

C O L O S S E U M

by

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FADE IN:

ROCKY LANDSCAPE

Noonday heat shimmers. Sun bleaches all color from the scene. We HEAR the slow, rhythmic CLANG of iron on stone...

SUPER: DEIS SOLIS (Sunday)

ANGLE - MAN

Crushes rock with iron shaft. MARCUS CALIDIUS REGULUS, 32, wears slave's tunic and shackles. Pauses from labor.

Wipes sweat from unshaven face. Surveys surroundings...

WIDER - MARBLE QUARRY

Hundreds of SLAVES stab at an unyielding Earth, watched by GUARDS armed with sword and spear.

SUPER: QUARRIES AT ALBULAE, 80 A.D.

BACK ON - MARCUS

Notes altercation down the hillside.

EXT. QUARRY - DAY

Four SLAVES of mixed races surround ELDERLY SLAVE, emaciated and shriveled by forced labor. All in shackles.

MARCUS' VOICE (O.S.)
Citizens...

INCLUDE - MARCUS

Stopped a few metres off, five-foot iron pike in hand.

MARCUS
What harm has the old man done you?

The predatory Slaves do not seem intimidated.

SLAVE #1
One less mouth to feed, more food
for us.

MARCUS
Ah, the Imperial Age...

He takes a step forward, iron shaft in both hands now.

MARCUS (CONT'D)
Leave him. He can have half my
share.

The four Slaves turn to meet Marcus as one. Threatening.

MARCUS (CONT'D)

Wait.
 (points off)
 See that man?

ANOTHER ANGLE - GIANT SLAVE

Homunculus from the primaeval forests of Gaul. Brain eater.
 Beyond terror.

MARCUS (CONT'D)

He receives the other half. Small
 price to pay for friendship.

The slave gang takes pause.

EXT. QUARRY - LATER

Marcus sits with Elderly Slave in the shade of a rocky ledge.
 The old man accepts a water skin from his benefactor.

ELDERLY SLAVE

The gods will look favorably on
 you, my son.

MARCUS

Marcus Calidius Regulus.
 (beat)
 The gods don't know me from a clod
 of dirt.

Elderly Slave drinks greedily, water spilling across his
 chin.

MARCUS (CONT'D)

Easy. Water's more precious than
 gold in the quarries of Albulae.

The ancient savors the wondrous elixir.

ELDERLY SLAVE

I was an important man once.

MARCUS

You don't say?

ELDERLY SLAVE

Vibius Seius Aculeo. Nero's favored
 sail-master.

MARCUS

Careful. Mention of our former
 emperor invites "permanent" rebuke.

Elderly Slave grows wistful, lost in memory.

ELDERLY SLAVE

I can almost hear the rustle of
leaves blowing outside my villa at
Antium...

Marcus nods, according the old man's memories their due.

MARCUS

(philosophical)

What choice, but to play the die we
cast?

The Elderly Slave regards Marcus with warm, sad eyes.

VIBIUS

Marcus Calidius, I would like to
repay you for the kindness you've
offered me today.

Marcus offers only a nice smile in return. All ears.

EXT. QUARRY/GARDEN PLOT - DUSK

Behind the guards' barracks. At far end, BEE HIVES...

Marcus keeps lookout as corrupt GUARD crouches and removes
the prisoner's shackles.

MARCUS

Easiest fifty denarii you ever
made.

The Guard stands. Hold out his palm. Anxious.

GUARD

Not until I make it.

Marcus grins. Turns to nearest BEE HIVE and carefully,
extracts a few coins he'd hidden inside it.

He drops the coins in the Guard's palm as a few BEES buzz
harmlessly around their heads.

MARCUS

Tell him...
(cryptically)
...I let him catch me.

The Guard has no idea what Marcus is talking about, but is
keen on leaving the scene of his crime.

GUARD

Off with you.

He turns and quickly leaves in the direction of the barracks.

Marcus waits a few moments, watching to see the Guard is gone, then extracts more coins from his stash in the hive. Turns to leave...

REVERSE ANGLE - SLAVE GANG & GIANT GAUL

Stand in his path.

Apparently the gang has realized the Giant Gaul is not in actuality Marcus' ally. None are happy about the deception.

Marcus seems neither surprised or concerned.

MARCUS
Citizens, one difference now
between you and me...?

He holds up his shackles.

MARCUS (CONT'D)
Ability of flight.

Marcus kicks the leg out from nearest BEE HIVE, sending it toppling to the rocky ground.

Insanely angry BEES swarm as Marcus easily evades attack and flees the scene...

Shackled prisoners suffer much different fate.

EXT. ROME - DAY

City of gleaming marble. Center of the known world.

SUPER: DEIS LUNAE (Monday)

EXT. ROME/STREET - MORNING

Crowded with busy Romans from all walks of life. Hustle and bustle of a thriving metropolis.

MARCUS

Bathed, trimmed and shaved, he wears white toga over linen tunic. Confident stride, like he owns this city.

WIDER

Marcus turns, entering through gate of a grand town house.

INT. TOWN HOUSE - MORNING

Marcus is led by a handsome male SLAVE through the elegant home of silks and cool shadow, to...

EXT. TOWN HOUSE/GARDEN - MORNING

A corpulent GAIUS ACILIUS BARBA, 50's, oversees SLAVES tending to exotic flowers. He wears a *toga picta*, dyed solid purple and embroidered with gold.

The older man seems mildly surprised to see Marcus.

GAIUS
Marcus Calidius. I'd heard you were dead.

MARCUS
My apologies if I disappoint.
(re Gaius' toga)
Were you named emperor in my absence?

GAIUS
Enjoying my retirement, many thanks.

Marcus casts a jaundice eye toward the comely MALE SLAVE replenishing his master's wine goblet.

GAIUS (CONT'D)
Don't judge. All of this you see here, I earned --

MARCUS
Stole.

GAIUS
-- through dint of my hard labor.

MARCUS
You took your cut.

GAIUS
(with a shrug)
There are worse scoundrels than I.

MARCUS
But few with greater appetites.

GAIUS
I am imperious to flattery, snipe.
(beat)
What do you have for me?

MARCUS
And spoil your retirement?

GAIUS
(irritably)
Be quick. I'm overdue a nap.

MARCUS
Nero's lost treasure trove.

GAIUS
Nero's treasure trove is "lost"
because no one knows where it is.

MARCUS
I do.

Gaius absorbs the statement. Suddenly somber.

GAIUS
Marcus Calidius, don't excite with
frivolous claim.

MARCUS
I speak the truth.

GAIUS
Can it be taken?

MARCUS
Anything can be taken.

GAIUS
Where?

MARCUS
(sly grin)
In due time, Gaius Acuilus.

GAIUS
How did you come by this secret?

MARCUS
Nero's sail master told me.

GAIUS
Not executed along with everyone
else?

Marcus shakes his head no.

MARCUS
I tracked him from a Tullianum
dungeon, to the salt mines of Lake
Tritonis and, finally, the quarries
at Albulae.

GAIUS
Your capture after that adventure
on the Aventine was inauthentic?

An arch look from Marcus. "Please."

Gaius can't disguise his admiration. Weighs decision.

GAIUS (CONT'D)

It's difficult to say yes when I don't know what I say yes to.

MARCUS

Say "yes" to gold, Gaius Acilius. A lot of gold.

GAIUS

How many men of your prior league?

MARCUS

All of them.

GAIUS

Sounds expensive.

MARCUS

Ten thousand sestertii will do the trick.

Gaius visibly blanches.

GAIUS

An Olympian investment.

MARCUS

Considering the reward? Not so much.

A moment as Gaius broods.

GAIUS

I have all the gold I'll ever need. But to deny our brute of an emperor what he so fervently desires...?

(beat)

I'd give one hundred thousand sesterii.

Marcus smiles. Turns to go, as we CUT TO...

EXT. ROME/MARKET PLACE (LUKUANI) - DAY

Travelers from abroad and provincials mix easily with Roman citizens.

Anything and everything the empire has to offer is for sale.

ANGLE - VESTAL VIRGIN

Wearing a narrow headband and veil. She is a vision of chaste beauty and pious regard.

Presents a NECKLACE to WEALTHY COUPLE from Cyrenaica.

VESTAL VIRGIN
 Honored guests, the inherent
 blessings of the necklace are
 undisputed.

RICH CYRENAICIAN LADY
 (breathless)
 Might I hold it?

The Vestal Virgin lays the "holy" beads in the wealthy
 tourist's open hands.

VESTAL VIRGIN
 For the duration of Parentalia, it
 graced the neck of goddess Vesta
 herself.

RICH CYRENAICIAN LADY
 I feel its divine power, husband.

RICH CYRENAICIAN GUY
 (to Vestal Virgin)
 Worn by the temple statue?

VESTAL VIRGIN
 Placed there by my own hands.

MAN'S VOICE (O.S.)
 Ten denarii.

INCLUDE - MARCUS

Who has approached from the side.

MARCUS
 Forget ten. I'll give you twenty.
 (re necklace)
 What better way to display one's
 moral purpose?

Vestal Virgin, anxious to calm her buyers' jitters, shoots
 Marcus a look.

VESTAL VIRGIN
 Transaction of money would only
 diminish the presence of our
 goddesses' spirit in the artifact.
 A lit candle at her altar. Or
 offering a cup of wine perhaps?

MARCUS
 A cup of wine?
 (pointed, to Rich Guy)
 Money is something even the gods
 can appreciate.

The Rich Cyrenaician Guy gets the hint.

RICH CYRENAICIAN GUY
Forty denarii?

MARCUS
(with broad grin)
Victory is yours, citizen.

The Rich Cyrenaician Guy hastily drops the coins in the Vestal Virgin's open palm, as we CUT TO...

EXT. ROME/STREET - MOMENTS LATER

Marcus catches up with the Vestal Virgin just outside the market.

MARCUS
Wait...

JULIA NOVELLA, 27, stops. Flatly...

JULIA
I'm with Lucius now.

Marcus reacts, disheartened.

JULIA (CONT'D)
I thought you were dead.

MARCUS
A common mistake.
(re her clothing)
Do you know what they do to Vestals
who break the vow of chastity?
Buried alive at Campus Sceleratus.
Hate to think what they do when
they catch imposters.

JULIA
I don't get caught, unlike some
people I know.

MARCUS
Arrest isn't so bad, if you know
how to get away.
(beat)
Why this poor temper? Forty denarii
is four times your usual take.

JULIA
Somehow I've managed to survive
without you...
(beat)
What do you want? Why are you
bothering me?

MARCUS

I need a reason to see you again
after two years of forced labor,
harsh beatings and enslavement?

JULIA

Perhaps you didn't hear me the
first time. I'm with Lucius now.

MARCUS

It won't last. I know you better
than you know yourself...

(beat)

Lucius too safe a bet for the likes
of you. Not enough excitement.

JULIA

Exciting enough.

She turns to go. He calls after her...

MARCUS

How many more wooden beads do you
have to sell to provincial rubes
before you can buy your parents
that villa outside Pompeii?

Julia stops. Faces Marcus again.

MARCUS (CONT'D)

This one, Julia Novella. This one
is colossal.

(beat)

Convincing the others will not be
difficult, believe me.

JULIA

Am I the first?

MARCUS

Gaius Acilius was first.

(beat)

In seven days time, you'll have
enough gold to buy your parents a
hundred villas.

Julia says nothing, hating herself. Marcus takes that as a
"yes."

MARCUS (CONT'D)

Good. You can help me with Lucius.

EXT. CIRCUS MAXIMUS - DAY

In the valley between Palatine Hill and Aventine Hill. A
magnificent racing venue that seats 250,000 people.

INT. CIRCUS MAXIMUS - DAY

Seven CHARIOTS pulled by teams of horses race around the track, cutting in front of opponents so that they CRASH into the *spinae* (singular spina).

Marcus and Julia stand at the heightest reaches of the viewing stands. Marcus strains to identify the chariot drivers.

MARCUS
Too far away. Which one is he?

Julia gives him a flat look.

EXT. CIRCUS MAXIMUS/STABLES - DAY

A HORSE in its stall seems ready to bolt...

LUCIUS ANNEIUS CORVINUS, 30's, wearing dirty tunic, whispers softly in it's ear.

MAN'S VOICE (O.S.)
What in Hades do you think you're doing?

INCLUDE - HORSE TRAINER

50's, rough and with hunched back.

LUCIUS
(re horse)
Roar of the crowd makes her nervous. Ulcers, too, I think.

HORSE TRAINER
Babying does them no good.
Establish control. The sting of a whip...
(beat)
But what's it to you?

The Horse Trainer takes hold of a crude shovel and thrusts it toward Lucius.

HORSE TRAINER (CONT'D)
Your trade is horse shit, not horses.

Lucius takes the shovel and starts cleaning out the stall. Horse Trainer watches, satisfied, then moves on with a grunt.

We STAY ON Lucius as he labors, the ROAR of the crowd filtering down from the circuit beyond.

As he stands erect to dump a particular noxious load of manure, he stops...

ANGLE - MARCUS & JULIA

Stand on the other side of the stall, watching him work.

MARCUS
I know. You heard I was dead.

LUCIUS
At this moment, I wish you were.

Lucius flips the horse-shit into waiting cart.

MARCUS
I understand you've got to start
somewhere...
(re stall)
...but this is ridiculous.

Lucius ignores the crack.

LUCIUS
(to Julia)
My beauty.

JULIA
My heart.

LUCIUS
The hours since I saw you last feel
like days.

JULIA
Delicious agony.

MARCUS
I'm still here, you realize.

LUCIUS
One wonders why. At least, I do.

MARCUS
(re Julia)
She does not.

Lucius looks to Julia.

JULIA
Nero's lost treasure.

LUCIUS
What about it?

JULIA
Marcus knows where it can be found.

MARCUS
 (to Lucius)
 But you already have an occupation.

LUCIUS
 My occupation is horse shit.

MARCUS
 (re stalls)
 Prospects unlimited.

LUCIUS
 You said Nero's treasure, right?

MARCUS
 There for the taking.

Lucius gives it some thought.

HORSE TRAINER'S VOICE (O.S.)
 Plebe! I'm not paying you to flap
 your lips!

INCLUDE - HORSE TRAINER

Has returned from some other area of the stables.

HORSE TRAINER
 Get busy!
 (to Marcus & Julia)
 And you two! Leave this place!

MARCUS
 (to Trainer, re Lucius)
 I've seen this man out-ride an
 entire cohort of Rome's best
 mounted calvary. And you give him
 shovel...?
 (beat)
 Proof the empire is in decline.

Lucius tosses the shovel to the Horse Trainer...

LUCIUS
 It was two cohorts.

...and follows Julia and Marcus out of there.

EXT. CIRCUS MAXIMUS/ROAD - DAY

Marcus, Lucius and Julia walk away from the venue, toward the
 Aventine. Patrician class of Roman out in throngs.

MARCUS
 The wealthy. They smell different.
 (to Lucius)
 Well, different than you.

LUCIUS
Nothing a bath and a found treasure
trove won't cure.

MARCUS
(to Julia)
See what happens when I'm not
around to think for him? He
stumbles into an "honest" life.
(to Lucius)
We're born crooks, you and I.
Useless to pretend otherwise.

LUCIUS
Was it horrible? Where did your
enslavement take you?

MARCUS
Here and there. For your next
adventure, I can't recommend Libya.

LUCIUS
Your craving for this treasure
borders on obsession, friend.

MARCUS
I have my reasons.

LUCIUS
That's what concerns me.
(beat)
Who is next?

MARCUS
All that were once in our league...
(beat)
Best if we split up. Time is short.

Lucius puts a hand on Marcus' arm, stopping him, as Julia
continues up the hill. We STAY ON Marcus and Lucius.

LUCIUS
When we heard you had been arrested
by the Urban Cohort...

Marcus holds up a silencing hand.

MARCUS
I would've done the same.

With easy grin, Marcus clamps the hand on Lucius' shoulder.

MARCUS (CONT'D)
Besides, I'll steal her back.

They both turn and continue after Julia.

EXT. FORUM - DAY

Epicenter of Roman public life.

ANGLE - YOUNG PATRICIAN MAN

Bumps into an OLDER PATRICIAN MAN walking in the opposite direction with his ELEGANT WIFE.

YOUNG PATRICIAN MAN
My apologies, citizen.

The younger man places steadying hands on the older man.

OLDER PATRICIAN MAN
(irritated)
Watch where you go.

The Young Patrician Man continues on his way...

We STAY ON the Older Patrician Man, who is about to start forward again when...

OLDER PATRICIAN MAN (CONT'D)
(to his wife)
My money. It's gone!

He whirls around. Sees the Young Patrician Man heading off, already some twenty feet away.

OLDER PATRICIAN MAN (CONT'D)
Stop! Thief!

Older Patrician Man starts to chase after the alleged thief, who is briefly lost in a sea of white togas...

OLDER PATRICIAN MAN (CONT'D)
Help! That man stole my money
purse! Someone stop him.

ANGLE - YOUNG PATRICIAN MAN

With others, he stops and turns. Older man comes hurrying up.

OLDER PATRICIAN MAN (CONT'D)
Here he is! Take him!

Other toga-clad men take the suspect him by the arm as two armed SOLDIERS of the Urban Cohort arrive on the scene.

Crowd forms. One of those looking on is Julia Novella.

SOLDIER
What is all this?

OLDER PATRICIAN MAN
 (re younger man)
 He stole my purse!

The Young Patrician Man holds out his arms wide.

YOUNG PATRICIAN MAN
 You accuse an innocent man. Search
 me, if you must.

OLDER PATRICIAN MAN
 I know how this game works. You've
 already passed my money to another.

SOLDIER
 Where did this theft occur?

The older man indicates back behind them.

OLDER PATRICIAN MAN
 Just past the Arch of Augustus.
 That's where he bumped into me, not
 thirty seconds ago.

YOUNG PATRICIAN MAN
 But, citizen, I have come from that
 direction...past the Capitolium.
 (points opposite way)
 In fact, I asked this officer of
 the Urban Cohort for directions.

The soldier barely pauses to study the young man's face.

SOLDIER
 He did. Less than a minute ago.

OLDER PATRICIAN MAN
 But that's...that's impossible.
 He...

The Older Patrician Man falters, not a leg to stand on. On-lookers scowl and shake their heads.

SOLDIER
 Take greater care with your
 accusations, old man.

As befuddled patrician stammers, the alleged thief smiles good-naturedly and continues on his way...

...unaware Julia Novella follows him.

EXT. FORUM - MOMENTS LATER

The young thief pauses...and is met by his IDENTICAL TWIN, who flips a LEATHER MONEY PURSE in his hand.

