

FADE IN

EXT - A MIST-COVERED SWAMP - DAY

We SEE the still, calm surface of an indeterminate body of water. There is no sound - how much noise does a creeping fog make?

Slowly the CAMERA slides to the left, as if following something below the surface. Now there is the faintest hint of a sound, like a large bird swooping overhead unseen, and a whispered word. The CAMERA continues its slow crawl, until we SEE a sodden earthen embankment, eroded by constant, soft waves. The whisper is heard again, louder, questioning:

DRUIDESS (V.O.)

*Aeratus tabella? Aeratus tabella?*

A male voice answers, firmly, but just as ghostly:

AULUS (V.O.)

Bronze tablets.

The CAMERA finally halts upon an object, half-buried in the muck. It appears to be a tablet, heavily aged, with deep carvings upon its face. The CAMERA slowly closes in upon the first line. It's engraved in Latin, and a voice reads to us from it:

AULUS (V.O.)

My name is Aulus Hirtius, and I am  
... a Roman!

The last words are spoken with heavy contempt. FADE OUT.

FADE IN

EXT - THE BATTLEFIELD OF ALESIA - DAY (YEAR 54 B.C.)

Accompanied by a somber THEME (Grieg's "Ase's Todt"), we SEE the gates of a great walled town slowly open outward. Out rides a proud Celtic warrior, astride a magnificent white war-horse. This is VERCINGETORIX, leader of the Gallic resistance. He rides slowly across a devastated battlefield, littered with the debris of a long, horrific siege: bent shields, bloody broken swords, and thousands of bodies, mostly Celts.

Vercingetorix rides down to a massive Roman palisade, whose gates open outward for him. He rides through, stared at by dozens of hardened LEGIONARIES. He passes through a second gate, which leads to the rest of the battlefield. He heads left, rides past more Roman soldiers, then past a large group of kneeling, chained Celts - the remnants of Vercingetorix' beaten army. They look up at him with pride. Far to the left, the only Roman seated amidst a knot of standing officers with their arms crossed, is a balding, unimposing officer, wearing a blood-red cloak. It is JULIUS CAESAR, the confidant and ruthlessly successful Roman general.

Vercingetorix circles the officers. His horse kicks dirt on the nearest CENTURIAN. He ends up in front of Caesar, and stares in seething hatred. Caesar returns his stare indifferently. Suddenly, Vercingetorix draws his sword. The officers leap forward, but a single raised finger from Caesar halts them. Vercingetorix hesitates, then tosses his sword at Caesar's feet. His shield and helmet follow, landing in the dust. The barest hint of a smile crosses Caesar's lips.

Vercingetorix slips off his horse and stands defiantly before the group. He glances back at his bound and manacled friends. With barely-contained rage, he slowly drops to one knee. Caesar gives a slight nod, and four LEGIONARIES clap a slave ring about his neck. He looks skyward at two high-flying hawks, signifying the freedom he will never again know. As the CAMERA slides away, displaying the still-smoldering city and the littered battlefield, the VOICE OVER continues:

AULUS (V.O.)

As I write this, the great general, Julius Caesar, is dead, murdered by his friends - his *friends*. But before he died, he led his legions across the face of Gaul, defeating every tribe he came into contact with. Finally, a noble Celt warrior, Vercingetorix, gathered the Gauls together and made a stand, at a walled town called Alesia. But the might of Rome and the inspiration of Caesar was too much for them. Their armies were shattered, their warriors sold into slavery, and Vercingetorix was hauled off as Caesar's personal trophy.

The CAMERA catches the tail of the Roman army leading thousands of Celts. Vercingetorix is last, manacled but still proud. FADE OUT.

FADE IN

EXT - THE BATTLE OF THE MARSHES - DAY

A bright spring day. Leaves sway on a tall oak, which shudders and falls to a Roman AXE-WIELDER. The VOICE OVER picks up:

AULUS (V.O.)

After Alesia, Caesar was confident the power of Gaul was forever broken, and the land would now be pacified.

The CAMERA pulls back, displaying a Roman legion fortifying a hilltop. Soldiers dig like automatons, others cut down saplings to build a palisade behind the trench. At the foot of the hill is a vast swamp, and on the opposite side, another hill, swarming with Celt warriors.

AULUS (V.O.)

But not all of Gaul *felt* pacified. Together with their spiritual leaders, the Druids, they decided to make one final attempt to drive the invaders from their sacred land.

TITLE

CREDITS

While the credits roll, we WATCH the preparations. The Romans fortify their hill, complete with defensive trenches and walls, while others fashion fascine bundles and construct wooden bridge sections for a future attack. Still others busy themselves sharpening long, spear-like arrows, as centurions bark orders.

