

THE IMPERIUM

By

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FADE IN:

EXT. MOUNTAIN RANGE - AERIAL SHOT - DAY

MOVING TOWARD a mighty stone castle on the horizon, on the cliffs before the sea.

NARRATOR (V.O.)

The year is 0131. The reign of the first Sovereign, 31 years after the founding of an empire.

CUT TO:

FLASHBACK - EXT. BEACH - DAY

A dozen galleons on the horizon of the ocean. Rowboats carry soldiers to the shore. Legions of swordsmen, pikemen, and archers in ranks.

They are disciplined, strong, eager for war. On a black horse at the head of the army is LORD BALTHAZAR, 30s.

NARRATOR (V.O.)

Lord Balthazar's soldiers. Idleness at sea turned them bloodthirsty.

Balthazar unsheathes his sword and raises it above his head. The army gives a shout and marches.

CUT TO:

FLASHBACK - EXT. VILLAGE - DAY

The army pours in. Soldiers plunder, clearly enjoying themselves. Men, women, and children flee, screaming, as soldiers chase down and kill them.

NARRATOR (V.O.)

With the invaders came unimaginable creatures.

Four skeletons and a ghost storm out of a little house, carrying pouches of coins and other valuables.

Only clothing distinguishes them. PATRICK is naked. REGIS wears a big black helmet. SKELETON THE FIRST wears white armor and SKELETON THE SECOND wears black armor; these two carry spears. GHOSTY wears several layers of rags. He is translucent, and wields a small knife.

A big man with a hammer and a pitchfork charges out of the house, his body bleeding from several stabs. The HAMMER SMASHES Regis in the JAW, which BREAKS OFF.

Skeleton the First SPEARS the big man through the heart, and he falls dead. Regis snatches his JAW off the ground and SNAPS it back into place.

NARRATOR (V.O.)
The skeletons. Even more selfish
and power-hungry than men.

The skeletons scatter to continue the raid.

END FLASHBACK.

EXT. PINE FOREST - AERIAL SHOT - DAY

PICKING UP SPEED TOWARD the castle.

NARRATOR (V.O.)
These lands belong to Balthazar
now.

Small villages surrounding the castle COME INTO VIEW.

NARRATOR (V.O.)
But with absolute victory comes
absolute idleness. And with the
continent secure, who could his men
fight... but each other?

CUT TO:

EXT. CLIFFS - AERIAL SHOT - DAY

MOVES OVER the stronghold. A black flag with a silver griffin adorns each tall spire. OCEAN WAVES CRASH against the cliffs beside the walls.

NARRATOR (V.O.)
There was hope yet for the people
to escape the iron fist of
Balthazar, and to bring down that
evil empire called... the Imperium.

DRAWS NEAR ENOUGH to see soldiers on the ramparts.

CUT TO:

EXT. CASTLE - RAMPARTS - NIGHT

CROW stands guard, watching the bright moon with his one good eye. Thirty paces on either side of him is another man and a torch. Crow wears the crimson cloak of a common soldier over his armor and tunic.

EREBUS slinks out of the darkness.

EREBUS
(sneers)
On watch again?

CROW
What are you doing up here?

EREBUS
None of your concern.

Crow turns away.

EREBUS
Crow, I'm surprised you're assigned guard duty at all.

CROW
We all have to serve.

EREBUS
I meant with that one eye of yours. You're only half as capable to stand watch as any other man.

CROW
And I'm surprised you're sober. That's what you do during your guard, isn't it? Drink ale all night?

EREBUS
I suggest you watch your tongue.

CROW
I'll watch mine. And cut out yours.

EREBUS
I'll see you dead for that.

CROW
Not if I see you first!

Crow pulls out his sword and swings for Erebus' head. Erebus ducks and unsheathes his own sword. They CLASH BLADES along the narrow parapet.

CROW
 You've insulted me for the last
 time.

Soldiers draw near to watch, shouting. Crow backs Erebus
 against the wall.

CROW
 You've grown weak, Erebus.

Crow PIERCES Erebus' thigh. Erebus screams, until his head
 is SLICED OFF.

Cheers as Erebus' body collapses on the cobblestones. Crow
 bends down to clean his sword on Erebus' cloak. He furrows
 his brow. Lifts the cloth into the moonlight.

Crow stares in horror. It is deep blue. Not crimson.

FOOTSTEPS along the parapet. The soldiers stand at
 attention. SECOND IMPERATOR GRACCHUS arrives.

GRACCHUS
 (shouts)
 What is going on here?

Crow drops to his knees in fear.

CROW
 I -- I did not see!

GRACCHUS
 You fool. You've just murdered an
 emperor!

CROW
 I did not know he was promoted. He
 didn't speak of it!

GRACCHUS
 He was appointed just this evening!

CROW
 Emperor, I beg of you --

Gracchus points at two nearby guards, ZECHARIAH and MARK.
 Zechariah has dark hair and wears a black tunic under his
 segmented breastplate. He is armed with a two-handed
 broadsword.

Mark has light hair and wears a rust-colored tunic under his
 armor. A griffin is emblazoned on the round shield slung
 across his back. He carries a short sword.

They both wear crimson cloaks. They are in their 20s, younger than the other men.

GRACCHUS

Zechariah, Mark. Seize this man.
Bring him before the Sovereign.

CROW

No! Please!

Zechariah and Mark grab hold of Crow and march him away into the darkness.

CUT TO:

INT. CASTLE - THRONE ROOM - NIGHT

Along the walls hang tapestries of Imperial victories. Weapons and shields displayed on both sides, leading to the iron throne. On the wall behind the throne is a diamond-shaped sculpture of four intertwined serpents.

Beside each torch on the wall is a bodyguard in gleaming plate armor and a gray cloak. They wield ceremonial halberds and daggers.

Balthazar, 60s, sits on the throne. He wears the black cloak of the Sovereign over his silver robes. No crown sits upon his bald head. He is armed with an old longsword.

The massive doors at the far end open and Gracchus enters. Zechariah and Mark follow with Crow. They throw him before the Sovereign.

CROW

My Lord, I beg of you...

BALTHAZAR

(disgusted)

What is his transgression?

GRACCHUS

He has stabbed Erebus to death,
Sire.

Balthazar rises.

BALTHAZAR

I appointed him just hours ago!

CROW

I did not know. I could not see in the darkness. He was baiting me, and I was within my right to --

BALTHAZAR

You would have been in your right before. But not now!

CROW

Sovereign --

BALTHAZAR

Why do you still speak? Why waste your breath, while you have it?

Crow lowers his head in terror. Balthazar sits.

BALTHAZAR

Did you hope begging me would grant you forgiveness? That I would pardon your crime because of your excessive display of weakness? Fool! You should have fallen upon your sword the instant you realized your mistake. Now I shall make an example out of you.

CROW

Lord, keep me as a slave. I'll do anything!

BALTHAZAR

Silence! If you continue to whine like a dog, your death shall be far slower. And thus more enjoyable for myself and my men.

Gracchus, Zechariah, and Mark fight smiles. Balthazar looks to the two common soldiers and points at Crow.

BALTHAZAR

Throw this swine off the High Tower.

ZECHARIAH

With pleasure, my Lord.

CROW

No. No!

Zechariah and Mark drag CROW KICKING and SCREAMING to the balcony.

CROW
You can't do this!

Without hesitation, they pitch Crow over the ledge. Crow emits one final shriek. Several seconds later, a FAINT IMPACT.

BALTHAZAR
(chuckles)
The crow doesn't fly so well.

GRACCHUS
The infighting is growing worse, My Lord.

The Sovereign rises angrily and strides to the wall on his right, where a massive map of the continent hangs. The northeastern part is Imperial territory. To the west are mountains and forests. To the south a colossal desert, as large as the Imperium itself. South of the desert, nothing. Not yet explored.

BALTHAZAR
We'll have to send more expeditions across the wastelands. If an empire truly exists past the desert, we'll find it.

GRACCHUS
Very good, Sire.

BALTHAZAR
You're dismissed.

Gracchus bows and exits. Balthazar turns to the two men.

BALTHAZAR
How are you, my sons?

ZECHARIAH
We are well, my Liege. Thank you.

Balthazar returns to his throne.

BALTHAZAR
Now I must find someone to replace Erebus as fourth imperator. It's a shame. I had such high hopes for him as a leader.

Zechariah and Mark are silent.

BALTHAZAR

(laughs)

You two will get your chance! If you were but a little older, I would appoint you my first and second imperators right now.

The men grin at each other.

BALTHAZAR

But I think I'd have a mutiny on my hands if I passed up some of my oldest, most loyal men for you.

MARK

There are none more loyal than us, Lord Balthazar.

BALTHAZAR

Of that, I have no doubt.

CUT TO:

EXT. CLIFFS - DAY

On the road winding through the cliffs to the castle, two horses pull a wagon. Within, six beautiful women in new dresses. A dozen soldiers accompany them on horseback.

The leader, THIRD IMPERATOR VAUL, holds up a hand and the wagon driver stops the horses.

On the road before them lies the broken body of Crow. Vaul nods to his men.

VAUL

Get rid of it.

The women peek through the curtain and scream. Two soldiers pick up the corpse and toss it off the road. It tumbles down a rocky slope.

Vaul looks at the sky. Griffins circle high above.

CUT TO:

EXT. CASTLE - COURTYARD - DAY

The wagon pulls up to a gathering crowd of soldiers. Vault and his soldiers guard it. Several men try to dive through the barricade. Cheers from the others.

VAULT

Stay back, or I'll throw you all in the dungeon!

The crowd quiets instantly when the huge doors of the High Tower open. Balthazar marches into the courtyard with four bodyguards. The sea of men parts.

BALTHAZAR

Calm down, you pathetic excuse for an army!

He reaches the wagon and opens the canvas. The woman huddle together fearfully. The men cheer. Zechariah and Mark stand at the edge of the crowd.

BALTHAZAR

Silence!

The men obey. The skeletons (Ghosty included) appear at the back of the crowd. They push forward.

BALTHAZAR

Now listen well! Remember my law. So none of you end up like Crow out there...

Nervous laughter.

BALTHAZAR

We have only six women. I shall appoint them to six men of my choosing.

Eager nods.

BALTHAZAR

These men have the authority to kill anyone to protect what is theirs.

The skeletons reach the front.

BALTHAZAR

Many of you will be disappointed that you did not receive a wife. You will be tempted to go find a

(MORE)

BALTHAZAR (cont'd)
 peasant girl from a village for
 yourself.

Silence.

BALTHAZAR
 But anyone who pollutes the
 Imperial bloodline shall be put to
 death. And the woman, too.

Nods.

BALTHAZAR
 Now then. To business!

Laughs. The skeletons look to Regis. He steps forward and
 speaks in a skeleton's high-pitched, cracking voice.

REGIS
 My Lord, if I may...

The women shriek.

BALTHAZAR
 (annoyed)
 What is it, Regis?

REGIS
 My Sovereign! I come to you
 representing the esteemed skeletons
 Patrick, Skeleton the First,
 Skeleton the Second, Ghosty, and
 myself, Regis --

BALTHAZAR
 Get on with it!

REGIS
 Uh, my Lord, we -- we request to be
 included in the consideration for
 these lovely prizes --

Balthazar throws back his head and laughs. The men join in.

BALTHAZAR
 You? Skeletons!

Regis backpedals.

BALTHAZAR
 My soldiers! Our disgusting dead
 brothers want women for themselves!
 They would take them from you!

The crowd grows angry. Balthazar looks at soldiers nearest the skeletons.

BALTHAZAR

You men! See if you can find these devils some slaves to look after.

The men laugh as the skeletons are marched away, shouting in protest.

Balthazar motions to Vaul, who helps the first woman out of the wagon.

BALTHAZAR

This one will belong to Alexander!

ALEXANDER steps forward and the woman is given to him. The crowd cheers heartily.

Balthazar locks eyes with Mark in the crowd and smiles.

BALTHAZAR

Mark!

Zechariah grins as Mark heads for the wagon. Vaul helps the next woman out.

Her name is CECILY. The most beautiful of all. Golden hair. Pale skin. Brilliant eyes.

Mark is in a trance, awestruck. Balthazar calls out the other winners, but his voice is unintelligible, far away. Mark offers Cecilly his hand. She reluctantly takes it. Her face is like stone.

Balthazar turns to the six men and six women. He pulls out his sword.

BALTHAZAR

Sons for the Imperium!

The crowd roars, BEATING WEAPONS on shields.

CUT TO:

INT. CASTLE - ARMORY - DAY

The skeletons SHARPEN WEAPONS.

PATRICK

Well, that went well.

REGIS

Shut up!

GHOSTY

I'm tired of guarding slaves all day.

SKELETON THE SECOND

So am I. It's time for another war.

PATRICK

No one left to fight.

SKELETON THE FIRST

(brightens)

Villagers!

The others groan.

REGIS

Don't you ever get tired of pillaging little towns?

GHOSTY

It's all we've done for years.

SKELETON THE FIRST

It's more fun than anything else.

SKELETON THE SECOND

But think of actual war again, brother!

SKELETON THE FIRST

Well, I suppose...

PATRICK

Get used to peace. We've defeated everyone.

REGIS

Everyone except the Solari.

Sharpening stops. The others grow nervous.

GHOSTY

The swamps...

REGIS

Exactly.

SKELETON THE SECOND
 Balthazar won't invade the swamps.
 The diseases kill every scouting
 party.

PATRICK
 If the Solari don't get to them
 first.

