying in through the slit in the tent wall. He watches her, smiles.

MARCUS:

If only you had been born a man...

She turns to him. He leaves his body slaves and goes to her.

LUCILLA:

Father.

MARCUS:

What a Caesar you would have made.

LUCILLA:

You're right.

MARCUS:

I think you would have been strong.
I wonder if you would have been
just?

LUCILLA:

I would have been what you taught me
to be.
A beat. They stare at each other. He finally smiles.

MARCUS:

Well, pretend to be my loving
daughter tonight and walk with me to
my chamber.
She smiles and takes his arm. They slowly walk down the
tent corridor as:

MARCUS:

This is a pleasant fiction, isn't
it?

They disappear into darkness.

EXT. TENT CITY - DAWN

Maximus is slogging through the mud and snow that blankets
the Rome camp. He stops to observe an unusual sight.
Commodus is stripped almost naked, his chiseled body
covered in a fine sheen of sweat. He and his six
CENTURION BODY GUARDS are going through their daily
ritual. They defy the sub-zero temperatures and hack at
small trees with swords.

It is an eerie, zen-like workout. Commodus' intense
concentration is unnerving.

Maximus watches for a moment then moves on. He approaches

a large network of tents. He enters.

INT. MARCUS' TENT - DAY

Maximus enters Marcus' darkened tent. Flickering braziers provide the only light in the enormous Imperial tent. Heavy beams support the canopy and they creak like the timbers of a ship as the tent sways slightly in the wind. Marcus stands before a map of the Roman Empire.

MAXIMUS:

(bows)

Caesar.

Marcus holds out a scroll.

MARCUS:

Read this.

MAXIMUS:

I never acquired the art, sir.

MARCUS:

Of course. No matter. In this letter I denote my intention to nominate you to stand for the Emperorship after my death. A stunned pause. Maximus stares at him.

MARCUS:

My son is not a moral man. You have known this since you were young. He cannot rule.

MAXIMUS:

Caesar, I am honored but --

MARCUS:

For twenty years I have been spilling blood. For twenty years I have written philosophy and ruminated and conquered. Since I became Caesar I have only had four years without war. Four years of peace in twenty. So perhaps I can be... forgiven.
A long beat.

MARCUS:

While I have been fighting, Rome has grown mad and corpulent and diseased. I did this. And now I shall make it right.

MAXIMUS:

Sire, you brought the light of the Gods to barbarian darkness. You brought civilization and justice to the farthest --

MARCUS:

(fierce)

I have brought the sword -- nothing more! Rome is far away and we shouldn't be here. What matter is it to the Gods if we subdue one more tribe of Parthians or Gauls? What matter is it to Rome if a thousand more barbarians bend to our lash?

A beat.

Marcus sits. He doesn't look at Maximus.

A pause.

MARCUS:

Winter, Maximus. It's winter now...

A beat.

MARCUS:

There was a dream that was Rome. I can only whisper of it now.

Anything more than a whisper and the dream vanishes. It's so... fragile.

The true glory of Rome is in a very fragile idea. Imagine a place devoted to the rights of the citizen. Where every free man has a voice. That was the dream... And I fear it will not survive the winter.

He holds out a hand to Maximus. Maximus takes his hand, deeply moved, kneeling.

MARCUS:

Let's just whisper here, you and I.

MAXIMUS:

Yes, Caesar.

MARCUS:

If the dream is ever to live again the people must have a true voice. The voice I took from them. That all the Caesars took from them, bit by bit, conquest by conquest. And now that I am dying I am going to give them that voice again.

MAXIMUS:

You're not dying.

MARCUS:

I am, Maximus. It's strange... I find as I near the end I think little of the waning moments around me... instead I think much of the past... and of the future. How will the world speak my name in years to come? Will I be known as the philosopher? The warrior? The tyrant? Or will there be a more golden sounding to my name? Will I be the Emperor who gave Rome back her freedom?

A beat.

MARCUS:

Before I die I will give the people this final gift. I will give them the Senate reborn. The voice of the people empowered again, as it was always meant to be. It is my design that they will elect the next Emperor. And I would put forward your name with my backing.

MAXIMUS:

Caesar, you do me honor -- but your son has pride of place for succession.

MARCUS:

You are the son I should have had... Although I fear in my deepest heart that if you had truly been my son my blood would have polluted you as it did Commodus. We're a cursed bloodline. We have lived so long in power and depravity that we no longer remember a life without it. We can no longer even imagine a life without it.
A beat.

MARCUS:

Look at me, son.
Maximus looks at him.

MARCUS:

Son... I know that one grove of your vineyard is worth more to you than all the treasures of Rome. I know one loving word from your wife is worth more than the accolades of an Empire. But... a fond old man, who loves you more than he can say, begs you to at least think about what he has said tonight.

MAXIMUS:

I shall, Caesar.
A beat.

MARCUS:

I'll keep this letter to myself. I hope that with the sunrise you will agree. And embrace me as a father. Maximus nods and rises. He begins to go. Stops.

MAXIMUS:

You have always been my father.

He goes.

INT. TENT CORRIDOR - DAY

Maximus emerges from Marcus' tent into a long tent corridor, deep in thought.

LUCILLA'S VOICE

He always favored you...

He turns. Lucilla is waiting. She glides to him.

LUCILLA:

Even over his son.

MAXIMUS:

(turning away)

That's not true.

LUCILLA:

Maximus, stop...

(he stops)

Let me see your face.

He turns to her.

LUCILLA:

You've been crying.

MAXIMUS:

I lost too many men.

LUCILLA:

What does my father intend?

He turns and walks. She walks with him.

MAXIMUS:

I don't know.

LUCILLA:

You're lying. I could tell when you were lying even when we were children. You hate it.

MAXIMUS:

I never acquired your comfort with it.

LUCILLA:

True. But then you never had to.
Maximus, stop...
(he stops again)
... Is it really so terrible seeing
me again?

MAXIMUS:

No. I'm sorry. I'm tired from the
battle.

LUCILLA:

And you are hurt to see my father
dying.
A beat.

LUCILLA:

He will announce Commodus'
succession. That's why he summoned
us. Will you serve my brother as
you served his father?

MAXIMUS:

I will always serve the ideals of
Rome.
A beat.

LUCILLA:

Do you know I still remember you in
my prayers...? Oh yes, I pray...
Ever since that day you saved me
from drowning off Capri. Do you
remember?

MAXIMUS:

Yes.

LUCILLA:

Commodus was so angry that a mere
peasant -- a Spaniard no less --
touched the royal person, do you
remember his anger?

MAXIMUS:

Yes.

LUCILLA:

Mark this, Maximus: that is the man
who will be Emperor.
A beat.

MAXIMUS:

May I be permitted to go, Highness?
She smiles sadly.

LUCILLA:

There was a time when you didn't
call me "Highness."

MAXIMUS:

And there was a time when you were
just a little girl drowning in the
sea. All that was a different life.

LUCILLA:

(quietly)
Very different... I wonder if it was
better?

MAXIMUS:

It was more honest.
A moment between them. We sense there is much to be said,
much that could be said.

Finally:

MAXIMUS:

I thank you for your prayers.
He goes. She watches him walk away.
INT. MAXIMUS' TENT - NIGHT
Maximus kneels before a small altar in his tent. He faces
six small figures that represent his dead ancestors.

MAXIMUS:

Ancestors, true bloodline, I ask you
for your guidance. Bring me your
solace and your wisdom. Blessed
Mother, come to me in my dreams with
the Gods' desire for my future.

Blessed Father, watch over my wife and my son with a ready sword. Keep them safe until my return. Whisper to them in their sleep that I live only to hold them again and all else is dust and air. Ancestors, true bloodline, I honor you and will try to live with the dignity you have taught me.

He looks at his "ancestors" for a moment and then blows out the candles around them.

INT. MARCUS' TENT - NIGHT

Commodus' eyes are red with weeping. He sits, head down, at the foot of Marcus' bed and speaks to his father.

COMMODUS:

(quietly)

I search the faces of the Gods for ways to please you... to make you proud... and I can never do it. One kind word -- one full hug where you pressed me to your chest and held me tight -- would have been like the sun on my heart for a thousand years... What is it in me you hate so much? My eyes are your eyes. My hands are your hands. All I have ever wanted was to live up to you. Caesar. Father.

He stands. We see that he is holding the scroll denoting Marcus' intention to nominate Maximus as Emperor to the Senate. Commodus cannot control his tears.

COMMODUS:

Why does Maximus deserve what I could never have? -- Why do you love his eyes over mine? -- I would butcher the whole world -- if you would only love me...

Commodus weeps.

INT. MAXIMUS' TENT - NIGHT

Quintus is waking Maximus --

QUINTUS:

General -- Maximus --

MAXIMUS:

Quintus -- ?

QUINTUS:

The Emperor needs you. It's urgent.

Maximus leaps up and throws on a cloak, strides out with Quintus...

EXT. TENT CITY - NIGHT

Dead of night. Maximus and Quintus stride quickly through the sleeping camp toward Marcus' tent.

MAXIMUS:

What is it? Is he ill?

QUINTUS:

I don't know...

They continue on toward Marcus' tent.

INT. MARCUS' TENT - NIGHT

Maximus and Quintus stride into the tent -- Maximus slams to a halt. Stunned.

Commodus stands before him. Lucilla stands in a corner of the tent, head down.

And Marcus Aurelius dead, lying on his bed.

Maximus stares at Marcus.

COMMODUS:

Lament with me, brother, our great father is dead. I want --

Maximus, not even hearing, steps past him to Marcus.

He stands for a moment and then slowly kneels before

Marcus and gently kisses the old man's forehead. A ritual farewell.

A moment of silent mourning and then Maximus stands. He turns very, very slowly to Commodus.

COMMODUS:

General, the Gods' have taken the great man and left me alone. My

first desire as Emperor is that you take my hand in friendship. I need

you at my side, Maximus, at this

moment above all others. Stand with

me.

Maximus glares at him:

MAXIMUS:

How did he die?

Commodus does not respond.

MAXIMUS:

How did he die?

COMMODUS:

The surgeons say it was his breath
that gave out.

Maximus glances to Lucilla, she avoids his eyes.

COMMODUS:

Take my hand, Maximus. I only offer
it once.

A beat.

Maximus turns back to Marcus.

MAXIMUS:

How will the world speak your name
now, old man?

Without a glance to Commodus, he stalks out.

A silent beat. Then Commodus nods to Quintus. Quintus
goes.

Lucilla looks at Commodus for a long moment, her face an
enigmatic tornado of complex emotions.

Then:

LUCILLA:

Hail, Caesar.

INT. MAXIMUS' TENT - NIGHT

Maximus is kneeling before his ancestors, head down, his
fists clenched, praying.

Quintus and four Praetorian ASSASSINS suddenly burst in --
the assassins move immediately to bind Maximus -- swords
at his throat --

MAXIMUS:

What -- ?!

QUINTUS:

(ashamed)

Please don't fight, Maximus --

MAXIMUS:

Quintus --

Quintus goes to Maximus' armor, which hangs nearby, and slowly removes his seal of office.

QUINTUS:

I'm sorry, General, Caesar has spoken.

They pull Maximus out --

EXT. MAXIMUS' TENT - TENT CITY - NIGHT

Five horses are waiting.

MAXIMUS:

Quintus, what -- ?

QUINTUS:

(anguish)

I have no choice --

They are almost run over by a stern cohort of twenty Praetorians who gallop past. Maximus knows immediately what this means.

MAXIMUS:

(suddenly)

My family?!

A beat.

MAXIMUS:

What about my family, Quintus?

QUINTUS:

(quietly)

They will greet you in the afterlife.

Maximus lunges at him -- the Praetorians subdue him -- slamming him with a sword hilt -- knocking him unconscious.

QUINTUS:

(quietly, to

assassins)

Take him as far as the sunrise and
then kill him.

EXT. FOREST ROAD - DAWN

The four Praetorian assassins lead Maximus along a road.
He sits slumped in his saddle, drained.

ASSASSIN #1

All right, this is far enough.

The three other assassins climb from their horses.

Assassin #2 pushes Maximus from his horse. He falls to
the ground hard.

ASSASSIN #1

You two take him down there where no
one will find him.

ASSASSIN #3

Come on, General...

Assassin #3 and Assassin #4 drag Maximus down a densely
forested hill along the road. Maximus' hands are still
bound in front of him. He seems totally lacking in any
resistance.

EXT. FOREST - BELOW THE ROAD - DAWN

Maximus eyes the two assassins as they troop down the
hill away from the road, he notes their sparkling armor.
The armor of men who have never seen real battle.

MAXIMUS:

Have you ever done this before?

ASSASSIN #3

What?

MAXIMUS:

Killed a man with a sword?

ASSASSIN #3

Not like this, exactly... this is
good, you can stop.

They stop. They are far down the hill, out of sight of
the road.

MAXIMUS:

It can be very messy -- you could
get blood all over your armor. You
don't want to hack me up now. You
want one clean stroke.

ASSASSIN #3

Would you kneel, General?

Maximus kneels, his whole body secretly coiling. Assassin #3 stands over him as:

MAXIMUS:

One good stroke -- you do know where, don't you?

ASSASSIN #4

Be quiet.

MAXIMUS:

If you miss the spot there'll be blood everywhere. Quite a spray.

ASSASSINS #3

All right, where?

MAXIMUS:

Here -- you don't want to hit the vein on the neck --

Maximus points his bound hands at a spot on the back of his neck.

MAXIMUS:

Put the point of your sword here... you want one, good blow right at this spot --

Assassin #3 dutifully puts the point of his sword on the spot on Maximus' neck.

A grave mistake.

Maximus instantly grabs the blade of the sword with his hands and yanks it from Assassin #3 -- EXPLODING up -- his hands are bleeding but he tosses the sword into the air and catches it -- swings the sword with brutal efficiency -- decapitating both assassins --

EXT. FOREST ROAD - DAWN

On the road above, the other two Assassins are on their horses, waiting.

They hear a quick yelp from below. And then nothing.

Assassin #1 nods for Assassin #2 to check on the execution. Assassin #2 canters off the road and down the hill...

EXT. FOREST - BELOW THE ROAD - DAWN

Assassin #2 canters down the hillside.

He senses movement behind him -- spins around, drawing his

sword -- too late --

Maximus throws a sword -- it flashes through the air --
and into Assassin #2.

EXT. FOREST ROAD - DAWN

Assassin #1 waits on his horse. He hears the commotion
below -- spins his horse around just as Maximus bursts to
the road. He stands with a sword.

Assassin #1 spurs his horse and gallops toward Maximus at
full speed -- Maximus crouches and prepares --

Assassin #1 and Maximus swirl together for an instant --
both slashing brutally --

Assassin #1 continues to gallop past Maximus. He stops.
He looks down. A wound in his stomach. He falls off his
horse. Dead.