On the other hill, the Celts mill about, jeering at the ant-like Romans. Three of their leaders sit apart, on horseback:

TASGETIUS

I don't like this. It's not like their usual one-day defenses. I'd say Caesar is planning to stay.

CORREUS

He plans to fight - as do we.

They turn to a fourth leader, standing slightly apart, near the crest, studying the thick trees. The CAMERA catches her face, and we SEE it's a woman, COTUATES, a noble female Druid. She regards two birds sitting on a branch.

CONNEDDUMNUS

What do the Gods tell you, Cotuates?  
Do they favor us?

She pauses before answering, watching the birds jump about in agitation. A nearby warrior throws his sword high as a challenge to the Romans, and the birds jump into flight. The warrior catches his sword and laughs.

COTUATES

You may fight this day, but if you do, the Fates will not be with you. I counsel... withdrawal.

CORREUS

Run? In the face of these, these diggers? They do not fight like warriors. They bury their faces in the mud!

COTUATES

You asked my advice, and I have given it. I've read the signs. Today is not a day to fight the invaders.

CONNEDDUMNUS

We respect your counsel, Cotuates, but you must understand. To retreat before of the Romans is to invite disaster.

TASGETIUS

Their cavalry will cut us to pieces!

Cotuates looks back at them, and spots a burning brazier nearby. She glances across the valley at the Roman army.

COTUATES

There may be a way to convince them not to follow.

INT - CAESAR'S TENT - DAY

Officers mill around Caesar, whose back is to us. We see what he SEES: the legionaries working furiously to fortify their camp, the preparations to cross the swamp, the taunting Celts in the distance. His calm demeanor is not shared by his nervous Legates, who talk to each other in whispers:

MAXIMUS

Does Caesar know our reinforcements are approaching?

LABIENUS

He knows. (smiles) Counts in his head the hours since he sent the order, and calculates their marching time. Oh, he knows.

BRUTUS

Even with Trebonius' reserves, the Gauls still outnumber us. (peers at Caesar's back) Is he planning to retreat?

ANTONY

Brutus, have you ever known Caesar to voluntarily retreat?

BRUTUS

No, but -

LABIENUS

Why else does he have the legions building those bridge sections?

A CUTAWAY shot shows us the soldiers practicing the placement of the 10-foot bridge sections, on top of the fascine bundles.

BRUTUS

Still, perhaps someone should inform him they approach?

LABIENUS

You want to disturb him? (grunts) Go right ahead.

Brutus glares at Labienus, but does not move. The CAMERA cir-

cles around, closing in on Caesar, lost in concentration. As it approaches, we HEAR the thoughts racing through his mind:

CAESAR (V.O.)

Our four legions plus Trebonius' three, that's thirty-three thousand or so, plus two thousand Germanic horse, against forty-five thousand Gauls, who don't want battle, or they would have attacked us before we began encampment. Another hour before Trebonius arrives, but at least two before the bridge sections can be put in place...

He leaps to his feet, a blur of energy, still facing the Celts.

CAESAR

Labienus! Assemble the Ninth. Have them take the completed bridge sections to the edge of the marsh and begin deployment. Guard them well from counter-attack. Maximus! Bring the Eighth plus five cohorts from the Seventh down to the marsh. Have them ready to cross as soon as the final bridge section is down. Hold the other side, but do not advance beyond a safe distance. Antony! Take the Eleventh, finish the rest of the bridge sections by sunset and have them ready to support when needed. Brutus? (smiles) You stay by my side.

LABIENUS

(to Brutus) Wasn't there something you wanted to tell him?

EXT - APPROACHING THE ROMAN ENCAMPMENT

Three legions march to the Roman camp, led by their Legate TREBONIUS on horseback, and the Tenth Legion aquilifer AULUS HIRTIUS, a proud, scarred veteran of many close battles.

TREBONIUS

Well, we made it, Aulus. And the battle hasn't started yet!

AULUS

Just as long as I can get some reading in before the fight.

TREBONIUS

What caudex are you reading now?

AULUS

A work by Publius Varro, *Bellum Sequanicum*. His new work on the Gauls. Some interesting sections on the Druids.

Trebonius' appearance hardens at the mention of the subject.

TREBONIUS

Friend Aulus, are you going soft on the enemy?

AULUS

Never! I just find it better to know every aspect of my opponent.

TREBONIUS

Well, I'd better ride ahead to report in. May the Gods smile on you!

Trebonius rides on, leaving the legions to march at their own pace. Aulus carries the legion standard proudly, as he surveys the buildings on either side of the road. Women and children scrape in the remains of their destroyed buildings. Aulus hesitates, then swings his eyes back to the roadway.

