

CON MEN  
or The Reign of Constantine the Great,  
First Christian Emperor of Rome  
A Play in Five Episodes by Christian Toth  
(C) 2015

How did Christianity become the dominant religion of the Western hemisphere?  
It had one hell of a pitch.

## CHARACTERS

(Parts may be rearranged for convenience or effect.

Bold means principal. See next page for principal character descriptions.)

### ACTOR #1:

Voice #1 (citizen, episodes 1&2)

TV Viewer #1 (episode 3)

Soldier #1 (episode 3)

Child #1 (episode 3)

Bishop #1 (Caecilian, episode 4)

Puppet #1: LORD (episode 5)

**Eusebius (episode 5)**

Mr. Pagan (episode 5)

### ACTOR #2:

**Miss Lactantia**

Voice #2 (citizen, episodes 1&2)

TV Viewer #2 (episode 3)

Soldier #2 (episode 3, one line in 4)

Child #2 (episode 3)

Bishop #2 (Donatus, episode 4)

Prefect (episode 4)

Puppet #2: Abraham (episode 5)

Mrs. Pagan (episode 5)

Soranus (episode 5)

### ACTOR #3:

**Galerius (episodes 1&3)**

Voice #3 (citizen, episode 2)

Constantius (flashback in episode 2)

Timon Russertus (episode 3)

Walter Cronkite(us) (episode 3)

Soldier #3: Praetor (episode 3,  
with Centurions and later with Maxen-  
tius)

Messenger (episodes 3&4)

Bishop #3 (Arius, episode 4)

Puppet #3: Isaac (episode 5)

Mr. Christian (episode 5)

### ACTOR #4:

**Severus (episode 1)**

**Maximian (episode 2)**

Helena (flashback in episode 2)

Oracle (episode 3)

Constantius II (toddler in episode 4)

Constantia (episodes 4&5)

Bishop #4 (Alexander, episode 4)

Mrs. Christian (episode 5)

Puppet #4: Angel (episode 5)

### ACTOR #5

**Maxentius (episodes 1-3)**

Bishop #5 (Pesachus, episode 4)

### ACTOR #6

**Crispus**

### ACTOR #7

**Haruspex (enters episode 3)**

### ACTOR #8

**Fausta**

### ACTOR #9

**Narrator (including Narrator Puppet)**

### ACTOR #10

**Ossius ("Ossie") (episodes 2-5)**

### ACTOR #11 **Licinius**

### ACTOR #12 **Con**

Diocletian appears only in opening DUMBSHOW doubling as one of two soldier emperors, the other of whom is doubled with Maximian.

## PRINCIPALS

NARRATOR: Like Paul Frees or Leslie Nielsen, very serious.

CON: Constantine the Great, Caesar, subsequently Augustus. Executive material.

FAUSTA: Maximian's daughter, Maxentius' sister, Con's wife. Ambitious for her kids.

LICINIUS: Caesar, subsequently co-Augustus. Not mean, just selfish.

GALERIUS: At start of play, the man in charge of the empire (senior Augustus).

MISS LACTANTIA: Evangelical secretary.

MAXIMIAN: Father of Maxentius and Fausta. Con's father-in-law. An old hero.

MAXENTIUS: Son of Maximian, brother of Fausta. He tries so hard.

CONSTANTIA: Half-sister of Constantine. Played as pawn, strikes as knight.

CRISPUS: Oldest son of Constantine, NOT by Fausta. Ambitious but guileless.

HARUSPEX: A traditional priest of polytheism.

EUSEBIUS: Your favorite Christian bishop and talk show host.

OSSIUS OF CORDOBA ("Ossie"): A well-connected bishop and advisor.

SEVERUS: Co-Augustus. A stooge picked by Galerius.

## SPECIALS (to be live or recorded)

Attack Ad Tape - Announcer + music + one line from Maxentius – episode 3

The Maxettes – Song & Dance number – episode 3

TV Announcer – episode 3

Intercom – episode 4

Goths TV Ad – episode 4

Goths (group) – episode 4

McManus (TV Announcer) – episode 5

VO at end of Christian/Pagan commercial – episode 5

This is epic theater! Find the cleverly hidden moments of emotional truth.

Sets are minimal. Action is farce-paced.

Time: A.D. 307-337

A few props and costume elements suggest ancient Rome (crowns, sandals) HOWEVER aesthetics are otherwise those of the 1960's New York advertising world.

Acts are called "Episodes." Episode titles may be displayed on placards.

EPISODE ONE: Pompous Pilot

A.D. 307, Imperial Court, City of Rome, Constantine's home.

EPISODE TWO: The Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost

A.D. 311, City of Rome, Compania Club, Augusta Trevirorum.

EPISODE THREE: Constantine the Great and the God of Death

A.D. 312, Television, Imperial Court, City of Rome.

EPISODE FOUR: Meet the New Boss

A.D. 313, City of Rome, Imperial Court, Arelate, Illyricum.

EPISODE FIVE: The Wrath of Con

A.D. 324, Recording Studios, Imperial Court, Motel, Nicomedia

Pre-show

MUSIC: The Four Lads' "Istanbul"

DUMBSHOW begins as audience arrives and continues through the NARRATOR'S line, "Until Diocletian established the Tetrarchy."

FIRST SOLDIER EMPEROR is on top of a block.

SECOND SOLDIER EMPEROR gets on the block with him, shares a moment with him, kills him, and he falls off the block.

FIRST SOLDIER EMPEROR then revives, walks behind the block, gets on the block with SECOND SOLDIER EMPEROR, kills him, and he falls off the block.

They repeat this behavior over and over with variations that produce COMEDY.

Episode One: Pompous Pilot

MUSIC: Replacing The Four Lads, EPIC HORNS startle the actors of the DUMBSHOW in the midst of their behavior, which then continues.

NARRATOR:

(His grave speech synchs with the action of the DUMBSHOW. Some details of what he says may get lost in the accelerating flow.)

The third century A.D... A period of crisis in the Roman Empire. Twenty emperors ruled over the course of fifty years, with an average reign lasting only two years ... usually terminating with assassination. Until Diocletian established the Tetrarchy ...

(In DUMBSHOW during speech above and below: FIRST SOLDIER EMPEROR becomes DIOCLETIAN and gets on the block. SECOND SOLDIER EMPEROR becomes MAXIMIAN. MAXIMIAN prepares to dispatch DIOCLETIAN according to the pattern, but then DIOCLETIAN invites him up in a friendly way. MAXIMIAN accepts, joins him atop the block, and each puts on a *gold* crown.)

... whereby two men served as Augustus ... each with a Caesar serving under him.

(In DUMBSHOW during speech above and below: CONSTANTIUS and GALERIUS also climb onto the block, putting on *silver* crowns. SIGNIFICANTLY, the block is over-

crowded. DUMBSHOW enlivens the confusing speech below as various figures dominate, share, trip, shove, raspberry, shake hands, die, spit, kiss, give the finger, etc.)

Diocletian saw this system as a permanent solution, with the Augusti stepping down every twenty years to promote their Caesars, and two more Caesars ascending to take their place. Sadly, things did not go so smoothly. When Diocletian willingly abdicated after twenty years—and persuaded his Co-Augustus, Maximian reluctantly to do the same—there was disagreement about who the next two Caesars should be. For both the new Augustus Constantius and the exiting Augustus Maximian had *sons*, each of whom expected the throne. But the *other* new Augustus, a cunning man called Galerius, had ideas of his own. He reasoned that if he appointed two servile cronies as Caesars ...

(The cronies are LICINIUS and SEVERUS.)

... he would have control of three quarters of the empire. And so it happened. But then, Constantius died suddenly and his son Constantine took his place before Galerius could react. Out of pragmatism, Galerius decided to accept Constantine ... but only as a Caesar. Out of pragmatism, Constantine accepted this arrangement. Meanwhile, the son of Maximian, Maxentius, felt seriously dissed. If Constantine could be an emperor, why couldn't he? So Maxentius invaded the city of Rome. He won over the citizens by cutting a few taxes, cutting a few throats, and paying all obeisance to the ancient gods of Rome.

(MAXENTIUS, wearing a tin-foil crown, sacrifices a stuffed rabbit.)

It is now the year A.D. 307, and news of the usurpation of Maxentius is just making its way to the highest offices of the empire ...

(MUSIC: Something like “When the Quail Come Back to San Quentin” by Artie Shaw)

(The space is cleared and set up for Constantine's office, with the desk of Miss Lactantia downstage. A phone rings.)

MISS LACTANTIA:

(Answering phone) Galerius, Severus, Licinius and Constantine, you've reached the office of Constantine the Great. I'm sorry, Mr. The Great is not currently available, may I take your message?

LICINIUS:

(Entering) I'm here for my 9:30. No need to show me in.

MISS LACTANTIA:

But Mr. Licinius ... (to phone) Yes? (to Licinius) No! (to phone) Yes ...

LICINIUS:

(Entering Constantine's office) Con? Constantine? (Sees Constantine asleep by his desk)  
Con... the chariot of Phoebus rises in the East and the coffee's hot. I'm here for our 9:30.

CON:

Licinius, good morning.

LICINIUS:

Long night?

CON:

I was up late conducting the Gallic campaign.

LICINIUS:

How galling. That pretty young wife of yours OK with you spending all these nights  
away from the family domus?

CON:

Behind every great emperor there's a patient wife.

LICINIUS:

And before every great emperor there's a patient boy's behind.

(Con gives him a look.)

Alright, *most* great emperors.

(Multiple phones start ringing around the office, including that of Miss Lactantia.)

MISS LACTANTIA:

(Answering phone) Galerius, Severus, Licinius and Constantine, you've reached the office  
of Constantine the Great. Yes, Mr. Galerius. Yes he's in. I'll let him know right away. Mr.  
The Great, you're wanted in the office of Mr. Galerius right away.

LICINIUS:

The Big Gal himself! Maybe I'll tag along.

CON:

(To Lactantia) Please let him know I'm on my way.

LICINIUS:

You gonna shave, Con?

CON:

I dunno, I'm thinking of cultivating a martial beard, what do you think?

LICINIUS:

I don't think Mars has anything to worry about yet.

(As they begin walking toward Galerius' office, Severus meets them.)

SEVERUS:

Hey, the phones are ringing off the hook. What's going on?

CON:

We've just been called in to see Galerius, Severus, hop on the bandchariot. Miss Lactantia, pick up a few camphoras of oil and have them sent to Mrs. The Great, will you?

MISS LACTANTIA:

Yes sir, any note?

CON:

Oh, *semper fidelis* or something like that. You work it out.

MISS LACTANTIA:

I understand.

CON:

Gratia.

(Switch scene: In the office of Galerius)

GALERIUS:

Salve, gentlemen. The news is already making its way around the imperial office but I wanted you to hear it from me first. Maxentius, the son of the old Augustus Maximian, has stolen the Rome account.

SEVERUS:

The Rome ... but that's our flagship account!

GALERIUS:

Well observed, Severus, and typical of the kind of incisive commentary that's catapulted you to the Augustan heights. Needless to say we're not going to take this lying down. Rome may no longer be significant administratively or strategically but we are after all the *Roman* Empire, and if word gets around that we can't hold the eponymous city then we'll be looking at usurpations of every client on the register. Which is why you, Severus, are going to win it back, under my close guidance.

(Constantine and Licinius look at each other.)

SEVERUS:

Sure thing boss, you can count on me.

(All light cigarettes.)

GALERIUS:

Yes. Now let's look at what we're up against. To start with, Maxentius is leveraging his father Maximian's brand. (Shows poster: "Rome: To the Max.") "Weren't the old times great. We were important before, I'll make you important again." Then there's the economics angle. (Shows poster: "Labia licti: non annona. Read my lips, no new taxes" with image of sexy woman.) Sex and taxes. 'Nuff said. Finally we have the religious approach. (Shows poster: "Four out of five oracles agree—Maxentius is the emperor with pep, zip, and staying power!") Now this is the one that really picks my grapes. Severus, I want a campaign that will show the people of Rome the gods are on my side. That the emperor is anointed by the ancient pantheon and no snot-nosed kid can take his place. Dammit I'm the senior Augustus of the Roman fucking empire. I'm giving you enough of a budget for Britannia-to-Parthia coverage. I want white bulls sacrificed on golden altars. Vestal virgins. A full Christian persecution campaign. And an army the size of ... an army. (To Constantine and Licinius) What. You're over there making the Janus faces the whole time I'm talking, you got something to say?

CON:

Galerius, I think we can all appreciate how strongly you're feeling about this strategy and I think we can all relate. But when I put myself in the sandals of the average Roman citizen—Joe Plebian coming home to his wife after a long day selling spices in the Forum, the Praetorian Guardsman kicking back for some wine with his cohort—I think these guys have already bought into *Maxentius* as anointed by the gods. After all, they let him

take the city. We go in there saying no, the gods are really on our side, it's just a he-said-she-said.

GALERIUS:

So what do you suggest, Constantine, we let him stay there? A tetrarchy's not good enough for you, you want a pentarchy?

CON:

Of course not. But I think it might be a good idea to prepare some fresh creative ... as an alternate.

GALERIUS:

Fresh creative ...

CON:

Yeah.

GALERIUS:

What do you have in mind? Say we're supported by the god of the Jews? Storm the city wearing funny old-fashioned clothes and waving our circumcised cocks in the air? Or maybe we should say we're Christians—sacrifice some babies and drink some blood ...

CON:

I don't think we'd have to go that far ...

GALERIUS:

Listen. If you want to put together a team to develop a new pitch you go ahead. Hell, you took your daddy's crown, give a few orders. Knock yourself out. But I'm not even going to look at it unless Severus, *and* Licinius, *and* I all blow the deal. This empire was built on the backs of Jupiter, Mars and Hercules, and it rides on the asses of Juno, Minerva and Proserpina. They've kept us going for five hundred years. They were good enough for Romulus and Remus and they're good enough for me. Concipemus?

CON:

Concipio, sir.

GALERIUS:

Bene. Good morning, gentlemen.

(Switch scene: Constantine's office. Con pours himself a drink.)

MISS LACTANTIA:

(Entering) Mr. The Great?

CON:

Miss Lactantia.

(Furtive, passionate embrace and kiss.)

MISS LACTANTIA:

How'd it go in there, he tell you about Maxentius?

CON:

Yeah, Galerius thinks he can win the city back by saying the gods on are his side. When I pointed out that's just what Maxentius is saying, he practically called me a Christian.

MISS LACTANTIA:

(Laughs) Would that be so terrible? Don't spread it around, Con, but a lot of the girls in the office are closet Christians. Some of those priests are very charismatic. Then there's the promise of eternal life. And those communion wafers are divine for helping a girl keep her figure.

