

"ARMINIUS"

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FADE from RED

In a wooded scene, a well-trod road opens up to a vast clearing. Inside, an enormous pillar is surrounded by a gilded fence.

TEXT: Germany, 772 AD. Charlemagne's first campaign against the Saxons.

A vast assembly of grim, armed men is marching along the road. Cavalry units are interspersed. As each unit passes, they turn and solemnly salute the pillar Arminsul and a small detachment, with staves and white cloaks, guarding each side of the fenced square. The guards quietly nod in return.

Waves upon waves of soldiers pass by.

The guards begin a solemn song - which breaks out into a chorus, in three parts, among the marching men. As the final troops round the bend, the dust hangs in the air. The guards stand firm.

Montage of battle scenes. Saxons are besieged in obvious defense of the pillar of Arminsul.

Same scene. Darker hour. Smoke rising on the horizon. Bloodied troops scramble to regroup with the original guard at Arminsul.

A cavalry unit with shining breastplates appears around the bend, in pursuit, accompanied by a royal standard, and two dignitaries.

The guards acknowledge the threat, and give concerned looks to one another, and then to Arminsul. Brightening, with a look of determination, they kneel, grip their staves, restart their song, and are cut down and trampled under foot of the horsemen.

One of the crushed survivors, choking blood, looks to his trampled companions, and struggles to continue the song alone.

He looks defiantly up at a horseman who reels around and charges at him with spear at the ready.

As the horseman bears down on him, the guard closes his eyes, and croaks out the refrain "ARMINIUS, ARMINIUS"

CHARLEMAGNE
 (Jumps forward, pointing to man singing)
 (*Frisian with English subtext*)
 Silence him!!!! Now!!

The horseman launches his spear, driving it home. The guard is silenced.

Charlemagne squints up at the pillar.

CHARLEMAGNE
 (*Frisian with English subtext*)
 I've waited years for this day.

With a grimace, Charlemagne motions troops with battle-axes to fell the pillar. Meanwhile, horsemen start lashing ropes to the higher reaches.

ALCUIN
 (*Old English with English subtext*)
 Charlemagne, why such wasted devotion on a false idol?

Interrupting his motioning to troops, Charlemagne replies with surprise at the assumption.

CHARLEMAGNE
 Alcuin, this isn't a religious relic. Perhaps you English have forgotten your Saxon roots. This is more dangerous than religion. This is the pillar of ARMINIUS.

With a puzzled look, Alcuin begins examining the fallen guards, the fence, and the shuddering pillar itself.

ALCUIN
ARMINIUS?!

CHARLEMAGNE
(frowns)
ARMINIUS is best forgotten.

TEXT: BASED ON A TRUE STORY

Amid splinters and groans, the mighty pillar falls in slow motion, crushing the last trampled guard.

A wail begins on the horizon - and echoes throughout the surrounding forest.

FADE TO RED

FADE TO BLACK

FADE FROM BLACK

EXT. NIGHT

Pan down slowly from a starry night sky - with a pause over a dazzling bright star just above the horizon.

TEXT: Germany.

TEXT: Centuries earlier.

TEXT: In the days of - Caesar Augustus.

Pan down slightly lower to reveal silhouette of a young man staring up at the star.

The silhouette of a young woman approaches.

THUSNELDA
(whispers)
ARMINIUS?

(no response)

THUSNELDA
ARMINIUS? What do you think it means?

ARMINIUS
(With a sense of awe.)
I'm not sure. According to my uncle, it heralds the coming of a new great leader. What does your father say?

THUSNELDA
(shrugs)
He claims it's the gods smiling upon Caesar Augustus, ushering in an era of peace and prosperity for Rome.

ARMINIUS
(smiles, shakes head)
Spoken like a true Roman priest.

THUSNELDA
(scowls)
He's not Roman.

ARMINIUS
Well, I'm sorry, but Rhanis says most of his teachings are based on Roman beliefs. What do you think it means?

THUSNELDA

I don't know either. But if this is a new era of peace, Rome wouldn't require you to march off to war.

ARMINIUS

This isn't a war. We're just auxiliaries and may never see combat. It's the price of our alliance with Rome. It's either that, or fight them again. That's what my father would have preferred. But that's not how the council voted.

Closeup of ARMINIUS' face, lighted only by the moon and starlight.

THUSNELDA watches ARMINIUS.

THUSNELDA

(edges closer and takes ARMINIUS' hand)
I don't want things to change.

ARMINIUS

(turns to face her)
Nothing will change between us.

THUSNELDA

(a tear forms on her cheek)
War changes everyone. Rome changes everything. I don't even like what I see in my own father.
(pause)
Do you think your brother has changed?

ARMINIUS

(embraces her)
He left for Rome so long ago that I hardly remember him.
(pause)

THUSNELDA

I wish I could go with you.

ARMINIUS closes his eyes, and shakes his head with a pained expression.

ARMINIUS

I'll be gone so long . . . I don't expect you to wait.

THUSNELDA

(smiles)

That's not for you to decide.
(holds him close)

=====

EXTERIOR - DAY - SPRING

A large auxiliary unit is advancing eastward on horseback.

ARMINIUS is at the front of the ranks, next to a large man with slightly graying hair.

ARMINIUS

Uncle Rhanis. What do you remember about my father?

RHANIS

His affection for your mother was deeper than the North Sea. I thought of him the day I was married. He always spoke of you and Flavus. He was tall, strong, fun, loving, brave. Not very likeable.

(winks)

You're a lot like him.

ARMINIUS

Was he a good soldier?

RHANIS

He was a better strategist and swordsman than any man I've known. But he hated war. He lost his life saving mine on our last campaign.

(glances at ARMINIUS)

So I have pledged my life for your safety.

(looks forward again)

That was back in the days when we were fighting *against* Rome, instead of *for* her.

(Rhanis glances up at the standard)

ARMINIUS

So it was shortly after that when FLAVUS was sent to Rome?

RHANIS

As part of the treaty, Rome demanded hostages. And at the council, our family's lot was drawn. FLAVUS was the oldest.

ARMINIUS

Tell me about FLAVUS.

RHANIS

Well, he's still a lot better looking than you!
(winks)

The roadway clears to reveal a heavily-guarded bridge, beyond which is a heavily-fortified Roman village.

ARMINIUS slows his horse, and quietly studies the guard posts, the lookouts, the bridge, and the fortifications. ARMINIUS raises an eyebrow to RHANIS.

RHANIS solemnly nods.

They pass together through the gates of the fortification, and are saluted by a guard who clearly recognizes RHANIS.

RHANIS

(signals the unit to a stop)

DISMOUNT!

(the young recruits, aching from the long ride, dismount)

GUARD

(grins at RHANIS)

RHANIS! I see you brought in a new crop. Seems like Rome will enlist anything these days.

RHANIS

(salutes and pauses, scrutinizing the guard
from head to toe)

Agreed. For a minute there, I thought Rome had
begun enlisting women.

(winks to ARMINIUS).

ARMINIUS and the troops behind break into guffaws.

GUARD

RHANIS, you've been on campaign WAY too long.

(puckers lips with a grin) But you're just in time
to watch FLAVUS show off again.

(Rolls his eyes, turns, and marches into
compound, motioning them to follow.)

They enter a clearing, surrounded by cheering troops, where Flavius,
now a handsome young man, squares off with an older, chubbier man.

FLAVUS shows off, acting bored while parrying thrusts. The
chubbier man starts huffing under the exertion.

FLAVUS

(sarcastically, loud enough for the crowd to
hear)

Oh Sergeant, you're good. I'm almost spent.

GUARD

FLAVUS! Your uncle and brother are here.

The opponent shows a look of exhausted relief, and lowers his
shield.

FLAVUS glares, winds up, and cold cocks the sergeant, who falls to
the ground. Once on the ground, FLAVUS hits him again.

The sergeant's face is covered with sweaty dirt. Blood flows down his stunned face, especially from his right eye socket.

FLAVUS

(sneers)

Let NOTHING distract you.

(turns to emphasize his point to the other recruits. Then fires a glare in RHANIS' direction.)

Not even family. Syria will be less forgiving than I have been.

SERGEANT

(glares at FLAVUS' back - between clenched, bloody teeth, and mutters under his breath)

If you weren't under the emperor's wing....

ARMINIUS steps forward, and extends a hand to help the sergeant up.

FLAVUS

I'm teaching a lesson here. If you help him, you'll have to deal with me.

(palms stave with a grin)

ARMINIUS smiles and helps the sergeant off the ground. ARMINIUS grins at RHANIS. With his back still to FLAVUS, he waits for FLAVUS to make his move, carefully watching the Sergeant's eyes for a clue.

As FLAVUS advances, and the Sergeant flinches, ARMINIUS whirls, in a low spin, and sweeps FLAVUS' feet out from under him, grabbing the staff as he falls. Swinging the staff in a sweeping arc straight for FLAVUS' head, he stops just before striking him square in the face.

ARMINIUS
(Cheerfully)
It's good to see you too, brother!
(He extends a hand to help him up)
When do we leave for Syria?

FADE TO WHITE

FADE FROM WHITE

Hot desert sun

TEXT - Twelve years later. A day's hard ride north of Jerusalem
RHANIS, FLAVUS, ARMINIUS and their men are watering at a river.

ARMINIUS is the last to reach the river.

CENTURION
(to another centurion - references ARMINIUS)
By going last, he doesn't teach his men who's in
charge.

RHANIS
(waiting his turn)
In our land, leaders take care of their people
first. It's our way.

They turn to take a closer look at ARMINIUS.

As ARMINIUS is watching his horse drink, the water gives way to:

Glimpses of battle

Shouting

Swords clashing

Fires burning

Roman soldiers dying

He sees a fast eagle-eye flyover of the way to a besieged Roman stronghold - in the direction they had just come.

ARMINIUS
(whispers)
The garrison!

ARMINIUS
(face tightening)
1st CENTURY! MOUNT UP! NOW!

VARUS
Prefect, stand down! We camp here tonight. Your orders are to guard our rear.

Ignoring VARUS, four columns of 20 men quickly form up behind ARMINIUS.

ARMINIUS
Governor. We are needed, immediately. Please trust me this time.

FLAVUS shakes his head in disgust and disbelief.

ARMINIUS salutes, and spurs his horse down the road, with four columns in tow, kicking up a cloud of dust.

VARUS
ARMINIUS!
(continues cussing in the background)

CENTURION

What a fool! He'll be whipped for desertion.

RHANIS

This isn't desertion. He has a gift.

CENTURION

(Chuckling)

...of running away?

RHANIS

(Frowning)

...of sensing others' needs. That's why he commands at so young an age. He'll return.

CENTURION

To be punished for desertion and insubordination.

RHANIS

We'll see.

(grins)

After all, his orders ARE to cover our rear.

(looks back in the direction ARMINIUS went)

VARUS

Insolent northerner!

VARUS

(Turning to RHANIS)

RHANIS!

RHANIS mounts, canters up to VARUS on horseback, and salutes.

VARUS

Track them down, and bring them back. Alive!

RHANIS
FLAVUS! Mount up!

FLAVUS signals his men to mount.

FLAVUS
That dreamer is going to get us all killed.

Within moments, RHANIS, FLAVUS, and four other columns dash off in hot pursuit.

FADE TO RED

FADE FROM RED

EXTERIOR - DAY - VILLAGE

Beleaguered Roman soldiers form a tortoise shell formation, and slowly retreat as they are being showered with rocks, spears, and arrows.