EXT - THE ROMAN ENCAMPMENT

The legions march into the half-walled camp. Centurions direct the new troops to their quarters. Aulus and the Tenth head for their section of the half-finished camp. As soon as they arrive, they quickly unload their gear and set up their tents. One centurion, PULLO, barks orders:

PULLO

Right! One hour's rest before duty-call. Spend it wisely.

Most of the legionaries drop to their bedrolls. Aulus pulls out a book, a caudex. The other seven soldiers and two non-

comes in the tent regard him with interest.

ATRIUS

What's that you're reading, Aulus?

TULLUS

Don't you know? Friend Aulus is going to learn how we can defeat the Gauls and be back in Rome before the summer.

AULUS

It says here, 'The Gauls have in their midst, leaders and judges of a high capability, who are called Druids. They officiate over all disputes. Some of them, it is said, can speak directly with their Gods, and some of them are women.' Interesting?

PALLENIO

The only thing I find interesting about the Gauls is their ability to work gold.

He draws out some beautiful torcs from a bag, admiring them. The rest of the legionaries bring out their own personal trophies, open food and drink, or clean weapons.

CANTERIUS

A few more battles like the last one, and Pallenio will be a wealthy man.

PALLENIO

Can I help it if all the Gauls I kill are rich ones?

TULLUS

Hey, Aulus, anything in there about human sacrifice? I hear the barbarians are particularly fond of them.

ATRIUS

Now, what makes you think a Roman author would tell the truth about something like that?

TULLUS

Oh, I doubt if his account is accurate. Still, an author can't lie about the truth - can they, Aulus?

AULUS

What is truth, Tullus, and what is propaganda? Is it true that the Gauls sacrifice prisoners?

TULLUS

Yeah, well, we've had reports that -

AULUS

And do we sacrifice the Gauls when we catch them?

TULLUS

(uneasy) Yes, if the Gods need their blood.

AULUS

And do we, educated Romans, still sacrifice prisoners in the Coliseum, to placate the mobs? And are those prisoners sometimes women and children?

TULLUS

(drily) So I've heard.

AULUS

(softly) Then *who* are the barbarians?

There is no answer. The others turn to more private interests in the now-quiet tent. Atrius moves closer where he can talk and not be overheard.

ATRIUS

Take care, Aulus. Words like that can lose you friends.

AULUS

My friends are those that stand with me in battle, Atrius. Those I can win with flattering words are not ones I'd wish to keep.

Another centurion, VORENUS, sticks his head in the tent.

VORENUS

Aulus? Aulus Hirtius? You're wanted  
at the Commander's tent.

Aulus puts his caudex away and walks out.

CANTERIUS

What's the mighty Caesar want with  
our aquilifer?

ATRIUS

Don't you know? (glances at Tullus)  
He's the reason we even *have* a mighty  
Caesar.

INT - CAESAR'S TENT

Energy infuses all the activity. Runners take wax tablets  
from Caesar to the troops. Other officers get final direc-  
tions, salute and leave. Caesar welcomes Aulus openly.

CAESAR

And here is the aquilifer of the  
Tenth, my most trusted legion!  
Greetings, Aulus Hirtius!

AULUS

Greetings to you, great Caesar. May  
the Gods find you well.

CAESAR

If the Gods could take away these con-  
stant back pains, I'd sleep better. I  
understand the Tenth had a close scrape  
fighting the Belovacci last week?

AULUS

We were surrounded briefly. (quieter)  
Lost eight centurions.

CAESAR

Why don't you accept the position  
I've offered you? I would always wel-  
come you back under my tent.

AULUS

I don't belong at your heels, fawning  
in gratitude at the scraps you toss.  
I belong with the other men, in battle.

CAESAR

You know I will always be in your  
debt for... certain brave deeds. You  
do the things I wish I'd done myself.

Caesar places his hand upon Aulus' forearm. Aulus merely  
looks down at it, until Caesar, embarrassed, removes it.

CAESAR

Yes, well... there is this. (holds up  
a wax tablet with impressed orders)  
We have not been lucky as of late on  
the daily supply runs. It seems the  
Gauls will not give up their grain  
without a fight. Perhaps you'd be  
interested in taking out one of the  
forage parties? It's a good opportu-  
nity. You could make a name for your-  
self, maybe even a little booty as  
well, eh? Can't say no to making a  
little profit off this war?

AULUS

(brittle) If Caesar orders me to com-  
mand a raid, then I will.

CAESAR

Aulus, I'm trying to thank you for -  
(he checks around) for saving my  
life. I will never forget what you  
did for me at the battle of Mytilene.

AULUS

You're memory wasn't so good that day  
after they found us, when you took  
credit for saving me, and the others.

CAESAR

It was the expedient thing to do. A  
great general must be seen to be...

