

Spartacus Film Summary

Spartacus by Howard Fast

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Context

Stanley Kubrick is best known for exploring the dark side of human nature in his films, focusing on war, crime and betrayal. Although he directed a few films first, *Killer's Kiss* in 1955 and *The Killing* in 1956 made Hollywood take note of Kubrick. *Paths of Glory* (1957) guaranteed him success. In addition to *Spartacus*, his later famous works included *Lolita* (1962), *A Clockwork Orange* (1971), *The Shining* (1980), *Full Metal Jacket* (1987) and *Eyes Wide Shut* (1999). Every film Kubrick has worked on has become an immediate success.

Kirk Douglas owes the beginning of his career to his former classmate, Lauren Bacall. While he was still trying to get minor gigs on Broadway, she convinced producer Hal B. Wallis to test Douglas for the lead in her film, and he won the lead role in *The Strange Love of Martha Ivers* (1946). He then appeared in the 1948 film *I Walk Alone* with Burt Lancaster, and the two appeared in seven films thereafter. Douglas appeared in close to a hundred films, and he was loved for his strong chin and intense blue eyes.

Laurence Olivier gives an exceptional performance in *Spartacus*. Early in his career, he performed in such films as *Fire Over England* (1937), *Wuthering Heights* (1939), *Rebecca* (1940) and *21 Days* (1940). His role as Maxim garnered him quite a bit of praise, and he went on to star in over eighty movies over the years.

Spartacus won six Oscars: Best Actor in a Supporting Role for Peter Ustinov; Best Art Direction-Set Decoration, Color for Alexander Golitzen, Eric Orbom, Russell A. Gausman and Julia Heron; Best Cinematography, Color for Russell Metty; and Best Costume Design, Color for Valles and Bill Thomas. It was also nominated for Best Film Editing for Robert Lawrence and Best Music, Scoring of a Dramatic or Comedy Picture for Alex North.

At the Golden Globes, the film was nominated for four awards: Best Motion Picture Actor - Drama for Laurence Olivier; Best Motion Picture Director for Stanley Kubrick; Best Supporting Actor for Woody Strode; and Best Supporting Actor for Peter Ustinov. It won a Golden Globe for Best Motion Picture - Drama.



Summary and Analysis

Spartacus begins with an overture, and then the narrator begins talking about the Roman Republic before the birth of Christianity. Even at the best point of the Roman Empire, it was plagued by slavery. An illiterate slave woman gave birth to Spartacus, who was sold into slavery before he was fourteen. He lived out his youth dreaming of the death of slavery 2,000 years before it came about.

The audience then sees Spartacus as he struggles to carry a heavy load. When a man falls in front of him, he helps him rather than leaving him on the ground to die. After he trips, a soldier begins to whip him. Spartacus bites his ankle and is then knocked out by another soldier. Someone says that since he's done this again, it's time for him to die.

Lentulus Batiatus, the owner of a gladiatorial school, arrives and complains about the difficulty of travel. He is looking for new slaves, and the soldiers begin showing him the men. They call a man down and inspect him. They come upon Spartacus, and Lentulus Batiatus finds him healthy and with a mind of his own. He buys Spartacus.

Lentulus Batiatus travels through the desert with his slaves following behind. By ship and land, they finally arrive at his home. He then shows the slaves to the director of the gladiatorial school. The director explains that eventually the men will be forced to fight to the death. Gladiators are pampered to be sold at high prices. The men are told that if they please Lentulus Batiatus, they may even get the company of a woman sometimes. Some men, like Marcellus, are freed to become trainers. Then, Lentulus Batiatus warns Marcellus about Spartacus.

The men are then brought to the fire and branded. Marcellus talks to them later and invites them to be his friends and work with him. Spartacus watches him with hatred in his eyes, and Marcellus notices. He has a soldier give Spartacus a sword and asks whether Spartacus wants to kill him. Then, he demands that Spartacus kill him. Marcellus continues to hit Spartacus as he glares at him. Marcellus is impressed at Spartacus' intelligence and warns Spartacus that he'll be watching.

Later that evening, the other slaves warn Spartacus that Marcellus has picked him to kill as an example. Another man wants to be picked so that he can kill someone on his way out. Spartacus asks for a name, and they explain that slaves don't make friends since they might have to kill each other someday.

Marcellus pairs women up with the gladiators, and Varinia is given to Spartacus by Lentulus Batiatus' direction. She goes to Spartacus' chamber and stands quietly as he comes over to her. He caresses her face and neck as she stands quietly, but he stops her as she walks toward the bed. Instead, he caresses her and tells her he's never had a woman; she undresses for him as he watches.

Suddenly, Spartacus and Varinia hear laughter from above. Lentulus Batiatus and Marcellus are watching through the grate, and they tell Spartacus to take her or she and



they will think badly of him. Spartacus tries to attack, but they step on his hand. As they leave, he yells, "I'm not an animal!" Then, Varinia says, "Neither am I." He sits down, and she begins to dress, with tears in her eyes. Spartacus asks for Varinia's name. Lentulus Batiatus and Marcellus then come in to take her away and tell Spartacus that this sorry show gives them little hope that he'll ever become a man.

Later, the men are trained to become gladiators as viewers watch. They perform many different types of drills and activities to prepare them to fight. Spartacus is by far one of the most successful gladiators at the school. As he waits his turn, he sometimes catches a glimpse of Varinia, and they share a secret smile of look.

