

S.P.Q.R.

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BLACK SCREEN

NATIVE INDIAN NARRATOR

In 1785, George Washington attended a secret meeting with the Chiefs of the Iroquois Indian Nation. Afterwards, he famously called the Iroquois the "Romans of the New World".

INT. GEORGE WASHINGTON'S QUARTERS. DAY.

SUB-TITLE: NEW YORK, 1785.

GEORGE WASHINGTON is seated at a giant oak desk in a room full of maps and military paintings. As he reads over documents, deep in thought, a KNOCK at the door gets his attention.

WASHINGTON

(annoyed)

Come in.

Two men enter with excited expressions on their faces and hurry to his desk. It is BENJAMIN FRANKLIN and THOMAS JEFFERSON. Washington notices their excited mood.

WASHINGTON (CONT'D)

Well, well, what news do you bring?

FRANKLIN

News is not the term, George.

JEFFERSON

No, indeed. Not news, rather a stunning find!

FRANKLIN

A most stunning find!

JEFFERSON

Well, in fact, it is not a find to us, so much as it is a revelation to us, by the Iroquois tribes.

FRANKLIN

One of the gravest and most profound finds of the New World, in fact!

JEFFERSON

Franklin is right. This will change the course of history for the states, I am sure!

Washington, impatient, is drawn in to the banter of his two highly respected friends. He raises his hands to stop them.

WASHINGTON

What in the world are you two babbling about? Come now, out with it. I find myself overwhelmed with truly serious and grave work that I can't fathom wasting any time with your scientific curiosities about the natives.

FRANKLIN

This revelation has the power to shape the very future of our country and give it a firm foundation in antiquity.

JEFFERSON

We have found the element we once looked for to point us in the proper path of statehood. To help mold our identity. Not even the Anti-Federalists will disagree with us on this direction.

Impressed with their urgency, Washington leans back in his chair and closes the book in front of him.

WASHINGTON

Very well, brothers. You have my ears. What is it then that you wish to tell me?

FRANKLIN

It is best you hear it from the very source. He has only given us an inkling of the story. Said he would only tell all the details to the great Warrior Chief Washington.

WASHINGTON

Is he here?

FRANKLIN

Yes.

WASHINGTON

Well, then. Bring him in.

Jefferson turns around towards the door and calls out:

JEFFERSON

Let him and the translator in. The Braves must wait outside.

GUARD

Yes sir, Mr. Jefferson.

The guard ushers in an old Iroquois Indian CHIEF and his young female Indian TRANSLATOR, signaling the two BRAVES to wait in the hallway.

The Chief and Translator shuffle slowly towards Washington's desk. The old Chief carries a wrapped "history belt" under one arm. Washington rises out of his seat to greet the Chief.

WASHINGTON

Thank you, great chief, for seeing me.

The Chief raises one hand and greets Washington in a few sentences. The translator speaks in English a few beats behind.

TRANSLATOR

Thank you for seeing me, oh Great White Warrior. I come as the leader of all the Iroquois nations to settle for peace and prosperity for both our peoples, and to tell you the ancient story of how so many tribes came to be one people under the great sky.

Franklin and Jefferson, standing off to the side, smile broadly, bowing their heads. Washington also smiles and bows his head in gratitude. He responds a bit awkwardly.

WASHINGTON

Thank you for coming here, great Chief. I am honored to hear your story.

The translator relays Washington's words. The old chief stares at him stone-faced. Washington looks at Jefferson and Franklin for some help.

FRANKLIN

Oh, yes. Please tell the Chief to show the President the Wampum belt.

The translator translates and the Chief places the belt down on Washington's desk and carefully begins to untie it.

WASHINGTON

What is a "wampum" belt, Franklin?

FRANKLIN

It is a form of writing using shells. They are the only tribe to use such a writing system.

JEFFERSON

The Iroquois use these belts to record their history and laws.

WASHINGTON

Laws?

JEFFERSON

(smiling)

Yes, laws. There's more.

FRANKLIN

This belt is the oldest they have. It is like their Bible.

WASHINGTON

How old is it?

FRANKLIN

At least four hundred years old.

WASHINGTON

(impressed)

Before Columbus discovered America,
then?

