

GLADIATOR 2

by

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1. CREDIT SEQUENCE

A dense blanket of rain descends on a vast, sodden wilderness. TWO THIEVES, dressed in rags, hair plastered to their faces, run through the deluge. One holds a wooden staff in his hand. They puff and pant. Occasionally they stop and point through the impenetrable rain, then trudge on. Eventually they stop. THIEF ONE looks up, into the rain, THIEF TWO looks down at the ground below.

2. EXT. WILDERNESS

C/U of MAXIMUS, lying, arms splayed, in the mud, unconscious. Rain hammers down. He wears his gladiatorial breastplate and his sword rests in his lifeless hand. The TWO THIEVES, like buzzards, swoop down upon him. The TWO THIEVES strip MAXIMUS of his breastplate. THIEF ONE puts on the breastplate and roars with toothless laughter. He brandishes his staff.

THIEF ONE

Ah, the mighty gladiator! Take up your sword,
you dog!

THIEF TWO picks up MAXIMUS' sword.

THIEF TWO

Dog? I piss in your mother's milk! Prepare
to die.

TWO THIEVES cackle with laughter, then mock-fight over the lifeless body of MAXIMUS. THIEF TWO stops suddenly, stands rigid for a moment, his face full of stupid surprise.

THIEF TWO

I'm hit!

THIEF TWO wavers, drops the sword, then falls flat on his face in the mud. A spear hangs out of his back. THIEF ONE, still wearing the breastplate, turns and flees across the mudded expanse, disappearing into the rain.

MAXIMUS, with a great sucking of breath, rears suddenly up. His eyes wide with horror, he looks about him. He tries to stand, but is too weak. He sees a figure (MORDECAI) moving mysteriously toward him through the rain.

MORDECAI (40 years old) reaches MAXIMUS. He stands over him. He gestures at the dead THIEF.

MORDECAI
Another poor wretch despatched to oblivion.

Again MAXIMUS tries to stand but cannot. MORDECAI squats down beside him.

MORDECAI
Take it slow, my friend.

MAXIMUS looks around, bewildered, as if waking from a dream.

MAXIMUS
What place is this?

MORDECAI
That is a good question...

MAXIMUS reaches out in panic, grabs MORDECAI roughly by the collar and pulls him close.

MAXIMUS
asked you what place is this?

MORDECAI detaches himself from MAXIMUS' grip.

MORDECAI
At first you will be disorientated and confused,
...and, indeed, a little vexed. It is to be expected.
But direct your anger elsewhere. I am a friend.
Let me help you stand...

MORDECAI helps MAXIMUS to his feet.

MAXIMUS
Who are you?

MORDECAI wraps his hands around the spear that sticks out of the dead THIEFS' back.

MORDECAI
Me? My name is Mordecai...

MORDECAI places his foot on the dead THIEFS' back for leverage and with a grunt, pulls free the spear.

MORDECAI
I keep the peace.

MORDECAI turns his back on MAXIMUS and begins to move away. He stops. He turns to MAXIMUS.

MORDECAI
Well, come on. Follow me.

MORDECAI trudges off through the rain. MAXIMUS, picks up his sword, then, unsteady and drained, follows.

3. EXT. ROCK LEDGE SHELTER. FOOT OF A HILL.

MAXIMUS and MORDECAI sit under the shelter of a ledge jutting from a rock face, at the foot of a rise. Rain hammers down. MORDECAI shouts to be heard above the rain. He hands MAXIMUS some bread, some meat.

MORDECAI
Eat. You will be hungry.

MAXIMUS takes the food and eats, ravenously. MORDECAI hands MAXIMUS a bladder of wine.

MORDECAI
Rough as dog's guts, but the best you will find around here.

MAXIMUS drinks greedily.

MORDECAI
I have been waiting for you.

MAXIMUS stops eating. He looks at MORDECAI.

MAXIMUS
For me? I do not know you.

MORDECAI
But I know you, Maximus. I saw you fight... just yesterday...in the Coliseum.

MAXIMUS
(dimly remembering) The Coliseum?

MORDECAI
I saw you slay the emperor.

MAXIMUS leans back heavily against a rock. He closes his eyes. He opens them.

MORDECAI
(softly) I was there, but I was not there... I cheered but no one heard me...

MAXIMUS
Speak...plainly...

MORDECAI
I saw you fall.

MAXIMUS closes his eyes.

MAXIMUS
(barely audibly) Fall?...

MORDECAI leans closer to MAXIMUS.

MORDECAI
I saw you die.

The bladder of wine falls from MAXIMUS' hand.

MAXIMUS
...no time...for riddles...

MORDECAI takes a shirt from his bag, folds it and places it behind MAXIMUS' head.

MORDECAI
Oh, you have time, my friend...

MORDECAI stands and looks out at the wilderness and the relentless rain.

MORDECAI
You have an eternity.

4. EXT. TOLEDO WHEATFIELDS. DREAM.

MAXIMUS walks through golden wheat fields touching the tips of wheat with his fingers. In the distance by a farm house, and beneath a giant poplar, stands his wife, MARIA and his seven-year-old son, MARIUS. MAXIMUS walks toward them. Without warning, great bruised storm clouds move across the sky and it begins to rain heavily. The rain is so dense MAXIMUS can barely see his wife and child. There is a rumble of thunder and a bolt of lightning leaps from the sky and with a great crack, cleaves the mighty poplar in half.

5. EXT. ROCK LEDGE SHELTER. FOOT OF HILL.

MAXIMUS rears up from his sleep, in panic.

MAXIMUS
Maria! Marius!

MORDECAI, who is looking out at the wilderness, turns. MAXIMUS climbs to his feet and grabs MORDECAI.

MAXIMUS
My wife...my son...I must find them. What is this place? Where am I?!

MAXIMUS spins around, looking wildly about him. MORDECAI pulls himself free and moves off.

MORDECAI
Come, Maximus. I have something to show you.

6. EXT. RISE OF HILL

MAXIMUS and MORDECAI walk up the rise of a steep hill. The rain beats down. The sky growls and a fork of lightning pitches itself from the heavens. MAXIMUS looks up at the heavens, then all around him. He is in a state of great agitation.

MAXIMUS
Thunder...

MORDECAI
It rains a lot here.

MAXIMUS

There is another place than this. A place of wheat fields and olive trees. I know. I have seen it. My wife and son are there. They await me.

MORDECAI

As I said, it rains a lot here.

MAXIMUS

Elysium. I was moving toward Elysium. Sunlight. Wheat fields. The great poplar. I must find them.

MORDECAI

Calm yourself, Maximus...and take heed...

MAXIMUS and MORDECAI approach the top of the rise.

MAXIMUS

I will find them!

MORDECAI stops MAXIMUS a few feet before the top of the rise.

MORDECAI

Listen to me, Maximus. There are two types of people here. Those who search and those who have given up the search. The former, in time, *always* becomes the latter. To search is to hope and, well, here...there is no hope.

MAXIMUS

Tell me where we are!

MORDECAI

That is simply the way it is. You will learn, in time that eternity is the state of things at this very moment. We inhale. We exhale. And our blood pumps endlessly around our body, without pause and for all time. It sends some people mad, you know....

MAXIMUS looks at the wilderness around him.

MAXIMUS

No, I don't know. What people?

MORDECAI escorts MAXIMUS to the top of the rise and gestures to the valley below.

MORDECAI
Those people.

MAXIMUS stands at the top of the hill and looks down, through the rain, in horror.

7. EXT. THE ENCAMPMENT

Below them, on a vast plateau, a multitude of people are camped by the edge of a flat, black sea: a massive refugee camp that stretches on endlessly. Fires burn amongst the improvised shelters and thousands of people sit forlorn and hopeless in their squalor. A fog hangs lifelessly over the dark, motionless water of the sea. MAXIMUS stares down.

MAXIMUS
What unholy place is this?

MORDECAI
This, my friend, is a dumping ground for the inconsequential...the unnamed...the insignificant. I suspect there are many such places as these. It was not always so ...well...*impossible*.

MAXIMUS moves off in the direction of the encampment. MORDECAI follows.

MORDECAI
Once the powers were strong. There was order... a reckoning... a passing from one place to another. But not anymore. Something *unheard* is happening here. The order is shifting. The scales have been tipped.

MAXIMUS
But what name does it go by?

MORDECAI
It has no name. It does not need one.

MAXIMUS and MORDECAI walk down into the crowd. The mob eyes them suspiciously. MORDECAI moves amongst them with authority. Bedraggled people squat and cook and sit and wait in their rough shelters. They part for

MORDECAI and MAXIMUS as they weave their way through. A desperate looking WOMAN pushes past MAXIMUS and MORDECAI.

WOMAN
Cow!

The WOMAN kicks over ANOTHER WOMAN'S cooking pot and the two of them brawl, rolling in the mud, tearing at each other. MORDECAI reaches down, takes the desperate WOMAN roughly by the hair and hauls her off.

MORDECAI
What is the problem here?

The desperate WOMAN stares sullenly at MORDECAI.

MORDECAI
I asked you a question.

The desperate WOMAN lowers her eyes. MORDECAI pushes her away and she disappears into the throng. MORDECAI uprights the cooking pot then turns to MAXIMUS.

MORDECAI
Women...they are the same everywhere.

The WOMAN with the cooking pot hands MORDECAI a lump of bread. MAXIMUS and MORDECAI continue through the crowd. MORDECAI chomps on the bread.

MORDECAI
They have given me a little power...a modest position of rank...I maintain order, such as it is. In turn, I am rewarded...

MAXIMUS
With bread?

MORDECAI looks at the bread, then tosses it away and laughs.

MORDECAI
They allow me brief sojourns home.

MAXIMUS
Who are *they*?

MORDECAI points to a ruined stone edifice beyond the crowd, on the next

rise. He sneers and gestures grandly.

MORDECAI
Them. Up there. The *all-powerful*...

MAXIMUS looks up at the ruined temple, then looks at MORDECAI.

MAXIMUS
And where is home?

Once again MORDECAI laughs.

MORDECAI
Well, Rome, of course!

MAXIMUS stops walking and grabs MORDECAI by the arm and swings him round to face him.

MAXIMUS
Rome?

MORDECAI smiles.

MORDECAI
I see Rome, but Rome does not see me.

MAXIMUS
Speak sense!

Suddenly a tremor of excitement ripples through the crowd and people begin to stand and push and press toward the sea.

MORDECAI
The weather, there, is more agreeable...

A great roar goes up and MAXIMUS and MORDECAI are jostled apart.

MORDECAI
...night follows day...

MAXIMUS and MORDECAI are pushed further apart and MORDECAI shouts toward MAXIMUS above the din.

MORDECAI
...the birds sing on the branches...
Winter becomes Spring... Spring becomes

Summer...

MORDECAI throws out his arms in a grand, mad gesture.

MORDECAI

Look at these fools! They think there is some way out of here!

MORDECAI, is elbowed in the face, and knocked to the ground. MAXIMUS is shoved forward by the crowd. They are separated. The crowd seem to chant a word that MAXIMUS cannot make out. A toothless OLD MAN, eyes bulging, runs into MAXIMUS.

OLD MAN

Elysium! Elysium!

MAXIMUS takes hold of the old man. The old man struggles.

MAXIMUS

Elysium?

OLD MAN

Let me go!

MAXIMUS

Where? Where is Elysium?

OLD MAN

There! On the water! A boat!

MAXIMUS releases the old man aside and pushes his way roughly through the crowd. MAXIMUS reaches the shoreline and stares out at the flat black expanse of water. People have waded into the sea, shouting and crying and gnashing their teeth. A small boat is moving slowly away and MAXIMUS can just make out the shape of a man, head bent, holding a crutch, silent amongst the roiling masses, before the boat is swallowed up by the fog. Fights break out on the shoreline as people hurl themselves at each other. Women wail and beat their breasts. Others sit, their faces drained of hope and stare blankly out at the sea. MAXIMUS takes all this in. He then turns and looks up at the ruined temple on the rise, and with the crowd rioting about him, begins to walk toward it.

8. EXT. THE ENCAMPMENT.

MAXIMUS pushes through the hordes of people. Women huddle over babies. Children cry. Men rush, this way and that. It is a place of great anguish.

9. EXT. ENCAMPMENT. VENDERS STALL.

The crowd has thinned as MAXIMUS makes his way toward the ruined temple. MAXIMUS passes a vendors stall: an improvised shelter with a thin trellis table. The VENDOR sees MAXIMUS. MAXIMUS sees the VENDOR. The VENDOR gabs something from the table and shoves it underneath. There is a brief moment of recognition as MAXIMUS lurches forward, takes hold of the VENDOR and drags him onto the table. It is the THIEF who stole the breastplate. MAXIMUS says nothing as he stares down at the THIEF, wild-eyed. The THIEF reaches back, gropes beneath the table and drags forth the breastplate. MAXIMUS takes it off him. MAXIMUS releases the VENDOR, the table collapses and the shelter topples around him. MAXIMUS moves off.

10. EXT. ENTRANCE OF RUINED TEMPLE.

MAXIMUS, wearing his breastplate, approaches the ruined temple. MORDECAI sits on the stone steps of the temple, pressing a blood-spotted rag against his nose. MAXIMUS begins to mount the steps. MORDECAI gestures to the breastplate.

MORDECAI

Ah, the gladiator restored.

MAXIMUS continues up the steps, ignoring MORDECAI.

MORDECAI

I had a feeling you would come here...

MAXIMUS passes MORDECAI. MORDECAI dabs at his swollen nose.

MORDECAI

They await you, my friend...but stay sharp...

MAXIMUS enters the temple.

MORDECAI

(to himself)...all is not as it seems to be...

MORDECAI presses the bloody rag back against his nose.

11. INT. RUINED TEMPLE

MAXIMUS enters the dim confines of the temple. Rain leaks through the broken stonework and runs down the walls. A large torch-wheel hangs from the ceiling on a chain and it swings and creaks. SEVEN DISSOLUTE OLD MEN (JUPITER, APOLLO, PLUTO, NEPTUNE, MARS, MERCURY, BACCHUS) cluster around a makeshift table, their heads craned toward each other as they mumble amongst themselves. MAXIMUS stands before them. The OLD MEN grow silent. They look ill and diseased. The torch-wheel creaks. JUPITER, fat, eyes boiled and blood shot, sits in the centre. He looks at MAXIMUS and pushes the other OLD MEN away.

JUPITER
Give me room...

The OLD MEN sit upright, tottering drunkenly on their seats. JUPITER leans forward and throws open his arms.

JUPITER
Behold the mighty gladiator...

The OLD MEN smirk and titter.

JUPITER
in all his *thundering* apparel...

The OLD MEN burst into laughter, rocking and howling, in their seats. JUPITER raises his hand. The hilarity dies down. MARS, spider-thin, sniggers, like a girl, behind his hand.

JUPITER
Speak, gladiator. State your purpose. What brings you here?

MAXIMUS
I seek my wife and my son.

