

HEROD

Episode 1: "Edomite Dog"

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EXT. KING'S HIGHWAY EAST OF JORDAN RIVER - NIGHT

A full moon hangs in the sky. A long convoy of camels heads north on the hilly King's Highway toward Gadar. The camels' BELLS JANGLE monotonously. The camels are packed with perfumes, spices and coral. Twenty armed guards on horseback ride alongside the convoy, and at the head of the convoy, several Nabataean merchants ride on camels.

EXT. GROVE NEAR KING'S HIGHWAY - CONTINUOUS

Down the way, on a grove to the right of the King's Highway, several dozen men lie in ambush. These are Hezekiah the Galilean's men. HEZEKIAH, a strong man with a scar cutting down his face, briefs them quietly, using pebbles as visual aids.

HEZEKIAH

We hit the first one. He falls - the convoy stops. The guards run up to him. Uriya and Simon - you set the camels at the end of the convoy on fire. The guards will run back and forth. We'll strike them down with arrows, then with daggers. Next - Yonatan and Yair - one of the camels is carrying money for passage tolls. Find out where it is and take it. We'll gather back at the spot.

URIYA, one of Hezekiah's men, asks:

URIYA

Hezekiah, we're not sticking with you?

HEZEKIAH

No.

URIYA

Then we'll take the camels with us.

HEZEKIAH

No, they're too slow. And I warn you, if any one of you touches the cargo, I will personally deal with him. I

(MORE)

HEZEKIAH (CONT'D)

want money and weapons, no perfumes and no spices. I am not a merchant. Any questions? Does anyone not know what they're doing? Go on, take your positions.

EXT. KING'S HIGHWAY EAST OF JORDAN RIVER - CONTINUOUS

The convoy nears the grove. Two of the merchants - MALIK, 60, and IDRIS, 40, talk quietly.

MALIK

I'm not afraid of the Roman. The Roman is an ass. We've been cheating him for years. The problem is the Egyptian whore is riding the Roman ass these days, and she wants it all.

IDRIS

Cleopatra.

MALIK

Cleopatra. She wants to open a shipping route from Egypt to India through the Red Sea. If that happens, no one is going to need us or our camel convoys. The goods will go straight to Egypt by ship, and we'll go... I don't know... grow grapes on the desert sands.

IDRIS

Your wife would like that. You can spend your days with her at Hadhramaut, counting her wrinkles, playing with the great-grandchildren, chewing on some Arabian Tea.

MALIK

I don't know... I've been out of the house for forty years. After a week with her, I start to suffocate. I'd rather rest in Damascus.

IDRIS

With the Syrian.

MALIK

With the little Syrian.

IDRIS

She's your daughter's age.

MALIK

My granddaughter's age.

They laugh.

Then - an arrow pierces Malik's eye. Idris doesn't notice this. They keep riding, and Malik leans to the left and falls off the camel.

IDRIS

Malik! Malik! Stop!

The convoy stops. The merchants stop the camels. The guards gallop ahead and surround Malik, trying to understand where the arrow came from. Uriya and SIMON sneak behind the convoy and dump tar onto the cargo of the last two camels.

The GUARD COMMANDER looks around:

GUARD COMMANDER

Where did it come from?

IDRIS

Maybe the grove?

GUARD COMMANDER

Come with me.

Several guards join him and gallop toward the grove.

As they ride into the thicket, a barrage of arrows hits them. The ambush kills them all.

A cry is heard from the convoy. The heavy cargo atop the last two camels in the convoy catches fire, setting the night ablaze. The remaining guards gallop back to the end of the convoy, and stop helplessly in front of the camels engulfed in flames, their cries piercing the night.

A sharp smell of incense fills the air. They stop to smell it - and are hit with an arrow. The attackers come out of the dark. The remaining guards flee on horseback. The convoy is now in the hands of the attackers.

The merchants at the head of the convoy are tied up and

dragged into the grove to the side of the road. YOHANAN puts a knife up to Idris's neck.

IDRIS

The ninth camel...

The ninth camel is forced to the ground. Yohanan and YAIR pull four sacks of coins out of the cargo. They get on their horses and ride away.

EXT. GROVE NEAR KING'S HIGHWAY - NIGHT

In the grove, tied to each other, with their robes and headdresses off, the Nabataean merchants sit stunned. Their mouths are gagged. Hezekiah is now wearing Idris's robe. His men have also taken merchant robes.

HEZEKIAH

Wait here quietly. Tomorrow morning, men will come to release you. The camels and the cargo will wait for you in Gadar. We have taken the money.

EXT. KING'S HIGHWAY EAST OF JORDAN RIVER - NIGHT

The convoy resumes its path in the same pattern - the "merchants" riding camels in the front, the guards riding horses alongside the convoy. Only now, they are all Hezekiah's men.

EXT. ROMAN LEGION CAMP AT ENTRANCE TO GADAR - NIGHT

It's the Roman army's camp at the entrance to Gadar. Two Roman soldiers, LULIOS and ARBUS, stop the convoy at the road block.

ARBUS

You would come at this hour?

HEZEKIAH

The camels gave us trouble along the way. They're in heat these days.

LULIOS

So are we. And not just these days.

ARBUS

What have you brought us?

HEZEKIAH

When is your salary due?

LULIOS

Next week.

HEZEKIAH

I'll give it to you today.

This is for you,

(hands them two bundles of
coins)

and this is for the wife.

(hands them cloth sacks with
resin crystals)

Smell it, smell it.

The guards smell for the last time in their lives. Two of Hezekiah's men strangle them to death.

Hezekiah and his men enter the camp and pour black tar on the military tents.

The city gates open, and the convoy of camels enters.

EXT. GADAR - CITY SQUARE - NIGHT

It's a square in the center of the city. The dozens of camels and their cargo block the roads leading up to the square. Several Roman soldiers, gagged and stripped down to their underwear, are bound by the wall. A SMALL DOG keeps BARKING at Hezekiah, who hurries his men. They are looting the armory and loading shields, swords, spears, armor and helmets onto the spare horses.

Hezekiah kneels and whistles to the dog. It comes over, tail wagging. He pets the dog, then picks it up by its nape.

A DISTANT TRUMPET is heard.

HEZEKIAH

Come. They're waiting for us.

EXT. ROMAN LEGION CAMP AT ENTRANCE TO GADAR - NIGHT

Hezekiah's men are on their horses, loaded with weapons, and they gallop out of the city gates.

As they pass the Roman camp, they toss a lit torch at it, and the tents catch on fire. Half-naked soldiers run out of the tents, confused and joining the general chaos.

EXT. HILL BY YARMOUK RIVER ESTUARY SEA OF GALILEE - NIGHT

The sun rises in the east. Hezekiah and his men join their comrades waiting with the sacks of money they took from the convoy. Hezekiah gestures to two of his men to look down at the road below.

HEZEKIAH

Did you count it?

YONATAN nods.

HEZEKIAH (CONT'D)

How much?

YONATAN

A lot. Did everybody make it back?

HEZEKIAH

Bless the Lord.

One of the scouts whistles. Hezekiah walks over to him. They hide behind the rocks and look down at the road.

From afar, a small and impressive convoy approaches. It's a royal convoy, with an armed battalion of guards at its head and to its sides.

The convoy stops. A chubby, tall man in his 50s dressed luxuriously steps off the convoy and takes a few steps to the bushes on the side of the road. He stands there and pees.

Hezekiah smiles.

SIMON

Who are they?

HEZEKIAH

When you get back to your wife, you tell her you saw, with your own two eyes, John Hyrcanus, the High Priest of the Jews, peeing on a bush like a commoner.

SIMON

That's the high priest?

HEZEKIAH

Yes. And that's his Edomite dog, Antipater.

Hezekiah is referring to an impressive, strong, gray-haired man in his 50s, who is talking to two young men in fancy garbs. These are the sons of ANTIPATER - HEROD and PHASAEL.

YONATAN

Are they leaving the country?

HEZEKIAH

I wish. They're riding to Syria to see Julius Caesar. He was victorious in Egypt, and all the kings in the area are swarming Syria to kiss his ass in the governor's palace. So the High Priest is representing us.

YONATAN

He doesn't represent me.

SIMON

Me neither.

URIYA

It's strange - there are more guards around the cart than around the High Priest.

HEZEKIAH

That's because the cart is loaded with the bribe gold they're bringing for Julius Caesar.

YONATAN

Don't we need that gold?

HEZEKIAH

God hates the arrogant. We have taken enough. We used up all the luck we had for one day.

EXT. ROAD BY SEA OF GALILEE - CONTINUOUS

The High Priest HYRCANUS returns to the carriage.

HYRCANUS

The best ideas always come to me while I'm peeing...

He climbs onto the carriage and opens a window. The

convoy rides off. Hyrcanus talks to Antipater through the carriage window. Herod and Phasaël listen to their conversation.

HYRCANUS (CONT'D)

What if Antigonus, my brother's son, comes before Julius Caesar and demands to be king of Judea? What if he brings a bigger bribe? What if Caesar prefers him and kicks me out?

ANTIPATER

You said you had an idea.

HYRCANUS

Perhaps I should offer him something - governor, or deputy, or heir. Or perhaps that I shall rule for a few years and then we switch.

Antipater turns to see if his sons are listening. They are. Herod smiles distrustfully.

ANTIPATER

Or perhaps we should return to Jerusalem and let Caesar know that you are not interested in being the king or the High Priest. You, sir, wish only to nap in the afternoon.

HYRCANUS

If there is no other choice, I am willing to share the crown with Antigonus. He is my brother's son. The people always loved my brother more than they loved me.

HEROD

(to Phasaël)

Antigonus would snap his head off right after he gave him the crown. That's what I would do if I were him.

HYRCANUS

What did Herod say?

ANTIPATER

Herod said that new kings have a tendency to pick off the heads of their predecessors and those closest to them. And since I am the one who put you in your seat twenty years ago, and has stood by your side ever since and kept you from falling, I will probably lose my head moments after--

Hyrchanus shuts the carriage window. Antipater turns to Herod.

ANTIPATER (CONT'D)

Why can't you keep your mouth shut?

PHASAEEL

Herod is right, father. You think we can rule through this man, but it's just like--

HEROD

(completes his sentence)

Like trying to fuck a woman with another man's cock. A very old man.

ANTIPATER

I am your father, Herod. Not your friend.

Phasael laughs. Antipater puts some distance between them. Herod stops.

HEROD

Phasael, hold on. Do you see them, in the rocks?

PHASAEEL

They want you to see that they could attack but they won't, and that you couldn't do a thing to them.

Herod locks eyes with Hezekiah. Hezekiah runs his finger across his neck, the gesture for slaughter. Herod smiles at him.