THIEF'S TWIN
One more time, brother?

We HEAR CLAPPING of hands at measured pace...

INCLUDE - JULIA

She has approached them from behind. Away from the crowds.

JULIA
What I would give for another me.
(beat)
Again, which of you is Castor and
which is Pollux?

"CASTOR" and "POLLUX", 22, apparently, are known even to
their occasional conspirators by their aliases.

CASTOR
Does it make any difference?

POLLUX
As long as our women know which is
which, eh brother?

CASTOR
I'm not sure. Could make things
interesting.

Julia makes a show of moral outrage.

JULIA
I remember the day you two arrived
in this city. Good, clean-living
criminals from the provinces.

CASTOR
Rome has corrupted us...not that
we're complaining.

POLLUX
What brings you here, Julia
Novella? We heard you were working
the Pantheon.

JULIA
On to bigger things...
(beat)
Marcus Calidius calls our league
together again.

Pollux starts to say something.

JULIA (CONT'D)
(cutting him off)
Very much alive...and more
ambitious than ever.

The twins exchange a look, then back to Julia.

POLLUX
Two full shares or one to split,
mother?

JULIA
(taking offense)
I'm not even thirty.

Castor flips the leather purse in his hand.

CASTOR
There are other ways we think of
you besides maternal.

JULIA
Rome is barbaric place and a Roman
woman must never be without dagger.
Perhaps you'd like to see mine?

POLLUX
So what will it be? Two shares or
one?

JULIA
Two shares...
(turning to go)
...and a spanking for both if you
don't behave yourselves.

INT. BROTHEL - EVENING

Marcus enters luxurious reception area. Scantily-clad
PROSTITUTES relax with newly arrived CUSTOMERS.

The MADAME approaches Marcus.

BROTHEL MADAME
Any special requests, handsome?

MARCUS
The ex-gladiator. Massiva.

BROTHEL MADAME
Apologies, but Massiva entertains
only the women of Rome. We have --

MARCUS
(cutting her off)
Friend, not customer.

ANGLE - LARGE MAN

emerges from the back rooms with PATRICIAN WOMAN.

MASSIVA, 39, is powerfully built and, true to his name, very big. He carries a ridiculous, ornamental SWORD as costume.

PATRICIAN WOMAN
How many did you kill, lover? In
the arena at least?

Massiva catches sight of Marcus.

MASSIVA
(to Patrician Woman)
One hundred to win my freedom.
Fifty more for the fame.

The woman thrills. The brothel Madame goes to usher the Rich Lady out as Marcus approaches...

MASSIVA (CONT'D)
(to Marcus)
They said you were dead but I
didn't believe them. No one could
kill Marcus Calidius...except me.

MARCUS
I promise to keep that in mind.
(beat)
I've got something...

Massiva holds up one of his enormous hands, silencing Marcus.

MASSIVA
Not here. The walls have ears.

He starts toward the exit, followed by Marcus. They are intercepted by the Madame.

BROTHEL MADAME
Where are you going, gladiator?
There's money to be made.

She indicates across the room...

ANGLE - RICH LADIES

A clutch of them boldly stare at Massiva.

BACK ON - MASSIVA & MARCUS

Massiva SIGHS and tosses the fake sword on the table, turning to Marcus.

MASSIVA
Whatever the prospect, count me in.

EXT. PORTA CAPENA - DAY

A Roman legion marches in formation through the city gate. Sparse CROWD look on, mostly bored.

Lucius among those watching from the side of the street. Looking for someone. Focuses on...

LEGIONNAIRE marching with dejected air.

Lucius leaves the line of on-lookers and moves toward the marching column of Roman legionnaires. Falls into step with ATTIUS GALERIUS DOLABELLA, 26.

LUCIUS
What did the Jews ever do to you,
Attius Galerius?

ATTIUS
The Jews? Nothing.

LUCIUS
Then why go fight them?

ATTIUS
My spirit has been shattered into a
thousand pieces. My life is over.

LUCIUS
(re military column)
It is if you keep this up.
(beat)
Your skill with locks. It endures?

ATTIUS
She broke my heart, Lucius Anneius,
not my fingers.

Lucius nods; all he needs to know. Searches up and down the column of marching soldiers.

LUCIUS
Where is your commanding officer?

ATTIUS
Up ahead. Why?

Lucius clutches a hefty leather money purse.

LUCIUS
You sold ten years of your life to
the legion. I intend to buy them
back.

EXT. ROME/STREET - LATER

Lucius, in uniform, and Attius walk down a quiet street.

ATTIUS

It's a mystery. She seemed content.
Joyful even. Just the other day, we
held hands while watching the sun
set from the Esquiline Hill.

Lucius privately rolls his eyes. Reserves comment.

ATTIUS (CONT'D)

Am I not tall enough? Is my hair
too curly? Did I not have enough
money to suit her tastes?

LUCIUS

The last item we'll soon address...
(beat)
That uniform will be useful to our
cause.

Attius doesn't seem to much care. Forlorn.

LUCIUS (CONT'D)

Are you certain your skills survive
this heart torment?

Attius straightens himself up. Thrusts his lance into Lucius'
hands and retrieves a small TOOL from a pocket in his tunic.

As he walks past locked doors and gates that front the
street, Attius picks each lock with barely a pause...gates,
windows and house doors yawning open in his wake.

He waits for Lucius to catch up. In all, he has picked five
locks in less than 15 seconds.

EXT. ROME/CITY SQUARE - DAY

Marcus and Lucius walk past small market stalls and all
manner of commercial offerings. Hectic scene.

LUCIUS

Our last?

MARCUS

Tiberius Seius Leonardus. Our most
important.

LUCIUS

I've never heard of him.

MARCUS

You have my word. He is a valuable
addition to our league.

Marcus stops, arriving at their destination.

REVERSE ANGLE - CHILDREN & TEACHER (*LUDUS LITTERARIUS*)

Any educated man can establish a "school" and at any location...in this case, a public street.

The *litterator* is TIBERIUS SEIUS LEONARDUS, 25. Philosopher. Inventor. Nerd. Six foot six, one hundred and ninety pounds.

He sees Marcus and waves.

Lucius can scarcely believe it. Highly dubious.

LUCIUS
You can't be serious.
(re Tiberius)
This...creature...is your criminal
mastermind?

MARCUS
Best isn't always the most obvious,
Lucius Anneius.

Tiberius bounds over to them. Embraces Marcus.

TIBERIUS
Marcus Calidius! How good it is to
see you!

MARCUS
Tiberius Seius, it is equally good
to see you.

TIBERIUS
So? I'm anxious to hear news of
your quest.

MARCUS
Your instincts were sound. The sail
master was alive and generous with
his secret...once generosity was
shown him.

TIBERIUS
Praise the gods! Kindness begets
kindness, always!

Lucius shoots Marcus a look...which Marcus ignores.

TIBERIUS (CONT'D)
And the sail master's tale. How
does it portend for our cause?

MARCUS
The vault is near, within the
city's walls.

Without pause, Tiberius turns to his pupils...

TIBERIUS
 Class dismissed! Go forth, young
 philosophers, and prosper!
 (turns back to Marcus)
 When do we start?

EXT. ROME - DAWN

Quiet. Still. Even the dogs are asleep.

SUPER: DEIS MARTIS (Tuesday)

EXT. COLOSSEUM - DAWN

Mammoth entertainment venue at city centre. Colossal statue
 of the sun god, *Sol Invictus*, lends its eventual name...

Marcus, Julia, Lucius, Attius, Massiva, Castor, Pollux,
 Tiberius and Gaius approach the deserted plaza, coming alone
 or by twos, depending.

They meet up, the elliptical amphitheater as their backdrop.

Quiet greetings among them as Marcus arrives. Team leader.

MARCUS
 Thanks to all for coming. I believe
 most of you know one another.
 (beat)
 Gaius Acilius Barba...sponsor.

GAIUS

Barely nods his head. Senior to all, he demands respect.

FLASHBACK - EXT. ROMAN MARKET - DAY

Under Gaius' direction, his GANG hijack a mule-drawn cart
 laden with casks of wine from WINE MERCHANT.

MARCUS' VOICE (O.S.)
 Gaius Acilius has delayed
 retirement from an infamous life of
 crime to fund our enterprise and
 provide valuable counsel.

In Robin Hood-like gesture, Gaius off-loads one of the casks
 to an appreciative PLEBE.

EXT. COLOSSEUM - JULIA

smiles fetchingly. Every man present can't help be smitten.

MARCUS' VOICE (O.S.)
 Julia Novella...decoy.

FLASHBACK - INT. TAVERN - DAY

Julia lets herself be wooed by patrician CARD PLAYER while...

MARCUS' VOICE (O.S.)
Criminal beauty. Confidence artist.
She wins your trust, then robs you
blind.

...cool as a cucumber, takes money off table behind his back.

EXT. COLOSSEUM - TIBERIUS

grins goofy smile. Military salute of right forearm to chest.

MARCUS' VOICE (O.S.)
Tiberius Seius Leonardus...brain.

FLASHBACK - EXT. ROME/STREET - DAY

Tiberius watches from the side of the street...

MARCUS' VOICE (O.S.)
If problems of mechanics or
engineering arise...

...as SOLDIERS of the Urban Cohort on horseback give pursuit
of a gaggle of STREET URCHINS...

MARCUS' VOICE (O.S.) (CONT'D)
...and they will...

...a partially obscured RIGGING OF PENDULUM AND TAUNT ROPE
stretched across the street causes all pursuing soldiers to
be flipped from their mounts without harm to the horses.

MARCUS' VOICE (O.S.) (CONT'D)
Tiberius Seius will provide
solution.

EXT. COLOSSEUM - LUCIUS

offers a modest grin. Exchanges a glance with Julia.

MARCUS' VOICE (O.S.)
Lucius Anneius Corvinus...
transport.

FLASHBACK - EXT. ROMAN COUNTRYSIDE - DAY

Lucius makes his escape from LEGIONNAIRES, riding two horses
at the same time, while standing up, "Roman-style."

MARCUS' VOICE (O.S.)
Friend. Partner in crime. And best
horseman in the empire.

Roman ARCHERS let fly with arrows...

Lucius releases grip on the reins of one horse and slips down low, behind the horse he rides, "Indian-style."

EXT. COLOSSEUM - CASTOR & POLLUX

are indistinguishable in every respect.

MARCUS' VOICE (O.S.)
Castor and Pollux...factotums.

FLASHBACK - EXT. VILLAGE SQUARE - DAY

A young Castor, 11, performs a magic trick before a crowd of VILLAGERS, by shimmying into a LARGE BOX set before them.

MARCUS' VOICE (O.S.)
Can be anybody, at anytime, and
anywhere...or each other.

Pollux, 11, appears on the roof of a building behind the crowd, convincing the rubes of magical transport.

MARCUS' VOICE (O.S.) (CONT'D)
Who knows their real names? One day
they'll own this city.

While the audience has its back turned to the box, Castor emerges and pickpockets the unsuspecting spectators.

EXT. COLOSSEUM - ATTIIUS

as always, somewhat furtive. Fails to meet anyone's eyes.

MARCUS' VOICE (O.S.)
Attius Galerius Dolabella...lock-
picker.

FLASHBACK - INT. ROMAN HOUSE - NIGHT

Attius is crouched before an interior door with a very serious lock on it...

MARCUS' VOICE (O.S.)
There isn't a lock in the empire
that cannot be opened by
him...sometimes, to his detriment.

Attius pushes open what turns out to be a bedroom door, revealing inside a COUPLE in bed expecting privacy...

MARCUS' VOICE (O.S.) (CONT'D)
Attius Galerius recently
experienced traumatic loss. Be
kind. We need him.

Attius reacts, devastated.

EXT. COLOSSEUM - MASSIVA

grins cheerfully. Freak of nature and superstar.

MARCUS' VOICE (O.S.)
Massiva. Gladiator.

FLASHBACK - EXT. AMPHITHEATER IN POMPEII - DAY

Massiva makes short order of four GLADIATORS.

MARCUS' VOICE (O.S.)
Do I really need to tell you why
he's here?

Opponents dispatched, Massiva exits the arena without
acknowledging the CHEERING crowd.

EXT. COLOSSEUM - MARCUS

MARCUS
Finally, there's me...Marcus
Calidius Regulus.
(beat)
My attribute? I'm not dead.

WIDER

Marcus stands at their center.

MARCUS (CONT'D)
Welcome. All of you.

GAIUS
Enough patter, Marcus Calidius.
Where is it? Where's Nero's vault?

MARCUS
Here. Or, well, there...

He points behind him. At the mighty Colosseum.

MARCUS (CONT'D)
To be perfectly accurate...under
there.

ATTIUS
Under Flavian's Amphitheater?

MARCUS
Correct.

TIBERIUS
Of course!

JULIA

How, in the name of the gods, did
Nero's vault--

She stops herself. Getting it as well.

FLASHBACK - EXT. GOLDEN HOUSE (*DOMUS AUREA*) - DAY

Newly built palace. Beside it, a glimmering lake...

TIBERIUS' VOICE (O.S.)

After the Great Fire of 64, Nero
constructed his palace, *Domus
Aurea*, here, at the foot of the
Palatine...

FLASHBACK - EXT. *DOMUS AUREA*/ARTIFICIAL LAKE - DAY

NERO rides in the sail boat...piloted by younger Sail Master.

TIBERIUS' VOICE (O.S.)

...and places his treasure chamber
beneath man-made lake, the perfect
hiding place.

(beat)

Then, suicide...and a new dynasty
takes power of Rome.

FLASHBACK - EXT. *DOMUS AUREA* - DAY

In ruins. The lake is dry ground. Beginnings of amphitheater
rising in its place. Swarms with SLAVE WORKERS.

TIBERIUS' VOICE (O.S.)

Damnatio memoriae. Intent on wiping
all memory of Nero, the new emperor
Vespasian razes Golden House,
drains the artificial lake and
unwittingly builds his amphitheater
over the vault.

FLASHBACK - EXT. JERUSALEM - DAY

Roman legion lays siege to the ancient city, led by a fiery
Titus, 30's, soon to be emperor of Rome...and most powerful
man in the known world.

TIBERIUS' VOICE (O.S.)

Vespasian's son and our current
emperor, Titus, having bankrupt the
empire with war-making, searches
high and low for the treasure, when
in truth...

EXT. COLOSSEUM - DAWN

The crew stare as one at the magnificent amphitheater.

MARCUS

...he sits on top of it.

GAIUS

And your design is to find the vault somewhere under that, ...
(indicates Colosseum)
...open its lock without key, remove the gold and somehow get it out of Rome without being caught?

MARCUS

You play the die you cast.

Their motto. The others are fine with it.

LUCIUS

Earlier you said time was of essence. Why?

MARCUS

Construction of the amphitheater isn't fully complete. A subterranean level has been partially excavated and will be finished after the inaugural, hundred days of games.

MASSIVA

In four days.

TIBERIUS

Titus hasn't stumbled on the vault yet...but he will eventually.

MARCUS

Not if we get there first.

CASTOR

What exactly is in the vault?

Good question. All await Marcus' response.

MARCUS

Perhaps I should let Tiberius Seius answer.

They look to Tiberius.

TIBERIUS

In the vault? Treasure collected from every corner of the empire...along with several hundred talents of gold.

For a beat, all are speechless.

GAIUS
Define "several," philosopher.

TIBERIUS
One thousand, to be exact.

MARCUS
One share, one hundred talents of
gold. Even split.

MASSIVA
And the tenth share?

MARCUS
Held in reserve for the tenth of
our league, whose identity will be
revealed at later date.

The others aren't sure about that, but hold comment for now.

GAIUS
Right. So, what's our plan?
(beat)
We do have a plan, yes?

MARCUS
Of course we have a plan.

INT. URBAN COHORT/BARRACKS - MORNING

SOLDIERS of the Urban Cohort (*Cohortes Urbanae*), Rome's
policemen, prepare for their "rounds."

INT. BARRACKS/TRIBUNE'S CHAMBERS - MORNING

SPIRIUS VALERIUS MERULA, 40's, is attended to by a SLAVE, who
helps his master into polished breast plate, cloak and sword.

SHOT from the side, we SEE only his right profile.

ANGLE - CENTURION

Hovers in open doorway.

SPIRIUS
Yes?

CENTURION
Marcus Calidius Regulus, tribune.
He's reported here in Rome.

SPIRIUS
Impossible. The criminal rots in
the quarries of Albulae. I know
this because I sent him there.

CENTURION

Escaped. Our informant has seen the man with his own eyes.

Spirius turns so that we SEE his FULL FACE...and that he is missing his left eye. Centurion draws back ever so slightly.

SPIRIUS

Do I repulse you?

CENTURION

(he does)

No, tribune.

FLASHBACK - EXT. FORESTS OF GAUL - DAY

Spirius Valerius, at the front of his cohort of LEGIONAIRES, charges a line of HOWLING GAULS...and in a split second from catching a SPEAR in his left eye.

INT. SPIRIUS' CHAMBER - DAY

Spirius retrieves his ARTIFICIAL EYE from a box.

SPIRIUS

Eye Of The Cod. That is what the men call me, do they not?

CENTURION

(of course they do)

No, tribune. Never.

SPIRIUS

Do you know how I received this offensive name, centurion?

FLASHBACK - EXT. AVENTINE - NIGHT

Soldiers have Marcus by both arms. Spirius approaches, his fake eye catching the moonlight in startling manner.

MARCUS

(reacting)

The gods save me, you've the eye of the cod.

The soldiers restraining Marcus suppress grins.

INT. SPIRIUS' CHAMBER - DAY

Spirius inserts his eye. The Centurion averts his gaze; not an easy sight to behold.

SPIRIUS

His jocular cost him, believe me.

FLASHBACK - INT. TULLIANUM/DUNGEON

Prison GUARDS beat Marcus hanging from his wrists.

INT. SPIRIUS' CHAMBER - DAY

Spirius continues.

SPIRIUS

His decision to escape punishment
will cost him much, much more...

(beat)

Find the criminal and return him to
state's custody, in poor condition.

CENTURION

Yes, tribune.

Spirius turns to his Slave so he can finish being dressed. He has nearly forgotten the junior officer is even there.

CENTURION (CONT'D)

Commander...

SPIRIUS

Yes? Out with it.

CENTURION

This spy, he tells that Marcus
Calidius knows where Nero's
treasure trove can be found.

That gets the tribune's full attention.

EXT. BARRACKS/COURTYARD - MORNING

Over four hundred and eighty SOLDIERS of the Urban Cohort are assembled in formation. Wearing light armor.