Maximus has also been wounded -- a deep gash on his side.
He fights the pain as he moves toward the horses...

EXT. FOREST ROAD - DAY

Maximus is galloping through the forest at lightning
speed, leading four horses behind him. The gash in his
side bleeding.

EXT. TENT CITY - DAY

A gloomy day. Emperor Commodus stands before the
assembled Felix Regiment.

The soldiers are already uneasy. They note Quintus
standing by Commodus, wearing Maximus' seal of office.
Where is Maximus?

COMMODUS:

Even as the Gods curse this dark day
with clouds, so too does the sun
begin to shine forth on a promised
tomorrow. Even as we mourn the
passing of our father, so too do we
celebrate the coming of a bright,
new age for Rome. At my side,
brothers, you shall pull fresh
glories from the heavens. At my
side, brothers, you shall know the
adoration of the Gods. Doubly-dark
is this day because my friend, your
noble commander Maximus Meridas, has
been called to Rome to deal with
urgent matters of state...

Titus glances quickly to Gallus, whose hand is bandaged

from surgery. They know this cannot be true.

COMMODUS:

Until his promised return I
appointed Quintus Domitian to serve
in his stead. I salute you,
Legionnaires!

QUINTUS:

(raising his sword)
Hail, Caesar!
The Felix Regiment responds, many unsure.

FELIX REGIMENT:

Hail, Caesar!
Commodus strides off and the Felix Regiment slowly
disbands, muttering to one another in confusion.
Titus and Gallus go to Quintus.

TITUS:

Quintus, what is -- ?

QUINTUS:

(firmly)
Don't speak of it. Never speak of
it.
He stalks off. Titus and Gallus, concerned, watch him
follow after Commodus.

INT. MAXIMUS' TENT - DAY

Lucilla stands in Maximus' tent. She looks around. She
gently touches his Lorica Segmentata. Her fingertips move
along the contours of his armor. She tries to retain her
neutral demeanor.

She notes his "ancestors" on the small alter.

EXT. HILLSIDE - NIGHT

Maximus continues to gallop, he is on a different horse.
He leads only two horses now.

EXT. VINEYARD - DAY

Maximus' home in Spain is beautiful beyond measure.
We see verdant farmlands and vineyards and a spacious
house nestled amid gently rolling hills.
Maximus' eight-year-old SON is in a paddock playing with
his pony. He stops, sees something. Over a hill, he can
just glimpse a battle flag, approaching.

He screams with joy and runs toward the flag as he calls:

MAXIMUS' SON

MOTHER! MOTHER! FATHER'S HOME!

Maximus' WIFE emerges from the house, drying her hands on a cloth and smiles.

Maximus' Son races toward the flag. He can just see the soldiers beginning to appear over the hill. Not a Roman Legion at all. Twenty Praetorians canter over the hill. Maximus' Son stops, confused.

EXT. OLIVE GROVE - DAY

Maximus is galloping up a hill, leading only one horse now. The horse he is on is exhausted, spent, foam coats its neck. It can't make it.

The horse collapses and Maximus falls. He immediately leaps onto the remaining horse and continues riding up the hill.

EXT. HILLS AROUND VINEYARD - SUNSET

Maximus is racing over the countryside, galloping in a frenzy. His wound is bleeding profusely, coating the side of his horse.

He rears the horse to a stop for a moment. Over a hill he can see thick black smoke rising. He spurs the horse and gallops over the hill...

EXT. VINEYARD - SUNSET

And his worst nightmares are realized.

His home and his vineyards have been destroyed. The earth has been scorched and his house is still smoldering. He rides up to the house and practically falls off the horse. He pulls himself up and walks past the smoldering debris of his house, fearing what he knows he will find.

He sees the bodies of servants scattered about in the ruins. He sees a Praetorian battle flag.

He continues on, his wound bleeding more with every tortured step. He finally stops. He stares up.

His wife and his son have been crucified and burnt. They are nothing more than grotesquely twisted, charred shapes.

Maximus instantly collapses to his knees -- he howls out his torment in a heartrending keening of despair as he coats his face in the ashes of his dead world. He sinks into unconsciousness, praying for death.

EXT. VINEYARD - DAY

An unusual jingling sound is heard. Maximus appears to be dead, his gaping wound beginning to fester.

The source of the jingling becomes clear when we see the

feet of Bedouin brigands, with delicate anklets, shuffling around him. A hand touches his sandals. Rich sandals. Another touches his tunic. Good cloth. Suddenly Maximus groans. The hands stop. He's alive. A bit of quick language in an unknown tongue. Then the hands grab Maximus and drag him away.

EXT. SLAVE WAGON TRAIN - DAY

Maximus' eyes slowly open --

Inches away from his face -- a lion roars --

Maximus lurches back.

He looks around to realize he is in a filthy slave wagon. Three other wagons slowly move over the desert landscape. Exotic animals are caged in pens or led alongside the

wagons:

slaves are chained together alongside sacks of spices and other cargo. Bedouin slave traders jabber in a surreal babel of foreign tongues.

And someone is looking at him. JUBA, a striking African, is gazing at him impassively as he chews something. Juba is also chained.

MAXIMUS:

(weakly)

Am I in Hades?

JUBA:

Yes.

Juba spits what he has been chewing into his hands and moves to Maximus.

JUBA:

For your wound...

Maximus stares at him.

JUBA:

(nods)

For your wound.

Maximus looks down -- the bloody wound at his side.

Juba carefully places his poultice over the wound --

Maximus hisses in pain -- Juba massages the poultice into the wound gently as:

JUBA:

If you die in the wagons they feed you to the lions... The lions are worth more than we are. I think we are worth more than the zebras though. So they don't feed us to them.

Maximus stares at him. Juba looks down at him with the barest hint of a smile.

JUBA:

I'm not sure about the giraffe.

EXT. SLAVE MARKET - DAY

The heat of Morocco is unlike anything Maximus has ever known. Shimmering heat waves undulate over the sand. The provincial market is bustling like the proverbial anthill. Slave traders and dealers and merchants move around, all talking very quickly and very emphatically. Maximus, Juba and a number of other slaves are on display, poked and prodded and fondled. Their BEDOUIN SLAVE TRADER sings out their praises to any passers. The crowd parts almost magically for the dramatic arrival of PROXIMO. Proximo is a large man of immense appetites. He has the ferocious appearance of a true pirate. Two slaves follow behind him and impotently swat at flies with switches.

SLAVE TRADER:

Proximo, my old friend, see what I have for you today -- !

Proximo SLAMS a fist into the Slave Trader's face. The Slave Trader sails back.

PROXIMO:

Those giraffes you sold me won't mate! All they do is run around not mating! YOU SOLD ME EUNUCH GIRAFFES!!

The Slave Trader pulls himself up, hugely obsequious.

SLAVE TRADER:

I will make it up to you, Master. It's bargain day for you! Look, look, look -- I have two lions and a panther -- hear how they roar for

you! "Bring me home, Proximo!"
Proximo examines the animals.

PROXIMO:

How much for the lot?

SLAVE TRADER:

For you -- 8,000 sesterces.

PROXIMO:

For me -- 6,000 sesterces and I want
to see their balls first. And you
throw in those two slaves.

SLAVE TRADER:

(moves to Maximus)

What about this one? Look at the
arms!

Proximo moves to Maximus. The Slave Trader forces open
Maximus' mouth.

PROXIMO:

Good teeth --

Proximo notes the many old battle scars on Maximus' body.

PROXIMO:

Where did you get those scars?
Maximus doesn't respond.

PROXIMO:

Are you a soldier?

Maximus doesn't respond.

PROXIMO:

Do you speak? --

(he roars back to a
slave)

KEEP THOSE DAMN FLIES OFF ME!

(back to Maximus)

He's dying.

SLAVE TRADER:

1,000 sesterces.

PROXIMO:

My ass...

(moves to Juba)

You throw in this one and we'll make it 7,000 sesterces for the whole lot.

SLAVE TRADER:

I have to eat, Master! He's my finest, I couldn't let him go as part of the lot for less than 9,000 total...

(back to Maximus)

I tell you this one is prime. He's a Spaniard and killed fourteen of my men before he could be subdued!

Proximo looks at Maximus, notes the many battle scars again. The scars, and something he senses in Maximus' eyes, is enough for Proximo to consider it.

PROXIMO:

(to trader)

All right, let's see.

The Slave Trader and his colleagues grab Maximus and bustle him across the market, unlocking his chains. Maximus has no idea what's going on.

In the center of the market place, a veritable GIANT of a man sits on a small stool, a wooden sword in his hand. He is hunched over and chained to the ground by a ten foot chain shackled to his ankle. A thick metal helmet is riveted around his entire head, only long tufts of hair emerging. His dim eyes stare listlessly through a slot in the helmet.

The Slave Trader puts a wooden sword in Maximus' hand and shoves him toward the Giant. The Giant stands. He towers over Maximus.

The Giant suddenly swings his sword -- he moves with remarkable quickness -- Maximus makes no attempt to block the blow -- it sends him flying to the ground.

Maximus pulls himself up.

The Giant moves in and hits him again -- Maximus recoils -- the Giant hits him again -- Maximus falls.

Maximus pulls himself up.

The Giant moves in again -- he slams him a few more times

-- Maximus makes no attempt to protect himself -- he falls.

Maximus pulls himself up.

The Giant is about to attack again --

PROXIMO:

(to Slave Trader)

That's enough.

SLAVE TRADER:

STOP! STOP!

His colleagues race into the ring and haul the Giant away from Maximus. The Giant quietly sits back on his stool. Proximo studies Maximus for a moment and then glances to the Slave Trader.

PROXIMO:

I'll give you 500 sesterces.

SLAVE TRADER:

No -- no -- 1,000!

PROXIMO:

(laughs)

Come, don't quibble with your old friend. I'll take the lions, the panther, the Numidian and this one for 7,000. And I'll buy you the best whore in the town for two nights. She's an enormous mountain of flesh who craves a stern hand.

SLAVE TRADER:

How could I say no to my old friend Proximo?

EXT. PROXIMO'S SCHOOL - DAY

Maximus and Juba are crammed into a wagon with about ten other slaves, including a very scared and reedy SCRIBE. Other wagons are filled with exotic animals, including several lions.

The wagons move through a crowded casbah and are taken through an imposing set of gates to...

EXT. PROXIMO'S SCHOOL - COMPOUND - DAY

An open compound in Proximo's school. On one side of the

compound is a series of cages filled with wild animals of every description -- including Proximo's two hapless giraffes.

Proximo's house slaves begin unloading the newly purchased exotic animals into cages as Maximus and the new slaves are unloaded. Heavily armed guards supervise everything. But Proximo's slaves are having a bit of a problem with one of the new lions -- it growls and resists them. Without the slightest hesitation, Proximo thunders to the lion and grabs it by the mane -- manhandling it into a cage.

PROXIMO:

COME ON, YOU FILTHY BEAST!

He kicks the lion in the rear as he shoves it into the cage.

Proximo's provincial school resembles nothing so much as a seedy prison. The fading grandeur of the decaying battlements and the sweeping North African architecture only slightly mitigate the brutal feel of the place. And if Maximus had any doubts as to Proximo's profession -- all doubts are washed away when he sees the compound. Twenty GLADIATORS are working out in the compound -- hacking at practice dummies and sparring. The many heavily armed guards oversee everything. The gladiators stop working out as they see the new slaves enter. They eye their potential new opponents warily. One huge, glowering gladiator -- VIBIUS -- watches with particular interest. His eye is quickly drawn to the most

obvious athlete:

The new slaves are herded to the middle of the compound and house slaves immediately begin throwing buckets of water on them, cleaning them.

Meanwhile, Proximo shrugs off his cloak. A slave brings him wine as he give his "welcoming speech" to the new

slaves:

PROXIMO:

Slaves. I am Proximo, trainer of gladiators. You live and die at my pleasure. Fight well and you will live. Fight poorly and you will

die. It is better to live.

Slaves now toss thick handfuls of powdered lime on the new slaves -- they cough and clench their eyes shut, the lime coats and stings their wet bodies.

PROXIMO:

Here you will be trained in the art of combat. Here you will be given the tools to survive. Please my patrons in the arena and all the gifts of the world will be showered upon you. Imagine riches beyond your paltry dreams of riches! Imagine fame beyond your rude understanding of the word! All this can belong to the select few who prove their worth in the arena.

Slaves throw more water on the new slaves -- washing off the lime.

PROXIMO:

If... on the other hand... you disappoint me... you will be dismembered and fed to my jackals limb by limb.
He gazes evenly at his new acquisitions.

PROXIMO:

And my jackals are always hungry.
He strides off and the guards shove the new gladiators toward their cells.

INT. PROXIMO'S SCHOOL - MAXIMUS' CELL - NIGHT

Maximus and Juba share a small, filthy cell. The cell door faces the open compound. Across the compound they can see the much more comfortable cells of the "star" gladiators such as Vibius.

They both sit on the floor, leaning against the wall. Juba is eating a bowl of food with a wooden spoon. Maximus' bowl and spoon are at his side, he has not touched them.

JUBA:

Have you killed a man before?
Maximus does not respond.

JUBA:

You should eat. You'll need your strength tomorrow.
Maximus does not respond.

JUBA:

I've never killed a man. But I think you have.
Maximus does not respond.

JUBA:

I almost killed once. The Romans destroyed my village. I was with a hunting party and when we returned... I would have killed every Roman in the world.
A long beat.

JUBA:

If you don't eat you will die.
Maximus does not respond.
A beat.

JUBA:

In the village I come from there was a man once. He went fishing one day and his boat was attacked by crocodiles. One of them ate his leg. He pulled himself to the shore and a lion attacked him. It ate one of his arms. He dragged himself through the desert on the way home and a scorpion stung his eye. So he only had one eye. When he reached the village I sat with him. I said, "You have lost a leg, an arm and one eye. You must have a mighty will to live." He said, "No, Lord, it's just better than the alternative."
Maximus finally looks at him.

JUBA:

Life is a gift from our fathers to

us. Who are you to give it up for
lack of lifting a spoon?

Maximus does not respond.

EXT. PROXIMO'S SCHOOL - COMPOUND - NIGHT

Maximus and Juba are being observed. Proximo stands in
the shadows of the compound and watches intently.

EXT. SLAVE WAGON - PROVINCIAL STREETS - DAY

Blood appears to be flowing across an oxen's back. But
the blood is too rich, too red.

The oxen are pulling an open slave wagon through the
crowded streets of the town. Hanging above the street is
dye wool drying in the sun. Vermilion and crimson dyes
drip down and splash across the oxen -- and splash across
the gladiators.

Maximus, Juba, the formidable Vibius are chained in the
back of the wagon. Also the frightened Scribe.

