

SEVERUS
Episode Three

Story By
Steve Exeter & Mike Lukey

Written by
Steve Exeter

© 2002 - 2017

FADE IN:

EXT. LEPCIS MAGNA, OVERHEAD SHOT - DUSK

The sun casts a dark orange glow on the ancient city. The streets are oddly quiet as SEVERUS walks alone. He has a bruise on his cheek, one eye bloodshot, and a single red-tinted tear drips down his face.

CUT TO:

EXT. LEPCIS MAGNA, MARKET SQUARE - A LITTLE LATER

Here, a few people mill about, including some merchants packing up their stalls. As Severus walks past, all goes quiet. Some stare at him. One or two hiss.

CUT TO:

EXT. PLAUTINIUS'S HOUSE - MOMENTS LATER

As Severus approaches, he sees someone has painted the word "Proditor" on the house. Severus swallows hard and knocks on the door.

The door opens and an older man (KARAM, mid-fifties, dark-skinned, harsh-looking but with soft eyes) stands there, ready to strike Severus. He stops when he sees the young man.

KARAM

Severus! By the Gods, get inside!

He pulls Severus in through the door.

CUT TO:

INT. PLAUTINIUS'S HOUSE - SECONDS LATER.

Severus is ushered into the small common room where he sits down heavily. Karam sits down beside him.

KARAM

You look as if you've been through a war.

SEVERUS

I have.

KARAM

Paccia is sleeping. Shall I wake her?

SEVERUS

No, not yet. Please, old friend, I must know what has happened while I have been away. The people hiss at me in the street. My very presence makes some turn away in fear.

KARAM

(Sighs)

The rumour is that you helped the Garamantes attack the palace.

Severus looks down in shame.

KARAM (CONT'D)

It's true, isn't it?

SEVERUS

It is not so simple. I was deceived.

KARAM

That doesn't matter. People don't listen to facts, they believe what they choose to believe. You've openly spoken of your hatred for Rome for years. Now you are some Roman hero off to save the Empire or some such nonsense.

SEVERUS

(Angrily)

Yes, because life is not so simple!

KARAM

I'm not the one who needs convincing.

Severus sighs and calms down. From a doorway, Paccia steps into the room. She looks at Severus with warmth until she sees his face. She gasps.

PACCIA

What happened?

SEVERUS

Only what I deserved.

CUT TO:

FLASHBACK

INT. SEPTIMUS HOUSE - EARLIER

Severus looks shocked while Geta screams in his face.

GETA
Betrayer! Murderer!

Geta grabs a decorative vase and smashes it into Severus's cheek.

CUT TO:

INT. PLAUTINIUS'S HOUSE, COMMON ROOM - PRESENT

Paccia has her hand over her mouth. She steps over to him and begins examining the wound.

PACCIA
You should see a healer.

KARAM
Severus, it might be best if you took Paccia with you if you left.

PACCIA
Left?

KARAM
Well you two can't stay here. Every night my house is painted or scratched or has garbage thrown against it. They know I'm providing a haven for her.

SEVERUS
I cannot take Paccia with me! Rome is sending me into a place of war! She might be killed.

PACCIA
You might be killed!

SEVERUS
Please, Karam, there must be some place she will be safe.

KARAM
(Frowns) Perhaps... But I don't think either of you will like it.

PACCIA
Why?

KARAM
It's a brothel.

Severus stands angrily.

SEVERUS
Karam! What madness are you speaking?!

KARAM

Severus, see reason! There is only one place a woman will blend in with a crowd of other women. She doesn't need to work at the brothel. I know the woman who runs it. She will be safe there, taken care of.

PACCIA

To live among whores, ashamed to show my own face... Oh, Severus, surely a war is less horrific than this.

KARAM

My dear, you've never seen war. Pray you never do.

SEVERUS

He's right. Women are raped and killed in war.

PACCIA

Damn!

Paccia stands and paces angrily.

PACCIA (CONT'D)

Damn Rome, damn the Garamantes, and damn you, Severus!

Severus looks shocked. Paccia looks away in shame.

PACCIA (CONT'D)

(Quietly)
I'm sorry.

KARAM

She's upset, Severus, she doesn't mean it.

SEVERUS

Please, old friend, may we have a moment alone?

KARAM

Of course.

Karam pats Severus on the shoulder and walks out of the room. Paccia immediately turns to Severus.

PACCIA

You said you would take me with you!

SEVERUS

And I will!

PACCIA

When?!

SEVERUS

When I am not about to stand before an army of Moor's who are hell-bent on killing anyone who gets in front of them.

PACCIA

Including you!

SEVERUS

If that is what it takes!

PACCIA

For Rome?!

SEVERUS

(Enraged)

For everyone!!!

Paccia quiets at his outburst.

SEVERUS (CONT'D)

Paccia, I've been a fool. I thought Rome was a greedy monster slowly eating the world. But that was the view of a child. Now I see what it truly is.

PACCIA

What?! What is in Rome that has turned the heart of my husband?

SEVERUS

I met the face of Rome.

PACCIA

The Emperor?

SEVERUS

Marcus Aurelias himself. And he sent me on this mission. If I can do it, he has promised me many things, things I thought impossible. But the safety of my wife is one of those things. I will take you with me to Rome, and from there, we will build a life. We will show all of Rome who we are as Africans. They will be forced to respect us. The Emperor even agreed to pull the Roman legions from Africa once the fighting has ended. Don't you see? This is exactly what I have been fighting for my whole life.

PACCIA

You are stubborn, Severus. And there is something different about you.

SEVERUS

I have finally learned to temper my pride. I have found wisdom.

PACCIA

Severus, I don't understand. I suffer here while you go find wisdom.

SEVERUS

I know, my love. I promise, it will only be for a short time longer. Then, we shall be together. I swear it.

Paccia bites her lip, tears slipping down her face.

PACCIA

I will hold you to that, Severus.

She places her hand on his cheek.

PACCIA (CONT'D)

I will not sit and rot while my husband becomes the very thing he used to hate.

Severus smiles.

SEVERUS

That will not happen. I am African. I shall always be African. If I must use Rome to make Africa greater, then I shall.

Paccia kisses him.

PACCIA

There is that passion.

CUT TO:

EXT. LEPCIS MAGNA, PIER - MORNING

Severus stands on the pier, heading for another Roman Naval vessel. He looks back and sees Karam and Paccia waving to him. He waves and smiles, but sadness touches his eyes as he turns and boards the boat.

SEVERUS (V.O.)

Have no fear, my love. I shall perform this task for Rome.

(MORE)

SEVERUS (V.O.) (CONT'D)
Then I shall return for you, make
peace with my brother, somehow...
And we shall prosper. Our suffering
shall not be in vain. I swear it.

CUT TO:

EXT. OCEAN - LATER

Under a cloudless sky, the Roman vessel flies over the water. Severus looks out at the endless blue around him, a strange look of quiet contemplation on his face.

We see time pass as days turn to night, and back to day.

CUT TO:

INT. ROMAN VESSEL - BELOW DECKS DAYS LATER

Severus and a roman soldier practice with swords in a sparring match. He seems somewhat adept, but obviously not a master as the soldier he spars against easily bests him.

CUT TO:

INT. ROMAN VESSEL, CABIN - LATER

Severus sits in a bunk, reading a scroll, studying it carefully. We pan around and see a map of the Southern Shore of Spain.

CUT TO:

EXT. ROMAN VESSEL, UPPER DECK - DAYS LATER

Severus is once again sparring with a Roman soldier. This time, he is clearly more competent, and confident. Nearby, Centurion GAIUS watches. After a time, Gaius waves the soldier aside. The soldier breaks from combat, and the Centurion steps forward, drawing his sword. He attacks Severus.