JUPITER leans forward.

JUPITER
Were they good people, gladiator? Were they kind?

MAXIMUS
They were.

MARS sniggers and leans forward.

MARS
Were they honest and compassionate?

MAXIMUS
They were.

MARS
Were they virtuous, gladiator? Did the little birds
twitter as they passed by?

MAXIMUS stares at JUPITER.

JUPITER
Well you won't find them around here!

JUPITER throws himself back in his seat and laughs, then breaks into a coughing fit. Again the OLD MEN roar with laughter. MAXIMUS steps forward and rests his hands on the table. He leans in close to JUPITER.

MAXIMUS
Can you help me, old man, or not.

In unison the OLD MEN reel back and wave their hands in mock-horror.

MARS
Ye Gods! The man means business!

The OLD MEN laugh. JUPITER raises his hand. The laughter dies. JUPITER stares into MAXIMUS' eyes.

JUPITER
Old ? It is true. But a mere *man*?

JUPITER slowly shakes his head.

JUPITER
I think not.

JUPITER leans forward.

JUPITER

I could assign you to oblivion in a breath.

MAXIMUS and JUPITER stare at each other.

MAXIMUS

I have come to you in good faith. Can you help me?

JUPITER, theatrically, cups his hand to his ear.

JUPITER

Hush...listen...what is that I hear?

The room grows silent. The torch-wheel creaks.

JUPITER

The winch of fortune turning in your favour.

MAXIMUS

How so?

JUPITER

Listen to me, Maximus.

JUPITER leans closer. His face becomes grave.

JUPITER

There is this... *man*. His name is Hephaestos. He is...well...*one of our own*. He has disappeared... turned his back on us...lit out into the wilderness... the great desert...his head full of devils and bad ideas...

BACCHUS, ravaged, old hands trembling, leans in.

BACCHUS

A madman...

APOLLO

A lunatic...

MARS

A dissident...

JUPITER

His brains swarm with all manner of damnable
and most dangerous notions...and he has...
converts, Maximus...*converts*...

BACCHUS

Apostates...

MARS

Fanatics...

JUPITER

He is an *agitator*. He squeezes the bellows
of dissent...a little wind...a mere puff...but within it
the presage of pandemonium. Am I making
myself clear?

MAXIMUS

No.

JUPITER

Hephaestos has certain *ideas*...about...*omnipotence*.
He believes there is a being greater than us! Can you
imagine it? This evil little idea is growing...collecting
weight...some of the rabble are actually listening to
him...this little idea...

JUPITER gestures at the ailing, OLD MEN, then leans forward. JUPITER
grows quiet, almost sorrowful.

JUPITER

...is hurting us. Look about you. We were not
always this way. We are sick unto death.

BACHUUS

Languishing.

MARS

Laid low.

MAXIMUS moves closer, so that his face is close to that of JUPITER.

MAXIMUS

What has this to do with my wife and child?

JUPITER

We are suffering, Maximus, but we are not without our powers. We can bring you and your family together. Indeed...I can do it in a breath...

MAXIMUS

If you have such power, why not deal with this problem yourselves?

JUPITER

It is not so simple. Hephaestos, he is one of us.

JUPITER runs one fat finger slowly down the length of MAXIMUS' breastplate.

JUPITER

In any case, your reputation precedes you, *gladiator*.

The OLD MEN smirk and chuckle.

MAXIMUS

What do you want me to do?

The OLD MEN laugh. JUPITER does not. He leans close to MAXIMUS.

JUPITER

Find him.

MAXIMUS

Find him?

JUPITER

And kill him.

MAXIMUS and JUPITER stare at one another. MAXIMUS turns and leaves. He sees MORDECAI leaning in the doorway. MAXIMUS pushes past him and exits the temple.

12. EXT. THE ENCAMPMENT

MAXIMUS moves, with purpose, down the temple steps. MORDECAI follows him down.

MORDECAI

Wait!

MAXIMUS ignores him and marches on. MAXIMUS stops, turns and confronts MORDECAI.

MAXIMUS

How do I get to the desert?

MORDECAI

Maximus...

MAXIMUS

The desert! How do I get there!

MORDECAI

They are lying to you.

MAXIMUS

I will find it myself...

MAXIMUS stalks off. MORDECAI shouts after MAXIMUS.

MORDECAI

Your wife and son are not where you think they are!

MAXIMUS turns and takes hold of MORDECAI roughly.

MAXIMUS

Tell me what you know.

MORDECAI

Your wife made a plea.

MAXIMUS

A plea? With whom?

MAXIMUS releases MORDECAI. MORDECAI points to the ruined temple.

MORDECAI

That is where the bargains are done.

MAXIMUS

What kind of plea?

MORDECAI

Your wife sacrificed her place in Elysium, so that your son could live out the rest of his life on Earth.

MAXIMUS

My son is alive?

MORDECAI

Alive, my friend, and in Rome.

MAXIMUS

And my wife? Where is she?

MORDECAI gestures around the vast encampment.

MORDECAI

Somewhere here...or beyond?

MAXIMUS

Beyond?

MORDECAI waves his hand toward the next rise, miles away.

MORDECAI

Maximus...it goes on and on...

MAXIMUS stares out at the endless encampment. MORDECAI looks at MAXIMUS, reading his thoughts.

MORDECAI

There is nothing you can *do*, Maximus. One simply has to *be*.

MAXIMUS looks at MORDECAI with scorn.

MAXIMUS

Do *nothing*? Then you are of no use to me.

MAXIMUS moves off. MORDECAI hops along beside him.

MORDECAI

Wait...Maximus...

MAXIMUS keeps walking.

MAXIMUS
I, too, made a bargain.

MORDECAI
Where are you going?

MAXIMUS
The desert.

MAXIMUS lurches off. MORDECAI follows.

13. EXT. EDGE OF THE DESERT

MAXIMUS and MORDECAI stand on the top of a rise looking out over a barren expanse. Behind them, way down, is the vast encampment, over which squats a great purple rain-filled cloud, beyond that, the black sea. The expanse, in contrast, is dry and deserted. A merciless sun beats down. MAXIMUS moves on down into the parched landscape. MORDECAI remains standing on the rise watching solemnly, the retreating figure of MAXIMUS.

14. EXT. THE DESERT

A blistering sun beats down. MAXIMUS trudges on through the desert; an endless vista of nettled scrub and thorny thickets and dust and rocks.

15. EXT. THE DESERT

MAXIMUS sits by a rock. He has removed his breastplate, which he has balanced on the rock and propped up with a stick to form an improvised shelter from the terrible sun. He drinks from a skin of water. He stares out at the vast nothingness.

15. EXT. THE DESERT.

MAXIMUS trudges on, as the sun sinks, his breastplate on his back, for shade, like a shell.

16. EXT. THE DESERT. CAMP BY THICKET

Darkness descends. MAXIMUS sits by a large, weird, black-thorned thicket. He has lit a small fire. There is deathly, oppressive stillness. He hears strange half-human, half-animal noises. He lies down and tries to sleep.

17. EXT. THE DESERT. DREAM.

A FIGURE walks forward shimmering in the heat. The FIGURE collects its form as it draws closer. It is a woman. It is MAXIMUS' WIFE, MARIA.

MARIA
Help us, Maximus

MARIA moves closer.

MARIA
Help us...

18. EXT. THE DESERT. CAMP BY THICKET.

MAXIMUS rears up from his sleep. It is morning. He looks around him.

MAXIMUS
Maria!

MAXIMUS hears the voice again and he leaps to his feet.

V/O MARIA
Help us....Maximus...

MAXIMUS looks around in panic. He hears a movement in the thicket, turns and sees a dark, fleeting shape.

MAXIMUS
Maria!

V/O MARIA
Help us...

MAXIMUS follows the voice, skirting the edge of the thicket. MAXIMUS hears a crashing in the brambles and a strangulated moan.

MAXIMUS
Maria...

MAXIMUS sees the shape again, tears at the brambles and finds a great stag, its horns entangled in the thicket. The stag looks at MAXIMUS with its spooked, rolling eyes. The stags head is torn by the brambles, its forehead speckled in bright blood. It opens its mouth soundlessly.

V/O MARIA

Help us...

MAXIMUS draws his sword and begins to hack at the brambles. The deer bucks and kicks. MAXIMUS continues to chop. The stag panics and its eyes roll white. It releases a terrible moan. The stag chokes itself to death in thicket and dies. MAXIMUS draws back, his arms and chest torn by the briar, his sword limp at his side. The voice of his WIFE disappears.

19. EXT. THE DESERT.

MAXIMUS trudges through the desert. The terrain has become rockier. The sun beats down. MAXIMUS sees FIVE PEOPLE, wearing pagan masks, squatting on boulders. They are naked, but for their masks. The LEADER stands. He wears the horns of the stag, the skin thrown over his back. They watch MAXIMUS as he passes. MAXIMUS continues on, growing weak, the unholy sun hammering down.

20. EXT. THE DESERT.

MAXIMUS, weak and streaked in blood, falls to his knees. He bows his head. He closes his eyes.

MAXIMUS

Oh, my wife, my son, I am sorry...

MAXIMUS stays like that for a time. He raises his head. MAXIMUS sees, ahead of him, in the distance, shimmering in the heat, what looks like a small man-made shelter. He stands unsteadily and moves towards it.

21. EXT. HEPHAESTOS' SHELTER.

MAXIMUS approaches the shelter. Lying on his back, on a crude pallet is HEPHAESTOS. He is old, wasted, cadaverous, barely alive. He holds a rough cross, made of sticks, in his bony hand. His movements, such as they are, are dream-like and slow. MAXIMUS stares down at the pitiful creature. HEPHAESTOS turns his head, slowly and with great effort, then looks up at MAXIMUS, his eyes deep and dim in their orbits.

HEPHAESTOS
I have been waiting for you.

MAXIMUS kneels down beside HEPHAESTOS.

HEPHAESTOS
I feared you would not come.

MAXIMUS opens his skin of water and puts it against HEPHAESTOS' lips.

MAXIMUS
I have been sent to kill you.

HEPHAESTOS coughs back the water. He closes his eyes. He opens them.

HEPHAESTOS
We are dying...we gods...fading from the
grand scheme...it is for the better...

HEPHAESTOS turns his head away and looks about him.

HEPHAESTOS
They have deserted me...my followers...left me
here to die...did you see them?

MAXIMUS nods.

HEPHAESTOS
They lost faith...they fear death...oblivion...
I tried to tell them...hold true and the rewards
will be...*beyond measure*... oh my children...

HEPHAESTOS' hand tightens around the cross and his voice drops to a barely audible whisper. MAXIMUS leans closer to hear him.

HEPHAESTOS
I have seen the way things shall be. There
is...but...one...God. May He forgive all that we
have done...

HEPHAESTOS moans horribly.

HEPHAESTOS
Oh, the rivers of blood...the torrents of tears...

MAXIMUS

I must find my wife...and my son...

HEPHAESTOS

Yes. Your son is in grave danger. He stands before a great storm...in his hand the nub of truth...

MAXIMUS

My son? What are you talking about?

HEPHAESTOS

We are all in such terrible and grave danger.

MAXIMUS

Where is he? What do you mean?

HEPHAESTOS reaches out, and with his skeletal claw grabs MAXIMUS and pulls him close.

HEPHAESTOS

Come. I will show you.

HEPHAESTOS stares into MAXIMUS' eyes, clutching his rough cross.

HEPHAESTOS

Help me...Maximus.

HEPHAESTOS arches his body suddenly, stretches back his neck and opens his mouth soundlessly.

22. EXT. TOWN SQUARE. LYONS.

MAXIMUS rises out of the body of a dying CHRISTIAN. The CHRISTIAN is arched backwards, mouth open in a terrible scream, a sword thrust downward, deep in his chest. All about him CHRISTIANS are being massacred by a mob of civilians and guards. Some kneel, some attempt to flee, as they are clubbed and hacked to death by a frenzied mob. Bodies twist and shudder and spurt blood on the ground of the town square. The air is full of screams of pain and prayer. MAXIMUS looks about him in horror. He sees, at the centre of the mayhem, an old man, POLYTHNUS, kneeling in the dirt, petitioning the heavens in prayer. He holds a wooden cross. CHRISTIANS try to protect POLYTHNUS and are slain in the process.

MAXIMUS is attacked by the mob. MAXIMUS draws the sword out of the chest of the CHRISTIAN and begins to hack a swathe through them. With great art he chops and swings at the blood-hungry mob.

SEVERAL GUARDS bear down upon him. THE GUARDS raise their swords against MAXIMUS , to deliver the deathblow. A man, LUCIUS (25 years old), tall, powerful, virile, pushes through the crowd on a large, black stallion.

LUCIUS
Wait!

The GUARDS lower their swords and take hold of MAXIMUS. LUCIUS dismounts and walks towards MAXIMUS, bloody sword in hand.

LUCIUS
I have seen this man before.

LUCIUS touches MAXIMUS' breastplate with the tip of his sword.

LUCIUS
What is your name?

The crowd has quietened. POLYTHNUS addresses the heavens, clutching his cross.

POLYTHNUS
O Lord, Almighty God, and father of your
beloved and blessed son...

LUCIUS
Your name?!

MAXIMUS
Leave the old man. He has no weapon.

LUCIUS gestures toward POLYTHNUS, who continues to pray.

POLYTHNUS
...through whom we receive our knowledge of
you...

LUCIUS
Who? Him? The beloved Bishop of Lyons?

MAXIMUS
I said leave the old man.

LUCIUS
Do you threaten me?

LUCIUS turns and walks away. Seven paces...eight...

POLYTHNUS
Today I am in Heaven.

LUCIUS
(loudly) *Do you threaten me?*

LUCIUS turns, then runs toward POLYTHNUS, bringing down his sword and with one mighty blow, decapitates him. He turns to MAXIMUS and the GUARDS, his Roman breastplate brindled in blood. LUCIUS points his sword at MAXIMUS.

LUCIUS
Kill him.

MAXIMUS head butts one GUARD, disarms another, brings the sword down upon another. A GUARD, on a horse, bears down upon MAXIMUS. MAXIMUS drags the GUARD from his horse, mounts it, and as the CHRISTIANS scatter, flees.

23. EXT. OUTSKIRTS OF LYONS. NIGHT.

It is night. MAXIMUS leads the horse down a road on the outskirts of Lyons. He moves quietly, cautiously, under the many stars. TWO YOUNG MEN, PETER and MARCUS, emerge from the shadows. They confront MAXIMUS. MAXIMUS' hand moves to the hilt of his sword.

PETER
We've been looking for you. Come.

MAXIMUS
What do you want?

MARCUS
It is not safe here. Come.

PETER takes the reins of MAXIMUS' horse.

PETER
Come.