Suddenly, he gallops his horse toward Hezekiah's men, taking them by surprise. He comes very close to them, and

by the time they get their arrows in their bows, he turns his horse around and rides away, followed by a cloud of arrows.

HEROD

Maybe not today...

ANTIPATER

Herod!

Herod rejoins the convoy.

EXT. SEPPHORIS - GARRISON FORTRESS - DAY

Two farmers walk up to the fortress gate with a handcart packed with vegetables. They are Yonatan and Yair. The SOLDIER at the gate asks:

SOLDIER

What is that?

YAIR

Onion and garlic. For the kitchen.

The Soldier lets them through. They walk into the fortress, abandon the cart and hurry up the stairs.

They enter--

INT. FORTRESS COMMANDER'S OFFICE (SEPPHORIS) - CONTINUOUS

HILKIAH, a fat military man in his 40s, sits in his office. Yonatan and Yair lay a leather sack full of coins on his desk.

HILKIAH

How did you get in here? Were you spotted?

YAIR

This is your share. A tithe of the loot. With blessings and salutations from Hezekiah.

Hilkiah pours the coins out on the desk.

HILKIAH

This is it? You didn't bring any spices? Persimmon oil? I promised my wife.

YONATAN

No persimmon today. Shall I tell Hezekiah you said thank you?

HILKIAH

Then it isn't worth it. I'm taking too much of a risk for him. You cause too much trouble. Tell him the Roman governor in Syria sends messengers my way every two days.

YAIR

(smiles)

Hold steady.

EXT. CLIFFS OVER SEA OF GALILEEE - DAY

Hezekiah and his men have reached the cliffs over the Sea of Galilee. They unload the loot - the sacks of money and the equipment - and carry it into the large caves in the cliffs.

Women and children run out to greet them. JUDAS, an 8-year-old boy, runs up to Hezekiah, hugs him and leaps up on his back. TALIA, Hezekiah's wife, joins them.

TALIA

He didn't sleep all night and wouldn't let anyone else sleep.

HEZEKIAH

Get off, Judas. My back hurts. We rode all night.

TALIA

And you brought nothing but weapons?

HEZEKIAH

And a lot of money. It'll last us all winter.

Judas waves a stick, wearing a Roman helmet he took from the loot, which covers his eyes.

Talia is horrified:

TALIA

Judas! That's impure, it's a
dead man's helmet - take it
off this instant!

JUDAS

(to Hezekiah)

I want to kill with you too.

HEZEKIAH

(to Talia)

Don't be mad. It's new, from
the armory. We tried not to
hurt them. Judas, if you give
me the helmet, you'll get
this.

Hezekiah reaches for the sack tied to his horse and pulls
out the small dog he took captive. The DOG starts BARKING
immediately.

TALIA

Full of ticks.

HEZEKIAH

Give him food and water.

TALIA

Thank you very much. Another
mouth to feed.

JUDAS

I'll take care of him.

HEZEKIAH

And who will take care of me?

EXT. SYRIAN ANTIOCH - GOVERNOR'S PALACE - GARDEN - DAY

The delegation from Judea - the High Priest John
Hyrchanus, his right hand man Antipater, Antipater's two
sons Phasaël and Herod, and the slaves carrying chests of
gold - walks through the garden gates and stops, stunned.

Among the trees, the water fountains, the rock garden and
the paved pathways of the marvelous garden, groups of
representatives from all over the east huddle together -
from Armenia to the islands of Greece.

At the center of each group, a man dressed in royal garbs
stands surrounded by advisors, ministers and military

men, all dressed up for the occasion. Facing the groups of kings are groups of contenders for the crown - scowling, scheming, ready for battle. Roman senators in togas and Greek lawyers hover from group to group, trying to mediate or instigate, while armed Roman soldiers do their best to prevent angry brawls, conflicts or threats among rival delegations.

It is an awe-inspiring sight. A buzzing hive of nationalities, flagrant dress, crowns, beards, gleaming jewelry, and CONSTANT CHATTER. Herod looks around with a stupefied smile, like a child in a candy store.

POTIMOS, Julius Caesar's freed slave, lords over the chaos, accompanied by guards and slaves. He is a short, balding Greek man with skittish, mousy eyes.

HYRCANUS

It'll be a week before we get in.

POTIMOS

(declares)

You, the king of Armenia and three advisors - the Consul Gaius Julius Caesar will see you now.

The king of Armenia, pale, with big eyes and a reddish gold crown upon his black hair, hurries into the palace, accompanied by his advisors. Behind one of the trees, a young scowling redheaded man walks off, accompanied by a remarkably tall Greek lawyer carrying scrolls and documents. They both hurry in, but are blocked by Potimos and the guards. Hyrcanus watches this, concerned.

HYRCANUS

Who are those?

The redheaded man takes a ring off his finger with a gigantic diamond and hands it to Potimos. Potimos examines it, pleased, and lets them in.

Antipater walks over to speak to Potimos in private. Hyrcanus is sweating and tense. Herod offers him a cloth handkerchief.

HYRCANUS

Is Antigonus not here? Do you see him? Has he not showed up?

HEROD

We don't know him.

HYRCANUS

A handsome man. Tall. A
prince. Looks a lot like me.
He's my brother's son,
Aristobulus. I'm his uncle.

Antipater walks over with Potimos.

POTIMOS

You'll go in after the
Armenians. It won't take long.

ANTIPATER

(to Hyrcanus, quiet)
Antigonus hasn't showed up.

HYRCANUS

Who was that man who went in
after the king?

POTIMOS

(smiles)

That was Tigranes, the son of
the king's brother, who very
much wants to replace him.
Just like it is with your
people. Would you like me to
store your chests somewhere
safe?

Potimos's slaves carry the chests of gold away.

The palace doors open, and the Armenian delegation runs
out, horrified. They quickly get on their horses, get
into their carriages and leave the place.

Roman guards exit the hall, leading the former ruler in
handcuffs, his black hair matted. He's screaming in a
foreign language. They disappear with him behind the big
gate.

HYRCANUS

What is this? Where are they
taking him? Where is his
crown?

PHASAEEL

It's terrible. This place is a
slaughterhouse.

HEROD

It's wonderful. I love this place. I want to live in a place like this.

Soldiers struggle to carry chests bursting with gold coins and disappear into another door. Tigranes, the young redheaded man, comes out with his lawyer. The lawyer is carefully carrying the deposed king's crown. Tigranes is overjoyed and overwhelmed. Several senators gather around him.

POTIMOS

As I said, Caesar makes his decisions quickly. You can head in now.

INT. GOVERNOR'S PALACE - RECEPTION HALL (SYRIA) - DAY

JULIUS CAESAR, in uniform, sits on a luxurious throne. SEXTUS CAESAR, the Roman Governor, sits by his side. His officers and advisors stand around them. The chests of gold the slaves brought in earlier are displayed before them. The delegation from Judea enters the hall. Potimos declares:

POTIMOS

From Judea - John Hyrcanus of House Hasmonean, the High Priest of the Jews, and with him, his right hand man, Antipater son of Antipas and his two sons Phasael and Herod, all bless Gaius Julius Caesar, Consul and Dictator on behalf of the Roman Senate, conqueror of Gaul, conqueror of Egypt and defender of Rome.

Julius Caesar gets up and, to the surprise of those present, walks over to Hyrcanus and Antipater and hugs them warmly. Herod is moved by this, and looks at Julius with a gleam in his eyes.

JULIUS CAESAR

It's alright, Potimos, we know each other.

(to Antipater)

These are your sons?

ANTIPATER

Phasaël, the eldest, and
Herod, his younger brother.
They organized the convoys of
equipment and supplies from
Ashkelon for your war in
Egypt.

JULIUS CAESAR

I thank you.

(to his men)

I am happy to say there is
nothing to discuss in this
case. I was there myself and
can attest to what these men
did for the Roman people. Many
of the rulers who now come to
us begging were only yesterday
assisting the traitor Pompey
in his war against Rome.
Unlike them...

One of Julius Caesar's men walks over and whispers in his
ear. Julius Caesar smiles and nods.

JULIUS CAESAR (CONT'D)

Let him in.

Potimos lets four men into the hall: MATTATHIAS
ANTIGONUS, accompanied by three others - Ptolemy king of
Chalkis, a Roman senator in a toga, and an elderly Greek
lawyer. Antigonus is truly impressive in his beauty and
appearance.

Slaves bring in a chest with a giant golden wreath.
MURMURS OF AWE ripple through the crowd. Hyrcanus pales.
Antipater and his sons watch Antigonus with great
interest.

ANTIGONUS

A golden wreath for the
emperor's carriage on its
Roman Triumph.

POTIMOS

Mattathias Antigonus,
contender to the throne of
Judea. Antigonus is the nephew
of John Hyrcanus, who stands
before us today.

JULIUS CAESAR

This man, John Hyrcanus,
recruited an army and
courageously broke the siege
on Alexandria, struck the army
of Ptolemy the 13th, and
altered the tides of the war.

HEROD

(cynical, to Phasael)
Didn't father do all that?

JULIUS CAESAR

In Rome they say the Gods
bring us victory. This time
they sent our friend from
Judea to bring us victory -
and they do not even believe
in our Gods. Therefore, as a
sign of gratitude, Zoilos,
read our decision.

ZOILOS, Julius Caesar's secretary, a haggard man who
looks like he's suffering from a toothache, reads quickly
from a scroll:

ZOILOS

I, Julius Caesar, emperor and
dictator, have decided on
behalf of the Senate, that
since Hyrcanus son of
Alexander man of Judea has
proven his loyalty and
dedication to our interests,
he and his offspring shall be
rulers of the Jewish People,
and serve as High Priests for
eternity, and be our allies
and count among our dearest
friends.

Mattathias Antigonus looks around at his men in anger. It
seems they promised him something else.

HYRCANUS

(whispers to Antipater)
I'm not a king? What is a
ruler of people?

ZOILOS

No clerk shall have the right to recruit soldiers from among the Jews. The Roman army shall not park along your land's shore, and no taxes shall be collected. The city of Jaffa and its port, like all of the cities, towns and villages torn from their rule, shall be returned to them as it was before.

Mattathias Antigonus can no longer hold his tongue:

MATTATHIAS ANTIGONUS

Sir, these people your lordship glorifies were the minions of the traitor Pompey, sir. Along with Pompey they shattered the walls of Jerusalem and killed thousands of their own people. Along with him they desecrated the Holy Temple and deposed my father, Aristobulus, the lawful king of Judea. They handed over to Pompey the treasures of our temple so that he might fund his war against you.

Julius Caesar's men are made visibly uncomfortable by this. They clearly see Hyrcanus in a different light. Hyrcanus and his delegation are nervous.

