

"The Gospel* According to Mel"

*from Old English "godspel" meaning "good news"

An Original Screenplay by NINA GALEN

Comedy / Historical / Adventure

WGAE Reg. No. 141825 - 00

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A BLACK SCREEN

A disclaimer appears: "No animals, human beings, nationalities or religions were significantly impacted during the making of this film."

A BLACK SCREEN

NARRATOR (V.O.)

To understand the following story,
there are two historical events of
which you must be aware.

A title appears -- [flashing] "1000 B.C." [not flashing]
"The planet Midway, halfway between Jerusalem and the Seat
of God"

EXT. THE PLANET MIDWAY -- LATE AFTERNOON

A desert scene, sand, rocks, not a blade of grass. A slight hill on which a young man, Jesus-of-Jerusalem, in the starry loincloth of a poor magician, hangs tied to a wooden cross, looking dead. A few other young men hang around, including JOSH-THE-JUGGLER, who is juggling some small scrolls, and AL-THE-ACROBAT, who is doing some extreme body-stretches. One, MEL-THE-MUMMER, skinny, slope-shouldered, with a distinctly Semitic profile, about 20, dressed in well-padded, improvised women's clothes, but without a wig or hat, is busy scribbling on a pad. A few of the planet's inhabitants, short, teddy-bearish creatures with human-like arms and legs, paws, and generous noses, none of whom wear clothes, stand around silently or sit on rocks.

NARRATOR (V.O.)

One of these historical events is
the crucifixion of Jesus-of-Jerusalem,
the first son of God. Jesus, a
magician, along with 12 members of
his troupe including Mel-the-Mummer,
Josh-the-Juggler and Al-the-Acrobat,
levitated to the planet Midway in a
vain attempt to reach his father's
throne.

Al breaks off his stretches, looks at the cross, sighs and shakes his head.

AL-THE-ACROBAT

He's been up there all day and his
father hasn't said boo.

Josh catches his juggling scrolls, regards the cross.

JOSH-THE-JUGGLER

I don't think the Midwayans will cut
him down.

(MORE)

JOSH-THE-JUGGLER (CONT'D)

That plague of sand and stones he
sent has ruined their ecology.

ANGLE ON some Midwayans who look teed off.

AL-THE-ACROBAT

If we touch him, it might break his
concentration. If they think he's
still alive, they'll kill him.

(calling)

C'mon, Mel. Finish already. It's
getting late.

MEL-THE-MUMMER

You guys go on. I'll catch up later.

The Young Men and the Midwayans drift off. Mel-the-Mummer
remains, scribbling, as the sun sinks toward the horizon.

ANGLE ON Jesus-of-Jerusalem who peeps cautiously between his
eyelids. Thinking he's alone, he sighs and looks with anguish
at the sky.

JESUS-OF-JERUSALEM

Father, father, how the heck can I
get your attention? So *what* if I'm
not a rabbi. Can't you accept me for
what I *am*?

Shaking his head, Jesus-of-Jerusalem unties himself and climbs
down from the cross. He walks off in the opposite direction
from his friends, followed at a short distance by Mel-the-
Mummer, still scribbling.

A BLACK SCREEN

NARRATOR (V.O.)

Okay. Now, here's the *second*
historical event that will help you
understand this story.

The words appear -- [flashing] "c. A.D. 33" [not flashing]
"On a road nigh unto Damascus, about noon..."

EXT. ROAD TO DAMASCUS -- ABOUT NOON

Nothing is seen but a CLOSE UP of the agonized face of PAUL
OF TARSUS (known to his Jewish friends as SAUL), about 26,
blinded by a great light.

JESUS (O.S.)

Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me?

Continued CLOSE UP of Paul's face as he falls to the ground,
blinded by light.

PAUL
Who are you, Lord?

JESUS (O.S.)
I am Jesus of Nazareth, whom you
persecute.

PAUL
What shall I do, Lord?

JESUS (O.S.)
Get to your feet and go into Damascus,
and I will tell you what to do.

A BLACK SCREEN

NARRATOR (V.O.)
Got it? About 33 A.D? On a road nigh
unto Damascus? The conversion of
Paul of Tarsus to Christ? Okay, let's
get on with our story.

The flashing message appears: "c. A.D. 10"

The SOUND OF A HELICOPTER.

EXT. AERIAL VIEW OF TODAY'S ROME -- DAY

SOUND OF HELICOPTER fades under as we are shown around the
city's rooftops and places of interest.

NARRATOR (V.O.)
Our story begins about 10 A.D., four
years after our hero was born.
However, to save money, and for other
reasons too, it was filmed in part
against a present-day background.
As no crocodiles sent in resumes,
the non-speaking role of Crocchus
Africanus was given to a black male
actor. Otherwise, historical accuracy
was strictly observed, we think.

DESCENDING VIEW ANGLING ON a poor quarter of the city.

EXT. ROMAN STREET -- DAY

We see a narrow, twisted street, broken by stairs and shaded
by hanging laundry. CROWDS OF CITIZENS in togas and tunics,
rich and poor, HAWKERS selling goods and edibles, fill the
street. BRICKLAYERS take bricks off a cart and work at
constructing a small Roman archway in one wall.

In the lee of the bricklayers' cart, a TOUR GUIDE with "Last
Chance Tours" on his T-shirt speaks to a group of aged, infirm
AMERICAN TOURISTS wearing T-shirts identical to his.

TOUR GUIDE

After the defeat of Anthony and Cleopatra in the battle of Actium, the Emperor Augustus brought 200 years of peace to the Empire. This Pax Romana was very welcome after centuries of warfare, encouraging merchants and emigres from all over the Empire, and beyond, to travel to Rome. Any free man could obtain Roman citizenship, if, when in Rome, he did as the Romans did.

Two Midwayans wander past dressed in tunics.

TOUR GUIDE (CONT'D)

To keep these unemployed masses fed, amused, and non-revolutionary, Augustus decreed that hundreds of thousands of Roman poor be given "bread and circuses."

ANGLE ON a BLIND LADY TOURIST with white cane and dark glasses.

BLIND LADY TOURIST

This is so *boring!*

She refers to her wristwatch but is unable to read the time.

BLIND LADY TOURIST (CONT'D)

Damn!

She nudges the old DEAF LADY TOURIST next to her.

BLIND LADY TOURIST (CONT'D)

(in a loud whisper)
Do you have the time?

DEAF LADY TOURIST

(cupping her ear)
Eh?

TOUR GUIDE

But I'll say this: These narrow, twisting streets weren't any place for a blind lady to go looking for a morning newspaper!

He and some of the tourists laugh.

ANGLE ON poor, white-eyed NOLIA, about 35, making her way down the crowded street, tapping with a rough cane, one hand brushing along the wall.

TOUR GUIDE (CONT'D)

One danger in Roman streets was getting run over by some hot-shot chariot driver racing to the Circus Maximus. Not to mention getting beamed by stuff thrown or dropped from a window.

ANGLE ON a poor young MOTHER, pulling her four-year-old son, MEL, by the hand up the busy street.

ANGLE ON blind Nolia coming down the street, approaching some stairs.

ANGLE ON Mel's Mother coming up the street.

ANGLE ON a third floor window with a flower pot on the sill. Suddenly a fat ELBOW appears, accidentally knocking the pot off. It falls, landing on Mel's Mother's head. She drops like a stone, letting go of Mel who dodges the passing legs and gets separated from her. PASSERS-BY converge on the downed woman. A passing DOCTOR examines her briefly.

DOCTOR

She's done for.

He motions to his SLAVE.

DOCTOR (CONT'D)

Take her.

The Slave picks up the dead woman and follows the Doctor up the steps. As he reaches the top he swerves to avoid an obstruction and the Mother's legs accidentally strike Nolia from behind, sending her flying down the stairs in SLOW MOTION where she lands on top of little Mel. Feeling his young form under her, Nolia instinctively shields him. A PASSER-BY lifts her quickly to her feet and hands her back her cane, then keeps on going. Nolia holds onto Mel's hand, managing to lead him to the wall.

NOLIA

What is your name, child?

MEL

Mel.

NOLIA

(looking about blindly)

My name is Nolia. Do you see your mother, Mel?

MEL

(looking at the passing legs)

No.

Nolia tries to lift him, but almost loses her balance. She can only hold him by the hand. She cries out in a thin voice.

NOLIA

Here is a child, a child named Mel.
Is anyone looking for a child named
Mel? Is anyone looking for Mel?

No one pays any attention. Holding Mel's hand, Nolia feels her way back along the street walls until she comes to a familiar door. She pushes it open and takes Mel through.

INT. SIMPLE COMMUNAL ROOM -- CONTINUOUS

The room is furnished with straw mattresses, and a simple grill where sausages are roasting. Poor people live there communally.

NOLIA

Claudia, Claudia, help me with Mel.

CLAUDIA, a woman of about 40, comes over.

CLAUDIA

I'm here.

NOLIA

Mel, this is Claudia. Claudia, this
is Mel.

MEL

Where's my mama?

NOLIA

Mel, your mama will come tomorrow.
And your dada too.

MEL

(excited)
My dada won't come. He won't come.

NOLIA

Of course he will.

MEL

He's dead. He died when I was small.

NOLIA

Ah. Claudia, give Mel some sausage.
Go, Mel, go to Claudia.

Claudia picks up a sausage that has cooled and offers it to Mel.

CLAUDIA

Here, Mel.

MEL

I don't eat sausage. I don't eat pork.

Curious, Claudia lifts Mel's tunic in front, looks beneath it, and chuckles.

NOLIA

That isn't pork sausage, Mel. No, not at all. That sausage is made from arena kill. It's lion meat, not pork.

MEL

Lion meat?

NOLIA

Yes. Yesterday brave hunters killed twenty-five lions in the amphitheater. They gave some of the meat to the poor. Have you ever seen a lion, Mel?

MEL

No, have you?

Smiling radiantly, as if remembering, Nolia shuts her white, sightless eyes.

NOLIA

Of course I've seen lions. And once I saw your father fight in the amphitheater. Your father was a great gladiator, Mel. A *great* gladiator.

MEL

He was? My father? You saw him fight?

NOLIA

Yes, yes I did. All Rome saw him. They loved him. He died bravely, fighting a lion.

MEL

My father died fighting a lion? Did you see him...fight it?

NOLIA

Yes, I did. And Mel, there never was a braver gladiator than your father. Claudia, give the son of that great gladiator some sausage made from lion loins.

Mel takes the sausage, chews on it thoughtfully, then crams it into his mouth, chews briefly and swallows. He throws his arms around Nolia.

MEL

(earnestly, proudly)
Nolia, my father was a great
gladiator! He died fighting a lion!

NOLIA

That's right, Mel. That's right.
Now, Claudia will take us to the
baths and later we'll have supper
and she'll give you a bit of straw
to sleep on. Your mama will come for
you tomorrow.

MEL

Mama will come tomorrow.

EXT. A ROAD OUTSIDE ROME -- JUST BEFORE DAWN

Five or six wagons, pulled by CLOPPING OXEN and piled high
with the corpses of animals and other refuse, CREAK along
the road. Sticking out of one dark pile we see the white arm
of a young woman.

NARRATOR (V.O.)

But Mel's mother didn't return to
claim her son. She was laid to rest
in an offal pit near the Esquiline
road, along with dead criminals,
lions, bears, the unclaimed bodies
of gladiators, and other arena-kill.

FADE OUT TO BLACK SCREEN

The words appear: "TWELVE YEARS LATER"

EXT. WIDE ROMAN STREET -- DAY

Nolia, her hair as white as her eyes, is walking down the
street with her hand on TEENAGER MEL's arm. Physically he
looks identical to Mel-the-Mummer.

NARRATOR (V.O.)

The years passed, during which Mel
lived with Nolia and her friends.
Then one day...

We hear O.S. SHOUTS and CLOPPING OF HORSES' HOOVES. Mel looks
back. ANGLE ON a chariot speeding up the street, scattering
the pedestrians. Mel tries to pull Nolia out of the way, but
she trips and is hit. VARIOUS ANGLES ON HOTSHOT CHARIOT
DRIVER, HORSES, WHEELS, NOLIA BEING STRUCK AND KILLED, MEL'S
PANICKED FACE. A Doctor stops and examines Nolia, shakes his
head, signals his Slave to take her.

Overwhelmed, Mel runs off through the crowded streets, tears
running down his cheeks.

NARRATOR (V.O.) (CONT'D)
 Nolia's death occurred when Mel was
 16, old enough to continue his story
 by himself. So I'll say *adieu*.

EXT. STREET -- A SHORT TIME LATER

Mel has slowed down, is walking aimlessly through the streets.

MEL (V.O.)
 When Nolia died I went a little crazy.
 I swore to Jupiter I'd never love
 anyone again.

He arrives at where the entrance to their communal home had
 been. During his short absense the building was razed.

MEL (V.O.) (CONT'D)
 When I got home that day I found
 that while I was out our communal
 home had been torn down for a new
 temple to Jupiter. Now I had no Nolia,
 no community, no home.

INT. PUBLIC BATHS

MALE BATHERS talk, work out, are rubbed with oil by SLAVES.
 Many are naked some wear towels. Mel sits in the water with
 his eyes closed.

MEL (V.O.)
 What saved me were the baths. I would
 get into the warm water, close my
 eyes, and pretend I was back in my
 mother's arms. I loved the baths,
 but a man can't stay in water forever,
 like a fish.

He climbs out of the water shielding his genitalia with his
 towel, which he wraps quickly around his lower torso.

MEL (CONT'D)
 I had another problem. When I was an
 infant I must have cut myself on
 something sharp. When people saw the
 scar they'd laugh and make fun of
 me. So I tried not to show it.

Mel sits down on the edge of the pool, his feet in the water.
 Nearby the same Tour Guide from before, looking older, speaks
 to the same but much older and slightly smaller crowd of
 American Tourists, some using canes and walkers.

TOUR GUIDE
 Rome had baths that were open to the
 public free of charge.
 (MORE)

TOUR GUIDE (CONT'D)

The Romans liked cleanliness, it was part of their religious practice. Their main problem was: *soap* wasn't used for *washing* until *two hundred years after Christ*. Before that the Romans used soap as *medicine*. *Yuck!*

TOURISTS

(laughter and coughing)

TOUR GUIDE

Without soap, shaving was so painful that some preferred to have their beards and underarm hair *plucked*. *Ouch!*

TOURISTS

(laughter and choking)

Mel, oblivious to the time-warp Tourists, gets up and wanders around among the Bathers, sitting down next to GLAUCON and THRASHYMACHUS, two naked young men with long beards who are deep in conversation.

MEL (V.O.)

The public baths became my family, my school. There I could listen for hours to conversations by all sorts of people, like Greek philosophers discussing Beauty.

THRASHYMACHUS

Now, if a man believes in the existence of beautiful things, but not of Beauty itself, and cannot follow a guide who would lead him to a knowledge of it, is he not living in a dream?

GLAUCON

I should certainly call that dreaming.

THRASHYMACHUS

Contrast with him the man who holds that there is such a thing as Beauty itself and can discern that essence as well as the things that partake of its character without ever confusing the one with the other -- is he a dreamer or living in a waking state?

GLAUCON

He is very much in a waking state.

THRASHYMACHUS

So may we say that he knows, while
the other has only a belief in
appearances; and might we...

His VOICE UNDER as WE ANGLE ON TWO FAT, NAKED ROMANS, their
left hands covered with gem-studded rings, who wade up, turn,
and sit on the other side of Mel. He turns his attention to
them.

MEL (V.O.)

Sometimes senators would come to
bathe.

The FIRST SENATOR speaks in a low voice to his companion.

FIRST SENATOR

I think the deed might best be done
some evening when that rat leaves
his house to walk to the Forum where
his mistress awaits.

SECOND SENATOR

I hear he carries a knife under his
toga. We'll need at least three men.

FIRST SENATOR

Wait! I have a better idea. I could
tell my wife to put a spell on him.

SECOND SENATOR

A spell? Perfect! Our hands would be
clean. What kind of spell?

FIRST SENATOR

She could make him think he was a
chicken.

SECOND SENATOR

Could she really?

FIRST SENATOR

Yes. Once she made one of our slaves
think he was a chicken. The fellow
ran about all day clucking and pecking
at insects.

SECOND SENATOR

Poor fellow. Did she change him back?

FIRST SENATOR

Of course not.
(nudging him with his
elbow)
We needed the eggs!

He bursts out laughing at his joke.

SECOND SENATOR
 (groaning, laughing)
 Oooh, that's so *old*.

The Philosophers have left. ANGLE ON TWO POLITICIANS who take their places.

MEL (V.O.)
 But most of all I liked to hear talk about the amphitheater games. I kept hoping one day I'd hear someone speak of my father the gladiator.

FIRST POLITICIAN
 I tell you, these damn games are going to bankrupt me. You won't believe the rental fee my lanista charged for five pairs of gladiators. Two were killed and I had to reimburse him at an astronomical price.

SECOND POLITICIAN
 Gladiators? The price of *ostriches* is through the roof! The smallest *monkey* costs a fortune. The *good* news is, I have a contact who says he can get me a tiger. Now a tiger is worth any price. I'll feed it vegetables for a week, then run it against ten unarmed POW's. My constituents will love it.

FIRST POLITICIAN
 Well, if we don't keep our people amused, somebody else *will*.

Just then DORKAS, a young man with a short beard and scholarly air beckons to Mel who gets up, goes over and sits down next to him on the edge of a pool.

MEL (V.O.)
 One afternoon a week I was taught to write Greek and Latin by Dorkas, a friendly Grecian slave.
 (to Dorkas)
Shalom.

Dorkas hands Mel a wax tablet and stylus.

DORKAS
 I don't understand, Mel. Your Latin is good, your Greek okay, but you're *fluent* in *Hebrew*. When did you learn Hebrew?

MEL

I never learned it. It was already
in me when I was born, like my
eyesight and hearing.

DORKAS

Mel, are you sure you're a Roman?

MEL

Are you serious?

