

"Nex"

Movie Pitch:

"*Veni, vidi, neci.*" (*I came, I saw, I murdered*)

A sequel to *Gladiator (2000)*.

Background:

Still in the early stages of development.

A recap of the players in *Gladiator (2000)*:

The story is based on the lives and actions of Commodus (Joaquin Phoenix), Maximus (Russell Crowe), Lucilla (Connie Nelson) and Marcus Aurelius (the late Richard Harris).

At the end of the film, Marcus Aurelius is dead (suffocated by Commodus), Commodus is dead (killed by Maximus in a fight), and we are left to assume that Maximus too, dies as a result of foul play by Commodus during the fight. Only Lucilla and her son Lucius (Spencer Treat Clark) survive.

Historical records show that Commodus was a twin. His brother, Antoninus, apparently died at about the age of four. The records also seem to show different demises for Narcissus, the wrestler upon whom the character of Maximus is based, creating some confusion as to his ultimate fate.

Nex (murder, violent death) weaves a complex story that makes use of those additional pieces of information (that at one time Commodus had a twin brother and that Maximus might not have died after all) although it is based less on historical fact (much is based on events that did occur, just not necessarily to these players) and more on "what if" speculation. It combines unrequited love, pathological hatred and political intrigue with action and adventure, and allows at least two of the characters from *Gladiator (2000)* to be resurrected after a fashion, to meet and fight again.

In this story, the events that took place late in the second century, partly in Roman Britain, partly in Rome, are uncovered by a British archaeologist working on a recently discovered Roman settlement on the outskirts of a market town called Wantage in Oxfordshire. The role of the archaeologist in the story serves to guide the audience and to collate and underscore the events and the behavior of the people involved.

The Plot

By dint of a combination of present-day discussion of archaeological discoveries made at a site near Wantage in Oxfordshire, England, together with flash-backs to the period and the events that occurred, the audience is guided by an archaeologist through the story that

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continues from *Gladiator (2000)*. We follow the events some 1800 years later as s/he sifts through the tantalising evidence left behind:

When they were much younger, Antoninus, Commodus' twin brother, is the victim of an attempted murder by Commodus. Even at the age of four, Commodus' need to be the sole focus of his universe leads him to attempt to strangle Antoninus. Commodus sets fire to the building in which, he believes, lies the body of his brother, in an attempt to mask the murder.

Fortunately for Antoninus, he is discovered, rescued and revived by servants deeply loyal to his father, Marcus Aurelius. The servants are fearful of Commodus and dare not confront Marcus Aurelius with what has happened. Sufficient evidence remains in the ruins of the building to convince Marcus Aurelius that his son perished there.

Not knowing how to proceed, the servants consult an Augur - a kind of soothsayer - who advises them to take Antoninus to safety, as far away from Rome and Commodus as possible. The servants spirit him away to the distant land known as Britannia (Britain), to be protected and raised by Romans stationed in Britain and fiercely loyal to Marcus Aurelius.

The Romans in Britain rely upon the assistance of Britons loyal to the Roman Governor of Britain. Contrary to popular belief, for much of the time the Romans in Britain were seen as a welcome and civilizing influence, conferring peace, education and prosperity on those they conquered.

Ignorant of his heritage, as he grows Antoninus displays some of the characteristics of his twin brother, but without the power to enact any plans he does not appear to develop into the evil character that is Commodus.

When Marcus Aurelius dies, in the minds of his followers suspicion falls on Commodus as the agent of his death.

At the same time, a feeling grows among many Romans stationed in Britain and elsewhere in Europe that Commodus will be a terrible Caesar, and they plot to secede from Rome.

When Commodus dies at the hand of Maximus and the latter appears mortally wounded, Lucilla arranges for Maximus to be taken to her quarters, where, with her tending, he survives.

Lucilla feels that Maximus might become Caesar as her father intended, and with her by his side, he might prove to be the most powerful of all the Caesars.

But Maximus, having lost his family to Commodus' brutal hand, is still so grief stricken that he rejects both Lucilla's advances and the idea that he might become Caesar. He buries himself in strong wine and deep depression.

A rumor reaches Lucilla and, independently, Maximus, that Commodus has been seen in Britain. Initially they both dismiss the rumor, but the seed of an idea is sown that perhaps Commodus also managed to survive the fight with Maximus, and escaped to Britain.