MATTATHIAS ANTIGONUS (CONT'D)

This kindly man, John Hyrcanus, my good uncle, exiled me and my brother and sisters like dogs from our homeland and confiscated our homes and our property. My father's body has been embalmed in a closet of honey for the past two years because his brother will not allow him to be buried in Jerusalem. You, sir, sent my father Aristobulus and my brother

(MORE)

MATTATHIAS ANTIGONUS (CONT'D)

Alexander to fight Pompey in
your name. They never made it.
Pompey's supporters poisoned
my father and took my
brother's head with an axe.
They gave their lives for you
before you defeated the
traitor.

JULIUS CAESAR

That is true.

MATTATHIAS ANTIGONUS

Unlike them, these two jumped
on my lord's bandwagon after
Pompey was killed. This evil
duo shook in fear of your
revenge, just like the rulers
of the kingdoms shivering
outside this door as we speak.
It was not to your rescue that
they rushed to Egypt, but to
escape your vengeance. If you
give them their lives as a
gift, you will be remembered
in the pages of history as a
merciful ruler who forgives
his enemies. But if you make
the mistake of appointing them
rulers over a land that hates
them like a man with mange
hates his boils, you will soil
the glory of your wisdom
forever.

MURMURS ripple through the hall. Julius looks at
Hyrchanus, who is embarrassed, and Antipater, who seems
expressionless.

JULIUS CAESAR

(to Mattathias Antigonus)

Your rhetoric teacher was
worth whatever you paid him,
but even so, I would not
recommend calling me a fool if
I do not do as you say.

(to his men)

This young prince is like an
acrobat, walking the tightrope

(MORE)

JULIUS CAESAR (CONT'D)

between courage and insolence.
Who among you would wish to
answer him? But be quick about
it, because the courtyard is
packed.

HEROD

(quiet, to Phasael)

This is where I want to be. In
places like this. With people
like these.

ANTIPATER

My loyalty to Caesar needs no
rhetoric. For even if I am
silent...

Antipater takes a step forward and surprisingly drops his
garment. He stands nearly naked in the middle of the
hall, to everyone's amazement. His body is covered in
bandages and battle scars.

ANTIPATER (CONT'D)

...my body cries out. From an
arrow before the walls of
Pelusium; the burn marks from
boiling oil when I was first
up the wall; the broken rib
from an Egyptian horse's
hooves in the Nile Delta; and
the sword wounds from the
battle on the river's banks,
when I and this good man,
leading thousands of our
soldiers, broke through the
siege the Egyptians had placed
on my lord.

Antipater puts his robe back on.

ANTIPATER (CONT'D)

But I, sir, do not cry out, do
not apologize and do not
defend myself. I am merely
stunned to hear this acrobat,
whose father betrayed Rome
again and again, was exiled
and imprisoned and defected
from prison time and time

(MORE)

ANTIPATER (CONT'D)

again. This young man, who inherited from his father the passion for riots and rebellion, stands here and dares to accuse others of disloyalty. He asks for the kingdom? He should thank his God that he is still alive, unlike his father and brother. If you give him the scepter he will stab it in your back the moment he has the chance.

JULIUS CAESAR

Alright, time for my decision. Antigonus, my young friend. Your uncle is loyal to Rome, not to one man or another. If in the future I shall betray Rome as Pompey did, I hope they should fight me in the name of Rome. After all, what do I look for in my allies? Loyalty, judgment, and political wisdom. Zoilos...

Julius Caesar signs a document that Zoilos hands him.

JULIUS CAESAR (CONT'D)

And you, Antipater son of Antipas - how would you prefer to serve your country? Choose a position worthy of your wisdom, valor and talent.

ANTIPATER

Sir, you bestow the honor, it is for you to determine its measure.

JULIUS CAESAR

So be it. Zoilos, write this down. Antipater shall be the strategos of Judea, governor and supervisor over this hard land. From this day forth, he and his lineage shall be citizens of Rome and deserving of all the rights of Roman

(MORE)

JULIUS CAESAR (CONT'D)

citizens. Antipater, appoint them district governors. Let them start to work with their father.

Phasael and Herod are surprised by this. Herod secretly shakes Phasael's hand. Sextus Caesar whispers something in Julius Caesar's ear.

MATTATHIAS ANTIGONUS

Sir, these Edomites were our slaves, and now you appoint them our rulers?

JULIUS CAESAR

Sextus Caesar, our governor in Syria, asks that your first mission be to restore peace to the Galilee. We hear that Jewish robbers are stirring up chaos over there.

MATTATHIAS ANTIGONUS

And if these people rule over them, the Jews will continue to rebel.

ANTIPATER

Now he's threatening you too.

Antigonus turns to leave. He gestures to his people to take the chest with the golden wreath that he brought in.

JULIUS CAESAR

Young man, Antigonus - all of us here understand you were meant for greatness. We're only asking ourselves whether that pretty head of yours will be adorned in the future with a crown, or heaven forbid be chopped off and adorn the top of a spear. A great war approaches, against the Parthians, our sworn enemies from the east. Join me. And who knows, you might make a name for yourself.

Potimos shows up by the chest with the golden wreath, along with two slaves.

POTIMOS

It's alright. You can leave it here with us. We'll take care of it.

Hyrchanus, Antipater, Phasaël and Herod walk by, stifling their smiles.

MATTATHIAS ANTIGONUS

(in Hebrew)

Don't be too happy, uncle. The wheel keeps turning. Roman careers end very swiftly. Before you can even sit down on your throne, I will knock you off of it, like my father did to you. I promise you that.

HYRCANUS

And yet for 16 years I have been the High Priest in Jerusalem, while your father is eaten by fish in the Tiber in Rome.

HEROD

(comes close to Antigonus's face)

And I will chop off your pretty little head with my own bare hands. I promise you that as well.

The hall is silent, and Herod's words are heard, loud and clear. He notices Julius Caesar and the others staring at him.

POTIMOS

Gentlemen...

As they leave, another similar delegation enters - a glorified king and his ministers, advisors, and slaves carrying in a gift of gold for Caesar.

INT. DORIS'S PARENTS HOUSE (JERUSALEM) - DAY

In the Edomites' neighborhood in Jerusalem, it's a large room in the home Doris's parents. The smoke of incense rises from red clay pomegranates. Figurines of the three-horned fertility goddess are set in niches in the wall. In the center of the room there's a large bed where DORIS

(14, Herod's bride-to-be) sits, naked and frightened.

An elderly priestess mumbles, and the royal court's women prepare Doris for her wedding night. They weave flowers in her hair and smear her body with perfumed oils. During the ceremony, the women sing a song about what she can expect on her wedding night:

WOMEN

(singing)

He stands at the gate
His sword on his thigh
Open up for him
Let him enter your rooms

Open the gate
And your beloved shall come
Feed you honey
Put roses in your lap

CYPROS, Herod's mother, and UZA, Doris's stout mother, watch her. Both women are no older than 40. Cypros, eyes gleaming, looks like a Gypsy woman. Little SALOME, 10 years old, Herod's sister, clings to her mother. She's a tanned girl with straight hair.

CYPROS

Persimmon perfume. Herod has loved persimmon ever since he was a child. It drives him crazy. He'll swallow her up this way - like you swallow the first fig before summer.

The priestess brings a golden cup up to Doris's lips. Doris refuses to drink.

UZA

Drink it, Doris. It's good.
You won't feel a thing.

CYPROS

Force her.

Facing the bed, on a special stand, there is a golden mask of a wild donkey with two rubies for eyes. Doris stares at the mask, hazy. The women's singing grows louder:

WOMEN

(singing)

Who is this stranger, mother
 Whom I did not call
 And if he hurts me, mother
 If he breaks my heart

Rise, daughter of the desert
 Today he is your master
 Tomorrow he is your slave
 Tomorrow he is your slave

Doris is afraid. The women lay her down, shove a pillow beneath her behind, grab her and pin her down to the bed. The two mothers approach the bed. Little Salome peeks fearfully through her fingers.

The priestess tends to something we cannot see between Doris's legs. Then she pulls it out and ceremoniously presents to Cypros the thread that blocked the girl's genitals. Cypros puts the thread in a small golden box. The women's singing is quite loud now:

WOMEN

(singing)

Give him a flower
 A desert apple
 The enchanted milk of your
 body
 River water.

SALOME

If you put one of those in me
 I will burn the house down.

CYPROS

When you were a baby I wanted
 to sew you shut, but your
 father wouldn't let me.

One of the handmaidens, sickened by the sight, runs out of the room.

CYPROS (CONT'D)

What's wrong with her?

UZA

She's a Jew. Too delicate.

CYPROS

Catch her. Tell her to keep her mouth shut or I will rip out her tongue with my bare hands. Why did you let her in here? Now she'll run off to tell the Jews.

EXT. JERUSALEM - ANTIPATER'S COURTYARD - DAY

In the courtyard of Antipater, governor of Judea, there's a flurry of activity - slaves prepare the yard for the wedding according to orders from BAGOHI, 30, the gorgeous Persian eunuch, and his personal assistant, a curly-haired boy named HABUB, 15.

BAGOHI

Scatter the large pots with the trees around the yard. I want a blooming green garden here. Arrange the couches along the walls, under the trees. Habub...

HABUB

Yes. I'm here.

BAGOHI

Don't deal with anything right now, just listen. Take out the most beautiful cloths we have - velvet, silk, Damascus, lace - drape them over the couches and make sure none of these people steal anything. Where are the pillows? Has anyone seen the pillows? Find the pillows, scatter them on the couches, after you've covered them in cloth.

Several half-naked dancers rehearse acrobatic exercises. Bagohi locks in on their leader.

BAGOHI (CONT'D)

You, come to me for a moment. Finish rehearsing and go get dressed. The High Priest is coming to this wedding, and I don't want you waving asses

(MORE)

BAGOHI (CONT'D)

and tits in his face. Habub,
go find out where the groom is
hiding; I haven't seen him
since this morning.

Habub heads into the house.

INT. ANTIPATER'S HOUSE - ENTRANCE LOUNGE (JERUSALEM) - DAY

Sitting in the lounge are KOSMELEKH, the father of the
bride, a bitter man, and Antipater. They're discussing
the terms of the marriage. Herod and Phasaël are in the
room as well.

KOSMELEKH

Then I'm calling the wedding
off.

ANTIPATER

What will you gain by doing
that, Kosmelekh? You'll lose
what you've already spent, and
you'll forfeit the wedding
gifts.

KOSMELEKH

But you aren't giving me
anything. I'm paying for the
wedding, I'm giving you a
gigantic estate in the Ella
Valley - vines, olives, sheep.
What are you giving me?

ANTIPATER

The groom.

KOSMELEKH

No offense - that's not
enough.

ANTIPATER

It's more than enough. This
groom doesn't have to study a
profession and he doesn't have
to build a house. This groom -
I was going to announce this
at the wedding, but I'll let
you know right now - is to be
appointed governor of
Jerusalem today.