While the rebels are being kept at bay, an enraged mass of Jewish insurgents swarms the nearby armory, cuts down the few guards there, and emerges with shields, swords, and helmets. An enormous cheer erupts from the rebels.

The armed mob begins to close in on the Romans.

CENTURION
(urgently points to legionary standard)
Protect the standard!

Just then a trumpet blast sounds in the distance, and they all turn to see two trails of dust.

Rebel faces shift from hope to dismay.

Roman faces shift from terror to hope.

ARMINIUS and his troops pour through the city gate.

ARMINIUS and his men form up to face the rebels, and advance.

As rebels turn to face the thundering threat, the beleaguered Romans charge from behind with a roar.

One of the local centurions is dragged off his horse by three rebels. While he recovers his footing to face two more rebels, the third attacks from behind - only to be cut down by ARMINIUS, who has several rebels bearing down on him. ARMINIUS quickly spins to parry.

The saved centurion exhales, and with a flash of the sword, quickly dispatches the other two, remounts, and continues the advance.

The rebels are quickly routed.

ARMINIUS dismounts to greet the Roman centurion.

CENTURION
(salutes ARMINIUS)
To whom do we owe our thanks?

ARMINIUS
(in Old German)
The Germani, a mighty people from the north.

His men chuckle.

The CENTURION returns a puzzled look.

ARMINIUS
(smiles at the Roman centurion)
Thanks be to Augustus, Emperor of Rome!
(winks to his men).

FLAVUS, RHANIS, and their troops arrive.

ARMINIUS
(with an exhausted grin to FLAVUS and RHANIS)
What took you so long?

SCENE - NIGHTFALL - MILITARY CAMP

ARMINIUS is washing the blood off his equipment.

RHANIS and ARMINIUS are somber.

FLAVUS
How many did you kill?

RHANIS notices how pleased FLAVUS is.

RHANIS
(frowns)
You forget our ways.
(points)
That is other men's blood. This is not a time to
gloat. It's a time for reverence.

ARMINIUS quietly nods.

A messenger arrives, salutes, and hands a note to RHANIS.

RHANIS breaks the seal, reads the note, and his face lights up with wonder.

The messenger retreats into the background. The nephews await some response.

RHANIS
(with reverent pause)
I'm a father!

SCENE - NIGHT - INTERIOR - A HUMBLE BUT WELL-KEPT HOME ADJACENT TO THE MILITARY ENCAMPMENT.

An oil lamp is flickering on a rustic table. FLAVUS and ARMINIUS are sitting impatiently. FLAVUS is fidgeting.

RHANIS comes out of the bedroom doorway, and approaches FLAVUS and ARMINIUS with a humble grin. He waves them in.

A woman, RHANIS' wife SARAH, is lying on a bed, snuggling the infant. As the men enter, she looks up and gives them a warm but tired smile.

RHANIS
(in Aramaic)
Sarah, these are our nephews ARMINIUS and FLAVUS.

SARAH
(in broken Low Saxon)
I've heard much about you two.

RHANIS picks up the child and extends him first to FLAVUS.

FLAVUS
(waves off the child)
I'm afraid I'd drop him.

RHANIS offers the child to ARMINIUS, who is awestruck as he eagerly scoops the child into his arms.

A trumpet sounds, while ARMINIUS, Sarah, and RHANIS dote on the child. RHANIS raises an irritated eyebrow to acknowledge the call.

FLAVUS snaps at the sound, and fidgets by the doorway, obviously anxious to go.

FLAVUS
We better get going, or we'll be late for the ceremony.

FLAVUS walks out.

ARMINIUS
Have you chosen a name?

RHANIS
Sigimer. After your father.

Tears well up in ARMINIUS' eyes as he gazes on the child.

ARMINIUS
(turns to RHANIS)
How do you say 'thank you' in her tongue?

RHANIS
(in Aramaic)
Thank you.

ARMINIUS

(returns the child to Sarah, and leans to kiss
her gently on the cheek, and whispers in
Aramaic)

Thank you.

Tears well up in Sarah's eyes.

SCENE - EXTERIOR - NIGHT

Soldiers are casually arrayed in ranks before a raised dais. A reddish full moon fills part of the sky, and a bright star hovers on the horizon.

RHANIS winks at ARMINIUS. ARMINIUS gooses FLAVUS next to him. FLAVUS jumps and swats the hand away. Snickers ripple through the ranks as FLAVUS fumes.

Trumpet sounds, as VARUS enters with an entourage.

LEGATE

Troops! Attention!

Soldiers snap to attention. FLAVUS is still fuming.

LEGATE

(bowing)

I present VARUS, the august governor of Syria and
Palestine.

VARUS approaches the podium, with rod in hand. He nods to the legate.

LEGATE

And Herod Archelaus, ethnarch of Judea and Samaria.

ARCHELAUS takes a set next to VARUS.

FLAVUS

(nods towards ARCHELAUS, quietly to aide)
We attended school together in Rome.

LEGATE

(unrolls parchment and reads)
When your name is called, step forward.
Rufus!

The saved centurion steps forward.

VARUS

It is my privilege to bestow upon you the torque and
spear of valor.
(bows)

LEGATE

ARMINIUS!

ARMINIUS steps forward.

VARUS

It is my privilege to bestow upon you the civic
crown—the greatest honor bestowed upon a soldier of
the Empire for saving the life of a fellow citizen.

VARUS stops in front of ARMINIUS.

ARMINIUS

(looks VARUS in the eye as he is crowned)
Do you trust me now?
(smiles)

VARUS
I will trust you when you start obeying my orders.
(smiles)

ARMINIUS nods.

VARUS
(turning to other troops)
What say you who were spared?

Cheers erupt from those soldiers who were saved. The saved centurion clasps ARMINIUS' arm in gratitude.

LEGATE
Attention!

VARUS
(at dais)
Tonight is a time for celebration and honor. However, you are expected to retire at the normal hour. Tomorrow at sunrise, you will reassemble for a special assignment. RHANIS and RUFUS, follow me to my tent. Troops dismissed.

RHANIS and RUFUS give each other a curious look, and follow behind VARUS, ARCHELAUS, and their retinue.

SCENE - NIGHT - INTERIOR COMMAND TENT

ARCHELAUS takes a seat.

VARUS
RHANIS, you will select a detachment to escort the prisoners to Jerusalem.

RHANIS nods.

VARUS

Tomorrow morning, Rome will teach this rebellious province a lesson. At daybreak, you and your men will burn Sephoris to the ground. Kill any who resist, and gather up the rest. Your orders shall remain secret until then. Dismissed.

RHANIS

(brow furrowed)

Sir, may I speak freely.

VARUS

Certainly.

RHANIS

This will only incite more rebellion.

ARCHELAUS

(smiles)

Exactly.

VARUS

You have your orders. Dismissed.

SCENE - NIGHT - EXTERIOR COMMAND TENT

Red-blood moon.

RHANIS exits the tent solemnly.

RHANIS

(under his breath)

This is madness! Why are we doing this?

RUFUS

Isn't it obvious? More rebels mean more battles. More battles mean more victories, more slaves and more confiscations of land. We're about to make VARUS and ARCHELAUS rich men.

RHANIS shakes his head.

As RHANIS departs, his attention is diverted toward a group of Roman soldiers who are loudly engaged with wine and women. FLAVUS, among them, sees RHANIS, raises his drink in salute to ARCHELAUS, while a local wench kisses FLAVUS' neck.

RHANIS

(approaches, withdrawn and despondent)
Where's ARMINIUS?

FLAVUS

He went to visit Sarah and Sigimer. I couldn't get him to join us.

RHANIS hastens away.

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SCENE - NIGHT - HOME INTERIOR

ARMINIUS is holding the sleeping SIGIMER.

SARAH is watching and smiling.

RHANIS enters.

RHANIS

ARMINIUS, you and your men are to take the prisoners to Jerusalem.

ARMINIUS

When?

RHANIS

Within the hour.

ARMINIUS

You're not coming?

RHANIS

Not this time.

ARMINIUS

Why not?

RHANIS

I'm not at liberty to tell you.

ARMINIUS

Why all the mystery?

RHANIS

It's best that you not know. You'll thank me later. Trust me on this one.

(Reaches for SIGIMER)

SARAH

RHANIS, what's going on? I've never seen you so upset.

ARMINIUS hands SIGIMER to RHANIS.

ARMINIUS

Can't you send FLAVUS instead? I want to stay here.

RHANIS

(protectively holds SIGIMER, and shakes his head)

Sorry ARMINIUS, but those are your orders.

(nods to the door)

ARMINIUS is puzzled, but departs.

SARAH

(in Aramaic, with subtext)

You're too quiet. What's wrong.

RHANIS

I can't say. But I have to leave at sunrise.

SARAH nods.

RHANIS

I need you to promise to remain here all day.

SARAH

I will.

RHANIS takes her by the hand, and they kneel beside the bed.

RHANIS

I can't pray tonight. Will you?

With a concerned look, she nods. They bow their heads.

A reveille trumpet sounds.

SCENE - DAWN - EXTERIOR OF JERUSALEM - RED SKY

ARMINIUS is on a fortress parapet, looking down at the temple interior.

ROMAN GUARD
(looking to red sky)
Looks like a storm is coming.

CUT TO: HOME, INTERIOR

SARAH and SIGIMER are playing.

A young child approaches.

CUT TO:
ARMINIUS, pensive, observes the morning sacrificial service.

CUT TO:
YOUNG CHILD
Aunt SARAH. Momma is having the baby now. She said she needs you.

SARAH hesitates for a moment, gathers up SIGIMER and a bundle of white cloth, takes the child by the hand, and rushes off.

CUT TO: COURT OF THE PRIESTS - WATER CONDUIT POURS WATER INTO BRASS LAVER.

CUT TO: SARAH pouring water into pitcher with Sigimer.

PRIESTS
It is time.

TEMPLE PRESIDENT
 (to PRIEST 1)
 Go and see whether the time for sacrifice has come.

PRIEST 1
 The morning shineth already.

TEMPLE PRESIDENT
 Go and bring a lamb.

CUT TO: SARAH and SIGIMER hurry away from their home.

PRIEST 1 brings lamb and gives the lamb a drink from a golden cup.

PRIEST 2 unlocks and opens the great gate.

Three blasts from silver trumpets.

The lamb is facing west with head toward the south. Right foreleg tied to right hind leg. Left foreleg tied to left hind leg. PRIEST 1 draws forward the lamb's windpipe and gullet, quickly thrusts upward with knife. PRIEST 3 catches the blood in a golden bowl.

ARMINIUS stiffens, sees fast-motion, bird's eye view of Sephoris, Roman soldiers advancing.

PRIEST 3 sprinkles blood to NE corner, then SE corner of altar's base and pours remaining blood at the base of the altar.

TEMPLE PRESIDENT AND CHOIR
 (singing)
 Lord, How long shall the wicked triumph?

CUT TO: Roman soldiers breaking into homes.

TEMPLE PRESIDENT AND CHOIR

(singing)

They break in pieces thy people, O lord. They slay
the widow and the stranger, and murder the
fatherless.

CUT TO: VARUS on horse, casually overseeing the pillage of
Sephoris.

TEMPLE PRESIDENT AND CHOIR

(Singing)

The Lord knoweth the thoughts of man, that they are
vanity.

CUT TO: FLAVUS tearing child from mother's protective grasp.
Mother falls to ground screaming, weeping for her child.

