

The Red Serpent

Written by
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FADE IN:

AN ANCIENT MAP,

yellow and faded from untold years. TIGHT ON a crude representation of ROME. DRUMS fade up, rhythmic and powerful. We begin to drift

SOUTH OF ROME,

gaining speed as the drums build. Down the Appian Way, into the region of CAMPANIA. We SWOOP IN, gliding across the map's hilly terrain as it

THRUSTS UP FROM THE PARCHMENT,

ink lines TRANSFORMING into the desolate plains of CAPUA.

EXT. CAPUA - DAY

Continue soaring across the plains, the harsh sun pounding the parched earth. THUNDER BOOMS from a clear sky. No, not thunder. The ROAR OF A CROWD. As the deafening sound splits the air, we DIVE into a wooden ARENA on the edge of the city.

EXT. ARENA - DAY

The CROWD howls as a MURMILLO GLADIATOR toys with DRENIS, a bloodied Thracian prisoner. Drenis is a brute of a man, early 30s, with an unruly black beard. He wields only a sword against the shielded and armored Murmillo.

TIME SLOWS AND ACCELERATES

as we ROTATE AROUND the battle, Drenis and the Murmillo trading deadly blows. Their swords crash against each other, PROPELLING us

INTO THE MURMILLO'S HELMET

where we see the blazing fierceness of his eyes, sweat coursing down his face from the exertion. The SOUNDS of the CROWD FADE, replaced by the Murmillo's LABORED BREATHING. We SNAP AROUND to

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

THE MURMILLO'S POV

from inside his helmet, looking through the grating of his eye shields. Drenis lunges forward. As the Murmillo swings his sword to meet him we

PUSH OUT OF HIS HELMET

and BACK INTO THE ARENA. The ROAR of the CROWD SURGES. The Murmillo

DEFLECTS DRENIS' BLOW

and whirls around with his own sword. We DIVE IN close to the blade as TIME SLOWS. Briefly reflected in the gleam of the blood-splattered steel are the

TWISTED FACES

of the crowd, howling for blood.

TIME RESUMES

as the Gladiator's sword completes its arc, SLICING OPEN DRENIS' ARM. The crowd CHEERS as

BLOOD SPRAYS

across the arena. We follow the blood, PUSHING THROUGH IT to take us up to the bars of a PRISONER PEN. Reveal

THE THRACIAN

standing behind them. Mid 30s. Well muscled. Dirty and battered. Long matted hair partially obscuring his searing eyes. His grip tightens on

THE SWORD

in his hand. He stares out into the arena, waiting to be called to his fate. We rotate around him, MORPHING US to --

INT. VILLAGE HALL - THRACE - NIGHT (FLASHBACK)

A crude structure of wood and skins lit by torches. The Thracian works his way through a crowd of THRACIAN WARRIORS, moving towards the front of the hall as the men shout to be heard over each other.

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CONTINUED:

EPTENOS,

a hulking elder with piercing blue eyes and a great white beard, shouts them down.

EPTENOS

Hold your fucking tongues! Let the Roman have his say!

The men reluctantly quiet down, turning their eyes towards the front of the hall where

CLAUDIUS GLABER

stands with his TRIBUNE and a handful of ROMAN SOLDIERS. Glaber, 40, handsome with the keen eyes of an ambitious man, is the LEGATUS (regional commander) of the Roman Army.

GLABER

Thrace and the Republic have known their differences. We have not always been as brothers. Let us put such matters aside, uniting in just cause.

EPTENOS

You pushed your way into our lands, and now you stand asking for our help, your hand extended?

The men bellow in agreement. The Thracian remains silent, studying Glaber. Gauging the man.

GLABER

I extend no hand. I am here merely to inform. Mithridates and his Greeks attack from the east, encroaching from the Black Sea --

EPTENOS

Far removed from our villages.

GLABER

True. But the Getae take advantage of the distraction. Their barbarian hordes amass to the north. Barely half a week's march from your villages.

The Thracians grumble, exchanging concerned looks.

EPTENOS

How many?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

GLABER

Thousands.

An uproar. Glaber shouts over the din.

GLABER (cont'd)

Align yourselves with Rome! Pledge
your service to the auxiliary and
join us in our campaign!

THE THRACIAN

To what end?
(shouting to be
heard)
TO WHAT END?!

The men murmur, nodding at the question. Glaber surveys them
confidently.

GLABER

Victory.

THE THRACIAN

And how is it to be measured? The
Getae have raided our villages in
the past. Killed our children.
Raped our women. Each time we have
pushed them back. Only to see them
return.

EPTENOS

(to Glaber)
He speaks out of turn. Yet the
truth falls from his mouth.

THE THRACIAN

If we align ourselves with Rome,
the purpose must be clear. The
Getae dead. All of them.

He locks eyes with Glaber. A tense beat. Glaber nods.

GLABER

Dead. All of them.

The men roar their approval. OFF The Thracian, standing
proud among his people...

INT. HUT - THRACE - NIGHT (FLASHBACK)

A simple hut, lit by many candles. SURA, a raven-haired
beauty with the edge of a woman you do not want to fuck

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

with, kneels before a small shrine to Dionysus. A SWORD rests across her outstretched palms as she silently prays.

THE THRACIAN

enters through a flap of animal skins behind her. Sura pauses, not looking back at him.

SURA

The council has decided?

THE THRACIAN

We go to war.

She nods, the news hitting her hard. She pushes aside her concern, rises with the sword in her hand.

SURA

I have asked the gods to bless your sword. With the blood of our enemies.

She hands it to him. He slips it into a sheath crisscrossed with an ornate PURPLE BINDING.

THE THRACIAN

Once the Getae are wiped from our lands, there will be no reason to ever pick it up again.

Sura laughs at the thought.

SURA

And what would my husband do without it in his hands?

THE THRACIAN

Grow crops. Raise goats. Make children...

He brushes a stray lock of hair from her face.

SURA

You would fight no more?

THE THRACIAN

Forever. To be by your side.

She kisses him, wishing the day had already come.

SURA

How soon do you march?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

THE THRACIAN

At first light.

SURA

Then come to bed. If a single night
is all we have... I would make the
most of it...

She slips out of her dress (nudity only hinted at here) and
smiles warmly. The Thracian returns it, his eyes shining
with love. OFF the moment...

EXT. THRACE - CLEARING - DAY (FLASHBACK)

Lush and verdant. A stark contrast to the water-starved
lands of Capua. Snow-capped mountains sparkling on the
horizon. The Thracian's VILLAGE is nestled in a valley in
the distance. THRACIAN WARRIORS say goodbye to their wives
and children.

THE THRACIAN WALKS PAST,

joining Sura on a hilltop. He stands beside her looking out
across the mountains. A beat.

THE THRACIAN

I woke expecting my wife beside me.

SURA

She rose early to pray.

She turns to him, her eyes betraying second thoughts.

SURA (cont'd)

That her husband would stay with
her.

He frowns at the suggestion.

THE THRACIAN

I thought we were in agreement.

SURA

We were.

THE THRACIAN

Were?

SURA

(soft)
The gods came to me last night. In
my sleep.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

The Thracian tenses.

THE THRACIAN

What did they show you?

SURA

My husband on his knees. Bowing
before a great red serpent. The
life flowing from his veins.

THE THRACIAN

And the meaning you take from it?

SURA

A warning. That you are destined
for great and unfortunate things,
if you go to war.

The Thracian absorbs that, gently dismisses it.

THE THRACIAN

The Getae worship the mountain
wolf. They place no faith in
snakes. It was only a dream.