Herod turns around, surprised. Phasael must have known about the appointment.

ANTIPATER (CONT'D)

Your daughter will start her life very high up the ladder. Here, Herod is surprised too.

HEROD

And Phasael?

ANTIPATER

Phasael will be governor of the Galilee.

HEROD

I wanted the Galilee.

ANTIPATER

No, no. You are getting married today. Settle down with your wife, give us grandchildren. Jerusalem is a complicated city. Be close to me; you will help me and I will help you. Maybe in a year or two.

Herod is not happy about this. Bagohi walks in.

BAGOHI

You're here. Have you bathed already? Have you cleansed yourself? Go get dressed.

HEROD

It's like I have a second mother, and she doesn't have balls either.

BAGOHI

The procession is leaving for the bride's house in a bit. If you won't be ready, we'll leave without you.

HEROD

A procession without a groom?

BAGOHI

We'll find someone to take
your place, both in the
procession and in the bridal
bed.

HEROD

Certainly not you.

BAGOHI

When God wishes it so, even a
broomstick can shoot.

Bagohi takes him out of the room.

KOSMELEKH

I'd be very happy if this
wedding did not include eunuch
jokes. It's hard enough for me
to give away my daughter for
nothing as it is.

EXT. JERUSALEM - ANTIPATER'S COURTYARD - DAY

Herod is off to get dressed. Antipater catches up to
Bagohi in the yard.

ANTIPATER

Bagohi, where is my wife?
Where is Cypros?

BAGOHI

I don't know, haven't seen
her, haven't heard her.

ANTIPATER

Where is my wife, before I
scalp you.

BAGOHI

With the bride. Women's
affairs. But it's a secret.

ANTIPATER

Bagohi, when the High Priest
gets here I don't want to hear
any singing in Edomite or any
wailing in Arabic. Do you
understand what I'm saying?

BAGOHI

You won't hear any of that.
Nothing but psalms. The Song
of Songs. Nothing but Hebrew.

ANTIPATER

And if I catch any Edomite
priests or anyone wearing the
head of a donkey - I'll
castrate them. Sorry.

BAGOHI

Is that all?

ANTIPATER

And if I find a statue of Qos
or any of the old Gods, I will
smash it to pieces, and I
don't care if it's an
inheritance from Cypros's
grandmother in Petra.
Understood?

BAGOHI

Understood. If you won't look
for it - you won't find it. Go
get dressed too.

Antipater walks off. Bagohi makes sure he's gone, then
pulls out several three-horned figurines that were hidden
in the bushes. He hides the figurines in his clothes.
Then he stops and sniffs.

BAGOHI

Habub, what is that smell? Do
you recognize that smell?

HABUB

Is someone frying something?

BAGOHI

Come with me. I'll kill that
Greek idiot.

INT. ANTIPATER'S HOUSE - KITCHEN (JERUSALEM) - DAY

Bagohi bursts into the kitchen. He walks past the
handmaidens and the kitchen boys, busy chopping
vegetables, plucking chickens and kneading dough. He gets
to the burning stovetop, where ADONIS, a mustachioed
Greek chef, drops slabs of fat into a sizzling pan.

BAGOHI

What is this, what are you
frying, what's in there?

ADONIS

Fat.

BAGOHI

What kind of fat? Is that
pork?

ADONIS

What?

BAGOHI

I told you not to use pork
fat.

ADONIS

Then you know nothing about
food. This is much tastier.
Who doesn't eat pork fat?

BAGOHI

Jews, you idiot, Jews don't
eat pork.

ADONIS

Then they're barbarians. They
need to be educated.

Bagohi lifts the pan from the fire and dumps its contents
onto Adonis's feet. Now he beats him out of there.

BAGOHI

Get out of here! Pack your
things and get out!

(to Habub)

See him out.

ADONIS

What about my money?

BAGOHI

(throws pan at him)

Get out!

(to other workers)

I warn you. If any one of you
dares to cook meat in milk or
let any pork in here, I will
roast him myself.

He looks at a FEMALE CHEF standing and smiling near him.

BAGOHI (CONT'D)

You're a Jewess. Didn't you see what he was frying there?

FEMALE CHEF

Excuse me? You brought that arrogant Greek man from Ashkelon with his spawns and his pork because you thought I wasn't good enough. Now you can eat what you cooked.

BAGOHI

Get back to work! The guests are arriving. Why am I not smelling bread in the oven?

Habub returns.

HABUB

Come to the gate. There's a problem.

EXT. JERUSALEM - ANTIPATER'S COURTYARD - DAY

Bagohi and Habub cut across the yard, where the wedding procession is getting ready to leave for the bride's house. There is a luxurious litter (a human-powered vehicle, also known as a king-carrier - cab with four carrier poles) with a couch inside decorated with flowers, and there's a carriage bound to two decorated mules, carrying a band of musicians with flutes, tambourines, cymbals, trumpets, shofars, and a large drum. Young men and women have gathered around the carriage, dressed for spring. Herod stands at the head of the procession, ready to start marching.

Bagohi and Habub reach the gate and find three Roman horsemen - including OPTIMUS, a Roman officer - dusty and angry, and the GUARD groaning and writhing in one the hands of one of the horsemen.

BAGOHI

What's going on?

GUARD

You said not to let any strangers in today. Because of the wedding.

OPTIMUS

I have an urgent letter from
Sextus Caesar, the Roman
governor in Syria, to
Antipater, strategos of Judea.

BAGOHI

I'm sorry, please, come in.
Our home is your home. We have
a wedding right now, and you
are invited to join us in our
festivities. We will care for
the horses. Habub!

Herod has arrived at the gate.

HEROD

(to Optimus)

Thank you. I'll take that.

Herod takes the letter. He turns to Bagohi.

HEROD (CONT'D)

Get my father and Phasael.
Hurry.

HABUB

I'll take them.

(to Guard)

Listen, you idiot, when a
Roman officer wants to come in
you open up for him - even if
he wants in to your virgin
sister's room.

INT. ANTIPATER'S OFFICE (JERUSALEM) - DAY

Antipater summarizes the letter for Herod and Phasael.

ANTIPATER

Hezekiah the Galilean's gang.
They're raiding villages and
towns in Syria, stealing
weapons, robbing convoys. They
burned down a legion base by
Gadar. The Nabataeans have put
a halt to any convoys along
the king's highway. The
governor is losing money. He's
turned to the Senate in Rome
and asked for permission to

(MORE)

ANTIPATER (CONT'D)

invade the Galilee and take care of the problem himself.

HEROD

Why do we maintain fortresses and soldiers up there if they do nothing against these rebels?

PHASAEL

Because both the soldiers and the robbers are from the same families, the same villages.

HEROD

So they split the loot with the robbers and draw a salary from us.

Habub walks in.

HABUB

We're ready to go. Waiting on the groom.

HEROD

Wait outside and don't bother us now. The bride won't run away.

Habub leaves the room.

ANTIPATER

Phasael, recruit a battalion of mercenaries. Don't get any Jews. Get Edomites, Samaritans, Greeks. Get the Iturean archer's platoon and go restore some order up there.

PHASAEL

I'm not sure a battalion will be enough. We don't know anything about them. How many they are, where they are...

HEROD

Are you afraid?

PHASAEL

I'm cautious and I am not arrogant.

HEROD

You're afraid. A few pathetic peasants, and you're afraid.

PHASAEL

Don't make any mistakes - you can still get a beating, even if it is your wedding day.

HEROD

Let me go up to the Galilee.

PHASAEL

What did you say?

ANTIPATER

I need you here.

HEROD

No, father, you need me there.

PHASAEL

Are you saying I can't deal with a few robbers?

HEROD

I'm saying you're smart, you're cautious, you think twice. You're not rash or arrogant - I am. I'm as crazy as Hezekiah. I think like him. Let me take care of him. Give me two months, and then we'll switch.

PHASAEL

To set the region on fire you don't need two months. All you need is one moment with a hotheaded--

ANTIPATER

He's right. You are hotheaded.

HEROD

No, father. I'm a hunter. I'm the best hunter you know. Let me hunt them. The Roman governor in Syria will owe us. Rome will owe us. Julius Caesar will get word of it.

PHASAEEL

He's already hunted the tiger;
now he's sewing a coat from
its fur.

HEROD

You won't regret this, I
promise.

ANTIPATER

(to Phasael)

What do you say?

HEROD

You are the governor of Judea,
this is your decision to make.
Not my brother's. Phasael,
your wife is pregnant, your
children are little. You have
a family in Jerusalem.

Bagohi walks into the room.

BAGOHI

Excuse me. The High Priest
will be here any minute. We
have to leave to get the
bride.

HEROD

Then go and get the bride.
I'll wait for her here.

BAGOHI

But--

HEROD

Go!

INT. HASMONEAN PALACE - HIGH PRIEST'S HOUSE - LOUNGE - DAY

John Hyrcanus returns from dipping in the ceremonial bath (Mikveh) in his home. His servant hands him a towel to dry off with. He waits to dress him in the garbs of the High Priest. MALACHI, Hyrcanus's close advisor, is in the room as well. He is a rich aristocrat in his early 50s, heavysset, with thick hair.

MALACHI

It's nothing more than an
Edomite political event. The
marriage of two families.

HYRCANUS

Malachi, weddings are usually between two families. Don't confuse me.

MALACHI

You're the High Priest. If you're there, that makes a political statement.

HYRCANUS

Saying what? What am I politically stating?

MALACHI

That Antipater is the most powerful man in Judea, and that you have to report to his events.

HYRCANUS

Malachi, my dear. Antipater is the most powerful man in Judea, who has been with me for twenty five years and it is solely thanks to him that I sit in this chair today. And I am not "reporting" to Herod's wedding; I am coming as a friend and honoring them with my presence. I have known Herod since he was a young child, Malachi.

Hyrcanus is done getting dressed.

MALACHI

Fine. Then take off your High Priest's garbs and come as a friend, as a private person.

HYRCANUS

Without my priestly guards?

MALACHI

Without priestly guards. We'll accompany you. Me, Felix, Ben Gadya, Dosythius.

HYRCANUS

All of Antipater's haters. Did he even invite them?

The beautiful ALEXANDRA, Hyrcanus's 30-year-old daughter, walks into the room.

ALEXANDRA

Are my children here?

HYRCANUS

Alexandra, aren't you coming to the wedding?

ALEXANDRA

Of course I'm coming, father. How could I miss such an event?

HYRCANUS

And this is what you're wearing? It's a glamorous wedding; all of Jerusalem will be there.