Proximo and a few of his guards drive the wagon. Proximo
has an umbrella over him, colored with years of dripping
dyes.

They pass a banner honoring Vibius, the star of Proximo's
stable.

Meanwhile, the terrified Scribe is almost weeping,
chattering nervously to Vibius, chained next to him:

SCRIBE:

I know nothing of armaments and
warfare! I'm a scribe -- I write
down words! I can write down seven
languages --

VIBIUS:

Be still.

SCRIBE:

I don't -- how do you hold the
sword?! I've never held a sword!

VIBIUS:

You point the sharp end at your
opponent and you shove it in his
guts.

SCRIBE:

I can't -- I --

He suddenly vomits.

VIBIUS:

(calling to Proximo)

Proximo! You insult me with this
carrion! Chain him to someone else!

PROXIMO:

(calling back)

Don't worry, noble Vibius, he won't
be bothering you for long.

The Scribe begins to weep.

The crowds in the street jeer at the passing gladiators.
Occasionally throwing trash at them. A pack of children
run alongside the wagon, chanting:

CHILDREN:

Dead guts! Dead guts! Dead guts!

Maximus watches the children for a moment and then another
sight draws his attention. Over some buildings he can see
vultures circling in the distance.

EXT. PROVINCIAL ARENA - DUGOUT - DAY

In the cramped holding area of the arena, a dugout beneath
the stands, Maximus and the other gladiators are waiting.
Proximo walks before them, giving a final "pep talk." He
gazes at them evenly, his eyes going from face to face.

PROXIMO:

Some of you say you can't fight, you
won't fight... They all say that...

But one day you will pick up a sword
and thrust it into another man. And
the crowd will cheer you and love
you. And you will love them for it.

On that day... you will be a
gladiator.

He stops at Maximus.

PROXIMO:

In this life, we all die. All we
can choose is how we die. And how
we are remembered. Be remembered
proudly.

Drums are heard from the arena. Proximo nods to a waiting

blacksmith.

The blacksmith begins slamming shackles on the gladiator's wrists -- chaining them together in teams of two by a chain about four feet long.

The blacksmith is about to chain Maximus to the Scribe.

PROXIMO:

No...

(he points to Juba)

... give the Spaniard to him. Give the Scribe to Vibius.

Proximo nods to Vibius, who, for reasons we shall soon see, makes no protest to being chained to the whimpering Scribe.

Proximo watches the blacksmith shackle Maximus and Juba together and then strides off.

JUBA:

(to Maximus)

Are we going to fight each other?

EXT. PROVINCIAL ARENA - DAY

Proximo sits in a box with several other GLADIATOR TRAINERS. They drink wine and eat constantly. A perpetual chatter of wagers and odds and side bets. The arena is only sparsely attended this day.

PROXIMO:

Make it 600 sesterces for each decapitation.

TRAINER #1

How many strokes?

PROXIMO:

Two.

TRAINER #1

For the great Vibius, one stroke.

PROXIMO:

Done. 400 sesterces for two strokes.

In the arena:

Proximo's chained teams enter the arena, five teams. Maximus and Juba are chained together. Some of the small

crowd cheers for Vibius. He acknowledges the cheers. He is chained to the weeping Scribe.

In the box:

Trainer #1 laughs.

TRAINER #1

(re:

Who's he with?

PROXIMO:

A Greek Scribe.

TRAINER #1

I'll raise the wager.

PROXIMO:

(smiles)

Give me odds, friend.

In the arena:

From the opposite end of the arena a dozen armored, very scary Andabatae thunder into the arena. Some of the crowd cheers.

The Andabatae immediately race for the chained teams and the battle is on.

Vibius spins into action -- dragging the weeping Scribe after him as he circles opponents and fights -- the Scribe is almost instantly killed -- Vibius immediately hacks through the Scribe's wrist and frees himself, as Proximo surely intended. Vibius is now free to fight alone, swinging the chain as an additional weapon.

Juba's eyes dart everywhere as he tries to move with Maximus -- Maximus neither helps nor hinders -- allowing Juba to pull him along --

Proximo, now that his star Vibius is safe, watched Maximus and Juba closely.

Juba fights well, with a strange elegance, his body flowing like liquid -- but he is inexperienced. He strikes a few blows and then tries to move away -- finally he is in trouble -- cornered -- a huge Andabata is slicing at him -- it is a desperate battle -- Juba is losing -- his sword is slammed away -- the Andabata raises his sword for the kill --

And Maximus strikes.

With a sudden roar he EXPLODES into action -- he swings past Juba and blocks the blow meant for Juba -- then he slashes the Andabata -- killing him -- he pulls Juba after him as he fights --

It is a dazzling display of Maximus' skill -- he moves through the Andabatae at amazing speed -- spinning around Juba and protecting him -- slashing ruthlessly -- pulling Juba after him and commanding the battle -- Juba recovers a sword and they fight together.

In the box:

Proximo watches, smiles. A gladiator is born.

EXT. ROME - WAGON - DAY

SENATOR GRACCHUS, an imposing, moral and corpulent man in his 60's, is riding in a luxurious wagon with Senator Gaius.

And CAPTAIN MARCELLUS, the handsome Head of the Roman City Guard.

Their wagon slowly maneuvers through the crowded streets of Rome. The cosmopolitan bustle of the great urban center is everywhere around them.

GRACCHUS:

We have plague in the Hebrew Quarter and it is spreading... we have looting at the granaries... we have so much filth in the Tiber that the water is undrinkable... we have Praetorian Guard units that are demanding protection payments from the merchants at the exchange --

MARCELLUS:

My City Guard units have tried to curtail these excesses but no constabulary can police the entire city. And the Praetorians outnumber us two to one.

GRACCHUS:

Rome dies as the Emperor plays at beneficence. At least Nero gave us music!

GAIUS:

Do you think he'll listen to us?

GRACCHUS:

It is his duty to hear the will of the Senate.

Their wagon stops -- hopelessly stuck in a massive traffic jam of chariots, wagons and sedan chairs.

GRACCHUS:

Not to mention the damn traffic!

INT. PALACE - THRONE ROOM - DAY

Emperor Commodus is standing before a group of male children and their tutors in his throne room.

The throne room is still very much the province of his father. Manuscripts and astronomical charts and papyrus scrolls and wax tablets litter the heavy desk. A large bust of Marcus Aurelius is in one corner.

Lucilla and Senator Falco are present. So too Senators Gracchus and Gaius and Captain Marcellus.

A well-rehearsed child presents Commodus with a laurel wreath.

CHILD:

We honor Caesar with the laurel to show our love and appreciation for his benevolence.

COMMODUS:

Caesar is honored to accept your tribute, Citizen Scholar.

The child smiles and moves back to his fellows.

COMMODUS:

(to all)

It is the most sacred duty of the Emperor to oversee the education of the young. If I could leave no other legacy than the scholarship of all children my life would be blessed. Tutors, you hold the future of Rome in your hands. Teach them well so that they will bring honor to the Empire. I salute you.

Commodus actually bows before them, an unimaginable honor. The tutors bow in response and herd the children out.

COMMODUS:

Look at them, Senators... my truest gift to Rome.

GRACCHUS:

Darling children, to be sure, now if I may proceed?

COMMODUS:

(sighs)

Very well...

Commodus moves to the desk, standing over it and gazing at Marcus' scrolls as:

GRACCHUS:

Caesar, your presence in Rome is an invaluable opportunity to begin correcting some of the ills that have beset the city since your father went to the wars. We would like to --

COMMODUS:

Peace, good Gracchus, peace...

Commodus slowly begins pushing Marcus' papyrus scrolls off the desk to the floor, one by one, as:

COMMODUS:

My beloved father was a careless shepherd to his flock. I shall be a good father to my children. I shall remain in Rome and show them how they are loved.

GRACCHUS:

With respect, sire, the people don't need love -- they need law. The Senate has prepared a series of protocols to begin addressing the corruption in the city --
(Gaius hands him a

scroll)

-- starting with basic sanitation in the Hebrew Quarter. If Caesar could study this and --

COMMODUS:

You see that's the very problem, isn't it, my old, old friend? My father spent all his time at study. At books and learning and philosophy...

As Commodus speaks he moves to the chair behind the desk, tries it, doesn't like it, nods to a slave. The chair is whisked away.

COMMODUS:

He spent his twilight hours reading scrolls from the Senate. All the while, the people were forgotten.

GRACCHUS:

The Senate is the people.

COMMODUS:

I doubt many of the people eat so well as you do, Senator Gracchus...

As Commodus speaks he moves to the bust of Marcus, studies it, doesn't like it, nods to a slave and the bust is whisked away. Lucilla watches this closely.

COMMODUS:

I doubt many of the people have such splendid armor, Captain Marcellus. Or such fine mistresses, Senator Gaius. No... only their true father knows what the people need. I shall show them they are loved. I shall hold them to my bosom and embrace them tightly --

GRACCHUS:

Have you ever embraced someone dying of plague, sire?

Commodus stops. Looks at him. A lethal moment.

COMMODUS :

No. But if you interrupt me one more time I assure you that you shall. I will emulate the immortal Caesars of the past. I will give the people what they truly want. Starting this day I will draw all of Rome to the Colosseum. I will give them bread. And they will want nothing more.
Startled looks between Gracchus, Gaius and Marcellus.

GRACCHUS :

You want to hold games?

COMMODUS :

Not just any games, Senator! A series of games that will make the Gods envious and leave my children happy! I will subsidize the arena from this day forth -- and I will culminate this celebration in a great spectacle the likes of which the world has never seen! A great spectacle to honor my father! Magnificent, unending weeks of festivity all in the name of Marcus Aurelius!
A beat.

GRACCHUS :

If I may, Caesar... how are you going to pay for this?

COMMODUS :

That is not your concern.
Gracchus ignores a warning look from Gaius.

GRACCHUS :

Respectfully, sire, taxation and import duties are the exclusive province of the Senate --
Commodus spins on him so quickly and with such feral

violence that everyone is shocked --

COMMODUS :

MY FATHER DESERVES TO BE HONORED AND
I WILL HONOR HIM! -- AND THE PEOPLE
WILL LOVE ME! -- AND THE SENATE WILL
OBEY ME OR EVERY ONE OF YOU WILL
BURN! BURN! BURN! -- I WILL HAVE
ORDER!

He snarls like a great jungle cat and he stalks away.

Senator Falco quickly follows.

A dreadful silence.

Then :

LUCILLA :

Gentlemen, in the future do not
concern my brother with these
matters. Come to me.

She sweeps out.

A beat.

MARCELLUS :

Games? He wants to hold games?

GAIUS :

It's madness.

GRACCHUS :

No... it's not...

A beat.

GRACCHUS :

He knows who Rome is. Rome is the
mob. He will conjure magic for them
and they will be distracted. And he
will takes their lives. And he will
take their freedom. And still they
will roar. The beating heart of
Rome isn't the marble of the Senate.
It's the sand of the Colosseum. He
will give them death. And they will
love him for it.

INT. PROVINCIAL ARENA - DUGOUT - TUNNELS - DAY

Maximus is marching relentlessly through the dugout and cramped, serpentine trench-like tunnels that lead to the arena.

We don't really see Maximus well in the dark tunnels. Proximo scurries to keep up with him -- they brush past gladiators who line the walls. Some are wounded, some are being attended to by surgeons, some are shell-shocked, some are nervously waiting to go on, whispering prayers. We twist and turn in the tunnels with Proximo and Maximus

as:

PROXIMO:

(quickly)

I've wagered on you against the Celts -- ignore the others and go for them -- there are two axe-and-net and two long spear. Now the Celts aren't used to the sun so you have the advantage there...

The roar of the crowd is growing, they are nearing the arena...

PROXIMO:

And keep them moving, their lungs aren't strong, ground the spears as soon as you can and then go for the ax-men. If you get all four there's an extra bonus so don't be distracted by the Spartans...

Without a word to Proximo, or a moment's hesitation, Maximus strides into the arena.

EXT. PROVINCIAL ARENA - DAY

We continue with Maximus as he strides into the roaring arena.

We finally see him in the blazing sunlight -- he wears traditional gladiator armor and now has longer hair and a beard --

A battle is already in progress, fighting and dead and dying gladiators crowd the arena --

We stay with Maximus as he wades through his opponents, fighting them heroically, slashing through them without stopping --

The large crowd cheers mightily -- chants of "Spaniard!"

Spaniard! Spaniard!"

We stay with Maximus as he cuts through the four Celts like a scythe through wheat and then we dramatically pull up and away --

Taking in the roaring arena and the hero.

EXT. PROXIMO'S SCHOOL - COMPOUND - NIGHT

A large mess area has been set up. The tables around the compound are crowded with gladiators. Guards everywhere. Maximus and Juba enter. Move to get food. All conversation gradually drains away as the other gladiators watch them. Silence.

Maximus and Juba note the strange silence as they move to a large table.

Vibius is at the table with a number of other gladiators. There are no places for Maximus and Juba.

Vibius stands and kicks two other gladiators off their bench.

VIBIUS:

MOVE ASIDE! THIS IS A TABLE FOR MEN!

Maximus and Juba sit.

Vibius remains standing. He begins to pound on the table with his fist. Soon all the gladiators are pounding on their tables. It is a cacophonous din honoring Maximus.

INT. PROXIMO'S SCHOOL - PROXIMO'S CHAMBER - NIGHT

Proximo sits on a terrace overlooking his compound, sipping wine. Various gladiators can be seen working out below.

A guard brings Maximus. Proximo nods for the guard to leave.

PROXIMO:

(holding up a plate)

Butterfly?

The plate is filled with honeyed butterflies, their wings still moving slightly.

Maximus shakes his head. Proximo pops one into his mouth. He chews as he looks at Maximus.

PROXIMO:

Perhaps you'd like a woman?

Maximus shakes his head.

PROXIMO:

Boy?

Maximus shakes his head.

A beat.

PROXIMO:

Gold?

Maximus shakes his head.

PROXIMO:

Well, I have nothing left to offer you! A man who turns down a butterfly, a woman, a boy and gold confuses me. Personally, I'd grab them all and then grab some more because the Gods are fanciful and take us at their whim. Does the Spaniard have any needs?

Maximus shakes his head.

A beat. Proximo studies him.

PROXIMO:

You fight like a soldier. You have wounds like a soldier who has been on long campaigns. You eye the world around you like an enemy. What is your name, Roman soldier?

MAXIMUS:

Gladiator.

A beat.

PROXIMO:

And nothing more?

MAXIMUS:

Nothing more.

A beat.

Proximo watches Maximus very closely for the following:

PROXIMO:

In two days we leave for Rome.

Maximus' eyes suddenly flash to Proximo. He is transfixed, his eyes burning.