(MORE)

CAESAR (CON'T,)

...brave. I began a career with that move. What would you have done with the honor? Retired at twenty-one, your bravery behind you? (pause) Look, I didn't bring you here to argue with you. I am offering my hand in gratitude, once again. Take it! Take a step up the ladder, beside me!

Caesar holds out the tablet with the appointment, but Aulus does not take it. Finally, Caesar lets his hand drop.

AULUS

If there is nothing further, I would like to get back to my caudex. I have little time before we go on duty.

CAESAR

Still reading? I have literary aspirations of my own, you know. When these campaigns are over, I'll compose my memoirs. Something for the historians to quibble over. (pause) I'd like it if you would look them over when they're finished.

AULUS

I would be honored.

CAESAR

Well, if you change your mind, my hand is always open. (sighs) Dismissed.

Aulus salutes, spins and leaves. Caesar stands quietly, amidst bustle and activity, regarding the departing Aulus.

EXT - THE ROMAN ENCAMPMENT

Aulus' return finds the men gambling and laughing. He watches the two legions advance across the bridges. In time, Atrius joins him. They speak while watching the advance.

ATRIUS

And what did our brave commander want?

AULUS

The same as always. He wants to buy me off his conscience.

ATRIUS

What did he offer you this time?

AULUS

Another staff position, or a chance to lead a forage party.

ATRIUS

Aulus, you should take one of these appointments. You're not getting any younger. Someday Caesar may get tired of holding out his hand, and pull it back for good.

AULUS

Our Caesar? Tire of something? Hah!

The centurion VORENUS marches past them, dispensing orders.

VORENUS

Grab your tools, men. We've got trenches to dig.

Grumbling indignation rolls out of the tent. Aulus and Atrius share a glance and a brief laugh before falling in.

ATRIUS

Looks like your caudex'll have to wait.

EXT - THE MARSHES - THE MEETING OF THE ARMIES

The CAMERA swings out across the battlefield and approaches the fight. Skirmishes break out as the Romans cross to the other side, and the surviving Gauls beside the marsh slowly retreat up the hill.

Farther above them, the Gauls stand in one great mass, thousands upon thousands. The CAMERA passes over the first few ranks, shouting and taunting the Romans to come up after them. Meanwhile, behind the screen of the front ranks, the rest quietly pass forward damp bundles of straw and twigs, forming a thick wall of them. At the crest of the hill, the

four leaders are discussing their plan:

COMMIUS

The invaders are forming ranks at the bottom of the hill, Connetdumnus.

CONNEDDUMNUS

(grunts) They will not have enough troops on this side of the swamp until sundown. But they've never been adverse to fighting at night.

TASGETIUS

That's because they have no souls, so they're not afraid of losing them in the dark (laughs). What say you, Cotuates? Have the Romans souls?

COTUATES

The Romans have souls, like every living creature. Whether or not they are foolish to fight at night...?

TASGETIUS

You think your plan will keep them at bay?

Cotuates speaks up to the giant on horseback, but somehow, she seems infinitely more in control, more the leader.

COTUATES

They will interpret it as an ambush. Their leader will be cautious in his advance. And their soldiers will be superstitious, and think it is some trick of our magicians - we Druids.

CONNEDDUMNUS

Cotuates is teaching you the first rule of battle, Tasgetius: stoke the fears of your opponents like a bonfire.

CORREUS

I still say we should attack now, while they're divided! Swoop down on this half and drive them into the mud!

CONNEDDUMNUS

The Druid Cotuates has said that the Gods are not with us this day. We will withdraw under cover of her ploy. (firm) Connetdumnus has spoken.

CORREUS

If I were not chief of the Atrebates, I would say the leader of the Carnutes is afraid of fighting the Romans!

CONNEDDUMNUS

If you were merely a warrior, Correus, I would take your head for that remark! (lighter) After we withdraw, you may lead the Atrebates where you wish, and make whatever counsel you desire.

CORREUS

The only counsel I will make will be with my weapons!

Correus strikes his horse and rides away. Tasgetius and Cotuates exchange looks. Connetdumnus stares hard at Cotuates.

CONNEDDUMNUS

When do the auguries suggest we do this thing?

COTUATES

Sundown, my lord.

CONNEDDUMNUS

This had better work, or I'll be riding all night with a Roman spear up my ass!

EXT - THE ROMAN ENCAMPMENT - LATE AFTERNOON

The sun is just touching the horizon. Aulus and the rest of the Tenth are busy widening the trench in front of their walled encampment, while in the distance, the Eighth and Ninth are formed up across the marsh, at the bottom of the hill. Aulus looks up to watch the Gauls hurling more epithets, and the occasional spear and arrow, down at the assembled Romans. Aulus looks higher up the hill, and with

him we can just barely SEE the three Gaul leaders at the very top, two on horseback and a woman standing with them.