Spirius exits the barracks in haste, hauls himself on his horse HELD by ORDERLY, and rides out, followed by his men.

EXT. ROME/CITY STREET - MORNING

Twenty Soldiers of the Urban Cohort on patrol.

ANGLE - MARCUS & GAIUS

Watch the Soldiers pass by from the shadows of an alley.

GAIUS

I haven't seen them out of their
barracks in weeks.

(beat, sarcastic)

I wonder if your arrival in the
city and this influx of Urban
Cohort are related.

MARCUS
I am only one man.

As the soldiers have passed by...

Marcus and Gaius step out from the alley and head down the street in the opposite direction.

GAIUS
So? When do we begin?

MARCUS
We already have.

EXT. COLOSSEUM/PLAZA - MORNING

Thousands of Rome's CITIZENS approach the numerous entrances to the amphitheater. Festive air. MERCHANTS sell food, beverage and various wares from wagons on the mobbed plaza.

BILLBOARD

Conspicuously placed where those arriving will see. Lists reason for the games, its editor (sponsor), dates and the paired gladiators.

MARCUS' VOICE (V.O.)
Primary task...locate the vault.

ANGLE - TIBERIUS

Approaches the north entrance, followed by Castor and Pollux. Tiberius wears a toga. Castor and Pollux, dressed as his slaves, carry an assortment of rolled parchment and satchel.

MARCUS' VOICE (V.O.)
We require unrestricted entry to the amphitheater...of the sort an architect might enjoy.

We FOLLOW Tiberius and his "slaves" through one of the arched entrance, into...

EXT. COLOSSEUM - MORNING

The ROAR of more than fifty thousand souls throttles to high pitch as CAMERA whirls off Tiberius, Castor and Pollux and down, PANNING across...

...rows and rows of Romans representing every segment of the city's society, clad in a colorful array of toga and tunic. Their CHEERS ebb and flow with the action down in...

EXT. THE ARENA - SAME

Where a beast hunt is in progress. Half-dozen HUNTERS (*venatores*), armed with spear, bow & arrow, and sword, do "battle" with wild animal -- leopards, tigers, rhino and lion -- that are shepherded by BEAST MEN (*bestiarii*).

CLOSER ON - BEARDED HUNTER

with terrible scars across his chest and back, battling a fierce PANTHER restricted by ball and chain.

The Bearded Hunter takes great relish in slaying the beast with sword, to the ROAR of the crowd. Preening.

INT. COLOSSEUM/GROUND LEVEL - SAME

Tiberius, Castor and Pollux watch the from concourse rail.

TIBERIUS
(re hunt)
Barbaric.

Castor and Pollux seem to be of a different mind.

CASTOR
I've never feasted on lion's meat,
brother.

POLLUX
Perhaps a slice of rhino.

Disgusted, Tiberius turns away from the rail.

CASTOR
(re Tiberius)
Our "master" feels otherwise.

Castor and Pollux reluctantly follow.

INT. COLOSSEUM/INTERIOR STAIRWELL

Tiberius, Castor and Pollux take the stone steps down, into the bowels of the amphitheater.

Torchlight illuminates the passage to...

INT. COLOSSEUM/HYPOGEUM

Main corridor in this subterranean level connects storage rooms, animal cages and gladiator's "dressing rooms."

Private GUARDS confront Tiberius, Castor and Pollux enter from interior stairwell...

GUARD

Halt! What business do you have here?

TIBERIUS

Only design of all that you see around you, plebe.

(haughtily)

I am the emperor's architect.

The Guard, terrified to displease, bows apologetically.

GUARD

At your service, citizen.

Tiberius passes by, airily. As Pollux moves past the Guard, he offers *digitus impudicus*...or extended middle finger.

EXT. CIRCUS MAXIMUS - DAY

Marcus and Gaius approach the huge racing venue, presently quiet.

MARCUS

We need a way to move one thousand talents of gold beyond the city's walls.

GAIUS

Horses.

MARCUS

Not just horses. Race horses.
(indicates Circus)

Fast, get-out-of-town race horses.

Marcus holds out his open palm. Gaius reluctantly reaches under his toga and hands over a large MONEY PURSE.

Marcus appreciates the purse's heft.

MARCUS (CONT'D)

This oughta work.

GAIUS

Should hope so. I haven't much "generosity" left after this expenditure.

Gaius follows Marcus into the venue.

INT. CIRCUS MAXIMUS/STABLES - DAY

Horse Trainer and Lucius with a team of six magnificent CHARIOT HORSES as Gaius and Marcus approach.

LUCIUS
 (re racehorses)
 Aren't they beautiful?

MARCUS
 They're horses, I can see that.

HORSE TRAINER
 "They're horses?"
 (to Lucius, re Marcus)
 Who is this imbecile?
 (before Lucius can speak)
 Never mind. Just give me the money
 and leave.

Horse Trainer holds out his hand.

HORSE TRAINER (CONT'D)
 One thousand. Be quick about it.

Marcus starts to hand over the money purse, then stops.

MARCUS
 (to Horse Trainer)
 Are you a gambling man, citizen?

Horse Trainer GUFFAWS. His life is gambling.

MARCUS (CONT'D)
 I propose a race. Winner takes the
 money and the horses.

Gaius starts to react but a look from Marcus silences him.

Horse Trainer ponders it, not quite sure.

HORSE TRAINER
 Who's your driver?

Marcus indicates Lucius.

MARCUS
 He is our driver.

HORSE TRAINER
 (incredulous)
 The stable hand? He couldn't drive
 a broom.

MARCUS
 Then you've got nothing to worry
 about.

Horse Trainer can't repress a greedy smile.

INT. CIRCUS MAXIMUS - DAY

The rows of bench seats, capable of holding 250,000 people, are empty. Two chariots are on the track. Lucius stands upright in one. OTHER GUY stands in his chariot.

Marcus, Gaius and the Trainer, along with a smattering of SLAVES and TRACK PEOPLE look on from the side.

Marcus approaches Lucius.

LUCIUS
You realize he wasn't selling us
his fastest team.

MARCUS
Which is fastest?

LUCIUS
(indicates other guy)
That one.

Marcus briefly studies the other chariot driver and horse team, then back to Lucius.

MARCUS
So. Will you win?

A ridiculous question.

LUCIUS
Of course I'll win.

The Horse Trainer is anxious to collect his winnings. Raises his right arm...

HORSE TRAINER
Drivers ready?

With barely a beat, Horse Trainer drops his arm.

HORSE TRAINER (CONT'D)
Race!

Marcus is forced to jump out of the way as the two chariots lurch forward, drawn by their splendid horses...

CHARIOTS

race down the straightaway of the circuit track. The Other Guy had gotten a fast start and is well ahead

OTHER GUY

whips his horse team mercilessly, while...

LUCIUS

coaxes his horse team without harsh exhortation, expertly manipulating the reins and simply talking to the horses.

The horses respond, surging.

WIDER

Lucius catches up with the Other Guy...then passes him by.

BACK ON - START LINE

Marcus exchanges a confident grin with a relieved Gaius. The Horse Trainer looks sick.

MARCUS
(to Gaius, insincere)
I feel bad.

WIDER - CIRCUS MAXIMUS

The two chariots race around the circuit in the deserted stadium, Lucius building on already sizable lead.

EXT. PALATINE HILL/IMPERIAL GARDENS - DAY

Peace and tranquility, especially compared to the city down below. How the gods might live if they walked the earth...

Emperor TITUS FLAVIUS CAESAR VESPASIANUS AUGUSTUS, 41, stands with his best AUGUR, 70's, a priest in blazing white whose chief duty it is to "read" signs and predict the future.

The emperor's RETINUE stands further away, affording Titus some measure of privacy with his fortune teller.

All stare into the sky, quietly watching...

FLOCK OF STARLINGS

One of the trademarks of Rome, then and now. Turning this way and that against a perfect, blue sky.

TITUS & AUGUR

The old priest intently follows the flight of the birds.

AUGUR
Imperator, do you see? Look how they turn toward the east, feint, and then toward east again, in the direction of Apollo's temple? The message is clear.

TITUS
Yes, priest? What is the message?

AUGUR
 Yours will be a long reign, Caesar.
 A gift to Rome.

TITUS
 Long? How long is long? Augustus
 ruled for over forty years.

The Augur indicates the bird flock...

AUGUR
 By the will of the gods, my
 emperor. Your humble priest only
 takes the auspices and renders
 their message...
 (beat)
 Forty years long, Caesar. Perhaps
 fifty years of rule!

Titus nods, grimly satisfied.

TITUS
 Pray that I can afford it, priest.

WIDER

Titus starts back towards his palace, followed by retinue.

REVERSE ANGLE - SPIRIUS

Approaches from that direction. Takes a knee and bows his
 head.

TITUS (CONT'D)
 Visit from tribune of the Urban
 Cohort can only mean bad news.

Spirius stands erect again.

SPIRIUS
 Emperor...

TITUS
 What is it this time? Have the
 starving masses finally seen fit to
 riot? Crucify the leaders and their
 children.
 (beat)
 A message that resonates.

SPIRIUS
 I bring good news, Emperor.
 Intervention of the gods.

Titus glances toward his priest, then back to Spirius. Waits.

SPIRIUS (CONT'D)

A condemned criminal escaped punishment and has returned to the city...

TITUS

This is news? Even Rome is improvement over the quarries.

SPIRIUS

The thief knows whereabouts of Nero's vault, no doubt has designs on its contents.

It's as if Titus had been shot through with electric charge. He seizes Spius by the tunic front, twisting it so that it chokes the tribune.

TITUS

I want that treasure, understand?

Spius nods, unable to talk.

TITUS (CONT'D)

Find him...find this man.

Spius struggles to answer...

Titus seems to only now realize he is strangling Spius. Releases his grip and smooths out the fabric...

Somehow, this is even more threatening.

TITUS (CONT'D)

Locate the escaped prisoner, tribune, yes? Find your emperor his treasure.

SPIRIUS

Yes...of course, Emperor. I will not rest until it is found.

Titus nods, with inscrutable expression, then continues to the palace, followed by his retinue.

EXT. CIRCUS MAXIMUS - DAY

Marcus, Gaius and Lucius exit the venue. Lucius leads the team of racehorses. Gaius hugs money purse to chest.

GAIUS

What else?

MARCUS

Diversion...

EXT. GLADIATOR SCHOOL - DAY

Ludus Magnus, largest gladiator school in Rome, is situated directly next to the Colosseum and connected to it by tunnel.

MARCUS' VOICE (V.O.)
 Something to capture the emperor's
 interest while we steal his gold.

ANGLE - MASSIVA

Enters through gates into DIN of training gladiators.

His enormous frame fills the open gateway. Several combatants stop fighting to stare.

INT. GLADIATOR SCHOOL/APARTMENT - DAY

VIBIUS CAECILIUS CILO, 40's, the school's manager (*lanista*) eats his midday meal at a simple wooden table.

A breathless SLAVE enters in great haste and excitement...

LANISTA'S SLAVE
 Master!

Vibius frowns, displeased by the interruption.

EXT. GLADIATOR SCHOOL - DAY

Gladiators have stopped sparring to gather around Massiva...

ANGLE - VIBIUS

Comes down the stairs from his second-story apartment.

Crosses compact "arena" to where Massiva waits. The gawking gladiators part so their master can approach.

VIBIUS
 I must be dreaming.

MASSIVA
 Your eyes do not deceive, Vibius
 Caecilius. It is Massiva.

VIBIUS
 Ten years? Longer?

MASSIVA
 Nine years, one hundred and five
 days.
 (offers his hand)
 I won my freedom on the first day
 of Quinquatrus, in the last year of
 Emperor Nero's reign.

They embrace.

 MASSIVA (CONT'D)
 How have you fared, old friend?
 (re school)
 Business must be good.

 VIBIUS
 Business is excellent. Our new
 emperor buys the city's good will
 with gladiator's blood and can
 barely afford that...
 (beat)
 Why do I receive honor of your
 presence, hero? Do you wish to
 fight in the arena again?

He chuckles, believing he has made a wonderful joke. Massiva remains neutral.

 MASSIVA
 That is my wish.
 (off Vibius)
 Something amuses you?

 VIBIUS
 All due respect, champion, but what
 I hear, the only sword you wield of
 late is the one between your legs.

Some of the other Gladiators SNICKER. Massiva maintains flat expression. Vibius knows he went too far.

 VIBIUS (CONT'D)
 Massiva, your skill in the arena
 was unrivaled. But that was long
 ago. While you have grown ten years
 older...
 (indicates gladiators)
 They remain young and strong. I
 cannot incur the anger of my
 emperor with inferior sport.

 MASSIVA
 Don't worry, Vibius Caecilius, I
 promise not to damage your property
 ...permanently.

Vibius sizes up Massiva, his dignity on the line.

 VIBIUS
 Your willing to prove yourself
 against one of my gladiators?

 MASSIVA
 Only one?

EXT. GLADIATOR SCHOOL/ARENA - DAY

Massiva, wooden sword in one hand and small shield in the other, stands facing six GLADIATORS...

All huge. All young. All armed with various, non-lethal weapons.

Vibius and other gladiators stand to the side.

VIBIUS
Gladiators...fight!

All six gladiators approach simultaneously. Massiva is a whirl of action, moving high and low, from left to right, engaging one combatant after another, using wood sword as often as fist, foot and shield to batter and batter his opponents to the ground, one after another...

Massiva is only slightly winded by the exertion. Vibius gawks.

MASSIVA
You see?
(holds up his gladius)
I am good with many swords.

INT. COLOSSEUM/HYPOGEUM

Tiberius, as "architect," and his two "slaves," Castor and Pollux, emerge from the partially-completed portion of the hypogeum...

Main corridor is finished, but connecting tunnels leading off of it are only roughed out.

Castor holds up torch for illumination. We HEAR the ROAR of the crowd from above.

POLLUX
The vault could be anywhere...

CASTOR
...or not.

Tiberius carefully observes their surroundings.

TIBERIUS
It's here. We just have to find it.

POLLUX
Oh, is that all?
(to Castor)
We just have to find it, brother.

CASTOR
Why didn't I think of that?

Tiberius ignores the chatter. Leads them up the ramp, to ground level, looking through iron gates, out into...

HIS POV - THE ARENA

From this vantage point, an awe-inspiring sight. The mid-day "hunt" has just concluded.

EXT. ARENA - SAME

As the hunters strut out of the arena to the CHEERS of the crowd, beast men drag their slain prey behind them.

INT. COLOSSEUM/HYPOGEUM

Tiberius, Castor and Pollux stand aside as SLAVES open the gates for hunters to pass through, followed by the beast men.

ANGLE - ANIMAL CAGES

Just inside the gates. Inside a majestic PANTHER watches...

PANTHER'S POV - HER MATE

Dragged through the gate and down the ramp into the *hypogeum*. If an animal can experience rage...

INCLUDE - TIBERIUS

Takes keen interest in the Panther's low GROWL. Bends down next to the cage and looks over his shoulder...

...at the Bearded Hunter as he struts down the ramp, formulating a plan, as we...

CUT TO:

MAN'S FACE

Battered and bruised. Belongs to the Guard from the quarries at Albulae...

INT. TULLIANUM - DAY

City's dungeon. The Quarry Guard is held up on his feet by two SOLDIERS of the Urban Cohort for...

INCLUDE - SPIRIUS

...to interrogate.

SPIRIUS

The prisoner who bribed you for release. What did he say of his intent?

GUARD

Nothing, tribune. He told me
nothing. I beg you--

Spirius gives one of his Soldiers a look. A brawny fist is
brought to the prisoner's face with sickening THUD.

SPIRIUS

Marcus Calidius Regulus. Condemned
criminal. Enemy of Rome. I captured
him two years ago. Brought him to
heel in this very cell. You
facilitated his escape, released
the fiend on this city. For fifty
denarii you bought passage across
the River Styx.

(beat)

Tell me what the prisoner told you.

GUARD

He said...

Spirius leans in close to the Guard.

GUARD (CONT'D)

...to tell you he let you catch
him.

Spirius steps away from the prisoner, stung, giving the
Soldier a nod as he turns away...

SPIRIUS - MOVING

...toward cell door as we HEAR the Guard's DEATH CRY.

Soldiers of the Urban Cohort snap to attention as their
tribune strides by, grim-faced.

EXT. COLOSSEUM/PLAZA - DAY

Tiberius, Castor and Pollux exit the venue, blending in with
the crowds milling about.

ANGLE - MARCUS & GAIUS

Crowds swirl around them as they wait for their compatriots.

POLLUX

(to Marcus)

No evidence of the vault or clue to
its whereabouts. Looked everywhere.

GAIUS

Little louder? I don't believe they
heard you at the port in Ostia.

The five men join up.

TIBERIUS
It's there. We'll find it.

MARCUS
Of that I have no doubt.

GAIUS
Three days of games remain. Three.

Tiberius and Marcus ignore Gaius' fretting.

TIBERIUS
I have some notions for our wagon.

MARCUS
Lucius Anneius sees to our
transport needs. But first...

TIBERIUS
...the Archimedes mechanism.

MARCUS
The Archimedes mechanism.

GAIUS
What --

Marcus, turning away with Tiberius, cuts off Gaius before he can ask. Back over his shoulder, more than an observation...

MARCUS
Everywhere I look, I see soldiers
of the Urban Cohort, Gaius Acilius.

As Marcus and Tiberius walk away, evaporating into the surging crowd...

Gaius turns and looks around, seeing...

HIS POV - PLAZA

Crowded with spectators...and Spirius' men.

INT. VILLA - AFTERNOON

Gaius enters, in a rush. His Slave meets him with wine goblet. Gaius shocks by pushing the wine away.

GAIUS
(impatient)
Are they here? I sent word ahead.

SLAVE #1
In the garden, master.

Gaius heads that way. In haste.

EXT. VILLA/GARDEN - MOMENTS LATER

A half-dozen SHADY CHARACTERS loitering about come to half-hearted attention as Gaius enters. His lieutenants.

HENCHMAN #1
I thought you'd retired.

GAIUS
Boredom bores me.

Gaius has six separate money purses in hand. He starts handing them out to his henchmen.

GAIUS (CONT'D)
Every quarter of the city. Spread
word to all of our allies. No one
sleeps tonight...
(beat)
Especially not Eye of the Cod.

As the henchmen head out.

GAIUS (CONT'D)
What Rome does best, citizens.
Nothing outrageous.

EXT. FLAVIAN PALACE - NIGHT

Titus' palace on the Palatine Hill. The Colosseum and Circus Maximus lie just below. Magnificent.