PROXIMO:

Ah... so it's Rome you want. Well you shall have her, Gladiator. The new Emperor has ordered a series of matches to culminate in a grand spectacle. If you do well I shall become very, very rich. If you do well enough I shall set you free. Is it freedom you want?
A beat.
Maximus shakes his head.

PROXIMO:

(quietly)
Not even that.

MAXIMUS:

(barely controlled)
The Emperor -- will he be there?

PROXIMO:

Oh yes. He's apparently quite mad about the games. Spending a fortune, which is, needless to say, good for me again. But what is good for you, Gladiator?

MAXIMUS:

Have you -- how does one meet the Emperor?

PROXIMO:

As a gladiator?

MAXIMUS:

Yes.

PROXIMO:

One doesn't.
A beat. Proximo sees that Maximus' mind is racing.

PROXIMO:

Except... If one has proven oneself

in battle. If at the end of the games you are the final man standing -- the Emperor will present you with a small wooden sword. The sword is your freedom.

MAXIMUS:

He give it personally?

PROXIMO:

He did to me...

(Maximus is surprised at this)

Our great father Marcus Aurelius looked into my eyes and touched me on the shoulder.

MAXIMUS:

You knew Marcus?

PROXIMO:

I didn't know him. He touched me on the shoulder. Just once. But that was enough.

A beat.

PROXIMO:

All right, Gladiator. We shall go to Rome together and have bloody adventures. The Great Whore will suckle us until we are fat and happy and can't suck another drop. That is Rome.

INT./ EXT. SLAVE WAGON - OUTSIDE ROME - EVENING

Maximus is crouched in the back of an enclosed slave wagon with Vibius, Juba and a few other gladiators.

In the distance, Rome.

INT. PALACE - COMMODUS' BEDROOM - NIGHT

Commodus sits on his bed, rubbing his aching head.

Lucilla is preparing a drink for him, a medicinal tonic.

COMMODUS:

All my desires are splitting my head to pieces -- there's so much I want

to do -- but all my efforts to show
my children they are loved go
unappreciated by those dragons in
the Senate --

LUCILLA:

(mixing tonic)

Quiet, brother...

Unseen by him, she adds a little special powder to the
drink from a vial secreted in her robe.

LUCILLA:

Leave the Senate to me. Don't
trouble yourself.

COMMODUS:

All I want is to be a good father to
my people. Why don't they
understand that?
She goes to him.

LUCILLA:

Shhh. The tonic will help...
She takes a sip and then hands it to him.

LUCILLA:

Yes, just drink this down.
She sits on the edge of the bed. He drinks as:

COMMODUS:

I must take a firmer hand with them.
They must know their father can be
firm. As our father was firm with
us.

LUCILLA:

Our father lost his way. His
mistake was believing the old songs
of the "Republic." We know better.
So let the Senate talk. They have
no real power.

COMMODUS:

Yes... yes... you always know the

way. You were always so wise in these matters...

(he takes her hand)

You know if I didn't have my duty to Rome I think I should be an artist.

I should go away and paint pictures of the sea and leave all the politics to you...

A beat. He is sleepy, he lies back on his bed.

COMMODUS:

Will you stay with me?

LUCILLA:

(smiles gently)

Still afraid of the dark, brother?

COMMODUS:

Still. Always.

A beat.

COMMODUS:

My dreams would terrify the world.

A beat.

LUCILLA:

I'll stay with you until you are asleep.

COMMODUS:

(falling asleep)

And after... just sit with me. Keep me safe...

He is asleep.

She watches him for a moment and then rises.

She goes.

INT. PALACE - HALLWAY - NIGHT

Lucilla moves down a long corridor in the palace and blows out candles as she goes.

She finally arrives at her own chamber and enters...

INT. PALACE - LUCILLA'S CHAMBERS - NIGHT

Senators Gracchus and Gaius and Captain Marcellus are waiting.

LUCILLA:

He's asleep. Be quick.

GRACCHUS:

We've taking a sounding, the Senate
is with us.

LUCILLA:

Good.

GRACCHUS:

But we are only words. We are air.
We need steel.

MARCELLUS:

The City Guard is faithful to the
Republic. But we don't stand a
chance against the Praetorians.

LUCILLA:

Can they be bought?

MARCELLUS:

They are zealots -- totally
committed to your brother.

GRACCHUS:

Well, can they at least be rented
for a day?

MARCELLUS:

I doubt it. He pays them exorbitant
salaries and lets them loot and
extort as they see fit. The city
belongs to them.

LUCILLA:

And they've started arresting
scholars now. Anyone who dares
speak out -- even satirists and
chroniclers.

MARCELLUS:

And mathematicians and Christians.

All to fill the arena.

GAIUS:

And what pays for it? These games are costing a fortune and yet we have no new taxes.

LUCILLA:

The future. The future pays for it...

A beat. She looks at them.

LUCILLA:

He's started selling the grain reserves.

GAIUS:

No.

MARCELLUS:

That can't be true...

LUCILLA:

He's selling Rome's reserves of grain. The people will be starving in two years. I hope they are enjoying the spectacles because soon enough they will be dead because of them.

MARCELLUS:

Rome must know this.

LUCILLA:

And who will tell them?! You, Marcellus? You, Senator Gaius? Will you make a speech on the Senate floor denouncing my brother? And then see your family in the Colosseum? What town-crier would dare?

A long beat.

LUCILLA:

He must die.

A beat as her words sink in.

GAIUS:

The Praetorians would only seize control themselves.

LUCILLA:

No -- cut off the head and the snake cannot strike.

GRACCHUS:

Lucilla, Gaius is right. Until the City Guard can neutralize the Praetorians we can accomplish nothing.

MARCELLUS:

And I haven't enough men.

LUCILLA:

What about the army?

GAIUS:

No Roman army has entered the capital in a hundred years.

LUCILLA:

So we do nothing?!

A door opens, a voice...

LUCIUS' VOICE

Mother...

An eight-year-old boy stands in a doorway, sleepy. He is LUCIUS, Lucilla's son.

LUCIUS:

I heard voices...

LUCILLA:

(going to him)

It's all right, darling, you --

Lucius suddenly notices Senator Gracchus:

LUCIUS:

(running to Gracchus)

Senator! What did you bring me?!

He leaps onto Gracchus -- Gracchus laughs and pulls something from his robe.

GRACCHUS :

For you prince Lucius... a sea monster!

Gracchus gives Lucius a beautifully painted toy of a sea serpent.

GRACCHUS :

Off the coast of Achaea they grow twenty times this size, with snapping teeth to devour any nasty Praetorians they come across... now, where is Achaea?

LUCIUS :

Below Macedonia!

GRACCHUS :

Show me on the map.

Lucius runs to a map and stabs his finger at Achaea. We sense this is an old game between them.

LUCILLA :

Lucius, you go in now, I'll be in shortly.

LUCIUS :

(to Gracchus)

Thank you, Senator Mountain!

GRACCHUS :

You're welcome, Prince Anthill!

Lucius goes. Lucilla shuts the door after him. A moment. She turns to the others, a deep anguish in her eyes.

LUCILLA :

What are you going to do?

Gracchus goes to her, holds her.

GRACCHUS :

Peace child... One dark night the
Gods will light our path. They will
give us the voice we need. Have
faith in that. Have faith.

INT./ EXT. ROMAN STREETS - SLAVE WAGON - NIGHT

Maximus cranes for a sight of the Eternal City through a
hole in the wooden slats that cover the slave cart.
He can see only glimpses of Rome as they pass. But the
images are not what he expected. Alongside the undeniable
glory of the city, the madness and disease Marcus Aurelius
spoke of are readily apparent.

Maximus sees flashes of plague victims being tossed on
carts heaped with bodies -- he sees getting and spending
and commerce everywhere -- he sees fascist Praetorian
Guard units trooping past -- he sees the magnificent
architecture of the city -- he sees starving children
begging from filthy gutters -- he sees rich citizens out
for a stroll -- he sees a swirling combination of
sophistication and depravity, of civilization and
corruption.

He sits back in the cart, deep in thought. Vibius looks
at him.

VIBIUS:

Not what you expected?

MAXIMUS:

No.

VIBIUS:

Rome is nothing but a slaughter
house. And we are the meat.

EXT. PROXIMO'S COMPOUND - NIGHT

The slave wagon pulls up to Proximo's rather grand Roman
compound. Guards unlock imposing gates and the wagon
drives in...

EXT. PROXIMO'S COMPOUND - COURTYARD - NIGHT

Inside the gates is a large courtyard, much like Proximo's
Moroccan school but much more impressive. A fountain with
an enormous statue of the war god Mars is central in the
courtyard.

The gladiators climb from the wagon, stretching after the
long journey. Vibius leads Maximus and Juba to the
statue. He wades through the fountain and kisses the toe

of Mars.

VIBIUS:

Tradition. He watches over us.
Juba steps up and kisses the toe.

VIBIUS:

(to Maximus)
Oh go on, it won't kill you.
Maximus kisses the toe as well.

PROXIMO:

(calling to them)
Stop that! You'll get some
monstrous disease and then you'll be
worth nothing to me!
Guards come and lead them to their cells, which line one
side of the courtyard.

INT. PROXIMO'S COMPOUND - CELL - NIGHT

Later. Maximus and Juba again share a cell. It is more
comfortable than their cell in Morocco, befitting Maximus'
new status as one of the "stars." A high, barred window
on one wall opens to the city. Another barred window is
directly over them, twenty feet above.
Maximus pulls himself up to the side window, he looks out.
And sees at last... The Colosseum.
It is a breathtaking sight. Monolithic Albert Speer-like
columns of light shine up from the Colosseum. It seems to
illuminate the whole city and the heavens above.
Maximus drops back to the floor.

JUBA:

Do you think it will be much
different? Here in Rome?

MAXIMUS:

Bigger arena. Same killing.
A beat.

JUBA:

Are you scared for tomorrow?

MAXIMUS:

No.

A beat.

JUBA:

Me too.

A beat.

JUBA:

I never though it would be so easy
to kill.

A beat.

JUBA:

So you're finally home.

MAXIMUS:

This isn't my home.

JUBA:

For all Romans... this is home.

A beat.

JUBA:

(quietly)

Among my people we honor the soil of
our home. Our ancestors are in that
soil. All their dreams live there.
I will never see my home again. The
soil is dead and no one honors them,
so the dreams die.

A beat.

MAXIMUS:

Perhaps one day you'll return.

Juba looks at him.

JUBA:

How can I go back? I am not what I
was. When a man kills for no
reason, he has lost himself.

A long beat.

Juba leans his head back and quietly begins to sing. A
haunting lament in his native tongue.

EXT. COLOSSEUM - DAY

A flurry of images from around the Colosseum, the energy

mounting. At this point we see practically nothing of the inside of the Colosseum:

Slaves are balancing high above the empty arena. They are on ropes unrolling huge rolls of muslin; sun tarps that provide shade below...

Merchants open stalls in the curved arcade around outside of the Colosseum. They sell everything from food to magic elixirs, from toys to aphrodisiacs. They immediately start declaiming and demonstrating the virtues of their products...

Gangs of whores of both sexes trawl the streets. They have bizarrely-colored hair and elaborate makeup...

Citizens begin arriving, pushing past the vendors and the pickpockets. We see whole families with picnic lunches...

Ferocious animals are brought into the Colosseum in barred cages...

In the busy arcade, barbers and blood-letters practice their craft alongside exotic alchemists, fire eaters and contortionists...

Richer citizens arrive in sedan chairs and chariots, they feign indifference to the hooting mob...

Mounted City Guard police units try to retain some order...

Gamblers crowd betting booths and haggle mercilessly...

Finally, we see Maximus and the other gladiators in a slave cart. Maximus watches everything as the slave cart disappears into the Colosseum...

INT. COLOSSEUM - ROUTE TO HOLDING CELLS - DAY

The interior of the Colosseum is a busy world unto itself. Maximus and the others are lead by Proximo's guards down a long ramp and past countless animal cages. Gamblers circulate everywhere and observe the warriors, angling for the best odds and the best matches.

Maximus and the others are led even deeper into the bowels of the Colosseum to a new whole subterranean realm.

Numerous cells line the walls. Racks and racks of weaponry and armor.

And, most striking, everywhere around them is the heavy machinery of the spectacles above. Huge "elevator" platforms and ramps and pulleys and counterweights are manned by teams of sweating slaves.

INT. COLOSSEUM - HOLDING CELLS - DAY

Finally, Proximo's guards lead the gladiators to their holding cells. These cells are right at the edge of the

arena. Barred windows offer a sand-level view of the action.

Maximus immediately goes to a window and looks out. He cannot see much of the entire arena, but what he does see transfixes him.

A band of Christians are huddled together. An eerie silence from the Colosseum but for the prayers of the Christians.

Maximus watches them. One little girl peels past her mother's arm. She sees Maximus. She smiles.

Suddenly a dozen ferocious lions race up a ramp by Maximus -- they roar into the arena --

We do not see the carnage. We watch Maximus' face as we hear the sounds of the slaughter.

And the sound of the roaring crowd.

Maximus finally cannot watch. He drops his head.

INT. COLOSSEUM - TRAINER'S LAIR - DAY

Proximo is with a dozen other gladiator trainers and the Colosseum's orator and majordomo, CASSIUS. They are haggling in an secluded area not far from the arena itself. Huge chalkboards chart the day's matches and wagers and odds.

Colosseum touts continually erase and mark new figures on the chalkboards to keep up with the swiftly changing bouts.

The roar of the lions and the unnerving screams of the Christians can clearly be heard.

CASSIUS:

... and the Emperor will have no more animal battles today --

Upset roars from some of the trainers.

TRAINER #1

You promised me a bear match, Cassius!

TRAINER #2

I have ten damned gorillas! You said gorillas yesterday!

CASSIUS:

Talk to the man in the imperial box.

Who has the next slot...?

(he checks the boards)

-- Lentulus, Gideon, Trebonius and

Proximo --

(to Proximo)

-- Nice to have you back, you
piratical bastard -- now listen, the
Emperor wants the Carthage
spectacle.

The four trainers explode in a flurry of resistance --

PROXIMO:

No -- have pity, Cassius -- !

TRAINER #3

My men are too good for -- !

CASSIUS:

You give us the Carthage match or
lose your spot on the rotation --
but don't worry -- gold is flowing
from the Emperor's fingers.

TRAINER #3

It'll cost you --

PROXIMO:

I won't do it for less than 100,000
sesterces -- !

TRAINER #4

120,000! All I have is my best
Thracians!

CASSIUS:

(to Proximo)

And I want to see this famous
Spaniard of yours -- his reputation
soars from the provinces. The
people are eager for him --

PROXIMO:

I won't throw my Spaniard into a
spectacle! Damn you and damn the
rotation!

CASSIUS:

You will and the price will be
90,000 sesterces each --

(to all)

-- which you all know is exorbitant
-- AND IF YOU EXTORTING BLOOD-WHORES
TRY TO PAWN OFF LESSER FIGHTERS ON
ME I WILL SEE YOU DEAD IN THE ARENA
TOMORROW!

