

CORNELIUS

Written by

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Inspired by the Holy Bible

**PREVIEW ONLY**

OVER BLACK

Haunting *ARAB MELODY* plays.

FADE IN:

EXT. BATTLEFIELD - DAY

*SUPER: 32 A.D. Parthia*

Storm clouds mix in with the blood-red setting sun.

A horse flares its nostrils, gallops away. The carnage obscured behind it, now in full view...

Unsightly vision of Hell on Earth. SOLDIERS, Roman and Parthian, crushed and bloody. Wounded and dead figures litter the war ravaged landscape.

CORNELIUS (V.O.)  
My name is Cornelius.

Faint cries for both mercy and death drift out. A few skirmishes carry on here and there. The once mighty battle nearly over.

A cut and calloused hand, encrusted with grime and blood, casually pulls free an ornate Gladius from a Parthian corpse. His leather sandals step over a vanquished enemy.

CORNELIUS (V.O.)  
Servant of the holy Emperor of  
Rome, Tiberius.

CORNELIUS (late 20s) but with the gravity of a man much older, in bronze gilded armor, muscular build, battle-fatigued. He faces off against two PARTHIAN SOLDIERS.

CORNELIUS (V.O.)  
Centurion, Primus Pilus, 1st  
Cohort, Legio Gallica.

With labored breath and hatred in his eyes, Cornelius stares his hesitant enemies down. The standoff makes him impatient.

CORNELIUS  
Well?! I haven't all day!

The two soldiers look at one another, then back at Cornelius. Spears clutched nervously tight, they charge.

With deft swordsmanship, Cornelius parries the wave of incoming blows. He fights them two at a time.

The Parthians thrust wildly. Cornelius takes advantage of their sloppiness, cuts the spear shaft of the nearest attacker clean in two. He plunges his sword into the Parthian's throat.

The second Parthian presses forward with fury. Cornelius loses his footing and as he falls, the Parthian spears him in the hand, shears his fingers clean-off.

CORNELIUS (CONT'D)

Arghh...

Cornelius drops his Gladius, rolls, dodges one spear thrust, rolls, dodges another. He reaches for the broken spear and rams the wooden shaft upward into the Parthian's chest.

The Parthian stares down at the gaping hole, drops his spear and slumps over, dead. Cornelius stands in agony, clutches his injured hand.

He finds his sword, struggles to sheath it. He examines his right hand, the pinky and ring finger now gone. He can't do anything, but laugh.

CORNELIUS (V.O.)

Boys... bested by boys.

Two ROMAN SOLDIERS approach, salute Cornelius.

ROMAN SOLDIER

Are you all right, sir?

Cornelius' face unmoved, limps forward.

CORNELIUS

Fine. Report.

ROMAN SOLDIER

The Parthian army is all but defeated. We are cleaning up the few remaining stragglers.

CORNELIUS

And General Apollos?

ROMAN SOLDIER

Requests your audience at the medical tent, sir.

Cornelius nods, heads toward the rear lines.

ROMAN SOLDIER (CONT'D)

Sir, what shall we do with the prisoners?

Cornelius looks the battlefield over. A cold wind rustles his tattered cape.

CORNELIUS  
Kill them. Kill them all!

*MAIN TITLE: Cornelius*

Fires burn.

CORNELIUS (V.O.)  
Duty, honor, service, for Rome. For my family, for the brother to the left and the right. Those words were ingrained in my inner-fiber.

Burning, embers rise throughout the battlefield.

CORNELIUS (V.O.)  
And now, with one lucky blow, it was all coming to an end, at the hands of Parthian dogs no less.

MATCH CUT TO:

INT. CORNELIUS' HOUSE - NIGHT

*SUPER: Italy, ten years earlier.*

Logs burn in the fireplace. The modest abode with sparse furnishings.

CORNELIUS (V.O.)  
I was sure my service had ended that day, for a warrior cannot fight with only one good hand. But I couldn't be anymore wrong...

Cornelius stares at the fire. His eyes intense, still contain innocence.

His father MAXIMO (40s) weather beaten, portly, an aged warrior of his own right and his mother VITA (40s) elegant, somber, beside Cornelius, drink wine.

Maximo's right arm severed below the elbow, long since healed.

MAXIMO  
The levy came quicker than expected.

Maximo and Cornelius sip their wine.

CORNELIUS

I would have volunteered had it not.

Maximo looks to his son fondly.

MAXIMO

Yes, yes of course.

Vita crosses to Cornelius, sits beside him. She embraces him, her eyes well up.

CORNELIUS

I'm not a child anymore.

VITA

You'll always be my child.

CORNELIUS

Please, mother.

Maximo crouches down in front of Cornelius.

MAXIMO

Honor Mars as our forefathers  
Romulus and Remus had and he will  
bring you glory.

Cornelius nods.

CORNELIUS

I will Father.

He stares at his father's severed arm.

MAXIMO

Duty and honor.

Cornelius manages a smile.

CORNELIUS

Duty and honor.