24. INT. HOUSE OF IRENAEUS. LYONS. NIGHT.

A small room, lit by a single candle. IRENAEUS (37 years old), and FIVE CHRISTIAN MEN and A YOUNG CHRISTIAN GIRL sit silently in the yellow light. The door opens. IRENAEUS rises to his feet. MARCUS enters. He ushers in MAXIMUS. IRENAEUS addresses MAXIMUS in a hushed voice.

IRENAEUS

We saw you today... fight in the square.
Who are you?

IRENAEUS opens the collar of his robe and shows MAXIMUS a symbol of a fish hanging on a leather thong.

IRENAEUS

Are you one of us?

MAXIMUS

What are you?

One of the MEN, PAUL, stands. His head is bandaged.

PAUL

We are followers of Christ.

IRENAEUS

You fought beside us. Why?

MAXIMUS

I saw no-one fight today. I saw sheep bleat at the slaughter.

PAUL

You saw the serpent, himself.

IRENAEUS

His name is Lucius He believes, like all the Roman idolaters, that he can snuff out the candle of Truth with a sword. But he is wrong. He who raises up the sword, perishes by it.

MAXIMUS

His sword made short work of your Bishop.

PAUL

Polythnus will be with God this day...in Glory.

IRENAEUS

As one falters, there beside him is another. My name is Irenaeus. I am the *new* Bishop of Lyons. And when I fall, so another will stand to take my place. Then, I too, will be in Eternity.

MAXIMUS

You will be hunted down and annihilated.

IRENAEUS

We are people of peace.

MAXIMUS

What do you want from me?

IRENAEUS turns and moves to the window. He looks out. The YOUNG GIRL stands. She glows ghostly in the yellow light.

YOUNG GIRL

We need your help...

MAXIMUS

Help?

IRENAEUS continues to look out the window. He does not turn when he speaks.

IRENAEUS

Lucius (last name) is returning to Rome. Our leader in Rome must be alerted. His name is Cassian (last name). He is a school-teacher.

MAXIMUS

These are not my concerns.

IRENAEUS turns. He looks at MAXIMUS.

IRENAEUS

Of course not. It is only that we saw you today and thought you could help. We are sorry.

MAXIMUS turns to leave. MARCUS opens the door. At the door MAXIMUS turns around.

MAXIMUS

Today...in the square...why did you do nothing?

IRENAEUS touches the symbol of the fish around his neck.

IRENAEUS

Faith.

MAXIMUS

In what.

IRENAEUS

In a better world, beyond.

MAXIMUS looks at the YOUNG GIRL who stares back, her eyes, innocent and vulnerable, in the dim light. MAXIMUS' face darkens.

MAXIMUS

Your faith is misplaced.

MAXIMUS leaves.

25. INT. CONSUL OF LYONS. NIGHT

LUCIUS, fit and iron-hard, stands beside the CONSUL OF LYON on a balcony over-looking the city. The CONSUL is flabby, distracted. They drink wine. The night is silent. There are many stars.

CONSUL

I could hear their screams from here.

LUCIUS

I can assure you they will be silent now.

CONSUL

You did what you came to do, Lucius. Now your work is finished. I assume you will be leaving in the morning.

LUCIUS

Anxious to be rid of me, Consul?

CONSUL

Desirous of a little harmony, Lucius. What is it that those poor wretches say? "Follow all things that make with peace"?

LUCIUS

Dangerous words, Consul. Within that one axiom lies the death of us all.

LUCIUS places his cup on a table. C/U of a bead of wine as it travels down the cup and bleeds into the white tablecloth. It spreads pinkly.

V/O LUCIUS

I leave for Rome tomorrow. I have work to do

26. EXT. FIELD ON THE OUTSKIRTS OF LYONS. NIGHT.

C/U of a huge pink moon. MAXIMUS lies on his back, in a field, his head resting on his breastplate. His horse grazes beside him. He stares up at the moon and the many stars above him.

27. EXT. TOLEDO FARM AFTERNOON. DREAM.

MAXIMUS' SON, MARIUS (7 years old) stands beneath the great poplar, on the dirt road that leads to the Toledo farmhouse. MARIUS waves.

MARIUS

(shouts) Father!

A wind blows up. The great poplar bends and turns its leaves.

MARIUS

Father!

Within the sound of the wind, we hear many horses galloping. The sound of the horses grows louder. MARIUS looks in alarm, turns, and begins to run toward the farmhouse. The sound of the horses grows to a thunderous roar. MARIUS' runs, looks over his shoulder, his face twisted in fear.

28. EXT. FIELD ON THE OUTSKIRTS OF LYONS. SUNRISE.

MAXIMUS wakes with a start, face beaded in sweat. The thundering of the horses continues. He stands in the field and looks to the road that leads out of Lyons. MAXIMUS sees LUCIUS leading his TWENTY GUARDS, at a

gallop, down the road. LUCIUS rides, erect and rigid in his saddle, his pale eyes full of grim determination. MAXIMUS stares after them, as they disappear down the road, in a cloud of dust.

58. EXT. ROAD OUTSIDE OF LYONS. MORNING

MAXIMUS rides his horse through the countryside.

59. EXT. ROAD TO ROME. WHEATFIELDS. AFTERNOON.

MAXIMUS passes golden wheat fields. A warm wind blows through them and they sway. MAXIMUS reaches down and touches the tips of wheat.

(to himself) MAXIMUS
I remember such fields as these.

Suddenly and without warning, a SMALL GIRL (6 years old), covered in blood, bursts out of the wheat, onto the road, her face a mask of terror. MAXIMUS' horse rears. The YOUNG GIRL sees MAXIMUS, turns in fright, and charges back into the wheat. MAXIMUS follows after her, riding up the road, along the edge of the wheat. At the top of a rise, MAXIMUS turns sharply and follows the edge of the field along. MAXIMUS dismounts. The SMALL GIRL crashes out of the other side of the wheat and MAXIMUS scoops her up in his arms. The SMALL GIRL looks at MAXIMUS, her eyes bulging in her head in abject horror. MAXIMUS hears a moan come from the wheat and finds TWO MEN and A WOMAN (FARM WORKERS) trembling and cowering on the ground. The WOMAN reaches up, with shaking hands and MAXIMUS hands her the SMALL GIRL. The WOMAN takes the GIRL and shrinks back from MAXIMUS,

MAXIMUS
I mean you no harm

The TWO MEN and the WOMAN tremble and shake.

MAXIMUS
What happened here?

MAXIMUS turns away from them and sees at the bottom of the rise, a small river. Beside the river, lies a slaughtered family. MAXIMUS moves down among them. A small farmhouse smoulders. A MAN and A WOMAN lie, half in the river, half out, and the water runs red. An INFANT lies butchered by a tree. A YOUNG GIRL, legs streaked in blood, kneels by the river, her hands clasped together, bruised face heavenward. She prays. Strung between two trees on a makeshift

clothesline, white sheets flap in the wind. Upon one of them, the symbol of a fish has been painted in blood. MAXIMUS, sword drawn, moves slowly around the carnage. The sheets flap. He parts them, moves through them.

A FIGURE stands before him. MAXIMUS lifts his sword to strike. It is MORDECAI.

MORDECAI

Save your strength, gladiator, I'm already dead.

MAXIMUS

Mordecai?

MORDECAI

The gods allow to me return from time to time... for services rendered, you see...but I suspect it is just to torment me...

MORDECAI lifts his face up at the sun.

MORDECAI

...I wish I could feel that sun...

MORDECAI looks at MAXIMUS.

MORDECAI

You can see me, others can't.

MAXIMUS sheathes his sword.

MAXIMUS

What are you doing here?

MORDECAI

You, my friend, have angered the gods. They have deemed you never return.

MAXIMUS

Return?

MORDECAI

To the other world.

MAXIMUS

I have seen that world. For now, my place is here.

MORDECAI
Ever...

MORDECAI looks around at the carnage. He looks at MAXIMUS.

MORDECAI
Look at these people. They have spent their days preparing for this moment, with just a whisper of hope in a better world...a world without end. They have laid the true prize of eternity to waste...their brief but beautiful lives.

MAXIMUS
I have witnessed the way these people are. They Lay themselves before the sword like beasts. I must go. I must find my boy.

MORDECAI laughs.

MORDECAI
Your *boy*? He is no longer a boy. Many years have passed since you died. Your son will be a man.

MAXIMUS
A man? How can that be?

MORDECAI
Time here rushes by, Maximus...in the other world it crawls...

MAXIMUS
Then how will I know him?

MORDECAI
You are his father. You will know him.

MAXIMUS
Can you tell me where he is?

MORDECAI
He is in Rome. That is all I know.
(beat) But I do know *what* he is.

MAXIMUS
And what is that?

MORDECAI gestures at the massacred Christians.

MORDECAI
Look around you, Maximus.

MAXIMUS looks around in disbelief. The sheet flaps. MAXIMUS looks to MORDECAI. MORDECAI has gone.

60. EXT. ROAD TO ROME. EARLY EVENING.

MAXIMUS gallops down road, through the open countryside.

32. EXT. HILLTOP. SUNSET.

MAXIMUS stands on a hilltop, silhouetted by a dying sun. He looks out across the land, all bathed in gold.

33. EXT. ROAD TO ROME. MORNING.

MAXIMUS moves down the road at a pace. He passes a FAMILY (FATHER, MOTHER, TWO SONS) in a horse and cart, their meagre possessions piled on the back of the cart, moving in the opposite direction. The FAMILY watch MAXIMUS as he passes by.

34. EXT. PLAGUE VILLAGE. DAY.

MAXIMUS approaches a small village of crude houses. Outside the village, TWO MEN sit by the side of a road, a rag held over their mouths and noses. ONE OF THE MEN gestures to the deserted streets and shakes his finger. The SECOND MAN copies his gesture. MAXIMUS nods and turns his horse away from the village. Then stops. He turns back. MAXIMUS looks down at the SECOND MAN.

MAXIMUS
Where did you go?

The SECOND MAN pulls the rag from his face and smiles up at MAXIMUS. It is MORDECAI. The FIRST MAN looks at MAXIMUS bewildered.

MORDECAI

I was called back. They need me there...more
and more...they need me...

MORDECAI stands and looks down at the village.

MAXIMUS

Plague...we can go around...

MORDECAI laughs.

MORDECAI

No need for that, my friend, you are already
dead.

MORDECAI stands and begins to walk boldly down into the village.
MAXIMUS, on horseback, follows.

35. EXT. PLAGUE VILLAGE. DAY.

MAXIMUS and MORDECAI move through the village. It is eerie and silent. All the doors to the houses are closed, but eyes watch them through the broken slats of the windows. Dark figures huddle in doorways, their faces hidden in their robes. Rattleboned dogs lope about. They pass a makeshift trailer of corpses.

MORDECAI

Once again, I have chosen a pleasant day to
visit you, Maximus.

MAXIMUS

Are these the brief but beautiful lives of which you
spoke?

MORDECAI

(mournfully) They die. There is beauty in that.
Loved ones grieve for their departed. Fathers bury
their daughters. Wives bury their husbands...and
flood the earth with their tears. Each life leaves a
ripple of consequence. In the other world,
time stretches on infinitely, robbing all action of
meaning...of purport...of hope...and here, well,
here I signify nothing...I could scream down the
Heavens and even the dogs would not hear me...

MAXIMUS

And I see I have caught *you* on a good day,
Mordecai...

MAXIMUS turns to MORDECAI and once again MORDECAI has gone. MAXIMUS continues through the village. As MAXIMUS leaves the village he sees a SMALL BOY sitting alone in the dirt. MAXIMUS draws closer. He looks down at the SMALL BOY. The SMALL BOY looks up at MAXIMUS with his emaciated face, his deep sunken eyes. MAXIMUS and the SMALL BOY stare at each other for some time, saying nothing.

36. EXT. ROAD TO ROME DAY.

MAXIMUS continues along road. Dust and hot sun. MAXIMUS sees a huge grey lumpen mound on the side of the road. He moves toward it. He looks down from his horse and sees a dying rhinoceros lying in the dust. The rhinoceros is barely breathing. MAXIMUS looks further up the road and sees a large caged wagon tilting perilously on its side. He draws close to the wagon. The wagon has lost a wheel that lies shattered on the side of the road. An ANIMAL MERCHANT sits next to the wheel, looking at it, in a state of distress. Crammed in the caged wagon are three lions that lie in a heap. One lifts its head languidly and looks at MAXIMUS. The ANIMAL MERCHANT stands as MAXIMUS approaches.

ANIMAL MERCHANT

Have you seen my rhinoceros?

MAXIMUS looks at the ANIMAL MERCHANT and says nothing.

ANIMAL MERCHANT

I've thrown a wheel...I'm headed for Rome...The Coliseum...I fear these poor brutes will not survive the journey...Sir?

MAXIMUS continues on, moving past the wagon, the MERCHANT and the dying animals.

37. EXT. ENTRANCE TO ROME. AFTERNOON.

LUCIUS enters Rome, tall and invincible in the saddle. His GUARDS, weary and travel-worn, follow him. The streets throng with people. Roman civilians move out of the way, look up in admiration and respect as LUCIUS and his GUARDS pass by. Children run along side them. TWO CHRISTIANS

(JAMES and JUSTIN) watch the procession, nervously, then melt into the crowd.

38. INT. CLASSROOM. ROME. AFTERNOON.

CASSIAN, THE SCHOOLTEACHER, (55 years old) stands at the front of his classroom teaching a GROUP OF TEN YOUNG MEN philosophy. The STUDENTS look at CASSIAN, bored and with a trace of hostility. MARIUS , the SON of CASSIAN (23 years old) , at the back of the class, listens attentively.

CASSIAN

(reading) "Odysseus bent his knees and sturdy arms, exhausted by his struggle with the sea. All his flesh was swollen and streams of brine gushed from his mouth and nostrils..."

There is the sound of commotion, of horse's hooves, and a ripple of excitement passes through the STUDENTS. ONE STUDENT, SARDIS, rises and rushes to the window.

CASSIAN

(cont.) Winded and speechless he lay there...

SARDIS

It is Lucius!

CASSIAN looks up, then slams his fist down on the table.

CASSIAN

Back to your seat!

Ignoring CASSIAN, the other STUDENTS join SARDIS, jostling each other at the window. They are excited and greatly impressed by what they see. MARIUS remains seated.

SARDIS

...returned from Lyons!

CASSIAN

I said return to your seats!

Reluctantly, the STUDENTS return to their seats, eyeing CASSIAN with undisguised loathing. CASSIAN, stern and strong, stares down at the STUDENTS, trembling with fury.

CASSIAN
(not reading)...he lay there, too weak to
stir, overwhelmed by a terrible fatigue...

CASSIAN continues to stare down at his STUDENTS.

CASSIAN
(flatly) You may go.

The STUDENTS stand and pour noisily out of the classroom. CASSIAN watches them leave, then bows his head. MARIUS remains seated, staring at CASSIAN. SARDIS lingers at the door. MARIUS does not notice SARDIS.

MARIUS
Father, he is back.

CASSIAN lifts his head, sees SARDIS and raises one hand, to silence MARIUS.