TRAINER #4

My Thracians are worth -- !

CASSIUS:

Give me your best, brothers. They
die before Caesar.

He strides back to the arena. The touts instantly begin
making new marks on the boards to represent the mysterious
"Carthage Spectacle" as some of the trainers hurry out.

Proximo walks with Trainer #4:

PROXIMO:

I give you 30,000 my Spaniard will
kill at least one of your Thracians.

TRAINER #4

30,000?! On a Spaniard?! That
provincial sun has curdled your
brain!

PROXIMO:

Then make the wager, you smug
bastard!

They disappear down a dark corridor, negotiating all the
while.

INT. COLOSSEUM - HOLDING CELLS - DAY

Maximus, Juba, Vibius and another of Proximo's gladiators
are being armed. They all wear mask-like helmets.

Proximo hurries to them.

PROXIMO:

All right -- there are three other
teams, four men each --

(to Maximus)

You know what a Thracian looks like?

MAXIMUS:

Yes, but --

PROXIMO:

Ignore the others -- go for the Thracians. The sun is to the east -- over the gate -- keep your back to the gate and you won't have the sun.

MAXIMUS:

What -- ?
Trumpets begin sounding from the arena.

PROXIMO:

Hurry -- !
The guards quickly bustle the four toward a gate leading to a dark tunnel to the arena.

PROXIMO:

Die well and we'll sing songs about you for a generation.
Short swords are shoved into their hands and the gate rises. They are pushed into the dark tunnel leading to the arena. The gate closes behind them.
The four gladiators stand for a moment and then slowly walk down the tunnel to...
EXT. COLOSSEUM - ARENA - DAY
At last we see it.
The mighty Colosseum Arena.
Nothing we could have possibly imagined could have prepared us for the sight of the thousands and thousands of screaming spectators, the row after row of cheering faces.
It is staggering.
But for Maximus none of this exists. His full attention is focused on one spot alone. The Imperial Box.
He can see Commodus and Lucilla sitting in the box. The box is elevated fifteen feet above the arena floor at the top of a sheer black marble wall. A cohort of fifty imposing Praetorian Guard Archers surround the box. Commodus' personal Body Guard of six Centurions actually stand in the box itself, eyes constantly watching like modern Secret Service agents.
Commodus is untouchable.
Meanwhile, three teams move from different entrances to the arena.

As Cassius orates to the crowd:

CASSIUS:

This day we reach back to hallowed antiquity to bring you... THE FALL OF MIGHTY CARTHAGE...!

(the crowd cheers)

... On the barren armies of the barbarian Hannibal! Ferocious mercenaries and warriors of all brute nations bent on merciless conquest! Your Emperor is pleased to give you... THE BARBARIAN HORDE!

He gestures to the gladiators in the arena. The crowd laughs, jeering the "barbarians."

The drummers begin pounding out a more insistent, heroic beat.

CASSIUS:

But on that illustrious day the Gods sent against them Rome's greatest warriors...! The very life-image of nobility and glorious valor... who would on this day, and on these same arid Numidian deserts, decide THE FATE OF THE EMPIRE... Your Emperor is pleased to give you... THE LEGIONNAIRES OF SCIPIO AFRICANUS!!

The crowd EXPLODES in cheers as the huge doors at one end of the arena suddenly burst open and ten chariots thunder in --

Each chariot has a driver and an archer, both dressed in theatrical versions of the familiar Roman Lorica Segmentata.

A chaos of dust -- and the battle is on --

The chariots zoom around the arena -- the archers keeping up a deadly hail of arrows.

Maximus immediately dives onto a passing chariot and kills the charioteer and archer -- he dramatically leaps from the front of the chariot to a lead horse and cuts it free. And Maximus takes control, we see the General of the Felix Regiment gloriously alive again as he barks out orders and leads his gladiators in battle. They follow him faithfully, his stern commands unquestioned.

His strategies are quick and smart, he makes the gladiators work together.

This kind of slaughter could last for hours...

We see flashes of the endless battle... Maximus races on his horse past another chariot, kills the driver, the chariot smashes into a wall... the sun sinks lower, the shadows on the sand lengthen... areas of the sand are swamps of blood, Juba slips, pulls himself up fighting... Maximus uses Vibius to create a diversion, two chariots collide... the crowd roars... a gladiator is dragged between a chariot and the side wall of the arena... the drummers pound out their relentless tattoo...

Finally...

Maximus is on his horse across from the final chariot.

We can see that Juba and Vibius and a few other gladiators are still alive. The rest of the arena is polluted with the dead and injured.

Maximus spurs his horse and gallops toward the final chariot -- the charioteer whips his horses and zooms toward Maximus --

The crowd is breathless -- watching the final battle -- Maximus and the chariot speed toward each other -- like Medieval jousts --

And collide in a flashing explosion of steel --

Maximus sails from his horse -- as the charioteer sails from his chariot --

Maximus lands hard but quickly pulls himself up, he races to the final charioteer. The charioteer is defeated but not dead.

Maximus glances around, all his opponents are defeated. He stands over the final charioteer. Then he simply tosses down his sword.

The crowd is stunned by this strange act of mercy. But then an enormous roar grows from the crowd -- wave after wave of adulation for the hero of the day.

Maximus looks around, taking it all in.

Then he turns to the Imperial Box.

Maximus slowly walks to before the the Imperial Box. The Praetorian Archers immediately raise their bows, pointing down at him.

Maximus glares up at Commodus through his helmet mask.

Commodus returns his gaze, curious.

The crowd is intrigued, growing quiet. What is going on? Then Maximus simply turns and begins walking away.

COMMODUS :

Slave! Who are you?

The Colosseum is suddenly silent. The Emperor is speaking to a gladiator.

Maximus keeps walking.

COMMODUS :

SLAVE! WHO ARE YOU?

Maximus keeps walking, his fists clenched now.

Commodus suddenly grabs a spear from a nearby Praetorian and hurls it with perfect aim -- the crowd gasps -- the spear sails past Maximus -- actually nicking his shoulder -- it slices into the sand ahead of Maximus.

Maximus stops.

COMMODUS :

SLAVE! WHO ARE YOU?!

Maximus can hold it no longer. He spins to Commodus -- ripping off his helmet mask -- and THUNDERING:

MAXIMUS :

I AM MAXIMUS MERIDAS, GENERAL OF THE
FELIX REGIMENT OF THE ROMAN ARMY AND
SERVANT TO THE EMPEROR MARCUS
AURELIUS!

Commodus eyes shoot wide -- Lucilla bolts up -- Gracchus leans forward -- Proximo is stunned -- the crowd is mystified --

MAXIMUS :

I AM FATHER TO A MURDERED SON AND
HUSBAND TO A MURDERED WIFE AND
LANDLORD TO A MURDERED WORLD -- AND
I WILL HAVE VENGEANCE!

The Praetorian Archers tense their bows -- ready to kill the defiant slave --

But something extraordinary stops them. Almost as one being the crowd roars -- they leaps to their feet and thrust their thumbs up! They cheer and stomp their approval of Maximus.

Commodus looks around at the people of Rome, amazed.

He finally plasters on a benevolent smile and thrusts his thumb up! The Praetorians lower their bows.

And the crowd cheers. Never in the long, long history of the Colosseum have they ever seen such a thing.

Maximus leads his gladiators out of the arena.

INT. PALACE - THRONE ROOM - NIGHT

To our great surprise, Commodus is not raging. He sits quietly on the polished marble floor in front of a model of the Colosseum. He moves model pieces around in the Colosseum, planning his festival.

Lucilla stands, tense.

COMMODUS:

Why is he still alive?

LUCILLA:

I don't know.

COMMODUS:

He shouldn't be alive. That vexes me. I am terribly vexed...

Lucilla watches her brother cautiously, expecting the explosion. He carefully moves some model pieces in the arena.

COMMODUS:

There, that's better. Do you like the platform here?

LUCILLA:

Mmm.

COMMODUS:

I do too. Simple, elegant...

Lucilla is growing more and more unnerved at Commodus' unusual serenity.

COMMODUS:

Father would have wanted something more ornate but he's dead now.

A beat. Commodus laughs. A beat.

COMMODUS:

Maximus Meridas haunts me. I see Father turning away from me and gazing at him. How many times did I

suffer that indignity, I wonder?

LUCILLA:

What are you going to do?

COMMODUS:

I'm going to kill him.

LUCILLA:

Good.

COMMODUS:

(glances at her)

Oh, you're too clever, Sister.

Don't tell me part of you won't weep
for him.

LUCILLA:

When he defies my brother the
Emperor, he defies me. But you
shouldn't send assassins.

COMMODUS:

No?

LUCILLA:

The people embraced him today. They
will be expecting his next match...

(she kneels next to
him)

... let him die in the arena like
the slave he is. Let the people see
what comes of defying Caesar.

A beat as he looks at her.

COMMODUS:

He wounded you deeply, didn't he?

Long ago.

She does not answer.

COMMODUS:

Nonetheless, your political acumen
is, as always, unerring.

He picks up a model tiger and puts it in the arena. He

looks at the model tiger and smiles.

INT. PROXIMO'S COMPOUND - CELL - NIGHT

Maximus silently awaits Commodus' assassins with Juba. They hear footsteps outside the cell. Maximus stands, preparing for death.

JUBA:

(also standing)

I will fight with you.

MAXIMUS:

This isn't your battle.

JUBA:

Better to die for a friend than to die for gold.

The door swings open and they are surprised to see Proximo sweeping in with a cloaked woman. The woman gives Proximo a bag of money.

PROXIMO:

Enjoy yourself, Madame...

(he glances to Maximus)

General, perform well and there will be riches for you.

He beckons to Juba, they go, shutting the door behind them. The woman pulls off her cloak, it is Lucilla. Maximus glares at her, his muscles tensing.

LUCILLA:

Rich matrons pay well to be pleased by the bravest champions.

Maximus backs up, fighting the urge to strangle her on the spot. He finally bumps into a wall of the cell.

MAXIMUS:

I knew your brother would send assassins. I didn't think he would send his best.

LUCILLA:

Maximus, listen to me --

MAXIMUS:

My family were crucified and burnt while they were still alive.

LUCILLA:

I knew nothing of that.

MAXIMUS:

(low)

Don't lie to me.

LUCILLA:

I wept for them.

MAXIMUS:

Don't.

A long, tense moment.

She does not look at him.

LUCILLA:

Do you know what it is to be the daughter of the Emperor? I learned on the night my father had my husband killed. I loved my husband very much. Very... simply. He was a man who believed in the Republic. He was a man who thought Marcus should be tending to Rome and not conquering the world. One night my father had him strangled for conspiring with the Senate. My father never spoke of it. I never spoke of it. That is what it is to be the daughter of Rome.
She finally looks up at Maximus.

LUCILLA:

My son will live. He will survive this cursed bloodline. Rome will die and the jackals will pick her clean -- but my son will survive. Empires come and go. Cities crumble to dust. Only family matters.
A beat. Despite himself, Maximus is moved.

MAXIMUS:

My son was innocent.

LUCILLA:

So is mine.

A beat.

MAXIMUS:

I want your brother dead.

LUCILLA:

So do I.

A beat. Maximus is surprised at her direct answer.

LUCILLA:

My son will never be safe while he
lives.

A beat.

MAXIMUS:

How do you plan it?

LUCILLA:

The Senate is with us, and the City
Guard. We have growing power in the
streets. But we need a leader.

Someone the people can --

MAXIMUS:

So the crown passes to your son.

LUCILLA:

No. So that my son will be safe.

So that we may leave this charnel
house forever and never look back.

Look into my eyes, Maximus, and
believe what I say to you...

She rivets him intensely with her eyes.

LUCILLA:

By all the Gods, and in the name of
my father who loved you, and in the
name of the husband I loved... I

swear to stand by your side in this
now and always.

A beat.

MAXIMUS:

What is your son's name?

LUCILLA:

Lucius Verus. Like his father.

MAXIMUS:

I weep for him.

A long beat. Maximus' cold eyes give away nothing.

Lucilla turns and starts to go. She stops, not looking
back.

LUCILLA:

Commodus plans to kill you in your
next match in the arena. He's
planning something. I will pray for
you. As I have always done.

She then pulls something from her robes and sets it down,
a little bundle wrapped in cloth. She sweeps out. The
sound of the door being bolted shut on the other side.
Maximus stands for a moment and then goes to what she has
left. He opens the cloth. Inside are his six "ancestor"
figures.

He picks up one of the figures. He looks at it deeply,
gently feeling along the contours with a finger.

EXT. COLOSSEUM - ARENA - DAY

The Colosseum is again packed. Commodus, Lucilla and her
son Lucius are in the Imperial Box.

It is late in the day and teams of slaves are cleaning the
arena after a bout. They haul off carcasses and toss down
fresh sand.

Meanwhile, Cassius is orating to the crowd:

CASSIUS:

... in his majestic charity the
Emperor has deigned to this day
favor the people of Rome with an
historical final match. Returning
to the Colosseum today... after five
years in retirement... Caesar is

pleased to bring you... THE ONLY
UNDEFEATED CHAMPION IN ROMAN
HISTORY...

(the crowd is going
mad)

... THE LEGENDARY... TIGER OF GAUL!!

The crowd erupts in paroxysms of joy as TIGER explodes into the arena in an ornate chariot. Tiger is a fierce man in his 40's, his brutal, scarred face and hugely muscled body a testament to his many years in the arena. Tiger speeds around the rim of the arena in his chariot, raising an arm in triumph. The crowd roars.

INT. COLOSSEUM - HOLDING CELLS - DAY

Proximo stands with Maximus, who is busy strapping on armor.

PROXIMO:

Gods! That old Homicide! The Emperor must truly hate you.

MAXIMUS:

What can you tell me?

PROXIMO:

He cheats.

INT. COLOSSEUM - ARENA - DAY

Tiger waits. He stands in the center of the arena. He has only a traditional short sword. The crowd is breathless with anticipation. As:

CASSIUS:

(orating)

And from the rocky promontories and martial bloodlines of Spain...

representing the training lyceum of Proximo Antoninus... I give you...

THE WARRIOR MAXIMUS!

The crowd cheers. Maximus appears from his gate. His fans have increased in number considerably. They eagerly crane forward and celebrate him.

Meanwhile, Maximus looks at Tiger. Only one man with a sword? Maximus approaches, cautious but confident.

He stops a few feet from Tiger. They lock eyes, salute each other and then turn to the Imperial Box, raising

their swords.

The crowd waits eagerly for the immortal words...

MAXIMUS AND TIGER

We who are about to die salute you.

