

POMPEII

Written by

Lee Batchler & Janet Scott Batchler

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FADE IN:

EXT. POMPEII, THE RUINS - DAY - PRESENT DAY

An entire city, bereft of life. Frozen in time.

We GLIDE THROUGH acres of ruins. Arches that lead to nowhere. Columns that hold up nothing. Crumbling walls.

Incongruously, an AMERICAN TOUR GROUP wanders into view. Cargo shorts and sandals. Flip videos and iPhones snapping pictures. We're just close enough to hear the TOUR GUIDE.

AMERICAN TOUR GUIDE
--the volcano exploded with the
power of 40 nuclear bombs going off
all at once--

As the tour obediently follows their Guide, we realize PRESENT DAY POMPEII is filled with tour groups from all over the world -- all snapping pictures with their smartphones.

IN THE FORUM

A wide, grassy field hosting the proud remains of the Temples of Apollo and Jupiter. Little more now but bare columns and steps leading to emptiness.

We see MORE FOREIGN TOUR GROUPS, scattered here and there, exploring the dead city. We continue to FLOAT past them all.

GERMAN TOUR GUIDE
*Es fing wie einen beliebigen
Sommertag an. Sie wußten nicht, daß
ihr Leben bald enden wurde.*

JAPANESE TOUR GUIDE
*Jikan no nagare ga touketsu sareta
koso, tokai sekatsu no honshitsu wo
yatto mieru you ni natta.*

We weave our way through the streets, approaching a series of plaster casts.

A British Tour Group halts before the first plaster cast: Three men sprawled on a staircase as if drunk.

BRITISH TOUR GUIDE
--The rush of ash and smoke from
the volcano was over 1000 degrees
hot. It moved so fast, and buried
the victims so quickly, it froze
everything in place. These men--

She gestures to the plaster casts.

BRITISH TOUR GUIDE (CONT'D)

This is exactly what they were
doing the instant the pyroclastic
flow hit them...

We GLIDE BACK to the American tour group, standing before a
plaster cast of a young man curled up, sucking his thumb. A
10-year-old GIRL is upset at what she's seeing.

GIRL

Why didn't they run away?

AMERICAN TOUR GUIDE

They couldn't run, sweetie. It all
happened too fast.

GIRL

No, I mean before. Before the
volcano even went off.

AMERICAN TOUR GUIDE

It had been dormant for 800 years.
They didn't even know it was a
volcano. To them it was just a
mountain.

We FLOAT UP above the tour groups, HOVERING over the ruins as
the SUN SETS over the Bay of Naples.

TILT DOWN TO REVEAL

Iron gates clang shut. Tourists drift off to the parking lot.
A key in a lock.

All is quiet. Even ghostly, in the dusky light.

A STRONG YOUNG WOMAN'S VOICE speaks with firm yet eerie authority.

STRIGANA (V.O.)

This was my city...

We lower down to REVEAL more plaster casts. A man and woman
in a lover's embrace.

QUICK FLASH!-- LIVE ACTION: The Man and Woman (MARCUS VETTIUS
and FORTUNATA) cling to each other, their eyes fixed on
something shocking coming at them.

STRIGANA (V.O.) (CONT'D)

"Whom the gods would destroy, they
first make mad." The Greeks said
that. But I say they were wrong.
It is not madness that precedes
destruction. It is the arrogance
that says we humans are more
powerful than any gods.

BACK TO MODERN POMPEII

And the plaster cast of the young man sucking his thumb.

QUICK FLASH!-- LIVE ACTION: The Young Man (CLAUDIO) huddles against a wall in fear. He sticks his thumb in his mouth as he looks up at something horrible--

STRIGANA (V.O.) (CONT'D)
My people had their temples by the dozens. But they prayed for the gods to serve them. To make them wealthy. Beautiful. Powerful. I tried to warn them. But did they listen?

BACK TO MODERN POMPEII

Another pair of plaster casts.... A Gladiator thrusts a sword into the gut of another Soldier.

QUICK FLASH! -- LIVE ACTION: Even as he stabs, the Gladiator (BELLATOR) lifts his face to the sight of something deadly.

STRIGANA (V.O.) (CONT'D)
Could you outrun the wrath of Vulcan when he pours poison on the city? Could you hide from Neptune when he sends the ocean's fury to punish those who displease him?

BACK TO MODERN POMPEII

We begin to RISE above modern Pompeii, above the Forum, above the ruined Temple of Jupiter.

Looming over modern Pompeii, the saddlebacked shape of MOUNT VESUVIUS, 4200' high.

STRIGANA (V.O.) (CONT'D)
Who would you call for help? Where could you hide?

As we watch, the mountain begins to GROW and MORPH into--

ANCIENT VESUVIUS. A perfectly shaped cone, 7500' high. Almost glowing in the sunset.

SUPER MAIN TITLE: **POMPEII**

The ruins of the Temple of Jupiter MORPH into their non-ruined form. A magnificent temple of MARBLE grows before our eyes.

Daytime FIREWORKS -- EXPLOSIONS of smoke -- green, magenta, yellow -- erupt high in the sky. CHEERS from a crowd below.

AS WE TILT DOWN

A huge STATUE of the god VULCAN rises in mid-air toward us. A mighty hammer clutched in one hand, GILDED fire carved of stone in the other.

We can make out the Latin name "LVCRETIVS GLACCHII" carved in tastelessly large letters on the statue's base, identifying for posterity its generous donor.

PULL BACK TO REVEAL

EXT. STREETS OUTSIDE COLOSSEUM - DAY

The statue is being hoisted by a huge CRANE (wooden, with iron chains and pulleys) into a position of honor over the entrance to Pompeii's Colosseum.

And below it--

A huge public space, dominated by the Colosseum, jam-packed with an excited crowd, young and old.

The PARADE OF GLADIATORS is underway. Twisting serpent-like toward us -- BANNERS, MUSICIANS, DANCERS.

SUPER TITLE: *August 23rd. 79 A.D.*

WE BEGIN A LONG TRACKING SHOT.

AHEAD OF US, TRUMPETERS approach. Three foot long trumpets, blaring their fanfare.

The Trumpeters split around us to REVEAL, marching at the head of the parade:

The first FLOAT -- DANCING GIRLS in exotic costumes. They toss flowers to the crowd. The float is pulled by a dozen sturdy SLAVES of all races.

Following the Dancing Girls-- A rolling CAGE, pulled by slaves as well. In the cage, a pair of LEOPARDS snarl and hiss.

Next up: The movers and shakers of Pompeii. A posse of TOGA-CLAD MEN, soaking up cheers that aren't really for them.

Front and center is MARCUS VETTIUS, the Magistrate (mayor) of Pompeii (40s, slick, toga with a purple stripe).

With him is LUCRETIVS GLACCHII, 50s: a shipping tycoon and the real power behind the throne here in Pompeii. His superior air disguises the fact that this is a make-or-break weekend for him.

Marcus Vettius waves with the practice of a seasoned politician. But Lucretius scowls, looking at--

THE STATUE OF VULCAN, still being settled into its spot over the entrance to the Colosseum.

LUCRETIVS

That should have been up two days ago.

MARCUS VETTIUS
I did the best I could.

He glances back at a chariot pulled by six matched horses.

ON THE CHARIOT

SENATOR ATTIAS ORVO (40s, white toga with a purple stripe). The consummate scheming politician who misses the dark days of Emperor Nero. Sleazy and bipolar, Orvo is a cockroach who will not die.

Orvo waves to the crowds.

BACK WITH LUCRETIUS AND MARCUS VETTIUS

MARCUS VETTIUS (CONT'D)
I think the Senator looks happy,
don't you?

LUCRETIUS
How could you ever tell?

Marcus Vettius gives the crowds a wave of his own.

MARCUS VETTIUS
(a politician's grin)
Ho! Vulcanalia!

We let the politicians pass us, REVEALING what the crowd's really screaming for:

THE GLADIATORS.

Riding on a special float, a *pegma*, consisting of two counter-weighted stages on a fulcrum. One side rises as the second drops.

Four Gladiators in armor laugh as they spar on the first stage, waging a mock sword fight.

As their stage hits bottom, the Gladiators stop to wave to the spectators. Fangirls squeal and throw flowers.

Joining right in is Marcus Vettius's sultry wife FORTUNATA, a gorgeous 35. Her TROPHY WIFE GIRLFRIENDS (20s-30s) also shriek like teenagers.

The Gladiators smile and wave and drink in the adoration. Truly they are the rock stars of the first century.

The second stage lowers toward us, REVEALING--

NIGELLUS the Gladiator. Early 30s, battle-scarred, solid muscle. A true star, enjoying his moment of glory to the hilt.

Nigellus battles another Gladiator, but he barely has to try. The crowd cheers, throws flowers, yells his name.

As the *pegma* reaches the bottom of its seesaw journey, an overly ardent YOUNG GIRL runs and holds her arms up to him.

Nigellus, still fighting with his sword arm, lifts the girl with the other arm. She throws her arms around his neck. He kisses her as--

The stage rises up. The Young Girl loses her grip--

The Young Girl drops-- Nigellus catches her wrist with one hand. WHOOPS and YELPS from the crowd.

The Parade twists around, heading for the entrance to the Colosseum as Nigellus milks the moment.

And we twist BACK TO OUR MOVERS AND SHAKERS.

MARCUS VETTIUS (CONT'D)
Now, tonight-- Remember, Flamma
shouldn't be introduced until after
all the other gladiators--

LUCRETIVS
Marcus Vettius. You may not be
able to get your end of things
done on time, but I know how to
throw a party.

MARCUS VETTIUS
This is important, Lucretius--

LUCRETIVS
--More important to me. Shut up
and wave.

Marcus Vettius snaps his grin into place and waves to the crowd. Lucretius waves as well. Through a fake smile--

LUCRETIVS (CONT'D)
If it puts your mind at ease, I've
left Milo in charge of everything.
He's at the villa as we speak.

WE PULL UP AND AWAY FROM THE COLOSSEUM

The noise of the crowd below -- the screaming fans, the music, the marching -- all fades out. The sound of SPLASHING WAVES begins. The CREAKING of a ship's hull--

MILO (O.S.)
Whoooooooooa!

EXT. FISHING BOAT, AT SEA - DAY

ON THE TOP OF THE MAST

Is MILO, 20s. Smart and resourceful, Milo brims with a confidence and charisma that belies the fact that he's only a slave.

Below him on deck, KELLUS, 20s, a seasoned sailor and Milo's partner and friend, looks up.

KELLUS

Milo! You all right up there?

Milo balances atop the crossbeam of the single mast, all while the small fishing boat ROLLS.

MILO

I have everything under control.

Whoops! He almost slips and falls. Quick reflexes keep him on his feet.

MILO'S POV -- MOVING AND DIZZYING AS THE BOAT PITCHES

The boat is surrounded by an ocean of fish, swarming near the sea's surface. Below him, the CREW struggle with a net so full of fish, it's almost capsizing the boat.

Milo finishes tying a block-and-tackle to the crossbeam, then SLIDES down the rope TOWARD US, jumping onto the deck. The crew tie the rope to the net.

MILO (CONT'D)

Now! Pull!

The crewmen pull-- Milo hauls on the pulley rope--

And the net SPILLS over onto the deck. Stem to stern, the boat is suddenly a mass of wriggling fish.

MILO (CONT'D)

This is crazy!

KELLUS wades through the shin-deep fish.

KELLUS

It's because it's Vulcanalia.

MILO

(dubious)

You think Vulcan did all this?

KELLUS

He likes fish, right? It's his feast day, right? It makes sense.

Milo looks at the ocean surrounding the boat.

MILO

I'm not so sure about that.

ALL AROUND THE BOAT

Fish POP TO THE SURFACE. But these fish aren't wriggling. They're dead. More pop up every second.

SUDDEN PULLBACK TO REVEAL

The boat is tiny, surrounded by a veritable lake of dead fish.

Milo is creeped out by all this. He examines the fish on deck more closely. Some of them are dead, too.

MILO (CONT'D)
This can't be good.

KELLUS
What's killing them? Red tide maybe?

MILO
(disquieted)
No... Let's go home.

A twinkle in Kellus's eye.

KELLUS
Why the rush?

MILO
Today's the day she comes home--

KELLUS
(to the crewmen)
Raise sail! We've got a man in a hurry here!

As the men raise the square sail, the boat SHOVES through the morass of dead fish. Kellus takes the tiller, aiming directly for a LIGHTHOUSE on a point outside of town. Beyond the lighthouse, in the distance, lies Pompeii.

KELLUS (CONT'D)
So. She's not coming back from Rome married after all?

MILO
No. She's not.

KELLUS
I thought that was the point. Set her up with a senator, give Lucretius even more power.

MILO
That was the plan.

KELLUS
So where does that leave you?

MILO
I don't know. It's been almost a year since I've seen her.

KELLUS
Her father ever finds out what's between you two, he'll sell her as a slave. After he has you burned. Or crushed by an elephant--

MILO
He won't find out--

KELLUS
Or sews your mouth shut. Or has
you baked alive in an oven--

MILO
Stop it!

KELLUS
Or has you covered with honey and
feeds you to the ants--

MILO
Kellus!

KELLUS
Look, if you're lucky, she won't
even remember you're alive.

That's exactly what Milo's afraid of. Thanks a lot, Kellus.

EXT. HIGH COASTAL BLUFF, OUTSIDE POMPEII - DAY, CONTINUOUS

A rich CARRIAGE lumbers along a wide road across the top of
the bluff toward Pompeii. The azure sea is to our left.

Just ahead, a huge centuries-old CEREMONIAL ARCH. Decorated
with elaborate MOSAICS of a battle in progress, the arch marks
Pompeii's southern border.

On this side of the arch, the road is dirt. On the city side,
the road is paved with flat stones, and heads down a steep bluff.

The carriage's sole passenger is a vivacious young woman:
COLUMBA. She's 22, and joyously rebellious. How a prick like
Lucretius wound up with such a vibrant daughter is a mystery
known only to the gods.

Columba gasps with delight as more DAYTIME FIREWORKS explode
high in the sky above the Colosseum in the center of town.

COLUMBA
It's started! It's started!

She stands up in the carriage as if to get out, unpinning her
beautiful long hair so it flies free in the wind.

The CARRIAGE DRIVER is too old and crusty for such nonsense.
He halts the rig.

DRIVER
You sit down, Miss Columba!

COLUMBA
Don't stop! We're supposed to be
there already--

DRIVER

I never thought you'd grow up to be one of those silly girls who chases after gladiators.

COLUMBA

I am not! I just want to get home and see--

DRIVER

...See what?

COLUMBA

Never mind.

She stands again to see the city of Pompeii over the edge of the bluff.

DRIVER

Miss, would you please sit down? Pompeii's not going anywhere.

But as the carriage moves through the arch, WE SEE--

Ahead of them-- A TRAFFIC JAM. A line of carriages and wagons slowly picking their way down the road toward Pompeii.

COLUMBA

...And neither are we.

Columba climbs out of the carriage--

DRIVER

What are you doing?!--

--But as she steps down, the CARRIAGE WOBBLER and she almost loses her footing. All around them--

--Rocks slide across the road--

--Children yelp in carriages and wagons further down the road--

--Parcels piled onto wagons FALL from their perches--

DRIVER (CONT'D)

Miss, are you all right?

COLUMBA

It was a little one. I'm fine.

But-- ANGLE ON

The top of the arch.

A CRACK FORMS, running jaggedly across the inside of the arch.

RACK FOCUS, THROUGH THE ARCH, TO

Columba skips away down the road on foot.

DRIVER
Don't do this to me!

COLUMBA
(calls back)
Just tell Father you couldn't stop
me. He'll believe you.

As the Driver flicks the whip and drives through the arch--

HOLD ON

The CRACK in the arch. It keeps growing. Wider. Longer.

We MOVE THROUGH THE ARCH and FLY OVER--

EXT. POMPEII - DAY

AERIAL SHOT

A sun-kissed Roman paradise stretches below and ahead of us:
The beautiful city of POMPEII, gleaming golden along the
southern end of the Bay of Naples. A mecca for dreamers,
hedonists and opportunists.

Expansive villas outside the city walls. Pristine beaches.
Marketplaces and a huge Colosseum. Fountains and pools
sparkle in the sunshine.

Looming over the city, Mount Vesuvius looks peaceful. For now.

ANGLE DOWN

to the Colosseum.

EXT. THE ARENA, COLOSSEUM - DAY

The stands are filled with excited spectators. In the JUDGES
BOX (the best seats in the house), Marcus Vettius and Lucretius
make respectful room for a haughtily bored Senator Orvo.

Five PROCLAIMERS appear on the wall surrounding the sandy
arena floor. Like a GREEK CHORUS, they wear giant MASKS which
amplify their voices. They boom out so loud in PRECISE UNISON
across the stadium, we can even hear their echoes.

PROCLAIMERS
*Brothers and sisters of Pompeii.
The glorious battle of Sybota,
Where, on a tiny island,
The proud few were set upon
By invaders from wicked Corinth!*

Excitement from the crowd as...

The SANDY FLOOR of the arena begins to move.

UNDER THE ARENA FLOOR

Slaves turn cranks-- Cranks turn huge gears-- Gears pull pulleys-- Pulleys pull ropes--

BACK IN THE ARENA

The floor's not sand at all-- Giant canvas tarps are sucked back into the walls of the arena, REVEALING--

A vast POOL OF WATER-- More water pours in through giant pipes--

INT. TUNNEL, COLOSSEUM - DAY

We are under the floor of the Colosseum. All around us, we hear the RUSH of water pouring in above.

NIGELLUS, fully armed, taut and focused, grips a handhold on a large structure we can't see clearly. He peers upward, waiting for his moment.

Also poised and waiting -- TEN GLADIATORS, equally tense. Among them: BELLATOR, not as impressive-looking as Nigellus, but formidable nonetheless.

Off to one side: PROCULUS, a particularly nasty guard, taunts Bellator.

PROCULUS

You know who's out there today?
Hungry for your blood?

Bellator doesn't respond. He doesn't want to hear it. Proculus enjoys his bullying.

PROCULUS (CONT'D)

Every pirate captured this year
throughout the entire Empire.
Pirates from Cilicia, Dalmatia,
Anatolia. And if they kill you, they
go free. I'm betting on the pirates.

Nigellus glances at Bellator, who seems almost paralyzed.

NIGELLUS

We can handle them.

PROCULUS

(to Bellator)
That's all right. You can hide
behind Nigellus today. But
tomorrow he kills you.

Nigellus's eyes meet Bellator's. It's true. An awkward moment.

NIGELLUS

No one knows what tomorrow brings.

PROCLAIMERS (O.S.)
The Defenders of the Keep.
Strong of heart, but weak in numbers.

NIGELLUS
 (that's his cue)
 That's us! Go! Go!

The structure they're hanging on to begins to RISE.

EXT. THE ARENA, COLOSSEUM - DAY, CONTINUOUS

The entire arena is FLOODED.

The crowd CHEERS as, in the center of this "sea"--

A cement ISLAND, representing Sybota, RISES--

From the center of the island, a TOWER RISES UP--

Nigellus, Bellator, and the other Gladiators emerge out of the top of the Tower to raucous applause-- They rappel down the sides of the Tower-- as--

Three more TUNNELS leading into the arena OPEN and--

THREE SHIPS sail in (their sails fixed, the ships are actually poled forward from underneath). Each ship, scaled to fit the size of the arena, is manned by a crew of 40 CONVICTED PIRATES.

PROCLAIMERS
The Enemy from Corinth cannot wait.
They seize the advantage and attack.

BOOS from the audience -- They know bad guys when they see them!

The BATTLE BEGINS.

The Pirates attack fiercely-- SPEARS and ARROWS--

The Gladiators catch the spears and arrows on their shields--
 THUNK! THUNK!

One Ship pulls close to the Island--

Pirates swarm off the first ship--

CLASH! Hot swordplay between the Gladiators and the Pirates--
 The Gladiators have mad fighting skills, but they're badly outnumbered--

One Gladiator goes down--

BOOS and CHEERS mixed from the crowd--

The SECOND SHIP beaches itself on the Island-- the first dozen Pirates leap over the rails--

Nigellus opens a door in the tower, REVEALING--

A basket of CALTROPS -- four-pronged, viciously barbed devices that look like children's jacks -- no matter how you throw them, three prongs will land face down, one face up--

And Nigellus THROWS them by the handful straight at the Pirates--

Running Pirates try to dodge the caltrops--

As the Caltrops hit the ground-- Pirates step on them-- Trip over them-- Gouging their feet-- Cutting themselves as they fall--

A dozen Pirates downed-- CHEERS--

Nigellus yells to the Gladiators nearest him--

NIGELLUS
We're taking that ship! Follow me!