TEMPLE PRESIDENT AND CHOIR

(Singing)

Who will rise up for me against the evildoers? Who
will stand up for me against the workers of
iniquity?

ARMINIUS straightens. As he hastens to leave, he turns and notices
a young lad in an alcove of the temple. Older men are gathered
around him, clearly astonished.

The lad turns his face to ARMINIUS. Their eyes lock. ARMINIUS
instinctively begins to salute, but stops himself, and bows his
head, puzzled at his own action. The young lad smiles. ARMINIUS
reluctantly tears himself away and mounts his horse.

CUT TO: ARMINIUS, desperately, frantically is riding like the
wind. Sky still red.

TEMPLE PRESIDENT AND CHOIR

(Singing)

They gather themselves together against the soul of
the righteous, and condemn the innocent blood.

CUT TO: SARAH fleeing with SIGIMER, being pursued by soldiers.
RHANIS sees her danger, and rallies his countrymen who futilely
defend SARAH and SIGIMER from the Roman onslaught. RHANIS and his
companions are overcome.

TEMPLE PRESIDENT

And he shall bring upon them their own iniquity, and
shall cut them off in their own wickedness; yea, the
Lord our God shall cut them off.

CUT TO: VARUS smiles in satisfaction, nods to guards and turns
horse back toward fortress.

SCENE - SEPHORIS (MID-MORNING)

Sephoris is in obvious disarray. Weeping is heard, smoke rises
from ruined buildings.

ARMINIUS rides into town. Upon entering, he is saluted by Roman
guards.

He salutes grimly.

In disbelief, ARMINIUS surveys the carnage. He dismounts, dropping
the reins.

First at a walk, then at a run, he enters a smoldering home.

Blood. Disarray.

He notices a larger spread of blood near an overturned table, kneels, and begins to weep.

He removes his Roman cape, and gently wraps a bundle to his bosom.

Roman soldiers come to the doorway.

ARMINIUS rises, with a child in his arms, to exit the building.

Soldiers again salute. Heartsick, ARMINIUS brushes by, ignoring them.

SCENE - SEPHORIS (MID-MORNING)

ARMINIUS grimly places the last few rocks on top of a small grave.

His unsheathed sword lies on the ground.

With dusty hands, he reaches for the sword, grits his teeth, and, with fire in his eyes, thrusts the sword deeply at the head of the grave.

A corner of his cape is visible beneath the stones.

SCENE - SEPHORIS (military stockade)

ARMINIUS enters stockade, and disarms. The guards salute. Once again, ARMINIUS brushes by.

RHANIS is unarmed, in chains. Bruised and bleeding. Eye swollen shut. Several other men are chained alongside him.

ARMINIUS and RHANIS embrace through the bars.

ARMINIUS
I buried him.

RHANIS collapses.

ARMINIUS
(whispers)
Where is Sarah?

RHANIS
VARUS wouldn't say.

ARMINIUS
(gritting teeth)
Then he will die.

ARMINIUS turns to leave.

RHANIS
(attempts to rise, but grimaces in pain)
Don't waste your life. You must survive this.

ARMINIUS
I can't stand by and do nothing.

RHANIS
This is a time for sacrifice. Live to save our people. Find a way. Keep them free. That's my final order. That's my dying wish.

Tears well in ARMINIUS' eyes. He nods once in affirmation, and retreats from the dark stockade, not turning back.

SCENE EXTERIOR - DUSK - Sephoris Military Encampment

Troops are assembled in formation on the parade ground before VARUS' dais.

ARMINIUS stands at the head of his formation.

RHANIS stands in chains to the left of the dais. Several of his men are in chains nearby.

VARUS approaches the dais and sits on his chair.

AIDE
(shouts)
Attention!

Troops comply.

FLAVUS approaches the dais, tablet in hand:

AIDE
(takes tablet, begins to read)
This morning, during the attack on Sephoris, Captain RHANIS and his men defied their sacred oath as Roman soldiers, and rebelled against their commander, their emperor, and Rome.

AIDE
By order of Publius VARUS Quintilius, Governor of Syria-Palestine, these traitors are condemned to die at the hands of those they betrayed.

AIDE

FLAVUS, are you and your soldiers ready?

FLAVUS nods.

AIDE

You know your orders!

As FLAVUS and aides step forward and surround the traitors, VARUS leans forward and whispers in the ear of the aide. The AIDE nods.

AIDE

ARMINIUS! You are hereby ordered to execute RHANIS.

RHANIS stiffens in defiance, and glares at VARUS.

VARUS leans forward and watches ARMINIUS intently.

ARMINIUS hesitates, tightens his jaw, and steps forward...refusing to look VARUS or his uncle in the eye.

RHANIS reaches to grab ARMINIUS by the shoulder.

Guards step forward quickly reaching for their hilts - ARMINIUS waves them off.

ARMINIUS

(whispers to RHANIS)

I can't do this. I won't.

RHANIS

(grabs ARMINIUS by each shoulder, chains

clinking, and smiling, whispers into his ear)

VARUS is testing you. Remember my order.

(bows head)

My pledge to your father is fulfilled.

(looks ARMINIUS straight in the eye and nods)
 There is nothing you can do to save me. Do this.
 For our people.

ARMINIUS swallows hard.

Drums beat in the background. Muffled thumps of men collapsing on each side.

ARMINIUS looks his uncle straight in the eye.

ARMINIUS
 Until we meet again.

RHANIS
 (smile tightens to a grimace of pain, and he
 slips downward, whispering)
 Good boy.

ARMINIUS
 (hesitates, pivots stiffly to face the dais,
 holds fist with bloody dagger to chest in
 salute, and looks at VARUS, emotionless)
 For Rome.

VARUS nods.

FLAVUS looks away.

=====

SCENE - EXTERIOR - NIGHT

ARMINIUS on horseback is blazing across the desert.

As the horse slows down, ARMINIUS spreads his arms backward, raises his eyes heaven-ward, and screams in anguish.

EXTERIOR - DUSK.

Text: Four weeks later. Northern Italy.

Troops march along a Roman road. A viaduct is in the background.

ARMINIUS and his century are on horse.

Figures dart between trees and rock walls.

FLAVUS looks from side to side. Tenses. Holds fist up in the air.
Troops come to a halt.

FLAVUS
(to his aide)
Trouble ahead. Form ranks.

AIDE
(turns to address men)
Century! Battle ready!!

Helmets are quickly donned. Men glance at one another and scan the landscape.

VARUS, further back in the column, notes the change of tone up ahead, and spurs his horse forward.

Flitting movements between the trees.

FLAVUS trots towards the movements, as the century swings into formation behind.

A barrage of material is launched from the treeline.

FLAVUS
Shields UP!!!

Vegetables, rocks, dirt clumps, and sticks hit shields, helmets, and the ground in front of them.

With a look of realization, ARMINIUS smiles.

Kids emerge at the edge of the trees, and taunt the soldiers.... Some are teenagers, others much younger.

The other men begin to laugh, break formation, and remove their helmets.

FLAVUS' face reddens in anger.

VARUS immediately appears on the scene.

VARUS
(to FLAVUS)
They're worth good money. You know what to do.

FLAVUS
(to aide)
Form ranks.

ARMINIUS
(to FLAVUS)
What's your cut in this?

FLAVUS
You have a problem, brother?

FLAVUS, not waiting for an answer, signals the troops to advance. Reluctantly, they and ARMINIUS follow.

Smiles vanishing, the children scream and scatter in all directions.

Troops scoop up children as they ride by.

ARMINIUS picks one up - face of innocence and purity.

The child initially struggles.

Tickling ensues.

ARMINIUS smiles.

The child tries to be tough, but eventually breaks into laughter.

ARMINIUS sets off with the child until he crests the rise.

FLAVUS watches them disappear over the horizon.

The child points to a farmhouse, and ARMINIUS reins the horse in that direction.

EXT - DUSK

Men assembling, setting up camp...building ramparts & setting up pickets. Slaves are gathered in the background. Some are crying.

ARMINIUS returns without the child, dismounts, and begins unpacking his horse.

FLAVUS approaches ARMINIUS.

FLAVUS
Where's your catch?

ARMINIUS raises an eyebrow and returns to unpacking his horse.

FLAVUS
Don't ignore me!

ARMINIUS turns to look at the slaves.

FLAVUS
(with irritation)
I saw you capture the boy. Where is he?

ARMINIUS
Where he belongs.

FLAVUS
He belongs here with the other rebels.

ARMINIUS
(glares)
He's with his family.
Tell me, why are we here?

FLAVUS
To crush these rebels and restore peace to this region. You know that.

ARMINIUS

Like the peace we brought to Sephoris?! Dead children and slavery?

FLAVUS

You've become soft, like RHANIS.

ARMINIUS

(whirls and coldcocks FLAVUS...who almost crumbles at the blow)

FLAVUS, staggers for a moment, then in a rage, draws his sword.

VARUS

(swaggers in)

Sheath your sword!

FLAVUS, red-faced in fury, slowly sheaths his sword, but glares at ARMINIUS.

VARUS

I expect more of you two. Save your anger for the rebels. See to the defenses.

FLAVUS glares at ARMINIUS, palming the hilt of his sword, as ARMINIUS and his men get to work.

INTERIOR - EVENING - VARUS' TENT

VARUS, FLAVUS, and other staff lean over a map of Europe.

MESSENGER

(enters)

Governor, you have a visitor.

VARUS

Who is it?

MESSENGER

The Germanic priest SEGESTES - he comes with news from the north.

VARUS

Perfect. Send him in right away.

Evening - Exterior - Outside VARUS' tent.

MESSENGER

(emerges from tent)

VARUS will see you now.

SEGESTES

(nods. Turns to the beautiful woman at his side)

THUSNELDA, I'll be back in a moment.

THUSNELDA smiles.

Evening - Interior - VARUS' tent.

SEGESTES is warmly embraced by VARUS.

VARUS

So we finally meet. Your timing is perfect. Formalities first, however.

VARUS

(turning to FLAVUS)

You may not recognize this young officer, but this is FLAVUS.

SEGESTES

(impressed, and motions with his hand)

You were only this tall the day you left for Rome. I see Rome has treated you well.

FLAVUS

Indeed.

SEGESTES

Is ARMINIUS here too?

Evening - Exterior - VARUS' tent

THUSNELDA overhears and reacts. She leans closer to listen.

INTERIOR - EVENING - VARUS' tent

VARUS

He and his men are on a scouting expedition. I expect them back by second watch.

SEGESTES

My daughter will want to see him. She refused to stay behind.

VARUS
Women have their way.

They all chuckle.

THUSNELDA reacts.

VARUS
What news from the north? Are your people ready?

SEGESTES
They march south as we speak, with Tiberius. We will
join forces here.

SEGESTES points out their path, his finger pointing to the
"Marcomanni" label on the map.

FLAVUS
How many?

SEGESTES
Of our people? Six thousand strong. Plus Tiberius'
legions. And the Marcomanni?

VARUS
We've bought off two of their leaders.
(points back to map)
Once we've swept the Marcomanni...
(he sweeps northward with hand on map)
...we'll be poised to advance through the region all
the way to the Elbe.

VARUS' hand pauses just beyond the "Germani" name.

FLAVUS
It's about time our people were civilized.

SEGESTES

(nods)

It's already quietly begun. But it won't be as easy as we had hoped.

Outside, THUSNELDA reacts.

FLAVUS

Why?

SEGESTES

Our legion thinks they are destroying the Marcomanni in exchange for their freedom. But after this victory, they and your German auxiliaries should be reassigned to a distant region so you can more easily complete the sweep north through Germania.

