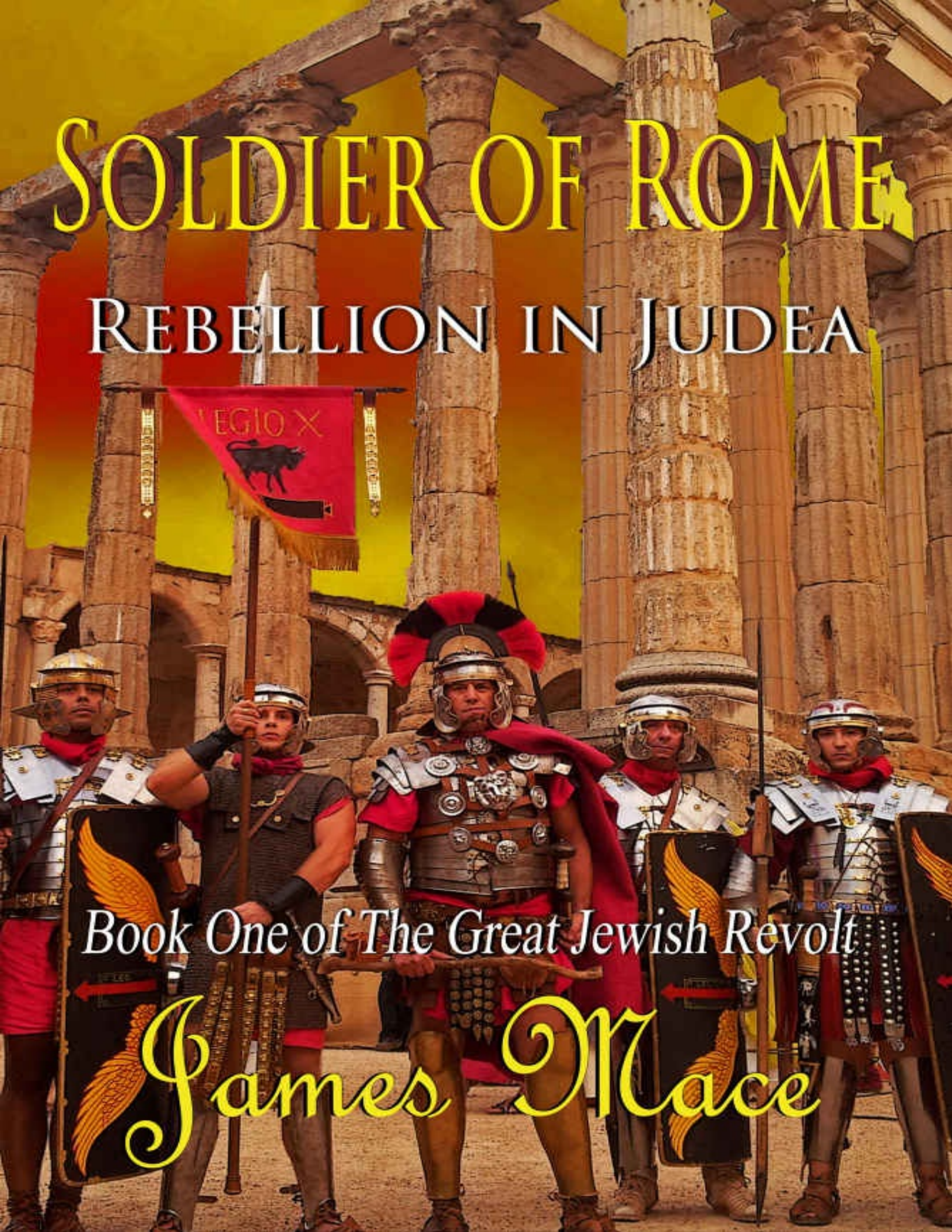

SOLDIER OF ROME
REBELLION IN JUDEA
LEGIO X
Book One of The Great Jewish Revolt
James Nace

Soldier of Rome

Rebellion in Judea

Book One of The Great Jewish Revolt

James Mace

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The darkest places in hell are reserved for those who maintain their neutrality in times of moral crisis.

There is no greater sorrow than to be mindful of the happy time in misery.

- Dante Alighieri

Dedicated in memory of

Lisa Marie Ryder
1973 – 2014

and

Scott Richard Fleming
1958 – 2014

Friends who left us too soon

The Works of James Mace

Note: In each series or combination of series', all works are listed in chronological sequence

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Soldier of Rome: The Sacrovir Revolt
Soldier of Rome: Heir to Rebellion
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Preface

In the year 66 A.D. the Roman province of Judea exploded in rebellion. Far from being a revolution of unified peoples, the various Jewish factions of Sadducees, Zealots, Sicarii, and Edomites are in a state of civil war; as anxious to spill the blood of each other as they are to fight the Romans.

The Judeans find hope when the Romans commit a serious tactical blunder and allow their forces to be ambushed and nearly destroyed in the mountain pass of Beth Horon. Following the disaster, Emperor Nero recalls to active service Flavius Vespasian, the legendary general who had been instrumental in the conquest of Britannia twenty-three years before.

In the northern region of Galilee, a young Judean commander named Josephus ben Matthias readies his forces to face the coming onslaught. A social and political moderate, he fears the extremely violent Zealot fanatics, who threaten to overthrow the newly-established government in Jerusalem, as much as he does the Romans.

Soon Vespasian, a tactical and strategic genius who had never been defeated in battle, unleashes his huge army upon Galilee. His orders are to crush the rebellion and exact the harshest of punishments upon those who would violate the Peace of Rome. Lacking the manpower and resources to face the legions in open battle, Josephus knows he will need plenty of cunning, ingenuity, and, perhaps, even the intervention of God Himself, lest the once proud Kingdoms of Judah and Israel become a kingdom of the damned.

Cast of Characters

Romans:

Titus Flavius Vespasianus – More commonly known as Vespasian, he was appointed by Emperor Nero to crush the Jewish Revolt.
Titus – Sharing the same full name as his father, he is the son of Vespasian and commanding legate of the Fifteenth Legion
Marcus Ulpius Trajan – Commanding legate of the Tenth Legion
Sextus Vettulenus Cerealis – Commanding legate of the Fifth Legion
Lucius Vetutius Placidus – Commander of Vespasian's auxiliary corps
Claudius Nicanor – A centurion within the Tenth Legion
Gaius Artorius – An optio serving under Centurion Nicanor. His grandfather served with Vespasian during the Invasion of Britannia.

Jews:

Hanan ben Hanan – Former high priest, now leader of the Jewish resistance to Rome
Josephus ben Matthias – Hebrew name: Yosef ben Matityahu, he is the commander of the Jewish garrison at Jotapata
Simon bar Giora – Zealot leader
John of Giscala – Hebrew name: Yohanan ben Levi, he is the leader of a rival zealot faction, who despises Hanan as much as he does the Romans
Marcus Julius Agrippa II – Client King, commonly called Herod Agrippa II, he is the son of the original Herod Agrippa and great-grandson of Herod the Great
Julia Berenice – Client Queen of part of Judea and sister of Agrippa
Yaakov – Friend of Josephus and commander of his personal guard
Devorah – A refugee in Jotapata who befriends and becomes a romantic interest of Yaakov
Levi – Military leader in Galilee, torn by his loyalties to both Josephus and John of Giscala

Prolog: From Hero to Exile

Achaea, Greece
November, 65 A.D.
***

How quickly one can go from conqueror to obscurity, Vespasian thought to himself. At one time hailed as one of the greatest military leaders of the age; now, he was little more than a lackey to the despondent Emperor Nero.

Titus Flavius Vespasian made his reputation more than twenty years prior, during the Invasion of Britannia. Returning to Rome after winning numerous decisive victories, he was lauded as 'the greatest military leader since Caesar', with a future that appeared set. His reputation was well-deserved, for not once had he tasted defeat in battle, while at the same time he mastered the art of siege warfare, devising stratagems that broke seemingly impregnable strongholds with contemptuous ease. A few years later he was elected consul, placing him at the height of power for a member of the Roman senate outside of the emperor himself. The following years had seen his fortunes both flourish and flounder. Coming from more humble origins than other members of the senatorial class, he was often viewed as an outsider, and his wealth paled in comparison to most of the old Roman families. At one time he was reduced to trading in mules and other beasts of burden as a means of making money, and political fallout with members of the imperial family had led to his effective retirement from public life. His recent governorship of North Africa partially brought him back into the public sphere, yet now he was reduced to accompanying the insufferable, unstable, and if one were being honest, insane Emperor Nero as a member of his entourage while he toured the eastern provinces.

Nero was the stepson of Emperor Claudius, who, in his will, had stipulated that both the young man, along with Claudius' own son, Britannicus, would be joint heirs. Instead, Nero had Britannicus killed soon after Claudius passed on to the afterlife, and for the last eleven years ruled Rome by instilling a mixture of both terror and favor upon members of the senate and equites. He further had placed great strain on the empire's finances with his endless games and theater performances; the latter of which he took part in personally, either playing the lyre or reciting his rather

amateurish verses for hours on end.

It wasn't that Vespasian necessarily disliked poetry or music. He was an avid reader of Horatius Flaccus, who was more commonly known as Horace, while also possessing a number of works by Ovid.

"Horace was once described as amusing, yet serious," Vespasian said to his friend, Suetonius Paulinus, who was accompanying him this evening to the emperor's latest mandatory entertainment. "As his friend laughed, Horace slyly put his finger on his every fault; once let in, he played about the heartstrings. The man was a literary genius. And yet tonight, we will be subjected to incessant drivel."

"Well, you cannot fault the emperor for trying," Paulinus replied with a dark chuckle.

It was close to sundown, and the two former generals were reluctantly making their way to the large villa where the Emperor Nero would be reciting his latest verses for local nobles, as well as his sizeable entourage. Vespasian loathed that he had agreed to accompany the young emperor to Greece as part of his retinue. He told Paulinus he had only done so to keep close to the emperor after the family of his daughter-in-law was implicated in a plot to overthrow Nero. Vespasian's son, Titus, had immediately divorced his wife and taken their daughter away. Thankfully, nothing had been mentioned of it by Nero, who, in fact, even once applauded Titus' growing reputation as a military officer. And while his son's career seemed on the rise, Vespasian lamented that his own seemed to have stagnated.

"Well, it has been fourteen years since your consulship," Paulinus reasoned.

"Yes, and then I was dismissed from the imperial court after a dispute with that bitch, Agrippina," Vespasian grumbled.

The woman he referred to was the fourth wife of the late Emperor Claudius and the mother of Nero. When her son had had her murdered six years ago, Vespasian proposed a toast at a dinner party, celebrating her demise. It had been in poor taste, though few made any mention of it. If anything, it may have actually helped his standing with Nero, for it was not long after that he was appointed governor of North Africa.

"And I hear you're on the cusp of being elected consul," Vespasian said, changing the subject.

"I am standing for election, yes," Paulinus confirmed. "Though we'll see how our peers feel about my being colleague of the emperor, who seems to

perpetually hold the other consulship. Remember, not all approved of how I handled the aftermath of the Iceni Rebellion in Britannia."

"Piss on them," Vespasian remarked. "They didn't have two hundred thousand barbarians trying to spill their guts."

The friendship between Suetonius Paulinus and Flavius Vespasian had been an unusual one. Both men were in their fifties, and each had made their reputations in Britannia, albeit at much different times in their careers. Vespasian had been a very young legate, in command of the Second Legion, during the initial invasion, twenty-two years earlier. He had won more than thirty decisive victories and smashed numerous hill forts that some viewed as impenetrable. His commanding officer, Aulus Plautius, recognized the young general's talents and credited him with the army's overwhelming victory at the Battle of River Medway. Such had led the Emperor Claudius to personally decorate Vespasian with triumphal ornaments. Later disputes with the emperor's wife, Agrippina, negated, for the time, the achievements of one of Rome's greatest generals.

Paulinus came to Britannia much later, being appointed its governor by Nero during the first part of his reign. When the province exploded in rebellion under the Iceni queen, Boudicca, many of the southern cities and townships were destroyed in her rampage of murder. In Londinium alone, more than thirty thousand citizens, mostly women and children, were murderously butchered. In subsequent battle, Paulinus, despite being seemingly cornered and outnumbered as much as twenty-to-one, completely annihilated Boudicca's army and the queen herself perished soon after. Nero had contemplated abandoning the province altogether, though Paulinus' overwhelming victory changed his intentions. Moreover, the emperor was secretly glad for the public distraction from what amounted to the beginning of his disastrous financial policies. However, as quick as Paulinus was lauded as a hero, his punitive expeditions of vengeance following Boudicca's death earned him the rebuke of his peers and led the emperor to recall him, feeling that he had gone too far in seeking retribution.

"I sometimes wonder if Nero keeps you close because he's afraid of you," Vespasian observed with dry humor. "It would explain the push to make you consul for the coming year."

"We'll see," Paulinus replied as they walked up the handful of steps leading into the main house of the villa. Musicians were playing lyres at one end of the hall, which was decorated with laurels and various Greek flowers.

“Let’s just hope I don’t do anything stupid, like nod off during one of his recitals.”

Vespasian sighed in resignation as he accepted a cup of wine from a passing servant, and tried to find a place to sit that was inconspicuous and somewhere in the back of the gathered throng. There were about twenty senators accompanying Nero, along with about twice as many equites, serving as clerks and aids. Praetorian guardsmen lined the walls of the hall.

“Welcome, friends!” Nero said, as he stepped towards a small stage placed in the center of the tables and couches. He was wearing his finest imperial purple robes with a gold laurel crown, and his face painted in gold, as well. Vespasian chuckled quietly, wondering if the face paint would give him a rash later.

As the emperor took to stage, Vespasian grimaced when he saw that Nero carried a scroll. It was going to be a poetry recital. The old general was able to tolerate Nero’s playing of the lyre, for while he was amateurish at best, he really wasn’t that bad. His poetry, on the other hand, was downright nauseating. It also caused Vespasian to drink more than he normally would. The wine was a mellow blend, not too sweet, and it went down quickly. It was also rather potent. Before he knew it, Vespasian was staring into his cup, an inane grin on his face, as the emperor prattled on. He didn’t even remember nodding off and probably would have gone unnoticed, had it not been for a moment of silence following a round of clapping from the overly enthusiastic guests.

As Nero stopped to take a bow, the stillness was broken by the sounds of voracious snoring. Nero’s eyes grew wide, and all the guests turned to where the former general lay on his side, head resting on his elbow, and a grin of contentment spread across his face as he continued to snore loudly. Aghast, the emperor shoved his way through the crowd and stood glaring over Vespasian. His face red with rage, Nero threw his scroll at the sleeping man, startling him awake.

“Ah, highness,” he said sleepily as he sat upright. “Excellent recital, most excellent…”

“You impudent ass!” Nero snapped. “While your emperor was pouring his very soul into his art, you’ve been sleeping this entire time!”

“Oh, bugger,” Vespasian grumbled under his breath. He suddenly realized that whatever his past glories in service to the empire, and regardless of how he felt personally about the young man who now held the mantle of

Caesar, it was Nero who wielded the ultimate power over life and death in Rome. Knowing there was nothing else for it, he stood and bowed slightly. “Apologies, sire. I have not been well this evening.”

“I could have you strangled for this,” Nero said coldly. “Or better yet, I could have one of the praetorians cut off your head so I can carry it with me, to be used as a piece of décor while serving as a warning to those who would mock us.”

“If that is your desire,” Vespasian replied. While he acknowledged that the emperor could very easily have him put to death, he was not about to demean himself by begging.

“Oh, come now, sire,” one of the assembled senators stated, “let us not allow this insufferable twit a quick end. Let him linger in exile, while wallowing in the torment of his sins.”

“You shouldn’t be so quick to rid yourself of one of Rome’s greatest generals,” Paulinus spoke up. He then whispered to the emperor, “Perhaps one day he will prove useful to you once more.”

“Yes,” Nero replied, his hands folded in contemplation. “It’s been a bad enough year for the Flavians, especially after that unfortunate incident with your daughter-in-law.” He grinned maniacally, gauging Vespasian’s response, though the general remained stoic.

His son, Titus, married into the distinguished family of Marcia Furnilla, only to, soon after, have her family implicated in the failed Pisonian Conspiracy, which had threatened to overthrow the emperor. Until this moment, the emperor had not so much as mentioned the affair to Vespasian. But now, his falling asleep could endanger both himself and his son.

“I must say,” Nero continued, “I know not whether it was wisdom or cowardice that led your son to divorce his wife and run off to the legions once more.” Given Titus’ already distinguished military record, any accusations of cowardice were beyond absurd, and Vespasian let the matter be.

Nero, now in a more jovial, yet malignant mood, strolled around the room in thought. It was embarrassing for Vespasian to be the subject of his scorn in front of so many distinguished guests. He was regretting more and more ever deciding to join the emperor’s retinue during his tour of the eastern provinces. Perhaps that was why Nero’s next words came as at least a partial relief.

“Your services in my entourage are no longer needed,” he said. “You will

remain here, until such time as we decide if you are of any further use to us, or if you should be disposed of for good. They raise bees here, so surely one who has commanded thousands of legionaries can oversee the little buzzing bastards. Now out of my sight at once!"

Vespasian bowed and quickly left the hall, filled with a twisted combination of humiliation, resentment, and even respite. Paulinus snuck away as Nero began to address his guests once more, berating any who might consider falling to the old general's folly.

Vespasian really had no idea where he was going. All guests were staying at the villa, though he dared not show his face while the emperor was still tormenting everyone with his recitals, sweat causing the gold face paint to drip all over his robes. He decided he would walk and clear his mind until the hour grew late and he could sneak his way back in to find his quarters, provided he could remember which ones were his! In the morning, the emperor and his entourage would be gone, and he would remain behind, living at the villa while overseeing the raising of bees. He supposed there were worse things.

"Vespasian, wait!" Paulinus shouted as his friend walked briskly down the path, the light of the moon casting its glow. Behind them, tall torches lined the main house, their flames flickering in the night.

"Damn him," Vespasian growled as he stopped and took a deep breath. "And damn me for allowing him to make such an ass of me!" He turned to his friend, his face red with anger. "Whatever he does to me, no matter, but how dare he impugn my son!"

"Easy, old friend," Paulinus replied, placing a reassuring hand on his shoulder. "No one, not even Nero, thinks Titus is anything but a valiant soldier. He served with distinction in Germania, and he was one of my chief tribunes during the Iceni rebellion. My deputy, Agricola, even said that Titus will be ready to command his own legion sooner rather than later. Be glad he's away from the politics of Rome and back with the legions, where he belongs. Believe me, if the emperor ever had any doubts about Titus' loyalty, he would have met the same fate as his wife's family."

"I know," Vespasian acknowledged. He then continued his walk at a more measured pace. "He still managed to keep his position as Quaestor, despite the scandal, so it wasn't a total loss. And my brother still holds influence with the senate. Still, you understand this has been an unfortunate

year for the Flavian family."

"Give it time," Paulinus reassured him. "Nero is mentally unbalanced and will likely forget this whole incident within a week. I daresay, he'll be asking within a month why his dear friend, Titus Flavius Vespasian, didn't accompany him to Athens and to Asia Minor."

Both men laughed at this, realizing that while absurd, it would likely prove true.

"Good luck in your bid for the consul's chair," Vespasian said, clasping his friend's hand. "We may have an emperor who is unhinged, which means we need strong men leading the senate."

The hour was late when Vespasian returned to the villa. Besides a few praetorian guards, no one else was awake. He crept along one of the corridors, trying to remember which room was supposed to be his. He quietly opened one, only to hear the sounds of snoring coming from within. At the next door down, the loud creak of the bed, combined with attempts to stifle loud groans of copulation could be heard. On his third attempt he found a vacant room and decided to take it, regardless of whether or not it was meant for him.

The house was abuzz with activity early the next morning, as servants feverishly packed the belongings of their masters and mistresses. Voices were heard shouting orders, and the emperor's retinue made ready to begin the day's journey. The noises awakened Vespasian, who was stirring in the discomfort that came with a full bladder. However, since he did not wish to be seen, he relieved himself in a potted flower near the door.

It was midday when he ventured out, feeling hungry and deciding he'd best explore the villa to see what it offered. The owner was the overseer of the bee farm, who had but a handful of servants living within the large house. Those who worked the beehives came from the nearby village.

"Quite a festivity last night," the voice of the overseer said over Vespasian's shoulder.

The old general turned and forced a smile.

The man then asked, "The others left this morning, how come you're still here? Did you oversleep?"

"No," Vespasian replied with a grin, thankful the man either did not know who he was or, at the very least, was ignorant as to what transpired the night before. Of course, there was the possibility that he was simply being polite to

his new guest. “The emperor asked that I remain here. He has a fascination with bees and thought perhaps I could learn a few things for him.”

“Of course,” the overseer said, smiling and clapping his hands together. “Aside from last night, I don’t get many distinguished visitors here. And for the hero of the Britannic Conquest, I’ll put you up in my finest room!”

The man soon departed and Vespasian was left to his thoughts. It was clear that either the man did not know why the former general and consul had been left at his villa in Greece, or he was just showing good manners by not mentioning it. Either way, Vespasian decided he’d best write to his brother, Sabinus, as well as his son, Titus, and inform them of the latest of their family’s misfortunes.

“From conqueror to exile,” he muttered under his breath, his feelings a mixture of both shame and relief. He then grinned, realizing there wouldn’t be any more of Nero’s poetry recitals for him to sit through.

Part I

Rise of the Rebellion and the Calamities that Befell the Jewish Peoples

Chapter I: A Kingdom in Crisis

Caesarea, Roman Province of Judea
April, 66 A.D.



Josephus ben Mathias

It was now the twelfth year in the reign of the Roman emperor Nero, and the seventeenth of King Agrippa II of Judea. Though his father had ruled as a semi-autonomous king, the younger Agrippa was viewed as little more than a political figurehead and by his political rivals as a lapdog to his Roman masters. The current master who lorded over Judea as Roman procurator was a vile man named Gessius Florus. A greedy and pathetic administrator, he had only gotten the post due to his close friendship with Nero's wife, the Empress Poppaea. After the stability that had been the independent reign of King Agrippa I, the province of Judea had been in turmoil ever since. A string of Roman procurators, mostly possessing varying degrees of corruption, had been appointed in a span of just a few years.

The Jews also brought about much of the strife. The high priest, Hanan, had taken the opportunity brought about by the sudden death of a previous procurator, Festus, four years prior, to convene the Jewish assembly known as the Sanhedrin. He further used this time to compel the Sanhedrin to order the death of a popular man named Yaakov bar Joseph, who was sometimes known as *James the Just*. This brought swift rebuke from the new procurator, Albinus, which led to Hanan's removal as high priest by King Agrippa.

However, due to Hanan's popularity with both the Sanhedrin and the people at large, coupled with their growing dislike of Agrippa and the Romans, the deposed high priest still held vast power and influence within the region.

Despite this initial quarrel, Albinus showed real promise and concern for both the Jews, as well as the various ethnic groups that populated Judea. Much to the relief of the Sanhedrin, he sought to expel the Sicarii, a splinter group of extremely violent zealots whose name literally meant 'dagger men'. It was not to last, and within two years of his appointment, Albinus was transferred to Mauretania and replaced by the wicked Florus. So profound was his greed, that while additional taxation would often be used for public works and infrastructure, he plundered whole cities simply to increase his own coffers. Roads, aqueducts, and sewer systems were left in disrepair, despite the protestations of the people, asking where exactly their taxes were going if not to improve infrastructure.

And yet it was not Florus' thievery that sparked the Judeans' hatred for Rome; rather, it all started with a simple matter of neglect and religious insult. As the Roman coastal capitol of Caesarea was home to many differing peoples and faiths, religious strife was commonplace. It began with the sounds of an angry mob outside his palace, which in turn caused Florus much agitation.

"What in the name of Juno are these ungrateful provincials complaining of?" he asked his freedman aid.

"It would seem that a number of Greek priests of Hera conducted a sacrifice of birds on the grounds just outside the Jewish temple," the man replied. "The Jews viewed this as a profane insult, and so quarrels have broken out in recent days."

"Not my problem," the procurator scoffed. "As I've said before, I'll not expend Roman lives and resources every time there is a scuffle between the Greeks and the Jews."

"Forgive me," the aid said, "but did you not crucify a number of Jewish rabble-rousers who conducted a similar offense near one of the Greek temples? I know our Achaean subjects far outnumber the Jews in Caesarea, but there have been substantial grumblings that Rome is showing blatant favoritism towards the Greeks. This could cause problems in Rome itself, given the substantial Jewish population within the imperial city."

Before Florus could answer, the door was opened and an imperial messenger walked in. The man wore the armor of an auxiliary cavalryman;

he was disheveled and looked out of breath.

"Is this how you present yourself?" Florus chastised sharply.

"Forgive me, sir," the trooper replied, "but I've just barely managed to break through the mob that is rioting outside the palace."

"Rioting, are they?" Florus asked, his eyes narrowing.

"They are," the messenger confirmed. "Worse yet, they are protesting not just the treatment by the Greeks, but also what they call oppressive taxation. As I forced my way through, I was accosted by those carrying baskets the Jews collect alms in. They said it was for 'poor Governor Florus'."

"That's not all," another magistrate said as he entered the room. "We've just received word from Centurion Capito in Jerusalem. A number of Romans and perceived Roman sympathizers have been attacked by bands of brigands."

"Is this how these filthy bastards thank us for all we've done for this shit hole of a province?" Florus growled, his voice full of malice. "I think it is time these pernicious Jews were taught a harsh lesson in who their masters are. And what of King Agrippa?"

"He is away in Alexandria," the magistrate replied. "No doubt he will be furious when he hears what the people have done."

"Indeed," the procurator noted. King Agrippa II was the son of Agrippa I, who had been best friends since childhood with the previous emperor, Claudius. Both men were more Roman than Jewish, and though the current king genuinely cared about his subjects, it was easy for his imperial masters to manipulate him. Though Jerusalem had a palace for Agrippa, his seat of power lay at the port city of Tiberias, on the Sea of Galilee.

"Summon the guard," Florus ordered. "I want this rabble in front of the palace cleared off and have their leaders brought to me in Jerusalem. I think it is time I paid a visit to the Jewish holy city."



It was a bright spring morning as Hanan made his way to the temple. A few pilgrims from the Passover celebrations still lingered, though most had since returned to the outlying cities and farms. The former high priest was troubled by the random acts of violence against Roman merchants and supposed sympathizers. Of course, when several hundred thousand wayfarers converged on the most holy of Judaism's cities, there were bound to be a few

wicked souls amongst the otherwise pious.

Hanan ben Hanan was in his early fifties, above average in height, with black hair that reached to his shoulders and a beard that he kept trimmed close. He had spent most of his life in service to God, starting first as a scribe to the temple when he was a young boy. This had enabled him to receive the finest of educations, where he studied theology, Jewish law, as well as numerous foreign languages and customs with fervor. He was fluent in both Latin and Greek, along with his native Hebrew and Aramaic. His scholarly intuition and influential public speaking abilities made him extremely popular with the masses; this, despite his being removed as high priest by King Agrippa after offending the Roman procurator. And while he still gave respect to the current high priest, as well as the king, it was Hanan who was able to bring together many of the rival factions within Judea, whose conflicting ideologies led them to harbor as much hatred towards each other as their Roman overlords.

On this particular day, Hanan was to take part in the sacrifice of a lamb, thanking God for blessing the year's Passover celebrations. For with the mass of pilgrims, also came vast quantities of coin and tithing that needed to be accounted for. And so, it appalled him when he walked through the large gate at the Temple of Herod to see two centuries of Roman auxiliaries in full armor, their shields and spears at the ready. A centurion was arguing with the high priest, and Hanan thought he heard something mentioned about tribute.

"What is the meaning of this?" he asked, his anger rising. "Your soldiers are forbidden from entering our holiest of shrines!"

"And so it will remain," the centurion answered, "once we've secured the tributes for Caesar."

"I don't understand," Hanan began.

"I've tried to explain to them," the high priest said in exasperation. "We've paid our tributes to the emperor for the year!"

"Perhaps I should clarify," the centurion replied sternly. "This is in retribution for the disturbances caused by bands of brigands and their attacks, during the Passover, on Roman citizens."

"Outrageous!" the high priest shouted.

Hanan raised a hand, silencing him. Though subordinate to the priest, he knew he had the best chance of negotiating with the Romans, and so he was allowed to speak for them. "How much is Caesar demanding?" he asked calmly.

“Seventeen talents in gold,” the centurion replied.

All the priests, and even Hanan, were dumbstruck by this. A talent, which was a unit of measure equal to approximately seventy-one modern pounds, was used when calculating large sums of weight. That the Romans were demanding twelve hundred pounds of gold flabbergasted even the cool-headed Hanan.

“That is four times the amount we’ve already paid for the year,” he remarked. “Indeed, it is a greater combined weight than the gold, silver, and grain we provide to Rome annually. Is this tribute then for Caesar, or is it for Florus?”

“That’s no concern of yours, Jew,” the centurion snarled. “Either bring the gold to us, or else my lads and I will enter your holiest shrine and take it ourselves. Any if any stands in our way, we’ll use their guts to repaint the walls and burn the fucking place to the ground.”

The high priest, knowing he was choice-less, nodded to his aide. “Bring the Romans what they ask for,” he said solemnly.

“The procurator will hear of this injustice,” Hanan said to the centurion, who could only smile.

“Feel free to address him personally. I received a message from him this morning, and he’s on his way to Jerusalem as we speak. It seems he’s none too happy with you lot for the troubles caused during Passover, and he wants all troublemakers brought to justice. Have the gold brought to Herod’s palace, and don’t try and skimp on it, we’ve got our own scales to weigh it with.”

Amongst the entourage of Judean priests and scribes was a young scholar named Josephus. A pupil of Hanan, he watched his mentor carefully, while taking in everything that was said between the men. He quickly surmised the injustices being wrought came not from the emperor, but from one greed-filled administrator.



Over the next few days, this latest move of sending auxiliaries to take seventeen talents of gold from the sacred temple itself had driven the people to rioting, for the indignant priests soon let all know that the wicked Florus was stealing from God. It was a doubly hard blow for the Pharisees and the common people. Not only had Roman troops defiled their temple, but they

knew whatever was taken in treasure would be passed on in further taxations upon them by the Judean ruling council, and would likely have the endorsement of King Agrippa. The Pharisees were constantly at odds with the wealthy classes, known as the Sadducees. The legal and religious council of elders, known as the Sanhedrin, claimed to represent all, but since they were appointed from the Sadducees, it was to their own best interests they most often looked.

Florus had summoned the council elders, as well as the high priests, as soon as he arrived in Jerusalem. Outside, the chants of enraged citizens echoed. Since Hanan was among the few who both the Pharisees and the Sadducees trusted, it was he who spoke for the people at Florus' tribunal, rather than the high priest.

"Is this how your people bid their masters' welcome?" the procurator asked. He sat atop his tribunal outside the palace of Herod, surrounded by magistrates, with a number of soldiers posted between him and the multitude of eminent persons within the Judean community. After having taken massed quantities of gold from the Jewish holy places, not for imperial taxes, but to fill his personal coffers, massed protests had erupted.

Hanan was secretly glad that Florus could not speak Aramaic, for amongst the chants were calls of, *'Down with Florus!'*

"Governor," he replied. "You have already extorted a far higher toll from us than the emperor ever asked, and now you come with your soldiers, demanding we deliver up troublemakers when we do not know who they are, or even if they are still within the city."

"That is not my problem," Florus said coldly. "I will have those who defy Rome and the emperor brought before me!"

The masses had only been dispersed temporarily, and only with utter brutality by the Roman governor's soldiers. Despite the loss of life already, he now demanded those who were responsible for the riots be brought forward to face flogging and crucifixion.

"Excellency, we implore you to show mercy," Hanan pleaded. "There are only a few who have caused you offense, and all within Jerusalem are heartily sorry for any distress this may have caused you."

The procurator was not only unmoved by the pleas but enraged by them. Trouble had been building in the province for some time, and it was finally coming to a head, just as he wanted.

"You ask for clemency," Florus scoffed, "after hordes of rampaging

barbarians threatened my lawful acquisition of gold for the emperor?!"

"It was not yours to take!" a younger man with Hanan spat. "It belongs to the people and should be used to benefit the people, not for some fat magistrate to steal at his leisure!"

His outburst led to a loud outcry from the priests and Jewish elders gathered. Their fear of the Roman procurator led them to hold their tongues after Hanan raised his hands to silence them. After all, it was such mockery of Florus that led to the present confrontation.

"Easy, Josephus," Hanan said to the man who had snapped at the procurator, placing a hand on his shoulder. "Allow me to speak for our people."

"You would do well to listen to him," Florus said, with ice in his voice. He then addressed the assembly. "Know this, if you do not produce the criminals before me, then it is you, the elders and leaders of this city, who will face my wrath!"

A series of murmurs and frantic conversations came abuzz amongst the assembly. Both Hanan and Josephus were horrified by what the procurator was saying.

"Is he trying to goad us into rebellion?" Josephus asked quietly. The former high priest swallowed hard and shook his head in disbelief.

"Excellency, please!" he said, raising his hands in subjugation. "We are here to show you that the people are peaceably disposed, yet rightly outraged at what they view as theft from the house of God. We beg your forgiveness for any transgressions committed. And if I may be upfront, we simply do not know who all caused you offense, but we can ascertain that they are few in number. And as we have quelled the situation, surely Rome is merciful enough to spare the multitude of innocents and forgive the few guilty."

Florus sneered and rose from his seat, giving a sinister chuckle in rebuke to the pleas of Hanan and the other Jewish leaders. "It would seem that my threat to punish you in place of the guilty has failed to move you," he snarled. "Very well, then. If threats to your persons are not enough to persuade you, then see what happens to your people." He then signaled to a centurion of auxiliaries, who promptly jogged up the steps and saluted. Florus gave his orders loud enough for Hanan and the others to hear. "Take a thousand men, go to the place within the city known as Upper Marketplace and destroy it. Kill any that stand in your path, man, woman, or child, and take whatever plunder you wish."

“Sir!” the centurion replied with a sharp salute before running back down the steps and shouting subsequent orders to several of his assembled officers.

“Vile monster!” Josephus said through gritted teeth.

The priests and councilmen were now shouting remonstrations and shaking their fists at Florus. The procurator simply grinned wickedly and snapped his fingers. Every guard and soldier who lined the chamber suddenly made a rush for the dais, coming between Florus and the enraged Jewish leadership.

“Watch and learn what happens when you violate the law of Rome!” Florus snarled. He waved his men forward, forcibly removing the elders and priests, who continued to shout defiantly. Both Hanan and Josephus were horrified at what had just transpired, as they were shoved away violently by the shields of the Roman auxiliaries.

Up on his tribunal, the procurator gave a sinister laugh of contempt.

“Shouldn’t we eliminate that man, Hanan?” a magistrate asked.

“No, leave him be,” Florus replied. “If I am to incite a rebellion, and thereby stave off any inquiries from the emperor as to my *acquisitions*, then I will need men like him alive. Besides, watching him squirm at the plight of his people will be far more amusing than simply killing him now.”



Soldiers within the Jerusalem garrison, and indeed throughout all of Judea, were not legionaries, but auxiliaries. Drawn from noncitizens within the local populace, they served in the ranks for twenty-five years, after which they would be given a small pension and Roman citizenship for themselves and their families. Legionaries looked down on them as undisciplined amateurs, and the people of Judea viewed them with both disdain and terror. This was because few, if any, Jews would ever stoop to join the ranks of the Roman army. The majority of auxiliaries were Samaritans who shared a mutual antipathy with the Jews going back millennia. As such, the soldiers who marched into Upper Marketplace felt neither remorse nor pity for any of the people as they moved through the streets with their swords drawn.

At first the people who crowded the large square were shocked to see soldiers with weapons unsheathed and ready to strike. Surprise turned to

abject terror as the auxiliaries charged into the forum. An old man carrying a basket of bread was the first to fall as a gladius was plunged into the side of his neck. As he fell to the ground, blood gushing forth while his body thrashed about, his wife gave a scream of anguish before she, too, was brutally slain. People, both shoppers and vendors alike, dropped their wares and fled in horror. Yet so crowded was the square, the narrow streets became choked up with the rampaging mob, and the soldiers were able to slay at will. It became sport for them, each man plunging his gladius into the back, neck, or guts of their victims. Some they would deliberately wound, just so they could watch them thrash about in pain as the auxiliaries cut them repeatedly. Several younger women were pulled from the crowd by their hair, thrown to the ground, and then raped before their assailants murdered them.

Adding to the horrid dismay was that no one knew why the soldiers were on the rampage. They savaged the populace with reckless abandon, showing no mercy to any, regardless of gender or age. A mother shrieked as her month-old child was wrenched from her arms and then bashed repeatedly against the side of a building, until its skull burst, leaving a gory mess smeared upon the brick. The horrified mother was subsequently stabbed by several soldiers and fell face first into a growing pool of blood and bodily fluids.

As the survivors fled for the perceived safety of their homes, the auxiliaries began looting the marketplace for anything they found valuable. Stalls were overturned, pavilions torn down, with all manner of foods, textiles, jewelry, and anything else being sold in the marketplace carted off. Bodies filled the square, which was now saturated in a pool of congealing blood. Those soldiers who had not been quick enough to find anything worth taking started marauding down the streets that led into the market, smashing in the doors of people's homes, leading to another round of incessant murder and pillage. As the stalls within the market were set afire, a reign of terror had come to Jerusalem.



Outside the palace, most of the elders and religious leaders fled out of fear of the maddened procurator. Even Hanan had returned to the temple, stating he needed to pray and meditate on the crisis. Josephus wandered the nearby plaza in almost a daze, unable to fathom how such wickedness was

allowed to go unchecked.

A well-read young man who was fast approaching his thirtieth birthday, Yosef ben Matityahu, or Josephus as he was more commonly known, had been born and raised in Jerusalem. In appearance he was a handsome man, keeping his hair cut short while variously keeping either a close-cropped beard or clean shaven face. He came from a wealthy Jewish family, though he preferred to dress modestly in a plain white or gray tunic, rather than lavish robes worn by the upper classes. He was noted at a young age to possess a keen intellect and an uncanny ability with complex mathematics. His father, Matthias, had spent a fortune on his education, and the young Josephus had taken full advantage of the opportunities afforded him. He also took to studying military histories: Jewish, Mesopotamian, Persian, Greek, as well as Roman. He knew the auxiliaries who now wreaked havoc upon the people of Jerusalem were but ill-trained scabs compared to the fearsome imperial legions. Roman legionaries were, without a doubt, the best trained, disciplined, and well-equipped fighters of the age. Professional soldiers whose sole purpose was to fight, under the right leadership they were nearly invincible. It was because of this formidable reputation the Jewish leaders sought a political, rather than military solution to their current predicament.

"I don't hate the Romans!" he said, wringing his hands in anguish that evening as he sat down to supper with his wife, Judith.

As she placed a bowl of soup in front of him and sat with her arm around his shoulders, he was suddenly very grateful that his wife had not visited Upper Marketplace on this particular day.

"I fear for our people," he said, clasping her hand.

"As do I," she replied quietly, trying to control her cracking voice, for she had several friends who had gone to the market and had not been heard from or seen since.

"To see one man…*one man*, filled with such wickedness!" he lamented, shaking his head.

Josephus was amongst the minority who felt that Judaism and Greco-Roman thinking were compatible; *Hellenistic Judaism*, as it was called by those who studied and applied both Jewish and Roman thinking. He also had a number of close friends who were Roman. One man in particular, named Nicanor, was the son of an imperial officer who had spent most of his career in the east. Nicanor and Josephus were the same age, and had shared a friendship that was devoid of the inherent prejudices brought on by both their

respective cultures. When they came of age, Josephus had been given over to study at the temple, while Nicanor elected to follow the same path as his father and joined the legions. Perhaps once a year, usually around Passover, Josephus would receive a letter from his friend, who was now an optio with the Tenth Legion in Syria and second-in-command of an eighty-man century of legionaries.

Because Josephus' rapport with the Romans was well known, he had been sent as an emissary to Rome the year before to petition the emperor for the release of a number of Jewish political prisoners. The scale and grandeur of 'the Eternal City', as it was sometimes called, had impressed him greatly. And while he found Emperor Nero to be completely debauched and bordering on insane, somehow Nero acquiesced to Josephus' request, and released all of the Jewish political prisoners, seemingly unable to remember why, exactly, they were imprisoned in the first place. It was due to his personal history with the Romans that he was now filled with conflicting emotions. He spent the remainder of the night with his wife, in the morning joining several of his friends and compatriots to discuss the calamities that had befallen them since the arrival of Governor Florus to Jerusalem.

"It's as if Florus *wants* rebellion," his friend, a young man named Yaakov, grumbled in disgust.

They met at a tavern near the Herodian palace, sitting outside under the shade of an overhang off the building. Crowds of people walked the streets, several coming and going from the tavern at any one time. A crowd often offered total anonymity.

"When you look at it, it makes complete sense," Josephus replied. "The man is as brash a thief as any who has been cast upon us as procurator. What other governors attempted to do in secret, he does in broad daylight, daring anyone to oppose him or complain to Rome about his transgressions. If he further drives the people into open rebellion, it will distract his masters from seeing the extent of his evil. We will then be portrayed as the villains in this affair."

"And our so-called 'king' is little more than a Roman dressed as a Jew," Yaakov muttered.

"King Agrippa means well enough," Josephus replied. "But he is caught in a delicate situation, for he is still subservient to Rome."

"And he was raised in the court of the emperors," his friend added. "Even

his very name is Roman. No, there will be no help coming from King Agrippa."

"If not the king," Josephus reasoned, "then perhaps a queen." He nodded his head over towards the palace where, up on a balcony overlooking the spectacle that had played out, was Agrippa's sister.

"And what possible good do you think she can do us?"

"She can be a level-headed voice of reason," Josephus hoped. "And with her brother away, she may be the one hope we have."



While Josephus and Yaakov discussed matters across the way at the tavern, Florus lounged on a great couch in his ornate dining hall, surrounded by various magistrates and their wives. His eyes wandered lewdly about as a number of female slaves served the guests wine and delicacies. In some cultures this may have been viewed as an affront to Florus' wife, who lounged on her own couch nearby, and perhaps it was. However, Roman law had a very different view of sexuality and what exactly constituted adultery. Intercourse between a married person and a slave or prostitute was both legally and socially acceptable. Of course Florus, unconscionable man that he was, still found himself lusting after certain wives from amongst his guests. In fact, several had only been invited so the procurator could leer and perhaps make a play for them later. A veiled promise or threat to the husband usually sufficed.

His lecherous thoughts were interrupted by the return of a centurion named Capito, the commander of the Jerusalem garrison, who Florus had dispatched to raze Upper Marketplace. The officer's hamata chain mail armor was splashed with what one could only assume was blood. His face was grim, and his hair matted with sweat. He carried his helmet under his left arm and saluted sharply as he entered the hall. Florus scarcely acknowledged him at first.

"The Upper Marketplace is cleared, sir," the centurion said.

"And how many of these troublesome Jews did you dispose of?" Florus asked, his mouth full of dates as he slurped his wine.

"At least three thousand fell by our blades in the forum," Capito replied. "My men assaulted a number of houses in the vicinity, and we estimate another five to six hundred perished this way. The streets run red with blood,

governor. I hope this will suffice and we can put an end to the violence."

"Yes, well…," Florus replied. He waved absently. "You are dismissed, centurion."

Capito saluted and quickly left the hall.

"You know, if this keeps up, you'll have these damnable Jews in open rebellion," a magistrate remarked with a drunken grin.

"I hope so," the procurator replied. "I'll not be able to afford many more of these dinner parties if they remain peaceable and, instead, send a formal complaint to the emperor. I've already received an admonishment from Gallus." The man he referred to was Cestius Gallus, the senatorial legate who governed nearby Syria and was Florus' direct superior.

"I wouldn't worry too much about Gallus," the magistrate replied. "He's never so much as set foot in Judea. But you know, after what happened today the Jews will undoubtedly send a formal complaint to him, so you'd best get a message off at once and beat them to it. Tell him they caused the disturbance and that your auxiliaries only fought in self-defense."

"Already on his way," Florus stated with a grin. "In fact, I sent an imperial messenger to Antioch as soon as I dispatched Capito to clear out Upper Marketplace."

"Master," a slave said quietly into Florus' ear, "there is a man from the entourage of Queen Berenice who insists on meeting you immediately."

"Indeed," the procurator said with irritation as he sat up. He then addressed his guests. "Forgive me, but official matters of state require my attention. Musicians, play on!"

The sounds of flutes and lyres resonated throughout the hall and down the long corridor as Florus made his way to the atrium where a well-dressed Jewish man in a green riding tunic awaited him. He wore a bronze breastplate and carried a long Parthian helmet under his arm.

"Well, what is it?" Florus growled.

"I am captain of her majesty's horse guard," the man replied with a bow. "I have been sent on behalf of my queen to ask that you cease in this unholy slaughter of our people. Your soldiers have taken many prisoners, some of them Roman citizens, though they were Jews by birth. We fear they have been badly treated, and the queen implores you to show clemency."

"Does she now?" Florus said, before taking a deep breath in through his nostrils. He exhaled slowly as he answered. "You run along and tell your queen that tomorrow morning she can come to the tribunal and see for herself

what I consider Roman mercy.” He then waved the man off, returning to his dinner party in a foul mood. Not even the advances of a pair of sultry maidens, acquired explicitly for his pleasure, could change his darkened demeanor. Decius Florus intended to show Queen Berenice, in the harshest of ways, who ruled Judea.

Chapter II: Tears of the Queen

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While her brother was paying a visit to Alexandria, Queen Julia Berenice came to Jerusalem. Word had reached her before she even arrived at the great city's gates of Florus' barbarism, and it upset her greatly. She rode to the tribunal in a litter, covered with translucent silks, and surrounded by an escort of a dozen armed guards.

The younger sister of King Agrippa II, she was thirty-eight years of age, slightly taller than average, with smooth olive skin, and a figure that was still shapely and firm, despite having borne two sons during her second marriage. She had been twice widowed and had fallen out with her third husband, King Polemon of Cilicia, soon after taking their vows. As such, she returned to the court of her brother, who installed her as his queen and equal. The act of having his own sister essentially named his consort had fueled rumors that there was an unnatural relationship between the two. Whether truth or fiction, it added a stain on what was otherwise an amicable relationship between the queen and her people. At the very least, they felt she had their interests at heart, more so than her brother.

The sight in front of the tribunal filled the queen with both revulsion and fear. Just behind a wall of auxiliary soldiers, at least a dozen Jewish men lay stricken in a growing pool of blood. Their bodies were covered in open lacerations, and the trauma of their injuries made Berenice wonder how any of them still lived. A handful of soldiers, Samaritan auxiliaries from the looks of them, carried corded whips, which they used to lash the men mercilessly. The queen cringed as one such whip slapped hard against a young man's back, where his robes had been torn away. He was covered in bleeding gashes. He gave a weakened cry of anguish, bringing immediate tears to Berenice's eyes.

"What is the meaning of this?" she chastised the soldiers, who stood shoulder-to-shoulder, preventing anyone from passing through. Only a small handful of onlookers dared linger, fearful they may be subjected to the same torments.

"Piss off, Jewish bitch," one of the soldiers sneered before spitting at her.

“How dare you!” Berenice snapped. “Do you not know who I am?”

“No,” another auxiliary retorted, “nor do any of us care who in the bleeding fuck you are. Best move along or else my friends here will show you how we deal with troublesome Jewish whores.” The man then prodded her roughly with the tip of his spear. In reality, the men knew exactly who Queen Berenice was; however, they had explicit orders from Florus not to allow her to interfere in the punishment of the rabble-rousers. He had further encouraged them to treat her with cruelty and spite.

Upon the sight of the auxiliaries harrying their queen, her guards immediately stepped forward to protect her, their curved swords drawn. The auxiliaries immediately lowered their spears and crouched into their fighting stances. There were at least fifty of them blocking the square, while Berenice’s guards numbered only a dozen.

“Stop!” she said quickly, raising her hand and backing away. “I’ll take this to the procurator and deal with him myself!”

Behind the auxiliaries, she could see the first of the hapless victims lifted onto a crucifix. The post fell into its hole with a loud thump, jolting the prisoner, who was barely conscious and bleeding from scores of fearsome gashes. Since executions by crucifixion were almost always restricted to the rock of Golgotha, outside the city, the executions of these men so publicly was meant to instill fear in the Jewish populace.

The queen, along with her escorts, quickly left the square and returned to her palace where she remained behind locked doors, fearful the Roman auxiliaries would make good on their threats towards her. Given her extreme distress over the plight of her people, she resolved to first show supplication to God before going to the procurator.

“Take these,” she said, handing her maidservant a pair of sheers. “Cut every lock of hair from my head.”

Her servant bowed, saddened at what she was ordered to do, for the queen’s dark brown hair was soft and luxuriant, and went down almost to her waist. Berenice simply closed her eyes and folded her hands in prayer as the young woman chopped her hair close to the scalp, the long locks falling in her face, onto her shoulders, and down to the floor. After several minutes, the servant brushed away any stray strands, her eyes tearing up as she witnessed the humbled sight of her mistress. Berenice paid her no mind, then kicked off her sandals.

“And now for thirty days I may not consume wine, and I must tread

across the ground barefoot," she stated. "And when I go to the procurator, I pray God will bend his ear, and he will find mercy in his heart for our people."



"The people mourn their dead, and many wailings can be heard from Upper Marketplace," an aid said to Florus, "but the people still are not ready for rebellion. Indeed, their priests are admonishing them to be compliant to the will of Rome and not cause further provocation."

"And to think, weak-willed men like Pontius Pilate used to complain about how volatile the Jews are!" Florus grumbled. "A little Roman steel cows them easily enough." He grinned sinisterly, as the doors to his chamber opened and Centurion Capito entered, escorting a Jewish woman and several high priests, including Hanan.

"Governor," Capito said, waving his hand towards Berenice, "Queen Berenice of Judea."

"Excellency," the queen said with a short nod.

"You are welcome, Queen Berenice," Florus replied. He stood from his chair on the dais and walked down the short steps, eyeing her from head to toe. "You come in here devoid of sandals on your feet and hair upon your head? What mockery is this?"

"No mockery," she replied, her hard gaze meeting his. "It is how we show supplication before God when we are in distress and needing His guidance."

"Indeed," Florus shrugged. He then proceeded to pace in front of her with his hands clasped behind his back. "And what is the source of your distress, my queen?"

"It is the scourging and crucifixions you have ordered in front of the tribunal…"

Her words were cut short when the procurator turned towards her, his face contorted in rage.

"You *dare* question my lawful execution of unruly traitors?" he barked at her. As his rebuke failed to move Berenice, he inwardly admitted he was impressed that his harsh tone had failed to overawe her.

"I'm not questioning the legality of your slaughter," the queen replied coldly. "All I ask is a demonstration of true Roman strength by showing

clemency. When one has the means and the right to kill but does not, that is true power."

"You want a demonstration of Roman strength?" Florus asked, stepping towards her.

Hanan and the elders instinctively took a step back, but Berenice remained firm.

Florus paused as their gazes locked for a moment. He then turned to the priest. "So be it. Hanan, there are two cohorts of soldiers coming up from Caesarea that will be arriving tomorrow. You will send a large delegation of your people to greet them along the way, to show they are indeed compliant to the rule of Rome."

"Very well," the former high priest said with a bow.

As Hanan and the others quickly left the chamber, the procurator turned to the queen once more. "Let us see if the people can show even half as much supplication to their Roman masters as they do to their God."

The queen gave a short nod, refusing to fully bow, and followed the priests out. As soon as she was out of earshot, Florus signaled to Centurion Capito.

"Send word to the commanders of the approaching cohorts," he directed. "Tell them not to return the salutations of the Jews who greet them. And if there be any provocative rumblings from the mob, they are to disperse them with clubs. Perhaps a little beating will set these people into action."

"Yes, sir," the centurion replied with a trace of reluctance in his voice, before saluting and leaving. Being of Samaritan ancestry, Capito certainly had no love for the Jews. However, he was not a murderer, and the orders he'd been given by the procurator over the past week turned his stomach. Still, he was a soldier, and he followed his orders.

Florus had not paid any mind to the various hostile factions within Judea. The Sicarii, Edomites, and assorted zealots would certainly have relished the opportunity to come to blows with Rome, but Florus had yet to focus his attention outside of Jerusalem. In fact, the procurator had never so much as visited the districts of Perea, Galilee, or indeed any other place outside of Jerusalem and his headquarters in Caesarea. Much less provocation would have been needed toward them to bring Judea to war. However, most of these sects were in a near constant state of war with each other, and they cared little if the people in Jerusalem were savagely tormented by the Romans.



“I’m telling you, it’s a trap!” Josephus protested. “One little mistake, and the Romans will fall upon us with their weapons and then claim we provoked them!”

Hundreds had gathered in the temple square that evening. All were distraught by the horrific slaughter already inflicted on the people. Many had just come from burying the dead fallen at Upper Marketplace; their clothes were torn from their sorrows.

“And what would you have us do?” a priest asked. “Ignore the procurator and have his soldiers inflict further slaughter upon our people?”

“We cannot fight them,” another spoke up, “we have no army!”

“Florus continues to deliberately provoke us,” Josephus said. “We have been plagued by corrupt governors ever since the death of King Agrippa I, yet none have been as wanton in their greed as he.”

“Josephus is right,” Hanan spoke up. “Florus is evil, and while he steals from us to fill his coffers, he tries to compel us into rebellion so as to hide his crimes from the emperor.”

“Rome is not our enemy,” Josephus continued, raising a hand in emphasis. “And we must make that known to them. Florus will do nothing but inflict further pain upon us unless we stop him. To send a multitude out to greet his soldiers is only asking for trouble. Let us not forget, the garrison in Judea is not made up of Roman legionaries, but auxiliaries drawn mostly from our hated enemies, the Samaritans.”

“And if we take our grievances to the Syrian legate, or even to the emperor, and they ignore us, what then?” the high priest, Ananias, asked. “Florus will not be procurator forever, and it would be prudent for us to wait him out.”

“And then what?” Hanan asked. “Take our chances with another equally corrupt governor? Do you think these magistrates don’t talk to each other? Unless we make a stand against him, Florus will simply let his successor know how easily cowed we are, and that they can rob us into starvation while sending their auxiliaries to bloody us into submission any time there is the slightest sign of unrest.”

Given their rent garments and faces filled with sadness and anxiety, it was clear the priests sympathized with Hanan and those filled with sedition. Ananias signaled to those on either side of him, who went into the temple.

Sounds of somber music soon came from within, and the musicians soon appeared, strumming the lyres and playing a melancholy tune upon their flutes. Sacrament vessels were carried out by some of the priests, along with the elaborate gold and silver candelabras.

"Behold, the intimate treasures of our people," a priest stated, "from the very heart of God's most sacred temple. Would you provoke the Romans into taking these precious gifts from you, or worse yet, destroy the very temple that God Himself had built?"

"Empires rise and fall by the will of God," another said. "And it is His divine will that gives Rome its power. We must respect that!"

The seditious crowd was suddenly quiet. Even Josephus' hardened heart knew the words to be true. It was especially difficult for him, given his history of friendship with the Romans.

"What benefit will it bring to the soldiers to have a salutation from the Jews?" Ananias further asked. "And tell me, what amendment of your affairs will it bring you, if you do not now go out to meet them? If the people salute them and act civilly, Florus will lose any initiative to begin a war; that we should thereby gain our country and freedom from any further sufferings. It would further be a sign that the people are of great want of command of themselves, should they yield to a few seditious persons. Hanan, you were once high priest of our people, it is, therefore, more befitting for you who still hold profound influence to compel the others to act soberly."

"Very well," the former high priest said. "Those who wish will go and greet the approaching soldiers. And I pray they will receive our entreaties in the peaceful manner in which they are meant."



Queen Berenice determined she should stand with the multitude who lined the road leading into Jerusalem the following day. Her bodyguards had remained at her palatial quarters, lest their presence provoke the soldiers. Thousands gathered along either side, approximately a mile from the gates. Still hundreds more watched from above the massive walls that lined the city. As she was still performing her vows of penance to God, the queen neither rode in her litter, nor did she so much as wear sandals upon her feet, which were now cut and bruised in numerous places.

"Highness, I wish you were not here," Josephus said with his head bowed

slightly. “Florus is determined to provoke war, and I fear our good intentions will bring further disaster this day.”

“My brother has not returned from Alexandria,” Berenice replied calmly, “therefore it falls to me to represent our people. What kind of a queen would I be if I simply stood back and let my subjects stand alone?”

“If the Romans turn on us, you could be a dead queen,” Josephus observed candidly. “You saw at the tribunal, they’ll show no mercy to monarch or peasant, should they feel provoked.”

“So be it,” the queen replied, folding her arms across her chest.

Josephus could not help but admire his queen for she had, thus far, shown a stouter heart filled with greater courage than any man he knew.



At the king’s palace, Florus waited with two cohorts of auxiliary soldiers. He wore his tribune’s armor and carried his plumed helmet under his arm.

“Are the walkways that lead from the Antonia Fortress to the temple secure?” he asked Centurion Capito, who had just returned from placing his infantry at tactical strongpoints leading from the gate to the temple.

“They are,” he replied.

“No doubt the mob will flee for the supposed safety of their temple,” Florus noted. “This alone will give us provocation to pursue them. And then the treasures of the temple will be mine!”

“Yours…or the emperor’s?” the centurion asked.

“Damn your impudence!” Florus snapped. “The emperor is a sad little madman who cares little for what goes on in the provinces this far from Rome. And I already have messages ready for the Syrian legate. Once the Jews meet violence with violence, he’ll care not for what provoked them, only that order be restored.”

Capito, who was standing behind Florus, shook his head but said no more.



“Here they come!”

Josephus and a number of the others strained their eyes to see the two columns of auxiliary infantry that marched along the road, just down a gentle

rise from where the multitudes now gathered. The area to the northwest of the city consisted of numerous rolling hills, dotted with the occasional small forest.

"There, in the distance," a man noted. "What are those dark shapes well to the left and right of them?"

"Cavalry," Josephus said, his face becoming hard. "Nothing was mentioned that Roman horsemen would be returning as well, yet that looks like an entire squadron on each flank." He then made his way through the mob and found Berenice. "My queen, I beg you, we must leave at once!"

"Why would we leave with the Romans now in sight?" she asked with irritation in her voice.

"Because three hundred mounted troops accompany them," Josephus replied. "Cavalry units are not stationed within Jerusalem, and two infantry cohorts marching up from Caesarea are never accompanied by such a sizeable escort. Believe me, highness, they come to fight!"

"No," the queen whispered, her countenance fallen. She took a deep breath, her voice shaking as she came to the bitter realization of the truth in Josephus' words. "What can we do?"

"That hill," Josephus said, pointing to a rise a quarter mile to the west. "There is a grove of trees we can watch from. They won't see you up there."

"But what of the people?" Berenice implored.

Knowing he could not compel the mob, which numbered several thousand, to disperse, Josephus sought out his friend, Yaakov, and grabbed him by his tunic. "Yaakov, you must come with us!"

"But aren't we supposed to greet the Roman column?" he asked, confused.

"It's a trap," Josephus replied. "Come, there's no time to explain."

The young man, who had always viewed Josephus as a mentor, immediately complied. The three of them quickly walked up the rocky slope, with the two men having to help their queen, whose feet were already raw and bloodied. The soft grass that grew within a grove of olive trees proved a welcome respite to her. From the higher ground they could see the two cohorts of auxiliary infantry, each numbering between four and five hundred men, marching up the road, now within a few hundred meters of the crowd. What they could also see, and what the people down below could not, were the two wings of cavalry making their way around the low hills in an attempt to envelop the masses.

"Ave, Romanus exercitus!" one of the priests who accompanied the throng said, attempting to show good will by speaking in Latin to the approaching soldiers.

This courtesy was lost upon the soldiers, who were all auxiliaries, mostly Samaritan. Only their centurions appeared to fully understand what the Jew was trying to say, yet they maintained their silence. Nor did they return the friendly waves and salutes the people rendered as they passed between them. That they were being so coldly ignored, despite being directed by the procurator to show supplication to the soldiers, both angered and confused the people.

"You see?" one of the more seditious men in the crowd said. "The Romans treat compliance and respect with scorn!"

"To hell with Florus and all corrupt governors!" another man spat.

As if this were a preplanned signal, the auxiliaries immediately dropped their packs and revealed large clubs they each carried. Florus had declared that since the mob would likely be unarmed, his men should refrain from drawing their swords unless they had no other option.

They fell upon the throng, smashing them with clubs and knocking people over with their shields. The priest who had first addressed the Romans with as much decorum as he could muster was among the first struck down. A large Samaritan trooper smashed him across the face with his cudgel, breaking both skin and cheekbone. The priest screamed in pain as he fell to the ground, writhing in agony as the Samaritan continued to beat him mercilessly about the face and body. Finally, a blow to the back of the head caused the poor man to stiffen, his eyes becoming lifeless as blood pooled under his shattered head.

As those closest to the auxiliaries were treated with equal savagery, screams of terror resonated from the crowd, and people immediately fled for the city gate. A cornicen sounded his horn, and scores of cavalry came at the gallop around the outer spurs off nearby hills. Wearing long robes with sandaled feet, the people were not as quick to move as they needed to be, and as the most fleet-footed reached the city gates, the auxiliary cavalry smashed into the mob on both sides, lances protruding forward. Showing no mercy to man or woman, young or old, they impaled with glee those unable to escape. Spears punctured flesh, bone, and vital organs as people fell screaming to the ground. Still even more were knocked down, either by their fellows, or by the

wall of cavalry, where they were subsequently trampled.

Up on the hill, Queen Berenice stood silently watching as tears streamed down both sides of her face. Neither Josephus nor Yaakov spoke as they watched dozens of people, who had once been friends and acquaintances, trampled in the onslaught. What they could not see was that there were those amongst the throng who, instead of fleeing in terror, were now resolved to fight back.



"The people spoke out against you, and the cohorts fell upon them with their clubs," Centurion Capito reported. "Many are now fleeing for the safety of the temple."

"Excellent!" Florus said with a gleeful smirk. "Send four cohorts into the temple via the causeway at the Antonia Fortress. And for this latest transgression, they will lose the sacred treasures of their holiest shrine."

Capito saluted and quickly left the chamber, dozens of soldiers following him. In truth, the centurion was sickened by this latest directive. He knew that whatever his troops plundered from the temple, it would not go to Rome, but rather to Florus. Still, like always, he followed his orders.

As hundreds of terrified citizens fled to the temple, others took up positions on the rooftops. The auxiliaries who pursued the fleeing mob were not expecting any form of resistance and, as such, they were scattered and not in any sort of formation. The first rock flung from the roofs caught a Samaritan trooper on the side of the helm, concussing him as he fell to the ground. Short throwing spears and the occasional arrow rained down upon them as well. Indignant shouts of surprise and pain came from the soldiers as more were felled. Despite several killed and a dozen or more wounded, the auxiliaries pressed on, viewing this attack as little more than the sting of a few maddened wasps. Being neither as well equipped, nor remotely as disciplined as legionaries, their attempts at maintaining formation and protecting each other from the raining projectiles proved futile.

Centurion Capito gritted his teeth in frustration as rocks and short throwing spears bounced off his shield, which he held overhead. His aggravation lay not with the rioting Jews, for he could not blame them for retaliating after what they'd been through. Rather he quietly cursed Florus

and all bureaucrats whose purely selfish motives led to violence and so many needless deaths. A rock smashed the face of an auxiliary soldier next to him, the man fell screaming to the ground as blood streamed through his fingers.

"There's the fortress," he said as calmly as he was able, as his men ran into the gigantic open plaza that surrounded both the Antonia, as well as the temple complex.

"People are still rushing for the main gate, sir," one of his men noted, pointing with his spear.

"They'll shut it before we can get there," the centurion replied. "We'll go in through the fortress and across the causeway that joins the two."

Capito led his men in through the main gate of the Antonia, where more than thirty years before a rather brazen band of rebels under a zealot named Jesus bar Abbas had tried to take the fortress and capture the procurator, Pontius Pilate. The centurion and his men ran through the main courtyard and up a long flight of stairs to the second landing, where the rope bridge causeway connected the fortress to the temple complex. As Capito reached the entranceway, he saw several auxiliaries hunkered down behind their shields.

"They're attempting to cut the bridge, sir!" one of the men said.

"Why aren't you stopping them?" the centurion asked in irritation.

If the Jews managed to sever the bridge, there would be no way for the Roman garrison to break into the temple complex. Its walls were sixty feet high, and it would take an army with siege towers to break in.

"We tried, but they have slingers and archers protecting them," another soldier replied. He nodded his head to where the centurion saw a dead auxiliary on the bridge, facedown with an arrow protruding from the side of his neck.

Two more lay sprawled on the ground below. Capito had just turned back to order his men to follow him over when the support ropes on the left side snapped, causing the bridge to flop to one side, sending the corpse of the lone soldier tumbling unceremoniously onto the ground twenty feet below. Within a minute the right-hand ropes were severed, and the bridge fell from the far side and slammed against the wall of the fortress with a loud slap. The cheers of dozens of Jewish rioters could be heard from the far side.

"Damn it all," the centurion muttered.



It seemed strange to the outside observer that Florus was none too concerned over the violence that had erupted, since his returning cohorts attacked the throng that greeted them on the way to the city. Secretly, he wondered why it had taken them so long to fight back against the savagery of his soldiers.

Following the violence, Queen Berenice made her way to the king's palace, accompanied by Josephus. Yaakov returned to the queen's quarters to summon members of her guard to protect her, in case her confrontation with Florus took a bad turn. The queen's feet were swollen and covered in bloody scabs. Her eyes were swollen, her cheeks red and streaked with tears. Still it impressed Josephus that her voice kept its composure as she addressed the procurator.

"Your soldiers have done enough!" she snarled at him, contemptuous of his authority or what he might order his soldiers to do.

"My soldiers will have done enough when they run down these perpetrators who dared insult the magistrate of Rome," he replied coolly.

"Sir, the causeway leading to the temple complex has been severed," an auxiliary trooper said as he ran into the foyer where the procurator and his entourage waited. Seeing the procurator's face twist into a snarl told Berenice what she already suspected.

"So, were your men pursuing renegades?" she asked, "or were they going to steal the treasures from the temple for you?"

Florus glared at the queen, but said nothing. Whatever his brazenness, Berenice knew that were the procurator to order her apprehended or harmed in any way, it would shatter any alliances with the house of Herod. This would bring the emperor's wrath down upon him, and Florus sought to keep the government in Rome out of the affairs of Judea.

"Send for the Sanhedrin," he ordered one of his aids. "And be sure they bring Hanan with them."

Chapter III: Hatred Grows

Camp of the Tenth Legion, Fretensis
Raphaneae, Syria
May, 66 A.D.
***

"Stand ready!" the young decanus shouted.
It was a warm spring afternoon at the fortress of the Tenth Legion in Syria, hundreds of miles away from the chaos of Jerusalem. His legionaries, all in full armor, each carrying a wicker practice shield and wooden sword, hunkered into his fighting stance. Shield forward with one foot, the opposite foot staggered behind the other. A thick six-foot post was planted in the ground in front of each soldier.

The man's name was Gaius Artorius Armiger. His family, the Artorians, had a distinguished military reputation, with Gaius' father and grandfather both retiring as high-ranking centurions and earning their place amongst the lesser nobility of Rome, known as the *equites*. Because he had not been born into the class and, additionally, because he had an older brother, Gaius' prospects were dim. His brother, Lucius, had been able to secure a minor political post in Rome with the censors, yet this had expended the family's political and financial capital. The thought of learning a civilian trade appalled him, and so Gaius had elected to join the ranks as a legionary as soon as he came of age at seventeen. His mother, like all before her, fretted over her youngest son running off to the army, especially when he was posted thousands of miles from home, in the remote east. And yet his father, who spent several years in Judea, could not have been more proud.

Gaius was now twenty-four years of age and had served with the Tenth Legion, Fretensis, in the east during the entire duration. It had been during the Parthian Campaign under Domitius Corbulo a few years prior that he'd been promoted to decanus, sergeant of legionaries. Each decanus had a squad of up to seven legionaries under his charge, with ten squads forming a century under the command of a centurion and optio. Six centuries formed the cohort with ten cohorts in a legion. In total, over five thousand of Rome's finest soldiers served in the Tenth Legion.

Already a hardened combat veteran despite his lack of years, Gaius took

his posting with utter seriousness, and he was determined to make his soldiers the best in the legion.

"Shield strikes…go!"

Each legionary punched his practice shield, which was double the weight of their service scutum, against the large training stakes. Though a contubernium, or squad, consisted of seven legionaries and a decanus, there seemed to always be vacancies. The barracks room which Gaius and his men occupied had two empty bunks.

The decanus walked around each of his five legionaries and made corrections as he went. *"Watch your feet, Corbo! If you miss, you'll fall flat on your face! Widen your stance, Decius, unless you want some Parthian to knock you flat on your ass!"* After about a minute's time, he gave his next command, *"Groin and throat strikes…go!"*

His men now stabbed with their practice gladii at the lines marked for where the groin and neck would be on an average enemy combatant.

"Sergeant Artorius!" a voice shouted from the edge of the practice field.

"At ease," Gaius told his men before quickly walking over to see the source of the call.

It was Nicanor, the optio and, therefore, second-in-command of the century. Seven years older, he had been Gaius' decanus during the Parthian campaign and was both his mentor, as well as his best friend.

"A little remedial training, I see," the optio noted.

"The brothel had some new 'stock' come in, and they were out more than a little late last night," Gaius remarked. "Damn fools almost missed formation this morning!"

"I hadn't noticed."

"That's because I gave them all a swift kick in the backside to get them out the door," the decanus said candidly. "This extra training will ensure they never risk embarrassing me like that again. And besides, a little remedial weapons drill is far more productive than putting them on shit-shoveling detail."

"Nice," Nicanor replied, his arms folded and mind clearly elsewhere. "We need to talk."

Gaius turned to his squad, who were all sweaty and panting from their exertions. "You lads caught a break for now! Be back here after supper for another hour of drill. *Dismissed!*"

The legionaries all breathed sighs of relief as they made their way back to

the barracks and out of the midday heat. Gaius and Nicanor walked over to a large awning with palm leaves lashed together as cover, and a number of long wooden tables beneath.

"I'll be joining them," Gaius added, "since it's my own damn fault they were out late." The two sat across from each other on benches, and when Nicanor did not speak for a moment, the decanus asked, "So what has you so clearly vexed?"

"Possible trouble in Judea," Nicanor replied. "It's all just rumor at the moment, but you know Centurion Marius has all sorts of sources within the province."

"As do you," Gaius noted.

Though his father and grandfather had served in Judea, it had been many years before he was even born, and there were no ties or connections within the province for him to speak of. Nicanor, on the other hand, had been raised in Caesarea and had formed a number of childhood friendships amongst many of the Jews. He could also both speak and read Hebrew and Aramaic.

"Well, my sources are friends of my youth, not paid informants like the centurions," Nicanor observed. "They are reluctant to write to me regarding any of their grievances, lest the letter be intercepted and read by unfriendly eyes."

"Yes, that would not bode well for you or them."

"Quite," the optio continued. "I did, however, receive a rather candid message from a friend named Josephus. He went into detail on the excessive taxes levied by the procurator, Decius Florus, who seems to be the latest in a string of incompetent bureaucrats attempting to govern Judea in recent years."

"My father knew Florus," Gaius said. "He said he was a far greedier prick than any man he knew, that he would sell his own mother into slavery if the price was right."

"Your father was more accurate than he knew," Nicanor added. "I have no reason to doubt Josephus, who last year was sent as an emissary to Rome where he managed to get a number of Jewish political prisoners set free. Anyway, he said that Florus demanded seventeen talents in gold, on top of what was already paid in taxes."

Gaius whistled in reply, though his face showed he was not surprised. "No doubt the Sanhedrin can afford it," he noted.

"Of course they can," his friend remarked. "However, they will make up

the loss by demanding an even greater tribute be paid to the temple from the Pharisees and the common people. Let's not kid ourselves, it is the working peasant class that always gets fucked by the wealthy in the end."

"What does he expect you to do about it?" Gaius asked. "You're an optio in the legions, hardly one to make a difference in political matters of state."

"You're right. I think he was simply venting to a friend, one who was not a Jew. And I also think it may have been a subtle warning of what is to come, should Florus prove implacable."

"Well, it's been a few years since this legion was involved in a decent scrap," Gaius noted. "I saw my first and last action at Tigranocerta."

"Yes, I remember you were a little put off when you were assigned to the onager crews," Nicanor said, remembering well the look of disgust on the young soldier's face when told he'd be manning a catapult instead of fighting on the line with his mates. "And who would have thought you'd be the one to fire the head of a decapitated enemy general over the walls, only to have it land right in the middle of their assembled council!"

"Our commanding legate said he wanted us to instill fear into the enemy," Gaius shrugged. "We set the catapult to maximum elevation, and I had it turned towards where it looked like the highest and most important buildings lay. Hell, I was afraid the damn thing was going to splatter on one of the rooftops!"

"Instead, it lands amongst the gathering of nobles. The city promptly surrendered without a fight, and Legionary Gaius Artorius Armiger is subsequently promoted to decanus."

"It probably helped that you were promoted to optio not long before," Gaius thought aloud.

Nicanor could only shrug. "All I did was let the centurion know who fired the shot that scared the Armenians into immediate capitulation."

"And what will happen now?" Gaius asked, back in the present once more. "It was one thing to battle Parthians and Armenians who we had no personal ties to. How will you handle it if, in fact, Judea erupts in rebellion and you have to face old friends?"

"I am a soldier of Rome," Nicanor emphasized. "I will do my duty, as I am certain Josephus will do his."



“The violence has ceased,” Hanan said, once more speaking for the Sanhedrin, the day after the skirmish. “We ask that we be allowed to bury our dead, and the people be no more assailed by your soldiers.”

“If you do not stop these attacks,” Ananias added, “we cannot vouch for the safety of you or any Roman citizens within Judea. The entire province will erupt in rebellion!”

Florus was still angered at losing the chance at plundering the temple itself. However, he still had the seventeen talents in gold, albeit much of that would have to be used in paying bribes to keep the disturbances in Judea from the emperor’s ears. Nero, deranged madman that he was, was touring Greece and a number of the eastern provinces, and any word of trouble might bring him to Syria and Judea.

“I am leaving Jerusalem and returning to Caesarea,” Florus said at last to the assembled members of the Sanhedrin. “I am satisfied the matters have been concluded and will leave you with whatever garrison you think is fit to maintain order.”

It was a leading offer, if the Sanhedrin asked that all Roman soldiers leave Jerusalem, the procurator, no doubt, would view this as an affront to imperial power and would likely unleash his auxiliaries on the populace once again. Still, they knew they had the welfare of the people to consider.

“Leave us four cohorts,” Ananias answered. “All we ask is they not be soldiers who took part in the violence against our people. There are still many bitter feelings, and to see the same men who drew blades against them will only lead to further backlashes of violence.”

“Granted,” Florus replied. “I will take the rest and return to Caesarea at once. And don’t bother having the people wave or send us off with any fanfare.” The mockery and condescension in his last remark could be felt by all.



In Antioch, Syria, the governing legate, Cestius Gallus, was deeply troubled when a week later he received dispatches from both Florus, as well as the Jewish Sanhedrin. Gallus was in his early forties and, though commanding legate of the Twelfth Legion, Fulminata, he had no actual combat experience to speak of. His command of the Twelfth came in conjunction with his senatorial governorship of Syria. He was an able enough

administrator, but he hoped whatever troubles may arise in the east would not be more than his subordinate procurators could handle with their auxiliaries. Of course, there were other legions he could call upon should a serious crisis arise. He quietly hoped that would not be necessary as he showed the two messages to his chief tribune, Neopolitanus.

"What do you make of this?" the legate asked after giving the young man enough time to read both accounts.

"Florus is very vague in his descriptions," the chief tribune replied. "He simply says the Jews rose up in rebellion, protesting taxes, which is nothing new. The level of violence is what perplexes me. If the Jews were actually openly rebelling, I doubt they would have allowed Florus to return to Caesarea unmolested. And any sign of rebellion would most certainly entice the various splinter groups of zealots to cause trouble."

"He says he returned to Caesarea after the Jews cut down the causeway between the Antonia Fortress and the Temple of Herod," Gallus added. "The letter from the Sanhedrin confirms this, but it does not verify why they felt the need to." The legate then decided to call an assembly of his senior magistrates, as well as the leadership of the Twelfth Legion.

"We need to ascertain the truth to these countering allegations," the master centurion said, soon after Gallus had briefed everyone on the situation. "I suggest we take the entire legion into Judea. If the procurator's accusations of rebellion prove true, then we can crush it underfoot before it spreads. Gods know the entire province is ripe for an insurrection."

"And if it proves false," a centurion of the elite First Cohort spoke up, "we can settle the affairs of Rome on surer footing. Both Florus and the Sanhedrin will be on their best behavior with an imperial legate and five thousand legionaries camped outside their capital."

"Perhaps," Gallus said while sitting with his chin resting in his hand. "However, it will take at least two weeks to uproot the entire legion and march all the way from here into Jerusalem. Juno knows what could happen during that time if it is, indeed, a rebellion in the works. Hell, these letters are dated a week ago already."

"What then, sir?" Neopolitanus asked.

"You, my chief tribune, will act as emissary for me," the legate directed. "King Agrippa has been in Alexandria for the past two months and should be returning to his kingdom in northern Judea soon. I think the Sanhedrin will

petition him personally for assistance, that is where you must go."

"Where is that?" the chief tribune asked.

"Gaza," Gallus explained. "Take a handful of men to act as your escorts and set sail for the port city of Gaza. You should be able to reach it by ship in a couple days. The people there will know if Agrippa has passed through, in which case you can catch him readily enough. And if not, simply wait there for his arrival. Have him escort you to Jerusalem, and from there you will find out the truth behind this so-called rebellion."