JEFFERSON

Yes. The histories are much, much
older, though. The Iroquois, like
all Indians, maintained their
history through oral story-telling
for generations before they wrote
them down.

The Chief has finished untying the bundled Wampum belt.
Franklin and Jefferson can barely contain their excitement.

FRANKLIN

Do you see it?

Washington's face contorts into curiosity and wonder as he
looks down at what is there before him. He squints his eyes
in disbelief.

WASHINGTON

Impossible. This belt is older
than the discovery of America.
What could this mean?

JEFFERSON

I think we are about to find out.

The old Chief glances at Jefferson and Franklin before setting his eyes on Washington. Looking down he points at the belt of shell designs and begins speaking in his native tongue. We finally see what all the amazement is over: written in white shells, four letters are clearly set within a design of waves... S.P.Q.R.

TRANSITION DEVICE

The camera ZOOMS into the SPQR on the belt made from shells.

DISSOLVE TO:

EXTREME CLOSE UP OF THE LETTERS SPQR CHISELLED IN STONE.
ZOOM OUT TO REVEAL A TRIUMPHAL MARBLE ARCH IN THE CENTER OF ROME:

EXT. IMPERIAL ROME. DAY.

The vast architectural grandeur of early Imperial Rome stretches along the Tiber River.

SUB TITLE: ROME, 43 A.D.

The camera flies over the city and pushes in towards a giant white marble building with rows of columns.

INT. IMPERIAL ROME. LIBRARY. DAY.

In an open space full of desks and scrolls, three Senators, CRASSUS, DOMETIAN, and VARUS sit off in a corner and conspire in hushed tones.

VARUS

You both know that Cato will oppose
any motion of war at this time.

CRASSUS

(disgusted)

To the fiery hells with Cato and his self-righteous droning of peace. He would oppose war if barbarians were at the walls of Rome!

DOMETIAN

Expansion at this time is dangerous. We may have opposition from other Senators. We will have to work hard to ensure we have a majority. The senate knows our legions are not at their best...

CRASSUS

That is exactly why we must act now, Dometian, before all the legions grow fat and useless and leave us totally exposed to invasion.

VARUS

Perhaps you should seek a Pro-consulship elsewhere, Crassus. In a territory Rome has already subdued.

CRASSUS

What's the point in that? A Pro-consulship anywhere but virgin territory is a waste of energy.

(MORE)

CRASSUS (CONT'D)

I need glory and riches to gain power, and those can only be found through conquest on a grand and bloody scale.

DOMETIAN

And what of us? If we help you with your war, and secure your Proconsulship in the new territory, what assurances can you give us that our labors will be rewarded?

Crassus leans in closer, smiling wickedly.

CRASSUS

I promise you and Varus that if this works, and we do indeed expand the empire, the three of us will become the richest and most influential men in Rome.

EXT. COUNTRYSIDE SOUTH OF ROME. DAY.

Amongst the rolling hills of a country estate, a strong farmer in his thirties, MARCUS SCIPIO, is working on an irrigation dike near a field with his slaves. A boy of twelve, his SON, comes racing towards him on a horse. Marcus leans up from his work to see what is the matter.

SON

(excitedly)

Papa! Papa!

MARCUS

What is it, boy?

SON

Papa, there is a Senator at the house come to see you!

MARCUS

(confused)

A Senator? Are you sure?

SON

Yes. That is what he said. He said, tell your father a Senator of Rome has come to see you. He gave me this!

His son shows him a coin. Marcus walks towards his son, unsuccessfully trying to brush off the filth from himself.

MARCUS

Give me the coin.

SON

Papa! Why?

MARCUS

You did not earn it.

Upset, his son tosses him the coin. Marcus catches it.

MARCUS (CONT'D)

Hop off and stay here. I'll return in a short while.

His son obeys and hops off, giving the reins to his father. Marcus mounts the horse and wheels it around. He rides through his fields towards a large sprawling house on top of a nearby hill.

EXT. MARCUS'S COUNTRY ESTATE HOUSE. DAY.

Marcus arrives and dismounts his horse. He strides up the stairs to see Crassus waiting on the veranda in the shade. Crassus stands to greet Marcus. Marcus is apprehensive.

CRASSUS

(smiling)

Marcus! I thought you were one of the slaves, covered in such dirt!