CASSIAN
Can I help you, Sardis?

SARDIS smiles insolently.

SARDIS
Thank you for the lesson, *Sir*. It has been most interesting.

SARDIS turns and leaves. MARIUS stands and walks to the front of the classroom. MARIUS looks grimly at CASSIAN.

MARIUS
(quietly) What shall we do?

CASSIAN pulls at the collar of his robe unconsciously.

CASSIAN.
Alert the others.

39. EXT. ENTRANCE TO ROME. EARLY EVENING

MAXIMUS leads his horse through the darkening streets of Rome. Merchants have packed up their stalls and the crowds have gone.

40. INT. INN. EVENING.

MAXIMUS enters a noisy inn. He moves through the REVELERS. An OLD DRUNKEN MAN leaps to his feet and breaks out in verse.

OLD DRUNKEN MAN

"It's over, love: look at me pushing fifty now
Hair like grave-grass growing in both ears
The piles and boggy prostate, the crooked penis
The sour taste of each day's first lie!"

The OLD DRUNKEN MAN breaks into a dance and all the REVELERS laugh and cheer. MAXIMUS approaches the INNKEEPER (40 years old). The INNKEEPER shouts above the noise.

INNKEEPER

Can I help you?

MAXIMUS

I need a room.

INNKEEPER

You are in luck, Sir.

The INNKEEPER addresses his WIFE, ELISABETH.

INNKEEPER

Elisabeth! Show this man the room.

MAXIMUS

...and some information.

INNKEEPER

At your service , Sir!

The DRUNKEN OLD MAN has placed a stool on one of the tables and is sitting on it, a soup bowl on his head and wooden spoon in his hand, like a mock-emperor. A YOUNG REVELER shoots to his feet.

YOUNG REVELER

Even on the loftiest throne you must sit on
your own arse!

The YOUNG REVELER kicks at the stool, which topples and the DRUNKEN OLD MAN tumbles down, falling to the ground on his rump. A roar goes up from the crowd.

MAXIMUS
(above the din) I am looking for a school teacher named Cassian.

INNKEEPER
Cassian? He is known around here...and not much liked...

The INNKEEPER begins to take more interest in MAXIMUS. He studies him closer becoming more incredulous by the second.

INNKEEPER
He lives and teaches...on...the...Via (name)...

MAXIMUS
Thank you.

ELISABETH
This way, Sir...

MAXIMUS turns to follow ELISABETH. The INNKEEPER'S hand shoots out and he grabs MAXIMUS by the arm. MAXIMUS turns to face him.

INNKEEPER
I know you...I have seen you...

MAXIMUS
You are mistaken.

The INNKEEPER shakes his head at the foolishness of his thoughts. He releases MAXIMUS.

INNKEEPER
No. Of course. You are right. I am sorry...

MAXIMUS follows ELISABETH up the stairs. The INNKEEPER watches him as he retreats.

41. INT. ROOM ABOVE THE INN. NIGHT.

In a small room, above the inn, MAXIMUS stands at the window, looking out,

deep in thought.

42. INT. QUARTERS OF THE EMPEROR, DECIUS. EVENING.

The emperor, DECIUS (60 years old) sits at a table. On the table is a shallow basket. In the basket is a silk cushion and on the cushion lies a tiny spider monkey. DECIUS sops a small piece of bread in a bowl of milk and tries to feed the monkey. The spider monkey is not well. He does this with great concentration. LUCIUS enters DECIUS' chamber. He moves through the room and stands before DECIUS.

LUCIUS
Sire?

DECIUS sops another piece of bread in the milk.

DECIUS
Ah, Lucius. You have returned.

LUCIUS
Yes, Sire, you sent for me.

DECIUS continues to tend to the monkey.

DECIUS
Indeed I did. You must be worn out from all your vigorous activity.

LUCIUS
I have only this evening arrived.

DECIUS
Reports have come back from Lyons that concern me somewhat, Lucius. I believe my instructions were that that you arrest the leaders and bring them back to Rome. It would appear your methods were somewhat over-zealous.

LUCIUS
My interpretation of your orders, Sire, was that you wished the Christian movement quelled. This I did.

DECIUS looks up, for the first time.

DECIUS

Your *interpretation* of my orders? I hear you painted the streets of Lyons in their blood.

DECIUS examines LUCIUS. LUCIUS stands tall.

DECIUS

Still, Lyons is Lyons and Rome is Rome...

The monkey lets out a little squeak. DECIUS looks back down and strokes the monkey's head.

DECIUS

Look at this poor thing. It is blind and near to death...

LUCIUS

May I speak plainly, Sire?

DECIUS

He barely breathes...

LUCIUS

Sire, the gods are vexed...

DECIUS

With my monkey?

LUCIUS

The countryside is devastated. Plague, famine, earthquakes, the great granaries of Rome destroyed by inundations...hard is the anger of the gods...

DECIUS

I do not need to be told the condition of my Empire.

LUCIUS

These Christians...these *atheists*... mock the empire and the divinity of the gods, Sire. They are disrupting the order of things. They must be put away.

DECIUS

Your words, Lucius, are like a cracked bell. They ring untrue.

LUCIUS
Sire?

DECIUS
I fear this is more ...personal.

A knot of muscle works in LUCIUS' jaw and his pale eyes narrow.

DECIUS
Your dear mother, Lucille, did she not have certain
sympathies with these people?

LUCIUS , stung, stiffens. DECIUS strokes the monkey's head.

LUCIUS
I fear for the empire, Sire.

DECIUS looks up at LUCIUS and leans back in his chair.

DECIUS
Hear me, Lucius. As I am sure you are aware, I
have posted an edict to the citizens of Rome. On the
week of (date), each Roman family will be ordered
to make a sacrifice, under law, to the gods. The
Jews, of course, will be exempt. These...*Christians* ...
believe this sacrifice to be an affront to their so-called
God. They will not participate in the ritual. They fear...
some kind of ...*eternal damnation*. This edict will
effectively expose the Christians. A census will
be taken and a list drawn up. Citizens not on the list
will be arrested and tried, according to the law. They
will be offered a chance to recant. Those who do not
will be put to death...in the Coliseum...thus, Lucius, the
gods will be appeased...the laws will be upheld...and
the people entertained...

DECIUS moves forward and once again looks down at the monkey.

DECIUS
After all, it is not as if these Christians are a
warring faction...it is not as if they have risen up
against us...

LUCIUS
Not yet, Sire, but their beliefs strike at the very
heart of all that is Rome.

DECIUS
Beliefs? And what are *your* beliefs, Lucius?

LUCIUS stands tall, then nods toward the basket.

LUCIUS
I believe, Sire, that your monkey is dead.

DECIUS peers closer into the basket.

43. INT. CASSIAN'S HOUSE. LATE NIGHT.

A BAND OF TWENTY CHRISTIANS: CASSIAN, MARIUS, SATURUS (50 years old), JAMES (30 years old), his brother, JUSTIN (25 years old) and OTHERS, pack a small room in CASSIAN'S house. The room is dim and shadowy in the candle light. There is a great commotion as the BAND OF CHRISTIANS argue with one another, their voices rising up in anger, then dropping down, to furtive whispers.

CASSIAN
(angrily) Paul wrote in his letter to us. "Shall trouble or hardship or persecution separate us from the love of Christ? *No!* In all things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us."

JAMES
But the *edict*, Cassian. We will each be exposed! What of our movement if we are all hunted down? What of our Church if we are all put to the sword?

JUSTIN
Lucius (last name), this day, has arrived in Rome in search of us. We must make a stand!

CASSIAN
"for His sake we face death all day long. For His sake we are considered as sheep to be slaughtered."

JAMES
Justin is right, Cassian! We must no longer fear the enemies of truth! We must challenge them...

JUSTIN
...and drive back the great serpent, the champion of

the Antichrist! Lucius!

SATURUS

With what? Our bare hands!

JAMES

There are many of us willing to fight to protect our Church, in Christ's name...

CASSIAN

The same Christ who tells us to "Love our enemy and pray for those who persecute us?"

The BAND OF CHRISTIANS descend back into anger and confusion. The candles gutter, throwing out their wobbly yellow light.

VOICE

(O/S) You will be hunted down and annihilated.

The BAND OF CHRISTIANS grow silent and turn to the sound of the new voice. MAXIMUS stands enigmatically in the doorway. CASSIAN takes a candle and moves toward MAXIMUS.

CASSIAN

Who are you?

MAXIMUS

I am a messenger.

MAXIMUS' eyes move around the crowded room.

CASSIAN

And?

MAXIMUS

I was in Lyons. I saw a mob massacre men, just like you and wash the streets in their blood. I saw Lucius (last name) behead an old man named Polythnus. I saw slaughtered women and children.

The BAND OF CHRISTIANS begin to talk noisily.

CASSIAN

(quietly) Polythnus...the bishop of Lyons.

MAXIMUS

The *former* bishop of Lyons.

CASSIAN

We do not shudder at our own blood, streaming forth...

MAXIMUS

That is not what I saw...I saw much shuddering... and much streaming forth of blood...

CASSIAN, head bowed, turns. The light flickers.

MAXIMUS

I met a man named Irenaeus. He asked me to alert you to the arrival of Lucius (last name). He wanted me to tell you what I had seen.

CASSIAN turns around.

CASSIAN

Irenaeus? Then you are a Christian.

MAXIMUS

I was a Roman soldier.

The crowd parts and MARIUS steps forward.

MARIUS

Then you served the devil himself.

MAXIMUS sees MARIUS and reels back visibly from the shock. MARIUS, tall and powerful, is his father's son.

MAXIMUS

(to himself) Marius.

MAXIMUS looks into MARIUS' eyes.

MAXIMUS

(quietly) You will die...

MARIUS passes CASSIAN and stands before MAXIMUS. He looks MAXIMUS full in the face.

MARIUS

And glory in it.

MAXIMUS steps toward his son. MARIUS holds firm.

MARIUS
Leave this place, *idolater*. We have no use for
you.

MAXIMUS and MARIUS stare at each other. The BAND OF CHRISTIANS
descend back into dispute and confusion.

44. EXT. STREETS OF ROME. LATE NIGHT.

MAXIMUS moves through the dark and empty streets, a great silver moon
above him. MAXIMUS passes a Roman temple and walks beneath stone
statues of the gods.

VOICE
(O/S) Dear, oh dear...

MAXIMUS swings around to find MORDECAI sitting on the stone steps of
the temple.

MAXIMUS
Mordecai.

MORDECAI
Clearly Hephaestos had a motive of his
own for bringing you here.

MORDECAI points to one of the statues of the gods. The statue is
Hephaestos, standing, strong and virile.

MORDECAI
That's him up there, you know. In his more
robust days. And there is the mighty Jupiter...
now fat and old and cankerous...

MORDECAI stands.

MAXIMUS
My son does not know me.

MORDECAI
Of course not. Your son will have no recollection
of you at all. Ah, but isn't he like his father...

MAXIMUS moves suddenly toward MORDECAI. MORDECAI raises his hands.

MAXIMUS

My son does not even know me!

MORDECAI disappears. MAXIMUS sits down upon the steps. He looks up at the moon, the stars, his face twisted in anguish, the cold graven images of the gods above him.

45. INT. CASSIAN'S HOUSE. LATE NIGHT.

CASSIAN sits alone at his desk, the band of Christians gone. He reads by candlelight, deep in thought. CASSIAN rubs his face, then looks up to find MAXIMUS standing in the doorway, in the yellow candle lit gloom. CASSIAN sighs and stands, wearily.

CASSIAN

What do you want with me?

MAXIMUS

I come as a friend.

CASSIAN

You come like a thief in the night, under the cover of darkness. What am I to think? I have few friends and many enemies. But come in. You say you are a friend. What is your name?

MAXIMUS moves into the room.

MAXIMUS

My name is Maximus.

CASSIAN

And mine is Cassian.

CASSIAN gestures to a seat.

CASSIAN

Sit, Maximus.

CASSIAN sits back down at his desk. MAXIMUS sits in front of him. CASSIAN gestures to the papers on his desk.

CASSIAN

You must excuse the disarray. I was preparing for tomorrow's lesson. I have the dubious honour of teaching a group of young men...*philosophy*...It is ironic, really, all things considered.

CASSIAN moves things around on his desk.

CASSIAN

My heart is not really in it...no, it's not that...My *soul* is not really in it.

CASSIAN looks at MAXIMUS

CASSIAN

What is it that you want?

There is a silence.

MAXIMUS

At the meeting, there was a young man...

CASSIAN

Marius?

MAXIMUS

(quietly) Yes...Marius...

CASSIAN

If he offended you, then I apologise. My son is somewhat hot-tempered...

MAXIMUS

Your son?

CASSIAN

My adopted son...Again, Sir, what is that you want?

MAXIMUS and CASSIAN look at one another in silence. CASSIAN leans forward.

CASSIAN

Have you seen inside your heart? Has He called to you?

MAXIMUS
What?

CASSIAN
Yes, I can see. He calls to you, does he not?
He who believes in Him shall live and never die.
Speak, Maximus, there is no shame!

MAXIMUS
I saw a baby butchered by a river. Did that baby believe?

CASSIAN
There are something's worth dying for, Maximus.

MAXIMUS
There are something's worth fighting for.

CASSIAN
What is it that you want, Maximus!

MAXIMUS
I can help you.

CASSIAN
What? With a sword?

MAXIMUS
If need be.

CASSIAN
"If he strikes you on the right cheek, turn him the other also". I am a man of peace.

MAXIMUS
And your son?

CASSIAN
What of my son?

MAXIMUS
Will you drag him with you to the slaughter?

CASSIAN moves close to MAXIMUS.

CASSIAN
I ask you again. *What is it that you want?*

MAXIMUS and CASSIAN stare at one another.

46. INT. INN. LATE NIGHT.

Inside the inn, the crowd has thinned. The DRUNKEN OLD MAN lies flat out on a table. Other REVELERS are sprawled around the inn, in a state of disrepair. They all sing a song together.

REVELERS
(singing) The Christians asked the lions
If they knew a way to free them
Then the Christians and the lions
Danced around the Coliseum!
Going, la la la la la la...

MAXIMUS enters the inn and the REVELERS stop singing. A WENCH nudges the DRUNKEN OLD MAN on the table. The DRUNKEN OLD MAN lurches up as he sees MAXIMUS.

DRUNKEN OLD MAN
Ye Gods, woman! It is true. He walks!

MAXIMUS walks through the REVELERS. They part for him in fear and awe, unwilling or unable to believe what they see. The INNKEEPER looks on, a frightened look on his face. A huge black man, JUBA, (40 years old) standing in the corner, pays special interest. MAXIMUS passes through the crowd and disappears upstairs. A DRUNKEN REVELER stands and shakes his head.

A DRUNKEN REVELER
No! It is not him! Maximus, the gladiator was as
big as a bear and had arms the size of tree trunks!

JUBA moves slowly towards the stairs.

