

SEVERUS  
Episode Five

Story By  
Steve Exeter & Mike Lukey

Written by  
Steve Exeter

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FADE IN:

EXT. ROMAN LEGION CAMP, DANUBE RIVER - MORNING, CONTINUOUS

It is a grey, misty morning. A young boy (GETA) runs through the muddy camp, ducking between a soldier's legs. A larger boy (LUCIUS) chases after him.

We follow this chase as the young boy runs past a cage containing what look like wild wolves. In the distance, a large funeral pyre is burning, and there are Roman soldiers throwing bodies onto it. Greasy black smoke drifts past.

Young Lucius catches up to the smaller boy, but they are clearly not playing as Lucius knocks the boy down. He grabs a mud-covered rock from nearby and raises it as if to strike the boy.

We hear the cry of Julia, who stands in the middle of the camp, looking furious.

JULIA

Lucius!! Lucius, you stop that now!

Lucius drops the rock and turns to Julia.

LUCIUS

He started it!

JULIA

He is smaller than you, younger than you, and you would hit him with a rock? Come here this insane!

Lucius looks dejected, but obeys his mother. Julia takes his hand.

JULIA (CONT'D)

Are you all right, Geta?

GETA

Lucius threw a stone at me!

JULIA

(To Lucius)  
Why?

LUCIUS

He called me a savage!

GETA

That's what the white people say we are!

Julia takes Geta by the hand.

JULIA

Hitting people with stones makes a person savage. Not skin. Now come on, your father won't like this at all!

We pan around to see Demetrius leading a group of Saxons in chains through the camp with a dozen Roman soldiers guarding them.

DEMETRIUS

As a measure of goodwill, you are to be set free to return to your people. Tell them that General Severus wishes to meet with your tribal leaders to discuss a temporary peace.

The camera then moves towards a large, ornate tent. From within we can hear the sounds of sexual grunting and moaning. The camera sweeps past and a man in the armour of a Roman General (GNAEUS) walks with another man in the armour of a Legate (LAETUS).

LAETUS

The General will be most anxious to see you.

GNAEUS

I'm anxious to see him. In the last three months, I've had my best centurion decapitated for assaulting a Gaul woman who turned out to be some queen or princess. If we are losing men to these savages and Rome crumbles while we're away, I'll be most infuriated. Damn that fool Commodus.

LAETUS

Commodus is dead.

GNAEUS

Who succeeded him?

LAETUS

Pertinax.

GNAEUS

Pertinax is a fine man, he would not let Rome fall!

LAETUS

Pertinax is dead.

Gnaeus comes to a stop and looks at Laetus.

GNAEUS

Do you mean to tell me that we have gone through two Emperors in the span of only a year?

LAETUS

I'm afraid it is much worse than that, sir.

CUT TO:

INT. SEVERUS'S TENT - LATER

Severus has a large map spread out over the table. Julia, young Lucius and Geta are in the background. Severus is pointing to Geta when Demetrius enters the tent.

SEVERUS

The next time you hear one of those Romans say something like that, you remind him who his commander is.

Severus turns to Demetrius.

DEMETRIUS

I heard the General is here, Sir.

SEVERUS

Good. Come here, please.

Demetrius approaches and sees that Severus has marked positions on a large map.

SEVERUS (CONT'D)

Albinus hides in the land of the Britons, while Niger rallies soldiers and mercenaries in Africa. We are closer. We could make it to Rome before they do, if we could get these savages to stop attacking us for one day.

DEMETRIUS

This is real, isn't it? We're marching on Rome.

SEVERUS

There is little choice, my friend. The role of Emperor for sale to the rich, the Senate at the mercy of the whims of the Praetorian Guard, the Empire too poor to pay it's soldiers despite having half the world taxed to poverty... This cannot go on.

DEMETRIUS

It's funny... When I was a boy, I thought Rome was an example of how the world should work. A great Republic, one Emperor to lead in times of crisis, a wise philosopher on the throne...

SEVERUS

(Nods)

Yes... But Rome has always had its flaws. Now we see what happens when they are never addressed. It is funny, my friend, because as a boy... I always imagined I would march on Rome with a great army, like Hannibal. I never thought I would be fighting to save Rome. But now I see if Rome falls, so the world falls with it.

DEMETRIUS

Do you have a plan?

SEVERUS

Yes. For you see, it is simple. The first one to Rome with the largest force wins. We do not have the wealth of our rivals, but we have the soldiers, loyalty to Rome, and certain victory if we can move quickly.

DEMETRIUS

But if the Saxons see us leave...

SEVERUS

They will hack at our backside all the way down the Danube, cutting our column in half by the time we reach the Roman gates.

Demetrius sighs and takes off his helmet. He looks down at his absent hand and shakes his head.

DEMETRIUS

Why do we always get the fun jobs?

Severus smiles. The tent flap opens and General Gnaeus enters with Legate Laetus. Severus and Demetrius stand at attention.

SEVERUS

General Gnaeus.

GNAEUS

General Severus.

They salute.

GNAEUS (CONT'D)

Your Legate is a very dedicated man.

LAETUS

Thank you, Sir.

GNAEUS

Now, General, please help me understand. What on Earth is happening in Rome?

SEVERUS

The Praetorian Guard have taken control of the government. Whoever pays them the biggest bribe gets to be Emperor.

GNAEUS

What?!

SEVERUS

Right now, Didius Julianus sits on the throne, however, two Senators who were outbid are now raising forces to take the Throne from him, Albinus Clodius and Pescennius Niger.

GNAEUS

(Shocked) By the Gods... Civil War in Rome.

SEVERUS

Yes. I have heard you are a clever man, so I don't need to tell you what will happen no matter who wins.

GNAEUS

Our problems with the Saxons and Moors will more than double, provinces will demand independence, power vacuums will attract petty tyrants... Gods, Rome will never wash the blood from it's walls.

SEVERUS

Unless we get there first.

GNAEUS

We?

SEVERUS

We. Both of our forces combine will outmatch anything in the Praetorian Guard, and far outnumber the forces of our rivals.

GNAEUS

I see... And assuming we are victorious in seizing Rome, what then?

SEVERUS

We'll need to restore power to the senate, and find an Emperor who can restore order.

GNAEUS

You?

SEVERUS

I hope not.

Julia pipes up from the other end of the tent.

JULIA

Yes, him.

Severus turns to her.

SEVERUS

No. I do not seek the throne.

GNAEUS

Neither do I.

SEVERUS

We shall deal with that matter when it comes up. However for right now, we must end this fighting with the tribes. I've sent peace envoys out.

GNAEUS

Madness. If they sense weakness, they will attack with even more fury.

SEVERUS

Good. Then we can slaughter them all at once and be done with it.

GNAEUS

You mean to bait them?

SEVERUS

I am letting them decide their fate. If they chose peace, so be it. If they choose war, we are prepared. But either way, we cannot waste any more time.

GNAEUS

You're right.

JULIA

My husband is wise.

Gnaeus gives her a look, but then turns back to Severus.

GNAEUS

Lucky for you, I managed to defeat the berserkers to the west. I have several legions ready to march on Rome.

SEVERUS

Good. Then, you are willing to commit yourself to this?

GNAEUS

I have served Rome since Marcus Aurelius was still being groomed for Emperor. I will not flee now that she needs me the most.

SEVERUS

I'm glad to hear it. I know you only be reputation my friend, but I'm glad to see that you more than live up to it.

GNAEUS

And I know of you, General Severus. There are some Saxons who call you the Black Sword of Rome. They truly despise you.

SEVERUS

That's a pity. I'm really quite friendly when there are no swords swinging at me.

Severus smiles. Gnaeus grins and salutes him.

GNAEUS

I shall assemble my forces and we shall prepare to march on Rome.

SEVERUS

Thank you, General.

Gnaeus salutes. Severus returns the salute, and the General leaves with Laetus. Demetrius looks to Severus.

DEMETRIUS

The Black Sword of Rome?

SEVERUS

A far cry from what I thought I would be.



JULIA

But a sign of who you will be, my  
love.

Severus shoots her a look. Demetrius sees this, and tries to bring Severus's attention back to the problem at hand.

DEMETRIUS

Niger and his forces will reach  
Rome before Albinus. He'll be our  
first problem if we do take the  
city.