ALEXANDRA

It's an Edomite Arabian Nabataean wedding; the groom's mother grew up in a tent in the desert, and the bride's relatives smell like camel piss and campfire smoke. Even if I wore my maid's nightgown I'd look better than anyone else there. Father, let the handmaidens tend to my dress. I won't embarrass you. Where are my children? Mariamne!!

Alexandra walks out.

MALACHI

That is the right attitude, my lord.

EXT. JERUSALEM - OUTSIDE DORIS'S PARENTS' HOME - DAY

The procession comes down the road toward the gate, with song and dance. The singers sing lyrics from the Song of Songs, and the dancers prance about.

Doris, wearing her bridal clothes, her hair down and a wreath on her head, walks out to the gate accompanied by Uza, her mother, and Cypros, Herod's mother, little Salome (Herod's sister), and all the women we saw at the ceremony. They're smiling, excited. Doris is hazy and

dreamy.

WOMEN

(singing)

Let him kiss me with the
kisses of his mouth; for thy
love is better than wine.

MEN

(singing)

Behold, thou art fair, my
love; behold, thou art fair;
thou hast doves' eyes.

WOMEN

(singing)

Behold, thou art fair, my
beloved, yea, pleasant; also
our bed is green.

MEN

(singing)

As the lily among thorns,
so is my love among the
daughters.

WOMEN

(singing)

As the apple tree among the
trees of the wood, so is my
beloved among the sons.

UZA

At least their songs are
pretty.

DORIS

Where is my groom?

Habub stands close to Cypros and whispers something in
her ear. She whispers in Uza's ear.

DORIS (CONT'D)

Where is my groom? Why won't
he come to get me?

CYPROS

He's waiting for you at the
house. He'll greet you at the
house. He'll let you in like a
king greets his queen.

Cypros turns to Salome:

CYPROS (CONT'D)

Salome, run ahead and find
him. And tell him--

SALOME

I know what to tell him.

Salome runs off.

Four men come up and set down a litter, its padded seat
inside decorated with myrtle.

UZA

Doris, come, get in.

Doris refuses. Her eyes fill with tears. Uza comes closer
and secretly pinches her.

UZA (CONT'D)

Get in and sit down or your
sister will marry him.

Doris sits down on the padded seat. The four men lift the
litter up on their shoulders. The MUSICIANS BEAT the big
DRUMS and PLAY the FLUTES and the SHOFARS.

The procession heads out toward Herod's house. Children
and young men run after the procession. The youngsters on
the carriages throw nuts and almonds at them. A MAN
carrying a barrel of wine on his shoulder marches at the
head of the procession and yells out:

MAN

The bride has a cork and the
barrel has a cork. When the
barrel is opened - the bride
shall be opened!

INT. ANTIPATER'S HOUSE - COLUMBARIUM (JERUSALEM) - DAY

It's a large, underground room. In the walls there are
dozens of niches with pigeons. In the center of the room
there is a stone table. SOEIMOS, 30, a fair-haired
handsome man, commander of the Iturean archers, briefs
Herod, who listens to him intently.

SOEIMOS

This is the Sea of Galilee. To
the East, we have the Golan
Mountains. To the west, the
Arbel Cliffs. And up here,
Mount Hermon. Hezekiah attacks

(MORE)

SOEIMOS (CONT'D)

the Syrian settlements in this area, and the Nabataean convoys on the King's Highway, which runs through here.

HEROD

What do they want?

SOEIMOS

They want Antigonus, and they don't want to pay taxes. These are farmers who lost their land, who owe a lot of money. The tax collectors are after them, so they fled to the mountains. To the caves. They're hard to reach.

HEROD

How many are they?

SOEIMOS

A few dozen. But they have many supporters. People are willing to risk themselves for them and hide them.

HEROD

Why?

SOEIMOS

They help people. They share the loot with those who have nothing.

HEROD

With our commanders too.

SOEIMOS

Looks like it.

HEROD

Are you from there? Were you born in that area?

SOEIMOS

Here, in Iturea, north of the Hermon. I'm Iturean, me and my archer's platoon.

(smiles)

I come from an ancient family

(MORE)

SOEIMOS (CONT'D)
of Iturean robbers. We only
recently moved to the other
side and became soldiers.

HEROD
Why haven't you taken action
against them before?

SOEIMOS
I'm a soldier. No one gave me
the order.

EXT. JERUSALEM - ANTIPATER'S COURTYARD - DAY

The procession has reached Antipater's courtyard, singing and dancing. The yard is packed with guests. Servants make the rounds with trays of refreshments. At the far end of the yard there is a decorated wedding canopy with two ornate chairs.

Doris looks around, trying to spot the groom. She can't find him. She cries. The mothers are embarrassed.

The men carrying the litter set it down next to the canopy. Antipater and Herod's brothers - Phasaël, JOSPEH, and PHERORAS, walk over to Cypros. Kosmelekh, the father of the bride, walks over to his wife Uza.

CYPROS
Where is he?

ANTIPATER
He'll be right over. There's
an urgent matter.

INT. ANTIPATER'S HOUSE - COLUMBARIUM (JERUSALEM) - DAY

COSTOBARUS walks in. He's an energetic, squat man with silver temples, an Edomite nobleman and experienced military man who is ten years older than Herod, and reluctant to accept his authority. A WRITER sits at the table with papyrus and a quill.

COSTOBARUS
Your bride is looking for you,
and even worse, your mother is
looking for you. People are
sensing there's something
missing at this wedding...

HEROD

(to Soeimos)

This is Costobarus. He will be my deputy in the Galilee, though I am much younger than he is. If he tries to give you orders behind my back - ignore him.

COSTOBARUS

Who is this man? You chose your wedding of all times to find yourself a lover?

HEROD

Soeimos. He is the commander of the Iturean archers. He will be going up north with us.

COSTOBARUS

You're Iturean?

SOEIMOS

An Iturean Jew. Third generation.

COSTOBARUS

(smiles)

Yes. Herod and I are also third generation Edomite Jews. Our grandfathers were forced to convert as well.

HEROD

Yours was forced. My grandfather wanted to convert.

COSTOBARUS

(cynical)

Wanted. Of course. Who doesn't want to get circumcised at forty years old?

HEROD

(to Writer)

Read me what you've written.

WRITER

"Greetings Hilkihah, governor of the Galilee. You are hereby informed that following the seven days of my wedding banquet, I shall begin training and arming a battalion of warriors recruited from the cities of Judea. In two months' time we shall go north to the Sepphoris fortress, and I shall take over duties as governor of the Galilee. Sincerely, Herod son of Antipater."

HEROD

You are dismissed. Leave that here.

Herod signs the message, blows on the paper and rolls it into a leather tube. He walks over to one of the niches in the wall, takes out a pigeon and ties the small leather tube to its leg.

COSTOBARUS

In two months? I was sure we were in a hurry.

SOEIMOS

(smiles)

We are in a hurry. He wants to get there before the pigeon.

Little Salome runs into the room.

SALOME

I knew you'd be here! Mother told me if you didn't get up there now. Right now. Right this instant--

Herod picks her up in his arms and hoists her over his shoulder.

EXT. JERUSALEM - ANTIPATER'S COURTYARD - DAY

TRUMPETS AND SHOFARS BLOW as the High Priest's entourage enters: John Hyrcanus, Malachi, FELIX, BEN GADYA, DOSYTHIUS, Alexandra and her two children, MARIAMNE, 8, and ARISTOBULUS, 6, as well as several guards. Alexandra

is wearing a simple cloak.

BAGOHI

The High Priest John Hyrcanus
and his daughter, Princess
Alexandra!

CYPRUS

She's dressed as if she's gone
out to the market.

UZA

To mock us.

CYPROS

To mock us? They've mocked
themselves. She's dressed like
a goat herder.

Alexandra takes off her robe, revealing a dress that has everyone in awe. She comes closer to them, smiling and holding the simple cloak in her hands. She turns to Cypros, the mother of the groom:

ALEXANDRA

Cypros, could you please make
sure this is stored somewhere.

Cypros walks over, embarrassed. Bagohi pops up beside them.

BAGOHI

I'll take it.

ALEXANDRA

Is that the bride? The chubby
one?

UZA

Doris, my daughter.

Alexandra smiles at her sweetly.

ALEXANDRA

The groom hasn't arrived yet,
or has he already left? Does
he know it's today?

The entourage sits down in reserved seats of honor after shaking hands and exchanging the customary best wishes.

UZA

(to Cypros)

If he doesn't show up right now we will leave. You won't make fools out of us.

CYPROS

Sit down and be quiet.

INT. ANTIPATER'S HOUSE - COLUMBARIUM (JERUSALEM) - DAY

Herod hands Salome the carrier pigeon.

HEROD

Hold it in both hands. This pigeon was born in the fortress in Sepphoris, up north. If you let it loose, where will it fly?

SALOME

Home. To Sepphoris.

HEROD

That's right. These were born in Arbel, and these in Ashkelon. I'm taking fifty pigeons with me that were born here in Jerusalem. I want you to check every evening to see if I've sent a pigeon. They'll come back here. It'll say right here who it's for - mother, father or Phasaël. And there will be things I will write only to you. How is my bride?

SALOME

Hazy. Mother doesn't like her very much.

HEROD

I'm asking you, not mother.

SALOME

She's only a few years older than me, and I'm much better for you.

He smiles.

SALOME (CONT'D)

I want to come with you.

HEROD

Salome, you're not a little baby who clings to her big brother anymore. You are now the commander of these pigeons, and all of our lives are in your hands. Do you understand what I'm saying?

SALOME

Yes.

HEROD

And you will do whatever is necessary.

SALOME

Yes.

HEROD

Let it loose.

The pigeon flies up and immediately returns. Herod is angered. He pulls the leather tube off its leg, snaps the bird's head off and tosses it on the floor. Salome stares, wide-eyed.

HEROD (CONT'D)

She's worthless. Forgotten where she came from.

He walks over to get another pigeon.

HEROD (CONT'D)

Hold on. Do you know how to read and write?

SALOME

Not yet . I'll learn.

EXT. JERUSALEM - ANTIPATER'S COURTYARD - DAY

Antipater huddles privately with John Hyrcanus, who's trying to understand who these three Romans celebrating with them are.

ANTIPATER

They're Sextus's messengers.
Antigonus's people are rioting
up north, and he's threatening
to invade.

HYRCANUS

Now you tell me? It must be
stopped.

ANTIPATER

I've appointed Herod governor
of the Galilee. He is leaving
for the north.

HYRCANUS

Herod?

Herod enters the yard with Salome. Everybody tenses up at
his arrival. He looks excellent in his wedding garbs.

The music, which had softened, turns louder now. The
choir sings a lively song as he comes closer to Doris,
who is stunned. He kneels before her and kisses her hand.
Then he gets up and takes a seat by her side, and
whispers something in her ear. She glows, blushing. She's
already in love.