Spartacus is used as an example one day when Marcellus explains what will kill, cripple or slow a man. He explains that you should always go for the kill or cripple first. As Marcellus talks, Spartacus watches Varinia. Marcellus catches him and begins to mock him.

Spartacus sits in his cell and watches the girls walk past through his grate. Suddenly, the door opens, and Varinia is brought in. Then, the guard comes in and tells him that she's going to someone else. Spartacus hears the door lock, and Varinia goes to another man for the night. Spartacus is obviously angry.

The next day, Varinia serves food to the gladiators. Spartacus watches her as she serves them but tries to keep his looks hidden by eating his dinner when Marcellus comes by. As she pours his soup, Spartacus quietly whispers, "Did he hurt you?" and she says no. She seems surprised by his concern.

As the men fight, Spartacus wins almost every fight. At dinner and other times, he watches Varinia as she watches him, and sometimes they have the opportunity to speak. One day, she even reaches out and caresses his hand.

While a woman fixes Lentulus Batiatus' hair, he finds out that Marcus Licinius Crassus is arriving at the school. Lentulus Batiatus wants the men ready since Crassus has expensive taste and is sure to buy some of the best men. The audience then watches as Crassus' enormous party arrives at the school and is welcomed with open arms.

Varinia serves Crassus, and his party drinks. Crassus watches Varinia and seems intrigued by her. Helena introduces her brother and his new wife, Claudia. The ladies want two pairs of gladiators to fight to the death for their amusement. Lentulus Batiatus tries to convince them not to ask and explains that the costs are high. Lentulus Batiatus asks for 25,000 to cover the costs of what he'll lose. The women want to choose the men themselves.

That evening, Spartacus is told that there will be a fight to the death, but no one knows who will fight. His friend is afraid that they'll match the two of them, and Spartacus says he would have to fight and would kill if he had to. The gladiators are then called up to the training area for an inspection.



Helena and Claudia are impressed with the men. Helena wants Crixus. Lentulus Batiatus tries to convince Claudia to choose Dionysus, but she wants Galeno instead. Lentulus Batiatus then tries to get them to choose an Ethiopian, but Claudia asks for the largest Ethiopian they have. Lentulus Batiatus says only one man would stand a chance against the Ethiopian - Spartacus. Lentulus Batiatus then conducts them to the gallery to watch the fights.

In the gallery, the guests find the bust of Sempronius Gracchus, the first person in Rome. Varinia pours water for the guests. When Glabrus makes a rude statement, Varinia "accidentally" pours water over his head. Crassus is impressed with her and decides to buy her since she is well-educated. Then Crassus tells Glabrus that he is now in charge of the garrison of Rome, the only one strong enough to stand against Gracchus.

Helena warns Claudia to watch out for Glabrus with the slave girls. As they laugh, Spartacus sits quietly, angry. Crixus and Galeno go out first to fight. Spartacus and the Ethiopian listen to the clash of swords as they fight. Crixus wins. The fight ends, and it is the turn for the next two.

Spartacus and the Ethiopian go out to fight as Varinia and the others watch. As the fight continues, Gracchus explains that Crassus got Glabrus' appointment behind Gracchus' back. The fight is an intense one, and the Ethiopian comes to a point where he can kill Spartacus. Helena gives a thumbs-down motion, meaning to kill the slave, but the Ethiopian walks away. The crowd yells out for the man to kill Spartacus, but the Ethiopian throws the pitchfork at the viewers. He is killed by a guard's spear and Crassus' knife.

That night, the men solemnly return to their cells as they walk past the Ethiopian's dead body hanging from the ceiling. Marcellus says the man will hang there until he rots. Spartacus listens as a guard walks around above them, realizing that the man's death is what awaits them all.

As Spartacus goes to lunch the next day, he sees Varinia riding out in a cart. He is shocked to learn that she's been sold, and the man whips him when he speaks. Spartacus attacks Marcellus, and a riot begins. Marcellus ends up drowning in a bowl of soup as Spartacus holds down his head.

Guards run out to tell Lentulus Batiatus, and he sends them in to stop the fighting while he delivers Varinia personally. Spartacus and the other men climb the fence and attack the guards. Spartacus and the others run out of the school as quickly as they can while the guards try to chase them.

Viewers are then transported to Rome, where the Senate meets and discusses the seriousness of the slave revolt led by Spartacus. The numbers are getting larger by the day, and the Senate must decide what happens. Crassus is not there, but Glabrus attends. The Senate listens to one man who says he wants to call back the soldiers from Spain.



Gracchus then goes forward to make a fool of Glabrus by calling upon him and the legions of Rome to protect them. Another man protests, since there are more slaves in Rome than Romans. If the garrison leaves, then the slaves of Rome might rise as well. Gracchus asks Glabrus to take a small number of soldiers, and Glabrus is forced to accept in front of the city. The city is to turn out in tribute the next day as they march through, and Gracchus suggests that Julius Caesar take temporary command of Rome while Glabrus is gone.

Outside, Gracchus asks why Caesar doesn't seem excited by the new job. Gracchus wants Glabrus and Crassus to be separated for a time. Gracchus and Caesar publicly make a sacrifice for Glabrus' success, even though Gracchus privately doesn't believe in Glabrus at all.