JULIA

Niger will not be happy if you take  
Rome first. He is a very jealous  
man.

SEVERUS

(Angrily) And you would know.

Demetrius looks between the two, then puts his helmet back on.

DEMETRIUS

I can see there is much work to do  
before we march. If you'll excuse  
me, General.

Demetrius steps outside while Severus walks over to Julia.

JULIA

You still doubt my word.

SEVERUS

How can I not? Since I met you you  
have deceived me. And even when I  
lower my guard and try to accept  
you as my wife, you speak madness  
and treachery.

JULIA

You do not listen when I speak!

SEVERUS

I listen better than you think.

JULIA

Then you would know for certain my  
faithfulness and dedication!

SEVERUS

Tell me...

JULIA

What do you wish to know?

SEVERUS

Did you sleep with Niger? Is Lucius even my son?

JULIA

He has your face. But to be truthful... Yes, I did sleep with Niger.

SEVERUS

(Enraged)  
And that is what you consider faithful?!

JULIA

You do not understand! You refuse to let me explain!

SEVERUS

(Angry and defeated)  
I suppose I deserved this for what I did to my brother.

JULIA

Niger is a small-minded man, but a dangerous, ambitious one. He tried to seduce me for information. I let him, so I could discover what he wanted. That is why I wished you to take me from Rome!

SEVERUS

To flee from your shame?

JULIA

Because he was going to kill you! And me, and Lucius. I let him have my body so I could steal secrets from his mind! Severus, you are my love! I have told you before. I saw your coming in a vision, and I see our children standing beside you as you rule all of Rome!

SEVERUS

Enough! Julia, you are mad!

JULIA

No, Severus!

JULIA (CONT'D)

I am not mad! Everything has happened just as I had foreseen it. And you may deny my visions, but not your own.

Severus looks at her, his face going pale.

SEVERUS

Dreams... Nothing more than dreams.

JULIA

Dreams are the Gods speaking to us. We do not understand their language, so they must make their messages simple for us. You saw the death of your brother and wife before it happened, maybe *while* it happened. You have the gift. I have the gift. Our children shall have it.

SEVERUS

Julia... Even if you speak the truth, you would have me become the embodiment of the thing I spent my youth hating. I have already risked my life for Rome, watched my pride shatter, accept a world that I cannot change, and lose good friends. So much of my life is wrong.

JULIA

Husband... Listen to me. My visions have told me that you are as yet a broken man. But that you are not destroyed. Now, you are being forged into something stronger in a terrible fire.

Severus softens a little and turns to her.

SEVERUS

Julia, some days I wish to strike the head from your body. Some days I wish for your tenderness and warmth.

JULIA

And what do you wish today, Severus, my love?

Severus stares off in thought for a long moment.

SEVERUS

Tell me everything that happened with Niger.

JULIA

It will wound you.

SEVERUS

Pain is an old friend.

CUT TO:

INT. PALACE IN ROME, SUITE - NIGHT

A slightly pregnant Julia sits and laughs naked on a wide bed with Pescennius Niger.

JULIA (V.O.)  
He is an arrogant man. Foolish. He  
thought I would swoon at the sight  
of his manhood.

Niger reaches for her and fondles her breast. Julia smiles and beckons him closer.

JULIA (V.O.)  
In truth, he was as unskilled in  
bed as he is in lying.

Niger climbs over her and pushes her down.

JULIA (V.O.)  
He came quickly, and fell asleep.

CUT TO:

INT. PALACE, ROME, SUITE - LATER

Niger sleeps peacefully, his lips moving, mumbling. Julia lies there, watching and listening.

JULIA (V.O.)  
I know how to make a man speak in  
his sleep, and how to get him to  
reveal the truth in his dreams.

NIGER  
I have the slaves watching and  
listening... Paid with coin...

CUT TO:

INT. SEVERUS'S TENT - PRESENT

Severus is listening as Julia speaks, patiently, but his demeanour towards her softening.

SEVERUS  
The slaves... Of course.

JULIA  
In turn, I paid some of the slaves  
more to spy for me. But I could not  
tell you what I knew. The Palace is  
full of slaves, and all could be  
spies for the Guard.

SEVERUS

But here, on the road, and in  
Germania...

JULIA

You have made your distrust of my  
words very clear, husband. How  
could I make you listen before you  
were ready?

SEVERUS

So I am to blame for your secrecy?!

JULIA

Not to blame, my love. But you are  
stubborn, still prideful, and you  
burn with a rage that could consume  
the world. Even when we make love,  
your eyes burn with rage.

Severus looks away.

JULIA (CONT'D)

I forgive you, Severus. Don't you  
see? I have known you since before  
I knew what the touch of a man felt  
like. I have known you since before  
I knew the Gods, and the dreams  
they speak through. I am proud of  
what you have done, and prouder  
still of the man you are becoming.  
You doubt my words, but you shall  
be Caesar, and you shall rule this  
world the way it must be ruled.

SEVERUS

I do doubt you... about that. But I  
think I believe you about Niger.

JULIA

A woman in Rome has but one weapon  
she can use. It is more effective  
than any sword when wielded  
competently.

SEVERUS

I still do not like it.

JULIA

I accept that. I accept your rage.  
But I did not earn your hatred.

Severus pauses for a long moment.

SEVERUS

I don't hate you. I hate what you  
make me.

JULIA

What?

SEVERUS

You make me believe I should be Emperor.

JULIA

You are strong, wise, and just. Despite your rage, you have never raised your hand to me. You have every reason to. Many wives would already have been killed for what I did.

SEVERUS

But for Lucius and Geta...

JULIA

And our future.

Severus sighs and looks at the ground.

SEVERUS

I am sorry for how I have treated you.

JULIA

I forgive you. Do you forgive me?

SEVERUS

... Yes. But never again, Julia!

JULIA

Never again. It was not a decision I made lightly, I promise. But never again.

Severus looks at her skeptically, but then nods.

CUT TO:

EXT. ROMAN LEGION CAMP, DANUBE RIVER - LATER

Severus stands on a platform. Before him are the assembled Roman legions, all holding their swords high and cheering. Julia is at his right with a child holding each hand. General Gnaeus is at his left. Severus holds up his hands and they quiet down, though many still chant his name.

SEVERUS

Men of Rome! Hear me! By now, you have heard that Emperor Pertinax is dead. You have heard that the senate is fractured, that Rome is headed towards civil war. I know your thoughts.

(MORE)

SEVERUS (CONT'D)

You are thinking, 'I fight for Rome, not for greedy men of wealth.' You think 'I did not lose my fingers, my hand, my blood, or my friends so that Rome could fall. You are thinking 'I did not risk my life so that the few fools could cut Rome up like a slaughtered goat.' I know your thoughts because I have them as well. Because I have sacrificed, I have lost friends, I have fought and nearly died for a mighty Republic that now crumbles from inside. We are bound to serve Rome! Marcus Aurelius was bound to serve Rome. Pertinax was bound to serve Rome. They are dead now! But we are alive! We represent the Rome they sought to build, one of strength, unity, peace and justice.

Some cheering comes up from the crowd.

SEVERUS (CONT'D)

Tomorrow, the Saxon tribes will either let us go in peace, or be cut down by our swords. Because the day after, we march on Rome! For the Republic! For the Empire! For our families, our brothers, our friends, and even for our enemies! Because we shall not die in service to madmen and thieves! We shall die in service to Rome!

The crowd cheers. Julia looks to Severus with pride in her eyes. General Gnaeus seems genuinely impressed.

CUT TO:

EXT. GERMANIA, OPEN FIELD - LATER

It is raining, the field is cold and misty, and the Roman legion stands behind Severus in a line. Severus waits patiently with Demetrius by his side. A large group of Saxon warriors emerge from the mist as they move towards the Roman line. They look as if they are ready to fight.

Demetrius leans over to Severus.

DEMETRIUS

I don't think they want to talk peace.

SEVERUS

I got that impression myself. You know what to do.

DEMETRIUS

Yes, sir.

SEVERUS

But wait for my signal.

The German horde seems to pour out from the woods all around the Romans. The legion remains rock-steady, unwavering. A large warrior (BERSERKER), approaches.