He turns his head to show his generous profile.

MEL (CONT'D)

Is this a Roman nose or *what*?

EXT. STREET IN FRONT OF THE COLOSSEUM -- DAY

A disclaimer appears: "Purists will say that the Flavian Amphitheater - known today as the Colosseum - wasn't built until half a century after our story. But what the *hey*? It's *gorgeous*."

Outside the huge edifice TOUR BUSES and HORSE-DRAWN CARRIAGES await their clients. We hear HORN MUSIC and RHYTHMIC SHOUTING of CROWDS watching the event.

CROWD

Verbera! Verbera! [sub-title: Kill
the coward! Kill the coward!]

EXT. COLOSSEUM STANDS -- DAY

Thousands of angry SHOUTING, SCREAMING ROMANS fill the stands. Many are eating sausages. In the first tier, the EMPEROR TIBERIUS and DISTINGUISHED MALE PRIVATE CITIZENS. Next tier up, MIDDLE-CLASS MALES. Next tier, THE MALE POPULACE. ANGLE ON Mel shouting. The top tier is reserved for WOMEN and YOUNG GIRLS.

CROWD

Verbera! [sub-title: Kill the coward!]
Iugula! [sub-title: Cut his throat!]

In the arena are TWO GLADIATORS. One stands over the other. The fallen man begs for mercy. The other looks toward the Emperor and up at the stands for guidance.

The CROWD signals thumbs down.

ANGLE ON Emperor Tiberius, busy with some correspondence. He nods a little absently and points his thumb down.

ANGLE ON the Gladiator raising his sword.

GLADIATOR

Sorry brother. I'm glad mom didn't live to see this. But you know what they say, *Ut quis quem vicerit occidat*. [sub-title: Kill the loser, whoever he may be.]

He brings the sword down with all his strength.

ANGLE ON THE LOWER STANDS where a spray of blood hits the distinguished spectators. It splashes on the sausages in their hands which they eat with added gusto.

ANGLE ON the Emperor Tiberius whose paperwork is likewise splashed.

TIBERIUS

(absently)

Give him a palm branch. Get me some sand.

ANGLE ON the winning gladiator who runs around the arena holding up a palm branch in front of the CHEERING CROWD.

FADE OUT

A BLACK SCREEN

The words appear: "FIVE YEARS LATER"

EXT. STREET IN FRONT OF THE COLOSSEUM -- DAY

On the street TOUR BUSES and HORSE-DRAWN CARRIAGES await. ANCIENT ROMANS mingle with MODERN TOURISTS.

Mel walks along the sidewalk, pausing to look at posters announcing the upcoming gladiatorial games and animal hunts.

MEL (V.O.)

When I wasn't hanging around the baths, I was hanging around the amphitheater, dreaming of one day becoming a gladiator like my father.

Mel passes by the same "Last Chance Tours" Tour Guide and his group of Elderly Tourists. Their number cut by two-thirds and visibly older, all lean on walkers or slump in wheel chairs. The Tour Guide uses a walker and body brace.

TOUR GUIDE

The Colosseum was built by the Emperor Flavius in the seventies. Not the *nineteen* seventies -- the A.D. seventies.

Chuckling, he looks for a reaction to his joke. Most sit dully, except for one elderly MALE TOURIST who is dissolved

in almost soundless laughter. His uncontrollable squeaks of mirth continue throughout the rest of the guide's talk. The Tour Guide glances uncomfortably at him from time to time.

TOUR GUIDE (CONT'D)

In their amphitheaters, the Romans held what they called "games," extreme blood sports that included gladiator fights -- helloo, I'm talking to you -- and contests with wild beasts. Roman games were held for more than eight hundred years in arenas all over the Empire. At the grand opening of the Colosseum, which lasted 100 days, ten thousand gladiators lost their lives. On *one day alone*, 9000 wild animals were slaughtered. Can you imagine the mess that was left for someone to clean up?

A hard-of-hearing LADY TOURIST, cupping her ear, nudges the laughing man.

LADY TOURIST

What did he say that was so funny?

The man gasps for breath.

MALE TOURIST

It's not what he *said*, it's the way he *said* it.

He explodes in mirth.

ANGLE ON Mel who stands on the sidewalk looking at a wall poster.

MEL (V.O.)

Then one day my big break came.

ANGLE ON a Colosseum BOSS coming out of a doorway. He calls to Mel.

BOSS

Hey, kid. Wanna job?

MEL

As gladiator? Can I be a gladiator? My father was a great gladiator. He died fighting a lion. My name's Mel.

BOSS

Tell you what, Mel. You work hard and when you're old enough I'll enroll you in the Imperial Gladiator School.

MEL
How old is "old enough?"

BOSS
How old are you now?

Mel shrugs.

BOSS (CONT'D)
Okay, well, let's say in ten years.
How's that?

MEL
Great! It's a deal.

BOSS
I'll draw up the contract and you go
see that guy over there. He'll give
you your hook.

Mel goes happily off toward the indicated person. A MAN who'd been observing the scene walks up to Mel's Boss.

MAN
You know who that kid reminds me of?
That Judaeen slave who used to clean
the arena a while back. I think his
name was Mel.

BOSS
Yeah. The kid's name is Mel too.
Must be his son. I just hope he
doesn't make the same stupid mistake
as his old man.

MAN
Yeah. Hey, kid! If you find a lion
with a thorn in its paw, *don't try*
to pull it out!

Mel, holding a hook, smiles, nods, makes a thumbs-up sign.

EXT. ARENA FLOOR -- DAY

The arena floor is dotted with slain black bears and some human victims that are being removed along with plants that had made the arena floor look like a natural hunting habitat. Mel has hooked a bear and is pulling it with all his strength toward the exit, making a long bloody furrow in the sand. Where he's passed, men rake the sand and scatter fresh sand to hide the blood.

MEL (V.O.)
The best part of my job was getting
to see gladiators, hunters, and wild
animals up close.
(MORE)

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

Of course, by the time I got close, they were dead. But their blood was fresh and hot and the smell of victory hung in the air. Life couldn't get better than this.

The arena floor is cleared and now HORNS announce the entrance of the GLADIATORS. Some run in proudly, others have to be whipped. The Crowd goes wild. Women and girls in the top tier wave and scream the names of their favorites. ANGLE ON some GLADIATORS with badly chopped-up faces and runny eyes, who wave back as they run.

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

Everyone admired and envied these men. I know I did. I was sure my father had won many victor's wreaths, prizes and bowls of gold coins.

EXT. STREET IN FRONT OF THE COLOSSEUM -- DAY

Mel is looking at posters proclaiming an upcoming event.
INSERT: Poster advertising a crocodile hunt.

MEL (V.O.)

Wow! The next day I read an announcement that twenty-five African crocodiles would be hunted in their natural habitat by five natives throwing javelins.

EXT. ARENA FLOOR -- DAY

The arena has been partially filled with water and planted with marsh plants and trees. Now, the event over, the bloody water is rapidly draining away. Dead crocs are being hooked and pulled off. Mel comes up to one and notices that a broken-off javelin head is lodged in its upper tail.

MEL

(speaking to himself)
Gotta get that out.

He bends down and pulls on the javelin head.

CLOSE SHOT of the javelin head being pulled out of an ACTOR'S BUTTOCK. At the same time an animal bellow of pain is heard.

The head of the "croc" swivels around and the terrified eyes of a BLACK MAN meet Mels' amazed gaze.

MEL (CONT'D)

You're alive!

The two stare into each other's eyes, and in this moment they seem to bond.

MEL (CONT'D)

Poor fellow, you're hurt. Don't be scared. I'll help you. Come. Pretend you're dead and I'm pulling you.

Mel helps the croc up. Then, pretending to pull him along with his hook, Mel guides him toward an exit.

INT. UNDERGROUND CORRIDOR

O.S. SCREAMS and WAILS of unseen caged animals. Mel and the croc come to an open doorway leading into Mel's small, cell-like room, and enter it.

INT. MEL'S ROOM -- CONTINUOUS

The room is bare of furniture. Mel helps the croc lie down on some straw in the corner.

MEL

Rest here, big fella. Let's see. What'll I call you. Croc...Crocchus. That's it. Crocchus. Well, Crocchus, you stay right here and I'll be back as soon as I can.

Mel pats CROCCHUS on the head and exits through the door.

EXT. ROMAN STREET -- MOMENTS LATER

Mel, hurrying along a street, comes up to an APOTHECARY standing before his shop. They exchange a few words and Mel waits in the street. A moment later the man returns with a small cloth bag which he gives to Mel in exchange for a coin. Mel hurries back the way he came.

INT. MEL'S ROOM -- MOMENTS LATER

Mel enters his room where Crocchus is waiting. He mixes the powder in a bowl with some water from a jug and applies it to Crocchus's wound.

MEL

This should make it heal.

Crocchus looks grateful. Mel pours the rest of the water over Crocchus's head.

MEL (CONT'D)

Tomorrow they're putting panthers and antelope together in the arena. I'll bring you fresh meat.

Crocchus rubs the side of his face gratefully against Mel's arm. Mel kneels down and hugs him.

MEL (CONT'D)

Oh, Crocchus, it's been so long since I had a friend. I promise you, I'll do everything I can to make you happy and successful. When you die, you won't die like a slave or a beast; you'll die a brave death, a hero's death. I promise you this. I promise you.

INT. PUBLIC BATHS -- NEXT DAY

Mel, wearing a towel around his lower torso, finds his Boss sitting in the water.

BOSS

Mel! How's it going? I hear you have a new friend. *Quite* a friend in fact. I may decide to borrow him one of these days.

MEL

Well, sir, that's what I want to talk to you about. The truth is... well...I'd like your permission to be Crocchus's handler.

BOSS

Crocchus, is it? You've given the beast a name?

The Boss beckons Mel toward the water.

BOSS (CONT'D)

Come on in. Why are you standing there like that? Hiding something?

MEL

Uh, no, sir.

BOSS

Then take off your towel. How can we talk business if you're out there and I'm in here.

Mel reluctantly removes his towel, revealing something at which his boss laughs heartily. Ashamed but determined, Mel gets into the water.

BOSS (CONT'D)

That's better. So, you want to be the croc's handler. Well, it's okay with me. I'll put it in our contract, as long as you keep up the good work.

MEL

Oh, I will. I promise. But there's something else. Crocchus will be killed in the arena unless he gets training. I want to enroll him in a gladiator school. Can you give me the name of a good lanista?

The Boss laughs.

BOSS

A good *lanista*? They're all a bunch of butchers and pimps. I know one, but I doubt he'd take your friend.

MEL

Oh, he will. He has to. Crocchus won't survive another hour in the arena unless he's trained.

BOSS

I'll draw you a map tomorrow so you can find the guy's office. Now get outta here. And put that towel back on before someone sees you.

The Boss laughs as Mel hurriedly gets out of the water, careful to conceal himself with the towel.

MEL

Thank you, Boss. Thank you.

EXT. ROMAN STREET -- AFTERNOON

Mel and Crocchus are walking up the narrow, busy street. Mel refers to a piece of paper, then looks at an unmarked doorway.

MEL

This must be it. C'mon.

They enter the doorway.

INT. STAIRWAY -- CONTINUOUS

Mel and Crocchus climb the stairs. On the second floor is a door bearing the title "LANISTA". Mel knocks.

LANISTA (O.S.)

Inventi. [sub-title: Come in.]

They go inside and shut the door behind them. There is some UNINTELLIGIBLE O.S. CONVERSATION, then shouting.

LANISTA (O.S.) (CONT'D)

Minime vero! Minime vero! [sub-title: No! No!] Enroll a *crocodile*? And what *next*? *Women*? *Dwarfs*? *Midwayans*?

MEL (O.S.)

But if Crocchus isn't trained, they'll kill him. He'd die without a chance to show his courage.

LANISTA (O.S.)

I said *minime vero!* [sub-title: No!] What part of *minime vero* don't you understand?

EXT. THE SAME STREET -- MOMENTS LATER

As Mel and Crocchus exit the doorway into the street, they run into another arena cleaner, PRISTIUS walking with a HUGE GORILLA.

MEL

Hey, Pristius. Who's your friend?

PRISTIUS

His name's Kongus. I'm his handler.

MEL

No kidding! I can't believe they let you.

PRISTIUS

(shrugging)

They had no choice.

MEL

How much does he weigh?

PRISTIUS

Eight hundred *librae*.

MEL

Wow! An 800-*libra* gorilla! Wait! That gives me an idea. Come with us.

The four enter the door of the building.

INT. IN FRONT OF THE LANISTA'S DOOR -- MOMENTS LATER

Mel knocks on the door.

LANISTA (O.S.)

Inventi. [sub-title: Come in.]

The four go in and the door closes behind them.

LANISTA (O.S.) (CONT'D)

(firmly)

I said *minime vero!* *Minime vero!*

Terrible GROWLS, HUMAN SCREAMS, BREAKING FURNITURE

LANISTA (O.S.) (CONT'D)
 Okay, *okay!* Sign here.
 (meanly)
 But you don't get the bonus.

MEL (O.S.)
 That's okay. Keep your damn bonus.

LANISTA (O.S.)
 In fact, *you* should pay *me*.

MEL (O.S.)
 In your dreams.

INT. SCHOOL CLASSROOM -- DAY

Standing in front of the room, calling the roll, is the LANISTA. On the wall behind him are little x's and circles.

POV the Lanista who is calling roll. Seated at desks among SHACKLED PRISONERS and SLAVES are Crocchus, Kongus, BETTE MIDLER, a DWARF, the COWARDLY LION, and a MIDWAYAN.

LANISTA
 Crocchus Africanus?

Crocchus taps his desk.

LANISTA (CONT'D)
 Kongus?

The Gorilla growls, looks around proudly.

LANISTA (CONT'D)
 Cowardly Lion?

The Lion simpers.

LANISTA (CONT'D)
 Midwayan?

The Midwayan raises his furry arm. The Lanista puts down the role sheet.

LANISTA (CONT'D)
 Okay, listen up. You wanna win? You wanna win big and often? You want victory wreaths, cash prizes, and beautiful women running after you?

Everyone is smiling and nodding, even Bette.

LANISTA (CONT'D)
 Well, here's some tips. *Never turn your back on the enemy.* If you're down, *never beg for mercy.*
 (MORE)

LANISTA (CONT'D)

The crowd hates that. You gotta show
bravery, that you aren't afraid to
die. Don't worry, we'll teach you
how to die bravely. If you show you
have courage, thumbs will be...

He makes a thumbs-up sign.

LANISTA (CONT'D)

...up. If you don't...

He makes three or four thumbs down signs.

LANISTA (CONT'D)

Any questions?

The Lanista looks around the room. No one budges.

LANISTA (CONT'D)

Good. Let's get started.

FADE OUT

EXT. TRAINING ARENA -- DAY

In the middle of a sandy, tightly guarded oval stands a worse-for-wear wooden post at which three or four unshackled students take turns slashing with wooden swords under the eyes of their individual trainers. Crocchus's trainer is an African bush hunter with painted face and body. He feints at Crocchus with a spear as Crocchus twists to avoid it. Bette Midler cuddles the Midwayan, who puts his paw into her cleavage. Kong strangles a shackled slave as their trainers look on critically.

LANISTA (V.O.)

Above all, remember this: Romans
don't philosophize; we rule. We don't
play; we kill. We harden our bodies
with work, not athletics. We do
everything to placate the gods, and
we worship our late, great, Emperor
Augustus...

(aside)

...and someday maybe Tiberius, if
that dork doesn't kill the games.

ANGLE ON the Lanista standing at the side, giving his pep talk.

LANISTA (CONT'D)

The two main Roman virtues are
physical courage and physical courage.
Let the Greeks run and jump; we kill
and die with excellence.

(MORE)

LANISTA (CONT'D)

Roman crowds want to see violence,
gaping wounds, bloody accidents,
betrayals, brave men victorious and
cowards dead. *Capiche?*

Crocchus has stopped practicing and has been listening and getting taller and straighter with each uplifting word. Suddenly a STUDENT standing behind him lifts a large net and hurls it toward Crocchus, whose Trainer shouts.

TRAINER

Crocchus! Behind you!

Crocchus instantly ducks, spins, catches the edge of the net in his jaws, whirls it around and sends it flying back, ensnaring the other and pulling him to the ground.

TRAINER (CONT'D)

Lookin' good, Crocchus.

FADE OUT

A BLACK SCREEN

The words appear: "TWO YEARS LATER"

THE SOUND OF A HELICOPTER

EXT. AERIAL VIEW OF THE COLOSSEUM FROM DIRECTLY ABOVE -- DAY

HELICOPTER SOUND UNDER. The stands are packed. Cheering of thousands and HORN MUSIC are heard.

CROWD

Crocchus! Crocchus! Crocchus!

EXT. ARENA FLOOR -- DAY

While the crowds cheer, ANGLE ON Crocchus running around the arena with a wreath on his head. Mel follows, carrying a bowl of gold coins. Lying in the arena is a GLADIATOR completely bound up in a net.

MEL (V.O.)

Over time, Crocchus proved himself a fearless fighter. In two years he won six wreaths and became the darling of Rome.

EXT. WOMEN'S TIER

Girls and women SCREAM AND CHEER. ANGLE ON LUCIA, a well-dressed, handsome woman, over 40.

LUCIA

Crocchus! Crocchus!

EXT. ARENA -- CONTINUOUS

As Crocchus and Mel reach the arena exit, Mel's Boss deftly removes the bowl of gold from Mel's hands. Turning, he gives a conspiratorial wink at the Lanista standing behind him.

EXT. WOMEN'S TIER -- CONTINUOUS

Lucia sits quietly in the WILDLY CHEERING STANDS. Then a passing shadow causes her to glance up. She sees a FLOCK OF CROWS flying over the Colosseum.

LUCIA
 (to herself)
 Oh, no. A bad omen.

CLOSE SHOT of bird droppings landing in her lap.

LUCIA (CONT'D)
 A very bad omen. Crocchus is in danger. I can feel it. Crocchus, you are the greatest of them all. I have to save you. But how? How?