47. INT. ROOM ABOVE INN. LATE NIGHT.

MAXIMUS sits on the edge of his bed. There is a furtive knock on the door. MAXIMUS stands and walks slowly towards it.

MAXIMUS
Who is there.

VOICE
(O/S) A friend.

MAXIMUS cautiously opens the door. MAXIMUS stands, face to face, with his old gladiatorial friend, JUBA. JUBA stares down at MAXIMUS in disbelief.

JUBA
It is you!

MAXIMUS
Juba!

JUBA and MAXIMUS embrace.

JUBA
Do I embrace a ghost?

MAXIMUS
You embrace a comrade...

JUBA
But how?

MAXIMUS smiles, looks past JUBA.

MAXIMUS
Juba, come in...

48. EXT. STREET OUTSIDE JUBA'S PLACE. ROME. LATE NIGHT.

MAXIMUS and JUBA sit in a doorway on a darkened, moonlit street. They drink from a wineskin. They are a little drunk. For a time they are silent.

MAXIMUS
And that's not the all of it...

JUBA takes the wineskin away from his mouth.

JUBA
There is more?

JUBA grins broadly.

JUBA
There is *more?!!*

MAXIMUS takes the wineskin.

MAXIMUS
There is a strange melancholy ghost named
Mordecai that follows me around.

JUBA
A ghost?

MAXIMUS
A ghost.

JUBA
Named Mordecai?

MAXIMUS
Mordecai, the Melancholy...

JUBA
Is he here, you know...with us...now?

MAXIMUS drinks from the wineskin.

MAXIMUS
No...he comes and goes...

MAXIMUS and JUBA are silent. Then JUBA grins and breaks into a laugh.
MAXIMUS looks at JUBA and smiles.

JUBA
Forgive me, friend, but truly, these are the kind of
stories I tell my children!

MAXIMUS
You have children?

JUBA
I do. Two little girls. Twins. Teresa and Daphne.
They are eight years old. And my wife, Maximus,
she could shame the goddess, Venus, herself. I

met her after I was freed. She sought me out. It seems I made quite an impression on her...in the arena...

MAXIMUS

Then you have done well, my friend.

JUBA stands unsteadily. There is a rumble of thunder and a light rain begins to fall.

JUBA

And I have my own business. Come. I will show you...

MAXIMUS stands and together they move a little further down the street, as the rain grows heavier. JUBA points to a darkened window above them.

JUBA

Stay quiet. My wife...she sleeps.

Next to the house with the window is a large wooden door. JUBA opens it. The door creaks loudly as it swings open. JUBA grimaces comically.

JUBA

Sshh!

MAXIMUS and JUBA enter through the door.

49. INT. THE FORGE. ROME. LATE NIGHT.

JUBA lights a lamp, which throws its dim light over a blacksmith's workshop. A large furnace stands in the centre of the workshop. MAXIMUS and JUBA step inside. JUBA gestures at his surrounds.

JUBA

I do well, Maximus. I take commissions from merchants...farm equipment, mostly...

MAXIMUS

I am happy for you, Juba.

JUBA moves further into the workshop.

JUBA

Maximus, I have something for you...

JUBA moves to the back of the workshop, reaches up and takes something of a shelf. He returns to MAXIMUS. JUBA hands MAXIMUS something small wrapped in a cloth. MAXIMUS unwraps the cloth and looks down at the two totemic figurines of his wife and child. MAXIMUS looks at them, touching them lightly with his hand.

JUBA

I buried them in the ground at the Coliseum, not long after you...

MAXIMUS

...died...

JUBA

Yes...but not long ago I heard the emperor intended to flood the Coliseum...you know, fill it with water... for a spectacle involving alligators. It seems the numbers are dwindling. The public has grown weary of seeing these damned Christians torn apart by lions. The emperor was after something more ...uncustomary ...something more...exotic.

MAXIMUS looks at JUBA.

JUBA

I went there and retrieved them.

MAXIMUS wraps his hand around the figurines.

MAXIMUS

(quietly) Thank you, my friend.

A door on the other side of the forge opens and JUBA'S WIFE, CAMILLA (35 years old) appears in the doorway. CAMILLA is tiny, pretty, stern and dressed in her bedclothes. She holds a lamp.

CAMILLA

Juba?!

JUBA

Yes, my dear!

MAXIMUS looks across the workshop at the pale and tiny CAMILLA, then looks at the great black giant, JUBA. MAXIMUS smiles.

MAXIMUS
(whispers) Your wife?

JUBA nods sheepishly.

MAXIMUS
The brain boggles.

JUBA smiles.

CAMILLA
Who are you talking to?

JUBA
Go back to bed, woman.

CAMILLA
I will not go back to bed! Who ever it is, send him away, and come inside. It's late!

MAXIMUS embraces JUBA.

MAXIMUS
Goodbye, my friend

JUBA
Goodbye, Maximus. Will I see you soon?

MAXIMUS nods and exits the forge, into the rain. JUBA pulls closed the door, then looks at CAMILLA standing in the doorway, glowing in the lamplight. JUBA smiles.

JUBA
Coming, dear.

50. INT. ROOM ABOVE INN. LATE NIGHT.

MAXIMUS stands in his room. He takes the figurines from his pouch, looks at them, he returns the figurine of his son to the pouch, then places the figurine of his wife on a table before him. He kneels down in front of it. He closes his eyes in prayer.

MAXIMUS
May the gods protect...

MAXIMUS stops praying. He remains on his knees. He reaches out and picks up the figurine of his wife and squeezes it in his palm. He presses his fist against his head, his face full of rage and sorrow. Outside we hear the rain.

MAXIMUS
Oh Maria...

51. INT. LUCIUS' ABODE. ROME. LATE NIGHT.

LUCIUS sits on the balcony of his bedroom. With his pale eyes, he stares out over the rain-drenched city below him. With one long finger rested on the top of the hilt of his dagger, the tip in the table, he touches the handle so that the knife spins slowly around. On the edge of his bed, behind him, sits a young girl, barely visible in the yellow and melancholy light; naked, knees together, silent.

52. EXT. LUCIUS' ABODE. ROME. DAY.

The rain has stopped and the sun has risen over Rome. LUCIUS marches down the steps of his abode, all business. FOUR GUARDS loiter around the entrance, with horses, in the wet and steaming street. The GUARDS draw to attention as LUCIUS approaches. One of the GUARDS holds LUCIUS black stallion, which is saddled and ready. LUCIUS points to TWO OF THE GUARDS.

LUCIUS
You and you...come with me.

LUCIUS swings into his saddle. The GUARDS mount their horses. LUCIUS rides off, the TWO GUARDS following.

53. EXT. STREET OUTSIDE SCHOOLHOUSE. DAY.

MAXIMUS stands on the street near the schoolhouse. People bustle by. The door to the schoolhouse opens and SARDIS walks onto the street followed by the other STUDENTS. SARDIS talks to THREE STUDENTS, who move off and turn a corner, out of sight. MAXIMUS watches all this. A few moments pass, then MARIUS exits the schoolhouse alone and moves down the street, his head bent, deep in thought. He turns the corner. MARIUS looks up and sees SARDIS and the other THREE STUDENTS waiting for him. They block MARIUS' way. MARIUS stops in his tracks and faces them.

SARDIS

Tell us about your Jesus, atheist. Tell us about the gloomy little criminal you worship !

MARIUS makes to move forward. SARDIS grabs MARIUS by the collar and pushes him roughly, up against a wall.

SARDIS

(hisses) Tell us about your beggar-Christ that calls down curses on the very gods themselves!

MARIUS looks SARDIS in the eye.

MARIUS

He is with me now.

SARDIS slaps MARIUS viciously across the face. His cheek smarts red.

SARDIS

Where? I don't see him.

MARIUS continues to look SARDIS in the eye and then slowly turns his face.

MARIUS

He is all around.

SARDIS slaps MARIUS with even greater savagery. MARIUS stung, eyes watering, mouth trembling in rage, stares back at SARDIS.

SARDIS

What? No cheek left to turn!

SARDIS head butts MARIUS, then lets MARIUS slide down the wall. MARIUS crumples in a heap.

SARDIS

Christian dog!

SARDIS spits at MARIUS, who begins to rise to his feet. The other THREE STUDENTS push down at MARIUS with their feet. They look up to find MAXIMUS standing in front of them. SARDIS moves forward and looks at MAXIMUS.

SARDIS

What do you want?

With one quick punch MAXIMUS breaks SARDIS' nose. The FOUR STUDENTS stand motionless, in shock. MARIUS climbs to his feet and looks at MAXIMUS.

MARIUS
No.

SARDIS, his nose broken, backs away. The OTHER STUDENTS follow. They move off. MAXIMUS stands before MARIUS.

MAXIMUS
Perhaps we should talk.

MAXIMUS and MARIUS stare at one another.

53. INT. HOUSE OF SIMON. ROME. DAY.

A MAN, SIMON (45 years old) sits in a chair, his face beaten horribly. Blood streams from his nose and from cuts above his eyes. Towering over him is a GUARD, sweating, his knuckles barked. LUCIUS sits in a chair, lean and virile. Sitting across the room is RACHEL, SIMON'S WIFE (35 years old). Her face is a mask of despair. The OTHER GUARD stands by her. LUCIAN looks at SIMON, enjoying himself.

LUCIUS
I'll ask you again. Your leaders name.

SIMON looks into the eyes of his WIFE, RACHEL.

LUCIUS
Look at me.

SIMON'S eyes shift and stare at LUCIUS. SIMON says nothing. LUCIUS nods at his GUARD. The GUARD strikes SIMON with great force. SIMON reels back from the blow, rights him self, but still SIMON says nothing.

VOICE
(O/S) Mummy?

Everybody turns in unison and looks at the door leading to the rest of the house. Standing in the doorway is LUKE (7 years old). He is dressed in his bedclothes, his hair tousled, sleep in his eyes. LUCIUS leans forward in his chair and smiles.

LUCIUS
Aah...a child...

RACHEL tries to stand but the GUARD presses down on her shoulder.

RACHEL
Go to your room!

LUCIUS , strong and handsome in his uniform, leans forward and with his pale blue eyes, looks at the boy.

LUCIUS
Come to me, boy.

The BOY looks at LUCIUS, terrified but entranced. LUCIUS smiles.

LUCIUS
Come... Come to me.

The BOY moves tentatively toward LUCIUS.

RACHEL
Child, go to your room!

RACHEL begins to sob uncontrollably. The BOY moves forward.

LUCIUS
A fine boy.

The BOY reaches LUCIUS. LUCIUS takes hold of the BOY gently.

LUCIUS
What is your name?

BOY
Luke...

LUCIUS leans close to the BOY.

LUCIUS
Look at your father, Luke. He is scared.

LUCIUS takes out his dagger, mock-jabs it at SIMON.

LUCIUS
(quietly) Boo! See? Scared.

SIMON looks back at LUCIUS trembling with fear and rage. LUCIUS gives the knife to LUKE.

LUCIUS
Here. You do it. Scare your father.

The BOY looks into LUCIUS eyes.

LUCIUS
Go on.

The BOY mock jabs the knife in the direction of his father.

BOY
Boo.

RACHEL sobs and moans.

RACHEL
His name is Cassian!

SIMON
Quiet, woman!

RACHEL
Cassian, the schoolteacher!

LUCIUS sheathes his knife and runs his fingers through the boy's mop of hair.

LUCIAN
Good boy...

54. INT. CASSIAN'S HOUSE. ROME. DAY.

MARIUS sits on a chair holding a rag against his nose. MAXIMUS stands near by. Light streams through the window of the sparse abode. MAXIMUS and MARIUS are silent for a time.

MARIUS
I suppose I should thank you.

MAXIMUS

What you should do is hold your head back. It will staunch the flow of blood.

MARIUS

But I cannot thank you. In the garden of Gethsemane, when the soldiers came to arrest Christ, his disciple, Simon Peter, attacked one of the guards. Christ berated him, saying, "Put your sword back in its place, for all who draw the sword will die by the sword." Christ teaches us that violence begets violence. And once it begins there is no end to it.

MAXIMUS

I know nothing of this. I saw a young man outnumbered. I acted accordingly.

MARIUS

But why? How I conduct my life is no business of yours.

MAXIMUS

I was a soldier in the Roman Army. I stood, shoulder to shoulder, with men of conviction and valour, who fought, often to the death, for something they believed in. That they would lay down their weapons, kneel in the mud and give themselves up to the enemies sword...what meaning is there in that?

MARIUS

You did not answer my question. Why are you here? What do you want?

MAXIMUS and MARIUS stare at one another. MAXIMUS walks to the window.

MARIUS

My father told me you came to see him. You seem to have made something of an impression on him.

MAXIMUS

Your father loves you very much.

MARIUS

My father is a teacher and a wise man. I have learned much from him. Do you know the story of the apostle Paul? He brought down much havoc on the Christians but on the road to Damascus, saw a blinding light and heard the voice of Jesus. He converted and became Christ's chosen instrument. My father says that there is often great anguish and vexation before one can step from the darkness into the light, and hear His voice. Are you touched by that story?

MAXIMUS turns from the window and looks at MARIUS.

MAXIMUS

Why should I be?

MARIUS

My father was referring to you.

MAXIMUS

While your father is telling you stories, there is a man preparing to pour out our blood like water. He will not just slap your face, Marius, he will knock out your brains. You will welter in your own blood.

MARIUS brings the rag up to his nose.

MARIUS

God's will be done.

MAXIMUS

Your God does not seem to have your greater interests at heart.

MARIUS

Jesus said, "I am the light of the world. Who ever follows me will never walk in darkness, but will have the light of life." This is my faith.

MAXIMUS turns back to the window. They are silent.

MAXIMUS

(quietly, after a time) I once had a son...we lived on a farm in Toledo. My son was put to death...his little body hung from a tree in a field. He was seven years

old. He was too young to afford the luxury of faith, except to believe that one day he would see his father come back from the war.

MAXIMUS turns to MARIUS.

MAXIMUS
He never did.

MARIUS
What was your boy's name?

MAXIMUS
His name was Marius.

MARIUS looks at MAXIMUS and smiles sadly. MAXIMUS returns it and nods.

MAXIMUS
Yes. And like you he had a stubborn streak.

MAXIMUS steps forward.

MAXIMUS
Listen to me, Marius...

VOICE
(O/S) Marius?

MAXIMUS and MARIUS turn to see CASSIAN standing in the doorway. CASSIAN looks at MARIUS, who holds the bloody rag to his nose. Then looks to MAXIMUS.

CASSIAN
Marius? What has happened here?

MARIUS brings down the rag. He smiles.

MARIUS
It's nothing, father. I had a little trouble. Maximus
... *assisted* me...

MAXIMUS
I must go.

CASSIAN
Assisted you? What trouble?

MAXIMUS turns and moves towards the door. MAXIMUS turns and looks at MARIUS.

MAXIMUS
Goodbye.