SKELETON THE FIRST
 The army can't survive out there.

REGIS
 We can.

The others ponder this.

REGIS
 Imagine it. We skeletons returning
 victorious from the swamps. With
 hundreds of prisoners!

PATRICK
 There are too many of those foul
 creatures.

REGIS
 But they can die. We can't.

SKELETON THE SECOND
 Yes! That's it!

GHOSTY
 Another war!

Patrick cackles with laughter.

PATRICK
 You're all mad!

SKELETON THE FIRST
 I'm sure we could do it. Brother?

SKELETON THE SECOND
 I think we could.

REGIS
 Of course we can do it! Patrick,
 you with us?

PATRICK
 I don't know...

REGIS
 Excellent. Now, here's the plan. We
 offer our unique services to
 Balthazar, in exchange for --

Patrick suddenly swells with enthusiasm.

PATRICK
 Gold!

SKELETON THE FIRST
 Power!

GHOSTY
 Women!

SKELETON THE SECOND
 Gold!

PATRICK
 I said that!

REGIS
 All of the above!

CUT TO:

EXT. CASTLE - RAMPARTS- NIGHT

Mark and Cecily lean on the castle wall by a torch, staring
 into the dark. Silent. Awkward.

Mark clears his throat.

MARK
 How is the Fatherland? I haven't
 been there since I visited as a
 boy.

CECILY
 (coldly)
 Overpopulated.

MARK
 The Sovereign ships men over as
 quickly as he can.

CECILY
 But so few women.

MARK

Balthazar thinks women make the army weak. That's why each man can only have one, and the giving is slow. But the anticipation, the spectacle keeps up morale.

CECILY

I can tell.

A few beats.

CECILY

I'm not happy to be here.

Mark swallows. Shifts his weight.

Cecily's eyes are far off.

CECILY

My parents told me it could happen to me. All of us grew up with the constant fear of being sent overseas.

Mark lowers his head.

CECILY

When I heard I'd been selected...

She looks away.

MARK

I... I'm sorry, Cecily. I know this is hard.

Her eyes well up.

CECILY

I will probably never see my parents again. Nor my sisters.

Shame appears on Mark's brow. Cecily wipes her eyes.

CECILY

And I don't even want to mention the conditions on the ship! For three months.

Mark nods, a knowing smile at the corner of his mouth.

CECILY
And now I'm here. With a husband
I've never met.

An awkward lull.

Cecily clears her throat.

CECILY
Did they send you here as a boy?

MARK
No. I was born here. Zechariah and
I were the first.

Cecily nods.

MARK
We don't remember our parents. Our
mothers died of plague. Our fathers
died in battle.

Beat. Mark points to the stars.

MARK
They're up there. There's a star
for every man who dies in war.

CECILY
That's what they say.

MARK
Perhaps the gods reserve the
brightest stars for those who die
exceptional deaths.

CECILY
Looking forward to having your own?

MARK
I'm not planning on dying any time
soon.

Beat. This time more comfortable.

CECILY
I... do have some things to be
grateful for.

MARK
Oh? Like what?

CECILY

I was told to expect an arrogant,
violent man for a husband. Even
cruel. But you don't seem that way.

MARK

I've killed hundreds in battle.
Does that not count?

CECILY

No, that's just war. Cruelty is
when you kill for fun. Or over the
littlest things. I've heard the
stories.

Mark is silent.

CECILY

Have you ever done anything like
that?

MARK

No. I kill when the Sovereign asks
me too.

Cecily grimaces.

CECILY

Then not even you are truly a man.

Mark stiffens. Cecily peers at the stars.

CECILY

I think the brightest stars are for
those who fight not for power or
wealth or for a Sovereign. But for
something that matters.

Mark watches her expectantly. She says nothing more.

CUT TO:

INT. CASTLE - THRONE ROOM - DAY

Balthazar on his throne, the skeletons on their knees before
him.

BALTHAZAR

You want to do what?

REGIS

Uh, I -- we will conquer the marshes for you, Lord Balthazar.

BALTHAZAR

You're a pack of imbeciles.

REGIS

Give us weapons, and we won't leave the swamps till we've claimed them for the Imperium!

PATRICK

Solari will come pouring out of their nests, begging you to open the gates and enslave them!

Balthazar chuckles. Rises.

BALTHAZAR

And in exchange for your conquest?

REGIS

Fifty pounds of gold for each of us. A woman for each of us.

Balthazar collapses in his throne laughing.

REGIS

I -- uh...

BALTHAZAR

Ten pounds for each of you. But the women are out of the question.

Beat.

SKELETON THE SECOND

If I may?

BALTHAZAR

Yes?

SKELETON THE SECOND

Let us be guards, my Sovereign. Give us crimson cloaks!

BALTHAZAR

Done.

CUT TO:

EXT. VILLAGE - DAY

Zechariah, Mark, and Gracchus ride on horses. Peasants eye them uneasily. Gracchus dismounts.

GRACCHUS

I need to pay a little visit to the tax collector. Patrol the area.

ZECHARIAH

Yes, sir.

Gracchus ties his steed to a tree. Marches to a nearby house. Zechariah and Mark ride slowly through the village. Peasants shut themselves in their homes.

ZECHARIAH

How is she?

MARK

She's extraordinary. Better than I'd hoped.

ZECHARIAH

You're lying.

MARK

I am not.

ZECHARIAH

Well you're not telling me everything.

MARK

She's just...

ZECHARIAH

Too beautiful?

MARK

Homesick. Unused to our ways.

ZECHARIAH

I'm sure that will pass.

MARK

I hope so.

ZECHARIAH

You're a lucky man. I'm glad for you, friend. And quite jealous.

MARK

Your turn is coming up.

ZECHARIAH

No doubt. Balthazar's taking care
of us. He always has.

They arrive back at Gracchus' horse. Gracchus comes out of
the house. Blood on his sword.

GRACCHUS

We'll be needing a new tax
collector for this village.

They nod. Gracchus mounts and they ride out.

CUT TO:

EXT. SWAMPS - NIGHT

Giant trees, as large as castle spires. A fog surrounds the
skeletons as they make their way across the muddy landscape.

GHOSTY

How much further?

REGIS

Keep quiet! Brainless oaf.

They arrive at deep pools of murky water. Snakes slither.

SKELETON THE SECOND

I hate snakes!

PATRICK

Shh!

They wade into the pools.

GHOSTY

It smells here.

REGIS

Stop whining! This is for gold.

High above, a lean Solarian slinks down a tree toward them.
His gleaming, poisonous skin is bright red and black. He has
long, flexible fingers and toes, suction cups at the tips. His
eyes are deep pools of black.

SKELETON THE FIRST

Just imagine what we can buy with
ten gold pieces! And if we combine
our fortunes, we'll have thirty! Or
is it twenty?

PATRICK

Forty, idiot.

REGIS

Do you hear something?

The Solarian freezes as the skeletons look about.

GHOSTY

I don't see anything.

They continue on. The Solarian finds a branch to crawl
across, directly over them.

Skeleton the Second stops, looks up, and shrieks.

SPLASH!

The Solarian SMASHES him into the ground. It lets out a
MIGHTY HISS, more like a ROAR, SPEWING Skeleton the Second
with POISON.

REGIS

Attack!

The skeletons charge. The Solarian SLAMS REGIS and PATRICK
into the water with a swing of his arm. The SOLARIAN HISSES
in astonishment as his arm passes through Ghosty.

Ghosty STABS the Solarian between the eyes with his KNIFE.
It falls into the water. Floats away.

SKELETON THE FIRST

Good job, Ghosty!

The skeletons watch the Solarian bump against a tree and
become stuck.

REGIS

One down...

CUT TO:

EXT. SWAMPS - NIGHT

The skeletons gaze up at a dozen nests, high in the treetops.

PATRICK
What's the plan?

REGIS
You come with me.

Regis points at Skeleton the First and Skeleton the Second.

REGIS
The twins together. Ghosty, you're on your own.

GHOSTY
I always am...

SKELETON THE SECOND
Cheer up. You've got a huge advantage.

REGIS
OK, kill the males and the females. They're equally dangerous. We take the children.

They crawl up the tree. Sneak across the twenty-paces-wide branches. They slip inside the hive-like nests.

Regis, Patrick, Skeleton the First, and Skeleton the Second come out, blood on their weapons.

HISSSSS!

They run to the nest Ghosty entered.

The hissing abruptly stops. Ghosty emerges.

PATRICK
(whispers)
What happened?

GHOSTY
It woke up!

ANGRY HISSES from the other nine huts. SOLARI come leaping out on all fours. The skeletons scream. Panic.

The Solari SMASH the SKELETON'S SKULLS. Ghosty's KNIFE is BASHED from his hand. SOLARI furiously attempt to hit him.

GHOSTY

Let them go, mortals!

The ALPHA MALE, his skin a brilliant yellow, approaches Ghosty and ROARS. Then he speaks in the raspy, hissing language of Solari (SUBTITLED):

ALPHA MALE

What are you?

GHOSTY

Release my friends. Uh, please. I mean... immediately!

ALPHA MALE

You've killed Solari. Now you will die.

GHOSTY

Been there, done that, baby.

Ghosty dives to the ground. Passes into the tree branch. The Alpha Male is knocked off his feet from below. The SOLARI HISS in panic. Two more are knocked down.

The skeletons break free of their captors and leap off the tree, falling hundreds of feet into the swamps. Ghosty dives after them, waving goodbye amiably to the enraged creatures.

CUT TO:

INT. CASTLE - MARK'S BEDCHAMBER - NIGHT

Cecily and Mark in bed, on the verge of slumber. A symphony of insects play outside. Cecily keeps her back to him. Mark turns to her.

MARK

Every tenth year the Sovereign sails for the Fatherland. I'll ask to join him. I will take you to see your family.

Cecily is still.

MARK

Cecily?

CECILY

Do what you will.

Silence. Mark swallows.

MARK

Will you ever learn to love me?

Cecily faces him.

CECILY

Will you ever learn to fight for good instead of evil?

MARK

What is your definition of good?

CECILY

Justice is good. Friendship is good. Love is good.

Mark is silent.

CECILY

You fight for an empire of greed and bloodlust.

Mark ponders for a long while.

MARK

This is my home. Things may be different in the Fatherland. But this is all I know.

Cecily closes her eyes, to sleep. Mark frowns and does the same.

Cecily's hand slides over and holds Mark's. They open their eyes.

CECILY

Thank you. For taking me to see them. I'd like that.

CUT TO:

EXT. CASTLE - COURTYARD - DAY

Five horsemen gallop across the drawbridge and into the castle. Zechariah lounges in the sun, eating lamb and bread.

The horsemen dismount and their leader, carrying a parchment, enters the High Tower. The four others talk amongst themselves. The biggest one is GUDERIAN.

ZECHARIAH
(to Guderian)
Hail Balthazar!

Guderian turns and approaches him.

GUDERIAN
Hail Balthazar. How are you, mighty
Zechariah?

ZECHARIAH
Most content. What news do the
Sovereign's messengers bring?

GUDERIAN
News from the Fatherland.

ZECHARIAH
Let's hear it.

GUDERIAN
How badly you want to know?

Zechariah pulls out three gold coins and gives them to
Guderian.

GUDERIAN
You received wives three days ago?

ZECHARIAH
Yes.

GUDERIAN
Turns out one of the women wasn't
of pure blood.

ZECHARIAH
(shocked)
Are you serious?

GUDERIAN
On my honor.

ZECHARIAH
How is that possible?

GUDERIAN
One of them is the offspring of a
slave.

ZECHARIAH
Which one? Tell me!

GUDERIAN

I know not. But she is supposed to
be the most beautiful of all.

Zechariah stares at him in horror an instant. He dashes
across the courtyard and through the doors of the High
Tower.

ZECHARIAH (O.S.)

Mark! Mark!

His frantic screams echo and vanish.

CUT TO:

INT. CASTLE - THRONE ROOM - DAY

Mark and Zechariah burst inside. Balthazar sits at his
throne, FIRST IMPERATOR TIBERIUS beside him in bronze armor
and a dark blue cloak.

Cecily is in chains on the floor. Bruised and bloody. She
weeps and shivers. Balthazar's bodyguards surround her. Mark
stands over her defensively.

MARK

Sovereign!

Balthazar raises a hand.

BALTHAZAR

It is true, my son.

MARK

How could an impurity make it
through the selection? Make it all
the way here?!

BALTHAZAR

Mistakes can be made. Don't worry,
the selector shall be executed as
soon as possible.

MARK

And her?

BALTHAZAR

You know my laws.

Mark marches forward. Sweat on his brow. Fire in his eyes.

MARK
Lord Balthazar --

BALTHAZAR
Don't worry. You could not have
known. You shall not be punished.

MARK
She did not know, my Lord!

BALTHAZAR
It matters not. She will pollute
our bloodlines.

MARK
Don't --

BALTHAZAR
(enraged)
Don't attempt to tell me what I
should or should not do!

Mark glares. Balthazar sighs.

BALTHAZAR
Mark, you and Zechariah are like
sons to me. You are the new
generation of Imperials.

Mark looks away, seething.

BALTHAZAR
I put down an insurrection to keep
you here. Keep you alive. I am not
like your father?

Mark nods.

MARK
Yes, Lord.

BALTHAZAR
Zechariah?

ZECHARIAH
Yes, my Liege.

BALTHAZAR
You are my best warriors. Do you
not love the Imperium?

MARK
I do, my Lord.