CUT TO:

EXT. SEA OF GALILEE - DAY

*SUPER: Sea of Galilee, Judea*

The sun rises. The vast expanse of calm water filled with fishing boats as far as the eye can see.

INT./EXT. FISHING BOAT - DAY

A fishing net is thrown into the water by PETER (20s) a handsome man who doesn't mince his words.

ANDREW (20s) lean, humble-eyed, cheerful, lowers and spreads the fishing net over the water.

PETER

They tax everything. We barely make enough to survive.

ANDREW

What shall we do about it?

PETER

A group of patriots gather.

Andrew laughs.

ANDREW

Patriots or zealots?

PETER

Does it matter? What do you suggest we do, Andrew?

ANDREW

Pay our due taxes.

Peter huffs, waves him off.

ANDREW (CONT'D)

Do you really think they can defeat the might of Rome?

PETER

Yes, just sit back and do nothing.

They pull the net, fill with excitement. It's full of fish.

ANDREW

You see! Have some faith.

Peter smiles.

PETER

Perhaps.

ANDREW

God provides.

Andrew and Peter pull the haul onto the boat, pluck fish out of the net, toss them into baskets.

PETER

Rome is an affront to God. It strangles us. We are no better than slaves. We--

ANDREW

We will not be under Roman rule forever. The Messiah will free us from this oppression. The one called John the Baptist--

PETER

Messiah.

Peter shakes his head in dismay.

ANDREW

Yes, the Messiah!

*THUMP. THUMP. THUMP.*

The sound of disciplined feet march in step.

On the beach, a contingent of ROMAN SOLDIERS march. Peter stares at them with open loathing.

PETER

You live on dead dreams. The Messiah is not coming.

Peter points at the soldiers.

PETER (CONT'D)

Rome would not be here if he were.

ANDREW

You'll see, Peter, one day you'll see.

The Roman Soldiers march past.

MATCH CUT:

EXT. ITALIAN VILLAGE - DAY

*THUMP. THUMP. THUMP.*

ROMAN SOLDIERS, their faces expression-less, implacable, march down the main street of the somnolent little town.

VILLAGERS, clustered near houses, watch in reverence and awe as the troops come to a halt.

EXT. ITALIAN VILLAGE - COURTYARD - DAY

Gilded eagles and banners aloft, shields, helmets, and breastplates flash in the sun as the contingent of troops disperse and approach.

YOUNG MEN, white-faced, tense, anxious, await. The crowd gathers behind them.

CENTURION TITUS (40s) venerable, face heavily scarred and ruddy, passes along the line, scrutinizes each boy.

TITUS

In the name of the Divine Emperor  
of Rome, Tiberius, greetings.

Murmurs from the crowd.

TITUS (CONT'D)

My name is Centurion Titus. I speak  
on the authority of Emperor.

Titus pounds his fist into his hand, walks down the line.

TITUS (CONT'D)

These young men will become part of  
the greatest army known to mankind.  
They will bring great honor to your  
households.

The crowd claps and cheer with deep reverence. Titus eyes the recruits. They shrink under his gaze. He stops at Cornelius.

TITUS (CONT'D)

What is your name, boy?

CORNELIUS

Cornelius, sir.

TITUS

What is your father's name?

CORNELIUS

Maximo, Sir.

A ghost of a smile plays across Titus' face.

TITUS

Maximo?

Titus looks toward the villagers, sees Maximo. They share a moment.

TITUS (CONT'D)

I fought with your father in Gaul.  
Are you a brave warrior like your  
father?

CORNELIUS

I could only hope to be as brave as  
my father.

TITUS

We shall find out soon enough.

Titus moves off towards the villagers. A DECANUS (sergeant)  
takes position in front of the group.

DECANUS

Line up! Show some discipline!  
You're in the Roman Army now!

The Roman Soldiers round up the men, line them up two by two.

Titus with Maximo. They shake hands. Titus returns to the  
formation.

DECANUS (CONT'D)

Ready for the march, sir.

TITUS

Forward march!

The fresh recruits start their trek. Barely the feet of men,  
pound the earth. Onward to Rome!

EXT. OUTSKIRTS - ITALIAN VILLAGE - DAY

The soldierly formation moves further from the village.  
Verdant fields and orchards in the background.

Varying degrees of fear, excitement, and joy on their faces.  
Cornelius glances back. Vita weeps. Maximo comforts her.

DECANUS

Eyes to the front, boy!

The formation marches away, their past lives disappear into  
the sunset.

EXT. CAMP MARTIUS - DAY

*SUPER: Camp Martius, Rome*

Stone fortress with archways. GUARDS with spears at attention, flank the gates. ARCHERS posted in the towers.

The fifty RECRUITS, in simple robes and sandals, await in silence outside the fortress walls. Backpack-like sacks full of rock at their feet.

ATTICUS (20s) tall, lanky, goofy-looking, not the sharpest knife in the drawer, inspects his backpack.

TITUS

I will be your Campidoctor,  
assigned to prepare you for the  
rigors of a Roman Legionnaire. I  
take this duty very serious.