SEVERUS (CONT'D)

Hail, mighty Saxon warriors. We come here to talk peace.

BERSERKER

(Laughs)

We come here to rend you to pieces!

The Berserker lets out a massive roar, beating his chest. The rest of the Saxons join in the roar and raise their weapons.

Severus turns to Demetrius and nods.

Demetrius turns to the legion.

DEMETRIUS

Fire!

The call goes out from the line all the way back. A soldier behind the front line raises a torch in the air and waves it.

From far behind them, several distant objects are flung into the air. The Legion waits as the Saxons advance on them.

The objects in the air come closer, very fast, trailing smoke and flame. They crash into the battlefield all around the Saxons, spreading fire everywhere as they shatter.

SEVERUS

Archers!

DEMETRIUS

Archers!

The front line of Romans duck down and raise their shields. A line of archers behind them take aim and fire. A swarm of arrows fly into the approaching Saxons. Those archers duck down and a line of archers behind them fire, sending another swarm of arrows. The first line of archers rises, new arrows knocked into place.

The Saxons continue forward, despite many of them being on fire and partially skewered. The Berserker takes two arrows in the chest and keeps rumbling forward while roaring. He raises a massive hammer and barrels towards Severus.

SEVERUS

Shields!



DEMETRIUS

Shields!

The Roman front line forms up and raises their shields, forming a wall, with their spears held up in between, forming a lethal barricade. Severus and Demetrius stand in front of that wall. The Berserker breaks ahead of the others and swings his hammer down at Severus with a mighty leap attack.

Severus watches the Berserker's movements, he and Demetrius quickly sidestep, slashing their swords at his exposed flesh. When he misses his target, his hammer slams into a Roman shield, and he becomes impaled on a spear. Severus turns back and stabs him in the chest. The Berserker stumbles back, trying to swing his hammer at Severus again while blood pours out of his wounds and mouth.

SEVERUS

Oh, come on... Just die!

The Berserker swings his hammer, and Severus ducks back. Demetrius puts another blade in the Berserker's back while he swings at Severus, twisting the sword. The Berserker stumbles to his knees.

By now, the rest of the Saxons have caught up, and Severus turns to the legion.

SEVERUS (CONT'D)

Barrage!!

The front line drops again, and from behind them comes a rain of spears that strike a number of incoming Saxons, impaling some, sticking others to the ground. One Saxon takes a spear in the leg and screams as he falls. More Saxons now crowd around Severus and he parries their attacks with his sword.

SEVERUS (CONT'D)

Legion! Unleash Hell!

The Romans break formation and attack the Saxons. The few that survived the onslaught from the Romans are either wounded or lucky. As the more organised, disciplined Romans step forward and produce their swords, the Saxons are immediately outnumbered and quickly slaughtered. Demetrius battles a very large Saxon with an axe.

DEMETRIUS

By the Gods you're big...

SAXON

You have only one hand to fight with!

DEMETRIUS

That's all I need!

Demetrius uses the shield strapped to his stump arm to deflect the swinging axe, then thrusts his sword into the man's chest. He cries out, then falls to his knees. Demetrius finishes him with a slash to the throat and moves past the warrior as he falls.

Demetrius finds Severus in the melee, once again, using a sword in each hand to battle multiple Saxon warriors. Severus almost seems a little berserk himself, but he fights with precise slashes and thrusts, expertly parrying attacks and juggling multiple foes at once.

A Saxon manages to get close enough to almost put a sword in Severus's back, but Demetrius intercepts him and cuts low at his foot. The slash cuts his Achilles tendon and he goes down screaming.

DEMETRIUS (CONT'D)

(To Severus)

So much for the peace envoy.

SEVERUS

They will keep coming.

Severus kills the Saxon he's fighting, then looks to the woods where more Saxon warriors are pouring forth.

SEVERUS (CONT'D)

FORM UP!!!

Instantly, the Roman legion reassembles into a line.

SEVERUS (CONT'D)

Fire!!

The call goes back as multiple voices echo 'Fire.'

SEVERUS (CONT'D)

Archers!

The front line drops and the archers behind them open fire on the incoming Saxons. Overhead, more fireballs fly at the attacking hordes.

The Archers move like pistons in an engine, the front line firing then ducking to nock another arrow, the second line firing, then the front line rising again to fire. Arrows seem to fly continuously from the Roman line until, once again, the Saxons get close enough.

SEVERUS (CONT'D)

Shields!

The Romans form up again, the front line raising their shields with their spears pointed out. Severus slips behind the front line with Demetrius.

The Saxons approach the wall of shields and begin trying to hack around the edges of the shields. Severus's voice carries over the clatter.

SEVERUS (V.O.) (CONT'D)  
Legion! Break!

The wall opens on every fifth shield, the soldiers falling back enough to let some of the Saxons through. Those Saxons are met by whirling blades from every Roman on the other side. The Romans have taken no casualties yet, and the Saxons are only piling up bodies before their line of shields.

FADE TO:

EXT. GERMANIA, OPEN FIELD - LATER

The battlefield is covered in blood and ashes. Some of the wounded Saxons are being lifted by Roman soldiers. Severus walks among the dead and chooses one Saxon who appears able to walk. He waves his men away and stares directly at the warrior.

SEVERUS  
This was your show of strength?

The warrior nods dumbly.

SEVERUS (CONT'D)  
Tell your leaders that we had no dead Romans today. And if they try this foolishness again, we will not be so merciful.

Severus kicks the warrior.

SEVERUS (CONT'D)  
Go! Go tell them what happened here!

The warrior sulks off towards the forest. Demetrius steps up next to Severus.

DEMETRIUS  
Do you think this will work?

SEVERUS  
They will be angry. We have broken their pride. But if they are not complete fools, they will leave us alone.

DEMETRIUS  
I hope you're right, my friend.

SEVERUS

Come... We must tend to the wounded and prepare to march. We have wasted enough time here proving Rome's might.

DEMETRIUS

I agree. Also, this weather is extremely unpleasant.

Severus smirks lightly.

FADE TO:

EXT. YORK, ENGLAND - DAY

Establishing shot.

It is even colder and just as rainy in the soggy English countryside. A Roman vessel is docked at a small pier along a river. A Roman fortress stands nearby, replete with purple tapestries and the symbol of the Roman Emperor on every flag.

Roman soldiers escort a man in a thick cloak with a heavy hood drawn over his face as he approaches the fortress.

CUT TO:

INT. ALBINUS'S STRONGHOLD - MINUTES LATER

Albinus sits before a small group of Roman soldiers and nobles. Each man in the room looks grim. One of the nobles, a stout man (MARCELLUS) who seems uncomfortable in the climate, is standing and looking at Albinus angrily.

MARCELLUS

Four legions?! Is that all? We couldn't capture an olive farm with that few men!

ALBINUS

Four legions today. Three yesterday. We have seven legions here in total, and with your support, we can bring that to ten.

MARCELLUS

This is madness! Your claim to the throne is tenuous at best!

ALBINUS

And you would prefer if that brown-skinned bastard Niger held the throne?!

MARCELLUS

Of course not! Rome is for Romans!  
But you are not Roman yourself!

ALBINUS

More than my two rivals. Even  
Julianus is an impure specimen.

MARCELLUS

And what will you do when we get to  
Rome? Kill the Praetorian Guard?  
Murder fellow Romans?

ALBINUS

Only the ones in my way!

The doors open dramatically and allow in a sweeping wind that carries cold, damp rain with it. The cloaked figure enters, with two soldiers flanking him. He throws the hood back off and looks to Albinus.

MESSENGER

Albinus Clodius?

ALBINUS

Emperor Albinus Clodius.

MESSENGER

As you say, Sir. I deliver a  
message from Germania.

MARCELLUS

Germania? We have at least eight  
legions there now.

The messenger hands Albinus the scroll. Albinus looks at the seal.

ALBINUS

From house Septimius? Yes, of  
course...

He opens the scroll and begins to read. His expression turns pale.

MARCELLUS

Well?!

ALBINUS

It is from General Severus. He asks  
that I stand down and abandon my  
claim to the throne for the good of  
Rome. He says he marches for Rome,  
and will arrive there before my no  
matter the circumstance.

MARCELLUS

And he marches with eight legions?