CUT TO:

INT. ROMAN VESSEL, CABIN - LATER

Severus has a few small cuts on his face and chest while he reads over a very long scroll in Latin. He seems to get to a specific passage and sigh, shaking his head. We pan around and the scroll has a small sketch of a dark-skinned Moor illustrated in a very unflattering way.

FADE TO:

EXT. SPANISH COAST, SARDINIA - ONE MONTH LATER

Establishing shot. The Roman vessel approaches a small pier on a beautiful beach.

FADE TO:

EXT. ROMAN FORT, SOUTHERN SPAIN - LATER

The column of soldiers approaches what appears to be a ramshackle Roman encampment.

Centurion GAIUS leads the column. Severus walks beside him.

It is made of thick logs cut down and used to make high walls as protection. As the column approaches, there are trails of smoke in the forest beyond that curl high into the sky, dozens of them. Severus seems to see this and frowns as he approaches the camp. As they get close, a great gate seems to slide out of the way. The Romans march inside.

INT. ROMAN FORT, SOUTHERN SPAIN - MINUTES LATER

Once the column enters, we pan around to see the 'gate' is really a series of thick wooden logs lashed to a carriage. The carriage is pushed back into place, barring the gate once more. The soldiers put thick cuts of wood around the wheels to keep the carriage in place.

Many legionaries are on guard here, all obviously weary, battered and battle-hardened. Some are wounded. Severus passes one soldier (DEMETRIUS) who is missing a hand, but has a shield lashed to his stump of an arm, which still looks raw and possibly fresh.

Soon, another Centurion appears (JULIAS,) who is, himself, very weathered and worn. His armour is so battered it looks brittle. His tunic is cut and threadbare. His shield is punctured in several places as if by arrows. His face is scarred and he has a bandage wrapped over one bicep. A crimson stain rests in the middle of it.

JULIAS

At last! Hail Caesar!

GAIUS

Hail, Caesar!

Julias looks at Severus.

JULIAS

And who are you supposed to be?

SEVERUS

I am Septimius Severus. I am here to try to negotiate with the Moors.

Julias laughs a huge, hearty, belly laugh. After a moment, he looks at Severus's face and pauses mid-laugh.

JULIAS

You're serious. Forgive me, I must share this with the men.

(To the legion)

Everyone! Rome has sent someone to negotiate with the Moors!

All of the battered Romans erupt in laughter. Severus looks irritated, but also disappointed.

SEVERUS

Is this conduct becoming of a Centurion?!

GAIUS

Definitely not! Centurion, explain yourself!

Julias smirks and grabs the edge of his bandage, tugging lightly.

JULIAS

This is how the Moors negotiate. With blood. I would think you'd know that, being a Moor yourself.

SEVERUS

(Angrily)

I am...

Severus pauses for a moment, a strange look of confusion on his face. He looks back to the Roman soldiers, seeing that most of them are wounded, but still ready to fight. He turns and looks at the sky where the distant smoke trails from the Moorish camp fires can be seen. He turns back to Julias.

SEVERUS (CONT'D)

I am here on behalf of the Emperor, Caesar Marcus Aurelias himself.

JULIAS

Go home, boy. Tell the Caesar that what we need are more men and supplies, not negotiators.

SEVERUS

With all due respect, Centurion, I do not take my orders from you.

Julias steps up to Severus and draws his sword. Gaius starts to step between them, but Severus pushes him back, shaking his head. Julias approaches and comes within a foot of Severus.

JULIAS

Be very careful, African. Your head will look just like theirs when hanging from the battlements.

Severus is clearly controlling his anger.

SEVERUS

(calmly)
Centurion, you have been fighting bitterly for a long time. I am not blind to that. I do not mean to disrespect you, but you have disrespected me. Now... If I negotiate with the Moors and die, you lose nothing. If I succeed, you and your men will not have fought and died in vain. And you will live to fight for the further glory of Rome. I know my mission seems foolish.

JULIAS

It seems suicidal.

SEVERUS

Then I will meet my death with honour as I carry out the will of a man I have come to respect.

Julias looks Severus in the eyes, leaning very close.

JULIAS

My men drop like flies, most of them have lost hands, legs, eyes, all in the service of Rome. Now we are supposed to negotiate with these savages? We should be wiping them out.

SEVERUS

One battle at a time, Centurion. And if by the end of it, I must shed the blood of my dark-skinned brothers, then I am prepared to do it.

JULIAS

Are you?

SEVERUS

I have done it before.

Severus's eyes carry a certain regret in them, and Julias seems to see that. Julias's expression eases, and he turns to Gaius.

JULIAS

Centurion, welcome to the last stop before Elysia. If you'll both follow me, we have much to discuss.

CUT TO:

INT. CENTURION TENT - LATER

Julias leads Gaius and Severus into a large tent. Inside is a map of the region spread on a table, multiple pieces of parchment and scrolls.

JULIAS

I'm sorry for my harshness. My men expect strong leadership, and I am forced to take liberties with protocol for the sake of appearances.

GAIUS

How desperate is your situation?

JULIAS

You saw the smoke from the campfires? There are more every day. We are holding against the hordes, barely. Every day, the attacks come. We were barely able to erect the walls without the damned savages trying to burn them down. As it is, we must have bucket teams standing by at night. Archers kill anything that moves, but we run low on everything from food to arrows to bandages.

GAIUS

Where is the Legate?

JULIAS

Dead. This outpost once housed two legions. Now, you see what is left. How many men and supplies have you brought?

GAIUS

One hundred men, and supplies for two hundred. We did not know how desperate the situation was.

JULIAS

You still don't. There was a village nearby. We relied on them for food. The Moors slaughtered them, burned their crops, violated their women, children...

Julias seems to be struggling to control himself.

SEVERUS

Bastards.

JULIAS

I'm glad we agree! Truth be told, even if the Emperor himself were with you, my men would still probably be planning your murder.

SEVERUS

Then control them!

Julias stabs a dagger into the table.

JULIAS

It's not that easy! My men saw atrocities that make the darkest parts of Tartarus look gentle. All of it was committed by men like you.

SEVERUS

No... Not like me. Perhaps they look like me. I accept that.

JULIAS

My point, sir, is that my men might not be able to tell the difference.
(Pause)
If I'm being honest... I almost killed you myself.

GAIUS

Centurion, you forget yourself!

SEVERUS

No... No, I understand. I once felt the same way about Romans. It was quite recent, actually.

Julias looks angry.

SEVERUS (CONT'D)

Yes, there! I see it in your eyes, Centurion. That burning in your heart that lights up your eyes with hatred. I lived in that place once. It was not kind to me.

Julias softens and looks away.

GAIUS

Have there been any attempts at negotiation?

Julias scoffs.

JULIAS

Yes. And their heads are posted
sentinel around the Moor's camp.

SEVERUS

And are they white?

Julias nods.

SEVERUS (CONT'D)

Then at least, if I fail, I shall
prove that not all Africans are
savages.

CUT TO:

INT. ROMAN FORT, SOUTHERN SPAIN - NIGHT

Severus sleeps soundly in his tent. A loud noise, a sound of
impact, causes a shudder in the ground. Severus wakes
instantly, his eyes popping open. He almost leaps to his
feet.

CUT TO:

INT. ROMAN FORT, SOUTHERN SPAIN - MINUTES LATER

Severus emerges from his tent to find Roman soldiers running
back and forth with buckets of water. Severus runs towards
one of the walls where smoke and a flickering amber glow
highlight the edges.