Titus slams a fist into his palm, paces in front of them.

TITUS (CONT'D)

Few men are born brave; many have  
become so through care and force of  
discipline. I will be that  
discipline should you lose yours!

Fear brews in the eyes of his listeners.

TITUS (CONT'D)

Today we will see if you are fit to  
serve in one of my beloved legions.

Atticus wearily raises his hand, as to ask a question. SEPPA (20s) stocky bull of a man, chisel-jawed, glares at Atticus.

SEPPA

Put your hand down, idiot.

ATTICUS

But I have a question.  
(to Titus)  
Centurion? Sir?

Titus' glaze burns a hole into Atticus' forehead.

TITUS

Speak!

ATTICUS

What are these rocks for?

Titus approaches Atticus.

TITUS

What is your name, boy?

ATTICUS  
Atticus, sir.

TITUS  
Where are you from, Atticus?

ATTICUS  
Rome, sir.

TITUS  
A city boy. Impetuous, soft, and pampered! Unlike your country brethren. Do you want me to carry your equipment?

ATTICUS  
Sir?

TITUS  
Perhaps an Egyptian chariot to take you to battle?

ATTICUS  
No, sir.

TITUS  
Maybe one of Hannibal's elephants?

The recruits laugh. Titus' glances at them with his cold eyes, immediately silences them.

ATTICUS  
That would be interesting.

Titus punches Atticus in the gut. He keels over.

TITUS  
Get up, boy!

Atticus stands back up.

TITUS (CONT'D)  
In combat, you will need to bring a few days rations, water, your weapons, armor, and sleeping gear. No one else will do this for you. Now put them on!

The recruits put their packs on. Atticus struggles with it.

TITUS (CONT'D)  
Do you have any other stupid questions for me, boy?

ATTICUS

No, sir!

Titus slaps his pack on. Mountains dominate the background.

TITUS

Let's go!

They head off.

EXT. MOUNTAIN TRAIL - DAY

Titus marches at fast pace. The recruits struggle to follow.

LATER

The exhausted, outstretched group reach a Roman Eagle marker at the zenith of the trail and turnaround.

TITUS

Move! Halfway done!

As the group heads down, Atticus heads up, struggles toward the turnaround point.

TITUS (CONT'D)

To the marker. Your weakness disgusts me!

Titus backhands Atticus as he passes. Atticus trips and falls. Cornelius drops back, helps him up.

CORNELIUS

What's your name?

ATTICUS

Atticus.

CORNELIUS

Atticus, we cannot fail. It would bring great shame to our families.

ATTICUS

I'm trying.

CORNELIUS

You can do it.

ATTICUS

The women.

CORNELIUS

What?

ATTICUS

My soft hands! The Centurion  
doesn't like them. The women never  
seem to have a problem with them.

Cornelius manages a smile.

CORNELIUS

Let's focus on finishing.

Atticus nods.

ATTICUS

I don't think the centurion likes  
me.

CORNELIUS

Whatever gave you that idea?

Atticus regards his hands as they stride forward.

ATTICUS

My poor hands.

CORNELIUS

Worry about that later, for now,  
keep moving.

Atticus huffs, speeds up a little.

EXT. CAMP MARTIUS - DAY

Titus finishes, drops his pack.

TITUS

Well done.

A procession of exhausted recruits stagger in. Cornelius and  
Atticus in the distance. Cornelius pushes Atticus.

CORNELIUS

Almost there.

They make it to the finish line. Atticus drops from  
exhaustion. Titus stares at him with disdain.

TITUS

You have all passed. Perhaps I will  
make soldiers of you after all.  
Welcome to the Roman Legion!

Titus pound a fist into his open hand.

TITUS (CONT'D)

Camp Martius will be your home for the next four months. See you in the morrow to begin the real training.

Titus storms off.

ATTICUS

You didn't need to do that. I don't even know your name.

CORNELIUS

Cornelius.

ATTICUS

Why did you help me?

CORNELIUS

Because you're a soft and pampered city boy. I felt sorry for you.

They share a laugh. Seppo passes by, slams a shoulder into Atticus, knocks him down.

SEPPO

Should have left him, he's nothing but dead weight.

Cornelius helps Atticus to his feet.

CORNELIUS

We'll see.

ATTICUS

Yeah, we'll see.

Seppo shakes his head, carries on.

CORNELIUS

You couldn't think of anything better to say?

Atticus grimaces.

ATTICUS

No, I don't like confrontations.

Cornelius laughs.

CORNELIUS

You're in for some real trouble then.

ATTICUS

Don't get me wrong. I know how to  
fight if I need to.

Cornelius furrows his brow.

CORNELIUS

Rome is surrounded by enemies. You  
definitely will need to.

ATTICUS

Then I shall.

Cornelius, Atticus, and recruits walk into the camp's  
archway. ROMAN SOLDIERS flank them.

ROMAN SOLDIER

Glorious day for training! Glory to  
the Emperor!

RECRUITS

Glory to the Emperor!