He pulls out a ring. He shows it to everyone, and puts it
on her finger.

ALEXANDRA

Praise the Lord. The groom has
arrived.

Herod walks over to his father and Hyrcanus.

HYRCANUS

Will you take your young wife
with you to the Galilee?

HEROD

It'll be a couple of months
before we go. We have to
recruit a battalion, train
it...

MALACHI

You'll command them?

HEROD

Yes. Why does that trouble
you, Malachi?

MALACHI

Because during the last war
you hid in Ashkelon, 300 miles
from the front, while the old
men sitting here broke through
the walls of Alexandria. I'm
not sure the situation up in
the Galilee calls for a
quartermaster, of all people.

HEROD

Malachi, how can I ease your
concerns?

MALACHI

Why don't you ask your father
to appoint someone who's been
on a battlefield before and
won't shit his pants when the
spears start flying?

HEROD

(smiles)

You're welcome to come up
north with us and wipe my ass
every time that happens.

ANTIPATER

I trust him.

MALACHI

Of course you trust him. What
other choice have you got?

ANTIPATER

I wanted to appoint you, but
you're too old, too fat, too
rich, and you serve too many
masters, and in this case,
loyalty is very important. Why
aren't they pouring any wine
here, what's with the wine?

MALACHI

You drink wine? Since when do
Edomites drink wine?

ANTIPATER

We're Jews now. We converted
especially for the wine.
Cheers.

John Hyrcanus gets up to speak. Everyone hushes down.

HYRCANUS

About a hundred years ago,
King Antiochus the fourth
decided that the time of the
Jewish people had passed, and
he ordered us to forget the
rules of our forefathers. The
Holy Temple was desecrated,
impure pigs were sacrificed on
the altar, and circumcision
was banned. Many of us gave in
and bowed our heads, but one
man, a priest from House
Hasmonean, my great-great-
grandfather Mattathias,
thought differently. He and
his five sons rebelled and
expelled the enemy. The Jewish
people did not disappear then.
On the contrary - many joined
us and share our fate. Our
Edomite brothers from the
south, and our Iturean
brothers in the north.

Costobarus winks to Soeimos. Herod stands above Doris,
his hand on her shoulder. She holds his hand, delighted.

Salome pesters little Mariamne:

SALOME

You want to see my brother's
pigeons?

MARIAMNE

I'm not allowed to play with
you.

SALOME

Because you're scared?

MARIAMNE

Because you're an Edomite and
you're not part of the royal
family.

HYRCANUS

Herod, son of Antipater. Your grandfather Antipas was a friend and dear advisor to my father, Alexander Jannaeus, King of Judea. Your father, Antipater, is my friend and dear advisor. He is a loyal servant to this land. Today you are appointed governor of the Galilee, and you will devote your life to the land of Judea. I hope we know nothing but pleasure from you. I would like to bless you with the ancient Jewish blessing for a groom on his wedding night: The Lord make the woman that is come into thine house like Rachel and like Leah, which two did build the house of Israel, and do thou worthily, and be famous, of the seed which the Lord shall give thee of this young woman. Blessed art thou to the Lord!

Applause is heard. Uza wipes away a tear. The music plays again, and the food is served - enormous trays come out of the kitchen packed with baked goods, roasted chickens, stuffed lambs, bowls of stew and fresh vegetables. Servants pour wine out of glass carafe.

Herod walks over to his mother, Cyprus, and whispers something to her. She looks at him, surprised.

CYPROS

Now? They're serving the food now.

He insists. Cypros gestures to Uza about Doris, and orders the women around. The courtyard is in turmoil. The women surround Doris, who's frightened, and the two mothers - Cypros and Uza - stand on either side of her.

MUSICIANS

(singing)

As the apple tree among the trees of the wood, so is my beloved among the sons.

(MORE)

MUSICIANS (CONT'D)

As the lily among thorns,
so is my love among the
daughters.

Antipater and Kosmelekh, the father of the bride, stand on either side of Herod, who seems impatient. His friends and brothers join them.

The chaperones take the couple to their wedding bed, and wait outside while the deed is done. First the bride and her chaperones leave. The groom, in the meanwhile, stands and suffers insults.

ANTIPATER

I hope your mother didn't put
a donkey in there for your
first time...

HEROD

Father, enough.

ANTIPATER

Your grandmother put a donkey
in our bridal room. It's an
old Edomite custom. Kosmelekh,
did you have a donkey as well?

KOSMELEKH

The same donkey.

HEROD

Father, listen. Either way, I
am no longer here. I am in the
Galilee. I have robbers on my
mind, caves, rebels, Hezekiah.
Now you've got an Edomite
donkey running around in
there. Thank you very much.
How can a man sleep with a
woman when he's thinking about
his mother and father in bed?

KOSMELEKH

That's what the donkey is
for...

The group accompanying Herod has stopped. The CHAPERONES offer insults:

CHAPERONE 1

He's awfully pale, give him
something to eat.

CHAPERONE 2

The poor man, he waited twenty five years for this moment.

HEROD

Nonsense. I screwed your sister ten years ago. You too.

PHASAEL

Herod, when she takes her clothes off - you don't have to shut your eyes.

Alexandra walks by the men on her way to join the women. She whispers to Herod.

ALEXANDRA

This is what they found for you? An Edomite bride? Did no Jewess agree to marry you?

HEROD

Jewesses are for amusement, not for marriage.

ALEXANDRA

Just remember, with women it's in the front...

HEROD

You've explained it to me already. Many times.

CHAPERONE 1

And you don't have to pay when it's over. You can go in without your wallet.

CHAPERONE 2

And she won't go baahhh, like you're used to.

CHAPERONE 3

Go on, get to work.

They walk Herod to the doorstep. Cypros and Uza are standing there. Cypros hugs Herod.

CYPROS

Don't be afraid.

HEROD

Of what?

(smiles)

I'm stronger than she is.

CYPROS

And if it doesn't work out at first, it's alright. Talk for a while, caress her...

HEROD

If I have any trouble, I'll call you.

CYPROS

It's nothing to be ashamed of. Your father was also very nervous at first.

UZA

So was Kosmelekh.

It turns out Uza was listening to their conversation. She smiles at Herod.

CYPROS

Don't think about it. Put your right foot first.

INT. ANTIPATER'S HOUSE - BRIDAL ROOM (JERUSALEM) - DAY

Herod walks in. The room is dark, and lit by candles. A large, tall canopy bed stands in the middle of the room. MUSIC, SINGING and LAUGHING are heard outside.

Herod's eyes grow accustomed to the dark. He notices Doris on the bed. She is wearing a sheer nightgown. He breathes in the smell of the persimmon.

HEROD

That's a wonderful smell. How old are you?

DORIS

Fourteen, my lord.

He sits by her side and caresses her. He pours wine into a chalice and serves it to her.

HEROD

Drink.

She drinks hesitantly.

HEROD (CONT'D)

Don't be afraid.

DORIS

It's going to hurt.

HEROD

Yes, at first.

He caresses her cheek, then undresses and climbs onto the tall bed. He lies down by her side, caressing her and soothing her. Doris shuts her eyes and gives in to him hesitantly. He kisses her.

In the shadows, by the wall, there is a man wearing the golden donkey mask with the ruby eyes. The motions on the bed grow faster, and then Herod abruptly turns the girl over and penetrates her from behind. She screams in pain, and the donkey brays.

Herod moves inside her, then climaxes and rolls over to the side. He gets off the bed and walks over to the man, ripping off his donkey mask. He reveals an older, frightened DANCER.

DANCER

Your mother asked... it's our
forefathers' custom, from
Edom. I didn't want to...

Herod turns him around and kicks him out.

He gets dressed, while Doris cries.

HEROD

Doris. Doris.

DORIS

Is it over?

HEROD

(smiles)

Yes... it only hurts once.

DORIS

You're leaving?

HEROD

I'm heading north.

DORIS

Tonight?

HEROD

Now. But it's a secret. You can't tell anyone, not even mother.

DORIS

I'm staying with mother?

HEROD

With my mother, in our house. You'll come to me later... don't cry, Doris. You are my wife now. And forever.

He kisses her on her eyelashes, wet with tears. She looks up at him, and a smile breaks on her face.

EXT. JERUSALEM - ANTIPATER'S COURTYARD - EVENING

Herod opens the door. The mothers rush into the bridal room to check the sheet. Herod's groomsmen bray loudly now, bursting with laughter. Herod walks out and joins Soeimos and Costobarus, who wait to the side.

COSTOBARUS

Did you leave something of the girl?

HEROD

Let's head out.

SOEIMOS

We're ready.

COSTOBARUS

The battalion will leave tomorrow morning and will join us in four days.

EXT. JORDAN VALLEY - NIGHT

The Iturean archers, with Herod, Costobarus and Soeimos riding at the head, gallop along the Jordan River due north. The pigeon flies in the sky.

EXT. SEPPHORIS - GARRISON FORTRESS - DAY

It is morning. An old soldier scatters seeds and pours water in the pigeon cages in the big coop in the fortress's yard.

The PIGEON Herod sent from Jerusalem lands and COOS. The

soldier scatters seeds before it, then unties the leather tube from its leg with the note.

INT. FORTRESS COMMANDER'S OFFICE (SEPPHORIS) - DAY

Hilkiah, commander of the Galilee, reads through the note Herod wrote. He is stunned. He looks up furiously at JACOB, the officer who brought him the leather tube.

HILKIAH

Sons of bitches... he's going
to pay for this.

EXT. LOWER GALILEE - DAY

Jacob, the officer from the fortress at Sepphoris, gallops down a ravine among the cliffs. Two ARMED GUARDS watch him from above. As he reaches the bend, they stop him.

ARMED GUARD

Where to?

JACOB

To Hezekiah. A letter from
Hilkiah, commander of the
fortress at Sepphoris.

ARMED GUARD

Got any weapons on you?

Jacob hands over a short dagger. They pat his body down searching for other weapons.

INT. LARGE CAVE (LOWER GALILEE) - DAY

The cave is spacious, part of a network of caves, and at the moment Hezekiah's men are in it. Some take care of the weapons, others sort coins into bags, others set the table for a meal - clay bowls, loaves of bread, vegetables, cheese wedges. The women mend clothes and tend to the babies. Judas, Hezekiah's son, plays with the dog.

Hezekiah reads the note written by Herod in Jerusalem on his wedding night. He's surrounded by his men, among them Yonatan, Uriya, Simon and Yair. Jacob stands before them.

YONATAN

When did this arrive?

JACOB

A pigeon came from Jerusalem
at dawn.

HEZEKIAH

What do we know about him?

JACOB

He's a boy. Son of Antipater,
governor of Judea. Hilkihah
says he doesn't know the
Galilee and has never held a
sword in his hand.

