

## **Gladiator**

### **Story structure**

(OPENING) Maximus Meridas is a general in the Emperor's army. He leads the men successfully and valiantly!

(CATALYST) When the Emperor, Marcus Aurelius asks him to succeed him as ruler over Rome, the Emperor's son, Commodus takes revenge. Commodus murders his father, steals his title and sentences Maximus to death.

Maximus escapes execution and makes his way home to find his wife and son murdered by Roman assassins. Wondering aimlessly in the wilderness close to death, he is picked up by some travellers and sold to Proximus as a gladiator.

(NEW SITUATION) He is invited to Rome where he knows he will take his revenge on Commodus.

Maximus leads the other gladiators through successful battles in the Colosseum and they earn a reputation for beating the Emperor's gladiators, winning over the crowd. Through this, Maximus has remained anonymous, both to his peers and to the crowd. A mask disguises his face from Commodus, making the self-appointed Emperor curious to know this powerful gladiator's true identity.

(POINT OF NO RETURN) Eventually, the time comes for Maximus to reveal his face to his enemy!

Commodus is surprised to see him alive. He plots to have Maximus killed, but it must be in the arena, because of Maximus' popularity. But Commodus fails. In return for his freedom, Maximus strikes a bargain with Commodus' sister to release him so he can gather together his army and overthrow Commodus.

(MAJOR SETBACK) But the plan fails. Commodus captures Maximus and throws him in jail.

Commodus challenges Maximus to a one-on-one in the arena. Maximus accepts.

(CLIMAX) It is a difficult fight, they are both injured. Commodus dies first. Maximus soon after.

(AFTERMATH) Commodus' sister declares a new worthy Emperor. Maximus goes home to heaven to his wife and son.

### **Finding the theme: Humility versus Pride**

I love the moment in this film (at the point of no return) when Commodus stands face to face with Maximus in the arena, taunting him with, "They told me your wife moaned when they raped her and your son squealed when they nailed him to the cross!" Like all our strong heroes, we expect Maximus to draw out his sword and kill Commodus with a vengeful strike. But Maximus is wiser and knows this would be playing into his enemy's hands. He bows his head in dutiful respect of his Emperor and walks away.

We have two wonderfully contrasted characters in Maximus and Commodus. Quite simply, humility and pride. These characteristics (or themes) are symbolised throughout the film.

#### Maximus HUMILITY :

His character represents the Gladiator, bred to be slaughtered for sport!  
One man amidst a great army  
Keeps perspective by washing hands in dust/soil before battle  
Prays to God for strength and guidance  
Thinks of himself as a farmer not worthy of being Emperor  
He remains anonymous as a Gladiator for five years!  
His environment is always vast AND against him.

#### Commodus PRIDE :

His character represents Rome, a strong proud nation.  
Presumes himself worthy of being Emperor  
Eliminates those who disagree!  
Reopens the huge Colosseum  
Hides behind his army and his title  
Even at the end, thinks he can defeat Maximus

Reading through the screenplay, I noted that much of Maximus' humility is missing. Whether it was added in a later draft or was recommended by the director, I cannot say, but it was a smart move. This is a lesson to us as screenwriters that this practice of developing theme is important in our screenwriting. Directors love it. But many screenwriters fail to include it. If we develop these skills in early, how much more attractive will our work be to a director!

**By Tracey Flynn - NewVision**