VARUS

(Walks to chest of silver, and fingering the money, smiles)

You both worry too much. FLAVUS and ARMINIUS have proven their loyalty to Rome. When the time comes, the troops will follow them. Until then, we reveal nothing about this.

EXTERIOR - NIGHT - VARUS' Tent

THUSNELDA begins pacing, angry.

ARMINIUS appears on horseback, clearly still in a foul mood, barking orders.

THUSNELDA watches - without moving.

ARMINIUS

(to a graying, overweight soldier)
What kind of Roman soldier are you!? Move it!!

ARMINIUS approaches VARUS' tent and senses something. Stops in his tracks, without looking in THUSNELDA's direction. Smiles. Promptly vanishes behind a tent.

Men grumble over having to build fortifications that they'll abandon in the morning anyways.

SOLDIER

(sees ARMINIUS vanish, frowns)
I liked him better before VARUS had him kill RHANIS.

THUSNELDA holds her hand to her mouth, stunned. A tear streams down her face.

A hand reaches out and drags her into the darkness.

VOICE

Beautiful women should not be alone in the dark.

THUSNELDA

(screams)
Roman pig!!

She whirls, and knees her attacker in the groin.

ARMINIUS crumbles to the ground, gasping for breath, trying to laugh.

VARUS, SEGESTES, and FLAVUS burst from the tent. THUSNELDA, dagger drawn, is poised for battle.

SEGESTES
(runs to her)
What happened?!

THUSNELDA
This oaf attacked me!

VARUS, FLAVUS, and aides approach with swords drawn.

ARMINIUS, still on the ground, rolls towards the light where he can be recognized, still gasping for breath, but laughing as best he can.

SEGESTES
(recognition melting into astonishment)
ARMINIUS!!?

ARMINIUS laughs, and starts to get up.

THUSNELDA
(whirls back to face him)
ARMINIUS!!
(gives him a push that sends him back to the ground.)

VARUS
(slaps FLAVUS on the shoulder)
FLAVUS, she's better at fighting him than you are.

FLAVUS scowls, but begins to appraise THUSNELDA with growing interest.

ARMINIUS continues to laugh.

THUSNELDA
(to SEGESTES)
I'm ready to go home.

SEGESTES
(slips sack of money into his cloak)
Our business is done here. We leave at dawn.
(puzzled) But I thought you came to see ARMINIUS?

THUSNELDA

(notices ARMINIUS' rump as he attempts to get up)

I've seen enough. (turns to aide) Please show me to my tent.

SEGESTES

I'll join you shortly.

ARMINIUS

THUSNELDA!! Can we please talk?!

THUSNELDA walks away, without looking back. ARMINIUS pulls himself up, and brushes himself off. He waddles to his horse, and with some fumbling, gingerly gets on with a wince, and with a mock salute to the other men, sets off at a slow, painful, canter in THUSNELDA's direction.

FLAVUS

What's the history there?

SEGESTES

They were talking of marriage when he left years ago. Apparently something's changed.

FLAVUS

Indeed.

(Looks at VARUS with eyebrow raised.)

VARUS nods, takes SEGESTES by the elbow, and they reenter the tent, motioning toward FLAVUS and THUSNELDA.

FLAVUS smiles.

INTERIOR - EVENING - ROMAN TENT - NEAR RAMPART & PICKETS

THUSNELDA is pacing inside the tent, arms crossed, fuming.

The tent corner nearest her suddenly collapses on her head.

In the dark outside, a sword slashes at a tent rope.

THUSNELDA becomes entangled by the collapsing canvas. She yells in rage.

As she tunnels her way to the collapsed entrance and emerges, a horseman gallops from and across the flattened rear of the tent, leans, scoops her up, dumps her on the horse in front of him, and gallops away. She struggles and yells furiously, as they gallop past the saluting sentries and out into the darkness.

EXTERIOR - EVENING, FOREST

The only light is from a partial moon, and its reflection off a small pond.

ARMINIUS' horse comes to a stop at a grove clearing. THUSNELDA still struggles to get free.

ARMINIUS lets go. In the process of getting away, she falls and lands in low bushes that quickly entangle her dress.

ARMINIUS cocks his head and dismounts slowly.

THUSNELDA

Swine!!

(She dislodges her hem from the branches, and rises to face him, hands clenched in fists.)

ARMINIUS

(approaches her slowly - she braces herself...but he simply scoops her into his arms)

I love you.

THUSNELDA struggles

ARMINIUS

I love you.

THUSNELDA's struggles melt into sobs

ARMINIUS
(gently)
What's wrong?!

THUSNELDA
You lied to me. You changed.
You became the enemy.

ARMINIUS releases THUSNELDA and steps back one pace.

THUSNELDA
You killed RHANIS.

ARMINIUS crumples on a nearby stump.

THUSNELDA
(hand to mouth in shock, tears welling in her
eyes)
It's true?!!
(She steps backward two steps, crying)

ARMINIUS
(shoulders slumped, eyes moistening)
A town was attacked. RHANIS rebelled and tried to
save his family.

THUSNELDA
And you killed him for that?!!!

ARMINIUS

(shakes head, spent)

I visited RHANIS that night in the stockade. He made me promise to protect our people and let him die.

THUSNELDA

So you didn't kill him?

ARMINIUS

(long pause, braces himself)

The next morning, VARUS ordered me to execute RHANIS to prove my loyalty to Rome. RHANIS ordered me to do it so I could live to keep my promise.

(hangs head)

I wish I had died that day.

(Begins to sob.)

ARMINIUS

Women and children were killed and enslaved. When I buried RHANIS' son, I vowed that I would not let this happen (lifts his face to her) to OUR children, to our people.

THUSNELDA slowly approaches ARMINIUS, embraces him, and they sob together.

THUSNELDA

You haven't changed. Forgive me for doubting you.

THUSNELDA takes his face in her hands, admires him for a moment, and kisses him tenderly.

THUSNELDA

If you're not going to let this happen to us, what do you plan to do after VARUS conquers the Marcomanni?

ARMINIUS

My term of service will be completed, and I'll come home to Germania as promised.

THUSNELDA

That's not what I meant. What will you do when VARUS attacks us?

ARMINIUS

What are you talking about? VARUS will be recalled to his governorship in Syria.

THUSNELDA

Then you haven't heard. Your campaign tomorrow is just the beginning. Just tonight, I heard VARUS tell my father and FLAVUS that the battle will be taken to our villages.

ARMINIUS

(takes a step back in shock, then nods)
I should have seen this coming.

(paces, then comes to a recognition)

I need you to take a message to the tribes.

Arminius draws his dagger, and rapidly begins to sketch things on the dirt. THUSNELDA crouches to see in the faint light, nodding. As the camera pulls away, their voices muffle, but their resolve is obvious.

MORNING - EXTERIOR - TROOPS ASSEMBLING TO MARCH

ARMINIUS sweeps THUSNELDA into his arms, and kisses her farewell.

VARUS sees their kiss, and slowly nods.

ARMINIUS' men hoot and whistle in reply.

THUSNELDA grins, and waves.

Trumpets signal assembly.

As they are assembling, and as VARUS rises to address the troops, a messenger arrives on horseback.

The messenger dismounts, and rushes a sealed message to VARUS' aide.

VARUS rapidly opens the message. Alarm registers on his face as he scans it. He pauses for a moment as the men begin to get restless in curiosity.

VARUS stamps the tablet with his signet, and hands the tablet back to his aide, who returns it to the messenger.

VARUS

Protectors of Rome! Our orders have changed. The Pannonians to our east have rebelled. Our campaign to the north is postponed for a season.

ARMINIUS and THUSNELDA exchange glances of relief.

VARUS

We march to teach the rebels a lesson.
(Signals to his aide)

AIDE
Form ranks!

They march off into the distance. ARMINIUS and THUSNELDA keep sight of each other until he crests the final rise.

Her father at her side, THUSNELDA sheds a tear.

He puts his arm around her. She stiffens.

Exterior - Day - Mountain stronghold

Roman legions march through a narrow gorge toward a mountain stronghold surrounded by a timbered wall. The narrow pass requires them to string out their formation thinly.

ARMINIUS approaches the gorge on horseback, and notices the ranks stretching out before him. He envisions smoke, fire, and Roman troops dying.

ARMINIUS
(Shakes his head. Under his breath:)
VARUS, you fool. We're stretched out too thinly.

ARMINIUS
(Scans the treeline above him nervously)
Your arrogance is going to get us killed.
(Signals to his detachment, prods his horse,
and steps off the trail to rapidly climb to the
plateau above.)

VARUS, toward the rear of the column, notices ARMINIUS' departure and nods.

At the end of the ravine ahead, troops reach the stronghold walls, and begin engaging the enemy. They exchange volleys of arrows.

VARUS and his retinue remain in the ravine, observing the action.

On the plateau above, ARMINIUS and his band begin clearing the woods of rebels.

Roman catapults groan as they unleash their stones - shattering the wall on the left corner. A tower collapses, and defenders retreat from the wall.

The Romans pause, and in the silence, ARMINIUS turns, with alarm. The Roman troops pour through the breach in the wall.

ARMINIUS

NO!

The Roman troops enter, and slowly approach the inner wall, meeting no resistance. There is an eerie silence. They look around, and begin to realize something is amiss.

ARMINIUS

(notices from his vantage point the torches setting fire to the perimeter wall and buildings)

It's a trap!

ARMINIUS turns back to alert VARUS, only to notice enemy forces charging towards VARUS. He signals to his men, and cascades down to the ravine floor.

Reaching the ravine floor, ARMINIUS hears a distant cry of alarm.

The Roman troops that stormed the fortification are trapped by fire. They are in disarray as missiles descend from the defenders within an inner wall.

Shaking his head in resolve, ARMINIUS draws his sword again, and signals his men. They dash toward the rear where FLAVUS and VARUS' guards are bracing for the enemy attack.

An eagle cries overhead.

ENEMY CAPTAIN

Volley!

Enemy archers raise drawn bows in unison, and unleash a torrent of arrows upon VARUS and his beleaguered camp.

FLAVUS

Protect the standard!

As Roman shields are raised to form a canopy, FLAVUS immediately falls with an arrow in his eye.

ARMINIUS sheaths his sword, grasps his spear, and, flying past VARUS and his defenders, braces for impact. He collides with the attackers, his men at his wing.

ARMINIUS urges his men as they break through the front ranks, and crash through to the archers.

Back in the fortification, the trapped Roman soldiers try to take cover behind burning buildings. Those who retreat are burned, those who advance are struck by missiles.

In desperation, a band of Romans gather bodies around them and throw them on top of the burning timbers (in twos - swinging them with arms and legs) forming a bridge of death across the flames and cinders....One soldier recognizes the man he is swinging, and quietly apologizes.

The rest of the army at the upper end of the ravine, are pressed together in disarray, and cannot advance through the flames to assist.

Back in the rear, as ARMINIUS begins to put the larger enemy to flight, he hears a trumpet, and looks upward to see the sides of the ravine bristling with enemy troops and archers - arrows knocked.

Trapped between the flames and the ravine, VARUS notices his peril.

Another trumpet sounds from the top of the ravine. Rebels stop fighting and withdraw, arms still at the ready.

The rebel leader Bato and his entourage descend, banners flapping, to the foot of the ravine. They stop, facing VARUS.

ARMINIUS and his men canter to rejoin VARUS.