Chapter IV: Failure of the Herodians

Gaza, Judea
June, 66 A.D.
***

The month after Florus' departure was one of mourning within Jerusalem. The city was a sprawling metropolis that housed as many as half a million souls, and yet with over four thousand killed and several times as many beaten and injured, it seemed every person mourned for someone struck down by the wave of violence. Men, even the high priests, ripped their garments, while women wailed and chanted lamentations.

It was word of such expressions of grief that greeted King Agrippa as he journeyed back from Alexandria. He arrived by ship to the city of Gaza, where he was greeted by more than twenty elders and members of the Sanhedrin from Jerusalem. Along with them was his sister, Queen Berenice. Her month-long supplication complete, she now wore her sandals once more and allowed herself to be carried about in a litter. Though her hair had begun to grow back, for the time being she kept the top of her head covered beneath a silken scarf. Along with the queen and members of the Sanhedrin, Agrippa noted a Roman wearing the armor of a chief tribune. As this meant he was of the senatorial class, and therefore senior to Florus, the king suspected something was amiss. The procurator himself, or at least one of his aids, should have been the ones to greet King Agrippa, instead of a man who was by class his superior. It was this Roman who the king first decided to address.

"Hail, most noble emissary of Rome," he said with a bow and open arms. In truth, he felt more at ease speaking with Romans than fellow Jews. Like his father, Agrippa had been raised in Rome from the time he was a small boy, he had a Roman name, and though now ruler of a portion of the former Kingdom of Judah, to most of his people he was a foreigner.

"Greetings, King Agrippa," Neopolitanus said with a respectful nod. "I come on behalf of Legate Cestius Gallus of Syria. There are some grave matters that we must discuss." The king raised an eyebrow at this, and his sister was quick to explain.

"There has been much violence in Jerusalem, wrought by the procurator against the people."

“Thousands were slain, and all based on false presumptions,” a member of the Sanhedrin added.

“Legate Gallus has sent me to ascertain the truth about these conflicting claims,” Neopolitanus said quickly, “for the procurator has insisted the Jews started the fighting, whereas their claim is that the auxiliary soldiers attacked them unprovoked. Therefore, Gallus has instructed you to accompany me to Jerusalem at once. I feel I should offer you my apologies, as I know you are doubtless anxious to return home.”

“It is understandable,” Agrippa replied.

Though the Romans had been courteous enough to formulate their directive as a request, in truth, the king was subservient to his imperial overlords and had no choice but to obey. His being an independent sovereign was little more than a façade.

During the five-day trek to Jerusalem, the king shared his oversized litter with his sister during the day, so they could converse in private. His concerns were much larger than just the slaughter of thousands of Jerusalem’s citizens. While he doubted Florus’ accusations of rebellion, he knew the Jews well enough to know their incessant hatred for Rome and that they were among the most unruly peoples in the entire empire.

“I watched the soldiers fall upon the people outside the city,” Berenice said, shuddering as she remembered the horror of the slaughter. “They may have shouted a few provocative words, but tell me, brother, when did that warrant rampaging murder?”

“Now that I have returned, I doubt Florus will be so blatant in his hostility,” Agrippa replied, deflecting the question. “What we must do is make certain the more seditious sects don’t attempt to use this to start their own rebellions. Imagine if the zealots, or worse the Sicarii, gain the confidence and control of the people!”

Berenice shuddered at the idea. “The zealots are fanatics,” she said. “They would see everything we’ve worked for over the last hundred years destroyed, because they view any who do not follow them blindly as traitors. And the Sicarii…well, they are nothing but murderers who care not whether they butcher Jew, Samaritan, Greek, or Roman.”

“The people are mostly sheep,” her brother added with a trace of contempt. “And right now, though they have a certain level of inborn hostility towards the wealthy classes of the Sadducees, they are not yet murdering the rich in their beds like the Sicarii would have them doing. As

unfair as the class system is amongst these people, if the Sadducees lose power, then it will be anarchy. The masses will follow whatever a zealot leader or local messiah tells them to do, and they will be so bent on spilling the blood of each other they won't even be able to fight against the Romans."

"I notice that you always say things like *'these'* people rather than *'our'* people," Berenice observed.

"Let's not pretend, dear sister," the king replied. "You and I were both raised in Rome, as was our father. We may be the great-grandchildren of Herod the Great, but we were raised as Romans. The only reason our father was installed as King of the Jews was because he was a lifelong friend of Emperor Claudius."

"And when Father died, you and I were only given fractions of what had once been his kingdom," Berenice noted.

"We were still very young then," Agrippa noted. "The people accept us because they loved our father, despite his deep association with, and influence by, the Romans. It gave them the closest they've had to independence since Pompey Magnus first annexed Syria and then Judea over a hundred and twenty years ago. They accept us, even though Jerusalem is not technically within our lands, because as long as the line of the Herodians exists, they have at least a thread of autonomy from Rome. Without us, they would be completely at the mercy of the empire."

"And to maintain that, we must keep the peace through the Sadducees and the Sanhedrin," the queen remarked. She then paused before stating what both of them understood. "If they should lose power, and the kingdom falls into rebellion, then we must side with Rome."

"As if we had any other choice," Agrippa said. "And even if we could feasibly choose sides, I'll take the mad Emperor Nero before I ever leave my fate to those disgusting zealots."



On the fifth day from Gaza, King Agrippa elected to ride his horse into Jerusalem, so as to be best seen by the people who awaited his arrival. He wore modest robes of dark green, laced with gold; something he found dignified, but not too ostentatious, given the somber nature of his visit. His entourage was large, for it included the majority of his household staff, numerous magistrates and officials, his and Berenice's personal guards, as

well as the small number of Roman cavalrymen who accompanied Chief Tribune Neopolitanus. Merchants, who had departed Jerusalem for wherever their business led them, turned back and made for the city when they saw the king approaching. Word quickly spread and, at first, dozens, then hundreds of people began to throng the sides of the road. By the time Agrippa and his large train of followers were within a mile of the city, there were at least ten thousand awaiting him outside the gates. The most vocal, and who made sure they were seen first, were the wives and mothers of those slain by Florus' rampaging cohorts.

"Our king, we beseech you!" an older woman wailed as she fell to her knees in front of Agrippa's horse. One of his guards made to shove the woman aside, but he was restrained by none other than the Roman officer, Neopolitanus.

"What is your grievance, woman?" he asked as she noticed him for the first time.

"Oh…please, noble Roman, we beg of you to help us," the old woman replied, regaining her composure as she rose to her feet. "I have lost my husband, as well as my son, to those murdering vagabonds unleashed by Governor Florus. They came here, on the procurator's own directive, to greet his soldiers as they came up from Caesarea. And instead, the soldiers smashed them with clubs and trampled them with their horses!"

"Our men were unarmed!" another woman shouted. "Just like the poor souls they murdered in Upper Marketplace days before!"

"We know of this," the chief tribune replied, "and we have come to find the truth behind whether the fighting was started by the Jews, or by Florus' soldiers." He deliberately avoided using the term 'Roman', for he did not wish it to sound that Rome herself was in any way implicated.

"I will hear all at the palace," Agrippa replied. He further prodded the crowd, "And I know that your quarrel is not with Rome, but with one man. And therefore I will hear your complaints against him, as will this noble officer, who acts as emissary for the Syrian legate and speaks on his authority."

The remaining trek into the city and to King Herod's palace took more than two hours, for the way was packed with multitudes of people anxious to see the king, as well as to air their protests against Florus. Once at the palace, Agrippa left the settling in of his household staff to his chamberlain, though they would only be in Jerusalem for a few days. He immediately took his

place upon the throne in the large audience chamber, where he was joined by both Berenice and Neopolitanus. A few of the widows from the massacre were allowed into the chamber, as were several of the high priests and members of the Sanhedrin, including Hanan, who was accompanied by Josephus. Ananias, though present, was deferring to the more influential Hanan in this matter. The king sat quietly and showed great patience, as numerous women told him their sorrowful tales in explicit detail.

When the last had pleaded her case, Hanan finally said calmly, “Sire, we must make it plain that our grievances are not with Rome, but with one man alone. You have our word against his and his soldiers, and you cannot know for certain what actually transpired here.”

“How then, would you have us determine the validity of your arguments against Florus?” the king asked.

“A demonstration,” Hanan said animatedly. “Let us show this noble Roman officer firsthand that our quarrel is not with Rome, and the people wish to live in peace under imperial rule.” As a member of the Sadducees, Hanan had as much, if not more, to lose than King Agrippa, should the wealthy ruling class lose control over the masses. But more importantly, he had genuine compassion for the people, and both Pharisee and Sadducee trusted him completely. It was only the radicals who despised the former high priest. As such, his word meant more to the people than any, even the king’s.

“How then do you propose we show this?” Agrippa asked further.

“Have…I mean, *ask* him to walk the streets of Jerusalem, alone except for a single servant, during the day when the city is at its liveliest. He can see for himself that the people mean no harm, and in turn he can show that Rome is of no threat to them.”

Neopolitanus’ eyes grew wide at the suggestion, and he glanced over at the king to gage his thoughts.

“It would be a good gesture,” Agrippa said, keeping his eyes on Hanan. “If you went from here as far as Siloam in the east neighborhoods of the city, then many would see you, and you could interact with people as you please.”

“Very well,” the chief tribune replied. He then leaned over to the king and said quietly, “Just know that if anything happens to me, Rome will raze Jerusalem to a pile of ash.”

“Your threats are not necessary, Excellency,” Hanan said, catching Neopolitanus off guard. “I assure you, the people wish to live in peace with Rome, as you will see for yourself.”

The chief tribune did not realize he had been heard. “I will do as you ask, in the morning.” He stood to excuse himself from the hall. “And then we shall see what the people of Jerusalem wish their relationship with Rome to be.”

The night passed nervously for all, especially for Hanan and the Sanhedrin. His greatest fear was that the seditionists, who were far from placated by having King Agrippa and a Roman envoy hearing their grievances, would create havoc or threaten to do harm to the chief tribune. The zealots did not occupy Jerusalem, though there was little doubt they knew about King Agrippa’s return and subsequent visit to the city. Hanan just hoped they would stay away long enough for Neopolitanus to see for himself how docile the common people were, and be satisfied. The former high priest knew once the Roman left, he and Agrippa would still have to deal with the seditionists, who were growing in number and threatening to invite the zealots into Jerusalem. His own protégé, Josephus, was remarkably undecided as to where his loyalties lay. Of course he was loyal to the Judea, but he was starting more and more to think their only salvation would be through force. Hanan would only accept that as a last resort, and even then he would try for a peaceful conclusion as soon as possible.

As morning came, Neopolitanus donned his chief tribune’s armor, along with his ornate helmet, crested by a tall, dark plume. He wore a deep red cloak over his left shoulder, which partially covered the scabbard to his gladius. He was not so trusting as to go out into the city unarmed. However, he knew the best way to get an answer for Gallus was to try Hanan’s plan and go into the city alone. His only companion was a household servant who would act as interpreter. The streets were certainly full of people, and like any other large city they moved about like ants, frantic to get to their place of business. Most either ignored or simply did not notice the Roman officer. And as Neopolitanus walked through the crowded streets and marketplaces, he reckoned the people of Jerusalem were in many ways like those in Antioch, Athens, or even Rome. They dressed differently, spoke different languages, and worshiped different gods. Yet in the daily chaos of the vast metropolises of the civilized world, they went about their day like any other.

In the lesser congested areas a few people smiled and greeted the Roman officer, often with something in their native tongue, but a few would give him an *“Ave”* in Latin as a show of respect. After about three hours, he arrived at

a neighborhood that overlooked a large pool.

“The Pool of Siloam,” the guide explained. “It dates from the time of King David. There are some who think it has healing powers.”

“Indeed,” the chief tribune replied. He walked down a large flight of wide stone steps leading to the pool. He knelt by the edge, removed his helmet, and splashed the cool water over his face and neck. “I’ll not cause offense by this, I hope,” he said.

“No, Excellency,” the servant replied. “If anything, it shows you respect the healing powers of the waters.”

“Well, it is nice and cool,” the chief tribune chuckled as he donned his helmet once more. “This has been an uneventful morning, which I suppose is for the best.”

He expedited his move back to the palace, only chancing the occasional glance to see if the people’s demeanor had changed at all. There were the occasional salutations, though mostly the people paid no mind to the Roman. In truth, he was glad for it, for too many greetings, or worse, gross fawning by the people, would have appeared as false flattery. As soon as he returned to the palace, he had King Agrippa and the high priests call together the elders and leaders of the city, gathering them at the outside tribunal, where only a little over a month prior Florus had scourged and crucified many of their friends.

“Leaders of the Jewish nation,” the chief tribune began. “Today I ventured, alone except for a single servant, into the heart of your great city. I even went so far as to refresh myself at the pool in Siloam. The people greeted me with respect and showed proper obedience to Rome. I see now they only were displeased by the barbarity of Governor Florus. I commend you for this, and further implore you to maintain the peace, that we may continue in the spirit of cooperation and friendship from this day forth.”

“Excellency, what of Florus?” Hanan asked pointedly.

“I shall report to Gallus what I have observed here,” Neopolitanus replied. “And I will make certain he knows the Jewish people do not shoulder grievances against Rome. Therefore, one should not expect any further aggression from Governor Florus.” He extended his hand to King Agrippa. “I now bid you farewell.”



Though he had hoped the Roman officer would be able to give a more definitive answer, King Agrippa was satisfied that he had done all he could to keep the peace in Jerusalem, and as such made ready to depart the city two days later. It was during this brief interlude the seditionists came back out in force. Many were now demanding that deputations be sent directly to Emperor Nero, as they were dissatisfied with how Legate Gallus handled the crisis.

"He sends a lackey, instead of coming himself!" one man scoffed.

"The emperor is supposedly touring the provinces in Greece and Asia Minor," another added. "Let us send him a message that we will not live under these oppressive conditions anymore!"

"Have the people assemble at the house of the Asamoneans," the king replied, exacerbated that the unrest was not ended as hoped. "I will address their grievances there."

The house he spoke of was over the gallery at the passage to the upper city, where the bridge joined the temple to the gallery. It was an open area that allowed as many people as possible to see and hear the king. It was also where he had placed his sister during his stay in Jerusalem. She, too, joined him on the balcony as Agrippa addressed the assembled masses that came to hear him. He had prepared his words carefully, knowing their impact could either maintain the peace, or provoke the people into all out rebellion.

"People of Jerusalem!" he said, raising his arms in an attempt to silence their constant ramblings and hostile shouts to overthrow the rule of Rome. *"I have heard your cries of distress, and your grievances have been answered. Why then do you still make the call for war? Do you not know the abject suffering you will inflict upon our people?"*

"You're nothing more than a damned Roman lapdog!" one man shouted back. "You care nothing for the Jews or what those bastards have done to us!"

The king closed his eyes and fought to maintain his composure. *"Had I perceived that you were all zealously disposed to go to war with the Romans, and that the purer and more sincere part of the people did not propose to live in peace, I had not come out to you, nor been so bold as to give you counsel…"* He spoke long and earnestly, and gradually the multitude grew quiet and listened to his words. His speech lasted for over an hour, and in it he not only reprimanded those who would call to strike down the very masters God had appointed over them, but further the brutal retribution they

would face should they remain defiant against the most powerful empire the world had ever seen. He cited examples from antiquity, of the Spartans and Greeks, who had stood against Xerxes and the Persian Empire, and yet had been powerless against the might of Rome. He gave more recent examples, in Gaul and Germania, and even in Britannia, where the people were both valiant and great warriors, yet were slaughtered like sheep when facing the imperial legions.

Having reinforced fear to keep the people in line, the king, at the end of his lengthy discourse, implored the people with compassion. *"Have pity, therefore, if not on your children and wives, yet upon this your metropolis, and its sacred walls; spare the temple, and preserve the holy house, with its holy furniture, for yourselves; for if the Romans get you under their power, they will no longer abstain from them, when their former abstinence shall have been so ungratefully requited. I call to witness your sanctuary, and the holy angels of God, and this country common to us all, that I have not kept back anything that is for your preservation; and if you will follow that advice which you ought to do, you will have that peace which will be common to you and to me; but if you indulge four passions, you will run those hazards which I shall be free from."*

The people remained silent, and Agrippa found himself moved to tears, as was Berenice. Many amongst the gathered crowd were women with their young children, as well as the elderly. Whatever his hard heart was towards the common people, Agrippa found himself looking into the faces of young boys and girls, and he knew that if he failed to stop this uprising, then they would be shown no more mercy than the most seditious of the zealots. He pitied them, and knew that in war, especially against Rome, the innocent suffered as much as the guilty.

"We do not fight against the Romans, but Florus!" the first man finally shouted from below. Numerous mutterings of agreement were heard, and Agrippa raised his hands once more.

"The people have now fallen behind on their taxes to Caesar!" Agrippa responded. "And by doing so, not to mention severing the cloisters between the temple complex and the Antonia Fortress, you make war upon Caesar and Rome. Call in the taxes owed, and I promise you this, no more Judean coin will fall into the hands of Florus!"

Agrippa allowed himself to remain in Jerusalem a further week while the

cloisters were rebuilt and the district leaders sent out their tax collectors to bring in what was owed to Rome. It was on his day of departure that the king elected to address the people one last time. Sadly, it would prove to be his undoing.

"You have done well," he said to the Sanhedrin. "The cloisters are rebuilt, and the taxes have come in from the outlying districts. It is time for the tributes to be paid to Rome."

"By that you mean Florus?" Hanan asked with furrowed brow.

"Until he is removed by the emperor, he is still procurator," Agrippa replied, aggravated that there may be further squabbling. "I implore all of you to obey Florus as the rightful representative of Caesar, until such time as he is replaced."

"And then what?" a voice snapped. All turned to see a young man with close cropped hair and a shaven face. His name was Eleazar bar Ananias, the son of the current high priest. A member of the zealots, who had also been recently named governor of the temple since his return from the nearby region of Perea, his relationship with his father was quietly hostile at best. "You say we should just wait to see if and when the emperor replaces Florus, and with who? Another tyrant? Piss on you, Agrippa, you are no king of the Jews!"

"How dare you speak to the king this way!" Ananias barked at his son. "He is the rightful ruler…"

"And to hell with you, *Father*," Eleazar sneered. "This man is raised in Rome, is named after a bloody Roman, and yet he pretends to be a Jew!" As he spoke, numerous others started shouting agreements with him and hurling insults at both Agrippa as well as Berenice. It was then noted a number of zealots had, in fact, accompanied the young man to Jerusalem, and were part of his personal entourage.

Eleazar continued, "Know this: the temple of Jerusalem will no longer accept sacrifices on behalf of any foreigner; the cult of the emperors is finished; and Caesar can take his tributes and shove them up his bloated ass!"

The crowd, supplemented by numerous zealots who'd come in from the outlying districts, became increasingly hostile, with several men even going so far as to hurl stones at Agrippa and the high priests.

"Impudent bastards!" the king shouted. He then turned to Ananias and the other elders. "I leave this rabble to you. See to it that the tribute gets to Caesar, or God help you all!"

Chapter V: Anarchy and Civil War

Jerusalem
August, 66 A.D.
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Hanan feared there would soon be no turning back. The infiltration of the zealots into the community was quickly unraveling the peace that he and the others had so desperately tried to maintain. The appointment of Eleazar as governor of the temple by his father had been an attempt to promote unity, yet the results had been disastrous.

"I fear what will happen if we fall under the control of these uncompromising fanatics," Hanan confided to Josephus one evening. He found he was entrusting more private information to the young man as a means of gaining his confidence. "They'll accept nothing but complete independence from Rome, which will prove difficult, the might of their legions aside. And even if successful, they will not accept the legitimacy of any government not led by the most radical of their own leaders. To compound matters, there are many outlying districts that are decidedly pro-Roman, and they will not give up lightly the benefits of imperial rule to live under extremist hardliners. What's worse, the fanatics are not even united; they hate each other as much as they do the Romans. It will mean anarchy and civil war!"

"We would lose everything," Josephus replied. Like Hanan, he feared the radicals even more so than the Romans. At least with Rome a peace could be negotiated. He shook his head. "Eleazar has already banned sacrifices in the temple on behalf of the emperor. What can we do?"

"Unfortunately, our only choice to preserve the temple, as well as prevent total chaos, is to petition those we detest the most for aid."

"You mean the Romans?" Josephus asked, horrified at the notion. "That will mean even more reckless killing."

"Then we must look to help from the king," Hanan surmised. "Agrippa neither wants the nobility overthrown nor does he want the people to suffer needlessly. It is, therefore, to him we must implore to send reinforcements to restore order."

"The high priest is in a deep state of grief over his son joining the

fanatics," Josephus observed. "As the unrest and disorder spread, I feel, more and more, the people will turn to you. It is a heavy burden, but you are one of the few both the conservatives and seditionists will listen to."

"As are you," Hanan said. "You are young, but with your powers of oratory, you can sway many of the more defiant to see reason. Know that I will be relying on you heavily over the coming months, should this crisis continue unabated."

"I appreciate your vote of confidence. I also know we will need every ally we can muster. I heard rumor that Manahem has returned to Jerusalem."

"Manahem," Hanan replied, closing his eyes at the sound of the name. "He is one of the most violent and unbending leaders of the Sicarii. His return will only lead to more bloodshed."

Fighting increased over the coming days with men on multiple sides, at first trading insults, then blows with their fists, and finally all-out battles with swords and clubs. Alarmed by the outbreak of violence within Jerusalem, and fearing civil war, King Agrippa soon dispatched three thousand of his best troops under a cavalry officer named Darius. What they saw when they reached the upper city around Mount Sion in Jerusalem was not a riot, but a pitched battle in progress. Seditionists and zealots, now reinforced by members of the Sicarii, were brawling with those loyal to the Sanhedrin. The fanatics were outnumbered for the moment, yet they were far better armed. Most carried curved swords or stabbing spears, with metal bucklers for protection. The loyalists were armed mostly with clubs, with a few short swords distributed throughout, and neither side wore any protective armor. Sling stones and two-foot throwing darts rained down from rooftops, killing and injuring many on both sides.

"Sound the advance!" Darius ordered.

With a loud shout, his horsemen broke into a charge. Though the confines of urban warfare limited the use of cavalry considerably, the vast open square was more than sufficient for his troops to array themselves into several ranks and ride into the horde of their surprised foe. Sword and spear bit into flesh and bone, as the fanatics were driven away from the mob of loyalists by the sudden appearance of professional soldiers.

Zealot slingers soon turned their attention to this heavily armed force that trampled their way through the mob. A flat stone whipped past Darius with alarming speed, smashing into the face of a nearby trooper who fell

screaming from his horse, his cheekbone shattered by the rock and blood spurting from his face and eye. Several others were struck down in similar fashion.

A number of mounted archers rode at the back of the contingent, and they immediately turned their bows towards the rooftops, with sling shots being met by well-placed arrows. Darius glanced up as two zealots fell; one struck in the shoulder and falling backwards, the other taking an arrow in the guts. This poor wretch fell headfirst from the rooftop, shrieking in pain as he plunged to his death.

Several horsemen were pulled from their mounts, where the zealots mercilessly slashed and hacked away at them with sword and club. Yet they knew this was a fight they were losing, for there were more of King Agrippa's cavalry riding into the fray from various side streets. These men were mostly lancers, a few carrying long spatha cavalry swords, and they soon turned the tide of the battle. The leaders of the fanatics began shouting for their men to pull back.

One such man was the feared zealot, Manahem ben Judas. Far more tactically savvy than most of his brethren, he knew the battle could not be won this day. "Withdraw, but do not run!" he shouted to his men. Zealots and Sicarii backed away from the frenzy, carrying away as many of their wounded as they were able. Shields and weapons still brandished forward, though it looked as if neither the loyalists nor King Agrippa's horsemen were seeking to pursue them. As the lower city was under the control of the radicals, none dared give chase, lest they be swarmed by the mobs whose loyalties were ever shifting.

"We will finish this another day," Manahem told his men as they rushed past him and made for the lower city. He had a plan for dealing with the moderates, and he met with his senior leaders that evening. Among those present was Eleazar ben Ananias, the son of the high priest who now appeared to be throwing in his lot with the radicals.

"Tomorrow is the Festival of Xylophory," Manahem said. Commonly known as the feast of wood-bearing, it was a time when all brought forth wood for the eternal fire that burned unquenchable at the temple. It was also when young maidens of Jerusalem, both rich and poor, would dress in purest white and go dance amongst the vineyards with the young men, who would be asked to choose their future brides. To the outside observer it seemed

strange that such a festival would still be happening, when over the course of the previous seven days a pitched battle had taken place between various Jewish factions, and now hundreds lay dead, with numerous more badly injured.

“The high priests have asked for a truce to allow the festivities to commence,” Eleazar noted. “However, they excluded all of our factions from taking part.”

“There will be fire tomorrow,” Manahem said with a hint of malice. “But it is not just the eternal flames which will be rekindled. Our friends, the Sicarii, have been arriving in the city covertly. The people are with us, and when they see hundreds of dagger men in their midst, they will not hesitate to drive off the traitors who have desecrated the temple and our most holy of cities.”



The next day, Ananias, the high priest, made ready to accept the offerings of wood brought forth by the people. He was joined by the other priests, along with members of the Sanhedrin, as well as both Hanan and Josephus. Darius was also on hand, with a large contingent of his soldiers, now dismounted, forming an armed barricade between the growing throng and the priests, who had mounted the stone steps of the large dais where the caldron of eternal fire burned.

“This day shall be one of peace and remembrance,” Ananias said. “Let those who would bring their offerings of wood come forth.”

A few people forced their way through the wall of guards, each carrying a bundle of sticks to add to the flames. But soon others pressed forward, first a few at a time, then scores, and finally hundreds. Soon, such a mass of humanity surged forward, that the king’s soldiers pushed back against them with their shields in vain.

“The mob has become unruly,” Josephus said quietly. “If this persists further, we must flee. The king’s soldiers are too few.”

“No,” Ananias said, shaking his head. “I will not allow a handful of ruffians to disrupt this sacred rite!”

“I fear the crowd has been infiltrated by members of the opposition,” Hanan added cautiously. “We must make ready for our own preservation.”

The number of people was continuing to grow, and as a few at a time

came forward with their offerings of wood, it became clear that most of those assembled carried no such donatives at all. In fact, they began to berate those that did try and carry their offerings forward, tripping and striking at them. Josephus even swore he saw the flash of blades amongst the mob.

"The Roman garrison is close," a priest spoke up, suddenly afraid of what was transpiring.

The Antonia Fortress sat just across the way from the temple complex, now guarded only by a couple hundred auxiliaries. And though the soldiers under Darius, who attempted to keep the mob at bay, were heavily armed, they were also hopelessly outnumbered. The crowd, which now numbered in the thousands, with more coming every minute, was beginning to shout obscenities towards the assembled priests.

"The Romans!" Ananias snapped, horrified at the thought of unclean gentiles in the temple. "I'll not have them defile this sacred place!"

"Then be prepared for it to be defiled by them," Josephus said, nodding his head towards where the line of Darius' men was starting to give way. One suddenly fell, stabbed through the neck by a member of the Sicarii. It was then they saw the hated radical, Manahem, rush forward, his sword held high.

"Now, my brothers!" he shouted. *"Now is the time to take back what is ours from the hands of traitors!"*

Spurred on by his battle cry, the mob surged forward. Blades flashed from beneath the cloaks of both Zealot and Sicarii, and even the unarmed members of the mob fell upon the soldiers of King Agrippa, who now leveled their spears as they backed their way up the steps in an attempt to save themselves. The day of peace became one of violence once again, as Manahem and his men surged the crowd forward on a wave of utter hatred.

Though a number of the enraged mob were killed or badly injured by the spears of the soldiers; so great was their rage, they would not be contained. A number of the king's men were unable to get away and were cut to ribbons by the rampaging horde; their weapons and blood-soaked armor taken by those who were as yet still unarmed.

"To Herod's palace!" Hanan said, quickly waving everyone who could flee towards a side gate across the temple complex.

Josephus felt himself a coward for running, but then, hearing the terrified screams of one of the Judean soldiers who had not been quick enough on his feet, he found himself sprinting for the gate and praying there were not more of the radicals on the other side.

“Let the cowards run,” Manahem said, as his men swarmed the large courtyard that led into the temple proper.

“The temple is ours once more!” Eleazar shouted in triumph, eliciting cheers from the joyous throng.

It was difficult to tell if the people were, indeed, jubilant at having driven the priests and the king’s soldiers away, or if they were simply caught up in the wave of aggression and thought it best to join in, lest they become victims.

“The temple is now *mine*,” Manahem said quietly, though Eleazar gave him a curious look, as he had been close enough to hear him.

The young man then looked towards the far gate and lamented for a moment. Amongst the supposed traitors was his own father, as well as an uncle.

“Make torches!” the leader of the zealots shouted. “And let us both liberate the people, while showing those cowards what happens when they flee like dogs!”

Most of the men who acted as leaders for the mob were members of the Sicarii, who Eleazar both respected as well as feared.

“And what will burn on this day of Xylophory?” he asked.

“Something that will turn the people to my cause,” Manahem said, grabbing a long stick and holding it over the eternal flame.

Eleazar was once again troubled by not only this man’s use of the singular term when describing whose revolution this was, but the sheer malevolence in his eyes.

“Come, my brothers!” Manahem shouted, holding the burning staff high. *“Let us give the people liberty!”*

Just a few short blocks from the temple sat the local archives and legal repository. Like the Romans, the Jews were obsessive about bureaucratic organization. Every landholder’s certificate, public bond, legal transaction, as well as every piece of documentation regarding personal debts, was kept here. Despite the bloody battles that had taken place not far from them, as well as the riot that had desecrated the Festival of Xylophory, the caretakers of the Judean archives went about their daily tasks, oblivious to the chaos.

One administrator had just received a pile of scrolls, detailing the transactions between a wealthy banker and several farmers he had lent money

to. As he rolled the scrolls and made ready to file them in one of the thousands of cubby holes lining the endless rows of shelves and bookcases, the door was flung open with a violent bang. An enraged man, carrying a burning staff, stood at the head of a murderous looking throng.

“Here!” he shouted. “Here is the first place we will grant the people freedom!” He eyed the scribe with the bankers’ transcripts and lunged towards him.

The poor old man was clubbed to the floor with the burning staff. The renegade then held up the handful of scrolls in one hand, set them alight, and tossed them into a bin of papers that had yet to be logged.

The other clerks and administrators were filled with fear as the raucous mob shouted in glee and fell upon the place with both torch and sword. In their rage, they slew several of the men, whose only crime was working within the place that was subjugated by their rage. Manahem was filled with remorse, for one brief moment, as a particularly old scribe was stabbed through the throat by one of his men. His face was contorted with rage, eyes bulging as he plunged his blade through the scribe’s blood-spurting windpipe. Whatever feelings of regret he had were quickly diminished as he gazed around the large repository. He knew by destroying the archives, he would disrupt the administration of the Jewish state, while at the same time winning over the loyalty of those masses who would now have their debts to the moneylenders obliterated. Documentation of all legal matters was also kept here. There would be many grateful souls whose records of indiscretions would now be consumed in fire.

“Once this building is engulfed in flames,” he said to his nearest men, “we will unleash retribution upon our oppressors.”

Out in the street, the multitude that gathered was filled with people in a state of shock and horror, intermixed with an equal or greater number who cheered the raiders for having destroyed their debts and transgressions. Manahem sought out, amongst the *dagger men,* a man named Eleazar. Not, Eleazar, son of the high priest, but Eleazar ben Yair, Manahem’s kinsman and a leader of the Sicarii.

“We have lit the fires that will consume the old order,” ben Yair said.

“And it does not end here,” Manahem remarked. “The houses of the false king, Agrippa, his whore of a sister, as well as the high priest, are not far from here. Let them all be consigned to hellfire.”

Knowing their homes were no longer safe, the priests and elders had fled

to the safety of Herod's fortified palace. A few household servants were all that remained at the houses, and they were either killed or driven off as the buildings were ransacked. Anything of value was taken by the robbers, and soon the houses were set alight.



The night sky glowed an eerie orange and red as Josephus watched in the distance, flames consuming the homes of Agrippa, Berenice, and Ananias. The fires had spread to nearby domiciles as well, and several blocks of the city now burned. The most holy city in Judaism, which many viewed as the center of the entire universe, was now incinerated by the fires of hate. To Josephus, the sight of the flames was a hideous blasphemy.

"Praise God the king and queen left the city long before this," his father, Matthias said, joining his son on the balcony.

During the chaos, Josephus had fled to his home within a block of flats in the upper city, not out of cowardice, but because he feared for both his wife, Judith, as well as his parents, who shared the two-story building with them.

"But what of their servants and staff?" Josephus asked. "With so much blood already so pointlessly shed, many will wonder what difference are a few more lives. And yet my heart breaks for them, for those murderous renegades of the Sicarii will spare none. I also fear for Ananias. Hanan and many of our leaders fled to Herod's Palace, while others to the Antonia Fortress, but there has been no sign of the high priest."

"For our people's sake, I would be more concerned about Hanan," Mathias replied candidly. "Ananias was always in an unenviable position, and one that he was not suited for. King Agrippa's greatest transgression was removing Hanan from this position, for it is he alone who can unite both moderate and radical amongst the people."

"I hope so," Josephus replied, resting his chin on his forearms as he leaned against the rail.

The glow of fire in the distance, thankfully, had not spread further. Although, he could smell the smoke, and he gathered it was near anarchy on those streets. As his wife joined him, he thought about Hanan's words the evening before. Despite his supreme hope that the people would come to their senses, he feared far worse was to come, and that he would have to play a much more active role in the ensuing conflict than he ever imagined. For the

time being, Jerusalem was in the hands of the fanatics.

Chapter VI: Daggers in the Shadows

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“We have laid siege to the traitors and pretenders, and we now hold the temple itself,” Eleazar said. “However, we need proper weapons if we are to drive the enemy from the Antonia, as well as Herod’s palace.”

The subsequent day of fighting had ended in a standoff, with the seditionists unable to breach either stronghold. The defenders were well equipped with bows and throwing darts, and the renegades had lost a number of men as a result.

Knowing what needed to be done, Eleazar then turned to Manahem. “Herod’s armory lies within the fortress of Masada, yet it is only lightly guarded.”

“A small garrison could hold out indefinitely,” Manahem noted.

“Provided, that is, they anticipated an attack,” his cousin, ben Yair, replied with a grin.

“Take your men and capture the fortress,” Eleazar said. “And gather whomever you must along the way. Once we have compelled my father and those within the old order to unite with us, we will need every ally we can muster if we are to defeat the Romans. Word is bound to reach them soon enough of the unrest in Jerusalem; if Agrippa hasn’t already gone groveling to them on his knees.”

Quietly, the young man hoped that by sending the Sicarii away from the city, he could once more reassert control over the masses. The loyalists were scattered for the moment, though they would return once they rallied the survivors. On a personal level, Eleazar feared for the safety of his father and uncle. Though they were now enemies, he wished to spare the old men from the ignominious deaths that had befallen so many already.

And though uneasy about his new-found allies, at the moment, Eleazar needed Manahem, his kinsman, ben Yair, as well as their Sicarii fighters. He knew there were at least two very powerful factions amongst the zealots, who had yet to declare their allegiance in the struggle. One was led by a man from Giscala: Yohanan ben Levi, who was more commonly known as John of Giscala; the other by Simon ben Giora. Each was a volatile revolutionary who commanded thousands of loyal warriors whose uncompromising resolve

matched their own. The two factions were openly hostile towards each other, and so it would take a strong leader to compel them to fight together against the Romans. Like his father and the other moderates, Eleazar considered the splinter factions so consumed with hatred towards each other that many would sooner perish than stand united against a common enemy. John's home city of Giscala was up north in Galilee, and so, for the moment, he and his forces were not involved in the ongoing strife. Simon ben Giora was from the much closer region of Perea, east of Jerusalem.

Eleazar reckoned it would take Manahem up to a week to reach Masada, and depending on how well his attack on the fortress went, at least another week to round up arms and return to Jerusalem. Given that an effective stand against Rome would require tens, if not hundreds-of-thousands, of able bodied men, he knew the arms in the Herodian armory would only be enough to equip a tiny fraction of their needed forces. It would be a start, though, not to mention a moral victory for the revolution. And if the Sicarii failed to surprise the small garrison and take the old fortress, well, that just meant one less rival faction to contend with.

He lamented at the horrific rift this crisis had created between him and his own father. It was very difficult to think of his father as a traitor. Yet, if Eleazar was true to his convictions, then that is what his father was. He hoped Ananias had escaped the city and gone into hiding someplace safe. Whatever their differences, the last thing Eleazar wanted was to be responsible for the spilling of his own family's blood.

"But if that's what it takes to remain loyal to the true faith," he said quietly, "then so be it."



It was ten days into the fighting in Jerusalem when King Agrippa's chief general, Jacimus, finally came to make his report. Some of his men had withdrawn to the palace in Jerusalem, while others had pulled back to their camp just outside the city. The general felt the situation had completely unraveled, and he needed to inform his king.

"The men of power, along with the priests and other loyalists, have held the upper city," he reported.

"And what of the temple?" Agrippa asked.

"I regret to say it is in the hands of the seditionists," Jacimus confessed.

“And it gets worse. The houses of the high priests, as well as your own and that of Queen Berenice, have been burned.”

“I expected as much,” the king remarked. He started pacing with his hands clasped behind his back in contemplation. “Is there no order to be had within the city?”

“Not with the men we have,” the general replied with a regretful shake of his head. “Many of the people have gone over to the fanatics. Although this could be simply out of fear of reprisal. As you well know, sire, the people are mostly sheep who are easily swayed one way or the other.”

“Then I must send word to Gallus,” Agrippa said reluctantly. “If the situation has gotten that bad in Jerusalem, then the entire kingdom is set to fall into anarchy. Auxiliaries from Caesarea alone will not be enough. It will take the entire might of Rome to restore order and sanity, lest everything we have fought for over the millennia be destroyed by these turncoats.”



The fortress of Masada lay to the southeast of Jerusalem, in a barren wasteland not far from the Dead Sea. Following the main road that ran parallel to the sea, it was a journey of about sixty miles. Though garrisoned by Roman Auxiliaries, Manahem was unconcerned.

“These soldiers are Roman in name only,” he explained to Eleazar ben Yair as they rode at the head of the large column of Sicarii and zealot fighters. Only a few of the wealthier leaders amongst them had been able to purchase or otherwise acquire mounts, with some settling for riding on the backs of donkeys. These weren’t the most dignified of steeds, but it was still preferable to walking. Both Manahem and ben Yair were fortunate enough to be in the possession of fine Arabian horses.

“I also understand that their numbers are few,” ben Yair added, “twenty or so at the most.”

“And like I said, these are not true Roman soldiers. Were they legionaries, I would not be so confident in our endeavor. However, they are auxiliaries, mostly Samaritan. Likely they’ve been left to rot at that hellish fortress, since God knows when.”

“So much more will be the pleasure in slaying them,” ben Yair remarked with morbid glee. He further added, “And one does not get assigned to guarding a barren shit hole like Masada for good behavior. No one ever goes

up there, so most likely they've been essentially left there to rot."

"Precisely," Manahem chuckled. "As long as we are at least somewhat cautious and advance during the night, they will be mostly drunk, sleeping, or likely both."

"I know you seek to arm your men within Jerusalem," ben Yair said contemplatively. "Just know that a number of my Sicarii have no love for any of the zealot factions vying for power. And yet, they will require a share of the arms we procure in return for their service in taking Masada."

"Of course," his kinsman concurred. "It is an uneasy alliance we share at the moment, perhaps only able to exist since I have known you since birth."

Ben Yair paused for a few moments, choosing his words carefully. "I will fight for you," he said at last, "but not for any of the others. I curse that I was born with the same name as that twisted viper, Eleazar ben Ananias. You know he is using us to secure arms for his warriors, yet he would make himself king at our expense."

"I would not worry too much about him," Manahem said with a grin. "Our people need strong, uncompromising leaders, and he is not one of them. No doubt he has allowed his emotional attachment to his traitorous father to cloud his resolve. I have ordered my men still within Jerusalem to hunt down Ananias and the other high priests. Their deaths will break his son's will to contest us. The ancient Kingdom of Judah will have its ruler once more, but it will not be Eleazar ben Ananias, or that Roman lap dog, Agrippa."

Eleazar ben Yair nodded in agreement. He personally had no designs towards higher power within the Judean government. The various factions would always be in conflict with each other; Sicarii, Edomites, Sadducees all bore such extreme hatred towards each other that extermination seemed to be the only true means of achieving peace. With his kinsman installed as King of Judea and Sicarii ally that would be enough for both him and his fighters. He would be content as the militant arm of Manahem's rule, his ruthless *dagger men* killing all who would betray the true faith.



The following morning, while the fires that consumed the archives, royal apartments, and homes of the high priests died down, clouds of smoke still billowed into the sky. The temple complex was now under the control of Eleazar and his zealots, with Sicarii fighters infiltrating the populace. The

people themselves were in a state of confusion, not knowing who was really in control of the city and, indeed, what was to happen with the festival, now that the high priests had been driven into hiding.

As the sun slowly rose in the east, Ananias shivered, his body was numb from the cold waters, and he ached all over. He and his brother, Hezekiah, had taken to hiding in an aqueduct, for there had been no other place for the two old men to flee. Their houses had been ransacked and burned by the seditionists, their families fleeing in terror. With the robbers and murderers actively seeking them, they had taken cover wherever they could.

"We cannot remain in hiding forever, brother," Ananias said as he looked over at Hezekiah. "But I know not what I can do."

Both men were a fearful sight; their robes torn and soiled, beards and gray hair matted, with eyes bloodshot from strain and lack of sleep.

"Are you or are you not still the high priest?" Hezekiah asked, his body shivering in the cold as the fast moving waters of the aqueduct continued to flow around them. "If you are, then you must reassert your authority over the people. Make them follow you and throw off these usurping renegades!"

It was a pathetic feeling for Ananias, being so helpless in the face of the violent opposition; worse still because one of the leaders was his own son! To think he had been appointed as high priest by King Agrippa, only to now find himself hiding in the trough of an aqueduct like a drowning rat.

Trying to find his resolve as the orange glow of the rising sun slowly warmed the ground, he pulled himself upright and tried to gather his bearings. In their flight they had climbed to the top of a small hill, which the aqueduct ran over. Because of the terrain here, the arches holding the large stone trough were just a few feet off the ground. It had been both a terrifying and horribly undignified ordeal. However, as he saw the plumes of smoke continuing to rise from where he knew his house once stood, the high priest realized he'd had no choice.

His robes dripping, he climbed out of the trough and had just started to lower himself down when a rough set of hands grabbed him from behind and viciously pulled him to the ground with a thump. The wind knocked from him, his vision blurred for a moment, he heard the loud taunts of his assailants.

"Look what we've found here!" one man shouted. "It's the damned high priest himself!"

“And here,” another said as he climbed into the aqueduct. “It’s his filthy brother!”

Hezekiah attempted to cry out in protest, but was cut short as he was pitched headfirst over the side of the aqueduct, cracking his head on the rocks beneath. Ananias was in great pain and could not feel his legs.

“What shall we do with them?” one of the men asked.

“We’ll return the high priest to the temple,” their leader said, grinning wickedly. “Only this time it will be as a sacrifice!”

Unable to speak, Ananias’ eyes and mouth grew wide as the blade of a curved sword slashed across his throat. In shock, he did not feel it at first. Then, as his windpipe filled with blood, his life quickly faded.

God have mercy, he thought as his world grew black, *for the Romans will show none.*

Chapter VII: False King

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It was with utter revulsion that Eleazar witnessed the brigands dragging the bloodied bodies of his father and uncle from a cart that stopped just short of the steps leading into the inner temple.

"What is the meaning of this?" he shouted as he rushed down the steps. He stopped and stared into Ananias' lifeless eyes, the rest of his face and slashed throat covered in coagulated blood. "By God, what sacrilege! You've murdered the high priest!"

"No," one of the men said. "We slew a pair of traitors. Their lives were forfeit by orders of the king."

"Agrippa would never have called for the slaying of his own high priest!" Eleazar retorted.

"Who said anything about Agrippa?" the man sneered. "Manahem is king of Judea now."

Gleeful zealots and Sicarii grabbed up the bodies, which they would place on display just outside the temple gates. Such a twisted exhibition of murdered men, who only the day before were calling for a day of peace, would instill the proper amount of fear in any who would dare rise up against the new order.

Eleazar's stomach twisted, and he feared he should become ill as he left the horrid sight and went into the temple. Though the people were quelled for the moment, he knew they would never stand for a usurper declaring himself king, regardless of their fear of the Sicarii. It was then that he decided Manahem ben Judas' usefulness would end, once he captured the Herodian armory at Masada.



It was a narrow, winding path that led up the steep hill towards Masada. Given there was no other passable means, and that any who attempted to scale its heights would likely fall to their death, it was little wonder it was regarded as impregnable. Such assumptions also led to apathy, which is what Manahem was hoping for. It was on a moonless night that he, along with his

cousin, ben Yair, and twenty men made their way up the long trek. They moved slowly for it was completely black, and they could see but a few feet in front of them. At one point, Manahem almost walked off the edge of the cliff, only to be grabbed at the last minute by his cousin.

As they reached the top, it felt as if the fortress was completely deserted. No torchlight could be seen, and to Masada it felt almost like a tomb. Ben Yair, being the most nimble of the men, had Manahem and a Sicarii lift him up until he could just get his fingertips on the top of the wall. He pulled himself the rest of the way over as quietly as he was able. Inside it was just as dark as it was below, and he could just barely see the shape of what appeared to be a sleeping guard. He drew his sicae dagger and crept silently up to the man. He threw his hand over where he guessed his mouth would be and slammed the sharp point of his dagger home, sawing it back and forth as the guard thrashed violently, blood gushing onto ben Yair's hand.

Once satisfied the man was dead, he uncoiled the rope he carried, tied it off to a support pillar, and tossed it over the side. Within a couple minutes all of his men were inside the fortress. Silently they moved about, finding the quarters of the sleeping guards, and living up to their name of 'dagger men'. The guards may have been employed by Rome, but, as Manahem had said, they were anything but professional soldiers. As the glow of the predawn lit the earth, it was clear their armor and weapons were in a state of disrepair and practically useless. However, it was not the paltry arms of a few auxiliaries that they sought. Soon, not a single guard within Masada lived; pools of blood ran into the hard packed earth and underneath the doors of the barracks.

"Over here!" one of the Sicarii said excitedly, as he found the large bolted doors that led into the Herodian armory. The sorry state of the guards' armor and kit told all they needed to know, that none of them had the keys to the armory. Most likely it was King Agrippa who possessed these, though Manahem was unconcerned.

One of the Sicarii had brought a large hammer, which he used during the night to bash in the brains of one or two sleeping guards, and it was slick with blood and gore. The sound of the heavy weapon smashing against the thick iron lock echoed all the way down to the valley below. The gates to the fortress had been thrown open, and the remainder of their raiding party had joined them, along with several empty oxcarts they would use to transport their plunder.

After about a minute of constant smashing, the lock finally broke and fell to the dirt. Two men pulled open the long slide and pushed in the thick wooden doors. As it had no windows, it was completely dark within. Torches were procured and brought forth.

"Well, there's a pretty sight," Manahem said as he gazed into the vast chamber.

Gleaming in the torchlight were hundreds of mail shirts, chest plates, greaves, scale armor, eastern style helmets, with innumerable short swords and stabbing spears lining the walls and stacked in piles. But there was something more that caught his attention.

About halfway back, in the center of the room on a stand, was a long set of green flowing robes lined with gold and purple. Over the top was an armored over-shirt consisting of small rectangular overlapping plates, with an ornate chest piece in the center. It was topped by a conical helmet with a mail neck cover draping down the back. A large curved sword leaned against the display.

"The armor of the kings," Eleazar ben Yair stated. "No one since Herod the Great has worn it. I daresay, King Agrippa has never so much as laid eyes on it!"

"And now, it will have a new bearer," Manahem said with a grin. He passed his torch to one of his men. "Help me," he directed ben Yair. He quickly stripped out of his brown, tattered tunic, while his cousin and two other men helped him into the king's garments.

The robes were sturdy, yet light, though the scaled armor was rather cumbersome, and clearly designed more for appearance than practical use in battle. Two of his men helped belt the armor around the middle and slung the baldric of his long sword off his right shoulder. Ben Yair carried the helmet and nodded to his cousin, who grinned and stepped out into the light of day.

"Behold your king!" ben Yair shouted while holding the helmet high, as if it were a crown, before placing it on Manahem's head.

It was a strange sight, given that his audience consisted of a few dozen grizzled and filthy renegades who looked more like the bandits they were, rather than the entourage of the King of the Jews.

"Hail, Manahem!" one of the men shouted, raising his sicae in the air.

The others quickly mimicked him, not out of any personal loyalty to Manahem, but knowing that by anointing him as king, they stood to gain much.

“A king’s entourage needs to be properly equipped,” Manahem said, holding both arms out to his sides and back towards the armory. “The finest weapons and armor in all of Judea are yours, my friends!” As his men shouted in triumph and swarmed through the open doors, Manahem turned to ben Yair. “Cousin, you will have a portion of these arms sent to our friends amongst the Sicarii and whatever factions may be loyal to our cause.”

“It will be done. I will also leave a handful of men to guard Masada, men who will not be so easily dispatched as these Roman slaves were.”



Over the following week, a type of uneasy tranquility descended upon Jerusalem, like the proverbial calm before or after a storm. The Roman Auxilia lay besieged within the palace, with the Judean rebellion still lacking central leadership and uncertain as how to dislodge them. Hanan, Josephus, and the other moderate leaders found themselves completely displaced. And with word spreading that Judea lacked a central government, the various radical factions throughout the region became emboldened.

Eleazar, despite his status as chief of the temple, found himself diminished politically. The brutal slaying of his father had been a great personal loss, while further empowering the fanatics who were slowly usurping authority. Sensing this, Hanan, often through his protégé, Josephus, attempted to maintain a sense of calm and order. The people themselves were like a confused mass of sheep, unsure as to who they should follow. Easily swayed, one day they would call for temperance and unity with the moderates, the next the zealots and fanatics would have them riled up into calling for the blood of all who denied the ‘true faith’. And yet, as much as God and faith were invoked in their furor, little was ever said about what that faith or the will of God actually meant. In perhaps the only show of good faith thus far, Eleazar had ordered the purging of the former high priests to cease immediately. The brutal killing of Ananias had repelled the people, rather than cowing them, and Eleazar knew he must try and reconcile with the more moderate factions, lest the radicals break what little sense of order remained. Since calling a truce, Eleazar had allowed the elders to return, knowing there were many practical and administrative matters that needed to be addressed immediately. A number of highly respected military leaders had heeded the call to come to Jerusalem to help raise an army on behalf of the

people.

“The extremists proclaim themselves to be pious before God, yet they will murder their fellow man in His name,” Hanan muttered to a group of supporters that met within the temple district to try and work out some of the economic issues that were sure to rise in light of the rebellion.

“Thou shalt not kill, sayeth the Lord,” one of the senior priests remarked, shaking his head. His name was Joseph ben Gorion, a former general in King Agrippa’s army, though like Hanan and Josephus, he was a moderate who would only condone violence when no other means existed.

“Breaking of the Commandments aside,” a man named Niger of Perea spoke up, “we will be powerless against the Romans if we do not stand together. With all of the internal fighting and grasps for power, we have all but forgotten that we will have to contend with them soon enough. They will not allow the insults levied against them to go unpunished.”

“Agreed,” Hanan replied. “And while the Romans have not crossed into Galilee in force, we have received word that Manahem has successfully taken Masada.”

“This could be a good thing,” another general named Yohanan observed. “The Herodian armory holds a vast number of weapons and armor, enough for, at least, a decent-sized army.”

“Manahem has aligned himself with many of the most volatile fanatics,” Josephus said. “The Sicarii, especially, care for us about as much as they do the Romans. The amount of arms he does bring back to Jerusalem will be greatly diminished by those he gives away to his so-called ‘friends’.”

“It is true,” Hanan added. “The Sicarii are loyal to no one, not even to God. Still, we may need to make some uncomfortable alliances if we are to succeed in resisting further subjugation of Rome.”

Just then, a man from the city watch burst into the room. “Manahem has returned!” he said with both excitement and apprehension. “It would appear he has crowned himself king.”



The self-proclaimed King of Judea’s procession into Jerusalem was met with a mixture of confusion, exhalation, as well as revulsion, depending on where people’s loyalties stood on that particular day. In a city whose population exceeded a half million souls, it was easy to find multitudes of

people with various beliefs and loyalties.

Manahem rode at the head of the procession atop an Arabian mare. The helmet with its mail neck guard made him sweat uncomfortably, but he paid it no mind. The armor he wore was cumbersome and made movement difficult, yet his intent was not to fight the populace, but to overawe them.

To his right and a half pace behind, rode his cousin, Eleazar ben Yair. He had donned a deep red tunic and wore the ring mail armor of a king's guardsman. He donned a similar conical helmet, and carried a long cavalry sword, very similar to the Roman spatha. The carts bearing captured weapons and armor were pulled behind them, lined with scores of Manahem's men, who wore ceremonial armor similar to ben Yair's, each wielding a long spear.

"The people seem uncertain as to their feelings for you," ben Yair noted as he rode up beside his cousin.

While there were groups who hailed Manahem's return as that of one who saved Judea, others hurled insults that he was a blasphemous usurper.

"Love and hate are irrelevant," Manahem replied. "Fear and obedience are all that matters. We will make this plain once we arrive at the temple."

Hanan, along with the elders and allied generals, awaited them at the temple steps as the gates of the outer wall were thrown open. Hundreds of people followed the entourage into the vast courtyard, curious to see how this self-proclaimed king would be received. Eleazar accompanied them, though he and his men walked a notable pace behind the Sicarii.

"We welcome your return, Manahem ben Judas," Hanan said, with a respectful nod, careful to avoid a full bow.

"A welcome is expected for one's king," Manahem replied as he dismounted his horse and slowly walked up the steps.

"Know that we wish to put aside the sword and embrace our friends and allies," Hanan continued, ignoring the sovereign reference. "As you can see, a number of the greatest generals in the old Kingdoms of Judah and Israel returned to serve their people. We have much to do if we are to form a new government for this land, as well as defend the people from the pending reprisals from the Romans."

"Yes," Manahem said, glancing over each man in turn, "you will all serve me well." He then turned as ben Yair addressed the multitude.

"People of Jerusalem, your king has returned! Show proper homage to him, and he will rule you well. Any disloyalties will be dealt with swiftly and

harshly. Hail to the king!”

Josephus chanced a glance over at Eleazar, who looked horrified. It was he who had unleashed this monster upon the people, and soon he would have to be the one to remove it.

Chapter VIII: Reign of Chaos

Antioch, Syria
September, 66 A.D.
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As the rebellion spread throughout Judea over the coming week, various splinter groups fell upon the cities, causing virtual anarchy in much of the region. Manahem may have installed himself as king, but his position was tenuous at best. Most of the seditionists rejected his claims of sovereignty as much as they did the rule of Rome. Some of the cities were still loyal to Caesar, with the multicultural coastal city of Caesarea falling into chaos as the large Greek population took it upon themselves to attack the Jews and drive them from the city. Florus and his auxiliaries had done little, if anything, to quell the fighting.

To the north in Syria, Cestius Gallus was finally beginning to realize he had no other option but to lead an army in the brutal subjugation and re-conquest of the province. As the senior senatorial legate in the region, as well as governor of Syria, Judea fell under his responsibility. If the procurator failed to restore order, then it fell upon him to do so. Still, he had hoped the arrival of King Agrippa would give him news that would lead him to avoid an all-out invasion. Upon the king's appearance, Gallus called a meeting with the commanding generals of the legions stationed in Syria. Amongst them were a pair of legates named Cerealis and Trajan, who commanded the Fifth and Tenth Legions, respectively. Also present was Gallus' close friend, Appius, who was legate of the Sixth Legion. Rounding out the senior commanders was a former legate named Placidus, who had already served tours as a legion commander and had since been appointed as commander over a large corps of numerous auxiliary regiments.

"The situation is grim," the king said plainly. "Violence continues within Jerusalem, the remnants of the Roman garrison are trapped within the palace, and the entire province is in chaos."

"Damn it all," Gallus cursed, shaking his head and beginning to pace around the room in thought.

"Governor, we must look to securing the port cities," Trajan stated. "If the rebels can take to the seas, it will mean disaster."

“From what I can gather, Caesarea is in shambles,” Agrippa remarked. “But, the large Greek population is, at least, keeping the insurgents from attempting to lay claim to it.”

“Agreed,” Trajan replied, “but what of Ascalon, further south? It is deep within enemy territory and has but a small garrison of auxiliaries, one cohort of infantry with an understrength regiment of cavalry.” Gallus ceased in his pacing and stood facing the men, his hands clasped behind his back.

“If the rebels manage to gain a port city, they can strike well beyond the borders of Judea,” he said. “Maritime traffic within the entire eastern Mediterranean would face the threat of Jewish privateers. Trajan, detach one of your cohorts to Ascalon at once, and let us hope the enemy is unable to array a significant force against them.”

“Yes, sir,” the legate replied. “It is a fortified city, with its only access coming across an open plain to the east. Hopefully the sight of legionaries on the walls will be enough to keep the renegades at bay.”

“What else can you tell us about the situation in Jerusalem?” Gallus asked Agrippa. He hated not knowing the full situation within the unruly kingdom, and he felt like he was completely blind in this pending endeavor.

“The high priest, Ananias, who I personally appointed, has been murdered,” the king replied. “I’ve also received word that fanatics have captured the Herodian armory at Masada, and one of their leaders, a vile creature named Manahem, has declared himself king.”

“No wonder you wish for us to put down the rebellion,” Gallus grumbled. “Another has usurped your throne.”

“Jerusalem is technically not within my realm,” Agrippa replied, his voice icy. “The people may call me king, but I know what I am to most of them, a Roman despot parading as a Jew. Now are you going to put down these renegades, or are you willing to risk neighboring provinces coming to the conclusion that breaking away from Rome would be in their best interests as well?”

Gallus took the remark as an insult and was, at first, tempted to formally rebuke the king. However, knowing he needed all of his friends and allies, he simply said, “If you want peace in your lands, then you will supply me with men to subdue them.”

“Of course,” Agrippa acknowledged. “I’ll have my best regiments of horsemen at your disposal.”

“And what of legionary forces?” Cerealis asked.

“The Twelfth Legion should be sufficient,” Gallus surmised, though the other legates cast glances of doubt towards each other. He then added, “Appius, I’ll need four cohorts from the Sixth, as well. You shall accompany me as second-in-command.”

His friend simply nodded in reply.

“And what of your auxiliaries?” Placidus asked.

“What of them?” Gallus replied.

“I have an entire corps of ten thousand men that I can bring from Cilicia. Many of them are veterans of the Armenian war.”

“There’s no need for that,” Gallus said dismissively. “Between what forces King Agrippa sends, plus my own auxiliary regiments, and those of our friends in nearby client kingdoms, I will have plenty of men. I’m sorry, Placidus, but your services will not be needed during this campaign.”

“Gallus, what of the legions to the south?” Trajan spoke up. Like his fellow legates, he was concerned that the governor was planning on invading Judea with too small of an army.

“The legions in Egypt are not within my authority,” Gallus retorted.

“Maybe not, but the Fifteenth has been sitting on its ass since it arrived in Alexandria,” Trajan persisted.

“Egypt already has the Third and Twenty-Second Legions,” Cerealis added. “The Fifteenth doesn’t so much as have a home right now. If you send a request to them, surely Legate Rubellius will come up from the south. Ask him to secure the port cities, while also drawing away a portion of the enemy force.”

Gallus was now becoming irritated. While the legates were officially his peers, he was growing tired of their incessant undermining of his authority as Governor of Syria. “As I said,” he replied curtly, “the Twelfth Legion will be sufficient. And unless you men have anything productive to add, then this meeting is adjourned.”

“That could have gone better,” Cerealis grumbled as they left and walked out into the afternoon sun, which shone down upon the steps of the governor’s palace at Antioch.

“Fucking jackal,” Placidus snapped as he walked past Cerealis and Trajan. “He has no one to centrally coordinate his auxiliary troops. If he thinks he can do it all himself, then he’s mad.”

“That’s what happens when one who has no real combat experience is

expected to lead an entire task force in suppression of a rebellion," Trajan added.

"I agree," a voice behind them said.

They turned to see it was Appius, who was looking a little uncomfortable as he approached his fellow legates.

"At least you're going with him," Trajan observed.

Appius was a capable leader, who was into his third year as commander of the Sixth Legion. "Gallus is my friend. I daresay that is the only reason I was given the opportunity to join him on this expedition. Still, I wish some of you were coming with us. Let us hope this rebellion is overblown and the Jews become compliant soon enough."

"For your sake, I hope so," Placidus remarked.

"Well, time for me to meet with my senior officers," Trajan said, "and see which of our cohorts gets the esteemed honor of guarding Ascalon."



Training had finished for the day, and the men were having their evening meal when Optio Nicanor came for Gaius. The men knew the meeting had to be one of importance, given that Centurion Marius had summoned all decanii along with the principal officers within the century. The signifier and tesserarius sat with the ten squad leaders along one side of a long table; Marius and Nicanor both stood facing them.

"Men," the centurion said, "all of you have heard rumors running rampant about the situation in Judea, that the province has fallen into rebellion. We have confirmed those rumors are true. Jewish rebels now hold Jerusalem, they have taken the fortress at Masada, and all Roman forces have been driven from Caesarea. Legate Gallus is forming an expeditionary force to crush the rebels and restore order."

"About time," the tesserarius grumbled. "When do we leave?"

"Unfortunately, we will not be a part of the expedition," the centurion replied, bringing downcast looks and mutterings from his assembled leaders. "The Twelfth Legion will spearhead the effort, augmented by four cohorts from the Sixth Ferrata, with a further twenty-thousand allied and auxiliary troops."

"What is our mission, sir, if we are not part of this task force?" Gaius

asked.

"The coastal city of Ascalon in the south, near Gaza, is one of the only strongholds not yet overrun by one of the rebel factions," the centurion explained. "It currently has a garrison of just a single ala of cavalry, along with an understrength cohort of auxiliaries, less than six hundred men altogether. Those of us in the Fifth Cohort will set sail for Ascalon and reinforce the garrison against any potential rebel attack."

"Guard duty," a decanus said with disdain. "They're placing us on fucking guard duty."

"It's either that or be left sitting on your ass here with the rest of the legion," Nicanor snapped.

"Ascalon is of strategic importance to both sides," Marius continued. "If the rebels capture it, they can prevent us from landing troops to the south, plus they would be able to use the dockyards to build their own ships to harass our military and merchant vessels. It is also well fortified and will make a good defensive strongpoint for either side. Depending on how well or ill Gallus' campaign goes, we may expect the Jews to make an attempt to take Ascalon."

"Your fellow decanii don't seem too happy," Nicanor noted to Gaius as the meeting broke up.

"It's shit duty," the decanus replied bluntly. "But don't worry, they'll make it sound like it's the most glorious posting in the entire campaign, once they brief their legionaries. They may not like it, but they know that any gripes go up the chain-of-command, not down."

"Well, it is still better than sitting back here and possibly missing the whole damn thing," the optio remarked. "I confess I do worry that Gallus is taking the Jews far too lightly. He has no combat experience and he knows little of the Jewish factions or even which ones he is facing. Not all of them are docile sheep that are easily led. Some of the zealot groups are well equipped, especially after raiding the Herodian armories."

"You think he's setting himself up for disaster," Gaius stated, rather than asked.

"I hope not," Nicanor replied. "I just wish Trajan had been given command. He led us to victory numerous times during Corbulo's campaigns in Parthia, which got him a second consecutive tour as legate. That is no small feat. And yet, he gets left on his backside while Gallus tries to swallow

up some personal glory." Nicanor shook his head. "Whatever my personal biases, I'm just an optio, and my concept of the larger strategic picture is blurred at best. I hope my gut instincts prove wrong and Gallus cuts the head off this rebellion in Jerusalem quickly. Hopefully, the worst thing we have to deal with is a bunch of bored legionaries bitching that they missed all the action."

Despite the fact that they were moving from one garrison environment within a city to another, the cohort commander, a centurion pilus prior named Sertor Antonius, insisted they pack all of their tents and field kit. "On the possibility we get recalled to join the main effort!" he explained enthusiastically to Centurion Marius one morning, as their men made ready for the pending departure.

Antonius was a wily, and rather burly, veteran who experienced his first campaign during the Invasion of Britannia with Legio II, Augusta, twenty-three years before. A bit hard of hearing, he tended to speak in a much louder volume than was necessary, giving the impression that he liked to shout a lot.

"A sound idea, sir," Marius replied. "Still, do you think we will get called up to join the fight?"

"If we don't, then all we have to concern ourselves with are our legionaries, who will complain about packing a bunch of shit they didn't need. In which case, a crack about the head with the vine stick will fix that! What won't do, is having to explain to the commanding general why we cannot reinforce him in the event things turn sour, because we don't have our tents and field equipment."

It was a two-day trek for the Fifth Cohort as they left their billets in Antioch and made their way to the port city of Seleucia Pieria. Like many land-based soldiers, Gaius hated traveling by sea, yet, mercifully, the journey was only two days down the coast. The normal trade route from Seleucia went directly to Caesarea. But with the ongoing violence, the port was, essentially, closed for the time being. The ships in their flotilla kept far enough out to sea that they could barely sight the shore on the horizon, one would never know the lands they sailed past were now wracked by strife.

Upon their arrival in Ascalon, Centurion Antonius met with the mayor of the city, as well as the commanders of the auxilia infantry and cavalry units. By orders of General Trajan, he assumed overall command of the garrison, while also requisitioning a lane of buildings near the eastern wall to be used

as a barracks for his men. Though the displaced residents and shopkeepers protested vehemently, they knew they had little choice in the matter. Antonius made it plain to them that if not for his legionaries, they would be at the mercy of the rebel mobs they had already heard horror stories about. The men soon settled in to their billets, with the standard work details, guard duty, and training schedules implemented. On their very first evening, Gaius took a walk to try and work the wobbliness of the sea out of his body. He stood atop the wall which was now manned by a squad of legionaries, in addition to local auxiliaries and militia, with sentries posted every fifty paces. The decanus sighed as he leaned against the rampart and looked out onto the vast plain. Somewhere far beyond was the city of Jerusalem, undergoing turmoil none of the Ascalon garrison had any knowledge of. They only knew the land now belonged to their enemies. All they could do was sit and wait.



In Jerusalem, nearly fifty miles from where Gaius and his legionaries watched and waited, the situation was becoming more unstable. The self-proclaimed king had, indeed, become a tyrant of similar nature to the hated Florus. He cared little for the actual governing of the city, nor whether or not the peoples of the outlying regions acknowledged him as king. Those who once aligned themselves with him were quickly beginning to regret their choice in loyalties.

“Manahem has become a cruel despot,” Eleazar moaned. “Those who do not show proper respect are beaten, thievery by his Sicarii has become accepted as a form of taxation. They control the people through terror, telling them this suppression is the will of God.”

“And yet you empowered him to rise as a usurper,” Hanan scolded sharply.

He was joined by Josephus, along with two prominent Judean generals, Niger of Perea, and Yohanan ben Levi. “You allowed the most violent of factions to defile our holiest shrines. It even led to the murder of your own father!”

“You must understand, I did not foresee any of this,” Eleazar protested. “The people come to me now, begging that Manahem be stopped. I alone cannot bring down this madman, for there are many like yourselves, who blame me for his rise.”

“And so, you need us to rally the people,” Josephus remarked. He turned to Hanan. “Or rather, we need *you* to unite the masses.”

Hanan looked at him, a brief moment of uncertainty coming over him, then he nodded in understanding.

“I abhor that we have needlessly spilt so much blood already,” he said. “But if it can save lives and stop the endless infighting, then Manahem must be struck down.”

“In the past week, he has had people publicly flogged for even the most minor of offenses,” Joseph ben Gorion added. “His support, even amongst the seditionists, is waning. The people cry out for a strong leader, for they know he is not.”

“Yohanan and Niger,” Josephus said, addressing the two generals. “You both have extensive military backgrounds, and you are amongst those that all factions respect. What say you?”

“Like our friends, Hanan and Joseph, we wish to save the people from needless suffering,” Yohanan replied. “Manahem blasphemes God and disrespects the memory of our ancestors by his attempts at making himself king.”

“Tomorrow is the Sabbath,” Eleazar said. “I will confront Manahem at the temple and let the people know we will not trade one tyrant for another. With your help, we can overthrow him and the Sicarii. After which, we will deal with what remains of the Roman garrison. Only then will Jerusalem be free.”

All noted his reference only to the holy city, for they understood that once purged of the extremists and the Romans, only then could the work begin, in earnest, to free all of the Promised Land.

“Striking him down will be easy,” Niger added. “Maintaining order afterwards will be an issue. At this moment we have no standing army, only militia who are loyal to whatever sects they have sworn themselves to on any given day.”

“We will amend that soon enough,” Hanan reassured him. “Once we have established the ruling council for the state, we will begin the process of recruiting soldiers who will fight for us.”



The Sabbath, being the Jewish holy day of rest, brought many to the

temple to both make sacrifices in attempts to bring God's favor, while also seeing what actions would come from their supposed king. Manahem, Eleazar ben Yair, along with a score of Sicarii guards, walked across the grounds of the temple mount towards the length of steps leading towards the inner sanctum itself. The gathered crowds were mostly quiet, watching intently as Manahem approached the steps. At the top stood Eleazar, along with Josephus and Hanan, who once more donned the robes of high priest. A number of other elders and priests joined them this day.

"Eleazar," Manahem said, grinning, "What pleasure is this? And Hanan, I don't remember reinstating you as high priest."

"It was I who appointed Hanan back to his rightful place," Eleazar replied, his voice rising so that all within the temple square could hear him. He then pointed accusingly. "It is *you* who has committed blasphemy and dares to take on airs as king! We did not rebel against the Romans in the pursuit of liberty, only to bear a lord who is more savage than they!"

"How dare you speak to me this way!" Manahem snapped, striding forward, his hand on the hilt of his long sword.

"How dare *you* usurp the will of the people!" a voice said, behind him. It was Yohanan, the former general of Agrippa, who was flanked by dozens of armed men. It was then that Manahem noticed the people within the crowd carried large rocks, which they now brandished.

"Down with the tyrant!" Eleazar shouted, prompting a multitude of cries from the people, who hurled stones at Manahem and his followers.

His guards attempted to protect themselves with their small circular shields, though several were struck down in the hail of rocks. The masses fell upon the poor wretches, smashing them with clubs and beating them with their fists until, finally, a few who were armed with swords and daggers, finished them by slitting their throats, almost as one would a sacrificial lamb.

Like Ananias and Hezekiah just a couple weeks prior, it was now Manahem, ben Yair, and the remaining Sicarii who were forced to flee for their lives. Their heavily armed fighters were able to keep the mob at bay with their long spears for a short time, allowing the two leaders the opportunity to make a run for the main gate. Many within the throng were skewered by Sicarii spears, yet their numbers proved too many, and by the time Manahem and ben Yair reached the gate, there were only three guards left with them. Their horses were, surprisingly, still tethered just outside, where a handful of Sicarii watched in horror as their friends were butchered

by the mob.

"Help me up!" Manahem pleaded, his ceremonial armor encumbering him to where he could not mount his horse. Ben Yair shoved him aside, mounting the beast, which was far superior to his own.

"To hell with you and your revolution!" he spat. He looked back at the rampaging multitude now rushing for the gate. *"And to hell with Jerusalem!"* He spit on the ground and kicked the horse into a full gallop. One of his Sicarii managed to mount the other horse and follow him; the rest attempted to flee on foot. Those who were not quick enough were bludgeoned to death by the horde.

Manahem shrieked in terror as Eleazar and a number of his zealots, now armed with the weapons taken from the slain Sicarii, surrounded him. They drug him into the temple square, where they tore the armor of King Herod from him and rent his garments while beating him with clubs and jabbing him with their spears until he was bleeding from numerous wounds. His cries for mercy went unheeded until, at last, one zealot drew the long sword of the king and with a single blow cleaved Manahem's head from his shoulders. As the crowd shouted in vengeful glee, Eleazar stood over the body that twitched in the last convulsions of death as blood flowed from the stump of the usurper's neck.

"And now," he said, "we must settle our affairs with the Romans!" He did not wish to lose any momentum after having roused the mob to his cause, and if he could destroy what remained of the imperial garrison, then Jerusalem would be theirs.

The Palace of Herod was surrounded by zealots and various fighters who had, thus far, avoided taking part in any of the internal turmoil. Their numbers were vast, and while several dozen had fallen from throwing spears and attempts by the Roman auxilia to break out, they had held firm. Barricades of wooden palisades and broken wagons now surrounded the palace, with men standing ever vigilant watch, lest their enemies be allowed to escape.

Eleazar approached the barriers nearest the large entrance to the palace. A number of bodies lay strewn about, along with a massive log they had attempted to use to batter their way in. The corpses of the slain were starting to bloat in the sun after a couple days, yet none dared attempt to retrieve them, lest they be struck down by one of the auxiliaries' throwing darts.

Thankfully, they had no archers amongst their ranks, otherwise they could possibly have forced their way out of the city already. The zealot leader walked in front of the barricade, his hands held high.

"Hail, most noble adversaries!" he shouted, alerting the Roman sentries. They were soon joined by their commander, an auxilia centurion named Metilius.

"And what would rebellious scum like you have of us?" the centurion called down from the flat roof of the palace.

"A truce," Eleazar answered. "We cannot get into the palace, and you cannot get out. We wish to have the halls of Herod the Great returned to us, and you wish to leave Jerusalem with your lives. The elders of the city offer you their right hands in oath that none of you will be harmed, if you would leave the palace and lay down your arms."

"And once we lay down our arms, what then?" Metilius was clearly skeptical, yet he had to know that no help was coming to him, and with only a couple hundred men under his command, there was no other way out for them. Food supplies in the palace would only last for so long, and by then they would be no closer to escape or rescue.

"You can simply walk away and leave Jerusalem forever," Eleazar replied.

"Do you think they will come out?" one of his men asked as the Roman auxiliaries went back inside to confer.

"We haven't offered them any chance at life before now," his leader reasoned. "They know this may be their one chance to live, for no help is coming for them."

After a number of minutes, there was a loud commotion on the other side of the large palace doors, where furniture and other implements to build a barricade were being pulled down. The doors opened with a loud creak, and Metilius led his men from the palace. All appeared exhausted from their ordeal of the past few days, yet relieved that it was over. Eleazar reasoned that legionaries would have been more likely to fight to the last and was grateful these men were simply foreign-born soldiers who served Rome in the attempt to win citizenship. It was to be denied to them this day.

The horde that had gathered around the men kept their distance while Metilius drew his gladius and dropped it into the dirt. His men laid down their spears, shields, and swords in turn.

"We leave you in peace," Metilius said. "Now let us pass."

Eleazar bowed slightly and backed away. A corridor opened through the crowd, as the now disarmed Roman auxiliaries walked somberly past them. The zealot leader then nodded quickly and with great shouts of rage, his men fell upon them.

"Betrayal!" one of the auxiliaries shouted. None attempted to defend themselves, nor did they appeal for mercy. They simply stood their ground and accepted their fate.

"You violate the laws of capitulation!" a soldier shouted, glaring at Eleazar. "And by our deaths you have sealed the fate of Judea!"

In a flashing of swords and spears, coupled with screams of pain and shouts of hatred, the auxiliaries were soon slain to the last man.

Only their leader, Metilius remained unscathed, being forced to watch the brutal deaths of his men. In that moment, whatever courage he had vanished, and he fell to his knees in terror. *"Mercy!"* he pleaded. "Show mercy and I will convert to Judaism! Circumcise me and count me as one of your own!"

Eleazar was befuddled for a moment, seeing this Roman suddenly lose whatever dignity he had by refusing to die honorably like his men.

"Hold!" the voice of Hanan shouted, staying the hand of a zealot who had raised his club to smash the Roman's head in. "If this man is willing to convert, then so be it. Let it be known that those who renounce the false idols and embrace the true faith of God will be shown clemency."

"Very well," Eleazar replied. He nodded to his men, who roughly lifted the Roman to his feet and led him away. He then looked to Hanan, who was clearly horrified by what had just transpired.

"It is not that I grieve for any of these dead men," he explained. "But by refusing to honor the terms of surrender, the Romans will be ever more savage than they've been before. And to have committed such slaughter on the Sabbath is an ill omen. May God have mercy on us now, for the Romans, surely, will not."

Chapter IX: The Purging of Alexandria

Alexandria, Egypt
September, 66 A.D.



Titus

For Titus, his return to the legions was welcomed, yet also filled with trepidation. Two weeks had passed since he left the port of Ostia near Rome, and as he stepped off the ship in the great harbor of Alexandria, he spent a moment taking in the monumental city that rivaled even the imperial capital in splendor and grandeur.

The young officer's full name was Titus Flavius Vespasian. He was named after his father, the former consul who was awarded *Triumphal Regalia* for his conquests in Britannia, and yet, had fallen on hard times after being exiled to Greece by Emperor Nero. Titus had received the rather distressing letter from his father, Vespasian, letting him know of his misfortune, the very same day as he had received his orders sending him to Alexandria. News of the unrest in Judea had yet to reach Rome, and so for all he knew, he was simply taking another military posting, this time in the east.

The posting was, officially, as chief tribune of the Fifteenth Legion, Apollinaris. Titus had already served two such consecutive three-year tours in Germania. While each legion had six military tribunes from the equites, the chief tribune came from the senatorial class. These postings went to young

patricians who had shown military leadership potential and were highly sought after; for the chief tribune was second-in-command of the legion. And, if the young officer performed his duties well, he could expect to eventually rise up to legate in command of the legion, the most auspicious posting for a Roman patrician.