After the Senate meeting, Crassus meets with Glabrus. The governor of Sicily has sent slaves as a gift. One of the men is Antoninus, a popular singer of songs. Antoninus is made Crassus' body servant. Glabrus is pacing outside and tells Crassus what has happened. Crassus is angry that Gracchus was behind this plan. Crassus realizes that Gracchus plans to be in charge of all of Rome. Glabrus wants to withdraw from the mission, but Crassus is convinced that Gracchus cannot overthrow him.

Glabrus then suggests that Crassus bring his men into Rome, since they are just outside, but Crassus points out that it is against the law. He refuses to violate Rome, since he is just on the brink of possessing it. Crassus asks Glabrus to leave with his men that night to avoid any more fanfare and embarrassment. Crassus tells Glabrus to make him proud.

The slaves are ravaging the towns and patricians of other cities so that they can put the gold to better use. More slaves join them constantly. The school is now deserted, and Spartacus rides in to inspect it. He finds that the Ethiopian's body is gone, and everything is in ruins.

As Spartacus enters his old cell, he remembers all that happened there. He suddenly hears voices outside and goes to investigate. The slaves are watching as two rich old men are forced to fight in the ring. Spartacus walks into the ring and between the men. Everyone becomes silent as he begins to speak. He forces the Romans to drop their swords, and the men complain.

Crixus jumps down and tells Spartacus that he wants the men to fight to the death. Spartacus made a promise to himself that he would never again watch two men fight to the death. Spartacus asks the slaves if they are becoming Romans, looking for wine rather than bread.

Spartacus explains that these men are an army of gladiators who can beat anything they come against. They want to free every slave, and they plan to leave by sea. He believes that the Phoenicians who are fighting Rome will take everyone away for some money. Everyone then decides they should hire the pirates and march to Ethiopia, and they begin celebrating and running to their horses.



The men ride as the audience sees smoke in the distance. The warriors free slaves all along the way, as their numbers become greater. Suddenly, Spartacus rides into a clearing and sees Varinia. They both cry with happiness to see each other. She escaped by jumping out of the cart and running away from Lentulus Batiatus. They laugh at the thought of the event and with the joy of finally being free. She tells him that she loves him and asks him to forbid her ever to leave him. He forbids her, and they embrace. The two jump on his horse, riding off in the sunset.

Lentulus Batiatus visits with Gracchus for dinner. They discuss how they love to be fat and happy. Lentulus Batiatus says that Gracchus has a great love for the ladies, and then Gracchus says he keeps the women out of respect for the morality of Rome. He refuses to take a marriage vow that he will eventually break just because of human nature. Gracchus then asks why Lentulus Batiatus has come to him.

Lentulus Batiatus then says that he hates Crassus. He feels that it's Crassus' fault that he is now poor. The revolution can be attributed to Crassus. Lentulus Batiatus has one idea for revenge against Crassus. The slave he sold Crassus is now off with Spartacus, and Crassus won't pay for her. Gracchus puts a down payment on her so that she will belong to him when she's caught by the troops. Lentulus Batiatus thanks him, and Gracchus says he just wants to help him and annoy Crassus.

Crassus talks to his new manservant Antoninus. He asks whether Antoninus has ever lied or defied the gods. Antoninus answers all the questions favorably and agrees that what a man eats is all a matter of taste instead of appetite or morals, whether he eats oysters or snails. Antoninus gives Crassus his robe, and Crassus reveals that he likes both snails and oysters. Crassus asks Antoninus to look at Rome, a nation that no one can withstand, much less a boy. Crassus tells Antoninus that the only way to serve Rome is to serve her, abase yourself and love her. When Crassus finishes talking, Antoninus is gone.

Spartacus inspects the camp as the ex-slaves take care of their daily duties. Spartacus is happy with the way things are turning out. He talks to some escaped slaves who are waiting to train as they create an army large enough to take on Rome. Spartacus is worried that there are so many women, and an older woman berates him for his discrimination. Antoninus is in the group and tells Spartacus about his former jobs.

Elsewhere, Glabrus and his men prepare to attack the camp. Meanwhile, the men train, but Antoninus is by far the weakest and least talented of them all. They continue training, though, so that they can eventually destroy the Romans. At night, Antoninus performs songs and magic tricks around the campfire to amuse the group. Varinia even gets to try, and the egg she opens has a bird inside. Spartacus then tries and gets covered in egg, to everyone's amusement.

Spartacus asks about one song Antoninus sings, and Spartacus believes Antoninus can help them best by teaching songs. Antoninus insists that he came to fight, though, but Spartacus tells him that there's a time to fight and a time to sing. This is the time to sing.



Spartacus and Varinia walk in the woods, and he tells her that anyone can learn to fight. Singing beautiful things and making people believe, though, is a true gift. Spartacus is happy to be free but is scared that he can't be taught to read. He wants to know everything - why things happen and how they happen. Varinia tells him stories of how the wind blows, and he enjoys hearing what she has to say. They lie together on the grass, and he says he wants to know all about her as well. Then they embrace passionately on the hillside as the scene ends.

Soon after, there is a terrible rainstorm, and Spartacus is told that there are a couple of legions of soldiers nearby. A man comes to meet him and delivers a written message. Tigranes Levantus is bargaining in the name of the island of Sicily. Tigranes explains that they want Spartacus to defeat the soldiers and increase the likelihood of the Phoenicians winning the war.