The sun drops below the walls of the Roman camp, and the shadows creep towards the warriors on the far hill. Aulus is busy hacking away at the embankment, when a shout goes up along the trench.

CANTERIUS

Look! The Eight and Ninth are going in!

All the soldiers in the trench look up to see the two legions, their cohorts arrayed in checkerboard formation, begin advancing up the hill just as the sun finally disappears. The CAMERA focuses on the Celts' line, fronted by a long low wall of damp bundles, as their verbal abuse increases. Just as the legions near their lines, we SEE Connetdumnus signal by dropping his sword. With all their energy the Gauls increase their noise and fury, as select warriors bring lit torches to the damp walls, which burst into roaring flames. The few warriors in front of the wall quickly retreat through planned gaps, which are then filled with more bundles and also set alight.

The legions are thrown into disarray. Officers' horses rear in fright, centurions urge their fellows forward, but none dare advance through the fires. The entire Gaul army is blocked by flame and smoke.

Back in the trench with the Tenth, all the legionaries are enthralled by the spectacle.

TIBERIUS

Gods! They've set the world on fire!

TULLUS

It's those damnable Druids! They must have sacrificed their whole army! Set them on fire to prevent us from taking them prisoner! Not very honorable.

ATRIUS

Set their own men on fire? Not likely, Tullus. (to Atrius) What does the learned Aulus think?

AULUS

(in awe) I think the Gauls are smarter than we give them credit for.

PALLENIO

We'll have to chase them for another month before we can bring them to battle again. Caesar will be furious at this!

AULUS

I can tell you exactly what mighty Caesar is feeling right now - and it's not fury.

INT - CAESAR'S TENT

Caesar is laughing, aware the Celts have tricked him, his anger just below the surface. None of the officers dare speak, for fear of unbalancing him.

EXT - THE ROMAN ENCAMPMENT

The veteran legionaries are intimidated, even frightened by the fiery spectacle, but Aulus is singularly mesmerized.

AULUS

Amazing! Simply amazing!

Aulus sinks his adze deep into the earthen wall and climbs up out of the trench. He wipes his hands on a rag as he prepares to leave.

VORENUS

And where do you think you're going?

AULUS

I'm going to visit our commander. (he gazes across at the legions stalled in front of the fire) I think he has a job for me. (to Atrius) Wanna join me?

ATRIUS

(indignant) And give up digging trenches? (pause) Why not?!

Aulus gives him a hand up out of the trench. FADE OUT.

EXT - APPROACHING A CELT VILLAGE - DAY (9:00 AM)

Aulus rides, Atrius marches at the head of two cohorts, nine hundred marching, armored men. Aulus beams, enjoying the bright spring day.

AULUS

I could get used to this, Atrius.

ATRIUS

What's that? Gathering grain from the locals? Or riding someone else's horse?

AULUS

Getting out and seeing the real Gaul, the land and the people. Hah! I feel like a tourist!

ATRIUS

Why did you come out here? Really?

AULUS

Maybe I was intrigued by the Gauls' unusual tactics. Maybe I was worried a different officer would execute his orders with too much force. Or maybe I just wanted to see what their villages looked like, before we burned them all to the ground.

As they approach, the villagers, women, children and old men, begin to flee. Some head for their homes, or rush across a wide clearing to the distant forest. One woman, dressed in blue and red, stands firm, with her twelve-year-old boy. An officer, MARTO, stands nearby, as Aulus reins in his horse to converse with her.

AULUS

Why didn't you run off like the others?

CELT WOMAN

This is our village, our land. Why should I run from the likes of you?

AULUS

Nice house. Is it yours?

CELT WOMAN

My husband built it - before he died  
fighting you!

Aulus gives up trying to befriend the woman, and becomes all  
business.

AULUS

Can you tell us where your village  
stores your grain?

CELT WOMAN

We have no more grain! What wasn't  
burned in the fields, has already  
been stolen by other Roman thieves!

MARTO

Watch your tongue, woman! You can  
still be taken!

Marto steps forward and roughly grabs her arm. She spits at  
him. He slaps her, throwing her to the ground. Her boy tries  
to protect her.

MARTO

I'll teach you to respect your bet-  
ters, whelp!

AULUS

Stop it! They're harmless!

The Boy pulls a dagger from his tunic and slashes Marto  
across the arm, then turns and runs. Marto screams in pain,  
then gives chase.

ATRIUS

Harmless, are they?

The CAMERA follows the boy, racing for the woods and yelling  
for help.