EXT. PALACE APARTMENT/BALCONY - NIGHT

Titus, adorned in exquisite purple toga, looks out over a stunning view. SLAVES attend to his every need.

ANGLE - SPIRIUS

Escorted onto the balcony by Slave. Takes his knee and bows his head.

Titus gestures for him to stand.

TITUS
Do you see what I see, tribune?
(indicates Colosseum)
I see a colossal money suck begun
by my father that I had no choice
but complete. It will be my demise.

Spirius gazes down on the lit-up amphitheater.

SPIRIUS
A wonder of the world, my emperor.
It will stand for a thousand years.

TITUS

Ought to stand for five thousand
for what it cost.

(beat)

What is your report?

SPIRIUS

Every soldier of the Urban Cohort
is out of their barracks and
hunting for the criminal Marcus
Calidius.

(beat)

I swear, we will find him.

TITUS

And if he finds Nero's treasure
trove before we find him?

SPIRIUS

It was an informant in their league
who first alerted us, Emperor.
Contact with the spy has been lost,
but not for long.

Titus nods, satisfied. Brooding. Falling victim to some inner
darkness...

TITUS

Every Caesar requires his Brutus to
gain "immortality."

SPIRIUS

I will protect you from any
assassin, lord...

(impassioned)

Curse the gods I have only one life
to sacrifice in defense of yours!

Titus seems hardly mollified. Filled with dread.

TITUS

Pray you have ten lives to make my
one long-lived, tribune.

Spirius is about to respond when something past Titus catches
his attention...

The emperor turns to see what Spirius is looking at.

ANGLE - CITY

In a distant quarter, CONFLAGRATION glows.

TITUS (CONT'D)

Fire...?

ANOTHER ANGLE - CITY

Another district and another FIRE. And ANOTHER.

SPIRIUS
Not just fire, Emperor...
(beat)
Unrest and riot.

Spirius looks to his emperor, begging his leave.

EXT. STREET - NIGHT

Deserted. Instigators and mayhem confined to distant quarters.

MARCUS & TIBERIUS

Walk with purpose.

MARCUS
Pleasant evening for a stroll.

TIBERIUS
Isn't it?

MARCUS
A citizen can enjoy his freedom on
a night such as this.

TIBERIUS
Thank the gods!

MARCUS
The gods...and Gaius Acilius Barba.

They stop before imposing building.

MARCUS (CONT'D)
The Porticus Octaviae, I presume.

TIBERIUS
Decent collection of scrolls and
artifact...curated by imbeciles.

Tiberius leads them up the steps, to the entryway.

INT. PORTICUS OCTAVIAE - NIGHT

Marcus and Tiberius stroll colonnaded walk, pass temples of Jupiter Stator and Juno Regina to library erected by Octavia.

INT. LIBRARY - NIGHT

Marcus and Tiberius are led by LIBRARIAN past tables piled high with scrolls, to the back of the reading room where they find...

ANGLE - ARCHIMEDES MECHANISM

Three feet high, half that wide and six inches thick, the ancient computing device is comprised of thirty bronze gears housed in a wooden box.

Inscriptions on the face of the mechanism are in Greek.

TIBERIUS

Look, Marcus Calidius! It's absolutely beautiful!

LIBRARIAN

We have no idea how to operate it.
(shrugs)
Who knows how old it is.

Tiberius approaches the machine, in awe.

TIBERIUS

Astral calculator. Fabricated by Greek astronomers two hundred years ago, from theorems postulated by the genius, Archimedes.
(beat)
An exquisite specimen.

MARCUS

Boys and their playthings.

Librarian could care less. Palms the COINS Marcus had given him at the door.

LIBRARIAN

At your leisure, citizens.

The old man shuffles off, leaving Marcus and Tiberius with the ancient calculating apparatus.

MARCUS

Can you make it work?

Tiberius is hunched over the thing, operating hand crank.

TIBERIUS

Work? Of course. Turning the hand crank, causes interlocking gears within to rotate...

An indecipherable group of turning DIALS with engraving of planets, stars and sun.

TIBERIUS' VOICE (O.S.)

...by which we calculate position of the Sun and Moon, as well as lunar phases and the locations of planets.

Tiberius looks up, triumphant. Marcus grows impatient.

TIBERIUS
Simple as reading Greek!

MARCUS
(pointed)
If only it kept time.

Sarcasm lost on Tiberius, operating mechanism again.

TIBERIUS
A stick thrust in the ground keeps
time, Marcus Calidius. To record
the dance of heavenly orbs requires
more sophisticated mechanism.
(reacting to reading)
Now this is very interesting...

EXT. IRON SMITH - MORNING

On a quiet street in a quiet, working man's quarter of the city.

SUPER: DEIS MERCURII (Wednesday)

ANGLE - CASTOR & POLLUX

Approach from up the street. They pause in front of the iron smith's and check to see if they're being followed.

Once sure the coast is clear, then duck inside...

INT. IRON SMITH - MORNING

Crew is gathered around a WAGON unlike any seen before on the streets of Rome.

Lucius is very proud of his work...

WAR WAGON/WHEELS

Over-sized wheels that are reinforced with iron bands.

LUCIUS' VOICE (O.S.)
Increased circumference and
reinforcing bands provide greater
stability at high speeds.

WAR WAGON/BED & SIDES

Comprised to long, slatted wood.

LUCIUS' VOICE (O.S.) (CONT'D)
Floor slatted to reduce weight,
without sacrificing strength...

WAR WAGON/FRONT & REAR AXLES

Extra beefy.

LUCIUS' VOICE (O.S.)
Modified axles the same used to
transport granite blocks from river
barges to the amphitheater's
construction site.

WIDER

Marcus grins, pleased. Rest of the crew equally impressed.

MARCUS
Good work.

LUCIUS
(fussing)
It's not quite finished.

Gaius admires the size and strength of the vehicle.

GAIUS
(to Marcus)
At last, full measure of your plan
reveals itself...
(beat)
The Fat Merchant of Beneventum.

Marcus grins. Good guess. Only newcomer Tiberius is at sea.

TIBERIUS
Sorry? Beneventum?

FLASHBACK - EXT. BENEVENTUM - DAY

Prosperous, walled city in the Roman province of Campania.

MARCUS' VOICE (O.S.)
One of the more lucrative of our
league's concoctions.

FLASHBACK - INT. TOWN HOUSE - DAY

The biggest house in the city. Castor, Pollux and Marcus
stand behind Attius who picks the lock on a man-sized VAULT.
Julia searches for additional treasure in the room.

On the floor the FAT MERCHANT lies bound and gagged.

MARCUS' VOICE (O.S.)
The actual thievery always the
simplest task...

FLASHBACK - EXT. TOWN HOUSE - DAY

House gate is smashed to bits as horse-drawn CHARIOT, piloted by Lucius, comes barreling into the street. Massiva and Marcus ride out on horseback, dropping "GREEK FIRE" BOMBS in their wake.

MARCUS' VOICE (O.S.)
Mixed with generous helping of
shock and awe, with first flight...

FLASHBACK - EXT. BENEVENTUM/STREETS - DAY

Chariot easily out-paces all those in pursuit on horseback.

MARCUS' VOICE (O.S.)
Add to speed and surprise, before
potential heroes have time to
organize their pursuit...

FLASHBACK - INT. CAMPANIA/COUNTRYSIDE - DAY

The crew ride away from the blazing getaway chariot partially hidden in a grove of trees...

...each rider carrying a share of the loot.

MARCUS' VOICE (O.S.)
Finally, not too distant rally
point and quick dispersal of
valuables the essential ingredient.

INT. IRON SMITH - MORNING

Marcus has finished laying it out.

GAIUS
A confident recipe. Tried and true.
(beat)
When do we start cooking?

MARCUS
A few tasks remain to be done...
(beat)
Dies Veneris...last day of games,
emerges most fortuitous.

JULIA
Did you become more religious in
your absence?

Marcus shares a grin with Tiberius.

MARCUS
Better than that.

CASTOR
(pointed)
All remains is to find the vault.

TIBERIUS
I have perfected solution...
He proudly holds up a Y-shaped STICK for all to see.

TIBERIUS (CONT'D)
.....rhabdomancy.

POLLUX
A stick.

TIBERIUS
Not "stick." Divining rod. Cousin
to the Caduceus, of which Homer
wrote, legendary shaft passed from
Apollo to Asclepius, Greek god of
healing.

Blank faces all around.

TIBERIUS (CONT'D)
Please, my youngest students know
of these matters.

No one else shares Tiberius' enthusiasm...or confidence.

POLLUX
Perhaps if we had more help in the
search...

MASSIVA
I fight in the arena today, to win
position in the premier match-up on
the games' last day.

MARCUS
Then that is what we need you to
do, friend.

GAIUS
I can't. I can't go down there.

LUCIUS
Why in the gods name not?

GAIUS
I'm...I'm afraid of the dark.

The others laugh at Gaius expense. Attius timidly raises his
hand.

ATTIUS
I can help search for the vault.

LUCIUS
Will you be able to open it after
finding it?

ATTIUS
(defensively)
Of course.

TIBERIUS
(the stick again)
There's no need for any of that...

All politely ignore Tiberius, even Marcus.

MARCUS
(to Gaius)
Where is there similar vault so he
can rehearse?

GAIUS
There's only one in the whole
empire that would share attributes
with Nero's...
(beat)
Rome's treasury vault in the temple
of Saturn.

Marcus and Lucius exchange a look.

EXT. IRON SMITH - MORNING

Marcus and Lucius in private conference while the others
remain inside.

MARCUS
Heads, amphitheater. Ships, temple
of Saturn.

Marcus flips a coin into the air. Catches it in hand and
displays it for Lucius to see.

MARCUS (CONT'D)
Heads.

Lucius frowns. Marcus grins.

MARCUS (CONT'D)
I'll take good care of her.

That's what worries Lucius. As he turns back toward the door,
a smiling Marcus flips the coin in his palm and we...

ANGLE ON - COIN

Both sides are heads.

EXT. COLOSSEUM/PLAZA - DAY

Thousands of Romans stream toward the amphitheater.

MARCUS & JULIA

Approach the entrance, looking every bit the handsome patrician couple.

TIBERIUS, CASTOR & POLLUX

Separately approach the same entrance. Young architect and his two slaves.

EXT. COLOSSEUM - DAY

Marcus and Julia stay at ground level while Tiberius, Castor and Pollux take stairs down toward the *hypogeum*...

We STAY ON Marcus and Julia as they stroll the concourse.

JULIA

Unlikely we'll find the vault up here.

MARCUS

(teasing)

People come here for the spectacle, too.

ANGLE - DOWN IN THE ARENA

Midday FIGHTERS engaged in their blood sport.

BACK ON - MARCUS & JULIA

as they make their way around the amphitheater.

JULIA

I haven't forgiven you.

MARCUS

They say patience is a virtue.

JULIA

And now you tell me you got yourself arrested on purpose...?

MARCUS

Would it have been better if I'd gotten arrested by accident?

JULIA

Yes.

MARCUS

I apologize for my ambitions.

JULIA
Apologies unaccepted.

They stop on the concourse not far from the emperor's box.

JULIA (CONT'D)
You shattered my heart, Marcus
Calidius. I hate you.

MARCUS
Looking at you now, I hate myself.

INT. COLOSSEUM/IMPERIAL BOX - SAME

Titus watches the gladiators fight. Idly looks to his right and sees...

HIS POV - JULIA

Standing at the balustrade. Marcus next to her.

INT. COLOSSEUM/HYPOGEUM

Vibius looks on as Massiva finishes final preparations before his fight.

VIBIUS
Go slow. Steady. Don't try to win
the fight before it's won.

Massiva, unlike his manager, is utterly calm.

MASSIVA
I knew this fight was won the day I
sprung from my mother's womb.

Massiva takes up his sword and walks toward the ramp leading up to the arena.

INT. COLOSSEUM - GROUND LEVEL

Julia seems anxious to get going but Marcus hangs back.

JULIA
Lucius knows how to treat a woman.

MARCUS
He is a good man.

JULIA
Somehow that sounds like an insult
coming out of your mouth.

MARCUS
Handsome and skilled...but dull.

JULIA
 (guffaws)
 Lucius Anneius is hardly dull.

MARCUS
 Comparatively speaking then.

JULIA
 A danger to one's health being its
 comparison?

Marcus just smiles in response, as...

INCLUDE - OFFICER OF PRAETORIAN GUARD

Approaches.

PRAETORIAN OFFICER
 Citizens, the emperor begs your
 audience.

MARCUS
 An invitation not easily rejected.

Julia gives Marcus pointed look as they follow after soldier.

EXT. FORUM - DAY

Lucius and Attius stride purposefully past temples and
 buildings of Rome's center.

Attius wears his legionnaire's uniform. Lucius wears one of
 Gaius' very finest togas and carries leather "portfolio."

ATTIUS
 I don't see how this is going to
 work.

LUCIUS
 It'll work.

ATTIUS
 I look like a fool.

LUCIUS
 You were good enough for the Roman
 legion, you'll be good enough for
 the treasury guard.

They turn and begin climbing the steps to the...

TEMPLE OF SATURN

Majestic columns define the classic portico. Home to one of
 Rome's greatest gods...and its reserves of gold and silver.

INT. COLOSSEUM/IMPERIAL BOX - DAY

Titus remains seated as Julia and Marcus approach. Julia and Marcus perform the necessary genuflection.

TITUS

(to Julia)

Please. I cannot endure such loveliness in humbled state.

(beat, to Marcus)

Is this wondrous creature your wife, sir? Joy would be mine that she is your sister.

MARCUS

She is neither, Caesar.

TITUS

Only friend? Even better.

MARCUS

This lady I will one day marry.

TITUS

What is this game? Betrothed then.

MARCUS

Not quite. Presently, she professes nothing but hatred for me.

Titus' expression goes cold.

TITUS

What is your name, citizen? I've never seen you or your "intended" in my society.

MARCUS

My name is lost, a casualty of *damnatio memoriae*, along with all evidence of family distinction.

(beat)

By your decree, Imperator, and decree of your father.

Julia presently staring holes through Marcus' head.

TITUS

My father...? How dare you--

MARCUS

(interrupting him)

Marcus Calidius Regulus was the name given to me by my mother, to protect me from the enemies of my father, Nero Claudius Caesar Augustus Germanicus...

Titus can scarcely believe his ears.

MARCUS (CONT'D)
 You've condemned all memory of my
 father, except for one thing...me.
 (beat)
 A bastard, true, but blood all the
 same.

TITUS
 (stammering)
 Why...are you here?

MARCUS
 To take what's mine.

Alarmed, Titus turns to his Praetorian Officer as a
 tremendous ROAR comes up from fifty thousand Romans...

HIS POV - ARENA

The great Massiva enters below, dressed in simple tunic and
 armed with sword and dagger. A superstar's return.

BACK ON - TITUS

looks back to where Marcus and Julia had been standing.
 Gone...

TITUS
 Where...?
 (to Officer, sharp)
 Where did Nero's bastard go?!

PRAETORIAN OFFICER
 Who, my emperor?

Outraged, Titus sees Marcus has made his escape...

INT. COLOSSEUM/CONCOURSE - DAY

Marcus walks quickly through heavy crowds surging in both
 directions along the corridor. Julia at his heel.

JULIA
 Marcus Calidius, you had no
 intention of finding the vault
 today.

MARCUS
 Other fish to fry.

JULIA
 And I the bait!

MARCUS

Hooking an emperor of Rome? Most women would be flattered.

Julia pulls Marcus to a stop. Confronting him. Red hot.

JULIA

What purpose is served by Titus knowing our intent?

MARCUS

Besides revenge and humiliation of one's betters? Can't think of one.

Julia has to resist the urge to hit him, as...

ANGLE - DOWN IN THE ARENA

Massiva, with sword and dagger, squares off against his first opponent since coming out of "retirement"...

Head encased in a metal helmet with narrow eye slits and nearly every inch of his body protected by leather greaves or metal plates, the *Samnite* is well-trained killing machine.

Massiva and the *Samnite* circle one another, testing with feints and exploratory thrusts of their swords.

Samnite begins whipping his great sword around and around, faster and faster, backing Massiva up, as the blade rips the air, inches from Massiva's chest...

The crowd ROARS. Was Massiva's self-confidence unfounded?

Glancing over his shoulder, Massiva sees he's running out of room...

Samnite smashes Massiva's sword out of his hand...

MARCUS & JULIA

up at the concourse rail, watching Massiva.

Julia looks to her left...

HER POV - PRAETORIAN GUARD

Approach from the other end of the crowded concourse.

BACK ON - MARCUS & JULIA

Even a cool customer like Julia getting nervous...

JULIA

(firm, to Marcus)
We have to go.

Marcus doesn't move. Rooting for his colleague in the arena.

MARCUS

Finish it.

MASSIVA & SAMNITE

Massiva, armed now only with dagger, is up against the wall.

Grinning, the *Samnite* raises his sword overhead...

Massiva grins right back at him.

The smile fades from the *Samnite's* face; what does Massiva have to smile about?

Massiva reaches down, grabs a handful of talc powder off the floor of the arena and casts it into the *Samnite's* face...

The enraged *Samnite* begins to swing blindly with his sword. Massiva ducks, comes up from behind the *Samnite* and jabs the man in the back of the neck...

No more than a love tap. Practically bloodless.

The *Samnite* falls over like a redwood.

The crowd is stunned to silence by the turn of events...then erupts in ECSTATIC CHEERS for their returned champion.

CONCOURSE

Praetorian Guard approaching, catching sight of...

MARCUS & JULIA

Marcus grins, satisfied.

MARCUS

Now we go.

Marcus ushers Julia through the THRONG as Praetorian Guard attempt to give chase...

EXT. COLOSSEUM - DAY

Marcus and Julia run, hand-in-hand, darting in and out of the milling crowd, a few steps ahead of Praetorian Guards.

EXT. ROME/ALLEY - DAY

Marcus and Julia dash into the relative safety of the shadowy side street. Out of breath.

They lean back against the wall, practically into each other's arms. She's staring at him, grinning.

MARCUS

What?

JULIA

Nero was your father?

MARCUS

You prefer me a common man.

Julia laughs as Marcus turns to go...

She stops him. Pulls him close, their lips pressed together in passionate kiss.

Just as quickly, they pull back from each other.

Her expression is of terrible inner-conflict.

He's in mild shock, the first time we've seen Marcus caught off guard.

MARCUS (CONT'D)

(awkward)

I remember that.

In personal turmoil, Julia shoves off. Marcus follows.