BALTHAZAR
Do you not trust me?

Mark is silent.

The doors open and the executioner enters. Mark and Zechariah look at each other in horror. The executioner takes his position over Cecily.

Readies his ax.

BALTHAZAR
Kill her.

Mark kneels before Cecily. She meets his gaze. Their eyes well up. They watch each other. And wait.

SLAM!

The AX falls and DECAPITATES her. Mark's face is speckled with blood.

Silence. Zechariah bows his head. Mark is frozen.

BALTHAZAR
Mark... she was a barbarian.

Mark roars like a lion. He springs forward with inhuman speed, unsheathing his sword.

SLICE!

The EXECUTIONER'S HEAD slams on the ground near Cecily's.

The body crumples. Mark storms from the room. Balthazar clenches his teeth.

BALTHAZAR
Zechariah, go calm him.

Zechariah, shocked, nods and exits. Balthazar turns to Tiberius.

BALTHAZAR
Dispose of those. Put her head on a stake. Feed the bodies to the wild dogs.

CUT TO:

EXT. CASTLE - COURTYARD - DAY

Tiberius watches two soldiers secure Cecily's head onto a twenty-foot pike. The soldiers milling about laugh at it.

SERRIA, at the gate tower, BLOWS a HORN. Tiberius steps toward him.

TIBERIUS
Who approaches?

SERRIA
The worthless skeletons, Emperor!

TIBERIUS
Back from their conquests so soon?

SERRIA
Shall I lower the drawbridge?

TIBERIUS
No. Let them beg!

CUT TO:

EXT. CLIFFS - DAY

Mark and Zechariah sit on an enormous boulder. Archers take target practice in the plains. The skeletons BANG on the GATES.

Zechariah swallows.

ZECHARIAH
More women will come, my friend.

Mark is silent. In pain.

ZECHARIAH
You'll just have to wait with me a while longer. Just like old times.

MARK
I don't care about other women.

ZECHARIAH
By the gods. You loved this girl!

MARK
What, the executioner's corpse didn't give it away?

ZECHARIAH

I thought that was just a tantrum.

Mark shakes his head.

ZECHARIAH

I don't know what to say. That's unexpected for sure.

MARK

He had no right...

Mark bows his head.

ZECHARIAH

He's the Sovereign, Mark.

MARK

She didn't do anything wrong.

ZECHARIAH

She was a barbarian passing herself as pure.

MARK

She was brought here against her will.

ZECHARIAH

Would you listen to yourself? Last week Balthazar killed Emperor Wolf for stepping on his cloak! What do you expect?

MARK

He's a murderer.

ZECHARIAH

No. You're only now disagreeing with it now because he killed someone you cared for. The way you're feeling is your fault.

Mark puts his head in his hands. In the fields, archers take aim at the skeletons and RAIN ARROWS upon them, laughing hysterically.

MARK

Zec... would you disagree with it if it were me?

ZECHARIAH

What?

MARK

That's how it feels right now. What if it was my head on that stake?

Zechariah grimaces and looks away.

CUT TO:

EXT. CASTLE - HIGH TOWER BALCONY - DAY

Balthazar, Tiberius, Gracchus, Vaul and two scribes huddle around a table piled with diagrams and maps. The sun is merciless upon them.

BALTHAZAR

Tomorrow I want more slaves in the lumberyards. The slave compound needs extensive repairs.

TIBERIUS

Yes, Sovereign.

The skeletons, caked with dry mud, slink from the throne room and into the sun.

BALTHAZAR

Well, well, well. The mighty skeletons return!

The other skeletons push Regis forward.

REGIS

I can explain, my --

BALTHAZAR

(shouts)

Explain?

The skeletons huddle together in fear.

BALTHAZAR

No explanation is necessary, you demonic halfwits!

REGIS

A thousand apologies. We have failed you, Lord Balthazar. We --

Balthazar laughs.

BALTHAZAR
Failed me? The only failure is that
you came back.

REGIS
What?!

BALTHAZAR
I was hoping the Solari would
capture you and find some way to
destroy you.

REGIS
You mean to say --

BALTHAZAR
I just wanted you, the thorns in my
side, out of my castle. For as long
as possible.

PATRICK
My Lord --

BALTHAZAR
But you returned much sooner than
expected.

Balthazar looks at Tiberius.

BALTHAZAR
Throw them in the dungeon. One
week.

The skeletons shout in protest, but are dragged away by
guards, led by Tiberius. Balthazar turns to his bemused
imperators.

BALTHAZAR
Now then. Where were we?

CUT TO:

INT. CASTLE - RAMPARTS - NIGHT

Mark and Zechariah walk among the guards.

ZECHARIAH
Gracchus has been ordered to take a
battalion and get more slaves from
the villages. We're assigned to go
with him.

MARK

Balthazar wants to give me something to do.

ZECHARIAH

It'll be good for us.

MARK

It won't help.

ZECHARIAH

You obviously haven't seen yourself when you're raiding little towns. Your face lights up like the sun.

Mark grins a bit.

MARK

Very funny.

They pass two guards, LOGAR and KAHTEK.

KAHTEK

Mark! I hear your prize was nothing but a slave child!

Mark's fingers curl into fists.

MARK

And what of it, Kahtek?

KAHTEK

I merely thought a barbarian wife was fitting for you.

MARK

Have you decided to throw your life away tonight?

LOGAR

Enough, Kahtek.

KAHTEK

(to Mark)

I'm not scared of you. They say you're the fastest. Well, I'm fairly quick myself.

ZECHARIAH

This deadbeat isn't worth it, Mark.

KAHTEK
 Yes, listen to your little
 playmate. Walk away.

Mark turns and marches away with Zechariah.

KAHTEK
 Cowardly mongrel.

Mark whirls, pulls out his sword, and lunges at Kahtek. Kahtek stumbles back, shocked at Mark's speed, and struggles to unsheathe his own weapon. Mark PIERCES Kahtek's chest clean through.

Logar shouts and tries to gut Mark with a dagger. Zechariah is suddenly there, and CUTS OFF Logar's arm.

Soldiers shout and run for Zechariah and Mark from both directions.

Mark attacks. Zechariah joins him after a brief hesitation.

ZECHARIAH
 (shouts)
 What are we doing?

MARK
 What we must!

The battle rages. Zechariah and Mark build up two large piles of bodies. Archers pour onto the scene from the courtyard.

ZECHARIAH
 Archers!

MARK
 This way!

They run up the piles, HACKING OFF LIMBS as they go. They sprint along the ramparts. Arrows fall around them. They burst through a door and into:

INT. CASTLE - HALLS - NIGHT

They flee down several steps before reaching the labyrinth-like corridors.

ZECHARIAH
 You realize we're traitors now,
 don't you?

MARK

The thought had crossed my mind.

A group of running soldiers enters the hall ahead of them.
The traitors MAIM THEM ALL and continue on.

MARK

You can turn back, you know.

ZECHARIAH

And take my chances with Balthazar?
No thanks!

They sprint up stairs.

CUT TO:

EXT. CASTLE - SPIRE - NIGHT

Zechariah and Mark reach the top of a castle spire, one that is flat at the top and ringed with battlements. Six guards follow them up and charge. THEY ALL DIE.

ZECHARIAH

Now what?

MARK

I don't know.

ZECHARIAH

Was that run up the stairs just for exercise?

MARK

I hear more coming. We can take them.

ZECHARIAH

The whole army's awake. And we're cornered up here.

Mark looks over the northern battlements and far down to the dark ocean. He moves to the southern end of the spire and prepares to sprint.

MARK

Let's go.

ZECHARIAH

You've got to be kidding!

Mark sprints and jumps off.

ZECHARIAH

Mark!

He watches Mark fall into the ocean. The doors to the spire open and soldiers come running out. Zechariah takes a few steps back and runs.

ZECHARIAH

(shouts)

Don't worry! I'll kill him for this!

Zechariah jumps off the wall and into the choppy waters below.

CUT TO:

INT. CASTLE - DUNGEON - NIGHT

The skeletons share a slimy, tiny cell.

SKELETON THE SECOND

We'll kill him for this.

GHOSTY

Kill the Sovereign?

PATRICK

Quiet, you fools!

Skeleton the First stares at the ceiling.

SKELETON THE FIRST

I wonder what all that noise was about...

REGIS

Stop worrying, Patrick. No one can hear us.

PATRICK

You hope. Enough talk about killing Balthazar.

SKELETON THE SECOND

Agreed. We're in enough trouble as it is.

REGIS

Hey, what's that?

The skeletons look into the corner of the cell and see a bright green leaf in a puddle of murky water.

GHOSTY
A leaf. So what?

Regis crawls over. Picks up the leaf. It's made of glass.

REGIS
Check this out!

Patrick snatches it from him. Examines it. Throws it against the far wall. It does not break.

REGIS
Hey!

PATRICK
We should be figuring out how to get out of here.

SKELETON THE FIRST
Wait. Ghosty can go through walls.

PATRICK
Yeah, what are you waiting for?

GHOSTY
We're only down here a week. If I escape and let you guys out, they'll catch us and put us here forever.

SKELETON THE SECOND
You are such a coward.

GHOSTY
An insult! Why I --

REGIS
Stop bickering. Ghosty's right. We'll only be trapped here longer. I say we stay. And plot our revenge.

PATRICK
Revenge? For what?

REGIS
For him throwing us in here! For treating us worse than slaves! For calling us worthless!

SKELETON THE FIRST
And for tricking us into attacking the Solari!

REGIS

Right!

GHOSTY

I don't know --

SKELETON THE SECOND

Shut up, coward.

REGIS

We will kill Balthazar. And take
the throne for ourselves!

CUT TO:

INT. CASTLE - THRONE ROOM - NIGHT

Logar, his armless shoulder sloppily bandaged, kneels before
the Sovereign. His face is pale. He shakes violently.

BALTHAZAR

Kahtek got what he deserved.
Provoking Mark was a death wish.
But that doesn't explain why
twenty-three more of my men are
dead.

LOGAR

My Lord... may I rest for... a
moment?

BALTHAZAR

After you're finished, weakling.
And don't you dare die before
finishing this conversation.

LOGAR

I -- when I tried to stop Mark,
Zechariah struck my arm.

BALTHAZAR

Then you got what you deserved.
Getting between Zechariah and Mark
was most unwise.

LOGAR

Yes, Lord.

BALTHAZAR

Then what?

LOGAR

Soldiers rushed to see what was going on, and they attacked.

Balthazar rises from his throne and paces.

LOGAR

I believe... Mark just snapped, Lord.

BALTHAZAR

Do you think? Idiot! Leave the thinking to someone with wits. It's clear that Mark was dangerously close to the girl. He was just looking for someone to kill. But why betray me? Why escape?

LOGAR

You did order... the girl's death...

BALTHAZAR

Shut up!

LOGAR

It's -- I'm very dizzy, Lord.

BALTHAZAR

Get out of my sight!

Logar crawls from the room.

BALTHAZAR

Gracchus!

Gracchus enters. Bows.

BALTHAZAR

You will take one hundred cavalry and find the traitors.

GRACCHUS

Yes, Sovereign.

BALTHAZAR

Bring me their heads.

CUT TO:

EXT. CLIFFS - NIGHT

Zechariah and Mark, wet, run up and down massive hills blanketed with rocks and boulders. Mark leads.

ZECHARIAH

I can't believe you had to go and do that before I'd even gotten a wife!

MARK

I said I was sorry.

ZECHARIAH

Now we've got no food, no water, no shelter. And an army of thousands preparing for the hunt of the first Imperial traitors.

MARK

I wasn't planning on being a fugitive.

ZECHARIAH

What is your plan?

MARK

Find food, water, and shelter.

ZECHARIAH

Ha-ha.

MARK

It's only a mile to the slave compound.

ZECHARIAH

What? The slave compound? You've got to be joking!

They reach the top of a gigantic hill and look to the horizon. Across the plains is a small wooden barracks.

ZECHARIAH

We won't last two minutes in there.

MARK

They don't know about us yet. We can hide.

ZECHARIAH

You're insane.

MARK

Look, they won't be expecting us to stick around, will they?

Zechariah frowns, unable to argue with that.

CUT TO:

EXT. SLAVE COMPOUND - NIGHT

Hundreds of little shacks. Soldiers march along the dirt paths, keeping watch. The walls are twelve feet high with spikes on the top.

Zechariah leaps from a massive tree outside the walls. Narrowly misses the spikes. Rolls as he lands. He waves Mark down. Mark jumps.

ZECHARIAH

After you.

Mark runs bent over to the nearest shack. He pulls out his sword and pushes past the animal skin serving as a door. Zechariah looks around and follows.

Darkness.

The room has a small table, tools piled high. A dirt floor. A small bed in the back. A slave under a thin blanket.

It is a Solarian. His skin once bright blue and black, it is now discolored, cracked and dry. The poison has been purged from his flesh. Mark slides his sword under the Solarian's neck. The slave awakes.

MARK

Don't make a sound.

The slave is terrified.

MARK

Don't worry. We don't want to kill you.

ZECHARIAH

Can you understand us?

The slave nods.

MARK

What is your name?

The Solarian sits up. Speaks with hiss-like "S" sounds.

RILLIC
My name is Rillic.

ZECHARIAH
Wow. I've never heard a Solarian
speak our tongue so well.

RILLIC
All us slaves speak like you.

ZECHARIAH
How many of you are there?

RILLIC
Twenty Solari. Two hundred like
you. Ten beasts.

MARK
The Tor.