BOY

Now! Now! Now! N-

Before he gains the woods, Marto throws his spear, piercing the Boy's back clear through to his chest. He falls. We SEE Marto smile grimly, then watch as his smile drains from him. The CAMERA shows us what he sees: a great horde of Gaul warriors rushing out from the woods in ambush. On foot and on horse, they charge, waving weapons and yelling.

Marto hesitates, then runs forward for his spear. He looks down and finally realizes he's killed a mere child. Marto stands there, frozen in denial, as the Celts roll over and past him like a tidal wave.

Aulus and Atrius SEE the Celts, and are momentarily stunned, then:

ATRIUS

By the Gods - we are dead!

AULUS

Form up! Form up! Prepare to throw  
pilum at thirty paces!

The legionaries snap to action. The first cohort quickly forms a straight line three deep and sixty wide, while others behind them prepare their spears. We SEE the Celts in CLOSE UP, slavering, screaming, wild with fury.

From the middle of the Roman line, we WATCH as Aulus sits calmly astride his horse. His hand is raised to signal for the spear throw.

AULUS

Steady...steady...Now!

As one, the rear ranks throw their spears, which fly through the air like a dark cloud. They land with deadly effect on the lightly-armed Celts, killing fifty instantly and wounding dozens of others. But there are too many, and they keep coming, screaming even louder.

From above, we WATCH as the thousands of Celts crash into the dense Roman ranks, forcing the Romans back a ways by the impact of their charge. Fierce fighting breaks out. Aulus watches as the Romans hold their own, then HEARS more yelling. He turns his horse, and we SEE another charge, coming at the Romans from the rear.

AULUS

Second cohort! Reverse direction! In  
line facing the rear!

They spin around and form ranks just in time, as the Celts  
slam into them before they can throw their spears. The Celts  
who cannot reach the Roman ranks begin to pour around  
towards the open flanks.

AULUS

Centurions! Take the uncommitted  
troops and fill in the flanks!

The Roman officers react quickly, plugging up the holes. Now  
the Romans are truly surrounded, eight hundred survivors in  
a small rectangular formation. Celts swarm all around them,  
fighting like madmen.

ATRIUS

Aulus! We can't hold! There's too  
many of them!

AULUS

I know, I know! Look, you'll have to  
take most of the men and break out!  
Form a wedge, shields up. Get through  
and take word to Caesar! Tell him we  
died - we fought bravely.

ATRIUS

But Aulus, what about -

AULUS

Just do it! Do it - and may the Gods  
watch over both of us.

EXT - BEHIND THE CELT LINES

From just inside the clearing, the mounted Correus directs  
his warriors. He's confident, almost arrogant.

CORREUS

Look to the main road. Make sure no  
more Romans are coming. We'll have  
these dogs -

Just then, he SEES the Roman rear line part and a wedge of warriors burst through. The suddenness and determination of the Romans catches the Gauls off-guard, and the wedge breaks through the undisciplined attackers. They rush for the main road, followed by Gauls who don't know how to fight the shielded force or even how to slow it down.

EXT - THE ROMAN DEFENDERS

The remaining Roman force is small, but the Celt attack has slowed. Aulus slides down off his horse, picks up a shield and draws his sword.

AULUS

All right, men. Make Mars proud of you!

The Gauls who are left pause, then renew their attack. Aulus soon finds himself in the front ranks, parrying and slicing. He spots a gap in the attackers and the empty woods beyond.

AULUS

There! That's our chance! We'll  
escape to the woods!

With a brief surge of energy, the legionaries on both sides of Aulus break through the gap and take off for the woods, Aulus in their midst. Maybe ten break through, but as soon as they do, the Gauls close up behind them. The savage fighting behind them, surrounding the remainder, intensifies.

The CAMERA follows Aulus and his ten, as they burst across the open field. They encounter small bands here and there, and brief fights break out. A Roman falls to a determined swordsman here, another falls to a pair of axe-wielders there. Aulus finds himself face-to-face with a tall yellow-haired warrior, who grins wildly as he joins battle. Aulus parries with his shield, swings, strikes and strikes again, but takes a vicious wound on his right shoulder. He finally dispatches his opponent, but he's winded and bleeding badly.

EXT - THE FOREST'S EDGE

Aulus stumbles to the woods, followed by five legionaries. Two turn to defend their leader as he makes it into the woods, and the following Gauls stop to overwhelm them. From the safety of the woods, Aulus and the three turn to gaze

back. The site of the battle is marked by a swarm of jubilant Gauls, waving what look like severed heads high in the air. Grimly, Aulus and the three turn and lope off further into the woods.

EXT - DEEPER IN THE WOODS - DAY (11:00 AM)

The four Romans troop through the dark woods, following some barely identifiable path. They are all bleeding and dirty, exhaustion evident through ragged breathing and missing gear, but they don't slow.