HEZEKIAH

(troubled)

And he was appointed governor
of the Galilee? Isn't Hilkihah
going wild?

JACOB

What can he say? He's been
deposed.

YONATAN

When is he coming here, this
Herod?

HEZEKIAH

He's getting married first,
then celebrating with a seven
day banquet, then he'll
recruit soldiers, then he'll
train them, and then he'll
come and get us.

YONATAN

He doesn't mention the bride's
name, the parents' name, or
what they ate at the wedding?

HEZEKIAH

It makes no sense for
Antipater to appoint a fool to
be governor of the Galilee.
That Edomite dog is far too
clever for that.

The DOG BARKS. They laugh.

HEZEKIAH (CONT'D)

Judas, take the dog outside,
give him something to eat,
give him some water. He's your
responsibility now.

JUDAS

The women aren't back from the
spring yet.

YAIR

Hold on a minute - isn't he
that fool from Hyrcanus's
convoy, who tried to attack us
on his own at the Yarmouk? How
about we let the boy take care
of him. Judas, do you want to
kill the new governor of the
Galilee?

JUDAS

Today?

YAIR

Oh, you're busy today? Then
not today. You've got at least
two months to get ready.

HEZEKIAH

(to Jacob)

Alright. Thank you.

(hands him sacks of coins)

This one's for you, and this
one's for Hilkiah. Hold on,
take some myrrh for your wife.

Jacob leaves.

YONATAN

Are you worried?

HEZEKIAH

I won't be dismissive of him.
He's coming with a battalion
to take us out, and he can't
be bribed with a few coins.
We're going to have to recruit
fighters too. Over the next
month we'll go on nightly
raids, cause as much damage as
possible, gather as much loot

(MORE)

HEZEKIAH (CONT'D)

as possible. In a month we'll
move closer to the fortress in
Sepphoris and wait for him.
We'll be sure to give them a
proper welcome when they
arrive.

EXT. LOWER GALILEE - BY CAVES - DAY

A group of women returns from the spring with donkeys
packed with leather waterbags and bundles of straw.

The DOG BARKS. It's Judas's dog, barking angrily at some
bushes. Judas walks over to the dog. Someone pulls him
into the bushes.

Uriya walks out of the cave. He's carrying a stake, and
steps aside to defecate.

IN BUSHES

Herod gestures to his men to wait.

As Uriya squats down, a knife is held to his neck, and
his mouth is gagged. He's dragged into the bushes.

Herod questions him:

HEROD

How many people are in the
cave?

URIYA

Hundreds.

HEROD

The boy said dozens. Is
Hezekiah in the cave?

URIYA

No.

HEROD

No way of knowing who's lying
and who's telling the truth.
Slaughter him.

URIYA

No!

HEROD

Is there another entrance to
the cave?

URIYA

Yes.

Herod gestures to his men. They grab Uriya and pull away.

As they quietly approach the back entrance to the cave, Uriya cries out:

URIYA

We're under attack!!

He is slaughtered instantly.

INT./EXT. LARGE CAVE (LOWER GALILEE) - CONTINUOUS

Hezekiah tenses up. Everybody stops whatever they were doing. The cave falls completely silent.

Hezekiah whistles for the dog, and waits.

He grabs a weapon and heads out with a few of his men.

OUTSIDE CAVE

Hezekiah does not see a thing.

Then, the carcass of the dead dog lands at his feet. He looks up and sees Herod standing in the bushes in front of the cave's opening.

HEROD

Are you thirsty? Your donkeys are here with the water. And the women, too.

HEZEKIAH

(quietly, to Yonatan by his side)

Get everybody out through the other exit. I'll stall him.

(to Herod)

What do you want?

HEROD

I want you to come out one at a time and we'll all go to Sepphoris. Excuse me for one second. What? There's a boy here who wants to talk to you.

He pulls Judas forward and holds a knife to his throat.

JUDAS

Father, don't surrender!

HEZEKIAH

(to Herod, regarding Judas)

You can kill him.

YONATAN

(steps out of cave)

They've blocked the other opening. The cave is filled with smoke.

Hezekiah hesitates. A barrage of arrows sends him and his men fleeing.

Herod's soldiers approach the cave's opening from either side to avoid getting hurt. They toss several haystacks inside and then shoot burning arrows at them. The cave fills with smoke.

Hezekiah's men try to put out the burning hay. One man's clothes catch on fire. He runs outside and is shot dead with an arrow.

Herod calls out to the cave:

HEROD

My name is Herod, son of Antipater. I am the new governor of the Galilee. I am not your judge or your executioner. Give yourselves up and come with me to Jerusalem, to be tried by the Sanhedrin. Your wives and children can remain here unharmed.

He gives the signal, and the women carrying water are brought forth to the cave's entrance. Herod lets Judas go, and he runs toward the cave.

JUDAS

Father, don't come out. He hasn't got many soldiers.

The women and children cough, suffocating on the smoke, and hurry out of the cave. Herod's men direct them to the donkeys bearing water.

Now the fighters come out, thirty of them in a row, and are bound one by one. Herod stands at the entrance to the cave and calls into it:

HEROD

Whoever I find in the cave
will be executed immediately,
along with his wife and
children.

Several fighters, including Hezekiah, come out. One of them is dragged with force by the others.

INT. LARGE CAVE (LOWER GALILEE) - DAY

Herod tours the cave, which has been set up to house dozens of people. He covers his face with cloth due to the smoke.

He finds the note he sent from Jerusalem on Hezekiah's desk. He smiles.

EXT. LOWER GALILEE - ROAD TO SEPPHORIS - DAY

The convoy of prisoners - Hezekiah's men, bound in pairs on donkeys and surrounded by Herod's horsemen - makes its way to Sepphoris. Moving fast, it pulls away from the women and children marching after it on foot.

EXT. SEPPHORIS - GARRISON FORTRESS - DAY

The convoy has reached the fortress. The soldiers at the fortress are embarrassed by the invasion of Herod's horsemen and the convoy of prisoners.

Hilkiah, the fortress commander, greets Herod with flattery and endless chatter. Hezekiah tries to get Hilkiah's attention, but Hilkiah ignores him.

HILKIAH

This is a lot of people.
You've surprised me. I thought
you'd be here in a month or
two. You got them all, just
like that, at once? We'll hold
them here, I've got a pen
ready for these animals. We'll
keep them in the yard.

HEROD

Where do you sit? Where is my
office?

HILKIAH

Here, follow me. How long do you think you'll stay here?

HEROD

I haven't decided yet.

HILKIAH

I say the faster you leave - the better. People will start gathering from all over the Galilee, and you'll never be able to leave the fortress. Now they're stunned, not everybody's heard the news. As soon as the sun sets, leave for Jerusalem.

They enter--

INT. FORTRESS COMMANDER'S OFFICE (SEPPHORIS) - CONTINUOUS

Hilkiah shows Herod into the office.

HEROD

You're very scared of your subjects.

HILKIAH

Or you could try them here in the Galilee. Not drag it out. Make everyone realize that a robber's end is at the end of a rope. These are criminals - they'll start talking now and lying and telling you all sorts of stories about me. Hit them hard, so they remember the blow. That will help you later on. As for the decision to replace me, did they say anything about another position for me?

HEROD

I need a carpenter.

HILKIAH

A carpenter? Me, a carpenter?

HEROD

I want to put them in cages
and load them on carriages to
Jerusalem. Get me a carpenter.

HILKIAH

Why not by foot?

HEROD

It would take a month to march
them. It exposes the guard to
attacks along the way.

HILKIAH

Sepphoris has a few carpenters
who are real artists.

HEROD

Not artists. Just a carpenter
who can hammer two boards
together.

HILKIAH

There's a young man from
Nazareth... Joseph.

HEROD

Send for him. Have him bring
wood and an assistant. Now.

Hilkiah leaves, and Herod looks through the fortress
logs.

Hilkiah returns.

HEROD

It says here that a pigeon
arrived yesterday with a note
from Jerusalem.

HILKIAH

Yes. From you. Your message...

HEROD

Where is the note?

Hilkiah is embarrassed. He looks around. Herod pulls out
the note he found in the cave.

HEROD (CONT'D)

Can you explain how this wound
up in Hezekiah's cave?

He walks over to the window and looks down. He whistles

to Soeimos.

HEROD (CONT'D)
 (to Soeimos outside)
 Get me two soldiers.

HILKIAH
 I can explain. It must be my
 lieutenant. I'll check with
 him.

Two soldiers report to the office.

HEROD
 (to soldiers)
 Take him down. Tie him up and
 put him with the prisoners.

INT. ROMAN GOVERNOR'S PALACE (SYRIA) - DAY

Sextus Caesar, the Roman governor in Syria, along with Optimus, the officer who brought Antipater the message on Herod's wedding day, confer with Soeimos, the Iturean commander, and Zoilos, Sextus's secretary.

SEXTUS CAESAR
 Is he lying?

OPTIMUS
 I left Jerusalem the day after
 the wedding. I spent the night
 at Scythopolis, and I kept
 going the next day.

SOEIMOS
 We left in the middle of the
 wedding and we did not stop at
 Scythopolis. We gained two
 nights.

OPTIMUS
 And you caught them all,
 without suffering any
 casualties? How many men were
 you?

SOEIMOS
 A platoon.

SEXTUS CAESAR

A platoon?! These men ignited the whole region; they burned down military camps; they robbed villages and convoys. And you captured them with a platoon?

SOEIMOS

Herod knew you wouldn't believe him. So he sent this.

Soeimos removes a cloth cover wrapped around a long, narrow object.

SEXTUS CAESAR

Do you recognize it?

OPTIMUS

Yes. It's the standard of the legion in Gadara.

SEXTUS CAESAR

So you believe him?

OPTIMUS

I don't understand it.

SEXTUS CAESAR

(to Zoilos)

Write this down: "To Herod, son of Antipater, governor of the Galilee and friend of Rome, from Sextus Caesar, governor of the province of Syria. I was happy to hear of your wonderful achievements in your action against the outlaws. I pass on to you the gratitude of the Senate and the Roman people for the property returned to us, the standards of the 12th legion, the Victrix. From now on, you may see me as your friend, and consider yourself welcome at this home at all times. Per your request, we are sending one hundred horsemen to secure the transfer of the criminals to Jerusalem."

As Zoilos writes this, Sextus turns to Optimus:

SEXTUS CAESAR (CONT'D)

I admit I thought the man was
a hotheaded brat. Here, in
this hall, in front of Julius
Caesar, he promised a Jewish
prince he would chop off his
head with his own hands. Isn't
that right, Zoilos? You were
here.

ZOILOS

Even now, it doesn't look like
we're dealing with Cicero
here.

SEXTUS CAESAR

One Cicero is enough.
(to Soeimos)
What is your name?