SURA

And if it is not?

THE THRACIAN

I gave my word, Sura. Blood and
honor. It speaks to the man.

She nods, understanding despite her heart cleaving in two.

THE THRACIAN (cont'd)

Nothing will keep me from returning
to your arms. Not the Getae. Not
the Romans. Not the gods
themselves.

He takes her in his arms. She bites back the tears as she
hugs him close.

SURA

The nights grow cold. What am I to
do without you in our bed?

THE THRACIAN

(soft)
Lift your dress.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

She complies, lifting her dress to reveal the turn of a perfect thigh. He removes the ornate PURPLE BINDING from his sheath. He kneels, tying it around her thigh.

THE THRACIAN (cont'd)
Keep me close to your thighs. The
thought will warm us both.

He rises, a warm smile bending his lips. He kisses her, soft and loving.

SURA
(soft)
Kill them all.

THE THRACIAN
For you.

One final kiss, then he turns to join the march from the village. She watches him go, her eyes filled with sadness...and pride.

ON THE THRACIAN

as he slips his helmet on. He picks up the pace and draws his sword as the background BLURS behind him, transforming into --

EXT. MOUNTAINS - NORTHERN BORDER OF THRACE - DAY (FLASHBACK)

A frozen wasteland dotted with half burned trees. The BARBARIANS howl as they crash through the snow, with swords, axes, and spears. The Barbarians wear no helmets, their faces PAINTED in thick streaks, highlighting multiple

FACIAL PIERCINGS AND SCARIFICATIONS.

An army from the depths of the underworld. SNAP AROUND THEM as they streak past, REVEALING

THE THRACIAN AND THE AUXILIARY

rushing to meet them. The Auxiliary is composed entirely of THRACIAN WARRIORS, wearing the armor of their various tribes. They are distinctly non-Roman in appearance -- and ferocity.

TIME SLOWS AND ACCELERATES

as The Thracian slams into the hordes, his sword trailing

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

SLOW MOTION RIBBONS OF BLOOD

as he viciously hacks his way through arms, legs, and guts. The BLOOD RIBBONS hang in the air as the Thracians following PUSH THROUGH THEM, streaking their armor and faces.

THE THRACIAN

Hold the line!

DRENIS,

the prisoner in the arena from the opening, hacks his way through the hordes, bellowing merrily as he adds to the carnage.

DRENIS

I will fuck your women! I WILL FUCK THEM!

BYZO,

aka "the Goat" because of his looks and rather strong odor, runs a Barbarian through with his spear. BLOOD spatters his terrified face as he eyes the overwhelming odds.

BYZO

Where the fuck are the Romans?

THE THRACIAN DECAPITATES A BARBARIAN,

the severed head grimacing in agony as it FLIES PAST THE CAMERA. He spots a BARBARIAN ARCHER about to loose an arrow at him.

THE THRACIAN HURLS HIS SWORD

at the archer. TIME SLOWS as it ROTATES through the battle, narrowly missing Barbarians and Thracians alike. TIME RESUMES as the sword

SLAMS INTO THE ARCHER'S SKULL,

lifting him off his feet. The arrow goes wild, missing The Thracian but still coming close enough to THROW SPARKS as it creases his helmet in SLOW MOTION.

A BARBARIAN BLASTS HIS HORN,

sounding the retreat. The hordes scramble back into the woods as

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

CLAUDIUS GLABER

thunders up on his horse. Glaber, 40, handsome, with the keen eyes of an ambitious man, is the LEGATUS (regional commander) of the Roman campaign. His armor is pristine and unblemished.

GLABER

Romans! Forward!

He thunders after the enemy, followed by ROMAN SOLDIERS and CAVALRY.

DRENIS

Little late.

He spits in contempt. The Thracian laughs.

THE THRACIAN

They'd just get in the way.

He yanks his sword from the fallen Archer's head. BLOOD arcs from the blade. TIME SLOWS as we follow

THE BLOOD SPRAY

up into the sky. It freezes in a familiar pattern, becoming the CRATERS ON THE FULL MOON as we MORPH TO --

A FULL MOON

illuminating a crisp night sky. ADJUST DOWN from the FULL MOON to find we are now --

EXT. MOUNTAINS - THRACE - NIGHT (FLASHBACK)

Snow glitters across the muddy terrain. The Thracian, worse for wear after months of war, stands on a hill overlooking

THE ROMAN ENCAMPMENT.

Thousands of torches reveal the perfect grids of the encampment, with the main command tent in the central square. The Thracian turns away, heading back into the shit and blood stained snow of

THE THRACIAN AUXILIARY ENCAMPMENT.

The Thracians are exhausted, battered, and malnourished. No well organized tents protecting them from the elements. Instead they huddle around

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

MAKESHIFT CAMPFIRES,

animal skins pulled around them for warmth. Drenis, Byzo, and a knot of hard looking THRACIANS choke down bowls of oily soup. Drenis discards his in disgust, the bowl landing at The Thracian's feet.

DRENIS

My own shit would taste better!

BYZO

I cook what they give us, Drenis.

DRENIS

Guts and bones! While Glaber and his Romans feast on meat.

The Thracian picks up Drenis' bowl and scoops himself the dregs of the soup from a large kettle over the fire.

THE THRACIAN

Let them. Women need more nourishment than men.

The men chuckle. Drenis doesn't share their mirth.

DRENIS

This is a laugh? How is this a laugh? Last to eat. Last to share in the spoils.

He kicks over the soup kettle, sending men scrambling.

DRENIS (cont'd)

But always first to be sent against those barbarian cunts.

The men grumble in agreement.

DRENIS (cont'd)

Maybe this isn't it. Not the fucking least. Maybe Legatus fucking Glaber rolls out of his nice warm tent and finds his Thracian dogs've returned to the wild!

The men laugh and nod in support. The Thracian SLURPS HIS SOUP, draining his bowl loudly. All eyes turn.

DRENIS (cont'd)

Something to add, little man?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

THE THRACIAN

A word.

DRENIS

Which might that be?

The Thracian rises.

THE THRACIAN

The one I gave the Romans. And my body and blood with it. We all did, to push the Getae back --

DRENIS

We can defend our own lands!

The men rumble.

THE THRACIAN

We gave our word. In my village such a thing still bears meaning.

DRENIS

Your village. Is that why you're here? To protect your village? Or maybe trying to impress that sweet taste you're always going on about with stories of war.

The Thracian glares. Drenis laughs.

DRENIS (cont'd)

Struck the mark near, did I? Words and honor, my great fat ass! All comes back 'round to a pair of tits and a tight little hole --

WHAM! The Thracian kicks the much bigger Drenis in the gut. Drenis flies back, rolling across the fire as he smashes back to the snow-cruled earth.

EMBERS ERUPT

into the air. Drenis snarls, launches himself at The Thracian. TIME SLOWS and ACCELERATES as the two men trade thunderous blows. The men laugh and howl in encouragement. Violence and mirth. Part and parcel of this ancient land.

THE THRACIAN TAGS DRENIS

in the face with a devastating fist. BLOOD explodes from his mouth, defying gravity in a frozen moment before TIME RESUMES. The blood

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

SPLASHES BYZO IN THE FACE.

Drenis explodes, rushing The Thracian. The Thracian catches him, flipping him to the ground and landing on top of him. Just as he cocks his fist to smash in Drenis' face,

THE SNORT OF A HORSE

splits the air. All eyes whip over to

LEGATUS GLABER

thundering up with his TRIBUNE and SOLDIERS on horseback. The Thracians go quiet. Glaber eyes them with contempt, waves towards his Tribune to address them.