EXT - THE SAME WOODS, SOMEWHERE BEHIND THEM

The band of a dozen or so Gauls are tracking them, grinning, eager.

EXT - THE CAPTURED GAUL CAMP NEAR THE MARSHES - DAY

Caesar and his officers stride through the abandoned camp.

CAESAR

They certainly planned for their retreat. They left little behind but scraps and garbage. I do not enjoy capturing other people's refuse - no profit in it! (laughter) How am I supposed to bribe the consuls in Rome with this?

Labienus and the others laugh. Suddenly, consternation fills the edge of the group. The guards there draw back, and Atrius appears, staggering, wounded, caked in mud and dried blood.

ATRIUS

Caes... Caesar...muh...mighty Caesar.

He manages a weak salute. Caesar guides him to an upturned chair. Atrius almost collapses as he drops into it.

CAESAR

Drink! Get a drink for this man!

A centurion locates a cup of wine and offers it. Atrius drinks voraciously, before he remembers his place and straightens to attention.

ATRIUS

We were...ambushed. Seven...maybe eight thousand Gauls...overran our party, one...one cohort, all five hundred legionaries...are, are lost.

CAESAR

(cautiously) And your commander, Aulus Hirtius? What of him?

ATRIUS

Dead - or captured.

CAESAR

(burning) Who did this? What tribe is responsible for this - this insult?!

LABIENUS

Mighty Caesar, our scouts report that the Atrebates separated from the main Gallic force just after the retreat from the marshes. They would be the most likely tribe to have attacked alone. Their leader is a wild, impetuous warrior named Correus.

CAESAR

Correus, Correus of the Atrebates. Well, we must pay a visit to this Correus. Let him know that making war on Rome carries high penalties.

His anger now under control, Caesar strides quickly back in the direction of his tent. His officers follow, while others attend to Atrius.

EXT - THE DEEP FOREST - DAY (2:00 PM)

Aulus and his three legionaries are still running deeper into the woods. They seem to have thrown off their pursuers, though they look back in worry now and again.

Suddenly, Four Gauls leap out from the woods on either side. The Romans have no time for planning, as each is attacked by two or more. Aulus has a hard time with his two, until one of the other Romans throws himself past his attackers to

land on one of Aulus'. Aulus sees his chance and drops the one in front of him, but his compatriot dies in the sacrifice. Suddenly, the battle pauses. Only Aulus and four Gauls remain alive. Aulus stumbles back against a carved tree, then staggers off. The Gaul leader stops his men - and takes the trail around the carved tree.

(Following: The battle on the plains, all text descriptions, sparse dialogue: orders by Caesar on horseback). At the end:

The Roman legionaries back off a pace, as Labienus rides up. He honorably salutes Correus' bravery with a wave of his staff.

LABIENUS

Caesar would have such brave leaders  
join us as allies. Throw down your  
weapons and choose life.

CORREUS

As a slave? Hah! I would rather spend  
eternity fighting Romans, than live  
one single day in chains!

Correus throws himself at the legionaries between himself and Labienus. Two go down, before the rest overwhelm him. Labienus' face curls in distaste, as we HEAR the sickening sound of swords stabbing Correus to death.

EXT - THE SACRED GROVE - DAY (MORNING)

Aulus is just waking up from a horrible dream, MUMBLING and shaking his head to and fro, sending a covering cloak part way to the ground.

AULUS

...chains, live in chains...Labienus,  
excuse my...my...

His eyes fly open, as he realizes where he is. He sits up and looks around, and we SEE his location: he's laying on his back on a wooden pallet at the edge of a clearing. The sun is just peeking through the trees to his left, while many birds CHIRP in the distant branches overhead. A small fire sends lazy curls of smoke skyward, next to a small

table set with fruit, meat, a pitcher and mug. As the cloak slides off his body, Aulus notices an odd poultice of mud and moss on his wound. He sniffs it and wrinkles his nose.

He HEARS, faintly, the sound of children laughing. The CAMERA follows their voices, and not too far off, at the end of a narrow fern-choked trail, is a larger clearing, surrounded by a dozen stone huts. This is the village of Cautreneu, untouched by the war, somehow overlooked by the Romans. Three young CHILDREN scamper past the open door of a thatched hut, just as a WOMAN emerges with a rack of stretched furs.

The children continue past an iron worker and his assistant, bending a wagon wheel, then past a metalsmith carving designs into a cup of worked gold. The CAMERA loses them as they race past a spot where five older CHILDREN are laughing in front of their Instructor. Their teacher is the Druidess, COTUATES, in her early thirties, an attractive, robust brunette with shoulder-length hair and a willowy figure. She tries to keep a straight face, but eventually she too joins in with the laughter. After a time, she tries to restore order.

COTUATES

All right, all right, that's enough!  
Now, I mean it!