The Gladiators CHARGE the beached ship--

HAND-TO-HAND COMBAT at the enemy ship--

Swords clash-- Maces swing-- Shields slam against daggers--

The Pirates' skills are no match for the Gladiators, but they fight with ferocity and desperation--

Nigellus is a fighting dervish-- All over the beach-- Leaping up to the ship and down again--

NIGELLUS'S POV, ON THE BEACH

Bellator's fighting THREE PIRATES at once-- He's in trouble-- They have him backed up against the hull of the ship--

Bellator's down-- Hiding behind his shield as the Pirates pounce--

Nigellus swoops over-- Grabs one Pirate from behind and THROWS him away-- Even as he SLASHES another Pirate in the arm--

Nigellus yanks Bellator to his feet-- They fight back to back-- More PIRATES rush to fight them-- SLASHING--

BELLATOR
(gasps)
Thanks--

IN THE JUDGES BOX

Marcus Vettius looks sidelong at Senator Orvo -- is he having a good time?

Senator Orvo yawns. His eyes droop.

Marcus Vettius cringes. He nudges Lucretius. Lucretius has noticed, too.

BACK ON THE ISLAND

An orgy of carnage-- Mad fighting everywhere we look--

The Gladiators are in trouble, overwhelmed by sheer numbers.
Two Gladiators lie motionless on the ground.

A WAVE OF ARROWS from the Pirate ship still in the water--

Gladiators have to raise their shields to block the arrows --
exposing themselves to attacks from the Pirates on the beach--

Another Gladiator falls-- Pirates dive on him, hacking away--

And another Gladiator falls--

NIGELLUS, fighting furiously, looks through the mayhem at the
third ship where--

NIGELLUS'S POV

Pirates are lining up a huge BRASS TUBE on the rail--

Oh shit-- Nigellus slashes his way through the next wave of
Pirates-- Yells back at his comrades--

NIGELLUS
Off the ship! Now!

And he's into the water-- It's not that deep-- Shield over his
head as arrows rain down-- Nigellus pushes toward the ship--

Nigellus boards the third ship-- Pirates SLASHING down at him--
He jabs his sword up-- Smashes Pirates away with his shield--

ON THE THIRD SHIP

The BRASS FIRE TUBE is in place-- The Pirates shoot out a
first, tentative BLAST of GREEN FIRE--

Nigellus SLAMS Pirates out of the way-- Grabs the Brass Tube--

A 30-foot stream of GREEN FIRE BLASTS OUT of the tube,
straight at the first enemy ship--

The enemy ship CATCHES ON FIRE!

It BLAZES UP immediately-- Sails, hull, all an instant
FIREBALL-- Pirates on fire-- Falling into the water--

The FIREBALL blasts up over the top of the Colosseum walls--

The last Gladiators dive off the second ship as--

Nigellus turns the Brass Tube in its direction-- FWWWWMMMMPH!

GREEN FIRE streaks across the arena--

ENGULFS the Second Ship--

ANOTHER GIANT FIREBALL!

The chant begins: "Ni-gell-us! Ni-gell-us!"

EXT. POMPEII HARBOR, THE DOCKS - DAY

A crazy bustle of sailors, fishermen and merchants. All of whom pause as--

The FIREBALL poofs up over the roofs of the city.

ON MILO

Who grins as he sees it. He turns to one of the crewman from Kellus's boat.

MILO
Nigellus is at it again.

Sure enough, floating on the air from the Colosseum, we hear... "Ni-gell-us! Ni-gell-us!"

Milo turns his focus back to Kellus, who's haggling with a tight-fisted FISH MERCHANT at his booth.

KELLUS
You're a shameless dog, Caradoc.
Last week you paid--

FISH MERCHANT
--Every fishseller in the market's agreed. During Vulcanalia, we'll have one price and stick to it.

MILO
Fine. We'll just take our catch to Naples then.

FISH MERCHANT
Who's going to buy? Everyone's already here in Pompeii for the festival. You sell to us at the price we say, or you don't sell at all.

Milo is frustrated. Kellus shrugs. He expected this.

EXT. POMPEII HARBOR - DAY

The fishing boat is tied up at a short wharf. The Pompeii marina is filled with similar small craft, but dominating the harbor are--

Half a dozen square-rigged ROMAN SHIPS OF WAR, moored out in the deeper water. SOLDIERS swarm the ships. On the decks are massive CATAPULTS and BALLISTAS and ominous looking SIEGE ENGINES.

The largest ship, a TRIREME (three rows of oars), boasts a giant RED SAIL with the Imperial Eagle in gold.

AT THE WHARF

Kellus, Milo and the crew offload thousands of fish into overflowing wagons.

KELLUS

Have you got time for all this?
You're pretty late already.

MILO

As long as I get everything done in time for the party, I'll be all right.

KELLUS

(sniffs a fish)
Is it even safe to sell these fish?
I mean, they were already dead--

MILO

No one's going to eat them. It's Vulcanalia. People just want them as a gift to the gods.

KELLUS

I wonder what would happen if you did eat them. Maybe you'd throw up and get sick. Or maybe the poison would make your stomach swell up and--

Milo's looking past the buildings of Pompeii up toward Vesuvius.

MILO

Or maybe you can help me cart them up to our new buyer.

EXT. TEMPLE - DAY

A classic Roman temple at the base of Mt. Vesuvius.

Above the temple, on the mountain's slopes, PRIESTS and SLAVES erect a dozen giant stacks of wood, 15' high, giant bonfires in the making.

MILO (O.S.)

How would the temple like to make three months' worth of offerings in one day?

ANGLE ON

Milo walking with the HIGH PRIEST. Behind Milo and the High Priest stands Kellus with their wagon loads of fish.

HIGH PRIEST

Pilgrims bring their own fish to Vulcanalia.

MILO

And every year, they wish they'd brought even more to throw on the fire. No one wants to carry heavy baskets of fish all the way up here.

HIGH PRIEST

The temple is not the marketplace. People come to make holy offerings to Vulcan.

MILO

And the more fish go up in smoke tonight, the more blessings Vulcan will rain down on Pompeii. It's practically your civic duty to say yes!

The High Priest looks back at the wagons full of fish.

HIGH PRIEST

Your master approves of this?

MILO

My master has no say in the matter.
(gestures back at Kellus)
It's his boat. It's our fish.

HIGH PRIEST

...Half the profits to the temple.

MILO

One quarter to the temple. You're just providing the space.

HIGH PRIEST

What will you do with your share of the money?

MILO

I need some new clothes.
(fingers his hitched-up tunic)
Ones that don't say to the world that I'm a slave.

HIGH PRIEST

(raises an eyebrow)
Aren't we ambitious.

MILO

We could set up our carts just down the road and still do very well. But we'd rather be right by the bonfires.

The High Priest scowls at the idea of being cut out.

HIGH PRIEST

One-third to the temple.

MILO
And we count the money.

HIGH PRIEST
Done.

The High Priest claps Milo's shoulder. Milo, pleased, returns the gesture. They have a deal.

FESTIVE MUSIC begins -- Flutes, lyres, drums.

EXT. LUCRETIUS'S VILLA - SUNSET

All the luxury of ancient Rome embodied in one estate. An expansive, elaborate villa stretching across acres.

Men in dress togas and women loaded with jewelry pour into the villa, many wearing wreaths of flowers. Sounds of festivity spill out of every wing of the villa.

INT. LUCRETIUS'S VILLA - SUNSET

A party as only the Romans could throw is in full swing.

The upper crust of Pompeii society mingles. Slave WAITERS pour wine. Strolling MUSICIANS and DANCING GIRLS entertain.

The mosaics on the floors and walls positively shimmer in the candlelight. Garlands of flowers drape from the ceiling. Indoor fountains sparkle and splash.

Marcus Vettius surveys the room with satisfaction, flanked by his yes-men CLAUDIO and FENNIUS, who seem joined at the hip.

Claudio sips from a goblet. He makes a face.

CLAUDIO
This water is absolutely foul!

FENNIUS
(are you crazy?!)
Why are you drinking water?

Marcus Vettius flags down a Slave holding a tray. He snags a honey-crusted dormouse, tail and all. Yum.

MARCUS VETTIUS
This is pandemonium. When do we get to lie down so we can eat properly?

Just before he crunches down on the dormouse, we see--

Columba, luminous in a shimmering purple silk *stola* and leafy gold belt and earrings. She's looking for someone.

DULCIMA
Looking for Milo?

DULCIMA, Lucretius's head female slave, scheming and sassy, leads four Slaves carrying a life-sized bronze statue of a donkey, its baskets laden with black and green olives.

COLUMBA
I was looking for my father.

DULCIMA
Of course you were. He's in the garden.
(to the slaves)
No, you idiots, this way.

EXT. FORMAL GARDEN, LUCRETIOUS'S VILLA - SUNSET, CONTINUOUS

We see Pompeii spread before us. The giant temples. The Colosseum. The harbor. All lit in magic sunset light.

Then a pair of toga-clad legs walks by, breaking the illusion.

PULL BACK TO REVEAL

We're actually looking at a MODEL of Pompeii, built at 1/16 scale. Buildings of marble and clay. A standing pool filled with model ships. Crushed shells and sand for the roads.

CONTINUE PULLBACK, REVEALING

Lucretius's formal garden rests right at the edge of a promontory overlooking the city of Pompeii. The model Pompeii mirrors the view below.

The model, however, is grander, featuring impressive temples and an expanded embarcadero that doesn't yet exist in the real Pompeii below.

At the edge of the garden, Lucretius gives his admiring guests a tour of the model Pompeii. Among the guests is Senator Orvo, who emanates a pissed-off vibe.

LUCRETIOUS
We've finished the restoration of the arena, as you see. Next, we build a temple to Neptune and expand the port.

The group buzzes with conversation about Lucretius's remarkable garden. Lucretius flicks a glance of displeasure as Milo approaches.

LUCRETIOUS (CONT'D)
(sidelong, to Milo)
Where've you been?
(sniffs)
I'd better not smell fish.

MILO
Sorry, master.

LUCRETIUS
Get that Trojan pig served.

MILO
Yes, master.

As Milo heads away--

Lucretius takes a deep breath and approaches Orvo.

LUCRETIUS
Senator Orvo. You'll be pleased to see we're having a Trojan pig tonight--

ORVO
No one's serving those in Rome anymore.

Lucretius bites his tongue.

LUCRETIUS
Tomorrow's festivities can't rival Rome's, of course, but we have--

ORVO
Glad to see you've been spending my money so wisely.

Lucretius tries to keep his cool.

LUCRETIUS
Of course I'm most grateful for your special contribution--

ORVO
And my thanks is to be humiliated in front of all of Rome. By your daughter.

There's no good answer to this.

LUCRETIUS
Your investment is already beginning to pay off.

ORVO
There's only one way you can repay your debt to me, Lucretius Glacchii.

Lucretius, unfortunately, knows exactly what Orvo is talking about. But before he can respond--

Marcus Vettius bustles over, pompous and excited to have a real live Senator in the house.

MARCUS VETTIUS
 Senator Orvo! So delighted you
 could join us for Vulcanalia! Did
 you know we're going to have a
 Trojan pig?

AT THE OTHER END OF THE GARDEN

Columba enters the garden, looking around.

Nearby are Fortunata and her Trophy Wife friends, whom we
 glimpsed at the parade, each wearing a king's ransom in jewels.
 Fortunata looks around at the party with some disdain.

FORTUNATA
 I'm bored. When do the real men
 arrive?

TROPHY WIFE
 (nudges Fortunata)
 Look who's here.

As Columba passes, Fortunata snags her.

FORTUNATA
 Columba. Tell us what really
 happened with Senator Orvo.

COLUMBA
 I beg your pardon?

FORTUNATA
 Did you really reject him? Very
 foolish, my dear. He's a powerful man.
 (to the Trophy Wives)
 Everybody in Rome was laughing at him.

COLUMBA
 You shouldn't believe everything
 you hear, Fortunata.

As the Trophies titter, Fortunata turns back to Columba,
 dripping with compassion.

FORTUNATA
 I know how awkward this is for you,
 dear. What did he say tonight when
 you saw him?

COLUMBA
 (startled)
 He's here?

Fortunata's pleased with the effect of her question.

FORTUNATA
 You're still a valuable asset to
 your father, you know. What is his
 plan now? I happen to know several
 young men from good families--

COLUMBA

I'm sure you know every young man
in the city. You'll excuse me.

Columba sweeps away toward the villa, hiding her consternation
at Fortunata's words.

ACROSS THE REFLECTING POOL

Orvo strides toward the house. Lucretius follows. As the two
men head inside--

CHEERS and APPLAUSE issue from the villa itself. The crowd
turns to look as--

THE GLADIATORS enter the garden toward us, clad in gleaming
armor and looking incredibly hot. Nigellus is in the forefront.

Fortunata and her friends squeal, rush up to stroke the
Gladiators' muscles. The Gladiators don't seem to mind.

A group of YOUNG ARISTOCRATS scowl at the sight of the women
pawing the Gladiators.

Marcus Vettius also watches enviously.

MARCUS VETTIUS

I could do that. If you just leave
out the fighting part.

PUSH IN ON

A single window in the villa. CANDLELIGHT flickers within.

LUCRETIUS (O.S.)

Why does it have to be Columba?

INT. LUCRETIUS'S STUDY - TWILIGHT

Lucretius and Orvo face off, lit only by a couple of CANDLES.

LUCRETIUS

With all the pretty faces in Rome--

ORVO

She made me a laughingstock in
front of the entire city. No one
does that without paying a price.

LUCRETIUS

That she even met you in Rome was
an accident I dearly wish I could
undo. I thought you wanted to talk
business.

ORVO

Fine. We'll talk business. I want
my money back.

LUCRETIUS
(not sure he heard right)
You what?

ORVO
I didn't lend you fifty thousand
denarii so you could turn this city
into a monument to yourself.
I want my money back. Today.

LUCRETIUS
It- It's not due until--

ORVO
It is due when I say it is due.
Read our contract.

Lucretius tries to smooth things over. He opens the door.

LUCRETIUS
Senator. Let us say this is the
wine talking. I will forget you
ever--

Orvo SLAMS the door shut.

ORVO
Do you even have fifty thousand
denarii right now? In cash?

No. He doesn't.

LUCRETIUS
I apologize for the way Columba
behaved in Rome. Trust me,
Senator. I will pay you back in
full, plus interest.

ORVO
With what?

LUCRETIUS
I have three spice ships returning
from the East any day now--

Orvo chuckles. He's been waiting for this.

LUCRETIUS (CONT'D)
What's so funny?

ORVO
Your spice ships were lost to
pirates off Ephesus six weeks ago.

Lucretius has no reason to believe Orvo.

LUCRETIUS
I've received no message regarding
any loss--

Orvo slips a sealed scroll out from under his toga. Lucretius snaps the wax and unfurls it to read.

ORVO

News comes to Rome so much more
quickly than it does to Pompeii.

It's indeed bad news. Very bad. Lucretius tries to hold himself together.

ORVO (CONT'D)

Now let me see.... What asset
could you possibly have that would
be worth that kind of money to me?

LUCRETIVS

I have assets worth much more than
my daughter--

ORVO

I disagree. Upon your death,
Columba will inherit your lands,
your ships-- You see, we are
talking business.

Lucretius can't begin to respond. Orvo has him by the balls.

ORVO (CONT'D)

I'll take her back to Rome with me
tomorrow. My ship sails on the
tide. Have her ready.

Lucretius bites his tongue. What he'd give to strangle Orvo right now. Orvo steps up to him, speaks very softly.

ORVO (CONT'D)

I will not be humiliated,
Lucretius.

Suddenly all smiles, Orvo cheerfully opens the door.

ORVO (CONT'D)

Shall we get back to the party?
You've really done a lovely job.
I'm impressed.

EXT. FORMAL GARDEN, LUCRETIVS'S VILLA - TWILIGHT

Orvo steps into the garden, where the party is at full buzz. The Gladiators in particular are laughing and having a fine time.

ACROSS THE GARDEN, Orvo spots--

Columba. She sees him --and she's not happy about it. Annoyed, she makes her way to Lucretius as he enters the garden.

COLUMBA

Father, why is Senator Orvo here?

LUCRETIUS
 Why shouldn't he be here?
 (looking past her)
 What do you want?

Columba turns to find Milo standing beside her. Milo speaks with careful formality. There's a constraint between them, as if neither can read the other's mood.

MILO
 Welcome back, my lady. I am happy
 to see you home safe.

COLUMBA
 So much has changed while I was gone.

MILO
 May I get you anything?

COLUMBA
 No. I think I'll step out to the
 orchard for a moment of peace.

Milo bows slightly as Columba glides away. Milo turns, heads the opposite direction, back into the house.

Lucretius watches after him, his eyes narrowed with suspicion.

INT. KITCHEN, LUCRETIUS'S VILLA - TWILIGHT

Open charcoal FIRES burn under half a dozen huge grills. Kitchen slaves fill serving trays:

A stuffed flamingo surrounded by peacock and swan feathers. A stack of sea urchins. An elaborate tower of pomegranates, figs, apples, dates.

Milo enters, looks around.

MILO
 Dulcima. Where is the pig?

DULCIMA
 There are so many possible answers
 to that question.

Milo leaves the kitchen.

EXT. FORMAL GARDEN, LUCRETIUS'S VILLA - TWILIGHT

As Milo crosses the garden, he passes--

Nigellus, on a bench, surrounded by a bevy of gorgeous women.

NIGELLUS
 Milo! There you are! Have you
 seen her yet?

Milo shoots Nigellus a "shut-up-not-now" look, but nods toward the outside of the garden. Nigellus gives Milo a thumbs up.

Milo heads for the cypress trees bordering the garden, and slips through them.

Nigellus turns his attention back to the ladies. His arm is around someone's HOT WIFE. He continues with his story.

NIGELLUS (CONT'D)

So he had me backed up against the wall. But I looked at his knees, and I knew he was weakening.

As he speaks, his hand drifts down to caress the Hot Wife's shapely ass. The Hot Wife doesn't seem to object.

But someone objects. Three of the young Aristocrats we noticed earlier object quite a bit.

They gather around Nigellus threateningly. The young men are lean, ripped and dangerous-looking.

ARISTOCRAT 1

That girl is my wife, if you don't mind.

He pulls his Hot Wife away. She resists.

HOT WIFE

Don't mind him. He's just pretending to be a man.

Aristocrat 1 raises his hand to slap her. Nigellus leans in front of her to block the slap.

NIGELLUS

You want to hit someone, hit me.

Aristocrat 1 doesn't want to hear it. He wrenches away and punches Nigellus in the gut.

The punch would have decked any other man. Nigellus doesn't even flinch.

ARISTOCRAT 1

You know, there's a reason you gladiators are slaves. Because one way or another, you deserve to die.

ARISTOCRAT 3

Let it go, Hector.

ARISTOCRAT 1

No slave boy gets to paw my wife.

NIGELLUS

(to the Hot Wife)

You neglected to mention the "wife" part.

Aristocrat 1 gives Nigellus a shove, anyway.

NIGELLUS (CONT'D)
Listen to your friend. You don't
want to fight me.

ARISTOCRAT 1
"Fight" you? I can do this to you--

He slaps Nigellus on the face. Nigellus doesn't move.

ARISTOCRAT 1 (CONT'D)
--And you don't dare touch me.
Because you're nothing but a
glorified slave. I can slice you
apart--

He plucks a carving knife off a nearby table filled with food,
waves it tauntingly in Nigellus's direction.

ARISTOCRAT 1 (CONT'D)
I can kill you, and all I'd have to
do is pay your owner for the
damages.

He lunges with the knife, straight at Nigellus. But Nigellus
makes a one-handed grab of an entire LEG OF MUTTON--

Whirls it around at Aristocrat 1--

Aristocrat 1's blade sinks deep into the meat -- THUNK!

Aristocrat 1's friends pull him away as, cool as silk,
Nigellus sits back down on the bench where all this started.

More smitten than ever, fawning women crowd around Nigellus.

NIGELLUS
(to the girls)
Now, where were we?

EXT. ORCHARDS, LUCRETIUS'S VILLA - TWILIGHT

A full acre of fruit trees, quiet and restful. Music and
laughter and light float from the villa in the background.