MARIUS nods at MAXIMUS. MAXIMUS exits the room onto the street. CASSIAN stares after him. MARIUS brings the rag back to his nose and tips back his head.

55. EXT. STREET. ROME. DAY.

MAXIMUS walks down a street. Crowds jostle by, the sun overhead.

VOICE
(O/S) Well done.

MAXIMUS stops and turns. MORDECAI stands beside him.

MAXIMUS
What do you want, Mordecai?

MORDECAI
It appears that to save the soul, one must deny what is in one's very heart.

MAXIMUS
What are you talking about?

MORDECAI
One must reject the most natural of instincts.

MAXIMUS
Speak sense, Mordecai, or don't speak at all.

MAXIMUS continues to walk down the street. MORDECAI tags along.

MORDECAI
I'm speaking about your son.

MAXIMUS
What?

MORDECAI
In spite of himself, he's *warming* to you, don't you see?

MAXIMUS
I see a young man about to put his head in the jaws of a lion.

MORDECAI
Speaking of which, Maximus...are you going?

MAXIMUS
Going where?

MORDECAI stops walking. MAXIMUS continues on. MORDECAI throws out his arms.

MORDECAI
To the Games, Maximus...to the Games!

56. EXT. DECIUS' PRIVATE ZOO. ROME. DAY.

DECIUS stands in the muddy surrounds of his private zoo. About him are cages of monkeys, a few lions, an antelope, a couple of hyenas. There is a pen with a chained elephant. The zoo is dismal and grim and the beasts look disconsolate and ill-tended. DECIUS appears distressed. TWO WORKERS tie a large tarpaulin onto a cart. LUCIUS walks towards DECIUS, through the steaming mud. The sun beats down.

LUCIUS
I need to speak with you, Sire.

DECIUS, his face pale and spooked, turns towards LUCIUS.

DECIUS
The portents, Lucius...the portents...

LUCIUS
Sire?

DECIUS turns back to look at the WORKERS at the cart.

DECIUS
This is not a good day.

LUCIUS moves closer to DECIUS.

LUCIUS
I have the leader's name.

DECIUS
Leader? Which leader?

LUCIUS
The leader of the Christian Movement in Rome.
He is a schoolteacher named Cassian.

DECIUS
Do you think the Gods are angry, Lucius? Do
you think the Gods are angry...with *me*?

The TWO WORKERS begin to pull the cart, moving it through the mud.
DECIUS and LUCIUS observe it as it approaches.

LUCIUS
I see a great cataclysm moving towards us.
I think we must act now...and with conviction.

The TWO WORKERS pull the cart past DECIUS and LUCIUS. We see the
hoofed legs of a giraffe sticking out from under the tarpaulin. DECIUS looks
on mournfully.

DECIUS
Look...last night...the thunderstorm...

LUCIUS
Sire?

DECIUS
My giraffe was struck by lightning...

LUCIUS
Sire, grant me permission to arrest this man.

DECIUS
It was horrible...most horrible...

DECIUS turns to LUCIUS.

DECIUS
Remember the edict, Lucius.

LUCIUS
Sire, these Christians grow stronger by the day.

DECIUS begins to walk. He stops at a monkey cage. LUCIUS follows.

DECIUS
Will I see you at the Games, Lucius?

LUCIUS
Of course, Sire.

DECIUS
It will be quite a spectacle.

LUCIUS
And this schoolteacher, Sire?

DECIUS continues to look through the bars of the monkey cage.

DECIUS
Arrest him, then.

LUCIUS
Thank you, Sire.

LUCIUS turns to move away.

DECIUS
And, Lucius?

LUCIUS stops and turns to DECIUS.

LUCIUS
Sire?

DECIUS
Just that...and no more...

LUCIUS
As you wish, Sire.

LUCIUS turns and moves away. DECIUS continues to look into the monkey cage.

57. INT. THE FORGE. ROME. DAY.

MAXIMUS helps JUBA in his workshop. JUBA, shirtless, his muscles rippling, fires up the furnace with a great pair of bellows. The fire roars. Both men sweat in the heat. JUBA shouts over the noise of the furnace.

JUBA
I received a commission today...

MAXIMUS throws coal into the furnace.

JUBA
...of an *official* capacity...

JUBA squeezes the bellows. The flames roar. The two men shout.

MAXIMUS
A commission for what?

JUBA kicks the door of the furnace shut with his foot. It clangs and the noise abates.

JUBA
Fetters, Maximus...leg irons...

MAXIMUS looks at JUBA. JUBA looks at MAXIMUS.

JUBA
One hundred pairs...

JUBA picks up a large skin of water and pours it over sleek, black head. He drinks from the skin, then throws it to MAXIMUS. MAXIMUS drinks.

JUBA
I still carry the scars from them.

MAXIMUS
As do I.

JUBA
But money, my friend...

JUBA pulls at a lever, that draws a heavy chain connected to a metal tray toward the furnace. He grunts as he does it.

JUBA
...is money...

JUBA releases the lever. The chain slackens. The tray rests at the mouth of the furnace.

MAXIMUS
I saw my son again today.

JUBA stops working and stands and faces MAXIMUS.

JUBA
Oh?

MAXIMUS
What do you know about the Christians?

JUBA
Me? Not much. Your son is a Christian?

MAXIMUS
Yes.

JUBA
What is it that they say? "No rain, blame the Christians. Rain, blame them anyway." These are dangerous times, Maximus.

MAXIMUS
Were they any other way?

JUBA piles lumps of metal onto the tray.

MAXIMUS
What should I do?

JUBA drags the chain that lifts the tray. He locks the winch. He stops.

JUBA
Strength of purpose, Maximus. Your son must possess that.

MAXIMUS

He does. He is a strong young man.

JUBA

Then perhaps he should be allowed to live his own life.

JUBA kicks open the door of the furnace. The fire roars. MAXIMUS stares into the flames.

61. INT. CASSIAN'S HOUSE. ROME. MORNING.

CASSIAN and MARIUS sit at a table. They are eating. CASSIAN breaks a lump of bread and passes it to MARIUS. There is a silence between them. After a time CASSIAN leans forward and addresses MARIUS.

CASSIAN

Remember when I found you, Marius?

MARIUS

My memory is dim, father. I was seven years old. But I have heard you tell the story many times.

CASSIAN

All those dying children...and you walking through the halls of the hospital *untouched*...like you were protected from the pestilence...looking for your mother...

MARIUS

Father...

CASSIAN

I knew you were exceptional the moment I saw you...

MARIUS

Father...

CASSIAN

I knew great good would come from you...

MARIUS

What is troubling you, father.

CASSIAN
I had a dream...last night...

MARIUS
A dream?

CASSIAN
I saw you in a field...a wheat field...you were
engulfed in a great darkness...

MARIUS
Father...

CASSIAN leans forward and grabs his MARIUS by the wrist.

CASSIAN
Hold true, Marius.

MARIUS stares at CASSIAN.

MARIUS
Father?

CASSIAN stares into MARIUS' eyes. He leans still forward.

CASSIAN
Hold true.

MARIUS and CASSIAN stare at one another.

60. INT. CLASSROOM. ROME. MIDDAY.

CASSIAN sits at the front of his classroom. He teaches his TEN STUDENTS. SARDIS has a bandage across his nose. There is an obvious tension in the room. MARIUS sits at the back of the class. CASSIAN recites Horace. The STUDENTS scratch notes with their pens.

CASSIAN
"What God can the people call as the empire totters,
what prayer shall the virgin priestesses use to implore
Vesta, who leans away from their chants, and listens
less and less..."

CASSIAN stops reading.

CASSIAN
What is Horace saying here?

The STUDENTS look at CASSIAN, saying nothing, as the door bursts open and LUCIUS enters with THREE GUARDS. LUCIUS, handsome in his uniform, moves to the front of the class. CASSIAN makes to stand.

CASSIAN
What is this?

LUCIUS pushes down on CASSIAN.

LUCIUS
Stay where you are, old man, and do not move.

CASSIAN
You come for me here? In my place of work?
I insist you leave.

CASSIAN again attempts to stand. Again, LUCIUS pushes him down roughly, then leans in close, drawing a finger to his lips.

LUCIUS
Sssshhh...

LUCIUS reaches down, tears open the neck of CASSIAN'S robe, and yanks free, the fish symbol CASSIAN wears on a thong around his neck. The STUDENTS watch LUCIUS in a mixture of terror and awe. MARIUS sits, at the back, in his seat, pale and silent.

LUCIUS
You are students, are you not? Scholars? Learned young men? Then, answer me this...

LUCIUS leans forward, stares at the STUDENTS with his pale eyes.

LUCIUS
Does Rome stand deep-fixed and deathless as in the time of the great Caesars?...

LUCIUS extends his arms. He raises his eyebrows, questioningly.

LUCIUS
...No. I think not. Does she prowl the world, hungry and fearless and all-powerful? Again...I think not. Do

the gods sit mighty and well-pleased in the Heavens
and bestow on her, her just rewards? No and again,
no...*I think not.*

LUCIUS holds out the fish symbol for the STUDENTS to see.

LUCIUS
Rome weeps and this little fish swims in her tears.

LUCIUS lets the symbol swing as he addresses the STUDENTS.

LUCIUS
(softly) *A fish...a little fish...hidden around an old
man's neck.*

LUCIUS begins to walk among the students, swinging the symbol.

LUCIUS
The earthquakes that have ripped this mighty
empire asunder...charge this little fish...
the infernal plagues and disease, the hellish
pestilence that ravages our land...charge this
little fish...

LUCIUS passes SARDUS, who looks on in veneration.

LUCIUS
The droughts and terrible floods that have
devastated the provinces...the fish...the little
fish...

LUCIUS leans over MARIUS and swings the symbol before his eyes.
MARIUS sits rigid.

LUCIUS
the mad weather...the diabolical rage of the gods...
I say again...*charge this fish...*

LUCIUS returns to the front of the classroom.

LUCIUS
And charge the one that wears it!
This man here spits in the eyes of the gods
themselves! He is the enemy of us all!

LUCIUS grabs CASSIAN by his hair and pulls back his head, so that CASSIAN stares up into LUCIUS' hate-filled face.

LUCIUS
Deny it.

CASSIAN looks into LUCIUS' pale eyes but says nothing.

LUCIUS
Deny it!

CASSIAN
Lord, forgive this man.

LUCIUS trembles with rage. CASSIAN stares into LUCIUS' eyes.

CASSIAN
I knew your mother. She was a good woman.
She is with God and all His angels now.

LUCIUS' face twists in fury. MARIUS stands.

MARIUS
Father!

LUCIUS scoops up CASSIAN'S pen in his fist. CASSIAN looks at MARIUS.

CASSIAN
(quietly) My son.

LUCIUS
(to CASSIAN) You dog.

LUCIUS raises the pen above his head and buries it in CASSIAN'S neck. Blood pumps out. LUCIUS stands over CASSIAN, opens his arms and calls forth the STUDENTS.

LUCIUS
Come...come...

The STUDENTS, led by SARDUS, surge forward and stab CASSIAN to death with their pens. MARIUS stands at the back of the classroom, paralysed with horror. LUCIUS looks up and points to MARIUS with one bloody finger.

LUCIUS

Seize him!

MARIUS, leaps from his seat and rushes at the door. The GUARDS scabble to lay hold of him. MARIUS flees.

LUCIUS
Seize him!

The THREE GUARDS exit the classroom in chase of MARIUS.

61. EXT. STREETS OF ROME. MIDDAY.

MARIUS charges into the street. He pushes his way past pedestrians. The THREE GUARDS follow, hot on his heels. MARIUS turns down a smaller street. The GUARDS follow.

62. EXT. GARDEN SQUARE. ROME. MIDDAY.

MARIUS runs into an empty square, surrounded by stone benches. A MAN lies asleep on one of them. There are seven olive trees and a fountain in the centre. MARIUS stumbles. The GUARDS pour into the square. MARIUS rights himself. He looks to the left, to the right. The THREE GUARDS grab hold of MARIUS. MARIUS struggles.

VOICE
(O/S) Let him go.

The THREE GUARDS turn to see MAXIMUS standing at the entrance to street, from which they have just come. The THREE GUARDS turn to face MAXIMUS. MAXIMUS draws his sword. The THREE GUARDS move towards MAXIMUS. MAXIMUS moves towards the GUARDS. They fight and MAXIMUS cuts them down. The THREE GUARDS lie dead around the fountain. MARIUS stands, speechless. MAXIMUS sheathes his sword and grabs MARIUS.

MAXIMUS
Come.

MARIUS stares at the dead GUARDS, frozen with fear.

MAXIMUS
Come.

MAXIMUS leads MARIUS away. LUCIUS enters the garden square. LUCIUS looks at the THREE GUARDS sprawled dead around the fountain, under the seven olive trees. LUCIUS sees MAXIMUS and MARIUS, before they disappear into the adjoining street. He stares out with his pale eyes, a knot of muscle working in his jaw. The SLEEPING MAN sits up on the stone bench. It is MORDECAI. MORDECAI surveys the scene.

MORDECAI
(quietly) Dear, oh dear...

63. INT. THE FORGE. ROME. AFTERNOON.

Inside the workshop MARIUS sits with his head in his hands. MAXIMUS stands close to him. JUBA pulls closed the workshop door and goes to the window and looks out at the street. There is a heavy silence, but for the shut furnace, which roars softly. After a time MARIUS raises his head and looks up at MAXIMUS.

MARIUS
I did nothing.

MAXIMUS
Tell me what happened, Marius.

MARIUS
What happened? I sat there...*in fear*...and I did nothing.

MAXIMUS
Tell me.

MARIUS
They slayed my father...and I ran...

MAXIMUS
Marius...

MARIUS stands and grabs hold of MAXIMUS, his face twisted in rage.

MARIUS
...and I *loved* my father.

MAXIMUS
You are alive, Marius.

MARIUS releases MAXIMUS.

MARIUS
All these hollow words I have uttered...all this
senseless, empty *prattle*...

MARIUS moves to the door of the workshop. MARIUS turns to MAXIMUS.

MARIUS
My father told me something this very morning.
He said "*hold true*". O father...forgive me...

MARIUS wrenches open the door to the workshop. MAXIMUS moves after him.

MAXIMUS
Wait...

JUBA takes MAXIMUS by the arm, as MARIUS exits.

JUBA
Let him go, Maximus.

64. EXT. OUTSIDE CLASSROOM. ROME. AFTERNOON.

A CROWD has grown on the street around the classroom. A horse drawn trailer stands outside. MARIUS pushes through the crowd and watches as TWO CIVILIANS carry the body of CASSIAN out of the schoolroom and load it onto the trailer. LUCIUS, grim-faced, stands by the trailer. MARIUS, hidden in the crowd, watches LUCIUS. MARIUS turns and disappears back into the crowd.