SOEIMOS

Soeimos.

SEXTUS CAESAR

How long have you been
fighting together?

SOEIMOS

I met him four days ago, on
his wedding day.

SEXTUS CAESAR

Tell Herod that if he senses
any danger from the prisoners
or their supporters, he may
kill them at any time he sees
fit. We will protect him.

INT. ANTIPATER'S HOUSE - COLUMBARIUM (JERUSALEM) - NIGHT

Salome sits outside the Columbarium as a pigeon lands.
She pulls the tube off its leg and reads, moving her
lips. She runs out.

SALOME

Father!!

EXT. SEPPHORIS FORTRESS - INNER COURTYARD - DAY

JOSPEH, 25, the carpenter from Nazareth, a curly-haired

innocent-looking man, works with his assistants on the wooden cages. Three cages are ready, and three are under construction. Herod and Costobarus walk into the yard.

HEROD

When will it be ready?

JOSEPH

Tomorrow morning. We're working nonstop.

HEROD

(to Costobarus)

We shouldn't linger here too long. As soon as the battalion gets here, you take them to Jerusalem. Or maybe we won't wait for the battalion. Let's get them out with a platoon, and not wait for the battalion. What do you say?

COSTOBARUS

And if we get attacked on the way? They're probably preparing to rescue them as we speak.

HEROD

They're robbers. This isn't an organized army. These aren't soldiers who've been training at the gymnasium since they were little. It's a rabble of former farmers. We caught them like fish in a net.

He looks out at the outer courtyard, where the prisoners are tied up in a pen behind a sharpened fence. He notices a gathering around the fortress gates. He whistles. A SOLDIER comes up to him.

HEROD

What's going on over there?

SOLDIER

People are coming in from all over. Families. Unarmed. They want to talk to the governor.

Herod decides to walk over there.

COSTOBARUS

They'll hurt you.

HEROD

The day I start fearing women,
children and the elderly, you
can tie me up and toss me at
my mother's doorstep.

EXT. SEPPHORIS FORTRESS - OUTER COURTYARD - CONTINUOUS

Hezekiah's wife Talia and his son Judas are by the gate.
The guards stop them from passing. Herod approaches.

HEROD

Let her through.

Talia and Judas walk in. Judas sneaks into the pen and
joins his bound father.

TALIA

What are they going to do to
them in Jerusalem?

HEROD

They'll try them.

TALIA

And what will they do to them?

HEROD

They'll probably execute them.
That's what they do to rebels,
robbers and murderers.

HEZEKIAH

Who are we rebelling against?
This is the land of Judea,
under Jewish rule, and you are
an Edomite slave to your Roman
masters.

HEROD

And unfortunately for you, I
am the governor of the
Galilee.

HEZEKIAH

Governor of the Galilee... pet
slave to the Roman governor in
Syria...

The confrontation between Herod and Hezekiah incites

laughter and mockery, starting with the prisoners and spreading to others present - soldiers and family members swarming the gate.

HEROD

And you have probably gotten yourself in trouble with the Syrian governor and will probably be executed in Jerusalem. You present yourself as brave rebels against the government, but in fact you're nothing but petty thieves, who instead of working like anyone else prefer to rob those who work the land.

HEZEKIAH

And what have you got to do with any of this?

COSTOBARUS

(to Hezekiah)

Save your wit for the court. Herod, it is beneath your honor to argue with the robber.

HEZEKIAH

Beneath his honor... governor of the Galilee, who puts a knife up to an eight-year-old child's throat. Kidnaps donkeys and women on their way back from the spring. Slaughters a puppy and shoots arrows from afar like a coward, instead of standing like a man, like a soldier, and fighting.

HEROD

And that is the only reason you are still alive.

HEZEKIAH

No, Edomite slave, that is why you are still alive. Give your men swords, pit them against

(MORE)

HEZEKIAH (CONT'D)

us, and you can die like a man, not like a eunuch.

HEROD

You best pray to God that I'm not tempted to fight you. Sometimes the Sanhedrin in Jerusalem has mercy for the pitiful. You might still get to hug your wife and raise your boy.

HEZEKIAH

What did I expect him to be? A tiger? A lion? An Arabian wolf? What else could I expect from the eunuch son of an Arab whore and an Edomite dog of a father...

Great laughter erupts. Herod is no longer feeling humorous.

HEROD

Untie him. Give him a sword. Take the boy away from here.

HEZEKIAH

No, no. Let him stay and watch his father punish... what was your name?

Hezekiah gets up, stretches his bones. His men get up as well, though they are shackled. Hezekiah is big and strong and confident. His men are in high spirits.

COSTOBARUS

Let me fight in your place.

HEROD

Did he insult you? He insulted me.

COSTOBARUS

What should I tell your family?

HEROD

(smiles)

That I killed a petty thief.

The duel beings.

The soldiers of the fortress, Hezekiah's captured men, the families at the gate, all react to every good move Hezekiah makes. He's in the center of the ring, while Herod stays carefully to the sidelines, waiting for the right moment. Herod is easy and mobile and focused on Hezekiah's face, learning when he is about to attack.

Hezekiah lunges in for an attack, talking to the crowd the whole time:

HEZEKIAH

Just as I thought, he fights like a girl.

YONATAN

An evasive girl.

HEZEKIAH

You made a mistake, you shouldn't have agreed to this. A general like yourself, governor of the Galilee, you shouldn't be so gullible.

Hezekiah lunges again.

HEZEKIAH (CONT'D)

Where did you learn to fight, with your Nabataean forefathers? He's got tricks like a perfume salesman.

SIMON

That's why he ran off in the middle of the wedding, so they wouldn't find out he was a eunuch.

HEZEKIAH

Poor man, to die without bedding a woman.

YAIR

You can relax, I'll screw her for you.

Herod turns to the man who spoke.

HEZEKIAH

Why does he turn his back on me?

YAIR

So you can screw him up the
ass.

Looking into Yair's eyes, Herod can see Hezekiah's attack, as Hezekiah charges him.

Herod steps aside, and Hezekiah loses his balance and falls. Herod turns quickly and stabs him. He pulls his sword out, cuts Hezekiah's throat, then chops his head off in a fit of rage and lifts it up in the air with a frightening roar.

Costobarus stops him before he can attack the shackled prisoners. The crowd is stunned. A terrible cry is heard from the gate.

HEROD

Get them away from the gate.
And take these ones inside.

Talia and Judas stand there, paralyzed.

EXT. SEPPHORIS - GARRISON FORTRESS - NIGHT

It's the last watch. Campfires burn outside the fortress, lighting the faces of the rebels' families - women, mothers, old people, and children. They sit and lament.

From within the fortress, we hear the HAMMERING of the carpenter and his assistants. The fortress soldiers stand tense at their stations.

Herod, Costobarus and Soeimos stand on the bridge on the second level above the yard. Herod reads through a scroll brought by Soeimos.

SOEIMOS

He's sending us one hundred
horsemen.

COSTOBARUS

That won't be enough. We can't
wait any longer. This is a
siege. If it keeps up, we
won't be able to get out, and
reinforcements won't be able
to get in. They're stunned
right now. We should leave
immediately.

HEROD

(to Soeimos)

What do you say?

SOEIMOS

Wait for backup. When the horsemen arrive, and the battalion arrives, we'll head out.

COSTOBARUS

The battalion wouldn't be here before next week. I suggest that at dawn we create a diversion, start a negotiation, and meanwhile we get them out the back gate.

HEROD

If you were in their position, wouldn't you ambush the convoy along the road?

COSTOBARUS

I see where this is going. It could end in a massacre. Do we want a massacre of civilians? Of Jews?

SOEIMOS

On the other hand, if my platoon leaves for Jerusalem with the prisoners now, you'll be left with soldiers you can't trust. And then you'll be the ones massacred.

HEROD

We'll decide in the morning. Costobarus, gather your officers and let them know tomorrow we'll be paying salaries with a bonus in honor of my taking office. That way no one will betray us or open the gate for them. Occupy the Jewish soldiers with busywork and take their weapons away. The others, including your archers, Soeimos, man the

(MORE)

HEROD (CONT'D)
 stations, two per shift. The
 slightest suspicion, a
 movement made toward the
 fence, you shoot immediately.
 Then we'll find out what it
 was about. Go to sleep. We've
 got a very long day ahead of
 us tomorrow.

COSTOBARUS
 What should I do with his
 head?

HEROD
 That's what you're worried
 about right now?

Costobarus grumbles and walks away.

SOEIMOS
 Why did you fight him?

HEROD
 I had no choice. If I'd run
 away from the battle, they
 would all be pissing on me
 now.

Soeimos looks at him silently.

HEROD (CONT'D)
 He called my mother an Arab
 whore and my father an Edomite
 dog, and they all laughed.
 Ever since I was a kid I've
 been waiting to kill someone
 like that. Goodnight.

Soeimos leaves. Herod is left alone. Jacob, the officer
 walks up to him.

HEROD (CONT'D)
 (to Jacob)
 Yes?

JACOB
 They're asking to say goodbye
 to the prisoners before
 they're moved to Jerusalem.

HEROD

I'll allow it. They can see them.

JACOB

Sir...

HEROD

Yes. Speak up.

JACOB

Don't ask me what or how...
but I've learned that a large
ambush is waiting for the
convoy along the road to the
south.

HEROD

What is your name?

JACOB

Jacob.

HEROD

Come with me.

EXT. SEPPHORIS - GARRISON FORTRESS - DAY

It's dawn. The campfires have died down. We hear the MUMBLING of PRAYERS, SUDDEN CRYING, a HEART-WRENCHING MOAN.

The gate opens and the officer, Jacob, walks out to the families. Everyone falls silent.

JACOB

The governor of the Galilee
will allow you to say goodbye
to the prisoners. Choose three
from every family - father,
mother, wife, brother, son -
and follow me.

MUMBLES ripple through the crowd of families. The relatives come up to the gate.

JACOB (CONT'D)

Follow me.

They walk in and the gate shuts behind them. They are led into--

EXT. SEPPHORIS FORTRESS - INNER COURTYARD - CONTINUOUS

The cages are gone, and there's nothing but leftover wood in the courtyard. Joseph the carpenter gathers his tools. Soldiers lead the people through the back gate of the fortress, to a nearby hill:

EXT. SEPPHORIS FORTRESS - NEARBY HILL - CONTINUOUS

As the family members approach the hill, they see Herod waiting for them on his horse. They thank him. He nods.

The family members hurry up the hill and stop short, stunned and horrified.

The first rays of sun shine upon dozens of crosses. The bodies of the prisoners and the body of Hilkihah, the deposed governor of the Galilee, are nailed to the crosses.

HEROD

Go ahead. Speak. Say your goodbyes.

END OF EPISODE 1