INT. TEMPLE OF SATURN

Statue of Saturn is veiled and armed with a scythe. Legs were covered with bands of wool. A few WORSHIPPERS make offerings.

Lucius and Attius cross the main room of the temple, heading toward stairwell at the back.

LUCIUS

Perhaps a little more warlike,
Attius Galerius?

Attius valiantly attempts a more military bearing.

INT. TEMPLE OF SATURN/LOWER LEVEL

Lucius and Attius exit stairs and enter a smaller room than what's above. Numerous armed TREASURY GUARDS stand sentry.

TREASURY GUARD

(to Lucius)

State your business, citizen.

LUCIUS

Emmissary of Titus Flavius Caesar
Vespasianus Augustus.

(re satchel)

Documents for the state's archives.

Treasury Guard gestures and Lucius opens the satchel for inspection.

CLOSER ON - DOCUMENTS

Bear the emperor's seal.

WIDER

Satisfied, the Treasury Guard motions for Lucius to pass.

As Attius, in his soldier's uniform, walks by, the Treasury gives him a hard look.

REVERSE ANGLE - TREASURY VAULT

Marble and bronze. Ancient Rome's version of Fort Knox.

Lucius and Attius pass other Treasury Guards as they approach the vault...entering a short, access corridor to vault door.

ATTIUS

There is a slight hitch to your plan, Lucius Anneius. If I fail to open the vault, the Treasury Guard will surely realize we have no key and know us as imposters.

LUCIUS

All the more reason to succeed.

They come to the vault door, secured by WARDED LOCK.

CLOSER ON - WARDED LOCK

Concentric plates protruding outwards block rotation of a key not designed for the lock.

LUCIUS & ATTIUS

As Attius studies the warded lock. Lucius glances over his shoulder at the Treasury Guards, then turns back to Attius.

LUCIUS (CONT'D)

Well?

ATTIUS

A challenging mechanism...but not impregnable.

Lucius pats Attius on the shoulder.

The Treasury Guard that had stopped them before peers down the length of the short access corridor.

TREASURY GUARD

Is there a problem, emissary?

Lucius gestures to Guard. "No problem." Turns back to Attius.

LUCIUS
Be quick.

Attius has withdrawn some lock-picking tools from inside his tunic. Working at the vault lock.

ATTIUS
Need I remind you this lock secures
Rome's treasury?

Lucius glances up the access corridor, where...

ANGLE - TREASURY GUARD

Starts to approach.

TREASURY GUARD
What goes on down there?

BACK ON - LUCIUS & ATTIUS

Lucius watches Attius work the lock.

LUCIUS
Now, brother.

ATTIUS
Almost...have it.

The lock opens with a satisfying THUNK. Attius pulls the heavy door open...

INT. TREASURY VAULT

Practically empty except for state archives and insignia. The shelves dedicated to gold and silver reserves are empty.

Attius and Lucius are equally stunned.

LUCIUS
Our emperor is poorer than we are.

INCLUDE - TREASURY GUARD

Enters and regards the meager holdings.

TREASURY GUARD
By the gods, I don't know why they
bother posting guards here.
(to Lucius, grumpily)
Leave your documents and be gone.

The Treasury Guard turns and exits the vault.

INT. COLOSSEUM/ARENA - DAY

As SLAVES use hooks to drag the *Samnite's* corpse from the arena, Massiva exits...met by an ecstatic Vibius Caecilius.

The *lanista* ushers his star gladiator down the ramp.

VIBIUS
Still a champion! You can have any
fight you wish.

Massiva betrays just a trace of being rattled; it was harder being back in the arena than he anticipated.

MASSIVA
The best. I want to fight the very
best Rome has to offer.
(beat)
Every pair of eyes...watching me.

As *MEDICI* begins to work on Massiva's injuries, we...

ANGLE - FURTHER DOWN THE TUNNEL

We SEE three figures prowling the unfinished portion of the *hypogeum* by torchlight.

INT. COLOSSEUM/HYPOGEUM - SAME

Tiberius, Castor and Pollux have resumed the search...

Tiberius is a few yards ahead, holding divining rod firmly with both hands. Castor and Pollux follow a few steps behind, illuminating their way with torch.

POLLUX
How does one know when one has
found an emperor's treasure vault?

CASTOR
If you stub your toe upon it, you
know you've found it.

POLLUX
If the gods drop it from the
heavens and it lands on your head,
you know you've found it.

CASTOR
If it should be served to you for
supper, you know you've found it.

Tiberius stops in his tracks, a few feet ahead.

POLLUX
If --

TIBERIUS
 (interrupting him)
 -- divination rod begins to move in
 skittish manner, then you know
 you've found it.

Castor and Pollux stare at divining rod, then all three look
 in direction the stick is pointing...

...EARTHEN WALL of freshly cut tunnel. Looks no different
 than elsewhere.

Pollux throws himself at wall, scraping away with shovel.
 He's joined by Castor, who claws at dirt with his hands.

In short order, they expose...

...SUPPORT COLUMN of access tunnel pre-dating the *hypogeum*.

CLOSER ON - DECORATIVE TILE

Imbedded in the support column. Depicts monument built in
 honor of Augustus, first emperor and Nero's ancestor.

TIBERIUS' VOICE (O.S.)
Ara Pacis. Nero's seal, in honor of
 his grand-uncle, Caesar Augustus,
 founder of Julio-Claudian dynasty.

WIDER

The twins gawk. But Tiberius never had any doubt.

TIBERIUS
 Finding the vault was a trivial
 matter.

The vault's narrow access tunnel, older than the Colosseum's
 construction Clearly, is buried by tons of dirt and stone.

TIBERIUS (CONT'D)
 The real challenge will be
 unearthing it.

EXT. COLOSSEUM/GATE - NIGHT

Marcus, Julia, Lucius and Massiva wait at one of the entry
 gates, closed at this late hour, as...

Attius picks the gate lock. The crew enters...

EXT. COLOSSEUM/CONCOURSE - SAME

Carefully closing the gate behind them. We FOLLOW them as
 they walk silently up the corridor, toward stairs leading
 down into the *hypogeum*.

ROUGH VOICE (O.S.)

Halt!

INCLUDE - NIGHT WATCHMAN

Approaches from opposite end of the corridor, armed only with wooden club. A simple man, barely above slave in status.

NIGHT WATCHMAN

Gate was locked. Checked it only moments ago.

Marcus holds out his hands, posing no threat.

MARCUS

And now its open.

NIGHT WATCHMAN

What's your business here?

MARCUS

We've come to rob the emperor.

The others exchange looks. Will he raise the alarm? But the Night Watchman's guarded expression goes neutral.

NIGHT WATCHMAN

Well enough. Be certain you don't get caught.

With that, the Night Watchman turns and walks slowly back in the direction he came.

INT. COLOSSEUM/HYPOGEUM

The whole crew (except Gaius) gather around the partially exposed support column bearing the Julio-Claudian insignia, the scene illuminated by torchlight.

LUCIUS

I don't know whether to be happy or sad.

MARCUS

Happy.

LUCIUS

Because...?

MARCUS

Sail master was right. The treasure is buried beneath the amphitheater.

LUCIUS

Something is buried under the amphitheater.

MARCUS
Nero's vault.

LUCIUS
Well, you would know.

Marcus gives Julia a look.

LUCIUS (CONT'D)
We're not stealing a horde of gold.
We're recovering your inheritance.

MARCUS
We're stealing a horde of gold that
happens to be my inheritance.

LUCIUS
Still, you might've mentioned going
in you were Nero's bastard.

Marcus gives Julia another quick glance.

MARCUS
There's much I could mention, but
will wait for a better time.

CASTOR
Wait. Who is Nero's bastard?

LUCIUS
He's Nero's bastard. Marcus
Calidius.

Marcus reluctantly explains. What other choice has he?

MARCUS
My mother was in the household of
Poppaea Sabina, the emperor's
second wife. My arrival meant her
departure, but from time to time,
the emperor would have us back in
secret. I've fond memory of playing
on the Palatine. Then the army's
insurrection...and no more Nero.

MASSIVA
His last words: "Is it so dreadful
a thing then to die?"
(beat)
A great man. Hero to the ordinary
people of Rome and loved by them.

LUCIUS
Nero's bastard. Explains a lot.
(to Marcus)
Shall we address you as "Caesar"?

MARCUS

You'll get no complaint from me.
 (beat)
 Now about this matter...

He gestures at the wall of dirt before them.

CASTOR

We tunnel at night.

POLLUX

Like moles.

CASTOR

Spread the excavated soil over the arena. None will be the wiser.

POLLUX

Like busy, dutiful moles.

CASTOR

Then what do you propose, brother?

POLLUX

River water.
 (off Castor)
 We flood the tunnel with water from the Tiber. Wash away all this loose dirt and expose the vault in that fashion.

CASTOR

Thank the gods I was born with my brain and not yours.

Tiberius, meanwhile, has been brooding. Pipes up...

TIBERIUS

You know, it just might work.

All look to their resident philosopher and engineer.

EXT. GAIUS' VILLA/GARDEN - NIGHT

The whole crew is present except for Gaius.

TIBERIUS

Hushing is a mining process that's been in use for decades...

Tiberius demonstrates, pouring a pitcher of water over a mound of soil.

TIBERIUS (CONT'D)

A large volume of water stored in a reservoir above the area to be mined is quickly released.

(MORE)

TIBERIUS (CONT'D)
 Resulting wave of water removes
 debris...exposing gold veins.

A stone is revealed after the soil is washed away.

CASTOR
 (indicates stone)
 That's not gold.

All ignore the well-meaning Castor.

MARCUS
 But the water in this circumstance
 is below the vault.

TIBERIUS
 The river isn't. If we dam the
 appropriate channel and direct it
 into the access tunnel below the
 amphitheater, it will flood.

Marcus and Lucius exchange a somewhat skeptical look.

MARCUS
 Can you have it ready in two days?

Tiberius nods, ready to tackle any engineering problem.

MARCUS (CONT'D)
 Good. Let's all get some rest.

They start to adjourn the meet.

GAIUS' VOICE (O.S.)
 There's one more problem...

INCLUDE - GAIUS

just arrived.

MARCUS
 Can it be solved with hydraulics?

But Gaius is in no joking mood.

GAIUS
 Efforts to bribe the centurion in
 charge of the gate at Capena has
 failed. He will not be bought at
 any price.

TIBERIUS
 There are other gates.

GAIUS
 This unusually honest centurion
 commands all the city's gates...
 (MORE)

GAIUS (CONT'D)

(beat)

No matter how fast our horses, they
will not outrun signal fire.

A beat as this information sinks in with the crew.

MARCUS

Isn't it true the gates are
infrequently closed? Two, maybe
three times a year.

LUCIUS

Sometimes not even once.

Lucius knows where Marcus is going with this.

LUCIUS (CONT'D)

We need to sabotage the gate at
Capena...

MARCUS

Without the guards knowing we were
ever there.

GAIUS

You want to sabotage one of the
gates of Rome?

MARCUS

(with a shrug)

The die is cast.

GAIUS

You're aware of what they do to
those who tamper with the city
gates?

LUCIUS

Death by crucifixion, if they're
feeling magnanimous.

MARCUS

Besides, when was the last time the
city was invaded?

(beat)

That is, by other than one of our
own generals.

No one has a clue.

EXT. PORTA CAPENA - MORNING

Gate in the Servian Wall, near the Caelian Hill. One of the
main entries into Rome, since it opens on the Appian Way.
Frequented by BEGGARS. A hectic, unruly place.

SUPER: DEIS IOVIS (Thursday)

Detachment of Urban Cohort guard the gate, commanded by stern-faced CENTURION. An even dozen soldiers in all.

CLOSER ON - THE GATE

Heavy wrought-iron. MECHANISM to the side raises and lowers the huge gate via a series of chains and pulleys partially enclosed in a wooden housing.

ANGLE - MASSIVA

Walks toward the gate, his bulk towering over everyone...

ANOTHER ANGLE - LUCIUS ON HORSEBACK

Entering the city, through the gate. He turns his horse into Massiva's path at the last second...

MASSIVA

Watch where you're going!

Massiva pulls back his right arm and PUNCHES the horse in the side of the head...

The horse drops with the one punch. Lucius barely jumps clear in time so as not to get his leg broken...

Lucius draws his short sword.

LUCIUS

Scoundrel! I'll kill you!

Lucius comes after Massiva with the sword. Soldiers approach to break up the fight...

Massiva takes a SPEAR right out of one of the soldier's hands and starts swinging it at Lucius, who jumps clear.

PASSERSBY start to form up around the altercation, cheering the combatants.

Massiva takes a swing at Lucius with the spear, who ducks just below its arc...one of the soldiers taking the brunt of a direct hit to the side of his head.

Massiva drops the spear, turns and starts running...

The soldier who got hit and another take off after him.

Lucius touches his horse and it immediately stands to all four feet, seemingly unaffected by the punch...

Lucius pulls himself up on the horse, spurs it in the opposite direction Massiva just fled.

Two soldiers take off after him.

Which leaves eight soldiers guarding the gate, as...

CASTOR & POLLUX

emerge from the crowd of passersby who had circled up around the fight.

We HEAR the sound of coins hitting paving stone...

DENARII roll across the street, scattering everywhere...

BEGGARS react, morphing into hysterical, scrambling mob...

Castor and Pollux move away from the gate...

We SEE the coins dropping from beneath their togas...

Mob of beggars become more frenzied as the money trail directs them further away from the gate, as...

Six soldiers, including their commanding Centurion, leave the area directly in front of the gate to deal with the mob.

Leaving only two soldiers on duty at the gate, as...

MARCUS, JULIA, TIBERIUS & ATTIUS

start moving from off to the side, where they have been watching and waiting for the right moment...

ATTIUS

How long before those soldiers
return...or the twins run out of
money?

MARCUS

Long enough.
(to Tiberius & Julia)
Once we start, hold them fast until
we're finished.

Julia and Tiberius nod their acknowledgement and continue toward the gate as Marcus and Attius split off...

STAY ON - JULIA & TIBERIUS

Both dressed in fine togas, Julia badly overmatches Tiberius in the looks department. One of those couples.

REVERSE ANGLE - TWO SOLDIERS

All that remain of the detachment guarding the gate.

They don't give Julia and Tiberius much attention as they walk up. Long-suffering, bored air of professional soldiers.

TIBERIUS
Heroes of Rome!

No reaction from the jaded soldiers. Who is this dork?

Julia stops, some fifteen feet from the Soldiers.

Tiberius continues forward, to one of them...

TIBERIUS (CONT'D)
Commander, gods willing, perhaps
you can be of assistance.

SOLDIER #1
I'm neither commander, nor hero.
Move on.

TIBERIUS
I have proposition for you.

Points behind him, at Julia.

TIBERIUS (CONT'D)
It regards my wife...
(beat)
Because of physical ailment, I
cannot help her to "sing."

Soldier #1 looks around Tiberius, to Julia.

TIBERIUS (CONT'D)
I wonder, hero, if you could help
my wife sing.

That gets a reaction out of the soldier. Tiberius holds up a
small, leather MONEY PURSE.

TIBERIUS (CONT'D)
With compensation, of course.
(with a shrug)
She has long had a fixation for all
things military.

Soldier #1 can scarcely believe his good fortune.

SOLDIER #1
Citizen, I might be of assistance.

TIBERIUS
Come. Meet her...
(an aside)
Introduce yourself as singing
teacher.

We FOLLOW Tiberius and Soldier #1 to where Julia stands,
leaving only one, last guard at the gate.

The soldier gives a small bow of the head to beautiful Julia.

SOLDIER #1
I am your singing teacher.

Julia plays the role, looking the soldier up and down.

JULIA
(to Tiberius, re soldier)
He is on the scrawny side, husband.

The soldier reacts, mild outrage.

JULIA (CONT'D)
But if his friend joined the fray?

TIBERIUS
But, darling, that will cost twice
as much.

JULIA
Well, if you don't love me...

She starts to turn away.

TIBERIUS
Wait!
(to Soldier #1, desperate)
Perhaps your comrade would also be
interested?

The soldier considers it for a moment, then turns to the last guard at the gate and gestures to him to come forward.

As SOLDIER #2 moves to join Tiberius and Julia, as...

MARCUS & ATTIUS

Approach the gate from along the Servian Wall, stopping at gate mechanism housing.

GATE MECHANISM HOUSING

Locked.

MARCUS
Can you open it?

Attius gives Marcus a look. Of course he can open it.

He has one of his lock-picking tools at ready. With a brief flourish, he opens the lock.

Marcus glances over his shoulder, then withdraws TOOLS from under his tunic.

ANGLE - UP THE STREET

The four Soldiers who chased after Lucius and Massiva have given up pursuit and return. Two Soldier -- the ones who chased after Massiva -- have to be helped by the other two.

A ways off and moving slowly...but steadily.

BACK ON - MARCUS & ATTIUS

Marcus working an IRON PIN into the gears of the mechanism.

Attius checks over his shoulder...

...the two Soldiers with Julia and Tiberius, their backs to the gate but only 20 feet away, at the most...

ATTIUS
Coming back.

Marcus works steadily, not one to panic.

TIBERIUS & JULIA

Keep their two Soldiers occupied, but losing them...

SOLDIER #2
(to Soldier #1)
They're not serious.

He starts to turn away, back toward Marcus and Attius at the open mechanism housing.

Julia grabs Soldier #2 by the wrist, pulling him back.

JULIA
(seductively)
Very serious.

ANGLE - SIX SOLDIERS

Have largely dispersed the mob of Beggars who have been scrambling for the coins cast about by Castor and Pollux.

CENTURION
That's got it, boys.

They start to turn back for the gate...

BACK ON - MARCUS & ATTIUS

ATTIUS
Soldiers.

MARCUS
Almost...

Marcus inadvertently releases the gate...

...just as the gate starts to drop down, Marcus grips the chain, straining against the enormous weight of the wrought iron gate. Attius takes hold as well, with rising panic.

MARCUS (CONT'D)
(superhuman calm)
Good?

Attius barely has it when Marcus lets go of the chain to finish the sabotage job...

CLOSER ON - MECHANISM

Marcus successfully wedges the iron pin deep into the works. Attius can let go, the gate again safely secured open. Marcus twists the end around to make extraction almost impossible.

MARCUS' VOICE
Done.

WIDER

Attius quietly closes the housing cover and starts to lock it, but...

The rusted lock won't click back in.

MARCUS
Now, Attius Galerius.
(beat)
Lock it now.

ANGLE - TWO SOLDIERS

With Julia and Tiberius are getting aggressive.

SOLDIER #2
A kiss to show me you're serious...

He starts to pull her close. Tiberius reaches out to stop him and gets shoved aside.