ZECHARIAH
How long have you been here?

RILLIC
Since the beginning.

MARK
Since the founding?

RILLIC
I fought the invasion army. Taken
as slave when the kingdom fell.

ZECHARIAH
You weren't in the swamps?

RILLIC
With Solari army. Protected ally
kingdom. Human kingdom.

MARK
I see.

RILLIC
What do you want?

Beat.

MARK
We need to hide.

ZECHARIAH
Don't tell him anything, Mark.

RILLIC
Why hide?

MARK
We betrayed Balthazar. We're on the run.

Zechariah rubs his eyes.

RILLIC
Betrayed Balthazar?

MARK
Yes.

RILLIC
Why?

MARK
He killed my wife.

Silence.

RILLIC
He kill you when he finds you.

ZECHARIAH
You bet he will.

RILLIC
Cannot hide here. He find you.

MARK
We won't hide for long. Just until tomorrow night.

RILLIC
Too risky. He kill me, too.

MARK
He will never know. I swear it.
Will you help us?

Rillic rubs his fingers together nervously. Ponders.

RILLIC
Well... enemy of Balthazar is friend of mine, yes?

MARK
Yes. Thank you.

CUT TO:

INT. SLAVE COMPOUND - DAY

Zechariah and Mark awake at a GUARD'S SHOUT outside the hut. They stay on the floor, motionless, as Rillic moves about. He fills a bag with tools.

RILLIC
I work the fields today. Back at sunset. Stay here. Quiet.

ZECHARIAH
Will you be able to steal any food?

RILLIC
No. Guards search us before we come back.

MARK
We'll find some from the soldiers' barracks.

RILLIC
Maybe six soldiers stay. Drink all day.

ZECHARIAH
Excellent!

RILLIC
They sense trouble, they search the whole camp. Careful.

Another SHOUT from outside. Rillic exits. Zechariah and Mark watch through the gap between the animal skin and the wall.

Soldiers escort hundreds of slaves in a quick march. Among the humans are a few Solari. And the Tor: ten-foot-tall ape-like creatures with curved horns, short claws, and long tails.

CUT TO:

INT. CASTLE - THRONE ROOM - DAY

Tiberius and Gracchus kneel before the Sovereign.

BALTHAZAR

Report!

GRACCHUS

I have squads of twenty-five
cavalry searching south, east, and
west, my Lord. They are
concentrating on the villages.

BALTHAZAR

And the remaining twenty-five?

GRACCHUS

Patrolling the roads, Sire.

BALTHAZAR

Well done. First Emperor!

TIBERIUS

Yes, my Lord.

BALTHAZAR

I want the castle battle-ready.
Double the guard. Distribute heavy
weapons and armor.

TIBERIUS

My Lord, do you expect the traitors
to return?

BALTHAZAR

My dear pathetic First Emperor.
These men are the most dangerous
soldiers alive. Must I remind you
where they come from?

TIBERIUS

Of course not, my --

BALTHAZAR

Shut up! Just do as I command. We
cannot underestimate them. And we
cannot over-prepare for their
return.

TIBERIUS

They would be foolish to --

BALTHAZAR

Silence!

Tiberius swallows in fear.

BALTHAZAR

They will come back. I promise you that, Tiberius. Mark wants revenge. Zechariah will help him. It's me they want to kill, and so we shall wait. We must be ready.

CUT TO:

INT. SLAVE COMPOUND - NIGHT

Rillic and Zechariah eat big portions of stolen food at the table. Rillic devours his meal. Mark sits a few feet away, lost in his own thoughts.

MARK

I'm going to kill him.

Zechariah and Rillic freeze.

MARK

I'm going to kill Balthazar.

A tense beat. Zechariah shakes his head.

RILLIC

I can help you, maybe, yes?

MARK

How?

RILLIC

I helped build the castle. Thirty years ago.

MARK

And?

Rillic finishes his meal.

RILLIC

Balthazar wanted a secret escape route in castle. We slaves built a tunnel.

Zechariah leans forward, intrigued.

ZECHARIAH
Where is it?

RILLIC
Behind the throne. Goes through the
castle to the cliffs outside.

MARK
Can you show us where the entrance
is?

Rillic rubs his head.

RILLIC
He will know slaves helped you.

MARK
He'll be dead.

Rillic grins.

RILLIC
I show you.

He dips a suctioned finger in a bowl of water and draws a
map on the table.

CUT TO:

INT. CASTLE - DUNGEON - NIGHT

The skeletons lay asleep. Regis and Patrick are curled
against each other. Skeleton the First snuggles with
Skeleton the Second. Ghosty's alone.

CLANG!

They awake. Tiberius UNLOCKS the CELL and steps inside.

PATRICK
What? What's going on?

TIBERIUS
Get up, you despicable fools! The
Sovereign wants you.

SKELETON THE FIRST
I knew he'd come to his senses!

GHOSTY
More likely he missed my charming
demeanor...

TIBERIUS

Come!

Soldiers behind Tiberius drag the skeletons to their feet and march them out.

CUT TO:

INT. CASTLE - THRONE ROOM - NIGHT

The skeletons bow before Balthazar.

BALTHAZAR

I didn't want to release you --

REGIS

Oh thank you, thank you, thank --

Balthazar grinds his teeth.

BALTHAZAR

Listen to me, you idiots. Zechariah and Mark have betrayed me and are coming back for revenge.

The skeletons stare at him. Then scream in panic.

BALTHAZAR

Shut up! Shut up!

The skeletons cling together, looking around as if Zechariah and Mark are lurking in every shadow.

BALTHAZAR

I would have loved to keep you in the dungeon forever, but I need every soldier I can get.

SKELETON THE SECOND

But Sire, those two have the most kills between them of any --

BALTHAZAR

I know, fool!

PATRICK

Could we go back to our cell now?

BALTHAZAR

As much as I hate to say it, the five of you might be the best defense we have against them.

The skeletons look confused.

BALTHAZAR

You're the only soldiers I have who they cannot kill. Now, can I count on you to attack them like... your lives depended on it... when the time comes?

REGIS

Are you saying... we're gonna be warriors again?

BALTHAZAR

Yes.

REGIS

Oh thank you, thank you, thank you!

The skeletons cheer. Balthazar grimaces, then forces an insincere smile.

BALTHAZAR

You are Imperial guards!

The skeletons cackle with laughter.

BALTHAZAR

Tiberius will assign you posts.

CUT TO:

INT. SLAVE COMPOUND - NIGHT

Zechariah and Mark tighten their armor and drink water from bowls. Rillic sits on his bed. Rubs his fingers together.

MARK

We can't thank you enough.

ZECHARIAH

We'll pay you back when we can.

RILLIC

Good luck, friends.

ZECHARIAH

Let's go. We're going to have to be far away before morning.

MARK

Right.

They nod to Rillic. Step toward the exit.

RILLIC

You said your wife was not a pure Imperial, yes?

They turn.

MARK

That's right.

RILLIC

Neither are you.

Zechariah and Mark glance at each other in confusion.

RILLIC

I was there at beginning. Saw when you both arrived.

ZECHARIAH

What are you talking about?

RILLIC

Ask Balthazar, before you kill him.

Rillic lies on his bed and pulls the blanket over his shoulder. Zechariah steps toward him, but Mark holds him back and motions toward the exit. Zechariah reluctantly turns. Follows Mark outside.

CUT TO:

EXT. CLIFFS - NIGHT

Zechariah and Mark reach the road to the castle. They move down the slope, away from the castle. They reach a sharp turn and step off the road. Into the shadow of a cliff. They search the wall.

ZECHARIAH

Here it is.

An engraving of four serpents forming a diamond on the rock. Mark pulls out his sword. He SMASHES the symbol with the BUTT of his SWORD.

CRASH!

A MAN-SIZED CHUNK of the cliff wall COLLAPSES next to them.

They stare into the blackness.

ZECHARIAH
Come to think of it, we should have
stolen torches.

They look at each other. Then enter the darkness.

CUT TO:

INT. CASTLE - THRONE ROOM - NIGHT

Two guards try not to fall asleep.

SCREECH.

Balthazar's THRONE moves an inch. The guards stare. Take a few steps toward it. The THRONE SCRAPES a foot forward.

The guards ready their halberds and each peer around a side of the throne. SWORDS SLICE through their necks. The guards fall. Zechariah and Mark emerge from the tunnel.

CUT TO:

INT. CASTLE - BALTHAZAR'S BEDCHAMBER - NIGHT

Zechariah and Mark open the heavy doors. Four guards lie dead in the hall. Zechariah shuts the door as Mark moves swiftly to the huge bed.

Empty.

MARK
He isn't here!

ZECHARIAH
Then why are there guards outside?

Suddenly, Balthazar jumps from the shadows behind Zechariah and holds a dagger to his throat.

BALTHAZAR
Move, and he dies.

Zechariah winks at Mark... then again. On the third wink, Zechariah RAMS his elbow into Balthazar's ribs. Ducks the blade. Mark speeds forward, raising his sword.

Zechariah STRIKES aside the DAGGER, which CLATTERS on the floor. Balthazar grasps Zechariah's neck and chokes him. Mark SMASHES the FLAT OF HIS SWORD against Balthazar's head.

The Sovereign collapses. Zechariah grabs Balthazar and SLAMS him against the wall.

ZECHARIAH

Who are we?

BALTHAZAR

Wh -- What?

ZECHARIAH

Where do we come from?

BALTHAZAR

I don't know what you're talking about.

CRACK.

Zechariah PUNCHES Balthazar in the nose. Blood gushes.

ZECHARIAH

Don't lie to us, you coward.

MARK

We're not Imperials, are we?

Mark puts his blade under Balthazar's neck.

BALTHAZAR

You'll kill me anyway.

MARK

We want answers. The more you give us, the less painful your death.

Beat.

BALTHAZAR

You... you weren't born here at the castle.

Zechariah grinds his teeth.

BALTHAZAR

When I invaded these lands thirty years ago, there was one kingdom that almost defeated me. You are the sons of two of their warriors.

MARK

What were their names?

BALTHAZAR
I don't remember.

MARK
Tell us!

BALTHAZAR
I swear I don't know!

ZECHARIAH
How did we get here?

BALTHAZAR
When I defeated the kingdom, your fathers fled with the survivors. They escaped my grasp for several years.

Zechariah and Mark glance at each other.

BALTHAZAR
When we found them... and slaughtered them... I took both of you. Your fathers were the greatest fighters I had ever seen. I knew you would inherit their strengths.

ZECHARIAH
You let us believe we were one of you.

BALTHAZAR
You are one us. You fought under my banner. You've killed for me.

MARK
Not anymore.

BALTHAZAR
Mark... all this just for a single woman? End this madness, and I shall give you as many as you desire!

There is a SHOUT from the hallway. Distraction. Balthazar LASHES OUT at them, breaks free, and heads for the door.

Mark beats him to it. KICKS him to the floor. Mark CHOPS OFF HIS HEAD.

They enter the hallway, and are attacked by two guards. Not a problem.

MARK

Come on!

They run down the hall. Into the throne room.

CUT TO:

EXT. CLIFFS - NIGHT

Zechariah and Mark come out of the tunnel, both lost in their own thoughts. They walk down the road, away from the castle.

MARK

We need to find somewhere the Imperium hasn't tainted. Live there.

ZECHARIAH

What?

MARK

They won't stop hunting us now. We should journey south across the desert.

Zechariah stops. Mark turns.

ZECHARIAH

Revenge isn't enough.

Mark looks at him, confused.

ZECHARIAH

Any minute now, Tiberius will become the new Sovereign. And he'll be just like Balthazar. And when Tiberius dies, his successor will be just like him.

MARK

What are you saying?

ZECHARIAH

The Imperium is an evil our fathers died fighting. We know that now. And we've both seen evil... where we never had before.

Mark nods.

ZECHARIAH

If it had been your head on that stake... I wouldn't stop fighting until every last Imperial was dead.

Silence.

MARK

There are only two of us.

Zechariah grins.

ZECHARIAH

There will be more.

He catches up with Mark.

ZECHARIAH

Come on. We have friend who's still in bondage.

CUT TO:

INT. CASTLE - TIBERIUS' BEDCHAMBER - NIGHT

Tiberius sleeps soundly.

KNOCK - KNOCK! KNOCK! He awakes.

TIBERIUS

(angry)

What is it?

Gracchus enters. Bows.

TIBERIUS

What? Why do you bow?

GRACCHUS

My Lord... Balthazar is dead, Zechariah and Mark are attacking the slave compound, and you are the new Sovereign.

Tiberius' mouth hangs open.

CUT TO:

INT. SLAVE COMPOUND - NIGHT

Soldiers lie slain. Human and Solari slaves swarm about. Tor SMASH DOWN the OFFICER'S BARRACKS and CRUSH soldiers inside.

Zechariah and Mark jog through the camp, Rillic leaping on all fours beside them. Mark motions to the slaves following them.

MARK

Gather as much food and water as you can!

ZECHARIAH

The Tor must break down the gates!

Several Tor hear him. They run on all fours to the GATES and TEAR THEM APART.

MARK

Get all the weapons. Don't leave anything.

The chaos transforms to efficiency as slaves pour into the barracks and steal. A Tor scoops weapons out of the collapsed armory and drops them in a pile. The humans arm themselves. The Solari use no weapons.

Zechariah, Mark, and Rillic reach the gate. Zechariah raises his sword above his head.

ZECHARIAH

Let's go! Let's go!

Over two hundred slaves sprint after them to freedom.