MARCUS

Working with my hands and back keeps me honest, Senator Crassus!

CRASSUS

If you say so.

Marcus tosses him the coin his son had.

CRASSUS (CONT'D)

What's this?

MARCUS

I'm trying to raise an honest son. He must work hard for his money, and not be bought off.

CRASSUS

(amused)

Always the stoic, Marcus.

Crassus flips the coin in the air, catches it, and makes it disappear.

CRASSUS (CONT'D)

(smiling)

Money is an illusion Marcus. You know that.

MARCUS

Rome's most powerful Senator did not come to my farm to do magic tricks.

CRASSUS

I'm afraid the winds over Rome have begun to shift in a dangerous direction, Marcus.

Marcus's demeanor becomes serious and worried.

MARCUS

Is something amiss, Senator?

CRASSUS

No. Not yet. I am working with other Senators to prevent the inevitable if things continue in a certain direction. The potential for disaster looms.

Marcus grows suddenly serious.

MARCUS

Senator Crassus, how may I serve the people of Rome?

CRASSUS

By serving the Senate, Marcus. Tomorrow, myself and a few others will address the Senate in a council of war.

MARCUS

War? With whom? Parthia?
Germania?

CRASSUS

(smiling)

No. Britannia.

Marcus is clearly not happy at hearing this. He turns away and walks to the edge of the veranda to look at his fields and at his son playing near the dike.

MARCUS

Britannia? Even the great Caesar
turned his army away from there.

CRASSUS

That is why Rome is in need of its
greatest living general, Marcus
Scipio. Will you answer such a
call?

MARCUS

I am afraid I have retired from the
battlefield, senator. My place is
here with my family. Perhaps I
could help as an advisor...

Crassus, clearly irritated, walks to stand alongside Marcus.

CRASSUS

You are a Roman warrior, great
Marcus, not a politician, or a
farmer, or a father. If you retire
from the battlefield, then you
retire from the people of Rome.

(MORE)

CRASSUS (CONT'D)

Are you ready to turn your back on
all that Rome has given you,
including this land, your family,
your son...

Crassus' subtle threat hits it's mark. Marcus turns to face
Crassus who smiles maliciously. The message is clear.

INT. THE SENATE HOUSE. ROME. DAY.

The great meeting hall of the Senate is in full session.
Crassus stands in the center, addressing his fellow Senators,
pressing his argument for war in a bellowing voice.

CRASSUS

What is Rome!? S.P.Q.R. *Senatus,
Populos, Que Romano.* We see these
letters everywhere here in this
great city. What does it mean? It
is an idea, and we spread this idea
to the far corners of the empire to
cast our democratic light upon the
darkness of our barbaric borders.
It is the SENATE and the PEOPLE
that make up the greatness of Rome!
One without the other, and we are
no better than the barbaric hordes
who threaten our very existence!

The senate responds with a volley of applause.

CRASSUS (CONT'D)

The time for Rome to wake from it's
slumber and expand its borders is
long overdue. But these words of
mine are meaningless, nothingness,
without action.

(MORE)

CRASSUS (CONT'D)

Never has light been shed on
darkness without action. The very
foundation of Rome is based on
action, and not action of words,
but action of swords!

The senate applauds again, some even standing. Crassus has worked his listeners into a frenzy. As the senators finally calm down and stop their clapping and sit, one Senator, an old grey-haired man in his seventies, CATO, stands up.

CATO

Crassus, you speak eloquently of war, of Rome's light caressing the faces of barbarians and bringing them into the fold of the empire, making them civilized men, taxpaying men. I am sure you are right that conquering Britannia will increase the empire's wealth and deliver more stability to our northern and eastern borders. But now is not the time to break the peace we have worked so hard to maintain and prosper in.

Some senators applaud at Cato's retort.

CATO (CONT'D)

More than this, you have gravely miscalculated in your blind call for war when Rome hasn't a single general worthy of such a colossal expedition.

The senate is quiet as Cato continues. He turns, his arms outstretched towards everyone present, and continues with a chuckle in a mocking tone.

CATO (CONT'D)

Who could you possibly find capable to lead the legions on such a foolhardy and perilous adventure? The greatest general of Rome, Caesar himself, turned away from Britannia!