CON:

Eternal life, huh? I dunno. Sounds boring.

MISS LACTANTIA:

That probably depends on who you're spending it with, Mr. The Great.

CON:

Can you get away for lunch?

MISS LACTANTIA:

Uh-huh.

CON:

Book a suite at Caesar's Palace.

MISS LACTANTIA:

Hail Caesar. (Exit.)

CON:

(Pensive) Eternal life ... for the Eternal City ...

(Con starts writing pensively on a scroll or tablet. Switch scene to Severus arriving at the gates of Rome. He carries a portfolio and is accompanied by a single, representative Centurion. He anxiously swigs from a flask.)

NARRATOR:

As Constantine the Great mustered his resources, the Junior Augustus, Severus made march for the city of Rome with a large army of veterans and a hastily assembled portfolio. He found the walls of the city larger than he had expected, never having seen them before except in the ads. But with the assurance that the gods were on his side, he gathered his courage to address the crowd at the gate.

SEVERUS:

Friends! Romans! Businessmen! I'd like to thank you for taking the time from your busy schedules to see us this afternoon. I hope you enjoy the snacks I've brought. I am sorry if I didn't bring enough for everyone. Rome may no longer be the administrative center of the empire, or the strategic center of the empire, and maybe there hasn't been an Italian emperor for fifty years, but the emperors of the Tetrarchy still value you, for, be it ever so humbled, there's no place like Rome.

(Shows a poster: "There's No Place Like Rome," with an image of Galerius smiling over the city.)

The benevolent Senior Augustus, Galerius is generously prepared to overlook your apparent acceptance of the usurper Maxentius. You must perceive it is in your interests to reject this usurper, as Galerius has the backing of the entire ancient and fraternal order of the Roman pantheon of gods, from the frolicking nymphs of the wood to great Jove himself. By Jove. What an emperor.

(Shows poster: "By Jove, What an Emperor," with Jupiter and Galerius shaking hands. The following Voices are planted in the audience.)

VOICE #1:

Saaaaay, Maxentius says the gods are behind *him*!

VOICE #2:

And the oracles back him up!

SEVERUS:

Are you going to believe a few musty old soothsayers? He probably paid them or threatened them! And anyway what is sooth?

(Voices mutter discontentedly, unconvinced.)

SEVERUS:

OK, well, if you want legitimate old-time religion, just look at our new campaign of Christian persecution! We've been blinding, maiming and dismembering bishops and lay worshippers since 307 in the East, and we have plans for expansion into the western provinces by 315. Just look at our creative ...

(Begins to show next poster but is interrupted by Voices.)

VOICE #1:

Saaaay, we're poor! Are we supposed to feed our children eyeballs and feet?

VOICE #2:

Yeah, who cares about a few gimpy bishops!

(General discontent.)

SEVERUS:

Well then you force me to fall back on the last item of my pitch.

VOICE #2:

(In a small voice) Already?

SEVERUS:

I am accompanied by a fully equipped, modern army of cavalry and footsoldiers, auxilia, cataphracti ...

(The centurion interrupts to whisper into Severus' ear.)

SEVERUS:

What?

MAXENTIUS:

(Entering) What the Centurion is telling the Junior Augustus is that his veteran troops happen to be veterans of my father Maximian's legion and that they would prefer to support me rather than a sniveling, desperate, gods-forsaken yuppie.

SEVERUS:

(Trying to roll up his posters and leave) Hi Maxentius. Ahhh ... Thank you very much for your time, citizens, I hope you'll get in touch if you have any need of our services ... did I give you all my card?

(The Centurion blocks Severus from exiting.)

SEVERUS:

Can we do lunch?

(Maxentius gestures to the Centurion, who stabs Severus through the heart.)

MAXENTIUS:

(Imitating Severus) As you see, Rome is where the heart is!

(Applause and verbal acclaim from Voices.)

NARRATOR:

Thus ended the rein of Severus.

(Switch scene: Con is in his car, driving home.)

NARRATOR (continued):

Later, Constantine the Great rode homeward to visit his young wife Fausta, his infant son, Constantius II, and his eldest son Crispus, the fruit of Constantine's first marriage, who was nigh upon manhood. The day had been long and trying, and many questions trembled in the crepuscular stillness.

(Fausta awaits, standing, with baby Constantius in her arms. Crispus, perhaps in a Roy Rogers costume or PJs, pounces energetically.)

CRISPUS:

Daddy daddy you're home you're home!

CON:

Yes yes! (Tepidly kisses Fausta's cheek, who has tepidly offered it.) Honey.

FAUSTA:

It's good of you to come home to see your family.

CON:

Did you get those oils I sent you?

FAUSTA:

I got the oils.

CRISPUS:

Bang! Bang! Look Daddy I'm rustling me up some Visigoths!

CON:

Hey, easy there, little Caesar! You know you're gonna have to learn to control yourself if you're going to be emperor someday.

FAUSTA:

And what about my little Constantius? What if he becomes emperor instead?

CON:

(Kindly) Fausta, we have four emperors right now. I'm pretty sure the Roman Empire can handle two. Oh, wait a minute, that's not even true anymore. Severus went to Rome today to put down an insurrection by your brother. Your brother Maxentius killed him.

FAUSTA:

Oh, dear. What did Licinius say about that?

CON:

What did Licinius say?

FAUSTA:

Well, he strikes me as the kind of man who'd be very capable in a crisis.

CON:

Well, we were all a little taken aback. Although ... this might just open up a few doors for this concept that I've been developing ...

(With one hand on Fausta/Constantius and the other hand on Crispus, he has assumed a position similar to that of Don Draper at the end of the "Mad Men" pilot, only standing. The lights begin to fade as "All of My Love" by Led Zeppelin starts to play. As his face fills with the possibilities ahead and the drums come in, back-lighting makes the posture look more like a crucifix. BLACKOUT. END OF EPISODE ONE.)

### Episode Two: The Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost

(Maxentius is speaking into a 1960s-style tape recorder, sitting behind a block, his desk.)

MAXENTIUS:

Emperor's log, Ides of February, in the year of the eighth consulship of Galerius Augustus. Having dispatched the junior Augustus of the Tetrarchy, Severus, I've booked a regional damnatio memoriae campaign: defaced all his statues, struck down all his edicts, and barred him eternally from any posthumous deification and worship. So much for Severus. New business: I've promoted Valerius Alexander to the position of magister annonae, interim acting, and assigned him to Africa Majora to secure the market. Provision must be made for pirate attacks ...

MAXIMIAN:

(Entering and overlapping) Well done, my boy!

MAXENTIUS:

Just a minute, Dad. Therefore I've authorized the construction of a supplement to the naval fleet as follows: oaken triremes, eight, bringing the total to ...

MAXIMIAN:

(Overlapping) The way you stuck it to Severus—"Rome is where the heart is"—ha! By golly, it's going to be fun sharing the imperial throne with you, son.

MAXENTIUS:

(Presses the "stop" button.) Hold on a minute. "Sharing" the throne?

MAXIMIAN:

Why naturally, now that I'm Augustus again, I expect you to remain on as executive vice Caesar.

MAXENTIUS:

Dad, I won the Rome account. Not you.

MAXIMIAN:

Of course! And I'm very proud of you. But you couldn't have done it without using my name, and my legion.

MAXENTIUS:

I leveraged the capital I had on hand, but I did all the work on my own. And I'm the one who's going to be emperor. Not you.

MAXIMIAN:

Great Caesar's ghost, boy, are you trying to shut me out? After all I've done for you? You've done a fine job here, but I'm still your father, young man, and you'd better start showing me some respect.

MAXENTIUS:

OK, Father, with all due respect, hit the road. They all lead to Rome anyway. . .

MAXIMIAN:

How sharper than a serpent's tooth it is to have an asshole for a son. We'll see about this. I'll make a speech before the people of Rome! They haven't forgotten me. At my investiture in Mediolanum they crowded the streets.

MAXENTIUS:

That was (counts on his fingers) X, X, V, I, I . . . twenty-seven years ago. And the "People of Rome" are still pissed off at you for building your palace in the *northern* capital.

MAXIMIAN:

But that was necessary for my campaign in Britannia! They won't overlook my military record. The citizens love a soldier.

MAXENTIUS:

You *lost* the campaign in Britannia. Diocletian had to send in Constantius to bail your ass out.

MAXIMIAN:

Enough of your revisionist history! I'll have the history books changed to reflect the real truth. *My* truth.

MAXENTIUS:

I dunno Pop, Rome may be pretty decadent but I don't think we'd stoop so low as to re-write history textbooks.

MAXIMIAN:

Oh ho, we shall see. I'm going out there right now to make my Pledge to Roma!

MAXENTIUS:

Go crazy. It's a free empire.

(Maxentius puts the tape recorder in his lap and begins changing the tape. Maximian moves the block DSC to become a balcony over the Forum. He mounts it.)

MAXIMIAN:

My fellow Romicans! Your revered Augustus Maximian Herculus has returned! My son thinks that he can lead you to victory against the Tetrarchs, but he is young and inexperienced. Join me and together we will end this destructive conflict and rule the empire as father and ... well we'll rule the empire.

(Voices come from among the audience.)

VOICE #1:

Methinks there is much reason in his sayings.

VOICE #2:

Methinks thou art a blockhead.

VOICE #3:

Methinks therefore me is.

(Maxentius mounts the block with Maximian, holds up the tape recorder and presses "play.")

SPECIAL: TAPE:

(In the style of a political attack ad: low, suggestive voice and threatening music) The old Augustus Maximian says that he can lead Rome to prosperity, but he wants to cancel Maxentius' tax cuts, and give your hard-earned denarii to Galerius in Nicomedia. Is this the man you want controlling the grain supply? Tell Maximian you've paid enough to the eastern capital. Riot in the streets for Maxentius. "I'm Maxentius Augustus and I approve this message." Paid for by the Chamber of Bread and Circuses.

VOICES:

Down with Maximian! Go Maxentius! Et cetera!

(Maximian reluctantly gets down from block.)

VOICES:

(Singing) Naaaa na, na na naaa na, hey hey hey, vale!

(MUSIC: epic horns.)

(During the following, characters enter as mentioned. Ossius also enters during this speech.)

NARRATOR:

The year A.D. 311. It is a period of civil war. Maxentius has usurped the city of Rome and expelled his father Maximian. Meanwhile, the Caesar Constantine the Great, who is married to Maxentius' sister, Fausta, plots with his co-Caesar Licinius to regain control of the Eternal City. The crisis calls for the gravest deliberation and the most decisive action—but there's still time for all the parties concerned to relax with a drink among the imperial elite at that nexus of the fourth century social hierarchy, the Campania Club...

(MUSIC: "Besame Mucho" by Artie Shaw.)

(The block is moved UL to become the bar. All characters behave as if at a social function at a country club, with drinks and chatter.)

LICINIUS:

So I said to the big Gal, that's one down. You ready to look at some fresh concepts yet? But he didn't seem to think that was funny.

CON:

I'm not surprised.

FAUSTA:

Thank you for putting the idea forward. It means so much to have a friend you can rely on.

LICINIUS:

I think you'll find that I'm always ready to stand up and push when it matters most.

CON:

*We're* very grateful, Licinius. This campaign's gonna need all the support it can get.

LICINIUS:

So how's it coming along with that whole Christian angle you were telling me about?

CON:

They're a cockamamie bunch, these Christians. Why would anybody want to worship only one god? And one that doesn't get along with any of the other gods? Seems like putting all your Lupercal Eggs in one basket if you ask me. But you know, you've got to hand it to them when it comes to grassroots organizing. They've got a network of charities and safe houses, a bishop in every major city ... Hades, they even have a health plan.

LICINIUS:

It sounds like you're thinking about more than just the Rome account, Con.

CON:

Maybe. I mean, you can tear them to pieces, blind them, throw them to the lions, and they just keep coming. They're like cockroaches.

FAUSTA:

I don't know that I'd want to live in an empire that had an infestation.

LICINIUS:

That's good.

MAXIMIAN:

(Crossing to them) Well get a load of this! I've walked right into the middle of "Your Show of Shows" – with two Caesars! (To Fausta) Hiya, Pipsqueak. (Kisses her cheek.)

FAUSTA:

Hi, Daddy.

MAXIMIAN:

(Shaking hands) Con... Lice. So. How's my favorite son-in-law? Sorry to hear about your pal Severus.

CON:

Yeah, we're all pretty broken up about that. But hey ... too bad about that thing with Maxentius. Tough break. But you didn't really want to be emperor again, did you?

MAXIMIAN:

What this empire needs right now is experience, Con, and I'm the only man around who can bring it.

LICINIUS:

(Exiting) Well, I should go mingle a little, hand out a few cards. Vale, all.

MAXIMIAN:

Con, I'm *going* to be Augustus again. And I want to give you a chance to get in on the ground floor.

CON:

What do you have in mind, Pop?

MAXIMIAN:

It burns you, doesn't it, to still be only a Caesar when you know you could be Augustus? You know Galerius is never going to give you an inch. He's afraid of you.

CON:

He's not crazy about me, that's for sure.

MAXIMIAN:

I'm prepared to offer you a full partnership. Co-Augustus. Just like back in the day with Diocletian and me. You'll be your own man at last, and when I pass on you'll be free to rule as you see fit, with my grandson by your side. What do you think about that?

CON:

With your grandson ... *and* my older son Crispus. I dunno, it sounds great, but what about *your* son, Maxentius?

MAXIMIAN:

I have no son. After what that ingrate did to me in Rome he deserves what he's got coming to him, and you're just the man to let him have it.

CON:

Then there's Galerius. He's still got a lock on every account in the eastern market.

MAXIMIAN:

You leave Galerius to me.

CON:

You've got some concepts?

MAXIMIAN:

Listen to you talking about concepts. Coming up with pitches, and broadcast plans, endorsements by the gods. Hokey religions and radio networks are no match for a good gladius at your side, kid.

CON:

A hostile merger, huh?

FAUSTA:

Daddy, you've retired. You should be taking it easy. Play a few rounds of ... golfus. Some orgies at your palace. People just don't lead armies at your age, it isn't respectable.

MAXIMIAN:

Pumpkin. Let the men talk. Think it over, Con.

CON:

I sure will, Pop. I sure will think it over.

MAXENTIUS:

(Entering) Salve, loving family. Hey sis.

FAUSTA:

Naughty Maxie.

MAXENTIUS:

Dad.

MAXIMIAN:

Viper.

MAXENTIUS:

Hey, Con, could I have a word with you in private?

(Con shrugs to the others and goes with Maxentius, crossing to other side of stage.)