Albinus nods, then tosses the scroll away in disgust.

ALBINUS

Messenger... Do you serve the General?

MESSENGER

I am a hired messenger. I serve whoever pays me coin.

MARCELLUS

What about blood?

Albinus raises a hand, then turns to the messenger.

ALBINUS

I shall pay double your fee if you return to Severus with my reply. It is a simple one, a single word. The word is "No." Now get out of here while I remain patient.

The Messenger turns and leaves, pulling his hood up as he exits.

MARCELLUS

I'm surprised at your restraint.

ALBINUS

Good messengers are hard to come by.

MARCELLUS

If Severus and his legions get to Rome first, they will fortify by the time our forces arrive.

ALBINUS

I know. We must collect support as we go. Have the legions depart immediately. Make sure they stop at every Roman stronghold and fortress from here to the Alps and collect every man they can. By order of the Emperor.

CUT TO:

EXT. ROMAN SENATE - DAY

Establishing shot. We hear the indistinct shouting of dozens of angry senators.

CUT TO:

INT. ROMAN SENATE - SECONDS LATER

The senators are in disarray, all involved in shouting matches, some screaming in each other's faces. Plautinius is there, though not in the garb of a senator, he seems to be watching the madness from the sidelines. In his hand is a scroll. It has the seal of the house of Septimius.

SEVERUS (V.O.)

My friend, I implore you to help me. Though the circumstances are grave, I will need as many friends as I can get when I return to Rome. Yes, I am coming, Plautinius. And I bring many many friends. This madness will end. Though I have never had a love for Rome, I have come to understand a truth that I did not understand when I was young. If Rome falls, the world falls with it. Be safe, my friend. I will be there soon.

Plautinius rolls up the parchment and slips it into a satchel bag.

Suddenly, the doors to the senate chamber are thrust open. The Praetorian Guard enter, followed shortly thereafter by Emperor Julianus in the full, ornate garb of the Caesar. All shouting ceases as the room goes quiet in fear.

JULIANUS

My friends! My friends! What is this anarchy? You are all Romans! Your duty is to Rome. And I am the Emperor, I am Rome. We cannot let petty politics divide us when we have such great problems to deal with.

The Speaker stands up, a tall, older man named RENATUS, who is still red in the face from shouting.

RENATUS

You are the great problem, Julianus! Since you purchased your office, you have set a dangerous precedent. Wealthy men all over the Empire are sending offers for government positions.

JULIANUS

Well, it sounds as if we've discovered the answer to Rome's debt problem.

RENATUS

No, you fool! Rome cannot operate like this! These men are not qualified for public service, they are men seeking personal profit and glory, not service to the state!

JULIANUS

Their profit is Rome's profit.

RENATUS

Oh, yes! Especially half of these new senators, most of whom support you unconditionally, and receive great sums of money for it!

JULIANUS

Be careful, Speaker. We are in a time of war. Albinus and Pescennius prepare forces to march on Rome. I have recalled legions from the front lines, but it will be some time before they arrive.

RENATUS

And half of them will march against you!

JULIANUS

Not when it is I who pay them.

RENATUS

This is madness. Worse than Commodus!

JULIANUS

Speaker Renatus, you are speaking to your Emperor. Watch your tongue.

RENATUS

I am Roman. I speak for Rome.

JULIANUS

I can speak for myself.

Julianus makes a nod towards one of the guards. The Praetorian seizes Renatus

RENATUS

No! Julianus, stop this before the Empire itself falls!

JULIANUS

Take him to a cell.

He looks and sees Plautinius hovering at the edge of the room.



JULIANUS (CONT'D)

Plautinius! I thought you had resigned your seat.

PLAUTINIUS

I have. I wanted to say farewell to my colleagues before leaving for home.

JULIANUS

But we need you, my friend. You are a friend of Septimius Severus, are you not? He has not responded to my recall order. I wondered if you had heard from him.

Plautinius says nothing.

JULIANUS (CONT'D)

No?

PLAUTINIUS

I have nothing to say, Emperor.

Julianus narrows his eyes.

JULIANUS

Praetorian, search him.

The Guard steps up to Plautinius. Plautinius allows himself to be searched, a mask of desperate resolve on his face. The Guard returns to Julianus with Plautinius's satchel. Julianus begins searching through it. He removes the scroll. He then unrolls it and reads through it.

JULIANUS (CONT'D)

You have kept in very close contact with your old friend, Plautinius.

Plautinius remains silent.

JULIANUS (CONT'D)

Severus intends to march on Rome. Well... Plautinius... This makes you a traitor.

PLAUTINIUS

I am no traitor. I want no part of this. I wish to leave Rome on the horizon as soon as possible.

JULIANUS

Well, I don't think that is going to happen. Guards, take him.

The Praetorians seize Plautinius, who struggles lightly.

JULIANUS (CONT'D)

We will have much to discuss later.

CUT TO:

EXT. DANUBE RIVER - DAY

The column of Roman soldiers marches back towards Rome. The weather is still dismal, grey, and dark. Severus rides on horseback next to General Gnaeus. There is a light drizzle in the air. Behind them, in a carriage, are Julia and Severus's son.

GNAEUS

I don't think it's a good idea to leave a gap between Emperors.

SEVERUS

I don't think it's a good idea to choose an Emperor out of fear.

GNAEUS

Most Emperors are groomed for years for the role. Even Commodus spent years learning the art of war and diplomacy from his father. Pity the whelp didn't take to any of it.

SEVERUS

My wife is convinced I will be emperor.

GNAEUS

You?

SEVERUS

It's not an idea I like the taste of.

GNAEUS

No, I can see that. I know many men that would already be wearing purple and flying banners. Not you, though.

SEVERUS

And not you, or else you would have suggested yourself.

GNAEUS

I know I'm wrong for it. I'm a man of the sword and shield. I have no knowledge of politics.

SEVERUS

Just like Pertinax.

GNAEUS

Exactly. But you... To be fair, I think you might be a good candidate.

SEVERUS

I'm in no mood for jokes.

GNAEUS

It is no joke. You are wise, educated, cautious, and you have the most important qualification for the job.

SEVERUS

What is that?

GNAEUS

You don't want it.

There is a long pause as Severus stares at him.

SEVERUS

"Those who seek power are not worthy of it." You know your Plato.

GNAEUS

No, I just know people. I knew Marcus Aurelias before he ascended. He was always full of doubt.

SEVERUS

He seemed very sure and wise when I met him.

GNAEUS

He said to me that fear and doubt should be taken seriously. Men who are always certain are frequently wrong.

SEVERUS

He said something similar to me. But I do not wish to be Emperor. It would break the last shred of my integrity.

GNAEUS

Integrity? Severus, you sent a request for peace to a warrior people when you could have just slaughtered them all at once. You march on Rome to depose a tyrant. You decline the opportunity to take the throne for yourself. You have more integrity than most men I have sworn to die for.

Severus says nothing. They ride in silence for a moment. Severus looks into the distance with a look of old pain in his eyes.

GNAEUS (CONT'D)

If not you... then...

Gnaeus doesn't ask the full question. Laetus and Demetrius come running up beside them.

LAETUS

Generals! Sirs!

DEMETRIUS

We have word from the Saxons tribes. They have surrendered.

SEVERUS

Good.

GNAEUS

You see? Your enemies surrender even when you march away from them.

There is a long, awkward pause as Severus seems unhappy with the thought.

GNAEUS (CONT'D)

Severus... Consider the idea. We cannot have a leaderless Rome when the senate's corruption is known even out to Germania.

Severus gives Gnaeus a solemn look, part stubbornness, part acceptance.

CUT TO:

INT. SEVERUS'S CARRIAGE - A LITTLE LATER

Julia sits with Lucius and Geta, reading, the young boys learning their Latin. Julia looks up as Severus enters.

JULIA

Do we make camp?

SEVERUS

Briefly.

Severus sits down heavily.

SEVERUS (CONT'D)

This Germanic weather is bitter.

JULIA

It is. I long for the warmth of the Southern lands.

Severus nods. He bites his lip.

SEVERUS

Gnaeus believes I should be emperor.

JULIA

So do I.

SEVERUS

I do not.

LUCIUS

If Daddy is Emperor, can I be Emperor, too?