CUT TO:

INT. CASTLE - THRONE ROOM - NIGHT

Tiberius SLAMS open the DOORS and walks toward the throne. Gracchus, Serria, Skeleton the First, Patrick, and three dozen other soldiers crowd in to watch. Tiberius stares at the throne in wonder.

GRACCHUS

Can't this wait?

Tiberius is in a trance.

TIBERIUS

I have been waiting a long time for
this, Gracchus. Bring me the cloak.

Gracchus presents a folded black cloak. He unceremoniously
puts it on Tiberius.

GRACCHUS

Now. We need to send
reinforcements.

Tiberius slowly walks to the throne and sits down. Smiles.

GRACCHUS

Sovereign, please!

TIBERIUS

I understand your urgency,
Imperator.

GRACCHUS

We must send cavalry units at once!

TIBERIUS

(shouts)

I am in charge here!

He looks at Serria.

TIBERIUS

You're my First Imperator. Organize
fifty cavalry and lead them out
immediately.

Serria brightens. What luck!

SERRIA

Yes, Sire.

Serria leaves. Gracchus clenches his teeth.

GRACCHUS

That won't be nearly enough.

TIBERIUS

If you speak again, I shall boil
your tongue.

Gracchus backs away angrily. Patrick and Skeleton the First
laugh at him.

TIBERIUS

It is a new age, my soldiers. The
second Sovereign of the Imperium
has taken the throne!

All but Gracchus cheer.

CUT TO:

EXT. CASTLE - HIGH TOWER BALCONY - DAY

Tiberius addresses a crowd of thousands of soldiers.

TIBERIUS

Balthazar was a fool! He obviously
had no idea what he was doing.

The men laugh.

TIBERIUS

Thanks to the former Sovereign,
every single slave was freed last
night by Zechariah and Mark.

Stunned silence.

TIBERIUS

Those traitors have caused enough
trouble. There will be a purse of a
thousand gold coins for each of
their heads.

Cheers.

TIBERIUS

You realize, of course, that no
slaves means we must get our own
food. Our own water. Our own lumber
and stone. We must build our own
defenses and make our own clothes,
armor, and weapons.

Dejected silence.

TIBERIUS

So the sooner we find the slaves
and capture them, the sooner life
will be as it once was.

Cheers.

TIBERIUS

My soldiers... it is time for war!

The men go hysterical. Tiberius turns to Serria.

TIBERIUS

Bring me the skeletons.

CUT TO:

EXT. PINE FOREST - DAY

The slave army rests against trees. Several Tor, Solari, and humans stand guard. Zechariah and Mark stand alone.

ZECHARIAH

We'll have to move at night. Too many patrols during the day.

MARK

I'm mapping out a route through the villages. We can request reinforcements.

Rillic joins them.

RILLIC

Two hundred and forty. Including us.

ZECHARIAH

More than expected.

RILLIC

We are eager for battle.

MARK

We need to figure out how to survive first.

ZECHARIAH

Rillic, do you know of anywhere we can get supplies?

RILLIC

Yes, yes. My people in the swamps. If they decide to help.

ZECHARIAH

They will. Do you know of the skeletons?

Rillic's eyes turn to stone.

RILLIC

Yes.

ZECHARIAH

Several days ago they went to the swamps and killed several Solari. Including children.

Rillic looks away.

ZECHARIAH

Tell your people if they want a chance for vengeance, this is it.

CUT TO:

INT. CASTLE - HIGH TOWER BALCONY - DAY

The skeletons, in crimson cloaks, bow before Tiberius and Serria.

TIBERIUS

I have a mission for you pitiful minions.

PATRICK

And we have to do this because...

TIBERIUS

No living being can do it.

SKELETON THE SECOND

Ah, the advantages of immortality. The last day of being human was the best of my life...

TIBERIUS

How touching. Now, you will be given horses, and --

REGIS

Pardon the interruption, Lord, but horses won't bear us.

SKELETON THE FIRST

Too frightened.

TIBERIUS

Of course.

Ghosty shrugs.

GHOSTY
Guess we can't go after all.

TIBERIUS
(annoyed)
You will go.

He leans forward.

TIBERIUS
You'll just have to walk.

CUT TO:

EXT. PLAINS - DAY

The skeletons march single-file through the fields. Regis and Patrick have been given short swords. They are all armed.

REGIS
I can't believe they got to
Balthazar first!

PATRICK
Stop complaining. They did our
dirty work for us.

SKELETON THE SECOND
Yeah, and your idea never would
have worked anyway.

REGIS
What? How dare you!

SKELETON THE SECOND
Dressing Balthazar up as an escaped
slave and having the archers shoot
him down?!

They laugh at Regis.

GHOSTY
In the three hundred years we've
known each other, that's got to be
the stupidest --

REGIS
OK! OK! I get it.

SKELETON THE FIRST
My bones are killing me.

PATRICK
Stop complaining. We'll be there in
another few days.

GHOSTY
We haven't seen a village or a
person or even so much as a tree in
forever!

SKELETON THE SECOND
Shut up, Ghosty.

SKELETON THE FIRST
What makes Tiberius think we can
train those creatures once we're
there?

PATRICK
He's just getting us out of the
castle.

GHOSTY
Everyone hates us.

SKELETON THE SECOND
He probably thinks they'll be
afraid of us. And then just do what
we say.

PATRICK
Yeah, right.

REGIS
Well, if we can train them, that
would give us considerable power,
wouldn't it?

PATRICK
Here we go again.

SKELETON THE SECOND
More likely we'll get eaten.

SKELETON THE FIRST
We've never experienced that
before. You think that could finish
us?

SKELETON THE SECOND
I'd rather not find out.

CUT TO:

EXT. VILLAGE - DAY

Zechariah, Mark, and a company of twenty slaves march in. People stare in amazement. Whisper. Point. A few lock themselves inside their homes.

The company halts and Zechariah jogs to an overturned wagon and jumps up.

ZECHARIAH
Good people, please listen to me.
My name is Zechariah. I was once an
Imperial soldier.

Resentful murmurs.

ZECHARIAH
My friend Mark and I betrayed
Balthazar. We have killed him.

Murmurs of alarm. And joy.

ZECHARIAH
Right now, Tiberius' army is
preparing to march. They are
tracking us, the army of former
slaves. We have freed every one!

Excitement.

ZECHARIAH
They will need more slaves. That
means they will be heading here.

Fearful cries.

ZECHARIAH
My father was one of you. So was
Mark's. They fought for these lands
when Balthazar invaded. I ask
you... take up arms with us now!

A mix of cheers and scared murmurs.

ZECHARIAH
Defend your families from slavery.
And we'll take back the land that
(MORE)

ZECHARIAH (cont'd)
was stolen from us! Take back your
freedom!

Shouts of agreement.

ZECHARIAH
If there was ever a day to fight
for what is rightfully yours, it is
today. Together we can defeat the
Imperium! Will you not join us?

The crowd roars. Zechariah pumps a fist in the air
victoriously. Mark just smiles.

CUT TO:

MONTAGE - DAY

Tiberius rides on his horse. Leads the Imperial army from
the castle and through the cliffs. Gracchus rides with him.

The skeletons journey far, through the plains and into the
mountains, bickering all the way.

Rillic leads a swarm of five hundred Solari along the
branches of the marshes.

Serria sits on Tiberius' throne in the castle, enjoying food
and drink, surrounded by gold and beautiful women.

Tiberius sends soldiers with dogs ahead of the army.

A herd of forty Tor CRASHES through the FOREST, leaving a
trail of destruction in its wake.

CUT TO:

EXT. MOUNTAIN RANGE - DAY

The skeletons stand before a small cave entrance on the face
of a mountain. They cling together in terror.

PATRICK
Do you think anyone's home?

REGIS
I hope not!

SKELETON THE FIRST
We should have brought food.

GHOSTY
You said it. I'm starving.

SKELETON THE SECOND
You don't have a stomach, idiot.

SKELETON THE FIRST
Not for us! For the --

An EVIL GROWL from the cave. The skeletons whimper.

PATRICK
Do you think they're hungry?

REGIS
Weapons, boys!

The skeletons ready their arms. A LOUDER GROWL.

SKELETON THE SECOND
Why us? Why us?

SKELETON THE FIRST
I'm too young to die!

REGIS
Steady!

Two dark, leathery-skinned dragons emerge from the cave. Eight feet long, six-foot tails, twenty-foot wingspans. Each with two pairs of wings. As they SNAP their TEETH, FIRE BURSTS from their mouths.

The skeletons shriek. The dragons crawl forward.

CUT TO:

EXT. FOREST - DAY

Gracchus walks away from the trackers and their dogs, who investigate an old campsite. Gracchus salutes Tiberius.

TIBERIUS
How long since they broke camp?

GRACCHUS
Three days, Lord. The trail splits into three directions: south, southwest, west.

TIBERIUS

Excellent. They've divided, hoping some will escape me. But they underestimate our numbers.

GRACCHUS

Orders?

TIBERIUS

We'll follow all three trails. You take a third and go south. Edwards the Mad will go west. I shall go southwest.

GRACCHUS

Sovereign, if I may, if you weaken us --

TIBERIUS

They have two hundred slaves, Gracchus! A third of my army could easily wipe out their force.

GRACCHUS

But surely the traitors know our strength --

TIBERIUS

You would be wise to stop arguing with me, Emperor.

Gracchus hesitates, but nods and marches off.

CUT TO:

EXT. MOUNTAIN RANGE - DAY

The skeletons backpedal. The DRAGONS ROAR and the skeletons scream.

REGIS

We're all gonna die! We're all gonna die!

The dragons are suddenly silent. They regard Regis with curiosity. They put their noses inches from his skull.

Regis coughs.

REGIS

Oh! You beasts smell terrible!

The DRAGONS take massive SNIFFS. The skeletons catch Regis before he's sucked forward from the force of the nostrils.

GHOSTY

Good Regis! Whatever you're doing,
keep it up!

SKELETON THE SECOND

They can tell we're not food!

The dragons nudge them playfully.

PATRICK

I think they like us!

SKELETON THE FIRST

It must be my rugged good looks...

REGIS

Don't be an idiot! They've just
never seen anything like us before.

The dragons lie down. Watch the skeletons intently.

SKELETON THE FIRST

Now what?

SKELETON THE SECOND

Now we see if these beasts can be
tamed!

Patrick steps around the dragons to the cave entrance.

REGIS

Hey, what are you doing?

PATRICK

Dragons sometimes guard treasures,
you know, so --

Patrick stops and stares. The cave is massive, as if the entire mountain was hollowed out. Within, thousands of dragons lie on top of each other, squirming and COUGHING UP FIRE.

CUT TO:

EXT. PINE FOREST - NIGHT

Tiberius stands alone, deep in thought. Two soldiers accompany Imperator Vault to the Sovereign. Vault bows. The soldiers leave.

VAUL

You sent for me, my Sovereign?

TIBERIUS

Yes, Imperator. I have an assignment for you.

VAUL

Anything, my Lord.

TIBERIUS

I put you in Gracchus' army for a reason...

VAUL

Yes?

TIBERIUS

Gracchus continues to question my authority. He's a threat to my rule. March south with him until tomorrow night, then stab him in his tent.

VAUL

I'd be delighted to, my Lord.

Tiberius hands him a parchment.

TIBERIUS

These are orders for you to take over his force and continue the hunt for the traitors.

VAUL

It will be done, Sire.

CUT TO:

EXT. PLAINS - DAY

Zechariah and Mark stand on a hill watching a Tor charge toward them. Rillic comes up the hill behind them.

MARK

Our scout approaches, Rillic.

RILLIC

The army is ready.

ZECHARIAH

Good. I'll lead the humans. We'll let them see us first, coming over the hills. They'll charge. Mark will come in with the Tor from the left. Rillic, half of your Solari will come in from the right. The rest will be reserves, behind my group.

Mark grins at Rillic.

MARK

Try not to accidentally bump into anyone.

The scout arrives.

ZECHARIAH

What did you see?

The TOR ROARS and BEATS HIS CHEST.

ZECHARIAH

Sounds like they're on their way.

MARK

Let's just hope we fooled them and we're not facing their full strength.

CUT TO:

EXT. PLAINS - DAY

EDWARDS THE MAD rides forward, squinting at the slave army on the horizon. His army is arrayed in battle formation behind him. He pulls forth his sword.

EDWARDS

Let Tiberius and Gracchus take as many prisoners as they please. Personally, I'd rather see this little band in pieces than in chains!

The men cheer. POUND WEAPONS on SHIELDS.

EDWARDS

Remember, Tiberius wants the heads
of Zechariah and Mark! Let's not
disappoint him! Charge!

The Imperial army marches.

CUT TO:

INT. CASTLE - THRONE ROOM - DAY

Serria paces the room. A scribe writes what the first
imperator dictates.

SERRIA

Imperator Gracchus. I have a
proposal for you. Since Tiberius
has left me in command of the
castle, the men are now loyal to
me. They are indeed angry with
Tiberius for leaving them out of
the war. I am going to make my rule
permanent. All that stands in my
way is, of course, Tiberius. If you
eliminate him, I shall appoint you
my first imperator and give you
more power than you ever dreamed.

Serria sits on the throne.

SERRIA

Signed, Serria, the new Sovereign
of the Imperium.

CUT TO:

EXT. PLAINS - DAY

Zechariah raises his sword and points at Edwards' oncoming
army.

ZECHARIAH

To battle!