In a clearing, Columba looks up at the stars now coming out.

REVERSE ANGLE, REVEALING

Milo is watching her. He's hesitant. His heart has waited
for this moment for so long.

Pushing away his nerves, he steps into the clearing.

MILO
They say Venus is the one to wish on.

Columba turns.

COLUMBA
I've heard that.

MILO
You caused quite a commotion in the capital, from what I hear.

COLUMBA
I did my best.

MILO
You've returned unmarried. Was there no one interested or worthy in all of Rome?

COLUMBA
Interested, yes. Worthy? No... And you? No one of interest here in Pompeii?

MILO
Let me think. There was Ancilla and her twin sister Chloe. And a couple of ladies after Nigellus was through with them. Claudia, Portia, Justina, Callista, it's actually hard to keep count. And Dulcima, of course--

This is ridiculous. Columba throws herself on him and starts kissing him. A year's worth of pent-up longing in one moment.

She pulls back for a second.

COLUMBA
Dulcima? Really?

MILO
Are you kidding?

And they're at it again. True love.

HOLD ON

the full moon cresting over Vesuvius.

TILT DOWN TO REVEAL

EXT. ORCHARDS, LUCRETIUS'S VILLA - NIGHT

Milo and Columba walk hand in hand through the trees. Milo is bursting with good news in the company of the one person with whom he can truly share his dreams.

MILO
I'm up to 365 denarii.

COLUMBA
(astonished)
What?! When I left, you had less
than 200.

MILO
One hundred thirty-five more, and
I'm free.

COLUMBA
If he keeps his word.

MILO
He has to. It's the law.

COLUMBA
This is my father we're talking about.

MILO
I pay him back the same price he paid
for me, he has no choice but to
release me. I will do it publicly
though. In front of many witnesses,
so he can't wriggle out of it.

COLUMBA
How long? A week? A month?

MILO
Less than a year--

COLUMBA
He wants me married. Now. We
can't wait. You wouldn't believe
what I had to do in Rome to keep
Senator Orvo away.

MILO
You know we can't marry until I'm
free. But I'm getting closer to
that every day.

COLUMBA
If Father even knew we were out
here together--

MILO
He doesn't. Don't worry. We just
have to stick to our plan. The
minute I'm free, we run away, and
our lives will be our own.

COLUMBA
But--

MILO
Trust me, I will buy my freedom.
And I will marry you. Everything
is going to work out just as we've
always wanted.

Columba wishes it could be that easy.

COLUMBA
I want to believe--

Suddenly-- SCREAMS from the villa. Lots of screams.

EXT. FORMAL GARDEN, LUCRETIUS'S VILLA - NIGHT

Party guests look up to the sky in panic as--

THUD! A DEAD CROW falls from the sky. .

THUD! THUD! THUD! More DEAD CROWS, dropping out of nowhere onto the garden. Into the pool.

Two slaves positioning a Trojan pig (roasted whole, on its feet, stuffed with fruit) duck to avoid more DEAD CROWS. The pig falls, bursts open. Fruit falls everywhere.

EXT. ORCHARDS, LUCRETIUS'S VILLA - NIGHT

Milo grabs Columba's hand. We RUN WITH THEM toward the villa.

COLUMBA
We need to split up.

As they reach the entrance, Milo lets go Columba's hand and heads for the kitchens.

We FOLLOW COLUMBA--

EXT. FORMAL GARDEN, LUCRETIUS'S VILLA - NIGHT, CONTINUOUS

The crowd is freaked out by the dead crows. Scared, they start milling toward the exits.

Fortunata clutches Marcus Vettius's arm, horrified.

FORTUNATA
It's a sign of death! Do something!

Columba slips into the garden. Lucretius spots her coming in, disheveled. He's not happy.

Orvo also spots Columba entering the garden. He grabs Lucretius's arm.

ORVO
There she is. Tell her.

LUCRETIUS
(a low voice)
I know who you really are, Orvo.
But out here, you need to behave like a Senator.

Marcus Vettius rushes to Lucretius's side.

MARCUS VETTIUS
The party's ruined! Stop them!

Lucretius turns to a nervous Claudio.

LUCRETIUS
(to Claudio)
Get Flamma. Now!

Claudio and Fennius rush off. Lucretius grabs Marcus Vettius, pulls him back.

LUCRETIUS (CONT'D)
Get up there. You're the leader of these people, remember?

Marcus Vettius leaps onto a stone bench. He tries to soothe the crowd.

MARCUS VETTIUS
Good people of Pompeii! Ho, Vulcanalia!

A few automatic responses of "Ho, Vulcanalia!" from the crowd, which starts to quiet down. Marcus Vettius casts his winning politician's smile.

MARCUS VETTIUS (CONT'D)
Before we go to the bonfires, we have a treat for you! Would you like to see a modern-day Hercules? Ladies?

Cheers from the crowd.

MARCUS VETTIUS (CONT'D)
Someone so terrifying, he even makes the birds fall from the sky!

Some big laughs at this. It's working. Claudio squeezes up to Marcus Vettius's bench, gives him the signal.

MARCUS VETTIUS (CONT'D)
The reigning champion of Rome!
Fifty-nine fights, 59 victories!

A fever pitch of excitement builds and builds. The crowd parts to make way for--

MARCUS VETTIUS (CONT'D)
People of Pompeii! Here from the Colosseum in Rome: Flamma!

Necks crane to see, entering--

FLAMMA. Almost 7' tall. Massive, dwarfing the puny mortals around him. Arms the size of cannons. Thighs that defy nature. A Roman Superman.

Flamma leaps to the bench, pushing Marcus Vettius aside. His oiled body glistens in the torchlight. He flexes his muscles. Strikes a pose. He opens his mouth and roars, REVEALING--

Sharpened teeth! He looks like a human shark.

The crowd goes absolutely crazy. Marcus Vettius couldn't be happier. He positively glows.

MARCUS VETTIUS (CONT'D)
My people! Listen! There's more!

As the hubbub dies down...

MARCUS VETTIUS (CONT'D)
Tomorrow, the games begin! And there's only one gladiator in all of Pompeii worthy to take on Flamma. Our own champion, Pompeii's best, our very own... NIGELLUS!

A ROAR goes up from the crowd.

SHOCK ZOOM TO NIGELLUS

Stunned. That can't be right. He must have heard wrong.

As everyone around him claps him on the back, congratulates him, his face grows pale.

The Aristocrats whose asses he just kicked see his reaction and laugh nastily.

ARISTOCRAT 1
Serves him right.

Nigellus looks at Flamma-- flexing, flashing those pointed teeth. An unbeatable monster. Nigellus is looking at his own death.

WATCHING HIM is Milo, also shocked at the announcement. His first move is to follow Nigellus-- but he checks himself and instead works his way toward--

Lucretius and Marcus Vettius, accepting congratulations. Milo isn't allowed to interrupt, but first chance he gets--

MILO
Master. Excuse me.

LUCRETIVS
Aren't you needed in the kitchen?

Milo swallows his surprise at Lucretius's angry response.

MILO
My apologies for my interruption, but-- Isn't Nigellus fighting Bellator tomorrow?
(to Marcus Vettius)
Magistrate?

MARCUS VETTIUS
The program's been changed.

MILO
But sir-- Nigellus is only two
fights away from earning his
freedom. And Flamma is--

MARCUS VETTIUS
Our guest from Rome deserves to see
our best. And Nigellus is our best.

MILO
I'm just thinking of his following.
He has thousands of fans here in
Pompeii. They love him. And if he
dies tomorrow--

MARCUS VETTIUS
They'll find another gladiator to
root for.

LUCRETIUS
The Magistrate doesn't care to
discuss this matter with a slave.

Milo bows. He knows when he's lost. He backs away. Looks
around the crowd. No sign of Nigellus.

INT. KITCHEN, LUCRETIUS'S VILLA - DAY

Milo sticks his head in the kitchen.

MILO
Have you seen Nigellus?

No. Milo ducks out.

THE NEXT ROOM

A darkened room filled with bodies. Wrapped around each
other, sliding and pulsing.

Milo lifts an eyebrow. Not what he was looking for.

EXT. ORCHARDS, LUCRETIUS'S VILLA - NIGHT

Milo runs through the orchards, looking right and left. No
sign of Nigellus. Ahead of Milo -- the STABLES.

INT. STABLES, LUCRETIUS'S VILLA - NIGHT

As Milo pulls open the barn door, light spills in from the
festivities in the villa.

AT THE FAR END OF THE STABLES--

Nigellus. A huge amphora of wine clutched in his hands. He's trying hard to get sloshed.

The two men just stare at each other for a moment.

MILO

I didn't know.

NIGELLUS

Neither did I. Obviously.

He raises his amphora.

NIGELLUS (CONT'D)

Here's to my last fight. Care to take some very long odds on me?

Milo says nothing.

NIGELLUS (CONT'D)

I didn't think so.

MILO

You were supposed to fight Bellator. They can't go changing the rules.

NIGELLUS

(a bitter laugh)

You know better than that.

MILO

What if Flamma takes on ten criminals instead? Men who are supposed to be executed anyway. If the people still get a show--

NIGELLUS

That's what I've always liked about you, Milo, since we were kids back in Salerno. You fix things. But you can't fix this.

MILO

Then we have to find a way for you to beat him. Even Achilles had a weak spot. I'm sorry, but this is wrong. You shouldn't be tossed to your death so people don't get bored on a feast day afternoon.

Nigellus lays his massive hand on Milo's shoulder.

NIGELLUS

Your problem, Milo, is you think this is still the Republic. Sorry to tell you. Nobility died with Julius, and the jackals have been feeding on its corpse ever since.

Milo watches, concerned, as Nigellus stumbles off.

EXT. LUCRETIUS'S VILLA - NIGHT

It's a complete zoo.

Dozens of Guests pour out of the villa at once. Most of them are drunk. Dozens of Slaves pull carriages around, calm nervous horses, look for their masters.

IN THE FORECOURT

The Gladiators stand in formation, surrounded by Roman Guards.

AT THE ENTRANCE TO THE VILLA

Lucretius says good night to his guests, Marcus Vettius hovering right behind. Suddenly Marcus Vettius elbows Lucretius.

MARCUS VETTIUS

Oh no. What is she doing here?

MARCUS VETTIUS'S POV

Fighting her way upstream against the departing guests, coming straight at them, is a hooded figure in a long, flowing robe. Guests move away from her with some trepidation as she passes.

NIGELLUS, stumbling around the side of the villa, amphora of wine still in his hand, spots her. His eyes widen. He changes direction, starts to move toward her when--

A WHIP SNAPS. Proculus the Nasty Guard snatches Nigellus's amphora from him.

PROCULUS

Festivities are over. Fall in.

NIGELLUS

But -- Wait--

He bellows back to the hooded figure--

NIGELLUS (CONT'D)

Strigana!

Hearing her name, the figure throws back her hood, REVEALING--

A woman with the whitest skin we've ever seen and purple eyes that see beyond the present. Beautiful but eerie, this is STRIGANA.

Strigana doesn't see who called her. She continues on toward--

LUCRETIUS AND MARCUS VETTIUS, watching her approach.

MARCUS VETTIUS
 I don't need any more bad news.
 (clutches Lucretius's elbow)
 Don't let her speak to the guests!

LUCRETIVS
 Let me handle this.

IN THE FORECOURT

Proculus jabs Nigellus into formation with the other Gladiators.
 Nigellus, looking back wildly, spots--

MILO, coming around the side of the villa.

NIGELLUS
 Milo! Milo!

Milo hears him. He rushes over. Nigellus is urgent.

NIGELLUS (CONT'D)
 I need to ask you a favor.

MILO
 What?

NIGELLUS
 Strigana-- Did you see her?

MILO
 Strigana the witch? What is she
 doing here?

NIGELLUS
 She's a prophet, not a witch. She
 can tell me how I die--

MILO
 You're not going to die--

NIGELLUS
 Please! I need to know.

Proculus shoves Milo--

PROCLUS
 Out of the way, slave! Gladiators--
 March!

The Gladiators start to march away.

NIGELLUS
 (calling back)
 Please, Milo! Ask her for me!

And the Gladiators, double time now, are out the villa gates
 and gone.

Milo, perturbed, looks around. No sign of Strigana. No sign
 of Lucretius and Marcus Vettius either. Where could they be?

INT. LUCRETIUS'S STUDY - NIGHT

Strigana speaks with low urgency to Lucretius and Marcus Vettius.

STRIGANA

You are the two men in Pompeii who can warn the people. They will listen to you.

MARCUS VETTIUS

So you're saying we're going to have another earthquake? Our buildings are much safer than they were 17 years ago. Our architects have learned--

STRIGANA

No! The end of the city is coming. The god Vulcan has spoken to me in a vision. You must warn the people of Pompeii, you must tell them of the coming destruction.

LUCRETIUS

When you say "destruction"--

STRIGANA

Are you not reading the signs? Don't you see? Crows fall from the sky all over the city. Fish die in the ocean. The earth shakes. Even the very water in the wells goes bad. The gods are speaking and you are not listening.

LUCRETIUS

Tell us what you want us to do.

MARCUS VETTIUS

You believe her?

LUCRETIUS

Birds don't just fall out of the sky, Marcus. This woman is a true prophet of Vulcan.

(to Strigana)

When is this going to happen?

STRIGANA

I don't know. Soon. Very soon.

LUCRETIUS

Then we must act quickly. What if we make an announcement tomorrow at the games? Ten thousand people will be there.

MARCUS VETTIUS

We can't do that! They'll never believe it!

LUCRETIUS
If it comes from you, they will
believe.
(to Strigana)
You were right to come to us. We
will get your message out.

INT. CORRIDOR, LUCRETIUS'S VILLA - DAY

Strigana walks away from Lucretius's study, overjoyed. As she
disappears from view....

Lucretius and Marcus Vettius step out of the study.

MARCUS VETTIUS
This announcement will be the most
embarrassing thing I've ever done.

LUCRETIUS
Don't worry. You're not going to
make any announcement.

MARCUS VETTIUS
But you just told her--

LUCRETIUS
I have too much riding on this
weekend to risk it all scaring half
of Pompeii over some silly thing--

MARCUS VETTIUS
But... but what if she's right?

LUCRETIUS
You can't be serious.

EXT. LUCRETIUS'S VILLA - NIGHT

Strigana makes her way out the front gates. Milo is waiting.
He touches her arm to stop her.

MILO
Strigana--

Strigana looks at Milo as if she sees deep inside his soul.

STRIGANA
Come to me in my temple tomorrow.
I will have your answer.

Milo is so stunned, he lets her walk away from him. Before he
can follow--

COLUMBA (O.S.)
Milo?

Columba has slipped up next to Milo. Meanwhile, Strigana
disappears in the departing crowd.

COLUMBA (CONT'D)
How is Nigellus? Can he possibly
beat Flamma?

MILO
No....

COLUMBA
I'm so sorry...
(a worried look)
I'll find you after the bonfires.
Father's waiting.

She runs through the maze of carriages towards--

LUCRETIUS'S CARRIAGE, where the crusty old Driver who brought
her into town sits on the driver's seat. He throws her a look
of warning. She doesn't see it.

COLUMBA (CONT'D)
I'm sorry, Father, I--

She stops. It isn't Lucretius in the carriage. It's Orvo.

He pulls her down next to him, gripping her tightly. He
speaks lasciviously into her ear as his hand roams dangerously
down her throat, across her breasts...

ORVO
You left Rome so swiftly. I know
you must have missed me.

POV FROM OUTSIDE THE CARRIAGE

As Columba squirms and shoves his hands away.

REVERSE ANGLE, REVEALING

Milo is watching all this. He's livid. His eyes meet Orvo's.
Milo starts to move toward the carriage when--

LUCRETIUS (O.S.)
Columba! We'll miss the bonfires!

Lucretius pushes past him. As he climbs into the carriage,
Orvo lets Columba go. She slides all the way across, forcing
Lucretius to sit between them.

COLUMBA
I'm already here, Father.

AS THE CARRIAGES RUMBLE AWAY

Milo watches the carriage drive away, still angry, then looks
up at Mount Vesuvius.

MILO'S POV

A bonfire BLAZES brightly across the mountainside. Then
another one.

EXT. TEMPLE - NIGHT

Hundreds of people gather around the huge piles of wood spread across the mountain slope. We see party guests, including Marcus Vettius and his entourage. Some people clutch single fish in their hands, others hold entire baskets of fish.

The High Priest shouts out to his priests, who touch lit torches to the wood. BONFIRES blaze up. All the people cheer.

People begin to gather around various bonfires. Gaily they toss their fish into the fires.

PEOPLE
To Vulcan! // Hear us, O Vulcan! //
Good fortune! // Favor us, Vulcan!

Suddenly-- A big EARTHQUAKE hits.

People stumble into each other--

The BONFIRES crackle--

Logs tumble down, scattering SPARKS--

One entire BONFIRE COLLAPSES, its burning logs spewing in every direction--

BURNING TREE TRUNKS barrel down the mountainside--

People nearby scream and run out of the way--

Dropping their fish as they run--

One little boy is hit by a flaming log--

His mother grabs him-- Slaps at the flames--

Another BONFIRE COLLAPSES-- SPARKS fly everywhere--

The High Priest stands frozen, horrified--

The EARTHQUAKE SUBSIDES. Everyone remains frozen in place for a second. Then--

As if in unison, the worshippers heave entire baskets of fish into the nearest bonfire. They look around--

WORSHIPPERS' POV

Kellus and his crewmen man a fish stall. Kellus is trying to straighten the piles of fish that have fallen.

Kellus looks up.

HIS POV

Hundreds of worshippers descend toward his fish stall en masse.

EXT. COLOSSEUM - NIGHT

TORCHLIGHT floods the arena's entrance. A full platoon of ROMAN GUARDS on horseback herd a group toward the front gates.

It's the Gladiators. Being locked up for the night. A whip CRACKS.

Proculus cracks a whip.

PROCULUS

Get in there, you sons of death!

Nigellus spits surreptitiously at Proculus as he's herded forward.

INT. COLOSSEUM - NIGHT

The Gladiators march through a tunnel lit by TORCHLIGHT. We hear animal GROWLS and HISSES up ahead.

Bellator straggles behind.

PROCULUS

Move along, Bellator! What's your problem?

Proculus jabs Bellator hard with the butt of his whip.

PROCULUS (CONT'D)

You sad that your boyfriend's going to get killed tomorrow?

Howling at his own joke, Proculus grabs Bellator's butt. Bellator twists away, then lunges at Proculus, ready to strangle. Another Guard swats him to the ground with a pike.

Nigellus looks back, simmering with anger. But he turns away and keeps walking into the Colosseum.

EXT. TEMPLE - NIGHT

Milo trudges up toward the temple, clearly headed the wrong way against the stragglers streaming downhill. Most of the giant bonfires have sputtered out, though a couple still burn.

KELLUS (O.S.)

Milo!

Kellus, inexplicably excited, dashes over to meet Milo.

KELLUS (CONT'D)

Where have you been? Did you feel all that shaking? I never saw that many people get so religious so fast.

MILO

Yeah, we felt it.

KELLUS

Here. I saved some for you.

Kellus digs a few fish out of the bottom of a basket. Hands them to Milo. Milo tosses the fish into the embers.

MILO

(mechanically)

All praise to Vulcan.

KELLUS

You aren't going to believe this!
Look!

Kellus kicks a couple of baskets aside to reveal an enormous box. He opens it.

The box is full of large brass coins. Kellus can't suppress his grin.

MILO

What's all this?

KELLUS

You said we should sell the fish.
We sold the fish.

MILO

But-- How much did you charge?

KELLUS

Priests kept jacking the price up
all night. That's over twelve
hundred in there.

MILO

That's-- twelve hundred? So if a
third goes to the priests--

KELLUS

Priests already took their cut.
And me and the boys took ours.
(nods at the box)
That's all yours.

Milo's jaw drops.

INT. GLADIATOR HOLDING CELL - NIGHT

The Guards herd the Gladiators into a large underground room filled with sleeping benches. Straw on the floor. Bare brick walls. One side of the cell is all iron bars holding the Gladiators captive.

The animal GROWLS are closer and louder here.

The other Gladiators shy away from Nigellus as they file in. Except for one.

As Nigellus flops down on his own bench, Bellator sits down across from him. To his credit, Bellator looks guilty about being happy at the change of program.

He tries to crack a lame joke at Nigellus.