MARCUS & ATTIUS

Attius can't coax the lock closed. Losing it...

ATTIUS
Can't get it!

Marcus calmly reaches to help, as...

JULIA, TIBERIUS & TWO SOLDIERS

Mixing it up, Julia no pushover, as...

INCLUDE - SIX SOLDIERS

From successfully crowd control. Centurion looking askance at Julia in tangle with two soldiers.

JULIA
(sharply)
Control your animals, centurion.

The two frustrated, would-be gigolos turn away from Julia and join the other six soldiers, as four who had pursued Massiva and Lucius come abreast.

All twelve now turning fulling to the gate only steps away...

REVERSE ANGLE - GATE

Marcus and Attius nowhere to be seen. Gate mechanism housing closed and locked. Nothing seemingly amiss.

WIDER

Tiberius and Julia swiftly walking away from the gate as...

The Soldiers turn wonder what the hell just happened.

INT. TAVERN - NIGHT

If you were looking for someplace to hide out, this would be the place. Filthy and cramped.

The entire crew is present. Celebratory mood.

Castor and Pollux in drinking contest, each chugging tall flasks of wine...

They slam down empties at exactly the same moment.

An inebriated Tiberius acts as referee.

TIBERIUS
Tie! A dead heat!

The twins refill their flasks for a rematch, while...

Attius performs magic tricks with a SESTERIUS COIN for Gaius' benefit...

ATTIUS
Easy come...

...and then makes the coin "disappear" into thin air after some manipulation in his hands.

ATTIUS (CONT'D)
...easy go.

Gaius is not completely impressed, as...

Massiva has wrapped a length of chain around his bare chest, the links of which burst with expansion of his massive girth.

Others applaud this astonishing feat of strength.

Marcus and Julia, standing almost shoulder to shoulder, grin and applaud Massiva.

Lucius watching them, taking note of their apparent casual intimacy. They seem a natural fit...

Lucius betrays no reaction. Just noting the moment, when...

Marcus holds up one hand. The others quiet down.

MARCUS

Today was a good day...

This is greeted by more SHOUTING and carrying on.

CASTOR

How is your horse doing, Lucius
Anneius?

LUCIUS

(indicating Massiva)
Ask him how his hand is doing.

Massiva turns to Julia and...SWINGS the same hard right hand, pulling it just in the last second so that it misses Julia's chin and SMACKS into his left palm.

Movie punch...perfectly timed. All LAUGH. Marcus holds up his hand again for quiet.

MARCUS

We have much to do still...

GAIUS

Because we haven't actually done
anything yet.

This comment is greeted with a CHORUS of BOOS and CATCALLS. Bread is thrown in the mob boss' direction.

Gaius looks to Marcus for assistance.

MARCUS

(with a shrug, to Gaius)
You brought this on yourself.

Marcus again calls for order. The others quiet down.

MARCUS (CONT'D)
 ...but our planning and preparation
 is complete.

FLASHBACK - INT. COLOSSEUM/HYPOGEUM - DAY

Under Tiberius' direction, his "slaves" Castor and Pollux fashion bury barred gates in the dirt floor of the main corridor. Being "architect," his work is ignored by Guards.

MARCUS' VOICE (O.S.)
 We've done our work well.

FLASHBACK - INT. COLOSSEUM/HYPOGEUM/ACCESS TUNNEL - DAY

Castor and Pollux run a CORD from the entrance to the buried vault.

MARCUS' VOICE (O.S.)
 We know the vault's location...

FLASHBACK - INT. IRON SMITH - DAY

Julia and Lucius load ASSORTED IMPLEMENTS and REED MATS into the bed of the War Wagon.

MARCUS' VOICE (O.S.)
 ...have all the tools and skills we
 need for the task...

FLASHBACK - EXT. COUNTRYSIDE/TREE GROVE - DAY

Marcus and Gaius scout a rally point beyond the city walls.

MARCUS' VOICE (O.S.)
 ...and a way of transporting the
 gold out of the city.

INT. TAVERN - NIGHT

Marcus raises his tankard of wine high.

MARCUS
 Now all we have to do is take it.

The others give a raucous CHEER. Marcus takes obvious enjoyment in their merriment.

CASTOR
 My only complaint is your choice of
 venue, Marcus Calidius. I wouldn't
 feed a horse in this shithole.

The others concur, VOCALLY. Once that has died down...

MARCUS

What you speak of so harshly was my
childhood home, citizen.

That shuts them up. Marcus indicates ROUGH TABLE.

MARCUS (CONT'D)

There...that table where you
sit...was my bed.

ATTIUS

This foul place...was your home? I
don't understand.

MARCUS

After my mother was forced to leave
the palace, she could only find
work here, in this establishment.
Where I spent the next ten years of
my life, in fact.

This is met with brooding silence. What child could survive a
place as foul as this?

MARCUS (CONT'D)

I cannot speak to your reasons, but
this...
...this place is why I demand
what's rightfully mine.

Julia looks to Marcus, full of tender compassion. He smiles
back on her. His hand lightly touches her shoulder...

ANGLE - LUCIUS

Watching, as we CUT TO...

EXT. PALACE APARTMENT - LATE NIGHT

Titus sits in a chair. Standing beside him is Spirius.
Address someone OFF CAMERA.

Standing beside him is Spirius. Address someone OFF CAMERA.

TITUS

A man with information that
valuable could expect reward in
equal proportion.

Spirius is less welcoming.

SPIRIUS

It's been several days since your
last report. How can you explain
this absence?

REVERSE ANGLE - LUCIUS

Stands before his emperor.

LUCIUS
You would rather speak more
regularly of the weather, tribune,
or wait for news of the vault's
location.

TITUS
The treasure's been found?

LUCIUS
It's nearer than you think,
Imperator.
(beat, his demand)
Of the patrician class...with land,
slaves and villa.

TITUS
Yes, yes, of course. Land, slaves
and villa. Where is the vault?

SPIRIUS
(prompting eagerly)
The criminal Marcus Calidius,
informant. The other conspirators.
Word of them as well.

Lucius nods, prepared to tell all...

EXT. ROME - DAWN

Sun rises over the city.

SUPER: DEIS VENERIS (Friday)

EXT. COLOSSEUM - MORNING

Quiet. The day's games still hours off. SLAVES sweep the
plaza, cleaning up after a long night of revelry.

SUPER: THE LAST DAY OF THE 100 DAYS OF GAMES

INT. COLOSSEUM/HYPOGEUM

Tiberius, Castor and Pollux walk the main corridor. Pollux
carries the torch that illuminates their way.

But Tiberius has stopped suddenly. Cups hand to ear.

TIBERIUS
(whisper, to twins)
Quiet.

They stop behind Tiberius. All listen...

The SOUND OF ACTIVITY from further down the tunnel.

Tiberius, Castor and Pollux move cautiously forward.

INT. COLOSSEUM/HYPOGEUM

Tiberius, Castor and Pollux watch from the shadowy recesses of the corridor, their torch extinguished.

REVERSE ANGLE - VAULT ACCESS TUNNEL

Numerous SLAVES busily excavate the dirt and rocks, already having revealed a portion of the narrow corridor.

Standing guard is detachment of heavily armed SOLDIERS, commanded by Spius' favorite Centurion.

BACK ON - CONSPIRATORS

They exchange shocked look.

INT. GAIUS' VILLA - MORNING

A MOB has broken down the gates. Household SLAVES run for their lives as the looters begin to destroy everything that isn't worth stealing.

Soldiers from the Urban Cohort watch the mob do their work before idly turning and walking away from the scene.

INT. TAVERN - MORNING

Where the crew had met the night before. Fire RAGES.

EXT. TAVERN - SAME

Consumed in flame. FIREFIGHTERS of the Urban Vigiles form bucket brigade in a hopeless effort to save the structure.

EXT. IRON SMITH - MORNING

Soldiers of the Urban Cohort exit the workshop, as it erupts in flame.

INT. PORTICUS OCTAVIAE - MORNING

Soldiers jog down colonnaded walk, swords CLANKING against breast plates, sandals SLAPPING on the paving stones.

INT. LIBRARY - MORNING

Soldiers burst through the doors, moving past startled LIBRARIANS as they continue the length of the room, to the...

ARCHIMEDES MECHANISM

...which is lifted from its place on table and SMASHED to bits and broken gears on marble floor.

EXT. PORTICUS OCTAVIAE/STREET - MORNING

Lucius and Marcus watch soldiers milling in the courtyard from a vantage point across the street, out of view.

MARCUS

Did you have to tell them about the Archimedes Mechanism?

LUCIUS

Maybe not.

MARCUS

Tiberius Seius won't forgive you anytime soon...

(beat)

Or Gaius Acilius.

LUCIUS

(quoting their motto)

Play the die you cast.

MARCUS

Nothing a hundred talents of gold won't cure.

(beat)

Think they've finished excavating the vault by now?

LUCIUS

If not done, then very close.

MARCUS

(derisively)

Hydraulics.

LUCIUS

Wouldn't work in a million years.

They turn and start walking away. We STAY ON them as go.

LUCIUS (CONT'D)

Seriously. The tavern? Was it really your home as a child?

MARCUS

You be the judge of that, friend.

(beat)

Did I mention I stole a kiss from Julia Novella? Day before yesterday. In the amphitheater. Adventure is the aphrodisiac.

LUCIUS

Really? The darling woman told me all about your feeble kiss. Said it compelled her to appreciate a true, dependable man all the more. Many thanks.

Marcus smiles at his friend's joust. Game on.

EXT. COLOSSEUM/PLAZA - DAY

The empire at play. As on preceding days, except for...

PRAETORIAN GUARD

Augment soldiers of the Urban Cohort ringing the venue.

EXT. COLOSSEUM - DAY

Not an empty seat in the house.

INT. COLOSSEUM/HYPOGEUM

Hectic scene of gladiators before and after their fights, workers, soldiers, *lanistas* and their slaves, and...

...the CLATTER of large, mule-drawn wooden CARTS transporting CORPSES of vanquished beasts and gladiators.

CLOSER ON - CORPSE CART

Fully-laden, its mule team directed down the main tunnel by two SLAVES...

INT. COLOSSEUM/SPOLIARIUM

The Corpse Cart enters the miserable, closed-in chamber with a HOLE cut out from the floor...

We HEAR flowing water.

Two Slaves position cart before the hole, then dump its sad cargo through the hole and into the sewer below...

As the two Slaves direct the mule team pulling the cart out of the *spoliarium*, we SEE it is Castor and Pollux.

INT. COLOSSEUM/HYPOGEUM

GLADIATORS who have just concluded their fights limp down the ramp, bloodied and bruised...and they're the victors...

Losers are dragged down the ramp at the end of hooks.

ANGLE - MASSIVA & VIBIUS

Massiva readies himself for combat. Sword and dagger in hand. No shield. No chest protection. Simply lethal.

His *lanista* delivers his version of a pep talk...

VIBIUS
You desired the best and the best
is who you will face.

MASSIVA
Odds with or against?

VIBIUS
Against. Ten to one.

Massiva ponders this fact for a moment.

MASSIVA
All I am due, bet on Massiva.

VIBIUS
But that money will buy you a
proper funeral. Your sarcophagus on
the Appian Way.

MASSIVA
Unnecessary. Make the bet.

Massiva turns. Starts jogging up the ramp.

VIBIUS
(after him)
Fifty-one fights! Fifty-one wins!

Massiva continues running up the ramp, toward the light of the sky above the amphitheater.

INT. COLOSSEUM/HYPOGEUM/VAULT ACCESS TUNNEL

Slaves continue to make progress excavating the access tunnel, which is now nearly fifty feet deep.

INT. COLOSSEUM/HYPOGEUM/MAIN CORRIDOR

Just outside the vault access tunnel, numerous SOLDIERS of the Urban Cohort stand guard...

CLOSER ON - ONE SOLDIER

It's Attius, looking nervous, as we CUT TO...

EXT. IRON SMITH - DAY

A burnt ruin.

Lucius approaches, pausing before the smoldering iron smith shop, then turns to cross the street...

ANGLE - STABLE

Lucius pauses to look up and down the deserted street...

...then approaches large, double "barn" doors of the stable, which he pulls open, revealing...

...War Wagon just inside the double doors. Race horses in individual stalls at rear of stable. Lucius enters, closing stable doors behind him.

EXT. ROME/STREET - LATER

Double doors pushed open again from inside...

A few moments later, race horses come CHARGING out, hitched to War Wagon. Lucius at the reins.

PASSERSBY stop and watch the stupendous vehicle and its horse team THUNDER past.

EXT. COLOSSEUM/CONCOURSE - DAY

Tiberius turns to descend the stairs leading down into...

INT. COLOSSEUM/HYPOGEUM

...where he is immediately stopped by a SOLDIER, part of the augmented guard.

SOLDIER #1
Can't come down here.

A second Soldier comes up.

SOLDIER #2
Let him pass...
(re Tiberius)
Emperor's architect.

Does the trick. Soldier #1 practically bows himself away.

EXT. COLOSSEUM/IMPERIAL BOX - DAY

Titus just entering his expansive seating area from private access tunnel.

Spirius has been waiting to give a report.

SPIRIUS
Excavations are nearly finished,
Imperator. Urban Cohort protects
the site, augmented by our best
units of Praetorian Guard.

TITUS

Once the vault has been revealed
and opened, remove its contents to
the palace...

(beat, bitterly)

...then bury it again.

Titus continues to his seat.

Crowd politely CHEERS the emperor's arrival.

EXT. COLOSSEUM/PLAZA - DAY

Marcus and Julia approach the amphitheater's north gate...

REVERSE ANGLE - SOLDIERS

Standing guard, part of the augmented force that surround the
amphitheater.

As Marcus and Julia pass by a soldier, we SEE he is one of
the would-be gigolos from Porta Capena guard detail.

The soldier/gigolo gives Julia a startled look, gaze falling
on Marcus...more impressive consort than "husband" Tiberius.

Julia plays it like the pro that she is. Cool as ice.

JULIA

(to Soldier, re Marcus)

Found one.

The soldier, humiliated, looks away from the very man he's
been assigned to apprehend...

EXT. ROME/STREET - DAY

Lucius, atop the War Wagon, directs the team of chariot
horses toward...

...exterior RAMP leading down to the subterranean level of
the amphitheater.

INT. COLOSSEUM/HYPOGEUM

Castor and Pollux push open huge, double doors, for...

...Lucius to drive the Wag Wagon through and into the
hypogeum.

The twins quickly closing the doors behind, as we CUT TO...

EXT. TIBER RIVER/OSTIA - DAY

A two-sail BOAT heads upriver, toward Rome. Solo CREWMAN at
the helm.

EXT. COLOSSEUM/CONCOURSE - DAY

Marcus and Julia mingle with crowd milling about.

MARCUS & JULIA - MOVING

Marcus gallantly takes her by the arm.

MARCUS

At some point, a final, irrevocable
choice must be made. Will it be
passion or dependability?

JULIA

Odd. I recall telling you I'm with
Lucius now.

MARCUS

Your lips on mine the day before
last said otherwise.

JULIA

I am a thief, but cannot tell a
lie...

(beat)

...that kiss brought intense
pleasure.

MARCUS

Then you are no longer with Lucius
Anneius?

JULIA

I did not say that either.

(beat)

It is a woman's right, Marcus
Calidius, to take care in deciding
such matters of the heart.

Marcus is about to respond when the ROAR of 50,000 spectators
interrupts...

EXT. COLOSSEUM/ARENA - SAME

Massiva enters the arena. He raises both arms in
acknowledgment, striding to the center of the arena...

CAMERA SPINS up, across the thousands of spectators seated in
the amphitheater, not stopping until it finds...

MARCUS & JULIA

Standing at the concourse rail, staring down into the arena
and catching the eye of...

MASSIVA

However briefly. Contact made.

EXT. COLOSSEUM/IMPERIAL BOX - DAY

Spirius stands behind Titus in his imperial chair, both taking in the scene before them.

He notes Massiva registering someone in the stands. Looks to see...

HIS POV - CONCOURSE

Where Marcus and Julia had been standing. They are no longer there.

Spirius doesn't think much of it. Leans to his emperor's ear.

SPIRIUS
I will check on the excavations,
Imperator.

Titus lifts an imperial hand. Go.

INT. COLOSSEUM/HYPOGEUM/VAULT CHAMBER

CHATTERING Slaves have excitedly exposed...

ANGLE - NERO'S VAULT

Large, stone structure covered with elaborate carvings and insignia.

At center of its facade is a large IRON DOOR decorated with bronze bas relief. Impregnable.

SPIRIUS

Crouching to navigate the access tunnel's low ceiling, enters the vault chamber, followed by soldiers...including Attius.

The tribune pauses to admire the vault.

SPIRIUS
Excellent.

He turns to his favorite Centurion, who is in charge of excavation and security.

SPIRIUS (CONT'D)
How quickly can you open it?

The Centurion indicates...

ANGLE - UP ACCESS TUNNEL

Six SLAVES carrying a BATTERING RAM into the vault chamber.

Centurion and Spirius step out of the way so the slaves can lay the battering ram before the vault door.

CENTURION
With appropriate tool, not long,
tribune.

Spirius turns to go, leaving them to their task...

SPIRIUS
Send a messenger to the imperial
box when it's done...
(beat)
I can promise you, the emperor will
reward quick work.

Spirius turns and heads back up the access tunnel as the Centurion directs the Slaves...

CLOSER ON - ATTIUS

who hurries out of the vault chamber, on Spirius' heels.

EXT. COLOSSEUM/ARENA - DAY

Massiva turns toward...

Gate raised for his opponent to enter the arena...FLAMMA, 26.

Lanky, sinewy assassin. Adorned in black-painted chain-mail and small "tribal" mirrors. Unsettling.

The ROAR that greets Flamma's entrance into the arena is even louder than the one Massiva received.

Together, Massiva and Flamma stride across the arena to right below the imperial box and Titus...

Gladiators raise their swords.

MASSIVA & FLAMMA
We who are about to die, salute
you!

The two combatants turn and face one another...

Spectators rapt. Anticipation beyond high...

Marcus and Julia seated just below concourse level. Eye-line with Massiva...

Titus in the imperial box, nods to...

MAGISTRATE-EDITOR

standing down in the arena.

He raises his arm, to the CHEERING THROG...

...then lowers it.

MASSIVA & FLAMMA

Rush at each other, swords raised. Blades CLANG at first strike, as we CUT TO...

INT. COLOSSEUM/HYPOGEUM/MAIN CORRIDOR

...where the soldiers guard vault access tunnel.