GETA

Me, too!

Severus and Julia smile at Lucius.

SEVERUS

We will see.

JULIA

You cannot escape fate, my husband.

SEVERUS

I often think back on the decisions I have made to get where I am. Some I regret. Most, I regret. To achieve the position of Emperor after I have betrayed myself, my brother, my family, my people, my wife... I don't have the right.

JULIA

I won't argue with you on this again, my love. But I will ask this: You have spoken of your respect for Marcus Aurelias. What would he say to you?

SEVERUS

He would tell me do the work that needs to be done.

JULIA

Yes.

Severus sighs and shakes his head with a small smile.

SEVERUS

I must be mad.

JULIA

It is said that madness and genius  
go hand-in-hand.

She touches his shoulder. He lets her. He looks up into her eyes, and they smile lightly at each other.

SEVERUS

(Wryly)  
Manipulative witch.

JULIA

(Wryly)  
Savage African.

They share a brief kiss.

SEVERUS

I've never known a woman to make me  
so enraged.

JULIA

I've never seen a man so resistant  
to being great. Fortunately, we are  
both stubborn.

LUCIUS

How come Mummy and Daddy fight so  
much, but then kiss like that?

Severus chuckles and shakes his head.

SEVERUS

The short answer is, because we  
want the same thing, but disagree  
on how to get it.

GETA

Grownups are weird!

CUT TO:

INT. ROME, PALACE, PRISON CELL - EVENING

Plautinius looks weak and pale as he sits in his cell. A pair of guards outside, both light-skinned, mock him.

GUARD 1

The barbarian still has not eaten  
his own hand.

GUARD 2

I owe you a denarius. I don't  
understand it.

GUARD 1

He refuses food.

GUARD 2

Why?

GUARD 1

Like I would know. Hey! Savage!  
Would you like an apple? I have a  
shiny apple for you...

The Guard offers the apple. Plautinius doesn't even look in his direction.

The guards chuckle and walk away. Plautinius sits there, shivering from cold and hunger.

A Praetorian steps into view and unlocks the cell door.

CUT TO:

INT. PALACE, EMPEROR'S CHAMBERS - LATER

A hungry, exhausted, and very weak Plautinius is brought into the chambers by the Praetorian Guard. Julianus sits there with many plates of food before him, and Plautinius who seems to have not touched any of the food. Plautinius looks somewhat pale himself, but clearly not for lack of food.

JULIANUS

Plautinius, please come in. Sit.  
Have something to eat, please.

Plautinius says nothing and does not eat.

JULIANUS (CONT'D)

I am troubled by your refusal to eat. Is this some African religious fasting I don't know about?

Plautinius still says nothing.

JULIANUS (CONT'D)

Ah, I see. It is some sort of protest. Hm.

Julianus contemplates it for a long moment.

JULIANUS (CONT'D)

I fail to understand how *you* not eating is going to, in any way, hurt *me*. But, perhaps, we may find a common ground elsewhere. Your friend Severus, he marches on Rome. I would like you to help me convince him not to. If the Roman legions march into this Palace, there will be nothing but bloodshed. You know how things are in a battle...

(MORE)

## JULIANUS (CONT'D)

The enemy is slaughtered, anyone around the enemy is slaughtered, and the last one standing is the winner. It's savage, messy, and unnecessary. I've been thinking about this very hard... I think it might be best if instead of fighting your friend and his forces, that we arrange a compromise. I'll even let him take the Emperor's chair if it means nobody has to die.

He turns to Plautinius. Plautinius seems to be looking at Julianus with dead eyes.

## JULIANUS (CONT'D)

Think of it, Plautinius. Just with a little bit of honesty and a hand of friendship, we could end a civil war before it begins. But I sense if *I* were to make the offer, Severus wouldn't trust it. He might think it were some form of trickery or deceit. But if you were to make the offer, on my behalf, he might just be willing to negotiate. And I do mean negotiate. I did not become a wealthy man without learning how to negotiate reasonably. Severus is a reasonable man. You are a reasonable man. Even if we disagree on who should hold this seat... Can we be reasonable enough to have a discussion about it? Without swords and spears?

Plautinius looks down at the food, then up at Julianus. He speaks, but his voice is hoarse and weak.

## PLAUTINIUS

I... will try.

CUT TO:

EXT. GERMANIA, LONG ROAD - DAY

The column of Roman soldiers continues marching. There is a great dark cloud ahead of them that seems to seep down off the mountains.

In the distance, we can see a small town with farms, small buildings, and a built-up main square.

CUT TO:



EXT. FLUSS LÄUFT - A LITTLE LATER

The Roman column enters the town. There are children running around them, cheering calling out to them. Some adults smile and wave. Other watch with bitter, resentful faces.

Close up on the eyes of one young male, maybe 15, with absolute hatred in his eyes.

Cut to Severus's own eyes, full of great sadness. He looks away from the boy, clearly remembering when he was on the opposite side of that look.

As the column marches into the centre of the town, Severus dismounts and looks towards a small gathering of older men who stand there to greet them. One of them, an older Jewish man, (SILAS) nods to Severus and then offers a Roman salute. Severus returns it.

SILAS

Passing through again, General?

SEVERUS

Hopefully for the last time.

SILAS

We have heard strange rumours, General. Is it true? Do you march on Rome to take the Emperor's throne?

Severus bites his lip and looks away. Behind him, Julia comes out of the carriage with Lucius. They approach slowly.

SEVERUS

I'm hoping it won't come to that.

SILAS

You have always been fair to our little town. The world could use a little more of that.

SEVERUS

So I hear.

SILAS

Would you like me to make you something a little more fitting for an Emperor?

SEVERUS

No, Silas, thank you.

LUCIUS

Can I have something? If Daddy's gonna be Emperor, I want to be, too!

Severus looks down at Lucius with irritation.

SEVERUS  
Lucius, no!

JULIA  
Oh, let him be.

Severus gives her a warning look. Julia returns his glare.

JULIA (CONT'D)  
Come, I'm sure we can let him have  
his fun.

She motions to Silas, who smiles and turns to Julia.

SILAS  
Of course. Come to my shop  
tomorrow, I shall make him  
something.

SEVERUS  
If you must.

SILAS  
Perhaps, something he will need to  
grow into, yes?

Silas shoots Severus an understanding look. Severus finds himself a little disarmed and nods.

SEVERUS  
Very well.

Silas walks away with Julia and Lucius. Severus turns and finds General Gnaeus standing there, having watched the entire exchange.

GNAEUS  
The boy's just excited. I would  
have been at that age.

SEVERUS  
Yes, so would I. That's what  
frightens me.

Behind them, a hooded messenger rides up on a horse.

MESSENGER  
Hail!

SEVERUS  
Yes?

The Messenger shakes his head. Severus sighs heavily.

SEVERUS (CONT'D)  
This is going to be difficult.

GNAEUS

Every battle worth fighting is  
difficult.

CUT TO:

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

Julianus sits worrying over a pile of parchments surrounding a great map on a table. Meanwhile a pair of Praetorian Guards stand nearby. Two senators also stand there, (CORBEN, youngish, well-groomed, haughty and elitist; and IAGO, early forties, olive-skinned, wearing fine silks.)

IAGO

The seas seem to be rougher this  
time of year, which will slow  
Niger's forces even more.

JULIANUS

And my messengers delivered an  
offer to Albinus for co-rule. If  
we're lucky, Severus's forces and  
Niger's will meet and cancel each  
other out.

CORBEN

Very likely. The African savages  
are always up for a fight.

JULIANUS

Not this one, not Severus. My spies  
tell me he attempted to make peace  
with the Saxons.

CORBEN

Oh? Well... How did that work out?

IAGO

They refused. Severus lured them  
into battle and turned the full  
force of all his legions on them at  
once. It was bloody, and over fast.

CORBEN

Well then...

JULIANUS

I'm working on the Severus problem.  
I have a friend of his, and have  
given him the same story to relate  
to Severus that I told to Albinus.  
I'm offering the Emperor's chair,  
or at least co-rule. When he  
arrives in the city, we will not  
hamper him in the least.

(MORE)

JULIANUS (CONT'D)

When he steps into this chamber, he will die, and we will force the legions to swear loyalty to me.