FAUSTA:

Daddy, you're not really going to start fighting again at your age?

MAXIMIAN:

You're a doll. I won't have to. That husband of yours will do all the work for me. Then once I've got the empire back in my hands ... well he'd just want to hand it all over to Crispus, wouldn't he? (SIGNIFICANTLY) A little poison in the wine has ended many imperial careers before now. Then you and I could groom little Constantius to be just the kind of emperor we want him to be.

FAUSTA:

And until he comes of age, somebody will still have to run the empire. A strong woman ... or man.

MAXIMIAN:

You are my daughter, Fausta.

(They exit, and Licinius reveals himself. Having been hiding, he heard their conversation.)

LICINIUS:

She's your daughter all right, Maximian. Bold in action, but not especially bright. (Exit)

MAXENTIUS:

So Con, I guess between Galerius and my old man you're feeling some pressure to win back the Rome account.

CON:

I probably wouldn't say no to the billings, Maxentius. Hell, the buildings are nice, too.

MAXENTIUS:

You're a smart ass, Con, but I wonder if you're smart. Constantine the Great. How'd you come to be called that, anyway?

CON:

You know that as well as anyone. It's what the soldiers hailed me as when my father named me as his successor.

MAXENTIUS:

You're sure that's what happened?

CON:

Pretty sure. I was present at his deathbed.

MAXENTIUS:

(Pause, then handing him an envelope) You ought to take this.

CON:

What is it? A tape?

MAXENTIUS:

It turns out that when you were there in your father's bedchamber, you weren't alone. There was a centurion. Sixth Legion. He heard everything that went on in that room. And when you were out arranging for your own promotion, he made use of the time to gather up some of Constantius' records. Private records. His plans ... his past. A word to the wise, Con. The people of Rome might not be so eager to build a statue of an emperor named "Constantine the Bastard."

CON:

(Feigning nonchalance) See you around, Maxie.

(Maxentius exits. Lights change to yellow "Flashback" lighting as Constantine removes his suit jacket and crown to reveal suspenders underneath. He cowers in a corner, watching as his parents, Constantius and Helen enter.)

HELENA (Actor #4):

But the boy needs a father!

CONSTANTIUS (Actor #3):

Maximian just made me his Praetorian Prefect, I have to marry his eldest daughter, Theodora. That's all there is to it.

HELENA:

By the gods, Constantius!

CONSTANTIUS:

The gods don't care, Helena. This position puts me on the fast track to becoming emperor. I wouldn't be doing myself, or you or Constantine any favors by marrying you now. Try to understand that.

HELENA:

What's going to become of us?

CONSTANTIUS:

You'll be alright. Constantine's going to live in Nicomedia as sort of a V.I.P. hostage and you can live nearby.

HELENA:

With no protection, no honor ...

CONSTANTIUS:

Honor? That's not something you can get from somebody else. The boy will make his own honor with the life he leads and the choices he makes. Or he won't. I gave him life and I gave him my name. The rest is up to him.

(End of flashback. Con puts his jacket and crown back on and crosses to "bar" area as Constantius and Helena exit. At the bar, Ossie Cordoba is looking for materials for a drink. He's already slightly inebriated. Con mistakes him for a bartender.)

CON:

Aqua vitae.

OSSIE:

That stuff'll kill you. Anyway, I can't find any. This bar looks like it was set up by Marcus Aurelius—all meditations and no medications.

(Con hops over the bar and finds some grapes.)

CON:

Red or white?

OSSIE:

I'll go with your recommendation.

CON:

(Discards the grapes and takes out a flask.) How about brown?

OSSIE:

The Lord helps them that help themselves.

CON:

Help yourself.

OSSIE:

(Drinks) Amen. My name's Ossie, by the way

CON:

Con. (Drinks) You seem awfully pious for a bartender.

OSSIE:

For a bartender, I'm awfully pious. But I'm not a bartender. Just thirsty. For the bishop of Cardoba, I'm probably just about pious enough.

CON:

You're a bishop? Like... a Christian bishop?

OSSIE:

Now you understand why I'm walking diagonally. (Pause.) That's a chess joke.

CON:

(Thinking about something else) That's funny.

OSSIE:

It is?

CON:

Tell me... how do you convert people? How do you sell Christianity?

OSSIE:

Oh, it's a tough sell, I'll give you that. But then the truth always is. You've got to believe that one man can change the course of history. You've got to believe that one man can take the burden his father passed on to him, and use it to bring peace and order to the whole world. You've got to believe in Jesus Christ. And you've got to believe in yourself, Mr. The Great.

CON:

My reputation precedes me.

OSSIE:

Well, the crown was a tip-off. Much obliged for the drink. (Exit)

(Con thinks and smokes and drinks.)

(MUSIC: Epic horns.)

(During this speech, the block is moved to center. A telephone and a gold crown are placed on it.)

NARRATOR:

So it came to pass that Constantine the Great, with a renewed confidence in his Christian Campaign, agreed to the terms of Maximian, and met him at Augusta Treverorum to secure terms. But what Maximian did not know was that Constantine had been warned of the old Augustus's plot to take his life.

(Enter Licinius (by Con's side) and Maximian with contract.)

(MUSIC stops.)

MAXIMIAN:

OK, the lawyers have had their fun and here's the contract. Constantine to be proclaimed Augustus... all the legions of Maximian signed over to his command... all divine rights of monarchical authority to be conferred therewith et cetera et cetera. All it needs is our Jonus Hancockuses. (As Con signs) I'm really looking forward to this, Con. Rome can look forward to a brighter, more stable future at last.

CON:

(As Maximian signs) You said a mouthful, Pop. (Looks over the contract.) Now. Maximian. Would you prefer to be executed or to commit suicide?

MAXIMIAN:

Sorry, que?

CON:

We've got plenty of swords here, and I brought along some hemlock ...

MAXIMIAN:

But ... Con! Is this how you thank your father-in-law?

CON:

I'm very grateful, Pop. That's why I'm giving you a choice. I recommend suicide myself. More in the grand Roman tradition. Besides, "A little poison in the wine has ended many imperial careers before now."

MAXIMIAN:

Fausta. OK Con, I'll have a snort. I know when I'm licked.

LICINIUS:

I never thought I'd hear those words coming out of the mouth of Maximian Herculus!

MAXIMIAN:

Well Licinius, a life probably hasn't been fully lived until you have said them. And you will. You both will. (Raising the glass.) Here's how. (Drinks and dies horribly.)

(Con puts on the gold crown and presses an intercom button.)

CON:

Miss Lactantia, please get a message to my wife, and one to her brother Maxentius. Tell them a tragedy has occurred. Their father Maximian has killed himself.

(Con blows a puff of smoke and looks at Licinius. Slow blackout. END OF EPISODE TWO.)

(MUSIC: "After Hours" by the Velvet Underground, beginning on the verse with, "Leave the wineglass out . . .")

### Episode Three: Constantine the Great and the God of Death

(MUSIC: Somber)

NARRATOR:

The year A.D. 312. Rome's civil war drags on. The Caesar Licinius and the newly anointed Augustus Constantine prepare their campaign to retake Rome from the usurper Maxentius, while the senior Augustus Galerius in Nicomedia continues to insist on an adherence to the old faith in the Roman pantheon of gods. The persecution of the Christians has reached a fever pitch, but if anything the cult grows stronger with each martyrdom. Meanwhile, Maxentius has been betrayed by his praetorian prefect in Africa, whose rebellion has halted the supply of grain to the capital. With its citizens starving and dis-

contented, Maxentius deploys all his resources to keep their support at this dangerous time.

(Stage Left, Viewer #1 kneels by a box (television set) changing channels while Viewer #2 reclines on a chair or sofa. Each of the following television excerpts is preceded by a moment of “snow” as the channel is changed. The action on the screen is performed at SR. SNOW before TV Show #1: “Meet the Plebs.”)

TIMON RUSSERTUS (Actor #3):

I’m Timon Russertus. This week on “Meet the Plebs” we’ll be talking to the Senior Executive Soothsayer for the Maxentius administration, Haruspex. Mr. Haruspex, thanks for joining us again and, before we begin, I just have to ask you: any predictions on the gladiatorial combat?

HARUSPEX:

Well, Timon, a little entrail tells me the Greens are going to draw a lot of blood this weekend.

TIMON:

Oh! I hope you’re wrong about that one, I’ve got fifty denarii on the Reds. But down to business, Harry ...

HARUSPEX:

Yes, Timon.

TIMON:

Maxentius. The interruption of the grain supply has seriously affected his standing in the polls. How long can he keep it up? Are the gods still on his side?

HARUSPEX:

Absolutely, Tim. Why, Maxie asked me to consult the Sibylline Books for him just this morning, and ...

TIMON:

Hold on a minute there, the Sibylline Books? The ultimate oracular authority in all of Rome? Those are normally only consulted in times of crisis. Is Maxentius getting a little nervous?

HARUSPEX:

The emperor feels the pain of the Roman People, Timon, and he’ll stint at nothing to make sure they get what they need. Anyway, the prophecy said that, and I quote, “The enemy of Rome will die ... today.”

TIMON:

Today.

HARUSPEX:

Today.

TIMON:

Kalends of October, in the year of the Second Consulship of Licinius Caesar ...

HARUSPEX:

Today.

(Viewer #1 changes the channel. SNOW before TV Show #2: Religious Programming.)

ORACLE (#4):

People are coming up to me, and they're saying Oracle. Has Maxentius lost the support of the almighty and ancient pantheon of Roman gods? Has ... Maxentius lost the *support* ... of the almighty and ancient pantheon of Roman gods and I say to them. *Jupiter* ... loves the emperor Maxentius. *Mars-uh* ... loves the emperor Maxentius. Vulcan loves Maxentius. (Makes a quick, understated Vulcan hand salute.) *Bachus* ... *Mithras* ... *Mi-NER-va* ...

(Viewer #1 changes the channel. SNOW before TV Show #3: Variety. This is a musical number.)

SPECIAL: THE MAXETTES:

Maxentius, Maxentius,  
He's the emperor who's not pretentious.  
Maxentius, Maxentius,  
He's the emperor who's most sententious.  
He's the one who the gods all love,  
Smiling down from Olympus above.  
He's the iron fist that fits like a glove,  
Maxentius is the one for me!

(Viewer #1 turns off TV.)

VIEWER #1:

Nothing on but crap. (Pause.) What's for dinner tonight?

VIEWER #2:

Nothing.

VIEWER #1:

Again?

(Viewer #1 turns on TV. SNOW before TV Show #4: The News.)

WALTER CRONKITE(US) (#3):

... and several small turds. (He is handed a paper.) This just in, Licinius and Constantine the Great have been bombarding the city of Rome with seditious illustrated pamphlets claiming that the quote “Highest God” endquote is angry that Maxentius is ignoring him. Reports vary as to this god’s identity, but many speculate that it has something to do with the Christian conspiracy. Others claim that the term is a reference to the neoplatonic Divine Mind favored by many of Rome’s pagan elite. Emperor Maxentius cautions that this ambiguity is deliberate, and urges the people of Rome to remain calm.

VIEWER #1:

(Overlapping after “deliberate”) Highest God, huh? I wonder if there’s anything to that.

(Viewer #1 changes the channel. SNOW before TV Show #5: “State of the Empire.”)

SPECIAL: TV ANNOUNCER:

“My Three Slaves” is brought to you by ... Maxentius, who comes to you now live from the Palatine with his State of the Empire address.

MAXENTIUS:

Citizens of Rome, times are tough. But don’t let despair blind you to the evil forces that confront us. Constantine the so-called Great is a godless con man. He murdered my father—your beloved Augustus Maximian—and called it suicide.

VIEWER #2:

Look, now he loves his father again.

MAXENTIUS:

Moreover, it has come to my attention that this supposedly great leader is in fact no better than the son of a common whore. A bastard. That’s right, Constantine the Great is really Constantine the ...

(Viewer #1 turns the TV off.)

VIEWER #1:

Man, he really is desperate.

(MUSIC: Artie Shaw: “When the Quail Come Back to San Quentin.”)

(Bustle as TV is cleared, Viewers exit, and Constantine, Licinius, Ossi, and Miss Lactantia enter Constantine's office.)

LICINIUS:

We've got our snipes posted, our pirate spots are airing, the flyer distribution has been fulfilled and did you read the news today?

CON:

Oh boy. "The enemy of Rome will die today." I think the time has come for us to make our pitch.

OSSIUS:

The bishops and the faithful are all lined up behind you, Con.

LICINIUS:

No time better. How are you going to handle Galerius?

(MUSIC stops.)

GALERIUS:

(entering) Yes Con, how are you going to handle me? You seem to be handling everything else around here. (Coughs violently into a bloody handkerchief.)

CON:

Mr. Galerius, are you OK?

GALERIUS:

No I'm not. My bowels are on fire, I'm coughing up rivers of blood, and there are maggots on my cock. I'm dying.

CON:

I'm ... sorry to hear that.

GALERIUS:

No you're not.

OSSIUS:

It's the chickens coming home to roost, Galerius. Your persecution of the Christians has roused the anger of the Lord.

GALERIUS:

Aaaah! Shit, I've just pissed myself.

LICINIUS:

You've got to take it easy, Big Gal...

GALERIUS:

Constantine, I've been against this Christian campaign from the word go. I've worked day and night to do the right thing—sacrifices, persecutions. Maybe ... aaaaah! Now I've gone blind. Miss Lactantia are you still there?

MISS LACTANTIA:

Yes sir.

GALERIUS:

Take a memo. To the people of the Roman Empire. It has grieved my heart to see the traditions of our ancestors trod upon by the adherents of a strange and foreign cult. However—the freedom of its shareholders being essential to the liquidity and growth of the Imperial Portfolio—I hereby declare Christianity a legal religion and withdraw all former edicts germane to its persecution.

OSSIUS:

Sweet Jesus.

GALERIUS:

It is to be hoped that the Christians will now join all their fellow citizens in appealing to their god for the health of their empire, and of its emperors. Signed, Galerius Augustus, Pontifex Maximus, Gothicus, Parthicus et cetera. You two ... sign it and affix my seal. Osius.

OSSIUS:

Mr. Galerius?

GALERIUS:

Will the pain stop now?

OSSIUS:

I honestly don't know. But the mercy of the Lord is infinite and he will always forgive a sincere penitent.

MISS LACTANTIA:

With respect, sir, the Lord is also all-seeing and quick to anger. I don't think you should count on his being a sucker.

GALERIUS:

Jupiter, why have you forsaken me!

(Galerius exits, stumbling and suffering enormously, followed by Miss Lactantia.)