Titus had made the most of the opportunities afforded him. During the third year of his last tour, he had been dispatched with reinforcements to assist in putting down the Iceni rebellion in Britannia. He fought his first actions there and was fortunate enough to receive written commendations from both his commanding legate, as well as the governor-general, Suetonius Paulinus. Upon returning to Rome, he spent a further three years as a legal magistrate, studying law, while also being appointed as a Quaestor, a position that conducted audits, as well as other financial and legal duties. While it had been satisfying work, he found it lacked the exhilaration and sense of accomplishment that serving with the legions offered.

Titus also had his share of personal and political issues while in Rome. His first wife died unexpectedly, and his second had the misfortune of being related to the Piso family, who were implicated and condemned in a recent plot to overthrow the emperor. Titus had quickly divorced his wife, lest he too be wrongfully associated with the conspirators, while also prohibiting her from seeing their infant daughter ever again. When he received the dispatch bearing the imperial seal three weeks ago, he, at first, feared it had something to do with the Pisonian Conspiracy, which was no doubt still fresh in Nero's mind. Having just finished reading his father's letter of misfortune earlier that day, had not helped matters any. He, therefore, took his transfer to the east with a sense of relief.

Since it was unusual for a young patrician to serve a third tour as a legion's chief tribune, he dared to speculate if, perhaps, greater things awaited him. He knew the current legate of the Fifteenth was nearing the end of his command tour, which gave him added hope.

"Chief Tribune Titus!" a voice called out, bringing the young officer out of his daze as he continued to admire the chaotic bustle of the city on a warm day with clear blue skies. Titus turned to see an equite tribune walk over and salute before extending his hand. "Governor Alexander sends his complements, sir, and asked me to accompany you to the palace."

"Are you of the Fifteenth?" Titus asked.

"I am, sir," the man, who appeared to be in his early twenties, said. "My

compulsory tour was almost finished, and I was set to return to Rome, but then the troubles with the Jews began." He pointed towards a large thoroughfare that would take them to the palace that had once been the seat of power for the Egyptian Ptolemaic Dynasty. The last of that line had been Queen Cleopatra VII; the lover of Marc Antony who had committed suicide after their defeat at the Battle of Actium, nearly a century prior.

"Oh?" Titus raised an eyebrow, as the equite tribune walked beside him.

"All started in Jerusalem about three months ago," the tribune, whose name was Porcius, replied. "And, as you know, the Greeks and Jews have no love lost between them, which has led to further outbreaks of violence within the eastern provinces."

"But all appears to be normal here in Alexandria," Titus said.

The young tribune shook his head. "Governor Alexander will be able to explain in more detail, sir, but what you see here is a façade."

Alexandria had been founded by Alexander the Great in 331 B.C., and while the pharos of the Ptolemaic Dynasty had ruled Egypt, they were decidedly Greek in both culture and dress. Indeed, the heart of Egypt resembled a Hellenistic city far more than an Egyptian one. The large palace of Queen Cleopatra, the last of the Ptolemaic line, had housed the Roman governor and his staff since the Roman acquisition of Egypt.

Titus and Porcius walked up the long flight of very wide steps that led into the palace proper. A pair of legionaries stood guard on either side of the large double doors, with two more immediately inside. The soldiers brought their heels together as they came to attention, driving the butts of their pila onto the stone step in salute. A large foyer led to a long corridor, at the end of which stood a half opened door.

Inside a large and rather ostentatious office, stood several men gathered around a large table. Several wore military tunics with various white leather trappings about the shoulders, as well as purple cloaks slung over a single shoulder that denoted their status as senior officers. The man who stood across from them wore a civilian white toga, bordered by a narrow purple stripe that denoted his status as a member of the equites. He was slightly taller than average, with a lean face and thick head of hair that was graying on the sides.

"Titus!" he said excitedly as the two men entered. He seemed to almost bound around the table, clasping the chief tribune's hand enthusiastically.

“You’ve arrived at a good time. We were just reviewing the situation within the Jewish quarter of the city and what must be done about it.”

“Alexander would have us wipe them out,” one of the officers said, turning to face them. Given that he appeared to be in his late thirties, well dressed, and with a strong aura about him, Titus assumed he must be his commanding legate.

“General Rubellius, I presume,” Titus said. When the man nodded, the chief tribune extended his hand quickly. “A pleasure to meet you, sir.”

“Yes, Rubellius here is hoping for a negotiated end to the crisis,” Alexander remarked as he walked back around the table. “I can’t say I blame him, though I suspect this affair will end rather bloodily.”

Tiberius Julius Alexander was best described as half Alexandrian, half Jew, and all Roman. Born into the equites and now approaching fifty, he had served as Procurator of Judea during the reign of Claudius, soon after the death of King Agrippa I and the restoring of direct Roman control over the province. He later served as a military tribune under Corbulo during the Parthian War in Armenia. In spite of his Jewish ethnicity, or perhaps even because of it, Nero had appointed him as Prefect of Egypt. It was speculated that his intimate knowledge of both Greek and Jewish culture would prove invaluable to Alexander, and by default to Rome.

Though subordinate in social and political class to Titus and the commanding legate of the Fifteenth Legion, Alexander enjoyed a very unique position for a member of the equites in having legions posted to his province. Following the defeat and subsequent deaths of Queen Cleopatra and her lover, the traitor Marc Antony, Egypt had become a Roman province, under the direct control of the emperor, who appointed a member of the equites that answered directly to him, rather than a member of the senatorial class who could pose as a potential rival. As such, Prefect of Egypt was the second most auspicious posting for a member of the lesser nobility, with only Prefect of the Praetorian Guard being considered senior. Because of these factors, Alexander was able to speak rather candidly with the patrician class officers.

“The hostility between Grecian and Jew goes all the way back to the founding of this city,” Alexander explained, giving Titus and the others a brief history of the perpetual troubles. “For their assistance in subduing the Egyptians, Alexander the Great gave the Jews the same honors and status as his fellow Greeks. They were also given their own vast section of the city, known as *the Delta*, where non-Jews have been prohibited from entering, and

thus ‘contaminating’ it with their ungodly presence.”

“Nearly four hundred years later, and the Jews and Greeks still battle each other continuously,” Rubellius added.

“And let me guess,” Titus spoke up, “the unrest in Judea has now spread to Alexandria.”

“*Unrest* would be putting it mildly,” the legate remarked.

“There have been a number of riots that have bordered on pitched battles,” Alexander said. “Most recently, the entire council of the Greek assembly were meeting in a local theater to discuss sending a message to Emperor Nero, regarding the increased violence, when the place was surrounded by a vast Jewish mob. I don’t know who started the fight, and I don’t give a pile of bat shit. What I do know is that the Jews have threatened to burn down the theater, along with everyone inside. I have sent delegations to them, warning that if they do not desist immediately, I will be forced to unleash the legions upon them.”

At this, Rubellius turned to his master centurion. “Place the legion on alert. I want everyone kitted up and ready for battle at a moment’s notice.”

“Sir!” the master centurion said with a salute as he quickly left the hall.

“Go with him,” the legate ordered Titus. “You’re already in your armor, and Master Centurion Ralla will give you a proper introduction to the legion. I will be there as soon as we hear back from the delegation.”

“Welcome to Alexandria,” the master centurion said with a laugh as Titus caught up to and fell into step beside him. The man was slightly shorter than he, though he kept a very quick gait. Like all plebian soldiers who had achieved the highest rank attainable for the common legionary, he had done so over a period of decades.

Titus reckoned the man was nearly old enough to be his father. Given his vast experience, one of Ralla’s duties was to train the chief tribune and make certain he was ready to command his own legion someday.

“I understand you’ve already served two terms as a chief tribune,” Ralla said as he mounted his horse just outside the palace. Then noting that Titus did not have a mount, he pointed to a black mare and said, “Take that one. It belongs to one of the staff tribunes.” He informed the two soldiers guarding the officers’ horses, and they then rode along the large forum that surrounded the palace.

“Yes,” Titus said, answering the man’s question. “I served in both

Germania and Britannia."

"You'll be easy to work with, then," Ralla said with a grin. He noted Titus' puzzled gaze. "Meaning no disrespect, sir. I've dealt with more young chief tribunes during my time under the eagle than I can count, all seeking to make a name for themselves."

"I'm not here for fame," Titus reassured him. "I am simply here to do my duty."

"Right you are, sir. Of course, it's just rumor right now, but Rubellius is getting rather short on his tenure here, and unless he's granted an extension to serve a consecutive tour, he'll be leaving us soon."

"And will he ask for an extension?" Titus asked.

"Shouldn't think so," Ralla replied, "seeing as how he hasn't asked for one yet. And with him leaving, that will leave his posting vacant. Since I haven't seen any orders assigning a new legate, one could speculate that you will be his successor." The master centurion's thoughts echoed Titus' own assumptions ever since he received his orders.

"We shall see," he replied, not mentioning the difficulties his family had been through as of late, seeing as how they were of no concern to a plebian soldier. Instead, he decided to change the topic of discussion. "Governor Alexander is in an envious position, being able to damn near give orders to senatorial legates."

"It's the nature of this posting," Ralla said. "While he cannot *order* a legion within his province into battle, his very *asking* could be subtly implied as coming directly from the emperor."

"And do you think we will have to go into battle?" Titus asked.

"Without a doubt," the master centurion replied. "There has been too much violence already between the Greeks and Jews within Alexandria. No doubt that is why the legate is sending you into the fray; perfect timing, what with you just getting off the ship and all. Whatever action we see this day will likely be his last as our commanding general, and though we haven't seen any official orders yet, it won't hurt your chances at succeeding him if you go straight into battle, just after coming off the boat, and perform well."

It was surreal to Titus. He had expected the usual greetings from the legate and supporting staff, followed by a tour of the barracks, then the midday meal to discuss the particulars of the legion and the city. That morning when he had awoken and saw the city of Alexandria coming into view, he never could have guessed the possibility that he would be riding into

battle before he'd even found his quarters!

A gigantic complex had been carved out of the city, soon after Egypt's defeat and annexation by Rome, and restructured to house a pair of legions. There were two sister legions that shared the fortress. Legio XXII, Deiotariana, was named in honor of its founder, a legendary Celtic king named Deiotarus, who had raised the legion and been a loyal Roman ally of the legendary general, Pompey Magnus. The other, Legio III, Cyrenaica, was named after the region of its founding, which was just to the west of Egypt. However, it was not to this complex that Master Centurion Ralla led his new chief tribune.

The Fifteenth Legion had only recently been sent down from two years of garrison duty within Armenia, in the territories won by Corbulo from the Parthians. As such, they lived in a typical legionary marching camp just outside the city and not far from the Jewish Delta.

Legio XV had been given its epitaph, *Apollinaris*, meaning *Legion of Apollo*, by Augustus for its distinguished conduct when fighting aboard ships during the Battle of Actium. The legion had served under the future emperor, Tiberius, during the campaigns in Pannonia, where it remained for almost sixty years before eventually being returned to the east.

As they rode into the east gate of the camp, Ralla gave some orders to the decanus who was in charge of the squad manning the gate and its accompanying guard towers. Titus then followed the master centurion over to the large red tent that served as the principia, the legion's headquarters. Towering over the other tents within the camp and extending as long as a hardened command post building, it was an impressive sight in and of itself. They quickly dismounted and made their way inside. Ralla grabbed the cornicen that was on duty and directed him to sound the alert.

The musician grabbed his horn and rushed outside, where he sounded the rapid series of loud notes, which may have meant nothing to the citizens of Alexandria who had to listen to them every day, but to the officers and men of the Fifteenth Legion, it warned them to be ready for action. The bathhouse located just a block from the camp cleared out, as half naked soldiers taking a morning plunge raced back to their billets. Soldiers on work details or conducting various drills and exercises did the same. Only those tasked with manning the walls and guarding the gates remained at their posts. The centurions pilus prior who commanded the legion's cohorts, as well as the centurions primus ordo of the elite First Cohort, soon arrived, wax tablets and

styluses in hand to receive the orders.

"Men," Ralla said, "the crisis within the city between the Jews and the Grecians has reached a breaking point. The Greek assembly has been surrounded by Jewish renegades, who are threatening to burn them alive. Unless a negotiated truce is reached quickly, we are to march straight to the Jewish Delta and smash the bastards into oblivion. Once your men are kitted up, have your centurions do a quick inspection, after which they can finish their breakfasts and stand easy. Just make certain every last one of them is ready for battle at a moment's notice. Also, since any potential fighting will be done street-to-street and house-to-house, the men will leave their javelins and carry gladii only."

Titus scanned the faces of the men who served as the senior leaders of what he suspected may soon be his legion. Almost all were hardened veterans with twenty or more years in the ranks, although he did note that two of the cohort commanders appeared to be a bit younger, probably in their early to mid-thirties.

"Any questions?" Ralla asked. There were none, as the orders at this moment were fairly simple. He then turned to Titus. "This is Chief Tribune Titus Flavius Vespasian. Don't let his youthful appearance fool you. He's already served two tours of duty, and he took part in suppressing the Iceni Rebellion in Britannia five years ago."

"Centurions," Titus said with a respectful nod.

"Sir," they replied.

"Alright, return to your cohorts," Ralla said. "I want this legion ready to march within the next half hour. Dismissed."

Orders were quickly passed to the centurions, and with rapid efficiency, legionaries donned their armor and kit, standing for inspection outside of their tents. All cohort commanders reported their men ready for battle in just over half the time given them. Barely an additional hour had passed when Legate Rubellius returned to the camp. His face was grim and full of determination as Titus and Ralla stepped out of the principia tent to meet him, along with the staff tribunes and First Cohort centurions.

"It's worse than before," he said quickly. "The mob attacked Alexander's envoys, who barely escaped with their lives. Our orders are to march on the Delta and destroy it. We will be on the right wing of the attack, the Third Legion on the left. Vexilations of the Twenty-Second will hold the center in

reserve. Cornicen, sound the assembly."

As he sat astride his horse next to the commanding legate, watching the legion cohorts form up into two large marching columns, Titus found himself in a familiar position once more, albeit in a completely different climate. Four of the equite tribunes accompanied them and were also mounted. One was left to supervise the guard detail left at the camp, the other, whose horse Titus had procured, remained with Alexander to act as his liaison.

"The legion is formed, sir!" Master Centurion Ralla said as he walked up and saluted.

"Very good, master centurion," Rubellius replied, returning the salute. He then turned his horse about and addressed the men. *"Fifteenth Legion! Forward…march!"*

Titus was impressed at how far his booming voice carried.

A cornicen echoed the order with a pair of blasts from his horn and, as a single-minded entity, the five thousand legionaries stepped off together, their hobnailed sandals sounding a rhythmic cadence upon the ground as they marched.

The Jewish quarter was known as the Delta due to it extending out onto the sea. It was huge and was, in reality, its own city. Titus quickly understood why Alexander had requested such a massive force to crush its rebellious denizens. They found the governor atop his horse in front of the theater where the Greek assembly had been threatened with smoldering death. Three cohorts from the Twenty-Second Legion were arrayed in four ranks in front of the prefect. They were acting as his personal guard, as well as a reserve force; not so much because Alexander thought two legions would be insufficient for the task, but rather to keep any Jews, who might be able to flee from the assaulting cohorts, from escaping the pending destruction. Behind them, tens of thousands of enraged Greek citizens had gathered. They were mostly silent, their faces filled with hatred. The attempted incineration of their council of elders had proven too much, and they would now watch with malicious delight as their enemies fell victim to the legions. Off to Alexander's left, the Third Legion was marching towards him, already arrayed into battle formation.

"Form up the legion," Rubellius ordered Titus. "I am going to have a word with Alexander before we attack."

Titus simply nodded, surprised that the legate trusted him already. But

then, he was not exactly a fresh-faced senator's son who had never served in battle. Indeed, Titus' experience during the harrowing and decisive defeat of Queen Boudicca's army in Britannia, in what history would later call the *Battle of Watling Street*, was still fresh in his mind five years later.

"Battle formation!" he shouted as he turned back towards the waiting legionaries. *"First Cohort take the center, all other cohorts will dress off them. Second Cohort, fall in on the far left, link up with the Third Legion. Move!"*

The chief tribune never ceased to be amazed at how rapidly and efficiently a professional army could execute its drill and maneuver. The elite First Cohort held in place, facing towards the Delta. The aquilifer stood in front of them in the center, holding the eagle standard high so as to give the forming cohorts their point of reference. The centurions in command of each cohort's six centuries formed their men into four ranks, with the centurions pilus prior placing each cohort in its position on the legion's battle line. The entire maneuver of bringing ten cohorts of legionaries from a pair of marching columns into battle line had only taken two to three minutes. The master centurion, who would be leading the First Cohort once they advanced, soon joined Titus, along with the aquilifer and a cornicen. The chief tribune looked across the way, where thousands of Jewish men armed with clubs, spears and slings awaited them. The sight of the legions had only emboldened them, and their ranks swelled as the Delta was emptying itself of every man and boy who could carry a weapon. There was no remorse on their faces for the calamity they had brought upon themselves, only contempt and hatred. They shouted insults in both Hebrew and Greek, which incensed the Grecian horde that stood watching behind the legions.

"They certainly don't lack for bravery," the aquilifer said, glancing back over his shoulder.

"Bravery or foolishness," Titus replied. He looked to the cornicen. "Sound cohort commanders' call."

Four short blasts from the horn, and soon the nine men who led the regular cohorts came jogging in from both wings of the legion. As they formed a half circle in front of Titus, Legate Rubellius rode back to them.

"Nice work, Titus," he said with approval. He then addressed the centurions. "Men, we are to destroy the Delta in its entirety."

"What about prisoners, sir?" a cohort commander asked.

"The population here is quite vast," another centurion pilus prior added.

“We could make a small fortune off selling them into slavery.”

The legate shook his head. “No,” he replied. “Destruction means every building will burn, and every man, woman, and child is to be slain. Your legionaries are cleared to plunder whatever they wish as they press through, just be certain they are thorough. *No one* is to get out of the Delta alive!”

As the cohort commanders raced back to their units to brief their centurions, Rubellius turned to Titus. “We are battling on a wide front, and coordination will be difficult once we reach the city blocks. You will command all cohorts to the right of the First, I will take the left. Master Centurion Ralla, you will serve as our axis in the center.”

“Yes, sir,” Ralla replied before taking his place at the head of his cohort.

Titus nodded to his legate and then rode down the line until he was centered between the middle two cohorts on the right wing. He drew his gladius, which he held high to show he was set. Rubellius did the same, and then pointed his weapon in the direction of the aquilifer, who raised the eagle high. A single trumpet blast sounded ominously, and the eagle was waved forward in a long arc.

“Advance!” Titus shouted.

The Third and Fifteenth Legions moved at a steady walk, with soldiers giving a more deliberately hard step to their footfalls so as to sound an even louder cadence than when they had first marched to the Delta.

“Gladius…draw!” was shouted by the centurions as they closed with the still-growing Jewish horde. Each soldier on the line kept about three to four feet between himself and the men on either side of him. This allowed enough room to move about freely once they engaged, while at the same time keeping close enough that they could support each other, as well as enabling them to close formation as necessary. To the Jews, though, the legions appeared to be one single entity. The wall of brightly painted shields, held against the bodies of men wearing banded plate armor, a monster with near impenetrable hide, and flashing blades for teeth.

As the legions advanced, Titus kept his horse about twenty paces behind the line, to best be able to see what was happening, both on the extreme right, as well as keeping Legate Rubellius in view. He noticed that Alexander and his four cohorts were also advancing, as was the Greek mob. The chief tribune knew his duties were fairly straightforward, keep cohesion on the right wing, while shifting units as necessary to prevent their enemies from escaping. The centurions on the battle line were the true professionals, and it

was they who would lead their men in this brutal task. Titus reckoned he should not have to personally bloody his weapon unless absolutely necessary. And yet, like his father, he had a knack for leading his men from the front, and so his sword arm twitched as he fought against the urge to spur his horse forward into the pending fray.

The dwellers of the Delta, who had been so bold when faced with little more than a mob of enraged Greeks, now realized their pending doom as the marching cadence of Roman soldiers echoed sinisterly. They started to back away towards the perceived safety of their structures. Sensing this, and wishing to catch as many in the open as possible, Titus elected to steal the initiative.

"Right wing…charge!" he shouted, raising his sword high. The command was echoed by centurions up and down the line, and with a long battle cry, the legionaries hunkered down behind their shields, swords ready to stab, and broke into a sprint to close the remaining distance. As the first rank of legionaries crashed into the now panicking mob, Titus took a quick glance off to his left. He saw that the First Cohort had followed his lead, with the rest of the legion following suit. Soldiers were now stabbing away very rapidly as the Jewish throng beat their clubs and swords against the shield wall in vain. The Greek mob cheered lustily as screams of pain punctuated the deafening sounds of battle.

Bodies fell in heaps, and the wall of legionaries advanced very quickly. Within the first minute, Titus' horse already had to step over the gory masses of slain and badly mauled rioters. The Jews, being poorly equipped with minimal weapons, no armor, and no real training to speak of, were horribly mismatched against the heavily armed professional soldiers who savaged them without mercy. Though they were certainly brave, facing a legion head on was nothing short of suicidal. It was nearly impossible to strike a blow past the wall of shields without first being stabbed by either the legionary they were attacking or one of his mates on either side of him. And if one did manage to bring their weapon to bear past the shield wall, while evading legionary blades for a split second, their strikes most likely would be deflected off either the soldier's helmet or protective armor.

Fatigue would be the legionary's greatest antagonist this day. And so, upon orders from the centurions, soldiers in the front rank would withdraw between the files of their companions, while those behind them surged forward into the fray. This concept, known as the *passage-of-lines*, was a

Roman innovation which enabled centuries to rotate their lines, thereby keeping fresh soldiers out front.

As the mob was driven back into the streets, numerous fighters appeared on the rooftops, bearing slings and throwing spears, which they rained down upon the legions. Though centurions quickly ordered their men to raise their shields to form protective shells over themselves, a number of enemy missiles still struck home. While most bounced harmlessly off the soldiers' armor, there were those that found their mark, embedding themselves in the necks and smashing the faces of legionaries. Casualties inflicted this way were the only means of retribution the Jewish mob attained thus far.

Fighting progressed onto the streets, with officers ordering their men to methodically tear apart each house or block of flats. Screams were heard from within as rampaging soldiers smashed in the doors and commenced to slaughter all within. Titus rode up and down the streets, casting glances down alleys and making certain that every foot of ground, as well as every building, was being systematically assaulted by his men. Soldiers had been ordered to toss out all valuables they wished to plunder onto the street. Once the fighting was over, they could retrieve whatever they wished from the piles of ill-gotten gains.

Titus soon found the term *'streets running red with blood'* to be literally true, as many tried to flee their ransacked homes, only to be slaughtered by those soldiers who raged through the streets. Dark crimson flowed freely from the twitching bodies of the dead and dying, running in between the cobblestones of the paved roads and soaking into the dirt paths that made up other streets and alleyways.

"Up there, sir!" a legionary shouted.

Titus looked up just in time to see a Jewish rebel lob his short throwing spear at him. Fortunately for the chief tribune, it was a rather crude weapon that was little more than a stick with a sharpened stone on the end. It deflected off his armor, with a shard of broken rock scoring the cheek guard of his helmet.

"Son of a bitch!" Titus swore under his breath. He quickly dismounted his horse and smashed his foot into the rickety plank door of the stone building. The boards were shattered by his third kick, and as he shoved aside the broken door, he looked back over his shoulder to a squad of awaiting legionaries. "With me!"

Cowering in the corner of the lower floor of the hovel was a young

woman and several terrified children. They shrieked in terror at the sight of the enraged Roman soldier, who brandished his weapon menacingly as he quickly scanned the room. There wasn't much, just a table and some chairs, along with a cooking pot over a clay oven in the opposite corner to where the woman and her children lay cringing in fear. A flight of wooden steps led up to the roof, the light coming through the opening being all that lit the room.

The woman and her children's cries had alerted the men on the roof, and one came rushing down the steps, which echoed audibly as he hurried to protect his loved ones. He was young; probably the woman's or her husband's brother. His hair was in disarray, and all he carried was a bundle of throwing darts and a hand axe. He gave a shout of rage at the sight of Titus and made a rush for him. The man was brave, but no match for the heavily armed Roman, and as he dropped his darts and raised his axe high, Titus plunged his gladius into the man's abdomen. The Jew had been racing towards him, and his momentum only caused the weapon to bury itself all the way to the hilt. His eyes grew wide, his weapon falling from his hand as the force of his falling into the chief tribune sent them both crashing against the table. As spittle and blood fell from his lips, he grabbed a hold of the Roman with his failing strength. Titus placed his forearm across the man's chest and threw him off as he pulled out his weapon, now soaked in blood.

The woman screamed as the twitching body fell at the feet of her and her children. The entire ordeal had taken but a few seconds, and the room was now swarming with a squad of legionaries. As she stood protectively over the horrified children, a soldier punched her hard across the mouth before stabbing her through in the throat with his gladius. His companions quickly fell upon the screaming children, slaying all with blood-spraying slashes of their weapons.

Titus then quickly sprang up the steps to the roof, only to find the children's father on his knees, face red with sorrow, wailing uncontrollably. The sight of those one loves the most being brutally murdered will trigger reactions of both rage and the harshest of sorrows. Fortunately for Titus, it was the pain of loss that had crippled this man, overwhelming his anger for one brief moment. The chief tribune stood over the pitiful man, almost feeling sorry for him in that moment of his profoundest grief. Finding his resolve, he grabbed the man by the hair and slashed his gladius across his throat. The grieving Jew collapsed as each bodily convulsion sent gouts of blood gushing from the wound. He was mercifully dead before Titus had

descended the steps back into the madness below. The floor inside the hovel was sticky with blood and gore. The legionaries, having found nothing of value, quickly moving on to clear the next building.

Titus mounted his horse and, after wiping the blood off his weapon, he continued to make his way along the various streets, getting his bearings and locating each of his cohorts as they tore the Delta city apart. He soon spotted the eagle, which marked the center of the legion. A number of soldiers guarded the sacred standard, and they quickly slew any who attempted to assail the aquilifer.

The legion advanced rather quickly and as the chief tribune rode back towards his men, after having made visual contact with the First Cohort, he found they had already advanced a further two blocks. All he had to do was follow the bloody trail of pilfered treasure and eviscerated bodies. Buildings were burning, the destruction ensuring that no escaping Jews could hide within. Titus noted the occasional slain legionary, as these men were laid in the middle of the street, away from the falling buildings that had been set alight. They would be collected up later, to be given proper funeral honors by their fellow soldiers. Titus found he pitied them in a strange way, given they had died not in battle with an enemy army that threatened Rome, but in the massacre of what was little more than a rebellious mob. To him it was an undignified way to die.

As the late afternoon sun started to slowly make its descent into the west, the soldiers of the Fifteenth and Third Legions reached the coastal shores of the Delta district. Waves lapped against the rocky shoals that were littered with bodies. They reckoned a number of Jews had, possibly, escaped by taking their chances in the sea. Where they would go was anyone's guess. The seas were choppy, and many would likely drown. Those whom fatigue drove back ashore along the banks of Alexandria, would likely be torn to pieces by the rampaging mobs of wrathful Greeks, who now fell upon the thousands of dead and dying within the district.

"Welcome to Alexandria, sir," a voice said beside Titus as he gazed out into the sea.

He turned to see it was the centurion pilus prior who commanded one of the flank cohorts.

The chief tribune dismounted his horse, and sheathed his spatha. "Not what you expected on your first day was it?"

"I don't think anyone ever thinks they are going to engage in a pitched

battle, followed by the sacking and slaughter of an entire city district before they've so much as found their quarters," Titus replied with a macabre chuckle that the centurion matched.

The sound of a cornicen's horn in the distance alerted them.

"They're sounding recall," the cohort commander noted.

"That must mean the city has been cleared," Titus said.

The centurion nodded. "Yes, sir. With your permission, we'll start our withdrawal back through the Delta."

"Very good," Titus replied. "The men can collect any loot they wish, provided they make certain to not leave any of their fallen behind."

"Yes, sir. Contrary to what many may think, the Roman army has quite the knack for organized plunder." The centurion winked at the last remark before jogging back to his men, barking out orders as he did so.

Just then the waft of smoke assailed Titus' nostrils, as it was accompanied by the scent of burning flesh. Many of the bodies of their slain enemies had been left where they fell. Now their charring corpses added a horrid stench to the air.

"And to think this has only just begun," the chief tribune said quietly. This was not Titus' first action, nor was he new to the sights, sounds, and horrific smells of battle. Indeed, he had taken part in the slaughter of the Iceni in Britannia, along with their families who had gathered to watch the battle that brought that particular rebellion to a bloody and ghastly end. All the same, the killing of so many, especially women and children, sat uneasy with him. It was the harsh realities of the era they lived in, but it did not mean he had to necessarily like it. As he rode his horse along the blood-slick streets, he wondered if there would come a time when it ceased to trouble him.



The slaughter within Jerusalem that followed Manahem's overthrow had been smaller, perhaps, but it was no less horrific than that in Alexandria. The false king was dead, and with the Sicarii either killed or fled to Masada, order had at last come to the holy city.

"The people have chosen you to lead them," Josephus smiled to Hanan. "Perhaps now reason will guide the Jews, rather than reckless hate."

"We can only hope so," his friend and mentor replied.

This was the first meeting of the established council for the independent

state of Judea, and many elders, priests, military leaders, and various nobles were present. Along with Niger of Perea and Yohanan ben Levi was a man named Simon bar Giora. He was the leader of an extremely violent sect of zealots, who had come to Jerusalem in an attempt to unite his vast numbers of fighters with the common cause of the moderates, in return for a prominent posting within the new government. Also present was a highly respected former general of King Agrippa's named Silas of Babylonia.

The doors opened and Eleazar strolled in, carrying a Roman auxiliary helmet under his arm. Like many, he had taken the opportunity to equip himself well with the arms left by Manahem from the Herodian armory, as well as the slain Roman auxilia. His face was somber, and his eyes bloodshot as if he had been weeping. This surprised no one, for once the fighting in Jerusalem settled down, he had taken the time to lament the loss of his father and uncle, whose deaths he blamed himself for. He was furthermore terrified at the prospect that the slaughter of the unarmed Roman soldiers on the Sabbath would bring about the wrath of God Himself. And so it was with a bowed head, he dropped to one knee before Hanan.

"I have come to atone for my transgressions before God, most humbly for the death of my father," he said. "I now pledge my loyalty to Hanan ben Hanan, high elder of Judea, to be used as he sees fit in the greater cause of the free Jewish peoples."

"On your feet, son," Hanan replied. "I am not your king, nor will I be addressed as one." He then spoke to the assembly. "I thank you for your trust in me, and in Joseph ben Gorion, who will serve as my deputy secretary. To Yohanan and Niger of Perea, we look to the defense of our new state. Silas of Babylonia, you are most welcome, your military credentials do you much credit."

"Honored, noble Hanan," Silas replied. "There is a dark history amongst our peoples, but know that I accept the God of Abraham and embrace the true faith in His divine name. I will give my life in its defense."

"As a former general of King Agrippa, I know it must have been difficult deciding where your allegiance lies," Hanan observed.

"My allegiance is on the side of the righteous," the Babylonian asserted.

The sounds of slow clapping drew the assembly's attention to the Zealot, Simon, who forced his way to the front.

"All great flowering speeches," he said, his voice dripping with sarcasm. "But it is not just generals of a bygone era that will win our freedom. You

will need warriors, and lots of them. I have fifty thousand men that I can call upon to face the invaders. If we can come to an agreement, then they will be yours."

"We know your reputation well, Simon bar Giora," Hanan replied calmly. "You are an uncompromising renegade who is almost as big a threat to law and order as the Sicarii who now skulk in hiding at the fortress of Masada. When Manahem usurped the throne, you were nowhere to be found. Only now, after his death, do you show yourself. Forgive us, then, if we have doubts as to your loyalties."

"You're very presumptuous, Hanan," Simon retorted. "As one who ordered the death of James the Just, you are hardly in a position to chastise or give yourself airs of piety. You are of the same scum of the earth as the rest of us."

"I did not call this council to argue the merits of one faction over the other," Hanan said, his voice still calm despite his growing temper. "Nor is it a place for us to ridicule or call into account the sins of each other. If you wish to join the greater society of our Jewish state, then you must be willing to show loyalty, not to yourself nor your faction of zealots, but to the people of Judea."

"Loyal are those who defeat the Romans," Simon said, his eyes narrowing. "And when I come again, you will be begging me to join the Judean hierarchy." With that, he gave a bow of mock subjugation and promptly left the hall.

"While I welcome any success against the Romans," Josephus said, "I think he will be an even greater threat than Manahem was, should he prove successful."

"Enough about him," Hanan remarked, taking control of the meeting once more. "What we now require is an army, a full-time professional force of fighting men. Silas, Niger, Yohanan, you three will raise up a mobile force of soldiers who are both loyal and valiant. They will put aside their former trades and take up the sword."



"You wished to see me, sir?" Titus asked as he entered Rubellius' office, that for the moment was little more than a partitioned section of the enormous tent that served as the principia. It had now been a week since his arrival, and

the Fifteenth Legion still did not have a permanent place to billet its troops, as such remaining in marching camp. It was still comfortable enough, at least for the officers.

"I did," the legate replied as he motioned his chief tribune towards a camp chair. He had a pair of scrolls in his hand and, though Titus could not make out the broken seals on them, the red tassels attached to each led him to surmise they had come from the highest authority. A slave entered with a tray bearing silver wine chalices, while another came in with a platter full of dates and nuts.

"Please eat," Rubellius said with a nod towards the refreshments. The two men ate and drank in silence before the legate held up one of the scrolls. "As you know, my term of service with the Fifteenth Legion is coming to an end. There are two sets of orders here. One is the termination of my command, along with all the flowering words of praise from the senate, emperor, etcetera, ordering me to return to Rome and take my place amongst the senate once more."

"And the other?" Titus asked, finding he could not control his anticipation. Of course, he knew what it contained, he just did not know whether it pertained directly to him, or to another member of the patrician class who had been appointed to take command of the legion.

"When you first arrived," Rubellius said, avoiding the question, "you took part in the subdual of the rebellious Jews in Alexandria. You had barely come off the boat, had not so much as found your quarters, and yet when the legion marched into battle, you performed your duties with both professionalism and valor. I figured such a harrowing experience might show your true leadership potential, and I was right. I also thought, perhaps, it would demonstrate to the emperor and senate your fitness for command. Well, judging by the date of this second dispatch, they had already made up their minds before you even arrived." He then handed the second scroll to Titus who, at first, thought that perhaps his hopes of command were for naught. Instead, his face grew into a broad grin as he read the contents.

Titus Flavius Vespasian,

You are hereby relieved of your position as Chief Tribune and are ordered to assume command as Legate of the Fifteenth Legion, Apollinaris, effective immediately.

Signed,

Gaius Suetonius Paulinus
Consul of Rome

"Are you sure they've got the right 'Titus Flavius Vespasian'?" Titus asked with a nervous laugh.

"Given your father's little mishap in Greece a few months ago, I doubt that Nero would be giving him a legion command so soon," Rubellius chuckled.

"Ah, so you did hear about that," Titus grumbled.

"My good man, *everyone* heard about it. Not that it matters here, of course. Your father is still a legend amongst the legions, his falling asleep during one of Nero's insufferable recitals be damned. And I think his son will do him proud."

Rubellius stood and extended his hand, which Titus readily accepted. "I no longer acknowledge you as my subordinate, Titus, but rather I welcome you as my peer."

That evening, Titus reread the order for the twentieth time. It gave him additional satisfaction to see that it was Paulinus, his former commander during the Iceni Rebellion, who had signed the order. There was a letter that Rubellius had given him that was a personal message from the consul. It read:

To Titus Flavius Vespasian, greetings,

It is with great joy that I was able to sign the order promoting you to command of the Fifteenth Legion. I remember with much approval your valiant service during that hateful affair in Britannia five years ago. Despite your relative youth, it is these memories of your leadership and conduct that led me to endorse your promotion.

With the situation in Judea becoming ever more volatile, I suspect it will not be long before you are leading men into battle once more. My one regret is that I have been unable to compel the emperor to recall your

father to active service. I am a proud old soldier, yet even I will readily admit that Vespasian is the strongest military leader of the age, and that his skills in battle surpass my own. For the sake of Rome, however, I do hope that by the time this reaches you, Gallus will have put down the revolt and beaten those troublesome Jews into docile submission once more.

The emperor has ordered me back to Rome, and so I will be leaving his entourage, which has recently arrived at Tarsus in Asia Minor. Nero intends to sail for Rome within a few weeks, and so I must return and make certain the city is ready to receive him. The route I'll be sailing will take me via Myra, then the Isle of Rhodes, and from there straight to Ostia and Rome. So, unfortunately, I will not be able to stop off in Arcadia to pay my respects to your father. Please know I wish him the best. While I pray daily to Mars and Victoria to grant our soldiers victory in rebellious Judea, if calamity befalls them, I expect Rome's greatest general to return to the ranks once more.

Wishing you success in peace and glory in battle, your friend,

Gaius Suetonius Paulinus

The words of his former commander and mentor brought Titus a strange mix of relief, as well as anxiety. Clearly, Paulinus had a lot of faith in him and his abilities as a leader of soldiers. By the same token, the responsibility was vast and Titus was very young for a commanding legate. He was the same age as many of the legionaries and decanii, and even the youngest of the centurions were at least a few years older than he. Still, the violent purging of Alexandria had given him a chance to immediately gain the trust and confidence of the men. Master Centurion Ralla was a competent senior leader, and Titus hoped he would be sent a chief tribune with at least some experience.

What troubled him even more was the great unknown revolving around the rebellion in Judea. News traveled slowly, even by imperial post, and it was always preceded with a plethora of rumors and gossip. Having bloodied their swords in the Delta, Titus' men were now anxious to join the main push to Jerusalem. Even amongst the centurions there was an attitude that the war

would end quickly and the rebel leaders would be nailed to crucifixes before the Fifteenth Legion could get involved.

A knock on the door jolted Titus out of his thoughts. “Enter!” he said, grinning as he saw it was his master centurion.

“Sir, I just came to extend my congratulations to you,” Ralla said as he walked in and saluted.

“Much obliged,” Titus replied. He then pointed to a chair. “Please, have a seat.”

The legate took a moment to apprise the man who he would be relying on extensively if he were to succeed as a legion commander. Ralla was not a big man, being a couple inches shorter than Titus. His hair was still thick, but mostly gray, and while Titus did not know his exact age, he surmised that Ralla had joined the legions well before he was even born. A deep and rather ghastly scar ran along the left corner of his mouth, all the way up to his ear. It greatly marred what had been, at one time, a handsome face.

“The men seem convinced this war with the Jews will end before we have a chance to bloody our swords again,” Titus said, echoing his earlier concerns.

“If they think that, then they are damned fools,” the master centurion remarked. “And if Gallus feels the same way, then Mars help us if he becomes careless.”

“My thoughts exactly,” Titus replied. “The worst thing one can do when going into battle is underestimate your opponent. No matter how well laid out ones strategic and tactical plans are, the enemy always has a say in the matter.”

“Well spoken, sir,” Ralla replied. “The Jews of this region are volatile, arrogant, and obsessive to the point of insanity, yet they are not stupid. These are not unwashed barbarians who will compliantly charge headlong into our shield walls for us to massacre. They are very cunning, and they know that in open battle they will lose against us.”

“Ambushes and selected raids will be their strategy,” Titus noted. “And when they strike, it will be without mercy, for as they have already seen, they will get none from us. Still, do you think the Fifteenth will be involved in this campaign?”

“Honestly, sir, you can answer that better than I can. I try and keep up on the political situation, only because it helps me to quash the never ending rumors that run rampant, plus it allows me and my centurions a better grasp

of what is needed from our men. And no disrespect to the Governor-General of Syria, but if Gallus invades Judea and does not call upon us to join him, then he is overconfident and an even greater fool than our legionaries, who think this will be a quick war."

"I appreciate your candor," Titus replied. "And I expect you to always freely give me your thoughts, even if it is something I'd rather not hear."

"Or course," Ralla nodded. "And if I may add, the Fifteenth Legion is essentially in excess of what is needed for the region. The Third and Twenty-Second are posted to Egypt, we have no fort to call our own, nor have orders ever come down directing us to build a permanent base of operations. The lads don't mind living in a marching camp, provided they are actually marching towards their enemy. It's as if we're stuck here, sitting on our asses, with no one in command having any idea as to what to do with us. It does not sit well, sir."

"No, I would imagine not," Titus concurred. "I will try and get some answers, but cannot promise anything. I think if Gallus felt he needed another legion, he would have sent word to us already. As it is, he probably wants his own Twelfth Legion to reap the glory."

"If he's not careful," Ralla replied, "they'll reap something, and I don't mean glory."

Chapter X: The First Invasion

Caesarea, Judea
October, 66 A.D.
***

The army under Cestius Gallus marched triumphant into the port city of Caesarea. All Jewish persons, whether rebel or not, had been driven from the city or killed by the city's Greek population who had risen up in a type of counter revolt. The streets were thronged with cheering citizens as Gallus and the Twelfth Legion marched through the city. Drums beat a loud cadence and musicians played songs of triumph, both to reassure the citizens of Caesarea, as well as to inspire confidence in their own men.

"At least some of the people in this gods' awful land know who their masters are," Appius, the legate of the Sixth Legion, said as he rode beside Gallus.

"The Greeks have no love for us," Gallus noted. "But fortunately, they hate the Jews far more than they dislike Rome."

The two generals shared a short laugh as they waved to the adoring crowds.

The invasion and suppression of the rebellion had, so far, gone well. Gallus had sent the Sixth Legion's vexilation, along with a number of auxiliary infantry and cavalry, to Sepphoris in Galilee to ascertain their motives. Given its proximity to King Agrippa's realm, the rumor was that the people were still loyal to Rome. Gallus had taken his crack troops of the Twelfth Legion, along with most of his cavalry, into Caesarea, from where they would stage the eventual assault on Jerusalem.

"Ah, and here is Julianus to greet us," Appius said as they approached the Herodian palace that had been used as the capitol building of the Roman governors for decades.

"Hail Cestius Gallus, Legate of the Twelfth Legion!" the new procurator said, extending his hand in salute.

Marcus Antonius Julianus had been sent directly from Nero's entourage that was still in Greece, to replace Florus, who had been recalled to Rome to face charges of corruption and embezzlement of public funds. Many viewed his departure with a sense of relief, albeit it came far too late to prevent the

war which now threatened to engulf the entire region. A cousin of the former governor, Marcus Antonius Felix, and nephew of the late Emperor Claudius' advisor, Pallas, Julianus had extensive knowledge of Judea and its many peoples.

"I take it provisions have been made for my men?" Gallus asked upon dismounting his horse.

"Of course," Julianus replied. "With the disposal of the Jews from Caesarea, there was plenty of food and other goods to be had from their former dwellings. I also sent foragers out to procure meat and vegetables, although you understand with the zealots and other bandits running wild, they could not be sent far."

Gallus simply nodded and signaled for the procurator to lead him into the palace. It was starting to come together, and he hoped for a quick end to this rebellion. Julianus had a map of the region laid out for them on a large table, with all of the rebel strongholds circled. Also joining them was an auxilia officer.

"This is Centurion Capito of the Jerusalem garrison," the procurator said.

"General, sir," the officer said with a nod of respect.

"Centurion," Gallus replied. "You are probably in the best position to explain the disposition of the rebels in Jerusalem and what brought them to this."

"I am simply a soldier, doing my duty. It is also not for me to comment on the policies of the previous governor…"

"Damn it, man!" Appius interrupted. "You are the one person here who saw what happened in Jerusalem. If there is information that can be used as viable intelligence for putting down this hateful rebellion, we need to know. Now, were Florus' actions towards the people as reprehensible as we've been told?"

Capito paused for a moment while formulating his words.

"Out with it!" Gallus persisted.

"Yes, sir," the centurion replied. "He brutalized the people, stealing directly from the temple in order to fill his own coffers. And when the people protested, he sent us in to their markets to slaughter all within. He even had us provoke the citizens to the point that they would hurl insults and rebukes at us, which we then used as an excuse for further brutality. Both King Agrippa and Queen Berenice tried using diplomacy, while expressing a desire for the people to show temperance. By the time Florus left Jerusalem, it was

too late."

"It's as I thought," Julianus said, his arms folded across his chest as he stared at the map. "And once Jerusalem erupted into rebellion, the most seditious areas of the province became emboldened. Tragic then, that one corrupt governor can incite uprising through his malicious greed."

"It matters not," Gallus replied. "Whether the rebellion was provoked or not, it must be put down immediately. And I have brought with me thirty thousand Roman soldiers to do so."

The reality was Gallus himself was partially to blame for the insurgency. For instead of heeding the advice of his senior officers when the grievances from the Jewish elders reached him, he sent a single chief tribune to ascertain the truth behind them. And when this man returned with word that the people were compliant and loyal to Rome, he let the matter be. Gallus had had full authority to sack Florus, and his failure to do so only rekindled the flames of sedition. Fortunately for him, the emperor did not care about the semantics behind the rebellion, and by crushing it efficiently and quickly, Gallus could actually improve his reputation within the imperial court.



"I am fucking *bored!*" Nicanor heard a legionary groan as he walked along the ramparts of Ascalon's eastern wall.

He turned to verbally chastise the soldier, as well as give him a solid rap across the helm with his optio's staff, when the man's decanus shouted for the soldier to, *'Belay that shit'*, followed by a hard cuff across the ear.

"The lads are restless," he said to Marius, who was ascending the nearby steps to join his second-in-command.

"One cannot blame them," the centurion replied, making certain they were out of earshot from the nearest sentries. Since the plain to the east was wide open for many miles, less than a squad of legionaries could man the entire stretch and provide ample warning of any enemy encroachments. Marius continued, "Cestius Gallus is readying a massive force to smash the rebels that may or may not include the Tenth Legion, and our lads are stuck sitting on their asses behind a coastal wall that sits barely two days march from Jerusalem."

"What's worse is we're sitting blind," Nicanor observed. "We hear the

occasional rumor that Jerusalem is in chaos and the Jews are on the brink of an all-out civil war. And yet we cannot substantiate anything with real facts. And it's not as if Gallus keeps us apprised of what he is doing. For all we know, he could have Jerusalem surrounded already, or he could still be sitting in Antioch."

"Such is the nature of communications during war," Marius replied. "Still, does it surprise you that the various Judean factions are fighting each other?"

"Not in the least," the optio replied, shaking his head. "I spent much of my youth in this part of the world, and I've seen the level of contempt the splinter groups exhibit towards each other. Some days I think they hate their fellow Jews more than they do us."

"Some of them do," Marius admitted. "We can also determine, if there is chaos in the city that means no central government has been established, and the rebellion is still fractious and divided. Regardless, let us hope that Gallus conducts his campaign with aggression, as well as prudence."

"Agreed. If he goes straight for Jerusalem too soon, without knowing the full disposition of the enemy, he risks being cut off and losing all lines of communication and resupply."

"You're a fast learner," Marius noted with approval. "Most soldiers, even those within leadership positions within a century, care only about the enemy directly in front of them, when their next hot meal is, and if they can jam their cock into the nearest prostitute before their mates do."

"That's true for all of us, to some extent," Nicanor laughed. "It is even more so while we are in garrison and not on active campaign, which is how the men view this little assignment."

"At least you've shown the willingness to look at the larger picture," the centurion remarked. "You've demonstrated a grasp of strategy and logistics, as well as operational tactics."

"When I was a boy, my father encouraged me to read," Nicanor explained. "He knew even before I did that I would wish to follow him into the ranks once I came of age. He spent much on my education, though I did not understand why, since at the time I did not understand how reading Aristotle would help me become a better soldier. And yet, I remember him saying repeatedly that literacy would ensure career success even more so than skill with a blade."

"He was a wise man," Marius stated.

“I didn’t understand it at the time, but thankfully I found myself enthralled with reading military histories, both Roman and eastern. I still remember, though, when father gave me a copy of Julius Caesar’s *Conquest of Gaul* when I was fourteen. It was the first book I actually owned, and I cannot tell you how many times I’ve read it. Caesar defeated Vercingetorix and the Gauls with his ability to keep his supply lines open, as much as by the fighting skill of his legionaries.”

“A good general will know strategy; a great general will know logistics,” Marius added, quoting the same work. “I just hope the commander-in-chief has studied Caesar as much as my optio.”



While the small garrison in Ascalon was essentially blind to the strategic situation in rebellious province, Gallus kept the governor of Egypt apprised, given Alexandria’s proximity to Judea. In turn, Tiberius Julius Alexander kept each of the legion commanders aware of the state of affairs in Judea. Information was relayed from both imperial vessels, as well as merchant ships coming through his city. Since both the Third and Twenty-Second Legions belonged in Egypt, and with the Fifteenth still without a permanent barracks, Titus suspected if any of the legions would get called to join in the fight, it would be them.

It was this very topic which dominated a dinner party the governor had one evening. The senatorial legates, along with their senior officers, had all been invited, as had a number of patricians who were living in Alexandria. It was a very large affair, with nearly two hundred guests gathered in the massive banquet hall, where Cleopatra had entertained both Julius Caesar and Marc Antony.

“My men are tired of sitting on their asses doing nothing,” Titus muttered as he took a date from a passing tray, following it with another pull of wine. “They may have bloodied their blades in the violent removal of the Jews from Alexandria, but the real fighting is going on just across the border. They’ve been stuck in marching camp for months now and are becoming rather restless.”

“Unfortunately, there is little I can do to help you,” Alexander replied, his voice full of sympathy. “Gallus commands Syria, not Egypt. I cannot send him reinforcements unless he asks for them, or if the emperor orders me to do

so. I also don't have sufficient auxiliary troops to supplement an independent expedition, and to launch one without coordinating with Gallus would invite disaster. So unless the rebels cross over into Egypt, there is little I can do. Besides, if the reports I've heard are true, then he is about to take Jerusalem, putting an end to this sordid affair."

"And do you think he will?" Titus asked.

"Absolutely not," Alexander replied with a surprising degree of directness, as well as countering his previous statement. "He'll have little problem with the smaller townships and even the walled cities. However, Jerusalem is a gigantic fortress. It would take an enormous army under the most competent siege master in the world to break it. And while Gallus is brave, he is a fool if he attacks Jerusalem. He has neither the manpower, nor the skill at siege warfare. The only man I know who could break that city is wasting away in exile."

Titus appreciated the less-than-subtle compliment Alexander gave to his father. For indeed, during the Conquest of Britannia, Vespasian's soldiers had referred to him as, amongst other things, *The Siege Master*.

"And as long as my father remains out of favor with Nero, Rome will be deprived of her best siege general," Titus stated. "I only hope that Gallus' folly does not come at too high a price for Rome."

The young legate spent the rest of the evening in contemplative thought. Part of him hoped he was being too critical of Gallus, and that his doubts were based upon a selfish notion of wishing to seek military glory for both himself and his legionaries. At the same time, he also knew that the most crucial mistake one could make was underestimating an enemy's strength or resolve. After all, it took Julius Caesar nine years to conquer the barbarians of Gaul. Should the rebellious factions in Judea manage to come together and put their personal differences aside, they could readily give Gallus the same difficulties Vercingetorix had given Caesar.



Despite the misgivings of so many of his peers, thus far it had come all-too-easy for Gallus. The Jewish rebels had refused to face him in open battle, and every village they had sacked and burned offered little to no resistance. Despite the protestations of Trajan and Cerealis, as well as the request from Titus of the Fifteenth Legion in Alexandria, he had elected to take only his

Twelfth Legion in its entirety, along with the vexilation from the Sixth. Although he had told the other legates to have their legions ready to move if needed, this was only done as a routine precaution, as well as a means of placating their collective egos. He'd only allowed Appius to bring four cohorts from his Sixth Legion because he was a long-time friend. As for the rest of his army, it was mostly auxiliaries and allied soldiers sent by various client rulers, including King Agrippa. And given how relatively smooth the campaign had gone thus far, Gallus felt confident his thirty thousand men were more than up to the challenge. Aside from Appius, he would not be compelled to share the spoils of military glory with his fellow legates once he returned to Rome.

The campaign had started late in the season, with only a couple of months until the winter rains made the roads virtually impassable. Gallus was aware of this, and knew he had to move his forces out of Caesarea soon, lest they be compelled to wait until spring to finish the campaign. Such a delay would not sit well with the emperor. Plus, it would give the rebels time to sort out their differences and possibly unite.

"I've just received word from my vexilations in Galilee," Appius reported. "While Sepphoris remains loyal, there is a nearby mountain region called Asamon, where they believe a large contingent of rebel fighters is holed up. We should exterminate this pocket of resistance, and thereby secure Galilee before we move on Jerusalem."

"Very well," Gallus sighed. "I hope we can bring this rebellion to a close well before the winter solstice. Even these warmer climates are not conducive to winter fighting, plus I think it fitting that we celebrate our triumph over the Feast of Saturnalia."

While Appius tried to share his friend and commanding general's enthusiasm, he had spent enough time in the east to understand just how tenacious the Jews were. After all, they had dealt with enslavement and rebellions against powerful kingdoms and empires throughout their entire existence. And while the legions of Rome were more powerful than any force they had ever reckoned with, putting even the mighty armies of the Babylonian King Nebuchadnezzar to shame, the Jews were far from cowed by them. He was grateful, though, that Gallus was not so brazen as to leave such a substantial enemy force behind them while making straight for Jerusalem. Perhaps, then, he did have enough strategic savvy to see this war to a successful conclusion.

Chapter XI: Bloody Skirmishes

Asamon Mountains, Galilee
Late October, 66 A.D.
***

Simon bar Giora was still fuming with anger when he made his way into Galilee. While he did have tens-of-thousands of loyal zealots, they were scattered, conducting raids to acquire resources, while simultaneously rooting out those Jews who they viewed as traitors and Roman sympathizers. Galilee was also the home of one of his chief rivals, John of Giscala, whose power and influence matched his own. While the moderates in Jerusalem had implored both factions to put aside their differences and work together against the common enemy, this was preposterous and completely unacceptable to both parties.

And so it was, when Simon and a few of his closest followers achieved a high point within the Asamon Mountains with which to camp, they were able to be little more than observers to the violent skirmishes that followed. John had remained in Giscala, watching and waiting to see what would transpire next, while Simon elected to take the initiative and gather further intelligence about their enemies.

"Sepphoris has remained loyal to the Romans," one of his men said, having just returned from the city. "A number of fighters have left to join the resistance, but these men are unwilling to fight for either us or Giscala."

"How many do they number?" Simon asked.

"About fifteen thousand altogether, and this includes those who have ventured forth from the remaining cities in Galilee. Word has spread that the main Roman army has headed this way after having first stopped over in Caesarea."

"And these men intend to ambush them in the mountains," the zealot leader reckoned. "Excellent! They will bloody up our enemies some, but will not be able to sustain the fight for long. They lack both resources, as well as leadership, and if they cannot see fit to join the true faith, then let them die by Roman blades."

"What will you have our men do?" another of his companions asked.

"For now, nothing," Simon answered. "Let the Romans have their victory

against this rabble. What they do next will tell us the true measure of their leaders. If they are foolish, they will make for Jerusalem once they've dispatched this lot, thinking the people are beaten. And once they do, we will strike."



Gallus and the Twelfth Legion soon departed from Caesarea, anxious to face the rebels in a decisive battle. The first few days were uneventful, and Appius sent ahead for guides from Sepphoris to help the army negotiate the mountains. Gallus was grateful for his friend's initiative and, as such, had the loyal Jews leading his vanguard of auxiliaries over and through the passes. His cavalry, along with a few mounted guides, covered both flanks of the advancing force. His core infantry from the Twelfth and Sixth Legions occupied the center. Their heavy armor made scaling the mountains difficult, and so Gallus left this to the more lightly equipped auxiliaries and allied troops. His siege train, along with most of the baggage, was kept in reserve, guarded by a single cohort of auxiliaries.

"My only hope is the rebels are as anxious for a brawl as we are," he said to Appius, as they watched the vanguard make its way up the slopes of the rolling hills.

"We've already torched a number of their villages," his fellow legate observed. "And besides, if they don't fight us, they'll be driven all the way to Sea of Galilee, which is only about a day's march from here."

Gallus grinned and chuckled, his confidence growing. A number of the larger cities were remaining loyal to Rome, and if he could gain a decisive victory here, the path to Jerusalem would be left open for him. "Perhaps they will simply open the gates for us," he thought aloud.

The sounds of battle trumpets alerted the two generals. In the far distance, near the second rise of hills, it looked as if their vanguard was in contact. It was impossible to say for certain, but it appeared the rebels occupied the heights along a broad ridge and were raining down throwing spears and sling stones upon their men.

"We should have the cavalry seal off the passes on the left and right flanks," Appius advised, "and see if the legions can get around and behind them."

Gallus simply nodded in reply, thankful for his friend's experience and

situational awareness. For Appius it was tricky, for while a senatorial legate, he had but four cohorts of his Sixth Legion with the task force, plus he was subordinate in position to Gallus. And while both men had publicly said to each other that they appreciated not having to share in the pending triumph with Cerealis and Trajan, secretly Appius wished their two fellow legates had come with them, along with at least a sizeable vexilation from each of their legions. In his lust for personal glory, Gallus had deprived his army of much-needed leadership experience. Cerealis had acquitted himself well during the Arminian campaign, and Trajan's military prowess was widely renowned. Perhaps the only general in all of Rome who possessed even greater tactical and strategic savvy was the currently exiled Flavius Vespasian. Unfortunately, none of these highly capable men were involved in this war, so Appius had to help the inexperienced Gallus learn quickly, while trying not to overstep his authority. The centurions and other officers within the legions were, of course, very capable in their own rights. However, their influence was limited only to what transpired within their individual centuries or cohorts. The best trained and equipped soldiers in the world were only as effective as the men who led them.

Well ahead of Gallus and Appius, the lead cohorts of the Twelfth Legion made their way through the mountain passes, the trumpets and sounds of fighting alerting them. The commander of the lead element, a centurion pilus prior named Cinna, could see what appeared to be hundreds of enemy fighters flinging darts and sling stones down upon the auxiliaries below, who were attempting to protect themselves with their shields. The slopes to their direct front were very steep, and those not directly engaged were struggling to make their way up the heights.

"Is there a way around this?" the centurion asked his Judean guide.

"There is," the Jew confirmed. "We'll have to scale the hill on our left, but once at the top it levels off. There is another rolling mass that will shield you from the view of the enemy, but the way around it is relatively flat. From there you can flank them."

Cinna nodded and raised his sword high. *"Cohort!"* he shouted, *"action left…reform on the heights!"*

The command was echoed down the line, and within seconds the legionaries on the left flank dropped their packs and did a sharp left turn. Upon the subsequent commands of their officers, they started up the steep

face. It would prove slow going, as it was a climb of over several hundred feet with few paths, with much of the hill covered in loose shale and rock. Despite being encumbered by their heavy armor, the legionaries still progressed rather quickly, using their shields and javelins to help pull them up the slope. To the right of the massive formation, their brethren were conducting a similar maneuver up the hills.

As they reached the top of the ridge, the centurion and his men were soaked in sweat and breathing heavily. Clawing their way up the steep face of the hill had kicked up much dirt and dust, and they were filthy. He gazed into the distance and saw further dust trails from where the cavalry on the army's left wing was galloping to seal off one of the passes. The cohort commander gave a nod of satisfaction and raised his gladius high. His signifier did the same with their standard, marking where his men were to fall in. Once at the top, centurions reformed their men, placing themselves on the right with their options on the left. Decanii barked out orders for their men to follow them, and within short order the cohort was arrayed in a battle line of four ranks, ready to advance. Subsequent units were forming up either behind them or off to their left.

"Cohort!" the pilus prior shouted.

"Century!" was called out by his subordinate centurions.

"At the double-time…march!"

Judging by the sounds of battle coming from around the short hill that shielded their view of the ongoing fray, they knew they were close. Legionaries allowed for a two-meter gap in between files, as the broken terrain would make it difficult to maintain a tight formation. There were many large rocks, deep cracks in the earth, along with the occasional tree the soldiers had to skirt around. It frustrated the centurion, having no situational awareness as to what was transpiring on the rest of the battlefield. With his commanding general sitting on his ass, nearly a half mile from the action, the officers in the lead cohorts were having to take the initiative on their own. Fortunately for the men of the Twelfth Legion, it appeared, for the moment, that they would avoid disaster for at least another day. As they rounded the hill, Cinna slowed his pace so as to allow the extending line on his left time to catch up, where two additional cohorts had placed themselves. Given that each cohort consisted of six centuries that varied between sixty and eighty men arrayed in four ranks, it was a large and unwieldy formation.

To their front they saw a large number of lightly armed Judean fighters.

These were mostly skirmishers, armed with slings and two-foot throwing darts. The centurion grinned instinctively as he saw an auxiliary trooper, struggling up the slope, thrust his spear upwards and catch a rebel in the stomach. The stricken man's face contorted in the extreme pain of having his bowels ran through, and he pitched face first down the hill.

"Javelins ready!" the centurion shouted as the Jewish skirmishers took notice of them.

Hundreds of enemy fighters suddenly turned about and started flinging their sling stones at the advancing legionaries. Soldiers in the front rank hunkered down slightly behind their shields, javelins resting on their shoulders. The men behind them raised their shields to provide overhead cover. They were still more loosely arrayed than they would be in a traditional *testudo* formation, though between their large shields, encompassing helmets, and segmented plate armor, the soldiers were very well protected. Stones and darts mostly deflected off the soldiers' shields and armor. On occasion, one would strike a legionary in one of the few unprotected places, eliciting stifled grunts and shouts of pain.

Doing his best to assess the developing situation, the centurion noted the missile attacks of their adversaries had slowed the legionaries down considerably. He saw that the enemy warriors who had been battling the advancing auxiliaries were now withdrawing. For being an undisciplined horde, they were showing a surprising level of organization. The skirmishers were backing away, but not fast enough to avoid the pending storm of death ready to rain down upon them.

"Front rank…throw!" the cohort commander shouted as his men continued to close the distance.

The lack of armor and shields left the Judeans completely exposed as the wave of heavy pila flew in a low arc towards them. Officers in the subsequent cohorts were executing similar orders, with the rebels taking a terrible punishing as javelins slammed into their exposed bodies. The lucky ones were killed quickly by pila that smashed into their chests, penetrating the heart or lungs. These were few in number, though. The majority who fell in the barrage had their guts ruptured, or various appendages mutilated. The centurion saw a rebel just a few meters from him take a pilum through the upper thigh. It smashed clean through, splintering bone, with a gory mess of blood and muscle tissue spraying out the exit wound. The man was in abject pain; though unless finished by a merciful legionary, he would likely linger in

anguish and eventually die of thirst, unable to move with his mangled limb.

And yet, rather than being intimidated by the punishing torrent of javelins, the Jewish fighters flew into a rage, with hundreds of them rushing the Roman lines. There was no time to give subsequent orders or close up the formation, as legionaries quickly drew their gladii and fought to defend themselves. Besides their projectile weapons, the rebels had mostly clubs or short swords, making individual melees with the Roman soldiers a horrible mismatch. Cinna scowled as one such man, with a club that had a rock tied to the end, smashed away at his shield. The officer slammed the bottom edge of his shield into the fighter's leg, buckling the knee as he fell to the ground. He then stabbed him through the throat before readying to face his next opponent. While their companion lay convulsing, blood erupting from his throat, two warriors came at Cinna. The one on his left was skewered by a pilum thrown by a legionary in the rank behind him. As there had been no time to issue orders for subsequent volleys, the legionaries who still carried their javelins threw them over the heads of their mates battling it out in the front rank, before drawing their swords and joining the frenzy. Cinna tilted his shield and jammed the bottom edge into the stomach of his second attacker, bowling the man over as the battle continued.



From his position on the high peak, Simon bar Giora had the best vantage point with which to observe the battle. The revolutionaries, who had so brazenly attacked the Roman battle lines, had done so in order for their friends to retreat safely.

"A noble self-sacrifice," one of the zealots said, as he nodded towards the brutal melee. It was difficult to tell by his voice if his words were those of admiration or mocking contempt. Simon figured it was probably a little of both. Cohorts of legionaries had swarmed in on both flanks of the throng, and with their superior training and weaponry they were dispatching the Jewish warriors with contemptuous ease. The auxiliaries who had conducted the frontal assault on the heights were now joining the battle en masse as well. The only thing saving the majority of the rebels was that their lack of armor made them much quicker on their feet than the Romans. Knowing the fighting was over, they were now fleeing for their lives. Those who sought the easier path down the dirt roads ran afoul of the Roman cavalry who, with

a blowing of their war horns, trampled many in their onslaught.

“The Romans are a fearsome enemy,” another man confessed as they watched the slaughter.

“Which is why you avoid facing them head on in open battle,” Simon remarked. “However, they missed a great opportunity here.”

“How so?” the first zealot asked.

“Where are their senior leaders?” Simon asked rhetorically. “Their centurions showed great initiative in the absence of orders, yet why did none of their generals position themselves on high ground to observe the battle and coordinate their men? Their legates and chief tribunes ride upon horses, it would have been no issue at all for one of them to find a good vantage. Had they done so, they could have wiped this rabble out. As it is, most of them will escape the slaughter, for as we can see the Romans do not have them completely enveloped.”

“Their commanding general lacks initiative,” one of his men said, his brow scrunched in thought.

“Exactly,” Simon replied with a knowing grin. “He’s tentative and relied on his subordinates to win this battle. I imagine in the coming weeks he will show even more of his weaknesses for us to exploit.”



Gallus was clearly ecstatic as they rode up to the ridge where the majority of the fighting had taken place, although Appius’ demeanor was that of tired relief. The legate of the Sixth Legion had hated staying back while the battle went on, as there was no way for them to know what was happening. It was only when a rider from the auxiliary cavalry came back to inform them the battle was over did Gallus give the order for his headquarters staff to advance. By this time, even the cavalry pursuit had ended an hour before. His chief tribune, Neopolitanus, was dismayed at staying back while their legionaries fought. They followed the main path that led through the hills and up to the plateau. The two legates looked on in approval as legionaries and auxiliaries went about the bitter tasks that followed every battle. Their wounded and dead were being sorted, while decanii got accountability of their men. Others walked about, finishing off the enemy wounded.

“This is a war of no quarter,” Gallus observed.

“After what they did to the garrison in Jerusalem, they have to know that

this conflict will be fought without a shred of mercy," Appius said. He then added quietly, "Mars help us, should we ever be on the losing end of a battle in this war."

The hour had grown late by the time the army reorganized and reformed. Gallus gave orders for them to encamp for the night, which would give them time to build the funeral pyres to send their dead to the afterlife. The flames cast an eerie glow throughout the camp, where soldiers went about their end-of-day duties. With an army of thirty-thousand men, simple tasks like digging latrine gutters for the night became a substantial undertaking. Palisade stakes were emplaced along the perimeter, where a deep trench had been dug out. Tents were erected, pack animals fed, weapons and armor inspected and repaired.

"What is the final casualty tally?" the commanding general asked one of his staff tribunes.

"Our total losses," the tribune replied, while going over numerous reports sent from various cohort and auxiliary commanders, "is sixty-five dead, three times that number wounded."

"After finishing off the enemy wounded, we counted about two thousand rebel corpses," Appius added.

"Excellent!" Gallus said, taking a long pull off his wine cup. "First victory to Rome! *Primo Victoria!*"

"Primo Victoria!" his senior officers echoed, raising their goblets.

In a quiet corner of the otherwise hectic camp, Centurion Pilus Prior Cinna, having led the attack on the enemy's left flank, was having a private conversation with the legion's master centurion.

"The general seems to think this was a great victory," he said. "But if I may speak plainly, we were lucky we were not ambushed as a whole and cut to pieces. We were blind the entire battle, and had this been an organized army, there would doubtless be many more of us burning on those pyres."

"I understand," the master centurion replied. "I myself was confined to the passes with the First Cohort until well after your men, and those on the right flank, had already scaled the heights. There was simply no way for me to get to a solid vantage point until the matter was already decided."

"No disrespect to General Gallus," Cinna remarked, "but why the fuck did he just sit back and not attempt to lead the army?"

The master centurion did not answer right away. As third-in-command of the legion, the centurion primus pilus was one of the most powerful and influential men in the entire army, and yet it appeared that Gallus had, essentially, sidelined him to being nothing more than another cohort commander. If a legate failed to listen to his most experienced subordinates, then he was setting himself, as well as the legion, up for a catastrophic failure.

Cinna continued, “Gallus talks as if we’ve beaten the Jewish army, yet these were nothing more than a rabble of local militias; and most of them escaped. The Herodian armory has been plundered, and we can be certain the rebels have taken every weapon and piece of armor to be found at the Antonia Fortress and Jerusalem barracks. And yet not one of the men we fought today wore any sort of protection, plus their weapons were crude at best. They did not benefit from the purging of arms, which tells me they were not part of the organized resistance.”

“A sound observation,” the master centurion replied. “All the same, we must not speak openly about our assumptions regarding General Gallus, lest it damage the morale of our men.”

“Or course, sir. That is why I am speaking to you in private. With hundreds-of-thousands of potential insurgents, the loss of two thousand dead renegades is hardly a crippling blow to them. I simply do not want to see the entire army become careless due to overconfidence and complacency because our general seems to think they are already beaten.”

“Nor do I,” the master centurion concurred. “Unfortunately, he seems to little heed my advice and that of the First Cohort centurions. I know Gallus intends to head straight for Jerusalem. We can only do our part to keep the good order and discipline of our men tight, while hoping, by chance, he is right in that the enemy no longer has any stomach for this fight.”

The words brought little comfort to Cinna. He consoled himself, thinking at least the primus pilus was well aware of their commanding general’s shortcomings. Doubtless most of the centurions, and even some of the enlisted rankers, had similar reservations. While he bore no personal ill will towards Gallus, Cinna morbidly thought the army would be better served if calamity befell their commander-in-chief. At least Legate Appius had a respectable reputation from having led the Sixth Legion, plus he had actual combat experience from the Arminian War. And the Twelfth Legion’s chief tribune, Neopolitanus, was wise enough to listen to the tactical and strategic

advice of his ranking centurions.



It took several days for Gallus' army to make its way through the mountainous terrain of Galilee and back to Caesarea. There were no further assaults upon his column and, indeed, it did appear the rebels were in retreat. Here he met with his senior leaders, as well as King Agrippa who was attempting to mediate, to no avail, between the warring factions. Gallus was quick to express his impatience over the delays, as well as reiterating his desire to attack Jerusalem at once.

"If you are going to make for Jerusalem," the king said, "your path will take you past Lydda, near the coast where the road turns east towards the holy city."

"Lydda is a fairly large city," Appius noted. "If it is in the hands of the rebels, we will have to besiege and capture it before moving on to Jerusalem."

"Damn it all," Gallus said in exacerbation. "I want this rebellion ended now, not having my entire army fucking around with every shithole town in Judea!"

"Well, if we don't," Appius replied, "we risk leaving our flanks and rear completely exposed to enemy attacks. I have to say, I am not convinced that we should have left Galilee as soon as we did. We won a victory, yes, but I believe the rebels in that region are far from beaten."

"I agree," Agrippa spoke up. "However, if you are successful in taking Jerusalem, then it will unravel the entire opposition. They will fall back into fighting amongst each other, while trying to place the blame for the city's fall upon each other."

"The Feast of the Tabernacles is almost upon us," one of Agrippa's advisors, a man named Borceus, said. "It is entirely possible that the people of Lydda will mostly be in Jerusalem."

"You Jews are a strange lot," Gallus remarked. "War ravages your lands, yet you still go about celebrating your festivals and holidays as if there wasn't a rampaging army at the gates."

"It may seem strange," Borceus replied, "but in many ways it is what the people are fighting for."



Three days later, the city of Lydda was eerily quiet as the army of Cestius Gallus approached from the west. The gates were shut, yet there appeared to be no sentries upon the walls. Impatient to make his way to Jerusalem, Gallus ordered two cohorts from the Twelfth Legion to storm the walls on either side of the western gatehouse near the main road, while auxiliaries assailed the northern and southern faces of the city.

For Centurion Cinna and his men, it was tricky business scaling the siege ladders. Some men would hold their large scutum shields overhead, while using their other hand to grab the rungs. This made their balance rather precarious, especially with defenders attempting to turn or tip the ladders over. Once at the top, one's shield became as much of an encumbrance as protection when battling it out on the narrow ledges. Conversely, while abandoning their shields would allow soldiers to climb the ladders much faster, they were far more susceptible to missile attacks, having only the protection of their helmets and armor.

Cinna had accepted the additional risk of scaling the wall without his scutum, and as he scrambled up the ladder, he expected to feel stones and bricks smashing off his helmet and shoulder plates, yet none came. As the walls were barely fifteen feet high, it took but a few seconds for the first wave of attackers to reach the top, only to find the ramparts completely deserted.

"Advance on the portcullis and get the gates open!" the centurion ordered his nearest legionaries. He then scanned the city below, baffled by the complete lack of any activity. He directed the rest of his men to form up below, while shouting down to the assault elements outside the walls, *"The city appears deserted!"*

An hour passed, and Gallus was perplexed at the reports, yet word from every assault force was the same; not one Jewish rebel stood on the ramparts to try and defend Lydda.

"It's as I thought," King Agrippa said, "the people have all gone to Jerusalem for the Festival of the Tabernacles."

"They *knew* we were coming," the commanding general replied, "and yet they still left their city to us."

"Sir, the city wasn't completely deserted, though damn near," a tribune

said as he read the latest report from one of the cohorts sweeping through the city. “They’ve captured around fifty men, mostly old and infirm, though there were a few young fighters amongst them. It would seem they were tasked with keeping Lydda safe from robbers.”

“Robbers,” Appius scoffed. “It’s as if they are oblivious to our very presence!”

“We’ll soon fix that,” Gallus grumbled. He then addressed the tribune, “I want the city burned to the ground, and all within crucified outside its walls.”

“Sir,” the officer replied, turning to distribute the legate’s directive.

Chapter XII: To Jerusalem!

Gabaon, eight miles northwest of Jerusalem
Mid-October, 66 A.D.
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Since the battle of the Asamon Mountains, the Jews had been reluctant to engage the Romans openly. This only seemed to confirm Gallus' suspicions that their enemy was broken and would come begging for peace once they saw his mighty army approaching the gates of their holy city. He was even more certain of himself after the non-affair that had been the sacking of Lydda. The glow of the burning city could still be seen in the distance, even as the army encamped nearly twenty miles away. The poor souls who had been left behind had first been brutally scourged with corded whips, to the point that their flesh was ripped away from their bodies, before being hung upon the cross. Fifty crucifixes lined either side of the road leading away from Lydda, as a grim warning. Even if family or friends were to cut the men down, their wounds were so ghastly that death would only be delayed a few days at most.

"Tomorrow we make for the citadel at Gabaon," the master centurion briefed his cohort commanders that evening. "General Gallus is hoping the people will come to their senses, thereby avoiding the need to directly assault Jerusalem."

"Sir," one pilus priors spoke up, "Gabaon is but a few miles from Jerusalem, yet the pass of Beth Horon is terribly narrow with high mountains on either side. Should we not go around and approach the city from the west?"

"Your concerns have already been addressed," the master centurion replied, "and the commanding general believes the lack of a defense at Lydda only shows that the enemy is close to breaking. Should we take a few extra days to go around Beth Horon, he feels it would show weakness and give the rebels time to reconsider." He paused for a moment, gauging the looks of disbelief on his centurions' faces.

"Who's to say the Jews didn't let us destroy Lydda only to draw us into complacency and ambush?" Cinna spoke up. He knew the primus pilus well

enough to know this had already been addressed with Gallus, yet he felt the need to vent his frustration.

"Our orders are to proceed to Gabaon and from there to Jerusalem via Beth Horon," the master centurion replied curtly. "You have your orders, now see to it your cohorts execute them!"

After the cohort commanders were dismissed, Cinna waited until the rest had dispersed so he could speak with his superior in private. "I meant no disrespect there," he said. "But you do understand my concerns."

"Of course I do," the master centurion nodded. "And the emperor does not pay you a centurion pilus prior's wages for you to be a mindless dog who never questions. You know I appreciate candor, as you should from your subordinate centurions. However, the matter has been discussed in detail with Gallus, and he is determined to follow this course of action. Though he did not speak up openly, I judged from Legate Appius' demeanor that he harbors some of the same uncertainties we do. All we can do is make certain our men are alert and ready for anything in the coming days."

"Yes, sir," Cinna replied. He still did not feel any better about the pending mission, though there was a sense of relief in that he had not angered the master centurion, who clearly felt as he did about the situation. He made ready to leave when the primus pilus spoke up again.

"One more thing, Gallus was going to recommend you for the *Rampart Crown* for being the first over the city's wall." There was a sarcastic grin on his face.

Cinna laughed and shook his head. "I hope you put a stop to that. The walls were deserted, so being the first man over hardly counts as an act of valor."

"That's what I said," the master centurion remarked. "Don't worry, your career won't be blemished by an unearned award." He gave a wink and turned away.

Cinna let out a sigh that was part trepidation and part relief, then went back to his cohort's camp to brief his centurions.



"The Romans have crossed the plain of Emmaus and the pass at Beth Horon," a Zealot scout reported two days later. "Silas of Babylon and Niger of Perea are planning an attack on their vanguard just past the citadel at

Gabaon."

"What is the Romans' disposition on the march?" Simon asked. Though he despised Silas and the other 'generals' appointed by the council in Jerusalem, if they could actively engage most of the invading army, it would give him the opportunity for a flank or rear attack on their column.

"They appear to be very brash, almost foolhardy," the scout observed. "Their baggage trains, instead of being part of the main column, are relegated to the rear, along with their siege trains."

"Are they protected at all?"

"One, maybe two cohorts of auxiliary infantry," the scout said as he attempted to remember all the details of what he had seen. "Of course this could change, the closer they get to Jerusalem."