EXT. STREET IN FRONT OF THE COLOSSEUM -- DAY

Mel is looking at posters on the Colosseum wall.

INSERT: Three posters titled "CROCCHUS AFRICANUS" showing a crocodile rearing up on his hind legs menacingly, throwing a net, a croc with a gladiator between his jaws.

Mel notices Lucia nearby, also looking at a Crocchus poster.

MEL (V.O.)
 There was one woman in particular who seemed to admire Crocchus. She'd come several times to see him work out at the barracks, and I sometimes saw her cheering for him in the stands. I inquired, and learned she was Lucia, a wealthy divorcée.

INT. PUBLIC BATHS -- DAY

ROMANS chat, chew on sausage and honey cakes. A MAN having his underarm plucked screams. TWO ROMANS stand in the water, chatting and chewing

FIRST ROMAN
 I hear Crocchus Africanus comes here from time to time. You seen him?

SECOND ROMAN
 They let crocodiles in the baths?

He peers down into the water, front, sides and behind.

FIRST ROMAN

Well, *this* croc's a *celebrity*.

SECOND ROMAN

(having checked)

He's not here now.

FIRST ROMAN

Y'know what's been bothering me lately? That big-mouth rabble-rouser over in Palestine. You hear about him?

SECOND ROMAN

The guy from Nazareth? What's his name. Jesus?

FIRST ROMAN

Yeah, him. I mean he's just asking for it. You can't go around telling folks, "I'm the Messiah, I'm King of the Jews." So what's Tiberius? Chopped olives? No. *Tiberius* is Emperor of the Jews. He's the Emperor of The Gauls, the Brits, us, and just about everything else. And he ain't gonna like some circumcised punk telling everybody different.

SECOND ROMAN

Who's our Procurator over there?

FIRST ROMAN

Pontius Pilate.

SECOND ROMAN

Well, Pont's a good man. He'll handle things.

Mel and Crocchus enter. Everyone applauds. A few toss sausages which Crocchus catches deftly in his mouth.

BATHERS

(variously)

Congratulations, big guy. Take a bow. Good show.

Mel and Crocchus step down into the water. Mel is beaming. The First Roman calls to Crocchus.

FIRST ROMAN

Hey, Crocchus. You wanna save the Empire? Then go to Jerusalem and shut up that guy Jesus. Do that and they'll put a statue of *you* alongside the *wolf*, maybe give you a couple kids to suckle.

SECOND ROMAN

Crocs don't suckle; they lay eggs.

FIRST ROMAN

So, he'll hatch a couple eggs, call'em
Ommulette and Remus.

A LAWYER gets into the water.

FIRST ROMAN (CONT'D)

Hey, y'know who that is? He's one of
the lawyers Petronius Calvus hired.
If he can overturn the judge's ruling,
Petronius could get back all the
money awarded his wife.

SECOND ROMAN

Lucia would be pauperized.

FIRST ROMAN

Easy come, easy go.

SECOND ROMAN

Hey, it was hers to begin with. The
guy didn't have a *cent* when she
married him.

FIRST ROMAN

Well, it's the old story. The lady
married for love and she married a
loser. Losers have a way of becoming
winners in divorce court.

The Second Roman looks over at the bathing hero, smiles, and
applauds gently.

SECOND ROMAN

(softly)

Yea, Crocchus!

Crocchus gravely acknowledges the applause with a slight
nod. Mel beams.

INT. BOSS' OFFICE -- DAY

The Boss is busy with some posters with Latin wording and
the picture of a crocodile on them. Mel enters the open door.

MEL

You wanted to see me?

BOSS

Yeah. I want you to put up these
posters.

Mel looks at a poster, his face registering disbelief.

MEL

Twenty-two armed African Pygmies are going to hunt Crocchus in the arena?

BOSS

Take the posters. Follow me.

Picking up a glue pot and brush, he sets off at a fast pace. Mel follows with the posters, dazed.

INT. HALLWAY UNDER THE COLOSSEUM

Mel follows his Boss down the hall, up some stairs, and through a door into the street.

EXT. STREET IN FRONT OF THE COLOSSEUM -- DAY

The busy street is lined with tour buses. CAR HORNS and POLICE SIRENS are heard. A short distance away the Tour Guide, looking like Methuselah, lectures to a coffin.

EXT. COLOSSUEM WALL -- MOMENTS LATER

The Boss stops at the wall.

BOSS

We'll put 'em up right here.

He dabs some paste on the wall.

MEL

But Boss! *Twenty-two armed Pygmies against one crocodile?*

BOSS

It'll be great. They'll fill the arena with water and then these real little guys with bones in their noses and paint all over -- they'll be in boats. Canoes. The only weapons they'll use are some tiny darts.

MEL

(alarmed)

Darts? *Poison* darts?

BOSS

Blow darts. Canoes and *poison blow* darts. It'll be a first. C'mon. C'mon.

A little ways along the wall we see Lucia approaching.

BOSS (CONT'D)

Stick one here. C'mon.

Mel, very disturbed, puts a poster against the pasted spot and rubs it on. Then he turns to plead once more.

MEL

But, Boss, Crocchus will be killed. There's no way he'll get out alive. It's a set-up. At least give him a *net*.

BOSS

Well, y'know, it has to happen *some* time. People wanna see the great Crocchus fight overwhelming odds, and maybe die. It'll bring in the crowds. I've got three politicians right now bidding for our contract. Given he's a crocodile, no love-struck gal is gonna retire him from the arena and buy him a villa outside Rome, so what choice do I have?

Lucia has come up and is looking at the poster. Mel points toward her.

MEL

Have you asked *her*?

BOSS

Not yet.

The Boss approaches Lucia. As they begin to talk, they walk away a few yards so we and Mel don't hear. Mel watches them as the talk becomes more animated. Once they glance Mel's way and Lucia shakes her head sadly. Finally they seem to come to some agreement. Lucia walks quickly off down the street. The Boss returns to Mel.

BOSS (CONT'D)

Well, you were right. The lady made me an offer I couldn't refuse.

MEL

She bought our contract?

BOSS

Yeah. She wants to retire Crocchus from the arena and give him a villa outside Rome.

MEL

Fantastic!

BOSS

You'll be working for *her* from now on. Don't forget to turn in your hook.

He starts to walk away, but Mel stops him with an urgent question.

MEL

Boss, did you tell her about my father
the gladiator?

BOSS

(ashamedly)
Yeah. I did.

MEL

Great! Thanks!

The Boss registers surprise at Mel's gratitude, then turns and walks away. Mel pulls down the poster and tears it up.

INT. COLOSSEUM CORRIDOR -- MOMENTS LATER

MELANCHOLY CRIES of caged wild animals are heard as Mel hurries down the hallway. He arrives at the open doorway leading into the small, windowless cell he shares with Crocchus.

INT. MEL'S ROOM

The room has been fixed up. Crocchus lies on his stomach on the lower level of a bunk bed. A small table, bench, and oil lamp complete the furnishings. On the wall hang six victor's wreaths. The O.S. ANIMAL WAILS CONTINUE, MUTED.

Crocchus looks over as Mel enters.

MEL

Crocchus. I have great news!

Crocchus sits up on the edge of the bed, interested.

MEL (CONT'D)

I saw a poster saying you were
scheduled to be hunted down by 22
African hunters using boats and darts.
Can you believe it?

Crocchus jumps up. He dances around the room as if ducking darts.

MEL (CONT'D)

But Crocchus, you wouldn't have
survived. The hunters would have
used *poison* darts. They'd have killed
you. It was a set-up to bring crowds
to see the great Crocchus get *killed*.

Crocchus dramatically feigns being mortally wounded by darts. With heroic courage he falls to the floor, convulses once or twice, and lies still, eyes closed.

MEL (CONT'D)

Crocchus, what are you doing? I know they trained you to die bravely, but you wouldn't have had a fighting chance.

Crocchus seems beatific in death.

MEL (CONT'D)

Crocchus. The hunt won't take place.

Crocchus's eyes pop open.

MEL (CONT'D)

It's been canceled. This lady -- a rich lady named Lucia -- bought our contract. She's retiring you from the arena.

Slowly Crocchus sits up, looking dazed.

MEL (CONT'D)

(upbeat)

She's giving you a villa in the countryside. Crocchus! We'll be out of here!

Crocchus, obviously upset by Mel's news, gets to his feet and strides around the room, proud, inconsolable.

MEL (CONT'D)

You wouldn't *really* want to die, would you? *Would* you?

Crocchus gives Mel a withering look, climbs into his bunk and turns his back. Mel takes a wreath from the wall, lays it on the side of Crocchus's head and pats it. Then he sinks on his knees next to the bed.

MEL (CONT'D)

I know, my friend. It's glorious to die bravely, and when we die I hope that's the way. But Crocchus, this is the beginning of a whole new life for you. Please don't be unhappy. You'll see. It'll be great.

Crocchus doesn't move. Mel puts his cheek against Crocchus's back and gently soothes the croc's head with his hand.

The INSANE CRY OF A LAUGHING HYENA RISES AND FADES.

FADE OUT

EXT. VILLA OUTSIDE ROME -- DAY

GRAND MUSIC as a coach bearing Crocchus and Mel arrives and stops in front of the villa. The two descend, each with three wreaths on his arm. Crocchus wears a sour expression. Lucia, beautifully dressed and coifed, followed by her HOUSEHOLD SLAVES, comes through the front door. She holds out her arms in welcome, but Crocchus elects to walk in the reflecting pool, kicking the water like a spoiled child. Lucia ignores this and greets them warmly, but Mel is mortified.

LUCIA

My name is Lucia Calvus, and I'm a great admirer of Crocchus Africanus. You honor me by accepting this humble gift. Welcome to your new home.

She gives a signal and two SLAVES step forward. One relieves them of the wreaths, the other unfolds a new toga and helps Mel put it on over his tunic.

MEL

My first toga! Thank you very much.

Mel glances at Crocchus, who still broods. Lucia ignores his manner.

LUCIA

Dear Crocchus, dear Mel, I have made blood sacrifices to Jupiter and Janus, examined entrails, and the omens are excellent. Your slaves and household gods await you. Be good to them and they will serve you well.

She hesitates.

LUCIA (CONT'D)

Oh, and by the way, my ex-husband has had my own villa denied me during his lawsuit, so I and my slaves will be living here with you until that gets resolved.

Lucia motions toward some tables and garden furniture where exotic foods have been set out.

LUCIA (CONT'D)

Please, rest and refresh yourselves. Make yourselves at home.

MEL

Thank you.

Mel sits down and helps himself to some olives. Crocchus sits on the side of the wading pool, his feet in the water, refusing food offered him by the Slaves.

Lucia comes over and sits down next to Mel.

LUCIA

Mel, what's wrong with Crocchus? He should be happy, but he isn't.

MEL

He'll be okay. Crocodiles sometimes have a hard time adjusting to new situations. He needs to be kept busy. He needs challenges.

LUCIA

You'd think a crocodile would find life more agreeable in the countryside than in the city.

MEL

Maybe you could introduce him to a female crocodile.

LUCIA

Minime vero! Minime vero! [sub-title: No! No!]

MEL

Madam, could I...

LUCIA

Please. Call me Lucia.

MEL

Lucia, could I ask...uh...why exactly you chose a crocodile when there were so many *human* gladiators to chose from?

Looking disturbed by his question, Lucia gets up, walks to a nearby bench and sits down. Mel takes a handful of olives, goes over and sits near her.

LUCIA

Let me explain. Some years ago my first husband, who was old and wealthy, died. A year ago my second husband, whom I loved and trusted, ran off with my best friend. I couldn't understand it -- I'd carefully chosen the wedding date, had considered all the omens, made sacrifices, examined entrails, and yada yada. When he left me, I swore I'd never love or trust a man again, nor would I have any female friends to betray me.

(MORE)

LUCIA (CONT'D)

The first time I saw Crocchus -- strong, brave Crocchus -- I knew he was perfect -- the perfect one to be my life's companion.

MEL

You don't have children?

LUCIA

(laughing)

Children! No one of my class has children nowadays. If we did, our husbands would kill them at birth.

MEL

No family?

LUCIA

My family disowned me when I married for love. I have slaves, and now I have Crocchus and you. I don't want other friends. Friends betray you.

MEL

So do slaves. I've heard it said that a man has as many enemies as he has slaves.

LUCIA

Perhaps, but the trick is to free them before they slip an asp in your figs.

Lucia gets to her feet and Mel does likewise. They stroll around the garden as they talk.

LUCIA (CONT'D)

But you asked why I've chosen Crocchus to be my friend. I've long been his greatest admirer. I saw him receive every one of his wreaths. On the last occasion, I happened to look up and saw a flock of crows flying over the amphitheater.

MEL

You did? I missed that.

LUCIA

Then some bird poop fell in my lap. I took it as a sign that Crocchus would die unless I did something.

MEL

Wow. Right on! You're prophetic.

LUCIA

Don't I wish. Then a final omen
clinched it. A man I didn't know
came up to me and asked if I wanted
to buy your and Crocchus's contract.

MEL

My boss!

LUCIA

He wanted top *denarius* for it, but I
didn't hesitate. And I promise you,
Mel, that when the time comes I'll
enroll you in the very best gladiator
school.

She pats his arm. Mal looks troubled, but feigns enthusiasm.

MEL

Thanks!

LUCIA

And now, from this moment on, we
must devote our lives to assuring
the happiness of that crocodile.

The two look in the direction of the wading pool where
Crocchus sits alone, his back to them, his head hanging.

EXT. VILLA GARDEN -- DAY

Gay, OOM-PAH-PAH MUSIC. Couples in togas dance the polka
while four musicians, wearing tunics and Tyrolean hats, play
percussive instruments and horns. Nearby tables are loaded
with Germanic delicacies: roast pigs with apples in their
mouths, piles of wurst, and sauerkraut. There is much beer
in evidence.

MEL (V.O.)

Lucia was true to her word. She
invited musicians from Germania to
play for Crocchus.

A plump lady approaches Crocchus using body language to invite
him to dance with her, but he looks away. Another dangles a
string of sausages in front of his snout, but he isn't
tempted. Mel and Lucia exchange worried glances.

INT. ORNATE ROOM IN THE VILLA -- EVENING

Four MUSICIANS, dressed in tunics, PLAY GREENSLEEVES ON
RECORDERS. Tables are loaded with bowls of Brussels sprouts,
kidney pie, and kippers. The guests show no appetite, but do
drink ale from steins.

MEL (V.O.)

(Yawning)

She tried musicians from Britannia.

Crocchus, reclining among the other sleepy Guests, can hardly keep his eyes open.

MEL (CONT'D)

Then Lucia had a real brainstorm.

INT. ORNATE ROOM IN THE VILLA -- EVENING

Exotic MIDDLE EASTERN MUSIC is played as BELLY DANCERS wiggle, trying to beguile Crocchus, but he is unimpressed.

MEL (V.O.)

Then she had a really *great* brainstorm.

EXT. VILLA GARDEN -- AFTERNOON

Two young, naked, long-bearded Greek philosophers, Glaucon and Thrashymachus, the same as in the baths, sit on the edge of the reflecting pool reciting Plato, while the Guests, also sitting around the pool with their feet in the water, listen.

THRASHYMACHUS

...but have you ever heard any argument which was not beneath contempt to show that what they admire is really beautiful or what they approve really good?

GLAUCON

No, and I do not expect to hear one.

ANGLE ON Lucia and Mel who are listening intently. Crocchus and the Guests are beginning to yawn and lean on their elbows.

THRASHYMACHUS

Now, with all this in mind, recall that distinction we drew earlier, between Beauty itself and the multiplicity of beautiful things. Is it conceivable that the multitude should ever believe in the existence of any real essence, as distinct from its many manifestations, or listen to anyone who asserts such a reality?

As they talk, Crocchus slithers off a little and hides his head under some towels, from where we hear a faint SCREAM.

GLAUCON

Assuredly not.

THRASHYMACHUS

If that is so, the multitude can
never be philosophical. Accordingly

...

ANGLE ON the Guests who -- except for Lucia and Mel, still listening intently -- are lying back, sound asleep. Even the Slaves are asleep. Crocchus lies motionless under the towels.
ANGLE ON Thrashymachus who breaks off his discourse, looks around, then turns to Glaucon.

THRASHYMACHUS (CONT'D)

These villa parties are so dull.
Let's run off to sea and become
pirates.

GLAUCON

You're on.

Getting naked to their feet, they say goodbye to the astonished Lucia and Mel, and streak across the garden.

FADE OUT

EXT. VILLA GARDEN -- EVENING

Crocchus wanders restlessly around the garden, remembering past glories. Every now and then he ducks and twists, as if to avoid a spear, or catches an imaginary net in his jaws, whirls it around, and sends it flying.

PHANTOM SHOUTS (V.O.)

Crocchus! Crocchus! Crocchus!

ANGLE ON Mel, standing at a window, observing his friend.

MEL (V.O.)

Poor Crocchus. It was clear he missed
the excitement of the arena, the
smell of blood.

INT. A SMALL ROOM IN THE VILLA -- DAY

Lucia and Mel are sitting and eating cakes.

LUCIA

Well, if it's violent death and the
smell of blood he's missing, we can
take care of that.

She gets to her feet.

LUCIA (CONT'D)

C'mon. I'll show you.

EXT. A ROAD -- DAY

A two-lane highway on which Alfa Romeos and Fiats race. Along both sides of the road, as regularly spaced as telephone poles, are wooden crucifixes from which men hang. Some are skeletons picked clean by birds of prey.

Mel, Crocchus, and Lucia walk along the shoulder of the road. A MOTHER and her DAUGHTER, about 7, each holding stones, stand in front of one crucifix where a live MAN hangs.

MOTHER

Go ahead. Throw.

The Girl throws a stone, hitting the Man on the leg. He cries out in pain. The Mother gives her another stone.

MOTHER (CONT'D)

That is a very bad man. You think about him next time you try to steal something from a shop. Now throw!