He climbs up to the small walkway and peers carefully over
the edge.

He sees only darkness and smoke, but a pale hand grabs him by
his tunic and yanks him backwards. As Severus goes tumbling
back into the arms of Centurion Julias, an arrow zips by his
head.

JULIAS

Get down! Even your skin isn't dark
enough to be invisible against
those flames.

SEVERUS

Let go of me!

JULIAS

You must be suicidal.

Julias lets go of him. Severus sees the arrow embedded in the
wooden post next to him and seems slightly humbled.

SEVERUS

I apolo-

Julias grabs Severus again and pulls him off the wall. A small dark shape crashes against the wood with the sound of shattering glass. The flames roar and surge up along the wood.

Julias stands up and turns to his troops.

JULIAS
Sand!! Buckets of sand, now!

He turns to Severus.

JULIAS (CONT'D)
If you wish to live long enough to negotiate, stay away from the walls!

Julias then storms away from Severus who seems stunned. Gaius goes running past, leading a number of Roman archers.

Severus watches as they climb the walls, duck to avoid incoming arrows, then on command, all rise, take aim, and fire arrows.

Severus stands dumbfounded, but as he turns, he sees on the other side of the camp, a dark figure is climbing over the wall.

SEVERUS
There!! Gaius! Julias! It's a
feint!

A Moorish warrior has already slipped over the wall. He rushes towards Severus. Severus draws his sword.

CUT TO:

FLASHBACK

INT. PALACE AT LEPCIS MAGNA

Severus savagely attacks a Garamonte, plunging his sword into the man's chest.

CUT TO:

INT. ROMAN FORT, SOUTHERN SPAIN - PRESENT

As the warrior closes on Severus, he raises his sword. Severus finishes drawing his weapon and blocks the blow. It is a clumsy attack, and Severus quickly turns with the blow, spinning and cutting the warrior down with a wide slash at his head that cuts his throat open.

We pull back to see one of the soldiers, Demetrius, running to Severus's aid. As the warrior drops, the Roman looks at Severus with surprise. Severus looks back to the wall, and more warriors are climbing over. He turns to Julias on the wall and screams.

SEVERUS
Centurion!

Julias turns, and looks where Severus is pointing his sword.

JULIAS
Bastards! Archers, forget the fire-starters! Shoot the intruders!

The archers turn as several warriors scale the wall.

Severus and the Roman soldier are joined by more legionaries. The Moorish warriors attack, but are easily repelled. Blood sprays into the air like a fine mist.

As suddenly as it began, the fight seems to have ended. Gaius and Julias approach the dead Moors and examine them.

GAIUS
Expendables.

JULIAS
Yes. They're testing us.

GAIUS
This happens often?

JULIAS
Not quite like this. Last night, they set fires in three places. The night before, we caught them trying to dig under the wall. Before that, they hurled rabid animals at us. Some tried to sneak in and poison our water rations. It's always different.

SEVERUS
They have superior numbers. They could overrun this place.

JULIAS
Yes, but it would cost them. And the more men they lose here, the less they have to march on into Spain.

Severus gets a light of understanding in his eyes.

SEVERUS
I see. And they know no matter how many Romans are here...

JULIAS
We are trapped. Yes.

Severus takes a breath and sits down heavily on the ground.

SEVERUS
Then... Then I think I know now how
I must negotiate.

FADE TO:

EXT. SOUTHERN SPAIN COUNTRYSIDE - DAY

Severus, in battered armour, walks with several Roman Soldiers. In the distance, there are several Moorish warriors standing in the road.

Severus motions for the Romans to hold back. He approaches them by himself.

Once he gets close enough, one of the Moors steps forward.

MOOR
What do you want, black Roman?

SEVERUS
(In an African language)
I am here to negotiate. Rome will
hear what you want.

MOOR
(In same language)
It speaks our tongue! It looks like
us! Yet it wears the trappings of
the lesser men.

SEVERUS
Speak with me, or speak with your
God. I have no patience for
foolishness.

MOOR
Your pale Empire insults us with
its foolishness! What we wish is
for your army of heathens to vanish
into smoke.

SEVERUS
If you speak for your leaders, then
continue to be stupid, by all
means. But otherwise, tell them
that I will meet them half a league
from the fortress, due South, at
this time tomorrow. If they do not
arrive, then Rome shall cease its
apathy and you will feel its
anger.

(MORE)

SEVERUS (CONT'D)
 For what you have seen thus far has
 been nothing but an indifferent
 border guard.

Severus turns to walk away.

MOOR
 (Laughs)
 You are funny, dark Roman.

SEVERUS
 So are you. But let us leave
 personal appearances out of this.

The Moor stops laughing and draws his sword. Severus turns,
 pulls a bow and arrow, and launches a shot at the Moor's
 foot. He stops as the arrow lands an inch from his toes.

SEVERUS (CONT'D)
 Do not test me, my brother.

Severus continues walking away. He rejoins the Romans. One of
 the soldiers leans over to him.

SOLDIER
 Amazing shot.

SEVERUS
 I was aiming for his thigh.

CUT TO:

EXT. SOUTHERN SPAIN COUNTRYSIDE, OLD ROAD - MORNING

A handful of Roman legionaries stand waiting. Severus is
 nowhere to be seen.

CUT TO:

INT. ROMAN FORT, SOUTHER SPAIN - MORNING

Severus, Gaius, and Julias stand on the wall, looking out at
 the forest where dark shapes move among the trees.

SEVERUS
 They will attack soon.

JULIAS
 And what of my men on the road?

SEVERUS
 I told them to return if no one
 showed within an hour, and to be
 ready to ambush from the trees.

GAIUS

So much for negotiation.

JULIAS

It was a fools errand.

SEVERUS

Yes, it was. But we are where we are now. I have made my attempt to negotiate.

JULIAS

Shall I send a message back to Rome?

SEVERUS

Don't bother. Any help will come too late. Let us survive the day. Then we shall see.

CUT TO:

INT. ROMAN FORT, SOUTHERN SPAIN - MINUTES LATER

Fire and arrows fly overhead. Severus leaps into battle with Moorish warriors. Gaius and Julias fight with him, as do dozens of other Romans. Julias takes an arrow in the chest, but keeps fighting.

CUT TO:

INT. ROMAN FORT, SOUTHERN SPAIN - DAYS LATER

Another battle, Severus and Gaius fend off a large group of Moors while Julias bleeds under a shield behind them. He tries to fire an arrow, but his body goes limp before he can draw the bow.

CUT TO:

INT. ROMAN FORT, SOUTHERN SPAIN - WEEKS LATER

Few Romans are left, but they fight with efficient brutality. Severus and Gaius lead them as they group together in waves to repel the attackers, breaking their ranks and finishing them off as a single, consolidated unit.

CUT TO:

EXT. ROMAN FORT, SOUTHERN SPAIN - MONTHS LATER

Severus holds a bleeding, dying Gaius while Romans finish off many dying Moor warriors around them.

Gaius hands Severus his helmet as his eyes roll back into his head.

CUT TO:

INT. ROMAN FORT, SOUTHERN SPAIN - YEARS LATER

Severus, older, more experienced, and battle-hardened lets out a battle cry from the battlements. The forest is on fire, and only four dozen Roman soldiers remain, but all are on the wall, sending flaming arrows down at the Moors and the forest, destroying their cover and killing them where they stand.

We close in on Severus, looking out on the field of the burned dead, their skin blackened by fire, the air thick with greasy smoke from human bodies burning. His eye twitches, and his hand shakes, but his jaw is set and his eyes blazing with the reflection of the flames.