"Perhaps," Simon replied, "though I doubt it."

It was all coming together too easily. In their haste to take the city, the Romans were leaving most of their siege train and supplies virtually unprotected. The slow moving pack animals that had to haul the enormous catapults and ballistae could only move at a fraction of the pace of marching legionaries. Instead of advancing his army at a more measured pace, Gallus was spreading his forces thin.

As Simon stood atop the hill, apprising his army, he smirked with a sense of self appreciation. While Hanan and the other Sadducees in Jerusalem sought men for their army whose character mattered as much as their ability to fight, Simon bar Giora was willing to take the lowliest scum of the earth into his ranks. His only requirement was that they fight the Romans. Like many of the leaders among the various zealot factions, he cared not for those who now controlled Jerusalem and their holiest of temples. To him, Hanan and his kind represented neither the people nor God. There would come a time to deal with them, but for now his focus was on destroying the army of Cestius Gallus.



"Lydda burns," a messenger reported to Hanan the following day. "Those who were left behind were crucified to a man."

"And they dare call us *barbarians*," Silas scoffed in anger. "They leave a path of pestilence and burning death while calling it *peace*."

"Word has spread about their army's approach to the northwest,"

Yohanan added. “The people are enraged that the festival is being so blasphemously interrupted. They are anxious for a fight. Perhaps we should give it to them.”

“Agreed,” Hanan concurred. “How goes the equipping and training of our standing army?”

“There are not nearly enough arms to go around,” Niger said, “what with those Sicarii robbers plundering the Herodian armory for their own selfish gains. There is enough to equip a sizeable vanguard, though. And Josephus, being familiar with the Roman methods of fighting, has been instrumental in organizing our forces into a series of cohesive units.”

Hanan smiled and nodded, glad to hear that his protégé was performing so admirably. “Any word from the renegade forces roaming the region?”

“None,” Niger replied, shaking his head. “For all we know, they could be cowering behind their city walls, or perhaps planning their own attacks on the Romans.”

“These petty squabbles are shit!” Yohanan snapped. “If they would but unite with us against the common enemy, we could drive the invaders from our lands forever.”

“I concur,” Hanan said. “However, I cannot control what Simon bar Giora or John of Giscala do with their fighters. Let us hope whatever they may personally think of the legitimacy of our government, they still find it preferable to that of Caesar, or at least enough to commit their forces to battle.”



Centurion Cinna’s trepidations were not eased at all as the army advanced from Gabaon towards Jerusalem. The logistics and siege trains had not even caught up with them when the order to leave the citadel was given. For all they knew, their provisions could still be miles away, trapped within the narrow passes of Beth Horon. This meant their soldiers only had what rations they carried with them. The undue haste shown by Gallus had also spread their column thin, and as they crested a short rise that led into the plain below, Cinna could see the vanguard of auxiliary and allied infantry was at least two miles ahead of the rest of the army.

If they become decisively engaged, we will not be able to support them, he thought to himself.

What he could not see was that the terrain of the large plain looked deceptively flat. Yet, it was covered in dozens of wide trenches and small ravines that could conceal an entire army. The rough terrain would also break up the marching column, if companies of infantry attempted to skirt around them. All of these factors gave the rebel army the opportunity they needed.



Thousands of Judean soldiers lurked in the crevices and trenches that scarred the landscape. All remained hidden, aside from a handful of lookouts, who lay concealed behind large bushes. Silas knelt behind a rather large stand of sage that gave him the perfect view of the approaching enemy force. He could not believe his luck when he saw their advance elements were exposed and unsupported. These men were Samaritan auxiliaries; ancient enemies of the Jews, whose brutal treatment of the populace under the Roman procurators had further stoked the fires of hate.

"Now!" Silas shouted.

War horns blared, followed by roaring battle cries of pure hatred as thousands of Jewish fighters swarmed out of the trenches. They found themselves within the ranks of the Roman vanguard, with the main body at least a half hour's march away.

Emboldened by their good fortune, they fell upon the flanks of the auxiliary infantry with a vengeance. Their enemies' armor, being of chain or leather with metal fittings, could not withstand the blows of weapons like the legionaries' segmented plate. They also struggled to form cohesive battle lines, with individual soldiers being encircled by numerous Judean soldiers, who cut them down with fury.

The chaotic frenzy was nothing like the organized battles that Silas and the other generals had hoped to train their men to fight. However, given the opportunities presented, the disarray worked decidedly to their advantage. The Babylonian, along with Niger and Yohanan, each led a wing of warriors, who were hewing the Roman vanguard to pieces. Over the deafening din of battle, they could barely hear the trumpets of the Roman column, ordering the legionaries to advance at the double-time. The Judean generals reckoned it would be at least twenty minutes before they would have to face the legions, given how encumbered they were by their heavy armor and weapons.

"Plenty of time to finish this lot," Niger chuckled sinisterly. He then

waved his weapon towards a band of allied Roman infantry that were attempting to form a battle line and, with a loud cry, led a wave of his men in the attack.

To their credit, the auxiliaries were recovering from the shock of the ambush, with their officers trying to restore order and prevent a general panic from ensuing. While a large number of the rebels were lightly equipped without armor and only short swords and shields, there were a surprising number more heavily armed. Those wearing the scale armor, helmets, and shields taken from Masada were at the apex of the Jewish attack. Their armament put them on even footing with the auxiliaries, at least in terms of weaponry and equipment. The Roman infantry were better trained, though with their forces scattered by the crisscrossing trenches, they were still easily overwhelmed by the Jews, who were able to utilize their superior numbers.

Dozens of men had already fallen, and the auxiliaries were falling into disarray. Sensing a pending rout, the Judean generals renewed their assaults en masse. By the time the advancing legionaries had formed up into battle lines, the vanguard had completely broken.



Ten miles up the road, the rear of Gallus' army was completely exposed.

"Ripe for the pickings," Simon bar Giora grinned as he watched the Roman baggage and siege train make its pondering way down the narrow pass that lead away from Gabaon.

The hapless infantrymen who had been tasked as escorts were oblivious to both the ongoing battle miles away, as well as the threat that loomed above and behind them.

With no cavalry support and only a single company of archers amongst their ranks, Simon knew the Romans would be highly susceptible to missile attacks. As such, he had placed his slingers and dart throwers behind the short defilades along the slopes. Had their enemies even bothered to send out a single squad to cover their flanks, Simon's forces would have been discovered and the initiative lost. As it was, their foes seemed to be battling boredom more than anything else. The entire supply train stretched more than a mile in length, and Simon knew he could not possibly snare all of it. However, his eye was set on the Roman siege engines; the catapults and ballistae that were clustered towards the very center of the column. Such a

prize would cripple their enemies' ability to lay siege to Jerusalem, while ensuring Simon's prominence as one of the leading generals in the resistance. Once satisfied that he had his prey where he wanted them, he stood and raised his sword high.

"Long live Judea!" he shouted at the top of his lungs.

Before the escorting soldiers could react, hundreds of Jewish skirmishers rose up and rained down a torrent of sling stones and short throwing spears upon them. Dozens were killed outright, with many more wounded. Men fell screaming as sling stones smashed their faces, while snapping exposed arms and legs. A number of pack animals were slain or disabled in the barrage, their piteous cries adding to the cacophony of terror.

Not wishing to lose too many of the mules and donkeys, Simon shouted for his men to charge, with his more heavily armed troops swarming past the lines of skirmishers, who pulled back up the slopes. The auxiliaries who could escape did so, spurring their wagons and pack mules on. The rest who had survived the initial onslaught, including the entire siege train, formed into thin lines, with their shields and stabbing spears at the ready. None attempted to surrender, despite the hopelessness of their situation. They put up a brave fight, with many of Simon's more brazen fighters being killed or seriously injured before they completely engulfed the escort infantry. Every last Roman was slaughtered, with the wounded having their throats cut.

Shouts of victory followed the brief engagement that Simon surmised had only last a couple of minutes.

"Strip them of any useable weapons and armor!" he ordered his men.

"What of the wagons?" a nearby Zealot asked.

"We'll take everything to Berea for now," Simon replied. "I suspect the Romans will be foolish enough to return via this pass once they realize they no longer have the siege assets to take Jerusalem. And when they do, we will annihilate what remains of their pathetic force!"

The bloodied corpses of the auxiliaries were left naked, with zealots taking every last helmet, weapon, and piece of armor. Carrion birds and wild dogs would soon fall upon them; the devouring of their bodies marking an ignominious and ghastly end.



"Where the fuck was our cavalry?" a centurion shouted in rage. The

fighting near Jerusalem had ended with the rebels fleeing back to the safety of their walls. “Agrippa’s mounted archers should have flanked those bastards!”

“They were all stuck in the middle of the column,” Cinna explained, trying to control his own seething anger. “They couldn’t get around our marching infantry that was still penned in by the mountains and were rendered useless.”

The centurion pilus prior knew he had to get control over his men’s emotions quickly. If the centurions were enraged to the point of such outbursts, it would only lead to severe breakdowns in discipline amongst their legionaries.

By the time the initial cohorts of the Twelfth Legion closed the distance to engage the rebels, the vanguard had been completely shattered, with fleeing auxiliary and allied soldiers hindering the advance of the legionaries. Only a few centuries had been able to unleash a single volley of javelins before their enemy withdrew, shouting taunts and profanities in a variety of languages at them. Only a handful of Jewish fighters had been slain by the sporadic pila.

While centurions attempted to restore order amongst the ranks, keeping their own emotions suppressed, Gallus sat astride his horse, watching the disorder while seeming, at the same time, completely paralyzed. A messenger, in a state of panic, had just informed him about the calamity that had befallen their siege trains and baggage.

“I said, ‘what the hell do we do now, sir?’” the master centurion shouted for what must have been the third or fourth time. He had also heard the message and was pushed as close to blatant insubordination as he had been in his entire three decades in the legions. Never had he witnessed such gross incompetence, and it was now putting the legion’s very survival in jeopardy.

“We…we will withdraw to Gabaon and regroup there,” Gallus stuttered.

The master centurion made ready to lash out at him, but thankfully Legate Appius intervened.

“Hold your tongue, master centurion,” he said calmly, yet sharply. “You are the last man in the legion who should lose his discipline. Get your men formed up and ready to march.”

His firm and measured tone was enough, and the primus pilus nodded and turned to the cornicen, ordering him to sound the cohort commanders’ call.



“The Romans have regrouped at Gabaon,” Yohanan reported to Hanan and the council three days later.

Despite their successful ambushing of the enemy vanguard, all knew the Romans were far from beaten.

“It is clear they will not make the same mistakes again,” Hanan said. “The only question now is when they will come again.”

None of the men present knew about Simon bar Giora’s raid on the Roman baggage and siege trains. For all they knew, Gallus’ army still possessed every one of its onagers that could batter the walls of the city.

“The people are growing restless once more,” Josephus added. “There are those calling for peace, saying we should beg the Romans for forgiveness, while others are clamoring that we fight them to the death.”

“And these factions, along with various others, will be battling each other, no doubt,” Hanan lamented, shaking his head.

“We’re still recruiting warriors from around the kingdom,” Yohanan said hopefully. “Our army was enough to conduct an ambush on the Romans’ vanguard, but had they been ready for us with legionary support, it would not have gone well for our men. We were fortunate that day.”

“To put it simply, we do not have the manpower needed to defend the outer walls,” Josephus surmised, “not with the people divided and too few soldiers in our army.”

“We’ll have to make due with defense of the second wall, as well as the fortress and temple,” Yohanan said.

Hanan nodded in agreement. “A pity we must sacrifice the outer districts of the city. However, if we can save the rest, as well as the temple, then that is what we must do.”

Later that evening, Josephus walked along the outer wall that faced the north. Behind him, those neighborhoods that dotted the otherwise barren land between the third and second walls were being evacuated. There would be those who would refuse to leave their homes, and there was nothing his men could do except leave them to their fate.

“You wish to protect them all.” The voice of Judith surprised him, though it came as a welcome reprieve as Josephus turned and took his wife in his arms.

“It saddens me that many will die who don’t have to,” he agreed sadly. “And yet, with as much as we’ve harried them already, I trust God will soon deliver us from the invaders.”

He gazed into the setting sun, praying silently for the salvation of his people, along with the safe keeping of his wife, mother, and father. Though he could not explain it on that fall evening, something inside told him the war against Rome would not be decided over the next few weeks in Jerusalem. On the surface, it appeared as if they were setting up for one final and epic battle for the freedom of Judea; yet it was all a façade. No one on either side wished to admit it, but Josephus firmly believed it would be months, if not years, before the killing ended.



Despite bands of Jewish rebels occupying the heights around Gabaon, they offered up no resistance as Gallus’ army ventured forth once more. It had taken some harsh discipline, coupled with lashes of centurion vine sticks, in order to quell the dissention that had arisen among the ranks following the series of debacles that had befallen them. The army would spend a further three days encamped on Mount Scopus, a little over half a mile northeast of the city. Foraging parties were sent out to plunder grain and other rations to supplement for those lost by the raid on their supply trains. It was the only action the men had seen over the past week.

As he paced along the defensive works thrown up by his cohort, Centurion Cinna marveled that despite their misfortunes, theirs was still a fearsome army. To have thirty thousand men encamped within full view of the city had to instill fear in all but the most fanatical of the zealots.

“Reconnaissance reports show only a small handful of defenders on the outer wall,” one of his centurions observed, as he joined his cohort commander.

“Which means their peoples are still divided,” Cinna noted. “There are half a million inhabiting Jerusalem, so the manpower exists to form a viable defense against us. That they have not can only mean there is much in the way of internal turmoil, which hopefully we can exploit before they come to form a cohesive resistance.”

“Not to mention before the winter rains piss down on us,” the centurion said, instinctively glancing skyward.

It was a slightly overcast day with a warm breeze blowing in from the west.

“Given our rather precarious logistical situation, should the rains come and we still find ourselves stuck outside the walls, this army will be pretty much fucked.”

“I agree,” Cinna replied. “Jerusalem must fall soon or we’ll all be damned.”

Chapter XIII: Ignominious Retreat

Jerusalem
Late October, 66 A.D.
***

"We have only a few siege ladders available," Appius said, reviewing the reports from the quartermasters.
Far more than just their catapults and ballistae were gone. The sacking of the siege train had deprived the army of most other assets required to assail a major city.

"If the outer walls are essentially unmanned, that will matter little," Gallus replied. "A few men can get over and open the gates for us. The only question then is, will these damnable Jews finally capitulate once we begin sacking their precious holy city?"

Early the next morning, a handful of lightly armed skirmishers scaled the walls to the northeast, opening the gates that led onto the road that ran the length of the outer wall. Jerusalem was partitioned off into various neighborhoods and districts, with the area the Romans now stormed into called *New City*. Consisting of many newer housing districts, it was easy prey for the rampaging legionaries and auxiliary troopers, who were under orders to burn all buildings in the area known as *Bezetha Hill*, which sat in full view of the Antonia Fortress. There was no resistance given and, indeed, most of the borough was deserted. The small number who had refused to leave were drug from their homes and brutally slain, with any younger women being savagely raped first. Citizens who had fled into the other quarters of Jerusalem had taken all of their belongings with them, so there was little for the soldiers in the way of plunder.

As a century of legionaries approached the Monument to Alexander, near where the second wall and the outer wall of the temple complex intersected, a storm of sling stones and arrows rained down from the heights.

"Form testudo!" the centurion shouted.

His men in front linking their shields together, with those behind bringing theirs up over their heads. Tightly compressed together, the encasement of shields was virtually impenetrable. It also meant the soldiers could only move at a very slow shuffle, and even then it was all defensive. While the

expansive miles of the third wall had been left undefended, the second and temple walls were heavily protected. Rebels shouted profanities as they hurled their missiles at the hated invaders who had desecrated their city. The century of legionaries slowly backed away, stones and spears bouncing off the protective shields, until such time as they were out of range. Jewish fighters stood upon the walls, shouting in victory, while daring the Romans to assail the ramparts.

"It would seem the rebels still have a lot of fight left in them," the centurion observed.

Once the Bezetha Hill neighborhoods were deemed secure, Gallus and his senior officers entered the city. They stood atop a two-story house, yet to be fired by their troops, and surveyed the scene.

"Those walls are forty feet high," Appius observed. "It will take siege towers to assault them."

"There is no time for building and employing those," Gallus replied. "We'll reconnoiter around the wall and encamp on the western side of the wall, near the hill known as Golgotha."

Appius simply nodded and folded his arms across his chest. It was clear to him that Gallus had no idea what to do now that his soldiers had entered the city. Surely he knew Jerusalem had multiple walls, and that to successfully take it would require large amounts of siege equipment and no shortage of time. If the commander-in-chief was looking to play the waiting game with the rebels, then he was certain to lose.



Josephus watched from one of the towers at the Antonia Fortress as the district of Bezetha Hill burned in the twilight. He was glad his own home was well protected within the upper city, but then immediately repented his selfishness. Even if they did drive the Romans away before they could take the second wall, scores were dead with thousands now homeless, as the remains of their houses and flats burned brightly with a thick pall of black smoke rising into the night.

That the Roman army had avoided further contact baffled Josephus, for it had been just after dawn that they had assaulted the outer wall and opened the gates into New City. Only putting the one district to the torch told him their

intentions were not to raze Jerusalem, but that they still held out hope of a rebel capitulation.

"One can almost see the rock of Golgotha to the west," Hanan said, walking over to his friend. "That is where our enemy is now encamped, and I suspect that is where they will stay for the time being."

"Our men made a brave showing," Josephus replied, his face creased with worry. "But if the Romans were to make a concerted effort on even a single part of the defenses, we would not hold for long. Many of our men cannot even assist us, trying as they are to quell the pockets of seditionists and various factions that insist on continuing their petty squabbles."

"I know that," Hanan replied. He then nodded towards the dark shape of the hill just beyond the second wall. "But do they? I have also heard rumor, cannot substantiate it unfortunately, that the Romans have met with disaster outside the city. It would seem our 'friend' Simon bar Giora has sacked their supply trains and captured their siege engines."

"If true, that would explain why we have seen no catapults or ballistae," Josephus remarked. "Still, I do not think his acts were done out of loyalty to the cause."

"And therein lies our greatest dilemma," Hanan observed. "Our most fearsome adversaries are not the Romans, but each other. Their army numbers perhaps thirty thousand men of whom, at most, seven thousand are legionaries. The rest are barbarian auxiliaries and whatever troops that slippery despot Agrippa has given them. If we figure one person in five within Jerusalem is a man of fighting age, that is still one hundred thousand warriors we can bring to bear."

"More than enough to envelope the Romans and wipe them out," Josephus concurred. "And yet, because they will not stand together, we are confined to cowering behind these walls. And how many more hundreds-of-thousands of fighting men are there beyond this city? Where are they?"

"We must be brave, Josephus," Hanan said soothingly. "This Roman general has shown his incompetence more than once. The simple fact that he sits on his ass instead of finding a way over the second wall tells me he is weak and indecisive. If we can continue to harangue him, while avoiding engaging his troops in open battle, then this conflict is certainly winnable."

"There have been numerous messages saying the enemy has been foraging extensively," Josephus said, his brow furrowed. Then, finding his confidence once more, he added, "That means they lost more than just their

siege equipment; they must be short on rations. And surely they realize that once the winter rains start, the roads will be nearly impassible for them. If they cannot take the walls soon, they risk starving to death."

"Precisely," the high priest replied, patting him on the shoulder. "You were one of my brightest pupils, Josephus, and your analytical mind makes you a formidable strategist. Moreover, you have not fallen to the deadly sin of pride, which consumes so many of our strongest."

"It is certainly Simon bar Giora's downfall," Josephus agreed. While he did not quite consider the powerful zealot leader an enemy, they most certainly were not friends. Josephus had made it plain in past meetings that he suspected Simon would betray his own mother if it meant personal gain. Still, if the rumors they had heard were true, at least the zealots were providing some service to the greater good of Judea. What they would demand in return troubled both Josephus, as well as his mentor.



"We could have built hundreds of siege ladders by now," Cinna grumbled to his master centurion. Nearly a week had passed, and all Gallus had done was send out the occasional probing of the second wall. Each time, soldiers were harried by the Judean defenders, who were becoming bolder each day. "If the Jews were that numerous in strength of fighting men, surely they would have sortied against us by now."

The master centurion sat on a rock overlooking the inner part of the city, remaining silent. His eyes were bloodshot, and his face worn with care. It was clear he was even more exacerbated by the events that had transpired since they burst through the outer wall of Jerusalem than his men were. Cinna also realized he was but one of nine cohort commanders who reported directly to the master centurion, and each one had pestered him on a daily basis about why orders had not come down to conduct a proper assault of the defenses. The Jews were simply waiting them out, knowing the Roman logistics were in shambles. It seemed everyone on both sides understood the tactical and strategic situation far better than General Gallus.

"There is a weak point on one of the walls," the master centurion finally said, his eyes still gazing ahead. "It is near the western gate, not far below here. We may not have onagers, siege towers, or battering rams, but what we do have is thousands of men with their individual pickaxes. I've pressed

Gallus into having our men undermine the wall with their entrenching tools. Building a protective cover for them to work under won't take any time at all, and we still have plenty of mounted and dismounted archers who can provide additional protection for them."

"Do you think it will work?"

"It's the only real option we have," the master centurion shrugged. "And if it doesn't, then Mars help us!"



At Hanan's directive, Josephus arrived at the intersection where the second wall ran into the first wall, which protected the upper city. He brought two score of archers and other skirmishers with him in support of Yohanan, whose missile troops were engaged with Roman archers below. Having forty foot walls to fire from gave the Judean skirmishers a tremendous range advantage, although the Romans had neutralized this by their ingenuity in protecting their arches. Scattered about the open field were groups of legionaries arrayed in two ranks. The first knelt behind their shields, which were linked together; the second balanced theirs at an angle off those in front. It was from behind this wall of protection the Roman archers engaged. As they were scattered about, they were unable to mass substantial volleys against the defenders, although Josephus did note a handful of dead fighters, along with a number of wounded being tended to with arrows protruding from various limbs. One man lay with his back against the wall, grasping the broken shaft of an arrow that ran through his guts. Such injuries were horribly painful and almost always fatal. What was worse was that it took hours for one to expire from such a grievous wound.

Forcing himself to pull his gaze away, Josephus walked along, hunkering beneath the protection of the ramparts, until he found Yohanan. The general was on one knee, glancing over the wall for just a few seconds at a time. As if to emphasize his reason for caution, a skirmisher on his right stood to loose his sling stone, only to take two arrows directly in the chest. The warrior dropped his sling and clutched at both arrows, his face contorted in pain. As blood seeped from both the wounds, as well as from his mouth, his body convulsed, sending him headfirst over the wall. Josephus reckoned there were other splattered corpses below and could only hope the enemy archers were suffering their share of losses as well.

“This is no simple harassment,” Yohanan said. “If you listen carefully, you can hear the sound of their pickaxes.” Josephus tilted his head slightly, trying to ignore the sounds of snapping sling stones, flying arrows, and the occasional cries of those hit. Even forty feet below he could hear the scraping and constant chipping away of dozens of Roman entrenching tools. “If they can compromise even a portion of the lower wall, we risk collapse.”

The formidable innermost wall, as well as that of the temple complex, were sixty feet high and fifteen feet thick, and so would be practically impervious to any such attempts. The second wall was just wide enough for a couple men to stand abreast and could be undermined far more quickly.

“What do you need me to do?” Josephus asked.

“They’ve built protective huts using scavenged lumber and hides,” Yohanan replied. “We’ve dropped stones on them, but to no avail. And with their archers arrayed below, every time we stand up to try and strike at their burrowing crews, we risk being shot down.”

“Do you want me to lead a sortie out?”

“No,” Yohanan said, shaking his head, “at least not directly. But you do have the right intention. If we can launch a raid against them at night, the Romans will think we’ve united the people and that they risk being overwhelmed by numbers alone. I figure it will take them at least a couple days to compromise the wall, so we have time. At dusk I want you to take some of your men to where the first wall joins the third, just north of Herod’s Palace. From there launch an attack with your most mobile skirmishers. Make as much damn noise as you can to fool the Romans into thinking your numbers are many.”

“Understood,” Josephus replied, grinning. He admired Yohanan greatly, for like Hanan, he was both a strong and just leader of men. Their situation was precarious, yet Yohanan kept his composure, even as he grieved, watching his men die. He had to tell himself, while regrettable, they died so their people might live. And if God was indeed just, then surely each who fell defending His people would find their place at the table of the righteous!



While Gallus was regaining some of his confidence that the war would still be won, he had no way of actually knowing just how close they were to victory. While Josephus’ men slinked along the massive first wall near the

Phasael Tower across from Herod's Palace, a brawl had erupted amongst the more volatile seditionists, and a sect lead by several former priests who were pressing for making peace with Rome.

"Traitors!" Eleazar ben Ananias shouted at the men. "You would open the gates to our enemies and allow them to slaughter all of our women and children!"

"Fools!" the older priest retorted. "If we do not surrender, *then* the Romans will kill our loved ones! In another day they will be through the second wall and all will be lost."

"I will not allow the Romans to desecrate the city of God!" Eleazar roared, grabbing the man by the neck.

This elicited cries of indignation from the older priest's supporters, and soon men were beating each other with their fists, as well as procured clubs. The throng that was promoting peace was soon overwhelmed by the sheer number of seditionists, who were now brandishing swords. Several men grabbed the old priest by the robes and dragged him towards the wall, both mobs following. Two men bearing torches stood at the top. The man was fighting against his assailants, albeit in vain, as they beat and dragged him up the stone steps. They held him upright, allowing him to see into the darkness below that was dotted with enemy campfires.

"Go," Eleazar growled. "Go prostrate yourself before your masters!" With a nod towards the ramparts, his men grabbed the screaming priest and hurled him over the wall. Eleazar then addressed both masses. "This is the fate of traitors!"

"Damn it, Eleazar!" Silas had come as soon as he'd heard the commotion, yet had arrived too late to stop the brawl or the murder of the priest. The Babylonian general had spent the last weeks searching for volunteers to join the professional army of Judea, while also quelling internal conflicts such as the travesty he had just witnessed.

"Would you betray us, too, Babylonian of Agrippa's army?" Eleazar snarled. "Your former companions are out there. Maybe you'd like to join them."

This insult was met with a sharp slap, the blow injuring Eleazar's pride more than his face.

"Piss on you!" Silas snapped, his eyes filled with rage. "I have proven my loyalty, yours is as fragile as a blade of grass in a storm. You twist and turn with every gust of the wind, and now you have resorted to murder."

“Oh, Silas,” Eleazar said, chuckling and shaking his head. “What are we doing? You assail me as a murderer, yet I have just prevented the gates from being opened to our enemies! That it was an old man and former priest is of no matter. Now I suggest you get this mob under control, lest more Jewish blood be needlessly shed this night.”

As much as it turned Silas’ stomach, he quietly admitted that, in a manner of speaking, Eleazar was right. The people needed to at least show a front of unity, lest the Romans exploit it to the demise of all. He gave a curt nod and turned back to address the seething crowds, who stood ready to continue in the pointless brawl. A few words of reassurance from the general seemed to quell their anger towards each other, at least for the time being.



While the macabre sight played out near the gate, sentries along the southwest corner of the Roman camp were startled by the sounds of battle cries and war horns. Despite being within the outer wall of the city, the vast plain that led up to the Rock of Golgotha was still susceptible to enemy attacks and as such, the Romans had wisely dug the required trenches and built up palisades.

These particular regiments were infantrymen from King Agrippa’s army. Therefore, the attacking Jews viewed them with a particularly deep sense of hatred. Despite the extreme and often violent differences that, continually, existed between the various Judean factions, to side with their common enemy was unforgiveable. Sling stones snapped past the heads of men who quickly ducked behind their shields. One was not quick enough, and a smooth flattened stone smashed into the bridge of his nose, sending him screaming to the ground, blood running between his fingers as he clutched his face.

“Sound the alarm!” the lead sentry shouted as a rock bounced off the side of his helmet, jarring his neck.

Frantic trumpet calls sounded, and soon the entire camp was on alert.

“It’s working!” a fighter said with a grin, as he and Josephus placed fresh stones in the pouches of their slings. With a few whirls overhead, they released their missiles towards the flashes of assembling soldiers beyond the line of palisades and flickering torches.

Josephus knew they had to move quickly, both to avoid being caught by the pending sorties of Roman troops, as well as to continue to deceive them into thinking the rebel numbers were far greater than they actually were. All told, Josephus had, perhaps, three hundred picked men with him, and the thought of their paltry force assaulting a camp of thirty thousand was so absurd he found himself breaking into sporadic fits of laughter.

The sound of galloping horses alerted him, and his laughter ceased. Having attacked King Agrippa's men, they had forgotten there was an entire regiment of horse archers encamped with them. While the darkness largely worked in their favor, the crescent moon and stars provided enough light for the mounted archers to pick out the shapes of rushing fighters to unleash their arrows upon. Josephus grimaced as one skirmisher standing next to him took an arrow in the back. The man's eyes closed, his mouth agape, as he pitched forward into the soft earth. Josephus was then fearful not for his own safety, but that of his young friend, Yaakov. Knowing there was no way of finding the young man in the chaotic darkness, especially with enemy infantry cohorts now sallying forth, he and his men made a run towards the Tower of Phasael to the south.

Scattered along the western edge of the massive Roman camp, various bands of twenty to thirty of Josephus' warriors struck in similar fashion, causing alarm and confusion amongst their enemies. His orders had been simple, to create as much havoc as possible, then to withdraw. If the way to the Tower of Phasael was blocked, they were to flee the city altogether via the western gate of the third wall, which was completely unmanned. From there, they would make their way several miles south, re-entering Jerusalem at the western gate of the upper city.

As it took several minutes for a Roman soldier, be they legionary or auxilia, to fully kit up, many sortied out in just their tunics and helmets, with shields and swords. This emboldened some of the skirmishers, who with sword and club attacked the soldiers with reckless abandon. Even when devoid of their protective armor, all classes of Roman soldiers were still far superior fighters to the Jewish renegades, and at least a dozen or so of the attackers paid for this lesson with their lives.

"What the hell is going on out there?" Gallus asked in a near panic, as he stumbled out of his tent on the back side of Golgotha. Below he could see hundreds of torches, their light glinting off the helmets and swords of various

regiments, and cohorts of his men who were spilling from the camp in order to meet their attackers.

“I can’t say for certain,” his master centurion replied, “but I speculate that it is little more than a band of skirmishers, sent forth to harass us.”

“That looks like far more than a mere band of raiders,” Gallus retorted, though he did not press the issue further.

What he did not know was that even Eleazar and the larger portion of his seditionists were on the brink of surrender, should the Romans succeed in penetrating the second wall. The raid by Josephus and his men had done little to help unite the warring factions within and without Jerusalem, yet this glaring weakness was completely unknown to Gallus and the Romans. In the early months of the Roman-Judean War, there was still hope for a negotiated peace. With the pending rains, not knowing the true disposition of his enemy, and further distraught over the loss of his siege engines and much of their supplies, Gallus’ order the following morning would baffle both friend and foe alike.



“What the fuck does he mean we’re retreating?” a centurion snapped, his military bearing completely lost with the perplexing news. “We’re almost through the damn wall! A few more hours and the blasted thing will come crumbling down!”

“Our orders are to withdraw,” Cinna replied coldly. He hated the directive as much as his men, yet he knew there was nothing any of them could do about it. “We are at grave risk of being completely cut off, what with the pending fall rains that will render the roads impassable. It is not for us to dictate policy for the legion, follow your orders and ready your men!”

The reality was that while all soldiers were expected to obey the orders of their appointed officers, centurions had earned their positions in part by being free thinkers. As such, when a command came down they knew was asinine, not to mention strategically dangerous, they tended to make their feelings known. A good commanding legate would elicit the advice of his senior-ranking centurions, as they were the most tactically and strategically adept men under his command. Gallus, however, was not a good legate and continued to ignore the council of his most able subordinate leaders.



“The Roman army has retreated from Jerusalem!” a scout gleefully reported to Simon later that afternoon. The zealot leader was in disbelief at the news. The last word he received was that the Romans had taken the outer wall and were ready to breach the second wall, with the defenders in a state of disarray and constant infighting. He had been mentally preparing himself and his men for the pending news that Jerusalem had fallen and the existing government surrendered to the Romans. Simon was fully prepared to continue fighting a guerilla-style war against the invaders, yet now his foes were handing him the initiative.

He summoned a number of his leading warriors and gave them a simple address, “It is time we show both the Romans, as well as the pretenders in Jerusalem, what it means to violate the ancient Kingdoms of Judah and Israel, which God Himself has given us!”

Chapter XIV: Disaster

Beth Horon Pass
November, 66 A.D.
***

The Jewish surprise at the abrupt Roman departure from Jerusalem did not last long. Hanan quickly ordered his generals to harry the enemy and, “Mark their ignominious retreat with a trail of blood!”

The leading elements of the long column had just crested Mount Scopus when the first skirmishers under Yohanan and Silas assailed their flanks and rear. Niger of Perea had ridden to a camp just a few miles northeast of the city, where a number of loyal fighters had gathered. The repulse of the invaders from the holy city had rallied more warriors to their cause. What baffled them was the utter disorder from the normally supremely disciplined Roman army. All seemed to have their heads tucked and no sense of situational awareness, only the desire to escape Judea altogether.



With Gallus at the head of the column, seeking foremost to save his own skin, Legate Appius remained towards the rear with two of his Sixth Legion cohorts, along with a large number of auxilia infantry that were tasked with protecting what remained of the baggage trains. His men spotted the first wave of slingers and spear throwers, and they quickly turned about to face this threat.

“Form ranks!” the legate shouted. He then turned to the nearest auxilia centurion. “Have your men double-time and catch up with the column. We’ll hold them as long as we can. Do *not* let the enemy capture our supplies!”

“Yes, sir,” the centurion replied, knowing full well the sacrifice the legate and his men were about to make.

“Ironclad Legion,” Appius shouted, referring to the Sixth by their given moniker, *“time to earn your name in history!”* He drew his gladius as his men readied themselves behind their shield wall.

His two understrength cohorts numbered less than eight hundred men

total. At least ten times that number swarmed them from all directions. The first waves of Jewish fighters were lightly armed with slings and throwing darts, which they unleashed in a torrent that fell upon the stalwart legionaries like rain. Though their shields and armor provided excellent protection, a number still succumbed to the sheer volume of enemy missiles. A sling stone struck Appius' horse in the flank, and the animal bolted, tossing the legate, who landed hard upon his back, the wind knocked from him.

While Appius struggled to regain his breath and get to his feet, the first waves of fighters ran past his men, intent on pursuing the retreating column. It was then the second wave of Jewish close combat warriors assailed them in massive numbers. These men were still more lightly equipped, carrying only small bucklers and a variety of lighter melee weapons, yet there were so many, and the Romans were already suffering casualties from the storm of sling stones and darts. The legionary heavy javelins did not have the same reach as these weapons, and they were only able to employ them as the Judean horde rushed to engage them.

"Javelins…throw!" the centurions shouted, knowing there was no time for measured volleys.

They still had the intended effect, skewering many of their attackers, while puncturing the shields of others, rendering them useless.

The cries of their dying friends who fell in the salvo only enraged the Judeans who rushed with fury, crashing into the wall of legionary shields. More fighters were now joining the fray from all sides, and while legionary tactics and armament allowed them to defeat opposition that had them substantially outnumbered, there was only so much they could withstand. There was also no flank support for them, so the Jews were able to mostly envelope their forces and utilize their superior numbers. Still, they paid a high price for their valor as long as the formations held. Legionary blades became soaked with blood as they stabbed repeatedly at their assailants, officers rotating their lines and deploying fresh troops forward as much as they were able.

Appius assessed the situation and realized, while there was little he could do about the enemy skirmishers who were intent on attacking the main column, he had given the retreating army enough breathing space that they would not be completely flanked by the Judean melee troops. He ordered his men to begin their own withdrawal.

With true Roman discipline, the soldiers for the Ferrata Legion began to

back away from the Jewish mob, keeping their shields together while maintaining a deliberate and measured pace. Bands of warriors would smash into them, trying to inflict casualties before scampering away. Sadly, for the legionaries, whenever one of their companions was badly injured or pulled from the line, there was little to do except watch him being torn to pieces by the rampaging throng.

"Steady lads!" Appius said, trying to reassure his men. What he could not see was a number of skirmishers who remained in the enemy ranks, and he was oblivious to the two-foot dart that sailed from the right and slammed into the side of his neck. The legate dropped his sword, eyes wide in shock as he fought for breath, the point of the dart having penetrated clean through. Blood spurted from both sides of his neck. Appius collapsed to the earth, his vision soon gave out as his soul was taken along with so many others to whatever afterlife awaited him. Of the men who valiantly held the line with him, a little over half miraculously made it all the way to where the army was encamping at Gabaon. The rest lay bloodied and broken, with rebel fighters ripping away their weapons and armor. It was a savage scene that would be replayed many times over the coming days.



As the last survivors made their way into the temporary sanctuary of the citadel, Gallus took Appius' death hard, blaming himself for his friend's demise. Moreover, his fellow legate had been the only officer whose advice and counsel the commanding general had even remotely listened to. Without that, and still unable or unwilling to heed the words of his centurions, his bearing completely collapsed. For two days they lingered at Gabaon, and while the legate insisted it was to give the men a chance to rest before pressing on, in reality it was because indecision gripped him and he had no idea how to save his army.

The delay would only worsen the situation, for word had spread about the Roman army's repulse and long retreat from Jerusalem. Fighters from all over Judea, and even Galilee, swarmed into the region. Knowing the route the Romans would take, they staged themselves at various ambush points along the way. Simon bar Giora alone had more than twenty thousand men encamped on the high ground outside of Gabaon. Niger of Perea had arrived

with an additional five thousand warriors, with an additional twenty to thirty thousand coming from Jerusalem and the surrounding districts under Yohanan and Silas of Babylonia. Though he had wished to take part in the fighting, Josephus had been kept back by Hanan in order to help him maintain order in the still highly unstable holy city, for seditionists would likely use the depletion of loyal fighters as an opportunity to spread dissention once more.

"The road from Gabaon all the way through Beth Horon is lined with warriors," Yohanan said to his friends, Niger and Silas, that evening. "Even the zealot, Simon bar Giora, has joined the fight!"

"He's little more than an opportunist," Niger observed. "Still, if his men will help spill Roman blood, then they are welcome to join us."

"I just wonder what that maniac will want in return when it's over," Yohanan mused. He then shook his head. "There's nothing for it. Over the coming days, we will drive the Romans from the Kingdom of Judah forever!"

While enthralled at what it could mean to free Judea once and for all, Niger was secretly a little conflicted. Like most of his companions, he had never left the east and had little appreciation for just how vast and powerful the Roman Empire was. He heard tales about the near-invincible legions that had conquered most of the known world, and yet they had an entire army of this very empire at their mercy. The question soon would be, would the Romans return after such an ignominious routing of their forces from Judea?



Gallus' latest order perplexed the men even more than the one to retreat from Jerusalem. Stating their pack animals not be allowed to fall into enemy hands, he ordered that all not carrying rations be slaughtered. He then ordered the army to move out, making for a small village known as *Beth Horon Katotera*. The road leading away from Gabaon soon came out of the hills and onto an open plain. In perhaps his only tactically sound move of the entire campaign, Gallus ordered his cavalry to cover the flanks of the army as they made their way to the Beth Horon pass.

"We're marching straight into a death trap," Centurion Cinna muttered.

The Jews were mostly keeping their distance, though a few more barefaced bands attempted to harry the screening cavalry, only to suffer

brutally at the hands of either mounted archers or charging lancers.

As the column approached the gap between the hills, every soldier within the army wished Gallus had found them another way. Each soldier that hunkered down beneath his pack and tried to tuck himself further into his armor knew that the rebels swarmed the hills, and the march through Beth Horon would be a bloodbath. The morale of the once triumphant army was now thoroughly crushed. Weeks of unending poor leadership, being forced to walk into enemy ambushes, the calling off of their efforts to undermine the walls of Jerusalem and end the rebellion, combined with the disasters on the retreat had proven too much for their collective psyche.

The master centurion of the Twelfth Fulminata marched with the aquilifer, who carried the legion's sacred eagle standard. Though authorized a horse, he was not about to run the risk of being tempted to abandon his men in any potential disaster. Like all leaders worthy of their men's respect, he viewed his own life no more valuable than that of his lowest ranking legionary. Gallus and his surviving tribunes remained mounted. Soldiers in the ranks kept close together, waiting for the pending storm. They did not have to wait for long.

A hail of sling stones, darts, and arrows fell in a torrent upon the column. Legionaries, being both better trained and equipped than their auxilia and allied troops, kept their shields in tight on the flanks and overhead. Auxiliary infantry were far more susceptible to the incessant volleys of projectiles, with many falling dead or stricken as the army continued its harrowing retreat. There was nothing that could be done for the wounded; any not able to keep up with the column were left to the merciless rebels, who fell upon them with sword and club. The screams of pain, anguish, and terror drove even the stoutest of hearts mad with fear.

At a bend in the path, flanked by large rock outcroppings, thousands of Jewish fighters grouped. Skirmishers and close combat troops alike eyed the prize of the Roman eagle carried by the Twelfth Legion's aquilifer. Knowing the disgrace and psychological trauma such a loss would inflict, they blocked the path and made ready to swarm the head of the column. Gallus' eyes grew wide, and he suddenly halted. Legionaries, who had thus far managed to hold their formations and discipline, crashed into each other, creating gaps in the ranks that the Jews were quick to exploit.

"Why the hell are we stopped?" the master centurion shouted as the young chief tribune's head snapped back, his body stricken in a barrage of

arrows and throwing darts.

Neopolitanus, the strong young officer who had walked the streets of Jerusalem alone in an attempt to maintain the peace, fell from his wounded horse and lay thrashing on the ground as gouts of blood gushed from his fearsome injuries. Gallus was open-mouthed at the sight.

"I…" he stuttered. "I don't know what to do."

"Hades damn you!" the master centurion growled, grabbing him by the chest plate of his armor. His discipline left him, and he knew he needed to take drastic measures if he was going to save the legion. "*You are a disgrace, Cestius Gallus!* I am relieving you of command; you are not fit to lead soldiers of Rome…" His words were cut off as an arrow embedded itself in the back of his leg, causing him to spasm and release the legate.

Gallus, in the grips of terror, spurred his horse onward, only the blockade of Judean warriors prevented him from abandoning his command. Behind him, the master centurion hobbled to the aquilifer, assumed command, and ordered his leading soldiers form into battle lines to fight their way through. They ran past their cowering legate, and unleashed a salvo of javelins into the Judean mob. Many upon the rocks, as well as those who blocked the road, were cut down. Arms and legs were shattered by the heavy pila, with torsos ran completely through.

"Gladius…draw!" shouted the lead centurion. His men drew their blades and attacked the mob head-on, anxious to exact retribution for the losses they had already suffered. Rebels on the high ground continued to rain down stones and other missiles upon the Romans who were now engaged in a brutal struggle for their lives. Those warriors who blocked the path slowly gave ground, knowing they could not stand against legionaries in close combat. They only needed to slow them down and keep their enemies from escaping.

A short ways up the column, Centurion Cinna felt like his left arm was going to give out, fatigued as it was from holding his shield overhead to protect himself from the unending storm of rebel stones and darts. It was maddening for both he and his men that every step they took on this long, hateful journey was wrought with death. What was worse was there was practically nothing they could do about it. The Beth Horon pass cut through a steep ravine, with the high cliffs on either side practically unassailable by the heavily armed Romans. And these were swarming with lightly equipped

Jewish fighters, who rained death upon them with reckless excitement. Those in the best position to fight back, auxilia skirmishers and King Agrippa's mounted archers, were specifically targeted by the rebels.

Cinna soon caught sight of the battle that was developing at the head of the column, where the front ranks of legionaries were trying to cut their way out of the disaster. He noted a sizeable gap between the lead elements and his own cohort, which was now overrun with Jewish warriors. The centurion realized, immediately, what they were after.

"Cohort!" he shouted over his shoulder. *"At the double-time…march!"*

His men stepped off quickly, trying to remain oblivious to the relentless hail of enemy missiles. Those soldiers who formed the vanguard and were tasked with protecting the eagle were now completely surrounded. Jewish fighters used their numbers, as well as the momentum from rushing downhill, to smash into their foundering ranks.

Cinna and his men ran as quick as they could, yet time seemed to stand still. All he could see now were enemy warriors, as if the entire lead element had been swallowed up. The centurion then gave a smile of hope, as suddenly their foes started to withdraw, legionaries clawing and battling back as they fought desperately for their survival. Cinna grinned in macabre satisfaction as he saw one Jewish fighter who'd been knocked to his back trying to regain his footing, only to take the blade of a legionary gladius into his guts.

As Cinna and his men closed the distance, he quickly realized the gallant soldiers had not driven away their attackers, but that they had pulled back of their own accord. A triumphant shout echoed all along the hillsides, and Cinna's heart sank as he saw a skirmisher carrying the legion's eagle. As much as he wished to chase the man down, he knew this to be impossible. The ground was too steep, and there were now hundreds of warriors gathering around their prize. War horns sounded a series of rapid notes, and soon the Judeans blocking the path began to disperse.

"Come on!" Gallus shouted from atop his horse, pointing his sword forward. "I will lead us out of this!"

Cinna was filled with revulsion at this grandstanding from the very man responsible for the disaster. As they rushed forward, he stopped briefly at the pile of bodies scattered near the opening that led away from the slaughter. Amongst the dead was one of the military tribunes along with his slaughtered horse, the aquilifer, and most dishearteningly to Cinna, the master centurion. A few legionaries and a score of Jewish rebels lay dead or dying in a pool of

blood that made the ground sticky. Cinna knelt and placed a hand on his former mentor's lifeless shoulder.

"May you find peace in Elysium," he said quietly, before joining his men who were practically running.

The ground opened up before them, the village of Beth Horon Katotera in the distance. It was now late afternoon, and the army had been beleaguered relentlessly for the last six or seven hours. All any could think about now was survival. While skirmishers continued to harass their flanks, once they were out in the open ground these tapered off, particularly with the redeployment of the surviving cavalry.

Gallus rode through the gates well ahead of his retreating army. Only one of his military tribunes from the Twelfth Legion remained. Both the chief tribune and master centurion were dead, along with two of the four centurion's primus ordo from the elite First Cohort. The commanding legate was grinning nervously as he dismounted near a well in the deserted town square. The citizens had fled for the safety of Jerusalem and the larger walled cities, with those loyal to Rome absconding towards Caesarea and Ptolemais once they heard about the army's shameful retreat.

As Gallus took the water bucket from the well and doused his face, a despondent legionary shouted, "Any more brilliant strategies, *general*?"

"Fucking coward!" another man spat.

Discipline had all but evaporated within the army, and not even the centurions bothered attempting to restore it. Such insubordinate remarks would normally get a soldier flogged or possibly even strangled, yet their officers stood idly by, their own contempt for the commanding general overriding even the hardest of disciplinarians. Gallus ignored the men and found a nearby deserted house, where he resolved to catch some sleep.

Centurion Cinna stood outside the gates of the village, watching as surviving cohorts from the Twelfth Legion stumbled past the gate. He further took stock of the vexilations from the Sixth Legion, the allied and auxilia cohorts, and finally the cavalry remnants who had valiantly kept the enemy at bay during the final push. It was well after dark by the time the last survivors made their way into Beth Horon Katotera.

There would be little rest for the shattered army, for as their enemies gathered in the darkness around the village, Gallus ordered his men to move out well before dawn. One century of legionaries, and three of auxiliaries

would be left behind as a rear guard. Their orders were to continue to make a presence known, while calling out the watchwords of the day in order to fool the rebels into thinking the entire army remained encamped within. The ruse did not last for long, and with little but a wooden stockade and low stone walls to protect them, the last remnants of Gallus' army within the village were quickly wiped out. The delay had given him about a four-mile head start, and by the time the haggard army reached the city of Antipatris, the Judean pursuit finally ended.

Devoid of any supplies or rations, the soldiers became wracked with hunger that weakened them greatly. It was only two days later, when they reached the safety of Caesarea, that any could rest easy. All told, nearly six thousand of the thirty thousand Gallus led into Judea perished. The Roman dead were scavenged for weapons and armor. His incompetent leadership had only emboldened their enemies, who just a week prior were on the verge of capitulation. The enemy now had all of the Twelfth Legion's artillery, not to mention their sacred eagle.

Roman honor had been sorely wounded, and once word spread throughout the empire, it brought the risk of further rebellions from dissatisfied provincials. And yet, as he made his way into the governor's palace at Caesarea to write his report to the emperor, all Cestius Gallus could think of was how to save his own reputation and upon whom to place the blame for the disaster.

Chapter XV: Aftermath

Jerusalem
November, 66 A.D.



Emperor Nero

The mood within Jerusalem was one of celebration, with sacrifices queuing at the temple, giving praise to God for saving the Kingdom of Judah and delivering them from the hated Romans. Yohanan ben Levi, Silas of Babylonia, and Niger of Perea were specifically singled out for their leadership and valor. Hanan, who by popular acclamation now led the new government of Judea, stood at the top of the temple stairs, addressing the adoring throng. Beside him were the three renowned generals, as well as Joseph ben Gorion, who had been appointed his deputy governor.

"We have driven the Romans from our lands!" he exclaimed, being met by further ovations from the multitude. "For the first time in generations we have our own independent Jewish state! Let all of us, as descendants of the Kingdom of Judah, come together as one nation!"

The multitude cheered loudly at this proclamation. For the briefest of moments, their internal squabbles were forgotten in the mutual jubilation at the defeat of the hated occupiers.

"Know this," Hanan continued, "the Romans will return, and when they

do, we will need every one of you to stand together as one. Are you with us?"

This was met with another round of shouts of adulation and triumph. After the strain of the past weeks, Hanan allowed himself to hope for the salvation of his people once again.

A meeting was held that evening with the newly appointed council, along with the most prominent Judean generals within the region. The captured eagle of the Twelfth was prominently displayed behind the dais which Hanan and the senior priests and council members occupied. While the masses celebrated in the streets, all within the chamber understood that the crisis with Rome had only just begun.

"We have beaten the enemy soundly," Hanan said to open the council, "but we know they will return. Our victories have given us much in the way of confidence, as well as new arms and equipment."

"Let us not forget the Twelfth Legion's entire stock of siege engines," Simon bar Giora spoke up.

"And for that we thank you," Hanan replied with carefully measured enthusiasm.

"Proper thanks would be granting me command of one of the military districts," Simon remarked. "Certainly I have proven my loyalty to be worthy of such trust."

"You have proven that you are willing to fight the Romans," Joseph ben Gorion stated. "But that does not mean you are loyal to the duly appointed government of Judea."

"You are still a radical member of the antiestablishment," Eleazar quickly added. The words sounded insincere, given his own questionable loyalties. However, Eleazar's powerful faction, along with that of another zealot leader named Jesus bar Gamalas, had been accepted into the coalition by Hanan and the council.

"You will take the spoils I have given you then cast me aside?" Simon retorted contemptuously. "Damn you and all hypocrites of this supposed government!"

"Take it easy, friend," Hanan said, raising his hands and trying to quell the situation. "Your fighters are more than welcome to join the cause. We will encourage and support whatever operations you may conduct if and when the enemy returns. But command of an entire district is something we cannot sanction, at least not at this time."

“You two-faced, opportunistic shits!” Simon shouted. He pointed his finger accusingly. “You would sell us all out to the Romans if you thought they would reward you for it! You’re no fighter, nor are any of you. Mark my words, at the first sign of trouble, this council will be crawling on its belly back to Caesar. Well piss on you all!” He then spat on the floor in scorn and stormed out of the hall.

An uncomfortable silence followed for a moment before Hanan spoke up once more.

“The council has divided the realm into a series of military districts,” he said, “Idumea, Jericho, the West, the Center, and Galilee. Each governor-general assigned will have full authority to raise sufficient militia to defend his area. Neighboring districts are to mutually support each other as much as they are able.” He then addressed Niger of Perea. “Niger, you were previously governor of Idumea. However, we feel you would serve us better as one of the chief generals for the Army of Judea.”

“I am honored,” Niger replied with a short bow.

“You, Yohanan, and Silas of Babylonia are charged with continuing the recruiting and training of our permanent standing army,” Hanan continued. “The Romans make such fearsome enemies because their soldiers are not simply farmers or laborers called up to service part-time. Their strength lies in being a professional army with men whose sole purpose is to fight. If we are to stand against them we will require the same level of commitment. I don’t doubt you will find plenty of volunteers amongst the younger generation who would prefer being paid to wield a sword than plow the fields.”

The remainder of the meeting was spent on administrative matters, for the running of a new government would require seeing to the daily needs of the people. The governor-generals would not simply be in charge of defense against further invasion, but would also appoint and oversee the councils of elders for each of the cities within their regions. There was also the matter of issuing coinage. Gold and silver would still be required for conducting trade outside of Judea, but the council agreed that they could no longer stand for the images of the Caesars desecrating their lands. And so, Hanan was granted the authority to mint and issue coins in the name of the people of Judea.



Silver Shekel of Judea
Inscription reads “Shekel of Israel” in Hebrew on the front, “Jerusalem the Holy” on the reverse



Word of the disaster reached Ascalon within days of the Judean council’s meeting. Merchants and other wayfarers brought news to the garrison though, like in all such cases, every rumor was treated with much skepticism. It was only after multiple sources, including contacts of both Marius and Nicanor, reported seeing the eagle of the Twelfth Legion paraded through the streets, that the full extent of the debacle became understood.

Centurion Antonius called an immediate assembly with his senior leaders once he was able to fully ascertain some of the facts surrounding the disaster. For Sergeant Gaius Artorius Armiger, the wait was maddening, as his soldiers were constantly pestering him regarding news and whether or not they would soon be under attack by the rampaging victorious Jews. He had just finished threatening them with two hours of extra weapons drills if they did not cease, when Optio Nicanor summoned him for a meeting with the centurion. As was the case anytime information came down from the cohort commander, Marius would pass on the news to his principal officers and decanii who would, in turn, disseminate any actionable intelligence down to the soldiers in the ranks.

“Men,” Marius said, looking somber. “As you all know, once a rumor starts it is hard to contain. Often they are filled with misinformation meant to alarm and bring disarray. Regrettably, in the case of the disaster that has befallen the army of Cestius Gallus, these rumors appear to be true.”

There were some muffled grumblings amongst the men, as they shook their heads in disbelief. While most of the officers sat in the small room the

century was using for its headquarters, the centurion stood with his hands on the table. His face ashen, his knuckles white as they pressed into the creaking wood.

"Is it true, sir, the Twelfth Legion lost its eagle?" a decanus asked.

An amazing universal truth is that rumor will always spread faster than official reports, and though this detail, along with the death of Legate Appius of the Sixth Legion had not reached Ascalon through official channels, it seemed everyone already knew about it. It appeared that given the calamity of Gallus' defeat, the garrison at Ascalon was essentially forgotten.

"From what I can gather, yes," Marius replied with a somber nod.

"This means that we and the other coastal garrisons are the only Roman troops left in Judea," Nicanor noted.

"Correct," the centurion acknowledged. "And our cohort is the only force of legionaries in the region. No doubt the rebels know this, and you can bet they will make an attempt to take Ascalon. Not only because of the symbolic nature of removing the last of the Roman legions from their lands, but because of the strategic value that holding one of the port cities will allow them."

"It's not all grim for us," Nicanor said, noting the forlorn expressions of his men. The last thing he or Marius wanted was for their legionaries to despair, for it would only hasten their destruction when the enemy did come for them, like it did for the army of Gallus. He explained, "We have the defensive walls of the city, and with the sea at our backs we cannot be completely cut off. As long as none of the other ports fall, we can still readily get supplies and food into the city."

"What about reinforcements?" Gaius asked.

"We can only hope," Marius said. "Optio Nicanor is right, at least the bastards cannot starve us out. Something Centurion Antonius noted during the senior leaders' meeting is that the plain to the east of the city is flat and open. It's also just wide enough for our force to form a viable battle front without too much risk of being flanked. There is also plenty of room for our cavalry regiment to maneuver. In short, we hold the advantage, and whatever fate befell Gallus and his army, we will not be taken so easily! If the rebels wish to take Ascalon, their road will be paved with skulls."

For Gaius, his experiences in Judea were a far cry from what his father and grandfather had described of their own time in the east, all those years

ago. Both had served in a volunteer cohort of legionaries under the procurator, Pontius Pilate, with Gaius' grandfather serving as the centurion pilus prior. Though the province had always been rather volatile, most of the unrest had come in the form of riots and official protests from the Sanhedrin to Jewish-sympathizing Emperor Tiberius, rather than full-scale insurrection. And, whatever the Jews now thought of King Agrippa, his father's lifelong friendship with Tiberius had given the people a direct line of communications to the emperor, thus helping to promote the peace.

The young decanus had seen little of the personable interaction with the Jews that his father had told him about, in depth, when he first heard his son was being assigned to the legions in the east. Instead, the land was filled with suspicion and hate. Gaius wished he could feel some form of sympathy for the common people, who no doubt were caught in the middle of the storm with no way of knowing which way to turn. He thought back to a previous conversation he'd had with Nicanor, and realized the poor of Judea were no longer simply robbed and taken advantage of by the wealthy. Now, their very lives had been deemed worthless by the seditionists who would sacrifice them on legionary blades for their own selfish gains.



Ever the coward, Gallus could not find his nerve to personally face Emperor Nero. Instead, he sent an ambassador from Agrippa's court named Saul, along with General Jacimus. It was he who led the king's lancers and mounted archers, whose valor had prevented the entire army from being wiped out. The emissaries did not have far to travel, for Nero was still touring the eastern provinces and had stopped over in Paphos on the Isle of Cyprus. And, of course, rumors regarding the disaster had reached the emperor even before the official dispatch, so he was already in a frenzy when Saul handed him the sealed scroll.

"The people of Damascus have risen up in fury against the Jewish population," Jacimus added as Nero read Gallus' report.

"No doubt with the intent of quelling any potential added uprisings," Saul observed.

It was awkward for both men, considering they were both Jewish. The acts of seditionists were spreading and causing the unwarranted deaths of many, and both had been rather distraught to hear about the rampant

slaughter in Alexandria two months prior.

The emperor appeared to ignore Saul, caught up as he was in the magnitude of the calamity that had needlessly befallen his army. He was further incensed that, despite Gallus being just a day's journey by ship away from Cyprus, he had sent these Jewish lackeys instead.

"Damn it all!" Nero screamed, throwing the scroll across the room. He pulled on his hair, eyes wide, and face contorted in rage. The disastrous campaign of Cestius Gallus, against what the emperor viewed as nothing more than a disorganized rabble, was more than his easily frayed nerves could handle. That Gallus attempted to deflect the blame from himself to Florus was contemptible and Nero said as much, spitting as he did so.

"Florus did indeed start the war," the consul, Suetonius Paulinus reasoned as he picked up and read the report. "But that does not explain away how Gallus' incompetence needlessly cost the lives of six thousand Roman soldiers."

Nero sprung towards him, his face, which was turning purple in his anger, inches from the consul's. "I want this rebellion crushed," he hissed. "I want the leaders nailed to crucifixes, their women and children enslaved or dead! Judea will drown in blood for this outrage!"

"Gallus is not the man to do it," Paulinus remarked. "Nor is he fit to govern Syria any longer. Mucianus is with your highness' entourage; he is an able general and administrator…"

"Fine!" the emperor interrupted with a quick wave of his hand. "He can have Syria. I need someone who can lead my armies to victory and not fuck it up…*find me someone!*"

Paulinus knew immediately who he wished to recommend to the emperor. He also understood that it would enrage Nero who, though practically insane, was well aware of the fact that he would have to politically prostrate himself before a man who he had contemplated having strangled not even a year prior.

"There is one who can do it; a man still called *The War Master* by many," he said slowly.

Nero turned towards him, not quite understanding the consul's meaning. After a moment's pause, his face then twisted into a sneer of understanding and defiance. "Not him!" he spat. "I will *not* humble myself before one who so grievously offended our sacred person!"

Paulinus was suddenly glad his term as consul was coming to an end

soon. His colleague had been fortunate enough to remain in Rome, overseeing the governing of the empire, while he had been stuck touring the provinces with the despondent and volatile man who, by the cruelty of fate, had ruled Rome as Caesar for the last twelve years. For the good of Rome, the consul knew he had to be firm in this matter with Nero, for anything less was to invite even greater misfortune.

"Do you want this war to be won or not?" he replied with candor that surprised Nero. Paulinus continued, "Or, would you rather risk losing Judea altogether, and run the likelihood that other provinces will come to the conclusion that rebelling from Rome is a sound idea? There is something you will have to face up to, sire, if you want to preserve the empire. Like him or not, you *need* Titus Flavius Vespasian!"

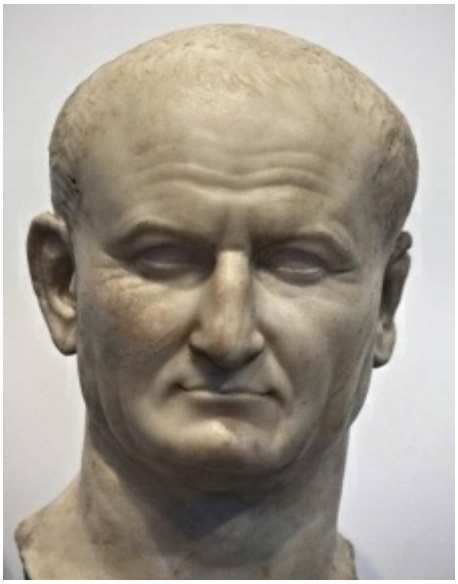
Nero said nothing for a moment, closing his eyes as he tried to accept what must be done.

Paulinus took the initiative. "I will send word to Titus in Alexandria. We'll draft up your highness' message and let him deliver it to Vespasian."

The emperor said no more, and simply walked out of the hall, looking thoroughly defeated. Paulinus took a deep breath of relief, knowing, given his unpredictability, Nero could just as easily have snapped and ordered him exiled with Vespasian for his insolence. The consul said a silent prayer of thanks to whatever gods may be listening, that the emperor had, for a brief moment, seen just enough reason to put aside a personal grievance for the good of Rome.

Chapter XVI: The War Master's Return

Achaea, Greece
December, 66 A.D.



Vespasian

There was something satisfying about working with bees. Their hives were a frenzy of organized pandemonium, with hundreds buzzing about, building honeycombs, reproducing, while producing honey and pollinating flowers and indigenous crops. Like the camp of a legion, there was order to be had in the chaos.

Vespasian sighed as he walked away from the bedlam of activity coming from his hives and removed his hood and gloves. It was all little more than a distraction from the cold reality that this was still exile. Twenty-three years before, he had been instrumental in the conquest of Britannia. His decisive victories against overwhelming numbers, along with his brazen assaults on enemy strongholds, which he seemingly broke with contemptuous ease, had earned him *triumphal regalia* and a reputation as the greatest military leader of the age. He was credited with succeeding where Julius Caesar had failed, though he was always quick to remind his admirers that he was but one of four legion commanders during the campaign. And now…now he was relegated to tending hives and honeycombs.

"I never should have agreed to be a part of the emperor's retinue," he

grumbled to himself, pulling off his protective overcoat.

"And where would you be then?" a voice asked behind him. Vespasian turned and grinned broadly for perhaps the first time in over a year.

"Titus!" he said as his son dismounted his horse. The two men shared a strong embrace. Titus bore much resemblance to his father, albeit he was slightly taller and had a fuller head of hair. Vespasian noted his son's armor, consisting of a muscled breastplate and ornate trappings. "By Juno, that's no tribune's armor, you've been made a legate!"

"Commander of the Fifteenth Legion, Apollinaris," Titus confirmed. "They've only just recently moved from Noricum to Alexandria. And a good thing, too, given the troubles in Judea."

"Judea," Vespasian scoffed as the two men walked through the glade of fruit trees towards his small villa. "Judea is a shit hole, an archaic backwater community full of revolting peasants and mindless revolutionaries."

"Yes, well, no doubt you heard what those 'mindless revolutionaries' have done," Titus replied, accepting a cup of wine from a servant as they stepped onto the outer covered landing. The young man set his helmet on a table and signaled a pair of slaves to help him out of his armor.

"I heard the less-than-official reports," Vespasian grumbled. "Is it true the Twelfth Legion lost its eagle?"

"It's true." Titus nodded glumly. "And Appius of the Sixth Legion was also killed."

"Gallus was a damned fool!" his father spat. "What did he think was going to happen when he tried to take Jerusalem with so few soldiers? And leading his men straight through Beth Horon pass was nothing short of suicidal. And now Judea is in a state of chaos and rebellion, with no order to be had."

"That is why I am here," Titus said, assessing the curious reaction on his father's face before continuing. "A backwater of the empire Judea may be, but if we don't smash this rebellion into oblivion and make it clear what happens when the peace of Rome is violated, then it could ripple throughout the east, if not the whole of the Roman world. Ungrateful upstarts in other provinces could see this as a sign that we are weak and that it is time to break away. That small state could unravel the entire Roman Empire if the rebels are allowed to go unpunished. And the Jews are far from unwashed barbarians. They're literate, highly educated, resourceful, and above all, relentless."

“So how does this involve me?” Vespasian asked, the corner of his mouth turned up in a slight grin, arms folded across his chest.

“The emperor has sent me with specific instructions to recall you back to active service.”

“A year ago I was threatened with strangulation for falling asleep during one of Nero’s damned awful poetry recitals,” Vespasian replied, appearing to be unmoved by Titus’ words. “It happened in this very villa. I was told to count myself fortunate that I was only being exiled, and that I could waist away my days raising honeybees.”

“Yes, well, many say that Emperor Nero is completely mad,” Titus noted, “and they’re undoubtedly right. However, he still has enough of his senses about him to recognize that you are the greatest general Rome has born in at least a generation, and because of that he’s willing to forget the whole recital debacle. He needs you, father. *Rome* needs you.” He was playing up to his father’s sense of patriotism, which was incredibly strong, even if he outwardly portrayed himself as indifferent to what happened to Rome.

Vespasian was, indeed, bitter towards the imperial family, viewing them as ungrateful and petty. To have exiled a former consul for something as minor as falling asleep during a recital was but one of many reasons why he knew Nero was unworthy of his noble predecessor, Claudius. Still, he knew Titus was right, and besides, with his other son, Domitian, still in Rome, he knew he could not very well refuse the emperor’s request. His son could easily be used as a hostage to keep Vespasian faithful, though any who knew the old general understood this was unnecessary. Loyalty to Rome was one of his strongest qualities, matched only by his prowess in battle.

“I take it he put his request in writing?” he asked.

Titus nodded and handed him a large scroll bearing the imperial seal. Vespasian gave a short chuckle as he read the text, written in a flowing script meant to add prominence to the message.

To Titus Flavius Vespasian, greetings,

It is with a heavy heart that our imperial person heard of the calamities within the province of Judea. With the Syrian legate proving his incompetence, at the expense of six-thousand Roman lives lost, including the noble legate, Appius, we must turn to the one man whose reputation in battle is insurmountable.

As conqueror of Britannia, pacifier of the Germanic lands, and the fist of imperial might in North Africa, we turn to you, noble Vespasian, to quell this rebellion while restoring order and Roman dignity to Judea. Our legions await you in Syria. We are pleased to have appointed your son, the noble Titus, as commanding legate of Legio XV, Apollinaris.

We anxiously await word of your victories and send the blessings of Mars, Victoria, and Bellona!

Nero Claudius Caesar Augustus Germanicus
Imperator

"He knows how to lay it on thick," Vespasian chuckled. "He must be desperate if he's turned to us."

"I think Nero would allow you to snore through every poetry and musical recital he does from now until the end of time if you save the empire from further insurrection."

"Excellent!" Vespasian said, as he boisterously slammed the scroll onto the table. "A chance for adventure, not to mention a real opportunity to secure the family's good name and fortune." There was spark behind his eyes that Titus had not seen in many years. The old general was back!

"When will you leave?" Titus asked, rising to his feet.

"I'll be ready in two days," his father replied. "Who commands the other legions?"

"Lucius Vetutius Placidus commands the auxiliary corps," Titus answered.

"I know him," Vespasian replied. "He's brash and aggressive to a fault sometimes, but he's versatile and an expert in psychological warfare. What about the others?"

"Sextus Vettulenus Cerealis commands the Fifth Legion, and Marcus Ulpius Trajan leads the Tenth."

"I've served with Trajan," Vespasian remarked. "He's a good man, was almost as young as you when he took his first command of a legion."

Titus smiled at the offhand compliment. At twenty-six, he was very young for a legate. Yet, like Trajan, he had already proven himself as a military leader. Vespasian was not a man to allow personal feelings to

interfere with his strategic thinking, and he knew that his son was well suited for command of a legion.

"You'll return to Alexandria tomorrow," Vespasian directed. "From there you will bring the Fifteenth north to Ptolemais, which will serve as the staging area for the campaign. I'll have word sent to all auxilia and allied regiments to rally there."

"We'll stick to the coastal roads," Titus said. "The area there is open. Plus, as far as we know, the port cities are still in Roman hands. Hopefully, the only enemy we will face will be boredom."

Given the open ended nature of the emperor's letter, it was clear that Vespasian was being given a free hand to suppress the rebels as he saw fit. The first thing he would do is make certain he brought plenty of legionaries with him and, above all, he would not make the same mistake as Gallus and underestimate his enemy.



It was a private meeting to which Hanan had summoned Josephus. It was evening, long after most of the temple staff and city council had returned home for the evening. There was a sense of joy and relief hanging over Jerusalem. Although, for the members of the rebellion's leadership, it was tempered with a sense of foreboding. If history had taught either side anything, it was that both Jew and Roman were relentless in equal measure.

"I need you up north, in Galilee," Hanan spoke plainly. "We have governor-generals assigned to the other districts, but Galilee will require a special touch that I feel you'd be most capable of bringing."

"Wherever I can best be of service," Josephus replied with confidence. He inwardly admitted he felt a sense of trepidation, for it would be Galilee which the Romans would assault first, if and when they should return. There was also the natural anxiety of leaving his wife and family. However, this was tempered by his sense of duty, as well as knowing that by fighting the Romans in Galilee, he could very well save them from being subjected to further retribution in Jerusalem.

"We require a strong leader," Hanan continued, "one who is both a pragmatic thinker and a viable military strategist. Though the Romans have been driven from our lands, you and I both know they will return. And I have a feeling their army will be much larger and far more competently led. Gallus

was a blithering imbecile; I doubt his successor will be nearly so inept."

"And yet, I fear our greatest enemy in the interim will be the various sects of seditionists," Josephus observed. "The Sicarii and many of the zealot factions refuse to recognize the legality of our government in Jerusalem."

"That they would see us all destroyed, rather than at peace with one another," Hanan lamented. "It is that divisiveness that plays against us in Galilee, and because of it, there are a number of cities that have remained loyal to Rome out of a sense of stability rather than loyalty to Caesar."

"The fanatics are but a small number of the population, at least you still have the love of the people," Josephus replied.

"And that is why it will take strong leadership to rally the local militias in each district," Hanan remarked. "Which is where you come in." Josephus raised an eyebrow at this. "The fanatics may be a minority, but they are a very vocal and violent force that can sway the masses. You are a social and political moderate who the people will listen to. You are old enough to have gained respect and experience, while still possessing sufficient youth to appeal to the younger generation. Sadducee and Pharisee, wealthy and working class alike, respect you. It is because of this I am sending you north into Galilee. You will be the governor-general of the district, speaking with the authority of the established government in Jerusalem."

"I am deeply honored that you have such confidence in me," Josephus replied. "We will give the people victory over the Romans, I promise you." When Hanan did not answer right away, Josephus asked, "What is it?"

"You must understand our long term strategy for this campaign," he explained. "Yes, we beat the Romans at Beth Horon, yet you must know that we can never defeat them in a long war. They have the resources of an entire empire to call upon. They are also stubbornly relentless, and simply too powerful. You've been to Rome, and you know how vast their empire is, and what brutal power they can unleash."

"If not victory, what then?" Josephus asked, frustration coming through his voice. "If you are not asking me to defeat the Romans, what would you have me do, throw down our arms and capitulate?"

"I did not say that," Hanan corrected. "They do not want to throw away lives any more than we do, so any victories you do achieve will help us reach our objective."

"Which is?"

"Some concessions," Hanan stated. "The reality is that while we cannot

hope to win a long war, we can make it very difficult for them. A failed siege of one of our cities in Galilee, or perhaps another blunder that allows us to ambush their forces, and we will be able to dictate the terms of peace."

"What terms do you think the emperor will accept?" Josephus asked.

"Firstly, no more corrupt governors," Hanan answered. "Secondly, that they show respect for the sanctity of the temple. And, perhaps, even some measure of independence, like what we had under the first King Agrippa. But it will be a long, arduous road before we can even send a single emissary to Caesar. Nero will want retribution for what happened at Beth Horon, and you must be stalwart in your defense of Galilee. The Romans will attempt to massacre and enslave as many people as they can, so you will be dealing with vast numbers of refugees fleeing to the safety of the walled cities."

"I understand," Josephus replied. "And with the radicals willing to destroy all we have fought for, just out of spite, we need to give the people at least some form of measurable victory to rally behind."

"And that is why your defense of Galilee will be crucial," Hanan explained. "I know I am placing much upon you, Josephus, but know that any measure of success you can gain will not only compel the Romans to negotiate, it will also legitimize our government in the eyes of the populace. The people, as you are well aware, are very much divided in their loyalties. Should we fail to unite them while keeping the fanatics in check, then we will lose everything."

"Everything," Josephus echoed. He then gave a dark prediction. "Even the temple would be lost."

It was well after midnight by the time Josephus returned to his home in Upper City. He did his best not to disturb his wife, Judith, as he crawled into bed, yet it was clear she'd been awake all night, as she immediately reached over and put her arm around his chest.

"Where will they send you?" she asked, somehow guessing the reason for Hanan's late summons.

"Galilee," Josephus replied quietly. "The council is placing me in command of Galilee." He felt her body tremble slightly at this revelation, and even in the darkness he could almost see the tear falling down her cheek. She said no more, but simply kissed him on the forehead and buried herself in his embrace.



In his indignation at being spurned, Simon bar Giora had already made his decision not to recognize the governing council in Jerusalem. Furthermore, he felt a sense of betrayal and ingratitude since he had delivered a plethora of siege engines to the Judean army, who were eager to take the machines and then cast off Simon and his zealots who had won them.

"Ungrateful bastards will see their folly in rebuffing me," he said sinisterly, one evening as he and a number of his men surrounded the house of a wealthy merchant they knew to be loyal to the Sanhedrin in Jerusalem.

The city of Qumran, which lay along the coast of the Dead Sea not far from the holy city, was full of many such rich targets of opportunity.

A wagon driven by a pair of men in hooded cloaks made its way along the cobbled street towards the gated wall of the house. As soon as it stopped, dozens of men rushed in from all directions, using the cart as a means of springing themselves over the wall. They quickly unbolted the gate, allowing the rest of their companions in. About twenty robbers remained with the cart, hands on their weapons, should any dare to try and stop them. A small bribe had already been paid to the commander of the local police, who promised his men would be otherwise disposed, provided no one was killed.

"What is this?" the old merchant shouted as the raiders stormed into his house. "How dare…" A punch to the stomach cut his words short. One of the men drew his sword and cuffed the rich man behind the ear with the pommel, knocking him senseless.

The screams of his servants filled the house, though they were forcibly kept from leaving and sounding the alarm. Within minutes every piece of gold, silver, jewels, and anything else of value was stuffed into canvas sacks. The furniture was then smashed and set alight. One of the raiders splashed the unconscious merchant with a cup of wine.

"You'd best leave before your house burns down on you."

A small crowd had started to gather as the brigands threw their bags of plunder onto the cart. Their companions brandished their weapons, keeping onlookers at bay, and soon they fled into the growing night. For Simon bar Giora, it was not about the money, but rather retribution against the men he viewed as traitors and turncoats. The wealthy who lived along the Dead Sea would soon feel compelled to purchase added security, as none of their homes were now safe from the raiders. They would soon petition Hanan for

assistance, which would further press the soldiers and resources of the still-forming Army of Judea. Jewish soldiers would be required to suppress the fanatics, while at the same time preparing to battle the Romans.



Cestius Gallus was no longer the Governor-General of Syria, following the disaster at Beth Horon. Emperor Nero made the surprisingly logical and pragmatic choice of sending a senator from his entourage named Gaius Licinius Mucianus to assume the governorship. The influence of Consul Paulinus had led Nero to make a couple of surprising choices for senior posts in the east, despite some of his inborn prejudices. Tiberius Julius Alexander was an Alexandrian Jew, and Mucianus a rather flamboyant homosexual. Yet, Alexander, though Jewish, was at heart loyal to Rome first and foremost; his purging of the Delta in Alexandria hammering this point home with brutal ferocity. And while not so much as attempting to hide his homosexuality, Mucianus was not a man that anyone could ever describe as ‘effeminate’. His administrative skills were sound, as was his military prowess.

While Mucianus would remain the administrator of the region, as well as legate of what remained of the Twelfth Legion, Fulminata, it was Vespasian who was commander-in-chief of the armies in the east, with the Syrian governor-general as his peer rather than superior. The two were conveniently good friends who had worked well together in the past. Mucianus, while a capable general in his own right, was more than willing to put his personal ego aside and leave the military decisions for the Judean campaign to Vespasian. The Twelfth Legion was also being pulled from active service to reconstitute its numbers. And so, Mucianus could focus on governing Syria and preventing the rebellion’s spread, rather than focusing on campaigning in Judea.

It would take the better part of a month before the new commanding general had assembled a corps of staff officers, who drafted up the necessary orders for the legions and auxiliary regiments that would take part in this next campaign. Vespasian also took the liberty of writing to King Agrippa, as well as a number of allied and client rulers within the region. He could only hope his reputation from the Britannic conquest more than two decades prior would ease at least some of the anxiety they may feel about committing more soldiers after the last ill-fated expedition. Gallus had invaded Judea with only

a single legion, Vespasian would be using three. If he could get even partial support from the local allies, he reckoned he could easily have twice as many total soldiers under his command as Gallus had.