TRIBUNE

The Legatus needs volunteers to scout beyond the forward line.

His eyes fall on The Thracian and Drenis, still entangled.

TRIBUNE (cont'd)

You. Tactical report by sunrise.

GLABER

Or go without rations.

Glaber spurs his horse, thundering off with his men. Drenis glares.

DRENIS

"Please" would have done.

The Thracian stands, offers his hand to help Drenis up.

THE THRACIAN

We'll finish our discussion after.

Drenis accepts his hand with a frown.

DRENIS

And if we're dead?

THE THRACIAN

My boot will find your ass in the afterlife.

The Thracian grins as he yanks his sword from its sheath, the GLEAMING BLADE WIPING US TO --

OMITTED

INT. COMMAND TENT - ROMAN ENCAMPMENT - NIGHT (FLASHBACK)

The command tent is richly appointed with expensive fabrics, divans, pillows, and an intricately carved DESK littered with maps and troop markers. GLABER ENTERS,

tosses his cloak aside as he crosses to the desk. He eyes the maps with concern, the campaign weighing on him.

A CLOAKED FIGURE

dusted with snow disengages from the shadows, creeping up behind him. He senses it at the last moment, whirls as the figure rushes forward -- and kisses him. The Figure laughs, pulling down the hood to reveal

ILITHYIA,

Glaber's young wife. Early 20s, beautiful, with a body built for mischief. Rich. Privileged. Spoiled. Glaber is less than pleased.

GLABER

Ilithyia --

ILITHYIA

(laughs)

What if I'd been an assassin? I'd be a widow. What's the respectful period of mourning before I could remarry?

GLABER

You overstep. Women are forbidden within the encampment.

ILITHYIA

I was discreet.

GLABER

You?

ILITHYIA

Your man helped whisk me through the sentries. After I threatened to run naked through the camp, screaming he laid hands on the wife of the Legatus...

She presses in close, kissing him. He can't help but respond.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

GLABER

Does your father know you're in Thrace?

ILITHYIA

Please. He's too busy colluding with the other corpses in the Senate.

She drapes a perfectly manicured hand over a MARBLE BUST of a stern looking Roman elder. Her father, the Senator.

ILITHYIA (cont'd)

He thinks I'm still lounging at the villa in Capua. Far too arid. Hasn't rained there since last forever. Bad for the complexion.

GLABER

You should have written.

He moves behind her, tasting her neck.

ILITHYIA

You would have told me not to come.

GLABER

I'm in the middle of a war.

His hand finds her breast. She giggles, slipping from his grasp.

ILITHYIA

I brought you a gift. Something to remind you of Rome...

She pulls an ornate JUG OF WINE from her bags.

GLABER

Sestii wine!

ILITHYIA

Let me fill your cup while you tell me about your little war.

She pours as Glaber indicates troop markers on the map.

GLABER

Too brief a tale. Mithridates and his army of Greek whores press the legion in the east by the Black Sea. And here I sit. Protecting the northern border of the land of piss

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

GLABER (cont'd)
and shit from simple barbarian
raiders.

Ilithyia hands Glaber his wine, eyeing the map.

ILITHYIA
Mithridates. Victory against him
would have your name on every
Roman's tongue.

GLABER
Cotta leads the assault.

ILITHYIA
He steals your laurels.

GLABER
He's the Consul. Theft is his
privilege.

ILITHYIA
Father will be disappointed. He
secured this position for you to
shine. And here you sit. Eclipsed.

GLABER
I'm doing what I can.

Ilithyia laughs, dismissing the matter. Almost.

ILITHYIA
Of course you are. I just wish you
were back home. Father's planning a
full day of spectacles and
gladiators! It's the talk of Capua.

Glaber chuckles, eyeing the bust of Ilithyia's father.

GLABER
I hadn't realized elections were
nearing.

ILITHYIA
Never too early to campaign. If
things were heading better, you
could be at his side.

GLABER
If.

Glaber's eyes fall to the map, his mood darkening. Ilithyia
laughs, breaking the tension.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

ILITHYIA

So serious! Bad for the humors.
Come. You haven't tasted your gift
yet.

Glaber eyes his cup, confused. Ilithyia giggles.

ILITHYIA (cont'd)

That isn't your gift...

She opens her cloak, revealing her perfect, naked body
underneath. Glaber's pulse quickens at the sight. He kisses
her, slowly dropping to his knees OUT OF FRAME.

ILITHYIA GASP-GIGGLES,

her hand shooting out to the table to steady herself. TROOP
MARKERS tumble across

THE MAP

as we DIVE INTO IT, the two-dimensional terrain MORPHING
into an AERIAL SHOT of --

EXT. MOUNTAINS - ENEMY FRONT - NIGHT (FLASHBACK)

We PLUMMET from the aerial shot to find The Thracian and
Drenis stealthily advancing through the arctic mountainside.
The Thracian pauses, signaling Drenis to hold. Nerves
strain.

THE SOUND OF DRUMS,

distant and menacing, are carried on the frigid winds. The
Thracian signals Drenis to swing wide up onto

A HILL

thick with snow. They crest it on their bellies, peering
down into

A FROZEN VALLEY

some distance away. TORCHES dot the icy landscape as the
Barbarian hordes strike their tents and load their horses.
Drenis grins, his teeth gleaming in the moonlight.

THE THRACIAN

They're breaking camp.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

DRENIS

Frightened little gashes, running
with their cocks between their
cheeks.

The Thracian's eyes narrow at the line of torches heading
off into the night.

THE THRACIAN

Retreat would take them beyond the
mountains to the north. Their
torches bear west.

DRENIS

West?

THE THRACIAN

They're swinging around to attack
the villages below the pass. Our
villages.

DRENIS

Slippery fucking cunts.

The Thracian's eyes burn at the thought. WE ARM UP AND OVER
the scene, the terrain once again MORPHING into

THE TWO DIMENSIONAL MAP

on Glaber's war table. Pull back to reveal we are in --

INT. COMMAND TENT - ROMAN ENCAMPMENT - NIGHT (FLASHBACK)

Glaber eyes his war map in surprise.

GLABER

West?

He glances up across the table at The Thracian and Drenis,
the Tribune lurking in the background. The Thracian
indicates positions on the map.

THE THRACIAN

They break for the mountain pass,
here. It will take them four days
at the most to reach the villages
below. Food. Supplies. Women... All
unprotected.

And his wife. Glaber considers the map.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

GLABER

It's a simple thing to be turned in the mountains at night. Perhaps I should send a Roman to properly assess the situation.

THE THRACIAN

Send the gods themselves. They'll report the same.

Glaber locks eyes with him.

GLABER

Dismissed.

THE THRACIAN

If we march by midday we can easily --

GLABER

Dismissed.

The Thracian clenches his jaw before a whipping offense spills from his mouth. The Tribune escorts him and Drenis out. A moment later

ILITHYIA APPEARS

from behind a partition.

ILITHYIA

The barbarians head west.

GLABER

So it appears.

ILITHYIA

Further yet from Mithridates and the Greeks. And the glory you deserve.

Glaber stares at the map, a man pressed by duty. Haunted by ambition. He comes to a decision, begins sliding troop markers on the map.

GLABER

Return to Capua.

She eyes him for a moment, not used to such abrupt treatment.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

ILITHYIA

And my father? How will he measure
the man he blessed with his
daughter?

Glaber pauses, turning the question.