CON:

That tears it. Licinius, take your men to Aquilea. Make them think the pitch is coming from the east. I'll take my team across the Alps and approach Rome via Augusta Taurinorum and Verona. (Looks at Ossius.) Ossie, I've got an idea ... call it a vision. My men will put crosses on their briefcases.

OSSIUS:

Yes ... say that they come in the name of Jesus Christ, Lord of Light, Eagle of Justice, Sun of Righteousness, Bringer of Everlasting Life and Peace.

CON:

No, I don't think so. That message won't play in Perugia. I'll just say: By this sign, you will conquer.

MISS LACTANTIA:

(Entering with gold crown) Galerius is dead.

LICINIUS:

Well, wherever he may be now ... let's hope it sucks.

(Licinius takes Galerius' gold crown from Miss Lactantia and puts it on. He smiles at Constantine. Constantine has trouble smiling. All exit except OSSIUS.)

OSSIUS:

And may God deliver us all from a similar suckdom. (Exit)

(Switch Scene: The Roman Campus Martius, where the Praetorian Guard is drinking.)

(MUSIC: "Praise the Lord and Pass the Ammunition" – Kay Kyser & His Orchestra)

SOLDIER #3: (PRAETOR):

Let us drink ... to the Emperor Maxentius!

(Groans from the others.)

SOLDIER #1: (FIRST CENTURION):

I know it's our job to fight for him and all, but I don't like the creep.

SOLDIER #3:

Those are treasonous words, Centurion.

SOLDIER #1:

Are you going to put me on report? This campaign can't spare a man. Besides, you feel the same way I do.

(Grunts of assent.)

SOLDIER #3:

We'll put that aside for now. OK then, let us drink ... to Jupiter.

SOLDIER #2: (SECOND CENTURION):

Fat lot of good Jupiter did for Maximian. He was Jupiter's son and look where it got him. Then of course Severus called on Jupiter and he bought it. Maxentius is calling on him now and the people are starving.

MESSENGER:

(Entering) Extree, extree! The Augustus Galerius dies in his own blood and shit! Renounces Jupiter and signs Christian toleration edict! Blood and shit for the dead Galerius, read all about it! (Exits.)

SOLDIER #2:

(Pause.) What about that "highest god" that Constantine's going on about?

SOLDIER #3:

You sap, that's just a euphemism for the Christian god.

SOLDIER #2:

Who says? The highest god could be anybody. That's what's so great about it, see? You just appeal to him, whomever he may be, and you can't go wrong!

SOLDIER #1:

Swell, I'm thirsty. To the highest god, whomever he may be!

(They drink.)

SOLDIER #3:

Guys, did we just drink to the god of the army that we're fighting against today?

SOLDIER #2:

Yeah.

SOLDIER #1:

You know what that means, don't you? Now we'll just have to drink a toast to each and every single god in the pantheon. Maybe better drink to some of the gods from the East, too.

SOLDIER #2:

And when we run out of gods, we can drink to ... drinking.

(They drink. They exit. SFX: horse galloping up offstage right. Enter Fausta. She looks around nervously. SFX: horse galloping up offstage left. Enter Licinius.)

LICINIUS:

Fausta.

FAUSTA:

We can't meet like this. I must be madder than Caligula.

LICINIUS.

And twice as sexy. At least!

FAUSTA:

Oh, Licinius, what are we going to do?

LICINIUS:

Well, I have time for a quickie before I have to take my legions to Aquilea ...

FAUSTA:

No ...

LICINIUS:

Or you could come along with me and we could have sex when we get there. We could get laid in Aquilea.

FAUSTA:

No.

LICINIUS:

Aquilea lay HEE hoo!

FAUSTA:

Stop it. What if Constantine finds out? He's already killed my father and I don't expect him to show any mercy to my brother.

LICINIUS:

Look Fausta, now that Galerius is dead I'm co-Augustus with your husband. Give us a few months to get the empire under control and then ... there's nothing you and I can't do.

FAUSTA:

Except ... each other. And what about the children?

LICINIUS:

Are you thinking that Con'll give all the power to Crispus? Don't worry. Little Constantius will be fine. There's going to be plenty of room in this empire for two Augusti.

FAUSTA:

What about ... three?

(Fausta indicates her belly.)

LICINIUS:

Three? You mean ... Mighty Aphrodite! But ... is it ours?

FAUSTA:

I don't know.

LICINIUS:

You've still been humping your husband, right?

FAUSTA:

Periodically. The major religious festivals, you know.

LICINIUS:

Then there's no problem. Con never has to know a thing. Fausta. He's not a bad guy. A little square maybe, but he knows what he's doing. To tell you the truth I'm looking forward to ruling with him. Just like Diocletian and Maximian ... Romulus and Remus ... Asterix and Obelix ... We'll be equals.

FAUSTA:

Sharing *everything*?

LICINIUS:

Mmm. Fausta. I may be fucking you, but Con's my friend. Let's not burn down Rome just so we can fiddle around, OK?

FAUSTA:

Just go.

LICINIUS:

(Cheerfully) OK! Hey, I'll see you at the triumph. You look great, baby. You're glowing!  
Vale. (Exit)

FAUSTA.

Vale. Equals, huh? Licinius doesn't know his friend as well as I know my husband.  
(Exit)

(SOUND: Flowing water. The Mulvian Bridge is set up left-to-right center during the following.)

NARRATOR:

And so the stage was set for the most important battle of the fourth century. A conflict that would forever alter the course of history. Its location: the plain before the Mulvian Bridge.

(Two children are sitting on the bridge wall. Their backs are to the audience. The "water" of the river is upstage of the bridge wall. One of the children has a fishing pole extended over it. The bridge road is downstage of the bridge wall.)

CHILD #1:

Nothing's biting today.

CHILD #2:

This bait sucks. Even the worms are starving.

CHILD #1:

Hey, look, a comic book!

CHILD #2:

Get it!

(Child #1 fishes the comic book out of the river. They turn DS toward audience.)

CHILD #2:

Is it a Hercules?

CHILD #1:

I don't think so. Look, it's about this rich guy. Check it out! He's got like a million slaves. Whoa.

CHILD #2:

Whoa. Concubines.

CHILD #1:

Now that's art.

CHILD #2:

(Turning pages) Big palace, big banquets.

CHILD #1:

Skip to the end. Who's that ugly guy with the horns? The Minotaur?

CHILD #2:

Pan maybe? This fella with the beard must be the hero. "Alas for you, for now death is come and you did not repent before the Highest God." Highest God? Who's that?

(Enter Maxentius in full armor, Haruspex, and Praetor.)

MAXENTIUS:

Get out of here, you kids. Beat it. Don't you know there's a war on? Scram!

CHILD #2:

I hope the Highest God burns his ass.

CHILD #1:

Yeah!

(Children exit.)

SOLDIER #3 (PRAETOR):

(Drunk) Sir, please reconsider. What little grain there is in Rome is safely stored inside the city walls. We could easily withstand a siege. Constantine's army will be starving in a few days.

MAXENTIUS:

You heard the Haruspex. "The enemy of Rome will die today."

SOLDIER #3:

But with most of our troops in Aquilea we're outnumbered! And the enemy is on a roll. They've already defeated the legions in Augusta Taurinorum and Verona.

MAXENTIUS:

Do you doubt the Haruspex? No? Good. What's with these men anyway? Come on, you! We'll bring the legion across the Mulvian Bridge, here, and meet the bastard on the other side.

SOLDIER #3:

With the river at their backs? There won't be any room for retreat.

MAXENTIUS:

Retreat? In our moment of triumph! I think you overestimate their chances. How's your shorthand, Praetor? Would you like to be a secretary? There's a nice woman's job for you. If I didn't need you by Jove I'd ... Bring up the Guard! Arms! Briefcases! On for Jupiter, Maxentius, and Ancient Rome! Charge!

(Maxentius and his men cross the bridge and exit. Alarum. Screaming.)

HARUSPEX:

(Watching the offstage battle from the bridge) There they go! Maxentius' legion is forming a wedge – they're going to break through Constantine's line. No, Constantine is holding firm ... What's happening? Maxentius' men have broken formation. They're parting like water! What's that glinting in the sunlight—some sort of logo? And all of Constantine's men have crosses on their briefcases. The logo must be some kind of magic charm! It's terrifying the men; they keep running away from it! They're falling all over themselves! It's almost as if they were drunk! Here they come.

MAXENTIUS:

(Entering) Stop running away! Turn around and fight!

(Maxentius' men retreat toward him over the bridge.)

SOLDIERS:

It's the symbol of the highest god!

MAXENTIUS:

It's just a couple of sticks, you morons! Hey, quit pushing! Stop! Whoa!

(Maxentius falls off of the bridge into the water. SPLASH.)

MAXENTIUS:

Help! I can't swim ... in ... fucking armor! Aaaaaaaaaaah!

(Over the bridge wall we see his hand bob up out of the water. He holds up three fingers, two fingers, one finger, drowns.)

HARUSPEX:

Well what do you know? I guess Maxentius was the enemy of Rome all along! Good old Sibylline Books. It's nice to know you can still count on something in life.

(Constantine enters with Miss Lactantia, a standard bearer with the Labarum, and his men.)

CON:

Where's Maxentius?

(HARUSPEX points to river.)

CON:

That's it? We win? I mean ... That's it! We win!

ALL:

Hooray!

CON:

Fish out Maxentius. Cut off his head and show it around the streets for a while. Everyone loves a parade. Miss Lactantia, Make preparations for the customary triumph and sacrifice at the Temple of Jupiter.

MISS LACTANTIA:

Ahem, Mr. The Great, the Lord doesn't permit the worship of other deities.

CON:

Sure, I know that but ... it's tradition! Going back centuries! And I want a triumph. It won't be a problem.

MISS LACTANTIA:

I don't know, Con, it seems to me you were given this victory by the one true God and I think that makes you a Christian now.

CON:

For real?

MISS LACTANTIA:

Do you want to wind up like all those other emperors? They stood against God and they all felt his anger, one after the other. And you can bet your bottom denarius that they're all roasting in hell now.

CON:

OK ... Let's all go into the city and, um, pray?

(Miss Lactantia nods.)

CON:

Right. Oh, and Miss Lactantia, have the office signs and stationary changed to Licinius and Constantine.

MISS LACTANTIA:

Yes sir.

CON:

On second thought ... (Ominously,) make that Constantine and Licinius.

(Blackout. END OF EPISODE THREE.)

(MUSIC: "Right Here Right Now" by Jesus Jones or "A Fine Day for a Parade" by Fountains of Wayne)

#### Episode Four: Meet the New Boss

(At the office of the Prefect (Mayor) of Rome)

HARUSPEX:

Constantine and Licinius now have a lock on the entire imperial agency. We need to know just what this "highest God" campaign is all about. Constantine's acting very unpredictably. Did you hear that he refused to run through the usual sacrificial channels when he entered the city? Not Jupiter, not Mars... He just gave orders for a huge statue to be erected—of himself—carrying that "labarum," that logo his soldiers were lugging around.

PREFECT:

Relax. Constantine may have taken the city of Rome, but if he wants to keep it he's going to need us and our influence.

HARUSPEX:

But with Maxentius gone there's nobody left who can fight for us. He's even disbanded the Praetorian Guards. That division represented 300 years of corporate history and he downsized it like it was nothing!

PREFECT:

Listen: I am the prefect of the capital city of the Roman Empire. And you are the highest priest of its ancient and inviolable religion. We'll be all right. (SIGNIFICANTLY:) Even Constantine the Great can't make a new Rome.

SPECIAL: INTERCOM:

Mr. Prefect? Mr. The Great is here for your 11 o'clock.

PREFECT:

Show him in.

(Prefect and Haruspex look at each other.)

CON:

(to unseen receptionist) Thank you. Salve, gentlemen.

PREFECT:

Welcome to Rome, Mr. The Great.

CON:

Please, call me Con.

PREFECT:

Ford. And this is our haruspex, Haruspex.

HARUSPEX:

We've already met. Good to see you, Con.

CON:

Harry.

(Drinks are poured.)

PREFECT:

How long are you in town for, Con?

CON:

Not as long as I'd like. Once I've put a few things in order I have to run to a meeting with Licinius in Mediolanum. But I wanted to stop by and let you know that we're very excited to be handling the Rome account again. We've got some big plans and I think you're going to be very interested.

PREFECT:

We were actually wondering just what your plans might be. The senate and the people are very eager to get things back to normal.

CON:

Well, let's try and think of it as a new normal. First of all, let me assure you that the rebellion in Africa is being handled, and until the grain routes are cleared you'll be receiving back-up supplies from the Illyricum department.

PREFECT:

Bene!

CON:

I'm afraid we won't be able to reinstitute your traditional tax exemption for a while, but we can revisit that once we've dealt with the imperial deficit.

PREFECT:

Ah.

CON:

There's good news though, I'm going to be authorizing exemptions for a number of the newly legalized Christian institutions in the city. Churches, charities. So anyone who wants to proclaim the new faith may find their lives have been made a little easier. Of course Harry, the exemptions currently in place for the pagan cults will still be honored ...

HARUSPEX:

Bene!

CON:

For now.

HARUSPEX:

Crappay.

CON:

It's not entirely in my hands. You see, I owe my promotion to a deal that was brokered by the Highest God. I know, you're probably a little apprehensive about what that means. I have to admit, I'm still a little unsure myself. The directives coming down from on high seem to indicate that the new worship must be a matter of individual consumers' choice. I can't force anyone to buy in. Between you and me, I'm still working out some of the details. But what's clear is that ... God ... has put me in charge of the empire. And Licinius of course. And that He's put some pretty stiff penalties on the books if I don't come through with results. Gentlemen, I like a good sacrifice as much as the next guy, but I

don't want to wind up burning in a lake of fire for all eternity or getting devoured by maggots like old Galerius. It's a ... well to tell you the truth ... I'm a little scared.

(Exeunt. MUSIC: Epic horns)

NARRATOR:

The western world would be forever transformed by the conversion of a Roman emperor to Christianity—but the transition was not to be a smooth one. Constantine had only a superficial understanding of the faith he had adopted, and when he turned to its bishops for support, he found to his dismay that the Church was riven with passionate sectarian disputes. Disturbed that the unity of the empire was in jeopardy—to say nothing of the eternal fate of his soul—he called a council to settle the differences among the warring sects. But first, he had to contend with the division of imperial power—that is, with his family.

(Characters appear as mentioned.)