BELLATOR

So Nigellus. You're a lucky guy.
You don't have to face me tomorrow.

NIGELLUS

(not in the mood)
Yeah. Lucky me.

BELLATOR

Leave it to these politicians to
make a mess of things, right?

Nigellus doesn't respond. Why should he?

BELLATOR (CONT'D)

I just wanted to tell you.... I
offered up prayers for you for
tomorrow.

NIGELLUS

(surprised)
Thank you.

BELLATOR

I prayed Flamma would take you out
early. That you wouldn't suffer a
lingering death, anything like that.

Nigellus throws a look at Bellator. Wow. That was comforting.

The last Gladiator has been shoved into the barracks.

GUARD

Stand clear!

--A massive IRON PORTCULLIS drops down -- THUNK! -- caging them
all in. A cacophony of ANIMAL ROARS responds to the sound.

Armed Guards lock the portcullis in place with steel chains and a
padlock, then hang the keys on a spike in the corridor wall.

Proculus "just happens" to turn so his pike jabs through the
bars and KNOCKS OVER the Gladiators' table of food and water.
Bread and meat fall onto the floor. Water spills over the food.

Proculus sneers at Bellator as he leaves.

BELLATOR

That bastard wouldn't last ten
seconds in the arena. But we're
locked up and he walks free.

NIGELLUS
After tomorrow, he's your problem,
not mine.

EXT. LUCRETIUS'S VILLA - NIGHT

Two shadowy figures creep from the villa toward the stables.

COLUMBA
(hushed voice)
What is this about?

INT. KITCHEN, LUCRETIUS'S VILLA - NIGHT

Dulcima, putting dishes away, glances out the window.

HER POV

A flickering lantern SILHOUETTES a male and female figure in a stable window.

MILO (O.S.)
Take a look at our future.

INT. STABLES, LUCRETIUS'S VILLA - NIGHT

CLOSE-UP ON

Milo's cashbox opened, REVEALING piles and piles of money.
Columba gasps.

COLUMBA
How much is it?

MILO
Over twelve hundred denarii.

COLUMBA
Twelve hundred?

MILO
I could pay your father double what
he paid for me and still have
plenty left over.

COLUMBA
This is amazing, Milo. But what if
my father won't agree to let you
buy your freedom?

MILO
He has to. It's the law. But next
comes the hard part. We need a plan.
(his mind works furiously)
I'll have Kellus move the boat to the
sea cave. We'll meet at sunset.

COLUMBA

Why?

MILO

Because tomorrow's the day we've been waiting for. The minute I buy my freedom, we leave Pompeii. We slip out of town, we meet at the cave, we just sail away--

Columba's head is bowed. Milo tenderly lifts her chin with his finger and sees-- She's crying.

MILO (CONT'D)

What's the matter? I thought you'd be happy.

He wipes her tears away. Leans to kiss her.

PULL BACK THROUGH THE STABLE WINDOW TO REVEAL--

EXT. ORCHARDS, LUCRETIUS'S VILLA - NIGHT, CONTINUOUS

Dulcima lurks in the shadows of the orchard, spying. She turns and heads into the villa.

INT. STABLES, LUCRETIUS'S VILLA - NIGHT

COLUMBA

In truth, Milo....Do you love me?

Milo is stunned at this, but immediately realizes--

MILO

I'm asking you to give up everything... If you've changed your mind--

She takes his hand.

COLUMBA

No! I just... I never thought this day would come.... Is this really going to work?

MILO

Yes. This is our time. And nothing can take it away from us.

Suddenly the two are kissing like there's no tomorrow.

DULCIMA (O.S.)

I saw them kissing, master.

INT. LUCRETIUS'S STUDY - NIGHT

Dulcima, gleaming with excitement over the gossip she's just delivered, faces Lucretius, who has scrolls spread out across his table. He seems unsurprised at her big news.

DULCIMA

Aren't you going to do anything about it?

Lucretius looks up, cold and hardened.

LUCRETIUS

I already have.

EXT. LUCRETIUS'S VILLA - NIGHT

Vesuvius looms, calm and stern in the MOONLIGHT.

NIGHT BLEEDS TO DAY

EXT. MT. VESUVIUS - DAY

CLOSE-UP ON

A SPIDERWEB, dewy and fragile, glistening in the morning light. The Spider works diligently.

RACK FOCUS TO REVEAL

Milo hikes up the side of the mountain. He pauses to catch his breath.

BELOW HIM

Lit by the earliest rays of the sun peeking over a placid Mt. Vesuvius, Pompeii, 1000 feet below, awakens in all its hedonistic beauty.

But Milo is distracted by the sight of--

DEAD SHEEP. Hundreds of them, lying on their sides all together on the side of the mountain. YELLOW SULPHUROUS FOG spurts up from the ground all around them.

Milo looks at the sheep, appalled, then puts his arm across his nose and keeps hiking. Not far ahead, a temple built right into the side of the mountain.

EXT. STRIGANA'S CAVE/TEMPLE - DAY

Grand pillars carved right out of the rock of the mountain stand guard on either side of the cave's entrance. Ancient rusted iron gates stand wide open.

Hesitantly, Milo enters.

INT. STRIGANA'S CAVE/TEMPLE- DAY

Down the tunnel where all daylight ends, a small firepit blazes.

MILO

Hello?...

No answer. Milo grabs an unlit torch and ignites it in the firepit.

AHEAD OF HIM

Fires burn along the tunnel, which opens ahead into an enormous cavern. Along the walls, carved friezes depicting the life of the Roman god Vulcan.

Milo enters...

THE TEMPLE TO VULCAN

Stalactites and stalagmites have been carved into elaborate columns, all surrounding...

VULCAN

Carved right out of the rock of the cave wall, looming 12' overhead. Painted with gold, with eyes of large rubies, Vulcan holds a hammer in one hand. The palm of his other hand, facing up, has a FIRE burning on it.

BEFORE THE STATUE

Strigana lights incense, whispers anxious words of prayer.

BEHIND STRIGANA

Milo appears from the tunnel. He lowers his torch.

MILO (CONT'D)

Strigana?

Strigana rises to face Milo. Her ultra-porcelain skin glows in the firelight. She doesn't appear pleased to see him.

STRIGANA

Your master has condemned the city to death. What kind of man does that?

MILO

(startled)

I beg your pardon?

STRIGANA

He lied to me.

MILO

I'm sorry, I don't know what you're talking about.

STRIGANA

Because your master chose to keep secret what I told him. I should not have trusted men whose main talent is to lie for a living.

She grasps Milo's hand so fast he can't jerk back.

STRIGANA (CONT'D)

Someone must tell the world that here once was a mighty city. You must do it. Go down the mountain and tell everyone you love to leave Pompeii. Now.

Milo jerks his hand away.

MILO

Look, I'm here because my friend Nigellus, the gladiator, asked me to come--

STRIGANA

I know why you are here. It is good that you care about your friend. But it is insignificant compared to the annihilation of thousands.

MILO

I... don't understand.

STRIGANA

The gods have aligned against the city. I told your master, and he refused to believe.

MILO

Just tell me how to help Nigellus. Does he win his match against Flamma?

STRIGANA

He wins. And yet he does not win. He loses. And yet he does not lose.

MILO

This is... not as helpful as you might think.

STRIGANA

Every man, woman, child and beast in the city will be consumed by Vulcan! That is the only prophecy that matters. You must go down the mountain and tell everyone you meet to flee!

MILO

You tell them to flee.

STRIGANA

I cannot. I may not leave this cave.

MILO

You left it last night.

She grips Milos's hand again, her snow white skin gleaming in the firelight.

STRIGANA

At night, yes. Not in the day. If the sun touches my skin, I die. My disease is the price of my gift.

Milo tries to pull away, but he can't. Strigana has surprising strength.

STRIGANA (CONT'D)

Do you need proof? Shall I tell you secrets only the gods know?

She twirls her finger around Milo's palm.

STRIGANA (CONT'D)

You love your master's daughter.

MILO

What?! No!

STRIGANA

She loves you. You plan to buy your freedom and escape together. I see treachery gathering against you--

MILO

Have you been spying on us?!

He yanks his hand free.

STRIGANA

Find your love, find anyone you love and flee. Don't wait for your master. If you leave in time, your life will be your own.

MILO

They crucify runaway slaves--

STRIGANA

Someone must live, or I have failed completely...

She reaches into nothingness, as if straining to catch a fading vision.

STRIGANA (CONT'D)

Burning... The city in flames...
A pillar to the heavens.

MILO

...I'm sorry, but I can't believe what you're saying--

STRIGANA

You have seen the signs. The earth trembles. Birds fall from the sky, dead.

MILO

(a bit troubled)
And the fish.

STRIGANA

Ask your heart. You will know what I am saying is true.

MILO

My heart tells me my best friend is going to die today. And if you can't do anything about it, then I have to.

STRIGANA

Don't wait until it's too late--

MILO

I'll think about what you said, Strigana, but I have to go.

As he starts to leave, Strigana calls after him.

STRIGANA

Watch for the signs. The pillar to the heavens. You won't have much time.

EXT. STRIGANA'S CAVE/TEMPLE - DAY

Milo emerges into the open air, a little baffled by what just happened. He starts the long hike back down the mountain.

BELOW HIM

The City of Pompeii. WE PUSH IN TOWARDS...

EXT. THE THERMAE - DAY

The public baths -- the social center of Pompeii. A three-story marble sports complex and spa. Add electricity and some neon, it would fit right in on the Vegas Strip.

INT. THE WATERFALL SHOWER, THE THERMAE - DAY

A CURTAIN OF WATER, 30' high, 40' wide, rains down over our movers and shakers, clad in loincloths and sandals. Lucretius looks around as he slips off his sandals and joins them.

LUCRETIOUS
Ow. Hotter than usual.

CLAUDIO
It's perfect once you get used to it.

Marcus Vettius continues his previous conversation as
Lucretius eases his way into the hot water.

MARCUS VETTIUS
The biggest problem will be
maintaining order outside the
Colosseum. Fans who can't get in.

LUCRETIOUS
You're talking about Flamma?

FENNIUS
Who else?

LUCRETIOUS
All he's done so far is wave his
arms around. Will he live up to
his billing, is my concern.

MARCUS VETTIUS
(rolls his eyes)
Ask my wife.

INT. WOMEN'S SPA, THE THERMAE - DAY

Fortunata and the Trophy Wives, barely-draped, lie on massage
tables arranged in a triangle so they can talk, as Slave Masseurs
knead them and scrape their skin with curved implements.

TROPHY WIFE
What say you, Fortunata? Dagger,
short sword, or long sword?

FORTUNATA
Javelin.

The ladies giggle.

FORTUNATA (CONT'D)
An unusually thick javelin.

More giggling.

FORTUNATA (CONT'D)
Or so I've heard.

And more giggling.

EXT. KELLUS'S APARTMENT - DAY

A narrow street filled with small brick dwellings.

Milo runs up the street, calls to a second floor apartment.

MILO

Kellus!

FROM THE ROOFTOP

Kellus sticks his head over the edge of the roof. Waves to Milo to come up.

EXT. ROOF GARDEN, KELLUS'S APARTMENT - DAY

A great view of the harbor and the bay from this peaceful roof garden. Spices and fruit grow in pots.

Kellus's wife, ANNA, lays out laundry to dry on one end of the roof garden, her TWO DAUGHTERS helping her. Kellus bounces a baby on his lap.

As Milo appears coming up the stairs--

ANNA

Good morning, Milo.

DAUGHTERS

Good morning, Milo.

MILO

Good morning, Anna, girls.

Kellus laughs as Milo crosses the roof garden to join him.

KELLUS

I thought you'd sleep in this morning! After a haul like that last night!

MILO

Listen. I need to buy the boat.

KELLUS

What?

MILO

Today. You know I've got the money.

KELLUS

Yeah, but-- You want your own boat, take your time, see if you can find something better. What's the rush?

A grin grows on Milo's face. He's been waiting to say this for a very long time.

MILO

I'm buying my freedom today.

KELLUS

Today?!

MILO

And the second I'm officially free,
Columba and I slip away. That's
why I need the boat--

KELLUS

Today?!!

MILO

And I need you to sail the boat down
to that sea cave. You know, the one
down south, under the bluffs.

Kellus lets out a loud whoop of joy. Milo shushes him.

MILO (CONT'D)

You're the only one who can know
about this. If Lucretius were to
find out--

KELLUS

I'll move the boat right now.

MILO

Thank you.

But his eyes follow Anna as she folds up endless layers of white
laundry. What if Strigana was right? He turns back to Kellus.

MILO (CONT'D)

Listen. Take some time off. You
should go on holiday.

KELLUS

Holiday?

MILO

You got all that money last night.
Go visit your brother in Salerno
for a few weeks.

KELLUS

(laughs)

You're thinking like a rich man
already.

MILO

It's not that... There's been a... a
prophecy. It might not be very
pleasant around Pompeii for a while.

KELLUS

Come on, you don't believe that stuff?

MILO

I'm not sure. But look. Once
Columba and I have left town,
someone might ask if you know where
we went. Please. Just take Anna
and the girls out of Pompeii.

KELLUS

(shrugs)

Sure. We'll go "on holiday." We can go to Salerno. Or maybe Naples. Or I've always wanted to go to Messina--

MILO

Tomorrow at the latest.

KELLUS

I don't believe this. You're doing what you always said you'd do! You're going to run off, get married, have babies.

MILO

That was always the plan.

KELLUS

Just don't let any of them grow up to be slaves.

Kellus gives Milo a bear hug.

KELLUS (CONT'D)

This is going to be the best day of your life!

As Milo pries himself out of the hug--

MILO

One last thing. Could you spare a couple of jars of honeyed posca?

KELLUS

A little early in the day, don't you think?

MILO

It's for a friend.

EXT. THE THERMAE - DAY

A steady parade of citizens in and out of the baths.

INT. EXERCISE POOL, THE THERMAE - DAY

Restful and quiet. A fountain TRICKLES softly nearby.

Marcus Vettius and Lucretius stand in the pool, splashing water onto their bodies. Fennius and Claudio sip wine by the pool. A couple of swimmers horse around in the water, racing and splashing each other.

Fennius calls out to Lucretius from the lounging area.

FENNIUS
Great party last night, Lucretius.
Loved the dead crows!

LUCRETIUS
Thank you.

MARCUS VETTIUS
Thank the gods it all ended well.
Bringing Flamma in just then-- that
saved the party.

LUCRETIUS
(sour)
Glad I thought of it, then.

ON FENNIUS AND CLAUDIO, as they pour more wine.

FENNIUS
Personally, I think gladiators are
a dying breed. No pun intended.

CLAUDIO
On the other hand, where are all
the good playwrights these days?

FENNIUS
At the stadium watching brainless
apes hack each other to death.
That's why nothing good has been
written since Plautus.

A witty laugh between the men until a BIG SPLASH from the pool
interrupts them.

FENNIUS (CONT'D)
Do you mind?!

EXT. COLOSSEUM - DAY

Milo stands at the gladiators' entrance to the Colosseum. He
holds two jars. Two SOLDIERS bar his way.

SOLDIER 1
Sorry. No one gets in to see the
Gladiators on game day.

MILO
But my master sent this special
wine as a gift to Flamma.

SOLDIER 2
To Flamma? You sure it wasn't your
master's wife?

MILO
Well, actually...

A knowing chuckle from the Soldiers. Soldier 2 takes a jar from Milo, sniffs it. It smells wonderful.

SOLDIER 2

Raisin wine? That's good stuff.

SOLDIER 1

Fine. Leave it here. We'll see that Flamma gets it.

MILO

I'll get in trouble. My master said specifically to hand it to Flamma... I made a mistake, though. I grabbed two jars on my way out instead of one. And they're so hard to carry. Could I trust you keep this jar safe?

He hands one over. The Soldiers glance at each other.

SOLDIER 1

We'll keep it safe. Just don't let our sergeant see you.

As they deliberately turn away, Milo slips into the blackness of the Colosseum tunnels.

INT. TUNNEL, COLOSSEUM - DAY

Milo strides down a torch-lit corridor under the Colosseum.

Plenty of activity under the Colosseum on game day -- Trainers, slaves, officials, all over the place. Milo walks with assurance, as if he knows where he's going.

A LARGE SPACE, with light shining down from outside.

Along one side of the walkway, a dozen men strain to pull ropes and pulleys. A PLATFORM RISES out of view. A huge metal structure is on it -- We can't quite see what it is.

Milo keeps walking.

AROUND ANOTHER CORNER

Ahead of Milo, we hear the sound of STEEL ON STEEL.

Milo rounds another corner and immediately slides back into the shadows as he spots--

FLAMMA

Clad only in a loincloth, his muscles glistening with oil.

Flamma's in a warm-up stall, sparring with FOUR TRAINING PARTNERS, each wearing a breastplate and fighting with a short sword.

The Training Partners fight hard. They're sweating. Trying to get to Flamma. But he's so massive, and his sword is so long, there's just no way. In fact, he seems almost bored as he fights.

BLOOD. A slash across a Training Partner's chest. The man falls.

TRAINING PARTNER #1
(checking his buddy)
I think he's really hurt.

The first Training Partner heads out on a run.

FLAMMA
Get me more.

Before he's even finished saying it, four fresh TRAINING PARTNERS enter the stall, ready to fight. The original guys drag their injured friend away.

Without a word, Flamma begins to fight again.

ON MILO

In the corridor, watching it all. His eyes narrow, following Flamma's huge sword flashing back and forth. He doesn't like what he sees.

Milo slips back down the corridor.

INT. FLAMMA'S ARMORY - DAY

Milo looks around. No one's watching. He slips into--

A cell turned into a temporary armory. Huge weapons. Enormous armor -- Flamma's cuirass alone (the breastplate that covers front and back) must weigh 70 pounds.

STANDING IN THE MIDDLE OF THE ROOM

A headless BRONZE SKELETON holding special armor. Black and covered with cowhide.

Next to the bronze skeleton, as if on display: A helmet in the shape of a bull's head. THE MINOTAUR.

Milo checks out the armor. He tries to lift the cuirass-- Oof! It's huge.

He checks out the smaller pieces: Greaves (shin guards). The cingulum (a hanging codpiece). Wrist guards. All the pieces are held on with thin leather straps.

Milo fingers the straps, pondering. Then he stands on tiptoe to inspect the helmet. He lifts the iron hinge at the back to glance into the helmet.

A small grin on Milo's face. He's got the answer. But--

FLAMMA'S TRAINER
You! No one's allowed in here!

Uh-oh! Milo's been caught.

FLAMMA'S TRAINER (CONT'D)
Trying to mess with my fighter's
equipment, are you?

MILO
This is for you. Keep up the good
work.

The Trainer sniffs the wine suspiciously. Mmm. Good stuff.
He looks up. Milo is gone.

INT. GLADIATOR HOLDING CELL - DAY

Milo pounds on the portcullis of the stall.

MILO
Nigellus! Hey, Nigellus!

INSIDE THE CELL

Gladiators are subdued. Looking within themselves. Each
preparing to fight and to die.

Nigellus rises to meet Milo.

NIGELLUS
...Milo? Did you get my prophecy?

MILO
I've got something even better.

Milo motions to Nigellus to crouch down. As Milo whispers in
Nigellus's ear...

WE BEGIN A SLOW PULLBACK, DOWN THE TUNNEL

Milo and Nigellus become smaller, crowded out by the darkness
of the tunnel. As all GOES TO BLACK...

INT. TUNNEL, COLOSSEUM - DAY

The SOUND OF MARCHING begins. TRUMPETS blare. People CHEER!

Ahead of us, the tunnel entrance. Bright light. Sunshine
GLEAMS on sand.

We're marching with two dozen Gladiators. Beside us, Guards
keep us moving forward as we march into....

EXT. THE ARENA, COLOSSEUM - DAY, CONTINUOUS

The brightness hurts our eyes as we enter the arena of the Colosseum.

Nigellus marches at the head of the Gladiators. He draws his sword and salutes as he passes the Judge's Box. The other Gladiators also salute.

IN THE JUDGE'S BOX

Marcus Vettius graciously waves at the saluting Gladiators. Surrounding him, in their best togas, the cream of Pompeii society.

Fortunata, overly bejeweled, is in the next box back, with some of the Trophy Wives.

Marcus Vettius glances around. Asks a waiting Flunky.

MARCUS VETTIUS
Where's Lucretius? We can't start
without Lucretius.