CUT TO:

INT. PALACE, EMPEROR'S CHAMBERS, ROME - DAY

Marcus Aurelias sits and tries to read over a scroll, but he is clearly having trouble. He is pale and his hands shake.

Commodus is there as well, and he steps up quickly to take the scroll.

A pair of senators stand there while the Emperor quivers. One of the Senators is FLUVIUS, an old, fat man who looks at Commodus with disdain.

COMMODUS

My father is too weary to suffer
your petty affairs gentlemen.
Please, be gone.

FLUVIUS

But, great Commodus, these matters
are urgent. The plague thins our
ranks. We have only half the
senators we require. Great Caesar
must act!

COMMODUS

My father believes otherwise. Now
go.

The Senators start to argue, but Commodus raises a hand. One of the Praetorian Guards draws a sword.

The Senators stop, glaring at Commodus with fury. Reluctantly, they comply, and quietly exit.

CUT TO:

INT. PALACE, ROME, EMPEROR'S CHAMBERS - MINUTES LATER

Commodus helps Marcus Aurelias across the room to a couch where he may lie down.

MARCUS AURELIAS
Commodus... My son...

COMMODUS
Yes, father?

MARCUS AURELIAS
It is my time. You must listen and heed my words.

COMMODUS
No! No, father, you will not leave me now!

MARCUS AURELIAS
Rome is... an idea. The wise... The wise must rule.

COMMODUS
Yes, father. I promise.

MARCUS AURELIAS
For Rome to be great... the wise must rule.

COMMODUS
I swear it, father. Rome shall be great!

Marcus Aurelias gets a distant look on his face, pain touches his eyes, and perhaps regret as well.

MARCUS AURELIAS
Lucilla... Where is Lucilla? Gods... She must run from this place.

COMMODUS
... Father? I don't understand.

MARCUS AURELIAS
The blood... My God, the blood...

COMMODUS
 Guards! Summon my sister
 immediately! Our father is dying!

CUT TO:

INT. PALACE, ROME, EMPEROR'S CHAMBERS - A LITTLE LATER

Marcus Aurelias lies with his children beside him. All he can do is groan in pain. Commodus is in tears, Lucilla is shaking, trying to hold in the sobs.

COMMODUS
 Father, please! Let me end your
 suffering!

LUCILLA
 Commodus, no! He's trying to speak!

COMMODUS
 He speaks nonsense! Lucilla, our
 father is gone now. Only his dying
 body remains.

LUCILLA
 Commodus!

MARCUS AURELIAS
 The Black Caesar... He will come.
 The black... He comes from fire and
 blood.

Commodus stalks across the room and grabs a dagger. He approaches his father. Lucilla steps in front of him and blocks his way.

LUCILLA
 No, Commodus!

COMMODUS
 I will not listen to his rants or
 his suffering!

LUCILLA
 Then let us at least be merciful
 and kind.

Lucilla turns from Commodus, the tears slipping from her eyes. It's clearly a hideous strain for her not to break into sobs. She lifts a pillow and approaches her father. Marcus Aurelias looks at her and there is almost a hint of a smile on his grimacing face. He beckons her closer. She bends down to listen. We do not hear his words, but she looks terrified. Marcus Aurelias gives her a grim nod, and closes his eyes. She places the pillow over his head. He does not struggle.

When his body goes limp, Lucilla turns, running away in sobs.

COMMODUS

What did he say?! What did he say?!

She does not stop. Commodus watches her go, then takes a deep breath and looks down at the dagger in his hands.

COMMODUS (CONT'D)

Rome will be great, father. I swear it.

CUT TO:

INT. ROMAN SENATE - LATER

Commodus stands before the Roman Senate. Among the group are many different men of power, including General PERTINAX (late forties, greying hair, but strangely bright eyes), POMPEANIUS (mid-fifties, stoic, aloof and almost elitist), and a young senator named LUCIAS (mid-twenties, passionate, young and rash.) Senator Fluvius is there as well, still looking dour.

COMMODUS

With the death of my father, I now rule Rome as it's sole Emperor. But in this tragedy, there will be celebration. For under my rule, Rome shall become greater than ever before. Rome shall be an example to the world. And I, as Emperor, as Caesar, will usher in peace, prosperity, and great works of beauty.

LUCIAS

And what of the plague, Caesar?

Commodus flinches and turns to the young senator.

COMMODUS

What of it?

LUCIAS

Forgive me, Caesar, I don't mean to speak out of turn. But I have been petitioning both your father and yourself for months. My neighbours burn with fever. The dead clog the roads of the living. I, myself, am only senator because my father fell ill six months ago, and passed away shortly thereafter.

COMMODUS

Tragic.

LUCIAS

I have even sent pleas to your
sister Lucilla.

COMMODUS

Lucilla is not Caesar!

PERTINAX

She was... once.

Commodus turns on the General with fury in his eyes, but
Pertinax smiles.

PERTINAX (CONT'D)

No disrespect intended, Caesar.
This one is young and desperate. He
reaches out for help, not to cause
injury.

Commodus looks at Pertinax sternly, but nods.

POMPEANIUS

Lucilla's turn as co-emperor ended
some time ago, General. A Senator
should know things like that.

LUCIAS

You are all correct. But these are
desperate times. Rome rots from the
inside-

COMMODUS

(Angrily)
Enough! I will not have such talk
in my Empire!

Everyone gapes in surprise.

POMPEANIUS

Great Caesar, if I may be so
bold...

COMMODUS

Speak, Pompeianus.

POMPEANIUS

Senator Lucias is not the only
senator worried about the death
toll of this plague. Perhaps we
could organise teams to dispose of
corpses and perhaps minimise
exposure to the sickly dead.

COMMODUS

(Smiles)
Words of wisdom. Let it be done.

PERTINAX

There is another dire matter, great Caesar. We have just received word that our forces in Spain have lost two Centurions, and almost all of their soldiers. They desperately require reinforcements.

COMMODUS

In Spain? Against the Moors?

PERTINAX

Yes, Caesar.

COMMODUS

Ridiculous. No force in the world can stand against the legion.

PERTINAX

I wish that were true. The desperate messages come from one Septimus Severus, who has assumed command on the death of the Centurions.

COMMODUS

Severus? Yes... Yes, I know him. I remember, my father thought he could negotiate with the Moors. I always thought it a fools errand.

PERTINAX

It would seem that is true.

COMMODUS

Well we can't have those cannibalistic savages murdering their way across Spain. There will be elephants outside the walls again soon.

There is some small laughter from the edges of the room.

POMPEANIUS

I suggest we send the General here with his forces to stem this invasion before it grows worse.

COMMODUS

I agree. I do hope that African still lives. He impressed me.

PERTINAX

He had your fathers esteem as well.

COMMODUS

Yes, he did. Pertinax, make it so.

FULVIUS

Perhaps this man may be interested
in joining the Caesar's senate...
If he lives.

COMMODUS

Perhaps... Though I think we have
too many senators already.

CUT TO:

INT. PALACE, ROME, EMPEROR'S CHAMBERS

Commodus storms into his chambers, enraged. Pompeianus
follows behind him as a sympathetic ear.

COMMODUS

They insult me! Why must I tolerate
them?! Why did my father?

POMPEIANUS

The Senate has it's uses, Caesar.

COMMODUS

Not to me. They will likely stand
in my way.

POMPEIANUS

No one would dare stand in the way
of greatness.

COMMODUS

None but fools. My father charged
me with making Rome great. I shall
do so, with or without the senate.
Withdraw the legion from current
conflicts, and send our best
diplomats to make peace with our
neighbours. My father made war with
the world. I shall make peace.