NARRATOR:

By the year's end, his wife Fausta had given birth to a third son, Constantine II. (Baby.) She was desperate to ensure that the infant, and his brother Constantius II (Toddler), would receive their share of power when they came of age. But Constantine's eldest son, Crispus, the fruit of an earlier marriage, soon came of age and proved a very capable leader, rivaling even his father in popularity. Meanwhile, to further unify the ruling family, Constantine gave his sister-in-law Constantia to his co-Augustus Licinius in marriage. And there was peace... as long as the barbarians remained outside the Roman borders ...

(ALQUACA peeks in from offstage, and fades back off.)

NARRATOR:

... and the familial balance of power remained undisturbed.

CON:

Crispus, son, one day all this will be yours.

FAUSTA:

*And Constantius' and little Constantine II's.*

CRISPUS:

Don't worry, Mother-in-law. When I'm Augustus I'll make sure that my little half-brothers get all they have coming to them.

CON:

Well, of course that won't be for a long time yet. A *very* long time. But just to keep best practices, I've decided to symbolically restore the system of the tetrarchy that worked so well for old Diocletian until Galerius interfered. Four emperors will head the empire once more: two Augusti—Licinius and I—and two Caesars: Crispus and little Constantius.

(Con issues silver crowns to Crispus and Constantius II.)

CONSTANTIUS II:

I get a shiney!

FAUSTA:

But what about Constantine II?

CON:

For Jupiter's ... for Christ's sake, Fausta, he's only a baby. He'll get to be Caesar when the time comes.

CRISPUS:

That's right, and when I'm Augustus I'll make sure that both of my little half-brothers get what's coming to them.

FAUSTA:

You're gonna get something coming to *you* in a minute.

LICINIUS:

Actually, Con, Constantia and I have a little announcement to make that I think you're all going to want to hear. Honey?

(There is a pregnant pause.)

CONSTANTIA:

I'm pregnant!

(Licinius smiles, the rest are shocked. Even the baby.)

CON:

Constantia, that's ... really ... great! I guess we can arrange ... I mean ... hell what am I talking about, come here! Congratulations!

(Con hugs Constantia and Licinius. Hugs all around except for Fausta, who looks daggers at Licinius.)

FAUSTA:

(Insincerely apologetic for not hugging) I'm holding the baby.

LICINIUS:

So, Con, don't you think that one of the Caesars should be in the Eastern half of the empire? Just to keep everything even-steven?

CON:

(Pause, glances at Fausta.) Of course. When the child is born ...

CONSTANTIA:

Licinianus. (Let's pronounce it "Lice-in-ee-AY-nus" shall we?)

CON:

When ... Licinianus is born ... we'll make him Caesar.

(He removes the crown from Constantius II and places it awkwardly on Constantia's belly.)

FAUSTA:

Instead of Constantius?

CONSTANTIUS II:

I wanna shiney!

CON:

Now, let's be reasonable. We can't have five emperors.

CRISPUS:

Don't you worry, when I'm Augustus I'll make sure that everyone gets a shiney.

FAUSTA:

(Conniving) Crispus ... what a big, strong, decisive man you're growing into.

CON:

Yeah, well listen, I really have to run to this church council. These bishops, you know, they're always angling for something. (Pause) That's a little chess joke. (Pause) I won't use it. I'll catch you all when I get back.

(Con exits. Fausta kills Licinius with her eyes. He shrugs. Constantius II cries. Crispus smiles. Constantia touches her belly. Baby Constantine II looks around. Other reactions may or may not be advisable as well before exeunt, clearing the stage for Miss Lactantia as she enters. She carries Con's coat, hat and briefcase. She looks conflicted for a moment before Con enters.)

CON:

Miss Lactantia you are a sight for sore eyes. Sometimes I feel like if I never even heard the word “Rome” again it’d be too soon.

MISS LACTANTIA:

Here’s your coat, your hat, and the reports for your meeting with the bishops in Arelate.

CON:

Is that book in there? The uh... Bible?

MISS LACTANTIA:

The one with pictures, yes.

CON:

What would I do without you? So, were you able to book that room overlooking the Rhone that I told you about? The view is inspiring. We can spend the whole night ... getting to know each other.

MISS LACTANTIA:

Con ...

CON:

Biblically, get it?

MISS LACTANTIA:

Con, we need to talk.

CON:

We can do that too.

MISS LACTANTIA:

I mean now. I’m not going with you.

CON:

What? Why not?

MISS LACTANTIA:

There’s a word for what we’ve been doing. It’s called adultery.

CON:

Well, we’re adults.

MISS LACTANTIA:

It's a sin, Con. A mortal sin. Baby. I can't be the reason why you burn in hell. We've accomplished so much together. Oh, God we've accomplished so much. No. If you're going to be God's representative on Earth he's going to be watching every move you make. We've gone too far already. Repent, Con. Be a good emperor. You'll always be in my prayers.

(Con watches as she exits. He looks hurt and thoughtful. At length, Licinius enters from the other direction.)

LICINIUS:

Con, I'm glad I caught you before you skipped town. Listen, I'm sorry if our little bundle of good news made things a little awkward back there. (Pause.) Chicks, man, right?

CON:

(Almost to himself) Licinius, have you ever thought about adultery.

LICINIUS:

(Nervous) What you mean like, sleeping with another fella's wife for instance?

CON:

(Evasively) For instance. It's a sin, Licinius. Do you realize that things are different now? We can't sin any more. If we do, the consequences ...

LICINIUS:

(Pause. Not joking,) Consequences, Con?

CON:

Well, hey. Forget about it. You and I don't have to worry about adultery, right? We're both happily married men.

LICINIUS:

Ecstatic.

CON:

Hey, you know what? Stay far away from my wife. Things are a little delicate right now and I think you should go away to your capital in the East and stay there for a while. You run your part of the business and I'll run mine, OK?

LICINIUS:

Sure.

CON:

You won't see me east of Spalatum unless it's something very serious.

LICINIUS:

Got it. And I'll stay out of the west for a while.

CON:

That's the idea. Congratulations again to you and Constantia. I'll see you around, Licinius.

LICINIUS:

Con ... (pause) Nothing. Forget it. Vale.

(Con exits.)

LICINIUS:

He knows about me and Fausta. I am so fucked.

(Licinius exits. Enter the four bishops. They may wear paper or other inexpensive bishop hats to make their role clear, and perhaps robes. They line up in opposing rows with Peshachus on whichever side is more convenient.)

BISHOP #1 (Caecilian):

We must let the past be the past. It's a new era for the one true faith, and it's our duty to overcome our differences and work together for the greater good.

BISHOP #2 (Donatus):

That's easy for you to say—you were appointed bishop by traitors who surrendered their holy books to be burned by the pagans and went into hiding while the *true* believers stayed behind and were tortured!

CON:

(Entering) Oh good, you've gone ahead and started without me. Salve, your holinesses.

BISHOP #3 (Arius):

Is it even right that the church should be submitting itself to a temporal authority?

BISHOP #4 (Alexander):

The day of judgment has not come (as predicted by the scriptures) before the death of the generation of the Christ. Instead it has pleased the Lord to grant us an emperor who has recognized His divine glory. We must adapt ourselves to the times.

CON:

That's right, you guys are the overseers of the Church and I have to be the overseer of the rest of the world. I've got to judge your cases but God's going to judge me, so come on. Let's settle in and make the Big Guy happy.

DONATUS:

Very well. This false bishop, Caecilian, is serving under false pretenses.

(Donatus shows a b/w poster of blinded and lame bishop in the style of a Jerry's Kids or Unicef poster child.)

DONATUS:

This is Theophilus. His eyes were gouged out and his foot severed because he stayed behind and kept the faith while Caecilian's friends, the traitors, stayed behind and made peace with the heartless Romans! No offense. But now you can help him. For only the cost of an Imperial Proclamation, you can see to it that Theophilus is honored and restored to his rightful place, and his treasonous successors condemned to theirs. Only you can make this proclamation. Excommunicate the false bishops of Caecilian ... today.

CON:

(Wiping a tear) That's ... moving. Really powerful stuff.

CAECILIAN:

Leaving aside the obvious bias of Donatus, who has his own political ambitions to fulfill ...

(Caecilian shows a chart.)

CAECILIAN:

... just look at the number of bishops who'd have to be replaced! Doing as Donatus says would create a massive logjam in the sacred production lines. Countless souls would be lost as they wait for their baptisms. The city of God will have to declare bankruptcy and our streets and subways will be painted with sin. And anyway what ever happened to turning the other cheek?

CON:

Maybe it would make sense if we ...

ALEXANDER:

I suggest that this dispute is really secondary to the primary issue we need to address: the fact that Jesus Christ is identical in substance with the Father.

ARIUS:

OK, how is that even possible? For Christ to be the Son, the Father must have been there first in order to beget him. So there must have been a time before the Son. And they're obviously not completely equal: Matthew says that not even the Son shall know of that hour, but only the Father alone, (Matthew 24:36).

CON:

That sounds reasonable. Alexander?

ALEXANDER:

Yes, but Christ also says "the Father and I are one, (John 10:38)."

CON:

I guess you can't really argue with that either. Is it possible that this ... Bible ... contains a few contradictions? Maybe we can make a few copyedits and give it a clearer call to action?

ALL:

Impossible!

BISHOP #5 (PESACHUS):

Guys, this is all very interesting, but all I want to know is when we're supposed to celebrate Easter. Is it to be calculated on the Jewish month Nissan as celebrated in the East, or on the first Sunday after the first full moon of the Spring equinox as celebrated in the West? Our drug stores don't know when to start putting out the chocolate bunnies!

(The following is a simultaneous cacophony.)

CAECILIAN: You can't undo what's done. We have the sees, we have the power. Filibuster! Filibuster!

DONATUS: When you get your eyes gouged out and confess your faith when you've been thrown in front of fucking lions, you can talk!

ARIUS: It just doesn't make any sense! Are you talking about two gods? One God? Three gods? Why don't you just worship the goddam Olympians!

ALEXANDER: ("Inherit the Wind" style,) I believe in the truth of the Book of Genesis! Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, Deuteronomy! Joshua, Judges, Ruth! First Samuel, Second Samuel, First Kings, Second Kings, Isaiah, Jeremiah, Lamentation, Ezekiel...

PESACHUS: How can we sing the Lord's song in a foreign land without bunnies?

(Con finally asserts his authority.)

CON:

Gentlemen, gentlemen! You're as fractious as the Roman Senate. Let's get it together, here. For the first time in years the Roman Empire is at peace. No civil wars, no barbarians invading our borders. This is our golden chance to talk things out like civilized, pious men, resolving our petty differences once and for all and bringing unity not only to the Church, but to the whole world. If we don't, heads are gonna roll, right into hell and mine'll be the first. Now let's all have a good stiff drink, and get down to business.

(Enter Messenger.)

MESSENGER:

Mr. The Great, there's a troubling memo from the Northern District! The Goths are moving in on Upper Moesia! Listen. (Turns on TV.)

SPECIAL: GOTHS' TV AD:

(Like an ad for a Ken Burns documentary, multiple, soft voices with gentle, treacley piano music. Succeeding stills of Goths smiling at camera, staring at inspirational sunset, etc.) This week on WILY: We are the wave of the future. We are the disenfranchised, the people of the waves. The ones who were disunited but now are one. We are a wave. We are the downtrodden who will rise up and claim what is ours. We are the Goths. We're the ones who will rise like a mighty wave to wash the Roman Empire clean. We're the ones who will smash through your border guards, pillage your storehouses, and rape your goats. We are the ones you call barbarians. We are the Goths. This is our time. Wave goodbye. Visit [www.GothsTheWave.com](http://www.GothsTheWave.com). Check local listings for alarming details. (TV off.)

(All look to Con.)

CON:

OK, well that changes things a little, doesn't it. I've got some recommendations here from Ossie of Cordoba, and this is going to be our action plan. (Consults the notes in his briefcase. To Caecilian:) Your guys get to stay bishops. (To Donatus) Your guys don't, but you won't be excommunicated either, just transferred to different flocks. (To Alexander and Arius) The Son is ... *consubstantial with* the Father. That's clear, right? There you go. (To Pesachus) Oh, and you can celebrate Easter on whatever day it is that has nothing to do with Jews. Eeyugh. (To all) In addition, now that we're a Christian empire, there will be no further injunctions to prevent the faithful from gainful employment in our government or our armies. (To Messenger) Have Crispus gather the legions and meet with me at Naissus. I'll be there as soon as I can. (To the rest) This is the will of our chief executive God as delivered by his field representative on Earth, me. God wants unity, peace, and harmony. And what God wants, God gets. So deal with it. Now if you'll excuse me, your holinesses... I've got to go kill some Goths.

MESSENGER:

Um, Mr. The Great, the Goths are pitching in the East, in Upper Moesia, and that's on Licinius' client list.

CON:

This is no time for pussyfooting. Just do it.

(Con and Messenger exit. Bishops look at one another.)

CAECILIAN:

Well, I thought those were some capital compromises.

DONATUS:

Your face is a capital compromise, you pointy-hatted poser. (Attacks Caecilian.)

ARIUS:

I'll make your name consubstantial with "mud!"

ALEXANDER:

Fuck you!

(Arius and Alexander attack one another.)

PESACHUS:

Won't someone please think of the bunnies!

NARRATOR:

Constantine's new creed for the Church never resulted in the hoped-for tranquility in his own lifetime, but it was to have far-reaching theological effects of the most tremendous import to all those who care about that sort of shit. The Augustus swiftly made his way to confront the new threat from the Goths, but briefly paused along the way to visit with his wife, Fausta.

(Enter Con and Fausta.)

CON:

I want you to know, Fausta, things are going to be different from now on. I'm a changed man.

FAUSTA:

Because of your new God?

CON:

Because of *our* new God. I need you to stand by me in this.

FAUSTA:

Maybe you've changed, Con, but I haven't. My first priority has always been the children. Our children, that is. Keep an eye on your that son of yours, Crispus. He's ambitious.

CON:

He's an OK kid. Just a little high-spirited.

FAUSTA:

High-spirited like a fox. And whatever you do *don't* trust Licinius.

CON:

Licinius? But you've always been his biggest fan.

FAUSTA:

Con, you're such a boy. I'm telling you. Turn your back on him and he'll screw you. I know.

CON:

I can't believe you're right about that. But I'll be careful. (Awkward kiss.)

(Exeunt.)

NARRATOR:

Meanwhile, news of Constantine's march into Licinius' territory had reached the apprehensive co-Augustus.

LICINIUS:

(On phone) Talk to me. Oh, salve, Bassianus. Constantine in Naissus? But he said he'd stay out of the East ... unless it was something very serious. Oh man this is it. He's coming to get me. Muster the troops. We're marching north. Tell the men that this new religion is an affront to the gods of Rome. Re-institute the persecution at full force, and sacrifice so many bulls they'll think we're starting a fast food chain. We're at war with the Christian emperor. (Hangs up. Aside, shouted, if possible with reverb.) Con!