EXT. LUCRETIUS'S VILLA - DAY

Milo hurries up to the entrance of the villa. As he catches his breath, he notices, in the forecourt--

A military wagon waiting at the entrance, with SOLDIERS holding the horses. On the wagon, an animal cage, like the one holding the leopards in yesterday's parade.

Also waiting: Lucretius's carriage, ready to ride out, and a black horse.

Milo's eyes narrow. This is odd. He glances at the villa gates-- Then rushes around the side of the villa toward--

EXT. STABLES, LUCRETIUS'S VILLA - DAY

Milo hurries into the stables.

INT. STABLES, LUCRETIUS'S VILLA - DAY

Milo starts digging through a pile of hay. He uncovers his cashbox. Flips it open--

IT'S EMPTY. He's been robbed.

Milo stares at it in disbelief. All his dreams... his entire future, shot to hell.

EXT. LUCRETIUS'S VILLA - DAY

Milo comes back around the corner of the villa to find--

Columba running out. Lucretius and Senator Orvo are right on her heels.

Lucretius snaps his fingers and points. Four Soldiers march on Milo with iron handcuffs and leg irons.

Dulcima lolls on the portico to watch as--

Columba runs past the Soldiers and throws her arms around Milo's neck. She's highly distraught.

COLUMBA

I'm sorry. I'm sorry. I swear I didn't know. I wanted to warn you--

LUCRETIUS

There'll be no more of that. Get back in the house.

Lucretius untwines his daughter from Milo as two soldiers grab him and pin his arms.

MILO

Master? What is this about? What have I done?

LUCRETIUS

What haven't you done? And with my daughter!

Lucretius slugs Milo in the gut.

LUCRETIUS (CONT'D)

As good as I have been to you all these years?! This is how you repay all my kindness and trust?

He backhands Milo with his fist, bloodies his lip. Senator Orvo steps in. Pulls Lucretius away from Milo.

ORVO

That's enough, Lucretius. Let the boy be.

MILO

(gasping)
Thank you--

ORVO

I won't let him hurt you anymore--

Orvo hits Milo in the jaw. Hard!

ORVO (CONT'D)
 --Because that's my job now. I'm
 your new master. And that's my bride
 you've had your filthy hands on.

COLUMBA
 (horror in her eyes)
 No!

She turns desperately to her father.

COLUMBA (CONT'D)
 Father, you can't sell Milo. He
 has the money to buy his freedom.
 Senator Orvo, I demand, under Roman
 law, that you allow this slave to
 buy his manumission!
 (to the Soldiers)
 You are all witnesses.

ORVO
 (to the Soldiers)
 Put him in the cage.

Columba starts to rush to Milo, but Lucretius grabs her and
 holds her back.

COLUMBA
 Tell me where you hid the money.
 I'll get it.

Milo can only shake his head.

MILO
 It's gone. Someone stole it.

COLUMBA
 What?!
 (to her father)
 He had the money. I saw it last
 night. We counted it.

She looks past Lucretius to--

Dulcima, on the front portico, drinking in Milo's humiliation.
 Columba points.

COLUMBA (CONT'D)
She took it. It had to be her.

LUCRETIUS
 Now hold on--

COLUMBA
 Over 1000 denarii which Milo earned
 legally! Ask Evaristus the high
 priest, he'll tell you!

LUCRETIUS
 Last night Dulcima recovered
 missing money which Milo stole from
 my private vault--

MILO
 What?! I have never--

COLUMBA
 That's a lie! Milo did not
 steal any--

LUCRETIUS (CONT'D)
 --and she handed me every last
 denarius. That's what I call
 loyalty.

Dulcima smiles at Lucretius with utter devotion.

LUCRETIUS (CONT'D)
And she informed me of your secret
 tryst in the barn last night.
 Surrounded by farm animals.
 Disgusting. Senator Orvo is
 willing enough to overlook the fact
 that you are damaged goods--

COLUMBA
 I love Milo! I've always loved him.
 Please, Father, I am begging you,
 don't do this!

ORVO
 Are we done with these maudlin
 theatrics?
 (to the Soldiers)
 Put him in the cage and take him to
 the docks.

The Soldiers haul Milo to the cage.

MILO
 No! Master-- This is a lie!--

ORVO
 And shut him up.

As the Soldiers gags Milo--

MILO
 Columba-- I love y--

And he can only try to shout futilely through his gag.

LUCRETIUS
 He's all yours, Senator.

ORVO
 (eyes Milo appraisingly)
 He doesn't look like much. But ten
 years in the copper mines of Turgut
 should toughen him up.

Columba sinks to her knees in despair as the Soldiers lock Milo into the cage with a massive iron padlock.

ORVO (CONT'D)
(to Columba)
Once we are married and back in Rome, I will turn you into a lady whether you like it or not.

He turns to Lucretius.

ORVO (CONT'D)
Have her packed and ready when I return.

Columba tears herself away from her father and starts to run. Orvo snaps at the Soldiers.

ORVO (CONT'D)
Stop her.

A Soldier, powerfully built, has Columba down in the street within a couple of paces. Orvo turns to Lucretius.

ORVO (CONT'D)
Lock her up. If you don't deliver her to my ship by high tide, I will consider you to have breached our agreement.

He mounts his black horse as the Soldiers start to drive Milo's wagon away.

INT. KITCHEN, LUCRETIUS' VILLA - DAY

Lucretius and Dulcima drag Columba through the kitchen. Working Slaves can't help but stop and stare.

COLUMBA
Milo is a person! The one good thing in my life! You had no right!

LUCRETIUS
You have no right. Stop this. I have to get to the games.

AT THE ENTRANCE TO THE WINE CELLAR

A few steps down from the kitchen. Lucretius and Dulcima shove Columba through the solid oak door and slam it shut. Lucretius slides the bolt.

FROM INSIDE THE WINE CELLAR

Pounding and yelling from Columba.

DULCIMA
When do I let her out, Master?

LUCRETIUS
You don't.

Dulcima bows and starts to walk away.

LUCRETIUS (CONT'D)
And Dulcima--

She stops.

DULCIMA
Yes, master?

LUCRETIUS
The money box you brought me. I
only counted 907 denarii. Columba
said there was over a thousand.

DULCIMA
(a tiny cringe)
Yes, master?

LUCRETIUS
Nicely done. But try to trick me
again and I'll put you in a cage.

He sweeps away from her.

EXT. FISHING BOAT, AT SEA - DAY

A SHARP PROW CUTS fast and clean through open ocean.

TILT UP TO REVEAL

Kellus sails his boat across the sea toward...

A SEA CAVE. It faces away from Pompeii, which we can see
several miles in the b.g.

Suddenly, all around the boat--

The glassy waters begin to bubble. YELLOW BUBBLES, which
burst into wisps of sulphurous gas. YELLOW GAS wafts through
the air, over the boat--

Kellus starts to choke. He can't breathe. He pushes the
tiller hard to starboard.

The boat floats into fresh air. Kellus gasps. He looks back.

An ugly YELLOW CLOUD hovers over the water, still bubbling.

Kellus takes a deep breath of clean air. That was weird.

He heads the boat toward the sea cave.

EXT. THE ARENA, COLOSSEUM - DAY

Tight with tension, Nigellus brandishes his sword to the crowd as he approaches the Judges Box. The crowd hushes. He salutes with his sword. Drops to one knee.

NIGELLUS

Marcus Vettius, Magistrate of
Pompeii. I who am prepared to die
salute you!

The crowd CHEERS. Marcus Vettius rises and steps to a large brass speaking trumpet, which magnifies his voice greatly.

MARCUS VETTIUS

Arise, brave Nigellus! For eight
years in this very arena, you have
shown your courage! Now I present
you with your finest challenge yet!

He signals guards at the mouth of a nearby tunnel.

MARCUS VETTIUS (CONT'D)

Your adversary, the reigning
champion of Rome -- FLAMMA!

Trumpets begin a FANFARE--

The Crowd begins to RISE TO THEIR FEET--

Bursting out of a tunnel, first we see--

Six MAGNIFICENT WHITE HORSES--

Pulling a golden chariot--

And on the chariot, looking like a god--

FLAMMA.

Flamma holds the reins to all six horses in one hand-- He
CRACKS a whip-- The Horses charge forward--

Flamma races the chariot around the arena, already victorious--

His fans go INSANE with excitement.

Nigellus, watching, is pale but determined.

IN THE JUDGES BOX

Lucretius arrives, pissed at being so late.

LUCRETIVS

How dare you start without me?!

MARCUS VETTIUS

I waited as long as I could--

The PROCLAIMERS appear on the arena floor, wearing their giant masks. As they speak in UNISON--

The ARENA FLOOR begins to open--

PROCLAIMERS
*Brothers and sisters of Pompeii,
 Before you, the maze impenetrable,
 The Labyrinth.*

A huge PLATFORM RISES up to the arena floor, REVEALING--

An enormous LABYRINTH. A battleground maze filled with ramps, towers, rope bridges, pits.

PROCLAIMERS (CONT'D)
*Today a hero comes.
 Will it be Theseus,
 Son of Neptune, King of Athens?
 Or will the Minotaur prevail once more?*

Out of the center of the Labyrinth, a smaller platform RISES, REVEALING--

FLAMMA, terrifying arrayed in the grotesque Minotaur armor. The crowd goes insane.

PROCLAIMERS (CONT'D)
*Behold the bull-headed man, the Minotaur.
 Angered and hungry, lost in his maze,
 He seeks only to devour.*

INT. EXERCISE POOL, THE THERMAE - DAY

Fennius and Claudio sit side by side, sipping their wine and relaxing.

The water in the pool begins to BUBBLE. It SLOSHES from one side of the pool to the other.

CLAUDIO
 I didn't order this.
 (to Fennius)
 Go tell someone to make it stop.

Fennius slides to his feet. As he does--

A TREMOR. The ground ROCKS. Claudio almost falls off his couch.

The pool is now a bubbling cauldron.

Fennius slips on the wet tile. Drops his wine glass- SMASH!--

And falls into the pool.

He SCREAMS! Bloodcurdling!

The water starts to BOIL.

Fennius goes under. Then emerges, gasping for air. His face is lobster red.

FENNIUS
Helllllp meee!

Claudio rushes to the side. Reaches out to Fennius. Claudio yanks his own arm back in pain.

CLAUDIO
I can't! It's too hot!

As the pool starts to BOIL OVER--

An entire WALL SPLITS OPEN. A JET OF STEAM shoots out with the power of a fire hydrant.

EXT. POMPEII HARBOR - DAY

Milo locked in his cage RISES BEFORE US-- Open sky behind him--

PULL BACK TO REVEAL

Milo's cage is being HOISTED onto the 130' square-rigged TRIREME we saw in the harbor earlier.

IN THE CAGE

Milo is still gagged and cuffed.

A huge crane-and-pulley swings the cage over to the deck as--

AT THE WATERLINE

A LONGBOAT bobs, manned by a dozen Sailors. Orvo, on the longboat, steps into a sling that's been lowered for him. Sailors climb rope ladders onto the ship.

EXT. TRIREME - DAY, CONTINUOUS

Milo's cage settles down on the deck of the ship. Watching, with contained fury, is--

LEONIDES. General in the Roman Army and captain of this ship. Dignified and confident, Leonides is a throwback to the noble days of the Roman Republic.

LEONIDES
This is unacceptable.

Orvo steps onto the deck.

ORVO
He stays in the cage.

LEONIDES
This isn't a prison ship, Senator--

ORVO

This is my slave. He is a runaway,
to boot. If you knew the facts,
you'd agree that I am showing
extreme mercy by not killing him.

Orvo waves imperiously at some watching Sailors.

ORVO (CONT'D)

Stow him in the hold.

The Sailors look to Leonides to confirm the Senator's order.
Leonides has no choice. He nods.

ORVO (CONT'D)

I also have a guest coming aboard
before we sail. She'll stay in my
quarters with me.

Orvo storms off. Leonides watches him go as sailors start to
haul Milo's cage away. Turns to his FIRST OFFICER standing by.

LEONIDES

Seems to me the wrong man is in
that cage.

INT. THE HOLD, TRIREME - DAY

It's dark down here. Milo's cage is surrounded by wooden
cargo crates.

Milo twists to try to see the padlock holding his cage locked.
It's huge. Milo throws his shoulder against the cage door.
The padlock's so solid, it barely moves.

A YOUNG SAILOR comes down the ladder. He carries some
flatbread and a wineskin. He places them in the cage.

YOUNG SAILOR

Orders of the Captain.

He reaches in and unties Milo's gag.

MILO

Thank you.

The Young Sailor starts to leave.

MILO (CONT'D)

Wait!

The Young Sailor pauses. Milo is all desperation.

MILO (CONT'D)

The key. Can you get me out of
here?

YOUNG SAILOR

No! Worth my life, that would be.
(a beat)
I'll come back to check on you.

And he heads up the ladder.

Milo, alone, shoves against the bars of the cage.
Impenetrable iron. He pounds his handcuffs against them.
Everything holds solid.

It doesn't look good.

EXT. THE ARENA, COLOSSEUM - DAY

Nigellus enters the Labyrinth.

NIGELLUS'S POV

The walls are high. He can't see what lurks around the next corner.

Cautious. Nigellus walks up a ramp--

And the ramp turns into a SEESAW-- Nigellus almost loses his footing--

He scrambles up-- Turns a corner--

And FLAMMA IS WAITING -- a giant WAR HAMMER in his hand--

SMASH! Flamma brings the War Hammer down at Nigellus's head--
Nigellus gets his shield up just in time--

The force of the blow brings Nigellus to his knees--

But he's up. And THE FIGHT IS ON.

Nigellus and Flamma fight, sword on sword-- Precariously
balanced as the Seesaw tries to tip them--

Nigellus dives at Flamma-- The Seesaw tips--

Nigellus leaps over a wall of the Labyrinth-- About to leap
down onto Flamma when-- FIRE shoots up from below--

The Gladiators fight each other-- DODGING THE FIRE--

Another BLAST OF FLAME-- Nigellus flings himself away--

Flamma chases Nigellus onto a high platform-- which TIPS OVER,
dumping the gladiators-- Nigellus falls into a pool of water--
Flamma grabs the edge of the platform, then also slips--

WE FOLLOW THEM--

UNDERWATER. As Flamma struggles to regain his footing, Nigellus SLICES at the leather strap on Flamma's greaves (leg armor)--

The leather strap SNAPS-- The greave falls off-- A CUT on Flamma's leg--

BLOOD IN THE WATER as Nigellus nicks Flamma's leg--

Flamma gets out of the pool-- As Nigellus starts to hoist himself out--

Flamma STABS at Nigellus's hands at the edge of the deck-- And again-- Again--

Nigellus, still in the pool, lunges at Flamma's leg-- Jerks him off his feet--

And Nigellus heaves himself out of the pool-- The fight resumes--

Nigellus is fast. But Flamma, all armored up as the Minotaur, with his long sword, is hard to reach.

The crowd ROARS each time Flamma slashes at Nigellus. A nick here, a scratch there. Very soon Nigellus has BLOOD oozing in patches all over his body.

Nigellus runs up a ramp and THROWS himself wildly into the air--

Landing on Flamma's back.

Flamma spins and shakes to dislodge Nigellus, but Nigellus clings fast. He pounds the butt of his sword on the huge metal Minotaur helmet.

FLAMMA'S POV, INSIDE THE MINOTAUR HELMET

The sound is deafening. We spin in a circle, but--

LOOKING THROUGH THE EYE HOLES, we can hardly see a thing.

Flamma slams backward into the Labyrinth wall, SMASHING Nigellus over and over again.

One huge SMASH into the wall-- And Nigellus loses his sword-- He twists to draw his dagger--

Nigellus begins STABBING at Flamma through the chinks in his armor-- A series of little stings--

Nigellus, holding on to Flamma for dear life through this punishment, slips the flat of his dagger through one of the straps holding Flamma's breastplate on. SNICK! He cuts it through.

One side of his breastplate now sagging, Flamma claws his way up onto a high platform, Nigellus still on his back, stabbing away--

Standing on the edge of the platform, FLAMMA THROWS HIMSELF OFF BACKWARDS-- A 10' drop to the floor of the arena--

Nigellus tries to twist away-- Not in time--

SMACK! The two men hit the ground. Flamma rolls off Nigellus-- Kicks him in the ribs--

Flamma grabs his helmet. He wrestles it off his head, REVEALING--

Complete rage. One side of his breastplate now sagging, Flamma THROWS THE HELMET at Nigellus. Oof!

Flamma rips off his sagging cuirass-- THROWS it at Nigellus as well-- Nigellus rolls to one side-- Grabs his sword--

And RUNS back for the relative safety of the Labyrinth.

Flamma lifts the Minotaur helmet and ROARS at the crowd. They ROAR back in return.

INT. THE HOLD, TRIREME - DAY

Milo inspects his cage. Solid iron bars on all sides, solid bars over his head. He tries to wedge an elbow through. That's not getting him anywhere.

He looks at the floor. Wood planks. Nailed together.

Milo looks around the cargo hold. Crates. A stack of rectangular military shields, piled high. Coils of rope. Large baskets. In one basket, a GLINT of something sharp and shiny.

IN THE BASKET

Caltrops (four-sided prongs, like kids' jacks. But sharp. Very, very sharp).

Milo throws himself against the side of his cage. Tries to rock it. It lifts a couple of inches off the ground on one side--

Then falls back.

He tries again. Harder this time.

The cage lifts a good foot off the ground. Then falls back.

Milo crouches low-- Then FLINGS his whole body at the top of the iron bars--

The CAGE TIPS. Over on one side. CRASH!

Again. Milo throws his body high against the (new) side of the cage-- The CAGE TIPS.

Milo has the hang of this now. He keeps tipping and rolling the cage until--

He's reached the basket. The wood floor of the cage is now on the side.

Milo twists and wriggles until he manages to get one caltrop in through the bars. So far so good.

Milo carefully places the caltrop's wickedly sharp point into the lock of his handcuffs-- Balances it--

And SLAMS it down on the floor--

The Handcuffs pop open. Milo grins.

Milo jams the caltrop's point in between two planks on the cage's floor. POUNDS at it.

The wood starts to give.

Milo keeps pounding-- Smashing apart the planks, he rips one down to REVEAL--

Another layer of flooring, laid the other direction.

As if crazed, Milo starts ripping the first layer of planks apart, stabbing the caltrop into cracks and seams, POUNDING on it with his iron handcuffs. Bits of wood litter the cage--

Milo throws himself against the side of the cage again-- The CAGE TIPS -- The floor's now the roof of the cage, over Milo's head.

Milo lies down on his back, rolls back and KICKS madly at the wooden floor/roof. Again and again.

The WOOD SPLINTERS.

FROM OUTSIDE THE CAGE

Milo RISES triumphantly through the split-apart wood flooring. He's free.

EXT. THE ARENA, COLOSSEUM - DAY

Nigellus, near exhaustion, is backed up against a wall of the Labyrinth as Flamma pummels him. Nigellus manages to dodge Flamma's sword thrusts, but barely.

Flamma knocks away Nigellus's shield--

He CLEAVES the shield in two with his sword, then picks it up and RIPS IT IN HALF with his bare hands--

Flamma frisbees EACH HALF INTO THE SEATS. The crowd goes crazy--

Nigellus ducks away-- Up onto a flimsy bridge of rope and planks -- mostly rope-- Suspended high over a section at the outside edge of the Labyrinth--

He tries to find his balance-- Flamma chases him onto the bridge--

Nigellus tries to dart in to stab Flamma, but he only has his dagger--

Suddenly-- FLAMES burst up under their feet--

They fight-- Dancing around the fire--

Pieces of the rope bridge start to BURN--

The bridge COLLAPSES under Nigellus's feet, in FLAMES--

Nigellus throws himself from the labyrinth-- TWISTING away from the fire beneath him-- Flailing--

His DAGGER FLIES AWAY FROM HIM--

Nigellus lands on the sand with a bone-crunching THUD. He just lies there.

Flamma runs along the Labyrinth's outside wall. Throws his shield directly at Nigellus. It lands on Nigellus's chest. Nigellus doesn't move.

Spectators begin to stand, craning their necks to see. Is Nigellus still breathing?

Flamma laughs. He stands over Nigellus, then JUMPS on the shield on Nigellus's chest. BAM!

The crowd WINCES with Nigellus's pain.

Flamma flexes his mighty muscles and struts like a peacock.

The crowd BOOS and HISSES.

IN THE JUDGES BOX

FORTUNATA
Make it stop! Look!