IAGO

Do you think they will?

CORBEN

With their leader dead? Of course they will.

JULIANUS

I hope so. If not, the guard have prepared a little trap.

The Praetorian guards smirk at the men.

CORBEN

Devilishly clever. What sort of trap?

JULIANUS

How soon until Severus's forces reach the edge of the peninsula?

IAGO

My estimates put him within a few days of the Alps. From there, he will have some slow going with this weather turning colder. Winter will be here soon.

CUT TO:

EXT. MOUNTAIN ROAD - DAYS LATER

The Roman column marches along rough, rocky mountain roads. Severus rides atop his horse next to Gnaeus. As Severus looks out at the massive mountains, he narrows his eyes, then slowly closes them.

CUT TO:

EXT. MOUNTAIN PASS - TWILIGHT

A heavy winter storm is hurling snow and ice at thousands of marching men. They are guiding massive elephants along the rough roads, leaning against the bitter wind and cold as they march on. At the front of this force is a man covered in furs (HANNIBAL) looking back at his scores of men with a hard, determined look on his face, even as ice forms on his exposed skin.

CUT TO:

EXT. MOUNTAIN ROAD - PRESENT

Severus's eyes open and he looks at the road ahead of them, the dark clouds gathering. He takes a long, slow breath. As he does, little white flakes begin to dance in the air around him.

CUT TO:

INT. PESCENNIUS NIGER'S COMPOUND, SYRIA - NIGHT

Niger sips from a generous cup of wine while a map is spread on a table before him. There is a single man there, an African dressed very much like a GARAMONTE warrior.

NIGER

Severus will find himself stalled  
in the mountains by the harsh  
winter. Albinus has only just made  
it to France.

GARAMONTE

All the more reason to sail now.

NIGER

No. Let them destroy each other.  
Let them tear Rome in half. We will  
pick up the pieces and re-build...  
our way.

The Garamonte smiles.

GARAMONTE

Pity. I'd hoped to kill the traitor  
myself.

NIGER

Oh, fear not. I've already taken  
his wife. That is enough to begin  
his humiliation. If he survives  
long enough to be there when we  
make landfall, we will complete his  
humbling.

GARAMONTE

With blood.

NIGER

Yes... Eventually.

CUT TO:

EXT. HARSH MOUNTAINS - LATER

Severus's forces march through bitter cold wintry winds. Hail pelts the roof of the carriages and pings off the helmets of the men. Severus emerges from the carriage and is met by a bundled-up Demetrius. They exchange words that we cannot hear. Severus hurries along with him up the column to where General Gnaeus stands, half-covered in snow. He turns to Severus, then back towards the horizon.

A massive storm is sweeping towards them, and from their height, they can see it bombarding the countryside with ice and snow. Severus turns to Gnaeus.

SEVERUS

We press on!

GNAEUS

Madness! We'll lose half our men!

SEVERUS

So did Hannibal! And our attack is more important!

GNAEUS

And how many men will follow you if you don't care for their safety?

Severus looks to Gnaeus, angrily.

SEVERUS

The weather will not improve if we wait.

GNAEUS

Neither will the men!

Severus turns back to the column. He then looks to Gnaeus.

SEVERUS

What are our options?

GNAEUS

We can't make camp, we can't keep going in these mountains. If we turn back, take shelter in the valley, we can push through after the storm.

SEVERUS

Then our men will be slipping on icy rocks.

GNAEUS

Better than freezing to death.

Severus looks to the men, shivering, battered, then turns to Gnaeus.

SEVERUS

You are right. Demetrius, give the order!

Demetrius turns and begins shouting at the rest of the men. Severus turns back to Gnaeus

GNAEUS

Of course. I'm used to this weather, but that doesn't mean I like it.

SEVERUS

I've never missed Africa more than today.

Gnaeus laughs.

FADE TO:

EXT. MOUNTAIN PASS - LATER

Severus walks along the icy pass, dressed in furs like Hannibal. He turns back to the column of Romans behind him. Here, the weather is less intolerable. He makes a gesture with his hand, and the Romans begin flooding into the safe haven, setting up shelters and constructing basic lean-tos.

Severus watches the men and the flurry of activity around him. He turns and climbs inside the carriage where Julia and Lucius are asleep. It is clearly warmer in here. Severus takes off his frost-covered boots and looks down at an old scar on his leg, just a tiny one, where a chip of stone cut him when he was a boy. He rubs his finger along it before looking up at Julia, sleeping peacefully.

CUT TO:

EXT. ITALIAN COUNTRYSIDE - DAYS LATER

The column of Romans passes massive vineyards and farms.

CUT TO:

EXT. ITALIAN COUNTRYSIDE - DAYS LATER

The legions continue their march. In the distance is a city. Severus rides atop his horse, and we see him look at it with some worry on his face.

CUT TO:

EXT. MEDIOLANUM - LATER

The city has clearly been cleaned up for their arrival. There are purple Imperial banners everywhere, and Severus looks a little uneasy at the sight.

Crowds are cheering for Severus's arrival. Women in fine clothes offer his soldiers bread, cheeses, cups of wine. Men in noble garb meet Severus and Gnaeus as they come to a halt.

One dignitary in particular, Governor TARQUIN, stands there with open arms. Severus dismounts and looks to him. He salutes Severus.

TARQUIN  
Hail, Caesar.

Severus is slightly taken aback.

SEVERUS  
General.

TARQUIN  
(Frowns)  
Really? I thought you marched on Rome to claim the seat of power.

SEVERUS  
It's complicated.

TARQUIN  
Well... no reason the people can't have their fun. I suspect your men are happy to be here.

Severus looks and finds his men are surrounded by cheering women offering gifts. Some are more obvious about their intentions and bare their breasts at the men. Severus looks back to Tarquin.

SEVERUS  
We seek to reunite Rome. Do you have a legion here?

TARQUIN  
Yes, the sixth legion is stationed here.

SEVERUS  
And will their Legate march with us?

TARQUIN  
Yes, he's been looking forward to meeting you. I've also got a bit of a surprise.

CUT TO:



INT. MEDIOLANUM PALACE - LATER

Severus, Demetrius, and Gnaeus enter the great hall of the palace. Standing there is a relieved-looking Plautinius. He smiles as he sees Severus.

SEVERUS

Plautinius! My old friend!

A pair of Praetorian Guards emerge from archways. Severus stops and reaches for his sword.

PLAUTINIUS

It's all right. Old friend, they were my escorts. There will be no fighting here today.

SEVERUS

Escorts?

Gnaeus gets a wary look on his face.

GNAEUS

I think I shall introduce myself to the Legate. Excuse me, General.

Severus looks to Gnaeus. Their eyes meet, and Gnaeus has a look of stern warning. Severus seems to understand.

Gnaeus exits. Demetrius carefully places his helmet back on his head. Severus looks back at Plautinius, tense.

SEVERUS

It's good to see you my friend.

PLAUTINIUS

I bring a message from Didius Julianus. He wishes to offer peace. He is willing to co-rule with you, or even step down if you are determined to take the seat.

SEVERUS

That is awfully kind of him. That seat cost him a great deal of money.

PLAUTINIUS

Yes, but he did not think it would cost so much blood. He wishes to unite forces against the other usurpers.

SEVERUS

Does he?

CUT TO:

EXT. MEDIOLANUM PALACE - MINUTES LATER

General Gnaeus steps outside and walks back to the road, where the legion waits. As he approaches, he notices there are different men in uniform around them. Severus's carriage is open. Julia and Lucius stand speaking to what appears to be a Praetorian Guard.

Gnaeus looks grim.

GNAEUS

Deceivers!

He turns to yell to Severus, but a pair of Praetorian Guards have come up behind him. They shut the doors to the palace and draw their swords. Gnaeus looks behind him to see more approaching. Gnaeus draws his sword.

Julia and Lucius are ushered back into the carriage.

CUT TO:

INT. MEDIOLANUM PALACE - MINUTES LATER

Plautinius seems oblivious to what's happening. But Severus and Demetrius exchange only a single look before drawing their swords.

PLAUTINIUS

Severus... What are you doing...

SEVERUS

Because we are old friends, I will assume that you have been used, my friend.