NARRATOR:

Under the capable leadership of Constantine and Crispus, the Gothic vanguard was soon checked ...

(There is an amusingly brief, parenthetical battle.)

NARRATOR:

... but the Augustus knew that with their numbers, determination, and marketing budget, the Goths would remain a threat. He therefore devised a plan to incorporate them under his own agency. He met with the Gothic warlord, Aliquaca to discuss terms.

(Enter Con, Crispus, Aliquaca, & retinues, incl. Crispus)

CON:

We salute the fierce chief Aliquaca and his mighty host of forty thousand.

ALQUACA:

Please, call me Al.

CON:

Con.

(They shake hands, light cigarettes.)

CON:

Can I just say: “The Wave?” Brilliant.

ALQUACA:

We have a good team. And I have to tell you Con, we have a lot of respect for your agency. We only made this pitch because we’ve been hearing so much about your high executive turnover rate lately and we were hoping it’d take you some time to regroup. Kudos to you and your people.

CON:

Thanks, Al, but I can’t take all the credit. Our new director, God, has really been driving the effectiveness of our recent campaigns.

ALQUACA:

“God” you say? Intriguing. Tell me more.

CON:

I sure will, but for now, let’s agree on a few terms for a peace contract. We’ll forego any punitive action and cede you some farmland in Dacia Ripensis conditional upon your good treatment of the Christians there. In return we ask that you offer your legions to fight on our behalf against any other invading tribes or insurgents.

ALQUACA:

Well, we like land, and we love to fight. So it sounds like a win-win. In return, we shall make offerings of many tchotchkes and trinkets from our publicity department – stress balls, pens, and paperweights – and ... we’ll pick up the tab for lunch.

CON:

It's a deal.

MESSENGER:

Mr. The Great! Mr. Licinius has mustered a huge army near Hadrianopolis. He says that you've moved in on his territory and he'll fight you to the last executive! He's re-instituted the Christian persecution and is calling this a campaign to land the Rome account once and for all!

CON:

He's lost his mind! Or was Fausta right about him ...? Crispus, take the navy to the Bosphorus to cut off his retreat. I'll meet him at Hadrianopolis. It looks like this empire isn't big enough for the two of us.

CRISPUS:

Sorry, you mean you and Licinius, right?

CON:

Right.

CRISPUS:

Just making sure.

ALIUQUACA:

And I shall put my forty thousand men at your disposal.

CON:

Great. I shall name them legionaries and we'll march at once. Thank you, Aliquaca.

(Exeunt.)

NARRATOR:

It was to be the last great campaign, pitching the old gods against the new God. With their teams drawn up, presenting arms, Constantine and Licinius faced one another for a last, desperate meeting.

(Con et al SR, Licinius et al SL.)

CON:

Licinius, you have broken the terms of your non-compete agreement respecting the freedom of religion clause and the separation of eastern and western powers.

Constantine, you are a dick.

LICINIUS:

I trusted you.

CON:

I'm only human, Con.

LICINIUS:

Have you gone crazy?

CON:

Sorry, Con, but what's done is done. I can't un-fuck what's fucked.

LICINIUS:

That's history in a nutshell. Then there's nothing more to say.

CON:

Thank God.

SOLDIER #2 (SECOND CENTURION):

Arms!

CON:

Briefcases!

LICINIUS:

Persuade!

BOTH:

(Alarum. Con & Licinius fight with swords and briefcases. Licinius' men make headway.)

We were like brothers!

CON:

Don't you Christians believe the first brother committed the first murder?

LICINIUS:

Shit I've really got to read that book.

CON:

(Alarum, more fighting.)

LICINIUS:

You're outclassed, Con! Your western legions are outnumbered!

CON:

You were counting on that, weren't you? Well I've brought along a little surprise. Initiate Operation: In Goths We Trust.

SPECIAL: GOTHS: (Beasty Boys-style)

Aliquaca and the forty legions, Aliquaca and the forty legions, Aliquaca and the forty legions, Aliquaca and the forty legions (&c.)

LICINIUS:

Retreat!

CRISPUS:

(Entering) The Bosphorus is secured, Dad! Licinius has nowhere to run!

(Con defeats Licinius and is about to dispatch him.)

CONSTANTIA:

(Entering) Con, please! Don't kill the father of my child! Your God is a god of mercy and forgiveness! Spare him for pity's sake!

CON:

I shall spare you, Licinius. But I'll expect to see your resignation on my desk in the morning.

LICINIUS:

Can we discuss my severance package?

CON:

(Aside) I'll see to it personally.

(MUSIC: Epic horns.)

(Constantine dons a fancy coat and moves about stage with his retinue enacting the events described by the narrator with a few steps and gestures.)

NARRATOR:

Thus Constantine the Great became sole Augustus of the Christian empire of Rome. As he toured his eastern acquisitions, reinstating the freedom of the Christians there, he made a special visit to the frontier city of Byzantium. His heart filled with ambition as he

surveyed its strategic position as a gateway to the Persian territory and points beyond. The whole world seemed to lie before his sword.

CON:

I like the look of this place. I want a new capital built on this spot. I shall brand it – Constantine’s city: Constantinople—the New Rome.

(MUSIC: “We Built This City” by Jefferson Starship)

(END OF EPISODE FOUR)

### Episode Five: The Wrath of Con

(The block is set up center. This time it’s a puppet stage. At curtain, ABRAHAM PUPPET is not bothering anybody, just minding his own business. He may even whistle, or say “Dum dee dum dee dum.” Then, behold, the LORD PUPPET suddenly appears.)

PUPPET #1 (LORD):

ABRAHAM!

PUPPET #2 (ABRAHAM):

Whoa! Yes hello, here I am!

LORD:

This is the LORD, Abraham.

ABRAHAM:

Oh, Lord.

LORD:

I have a little something I want you to do for me. I’d like you to pack up a few things and take your only son whom you love, Isaac, on a three-day walk to Mount Moriah.

ABRAHAM:

Sounds pretty nice, we could bring along a blanket and have a picnic ...

LORD:

SILENCE! When you arrive there, I want you to climb up the mountain ...

ABRAHAM:

Yes ...

LORD:

With your only son Isaac, whom you love ...

ABRAHAM:

Uh-huh ...

LORD:

And when you get to the tippy top ...

ABRAHAM:

Mmmmm?

LORD:

I want you to stab him to death with a knife and burn his corpse.

ABRAHAM:

Yes, sir! Will do! Roger wilco-reeno! I'll just stab him to death with a knife and wwh-hAAAHAH????

LORD:

I will be happy when you have done this.

ABRAHAM:

You want me to kill my own son?

LORD:

It just came over me. So hey, thanks, OK? Have a good one.

(Exit LORD Puppet.)

ABRAHAM:

Kill my Isaac? My boy? Well ... the Lord says to do it ... guess I gotta do it. Ikey?

PUPPET #3 (ISAAC):

(Entering) Yes, wise Father?

ABRAHAM:

I gotta tell you something.

ISAAC:

Yes, gentle Father?

ABRAHAM:

(Unable to break it to him) I ... I ... I ... ... ROAD TRIP!

ISAAC:

Oh boy! I'll load up the ass!

ABRAHAM:

(Dejected) The ass, yes, my son. Load up ... the ass.

(They make the journey as the NARRATOR PUPPET describes it.)

NARRATOR (may also be "puppetized"):

And so the father and son journeyed the three days to Mt. Moriah. When they arrived, Isaac carried the wood for the sacrifice up the steep slope himself, little recking that it was he himself for whomth the flame wast to burneth.

ISAAC:

Father, where's the goat for the sacrifice? Little do I reck *what* we're going to burn if we forgot the doggone goat.

ABRAHAM:

(His lip trembles, then he bawls.) Boooooo hoo hoo hoo hoo! Don't worry my good boy, my Ikey! The Lord (sniffs) will provide!

NARRATOR:

Finally they reached the apex of Mt. Moriah. Abraham bound Isaac ...

ISAAC:

Gee, whatcha doin', industrious Father?

NARRATOR:

Placed him on the altar ...

ISAAC:

How come you're putting me up here? Shouldn't the goat go here?

NARRATOR:

Unsheathed the sacrificial knife ...

(Isaac makes the traditional, mute Muppet face of shock aside as Abraham lifts the knife.)

NARRATOR:

And ...

PUPPET #4: (ANGEL):

(Entering) Wait! I am the angel of God. The Lord says you don't have to do it after all, there's a goat in the bush.

(SFX: "Baaaaah.")

(Pause. Abraham collapses, weeping.)

ANGEL:

What are you crying for? Did you *want* to kill your son? Sicko. Anyhow, the Lord says, great job with the whole obedience thing, blessings for generations, wishes he could be here, blah blah blah. Have fun killing the little goat. (Exit.)

(Abraham continues to weep as Isaac scratches his head.)

(MUSIC: Some Toots Thielemans harmonica)

NARRATOR:

"Abraham and Isaac" was brought to you today by the Father ... the Son ... and by the Holy Ghost. "Abraham and Isaac" is a production of the Chilling Television Workshop.

(SWITCH SCENE- A 1960's or 70's-style movie projector is placed on the block projecting toward the audience. Con, Ossie, and Haruspex enter. They have just watched this TV puppet show pilot.)

(MUSIC: Artie Shaw "When the Quail Come Back to San Quentin")

CON:

What a pilot! See, now that's good, wholesome educational television. Great work, Ossie. Way to get the message out.

OSSIUS:

Well I do think the kids will get something out of it, God willing.

CON:

"God willing?" Why wouldn't he will! Of course he'll will, won't he? Great production values, great messaging ... What do you think Harry, how will this fly with the non-Christians in the empire? Think they'll get it?

HARUSPEX:

Actually Con, I'm having a little trouble following.

CON:

A little trouble. OK, great. That's why we're here. Talk to the bishop.

HARUSPEX:

OK, Ossie, the Lord is supposed to be a kind, loving god, right? A good god?

OSSIUS:

The best!

HARUSPEX:

So why would he do something like any capricious old-fashioned god would do? Why would he ask Abramum to kill his son?

OSSIUS:

(Politely) *Abraham*. Why indeed, my heathen amigo. That's an excellent, thoughtful question that some of the greatest minds have wrestled with. The commonest answer is that it was a test.

HARUSPEX:

A test. But isn't the Lord all-seeing?

OSSIUS:

And all-powerful and all-knowing, yes.

HARUSPEX:

Doesn't that mean he would already have known how the test was going to turn out? I mean, why have the test in the first place?

CON:

(Sagely) Maybe he was just giving Abraham a chance to test ... *himself*. Right? (Smiles at Ossius, like a student seeking approval. Ossius smiles.)

HARUSPEX:

All right, I'll go along. Why would he do that?

CON:

(Tries, but is at a loss for words.)

OSSIUS:

(Saving Con) Perhaps he did it to strengthen his faith.

HARUSPEX:

So, the loving god, asked his good servant to kill his son, in order to strengthen his faith. His faith that ...

CON:

That God ... would ...

OSSIUS:

... protect his future generations.

HARUSPEX:

(Pause) I'm sorry, surely that was a little counterproductive?

OSSIUS:

No, no. As the author of Hebrews writes, the entire episode was parabolic.

CON:

That's right! Parabolic. (Playfully) Ya dope.

HARUSPEX:

I think I see. So this was one of those stories we're supposed to read symbolically as a parable foretelling Jesus.

OSSIUS:

That's right. Mind you, it did literally happen. (To Con, who is pouring drinks.) Oh yes, please.

HARUSPEX:

Let's follow this through to its logical conclusion then. If the Lord commanded you to kill your son, would you do it?

OSSIUS:

Oh, I've taken a vow of celibacy.

HARUSPEX:

Of course. How about you, Con? Would you put a knife in Crispus, or Junior or Little Constantius, if the Lord told you to?

CON:

(His eyes dart skyward for a split second.) Yes.

OSSIUS:

But he'd never do that.

HARUSPEX:

He told Abraham to do it.

OSSIUS:

To make a point.

HARUSPEX:

Suppose the Lord has a point to make *today*. Suppose he has to command you ... to ... suck his dick.

OSSIUS:

Come on, you're not taking this seriously.

HARUSPEX:

No no, go with me on this. Suppose the Lord of all creation appeared right now, and said, "Ossius, Bishop of Cordoba, I'm feeling a little tense today, so I'd like you to fellate me right here in front of your pal the Haruspex until my glory spills forth all over your adoring countenance."

OSSIUS:

That's just obscene.

HARUSPEX:

Aha! More obscene than asking a man to kill his own son?

OSSIUS:

It's totally different!

CON:

(Suddenly speaking as The Emperor) Both of you shut up. (Pause.) Hm. See that? Gentlemen, the story is good ... because it's about obedience.

(MUSIC: Epic Horns)

(Exeunt. During the following, the Narrator may walk across the stage, relishing one of his last monologues, or if he's VO maybe Con can walk across the stage trying to memorize notes for a big speech then exit.)

NARRATOR:

The year A.D. 326. Constantine the Great, now sole Augustus of the Roman Empire, has built his new capital, Constantinople, into the most important city in the world. Yet, as he attains his twentieth year as emperor (his vicennalia), he must journey once more to the spiritual heart of the empire – to Rome. The city prepares to celebrate his return with an

elaborate festival, which Constantine will use as a platform to announce major new policies to please his ever-demanding God, certain that the futures of both his empire and his soul hang in the balance. Meanwhile, alliances formed in the dark are coming to a fateful fruition that will put the faith of the Christian emperor to the ultimate test ...

(Enter Fausta and Crispus on opposite sides of stage. They stand apart and Crispus has to keep himself from looking around too much.)

FAUSTA:

Step-son.

CRISPUS:

Step-mother. May I ...?

(Fausta nods. Crispus rushes across to her and passionately kisses her neck.)

FAUSTA:

Oh, my strong, healthy, young Crispus. You're so like your father ... used to be.

CRISPUS:

I've missed you so much. I try not to think about you but it's like something has control of my mind.

FAUSTA:

Something probably has. Crispus, I have something ... stop a minute. I have something important to tell you.

CRISPUS:

Can't it wait? We only have like an hour before the vicennial games. If we're not in the VIP box people will talk.

FAUSTA:

Then *you* stop talking and listen. You know how we were talking about how tired your father has been lately?

CRISPUS:

Do you have to talk about my father again?

FAUSTA:

How running the imperial agency has been making him run-down and listless?

CRISPUS:

Yes.