With an evil look on her face, the Girl throws another stone. It hits the Man in the stomach. She looks toward her Mother for approval.

The Mother hands her another stone.

MOTHER (CONT'D)

Don't look at *me*. Throw!

Mel, Crocchus and Lucia walk along the shoulder of the highway and approach one CRUCIFIED MAN.

CRUCIFIED MAN

Please, good Romans, have pity on a dying man, an honest man wrongly accused, and give him some stupefying potion to drink, that he may forget his pain.

Mel and Lucia feel their clothes where pockets might be, then shrug at each other, shaking their heads.

MEL

I'm sorry, sir. We don't seem to have any stupefying potions on us.

CRUCIFIED MAN

Then please, some poison. Have you some poison on you? I cannot stand the pain.

LUCIA

We have no poison either, but our friend Crocchus would gladly hasten

(MORE)

LUCIA (CONT'D)
 your death by twisting your legs
 until your bones break.

The Crucified Man screams and attempts to pull up his feet.

CRUCIFIED MAN
Minime vero! Minime vero!

Crocchus doesn't seem interested anyway.

LUCIA
 Then I'm afraid we can't help you,
 poor fellow.

The three walk on. As they do so, all the Crucified Men who are still alive and see them coming attempt to pull up their legs. Mel shakes his head.

MEL
 I don't think they're enough of a
 challenge for Crocchus. He's used to
 professionals.

They pass a milestone reading: "Rome 2" Mel turns to look at the back of the stone. It says: "Rome 23,998"

MEL (CONT'D)
 Then it's true. They do all lead
 here.

EXT. VILLA GARDEN -- DAY

At a garden shrine, Lucia, helped by a Slave, is sacrificing a live chicken as Mel watches. She rubs the blood on her bare arms and cheeks.

MEL (V.O.)
 Lucia was very involved with the
 gods. Like most Romans, she believed
 there was a divine spirit in every
 tree, cloud, pot, and pan.

As Mel approaches, the Slave lays the chicken on the altar and walks back toward the house.

LUCIA
 Mel, Janus is my favorite god, the
 god of beginnings. Doesn't the word
 thrill you? I love beginnings. I
 love new adventures. Women are
 supposed to sit back and let men do
 everything, but not me. I worship
 Janus. The first of January always
 fills me with resolution. It's my
 favorite day of the year.

MEL

I wish Crocchus shared your enthusiasm for beginnings.

LUCIA

He will, he will. I sacrificed that chicken in his name. Janus will take note.

They walk around the garden, looking at the plants and flowers.

MEL

You have a beautiful garden, Lucia.

LUCIA

Do you know how to make flowers grow? You talk to them and Flora, the flower goddess, hears you. Making live offerings to her puts blood and bone into the soil, which does wonders for blooms.

She sighs and looks melancholy.

LUCIA (CONT'D)

But gardening isn't my passion. Want to know what my dream is?

MEL

Sure.

LUCIA

Promise you won't laugh?

MEL

Who, me? Your humble and obedient servant?

LUCIA

Thank you. Mel, I want to be a soothsayer, a clairvoyant. Not just see far enough into the future to prophesy the outcome of some piddling war or election. I want to see *thousands* of years into the future.

MEL

There must be exercises people can do to build up their prophetic powers, no?

LUCIA

If I hear of any, I'll practice every day. But now I -- we -- must concentrate on Crocchus.

(MORE)

LUCIA (CONT'D)

We have to find him a challenge that will restore his will to live. Have you noticed that he's practically stopped eating?

They walk off. ANGLE ON the dead chicken lying on the altar.

DAY FADES TO EVENING.

The dead chicken is still lying there as night begins to fall. Crocchus comes along, sees it and wolfs it down in one gulp. He walks on, begins to feel ill, and vomits the entire chicken at the foot of the next shrine, just as Mel comes along and witnesses this.

MEL (V.O.)

Poor Crocchus. I have seen him, when he thought none was looking, make sacrifice to the gods.

INT. LUCIA'S BEDROOM -- NIGHT

Lucia is asleep in bed, tossing and turning, her face covered with a white, creamy beauty mask.

A DREAM SEQUENCE

We hear SHOUTS of AMPHITHEATER CROWDS. A huge FLOCK OF CROWS materializes overhead, flying hard. ANGLE ON one CROW who turns his head to look down. From his POV, as into a vortex, we see the Colosseum below, filled with a huge Crowd. The crow lets out a LOUD CALL and instantly a rain of poop descends from the cloud of birds. It falls on the Crowd and runs down the Colosseum steps like grey lava. No one pays attention, even when it falls on the sausages which the citizens eat.

In the center of the arena stand two men. One is JESUS, armed with a wooden sword. The other is the Emperor Tiberius dressed in his robes, but he and his clothes are carved of wood. He stands still as a training post, as Jesus whacks him with his sword, causing minimal damage.

Suddenly the sword glints metallic, the Emperor becomes flesh and blood. Preparing to strike, Jesus waves the sword around his head.

CROWD

Crocchus! Crocchus! Crocchus!

Crocchus appears in the arena with a net in his jaws. He flings the net around Jesus and pulls it tight as the Crowd cheers and signals thumbs down. The Emperor steps forward, removes his crown, and places it on Crocchus's head. ANGLE ON Jesus, in the center of the arena, still in the net, nailed to a crucifix.

CROWD (CONT'D)
Crocchus! Crocchus! Crocchus!

Lucia begins to awaken.

LUCIA
(murmurs sleepily)
Crocchus, Crocchus.

Lucia sits up suddenly, wide awake, her whitened face a mask of horror.

LUCIA (CONT'D)
(to herself)
An omen. A very, very bad omen.
(she hesitates, smiles)
Or maybe a good one!

Two slaves, TRESSA and OLIVIA, who have been sleeping on mattresses in the same room, help Lucia out of bed. Olivia begins to remove the facial mask while Tressa starts fussing with Lucia's hair.

INT. DINING ROOM IN THE VILLA -- MORNING

Lucia and Mel recline, dining on fruit while slaves attend them. Crocchus isn't hungry. Tressa sends secret glances in the direction of Mel, who blushes and tries to avoid her eyes.

LUCIA
So now you know why I'm so nervous
this morning.

MEL
That was quite a dream. Do you know
what it portends?

LUCIA
There's no question. I'm sure the
fellow Crocchus netted, who got
crucified, was that fellow in
Jerusalem who's proclaiming himself
King of the Jews. Everyone in Rome
is talking of him.

MEL
You mean Jesus of Nazareth?

LUCIA
That's him. It's clear he hopes to
create an insurgency and bring down
the Empire. Even worse, he proclaims
himself the *one God*. This sort of
thing could offend our gods, with
disastrous results.

MEL

Can he be stopped?

LUCIA

Of course. He must be killed.

MEL

By whom?

LUCIA

(indicating Crocchus)

By our friend here.

MEL

Crocchus?

Crocchus pricks up his ears.

LUCIA

That's right. Crocchus must kill
Jesus of Nazaretyh.

She turns toward the Crocodile.

LUCIA (CONT'D)

Crocchus, the fate of the Roman Empire
and its gods depends on you.

Crocchus seems to pump up as she speaks.

LUCIA (CONT'D)

Are you ready to sail to Jerusalem
and kill this rabble-rousing
revolutionary?

Crocchus sits very straight and tall. Mel offers him a bunch of grapes which he snaps down in one gulp. Energized, Crocchus gets up and goes to the door. A Slave lets him out into the garden where through the window Mel and Lucia watch him jabbing and feinting like a prize fighter. They are delighted.

MEL

He's a new crocodile. When do we
leave?

LUCIA

(frowning)

That's the problem, Mel. I don't
know when. The magistrate presiding
over my husband's lawsuit died last
week while eating figs. We await the
appointment of another judge. In the
meantime, all my assets are frozen.
If I leave for Jerusalem now, my
husband will win his case by default.

MEL

You must stay and fight. He could leave you a pauper.

LUCIA

Oh, I don't care about material possessions -- wealth is a shackle, an addiction that enslaves all who believe that *they* possess it. But I worry about my personal slaves. He'll abuse them terribly if they're awarded to him. Oh, Mel, if I were free I'd hire a boat and we'd leave for Jerusalem tomorrow!

MEL

I never thought I'd hear a wealthy person say wealth was a form of slavery.

LUCIA

Well, now you have. I said it and I mean it.

SERVICIUS, a Slave, enters.

SERVICIUS

Madame, there is a lawyer asking to see you. He says his name is Iustus.

LUCIA

(smiles grimly)

Justice? A good omen, I hope. Bring him here, Servicius.

Servicius goes out and returns with the Lawyer from the baths, then leaves the room. Lucia looks startled when she who it is.

LAWYER

Good morning, Madame.

LUCIA

Good morning, sir. I think we have met. You are one of the seventeen lawyers hired by my ex-husband to represent him.

LAWYER

Exactly. *And*, I have the honor of informing you that your former husband has won his case. Another magistrate has overturned the late magistrate's decision.

LUCIA

And who might this *other* magistrate
be who makes his decision before
hearing *my* side of the story?

LAWYER

His name is Lucius Calvus.

LUCIA

Lucius Calvus! But he's my husband's
brother. He should have recused
himself.

LAWYER

Should have, could have, didn't,
thus giving your former husband sole
possession of all your...

Reading from a paper.

LAWYER (CONT'D)

...lands, houses, furnishings, money
and jewelry, except that which you
are currently wearing, and otherwise
excluding only your personal slaves...

Stopping reading, he holds up a small bag of gold.

LAWYER (CONT'D)

...and this bag of gold coins. You,
your friends and slaves have two
weeks to vacate these premises.

He hands her a paper and quill.

LAWYER (CONT'D)

Please sign here.

LUCIA

You mean that by signing this paper
I agree to give up all my worldly
goods except my personal slaves,
this jewelry, my friends, and that
gold?

LAWYER

Yes.

LUCIA

Will you write in it that the victor's
wreaths of Crocchus Africanus will
go into the Gladiators' Hall of Fame,
or be donated to a fine Roman museum?

LAWYER

Of course.

He begins writing rather painstakingly on the paper.

LUCIA

Mel, there's also the matter of your contract. I have to tell you, it was a scam from the beginning. There's no tuition needed to enter a gladiator school.

MEL

I know. *They pay you.*

LUCIA

Then why did you sign it? Why did you pretend?

MEL

I guess...without the contract...I didn't exist. Crocchus didn't exist.

She takes the contract off a shelf and hands it to him.

LUCIA

Well, you both exist now, my friend.

Mel takes the contract and tears it up. Lucia checks what the Lawyer has written, signs the paper and hands it back to him. He gives her the bag of gold.

LAWYER

Thank you, Madame. Two weeks then.

LUCIA

Servicius will give you the wreaths and see you out. If a crocodile in the garden tries to prevent your leaving with the wreaths, refer him to me.

LAWYER

Certainly.

The Lawyer follows Serviçius out. Mel and Lucia look at each other, amazed by what has occurred.

MEL AND LUCIA

(high-fiving)

Ita vero! [sub-title: Yes!]

LUCIA

We'll leave for the Port of Ostia tomorrow. I know Crocchus will be thrilled. But first we must make sure the gods favor our plans.

She leads the way to a small shrine in her bedroom which is next to her dressing table.

Picking up scissors, she cuts off her long hair and lays it on the altar.

LUCIA (CONT'D)

To Janus, father of the morning, the new year, and the gate, and author of my new life, I dedicate my favorite possession, my hair. May he send us a sign to show he favors our new beginning.

Lucia pauses and looks around, but no omen appears.

She shrugs and removes her bangles, rings, and necklaces and lays them on the altar.

LUCIA (CONT'D)

To Jupiter, god of thunder and rain, I dedicate my jewelry. May his lightning spare our masts, and his rain not shroud our view. Send us a sign, O King of Gods.

Again no sign. She looks at her dressing table.

LUCIA (CONT'D)

Let's see. What else is there?

She picks up her mirror and looks carefully into it, pulling her facial skin back with her fingers to achieve a younger image. Then she lays the mirror on the altar.

LUCIA (CONT'D)

To Neptunus, the sea god, I dedicate my mirror. For it will not show me as I was, and I will not see me as I am.

MEL

Not bad. Ovid?

LUCIA

It's credited to Plato, but you never know. Oh, wait! We'll need wind to fill our sails. There *is* a wind god. What's his Roman name?

MEL

Fartus?

LUCIA

Nooo.

MEL

Flatulus?

LUCIA

Close enough. Ah, I have something perfect for him.

She picks up a silver bottle, opens the top, sniffs the contents, then lets Mel sniff it. He rolls his eyes and nods approvingly.

MEL

Ummm.

Lucia sets the bottle on the altar.

LUCIA

To Flatulus I dedicate my perfume.
May it sweeten the wind that blows
from his fat cheeks and fills our
sails. Send us a sign, O God of Wind.

Mel farts.

LUCIA (CONT'D)

Now *that* sounded auspicious.

MEL

And felt great.

LUCIA

Thank you, my friend.

Mel bows.

MEL

Your humble and obedient servant.

LUCIA

Which reminds me. Before leaving I must free Tressa and Olivia and the other slaves.

MEL

First you should have Tressa do something with your hair.

LUCIA

Of course.

(slyly)

Oh, but I've seen Tressa looking at you with loving eyes. Perhaps you'd prefer I wait till tomorrow to free her.

MEL

(not meeting her eyes)

No. I'd rather share my first night of love with a free woman, if you think she'll have me.

LUCIA

(briskly)

Why wouldn't she? She's had everyone else. Now go tell Crocchus we leave tomorrow for Ostia to find a ship, after which we sail for Jerusalem where we expect him to save the Empire. And please assure him his trophies will have a good home.

MEL

Consider it done.

Mel goes out the way Crocchus went. Lucia goes to a window and watches Mel as he speaks to Crocchus in the garden. Crocchus looks elated. He bows to Lucia's window.

LUCIA

(quietly, aloud to herself)

Oh, Crocchus, with the help of the gods I promise you will achieve glory, a glory like you've never imagined.

INT. MEL'S ROOM -- NIGHT

Mel and Tressa lie entwined in each others' arms, kissing madly. Tressa smiles into his eyes.

TRESSA

Mel, I'm going to give you pleasure like you've never imagined.

A worried look crosses Mel's face.

MEL

Uh...I think you just did. Bad omen?

Tressa grabs his face and kisses his lips.

TRESSA

Not at all. The night is young...and so are you.

Mel winds his arms around her.

MEL

Oh, Tressa...

They kiss.

FADE OUT

EXT. APPIAN WAY -- DAY

A HORSE-DRAWN CARRIAGE CLOPS along the ancient paved highway. On both sides of the road MEN hang on crucifixes.

MEL (V.O.)

As it turned out, we didn't go to Ostia after all. Discovering that morning she was constipated, Lucia took it as a sign that the Tiber was silted up and the port of Ostia closed. So instead, we took the Appian Way. One hundred, thirty-two miles later we arrived at...

EXT. PUTEOLI - THE PORT -- DAY

MEL

...the sulfurous, foul-smelling port aptly named Puteoli.

ITALIAN MUSIC. A carriage arrives at the bustling docks where ancient ships lie at anchor. Mel, Lucia and Crocchus emerge. Lucia's hair looks properly trimmed. She wears a simple tunic. They stand a moment grimacing and trying to wave away the sulfurous smell of the air.

A small ship, the *Golden Apple*, is tied to the dock. It's an ancient-style military ship with one square sail and one row of 12 oar-holes on each side. A CAPTAIN stands by the ship. They approach and talk with him a moment out of our hearing, then a CLOSER SHOT.

CAPTAIN

She cuts the waves smooth as a shark's fin. You'll love the ride.

LUCIA

She looks fine.

CAPTAIN

She's a little old now, and saw some fighting in her day. I repaired her and put her back in the water myself.

MEL

How would we go?

CAPTAIN

Well, it's best to stay close to land when possible. We'll roll her over the isthmus on logs -- that's four hard miles, but we'll save 200 by not going around Peloponnesus.

LUCIA

What about pirates?

CAPTAIN

Oh, they don't usually bother small ships unless they know someone worth ransoming is aboard.

LUCIA
 (chuckling)
 There definitely *isn't*.

MEL
 How long will the voyage take?

CAPTAIN
 With a little help from Neptunus and
 Aeolus...

Lucia strikes her forehead.

LUCIA
 Aeolus! Damn! Bad omen!

CAPTAIN
 ...we could get there in two, three
 weeks.

LUCIA
 Mel, perhaps we should cancel the
 trip. We offered gifts to the wrong
 god. What to do? What to do?

MEL
 Oh, let's just go.

LUCIA
 (with sudden resolve)
 Yes, you're right. Let's just do it!

Lucia turns around, takes out her bag of gold, removes some
 coins, conceals her bag again, turns back, and gives the
 coins to the Captain.

LUCIA (CONT'D)
 Deal?

He studies the coins in his palm, then puts them in his purse.

CAPTAIN
 Deal. You can board tonight. We'll
 leave at first light.

EXT. GOLDEN APPLE AT SEA -- DAY

A beautiful day. The ship is under sail. SUPERTANKERS float
 in the distance. A SMALL PLANE BUZZES overhead.

EXT. DECK OF THE GOLDEN APPLE -- DAY

Mel, Lucia and Crocchus sunbathe on the fore deck. The Captain
 works the long oar tiller. A SLAVE comes with a bucket of
 sea water and splashes it over Crocchus who greatly enjoys
 it, especially when a fish flops out. Crocchus gulps down
 the fish.

Lucia sits up and rubs olive oil from a bottle on her arms and legs.

LUCIA
 (wistfully)
 Olivia used to do this for me. Mel,
 I wonder...

She sees that Mel is sound asleep and didn't hear her.

LUCIA (CONT'D)
 (under her breath)
 Just as well. Who knows where it
 might have led?

The Captain looks back, sees something, points his finger.

CAPTAIN
 Ship ahoy!