Her smiling but firm demeanor finally restores order.

COTUATES

All right then. Now, where were we  
before I lost track?

TINNELAEAS

Cotuates, Cotuates, I know! You were  
on stanza fifty-one!

COTUATES

Yes, that's right. Um... 'The mighty  
warrior strode forward, weapon in  
hand and spoke his magic words -"

Just then, Aulus appears at the edge of the clearing.

AULUS

Excuse me, but are you the one who  
tended my wounds?

COTUATES

Why, yes, Roman, I did.

AULUS

Please, call me Aulus.

Moving closer, away from the nosy children, she drops her voice.

COTUATES

Very well, Aulus. But I must warn you:  
there are warriors here who wish you ill.  
The only thing keeping you alive is  
that you managed to collapse within  
the boundaries of the Sacred Grove.

AULUS

(laughing) These trees keep me alive?!

COTUATES

(smiling, but serious)  
No. Our respect for them.

Aulus notices a knot of warriors watching him, weapons at hand.

AULUS

(serious) I see. Well, if you'd lend  
me a book, perhaps I could learn  
about your people, your history.

COTUATES

You'd respect our Gods and heroes?

AULUS

I would.

COTUATES

You'd be willing to learn the way all  
Gauls do?

AULUS

If that is your wish.

COTUATES

Very well then.

Cotuates returns to the children, who quickly retake their

places, poorly pretending they weren't just eaves-dropping.

COTUATES

Who would share with our visitor the  
legend of mighty Cuchulane, the Hound  
of Ulster? (many raise their hands)  
And who would recite it in the tongue  
of our guest, in his native Latin?  
(the hands all drop instantly)

CAERDWYNNE

But teacher, Latin is such a brittle  
language!

PELRICC

The words won't rhyme!

HAELGERIS

It'll sound funny!

COTUATES

We've been over this before. You must  
know your neighbor's tongue, so that  
you may better know them. (pause)  
Come now, someone surely has faith in  
their Latin? Pelricc? Tinnelaeas!

Tinnelaeas steps cautiously forward. Caerdwynne offers her a  
drink of water, and she drinks as she prepares herself.

AULUS

You said recite? You memorize your  
histories?

COTUATES

Certainly. That way, our knowledge  
moves with us, wherever we go. How do  
Romans store their knowledge?

AULUS

On tablets, scrolls and in a collection  
of written plates called a caudex.

COTUATES

(knowingly) And where's your caudex now?

He looks around him, realizes it's back at camp, and nods slowly in realization.

COTUATES

And there you are. (waits for him to sit) Comfortable?

AULUS

Um, yes. How...long will this take?

COTUATES

Oh, Tinnelaeas only knows the short version. I'd say...four hours or so. (pause) I'll have someone bring food.

EXT - THE EDGE OF THE VILLAGE CLEARING

Alternating scenes of Aulus listening to Tinnelaeas' rapturous story. At first he's bored - then interested - then haunted. When food arrives, he waves it away distractedly, he's so enraptured in the story. At the conclusion, he almost walks forward to congratulate her, then remembers the other watching, crouching Gaul warriors nearby. He sits back within the confines of the Grove, and bows.

AULUS

That was...that was - extraordinary.  
Your Latin was...superb!

Tinnelaeas smiles, bows and runs off to her friends, where they giggle and look back in girlish wonder at the Roman. Aulus turns to go, and waves over his shoulder at the warriors, who grin evilly in reply.

EXT - THE SACRED GROVE - DAY

Aulus finds Cotuates back in the Grove, mixing some components with a wooden mortar and pestle.

COTUATES

Well, Roman, how was the story?

AULUS

Wonderful. Marvelous. I never knew the spoken word could convey such power. I am a man of writing, myself.

She continues working, occasionally shooting him a glance.

AULUS

Who are you - what are you?

COTUATES

My name is Cotuates. It means 'leads with justice.' It is a title the others address me with. My official title is Gutruater of the tribe of the Carnutes.

AULUS

Guter -?

COTUATES

Gu-tru-a-ter. It means 'speaker with the Gods.'

AULUS

Titles. Offices. Don't the Gauls have names?

COTUATES

(laughs) Yes, we have names. (pause) But to share one's true name exposes one to great harm. Much power is involved in invoking another's true name.

AULUS

(proud) My name is Aulus Hirtius.

COTUATES

You're quick to trust others - Aulus. (pause) My mother named me Lanessa. It doesn't mean anything, it's just pretty.

Aulus looks through the trees at another group of warriors, just visible in the distance at the end of the woods.

AULUS

They want me dead, don't they?

COTUATES

Do you blame them? They lived happily, until Gaius Julius Caesar came up from the south with delusions of Godhood.