The crowd cheers and Maximus immediately turns and starts slashing -- Tiger easily blocks and strikes back --

The sword play is very fast -- they block and parry and hack like lightning -- constantly attacking -- they are perfectly matched --

As he fights Maximus becomes aware of a strange sound over the roar of the crowd -- a low rumbling -- then he feels something -- a vibration in the ground --

Suddenly traps doors swing open and four enormous platforms rise into view. On each platform is a snarling Bengal tiger restrained by a chain. Tiger's teams of "cornermen" hold the chains through a pulley system. The cornermen are safely inside cages. The platforms stop at ground level.

The four ferocious tigers now mark the four corners of the battleground.

Tiger takes advantage of Maximus' momentary confusion and assaults brutally -- forcing him back toward one of the tigers -- the tiger claws for Maximus -- Maximus just evades it claws -- rolls for a new position -- another tiger snaps at him --

Tiger attacks -- Maximus is on the defensive -- fighting off Tiger and evading the four snarling beasts --

And then all four tigers are suddenly closer. The teams of cornermen are letting the chains play out, bit by bit, gradually reducing the size of the battle ground. The crowd roars.

But the fight is hardly fair.

Whenever Tiger is near one of the tigers the cornermen pull back the tiger slightly -- when Maximus is near a tiger they let it out a bit.

Maximus and Tiger fight -- swirling action -- finally, Maximus has the edge -- he circles so that the sun stabs into Tiger's eyes -- then Maximus lunges forward under Tiger's swinging sword and SLAMS into him -- they fall -- a tiger swats at Maximus' face -- he jerks his head back -- he shoots out a leg and kicks Tiger's sword toward one of the tigers -- it is out of reach -- Maximus leaps up and stands over the winded Tiger, sword to his throat. Tiger is gasping for breath, crushed.

Then one of Tiger's corners suddenly cheats -- they completely release a tiger -- it leaps for Maximus -- Maximus barely has time to turn -- the tiger crashes into him -- its claws slashing into his back, cutting through his leather armor -- Maximus shoves an armored forearm into the tiger's jaws and stabs with his sword -- Tiger takes this chance to pull himself up -- one of his corners throws him another sword -- the crowd boos -- Maximus wrestles with the tiger -- spinning it around with superhuman effort so it is always between himself and Tiger -- so that Tiger can't get at him -- Maximus finally kills the tiger and leaps for Tiger -- he quickly disarms him and tosses him to the ground -- Maximus stands over him -- ready to administer the coup de grace.

All eyes turn to the Emperor.

Commodus slowly stands and steps to the edge of the Imperial Box. He raises his arm and gives the fatal thumbs down.

Maximus looks up at him.

And then defiantly tosses the sword to the ground, refusing to kill Tiger.

Commodus is stunned.

The crowd gasps -- a collective intake of breath -- and then an enormous roar building. It cascades around the Colosseum. It is a roaring celebration of the unexpected act of mercy. And the delicious act of defiance of the Emperor.

Commodus slowly sits.

Maximus walks across the arena -- the people stand and cheer for him. Cries of "Maximus the Merciful" can be heard.

It is the birth of a hero.

INT. COLOSSEUM - HOLDING CELLS - DAY

Maximus is resting in his cell after the battle, head down, deep in thought.

LUCIUS' VOICE

Is it true you're a General...?

Maximus looks up, Lucius is standing at his cell. Maximus has no idea who the boy is -- just another young fan -- but Maximus is immediately struck by Lucius' resemblance to his own son.

MAXIMUS:

I was a General.

LUCIUS:

I saw you fight. The Carthage battle too. I've never seen so much courage.

MAXIMUS:

It doesn't take courage to kill.

LUCIUS:

My father was killed.
A beat.

MAXIMUS:

I'm sorry.

LUCIUS:

He still comes to me in my dreams.
Do you have a father?

MAXIMUS:

I had a father. He wasn't really my father but I cared for him very much.

LUCIUS:

I hope he comes to you in your dreams. My father and I ride horses in mine.

These simple words strike something deep in Maximus. Lucilla appears from the shadows and puts her hands on Lucius' shoulders.

LUCILLA:

Lucius, run along now. I need to talk to the General.

Lucius runs off to his Male ATTENDANT, who leads him away. A long beat as Maximus and Lucilla look at each other.

Finally:

MAXIMUS:

Where is my army?

A drum beat is heard. It increases throughout the

following scenes, building momentum like a Roman gallery accelerating to ramming speed.

The conspiracy scenes are enclosed in a montage of scenes in and around the arena showing Maximus' growing popularity with the People of Rome...

EXT. COLOSSEUM - ARENA - DAY

Maximus is fighting an opponent.

The drums continue...

INT. THE SENATE - DAY

Lucilla conspires with Senators Gracchus and Gaius and Captain Marcellus in a dark corner of the Senate.

Whispers.

LUCILLA:

... Maximus will summon his army from Ostia and he will strike from the inside as his army strikes from the outside. But he insists that the Senate be present.

GAIUS:

We've been ordered to attend.

LUCILLA:

How many are with us?

GRACCHUS:

About half. But once the tyrant is dead. All.

A beat.

GRACCHUS:

I want to meet him.

LUCILLA:

I'll arrange it.

GAIUS:

And what of the Emperor?

A beat.

LUCILLA:

He has withdrawn. He's not eating. He doesn't go out. He won't even

see me... I don't know what tempests
rage within him but...

GRACCHUS:

We should fear for the blackest
storm.

LUCILLA:

Yes.
A beat.

GAIUS:

One question... who is to be the
actual Regicide?

A beat. She glances at him.

The drums continue...

EXT. COLOSSEUM - ARENA - DAY

Maximus defeats his opponent. He stands over him. He
does not kill him.

He tosses his sword down and walks away. The crowd goes
crazy, roaring their approval of Maximus.

Senator Falco, sits in the stands and watches with some
alarm. He glances around as the crowd exalts Maximus. He
is becoming a hero to the people.

The drums continue...

INT. COLOSSEUM - HOLDING CELLS - DAY

Maximus returns to the holding cells. Vibius and Juba are
waiting.

VIBIUS:

You didn't kill him.

MAXIMUS:

I will not kill another warrior.

There is no honor to it.

Maximus goes. Vibius thinks about it, listening to the
adulation of the crowd.

The drums continue...

INT./ EXT. SLAVE WAGON - ROMAN STREETS - DAY

Maximus and the other gladiators are in a slave cart on
the way from the arena. A gang of children run alongside
the cart, cheering and chanting:

KIDS:

Maximus the Merciful! Maximus the
Merciful!

The drums continue...

INT. PROXIMO'S COMPOUND - CELL - NIGHT

Maximus and Juba are with Lucilla and Gracchus. Lucilla
is writing on a piece of parchment.

MAXIMUS:

Tell him we will enter Rome on the
first day of Commodus' festival.

LUCILLA:

And they will march on Rome for you?

MAXIMUS:

Yes. But this letter must go to the
lieutenant named Titus, no one else.

LUCILLA:

Captain Marcellus will take it. And
his City Guard will be with you when
you get to Rome. Is that enough to
face the Praetorian Guard?

MAXIMUS:

(looks to her)

The Felix Regiment will never be
defeated.

A beat.

GRACCHUS:

I only have one question for you,
General... Why?

A beat.

GRACCHUS:

You will lead an army of your
brothers on Rome. Many will die.
Why?

MAXIMUS:

I want Commodus dead.

GRACCHUS:

That's not the reason. Tell me the truth.

A beat.

MAXIMUS:

Because one night an old man whispered to me about a dream. I will die for that dream.

A long beat.

GRACCHUS:

I knew the old man well. And I loved him very much. In our youth we would spend hours building that dream together. After he went to the wars and lost his way... I was very cruel. I tormented him to remember that dream we spoke of.

MAXIMUS:

He did.

GRACCHUS:

You can have no idea how much that means to me.

A beat.

GRACCHUS:

Any man who will die for a whispered dream deserves my respect. I honor you, General.

The drums continue...

EXT. COLOSSEUM - ARENA - DAY

Vibius defeats an opponent -- he stands over him. He looks around at the crowd. Then he tosses down his sword and walks off.

The crowd goes mad with pleasure. Vibius eats it up, raising his arms and soaking up the applause.

Maximus watches from the holding cells. He smiles.

The drums continue...

EXT. STREET - NIGHT

Proximo supervises as a huge banner is unfurled. It covers the side of a tall building.

It shows a dramatic painting of Maximus.

Proximo supervises happily as torches and braziers are lit to illuminate the mammoth banner.

The drums continue...

EXT. COLOSSEUM - ARENA - DAY

The ending of a group fight -- Proximo's gladiators triumphant.

The crowd waits for the delicious act of defiance. We note many placard and banners honoring "MAXIMUS THE MERCIFUL."

Maximus, Vibius, Juba and a few other gladiators toss down their weapons and walk off, leaving their opponents alive. The crowd roars. They have completely embraced Maximus and his fellow gladiators.

Gracchus, in the stands, laughs.

The drums finally conclude.

INT. PALACE - LUCILLA'S CHAMBER - DAY

Lucilla is with her HANDMAIDEN. They sit before a large mirror, the Handmaiden perfecting Lucilla's makeup for the day.

One of Commodus' Centurion Body Guards enters, bows.

CENTURION:

Madame, the Emperor would like to see you.

Lucilla quickly glances to her Handmaiden in the mirror and then braces herself, stands, and quickly leaves with the Centurion.

INT. PALACE - HALLWAY - DAY

Lucilla strides quickly, nervously, down the long corridor to Commodus' chambers. She enters...

INT. PALACE - COMMODUS' BEDROOM - DAY

Commodus is wrapped in a sheet, gazing out a window.

LUCILLA:

Caesar...

He turns. She stops.

He looks as if he has not slept for days. If a word could now sum up his clouded face it is this: tormented.

She goes to him, embraces him. He holds her tightly.

COMMODUS:

I am sorry to have kept you away...

I needed this time to think...

LUCILLA:

Of course...

He moves away from her, slowly moving around the room.

COMMODUS:

I limited my world to these four walls so as to let my mind free... again and again my mind settles on but one question... What kind of world are we making when the people of Rome prefer a slave in the arena to their father?

A beat. Commodus' strange philosophical bent is unnerving Lucilla.

COMMODUS:

It is my responsibility to make the world as it should be. How is it I have made this world?

LUCILLA:

Brother, do not be influenced by the mob. They are a great, faceless beast --

COMMODUS:

They are not "the mob," Lucilla, they are the people. They are my children and all I want to do is love them.

A beat. He stands before a bust of Marcus Aurelius. He touches it.

COMMODUS:

Our father loved Maximus... and I love him still... yet he defies me, he tasks me in front of my children. And they love him for it. Just as Marcus loved him for it. Tell me why, Lucilla.

LUCILLA:

They see themselves in him. They throw in their own sad dreams

alongside his. They think he fights for them.

COMMODUS:

And what do I do but fight for them?! I give them games to please them. I strangle dissent to give them peace. I empower the Praetorians to give them order. What more can I do?!
A beat.

COMMODUS:

Say I should fight him, in the arena. Let my children see who the Gods truly favor.

LUCILLA:

And what if he should win?
A beat.
Commodus continues to slowly move around the room.

COMMODUS:

A God is more powerful than a man...
This odd statement hangs in the air for a moment. Then:

LUCILLA:

Caesar, you let this unduly worry you. At best he is a passing fancy -- he is a name, an image on a banner, ephemeral -- he will be forgotten as the next fancy appears --

COMMODUS:

But I need to know -- why do they love him?

LUCILLA:

Mercy.
He stops. Looks at her.

LUCILLA:

He will not kill in the arena. He

is merciful. As they all wish they were in their own hearts. Something in her words has struck a chord in him.

COMMODUS:

And for that moment in the arena they are merciful too. For a moment... they are Gods. Offering life. He looks at her.

COMMODUS:

But who can be more merciful than the Emperor of Rome?

EXT. COLOSSEUM - ARENA - DAY

Maximus is fighting a thick GIANT of a man. A few quick blows and the Giant falls -- like a mighty tree he crashes to the sand.

The arena cheers their hero.

Maximus stands over the beaten Giant. The crowd waits for the famous act.

Maximus salutes the Giant and tosses down his sword, refusing to kill. He walks away.

The arena explodes in cheers -- a chant of "Maximus the Merciful" grows to deafening proportions.

Suddenly the arena is filled with Praetorians -- they block Maximus' exit from the arena -- the crowd boos -- horrified --

The Praetorians surround Maximus. He is unarmed, but coils for the inevitable battle.

Then the Praetorians part...

And Commodus walks through them. He carries something wrapped in a rich cloth. Maximus glares at him.

The Praetorians move back and the crowd watches eagerly.

The Emperor and the Gladiator, at last.

Maximus and Commodus stare at each other. The crowd cannot hear what is said, but strain to observe this incredible confrontation.

COMMODUS:

Brother... we've taken a sad path since we were children at Capri, have we not?

Maximus doesn't answer.

COMMODUS:

For my own part... I am sorry it came to this. And to you alone of all men, I acknowledge my errors. And my regret. I shall live with my sin for all my days.

MAXIMUS:

As will I, Commodus. As will I. Commodus unwraps the cloth bundle. Inside is a small wooden sword. He holds it up so the crowd can see. A collective gasp. The wooden sword, prized by all gladiators above all else. Freedom.

COMMODUS:

As the first act of my contrition I offer you the wooden sword of freedom. He holds out the wooden sword. A beat.

COMMODUS:

Take it, brother. Stand at my side as a free man worthy of your ancestors.

MAXIMUS:

I only have ancestors because of you, brother. You killed everything that ever lived alongside me. A beat.

COMMODUS:

Take it, Maximus. Let us heal that fatal wound together.

MAXIMUS:

This is the new home you cursed me to. And I am safer here from your treachery than I could ever be outside.

COMMODUS:

Will you always mistrust me?

MAXIMUS:

Why don't you ask your father that?

Commodus visibly flinches at that, but still holds the wooden sword out. The crowd is breathless.

MAXIMUS:

I have more power as a slave in the arena than I could ever have as a free man. As the Colosseum goes, the people go. As the people go, the Empire goes.

COMMODUS:

(tense)

You think this is power? I could show you power, slave --

MAXIMUS:

No, Caesar... I will show you.

With that, Maximus does the unimaginable. He simply turns his back on the Emperor and walks away.

And the crowd goes mad. They cheer the defiant gladiator, their champion.

And, equally, they deride the Emperor. They mock him by holding out food and trash like Commodus is holding out the wooden sword. They laugh and jeer.

Commodus glances around at his children, lost.

Then he turns to the Imperial Box. He sees Lucilla slipping out the back of the box. He watches her go.

And the crowd continues to jeer.