Mel awakens and groggily joins the others looking off to rear port where a ship about the size of theirs is heading in their direction.

MEL
 Looks like it wants to catch up with
 us.

CLOSE SHOT of the other ship, its figurehead a carved sea horse. "SEA HORSE" is written on its bow. Aboard it we see two bronzed, young Greek men wearing long beards and thongs: Glaucon and Thrashymachus.

MEL (CONT'D)
 Hey! We know those guys. They're
 Glaucon and Thrashymachus, the
 philosophers from your party.

At this, Crocchus's eyes grow wide with horror. A SMALL SCREAM escapes him. Getting up, he turns and flees down the hatch.

Mel and Lucia wave happily back at the Greeks. Thrashymachus takes a locket and chain from his neck. He throws it toward them, but just as Mel is about to catch it, Lucia grabs it instead. The Greek looks disappointed, then shrugs philosophically. Lucia looks at the locket.

LUCIA
 What a nice gift. Captain, please
 stop and let them come aboard.

CAPTAIN
 Are you sure, madame? They could be
 pirates.

LUCIA
No, they're philosophers. I will
vouch for them.

CAPTAIN
(into the hatch)
Oars up!

Both ships' sails are lowered and the *Sea Horse* maneuvers close to the side of the *Golden Apple*. Ropes are tossed and tied and the two Philosophers come aboard the *Golden Apple*. They greet Mel and Lucia.

THRASHYMACHUS
(to Mel)
Hey, we know you. Your father was a
great gladiator, right?

MEL
(thrilled)
Right!

GLAUCON
Didn't he die fighting a lion?

MEL
(delighted)
Yes, he did.

As they speak, several PIRATES, similar to the Philosophers but shaven, climb stealthily out of the *Sea Horse*' hatch and board the *Golden Apple*, where they overwhelm and tie up the Captain. Carrying ropes and spears, they disappear down the hatch.

LUCIA
(outraged)
I should have known that was a Trojan
sea horse. What did Virgil say? *Timeo*
Danaos et Dona ferentis? [sub-title
I fear Greeks, even when they bear
gifts.]

MEL
Something like that. I hope they
don't hurt anyone.

INT. ROWERS GALLEY OF THE *GOLDEN APPLE* -- DAY

The Pirates find 24 GALLEY SLAVES sitting on their benches. About to start tying them up, they notice the Slaves are already shackled to their benches.

FIRST PIRATE
They've done the job for us.

SECOND PIRATE

Not *all* of it.

He runs his hand down one Slave's powerful neck and chest.

GALLEY SLAVE

Mercy, sirs. Don't kill me. I have a wife and three children at home.

The Second Pirate kisses his shoulder.

SECOND PIRATE

I have no intention of killing you.

GALLEY SLAVE

Please, sir, reconsider. Kill me.
Please, kill me!

The First Pirate makes his way to the back of the galley. Opening a door, he looks inside and sees the tail of Crocchus who is trying to hide under his mattress. Closing the door, he opens another and enters Lucia's room.

INT. LUCIA'S ROOM

The First Pirate looks around, digs his hand into a box of Lucia's clothes, feels around, and withdraws her small bag of gold. He looks into it, then takes a gold piece and tosses it on her bunk.

FIRST PIRATE

Boatfare home.

He closes the bag, then tries to hide it under the thong on his hip. It can't be hidden. He tries the other side, same problem. He tries putting it into the crotch part, looks down, shakes his head. He ponders a moment, then hides it in his armpit, seems satisfied, and exits the room.

EXT. DECK OF THE *GOLDEN APPLE* -- MOMENTS LATER

The First Pirate, holding his elbow close to his side, climbs back over the rail onto the *Sea Horse*.

EXT. DECK OF THE *SEA HORSE* -- CONTINUOUS

The First Pirate joins Mel, Lucia, the two Philosophers and some other Pirates who are sitting around talking. Mel suddenly looks about, puzzled.

MEL

Where's Crocchus?

FIRST PIRATE

If he's a crocodile, he's hiding under his bed.

LUCIA

Under his bed? I can't believe it!
Crocchus should be here saving us.

MEL

Why did you guys stop us in the first
place? We're not a rich merchant
vessel. There's no one here you can
ransom.

THRASHYMACHUS

Who wants to tell him?

The First Pirate raises his arm to volunteer and Lucia's bag
of money falls to the deck.

MEL

I have no more questions.

LUCIA

Mel, go get Crocchus. I promise you,
gentlemen, he'll hurt no one.

THRASHYMACHUS

(smirking mysteriously)
I'm sure he won't. By all means, get
him.

MEL

(puzzled)
Am I missing something?

THRASHYMACHUS

Go. Fetch your friend.

Mel climbs over onto the *Golden Apple* and disappears down
the hatch.

GLAUCON

Crocchus will have a real surprise.

Thrashymachus snaps his fingers. At this the hatch on the
Sea Horse opens and a mysterious, exotic creature appears.
It takes a moment to realize this is a heavily veiled,
bejeweled CROCODILE [played by a black actor] in diaphanous
robes. Just then Mel reappears with Crocchus, who at first
doesn't look happy. But seeing the other croc, Crocchus,
wide-eyed, quickly climbs onto the *Sea Horse*, followed by
Mel. Lucia stares at the newcomer in amazement, then waves
her hand in front of her nose.

LUCIA

Phew! What a lot of perfume she's
wearing.

GLAUCON

I'd like to present Lashia. You wanted to know why we stopped your ship. We did so because we have aboard this lovely crocodile whose nose caught, from afar, the scent of a male croc on your ship. She begged us to catch up with you so that she might meet him.

Lashia and Crocchus look at each other with longing in their eyes.

MEL

Looks like a match. Crocchus, would you like a few minutes alone with Lashia?

Crocchus makes eager little stomping movements with his feet. Mel turns to the Pirates.

MEL (CONT'D)

Okay with you?

THRASHYMACHUS

Be our guest.

Lashia, charming and limp-wristed, leads the way to the hatch and Crocchus follows her below.

THRASHYMACHUS (CONT'D)

This is great. I can tell your friend is already infatuated with the lovely Lashus.

LUCIA

Lash-us? You said before her name was Lash-ia. That slip of the tongue could be an important omen.

MEL

(grimly)
A *bad* omen.

FIRST PIRATE

No slip. Lashus is his name.

MEL

His name? You mean I sent Crocchus below with a *male crocodile*?
(shouts)
Crocchus! Don't turn your back on him!

They hear a COMMOTION below deck. The two crocs emerge, Crocchus furious, Lashus -- unveiled -- near tears.

MEL (CONT'D)
 (to Crocchus)
 You all right, fella?

Crocchus doesn't want to talk about it.

LUCIA
 Well, in the presence of these
 philosophers, I suppose it's best to
 be philosophical and look on the
 bright side.

GLAUCON
 Meaning?

Lucia puts the locket chain around her neck.

LUCIA
 For one thing, you may have stolen
 our money, but our voyage to Jerusalem
 was paid for in advance.

GLAUCON
 Please, spare us your boring tourist
 chatter. We are philosophers.

LUCIA
 Well, if you'd rather discuss Beauty,
 I'd say I find this locket beautiful.
 While it isn't made of gold, or
 incrustated with gems, I think it's
 beautiful just because it is obviously
 very old.

Crocchus, looking very pained, tries to hide himself under
 some fish nets lying on the deck.

MEL
 Please, Lucia, don't get them started.
 Crocchus will have a heart attack.

LUCIA
 I just want their opinion. Can a
 thing be beautiful just because it's
 old?

GLAUCON
 Lady, we live in the reign of
 Tiberius. *Everything* is old. *Not*
 everything is beautiful.

THRASHYMACHUS
 I, for one, find the young more
 beautiful than the old. A boy can be
 beautiful just because he is *not*
 old.

He turns an amorous gaze on a YOUNG PIRATE, causing a look of jealousy to distort the features of Glaucon.

THRASHYMACHUS (CONT'D)

And is not the fairest also the most lovable?

GLAUCON

(angrily)

That need not follow. A man educated in poetry and music can only find love with one who also possesses this harmony, whether he is the fairest on earth or not.

There is a FAINT SCREAM OF ANGUISH from under the fish nets.

THRASHYMACHUS

Tell me, is there any pleasure you can name greater and keener than sexual pleasure?

He goes over to the Young Pirate and looks down at him with an amorous smile.

GLAUCON

Yes! The love of Beauty and Truth, which must be kept from all contact with licentiousness and frenzy. A lover may seek the company of his beloved and, with his consent, kiss and embrace him like a son, but *must never engage in any further familiarity*. If you don't believe me, read your Plato!

When this fails to move Thrashymachus, Glaucon pushes his way between him and the Young Pirate.

GLAUCON (CONT'D)

I challenge you, Thrashymachus.

THRASHYMACHUS

Fine. We can let Poseidon settle our argument.

Thrashymachus picks up a bottle of wine, opens it, and pours a small amount into the sea.

THRASHYMACHUS (CONT'D)

May Poseidon help me hold my breath under water longer than Glaucon can.

Glaucon takes a bottle and pours more wine into the sea than Thrashymachus did.

GLAUCON

May Poseidon help *me* hold *my* breath
longer.

Angrily Thrashymachus pours more wine. Glaucou retaliates by pouring even more. Thrashymachus empties his bottle into the sea. Glaucou does the same. Then they both throw their bottles into the water and dive in after them.

EXT. THE SURFACE OF THE WATER -- CONTINUOUS

Both men reappear. Each takes a deep breath to fill his lungs, but before they can submerge, they hear a cry.

MEL

Ship ahoy!

EXT. THE SEA TO THE HORIZON -- CONTINUOUS

A fat merchant ship floats on the horizon.

SECOND PIRATE

That's her! That's her! C'mon, we've
wasted enough time.

Glaucou and Thrashymachus quickly climb up a rope ladder to the deck. They shoo Mel and Lucia toward the *Golden Apple*.

MEL

Crocchus! Come!

Crocchus gets out from under the fish nets and joins them climbing over onto the deck of the *Golden Apple*. The pirates untie their ship and push off. Lashus waves sadly. Crocchus turns his back.

FIRST PIRATE

Have a good trip. May the gods be
with you.

LUCIA

(dryly)
Yeah, sure.

She turns to Mel, gesturing angrily toward the departing ship.

LUCIA (CONT'D)

I mean they'd hardly invoked the
name of Poseidon and that merchant
ship appeared. I dedicated my mirror
to Neptunus *days* ago, and *look* at
us. Tell me, Mel -- what are we to
the gods? Chopped squid?

They watch the *Sea Horse* row away as its sail is raised.

MEL

I'll untie the Captain. We'll be on
our way in no time.

EXT. DECK OF THE *GOLDEN APPLE* -- A FEW DAYS LATER

The ship moves along with rocks and the Peloponnesian coastline not far away. Mel, Lucia and Crocchus sunbathe on the deck. The sail is down, the oars row. Lucia sits up and squirts water from a skin pouch into her mouth, passes it to Mel who squirts some into Crocchus's throat, then into his own.

LUCIA

I don't know, Mel. You'd think the gods would be a little more cooperative. After all, we're committed to ridding the world of their worst enemy.

MEL

Maybe you should make them an offering they can't refuse.

LUCIA

Oh, Mel, I've done chickens, I've done lambs, kids, even did a sow once. Right now the only sacrifice I want to lay on an altar is Jesus of Nazareth. You'd think they'd cut me a little slack.

Mel lies back and shuts his eyes.

LUCIA (CONT'D)

I feel it in my bones, Mel: You, I, and Crocchus have a rendezvous with destiny.

MEL

Whatever. At least Jupiter hasn't let us down. The weather's been great. No lightning or thunder at all.

Lucia lies back and shuts her eyes.

LUCIA

Well, okay, that one thing has gone well.

As they lie there, suddenly a strong gust of wind hits them and a wave rocks the ship. The three sit bolt upright. Above them they see a roiling grey cloud mass, building rapidly in a yellow sky.

CAPTAIN

Don't worry, folks. I know this coast like the palm of my hand. There's an inlet right over there if we can make it in time.

LUCIA

And if we can't?

CAPTAIN

Madame will get a *full partial refund*.

(shouts into the rear hatch)

Turning to starboard!

The Captain mans the oar rudder, the ship turns left.

CAPTAIN (CONT'D)

I'll drop her in there nicely or die trying. Hang on!

The storm is upon them, the *Golden Apple* tossing on white crests. Chaos, foam, crashing waves, rocks, a crocodile, lightning and thunder. A crescendo of HOWLING WIND. With a sickening CRUNCH the boat breaks in half on some off-shore rocks. Mel, Lucia, Crocchus, and the Captain are swept off in a ROAR of green water and bubbles.

FADE OUT

EXT. ROCKY SHORE -- A SHORT TIME LATER

Bright sunshine. Quiet except for the RIPPLE OF THE SURF, the SOUNDS OF SEA BIRDS. Four fat, naked, GERMAN TOURISTS of a certain age toss a ball. Nearby Mel, Lucia, and Crocchus lie among the rocks and sand. A male German suddenly stops and looks at the bottoms of his bare feet. CLOSE SHOT of thick black goo on his soles.

GERMAN MAN

Schau mal! Was is denn dass für einen widrigen Schmutz? Teer? Wie kommt es bloss her? [sub-title: Look! What's this icky filth? Tar? Where did it come from?]

The Others look at their feet, finding the same thing.

GERMAN WOMAN

Von den Supertankern? [sub-title: From the supertankers?]

He tries to rub the tar off in the sand.

GERMAN
*Verdammpte Ölgesellschaften [sub-
 title: Damned oil companies!]*

Lucia sits up slowly, painfully, spits out her locket which is still on its chain around her neck, and looks at it.

LUCIA
 I can't believe this is my sole
 possession.

They get to their feet.

MEL
 You guys okay?

Lucia and Crocchus feel themselves all over, wriggle, find nothing broken, nod in reply.

LUCIA
 Where are the rest?

Mel looks out toward the wreckage of the ship.

MEL
 The slaves were chained to their
 benches.

LUCIA
 Oh, right. But the Captain wasn't.

They look around and discover the body of the Captain behind a large rock.

MEL
 There lies your full partial refund.

Mel bends down, rummages through the Captain's clothing and withdraws a small bag which he empties into his palm. Two LIVE CRABS fall out. He shakes them off, looks at the body.

MEL (CONT'D)
 We'll have to bury him.
 (sighs)
 Where's a hook when you need one?

Mel reaches down, grabs the Captain's feet, and pulls him across the sand, leaving a long furrow.

FADE OUT

EXT. GREEK COUNTRY ROAD -- DAY

A line of DONKEYS with packs, a MULE-PULLED CART, and sundry anonymous TRAVELERS move along a dusty road. The side of one narrow cart is emblazoned with the words "THE GREAT CROCCHUS".

At the mule's head walk Mel and Lucia while Crocchus reclines in the wagon.

EXT. MAKESHIFT ARENA -- DAY

In the center of a makeshift arena set up in a field, watched by a CROWD OF ABOUT FIFTY, Crocchus does net-whirling tricks. Mel, dressed in well-padded women's clothes, like those worn by Mel-the-Mummer, with a shawl on his head, entertains the Crowd with a drunken strut. Meanwhile, Lucia goes around collecting donations in a cup.

MEL (V.O.)

Perhaps because my father was a gladiator who literally lived for the adoration of the crowd, I, his son, found in myself the desire to perform, even as a foolish mummer. I hated to ask Crocchus to prostitute his fighting ability like this, but we needed money and he didn't seem to mind.

Suddenly the net whirls out and entraps Mel who screams and pretends to fight it. But Crocchus pulls it tight and runs around the arena victorious as the Crowd CHEERS and money RATTLES into Lucia's cup.

SOUND OF A HELICOPTER, THEN UNDER TO ZITHER MUSIC

EXT. ATHENS -- DAY

Title on screen: "ATHENS"

A hazy aerial view of the city where airliners like silver cigars rise and descend from Athens Airport. ANGLE ON a harbor. Mel, Lucia and Crocchus arrive on foot at the dock with only the clothes they wear, plus a small pack.

INSERT: A STYLIZED MAP on which their future route is shown with a moving line.

MEL (V.O.)

At Athens we were able to board a merchant ship sailing for Rhodes, and from there another that took us to Caesarea. There we boarded a ship to Joppa, the port nearest to Jerusalem.

EXT. PORT OF JOPPA [JAFFA]-- DAY

Mel, Lucia and Crocchus stand surrounded by PASSOVER PILGRIMS, BEGGARS, HEAVILY ARMED ISRAELI SOLDIERS, MERCHANTS, bales of goods, and DONKEY DRIVERS and MULETEERS offering to take them to Jerusalem. We see Mel bargaining with a Driver.

EXT. ROAD TO JERUSALEM -- LATER

Mel and Lucia ride donkeys along the shoulder of the road while the DONKEY DRIVER urges on the donkeys. Crocchus lies in a cart pulled by a mule and led by a MULETEER. The road they follow through the hills is lined with burro pack trains. Cars and military vehicles race past on the paved part.

DONKEY DRIVER

Tomorrow's the 14th day of Nisan.
Aren't you folks arriving a little
late for Passover?

MEL

Passover?

DONKEY DRIVER

Sorry. You speak good Hebrew. I
thought you were Passover pilgrims.

MEL

The lady and I are Roman. Crocchus
came from Africa.

They pass a sign saying: "Jerusalem two days. Rome 22,700".

MEL (CONT'D)

Think we'll get there tomorrow?

DONKEY DRIVER

Well, we're starting off little late.
I'd say it'll be more like Friday
morning.

LUCIA

Mel, ask him if we can overnight
someplace that has baths?

DONKEY DRIVER

I understand some Latin. There's an
inn I know next to a bath house. It
might have rooms if you're not too
fussy.

LUCIA

(sighs)

We're not fussy. Do you think they
take crocodiles?

DONKEY DRIVER

(chuckling)

Well, he don't look kosher to *me*,
but nobody's going to eat him. Know
who I saw the other day?

MEL

Who?

