

THE EAGLE OF THE NINTH

Screenplay by
Jeremy Brock

Based on the novel by Rosemary Sutcliff

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Blackout. Fading slowly out of the darkness, an ancient map of Roman Britain appears. The sound of marching feet, disappearing into the distance.

SUPERIMPOSE:

BRITAIN. 120 AD. THE NINTH LEGION
OF THE ROMAN ARMY OF OCCUPATION
MARCH NORTH TO CONQUER THE WILD
SCOTTISH TRIBES.

ALL FIVE THOUSAND MEN DISAPPEAR
WITHOUT TRACE, ALONG WITH THE
TREASURED STANDARD OF THEIR
LEGION, THE EAGLE OF THE NINTH.

SHOCKED BY THIS GREAT LOSS, THE
EMPEROR HADRIAN ORDERS THE
CONSTRUCTION OF A MASSIVE WALL TO
CUT OFF THE FAR NORTH.

HADRIAN'S WALL BECOMES THE LINE
MARKING THE END OF THE KNOWN WORLD.

DISSOLVE TO:

1 EXT. SOUTH WEST ENGLAND - DAY. 1

FIFTEEN YEARS LATER.

A series of angles on the West Country, bucolic and timeless. The rolling hills of Dartmoor, forests fringing cultivated land, distant FAMILIES working a field, then...

From the same dream-distance, we see a line of LEGIONARIES walking either side of a bullock-cart, sowing another field. There's something a little odd about this - soldiers behaving as farmers.

2 EXT. ROMAN ROAD/FIELD - DAY. 2

A COHORT of five hundred leather-clad auxiliaries marches down a Roman road, their Standard glittering in their midst. Pristine uniforms sparkle in the morning sun.

At their head walks the Pilus Prior Centurion, the Cohort Commander, MARCUS FLAVIUS AQUILA. Aged twenty three, the world at his feet, he carries all the confidence of youth with graceful ease.

The COHORT marches past the field of LEGIONARIES - closer now. MARCUS takes them in. They're hurling clumps of something mud-white over ground tilled with green shoots.

Then we see it. Everything behind them, as far as the eye can see, has shrivelled and died. The LEGIONARIES aren't sowing the fields, they're poisoning them.

MARCUS
(off a look from one of his men)
Salt.

3 EXT. ROMAN ROAD - DAY. 3

MARCUS and his COHORT march on. For the first time, they catch a trail of smoke drifting across the road from a burning farmstead. They pass a cluster of headless corpses lying at the roadside. All face down. Some only boys.

The first tremor of unease on the young soldiers' faces. MARCUS remains expressionless.

4 EXT. FARMSTEAD - DAY. 4

MARCUS and his COHORT march past the burning farmstead. The place is whipped with tension. Torched roofs burn. Kids bawl. Distraught mothers slap their faces in grief and rage.

Completing their mission, VETERAN LEGIONARIES race about, hurling valuables into a waiting cart, guarded by brother-soldiers. So much is happening at once, the eye can only glimpse it in random flashes...an OLD MAN screaming at one of the LEGIONARIES, losing it completely...a dog sniffing a corpse...a group of LOCAL MEN being frog-marched towards the trees to be executed...a sword slashing down on a bent neck...a wave of CELT BOYS hurling stones at the soldiers, before retreating to safety.

Suddenly, one of the VETERAN LEGIONARIES meets MARCUS's eye.

For a second, the LEGIONARY pauses. The two men stare at each other, the weary frontline soldier and the shining young officer striding past. Nothing spoken. Only their faces.

MARCUS marches on.

5 EXT. FORT - ISCA DUMNONIORUM - DAY. 5

The Roman fort of Isca Dumnoniorum dominates the hillside, overlooking a small satellite village. A Roman road leads out from the fort, slashed across the countryside like a cut.

6 EXT. FORT - ISCA DUMNONIORUM - DAY. 6

MARCUS and his COHORT near the fort, watched by war-weary LEGIONARIES from the parapet above. The great gates swing open and they march inside.

7 EXT/INT. FORT - ISCA DUMNONIORUM - DAY. 7

The LEGIONARIES stare down on the new arrivals marching into the main courtyard.

A grizzled Centurion, LUTORIUS, steps up. MARCUS salutes.

MARCUS

Marcus Flavius Aquila, Cohort
Commander of the Fourth Gaulish
Auxiliaries of the Second Legion,
come to relieve this garrison.

LUTORIUS

Lutorius Drusillus Salinator,
Tribune of the Dacian Horse and
second in command.

MARCUS

Where's the garrison commander?

LUTORIUS

He left this morning, sir.

A look from MARCUS.

LUTORIUS (CONT'D)

Couldn't wait to get away.

8 EXT/INT. FORT - ISCA DUMNONIORUM - DAY. 8

A series of angles on LUTORIUS showing MARCUS round the garrison - a small square of rectangular buildings around a colonnaded courtyard. En-route, they pass the usual routines of daily life, including a BLACKSMITH working the metal spear-heads. His HANDS hammering the tip to a point with such skill. Rome at its best.

LUTORIUS

The cohort Standard and officers
are all housed here, the rest of
the men across the yard.

They pass another ranker Centurion (GALBA) with two JUNIOR OFFICERS. They stop talking and salute. MARCUS returns the salute. The OFFICERS watch him walk away.

GALBA

(mutters disparagingly)

So that's Flavius Aquila's son.

(beat)

He's a boy.

MARCUS heard that. He smiles to himself and continues on.

9 INT. FORT - ISCA DUMNONIORUM - COMMANDER'S QUARTERS - DAY. 9

The commander's quarters comprise a sleeping cell, a polished oak pay-chest, a writing desk, a cabinet for the record rolls and a rather tasteless bronze pedestal lamp. Just outside the door is a rose bush in a pot.

LUTORIUS scoops up a duty-roster and a rope of keys. He hands them to MARCUS. MARCUS looks about - a certain formality in his manner.

LUTORIUS

Duty-roster and the keys to the pay-chest.

MARCUS

The paymaster?

LUTORIUS

We're too small a garrison. Unfortunately, that job falls to you.

(beat)

As you can probably tell, there's been a problem with the latrines, but we have someone working on it.

MARCUS

Unsuccessfully.

LUTORIUS

(smiles)

So far.

(off a gust of wind)

The west wind I'm afraid I can't change.

MARCUS glances into the sleeping cell.

MARCUS

What do you do for sport here?

LUTORIUS

Not much. Every two weeks or so the men are allowed into the village for "rest and recreation". Other than that, we stay in the fort.

MARCUS

You don't hunt?

LUTORIUS

We don't encourage the men to fraternize with the enemy.

MARCUS

Just to sleep with them.

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Again, LUTORIUS isn't sure if this is a joke or by-the-book criticism. He moves to the door, turns.

LUTORIUS
This your first tour of duty, sir?

MARCUS
It is.

LUTORIUS
What made you choose Britain?

MARCUS turns to the window. No answer.

LUTORIUS (CONT'D)
You have family connections, I believe.

MARCUS glances up. A tiny flicker of irritation.

MARCUS
No.
(dismissive)
I've an uncle in Calleva but I've never met him and he's never met me, so...

Turning away, MARCUS makes it clear the meeting is over - a habit of self-protective formality that comes and goes.

10 INT. FORT - ISCA DUMNONIORUM - COMMANDER'S QUARTERS - DAY. 10

MARCUS hangs up his sword and begins unpacking his trunk. He brings out some official-looking documents, some jars of *garum*, a brooch of the god Mithras, and a small carved wooden eagle - an exact replica of the one carried by the Legions. Carefully, he hangs it beside his bed.

11 EXT. ISCA DUMNONIORUM - FORT/ROAD - DAY. 11

MARCUS and LUTORIUS ride out of the fort with a GUARD OF DACIAN HORSE. All the way, they're followed by a gaggle of third world LOCALS.

A flap of wings makes MARCUS glance up.

High above him, a children's handmade kite flutters, crow-black against the sky. One of the Celt boys who hurled stones at the soldiers the day before, runs it along the side of the road. MARCUS and the CELT BOY stare at each other. The kite wings flutter and snap.

12 EXT. ISCA DUMNONIORUM - VILLAGE - DAY.

12

MARCUS, LUTORIUS and the GUARD OF DACIAN HORSE ride through the fort's satellite village, a shanty-town on the fringe of Empire.

LUTORIUS

Most of the time, we rub along.
They sell us food, we take their
taxes. If they break the rules, we
punish them.

Somewhere - as if in answer - a male voice calls out in prayer. A single note, rising and falling on the air.

At the same moment, they round a corner and meet a young Celt, CRADOC, leading two horses. CRADOC is lean, athletic and composed - compelling and distant. Three British chariots stand outside his hut, half-built or ready for repair.

LUTORIUS (CONT'D)

Cradoc. Over here.

In his own time, CRADOC turns and looks at them.

LUTORIUS (CONT'D)

Cradoc's a horse-dealer. He does work
for the fort.

MARCUS nods at the chariots.

MARCUS

You're a charioteer?

CRADOC

I am accounted the best in my tribe.

MARCUS

Our racing chariots in Rome are
smaller.

CRADOC

The Commander also is a charioteer?

MARCUS

I am accounted the best in my Legion.

CRADOC

British chariots are not as easy to
ride.

MARCUS

(a flicker of a smile)
I'm here to prove you wrong.

MARCUS and CRADOC hold each other's level gaze.

CUT TO:

13 EXT. CORNFIELD - EARLY MORNING. 13

A few days later, early morning mist enshrouds a beautiful, blue cornfield.

MARCUS stands on a British chariot, four harnessed horses steaming in the cold air. To his side stands CRADOC.

A pause.

MARCUS cracks the whip. With a jerk, the chariot moves off. At first, he finds the unfamiliarity difficult. He checks himself. Readjusts his stance.

In the distance - a still figure against the sky - CRADOC watches.

MARCUS begins speeding up. He feels the earth thumping upward through the base of the chariot. Adrenaline begins to pump.

MARCUS builds to a gallop. Hooves thunder under him. The cornfield flashes green-blue to his side. He turns the chariot for the final run, then - without warning - he steers the horses straight towards a forest of trees.

Close-up on CRADOC stiffening at the Roman's audacity.

14 EXT. FOREST - EARLY MORNING. 14

The chariot sweeps through the trees at full gallop, dipping and twisting with each check MARCUS makes to the reins.

15 EXT. CORNFIELD - EARLY MORNING. 15

The chariot explodes through the forest-edge and back into the field.

Slamming high and wide, we take in MARCUS, crouched low on the chariot, reins held high, whip slewing the air, animal and machine cutting a perfect line through the blue field.

With one expert manoeuvre, MARCUS rears up to CRADOC, reining the chariot to a halt. Silence. The two young men - Celt and Roman - hold each other's gaze.

MARCUS

Well?

CRADOC

The Commander begins to be a charioteer.

CUT TO:

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- 16 EXT. FORT - ISCA DUMNONIORUM - EARLY MORNING. 16
The LEGIONARIES complete arms drill in the central courtyard.
- 17 INT. FORT - ISCA DUMNONIORUM - COMMANDER'S QUARTERS - DAY. 17
MARCUS sits at his desk, working through the record rolls.
- 18 INT. FORT - ISCA DUMNONIORUM - DAY. 18
MARCUS and the QUARTERMASTER examine a delivery of grain on a bullock-drawn cart.
- 19 INT. FORT - ISCA DUMNONIORUM - NIGHT. 19
A trumpet sounds Late Rounds. Watched by MARCUS, the LEGIONARIES complete fatigues and begin breaking up for the night.
- 20 INT. FORT - ISCA DUMNONIORUM - COMMANDER'S QUARTERS - NIGHT 20
MARCUS burns incense on a small altar. Cutting his finger with a knife, he lets a single drop of blood fall into the flames.
- 21 EXT. FOREST - EARLY MORNING. 21
MARCUS and CRADOC ride through the trees, out hunting. Frightened by their approach, a boar suddenly smashes away through the undergrowth.
- MARCUS
A wager. One of your feathered
spears if I catch that boar.
- CRADOC stares back. With a faint smile, he nods.
- 22 INT. FORT - OFFICER'S MESS - EARLY MORNING. 22
The RANKER CENTURIONS, including LUTORIUS and GALBA, drift into the officer's mess for breakfast.
- GALBA
Where's our boy-commander?
- LUTORIUS
Out riding with Cradoc.
- GALBA shakes his head in disgust.

23 EXT. ISCA DUMNONIORUM - VILLAGE - EARLY MORNING. 23

The thunder of hooves. Pure adrenalin.

MARCUS is at full gallop, leaning low in the saddle, spear poised. Below him, the boar races through the undergrowth.

MARCUS hurls the spear and lets out a cry of triumph. He leaps off his horse, knife out for the kill.

CRADOC

Look out!

MARCUS turns too late. The speared boar is charging towards him, horns down. In a flash, CRADOC hurls his knife, striking the boar in the neck. The animal collapses, only feet from where MARCUS is standing.

A shocked beat. MARCUS turns to CRADOC, smiling gratefully.

MARCUS

Thank you.

CRADOC looks down, nods a fraction, then dismounts and begins pulling the dead boar out of the undergrowth.

24 INT. ISCA DUMNONIORUM - CRADOC'S HUT - EARLY MORNING. 24

CRADOC walks MARCUS into his hut. A line of spears stand against the wall. CRADOC nods MARCUS forward. He tests a few in his hand, then picks one out. It's newly tipped with a beautiful blue feather.

CRADOC

Any, except that one.

MARCUS gives him a quizzical smile, but CRADOC remains expressionless. Replacing the blue-feathered spear, MARCUS picks another one.

25 INT. FORT - OFFICER'S MESS - EARLY MORNING. 25

GALBA, LUTORIUS and the other RANKER CENTURIONS eat and talk.

GALBA

You mark my words. Marcus
Aquila is tainted.

CASSIUS

Tainted...? By what...?

GALBA

(giving him a look)
His father was Flavius Aquila. The
man who lost the Eagle of the
Ninth.

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LUTORIUS
Not to mention five thousand men.

GALBA
(smiling sarcastically)
Ah that. Five thousand men.

CASSIUS
Somebody tell me - how do five
thousand men simply disappear?

LUTORIUS
My sergeant says that if you stand
on the hilltop at Are-Cluta in
Caledonia, when the moon is full,
you can hear the ghosts of the
Legionaries scream.

PAULUS
I've heard they marched as far as
the ice mountains and fell off the
edge of the earth.

GALBA
I'm telling you. I've been with the
Eagles ten years. I know a bad omen
when I see one.
(beat)
The boy's a bad omen.

MARCUS appears in the doorway, holding his spear. The room
goes silent. Did he hear that? If he did, he betrays nothing.

MARCUS
Morning.

GALBA nods at the spear, deadpan.

GALBA
Nice spear, sir.

MARCUS
I won a wager.

MARCUS puts the spear aside and joins them. An awkward
silence. He turns to LUTORIUS.

MARCUS (CONT'D)
The grain from Durinum hasn't
arrived. I want you to send out a
patrol to investigate.

LUTORIUS
I wouldn't worry, sir. One day
late's nothing in Britain.

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MARCUS

Well it is to me.

(beat)

Send out the patrol.

GALBA

Do you really think that's wise, sir? There's a lot of unrest out there. We've made four punishment raids in the last month.

MARCUS stares calmly back.

MARCUS

The men need to eat too.

Silence. GALBA gives LUTORIUS a look. Feeling suddenly self-conscious, PAULUS lowers the hank of meat poised at his lips.

26 EXT. FORT - ISCA DUMNONIORUM - COURTYARD - DAY. 26

From the doorway of his quarters, MARCUS watches a PATROL march out of the fort. A moment of doubt, then he turns and goes back to work.

27 INT. FORT - MARCUS'S QUARTERS - NIGHT. 27

MARCUS prepares for bed.

He's about to enter his sleeping cell when the faintest shushing noise makes him stop. He walks over to the window. Pulling back the leather curtain, he peers into the blackness, listening. Nothing. He lets the curtain flap back.

28 EXT. HILLSIDE OUTSIDE FORT - NIGHT. 28

With preternatural speed, the camera glides over the surface of the grass, towards the fort.

29 INT. FORT - MARCUS'S BED - NIGHT. 29

MARCUS jolts upright, wide awake.

30 EXT. FORT - PARAPET - NIGHT. 30

Hauling a cloak over his nightshirt, MARCUS hurries towards the dim light of the watchtower. Three LEGIONARIES spring to their feet and salute.

MARCUS

Wake the Tribune.

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One of the men hurries away. MARCUS stares over the parapet. There it is again. The faint swish-swish of wind in grass.

MARCUS (CONT'D)
Can you hear it?

LEGIONARY
Sir-?

He holds up his hand. Through the dark, they hear the faint grunt of cattle. MARCUS swears softly under his breath.

LUTORIUS races up, cloak hauled roughly over his nightshirt.

MARCUS
It seems I may have got you up for nothing.

LUTORIUS
What did you hear?

MARCUS
Cattle, most likely.

LUTORIUS peers into the blackness. Faint but clear, we hear the shushing sound, then it stops.

MARCUS (CONT'D)
There. That. Hear it?

LUTORIUS nods. Both men stand there, staring intently over the parapet.

MARCUS (CONT'D)
(under his breath)
Damn the dark.
(beat)
Should I call the men to arms?

LUTORIUS
Depends. If it's just cattle, they won't thank you.

MARCUS
(decisive)
Better angry than dead. Call them out.

CUT TO:

31 INT. FORT - MILITARY QUARTERS - NIGHT.

31

A series of visceral, fast-cut close-ups. A LEGIONARY races down the dormitory, men twist out of bed, haul on armour, short swords, boots, everything fast and jagged.

32 EXT. FORT - COURTYARD - NIGHT.

32

A line of LEGIONARIES rush out into the courtyard, fitting helmets as they go. One of them nicks the underside of his chin with the buckle. His mate races past, slapping his helmet on as he runs.

LEGIONARY 1
Bloody buckle cuts.

LEGIONARY 2
(holding up his helmet)
What do you expect? Made in Bulgaria.

33 EXT. FORT - PARAPET/COURTYARD - NIGHT.

33

LEGIONARIES pour onto the parapet, taking up their positions. As each man hits his post, a weird silence settles. Slowly, the whole fort goes still.

MARCUS stands in the courtyard, a lone figure in full armour, his men at battle stations all around him. The seconds tick by. Nobody moves. Feeling his nerves kick in, MARCUS adjusts the buckle on his helmet. He winces, glances up. LUTORIUS is on the watchtower. He's about to turn away, when his shield-arm flies up involuntarily and a spear smashes into it.

All along the parapet, like a silent uprush of shadows, the CELTS attack. For a moment, the shock of the assault renders attackers and defenders silent, then...

MARCUS
Sound Arms!

A trumpet blasts through the silence and everything roars.

CUT TO:

34 EXT. FORT - PARAPET - NIGHT.

34

Close-up on MARCUS scrambling up the parapet. Staying right on his shoulder, we experience the attack not as an epic, but as a physical and emotional assault on one person's senses; raw, shadow-looming, chaotic.

He hits the parapet at a sprint. Smack. He wheels round on a CELT rearing out of the dark. Short-sword out. One quick stab. Someone screams. A LEGIONARY thumps to his knees, spewing blood. Another CELT rears over the parapet. MARCUS spins. Lunges. Misses him. Skids back. Ducks an axe-swing. Shoots out two quick stabs. One. Two. The CELT collapses over the parapet. Dry mouth. Heart pounding. He races on. Suddenly the sky ignites. A fire-brush flies over the ledge. Then another. Then another. MARCUS stamps wildly at them, sparks flying. A warning shout from behind. He spins round. Two CELTS are charging him. Shield up. Hard punch.

One of the CELTS reels left. A smack to his armoured shoulder. He twists in agony. The shield spins out of his hand. LUTORIUS bangs up alongside.

LUTORIUS
(yelling)
Back to back!

MARCUS slams round, back smacked up against LUTORIUS. Another wave of CELTS flies over the wall. MARCUS grabs for his fallen shield. His fingers scrabble madly for a purchase on the leather handle, then lock into place. He punches wildly into the darkness, and...

35 EXT. FORT - PARAPET/COURTYARD - NIGHT. 35

MARCUS races among his men, yelling encouragement, filling gaps in the line, carrying off wounded - each moment shot through with purpose, as if the full force of his leadership has been released by the battle.

36 EXT. FORT - COURTYARD/PARAPET - DAWN. 36

Through thick mist, streaks of dawn light reveal the chaotic courtyard. Dead and wounded lie amid burned-out fire-brush, abandoned arms and spilled grain from the upturned cart.

MARCUS helps carry a wounded LEGIONARY to the FORT SURGEON. Turning back, he glances at his exhausted men sitting about the yard. He gives them the thumbs up, grinning. The MEN smile back. A few call out. He's blooded now. One of them.

MARCUS
(turning to the Quartermaster)
Breakfast. Now. And double their rations.

A cheer from the men. The QUARTERMASTER grumbles off. LUTORIUS approaches. He and MARCUS climb back up the parapet.

MARCUS (CONT'D)
(suddenly remembering)
What happened to the patrol?

LUTORIUS'S FACE. He clearly thinks they've no chance.

MARCUS (CONT'D)
How long can we hold out without reinforcements?

LUTORIUS
With luck, several days.

MARCUS
Keep a fire burning on the roof.
Once the mist clears, we'll send up
a smoke column.

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They reach the watchtower. What they see halts them in their tracks.

Below the fort - seeming to rise out of the mist - a vast army of CELTS forms before their eyes. They swarm around the single figure of a saffron-coated DRUID. The priest stands on a chariot, the still centre amid a storm of warriors. Even at this distance, his presence is palpable. An elemental sense of menace underscored by the beat of invisible drums.

MARCUS stares at the DRUID.

MARCUS (CONT'D)
Fetch me our best archer.

A LEGIONARY races away. LUTORIUS and MARCUS stand together, staring at the enemy massing in front of them.

An ARCHER races up.

MARCUS (CONT'D)
See the priest?
(beat)
Kill him.

A thin smile from LUTORIUS. His young commander is hardening fast.

The ARCHER loads his bow, takes aim and fires. MARCUS watches the arrow fly straight and true. But the moment it strikes the holy man, it appears to sail right through him. MARCUS blinks in shock.

WATCHTOWER O/S
Sir!

MARCUS locks up. There, behind the line of CELTS, just emerging on the brow of the hill, is the PATROL. MARCUS stares out, urging them back with all his being.

MARCUS
(under his breath)
Turn around...turn around...go back.

Realizing their situation, the PATROL begins turning for a retreat. But before they can fall back, another LINE OF CELTS emerges on the horizon line, behind them. They're surrounded. With no option but to push on, they prepare to engage.

MARCUS stares, grim-faced. He turns and starts walking down to the men mustering at the gate. LUTORIUS follows.

LUTORIUS
It's not your fault. You did the right thing.

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MARCUS

I'm not leaving them to die.
(beat)
Muster fifty of the reserves and
hold them at the gate.

MARCUS begins arming himself to engage.

LUTORIUS shouts the order and the hastily mustered SQUADRON
begins forming in the shadow of the great gates - checking
weapons, tightening helmet straps, shield grips, spears.

LUTORIUS turns back to MARCUS.

LUTORIUS

Sir.
(beat)
Let me lead them, sir.

MARCUS

It was my decision. It's my
responsibility to bring them back.
(beat)
Open the doors.

The huge bars are drawn back and the great doors begin
swinging apart. With each inching second, the roar of the
battle closes in, louder and louder.

MARCUS steps to the front, ready to lead his men out. He can
hear some of them offering up murmured prayers. He glances
skyward. Instinctively, he whispers fast...

MARCUS (CONT'D)

Mithras, god of the sun, father of
our fathers, let me not bring
misfortune to my Legion...Mithras,
god of the sun, father of our
fathers, accept whatever sacrifice,
that I may not bring misfortune to
my Legion.

The gates are open. There's about a hundred yards clear
between them and the battle between the CELTS and the PATROL.

MARCUS (CONT'D)

After the charge...only when I call
it...form Testudo.
(off their nods, beat)
Ready.
(beat, sword out)
CHARGE!

37 EXT. FORT - ISCA DUMNONIORUM - DAY. 37

From high over the fort gate, we look down on the extraordinary sight of the tiny SQUADRON OF LEGIONARIES, roaring out of the fort towards the mass of CELTS.

38 EXT. SQUADRON - DAY. 38

Close-up on MARCUS, his whole body jolting at full sprint. Ahead of him, he can see the battle raging. As the first CELTS turn to engage them, he yells out...

MARCUS
FORM TESTUDO!

Suddenly - like a steel sky - the shields shoot up and the squadron is transformed into a mailed wedge. The move is so fast and unexpected that their momentum smashes them through the stunned line of CELTS and almost up to the PATROL, still fighting to break through on the other side.

MARCUS (CONT'D)
BREAK TESTUDO!

The SQUADRON burst out of formation, fanning out into a rough v-like corridor of escape for the PATROL.

MARCUS (CONT'D)
OUT SWORDS!
(drawing his sword)
CAESAR! CAESAR!

SQUADRON
CAESAR! CAESAR!

Another smack of energy as the entire SQUADRON draw swords, battling to maintain the escape-corridor. The CELTS are about to re-assault, when...the strangest thing. A British war-horn rings out and they fall back.

MARCUS blinks in surprise.

39 EXT. FORT - ISCA DUMNONIORUM - DAY. 39

Cutting wide, we see that the ROMANS are now isolated on the hillside outside the fort. Almost instantly, a warning trumpet sounds from the watchtower behind them.

MARCUS spins round. Then he sees it.

Rising over the horizon, in a thunder of hooves, sweeps a single, breath-taking line of CHARIOTS, the blades on their wheels spinning ferociously. The sheer speed and theatre of their approach is awesome.

MARCUS
FALL BACK!

A trumpet blares out. In a desperate scabble for safety, the SQUADRON begin sprinting for the still-open doors of the fort. From the parapet, their mates urge them on, screaming encouragement, yelling their names.

Close-up on MARCUS, falling back with his men. He glances over his shoulder at the still-separated PATROL. The sight of them there, fighting impossible odds.

Suddenly - aware that his men will die in retreat - MARCUS swerves aside and turns back on his tracks. He stands alone on the hillside, the sole Roman in a field of onrushing chariots. Purely and insanely heroic.

Seeing their Commander's courage, the SQUADRON begins re-grouping.

All MARCUS's attention is focussed on the lead chariot. Even from this distance, he can make out the DRUID standing behind his charioteer - saffron coated, hair flying out around him, one hand raised to the skies.

As it draws nearer, the charioteer looks up.

MARCUS freezes.

He's staring straight into the grim face of CRADOC. With one hand he guides the horses, with the other he grips the same blue feathered spear Marcus saw in his hut.

MARCUS'S FACE. Staring up at CRADOC. Before he can take in the moment's meaning, CRADOC is raising the spear, aiming it straight at him, then...MARCUS leaps - sword outstretched - at the on-coming chariot.

His dive carries him straight into CRADOC, killing him instantly. The chariot begins rearing out of control, then hits a rock and explodes into the air.

BLACKOUT:
DISSOLVING INTO:

40 EXT. TUSCANY - ROMAN VILLA - GARDENS - DAY. 40

Against a bright sky, YOUNG MARCUS plays soldiers with his FATHER. On his finger, we glimpse flashes of an emerald ring. Laughing and squealing with delight, YOUNG MARCUS circles his daddy, round and round, until everything dizzies into blue.

41 EXT. FOREST - CALEDONIA - DAY. 41

The roar of pitched battle. Everything close-up. Grey with rain.

01 SEPT 07 19

We're on the back of a ROMAN OFFICER, fighting a last stand with FORTY LEGIONARIES against hordes of CELTS. As the OFFICER battles, we glimpse flashes of an emerald ring on his sword hand.

Behind him stands the LEOPARD-SKINNED STANDARD BEARER. In his fist he grips the standard of the Legion. There at the top, wings outstretched, rises the great metal bird.

The Eagle of the Ninth.

42 EXT. TUSCANY - ROMAN VILLA - GARDENS - DAY. 42

YOUNG MARCUS bursts out from behind a tree, brandishing a wooden sword. He slows to a halt and stares.

Kneeling in the shade of a branch, his FATHER is carefully carving a small wooden eagle. With wings outstretched, it resembles a rough copy of the great Eagle. His father lifts the little eagle into the sky. MARCUS watches it gripped in the emerald-ringed HAND, swooping this way and that.

43 EXT. FOREST - CALEDONIA - DAY. 43

Another hallucinatory, close-up flash of the Eagle of the Ninth amid the roar of the encroaching battle.

44 EXT. ROMAN VILLA - DAY. 44

YOUNG MARCUS stares up at the silhouette of his FATHER on horseback, dressed in the magnificent uniform of a Senior Legionary Centurion. Further off, other OFFICERS on horseback wait.

Bending down out of the sun, FATHER kisses YOUNG MARCUS on the forehead and hands him the little eagle, smiling softly.

FATHER

The eagle is charmed. If you speak to it I will hear you, wherever I am.

YOUNG MARCUS

(staring into his father's eyes)
Wherever you are?

Their fingers remain linked over the eagle. The only sign of emotion his FATHER can bear to show, is the merest stroke of the boy's hand. He sits back into the saddle. Blinding sunlight reduces him once more to a silhouette.

Stepping close to his MOTHER, YOUNG MARCUS watches his FATHER ride away. He glances at his mother. Tears run down her cheeks, but she holds herself still. Courage drummed into her breaking heart.

45 INT. FOREST - CALEDONIA - DAY. 45

Close-up on swords slashing the air. Suddenly, the STANDARD BEARER is struck and the Eagle starts falling.

46 INT. FORT - SICK BAY - DAY. 46

MARCUS comes-to with a gasp.

LUTORIUS and the FORT SURGEON are standing over him. He blinks at them, searching for his bearings.

MARCUS

How long-?

FORT SURGEON

Six days.

MARCUS

(taking this in, then...)

The patrol?

LUTORIUS

Safe, sir.

MARCUS lets out a sigh of relief. He tries to move. Pain roars up from his leg.

FORT SURGEON

Lie still.

MARCUS

Reinforcements. Did they come?

LUTORIUS

They came. Their Commander's in his quarters - sorry, your quarters.

MARCUS blinks. The first glimmer of the loss to come.

FORT SURGEON

You must rest. Drink this.

The FORT SURGEON lifts a cup of bitter broth to his lips. MARCUS drinks. The FORT SURGEON settles his head back.

MARCUS

(starting to drift)

How did I get off the battlefield?

LUTORIUS

Oh a lot of us had a hand in that, sir.

MARCUS

How are the men?

01 SEPT 07 21

LUTORIUS

The men are anxious to know how
their Commander fares.

MARCUS

Tell them...
(a glint, beginning to go)
I've decided to give up chariots.

He blacks out.

CUT TO:

47 INT. UNCLE AQUILA'S VILLA - SOUTH ENGLAND - A WEEK LATER. 47

The sound of bird-song.

MARCUS opens his eyes.

He's lying on a different bed, in an unfamiliar room.

For a second he assumes himself to be dead, then slowly he
turns his head to look down at himself. He lifts the sheet.
The whole of his lower half is a mash of blood and bandage.

Turning away, he glances at the sun-drenched room. Opposite,
is an open door with a different potted rose outside. On the
walls are beautiful frescoes of fish. An elderly servant
(STEPHANOS) lies asleep on a divan, snoring softly.

MARCUS tries to speak. All that comes out is a croak. The
sound wakes STEPHANOS with a jerk. He takes one look at
MARCUS and promptly hurries out.

MARCUS tries to call him back. But even the slightest
movement brings a stab of searing pain. He lies back.

After a moment, a huge man steps into the doorway and smiles
dispassionately. UNCLE AQUILA is in his mid-50's, bald, big
boned - with limbs that appear to have been loosely strung
together from wet leather. When he speaks, his manner is
bluff and acerbic, with a certain self-conscious irony.

UNCLE AQUILA

Morning.

MARCUS peers - who is this man? UNCLE AQUILA reads his look.

UNCLE AQUILA (CONT'D)

I'm your uncle, Aquila.

(beat)

Your father's brother? You're in
Calleva now.

MARCUS

Calleva-?

01 SEPT 07 22

UNCLE AQUILA

The fort Commander had you transferred. You nearly died.

(beat)

Two hundred leagues in a mule cart, with an injury like yours...

(beat)

You don't happen to play checkers, do you?

MARCUS

(taken aback)

Um...sometimes...

UNCLE AQUILA

I'm addicted. Most of the time, I only play old Stephanos. I think the score is currently four hundred to two.

(beat, smiles softly)

He's a fine nurse, mind you. Hasn't left your side all week.

MARCUS

I've been here a week?

UNCLE AQUILA

Thereabouts. I'm afraid I lost count.

(calling through the door)

Stephanos?

STEPHANOS bustles back in, carrying a jar of hot water.

STEPHANOS

How is the patient?

UNCLE AQUILA

Alive.

STEPHANOS's face. A look. He begins mixing a sack of dried herbs into some hot water. UNCLE AQUILA wrinkles his nose in distaste.

UNCLE AQUILA (CONT'D)

Well, I hope that whatever he's about to give you does you good. It smells repellent.

Smiling, UNCLE AQUILA walks out. STEPHANOS gently lifts MARCUS's head and brings a cup of bitter broth to his lips.

STEPHANOS

Drink. It was made up for you by the Fort Surgeon.

As MARCUS drinks, their eyes meet.

01 SEPT 07 23

MARCUS
How long before I can go back?

STEPHANOS blinks nervously.

STEPHANOS
Sleep.

MARCUS lies back. His eyes close down.

FLASHBACK TO:

48 EXT. FOREST - CALEDONIA - DAY. 48

Lunging through the mud, the ROMAN OFFICER snatches up the fallen Eagle and begins racing away with the last remaining LEGIONARIES. Staying on the OFFICER's back, we glimpse his emerald-ringed fist, gripping the Eagle tight as he begins running for his life.

BACK TO:

49 INT. UNCLE AQUILA'S VILLA - MARCUS'S QUARTERS - DAY. 49

With another start, MARCUS wakes. As he comes-to, the first wave of regret washes over him. He turns to face the wall.

50 INT. UNCLE AQUILA'S VILLA - MARCUS'S QUARTERS - DAY. 50

Some days later.

MARCUS is now well enough to hobble about on two sticks. With painful slowness, he makes his way towards the window. UNCLE AQUILA appears in the doorway.

UNCLE AQUILA
You have a visitor.

LUTORIUS steps into the room. In honour of the occasion, he wears full armour. Sunlight catches the metal, making him seem unreachably glorious.

MARCUS adjusts his sticks, humiliated to be seen like this. In his awkwardness, he stiffens. Formal.

MARCUS
Tribune.

LUTORIUS
Sir.
(beat)
The men have been asking after you.

MARCUS
Thank them from me.

01 SEPT 07 24

LUTORIUS

I will, sir.

Silence. LUTORIUS looks down at his old Commander. He is deeply shocked to see him so transformed. UNCLE AQUILA can see it in his face. He comes to his rescue.

UNCLE AQUILA

You had good news for my nephew...?

LUTORIUS

Yes - sorry - I received news from headquarters. For holding the fort under extreme duress, the Cohort of the Fourth Gaulish has been awarded the gilded laurel. From today, their standard will carry its first wreath.

MARCUS smiles, genuinely touched.

MARCUS

Tell the men I could not be more proud.

LUTORIUS is delighted to catch a glimpse of the old MARCUS. He stumbles straight on.

LUTORIUS

And that's not all, sir. You yourself have been awarded the military signum for conspicuous gallantry... with an honourable discharge because of your wounds.

MARCUS stares back. LUTORIUS hands him the bracelet.

LUTORIUS (CONT'D)

The citation reads "honour and faithfulness."

MARCUS holds the heavy metal in the palm of his hand.

MARCUS

(softly)
Honour and faithfulness.

LUTORIUS

It's etched into the metal. There.

MARCUS

Yes. I see it.

A beat.

LUTORIUS

May I be the first to offer my congratulations.

01 SEPT 07 25

The effect of his own emotions - too personal now - makes MARCUS unable to respond as before. He can only nod, eyes fixed on the bracelet. A pause.

UNCLE AQUILA

I think perhaps my nephew is tired.

LUTORIUS

Yes.

(beat)

Sir.

LUTORIUS salutes.

MARCUS

(without looking up)

Thank you, Lutorius.

LUTORIUS hangs there a moment, then he and UNCLE AQUILA walk out. MARCUS can hear them talking softly as the old man sees the Centurion out. The door shuts. Lutorius is gone.

MARCUS stares down at the bracelet in his hand.

Slowly - carefully - he attempts to fix the bracelet around his wrist. But even this tiny feat is too painful. He's reduced to picking it up in his teeth and trying to slip it over his fingers. The metal links keep skewing. He tries again. A flinch of pain makes him gasp and the bracelet falls to the floor.

He stares down at it, lying there at his feet. Suddenly, all his pent-up pain and frustration explodes into his chest and he lets out a roar.

51 INT. UNCLE AQUILA'S VILLA - MASTER QUARTERS - DAY. 51

Hearing him cry out, UNCLE AQUILA and LUTORIUS look up. STEPHANOS hurries past, ready to rush to Marcus's aide. The old man holds him back.

UNCLE AQUILA

Leave him, Stephanos. There's no medicine for that.

52 INT. UNCLE AQUILA'S VILLA - MARCUS'S QUARTERS - DAY. 52

Close-up on MARCUS, rocking back and forth in an agony of lost hopes.

CUT TO:

53 EXT. UNCLE AQUILA'S VILLA - ORCHARD - DAY. 53

Some months later. Spring.

01 SEPT 07 26

MARCUS limps through an orchard on crutches, on the mend but still sad and solitary.

MOTHER O/S
Cottia...?!

MARCUS looks up.

Through the trees, in his neighbour's garden, he sees the flash of a white toga. A beautiful young girl races through the garden - innocent, free.

Close-up on MARCUS, staring at such happy abandon.

The girl catches a glimpse of MARCUS, then hurries inside.

UNCLE AQUILA walks up, smiling.

UNCLE AQUILA
Get yourself ready. We're off to the games.

MARCUS
Games...?

UNCLE AQUILA
Yes. You know, fun?
(beat)
If that's not too outrageous an idea.

CUT TO:

54 EXT. CALLEVA COLISEUM - DAY. 54

A third world version of the big time. A single street leading to a small, wooden coliseum. Along the way, the usual STREET KIDS selling drinks, sweets, fried food and souvenirs. CROWDS OF LOCALS AND LEGIONARIES pour past in holiday mood.

55 INT. LITTER - DAY. 55

MARCUS sits in a litter with UNCLE AQUILA. Through the crowd, he spots the beautiful young girl he saw in the garden. She's walking towards the coliseum with her FAMILY, laughing and joking with the same easy freedom as before.

MARCUS stares after her...

MARCUS
What was my father like?

UNCLE AQUILA
Your father...?

MARCUS
I hardly knew him.

01 SEPT 07 27

UNCLE AQUILA stares at his nephew a moment.

UNCLE AQUILA

Your father was the perfect Roman,
with all that that implies.

MARCUS

The man who lost the Eagle...?

UNCLE AQUILA

How the Eagle was lost, nobody
knows. If he died defending it,
then he died honourably.

MARCUS

What if he didn't? What if he was a
coward and ran?

Silence. Eye to eye. Heat and noise. The old man stares back.

56

INT. CALLEVA COLISEUM - DAY.

56

MARCUS descends the stairs on the arm of two SERVANTS. UNCLE
AQUILA walks ahead, nodding/saluting various acquaintances.

All the way to his seat, MARCUS can see the LOCALS glancing
at him, gossiping about the handsome young commander staying
in their midst.

UNCLE AQUILA

(helping Marcus into his seat)
Here we are. Ease him down. Gently.
He's not a sack of rice.

Seated, MARCUS looks about. In the arena, twenty GLADIATORS
are sham-fighting. Swordsmen, wrestlers, axemen - all hand-to-
hand. Some of the CROWD watch, others simply stand and chat,
doing business or passing the time.

Finally, an ASSISTANT blows a warning on his trumpet and the
GLADIATORS stop.

ASSISTANT

(bigging it up)
And now...a fight to the death!

The CROWD turn in their seats. All talking stops.

At a command from the CAPTAIN OF THE GLADIATORS, all his men
retreat, except for one. He carries a three-pronged spear and
net. He's clearly a favourite with the crowd, who call out
his nickname, THE FISHER.

Two ASSISTANTS drag a young Celt slave (ESCA) into the arena.
One of them hands him a sword and dagger.

01 SEPT 07 28

Stripped to the waist, ESCA bears the blue markings of the northern tribes, his long hair flung back. He's twenty six, but his grey-blue eyes stare straight ahead with the fierce pride of someone who's experienced way beyond his years.

Something about him immediately captures MARCUS's attention. In his look and demeanour, he resembles the charioteer, Cradoc. But it's the look in the Celt's eyes that really holds him.

UNCLE AQUILA

(mutters disparagingly)

A gladiator and a slave? Never a fair contest.

At a sign from the CAPTAIN OF THE GLADIATORS, ESCA and THE FISHER step into the centre. The CAPTAIN places them ten paces apart, checks their positions, then retreats to the barriers.

For a split-second, MARCUS notices the young girl, COTTIA, in the stands opposite. She stares nervously at the two men in the centre of the arena.

Silence falls. MARCUS can hear his own breathing. A nervous cramping in his leg makes him wince.

ESCA and the FISHER are still. Finally, ESCA starts circling his opponent. THE FISHER stands poised on the balls of his feet, net and trident at the ready. Suddenly, ESCA lunges. The net flies out and lands harmlessly behind him. The FISHER darts aside, just missing ESCA's sword thrust.

Close-up on MARCUS, remembering...

FLASHBACK TO:

The thrust of MARCUS's sword slamming into a body amid the roar of the fort battle.

CUT BACK TO:

Grabbing his net from the ground, the FISHER sprints away. ESCA chases after him, running low like a hunter. The two men tear around the perimeter, making a half-circle of the arena, until they are back in front of the private boxes.

Without warning, the FISHER whirls about and flings the net once more. It whips out, hitting ESCA full in the body. Caught off-guard, he crashes headlong and rolls over and over, helplessly enmeshed in the netting.

Close-up on MARCUS, another shock of memory bringing...

FLASHBACK TO:

01 SEPT 07 29

Bodies and blood, rolling, falling, screaming.

CUT BACK TO:

MARCUS wrenches forward, breath caught in his throat. The young Celt is lying right below his seat. He can hear him panting, see the sweat glisten on his upper-lip.

The CROWD roar. The FISHER strolls over. He raises his trident for the death strike, waiting for their verdict.

The CROWD hold out their thumbs. A few turned up, most down.

For a moment, ESCA appears to raise his arm from inside the mesh of netting - signalling an appeal for mercy - but he then lets it drop back. Suddenly, he's staring straight into MARCUS's eyes, a look as direct and intimate as if they were the only two people in the arena. Then...defiantly, he twists his head and offers his neck for the kill.

UNCLE AQUILA (CONT'D)

Now there's a man who's lost the will to live.

MARCUS spots COTTIA. She's standing as high as she can on her seat, distraught with panic, both thumbs turned upward.

MARCUS shoots out of his seat, exclaiming involuntarily.

MARCUS

No-

He raises his hand, thumb upward. Appealing to the CROWD.

MARCUS (CONT'D)

Come on...life...life!

But the thumbs in the crowd are still majority-down.

Clenching his whole body with the effort, MARCUS thrusts his hand even higher.

MARCUS (CONT'D)

Thumbs up! Thumbs up, you fools!

Finally, a few spectators start turning their thumbs upwards.

UNCLE AQUILA sits beside him, thumb raised.

The FISHER glances round, uncertain which way it's going.

MARCUS (CONT'D)

(pressing forward)
Come on...!

Still it's in the balance. Finally, with a little mocking bow, the FISHER raises his trident and steps back.

01 SEPT 07 30

ATTENDANTS rush forward and begin disentangling ESCA. An ironic cheer goes up from the FISHER's fans.

UNCLE AQUILA
(aside, dryly)
You keep this up, the Captain of
the Gladiators will have you on
commission.

Exhausted, MARCUS slumps back. His leg's agony.

MARCUS
I need to go...

UNCLE AQUILA clicks his finger. The two SERVANTS begin helping MARCUS out. As he stumbles up the steps, he throws one last look back over his shoulder.

ESCA lies where he fell, staring blazingly at MARCUS.

57 INT. UNCLE AQUILA'S VILLA - MARCUS'S QUARTERS - NIGHT. 57

Night. MARCUS lies in bed, clutching the carved eagle. His finger traces the wings, the nooks where his father carved the feather-curves.

FLASHBACK TO:

58 INT. ROMAN VILLA - MAIN COURTYARD - NIGHT. 58

YOUNG MARCUS wanders through the moonlit courtyard, drawn forward by the sound of weeping. As he nears his parent's rooms, he sees his MOTHER wailing and keening with all the ferocity of grown-up grief.

YOUNG MARCUS stares, helpless, at her agony. Turning away, he scrabbles in his pocket for the little carved eagle his father gave him. Shaking with terror, he presses it against his cheek and whispers at the dark, like his father taught.

YOUNG MARCUS
Father...where are you...?
(beat)
Father...?

CUT TO:

59 INT. UNCLE AQUILA'S VILLA - MARCUS'S QUARTERS - DAY. 59

The next morning.

MARCUS is trying and failing to put on his sandals. In frustration, he calls through the door.

01 SEPT 07 31

MARCUS
Stephanos! Stephanos!!

The sound of feet on stone, then UNCLE AQUILA appears.

UNCLE AQUILA
I've bought you a slave.

MARCUS
I don't need a slave.

UNCLE AQUILA
I'm not sure poor old Stephanos is
up to serving two masters. I
thought a body slave would
complement the household.

MARCUS
I should have been consulted.

UNCLE AQUILA
Well...you weren't.
(calling through the door)
Boy!

ESCA walks in. MARCUS stiffens in shock. ESCA stares straight
ahead, avoiding his eye

UNCLE AQUILA (CONT'D)
His name's Esca.

UNCLE AQUILA walks out.

ESCA doesn't move. MARCUS sits stiffly on the bed. A long,
sullen silence, neither young man giving an inch. Finally...

MARCUS
I've no use for you.

ESCA
I had no wish to be bought.

Angrily, MARCUS picks up his sticks and hobbles to the window.

MARCUS
You could have run. My uncle would
never have been able to stop you.

ESCA
You saved my life. I have a debt of
honour to you.

MARCUS
Against your wish.

ESCA
No man should have to beg for his
life.

01 SEPT 07 32

MARCUS

You didn't. I did. And I meant
nothing by it.

Another sullen pause. Finally, ESCA pulls out a dagger from
inside his tunic and throws it at MARCUS's feet. MARCUS stares
down at the exquisitely decorated hilt, the deadly metal.

MARCUS (CONT'D)

What's that?

ESCA

It was my father's. He who owns it,
owns me.

MARCUS is held by that glittering knife - the most aggressive
act of submission it's possible to imagine.

MONTAGE:

60 INT. UNCLE AQUILA'S VILLA - NIGHT. 60

An evening meal in the main quarters. MARCUS and UNCLE AQUILA
eat, while STEPHANOS fetches and carries. By contrast, ESCA
stands in the shadows, barely part of the scene. A fringe-
figure, outside the circle of light.

61 INT. UNCLE AQUILA'S VILLA - MARCUS'S QUARTERS - NIGHT. 61

MARCUS hobbles back to his quarters on his sticks. Behind
him, walks ESCA. ESCA hangs back in the doorway, but MARCUS
ignores him completely.

62 INT. UNCLE AQUILA'S VILLA - MARCUS'S QUARTERS - NIGHT. 62

Night. MARCUS tosses and turns in his sleep. Barely visible
in the doorway, stands ESCA. He stares down at the sleeping
figure with hooded eyes; dangerous, unreadable.

63 INT. UNCLE AQUILA'S VILLA - KITCHENS - DAY. 63

STEPHANOS works busily in the kitchen, moving to and fro.
Ignored by the other servant, ESCA crouches by the door. He
now seems barely part of the household at all.

64 EXT. UNCLE AQUILA'S VILLA - MARCUS'S QUARTERS - LATE DAY. 64

MARCUS hobbles across the garden, ESCA a pace behind. Losing
his footing, MARCUS suddenly cries out in pain and collapses
to the ground.

On instinct, ESCA dives forward and just catches him before
he hits the ground.

65 INT. UNCLE AQUILA'S VILLA - MAIN QUARTERS - LATE DAY. 65

MARCUS lets out another cry of agony. A middle-aged FIELD SURGEON kneels in front of him, examining his leg. ESCA stands nearby, holding his spear. The FIELD SURGEON gives a little grimace.

FIELD SURGEON
Who searched this wound?

MARCUS
The surgeon at the fort.

FIELD SURGEON
Was he drunk? I've never seen such a mess. You must have been in constant pain.

MARCUS doesn't answer. ESCA looks at him.

FIELD SURGEON (CONT'D)
I'm going to have to re-open the wound. There's still metal in there.

MARCUS takes this in. UNCLE AQUILA sighs.

UNCLE AQUILA
Well then...best get it over with.

FIELD SURGEON
Tomorrow morning?

Trying not to show his nerves, MARCUS nods. The FIELD SURGEON starts packing up his bag.

FIELD SURGEON (CONT'D)
I'll be round after breakfast. It'll be over before you know it. I've the best knives in the business.

The FIELD SURGEON pats MARCUS on the chest and walks out with UNCLE AQUILA. A pause. MARCUS with his back to ESCA.

MARCUS
Some wine.

66 INT. UNCLE AQUILA'S VILLA - MARCUS'S QUARTERS - EVENING. 66

MARCUS stands at the window, the wooden eagle clutched in his hand. ESCA walks in with a pitcher of wine.

MARCUS
On the table.

01 SEPT 07 34

ESCA lays the pitcher on the bedside table and walks out. At no point do they even meet each other's eye.

CUT TO:

67 INT. UNCLE AQUILA'S VILLA - MAIN QUARTERS - DAY. 67

The dining room has been transformed into a temporary surgery. UNCLE AQUILA stands a little gingerly in the doorway, watching the FIELD-SURGEON prepare his implements. He washes each one in barley spirit, whistling softly as he works. STEPHANOS potters back and forth, fetching water and blankets as requested.

MARCUS walks in on ESCA's shoulder.

FIELD SURGEON

Ready?

MARCUS

Ready.

MARCUS lays himself down on the table. ESCA covers him in a clean linen sheet. MARCUS avoids his eye.

MARCUS (CONT'D)

You can go.

ESCA turns for the door.

FIELD SURGEON

No, I'll need the slave to hold you down.

MARCUS and ESCA are embarrassed.

MARCUS

Can't my uncle do it?

UNCLE AQUILA

I haven't the strength dear boy.

FIELD SURGEON

(busying about)
Quickly now. Hold him down.

ESCA steps up. Reluctantly, he takes hold of MARCUS's wrists.

FIELD SURGEON (CONT'D)

(impatient)
Get your weight on him, boy!

ESCA leans down, pinning MARCUS to the table with the weight of his chest. Suddenly, their eyes are very close.

FIELD SURGEON (CONT'D)

Tighter!

01 SEPT 07 35

ESCA grips tight. The FIELD SURGEON prepares to make the first cut.

FIELD SURGEON (CONT'D)
Deep breath in. When I say "now",
let it out.

MARCUS nods. His eyes meet ESCA's.

FIELD SURGEON (O.S.) (CONT'D)
Now.

MARCUS lets out his breath and the knife goes in. His arms spasm involuntarily. ESCA grips him tight. Pain screams up his body. He blacks out.

FLASHBACK TO:

68 EXT. FOREST - CALEDONIA - DAY. 68

Close-up on the Eagle of the Ninth, flying through forest.

We are back with the ROMAN OFFICER and his few surviving LEGIONARIES, sprinting for their lives.

Now, for the first time, the camera angle alters so that we are looking directly at the officer's face, revealing what we half-knew but had not yet seen - that it is MARCUS'S FATHER. Teeth clenched, fighting for breath, he races through the trees.

BACK TO:

69 INT. UNCLE AQUILA'S VILLA - MARCUS'S QUARTERS - DAY. 69

MARCUS slowly comes-to. He is back in his own bed. ESCA crouches by the door. Seeing MARCUS stir, he rises from his post. MARCUS licks his lips, slowly coming-to.

Without waiting to be asked, ESCA picks up a cup of water. Lifting the back of MARCUS's head, he helps him drink.

MARCUS
Did I shame myself?

A beat. ESCA shakes his head. He lays MARCUS down on the pillow and steps back. We hold on the two of them there, ESCA standing a few feet from the bedside, MARCUS lying alongside.

MARCUS (CONT'D)
Thank you.

CUT TO:

70 EXT. FOREST - DAY.

70

Six months later.

A startlingly different, winter landscape.

Shooting through the trees, the camera dips and lifts with the rise and fall of two riders at full gallop.

MARCUS and ESCA are out hunting, their horses charging through frosted woodland. Hidden in the undergrowth, a wild boar scatters ahead of them, turning this way and that.

ESCA is a superb rider. He closes in on the boar, matching it, swerve for swerve. Finally, stooping low in the saddle, eyes ablaze with warrior-instinct, he raises his spear and hurls.

71 EXT. FOREST - DAY

71

The dead boar is tied over ESCA's horse. MARCUS and ESCA are in high spirits after the kill. Side by side, they ride back along the trail.

MARCUS drinks from a flask of water. He makes to hand it to ESCA, but at the last second, he eases his horse forward, carrying the flask tantalizingly out of reach. ESCA smiles to himself. He walks his horse up alongside, as if uninterested. Out of the blue, he whips out a hand, snatches the flask and gallops on ahead. MARCUS rides alongside, grinning.

MARCUS

Why didn't we hunt in our usual place?

ESCA

I thought better today, this side of the river. The boar wander when the moon is full.

MARCUS

(sending him up)
Cle-ver.

Suspicious, ESCA turns quizzically. As he does so, MARCUS snatches the flask and gallops on, cheering loudly at bluffing his friend a second time. ESCA grins after him.

72 EXT. HIGH HILL - DAY.

72

A few minutes later, ESCA and MARCUS ride the high trail, easy and relaxed. They pass a stream running down the hill. The horses stop to drink. Something flashes silver in the water.

01 SEPT 07 37

ESCA

Trout.

MARCUS

(a look)

I know what trout look like.

ESCA

Ever fished them by hand? You have to tickle them.

MARCUS

(grins, unimpressed)

You tickle them.

ESCA

One day, I'll show you.

MARCUS gives a little shake of the head. They go back to staring at the hypnotic roll of water over stone. A beat.

MARCUS

My father took me fishing once.

Both silent for a while. The water rolling on.

MARCUS (CONT'D)

What do you know about the Ninth?

ESCA

You mean their disappearance?

(beat)

They say the soldiers liked the weather so much, they stayed and married the women.

MARCUS smiles, but keeps pursuing it.

MARCUS

What else do they say?

ESCA

That their Eagle is a god and haunts the mists, still.

MARCUS

Your tribe believes that?

ESCA

My tribe is gone.

MARCUS looks at him, shocked.

MARCUS

You never told me that.

01 SEPT 07 38

Silence. ESCA stops on the crest of a hill, staring out over a vast tract of frosted land. It rolls away into infinity, hauntingly beautiful. A long pause. Finally...

ESCA

My father was Cunoval, bearer of the Blue War Shield of the Brigantes, Lord of five hundred spears. I was his armour-bearer until I became a warrior.

MARCUS stares quizzically at the Celt. This is the most ESCA has spoken in months. He continues without turning.

ESCA (CONT'D)

A year after my seventeenth summer, the Romans built the wall. It ran across the northern part of our lands. We rose against them. My father and two brothers died. My mother also. My father killed her before the Legionaries broke through. She knelt in front of him and he slit her throat. She made no sound.

A long silence. The terrible pain of this memory, etched in his still face.

ESCA (CONT'D)

I, alone of all my kin, survived.

73 EXT. UNCLE AQUILA'S VILLA - DAY. 73

MARCUS and ESCA return from the hunt to be met by a GUARD OF LEGIONARIES milling about outside the villa. STEPHANOS bustles out to meet them, looking harassed.

STEPHANOS

Your uncle has guests. Quick-quick, I'll see to the horses.

MARCUS and ESCA dismount and head inside.

74 INT. UNCLE AQUILA'S VILLA - MAIN QUARTERS - DAY. 74

MARCUS and ESCA enter, to be met by UNCLE AQUILA and two strangers, both Romans. One is an elderly Legate, CLAUDIUS, the other a young Staff Officer, PLACIDUS. They look pristine in their uniforms.

MARCUS stiffens defensively, still grimy from the hunt.

UNCLE AQUILA

Claudius, may I present my nephew, Marcus Flavius Aquila.

(MORE)

01 SEPT 07 39

UNCLE AQUILA (CONT'D)
Claudius Marcellus is an old friend
and - of course - esteemed Legate
of the Sixth Legion.

CLAUDIUS gives UNCLE AQUILA a smile. Old sparring partners.
MARCUS raises his hand in salute.

The young staff officer gives a little cough.

CLAUDIUS
Excuse me.
(gesturing Placidus)
Tribune Servius Placidus, of my
staff.

MARCUS and CLAUDIUS salute.

UNCLE AQUILA
Stephanos!
(smiles, leading them in)
Boiled eggs and fish. Don't all
rush at once.

75

INT. UNCLE AQUILA'S VILLA - MAIN QUARTERS - NIGHT.

75

MARCUS, UNCLE AQUILA, CLAUDIUS and PLACIDUS eat. STEPHANOS
and ESCA serve and pour wine.

UNCLE AQUILA
Tell me, Placidus. How do you find
working for a Legate, no less?

CLAUDIUS
Placidus is far too well-connected to
be impressed by a few oak-leaves.
Soon as he's completed his year in
the military, he's off to the Senate.

PLACIDUS
If it was my choice, I'd be a soldier
all my life. However...my father will
insist I go into politics.
(turning to Marcus)
Have we met before? Your name sounds
familiar.

MARCUS
I doubt it.

PLACIDUS
The Tribune's Club, in Rome?

MARCUS
No, I was only a cohort Centurion.

PLACIDUS

Ah. Right. I remember now.

(beat)

It's the name. Aquila. Your father
marched with the Eagles, too, did
he not...?

MARCUS

He commanded the First Cohort of
the Ninth Hispanic.

PLACIDUS

Of course. The Ninth. Every Roman
remembers the Ninth.

An awkward pause. CLAUDIUS shifts the subject on.

CLAUDIUS

Talking of the Ninth, there's been
a rumour recently along the Wall.

UNCLE AQUILA

Oh...?

CLAUDIUS

They say the Eagle's been seen,
receiving divine honours in some
tribal temple in the far north.

PLACIDUS

An Eagle in the hands of the
Painted People. That's a potent
weapon. One has to wonder how any
Roman could let it go.

MARCUS tenses. ESCA gives him a look.

CLAUDIUS

What can I do? We've only three
Legions in Britain. I can hardly send
an expeditionary force into the
unknown, based on a rumour.

UNCLE AQUILA

What does Rome say?

CLAUDIUS

Eagle lost, honour lost. Honour lost,
all lost.

(beat)

Rome would love to get the Eagle
back, but...politics being
politics, no Senator's going to
risk scores of lives for a tainted
Legion. My hands are tied.

01 SEPT 07 41

MARCUS
(out of the blue)
Not if you sent one person.

UNCLE AQUILA
What do you mean?

MARCUS
I mean...somebody should go alone.

UNCLE AQUILA
North of the wall? No Roman could
survive there alone.

MARCUS
Has anyone ever tried?

UNCLE AQUILA
No, but that's the point. To try
would be to fail.

MARCUS stares back, impulsiveness turning to defiance.

MARCUS
How do you know?
(beat)
One man can hide where an army
can't. No-one need even know he was
there.

UNCLE AQUILA
Marcus, what's past is past. Don't
waste your life chasing ghosts.

PLACIDUS
Quite right.
(straight at Marcus)
The loss of the Ninth is
humiliating enough, without adding
another pointless death.

MARCUS bursts out of his seat, ready to smack him down.
An electric silence. Reining himself in, he turns and
storms out.

76 INT. UNCLE AQUILA'S VILLA - MARCUS'S QUARTERS - NIGHT. 76

MARCUS lies on the floor, working out his fury in a series of
punishing exercises. ESCA waits in the shadows.

UNCLE AQUILA appears in the doorway.

UNCLE AQUILA
Ignore him. He's not worth it.

MARCUS gets up, wipes off the sweat and walks to the window,
still flying on anger and impulse.

01 SEPT 07 42

MARCUS

Ever since I can remember, all I ever dreamed about was being a soldier like my father.

(beat)

I can still see him now, riding away for the last time. I can still feel how proud I was. My father. Centurion of the First Cohort of the Hispanic!

(beat)

Can you imagine anything more magnificent? To be a soldier, serving Rome, with courage and faithfulness!

UNCLE AQUILA

And you did.

MARCUS

(turning on him)

For what?! An honourable discharge?!

A beat.

MARCUS (CONT'D)

When I made Centurion, they asked me where I wished to be posted. I knew the answer even before they'd asked it.

(beat)

I came to re-write my family's story. This is where my father lost the Eagle. This is where I was going to win so much glory that no Roman would ever dare bring up his name again. Now all I do is sit around while some silk-arsed politician's son pisses on my family's name! That's what I do! That's my life! Well, it's not enough. I will not sit in some villa, for the rest of my days, rotting and remembering.

(beat)

If I can't win back my family's honour as a soldier, then I'll do it by finding the lost Eagle.

UNCLE AQUILA

You'd never survive alone north of the wall.

MARCUS

I'll take Esca. He's a Celt. He can be my guide.

UNCLE AQUILA gives a little snort of surprise.

01 SEPT 07 43

UNCLE AQUILA

You're entrusting yourself to your
slave?

MARCUS

Why not?

UNCLE AQUILA

My dear boy, he may not be from
Caledonia, but these are still his
people. What's to stop him slitting
your throat the moment you're
alone?

MARCUS

He wouldn't do it.

UNCLE AQUILA

How do you know?

MARCUS

I trust him!

UNCLE AQUILA glances up. ESCA stares back, expressionless.

UNCLE AQUILA

You know nothing about him. He does
what you say because he has to.

MARCUS thinks instantly of Cradoc. He stalls. Impulse has got
him this far and now nothing is going to stop him.

MARCUS

If I'm wrong, then I'll die and it
won't matter.

UNCLE AQUILA stares back, his nephew already out of reach.

MIX TO:

77

EXT. THE ROMAN FRONTIER - HADRIAN'S WALL - DAY.

77

High and wide over the northern borders. Cutting across the
rolling landscape, awesome in its scale and grandeur, runs
the great gash of Hadrian's Wall. Eighty miles of stonework,
cresting hills, weaving with the land, a bastion of Empire.

MARCUS (V.O.)

Esca's tribal lands are just south of
the wall. He knows the southern
uplands well. As soon as we reach the
frontier, we'll buy a pair of retired
cavalry horses and head north.

78 EXT. HADRIAN'S WALL - MILE ENCAMPMENT - DAY. 78

ESCA and MARCUS ride slowly towards one of the encampments along the wall.

Drawing nearer, we become aware of the sharp contrast between the hubbub of activity on the Roman side, and the silent wilderness beyond.

MARCUS (V.O.)

It's not unknown in Caledonia for Celts to take slaves of their own. Once we're over the other side, we take each other's part.

79 EXT. HADRIAN'S WALL - GATE - DAY. 79

MARCUS and ESCA ride up to the heavily manned gate. From the intense interest their journey inspires, it's clear that next to nobody ever ventures north of the wall.

The gates open and MARCUS and ESCA ride out into the north. All the SOLDIERS manning the wall turn to watch the two traders crossing into the unknown.

MARCUS (V.O.)

Should anyone question us, they'll discover a young tribal Chief and his body slave heading north to pay their respects to the hidden Eagle.

As ESCA and MARCUS pass under the gate, the camera lifts up and over the wall, revealing, the great sweep of land beyond the frontier. On and on it runs, forest upon forest, mountain upon mountain, dark and forbidding.

80 EXT. LOWLANDS - BEYOND THE FRONTIER - DAY. 80

Drifting slowly down, the camera finds MARCUS and ESCA alone on the far side of the frontier. Evening light plays on Hadrian's wall, now only a thin line in the distance.

They are riding along a single track, cut clearly in the landscape. An old road - the only one - heading north.

Already, the sense of isolation is palpable. MARCUS glances round, then pulls up.

MARCUS

We'll stop here. Ready?

They dismount and swap clothes, each man becoming the other. A beat. MARCUS sniffs, makes a face.

01 SEPT 07 45

MARCUS (CONT'D)
Don't you ever take a bath?

ESCA
Too busy working for my master.
(seeing his clean hands)
Your hands. Get some dirt on them.

MARCUS rubs in some earth and "shows". ESCA nods.

ESCA (CONT'D)
I can't be a tribal Chief without a
weapon.

MARCUS'S FACE. In all his planning, he hadn't thought of that. He walks over to his horse and pulls out the short sword and the intricately decorated dagger Esca gave him, when submitting himself.

MARCUS hesitates. Should he give him back the dagger?

ESCA watches him.

Finally - without quite realizing the significance of this hesitation - MARCUS sheathes the dagger back in the saddle-bag and hands over his short sword.

ESCA says nothing.

MARCUS
This was mine. If anyone asks, you
say it's a war trophy.

ESCA
I'll tell them we fought and I won.

MARCUS looks up. From ESCA's expression - the merest hint of a smile - it's impossible to tell if he's joking or not.

They mount and ride on down the track.

MARCUS
Strange to think.

ESCA
What?

MARCUS
My father's Legion rode this way.

ESCA
This is easy. Wait 'til you don't
know which way they rode.

MARCUS looks at him, confident, sure.

01 SEPT 07 46 .

MARCUS

Five thousand men? Nobody could forget that sight, even if it was fifteen years ago. All we do is ask and follow the trail.

(beat, grins)

Logic, Esca. The gift of Rome.

ESCA only smiles at MARCUS's certainty and says nothing.

81 INT. FOREST - DAY.

81

A few hours later, ESCA and MARCUS ride down the slope of a thickly wooded vale. ESCA raises his hand. They stop.

ESCA

Listen.

MARCUS

What?

MARCUS strains to hear. Faintly, he catches the sound of humming. ESCA kicks on, his whole body alert to the slightest motion of the air.

As they near the bottom of the vale, the sound of humming mutates into the buzzing of flies. Suddenly, ESCA freezes. MARCUS rides up and stops dead.

The stench is almost unbearable.

Twenty yards away, almost obliterated by the frenzy of insects, hang the rotting, headless corpses of three young Celts. Blue body markings are still visible on their putrid flesh. They have been strung by their legs from long ropes slung over branches.

MARCUS (CONT'D)

Who did this?

ESCA

Rogue warriors. No true warriors would do such a thing.

(quiet)

This is a bad place to be.

MARCUS looks across. ESCA's still face is unreadable. He turns his horse and rides on. MARCUS glances back one last time - the image of those gently swaying bodies imprinting themselves on his mind.

82 EXT. LOWLANDS - HIGH GROUND - EVENING.

82

ESCA and MARCUS have made camp on a high dale. In front of them, deepening into gloom, the great hills of the northern territories stretch away and beyond.

01 SEPT 07 47

ESCA kneels over a small fire, cooking a ration of cured meat. With a heightened sense of danger, he completes a bow, pulling the strings across the arc. At his feet lie a pile of completed arrows.

A wolf howls in the distance. ESCA lifts his head, scanning the horizon for danger. He picks up the meat and carries it to where MARCUS is kneeling on the ground, cutting turf with his knife.

MARCUS
Where is everyone?

ESCA
We'll come to a village soon.

MARCUS lays slabs of turf in a square, creating a small alter. He adds bark, sticks and sprigs of heather. He hollows them into the shape of a nest, then sprinkles flower petals over the top. Taking out a flint and steel, he carefully lights the heather and the fire takes.

As the fire catches, MARCUS's eyes fix on the flames.

FLASHBACK TO:

83 EXT. ROMAN VILLA - DAY. 83

Blinded by sunlight, YOUNG MARCUS stands beside his MOTHER, re-living that moment when the silhouette of his FATHER rides away for the last time.

BACK TO:

84 EXT. LOWLANDS - HIGH GROUND - EVENING. 84

MARCUS completes a murmured prayer, then sits back. A pause. The two of them, staring into the flames.

ESCA
Who do you pray to?

MARCUS
Mithras.

ESCA
Your protector?

MARCUS nods.

ESCA (CONT'D)
How can you pray to a god that did
not protect your father?

MARCUS stares back. Another tiny jolt. A pause.

MARCUS
You have no gods?

ESCA
We have many gods, for many things.
But they did not defend my family
when we needed them.

MARCUS
Then what guides you?

ESCA
My eyes. My heart.

MARCUS
Nothing else?

ESCA is still. His turn for a moment of uncertainty.

ESCA
If I find a reason, then I will
believe.

A pause. MARCUS turns his gaze to the horizon.

MARCUS
Sometimes, I think I'll still find
my father alive. Do you believe
that's possible - that he could
have survived in some hidden place?

ESCA
I have seen my father kill my mother
for love.
(beat)
I know there is no impossibility
the world cannot contain.

85 EXT. HILLS - LOWLANDS - DAY. 85

The next day. MARCUS and ESCA ride on down a single track,
dwarfed by the landscape.

86 EXT. FOREST - LOWLANDS - DAY. 86

ESCA and MARCUS ride through dense forest.

87 EXT. RIVER - LOWLANDS - DAY. 87

Stripped to the waist, ESCA stands in a river. Gently, he
dips his hand into the water and under the belly of a trout.
Tickling the underside of it's skin, he soothes it to
stillness, then - plop - he lifts it out. He holds it up to
MARCUS.

ESCA
One tickled fish.

MARCUS smiles. Their mood lifts.

88

EXT. RIVERBANK - LOWLANDS - DAY.

88

ESCA and MARCUS eat the cooked fish while their horses graze. Slowly ESCA goes still. He stares over MARCUS's head.

ESCA
(softly)
Don't move.

MARCUS freezes. Carefully, ESCA reaches out a hand and pulls his spear and short sword close. He pushes the sword towards MARCUS.

ESCA (CONT'D)
Behind you, across the riverbank.
Six warriors.

Keeping the same stillness, ESCA gathers his bow and arrows.

ESCA (CONT'D)
When I say 'now', make for the tree
to your left.

MARCUS pulls out his dagger, balancing sword and knife in either hand.

ESCA pretends to eat, eyes fixed on the trees across the bank. The YOUNG WARRIORS are clearly visible now, darting between the trees, forming a semi-circle around their prey. Twenty yards away, the LEADING WARRIOR raises his hand. They freeze. Slowly, he raises his spear and...

ESCA (CONT'D)
Now!

ESCA and MARCUS burst left and right. In the same split-second, a spear smashes into the turf exactly where Marcus sat. A roar goes up and the SIX WARRIORS charge.

ESCA hits one with his first arrow.

Hidden in the undergrowth, MARCUS can hear them coming. He crouches low, testing his leg. At the last second, he bursts straight into the path of a YOUNG WARRIOR. One stab and the YOUNG WARRIOR collapses.

The next two are suddenly above him. Only an arrow from ESCA's bow saves him from an axe blow. A third WARRIOR collapses.

MARCUS spins to face his other attacker. As he does so, he's hit with a glancing spear-blow.

01 SEPT 07 50

The short sword spins out of his hand. Blood burns from a graze on his arm. He thrusts himself, head first, into his attacker. Both of them fall to the ground. As they tumble down the bank, MARCUS manages to knock the Celt's spear away. They bang up against a tree. Slamming down his hands, MARCUS pins the other man to the ground.

He finds himself staring into the eyes of a terrified YOUNG WARRIOR. The boy's eyes are drug-glazed, but still child-like in their fear. The YOUNG WARRIOR struggles a moment, then his body goes limp and he twists his neck, offering himself for the death blow.

MARCUS falters. Nothing happens. He pulls back. The YOUNG WARRIOR scrambles to his feet and begins sprinting away.

He reaches the riverbank when an arrow slams into his back, killing him instantly.

MARCUS spins round to find ESCA, bow poised from the strike.

MARCUS
What are you doing?

ESCA
He'd have been back with twenty others and we'd be dead. Next time, don't hesitate.
(beat)
This is a different world now.

ESCA begins gathering up his weapons.

On MARCUS, sensing for the first time the true extent of his isolation.

89

EXT. RIVERBANK - LOWLANDS - DAY.

89

ESCA's found the warriors' horses, tethered to a tree. On each saddle hang the skulls of their victims. MARCUS walks up, still shaken. ESCA sees his grazed arm. He immediately brings out a cloth and begins bandaging it. Neither looks at the other. Both tense.

ESCA
Stay still.
(yanking the bandage too tight)
We'll take their best two horses, the rest we'll turn out. Their animals will be more used to this terrain.

90 EXT. FOREST - LOWLANDS - DAY.

90

MARCUS and ESCA ride two warrior-horses out of the forest. The animals are magnificent, with beautiful Celtish markings burned into their rumps.

91 EXT. LOWLANDS - VILLAGE - DAY.

91

MARCUS and ESCA ride up to a small hamlet of huts. The moment they're sighted, the WOMEN bundle their CHILDREN out of sight. The VILLAGE MEN appear in a defensive group, spears and arrows at the ready. Their bodies are daubed with blue markings similar to those found on the bodies in the trees.

A VILLAGE ELDER steps forward.

ESCA
(sensing danger, whispers)
Stay back.

MARCUS watches ESCA ride up to the VILLAGE ELDER.

As he waits, MARCUS becomes aware of other VILLAGE MEN moving in the shadows...surrounding him...watching, waiting to attack.

ESCA turns and rides back.

ESCA (CONT'D)
Nothing.

MARCUS
Nothing?

ESCA
He remembers seeing the Legion march north, but they never came back. Why, he can't say.

MARCUS
He must know more than that.

ESCA
He says not.

MARCUS
Ask him again.

ESCA
No. Too dangerous. Rogue warriors came this way a week ago. Three of their young bloods were taken.
(beat)
They don't trust strangers.

MARCUS glances at the VILLAGE MEN staring coldly at them.

92 EXT. LOWLAND HILLS - DAY. 92

A series of angles on MARCUS and ESCA riding on through the lowlands. Slowly, the land is becoming more hilly and wild.

93 EXT. LOWLAND HILLS - EVENING. 93

MARCUS waits while ESCA questions a lone SHEPHERD. Again, the same shake of the head. He knows nothing.

94 EXT. CENTRAL VALLEY - DAY. 94

Rain slants across a valley-landscape. The horses slip and slide through mud as MARCUS and ESCA trudge on.

95 EXT. CENTRAL VALLEY - NIGHT. 95

MARCUS waits on a hillside. A little below glimmer the fires of a small hamlet. ESCA rides back from another unsuccessful parley. He shakes his head. Nothing.

96 EXT. LOCH LOMOND - DAY. 96

MARCUS and ESCA trudge on. They reach a peak and suddenly...

There in front of them is Loch Lomond. Beyond, the first highland peaks range away and away into the distance - vast, impenetrable and forbidding.

MARCUS stares in bewilderment.

Not a trail in sight. Only trees, mountains and endless wilderness.

MARCUS

Where are we?

ESCA

The beginning of the High Lands.

MARCUS

There's no track. There's nothing.
How could anyone...

He stops the thought. ESCA continues it for him.

ESCA

Five thousand men could disappear
in a single glen. There are
thousands of glens. You could
search for months and still find
nothing. Not even with logic.

MARCUS takes the rebuke.

01 SEPT 07 53

He pulls out the little wooden eagle and grips it tight - the only connection he has with his father. He stares at it in his hand, momentarily defeated.

MARCUS

What now?

ESCA

You have to choose. Left, to the Western Isles, right, to the Northern Mountains.

MARCUS stares ahead. In response to this dilemma, he does the only thing left to him and that's to fall on faith. Gripping the wooden eagle, he whispers...

MARCUS

Mithras, god of the sun, father of our fathers, guide my path and lead me to the Eagle...

He opens his eyes.

MARCUS (CONT'D)

The Northern Mountains.

(beat)

How many days' march to the farthest point?

ESCA

Twenty, maybe more. It depends on the weather.

97 EXT. CENTRAL HIGHLANDS - MOUNTAINS - DAY. 97

Battling through heavy snow, MARCUS and ESCA ride over one of the highland peaks. The ground is so icy, they're forced to dismount and walk beside their horses.

98 EXT. CENTRAL HIGHLANDS - MOUNTAINS - NIGHT. 98

Cloaked against the wind, MARCUS crouches beside the dying embers of a fire. Curled up beside him, ESCA sleeps.

99 EXT. CENTRAL HIGHLANDS - NORTH EAST - DAY. 99

A series of angles on ESCA and MARCUS riding on through the highlands.

100 EXT. CENTRAL HIGHLANDS - NORTH EAST - DAY. 100

A week later.

From a distant hill-top, we watch MARCUS and ESCA trudging on. A CLOAKED HUNTER drifts into frame, close-up.

01 SEPT 07 54

Someone is watching them.

101 EXT. CENTRAL HIGHLANDS - EDGE OF FOREST - DAY. 101

MARCUS rides behind ESCA as they enter a forest. MARCUS tenses in the saddle. A flicker of movement on the edge of his vision has alerted him. He scans the forest. No sign of life. He rides on.

102 EXT. CENTRAL HIGHLANDS - DEEP FOREST - DAY. 102

MARCUS and ESCA are deep in the forest, when MARCUS sees it again - a flicker of movement on the high ground above them. Riding up to ESCA, he points in the direction of the movement.

MARCUS

I saw something...on the ridge.

ESCA stares. Silence. Only the wind in the trees. He shakes his head. They ride on.

MARCUS hangs back, hoping to catch another glimpse of the mysterious shadow. But the forest is still.

103 EXT. CENTRAL HIGHLANDS - DEEP FOREST - DAY. 103

We are close on MARCUS now. The path ahead is steep and stony. His horse shifts uneasily beneath him. Loosening the reins, he sits back in the saddle and...

A WARRIOR flies through the air, hitting him chest-high.

MARCUS and the WARRIOR soar through the air.

ESCA turns in his saddle, grabbing for his bow and arrow.

All of this, in the space of a single war-cry.

Smack. MARCUS and the WARRIOR hit the ground, scrabbling for control. This man is much older and stronger than the boy warrior. He spits, snatches, claws - anything to gain the upper hand. Eventually, MARCUS's youth proves too much for him. MARCUS pins him to the ground, one hand thrust against the underside of his chin.

This time, MARCUS has no doubt. Pulling out his dagger, he prepares to slit his throat, when...

MARCUS

Wait.

ESCA

Do it!

(beat, screaming it at him)

DO IT!!

01 SEPT 07 55

MARCUS
He's a Legionary.

MARCUS has stopped, mid-strike. The warrior (GUERN) stares back, eyes fixed.

ESCA shakes his head in disgust.

ESCA
(dismounting)
I'll do it.

MARCUS
(rounding on him)
STAY WHERE YOU ARE!
(back to Guern)
YOUR NAME?!

GUERN
(celtic, shouting at Esca)
WHAT DOES HE WANT FROM ME?!

MARCUS
WHAT'S YOUR NAME?!

ESCA
HE DOESN'T UNDERSTAND YOU MARCUS!!

Viciously, MARCUS grabs GUERN's hair and yanks back his head, showing the thickened scar on the underside of his chin.

MARCUS
Chin-strap scar. Only a Roman helmet
does that.
(beat)
Your name, Roman.

GUERN stares back, refusing to budge. MARCUS gives his hair another vicious tug, face close, right into him.

MARCUS (CONT'D)
Your name.

A long pause. Finally, guttural, low...

GUERN
My name is Guern.
(beat)
Sixth Centurion, First Cohort of
the Ninth Legion.

A long silence. MARCUS studies him. GUERN grows uneasy.

GUERN (CONT'D)
Are you here to take me back?

MARCUS shakes his head. GUERN stares at him as if at a ghost.

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GUERN (CONT'D)
Fifteen years...

MARCUS
I'm not here to take you back.

GUERN
Then who are you?

MARCUS
My father was your commander.

GUERN goes very still. His eyes fix on MARCUS.

FLASHBACK TO:

104 INT. FOREST - CALEDONIA - DAY. 104

The scream of pitched battle. Blood, metal, mud and terror.
Huge, shocking and horrific.

BACK TO:

105 EXT. DEEP FOREST - DAY. 105

GUERN stares ahead, jaw set. Too terrifying to call back.

MARCUS
What happened to the Ninth?
(beat)
Tell me.

Stubbornly, GUERN shakes his head. MARCUS presses his face
right up to GUERN's - intimate, dangerous.

MARCUS (CONT'D)
You see my eyes? My father sees you
now, through my eyes.
(beat)
Do not dishonour him.

Something in GUERN's expression gives a fraction. That word
"dishonour". Finally...

GUERN
I ran before the end.

MARCUS
The end. You were attacked?

A pause. GUERN gives a tiny nod.

MARCUS (CONT'D)
Where?

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GUERN
North of here.

MARCUS
What happened?

FLASHBACK TO:

106 INT. FOREST - CALEDONIA - DAY. 106

Another split-second of battle horror. CELT FACES roaring.

BACK TO:

107 EXT. DEEP FOREST - DAY. 107

GUERN shakes his head. Still too terrifying.

MARCUS, in hard again.

MARCUS
Tell me.

GUERN
They surrounded us.

MARCUS
You fought back?
(pushing him)
Before you ran...you fought back?

GUERN can't speak. MARCUS jerks his head round, eye to eye.

MARCUS (CONT'D)
I will find out or I will kill you.

GUERN looks into his eyes. Knows it's true.

A long pause.

Finally...

GUERN
If I take you there. If I show you.
You'll let me go?

MARCUS glances up at ESCA. ESCA shakes his head - don't do it.

MARCUS
Yes.

108 EXT. NORTH EAST HIGHLANDS - RIDGEWAY - DAY.

108

MARCUS and ESCA ride behind GUERN. They are travelling along a high ridge, surrounded on all sides by highland peaks. A dead deer is strapped over the back of GUERN's horse.

ESCA moves up to MARCUS's side, voice low.

ESCA

I don't trust him.

MARCUS

What are you afraid of?

ESCA

He's a deserter. He ran away from your father when he needed him most. If it comes down to it, he'll slit your throat rather than risk being tried for desertion.

MARCUS

He knows I'm not here for that.

ESCA

Why would he risk it?

MARCUS

He wouldn't dare dishonour my father again.

ESCA

Where was his honour when he ran?

A moment, eye to eye.

MARCUS

He's still a Roman.

ESCA stares back - little shake of the head. Angrily MARCUS kicks on his horse, leaving ESCA isolated at the back.

ESCA stares after him, bruised and ignored.

MARCUS comes alongside GUERN. For a while, they ride together in silence.

MARCUS (CONT'D)

Why did you attack us?

GUERN

I thought you were rogue warriors. Your horses had the markings-

MARCUS

We stole them. They attacked us too.

GUERN

You should be careful who you steal from. A man doesn't wait for such people to find his family.

MARCUS

Where is your family?

GUERN

(tiny flash of a smile)

Not in Rome.

(beat)

Two days ride north. Soon after we...a local tribe found me dying. One of their women took me in. We have two sons together.

GUERN calls back to ESCA.

GUERN (CONT'D)

(celtic)

Stay close. It's dangerous to ride too far back.

MARCUS doesn't understand. He glances at ESCA. ESCA kicks his horse closer, refusing to catch MARCUS's eye.

109 EXT. HIGHLANDS - HIGH HILL - EVENING. 109

Evening sunlight cuts across a high hill. GUERN crouches over a fire, cooking fresh meat.

110 EXT. HIGHLANDS - HIGH HILL - EVENING. 110

MARCUS prays by a nearby stream, murmuring an oblation.

Opening his hands, he sends water rushing back into the stream. A shower of droplets catch the light, each one a perfect miniature of the sun.

In the distance, GUERN watches this ritual. His face betrays the echo of old memories, uneasy in his eyes.

111 EXT. HIGHLANDS - HIGH HILL - EVENING. 111

GUERN, MARCUS and ESCA eat round the fire. MARCUS watches GUERN. He stares into the flames. Out of the silence...

MARCUS

You were five thousand men.

(beat)

How could five thousand men just disappear?

A pause. GUERN begins softly, keeping his eyes on the fire.

GUERN

I can only tell you how I saw it. I don't know what your father's orders were. All I know is...Rome had it coming.

(beat, looks up)

Sixty years of occupation in the south, they had. Count it. Sixty years. A Legionary could live and die in that time and his only memory would be the weather, the blackmarkets and endless bloody raids. Why did they have to come north? There's bugger all worth farming and the weather's even worse. Couldn't they be satisfied with what they had? Do they always have to punish and push on? For more territory, more wars, more conquests.

(beat)

We were just footsoldiers. Me. Your father. Five thousand men. The Empire's infantry...slogging out their dream.

He picks up a stick and drops it in the fire. Sparks dance.

GUERN (CONT'D)

I remember...my first tour of duty with the Eagles was against the Atrebrates. Now that was a war. We had instructions to kill anything that moved.

FLASHBACK TO:

112 INT. HUT - DAY. 112

A ROMAN SOLDIER storms into a hut, slashing at infant screams.

CUT TO:

113 EXT. HIGHLANDS - MOORLAND CLEARING - DAY. 113

MARCUS, ESCA and GUERN ride south across open moorland.

GUERN (V.O.)

In those days it was easy. They ran at us like babies. Problem was, they learned fast. The more we killed them, the better they got. Used to make me smile, the way our Legates talked about "civilizing the savages".

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114 EXT. HIGHLANDS - EVENING. 114

MARCUS, ESCA and GUERN crest a hill amid glorious sunset.

GUERN (V.O.)

The greatest gift we ever gave the
Painted People was the art of war. They
may pray to different gods, but they
kill like true Romans. Believe me.

115 EXT. CAMP - HIGHLANDS - NIGHT. 115

MARCUS sits by a fire, while ESCA and GUERN sleep.

GUERN (V.O.)

When the order came to march north,
we were almost relieved. Waiting's
always the worst. Once you move,
you're on orders. You stop wondering.
You just do.

116 EXT. FOREST NEAR THE KILLING FIELDS - DAY. 116

MARCUS, ESCA and GUERN enter a huge forest. As the trees
swallow them up, they disappear from view.

GUERN (V.O.)

It was autumn. Worst weather in years.
For weeks we marched without a sign of
them, then, all of a sudden, they
appear out of the mist.

FLASHBACK TO:

117 EXT. FOREST - CALEDONIA - DAY. 117

A PAINTED WARRIOR rears out from mist-engulfed trees, sudden,
terrifying, like a dream-horror.

BACK TO:

118 EXT. FOREST NEAR THE KILLING FIELDS - DAY. 118

MARCUS, ESCA and GUERN ride through thick forest. They're
nearing the killing fields now. Dotted between the trees are
hundreds of poles. Rammed on the top of each, is a skull. The
death crop.

GUERN (V.O.)

You could hear them, picking men
off at the back, one by one. That
went on for a week. The further
north we marched, the worse it got.

(MORE)

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GUERN (V.O.) (CONT'D)
By the end of the second week we
were so run down, they simply
picked us off with arrows.

FLASHBACK TO:

119 EXT. FOREST - CALEDONIA - DAY. 119

Close-up on an arrow shooting through rain - silent, surreal.
It hits a LEGIONARY in the neck. His shocked face fills the
screen, his mouth a little "o". Then, he's gone.

CUT TO:

120 EXT. THE KILLING FIELD - DAY. 120

MARCUS, ESCA and GUERN ride through the last of the trees
until they reach a circular glen of open ground, surrounded
by forest.

Flat limestone rocks, like altars, protrude from the turf. On
top of the rocks lie the remains of Roman armour, bits of
bone, everything still laid out where the bodies were
sacrificed. Around the altars, covering every inch of ground,
are half-rotten sandals. Hundreds and hundreds of sandals.

GUERN (V.O.)
How were we to know we were facing
the entire confederation of the
northern tribes. Their army was
numberless. Finally, we gave up
looking for open ground. We just
turned and faced them. For four
days and nights we held them off.

FLASHBACK TO:

121 EXT. THE KILLING FIELDS - DAY. 121

Close-up on the Eagle of the Ninth, held shoulder high in the
Standard Bearer's fist. It hangs there, a dull glint of metal
wings surrounded by a blur of ARMS, LEGS, SWORDS and FACES,
everything a rain-grey mass of slugged-out, exhausted war.

BACK TO:

122 EXT. THE KILLING FIELDS - DAY. 122

MARCUS, ESCA and GUERN stop-dead on the rim of the killing
fields. The three of them stare at the frozen devastation.

GUERN (V.O.)
On the fifth night, most of our men
mutinied.

(MORE)

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GUERN (V.O.) (CONT'D)
You have to understand...by then,
all pride was gone. We were no
longer Roman. We were hardly even
human.

(beat)
Even so...I kept faith with the
Eagle.

Close-up on GUERN, eyes fixed. In his fear, he slips
momentarily into his new-born tongue.

GUERN (CONT'D)
(softly, celtic)
I go no further. This place is full
of ghosts.

MARCUS dismounts, transfixed.

MARCUS
Why are there sandals everywhere?

GUERN
They pulled them off the dead
bodies, so their souls could no
longer march to heaven.

MARCUS
The rocks?

GUERN
Altars for our officers. We could
hear them being sacrificed.

MARCUS walks into the glen. He moves slowly amid the sandals,
bits of bone and discarded armour.

MARCUS
And my father?

GUERN
After the mutiny, your father
planned to break out to the west of
the glen with the remaining men.
That's when I ran.

MARCUS
How many were left?

GUERN
About a hundred.

MARCUS
The enemy?

GUERN
Many thousands.

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MARCUS takes this in. He stares off in the direction Guern has pointed. Finally, he steps towards the imagined point in the trees where his father ran.

FLASHBACK TO:

123 EXT. FOREST - CALEDONIA - DAY. 123

Another angle on MARCUS'S FATHER and his five LEGIONARIES, sprinting across the clearing and into the trees, the Eagle still in FATHER's grip.

Suddenly, like ghosts emerging from the dark, a great line of CELTS appears through the trees, brandishing spears. Endless numbers of them.

MARCUS'S FATHER jerks to a halt.

BACK TO:

124 EXT. THE KILLING FIELD - DAY. 124

MARCUS turns sharply away. He stares back at GUERN and ESCA, still waiting on the far side of the glen.

MARCUS

What happened to the Eagle?

GUERN

They say a clan in the far north have it. The Seal People. The most feared of all the tribes.

(beat)

Nobody goes there.

MARCUS stares straight back.

MARCUS

How do I find them?

125 EXT. THE KILLING FIELDS - DAY. 125

MARCUS and ESCA are preparing to ride on. GUERN stands beside them, tightening his stirrups before turning back.

MARCUS

Thank you.

GUERN stares at him.

GUERN

I wish you'd never come.

(beat)

You've made me re-live my shame.

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MARCUS

I don't judge you. I've never been
hunted.

GUERN

Pray you never are.

A beat.

MARCUS

Go. Freely.

GUERN hangs there a moment. He's not sure why he says
this...pride, shame or both...but he does.

GUERN

We still have our swords and shields.
All of us.

He mounts his horse and rides away.

CUT TO:

126 EXT. CENTRAL HIGHLANDS - DAY/NIGHT. 126

A series of angles on MARCUS and ESCA beginning the long
march north west. Back across the mountains, the glens and
the lochs.

127 EXT. WESTERN HIGHLANDS - EVENING. 127

MARCUS and ESCA ride across a vast landscape of rolling
heathland, within sight of the coast. MARCUS stares at the
endless road to be travelled - still on edge.

MARCUS

You always knew this place existed,
didn't you.

ESCA doesn't answer.

MARCUS (CONT'D)

If you knew, why didn't you say?

ESCA

I didn't know.

MARCUS

We've wasted weeks combing half of
Caledonia, and all the time you
could have told me where to look!

ESCA

I didn't know.

MARCUS

You're lying!

(beat)

What I saw in that forest is beyond imagining. Fifteen years ago - when that happened - you were here. Guern said it himself. Every Celt tribe in Britain made peace to fight that battle, your people included!

ESCA

What do you know about "my people"?

MARCUS

They butchered my father's men like animals! That wasn't war, that was massacre!

(beat)

You knew and you didn't want me to see!

ESCA stares stubbornly ahead, refusing to be demeaned by this accusation. Finally...

MARCUS (CONT'D)

DAMN YOU ESCA, YOU WILL SPEAK!!

Finally ESCA whips round on him, cold eyes like fury.

ESCA

You're angry because you're afraid you'll find out your father was not the hero you want him to be! You say you love him, yet you never knew him! All you have is what you want to believe!

He almost spits out the last word. He turns his horse and rides on. MARCUS canters after him, incandescent with rage.

MARCUS

COME BACK HERE!! ESCA!!

They're riding side by side now, yelling at each other.

MARCUS (CONT'D)

YOU'RE STILL MY SLAVE!!

ESCA

YOU WANT ME TO LEAVE, BOY?!! YOU THINK YOU CAN GO ON ALONE?!!

MARCUS

I SAVED YOUR MISERABLE LIFE!!!

ESCA

YOU'D BE DEAD IN A DITCH WITHOUT ME!!!

01 SEPT 07 67

MARCUS leaps off his horse and crashes into ESCA, pulling him off his horse. They hit the ground, punching, kicking, nothing held back. Tripping and falling as they fight, they roll down the hillside until they finally reach the bottom with a thump. Still grappled together, they look up to find...

Staring down at them are FIFTEEN SEAL PEOPLE on horseback.

Utter silence.

ESCA and MARCUS freeze.

The SEAL PEOPLE are unlike anyone we've seen up until now. Darker skinned, heavily decorated, with dark facial markings, seal skin coats and long, feathered spears. On the back of some horses, hang dead deer and boar.

Their leader is a handsome young SEAL PRINCE, marked out by the twisted gold torque around his neck. He stares at MARCUS with fixed curiosity. Despite his stillness - or because of it - he is truly frightening.

ESCA suddenly turns on MARCUS, smacking him across the face. MARCUS crashes to the ground.

ESCA (CONT'D)

Never speak to your Master like
that again!

Stunned, MARCUS stares up at him, but ESCA refuses to engage.

The SEAL PRINCE watches, expressionless. ESCA steps away from MARCUS, putting distance between them.

[Note: whenever Celtic is spoken, this is indicated in italics, and translated on screen in English subtitles]

ESCA (CONT'D)

(celtic)
Good hunting?

A beat.

The SEAL PRINCE nods faintly, then returns his gaze to MARCUS.

ESCA (CONT'D)

(celtic)
I am Esca, son of Cunoval, slain
Chief of the Brigantes.

SEAL PRINCE

(celtic)
What do you do here?

ESCA

(celtic)
I seek the Eagle.

01 SEPT 07 68

The SEAL PRINCE stares at him in silence. Finally, maintaining the same dangerous reserve, he nods towards MARCUS.

SEAL PRINCE
(celtic)
*Who is he that you talk to in the
Roman tongue?*

ESCA
(celtic)
My slave.

The SEAL PRINCE's lips curl into a faint smile. He kicks his horse forward. Coming right up to MARCUS, he rides around him, staring all the time.

MARCUS keeps himself absolutely still. Shows no fear.

Bringing up his feathered spear, the SEAL PRINCE points it at MARCUS. MARCUS holds himself steady.

Using the spear like an extension of his arm, the SEAL PRINCE begins an examination of MARCUS. He investigates his hair, his clothing and his face. Finally, placing the tip of the spear on the underside of MARCUS's chin, he pushes it upward, forcing his head back. His neck is now bared, revealing the thin chin-strap scar.

The SEAL PRINCE gives a little grunt of delight. Keeping his spear on MARCUS's neck, he turns to the others.

SEAL PRINCE
(celtic)
*It's true. Their god marks them all
with the same scar.*

He turns to ESCA.

SEAL PRINCE (CONT'D)
(celtic)
*I've heard of German tribes with Roman
slaves, but never here. Is he good?*

ESCA
(celtic)
*He works hard, but he has a tongue
on him.*

The SEAL PRINCE grunts in amusement. With his spear still resting under MARCUS's chin, he casually observes...

SEAL PRINCE
(celtic)
*You were seen before by one of our
tribe. In the East.*

ESCA goes very still. The SEAL PRINCE watches him.

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SEAL WARRIOR
How did you learn to speak their
tongue?

ESCA stalls. MARCUS sees him tensing, without knowing why.

ESCA
(celtic)
My tribe was wiped out by their
Legions. I was captured and sold as
a slave. After three summers, I
escaped.

SEAL PRINCE
(celtic)
How did you come by him?

ESCA
(celtic)
A raiding party. The rest of his troop
were killed. I spared his life.

Silence.

The SEAL PRINCE stares at MARCUS, still considering his
response.

SEAL PRINCE
(celtic)
My father would like to see such a
slave. You will be my guest. Our
village is five days march to the
west, among the Loch of Many Islets.

ESCA
(celtic)
The Eagle-

SEAL PRINCE
(cutting in, celtic)
We do not speak of Holy Things.

A beat. Finally, the SEAL PRINCE lowers his spear from under
MARCUS's chin. He turns to ESCA, grinning boyishly.

SEAL PRINCE (CONT'D)
(celtic)
You must teach your slave not to talk
to you as he does. We will help you.

The SEAL PRINCE snaps his fingers and one of his WARRIORS
begins tying MARCUS's hands to the end of a long rope. Still
MARCUS refuses to snap. Voice low, he turns to ESCA.

MARCUS
What are they doing?

No answer. ESCA stares ahead, his face a mask.

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Suddenly, the SEAL PRINCE yanks the rope and MARCUS smacks to the ground. A giggle of childish laughter from the other WARRIORS.

MARCUS grits his teeth, refusing to cry out.

CUT TO:

128 EXT. WESTERN HIGHLANDS - DAY. 128

High and wide over the Western Highlands.

Diminutive against the vast landscape, the horsemen of the SEAL PEOPLE lead ESCA along the trail.

Stumbling behind, one end of the rope tied to ESCA's horse, the other to his wrists, comes MARCUS.

129 EXT. WESTERN HIGHLANDS - DAY. 129

The WARRIORS reach a high-peak overlooking the sea.

MARCUS stumbles on the icy ground. Suddenly, his feet go from under him and he's dragged along the ground by his hands.

Scrabbling back to his feet, he blunders on. Blood dribbles from cuts to his thighs. Still, ESCA does not turn.

130 EXT. WESTERN HIGHLANDS - NIGHT. 130

Through the dark of the encampment, MARCUS walks the horses to a stream. Behind him, seated around a fire, ESCA and the SEAL PEOPLE eat and talk. In ESCA's face, we see a new warmth. Speaking his own language seems to animate him.

131 EXT. WESTERN HIGHLANDS - DAY. 131

An increasingly battered-looking MARCUS walks behind ESCA and the SEAL PEOPLE along the trail. ESCA ignores him completely.

132 EXT. WESTERN HIGHLANDS - NIGHT. 132

MARCUS is curled up in a corner, filthy and beaten up.

Ignoring him, ESCA strolls past with the SEAL PRINCE, talking softly in Celtic.

133 EXT. WESTERN HIGHLANDS - DAY. 133

High over the coastal trail. The warriors converge on the Western Isles.

134 EXT. WESTERN HIGHLANDS - COAST - DAY. 134

Rounding a bend in the trail, ESCA pulls up. MARCUS halts.

Stretching away into the horizon are numberless islets, curling and counter-curling like hurled ribbons - blue sea against white sand, white sand against grey granite, grey granite against green.

135 EXT. WESTERN ISLES - SEAL PEOPLE'S VILLAGE - EVENING. 135

ESCA rides up the hill, MARCUS walking behind on the end of the rope. He now looks badly beaten up from days of walking.

They head towards the seal people's village - a fortified mound, guarded by WATCHMEN.

136 EXT. WESTERN HIGHLANDS - SEAL PEOPLE'S VILLAGE - EVENING. 136

Nearing the main gate, MARCUS passes another avenue of skulls lining the roadside - the same death-crop as in the killing fields. Some skulls are not fully rotted. Flesh clings. Hair obtrudes.

At the sight of the returning hunters, the VILLAGERS pour out to meet them. They stare curiously at MARCUS's bruised and battered body. CHILDREN race alongside. One of them, a YOUNG SEAL BOY dares to prod him. He laughs at his mates, holding up his hand, then races away.

137 EXT. WESTERN HIGHLANDS - SEAL PEOPLE'S VILLAGE - EVENING. 137

The SEAL PRINCE rides up to the central hut, followed by the others. More death-crop skulls decorate the entrance.

A crowd of TRIBESMEN and WOMEN gather to watch. Finally, with a theatrical pause worthy of any Emperor, the elderly CHIEFTAIN appears in the doorway, flanked by two of his SONS. He takes in the two strangers, then returns his gaze to the SEAL PRINCE. Everyone waits respectfully for him to speak.

CHIEFTAIN

(celtic)

The hunting was good?

SEAL PRINCE

(celtic)

It was good, father.

CHIEFTAIN

(celtic)

You wish me to eat these people too?

The crowd giggles and the old man puckers his lips, a stand-up, dead-panning his audience.

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SEAL PRINCE

(celtic)

*I bring a guest, Esca, eldest son
to Cunoval the slain Chief of the
Brigantes. And his slave. A Roman.*

ESCA bows his head, but the CHIEFTAIN is staring at MARCUS.

CHIEFTAIN

(celtic)

Does the slave have a name?

ESCA

Marcus Flavius Aquila.

CHIEFTAIN

Marcus Flavius Aquila.

(beat, celtic)

*I have brought many Romans back to
my village, Marcus Flavius Aquila,
but never with their head attached
to their body.*

Another big laugh. The old man smiles.

MARCUS shoots ESCA a glance, but ESCA is already moving off with the SEAL PRINCE. Never once does he look back.

CUT TO:

138 EXT. STREAM - EVENING.

138

With one eye poised for danger, MARCUS washes himself in a stream, working the water around his wounds.

Nearby, a YOUNG MOTHER crouches by a fire. She tips hot rocks from the fire into a pot of water. They hiss and crackle. At her side stands the YOUNG SEAL BOY (the same one who prodded him). He stares at MARCUS with smiling eyes. Something about this lad is special - a laughing intelligence behind the eyes. His face and upper body are covered with beautiful markings, like miniature copies of the ribboned islets.

Another rock the size of a man's head fizzes into the water. The SEAL BOY grins.

139 INT. STABLES - EVENING.

139

MARCUS settles the horses in their stables. As he unsaddles them, he becomes aware that he's being watched.

Led by the YOUNG SEAL BOY, a line of WOMEN and CHILDREN stand in the shadows of the doorway, staring at him with open curiosity. Each move of his saddle brush is echoed by a delicate shift of their heads. Beautiful, still faces, all decorated with the same sophisticated curlicues.

140 INT. CHIEFTAIN'S HUT - NIGHT. 140

MARCUS reaches the threshold of the Chieftain's hut. He stares at the huge fire burning in the centre. Smoke rises into the roof, creating a fog-like screen.

Someone's moving about behind the smoke. MARCUS narrows his eyes. There's something familiar about the figure. He takes another step forward when...

ESCA walks by without acknowledging him. MARCUS grabs his arm.

MARCUS

Esca-

SEAL PRINCE O/S

(celtic)

Esca. Come. Join us.

ESCA jerks his arm free. MARCUS bites his jaw furiously, but controls his anger. Quickly, he gets into step behind ESCA, head bowed respectfully. Mid-walk, it strikes him...

MARCUS

What does a slave do here?

ESCA

(pointedly)

Exactly what I did for you.

141 INT. CHIEFTAIN'S HUT - NIGHT. 141

YOUNG WOMEN and CHILDREN serve food on exquisitely decorated silver platters.

MARCUS stands behind ESCA's chair in a direct reversal of their previous roles. Now, it's him who's fetching and pouring the wine while ESCA talks to his hosts.

As MARCUS stands there, he lets the conversation drift over his head. The CHIEFTAIN gets up from his place to make a point. For a moment, he's hidden behind the fire, then...

FLASH TO:

142 MARCUS'S VISION. INT. CHIEFTAIN'S HUT - NIGHT. 142

MARCUS'S FATHER turns. With a paternal smile, he beckons us to join him.

BACK TO:

143 INT. CHIEFTAIN'S HUT - NIGHT. 143

The CHIEFTAIN sits back in his chair.

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MARCUS tries to control his breathing. He glances about. Nobody else has noticed except him. But he saw it. It was real. His father.

144 INT. CHIEFTAIN'S HUT - NIGHT. 144

ESCA follows the ROYAL FAMILY out. MARCUS stops him.

MARCUS
My father's here.

ESCA
(spitting at him)
Don't touch me!

The SEAL PRINCE glances back. ESCA hurries after him, muttering angrily under his breath.

CUT TO:

145 EXT. SEAL PEOPLE'S VILLAGE - DAY. 145

Increasingly isolated, MARCUS watches ESCA laughing and playing with the YOUNG SEAL BOY and his FAMILY.

146 EXT. SEAL PEOPLE'S VILLAGE - DAY. 146

ESCA, the SEAL PRINCE and other YOUNG WARRIORS ride off to the hunt, thundering through the gates and up the hillside. Perched on ESCA's saddle, laughing excitedly, is the YOUNG SEAL BOY.

147 EXT. SEAL PEOPLE'S VILLAGE - DAY. 147

MARCUS crouches in the doorway of a hut with other low-caste SERVANTS. They are cleaning their master's weapons, piled high in front of them.

All around them, MARCUS notices the orderliness of life in this apparently wild village - people building huts or simply bringing in the cattle.

His attention is caught by a BLACKSMITH working metal spear-heads over a fire. His HANDS. Hammering the tip to a point with all the same skill as the blacksmith in Isca Dumnoniurum. Rome at its best.

148 EXT. SEAL PEOPLE'S VILLAGE - DAY. 148

MARCUS watches ESCA and the others returning from the hunt. The YOUNG SEAL BOY rides next to ESCA, one arm proudly over his shoulder, clutching some fish.

YOUNG SEAL BOY
(celtic, shouting to his mates)
He taught me how to fish! You tickle the
fishes and they sleep! It's magic!

ESCA grins at the YOUNG SEAL BOY's wonder. Together, they ride on. MARCUS stares after them.

149 INT. CHIEFTAIN'S HUT - NIGHT.

149

A council of war. The CHIEFTAIN sits with the TRIBAL ELDERS. TRIBAL PRINCES stand behind, ESCA amongst them. In a third, outer circle, MARCUS and other SERVANTS wait behind their respective masters. In the ordering of this meeting and the way it is conducted, there is the same air of sophistication observed earlier.

The young SEAL PRINCE presents his case from the centre.

SEAL PRINCE
(celtic)
Now is the time to strike. Bring
the great bird south and complete
the victory of our clan brothers
fifteen years ago.

A clatter of spears from the TRIBAL PRINCES. The ELDERS confer. The CHIEFTAIN raises his hand for silence.

CHIEFTAIN
(celtic)
At the ceremony of the New Spears,
we will ask the The Horned One. If
he blesses your request, we will
march south.

A howl of approval from the TRIBAL PRINCES.

Through the roar of voices, MARCUS looks up to find the SEAL PRINCE staring straight at him. Cold eyes. Watching.

150 EXT. STREAM BY THE ISLET - DAY.

150

Next day. MARCUS is washing pots in a stream, when he notices some high caste VILLAGE GIRLS giggling on the hillside. They're watching ESCA and other YOUNG WARRIORS bathing off the islet. Suddenly...

SEAL PRINCE O/S
(celtic)
You!

MARCUS spins round. The YOUNG WOMEN scramble away, terrified. The SEAL PRINCE bears down on MARCUS, lifting him bodily off the ground and hurling him against the hillside.

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SEAL PRINCE
(celtic)
Take your eyes off her, slave!!

MARCUS forces himself to remain still. ESCA walks over.

ESCA
(celtic)
What is it?

The SEAL PRINCE glares down at MARCUS, spear poised.

SEAL PRINCE
(celtic)
He had his eyes on my sister.

Without warning, ESCA turns on MARCUS and smacks him hard across the face.

ESCA
(celtic)
He won't do it again.

MARCUS reels from the blow, bent forward over his knees.

MARCUS
(muttering at Esca)
You do that again, I'll kill you.

No answer. Hearing him murmur, the SEAL PRINCE observes him coldly.

SEAL PRINCE
(celtic)
How do I know he's not a spy?

ESCA
(celtic)
He swore allegiance to me.

The SEAL PRINCE spits in disgust.

SEAL PRINCE
(celtic)
*I don't trust the word of a Roman.
All Romans are savages. If you have
seen - as I have seen - what they
do to their prisoners. Such people
are not to be trusted.*

ESCA
(celtic)
He wouldn't dare disobey.

But the SEAL PRINCE makes a face - still not satisfied.

With a flick of his finger, ESCA beckons MARCUS to him.

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ESCA (CONT'D)
(celtic)
Kneel.

MARCUS glares at him. Doesn't budge.

ESCA (CONT'D)
(pushing him down)
Kneel!

MARCUS is pushed to his knees. Without warning, ESCA pulls back his head, baring MARCUS's neck to the warrior.

ESCA (CONT'D)
(celtic)
If it pleases you, kill him.

Absolute silence.

Everything, still.

For a long moment, the SEAL PRINCE stares down at MARCUS. Finally, he nods and walks away. ESCA releases his grip.

He stares at MARCUS, expressionless, then follows the SEAL PRINCE.

CUT TO:

151 INT. CHIEFTAIN'S HUT - NIGHT.

151

A strange energy has overtaken the evening meal. All the women and children have vanished.

The CHIEFTAIN rises. He begins reciting a low incantation. Cups of a narcotic brew are ceremoniously drunk. The SEAL PRINCE offers one to ESCA. He drinks, then rocks back with the shock of the drug.

Suddenly...

FATHER (V.O.)
Marcus?

MARCUS spins round. That was his father, right beside him.

He looks again. Only a crowd of TRIBAL WARRIORS pack the doorway, stoned-eyes staring.

152 EXT. SEAL PEOPLE'S VILLAGE - NIGHT.

152

MARCUS bursts out of the hut and stops. What confronts him is a completely different human landscape.

Scores of torches light the hillside. Drums beat a low, bass pulse. Not a woman or child in sight.

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In their place stand about TWO HUNDRED YOUNG WARRIORS, ghosts made flesh, their bodies daubed grey-blue with mud.

TRIBAL ELDERS hand out horn-shaped cups and the YOUNG WARRIORS drink.

Pushing past MARCUS, the SEAL PRINCE bursts out of the chieftain's hut. A howl goes up, rising into the sky.

CUT TO:

153 EXT. PATH BEYOND THE SEAL PEOPLE'S VILLAGE - NIGHT. 153

The silent rush of bodies. Feet pounding. Breathing hard.

The throng of torchlit YOUNG WARRIORS floods out of the village, streaming down the hillside towards the sea.

154 EXT. VALLEY TO THE HOLY ISLAND - NIGHT. 154

Sweeping high, the camera glides just above the throng of YOUNG WARRIORS as they rush towards the shoreline, their torches bobbing and weaving in the dark.

155 EXT. VALLEY TO THE HOLY ISLAND - NIGHT. 155

MARCUS races behind ESCA, jostled by the pressure of grey-blue bodies, like myriad soldier-ghosts hurtling into battle.

156 EXT. THE SHORELINE TO THE HOLY ISLAND - NIGHT. 156

Racing over the brow of the hill, the ghost-army floods down the hillside towards the beach. Separated from the shoreline by a stretch of water stands a small island.

157 EXT. THE SHORELINE TO THE HOLY ISLAND - NIGHT. 157

MARCUS reaches the beach, surrounded by YOUNG WARRIORS. Drums beat. The YOUNG WARRIORS face the island, thrashing the air with their spears. In the confusion, MARCUS loses sight of Esca.

MARCUS races along the shoreline, but ESCA has vanished. Before he can look any further, the YOUNG WARRIORS let out another cry.

Out of the dark, the TOTEM of their tribe shuffles out of the shadows, trance-like, into the torchlight. Dressed from head to foot in sealskin, the TOTEM scuffles and bounds about the shoreline, his animal skins swinging behind him.

There is no music, only the pounding of drums.

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Slowly, as if hypnotised by the TOTEM's movements, the YOUNG WARRIORS join the dance. Gradually, the torchlight fills with TWO HUNDRED GHOST BODIES, dancing along the shoreline in a single roar of noise.

MARCUS stops.

Walking seemingly across the surface of the sea towards him, comes a figure of nightmare beauty.

Wearing a cloak made from the feathers of sea-eagles, his face masked, his head crested with antlers, comes THE HORNED ONE. He is accompanied by ASSISTANTS bearing torches. The torchlight bounces off the water, making it seem as if the sea itself is burning.

Nearing the shore, THE HORNED ONE stops and raises his hands.

Like wheat under a scythe, the WHOLE TRIBE falls to its knees, face down.

MARCUS hits the ground but keeps his eyes on the THE HORNED ONE.

The drums halt.

A stunning silence, broken only the "hush" of the sea.

Moving his gaze from one side of the shore to the other, THE HORNED ONE takes them all in. Torchlight fires the tips of his antlers. Everything about him radiates God-spirit. He brings his hands down and the drums begin again, even louder than before. Manic thunder.

MARCUS feels the earth pounding under him. Eyes fixed on THE HORNED ONE, he sees...

Drawn slowly from beneath his feathered cloak, THE HORNED ONE holds up a great shaft.

Catching the moonlight - proud wings rising skyward - is the Eagle of the Ninth.

FLASHBACK TO:

158 EXT. FOREST - CALEDONIA - DAY.

158

The final angle on MARCUS'S FATHER, sprinting for his life through the forest. Right on his shoulder, we see - for the first time - the fear etched deep in his eyes. Mud spatters his cheeks, spittle flecks his lips. All around him, the thunder of the pursuing CELTS draws closer and closer and...

CUT TO:

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159 EXT. THE SHORELINE TO THE HOLY ISLAND - NIGHT. 159

MARCUS stares after THE HORNED ONE, disappearing across the water with the Eagle. Instinctively, he bursts after it, and...

He gets two paces towards the water's edge when FISTS smack him to the ground and he passes out.

160 EXT. THE SHORELINE TO THE HOLY ISLAND - NIGHT. 160

From high and wide, we look down on the beach. Embers of fires dot the shoreline, remnants of last night's party. The place resembles a battlefield, with the bodies of the YOUNG WARRIORS strewn across the beach or curled beside the embers. Everywhere, gourds of narcotic lie abandoned on the ground.

Gradually, as we look down on this scene, we become aware of a solitary FIGURE racing silently across the body-strewn beach. The FIGURE darts between the sleeping WARRIORS, making no sound.

161 EXT. THE SHORELINE TO THE HOLY ISLAND - NIGHT. 161

MARCUS lies flat out on the shore. Suddenly, ESCA is leaning over him, shaking him awake.

ESCA
(whispering)
Wake up...it's time.

MARCUS opens his eyes, still bleary from the crack to his head. ESCA splashes his face with water. He splutters awake.

ESCA (CONT'D)
Come. We have to go tonight. It's our only chance. While they're all asleep.

MARCUS stares at him.

MARCUS
I thought I'd lost you.

ESCA
(stares, beat)
Come. Let's go.

CUT TO:

162 EXT. CAUSEWAY TO THE HOLY ISLAND - NIGHT. 162

MARCUS and ESCA race across the causeway in the moonlight. Like birds in flight, they fly across the water's skin.

163 EXT. CAUSEWAY TO THE HOLY ISLAND/CAVE ENTRANCE - NIGHT. 163

Nearing the island, MARCUS and ESCA slow.

Facing them is a wall of jagged rocks. The black mass of it rears up above them, silhouetted against the stars. On the threshold, MARCUS holds up his hand. He listens.

Under the thick silence - almost imperceptible - comes the sound of exhalation, like a great beast breathing.

They step up to a sealskin curtain hanging across an opening in the cliff wall. The edges are decorated with heavy bronze discs.

ESCA pulls back the thick animal skin.

ESCA

Ready?

ESCA nods. Together, they slip inside.

164 INT. CAVE ENTRANCE - NIGHT. 164

The curtain falls back.

Total blackness.

Only the sound of their breathing, low, fast.

The sound of scrabbling, MARCUS sparks a flint over a fire-pot and wick. Nothing. Another spark. This time it catches.

Nursing the tiny flame, MARCUS raises it above his head.

In the lamplight, the passageway is revealed. What is immediately startling, is its absolute rawness. It is simply a fissure in the rock. As far as the light will travel, there is no clear path, only a meandering, pot-holed crevice leading sharply downward. No decoration. No sign of man.

MARCUS and ESCA step forward.

165 INT. PASSAGEWAY - NIGHT. 165

As MARCUS and ESCA walk further in, the passageway narrows to the point where they have to crawl on hands and knees. The sense of claustrophobia is intense. The tiny lamp swings wildly as they struggle across the uneven surface.

166 INT. CENTRAL CAVE - NIGHT. 166

Finally, the passageway opens out into a huge underground cave.

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Around the sides run cracks, rock-splits, tiny caverns and false passageways. It's like the chamber of a heart, fed by myriad veins.

MARCUS drops to a crouch and starts clambering down.

The floor of the cave is littered with the remains of huge birds, some with their feathers still intact. At the centre of the bodies lies a metal bowl, full to the brim with blood.

MARCUS stares at the carnage.

ESCA
Sea eagles.

They begin moving round the edge of the cave, searching the crevices. Nothing. Finally, they come to another anonymous cleft in the rock wall, and there it is.

MARCUS holds up the light.

Blotted dark against the stones, propped a little drunkenly, stands the staff and head of the Eagle of the Ninth.

MARCUS hands ESCA the light. He hesitates. Running his hands over the dented wood, he seeks the soldier's double grip, then pulls it clear of the wall.

ESCA (CONT'D)
Let's go.

MARCUS
Not the shaft. Only the Eagle.

ESCA
We can break the shaft when we're out of here.

MARCUS
No.

ESCA
Why?!

MARCUS
The Eagle will fly.
(beat)
I want them to know it.

MARCUS pulls out a dagger and begins levering out the first of four bronze pegs securing the talons to the wooden shaft.

Each one has become corroded into its hole. He digs out the first, then pockets the peg. The second, the same. The third won't budge. He tries levering again. His hand slips and he cuts himself. He blinks at the peg, forcing himself to concentrate over the pain.

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MARCUS (CONT'D)

Slowly...

At last, the third peg comes out. As he turns to the final peg, the light from the fire-pot suddenly flickers out in a breeze.

MARCUS (CONT'D)

(whispers)

What was that?!

Torchlight flickers towards them down the tunnel. MARCUS and ESCA freeze. The lights come nearer. They draw their swords.

Keeping his eyes on the approaching enemy, MARCUS whispers...

MARCUS (CONT'D)

Wherever your faith went, we need it now.

Two YOUNG WARRIORS appear across the cave, holding torches. Between them stands THE HORNED ONE, masked and robed.

Before they can raise their swords, ESCA leaps forward, killing the nearest YOUNG WARRIOR instantly. His torch smacks to the ground, still burning.

The second YOUNG WARRIOR steps in front of his master, who turns to run.

While ESCA and the YOUNG WARRIOR fight, MARCUS races to block off any escape route. He just manages to reach the tunnel and turn, as THE HORNED ONE draws a sword from inside his cloak and stabs wildly at him. MARCUS parries. They fight on.

Against an onslaught of blows, MARCUS is caught off balance and bangs sideways into the cave wall. A shock of pain roars up his leg. He forces himself up, only just avoiding another blow. All the time, he can see the emerald ring flashing against the hilt of his opponent's sword.

Again, THE HORNED ONE lunges forward. MARCUS spins aside.

Carried by his own momentum, his opponent bangs up against the far side of the cave wall, smashing into the rock. The mask clatters to the ground.

Silence.

MARCUS stares at the other man's back. The ring on his sword hand glitters.

A pause.

MARCUS (CONT'D)

Father...?

Slowly, the other man turns his face to reveal...

The CHIEFTAIN.

MARCUS feels anger and disappointment rising inside him like a torrent. With a cry, he stabs wildly into the folds of the feathered cloak. The CHIEFTAIN drops to his knees. MARCUS bends forward, breathing hard. He pushes the CHIEFTAIN up against the cave wall, grabs his ring-hand and presses the emerald up to his face.

MARCUS (CONT'D)
This is my father's ring. Where did
you get it?

The CHIEFTAIN lifts his head and spits a gob of blood at MARCUS. MARCUS smacks him across the face.

MARCUS (CONT'D)
WHAT HAPPENED TO MY FATHER?!!

The old man blinks indifferently.

CHIEFTAIN
(celtic)
How should I know? It was just another
dead Roman.

The CHIEFTAIN dies.

MARCUS hangs there a moment, everything colliding. Finally, he pulls off the ring. He turns to ESCA.

MARCUS
What did he say?

ESCA
Nothing.

MARCUS
He said something-

ESCA
Go. We have to go.
(beat)
Go!

MARCUS turns back, yanks the last peg out of it's socket and grabs the Eagle.

167 EXT. CAVE ENTRANCE - DAWN.

167

MARCUS and ESCA lurch out of the barrow, bloodied and dazed. In the distance, the first streak of dawn-light fringes the horizon. ESCA grimaces.

ESCA
We took too long.
(beat)
(MORE)

ESCA (CONT'D)
Can't risk the causeway. They may
be awake.

MARCUS
Where are the horses?

ESCA
Far side of the beach.

ESCA races into the sea. MARCUS slips the emerald ring on his
finger, then plunges after him.

168 EXT. SHORELINE - DAWN. 168

MARCUS and ESCA gallop along the mainland shore. Behind them,
the holy island gradually diminishes.

169 EXT. WESTERN ISLETS - DAWN. 169

Racing along the shoreline, MARCUS and ESCA suddenly pull up.

Running towards them, over the crest of a hill, comes the
YOUNG SEAL BOY.

MARCUS
What's he doing there?

ESCA
I don't know.

MARCUS
It could be a trap.

ESCA
No. Wait here.

ESCA rides up to meet the YOUNG SEAL BOY. He stops a few
paces off, staring up at ESCA with sweet, open-faced trust.

YOUNG SEAL BOY
(celtic)
I looked for you. You weren't in
your hut. Are you hunting?

ESCA
(beat, celtic)
Yes.

YOUNG SEAL BOY
(celtic)
Can I go with you?

ESCA
(celtic)
It's over now. Go home.

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YOUNG SEAL BOY

(celtic)

*I don't want to. I want to stay
with you.*

ESCA

(celtic)

*The hunting's finished. Go back to
your family.*

The YOUNG SEAL BOY blinks, hurt by ESCA's apparent coldness. ESCA hangs there, trying to gauge the moment on a knife edge.

ESCA (CONT'D)

(celtic)

Who else knows we're gone?

YOUNG SEAL BOY

(celtic)

No-one. They're all asleep.

ESCA pauses. Sensing something wrong, the YOUNG SEAL BOY throws a glance towards MARCUS.

YOUNG SEAL BOY (CONT'D)

(celtic)

Why are you afraid?

ESCA

(celtic)

*I'm not afraid...I'm sad because I
have to go away.*

YOUNG SEAL BOY

(celtic)

*You can't go without saying
goodbye. My father will be angry.*

ESCA

(celtic)

*You tell them when they wake. You tell
them, Esca's sorry but he has to go
now.*

(beat)

Not until they wake. You understand?

The YOUNG SEAL BOY hesitates, then nods. Seeing him pause, MARCUS rides up, voice low.

MARCUS

*We have to do something. We can't
risk him raising the alarm.*

ESCA

Don't even think it.

MARCUS

Remember the Eagle.

ESCA
You don't touch him.

MARCUS
Esca-

MARCUS puts a hand to his arm. ESCA snatches it away.

MARCUS (CONT'D)
Think what you like about me, but
you know I'm right. If he raises
the alarm, we're dead. Our only
chance of survival is if they don't
find the bodies until sunlight.

ESCA
Do you trust me?

MARCUS
He has no reason to protect us.

ESCA
(harder)
Do you trust me?

Silence. MARCUS stares at him. Eye to eye.

ESCA (CONT'D)
He won't betray us.

MARCUS and ESCA stare at each other. MARCUS kicks his
horse on.

ESCA looks back one last time. He raises his hand in salute,
but the YOUNG SEAL BOY only stares back.

Finally, ESCA turns his horse and...

CUT TO:

170	EXT. WESTERN HIGHLANDS - DAWN.	170
	MARCUS and ESCA ride like the wind.	
171	EXT. WESTERN HIGHLANDS - LOCH - DAY.	171
	Galloping around the edge of a loch, they sweep on.	
172	EXT. WESTERN HIGHLANDS - MOUNTAINS - DAY.	172
	MARCUS and ESCA reach the beginning of the mountain pass.	

173 EXT. WESTERN HIGHLANDS - MOUNTAINS - DAY. 173

The horses slip on the trail, now climbing steeply.

174 EXT. WESTERN HIGHLANDS - MOUNTAINS - EVENING. 174

Reaching the top of the pass, ESCA and MARCUS survey the sweep of forested land lying far ahead.

ESCA

Our best chance is to head for the forest, keep the coast to our right.

MARCUS

How many days to the wall?

ESCA

If we ride hard, four, maybe five.

MARCUS stares off. Silence.

ESCA (CONT'D)

Why didn't you tell me you were wounded?

MARCUS

It's just a fall.

ESCA

Let me look at it.

MARCUS

We should-

ESCA

The horses need to rest.

ESCA dismounts. Reluctantly, MARCUS climbs down. Even the slightest weight on his wounded leg is incredibly painful.

ESCA (CONT'D)

Here.

MARCUS lays himself on the ground. ESCA pulls back the folds of MARCUS's cloak to reveal a bloody cut running the length of his thigh. Immediately, he begins washing it with water, applying a salve.

ESCA (CONT'D)

When did this happen?

MARCUS

In the cave, coming out.

ESCA

Can you walk on it?

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MARCUS

No.

ESCA

(avoiding his eye)

As long as the horses hold out,
we'll be fine. With luck, we can
steal more.

He continues cleaning the wound. MARCUS watches him.

MARCUS

In the cave...the old man...what
did he say?

ESCA

Does it matter?

MARCUS

To me. Yes.

A pause.

ESCA

He said he wore the ring to honour the
man who died defending the Eagle.

MARCUS stares down at the side of ESCA's face. Even though,
in his heart, he knows this to be a lie, the deeper meaning
of the moment - the act of kindness - eclipses it.

MARCUS

Thank you.

ESCA carries on working.

175 EXT. MOORLAND - EVENING.

175

ESCA and MARCUS ride fast across open moorland. In the
distance lies a line of thick forest, stretching the length
of the horizon, like an inviting curtain.

Gradually, above the pounding of hooves, they hear it.

The faintest bray of hunting dogs, carried across the wind.

ESCA turns in his saddle. Head slanted, he listens.

ESCA

They're coming.

MARCUS

How far?

ESCA

Two passes back, at least. The wind
always lies.

MARCUS
How could they be so quick?

ESCA
(avoiding his eye)
They're half a day's march away. As long as we keep ahead...

MARCUS
The dogs can still track us.

ESCA
Even they can't run forever. Hya!!

ESCA kicks on his horse, flying forward. MARCUS reins round and gallops after him.

176 EXT. MOORLAND - EVENING. 176

Close-up on MARCUS, riding at full gallop. The sweep of the horse's head in the wind, the reins held high, the sky-skimming past - like a dark re-playing of the first glorious chariot ride.

177 EXT. EDGE OF THE FOREST - DUSK. 177

Bursting from light into dark, ESCA and MARCUS crash into the safety of the forest. MARCUS lets out a cry of relief. They gallop on.

178 EXT. FOREST - NIGHT. 178

Cantering through the dark, MARCUS and ESCA weave in and out of vision, between the moonlit trees.

179 EXT. FOREST - NIGHT. 179

Hours later, they are still riding.