FAUSTA:

And you remember how we said that, as a loving son, a time might come when for his sake, as well as for the good of the empire, you might have to step up and take control of the agency with a firm hand?

CRISPUS:

I vividly remember that part, yes. But Pop's not over the hill yet.

FAUSTA:

Crispus, history doesn't make itself.

CRISPUS:

I don't want to make history, Step-mother, I just want to make you.

FAUSTA:

Gods you sound just like Licinius.

CRISPUS: Like Licinius? Now you're comparing me to a dead man?

(We may wish to pause a moment to let that plot point sink in.)

FAUSTA:

(Getting an idea) What do you think will happen if your father finds out about us, my boy?

(Crispus stops in his tracks.)

FAUSTA:

After the war, his sister Constantia talked Con into sparing Licinius. But he still had him killed a year later.

CRISPUS:

Not killed, *executed*. On charges of treason.

FAUSTA:

(Hinting) And his baby, don't forget.

CRISPUS:

So?

FAUSTA:

He killed poor little Licinianus.

CRISPUS:

Wait.

FAUSTA:

Dirty little traitor baby.

CRISPUS:

You're not ...

FAUSTA:

Congratulations.

CRISPUS:

No ...

FAUSTA:

I'm pregnant.

(Crispus pauses before reacting audibly.)

FAUSTA:

Pull yourself together and be a man.

CRISPUS:

Is it Pop's?

FAUSTA:

What do you think? It's ours all right. Your pious father's become much too holy for hole.

CRISPUS:

That means ... I'm going to be a father.

FAUSTA:

For about five minutes if Con gets wind of it.

CRISPUS:

Oh God, Fausta, what am I going to do? Tell me what to do!

FAUSTA:

I can't tell you what to do, Crispus, I'm only a woman. But I'm very sure you'll find a way to do the right thing and kill your father before he finds out and kills you, me, and our baby.

CRISPUS:

How am I supposed to do that?

FAUSTA:

You'll think of something. Plenty of people would like to see Con take the fall. (Aside) If Crispus wins, I win because he'll do anything I say. If Con wins, I still win because my own sons will inherit the empire.

CRISPUS:

(Aside) The free way of life proposes ends, but it does not prescribe means. (Pause, to Fausta) Hey, can we still ...

FAUSTA:

(Leading him off) Oh, come on.

(Exeunt. SPLIT SCENE: On one side "It's Night with Eusebius" TV show, where Eusebius will interview Con. On the other side, Crispus meets with Constantia at a bar or restaurant.)

SPECIAL: MCMANUS:

(the announcer) It's Night with Eusebius! And now. Live from the Capitoline Hill, Ecce Eusebius!!!

(MUSIC: Celebratory organ music)

(Applause as Eusebius enters and goes through talk show host routine of bowing, signaling appreciation for the unseen musicians, and best of all, puts his hands together in a prayerful gesture like Conan O'Brian.)

EUSEBIUS:

Salve! Ave! Bonum Cibum! Ave, ave! OK! Thank you! Thank you. Now you all know ... (Applause dies down) You all know me as Eusebius, bishop of Caesarea. (Applause) And you may also know me as the author of such ecclesiastical histories as *The Ecclesiastical History, Volume I* (Applause) and *The Ecclesiastical History, Volume II* (lighter applause) Wup – sounds like not as many of you read that one. (Laughter) Better get on it, people, hell is real! (Laughter) But seriously, the best thing, for me, about writing *Volume II* was the privilege, the honor really, of including an extensive section on our current emperor, and tonight's very very special guest, Mr. Constantine the Great.

(Wild applause as Con enters, Eusebius shakes his hand, and both sit. Then, LIGHTS DOWN on Eusebius show, LIGHTS UP on Crispus and Constantia. Crispus is sitting but rises as Constantia enters.)

CRISPUS:

Thanks for taking the time to see me, Aunt Constantia. I know you're still in mourning for Licinius.

CONSTANTIA:

And for your cousin Licinianus.

CRISPUS:

Right.

CONSTANTIA:

My baby. Who was killed by your father.

CRISPUS:

(Apologetic) Yeah ... you know? Pop gets these ideas sometimes.

(SWITCH to Eusebius show.)

EUSEBIUS:

So, Con. I understand you're finally ready to share what must have been a very personal experience for you: just how you came to accept Christ as Lord. Is that right?

CON:

I sure am, Eusebius.

EUSEBIUS:

Well I'm sure there's a lot of folks here'd like to hear that story, am I right? (Applause)  
Amen.

CON:

Amen. Well, you see, Eusebius, I was on the road to Rome ...

EUSEBIUS:

Like Saul on the road to Damascus ...

CON:

I guess you could say that. To liberate it from Maxentius. When behold: a mighty presentation did appear in the sky, before the entire staff.

EUSEBIUS:

The whole staff saw it? The whole army?

CON:

You couldn't miss it. An enormous cross of light appeared, and lo, there was skywriting where there had been no airplane.

EUSEBIUS:

Wow. What did it say?

CON:

It said, "By this logo, you shall conquer."

EUSEBIUS:

Inspiring.

CON:

So I had the cross monogrammed on the briefcases of all the executives, and we marched in for our pitch, and ... well, the rest is ecclesiastical history.

(Applause.)

EUSEBIUS:

Neat. Really unbelievable. If it weren't our own all-powerful emperor telling me, I'd think I was being put on.

CON:

But it is your own all-powerful emperor telling you.

EUSEBIUS:

Indeed it is.

(SWITCH to Crispus and Constantia.)

CRISPUS:

So I guess if there were a chance for you to get revenge, you'd be kind of interested in that?

CONSTANTIA:

Try me.

CRISPUS:

Not everyone approves of the direction the empire has been taking lately. Some people think that the agency could use some new blood at the top.

CONSTANTIA:

And you'd spill your father's blood to paint the way there?

CRISPUS:

No! No, I don't think we'd have to *kill* Pop, whatever Fausta says.

CONSTANTIA:

Fausta?

(SWITCH to Eusebius show)

CON:

With the Lord's help, the blood of Christ will paint the way to The Great Roman Society. In nomine of which, by the way, I've put the kibosh on crucifixion as a form of punishment.

EUSEBIUS:

No more crucifixion of slaves and criminals?

CON:

The way I see it, the cross logo now gives crucifixion certain associations vis-à-vis divine authority and universal salvation that justify an exclusive copyright.

EUSEBIUS:

So crucifixion's too good for them.

CON:

It is now!

EUSEBIUS:

Amen. You hang in there with that crucifixion thing, Con.

(Applause)

CON:

But it's not just symbolic issues that concern the Lord, Eusebius. See, unlike gods of leading religions, the Lord insists on morality. Which is why, for example, adultery is now a capital offense.

EUSEBIUS:

(SIGNIFICANTLY) So it's death for all adulterers?

CON:

No adulterer will be spared. Sleep with your neighbor's wife, and you sleep with the fishes.

(Laughter. SWITCH to Crispus and Constantia.)

CRISPUS:

(With forced laughter, drinking) No, I'm not sleeping with Pop's wife! What am I, stupid? Why, if I slept with Fausta he'd kill us both! *And* the baby she's pregnant with!

(SWITCH to Eusebius show)

EUSEBIUS:

These new laws are going to be tough to enforce, aren't they, Con?

CON:

That's why I'm re-shuffling the imperial agency at the middle management level, and giving additional administrative responsibilities to the bishops. Not the least of which will be the power to free slaves.

EUSEBIUS:

(Raises his eyebrows) Hmmmm?

CON:

You heard right: free the slaves. Although my research team hasn't yet been able to find where it says so in the Bible, it seems to me that slavery is just wrong, and needs to be phased out. To buy and sell human beings for their labor, to say nothing of the expense of feeding them, housing them, and providing their health care, places an unfair burden on our producing class, the lords!

EUSEBIUS:

By which you mean the *domini*, the landed aristocracy.

CON:

Lords are people, my friend. And they have rights. So I'll be phasing out the old system of *dominus* and *sclavus*, lord and slave, and replacing it with a new system of *dominus* and *colonus*, lord and ... peasant!

(Applause.)

CON:

Instead of being bought and sold as human beings, peasants will now be bought and sold as an added-value feature of the land they work, and will be unable to buy their own freedom, and unable to leave that land under pain of death. Peasants will answer to their lords, the lords will answer to the *duces* ...

EUSEBIUS:

The dukes ...

CON:

The dukes will answer to the friends of the emperor ...

EUSEBIUS:

The *comites*, or counts ...

CON:

The counts are overseen by the *episcopos* ...

EUSEBIUS:

The bishops ...

CON:

And on up through the vicars, the prefects, the Caesars, and yours truly the Augustus. And of course we are all merely slaves to our great Lord in the sky, the one true God. Dominus vobiscum.

EUSEBIUS:

Zowie! What a great chain of being!

(SWITCH to Crispus and Constantia)

CRISPUS:

So I can count on your support?

CONSTANTIA:

Let's see what the future brings.

(SWITCH to Eusebius show)

CON:

We truly are about to enter ... the Bright Ages.

(Applause)

EUSEBIUS:

We'll be back after this.

(Clear both parts of stage and SWITCH SCENE to a commercial. Mr. and Mrs. Pagan, dressed as insulting caricatures of farmers, are burning incense and chanting at an altar. As they worship, Mr. & Mrs. Christian enter, stylishly dressed, smiling and shaking their heads good-naturedly.)

MR. PAGAN (Actor #1) & MRS. PAGAN (#2):

*Oh, Jupiter! Oh, Apollo! Oh ...*

MRS. PAGAN:

Don't forget Minerva, dear.

MR. & MRS. PAGAN:

*Oh, Minerva! Oh ...*

MR. CHRISTIAN (#3):

Oh, brother!

MRS. CHRISTIAN (#4):

Say, Mr. and Mrs. Pagan, you two aren't still worshipping that tired old pantheon of the Greco-Roman gods, are you?

MR. PAGAN:

What do you mean?

MRS. PAGAN:

Of course we are!

MR. CHRISTIAN:

You don't have to worship *them* in this day and age, Pagans! Get with the sophisticated city worshippers and pray to the one true God!

MR. & MRS. CHRISTIAN:

Of Christianity!

MRS. CHRISTIAN:

Those old-time gods are just plain old country. Only hicks worship them any more.

MR. CHRISTIAN:

And Latin for "country bumpkin" is ...

MR. AND MRS. PAGAN:

(Looking at each other) ... "*Paganus!*"

MR. PAGAN:

Mrs P., we need a name change!

MR. CHRISTIAN:

Don't worry, Mr. P., when you worship the one true God, you get to choose a brand new Christian name!

MR. & MRS. PAGAN:

Let's convert to Christianity ... today!

SPECIAL: VO:

Paid for by the blood of Christ.

(SWITCH SCENE to party after Con's TV appearance. SFX of party going on in background. Con is alone in a garden or on a balcony, with a drink, smoking and looking at the sky. Eusebius enters.)

EUSEBIUS:

Great job out there tonight, Con. I'll bet you made a million conversions.

CON:

Thanks, Eusebius.

EUSEBIUS:

Say, are you all right? Why are you out here on your own?

CON:

I'm fine, I just need to think a little bit.

EUSEBIUS:

OK, but don't stay away too long. You're the star of the party. And the Lord, of course.

(Exit Eusebius.)

CON:

Star of the party. (Drinks.)

(Miss Lactantia enters from the party, not at first seen by Con)

MISS LACTANTIA:

Mr. The Great.

CON:

What? Holy .... Hello.

MISS LACTANTIA:

I can't stay. I just wanted to see you. Con ... be careful. Some of the things you're doing, I'm afraid you may be going a little too far.

CON:

Too far? That's fine coming from you. I'm all alone here. The bishops all say something different, and that Bible is full of puzzles. And I love puzzles, don't get me wrong, but not when the stakes are ... Gods I've missed you.

MISS LACTANTIA:

God. I've missed you too.

(They hug, not sexually.)

MISS LACTANTIA:

Keep praying, Con. Don't try to do everything yourself. Remember, Vengeance is mine, saith the Lord.

CON:

What do you mean?

(Enter Constantia, who watches them until they notice and separate.)

CONSTANTIA:

I'm sorry, am I interrupting something?

CON:

Not at all, we just haven't seen each other for a while.

CONSTANTIA:

I can imagine how that must be very painful for you.

MISS LACTANTIA:

I was just leaving. (Exit.)

CON:

It's good to see you, Constantia. You haven't been around so much since ... (A pause during which she lets him struggle) ... a while.

CONSTANTIA:

I hate you. You hypocritical bastard. Kill me if you like for saying this. You've already killed everything I had to live for. But first let me tell you something. Earlier today, I met with your son Crispus. He's a fine young man now, Con. Ready to rule the empire. And he knows it. He's ready to rule the army, the agency, the Church, and there's only one thing standing in the way.

CON:

Me?

CONSTANTIA:

So you know what he did? He asked me to help take you down. Because he knows how much I hate you. And he thinks that you would trust me because I'm your half-sister. Would you?

CON:

I always have before.

CONSTANTIA:

Good. Trust me now. Your boy is plotting to take over your empire. Oh he feels guilty about it, but he'll do it all the same. And he'd rather you didn't have to die in the process but if it comes right down to it, he'll go there if he needs to. How do you feel now?

CON:

I'm sorry I had to kill Licinius.

CONSTANTIA:

And my baby, you son of a bitch. Did you have to kill him too?

CON:

I wish ...

CONSTANTIA:

Shh. Enjoy that feeling. I decided not to help Crispus take you down, because I want you to live a long time with that feeling. I decided to tell you about his plot instead because I want that feeling to tear you apart for the rest of your life until you die and God sends you to hell for a murderer.

CON:

Constantia ...

CONSTANTIA:

But wait, there's more! If you hurry now, you'll receive not only the guilt of murder, and the sting of betrayal by the son you love, but you'll also get to catch that son in the act of fucking your lovely young wife, Fausta.

CON:

What?

CONSTANTIA:

It must be nice for her to be with a younger man after all this time.

CON:

Wait ...

CONSTANTIA:

I believe you'll find them at the Octus Superbus Motel on the Via Flaminia. Pray your way out of this one, Constantinus Augustus Invictus Maximus Motherfucker. (Exit)

(Party SFX die down)

CON:

(Variously addressed) That baby would have grown up to be a threat to the succession. To everything I've worked for. To everything I've done for you. My boy, my Crispus... Why let this happen? I'm looking for a little influence, here, Lord. I'm ready to be persuaded, just say something. (Pause) Why won't you tell me what to do!

(Exit Con, SWITCH SCENE to the Octus Superbus Motel. Crispus and Fausta in mid-argument.)