DONKEY DRIVER

Pontius Pilate, the Procurator. He comes down from Caesarea to keep an eye on things during feast days. Brings extra soldiers. He'll have a lot on his plate this time.

MEL

Meaning?

DONKEY DRIVER

Meaning there's a guy who calls himself the Messiah. The Christ. Jesus of Nazareth. Rome hates him.

At the name, Mel, Lucia and Crocchus prick up their ears.

DONKEY DRIVER (CONT'D)

Jesus is in town with his family for the holidays. Know what he did? He gets to town, goes to the Temple, sees the money-changers...

LUCIA

Oh! Mel! Remind me to change our drachmas into shekels.

DONKEY DRIVER

...and then he throws 'em out of the Temple. Can you believe it? With all those pilgrims in town needing to change money? Who does he think he is?

MEL

The Messiah.

DONKEY DRIVER

Listen, the Jews have a word for it: *Chutzpah*. They're really ticked off. I think they'll let Pilate grab him if he wants. He may already have, for all I know.

LUCIA

What'll they do to him?

DONKEY DRIVER

(shrugging)

They'll crucify him. That's the Roman way.

LUCIA

(frowning)

Hmm. I don't suppose we could go faster. We've come a long way and time may be running out.

Four Israeli military vehicles ROAR past. A military jet SCREAMS by overhead.

DONKEY DRIVER

'Fraid not. This is as fast as it gets.

FADE OUT

EXT. ROAD TO JERUSALEM -- TWO DAYS LATER

POV from an adjacent hill of our party, among other pack-burro trains, moving along the shoulder of the road, heading toward Jerusalem. Modern traffic includes cars, trucks, and military vehicles. Mel and Lucia ride side by side.

MEL (V.O.)

The days passed and finally we were almost there. Lucia was almost crazy with impatience to learn whether they'd captured Jesus.

LUCIA

It's the not knowing, Mel. I swear, not knowing what the future holds is like being blind; you keep stepping into shit.

MEL

So, you clean your shoes and keep going.

LUCIA

Well, y'know, I'm not the *only* one to get fed up. Alexander had to grab that Delphi Priestess by the hair and pull her into the temple to get an answer out of her.

MEL

What did she tell him?

LUCIA

That he was invincible. Well, duh.

MEL

I think if *I* wanted to see into the future, I'd be awfully nice to Apollo. He's Greek, but he's the God of Prophecy.

LUCIA

Yeah. You could be right. If I had the money I'd maybe buy a lamb or something. I dunno.

As they near the top of the hill they strain their necks to see over the top, hoping to see Jerusalem. Jerusalem is there.

MEL

Hey! We've arrived!

EXT. OUTSIDE THE JOPPA [JAFFA] GATE -- A LITTLE LATER

Our travelers approach the ancient gate where we see Crowds of ancient PASSOVER PILGRIMS, MODERN TOURISTS with cameras, and DONKEY DRIVERS haggling over fares.

SOUND OF A HELICOPTER

An Israeli helicopter gunship flies past overhead and LOBS A MISSILE into the old part of the city.

DONKEY DRIVER

Well, this is where I leave you.
Hope you have a great time.

The three say goodbye to the Donkey Driver who goes over to seek another fare. At the gate a LEGIONARY searches their pack, then turns Crocchus against the wall and pats him down. Satisfied, he waves the three through the gate.

EXT. JERUSALEM STREET -- MOMENTS LATER

Mel, Lucia, and Crocchus walk through a Jerusalem Crowded with ROMAN LEGIONARIES, MERCHANTS, PASSOVER PILGRIMS, and ARMED ISRAELI SOLDIERS. There are no modern Tourists. Heavily laden donkeys are prodded by PEDDLERS in flowing kaffiyehs; MERCHANTS seated cross-legged in small shops call to passers-by. Fresh-killed meat hangs in front of butcher shops.

MEL (V.O.)

It was strange. The Passover meal was over, but odors I seemed to recall from some other time -- bitter herbs, burnt entrails, incense, the baking of unleavened bread -- floated on the air. Somehow I felt at home.

Walking along they pass ARAB BOYS throwing stones at ISRAELI SOLDIERS dressed in riot gear, who fire back with rifles. An ISRAELI TANK fires at an Arab building. They see none of this.

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

Life seemed to be going on normally; there was no way to tell if they'd arrested Jesus. But Lucia really wanted to know. So finally I screwed up my courage and...

Mel walks up to a ROMAN LEGIONARY.

MEL (CONT'D)

So, tell me. You guys nab that trouble-maker yet?

LEGIONARY

Which one?

MEL

You know, that false messiah, Jesus of Nazareth.

LEGIONARY

Oh, him. Yeah, we got him.

MEL

No kidding. You putting him on trial?

LEGIONARY

It's all done. He was convicted of blasphemy.

MEL

And then?

LEGIONARY

(chuckling evilly)

Well, first we crowned him "King of the Jews"...

(he makes quotation-mark signs with his fingers)

...and then...

(shrugging)

...we crucified him.

LUCIA

Already?

LEGIONARY

This morning at the third hour. Go take a look. He's on Calvary.

MEL

Thanks a lot. I guess we will.

(hesitating)

Um...which way is Calvary?

The Legionary points.

LEGIONARY

Go out that Gate and walk straight ahead. You can't miss it.

MEL

(turning to go)

Thanks.

LEGIONARY

Have a nice day.

EXT. PATH TO CALVARY -- MOMENTS LATER

Mel, Lucia and Crocchus walk along a path leading to a hill where THREE CRUCIFIXES can be seen. There is the DISTANT SOUND OF WOMEN WEEPING AND WAILING. Lucia walks faster.

MEL

Take it easy. He can't be dead yet.
It's only the middle of the afternoon.

Lucia slows her pace slightly, reluctantly.

LUCIA

If he isn't dead, Crocchus can at least finish him off by breaking his legs. *That* should put our friend in the history books.

MEL

Don't worry. There's time.

The WEEPING AND WAILING GROW SUDDENLY MUCH LOUDER. Lucia quickens her pace.

LUCIA

Uh-oh. A bad omen.

They reach the place of crucifixion and look up at three crosses. JESUS, wearing a crown of thorns, looks dead. Soldiers are breaking the legs of two CRUCIFIED THIEVES with clubs while a LEGIONARY looks on.

LUCIA (CONT'D)

Are we too late? Is Jesus dead?

LEGIONARY

Yeah, and he sure didn't die like a Roman.

LUCIA

How not?

LEGIONARY

Well, for one thing, he was only up there six hours, which means he couldn't stand a little pain. And then, just before he dies, he cries out: "Father, father, why have you forsaken me?" Does that sound brave? I don't think so.

MEL

Is that what he said? "Father, father, why have you forsaken me?"

LEGIONARY

His exact words.

MEL

That's so *strange*. Who's his father?

LEGIONARY

Well, he called himself the Son of God.

MEL

(disturbed)

Which god?

LEGIONARY

Whichever god these people believe in. The Hebrew god.

MEL

But why did his father forsake him?

LUCIA

Let it drop, Mel. The guy's dead. That's the end of it.

LEGIONARY

End of it? No way. This fellow had his army, his followers. They call themselves Nazarenes.

LUCIA

Nazarenes, huh? Thank you. C'mere, guys.

Lucia beckons Mel and Crocchus to walk a little apart.

LUCIA (CONT'D)

Did you hear that? We still have a mission -- finding and eliminating this army of Nazarenes. What do you think, Crocchus? The idea grab you?

Crocchus looks a little *comme-ci comme-ça*.

LUCIA (CONT'D)

Mel?

MEL

We'll have to make inquiries. Where are they camped? How many are there? How are they armed?

Lucia walks over to the cross where Jesus still hangs. WAILING WOMEN kneel near the base. Lucia runs her hand down the wood, then draws it back sharply.

LUCIA

Ow! Damn! A splinter.

Mel and Crocchus look on with concern as she extracts the splinter with her fingernails. She examines it.

LUCIA (CONT'D)

I'd like this as a souvenir, but it's so small. It'll get lost.

MEL

Put it in your locket.

LUCIA

Good idea.

She opens her locket, places the splinter inside, and shuts it.

LUCIA (CONT'D)

It's a talisman. Maybe it'll bring us luck.

Crocchus is looking sad. Lucia strokes his brow.

LUCIA (CONT'D)

Poor Crocchus, I've dragged you halfway across the world, and for what? To get to Jerusalem a day late and a shekel short.

MEL

I was thinking, maybe I should take Crocchus home to Africa. Would you like that Crocchus? You could find yourself a wife, raise a family?

Crocchus turns away, gazes off into the distance.

SOLDIERS begin taking the body of Jesus down off the cross. Mel and Lucia put an arm around Crocchus. Walking together, they start back in the direction of the city gate.

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

The future didn't look promising. I'd never felt more strongly that I wanted Crocchus to be happy and fulfilled, yet I'd never felt farther from this goal. At that moment, even finding a place to spend the night seemed a challenge too big for our spirits.

EXT. JERUSALEM STREET -- NIGHT

Mel, Lucia and Crocchus make their way through the crowded streets.

MEL (V.O.)

As it turned out, with our limited means we weren't able to find lodging in the crowded city, so we slept outside the walls for a few days while deciding what to do. By chance, one evening our steps took us to a shop selling leather goods that was also a place frequented by students and Pharisees. All the talk was about the crucifixion.

In the crowded space a young man, ELI, stands at the front of the room on a low bench.

ELI

So, Saul, if you had been Pontius Pilate, what would you have done?

He yields his place to SAUL, an intense, young, bearded man.

SAUL

What would I have done? I'd have scourged him myself with the flagellum, as if he were the basest slave. I am descended of the tribe of Benjamin, and fire smolders in my blood. Like you, I am one of God's chosen people. Like you, my circumcision is my covenant with God. We Pharisees know and obey the laws of Judaism, share in the traditions and beliefs of our fathers. Who was this man, this brother Jew, Jesus of Nazareth, to come and blaspheme our laws and traditions? Because the Temple was forbidden him, he said his blood was wine, his flesh a wafer of unleavened bread. Thus he offered *his own body* as sacrifice outside the Temple. My brothers, our duty is clear. We must stamp out the evil that he has breathed to life in our land -- stamp it out before his gospel becomes a conflagration that engulfs the Empire and the world. We must find and kill every one of his followers, these Nazarenes. I Saul, intend to devote my life to this cause.

(shouting)

Are you with me?

ALL

Yes! Yes! We're with you!

The room resounds with SHOUTING AND REJOICING. Looking down, Paul sees Mel and Lucia also shouting. He steps down and stands shoulder to shoulder with them and Crocchus.

PAUL

(suddenly charming)

Are you Passover pilgrims? If so, you must wonder where you're at.

MEL

No, no. We're travelers from Rome, here to see your fabled city. My name is Mel and the fair lady is Lucia. This is our friend, Crocchus Africanus, whose fame as amphitheater fighter has perhaps not yet spread this far.

PAUL

I'm sure it has, for those with eyes and ears, but my senses have been devoted for some time to matters other than the Roman games. Let me introduce myself. My name is Saul. Through my father I'm a Roman citizen and my Roman name is Paulus. You can call me Paul. I come from Tarsus.

(smiling)

You can call it Tarse.

LUCIA

We're pleased to meet you, Paul, and to hear the sentiments you expressed so fervently, which mirror our own.

PAUL

I'm glad. I hope you'll join our cause.

MEL

We'd be glad to. Unfortunately, on our way here we suffered shipwreck and lost everything we owned. Now we must stop and find a way to replenish our funds so that we can afford the least of life's luxuries: food and shelter.

PAUL

Don't worry about that. My father is a citizen of substantial means.

(sourly)

In fact, he's *generously* given me this shop so that I might have an *honorable occupation* as artisan -- and be a leather worker -- a tent

(MORE)

PAUL (CONT'D)

maker -- the rest of my days. If he knew that I've been buying finished products from a fellow a few streets over, and selling them here at a profit, he'd hit the ceiling. Well, I'll be closing this place soon to concentrate on other matters.

MEL

(looking around)

You'd abandon this fine shop to go off and kill Nazarenes?

PAUL

In a Roman minute. But please, honor me by being my guests. There are rooms above this shop where all three of you can stay. Then, when everything's in place, we'll start our crusade. How does that sound?

MEL

Lucia?

LUCIA

Meeting Paul was a good omen, Mel. I'm ready.

MEL

Crocchus?

Crocchus indicates that he's not adverse to the plan.

MEL (CONT'D)

That settles it. Count us in.

EXT. STREET OUTSIDE A SYNAGOGUE -- EVENING

Frontal view of the building. A few LEGIONARIES and PEDESTRIANS pass by. All is quiet, except for MUSIC THAT SEEMS TO SAY "BEWARE." Suddenly a GANG OF NINE OR TEN, led by Paul, with Mel, Lucia and Crocchus at the rear, runs YELLING at the door and pushes it open.

INT. THE SYNAGOGUE -- CONTINUOUS

The Gang stands in the doorway. Some hold leather scourges and bats. The WORSHIPERS look up startled.

PAUL

Who among you believes that Jesus lives? Who among you calls himself a Nazarene?

The worshipers are thrown into turmoil, except for FOUR MEN who stand straight, tall, and defiant.

PAUL (CONT'D)
 Are you ready to suffer for your
 "anointed one"? To die for him? Or
 will you recant?

One MAN wilts and melts back into the crowd of worshipers.

MAN
 (mumbling)
 I recant.

PAUL
 I can't hear you!

MAN
 (stronger)
 I recant.

PAUL
 Go in peace.

The man hurriedly leaves. The other three men stand tall and silent. Seconds pass.

PAUL (CONT'D)
 Let's get 'em.

Paul and the gang rush forward, except for Mel, Lucia and Crocchus who watch from the doorway. The three Nazarenes are grabbed and whipped and beaten mercilessly. The worshipers SCREAM AND CRY. The three men suffer silently.

PAUL (CONT'D)
 Stop!

Everyone freezes.

PAUL (CONT'D)
 Do you recant?

THE THREE MEN
 Never!

PAUL
 Continue!

The beating continues.

MEL (V.O.)
 I had never seen such violence of
 man against man since leaving Rome --
 nor a punishment so well deserved.
 The Nazarenes had to be made to
 recant. Their threat against the
 Empire could not be allowed to stand.

Finally the three men are reduced to wretchedness.

PAUL

We will not kill you, vermin that you are, because we want you to be an example to all who see you.

They drag the three men out.

EXT. STREET IN FRONT OF THE SYNAGOGUE -- MOMENTS LATER

Some passing LEGIONARIES stroll over.

FIRST LEGIONARY

What's going on here?

Paul and the gang release the three, who fall to the ground.

PAUL

We're taking these men to prison. They say that Jesus of Nazareth lives.

SECOND LEGIONARY

(looking pleased they walk away)

Be our guests.

The Gang, excluding Paul, Mel, Lucia and Crocchus, hauls the wretches off down the street. Paul looks with satisfaction at his three new friends.

PAUL

Well, *that* was productive. Our reign of terror has begun well. But why didn't you join in?

LUCIA

I don't know, Paul. I guess we Romans tend to regard bloodshed and torture as passive entertainment, not team sport. Crocchus is a trained killer, of course, but he's currently in retirement.

MEL

Anyway, he prefers to fight trained professionals, not unarmed citizens. When we find the real *army* of Nazarenes, he'll step in.

Crocchus seems to assent to this.

PAUL

No problem. I suggest we all go home and get some rest. This is just the beginning.

The four walk off down the street.

INT. PAUL'S LEATHER SHOP -- DAY

Mel and Lucia are waiting on customers who examine the leather goods closely. One woman feels Crocchus's hide appraisingly. Crocchus, deeply offended, recoils.

MEL (V.O.)

Because Paul was kept busy beating and torturing Nazarenes, Lucia and I helped out at the shop. It was a pleasant life. We didn't know it was about to end.

Suddenly Paul bursts into the shop.

PAUL

Guys. Close up and come with me. Something's happening at the Temple.

Mel and Lucia are startled. They look around. The shop is full of customers. What to do?

LUCIA

But how can we just...?

Crocchus stands up and lets out a BELLOW. People fall over themselves getting out the door. Lucia looks around the empty shop and smiles.

LUCIA (CONT'D)

Lead the way.

EXT. JERUSALEM STREETS -- DAY

Mel, Lucia, Paul and Crocchus rush through the streets until they reach the Temple.

MEL (V.O.)

It seems a man named Stephen had defied the Jewish Council, blaming *them* for the death of the Messiah. The Council had then accused Stephen of blaspheming Moses and God.

EXT. STREET IN FRONT OF THE TEMPLE -- DAY

STEPHEN stands in front of the Temple. An angry CROWD made up of MEMBERS OF THE COUNCIL confronts him as Mel, Lucia, Paul and Crocchus arrive.

STEPHEN

(shouting)

How heathen your hearts! How deaf you are to God's message!

Stephen looks toward heaven.

STEPHEN (CONT'D)

Look! I see heaven opened and the
Son of Man standing at the right-
hand of God!

FIRST COUNCIL MEMBER

Cover your ears! Don't listen to
him!

SECOND COUNCIL MEMBER

Let's take him outside the wall.
We'll deal with him there.

The Council Members rush Stephen, beating him.

STEPHEN

You are more like a pack of wild
dogs than men. Did Jesus die to save
men like you?

They hustle Stephen off. Paul and the three friends hurry
after them. Paul seems to have some pain which makes walking
difficult.

MEL

Is something wrong?

PAUL

No, no. I was born with a thorn in
my flesh. Don't worry. The pain will
pass.

EXT. BEFORE A GATE IN THE CITY WALL -- A FEW MINUTES LATER

The guards wave them through. The Council Members pull Stephen
through the gate.

EXT. THE STONING PLACE -- A FEW MINUTES LATER

It is a place with low stone walls. Rocks and rubble lie
about. The Council members push Stephen against a wall and
pause a moment to rest.

FIRST COUNCIL MEMBER

It's so warm. I'd like to shed my
cloak.