65. INT. THE FORGE. LATE AFTERNOON. ROME.

MAXIMUS and JUBA sit in the workshop. There is a hammering on the door and MAXIMUS and JUBA stand. JUBA pulls open the door. MARIUS steps inside. MARIUS stands before MAXIMUS.

MARIUS
You said that you could help us. How?

MAXIMUS
I am a soldier. I can teach you to fight.

MARIUS
Then the time is now.

MAXIMUS
There are other options.

MARIUS
I see none.

MAXIMUS
You could leave this place. Go elsewhere.

MARIUS
As we speak they are wheeling the corpse of
my father away. I failed him once. I will not fail
him again. Will you help us?

MAXIMUS stares at MARIUS. JUBA looks furtively out the window.

66. INT. LUCIUS' ABODE. ROOM. ROME. EVENING.

LUCIUS stands in a room. The walls of the room are hung with a collection of swords and various implements of war. There are marble busts of emperors. Upon one bust is the breastplate of MAXIMUS. LUCIUS stands in front of the bust and stares at the breastplate, the room lamp-lit, a haunted look on his face.

67. EXT. STREET. ROME. MORNING.

The streets teem with people, vendors, civilians, all walking in one direction. There is much commotion and excitement. MAXIMUS and MARIUS push through the crowds in the opposite direction. They enter an open stable. The HORSE TRADER is locking a door.

MAXIMUS
My horse.

The HORSE TRADER continues to lock the door. He does not look up as he speaks.

HORSE TRADER
Not today. I am closed. Today I go to the games....

The HORSE TRADER stands and looks at MAXIMUS. His gnarled face freezes in fear. He backs away.

HORSE TRADER
Yes, sir...

MAXIMUS
And one other.

The HORSE TRADER continues to back away.

HORSE TRADER
Yes, Sir.

The HORSE TRADER disappears amongst the horses. MARIUS looks at MAXIMUS.

MARIUS
He fears you. Why?

MAXIMUS
I suspect he thinks I am someone else.

The HORSE TRADER returns with two horses, his face spooked. The HORSE TRADER gives the reins to MAXIMUS. His hands shake as he does so.

68. EXT. ROAD ON THE OUTSKIRTS OF ROME. MIDDAY.

MAXIMUS and MARIUS ride their horses down a dusty, empty road. They ride them hard. The sun beats down. MAXIMUS and MARIUS draw to a halt. There is a road that veers off and leads to a farm.

MAXIMUS
You ride well, Marius.

MARIUS
Yes, I have always known how.

MARIUS points to the farm.

MARIUS
There...the farm is there.

MAXIMUS and MARIUS move their horses down the road to the farm. Standing in front of the farmhouse are JAMES and his brother, JUSTIN, who walk toward MAXIMUS and MARIUS as they approach.

69. EXT. THE COLISEUM. ROME. MIDDAY.

The Coliseum teems with PEOPLE. The PEOPLE scream and cheer and shout at the carnage they witness in the arena. The grounds of the arena have been flooded, and in four foot of water, a naval battle ensues. The water roils with one hundred alligators that have been released in the water. GLADIATORS fire arrows, throw spears, launch fireballs as the two vessels approach each other. CHRISTIANS kneels on the decks, hands clasped in prayer. Some CHRISTIANS, impaled on spears and arrows, fall from the vessels and are torn apart by the alligators. DECIUS and his RETINUE watch the proceedings with blood-hungry delight. DECIUS rises to his feet and cheers as a fireball explodes on the deck of one of the vessels. LUCIUS makes his way through the RETINUE towards DECIUS. DECIUS sees LUCIUS and beckons him over.

DECIUS

Look about you, Lucius. The people are pleased!

A roar goes up as the two vessels collide and GLADIATORS leap from one vessel to the other, hacking and thrusting their spears.

LUCIUS

We must speak, Sire.

DECIUS

Speak? Now?

DECIUS laughs. The CROWD roars.

DECIUS

Now?!

LUCIUS

It is a matter of great urgency, Sire.

DECIUS

A matter of what?!

LUCIUS

Great urgency, Sire. They are rising up against us.

DECIUS
Who are rising up?

LUCIUS
The Christians, Sire.

DECIUS
The Christians?!

Another great roar goes up, as one of the vessels begins to tip and CHRISTIANS and GLADIATORS, alike, slide across the deck and fall screaming into the water. The water churns with blood and death. DECIUS points at the terror-crazed scene before him. He laughs, high-pitched and hysterical.

DECIUS
Them?! Rise up?!

LUCIUS
I have three dead guards who pay testament to it.

DECIUS
They killed your guards? *The Christians?*

LUCIUS
Three of them, Sire. Slain.

Another roar goes up. DECIUS cranes to see the carnage. DECIUS looks at LUCIUS.

DECIUS
The day is drawing close. The Roman citizens must honour the edict.

LUCIUS
Give me their names, Sire.

DECIUS
You will have them. Then you may do as you will.

The frenzied crowd cheer as the victorious GLADIATORS stand on the deck of the remaining vessel, brandishing their weapons in the air. DECIUS claps half-heartedly, his jubilant mood, gone. He sits down. MORDECAI sits beside him. LUCIUS sits down and leans toward DECIUS.

LUCIUS
There is more, Sire.

DECIUS sighs. MORDECAI leans in closer, to hear.

LUCIUS
A man helps them.

DECIUS
A man?

LUCIUS
He was there in Lyons. But I have seen him
before...many years ago.

DECIUS
Where?

LUCIUS
Here.

DECIUS gestures around him.

DECIUS
Here?

LUCIUS
He was a gladiator.

DECIUS
And?

LUCIUS
He was Maximus Moridius.

DECIUS
Maximus Moridius? He is dead. I saw him die.

LUCIUS
I know. So did I.

DECIUS looks out with his spooked face. LUCIUS stands, pats down his uniform. MORDECAI leans away, his eyebrows raised, querulously.

70. INT. FARM OF JAMES . OUTSIDE ROME. AFTERNOON.

MAXIMUS, MARIUS, JAMES and JUSTIN stand in a room in the farmhouse.
JAMES embraces MARIUS.

JAMES

We are sorry to hear of your father, Marius. He
was a great man.

MARIUS

Thankyou, James.

JUSTIN embraces MARIUS.

JUSTIN

He is with God now.

MARIUS turns and moves to a window. He looks out.

MARIUS

Yes, he is, but we are not.

He turns and faces JAMES and JUSTIN.

MARIUS

We are here...on earth and our business is not
done.

JUSTIN

Dozens more have died today, in the Coliseum.

MAXIMUS

And you will continue to die.

JAMES and JUSTIN look at MAXIMUS.

JAMES

Who are you?

MARIUS

He is a friend.

JAMES

A friend?

MARIUS

He saved my life. His name is Maximus. He can be trusted.

JUSTIN moves forward, toward MAXIMUS.

JUSTIN

We saw you before... at the meeting. You are the soldier.

MAXIMUS

How many of you are there.

JUSTIN

How many?

MAXIMUS

How many of you are there, that are willing to fight.

JAMES and JUSTIN look at each other.

JAMES

It is too late for that. You forget the edict.

MAXIMUS

The edict?

JUSTIN

In twenty days each citizen must make a sacrifice to the Gods. Those who fail to do this will be rounded up. We Christians will become more blood sport for the mob...

JAMES

Our faith is well tested. Some have already left Rome. But there is no where to run. The emperor has sworn to impose the edict throughout the empire.

MARIUS turns to the window again.

MARIUS

Then we have little choice.

MAXIMUS

You can fight or you can die.

JAMES and JUSTIN look at MAXIMUS.

MAXIMUS
How many are you?

JAMES
We have strong men but we are not soldiers.

JUSTIN
We have no weapons.

MARIUS turns from the window and moves across the room and stands by MAXIMUS.

MAXIMUS
How many are you?

JAMES and JUSTIN look at MAXIMUS and MARIUS.

71. INT. THE FORGE. ROME. DAY.

The door to the forge is shut but daylight streams through the window. JUBA raises high his hammer and pounds at his anvil. JUSTIN hammers at another one beside him. MARIUS drops a red-hot piece of metal into cold water and it hisses violently. MAXIMUS works with him. There is great concentration and industry. The metal clangs, the fire roars.

72. INT. THE FORGE. ROME. LATE NIGHT.

MAXIMUS and MARIUS sit alone in the forge. It is lamp lit. In the dim light, there is evidence of spears and swords and arrowheads that have been forged. MAXIMUS and MARIUS sit together in the gloom. MARIUS picks up a sword and holds it in his hand.

MARIUS
I am wondering what my father would have thought of this.

MAXIMUS
That sword can save your life, Marius...

CONVERSATION CONTINUES.

LUCIUS moves to the back of the forge and lies down on a pallet on the floor. MAXIMUS turns to see MORDECAI leaning on the furnace. MORDECAI looks around him at the piles of weaponry.

MORDECAI
Planning on spilling a little blood, my friend?

MAXIMUS
Will you haunt me all of my days?

MORDECAI
Until eternity itself has said it's prayers.

MORDECAI smiles gloomily. MAXIMUS looks away. MARIUS sleeps.

73. EXT. FARM OF JAMES. OUTSIDE ROME. MORNING.

In a field beyond the farmhouse, TWO HUNDRED CHRISTIAN MEN have amassed, and stand in a rough formation. MAXIMUS moves past them, looking into their faces. They stare back, young, old and in between, with a grim determination. JUBA stands by a trailer. He pulls back a canvas sheet, to reveal a pile of spears and swords.

74. INT. BROTHEL. ROME. NIGHT.

LUCIUS lies in a large sunken marbled bath. The room is dim in the yellow lamplight. Steam curls of the water. A FEMALE ATTENDANT stands statue-like, beside the bath, holding a large jug of water. Against an opposing wall sit TWO PROSTITUTES, young, naked, motionless, knees together. LUCIUS stares out, the knot of muscle working in his jaw. All is still, in the gloom. All is quiet.

VOICE
(O/S) Sire?

LUCIUS looks to the door.

LUCIUS
Enter.

A GUARD enters the room, stares out and does not look at LUCIUS.

LUCIUS
Speak.

GUARD

We have found out where he is hiding, Sire.

LUCIUS nods. The GUARD exits. LUCIUS stares out and all is as before.

75. EXT. FARM OF JAMES. OUTSIDE ROME. DAY.

In the field beyond the farmhouse there is great activity as the TWO HUNDRED CHRISTIANS fire arrows, throw spears at a wall of straw bails, bring down their swords. MAXIMUS and JUBA move among them, preparing them.

76. INT. THE FORGE. ROME. DAY.

The door to the forge is shut. JUBA hammers at a sword on his anvil, his muscles rippling. The door opens and daylight streams into the dim interior. JUBA brings down his hammer with a great clang, but does not look up.

JUBA
Maximus?

JUBA brings down his hammer again. Sparks fly of the metal. JUBA looks up into the light. LUCIUS stands back-lit and silhouetted. JUBA squints at the figure.

JUBA
Maximus?

77. EXT. STREET BETWEEN STABLE AND FORGE. EVENING.

MAXIMUS, who has left his horse at the stable, walks along the street, toward the forge. The HORSE TRADER stands outside the stable and watches MAXIMUS walk away, his face fearful.

VOICE
(O/S) The whole of Rome speaks of you.

MAXIMUS continues walking.

MAXIMUS
Let them talk.

MORDECAI moves up beside MAXIMUS.

MORDECAI
They say you are the great gladiator, returned
from the dead.

MORDECAI laughs. Then stops laughing.

MORDECAI
And for once the people are right.

MAXIMUS arrives at the forge. He takes hold of the handle of the door.
MAXIMUS turns to MORDECAI.

MAXIMUS
Go, now. Let me be.

MORDECAI leans close to MAXIMUS.

MORDECAI
But I have some advice for you.

MAXIMUS pulls open the door of the forge. MORDECAI leans in further and
whispers into MAXIMUS' ear.

MORDECAI
Beware.

MAXIMUS enters the forge.

78. INT. THE FORGE. ROME. EVENING.

MAXIMUS enters the forge. It is dark and it is quiet. MAXIMUS moves into
the forge and lights a lamp. The lamp spills forth it's yellow light. A chain
clanks.

VOICE
(O/S) Are you a ghost?

MAXIMUS turns as LUCIUS steps out of the shadows on the opposite side
of the forge. TWO GUARDS stand behind him. LUCIUS stares at MAXIMUS
with his pale eyes. ONE OF THE GUARD'S hands rests on the crank of a
winch.

LUCIUS
Are you a spectre, Maximus Moridius?

MAXIMUS slowly draws his sword.

MAXIMUS
Let us find out.

LUCIUS' eyes look up and move across the heavy chain of the hauling device, the pulleys and the counterweight. LUCIUS' eyes alight on JUBA, who stands, at the other end of the forge, his hands bound, the chain around his neck. He is gagged. His face has been beaten. JUBA looks at MAXIMUS his eyes wide.

LUCIUS
Move one step closer and my guard will release the lever. Your friend's neck will snap like a twig. Now, put up your sword.

LUCIUS moves a step closer.

LUCIUS
I wish to speak with you.

MAXIMUS
Release him. He is not part of this.

LUCIUS
You must understand, gladiator, I have to take precautions. You are well versed in the art of killing. O, how you used to swing that sword...

MAXIMUS
You will die. I will see to that.

LUCIUS
Perhaps. But not this day.

MAXIMUS
What do you want?

LUCIUS
Forgive me, Maximus, but I am confused...about many things. As a boy...as a little boy...I watched a Roman General who became a gladiator bring

down the very heavens upon his foes. And when he died, I stood by my mother and we wept, and all of Rome wept with us. He was a soldier... a great warrior. Yet he stands before me now. How can that be?

MAXIMUS

Do not despair. You will see the heavens come tumbling down again.

LUCIUS waves his hand, dismissively, and smiles, almost sadly.

LUCIUS

But I am further confused. Not only does this... man... stand before me now, but he forges an alliance with a sect of infidels whose beliefs defy all that he has ever fought for. I mean, Maximus, we are fighters... you and I... we are warriors. Roman warriors. Again, I am much perturbed.

MAXIMUS

I knew your mother well. She was a good woman. It would appear that she gave birth to a snake.

Again LUCIUS waves away MAXIMUS' retort.

LUCIUS

A good woman, yes...but a vulnerable one. After you...died, Maximus, she lost heart. She became remote...distant. They preyed on her, these... Christians, They lured her in. They poured their cup of poison into her ears... filled her poor mind with their foul notions of glory. Glory through *martyrdom*. She was set upon by a mob and stoned to death...my *good* mother... She knelt in the dirt, wrung her hands and flung her empty prayers to the stars. Meanwhile, the mob tore her asunder. These fanatics that you abet, that you *protect*, Maximus, they *cheered* her on. She worshiped you.

LUCIUS smiles sadly.

LUCIUS

As did I.

MAXIMUS and LUCIUS stare at on another.

LUCIUS

And what now? Are we fated to do battle, you
and I? We, who are so alike?