GLABER

A colossus, towering above the
enemies of Rome.

He slides a large CAVALRY MARKER east across the map, WIPING
US TO --

EXT. ROMAN ENCAMPMENT - NIGHT (FLASHBACK)

The Thracian thunders down a dirt road lined with well
ordered Roman tents. Drenis follows, more subdued in his
reaction.

THE THRACIAN

Pompous, arrogant, Roman boy-lover!
All but called us liars.

DRENIS

How are you certain?

THE THRACIAN

You heard what he said. "Turned in
the mountains at night!" Like he's
speaking to children!

DRENIS

No, about the boys. How do you know
he favors them?

The Thracian glares.

THE THRACIAN

Now who's having a laugh?

DRENIS

There is a tickle at the back of my
throat.

THE THRACIAN

That would be the cock Glaber just
forced down it.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

DRENIS

If he wants to send his own men,
let him. Won't change the direction
the Getae move.

THE THRACIAN

Glaber's the most dangerous kind of
fool. One with a title.

DRENIS

Truth. But perhaps he has better
sense when it comes to wine...

He opens his cloak to reveal the ornate JUG OF WINE Glaber's
wife Ilithyia brought him. Drenis just lifted it from the
command tent. The Thracian stares in disbelief.

THE THRACIAN

(hushed)
You stole his wine?!

DRENIS

Only borrowed it. Plan to piss it
back shortly.

Drenis quickly conceals the jug with his cloak as they pass
a knot of ROMAN SOLDIERS, WIPING US TO --

EXT. AUXILIARY ENCAMPMENT - DAY - SUNRISE (FLASHBACK)

Close on the dying embers of a fire. PULL BACK to reveal The
Thracian sitting beside it, watching the sunrise as he
sharpens his sword with a stone. His weary, concerned eyes
tell of no sleep. And worry for his wife's safety.

DRENIS

snores nearby, passed out beside his jug of pilfered wine.
Drool entangles Drenis' beard, intent on forming a frozen
crust.

A PIERCING HORN

splits the air. The Thracian tenses. Finally, the call to
arms. SHOUTS ERUPT, followed by Byzo and the other men
hustling to gather their gear. Spartacus nudges Drenis.

THE THRACIAN

Up.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

DRENIS
 (half asleep)
 I will fuck your mother.

THE THRACIAN
 The Romans sound the call.

DRENIS
 Fuck the Romans. And their fucking
 horns.

The Thracian kicks Drenis.

THE THRACIAN
 Up, you drunken goat. The Legatus
 has gained his senses.

Drenis groans, his eyes struggling to adjust to the harsh
 aftermath of day. The Thracian tends to his gear.

DRENIS
 Any wine left?

THE THRACIAN
 Your belly holds the sum.

DRENIS
 (belching)
 It may return the balance
 presently.

He rises with a groan, wipes at his beard.

DRENIS (cont'd)
 How far to the mouth of the pass?

THE THRACIAN
 Three days by foot, if we march
 with meaning.

DRENIS
 A drink would spur my intent.

The Thracian laughs.

THE THRACIAN
 My village is only a ways further
 west. My wine is yours after we --

Byzo pauses in packing his meager gear.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

BYZO

West? We march east, to challenge Mithridates.

The Thracian shares a look with Drenis.

DRENIS

Byzo. Did the Legatus send his own men to scout the front?

BYZO

Yes, he told me all about it over a delicious morning meal. How the fuck should I know? They blow their fucking horns, a Roman dog barks and the gods shit on me. Welcome to the fucking auxiliary.

THE THRACIAN

The fool moves opposite to purpose. The Getae head west.

The men within earshot react.

BYZO

What lends you the bearing?

THE THRACIAN

My eyes, and a head borne of reason. If we don't move to follow, every village west of here will fall.

The men grumble, a crowd beginning to form. Byzo snorts in contempt.

BYZO

My village lies south.

DRENIS

The direction shit runs.

The Thracian spots Legatus Glaber riding up in full polished adornment, flanked by his Tribune and TWO ROMAN SOLDIERS.

THE THRACIAN

Light rides to the matter.

He steps in the way of their horses, halting them.

THE THRACIAN (cont'd)

A word, Legatus?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

The Tribune cuts him off.

TRIBUNE

Move to formation. We advance east.

THE THRACIAN

(to Glaber)

Surely you mean west, as the Getae advance.

Glaber stares down from his mount. Shit in his path.

GLABER

Mithridates and his Greeks are of pressing concern.

(to Thracians)

You have aligned yourself with Rome. I am its body and voice. We march east to the Black Sea. Fall to formation.

THE THRACIAN

No.

The air electrifies. A ripple of uncertainty passes through the Thracian Soldiers. Glaber glares down at The Thracian.

GLABER

You would defy an order from your Legatus?

THE THRACIAN

I gave my word to defend against the Getae. Not to march east to attack Mithridates --

GLABER

You will march where commanded!

Glaber suddenly draws his sword to strike The Thracian. The Thracian reacts, grabbing the bridle of Glaber's horse and yanking hard. The horse rears back.

TIME SLOWS

as Glaber is thrown, his body drifting lazily to the ground.

THE TRIBUNE AND HIS SOLDIERS

reach for their swords.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

THE THRACIAN

registers shock at the sudden turn of misfortune. The path of his life has just veered sharply.

TIME RESUMES,

smashing Glaber to the muddy ground, sending him reeling into unconsciousness. The Tribune and his Soldiers whip their swords free. Byzo tries to calm the situation.

BYZO

Wait -- wait!

The Tribune swings his sword. TIME SLOWS as The Thracian whips his head back to avoid the blow. The Tribune's blade SEVERES A HUNK of The Thracian's unruly mane. TIME RESUMES.

HELL IS UNLEASHED

as Drenis and the Thracians rush to meet the Roman threat in kind.

ROMAN SOLDIER #1

is run through the side by a THRACIAN SPEARMAN. The Tribune and Roman Soldier #2 hack their way through the mob. The Spearman is cut down in a SPRAY OF BLOOD.

ROMAN SOLDIER #2

is yanked from his horse. The mob falls on him with swords and axes, splashing their twisted faces with hot blood.

THE TRIBUNE

is pulled off his horse by Drenis. The Tribune kicks him away and makes a break for the Roman encampment. The Thracian grabs up the Spearman's weapon and draws back. He hesitates, knowing the measure it will cost him to unleash it.

DRENIS

Throw! Throw, damn you, before he

--

The Thracian hurls the spear. It WHISTLES through the air. BLOOD ERUPTS as it slices the Tribune's neck open. He clutches at the wound, tumbles to the ground, dead. The Thracian stares, eyes filled with the weight of the deed.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

BYZO

What have you done, you stupid
shit?!

DRENIS

What he had to!
(to the mob)
Break and go your way! West if your
lives are there. If not, I could
give a fuck.

The men scatter, grabbing their gear. Drenis moves to The Thracian, who stares at the carnage, his fate altered beyond repair.

DRENIS (cont'd)

What of the Legatus?

The Thracian casts his eyes to Glaber, laying unconscious in the muddy snow. His face hardens.

THE THRACIAN

Leave him in the mud.

The Thracian turns to go, his CLOAK WIPING US TO --

EXT. THRACE - CLEARING - DAY (FLASHBACK)

The golden sun warms the skin of Sura, The Thracian's wife. She hums absently, gathering PERSIMMONS from the great gnarled tree..

SURA PAUSES,

sensing something. Her eyes scan the tree line. Nothing. She laughs at herself, turns to go -- and freezes.