PAUL

Leave it here with me.

They all remove their cloaks and lay them on the ground in
front of Paul who stands with Mel, Lucia and Crocchus. Then
they turn toward Stephen.

FIRST COUNCIL MEMBER

Will you recant?

STEPHEN

Never!

FIRST COUNCIL MEMBER

Let the stoning begin.

They start throwing stones at Stephen.

STEPHEN

Lord Jesus, receive my spirit.

They continue stoning him. Stephen falls to his knees.

STEPHEN (CONT'D)

(in a loud voice)

Lord, lay not this sin to their charge.

Stephen falls dead. They stop throwing stones, come to take their cloaks. Everyone, including Mel, Lucia and Crocchus, looks at Paul who, satisfied, nods his assent.

FADE OUT

EXT. A HOUSE -- DAY

Paul and his Gang pull a cowering MAN and WOMAN out of their doorway as their CHILDREN look on in terror. Mel, Lucia and Crocchus watch.

MEL (V.O.)

The stoning of Stephen was like a signal to Paul. He and his gang went from house to house, beating, torturing, dragging men and women from their homes and taking them to prison. As a result, many Nazarenes fled Jerusalem to other cities, so that Paul had to hunt them down in places like Ashdod and Ashkelon.

INT. PAUL'S SHOP -- DAY

Mel and Lucia are waiting on customers in the shop.

MEL (V.O.)

Feeling we weren't contributing enough, Lucia and I volunteered to stay in Jerusalem, water Paul's plants, and run his shop while he was away. Then one day...

Paul, looking happy and upbeat, walks into the shop.

PAUL

We did it! We got 'em all. We've broken the back of Christianity.

Mel gives him five, but Lucia holds back. She puts a consoling arm around Crocchus.

LUCIA

(looking sad)

Congratulations, Paul. Your name will go down in history along with Pontius Pilate as the savior of the Roman Empire.

MEL

Don't worry, Crocchus. We'll find another noble task for you. Oh, by the way, Paul, a letter came.

Mel hands the sealed paper to Paul, who opens and reads it. His face falls.

MEL (CONT'D)

Something the matter?

PAUL

Well, I may have been a little premature. We may have missed a few. I have to go to Damascus.

LUCIA

Oh, Paul, can we come? I think Crocchus needs a change. This has been a terrible time for him.

PAUL

Sure. We'll start as soon as I can arrange some mules and a guide. And by the way, thanks for keeping an eye on the shop.

Crocchus gives him a ticked-off sideward glance through half-closed eyes.

EXT. ROAD TO DAMASCUS -- ABOUT NOON

We see a wide plateau with a paved highway running across it. Cars speed by. Paul, Mel, Lucia and Crocchus ride mules along the shoulder of the road, led by some MULETEERS and a GUIDE. They pass a milestone reading: "Damascus nigh. Rome 22,604." Overhead a stormy sky, rumbles of thunder, winds blow strongly.

MEL (V.O.)

It felt good to be on the road again. Our journey so far had been uneventful. Overhead Jupiter hurled his lightning bolts, but here on the cusp of the Empire Lucia seemed unconcerned with omens.

(MORE)

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

One noontime, when we were nigh unto
Damascus, we decided to take a latrine
break.

They all climb down from their mules and disappear behind
trees and rocks. A moment later they reassemble near the
mules. Lucia, acting silly, walks around waving her arms
toward the sky.

LUCIA

Nya nya ne nya nya! I don't know,
Mel, but I'm not afraid of the gods
any more. We've almost finished our
journey and look, we're still alive.
Isn't that the goal of life? To
survive?

MEL

To survive? The goal? What do *you*
think, Crocchus?

LUCIA

All right, all right. I've screwed
everything up. *Mea culpa*. What more
can I say? But Mel, I'm *beyond*
worrying about fate. I'm beaten.
Beaten. It'll take a *miracle*, not a
thunderbolt, to turn things around
for you, me, and Crocchus.

The wind howls, the thunder grumbles. She looks up at the
roiling sky.

LUCIA (CONT'D)

Blow winds, and crack your cheeks!
Rage! Blow! You lightning bolts,
singe my head. And thou, thunder,
split this flat and godless world
asunder!

MEL

Are you all right, Lucia?

LUCIA

(coming back to
herself,)

Sorry. I guess I got carried away.
Paul, could we walk for a while? My
sores have sores.

PAUL

Sure.

They continue on their way afoot, followed by the mules and
others.

PAUL (CONT'D)

Lucia, you're right to mock your pagan gods. The only god is God, the Hebrew God. Only *he* should be worshiped -- not Jupiter, not Zeus, not dead Emperors.

LUCIA

What's your Hebrew god like? Does he play the harp like Apollo, fly with the speed of Mercury? Throw lightning bolts?

PAUL

God? Oh, well, lightning bolts yes, a few, but mostly he's your typical father type, patriarchal, short-tempered, vengeful, controlling... overbearing... unforgiving.... I'd say God's a lot like my old man.

The THUNDER GROWLS ominously. The WINDS HOWL.

PAUL (CONT'D)

My dad would nail me up like *that*...
 (snaps his finger)
 ...forsake me like *that*...
 (snaps his finger)
 ...if I went around telling folks to worship *me* instead of *him*.

MEL

I guess I've already told you my father was a...

PAUL AND LUCIA

(shouting and laughing)
 ...brave gladiator killed in a fight with a lion!

MEL

Right. He didn't forsake me.
 (pauses)
 Except...deep down...I've always felt that...in a way...he did.

PAUL

Mel, are you sure you're not Jewish?

MEL

(crossing his heart)
 Cross my heart. But you know, Paul, there's something I don't understand. You seem to resent your father. You even seem to resent your *God* because he's so much *like* your father.

PAUL
Your point being?

MEL
Well, I'd think you'd have more in
common with the son than with the
father.

PAUL
(puzzled, almost dazed)
The son?

MEL
Jesus. The Son of God. We saw him
nailed to the cross. Paul, you're
almost his exact age. I'll bet he
felt the same way about *his* father
as you do about *yours*. If there's a
choice of gods, why don't you choose
Jesus?

Paul stares at Mel whose words have left him confused and
speechless.

LUCIA
Not to *change the subject*, guys...
Paul, did I ever tell you I have a
tiny piece of wood from the cross
Jesus was crucified on? I keep it in
my locket. Wanna see?

Paul, Mel and Crocchus move close to Lucia as she pulls the
locket out of her décolleté.

CUT TO:

CLOSE SHOT OF THE LOCKET as she opens it. Suddenly there is
a CRASH OF THUNDER and a BLINDING FLASH that seems to come
out of the locket, hitting them all full in their faces and
sending them reeling.

The effects of the flash are shown in FOUR QUADRANTS OF THE
SCREEN in close-ups of the four characters' faces in the
glare of the flash: Paul top left, Mel top right, Crocchus
lower left, Lucia lower right.

CUT TO:

THE FIRST QUADRANT: CLOSE SHOT of Paul's agonized, blinded
face as he falls to the ground. [As in Scene 1]

JESUS (O.S.)
Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me?

PAUL
Who are you, Lord?

JESUS (O.S.)
I am Jesus of Nazareth, whom you
persecute.

PAUL
What shall I do, Lord?

JESUS
Get to your feet and go into Damascus,
and I will tell you what to do.

The Muleteer and Guide help the blinded Paul up.

PAUL
I heard him. I heard my Lord Jesus.
Take me to Damascus so that I may
learn how to serve him.

They lead him toward a mule.

CUT TO:

THE SECOND QUADRANT: Mel's face bathed in light.

MEL-THE-MUMMER (O.S.)
Mel, Mel, it is I, Mel-the-Mummer.

Mel sits on the shoulder of the road, his face bathed in
light.

MEL
Who?

Mel-the-Mummer, wearing his mummers' clothes, APPEARS AS IN
A DREAM.

MEL-THE-MUMMER
I, Mel-the-Mummer. One thousand years
ago I witnessed the crucifixion of
Jesus-of-Jerusalem on the planet
Midway, and wrote my gospel.

MEL
I never heard of your gospel.

MEL-THE-MUMMER
That's another story. It was
accidentally left up there.

MEL
What do you want with me?

MEL-THE-MUMMER
I want you to know that you are
descended from *me*, and are therefore
a *Jew*.

MEL

(clutching his crotch)
I'm *Jewish*? *How Jewish*?

MEL-THE-MUMMER

Jewish Jewish, the latest in a long line of Mels. That scar you conceal is not the result of an accident you suffered in infancy. That scar is a circumcision.

MEL

You're wrong! How could I be Jewish? I don't even know what a Jew *is*.

MEL-THE-MUMMER

We Jews are a race of slaves, wanderers, and seekers who spend our lives trying to find our fathers so that we might push them aside and replace them.

MEL

But my father died when I was a baby.

MEL-THE-MUMMER

Doesn't matter. Other typically Jewish traits are suffering guilt, analyzing everything, and taking notes.

MEL

Notes?

MEL-THE-MUMMER

Sometimes some simple thing, like an ordinary crucifixion, can shake us so profoundly that we're inspired to write an entire *gospel*.

MEL

If you mean Jesus, he was already dead when I got there. I haven't a clue what it meant. What would I write about?

MEL-THE-MUMMER

Write about what you know.

MEL

But what *do* I know? What do I *believe*? Who is my god?

MEL-THE-MUMMER

That is for you to discover. Farewell.

Mel-the-Mummer disappears. Mel stares into space.

MEL

Oh, my *god*.

Mel continues to sit, dazed, by the side of the road.

CUT TO:

THE THIRD QUADRANT: The face of Crocchus in a bright light.

DREAM SEQUENCE: Crocchus stands alone as Lashus appears in the distance, running in slow motion toward him, robes flying. As he reaches Crocchus he embraces him, kissing him hard on the mouth, then steps back with smiling eyes. Crocchus's eyes are wide. Suddenly, in slow motion, he grabs Lashus, pulls him close, and kisses him back. They look at each other with joy, then Lashus disappears.

IN REAL TIME: Crocchus stands by the side of the road, looking joyful, excited, limp-wristed, and very distressed.

CUT TO:

THE FOURTH QUADRANT: Lucia's face hit by the light. Then, the flash past, she looks around in amazement, almost stepping off the shoulder into the road. BLARE OF A LOUD, LONG, CAR HORN as a car speeds by. Lucia shakes her fist after it.

LUCIA

(shouting)

For Chrissake! Why don't you bastards
look where you're going?

She looks around, sees her friends standing about, confused. Paul, still blinded, is being led off on a mule. Mel stands dazed, still holding his crotch. Crocchus, very limp-wristed, is hopping up and down. The storm clouds are gone.

LUCIA (CONT'D)

Paul! Wait!

PAUL

(calling back)

I'm going to Damascus. Lord Jesus
has called me. Goodbye, my friends.

LUCIA

Goodbye, Paul. Good luck.

Paul is led off.

LUCIA (CONT'D)

For the love of God, what's going on
here? What happened? Mel, Crocchus,
are you all right?

MEL

I don't know. There was a flash, and suddenly...I'm Jewish!

LUCIA

Well, maybe you were Jewish all along.

MEL

That's what *he* said!

LUCIA

Who?

MEL

Some guy called Mel. Some really ancient mummer.

Crocchus hops in front of Mel, trying to be noticed.

MEL (CONT'D)

What do you want, big fella?

LUCIA

He looks like he has to go.

MEL

Go where?

LUCIA

To the bathroom, of course.

MEL

To bathe himself?

LUCIA

No, you nit. To use the latrine.

MEL

Latrine? He's a crocodile. The whole *earth* is his latrine. Anyway, he just went.

LUCIA

That's not what I meant. Oh, I don't know *what* I meant.

MEL

What is it, Crocchus? Do you want to go somewhere?

Crocchus makes affirmative motions.

MEL (CONT'D)

To the baths?

Negative motions.

MEL (CONT'D)
To Damascus?

Negative.

MEL (CONT'D)
Jerusalem?

Negative. Crocchus hops up and down, holding out his limp wrists.

MEL (CONT'D)
Crocchus, is something wrong with your wrists?

Crocchus is excited now because Mel is getting close.

MEL (CONT'D)
Are they broken?

Crocchus very negative.

MEL (CONT'D)
You know who you remind me of? You remind me of Lashus. You're acting just like Lashus.

Crocchus is beside himself with delight. He almost hugs Mel.

MEL (CONT'D)
So you want to go to Lashus?

Crocchus is very affirmative.

MEL (CONT'D)
Okay, big fella. I'll take you to back to Lashus. It's the least I can do.

LUCIA
Boy, that was some bolt from the blue. Paul was converted to Christ, you're a Jew, and Crocchus is in love with a reptilian drag queen.

Crocchus dances about in delight. Mel turns to Lucia.

MEL
So what, if anything, did the lightning do to you?

LUCIA
I'm not sure, Mel. I see so far now, and everything looks so different. It's like I can suddenly see way, way into the future.

MEL

Well that's great. It's what you wanted. Now you can go to Delphi, drag that Priestess out by the hair, and take her place.

Three WARPLANES IN FORMATION SCREAM OVERHEAD at low altitude. Lucia glances up at them, the others are oblivious.

LUCIA

That's what I'm going to do, Mel. I'm going right to Delphi. You can't believe what I'm seeing.

Another WARPLANE SCREAMS PAST. Lucia glances up.

LUCIA (CONT'D)

I used to think a flock of crows was a bad omen. Man, I didn't know what a bad omen was.

Suddenly fearful, Lucia hugs Crocchus.

LUCIA (CONT'D)

Mel, you can't take Crocchus back to the pirates.

MEL

Why not?

LUCIA

I foresee death and disaster.

MEL

Lucia, we live with death and disaster around us every day. Everybody does. Anyway, Crocchus and I know it's better to die bravely than live as cowards. Right, Crocchus?

Crocchus agrees.

MEL (CONT'D)

Look at that guy Stephen. Wasn't he great? "Lord, lay not this sin at their charge." I mean, he couldn't have died better if he'd been to gladiator school.

LUCIA

I don't know. Anyway, we'll be traveling together for a while, so maybe I'll have time to convince you.

MEL

You can try, Luce, but I have the feeling that if I *don't* take Crocchus back to Lashus, he'll get there anyway, if he has to swim the Mediterranean.

Mel turns, sees two Muleteers with three mules still waiting.

MEL (CONT'D)

We're turning back. Take us to the nearest major seaport.

MULETEER

That would be Sidon.

The Muleteer turns his mules around. They help Crocchus onto one mule's back and, the rest walking, head back the way they came.

FADE OUT

A BLACK SCREEN

The words: "ONE YEAR LATER"

EXT. DELPHI -- DAY

LONG SHOT of the TEMPLE OF APOLLO in the hills as CARS and a SMALL FIGURE ON FOOT travel the road leading to it.

The figure is Mel. He carries a small pack and his steps are tired. He passes a parking area where we see a TOUR BUS labeled "Last Chance Tours."

EXT. THE TEMPLE OF APOLLO -- A SHORT TIME LATER

In the ruins which are open to the sky, a FEMALE TOUR GUIDE with "Last Chance Tours" on her T-shirt, speaks to a group of ELDERLY AMERICAN TOURISTS all wearing T-shirts identical to hers. Lucia, dressed like a young girl with a crystal ball in her hand, is given a few coins by some ANCIENT ROMAN TOURISTS who do not look pleased with her.

FEMALE TOUR GUIDE

In the time of ancient Greece, Delphi was considered the center of the world. We stand here in the Temple of Apollo where the oracle was kept. Emperors, lawmakers, generals came here to ask Apollo, through his Priestess, to forecast the outcome of projected wars or political actions. In fact, you could even say Apollo's Temple was the *political intelligence center -- the war room -- of the ancient world!*

She looks pleased, and some of the tourists chuckle. She leads them off a ways, points to a mountain above them.

FEMALE TOUR GUIDE (CONT'D)

That mountain is Mount Parnassus where the Muses lived. I come here a lot, which is probably why I'm so a-*muse*-ing.

More chuckling of tourists.

ANGLE ON Mel who arrives at the temple, walks up the front steps into the ruin, looks around and spots Lucia just as she sees him. They rush into each other's arms.

LUCIA

Oh, Mel, I'm so glad to see you.
(she indicates the ruin)

But look what they've *done* to this place! They've *ruined* it. It's a *ruin*.

MEL

(oblivious to her words)
Got any water?

LUCIA

Wait here.

She goes off. Mel steps out of the "front door" of the ruin, turns and looks at the long-vanished words written in Greek above the portal, "reading" them aloud in Greek.

MEL

(reading in Greek)
"Know *thyself*." [sub-title: Know Thyself] Hmm. Wonder what they mean by *that*.

As he stands there, the Tour Guide and Group walk over.

FEMALE TOUR GUIDE

To Delphi came Oedipus, King of Thebes, to consult the oracle and learn his horrible fate. Even Alexander-the-Great came here for a prophesy.

TOURIST

What was the Priestess like?

TOUR GUIDE

Well, she'd be a woman over fifty who

(MORE)

TOUR GUIDE (CONT'D)

(meaningfully, with a
wink)

didn't live with her husband and
dressed like a virgin. Before giving
a prophesy she'd chew on some laurel
leaves. Then she'd go into a trance,
mumble or scream some weird,
incoherent stuff, and priests would
write it down into poetic prophesies.

(chuckling)

Kinda makes you wonder what Apollo
was putting in those laurel leaves!

Lucia returns with a bottle of Evian.

LUCIA

Open your mouth.

Mel does, and Lucia pours in a stream of water.

LUCIA (CONT'D)

Feel better?

MEL

Yeah, thanks. I was really dry.

They sit down on the front steps of the ruin.

LUCIA

Mel, I've so much to tell you. You
remember Paul and the way he hated
Nazarenes and Christians and working
with leather?

MEL

How can I forget?