They make an especially good show of their vigilance as Spirius, exits access tunnel and heads back up the corridor.

ATTIUS

Appears even more manic before. Seemingly losing it.

He abruptly leaves the immediate area around the vault access tunnel entrance, striding 20 or 30 feet up the main corridor and crouching down to take hold of...

...the END OF A LENGTH OF CORD (which we saw the crew laying out earlier) lying on the ground to one side of the corridor.

MAN'S VOICE (O.S.)

(harsh)

Back to your post, soldier!

CENTURION

approaches from up the corridor...

BACK ON - ATTIUS

Attius gives the cord three hard yanks, as...

INT. COLOSSEUM/HYPOGEUM/MAIN CORRIDOR

...Tiberius, on one knee and holding his end of the cord, feels it tug.

He immediately stands and goes to a LARGE LAMP by barred window looking out onto the arena...

ANGLE - THROUGH BARRED WINDOW

we SEE Flamma and Massiva engaged in gladiatorial combat.

TIBERIUS

throws a YELLOW POWDER on the open fire, a breeze blowing up from behind him, as...

EXT. COLOSSEUM/SEATING - DAY

Marcus and Julia see...

THEIR POV - YELLOW SMOKE

blowing out from arena-level window.

MARCUS & JULIA

See smoke. Marcus raises his left arm high...

INT. COLOSSEUM/ARENA - SAME

Massiva trades sword strikes with Flamma.

Out of the corner of his eye, he sees Marcus in the stands ...giving the signal.

Massiva backs off. Lets Flamma take the offense. Drawing out the fight...

Crowd ROARS its approval, as...

INT. COLOSSEUM/HYPOGEUM/MAIN CORRIDOR

Attius lets go of his end of the cord as the Centurion comes up. Strikes Attius with the flat side of his sword.

CENTURION

I said, back to your post!

With an INSANE HOWL, Attius throws himself at the Centurion, throttling the man...

Other SOLDIERS rush forward and wrestle a seriously deranged Attius off their commanding officer.

Attius releases his grasp of the Centurion, turns and, with more mad HOWLING, dashes up the corridor to...

ANIMAL CAGES

Not yet in use.

WIDER

Attius takes refuge in one of the cages, cowering from...

...Soldiers, who crowd around the cage. Unsure what to do next...

Centurion has regained his wits and takes command.

CENTURION (CONT'D)
Leave the maniac in his cage then!

Soldiers latch cage door shut. Turn and walk away, laughing.

We STAY ON Attius for a beat and see his expression transform from deranged to something much more calculating...

EXT. COLOSSEUM/ARENA - DAY

Massiva and Flamma going at it with skill and ferocity not witnessed before, even in a place such as this...

INT. COLOSSEUM/HYPOGEUM

Workers, other gladiators and soldiers of Urban Cohort -- everybody with a pair of eyes -- has moved to arena-level in order to watch what is turning out to be an epic fight.

TIBERIUS & LUCIUS

Enter the area. Check to see the coast is clear...

The entire subterranean level is atypically deserted.

INCLUDE - CASTOR & POLLUX

...who pull gates into place they had previously buried beneath the dirt floor of the main corridor, closing off the main area of the *hypogeum* from...

ANGLE - BEASTS

In their cages. LIONS, PANTHERS, TIGERS and BLACK BEARS. Dozens of half-crazed and nearly starved animals.

BACK ON - TIBERIUS, LUCIUS, CASTOR & POLLUX

They exchange a look. All nod their head. Ready.

Tiberius pulls on a handful of CORD ENDS...

ANGLE - CAGE DOORS

All pulled open, as LATCHES are pulled.

A ROAR of the crowd from above spooks every animal out of their cages...

WIDER

Castor and Pollux YELL...

...driving the animals in the opposite direction...

...disappearing in shadows, deeper into the unused part of the *hypogeum*.

INT. COLOSSEUM/*HYPOGEUM*/MAIN CORRIDOR

Soldiers stand guard outside the access tunnel entrance.

We HEAR a rhythmic BANGING from inside the tunnel...

INT. COLOSSEUM/VAULT CHAMBER

Centurion oversees Slaves SLAMMING the battering ram repeatedly into the vault door...to no discernible effect.

INT. COLOSSEUM/*HYPOGEUM*/ACCESS TUNNEL

One of the soldiers hears something. Turns to look up the corridor...

CLOSER ON - SOLDIER'S FACE

"Oh shit."

HIS POV - LION

Charging down the tunnel...

Behind the lion are tigers, panthers and black bears.

Rampaging, SNARLING, bestial horde. Haven't been fed in days and days...

Soldiers in the main corridor turn and flee in the opposite direction, deeper into the unfinished section of the *hypogeum* ...a very lethal dead-end.

Some don't even get that far...

INT. COLOSSEUM/VAULT CHAMBER

Centurion turns away from the vault door in time to see...

REVERSE ANGLE - TIGER

Leaping at him.

Centurion and slaves are trapped in the chamber with the beasts...

INT. COLOSSEUM/*HYPOGEUM*/ANIMAL CAGE

We STAY ON Attius, cowering in his refuge, for remainder of the sequence.

His reaction and SFX is all we need to know what's happening OFF CAMERA.

EXT. COLOSSEUM/ARENA - DAY

Gladiatorial bout continuing...

Massiva spins from the path of Flamma's sword but catches a blade in his shoulder...

Crowd CHEERS this first sight of blood.

Encouraged, Flamma pours it on with rapid strikes...

Massiva backpedals but is cut again, this time in the leg.

EXT. COLOSSEUM/IMPERIAL BOX - DAY

Titus is enjoying the epic fight, just like everybody else in the amphitheater. Pushes up in his seat to see better.

EXT. COLOSSEUM/ARENA - DAY

The younger, faster Flamma continues to whittle away at Massiva's defenses. Scoring repeated, non-fatal hits.

Backing away briefly from his opponent, Massiva looks to...

MARCUS

who gestures to keep it going.

BACK ON - MASSIVA

digging in for the long haul.

INT. COLOSSEUM/HYPOGEUM/ACCESS TUNNEL

Attius is inside the cage. A TIGER stalks up and down the length of the cage on the outside.

ATTIUS

You didn't get yours, citizen?

He withdraws a small MORSEL from a pouch. Flips it through the bars of the cage...

...directly into the gaping jaws of the big cat. Swallowed just like that.

LUCIUS' VOICE (O.S.)

Attius Galerius?!

ATTIUS

(calling back)

I would walk slowly if I were you.

TIBERIUS' VOICE (O.S.)

Did you feed them the meat balls?

ATTIUS

Yes! I fed them the meat balls!

Attius keeps his eyes on the tiger outside his cage, which is beginning to pace slower and slower.

ATTIUS (CONT'D)

(to tiger)

You are feeling very sleepy...

We HEAR the CLATTER of the wooden corpse cart.

LUCIUS' VOICE (O.S.)

(closer)

All slumbering?

The tiger stops pacing. Tottering...

ATTIUS

...and pleasant dreams.

Tiger collapses. Fast asleep.

ANGLE - LUCIUS, TIBERIUS, CASTOR & POLLUX

Approach from up the corridor. Castor and Pollux direct the mule team pulling the empty corpse cart.

Stop next to Attius in his cage.

CASTOR

(re sleeping cat)

It worked.

TIBERIUS

Argentum nitricum. Very effective soporific. Any person knows this.

Castor and Pollux exchange a look. How much longer do they have to put up with this guy?

ATTIUS

Imagine my pleasure on being released from this beast's cage.

Castor bends down and unlatches the cage door.

Attius crawls out.

With a quick glance down at the apparent gore at his feet, Lucius turns toward vault access tunnel...

LUCIUS

Gaze elevated, citizens.

They all walk gingerly in that direction, careful not to look down...

INT. COLOSSEUM/HYPOGEUM/VAULT CHAMBER

Lucius leads the way in from access tunnel.

Attius immediately goes to the vault door. Studies the lock, displeased...

LUCIUS
What's wrong?

ATTIUS
The lock is not at all the same as
at the treasury.

TIBERIUS
(re slumbering beasts)
We haven't much time.

LUCIUS
At long last, Attius Galerius, your
moment.

That only makes an already nervous Attius more nervous.

ATTIUS
I can't...

LUCIUS
You must.

Attius pulls himself together. Retrieves his tool bag and sets to work on picking the lock, as we CUT TO...

EXT. COLOSSEUM/ARENA - DAY

Massiva and Flamma continue with their epic battle, to the thrill of a rapturous crowd...

EXT. COLOSSEUM/SEATING - DAY

Marcus looks from combatants to window at arena level from where the yellow smoke had signaled. Nothing again since.

INT. COLOSSEUM/IMPERIAL BOX - DAY

Titus takes measure of the mood...

HIS POV - AMPHITHEATER

Guards, workers, slaves and spectators...everybody.

BACK ON - TITUS

Alarmed. Gestures toward Spius, at the rear of the box.

TITUS
 Tribune!
 (indicates arena)
Who protects my gold?

Spirius takes stock of the situation...

EXT. COLOSSEUM/SEATING - SAME

Marcus looks to imperial box. Sees Spirius leaving in apparent haste.

MARCUS
 (to Julia)
 If you see the signal, Massiva will
 be grateful if you pass it along.

He leaves before she has a chance to speak...

INT. COLOSSEUM/HYPOGEUM/VAULT CHAMBER

Attius struggles with the vault door lock. Lucius, Tiberius, Castor and Pollux look on.

Attius begins to panic, which helps his focus not at all.

ATTIUS
 Mechanics are unfamiliar to me...

LUCIUS
 You can do this.

ATTIUS
 I cannot. I cannot do it.

LUCIUS
 What is the name of your woman?

ATTIUS
 ...left me, gone to another...
 (morosely)
 I am ruined because of her black
 heart.

CASTOR
 How much longer will it take?

Lucius ignores Castor; focusing on Attius.

LUCIUS
 Her name, friend. What is her name?

ATTIUS
 Quinta. Quinta Luculla.

LUCIUS
 Quinta Luculla.

ATTIUS

Beauty of a goddess. Hair as fine
as Persian silk. Blue eyes as
bottomless as the sea...

LUCIUS

Attius Galerius, listen to me...
(beat)
With the treasure inside this
vault, you can win her heart.

ATTIUS

But she isn't like --

LUCIUS

(cutting him off)
She is like that.

Attius goes silent. Stares at the vault door and its lock.

LUCIUS (CONT'D)

This is Rome. There's not a woman
in the city who isn't like that.

Attius nods his head. Redoubles his efforts...

Castor and Pollux exchange a look. Dubious.

LUCIUS (CONT'D)

(to Attius)
Quinta Luculla. You can see her
now, can't you? She waits for you
behind this door.

(beat)
Open the door, Attius Galerius.
Open the door and go to her.

Attius works his tools into the warded lock's mechanics...

ATTIUS

Open...the...door...and...go...
to...

We HEAR the mechanism CLICK open.

ATTIUS (CONT'D)

...Quinta Luculla.

Castor eagerly reaches past Attius and pulls the door open,
revealing the interior of vault with torch...

ANGLE - INSIDE VAULT

Stacked from floor to ceiling with STUPENDOUS TREASURE and
GLITTERING GOLD BULLION.

TIBERIUS
Nero's treasure...

LUCIUS
Our treasure.

Lucius steps inside the vault, as we CUT TO...

INT. COLOSSEUM/HYPOGEUM

Spirius enters the main "ready" area from inner stairwell...
...surprised to find it utterly deserted.

No slaves. No soldiers. No workers. No gladiators. Sees...

HIS POV - WAR WAGON

stopped just inside the subterranean access doors.

WIDER

Spirius walks toward War Wagon for closer inspection...

MARCUS' VOICE (O.S.)
Beauty, isn't she?

INCLUDE - MARCUS

emerging from shadow, ROAR of the crowd wafts from above.

MARCUS
Built to take a beating. Faster
than anything you've got.

Spirius draws his sword.

SPIRIUS
You should've gotten out when the
getting was good, thief.

MARCUS
And leave all that gold behind?

Spirius starts to take a step toward Marcus, sword at ready.

LUCIUS' VOICE (O.S.)
An unwise course of action,
tribune.

INCLUDE - LUCIUS

Standing behind Spirius, sword poised for thrust through the
tribune's neck.

The tribune is understandably confused...

SPIRIUS
 (to Marcus, re Lucius)
 That man is our informant.

MARCUS
 In truth? He is our informant.

Spirius realizes he's been badly had. Resigned to his fate.

SPIRIUS
 I am dead.

LUCIUS
 Not our *modus operandi*.

Lucius bashes Spirius with the pommel of his sword, knocking him unconscious.

Marcus looks to Lucius, expectantly.

LUCIUS (CONT'D)
 Your father died a very wealthy man.

A simple, satisfied nod from Marcus.

MARCUS
 Signal when your work is done...

Marcus takes hold of the unconscious Spirius by the arms, as we CUT TO...

INT. COLOSSEUM/HYPOGEUM/ACCESS TUNNEL

Lucius rejoins Tiberius, Castor and Pollux...

...and helps them carry GOLD and TREASURE out of the vault access tunnel...

...placing it on the ground next to mule-drawn corpse cart.

EXT. COLOSSEUM/ARENA - DAY

The bout continues, unabated. The younger man is clearly winning...

...Massiva bloodied and bruised. On his last legs.

EXT. COLOSSEUM/SEATING - DAY

Marcus just taking his seat next to Julia again. One look at Massiva tells him all he needs to know.

MARCUS
 That bad?

JULIA

That bad.
(beat)
Is it finished?

Marcus shakes his head no. Continues to watch.

INT. COLOSSEUM/IMPERIAL BOX - DAY

Titus looks around the amphitheater and sees nothing has changed...

HIS POV - GUARDS & SOLDIERS

watching the arena battle instead of protecting his gold.

BACK ON - TITUS

What happened to Spirius?

The emperor gestures toward other OFFICERS of his PRAETORIAN GUARD standing at the rear of the imperial box...

EXT. COLOSSEUM/ARENA - DAY

Flamma presses, driving Massiva back across the arena with repeated sword strikes...

One of Flamma's feints catches Massiva off balance...

The younger gladiator quickly exploits the advantage and...

..SLASHES Massiva across his sword hand.

Massiva drops his sword. Defenseless, except for his dagger.

EXT. COLOSSEUM/SEATING - DAY

Marcus observes Massiva's situation, with alarm...

EXT. COLOSSEUM/STAIRWELL - DAY

Praetorian Guard hurry down the stairs, down into *hypogeum*...

EXT. COLOSSEUM/SEATING - DAY

Marcus and Julia alternate between watching Massiva and looking toward...

THEIR POV - ARENA-LEVEL WINDOW

...from which they expect the signal from Tiberius.

INT. COLOSSEUM/HYPOGEUM

Praetorian Guard exit the inner stairwell and enter subterranean level...

"Ready" area is deserted and weirdly quiet.

ANGLE - LAMP

By a high, barred window overlooking the arena...

CLOSER ON - LAMP

POWDERY SUBSTANCE has been cast over the open flame...

Blue SMOKE issues from the lamp.

EXT. COLOSSEUM/SEATING - DAY

Marcus and Julia see the smoke from their seats.

JULIA
The signal!

Marcus gestures to...

EXT. COLOSSEUM/ARENA - SAME

Massiva in the arena, where he is getting his ass kicked.

Situation too dire to notice Marcus gesturing to him...

EXT. COLOSSEUM/SEATING - SAME

Marcus stands while all other spectators are seated...

EXT. COLOSSEUM/ARENA - SAME

Massiva catches sight of Marcus out of the corner of his eye. Understands the gesture...

EXT. COLOSSEUM/IMPERIAL BOX - SAME

Titus looks in the direction Massiva has glanced and sees...

HIS POV - MARCUS

Standing up from his seat.

TITUS

Sitting bolt upright in his chair, indicating Marcus across the amphitheater, and to no one in particular...

TITUS
Marcus Calidius! The criminal is
here!

EXT. COLOSSEUM/ARENA - DAY

Massiva has received what he's been waiting for: a signal that he can end this thing.

Flamma is in middle of arcing swing of his sword when Massiva shoots his hand, snatches hold of his opponent's wrist, and comes up with a left hook that catches the other gladiator in the side of his helmeted head...

Before Flamma can react, Massiva flips his dagger from left hand to right...and buries it in the other man's leg.

Flamma drops his sword, crouches over and grabs his leg as Massiva takes the sword and walks briskly away...

We FOLLOW Massiva to arena wall, where he hoists himself up and into the stands....

Panic as Massiva raises his sword in threatening manner. Spectators flee in terror.

ANGLE - CONCOURSE

Panicking spectators mob the passageway. Soldiers are pushed back by the surging crowd...

MARCUS & JULIA

Move in opposite direction, toward the amphitheater exit.

INT. COLOSSEUM/HYPOGEUM

Praetorian Guard search the "ready" area, when they find...

SPIRIUS

Bound, blind-folded and gagged. Lies on the ground where the War Wagon, since departed, was once parked.

The soldiers free the tribune. Once his gag and blindfold are removed, he sees...

HIS POV - RAMP AREA

The War Wagon no longer there.

SPIRIUS' VOICE (O.S.)
I know this scheme...

SPIRIUS

Helped to his feet by the soldiers. Spitting rage.

SPIRIUS
The Fat Merchant of Beneventum.
 (beat, to Soldiers)
 My horse!!

As two of the Soldiers turn to respond, Spiriuss grabs another by the tunic.

SPIRIUS (CONT'D)
 Signal the city gates! Close them
 all! Hurry!

The Soldier turns on his heels. Sprints out of there, as Spiriuss goes to the open doorway and sees...

HIS POV - WAR WAGON

...racing to the top of the access ramp and ground level.

WIDER

Soldiers mobilize their pursuit.

EXT. COLOSSEUM/PLAZA - DAY

As Marcus and Julia exit the amphitheater with the throng spilling onto the plaza, we...

ANGLE - WAR WAGON

Comes barreling up from the ramp from *hypogeum*, Lucius at the reins of the fire-breathing horse team.

MARCUS & JULIA

He turns to her, about to bolt...

MARCUS
 The rally point!

She nods yes...

INCLUDE - MASSIVA

Approaching from the venue exit.

MARCUS (CONT'D)
 (to Massiva, re Julia)
Help her.

WIDER

Bare-chested Massiva immediately takes a protective arm around Julia, ushering her through frenzied mob, as...

Marcus sprints across the plaza, to...

WAR WAGON - MOVING

...pulling himself up alongside Lucius.

LUCIUS
How many times can you abandon her
in one lifetime?