FLAVUS groans in agony.

AIDE
(to VARUS)
Sir, they await you.

VARUS
I'm too valuable a hostage. Send ARMINIUS.

Ext - Day - Ravine Floor

ARMINIUS and two aides approach Bato and stops. They exchange salutes.

BATO

You were the one on the plateau.

ARMINIUS

Yes. Brilliant strategy.

BATO

(smiles and nods)

Thank you. Your name?

ARMINIUS

Arminius. And yours?

BATO

Bato. Why has VARUS sent you?

ARMINIUS

(puzzled)

You know him?

BATO

By reputation.

ARMINIUS

(stiffens)

Varus has sent me to negotiate a truce.

BATO

I will end the slaughter if Varus agrees to withdraw and let my people go.

ARMINIUS

And?

BATO

Nothing more.

ARMINIUS salutes and rides off with his men.

Exterior - Day - battlefield

ARMINIUS dismounts and salutes as he approaches VARUS

ARMINIUS

He extends honorable terms. The army will be spared if you promise to withdraw and leave his people free.

VARUS

Go tell that dog we'll agree to those conditions, only if he surrenders.

ARMINIUS

Sir, we're in no position to negotiate.

VARUS

If he won't agree, tell him there will be tremendous losses on both sides today, and regardless of who wins here, Rome will return later with a vengeance.

ARMINIUS salutes, remounts, and rides off stoically with his two aides.

=====

Exterior - Day - Valley Floor

ARMINIUS dismounts, salutes, and approaches Bato, while his two aides remain on horseback.

ARMINIUS

(hesitatingly)

Varus requires your surrender.

BATO

(raises eyebrow)

I knew he was a fool. But is he also blind?

(waves hand towards surrounded Romans)

ARMINIUS

I'm to persuade you to surrender, all the same.

BATO

Varus is in no position to dictate terms.

ARMINIUS

You may win this battle, but Rome will be back to crush you. You know that.

An alarm sounds from up above. One of BATO's scouts rapidly descends to the valley floor on horseback waving/pointing in VARUS' direction.

A vast column of Roman troops approaches from the distance behind VARUS.

Trumpets sound.

ARMINIUS

Tiberius is coming. Surrender now.

BATO

(Looks to his men, and shakes his head.)

We will surrender to Tiberius, but not to VARUS.
And only if my people are pardoned.

=====

Exterior - Night - Tribunal

Tiberius is seated on a dais, flanked by VARUS, as BATO is brought forward and kneels before the dais. ARMINIUS, FLAVUS, and aides are nearby.

AIDE

(steps forward and reads from a wax tablet)

BATO. You are hereby charged with rebellion and high treason against Rome, punishable by death.

BATO

(stretches forth his neck)

I speak only in defense of my people. I ask no mercy for myself, but please honor your pledge to spare them.

TIBERIUS

What defense do you proffer?

BATO

Your Excellency. We are your flocks. But instead of sending shepherds or dogs to watch over us, Rome sent wolves.

(looks to VARUS, and to FLAVUS - who is now sporting a large bandage over his eye).

TIBERIUS

You showed mercy by sparing VARUS's troops. Your mercy is hereby rewarded. Please stand.

TIBERIUS

BATO, your people are hereby pardoned. You, however, will return south and spend the rest of your days in Rome.

BATO glances to ARMINIUS.

ARMINIUS nods.

BATO is escorted away.

TIBERIUS

(turns to VARUS)

Honor is served. This conflict is over. Take up your new post in Germania. Dismissed.

ARMINIUS raises an eyebrow.

EXTERIOR - DAY

VARUS and his troops stand in formation, standards dipped in salute.

TIBERIUS and his troops march by.
ARMINIUS is standing nearby.

VARUS
(quietly to FLAVUS)
You grew up with ARCHELAUS, right?

FLAVUS
Yes.

VARUS
The Emperor banished ARCHELAUS to Gaul, and absorbed his territories.

FLAVUS
When? Why?

VARUS
He's on his way now. Apparently the Jews and the Samaritans complained to the Emperor.

ARMINIUS
Jews and Samaritans? They'd rather kill each other than agree on anything.

VARUS nods solemnly in agreement.

BATO is in the midst of the marching formation, in a horse drawn cart, in chains.

As BATO passes, BATO and ARMINIUS lock eyes.

BATO nods.

=====

INTERIOR - DAY - VARUS' TENT

VARUS is reclining and eating.

ARMINIUS enters and salutes.

ARMINIUS
You sent for me?

VARUS
(motions aide to extend Arminius a goblet of
wine)
There has been a slight change of plans.

ARMINIUS pauses just before drinking.

VARUS
We have unfinished business here in Pannonia. I
need you to serve as my bodyguard.

ARMINIUS
And my men?

VARUS
They have been reassigned.

FLAVUS enters, out of breath, and salutes.

FLAVUS
It has begun.

VARUS nods.

FLAVUS

(Moves to back out of the tent, but turns to
Arminius.)
Are you coming?

VARUS

I have asked Arminius to be my personal bodyguard.

FLAVUS

Then I have work to do.
(Salutes, and storms out).

Screams erupt in the distance.

ARMINIUS stiffens, glances down into his goblet, and begins to
"see" what is happening outside. Families are dragged out of their
homes. Men who resist are massacred.

VARUS

Tell me about your people.

ARMINIUS sees: infants slain.

ARMINIUS turns his back to VARUS, feigning interest in a tray of
food.

ARMINIUS

They are a proud people.

VARUS

(begins pacing)
Go on.

Horse noises. Muffled shouts and screams.

ARMINIUS pauses for moment before going on. Something clearly registers. He squares his shoulders and turns to face VARUS.

ARMINIUS

Their pride makes them weak. Their fierce independence makes them vulnerable. They can't keep their tempers in check. And they are too fickle to be united.

VARUS smiles and drinks.

VARUS

Go gather your things. Your new tent is the one next to mine.

=====

EXTERIOR - DAY - Edge of Village

Homes are burning. Men, women, children, and livestock are being gathered.

A wagon is loaded with people in chains. As FLAVUS trots by on horse, a female voice cries out from the wagon.

WOMAN

FLAVUS!

Annoyed, FLAVUS rides on.

WOMAN

FLAVUS! Save me.

The woman presses to the edge of the wagon. She is dirty, bruised, and beaten. It is Sarah.

FLAVUS
 (not noticing who the woman is, turns to Aide)
 Silence her.

The aide draws a sword and advances toward the wagon.

SARAH
 FLAVUS! It's Sarah! Help me.

Doubt in the aide's face. He pauses.

FLAVUS
 (Wheels his horse around, and approaches Sarah slowly. He waives the aide away.)

SARAH
 Is RHANIS here?

FLAVUS
 (Still angry. Brings horse to a halt. Hesitates. Looks around and notices other soldiers watching.)
 ARMINIUS executed him weeks ago.
 (A look of satisfaction crosses his face. A bandanna covers his wounded eye)

SARAH
 (Stunned. Recoils from his look.)
 Then let me see ARMINIUS.

FLAVUS
 (Notices soldiers watching.)
 You are the wife of a traitor.
 (Turns his back and rides away.)
 (To aide, as he passes)
 Crucify them.

Soldiers move toward the wagon.

=====

INTERIOR - NIGHT - BUILDING

ARMINIUS is looking at young SIGIMER playing on the floor with RHANIS and SARAH. As if on cue, they all turn and look at ARMINIUS. They smile.

ARMINIUS awakens, and smiles.

=====

EXTERIOR - MORNING - ASSEMBLY GROUND

The troops are marching northward in a column.

ARMINIUS is on horseback next to VARUS. FLAVUS is nearby. They pass a row of crucifixes.

ARMINIUS looks back to FLAVUS.

FLAVUS is looking up at the face of one of the victims.

ARMINIUS turns to follow FLAVUS' gaze, looks upwards, and recognizes SARAH.

In shock, ARMINIUS looks back to FLAVUS, who is already staring at him with a look of smug hatred.

ARMINIUS wheels his horse around to approach the cross.

ARMINIUS
 (to four soldiers in formation)
 Break ranks.
 (points to SARAH)
 Give her a decent burial.

ARMINIUS notices a look of peace on her face.

ARMINIUS wheels his horse and comes up alongside FLAVUS.

ARMINIUS
 For many, there is peace in death.
 I'm afraid you will not be so fortunate.

ARMINIUS gives FLAVUS a stare, then spurs his horse forward to come alongside VARUS.

=====

NIGHT - INTERIOR - UBII ALTAR

FLAVUS, ARMINIUS, SEGESTES, SIGMUND, and VARUS are in attendance.

SIGMUND, a young teenager, approaches ARMINIUS, and in awe, shakes his hand.

SIGMUND
 My sister wants you to meet her in the grove
 afterward.

ARMINIUS
 Thanks SIGMUND. I will. (winks)

A group of acolytes assembles before a candlelit altar. A bust of the emperor is in a place of honor near the altar.

FLAVUS and ARMINIUS approach and place their units' eagle standards near the altar.

SEGESTES approaches the altar, prostrates himself before the image of the emperor. SEGESTES covers his head.

The acolytes all prostrate themselves to the ground.

SEGESTES
 Oh divine ruler of earth. Holy Emperor of Rome.

ACOLYTES
Holy Emperor.

SEGESTES
Bestow thy grace upon these servants, who have come
to be ushered into the brotherhood of arms.

SEGESTES
Arm them with courage, strength, and honor, in
return for their oath of loyalty to thee, and to one
another.

SEGESTES removes hood and rises.

FLAVUS
Acolytes, arise and repeat after me.

FLAVUS
I will strictly obey the empire's commands.

ACOLYTES
I will strictly obey the empire's commands.

FLAVUS
I pledge my life for the honor and glory of Rome.

ACOLYTES
I pledge my life for the honor and glory of Rome.

FLAVUS
Face front.

Men turn to face front as VARUS approaches.

VARUS

What you are about to receive marks you to friend
and foe alike as a member of the mightiest force on
earth.

Aides step forward, including SIGMUND, and hand out belts to the
troops.

VARUS

(pointing to ARMINIUS and FLAVUS)

If you follow their lead, you will be a great credit
to Rome. FLAVUS, a few words please.

FLAVUS

Though born here in Germania, I had the great
fortune of being raised in Rome. As early as I can
remember, the might and majesty of the Empire have
been before my eyes. The glory of Rome should be
your waking thought, and your nightly dream.

(Salutes)

Strength and honor.

SOLDIERS

Strength and honor!

VARUS

FLAVUS, kneel.

FLAVUS kneels.

VARUS

By the power vested in me by Rome, I hereby appoint
you to be the new chieftain over this province.

VARUS places crown on FLAVUS' head. Murmurs ripple through part of
the audience. ARMINIUS is stunned.

VARUS

To celebrate this merging of Germania with Rome, I am pleased to announce that FLAVUS will wed THUSNELDA, the daughter of your high priest.

FLAVUS gives a look of satisfaction.

SIGMUND gives a startled look to ARMINIUS, as do several of the acolytes. ARMINIUS masks his surprise and anger.

VARUS

Now, the man who has loyally served as my bodyguard, and who is hereby appointed to train you in Roman warfare. Arminius.

ARMINIUS steps forward. Long, pause. Eyes the recruits.

ARMINIUS

Face ranks

Soldiers turn to face each other.

ARMINIUS

Repeat after me. I will never desert my comrades to save myself.

ACOLYTES

I will never desert my comrades to save myself.