A BARBARIAN

is now standing in the clearing, watching her. A frozen beat. The Barbarian doesn't move. Sura's eyes flick to the tree line as

MORE BARBARIANS

appear from the woods. FIVE in all. Standing. Watching. A bird CAWS. Sura explodes into purpose, making a break for it. The Barbarians descend.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

BARBARIAN #1 GRABS HER,

laughing at her struggles. WHAM! His mirth is cut short as she slams her head into his nose, breaking it in a

SPURT OF BLOOD.

He howls, releasing her. She whirls and plants her foot in his crotch. Barbarian #1 sucks air in agony.

SURA GRABS HIS SWORD,

yanking it from his sheath as he crumples to the ground. The remaining four Barbarians chuckle as they encircle her, drawing their own weapons. She holds her sword out, trying to keep them at bay, which makes them laugh even harder.

A BARBARIAN WITH ROTTED TEETH (#2)

grins as he steps forward with his axe -- then freezes in confusion as he spots something behind Sura high in the sky. Sura glances behind her and sees

SOMETHING GLINTING THROUGH THE AIR

like a diamond in the sky. At the last second Sura realizes what it is. TIME SLOWS as Sura ducks, narrowly avoiding

THE THRACIAN'S SWORD

as it whizzes past her head. TIME RESUMES as the sword slams into ROTTEN TEETH'S mouth, knocking him off his feet in an explosion of blood and teeth. Dead before he hits the ground.

THE THRACIAN APPEARS

from the treeline, sprinting full tilt at the Barbarians. He's now armed with nothing but a shield. Sura's heart leaps into her chest.

SHE SWINGS HER SWORD,

slicing open Barbarian #1 as he struggles back to his feet.

TIME SLOWS AND ACCELERATES

as The Thracian launches himself at the remaining three Barbarians. He slams his shield into Barbarian #3, crushing his face in a spray of sweat and blood. Barbarian #4 and #5 attack,

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

HAMMERING THE THRACIAN

with sword and axe. Sura tries to intervene, but Barbarian #4 backhands her in the face. She reels back, blood flowing from a busted lip.

THE THRACIAN ERUPTS,

his shield flashing in the sun as it finds Barbarian #4's throat, crushing it in an explosion of gore. A beat as The Thracian and Barbarian #5 eye each other, bloodied and winded.

BARBARIAN #5 HOWLS,

rushing The Thracian. They trade blows, each getting in their crimson strikes. The Thracian slams the edge of his shield into Barbarian #5's axe arm,

SNAPPING THE BONE

and sending his axe tumbling. Barbarian #5 screams, dropping to his knees to clutch at the BONES protruding from his flesh. The Thracian grabs the fallen axe and

DECAPITATES BARBARIAN #5

in a geyser of blood and gore. The headless body crumples. Twitches. Is finally still.

SURA AND THE THRACIAN

rush to each other. He grabs her into a passionate kiss. She touches his battered face, a thousand questions searing her tongue.

A BARBARIAN HORN

splits the air, interrupting the answers.

THE THRACIAN

The village...

They rush to

A HILL

Overlooking their village. THICK SMOKE rises from the destruction of the barbarian assault. Sura starts forward, but The Thracian catches her arm. He shakes his head, his face etched with regret.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

THE THRACIAN (cont'd)

We have to go. Now.

He turns away, his body WIPING US TO --

EXT. PLAINS - THRACE - NIGHT (FLASHBACK)

A CAMPFIRE burns. PULL BACK to REVEAL Sura sitting alone beside it. Stained by dirt and blood, face etched by fear and regret. Something moves behind her. She whirls to find

THE THRACIAN

appearing from the darkness. Bruised and battered from his adventures, sword in hand.

THE THRACIAN

They haven't followed.

SURA

Why would they. When they have an entire village to...

She can't finish the thought. The Thracian's face slides into regret.

THE THRACIAN

You were right. I never should have left.

SURA

You had given your word. The fault lies with the Romans in breaking theirs.

THE THRACIAN

I'll point to their shortcomings, if I ever find myself in Rome.

He sits with a grimace, favoring his side. Sura tenses.

SURA

You're hurt.

THE THRACIAN

It's nothing.

SURA

Let me see.

THE THRACIAN

Sura --

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

SURA
(firmly)
Let me see.

THE THRACIAN
Your tone is disquieting.

SURA
You should be used to it by now.

He frowns, gingerly moves his cloak aside. His well muscled body is revealed. Sura reacts to the bruises, scrapes, and gashes. A tapestry of pain.

THE THRACIAN
(soft, off her look)
I'm all right.

She forces a smile.

SURA
Of course you are. Hold still...

She takes piece of wrap from her dress. He winces as she tends to his wounds. A long beat. The fire crackles, throwing flickering shadows across their faces.

SURA (cont'd)
(soft)
It's gone, isn't it? The village.
Everyone we knew.

THE THRACIAN
(a beat)
We'll move south. I had people there once. The Getae won't venture that far. Not to the risk of thinning their numbers.

SURA
And the Romans?

THE THRACIAN
Their concern rests against Mithridates to the east.

SURA
South it is.

The Thracian watches her face as the campfire caresses it. Even dirty and disheveled, she's radiantly beautiful. The Thracian drifts from love to sadness.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

THE THRACIAN

(soft)

I wish I had been a thousand men.

SURA

You did what you could. You came back. For me. Knowing it could mean your life.

He puts a hand to her cheek.

THE THRACIAN

There is no life without you.

He kisses her. Longing and desire flare. They hungrily devour each other, silhouetted by the campfire.

MOVE INTO THE FIRE

as the FLAMES consume the screen. SHADOWS of SURA and THE THRACIAN'S NAKED BODIES writhe within them. The flames ABATE, dissolving to

THE SMOULDERING REMAINS

of the campfire, warmed by a golden sun. PULL BACK to reveal we've TRANSITIONED TO --

EXT. PLAINS - THRACE - DAY (FLASHBACK)

The Thracian lies naked under his cloak, Sura nestled against him. He stirs, his eyes finding her. Even more radiant in slumber. His gaze moves down her body to

HER BARE LEG

half exposed. A bit of FABRIC flutters. He eases the blanket back, revealing the PURPLE BINDING tied once again to her thigh. His fingers caress it. Sura stirs. She smiles sleepily, eyes sparkling with love -- until a SHADOW eclipses them, the source filling her with terror. The Thracian whips around to find

ROMAN SOLDIERS

now looming over them. He grabs for his sword but a SOLDIER'S BOOT slams down on his arm. The Thracian grunts in pain.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

SURA SCREAMS

as calloused hands rip her from the crude bed, hoisting her naked into the morning air.

THE THRACIAN

Sura!

Boots slam into The Thracian as the Soldiers kick him into submission.

SURA

No!

Sura is dragged away. The Thracian desperately struggles to follow.

THE THRACIAN

Sura --

WHAM! A boot catches him in the face. TIME SLOWS as BLOOD arcs from his mouth, the crimson wave hanging in the air for a moment before TIME RESUMES. The Thracian's head swims, his eyes forced back into focus by the appearance of

GLABER ASTRIDE HIS HORSE,

riding up with more SOLDIERS. A GASH creases Glaber's brow from his fall from his horse in the Auxiliary encampment. The Thracian is yanked to his feet.

GLABER

Did you truly believe? That
insurrection could be cast without
consequence?

Glaber dismounts, confronting The Thracian.

GLABER (cont'd)

My Tribune dead. Half the auxiliary
deserted.

