

ACT 1: THE HUNT

Scene 1) Beware the Ides of Fringe

The stage is set as a makeshift Roman Coliseum outdoors with the audience surrounding the playing area within. A Commentators' desk and Emperor's Box are positioned opposite each other on the north and south points. As audience members meander in, an ANNOUNCER comes over the loud speakers.

ANNOUNCER Ladies and Gentlemen, the Ludi is about to begin. We would ask you at this time to ensure that all sundials and hourglasses are turned off. We would like to remind you that the use of electronic recording devices of any kind is strictly not invented. Thank you for your attention in this matter. And now, without further a-do, the man who is responsible for these games: he crushed all of his enemies, he's been compared to Alexander the Great – by himself – and he's veni, vidi, vici'd his way into our hearts...give it up for YULIUS KAISER!

CAESAR and his TRAIN enter with great fanfare. Most of the MEN wear robes with nothing underneath except a loincloth, and they all wear white half-masks that give them an almost Greek Chorus effect. They carry "goatskin" phalluses for "whipping" people. CAESAR stops in the centre of the Coliseum.*

CAESAR Calpurnia.

CASSIUS Peace ho, Caesar speaks.

CAESAR Calpurnia.

CALPURNIA Here my Lord.

CAESAR Stand you directly in Antonio's way,
When he doth run his course. Antonio.

ANTONY Caesar, my Lord.

CAESAR Forget not in your speed Antonio,
To touch Calpurnia.

CALPURNIA (*spanking ANTONY*) Yeah – forget not to touch.

* In the original production these were nylons stuffed with balls of paper.

10 SHAKESPEARE'S GLADIATOR GAMES

ANTONY I shall remember,
 When Caesar says, Do this; it is perform'd.

CAESAR Set on, and leave no Ceremony out!

On this cue the MEN drop their robes as Ceremonial music fills the air and they run around the Arena in a celebratory fashion swinging their phalluses until a cry cuts through the air.

SOOTHSAYER Caesar!

EVERYONE freezes and the music comes to a halt.

CAESAR Who is it in the press, that calls on me?
 Speak, Caesar is turn'd to hear.

SOOTHSAYER (*ominously*) Beware the Ides of March!

CAESAR and his TRAIN explode with laughter.

CAESAR March?! Like someone's pendulum stopped. Hello – it's
 JULY!

SOOTHSAYER Are you sure about that?

CAESAR I think I would remember the month that I named after
 myself.

SOOTHSAYER Oh, sorry about that – never mind.

CAESAR Proceed with the Holy Chace.

Cue music again and the MEN run around until another cry goes out.

SOOTHSAYER Caesar!

CAESAR What now?!

The Ceremonial music and celebration stop once more.

SOOTHSAYER No, I got it this time. (*ominously*) Beware the Ides of
 Fringe!

Crashing music and everyone shudders.

CALPURNIA Do not go forth today: Call it my fear
 That keeps you in the house, and not your own.

CAESAR Cowards die many times before their deaths,
 The valiant never taste of death but once.
 And today we're going to party like it's 1 BC!
 LIVE FROM TORONTONIUM –
 IT'S LUDI FRINGES!!!

Scene 2) A Funny Thing Happened on the Way to the Forum

The triumphant strains of the Upstart Crow Sports Network (UCSN) theme begin pounding. CAESAR and his small TRAIN make their way to the Emperor's Box. OVID, one of our Commentators, enters searching for his co-host PLAUTUS but cannot find him anywhere. Somewhat bewildered and peeved, OVID takes his chair at the Commentators' desk and addresses the audience.

OVID Good morning Gladiator and Ludi fans alike. Thank you for joining us for what promises to be a glorious munera full of Roman Virtue and Carnage. Before we start our morning activities, I'd like to take this opportunity to thank our Ludi sponsor: Romulus and Remus Charioteers: "For top quality Chariots at rock bottom sesterces – no one sucks wolves like Romulus and Remus Charioteers." *(aside)* Who the hell writes this ad-copy? Ah-em. I'm Publius Ovidius Naso and obviously *not* joining me today is my co-anchor Titus Maccius Plautus. But like I always say, "The cause is hidden. The effect is visible to all."

PSEUDOLUS comes running in out of breath.

PSEUDOLUS Wait, wait, wait...it's okay...it's okay, I'm here – I can explain everything.

OVID Explain? Where is Plautus?

PSEUDOLUS Well, you see. A funny thing happened on the way to the Forum.

OVID Forum? Why did you go to the Forum?

PSEUDOLUS Well you see...that's the funny thing...

OVID I told Plautus: Trinity Collegiate Amphitheatre, eight o'clock.

PSEUDOLUS Day of Kalends.

OVID No, Day of Ides.

- PSEUDOLUS No, I know. He thought it was the Day of Kalends.
- OVID He thinks today is Day of Kalends?
- PSEUDOLUS No, he thought you had told him Day of Kalends.
- OVID Regardless, the Games are never held in the Forum – why did he go to the Forum?
- PSEUDOLUS He didn't go to the Forum.
- OVID He didn't? But you just told me...
- PSEUDOLUS He didn't go anywhere. He's home sick. *I* went to the Forum.
- OVID You – what have you got to do with this?
- PSEUDOLUS That's what I've been trying to tell you. Plautus told me to tell you he's home sick and can't come. He sent me as a replacement – I'm late because I went to the Forum first.
- OVID So why did *you* go to the Forum?
- PSEUDOLUS Everyone knows that on Day of Kalends they open the markets – I went to get some fresh meat.
- OVID (*very frustrated*) But today is NOT Day of Kalends, it's Day of Ides!
- PSEUDOLUS Tell me about it – on Day of Ides all the Christians come out of the woodwork and get on their orator's box – and those guys just don't know when to shut up do they?
- OVID Enough! Who the Hades are you?
- PSEUDOLUS Oh, that's easy. I'm Plautus' slave. My name is...

Nine PERFORMERS run out holding placards containing the letters P-S-E-U-D-O-L-U-S, raise their cards in an incorrect order, and shout out what their misspelling reads.

No, my name is...

The nine PERFORMERS re-arrange themselves, again incorrectly, and shout out their second misspelling. Finally PSEUDOLUS correctly re-arranges them, and they shout out "PSEUDOLUS!"