FOLLOW HER POINT TO

Nigellus, stirring ever so slightly. He manages to lift his arm straight up in the air for just a second.

FORTUNATA (CONT'D)
He's surrendering! Stop the match!

LUCRETIVS
He's not surrendering. And it stops when I say it stops.

Suddenly-- The GROUND IS MOVING. The shield tumbles off Nigellus's chest.

WHOOPS and HOLLERS from the crowd as the EARTHQUAKE rumbles through the stadium. They're loving this!

Flamma freezes in place, stumbling just a bit to keep his feet. He looks around as if he could see what's causing it.

Nigellus, trying to get up, reaches for his dagger, just out of reach. But the quake SKITTERS IT away from him--

Nigellus stretches with all his strength. His fingers touch the dagger, but he's too weak even to lift it.

The EARTHQUAKE STOPS. More WHOOPS from the crowd.

Flamma ROARS. He beats his chest to the crowd. With another body slam, he swan dives toward Nigellus--

Nigellus opens his eyes just in time.

NIGELLUS'S POV

Of Flamma flying in mid-air just above him.

Nigellus -- split-second -- grabs his dagger. Rolls his arm up.

Flamma lands chest down on Nigellus's arm.

CLOSE-UP ON

Flamma. A look of horror and pain.

With difficulty, Flamma stands up. Nigellus's dagger is impaled to its hilt in his chest. GASPS from the crowd.

Nigellus struggles to his knees. The crowd begins to CHEER.

Flamma bends over in pain. Picks up his sword. He stumbles toward Nigellus. Swings. Misses wildly.

He looks down at the dagger sticking out of his chest. Screws up his fortitude.

Flamma grabs the dagger. And PULLS IT OUT of his chest. He waves it over his head as he ROARS at the crowd.

FLAMMA

I -- LIVE! Your man FAILS! I--
FLAMMA -- AM INVINCIBLE!

The crowd SCREAMS -- approval, horror, bloodlust.

Suddenly, from the far side of the arena --

A CRACK IN THE EARTH.

BEHIND THE JUDGES BOX

Fortunata is transfixed. To her Trophy Girlfriend--

FORTUNATA

How do they do that?

TROPHY WIFE
Is this part of the show?

BACK ON THE ARENA FLOOR

The CRACK spreads toward Flamma. The GROUND SPLITS OPEN right under his feet, spouting HOT STEAM.

Flamma falls into the fissure. A

Nigellus almost falls in himself. He scrambles back on all fours. At the edge of the fissure--

NIGELLUS'S POV

Flamma falls 20' straight down as--

A GEYSER OF STEAM erupts.

Earth begins to move again. Flamma, still ROARING, is BURIED ALIVE.

The Crowd goes crazy-- The best fight they've ever seen-- Even as--

The EARTHQUAKE continues to grow. Then suddenly--

It stops.

Silence in the Colosseum. But only for a second.

EXT. MT. VESUVIUS - DAY

All seems peaceful.

CLOSE-UP ON

The SPIDERWEB. It trembles-- More-- Shaking-- Shuddering--

And suddenly it BLOWS APART -- POOF!-- fragmenting into mere strings as--

RACK FOCUS TO REVEAL

The summit of the mountain EXPLODES! A colossal column of SMOKE AND ASH detonates straight up in the air.

EXT. THE ARENA, COLOSSEUM - DAY

COLOSSEUM'S POV

The SMOKE from Vesuvius continues to burst upward, thousands of feet per minute.

SCREAMS of panic as all hell breaks loose.

Nigellus rises to his knees before the sight.

IN THE JUDGES BOX

Marcus Vettius turns to Lucretius.

MARCUS VETTIUS

Is this what Strigana was talking about?

LUCRETIUS

Of course not. Don't be absurd. The earthquake must have let out an underground pocket of steam. Perfectly harmless.

Fortunata flings herself down from the Wives Box to cling to Marcus Vettius.

FORTUNATA

What is that thing, Marcus? Make it stop!

LUCRETIUS

I can see you have your hands full. I'll be back at my villa if you need me.

And Lucretius is gone.

EXT. TRIREME, POMPEII HARBOR - DAY

Men stand aghast, staring at the mountain on fire.

EJECTA begin to spew out from the plume of smoke and ash. A canopy of SMOKE billows toward the city.

EXT. TRIREME - DAY

ON THE FOREDECK

Sailors, panicked, cluster around Leonides.

SAILOR

What is it?

Leonides shakes his head. He doesn't know. The sailors gasp as they spot--

OVERHEAD, A FLAMING LAVA COMET zooms straight at the harbor.

ON LAND, IN THE FISH MARKET

Caradoc the Fish Merchant stares as the Lava Comet--

HIS POV

--Speeds straight toward him. BURNING LAVA, closer, closer--

CRASH! The LAVA COMET hits the fish market and EXPLODES.
Fish stalls BLAZE. FLAMING EMBERS shoot across the harbor.

ON THE TRIREME

Milo scrambles up the ladder from the Hold. He's shocked at
what he sees: The Volcano, the ashes, the Lava Comets...

MILO

...The pillar to the heavens.

Leonides spots Milo on deck. His face clouds over. But
before he can go stop Milo, he's distracted by--

HEADING TOWARD THEM

A SHOWER OF LAVA COMETS. Speeding out over the water-- They
POUND down all around--

Plumes of STEAM as they hit the water--

The Lava Comets BURN-- Yes, even on the surface of the ocean--
An eerie light over the scene--

SMASH! A huge BOULDER grazes the side of the Trireme-- BREAKS
off the railing-- The ship ROCKS-- Splinters of wood FLY about--

The boulder hits the water, sending up STEAM--

MILO'S POV

The Young Sailor who brought him food is hurt-- His head gashed
open and bleeding, he reaches for a piece of railing that isn't
there-- He FALLS OVERBOARD--

Leonides bounds to try to help the Young Sailor--

But Milo gets there first. He leaps to the rail--

IN THE OCEAN

The Young Sailor is passed out. He SINKS.

Milo dives overboard.

Leonides, astonished, looks after him--

EXT. UNDERWATER - DAY

Milo breaks the surface and swims downward He sees--

FIRE. The underside of a Lava Comet, BURNING UNDERWATER.

Milo tears his eyes away. Spots the Young Sailor--

Sinking. Down. Not moving.

Milo dives down after him.

EXT. COLOSSEUM - DAY

As VESUVIUS continues to spout SMOKE and ASH miles into the atmosphere, thousands of people push out of the Colosseum's main entrance. Those who hesitate get trampled. Roman SOLDIERS, some on horseback, try to maintain order.

A WHITE STALLION

pushes through the crush. On its back, Lucretius.

A trio of PANICKED MEN grab Lucretius's bridle--

PANICKED MAN
We need your horse! Get off!

Lucretius flicks his WHIP at the man in response. The Panicked Man, blood flowing across his forehead, howls and lets go the horse.

Lucretius snaps his whip again and forces his horse forward through the crowd.

EXT. TRIREME - DAY

Milo clings to a rope ladder, exhausted, hauling the nearly-drowned Young Sailor with him.

Gasping for breath, Milo manages to heave on deck first the Young Sailor, then himself.

Waiting to help them-- Leonides. He's very impressed.

LEONIDES
You didn't have to save him. Why did you do it?

But before Milo can respond--

Orvo, stunned and angry, tromps across the deck.

ORVO
How did you get free?

MILO
How did you get to be a Senator?

ORVO
(yells)
That's it! I've had enough!
Somebody kill this slave!

Milo turns to Leonides.

MILO
The city is going to be destroyed.
You need to save your men, General.
And I need to go back. I have
someone to save, too.

ORVO
 (howls)
 I'll do it myself! Somebody give me
 a sword! Stop him!

Milo starts to back away from Orvo, heading toward the rail.
 He backs right into Leonides.

Leonides barely whispers so only Milo can hear him.

LEONIDES
 Swim under the ship.

Milo masks his surprise at Leonides's help as Orvo approaches,
 sword in hand, mania on his face--

Milo takes off across the ship-- He has to duck around
 Soldiers and Sailors trying to catch him--

LEONIDES (CONT'D)
 Archers! I need archers up here!

ORVO chases Milo, madly swinging the sword--

Milo dodges-- Then shinnies up a mast--

Orvo swings the sword high over his head, trying to stab at
 Milo's feet--

Milo catches a line hanging from the sails and SWINGS over
 Orvo-- Kicking him in the face--

Orvo goes down-- Scrambles up-- After Milo again--

Milo runs to the rail--

And DIVES into the water!

ORVO
 (fulminating)
 He's getting away!

Soldiers with bows and arrows rush to the General. Leonides
 signals his archers to the railing.

LEONIDES
 There he is! Archers, shoot!

ARROWS FLASH into the water--

EXT. UNDERWATER - DAY, CONTINUOUS

Milo dives deeper as ARROWS PEPPER THE WATER all around him--
 Deeper--

He turns to swim UNDER THE TRIREME'S KEEL--

EXT. TRIREME - DAY

Orvo leans over the rail.

ORVO

I don't see a body. Did they get him?

LEONIDES

These are Roman archers. Of course they got him.

(looks overboard)

He's right there. Can't you see?

Orvo straightens up. He's suddenly icy cold and back in control.

ORVO

You did well, General. I'll see that the Emperor hears of this.

LEONIDES

Thank you, Senator. I'll have lunch brought straight to your cabin now.

Orvo nods and heads below decks. Leonides crosses the ship to join his First Officer at the opposite rail.

LEONIDES (CONT'D)

That slave has more honor in his little finger than a hundred Senators.

ANGLE ON

The water in the harbor, where a now-tiny figure swims to shore.

EXT. LUCRETIUS' VILLA (RUINED) - DAY

The place is a disaster. Dust in the air obscures the view.

Lucretius holds the end of his toga over his mouth. He rushes through the house.

IN THE TRICLINIUM

A stately full-sized marble statue of Apollo has fallen over and lies in ruins.

Broken crockery all over the floor. The roof sags badly, about to collapse.

LUCRETIUS

Hello? Dulcima? Someone?

No answer.

AT THE WINE CELLAR

Lucretius tries to unbolt the door. But the door frame is twisted. The bolt is hopelessly jammed.

A PIECE OF CEILING FALLS, barely missing Lucretius.

LUCRETIUS (CONT'D)

Columba?

FROM INSIDE THE WINE CELLAR

We hear COLUMBA'S VOICE, muffled. We can't make out what she's saying.

Lucretius hurries away.

IN THE TRICLINIUM

Dulcima, a heavy bag slung around her shoulder, picks a tiny pure gold statue of Aphrodite out of a pile of rubble. Startled, she drops it when--

Lucretius rushes into the room.

DULCIMA

Master! Thank the gods you're all right--!

LUCRETIUS

Come help me open the wine cellar.

DULCIMA

(lying)
Your poor daughter-- I tried to get the door open--

LUCRETIUS

Yes yes yes. Come along.

He heads back toward the wine cellar. Dulcima hesitates. Then, a bit sullen, she's about to follow Lucretius when--

A CREAKING SOUND from above. Lucretius looks up as--

The CEILING COLLAPSES right onto him. Dulcima jumps back.

Lucretius is pinned under the fallen ceiling timbers.

LUCRETIUS (CONT'D)

Dulcima! Help!

Dulcima considers Lucretius. A half-step toward him. She reaches out as if to help--

Instead, she deliberately knocks over an almost-collapsed wall. It falls on Lucretius, burying him.

Dulcima turns to walk away-- then pauses and looks back.

She bends to pick up the gold statue of Aphrodite she had dropped. She heads out of the villa.

EXT. POMPEII STREETS - DAY

His eyes always on the volcano, Kellus runs through a maze of narrow streets to--

EXT. KELLUS'S APARTMENT - DAY, CONTINUOUS

ON THE ROOFTOP

Anna stands in the roof garden atop their apartment, watching the volcano as she cradles their Baby. She spots Kellus as he rounds the corner, still running.

ANNA

Kellus!

He waves as he disappears from the street. A few seconds later, panting, he arrives on the roof. Anna flies into his arms with relief.

ANNA (CONT'D)

What is it? What do you think it means?

KELLUS

I don't know... Milo would know.

WIFE

Are we in danger?

Their TWO DAUGHTERS run up the stairs and rush to their mother. The YOUNGER DAUGHTER tugs at her arm.

YOUNGER DAUGHTER

What is it, Mama?

ANNA

There's a beast beneath the mountain. A dragon god from the underworld, and it breathes fire.

The little girl is panicked at this. Kellus throws his Wife an exasperated look.

KELLUS

It's not a dragon...

(looks at the volcano)
But it might as well be. Start packing. We've got to get out of here. Now.

TILT UP TO VESUVIUS

LIGHTNING begins to spark around the plume of smoke.

We DROP DOWN TO--

EXT. LUCRETIUS'S VILLA (RUINED) - DAY

Milo, exhausted, runs up the road toward Lucretius's estate.

The first of the REFUGEES clutter the road. Carriages full of household belongings. Fathers lugging children on their backs. Rich people with slaves carrying precious artwork and crates of jewelry.

Milo threads his way through the Refugees to the gates to Lucretius's villa. He stops to take in the scene.

Much of the villa is collapsed. The stable walls TILT, ready to fall down. A FIRE in the orchards burns out of control.

Milo rushes in the front door.

INT. LUCRETIUS'S VILLA (RUINED) - DAY, CONTINUOUS

MILO
Columba! Columba! Where are you?

As Milo rushes into the dining chamber, a piece of rubble shifts.

MILO (CONT'D)
Columba!?

A groan from under the debris. Milo starts tossing pieces of rubble aside. He clears one last piece, REVEALING--

Lucretius. Groggy, a bloody gash across his forehead.

MILO (CONT'D)
Where's Columba?

Lucretius struggles to focus on Milo. He's not happy with what he sees.

LUCRETIUS
Milo...?

Milo pushes aside a heavy timber, then pulls Lucretius free of the rubble.

MILO
Where's Columba?!

LUCRETIUS
In the wine cellar.

Wobbly, Lucretius gets to his feet as Milo dashes toward the wine cellar.

INT. WINE CELLAR, LUCRETIUS'S VILLA (RUINED) - DAY

Columba, tense in the almost-total darkness, jolts upright as something BOOMS at the door.

MILO (O.S.)

Columba?!

Columba rises, astonished.

COLUMBA

Milo?!

Another BOOM. And another.

The door FRAGMENTS open. Milo, backlit, reaches in.

INT. LUCRETIUS'S VILLA (RUINED) - DAY

Milo frees Columba from the collapsed wine cellar. Wraps his arms around her in a hug. Relief and passion.

COLUMBA

How did you get here?

MILO

I ran away.

Past Milo, Columba notices--

COLUMBA

Father?

Milo turns to see, through the broken walls--

Lucretius stands in the middle of his formal garden, right in the center of the model of Pompeii. He turns in circles, looking, not at the real burning city below, but at the ash-covered model.

The model Colosseum has collapsed. Other model buildings, temples, grand causeways, also lie in ruins.

LUCRETIUS

...It will cost a fortune to rebuild.

Milo looks from the model Pompeii up to VESUVIUS--

--Which continues to spout ash, smoke, flaming boulders. The plume of smoke is now 10 miles high. LIGHTNING CRACKLES non-stop around the summit, wrapping the plume in brilliant flashes.

Lucretius spots Columba. He gasps. Holds out his arms.

LUCRETIUS (CONT'D)

Columba! My dear daughter--

Columba backs away, not allowing her father to embrace her. She takes Milo's hand defiantly.

COLUMBA
We're leaving. Now.

Milo and Columba, hand in hand, head toward the villa's front door. They start to run.

Seeing them together reawakens Lucretius's fury at Columba's betrayal.

LUCRETIUS
You're not going anywhere.

EXT. LUCRETIUS'S VILLA (RUINED) - DAY

As Milo and Columba run out the front gates, they find--
Even more REFUGEES -- on foot, on horseback, in small wagons.
Milo and Columba start to push against the tide.

MILO
Kellus moved the boat-- It should
be there--

POV FROM BEHIND MILO AND COLUMBA, FOLLOWING THEM

As they run toward the city everyone else is fleeing.

CENTURION (O.S.)
You there! With the girl! Halt!

Startled, Milo and Columba turn to see--

A CENTURION with another SOLDIER, on horseback, bearing down on them.

CENTURION (CONT'D)
Where are you going, slave?

LUCRETIUS (O.S.)
That's him! That's him!

Lucretius catches up on foot, out of breath.

LUCRETIUS (CONT'D)
Kill him! He's a runaway slave!
And he's trying to steal my
daughter!

Columba gasps. But this is actually a perfectly reasonable request, if--

CENTURION
Is this your slave?

LUCRETIUS MILO
Yes! No! I don't belong to you--

He's lying! LUCRETIUS

COLUMBA
No he's not!

LUCRETIUS
You stay out of this!

Lucretius SLAPS Columba. Milo lunges at Lucretius, ready to haul him off his horse when--

He's WHACKED on the head by the flat of the Centurion's sword, which knocks him away from Lucretius. Reaching down from his horse, the Centurion grabs Milo by the neck.

LUCRETIVS (CONT'D)
You saw that! My slave attacked
me! I invoke my right to kill my
property!

CENTURION
I'm here to keep order with all the
people leaving the city. I don't
have the time for this--

LUCRETIUS

Fine. Throw him in jail--

CENTURION
The jail's collapsed--

LUCRETIUS
Then kill him!

SOLDIER
The Colosseum. We can lock him
away with the gladiators--

Lucretius gets control of himself as the Soldier ties Milo's hands behind his back and pulls him up onto his horse.

LUCRETIVS

Fine. And get a guard around the Colosseum. I don't want the gladiators escaping, either. They're valuable property.

Yes sir. CENTURION

As the Soldiers take Milo away, Milo twists back to Columba.

MILO
Get to the ship! Get out of Pompeii!

Columba kicks and scratches at her father, till he lets go of her.

LUCRETIUS

You have brought me nothing but shame. You are no longer my daughter.

COLUMBA

That's the greatest gift you could give me!

She SLAPS him in the face, then whirls from him and begins to run after the Centurion and Milo.

LUCRETIUS

(screams after her)
I disinherit you!

EXT. KELLUS'S APARTMENT - DAY

ON THE STAIR LANDING

Kellus dumps a second bag onto the landing. His Younger Daughter comes out of the apartment holding a tiny KITTEN.

YOUNGER DAUGHTER

Papa, Mama says you won't let me bring Maximus.

Kellus is trapped. Great. Make me the bad guy.

Anna rushes out, puts an arm around the Daughter.

ANNA

Let's see if we can find a bag Maximus will stay in.

As Anna hustles her Daughter back in, we hear from the street one floor below--

NEIGHBOR

Hey! Kellus!

Kellus glances down to see a TRIO OF NEIGHBORS, slugging back wine, enjoying the frenzy around them.

NEIGHBOR (CONT'D)

Isn't this great?

The Neighbors are playing a sort of badminton with the FALLING PUMICE stones, which are lightweight enough to be bounced away. They're having a wonderful time.

NEIGHBOR 2

Come on down! Join the fun!

Just then-- a LAVA COMET SMASHES down not 50' away. Hurtling down with it-- HUGE ROCKS. One smashes the Neighbor to the ground. He's badly hurt.

KELLUS

You let me know how that works out
for you.

He turns to Anna.

KELLUS (CONT'D)

Time to go. Come on.

Maximus the Kitten bolts out the door and onto the landing.
Kellus throws himself after it and snags it by the scruff of
its neck.

KELLUS (CONT'D)

No, you don't. There's no running
away today.

INT. GLADIATOR HOLDING CELL - DAY

A dozen GLADIATORS bellow and beat against the iron bars. A
couple of them try to pry their portcullis free from its
chained and locked position. They can barely wiggle it.

A CLANKING NOISE above them. Several Gladiators dash
underneath, looking up at--

A metal-barred STONE HATCH. It's opening.

The Gladiators yell upward in a cacophony of languages.

Something blocks the light coming from the hatch. It's a body.

GUARD (O.S.)

Lunch!

Cackling laughter from overhead. The body is lowered most of
the way by rope, then dropped to the floor. The Guards above
pull up the rope.

It's Milo. Scraped up, some bloody streaks on his face.

The hatch above remains open, allowing sooty air and a few
pieces of floating pumice to waft down into the cell.

MILO

(groans)

Do you have any water?

NIGELLUS (O.S.)

Milo?

Milo turns in the direction of the voice.

MILO

Nigellus?