The ex-slaves are told that there are at least five hundred ships, and Tigranes gives an extremely high price. Spartacus says that they will have such a sum and shows the gold they have found. Spartacus asks about the ships, and Tigranes asks when Spartacus will be ready. Spartacus replies that they will arrive in seven months. Tigranes is not convinced that they will make it, but Spartacus offers a chest of treasure now and the rest when they arrive at the ocean.

Tigranes drinks with Spartacus and points out that he can't read. He also says that he once entertained Crassus in the ring. Tigranes believes they will lose and reveals that part of the garrison of Rome is now approaching. Spartacus says that they will figure everything out and explains that they will continue to fight even if they lose. All men will die. Death, though, is the only freedom slaves know, so they are not afraid of it. Because of this, they will win.

Some of the slaves arrive and tell Spartacus that the Romans are arriving. The Romans are having a picnic, and Spartacus suggests that they join it. The men prepare to fight the six cohorts so that they can use the arms to build their army. Varinia sees Spartacus off as he goes to fight the Romans.

Spartacus and the other slaves burn down the Roman camp and kill the soldiers easily. Finally, they get Glabrus cornered, and he asks what will happen to him. One man suggests that they fight him, but Glabrus says he won't fight as a gladiator. Spartacus has the symbol of Rome and breaks it in two. Then, he sends Glabrus back to tell the Senate that the slaves want their freedom. The film pauses for intermission.

Glabrus goes back and reports to the Senate that the slaves plan to take the Sicilian ships home. Crassus is surprised to hear Spartacus' name. Glabrus and fourteen others have survived as far as they know.

Apparently, Glabrus did not make all the preparations needed to protect his men. Glabrus did not expect so much from slaves. Crassus asks the Senate to punish Glabrus, but Gracchus says that Crassus should decide the punishment since he appointed Glabrus. Crassus expels Glabrus from Rome and follows his lead to private



life. As Crassus begins to leave, Gracchus calls him out. He doesn't believe that Crassus is doing this selflessly. Gracchus yells out that he expects Crassus to attempt to establish a dictatorship. He expects that eventually Crassus will be back.

The army of slaves is now huge and spans the desert as they travel. As they camp, they prepare for battle by getting weapons together and participating in training. Varinia bathes as Spartacus watches quietly. She is shocked when he begins talking, and he didn't want to bother her because she seemed so happy. He picks her up because he wants to make love to her. Varinia tells him to be gentle because she's going to have a baby. Spartacus is shocked, and she tells him it's due in the spring.

The Senate discusses how strong Spartacus' army is, and they believe they should let them go. Caesar, on the other hand, says that this uprising will spread if it's not stopped. Gracchus then suggests that Caesar be confirmed as the commander of the garrison of Rome and send out two legions of soldiers to intercept Spartacus at the city of Metapontum.

Viewers are then transported to Metapontum, where Spartacus' army comes in to the cheers of the entire city. The men drink and enjoy an evening together after they arrive. Elsewhere, the Senators discuss the news from Metapontum. They lost 19,000 men. They can't understand how Spartacus can train an army so quickly. Spartacus is nearing the seaport at Licinium.

Crassus and Caesar discuss the war. Crassus accuses Caesar of leaving Rome for Gracchus and deserting the gods of Rome. Crassus wants Caesar to dream of Rome as he does and come back to his own kind. Caesar says they must take the field against Spartacus in order to save Rome. Crassus asks whether it's their Rome or someone else's. Caesar says Gracchus is his friend, and he will not betray him. Crassus says it's better to betray a friend than to betray Rome. He assures Caesar he will have to make that choice sooner than he thinks.

Gracchus sees the two men and calls them over. They discuss the day's battle. Crassus expects to be called for help, and he wants to be First Consul to abolish Senatorial authority over the cause. He refuses to agree if the terms are unacceptable. Crassus will be ready when the Senate changes, and then he leaves.

Caesar discusses the situation with Gracchus and says that the Senate will change if Spartacus isn't stopped. Gracchus says that when Spartacus reaches the sea, the crisis will be over. Gracchus has made a deal with the pirates so that Spartacus and the others are transported safely out of Italy. Caesar is appalled, but Gracchus explains that politics are practical. If a criminal has what you want, then you bargain with him.

Spartacus and the others finally arrive at the ocean and plan to camp in that spot. One man goes to get Tigranes while the others prepare their camp. Everyone celebrates their successes that evening. They expect to load many ships every day, and Spartacus demands patrols so that there are no surprises.



Tigranes sees the treasure but gives bad news to Spartacus. He reports that Pompey and his army have landed in Italy, and a Roman fleet will be arriving the next day. There are no ships. The ones in the harbor have been obliged to withdraw. Spartacus does not trust Tigranes and finally gets the truth out of him. The pirates were paid by Crassus.

Tigranes has no idea why Crassus paid the pirates. Spartacus realizes that they have been surrounded, and the only other army in Italy is in Rome. Crassus wants them to march to Rome so that he can get all the glory for the win. Tigranes offers to get the leaders and family out of Italy for a small price. Spartacus sends him away.

The scene switches back and forth between the speeches of Crassus and Spartacus. Crassus is placed at the head of the army of Rome. Spartacus brings his men together and tells him that they must march on Rome and free all slaves in Italy. Crassus, on the other hand, promises the end of Spartacus' army. Spartacus tells his people that he'd rather be free with friends than a rich citizen of Rome eating food he didn't work for. Crassus swears to bring Spartacus back, punished appropriately. Spartacus tells his army that they must fight again. Maybe there's no peace, but as long as they live, he wants them to stay true to themselves. They begin their march that night.