PLAUTINIUS

What?

The Praetorian Guards draw their swords.

SEVERUS

These are the most elite soldiers in all of the world.

DEMETRIUS

You always did enjoy a challenge, sir.

SEVERUS

My wife and child are in danger.

DEMETRIUS

Gnaeus?

SEVERUS

Is aware of things, yes.

PLAUTINIUS  
Severus, no... No, this is-

He turns and sees the Praetorians slowly advancing on Severus.

PLAUTINIUS (CONT'D)  
You can't! No! You liars!  
Julianus... He lied!

SEVERUS  
And you are the only one surprised,  
my friend.

Plautinius turns to the Praetorians in fury.

PLAUTINIUS  
You liars!

Plautinius turns to attack the nearest Praetorian.

SEVERUS  
NO!

The Praetorian kills Plautinius with a quick sword-thrust, as if it were an afterthought, then turns to Severus and Demetrius.

Severus looks infuriated.

SEVERUS (CONT'D)  
You will pay dearly for that.

PRAETORIAN  
Come and collect!

Severus attacks on guard, Demetrius attacks the other. They are both clearly fighting superior opponents. Demetrius faces the disadvantage of having only one hand, but he seems to be able to hold his own. Severus finds himself immediately on the defensive, and gets a slightly panicked look in his eyes for a brief moment. The Praetorian is clearly a better swordsman.

Severus side-steps a swing, then leaps across the room, taking the second Praetorian by surprise. The distraction is enough for Demetrius to land a glancing blow, and Severus to slash his face. The Praetorian screams, putting his hand to his face. Blood oozes from beneath his hand.

Together, Demetrius and Severus turn to the other Guard and attack aggressively. Their blades swing in perfect concert, but the Praetorian manages to just barely dodge and deflect.

CUT TO:

## EXT. MEDIOLANUM PALACE - SIMULTANEOUS

Gnaeus fights defensively against the Guards. He has greater experience than Severus, but he is older, slower, and the faster guards are leaving many shallow cuts here and there. Still, he fights on, getting a few lucky swings in and wounding some of the Praetorians.

CUT TO:

## EXT. MEDIOLANUM STREETS - SIMULTANEOUS

Many of the legionaries that marched into the city are drinking wine and carousing with women. As they do, Praetorian Guards seem to appear from doorways, shadows, and from behind columns to slit their throats, stab them, or otherwise murder them.

CUT TO:

## INT. SEVERUS'S CARRIAGE - SIMULTANEOUS

The Praetorian Commander sits with his hand on his sword, smiling at Julia. Julia keeps Lucius and Geta behind her, a single dagger her only weapon. Beside them is a half-finished meal of fruit and cheese. Lucius is looking at the small cheese knife.

PRAETORIAN COMMANDER

You know, I might be persuaded to spare your life-

JULIA

Show me your cock and I'll cut it off to use as a toy when I'm lonely!

PRATORIAN COMMANDER

Such language in front of the boys.

LUCIUS

My father will cut off your head!

GETA

And I'll pee on it!

The Praetorian commander looks surprised, but amused.

CUT TO:

## INT. MEDIOLANUM PALACE - SIMULTANEOUS

Severus and Demetrius battle the Praetorian, and barely manage to overpower him by striking in concert, each one timing their blows so the guard cannot possibly block and dodge at the same time. Demetrius gets his blade through and slashes the Guard's hand at the wrist. The blade bites into it deeply. The Guard does not scream, only looks angry. Severus then sweeps his blade low at the shins and digs into the lower leg.

Demetrius slams his shield into the Praetorian, knocking him back. He stumbles onto his hurt leg and falters. Severus finishes him with a thrust to the neck.

CUT TO:

## EXT. MEDIOLANUM PALACE - SECONDS LATER

The doors burst open. Demetrius and Severus see Gnaeus, horribly wounded and still fighting, but outnumbered by Praetorian Guards. They rush to help.

Demetrius and Severus hack and slash in time, together, and manage to get to the wounded Gnaeus. Despite the many bleeding cuts and two open stab wounds, Gnaeus gets up and fights on, especially now that he sees Severus and Demetrius heading for them.

Their swords almost seem to strike in time, meeting every incoming blade with a blade, finding the opening in their enemies and exploiting it. The ground around them soon becomes slick with blood.

They descend to the streets, fending off Praetorian Guards. Severus takes a slice to his side. He raises his blade to counter, but takes another wound in his belly. Demetrius swings around to protect him with his shield.

Gnaeus draws a dagger from his side and hurls it at a Praetorian while he turns back to the guard he's fighting. The dagger hits its mark, striking the Praetorian in the back of the neck, and sending him tumbling into Demetrius's sword.

Severus ducks a blade aimed for his head, grabbing the arm that swung it, and sticking his blade up, into the attacker's armpit where there is no armour. Then Severus pulls and the arm comes loose from the body while the guard screams. The guard legs go off the sword and Severus catches it. With a sword in each hand, Severus and Demetrius return to their times attacks, re-joining Gnaeus and finishing off the last of the guards that ambushed them. Once the last guard falls, Gnaeus drops to his knees, clearly too weak to carry on. Demetrius kneels to help him.

As the battle quiets, we hear an angry growl from nearby. We see the carriage open.

The Praetorian Commander exits, holding Lucius in one arm, and a sword in the other. He is pointing the sword at the boy. Julia slowly emerges, glaring at the Praetorian with a fiery hatred, while tugging young Geta alongside her.

PRATORIAN COMMANDER  
Well fought, Septimius Severus.  
It's too bad we must fight as  
enemies.

GNAEUS  
The bastard...

The Praetorian gestures for Julia to stand in front of him. He places the sword at neck-level, ready to pierce the soft skin.

PRATORIAN COMMANDER  
Surrender, or your family dies.

SEVERUS  
No.

The Praetorian looks shocked.

PRATORIAN COMMANDER  
What?

SEVERUS  
I said 'no.'

PRATORIAN COMMANDER  
See reason. I'm about to kill your  
family.

SEVERUS  
How is this for reason? If they  
have so much as a scratch on them,  
there will be nothing between you  
and I. No distance, no shield, and  
no God will stop me from exacting  
the kind of revenge that make men  
weep. From pity.

The Commander presses his sword lightly into Julia's neck. Julia does not move.

JULIA  
He's not lying.

PRATORIAN COMMANDER  
Quiet, whore!

GETA  
Kill him, Daddy!

PRATORIAN COMMANDER  
Shut up! All of you shut up!

SEVERUS

You've judged the situation wrong,  
my friend. You are not buying my  
compliance with their lives. Their  
lives are buying you your own.

PRATORIAN COMMANDER

You're mad.

JULIA

No, he's right.

The Praetorian Commander looks at them. His resolve seems to falter.

Julia turns slowly around, the sword making a shallow cut along her neck. She does not flinch.

JULIA (CONT'D)

Give me the sword.

PRATORIAN COMMANDER

No! No, witch, I will not-

There is the sound of a blade sticking into flesh. The Pratorian Commander turns, and we follow his gaze, as little Lucius has put the cheese knife in the Pratorian's back. The Praetorian is absolutely horrified.

LUCIUS

Daddy took too long.

Julia seizes the sword from the Pratorian and sticks it into his chest. Lucius drops down to the ground as the commander's grip loosens. Julia turns to Severus with fire in her eyes. Severus looks back at her, a dark grin on his face. The two run towards each other and embrace.

Young Lucius and Geta join their embrace while they share a deep kiss. They break the kiss and look down at the children. Severus lifts Lucius up with a look of odd pride on his face.

LUCIUS (CONT'D)

I killed the bad man!

Severus laughs.

SEVERUS

Yes you did, son. Good job. Now I need you to protect your mother from the other bad men, okay? Stay inside the carriage and stab anyone who tries to force their way inside.

LUCIUS

Yes, Daddy!

Severus looks to Julia, and his eyes show relief as well as triumph. Julia lifts the sword from the Praetorian and smiles, giving Severus a salute. Severus turns to Demetrius and Gnaeus. Gnaeus carefully stands, holding his wounds. He nods towards the city. Demetrius lives his side and joins Severus as they walk away.

DEMETRIUS

The Praetorians will be  
slaughtering our people while they  
rest.