The slave army cheers and runs. Edwards' army runs. As the
armies draw near, Mark sprints from the hills on the left
with fifty wrathful Tor. Rillic appears on the right and
charges in with the Solari.

CRASH!

Zechariah' force CLASHES with the Imperials. Zechariah is a whirlwind of destruction, SMASHING his SWORD into Imperial troops with unrivaled strength.

Edwards notices Mark and the Tor. A slave attacks Edwards with a spear, which he sidesteps. Edwards SLAYS the slave and notices Rillic and the swarm of Solari. He grits his teeth and battles harder.

CUT TO:

EXT. FOREST - DAY

Gracchus marches with his force. A commotion at the back of the army. Vault nears Gracchus.

VAULT
A rider approaches.

Gracchus holds up his hand and the army halts. A MESSENGER on horseback arrives.

MESSENGER
Imperator Gracchus.

The Messenger holds out a parchment.

MESSENGER
From Imperator Serria.

Gracchus eyes the letter. Takes it. The Messenger rides back. Gracchus looks at his men.

GRACCHUS
Take a rest.

Gracchus steps away. Opens the letter. Upon reading it, a look of greed enters his eyes.

CUT TO:

EXT. PLAINS - DAY

Zechariah SLICES through HELMETS, SHIELDS, and BLADES. The TOR arrive and swing their arms and tails, leaping through the air, CRUSHING the enemy, ROARING and SHRIEKING.

Mark is the fastest moving object on the battlefield; he doesn't bother blocking sword thrusts. He dodges them and strikes.

The SOLARI leap into the fray, HISSING SAVAGELY, SPEWING POISON.

The Imperials are steadily surrounded.

Edwards whirls around, astonished. A Solarian reaches him and SCRATCHES his arm. Edwards shouts in pain and CHOPS DOWN the Solarian. Edwards drops his shield; his arm can no longer hold it. Poison spreads across the limb.

Zechariah and Mark meet in the midst of battle and work together. Rillic shows surprising savagery. His colors, sapphire and black, have returned. His poison, too.

CUT TO:

EXT. PLAINS - DAY

Tiberius leads his force. Soldiers look at the sky and point. Tiberius stops his horse. Squints into the sun. Two black objects soar toward them.

The soldiers shout. Tiberius raises a hand.

TIBERIUS
Don't be cowards!

SOLDIER
What are those?

Tiberius smiles wide.

TIBERIUS
It's the skeletons.

CUT TO:

EXT. PLAINS - DAY

Edwards watches his army get torn apart. Zechariah and Mark haven't been touched. They do not appear to be tiring. Rillic has been cut on the head, but continues on. The Tor approach Edwards.

Edwards turns and runs.

The Imperials fight for their lives.

Edwards is STRUCK in the back of the head by FIST. He gasps and collapses. Poison crawls around his neck. Rillic leaps past him. Moves off to kill others.

The Imperials wildly try to flee from battle. Surrounded, there is no escape.

CUT TO:

EXT. PLAINS - DAY

Tiberius laughs as the dragons, one with Skeleton the First and Skeleton the Second on its back, the other with Ghosty, Regis, and Patrick, land before him.

Tiberius' soldiers back up.

TIBERIUS

My skeletons! You have accomplished your task.

The skeletons dismount.

REGIS

Yes, Lord Sovereign! We have the key to defeating the traitors.

TIBERIUS

You fool, we have more than enough men to handle them. I need the dragons for better purposes now.

PATRICK

Who shall we destroy, my Lord?

TIBERIUS

My scouts have told me the slaves received reinforcements from several villages throughout the Imperium.

SKELETON THE FIRST

Yes...

TIBERIUS

You will take the dragons to each and every village that helped our enemies.

GHOSTY

(excited)

Yes...

TIBERIUS

You will burn them to the ground.

The skeletons grin wickedly.

REGIS
All right!

Regis turns to the skeletons. They mount the dragons.

REGIS
Let's go, boys!

The DRAGONS BEAT their WINGS and take flight. The skeletons cackle with laughter.

CUT TO:

EXT. PINE FOREST - NIGHT

Gracchus' soldiers sleep in the grass. Sentries march back and forth.

Vaul opens his eyes. Watches a sentry go by. He stealthily rises. Sneaks into Gracchus' tent. He pulls out his sword and approaches Gracchus' bed. He stops.

Empty.

Vaul turns and rushes out of the tent.

THWAK!

Gracchus buries his sword in Vaul's chest.

CUT TO:

EXT. VILLAGE - NIGHT

The town is aflame.

The skeletons laugh evilly as they kill and steal. The DRAGONS circle high above, diving in and BELCHING FIRE onto thatched roofs.

Villagers scream and flee. Some try to fight, but are either slain by the skeletons or burned by the dragons.

CUT TO:

EXT. PINE FOREST - NIGHT

Gracchus pours water onto his sword. Washes away the blood. A NOISE makes Gracchus turn toward the thick trees. He readies his sword as the TREES RUSTLE. Something draws nearer.

Suddenly a terrified horse bursts forth. The army awakes at its NEIGHING. Gracchus grabs its reigns. Calms it.

SENTRY

Where did he come from?

Gracchus looks over the horse in horror. Dried blood cakes the animal. Gracchus opens the saddlebag and gasps.

Edwards' head.

CUT TO:

EXT. VILLAGE - DAY

Zechariah, Mark, and Rillic walk through the streets. The slave army, in high spirits, have made themselves at home among the peasants.

ZECHARIAH

The two remaining forces have reunited.

RILLIC

Not good. Can't beat so big an army.

MARK

I agree. How many do we have now?

RILLIC

Six hundred after the battle. But villagers here want to join.

MARK

We can't face Tiberius. We're still outnumbered two to one.

ZECHARIAH

They've practically sent the whole army after us.

RILLIC

The whole army?

They stop.

RILLIC

If the whole army chases us, how many left in the castle?

They smile wide.

MARK

Not many... not many at all.

ZECHARIAH

But we can't lay siege to a castle that size with only --

Zechariah stops.

MARK

Unless we didn't have to lay siege.

CUT TO:

EXT. PLAINS - DAY

Tiberius in his tent with Gracchus, both red-faced.

TIBERIUS

You shouldn't have come back. The slaves were weakened. You should have crushed them!

GRACCHUS

By the time we found the battlefield, the traitors were four days ahead of us.

TIBERIUS

It was a mistake to let you lead. You imbecile. I should have put Vaul in charge.

GRACCHUS

Funny you should say that.

TIBERIUS

You still haven't explained why he isn't here!

GRACCHUS

He tried to kill me. Unsuccessfully. You wouldn't know anything about that, would you, Tiberius?

TIBERIUS
Address me by my title, swine!

GRACCHUS
If Vaul was under your orders --

TIBERIUS
He wasn't! He acted on his own.

Gracchus glares suspiciously.

TIBERIUS
We must continue the hunt.

GRACCHUS
That would be a mistake. We should
return to the castle.

TIBERIUS
What? Retreat? You fool!

GRACCHUS
We have underestimated their
strength! We don't know --

TIBERIUS
Enough! Are you the Sovereign or am
I?

Gracchus' eyes brighten for an instant.

TIBERIUS
We pursue them. With all haste.

Gracchus smiles mockingly, bows, and storms from the tent.

CUT TO:

EXT. VILLAGE - NIGHT

Zechariah, Mark, and Rillic sneak through trees and over a large hill. They peek over some rocks at the crest of the hill.

The skeletons relax around a small fire in a clearing. The dragons sleep beside them.

Zechariah and Mark look at each other in amazement.

Patrick prods the fire with his foot.

PATRICK

This is more fun than I've had in a long time.

REGIS

Yeah, this is the life!

SKELETON THE FIRST

Tiberius is great. We have way more power than ever before.

REGIS

Well, duh.

SKELETON THE SECOND

Who can stop us with these babies?

They sigh happily.

Suddenly, all five bolt upright and stare at each other.

REGIS

Who... can... stop...

PATRICK

Us...

Regis laughs.

REGIS

That's it! You're a genius, Second!

GHOSTY

Why didn't we think of this before?

SKELETON THE FIRST

Well done, brother!

REGIS

Tiberius isn't great. He's an idiot! He's given us the means to take the throne for ourselves.

Skeleton the Second bows.

SKELETON THE SECOND

Thank you, thank you.

PATRICK

We fly back to the castle, fry Serria --

GHOSTY

And anyone else who tries to stop
us.

REGIS

The men will be too terrified to
fight. They'll beg us to lead.

PATRICK

But what about Tiberius?

REGIS

We'll have the castle, the gold,
everything. Who cares about him?

GHOSTY

Yes!

SKELETON THE FIRST

Let's go. Right now!

The skeletons rise. Smother the fire. Climb up the beasts.

Zechariah, Mark, and Rillic roll under a tree as the DRAGONS
BEAT their WINGS.

The dragons rise into the air and soar past the moon; the
skeletons hold on tight.

CUT TO:

EXT. PLAINS - NIGHT

Tiberius sleeps in his tent. He awakens in fright when a
sword touches his neck. Gracchus stands over him.

GRACCHUS

Make a sound, and I slit your
throat.

TIBERIUS

You traitor. You're no better than
Zechariah and Mark.

GRACCHUS

Stand up.

Tiberius rises and Gracchus walks him toward the exit.

TIBERIUS

The men will kill you for this.

GRACCHUS

If Balthazar was known for his brutality, you are known for your incompetence. The men will thank me. After all, you just lost a third of our army to slaves.

Gracchus pushes Tiberius out of the tent. The tent is unguarded. They head away from the army.

GRACCHUS

See? Not even your guards care what happens to you.

TIBERIUS

Where are they?

GRACCHUS

I gave them ale. They're giving me the throne.

TIBERIUS

You have no power! Serria --

GRACCHUS

Serria is weak. He wanted me to kill you. He'll appoint me first imperator. Then I'll kill him. Easy as that.

TIBERIUS

You'll ruin the Imperium!

GRACCHUS

Zechariah and Mark were my bodyguards for years. I know them best. I can crush them.

TIBERIUS

I demand you release me!

Gracchus throws Tiberius to the ground.

TIBERIUS

Gracchus! Don't do this. I'll name you first imperator. Put you in charge of killing the traitors! Please!

GRACCHUS

I didn't expect groveling from you, Tiberius. Serria maybe, but not you.

TIBERIUS

Don't... don't kill me. Please.

Gracchus smirks and swings his sword.

CUT TO:

MONTAGE - DAY

Zechariah, Mark, and Rillic lead the army through the plains toward the castle.

The skeletons soar over the cliffs to the top of the castle. Soldiers shout and run in terror. The DRAGONS SCORCH them. Men leap from the ramparts to avoid the flames.

The slave army draws closer to the cliffs on the horizon. Griffins follow them, eager to scavenge.

The skeletons bicker in the throne room, all trying to sit on the throne at once. The dragons guard the doors, happily chewing on Serria's body.

Gracchus' army marches through the forest toward the castle.

CUT TO:

EXT. PINE FOREST - DAY

The Messenger rides toward Gracchus' army. Gracchus rides forward to meet him. The Messenger is bloody, dirty, tired.

GRACCHUS

What's happened?

MESSENGER

It's those mangy skeletons! They -- where's Tiberius?

GRACCHUS

I killed him, of course. Now what about the skeletons?

MESSENGER

They're at the castle! Their dragons... they've killed sixty, seventy men. They killed Serria.

Gracchus brightens.

MESSENGER

They command the castle. With those
beasts, we can't defeat them!

GRACCHUS

Well, it's a good thing we're on
our way.

MESSENGER

There's something else, Emperor.

GRACCHUS

That's "Sovereign" to you.

MESSENGER

Yes, Sovereign. It's the slave
army.

GRACCHUS

What about it?

MESSENGER

I passed it yesterday. They too
head for the castle.

Gracchus smiles.

CUT TO:

EXT. PLAINS - DAY

Mark paces angrily. Zechariah, Rillic, and the rest of the
army watch him.

ZECHARIAH

Who knows how they found us. Or how
they caught up to us so fast.

RILLIC

They must be returning to the
castle. They are less than a day
behind.

ZECHARIAH

What do we do?

Mark stops pacing. Stretches his legs.

MARK

We run.

CUT TO:

INT. CASTLE - THRONE ROOM - NIGHT

The skeletons, all wearing black cloaks, sit in five identical thrones. Gold coins and jewels flood the room. The dragons sleep peacefully.

Regis throws gold pieces into the air and laughs.

REGIS

The entire treasury is ours!

SKELETON THE FIRST

The castle is ours!

PATRICK

We did it!

REGIS

Now. The first order of business...

SKELETON THE SECOND

All the women now belong to us.

REGIS

Oh. I had forgotten, Sovereign Skeleton the Second. Thank you.

SKELETON THE SECOND

You're perfectly welcome, Sovereign Regis.

REGIS

Second order of business. We should find some halfwit to oversee the duties we don't want to do.

GHOSTY

Like feeding these worthless mortals.

REGIS

Exactly. Guards!

Two soldiers step carefully into the room. The DRAGONS awake and ROAR at them. The soldiers cower.

REGIS

Down boys.

The dragons lie down, but watch.

PATRICK
 Guards, find Jackal for us.

The other skeletons nod their agreement.

PATRICK
 He always treated us like we
 weren't even human.

Skeleton the First gives him a look, but refuses to bite.

REGIS
 Go get him!

The guards bow and all but run from the room.

CUT TO:

EXT. PLAINS - DAY

The slave army has nearly reached the cliffs. Mark raises his hand. The men halt, exhausted.

