

Beginning

The story begins with the PCs as members of a Thyatin legion in the Hinterlands. Their cohort has been instructed to hold off an approaching force of Wolf Clan while a convoy of civilians are evacuated from a nearby town. The Wolf Clan force is much larger than expected, however and the Secundus Pilus Prior panics as do many of the men and the cohort routs. The PCs can choose to fight till they drop or flee with their comrades. Either way they find themselves alive, either severely wounded and incapacitated or safely hidden. All of their comrades are slain, as are the civilians.

The survivors of the cohort (the PCs) are brought before a local martial court. It turns out that a friend of the Emperor was among those slaughtered and that he wishes the survivors of the disgraced cohort to be properly punished and humiliated. They are each marked with a magical yellow stripe down their backs and stripped of their citizenship. They are declared to be "noxii" and entered into the games for execution.

The PCs are forced into the arena, unarmed, against a visiting school of gladiators. Their victory (hopefully) impresses the school owner. Even though they were sentenced to death in the arena, the local commander is corrupt and he sells the PCs to the school owner. Overnight, assassins come and slaughter the school owner and most of the gladiators - the PCs can fight them off but are the only survivors. When the local magistrate goes through the school owner's belongings he finds a will - all of his possessions are to go to his gladiators, including ownership of the school. The owner had assumed that his lead gladiator would take over for him, but only the PCs remain. They now jointly own the school... but are technically their own slaves and are forbidden to free themselves. Only the Emperor can declare them free.

The Hinterlands

The local magistrate knows the commander is corrupt and wants him gone but the commander has too many powerful friends back in Thyatis. The magistrate has arranged a series of embarrassing events for the commander, including the attack on the civilians - he tipped off the Wolf Clan and made sure the weakest cohort was involved. Now he wants to curry favor with the local tribes and get them to revolt. He intends to use the PCs as goodwill ambassadors to win their favor and then work through them.

The PCs have two choices of games to enter, the tribal games or the Imperial games. The Imperial games are held weekly and are very small scale - they mostly involve execution of noxii or fights to the death with gambling stakes involved. Not savory business at all. The tribal games tend to be games of skill with blunted or padded weapons and are definitely non-lethal.