He reaches into his cloak and pulls out an official looking scroll wrapped around a heavy, ornate rod.

GLABER (cont'd)

Now orders recalling me to Rome.
All from your hand.

The Thracian spits blood, glares.

THE THRACIAN

I own my actions. But my wife --

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

GLABER
Has been condemned to slavery,
courtesy of her husband.

The Thracian lunges, but the soldiers hold him.

GLABER (cont'd)
The shadow of Rome is vast. And
you, Thracian, will die under it.

Glaber swings the dispatch. It finds The Thracian's jaw, snapping his head from the impact. His eyes unfocus, legs turning to jelly as the Soldiers release him.

THE THRACIAN FALLS,

the ground below him transforming into the INKY BLACK ABYSS of unconsciousness. He tumbles down into it, swallowed by

THE VOID,

vast and impenetrable. A beat. A SOUND RISES: the CREAKING of WOOD. A DROP OF WATER hits the void, rippling and dissolving the darkness to reveal an ECU of

THE THRACIAN,

battered and unconscious. WATER drips on his face, refreshing the dried, caked blood. PULL BACK to reveal we are now --

INT. SHIP'S HOLD - NIGHT (FLASHBACK)

Dark and dank. The wooden hull CREAKS as the ship pitches along its course. The Thracian's eyes suddenly SNAP OPEN. He blinks, his head swimming.

VOICE (O.S.)
Good of you to join us.

The Thracian glances over to find DRENIS,

battered and bloody, grinning at him. Byzo and three other men from the THRACIAN AUXILIARY are with him, all in equal condition. All crammed into a cage in the cargo hold.

DRENIS
Thought you were dead there for a
while.

BYZO
Smells dead. Stupid fuck.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

The Thracian tries to rise, groans, his head pounding.

DRENIS

Easy. You've been out for days.

Drenis helps him sit. The Thracian takes in his surroundings.

THE THRACIAN

We're at sea?

DRENIS

Upon the Adriatic. Bound for Capua.

BYZO

And death. Because of you.

THE THRACIAN

Sura...

DRENIS

Your woman?

THE THRACIAN

The Romans took her.

Drenis frowns, knowing what that will mean.

DRENIS

Best to forget her then.

The Thracian shakes him off, eyes blazing.

DRENIS (cont'd)

(soft)

You know what they'll do to her.

The fire drains from The Thracian. He looks at the other men, beaten and bloody, knowing the fate he's condemned his wife to will be infinitely worse.

A ROMAN SHIP

sailing the seas of the Adriatic dissolves up, quickly giving way to --

A MAP

drawn in the same crude style as the opening. A RED LINE indicating the progress moves across the sea, hits what will one day be known as Italy, veers north. As it nears

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

CAPUA

we dive closer, rough sketches of buildings and city streets springing into existence. THE LINE FADES as we come to

A LAVISH VILLA

on a hill overlooking the city. As we DIVE INTO THE MAP, the lines of the villa erupt into the air, MORPHING US TO --

EXT./INT. VILLA - CAPUA - DAY (FLASHBACK)

The harsh sun scorches Ilithyia, Glaber's wife, as she stands on the balcony, lost in thought. A breeze stirs her hair. She closes her eyes, hoping it will cool the sweat staining her face. A beat.

A HAND APPEARS

into FRAME, reaching out to touch her cheek. As it makes contact she jolts back, her eyes crashing open to find

GLABER

now standing beside her. He smiles playfully.

GLABER

What if I'd been an assassin?

Ilithyia flings herself at him. She finds his mouth, devours it.

ILITHYIA

Father's in town. He'll be back shortly.

GLABER

How shortly?

His hand slips down to explore just how excited she is to see him. She giggles, slipping from his grasp.

ILITHYIA

He's not very happy with you.

GLABER

And his daughter?

Her face slips into concern. And disappointment.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

ILITHYIA

She missed her husband. But fears
his reappearance has come too soon.

Glaber turns away, looking out across the city.

GLABER

The games your father presents the
people of Capua. Have I missed
them?

ILITHYIA

They begin tomorrow.

GLABER

The feast is tonight?

ILITHYIA

That's to his purpose in town.
Barking orders till everything is
set just so.

GLABER

I would have a word with him.

ILITHYIA

It will take more than one to
regain his favor. The senate
chamber is full of whispers over
your --

(catching herself)
Early return.

GLABER

The cheers of the crowd will still
their tongues.

ILITHYIA

Cheers? How will you draw them,
short of victory?

GLABER

By giving them a gift few have ever
seen: Thracian blood, spilled in
the arena. Win the hearts of the
crowd, and the senate will beg to
follow.

A COMMOTION ERUPTS from inside the villa. The angry voice of
SENATOR ALBINUS, barely discernible, rumbles like distant
thunder.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

ALBINIUS (O.S.)
Inbred shit whores! I should sell
the lot of you to the mines!

ILITHYIA
Father's returned. And in a fine
state.

Glaber clouds with worry.

GLABER
If he refuses to aid my
intentions...

ILITHYIA
He refuses his daughter nothing,
when pleaded with teary eye.
(taking his arm)
I'll have you the toast of the
feast, your gifts well astonished.

She heads inside with a smile, WIPING US TO --

EXT. COURTYARD - CAPUA - NIGHT (FLASHBACK)

A courtyard has been lavishly appointed for the Cena Libera,
the outrageously indulgent feast the night before the munus
(gladiatorial games). MUSIC plays. GUESTS bray as they eat
and fuck. NAKED SLAVES offer epicurean oddities. Precious
WATER flows freely.

SENATOR ALBINIUS

steps into FRAME, commanding attention.

SENATOR ALBINIUS
Good citizens of Capua! Revered
guests! Ancient friends!

Albinus nods at a WIZENED MAN with a great WHITE BEARD. The
Guests LAUGH.

SENATOR ALBINIUS (cont'd)
A debt of gratitude for partaking
in this celebration of the family
name of Albinus!

CROWD
Albinus! Albinus!

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

SENATOR ALBINIUS

Your attendance honors the memory of my elders, gone too soon from the realm of the living, and the joy of a daughter, yet so full of life.

He indicates Ilithyia, a vision in her intricate gown. She glows at the compliment.

SENATOR ALBINIUS (cont'd)

I repay your kindness with gifts of water! Carried from Rome where the gods have seen fit to keep the drought at bay! And gifts of blood, to be spilled in the arena!

The Guests cheer.

CROWD

Albinus! Good Albinus!

SENATOR ALBINIUS

Quintus Lentulus Batiatus! Step forward and present your gladiators!

BATIATUS, a thick, boisterous man in his 50s, appears on a platform in the center of the courtyard.

BATIATUS

In honor of Senator Albinus and the people of Capua, I give you Barca! The Beast of Carthage!

The Guests applaud as BARCA, a wild giant of a man, climbs the platform. He grunts, grinning viciously for their amusement.

BATIATUS (cont'd)

Yet his ferocity pales against the titan of the arena! The god of blood and sand! Crixus! The undefeated Gaul!

CRIXUS takes his place besides Barca. Smaller than Barca but more powerfully built, Crixus radiates calm, deadly menace. The Guests greet him with cheers.

SENATOR ALBINIUS

Gratitude to Batiatus! Now to Marcus Decius Solonius, and his offerings!

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

Batiatus and his men move off as SOLONIUS, mid 40s, a tall, severe man with a shaved head takes the platform.

SOLONIUS

In honor of Senator Albinus and the people of Capua, I give you six of my finest men! Behold Arkadios! Scourge of Athens!