ZECHARIAH
 We won't be able to fight after
 running all day!

Mark is not tired.

MARK
 We're almost there!

ZECHARIAH
 Even if we can take the castle,
 we'll have Tiberius' army at the
 door.

He points to Gracchus' army on the horizon behind them.

MARK
 What else can we do? We're about to
 be swallowed up. Our only hope is
 to take the castle while we still
 have the chance, and hold it. Let's
 go!

Mark runs ahead. Zechariah waves the army forward.

CUT TO:

EXT. PLAINS - DAY

Gracchus rides with the Messenger, ahead of his fast-marching force.

MESSENGER

They're fools to think they can take the castle, my Lord.

GRACCHUS

Yet they still head for it, even with us threatening to crush them against the walls. They know something. They're well-planned.

MESSENGER

Will the skeletons use their beasts to help?

GRACCHUS

The skeletons will do whatever it takes to keep their power. They'll defend the castle. We'll defeat Zechariah and Mark, and then those treacherous skeletons.

The Imperial army swarms past several men from the slave army who collapsed, SLICING THEM TO PIECES.

CUT TO:

EXT. CLIFFS - DAY

The slave army pours down the road. Zechariah and Mark reach the entrance to Balthazar's secret passage and stop. The army runs after Rillic into the opening.

ZECHARIAH

Don't be afraid! It's narrow, you can't get lost.

MARK

Zec! Will the Tor fit?

A Tor arrives at the entrance and is forced to crawl into it.

MARK

That'll slow us down.

PATRICK
AAAAAAAAAAAAAH!

REGIS
Tiberius? No!

Jackal grins.

SKELETON THE SECOND
Prepare all the defenses.

PATRICK
Arm every soldier.

Jackal heads for the door.

JACKAL
You should get on the dragons and
make yourselves useful.

REGIS
What do we do?

SKELETON THE FIRST
Stay here!

SKELETON THE SECOND
Agreed!

PATRICK
You two agree on everything.

REGIS
They're right. If we can defend
this room, no one can take our
power from us. Not Zechariah, Mark,
or Tiberius!

CUT TO:

EXT. CLIFFS - DAY

Still a hundred men filing into the cave.

ZECHARIAH
We're not gonna make it.

He whirls around at the sound of RUNNING FEET.

ZECHARIAH
Hurry, hurry, they're upon us!

The slaves begin squeezing into the cave in a panic, two at a time.

Zechariah pulls out his sword. The remaining eighty soldiers do the same.

ZECHARIAH
We'll fight them off and give Mark
a chance.

CUT TO:

INT. CASTLE - THRONE ROOM - DAY

The skeletons have armed themselves and sit nervously on their thrones.

PATRICK
What's happening out there?

REGIS
Where's Jackal? That idiot's
abandoned us!

Ghosty awakes. Bolts upright.

GHOSTY
Do you guys hear something?

SKELETON THE FIRST
Take it easy, big guy. You just
fainted.

GHOSTY
No, listen!

They listen.

SKELETON THE SECOND
I don't hear any --

SCREECH!

Regis and Patrick's thrones move forward. The DRAGONS approach, GROWLING.

REGIS
What the --

The TWO THRONES are thrown over and SMASH to the ground.

Rillic leaps inside. The skeletons scream as the slave army pours in.

Rillic looks in terror at the dragons for an instant, then charges.

RILLIC

Attack!

The DRAGONS ROAR.

REGIS

Don't make them angry! They'll
toast us all!

The slave army charges. The dragons tear slaves apart. A Tor makes it through the entrance and leaps onto a dragon, biting its neck. A Solarian SPITS VENOM in one of the dragon's eyes.

The skeletons attack, but are subdued by Solari.

The slaves HACK AWAY at the dragons. They CUT OFF one's head and PIERCE the other's heart. The decapitated one falls and writhes on the floor. The other fights on, BLASTING a PILLAR OF FIRE into the room.

Rillic barely avoids the flames. A dozen slaves and the Tor are afire. Slaves collapse. Allies try to put out the flames. The TOR SHRIEKS in pain. Rushes the dragon. Wrestles it to the ground. The dragon bites its neck and kills it.

Rillic FIRES POISON into the last dragon's mouth and it COLLAPSES.

More slaves push inside. Rillic leaps to the doors and takes off right. Slaves pour into the halls right and left.

CUT TO:

EXT. CLIFFS - DAY

Gracchus gallops around the bend and pulls his horse to a stop.

Zechariah and the eighty slaves block the road. Gracchus is shocked to see the cave entrance. Soldiers crowd behind him. Eager to kill.

ZECHARIAH

What took you so long?

GRACCHUS

You're a good bodyguard but a
foolish commander, my dear boy.

(MORE)

GRACCHUS (cont'd)
 You've put your army in a
 bottleneck. We shall sweep into the
 tunnel and it will be a massacre.

ZECHARIAH
 Not before you get through me.

GRACCHUS
 That shouldn't take long. Can
 eighty men stand against twelve
 hundred?

ZECHARIAH
 What happened to Tiberius, by the
 way?

GRACCHUS
 Prepare to charge, men!

ZECHARIAH
 Oh, come, Gracchus. Be a man. Fight
 me.

GRACCHUS
 You know me, Zechariah. And I know
 you. I am no match for you.

ZECHARIAH
 Coward. Fight me!

GRACCHUS
 You will learn that a wise leader
 never lets pride get in the way.
 Men, kill him!

The Imperials charge. The two forces CLASH.

CUT TO:

INT. CASTLE - THRONE ROOM - DAY

Mark enters from the tunnel. Steps to where the skeletons
 are held hostage by Solari. He bows.

MARK
 My Lords.

REGIS
 Very funny.

Mark turns to the Solari.

MARK
Don't let them escape.

SKELETON THE SECOND
You're an idiot, you know.

The other skeletons gasp.

PATRICK
Shut up, you!

GHOSTY
What are you doing?

MARK
Excuse me?

SKELETON THE SECOND
Don't you realize that Tiberius is coming after you? He'll swarm the castle through your own secret passage!

Mark bites his lip.

REGIS
Don't help him! He's the enemy!

MARK
He's right. What were we thinking?

The skeletons laugh.

MARK
We weren't thinking. We were running.

Mark looks at the entrance

SKELETON THE SECOND
Shouldn't have come. You've doomed yourselves!

MARK
If we hadn't been followed it would have worked.

Mark is about to continue, but stops.

MARK
Why am I arguing with you?

Skeleton the Second shrugs.

Slaves continue arriving.

CUT TO:

INT. CASTLE - COURTYARD - DAY

Rillic and the slaves rush into battle with the Imperials. Rillic whirls and lunges, spewing venom. Two Tor enter the fray. Rillic turns to them.

RILLIC
Brace the gates! The army arrives!

The TOR ROAR. Run off.

Rillic SLASHES an Imperial across the face. Poison melts his eyes.

CUT TO:

EXT. CLIFFS - DAY

Twenty slaves remain. A hundred Imperials lie dead. The Imperials push them back toward the passage.

ZECHARIAH
Get into the cave!

The slaves sprint for the entrance.

Zechariah enters last, the Imperials close on his heels. He turns at the opening and slays Imperials until a pile of soldiers makes it difficult for others to approach.

Zechariah runs back a few steps. Readies his sword. Swings upward with all his might.

SMASH!

The SWORD strikes the CEILING. CRACKS SPLINTER in all directions.

Zechariah runs.

The PASSAGEWAY COLLAPSES at the entrance, burying Imperials. The CAVE CRUMBLES, sealing itself completely.

CUT TO:

EXT. CLIFFS - DAY

Gracchus and his army reach the gates.

MESSENGER

They've sealed the gates, my Lord.

GRACCHUS

I can see that!

MESSENGER

What do we do?

GRACCHUS

We break them down, of course.

MESSENGER

We lay siege to our own castle,
Sovereign?

Gracchus turns to his men.

GRACCHUS

Assemble battering rams!

CUT TO:

EXT. CASTLE - RAMPARTS - DAY

Zechariah and Mark reunite with Rillic in the chaos.
Imperials surround them, but together the trio is
unstoppable.

The slave army is winning.

CUT TO:

INT. CASTLE - THRONE ROOM - DAY

The skeletons huddle together. Six Solari watch them.

SKELETON THE FIRST

Do you think they can understand
us?

The Solari offer no reaction.

REGIS

Let's find out. Hey, you ugly
wort-ridden slime-bags! The
Sovereign will peel the skin off

(MORE)

REGIS (cont'd)
 your bones. You'll hiss for mercy
 till Death strangles you.

The Solari regard him with suspicion.

GHOSTY
 I don't think they can.

SKELETON THE SECOND
 We have to get out of here.

PATRICK
 And do what? Take on the slaves
 ourselves?

REGIS
 We have to open the gates for
 Tiberius!

GHOSTY
 We don't have any weapons.

REGIS
 You may not have any... but we do.

Regis grabs one of his RIBS and BREAKS IT OFF.

REGIS
 Ow.

The other skeletons do the same and rise. The SOLARI HISS
 and attack. The skeletons savagely BEAT them.

The Solari are slain. The skeletons dart out the doors.

CUT TO:

EXT. CASTLE - SPIRE - DAY

Mark STABS the final standing Imperial. The slaves let out a
 mighty cheer, waving their weapons in the air.

Zechariah looks down into the courtyard. The skeletons
 scamper over corpses toward the gates.

ZECHARIAH
 Mark! They're heading for the
 gates!

Mark is a blur.

CUT TO:

EXT. CASTLE - COURTYARD - DAY

The skeletons stop. Two Tor hold the gates against a battering ram.

PATRICK
Ghosty, it's all you, buddy!

The skeletons push him forward.

GHOSTY
I don't know...

Regis points.

REGIS
It's Mark! He's coming!

SKELETON THE FIRST
Go, Ghosty! Go!

Ghosty sprints toward the Tor. They unsuccessfully try to crush him. He reaches the gate and unlocks it. He raises his frail arms in victory.

A BATTERING RAM SMASHES against the DOORS, flattening Ghosty.

Mark reaches the skeletons. The enemy floods in.

MARK
No!

Mark and the Tor attack. Zechariah, Rillic, and the slaves arrive and battle desperately.

The skeletons watch the fray. They SNAP their RIBS BACK IN. Laugh evilly.

CUT TO:

INT. CASTLE - THRONE ROOM - NIGHT

Gracchus, in a black cloak, sits on one of the five thrones. Imperials crowd the room. Blood and burn marks still stain the floor and walls.

Zechariah and Mark are in heavy iron chains, bloody, weak. Their guards hold spears to their necks.

GRACCHUS

You led us on quite a chase. And
you gave us a good war.

The soldiers chuckle.

GRACCHUS

But you're defeated. Your army
vanquished. Did you actually think
you could bring down the Imperium?
The greatest empire in the world,
that will last a thousand years?

Zechariah and Mark look at each other through swollen eyes.
Gracchus rises.

GRACCHUS

I am going to have a victory
celebration. The first event will
be the execution of the surviving
slaves.

A cold silence.

MARK

You... you need them.

GRACCHUS

I need stability. I will make sure
we never have another slave
uprising again.

ZECHARIAH

Don't do this.

GRACCHUS

I shall keep you alive only long
enough to watch them all die. Then
it's your turn. And you will suffer
greater than any men have ever
suffered.

ZECHARIAH

You should kill us now. While you
have the chance.

Gracchus smirks and motions to the guards, who drag the
prisoners away.

CUT TO:

INT. CASTLE - DUNGEON - NIGHT

Zechariah and Mark huddle next to each other in the cramped cell, still in chains.

MARK

I shouldn't have dragged you into this.

ZECHARIAH

Where would you be without me?

Mark shrugs.

MARK

Probably dead.

ZECHARIAH

Exactly.

Mark looks in the corner of the cell. He crawls to the corner and pulls the bright green leaf out of the water.

ZECHARIAH

Um, it's a leaf.

MARK

No, it's not.

Mark hands it to him.

ZECHARIAH

Wow. It's beautiful. Who would make something like this?

The leaf glows green.

MARK

What the --

Zechariah swallows.

ZECHARIAH

Sorcery.

They watch in wonder.

MARK

What if... what if this is his?

Zechariah stares at him in horror.

ZECHARIAH
The wizard.

CUT TO:

EXT. CASTLE - RAMPARTS - NIGHT

Regis and Patrick stand watch near the gates. They once again wear crimson cloaks. Patrick sighs.

PATRICK
Sure was a great war.

REGIS
Yes it was.

PATRICK
I still don't understand how we're not in the dungeon.

REGIS
Gracchus is a reasonable guy. Since we opened the gates and saved the castle for him, he figured we'd made up for taking power.

PATRICK
Lucky for us.

REGIS
Yup, we saved the day. We're the ones who really captured those traitors.

PATRICK
You're right! Where's our reward?

Suddenly the WIND HOWLS from the cliffs. A mist falls upon the castle. The two skeletons look about in fear.

REGIS
What was that?

PATRICK
Down there. Look!

An old hooded man hobbles through the mist toward the gates.

REGIS
I say! Who goes there?

The old man ignores him. The old man casts back his cloak. The skeletons recoil in terror.

PATRICK
It... it... it's him!

REGIS
EEEEEEEEEEK!

Regis' scream is drowned out by a CLAP OF THUNDER.

The old man raises his hands and the GATES CRACK and SPLINTER.

REGIS
Blow the horn! Blow the horn!