Slightly frazzled, Marcus turns and sees...

HIS POV - SOLDIERS

On horseback racing in their direction from the far side of the plaza.

BACK ON - MARCUS & LUCIUS

Marcus faces front again. Girds for the wild ride to come.

MARCUS
My life? Many, many times, I fear.

Lucius whips the reins, urging the chariot horse team onward.

EXT. PALATINE HILL - DAY

Just past the Colosseum, soldiers have lit a BONFIRE.

The Soldier who had received the order to close the gates from Spirius, throws a RED POWDER on the flames...

EXT. ROME - DAY

Colosseum in the distance. Rising up next to it is a vibrant pillar of RED SMOKE...

EXT. ROME/STREET - DAY

War Wagon charges up a narrow street, scattering PASSERSBY.

WAR WAGON

Marcus retrieves a store of BOTTLES from behind their bench seat and begins to toss them over the side, one by one...

STREET

"Greek Fire" BOMBS ignite in a succession of BLASTS in the path of...

ROMAN SOLDIERS

"Greek Fire" BOMBS slow their pursuit but fails to stop it.

ANGLE - ONE OF THE MOUNTED SOLDIERS

Spirius. Chasing down his prey.

EXT. ARCH OF DOLABELLA - DAY

SOLDIERS guarding the gate see the red smoke. Turn and start immediately lowering down the heavy, wrought-iron gates.

EXT. PORTA CAELIMONTANA - DAY

SOLDIERS guarding the gate see the red smoke. Also hurry to lower the gate.

EXT. PORTA ESQUILINA - DAY

Gate SLAMMING shut.

EXT. PORTA FONTINALIS - DAY

Gate SLAMMING shut.

EXT. ROME/STREET - DAY

Lucius urges the horse team to gallop faster, but...

...Soldiers on horseback inexorably gain on heavy War Wagon.

As the War Wagon strains into a sharp turn to the left, going up on its two left wheels, Marcus leaps off...

...rolls and pops to his feet, then, reaching up as the Soldiers gallop past, he grabs hold of the saddle of one of the horses, hauling himself up and tossing off its rider in same motion, he takes control of the horse for himself.

Marcus races his horse to catch up with another Soldier...

...whipping sword from saddle sheath and braining the man, so that he falls off his horse...

...then twists around and slices the saddle straps on the Soldier on the other side, sending him to the ground as well.

Marcus gallops after the three remaining riders in pursuit of the War Wagon.

EXT. PORTA CAPENA - DAY

The Soldiers see the pillar of red smoke in the distance.

SOLDIER #1
The gates! Close the gates!

They converge on the gate mechanism. Their Commander has the key to the housing door, which he quickly unlocks. Attempts to engage lowering mechanism...and finds the thing jammed.

SOLDIER #2
Sabotaged!

They struggle to get the mechanism operational again, as...

ANGLE - WAR WAGON

From up the street, coming in hot.

SOLDIERS AT THE GATE

Seeing the War Wagon approach. Struggle to lower the gate. Mobilize for action...

WAR WAGON

Lucius stands, reins firmly in hand. Shoots a look over his shoulder at...

SPIRIUS & TWO SOLDIERS

in hot pursuit...

One of the Soldiers disappears off his mount, revealing...

MARCUS

In pursuit of the War Wagon's pursuers.

WIDER

The last remaining Soldier (besides Spirius) draws sword from saddle sheath and...

...engages Marcus in a sword fight while both men gallop ahead at top speed.

WAR WAGON

Approaching Capena Gate at top speed, scattering stray dogs, BEGGARS and PASSERSBY.

Lucius, standing atop the massive chariot, gestures to...

MARCUS

...who has his hands full with the Soldier. They exchange repeated blows, until...

WIDER

...the Soldier slices Marcus across his right shoulder.

Marcus drops the sword, CLATTERING to paving stones. Soldier has him dead-to-rights. Prepares the *coup de grace* when...

...the Soldier too late realizes he's directed his horse into the path of a...

RUNAWAY HAND CART

...which topples horse and its rider.

WIDER

...Marcus galloping ahead...

...coming abreast Spirius, the two adversaries hurtling forward at breakneck speed...

...just paces behind the THUNDERING War Wagon...

...fast approaching city gate...

...Soldiers scattering and leaping out of the way, when...

LUCIUS

Lets go completely of the reins...

...turning to put both hands on the enormous BRAKE LEVER to his left...

...throwing all his weight into pulling back and engaging the brake...

WAR WAGON

Massive front wheels stop turning completely...

...forward motion causing the rear wheels to elevate...

...Lucius goes flying off bench seat, propelled forward...

...onto the center horse in the team, as we ANGLE ON...

MARCUS & SPIRIUS

The tribune hauling back on his reins as War Wagon upends directly in their path...

...tornado of spinning wheels and twisting carriage...

...cargo exploding from its confines, a chaotic disaster which...

...Marcus directs his horse into, without hesitation...

WIDER

...horse and rider somehow darting through the gate micro-seconds ahead of...

...hurtling mass of War Wagon, thousands of pounds of cargo and carriage CRASHING into the gate...

...effectively closing it off to riders and pedestrians alike, as...

MARCUS & LUCIUS

Ride their mounts up the Appian Way -- Marcus on horse and Lucius on horse team -- hooves CLATTERING on paving stone.

EXT. PORTA CAPENA - SAME

Spirius sees the gate is blocked by the overturned War Wagon. Urges his horse to leap the barrier...but the horse balks.

SPIRIUS
(to the Gate Soldiers)
Get it out of the way!! Hurry!

The Soldiers swarm the wreckage and put all their strength into moving it...to no avail.

Spirius leaps down from his horse, in frustration, and goes to the wreckage...

The street in front of the gate is strewn with...BREAD.

With growing horror, Spirius grips the heavy cloth tarp that secures the cargo to the chariot and pulls it back...

...dumping HUNDREDS OF LOAVES OF BREAD onto the street.

FLASHBACK - INT. BAKERY - MORNING

Marcus and Lucius transact with BAKER.

MARCUS
Bread.

LUCIUS
A lot of bread.

EXT. PORTA CAPENA - DAY

As the Beggars of Porta Capena behold sight of all that bread...

...they begin to mob the scene, complicating the Soldiers' efforts to move the massive chariot.

SPIRIUS

filled with dread, realizes he's been had.

SPIRIUS
Where...?
(beat)
Where is the gold?!

FLASHBACK - INT. COLOSSEUM/HYPOGEUM/ACCESS TUNNEL

Lucius, Tiberius, Castor and Pollux empty the contents of the vault into the large, mule-drawn corpse cart...

...then hoist the sleeping beasts on top of the treasure.

EXT. COUNTRYSIDE/TREE GROVE - LATE AFTEROON

Some many miles out of the city. The "rally point" which had been early scouted by Marcus and Gaius.

Marcus and Lucius rest their horses in the cool shade.

MARCUS & LUCIUS

Lucius examines the cut on Marcus' shoulder.

LUCIUS
Sure this was cut by sword? A blade of grass perhaps.

MARCUS
Spirius would've brought more than blade of grass at you if it weren't for me, that much I know.

LUCIUS
For what crime? Delivering two-day-old bread to the masses? Hardly the material of epic verse.

FLASHBACK - INT. COLOSSEUM/*SPOLIARIUM*

Tiberius, Castor and Pollux place three GOLD BARS on woven, REED MAT, then carefully lower the treasure-laden "raft" through the *spoliarium*, and into the flowing sewer below.

Again and again, with more gold bars and reed "rafts"...

MARCUS' VOICE (O.S.)
Our story will be told one day,
Lucius Anneius, but not by Emperor
Titus or his tribune.

FLASHBACK - EXT. TIBER RIVER/ROME - DAY

Sail Boat anchored just beyond sewer outflow.

LUCIUS' VOICE (O.S.)
 Nero's treasure trove...long lost
 and never found.

The rafts come floating out and are snared by partially
 OBSCURED MAN, the sole crewman on the Sail Boat.

EXT. COUNTRYSIDE/TREE GROVE - LATE AFTEROON

Marcus watches approaching horse-drawn carriage...

MARCUS
 (muttering to himself)
 "Marcus Calidius. What news of our
 gold?"

The figure on the cart reveals to be Gaius Acilius, his
 favorite Slave beside him driving the horse-drawn carriage.

GAIUS
 (calling ahead)
 Marcus Calidius! What news of our
 gold?!

Marcus gestures to Lucius. They head toward the horses.

MARCUS
 Always about money with him, never
 honor.

LUCIUS
 What's honor?

They get on their horses. Turn them toward the road.

EXT. ROMAN COUNTRYSIDE - DAY

Marcus, Lucius and Gaius move at steady pace on the road...

ANGLE - TWO RIDERS

Approach, cutting across open countryside.

MARCUS, LUCIUS & GAIUS

Pull to a stop, waiting...

INCLUDE - JULIA & MASSIVA

...for reunion of compatriots.

MARCUS
 Did you have opportunity to collect
 on your bet, champion?

MASSIVA
 He knows I know where he can be
 found.

Lucius leans from his saddle and gives Julia a kiss.

 LUCIUS
 My beauty.

 JULIA
 My heart.

 LUCIUS
 The hours since I last saw you feel
 like days.

 JULIA
 Delicious agony.

 MARCUS
 We're still here, you realize.

 LUCIUS
 Can't be helped. It's our nature.

 JULIA
 Where is the shame in display of
 affection?

 MARCUS
 Then your final choice is made and
 it is Lucius Anneius?

 JULIA
 I wouldn't swear to it.

She starts to ride ahead.

We STAY ON Marcus and Lucius. Now it's Lucius' turn to be
 chagrined.

Marcus smiles broadly, at his friend's expense.

 MARCUS
 Only the gods know how this ends.

 LUCIUS
 If that.

WIDER

The entire party continues riding toward...

HARBOR AT OSTIA

...visible in the distance.

EXT. HARBOR AT OSTIA - DAY

Sail Boat is tied up at the dock, with Tiberius, Attius, Castor and Pollux on board.

Marcus and the others ride up and onto the dock...

MARCUS
(to Gaius)
What is proper greeting to marine?

GAIUS
"Hoay! Do you have the gold?"

TIBERIUS
Bear witness, citizens...

Tiberius and Attius take hold of a tarp and pull it back to reveal the gold. Gaius is staggered by sight of it...

GAIUS
Praise the gods!

MARCUS
We best cover it again before heart muscle of our benefactor gives out.

LUCIUS
(to those on board)
Your escape was without adventure?

FLASHBACK - INT. COLOSSEUM/*SPOLIARIUM*

Tiberius lowers himself through the hole in the floor, onto...

TIBERIUS' VOICE (O.S.)
All according to design.

FLASHBACK - INT. ROMAN SEWER

...large REED MAT, following Attius, Castor and Pollux on a wild rapids ride, the same the gold followed.

ATTIUS' VOICE (O.S.)
Next time, I choose wagon.

FLASHBACK - EXT. TIBER RIVER - DAY

Attius falls off his raft just before exiting the channel flowing into the river.

Pollux, Cast and Tiberius float past a struggling Attius as they all make their way to the waiting Sail Boat.

EXT. HARBOR AT OSTIA - DAY

Those on horseback drop from their mounts. Gaius clammers off his cart.

JULIA
The beasts?

TIBERIUS
What of them?

JULIA
Unharmred? They were our most prized collaborator.

TIBERIUS
The beasts...

FLASHBACK - INT. COLOSSEUM/HYPOGEUM

The sadistic *venator* (bearded hunter) sits on a wooden stool, waiting to "go on" for his next performance, ignoring...

...CORPSE CART directly behind him. In the cart, all the beasts that had been drugged asleep by our criminal league...

CLOSER ON - LEOPARD

It's eyes flicker open, slumbering no longer.

TIBERIUS' VOICE (O.S.)
Suffer only from full bellies.

BEARDED HUNTER

Idly drinking from a ceramic flask. HEARS a low GROWL...

WIDER

Bearded Hunter, seated, turns and sees the big cat poised to leap.

EXT. SAIL BOAT - DAY

Marcus joins the others on board. Embrace with Tiberius.

MARCUS
Welcome to our league thieves,
philosopher.

The others CHEER this statement. Agreed.

MARCUS (CONT'D)
The tenth man? Where --?

OLD MAN'S VOICE (O.S.)
 (interjecting)
 -- I belong...

ANOTHER ANGLE - NERO'S SAIL MASTER

The elderly slave from the quarries at Albulae emerges from the tiny below-deck.

SAIL MASTER
 ...on my boat.

MARCUS
 You mean, my boat.

FLASHBACK - EXT. *DOMUS AUREA*/ARTIFICIAL LAKE - DAY

The eccentric NERO rides in the stern of the same, lovely Sail Boat...piloted by much younger Sail Master.

MARCUS' VOICE (O.S.)
 This excellent vessel belonged to
 my father, did it not?

EXT. SAIL BOAT - DAY

Marcus moves toward the old man...

SAIL MASTER
 It did.

They embrace, warmly.

SAIL MASTER (CONT'D)
 Will you have me as your sail
 master, Caesar?

Before Marcus can answer, Attius points off...

ATTIUS
 Look!

REVERSE ANGLE - UP RIVER

A *quinquereme* -- Roman warship -- with double row of OARSMEN cuts through the waves, in pursuit.

BACK ON - MARCUS & SAIL MASTER

Marcus clamps a hand on the old man's shoulder.

MARCUS
 Vibius Seius, I appoint you sail
 master.

Sail Master makes ready to cast off as others come aboard...

EXT. SAIL BOAT - LATE AFTERNOON

The ship has left the dock in a hurry, trailing lines.
Propelled by gentle winds filling its two modest sails.

All crowded on deck, looking back at...

...Roman Warship gaining on them fast.

EXT. ROMAN WARSHIP - LATE AFTERNOON

The ship's CAPTAIN directs the crew, the stupendous vessel
moments from running down the little Sail Boat.

TITUS & SPIRIUS

on deck.

SPIRIUS

Thank the gods we've caught them,
Imperator.

TITUS

The gods had nothing to do with it.

(beat)

Report of Nero's boat on the River
Tiber after all these years was
enough to summon my fastest ship.

Spirius bows to his emperor's obvious powers of deduction.

WIDER

Quinquereme almost abreast of the Sail Boat. MARINES prepare
to throw grappling hooks...

SHIP CAPTAIN

(over to Sail Master)

Furl your sails! You are caught!

EXT. SAIL BOAT - SAME

The two vessels now only separated by a few dozen feet.
Marcus has moved to the stern, calling back...

MARCUS

All respect, Imperator, I've taken
only what was rightfully mine...

(beat)

Your share is safe with us,
tribune!

EXT. ROMAN WARSHIP - SAME

Titus looks to Spirius with narrowed eyes as the ship's
Captain nods to Marines with grappling hooks.

Marines begin swinging their grappling hooks, when...

SHADOW

Begins to play across the Marines' faces. React, startled...

WIDER

Two ships, plunged into sudden, inexplicable darkness...

Marines on board the emperor's ship panic. Immediately drop their oars and cower...

ANGLE - LATE AFTERNOON SUN

Going black.

The SOLAR ECLIPSE casts the entire scene in semi-darkness.

EXT. SAIL BOAT - SAME

Sail Master keeps steady course, unaffected by the eclipse.

MARCUS & TIBERIUS

exchange a glance.

MARCUS & TIBERIUS
Archimedes mechanism.

WIDER

Sail Boat continues at its modest pace, leaving the mighty Warship in its wake.

EXT. ROMAN WARSHIP - SAME

Titus doesn't even give Spirius benefit of a glance.

TITUS
(to Soliders, re Spirius)
Seize him.

Soldiers take a stunned Spirius roughly by the arms and...

...a piece of EXQUISITE JEWELRY falls to the deck from inside his tunic.

Titus looks from the gold piece to Spirius' face.

SPIRIUS
Imperator! No! I did not...
(stares at the jewelry)
How -- ?

FLASHBACK - INT. COLOSSEUM/HYPOGEUM - DAY

Marcus trusses up a knocked unconscious Spirius, next to the War Wagon in the subterranean "ready" room.

Hides an item from Nero's vault on Spirius' person.

EXT. ROMAN WARSHIP - LATE AFTEROON

Still cast in darkness. Titus turns his back on protesting Spirius as the tribune is hauled away...

EXT. MEDITERRANEAN SEA - LATE AFTEROON

Nero's Sail Boat leaves the river mouth, entering the open sea.

EXT. BAY - MORNING

Sail Boat makes way toward a harbor and its hillside town.

SUPER: DEIS SATURNI (Saturday)

EXT. HARBOR - MORNING

Sail Boat has tied up to dock in busy harbor. Already off-loaded.

SUPER: PORTUS JULIUS, BAY OF NAPLES

LEAGUE OF THIEVES

All ten on horseback or mule-drawn cart (Gaius). Those on horseback lead packhorse.

Guess what the packhorses are packing.

A silent moment shared between them...

...then they all turn their horses and ride away at slow pace in at least a half-dozen different directions.

EXT. COUNTRYSIDE - DAY

Marcus, Lucius and Julia ride three abreast, leading pack animals.

JULIA

I am not too proud to admit, I will miss our company of low criminals.

LUCIUS

It was excellent adventure.

MARCUS

As surviving representative of the great Julio-Claudian Dynasty, I thank you, friends and thieves...

(beat)

What will you do with your justly earned reward, Lucius Anneius?

LUCIUS

I hear word of very respectable horse farm near Pompeii in search of buyer.

MARCUS

How...predictable.

JULIA

And you, Marcus Calidius? What are your intentions now the family's inheritance is restored?

MARCUS

I hear word of Alexander the Great's lost treasure trove, buried beneath the ruined tower at Babel.

(beat)

Might be worth closer inspection...

LUCIUS

...if you live that long.

Marcus just smiles in response.

MARCUS

What about you, Julia Novella? What will you do with your trove?

From the look on her face, we can see that, up to this point, she hasn't given it a thought.

JULIA

I do not know.

Marcus and Lucius exchange a private smile.

They all stop, having come to the proverbial fork in the road. One way goes north, the other south.

LUCIUS

This is where I go to the south.

Marcus indicates other way.

MARCUS

And my route is there, heading north.

The two men look to Julia, between them.

LUCIUS
Him or me, Julia?

MARCUS
The final, irrevocable choice...

Expression on her face the same as before. Hasn't a clue.

FADE TO BLACK.

SUPER:

Despite cutting-edge auguring, Emperor Titus did not live six months past conclusion of the great amphitheater's inaugural games..

...but instead died of fever in the eastern province of Sabine, in pursuit of unnamed criminals.

The End