Vespasian arrived in Ptolemais without fanfare. It took five days to sail from Achaea to Syria. From there he waited a few days while dispatch riders were sent to Cerealis and Trajan. The two generals were to ride with all speed to Ptolemais, their respective legions expected to arrive a few weeks later. Placidus was also ordered to the staging ground once he gave his marching orders to his subordinate regimental commanders. Since the Fifteenth Legion would be advancing through enemy territory, Titus had insisted on accompanying them the entire journey. He understood that this would mean missing the initial strategic planning councils, as well as the possibility that Vespasian would launch the first part of his invasion before the Fifteenth arrived.

One evening the new commander-in-chief surveyed the ground outside of Ptolemais. It was mostly barren, with marking stakes scattered about that would dictate where every cohort and regiment within his massive army was to stage themselves. Surveyors had dictated where latrines were to be dug, as well as a garbage pit outside the camp for disposing of food and other wastes.

Vespasian glanced over at the one camp that was filled with soldiers, albeit it was devoid of any tents or other cover. He took a deep breath through his nose and made his way towards his principia tent, for he had one last issue to deal with regarding the battered and disgraced Twelfth Legion.

Having no commanding legate, chief tribune, or master centurion, the survivors had encamped outside Ptolemais while awaiting further orders. Approximately a thousand of their men had been killed during the botched retreat from Jerusalem, with a disproportionate number coming from their leaders. Five of the six military tribunes had been slain, along with twenty-five out of the fifty-nine total centurions. Deciding to put final closure on the disgraceful campaign of Cestius Gallus once and for all, Vespasian summoned one of the legion’s cohort commanders, whose acts of valor and leadership had been relayed to the commanding general by the man’s comrades.

“Centurion Pilus Prior Cinna reporting, sir,” the centurion said, saluting sharply with his helmet tucked beneath his left arm.

“At ease,” Vespasian replied after returning the courtesy. “Have a seat,

there is much to discuss."

The centurion sat uncomfortably across the table, uncertain as to why he was having a personal meeting with the man who now commanded all Roman forces within the eastern empire. General Trajan was also present, though he sat in a chair away from the table, acting simply as an observer.

"The previous attempt to suppress the Jewish rebellion was a fucking disaster," Vespasian spoke plainly.

His use of harsh profanity surprising Cinna. Patricians almost never used the coarse language of legionaries, though, from what the centurion already knew, Vespasian was no ordinary legate.

"We did encounter many unforeseen difficulties…" Cinna started to say.

Vespasian slammed his hand on the table.

"Piss on that!" he snapped. "Every centurion, and likely most of the damned rankers, knew Gallus' folly! Were your primus pilus still alive, he'd likely say the same thing. Forget any false loyalties you may have towards your former legate. Gallus no longer commands the Twelfth, nor is he Governor-General of Syria. He'll be lucky if he keeps his head after this debacle. His reports were spotty and full of rubbish that doesn't do a damn bit of good for us. However, *you* know what all transpired on that ill-fated campaign." His gaze bore into Cinna.

"Yes, sir, I do."

"I want to know everything," Vespasian demanded, "down to the last detail, including any observations made by you and your fellow centurions. Gallus' gross incompetence cost a lot of good Romans their lives, and I will not have his fuck ups repeated."

While still surprised by the general's language, as well as openly disparaging remarks about his fellow senatorial legate, Cinna was relieved to be able to vent his anguish and frustration to a man in power who would actually listen. Vespasian had earned his fearsome reputation in battle by demanding that his subordinates, particularly the centurions, both follow orders while at the same time were very candid in their professional opinions. Cinna took a deep breath before breaking into a long and detailed dissertation on every calamity that had befallen Gallus' army. Vespasian listened intently, though he said nothing, simply resting his elbows on the table and his chin on his folded hands. His gaze never left the centurion, and Cinna could readily tell the general was taking in every last word said. Gross mistakes had been made, and Vespasian was not about to needlessly throw away Roman lives if

he could avoid it.

"…and finally we arrived here," Cinna finished, suddenly finding himself out of breath, while also feeling like a massive weight had been lifted from his chest.

Vespasian leaned back and rested his still-folded hands in his lap. "You did well, saving as many as you could," he said after a rather lengthy pause. "Your orders are to return to Antioch and report to Legate Mucianus."

"But surely, sir, you need the extra soldiers for the coming campaign," Cinna protested. "My men want revenge…"

"And they shall have it," Vespasian cut him off, "but not today. You should know by now, centurion, that this will not be an easy campaign. Gallus' foolishness stemmed from his gross underestimating of his enemy. By doing so he only emboldened and strengthened the rebellion, and they will be infinitely harder to break now. I am returning to Judea with three full legions, plus auxilia and allied troops, more than double the total force that Gallus had under his command. Despite that, these Jews will not give up easily; they will fight us for every square inch of the Kingdom of Judah."

Cinna was surprised to hear the province referred to by the Jews name for the old kingdom.

Vespasian continued, "You have one mission, and that is to rebuild the Twelfth Legion. I know the primus pilus is normally selected by his peers. However, I am going to exercise my authority to break tradition. As of this moment, you are now *master centurion* of the Twelfth Fulminata. Restore your legion, and when you are ready, I promise you will have vengeance."

Chapter XVII: General Josephus

Jotapata, Galilee
January, 67 A.D.
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Though the winter rains had turned the roads into muddy bogs, it did not prevent thousands of able bodied young men from joining the ranks of the growing Judean armies. Many flocked to Galilee, where they knew the Romans would attack first. Josephus was pleased with the muster of his forces, which were arrayed on the plains west of Jotapata. These particular men were those who had been selected to act as leaders of various numbers of men during the coming campaign.

As the host assembled, Josephus pulled a small, rectangular box from his tunic and opened it. Inside was the final gift given to him by his wife, a lock of her hair. While at night, alone, he privately lamented that he may never see her again, her simple gesture gave him much-needed strength. He was not just fighting for his nation and the temple, but to protect the woman he loved. He closed the box and placed it back within his tunic. He then apprised his assembled leaders, took a deep breath, and addressed them.

"The Romans," he said, "hold power over much of the known world. They are far better equipped than we are, with superior armor and weaponry, and if we may put our collective egos aside, then we must accept that, individually, they are far better soldiers than we are."

This last remark drew some grumblings from the men.

"We drove them from Jerusalem, and we beat them at Beth Horon!" an elderly fighter named Ephraim spat. He, like many of his peers, was significantly older than Josephus, and they were prone to questioning the wisdom of the Jewish leadership in appointing him as governor-general of Galilee.

"This is true," Josephus replied, his voice even as he walked slowly and deliberately back and forth in front of the mass of men. "And yet if you look back through history, for every defeat they suffer, they win a hundred victories. Complacency and overconfidence will be the death knell of Judea." He stopped and paused for a moment, hands clasped behind his back. "Success or failure in battle comes down to one word, *leadership*. The most

heavily armed and best trained soldiers in the world are rendered impotent if poorly led, as the Romans' last campaign demonstrated. By the same token, take these men and provide them with aggressive and competent commanders, and they will rout any force put against them."

"And that is why you have summoned us," Ephraim said, now understanding his general's intent.

Josephus nodded. "I have seen their work, and though they may look like a mindless mass of men and metal, they have appointed leaders right down to the lowest levels. Each group of seven legionaries has a sergeant appointed over them. The harsh reality is, we will never be as well-equipped as they are, nor will our soldiers ever be able to fight with the same skill as theirs; after all, their men serve decades in the ranks, doing nothing but training to fight. Therefore, if we are to beat them, then we must mimic their leadership styles, while using our cunning and knowledge of terrain to best them. All of you have been selected because you know how to get men to obey. Judea needs you. Men who can follow their generals' orders, yet also can think for themselves and lead their men like soldiers, rather than a reckless mob."

"We will follow you," a man in the front rank asserted, "if you can but train us how to defeat the Romans!"

"Based on your individual experience and abilities," Josephus continued, "you will each be placed in a position within the command hierarchy. The youngest and least practiced will be made captains-of-tens. These will then be placed under a captain-of-hundreds. The hundreds in turn will fall under a captain-of-thousands. We must teach the men signaling; to heed the orders relayed by trumpets; how to expand the wings of an army and make them wheel about; and when one wing has success, to turn again and assist those that are pressed hard. They must also abstain from the crimes that many have indulged themselves in, such as theft, murder, rape, and defrauding of our own kinsmen in any way. Those that are wicked in life will have God himself for their antagonist. Train your men well. Be both hard as well as fair. The Romans may have conquered the whole of the habitable earth, yet they will think twice before invading Galilee again!"

Josephus spent the remainder of the week assigning his subordinates to their postings. Ephraim proved to be a strong and wise man, and so the young governor-general immediately made him one of his senior captains. There was another man named Levi, who had come with Josephus from Jerusalem. Being originally from Galilee, he became one of his closest advisors. Part of

their mission for the duration of winter was to recruit soldiers from their respective home cities and towns. Local militias would need to be raised to protect every settlement from both raiding brigands as well as Roman sorties. The rest of the recruits would become the mobile force that Josephus would use to shadow the Romans and attack their armies at every possible opportunity.



Allied forces had begun arriving in Ptolemais, and the camp started to slowly fill with regiments and cohorts that would join the next invasion. A week's worth of incessant rain had made the journey miserable for many of the soldiers, and the lack of natural drainage made the camp flood with every downpour. Still, they persisted in their duties, among them forming a massive trench and palisade that would encompass the entire camp. Vespasian did not wish for his enemies to know his total strength until he was on the move. He would use fear of the unknown as his first weapon against the rebels.

King Agrippa, knowing Vespasian's fearsome reputation, had committed four thousand men under General Jacimus. These were mostly cavalry, with a large number being mounted archers like those who had acquitted themselves well during the disastrous Gallus campaign. General Placidus and the advance elements of his auxilia corps had also arrived. While many of the infantry cohorts had been badly mauled at Beth Horon, he was able to amalgamate many of them into viable regiments. Two days after the arrival of Cerealis and Trajan, Vespasian called for a meeting with his senior generals.

"Gentlemen," the commander-in-chief began, "let us cut straight to the point. Judea has been a region of volatility for over a thousand years. The first thing we have to accept is these Jews are extremely tough and resourceful, so do not think this will be easy. Gallus made that mistake and look what happened to the Twelfth Legion. Titus and the Fifteenth are at least a week's march from here."

"The enemy's success in routing Gallus will doubtless help unify many of them," Cerealis noted. "We may have a bigger army, but so will they."

"The people of Judea are notorious for their constant warfare with each other," Trajan added. "Yet, I agree, we will be facing a much larger enemy force than Gallus did."

“Precisely,” Vespasian said, continuing. “From what our spies have reported, they have divided the region into military districts, each of which has an enormous number of fighting men it can call upon. Galilee alone is said to have sixty thousand men under arms.

“If they can unite the various factions of radicals, they could have as many as one hundred thousand fighters,” Trajan added.

“True,” Vespasian conceded. “Their central leadership, however, is still in Jerusalem.”

“Then that’s where we go!” Placidus said excitedly. “We make for the capitol and cut the head off the whole damned thing. Their factions will fall apart fighting each other, and we restore order, nice and clean.”

“That is the one thing we must not do,” Vespasian rebuked, drawing a confused stare from all three of his generals. “If we head straight for Jerusalem without first subduing Galilee, we’ll allow the rebels in the north to harass us and raid our logistics trains at will, like they did Gallus. And given how arid this country is, despite the winter rains we now contend with, you can imagine how much food and water we’ll need to bring with us everywhere we go. If our supply lines get cut, an army of this size will die of thirst or starvation in very short order.”

He paused for a moment before continuing. “Second, and probably more importantly, Jerusalem is a giant fortress. I have received reports from our spy networks that show the Jews have been anything but complacent since they routed Gallus’ army. The walls have been rebuilt, the garrison equipped. There are essentially three lines of sixty-foot walls, and their fighters are now armed to the teeth. Many of their weapons and armor were taken from our dead at Beth Horon. Not to mention, they are now in possession of the Twelfth Legion’s siege engines. We’d risk losing thousands of good Roman lives for nothing. No, we must avoid an assault on Jerusalem.”

“What then?” Placidus asked, his voice showing a trace of irritation.

Just as Titus had described him, Lucius Vetutius Placidus was brash and highly aggressive in his leadership style. In his early forties, he was slightly older than Trajan and Cerealis, who were both in their mid to late thirties. Having already served two tours as a legion commander, he rather enjoyed the flexibility commanding an auxiliary corps gave him. Though he came across as rather bellicose, Vespasian admired him in that he led from the front and never let aggression turn into recklessness. Every action he undertook was one of extreme violence, which the commander-in-chief intended to

make good use of.

"We'll start in Galilee," Vespasian explained. "Two of the larger cities, Sepphoris and Tiberias, are loyal to both Rome and to King Agrippa. It is the rest of the region that we must make an example of. So, we will burn every village, destroy their crops and livestock, kill every man and boy of fighting age, and sell their women and children into slavery. We will unleash a reign of terror so horrific it will turn the Jewish Holy Land into a burning caldron of hell!"

The following weeks would see a number of similar meetings with Vespasian and his generals as they laid out the specifics for the invasion of Galilee. The rains let up after just a couple weeks, and their camp continued to swell with incoming reinforcements. Titus had sent word that, given the impassibility of the saturated roads, he would not be able to depart Alexandria until at least February. This still gave him ample time to join the rest of the army, for none of them would be ready to move until early spring at the soonest. The winter of 66 to 67 A.D. would be one of preparation for both sides.



"Our numbers swell," Levi said with excitement. "Smiths are turning out arms as fast as they can in each city. They may not be the same quality as the Romans, and the manufacturing of armor is practically nonexistent; however, we still have plenty of swords and bucklers, as well as spears and helmets."

"Each city has reported their militias are at full strength," Ephraim added. "All have dispatched half of their men to join the main army, while the rest work to bring in provisions for both their companions, as well as the cities' populace. Our army will be for naught if the people starve. When one part of the army goes to war and the other part remains at their work. And so, those that send out their corn will be paid for it by those that are in arms, by that security which they enjoy."

Josephus nodded and then poured over a large parchment that was covered in notes and scribbling. "From what I can see," he said, "we now have roughly sixty thousand footmen under arms. What we severely lack is cavalry, only two hundred and fifty total."

"There is a severe shortage of good horses," Yaakov observed. "There simply are not enough available to form even a single regiment."

The young man had been placed in command of the general's six hundred man bodyguard, and so was always by his side. It was perhaps showing a bit of unfair favoritism that Josephus had given him this responsibility, although so far Yaakov had handled himself admirably. He was both loyal, as well as pragmatic, and he knew how to make best use of his men in order to ensure Josephus' protection.

"And we would be throwing away lives needlessly if we tried to use our horsemen in battle," Josephus added. "No, they will serve us far better as dispatch riders, as well as reconnaissance. What word have we of the Romans?"

"They have launched a series of raids into the border towns," Levi said. "However, their main army is still encamped near Ptolemais."

"We have time, then," Josephus remarked.

"We have also fortified as many of the towns as possible," Levi reported. "Bersabee, Selamis, Capharecchо, Jaffa, Sigo, as well as Mount Tabor, Taricheae, and Tiberias have all been walled up; albeit Tiberias is still torn between factions with differing loyalties. Moreover, we have built walls about the caves near the lake of Gennesar, in the Lower Galilee."

"Upper Galilee has been reinforced as well," Yaakov added. "The Romans will shed a lot of blood if they wish to defeat us."

"And what of that renegade, John of Giscala?" Josephus asked. "Has he arrived yet?"

"He promises he is coming," Levi answered. "A rogue and a thief he may be, but he still commands the respect of many fighting men. We need men like him if we are to repulse the imperial army."

Secretly, Levi admired John, even though he did not always approve of his methods. Yet, in times of great peril, it often took extreme measures to ensure eventual peace and victory. What Josephus did not know was that Levi, who had thus far been a loyal aid and commander of troops, had secretly sent messages to Giscala, and it was he who helped John in the planning of his rise to power in Galilee.

The doors opened and the man himself walked in. John of Giscala was an uncompromising man. Though a passionate member of the zealots, he was no friend to Simon bar Giora, who viewed him as little more than a brigand, nor was he particularly endeared by the Sicarii. His unabashed hatred for the Romans was only matched by the loathing he felt for his fellow Jews who, in his eyes, were traitors to the true faith and people. Such was the attitude of

most of the seditionists, and with so many strong men seeking power, the populace fell into the various factions. In most cases, siding with whomever seemed most likely to emerge victorious, rather than those they actually believed in.

A handsome man in his early thirties, John kept his hair cut above the shoulders, with his beard trimmed neat. He was lean and well-muscled, having spent his early years working as a stone mason. Though married with two young children, he wisely kept his family away from the forefront of his political and militant activities. Were he not such a fanatic, Josephus could have easily viewed him as a friend. As it was, the two men needed each other for the moment. And so, whatever deep political divides existed between them, both understood they had to at least attempt to work together if they were to stop the fearsome Roman juggernaut. At least, that was how John portrayed things.

"Hail Josephus, Governor-General of Galilee," John said, opening his arms and bowing slightly.

It was difficult to tell if the gesture was one of genuine respect, or veiled contempt to align himself with an outsider whom he despised. Josephus decided it would be prudent to take the man at his word and avoid any unnecessary conflicts.

"And to you, John of Giscala," he replied. "We welcome all of our friends during this time of great crisis."

"*Friends* may be pushing it, if we're being honest," John replied. "*Allies out of necessity* is more apt. I'll come straight to the point. My home city of Giscala's walls are in ruin, and we are practically defenseless. As governor-general of Galilee, it is to you I must look if we are to rebuild our ramparts and stand a chance against the Romans."

"Of course," Josephus concurred. "I will have a special tax levied upon the upper classes of Giscala in order to fund the building."

"It would help us immensely if we could also have access to oil," John added. He then told an outright lie. "The Syrian Jews are compelled to seek oil from outside the kingdom. If we could but purchase some Galilean oil, it would be of great benefit to us as a trade commodity."

"Galilee is, indeed, very rich in oil," Josephus replied. "Even with the chaos of revolution, we still export much. I am certain we can send you some amphorae at a reasonable rate. The quarries will be scoured for good rock with which to rebuild your walls, as well. Giscala is an important city, with

its protection vital to our cause."

There was little else to discuss, so Josephus broke up the meeting. He was still rather uneasy about his so-called 'ally', yet he hoped he had placated the rogue from Giscala for the time being.

"Levi," he said, "I want you to accompany John and deliver the oil. I also need you to find out what you can, regarding the disposition of the people of Giscala. Spend a day, two at most, in Giscala and then join me in Taricheae."

"Of course," Levi replied, smiling inwardly. This would give him the opportunity he sought, to find out for himself who really was the strongest and most worthy of leading their cause in Galilee.

"We will sell much of the oil to the nobility of Giscala, at more than double the rate which that fool, Josephus, gave us," John explained later that evening. "We will further pay bribes to every bandit and robber within Galilee, putting a price on his head. Though I prefer it if he dies, should he somehow overcome the brigands, I can still use their presence alone to undermine his authority. The council in Jerusalem despises me, yet they know they need a strong leader in Galilee, lest it fall to the Romans."

"But why simply try and blame him for the roaming bands of robbers?" Levi asked. Though he was favoring Giscala, Josephus was still his friend, and he did not wish any harm to come to him. "Why not spread seditious talk that he intends to hand Galilee over to the Romans?"

"I like the way you think," John said, with an evil glint in his eye. "But it will not be just seditious talk alone that will be needed."

"What then?"

"This will take some creative thinking," John replied. "I depart for Giscala in three days. On the night before I depart, when you deliver the amphorae of oil, we will talk again."

Chapter XVIII: Traitors in the Ranks

Dabaritta, Galilee
Mid-January, 67 A.D.
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Dabaritta was a small village that lay about a day's journey to the southeast of Jotapata. As it was in the opposite direction as Giscala, any chance of John being implicated in the conspiracy he was hatching was minimal. Levi, as a close confidant of Josephus, had to be careful not to arouse suspicion of himself either. It wasn't difficult. Through a couple of his paid informants, he sent word to a group of brigands within the village whose loyalties, at best, were sold to the highest bidder. Technically, they were paid mercenaries, tasked with keeping watch over a region known as The Great Plain, which led towards Nazareth and Jotapata. It was these men who the servant of Levi approached.

"I come in the name of General Josephus," he said, bowing deeply to the men. "He sends me to call for your aid in a mission that will bring him respite, as well as much coin for your purses."

"And what is it he would have us do?" the leader of the guards asked.

"As you all know, while the people scrimp for every last shekel with which to purchase protection and arms against the pending Roman offensive," the servant explained, "the king and queen continue to lavish themselves with our enemy's patronage. They claim themselves as being virtually hostages to Rome, and yet Agrippa intends to send several thousand men to supplement Vespasian's army."

"Vile bastard!" one of the men spat.

"What would Josephus have us do?" their leader asked.

"There is a man named Ptolemy," the servant said. "He is the steward of both King Agrippa, as well as his whore sister. He is departing Tiberias this very day with a wagon full of his masters' prized goods. Deliver these up to Josephus, and he will see you greatly rewarded, along with the promise of half of all treasure taken."

"Where is your master now?"

"He is currently in Taricheae, just north of Tiberias," the servant answered. "Deliver the spoils to him, and he will see you handsomely

rewarded.”

“It will also teach the traitor, Agrippa, a lesson,” the guardsman remarked.



Giscala was several days from Jotapata by foot, near the edge of the rolling mountains of Galilee. Having sent his servant south to Dabaritta, while he himself went north to Giscala, Levi had managed to separate himself from the sequence of events that John hoped would undo Josephus. His loyalties were shaky at best; some days he felt John would be the stronger leader, others that he was too unstable and Josephus was the rightful governor-general for Galilee. His personal friendships with both men further confounded his resolve.

Constant rumors reached them from Ptolemais, which lay less than thirty miles from Giscala and was even closer to Jotapata. The eagles of two legions had been spotted, and the number of soldiers arriving grew every day. The traitor, King Agrippa, had committed even more of his army to support the blasphemous invaders than first reckoned.

“More soldiers arrive each day,” John remarked during the last morning of their journey to Giscala. “And yet they have built their palisades well away from the camp, so as to mask their numbers. Still, we cannot concern ourselves with the Romans until they move on Galilee. For now, we must make good on fortifying our cities.”

“It will take some work to rebuild these walls,” Levi observed as they approached the city. As horses were scarce, he rode a donkey, while John and a few of his men rode in the cart carrying the oil. Twenty of his Zealots walked on either side of the cart, acting as armed escorts.

The walls of Giscala were not very tall, ten to fifteen feet in most places, and there were only two twenty-foot towers that straddled the gatehouse. They were crumbling in places and did not look very sturdy. Levi reckoned that while they would make local brigands think twice, Roman catapults and battering rams would reduce the walls to rubble within a day. Even an assault using nothing but a handful of ladders would likely carry the ramparts.

“Our mountainous location gives us some added protection,” John stated. “The Romans will scorch the lower villages first, attempting to hasten the end of this war through intimidation.”

“It won’t work,” Levi surmised. “Gallus tried this already, and we saw what happened to him.”

“Yes, the people are now ready to rise up against Rome,” John remarked. “And yet there are those who would likely strike a deal with the enemy if it should benefit them.”

“You mean Josephus?” Levi asked, puzzled.

“I know he was your friend,” John replied smoothly, “but these are desperate times. I am not saying for certain that Josephus is a traitor, but he is most certainly weak in his resolve. But, for now, he is simply an obstacle in the way of my taking command of all Galilee. Should he foil our attempts to discredit him, I would recommend watching him to see just how strong he truly is.”

John was welcomed into the city by an adoring mob of hundreds of fighters and their families. He dismounted the cart and made his way along the crowd, clasping the hands of the men, while accepting the embrace of women, and scooping up various children at random. Levi admired his ability to win over the hearts of his people. They believed in him, and if it were up to the citizens of Giscala, it would be John, and not Josephus, who led them against the empire.

And yet for all that he had seen, Levi felt even more conflicted as he left the city the following morning. John certainly was charismatic and had a way with the people, but then so did Josephus. Levi also sensed that while Josephus would first attempt to use diplomacy and reason to solve a crisis, John was prone to preferring violence and deceit. Such realizations gave him much to ponder as he made his way east to Taricheae.



Ptolemy was an old Egyptian man who had been in the company of King Agrippa since before the time of his father’s reign. Though born a slave, the elder Agrippa had freed him at a young age, and now Ptolemy served his former master’s son with the same level of devotion.

Even during the best of days he would have been extremely nervous about the burdens he carried within his wagon, let alone this time of virtual anarchy. He had been fortunate in that he had not been assailed by robbers during his journey, and he took heart as the village of Dabaritta came into view on the horizon. The sun shone brightly behind him, and he coaxed the

donkey pulling his cart to move faster, as he hoped to reach the shelter of the settlement before nightfall. About five miles from the village he spotted a series of tents lining either side of the road. Several armed men stood in the middle of the dirt road, and as they appeared to be wearing Herodian armor and tunics, Ptolemy reckoned them to be escorts sent out by the king. As hostility in the region was growing towards Agrippa, the elderly servant was hopeful for any type of protection he could muster. What he did not know was that the man who stood before him had, in fact, acquired his arms when the Sicarii raided the armory at Masada.

"Hold there!" the man said, pointing his spear towards him.

"Praise God you've found me!" Ptolemy said, drawing the cart to a halt. "I assume the king sent you to escort me."

"You must be Ptolemy then," the leader of the guards said.

"Yes, yes of course," the old servant said excitedly. His face was suddenly downcast when the armed man placed the tip of his spear against his chest.

"Oh, yes, we were sent to find you," he said. "But not by the king." He then jerked his head towards the rear of the cart. His men ran, pulling back the heavy tarp.

"Oh, isn't this a pretty sight!" one of them said.

Piled in the cart were numerous robes, tunics, gowns, and other royal garments. All were rich in vibrant colors of green, blue, red, and purple, while also lined with gold threading. A rattling crate was revealed to contain no small number of silver cups and plates, but it was the chest towards the front of the cart that caught the men's attention.

"Well, here's a pretty thing," one of them muttered with a near toothless grin.

Inside was a pile of almost six hundred gold coins, stamped with King Agrippa's image, as well as that of Emperor Nero and his predecessor, Claudius.

"Unhand that!" Ptolemy protested. "That treasure belongs to the king!"

"Well, now it belongs to the people," the leading guard said as punched the poor servant across the temple, sending him sprawling into the back of the cart as his eyes rolled into the back of his head.



Taricheae was an important strategic city for Josephus and the rebellion. Located north of Tiberias, on the western edge of the Sea of Galilee, it served as a local merchant and fishing port. It was also in need of repair work to its walls, and Josephus was spending a week assessing how to improve its defenses, while also recruiting men for both the local militia as well as his standing army.

It was at the large inn that the guardsmen who robbed poor Ptolemy found the governor-general. They made a great clamoring, all the while a large crowd gathered to see what the commotion was about. Josephus, along with twenty of his men, came out the front door and were surprised by what they saw.

"Behold!" the lead brigand said. "Treasures taken from the false king and his whore sister, as you requested."

"As I requested?" Josephus asked, confused and not knowing of the stratagems John had wrought. He stepped onto the cart, where a chest was laid open. When he also saw the beaten and unconscious Ptolemy, his face broke into a scowl.

"You damnable fools!" he shouted. "You steal from our own people and bring further violence against fellow Jews!" He then snapped his fingers, and his men shoved the brigands aside and started taking the treasure into the inn.

"Here, we was promised a share of that," one of the robbers protested.

"This is not yours to be had," Josephus growled. "Not be off with you, lest you wish to face a sound whipping!"

There was a quiet pause as the gathered crowd looked on in confusion while Josephus' soldiers took the plunder from the cart. Two of his men also took the unconscious servant and helped him inside.

"Here!" the lead thief said, pointing at Josephus accusingly. "He means to give it back to Agrippa and deny us our share!"

The men were quickly driven off by Josephus' soldiers, but soon they were spreading discontent to the surrounding villages about how the governor-general was set to betray them. Among those most outraged was Jesus ben Sapphias, the governor of Tiberias. Angrily, he summoned his militia, as well as any men of arms within the region, and marched up the sea to Taricheae.

Two days after the incident, Josephus was awakened by a banging on his door from Yaakov.

“There’s a multitude outside that’s calling for your blood!” the young man said quickly.

“What?” Josephus was immediately out of bed and threw on his tunic.

“They say you stole from them, and that you intend to give back to King Agrippa that which you do not first steal for yourself.”

“Do they now?” Josephus asked, tightening his belt.

“And what’s worse is most of your bodyguard ran off.” Yaakov lamented. “It’s just me, Levi, and two of the lads.”

Josephus, surprisingly, did not seem taken aback by this. “If the mob is that large, I cannot exactly blame them,” he shrugged. “What is their makeup? Are they all from Taricheae?”

“No,” Yaakov replied, shaking his head. “I’d say about half are from Tiberias.”

“Tiberias…” Josephus said quietly, as his mind worked over a solution. He then grinned broadly. “Good!”

“What do you mean ‘good’?” his friend protested, as Josephus made his way onto the balcony. “There’s tens-of-thousands out there!”

“As I can see,” the governor-general nodded as he gazed into the overflowing plaza below. There were, indeed, multitudes of angry men, who were now shouting protests and waving their fists at him. Josephus recognized both Jesus of Tiberias, as well as Eneas, the mayor of Taricheae. Both men stood in front of the respective mobs that Josephus surmised were from each of their cities. Knowing the only way to escape this debacle was to play them off against each other, he raised his hands, silencing them for a moment, before going into a long speech.

“My friends!” he began. “I protest this display of hostility towards your duly appointed governor-general, as well as these false accusations I find levied towards me. I did neither intend to send this money back to Agrippa, nor to gain it myself. For I did never esteem one that was your enemy to be my friend, nor did I look upon what would tend to your disadvantage to be my advantage. But, you people of Taricheae, I saw that your city stood in more need than others of fortifications for your security, and that it needed money for building a wall. I was also afraid lest the people of Tiberias and other cities should lay a plot to seize upon these spoils, and therefore, I intended to retain this money privately, that I might encompass you with a wall. But if this does not please you, I will produce what was brought me, and leave it to you to plunder it. But if I have conducted myself so well as to

please you, you may, if you please, punish your benefactor."

Upon this, the factions suddenly turned and faced each other.

"You were all going to keep the lot for yourselves!" Jesus spat at Eneas.

"Piss off!" the mayor of Taricheae shouted back. "Tiberias has plenty of defensive walls and armed men. You'd leave us poor and at the mercy of the Romans!"

Shouts followed from the throngs of men; no longer directed towards Josephus, but rather at their fellow countrymen from the neighboring cities.

"It's working," Levi said over his shoulder. His face was sweaty, and he looked out of breath.

"I'm glad you're here, Levi," Josephus replied. "You're a good and loyal friend."

The words, which were meant to comfort and inspire, bit into Levi like a knife.

Josephus, not seeing the vexation on his friend's face, turned and addressed the mob, which was increasing in its violence towards each other. *"You overly rash fools!"* he chastised them. "Do you not realize there is enough here for all? I promise not just to rebuild the walls of Taricheae, but also to reinforce Tiberias and whatever cities require further protection. Cease your quarrels and return to your homes!"

The crowds soon began to disperse, although there were a number of men, armed like soldiers with Herodian armor, who refused to leave the plaza. These men stood defiant, brandishing their weapons and shouting a host of obscenities towards Josephus.

"Josephus, I've managed to rally some of our men!" Yaakov said as he rushed back into the room. "Sixty of our guardsmen returned as soon as the crowds dispersed."

"Good. Take them to the furthest corner of the building, one that has a door that can be bolted shut."

Yaakov nodded and left the room with Levi following. Josephus then turned and addressed the angry mob that still remained. He raised his right hand, silencing them for a moment.

"Hold! I cannot comprehend what it is you wish, what with this ungodly cacophony you make! I promise to comply with whatever it is you wish of me, but know that I will only speak to your leaders, unarmed, and within the safety of this building."

The men, who were all from Giscala and therefore sent by John,

conversed briefly with each other. Josephus was unaware of their origin, nor did he know the men had been specifically sent to create discord within Taricheae and Tiberias in order to make him appear weak. Finally, their leader spoke.

"Very well, there are four of us who will come in and speak with you."

Josephus nodded and had the doors to the inn opened. He checked to see that the men were unarmed before allowing them in. "Come," he said. "We will parlay in the back room." By this time, Josephus was fed up with the constant squabbling and was tired of trying to placate every faction that sought to undo him over a petty grievance. These men would be made an example of!

A number of Josephus' bodyguards lined the walls of the hallway leading to a large storage room at the back of the building. They followed the men into the room, where Yaakov and several others waited. As soon as all had entered, the door was slammed shut and bolted. Before any could protest, the seditionists were grabbed roughly by Josephus' men, who tied gags around their mouths and threw them onto the ground, stripping them of their armor and clothing. Muffled screams resounded through the gags as they thrashed about. Their hands and feet were bound as the guardsmen started to beat them with corded ropes and whips. For nearly a half hour they were thrashed, and while their companions outside thought this to mean they were engaged in a lengthy discourse with Josephus, their flesh was heavily scoured and lacerated to the point that a puddle of blood was forming beneath them.

"Enough," Josephus finally said.

The men lay twitching and whimpering in a pool of their own blood and urine.

"Throw them out onto the street, and let this serve as a warning to those who refuse to stand with the people."

Outside, the armed force, which numbered in the hundreds, waited impatiently for the return of their leaders. All understood that any parlance with Josephus was meaningless, for their orders were to undermine his authority by whatever stratagems were necessary. Such was their horrified shock when the doors of the inn were thrown open, and their bloodied leaders tossed unceremoniously onto the street. The once prideful and assured men from Giscala were now naked and whipped to the point that the risk of infection and death was substantial. And though their men could have easily

smashed in the doors and overwhelmed Josephus and his small following, so great was their fear at the sight of their leaders, they fled in terror.



John of Giscala was dismayed by the failure of his schemes against Josephus, though he was far from beaten. After all, his enemy was still completely unaware it was he who sent the men, as well as roused the peoples of Taricheae and Tiberias after the theft of the king's property, which John himself had also set in motion. He then decided a more direct approach was necessary. So he sent a message to Josephus, stating he was in ill health and asked permission to come to Tiberias to bathe in the healing waters. Josephus, still thinking John was his ally, acceded to the request.

While the city of Tiberias was divided into various factions, including those loyal to King Agrippa and to Rome, Josephus' arrival had been greeted in the spirit of friendship by the governor and his council. No doubt this was partly inspired by the promise of a share of the king's captured treasure to help reinforce Tiberias. Jesus, the governor of the large city, accompanied Josephus down to the docks on the morning after his arrival.

"The Sea of Galilee is important for both food and commerce," Josephus noted. "Taricheae and Tiberias must be protected, for if one falls, the Romans can then harry our ability to harvest fish, while also cutting access to the River Jordan."

"Agreed," Jesus replied. "And this is why I am personally grateful for your willingness to share in the spoils with both cities. There are many other cities along the rivers south of the sea, Gadara amongst them, which will also be of great strategic importance."

"If I can protect the northern cities of Galilee, then perhaps their importance to the Romans will become a moot point."

The two men continued to walk, while discussing points of strategy for the defense of Galilee. Josephus knew they still had a couple of months before the roads and weather became accommodating for a Roman invasion. Jesus expressed his concerns over the pro-Roman populations within Tiberias. They had, thus far, remained dormant. However, if the Roman army gained some early successes, the loyalists could most certainly attempt to take the city and hand it over to their enemies.

“All the more reason we unite our forces and stop the invaders before they get this far,” Josephus reasoned.

Similar meetings with other mayors and territorial governors had led to commitments of thousands of potential soldiers for Josephus army. For while the fanatics would never be placated, there were still enough reasonably-minded men who realized they would all have to stand together against the coming onslaught. Of course, this was complicated by cities such as Sepphoris, who remained loyal to Rome and were too well fortified for the Judean army to lay siege to.

Along with Levi, Yaakov, and a few members of Josephus’ bodyguard, a growing number of curious onlookers soon fell in behind the men. There were a number who Levi recognized from Giscala’s men, and it suddenly made him nervous. He knew why they were there, and given Josephus’ abilities to root out divisiveness and unite numerous factions together, Levi suddenly came to regret his association with John and his renegades. His heart nearly stopped as he saw a blade being drawn by one of the men.

“Josephus, behind you!” he shouted.

Fortunately for Levi, none of the murderers knew who had given the warning, for his life would have most certainly been forfeited in that moment. Josephus, ever alert, spun about and caught sight of several armed men making for him. He grabbed Yaakov by the tunic, and they bounded down the dock and onto a small fishing vessel. Several of his men leapt aboard just as Yaakov quickly untied the mooring rope, with them pushing off into the sea.

They watched from the shore as the assassins suddenly found themselves being assailed by soldiers and citizens loyal to Josephus. The renegades were more numerous than he’d first realized, with a strength of several hundred, and Josephus feared an all-out battle with the spilling of more Jewish bloody by their fellow countrymen.

“Take us back to shore,” he ordered Yaakov and his bodyguards.

“It’s not safe,” Yaakov protested.

“I’ll not have any more Jewish lives lost on my account!” Josephus barked. “Now take us ashore!”

The brigands who had sought his demise were formed in a semicircle leading down to the beach, surrounded by hundreds of armed loyalists.

“Who in God’s name are these men?” Josephus asked as he leapt from the boat.

“They were sent by John of Giscala,” Levi said, as he rushed over to his general.

“Levi,” Josephus replied, “you saved my life back there.”

“It is a debt I owe,” Levi explained, bowing his head in shame.

Josephus did not wait for him to expound upon this cryptic answer, but instead rushed through the crowd to prevent any senseless killings before they began.

“People of Taricheae!” he shouted as he broke through the throng and placed himself between the would-be assassins and the enraged mass. “Your loyalty and courage has warmed my heart, and know that you have my love and devotion for it. But I ask that we not ruin this day with further acts of violence. Our fellow Galileans have been led astray by a traitor known as John of Giscala.”

“This same man has feigned illness and infests our healing waters with his presence!” Jesus spoke up. “He must be tried and executed for his murderous attempts at usurping power in Galilee!”

“Arrest him if you can,” Josephus concurred, “but I will not have his death on my hands. As for these men, strip them of their weapons and send them back to Giscala with a warning against all who would seek to keep our people divided.”

Knowing escape with their lives was otherwise impossible, the brigands readily gave up their arms before being escorted roughly out of the city. Loyalists struck at them with fist and club all the way to the city gates.

“They can take their chances with the outlaws roaming the mountains,” Jesus surmised as they watched the men flee from the city. “Now what of John of Giscala?”

“It would seem he has already fled,” one of his guards captains reported. “We sent men to the house where he was staying, but he was not to be found.”

They would later learn that John had stolen a horse as soon as he heard word his assassination attempt had failed.

“He still commands a vast following,” Josephus observed. “Now that they’ve been exposed, he will likely cease in his stratagems against us. However, if we are to succeed against the Romans, we will need his fighters to join with us. Therefore, we will send word to him that we extend the olive branch of peace and forgiveness, if only he will join us and show unity of our peoples.”

That evening, before joining his men for supper, Josephus was confronted by one other man who would seek his forgiveness that day.

"I have played you false," Levi said, his tear-stained eyes fixed on the floor. "I first found John of Giscala to be the stronger leader, and so he asked me to help him undermine you, that he may assume command of Galilee. And yet, I cannot ask you to forgive me for my transgressions."

"Ask God to forgive you," Josephus replied gently, "For His grace extends far beyond that of man. You have been led astray, Levi, but you proved your loyalty when it mattered most. Come, let us join our friends and speak no more of this." He placed an arm around Levi's shoulder and led him into the room at the inn, where Yaakov and several of their guards' commanders awaited them.

While some of the townships remained loyal to Rome, and John of Giscala lurked behind the walls of his home city with his followers, Josephus had succeeded in sorting out those loyal to Judea, who would join him in his struggle to help free their people from oppression, both that of Rome and of the fanatics. In many ways it was only a partial victory, yet they were much closer to unity than they were since before the rebellion began. And as he and his closest friends broke bread, he knew they had overcome far more obstacles than even Hanan and the Jerusalem council had reckoned.

Chapter XIX: Savage Retribution

Ascalon, southern Judean coast
Early February, 67 A.D.



Roman Legionary

Despite being confined to garrison duty, Centurion Antonius made full use of his cavalry, utilizing their reconnaissance abilities to keep him apprised of the situation throughout the province. The Twelfth Legion's inexplicable withdrawal from Jerusalem puzzled the men. The subsequent routing of their forces at Beth Horon had devastated morale. It was thought the strategic coastal city would soon feel the wrath of the emboldened rebels, particularly since Ascalon was the only city manned by legionaries. Word of Vespasian's assumption of command and subsequent preparations for a larger second invasion had only recently reached the small garrison. Yet, for the men of the Tenth Legion's Fifth Cohort, along with their auxilia allies, they felt very much cut off and alone. With the end of February in sight, Antonius knew the Judean rebels would not sit idle for much longer, as was confirmed one afternoon by the return of numerous reconnaissance patrols that reached as far as Jerusalem itself. The garrison commander called for a meeting with all of his centurions outside the city, along the open plain.

“The Jewish leaders are doing their best to raise a permanent standing army,” the cavalry commander, an auxilia centurion named Costa reported. “They’ve broken the kingdom up into six military districts, each ran by a governor with local militia and a small number of permanent troops. The crux of their army is a twenty-thousand strong mobile reserve force that can be rushed to any place our forces converge upon.”

“And no doubt they will be better armed than most of their compatriots,” Antonius noted.

“To a degree, yes,” Costa concurred. “However, remember they are trying to be a highly mobile force. They’re still more lightly equipped than we are. And since I doubt that Vespasian will keep his entire army together in one massed formation, I suspect they will try and find isolated pockets of our soldiers that they can mass their numbers against.”

“And with Vespasian not on the move yet, they may want to battle test this army against a small garrison,” the centurion pilus prior observed. “These people are smart enough to know that training a roughshod force will only prepare them so much. They will need to bloody their swords before they even think about facing Vespasian.”

His assembled centurions suddenly became alarmed. Though their commander sounded half mad some days, and was always anxious to get his men in on the real fighting, they also knew he was a strategic thinker, who was fully able of placing himself in his enemy’s position and thereby anticipating their next move.

“You think they’ll attack us here?” Marius asked.

“I have no doubt they will,” Antonius replied. “This port is vitally important to both sides, and with a lull in the fighting since Gallus’ withdrawal, the Jews have had time to formulate a plan to overrun us. They have absolutely no chance of holding Caesarea, what with the overwhelming Greek population, and Joppa is a burning wreck after Gallus rolled through there and is currently worthless as a potential port city.”

“Which leaves us,” a centurion remarked. “And we have barely a thousand men, which I am certain the enemy is aware of.”

“Their political situation is extremely fragile,” Antonius added. “There has been a bloody civil war between the moderates, who are tenuously holding on to power, and the more violent and uncompromising factions amongst the fanatics and zealots. A decisive victory by their newly-formed army will help the current leaders fortify their position. It will also unify the

peoples under their banner, which will in turn swell the numbers of those they can commit against the main body of our army. However, if we can smash this force, and send them back to Jerusalem bloodied and utterly defeated, then we will keep them divided and in many ways leaderless. Gentlemen, we may soon get the opportunity to play a larger role in this war than we first envisioned."

"We are in a good defensive position," Costa said, looking back towards the city, where militiamen patrolled the ramparts. "The walls here are at least fifteen feet high. They'll be hard pressed to get in."

"We're not going to fight them behind the walls," Antonius said, shaking his head. "Cavalry is all but useless in a defensive siege, and my legionaries will not skulk behind walls when they are far more effective smashing an adversary head-on in open battle."

"The terrain does work to our advantage," Costa observed, waving his hand out towards the plain in front of them. "The rocky outcroppings, as well as the sea, will prevent us from being flanked."

"We'll be stretched thin," Marius noted, pacing along their proposed frontage, his arms folded across his chest. "I would say, if we placed our infantry into formations by century, at four ranks deep, we might be able to cover this frontage."

"It does mean, though, that we won't have enough men to have even a single century as a viable reserve," another centurion added.

"It's still our best option," Antonius asserted. He then turned to his cavalry commander. "Costa, I want you to scout the surrounding area and find someplace that can conceal your cavalry, while also giving you a rapid avenue of approach back to the city."



It was a warm day, despite being February. The winter rains had let off for the last few days, and on the plain just to the west of Jerusalem, the army raised by Yohanan and Niger assembled. Between them they had raised over fifteen thousand man. Supplementing this was an additional five thousand brought forth by Silas of Babylonia.

Despite the fact that these three generals had raised these potential soldiers, it was Eleazar who addressed the assembly this day. Both Hanan and Joseph deferring to the young temple chief who had sought to regain his

position within the Judean hierarchy. And as he had been promised governorship of the lands along the coastal district southwest of Jerusalem, it was essentially his army that was being sent forth. A small dais had been erected on the plain, and from there, Eleazar addressed the men who everyone hoped would finish off the remaining Roman soldiers still occupying Jewish lands.

"Army of Judea," he began, "you have heeded the call of your nation, to expel the hated Romans, who have contaminated our lands for over a century! Destroy the garrison at Ascalon, and bring our people freedom from tyranny!"

His words were met with a series of battle cries from the assembled forces. Their captains then called them to attention, and in similar fashion as their adversaries, they marched by companies past the platform, where Hanan, Joseph ben Gorion, and the senior elders assembled with Eleazar. The three generals who would lead them into battle stood in front of the dais, hands clasped behind their backs, apprising their soldiers as they marched by.

Pack animals, some of which had been captured from Gallus' army, were staged nearby with their handlers. This would not only be the first battle test for the Army of Judea, but also one of logistics. While they would not be carrying all the equipment that was common of a Roman army, just having enough provisions and water available was a daunting task. Since Ascalon was only perhaps a week's march from Jerusalem, this would give the commanders a chance to assess if the amount of supplies carried by their logistics train was sufficient for what they hoped would be a mobile strike force.

Up on the platform, Eleazar turned to Hanan and Joseph.

"Our armies are as ready as they are going to be," he said.

Hanan nodded in reply.

"God speed them to Ascalon and to victory."



Roman scouts had spotted the army as soon as it left Jerusalem. The first thing they noted was that their enemies had no cavalry to speak of, nor were they bringing any of the captured siege engines with them. Soon after leaving the holy city, the army split into three battle groups, with Yohanan, Silas, and Niger each taking command of one element. This allowed the army to

advance quicker, with their generals maintaining better control of their men. Centurion Costa was quick to report this as soon as some of his scouts returned to Ascalon.

"They're approaching from three directions," he said to Antonius and the other centurions. "They have divisions coming from the north, the south, and the east, all converging on our walls here."

"You have to admit, it was a well-played strategic maneuver," Marius confessed. "They were able to coordinate twenty thousand men with all the necessary logistics. Now to see if they can fight."

"Fuck them," Antonius scoffed. "They've got some good leaders, I admit, but their soldiers are still bloody amateurs! They have no cavalry, and their infantry will attack us in the same old style, rushing wildly as individuals, with no concept of cohesion and teamwork. Our legionaries will chop them to pieces!"

When the reconnaissance patrols reported the Judean army was a day's march away, Antonius assembled his subordinate leaders on the plain once more.

"Auxiliaries will be on the wings and keep us from getting flanked, legionaries will occupy the center," he directed. "Each century will fight independently, rather than trying to mass a single formation of the entire cohort. Centurions, break your men into four ranks. Maintain a steady passage-of-lines, but make certain you stay on line with everyone else. I don't want any elements leaving noticeable gaps in the lines that our enemies can exploit. Now, we'll deploy fifty meters forward of our intended battle space, unleash our first salvo of javelins, then pull back to where the second volley of pila will be grounded, and then unleash again."

"That'll rattle the fuck out of them," a centurion said.

This was followed by confident assertions from the other leaders.

"Costa," Antonius said to the cavalry commander, "once we're fully engaged, you'll bring your regiment out of the woods and smash these bastards in the flank."

"I have over four hundred horsemen," Costa noted. "They won't stand a chance against us."

Antonius then dismissed his officers to brief their men on the plan of action for the morrow. He told his men to eat a hearty breakfast, for the day's fighting would be an exhausting ordeal. And if they should fail in saving the

city, then at least they would be sent to Elysium with full bellies and bloodied swords.



Surprisingly, Gaius slept soundly through the entire night. He figured that with the cohort going into battle the next day, nerves would get the best of him and he'd have a sleepless night. Instead, he accepted whatever came in the morning and was out before the first watch. Some of his men stayed up, talking quietly amongst themselves. It was a natural thing for soldiers, for it kept their minds occupied. Aside from Gaius, few would get much sleep, thus their banter kept them from dwelling in lonely silence on the pending battle. Though filled with confidence, the soldiers in Ascalon knew their enemies were many and, even if triumphant, for a number of them, the morrow would mark their last dawn on this earth.

Since Antonius anticipated the rebels would attack around sunrise, he gave the order that all troops were to be roused two hours prior. This gave the men time to eat a hasty breakfast, while their first-line leaders performed last minute inspections of weapons and kit. As he ate some undercooked wheat cakes, Gaius had one of his soldiers inspect his armor for him.

"Before I can check the men, I must make certain my own kit is in order," he had always said.

"Shoulder fittings are secure," the soldier said as he tugged on the overlapping plates on his decanus' shoulders. "It doesn't look like you have any loose rivets either."

"Here, check my sword," Gaius directed as he drew his gladius. Another reason for him having one of his soldiers inspect him was so the young legionary would know what to look for, if and when he became a decanus in charge of a squad.

"The blade is good and sharp," the soldier noted. He then grabbed the round pommel on the bottom and twisted it back and forth. "The pommel might be a little loose."

"Good," Gaius replied. "I left it that way deliberately to see if you would catch it." He then produced a set of iron pliers he'd gotten from the armorer and proceeded to tighten down the hex bolt that held the pommel in place. He sheathed his weapon and then ordered his men to stand to. He only had five

legionaries to inspect, though he took his position as a decanus very seriously and made certain he was thorough. Gaius Artorius Armiger was an ambitious young man, in no small part due to the distinguished careers of his father and grandfather. While content leading a squad of legionaries, he always sought out tasks which demanded greater responsibility in the hope that one day he would rise up to be one of the three coveted principal officers in the century.

As he walked the line of his legionaries, each man stood in full armor, helmets donned, with the bottoms of their shields and javelins resting on the ground. Gaius had conducted a thorough inspection of his men just two days prior, so this was more of a quick check to make certain his soldiers were ready for battle this day. Once satisfied, he told the men to finish their breakfast and left the flat to go find either the tesserarius or optio, to let them know his inspection was complete.

A few scant torches provided the only light as Gaius stepped out onto the street. Over by the main gate, he saw Antonius talking with the other centurions from the cohort, along with Costa from the cavalry, the senior auxilia leaders, and a couple of men from the city militia.

“Militia archers will man the walls,” he heard Antonius say. “They will cover our withdrawal, should the battle turn against us.” He then asked Costa, “I take it your men survived the night?”

“It was cold, and we slept fitfully, but we’re ready,” the cavalry centurion replied. Not wishing to give away their intentions, he had led his regiment out of the city under the cover of darkness and bivouacked in a ravine between two low lying hills about two miles away. Costa had accepted additional risk by riding back to the city alone, however, he needed to review any last minute changes to the battle plan with Antonius and the others.

“Return to your regiment,” Antonius ordered. “Listen for the cornicen’s horn. When our legionaries unleash their first wave of pila and pull back to the second line, it will be your signal to attack. If you hear three long notes, that means something has gone wrong and you are to abort the mission.”

“Understood,” Costa replied. He then left with a pair of cavalry troopers who acted as his escort.

“It appears some of their campfires are being relit,” Centurion Marius observed as he gazed out of the open city gates. “Which means they are having their own breakfasts and are not in any hurry to attack.”

“It would seem they are waiting until broad daylight to initiate hostilities,” Antonius replied. “Stupid bastards think they already have us

beaten, and they'll be able to walk right over us. We'll give Costa half an hour to return to his regiment then have the men fall in. Let these bastards see we are ready for them!"



The day had dawned cool and brisk, and to Yohanan it felt exhilarating. The Army of Judea had formed three separate camps, though all would converge on the walls of Ascalon as one entity. Yohanan had been given nominal command of the entire army, yet he viewed Niger and Silas more like his peers than subordinates. His men were enjoying a leisurely breakfast, and he had promised they would enjoy their supper within the liberated walls of the city.

"The Romans are forming up on the plain outside the main gate," a warrior from the pickets informed him. The Judean general could only grin as he turned to Silas the Babylonian.

"These arrogant fools are anxious for death," he scoffed. Secretly, it unnerved him a bit that the Romans were being so brash. Being one of the only Jews with a horse, he mounted and rode forward to a short rise, where he could see, in the distance, the black and gold shields of the marching legionaries, who were forming up into four ranks. On either side of them were several hundred auxiliary soldiers, each carrying an oblong shield and stabbing spear.

"Not even a thousand men," Silas said as he rode up beside his fellow general. "We'll sweep them from the field and then take the city as our own!"

"Your army will come in from the left," Yohanan said, waving his sword in a sweeping arc, "Niger from the right, and I will take the very center."

"As we rehearsed," Silas noted. "We'll let the men finish their meal and then send them forward to clear this rabble that defiles our lands!"



An hour passed and soon the blaring of Judean war horns alerted the Roman task force. In the distance, they could see the massed formations of the three Jewish divisions, slowly coming together as they were compressed by the terrain on either side.

"Damn it all, there's a lot of them," a legionary said under his breath. The

soldiers of the Tenth Legion's Fifth Cohort leaned against their shields, some nervously fumbling with their javelins as they watched the horde of Judean warriors advancing across the plain.

"Only scant amounts of armor," Gaius replied, pointing towards their foes. "Many don't even have shields. They may have looted the Herodian armories and plundered our dead at Beth Horon, but the majority of our enemies are still underequipped for their task."

"Not only that, but they are raw levies," Optio Nicanor said as he walked the line.

Gaius' squad was towards the left of the century's formation, and closest to where the optio positioned himself.

Nicanor continued, "These are undisciplined irregulars; men who fight with passion rather than reason. Hold the line, listen to the centurion's commands, and we'll be just fine."

The calming words had their intended effect on the men. What the legionaries could not tell was that their optio, as well as their centurion, were just as terrified as they. It was to be a bloody business this day, and while Nicanor and Marius had confidence in their men, they knew that for some of them, they had seen their last sunrise.

The six centuries of the cohort were arrayed in battle formation of four ranks of fifteen to twenty men apiece. A century at full strength had eighty legionaries and decanii, in addition to the four principle officers. However, reality was, units never had their full complement of soldiers, and indeed, Gaius' own century had a total of sixty-five men in its ranks, including the officers. Centurions stood to the extreme right of each formation, with options on the left. This allowed them to coordinate passages-of-lines, while also guaranteeing they remained on line with the rest of the cohort. Gaius noted they were one of the two centuries in the very center, with Antonius and his First Century being the other, on their immediate left.

The Jewish army was slowly clustering together as fighters sought to take part in the glory of wiping out this pathetically small force of foreign invaders. Flushed with confidence following their routing of the Roman force at Beth Horon, no doubt they expected a quick victory this day. Strangely enough, there were no slingers or archers amongst the first wave of Judeans that closed upon the defenders of Ascalon. Perhaps they were so certain they would triumph, that they did not wish to bother with trying to soften their enemies up first with missile weapons.

“Get ready, lads!” Centurion Marius said as he drew his gladius.

Gaius and his men hefted their shields and pulled their javelins out of the ground, resting them on their shoulders as they watched their advancing enemy. The Judeans were within a hundred meters and shouting a cacophony of defaming insults and battle cries. Like most of their antagonists, there was no sense of order or discipline to be had; it was simply a running mass of enraged fighters carrying only the crudest of weapons. Their generals may have trained them on formations and how to march, but their raw inexperience was getting the best of them as each sought personal glory and the chance to slay soldiers of Rome.

“Javelins ready!” the centurion shouted. Gaius took a deep breath and brought his pilum up to throwing position, while staggering his stance and placing his right foot slightly behind the other. The noise of the rushing Jews was deafening, as twenty thousand men converged on them in a mass of fury. They were now within fifty meters, then forty, then thirty…

“Front rank…throw!”

Taking a quick step forward, Gaius launched his pilum in a high arc towards the screaming mass rushing towards them. Without waiting to see if it found its mark, he quickly turned sideways, holding his shield against his body, and made his way to the rear of the formation as the other ranks unleashed.

“Fall back!” Optio Nicanor ordered, as the centurion gave the order for the next line to unleash.



Yohanan watched as dozens of heavy javelins slammed into the mob of his soldiers, impaling many. Men screamed as the heavy pila plunged into their guts and various extremities. As soon as each line of legionaries threw their pila, they passed back through their fellow soldiers, then sprinted away from the fray.

“What the hell are they playing at?” the general muttered, his face twitching as even more of his men were skewered like spitted goats.

Their pale tunics were splotched in flowing blood as they writhed in agony. His army was so close to engaging with the Romans, yet now there was not only the psychological shock of seeing so many of their companions run through, but the physical obstacles created by the slain. The dead and

dying men, along with several hundred long javelins strewn about, had created a gory obstacle his men now had to clamber through. Still, as appalling as it was to see their friends so badly maimed, the Judeans knew they had the Romans hopelessly outnumbered, which gave them heart as they stumbled on and over their afflicted companions.

While Yohanan had hoped to keep at least half his army in reserve, individual fighters were so driven by bloodlust none could bear to hold back while others reaped the glory. Those at the back of the great multitude could not see what was happening up front, and so they shoved and prodded those ahead of them as they struggled to try and get in on the fighting before it was over. From his vantage atop his horse, Yohanan was able to see the Romans reforming. He could also hear the ominous blaring of one of their battle trumpets.



"Front rank…throw!" The order came just as the last of the cohort's legionaries fell in on their spare javelins and made ready to unleash once more.

This time Gaius was able to stand his ground and watch as his pilum sailed across the short distance, puncturing the small buckler carried by one of the Jewish rebels. He was partially disappointed he had failed to score a killing blow, but then reckoned this man would now be devoid of any protection and would fall soon enough. Still others were killed outright or, in many more cases, badly injured by the volleys of heavy javelins. And still, there were those that missed outright and stuck in the ground, which posed an obstacle to their enemies.

"Second rank…throw!"

"Third rank…throw!"

"Fourth rank…throw!"

The continuous storm of pila continued to rain death upon their hated foes, whose collective rage only compounded further in the face of the deluge of Roman missiles.

"Gladius…draw!" came the next command.

"Rah!" all the legionaries shouted as their blades flashed from their scabbards.

Gaius settled into his fighting stance, keeping low behind his shield, his

sword arm at waist level, cocked back slightly, and ready to strike.

Though several hundred Jewish rebels had already been killed or injured in the javelin barrage, the casualties inflicted was but a fraction of their total numbers. The real effect it had, was it created two lines of impediments made up of their badly mauled friends, as well as roughly eight hundred pila stuck in the ground. This slowed their advance considerably, prohibiting them from executing a charge with any sort of momentum, as they at last closed with the Romans. And unlike the initial assaults on Jerusalem, or the ambush at Beth Horon, here they were facing legionaries where they excelled, head-to-head in open battle.

The cornicen's horn sounded just as the first wave of rebel fighters clashed with the wall of legionaries. The Jews in front, having survived the javelins, now had to face a far more fearsome enemy. Their short swords, which were a combination of capture gladii as well as curved blades similar to the Iberian falcata, bounced off the wall of legionary shields. They quickly realized it was virtually impossible for them to get close enough to inflict any real casualties upon the Romans, and when they did so, they were quickly stabbed multiple times by either the soldier they assailed, or one of his companions. The Judeans were individual warriors who had no concept of unit cohesion, and they failed to work in concert with each other. Had Yohanan and his fellow generals had a few months to train them, perhaps they could have turned this rabble into a well-disciplined force. For this battle, though, they would have to settle for relying on superior numbers to win the day.

For Gaius and his legionaries, they were in a brutal fight for their lives. They reeled under the relentless push of Jewish zealots who threw themselves at their shield wall. The young decanus felt his feet slide in the soft earth as one such warrior leapt onto his shield, trying to bring his weapon down upon his exposed neck. A soldier in the second rank thrust his gladius over Gaius' left shoulder, stabbing the man through the base of his neck. Blood gushed forth, splashing all over Gaius' shoulder and chest as he shoved the dying man away. Another fighter lunged at him, though his arms were out to his sides, and as he drove his gladius into the man's belly, Gaius realized that the man had been pushed forward by his companions and had lost his footing. This was the case with many who now clustered against the Roman shield wall. Like sacrificial lambs, these poor souls were slain in rapid succession.

The issue of the Jewish army refusing to heed Yohanan's call for restraint

and discipline was that those in the front of the mob were simply shoved forward by those behind them. They were unable to bring any effective offense against the Romans as they fell upon them. Legionaries began stabbing as quickly as they were able, with stricken Judean fighters often propped up against legionary shields by their onrushing companions as they bled to death.

"Set for passage-of-lines!" The command was echoed down the line, for even with only fifteen to twenty men in each rank, the din of battle was so loud that those on the left could not hear their centurion's commands. As he tried to think how he was going to effectively withdraw with so many enemy combatants pressing down upon them, Gaius sliced his weapon along the side of the neck of his nearest attacker. As the man's eyes grew wide with blood gushing forth, Gaius thrust his gladius at the rebel just behind him, catching him in the eye. This fighter dropped his weapon and grabbed at his face, screaming in pain. He was subsequently tripped up as the Jews behind him continued to press their way forward.

"Execute passage-of-lines!" The order of execution was verbally relayed by decanii on the line, the centurion having blown his whistle to signal the passage. Yet for Gaius and those on the left, all they could hear over the deafening screams and battle cries were the audible commands echoed down the line. Any attempts at an orderly withdrawal were dashed as the decanus tripped and fell backwards, landing hard on his side between two soldiers in the rank behind him. Several men trod on his shield, which he struggled to pull out from under them, as he clawed his way to the back of the formation.

Once he made his way past the soldiers in what had been the fourth rank, he quickly took stock of the situation. A quick check and he noted his legionaries were all accounted for. They were all gasping for breath and already soaked in sweat, with blood and grime mingled upon their shields and armor. Since all bore numerous cuts and gashes, it was difficult to tell how much blood was their enemies' or their own. The battle continued to rage to their front, and it was impossible to reckon how many of their fellow legionaries had not been as fortunate as they. Any who had fallen had most likely been violently pulled from the line and hacked to pieces by the rampaging mob that continued to throw itself against their shield wall. After the reign of terror wrought by Florus in the lead up to the war, combined with the atrocities the Jews inflicted in return at Beth Horon, neither side could expect any quarter to be given. Every man on the field that day knew, if their

side lost, death would be their fate. And what no one on the Roman battle line could see was that death had come to the rear of the Jewish army.



Silas was less concerned about the ill-disciplined nature of his army than Yohanan was. While a legendary leader in his own right, the Babylonian was more astute at gauging the larger strategic picture, rather than the blow-by-blow tactics of an individual battle. He rode his horse calmly around the rear of his force, unable to see how the fighting was progressing, but confident their numbers would prevail. As he and Niger had both told Yohanan, there would be time to train their army once Ascalon had fallen and the Jewish republic had control of the coastal waters in the district. It would be a harsh lesson for many, seeing how lack of good order would cost many lives, yet in the long view, Silas knew this bloody lesson would serve the survivors well.

What the Babylonian general did not see, were the hundreds of Roman cavalry that now bore down on them from their left and rear. They rode at a fast canter, coming out of a small ravine and forming a large wedge with lances forward at the ready. Amongst their ranks were a troop of mounted archers; soldiers from King Agrippa's personal army. These men, wearing scale armor and carrying a hexagonal shield in addition to their bows, were arrayed on the wings of the regiment. As the lancers advanced, archers quickly formed up into extended lines and loosed a volley of arrows which landed deep amongst the rebel horde. Their enemies reacted with profound surprise as they sought to see where this wave of death had come from. The Herodian horse archers were extremely fast with the draw, and a near continuous barrage plunged into the ranks of Silas' army.

The Babylonian turned his horse about watching his men being struck down. As he did so, a single arrow struck him in the side, just beneath his mail shirt. He gave a shout of surprise and pain as he clutched the shaft that embedded itself deep in his flank. Each breath he took was extremely painful, and blood oozed from the wound. He was soon swarmed by the charging Roman cavalrymen, one of whom knocked the general from his horse with a blow of his shield. Silas landed hard upon the earth, the arrow shaft snapping in half as it buried itself deeper in his side. His mount ran off as soon as he was unhorsed, and he was suddenly alone. His badly injured side faced in the direction of the unfolding melee. All he could do was turn his head to try and

see what was happening. The burning pain in his flank was only matched by the despair he felt as he watched the cavalry drive headlong into his army. Despite the barrage of arrows that preceded the charge, most of his men had been oblivious to the Roman horsemen's presence. They were easily knocked down and trampled beneath the thunderous assault. Others were skewered by the long lances of the auxiliary cavalry. Before the Judean army could effectively react, the Roman horsemen had wheeled their mounts about and were quickly riding away from the frenzy. A few were not quick enough and were pulled from their mounts, where the enraged rebels stabbed and chopped away at their thrashing bodies, blood spraying about.

It was a horrendous slaughter. For every cavalryman who was slain, at least twenty or more Judean fighters lay trampled and shattered by the assault, with still more falling every second to the withering volleys from the mounted archers. Unable to go forward, and maddened by the carnage wrought by the Roman cavalry, hundreds of Silas' warriors now turned their attention away from the main battle. As they fought as individuals, with each man looking for enemy troopers to battle, they were easy targets for the disciplined professional soldiers, who held a decisive advantage. The killing became sport for the cavalry as they rode in circles around their enemies. Lances easily found their marks, troopers riding away quickly after each kill. Officers brought their long spatha swords down upon the heads, necks, and shoulders of various fighters, adding to the bloody display of death.

For Silas the Babylonian, his attention turned from the brutal slaughter to his own fate. The arrow had penetrated deep into his side, and he found that if he tried to pull it out, he tore his own guts that were now wrapped around the barbed arrowhead. His breathing was becoming labored, and he was covered in a cold sweat. Silas knew he was dying; it was just a matter of time. But then, how long did it take a man of his strong constitution to perish from such an injury? The bleeding was only coming at a trickle, so would he eventually suffocate from his inability to breathe? Or would it be an even more agonizing death as he waited for infection to set in or wild dogs to assail him? He knew, even if his army emerged victorious and they were able to carry him from the field, there was no way of extracting the arrow without causing even further damage to his ruptured insides.

His vision was now blurred, his breathing becoming shallow as even the slightest inhale brought pain. He was suddenly grateful that it appeared he would soon faint from lack of air and death would be expedited. His lips

mouthed a silent prayer of thanks for the shortening of his misery, and he quietly hoped God would find him worthy of paradise.



The relentless push from the Judean army had lost most of its momentum as Gaius and his men executed the passage-of-lines in what was now their third rotation into the fighting. The piles of corpses and badly wounded men, mostly Jewish, had become such an obstacle that it was impossible for their enemies to attack with any type of impetus. Antonius' century, on their left, seemed to be holding their own, and since they had not been hit in the flank or rear, Gaius could only surmise that the remaining centuries, along with the auxiliary cohort, had held the line.

They could not see the cavalry wreaking even greater havoc upon the Judeans, their formations running down pockets of scattered enemy fighters. The mounted archers, having inflicted untold casualties with their precision bows, had drawn their spatha long swords and joined the lancers; their quivers having run empty.

For Gaius and the other legionaries on the battle line, they were able to take their time and engage their foes individually. Their orders were to hold the line, and so it was the Judeans who were compelled to try and force their way over the mounds of the horribly maimed and continue their assault. As one such man stepped on one of his dead companions and leapt into the air, the decanus tilted his shield and slammed it into his stomach, sending the warrior sprawling onto his back. Gaius resisted the urge to break formation in an attempt to finish him. As a sergeant of legionaries, he had to remain disciplined and set the proper example to his fellow soldiers. Were he to rush forward on his own to try and get a quick kill, the entire formation could collapse into a disorganized fever as legionaries followed his lead.

What surprised him was a lone mounted Jewish soldier, who he could only guess was one of their generals, riding amongst his wavering men, attempting to rally them to press forward. He wore a conical helmet and carried a long Roman-style cavalry sword. Gaius grimaced, assuming it was taken from a slain auxiliary officer at Beth Horon. The man boldly rode forward, bashing his sword against the shields of legionaries. It was only as a Roman soldier lunged forward and slammed his gladius into his stomach that his warriors finally took heart and renewed their assault. Gaius wondered if

the enemy general had deliberately sacrificed himself in order to rally his men to victory. Such heroics were not unknown to the Romans, though the decanus found such actions to be foolhardy.

“Surely there are better ways to get ones men to fight,” he grunted to himself, as he readied to face the next surge of enemy attackers.



With Silas breathing his last, and Yohanan now slain during his reckless attack of the Roman lines, it fell upon Niger of Perea to coordinate the rapidly disintegrating army of Judea. Of course, having been on the extreme right of the attacking force throughout the day, he had no knowledge that both of his fellow generals were lost and their men leaderless. With their army being so newly formed and only minimally trained, there had been little time to break the men into regiments with levels of command that were necessary in any professional army. The situation was further exacerbated by the very fact that the Roman lines still held. The vast majority of pitched battles during the era were decided within a matter of minutes, once initial contact was made. And yet, it was now midafternoon and the imperial soldiers were no closer to breaking than they were when the Judeans launched their attack a couple hours after dawn.

“Sir, the ground in front of the Roman lines has become nothing but a field of bloody corpses!” an older warrior despaired as he pushed his way back through the mob.

“What’s happening?” Niger asked, frustrated that he could not see the full extent of the battle. “Surely our men should have run the enemy into the ground by now!”

“No,” the warrior said, shaking his head. “They are stubbornly holding behind their shield wall, and every time it looks like their front rank may be wearing down, they simply withdraw and are replaced by a line of fresh troops. Even their auxiliaries on the flanks are refusing to yield!”

“General Niger!” another man shouted as he sprinted over from the left. He was sweaty and out of breath as he rested his hands on his knees. “The Roman cavalry…they slaughter our men at will, and there is nothing we can do to stop them! Their mounted archers specifically targeted our slingers and missile troops, and their lancers continue to trample us down.”

“Damn it all,” Niger swore quietly. His frustration was mounting, yet he

knew that victory was not to be had this day, and further engaging of the enemy would only lead to even greater losses. He then made a decision that turned his stomach, yet one he understood was unavoidable. “We will withdraw to our camp for now. The hour grows late, and we must prepare a better strategy to deal with the Romans in the morning.”

A nearby trumpeter sounded a serious of notes that echoed far along the open plain. One of the few aspects they had managed to train their army in, was the use of musicians to signal different maneuvers. The order to pull back had a disheartening effect on those still in the back of the massive army, who had neither engaged the Roman battle lines nor been assailed by their cavalry sorties.



“That was no Roman horn,” Nicanor said, as he rested his shield on the ground and caught his breath.

“The rebels are pulling back,” Gaius noted as they scanned the length of the large battle line to their front, which was now littered with bodies and badly wounded men. Yet, if the Judeans thought they were going to gain any respite, they were sadly mistaken.

“Nicanor!” Centurion Antonius shouted, catching the optio’s attention. “Pass the word; we’ll allow the Jews to withdraw about a dozen paces, then we’ll advance on them.”

“Yes, sir.” The cohort commander’s intent was to get enough space between the enemy force and the ghastly swaths of bodies to allow his men to reform their lines. The casualties and spent javelins from the first salvo created another obstacle, and Antonius intended to trap as many Judeans between these as possible.

The centuries quickly conducted passages-of-lines in order to get their freshest troops out front. Each rotation felt like it had taken longer than the last, and Sergeant Gaius Artorius was grateful for the reprieve. As he passed back between the files of legionaries, he noted the strain on the faces of his fellow soldiers. Many were young, having joined the ranks after the Armenian-Parthian War, and this was their first real action. Even for the decanus, who had served in Armenia, this was his initial taste of close-combat fighting. His role in the last conflict had been mostly confined to serving on an onager crew, and so he was just as inexperienced as even the

newest legionaries when it came to killing with the gladius.

The cornicen let loose a long note on his horn, alerting the cohort to advance. It was worse than walking through a slaughterhouse, for one could not take a single pace without stepping on a bloodied corpse or badly maimed foe. The Romans instinctively plunged their gladii into the bodies they stepped over, not wishing to give a wounded adversary the opportunity to cut them down as they passed by. Legionaries slipped on the bodies and were having to use their shields to prop themselves upright. The ground beneath the carnage was a growing pool of blood, excrement, and bodily fluids. Every soldier that passed through the wall of death was soaked up past his ankles in gore.

As harrowing as the ordeal was, it passed rather quickly, and in less than a minute the Fifth Cohort, along with their supporting auxiliaries, had reformed on the open plain. The Jewish rebels were no longer conducting an organized withdrawal, but were attempting to run from the advancing Romans. A quick order from Antonius and three short blasts sounded on the cornicen's horn.

"Charge!" shouted Nicanor and the other officers of the century.

For the first time that day, the Romans were on the attack. Fear gripped their enemies as they struggled to flee from the howling mass of armored soldiers. Shields slammed home, knocking men to the earth, as gladii plunged into exposed flesh. A few of the Jews attempted to fight back, although most of their companions were driven to the brink of madness with their attempts to survive. A few overzealous legionaries and auxiliary troopers lost their footing and were quickly cut down by the desperate rebels. Yet, for the most part, it was no longer a battle, but mass murder.

Once clear of the second line of bodies and javelins, the Jews were able to run at full speed from the fray. Those still caught in between found themselves compressed together, with many falling to the fury of legionary blades. The ensuing massacre lasted a few minutes as the last of the rebels fell. A brief pause followed as soldiers caught their breath.

Then a lone legionary raised his gladius and shouted, *"For Beth Horon!"*

This brought a surge of lustful vengeance from the soldiers, both legionary and auxilia, and with feelings of retribution in the wake of their victory, the entire force began to chant while brandishing their weapons towards their fleeing enemy.

"Beth Horon! Beth Horon! Beth Horon!"

Even the centurions joined in the celebration, the elation of victory combined with a shaky sense of relief that they were still alive. A small contingent of soldiers had restored the sense of invincibility to the Roman army.



Being in possession of one of the only horses on the field, Niger was first to reach the camp on the low ridge that overlooked the town to the north. The Roman cavalry, which up to this point had contented itself with conducting rapid hit-and-run sorties against bands of Judean fighters, was now charging full tilt in pursuit as the Jewish army fled the field. Lances and spatha cavalry swords slew many of those not trampled by the wall of horses. The Roman infantry continued its pursuit to about a hundred meters past the long row of Judeans who had been slain by their javelins before taunting them with their chants of triumph. The Jews, being unencumbered by heavy armor, were able to sprint away. A horn sounded in the distance, and the Romans ceased their advance.

For Niger of Perea, who had taken part in the routing of the Roman forces at Beth Horon, it came as a doubly hard blow. The lessons from their greatest victory had been quickly forgotten, and in their arrogance, the Judeans had faced the Romans where they were at their strongest. A terrible price had been paid, yet Niger resolved to not make the same mistakes again. His army would take the evening to recuperate, and in the morning they would devise a more viable strategy for taking Ascalon. Whatever it cost, he could not let the day’s slaughter go unavenged, nor would he allow such a paltry force to triumph over the Army of Judea.

Chapter XX: An Army Destroyed

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Details of legionaries were sent out to retrieve spent javelins, while others sorted through the Roman dead and wounded. For most of the rest, their grisly task now lay in walking the field and finishing off the enemy wounded. Knowing that many of those who had been unable to flee the field would pretend to be dead, soldiers systematically thrust their weapons into every body they came across. For many of the Romans, it was not just a matter of fighting for their survival this day. For them, particularly those with friends in the Twelfth Legion, it was a matter of revenge for the humiliating defeat at Beth Horon.

"Bastards should know when they're conquered!" a legionary spat as he thrust his gladius beneath the ribcage of a badly wounded Jew.

"The only way to quell a rebellion is to break not only their will to fight, but their very means to," Gaius remarked. He saw an older Judean, whose injuries to his legs, combined with being pinned beneath a slain comrade, made escape impossible. The man held up his hands and pleaded frantically with the decanus, who was thankful he could not understand Hebrew or whatever it was these people spoke. He quickly slashed with his gladius, knocking the man's hands away as the heavy blade cut deep and broke bone. The rebel cried out again as Gaius ran his weapon quickly along his neck, severing the artery. In his mind, he at least had the decency to give his adversaries a quick death.

"Gaius." The voice of Nicanor distracted him from his gruesome task. The optio's face was ashen and full of anxiety. The decanus, at first, reckoned it was simply a matter of exhaustion. After all, centurions and options had remained mostly out front during the course of the battle, as they coordinated both their men as well as adjacent units. Upon closer look, he saw that there was more to Nicanor's distress; his eyes were bloodshot and full of emotion. He was breathing hard, the stench of sweat and death clinging to his armor and tunic. "I need to see all decanii…now!"

"Sure thing," Gaius replied. He proceeded to follow his friend as he rallied all the leaders within the century.

The signifier and tesserarius joined them as well. The only man absent

was the centurion. The signifier, who stood by the centurion on the battle line, was also wrought with emotion. Nicanor's words quickly conveyed the reason for his vexation.

"For those who do not know, Centurion Marius is dead." The decanii near the right flank, as well as the signifier, had seen him fall. For the rest, it came as a brutal shock on what was otherwise a day of triumph.