Both armies march toward one another to put an end to the war. Crassus and his leaders plan their goals together. Crassus tells his men that he is after Spartacus and wants to kill the legend of Spartacus. Lentulus Batiatus then arrives, and Crassus asks for a physical description. He cannot believe that he actually saw Crassus fight once. Lentulus Batiatus asks to be an agent for the sale of survivors in exchange for identifying Spartacus during the battle.

In Spartacus' camp, most people sleep in preparation for the next day, as Spartacus walks through and sees them all. One little girl smiles up at him as she plays with a baby. Varinia doesn't believe that Rome will beat them this time either. Spartacus, though, feels like they've started something without an ending, but she assures him that it was all worth it. He asks her to take care of their son and tell him the truth about them and their dreams. Spartacus reassures her that they can have no farewell, since as long as one lives, they all live.

The next day, both armies prepare to fight. In Spartacus' army there are even women and children who demand to fight. The Roman army has far more soldiers than Spartacus, but the ex-slaves plan to fight anyway. When the Romans get close, the slaves start fires in front of them, and they roll the flaming logs toward the Romans so that they must retreat. Then, the slave army attacks as hundreds of Roman soldiers are set on fire.

The fighting continues, and then more Roman soldiers are unleashed onto Spartacus' army. Spartacus and his men fight bravely, but there are simply too many Romans. Finally, Spartacus is thrown off his horse, but he continues to battle. There are thousands of men dead when the Romans finally win the battle.



The Romans wander through the bodies and hear a baby crying. Crassus sends a message to the slaves taken prisoner and announces that their lives will be spared, but they'll be sold as slaves. The only condition for sparing their lives is that they identify Spartacus. Spartacus stands, as does Antoninus, and yells, "I am Spartacus." Then every man taken prisoner begins standing up and yelling the same thing. Spartacus begins to cry as he realizes the love his men have for him.

Crassus is frustrated, so he goes to get Lentulus Batiatus. Lentulus Batiatus is angry that the prisoners will all be crucified. Crassus makes the same offer as before. They once again hear the baby crying and find Varinia cuddling Spartacus' child. She tells them that Spartacus is dead and that she saw him killed. They realize, though, that she is lying. Lentulus Batiatus then suggests that they take the child as an investment. Crassus lets Lentulus Batiatus sell the other women, but Crassus wants Varinia and her child.

The prisoners are forced to march, and Crassus recognizes Antoninus. Spartacus watches the conversation as Crassus announces that slaves will be crucified the whole distance from there to the gates of Rome. He tells them to hold Antoninus and Spartacus until the end.

The audience then sees the bodies of men being crucified along the road as the prisoners walk past. As they walk through, the slaves watch with sadness. Lentulus Batiatus has been mistreated, and he is in pain from his wounds. He feels that he's finally found dignity by not turning over Spartacus and by not screaming during his punishment.

Gracchus says he hopes that Lentulus Batiatus will not give up the revenge he had planned for Crassus. Lentulus Batiatus says that he still plans to follow through. He reveals that Varinia is beautiful and proud, and Crassus believes that he is in love with her. Gracchus suggests stealing Varinia and hurting Crassus where it will hurt most. Lentulus Batiatus doesn't want to do the deed, but Gracchus offers a large reward for his troubles.

Julius Caesar then arrives to meet with Gracchus. Caesar is not alone and has come to teach his former teacher. Caesar takes Gracchus in to the Senate for the sake of Rome. Crassus yells at him in the darkened room. The next day, Crassus plans for them to fight to the death. Enemies of the state are being murdered for their deception and treason.

Gracchus asks if his name is on the list, and Crassus says it's the first on the list. He will still retain everything but will be exiled to a farmhouse. Crassus realizes that Gracchus' followers trust him and demands that Gracchus talk to them. Gracchus may be brought back sometimes to keep peace.

Spartacus and Antoninus listen as their friends cry out in pain as they are crucified. Elsewhere, Crassus has Varinia treated like a queen. He asks that she be grateful for



what she now has. He then draws her into the bedroom and has her sit down on a lounge chair for dinner.

Varinia finally eats and asks why she's there. He asks about her child, and she explains that she wants to nurse the child herself. Crassus tells her that the child is part of her old life, not her new life. He asks if she truly cares for the life of her child.

Varinia tells him that he can take her anytime he wishes, but he wants her to give. He wants her love. Varinia asks if he thinks that by threatening the life of her child, she will begin to love him. He apologizes and says he doesn't want her to grieve forever; she says she is just remembering.

Crassus begins asking about Spartacus. She tells him that Spartacus began alone, but when he died, thousands would have died in his place. He was a simple man, and she loved him. He yells that Spartacus was an outlaw. Crassus wants to know why she loved him, but she says she can't tell him things he would never understand. Crassus says he wants to understand to gain her.

Varinia sits down and points out that Crassus is afraid of Spartacus. He can soothe his fear by having something Spartacus had, but nothing can happen because of Crassus' fear. He says, "We shall see," and then leaves.

The remaining slaves sit together outside. Antoninus asks Spartacus if they ever could have won. Spartacus says that by fighting, they won something. If one man refuses, then Rome begins to fear, and tens of thousands said no. They rose and stood tall as one. Although everyone is dead, they are now free, even the baby.