POMPEIANUS

An excellent beginning, Caesar.

COMMODUS

Yes, but it is just the beginning.
When they see what I build with the
money we would have spent on war,
the world will beg for me to rule
them all as I have ruled Rome.

POMPEIANUS

Then let us make it so, great
Caesar.

They smile at each other. Commodus waves a dismissive hand.
He then turns to the Praetorian Guard.

COMMODUS

Tell my throne to get her
deliciousness in here immediately.
I need to relax. Oh, and I want you
to pick up a few things for me...

The Guard does his best to keep a perfect poker face.

GUARD

Yes, Caesar.

CUT TO:

INT. PALACE, ROME, EMPEROR'S CHAMBERS - LATER

Commodus sits in the middle of the room. His 'seat' is actually a woman on her hands and knees, naked. Before him are two frightened-looking women, young, one of them with her hair cut short.

COMMODUS

Your Emperor has made a demand of
you. You will comply.

WOMAN 1

G-great Caesar... We are not... I
mean, when your guard brought us
here...

COMMODUS

They were following my instructions
perfectly. I told them to bring me
two women who have passion for each
other.

WOMAN 2

But we aren't prostitutes.

COMMODUS

Good. I don't want insincerity in
my bedchambers.

WOMAN 1

But...

COMMODUS

No more. Be silent. You two will
have sex, right here, while your
Emperor watches. Or you will die.

The women go pale. One swallows and turns to the other, her lip quivering.

COMMODUS (CONT'D)

No! No tears. Do as I say and I
will reward you both greatly.

(MORE)

COMMODUS (CONT'D)

I know, I know, you are not prostitutes. The money I shall pay will ensure neither of you must ever work again in your entire lives. Now... once again... Show me your passion. Drop your clothes.

The women do as asked, each disrobing. Commodus smiles. The woman he is sitting on is silently weeping. Her tears land on the cold marble floor.

CUT TO:

INT. ROMAN FORT, SOUTHERN SPAIN - MONTHS LATER

Severus stands over a recently-slain soldier. He sighs, shutting his eyes and turning to the soldier with the stump, Demetrius.

SEVERUS

Thirty-four men, now.

DEMETRIUS

And most of us are wounded.

Demetrius waves his stump.

SEVERUS

We will likely die here.

DEMETRIUS

Probably today.

SEVERUS

And there is no word from Rome?

DEMETRIUS

We've found another dead messenger on the road this morning.

SEVERUS

The fools.

DEMETRIUS

It seems wise to me, and it's certainly-

SEVERUS

Not them! Rome! They sent me here to negotiate. Now, I believe they sent me here to die. They send messengers instead of reinforcements.

DEMETRIUS

All things considered, we have held out against an impossible siege for over a year now since you arrived, and over two years before. And to think, most of us were going to cut your throat in the beginning.

SEVERUS

There are days I wish you had. It would have saved time.

DEMETRIUS

Don't speak of such things, sir. Though you are not our Centurion, you have our respect.

SEVERUS

If only I could summon the entire legion with that respect.

CUT TO:

INT. ROMAN FORT, SOUTHERN SPAIN, CENTURION'S TENT - LATER

Severus and Demetrius look over a hastily drawn map of the fortress, complete with small marks representing the surviving soldiers.

SEVERUS

If we set enough traps along these walls, make it look like we've accidentally left holes in our defences, we may be able to lure some in. Do you think we can dig some pits in front of these walls?

DEMETRIUS

We could, but it would take time.

SEVERUS

Then perhaps we can get the Moors to do it for us.

DEMETRIUS

What?

SEVERUS

Those places where they attempted to tunnel beneath the wall, did we ever actually get around to collapsing the tunnels?

DEMETRIUS

... No, actually, we didn't. We had all of those plague-carrying rodents to deal with.

SEVERUS

Ah, yes. It's so strange, to be matching wits with an enemy I have never met. Each new tactic is designed solely to create or exploit a vulnerability. Each new move we make attempts to trap them in the attempt. If men were not dying, this could almost be...

DEMETRIUS

What?

SEVERUS

Nothing... I must be going mad. I was going to say fun.

DEMETRIUS

Yes, I'd say that is a sign of madness.

From outside the tent, screaming is heard. Severus and Demetrius run for the exit.

CUT TO:

INT. ROMAN FORT, SOUTHERN SPAIN - SECONDS LATER.

A Roman soldier on the wall is calling out for Severus. He and Demetrius run for the wall. They climb to the top and look out on the battlefield.

In the distance there are hundreds, perhaps a thousand warriors marching on the fortress from the other side of the burnt-down forest.

DEMETRIUS

It seems they are done softening us up.

SEVERUS

It would seem.

DEMETRIUS

Sir, there is no strategy to this. They will come. We will die. We will kill as many as we are able, but we will die.

SEVERUS

There is always strategy.

DEMETRIUS

Not here.

SEVERUS

I will not accept death so readily.

DEMETRIUS

No, sir. You must run. Run North,
warn everyone, make them understand
the death that marches on them.

Severus smiles.

SEVERUS

It will make no difference now.
Tell me, Demetrius, you are
Roman...

DEMETRIUS

I am Greek.

SEVERUS

Sorry. But may I ask... Do you
believe in the next life?

DEMETRIUS

Well... it would be nice to have my
hand back.

Severus smiles.

SEVERUS

I like you, Demetrius. I hope we
may see each other again in the
next world.

There is a shout from the opposite end of the fort.

SEVERUS (CONT'D)

What now? Are they outflanking us?

Demetrius hurries along the wall to the other side. He turns
back to Severus with a wide grin.

DEMETRIUS

Severus! You won't believe it!

Severus runs over, we follow him. As he moves around the edge
of the fortress, we can see on the opposite side is a massive
column of Roman legionaries.

CUT TO:

EXT. SOUTHERN SPAIN COUNTRYSIDE, OLD ROAD - SECONDS LATER.

We see from an aerial view that the massive force is complete
with catapults, cavalry, armoured chariots, and archers along
with scores of Roman troops all marching in unison.

CUT TO:

INT. ROMAN FORT, SOUTHERN SPAIN - SECONDS LATER.

Severus cries out and slaps Demetrius on the back.

DEMETRIUS

What do we do?

SEVERUS

Distract them! Have our archers
fire every last arrow we have.
Throw our oil, light flames, spread
smoke! Burn down the fortress if
you have to! Don't let them see the
legion until it's too late!

CUT TO:

EXT. ROMAN FORT, SOUTHERN SPAIN - MINUTES LATER

We see flaming arrows and clay jars of oil fly out and ignite
brush, trees, and even old dead bodies of fallen Romans.
Soon, smoke is wafting through the air as the Moor forces
continue forward.

As they get closer to the fort, there is the sound of
galloping hooves. The Roman cavalry breaks through the smoke
and begins cutting the Moors to pieces and spearing them into
the ground. The smoke covers their movements.

As the Moors close in, suddenly, legionaries are everywhere
around them, and fiery rocks are flying overhead into their
forces.

CUT TO:

INT. ROMAN FORT, SOUTHERN SPAIN - MINUTES LATER

General Pertinax approaches the wall of the fort where
Severus and Demetrius look down.

PERTINAX

Hail!

SEVERUS

Hail indeed! Your timing could not
be more precise!

PERTINAX

My scouts tell me there are a
thousand warriors approaching.

SEVERUS

How many legions did you bring?

PERTINAX

Two... For the first wave.

Severus laughs.