"May he find peace in Elysium," the signifier said, with his head slightly bowed.

"That makes you the centurion now," Gaius observed.

"Only acting-centurion," Nicanor corrected. "Antonius does not hold promotion authority at this level. Besides, right now I could give a damn about the rank. Marius was my friend and mentor. Even when he was at his harshest in dolling out discipline amongst the ranks, he still loved the men as if they were his own sons. He died trying to save one of them, who had been pulled off the line and was being torn to pieces by those rebel bastards."

"How many others did we lose?" the tesserarius asked.

"I don't know about the rest of the task force," Nicanor replied, "but as for our century, we're looking at four dead, including Marius, with another eighteen wounded. Thankfully, most of those injuries are superficial, and they should be able to return to the ranks soon enough. Only a couple are critical."

Gaius was suddenly grateful none of the fallen were men from his squad. Every soldier in a leadership position cursed himself for having failed in some way every time one of his legionaries died in battle. Each man slain was both friend and brother, and in some ways a son to those who led them. And yet, it was the cold reality of the soldier's life; in war, friends die.

"At least we gave it to those circumcised fucks far worse than we took," Julius, the tesserarius reasoned.

"And it's not over yet," Nicanor remarked. "The Jews have retired to their camp on the ridge, yet I doubt they are finished. I have a meeting with Centurion Antonius to go over the battle plan for tomorrow. Meantime, once your men have finished their tasks of pilum retrieval and finishing the enemy wounded, have them wash and clean their kit. And then get them some food. They've been exerting all day, and no doubt they are famished."

His last words made Gaius' stomach growl in protest. Hunger weakened a man, and he was grateful the most arduous of their ordeals for the day were finished. Nicanor then dismissed the men, and they went back to their brutal

tasks. Gaius felt almost in a daze as he slowly walked the field, absently thrusting his gladius into every body that was not Roman. Despite being a veteran of the Armenian War, it was there on the fields of Ascalon that he truly saw his first action. He now understood far more deeply what it meant to be a soldier of Rome.



Niger was filled with both rage and anguish as he listened to the unceasing cries of pain coming from the field below as the Romans butchered the Jewish wounded. He knew it was hypocritical, of course, for they had shown the Roman injured no mercy at Beth Horon.

Though they had been decisively beaten, he knew the majority of their losses had come during the cavalry pursuit, along with the infantry slaying vast numbers of men who would have otherwise survived their injuries. He was further troubled when he received word that Yohanan was killed, with Silas missing and feared to be dead as well.

“We must change our tactics if we are to take the city,” he said, as he was joined by a number of older warriors who had assumed leadership positions amongst their men. “Any further frontal assaults will be suicidal. We must, therefore, draw the Romans out and compel them to fight us amongst the hills.”

“And if they don’t take the bait?” one of the warriors asked. “No doubt they’ve heard about how we ambushed their forces in the passes. They’re unlikely to make the same mistakes again.”

“They are flush off a major victory this day,” Niger explained. “If we make it appear we are withdrawing towards Jerusalem, in the very least their cavalry will pursue us. We’ll make certain we use plenty of slings and arrows this time as well. And if we can eliminate the threat of their horsemen, it will tilt the odds substantially in our favor.”

With a lack of a decisive command structure, and with many of the leaders they did have either dead or missing, it was difficult for the general to gain a firm grasp on just how devastating their losses had been. As best as he could tell, they had lost half their strength; ten thousand either killed outright, or slaughtered during the pursuit and aftermath of battle. As was most often the case, the vast majority of those killed fell when one side or the other broke, and they were slain by the pursuing force. A sad reality of warfare

from this time was that most of the fallen died with their enemies' blades in their backs. Niger was determined, on the morrow, it would be the Romans who would break. They had learned a harsh lesson this day and would be hard pressed to replenish the ranks of their central army unless they had something to show for their losses. Whatever the cost, the Judean general knew they had to take Ascalon on the morrow.



The bathhouses in the port city were insufficient to see to all of the Roman soldiers garrisoned within, and so many elected to bathe in the sea; the warm Mediterranean waters washing the blood and grime from the day. Like so many of his compatriots, Gaius had stripped out of his armor before taking the short walk from where they were billeted to the sea. He removed his sandals as soon as he reached the beach, the soft sand feeling as if it were massaging his tired feet. The waters lapped lazily against the shore as the evening sun shone in their faces. As it was February, the sun set early, and so they only had a short time before dark to wash themselves and return to the barracks to conduct maintenance on their weapons and armor.

Gaius pulled off his grimy tunic and flung himself into the rolling surf. There were hundreds of legionaries and auxiliary soldiers also taking the plunge in the sea. Many giving yelps of surprise and biting pain, as the salt water seeped into gashes and wounds that many of them did not even realize they had.

"Bugger me!" one of his legionaries named Marcus shouted, looking down at his forearm. It was covered in dried blood that was now washing away. Thinking it was all from an enemy warrior he'd slain, he was, until this moment, oblivious to a deep gash that ran up his forearm.

"Go see the medics after you clean up," Gaius directed. "You need to get that stitched and wrapped before an infection sets in."

"It's just a scratch," the legionary protested. "I'll be fine soon enough."

"It wasn't a request," Gaius replied sternly. "Wash up and then get your ass over to the medics!"

"Yes, sergeant."

It wasn't often that Gaius had to be so blunt in his orders, though, when he did, his men always complied. In an odd sense, he felt an even greater sense of relief that his soldiers had lived through the day's ordeal, more so

than his own survival. If Marcus' forearm gash was the worst his squad had taken, so much the better.

His feet felt a stinging sensation all along his shins and heels. No doubt there were various cuts from where he'd stumbled and caught himself on rocks or dropped weapons. He figured he would check them out when he got back to the barracks and have them wrapped.

While their men bathed and worked on their kit, Centurion Antonius called a meeting of all the leadership within the garrison. When Nicanor arrived, he noted he was not the only optio present, the centurion of the second century having been badly wounded during the melee.

"Your men all performed heroically today," Antonius said, with a voice that was boisterous despite his fatigue. "We were outnumbered twenty-to-one, and yet, every last one of our soldiers fought with a tenacity worthy of Hercules himself!"

"Antonius, my men are resting their horses," Costa spoke up, "and we are refitting our mounted archers with as many arrows as we still have within the armory."

"Very good," Antonius replied. "From the numerous fires on the ridgeline, the Judean army appears battered but unbroken. Yet I doubt they will come at us as brashly as they did today."

"What if we take the fight to them?" Nicanor asked.

"You mean attack them up on their ridge?" a centurion asked. "Don't be absurd, man. They still outnumber us greatly, and besides, our cavalry cannot maneuver as effectively amongst that rocky terrain."

"But if we position ourselves before dawn, we can seize the initiative and slaughter them while they slumber," the optio retorted.

"That poses quite the challenge," Antonius noted. "The ground is mostly flat in this region. However, the ridgeline they have occupied is about four miles from the city, and the ground is strewn with large boulders. Encircling it will be simple enough. There are numerous woods that can be used to shield our movements. What of the terrain behind their position to the east?"

"It's flat, just like the rest of this area," Costa spoke up.

"Can your men ride around to that plain without being spotted?"

"We can," the cavalry centurion asserted. "It will require us going in a very wide arc around the ridge, lest the noise of our horses alert the rebels."

"Very good," Antonius replied. "The main road east goes right by the

ridge. The land before the rise is mostly farm fields, although there are some dense woods on either side."

"So does this mean you wish to attack the rebel camp, sir?" Nicanor asked.

"Unless someone else has a better idea," the cohort commander asserted. He paused for a moment to see if there were any dissenters to the plan. When no one else spoke up he continued. "We'll use the same basic formation as today, auxiliaries on the wings, legionaries in the center. Once we launch the attack, we'll have the cornicen sound the advance for the cavalry. Just be sure you leave our foes the perception that there is a means of escape. An enemy who knows he's trapped will likely fight to the death. Give them a false sense of hope and they will break all the quicker."

"When do we leave?" a centurion asked.

"We'll rouse the men one hour after midnight," Antonius replied. "That's six hours from now. I know they are tired, so have them rack out as soon as they've seen to their weapons and kit. I want us on the march no later than one hour after waking. As soon as we've got the false glow of predawn to see by, we will ransack their camp and send the bastards straight to hell!"

Once they were finished bathing, their orders were to wipe down their weapons and armor, as well as check for any damage. Gaius had just finished inspecting the weapons of the men in his squad when Nicanor gave a short rap on the door and let himself in.

"Optio, sir," one of the legionaries said.

"At ease, men," Nicanor replied. He then pointed to Gaius. "Come with me, we need to talk."

"Yes, sir." The decanus was puzzled as to what his friend needed, though he quickly threw on a fresh tunic and joined him out on the narrow lane that separated the flats the cohort occupied. A gentle breeze blew, causing the street lamps to flicker.

"I need someone to coordinate the left flank tomorrow," Nicanor explained.

"Julius is the tesserarius," Gaius noted. "Shouldn't that fall to him?"

"Normally, yes," the optio replied. "However, as effective as Julius is when it comes to supervising work details and coordinating the watch during garrison duties, he's not much use as a leader on the battle line. He's practically deaf and cannot hear shit once the fighting commences. That's

why Marius always placed him right next to himself on the battle line, so he'd be close enough to hear the commands."

"So are you asking me to take the left?"

"No," Nicanor replied, shaking his head and then forcing a smile for the first time that day. "I am *telling* you that you will be coordinating the left flank. Just don't let it go to your head; there's no guarantee that either of us will be promoted when this is over."

"Well, first thing we need to do is make sure we're still alive and the rebels are dead," Gaius noted. "Otherwise there won't be any of us looking at promotion."

Nicanor allowed himself a short laugh at the remark. Both his body and his nerves were completely frayed after the day's harrowing events. He was taking Marius' death very hard, although, to his credit, he had steeled himself to his duty. There would be time to mourn his friend later.

"Not that you need an added incentive," Nicanor remarked, "but if we are victorious tomorrow, and General Trajan does in fact endorse my promotion to centurion, then you *will* be my optio."



The call to rise from their bunks had come far too early for the tired legionaries. Though they only had four miles to trek, it would be done in utter blackness; torches were prohibited, and the moon was scarcely a crescent this night. Gaius had appointed Marcus with leading the squad, although with only four other legionaries to supervise, it was an easy enough tasking.

The decanus stepped out onto the street, his shield clutched in his left hand, a single javelin over his right shoulder, and his helmet hanging off a strap against his chest. There were others already milling about under the flickering light of the torches that hung off the sides of the buildings.

"Sergeant Artorius." Gaius turned to see Centurion Antonius walking towards him.

"Sir?" he asked, snapping to attention.

"At ease," his cohort commander said with a wave of his hand. "I understand Nicanor placed you on the left, in his normal duty position."

"Yes, sir."

"That means you'll be on my right. And since we're raiding the enemy's camp, it may be more difficult to maintain a cohort sized formation.

However, you still need to keep an eye on me as much as you can. Make certain your men do not get too far ahead of us, otherwise you leave yourselves vulnerable to being flanked. Also understand that while you will most certainly be involved in the fray, your primary mission is not fighting on the battle line. Neither you, nor Nicanor…nor I for that matter, will have the opportunity to catch our breath when we do a passage-of-lines, so don't burn yourself out too quickly. Communication with the element on your left, as well as coordination of the men in your century, is far more important than killing individual warriors. Are we clear?"

"Yes, sir," Gaius nodded. It felt strange at first, for Antonius said more to him in that short span than he had the entire time Gaius had been in the ranks. Perhaps it was that lack of familiarity that led the pilus prior to brief the young decanus so thoroughly. After all, this was not a training mission to test new leadership. By daybreak they would be attacking the camp of an enemy army that still had them terribly outnumbered. There would also be the additional hazards of advancing at night. Even the most experienced centurions and options often struggled to keep their soldiers in formation in the utter blackness.

The Fifth Cohort left the gates of Ascalon wordlessly; the soft echo of their rhythmic footfalls were the only sound. Half of the auxiliaries marched in front of them, the rest behind. Once they reached the pre-designated rally point at the woods near the ridge, the first group of auxiliaries would break off to the left, those in the rear heading right. The legionaries would take the center and advance straight for the Judean encampment. Screening the front of the column were about twenty mounted archers. Their purpose would be to pick off or run down any lookouts the Jews may have posted along their avenue of approach. Antonius did not anticipate this; however, he felt it better to play it cautiously. Their plan was daring enough as it was, without taking on unnecessary additional risks.

As they continued to march along the dirt road that led to the northeast, Gaius looked down at his shield, which covered most of his body as he walked. He was thankful the Tenth Legion had painted their shields black as opposed to the more common red, which could be seen from a distance even in the dark. There was still a chance that the metal bosses or brass strips on their shields would catch a faint glint of moonlight, not to mention their helmets and segmented armor, but this was minimal as clouds blotted out

most of the starlight.

The infantrymen allowed themselves a slightly greater spacing on the march than they would during the daytime. This prevented soldiers from unwittingly running into each other in the dark. Gaius marched at the back of the century, with Centurion Antonius a few paces behind him with his First Century. He felt it was strange that he was less fearful of the numerically superior enemy they would be facing soon, than he was of looking incompetent in front of his cohort commander. He then decided he should relish the opportunity, not only to excel as a leader of Roman soldiers, but to finish wiping out the only permanent standing army in Judea.

Though his eyes had well-adjusted to the dark, Gaius could not see the groves of trees until they were right up on them, with the auxiliaries to their front making their way through the woods. Antonius had directed them to advance two hundred paces before redirecting on the enemy camp. This would help them to remain in contact with the legionaries who would be on their immediate right. Having spotted no Judean lookouts, the horse archers galloped off to the right, making their way around the ridge to their own rally point approximately a mile from the camp.

The cohort of legionaries slowly formed into battle formation as they continued the advance. Gaius then realized the ‘ridge’ was really little more than a gentle slope that rose up maybe twenty feet. The men of his century followed Nicanor as they angled off to the right, forming up into four ranks. Once on line, the soldiers instinctively dropped down to one knee, with some resting their shields against their shoulders. This allowed the units on either side of them to see that they were set, plus it lessened the risk of being spotted by any Judean sentries.

Gaius desperately tried to spot any discernable shapes to their front, yet all he could make out were the smoldering embers left from dozens of camp fires. Their adversaries had no tents, which made the pending assault far easier to coordinate. Centurion Antonius knelt about ten feet from the decanus, as he, too, stared hard into the blackness. Time seemed to stand still, and Gaius had no idea if it was still the middle of the night, or if dawn was fast approaching. He grew restless, as he was sure all of the men were, fearful they would be spotted at any moment. It was absurd, given he could barely see the pilus prior on his left and could only make out the first few legionaries on his right. He made a mental note of what Antonius had told him about his tasking for the battle. Given the enormous responsibility

heaped upon Nicanor, Gaius had simply told his friend he had a handle on his duties, and to not worry about what happened on the left of the century.

As dozens of chaotic thoughts ran through his mind, he jolted at the feel of cold steel on his left arm. It was Centurion Antonius who had touched him with the blade of his gladius, the signal for them to rise up and make ready to advance. Gaius nodded and stood, gently tapping the legionary in the front rank on his right with the butt of his javelin.

With their vision impeded, the pilus prior slowly counted to fifty, allowing enough time for all units to get to their feet before starting the advance. With no audible signals, and no one able to see more than a few feet to their left or right, it was an impressive showing of drill and discipline that the entire task force stepped off at almost the exact same moment.

As they quickly marched the remaining distance, Gaius rested his pilum up on his shoulder, ready to throw at a moment's notice. There would be no controlled volleys of javelins this day. The men were directed to simply throw their pila at the first Jew who presented himself.

It wasn't even a sentry that first spotted them, but rather a lone rebel who was leaned over, attempting to warm himself with the glowing embers of a campfire. The man's eyes grew wide in disbelief and horror, but before he could call the alarm, a pilum sailed forth from Antonius' century, slamming through his stomach. The Jew gasped in pain as the pliable end of the shaft bent, pulling him to the ground. His nearest companions slowly roused by the commotion, yet they were quickly slain by legionaries who stabbed them with either pilum or gladius. Gaius saw the shadows of a man milling about in the dark, and he flung his javelin at him. It found its mark, striking the rebel in the hip. He gave a loud cry that was of both pain, as well as to alert his friends.

Those nearest were struck down by flying pila as they attempted to stand and gather their bearings. It was inconceivable that the Romans would not only come out from behind their walls, but also to attack the Judean camp.

"Now!" Antonius shouted to his cornicen, who turned and blared a series of long notes on his trumpet.

As the faint glow of the predawn made it easier to see, Gaius watched the chaotic frenzy as Jewish warriors leapt to their feet and tried to gather their weapons to face the storm of rampaging legionaries.

"Hold the line!" he shouted to the men of his century, as they started to press forward, well ahead of Centurion Antonius. The command was echoed

by decanii, alerting Nicanor that the century was advancing too quickly. He noticed their enemies were rushing about with no sense of direction, unsure as to what they should do. On the extreme right, the commander of the mounted archers had taken the initiative to place his men on a high vantage that they had not seen before. From there, his men loosed their arrows into those who were attempting to form some semblance of a battle line. Those who fled the field, they would leave to the rest of their regiment.



“That’s the signal!” Centurion Costa said as the blaring notes were faintly heard. He then directed his own musician to sound the advance.

His men rode at a fast canter, waiting until they closed with the Judean army before breaking into a full gallop.

“Sir, there are a number of rebels fleeing the battle!” a trooper shouted, pointing with his lance off to the right, where dozens of Jews were running as fast as they could.

“Let them go,” Costa ordered. “They can consider themselves the fortunate few and tell their masters in Jerusalem about how so many were annihilated by so few. *Speed up horse!”*

The regiment advanced in a long line, troopers spurring their horses into a quicker pace. The ground sloped upward slightly, leading into a large pocket between two small rises. This led onto a large plain that overlooked the city in the distance, and had been perfect for General Niger to place his men. Whereas the day before they were but one of three independent battle groups, on this early morn he had all that remained of the entire army clustered together. Legionaries and auxilia infantry were already ransacking the camp, with hundreds of rebels killed in the first few minutes. On the two rises, Costa noted the mounted archers waylaying the fleeing Jews with storms of arrows.

Though he had been flustered before when they had not returned, he was now glad their officers had taken the initiative to seize such a viable piece of ground which enabled them to pour enfilade volleys onto their confused enemies. Costa then grinned and kicked his horse into a full gallop as he raised his sword and gave a loud battle cry.

“Roma Victrix!”



The fatigue from the previous day turned to wide-eyed horror for Niger as he saw in the pale light hundreds of legionaries and auxiliary troopers storming his camp. He cursed himself for not posting lookouts that night! Although it had seemed an absurd impossibility that the Romans would attack his army, so too had it been equally irrational that they would have come out from behind their walls and face his forces in the open.

Those who could flee were doing so, with the entire camp fallen into disarray. A few of the older warriors were attempting to restore order and compel their men to fight. Niger seized his sword and ran through the chaos, grabbing men who were attempting to run.

“What are you doing?” he shouted. “Take up your weapons and fight them! We still outnumber them tenfold; do not give them this! Do not allow the Romans to beat us this way!”

Most had slept on the ground in their tunics, and many were without sandals, let alone weapons. The Romans were moving very fast, attempting to use speed and shock to win the day quickly and decisively. That they were utterly contemptuous of the Judean army’s vastly superior numbers only unnerved the Jews even more. Still, they were beginning to finally reorganize, with bands of slingers and arches breaking off to engage the mounted archers who rained death upon them from the two rises behind the camp.

A storm of sling stones, arrows, and short throwing darts felled both men and horse, and it was the first real offense Niger’s army had been able to unleash. He hoped to turn his men’s terror into anger, and that they would be able to swarm the Romans and envelop them. If they could manage, it would be just a matter of time before they were all cut to pieces. Nearly a thousand of his warriors circled the flank companies of auxiliary troopers on the left and the Judean general began to take heart. The legionaries in the center would be the toughest to break, but if their flank support was cut down, they would be forced to refuse their lines and therefore be unable to maneuver.

“We’ve driven the horse archers from the mounds!” a warrior exclaimed excitedly. “Many were killed, and our men are finishing off their wounded.”

“Excellent!” Niger replied, feeling the Romans had perhaps overplayed their hand. He could still take the city, and despite their horrifying losses he would have something to show for their sacrifice.

The sound of a horn alerted him, and he turned about to see the regiment of Roman cavalry riding into their encampment from behind. Lances and spatha swords cut down scores of Judean fighters, while the wall of horses trampled many more underfoot. Before he could react, the general was smashed across the head by the shield of a trooper who passed him at a full gallop. He fell facedown to the earth, and his men who watched him fall swore they saw him trampled by the mass of horsemen.



"Sir, the cavalry has hit the rebels on our right flank!" Gaius called out to Centurion Antonius.

The auxiliary companies on their left had been only minimally engaged, and as such were now making their way around the far side of the Jewish camp. Their enemies' will to fight was quickly vanishing, and those not killed in the initial onslaught were now attempting to flee from the battle.

Antonius turned to his cornicen. "Sound the pursuit!" he ordered.

A rapid series of notes and the cavalry quickly turned about and began chasing down those rebels who fled down the northern end of the ridge, most running along the road that led back to Jerusalem.

Those rebels still trapped within the killing field were trying hopelessly to fight their way out. Utterly defeated and thinking only of survival, they ran about every which way in an attempt to flee from the wall of armored infantrymen who were quickly surrounding them. Some, in their confusion, even ran straight for the Romans. Gaius quickly stepped to the side, knocking down one man, who had been trying to run in between the centuries, with a punch from his shield. He quickly stabbed him through the stomach, leaving him writhing in agony as they continued to advance.

On the far right, Nicanor was performing well as acting-centurion. He kept the pace of his men even with the century on their right, while coordinating with that unit's optio. He also made certain he rotated his line every few minutes, keeping fresh troops in the fight. As the sun rose in the east, just off to their right, they reached the edge of the camp, where the ground sloped down onto the plain in between the long mounds on either side. In the distance, they could see hundreds of Jewish warriors fleeing in every direction, all the while being pursued by Costa's cavalrymen.

"Century…halt!" Nicanor shouted, raising his gladius; his signifier doing

the same with their standard.

Behind him there was nothing but bodies stretching out nearly a half mile long and a couple hundred meters deep. His men leaned on their shields, sword arms hanging low. They had fought a lengthy battle the day before, gotten only minimal sleep this night, and then marched out and fought once more. All were exhausted and completely famished.

Gaius soon joined him. “Looks like it’s over for us.”

“The cavalry will run down many of them,” Nicanor added. “Those that are left will flee back to Jerusalem utterly beaten. Whatever elation our enemies enjoyed after Beth Horon, they will now drown in tears of defeat.”

“I daresay we’ve changed the course of the entire war,” Centurion Antonius said, as he and the other centurions joined them. “Have your men retrieve all javelins, as well as take care of any dead or wounded we may have suffered. We’ll then march back to the city and, tonight, celebrate our victory!”

This last remark elicited a loud ovation from the legionaries closest to their cohort commander, and it was soon echoed down the line in either direction. Their triumph was complete, with most of their losses coming from the auxiliaries who had been temporarily swarmed by the reforming rebels, as well as those horse archers struck down by enemy slingers and other missile troops. The elation of conquest over so many filled the hearts of the Romans with renewed energy and purpose. They went about the horrific task of slaying the enemy wounded with vigor. And while they would mourn for their own dead, as they retrieved the bodies of their fallen there was a sense that at least their friends had not died in vain. Admittedly, they were not quite as thorough in the killing of the wounded as the day before, and doubtless there would be a number of Judean fighters who would survive the slaughter. And yet, the fact that at least some survived would break the will of the people far more than if all had perished; for they would be able to tell all of the horrors they had faced.

Dawn was breaking as they marched back to the city, heads held high and hearts full from their victory. They soon passed over the plain where the bodies of their slain enemies from the day prior still lay. Rabid dogs, birds, and other carrion beasts feasted on the corpses. It would be a large undertaking to dispose of so many thousands of dead, but that would wait. The remainder of the day, and well into the night, was one of celebration.

Antonius and the surviving centurions purchased casks of wine for their men, and the local brothel was soon overflowing with soldiers seeking relief from the pent up strain of the past few days. The people of Ascalon were, essentially, neutral in the conflict, being a mix of Jewish, Greek, and those of other eastern origins. They therefore had little stake in the current conflict. What mattered to them was the fighting was over, and so they, especially the young and unmarried women, were more than willing to show some additional appreciation to the Roman army.



The Judean army camp was littered with corpses; scavenging birds and wild animals added a macabre cacophony to the scene of death. Weapons and whatever armor the rebels possessed had been taken by the Romans in order to keep other insurrectionists and brigands from equipping themselves further.

Niger could not fathom how he was still alive, for he appeared to be the only living soul on the battlefield. Any other survivors had already fled, and at first glance it looked like the Romans had been thorough in the dispatching of the Judean wounded. The general of Perea had been knocked senseless and fallen amongst several bodies that had been torn to pieces. The sheer volume of blood alone had led the murderous Romans to assume he was already dead.

He slowly pulled himself to his feet. Miraculously, he did not appear to have any broken bones, yet every inch of his body was in agony. His mouth and lips were completely parched, his craving for water almost maddening. In his torment, he wondered if his still being alive was a blessing or a curse. There were no streams or lakes for miles, with the only body of water being the Mediterranean Sea, about five miles west. While that would be useful for washing the filth from his body, the salt water was useless for quenching his thirst. Still, he could only conceive that his survival was the will of God, and there was a purpose for his continued existence. He was so weakened in his current state that he had not the strength or will to search for other survivors.

Slowly Niger limped down the gentle slope that led to the main road which ran northeast towards Jerusalem. His left arm was in pain, and he clutched it close to his side. He reckoned he must have been a fearful sight, for his face was swollen, and he was completely covered in dried and flaking

blood. His tunic was torn and soiled through, the straps on his sandals broken in places. Strangely enough, he encountered no one as the day went on, and he painfully tried to put a few miles between himself and the macabre scene behind him. As the late afternoon sun beat down upon him, he spotted what looked like an encampment in the distance. His vision was blurred by fatigue, coupled with lack of food and dehydration. What looked to be a nomad camp was actually much closer than he had first reckoned, and soon a number of dark shapes were moving towards him. Whether they were friends or robbers he cared not; at least they were not Roman!

As Niger fell to his knees in exhaustion, he thought he heard a voice say, "Our general lives!" He felt a number of hands upon him, carrying him towards a medium sized tent. The shade alone cooled him, and soon a bucket of water was splashed upon his face, wakening him.

"Water…" he whispered through dry and cracked lips.

"Here you are, sir," one of the men said, handing him a large wooden ladle. The coolness of the water brought both pain and relief to his lips, mouth, and throat. Exhaustion then overtook Niger, and he lapsed into a deep and dreamless sleep.



It was a sorrowful day, one accented by black clouds and the threat of torrential rain, when the leaders of the Judean council greeted the bedraggled survivors of the ill-fated assault on the coastal city. Word of the failed attack had reached the holy city, yet none were prepared for the total loss they had suffered.

Thousands of wives, mothers, parents, and children were gathered outside the city's walls, awaiting news of their loved ones. The sight of so few of their fighting men returning led to wails of sorrow that echoed for miles as family members sought news from the survivors. Only one in every ten warriors who had departed Jerusalem two weeks prior had returned. Worse yet, they had been unable to give any of their fallen brethren a decent burial. Brigands and robbers would have stolen anything of value not taken by the Romans, and the mutilated corpses would be left to rot in the elements.

More than just the sheer loss of life, which was three times that which they had inflicted upon the Romans at Beth Horon, was the loss of two of their greatest generals and the grave injuring of a third.

“Yohanan and Silas’ deaths will be difficult to recover from,” Hanan said quietly to Joseph ben Gorion as they watched from atop the ramparts. “It’s not that we don’t have other competent military leaders. However, so many of them are polarized in their loyalties. Yohanan was a true unifier of the people. Both moderate and fanatic respected him.”

“And Silas, being Babylonian, brought a sense of reconciliation between various warring cultures,” Joseph added.

Two days after his return to Jerusalem, the general from Perea was called before the council. He was still very weak from his injuries, but at least had managed to don fresh robes. His left arm was in a cloth sling and his forehead heavily bandaged.

“Traitor!” Eleazar shouted, pointing accusingly at Niger. “You call yourself a general, yet you led our men to be slaughtered like cattle!”

With Ascalon firmly in Roman hands, and little more than a few thousand militia to man the other cities, Eleazar felt his district was now virtually unprotected. Other councilmen shouted similar insults towards the general, with some going as far as accusing him of deliberately sacrificing his men and allowing the Romans to win. Niger made no attempt to defend himself. He was wracked by guilt at having survived while most of his men perished. Even Hanan was reluctant to offer open support of the disgraced general, who the council subsequently banished from Judea.

The effects of the disaster at Ascalon were far greater reaching than even Hanan realized. With his mobile army practically destroyed, Hanan’s struggles to keep his fragile alliance together compounded. It would now prove even more difficult to suppress the fanatics, should they attempt to wrest power from him.

Part II

Rome unleashes Vespasian on Judea, while Josephus attempts to defend Galilee

Chapter XXI: Storms on the Horizon

Late February, 67 A.D.



Roman Optio and Legionary

Once the roads were deemed passable, Titus ordered the Fifteenth Legion to ready itself for the long trek to Ptolemais. While the journey by ship could have been completed in a few days, there simply were not enough vessels available to transport an entire legion along with everything it possessed. And so, the legate and his senior officers concluded that provided they managed to avoid a decisive engagement with the rebels, they could conceivably reach Ptolemais in about three weeks.

A new chief tribune had been assigned to the legion, a young patrician named Domitius. He was of similar age to Titus, though he had taken a slightly different path through the *cursus honorum*, the career path of those within the senatorial class. As soon as he came of age, Domitius had been appointed as a Quaestor, a magistrate that oversaw finances within the empire. His duties had, thus far, been mostly administrative, and it was only recently that he was given the opportunity to serve as a chief tribune with the legions. Titus found him agreeable enough, and Master Centurion Ralla noted he was an eager study. Yet, despite there being only a couple of years between them in terms of age, Titus' extensive military experience made him appear much older to the young chief tribune.

Within a day of the order being given, the soldiers of the Fifteenth had broken down their camp, with all tents laid across their pack mules, along with rations, cooking implements, and palisade stakes. The legion's artillery of scorpions and onagers was loaded onto wagons, with a cohort tasked as their escort. The squadron of indigenous cavalry would provide reconnaissance.

Titus took his place at the head of the large column, with Domitius, the equite tribunes, as well as Master Centurion Ralla, accompanying him on horseback. The aquilifer carried the legion's sacred eagle, and was joined by a cornicen, along with a detachment of legionaries from the elite First Cohort. The commanding legate turned his mount and faced his large force, taking in the splendor and brutal power he commanded.

"Fifteenth legion! Forward…march!"



It was ten days into their journey as the Fifteenth Legion marched along the coastal road near Ascalon. Their reconnaissance cavalry had been met by troopers from the garrison, and they sent back for Titus.

As the legate and his escort rode ahead of the column to see what was amiss, they were greeted by a cohort of legionaries, who cheered as General Titus rode up. The centurion in command of the cohort stepped forward and saluted.

"Ave, Legate Titus!" he said.

The general returned the salute and dismounted. "You men are from the Tenth Legion," he noted once he spotted their vexilation standard.

"Yes, sir. We were dispatched by General Trajan to reinforce Ascalon, Centurion Pilus Prior Sertor Antonius, commanding."

"Have you men seen any action?" Titus asked, having no knowledge about the battles from weeks prior.

"I think I should show you personally, sir," the centurion replied with a chuckle. He snapped his fingers and a groom brought his horse to him. "This way."

Titus, along with his chief tribune, master centurion, and a few other officers, followed Antonius to the charred remains of a massive pyre. It was at least a hundred meters long, and an equal distance wide. It was piled with

thousands of burned corpses.

"This is only about half of them," Antonius explained. "The rebels sent three armies, totaling about twenty thousand men, to take Ascalon. No doubt they were seeking a coastal port they could utilize to disrupt our maritime traffic. These burned sods were those we slew outside the city's walls."

"And how many did you kill within?" Domitius asked.

"None," Antonius replied bluntly. "Legionaries fight best on open terrain, not cowering behind walls of stone. We slaughtered about half their army here, then burned the corpses so their decay did not bring pestilence to the city. We attacked their camp that very night. Those bodies we left to rot. I can show you, if you'd like."

"No, that's fine, centurion," Titus replied, nodding in appreciation at the sight of so many enemy dead. After Gallus' disastrous expedition and gross incompetence that led to the slaughter at Beth Horon, the young legate was glad for some positive news. "We knew the rebels were attempting to raise a permanent standing army of professional troops. Unless I'm mistaken, it appears you have destroyed this."

"Until they raise another one, sir," Antonius remarked.

"I wouldn't be so sure about that," the Fifteenth's master centurion stated. "The differing Jewish sects are doubtless busy fighting each other as much as us."

"And if their one unifying force has been wiped out," Titus added, "then they will fall into even greater disarray. It also means they have no mobile reinforcements to send to any of the military districts we attack. I doubt historians will give proper credit where it is due, but you and your men may have very well changed the pacing of the entire war, and given the initiative back to Rome."

The Fifteenth Legion encamped that night on the plain past the smoldering ruins of the Judean army's extermination. Titus was greeted by the mayor of Ascalon, who held a private banquet in the legate's honor for him and his senior officers.

For Gaius and those who had defended the city, having an entire legion in their midst was a welcome sight. He secretly wished they were continuing with them to Ptolemais. Still, no orders had come down from Vespasian or Trajan, and though the Romans now believed the Army of Judea to be completely exterminated, the acting-optio knew this to be rather presumptuous. The Jewish sects most certainly had their differences, yet to

think them unable to raise another army was foolish thinking. And so, as the Fifteenth continued on its way the following morning, Gaius Artorius and the men of the Tenth Legion's Fifth Cohort returned to their daily duties, not knowing if they would get another chance to prove their valor in this war against the Judean rebels.



"We have not yet fully felt the effects of losing our army at Ascalon," Hanan lamented as he walked along the outer wall of the city that faced to the west. His deputy, Joseph bar Gorion accompanied him, along with a couple of men he placed in command of the Jerusalem garrison. "What I do know, is it will only embolden the fanatics," he continued. "That army was meant not just to be a mobile reserve force to meet the Romans wherever they came, but to keep in check those very extremists who would seek to undermine us."

"The Romans are massing their forces at Ptolemais," Joseph noted. "With his forces scattered throughout Galilee keeping the peace and garrisoning each of the towns, Josephus will no doubt be soon begging for reinforcements."

"And sadly, I now have none to send him," Hanan replied morosely. He regretted sending his young protégé, whom he loved like a son, to what could very well be his death. If the reports coming out of Ptolemais were true, the Roman army assembling there would be twice the size of that under Cestius Gallus. They would have triple the number of legionaries, for the Fifteenth Legion's trek along the coast had not gone unnoticed.

"And we have not so much as an organized raiding party to assail them," Joseph said. "What forces we do have are attempting to pursue that filthy robber, Simon bar Giora. Whatever goodwill he gained from savaging the Roman supply trains and capturing their siege equipment, he lost when he fell to plundering our own people."

"Such selfishness will be the ruin of him and those like him," Hanan observed. "He will most likely flee to Masada, where his friends, the Sicarii, are skulking like the cowards they are."

"Good riddance to them," his colleague grunted. "Since they acknowledge neither us nor Rome, I do not foresee them involving themselves in the war any further."

"This is why we must now focus on stabilizing the region around

Jerusalem, while seeing what can be done to aid Josephus."

Hanan then reminded himself, with Yohanan and Silas of Babylonia dead, and Niger of Perea forced into exile by the seditionists in Jerusalem, Josephus was the most competent military leader the Judeans had. And he had driven the renegade, John of Giscala, to ground for the time being. What he lacked in numbers and armament, he more than made up for in cunning and strategic thinking. Josephus was wise enough to know his relatively untrained militias were no match for the battle-hardened, professionally trained legions. He would have to outthink the Romans somehow.



Little had transpired over the course of the month since their triumphant defense of Ascalon, the visit by Titus and the Fifteenth Legion notwithstanding, and Centurion Antonius knew his men were becoming anxious once more. The coastal cities lay in the hands of various factions, though thankfully none yet belonged to the rebels. The Greeks in Caesarea had seen to that. And with all of the internal turmoil that existed between the various rebel factions, no force of any real significance had reemerged to threaten Ascalon again. Antonius' concern now, was boredom and restlessness becoming their greatest enemies once more.

"Sir, there's an imperial vessel approaching the harbor," a legionary said.

Antonius had been gazing over the eastern wall of the city, where ashes still blew about from the enormous fire pit they used to burn the enemy dead two months earlier.

"Good," the centurion replied, turning to face the soldier. "Hopefully it bears news from the army to the north."

"Yes, sir. We've got men waiting at the docks with orders to send any official couriers to the principia."

Antonius nodded and made his way down the stone steps to the long cobblestone road that lined the inside of the wall.

The principia for his detachment was really little more than a converted inn the empire had procured for their use. Since the war had ground much of the merchant and tourist traffic to a halt, the innkeeper was delighted to have Roman officers utilizing his establishment. Although he only made a fraction off the room rates that he would have from wealthy merchants that served as his usual clients, the Romans more than made up for this in their wine and

food consumption. And, as Antonius explained to him before, they were the only source of revenue he was likely to see for the foreseeable future. That they could have used the emperor's authority and simply taken the inn from him was not lost on the innkeeper.

A pair of legionaries stood guard outside the door. Next to them was posted the red square flag with the image of a boar in gold thread, along with *'Legio X'* along the top and the legion's moniker, *'Fretensis'* along the bottom. Literally meaning *'Of the Sea Straight'* the Fretensis Legion had earned their cognomen during the Battle of Naulochus a hundred years prior. The flag, known as the *vexilation*, was only carried when a cohort or number of centuries was detached from its parent legion on temporary duty.

"Ah, noble centurion!" the proprietor said, as Antonius entered through the large wooden door that led down into the lowered floor. Numerous tables were set up for bar patrons. "Some wine and refreshments, perhaps?"

"Yes," the centurion replied, removing his helmet. "I'll be in my office upstairs; have wine, water, and some fresh fruits and nuts delivered there." He walked up the long flight of stairs which led to the floor of rooms. As this was a place for more wealthy patrons, these were all very large suites, decorated with ornate murals and carvings throughout. Inside a rather large room, one that had been meant for visiting dignitaries, sat Antonius' desk, along with a number of procured sitting couches. He always marveled at how he, even on his sizeable wages as a centurion pilus prior, could scarcely afford such accommodations were they not in war.

"Summon the centurions, both legionary and auxilia," he told his aid, who quickly saluted and left the office.

The senior officers of his detachment arrived right around the same time as the imperial messenger.

"Orders for Centurion Pilus Prior Sertor Antonius, from Legate Marcus Ulpius Trajan," the courier said with a sharp salute.

Antonius broke the seal and read the contents aloud to his subordinate centurions.

> *The Fifth Cohort, Legio X, is hereby ordered to return immediately to Ptolemais, where it will join the rest of the legion for the pending campaign in Galilee. Furthermore, I commend you for your exemplary valor and conduct in the defense of Ascalon. Your destruction of the Judean army has doubtless sent our enemies into disarray, as well as*

prevented them from reinforcing their garrisons to the north.

Marcus Ulpius Trajan
Commanding Legate, Legio X Fretensis

"When do you want us to be ready to move?" one of the officers asked.

"Tell your men to pack their gear and be ready to board the ship at dawn," Antonius replied. He then looked to the messenger. "I take it we are returning by ship?"

"Yes, sir," the man replied. "I came aboard a Quinquereme class warship."

"It'll be a tight fit," Nicanor observed, "but at least it's only a couple days by water to Ptolemais."

"And Nicanor," Antonius replied, "it would seem there is a second order here that pertains to you." He slid the smaller scroll across the table, although before the optio could read it, he added, "Congratulations, *centurion*."



"Here is my optio's staff," Nicanor said, handing the long pole with the knobbed end to Gaius. "Sorry I don't have an extra crest for you. I'm going to have to take mine and adjust it so it faces side-to-side instead of front-to-back."

"The lads all know who I am," Gaius replied with a shrug. "I can sort out getting a crest for my helmet when we rejoin the rest of the legion." He then noted the strain in his friend's face. "How are you managing? I know you are up to the challenge of leading these men, even if this came a little sudden."

"It's a possibility we all have to accept during war," Nicanor observed. "Marius was both friend and mentor to me, and I hate that I am only promoted because of his death."

"Well, don't be hastening your own demise," Gaius remarked. "I'm not that anxious to become a centurion."

The two men shared a morbid chuckle before setting about preparing to get their men ready for the journey to Ptolemais. The signifier and tesserarius, along with the decanii, soon joined them. As most of the men in Gaius' former squad had been young and relatively inexperienced, another soldier was selected to take his place as decanus.

The following morning, the soldiers of the Tenth Legion's Fifth Cohort stood gathered in a large formation on the beach just west of the main shipping docks. Had their orders come down before the arrival of the Fifteenth Legion, they would likely have been directed to fall in with General Titus and his men. As it was, the new commanding general was not foolish enough to direct a single cohort to conduct a weeklong march by itself through hostile territory. And so a pair of triremes had been tasked with transporting them, along with the quinquereme. The conditions would be cramped and uncomfortable, but for Gaius and his fellow legionaries, they were anxious to rejoin the main effort of the war. The balance of probability was the rebels would not risk another major assault on Ascalon, especially with Vespasian's gigantic army poised to invade Galilee.

"First Century, up!" shouted Centurion Antonius.

His men quickly rose and shouldered their packs. Upon the subsequent orders, they marched along the beach towards the nearest long dock, guiding their pack animals as they went. They were waiting for each century to get settled in before the next was ordered to stand and make for the docks.

"Fourth Century, up!" Upon the command from newly-promoted Centurion Nicanor, their men were soon on the march.

As the newly-promoted optio, Gaius took his place at the rear of the column. As he stepped from the sandy beach onto the gently rolling dock, he began to wonder about the significance of the great battle they had fought.

While it was certainly a decisively victory that left thousands of enemy dead, he was beginning to think, in the grand scheme of the war, it mattered little. They were fighting an utterly relentless foe, one who was willing to sacrifice any number of lives in order to achieve victory. What Gaius had no knowledge of, was the internal strife that ravaged the Judean populace, hindering their chance at independence from Rome just as much as the imperial army preparing to unleash a wave of fury upon their lands.

There was a queued line of men trying to make their way onto the waiting ship. Those stuck on the boarding ramp balanced uneasily, some showing signs of fear of falling into the sea in all of their armor. One man said as much to one of his mates.

"Not to worry," his companion said, "you're far more likely to land on the dock and break your leg!"

"And then you'd miss the entire damned war!" another retorted.

This drew some chortles from the men as the line finally started moving

again. Even Gaius gave a short laugh at the remark. The truth was, none of them had any idea how long the war would last. The horrific defeat at Beth Horon, followed by their decisive victory as Ascalon, was brought on by both sides grossly underestimating each other. And while both Judean warrior and Roman legionary secretly feared missing out on the fighting, none could begin to fathom the years of death and destruction that lay ahead.



Up north in Ptolemais, Vespasian grinned in appreciation as he rode his horse along the ranks of his massive army. In addition to the three imperial legions, he had eighteen cohorts of auxilia infantry with six regiments of cavalry. Allied reinforcements from Kings Agrippa II, Antiochus, and Sohemus each consisted of at least a thousand infantry, with an equal number of cavalrymen. King Malchus of Arabia had also dispatched five thousand infantry, of whom a large number were archers and a further thousand horsemen. All told, the Roman general now had roughly sixty thousand men under his direct command.

The old general felt invigorated to be back on campaign once more. Despite his age, having turned fifty-seven just prior to his recall to active service, he had lost none of his tenacity or physical stamina. Granted, he was balding on top, with most of his remaining hair gray, and he reckoned he could not move as quickly as he had when he led the Second Legion during the Invasion of Britannia twenty-four years prior. And yet, while age may have slowed him a bit physically, his wealth of experience made him the perfect man to lead such a massive army.

As he and his entourage rode along the camp, Vespasian was greeted by a delegation from Sepphoris, the largest city in Galilee. Like many of the peoples in this region, their manner of dress was a mix of Jewish and Roman. The dozen or so magistrates of the city all wore their hair cropped short, and at least half were clean shaven.

“Hail, noble Vespasian,” an elder said, stepping forward with a short bow. He wore a Roman-style white tunic, with a bluish cloak over his left shoulder. His face was close shaved, and his shoulder length hair was accented with gray. “My name is Yosef ben Yohanan. On behalf of the people of Sepphoris, know that we welcome Rome into our city as our

brethren."

"On behalf of Emperor Nero Claudius Caesar, I thank you," the legate replied, dismounting. "While traitors are thoroughly punished, those who show loyalty can expect an equal measure of the emperor's trust and friendship."

"That is so," Yosef acknowledged. "And as a show of that friendship, we will open the gates of Sepphoris to you. All we ask in return is that you provide us a garrison with which to defend ourselves. Our city is second only to Jerusalem in size and grandeur, and it will prove quite the prize to whoever can hold it."

"And you have no qualms with fighting against your own countrymen and fellow Jews?" Vespasian asked, folding his arms across his chest.

"Some bloodshed now may save much later," Yosef said bluntly. "The peasants in the outlying villages may be easily swayed by the rebels, however, I assure you those within the civilized areas of Galilee, namely Sepphoris, are decidedly pro-Roman. We would rather serve Caesar than deal with the chaos and bitter infighting that has already plagued much of the land."

Vespasian nodded and turned to his auxiliary corps commander. "Placidus, take six thousand of your infantry, along with a thousand cavalry, and reinforce Sepphoris. It will serve as a base of operations for you, from which you will conduct operations to pacify the area."

"Sir," Placidus said with a salute. He gave a short nod to Yosef and left to go address his senior officers.

Vespasian continued to speak at length to Yosef and the other councilmen in an attempt to gather as much intelligence as possible about the political state of the region. While Sepphoris remained loyal, most of the remaining cities had either sided outright with the rebels or had refused to declare for either side. And now there was talk that the city of Tiberias, once thought to be firmly behind Rome, was now wavering in its loyalties. It was now clear to Vespasian that the re-conquest of Judea would be a bloody one.

Chapter XXII: Break Them!

Ptolemais, Northern Judea
March, 67 A.D.
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Placidus was in a unique position. Though his soldiers were auxiliaries, supplemented by allied mercenaries sent over by friendly kings, he had far more men under his command than his peers who commanded the legions. The diversity of his various troops also gave him the ability to be flexible in how he approached his mission.

It was early morning when his large detachment was ready to begin its march to Sepphoris. Vespasian had ordered him to pack sufficient rations to avoid having to forage, or worse, take from the locals whose loyalty they sought to maintain. As such, numerous pack animals accompanied the column, bearing food and other equipment. With six thousand foot soldiers and a further thousand cavalrymen, it was an impressive display of military might that made ready to leave the massive encampment at Ptolemais. And yet, it only accounted for one tenth of the Romans' total forces. The commander himself stood at the head, a groomsman holding his horse, while Placidus waited for final instructions from Vespasian. He wore an unadorned breastplate without any of the fancy trappings normally worn by senior officers. His helmet was a simple trooper's helm, devoid of crest or any elaborate decor.

"Auxilia corps ready to depart, general," Placidus said with a sharp salute, as he was joined by Vespasian. "It's approximately thirty miles to Sepphoris, and we should arrive in a couple days."

"I am sending you, Placidus," Vespasian replied, returning the courtesy, "Because I know you will not simply sit on your ass behind stone walls and wait for the rebels to come to you. Treat the people of Sepphoris with respect, they are our allies. The rest of the region, outside the city's liberty, you will lay waste to. We will link up in Saab as soon as Titus arrives with the Fifteenth Legion. In the meantime, burn every village you find, kill all the men and round up their women and children to be sold as slaves."

At this, Placidus' face broke into a wicked grin. "Trust me, general," he said. "I will break them!"



Sepphoris lay less than thirty miles from Ptolemais, yet Placidus, as he predicted, took the better part of three days to reach the city. It lay in the rolling mountains and was situated between a number of hostile cities, including Jotapata to the north. Tiberias lay to the east, whose citizens' loyalties were, as yet, unknown. And while highly aggressive by nature, the general was no fool. He sent his light troops into the hills and kept them on the flanks of his main column. The advance guard was positioned just far enough ahead to give ample warning of any enemy ambush, while close enough they could still be supported. Because of his belligerent attitude towards their enemy, and his anxiousness to begin his campaign of destruction, Placidus was in no small way disappointed the rebels did not so much as show themselves to his corps.

During the early afternoon of the third day, trumpets sounded from the walls of Sepphoris as the auxilia forces approached along the hard packed dirt road that led to the gates, which were thrown open. The cheering masses along the walls and just inside the gate were welcome to the Roman force, albeit a bit unexpected.

"I did not expect this level of enthusiasm," an equite tribune in command of one of the cavalry regiments said as he rode up to his general.

Placidus, who simply grinned, said, "The larger cities of Galilee fall under the influence of King Agrippa. They are about as close to 'Roman' as one can hope to achieve in this bloody awful land."

"Welcome, soldiers of Rome!" an elder said, as he stepped forward, placing a hand on his heart and giving a slight bow.

Placidus dismounted and removed his helmet. "Lucius Vetutius Placidus," he replied. "I am to establish a temporary base of operations here. I take it you have sufficient housing for me and my men?"

"For you and your officers, yes," the elder replied. "Your men are welcome to make camp within the walls of the city."

The Roman general simply nodded and handed his helmet to his manservant before following the elder into the city. While escorts from the city garrison led the men of his force to a large city park where they could pitch their camps, Placidus and his senior officers were led to the city hall,

where the council wished to discuss the Romans' plans for the subjugation of Galilee.

Placidus had no love for the Jews, regardless of whether they were ally or enemy, and he detested King Agrippa as an opportunistic snake who would change his allegiance as readily as he would his clothes. Despite his prejudices and thinly concealed racism, he was still quite impressed by the architecture of Sepphoris. It was decidedly eastern in design, the columns and structures resembling a mix of Parthian and Assyrian design. The city hall was almost pyramid in shape, though very boxy, with three tiered levels stacked atop each other. A short flight of steps led through the modest entranceway that was capped by a defensive wall with triangular shaped blocks lining the ramparts.

"At least it's not mud huts of the Germanic barbarians," he said quietly, as he entered.

"General Placidus," a councilman said, rising from his bench. There were three levels of benches, upon each sat about a dozen men in long flowing robes. "We welcome you to Sepphoris and wish to offer our assistance in suppressing this horrid rebellion."

"My orders are to provide some men to help safeguard the city," Placidus replied, "but my overall mission is to lay waste to every town and village in this region that dares to oppose the power of Rome. You can assist me in providing guides and intelligence about the region."

"Of course," the councilman replied. "The smaller townships are all under the influence of the seditionists, every last one of them. Scorch them all, if you wish."

"Most of the loyalists are all within the walls of Sepphoris," another spoke up. "And those that are not have been sufficiently warned."

"And you have no issue with us wantonly killing your fellow Jews?" Placidus asked. He knew the answer, yet it gave him a sense of glee to hear it spoken.

"Fellow Jews," the first councilman spat. "They are traitors to God, the king, and the emperor. Like a rotten infection, they must be cut away!"

This led to a series of affirmative mutterings from the assembled leaders of Sepphoris. Words such as *traitor*, *scum*, and *villains*, along with various profanities in Hebrew and Aramaic dotted the numerous side conversations. Placidus grinned and chuckled to himself. The various Jewish factions were so filled with hatred towards each other, they would readily sell one another

out to settle their petty scores. It was perversely satisfying to him that among the instruments he would use to exterminate the rebels were their own kin and countrymen. The following day he would unleash the hammer of Roman vengeance.



“There it is,” a mounted centurion said the next day, as the outer buildings came into view. “These people will be the first to feel the emperor’s wrath.”

Placidus took a deep breath as he surveyed the sprawling township in the distance. Doubtless the Jews had posted lookouts on the tops of the taller buildings and would now be sounding the alarm that the Romans were coming. Those able to flee would try to, yet many would be either unwilling or unable to leave.

This particular village was near the small tributary that led back to Ptolemais and eventually to the sea. It was also just a few short miles from the base of the Galilean mountain ranges. Vespasian’s orders were for Placidus to begin his scorched earth campaign, but to avoid attacking the major strongholds unless assured of success. The general in command of the auxilia corps had divided his men into smaller battle groups of infantry cohorts supplemented by cavalry, as well as mounted and dismounted archers. Their orders were simple, and he reiterated them to his assembled regimental commanders.

“You know what to do,” he said. “Every man and boy near fighting age dies, along with the weak and infirm. Any healthy women and children will be taken prisoner to be sold to the slave drivers. Burn all crops and kill any livestock we don’t take with us, and then torch the village.”

“What is the plan of attack, general?” one of the cavalry centurions asked.

“Cavalry will cover the wings and envelope the town,” Placidus ordered. “Each regiment will be supported by mounted archers, in case the enemy has skirmishers lurking and waiting for us outside the settlement. Seal it off; no one gets in or out. Infantry will simultaneously conduct the main assault with dismounted archers in support.”

“Ground your packs,” an infantry centurion ordered his men. “Each squad will have one torchbearer.”

Torches were quickly distributed as the men laid down their packs,

donned their helmets, and hefted their spears. Orders were shouted to the cavalry, who divided themselves into two wings and fanned out on either side of the infantry.

A cornicen's horn sounded, and the cohorts began to advance. They moved at a brisk walk, keeping roughly six feet between each other, their footfalls sounding an ominous cadence. Placidus rode behind the first wave of infantry, who were arrayed into four ranks. As they grew closer, he could see people frantically trying to gather up their families and escape the onslaught.

A centurion shouted, *"At the double time…march!"*

The infantry cohorts increased their speed to a moderate jog, still keeping in line with each other and closing the distance rapidly. A series of horn blasts signaled the men to increase their pace further, and they started to move at a rapid jog, their armor and weapons clanking in a rhythm that matched their steps. In the distance, the general could see clouds of dust being kicked up by his cavalry as they encircled the town. People who had attempted to flee were now racing back towards the perceived safety of their homes. Surrounded by hostile troops, they were in a state of panic. Placidus' face was hard and focused. He continually eyed each situation as it developed. He then drew his gladius and nodded to his cornicen, who blasted three quick notes from his trumpet.

"Charge!"

The auxiliary troopers gave a loud battle cry, working themselves into a rage as they sprinted the last few dozen meters into the town. There was no unified resistance, no armed warriors rushing out to face them, not even skirmishers on the rooftops. Whatever fighting men that had lived within the city had fled, long before the Romans arrived.

"Heartless bastards, leaving their families to their brutal fate," a tribune scoffed, as he rode up beside Placidus.

"Not all," the general replied, nodding towards a hut on the outskirts of the town that was already burning.

A lone man with a short sword stood protectively in front of his wife and two young children. A squad of infantrymen swarmed him and cut him down, stabbing his thrashing body with their spears.

The woman screamed and leapt at the men, only to be tossed aside and brutally beaten by a pair of soldiers, who then proceeded to rend her garments, exposing her naked body. In what was a testament to the brutality

of the times, Placidus felt nothing as the woman was savagely raped by the auxiliaries. It was simply the way things were, and if the roles were reversed, one would bet the Judean rebels would show no mercy towards Roman women.

Similar scenes played out throughout the town. What few men there were, the soldiers killed, the women beaten and violated, often while their horrified children watched. Many were slain when they put up too much resistance, with any sick and elderly meeting a similar fate. Those who tried to flee were run down by the Roman cavalry; lancers and mounted archers making sport of it all, as if they were hunting deer or wild boar. A tribune made note of this.

"Except a deer has a chance of outrunning a horse," Placidus said grimly.

Dozens of buildings were soon burning, and in the livestock market, soldiers were gathering up whatever they could take with them and slaughtering the rest. The small warehouse used for storing grain was pilfered and set alight. There had been practically nothing of value for the soldiers to plunder, which only increased the aggravation they took out upon those they had not yet killed.

"Easy men," Placidus said, as he calmly rode up to a group of soldiers who were beating a pair of rather spirited women doing their best to fight against them. "We cannot sell them into slavery if they're completely broken."

"Right you are, sir," a decurion replied, before ordering his men to bind the women and drag them away to where the other prisoners were being gathered.

Approximately a thousand women and children were lined up with ropes placed around their necks, tied to the prisoners in front and behind them. Most of the women looked battered, and Placidus reckoned even the homeliest had not been able to avoid the lascivious assaults of his auxiliaries. They were not violated out of any sense of sexual gratification, but as a means of humiliation and brutal subjugation. Only when sword points were placed upon the necks of their children did they cease resisting and allow themselves to be bound. It was eerily quiet, for any who cried out were subsequently beaten across the face and head. Even the youngest of the children were now silent.

"It's a start, sir," one of the centurions said with a shrug, as he walked over to the general.

“This is just the beginning,” Placidus replied. “There are five more villages within a ten-mile radius of here. Once we destroy them, we’ll return to Sepphoris to see what further intelligence has been gathered, and then send this lot to Ptolemais.”

Four days later, after the last of the villages had burned, Placidus elected to give his regiments a short rest as they arrived back in Sepphoris. There had been surprisingly little resistance at any of the towns they sacked. Casualties had been light and were due more to accidents rather than enemy action. Cohorts tasked with taking prisoners to Ptolemais were, surprisingly, not attacked by enemy forces, which made him suspect they were all concentrated in a few locations and unable to harass his troops. Just how concentrated they were was made apparent the morning after his corps returned to Sepphoris.



Josephus knew it was a risky and provocative strategy, attempting to take Sepphoris, but he also knew that, as the largest city in Galilee, it was of crucial strategic importance to whomever held it. He traveled with half his infantry, thirty thousand men, along with all of his cavalry, still a paltry two hundred and fifty. He had left ten thousand men at Jotapata, which looked to be the strongest and most defensible city under his direct control. The remaining twenty thousand were dispersed throughout Galilee, reinforcing the city militias against both potential Roman attacks, as well as renegade bands of zealots and other brigands. Josephus still believed his army would be double in size, if only the fanatics would side with him against their common enemies. John of Giscala had, thus far, ignored his entreaties for peace and of a proposed alliance between their forces.

“The council of Sepphoris is made up of Agrippa’s lapdogs,” Levi grumbled, as they rode at the head of their vast army. “I tell you, this entire expedition is a waste of time and resources, as well as leaving us exposed to Roman attacks! You said so yourself. We do not have the strength to face them in the open.”

“If we do not at least make an attempt to allow the people of Sepphoris to see reason, then we have handed the city to the enemy without a struggle,” Josephus remarked. “Word will spread that we are unwilling to fight for all of

Galilee, which will turn more of the populace against us. Besides, the Roman army is still encamped at Ptolemais. They've sent some raiders into Galilee, yet their main force hasn't moved."

"The army needed to stretch its legs a bit," Yaakov added, attempting to defuse the tension. "We've also been able to use the time in camp to drill our companies and, I have to say, they are learning well."

"Not to sound too pessimistic," Levi persisted, "but if the enemy did move from Ptolemais and catch us in the open, we would be cut to shreds."

"Few armies in the world are able to face a legion head on," Josephus conceded, "but our men are eager and disciplined. They will make the Romans pay for every city and stronghold they wish to take in blood. Believe me when I tell you that we will make this war so arduous and hateful to them, they will sue for terms long before our fighters break."

It was a touch of bravado, perhaps, but Josephus had seen his men grow as soldiers, and he believed in them. Many, even amongst his senior captains, were a bit too brazen and believed they could go head-to-head against a legion, but as long as he kept them away from the Romans' main army, only facing them when the situation was most advantageous, Josephus knew he could give Hanan and the council in Jerusalem the victory they so desperately needed. This march was also an excellent test for the young general's logistical skills. Thirty thousand men required a tremendous amount of food and water, and so as part of the preparations for the spring offensive, he had sent men to scour the countryside for every pack animal they could find. Josephus also modelled their marching camps after the Romans', compelling his men to dig proper latrines each night and enforcing sanitation. Thus far, his army had proven itself capable logistically in the short term, though he understood that they would have to rely heavily upon the cities they were garrisoned to defend. The armies in Galilee simply could not remain in the field for extended periods, hence why it was important to ensure the loyalty of the major cities as soon as possible.

Five miles from Sepphoris, they passed a village that had been incinerated by the Roman auxilia corps the day before. Flames still flickered in the blackened ruins, bodies of both people and livestock lay strewn about. They were already starting to bloat in the sun, and the sight turned Josephus' stomach.

"Desolation under the guise of peace," he whispered to himself.

Yaakov overheard him and simply gave a short nod of understanding. For the young man who commanded the general's personal guard, the devastation was another sign that there could be no compromise with the Romans. And while his growing fanaticism lead him to listen more openly to the words of men like John of Giscala, he was still fiercely loyal to Josephus, whom he loved like an older brother, and trusted absolutely.

"There it is, sir," a rider said, pointing towards the city walls. The road leading to Sepphoris ran through a fairly open plain, and the militiamen manning the walls would have spotted their large army long before.

"They appear to be expecting us," Yaakov observed, noting the scores of men who now lined the walls.

"But do they welcome us as friend or enemy?" Levi remarked cautiously.

"We'll know soon enough," Josephus said, as they continued on.

They approached slowly. Their men nervously watching the soldiers on the ramparts. Josephus halted his men at just beyond the range of archers.

A voice called down to them. *"Hold there! Who comes unbidden to the City of Sepphoris so heavily armed and escorted?"*

"Josephus ben Mathias," Josephus hailed back. "I come as commander of the Judean armies of Galilee, at the behest of the Jewish governing council in Jerusalem. We come in peace and friendship!"

There was a pause as some men on the rampart between the gatehouse's towers conferred. Josephus overheard a highly irritated voice with a foreign accent say in Latin, *"Tell him to take his friendship and fuck off!"*

"I speak your tongue, Roman," Josephus replied back in Latin. "As it is your foreign army that has invaded our lands, who has the right to tell who to 'fuck off'?"

"Rebellious scum!" the Roman officer spat. "Galilee and Judea belong to Rome! The people of Sepphoris understand this. They welcomed the armies of Caesar with open arms. They know who their true friends are."

"Take your armies from our lands!" the Jewish man who'd first spoken added, speaking in Aramaic once more. "Sepphoris was and is Roman, and to Caesar will our loyalty remain!"

"Curse these traitors!" Yaakov said, just loud enough he could be heard by the men on the ramparts. He then said to Josephus, "If the Roman army is still in Ptolemais, then their garrison here cannot be much. We have thirty thousand men, let us bloody our swords and take the city from these defectors!"

“No,” Josephus replied. “If we had the armies of Giscala and his zealots, I would agree to a siege. But we don’t, and I’ll not waste the lives of our men in a futile assault against those walls. We will return to Jotapata, and from our strongholds we will let our enemies spill their blood.”

Feeling slightly dejected, but concurring with his commander’s assessment, Yaakov shouted orders to the mounted leaders who, in turn, directed their companies to turn and withdraw. The rebuke was something Josephus had foreseen, but like he told his friends, confidence of the loyalists in Galilee would have suffered had they done nothing.

“It was a faint hope at best,” Levi consoled him. “But at least now we know who our friends and allies are.”

Up on the walls, Placidus watched as the rebel army slowly departed. He had, at first, been extremely irritated he’d been disturbed while trying to catch some sleep, following their return to Sepphoris earlier that day. Now he was laughing sinisterly, for the Jews had shown their hand too soon and confirmed some of his earlier suspicions. He turned to two of his subordinate officers.

“Have reconnaissance cavalry follow these bastards and let us see where they lead us. We’ll continue our scorching of Galilee with additional vengeance.” He then paused and chuckled further. “Josephus ben Mathias… our enemy’s leader now has a name.”



With thousands of prisoners already on their way to Ptolemais, Placidus turned his attention back to laying waste to Galilee. Two days after the rebuke of Josephus’ army, his auxilia corps was on the rampage once more.

“It’s Jotapata, sir!” a scout reported excitedly, as he rode up to his commanding general. “Their army has scattered to various walled cities, yet Jotapata appears to be the strongest. A number of their leaders are likely assembled there.”

“Excellent.” Placidus grinned. “And perhaps we can even capture or kill this General Josephus, bringing his head on a platter to Vespasian by the time we rally in Saab. Make ready to assault Jotapata at once!”

It was half a day’s march from his camp to the city. If he attacked by late afternoon, then perhaps by sundown Jotapata would be theirs. It was a risky

plan, and Placidus knew it. He had no knowledge of the layout of Jotapata's defenses, nor was he aware of their total strength. Yet, if he could catch the enemy by surprise, he could very well take the stronghold with minimal loss, attaining much in the way of honor and glory for both himself and his regimental commanders. He ordered his men to construct some hastily made siege ladders. He was uncertain as to the height of the walls, but settled on twenty feet as a safe estimate.



Josephus had kept his meetings in Jerusalem with Hanan to himself, never telling even his closest friends that theirs was simply a delaying tactic in order to bring the Romans to the negotiating table. Levi had proven loyal at Tiberias, but he also harbored sympathies for John of Giscala and the zealots. Yaakov was young and very impressionable. He had never been out of Judea and Galilee, and so failed to grasp the vast size and power of the Roman Empire. Josephus felt a particularly strong bond with him and wished he could confide in Yaakov more.

Aside from the failed attempt to sway the people of Sepphoris, his administration of Galilee had progressed very well. By appointing local elders, rather than personal acquaintances from outside of the region, to rule over each city and district, he had gained much in the way of favor and trust of the people. It also made it far easier to recruit young men to serve in the militias, for they would, in essence, be fighting under the command of those they respected, rather than a political appointee from Jerusalem.

Josephus was spending a few days at Jotapata before moving on to see about the situation in the city of Garis. Once Vespasian launched his army, it would be unwise for the Judean general to allow himself to be cornered.

"We've been followed," a lookout reported, having just come from the hills. "It's the Roman auxilia from Sepphoris."

"No doubt they are anxious for a fight," Josephus scoffed. "What's their strength?"

"About six thousand men total, to include infantry and horse."

"Rather brazen of them to come after us with such a paltry force," Yaakov sneered.

"We'll meet aggression with aggression," Josephus stated. "If they are advancing with so few in number, they must think they have the element of

surprise. But it is we who will surprise them."

There was a gentle rise that led up to the open plain in front of Jotapata's northwestern gate. Since the city was surrounded by a steep ravine on all other sides, this was the only viable avenue of approach. It was here that Josephus rallied his men. Ten thousand of his forces had come with him to Jotapata, with the rest making their way to Garis, near Sepphoris. A further ten thousand defenders of Jotapata joined him in laying his surprise for the Roman auxilia.

He soon spotted the enemy vanguard; a single cohort of about four hundred infantry. They marched in loose order with shields at the ready. The men in the third and fourth ranks carried about a dozen siege ladders amongst them. Josephus had to give his adversaries credit; they may have been reckless in rushing to Jotapata, but they were not stupid. They were alert and ready for battle, shields and weapons in the front ranks held ready, as if they were expecting to be attacked.

"Now!" Josephus shouted.

His slingers and dart throwers unleashed a volley upon the enemy vanguard, who immediately dropped their siege ladders and dropped behind the protection of their shields. A handful of men fell wounded, and these were dragged back to safety by their companions.

Numerous battle cries sounded and the Judean forces rushed down the slope and moved to envelope the Romans on their flanks. A trumpet was heard in the near distance and soon, battle was joined by their main force. The auxilia infantry formed into battle lines, using their spears to keep the Jewish rebels at bay. Josephus ordered his heaviest troops, those with armor and larger shields, to lead the attack. Theirs was a mix of armament taken from the Herodian armory, along with twenty or so hamata mail shirts taken from Roman auxiliaries slain in previous battles.

As Placidus rode forward to observe the developing battle, he realized he was in a bad position. While the plain leading towards Jotapata was wide open, his forces could not get to it, held up at the bottom of the slope leading to flat ground. The rebels maintained the high ground, and their front ranks were well armed and equipped. A quick scan of his frontage and Placidus realized he was outnumbered at least three-to-one.

"It's a bloody stalemate, sir," one of the mounted tribunes said, as he rode

over to his commander. “The enemy is not being overly aggressive; both sides are, essentially, just banging away on each other’s shield wall.”

“And with their numbers and terrain advantage, they’ll sooner or later wear us down,” Placidus said, his face turning into a snarl of anger. “Shit!” He turned to his cornicen. “Sound recall. Drummers, give them a slow marching cadence so the men can withdraw in good order.”

Horns sounded, and the infantrymen started to step back, keeping in step with the slow booming of the drums. The Jews remained on the slope, not wishing to risk engaging their enemy on even ground where they would have the advantage. A smattering of sling stones added insult to the Romans’ injured pride, but no pursuit came. The battle, which had amounted to little more than a minor skirmish, was tactically inconclusive, yet it was a huge moral victory for the Jews. They gave raucous cheers and shouted insults at the withdrawing Roman forces. Still they retreated in good order, and Josephus knew better than to order a pursuit.

Placidus’ pride was wounded more than anything. His losses were hardly catastrophic, seven dead with about twenty wounded; the Judean fighters suffering a similar number of casualties. Yet, he hated ceding the field to enemies that he held in such utter contempt.



Their scrap with the Romans may have been a minor affair in terms of casualties, but for the people of Jotapata, there was sense of elation, as if they had driven the enemy all the way back to Syria. Josephus, though ever cautious, allowed him and his men a bit of respite. That evening Yaakov was leaving the house they had been put up in, when he was met by a rather fetching young woman.

“You have saved us from the Romans,” she said, her face in a broad smile. Like Yaakov, she appeared to be in her early twenties. Her skin was a light olive complexion, and her lighter brown hair reached just past her shoulders. Yaakov found himself grinning in embarrassment, enthralled by her beauty.

“We are here to protect the people from those who would do them harm,” he said, fearing his words sounded falsely noble and forced.

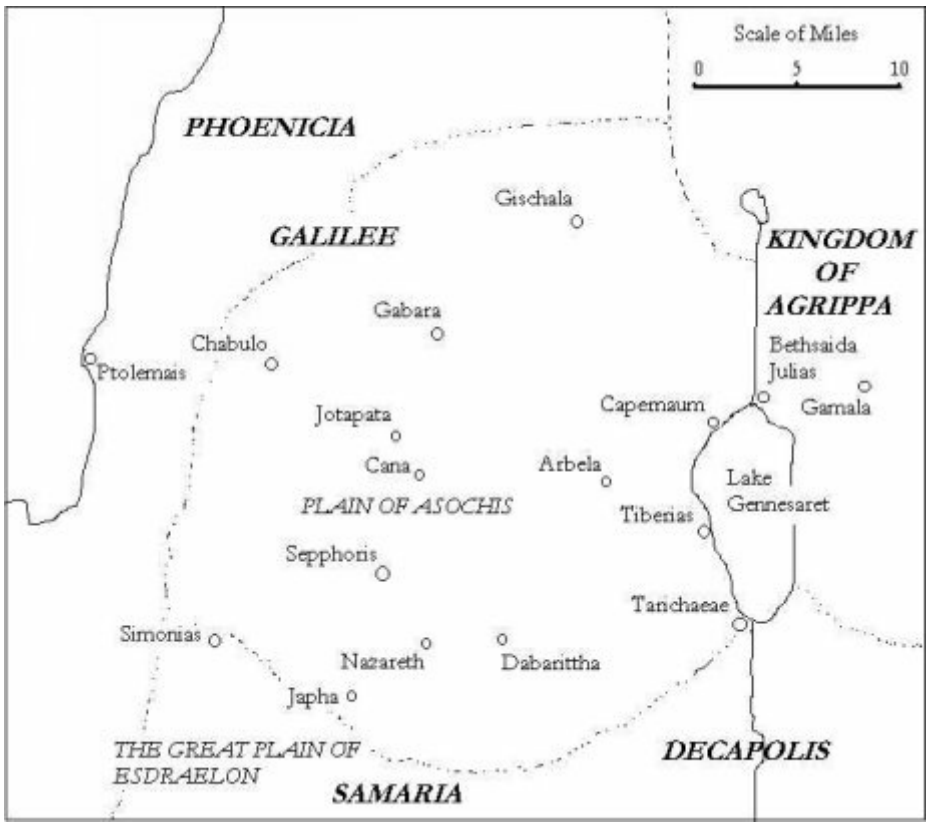
The young woman simply smiled once more. “My name’s Devorah.”

“Are you from Jotapata?” Yaakov asked.

Devorah shook her head sadly. “No, I came from a small village near Sepphoris. I was down by a small stream, fetching water, when the Romans came. I know not what happened to my family. All I could do was run. There were a few others who escaped, but I have heard nothing of my parents.” Her eyes were wet with tears, and Yaakov instinctively placed a reassuring hand on her shoulder.

“You’re safe now,” he replied. “I promise I won’t let anything happen to you.”

Devorah took his hand in hers, and in that moment, the young guard’s commander knew he would do anything to protect her.



Map of Galilee

Chapter XXIII: Know Your Enemy

Ptolemais, Northern Judea
March, 67 A.D.
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While Placidus commenced his campaign of terror in Galilee, Titus arrived in Ptolemais with the Fifteenth Legion. It had taken a couple of days to ready the legion ready to march, seeing as how they had remained static near Alexandria for so long. He also delayed a couple of days in Ascalon in order to see, firsthand, just how bad the rebel losses were following the assault, as well as to make an assessment of the defenses, should the Jews attempt to take it once more. A few times they spotted mounted scouts, but no actual resistance materialized to face the legion. In all, it had taken them eighteen days to reach Ptolemais, three days faster than Titus first reckoned.

Vespasian was sitting just inside his principia tent, counting and sorting a pile of coins, when he heard the sounds of trumpets and cheering men. As officers were often transferred between the various legions, a number of centurions from the Fifth and Tenth Legions came out to greet their friends within the Fifteenth. The men in the ranks were elated to have more legionaries joining the fight, rather than having to place so much trust in the auxilia and notoriously unreliable eastern allies.

"General!" Titus said, as he entered the tent and removed his helmet. His hair was matted with sweat, and his entire body filthy from the dusty roads. He looked exhausted, yet he still sharply saluted his father and commander-in-chief. "Fifteenth Legion reporting for orders; all present and accounted for!"

He then walked over to a table that had a pitcher of water and goblets, thirstily downing two cups full.

"Well done," Vespasian replied, making a couple of notes on a wax tablet. "You made good time. Any news to report from the south?"

"We did a lot of forced marches," his son noted, taking a seat across from him. "I did take a thorough look at the carnage around Ascalon that I'm sure you heard about."

"Yes, I hear it was quite the slaughter."

"It was," Titus remarked. "The pyre of enemy dead who attacked the city

was still smoldering when we arrived. And their commanding centurion told me where his force attacked the enemy camp the next day. It was a gutsy move, but it paid off and then some. I dare say the stench of the rebel dead will linger for months."

"The smell of a dead enemy is always sweet," his father replied with macabre humor.

Titus then nodded towards the pile of money Vespasian was counting and gave him a puzzled look. "What have you there?" he asked.

"Well, I didn't want the entire army sitting idle while waiting for the arrival of the Fifteenth," Vespasian explained. "I sent Placidus to Sepphoris to reinforce the garrison and reassure the loyal citizens that Rome stands by them. I also directed his forces to begin scorching the surrounding villages. He has been rather…*busy*, you might say." He chuckled at his last remark.

"Has he now."

Titus and Placidus were not on the friendliest of terms. It wasn't that they were enemies; Placidus felt Titus was far too young to be in command of a legion and only got his posting because of who his father was. Whereas Titus believed the auxilia corps commander was oftentimes reckless and put his troops at unneeded risks. Each man was, to a degree, both right and wrong about the other. Yet they were able to put their differences aside, if for no other reason than out of respect for their commanding general.

"A dozen villages are now piles of ash," Vespasian said. "Thousands of rebellious Jews lie dead, and best of all, Placidus has netted us nearly ten thousand slaves, who are fetching a good price. I'm just making some notes on what we sold this latest lot for, then dividing the shares up amongst Placidus, his officers and men, and of course their commanding general."

"Good," Titus replied, finally matching his father's grin. "Well, you said so yourself; a bit of warfare is a good way to make some real money."

"It's a lot more profitable than beekeeping or selling mules," Vespasian observed.

"I don't suppose I've missed all the action," Titus said.

"Not at all," his father replied, making a final note on his tablet. He then leaned back in his chair and folded his hands across his chest. "We've sold a few slaves and burned a handful of villages, but that is nothing to these Jews. They are very tough and will not break easily. There has been little in the way of resistance, which tells me that all of their fighting men are headed for the major cities. We suspect that whoever is in command in Galilee is rallying

his forces in a single place, we just aren't sure where yet."

"You think they want to stand and fight us?" Titus asked. "They'd be foolish to do so, especially after what happened at Ascalon."

"I doubt we will be so fortunate to face such a witless and foolish commander," Vespasian conjectured. "If they were that reckless, they would have attacked Placidus by now. As it is, they've let him rampage everything within ten miles of Sepphoris."

Their conversation was interrupted as an auxiliary cavalryman quickly dismounted outside the principia and stepped into the tent. He gave a quick salute before producing a small scroll. "Message for General Vespasian from General Placidus," he said, handing the parchment to the commander-in-chief. "He asks that you come with the main army at once to Saab."

"So I can see," Vespasian replied, reading the short note. He then told the trooper, "Have Placidus leave two cohorts of infantry at Sepphoris. He is to take the rest of his corps and meet us at Saab in four days. I want a thorough reconnaissance sweep from Chabulon to Jotapata, all the way to Selame."

"Yes, sir." The soldier saluted and left the tent.

Titus had his head cocked to one side. "News from Placidus?"