Antoninus asks whether Spartacus is afraid to die, and he says he's not. Antoninus is afraid. A moment later, Crassus comes in to see the remaining slaves. He talks to them and recognizes Spartacus. Crassus demands an answer as to Spartacus' identity, and when Spartacus refuses to answer, he slaps him. Spartacus hits back.

Crassus then calls the soldiers and asks them to let Antoninus and Spartacus fight for him now, despite what he told the people. He wants to test this myth of slave brotherhood; the one who doesn't die will be crucified. They are unchained and led to the ring.

Spartacus whispers to Antoninus not to give them the pleasure of a fight. Spartacus offers to kill Antoninus immediately, but Antoninus doesn't want Spartacus to be crucified. Spartacus gives a final order. When Spartacus tries, though, Antoninus fights back and tells him that he won't allow them to crucify Spartacus.

As Spartacus and Antoninus fight, Spartacus questions whether Antoninus knows how long it will take to die on a cross. They fall to the ground, and Spartacus asks Antoninus to forgive him. Then, he kills Antoninus. They share their love as father and son, and then Antoninus dies in Spartacus' arms.



Crassus walks over to Spartacus and watches. Spartacus warns Crassus that the slaves will rise up again in the millions. Crassus then asks what Spartacus would say if he knew that Varinia and her child were slaves in Crassus' house. Spartacus cannot believe his ears, and then Crassus gives the order to crucify him.

Crassus demands that Spartacus be burned and his ashes scattered in secret. He deserves no marker. Caesar asks whether Crassus was scared when he fought him. Crassus is even more scared of Spartacus than he is of Caesar. Caesar seems surprised that Crassus fears him.

At Gracchus' house, a slave girl cries, and he sends her away as Lentulus Batiatus, Varinia and her child return. Everyone is being arrested, so they've been hiding. Gracchus tells her that they must leave soon for different places and insists that Lentulus Batiatus go to Aquitania. Gracchus buys freedom for Varinia and her child, who will live at the farmhouse.

Gracchus is going to Lycenum, and Lentulus Batiatus is surprised. Lentulus Batiatus asks Gracchus to come with them, but Gracchus tells them to leave before the soldiers arrive. Varinia cries and hugs Gracchus. He then goes to another room with his dagger to commit suicide.

As Lentulus Batiatus, Varinia and her child leave, they identify themselves. The soldier forces them to get down to identify themselves, and Varinia is scared. The soldier reads the papers as Varinia walks over to the final cross and sees Spartacus hanging. He is still alive and looks down at her. She begins to cry and shows him their child, letting him know that they are both free. Spartacus sheds tears as she announces that the child will always remember him.

Lentulus Batiatus tells her to come on and get in the wagon so that they don't get caught. She embraces Spartacus' leg and begs him to die. He watches her ride away, and she says, "Goodbye my love, my life." Then, Spartacus leans his head back on the cross and dies.



Characters

Spartacus, played by Kirk Douglas

Description

Spartacus is born into slavery just like his father and grandfather. He never had a chance, and he reacts against his treatment as often as possible. He does not believe that he is any different than his captors and insists on being treated with respect.

Spartacus ends up being chosen to fight as a gladiator. In the school, he learns even more about the terrible way women are treated. One day, his anger finally boils over, and he attacks Marcellus, his teacher. When he does, all the other slaves revolt as well, and they escape their prison.

Spartacus then begins to lead a revolt of slaves in order to win freedom for slaves all over the Roman Empire. Spartacus falls in love with Varinia, and they begin their family during the mission. Spartacus is finally captured and sentenced to be murdered on a cross. As he dies, Varinia comes out of the city and shows their child to Spartacus so that he knows all their efforts were worth it.

Analysis

Spartacus has never been a man to accept his place in life. His actions show his belief that just because you were born in a situation does not mean that you necessarily deserve to be there. He focuses instead on changing his lot in life and creating a fair world for other slaves as well.

Spartacus also transforms before our eyes as he falls in love with Varinia. Having never been with a woman before, he doesn't even know much about them. For once, Varinia finally gets the respect she deserves. Through small exchanges over the course of months, they fall in love and are finally together when they both escape. Spartacus is revealed as a kind man that viewers can really relate to as his relationship with Varinia progresses.

Marcus Licinius Crassus, played by Laurence Olivier

Description

Marcus Licinius Crassus has one goal - to take over the Senate and the Roman Empire. He is committed to doing whatever it takes to knock Gracchus out of power. Although he experiences several failures in the beginning, he eventually gains the trust of the people and the Senate.



Crassus has two weaknesses in the film, his pride and Varinia. He is too proud to admit his mistakes, which makes him vulnerable to making even more mistakes. Once he gets Caesar on his side, though, he has this brilliant young soldier to back him up so that his forces are stronger.

Crassus also envies Spartacus' relationship with Varinia. Crassus has put down a payment on her, but she runs away before arriving in his home. As he fights Spartacus, he also hopes to get her back. When he does, though, he is disappointed because she refuses to love him, since he's not half the man that Spartacus is. Crassus gets his final comeuppance when Gracchus frees Varinia behind his back.

Analysis

Crassus is a selfish, conceited man. When he allows Helena and the other woman to require the slaves to fight to the death, he starts a terrible chain of events that eventually brings him to power but costs him dearly.

