1~2: Northern Roman commander Maximus leads the battle against the Germans. The dying emperor Marcus Aurelius watches from the top of the hill while his ambitious son Commodus and his daughter Lucilla hide in a wagon. After the battle, in the Roman camp, the soldiers and the emperor pay tribute to Maximus, and Commodus is jealous. Commodus expects to become emperor, and Marcus Aurelius thinks Maximus would be a better fit for the position.

3~4: Marcus Aurelius asks Maximus to become the protector of Rome until he can return power to the Senate. He knows that Commodus cannot be a good emperor. Commodus, learning of this decision, kills his father and orders Maximus' second son Quintus to execute Maximus. Maximus escapes and runs home to save his family but arrives too late. His farm and family were burned. He is captured and sold as a slave to Proximo, the owner of a gladiator school in Morocco. On the way there, he is helped by Juba, an African slave.

5~6: Maximus refuses to fight in his first training session and is branded a coward. Later, in his first real fight, he is tied to Juba and together defeats all the gladiators. Meanwhile, Commodus arrives in Rome and is welcomed by a small crowd. He is not popular. Lucilla tries to persuade him to listen to the senators who are concerned about Rome's problems. But Commodus has other plans. He will play for 150 days in the arena and have a spy to watch over the senator.