CUT TO:

EXT. ROMAN FORT, SOUTHERN SPAIN - LATER

The Romans are obliterating the Moors. Severus himself joins the fighting, with Pertinax and Demetrius at his side. They scream into battle, their swords finding bellies and backs to sink into.

Severus soon finds himself facing a group of men very much like the Garamantes he fought at the Palace in Leptis Magna. This time, Severus does not savagely attack them. They attack him, and Severus expertly blocks and dodges their undisciplined strikes. Each counter-strike is debilitating or lethal. With one swipe, a Garamante loses a large chunk of forearm. With another, Severus stabs into his abdomen, and upwards. His blade pops out the man's back. Severus then turns, using the dying man to block a swing at his head. Severus kicks the dead man off his sword, then slashes down, cutting his opponent's achilles tendon. As he screams in agony and falls, Severus plants the sword in his neck, silencing the scream to a bubbling cry.

Pertinax displays equal talent, using his shield and sword in fluid motions to deflect and counter-attack. Overhead, fiery missiles soar. Arrows zip around the battlefield, arcing down from the sky and buzzing between combatants like insects.

Demetrius emerges from the fray with an arrow in his shield. Severus turns to him. Demetrius salutes. Severus can see an arrow has gone through the shield, into his stumpy arm. He is bleeding, but still fights on.

FADE TO:

EXT. SPANISH COUNTRYSIDE - LATER

An aerial view shows fields of bodies infested by hungry crows.

Severus, Pertinax, and Demetrius approach the remains of the fortress. At some point, it had caught fire, and still burns.

PERTINAX

That is what you have used to fend off the horde?

SEVERUS

For many months now.

PERTINAX

I'm impressed! Your messages said you were down to only a few dozen men.

SEVERUS

We lost four the day I sent that message. I arrived with a hundred.

PERTINAX

Incredible. You have a gift for strategy.

SEVERUS

So it would seem.

PERTINAX

The cloud of smoke to obscure our approach was nothing short of genius.

SEVERUS

It seemed obvious to me. Besides, I would have liked to see the look of absolute shock on their faces to find two Roman legions suddenly appear before them.

PERTINAX

It's a pity we have to abandon this particular station.

SEVERUS

And go where?

PERTINAX

Sardinia.

SEVERUS

That is not in Spain.

PERTINAX

No. But it is perfectly placed to intercept and destroy their forces as they cross the sea. I could use a good tactician there.

DEMETRIUS

You'll not find a better one. Severus has kept us alive when we should all have died a year ago.

PERTINAX

Is that so?

SEVERUS

I did what I could.

PERTINAX

With weary men, logs, and rocks you kept a full invasion at bay for a year. I would love to see what you could do with a full Legion.

Severus nods humbly.

SEVERUS

I would be honoured. Besides, it would seem the best way to defeat all of my enemies is by continuing to succeed.

PERTINAX

Which enemies would those be?

SEVERUS

To begin with, a senator named Cassius.

PERTINAX

Oh, don't worry about him. He's been dead about a year now.

SEVERUS

A year? Then, why has the Emperor ignored my messages? My pleas for help?

Pertinax looks grim.

PERTINAX

Marcus Aurelias was very ill. He passed away a few weeks before I left Rome. His son, Commodus, is Emperor now.

Severus looks shocked.

SEVERUS

Tell me it's not true.

PERTINAX

It is.

Demetrius sighs heavily.

DEMETRIUS

He was a great Caesar.

PERTINAX

That he was.

CUT TO:

INT. PALACE, ROME, EMPEROR'S CHAMBERS

Commodus lies on a bed of fine silks, naked, with a young woman and a very boyish young man, also naked. They appear to be lounging in repose. Spilled wine pools on the floor.

A Praetorian Guard appears in the doorway.

GUARD

Hail Caesar.

COMMODUS

Yes, what is it?

GUARD

Senators Fulvius and Lucias to see you.

COMMODUS

Now?! Tell them to wait.

GUARD

I would, great Caesar, but you ordered me to make you remember your appointments.

COMMODUS

(Angrily) I did no such-
(Pause) Yes, yes of course. Wait two minutes, then send them in.

Commodus hastily dresses. He turns to his companions.

COMMODUS (CONT'D)

Out! Both of you! I'll have time for your amusements later.

The two appear frightened at his sudden change in tone, and both scurry quickly from the chamber.

Fulvius and Lucias enter a mere moment after. Commodus stands there, looking dignified.

COMMODUS (CONT'D)

Senators, what can I do for you?

FULVIUS

Caesar, I would make a humble request of you.

COMMODUS

Yes, yes, out with it you fat fool.

FULVIUS

My colleague here and I have a dispute we require your wisdom to resolve.

COMMODUS

Well, then out with it?

LUCIAS

Well, great Caesar, we wondered if you would look at these reports from the budget.

(MORE)

LUCIAS (CONT'D)

You've burned through Rome's yearly budget in mere months.

COMMODUS

It's only money. Just make more.

FULVIUS

Make... more?

COMMODUS

Yes, make more. Oh, but perhaps... yes, perhaps, less expensive. Then we shall save money while making money.

Both men are astonished.

LUCIAS

But... Caesar, that will damage the entire economy.

COMMODUS

Now that just doesn't make sense. How does more money damage the economy?

FULVIUS

Sir, it is more complicated than you believe. You see-

COMMODUS

Enough. No one tells the Emperor of Commodia, the Emperor of Commodia tells others.

Lucias and Fulvius both turn pale.

LUCIAS

Commodia?

COMMODUS

Yes. Rome shall now be known as the Glorious Empire of Commodia. Oh! We should print that on the new coins. How much will that cost?

CUT TO:

INT. ROMAN SENATE - LATER

fulvius and Lucias stand alone in the chambers, piles of parchment and scrolls are everywhere.

FULVIUS

A complete and utter disaster!

LUCIAS

He's mad. Completely mad.

FULVIUS

I am a conservative man, I was against the wars of Marcus Aurelius, but Commodus drains the treasury for lunacy! I have a receipt here for a statue of him that will be a hundred cubits high!

LUCIAS

And Commodia? He re-named Rome after himself! That is arrogance personified!

FULVIUS

First he ignores the ravages of the plague. Now he renames the empire and devalues its money. What next? Shall he eliminate taxes? Lead the conquest of the ocean floor?

LUCIAS

Don't give him any ideas.

FULVIUS

And worst of all... Here I am with my most bitter senatorial rival, agreeing with him.

LUCIAS

I am happy to debate with you all day, Fulvius, but you are right. Something must be done.

FULVIUS

And wind up like Cassius?

LUCIAS

I would rather wind up like Cassius than live in the Rome Commodus would create.

FULVIUS

Stop making good points. It's irritating.

LUCIAS

The wealthy *and* the poor will suffer under Commodus. You know it as well as I.

FULVIUS

Yes, I know. Damn you. What is the traditional method, then? Poison? Too obvious.

LUCIAS

Are you really suggesting that we kill him?

FULVIUS

We could always just stab him. There is precedent for the Senator murdering a Caesar.

LUCIAS

Yes, and that worked out rather badly, did it not?

FULVIUS

Perhaps... Perhaps we could hire someone to shoot an arrow into his head from far away.

LUCIAS

Why not meet in the middle and use a poison arrow? Just in case it misses the head.

Fulvius snaps his fingers.

FULVIUS

Yes. I hate you, but yes. Good idea. I know a few people who could do it.

LUCIAS

If we fail, we shall not survive the day.

FULVIUS

That's fine, I'd planned to kill you anyway.

LUCIAS

Oh, I was worried we might start to be friends.