Milo struggles to his feet. Stumbles to the dark corner where--

Nigellus lies on the ground. Bandages cover large portions of his torso, his arms and legs. He's a mess. But he's absolutely jubilant.

MILO (CONT'D)
You're alive!

NIGELLUS
You noticed. You know what this means?!

MILO
Um. You're not dead?

NIGELLUS
I bested my fate! I was destined to die today, and-- Look at me!

Other Gladiators start to cluster around Milo and Nigellus.

BELLATOR
Hell with all that. What's happening on the outside?

MILO
The mountain exploded.

The Gladiators stare at Milo, unbelieving.

MILO (CONT'D)
Great fires from the underworld. Flaming rocks falling all over the city. We have to get out of here.

GLADIATORS
They've got us locked in--/No way out-- / etc.

NIGELLUS
Milo-- What are you doing here?

MILO
I assaulted Lucretius. After I ran away from my new master.

Nigellus roars with laughter.

NIGELLUS
No, the truth. Why are you here?

Milo is a tad insulted.

EXT. COLOSSEUM - DAY

In the street outside the Colosseum, SOLDIERS who've abandoned their posts swig wine straight from amphorae, wrap themselves around pretty girls. Eat, drink and be merry, for today we die.

A LAVA COMET HITS -- just down the street. Buildings collapse. FLAMES shoot up. SCREAMS.

But here, only WHOOPS and CHEERS, and a great chugging of wine all around.

Shuddering away from all this--

--is Columba. She's almost to the Colosseum. Ahead of her, a dark tunnel beckons, when--

The Centurion who arrested Milo rides out of the tunnel on his horse. He heads straight for the drunken Soldiers.

CENTURION

You! Back on duty! Now!

Columba ducks behind a trio of DRUNKS as the wayward Soldiers grumble to their feet. The Drunks don't mind.

DRUNK

Hello, pretty thing.

Columba lets him paw her. She hides from view until the Centurion turns around--

--Then she PUNCHES the Drunk, picks up her skirt, and runs pell-mell into the tunnel.

EXT. POMPEII HARBOR -- DAY

AT THE DOCKS

The chaos at the docks is getting worse. Men fight for possession of boats. Fire has spread from the fish market to nearby boats. Sails burn like straw.

TWO OF THE BIREMES

Have pulled up to the docks. They load civilian passengers as fast as they can. Panicked REFUGEES push onto the gangplanks.

ON THE BOW OF THE TRIREME

Orvo stands transfixed by the volcano's plume with its LIGHTNING STORM. As he watches--

A pier CRACKS IN HALF, spilling people into the water. Panic. No one can swim.

Leonides strides across the deck to his First Officer.

LEONIDES

Raise anchor, get men to the oars.
We'll pull up to the port side of
that bireme, take on as many
passengers as--

Orvo tears his eyes away from the volcano.

ORVO
Are you insane?! We have to leave!
Now!

LEONIDES
I thought you were waiting for your
bride--

ORVO
There will be other brides!

LEONIDES
I have command of this ship--

Orvo snaps in manic rage.

ORVO
And I have command of you! I am a
Senator of the Empire! Your job is
to protect me! I would have you do
your duty!

LEONIDES
You would have me show less courage
than a slave.

Orvo is ready to hit Leonides when--

FIRST OFFICER
General! Look!

Leonides steps away from Orvo to see the Sailor leaning over
the seaward rail. As he crosses the ship--

FIRST OFFICER (CONT'D)
The tide's going out.

LEONIDES
Nonsense. It's high tide.

FIRST OFFICER
Not any more.

He points over the rails. Leonides and Orvo go to look.

THEIR POV

The water level is sinking rapidly, before our very eyes.

LEONIDES
Raise anchor!

A flurry of activity. Men race to the oars, to the sails.

WIDE ANGLE

The trireme pulls into deeper water. A hundred oars hit the
water at once. The other ships of the fleet are right behind.

BEHIND THEM

An unearthly sound as the water starts to SUCK OUT OF THE HARBOR. Faster. Faster.

LEONIDES (CONT'D)

Hoist sail!

Crewman leap to obey. The giant sail drops open -- RED with the ROMAN EAGLE in gold. It fills with WIND immediately. The ship speeds forward, already about to leave the harbor.

BEHIND THEM, IN THE HARBOR

Another PIER COLLAPSES as--

The water starts to SUCK OUT OF THE HARBOR. Faster. Faster.

The Trireme makes it out to deep water. But--

AT THE DOCKS

The Biremes unloading refugees are CAUGHT-- They TIP OVER--

The GANGPLANKS tip-- Collapse-- Dozens of Refugees fall off--

Refugees are SUCKED OUT TO SEA--

The remaining SHIPS are caught, keels mired in the mud at the bottom of the harbor. They TIP OVER.

Crewmen and Refugees fall off, ALL SCREAMING--

ON THE TRIREME

Standing at the stern, Leonides is shocked at the sight of a harbor of ships keeled over.

LEONIDES (CONT'D)

We have to go back! Those are good Roman soldiers--

ORVO

You'll get new ones.

The Trireme continues to shoot out to sea at an alarming rate.

WE RISE UP FROM THE TRIREME

Letting it drive forward into open ocean behind us as we FLY BACK TOWARD THE HARBOR.

BELOW US

The entire Pompeii harbor is now a MUD FLAT. Completely DRAINED of water. Many boats now lie useless on their sides.

Faster now, we FLY TOWARD POMPEII--

An endless line of REFUGEES stretches away from the city.
 In the city itself-- More Refugees clog the streets--
 GIANT FIRES burn, pushing up their own columns of black smoke--
 Tumbled buildings and destruction everywhere--

AHEAD OF US

VESUVIUS maintains its angry pulsing of SMOKE and LIGHTNING.
 In the mouth of the volcano itself, the ROAR is overwhelming--
 LIGHTNING flashes all around us--
 LAVA hisses, bubbles, flows downward--
 SMOKE pushes up, up, in its unending column--
 FURTHER DOWN THE MOUNTAIN
 On the lower heights-- Strigana's cave.

EXT. STRIGANA'S CAVE/TEMPLE - DAY

Fallen rocks half-obscure the mouth of the deep cave.

STRIGANA (O.S.)
 Why are you doing this?

INT. STRIGANA'S CAVE/TEMPLE - DAY

Strigana kneels before the giant image of Vulcan carved into the wall. She is distraught.

STRIGANA
 Surely the people have suffered
 enough. Relent. Please. Let the
 city live.

Vulcan's eyes are the dead, unfeeling eyes of a man-made idol.

INT. GLADIATOR HOLDING CELL - DAY

The Gladiators cluster around Milo as he shakes the portcullis. It's pretty solid. He tries to stick his head through the bars. It doesn't quite fit.

A nasty ROAR from much too close by.

MILO
 What is that?

CYNICAL GLADIATOR
 It's the bestiary.

Milo looks around at the huge Gladiators surrounding him.

MILO

There's enough strength in this room to lift this gate.

CYNICAL GLADIATOR

Not without the keys.

Sure enough, the portcullis is locked into place with a heavy padlocked chain. Milo looks across the corridor and sees the keys hanging from a spike on the wall.

NERVOUS GLADIATOR

When they built this place, they thought of everything.

MILO

No one thinks of everything.

EXT. THE ARENA, COLOSSEUM - DAY

Columba emerges into the arena.

The Colosseum, completely deserted, is an eerie place. The arena floor, once smooth, now is buckled and broken every which way. A giant crack, 5' across, runs down the middle.

Columba looks around.

COLUMBA

Milo! Milo!

INT. GLADIATOR HOLDING CELL - DAY

Milo hears her. He races to just under the hole he came down through.

MILO

Columba?! Down here! Columba!
COLUMBA!

Nigellus joins in.

MILO AND NIGELLUS

Columba! Columba!

And now most of the other Gladiators join in as well, deep voices shouting "COLUMBA! COLUMBA!" Nigellus turns to Milo.

NIGELLUS

You wanted to know if she still loved you? I'd say the answer is yes.

The Cynical Gladiator rolls his eyes.

EXT. THE ARENA, COLOSSEUM - DAY

Columba can't help but hear her name. She runs to an open shutter -- the cap of the hole Milo was dropped down.

COLUMBA

Milo?!

INT. GLADIATOR HOLDING CELL - DAY

MILO'S POV

Columba is backlit with the eerie glow of the fiery skies. She looks radiant and unearthly.

COLUMBA

I found you! Are you all right?

MILO

I'm fine!

NIGELLUS

He's fine! Get us out of here, Columba!

EXT. THE ARENA, COLOSSEUM - DAY

Columba looks around-- But before she spots anything helpful--

PROCLUS (O.S.)

Hey! Woman! What are you doing?

Columba, startled, turns to see--

A half dozen GUARDS approaching, among them, Proculus.

COLUMBA

Milo!!

She runs for the nearest tunnel-- The Guards pursue--

INT. TUNNEL, COLOSSEUM - DAY

SERIES OF QUICK SHOTS

Columba runs--

The Guards pursue--

Past Flamma's training pen--

Through an enormous deserted kitchen--

The Guards are right behind--

Past a SHIP from the naval battle, floating in its own pool--

Columba hits a dead end-- Looks around--

ANGLE ON

Proculus and the Guards, hitting the same dead end. They run back the way they came--

HOLD ON

the Ship, as Columba climbs out of it and runs down another tunnel--

INT. GLADIATOR HOLDING CELL - DAY

Milo, distraught, runs to the portcullis.

MILO
How do they open this normally?

NIGELLUS
They pull a rope. Down there.

He gestures down the hallway.

MILO
So they're counterweighted. So if we can find the right rope--

COLUMBA (O.S.)
What do you need me to do?

Milo is ecstatic. He throws his arms through the bars, tries to hug and kiss her--

NIGELLUS
No time for that.
(to Columba)
Where are the guards?

COLUMBA
Right behind me.

NIGELLUS
We need the keys.

Nigellus points across the corridor to a ring of keys hanging on a spike.

Columba rushes, grabs them, hands them to Nigellus. He hands them off to Bellator, who starts working on the padlock locking the portcullis.

MILO
That way.

NIGELLUS
You'll see a set of ropes, all tied off. Find the one that opens this gate, and pull it.

COLUMBA

I can do that.

And she's off, running down the corridor.

ANGRY GLADIATOR

Wait wait wait. You pull the wrong weight, you release the animals. Leopards. Crocodiles.

NERVOUS GLADIATOR

Yeah. Man-eating beasts. How are you going to handle them?

MILO

Isn't that what you men do?

Astonished looks from the Gladiators. The Angry Gladiator turns to Nigellus.

ANGRY GLADIATOR

Your friend's crazy.

NIGELLUS

(proudly)
Yes he is.

EXT. POMPEII STREETS

MT. VESUVIUS continues to churn out its unbelievable column of SMOKE and ASH -- now 15 miles high, straight up, its canopy spreading as far as the eye can see.

FORTUNATA (O.S.)

Don't you understand? This is your opportunity.

EXT. BALCONY, MAYOR'S PALAZZO - DAY

Fortunata, a scarf held to her mouth and nose, watches the refugees in the street below plowing through piles of fallen pumice and ash. Marcus Vettius stands beside her, unsure.

FORTUNATA

You will be the one who restores Pompeii. You will be the hero.

MARCUS VETTIUS

But Senator Orvo--

FORTUNATA

Senator Orvo's ship won't be able to leave in all this. He'll see it all! It's a gift of the gods that he's here. Think of how he'll praise you -- Don't you see? This mess is what gets you to Rome!

Marcus Vettius gazes at the mess. But what he sees now is a glorious future.

MARCUS VETTIUS

What a shame that we'll have to cancel tomorrow's dinner party.

FORTUNATA

Unavoidable. You'll be too busy with affairs of state.

Of course he will. Marcus Vettius, reassured of his own awesomeness, slides his hand down Fortunata's back.

MARCUS VETTIUS

You are a treasure, my dear. Come on. There are better ways to spend a free afternoon than gazing at fools.

His hand wanders southward.

FORTUNATA

Naughty boy.

Marcus Vettius removes his hand.

FORTUNATA (CONT'D)

I didn't say stop.

She turns into his arms. They kiss. He drags her inside.

MILO (O.S.)

Ready? One-- two-- three!

INT. GLADIATOR HOLDING CELL - DAY

Nigellus and the Gladiators have unlocked the padlock and untwined the chains holding the portcullis shut. They're trying to lift it--

NIGELLUS

Come on, you bastards. Liiift!

The Gladiators strain, Milo among them. Up a couple of inches--

The Portcullis shakes upward an inch--

A Gladiator lets go, gasping. Another falls backwards--

THE PORTCULLIS SLAMS DOWN with an echoing THUD that rings through the tunnels.

INT. TUNNEL, COLOSSEUM - DAY

Proculus and his Guards hear the THUD.

PROCULUS
The Gladiators! Back! Double
time!

As the Guards race away--

An enormous EXPLOSION obscures everything--

PULL BACK TO REVEAL--

EXT. RUINED VILLA - DAY

A LAVA COMET has just exploded in front of us. As the smoke clears, through the FLAMES, we spot--

Dulcima pulling a donkey, heavy-laden with overstuffed saddlebags. Piles of pumice CRUNCH under the donkey's feet.

Dulcima seems unfazed by the madness around her. Her eyes darting sharply around, she notices--

A crumbled wall has left a lavish home open to public view.

Dulcima glances around. Ties up her donkey. She climbs over the wall. Disappears from view.

360 DEGREE PAN AROUND THE STREET, REVEALING--

We're at the edge of town, at the foot of the mountain. A wealthy neighborhood. Lavish villas lie in ruins. Dead bodies are barely visible under piles of rock.

360 PAN ENDS, REVEALING--

Dulcima, clambering back over the wall. She's loaded down with jewelry, half a dozen gold-and-jeweled necklaces around her neck, bracelets pushed up each arm.

She glances around. Heads for another wealthy ruin.

BELOW HER, in the city of Pompeii proper...

EXT. COLOSSEUM - DAY

The giant structure stands firm, half-obsured by smoke and ash.

INT. TUNNEL, COLOSSEUM - DAY

Columba, running up a few steps, stops as she comes to a large niche cut into the corridor. In the niche are dozens of ropes, each tied off nautical-style, connecting to a network of pulleys high overhead. None of the ropes are labeled.

COLUMBA
Which one...

...is the right one? She can't tell.

Columba grabs a rope at random. Starts unwrapping it.

INT. BESTIARY CORRIDOR - DAY

Proculus and his Guards stride toward us, out of the hazy light into the wide corridor. We hear ROARS and HISSES, growing louder.

TRACK WITH THE GUARDS as they march past--

THE ANIMAL CAGES. Each blocked with a heavy iron portcullis.

RUNNING PAST--

--Four snarling LEOPARDS. One of the Leopards LEAPS at us as we pass--

--A jagged-horned RHINOCEROS--

--A pack of HYENAS, snapping and growling at each other--

--A sunken pool filled with snapping CROCODILES crawling all over each other.

At the end of the corridor--

THE GLADIATORS' HOLDING CELL

Trapped behind the portcullis are the near-exhausted Gladiators.

Proculus howls with laughter. The rest of the Guards begin to laugh as well.

PROCULUS

This is your idea of an escape?

BEHIND HIM

A portcullis begins to rise, REVEALING

Half a dozen CROCODILES crawling out of their pen.

GUARD

(heart in his throat)

Um, sir?

Proculus, still laughing, turns and freezes.

PROCULUS

(softly, petrified)

Draw your weapons.

One Guard fits an arrow to a bow. Fires at the crocodiles. Fffwwttt!

But the Crocodile's skin is so hard, the arrow BREAKS.

The Crocodile CHARGES at the Guards. Bites one Guard's leg clean through--

INT. TUNNEL, COLOSSEUM - DAY

AT THE COUNTERWEIGHT STATION

Columba unties the next rope. Starts to pull.

COLUMBA
Come on. Be the gladiator gate.

INT. BESTIARY CORRIDOR - DAY

DOWN THE CORRIDOR

Another portcullis rises.

Four LEOPARDS saunter into the corridor. They stretch, as--

Proculus and one Guard hold off a couple of slavering Crocodiles.

More CROCODILES slither about. One holds in its jaws one of the Guards. It WHIPS the Guard about, just for fun. The injured Guard screams.

IN THE GLADIATOR HOLDING CELL

The Gladiators stare in shock at the deadly mayhem occurring in the corridor. They back away from their portcullis as--

CROCODILES approach, snapping and growling.

Milo grips the portcullis, pushing it down as if he could single-handedly hold it in place. He looks down the corridor anxiously.

MILO
Don't do it -- don't do it--

Too late. The Gladiators' portcullis begins to rise, with Milo still holding on. As the Gladiators retreat to the far end of their cell--

Nigellus jumps to the bars of the portcullis as well. He and Milo RIDE IT UP as Crocodiles start to enter--

THEIR POV, from on high

As the Crocodiles ATTACK. Vicious teeth. Angry eyes.

Proculus, backed up against a wall and stabbing at a Crocodile with a spear sees--

PROCULUS
The Gladiators! Stop them! Don't let them get away!

The Guards fall on the unarmed Gladiators--

FROM HIS POSITION ON HIGH

Nigellus looks across the corridor-- Where a rack of WEAPONS is neatly mounted high along the wall. Nigellus summons up all his energy-- He FLINGS himself across the corridor--

SMASHES into the other wall-- but comes away with a SPEAR in his hand--

Nigellus starts throwing weapons into the Gladiators' Holding Cell -- Swords, spears, maces, you name it--

A THREE-WAY BATTLE-- Guards vs. Gladiators vs. Crocodiles-- Spears vs. swords vs. teeth and claws.

From his perch high on the raised portcullis, Milo surveys the chaos. BELLOWS at the top of his lungs.

MILO

Columba!!

INT. TUNNEL, COLOSSEUM - DAY

AT THE COUNTERWEIGHT STATION

Columba ties off the last rope and runs--

INT. BESTIARY CORRIDOR - DAY, CONTINUOUS

Columba charges around the corner to join Milo and Nigellus as they drop to the floor--

NIGELLUS

Next time, maybe you could let us out first.

He grabs Milo and Columba, shoves them ahead of him--

NIGELLUS (CONT'D)

Run!

EXT. POMPEII - DAY, CONTINUOUS

AERIAL SHOT

WE SPEED over the ruined city -- Temples fallen, FIRES ablaze--

Racing toward VESUVIUS, belching FLAMES--

And drop down toward STRIGANA'S CAVE/TEMPLE.

STRIGANA (O.S.)

Was this a game to you?!

INT. STRIGANA'S CAVE/TEMPLE - DAY

Strigana faces off with the image of Vulcan.

STRIGANA

Why send me as your prophet if you
never intended any to be saved?

No reaction from the statue. Strigana rises. Looks Vulcan in the eyes.

STRIGANA (CONT'D)

I see it now. You are an evil god.
You only pretended to be good so that
I would love you and serve you.

She stands up abruptly. She rubs her arms with her hands.

STRIGANA (CONT'D)

You gave me this disease, and I
thought it was a gift! But you
have stolen my life.

She looks at the entrance to her cave. Her prison.

Strigana looks one last time at the golden idol to which she has devoted her life.

STRIGANA (CONT'D)

How many days I have wasted loving
you.

She turns to the cave's exit.

EXT. THE ARENA, COLOSSEUM - DAY

Milo embraces Columba. Nigellus wrenches them apart.

NIGELLUS

This way.

EXT. COLOSSEUM - DAY

Fires burn unchecked on all sides, filling the air with BLACK SMOKE as--

The GLADIATORS (minus Nigellus) pour out of the tunnel onto the city streets. But they don't get far. Their way is blocked by--

The Colosseum GUARDS. Armed to the hilt. Standing shoulder-to-shoulder, all to stop the Gladiators.

PROCULUS

Ho! You scum, back inside, all of
you.

Bringing up the rear of the Gladiator pack is--

BELLATOR. A fierce light in his eyes as he sees the Soldiers.
A wicked grin on his face as he spots Proculus.

Bellator draws his sword halfway out of its scabbard.

BELLATOR
It would be a good idea for you to
get out of our way.

PROCULUS
You're going nowhere, unless it's
over our dead bodies.

Bellator grins.

BELLATOR
I'm so glad you said that.

Bellator CHARGES Proculus with a mighty bellow.

The fight is on! A massive CRASH as the Gladiators slam into
the Guards.

It almost feels as if the earth is shaking.