LUCIA

Well, listen to this! Paul's a
Christian himself now, and in a year
or two he'll travel all over the
Empire spreading the gospel of Jesus
Christ and supporting himself by
making tents. Isn't it ironic? Instead
of stamping out Christianity, Paul's
going to spread it everywhere. And
it finally brings down the Empire.
Know what I think?

MEL

(unimpressed)

What?

LUCIA

If Crocchus had killed *Paul*, the Roman Empire might have gone on forever. Instead, Rome will fall in about four hundred years, overrun by Christians and barbarians.

Lucia drinks from the bottle and pours some more into Mel's mouth.

LUCIA (CONT'D)

So, how'm I doin'?

MEL

You're good, Luce, Really good. You've got your Priestess role down perfectly. Trouble is, I don't believe a word you just told me.

LUCIA

You don't?

MEL

Not a word.

LUCIA

Damn! *Nobody* does. It must be Apollo's revenge. He did the same thing to Cassandra. Remember? He said that if she'd sleep with him he'd give her the power to see the future. But then the louse arranged it so that no one *believed* her! She prophesied the fall of Troy, but no one believed her.

MEL

(shrugs)

Well, she should have kept *her* part of the bargain.

Mel's expression changes to one of complete sorrow.

MEL (CONT'D)

Luce, something terrible has happened to Crocchus.

LUCIA

I know it has, Mel. But tell me about it. Tell me about Crocchus.

Mel slides down off the stone step until he's sitting leaning against the rock with his feet drawn up in a kind of fetal position. Lucia settles down beside him.

MEL

Well, in Sidon, after we split up, Crocchus and I bought provisions and boarded a coaster that followed the currents north,...

INSERT map with moving line.

MEL (CONT'D)

...then west along the coast of Cilicia to Myra. There we changed to a grain ship from Alexandria, which got laid up at Crete. So there we boarded a vessel called the *Sea Urchin*...

FADE TO:

EXT. DECK OF THE *SEA URCHIN* -- DAY

The ship is under sail. Mel and Crocchus are on deck, Mel pouring olive oil over a piece of bread taken from a sack of loaves. Crocchus stands at the railing.

MEL (V.O.)

I assumed Crocchus would eat fish as before, but I didn't count on his brilliance.

A GROUP OF DOLPHINS leaps out of the sea as they swim beside the ship. Crocchus notices a fish net lying on the deck. Taking the edge of the net in his teeth, he swings it out over the water. A dolphin is taken in the net.

Mel and three passengers, TESTUS, BIGGUS and HOLIUS, burley young men with no hair on head or body, help pull it aboard.

MEL (CONT'D)

Hey, guys, thanks.

Crocchus eats the fish on the deck as the ship sails on.

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

The trip was less eventful and a lot slower because of unfavorable winds. Among the passengers were Testus, Biggus and Holius...

ANGLE ON THE THREE SKINHEADS.

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

...three men with no hair. I figured it was some kind of skin disease. How come you guys have no hair?

TESTUS

What's it to you?

MEL

I was just curious.

BIGGUS

We got suckered. Some lady told us she could color our hair green with some unguent she had.

HOLIUS

She told us to rub it in three times a day for a week and our hair would turn green.

MEL

Did it?

Biggus shows him the top of his bald head.

BIGGUS

(sarcastically)

Sure. See the green?

MEL

I mean before it fell out.

HOLIUS

It was a compound made of leeches, vinegar and something really green imported from Gaul. Should've worked.

BIGGUS

It's the last unguent *she'll* ever compound, I can tell you that.

The three laugh evilly, look over at Crocchus who is now taking a snooze.

TESTUS

Who's your friend?

MEL

That's Crocchus Africanus, the great Roman amphitheater fighter. Crocchus won six wreaths.

BIGGUS

Yeah? Tough guy, huh?

MEL

Very. May I ask what you guys do?

TESTUS

I'd say we do pretty much what we want.

MEL

Really? I used to know an 800-libra gorilla who was the same way.

TESTUS

A while back, Holius and I were fishermen. Biggus was a baker, but now we're Christians.

MEL

You gave up your trades to become Christians? How come?

BIGGUS

Well one day that guy Jesus of Nazareth come along with about 5000 people. His disciples bought five loaves of bread from me and two fish from Holius, and then this Jesus fed 5000 people with them. Five thousand hungry people he fed with two fish and five loaves and they felt *full*.

TESTUS

It was obvious that the bottom had just dropped out of the bread and fish markets, but Christianity was on a roll.

BIGGUS

And he's not talkin' sesame roll.

MEL

So now what'll you guys do?

HOLIUS

So now we're trollin' for souls.

MEL

I take it you're not talkin' filet of soles.

HOLIUS

Souls of Sodomites.

MEL

Sodomites?

TESTUS

Ever hear the story of Sodom and Gomorrah?

MEL

I'm not sure. The names sound vaguely familiar. Gomorrah was Sodom's wife?

The three skinheads exchange glances and laugh. Testus cracks his knuckles.

MEL (CONT'D)

If you remind me who they are, maybe I can help you find them.

HOLIUS

Sodomites are men who love men.

MEL

Oh. You mean homosexuals.

TESTUS

That's right. Know any?

MEL

Why yes, I do. We're looking for Sodomites too. It's the whole reason for our voyage. In fact, I'm taking Crocchus back to Lashus. Both are males, but they love each other.

The skinheads exchange glances.

HOLIUS

Where does this Lashus hang out?

MEL

He's with some Greek pirates in the Gulf of Patrai. They're Sodomites too.

HOLIUS

How do you plan to find them?

MEL

When we get to that area I'm hoping Lashus will smell Crocchus on the wind. Or maybe Crocchus will smell Lashus, since he wears so much perfume. When you meet him you'll know what I mean.

BIGGUS

Sounds like a plan.

MEL

Two of the pirates are very well educated. If they weren't pirates, I'm sure they'd be very nice people to know.

TESTUS

We'd love to meet them.

MEL

Then stay with us and you probably will.

FADE OUT:

EXT. THE TEMPLE OF APOLLO -- DAY

Mel and Lucia sit as before.

MEL

Oh, Lucia. How could I have been so *stupid*, so *naive*?
(beating his chest)
Mea culpa! Mea culpa!

LUCIA

Don't blame yourself, Mel. You couldn't have known. Tell me what happened. Share it with me so that you don't have to bear it alone.

MEL

Well, we sailed on...

EXT. *SEA URCHIN* AT SEA-- DAY

We see the *Sea Urchin* rowing with two banks of oars on sunny waters.

MEL (V.O.)

The winds weren't always favorable, but everything seemed fine. Our ship stopped at Antalya, then Iraklion and Patrai. Now we were in pirate waters. The *Sea Urchin* was heading for Puteoli, but we hoped to disembark long before then.

EXT. DECK OF THE *SEA URCHIN* -- AFTERNOON

Mel directs Crocchus to stand up in the bow. Mel and the three Skinheads take positions at the rail.

MEL

Shout if you see a ship with a sea-horse figurehead. Crocchus, you think of Lashus and fill the wind with your musky scent.

POV the rail of the *Sea Urchin*, we see to the horizon, including islands and the Greek coast to the north. SMALL AIRPLANES BUZZ overhead, jet contrails cross the sky, there are some sailboats and an oil tanker, but they see none of these.

HOLIUS
 (pointing to starboard)
 Ship ahoy!

EXT. SEA HORSE AT SEA -- CONTINUOUS

We see the *Sea Horse* sailing in the distance.

EXT. DECK OF THE SEA URCHIN -- CONTINUOUS

ANGLE ON Crocchus sniffing the wind. Suddenly he alerts and his eyes light up. Mel notices this.

MEL
 That's them! That's the pirates!

Crocchus appears deeply affected, almost tearfully joyful and very excited. He can hardly wait to see Lashus.

MEL (CONT'D)
 (turning to go)
 I'll tell the captain to lower
 Crocchus down in a net and we'll use
 the ladder.

BIGGUS
 How do you know your pirate friends
 won't rush the ship and take hostages?

MEL
 The only "hostage" they want is
 Crocchus, and he'll go willingly.
 They'll take us aboard too. Trust
 me.

The *Sea Horse* approaches, its sail is lowered, and those on both ships wave and shout greetings. Unable to wait, Crocchus dives off the side, while the others climb down a rope ladder.

EXT. THE TEMPLE OF APOLLO -- DAY

Mel is seated with Lucia as before.

MEL
 As soon as we were all in the water,
 we hung onto Crocchus and he swam us
 over to the *Sea Horse*. They took us
 all aboard.

LUCIA
 Crocchus must have been so happy to
 rejoin Lashus!

MEL
 He was. But not for long.

EXT. DECK OF THE *SEA HORSE* -- MINUTES LATER

Mel and the three Skinheads arrive on the deck dripping wet. The Pirates look admiringly, flirtatiously, at the muscular Skinheads as they shed most of their wet clothes. Crocchus and Lashus hug each other.

MEL

Well, guys, we're back. These are my friends Biggus, Holius and Testus. They were looking for Sodomites, so I told them...

GLAUCON

(alarmed)
Sodomites?

MEL

You know. Men who love men.

The Pirates look at the Skinheads warily. Thrashymachus and Glaucou go off to huddle.

GLAUCON

(loud whispering)
Looking for *Sodomites*?

THRASHYMACHUS

Who are these guys?

GLAUCON

They must be okay if Mel and Crocchus brought them.

They return to the others, trying to be nice, but wary all the same.

THRASHYMACHUS

(attempting to sound normal)
I think we should have a party for Lashus and Crocchus. Maybe even a civil union ceremony.

The crocodiles look at each other, delighted.

HOLIUS

I'll help with the food.

BIGGUS

I'll pour the wine.

TESTUS

I'll set the table.

THRASHYMACHUS
 (unconvincingly)
 Great, fellas.

He opens the hatch and motions to the Skinheads.

THRASHYMACHUS (CONT'D)
 You guys go first.

BIGGUS
 No, no. After you.

The two Philosophers go down the hatch, followed by the Skinheads.

INT. ROWING GALLEY

The 24 GREEK OARSMEN are resting on their benches, eating bunches of grapes and chatting. The five men don't stop, but go through a doorway into the cooking galley.

INT. COOKING GALLEY

We see a small, prettily decorated kitchen. Testus notices a drop-leaf table attached to the bulkhead.

TESTUS
 Is that the table?

THRASHYMACHUS
 Yes.

Testus rips it off the wall.

TESTUS
 Where to do want me to set it?

THRASHYMACHUS
 (looking ill)
 Anywhere would be fine.

Testus tosses the table into a corner. Biggus looks around and finds a glass decanter and some wine glasses with stems.

GLAUCON
 (worriedly)
 Don't you love them? I bought the set in Morocco.

BIGGUS
 Lovely, but we don't need this.

Biggus breaks the stem off the glass, then turns, snaps a back molar out of his teeth and spills from it into his palm a small tablet. Snapping the tooth back in, he drops the tablet into the glass, pours wine into it, turns to face the others, and lifts the glass in a toast.

BIGGUS (CONT'D)
To Crocchus and Lashus.

He pretends to drink, then passes the cup to Thrashymachus who drinks and then passes it to Glaucon, who also drinks.

HOLIUS
Now why don't you fellas sit down
while I cook up something delicious.

The two Greeks yawn, then sit down abruptly right where they stand and pass out. The three Skinheads exit into the rowing galley.

INT. ROWING GALLEY -- CONTINUOUS

The Skinheads exit through the fore and aft hatches onto the deck.

EXT. DECK OF THE SEA HORSE -- CONTINUOUS

The Skinheads close the hatches and roll heavy barrels onto them.

INT. ROWING GALLEY

The Oarsmen pound on the closed hatches, but can't get out.

EXT. DECK OF THE SEA HORSE -- MOMENTS LATER

A fight breaks out -- the two Pirates and Crocchus against the Skinheads. Crocchus, about to tear off Holius' arm, sees Biggus strike Lashus on the head with an iron bar and then go after Mel. Abandoning Holius, Crocchus rushes to save Mel and Lashus. Testus picks up a fishing net and whirls it around his head.

MEL
Crocchus! Behind you!

But Crocchus ignores the warning, reaches Mel and Lashus and pushes them overboard just as the net descends on him. Ignoring it, Crocchus holds onto the railing, looking down to make sure Mel and Lashus are safe. Holius comes up behind the netted Crocchus and strikes him on the head. Crocchus goes down. Testus has already taken care of the two Pirates.

EXT. WATER -- A MOMENT LATER

Mel thrashes about, but the wounded Lashus comes to his aid and Mel grabs the croc's diaphanous robes and pulls himself over until he can hold onto Lashus's back.

EXT. DECK OF THE SEA HORSE

Holius, Testus and Biggus look over the railing.

BIGGUS

Let 'em go. Even if they live, they'll
wish they were dead.

EXT. WATER -- CONTINUOUS

Lashus and Mel make their way to shore. The blood from
Lashus's wound dyes the water red.

MEL (V.O.)

I held onto Lashus and he swam us to
shore. But he was losing blood and I
could tell he was getting weaker.

EXT. THE SHORE -- EVENING

Mel and Lashus lie on sand just out of the reach of the surf.

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

I stayed with Lashus all night. He
was dying, but there was nothing I
could do except be there for him.

EXT. THE SHORE -- MORNING

Sunlight. The sound of sea birds. Mel is asleep on the sand,
one arm over Lashus who is dead and has turned back into the
figure of a crocodile, his diaphanous robes soiled with sand.
When Mel awakens and sees Lashus, the tears run down his
face.

MEL

I'm so sorry, Lashus. I'm so sorry.
I'll come back and bury you, but I
have to try and find Crocchus.

Mel soothes the dead croc's head, then gets to his feet and
looks around. The *Sea Horse* is gone. Hurrying, he half
stumbles as he walks along the beach, looking right and left.

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

I thought maybe they'd thrown Crocchus
overboard. If so, I had to find him.
I had to find him alive. I didn't
want him to think I'd forsaken him.

EXT. FARTHER UP THE BEACH -- MOMENTS LATER

Mel comes to a terrible sight. Crocchus is tied up against a
tree. Tied to trees on either side of him are the bodies of
the two Philosophers. Mel rushes to Crocchus and looks for a
way to untie him.

MEL

Crocchus! Hold on. Please don't die.
I'll get you down.

But it's too late. Crocchus's gaze falls lovingly on Mel, then his eyes close and his head drops forward. Mel falls to his knees sobbing, as Crocchus turns back into a crocodile.

MEL (CONT'D)

(sobbing)

Oh, Crocchus, you've died your brave, brave death, but I wish you were alive. I wish you were alive.

EXT. THE TEMPLE OF APOLLO - CONTINUOUS

Lucia is weeping in Mel's arms. Mel, tears wet on his face, puts her gently aside and stands up. He looks agitated. His face and voice show a deep anger.

MEL

So I buried Crocchus together with Lashus, and the two Greeks I buried together so they could talk about Love and Beauty for all eternity. Then I ate some sea urchins and made my way to a road, and walked until I got here.

He helps Lucia to her feet.

LUCIA

You've had a terrible time, Mel. What can I say?

MEL

Say? What can you say? I'll tell you what to say, oracle lady. Give me some good news, something wonderful to look forward to.

LUCIA

Well, maybe you should ask Paul about that. He's spreading the good news that folks can have eternal life in heaven if they believe in Jesus Christ.

MEL

Paul's "good news" is eternal life? *Eternal life*? Would you like to live forever?

LUCIA

Don't ask me, Mel. I'm clairvoyant, but eternity's a little off my radar screen.

MEL

(grasping her by the
arms)

Luce, tell me what kind of human
being would want to spend eternity
looking down from the sky at the
horrors below, at the suffering of
men and beasts? Christians call that
"good news?"

(releasing her abruptly)

Well, Luce, I don't want *Christian*
good news. Give me some good news
for an *atheist Jew!*

LUCIA

(helpfully)

Okay, well, you won't have to walk
back to town. I can call you a cab.

MEL

(ignoring her words)

Listen, Luce, I'll tell you what *my*
good news -- *my* gospel message will
be: It's that when we die our bodies
turn into dust and our souls
extinguish like snuffed candles. The
good news, Luce, is that there is no
eternal life. The *bad news* is...

Mel seems to deflate, wilt, with a kind of despair.

MEL (CONT'D)

...what happens if I'm *wrong*.

Mel embraces Lucia, turns and starts walking out of the
temple, but stops and turns when he hears her voice.

LUCIA

Mel, there's something...you ought
to know.

MEL

What?

LUCIA

Mel...your father wasn't a gladiator.
He was a Judaeen slave. He cleaned
arenas, just like you. A lion killed
him when he tried to take a thorn
out of its paw.

MEL

(slowly, disbelievingly)

*My father tried to take a thorn out
of a lion's paw?*

LUCIA

Yes.

MEL

(pauses to consider
this)

Then he wasn't a great gladiator. He
was a great...man.

Mel comes quickly back and gives Lucia a hug and a kiss on the cheek, then turns and walks out of the temple ruin. SAD MUSIC RISES.

EXT. ROAD DOWN FROM THE RUIN -- MOMENTS LATER

From the POV of Lucia we see Mel's tired, slope-shouldered form walk away, down the road through the wild landscape of ancient hills.

EXT. HIGHWAY TO ATHENS -- MOMENTS LATER

POV Lucia we see Mel, far below, turn right onto the two-lane highway and start walking along the shoulder. As the MUSIC PICKS UP ITS BEAT we see him start to walk more strongly, head up, shoulders back, chin high, in tempo. He takes some quick steps, jabbing and feinting like a prize fighter. A taxi pulls over up ahead of him. Mel stops, turns, and waves, smiling, up at Lucia, then gets into the taxi.

EXT. THE TEMPLE OF APOLLO - CONTINUOUS

From OVER HER SHOULDER we see Lucia's quarter rear profile and upper arm, but the ANGLE REMAINS ON the scene far below as she waves back.

LUCIA

Goodbye, my friend. I can promise
you this: You will live in interesting
times.

The taxi drives off, the view expands to reveal the land to the Gulf of Corinth, as the MUSIC RISES AND THE CREDITS ROLL.