EXT. STREET THEATER - NIGHT

The crowd laughs riotously as Roman Actors perform a typically ribald comedy in a secluded street:

An outrageously dressed version of Maximus is parading around on an outrageously dressed version of Commodus, riding him like a donkey and slapping his rear with a wooden sword. The "Commodus" actor mews and brays and wails like an infant.

Captain Marcellus of the City Guard gallops past them, on his way out of Rome.

EXT. PROXIMO'S COMPOUND - COURTYARD - DAY

Maximus stands with Juba and Vibius. He draws a circle in the sand with a stick. He draws a line to the circle.

MAXIMUS:

The Felix Regiment will come from here. We'll face the body of the Praetorians outside -- here. Once inside, my archers will take up position to counter opposition inside the Colosseum. I'll enter and join you -- we'll attack here -- Maximus draws a line to the Imperial Box.

MAXIMUS:

-- a covert assault from within.

VIBIUS:

We'll be killed.

MAXIMUS:

Probably.
A beat.

MAXIMUS:

But if we aren't... think of the glory. Do you remember glory, Gladiator?

JUBA:

And if we die that day -- we die free men worthy of our ancestors.

VIBIUS:

You didn't know my ancestors. A rotten bunch.
Maximus points to the huge statue of Mars.

MAXIMUS:

Then be worthy of him. The old Titan who would rather die bravely in a just battle than slink off to grow old and fat.

JUBA:

And impotent.
A beat. Vibius thinks about it.

VIBIUS:

If I die, I want a hundred whores at my funeral.

INT. PALACE - LUCILLA'S CHAMBERS - EVENING

Commodus sweeps in. Thinks Lucilla is standing there. The woman turns, it is Lucilla's Handmaiden.

COMMODUS:

Where is my sister?

HANDMAIDEN:

She's out, sir...

COMMODUS:

Where?

HANDMAIDEN:

I... don't know, Caesar.

Commodus looks at her for a moment.

And then he slowly walks right to her. His face an inch away from hers.

COMMODUS:

Where is my sister?

INT. PROXIMO'S COMPOUND - PROXIMO'S CHAMBER - NIGHT

Proximo sits, considering Maximus.

MAXIMUS:

Was it Centurion...? General...?

PROXIMO:

Captain.

A beat.

PROXIMO:

How did you know?

MAXIMUS:

A soldier knows a soldier.

A beat.

PROXIMO:

All that was a long time ago. Too

much wine and too many women. And
too much money.

MAXIMUS:

No --

PROXIMO:

This is who I am...

(he pats his ample
belly)

You see? There was a time I would
stand against ten men and never give
an inch, spitting into the jaws of
Hades all the while. There was a
time my heart swelled to strap on
the armor of Rome. But now...

Something flashes across Proximo's eyes, something like
tragedy.

PROXIMO:

Now I am just an entertainer.

A pause.

MAXIMUS:

You said something to me once. You
said in this life, we all die. All
we can choose is how we die. And
how we are remembered. Do you
recall those words?

PROXIMO:

Yes.

MAXIMUS:

Then be remembered proudly. This is
your time, Proximo. Stand at my
side and be what you were. What you
truly are. One last time.

A beat.

Proximo suddenly begins to weep rather histrionically --
Maximus is a bit taken aback -- Proximo dramatically
flicks tears from his eyes -- and then can't keep the show
up -- he bursts into laughter.

Maximus stares at him.

PROXIMO:

(laughing)

You might have spared yourself the speech, General. The lady Lucilla bought all my gladiators two hours ago!

MAXIMUS:

You pox-ridden bastard -- !

PROXIMO:

I am the richest trainer in the Empire! And I will let my gladiators do anything you like! Conspire away, General! Maximus can only laugh as well.

PROXIMO:

But I tell you -- if you survive this madness I want you to go into business with me. I'll give you a quarter of my holdings.

MAXIMUS:

(standing)

A quarter?!

PROXIMO:

A third. And not a hair more. And you'll have to start in the provinces! Cleaning up the lion shit!

MAXIMUS:

You know, if you were half so awful as you pretend, you'd be a terrifying man.

Maximus shakes his head, smiling, and goes.

Proximo sits for a moment.

Then he rises and goes to a heavy chest. He looks at the chest for a moment and then opens it.

Inside is his old Lorica Segmentata. He gazes at his armor, considering what he once was. And what he now is.

INT. PROXIMO'S COMPOUND - CELL - NIGHT

Maximus enters. Lucilla is waiting, extremely tense.

MAXIMUS:

Lucilla --

LUCILLA:

Don't even say it. I know it's dangerous -- but I had to see you. Captain Marcellus has gone to the army with your message as you instructed.

MAXIMUS:

Good.

LUCILLA:

He says the City Guard will be ready at the south road at noon. They can only wait for an hour so --

MAXIMUS:

You've told me this already.

LUCILLA:

Did I? All right then. So everything is prepared. The Senate will be in attendance and you have your gladiators -- the usual cohort of Praetorians will be inside the arena --

MAXIMUS:

Lucilla... why are you here?
A pause.

LUCILLA:

Tell me honestly... please... do you think it will work?
A beat.

MAXIMUS:

No.

LUCILLA:

Do you think we'll all die?

MAXIMUS:

Yes.

She leans against a wall.

A pause.

LUCILLA:

Will you swear something to me?

MAXIMUS:

Yes.

LUCILLA:

Will you swear it on the memory of
your son?

A long beat.

MAXIMUS:

Yes.

LUCILLA:

By all that you have ever loved...
swear that if you survive you will
take my son out of Rome. Swear that
you will go far away and never
return.

He steps to her.

MAXIMUS:

(deeply)

I will.

A beat.

MAXIMUS:

And if I should not survive... swear
to me that you will honor my family
in your prayers always.

LUCILLA:

I will.

A long, difficult beat. She fights back tears.

LUCILLA:

Had I not been the daughter of
Rome...
He puts a gentle finger to her lips.

MAXIMUS:

Shhh... my heart breaks enough.
He holds her closely, tenderly.
INT. PALACE - LUCILLA'S CHAMBERS - NIGHT
Lucilla enters, deep in thought, still drained from her
meeting with Maximus.
She suddenly stops. Frozen.
Commodus is sitting across the chamber, Lucius at his
knee. An open scroll on Commodus' lap.

COMMODUS:

Sister... join us. I've been
reading to dear Lucius.

LUCIUS:

I've been reading too.

COMMODUS:

Yes, he's a very smart little boy.
He'll make a grand Emperor one day.
Lucilla has not moved.

COMMODUS:

Join us, sister.
Lucilla goes to them, sits.

COMMODUS:

We've been reading about the great
Julius and his adventures in Egypt.

LUCIUS:

She killed herself with a snake!

COMMODUS:

(to Lucius)
And just wait until you hear what
happened to some of our other
ancestors! If you're very good,
tomorrow night I'll tell you the

story of Emperor Claudius. He was betrayed! By those closest to him...

(he glances up to Lucilla)

... by his own blood... they whispered in dark corners and went out late at night and conspired and conspired...

Lucilla looks as if she is going to be ill.

Lucius is busy scanning the scroll. Commodus gently strokes his hair, his cold eyes never leaving Lucilla's.

COMMODUS:

But the Emperor Claudius knew that they were up to something dire. He knew they were busy little bees. And one night he sat down with one of them and he looked at her and he

said:

doing, busy little bee, or I shall strike down those dearest to you. You shall watch as I bathe in their blood." And the bee knew he spoke the truth, for the Emperor always speaks the truth. And what do you think happened then, Lucius?

LUCIUS:

(still pouring over the scrolls)
I don't know, Uncle.

COMMODUS:

(glaring at Lucilla)
The bee told him everything.
Lucilla's face is tortured.

INT. PROXIMO'S COMPOUND - PROXIMO'S CHAMBER - NIGHT
Proximo is asleep -- a sound outside wakes him -- the steady clip-clop of horses on stone. A lot of horses. He rises and goes to a window overlooking the street outside.

A stern Praetorian Guard cavalry unit is cantering into

position at his gates. Proximo grabs his clothes --

EXT. PROXIMO'S COMPOUND - NIGHT

With cool military precision the Praetorians take up position at the gates before Proximo's compound, an unassailable line. They quickly prepare their bows. Meanwhile, another Praetorian unit has taken up position at the other end of Proximo's compound -- sealing that entrance as well.

EXT. PROXIMO'S COMPOUND - COURTYARD - NIGHT

Proximo is hurrying across his open courtyard when the first flaming arrow arches into the compound -- it is followed by hundreds more --

The Praetorians on either end of his compound keep up a ceaseless hail of flaming arrows -- everything begins to burn -- the caged gladiators are stirring now -- shouting --

Proximo races to his panicked guards --

PROXIMO:

Release them! Release them all!

ARM THEM!

The guards sprint to the cells -- unlocking the gladiators as quickly as they can --

Not quick enough for many -- Praetorians are now pouring pitch through the gutter that runs along the bottom of the cells -- igniting it and incinerating all those trapped inside --

The compound is soon a raging inferno --

Proximo releases Maximus and Juba --

PROXIMO:

Come --

MAXIMUS:

But --

PROXIMO:

If you want to live -- follow me --

VIBIUS:

(calling to them)

Go, Spaniard! We'll show these Roman dogs how gladiators fight!

Proximo hauls Maximus and Juba off as Vibius and the other

gladiators arm themselves --

INT. TUNNELS - NIGHT

Proximo is leading Maximus and Juba quickly through a decaying cramped tunnel.

PROXIMO:

All the old gladiator schools have tunnels to the Colosseum -- most have long since collapsed --

JUBA:

How did they know?

MAXIMUS:

We were betrayed.

JUBA:

(stops)

I'll stay here. In case they follow.

Maximus stops as well.

JUBA:

Go! Bring us the army!

Maximus nods.

PROXIMO:

Quickly --

He leads Maximus down the disintegrating catacomb of tunnels --

EXT. PROXIMO'S COMPOUND - NIGHT

Vibius hoped to die fighting -- he never got the chance.

It is not a battle, it is a slaughter.

The Praetorians ruthlessly shoot anyone even approaching the gates -- all the walls are covered -- most of the gladiators die in the hellish inferno -- the relentless rain of flaming arrows continues --

Vibius coughs in the thick smoke and rages for someone to fight -- Praetorian snipers cut him down -- he dies reaching for the statue of Mars.

INT. COLOSSEUM - SUBTERRANEAN - NIGHT

Proximo and Maximus emerge deep in the bowels of the Colosseum.

PROXIMO:

(points)

Down that corridor is the butchery
-- the blood sloughs lead to the
Tiber. Gods watch over you.

MAXIMUS:

You're not coming?

PROXIMO:

They are killing my men!

He races back into the tunnel.

Maximus moves quickly down the corridor. He can finally
see...

INT. COLOSSEUM - BUTCHERY - NIGHT

Grisly carcasses of every description hang from hooks.

Two bored butchers hack them up. The good bits are tossed
into a wagon to fed to the Colosseum animals. The waste
and offal are shoveled into a large sewer opening. A
butcher occasionally lifts a sluice-gate and a gush of
water flows into the sewer from above, washing down the
blood and carcasses.

Maximus crouches and creeps through the nightmare of
hanging carcasses and flies.

When the butchers are looking elsewhere, Maximus creeps to
the sewer opening and climbs in -- he immediately slides
down for a few yards in the slanting, slippery blood
sluice -- out of sight --

Then he thuds to a stop. He can go no further because the
remains of an animal carcass blocks his way. He tries to
slither past the carcass --

Finally, one of the butchers above lifts the sluice-gate
and a torrent of water flows down.

Maximus is washed down the hideous sewer.

INT. TUNNELS - NIGHT

Proximo and Juba are quickly marching back down the tunnel
toward the compound -- they are very close now -- the roar
of flame is heard -- the creak of falling timber -- and
the screams of burning men. They run.

They round a corner and see there is no way past the world
of flame ahead of them. The tunnel to the compound has
collapsed.

PROXIMO:

Gods... they're killing them all.

Proximo leads them up a cramped stairway to...

EXT. STREET OUTSIDE PROXIMO'S COMPOUND - NIGHT

They emerge through a sewer entrance -- right into the arms of the Praetorian Guard. Proximo and Juba are bound. Proximo sees his compound burning. Sees the Praetorian archers taking out any last survivors. Hears the screams.

INT./ EXT. VARIOUS LOCATIONS - ARREST MONTAGE - NIGHT

A quick sequence of brutal arrests as Praetorian Guard units round up many associated with the plot. And many that are not.

GAIUS' BEDROOM:

hauled out.

CHRISTIAN HOME:

together, their secret altar smashed.

CAFE:

STREET THEATER:

performance.

GRACCHUS' STEAM ROOM: Gracchus is enjoying grapes with his handsome catamite. A unit of Praetorian bursts in. Gracchus looks at them. Sighs.

INT. PALACE - THRONE ROOM - NIGHT

Commodus stands with Lucius on a balcony overlooking the city.

The roaring flames of the fire at Proximo's compound can easily be seen.

LUCIUS:

What is that fire?

COMMODUS:

Why that's a bonfire, Lucius. I arranged it just for you.

He puts his hand on the boy's shoulder.

Behind them, Lucilla sits slumped in a chair. Her face is a mask of anguish at what she has been forced to do.

Two Praetorians enter with a bucket.

PRAETORIAN:

Caesar...

Commodus goes to them. He talks quietly with them for a moment and glances at what they are carrying.

COMMODUS:

Oh... that's for my sister.

They bring the bucket to Lucilla and set it before her. Commodus ignores her and goes back to Lucius on the balcony.

Lucilla glances inside the bucket...

Captain Marcellus' head is floating in brine. Lucilla moans. All is lost.

EXT. TIBER RIVER - NIGHT

Maximus splashes to the surface of the filthy Tiber, gasping for air.

Animal carcasses float up next to him. He grabs onto one and floats down the gently flowing river.

EXT. ITALIAN FRONT - CAMP - DAWN

The Wolf of Rome sleeps. Then its ears rise. Then its head. It sniffs the air. The wolf slowly rises and begins loping through the camp.

It passes slumbering soldiers and tents, smoke lazily drifting up from campfires.

The wolf finally stops and looks up.

Maximus is on a horse. He climbs down. The wolf goes to him and licks his hand.

Maximus begins marching through the camp, the wolf at his side. Soldiers stir, amazed to see their General is alive.

Gallus leaps up, stunned, and goes to Maximus. They continue to march through the camp, more and more astonished soldiers joining them.

They march toward the large tents at the center of the encampment.

Titus emerges from his tent. Slams to a stop --

TITUS:

By all the Gods...

He goes to Maximus and embraces him.

MAXIMUS:

Old friend...

TITUS:

You're returned from Hades! By all

the Gods!

MAXIMUS:

Where is he?

Just then Quintus emerges from the largest tent. He stares at Maximus, unbelieving.

A long beat as they look at each other.