MARCUS starts to fall asleep in the saddle. Slipping slightly, he jerks awake. ESCA rides alongside. He hands MARCUS some smoked meat.

Eating on the hoof, they ride on.

180 EXT. LEAF - DAWN. 180

Extreme close-up on a veined leaf, glistening with rainwater. MARCUS leans in and licks the moisture away. He's kneeling under the trees, like a supplicant, licking at the leaves.

181 EXT. FOREST - DAWN. 181

ESCA empties his sack of the last of their dried meat and throws half to MARCUS. They eat quickly, in silence.

ESCA
We'll rest here.

ESCA drops to the ground where he's standing. MARCUS simply curls on the ground. Both, instantly asleep.

182 EXT. FOREST - NIGHT. 182

Darkness. MARCUS wakes with a start. His hand snaps to the Eagle. ESCA is leaning over him, sword in hand. For a split-second, MARCUS thinks he's going to kill him. ESCA sees the fear and frowns.

ESCA
Time to go.

MARCUS pulls himself up. He winces involuntarily, his wounded leg is stiff from sleep. Without a word, ESCA helps him onto the horse.

183 EXT. HIGHLANDS - NIGHT/DAY/NIGHT. 183

A series of angles on MARCUS and ESCA's long ride south. At every point, the pace is brutal, the landscape unforgiving.

Faintly, in the distance - just like the low drumbeat at the opening - the braying of hounds drifts to the sound-surface.

CUT TO:

184 EXT. HIGHLANDS - DAWN. 184

A few days later.

A rustle of leaves. HANDS scuttle along the ground. Suddenly, ESCA'S FACE fills the screen, low to the ground. He freezes, then darts forward, both hands outstretched. A second later he sits back, holding a wood vole.

185 EXT. HIGHLANDS - DAY. 185

Hidden in a thicket of thorn trees, MARCUS and ESCA crouch over the skinned rodent, staring at the meagre flesh. Both look increasingly wrecked with hunger and exhaustion.

Without moving, MARCUS starts collecting bits of firewood.

ESCA
No fires. Too risky.

MARCUS
I'm not eating that.

ESCA
You don't have a choice.

MARCUS
I'm not a savage.

ESCA
Then die a Roman, I don't care!

ESCA snatches up the raw meat and bites into it. MARCUS stares, appalled, yet achingly hungry.

Furious, he turns away to sleep. He pulls the Eagle from its sack and clutches it to himself. ESCA stares contemptuously.

ESCA (CONT'D)
What are you afraid of? That I'll steal it?

Testing the weight of the Eagle in his hand, MARCUS draws out the question that lies behind his new nervousness.

MARCUS
Why did you come with me? You could have run at any time. What are you here for?

A long silence. ESCA stares into the trees.

ESCA
I wanted to come home.

MARCUS
And did you?

ESCA
No. Home is not a place. Home is here.

He touches his chest. Turning away, he refuses to pursue it.

186 EXT. HIGHLANDS - DAWN.

186

MARCUS and ESCA are nearing the end of another exhausting night's riding. Starved and sleep-deprived, they seem to be disintegrating slowly into the land around them.

ESCA
It'll be light soon. We'll look for a place to rest.

MARCUS
How many more days to the wall?

ESCA is about to answer, when suddenly, his head jerks up. He stares at the hills behind them. MARCUS turns to look.

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As he does so, the horizon begins to wriggle with the shapes of riders - dozens of them - heading straight towards us.

ESCA
(berating himself)
The wind's changed. No sound. Hya!!

MARCUS
Hya!!

Two cries and they're away, flying across the moorland - so sudden and undisguised that a flock of plover startle into an explosion of wings, scudding skyward in all directions.

187 EXT. THE HIGHLANDS - DAWN. 187

Tight on MARCUS's shoulder. The dark heather streaking backwards. The horse's mane spraying over his wrists. The spittle in his mouth. The backward glance. And the fear. Deep fear. Of being hunted.

188 EXT. RIVERBANK - DAWN. 188

Cresting another ridge, ESCA and MARCUS pull up. Below them, a river meanders through heavy copse. Half-hidden amid the trees, a stag drinks.

ESCA
Down to the stream.

Neck and neck, they hurtle down the hillside, sending the stag running.

189 EXT. RIVER - DAWN. 189

Flying through coppice, the horses crash into the river. It surges around them, pouring downstream.

Immediately, ESCA dismounts and begins dragging both horses towards the far bank. As he reaches the end, he yells above the roar of water.

ESCA
The sack!

MARCUS scrambles for his sack. He dismounts. Pain shoots up his leg. He grits his teeth.

ESCA beats at the horses backsides, yelling furiously at them. The terrified animals scramble up the bank and gallop away.

ESCA (CONT'D)
Take my arm!

Wincing against the pain, MARCUS hesitates.

ESCA (CONT'D)
TAKE MY ARM!!

Finally, furiously, MARCUS takes ESCA's arm.

Locked together, they stumble downstream.

190 EXT. RIVER - MORNING. 190

With the braying of the dogs growing louder all the time, MARCUS and ESCA continue wading downstream. ESCA searches the bankside for a hiding place. At last, he sees a rocky overhang covered in alder scrub and moss.

ESCA
In here.

They push in under the curtain of vegetation.

191 EXT. OVERHANG - MORNING. 191

MARCUS and ESCA cling to the edge of the bank, water swirling and bubbling against their clothes. The curtain of vegetation hangs loosely in front of them. MARCUS sniffs.

MARCUS
What's that smell?

ESCA
The stag. Confuses the dogs.
(beat)
Stay as low as you can.

MARCUS grips the Eagle inside its drenched sack-skin. Lowering himself down, he lets the water rise up to his mouth.

They wait.

Close on MARCUS and ESCA as the hunters descend. Second by second, a terrifying cacophony envelopes them. The sound of barking, then the thunder of hooves, then the first splash-crash of the dogs hitting the water. The sudden yelp as they pick up the stag scent. A few beats later comes the smash of the horses hitting the river, the yell of the hunters urging on the dogs, the sound of hooves crashing past, only feet away. Everything rising to a crescendo of sound, then...

Like a dissolving nightmare, men, hounds and horses fly downstream. The crescendo of yelps and cries fades away, until...

The only sound is the water, lap-lapping against their lips.

Cautiously, they ease themselves back onto the bank.
Drenched, shaken and exhausted, they catch their breath.

MARCUS

How long before they turn back?

ESCA

Depends how far our horses run. Once
they track them down, they'll be onto
us again. We'll follow the river
upstream as far as we can. With luck,
we may find some ponies.

Neither looks at the other.

ESCA slips back into the water. MARCUS eases himself down.
Tentatively, he puts weight on his wounded leg. Another shot
of pain slams into him. Immediately, ESCA steps up, one arm
around his waist.

192 EXT. THE RIVER - DAY. 192

ESCA and MARCUS wade slowly upstream.

193 EXT/INT. THE RIVER - DAY. 193

The river narrows and the current gets stronger. MARCUS slips
and crashes into the water. ESCA loses his grip.

Suddenly, MARCUS is under the water, his whole body streaming
backwards with the current.

ESCA thrashes madly after him.

MARCUS is drowning. He can feel himself giving into it.

Suddenly, ESCA grabs his arm and hauls him back to the
roaring surface. They stand there, drenched and shaking,
clinging onto each other.

194 EXT. THE RIVER - DAY. 194

Hours later. Rain pours.

The further they wade against the run of the river, the
weaker MARCUS becomes. He's breathing fast. Shallow gasps
against the constant pain. ESCA stops.

ESCA

Rest.

MARCUS

No.

ESCA
Rest!

MARCUS
No!

ESCA has to fight MARCUS out of the river. He half-draws, half-carries him up the bank and into a moorland clearing between the trees.

195 EXT. HIGHLANDS - MOORLAND CLEARING - DAY.

195

MARCUS pulls free. He's shaking with exhaustion and rage. The rain is now so fierce, it drums down in a constant roar. They have to shout to be heard.

MARCUS
It's no good!
(beat)
I can't go on without a horse!

He pulls the Eagle out of his sack.

MARCUS (CONT'D)
Take it! If you find horses come
back, if not keep south!

ESCA
I'm not leaving you here!

MARCUS
I order you!

Nothing. ESCA stares back.

MARCUS (CONT'D)
Do you hear me Esca! I order you!

MARCUS tries to hand him the Eagle. ESCA steps back, refusing to take it.

MARCUS (CONT'D)
Take it!

ESCA shakes his head, retreating from MARCUS's advance.

MARCUS (CONT'D)
Do not dishonour me!

ESCA
If I meant you to die, I could have
killed you myself!

MARCUS
Take it!!

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ESCA
I will not leave you!!

Furious, MARCUS strikes out with the Eagle and stumbles forward. He kneels there in the mud, rain pouring off his body, gripping the iron bird.

A long pause. The two of them, head to head under the storm. Everything, drawn down to this.

MARCUS
The dead are dead. The dead do not come back. I know that. In my heart, I've always known that. But if you could see this piece of metal as I see it. If it could speak to you as it speaks to me, you'd understand. To die for *this* is to die for something so much more than merely what we are.
(looks at Esca)
This is the best of us. This is what we dream of being. Can you not see that? Can you not grant me at least that much faith?

He stares up at ESCA. The Celt towers over him.

ESCA
Give me my freedom.
(beat)
All this time I've kept faith with you, and never once have you shown faith in me. You wish me to leave, then trust me to return.
(beat)
Give me my freedom!

Silence. The roar of the rain, drenching them both.

Finally, MARCUS slumps back. His shoulders drop and he lets it all go...his father, Esca, everything.

MARCUS
You're free.

Drained and exhausted, he holds out the Eagle.

But...ESCA shakes his head.

ESCA
I will return!

For a second their hands touch, then ESCA races away.

CUT TO:

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- 196 EXT. HIGHLANDS - FOREST - DAY. 196
With the grace of a deer in flight, ESCA runs through the forest.
- 197 EXT. HIGHLANDS - MOORLAND CLEARING - DAY. 197
Limping across the clearing, MARCUS makes for the shelter of the trees.
- 198 EXT. HIGHLANDS - FOREST - DAY. 198
ESCA pauses in his run. Checking the snapped tendrils of some alder scrub, he changes direction.
- 199 EXT. HIGHLANDS - MOORLAND CLEARING - DAY. 199
MARCUS searches among the trees, hunting for something.
- 200 EXT. HIGHLANDS - FOREST - DAY. 200
ESCA leaps, bird-like, over a rock-fall, arms spread wide. He truly is flying.
- 201 EXT. HIGHLANDS - FOREST - DAY. 201
Breaking off the base of a small coppice branch, MARCUS begins whittling it smooth with his dagger.
- 202 EXT. HIGHLANDS - FOREST - DAY. 202
ESCA slows. Again - with the same purpose as before - he checks the ground and changes direction.
- 203 EXT. HIGHLANDS - MOORLAND CLEARING - DAY. 203
Twisting dry grass, MARCUS makes a crude rope.
- 204 EXT. HIGHLANDS - FOREST - DAY. 204
ESCA approaches a hut, hidden in a clearing.
He passes some horses, grazing in a fenced enclosure. Instead of stealing them, he walks straight on towards the hut.
- 205 EXT. HIGHLANDS - MOORLAND CLEARING - DAY. 205
MARCUS finishes tying the Eagle to the top of the whittled branch. The task complete, he raises the handmade standard.

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The Eagle of the Ninth rises once more into the sky.

206 EXT. HIGHLANDS - HUT - DAY. 206

Out of the shadows of his hut doorway, steps GUERN.

Staring back at him across the clearing, breathing hard, stands a triumphant ESCA.

CUT TO:

207 EXT. HIGHLANDS - MOORLAND CLEARING - EVENING. 207

Hours later. Evening light slants down in low shadows.

MARCUS has fallen asleep over the Eagle. He wakes to the first faint bray of hounds.

208 EXT. HIGHLANDS - MOORLAND CLEARING - EVENING. 208

With the sound of the hounds growing gradually louder, MARCUS limps as fast as he can towards higher ground. In his hand, he carries the handmade standard.

209 EXT. HIGHLANDS - MOORLAND CLEARING - DAY. 209

Reaching the high ground, MARCUS draws his sword and turns to face his attackers. The pain in his leg is agony, but he bites it back, planting the standard firmly into the ground.

The CELT WARRIORS do not come at him in a rush. His stillness makes them wary. Instead, they emerge out of the darkness of the forest, in one terrifying line of dogs and horsebacked riders.

There are about a hundred in all. At their head rides the SEAL PRINCE, eyes fixed on MARCUS. Slowly, he raises his spear and his men close in.

MARCUS grips the standard, holding his courage.

Then, the most amazing sight.

Emerging through the trees, on either side of MARCUS, come thirty wild-haired, tattooed ghost-men, their Roman swords and shields held in perfect formation.

Led by GUERN, the THIRTY LEGIONARIES OF THE NINTH march into a two sided triangle, forming a wall of shields in front of the Eagle.

Stunned by the sight of Celtish Legionaries, the CELT WARRIORS halt.

ESCA rides up behind MARCUS, shepherding a spare horse, shields and swords. MARCUS stares in amazement at the LEGIONARIES gathered round him.

MARCUS

These men...

ESCA

Your father's Legionaries.

(beat)

You were wrong. The dead can live.

ESCA hands MARCUS a sword and shield, then prepares to fight.

GUERN approaches. He salutes, fist to his chest. MARCUS returns the salute. A pause.

GUERN

Before I ran, your father's last order was to form Testudo.

(beat)

In his name...

An electric silence.

GUERN (CONT'D)

The order, sir.

MARCUS

Prepare to form Testudo.

GUERN and the LEGIONARIES close in around him. A heartbeat of silence, then MARCUS lifts his shield, voice rising to the sky.

MARCUS (CONT'D)

Form Testudo!

Instantly, the LEGIONARIES bunch close and their shields shoot up. Again, the kiss and click of metal completes and the motley cohort is locked under the shield-wall.

Standing, side by side, MARCUS, GUERN and ESCA prepare to charge. The sound of thirty men, taking one breath.

MARCUS (CONT'D)

Steady, boys. Wait for them to advance.

Raising his feathered spear, the SEAL PRINCE shouts the command and ONE HUNDRED CELT WARRIORS roar up the hill.

MARCUS (CONT'D)

NOW!

Led by MARCUS, under the shadow of their Eagle, the LEGIONARIES OF THE NINTH charge forward.

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From high and wide, we look down, once more, on a fist of metal slamming into a line of Celts.

MARCUS (CONT'D)
BREAK TESTUDO!

The LEGIONARIES burst out of formation.

MARCUS (CONT'D)
OUT SWORDS!
(drawing his sword)
CAESAR! CAESAR!

LEGIONARIES
CAESAR! CAESAR!

Shoulder to shoulder, MARCUS, ESCA and GUERN slam into the on-coming CELT WARRIORS.

In the heat of battle, GUERN confronts the SEAL PRINCE. The SEAL PRINCE wrong-foots him and slices the back of his head open. ESCA spins round to see GUERN die. Roaring his revenge, he leaps forward. Celt to Celt, ESCA and the SEAL PRINCE fight. This time, ESCA is too good. In a sudden feint, he thrusts his sword in and up. The SEAL PRINCE collapses.

Seeing the SEAL PRINCE die, the LEGIONARIES battle on with preternatural courage to defend the standard they once abandoned. Even as they fall in its protection, their faces carry the mask of absolute certainty. This is what they were destined to do.

They may die, but they will not lose.

CUT TO:

210 EXT. HIGHLANDS - MOORLAND CLEARING - DAY. 210

MARCUS and ESCA stand, back to back, on top of the hill, exhausted, blood-spattered but victorious. Bodies are strewn everywhere. GUERN lies among the dead, along with scores of CELTS.

Around them - some on their knees from exhaustion - stand a few surviving LEGIONARIES.

Together, MARCUS and ESCA move among the men, embracing each one in turn, honouring them all.

CUT TO:

211 EXT. LOWLANDS - DAY. 211

From high and wide, we look down on MARCUS and ESCA, riding back across a great expanse of lowland hills.

In the distance, Hadrian's Wall appears, snaking across the countryside.

212 EXT. LOWLANDS - DAY.

212

MARCUS and ESCA ride across a high ridge. Far off in the distance, they catch their first glimpse of Hadrian's wall. The end of their journey.

MARCUS pulls up and dismounts. Crouching on the ground, he begins cutting out a large square of turf with his dagger. He lays the turf beside the hole, then pulls the Eagle out of its sack.

ESCA

What are you doing?

MARCUS

The Eagle doesn't belong to Rome,
it belongs to the men who died
defending it. Celt and Roman.

MARCUS lays the Eagle in the hole, then brings out his father's wooden replica. He rests it alongside - the original and its echo, like a parent and child.

He covers them with the square of turf, until it's impossible to tell the ground was ever disturbed.

Pulling out the jar from his bag, he murmurs a blessing, then sprinkles holy water over the resting place.

MARCUS (CONT'D)

Fathers, brothers, sons...peace and
honour follow you...let your souls
take flight and soar.

(beat)

With the Eagle of the Ninth.

The sound of a breath drawn out.

ESCA stands above his friend, both hands to his forehead. Slowly, he opens them out, palms upward, offering the spirits his blessing and the return of his faith.

As he exhales, his breath lifts into the sky, becoming its own music.

213 EXT. LOWLANDS - DAY.

213

MARCUS and ESCA ride side-by-side, heading south. There's a new lightness now, as if the weight of their story has finally lifted.

MARCUS

I forgot to give this back to you.

MARCUS holds out the dagger. ESCA takes it without comment.
They ride for a while in silence.

MARCUS (CONT'D)
Where will you go now?

ESCA
Go?

MARCUS
You're a free man. You could stay.

ESCA
I've nothing to keep me here.

A pause.

ESCA (CONT'D)
What about you?

MARCUS
I always wanted to go back to Rome.
Buy my father's house back. Not now.
(beat)
I'll need to settle things with my
uncle. After that, I might look for
some land of my own. A farm perhaps.

ESCA
(distastefully)
Farming?

MARCUS
What's wrong with that?

They begin riding away from us, their voices fading.

ESCA
Hunting maybe.

MARCUS
I can't hunt all my life.

ESCA
Horse breeding's an honourable
profession.

MARCUS
(laughs)
Horse breeding?! I never want to see
another horse as long as I live.

ESCA
There's good money in it.

MARCUS
What about Spain? A farm in Spain.

ESCA

A farm, with horses, in Spain.

They ride on, the huge sky above.

* * *