Patrick snatches the HORN on the wall.

UUURRRRRR! The THUNDER BOOMS, hiding the horn's call.

The GATES FALL and the old man shuffles into the castle. The skeletons run off into the mist.

The old man looks around. Hobbles through the courtyard.

Soldiers march down the stairs from the ramparts and surround him.

A GREAT WIND SWIRLS around the old man and RAMS the SOLDIERS into the WALLS.

CUT TO:

INT. CASTLE - THRONE ROOM - NIGHT

Gracchus lounges in the only remaining throne. Regis and Patrick burst into the room.

PATRICK
The old --

REGIS
Man! He's --

PATRICK
Here! He's about --

REGIS
To kill --

PATRICK
Us all!

Gracchus rises.

GRACCHUS

What?

REGIS

It's the Wizard!

Gracchus' eyes go wide with horror.

GRACCHUS

Sound the alarm! All soldiers awake
and to their posts!

CUT TO:

INT. CASTLE - DUNGEON - NIGHT

Zechariah and Mark awake, their cell as bright as day from
the leaf. Soldiers run past their cell, shouting.

A GUST of WIND SMASHES the SOLDIERS against the CEILING and
they fall, unconscious.

The prisoners rise, awestruck.

The old man, the WIZARD, arrives.

MARK

It is him.

The Wizard raises his hand. The CELL DOOR COLLAPSES. He
steps in. Zechariah picks up the leaf.

WIZARD

I'd wondered what happened to that.

ZECHARIAH

You're the wizard Balthazar once
captured.

WIZARD

I'm a hard sleeper. He found me
snoozing in the mountains. Locked
me up here. When I woke up, I was a
little cranky. Left this place an
awful mess.

Zechariah examines the leaf.

ZECHARIAH

What is this thing?

WIZARD

With that little trinket, I can
grow anything, anywhere.

He holds out his hand. Zechariah gives him the leaf. It
grows dull again.

WIZARD

It's a wizard's diamond. Totally
unbreakable.

Four more soldiers run down the hall.

WIZARD

Let's see if I can still use this
baby.

The Wizard pockets it. Raises his hands at the oncoming
troops.

A MASSIVE TREE SPROUTS in the middle of the hall and blocks
them. The Wizard points and laughs at them.

WIZARD

Still good!

Zechariah and Mark shake their heads in amazement.

WIZARD

I'd better be going. Got years of
practicing with this thing to catch
up on.

MARK

Can you take us with you?

WIZARD

What?

ZECHARIAH

They're going to kill us.

The Wizard strokes his beard.

WIZARD

Hmm. Let me think...

ZECHARIAH

Just get us out of the castle. Or
give us swords. Or out of these
chains even.

WIZARD

Hold on, hold on! I have to make
sure this doesn't violate the Code!

MARK

The Code?

The Wizard snaps his fingers. A book appears in his hands.

WIZARD

The Code of Neutrality. Against the
rules to take sides. Have to make
sure freeing you wouldn't give the
enemy an unfair disadvantage.

MARK

We're just two men.

WIZARD

Hmm. I guess you have a point. And
I don't see anything in here
against it.

The book vanishes. So do the heavy iron chains.

WIZARD

Shall we away?

CUT TO:

INT. CASTLE - DUNGEON - NIGHT

Gracchus marches down the hall. Stares at the tree in his
path. It is so strong and thick the soldiers HACKING at it
with AXES have little success.

GRACCHUS

Are they gone then?

The soldiers glance nervously at him. Gracchus growls and
storms back the way he came.

CUT TO:

INT. MOUNTAINS - WIZARD'S CAVE - NIGHT

Zechariah and Mark drink a hot beverage at the wizard's
table. The cave is large, lit with torches. Thick rugs,
leather chairs. On the walls, hundreds of wizard's diamonds.

The Wizard hangs the leaf on the wall.

WIZARD

I couldn't remember where I'd left it. It must have fallen from my pocket in the cell.

MARK

You didn't notice it was missing?

WIZARD

Not for a long time. Years, maybe. I had plenty of diamonds. Inherited from my uncle. I had lots of powers to explore.

The Wizard sits at the table. A drink appears and he sips it.

WIZARD

Lucky for me you boys picked it up. I can't find the bloody things unless someone takes it.

They nod, interested.

WIZARD

So, why were you in prison?

MARK

Long story.

WIZARD

I have an eternity.

CROSSFADE TO:

INT. MOUNTAINS - WIZARD'S CAVE - NIGHT

The Wizard paces. Zechariah and Mark watch him anxiously. The Wizard steps to the wall. Takes down an orange glass bird.

WIZARD

Haven't used this one in a long time.

He points at the floor. A cat appears.

WIZARD

Hello, old friend.

He puts the trinket back.

WIZARD

What you're asking of me is not allowed.

ZECHARIAH

It's the right thing to do.

WIZARD

Neutrality is everything, my sons. If wizards started taking sides you'd see death and destruction so great you wouldn't believe it.

MARK

Can't you help us at all?

WIZARD

I can send you anywhere you wish to go. Somewhere safe.

ZECHARIAH

We're not giving up.

WIZARD

Then I will send you back to fight on. But I won't get involved. There'll be no earthquake under the castle. Not by my doing, anyway.

Zechariah and Mark glance at each other, disappointed.

WIZARD

I'm sorry.

The Wizard goes to his kitchen. Washes dishes.

ZECHARIAH

What do we do now?

Mark shakes his head. Sighs. He is tired. They are both tired.

The Wizard fills a bowl of water and places it on the ground near the cat. The cat drinks. The Wizard sits at the table. Cards appear in his hand.

WIZARD

How about a game of cards before you go?

Zechariah looks at the bowl. The ripples. The water lapping against the side.

WIZARD
Something wrong?

Zechariah grins. Looks at Mark. Then the Wizard.

ZECHARIAH
Could you give us a wave?

WIZARD
A wave? What for?

ZECHARIAH
Would it be against the rules?

WIZARD
I won't flood the castle either.

ZECHARIAH
Just a gigantic wave.

MARK
What are you talking about?

ZECHARIAH
Trust me, Mark.

WIZARD
I don't suppose you'll tell me what
you'll do with it?

Zechariah shakes his head. The Wizard grins.

WIZARD
Well, if I don't know... then I
suppose I wouldn't be breaking any
rules.

The Wizard goes to the wall. Mark eyes Zechariah
questioningly. The Wizard sits.

WIZARD
We'll need this.

The Wizard holds up a plain glass square, sapphire in color.

CUT TO:

INT. CASTLE - THRONE ROOM - NIGHT

The skeletons bow before Gracchus.

GRACCHUS

Other Sovereigns made the mistake
of appointing human beings to
positions of authority.

The skeletons grin.

GRACCHUS

In my Imperium, there will be no
maneuvering for power. I won't have
officers who want nothing but to
kill me and take over.

The skeletons try to look innocent.

GRACCHUS

You're greedy beings, that's good.
But you must also know you can
never be Sovereigns again. The men
won't let you. And you have no more
dragons to help you.

The skeletons nod.

GRACCHUS

So, I am making you all my
Emperors. You may be idiots, but
you can't die, and you can't take
power. You shall be paid well, and
will answer only to me.

The skeletons' jawbones hang open in astonishment.

SKELETON THE SECOND

Make me your first emperor!

REGIS

No, me!

The skeletons incoherently squabble.

GRACCHUS

This is a mistake already.

Regis PUNCHES Skeleton the Second in the SKULL.

GRACCHUS

That's enough! Listen, before I
change my mind.

Instant silence.

GRACCHUS

You will be of equal rank.
Understood?

The skeletons nod.

PATRICK

My Lord, what of the traitors?

GRACCHUS

That they are with the wizard
should not concern us. Not with the
Code of Neutrality still in place.
We will build a new slave compound
within the castle. They'll never
steal from us again.

REGIS

They'll hide in the villages.

GRACCHUS

No. After your work with the
dragons, none will help them. Not
to mention they were defeated.
They're no longer a threat.

GHOSTY

Are you sure?

GRACCHUS

Of course. If we ever learn where
they are, we'll pursue them. But we
won't find them. The wizard could
send them anywhere.

CUT TO:

EXT. BEACH - IMPERIAL DOCKS - NIGHT

Zechariah, Mark, and the Wizard appear on the shore. The
ocean laps at their boots.

WIZARD

Here we are.

MARK

We appreciate it.

WIZARD

Yes, well, I'm just trying not to think of why I brought you here.

ZECHARIAH

Don't.

The Wizard grins.

MARK

Farewell. And thanks.

WIZARD

No goodbyes. I'll be around. I assure you.

He vanishes.

Zechariah and Mark walk unarmed across the sand toward the dock and a massive Imperial warship.

CUT TO:

INT. CASTLE - COURTYARD - DAY

Patrick scrambles across the cobblestones to Gracchus. Patrick, now wearing a dark blue cloak, bows low.

GRACCHUS

Imperator Patrick.

PATRICK

Yes, Lord?

GRACCHUS

Gather the slaves for their execution.

CUT TO:

EXT. OCEAN - WARSHIP - DAY

Mark at the helm. Zechariah drags a dead Imperial sailor across the deck. Throws him overboard. Blood soaks the deck.

MARK

How soon?

Zechariah looks at the sun.

ZECHARIAH

Almost midday. Any minute now.

MARK

Best make it full speed ahead,
then. We've got the wind.

ZECHARIAH

Aye, aye, Captain. Full sails.

Zechariah pulls the ropes above his head. The red sails open and the ship moves swiftly forward.

Mark looks nervously at the ship's heading, straight toward the mighty cliffs on which the castle sits.

CUT TO:

EXT. CLIFFS - DAY

Rillic and a hundred dirty slaves march in solemn rows toward the castle, surrounded by guards. Rillic looks to the ramparts.

The archers prepare their bows. The High Tower balcony and the ramparts are full to the brim with spectators.

Rillic swallows.

CUT TO:

EXT. CASTLE - SPIRE - DAY

The skeletons and Gracchus watch from the spire Zechariah and Mark once leapt from.

The archers fit arrows on their bows. The men jeer at the slaves.

REGIS

Now this is what I call a party!

GRACCHUS

I only wish the traitors were here
to see this.

Gracchus raises his hand.

The archers take aim.

The skeletons snicker.

Behind them, a warship is coming.

CUT TO:

EXT. OCEAN - WARSHIP - DAY

Zechariah gapes at the wave on the horizon. It is easily three hundred feet tall.

ZECHARIAH
By the gods. Here it comes!

Mark turns at the helm. His eyes grow wide.

ZECHARIAH
(wryly)
Think it'll do the job?

MARK
Uh... yeah. I think it'll do.

CUT TO:

EXT. CLIFFS - DAY

Rillic watches the archers take aim.

He closes his eyes.

CUT TO:

EXT. OCEAN - WARSHIP - DAY

The WAVE RACES across the ocean toward the ship. Mark grips the helm with all his might. Zechariah wraps his arms around the mast.

ZECHARIAH
Hold on!

The wave is upon them.

ZECHARIAH
Here we go!

The WAVE CRASHES into the ship.

And picks it up.

CUT TO:

EXT. CASTLE - RAMPARTS - DAY

Gracchus grins. The archers are ready.

The skeletons rub their hands together. Ghosty glances to the ocean. His mouth hangs open.

Ghosty reaches up and tugs at Gracchus' cloak. No response. He tugs harder. Gracchus turns.

GRACCHUS
(annoyed)
What is it now?

Gracchus sees the warship riding the speeding wave straight at them. The Sovereign's jaw drops. The shadow of the warship passes over the castle. The other skeletons turn.

REGIS
Oh no.

CUT TO:

EXT. OCEAN - WARSHIP - DAY

BOOOOOOM!

The WAVE SMASHES against the CLIFF. The WARSHIP RAMS into the CASTLE. The CASTLE BREAKS as the WARSHIP CRASHES through it.

The HIGH TOWER and RAMPARTS COLLAPSE. Soldiers are thrown in all directions, screaming.

The WARSHIP ROLLS OVER the south wall and RAMS into a CLIFF, coming to an abrupt halt.

CUT TO:

EXT. CLIFFS - AERIAL SHOT - DAY

A fallen castle and a useless warship.

Broken bodies, castle stones, and pieces of the warship scattered everywhere.

The soldiers guarding the group of slaves scatter. The slaves cheer mightily.

NARRATOR (V.O.)

The Imperium was defeated. The survivors threw away their weapons and took up lives as villagers, hoping to hide from the wrath of Zechariah and Mark. The skeletons were locked away forever.

Zechariah and Mark, supporting each other, escape the broken warship and limp toward the slaves, who rush to help them.

NARRATOR (V.O.)

The continent was safe again.
Peaceful and free.

Rillic almost embraces the heroes, but thinks better of it. He bows instead.

CUT TO:

INT. CASTLE - DUNGEON - NIGHT

All that is left of the castle are the underground dungeons. All the cell doors are open, save one. All the cells are empty, save one.

Utter silence. The one closed door is not only locked, it is sealed. Reinforced with chains.

Slowly, the translucent hand of Ghosty reaches through the door.

PAN DOWN to the bottom of the door.

Ghosty's feet emerge from the cell, sneaking away. After a moment:

BANG! BANG!

The SOUND of an AX. The CHAINS CLATTER to the GROUND. A KEY is INSERTED. The DOOR UNLOCKED.

It opens.

Four pairs of skeleton feet sneak out of the cell after Ghosty.

FADE OUT.

THE END