FAUSTA:

Stop touching me. You told Constantia about us?

CRISPUS:

You said to figure something out. I thought she could help ...

FAUSTA:

Let me think. What did she say.

CRISPUS:

She said she'd think about it.

FAUSTA:

Did you tell her about the baby?

(Pause.)

FAUSTA:

Damn it, Crispus! We have to get out of here. Now.

CRISPUS:

OK, where are we going?

(SOUND: Door breaks down. Enter Con with a Centurion.)

CON:

Fausta, Crispus. You're both under arrest for the crime of adultery. The penalty is death.

CRISPUS:

Pop. I'm sorry.

CON:

Why couldn't you just wait, son. And why couldn't the two of you ... You knew I was making adultery a capital offense, you were in all the meetings. Don't you understand what I've been going through? What I've sacrificed? Dammit I just made the announcement before all of Rome!

FAUSTA:

Con, think about this. No one has to find out. We'll do whatever you say. Con, I'm your wife. The mother of your children. No one has to know.

CON:

God knows. "The mother of my children." Except this one. Crispus, what if you'd gotten her pregnant!

(Pause, during which Fausta and Crispus look at each other.)

CRISPUS:

Wait.

(There is another pause. Everyone is wondering what Crispus will say, especially Fausta.)

CRISPUS:

Pop. I raped her. It only happened once and I raped her. She didn't want it. It wasn't adultery it was rape. We just met here to figure out what to do about it. What to tell you. It wasn't adultery. You don't have to kill Fausta.

FAUSTA:

(Happy to go along) I couldn't accuse your son. He was sorry afterwards. It only happened once.

CON:

I'm sorry. *You raped Fausta?*

CRISPUS:

It's true. I was overwhelmed by my manly urges and I forced my will upon her.

CON:

(Looks up to sky, then says to Centurion) Give it to me.

(Centurion hands cup to Con.)

CON:

(To Centurion) Wait outside. (To Crispus) Son, this is poison. Painless and fast-acting.

(Con hands cup to Crispus.)

CRISPUS:

Pop. If there's any way to take this cup away from me...

(Con looks at sky.)

CRISPUS:

You don't know what you're doing, here...

(Con looks at sky.)

CRISPUS:

If that's how it is, then ...

(Crispus drinks.)

CON:

Son!

(Crispus falls.)

CRISPUS:

All done.

(Con and Crispus form a sorrowful pieta tableau vivant.)

CON:

I can't feel my face.

(PAUSE)

FAUSTA:

(Slapping hands together and rubbing them.) Well, that's justice done, I guess. I'd better go and ... pray. (Exit.)

(Con passes out, if possible with a comical thud. Enter Ghost of Licinius.. This should be an APPALLING GHOST, maybe holding his head in his arm.)

LICINIUS:

And you're just going to let her walk right out the door, too. Doofus incredibilis.

CON:

(Groggily waking) Licinius? How can you be here?

LICINIUS:

Just a little public service announcement. Or call it a vision. A real one, not like that bull-shit you were shoveling to Eusebius.

CON:

But, why now?

LICINIUS:

I come but to whet your almost blunted common sense. Do you really think Crispus could have raped Fausta?

CON:

No, of course not. He was covering up for her.

LICINIUS:

You knew? Then why did you ...? Oh boy, you actually thought God would send an angel to save him at the last minute, didn't you. Congratulations, Con, you've reached a whole new level of crazy.

CON:

It sure looks that way.

LICINIUS:

Whatever, my time is short. Listen now: Fausta is a conniving, rotten, lying, sexy, unscrupulous, personality-disordered, two-faced horrible human being, you dig? That's what attracted me to her.

CON:

Attracted...

LICINIUS:

Ever notice how Constantine Jr. has my nose? Ahaaa, now you're getting it. That's why she was so insistent that you execute me. She never wanted you to learn the truth. Plus she couldn't stand that I was starting a family with your sister. Not only was she jealous, but my poor little Licinianus was a threat to her own brood so he had to go. Just like...

CON:

Sorry...

LICINIUS:

(Overlapping) Yeah shut up. Just like Crispus. Then she had to get rid of *him*, but how? He was your son. Well that was it: like father like son. She knew she could lead him around by the same appendage by which she led *you* around for so many years. She hadn't planned on getting pregnant, mind you, but if Crispus had managed to kill you that would have been just one more potential emperor sprung from her tender loins.

CON:

Pregnant...?

LICINIUS:

"Pregnant?" This is the ruler of the Western World, right here. Yeah, pregnant. Fausta is pregnant with Crispus' baby. And right now she's going to Dr. Soranus to get rid of it so

you'll never find out. That's what I came to tell you, don't ask me why. Oh and plus you have cancer. Byeeeee.

(Con falls again and rises again.)

CON:

(To the body of Crispus, in the spirit of Khan Noonien Singh.) I will avenge you.

(SWITCH SCENE to Dr. Soranus' office. There is a curtain barrier, a bathtub with straps and a valve, and some bloodletting equipment. The doctor is speaking to Fausta.)

SORANUS:

Pro vita, ergo pro electio, that's what I say. To be pro-life you have to be pro-choice.

FAUSTA:

(Smoking) Abortion humor. Love it. Listen: I don't have time for politics, let's get on with it.

SORANUS:

Mrs. The Great, I want you to consider the ramifications of this procedure. Now there are plenty of other humane options, like exposing the infant on a mountaintop, or selling it into slavery ...

FAUSTA:

Nunc. (Latin for "Now.")

SORANUS:

Miscarriage will be induced by the application of a vaginal pessary penecontemporaneously with a protracted phlebotomy. But first the tissue must be softened by immersion in a hot bath. Step right this way, Augusta Fausta.

(They go behind the curtain. Ideally a silhouette will be visible. SOUND: running water. Fausta disrobes. Con enters and listens unseen.)

FAUSTA:

(Testing the water) Ow!

SORANUS:

It has to be very hot. Don't worry, I have precise control of the temperature through this valve right here.

FAUSTA:

(Getting in) Ssssssssss. Well be careful. I don't want to end up boiled like a lobster.

(This image appears to resonate with Con.)

FAUSTA:

Are these straps necessary?

SORANUS:

They're to prevent movement that may hamper the phlebotomy.

FAUSTA:

Right. Strap me in.

(Soranus straps her in and makes an incision in her arm.)

SORANUS:

Now I'll just open this vein, relax.

FAUSTA:

It's OK. The blood is very cold at this point.

SORANUS:

(laughing uncomfortably) OK, I'll be back with the pessary. (Exit US.)

(Con meanders to the valve and turns it up.)

(SOUND: Running water louder, continuous.)

FAUSTA:

Soranus, the water's too hot. Soranus! Get in here, it hurts. It's hurting me! Oooh. Actually, now that's kind of nice, I can deal with that ... no wait it hurts again! Soranus!

SORANUS:

(Entering) Now now, Mrs. The Great the water's been carefully modulated HO! Mr. The Great, I didn't see you come in.

FAUSTA:

Con?

SORANUS:

Sir? That valve makes the water hotter. It's very sensitive.

CON:

This valve here?

FAUSTA:

Ow! Hello!

CON:

I'm sorry, I'll just turn it back again.

FAUSTA:

Aaaaah! That's the wrong way! You're doing it on purpose! Help me Soranus!

SORANUS:

Right away, I'll just ...

CON:

Hit the road, Soranus.

SORANUS:

Goodbye. (Exit.)

FAUSTA:

You bastard.

CON:

That's not a very original insult, your brother Maxentius used the same one before he drowned. You know, your family really ought to keep away from water...

FAUSTA:

Hypocrite! What will your God think of you murdering your wife!

CON:

I'll ask him when I see him.

FAUSTA:

Con!

(Fausta struggles and grows still during the following.)

CON:

Let me bounce some copy off of you, Fausta. You can help me with my work, like the old days. It's a little rough but I think there may be something there. Listen. The scene: It's the end of the world, people are all going crazy, but in the midst of it all one guy is sitting there looking ... like he just belongs there. He looks at the camera with wise eyes

and says, "I saw a great white throne and the one who sat on it. In His presence, earth and sky fled away, and all were judged according to their works. And whosoever was not found written in the Book of Life was cast into the lake of fire." Fausta?

(SOUND: Water off.)

CON:

Fausta? (He walks over to her.)

FAUSTA:

(Weakly) Don't believe ... everything you ...

(Fausta dies. Con slowly looks up.)

CON:

I think ... I'm pretty sure ... we can spin this.

(Clear scene.)

(MUSIC: Epic Horns)

NARRATOR:

This is history. We're not making this shit up. After poisoning his son and scalding his wife to death in a hot bath, Constantine the Great, the first Christian Emperor of Rome, started a war in the Middle East. Constantinople was ideally situated for a campaign against Persia -- modern Iran -- the ruler of which (Shapur II) was menacing the Christians in Armenia. It took ten years to make his preparations. He reorganized and modernized the army, instituting punishing new taxes that mostly hurt the middle and lower classes, and delegated power to his remaining sons, as well as to his half-brothers by Constantius I. However with his health declining and victory against the Persians far from certain, he began to realize that this was one campaign he hadn't time to win. Alarmed by the events in Rome, Ossius of Cordoba had returned to Hispania, so the Bishop Eusebius was summoned to conduct the emperor's formal baptism before it was too late.

(Con is dunked into a tub and wrapped in a white robe.)

CON:

Oh! It's chilly!

EUSEBIUS:

Congratulations, Con, on the purchase of your 4<sup>th</sup>-Century Christian Adult Baptism Package. You are now absolved of all your sins and can look forward to an eternity of bliss in heaven.

CON:

(His illness showing) That's fantastic.

(A parade of the dead from this play crosses the stage, as many of them as possible.)

CON:

Will I get to see all my friends when I get to heaven?

EUSEBIUS:

Some of them, probably. (Jokingly interacting with one of the ghosts) This guy, I dunno! Oh, sorry, you're invisible, right? Ah ... Some of them, probably. If they're not sent to burn in hell instead.

CON:

I sure hope not. What about Jesus Christ? Will I see him?

(Jesus appears in the parade, waving.)

EUSEBIUS:

Most assuredly.

CON:

We can have a drink and trade war stories, you know? Listen, Eusebius: I don't want to say the wrong thing to him. What was the deal again with consubstantiality? Is he the same as God, or his son, or what?

EUSEBIUS:

Con. You still don't understand the Trinity? You know this is only the most important thing in Christianity, right? I don't know if you can go to heaven if you don't understand ... No, I'm messing with you! It's fine, he's the same, he's both. It's a mystery.

CON:

(Remembering) The Trinity, yeah, 'cause if he was exactly the same as God, then he would have had to slam his own mom ...

EUSEBIUS:

I'd avoid bringing that up with him if I was you. Anyway it was the Holy Ghost that did the immaculate conceiving part.

CON:

Right of course. Holy Ghost. That makes sense. Will I see my slave Soldurius? And my dog, Spartacus?

EUSEBIUS:

Slave, maybe. Dog, probably not.

CON:

Poor ol' Sparty. That's too bad.

EUSEBIUS:

But maybe you can visit him in Doggy Heaven ...

CON:

Doggy Heaven! I like that! (Playfully) Are you making that up? You ought to be in my job, you ol' son of a bitch. I've been making things up my whole life. And now I'm absolved of all my sins, and heading to my rest. Yes, forever sleep. Tell my sons and brothers ... to kick some Persian ass. (Dies.)

(Con dies. He is placed in a coffin. The characters mentioned in the following get on and off the coffin, the same way the Soldier Emperors got on and off the block in the first scene of Episode One. When the Ottomans take Constantinople, the coffin is carried away.)

NARRATOR:

Constantine died on May 22, Whitsunday, in the year 337 A.D. Shortly thereafter, he was declared a god in the old Roman style. But his body was interred in a mausoleum he'd had built for himself, surrounded by relics of Christ's apostles, where he lay as the last of the apostles. The Eastern Orthodox Church eventually canonized him as a saint. Constantine had bequeathed power to his sons Constantine II, Constantius II, and Constans, and to his nephews Delmatius and Hannibalianus. The three sons quickly banded together to assassinate the two nephews and all their relatives except for two boys, Gallus and Julian. Constantine II was killed by Constans. Constans was killed by a usurper, Magnentius, who killed *himself* after being defeated by Constantius II. In need of help, Constantius II raised Gallus and Julian to power as Caesars, but then he killed Gallus and went to war with Julian, before himself dying of illness. Julian the Apostate, last in the Constantinian dynasty, tried to restore the empire to paganism, but was killed in the ongoing war against Persia. The Christian capital Constantinople lasted until 1453 when the Muslim Ottomans conquered it in the name of the one true god, Allah. Its name was changed to Istanbul in 1930, prompting a hit song for The Four Lads in 1953. Yet the triumph of Constantine's conversion of the Roman Empire endures to the present day, with Christianity preferred by three out of five of the world's consumers of religion.

(FINIS)

(MUSIC: They Might Be Giants' "Istanbul")

**PRONUNCIATION GLOSSARY:**

Aquilea (city in Northeast Italy) ak-will-LAY-uh

Arelate (city in southern France, now called Arles) ar-uh-LAH-tay

Ave ("Hail") AH-vay

Bene ("good" or "well") = BEN-ay

Bonum Cibum ("Buona Sera") bon-um SEE-bum

Comites ("Friends") KOH-mi-tays

Concipemus – ("Capisce? Comprendre? Get it?") cuhn-CHIPPY-muss

Concipio – ("I get it.") Cuhn-CHIPPY-oh

Duces ("dukes") DOO-case (as in, a case of doo)

Ecce ("behold") ETCH-ay

In Nomine ("in the name of") in NOH-min-nay

Labarum (symbol with cross and chi-ro, used as a standard) LAH-ba-rum

Nunc (“Now”) pronounced with an “oo” sound as in “book”

Salve (“hello”) = SAHL-way

SORANUS: Shall we say, Sore anus?

TIMON RUSSERTUS: Let’s pronounce it TIMMun

Vale (“bye”) = WALL-ay

#### PROPS:

Crowns: 2 gold, 2 silver, 1 tin foil

Sword

Puppets: LORD, Abraham, Isaac, Angel, Narrator (bring stuff to rehearsal)

Tape player (Maxentius, optional)

Bishop hats (bring stuff to rehearsal)

Drinks

Smokes

packet for Episode 2 (Maxentius gives to Con)

Bunny for Episode 1 prologue (Maxentius)

Bell for phone sounds

Blank poster:

for Episode 1 (Galerius, Severus) and Episode 4 (bishops, messenger (GothsTV))

Bloody hanky for Galerius

Baby (Fausta)