ARMINIUS

I will never desert the battle line, except to recover a weapon, attack an enemy, or save a comrade.

ACOLYTES

I will never desert the battle line, except to
recover a weapon, attack an enemy, or save a
comrade.

ARMINIUS

Face front.

Soldiers turn to face ARMINIUS.

ARMINIUS

(Salutes stiffly)

Dismissed.

(He exits.)

=====

EXTERIOR - NIGHT

ARMINIUS is on horse, sprinting uphill towards the grove.

A wolf howls in the distance.

=====

EXTERIOR - DUSK - FOREST GROVE

THUSNELDA is pacing, with fire in her eyes.

ARMINIUS bursts through the grove, breathing heavily.

ARMINIUS

Is it true?!

THUSNELDA

I would die first!

ARMINIUS

They will die first. I swear it.

He extends a hand and pulls her up on the horse. They embrace
fiercely, and kiss.

They gallop through the forest for some time. On the distant perimeter of a large rock formation, seven warriors step from behind a tree, bearing weapons.

WARRIOR

Halt! Identify yourselves.

THUSNELDA

Thusnelda daughter of Segestes.

ARMINIUS

Arminius, son of Sigimer.

WARRIOR

Welcome. We've been awaiting you.

The warriors disappear behind the trees.

ARMINIUS and THUSNELDA dismount and approach the rock formation.

A robust debate is going on inside. ARMINIUS and THUSNELDA listen from outside.

The interior of the rock formation is packed with men and women. A fire is burning in a pit that runs lengthwise through much of the clearing.

DEBATER #1

But if we stand up against Rome, we will be crushed again.

DEBATER #2

Not if we stand together.

DEBATER #3

The tribes have never stood together. What makes you think we will now?

DEBATER #2
ARMINIUS is the key.

DEBATER #1
How can we trust him? He's been fighting for Rome
for years! He's one of them.

DEBATER #4
Thusnelda trusts him.

ARMINIUS kisses THUSNELDA's forehead.

DEBATER #1
According to FLAVUS, ARMINIUS killed his own uncle.

WARRIOR
(bristles at the comment)

ARMINIUS
(grimly to Thusnelda)
It's time.

ARMINIUS motions for THUSNELDA to go first, and follows her in.

=====

EXTERIOR - ROME - DUSK

A triumph procession is marching through Rome. Tiberius is at its
head, basking in the adulation. His soldiers are clearly enjoying
the praise.

A storm is gathering.

BATO leads the ranks of the "defeated" chieftains.

As the procession approaches the Coliseum, children in golden robes with wreaths in their hair, run through the procession whispering to the soldiers.

CHILD 1
(whispers in Latin)
Enjoy this moment.

Tiberius smiles.

CHILD 2
(whispers)
Glory is fleeting.

Tiberius is annoyed.

CHILD 3
(whispers)
This too shall pass.

BATO nods.

Tiberius pauses for a moment outside the coliseum for dramatic effect, bringing the entire procession to a halt. There is a statue of the emperor, with the word "CAESAR" distinctly over Tiberius' shoulder. As he opens his mouth to speak to the onlookers, a blinding flash shatters the silence with a crack of thunder.

As the audience and Tiberius gather their composure, a second blinding flash of lighting strikes the emperor's statue, followed by a deafening boom.

Recovering from the shock, Tiberius rides toward the statue, and notices that the word CAESIR is now missing the C, which the lightning has obliterated.

TIBERIUS

(Turns to the onlookers)

Our Gods, the AESAR, have hereby revealed that
Caesar Augustus is God. All hail Caesar.

The crowd responds with hesitant applause initially, which rapidly expands into bursts of approval.

The procession continues on past the statue.

BATO

(Examines the statue, looks up at the clouds,
and says quietly)

Either that, or the gods are angry.

One of the golden children overhears, and giggles.

=====

EXTERIOR - DUSK - EXTERNSTEINE

ARMINIUS and THUSNELDA enter the assembly.

Noticing their entry, the assembly becomes silent.

The people are assembled in groups around various tribal banners.

ARMINIUS scans the room, sees their banner, and points to it near the front of the assembly. He and THUSNELDA approach the grouping there, and exchange greetings. THUSNELDA's brother SIGMUND is among them.

Observing from a distance, others in the assembly seem respectful. Others appear doubtful and even hostile.

MARBODUUS

(stands and moves to front of assembly)

At your invitation, (nods to ARMINIUS' group) and as this year's leader of the assembly, I have convened this emergency assembly of the tribes. The issue before us is the future of our alliance with Rome.

The audience begins to buzz with anticipation.

MARBODUUS

(raises his hand to silence the assembly)
 As is customary, before bringing this issue to a
 vote, those who want to be heard may stand and
 address the assembly.

A chieftain from the middle of the clearing advances to the front
 with his banner. MARBODUUS steps out of the way.

LAMECH

I am Lamech, speaker for the Lombard tribe. We
 chose to fight the Romans four years ago. Many of
 our warriors were killed. We have no love for the
 Romans. And the taste of subjection...

(looks briefly to Marbodius)
 ...is bitter to us. But a rebellion will unleash a
 Roman storm that will sweep us all into the sea, or
 reduce us to slavery. We vote to retain the treaty.

As Lamech returns to be seated, some reach out to shake his hand,
 while nodding adamantly. Others begin to get angry. The assembly
 is abuzz.

Among ARMINIUS' group, the one holding their banner extends it to
 ARMINIUS with a nod. Grimly, he reaches for it, arises, and
 approaches the front of the assembly.

ARMINIUS

I am ARMINIUS, son of SIGIMER. When I was a child,
 playing among these rocks, my father gave his life
 defending us from Rome. As a young man, I left my
 village to serve Rome on behalf of my tribe.

Let me describe the Rome I know, the Rome that many
 of your sons and brothers have witnessed. Rome
 divides families. Burns homes. Enslaves wives and
 children. Kills infants

(pause)
 and crucifies the innocent. Breaks promises.
 Violates treaties. When allowed, Rome steals the
 soul.

I am the nephew of RHANIS...who died at my hand.

Rumblings stir through the assembly.

ARMINIUS

(raises hand)

VARUS ordered the destruction and enslavement of the village where RHANIS' family lived. RHANIS rebelled and killed fellow Roman soldiers, trying to protect his family. I later returned to bury RHANIS' son. During the enslavement of the Pannonians, I found RHANIS' wife dead on a cross.

Audience recoils.

ARMINIUS

RHANIS was willing to sacrifice his life for his family.

MARBODUUS

And then you killed him?!

Murmurs buzz through the assembly.

ARMINIUS

(raises hand)

VARUS ordered me to execute my own uncle.

MARBODUUS

That is not our way!

ARMINIUS

True. But that is Rome's way of testing men's loyalty. My loyalty was to RHANIS, and I preferred to die alongside him. I loved him as my own father. But RHANIS ordered me to live, and made me pledge my life to our people. He offered his life for mine, and commanded me to take it. The memory of that moment has been my daily torment and my nightly anguish. This is what Rome will require of you.

A tear rolls down THUSNELDA's cheek. The assembly is silent.

ARMINIUS

It is time for the tribes of Germania to unite and leave the Empire.

Gasps ripple through the audience.

LAMECH

Leave? Where would we go?

ARMINIUS

We stay. The Romans leave.

Lamech is intrigued, but cautious.

MARBODUUS

Rome hasn't harmed us. This is dangerous talk.

DEBATER #3

I agree with MARBODUUS. Defying Rome is suicide.

THUSNELDA

(arises and points passionately)

MARBODUUS, it is **your** false sense of security that is dangerous. It is no secret to this assembly that VARUS and TIBERIUS recently assembled troops to invade your territory. But you were spared by the diversion of Bato's rebellion in Pannonia. You know this. Maintaining your alliance with Rome just allows them to bide their time, and crush you at their convenience. Rome cannot be trusted.

Arminius nods. Others nod in agreement.

DEBATER #3

I still say it is safer for us to be Rome's allies than her enemies. Too many of our people were killed in the previous wars.

ARMINIUS

(nods)

Too many of us have died fighting distant wars for Rome.

Many warriors and women voice their agreement.

ARMINIUS

(motioning to those who disagree)

I once thought as you do. But for many years, I have witnessed how Rome treats its allies. In Syria, Roman subjects were nudged into rebellion in order to justify their enslavement and the confiscation of their lands.

In Pannonia, VARUS promised to spare BATO's people if they agreed to surrender. But VARUS enslaved them anyway. This is how Rome treats its allies.

In order to get rich, Rome will sell you and your children into slavery. Instead of allowing us to preserve our own laws and appoint our own leaders, VARUS will impose Rome's laws, and force us to bow to officials whose loyalties are to Rome and their own greed.

DEBATER #4

That would violate their treaty with us.

ARMINIUS

Just today, VARUS appointed FLAVUS head chieftain over all of Germania. Our vote wasn't even requested.

The tribes explode with anger. Even Marbodius bristles.

ARMINIUS

Years ago, the Emperor ordered VARUS to divorce the wife he loved, and marry another, and he did.

(walks to Thusnelda, takes her by the hand, and returns to the front of the assembly)

Would you?

VARUS knew Thusnelda and I were engaged. But today, he announced, without our consent,

(turns to Thusnelda)

that Thusnelda will marry FLAVUS instead.

Murmurs rumble through the assembly. Some begin stomping their feet in agreement. The assembly becomes unruly.

ARMINIUS

Providence has brought each of us to this moment. We can reclaim our freedoms. Rome can be defeated. I have seen how. We owe this to our descendants. To this I pledge my life.

ARMINIUS

(raises hand and waits)

Stand idly by, and Rome will undermine our freedoms, steal our happiness (squeezes Thusnelda's hand), and destroy our souls. There will be a rebellion. Let us choose when. This is our time. This is our day. What say you?

The assembly erupts.

=====

INTERIOR - UBII ALTAR - EVENING

ARMINIUS approaches the Ubii complex.

Soldiers whisper and nod as ARMINIUS walks by.

SIGMUND is setting up for the evening's ceremony.

THUSNELDA and SEGESTES are arguing.

ARMINIUS slows as he hears talking.

THUSNELDA

How dare you make that arrangement without my approval! I won't go through with it!

SEGESTES

It's for the good of our people. THUSNELDA, this is a new era. Our people must change with the times. I am their priest. My family must set the example. We have no choice.

THUSNELDA

No choice?! Choice, freedom, is everything to our people. That will never change. You know I love ARMINIUS. We are engaged. I will die before I marry FLAVUS.

ARMINIUS draws sword noisily and enters the forum. Lays sword on the altar.

ARMINIUS

SEGESTES, if you do not help VARUS revoke his announcement, I swear on this altar to protect our right to choose. Not just for me and THUSNELDA, but for our entire people.

SEGESTES

How dare you. You desecrate this altar by your insolence. VARUS will hear of this. You are forbidden to have any further contact with THUSNELDA.

ARMINIUS

(Shakes his head.)

You have turned your back on your people. You are no longer one of us. You leave me no choice.

SEGESTES eyes the sword nervously.

ARMINIUS embraces THUSNELDA fiercely. He grabs his sword from the altar, and walks out with it, unsheathed.

=====

EXTERIOR - MORNING - TRAINING GROUNDS

A column of troops in Roman gear is marching warily through a narrow pass.

On the top of a hill, ARMINIUS is in full battle armor, mounted on his horse. Several aides flank him on either side.

Swarms of Germanic barbarians emerge from the tree line, surround the column, and they collide with a roar.