SEVERUS

Julianus will pay for this. He  
killed my friend. He threatened my  
family. I will burn a hole in his  
life before taking his head!

CUT TO:

INT. RESTAURANT/BAR - LATER

Praetorians and surprised legionaries fight desperately. Demetrius and Severus enter and begin fighting alongside them. They discover Laetus, wounded, but still fighting. He is missing an eye and a gash rests over half his face.

CUT TO:

INT. BATH HOUSE - LATER

Laetus and Demetrius fight together against a pair of Praetorians who are covered in blood, clearly not their own, while a pile of bodies lie nearby, mostly Roman soldiers, but a few are Praetorians.

CUT TO:

INT. MEDIOLANUM PALACE - LATER

Severus leads some of his legion to fight Praetorians who hold the Governor hostage. The fight is brutal, but short, ending with the Praetorians being rushed, knocked onto the ground, and stabbed by the swords of the legionaries. Severus turns to Tarquin who looks pale and shaken. He holds out his hand.

SEVERUS

Governor...

Tarquin takes Severus's hand.

TARQUIN

Hail Caesar.



Severus does not react.

FADE OUT:

FADE IN:

INT. ROMAN SENATE - LATER

Didius Julianus stands there in an empty senate chamber while the PREFECT of the Praetorian Guard sits in a senate seat, idly sharpening his sword. No one else is there, and the room is dimly lit as if it were a secret meeting.

JULIANUS  
You absolute fool.

PREFECT  
Clearly, I underestimated the  
African.

The Prefect slides the whet stone across the blade.

JULIANUS  
(Angrily)  
Clearly!

PREFECT  
Remember who gave you that throne,  
Didius.

JULIANUS  
To hell with you! That idiot  
Plautinius could have persuaded  
Severus to stand down and come to  
Rome expecting peace. Hell, I might  
have even persuaded him to  
surrender, or back me as Emperor.  
But now... Once word of this gets  
out, Severus won't need to send his  
forces to take Rome, the Romans  
will open the gates for him and  
shower him with roses!

The Prefect slides the whet stone across the blade.

PREFECT  
There is still a chance to end  
this.

JULIANUS  
Clodius will probably side with  
Severus, the coward. Niger is my  
only hope now. I'll need to send  
him an offer. Hell, I'll give him  
the throne if it means I survive  
another sunrise. I'll have to flee  
the city...

The Prefect slides the whet stone across the blade.

PREFECT  
You're missing something important.

JULIANUS  
(Angry and confused) What?! What is it?! You duplicitous bastard!

PREFECT  
General Severus knows how long it takes for messengers to get from Mediolanum to here. He's already marched his men from Germania in record time.

Julianus looks to the Prefect. The Prefect looks at Julianus and slides the whet stone across the blade.

Julianus goes pale.

JULIANUS  
No... No, he could not possibly cover that distance so quickly.

PREFECT  
Of course he could. He is a resourceful man.

Julianus looks at the blade, then turns to the Prefect, looking him in the eyes.

JULIANUS  
Maybe if I offer up you and the Praetorians I can buy my own life...

PREFECT  
No... You'll be dead. But I'll give you a choice. Either you can die by my hand, or your own.

Julianus goes pale.

PREFECT (CONT'D)  
You could run, too, if you're not worried about your dignity.

CUT TO:

EXT. ROME - EVENING

Severus's column marches through the streets. Unlike the welcome he received in Mediolanum, here the streets are empty. Rome looks deserted.

Severus rides at the head of the column with a patched-up Gnaeus. He still bleeds through bandages, and looks pale. Laetus rides beside him and helps keep him upright.

As we pull back, we see that the front line of the march has the Praetorian Guard's heads on the end of their spears.

Severus looks around at the quiet, desolate Rome.

SEVERUS  
I do not like this.

GNAEUS  
Because it's probably a trap.

SEVERUS  
Perhaps. But I think we've made our point already.

CUT TO:

EXT. PALACE - A LITTLE LATER

Severus's forces come to a stop outside the palace. As they do, the Prefect of the Praetorian Guard approaches bearing aloft the head of Didius Julianus. He is flanked by other guards. The Prefect steps forward and kneels before Severus's horse.

PREFECT  
Hail Caesar! Septimius Severus,  
Emperor of Rome!

Severus dismounts. He steps around to the Prefect, who remains kneeling.

SEVERUS  
Is this your idea of a joke?

PREFECT  
An offer, for peace.

SEVERUS  
After you sent assassins after me  
and my family? Killed my friend?  
Sent a team of spies to decimate my  
ranks?

PREFECT  
All in the past.

SEVERUS  
All in the past week.

There is a brief, tense pause. Severus turns to Gnaeus. Gnaeus gives him a solemn nod. Severus looks back to the Prefect.

SEVERUS (CONT'D)

You have killed the Emperor of Rome.

PREFECT

Weren't you here to do the same?

SEVERUS

No. I was here to restore order to the world. You are an assassin and traitor to Rome.

PREFECT

You cannot kill the Prefect of the Praetorian Guard. You need us. We are the most elite of the legion, dedicated to protecting the Emperor's life.

Severus draws his sword and sticks it into the Prefect's chest. The Prefect tries to get back, but from where he is kneeling, he cannot escape Severus's blade. His blood erupts onto the ground.

SEVERUS

I can protect myself.

He draws back the sword. The Prefect falls. Blood pools on the ground.

As if on cue, Demetrius signals the legion. They move as one and seize the Praetorian Guard, who do not resist.

SEVERUS (CONT'D)

As of now! You are all dismissed!  
Now get out of Rome! Or you will  
die by my blade and your heads  
shall decorate my palace!!

The legion cheers. Severus turns to his soldiers and raises his bloodied blade. They begin calling out "Hail, Caesar!"

FADE TO:

EXT. SENATE BUILDING - MORNING

Severus stands behind a podium. The Senate stands behind him as he addresses a crowd of Romans. It is as if the Romans have come out of hiding. The streets are packed, and people eagerly await what Severus has to say. General Gnaeus looks as if he's about to fall over dead. Laetus keeps him upright, and Demetrius stands there with the purple toga of the Emperor in his hands.

## SEVERUS

When I left the battle with the Saxons, I had no intention of becoming Emperor. I served Rome, because a greater man than I said that Rome is an idea. I didn't understand at first. I didn't want to understand. But now... Now I know what he meant. And since his death, Rome has been broken. Well... I will not stand idly by while it remains in pieces. Because the idea that is Rome must survive. Not just for Romans, but for Africans, for Saxons, for Britons, Spaniards. Rome should not be seen as the great leviathan, devouring everything in its path. Rome should be seen as the strong, fair, open, and wise pinnacle of civilisation. To be otherwise is to be unworthy of the power we have. So yes, I shall sit on the throne, and I shall have immense power. But I will use that power the way it should be used, the way it *must* be used! I shall pick up the pieces of Rome, put back together this great Republic, and show the world what Rome truly stands for!

The crowd cheers. The senators in the background look dubious. Iago leans over to Corben.

## IAGO

(Quietly)  
Gods help us, we've let Hannibal become Emperor.

FADE TO:

INT. PALACE, EMPEROR'S CHAMBERS - LATER

Severus stands in the purple toga. Julia and young Lucius also stand there while Niger kneels before Severus to kiss his ring. He casts a glance at Julia, an angry one, then looks to Severus, his features softening into a mask of unreadable emotion.

FADE TO:

INT. SENATE BUILDING - LATER

Severus stands with Albinus, shaking his hand and gesturing to the rest of the senate.

Albinus looks all-too happy to allow Severus his title as Emperor, suspiciously happy in fact.

FADE TO:

INT. PALACE, EMPEROR'S CHAMBERS - NIGHT

Severus looks at the throne. He runs his hands along the edge of it. Julia comes up behind him. She puts her arms around him, then kisses him. She gestures to the throne with a nod of her head.

Severus breaks away from her and sits down in the seat of power.

MARCUS AURELIAS (V.O.)  
The wise should rule the foolish.  
Gods help us if it should become  
the reverse.

Lucius comes running up and sees Severus sitting on the throne. He smiles and jumps up and down in excitement. He runs and climbs into his father's lap, beaming happily.

FADE TO:

BLACK