Crassus shows that he is weaker than Spartacus throughout the film. They are the antithesis of one another. Through Crassus' weakness, viewers see Spartacus' strength. Crassus can never be a man like Spartacus, and he finally realizes that when Varinia cannot love him.

Varinia, played by Jean Simmons

Description

Varinia is a slave woman who does chores at the gladiatorial school and is given to the men when they do well in the practice. She has never received kindness from the men until she meets Spartacus. At first, she remains cold toward him, but she finally comes around as he continues to show her kindness.

Varinia escapes when the gladiators leave, and she finds Spartacus. The two admit their love for each other and get married. They toil together to help all slaves find freedom and a better way of life. She has their child during the final battle and is taken in by Crassus. Gracchus, however, frees her in order to get back at Crassus one last time before he commits suicide rather than being taken captive.

Analysis

Varinia is a strong, capable woman. Although she has been mistreated for years in slavery, she refuses to lose her confidence or play the victim. When she meets Spartacus, she has finally found another who shares her same spirit, and she slowly but surely falls in love.

Varinia is Spartacus' best friend and better half. She supports and encourages him throughout their relationship so that he can remain strong as the struggle against the



Romans continues. Even during the most difficult times, she never gives up on him. When she sees him dying, she expresses her love and shows him their child, now free. She lets him know that their fight was worth all the difficulties.

Sempronius Gracchus, played by Charles Laughton

Description

Sempronius Gracchus is a powerful senator in the Roman Empire. He has ruled the roost, so to speak, for many years and is horrified to discover that he is quickly being replaced by the powerful Crassus.

When Gracchus realizes that he has now been outdone by Crassus, he takes things in stride. He tries to thwart Crassus at first, and when that fails, he gives in, but not without a fight. Gracchus takes Varinia, the most important person to Crassus, and buys freedom for both her and her child, sending them away to a safe place. Gracchus has the best revenge possible.

Analysis

Gracchus is a very influential man who is accustomed to getting his own way in everything he does. He is not happy when he discovers that Crassus is finally gaining power over him. Although Gracchus does his best to retain power, he realizes that Crassus' control over the Senate is finally complete by the end of the film.

Lentulus Batiatus, played by Peter Ustinov

Description

Lentulus Batiatus is the owner of the gladiatorial school. He treats the men well and never makes them fight to the death until Crassus and his group show up. Lentulus then agrees and causes such bad feelings among the slaves that they end up killing all the guards and escaping the school.

Lentulus goes to Gracchus after his school is closed. He helps Gracchus decide what to do about the slave revolt and provides moral support. Lentulus also serves Gracchus by taking Varinia and the child safely out of Rome.

Analysis

Lentulus Batiatus has run his school successfully for years. He is by far the best gladiator trainer in the Empire. His entire livelihood is destroyed by a stupid request from Crassus and his friends. Lentulus then goes to Gracchus, his only friend, for safety and comfort, which is freely given.



Lentulus changes over the course of the film. At the beginning, he seems to have no conscience, but by the end, he is helping Varinia escape. Now that he has been through tough times, he is better able to understand the needs and feelings of others.

Julius Caesar, played by John Gavin

Description

Julius Caesar begins his career in the Senate under Gracchus' wing. He is committed to finding his way to success and believes that Gracchus can help him. When Crassus begins to take power, though, Caesar quickly switches sides.

Analysis

Caesar is a seemingly kind but conniving man. He works to keep on top and changes sides whenever it is most convenient for him. Caesar works his way to the top on the backs of others.

Helena Glabrus, played by Nina Foch

Description

Helena Glabrus is Glabrus' sister. She and her friend decide that they want men to fight to the death for their amusement. Their selfish desires cause many of the problems that occur throughout the rest of the film.

Analysis

Helena is a selfish, horrible woman. She thinks only of her own needs and ends up risking the entire safety of Rome by angering the gladiators.

Crixus, played by John Ireland

Description

Crixus is one of the slaves in the gladiatorial school. He follows Spartacus as they try to defeat the Romans.

Analysis

Crixus is one of the men forced to fight to the death. Later, he tries to make two wealthy Romans do the same before Spartacus convinces him to be reasonable.



Themes

Persistence

Persistence is Spartacus' most powerful quality. Although he struggles against great odds, he never gives up on his army or their goals. He is a beloved leader because he always thinks of everyone else first.

While Spartacus works in the mines, he refuses to give up and become lazy. He works hard and uses every possible opportunity to fight back against the soldiers. If Lentulus Batiatus had not come at just the right time, Spartacus would even have been killed for his attempts to undermine the soldiers.

As Spartacus studies at the gladiatorial school, he uses the same persistence to help him look for opportunities to escape. When one finally does come along, he takes it and starts a huge revolution of slaves. Spartacus continues to persevere even until he takes his last breath on his cross.

Power of the Masses

There are more slaves in the Roman Empire than Romans, but most slaves never really try to escape or fight back. Instead, they simply accept the fact they are slaves and remain in bondage. After Spartacus takes charge, the slaves follow him to their freedom.

The Romans are terrified by the power of these masses. Although the group starts out as just a few men, it grows to thousands as other slaves take courage from Spartacus and his army. The power of the masses terrifies the Romans and shocks the slaves into action. Although the slaves are eventually defeated, they prove that the power of the masses can instigate change.