ARKADIOS, an ugly, scarred brute, takes the platform to the cheers of the crowd. Batiatus joins his wife LUCRETIA, a striking woman very much his junior.

BATIATUS

A Greek! The bald headed cock offers a common Greek! Like digging in the backyard to provide dinner for your guests.

LUCRETIA

(sotto)

You promised to hold silent.

BATIATUS

I promise many things. And keep fewer.

Batiatus glares over at Solonius. The man continues introducing his gladiators in the background.

BATIATUS (cont'd)

Preening shit eater. A mockery to the profession.

LUCRETIA

A mockery then.

BATIATUS

You disagree?

LUCRETIA

(soft yet sharp)

Let it pass. We're guests of the Senator. He's invited us to sit in the pulvinus.

BATIATUS

As consolation! Only two of my men retained to fight in tomorrow's games! While Solonius secures half a dozen of his ill-trained simians. The man has fingers in all the

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

BATIATUS (cont'd)
proper assholes. He wiggles them
and everyone shits gold.

Solonius finishes presenting his last man. The crowd cheers,
laughing and drinking.

SENATOR ALBINIUS
Gratitude to Solonius! But water
and games are distant praise for
the city that has held the name
Albinus as its own. More is
deserved! And the gods have seen
fit to bestow it in the form of my
daughter's husband, Legatus
Claudius Glaber, newly returned
from the savage lands of Thrace!

Albinus waves his hand, directing the crowd to Glaber as he
enters with his Soldiers. The Thracian prisoners are
presented in his wake.

THE PRISONERS

eye the scene, overwhelmed -- except for The Thracian, who
stares with dead, lifeless eyes. The crowd TITTERS.

GLABER
More gifts for the people of Capua!
Six Thracian jackals! Deserters
from the war against the barbaric
Getae! To be executed ad gladium in
tomorrow's games!

CHEERS of excitement as the Guests crowd for a better look.
Glaber basks in the triumph. Ilithyia beams, taking her
father's arm.

ILITHYIA
He is well received.

Albinus' senatorial smile belies a deeper displeasure.

ALBINIUS
Ask favor for him again, and your
tears will fall short of notice.
(to the crowd)
Come! Let us have music and drink!

Albinus disengages from her, turning his back to the
Thracian spectacle. Glaber's joy is tempered by the sight.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

A FAT MAN

gnaws on a bone of meat, wrinkling his nose at the Thracians.

FAT MAN
Jupiter's cock, the smell!

GLABER
The stench of treachery.

He smiles politely, moving after Albinus. The Fat Man tosses the decimated bone in the dirt at the prisoners' feet. Byzo dives for it.

DRENIS

yanks the chain connecting him, snapping Byzo back before he can seize the prize. The Romans LAUGH.

DRENIS
On your feet!

BYZO
I'm starving!

DRENIS
Then fill your belly with hate!
Show these Roman shits how a
Thracian faces death.

THE THRACIAN
(soft)
Let him eat.

Drenis shoots him a look. The Thracian stares off. Byzo hesitates, then falls on his last meal, not even bothering to wipe the dirt from it.

THE CLASH OF WOODEN SWORDS

draws The Thracian's attention to Arkadios and another of Solonius' men atop the platform. A demonstration in fighting techniques for the pleasure of the crowd. Batiatus passes with Lucretia, eyeing the Thracians.

BATIATUS
Thracians.
(snorts)
Between those animals and Solonius'
inferior offerings... A mockery, on
all accounting.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

LUCRETIA

Glaber mentions execution. Perhaps a word could lend our men to the task.

SOLONIUS

The position has been occupied.

Batiatus turns to find Solonius, his rival, near at hand. Batiatus instantly shifts into a mask of delight.

BATIATUS

Good Solonius! I was just marveling at your wares!

SOLONIUS

And I at yours...

He nods appreciatively at Lucretia.

LUCRETIA

You flatter.

SOLONIUS

I appreciate.

He turns his attention to Batiatus.

SOLONIUS (cont'd)

Good to lay eyes, old friend. I feared for a time you would be excluded.

BATIATUS

Games absent Batiatus?!

(snorts)

The dawn without the sun!

Solonius casts an eye towards Crixus and Barca, on display for the admiring guests.

SOLONIUS

Crixus and Barca. Two fine entries. They should provide distraction between the more important bouts.

BATIATUS

High waters, elevating the proceedings.

Solonius catches sight of Albinus across the way with Ilithyia and Glaber, motioning him over.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

SOLONIUS
The Senator beckons.

He takes Lucretia's hand in parting.

SOLONIUS (cont'd)
If I miss you at the games
tomorrow, Lucretia...

LUCRETIA
Unlikely. We've been invited to
seat in the pulvinus.

SOLONIUS
The pulvinus? With the senator?

BATIATUS
A great honor.

SOLONIUS
For you, certainly.
(to Lucretia)
I'll enjoy your company there.

He nods to Lucretia, moving off to join Albinus. Batiatus darkens.

BATIATUS
I shall witness his heart on a day.
Parted from his chest.

Lucretia wipes at her hand where Solonius touched her.

LUCRETIA
I will pleasantly grip the knife.

Lucretia moves off with Batiatus, revealing

THE THRACIAN

staring dispassionately from across the courtyard. Byzo gawks slack-jawed at the debauchery of the Cena Libera.

BYZO
I've never beheld such sights.

DRENIS
Nor will you again.

Drenis darkens, feeling the hand of death closing near. The Thracian glances at him, but there are no words left of meaning. He looks away, his eyes falling on

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

ARKADIOS

still engaged in mock combat. Arkadios catches the look. He grins at The Thracian, the promise of death flashing in it. As the wooden swords crash against each other they MORPH INTO STEEL, TRANSITIONING us to --

EXT. ARENA - CAPUA - DAY

The CROWD HOWLS as Arkadios (the Murmillo Gladiator) toys with a bloodied Drenis (bringing us full circle to the beginning of the episode). DRIFT AWAY from the battle, moving across the arena to find

THE THRACIAN

standing behind the bars of the PRISON PEN set into the arena wall, watching Drenis struggle for his life. He glances back, revealing

THE MANGLED BODIES

of Byzo and the other Thracian deserters littering the floor of the pen. They've already stepped into the arena. And fared poorly. The ROAR of the CROWD pulls him back with hope to THE ARENA

where Drenis surges forward, attacking. Arkadios expertly counters, swinging around and SLICING OPEN Drenis' arm. He grunts in pain, recovers to attack.

ARKADIOS

counters, his sword catching the sun as it finds Drenis' neck, opening it to the bone in a SPRAY OF BLOOD. Drenis falls to his knees, forcing a last defiant smile before giving himself to the sand.

THE CROWD ROARS

as LIBITINARII, the men in charge of clearing the corpses, rush in to carry off Drenis' body. Arkadios raises his sword in salute to

THE PULVINUS,

literally the "pillow of honor," the ancient equivalent to a sky box. Glaber acknowledges Arkadios to the cheers of the people. Ilithyia glows next to him. Albinus smiles politely. A crush of other honored guests crowd the pulvinus, including Batiatus, Lucretia and Solonius, seated in the second row behind Albinus.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

ILITHYIA

The crowd approves his gifts.

ALBINIUS

As do we all.

GLABER

I've withheld something of note for
the last...