At the same time, reports reach Pertinax, Caesar after Commodus, that there is mutiny afoot in Britain. Pertinax sends a Consul to investigate and report back. When the Consul arrives in Britain, he heads towards the perceived heart of the problem in the south of the country - to Wantage.

His first discovery is that an entire contubernium of Roman soldiers (eight legionaries who shared a tent together) has been murdered shortly before his arrival, and suspicion falls upon the local chief of a group of tribes, presumed loyal to Rome, whose leader is in fact one of those involved in protecting Antoninus. The method of killing and the weapons and other traces left behind point accusing fingers at the tribal group, and in particular, at the chief.

The Consul determines that the eight legionaries were involved in collecting and burying considerable wealth in the form of gold, silver and other precious materials, presumably in preparation for the planned secession. The legionaries were in fact murdered by fellow soldiers who stole the treasure for themselves - ostensibly a simple case of greed leading to murder and theft. But who put them up to it?

The Consul investigates further and pieces together more details of the players in the complex plan to secede, but is himself murdered just as he discovers the existence of the man who instigated the murder of the members of the contubernium. The murderer is: Antoninus. Genes will out, and Commodus lives again through his twin brother. Antoninus has love for no-one but himself, and sequesters the evidence gathered by the Consul. He does not care whether his British foster family lives or dies, so long as they serve a purpose; his purpose.

Without the evidence uncovered by the Consul to counter the accusation that the native Britons are to blame, the local chief, his family and fifty of his men are put to death by the Roman garrison.

It is at this time that Pertinax is also murdered and troops stationed in Britain and Spain proclaim Decimus Clodius Albinus as Emperor of Rome.

Lucilla and Maximus travel independently to Britain, the one to see whether Commodus somehow survived, the other to kill him if he did.

Lucilla, arriving first, and making good use of her father's faithful retinue to locate the apparent Commodus, soon determines that this is her presumed-dead brother Antoninus, and decides to throw her lot in with him (she feels that she can better control him than she did Commodus, and since Maximus has rejected her, this is her only other hope of seizing the power she craves, if she can get Antoninus crowned Emperor of Rome).

The drive behind the incestuous relationship she had with Commodus compels her to be equally attracted to Antoninus, and he to her. History prepares to repeat itself.

Commodus had a duelling scar on his upper lip, which Antoninus lacks. (This is how Lucilla had determined that the man before her was neither Commodus nor his ghost but Antoninus). She drugs Antoninus and re-creates the scar by slashing his upper lip while he sleeps.

Lucilla fabricates a story that she saved Antoninus' life when he was attacked in his sleep by an assassin sent from Rome to deprive him of his rightful place as Emperor. Lucilla shows herself to be just as evil and manipulating as her brothers.

The denouement occurs some weeks later when Maximus arrives, encounters Lucilla, and he and Antoninus finally meet. Maximus believes completely that he is matched once again with Commodus, somehow protected from death by vengeful gods. He fights Antoninus and pursues him for some time before catching him in Lucilla's tent, killing him in front of Lucilla.

Lucilla sees her plans dashed yet again and resolves to poison Maximus. Her son Lucius, meanwhile, who has inherited the same evil characteristics possessed by his mother and uncles, poisons both Maximus and his mother in the belief that *he* is the rightful heir to the throne in Rome.

Maximus survives long enough to dictate the events to a trusted scribe, who hides the document temporarily, intending to return and deliver it to the Roman Governor of Britain, but is subsequently killed in an uprising of the local tribes, triggered by the earlier execution of their tribal chief and his family. Lucius, too, dies during the uprising - but at the hands of his own retinue, who realize that only with his death will there be an end to the evil that possessed Commodus, Antoninus and Lucilla.

It is Maximus' account of the events leading up to his death, encapsulated in the hidden document that is unearthed by the archaeologist, together with other evidence, that finally reveals the whole story.

Possible characters:

Maximus
Antoninus
Lucilla
Lucius
Pertinax

Others TBD (such as the archaeologist, the tribal chief, the Consul, the Governor of Britain, etc)

Possible candidates:

Russell Crowe as Maximus
Jochin Phoenix as Antoninus
Connie Nelson as Lucilla
Spencer Treat Clark as Lucius

Helen Mirren as the archaeologist

Others TBD

Possible locations:

Wantage, Oxfordshire, England
Other locations as for *Gladiator (2000)*