CUT TO:

EXT. PALACE, ROME - DAYS LATER

Commodus stands before a crowd, his arms raised, and behind him is a banner covering a stone archway. He gestures, and the banner is lowered, revealing "COMMEDIA" has been chiseled into the stone.

The crowd cheers, though it is a small crowd, and members of the Praetorian Guard have formed a perimeter around them. At the edge, one old man is not cheering. The nearby guard jabs him, and the old man reluctantly claps.

We focus back on Commodus, but as he opens his mouth to speak, an arrow shaft flies past his head and shatters against the stone column of the arch.

Pull back to show a man on a rooftop nearby with a bow and arrows.

Turn back to Commodus, who points at the assassin and screams.

Turning back to the assassin, several arrows sprout from his chest as Praetorian Guards fire back. The body falls forward into the street as the crowd screams in horror.

CUT TO:

INT. PALACE, ROME, EMPEROR'S CHAMBERS - LATER

Commodus has a small cut on his cheek that a woman tends to with a wet cloth. Behind him Pompeianus enters the chamber with several guards.

COMMODUS

Who hired the man?!

POMPEANIUS

Sadly, the dead man cannot tell us. However, a witness says he met with two men at a bathhouse this morning. A fat man, and a short, thin man.

COMMODUS

Fulvius and Lucias! Those treacherous dogs were here bothering me about money. Find them!

POMPEANIUS

We have been looking, Caesar. But it appears they have fled the city. Rumour is they are heading to Africa.

COMMODUS

(Pauses, then laughs.)
Africa? Well then... I believe I know just the man for the job.

INT. PERTINAX'S TENT - NIGHT

Severus sits and reads a letter from his brother, Geta by the light of a small brazier.

We pan around to see over his shoulder as we hear Geta's voice narrate.

GETA (V.O.)

Dear Brother, time has cooled my fury. With our father's death, and the business of my new position, I have had no time to dwell on fantasies of revenge. I have excelled as well as you have, brother. For while you are master of games and ambassador, I have become Governor of Sicily.

CUT TO:

EXT. SICILIAN VILLA, DAY

The beautiful villa sits by the ocean. Geta stands at a window, looking out on the sea.

GETA (V.O.)

It is a great honour to serve Rome. I never thought we would both become such distinguished men. I know you have had to make difficult choices, as have I.

CUT TO:

INT. SICILIAN VILLA, DAY

Geta sits in an impressive study, scribbling on parchment.

GETA (V.O.)

I left Lepcis Magna shortly after you did. But I know Paccia still lives there, shunned, and in hiding. She should not suffer for our feud. Nor should you. I would welcome you both to my villa, for this house is beautiful but empty, and I long for the company of my brother once again.

CUT TO:

INT. PERTINAX'S TENT - NIGHT

Severus puts the letter down and wipes some tears from his eyes. He picks up another letter to read. This one is short, and bears the seal of the Emperor.

COMMODUS (V.O.)

Severus, I was pleased to hear you have kept the empire safe. I must call on you and General Pertinax for a new task now. Members of my own Senate have attempted to kill me. The cowards have fled to Africa, near your home city of Lepcis Magna. Find these traitors and drag them back to Commodia for trial.

Severus puts down the letter with a look of anxiety on his face.

SEVERUS

Commodia?!

CUT TO:

EXT. ROMAN VESSEL, UPPER DECK - NIGHT, DAYS LATER

Severus and Pertinax stand on the vessel while it glides across the sea. Pertinax looks unhappy, as does Severus.

PERTINAX

It's madness.

SEVERUS

Marcus Aurelias warned me. I didn't understand at the time. But now... Now I do.

PERTINAX

Politics is a messy game, my friend. I should know. I sense that, very soon, the senate and the Emperor shall go to open war. Not just rogue senators taking aim with proxy arrows, but a genuine civil war. It would tear Rome in half.

SEVERUS

You mean Commodia.

PERTINAX

Madness. Marcus Aurelias and I had our differences, but he was a good man! His son is...

SEVERUS

Not wise.

Pertinax smiles.

PERTINAX

Well said.

They stare at the stars for a moment before Severus turns away.

SEVERUS

I think I shall try to sleep.

PERTINAX

Good luck. Restless times are ahead.

CUT TO:

DREAM SEQUENCE

EXT. OPEN FIELD - NIGHT

It is misty. Severus finds himself alone and naked in a wide empty field. A horse races past him. When he looks again, Paccia is on that horse with a black collar around her throat. Her face changes, becomes misty, then turns into a face Severus does not recognise. (NOTE: JULIA'S face)

Suddenly, his brother Geta stands behind him. Severus jumps in surprise, but then extends a hand towards Geta.

Geta steps out of Severus's reach. He reaches into his tunic and removes a little piece of red silk. He draws it out slowly, staring at Severus the entire time.

Lightning crashes and thunder cracks.

CUT TO:

EXT. OPEN FIELD - NIGHT

Severus stands beneath a clear, starry night sky. The same horse gallops into view. Severus turns to look at it. Atop the horse is Pertinax in the garb of the Emperor, smiling down at Severus. Along the animal's mane, glowing Latin letters appear as if it's hair were catching on purple fire. It says, in Latin Brethren, Betrayer."

Suddenly, the horse bucks, and Pertinax falls off. Pertinax is lost in the mist. Severus sees the horse become agitated, angry, kicking and bucking. Severus does what he always does with a horse. He clicks his tongue, and reaches out his hand. There is a piece of fruit in his hand. The horse calms and begins to eat the fruit.

CUT TO:

EXT. OPEN FIELD - NIGHT

Severus finds himself sitting atop the horse, now in the purple Emperor's attire. He looks down and sees two bodies lying in the dirt, but they are indistinct, impossible to identify in the mist.

The mist swirls and forms into Geta's face.

GETA
Brethren and Betrayer!

CUT TO:

INT. ROMAN VESSEL, CABIN - NIGHT

Severus awakens in darkness, gasping for breath and sweating. He looks around the starlight-lit little cabin and shudders.

CUT TO:

INT. ROMAN VESSEL, CABIN - MINUTES LATER

Severus has a candle lit, and is writing a letter on parchment.

SEVERUS (V.O.)
Dear Brother, I have received your letter after months of strife. I'm afraid my success has come at the cost of much blood. Your forgiveness has brought some comfort to a strange time of my life. Even my dreams hint of impossible, disturbing things.

CUT TO:

INT. ROMAN VESSEL, UPPER DECK - MORNING

Severus is gathering his things and preparing to mount a horse. He feeds the horse a piece of fruit.

SEVERUS (V.O.)
Your offer of sanctuary warms my heart. I have already written Paccia, extending your offer. I'm afraid my quest takes me in a different direction. I hunt assassins for Emperor Commodus.

CUT TO:

EXT. ANCIENT PORT, SYRIAN CITY - DAY

The Roman vessel approaches the pier. Severus and Pertinax watch from the bow.

SEVERUS (V.O.)

I tell you the details of my dream because I fear it. I fear what it foretells, but also what it does not. For my dream did not reveal who the two bodies were lying in the mist. I fear they may be the father and son emperors.

CUT TO:

EXT. SYRIAN CITY, APARTMENT BUILDING - DAY

Severus and a handful of legionaries (Demetrius among them) are poised to break down a door.

SEVERUS (V.O.)

Whatever the relevance of my dream, I should value your opinion. For you are my brother, you are wise, and I ache to see you again as an equal, as a brother, as a friend.

Severus nods. The legionaries kick the door down and surge into the apartment building. There is much screaming, but soon, they drag out a half-dressed Fulvius. He is weeping, and drops to his knees, begging for mercy.