INT. STRIGANA'S CAVE/TEMPLE - DAY

The earth is shaking.

High on the wall, Vulcan's ruby eyes begin to GLOW.

REVERSE ANGLE TO REVEAL

A crack high in the cave wall. LAVA. Molten, glowing.
Spilling out and down to the cave floor. REFLECTED in the
statue's eyes.

More shaking.

The WALL SPLITS OPEN and LAVA BURSTS FORTH, rushing into the
cave.

EXT. STRIGANA'S CAVE/TEMPLE - DAY

Strigana ignores the shaking earth as she steps out of the
cave. She stands proudly as loose rocks slide down the
mountain around her.

The quake stops. All is still.

Strigana looks over the grey, ash-filled cloud hovering over
Pompeii -- and then--

As if by magic--

The winds blow a hole in the cloud, REVEALING the SUN, shooting GOLDEN AND PINK BEAMS through the smoky air.

Strigana stares in rapture at the beauty.

CLOSE-UP ON

Strigana. Her skin is already reacting. Small BLISTERS appear on her arms, her neck, her face.

She ignores it. She is totally overcome with joy at seeing the sun for the first time.

STRIGANA
It's so beautiful...

INT. STRIGANA'S CAVE/TEMPLE - DAY

A wild river of HOT LAVA rockets down the tunnel, ricocheting off the walls.

LAVA'S POV

Ahead, just outside the mouth of the cave--

STRIGANA, in silhouette.

EXT. STRIGANA'S CAVE/TEMPLE - DAY

BLISTERS continue to grow across Strigana's skin.

BEHIND STRIGANA--

The MOLTEN LAVA BLASTS out of the cave mouth.

It swallows Strigana instantly.

EXT. TRIREME, AT SEA - DAY

Leonides watches the beams of the sun shining down on the volcano.

The water is choppy, but the Trireme, under full sail, cuts fast through the whitecaps. The air is much less smoky out here.

Suddenly the wind stops. The sails flutter and droop. The Trireme glides to a halt.

On deck, Orvo looks around. Pissed.

ORVO
What the hell's going on? Get us moving!

But Leonides is watching the ocean, where--

The whitecaps disappear. The ocean is GLASSY CALM for miles.

FIRST OFFICER

General?

The First Officer points out to sea. Leonides turns to look.

A look of muted horror on Leonides's face. We don't see what he's looking at.

LEONIDES

No.

LEONIDES'S POV

To the west, the ocean is rising. And rising. Higher than the hull. Higher than the mast.

An enormous TIDAL WAVE is coming their way.

Leonides takes action, rushing around the deck, shoving men toward anything that looks safe -- a handhold to cling to, a niche to hide in.

LEONIDES (CONT'D)

Hold on! Get below!

He shouts as he races to haul down the sail.

LEONIDES (CONT'D)

All hands! Secure yourselves!

The ship starts to roll as the advance SWELL billows up underneath it. Orvo struggles to keep his balance.

ORVO

Help me!

LEONIDES

(yelling)

Come about into the wave--

Orvo shoves Leonides away from the mast.

ORVO

Forget the ship! Save me. It's your duty! I'm a Senator! Damn you, I'm a Senator!

Leonides looks at--

The WAVE, over 30' high, RACING TOWARD THEM. A deafening ROAR.

LEONIDES

Then show me who you are by how you die.

Orvo cowers in terror, his last scream on his lips as--

Leonides steps unafraid to the rail to face--

The WAVE. It SMASHES into the Trireme broadside. The Trireme CAPSIZES.

EXT. TRIREME, UNDERWATER - DAY, CONTINUOUS

The ship spins--

Men are sucked away from the ship, disappearing into the turbulent waters--

Orvo tries to scream underwater-- horror on his face--

Leonides drifts away, his eyes fixed on--

The huge red sail-- The Imperial Eagle-- FLOATING GRACEFULLY UNDERWATER--

Leonides reaches toward the Eagle as he sinks...

PULL BACK TO REVEAL

Hundreds of men floating downward to their deaths as the giant red sail sinks below them.... Orvo, dead, slips past us, just one of so many...

EXT. TRIREME, AT SEA - DAY, CONTINUOUS

The TIDAL WAVE LIFTS the Trireme out of the water. The ship rises up the face of the wave-- Rises-- Rises--

The ship is FLUNG UPSIDE-DOWN high in the air--

The WAVE passes beneath the airborne boat--

The HULL OF THE TRIREME SMASHES onto the ocean surface-- The giant ship, the pride of Rome, SPLINTERS into pieces--

ON THE SURFACE

WE STAY WITH THE TIDAL WAVE as it POWERS FORWARD. It carries pieces of the broken ship with it--

Shoving the bowsprit of the trireme, long oars, other smashed up pieces of the ship--

All rolling and tumbling over each other--

All SMASHING toward--

THE LIGHTHOUSE-- Proud and solid--

The Wave snaps it like a twig-- Knocks it to shreds--

WE STAY WITH THE WAVE, now racing toward the harbor, which seems to SPEED toward us--

EXT. POMPEII HARBOR - DAY

The dry harbor is now filled with people scavenging and trying to salvage destroyed boats. They look up at the approaching WAVE with horror--

They run-- There's nowhere to run--

The WAVE ROCKETS into the harbor with a perverse majesty--

It picks up the swamped NAVAL VESSELS, dwarfing all the other abandoned vessels--

--SMASHES the huge ships into the docks-- They splinter into a million pieces--

The Wave SMASHES boats into each other-- DESTROYS docks-- DROWNS all in its path--

A SHIP IS LIFTED HIGH-- Thrown forward OVER the docks, over the embarcadero--

The WAVE ENGULFS the entire wharf area -- the shops, the vendors, everything, WASHED AWAY instantly--

The SHIP hits a temple-- SMASHES through the COLUMNS, which collapse like dominoes--

As the ROARING TIDAL WAVE recedes, not a single person or boat is left. Water once again fills the harbor. But a new sound has started -- a GIANT RUMBLE.

EXT. COLOSSEUM - DAY

A madhouse, as people crush into the streets around the Colosseum.

The Gladiators kick the asses of the Soldiers and Guards. Bellator, filled with glee, fights Proculus. He glances around as he hears, behind him--

A CHARIOT racing out from the Colosseum tunnel, pulled by two horses. On the chariot--

Milo, Columba and Nigellus, who holds the reins.

The RUMBLE grows. The entire Colosseum starts to SHAKE.

THE STATUE OF VULCAN SWAYS-- FALLS--

Thousands of pounds of granite CRASHING DOWN--

WE FALL WITH THE STATUE TOWARD

The Chariot as it whisks forward--

The STATUE CRASHES into smithereens just behind the Chariot--

Bellator cheers for Nigellus as the Chariot gallops past and into the streets.

MILO

That way!

Nigellus cracks a whip. The horses bolt forward, through the smoke and haze.

The Chariot races away from the Colosseum.

EXT. POMPEII STREETS - DAY

Through the madness ride Milo, Columba and Nigellus--

A POOL OF WATER fills the street ahead-- Nigellus flicks the whip at the horses-- They power through--

WATER SPRAYS UP on either side of the Chariot--

AROUND A CORNER, INTO ANOTHER STREET--

Narrower here-- The Chariot can barely fit--

A LAVA COMET blasts down right next to the Chariot-- The Horses panic-- Nigellus uses all his strength to hold them back--

The RUMBLE grows still louder--

A shower of pumice falls on them as the horses push through--

FLAMING PUMICE lands on one of the Horses-- The Horse rears, whinnying in pain and shock--

Nigellus SNAPS at the pumice with the whip, sends it flying--

The Chariot CRUNCHES over piles of pumice in the street--

Below them, the streets begin to SHUDDER.

The Chariot breaks free into a wider Plaza -- Almost at the edge of the city, when--

BEHIND THEM

VESUVIUS continues to spout SMOKE--

The RUMBLE GROWS LOUDER. LOUDER. Deafening.

And then-- For the second time--

MOUNT VESUVIUS EXPLODES!

The TOP THIRD OF THE MOUNTAIN is blown to smithereens.

EXT. BALCONY, MAYOR'S PALAZZO - DAY

Marcus Vettius steps onto the balcony. Fortunata shrinks into him as they stare--

At the exploding VOLCANO.

EXT. VESUVIUS - DAY

The EXPLOSION continues. Lava speeds down the side of the mountain, spews out in every direction.

AERIAL POV

Looking down on Vesuvius. The 20-mile-high PLUME OF SMOKE AND ASH shudders--

And then--

The PLUME OF SMOKE COLLAPSES. 20 miles high, FALLING DOWN ON ITSELF.

The power of the BLAST flattens THOUSANDS OF TREES -- smashed to their sides instantly.

The PLUME OF SMOKE collapses slowly at first. Then faster. FASTER.

An AVALANCHE of SMOKE, LAVA, ROCKS races down the side of the mountain.

Hot -- 1000 degrees. Fluid -- wrapping itself around crags and valleys--

As it races toward POMPEII.

This is the PYROCLASTIC FLOW.

ON THE MOUNTAINSIDE

The temple, with its proud columns and stately grace, SNAPS as if made of matchsticks.

The FLOW buries it and rolls on.

INT. ABANDONED VILLA - DAY

Dulcima sits in a candlelit vault, gleefully stuffing gold into an already overfilled bag.

She looks up at the sound of an approaching ROAR--

The VAULT ROCKS and the DOOR SLAMS SHUT as the FLOW HITS--

Dulcima is overcome with horror as the contents of the vault BURST INTO FLAMES all around her.

Dulcima's CLOTHING BURSTS INTO FLAMES-- She screams--

Her gold necklaces and bracelets start to MELT -- Next, her skin, also MELTING--

She falls onto the piles of gold-- METAL MELTS all around her--

EXT. POMPEII STREETS - DAY

Milo, Columba and Nigellus cling to the Chariot as the horses gallop for all they're worth. Milo twists around, starts to rein up to look at the incredible sight--

MILO'S POV

The Pyroclastic Flow pours down the mountainside like a living river of death.

MILO
Don't look back! Go! To the
cliffs!

They charge hell-for-leather forward.

EXT. POMPEII STREETS - DAY

The Pyroclastic Flow sweeps through the city, an unstoppable monster made of smoke.

AERIAL POV

The Pyroclastic Flow swallows everything in its path.

It hits the outskirts of town. Mows them down.

We DIVE DOWN TO TRAVEL WITH THE FLOW--

PYROCLASTIC FLOW'S POV, MOVING

Racing forward-- Smashing everything in our path-- Quick glimpses of startled, horrified faces look back at us--

All blasted into oblivion--

People run from the Pyroclastic Flow, smoke billowing as it chases them.

Running women dive into a doorway to hide--

EXT. FORMAL GARDEN, LUCRETIVS'S VILLA (RUINED) - DAY

Lucretius turns from his model Pompeii to see the oncoming Pyroclastic Flow.

He stumbles backwards-- Trips-- Falls right onto a "temple"-- Smashes it in his fall--

He reaches to try to pick up the pieces--

The Flow smothers the model Pompeii--

QUICK FLASH! --Lucretius clutches fragments of marble, all grey, frozen in place.

INT. THE THERMAE - DAY

The Pyroclastic Flow BLASTS into the Thermae. Smoke fills the chambers instantly.

The POOLS VAPORIZE. Full one second. Nothing but steam the next.

Revelers open their mouths to scream-- And are dead before the sound comes out.

Claudio huddles in a corner, sucking his thumb in fear--

The Flow swallows him.

QUICK FLASH! --Claudio sucks his thumb, all grey, frozen in place.

INT. MAYOR'S PALAZZO - DAY

Marcus Vettius and Fortunata, in their shared toga, are paralyzed by the sight before them. Their eyes grow wide as the Pyroclastic Flow sweeps closer-- CLOSER--

They cling to each other-- The Flow covers their balcony.

QUICK FLASH! -- Marcus Vettius and Fortunata, curled around each other, all grey, frozen in place.

EXT. COLOSSEUM - DAY

The Colosseum itself starts to shudder under the pressure of the air as the Pyroclastic Flow sweeps toward it--

The Gladiators and the Guards still fight-- Bellator battles Proculus--

The Pyroclastic Flow swoops down on them-- The Gladiators scatter--

Proculus cringes--

Bellator lunges-- Sword into Proculus's gut-- Bellator looks up just as--

The Flow sweeps over them--

QUICK FLASH! --Bellator and Proculus, all grey, frozen in place.

EXT. OUTSKIRTS OF POMPEII - DAY

The Chariot carrying Milo, Columba and Nigellus races out of the city, past the few REFUGEES going in this direction.

They gallop past crumbled walls that let us see what used to be wealthy villas. Not much left but the ocean views.

Cobbled streets turn into dirt roads. Still full speed ahead.

AHEAD OF THEM--

The CLIFFS Columba ran down when she arrived in Pompeii-- Milo points to the road leading up the cliff--

MILO
That way! As high as we can!

BEHIND THEM

The Pyroclastic Flow has devoured more than half the town. But it looks like they're going to make it--

Until-- In front of them--

A huge SINKHOLE opens up-- And ahead of it, ANOTHER SINKHOLE--

The horses veer-- The Chariot fishtails--

AERIAL SHOT

SINKHOLE after SINKHOLE opens up ahead of the Chariot--

An entire BUILDING is undermined-- COLLAPSES sideways right into one of the larger sinkholes--

Nigellus swerves the Chariot left-- right-- Until--

A SINKHOLE opens up right under the Chariot's wheels-- The Chariot falls in-- The only thing holding it is the strength of the horses, straining on the road--

IN THE SINKHOLE

The Chariot TIPS OVER -- Columba FALLS OUT-- Milo lunges to grab her arm-- He FALLS OUT as well--

Milo grips the wheel of the chariot. Columba grips Milo--

NIGELLUS
Hang on-- I'm coming--!

But--

ON THE ROAD

A clutch of REFUGEES swarms up to the horses, trying to unbuckle the harness.

Nigellus, pure strength, PULLS HIMSELF UP the horses' reins, hand over hand, to the edge of the sinkhole--

NIGELLUS (CONT'D)

Get away!

Hanging on with one hand, he draws his sword, WHACKS a panicked Refugee with the flat of the blade-- FLICKS THE WHIP at them--

The Refugees run--

BACK IN THE SINKHOLE

Nigellus slides down the reins back into the sinkhole--

NIGELLUS (CONT'D)

Columba-- Come on.

Gripping the chariot for dear life, he reaches to Columba--

COLUMBA

I can't--

MILO

You can--

Milo heaves Columba up with all his might--

Nigellus grabs her one-handed-- Pulls her straight up--

ON THE ROAD

Columba rolls off onto the road--

Nigellus notices--

A pair of REFUGEES-- unfastening the harness of one of the horses-- Nigellus lunges after them--

But they're gone, galloping away--

And the chariot, with only one horse to hold it, DROPS-- Almost pulls the remaining horse back into the Sinkhole--

Nigellus dives to the edge of the sinkhole--

NIGELLUS

Milo!

He thrusts his arm down-- Milo grabs it--

Nigellus hauls Milo out of the sinkhole-- As Milo scrambles onto the road--

MILO

That's the second time you've saved my life today.

NIGELLUS
Thank me later.

BEHIND THEM

The Pyroclastic Flow advances-- Almost through the city now--
Getting closer-- We can HEAR IT -- A frightening roar--

Nigellus heaves Columba onto the horse--

NIGELLUS (CONT'D)
Get on--

Milo hoists Columba onto the second horse, which is still held
in place by the weight of the trapped Chariot-- He climbs on
to the horse's back--

MILO
Come on!

Nigellus turns to see--

The Pyroclastic Flow is past the edge of the city. Closer.
Unstoppable. They're in real danger-- Its ROAR is almost
deafening--

NIGELLUS
I'll slow you down too much--

MILO
We didn't come this far for you to
quit!

NIGELLUS
And I didn't come this far to watch
you die!

Milo reaches for Nigellus, to pull him to the horse. But--

Nigellus grabs his sword-- SLASHES THE HORSES' HARNESS off the
chariot-- SNAPS the whip at the horse's hind legs--

Heartbreak and horror on Milo's face as he looks into his
friend's eyes for the last time--

The horse takes off at full gallop, Milo and Columba on its back--

Milo hangs on to the bridle-- Columba hangs on to Milo-- The
long harness reins flap madly in the wind-- It's all they can
do to stay on the horse--

ON THE ROAD UP TO THE BLUFF

Running-- Running-- Straight up the paved road leading to the
bluffs outside the city-- Up-- Up--

Milo and Columba race up the road--

AHEAD OF THEM

The CEREMONIAL ARCH. The giant CRACK we saw form is huge now-- The Arch shakes and quivers-- The two halves TWIST AGAINST EACH OTHER, their foundations moving separately--

Milo slaps the horse-- It powers through the Arch just as--

It SNAPS IN TWO, then COLLAPSES behind them--

Galloping ahead-- To the top of the bluff-- Galloping--

BY THE SINKHOLE

Nigellus faces the Pyroclastic Flow-- Lifts his sword arm high, crosses his left fist over his heart-- The Gladiator's Salute--

NIGELLUS (CONT'D)

I who am about to die--

The Pyroclastic Flow RUSHES toward Nigellus-- OVERWHELMS him--

QUICK FLASH! --Nigellus salutes, all grey, frozen in place.

WITH THE PYROCLASTIC FLOW, MOVING

As we SPLASH like a sea wave hitting the cliff--

ON THE TOP OF THE BLUFF

Milo and Columba RACE away from the Pyroclastic Flow, tiny figures against the monster of smoke--

A gust of wind parts the smoke, which begins to dissipate,

REVEALING--

Pompeii is no more. Just a surge of roiling smoke and gas. Green and yellow, red and purple, swirling wildly. Disturbingly beautiful.

PUSH IN ON VESUVIUS

LAVA POURS down the sides of Mt. Vesuvius, now 3000' shorter. Its slopes are awash in glowing rivers of red.

SLOW DISSOLVE TO:

EXT. COASTLINE - DAY

FROM THE WATER

We see the sea cave where Kellus secured Milo's boat.

At the top of a steep path leading to the cave, a horse appears. Two riders on its back. It's Milo and Columba.

WITH MILO AND COLUMBA

As they dismount. Milo ties the horse to an olive tree.
Columba walks to the edge of the cliff... and gasps.

MILO

What is it?

But Columba is just staring... Milo walks over to join her.

THEIR POV

Of Pompeii and Vesuvius in the distance.

The volcano spews out spectacular JETS OF LAVA which RAIN DOWN
for miles. Against the ash-grey sky, they light up like the
devil's fireworks.

Below the mountain, Pompeii is buried under a hundred feet of
ash. SMOKE swirls upward from a vast field of nothingness.

MILO (CONT'D)

...Now we know what hell looks like.

COLUMBA

(takes his hand)

I'm sorry about Nigellus.

Milo's eyes search as if he could find a trace of Nigellus
left below. What just happened hits him with the force of a
physical blow.

MILO

A whole world died today...

EXT. SEA CAVE - DAY

Milo and Columba pick their way down a steep path. As they
round a corner, they spot--

BELOW THEM, IN A COVE

It's Kellus and his family.

Milo runs joyously down the steep path to hug Kellus. Columba
is right behind. Kellus's Daughters cling to them.

As we hear a MEOW, and Maximus the Kitten claws his way out of
his bag--

WE BEGIN TO PULL AWAY FROM THEM, ACROSS THE OCEAN --

IN THE DISTANCE

Vesuvius continues to belch intermittent clouds of SMOKE and FIRE.

TILT DOWN TO REVEAL

A Fishing Boat is poled out of a small cave in the bluffs.
The SAIL goes up.

EXT. FISHING BOAT, AT SEA - DAY, CONTINUOUS

Milo, Columba, Kellus, and Kellus's family sail toward us on the boat. Milo is at the tiller.

COLUMBA
Milo?... How does it feel to be a
free man?

Milo is startled.

COLUMBA (CONT'D)
Do you see anyone left to own you?

Kellus laughs, enjoying Milo's surprise.

KELLUS
By the way, do we have any idea
where we're going?

MILO
No.

KELLUS
We have no money, no food.

MILO
No.

KELLUS
Not to mention no city, no home.

COLUMBA
There may not even be a piece of
paper to show we exist. It's as if
we have no past.

Milo smiles. Puts his arm around Columba.

MILO
But we have a future.

A breeze catches the sail, and carries the boat past us.

Milo and Columba sail away from us into a brilliant orange sunset, heading to the great who-knows-where.

THE END