CRASSUS

(smiling)

You are right, Cato, that a profound and colossal expedition such as this would require a general of the first order, a general who has never once lost a battle, a general who is a living legend. You say Rome has no living heroes, that Rome hasn't such a man ready for service to the people... I say it is YOU who have made a grave miscalculation in underestimating Rome's generals! Fellow senators, I give you the greatest living general in all the Empire! Marcus Scipio!

On cue, the doors of the Senate house spring open and in strides Marcus in full armor. The surprised and delighted senators all stand and cheer.

As Marcus arrives in front of the Senate, he turns to face them and kneels down on one knee and bows his head.

The Senators cease their clapping as Crassus, beaming, silences them.

CRASSUS (CONT'D)

Great general of Rome, Marcus
Scipio, rise before us and tell us
if you shall answer the call of
Mars, god of war!

Marcus rises and takes out his sword, pointing it upwards at a forty five degree angle.

MARCUS

Senators! I, Marcus Scipio,
citizen of Rome, servant of the
empire, commander of the Northern
and Eastern legions, request the
honor of leading our armies to
victory over Britannia!

The entire Senate, except for Cato, rises to its feet in an eruption of cheers and applause.

ALL

(cheering)

VICTORY! VICTORY! VICTORY!

Marcus, sword raised, proudly gazes around.

DISSOLVE TO:

EXT. OSTIA. THE SHIPPING PORT OF ROME. DAY.

The Roman harbor is teeming with activity as the Roman army prepares itself for war.

Under a giant canopy on the shores of the dock, Marcus is surrounded by the lesser generals and his second in command, the fleet admiral, AGRIPPA. Agrippa is in his fifties and his face carries the experience of his life as a soldier and statesman. They stand over a giant map of Britannia.

MARCUS

We will land in force at night
under the next full moon and attack
one of the largest tribes of
Britannia, the ICENI... here, in
their main town on the coast.
Their surrender is not an option.
Kill and enslave.

AGRIPPA

What about their king, Prasutagus?

MARCUS

Once we have annihilated their
stronghold, he and the other tribes
will surrender on our terms.

AGRIPPA

How many soldiers can the
barbarians put in the field?

MARCUS

(smiling)

Our scouts along the coast have
their numbers somewhere around a
hundred thousand.

AGRIPPA

(surprised)

That many? Six legions against one
hundred thousand?

(MORE)

AGRIPPA (CONT'D)

Three of them to one of us...
(suddenly smiling) Sounds like the
odds are in our favor!

Marcus, Agrippa, and the lesser generals all laugh.

MARCUS

If our night-attack goes well,
these barbarians will think twice
about putting their men on the
field. But, if they decide to
fight, we will show them the true
glory of Rome!

Agrippa pulls his sword out and thrusts it into the air above
him.

AGRIPPA

(shouting)
For the glory of Rome!

ALL

For the glory of Rome!

MONTAGE:

The harbor is bustling with preparations for the voyage.
Ships are being loaded with all kinds of stores, gear, and
military equipment.

Priests hold a religious ceremony to Poseidon at the docks
and slaughter a bull, throwing the heart into the sea.

The fleet mobilizes and pulls out of the magnificent harbor
of Ostia. Thousands of oars row while drums beat a rhythm.

Crowds of Romans have gathered on the docks and shores to
cheer them on.

In the lead of the fleet, Marcus and Agrippa stand on the prow of their magnificent ship, much larger than the rest.

Clearing the harbor, the ships begin to open their sails.

In the open expanse of the sea, the massive Roman fleet touches the horizons. The fleet is an unstoppable force.

INT. ROMAN SHIP OF MARCUS AND AGRIPPA. NIGHT.

The nearly full moon casts an eerie glow across the sea interrupted by the silhouettes of the hundreds of ships.

Marcus is in his small quarters above deck, to the rear of the ship. He somberly studies a map of Britannia while drinking from a ceramic jug of wine. A knock is followed by Agrippa entering.

AGRIPPA

You called for me, Marcus? Still have knots in your stomach before battles, do you?

MARCUS

Always before a battle, but never during.

AGRIPPA

Still concerned about the landing? We will lose fewer ships and men this way.

MARCUS

No. You are right. Three points of landing will be fine. We'll crush them in a pincer move.