Quintus knows his destiny. With quiet dignity he begins whispering a prayer. Maximus moves to him, embracing him:

MAXIMUS:

I forgive you.

He stabs Quintus with a dagger as he embraces him.

Quintus falls.

A beat.

Titus goes to the dead Quintus and pulls the seal of office from his uniform. He hands it to Maximus.

An enormous roar of celebration from the Felix Regiment.

INT. PALACE - COMMODUS' BEDROOM - MORNING

A castrati choir sings a gentle hymn of celebration.

Their eerie voices and otherworldly harmonies undulate around Commodus' bedroom.

The Emperor himself is in a chair, wrapped in a robe. His body slaves work over him closely.

He is staring into a mirror, lost in another world as the slaves carefully apply golden eye makeup to him.

The castrati hymn continues...

EXT. OUTSIDE THE COLOSSEUM - DAY

The hymn is all we hear as we see crowds moving into the Colosseum...

It seems that all of Rome is here for this great day.

Huge throngs of citizens move like a massive wave toward the Colosseum entrances. Vendors are doing brisk business. Praetorian units in full dress uniform canter past.

We elegantly float up along the outer tiers of the Colosseum and then glide over the edge to see the arena stands...

EXT. COLOSSEUM - DAY

The hymn is all we hear as we see...

The stands are filling. We see the rich and poor alike. We see the orator Cassius. We see Senator Falco and most of the Senate. We see the cohort of fifty Praetorian taking up position around the Imperial Box.

A golden platform, with stairs down to the arena sand, now extends about twenty feet from the Imperial Box to a spot over the arena.

We float down the stairs and then we see the arena itself...

It is stunning in its simplicity.

The days victims are tied to posts in the center of the arena. Suspended above them is an enormous cloud. A thick, tumescent bladder painted to look like a threatening rain cloud.

We see Proximo and Juba. We see Senators Gracchus and Gaius. We see Gaius' wife and Gracchus catamite and Christian families and scholars and actors.

Seven stylized hills surround them.

The hymn comes to its soaring conclusion as we see the damned.

TIME CUT:

Later. By now, the Colosseum is packed. All fifty-five thousand seats are taken. Another ten thousand stand wherever they can. A feral anticipation buzzes through the crowd.

Outside the Colosseum, the streets are crowded with thousands more who couldn't get in.

Trumpets blare.

Commodus' six Centurion Body Guards stride into the Imperial Box.

Then Commodus enters. He is shrouded in a full lion's skin, the head of the lion concealing his own. His head is down, he does not look up.

Lucilla and Lucius enter after him and sit. Lucilla's face is drained, her eyes defeated. Lucius is wearing a miniature set of Lorica Segmentata, complete with ceremonial dagger.

EXT. ROMAN STREET - DAY

A mangy dog is slowly crossing a dusty street on the outskirts of Rome. The street is deserted. It seems that almost everyone is at the Colosseum.

The dog stops. Looks up.

Then a sound is heard. The steady cadence of horses' hooves.

The Felix Regiment rounds a corner. Maximus leads the cavalry. He wears Lorica Segmentata. His corps of archers and soldiers follow. They troop down the dusty

street.

Maximus and the cavalry canter past the mystified dog.

QUICK CUTS:

The Felix Regiment moves through the streets. The few pedestrians quickly disappear into shops and around corners. The roar of the Colosseum can be heard far in the distance...

Arrows slice into isolated Praetorian sentries. The Felix Regiment continues its stealth invasion...

Finally, Maximus reins his horse and his troops stop. The mounted City Guard are waiting.

Without a word, the City Guard joins Maximus and the two combined forces continue their inexorable march to the Colosseum.

EXT. COLOSSEUM - DAY

Commodus, still swathed in the lion skin, his head down, slowly walks out on the platform that now extends from the Imperial Box.

The crowd grows hushed.

Commodus reaches the end of the platform and waits for a moment. Then he dramatically flings off the lion skin.

The crowd gasps.

He is almost naked, his entire chiseled body is painted in gold. His eyes are lost in an eerie reverie as he looks around at his people.

He finally speaks:

COMMODUS:

(serene)

Rome... This is the day that was foretold. This is the day when your father takes away all fear...

(he holds up his hands)

With these hands I shall destroy your enemies so that you may sleep always and forever in peace. From this day forth let it be known that I, Lucius Aelius Aurelius Commodus, have surmounted mortality. That I, Lucius Aelius Aurelius Commodus, assume my destined place... at the side of the Gods.

The crowd is stunned. A few scattered laughs.
Lucilla stares at him, disbelieving.

COMMODUS:

And as a righteous God, I shall ever
protect you. I shall cradle the
world on my benevolent hands and
clasp it to my heart. So I have
spoken! And let the heavens tremble
at my might!

EXT. ROMAN STREETS - DAY

Maximus continues to lead the combined Felix Regiment and
City Guard cavalry through the streets. The roaring is
closer now. They are nearing the Colosseum, they can just
glimpse the edge of the top tier over some building.

EXT. COLOSSEUM - DAY

Commodus continues:

COMMODUS:

This day I reclaim Rome for her
people. I shall give you the
rebirth of your Empire! Reborn and
cleansed of her enemies!

He raises his arms. At his cue the Praetorian archers
raise their bows, ready, aiming at the victims.

COMMODUS:

I will make a new Rome! Founded as
it was at the beginning! Archers --
GIVE US BLOOD!

The Praetorians suddenly point their bows higher and
fire --

They shoot the cloud -- the bladder EXPLODES and thick
blood rains down on the victims -- the blood splashes over
them, coating them.

EXT. OUTSIDE COLOSSEUM - DAY

The roar from the Colosseum is now deafening as Maximus
and the City Guard round the final corner -- the Colosseum
is before them -- the massive Praetorian Guard force is
caught of guard -- with crisp military efficiency the
Felix Regiment and the City Guard quickly canter into
place, an unbroken line of seasoned warriors facing the
Praetorians.

The huge mob outside the Colosseum is confused, intrigued,

watching the face-off. The mounted archers of the Felix Regiment have drawn their bows. Maximus looks down from his horse at a Praetorian Officer.

MAXIMUS:

Throw down your weapons or we will kill you.

A beat.

The Praetorian Officer glances at the formidable force against him. He drops his sword. His men follow suit.

MAXIMUS:

(he turns to his men)

FELIX REGIMENT! DO HONOR TO YOUR ANCESTORS! I SALUTE YOU!

He spurs his horse and the Felix Regiment roars, springing into action -- they gallop through the crowd and to the Colosseum -- meanwhile the City Guard disarm and guard the Praetorian --

EXT. COLOSSEUM - DAY

Commodus continues:

COMMODUS:

As it was at the beginning so is it now. The great She-Wolf of Rome will again suckle us, again ravage our enemies -- AND BRING US A WORLD REBORN!

At his cue, two elevator platforms rumble into view, rising from the bowels of the Colosseum to the arena sand. On each platform is a cage full of ferocious wolves, they snap and growl, straining to be released.

COMMODUS:

So it was for Romulus and Remus, sons of Mars, so shall it be for us!

The great She-Wolf will --

Suddenly -- the huge wooden doors of the arena burst open and Maximus leads the Felix Regiment cavalry thundering into the arena.

The crowd is stunned -- Commodus is stunned -- Lucilla bolts up --

Commodus immediately spins to Lucilla, his eyes burning -- His Praetorian are momentarily confused --

At Gallus' command the Felix Regiment archers let fly -- multiple arrows and bolts cut through most of the Praetorians -- some confusing skirmishes as the remaining Praetorians fire back -- Maximus leaps from his horse and begins cutting the prisoners free -- Meanwhile, Commodus strides back down the platform toward Lucilla in the Imperial Box, murder in his eyes -- She suddenly hugs Lucius quickly and kisses him --

LUCILLA:

Remember your mother.
She pulls the ceremonial dagger from his little uniform and pushes him to his attendant -- his attendant pulls him away as --
Lucilla spins to Commodus -- he grabs her into an embrace -- he turns the knife on her -- thrusting deeply as he kisses her --
A long kiss as he holds her tightly to him. Then he gently sits her down on her throne. Her eyes wide, dying.
One of Commodus' Body Guards grabs him:
CENTURION BODY GUARD
Caesar -- we must go -- !
Commodus' six Centurion Body Guards begin hustling him out of the Imperial Box --

COMMODUS:

GET THE BOY!
He grabs Lucius from his attendant and drags him off -- They try to escape out the back of the Imperial Box -- but Felix Regiment troops are blocking their way -- racing up toward them --
CENTURION BODY GUARD
THIS WAY, CAESAR!
Below, through the confusion, Maximus sees Commodus escaping with Lucius down through a side tunnel.
Maximus cuts Juba and Proximo free. Juba immediately snatches up a sword. Maximus quickly offers a sword to Proximo.

MAXIMUS:

Captain?
Proximo takes the sword.

MAXIMUS:

(re:

the others)

Where are they going?!

PROXIMO:

This way!

They race across the arena and into a tunnel...

INT. COLOSSEUM - BOWELS - DAY

Proximo leads them through a series of catacombs -- damp tunnels shoot off in every direction -- everywhere around them the heavy machinery of the games rise like mammoth creatures to the arena above -- a baroque network of ropes and pulleys and counterweights and elevator platforms and air shafts and blood sewers -- And they suddenly run directly into Commodus, dragging Lucius, and his six Centurions coming the other direction.

The final battle begins with no preamble --

Maximus launches himself forward -- instantly separating Commodus and Lucius -- he slams at Commodus with his sword -- Commodus slams back --

Proximo and Juba race into the six Centurions -- a wild free-for-all as they prove their worth as warriors -- Juba fights with his usual elegant precision -- Proximo fights as a man reborn, alive again --

Proximo takes cagey advantage of his knowledge of this subterranean world -- spinning around machinery and leaping over blood sewers and swinging heavy counterweights --

Maximus and Commodus hack at each other with all the fiery passion in them -- Commodus is a perfect match for Maximus and equally ruthless -- their swords thrust and parry and slice at amazing speed -- one false move, one mistake, means death --

Meanwhile, the battle is turning into a victory for Juba and Proximo -- they are defeating the Centurions --

Commodus sees this -- and sees Lucius crying in a corner --

He screams to one of his remaining Centurions:

COMMODUS:

KILL THE BOY!

Maximus whirls to Lucius -- Commodus attacks -- slashing

Maximus' shoulders -- Maximus sees Proximo racing to try and save Lucius as he spins back to battle Commodus -- A Centurion raises his sword to kill Lucius -- Juba kills his final opponent, turns -- Proximo just manages to push Lucius out of the way -- the Centurion's sword slices into him --

Juba flings his sword across the room -- the final Centurion falls --

Maximus sees Proximo collapse to a wall -- dying -- Proximo locks eyes with Maximus as he slides down the wall. The old pirate shrugs. And is dead.

Juba races to Lucius and holds the boy, turning his face away from the slaughter --

Maximus, his furious passion redoubled at Proximo's death, attacks Commodus with every ounce of strength in him -- Commodus' eyes begin to flash with something we have never seen before, fear.

Maximus strikes mercilessly -- forcing Commodus steadily back until they are fighting atop one of the elevator platforms to the arena above.

MAXIMUS:

For my wife!

Maximus strike hard -- Commodus barely blocks the blow --

MAXIMUS:

For my son!

He strikes harder -- Commodus is losing --

MAXIMUS:

For my father!

He strikes with everything he's got -- slashing Commodus -- Commodus sails back -- his sword falling --

Maximus stands over him. Glaring. Commodus is panting, defeated, glaring up at him.

A beat.

MAXIMUS:

We who are about to die salute you.

Maximus raises his sword high -- Commodus raises an arm --

Maximus SMASHES the sword down -- and Commodus is dead.

A moment as Maximus stands over Commodus. Then he looks at the series of counterweight ropes around the elevator platform.

He slices through one of the ropes and the platform begins to rise...

EXT. COLOSSEUM - ARENA - DAY

A trap door springs open and the elevator platform rises to the sand of the arena. Maximus stands above the dead Emperor.

The crowd stares in amazement -- and then begins to cheer in joy at the return of their hero. A chant begins...

"Maximus the Merciful... Maximus the Merciful... Maximus the Merciful..." which then grows to a refrain of "Caesar... Caesar... Caesar..."

Maximus ignores them, his eyes drawn to one sight: Lucilla.

He goes to the steps of the platform leading to the Imperial Box. He slowly climbs the steps.

In the Imperial Box, Senator Gracchus is standing. So too Juba and others.

Lucius is kneeling by his mother, holding her hand, his head down. Lucilla is dead. Lucius mourns with quiet dignity.

Maximus looks at Lucilla and kneels. He takes her other hand. A long moment. He looks at Lucius.

Then he slowly bends forward and kisses Lucilla deeply, the ritual farewell.

He stands.

Senator Gracchus steps to him:

GRACCHUS:

General, the purple is yours if you so desire. The Senate will support you.

Maximus looks at him. And then at the people. The chant of "Caesar... Caesar... Caesar..." is like a powerful beating heart.

Maximus moves to the edge of the Imperial Box to address the people. The crowd grows silent.

Maximus looks around at the blood of the arena.

MAXIMUS:

Rome... you are better than this.

Look inside yourselves. I challenge you to find your true voice. Help the Senate speak for you. Make them your champion... And dare to think

what could be.

A beat.

MAXIMUS:

I give you back the dream.

With that he slowly turns and walks down the steps to the arena sand. The crowd is absolutely silent.

He goes to Titus:

MAXIMUS:

When everything has calmed down,
lead an orderly withdrawal. Take
them home.

Titus salutes.

Maximus return the salute and then leaps onto his horse.
As he canters toward the exit he turns for one final look
at Lucilla.

He sees that Lucius is now at the foot of the stairs, on
the arena sand, gazing at him.

Maximus stops his horse.

He canters back to Lucius. The boy looks up at him. A
moment between them.

Lucius thrusts up his hand. Maximus grabs his hand and
swings him onto the horse behind him.

A look to Juba. Juba bows his head with respect.

Farewell.

Maximus spins the horse around and begins cantering out of
the Colosseum.

Juba disappears into the crowd.

Maximus and Lucius canter across the arena and through the
huge doors...

EXT. COLOSSEUM - DAY

From high above we see Maximus and Lucius riding out of
the Colosseum and disappearing into the streets of Rome.

FADE TO:

EXT. VINEYARD - DAWN

Maximus stands with Lucius at his old vineyard.

It is still scorched and dead, weeds overgrowing the
vineyards, the house ruined.

Maximus puts a hand on the boy's shoulder, this boy so
like his own son.

MAXIMUS:

It doesn't look it now... but soon we'll have it growing again... Next year there will be vines, and then there will be grapes... It will be alive.

We leave them, dreaming of the future.

FADE OUT.

THE END: