The Red Serpent

Written by
Steven S. DeKnight
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
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.

(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)
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:  

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)
The Thracian tenses.

THE THRAICIAN
What did they show you?

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

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

SURA
And if it is not?

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

She nods, understanding despite her heart cleaving in two.

THE THRAICIAN (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 THRAICIAN
(soft)
Lift your dress.
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.

SURÀ (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)
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)
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:

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-crusted 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 THACIAN

We'll finish our discussion after.

Drenis accepts his hand with a frown.

DRENIS

And if we're dead?

THE THACIAN

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

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

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

DRENIS
West?

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

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.
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.
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)
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.
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 SEVERS 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)
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


(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)
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 --
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)
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 SMOLDERING 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.
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)
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 LA V I S H V I L L A

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

G L A B E R

now standing beside her. He smiles playfully.

G L A B E R

What if I'd been an assassin?

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

I L I T H Y I A

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

G L A B E R

How shortly?

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

I L I T H Y I A

He's not very happy with you.

G L A B E R

And his daughter?

Her face slips into concern. And disappointment.

(CONTINUED)
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 ALBINIUS, barely discernible, rumbles like distant thunder.
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!

Albinius 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 Albinius!

CROWD
Albinius! Albinius!

(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
Albinius! Good Albinius!

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 Albinius 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)
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 Albinius 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:

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
Albinius 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!

Albinius 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! Deserter
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.

Albinius' 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!

Albinius 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 Albinius. 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 Albinius 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 Albinius. 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)
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. Albinius smiles politely. A crush of other honored guests crowd the pulvinus, including Batiatus, Lucretia and Solonius, seated in the second row behind Albinius.

(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 MURMERS

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

THE PULVINUS

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

ALBINIUS
(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. Albinius is unreadable. Batiatus less so.

BATIATUS
(soft)
A mockery.
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)
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 THRAICAN HURLS HIS SWORD,
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. Albinius 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. Albinius 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.

Albinius 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