"It would seem the main Judean army in Galilee found them," his father replied. "Between thirty and forty thousand men, all well-armed, sought to take Sepphoris by negotiation. They were rebuffed by the city council, and when they saw our soldiers manning the ramparts, they withdrew."

"I hope Placidus keeps his reconnaissance cavalry right on their backside," Titus remarked. "If they scatter, so be it, we'll just continue the purge of Galilee. But if they concentrate on a single stronghold, then we will know where to strike."

"And that, my boy, is why you have the makings of a fine commanding general." Vespasian did not readily hand out compliments, and so his words meant much to his son.

Titus found it to be an added privilege, if one with a lot of added pressure, serving as a legate under his own father. He constantly felt the need to perform equal to or better than his peers, lest good order and discipline suffer because rumors spread that he only got his command due to nepotism. It mattered not that Consul Paulinus had secured his appointment well before Vespasian was recalled to active service. Perception was everything when it came to morale within the ranks. Titus knew his own potential, and he certainly did not lack in combat experience. However, he had yet to fight his

first action as a commanding legate. Soon enough he would be able to prove his mettle, for good or ill.

"There's something else in this message," Vespasian noted. "At least one of the Judean commanders is named Josephus ben Mathias. Have you heard of him?"

"No," Titus replied, "but that doesn't mean that there aren't those within the army who have."

"I want to find out whatever we can about this man," Vespasian said. "In any campaign it is crucial to know one's enemy as much as it is to know one's self." He turned to an aid. "Send word throughout the army, if anyone has knowledge regarding one Josephus ben Mathias, they are to report to me at once."

"Sir." The aid saluted and left.

Vespasian appeared to be lost in thought once more. "*Josephus,*" he muttered. "Somehow, I think I will get to know this name intimately."



The wait while encamped at Ptolemais was almost as bad for Gaius' legionaries as when they had been stuck in Ascalon. Rumors had been spreading that they would soon be breaking camp and invading Galilee. It was almost maddening, for the nearest rebel villages were barely ten miles from where the army was cantoned. That a corps of auxiliary troops was already laying waste to the countryside, while profiting off the sale of thousands of slaves, irritated the legionaries immensely. To keep their men occupied, Nicanor and Gaius set up training stakes and continued to drill their men on a continuous basis. When they weren't practicing individual close combat, they trained in employing various formations; moving from column to battle formation, conducting passages-of-lines, covering down when individual soldiers were killed or wounded and, of course, the famous testudo.

It was during such practice that Centurion Antonius found them. "Nicanor!" he shouted.

"At ease, men," Nicanor said to his century as he and Gaius walked quickly over to their cohort commander. "Sir?"

"General Vespasian just received a bit of intelligence that he's hoping

some of our men who've been stationed in the east can elaborate on. Check with your men, see if any of them are familiar with one named Josephus ben Mathias." Antonius' words hit Nicanor like a dagger in the heart.

"No," he whispered, closing his eyes. "Please, not him…"

"*You* know him?" Antonius asked, raising an eyebrow.

"All too well," Nicanor replied with a nod.

"I'll inform General Trajan," the pilus prior said. "You'd best get your ass over to Vespasian's principia and report to him at once."

"Yes, sir." Nicanor's face was pale, and he looked as if he might be ill. Antonius simply nodded and made his way to where another of his centuries was training.

"I'll go with you," Gaius offered.

"What for?"

"Because you look like shit, and I figure you might need a little friendly support," his optio replied. "Besides, I've never met General Vespasian, and this may be my one chance."

The two men shared a nervous laugh before directing the signifier to dismiss the century.

"Why did it have to be him?" Nicanor sighed, as they made their way through the camp towards Vespasian's headquarters.

"Is he the Jew you told me about that you were friends with before the war?" Gaius asked.

"That'd be him. Damn it all, I've known Josephus most of my life; he is like a brother to me. I had hoped we would not have to fight each other…"

It took them about twenty minutes to find their way to the center of the massive camp. Gaius wondered aloud if they'd be able to find their way back. His attempts at levity did not help his friend, as much as he tried. The commander-in-chief's tent was easy to spot. It was much larger than any of the others, at least twice the size of a legion's principia. Several legionaries stood guard outside, and they came to attention as the two officers approached. Nicanor let them know who he was, and one of the men stepped inside to announce them. After about a minute he came out and said, "You can go in, centurion."

The inside of Vespasian's headquarters was a lot more austere than Nicanor and Gaius had expected, for the commanding general was not one for useless clutter and pomp. The only statuary was a single pedestal with a bust of the emperor. There was nothing else in the way of décor. Towards the

back of the tent was a long table, used to conduct meetings with the legates and auxiliary commanders. Vespasian sat behind the table, his son, General Titus, stood behind him, hands clasped behind his back. The centurion and optio strode across the way, stopped in front of the table, and saluted.

"Centurion Nicanor reporting, sir!"

Vespasian stood and returned the courtesy. "At ease, men," he said. He then glanced over at Gaius. "And who are you?"

"My optio, sir," Nicanor explained, "Gaius Artorius Armiger."

"Artorius," Vespasian said, furrowing his brow. "I feel I should know that name."

"My father and grandfather both served with the Twentieth Legion during the Britannic Conquest, sir," Gaius said. "Grandfather was the Twentieth's master centurion."

"Of course," Vespasian said with a chuckle. "Can't say I knew your father, but I knew your grandfather quite well. We fought beside each other during the assault on the barbarian fortress of *Mai Dun*. I hope you continue to do honor to his valiant name."

"Yes, sir."

"Now, centurion," Vespasian said, looking once more at Nicanor. "I understand you know this Josephus, who it appears is a key leader of the resistance in Galilee."

"Yes, sir," Nicanor replied. "I was raised in the east. Josephus and I have known each other since we were boys."

"You two are friends then," the commanding general observed.

"We were," Nicanor replied.

"Were?" Vespasian said, raising an eyebrow. "You mean you're not still?"

"Well, there is a war going on, sir."

"Yes, well, Julius Caesar still considered Pompey Magnus to be one of his closest friends, even when they were locked in a bloody civil war with each other. Have a seat, both of you." Vespasian snapped his fingers and aids brought a pair of camp chairs over for the men.

Nicanor noticed that Titus remained silent the entire time, simply observing and taking in all that was said.

"Now," Vespasian said, once the men were seated, "what can you tell me about this Josephus? Tell me everything that a soldier needs to know about his adversary."

“He’s very clever,” Nicanor replied. “He’s foremost an intellectual and a scholar, but that does not mean he doesn’t know how to fight.”

“The mind is the most powerful weapon a man has,” Titus said, speaking up at last.

“Quite,” his father concurred. “Elaborate for me.”

“Even when we were young he read all the time, and not just Jewish histories. He told me once that he read Caesars, *The Conquest of Gaul* at least four times. I know he’s also read up on Tiberius’ campaigns in Raetia, as well as other Roman military works.”

“So he’s at least somewhat familiar with our tactics,” Titus noted, folding his arms across his chest.

“I would say so, sir,” Nicanor remarked. “He’s also been to Rome. A couple of years ago he was sent to negotiate the release of Jewish political prisoners.”

“And was he successful?” Vespasian asked, to which the centurion nodded. “Then he, no doubt, has an orator’s tongue.”

“That he does,” Nicanor said, continuing. “And if he’s studied Julius Caesar, then he knows more than just our tactics; he understands how logistics and supply lines work. It would explain why he has been given an independent command so far away from the central government.”

“And how he was able to field such a large force, even for the short march to Sepphoris,” Vespasian noted.

“Sir, if I may add,” Gaius said, “at Ascalon we saw that the rebels were trying to raise a permanent standing army. They know the only way to fight professional soldiers is with professionals of their own. It would not surprise me if Josephus was sent to Galilee to raise such a force here.”

“A sound observation, optio,” Vespasian acknowledged. He then said to Nicanor, “If Josephus is able to raise a standing army, where do you think he would deploy it?”

“He’s no fool, so I doubt he would concentrate in only one place,” the centurion said. “There are various factions of seditionists in the region, and I doubt that he’s been able to control all of them. One thing you’ll note about the peoples of this region is that many of their sects hate each other even more than they do us. They’ll face annihilation before they ever join together.”

“So where then?” the general persisted.

“He may try and use terrain to his advantage, strike us with the occasional

ambush. As long as we take our time, cover the flanks of our approach, and not make the same mistakes as Gallus, this should not be an issue. Our army is also double the size of the previous invasion force, so he may not even bother attempting to fight us in the open. Most likely he'll hold up in the various walled cities around Galilee and dare us to come to him."

Titus then asked, "If he were able to unite with the seditionists, or receive reinforcements from Jerusalem, would that embolden him to fight us beyond his strongholds?"

"I believe so," Nicanor nodded. "But after we slaughtered their forces at Ascalon, they may be hard pressed to find reinforcements. Judea has sufficient manpower to fight us, but like I said, they are very much divided. The psychological damage was far greater than the loss of life."

"At least we know we're not facing some mindless barbarian," Vespasian observed. "This Josephus appears to be a worthy opponent."

"I would say so, sir," Nicanor agreed.

"That will be all for now," Vespasian said. "I'll let Trajan know that I may need your input the closer we get to cornering our adversary and so will keep you close. Dismissed."

"Sir!" Nicanor and Gaius both said, as they stood and saluted.

They were just about to the entrance of the tent when Vespasian called out, "Centurion!"

"Sir?"

"I understand if this man still means a lot to you," the general remarked. "It's never easy, having to go to war against one's closest friends."

"I'm still ready to do my duty, sir," Nicanor asserted.

Vespasian gave a hard grin of determination and nodded. "I expect nothing less."



In a twist of irony, Josephus stood upon the walls of Jotapata, finding that he too was thinking about old friends who were now his enemies. The truth was, despite the horrific corruption of governors such as Decius Florus, Josephus did not hate the Romans. In fact, Nicanor had been like a brother to him growing up, and he loathed the possibility that his friend would soon be marching to destroy Galilee. He knew that Nicanor was with the Tenth Legion, and while none of his spies had been able to get close enough to the

Roman camp at Ptolemais to see for certain, the balance of probability was that the eagle of the Tenth would be found there. All Josephus knew was that this particular Roman army was huge, and like his opponents, he sought to find out what he could about his enemies.

"Still no word on whether the Romans have left Ptolemais yet," Yaakov said, as he leaned against the rampart and watched the sun setting slowly in the west. "We did verify who is in overall command."

"Vespasian," Josephus answered. "I know his reputation well. When I was in Rome, I heard tales about how he conquered the distant isle of Britannia almost singlehandedly. Whether the stories I was told were truth or embellishment, Titus Flavius Vespasian has a fearsome reputation as a soldier. We'll, of course, have scouts keep a watchful eye on his movements, but I doubt he will make the same mistakes as Gallus."

"Can he be beaten?" his young friend asked.

When Josephus did not answer right away, Yaakov became exacerbated. "Oh, come on, Josephus, no man is invulnerable. Any commander, no matter how great, still has his weaknesses."

"That they do," the governor-general replied. "And we have to find what those are. We also need better intelligence on the actual size and composition of his army, and we won't get that until they are on the march. Their damned patrols keep our spies from getting close enough."

"Where shall we gather this intelligence?" Yaakov asked. "The enemy does not know the area as well as we do, and does not suspect just how strong Jotapata is."

"That is because we did not let them close enough last time to see," Josephus replied. "This city will be very difficult for them to break, but we must only allow them to find us here once we've beaten them down some. They'll likely make for Sepphoris and from there see about securing Tiberias. Therefore, I will head for Garis; it lies between the two and will allow us freedom of movement to track our enemies' movements. I'll leave Levi in temporary command here, while we take ten thousand men and link up with our forces in Garis."

That evening, Yaakov returned to the home Devorah was staying in to let her know he had to leave for a while. They had grown very close over the past week, and she had proven an oasis of beauty and respite for the young warrior.

“I wish I could come with you,” she said, as she gently kissed his cheek.

“No,” Yaakov replied, shaking his head. “You’re much safer here. I promise I will return soon.” He then kissed her gently on the lips and let her rest her head on his shoulder.

They may not have known each other long enough to comprehend if their feelings were actually love, but whatever it was, Yaakov knew he would walk through the fires of hell itself in order to keep Devorah safe.



The day had finally arrived. In the name of the Emperor, Senate, and People of Rome, the vast army of Titus Flavius Vespasian at last broke camp and left Ptolemais. Thousands of curious onlookers had gathered to watch this massive machine of war as it departed the city. Many did not know whether to cheer for them, or cower in terror. Either would have suited the Romans just fine.

Something Vespasian understood, very well, was how to best employ his soldiers, even while on the march. He placed his lightest auxiliaries in front in a large screen line. These included skirmishers and some of his archers, who could easily search suspicious wooded areas, prevent the enemy from surprising their force, as well as setting up ambushes of their own as needed. Several cohorts of infantry followed, along with the pioneers and surveyors, whose purpose was to measure and lay out the various camps each night, along with clearing any obstacles that might impede the main column. The officers’ baggage trains were next, along with a strong mounted escort.

The commanding general followed close behind, placing himself in a position where he could readily be made aware of what was transpiring at the very front of his army, while also being able to call up and coordinate support units behind him. Escorting Vespasian was the cavalry alae indigenous to each legion, along with a select men who would act as his personal guard.

In a vast improvement over the order-of-march used by Cestius Gallus, Vespasian placed his siege trains in the middle of his column, rather than at the end. Each legion had fifty-nine scorpion bolt-throwing ballistae, one for each century, along with a variety of onager catapults and very large stone-throwing ballistae. Between the three legions within the army, this made for a vast siege train. And it was not just the machines themselves that had to be carted, but the variety of ammunition for each weapon. The logistics wagons

required far outnumbered those used for hauling the ballistae and catapults. Numerous mule carts were piled with baskets full of scorpion bolts, which were far heavier than they appeared at first glance. And while an onager could fire any matter of rock or boulder, the large siege ballistae required smooth round stones that were specifically cut to fit in the firing troughs for each weapon. The Romans also preferred using similar stones for the onagers, for by using boulders of similar weight and shape, it allowed them to sight in their siege weapons for greater accuracy. All told, Vespasian's train hauled nearly one hundred and eighty scorpions, about sixty onagers, and a dozen heavy ballistae.

Marching just behind the siege train rode the tribunes and centurions in command of the various auxilia regiments of infantry and cavalry. While the legions were the core of Vespasian's army, they only accounted for one quarter of its total strength. The majority of his soldiers were either auxiliaries or allied mercenaries. Each auxilia cohort or cavalry regiment was led by either an equite tribune or a ranking centurion of good repute. These officers rode together so as to be fairly close to their commanding general while, at the same time, being able to coordinate any necessary actions with each other before returning to their units in the event of a sudden crisis.

Behind them marched the main column, alternating between auxilia infantry cohorts and the legions. The Fifteenth Legion, under Titus, marched at the head of this massed formation. Six auxilia cohorts, along with two squadrons of cavalry, fell in behind them, with Trajan and the Tenth Legion next. A further assortment of auxilia infantry and cavalry came next, followed by Cerealis and the Fifth Legion. Legates and chief tribunes rode at the head of their respective legions, next to the aquilifers who carried their sacred eagles. Being mounted, these senior officers could readily ride up the column to attain orders from the commanding general in the event of a sudden crisis. The master centurion for each legion rode at the very back, ensuring his men maintained good order and did not allow for any stragglers.

The personal baggage for the army came next: a vast caravan of hundreds of carts and pack mules carrying tents, palisade stakes, along with all the rations and equipment needed for such a vast army. Cohorts of auxilia infantry marched on either side of these, with cavalry covering the flanks. Slaves and personal servants either walked beside the pack mules or drove the baggage carts. At the very rear of the army marched the variety of allied and mercenary troops sent forth by friendly kings and client rulers, including

King Agrippa's assortment of infantry and mounted archers. While these men fell under the direct command of Vespasian, the vast differences in their training and tactics made them harder to employ when fighting beside Roman legionaries and auxiliary soldiers. As such, the commanding general kept them at the back of his column, where they could provide security, as well as being sent off on scavenging missions and raids. This gave their commanders at least some sense of independence, which they greatly appreciated.

More than an hour passed before the last of the gigantic column left the encampment. In the midst of it all, Optio Gaius Artorius marched at the back of his century. Centurion Nicanor rode at the head, having acquired Marius' horse. Though as an optio Gaius was now authorized to ride during the march, the army did not provide him a mount; he had to purchase it on his own. Since he would not receive his first wages at his new rank for another two months, and with horses being rather scarce in southern Syria, he contented himself to walking with his legionaries. He did, however, take advantage of the privilege of placing his pack and javelins on one of the century's pack mules.

His legionaries marched in column, six soldiers wide. And despite the vastness of the baggage train, it was almost impossible to comprehend that, for the majority of the Roman Republic, it was much larger. During the reforms of Julius Caesar's uncle, Gaius Marius, more than a hundred and sixty years prior, when the army was converted from a citizens' militia to full-time fighting force, one of the changes made was soldiers would carry much of their own equipment. The pack was made of leather and was tied to a t-shaped pole that each soldier carried over his shoulder, along with his pila. It contained a change of tunics, socks, a bedroll or cloak, entrenching pickaxe and other tools, a small cooking pot, mess kit, several days' worth of dried rations, hand saw, small wicker basket, and a leather satchel with whatever personal items the soldier wished to carry. Shields were encased in a leather protective cover, and if enemy contact was not expected, could be slung over the legionary's back. By the same token, the helmet was either worn or hung off his chest via a carrying strap. His pugio dagger hung off his hip belt on the left side, with his gladius slung over his shoulder and hanging off the right. A water bladder also hung off his hip, as hydration was crucial, given the long, sweaty hours of exertion each day. The appearance of marching legionaries was far from the romantic depictions of men with shining armor, shields gleaming in the light, and weapons at the ready. The reality was each

soldier felt more like a beast of burden, and it was no wonder that after the army reforms of Gaius Marius a nickname developed for legionaries was *Marius' Mules.* In a testament to the level of efficiency this enabled, the combined marching weight carried by an individual soldier with armor, helmet, weapons, and packs, would change little over the next two thousand years.



Legionary Backpack with Carrying Pole

It was a bit of a slow start as they waited for the lead elements of the column to step off, but finally the men of the Tenth Legion were able to begin their long trek. Soldiers kept about two meters' interval between ranks, to account for the protruding javelins and packs, and to allow for the numerous trips and stumbles that would afflict most of them throughout the long days of marching along the uneven dirt roads of Galilee. As optio, Gaius' tasking was to ensure his entire century stayed in formation and to account for any potential stragglers, which usually happened whenever a soldier needed to adjust the straps on his sandals or, if given permission by his decanus, to break off from the column in order to relieve himself. This happened quite often, and the trees and bushes along the miles of the trek were lined with soldiers emptying their bladders before rushing back to join their mates.

There was little for the men to see as they followed the tributary that ran from the west towards the sea. At one point they passed a small farm settlement that a wing of King Agrippa's cavalry had recently set fire to. Gaius thought he could see a handful of bodies lying amongst the smoldering

ruins. He and his men gave it little thought as they continued along the road, which was barely more than a scraped over path of hard packed dirt, strewn with pebbles and small rocks. Roman engineering had yet to bring proper paving stones to this remote corner of the empire. This, combined with ponderous nature of the vast column, kept them moving at a slow and measured pace. Legionaries were expected to march anywhere from twenty to twenty-five miles per day, albeit this was usually on paved roads and under ideal conditions. Terrain and the size of the column would slow this pace considerably.

By midafternoon the army had only traveled ten miles, having reached the city of Saab, near the mouth of the river. The auxilia detachment under Placidus was encamped on a wide plain nearby. The general could be seen astride his horse, talking with Vespasian and the commanding legates from the legions.

Since they were close to the base of the Galilean mountains, Gaius surmised the army would encamp soon and continue its trek in the morning. His presumptions proved correct, and not far from the auxiliary camp the army's numerous surveyors and engineers had laid out where every unit was to be emplaced, right down to the cohort level. The first day of the Invasion of Galilee had been little more than a road march and encampment.

Chapter XXIV: Fear as a Weapon

Garis, Galilee
March, 67 A.D.
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It had been a rather humbling experience for Placidus, having to explain his failure to take the city of Jotapata. Vespasian would have given him a thorough chastising, had it not been for the fact that Placidus had withdrawn in good order and saved his forces from befalling the same fate as Gallus.

"I appreciate extreme aggression in warfare," the commander-in-chief told him, "but there is a time and a place for everything."

"Look at it this way," Titus said with a sarcastic grin, "one cannot say you failed to take the city since, after all, you didn't even get close enough to have a look at its walls."

"Piss on you, Titus!" Placidus sneered, drawing further mocking chuckles from the legate.

"Enough, both of you!" Vespasian snapped. "We have enough enemies to fight in this land as it is, without you two breaking into petty squabbles."

"Apologies, general," Titus said, still chuckling to himself.

"Now," Vespasian continued, "tomorrow we make our way towards the city of Garis. It's not far from Sepphoris and, from what our intelligence has gathered, it is a viable rebel stronghold. Placidus, your men are more familiar with the terrain, so I'll want your scouts to lead several squadrons of cavalry in a sweep of the area."

"Yes, sir," Placidus replied, anxious for the opportunity to redeem himself. "There is a large ridge that overlooks the city to the north. If you're wanting to use fear as a weapon, that would be the perfect place to camp."

"Very good," the commander-in-chief replied. "They haven't had a good look at us, so let them see us now. This army is one-and-a-half times the size of the invasion force we sent into Britannia; I'll bet these bastards have never witnessed such power!"



While Nicanor attended the centurions' meeting with Antonius, Gaius

walked the perimeter of their section of the camp. The ground was rocky and tough, yet his men still succeeded in digging out their section of trench, taking the earth and building a palisade capped with long stakes. Whiles these were being dug up, other soldiers had set about setting up the century's tents; one for each squad, plus another for principal officers, and finally one for the centurion. Others had cut a latrine trench, well away from the tents, while the remaining legionaries set about cooking the evening meal for their mates. It was the same routine every day, and each soldier understood his duties. Julius, the tesserarius, whose duty it was to oversee fatigue details and the watch, had already placed designated soldiers at their posts.

"Optio," Julius said, acknowledging Gaius with a nod. He was a number of years older, and perhaps a bit resentful that a young decanus had been selected over him to be second-in-command of the century. Still, he went about his duties, suppressing whatever personal feelings he may have had. "It took a bit to get the men going, but give it a day or two, and they'll be in their routines once more."

"Thankfully we had a short march today," Gaius noted. "The lads have had plenty of time to sort themselves out. A pity we haven't been able to get any replacements, especially after the number we lost last year who took their discharges and retirements."

"From what I gather, all new recruits in the region are being sent to reconstitute the Twelfth Legion," the tesserarius observed. He then asked, "What's our current strength?"

"Including centurion and principal officers, sixty-eight," Gaius replied.

"And to think we should have eighty-four total," his fellow officer grumbled with a shake of the head.

"Well," the optio shrugged, "when has any unit in the army ever been at full strength? We make do with what we have and ensure that these men remain healthy and combat ready."

In truth, the number of vacancies did trouble Gaius some, especially if they were now a low priority for receiving replacements. All the principal officer and decanii positions remained filled, but they were short sixteen legionaries. And given the scale of the invasion, coupled with the brutal tenacity of their enemy, he reckoned there would be many more before the matter of the Judean rebellion was resolved.



It was not just the Romans who were concerned about shortages amongst their ranks. Josephus had lost a number of scouts over the past two weeks, and while the deaths of men were always regrettable, what he could scarcely afford was the loss of horses. He, Yaakov, and about twenty members of his personal guard were mounted, with the rest of his horsemen used as reconnaissance and messengers. And what mounts he did have paled in comparison to those brought by King Agrippa's augmenting force. They had kept unwanted eyes away from the Roman column, with mounted archers hunting down those who sought to inform Josephus of the enemy's strength and whereabouts. He had come to Garis with about ten thousand men, and given its central location, he hoped to gain eyes on the Romans soon enough.

"Rider approaching!" Yaakov said, rushing over to his friend and commander.

"About time," Josephus replied with a sigh of relief. He walked towards the city gates, accompanied by the mayor and councilmen of Garis. While it did have surrounding walls, these were, at best, twelve feet high and in serious disrepair. The arrival of Josephus and his men was the only thing giving the people hope, and even so, there were many who were pressing the mayor to surrender and repent to the Romans.

"Lost!" the rider shouted, his voice filled with panic as his horse sprinted through the gate. "All is lost!"

"Damn it, man, calm yourself!" Josephus chastised him. "Now what have you seen?"

"An army large enough to swallow up hell itself," the scout replied, his face filled with terror.

Josephus then bade him to dismount, but the man refused. "There were three of us; the others were shot down by the traitor Agrippa's horse archers. I barely escaped with my life."

"Escaped…or was let go," Yaakov observed.

"He's right," Josephus said. "The Romans now want us to know where they are. And I have no doubt they are making a great showing of their strength in order to terrify us."

"Your ragged 'army' will not stand against that!" the rider retorted, pointing over his shoulder. Before Josephus or anyone else could stop him, he wheeled his horse about and galloped out the gate and away from the city.

"Filthy coward!" Yaakov spat.

“He’s right,” a nearby warrior said, his voice shaking. “If their army is that large, then what chance have we?”

This led to further grumblings amongst the assembled fighters who had arrived to hear the messenger’s news.

In disgust, Josephus turned and slapped the man hard across the face. “Listen to yourselves!” he shouted at them. “You came here to fight the Romans, and now that they are coming, you cower like old women before so much as setting eyes on them. And to think you call yourselves warriors!”

The offending fighter slinked away, holding his face, which was now red with both shame and from Josephus’ blow. The rest cast their eyes downward, unsure of themselves or their situation. The thirst for glory after receiving the news of their great victory at Beth Horon had diminished greatly over the past few months. As for the mayor of Garis, his fears were renewed upon sensing the cloud of doubt hanging over those in whose protection he was supposed to entrust his citizens. Evening was closing fast, and Josephus knew the next day or the day after would reveal his enemies to him.

It was just after dawn the following morning when he was awoken by the ever loyal Yaakov.

“Josephus!” he said, shaking his friend awake.

“Easy, Yaakov, I’m awake. What is it?”

“They’ve all run off,” his friend replied, eyes filled with the tears of frustration.

“All of them?” Josephus asked, bolting upright.

“Damn near. Only a few hundred reported for morning muster. Half of our horses are missing, too.” Before they could speak any further, an ominous cadence of drums echoed softly in the distance.

Boom…boom…boom, boom, boom!

Josephus dressed quickly and sprinted across the short distance from the small flat he had procured to the northern wall of the city. A handful of city militia, along with a couple of his loyal fighters, manned the rampart.

All were silent, and Josephus turned his ear towards the long ridge to the north. The once faint sound was growing louder, the rhythmic booming of Roman war drums. It was now coupled by the sound of thousands of feet marching in step. If their force was as vast as the scout had said, then they could be a couple miles away and the rebels would still be able to hear their

approach.

"Up there!" a sentry said, pointing towards the ridgeline.

At first all they saw were one or two men, mounted on horses. Soon they were joined by more, and before long the entire ridge was covered with regiments of Vespasian's cavalry. His horsemen alone nearly numbered the total fighters Josephus had brought to Garis, and most of these had fled like cowards in the night.

About twenty minutes after the cavalry had shown themselves, the first waves of Roman infantry crested the ridge. In what was a deliberate show of force, the eagles of three legions were first seen. These men posted their standards at the very top, with cohorts of heavily armed soldiers filing past them on either side. Their discipline was impressive, for it seemed that each man knew exactly where he was going. Each cohort formed up into battle lines of six ranks; soldiers had grounded their packs, helmets were donned and covers were removed from their shields, which gleamed in the morning sun.

"God save us," Yaakov whispered. The young man's courage driven to the brink, as waves of Roman soldiers continued to crest over the rise.

The ridgeline extended about three miles, and it seemed every inch of it was covered in armored men, ready to do battle. Indeed, the three legions alone covered this stretch, with the rest of the army falling in behind them. They ceased in their march about halfway down the slope, approximately a mile from the city's northern gate.

An army that could swallow up hell itself, Josephus thought to himself. He suddenly found it impossible to fault the scout for his panic, or his men who had fled during the night. He knew it would take a vast army, along with massive defenses, in order to keep this force at bay, and he had neither.

"There's nothing you can do," the mayor said behind him. "Our walls won't hold them for so much as a minute. And even if your warriors hadn't fled, what chance would they have against that?"

"Absolutely none," Josephus admitted quietly. He then turned to the mayor. "Forgive me if I leave you."

"The Romans don't know you're here," the mayor replied. "But if they catch you, and find out we gave you shelter, then we are all dead. That they haven't surrounded the city, and their army has ceased its advance tells me they are hoping we capitulate. I bear them no love, but you must understand that I have to do what I can to protect my people."

“I understand,” Josephus nodded. He then turned to Yaakov. “We ride for Tiberias. Send what men we still have to Jotapata. It is the strongest fortress in all of Galilee, and if we must, that is where we will face the Romans.”



“Well, there’s a pretty sight,” Trajan said, nodding towards the city below.

All senior officers rode with Vespasian, awaiting instructions as to whether they would hold in place or attack.

“Ripe for the pickings,” Cerealis added. “If all their cities are this poorly defended, Galilee will fall in a month.”

“We’ll give this lot a chance to surrender,” Vespasian remarked. “They are close enough to Sepphoris as to be within their sphere of influence.”

“Riders approaching, sir,” a nearby legionary said.

“That would be the city elders, no doubt,” the commanding general remarked. He then rode his horse down to where the front ranks of the Fifteenth Legion were arrayed in battle formation at the very center of the army. Legionaries rested on their shields, the approaching four riders posing no viable threat to them. Vespasian was mildly surprised to see that the mayor of Garis was a younger man, perhaps forty at most.

“Hail, armies of Caesar!” the man said in heavily accented Latin, holding up his hand in salute. “The city of Garis wishes peace between us and is willing to capitulate to your demands.”

“Indeed,” Vespasian replied. “I received word that a sizeable rebel force had taken up residence in your city.”

“They did, my lord,” the mayor replied, knowing it was probable the Romans had scouts watching them the whole time, and that it was best to be as candid as possible, without betraying Josephus. “They fled during the night when they heard about your approach.”

“That doesn’t surprise me,” Titus observed. “We let one of their scouts go so they could hear of our approach.”

“Terror is quite the weapon,” Vespasian grinned.

The mayor swallowed hard, for he was extremely fearful of this Roman general. “We ask for your forgiveness,” the mayor said, his voice shaking slightly. “The seditionists had ten thousand men; there was nothing we could do to stop them from occupying our city. As you can see, our walls are

enough to keep out random bandits, but not an army."

"Any idea where they may have run off to?" Titus asked.

"No," the mayor answered, shaking his head quickly. "There are any number of places they could have gone, for Galilee is full of cities loyal to both the rebellion and to Rome."

"Quite," Vespasian replied, his gaze fixed on the mayor. He grinned, rather enjoying watching the man squirm under his glare. His countenance then softened. "Roman doctrine in warfare dictates the commanding general has the discretion of showing clemency to a city that surrenders before the first blow is struck. Consider yourselves fortunate we will not make a violent example of you. Let all know, if they want to be spared the vengeance of Rome, they must come to us directly and petition for peace."

The mayor simply bowed in reply, and seeing the meeting was done, quickly rode back to the city, lest the Romans change their minds.

"I didn't think we were showing much in the way of clemency," Titus said.

"We're not," his father replied. "This single act of mercy is all these Jewish rebels can expect."

"So where to next, sir?" Trajan asked. "If I may say, the lads are going to be more than a little restless after today. They are hoping for plunder and the chance to bloody their swords."

"And they will have it," Vespasian replied. "This place is a dung heap, with little for the men to take. We gain more in the long term by sparing them. But don't worry, our men will have their spoils soon enough."



Even with a horse it took Josephus the better part of a day to travel the twenty miles from Garis to Tiberias. Only Yaakov and a handful of his guard came with him; the rest having been sent on the long journey by foot to Jotapata. His purpose for coming to the large port city was twofold. Firstly, to warn them of the coming onslaught, and secondly, to send urgent messages to Jerusalem.

"Hanan has raised a standing army, twenty thousand men," he explained to Yaakov as they neared the city late that evening. "They are under the command of Yohanan, Silas of Babylonia, and Niger of Perea, three of the greatest generals of our time. Their purpose, besides the protection of

Jerusalem and the suppression of the fanatics, is to act as a mobile reserve force. I think now is as good a time as any to call upon them."

"Between them, and whatever men we still have in Galilee, we could make a viable stand against the Romans," Yaakov added.

They had received no word from Jerusalem since they departed and were completely ignorant to the calamities that had befallen the Army of Judea.

"Precisely, which is why I am also sending word to all the garrisons in Galilee to send what men they have to Jotapata. From there we will rally our forces to make a stand against the invaders." It was still unknown to Josephus where and how he would fight Vespasian's army. He would need more than numbers alone, any potential stand required the right terrain or a stronghold with near impenetrable walls. In the very least, he needed to concentrate as many men as possible from a position of strength from which they could strike.

The people of Tiberias were alarmed when the young Judean governor-general arrived at the late hour. Having received little to no word about the Roman army's departure from Ptolemais, they were surprised to see Josephus this far east. Jesus the governor, along with the lead councilmen of Tiberias found him at a shipping warehouse near the docks, where he was scrawling a series of messages.

"General Josephus," one of the men said, "you come to Tiberias when the hour has grown late. Please explain your harried presence here."

"The hour grows later than you realize," Josephus replied. "The Roman army is on the march, and their numbers are vast; I saw them with my own eyes at Garis."

"By your disposition, you seem to be telling us the war is already lost," another man observed.

They were in a precarious position, for Tiberias was a city under King Agrippa, who had, from the beginning, made his allegiances clear. It was also populated by numerous factions of both loyalists as well as seditionists. The loyalties of the city were like stalks of wheat in the wind; going with whichever way the wind blew. Upon Josephus' revelation, it was now possible Tiberias would openly renew its allegiance to Caesar. Hence, the governor-general was using the port city for the short time he was able.

"I am sending messages to Jerusalem by ship," he explained. "They will reach the governing council far quicker this way."

“There is a merchant vessel bound for Jericho this very evening,” Jesus said. “It would be but a couple days by land from there to Jerusalem.”

“Good,” Josephus said with relief. “I will not endanger you any further and will be gone from your city by morning.”

He finished scribing his messages to the garrison commanders in Galilee before retiring to a local inn. He had a small detachment of fighters posted to Tiberias, and it would be these men he used to send the word out to rally every fighting man available to Jotapata. One of these messages was sent with the merchant vessel, to be dropped off to the rebel commander at Gadara, which lay at the southernmost tip of the Sea of Galilee, ten miles to the south. Little did he know, in doing so, he would be depleting them of their warriors just days before Vespasian would unleash the fury of Rome upon them.

Chapter XXV: The Punishment Due

Gadara, near the Sea of Galilee
March, 67 A.D.



Onager and Scorpion

Gadara had been an important strategic city for centuries, and had been described by the Greek historian, Polybius, in 218 B.C. as *'The strongest of all places in the region'*. Situated on a ridge with a gentle slope down to the east, the remaining three sides were very steep, giving it substantial natural protection. Given these natural defenses, it could have made a viable stand against the Roman army, had most of their fighting men not heeded the call to head to Jotapata.

Josephus, and indeed all of the rebel leadership in the region, assumed Vespasian would first make for Tiberias. However, the Roman general had decided to let that city sort out its own affairs, and instead made his way south. Given the strong pro-Roman factions in Tiberias, Vespasian hoped to force them to capitulate by making an example of some of the other cities first.

And while Gadara was in a strong strategic position, its lack of access on three sides also made it impossible for those within to escape, for the Romans now occupied the vale below, and all within the city could see their massive camp; the cooking fires alone that evening made it appear as if the entire

valley was alight.

“Gadara owes a debt of punishment,” Vespasian explained over a dinner with his senior officers that night. “They were guilty of iniquities in the ambushing of the Twelfth Legion and other Roman forces. Their men plundered our dead and slew the wounded without mercy. The simple fact they sanctioned the rebellion and sent their fighters out against Rome has sealed their fate.” He raised his cup. “Gentlemen, your soldiers want retribution, now they will have a taste of it.”



Gaius found himself awake just before dawn. Like most soldiers, he usually slept fitfully the night before going into battle, the eve before Ascalon being an exception. They had no way of knowing the strength of the Gadara garrison. For all they knew, there could be thirty thousand men behind those walls. Auxiliary cohorts of light infantry were being given first crack at the walls, while the legions would attempt to breach the gate. Gaius’ century had been selected to man the battering ram, which engineers hastily constructed during the night, from components carried with the siege train.

It consisted of a simple wooden framework with thick hides pulled over the top to provide protection. The ram itself was an immense beam, similar to a ship’s mast, one end covered with iron shaped into a ram’s head. It was suspended from another beam like a balance arm by cables around its middle and this, in turn, is supported at both ends by posts. It sat upon six large wooden wheels and was rather unwieldy to get into position. There were handles on the inside of the frame, and the soldiers tasked with manning the ram would simply have to muscle it up the long slope and into position.

The sun rose in the east, behind them, as the first wave made ready to make the long trek up the gentle rise. Auxilia light infantry carried siege ladders with legionary cohorts following behind them. The intent was for the auxiliaries to tie up the defenders on the ramparts long enough for the heavy troops to get over the walls and into the city.

In order to soften up the defenses, as well as give his artillery crews some viable practice, Vespasian ordered twenty onagers to deploy forward and commence bombardment. Gaius and his men watched as salvoes of heavy stones were lobbed towards the walls. Some sailed over and into the city, while others smashed into the ramparts.

“A pity for our enemies,” Nicanor said with dark humor. “They have no means of fighting back.”

Gaius grinned and snorted at the assessment, as the sound of the throwing arms slapping the support beams on the catapults echoed loudly. Whatever sentries may have occupied the walls had withdrawn after the initial barrage. As the men continued to watch the pounding volleys battering Gadara, Antonius walked over to them.

“Once the gate is breached, get the ram clear for our assault troops,” he told Nicanor. “The Second and Sixth Cohorts are going in first, we will be behind them. Have your men fall in behind us as we push into the city.”

“Yes, sir,” Nicanor replied. He turned to his century. *“Battering ram… make ready!”*

A loud roar echoed from his men as they took their places on the heavy machine. Nicanor positioned himself at the front, up against one of the long posts. Gaius was at the back, hunkering down as he braced against the pole, along with several legionaries. Javelins had been left in camp, and their shields were strapped to their backs. For now they had one purpose, and that was breaking the city gates.

“Cease fire!” a centurion shouted on the onager line.

The assault force knew it was time, and Gaius took a deep breath and closed his eyes for a moment.

“Battering ram!” Nicanor shouted. *“Advance!”*

The legionaries all gave a shout of exertion as they dug their feet into the earth and pushed off. The wheels sunk slightly, and it took a moment before they rolled over the loose dirt, and soon the ram was advancing steadily up the rise. A company of archers marched behind them, keeping low and using the ram as cover. The auxiliaries carrying the ladders kept pace with them, for they wanted to conduct all phases of the attack simultaneously. The only noise heard was the squeaking of the ram’s large wheels.

It was a bit unnerving for Gaius. He could see very little from his position, and at any moment he expected to hear the whistling of arrows and sling stones, along with the cries of the fallen. Yet none came, even as they grew closer to the walls. It was when the cohorts on either side of them gave a loud battle cry and raced towards the walls with the ladders that Gaius figured they were getting close.

“Alright lads!” Nicanor shouted from up front, *“Double time!”* The century gave a renewed shout as the blood pumped through their strained

muscles. The ground had leveled off and now the ram was rolling rather quickly as it made its way the final distance to the gate.

"Halt!"

Ladders were already on the walls, and it was only at this late hour that what defenders remained in Gadara found their courage. Rocks and throwing darts flew from the walls, felling a handful of the attacking auxiliaries. Yet their numbers were so few they did nothing to impede the overall assault.

"On the ram!" Nicanor ordered.

The men took up positions on the massive beam. Each grabbing the handholds as bricks and rubble were dropped on them from above, smashing into the defensive framework. The ram started to rock back and forth as the crew gained momentum. The holding chains squeaked loudly as the whole machine started to roll back and forth. Finally they had enough force built up.

"Pull!" shouted the centurion.

As each man pulled hard on his handle, the beam seemed to hang suspended in the air for a split second before the second order was given.

"Ram!"

"Rah!" shouted the century as one.

Gaius shoved for all he was worth and was jarred as the iron head smashed into the gate with a loud crash. He swore he could hear cries of panic coming from within the city.

"Pull…ram!" On the second blow the cross brace behind the gate splintered with a loud snap, the doors of the breaking apart.

"Pull…ram!" The ram smashed through the remnants of the gate with ease, bursting them open.

"Withdraw!" The men on the left side of the ram pulled hard, while those on the right pushed, in order to turn the machine and allow them to pull it out of the way.

No sooner had they cleared the gate than the first cohort of legionaries charged past them, gladii drawn. Only a small number of brave souls awaited them on the other side; those few who had not left for Jotapata, instead, remaining in what would be a futile effort to save their city and families.

Gaius quickly unslung his shield as he, Nicanor, and the other officers formed their men into a column of ten ranks. The soldiers of the other cohorts were moving quickly through the gate, which told them the resistance was short and being quickly overrun.

"Well done, Nicanor!" Centurion Antonius said as the Fifth Cohort joined

them. “Let’s see if there is any fight left in this city!”

“Yes, sir!” Nicanor replied, drawing his sword. He signaled for this century to follow, and they pushed through the gate.



It was chaos within as legionaries rampaged through the streets. Bodies lay strewn about, men, women, and even children. All along the expanse of the outer wall, soldiers were spilling into the city. In a scene that would play out throughout the war, every Jewish man was put to the sword, the women beaten and raped, if they weren’t killed outright. Vespasian’s face bore an expression of grim satisfaction as he walked along the streets. There was a large market square about half a mile from the gates, and it was there that he ordered his men to drag all the inhabitants they did not immediately slay.

He stood atop the dais, where slaves and other wares were auctioned off, and watched as hundreds, and then thousands of women and children were harried into the square. Many were dragged by their hair; others were kicked along, and still more prodded by the blades of legionaries or having their children threatened with violence.

“Quite a haul, general,” Trajan said, as he joined his commander. “There must be a good twenty thousand we can sell into slavery.”

“If only,” Vespasian sighed. He then addressed his men who surrounded the prisoners. “Is the city cleared?”

“Yes, sir,” a centurion asserted. “Every man and teenage boy lies dead. As soon as you tell us what to do with this lot, we’ll clear them out and torch the city.”

“We’ll take any of the women who are healthy enough to travel great distances,” he said. “Those who are infirm, as well as all children are to be slain. We have a long journey to our next target city, and we cannot be hampered by the weak.” It was a cruel order to give, but one that was made out of necessity as much as malice. It was also a reminder of the brutality of the age they lived in.

The badly shaken people of Gadara did not understand Vespasian’s words, since none were educated in Roman speak. Soldiers quickly bound those they deemed able to travel and started to sort them from the rest. Those with children started to protest loudly and were met with fists and the pommels of swords. The shouts turned to shrieks as blades were plunged into

the children and infirm. It was a horrific scene, and it turned Vespasian's stomach, despite his hatred for these people he sought to destroy. He found he pitied his legionaries who had to carry out the hateful task. There was no honor or glory in the killing of children, and while they followed their orders, many would be haunted for some time to come by the screams and the slaughter.

In short order the survivors were being dragged away, an echoing of tearful cries hanging over the city. The market square was piled with corpses that were practically floating in a sea of blood and bodily fluids. Giving the matter no further concern, Vespasian marched down the street that led to the main gate, while all around him the crackle of fires grew louder as his men burned Gadara to the ground.

Similar scenes would play out in the surrounding area. Every village and settlement within five miles was burned, and all inhabitants found within killed. Vespasian dispatched a messenger to Ptolemais, to send word to Governor Mucianus about how the war was progressing, and to have any slave traders wishing to make a quick purchase meet them north of Jotapata.

"No doubt Placidus will be anxious to have another crack at that place," Titus observed one evening as he and his father shared a private dinner.

"It's the strongest city in these parts," Vespasian noted. "My guess is that is where our friend, Josephus, is rallying his forces."

"Well, once he hears we're coming, he'll vanish like a rat in the night. Gods know he was probably at some of the places we've been to already."

"That's why we must corner him before he can escape," Vespasian remarked. "I'd like to take him alive, if possible. Send him to the emperor as a prize. But if not, I won't lose any sleep over his death. Trust me, son, when I tell you that once Jotapata falls, and Josephus with it, all of Galilee will be brought to its knees. Judea itself will be at our mercy."

Titus observed, "And we shall give them none."

Chapter XXVI: A Defiant Stand

Jotapata, Galilee
April, 67 A.D.
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It did not take Josephus long to hear about Vespasian's rampage through Galilee and the destruction of Gadara. The Romans were making good on their threat to kill every man of fighting age, sell the women and children into slavery, and to leave the very land a scorched ruin. Tens-of-thousands had already perished with a similar number enslaved. And yet the people would not break. Still, Josephus knew he had to make more than just a token show of resistance soon or the masses would lose faith in him completely. A month had now passed since he sent his urgent message to Jerusalem, and he had yet to hear a reply.

"It takes time to rally an army," Levi surmised. "And who knows what condition the roads will be in after the winter rains and how long it will take them to march this far north."

"We still have a sizeable force encamped here," Yaakov added. "Twenty thousand men are ready to defend Jotapata, should the Romans come."

"They will," Josephus replied. "I think their pride was wounded when we drove them back last time. If they can be drawn into attacking us here, plus with additional forces conducting raids upon their supply lines, it'll make it even more difficult for them. Come, let us check the defenses."

With that he summoned a number of his senior leaders and began his inspection of the defenses of Jotapata. The first places they went to were the wells. These were dug out of the ground, though there was no natural water table or springs beneath the city. Instead, they were fed by cisterns that caught the rain water and ran them down a series of gutters into the central well system.

"This looks good," Josephus said as he lifted the lid on one of the wells. It was about ten feet deep, with a small cavern off to one side. It looked to be almost three quarters full. "This will last us a while. Let us just hope it rains in the meantime!"

"Water will be crucial," one of his men stated, "as will food."

"Correct," Josephus nodded. "Levi, place men to guard the food

warehouses and grain silos. And get me an exact count on the weights and measures, so we know exactly how much corn and other rations we have."

Levi nodded and left with a couple of aids as Josephus continued out onto the street.

"We've taken in thousands of refugees," Yaakov noted. "The city only has a population of about seven thousand. Between our men, plus refugees, there are nearly six times that number here now. That will deplete our food stores that much faster."

"What choice do we have?" Josephus asked. "These people are who we are fighting for." They then walked up a set of stone steps along the outer wall and gazed over the vast plain. "And besides, if we ration everything, we should be fine. Their army is vast, and it's not just men, but all of their beasts of burden they have to feed and water. And they'll have to bring everything with them. Imagine just how much water *they* will need!"

Devorah was glad for Yaakov's return, although with the threat of the Romans so much closer, he feared for her. And yet, he knew there was no other place in all of Galilee that would be safer for her. She had taken to staying with him at the inn Josephus had acquired for himself and his senior leaders. Yaakov found her presence very calming, and as such it gave him strength in the face of overwhelming odds.

That night, Josephus had a dream, if it could be called that. It was more like a vision, for he did not have the foggy sense of dreamscape. Rather, he found himself in a dark room and, given his sense of alertness, he swore he was not asleep at all but wide awake. Suddenly, a bright light shone before him, yet he did not find he was blinded by it nor was he afraid.

A voice, one that he could not tell if he heard audibly or if it only spoke in his head, said to him:

Forty-seven days…you will face the strongest of the strong for forty-seven days.

And as quickly as it came, the light vanished, and Josephus was alone once more. The Voice, as he would call it, would linger within his mind, providing both reassurance and fear, for all it said was that he would face the strongest of the strong, not whether he would win or lose. And after what he had seen at Garis, he knew the armies of Vespasian to be the strongest in the

known world. It would take the intervention of God Himself to defeat such power.



“This road is shit!” a cavalryman spat as the advance guard of Vespasian’s force came across the boulder-strewn path.

“Infantry can navigate this, but not cavalry or our siege trains,” one of his companions added.

Indeed, an avalanche of jagged rock had covered most of the road in the month since Placidus had first made his trek towards Jotapata. While foot soldiers could crawl their way through it with great difficulty, at least a half mile of the road was utterly impassible for horses and carts.

“Ride back to the column,” their squad leader ordered the first man. “Inform General Vespasian.”

The commander-in-chief was not far behind his lead element, and he took the news well, which surprised the scout. The main column was about a half day’s march away from where they had found the rocky barriers.

“And there is no way around?” the general asked.

“No, sir,” the trooper replied. “By our reckoning, it is still another twelve miles from this position to Jotapata.”

“And hopefully the rest of the way is clear,” Vespasian thought aloud. He then turned to Placidus. “Send an infantry cohort forward. Have them recon the road as far as where you got last time. And have them be discrete. We don’t want to give away our presence just yet.”

The auxilia corps commander simply nodded and rode back to his regiments. Rumors from their spies, as well as actual sightings of enemy movements, seemed to point to their foes massing at Jotapata. And if Vespasian could trap most of them in one place, so much quicker could he end the war.

“If the road is that bad, it will take a few days for the engineers to clear it,” Titus observed.

“Well, that gives the slave drivers a chance to catch up with us,” Vespasian replied. “Our food and water rations are going to be stretched as it is, without having to provide for ten thousand prisoners.”

“I wondered why the scout’s report did not distress you more,” his son chuckled.

“I sent some of Agrippa’s cavalry back to find the slave drivers and escort them here. Hopefully, they don’t delay long.”

“True, we lose money every time one of them dies, whether from exhaustion or suicide,” Titus added. “We found several more this morning who had somehow hung themselves in the night. No doubt seeing their little ones slain has taken the will to live from many of the mothers we captured.” His last remark almost had an accusatory tone to it, which Vespasian found irritating.

“I’m not some bloodthirsty tyrant!” he snapped. “Do you think I enjoyed ordering the deaths of those children? It is a hateful thing, but a harsh reality of war and the world we live in. And if you were to reverse the roles, do you think these rebellious bastards would show any mercy to Roman children?”

“I understand,” Titus replied, attempting to calm his father’s anger. “It was also a practical matter. Like you said, our resources will be taxed to the limit as it is, let alone with having to take several thousand children with us.”

“And many more will perish before this is over,” Vespasian asserted. “We don’t have to like it, son, but we have to do our duty to the emperor and to Rome.”



As the older warrior crept away from Jotapata in the middle of the night, he was filled with a mixture of shame and relief. While he cursed himself for his cowardice, he had abandoned the cause not for himself, but to save his family in Nazareth. After hearing about how those tasked with facing the Romans at Garis had fled before the enemy had even appeared on the horizon, coupled with the destruction of Gadara and Vespasian’s brutal rampage, he knew the war was unwinnable. By coming from Tiberias to Jotapata, Josephus had essentially blockaded himself in. And once the city fell there would be no hope left for Galilee, or indeed for lower Judea. All the man who crept along the road cared about was saving his wife and children, for he feared Nazareth could be next in the onslaught.

The going was slow, and the sun was beginning to rise by the time he’d gone ten miles from the city. In the distance, he saw the glint of metal in the early morning light; helmets, shield bosses, and spear tips from a patrol of Roman auxiliary infantry. A large group marched along the road, while others climbed along the hill faces on either side. The old warrior was filled

with both relief and trepidation, for he did not know how the soldiers would react to finding him. He decided it was best if he made his presence known, as if he were seeking them out.

"Hail, soldiers of Rome!" he shouted while waving his arms. He continued to wave as he walked towards the men, about a dozen of whom were now running towards him. They soon surrounded him, spears leveled.

"Who are you and what is your business along this road, *Jew*?" their squad leader spoke.

"I am a deserter of the Jotapata garrison," he explained. "And my business was finding you. Please, I have important intelligence for your commanding general."

"He's armed, sergeant," a trooper said as he took the man's short sword from him.

"Of course I was armed," he replied, trying to keep his composure, as the spears of the other men remained level with his heart. "As I said, I was a member of the garrison, but I'm not daft enough to be walking through Galilee alone and unarmed."

"We'll take him back to camp," the squad leader said.

"Shall we bind him?" one of his men asked.

"Not yet." He then asked the Jew, "Are the roads passable from here to Jotapata?"

"They are," the warrior nodded. "The rockslide back where you came from is the only real obstacle."

The squad leader nodded and had six of his men march on either side of the rebel as they escorted him back to where the engineers had begun clearing the road. He found Placidus overseeing the operation, along with an ala of cavalry. The auxiliary sergeant reported what they had found.

"Excellent," Placidus grinned. "General Vespasian is on his way up here to check out the rock clearing operations. We'll escort this Jew back to him."



Vespasian elected to have an escort of legionaries accompany him as he made his way to the blockade. He had specifically insisted upon Centurion Nicanor accompanying him, on the chance of gathering some more useful information about Josephus and his whereabouts. The century marched on either side of the general, with Nicanor leading on the right and Gaius on the

left. As they came within a couple miles of the rock slide, they spotted Placidus, along with several of his cavalrymen, escorting an older Jewish man.

"Some interesting intelligence, general," the auxilia commander reported. He looked down at the old man, who was sweating and breathing heavily after trying to keep pace with the trotting horses. "Tell him, Jew!"

"It's General Josephus," the man said. "He has come down from Tiberias. Thousands of refugees have fled to Jotapata, where he has the largest concentration of his forces."

"What's their strength?" Nicanor asked.

"Fifteen…maybe twenty thousand total," the man replied. "With a similar number of refugees."

"Excellent!" Vespasian said, his face breaking into a broad grin of determination. "Our most prudent and cautious enemy has of his own accord locked himself into his own cell!" He then turned to his auxilia commander. "Placidus."

"Sir?"

"Once we clear away this wreckage, I want you to take a thousand of your best horsemen and surround Jotapata. Josephus may very well panic once he sees the legions approach, and he is not to get away!"

"Yes, sir."

As Placidus rode back to the rock slide, a pair of his men escorted the deserter away. Vespasian then looked down from his horse at Centurion Nicanor. "Does it trouble you that we are about to corner your friend?"

"Not at all," the centurion reassured him. "He made his choice, and he will have to live with the consequences, just like all men do in life."

"Quite," Vespasian concurred.

He then gave Nicanor an order that did not necessarily surprise him, but did cause him to swallow hard.

"Since you are the only one in this entire army who knows what Josephus looks like, you will either find him for us or identify his corpse."



Jotapata sat along a cliff with three of its sides dropping sharply into a ravine, so deep the bottom was lost in the shadows before coming up a series of steep mountains on the far side. The plain to the northwest was the only

means of approach, which meant the city was an ideal place to make a defense. It also meant that escape would be impossible, and so, Josephus and his warriors had to resolve themselves to fight to the last.

"We've spotted Roman horsemen patrolling the hills to the south and east," Levi reported, five days after Vespasian ordered his engineers to clear the road for his column. "No doubt they are watching us."

"Watching to see if we attempt to escape," Josephus added.

Northwest of the plain leading into the city was a small hilltop, beyond which was a long ravine, followed by a much larger hill that commanded the entire area. It was from this direction the ominous cadence he had heard at Garis sounded once again.

Boom…boom…boom, boom, boom!

The rhythmic pounding of the heavy drums sounded like the footfalls of a hell spawned demon. The noise grew louder, and a hush fell over the city. The sounds of hobnailed sandals, along with the clanking of weapons and armor, came as the clicking of the horns and claws of the savage beast.

"Everyone inside!" Josephus shouted. He ran to the top of the wall, his heart pounding in his chest as he remembered the fearsome sight that had assailed his vision at Garis.

All along the plain, women were seen rushing for the city, dragging or carrying their children. The menacing sound of the approaching army had filled them with terror and led them to flee for the safety of the walls well before Josephus shouted his warning.

"At least here our fighters can't run," Yaakov muttered. "Finally they will be forced to fight!"

The two were soon joined by Levi and Ephraim, along with a score of their senior captains.

"And a fight they shall have," Josephus said, as he strained his vision to catch the first glimpse of their enemy. He then muttered, *"Forty-seven days."*

"What was that?" Yaakov asked.

"A voice I heard," his friend replied. "Whether that of God or my own conscience, I know not. But this battle will last for forty-seven days."

"Well, like you said," Levi spoke up, hoping to put a spin of reason behind their commander's strange words, "the Romans will have to bring everything with them. Perhaps forty-seven days is all the food and water they can manage."

"Perhaps," Josephus concurred, though silently he was unnerved by the

voice that continued to echo in his mind. It did not say whether he would win or lose, only that he would face *the strongest of the strong* for forty-seven days.

Boom…boom…boom, boom, boom!

The sun was starting to fall in the west, and it shone behind the advancing mass of Roman soldiers. Like at Garis, they marched in battle formations, their intention to terrify the populace of Jotapata. Josephus could hear the heavy breathing of his men. For many of them, this was their first time witnessing the fearsome power of the Roman war machine.

"That any nation could muster an army so vast," one of them said in awe.

"Courage, brothers!" Josephus said, grabbing the man reassuringly by the shoulder. "We have near their strength of numbers, plus a decisive advantage of fighting on the defensive. And as you can see, the logistics of food and water for an army of that size will be to their detriment. Come, we must assemble our council of war."

"Will they not come tonight?" another warrior asked.

"I doubt it," Josephus replied. "They have likely marched all day and would be foolish to launch a complex assault at this late hour. We'll leave a few of our stoutest hearts on the walls, but bring the rest down. They mean to diminish our fighting spirits, and we should not give them the chance to do so."



While the falling sun cast a reddish glow upon the earth, Vespasian and his senior officers surveyed the stronghold below. Past the lower hill to their front, the plain before Jotapata was quite large and open. The cliffs fell off sharply on either side of the city.

"No way in, no way out," Placidus said, folding his arms across his chest. "Our enemy doubtless trembles in fear, knowing they are trapped."

"Or has resolved to fight that much harder," Titus conjectured. "After all, little will drive a man to greater valor than knowing that all is lost, and he has no escape."

Placidus snorted in reply, but held is tongue. While Vespasian had made a great showing of his army in order to terrify the defenders of the city, he was now more concerned about the practicalities involved in taking its walls.

"If their strength is what that deserter told us it was, this will not be easy,"

he said. “The natural terrain may have these people trapped, but it also means there is only one way for us to get in. That plain is large, but the frontage is really only wide enough for perhaps ten thousand men to assault at one time. If they should choose to meet us on the plain, plus utilize the defensive walls, it will give them a defense in depth.”

“Meaning?” Cerealis asked.

“Meaning, that when it comes time for battle, the Jews will be able to utilize their numbers more efficiently than we,” Vespasian replied. “That hill is also an obstacle to us. It forces us to bring our siege engines closer, thereby leaving them exposed to enemy countermeasures.”

“What is your plan then, general?” Trajan asked.

“The Fifteenth Legion will conduct the first assault tomorrow,” the commander-in-chief stated. “Four auxiliary cohorts will cover the flanks with another ten in reserve behind the main body. Between them I want every archer and skirmisher in the entire army, supported by scorpions.”

“You don’t intend to take the walls tomorrow, do you, sir?” Trajan asked further.

“If the assault force is able to drive the Jews back from the walls, then, yes, we will sound the general advance,” Vespasian replied. “But I suspect they will wish to give us a show of force tomorrow as well, and we need to gage their tenacity and overall fighting abilities. If our adversary, Josephus, has in fact been studying how Romans fight, then he will undoubtedly have trained his men to counter our tactics. Do not let their lack of professional appearance fool you. Let us never forget what happened to the Twelfth!”



Gaius sat atop the earthen ramparts of their marching camp that night. There was still much activity, for the commanding general was sending out various regiments of cavalry to provide in depth reconnaissance of the region and an early warning, in case the Jews should send an army to relieve Jotapata.

“Aside from those encircling the city on the hillsides across the far ravines, there is little else for them to do,” Nicanor observed as he joined his friend. He then gazed upon the city in the night. “Would you look at that?”

“I know,” Gaius replied. “All those lamps and torches in the night make the city appear gigantic.” He paused in thought for a moment. “It is nearly

May. You realize it's been a year since this whole ordeal began? And yet we haven't even moved in to reconquer Judea itself."

"Well, Vespasian hopes that after Jotapata falls, perhaps the resistance will crumble," Nicanor remarked. "Even if he wasn't able to bring all of the fanatics under the resistance's banner, Josephus has been a unifying force for many of the peoples within Galilee. Once he is taken, it is hoped the rebellious factions that remain will fall into disarray and resume fighting each other once again."

"Some of the lads were grumbling about being left out of the assault tomorrow," Gaius remarked.

Nicanor simply shook his head.

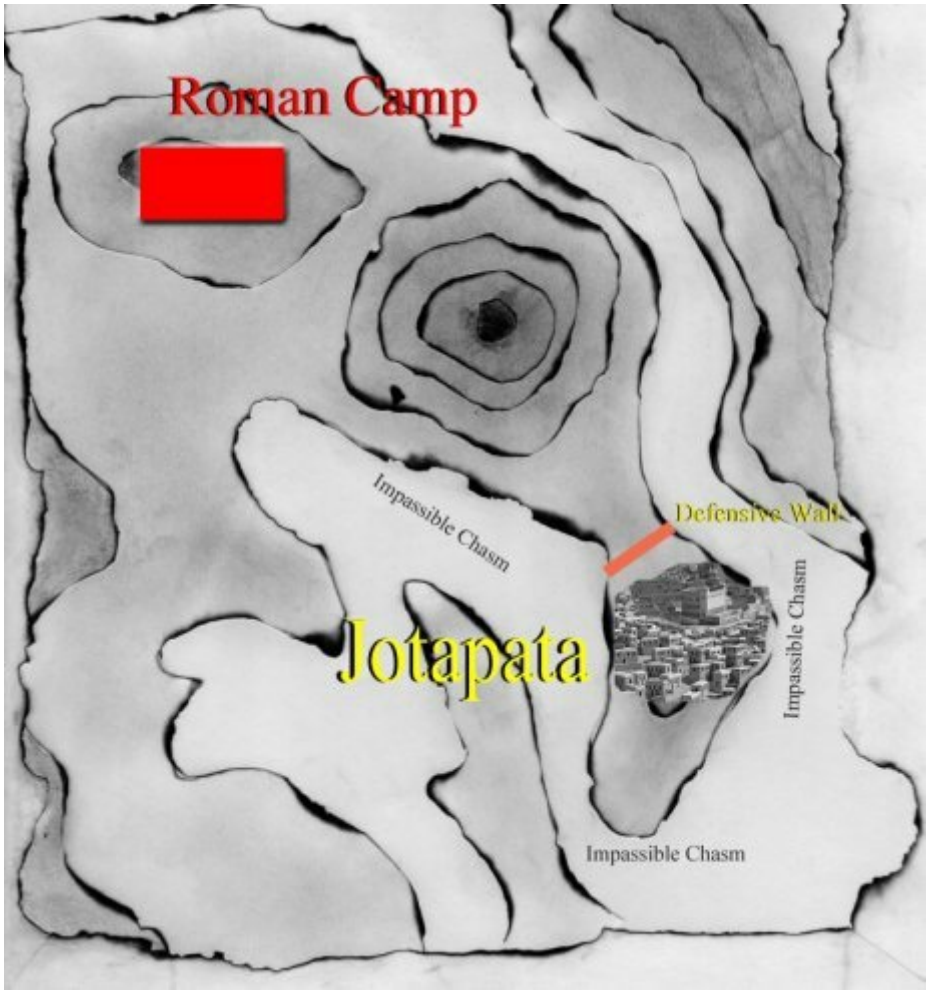
"If soldiers aren't complaining, then they aren't happy."

"True," the optio nodded. "Still, I rather sternly told some of the squad leaders to remind their men that they've already gotten a taste of plunder at Gadara, and they did each receive a twenty denarii bounty off the sale of those prisoners to the slave drivers."

"That's more than a month's wages for most of them, and they still find a reason to gripe," Nicanor chuckled.

It was a simple reality of professional armies that soldiers would always find something they were unhappy about. The centurion and optio knew they had been no different when they were young legionaries.

"I'll address the lads in the morning," Nicanor added. "The Fifth Legion is in ready reserve tomorrow, which means there will be nothing for us except camp improvement details and equipment maintenance. Still, there will be plenty of fighting for us before this siege is done."



The Roman approach to Jotapata.

The lower hill, separating the Roman camp from the city initially obscured their view, as well as narrowed their avenues-of-approach considerably. The cliffs and chasm surrounding the city made escape and reinforcements for the garrison nearly impossible

Chapter XXVII: The First Assaults

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As dawn broke the next day, the initial wave of Roman forces intent on smashing Jotapata broke camp. The majority of the assault force rounded the small hill on the Roman right flank. The Fifteenth Legion marched in the center, its cohorts arrayed in battle lines of six ranks, one century behind the next. Cohorts of auxilia infantry arrayed themselves on either flank.

Titus rode in the center of the force, directly behind the archers who marched in support of his legion. These men were in loose skirmishing formation, with gaps of six to ten feet between each man. The Fifteenth's aquilifer marched beside Titus, the highly polished eagle gleaming in the morning light. Behind them, and just ahead of the reserve infantry cohorts, came the scorpion crews. Two men manned each bolt thrower. As they advanced, one carried the scorpion over his shoulder while the other carried the supporting post. Between them they carried the basket of heavy bolts. The heavier onagers and siege ballistae were brought down from the camp, but kept for the time being well behind the reserve cohorts. Vespasian did not wish to chance losing his heavy weapons, should the rebels sally forth and succeed in creating breaches in the lines.

The commanding general himself was taking part in the attack as well. A predawn scouting party had noted a long slope that angled up towards the city on the far left. The view of this terrain feature had been masked by the small hill that separated the Roman camp from the city the night before. And so, Vespasian ordered a slight change in plans, personally taking two cohorts from the Fifteenth Legion, along with a company of archers and four scorpions and attacking from this direction. While this was in keeping with his lead-by-example style of command, it also served a practical purpose, for the slight elevation gave him a far greater vantage point with which to see the entire field of battle. The general advanced on foot, so as not to make himself an easier target for enemy archers.

Judean war horns, which had a distinctly higher pitch than the deep Roman trumpets, sounded from the walls of Jotapata. The gates were opened and thousands of warriors spilled forth onto the plain. Rather than racing

towards the Romans like a disorganized horde of barbarians, they fanned out into battle lines similar to their enemies. And, in an innovative tactic that showed just how familiar Josephus was with the Roman style of fighting, his front ranks carried large wicker barricades with which to help protect them from the legionary javelin volleys.

From his vantage, Vespasian watched as legionaries unleashed their initial salvoes of pila. Many smashed into the barriers, while others were deliberately thrown high so as to land amongst the fighters in subsequent ranks who were attempting to use their bucklers and small shields as overhead cover. A volley from the Roman archers inflicted further casualties and drove the Judean warriors back. At this, the auxiliary infantry and the Roman right flank charged and a violent melee ensued.

Rebel archers and slingers lined the city wall and began to unleash a violent storm of missiles upon their assailants. Roman archers soon focused their attention on this new threat, as did the scorpion crews, who began to assemble their machines. Given their far superior range, these men were able to stay well beyond the threat of the Jewish archers.

"Sir, on our left!" a centurion shouted, pointing towards the wall.

The rebels had spotted Vespasian and the threat offered by his detachment. They could see enemy captains shouting orders and directing elements of their force to counter this new hazard.

"Form ranks!" Vespasian shouted.

Just then a concentrated volley of arrows flew from the walls in a high arc towards their position.

"Down!" a centurion shouted, grabbing his commanding general and pulling him beneath the canopy of shields quickly raised by his legionaries.

"Archers, scorpions!" Vespasian called over his shoulder, as he stood once more. *"Suppressive fire on the wall!"*

Judean fighters soon swarmed his legionary contingent, who upon the orders of their centurions launched their pila into the enemy mass. Numerous warriors fell dead or badly injured from the missiles, yet so great were their numbers that they managed to nearly engulf the Romans. While Vespasian's men did have the advantage of the high ground, it was unstable and not very wide, with the Jews having far greater mobility than his legionaries.

A general stalemate ensued on the field, with neither side able to gain a distinctive advantage. Despite the fury of their clashes, casualties were surprisingly minimal. The Romans, both legionary and auxilia, enjoyed the

substantial protection offered by their shield walls and armor. The Judeans' could only rely upon their courage to fortify them. Yet, they also had their discipline, which had been instilled during the weeks of training under Josephus and his captains. In this, they naturally could not match their adversaries, who had years of such training and experience. However, they did not allow their courage to fall into recklessness and so, were not careless with their lives as their weapons clashed against the walls of shields.

One tactic the Judeans could do little to counter was the passage-of-lines, where renewed ranks of legionaries would surge forward to replace their tired mates in the front rank. Such a maneuver, while simple in its concept, was extremely difficult to execute, especially under the severe conditions of open battle. However, Roman soldiers had been drilled to perform this task since the day they joined the legions, so the Jews found themselves continuously having to battle fresh ranks of legionaries with no reprieve for their own fighting men.



"Our men grow tired," Yaakov said, catching his breath.

Josephus had personally led the attack on Vespasian's detachment, and his young guard's commander had joined him. What neither knew was that the Roman general was leading this force. Otherwise, they may have doubled their efforts against the legionary cohorts. As it was, the Jewish commander was balancing valor with temperance.

"Tired, but unbroken," he replied, smashing his sword several times against a legionary's shield before stepping back quickly.

The positioning of his men prevented this group of Romans from advancing further, lest they be completely surrounded and cut to pieces. And while it seemed neither side was gaining any sort of advantage, Josephus knew that even a stalemate was a victory for them, for it was Vespasian who had to break Jotapata. The Jews simply had to hold their ground.

The pacing of the overall battle appeared to have slowed considerably, each side realizing the issue would not be decided in a single day. Judean fighters were approaching the point of exhaustion while the late afternoon sun beat down upon them, yet the Romans did not attempt to press the advantage home. The rebels still managed to utilize the terrain in order to

bring more of their numbers to bear, and despite the use of the passage-of-lines technique, both legionary and auxiliary were feeling the strain of battle. There was also the intermittent harassment from the archers and slingers on the wall who, with the ramparts to hide behind, were given substantial protection from the return fire offered by the Roman archers and scorpions.

The Roman missile troops were clearly aware of this, and the archers slowed their rate of volleys considerably with scorpions being slow and measured in their shots, lest they expend all ammunition. For while Vespasian's supply train was vast, the number of arrows and bolts was certainly not unlimited. It would not do for his men to exhaust a large portion of their missiles on the first day of the siege.

By early evening, when it was clear the battle was a stalemate, the Roman trumpets sounded the withdrawal. Josephus' men did not offer any kind of pursuit, spent as they were. And with the Romans pulling back in good order, nothing could be gained by chasing after them. Instead, the Jews allowed themselves a loud cheer, for though tactically inconclusive, the battle had been a huge moral victory for the defenders of Jotapata.



"Thirteen dead," Titus reported that evening as he read through the reports from his cohort commanders, as well as those from the auxiliary regiments. "And approximately another hundred wounded, although many of these are minor injuries."

"Wrap a bandage on most of them and they'll be fine," Vespasian mused, grabbing a cup of wine from a servant's platter.

"That was a rather brazen move today, general," Titus added, "leading a detachment of our men. I saw them press you pretty hard today. Who knows what they would have done had they known you were with them?"

"A good commander doesn't sit on his ass while his men do all the fighting," Vespasian replied with a grin. "And should he fall in battle…well, that just means promotions all around."

The assembled senior officers all enjoyed a short laugh at his last remark. Vespasian and Titus, Placidus, Trajan, Cerealis, along with all of their chief tribunes and master centurions were invited to join in the commanding general's evening meal. It was the easiest way for him to disseminate information down to his senior commanders and issue orders, while

answering any concerns they may have. And while there were certain privileges to dining with the commander-in-chief, their meals paled in comparison to what they could normally expect as senior legates on campaign. Yet Vespasian insisted on his generals consuming the same rations as their men, only allowing them an extra portion of wine along with a few minor delicacies. Overall, both legate and legionary ate the same fare during the campaigns under Flavius Vespasian.

"Beg your pardon, sir," a legionary said, as he stepped into the tent. "Imperial messenger has arrived with dispatches. Will you see him now or wait until morning?"

"Send him in," Vespasian replied. "Since we're all here, may as well see what news we have from the rest of the empire."

The messenger walked in and saluted, handing his satchel to Vespasian. Inside were several scrolls bearing various seals. One was from the emperor, exhorting him for his service thus far in the war, while also lining his message with veiled threats should Vespasian fail to subdue Judea. Much of it was near gibberish, and the commander-in-chief gave a soft chuckle as he handed it to Titus. He then frowned as he read the next dispatch; this one from Mucianus.

"Cestius Gallus is dead." A silence followed as the men took in the news.

"That's good news, too, isn't it?" Titus finally spoke up, his face twisted in a half grin.

"Does it say how?" Trajan asked.

"No," Vespasian replied. "Mucianus speculates that upon his return to Syria he died of shame and despair."

"Likely meaning he killed himself," Placidus conjectured. "Not that anyone will mourn his loss. Six thousand Romans were needlessly slaughtered because of him, never mind the Twelfth Legion losing its eagle and all of their siege engines."

"For once I find myself in agreement with Placidus," Titus replied, giving a sarcastic wink to the auxilia corps commander. And while the two most certainly were still not friends, their animosity had since diminished, and both men were slowly finding a sense of mutual respect for each other's abilities. "What of the other dispatches?"

"These are just a few routine reports from our reconnaissance patrols," the commanding general replied. He then handed a couple of them to Placidus. "Have a look at these, since they come from your troops. What do

you make of it?”

“The rebels definitely know we’ve laid siege to Jotapata,” Placidus replied. “Judging by their movements, they are leaving Josephus to his fate and making for their home cities. This, however, troubles me.”

He handed one report to Titus, who looked at the dispatch and asked, “Joppa? What about it?”

“Well, it’s relatively close to here,” Placidus replied, “about ten miles. Their allegiance is unknown, but should they decide to side with the rebellion, it could create difficulties for us.”

“Agreed,” Vespasian said. “Another enemy stronghold so close to our position could allow them a place to launch raids upon our supply and communications lines. Keep an entire ala of cavalry posted in the vicinity and see which way they are leaning. If they should defect, then we will have to send a vexilation to smash them while holding the siege in place here.”

While normally he disliked the notion of splitting his forces, Vespasian’s army was large enough that he could readily task battle divisions with quelling potential uprisings within the region. As it was, most of his army was static and unable to engage in the Siege of Jotapata at all, given their limited avenues of approach. For the time being, he settled for gathering information and letting his enemies show their intentions more clearly.

“If Josephus is tenacious in his defense,” Trajan spoke up, “it could give the surrounding districts the courage they need to rise up against us.”

It was agreed then, while one legion would be tasked with primary assault duty with another in reserve, the third would make ready to move on any of the outlying cities or towns that declared for the rebellion.



The next several days would play out almost exactly the same as the first. The Jews, having found their courage with the success of their holding the Romans at bay on the first day, continued to launch sorties against their formations. Vespasian was still, for the time being, forced to keep his siege engines in reserve until such time as he could be assured of their safety once they were brought forward.

The Romans rotated their assault cohorts each day, giving those who had fought prior a day or two of rest. The rebels, though they could deploy more troops into battle at any given time, had no reserves to call upon; the same

warriors were forced to battle fresh soldiers each day, and by the end of the fifth day of fighting, fatigue was clearly taking hold. Scores had been killed with hundreds more wounded. Their medical training and supplies were archaic when compared to their adversaries, and there was an even greater fear of infection, illness, and death from wounds that a legionary would be able to heal from rather quickly. These issues were all brought before Josephus that night as he held a council of war with his captains.

"Our men are fighting well," Ephraim said. The older warrior had thus far proven to be a level-headed voice of reason amongst the more eager and fanatical of their men. However, even he was showing signs of wear after days of constant battle. "They are exhausted, though. And they keep having to face fresh Roman troops each day. How long can we continue this stalemate?"

"We may wear down before them in individual battle," Josephus replied, "but they will break before us. We must take a long view of the strategic situation. So far they have not been able to employ their heavy stone throwers against us. And remember, their supplies of food and water will dwindle well before ours, especially if God blesses us with some rain."

Josephus knew, whether it rained or not, the siege would be a close run affair, regardless of who won. And if the Romans were able to keep their supply lines open, it would require a drastic change of strategy for the Jewish defenders.

Chapter XXVIII: Relentless Power

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It was not just the Jews who felt a change of tactics was needed. After a lengthy discussion with his senior officers near the end of the first week of the siege, Vespasian decided to use the small patch of high ground to his advantage. Something the Romans were masters of was engineering, and when the commanding general put it to his surveyors and engineers to build up the embankment for the placement of siege towers, they enthusiastically set about their mission.

The first task that needed to be completed was the harvesting of massive quantities of wood. And so, while the cordon was maintained around the city, most of the soldiers not on guard duty were sent out to cut down nearly every tree within the surrounding area. There had been a number of sizeable forests that dotted the landscape, and these were quickly brought down. While this was taking place, still other details were ordered to bring down the hillock that had, thus far, acted as an impediment to their assaults. The stone and dirt would then be used for building up the banks the towers and siege engines would occupy. Vespasian's orders had been simple, "Level the damn hill!"

"We're nothing if not resourceful," Gaius observed, as he watched a number of his men dragging a fallen tree towards the waiting carts.

The ammunition wagons for the catapults had been emptied for the time being and were now being used to haul trees and boulders.

"Such is the source of our power," Nicanor added.

Though the tasks appeared daunting at first, the fact that the Romans had tens-of-thousands of men available made the near impossible happen with relative speed. It was not just the feats of engineering that overawed their enemies, but just how quickly they could achieve them.