ARMINIUS nods, and smiles.

One of ARMINIUS' aides blows a trumpet. The action below immediately freezes, as the men lower their arms and turn toward ARMINIUS.

A flag is waved from the hilltop.

The troops turn and assemble around the hill.

ARMINIUS
(raises hand to quiet the men)
Well done. An army is most vulnerable on the march.

The men in Roman armor remove their helmets, revealing full beards and long hair.

ARMINIUS
(points sword towards those in Roman gear)
And you're the ugliest Romans I've ever seen!

A roar emerges from the men. Swords clang against shields.

ARMINIUS grins.

=====

INTERIOR - EVENING - FEAST

VARUS is seated at a long table on a dais next to FLAVUS.

THUSNELDA is seated on FLAVUS' other side. SEGESTES is seated on her other side, along with SIGMUND.

The hall has several other tables, full of local dignitaries and officers.

Raucous music, slave dancers, loud laughter.

ARMINIUS gets up, steps down from the dais, and mingles with his men.

VARUS stands, a flagon in his hand.

VARUS

A toast to the betrothed couple. May their union symbolize lasting friendship between Rome and Germania.

Pregnant pause.

ARMINIUS

(stands, looks directly at SEGESTES)
Hear hear! To FLAVUS and THUSNELDA!

Applause erupts.

SEGESTES silently observes ARMINIUS & THUSNELDA. The pair seems almost glib, yet exchanges knowing glances. A look of concern gathers on SEGESTES' face.

VARUS
(under his breath)
I hate this province.

THUSNELDA hears him.

THUSNELDA
(to VARUS)
Would you like to hear a story about this province?

VARUS nods, surprised that he was overhead.

THUSNELDA pauses, pushes away from the table, stands, and reaches for a miniature statue of Victory, a centerpiece. She holds the statue up high.

The crowd quiets to listen.

THUSNELDA
Not far from here, on the west bank of the Rhine,
stands a statue, the lady Victory. She guards the
burial place of your General Drusus.
(Turns to her father)
Some say she is a Roman statue.
(Turns her back to VARUS)
We believe otherwise.

THUSNELDA
Almost twenty years ago, Drusus led his legions into
Germania...

(CUT to: Columns are marching through the region, smoke rising everywhere. Screams.)

THUSNELDA

...raping and pillaging and enslaving our people.
No tribe was spared.

THUSNELDA

As he advanced into the heart of this province, Lady
Victory rose from the marshes...

CUT TO: Image of a superhuman figure arising from the hazy marshes

THUSNELDA

...and thundered, "Where are you going in such
haste, Drusus? It is not in your destiny to conquer
these lands. The end of your labors and your life
is at hand."

THUSNELDA

Drusus fled in terror with his legions, but he could
not outrun his destiny. Drusus died that very day.

THUSNELDA

It is our destiny to be free. And powers greater
than any legion control that destiny.

SEGESTES

Hold your tongue.

In response, ARMINIUS reveals a flash of anger, which SEGESTES
notices.

VARUS

(waving off SEGESTES, who is still assessing
ARMINIUS)

And the statue of Victory?

THUSNELDA

Rome says the statue at the Rhine beckons Rome to
advance. We believe she stands as a sentinel over
our province and our way of life. That she stands
as a warning.

FLAVUS

A quaint belief.

SEGESTES

A dangerous one.

SEGESTES

(stands and speaks over the room)

And what do you believe ARMINIUS?

A hush settles over the room.

ARMINIUS

Although I am a Roman, I am also a Germani.
So I am not one to openly disagree with a strong-
willed Germani woman.

(Laughter erupts. ARMINIUS raises his flagon
with a grin, and salutes her.)

ARMINIUS starts to walk away, amid the laughter.

SEGESTES

(approaches VARUS, and whispers)

ARMINIUS is conspiring against you. I urge you to arrest him immediately.

THUSNELDA overhears.

VARUS

(pulls Segests off to the side)

Come now. What are you talking about? These are serious charges against a Roman citizen who has proven his loyalty.

SEGESTES

I know my daughter. I know this people. I see what's happening.

VARUS

Which is?

A messenger bursts into the hall with a message for VARUS.

VARUS reads the message quickly.

VARUS

(Looks up at SEGESTES with concern)

Part of the province has rebelled.

SEGESTES

This is ARMINIUS' doing. Arrest us all, and sort this out later.

VARUS

(long pause)

You Germans vex me.

(Shakes his head)

I have no reason to distrust ARMINIUS.

(Looks down at message).

And I need him now more than ever.

SIGMUND and THUSNELDA have overheard.

VARUS pushes away from the table and arises.

VARUS
(to ARMINIUS)
Prepare your men! We march tomorrow.

THUSNELDA quietly smiles.

EXTERIOR - EVENING - FULL MOON

Men are in trees, on lookout.

A guarded perimeter, in a grove.

Horses are tied to trees.

A priest stands in front of a makeshift altar.

THUSNELDA and ARMINIUS, hands clasped, are kneeling, facing each other.

They kiss.

EXTERIOR - DUSK

A Roman column is marching, but on a muddy, soggy trail. Men are sloshing and slipping.

ARMINIUS emerges from the treeline on horseback, a cavalry contingent behind him. The contingent comes to a halt, while ARMINIUS approaches VARUS. ARMINIUS and VARUS exchange salutes.

ARMINIUS
(motioning towards the front of the columns)

There's no improvement up ahead. The way narrows between a steep hillside and a swamp. It's an ideal spot for an ambush.

Men look warily from side to side, into the marshes and trees.

VARUS

(pointing ahead)

How long is that stretch?

ARMINIUS

It continues that way for about two miles.

VARUS

Any sign of trouble?

ARMINIUS

No. But that could change quickly. I suggest we either push through rapidly, or set up camp here for the night. The men are obviously getting tired.

VARUS

(beat, shakes head)

Let's push through and camp on the other side. Take your men and scout ahead.

ARMINIUS nods, and disappears with his men into the trees.

=====

EXTERIOR - DUSK

Front of Roman column arrives at choke point, requiring them to bunch up and stretch out. Several on the left edge of the trail slip repeatedly in the mud. The men look warily from left to right. A camouflaged turf wall borders the right side of the

trail. The troops occasionally hear noises - both beyond the turf wall, and in the marsh itself.

=====

EXTERIOR - DUSK

ARMINIUS and his men clear a steep hill, and enter a clearing where a campfire is being guarded. ARMINIUS nods, and one of his men lights an arrow, and launches it away from the setting sun.

After a brief pause, multiple arrows radiate out across the countryside.

ARMINIUS nods in approval.

ARMINIUS puts his shield to his mouth, and begins a low rumbling.

His men follow suit. The sound begins to resonate from all directions

=====

EXTERIOR - DUSK

The rumbling, roaring sound resonates everywhere.

VARUS' aide
(to VARUS)
The baritus! The barbarian battle cry. We're surrounded!

The men are in a state of panic.

Flaming arrows ignite the trees. Beginning at the front of the column, and at various points throughout, enormous trees come crashing down from the hillside, crushing men and wagons, cutting off their path. As the column comes to a confused halt, a hailstorm of spears and arrows is launched from the hillside.

The baritus reaches a crescendo as barbarians emerge from the treeline. ARMINIUS and his troops are at the front, bearing

torches. The baritus comes to an abrupt halt, as does the hail of weapons.

ARMINIUS

(lit by the torchlight around him)

Where are you going in such haste, VARUS? It is not in your destiny to conquer this province.

VARUS

(in shock, steps forward several paces, flanked by several men, including SIGMUND)

SEGESTES was right. I trusted you. Rome trusted you.

(angry)

How dare you betray me.

Roman troops rapidly attempt to form defensive ranks.

Centurions bark orders.

ARMINIUS

I have betrayed nothing. You released me as your bodyguard. I have fulfilled my duty. I now offer you a choice. A choice *you* can trust. You may surrender your weapons and covenant to leave our lands and never return. Or you will die. Choose now.

VARUS

(offended and arrogant)

Do you actually think you can defeat Rome?

ARMINIUS

We would all rather die than surrender our freedom. If Rome does not let us be, the day may come when we march on her. But today, your choice is to surrender, or die. Which is it?

VARUS

I will see you in hell first.

ARMINIUS

Then the end of your labors and your life is at hand.

ARMINIUS grimly turns to rejoin his battle line. He raises his shield to his mouth, and reinitiates the baritus.

As the baritus rises to a crescendo, the Roman legions brace themselves for the onslaught. The forest erupts with men.

Wedge formations of barbarians crash into sections of the columns, and splinter the Roman columns in several places.

Romans attempt to flee into the marshes. Men rise up out of the marshes and cut them down.

The Romans, who back up to the earthen wall for protection, are cut down by men who rise up from behind the wall.

ARMINIUS, at the head of a cavalry contingent, crashes through the initial Roman lines. A Roman archer near VARUS draws the string taut and readies his aim at ARMINIUS. SIGMUND, seeing ARMINIUS in danger, throws off his priest's robe, grabs a spear from a dead Roman nearby and heaves it through the archer, pinning him to the man behind him. VARUS turns in shock, and slips behind defenders.

ARMINIUS, realizing SIGMUND has chosen a side, laughs with joy, and cuts through the lines to help form a perimeter alongside SIGMUND.

After each Germanic wave penetrates the Roman lines, the Germanic forces vanish into the treeline, and a volley of spears and arrows launches from the treeline.

The baritus begins to rise again, and reaches a crescendo. As the forest erupts with the next barbarian wave, the missiles stop. Wave after wave obliterates the Roman lines.

More Romans attempt to flee into the marshes. Men rise up out of the marshes and cut them down.

AIDE

VARUS, we're doomed.

VARUS

I must die with honor.

(Extends his sword to aide).

Do it swiftly.

AIDE

(in disgust - as the baritus rises again)

Your arrogance killed us all. You don't deserve the honor.

(turns away)

VARUS, trembling, looks in dismay at his aide, then at his sword. He props the hilt on the ground, and attempts to fall on the point of the blade, but he botches the attempt, and although bleeding, and in terrible pain, is fully conscious of what's going on around him.

As the tree line erupts with the next wave of men, VARUS feigns death, gritting his teeth.

The wave passes. VARUS peeks at his surroundings. He attempts to crawl away, as a tree comes crashing down on his legs. He shrieks in pain. A roman eagle standard is in the mud right before his face.

A horse approaches the standard.

Someone dismounts.

A hand reaches down and picks up the standard.

ARMINIUS

(squats down and stares VARUS in the face)
Are you still willing to die for the glory and honor
of Rome?

VARUS looks at the Germanic troops encircling him, and spits at ARMINIUS.

ARMINIUS

(hands VARUS' sword to SIGMUND, and nods.)
Your family needs to set the example.

SIGMUND raises the sword.

A cheer rises from the Germanic troops.

SIGMUND swings sword in slow motion as ARMINIUS flashes back to:

RHANIS

(attempts to rise, but grimaces in pain)
Don't waste your life. You must survive this.

ARMINIUS

I can't stand by and do nothing.

RHANIS

This is a time for sacrifice. Live to save our people. Find a way. Keep them free. That's my final order. That's my dying wish.

ARMINIUS smiles

=====

ARMINIUS looks his uncle straight in the eye.

ARMINIUS

Until we meet again.

RHANIS

(smile tightens to a grimace of pain, and he slips downward, whispering)

Good boy.

ARMINIUS

(stiffly pivots to face the dais, fist with bloody dagger held to chest in salute, staring straight at VARUS, emotionless)

For Rome.