MAXIMUS stares at LUCIUS.

MAXIMUS

We are not alike. And fate has no part in this. I
will see you again...in this life.

LUCIUS nods.

LUCIUS

I think so.

LUCIUS waves his hand.

LUCIUS

Farewell. Go to your friend...ghost.

MAXIMUS moves across the room to JUBA. He pulls the chain from JUBA'S neck. The winch crank spins, the iron counterweight drops with an enormous clang to the floor. MAXIMUS unsheathes his sword and turns to face LUCIUS and his GUARDS. They are gone. MAXIMUS unties JUBA'S hands. JUBA tears off his gag. JUBA, smarting with humiliation, looks at MAXIMUS.

JUBA

I am sorry, Maximus.

MAXIMUS

Are you all right, my friend?

JUBA nods.

JUBA

I look forward to killing that man.

MAXIMUS stares at the door. The door swings open. MARIUS stands in the doorway.

79. INT. FARMHOUSE OF JAMES. OUTSIDE ROME. DAY.

MAXIMUS stands before MARIUS, JAMES and JUSTIN in a room of the farmhouse. Outside the sounds of the Christians training can be heard.

MAXIMUS
Is there somewhere the women and children
can go?

JAMES
Yes.

MAXIMUS
Arrange it. Make sure all the houses are
empty. No one should remain.

JUSTIN leans forward.

JUSTIN
Are we ready? Are we prepared?

MAXIMUS stares at JUSTIN.

MAXIMUS
We will amass, as planned, in the woods.

80. EXT. HUGE SQUARE IN ROME. MORNING.

Massive altars have been set up in various squares in Rome. Great queues of CITIZENS have formed before the altars. Among them they have thousands of animals: goats, chickens etc. in cages, on leads, in their arms. There is much commotion and confusion. GUARDS stand at the altars with lists. CITIZENS walk to the altars, give their names, swear their allegiance to Rome and slaughter an animal in ritual sacrifice. The GUARDS tick their names of the census. It is a scene of horrible carnage. The streets sound with the screams of animals and run with their blood.

81. EXT. THE WOODS. OUTSIDE ROME. SUNSET.

The TWO HUNDRED CHRISTIANS have amassed in the woods. They have set up makeshift camps and sit around fires, eating and drinking. MAXIMUS and MARIUS move about amongst them, in the dying light.

82. EXT. STREETS OF ROME. MORNING.

The sun has risen over Rome and LUCIUS, ready for business, rides through the streets, accompanied by SIX GUARDS.

83. EXT. STREETS OF ROME. MORNING.

Another group of FOUR GUARDS ride through the streets of Rome.

84. INT. CHRISTIANS HOME. ROME. MORNING.

LUCIUS and his GUARDS kick open doors and enter CHRISTIANS home. One GUARD holds a list in his hand. The house is empty. LUCIUS stands in the middle of the front room, while the GUARDS disappear into other rooms of the house. The GUARDS return to LUCIUS.

GUARD

There is no one here, Sire.

LUCIUS kicks over a table.

85. INT. CHRISTIANS HOME. ROME. AFTERNOON.

The other FOUR GUARDS kick in another CHRISTIAN'S door. ONE GUARD holds a list. Once again the house is empty. The GUARDS march through the house overturning tables and chairs.

86. EXT. SQUARE IN ROME. LATE AFTERNOON.

LUCIUS and his TEN GUARDS have met up in a square. LUCIUS face is full of rage. He watches as another FIVE GUARDS ride their horses toward him. ONE of the FIVE GUARDS moves his horse up to LUCIUS.

GUARD

We found no one, Sire. All the houses have been abandoned.

LUCIUS looks around him in a state of fury.

VOICE

(O/S) You will not find them in Rome.

LUCIUS spins around in his saddle and looks at a MAN, PAULUS, standing before him.

LUCIUS
Who are you?

PAULUS
The ones you seek have fled.

LUCIUS
Fled?

PAULUS
They are hiding in the woods, Sire...in their hundreds.

LUCIUS spins around his horse and addresses the GUARDS.

LUCIUS
Come!

LUCIUS and the GUARDS thunder away. PAULUS stands alone in the square.

87. INT. QUARTERS OF THE EMPEROR, DECIUS. EVENING.

DECIUS stands on the balcony of his quarters, staring out at the streets below. LUCIUS enters. DECIUS keeps his back to LUCIUS. LUCIUS is intensely agitated.

LUCIUS
Sire.

DECIUS
I expected to hear much agony and woe, Lucius.
I expected to smell the fear and the blood. But I
am standing here, listening, and hear nothing
but empty wind...

DECIUS sniffs the air.

DECIUS
...and smell only the sweet honeysuckle.

LUCIUS steps forward.

LUCIUS
They have fled, Sire. All of them.

DECIUS continues to stare out over the city.

DECIUS
Fled? Where?

LUCIUS
I have been informed they are hiding in the woods.
I have sent out some guards to verify it. Sire, this
presents a perfect opportunity.

DECIUS
What do you need, Lucius?

LUCIUS
Two things, Sire. I need troops...

DECIUS
And?

LUCIUS
Your blessing, Sire.

DECIUS turns to LUCIUS. He stares at him for a long time. DECIUS slowly
nods his head.

DECIUS
Of course you do. Of course you do.

85. EXT. THE WOODS OUTSIDE ROME. LATE EVENING.

In the woods, MAXIMUS and MARIUS sit together beneath the stars. There
is a small fire which throws it's light up onto their faces. MAXIMUS and
MARIUS share some bread and a skin of wine.

MARIUS
There is mad talk amongst the men.

MAXIMUS
What are they saying?

MARIUS smiles.

MARIUS
They say you are a great gladiator returned
from the dead?

MAXIMUS
As you said, Marius. Mad talk.

MARIUS
They believe you will lead them to glory.

MAXIMUS
Let them do so. Belief can be a powerful thing.

There is a silence between MAXIMUS and MARIUS.

MARIUS
What do you believe in, Maximus?

MAXIMUS
I was a soldier. My *beliefs* were of little importance.

MARIUS
To hear them talk, you were a great general.

MAXIMUS
I was a *soldier*. I loved and served my Emperor.

MARIUS
But as a man?

MAXIMUS
I believed in the goodness of my wife and my son.
On the battlefield, within the horror of it all, I held
that belief in my heart, like a trembling thing. A belief
that there would be an end to it all, the death and the
bloodshed, and I would stand beside them, once
more.

MARIUS
And they were taken from you.

MAXIMUS
I can feel them with me now.

A MAN approaches MAXIMUS and MARIUS. He squats down by them. It is PAULUS.

PAULUS
They know we are here.

MAXIMUS nods. PAULUS stands and moves off. MAXIMUS looks at MARIUS.

MAXIMUS
They will be here in the morning. It is better you sleep.

MARIUS
My father was also a great soldier.

MAXIMUS stokes the fire, the yellow light on his face.

MARIUS
My true father...my blood father...

MAXIMUS stops stoking the fire and looks at MARIUS.

MARIUS
I did not know him. He was never there. He was away, my father...forever at war.

MARIUS lies on the ground and pulls a blanket over himself. MAXIMUS stares into the fire.

86. EXT. ROAD OUT OF ROME. MORNING.

LUCIUS leads an army of FOUR HUNDRED ROMAN SOLDIERS on horseback, along the road. The morning sun beats down. LUCIUS sits, powerful and imperious, in the saddle.

87. EXT. THE WOODS OUTSIDE ROME. EVENING.

The TWO HUNDRED CHRISTIANS stand in the woods. They burn torches and there are campfires dotted about. MARIUS stands before them. Behind MARIUS and separate from the proceedings stand MAXIMUS and JUBA. MARIUS steps forward.

MARIUS
Let us pray.

The CHRISTIANS kneel down, en masse. MARIUS, too, kneels down.
MAXIMUS and JUBA do not kneel but stand and watch the proceedings.

MAXIMUS
Juba...

JUBA
Yes, my friend.

MAXIMUS
You do not have to do this.

JUBA smiles.

JUBA
It would appear that you are under some kind
of illusion, Maximus, that you can do this without
me.

MAXIMUS smiles. JUBA stares out at the CHRISTIANS. After a time,
MAXIMUS turns his head and looks behind him, through the trees. There is a
faint rustling. MAXIMUS sees the shape of a stag, moving eerily through the
growth. He watches the shape of the stag, as MARIUS prays. JUBA
continues to watch the CHRISTIANS, his smile gone.

88. EXT. RISE AND PLAIN NEAR WOODS. LATE MORNING.

The ARMY stands along the rise looking out over the plain at the large
woods, in the distance. LUCIUS, on horseback, rides slowly along the front
of the ranks, surveying the TROOPS. LUCIUS takes up position at the front
of the amassed ARMY. LUCIUS looks down at the plain, before him, and at
the woods. LUCIUS draws his sword.

LUCIUS
Charge!

LUCIUS and the ROMAN ARMY surge forth, down the rise and across the
plain. There is a great and spectacular thundering of horses, as they go.

89. EXT. THE WOODS. LATE MORNING.

LUCIUS leads his ARMY as they gallop across the plain. The army enters the woods on horseback. They continue into the woods. LUCIUS holds up his hand and the ARMY thunders to a halt. All is eerie and still. Light filters through the trees. The horses snort. LUCIUS swings around in his saddle, looking in all directions.

CHRISTIANS stand suddenly and fire arrows. Many SOLDIERS are hit as they are ambushed by the CHRISTIANS. SOLDIERS fall from their horses. General mayhem. LUCIUS and his ARMY dismount and a bloody ground battle ensues. CHRISTIANS die. SOLDIERS die. MAXIMUS ploughs into the SOLDIERS, sword flying. JUBA drags soldiers from their horses and slaughters them. There is a long and terrifying ground battle. JUBA is overpowered by THREE SOLDIERS, who bear down on him. MAXIMUS sees this and throws his sword and kills a SOLDIER before he can deliver the deathblow. JUBA stands. LUCIUS appears behind him and cuts JUBA'S throat. JUBA falls to the ground and dies.

MAXIMUS runs for LUCIUS. LUCIUS sees MAXIMUS coming and mounts his horse. LUCIUS charges off, through the woods. MAXIMUS mounts a horse and charges after him. MARIUS sees this and mounts his horse. The trees whip past. In a clearing, LUCIUS' stallion stumbles and LUCIUS is thrown from his horse. MAXIMUS dismounts. LUCIUS stands. LUCIUS unsheathes his sword. MAXIMUS, sword drawn, approaches LUCIUS. They fight. It is a long and bitter battle. MAXIMUS wounds LUCIUS, in the arm. LUCIUS holds his arm and drops his sword and stares into MAXIMUS' face. MAXIMUS raises his sword to deliver the deathblow.

LUCIUS
Only at your hands, Maximus...

An arrow flies through the air and sticks through LUCIUS' neck. MAXIMUS turns to see MARIUS standing there with a bow in his hand. LUCIUS staggers, his face full of surprise. LUCIUS dies. MARIUS lets the bow fall from his hand. He is covered in blood. MARIUS looks about him, at the butchered corpses of CHRISTIANS and SOLDIERS alike. MARIUS looks up to the heavens. Clouds rumble across. MARIUS' face is a mask of anguish and regret.

MARIUS
O Lord, what have we done?

MARIUS drops to his knees.

MARIUS
What have we done?

JAMES runs into the clearing, covered in blood, pumped up from the fight.

JAMES
They are retreating!

MAXIMUS
They will be back.

MARIUS, still kneeling, looks at MAXIMUS. MAXIMUS looks at MARIUS.

JAMES
What do we do now?

MAXIMUS and MARIUS continue to look at each other.

MAXIMUS
Do? We regroup...and we fight.

JAMES turns and heads back into the woods. MAXIMUS and MARIUS remain, in the clearing. They look at one another. All is still. There is a cracking of undergrowth and a stag crashes in to the clearing. Three arrows stick out of its neck, one out of its side. It moves unsteadily into the clearing. It stretches back its neck and bellows mournfully. MAXIMUS watches the stag. MAXIMUS kneels down, picks up some earth and rubs it into his hands. CU of MAXIMUS' hands as he rubs dirt into them.

90. EXT. BATTLEFIELD. MIDDLE EAST. DAY.

MAXIMUS stands. He is dressed in chain mail and covered in a white uniform with a red cross on it. He holds a sword in his hand. He is surrounded by HUNDREDS OF CRUSADERS, in similar attire. He looks up and an army of Muslims descend upon them. Their war cries are ferocious. They fight a horrific battle. MAXIMUS remains untouched.

92. EXT. THE WOODS. ROME. LATE MORNING.

The stag, shot with arrows, stumbles and drops to its knees.

93. EXT. ANOTHER BATTLE FIELD. EUROPE.

C/U of MAXIMUS' hands, as he rubs snow into them. MAXIMUS stands in the middle of another battle. More modern, in a field of blood and death and snow.

94. EXT. THE WOODS. ROME. LATE MORNING.

The stag falls onto its side. It moans.

95. EXT. ANOTHER BATTLE FIELD. EUROPE.

MAXIMUS stands in the middle of another battlefield. Armoured tanks bare down. Automatic weapons. MAXIMUS fights. SOLDIERS fall around him.

96. EXT. THE WOODS. ROME. LATE MORNING.

The stags dying eye rolls in its head.

97. ANOTHER BATTLE. VIETNAM. DAY.

MAXIMUS stands. Jungle. Carnage. Choppers. Flamethrowers.

98. EXT. THE WOODS. ROME. LATE MORNING.

C/U of the stags mouth, agape, lowing horribly.

99. INT. BATHROOM. PENTAGON. WASHINGTON.

C/U MAXIMUS rubs a cake of soap between his hands, under a steaming tap. MAXIMUS looks up. He is in a clean, sterile men's room. He washes his hands in a basin. The basin is one of three, in a row. As he does so, he stares into the mirror above the basin. MAXIMUS looks at himself for a long time. He stares deep into his reflected eyes. He is dressed in a crisp black suit and wears a tie. He continues to look at himself. He turns off the tap. He dries his hands on a towel. He looks back into the mirror. MORDEAI is standing behind him.

MAXIMUS
Ah, Mordecai.

MORDECAI
Yes, Maximus. Until eternity itself has said its
prayers.

MAXIMUS adjusts his tie. He moves out of the bathroom, leaving
MORDECAI behind.

100. HALLWAY.

MAXIMUS walks down a hallway, under neon lights. He passes a
SECRETARY who carries an armful of documents. He opens a door.

101. INT. ROOM IN PENTAGON. WASHINGTON.

MAXIMUS enters room. There is a large circular table. TEN MEN in suits sit
around the table. They each have a laptop open in front of them. There is a
bank of screens along one wall. MAXIMUS sits down at the table, in a black,
high-backed, leather chair.

MAXIMUS
Excuse me, gentlemen.

MAXIMUS looks at his laptop, then looks up at the other TEN MEN.

MAXIMUS
Now, where were we?

THE END