THE ARENA

The gate to the prison pen grinds open. The Thracian steps out with his sword, disoriented by the sun and the crowd. Arkadios waves him forward. Time to die. The Thracian's hand tightens on his sword. He steps forward to meet his fate, but as he does

THREE MORE GLADIATORS

hustle into the ring, surrounding the Thracian. Each Gladiator is from a different classification: SECUTOR (axe), HOPLOMACHUS (spear), and RETIARIUS (trident and net).

THE CROWD MURMURS

in disapproval. Four against one. Unfair, and very unRoman.

THE PULVINUS

Albinus echoes the sentiment of the crowd, turning his barely contained ire towards Glaber.

ALBINIUS

The odds seem out of favor.

ILITHYIA

This Thracian caused Rome a great
disservice, father.

GLABER

His cowardice led to mass
desertion.

ALBINIUS

Is his life not ample repayment of
the slight?

GLABER

He must be humiliated in example.
Solonius was kind enough to offer
his services in the act.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

Solonius grins uncomfortably, makes a gesture of apology under Albinus' withering glare.

ALBINUS
(to Glaber)
Give the command.

Glaber motions the Gladiators to commence.

THE ARENA

The Thracian turns, trying to keep each of the Gladiators in check as they close in. The Retiarius swings his NET lazily overhead, the checkerboard SHADOW ebbing and flowing across The Thracian's sweat drenched face.

TIME SLOWS AND ACCELERATES

as the Hoplomachus begins the attack, thrusting his spear out. The Thracian SNAPS his head out of the way, SWEAT erupting from the force. He counters, spinning to KICK the Hoplomachus back.

THE RETIARIUS

sweeps in with his net, catching The Thracian's foot and YANKING him from his feet. He crashes to the sand, narrowly rolling out of the way as Arkadios thrusts down with his sword.

THE THRACIAN'S BLADE

flashes out, cutting him free of the net. He rolls to his feet but is instantly set upon by the Secutor. The Thracian is knocked off balance.

THE HOPLOMACHUS SWINGS HIS SPEAR,

the arc of the tip OPENING A GASH across The Thracian's back.

THE PULVINUS

Glaber grins in satisfaction. Albinus is unreadable. Batiatus less so.

BATIATUS
(soft)
A mockery.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

THE ARENA

The Gladiators play cat and bloody mouse with The Thracian, opening up repeated wounds on his ravaged body. The Thracian tries to rally, but Arkadios slams him with his shield.

THE THRACIAN FALLS TO HIS KNEES

in the blood-soaked sand. The BOO of the Crowd FADES from The Thracian's ears, replaced by the SOUND of his own LABORED BREATHING. His eyes unfocus as he struggles to retain consciousness.

A DROPLET OF BLOOD

breaks free from his face -- but never makes it to the ground. Instead it slows, hanging impossibly in mid-air. The Thracian stares in hallucinatory wonder as

BLOOD RISES

like steam from the sand to join the droplet, twisting together to form A GREAT RED SERPENT

writhing in the air. Sura's spectral vision. The Thracian stares at it in wonder, the words of his wife carried on the hot breeze:

SURA'S VOICE

(a whisper)

Kill them all...

The Thracian grits his teeth, drawing strength from her words. As he focuses through the pain, the RED SERPENT dissipates, MORPHING into

A SNAKE STANDARD

carved into Arkadios' shield. Splattered with blood, the snake-adorned shield has taken on the deep red hue of Sura's vision.

THE DROPLET OF BLOOD

from The Thracian's face resumes its journey, falling to the sand. The SOUNDS of the ARENA crash back up as Arkadios raises his sword for the death blow.

THE THRACIAN EXPLODES,

his own blade flashing in the sun as he RUNS ARKADIOS THROUGH THE GUT with his sword. The crowd goes silent. A

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

frozen moment. The Thracian breaks it by rearing to his feet and

SPLITTING ARKADIOS IN HALF

from belly to shoulder as he yanks his sword up in a SPRAY OF BLOOD and INTERNAL ORGANS. The crowd erupts, ROARING their approval. The Thracian gains strength from it, engaging the remaining three Gladiators with renewed purpose.

THE PULVINUS

Glaber tenses. Ilithyia shares his concern.

THE ARENA

The Thracian trades blows with the remaining three Gladiators in a display of raw savagery. The Secutor rears back and

HURLS HIS AXE

at The Thracian's head. TIME SLOWS. The Thracian barely bends out of the way. As the axe passes in front of his face, he sees

THE REFLECTION OF THE RETIARIUS

raising his trident to attack from behind. TIME RESUMES. The AXE whizzes past The Thracian, accidentally

SLAMMING INTO THE HOPLOMACHUS,

killing him instantly.

THE RETIARIUS

thrusts his trident at The Thracian's back, but he whirls, diving under it. The Thracian swings his sword and

CLEANLY SEVERS THE LEGS

out from under the Retiarius. The Retiarius screams, blood spraying as he falls to the sand.

THE SECUTOR

desperately tries to yank his axe free from his fallen comrade's chest as the Thracian rises, dripping with blood and gore, his eyes burning. Just as the Secutor frees his axe THE THRACIAN HURLS HIS SWORD,

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

the blade slamming into the Gladiator's neck. He goes down, SPEWING BLOOD from his helmet as he dies. The crowd goes insane.

THE RETIARIUS,

tries to crawl away, his severed legs leaving a trail of gore like a great injured slug. The Thracian retrieves the fallen trident and

SLAMS IT INTO THE RETIARIUS' SKULL,

pinning the man to the ground. He twitches, goes still. The CROWD ROARS. The Thracian sways, more dead than alive as he locks eyes with

GLABER

in the Pulvinus. Glaber fumes. Albinus gauges the approval of the crowd.

CROWD

Live! Live! Let him live!

ALBINIUS

This presents some difficulty.

GLABER

The sentence of death holds.

ALBINIUS

But to defy the wishes of the crowd... Unwise. Even for a senator.

Glaber erupts, unable to hold his fury in check.

GLABER

He gave me grievance! I will not see him freed.

Batiatus, sensing opportunity, interjects.

BATIATUS

A solution, perhaps, if you will entertain, Legatus? The Thracian's shown promise in the arena -- albeit against Solonius' inferior stock.

Solonius glares.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

BATIATUS (cont'd)

I have a batch of new recruits, arriving tomorrow. If I were to purchase this man to addition, to be trained at my ludus in the gladiatorial arts... Why in his condition, I doubt he'll survive to the quarter moon.

Glaber starts to protest, but the shouts of the crowd still his tongue. He lowers his eyes, acquiescing. Albinus rises.

ALBINIUS

We will be merciful. And by such gain the favor you seek.

He turns to address the crowd, pauses.

ALBINIUS (cont'd)

What name does the man carry?

GLABER

I never cared to ask.

BATIATUS

The way he fights -- like the legend of the Thracian King of old. Spartacus, he was called.

Albinus smiles, raises his hands to the crowd.

ALBINIUS

People of Capua! This man -- this Spartacus -- has proven himself in the arena. For this... Legatus Claudius Glaber and I grant him LIFE!

THE ARENA

The thunderous CHEER of the crowd assaults The Thracian, now forever known to history as SPARTACUS. He stares up at them through the haze of blood and pain.

THE LIBITINARII

swarm in as he collapses, finally succumbing to his wounds.

OVERHEAD SHOT

looking straight down as the Libitinarii hoist the semiconscious Spartacus up. They carry him Christ-like from the arena as the Crowd chants his name.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

CROWD
Spartacus... Spartacus...
Spartacus...

His eyes flutter shut, plunging us into DARKNESS.

BLACKOUT.

END OF EPISODE