True Love

Varinia is a slave in the gladiatorial camp, and like the other women, she is given to the men sometimes as a reward for impressive fighting. When she is given to Spartacus, he is kind to her and admits that he has never been with a woman before. As Lentulus Batiatus and Marcellus begin to mock them, Spartacus and Varinia become angry.

Because Spartacus refuses to treat Varinia as an animal, though, she respects him and begins to watch him carefully as he trains. Over time, the two form a warm bond of friendship through innocent looks and small gestures of thanks and acceptance.

When Spartacus and Varinia finally meet as free people, they rejoice in their love. They have fallen madly in love over the course of these months, and now that they are free,

they can truly enjoy it. By respecting one another and caring for one another quietly, this couple experiences true love greater than anything they have imagined.

Style and Cinematography

Spartacus is one of the greatest films of the 1960s. The epic drama allows viewers to relive the events of a historical slave revolt. The film takes a literary license with characters and events so that viewers can truly relate to the slaves and their plight both in slavery and in their quest for freedom.

Stanley Kubrick is known for exploring the dark side of human nature. In this film, he puts characters into difficult positions so that viewers can watch as they make their decisions. Rather than just giving viewers good characters, Kubrick presents characters who are both good and evil at different moments.

Kubrick insists on creating real situations and decisions. All the characters are revealed as real people making tough decisions with the little that they know. Viewers are able to analyze the characters and watch as the historical slave revolt comes about, with a little dramatization along the way.



Motifs

Historical Event

Filmmakers have long understood the interest viewers have in true stories; thus, they often use historical events to stir the crowd's interest. In this case, the filmmakers take a literary license with the life and death of Spartacus.

In 73 B.C. the real Spartacus and other gladiators at a gladiatorial school escaped using knives from the kitchen and camped on Mount Vesuvius. When Roman soldiers attacked the group, Spartacus led his men down another way and attacked the Romans from behind.

Spartacus eventually had at least 70,000 slaves in his army. Although they won a battle, they were eventually barely defeated by Crassus' men. Spartacus is believed to have died during the battle, but because there were so many dead, his body was never found.

Life of Slaves

The life of the slaves is a difficult and thankless one. Most of the slaves viewers meet have been in slavery from birth or were kidnapped later in life and sold, as was Varinia. Few of these people know anything different from this type of life, but they dream of freedom and returning to their homes.

Throughout the film, the audience sees examples of the difference between slave life and Roman life. For instance, we may see slaves bathing in a creek while the Roman Senators relax in their marble baths. The living conditions are also completely different as the slaves sleep on the road and the Romans sleep in beautiful houses.

The more viewers see the contrast between slave life and Roman life, the more we sympathize with the slaves who experience this terrible cruelty. These scenes help viewers feel for the slaves and also help move the story along.

War

Times of war always catch viewers' interest. War captures the drama of massive battles and the romance of struggles from the level of the individual to the global. Much of Spartacus involves the war between the slaves and the Romans.

This epic film is one of the few that actually explores the characters deeply while still creating action scenes that are worthy of the name. As viewers see the different battles and how the slaves are treated as heroes, we become more involved with the film and see the historical significance of the events.



Symbols

Swords

Swords and other weapons are symbolic of power. While the slaves have no real access to weapons, they are unable to defeat the guards and soldiers surrounding them. Once Spartacus and the other gladiators retrieve knives, they are able to end their slavery and escape the school.

Additionally, the Romans realize that power lies in the masses as well as the swords. They are terrified when they discover that the slaves have weapons and are creating an army to fight Rome and escape Italy. Finally, the slaves find power, and the Romans are proven weak.

The Crosses

Both in the film and in real life, thousands of crosses line the Appian Way after Crassus defeats the slave army. He wants to show everyone in the country what happens to those who try to stand against Rome.

The crosses, though, symbolize more than that. They symbolize the love of the men for Spartacus. The men could easily have turned him in or let him reveal himself, but instead they all choose to die rather than execute their leader and return to the terrible life of slavery.

When the men refuse to reveal the true Spartacus, Crassus condemns them all to death by crucifixion. He doesn't care that Rome is losing the manpower of thousands. He only cares that his word is taken as law, so all the men are crucified.

The Baby

Spartacus and Varinia have a baby that is born during the battle. Varinia is willing to do anything she can to protect her child, and she ends up having to go to Crassus in order to save them both.

After Gracchus buys the mother and child's freedom, he sends Varinia and the baby to another city where they can be safe from Crassus. At the gate, Lentulus Batiatus and Varinia are stopped by the soldiers. She sees Spartacus on his cross and shows him their child, letting him know that the child will be raised a free man.

Although the slave army was defeated, the baby is the symbol that it was all worthwhile. Spartacus leaves a legacy to live on to future generations. Now that Spartacus' child will live a free and happy life, all their trials were justified. The baby symbolizes freedom and Spartacus' dream of freedom for his children coming true.



Essay Questions

Why is Spartacus almost killed at the beginning of the film?

Who saves Spartacus, and where is he taken?

Describe the gladiatorial school.

Describe the first meeting between Spartacus and Varinia.

Why do the men fight to the death at the school? Explain the motivations of the men and also of those who run the school.

Why does Spartacus kill Marcellus?

What do the gladiators do after they escape?

How do Spartacus and Varinia meet again?

How does the slave rebellion end?

What does Spartacus' child symbolize?