FULVIUS

Please! No! You must listen! He will destroy all of Rome! His is a monster! I should know... I am also a monster!

Severus takes out his sword.

SEVERUS

We are all monsters.

Severus stabs him in the chest. He then withdraws his sword, which drips with blood.

CUT TO:

INT. SYRIAN TEMPLE - NIGHT

Severus and Pertinax sit in an ancient temple. Pertinax sips a cup of wine and peers at the pictograms on the wall.

PERTINAX

Lucias was surprising. He did not beg. He actually asked for a warrior's death. It turns out his father was legion.

SEVERUS

Fulvius begged. Claimed Commodus was a monster.

PERTINAX

(Pause)
What if he's right?

SEVERUS

Do you know how I wound up in Rome?

PERTINAX

No.

SEVERUS

I betrayed everyone I cared for. I killed Africans for Romans at a time in my life when I hated Rome. Because Rome was taking away my people's culture, our way of life. I was a fool.

PERTINAX

You're not the first person to have that complaint.

SEVERUS

I know. Had the wind blown differently... I might be dead in a field in Spain right now, with a Roman sword in my belly.

PERTINAX

If I hadn't had my heart broken when I was a boy, I'd be selling fish. Life has interesting turns.

SEVERUS

I want to be loyal to Rome. I want to be loyal to Africa. I want to be loyal to my family. How can I be all these things at once? Especially when they tear in different directions?

PERTINAX

The Emperor... Sorry, Marcus Aurelias once said to me "Be loyal to people, and only people you know."

SEVERUS

(chuckles)
That sounds like something he'd
say.

PERTINAX

He was a wise man.

SEVERUS

That begs the logical question,
though, my friend. Are you loyal to
Commodus?

PERTINAX

(Tight smile)
I serve Rome. That is my duty. If I
must choose my loyalty, then Rome
is in danger.

SEVERUS

That's not actually an answer.

PERTINAX

Perhaps I'm afraid of the question.

Severus finishes his wine and hands the empty cup to
Pertinax.

SEVERUS

Our work is done here. In the
morning, we should go.

PERTINAX

You don't wish to stay in Africa?

SEVERUS

No. Not until I am finished with
Rome.

CUT TO:

INT. SYRIAN TEMPLE - LATER

Severus walks through the halls, looking at the pictographs.
A female silhouette appears behind him as he pauses to
examine one. It is a male figure on a horse. A voice comes
from the darkness behind him (JULIA).

JULIA

Why do you serve Rome when you are
not Roman?

Severus turns to see Julia, a beautiful dark-skinned woman
wearing priestly garb.

SEVERUS

I serve mankind.

JULIA

No you don't. You serve yourself.
You serve your own survival. I know
you, Septimus Severus of Lepcis
Magna.

SEVERUS

And you are?

JULIA

Julia. I was named after the
original Caesar, though I, also, am
clearly not Roman.

SEVERUS

Clearly.

JULIA

I am a contradiction, just like
you.

SEVERUS

You know nothing of me.

JULIA

I know you have had odd dreams.

Severus turns to her with anger in his eyes.

SEVERUS

You spy on me?!

JULIA

No. The old gods tell me many
things. I have seen you before,
Severus. I know that yours is a
path of struggle and triumph.

SEVERUS

Well, I don't know you.

JULIA

Then please... learn about me.

She begins to remove her clothing.

SEVERUS

Stop.

JULIA

Why?

SEVERUS

My heart belongs to another.

JULIA

I am not interested in your heart.

SEVERUS
I'm leaving.

Severus turns to leave.

JULIA
This concept of one man and one
woman marriage... is it Roman?

Severus stops and turns to her.

SEVERUS
What?

JULIA
I am not asking for marriage, love,
or your precious heart. You have
had a vision. I can help you
recapture that vision, answer the
questions that burn in your soul.
For that, the ritual is simple,
primal.

SEVERUS
I'm not interested.

JULIA
Yes you are. For many reasons. You
recognise my face, do you not?

Severus frowns.

CUT TO:

FLASHBACK

EXT. OPEN FIELD - NIGHT

It is misty. Severus finds himself alone and naked in a wide
empty field. A horse races past him. When he looks again,
Paccia is on that horse with a black collar around her
throat. Her face changes, becomes misty, then turns into
Julia's face.

CUT TO:

INT. SYRIAN TEMPLE - PRESENT

Julia disrobes. Severus seems reluctant.

SEVERUS
No. No, I have already broken
enough people's lives this way.

JULIA
Then leave with your unanswered
questions.

Severus looks at her. She beckons him with one finger.

CUT TO:

INT. SYRIAN TEMPLE, RITUAL CHAMBER - PRESENT

Severus and Julia are naked, and thrusting wildly. Julia's eyes are rolled up in her head. Severus cries out, almost as if in pain, while grimacing. His eyes open and the iris's are white.

CUT TO:

EXT. OPEN FIELD - NIGHT

Severus stands over two bodies, both indistinct and hidden by mist. He kneels down to try to reach for them. They seem to somehow slip away from his touch.

JULIA (V.O.)
You do not want to see. Break your
fear.

CUT TO:

INT. SYRIAN TEMPLE, RITUAL CHAMBER - PRESENT

Severus seems to be trying to strangle Julia, but his hands hover centimetres from her skin. He cries out in anguish.

CUT TO:

EXT. OPEN FIELD - NIGHT

Severus stands over two bodies, both indistinct and hidden by mist. He kneels down to try to reach for them. He grabs at one of them and pulls. A red silk scarf comes away from the body.

SEVERUS
No...

The red silk scarf slips from his hand. It becomes liquid and splatters all over him as blood.

The mist begins to clear. He can see Paccia's face on the ground.

CUT TO:

INT. SYRIAN TEMPLE, RITUAL CHAMBER - PRESENT

Severus screams in pain and fury. He pushes himself away from Julia and staggers away. He stumbles out of the chamber, knocking over candles and incense as he goes.

CUT TO:

EXT. SYRIAN TEMPLE - NIGHT

Severus finds himself outside, beneath the stars. His eyes are glazed over. Pertinax is nearby, and runs over to him, but we see from Severus's POV. Pertinax is distorted. His clothes turn purple.

PERTINAX

Severus! What's wrong?! Severus?!

Severus looks at Pertinax who sprouts daggers from his chest that ooze blood. Severus screams.

CUT TO:

INT. ROMAN VESSEL, CABIN - NIGHT

Severus sweats and rolls in his bunk. A healer sits nearby, with Pertinax watching with concern.

PERTINAX

What's wrong with him?

HEALER

Some sort of fever. It has broken, but he will need to sleep.

PERTINAX

Gods help him. What happened in that place?

CUT TO:

INT. SYRIAN TEMPLE - NIGHT

Julia smiles and looks up at the stars.

JUJILA (V.O.)

You will survive, Septimus Severus. You will become great. You will rule the entire world, and I shall be at your side.

Her hand goes to her stomach.

JULIA (V.O.)
And I shall bear a burden of pain
to bring an African dynasty to your
crumbling Roman world.

Pull back as Julia stares at the night sky.

CUT TO:

EXT. ROMAN PIER, ONE MONTH LATER - NIGHT

As the Roman vessel slides into port, there is a troupe of Praetorian Guards standing there. Pertinax greets them with a salute. They board and surrounded Pertinax.

GUARD
We have orders to arrest the
traitor known as Septimus Severus.

Pertinax looks shocked. The guard hands him a scroll sealed with the Imperial seal.

CUT TO:

BLACK.