=====

ARMINIUS snatches the standard from the mud and snaps it in two over his knee.

ARMINIUS

For you, Rhanis.

The baritus begins, this time with smiles.

ROMAN FRONTIER ENCAMPMENT - DAY

Smoke can be seen rising on the horizon from many directions.

THUSNELDA is in her tent, rapidly packing.

FLAVUS
(storms in)
Where are you going?

THUSNELDA
Wherever I please.

SOLDIER
(enters, and announces to FLAVUS)
Scouts report that VARUS and his legions are being
massacred. ARMINIUS is leading the rebellion.

FLAVUS
(stunned. Turns to Thusnelda.)
You knew, didn't you?

THUSNELDA
We all knew. But you closed your eyes to it.

FLAVUS
Guards!
(to Thusnelda)
You're going to Rome with me now.

Guards enter.

THUSNELDA
I will never marry you.

FLAVUS

(angry)

You have betrayed me and Rome. You're not going as my wife. You are going as my slave.

SEGESTES enters.

THUSNELDA

(looks angrily to her father and FLAVUS)

I'm not going anywhere. I will stay here, with my husband, ARMINIUS.

SEGESTES

(notices ring on her finger)

You eloped with that traitor?! You will go to Rome with FLAVUS, and you will beg the Emperor to forgive us.

FLAVUS grabs THUSNELDA, and begins to drag her toward the tent door.

SIGMUND

(enters, with hand on hilt, out of breath, and raises an eyebrow)

She stays.

FLAVUS

If you get in the way, priest, you'll die.

SIGMUND draws his sword. FLAVUS' men, surprised, do likewise.

A cry from a lookout on the camp embankment sounds.

SENTRY

Barbarians are approaching.

FLAVUS

(looks at his six men, and nods toward SIGMUND)
Kill him.

THUSNELDA

NO!

SEGESTES pulls THUSNELDA back from the fray. THUSNELDA squirms and kicks to get away from her father.

SIGMUND grabs a tent pole nearby, and impales the first man. Part of the tent collapses. SIGMUND exits the tent backwards, with a grin, as the men follow, and encircle him. THUSNELDA kicks loose, explodes from the tent with a dagger, and sinks it into the helmet of the second man. The third man, a large man, hits her so hard she collapses in a heap, unconscious.

SIGMUND explodes with a roar, and charges the third man, ignoring the other three and FLAVUS, thereby exposing his flank.

SEGESTES stoops to attend to THUSNELDA. A blotch of blood appears on her forehead.

CUT TO ARMINIUS and his band approaching

With a flurry and a roar, SIGMUND shatters the large man's shield with his sword, and whirls to elbow the man's face. As that attacker crumples to the ground, two of the men lunge from behind, and pierce SIGMUND.

SIGMUND collapses.

SEGESTES gasps.

A trumpet sounds from ARMINIUS' direction.

FLAVUS

(to the remaining three men - points to the horses nearby)

Leave everything else behind.

(Mounts his horse)

Toss her over my lap. We leave now.

The four horses gallop through the east gates, just as ARMINIUS and his men appear within view of the west gates, on the approaching road.

ARMINIUS and his men take possession of the camp.

Captives are being rounded up. But just as he approaches the gate, a woman screams. Other women scream. Children are crying.

ARMINIUS realizes what his men intend to do with their captives.

ARMINIUS rises to his full stature.

ARMINIUS

(points to those of his men taking captives)

Archers. To the ready.

Archers nock their bows.

The other men drop what they are doing.

ARMINIUS

These women and children are under my protection.
They should have been under yours.

BRUTE 1

Give me a moment, and this one will be under mine.
(Snickers erupt among a few of the men.)

ARMINIUS

(to archers)
Ready!

Archers take aim.

BRUTE 2

(indignant)
You have no right! These are our spoils!

ARMINIUS

(begins marching horses back and forth before
the men)
If I return to find one of them harmed, you will
suffer a worse fate.

ARMINIUS

(descends from his horse, and approaches a
crying child. He kneels before the child, and
raises it in his arms)
They have as much right to be free as we do. Would
you have us become Roman? Is that what you want?
Is that what we're fighting for?

If anyone disagrees, step forward now.

No one steps forward.

Some of the women hold their children, and sob in gratitude. A
woman kisses his hand. The word "ARMINIUS" is whispered left and
right.

ARMINIUS

(To the women and children)
You are free to go, or free to stay and become one
of us.

Moving towards the gate, ARMINIUS eyes SEGESTES, kneeling on the ground before SIGMUND.

SEGESTES
(whirls)
This is your doing.

ARMINIUS
(recognizes body, and winces).
Who did this?

SEGESTES
You brought this upon us.

ARMINIUS
(notices THUSNELDA's collapsed tent)
Where is Thusnelda?! Answer me priest!

SEGESTES simply glares. SIGMUND stirs.

WOMAN
(Points in the direction FLAVUS went)
FLAVUS.

ARMINIUS nods, and leaps on his horse.

The woman bends down to help tend SIGMUND.

ARMINIUS thunders out of the east gate. A half dozen of his cavalry follow.

EXTERIOR - DAY - Far outside the walls of the Ubii capital

FLAVUS is riding towards the Ubii capital, flanked by fellow riders.

FLAVUS looks to a ridge and sees ARMINIUS and his retinue gaining on him.

FLAVUS whips his horse.

ARMINIUS leans forward and encourages his horse.

The rough ride stirs THUSNELDA.

They are within a few hundred yards of reaching the Ubii wall. THUSNELDA realizes where she is, and sees ARMINIUS.

THUSNELDA attempts to slip off the horse, but FLAVUS restrains her - grabbing her clothing, arms, hair, to keep her from escaping.

She bites the arm restraining her, and head butts him, giving him a bloody lip.

She elbows him in the groin.

When approaching low branches, she covers his good eye. A low-hanging branch knocks him off the horse.

THUSNELDA almost falls off, as the horse continues on. THUSNELDA struggles to regain the saddle and the reins.

Meanwhile, FLAVUS, dazed and bleeding, sees ARMINIUS and company bearing down with swords drawn.

FLAVUS
(to his men)
To arms!

FLAVUS' men turn to face ARMINIUS, draw swords, and spur their horses to a gallop.

The two companies collide with a clash.

FLAVUS turns to see the Ubii wall, and starts running in that direction.

THUSNELDA is still struggling to regain control of the horse. While crossing a stream, THUSNELDA falls from the horse, and lands on the bank.

She turns and sees FLAVUS approaching, sword drawn.

ARMINIUS forces his way through FLAVUS' men and speeds off in the direction of THUSNELDA and FLAVUS. His men form up to fill the gap.

FLAVUS sheathes his sword and whistles for his horse.

FLAVUS' horse stands still.

Both THUSNELDA and FLAVUS make a dash for the horse.

THUSNELDA reaches it first, and leaps to the saddle. As she grabs the reins, FLAVUS grabs her leg. They struggle as the horse wheels around.

Just then, ARMINIUS crashes through the brush, sword drawn.

FLAVUS lets go of THUSNELDA and draws his sword.

Shouts are heard from the city wall.

ARMINIUS and THUSNELDA begin circling FLAVUS.

Roman cavalry pour out through city gate.

FLAVUS sees their approach.

FLAVUS
(leers)
They are coming for you.

ARMINIUS
And I've come for you.

ARMINIUS leaps from his horse, and in a fury, crosses swords with FLAVUS.

THUSNELDA
(worried as Romans approach)
He's not worth it! They're coming!

FLAVUS smiles and continues the fight.

ARMINIUS furiously presses forward.

THUSNELDA
(frustrated)
Leave him!

ARMINIUS' retinue crash through the bushes. They see the Romans approaching from the city, and move to head them off.

FLAVUS and ARMINIUS, temporarily distracted, return to their fight.

A hand bashes a large rock against FLAVUS' head, and he crumples to the ground.

THUSNELDA

(Drops rock, and wipes hands of dust)

Can we go now?

THUSNELDA reaches down and grabs FLAVUS' dropped sword.

ARMINIUS, initially angry at the interruption, smiles.

FLAVUS recovers, sees he is surrounded, and looks to see the status of the Roman cavalry.

FLAVUS

(defeated)

Return my sword, and I'll end this honorably.

ARMINIUS

You haven't earned the honor. I have what I came for.

THUSNELDA smiles.

ARMINIUS remounts his horse.

ARMINIUS

Go back to Rome in disgrace.

THUSNELDA spurs her horse to come alongside ARMINIUS.

FLAVUS

(looks to city)

Do not expect me to return the favor.

ARMINIUS whistles loudly to his men.

His retinue disengages from their skirmish, and gallops toward ARMINIUS. The Romans follow in pursuit.

As his retinue returns, ARMINIUS and THUSNELDA spur their horses away from the Ubii capital, with the Roman troops in hot pursuit.

One of the Roman cavalymen stops to assist FLAVUS, who is clearly embarrassed at having neither horse nor sword. FLAVUS takes the horse, and continues in pursuit of ARMINIUS.

As ARMINIUS, THUSNELDA, and their retinue clear a ridge, a row of Germanic archers stand up at that ridge, and unleash arrows in the direction of the Romans.

Several of the Romans fall, but FLAVUS urges the survivors forward.

Archers nock arrows again.

ARMINIUS sees FLAVUS approaching.

ARMINIUS
(to archers)
Hold!

FLAVUS and his men also come to a stop.

FLAVUS approaches slowly on horse. ARMINIUS does also.

FLAVUS
I will return with the strength of Rome.

ARMINIUS
(angry)
If you return, do not expect mercy again. We will be ready.

FLAVUS and retinue turn and head toward the walled Ubii capital.

FRONTIER - SUNRISE

A messenger on horse crosses the Rhine bridge, notices in shock the statue of Victory rotating around (with the help of many barbarians) to point in the opposite direction, towards Rome.

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INTERIOR - THE EMPEROR'S COURT - ROME

The messenger arrives in haste with a package.

MESSENGER

(salutes)

Augustus! VARUS' legions have been destroyed. The Roman frontier is defenseless. Northern Italy is in a panic. It is said the barbarians will soon cross the Rhine, and march on Rome.

EMPEROR

And VARUS?

The messenger nods toward the package.

The Emperor hesitatingly opens the package, sees the contents, and recoils in shock at the sight of VARUS' head.

The Emperor drops his head in hands.

EMPEROR

VARUS, VARUS!

(smashes fist on table)

Give me back my legions!!

EXTERIOR - NIGHT

ARMINIUS is on horseback on a hill overlooking his village.
THUSNELDA is in front of him on the horse, with ARMINIUS' arms
around her.

THUSNELDA
You're going to be a father.

ARMINIUS
(caresses her belly, and grins)
How did that happen?

THUSNELDA elbows him gently in the gut.

They kiss.

THUSNELDA
(motions to the village below)
Well, since the feast is in our honor, shall we join
them?

ARMINIUS
Not yet. Let's enjoy this moment.

A child's voice is heard in the background, as the refrain from the
Arminius song rises in the distance. Arminius shakes his head, but
Thusnelda smiles, as they turn to watch and listen.

Sigmund assists other priests raising a pillar, singing at the top
of their lungs.

TEXT: Arminius was unmistakably the liberator of Germany.
Challenger of Rome - not in its infancy, like kings and commanders

before him, but at the height of its power...To this day the tribes
sing of him.
Tacitus, ca. 117 AD.

FADE to title.