Despite the ring of camps that covered the hillsides on the far side of the ravines, there was still a single path that the rebels were able to use in order to send out messengers, while also bringing in fresh supplies. They didn't account for much, seeing as how anything larger than a single mule cart

would be spotted by the Romans. However, each fresh barrel of water, grain, or medical supplies that arrived at Jotapata provided an immeasurable boost to the morale of the defenders. Their one fear was that the Romans, in their deforestation of the hillsides, would find the path and cut the city off completely.

A further source of frustration was that he had received no word from the central governing council in Jerusalem. Militia leaders in Jaffa and other cities informed him that his defiance had given them hope, and they were ready to turn to the cause. And yet, he was completely blind to the events in Jerusalem.

"I don't understand," Josephus said, as he watched enemy soldiers covering the hillock like ants, hammering away with their pickaxes. "They want me to defend Galilee, yet they fail to send me the reinforcements I need! Vespasian's army is twice the size that invaded us before, and yet, I only have local militia with which to face them."

"General Josephus," Levi said, as he ascended the dusty stone steps that led to the rampart. His face was ashen, and his commander immediately knew something was terribly.

"What is it? Have you brought word from Jerusalem?"

Levi nodded. "Our standing army of reinforcements has been destroyed," he said, his voice shaking, for he had had many friends in its ranks. He, himself, had prepared to serve under Silas of Babylonia, only to come to Galilee when Josephus personally asked him. That he had all but betrayed his friend to the renegade, John of Giscala, had added the strain of guilt to his conscience. This latest blow was proving to be almost too much for the old warrior.

"What?" Josephus asked. His eyes were wide, and he was in shock at the news. "How?"

"About three months ago, they tried taking the port city of Ascalon," Levi replied. "I don't know how, but instead of defending the walls, the Romans attacked them in the open and wiped most of them out. Both Silas of Babylonia and Yohanan the Essene were killed. Niger of Perea has been slandered as a traitor and a coward by the zealots who now threaten the stability of Jerusalem."

"Yohanan and Silas were two of our greatest generals," Josephus said, hanging his head. "Their loss will be greatly felt. And damn it all, Niger is no coward! He is a close friend, I know him far too well, and the last thing he

knows is fear. Those bastards who sang his praises after Beth Horon, who now wish to lay all the blame of this disaster upon him, are the true cowards."

"That army numbered twenty thousand men," Yaakov added. "While I, too, will mourn the loss of friends, even if they had all been sent to reinforce us, it would still not be enough to face the Romans in the open."

"It is true," Josephus concurred, steeling himself once more. Whatever the calamity that had just befallen the resistance, he still had his duty to perform. Like all generals, he would simply have to make do with the resources he had. "Any number of those men would have proven useful in haranguing Vespasian's army. However, we must now double our efforts in recruiting the local militias for defense of the other cities. And there are still plenty of us who can make a stand here; we will simply have to make the Romans bleed from behind these walls, rather than out there." He nodded towards the open plain that stretched before them, in emphasis.

The reprieve from constant attacks had been welcomed by his men, though their hearts sank at the sight of the Roman engineering efforts. They knew the raising and widening of the banks would allow them to emplace their catapults and, at last, bring them to bear.

A portion of the harvested timber had been used to build large hurdles, similar to what the rebels had first used to impede the legionary javelins, only much larger. Consisting of intermeshed branches, covered in animal hides, they took a dozen men to carry and emplace. They provided ample protection for the engineers working to build the earthen banks. Josephus had ordered his men to save their stones and arrows, for they were useless against such obstacles. He wished he had been given some of the captured siege engines that now sat useless in Jerusalem. Even just one or two onagers would have broken up these hateful barriers!

"There's nothing for it," he said. "We'll have to tear them down ourselves."



Work on the banks had progressed very well. A substantial portion of the hillock had been carved away and used to build up the large earthen assault platforms. Construction had also begun on several siege towers, which Vespasian was told would be ready within a week. It was tiring work for his men, yet it kept them busy, and they realized they were doing something

productive to end the siege, rather than making fruitless assaults in an endless grind. There had been little activity coming from inside Jotapata, and the Romans could only assume they were taking a much-needed reprieve from the fighting.

Working crews had been informed that they would labor another hour before retiring for the day. As they set about to make the most of their efforts, none seemed to notice the gates of the city slowly open. Even the soldiers tasked with guarding the work parties seemed oblivious, and their thoughts were occupied with returning to camp for their evening meal and bantering with their mates.

"Oh, shit!" a sentry suddenly shouted, alerting the nearest work crews.

It was too late to withdraw, as hundreds of Judean fighters gave a shout of rage and fell upon the hurdles and workmen. Sling stones pelted the guards, who scampered back, holding their shields up protectively. Those who had been laboring on building the earthworks had neither weapon nor armor to protect them, and all they could do was try and run from the assailants. Several were brutally slain before they could escape, their cries of pain and anguish echoing across the plain.

Auxiliary infantry soon reformed and attacked the raiders, driving them back, but not before a number of men with torches managed to set fire to several of the hurdles. As the Jewish fighters fled for the safety of the gates, about twenty archers rushed forward and loosed a volley of arrows at them. Two men were killed as they were shot through the back, with several others injured as they were shot through the arms or legs. Still, the raid had caught the Romans completely unawares, and hundreds of defenders swarmed to the walls, cheering and shouting profanities down upon their confused besiegers. Soldiers went about trying to extinguish the fires before they spread further, while others tended to the dead and wounded.



"How in the fuck did you let this happen?" Vespasian's rage was boiling over, and he had spent the past ten minutes verbally ripping into the regimental commander whose soldiers had been on guard shift that afternoon. "You know I have half a mind to strip you of your rank and send you back to whatever backwater shithole you came from! Now get the hell out of my sight!"

The officer on the receiving end of his berating could only salute and leave as quickly as possible.

“Few things will enrage me faster than the needless loss of Roman lives,” the commanding general growled, as he took a drink of water from a nearby pitcher. He then turned to his auxilia commander. “Placidus, I want every man who was on sentry along the siege line given five lashes for their incompetence.”

“Right away, general.”

“They should consider themselves lucky to be getting away with only that,” Titus surmised, as soon as Placidus left. “Falling asleep or failure to remain alert while on guard duty is a capital offense.”

“I’m well aware of that,” Vespasian retorted. “The last thing I need is to further crush morale by strangling fifty men. Besides, I partly blame myself; I should have doubled the guard, to include units of legionaries. I also want all hurdles carried forward another fifty yards and linked together.”

“That will place them well within range of the enemy missiles from the walls,” Titus remarked with his brow furrowed.

“Precisely. It will make those daft sentries remain alert. We’re also to the point where we can start emplacing our siege weapons, so I’ll need added crews to man and protect those, as well.”

“We should probably move the entire camp forward, then,” Titus suggested.

“Soon enough,” Vespasian said. “But for now, I want onagers and siege ballistae emplaced by first light. We’ll give our enemies a smashing wake up come dawn.”



Ephraim had taken last watch for the night, along with a number of his men. They had seen torches along the plain and heard the movement of what sounded like numerous mule carts, though since the night had been cloudy and devoid of moon or stars, they could see little else. And despite the massive enemy force outside their gates, many citizens of Jotapata were attempting to find some sense of normalcy this morning. After all, there had been no assaults over the past few days, and the only action had come from a raid by the defenders against the enemy siege works. Something that also played upon the psyche of the citizens was that Josephus had forbidden all

non-combatants from either leaving the city, or even so much as coming to the defensive wall. Those who had been outside the day the Romans approached had fled within the gates long before their enemy had come into view. What the commander of the Jotapata garrison did not want was for panic to ensue. The people knew the Romans had blockaded their city, but they also knew that nearly two weeks into the siege the Judean Army still held the walls. Were they to see just how large the Roman army was, Josephus knew the people would be stricken with horror.

Despite the restrictions against civilians on the wall, several women had decided to come visit their husbands and significant others who were soon to come off guard duty. Ephraim first thought to berate the women, but then his heart was softened by seeing their warm embrace with those they loved. His own wife had died twelve years prior, and he had never remarried. His only son perished during the anarchy that took place in Jerusalem the year before, and he had not heard from his daughter since her move to Ascalon.

He sighed quietly as he saw one woman, who was great with child, kneeling and holding hands with her husband. Ephraim thought back to happier days, when he had been that young expectant father. He knew, over the last few days, some of the women had come to see their men while they were on sentry duty. However, since it had always happened at night, and because the friends of the men in question made certain to keep an eye out for them, Ephraim had let it be. While Josephus was a stern disciplinarian, he figured with as well as his warriors had fought, they deserved a little bit of reprieve. And besides, the women were always gone well before light, sparing the city any unnecessary panic.

Still smiling, with a flood of memories in his mind, he turned his eyes outward just as the first rays of the sun warmed his back. It was then that he and the other sentries' eyes grew wide in terror. For now they knew the source of all the commotion the night before. Arrayed upon the raised banks were a long line of onager catapults, along with six or seven heavy siege ballistae. The fearsome machines were loaded, their crews waiting for the light of dawn to unleash.

"Get off the…" Before Ephraim could finish, a Roman trumpet sounded, followed by a series of shouted commands.

The noise of the throwing arms from the onagers slamming into the support arms, along with the screech of the boulders from the ballistae flying along the troughs and out towards the walls sounded like the gnashing of

demonic teeth.

Dozens of heavy boulders, each weighing anywhere from twenty to forty pounds, smashed into the walls, while others sailed into the city, shattering the walls of nearby buildings. Smashed brick and mortar flew into the air, with several sentries knocked off the wall, stones crashing into their bodies. The survivors hunkered down behind the ramparts as more catapult missiles hammered against the walls and beyond. While keeping low may have offered some protection, it did little against a precise hit, as one defender learned too late. The stucco barricade shattered as a siege ballista hurled its heavy stone against it. As the wall burst, the poor man kneeling behind it took the full force of both broken stone, as well as the ballista shot, directly in his face, which caved in. Blood and bone sprayed everywhere, and the warrior's body twitched spastically as death took hold.

"Go!" the young expectant father said to his wife. "You must get off the wall!"

It was thirty feet from where they lay to the steps, and as more catapult shots smashed against the walls, the woman fought to find her courage. Finally she got to her feet, though her burden kept her from kneeling low as she made her way to the stairs. On the most perverse of chances, an onager fired just before she reached the steps. The heavy boulder slammed into the side of her protruding belly and, in a horrifying spray of blood, tore her child from her body. The woman's scream was nearly loud enough to be heard back at the Roman camp as she fell to her knees, her body ripped open and covered in gore, while blood vomited from her mouth as she collapsed and fell onto the path below.

Her husband shrieked at the sight of his wife and unborn child so cruelly torn to pieces. A madness consumed him and he stood upright, oblivious to the continuous torrent of siege stones. His eyes wide with the insanity of supreme grief, he clambered over the rampart, lowering himself down as far as he was able before jumping the rest of the way. He landed hard, nearly snapping his ankle, yet he was insensible to physical pain. Still screaming until his voice broke, he drew his sword and hobbled towards the Roman siege lines. The men manning the catapults were mesmerized by the sight of this lone assailant coming at them. A pair of archers stepped forward, and when the warrior was within fifty feet, one of them leveled his bow and loosed an arrow into his guts. To their surprise, the maddened fighter kept coming forward, so the second archer fired an arrow into his chest. This

slowed the man considerably, as it had pierced his lung, and he clutched at the shaft while still struggling onward. They watched as he limped towards them, never stopping, though his screams had now fallen to low whimpers as he fought for breath. When he was within ten feet of the line, his vision began to cloud over and he collapsed to the ground. A lone auxiliary trooper stepped forward, and while staring down at the man in a mixture of admiration and contempt, stepped on his victim's sword arm before plunging his spear into the man's throat.



Knowing his men could do nothing from the walls, Josephus quickly ordered them to abandon their posts and find cover behind nearby buildings. The thunder of catapult shot slamming into the ramparts and buildings echoed throughout the city, filling the people with terror. Though many had heard stories of the fearsome imperial war machines, none had ever witnessed such unholy destructive power.

"By God, what can we do against that?" a warrior asked, his face covered in dirt from where a part of the rampart had burst near his head.

"We need to build the wall higher," Josephus surmised. "Their siege engines can shatter the thinner ramparts readily enough, but not the thicker walls themselves."

"And how do you propose we do that?" another man scoffed.

A catapult stone crashed into the building, as if to emphasize his point.

"The Romans are not the only ones who know engineering," their commander reassured them.

While Josephus took some men to implement his next strategic counter, the bombardment continued throughout the day. Only a handful of brave souls continued to provide lookouts, in case the Romans decided to launch another assault. A couple of these men were smashed asunder as they were unfortunate enough to take a direct hit from onagers or ballista. Vespasian seemed content to punish the city for the remainder of the day in this manor, to let them feel the strains of relentless torment while being utterly powerless to stop it.

Chapter XXIX: Brutal Strategies

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Like the Romans during the buildup before the siege, Josephus now had the defenders of Jotapata engaged in a series of building activities. He was even able to employ the women and elderly in this task. Many expressed their profound thanks to him for allowing them the chance to assist in the defense of their beloved city. During the evening and throughout the night, he ordered the construction of large pylons, upon which were hung wicker frameworks with freshly slaughtered animal hides, similar to the Roman hurdles. These were further doused with water, in order to prevent their enemies from setting them alight.

Unused buildings were demolished for stone, and mortar was mixed and brought in large buckets to the wall. It seemed as if no one in Jotapata would sleep this night, and the entire city was lit up with torches silhouetting activity, coupled with an energy only those desperately fighting for their very survival could call upon.

Those not working on building the defenses were tasked with raiding the Roman siege works. Despite Vespasian having doubled the guard, there were still too few to protect all of their equipment. The raiding party this night moved as quietly as possible under the cover of darkness. A thousand men made for the engines on the extreme right of the Roman line, near where they had all but leveled the outlying hillock. This was also where the nearly constructed siege towers lay.

The Romans were more alert this night, particularly due to the activity they could hear coming from Jotapata. Still, the light of their torches only carried so far, and it was only when the raiders were within a few dozen feet that the alarm was sounded. Infantry quickly formed ranks, while a trumpet frantically sounded the alarm. And while a number of fighters clashed with the infantrymen, this was only to prevent them from saving their siege engines.

As the melee ensued and soldiers rushed in from various parts of the line, the most fleet-footed of the rebels pulled up three of the Romans’ own

torches and used them to set fire to a pair of onagers, as well as one of the large hurdles. They then rushed for where they knew the siege towers lay, praying as they ran that they might be able to set them alight before enemy reinforcements came down from their camp. Luck was partially on their side, as one of the men almost ran directly into one of the tower frames, which still lay on its side. Given the priority of emplacing the catapults and building up the earthworks, the towers had been left unattended, and over the previous week the wood had dried considerably in the heat of the late spring.

The towers immediately crackled and burst into flames that licked hungrily at the drying wood and rope. The men grinned in glee, yet the bright light from the fires condemned them, for one of them cried out in pain as an arrow embedded itself in his chest. As his eyes rolled into the back of his head, his companions spotted a patrol of mounted archers and auxilia cavalry. They started to run, though they knew the distance was too great. Their comrades were already withdrawing as the Roman infantry had become too many for them to contain. One of the raiders was shot through the back; the other ran through by a lancer just as he reached the embankment.



While Vespasian was mildly irritated by the raid, the results had not been catastrophic by any means. Yes, the proposed siege towers had been torched, however, he would soon come to realize they were much too short for what he needed anyway. Two onagers had been completely incinerated, along with one of the protective hurdles. The raiders had attempted to burn a siege ballista, though the wood had failed to fully ignite. Three auxiliary troopers had been killed during the skirmish with a further twenty injured. The number of Jewish wounded was unknown, though they did count eight fresh bodies, including the three who had paid for burning the towers with their lives. For all that, it was what the commander-in-chief saw when he gazed upon Jotapata itself that filled him with alarm.

All along the wall was an array of scaffolds covered in hides and wicker hurdles. The walls were also noticeably higher, the fresh mortar visible even from a distance. Onager crews were sending shots into the barricades, though the pliable animal hides proved surprisingly resilient. Some of the catapults aimed lower, though the thickness of the walls would allow them to withstand all but a sustained bombardment.

“Nicanor was right,” Vespasian muttered, “that bastard is clever.” He turned to Titus and Trajan, whose legion was in ready reserve to attack the walls. “These raiders are too damn fast for our heavy infantry to catch. Therefore, I want palisade stakes posted along the embankment, with every scorpion in the army on line. Archers and missile troops alone will guard the siege line, with infantry in reserve, should the enemy attempt to press us hard. It may be that we’ll just have to starve these brigands out.”

There were numerous complaints, as soldiers were always prone to, when the archers and skirmishers were told they were all relocating from their camps to the siege line. Those not on watch would sleep near the palisades or behind the catapults. There were a few logistics to sort out, because a latrine trench would now be necessary, and officers would need to coordinate with the quartermasters as to the supplying of rations for their men.

The establishment of these positions for the missile troops was undertaken while the siege engines commenced their second day of bombardment of the city. With enemy sentries only risking the occasional glance over the ramparts, the defenders of Jotapata were left unaware of the change in tactics by Vespasian.



There was great risk involved in coming to Jotapata, but the men knew they had to try. Josephus had sent some of his ablest climbers out of the city, covered in sheep skins, down into the rocky ravines. From there they would scale the steep cliffs that led to the surrounding hillsides, and provided they were able to elude the Roman patrols, they could send messages to the local garrisons and militia groups. They could, in turn, gather intelligence for Josephus and the resistance. Two such men had brought with them a satchel that contained detailed information from the governing council in Jerusalem, who Josephus was desperate to hear from. While they could not send reinforcements, he, at least, wished to know how Hanan and the others were managing, and if they were still keeping the radicals contained.

The trail was close; it was a narrow path that led into the chasm. From there they could make their way back towards the city. It had been this path that allowed the defenders to ferry in some much-needed supplies over the past three weeks. As they crept along, they suddenly heard a voice shout from higher up on the hill.

“Down there!”

Knowing that secrecy and stealth would avail them no more, they stood and shed the sheep hides, sprinting for the path. A squad of auxiliary infantrymen were stumbling their way down the slope, looking to cut them off.

“Here,” one of the men said, handing his friend the satchel. “You’re the faster of us. Get to Jotapata, I’ll hold them off!”

The second man made to protest, but seeing there was no time, he took the leather sack and started bounding down the path. The first messenger drew his short sword, though he barely raised it to strike before he was stabbed through the heart. It was enough, though, and his friend was lost in the darkness of the ravine before a pursuit could be made. It would take the badly shaken man several hours to negotiate his way through the dark ravine until he found the narrow and treacherous path that led up into Jotapata. As he clawed his way up to the top, he was spotted by a pair of guards, who helped him up and took him to Josephus.

“You did well getting this to me,” Josephus told the messenger as Devorah, who was now assisting at the inn, handed him a cup of water.

“I fear we are undone, though,” the man lamented. “The Romans now know about the secret path. Surely they will post a guard on it.”

“Which means no more supplies coming in or messages going out,” Levi observed with a sigh. He then steeled himself. “We’ll just have to fight our way out then!”

“There is another raid tonight,” Josephus acknowledged. “Let’s hope we can destroy some more of their hateful siege engines!”

“With your permission, I would like to join the raid,” the messenger said.

The governor-general replied with a nod. He then dismissed everyone and was left alone in the small room he’d acquired since his arrival.

The lady who owned the inn was a kind widow who had two sons that were taking part in the defense. She had said repeatedly to Josephus how she placed her faith in him, and in God, to deliver them safely. Those words of encouragement were, in truth, an additional burden, and he was exhausted. It seemed like he almost never slept, for something was always happening that required his attention. The raising of the wall, along with adding numerous towers, had done much to strengthen the defenses, and the constant raids were certainly hampering the Roman siege efforts and morale. He could only

hope that Hanan had some better news for him than the last message he had received, informing him about the disaster in Ascalon. This latest note was, surprisingly, barely a week old.

My Dear Josephus,

It is with heavy heart that we were unable to send you the reinforcements you requested, and our grief is doubled at the word of your being besieged by the enemy. I can only pray that by the time this reaches you that you are still holding the Romans at bay.

I do not wish to cause you additional strain; however, you must know that every faction is awaiting word from Galilee as to our success or failure. Both Simon bar Giora and John of Giscala stand ready to fill the void, should you meet your demise. With the support each man can gather, our central government will be too weak to oppose them. The moderates still control the city, but only because you have succeeded thus far in keeping the Romans from conquering Galilee and invading lower Judea. Both Simon and John have consented that if you are successful then they will withdraw their bids to assume command. Whether or not this means they will join our cause is unknown, but at least then we would not have them as enemies.

Eleazar has grown close with the Edomites; yet another violent faction in the same vein as the Sicarii who he helped purge from Jerusalem. It is as if he has traded one tyrannical master for another! He, too, is waiting to hear how you fare against the armies of Vespasian before he will play his hand. It is a sad world we live in, but the harsh reality is that if you are unable to withstand the Roman onslaught and Galilee falls, then there will be chaos. The fanatics will become emboldened, and will openly battle us as well as each other. What forces our army still has are being kept close to Jerusalem in order to keep these radicals suppressed.

I also must advise against negotiating with the Romans at this time, unless you find there is no other way. A negotiated end to the siege will still be a defeat and will lead to the fall of Galilee. It will also be used as political fodder by the renegades to claim we are weak in our resolve.

Remember, we need a negotiated ending of the entire war, not just one siege. Therefore, I ask that you not try and come to terms with Vespasian unless you are successful in driving him from Jotapata. Only then can we perhaps look to gain a successful settlement from them.

Again, it pains me to have nothing to offer you accept my thoughts and prayers for your safety, and that of Galilee. Go with God, my son, and may he guide you in this time of peril.

Your friend,

Hanan ben Hanan

The words of his mentor distressed Josephus and added even more to his burden. However, he was glad to have received at least some news from Jerusalem, for he had been ignorant to the larger strategic picture ever since he first left for Garis. He thought about this coming night's raid. Levi had insisted on leading it, and while his captains had told Josephus he needed sleep, there would be no rest for him while his men were outside the walls.

He was further concerned about the health and status of the garrison. Casualties and fatigue were taking their toll, with a number of the wounded succumbing to injuries they should have easily survived, due to lack of medical supplies and sufficient water. He feared there would be more this night. The more who died or fell badly wounded, the fewer men there would be to man the walls, provide necessary labor, and maintain the defense of the city.

"Forty-seven days," he whispered to himself, as he lay down on his bed, eyes still wide open. It was now day twenty-six.



Five hundred men had come with Levi this evening. Their target was a pair of onagers and a siege ballista that were straight out from the gate. A number of them carried torches that would be ignited by those the Romans had emplaced along the line. There were a lot more infantrymen guarding the siege engines now, but their armor encumbered them, plus they could not be everywhere at once without having half their army on sentry duty every

night.

Like most of the forays, this would have to be quick; rush in, ignite the engines and siege works, while keeping the Roman infantry at bay, then back to the city. Levi swallowed hard, his sword drawn as he stepped out of the gate. The sky was clear and a crescent moon cast a soft glow. He prayed silently that the enemy guards were not on alert at this late hour, for they had elected to launch the assault two hours before dawn. As the mass of rushing men reached the line of torches, they suddenly realized the siege works were even further back than they appeared. The Romans had fooled their sense of distance by emplacing their torches further ahead of their lines.

"Scorpions…fire!"

The volley of heavy bolts bored into the rebels, knocking men off their feet, smashing clean through torsos, necks, arms, legs, and even heads. Two fighters who had run into each other were pinned together by a single bolt.

"Archers…up!"

A single torch lit a line of pitch and oil that had been emplaced just past the, now visible, line of scorpions. Flames leapt along the shallow cutout revealing at least a company of archers who ignited their arrows, and on subsequent orders loosed a volley into the ranks of the hapless raiding party. An immediate retreat was ordered just as the scorpion crews reloaded and unleashed another wave of the thick bolts, causing even more men to fall screaming in anguish as they were impaled. Another shower of arrows fell upon the fleeing mass as they reached the gates, which quickly slammed shut.

Levi fought to catch his breath as he and his men stood sweating with the rush of terror at what they had just been subjected to. Outside the walls, they could hear the Romans shouting in triumph. Unless he was willing to commit half his garrison to the attack, there was now no way for Josephus to continue to assail the besiegers. Nearly a hundred men lay dead or crying out piteously in the night as a harsh reminder.



"There is a weakened section of wall, just to the right of the main gate," Vespasian said, as he stood along the siege line the next morning.

A number of the fallen Jewish raiders from the night before still groaned and attempted to crawl away.

"We managed to smash the protective screens before they could finish

building it up," Trajan noted.

"I want all fire directed on that spot," the commanding general ordered. "Every onager and ballista is to smash us a practicable breach between those towers. If we can crumble the upper ramparts and keep their fighters at bay long enough, then we can, perhaps, finally succeed in taking the walls of this damned place. The earthworks are also high enough and close enough to the wall that it's time we ready the battering ram."

It was the Tenth Legion's turn to assault the walls, and as they watched the catapults unleash hellish torrents of heavy stones upon the walls, Gaius grinned in anticipation. Thus far they had been kept in reserve, but with the Fifteenth and Fifth Legions already taking two-week stretches at trying to break the city, it was finally the Tenth's turn.

"At least we're not on the battering ram this time," Julius said, nodding towards where a century from the Second Cohort was pushing the large machine along the embankment.

The ram had since been reinforced with larger support poles and protective cover, which added considerably to its weight.



The earthworks had come close enough to the walls that it was now within range of the ram. Josephus knew this, and so he had devised a stratagem in order to counter the fearsome machine. While the walls of Jotapata could withstand catapult shot, they would crumble quickly should the Romans get close enough to unleash the heavy ram.

"Bring up the chaff," he ordered some of his men, "and have all women and non-combatants confined to their homes."

His last order had been made necessary the day prior, when several women, tired of being restrained, had gotten up on high vantage points within the city that gave them a spectacular view of the enemy army. That so many armed fighters could be gathered in one place, with every last one of them encased in armor and bearing weapons only the wealthiest in Judea could afford, filled them with terror. Many more had heeded their cries of anguish, and curiosity got the better of them. And so, now there was no secret at all as to the awesome power of the forces arrayed against them. As such, Josephus was determined not to allow the city's women to undermine the confidence

of his men.

The bombardment continued, and the nearby towers were battered incessantly, injuring several of the lookouts. At Ephraim's advising, Josephus had taken all of their injured and weakened fighters and placed them at the strongest points along the wall. He kept all of his able warriors ready to repel the attack they knew was coming.

"They're approaching with the ram!" a brave sentry reported, who was lying along the stone steps and just barely able to poke his head above the smashed ramparts.

"Ready the chaff," Josephus ordered. He turned to one of his captains, a very large and strong man named Sameas. "I need you to break that beast!"

The burly fighter simply nodded. He was half a head taller than Josephus and looked like a veritable Goliath.



There was an incessant barrage from both sides as desperate Judean fighters manned the walls, braving the storm of catapult, scorpion, and arrow volleys. They, in turn, hurled throwing darts, sling stones, and shattered blocks towards the attacking legionaries. The ram was a particular focus for their attacks, yet it seemed impervious as it wheeled slowly towards the wall.

"Steady lads!" Nicanor said, as he and his legionaries hunkered behind their shield wall.

They knew the Jews would attempt to destroy the ram, and their task was to protect it at all costs. The Fifth Cohort marched on the left side, just behind the ram, while the Seventh Cohort marched on the right. Two other cohorts were nearby in reserve, with the rest of the legion making ready to assault the breach once the ram broke through.

The shouts of enemy warriors alerted them to the threat on their left. What surprised them was the horde of fighters that was also coming from the right and heading for the Seventh Cohort. Josephus had emplaced a large contingent of his warriors outside the walls, under cover of various rock outcroppings and crumbled ramparts, allowing them another axis of attack.

"Stand ready!" Centurion Antonius shouted.

"Javelins ready!" Nicanor called out, as his men hefted their pila.

The rebels were on them surprisingly fast, and there was no time to give the order for them to throw by volleys. Instead, legionaries of their own

volition launched their javelins towards their foes before drawing their gladii. The cohort then fanned out in an echelon angling away from the ram.

On the left end of the line, a warrior with a sword and buckler came at Gaius. It was his first close look at their adversaries since the siege began, and the optio was surprised at how haggard these men looked. Their clothes were filthy, due to conserving their water strictly for drinking. They were also mostly unshaven. Faces, hands, and arms bore numerous cuts, gashes, and bruises from the weeks of fighting. They fought with the courage of despair, and as the warrior clashed shield-to-shield with Gaius, the optio slammed the bottom edge of his shield into the man's shin, snapping the bone and dropping him to his knees. Gaius quickly stabbed the warrior through the side of the neck. As his adversary dropped his sword, gouts of blood splashing onto the Roman's blade, his mouth agape, he looked up at his killer. In the brief moment it took for him to expire, Gaius swore the man's expression was one of both relief and gratitude for ending his pain.

Vespasian sat atop his horse, just beyond where the majority of the Tenth Legion stood ready. He was accompanied by Trajan, along with the legion's chief tribune. The loud crack of the first blow of the ram brought a grin to the general's face. The booming sound was unmistakable, and there were few walls in the world that could stand up to its relentless pounding. The ram slammed home twice more, and they swore they could hear the walls beginning to break. Upon the next blow, however, it sounded muffled, as if the ram were striking bags of straw.

"What the hell was that?" Vespasian asked.

Trajan shook his head in confusion and turned to one of his tribunes. "Ride forward and find out what is going on!" The sound of the ram's muffled impact sounded once again.



The large bags of chaff were working! The rebels had hung the sacks on long ropes so they were placed directly in the path of the ram's head. The soft material absorbed the shock of the blows, and the wall ceased to crumble. Numerous skirmishers manned the ramparts on either side, pummeling the ram, as well as the closest Roman troops, in order to prevent them from removing the obstacle.

“Now, Sameas!” Josephus called to his captain, who stood shirtless with gleams of sweat dripping off his muscular frame.

“With me, my warriors!” he shouted, raising his sword high as he leapt up the steps towards where the bags of chaff hung over the wall. He gazed at the chaos below, his face a hard grimace.

Hundreds of fighters were attacking the Romans from both sides, trying desperately to get at the ram, which was protected by ranks of legionaries. All along the walls, courageous warriors continued to hurl missiles down upon the Romans, all the while being punished by the endless barrage of catapult stones, arrows, and scorpion bolts. It would all be for naught if they could not stop that cursed ram! The Romans, ever full of ingenuity, had taken long poles and used them to knock the bags of chaff away from the ram. The heavy iron mass slammed into the wall with a resounding smash once more, causing Sameas to nearly lose his footing.

His face twisted in rage as he grabbed a large broken chunk of the wall, and with a loud cry he jumped from the wall and brought the stone down upon the ram’s head, breaking the wooden beam as he landed. Twenty or so of his warriors leapt from the wall, with several carrying torches used to set fire to the machine while the startled crew sprinted away. With immeasurable strength, Sameas hefted the iron head and held it high while giving a loud cry of victory. This was met by several arrows from nearby archers, which he seemed almost impervious to as they plunged into his flesh. It was when a legionary javelin punctured his lung that he dropped the head, which crashed onto the pile of rubble below. With blood trickling from his mouth, Sameas gave one last cry of defiance before collapsing in a twitching heap near the slow burning battering ram.



The sorties from the defenders would take place all day and into the night, while Roman work crews feverishly tried to rebuild the ram. Nicanor, Gaius, and the rest of the Fifth Cohort were withdrawn late in the afternoon and replaced by another from their legion.

“Bastards are fucking tough,” a decanus said as he downed the entire contents of his water bladder.

“Given their appearance, one would think they were close to breaking,” Gaius added. “Yet I think they are driven to continue to fight by that special

kind of courage when one knows they are going to die."

"Well, I wish they'd get on with dying then," the decanus grumbled.

The sound of the ram smashing into the wall alerted them.

"At least it looks like we'll have a breach in the wall soon enough," Gaius remarked. He then went to find Nicanor.

The centurion was near one of the onagers, speaking with Julius, who had gotten a tally on all casualties from the decanii.

"Two of our men are dead," the tesserarius reported, "and about a dozen more wounded. Those Jewish bastards were relentless today."

Gaius noted the names of the fallen. One was only seventeen, having joined the army just three months prior. The other was a thirty-one year old veteran with thirteen years in the ranks. The optio found it heartbreaking that, aside from their fellow legionaries, these men would soon be forgotten, consigned to the oblivion of history.

Skirmishing would continue well into the night, with Judean raiders desperately attempting to halt the operations of the battering ram. Exhaustion and casualties finally took their toll, and around midnight Josephus ordered his warriors to pull back behind the walls.



"The wall is breached," Trajan reported later that night. "We have long planks ready to position that will allow our men to take the city!"

"Outstanding!" Vespasian replied.

"We managed to take some prisoners, as well," the legate of the Tenth Legion added. "They all said the strangest thing. Their commander had a vision from God, telling him the siege would last for forty-seven days."

"Which god?" Vespasian asked, chuckling. "Of course, I sometimes forget they have only one."

"Well, it's been a month since we began, so perhaps their god is not so gracious in his prophecies," Titus added, joining the men inside Vespasian's tent.

"We still have to take the city, of course," Trajan remarked. "There is a breach in the wall, but you can bet they will defend it to the last."

"You know, we've seen the strangest things over the last few days," Titus remarked, having a seat on one of the camp chairs. "There are no natural springs here, and from what we can observe, they have cisterns that collect

rain water for their wells. Those cannot last forever, especially with the dryness of this spring and early summer. Our men have seen their sentries getting their water ration by measure each day. And yet, we saw women washing clothes and leaving them hanging out to dry."

"It's as if they are trying to convince us they still have plenty of water," Vespasian replied, resting his chin on his knuckles. "Damn it all, and we have no way of knowing for certain! Well, that's it then, we must take the breach tomorrow and be done with this. Otherwise, perhaps their god will start giving ideas to the outlying cities."



Inside Jotapata there was an eerie silence, following an end to the pounding of the Romans' battering ram. All within knew the wall had been shattered, and in the morning there would be thousands of enemy soldiers storming the breach.

"How can we possibly hold now that the wall is broken?" Yaakov asked.

The normally unshakeable young man was feeling the strain after a month of relentless assaults from the Romans, along with the countless deaths of friends and colleagues. He was filled with dread as he began to doubt his ability to save Devorah from the enemy, should they get into the city. The young woman consumed his thoughts, and he vowed he would die a thousand deaths, rather than see her harmed by the Romans.

"The numbers of sick and infirm grow every day," Levi added. "And with no means of gathering water or supplies, what can we do?"

"We have plenty of corn," Ephraim spoke up. "But I agree, unless it rains, soon our water will not last. Most of the wells are at less than a quarter of their capacity. We used much to make the mortar for the walls, along with the ruse of making it appear our water is still plentiful by having the women make a great showing of washing their clothes."

"Courage, my friends," Josephus replied. "Remember, they have been at this for a month, and still we hold the walls! They thought they would take us in a day, and now look at them. Every day we hold on gives the people hope. And not just in Galilee, but all of Judea, they look to us as their one chance at freedom. The Zealots, Edomites, Sicarii, and all the other fanatics have abandoned the people. Only we stand between the oppressors and liberty. We still have a few more tricks we can pull to thwart their efforts."

“What do you have in mind?” Ephraim asked.

Josephus grinned. “We need wood,” he replied, “and every amphora of oil within the city.”



Dawn came once more, and Gaius was filled with anticipation as he caught his first glance at the breach. Long ramps were being carried to emplace across the dirt embankment to the crumbling gap in the wall. The soldiers of the Tenth Legion were eager to assail the walls and end this struggle once and for all. A number of auxiliary cohorts were also tasked to provide support, as well as supplemental attacks upon the walls.

“Elements of the Fourth Cohort are to advance with their pickaxes and undermine the wall that’s been compromised by the ram,” the legion’s master centurion briefed the cohort commanders. “The Third and Sixth Cohorts will use ladders on either side of the breach. The rest of the legion will form up and assault the breach itself.”

“At least we’re not having to dig like moles while the battle is going on,” Gaius chuckled, after Nicanor briefed the century on the plan of attack.

“Well, since we got into the fray yesterday, we’re towards the back of the attack force,” Nicanor said. “And, of course, the First Cohort will want first crack at the breach.”

The elite First Cohort of any legion consisted entirely of veterans, many of whom had sixteen to twenty years in the ranks. All were noted for their superior fighting prowess and given their status, they were exempt from fatigue details, while also being given incentive pay. They had five centuries instead of the usual six. However, each century was at double-strength of one hundred and sixty legionaries. The First was also the only cohort that was almost always kept at full strength. So, while most of the remaining cohorts struggled to maintain even close to their authorized four hundred and eighty legionaries, the First had eight hundred select troops ready for battle.

Cornicens sounded their war horns and soon the Tenth Legion was advancing towards the wall. They marched with their shields close together, heads low, as they were soon subjected to barrages of sling stones and arrows from the walls. Onagers and scorpions attempted to suppress the defenders, while companies of archers advanced with the legionaries. As they had no shields, and their armor was hamata chain that did not provide nearly the

same level of protection, they attempted to stay low and behind the ranks of the heavy infantry.

All legates, along with Placidus, joined Vespasian to observe the assault. Trajan was busy coordinating the Tenth Legion, while Placidus' concern was for his archers and auxiliary infantry that were conducting the supporting attacks. Horns sounded once again, and a loud battle cry erupted from the lead elements of the Tenth as they stormed towards the wall. From their vantage, Vespasian could see the lead cohort in tight formation charging up the ramp and into the breach. It was a frenzied melee, while those tasked with undermining the walls went to work with their entrenching tools, their mates providing overhead cover with their shields. But then disaster struck, causing dismay to the assembled generals.



"Bring up the oil!" Josephus called over his shoulder.

The fighting in the breach was extremely fierce, with neither side giving ground. The broken ground from the crumbled wall prevented the Romans from keeping their formations close. However, their superior armor and training still gave them a decisive advantage in close combat fighting. The Judean warriors were starting to get pushed back as their casualties mounted. Blood-soaked bodies soon littered the pile of rocks and broken wall as legionaries smashed and stabbed with their shields and gladii.

The Jewish general himself was on the wall, where scores of defenders were attempting to keep the soldiers scaling up the ladders at bay. The armor of both legionary and auxiliary often protected them long enough to reach the top, where a brawl ensued along the ramparts. The legionaries with the pickaxes below were chopping away at what remained of the wall, while widening the breach. For the defenders, the situation was growing desperate.

The oil Josephus called for was carried in large metal bowls with wire handles. Fires had been burning since before first light, heating up the oil until it bubbled with fury. The use of it was one of the cruelest stratagems in warfare, yet as distressed as the Jews were, they knew they needed every advantage they could muster.

The scalding liquid was first poured upon the soldiers digging into the wall. Their screams were loud and high pitched as they dropped their shields

and fled from the walls. Their armor became a hindrance, as it kept the oil trapped against their skin, burning deep into their flesh. Next, copious amounts were poured down the ladders into the faces of the assault troops, who fell to the ground, clutching at their faces in agony. Lastly, the ramp itself was subjected to the dousing of the bubbling liquid. This not only scalded the men in the breach, but also made the ramp itself slippery and unassailable. Those within, who had fallen victim to the burning, were quickly slain as they writhed amongst the boulders and carnage. The attack was now in complete disarray. Where only an hour before the Romans were assured of victory, they now fled the walls in disorder, many of their friends left screaming in agony as they burned.



Vespasian could not believe what he was seeing. He spurred his horse forward until he was well ahead of the line of scorpions that continued to fire at the defenders on the wall. He saw the steam coming from the ladders and the ramp, only then realizing what his enemies had done. As he watched the chaos unfolding, a lone archer on the wall spotted him, and raising his bow in a high arc, sent an arrow towards the general. Vespasian howled in both rage and pain as the arrow embedded itself in his foot.

“General!” Titus called as he rode up beside his father, quickly dismounting and checking the wound. It was deep, but thankfully had not severed bone or ligament.

Cheers of overwhelming relief and exultation erupted from the city wall, as the Judean defenders watched the brutally strong Roman army fleeing in chaos. Centurions reformed their men into some semblance of order, while sending groups of men forward in testudo formation to try and retrieve as many of the wounded as possible. Those scalded by the oil were in horrific shape, the burning liquid searing their flesh all the way to the bone in places. The worst of the injured would succumb to infection within the coming days, as they slowly perished in agony. Morale of the Roman army reached its lowest point that day.

“Damn it all,” Vespasian grumbled. “Looks like we’ll have to starve them out after all.”

Chapter XXX: Unrest in Jaffa



Legionaries on the march

While the army licked its wounds following the abortive attack on the breach, imperial messengers arrived with even more disturbing news. Vespasian sat with his foot propped up and wrapped in a bandage. There was no usual banter from the senior officers this evening. More casualties had been suffered this day than in the entire rest of the campaign thus far. Fifty men lay dead, with three times that number wounded, many gravely from the scalding oil burns.

"And the situation just got trickier," Vespasian observed, looking at a report from Placidus' reconnaissance cavalry.

"Yes, sir," the corps commander replied. "It would seem our delay in taking Jotapata has emboldened others. Jaffa has now declared for the rebellion."

"And given their proximity, they could cause a lot of trouble," Titus noted, remembering an earlier conversation they'd had regarding this very real possibility.

"Well, we're not going to make any more assaults on Jotapata for the time being," Vespasian replied. "We'll let these bastards starve and thirst for a while. But if we are going to do this, then we need to make doubly sure our supply lines remain open, lest we starve or die of thirst ourselves."

"And with Jaffa having defected, they can easily launch raids from there,

essentially cutting us off." Trajan thought aloud.

"Precisely," Vespasian said. "That is why you will take six of your cohorts, along with a thousand cavalry, and squash this little problem."

"Jaffa is well defended with a double wall," Trajan observed. "It's hardly a 'little problem'."

"Send back for support if you need it," the commander-in-chief replied. "Titus, you will have a detachment ready to assist if necessary."

"Yes, sir."

"Cerealis," Vespasian said, to the legate of the Fifth Legion. "I have a mission for you, as well."

"Of course."

"It would seem the Samaritans have also been emboldened by the Jewish resistance and are claiming independence; at least a faction of them is. They are encamped on Mount Gerizim."

"That's about four or five days' march from here," Cerealis noted. "It's well within enemy territory."

"So, don't be stupid about it," Vespasian emphasized. "Take the Fifth Legion and whatever auxiliaries you need. We'll send some of Agrippa's troops with you, since they will be more familiar with the ground."

"Understood."

"The rest of the army will hold in place for now," the commanding general added. "We'll continue to bombard and harass them while they slowly succumb."



For the detached cohorts from the Tenth Legion it was almost a reprieve to be away from the siege at Jotapata, especially after the calamities that had befallen so many of their comrades. Their legate selected those that were still closest to full strength, while allowing those that had taken part in the previous day's assault on Jotapata a chance to regroup.

Trajan was a little unnerved at the thought of attacking another walled city, although from the intelligence reports gathered by Placidus' cavalry, their strength was not nearly that of Jotapata. The legion had begun its march at first light, and at only ten miles between the cities, they easily reached their destination by midday. The cohorts and their attached cavalry halted near a bend in the road, where beyond it went down a steep hill onto an open plain.

The town of Nazareth was but a mile to the east. Yet, as there had been no reports of unrest coming from there, it was left alone for the moment. Trajan rode forward with his cohort commanders to survey the city.

"The walls aren't too terribly high," Centurion Antonius said. "We could attack from multiple angles and envelope the defenses."

"That looks like what we'll have to do," Trajan concurred. "Ready your men. Cavalry will screen our flanks in case they attempt to send sorties against us."

As Trajan's battle group descended the slope and formed up on the plain, it became apparent there would be no need for siege ladders this day, as numerous horns sounded and the gates were thrown open.

"Brave, aren't they?" a legionary said.

"Brave or incredibly dumb," his decanus replied, "facing legionaries out in the open."

"Drop the ladders!" Trajan shouted, riding down the line. *"Battle formation!"*

In a show of efficiency, the ladders were quickly grounded with centuries forming into their battle lines, four ranks deep. Trajan had directed his cohorts to have their centuries fight as independent formations, in order to both extend their frontage as well as allow centurions easier command and control over their soldiers.

"Have both wings of cavalry fan out and cover the flanks," the legate told their regimental commander. "If no other threats emerge, you will envelope the enemy force. Wait for my signal!"

It at first baffled Gaius to see the enemy being so brazen, but then, given their numbers and desire to not have to endure a prolonged siege like Jotapata, the garrison was attempting to end the blockade before it was even in place. Nicanor marched on the extreme right of the formation, with the signifier standing close behind him. Gaius was on the left, though he and the tesserarius were more mobile, as part of their duties involved making certain none of their soldiers broke ranks, as well as to help drag any wounded to the rear of the line. Centurion Antonius and his century were on their immediate left, with another under a centurion named Galeo on their right.

"Steady lads," Gaius said, as the mass of Judean fighters raced towards them.

These men were not as well equipped as the defenders of Jotapata. Most were militia with little more than clubs or crude spears for weapons. And while a number did have swords, most did not have so much as a buckler to defend themselves.

"Just a bloody drill is all," one of the squad leaders on the line said, reassuring his men.

"Javelins ready!"

As pila were hefted to throwing position, the soldiers knew there would be no surprise or shock from the enemy here. After weeks of battling such a savage, cunning, and relentless foe, the Romans were at last given the chance to face the enemy on their own terms.

"Front rank…throw!"

The lack of shields by the Judeans, combined with their attacking like a rioting mob, made them easy prey for the storm of heavy pila. A swath was cut through the ranks of the horde as scores fell killed and maimed.

"Second rank…throw!"

The warriors pressed forward, stumbling over the bodies of their dead and dying friends. Gaius had waited until the second wave to unleash his javelin, sending it flying into the bowels of a young warrior who was running straight for him, eyes wide with rage. The force of the pilum gouging through his guts doubled the man over, and he dropped his weapon as he fell to the side, thrashing like a stricken ox.

"Third and fourth ranks…throw!" Nicanor gave the order, as the onslaught had only slowed their attackers long enough for them to bound over their fallen comrades.

"Gladius…draw!"

"Rah!" Blood surged through the veins of the legionaries, as each man settled low on his shield, his weapon ready to strike. They continued to march in step, increasing their speed slightly as the Judean mob crashed into their shield wall.

During the advance, Gaius had reckoned the enemy force was about the same size as that which attacked them at Ascalon. He was almost exact in his quick estimation, for eighteen thousand rebel fighters and militia had stormed forth from Jaffa. Though holding a six-to-one numerical advantage, the rebel army had had a near twenty-to-one superiority at Ascalon, where the results had been catastrophic.

Like the decanus on the battle line had said, the fray was quickly turning

into a bloody drill. With cavalry protecting the flanks, trampling and spearing any who tried to get around the legionary formation, the Jews found they could not use their numbers effectively. All they could do was engage in a bloody grind, fighting the Romans head-on, where their crude weapons were all but useless against the shield wall and legionary armor.

Gaius faced off against a rather tenacious foe with a long spear, who kept thrusting it towards the optio's face. Gaius kept his shield high in order to deflect the weapon away. At least twice the rather brash fighter had managed to catch him in the chest, though the spear deflected harmlessly off the segmented plates. Gaius then allowed the man to strike him a third time, and as the spear glanced off, the optio brought his arm down, pinching the weapon between his torso and bicep. Simultaneously, he twisted his body and swung his shield in a wide arc, the bottom edge catching the warrior on the side of the head. His eyes rolled back as he was knocked to the ground, rolling onto his back, unconscious. Gaius then plunged his gladius into the warrior's throat, causing his arms and legs to thrust upward in a violent spasm as the weapon severed his spine, killing him instantly.

"Set for passage-of-lines!"

The order was echoed by the legionaries and decanii as their fellow soldiers in the second rank made ready to lunge forward into the fray. While some centurions preferred to give a verbal command-of-execution, Nicanor favored following his preparatory command with a blow off his whistle. On the signal, the soldiers in the front rank held their shields against their bodies and quickly stepped backwards while those in the second rank rushed forward, smashing their shields into the Judean mob.

Like most ancient battles, this one did not last long. It soon became apparent to the defenders of Jaffa that they stood little chance against Roman battle lines, regardless of numbers. Those engaging the legionaries were quickly dismayed as their weapons proved ineffective, while their friends were slaughtered whenever they drew too close to the formation.

From his horse up on the short rise, Trajan gave a grin of satisfaction as he watched his legionaries cut their way through the enemy horde, like a mighty beast with thousands of flashing blades for teeth. The Jews were soon giving away, their courage failing them as they turned to run.

"Signal the cavalry," he told the aquilifer. "Have them surround the enemy. Our foolish adversaries have left the gates of the city open. If the

horsemen can slow their retreat, our legionaries can chase them straight into the city." He laughed sinisterly as he turned to his cornicen. "Sound the charge!"

The soldiers on the battle line had ceased the advance and were giving a loud cheer as the enemy fled in disarray. And so, it came as a bit of a surprise when the three rapid blasts on the cornicen's trumpet sounded.

"Alright lads, you heard the order!" Nicanor shouted down the line. *"Charge!"*

The entire line of legionaries shouted as one, racing after their fleeing enemies. While the unarmored Jewish warriors were much faster on their feet, they were slowed by the rampaging regiments of cavalry that rode over them, with lances plunging into the backs of many. The gates of Jaffa, which were not very wide, were suddenly crammed with warriors attempting to escape the massacre. This crushed their ranks together, many stumbling and being trampled by their very companions. It also gave the charging legionaries enough time to close the distance and smash into the mob from behind. Soldiers chopped their way through the mass, like a scythe through wheat, mangled corpses falling in a macabre spectacle of screams and spurting blood.

Those few defenders who had been left to man the outer wall were now racing down the steps and fleeing towards the second wall, approximately two hundred meters behind the first. Those fleeing from the battle who had been quickest on their feet managed to reach the gates, but as soon as those on the second wall saw their fellows were being swarmed by legionaries and cavalrymen, they panicked and slammed the gates shut in the faces of their friends.

As they stormed into the outer yard between the two walls, the legionary cohorts quickly reformed into battle ranks as they pressed forward. The mob was now pinned in between the wall and the Roman soldiers. Smashed together and unable to turn about or use their weapons effectively, they were killed without mercy. Gaius had no recollection as to how many he slew that day, only that he felt as if he were butchering cattle rather than men. His senses grew numb as he and his legionaries continued to thrust their weapons into the bodies of their enemies. Many continued to be stabbed repeatedly, long after they were dead, simply because, in the compressed mass, their

corpses could not fall to the ground.

As bodies fell in gory heaps and the Romans approached the second gate, those defenders who remained on the second wall started to drop sling stones and throwing darts down upon them. Legionaries quickly compressed ranks and brought their shields up to cover themselves, while dragging away those who had not been quick enough and were felled by the deluge of projectiles.

Once out of range, the Tenth Legion's cohorts, along with their supporting cavalry, took a few minutes to catch their breath as they assessed the situation. The day had gone far better than they could have ever expected, with the enemy so foolishly fighting them in the open. The majority of their foes now lay stricken either outside of the city, or in the open land between the two walls.

"That's as quickly as any of us thought we'd take the outer wall," Antonius chuckled, as he and the other pilus priors met with their legate.

"Excellent work today, gentlemen," Trajan exhorted them as he dismounted his horse.

"Shall we retrieve the ladders and make ready to assault the second wall?" another officer asked.

"Retrieve the ladders," Trajan ordered, "and set up camp here. We'll recon around the city and keep an eye on any additional gates there may be." He then turned to one of his tribunes. "Send word to Vespasian, let him know we've taken the first wall and slaughtered most of the garrison. Let him know we'll take those reinforcements from Titus before we assault the second wall."

"We'll send out details to finish off the enemy wounded and to retrieve any weapons they may still have," Antonius added.

Given the hardships they had been through, the men of the Tenth Legion allowed themselves a feeling of triumph and jubilation, even though the city still stood. Jaffa's size paled in comparison to strongholds like Jotapata and, given the volume of enemy dead, which would later be estimated in excess of fifteen thousand, they knew there would be little resistance once they attacked the second wall. Trajan's request for reinforcements was both a simple precaution, as well as a selfless act in that he was offering his fellow legate, Titus, a chance to share in the spoils and glory.



Back at Jotapata it was unnervingly quiet, with Titus posting elements of the Fifteenth Legion to various postings to cover the gaps left by the Fifth and Tenth Legions, as well as their auxilia detachments. Chief Tribune Domintius accompanied him as they walked the line near where the heaviest fighting had taken place over the past few days.

"Who would have thought this rabble would be so difficult to defeat?" Domitius asked. Though only about three years younger than Titus, his lack of actual experience made him naïve in many ways. He was learning fast just how relentless their enemies in Judea were.

"They are a tenacious lot," Titus admitted reluctantly. "They've been battling empires and conquerors for a thousand years; the one thing they really know how to do is fight."

"How is your father handling the strain of the siege?" Domitius asked. "After all, he shattered barbarian strongholds in Britannia in a fraction of the time."

"Our enemies in Britannia were no less brave," the legate replied, "but they had neither the resources nor resourcefulness of our enemies here. I still remember facing the hordes of Iceni and their allies six years ago. They had us horribly outnumbered, yet they relied on that and bravery alone to try and best us. This Josephus is twice the general that Boudicca ever was. He knows he cannot defeat the legions in open battle, regardless of numerical superiority, and so he uses both cunning and knowledge of the terrain to combat us. That and he's forced us into this bloody siege."

"I only hope the other rebel leaders are not so clever," Domitius said.

"There are others," Titus replied, "but Josephus has definitely been the most difficult for us to subdue."

They then heard the sound of a galloping horse coming up behind them. It was Master Centurion Ralla, bearing a dispatch.

"General, sir," he said, riding up and saluting. "Word from Trajan and the Tenth. They've routed the enemy at Jaffa. Seems the enemy was emboldened by the defense here and attempted to face his men in the open. They've taken the first wall, but request reinforcements to assault the second."

"Very good," Titus nodded. "Tell the cohort commanders of our reserve to make ready to march. Domitius, you will be in command of the legion while I'm gone. Head back to the main camp and inform General Vespasian."

The chief tribune saluted and started to walk away when he turned back briefly, a sly grin on his face. "Well, now we know that at least one of the

rebel generals is not nearly as clever as Josephus."



Gaius was taking the time to make some repairs to his armor while most of the century sat down for their evening meal around small campfires. Though the battle had been terribly one-sided, the task force had still suffered casualties. One man in his century had been killed, an older soldier who had been just a few years from his retirement and discharge. Seven more had been injured, two seriously. One had been stabbed in the thigh, the other had taken a throwing dart that had, unluckily, punctured between his neck and shoulder armor. The optio did not know how many others within the division had perished, though he did overhear General Trajan ordering timber to be collected for a massed funeral pyre.

"Mind if I join you, sir?"

Gaius looked up to see it was Quintus, the soldier who had replaced him as decanus after Ascalon.

"By all means," the optio replied, pointing to a fallen log. The ground between the two walls of Jaffa was mostly open ground, although there were a few hovels used by sheep farmers who grazed their livestock outside the city. "How are the lads managing?"

"Well enough," Quintus replied. "Decius got stuck in the forearm today, and though he says it hurts like a bastard, he'll be fine. I gave him an extra splash of concentrated vintage to numb it up a bit."

"You know I hardly see them anymore," Gaius remarked. "At one time all I cared about was the squad, those men who I'd be fighting next to on the battle line. After my promotion to decanus, I was consumed with trying to make certain their needs were always taken care of…not that they noticed, since taking care of them often involved berating and handing out extra duty for minor infractions. If I had any success as a squad leader, it was that none of my men ever had to stand before the centurion to face the lash. But now that I'm their optio, I never really see any of them except in passing; and even then they usually say little more than 'good day' or 'sir'."

"You may find this hard to believe, but the men are proud of you," Quintus replied. "Certainly you came down hard on them, and still have to in the absence of the centurion. Let's not forget that most of the lads in your squad were very young and came into the ranks at almost the same time. And

yet, after the harrowing ordeals we've all been through over the last few weeks, they now see the benefits of good order and discipline. They have become hardened veterans, in spite of their lack of years."

"And I suspect they will only grow harder," Gaius said thoughtfully, as he ran an oil cloth over the shoulder plates on his armor. "As we've already seen, no action goes without loss. I was promoted to optio after Centurion Marius was killed at Ascalon, and even a one-sided affair like today still had its share of friendly casualties. I suspect that tomorrow the city will fall, especially with the addition of General Titus' forces, yet not all of us will walk away from this place."

"That is the cold reality of our profession," Quintus added. "Still, what are your thoughts on the larger tactical picture? You know the lads are only focused on finishing their daily tasking, winning battles, and finding the nearest brothel when it's all said and done. I'm curious to know if you have any perspectives on the rest of this war. I'm certain Centurion Nicanor does, given his familiarity with the Jews, but I don't feel right asking him."

"General Vespasian's hope is that the war will end with the fall of Jotapata," Gaius answered. "Whether or not he believes in the probability of this, I don't know. The centurion understands Josephus well, because they were friends for so many years. He also feels that while the fall of Jotapata is crucial, it will not mean the end of the rebellion. That the various sects in Judea are disorganized and in a constant state of strife with each other is both an advantage and disadvantage to us. There are enough warriors amongst the various zealot sects in Galilee to have swelled Josephus' numbers to at least twice their strength. The same holds true for much of the rest of Judea. Because they insist on fighting each other, that means they cannot mass their numbers against us. By the same token, it also means that when one sect or faction is destroyed, the others still remain and have to be dealt with."

"That would explain why Vespasian has not ordered a direct assault on Jerusalem," Quintus surmised.

"I'm sure that's part of it," Gaius concurred. "Unless we can catch all the rival factions in Jerusalem at once, which is highly unlikely, then taking their holy city will mean little. The Edomites, Sicarii, and all the various zealots will still have to be smashed. That is why I think this war will take some time to finish."

Quintus sat in thought for a moment and then added, "Our men who survive will be hard as iron before it is over. Boys get sent off to war at such

a young age; it is no wonder their mothers don't recognize them when they return."

The city of Jaffa was covered in a pall of fear as night fell upon Judea. All within knew that unless by some miracle God delivered them safely, for most this would be their last night on earth. Most of the Jews spent the night in prayer, asking the Lord that if he would not save them from the Roman blades, that he at least show them mercy in the next life.



"We've emplaced assault cohorts all along the second wall," Titus said the next morning, as he and Trajan gazed upon the city from atop their mounts.

"Their defenses appear to be minimal at best," Trajan added. "There are scarcely any defenders manning the ramparts. Since we've brought neither scorpion nor onager, you would think they'd be swarming with fighters."

"Meaning your lads clearly did destroy most of the garrison," Titus remarked. He then added with a snicker, "Not that I couldn't tell by the piles of bodies you left between here and the outer wall!"

Trajan grinned in appreciation and then signaled to his cornicen. A long, somber blast resonated from his horn. As the assault cohorts advanced towards the walls with their ladders, one could almost hear the cries coming from within.

The ladders were very heavy, in part so they could not be easily overturned. It took ten men to carry each, while their companions walked beside them, using their shields to protect them from enemy missiles. Stones and spears fell in spattering bursts from the walls, though as the two legates had noted, there were too few defenders to man the entire wall. As the ladders were hefted upwards, a pair of legionaries held each one in place while their fellow soldiers raced to the top. The walls of Jaffa were perhaps fifteen feet high, and so it was only a matter of seconds before they were swarming with legionaries. Gatehouses were quickly overrun, and as the gates themselves were thrown open, hundreds of cavalry spilled into the streets, followed by more waves of legionaries. There was no organized defense, and both groups of fighting men, along with terrified women and various non-combatant

citizens, were trampled beneath the thundering cavalry. Infantry rampaged through the streets, killing all who resisted, while setting fire to every house and building within. Only some of the younger women and infants who could be sold as slaves were spared, their numbers just a little over two thousand. Their cries of sorrow were met with the fists and whips of the Romans who bound them.

Given the numerous men of fighting age who were slain, Jaffa had clearly been intended as a staging ground for the resistance. As such, Trajan ordered it completely demolished. Over the next three days, while the buildings and corpses within burned, both legionary and cavalry set about dismantling the walls and rendering them unusable. Jaffa had held for less than two days before it was destroyed, and its inhabitants slaughtered. And yet, Jotapata still stood when the Tenth Legion began its return march on the forty-fourth day of that siege.

Chapter XXXI: A Stalwart Enemy

Jotapata, Galilee
June, 67 A.D.
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More than six weeks had passed, and still Jotapata stood defiant. Vespasian found himself in a foul mood, as he leaned his hand against the large support pole of his principia tent. It stood on a low rise that looked down over the palisade of the Roman camp, commanding a full view of the open plain and the insolent city. The walls were battered, with the ramparts shattered in places from the constant bombardment, and yet General Josephus still held the city. A number of bodies, both Jewish and Roman, lay scattered below the walls. Carrion birds and wild dogs feasted on the bloated corpses, some of which had fallen in the first days of the assault. It upset Vespasian's men to see their friends defiled in such a grotesque manner. Doubtless it was having the same effect on the Judeans, who also had brothers and fellow warriors amongst the rotten carcasses of the slain. Yet neither side dared to try and recover any of the bodies, for in this war of no-quarter, noble gestures were met with savagery.

Trajan's destruction of Jaffa had come as welcome news; his forces returning just five days after Vespasian had dispatched them. On the same day Trajan and most of the Tenth Legion marched back into camp, a rider from Cerealis and the Fifth Legion arrived.

"Well, the Samaritans will be troubling us no more." Vespasian grinned.

"Oh?" Titus asked. The sight of the still-defiant Jotapata had dampened his spirits after the fall of Jaffa, and so he was anxious to hear some more positive news.

Vespasian was walking once more, albeit with a limp, and his foot was still bandaged. "They encamped on Mount Gerizim," he explained, "completely exposed to the elements, and all Cerealis had to do was surround them. They ran out of water, with many succumbing to the heat."

"So this early summer blaze has done some good then," Titus remarked, wiping his brow.

It was now mid-June, and the heat of Judea was becoming a constant source of misery for both sides.

“Several thousand sought to save themselves,” Vespasian continued as he read the dispatch. “So Cerealis offered them his hand in truce, should they surrender. Those who did were spared, although taken as prisoners to later be sold as slaves. He simply waited another two days, and when the rest refused his entreaties, his men simply walked in and slaughtered them. Eleven thousand in all. They were simply too weakened by the heat and thirst to make any sort of defense.”

“Now, if we could only finish the job here,” Titus nodded towards Jotapata. “I mean how much water and food can they possibly have left? And how many are still able to defend its walls?”

“Given that we only have one avenue of approach, they don’t need very many to defend themselves,” Vespasian replied, his own countenance grim, despite the favorable news he had just received from Cerealis.



Josephus knew they were running out of options. Though he had no knowledge of the events that had transpired at Jaffa, all he could see was that the Roman army was not about to abandon their siege, despite the horrific difficulties the defenders had put them through. No help was coming, water was becoming scarce despite their efforts to ration it, and the number of diseased and infirm exceeded those who could still fight. On the forty-fifth night of the siege Josephus summoned all of his captains who were still fit enough to continue the defense.

“This cannot be allowed to go on,” he said. “We have less than a thousand men who are still battle ready. The Romans may not know this, but they will figure it out soon enough. And when they do, they will roll right over the defenses.”

“What are you proposing?” Levi asked, folding his arms accusingly. His renewed faith and friendship with Josephus had waned considerably over the past six weeks. He found himself once more wishing he had remained with Giscala, instead of allowing his oaths to get the best of him. “You’re not suggesting we should surrender the city to the Romans?”

“No!” his commander snapped, angry at the accusation. “We were told to hold this city to the last, and we have done that. But there are other lives at stake here besides ours. There are thousands of women and children within Jotapata, refugees who came to us for safety. But if we do not make a bold

move now, that protection will amount to nothing."

"What do you propose then?" Ephraim asked. "We cannot conduct any further raids against the Roman siege works, not with their skirmishers and ballistae protecting them. And they don't appear to be in any rush to attack again."

"I need four volunteers," Josephus said. "We have not made any attempts to break out of the city ever since the messengers from Jerusalem were attacked. Perhaps the Romans have grown complacent. We need some of our best orators and persons of eminence to head for Jaffa. I know the city is ready to join the resistance, and with us besieged all this time, it is the ideal staging ground for local fighters. We need every last man that can be mustered and brought here to relieve the defenses."

"I'll go," Levi spoke, perhaps too quickly, for all eyes fell upon him. He explained, somewhat fictitiously, "The people of Jaffa know me well. I can rally them to our cause."

Josephus nodded and said, "Find three volunteers to go with you and take what provisions you need."

"I will leave at once."

After the sun had set, Josephus made his way to the wall. The stench of bodies cooking in the sun for weeks assailed his senses as a gust of wind blew into his face. He then decided, instead, to walk over to the cliffs on the eastern edge of the town. He sat along the ledge and stared off into the chasm below. Somewhere in the blackness, Levi and his men were slowly making their way to the hillsides beyond.

Off to his right, he saw a light coming from a nearby house. A woman was calling for her children, who came rushing in from the street. The people were doing their best to put on a brave show, particularly for the children, even as they faced annihilation. Josephus reached into his pocket and found the small box containing his wife's lock of hair. For perhaps the first time since coming to Galilee, he let the tears of anguish fall freely. He was at first ashamed, hoping no one would come upon him, but soon he no longer cared. Judith meant everything to him, and in that moment, he despaired that he would never see her again.

He took a deep breath, calming himself, and thought how easy it would be to simply push himself off the cliff and plunge into the blackness below, for that is all that he saw when he contemplated further resistance to the

Roman siege. He shook his head, knowing that such action would be cowardly, as well as an affront to God. And while he had not spoken of his vision for some time, *'forty-seven days'* remained at the forefront of his mind. He found a sense of strange solace in the words the Voice had given him, and so he resigned that for good or ill, it would all be over soon.



The rocks were dry as Levi pulled himself towards the top of the cliff, across the gorge from the far side of the city. Whatever Josephus' instructions, he was determined to leave this hellish place alive. The cursed moon shone brightly, but then Levi took heart, sensing the hillside was deserted. His companions pulled themselves out of the chasm, and they soon began their trek to the northwest. They had to get all the way around the Roman camp before they could reverse course and begin the journey southeast to Jaffa, none of them knowing that city lay a smoldering wreckage with every fighting man dead.

It had taken them an unmercifully long time to negotiate the ravine, and he feared that the sun would be coming up soon. The glow in the east behind them confirmed their fears, and the four men soon started to move at a quick jog. It was when they reached a road leading west towards Ptolemais that their luck ran out. A patrol of six Roman horsemen spotted them, and with all the woods in the area chopped down by their hated foe, there was nowhere for the men to hide.

They immediately began to run, knowing the four of them stood no chance against armored cavalrymen. A loud scream alerted the others, as the first one was run through, a lance plunging into his back and bursting out his chest. As they turned to see the horrific fate of their companion, another man was chopped down by the officer in charge of the patrol, his spatha long sword cleaving through the muscles connecting his neck to his shoulder. Gouts of blood sprayed everywhere as the man gritted his teeth and fell to the earth.

"Take at least one of them alive!" the squad leader shouted.

One of his men rode up behind the man and brought the edge of his curved shield down upon the back of Levi's head, sending him sprawling face first into the gravel road and tumbling over the side of the cliff. He landed about ten feet below in a pile of brush. As his vision clouded, he heard

a last scream as his final volunteer was stabbed in the leg by one of the cavalrymen.

"Send word to General Placidus," a voice said, as Levi slowly faded. "We'll make this Jewish shitbag talk…"



Dawn had broken on the forty-sixth day, and yet from the Roman perspective, nothing appeared to have changed. Placidus' patrols had yet to return with their prisoner, and Vespasian was left to contemplate what his next move should be. Jaffa may have been destroyed, but as long as Josephus held Jotapata, the rebellion still had a glimmer of hope. And then there was the matter of the emperor who, though returned to Rome, would no doubt be growing impatient.

"If we don't take this damned city soon, we'll both be finished," the commander-in-chief grumbled, as Titus joined him. His son was reading a rather lengthy scroll and seemed to be lost in thought. Vespasian added, "We'll both end up in exile then."

"I don't think so," Titus replied, shaking his head.

"What is it?" Vespasian asked.

His son was still reading intently.

"A letter from Rome. As it is addressed to *Titus Flavius Vespasian*, it was given to me, although I see it was meant for you. It's from Uncle Sabinus."

"Ah," Vespasian grinned. "And what does my brother have to say? How are things with him in Rome?"

"He's doing well enough it seems," Titus replied, "but things are not good in Rome."

"What do you mean?"

"It's the emperor," the young legate answered, causing his father to roll his eyes.

"And what's he doing now?" Vespasian asked.

"Going completely mad," Titus answered, "or rather, even more so than he was before. You know Nero did not win much love from the people when, after the great fire three years ago, he ordered the *Domus Aurea* built over much of the ruins."

"Yes, the *Golden House*," Vespasian replied with a dismissive wave. "That bloody thing is an embarrassment to the empire. The area should have

been rebuilt for the people, but instead he makes it into a damned monument to his own fucking ego."

"I know, I've seen it," Titus said. "The entire outside is painted in gold leaf, with precious stones used in the ceiling art. It is quite magnificent, but it is for his own personal, selfish use. And, of course, he ordered a manmade lake of well over a hundred acres created behind the palace."

"So, is that what is troubling my brother?" Vespasian asked. "That our emperor is self-centered and egomaniacal?"

"Well, that's the start of it," Titus replied. "The problem is, these things cost money and, after the great fire, that money should have gone to help the people. Instead, Nero has raised taxes on pretty much everyone, using it for his own personal pleasures instead of the public good. Here, I'll let you read it." He handed the letter to his father. It read:

To Titus Flavius Vespasian, greetings,

It is with heavy heart that I write to you about the calamites we are facing in the imperial city. Normally I would not bother you with petty politics, engaged as you are in a brutal war to suppress the volatile Jews into submission. I also know there is risk in writing to you, but I feel you must be made aware of the political situation at the heart of our beloved empire.

Nero has become more and more unstable of late; he screams at the senate, rather than talking with them. Daily he shouts for more money, and does not want to hear that his policies are driving Rome to the brink of ruin. The cost of his golden palace with its private lake is such that the treasury is near empty and a number of necessary services can no longer be provided. Aqueducts and sewage lines are not being properly maintained, and there is a severe shortage of coin to pay for the corn ration from Egypt. Food is becoming a scarce commodity because there simply isn't enough to go around, which in turn has driven inflation exponentially.

And with the people on the brink of risking starvation, the emperor demands even heavier taxation from the equite and patrician classes; not to pay for infrastructure or food supplies, but for his own selfish ends.

Orgies and banquets costing thousands of denarii are commonplace, yet those who attend do so at their own peril. Three of the wealthier senators were obligated to name Nero as their heirs over their own sons, and were then subsequently threatened with treason charges and compelled to commit suicide. The senate and equites now live in fear of the emperor, and with the plebs barely surviving, the patrician class gathers no sympathy from them. In short, Nero has divided the wealthy and working classes against each other while secure in his position to continue plundering from both.

Our family, being of modest means, leaves us in a fortunate position. We are not wealthy enough to risk the emperor turning an eye towards our fortunes; all of the old families in Rome will be extinct before that happens. By the same token, success or failure in Judea both are fraught with risk. If you should fail, the potential menace to our family is obvious. And yet, even if you should succeed, Nero in his madness may view you as a threat to him. I doubt he's forgotten Titus' one-time connection with the Pisos. The emperor has taken an interest in your younger son, Domitian; I would wager this is with the underlying purpose of using him as a hostage, should he fear a risk to his own power from you.

I ask that you keep correspondence between us to a minimum in order to avoid suspicion. I have my own contacts within the imperial post, yet one cannot guarantee they will be the ones to carry your messages. Be careful, dear brother. I fear not just for you and Titus in your wars in the east, but for the whole of the empire.

Your loving brother,

Titus Flavius Sabinus

"Bugger me," Vespasian said, as he finished the letter.

"It would seem these are perilous times, general," Titus said, "both at war and at home."

"And if Titus were in command, what would he propose?" Vespasian asked, after a lengthy pause.

"Well, sir," his son began, "I would say focus on the war in Judea, stay

above the political fray in Rome…and I would avoid going home for as long as possible." His last remark got a chuckle from both men.

"Excuse the intrusion, general," Placidus said, entering the tent, "but you're going to want to hear this. I took the liberty of summoning the other legates."

Vespasian and Titus then saw a pair of Placidus' cavalry troopers dragging a rather haggard Jewish prisoner, whose hands were bound behind his back. His face was badly beaten, his left eye closed shut, and his left leg covered in coagulated blood.

"What have you heard?" Titus asked, raising an eyebrow.

Placidus simply grinned as he removed his helmet. Trajan and Cerealis, along with their chief tribunes and master centurions, soon entered the principia. Placidus signaled for his troopers to bring the prisoner forward. They threw the poor wretch facedown at the feet of Vespasian.

"Four of these bastards were trying to escape," Placidus explained. "Three we killed, but this one we captured. It didn't take long before he was spilling his guts to us."

Vespasian sat quietly, his injured foot resting on his other leg, and a writing stylus turning over in his hand.

"Tell him what you told us, Jew," Placidus ordered, shoving the man with his foot.

"F…forty-seven days," the rebel said through swollen lips, a stream of blood and drool running out of the corner of his mouth. "General Josephus had a vision; the siege would last forty-seven days."

"Yes, we know about your general's 'vision'!" Vespasian scoffed.

"That's coming up pretty soon, tomorrow, in fact," Trajan noted. "Did he say if his vision told him who would win in the end?"

"No," the prisoner said, shaking his head quickly. "But with your forces still enclosed upon us, he feared the worst. He took a chance in sending us out to either find reinforcements, or to warn the others should the worst befall Jotapata."

Vespasian lowered his bandaged foot to the ground and leaned over the terrified prisoner.

"You told us this in hopes we would show you mercy," he said calmly.

The man refused to look up at him, and he was trembling in fear.

"Give us a little information and perhaps we'll let you go free, is that it?"

"P…please!" the man pleaded, eyes still cast on the ground, head bowed.

“I have told you all that I know!”

“Mmm, I don’t think you have,” the commanding general replied. He then grabbed the Jew by the hair, forcing him to look him in the eye. Vespasian’s cold glare terrified him, the legate’s next words confirming his fear. “Know this, Jew, you are going to die. Now, how you meet your God depends on what other useful information you tell us. Give us something useful that will get us into Jotapata, and we’ll make it quick. A sword slash across the jugular is said to be relatively painless. Play us false, or refuse to speak, and I’ll nail you to a cross myself, in full view of the city, where the buzzards can feast on your flesh over the days it will take you to die.”

The man opened his mouth as if sobbing, but no words came out. Clearly being captured by the Romans was the worst fate that could have befallen him. At least if he’d been killed, it would have made for an honorable end. Now they would torture him until he betrayed his companions; only then allowing his passage into the afterlife.

“Take him away,” Vespasian said, waving to a pair of guards. “We’ll give him until tomorrow to decide his fate.”

“Make sure he’s bound,” Titus added. “I don’t want him having a chance to hasten his own demise.”

The man began to scream as legionaries dragged him from the tent. His cries were cut short when a soldier kicked him hard in the side, his ribs audibly cracking with a snap.

“So,” Vespasian said, addressing his generals with an expression of renewed determination. “Tomorrow is the forty-seventh day. What say we fulfill General Josephus’ prophecy for him?” His face was filled with renewed vigor, not so much by the Jew’s prophecy, but by the utter despair and destitution of their enemy.



“Well?” Vespasian asked later that evening. “Did he talk?”

“He did,” Titus confirmed. “Gave us a bit of intelligence that may help us break the siege.”

His father’s expression became one of keen interest at this last remark.

“There’s a section of the wall, near the northeast corner, partly crumbled by our catapults. It’s difficult to see from here due to some rock outcroppings in the way, but if what he says is true, we can readily get men up on the wall

without needing siege ladders. He also told us the guards have become notorious for complacency of late. With that section of wall not readily assailable by our main forces, whatever guards they do post near there are prone to falling asleep on shift, especially just before dawn. Let's face it, general, they are worn out."

"And to think we've been conducting assaults both day and night to no avail," Vespasian replied, shaking his head. "Did he tell you anything else of use?"

"Just some personal information. He claims he is one of Josephus' captains. While the others were sent to find help, his tasking was to find a good over watch, and then head to Jerusalem immediately and report to their governing council, should the city fall."

"Indeed." Vespasian began to pace slowly with his hands clasped behind his back. His face then brightened, and he gave a sinister grin. "I think we shall let him fulfill his mission."

"Betrays his own people, anticipating a quick death, and then we inexplicably let him go," Titus replied, knowingly. "It'll drive him mad."

"That and once he arrives in Jerusalem, their government will know Galilee is now in Roman hands, plus this man will be looking to shift the blame from himself. It will create even greater divisions amongst the rebels."

"I like the way you think, general," Titus said, with an approving nod. "And now if you'll excuse me, I need to go make ready."

"Make ready?" his father asked.

Titus simply shrugged. "My legion is arrayed in front of where we must breach the walls," he explained. "This mission will be quite hazardous, and so it would not do for me to begin leading from behind." He winked as he donned his helmet and saluted before taking his horse and riding back to the Fifteenth Legion's camp. It filled Vespasian with both trepidation and pride, knowing his son was going to personally lead such a hazardous mission. If the Jew's intelligence proved wrong, then there was a strong likelihood that Titus would be killed or captured. And yet, he knew there was no alternative. After all, Titus had learned his style of leadership from his father, who had always been of the mindset that a commanding legate's life was no more precious than that of even his lowest ranking legionaries.

Vespasian thought back to his younger days during the Conquest of Britannia, when he had commanded the Second Legion, Augusta. During the assault on a massive hill fort called *Mai Dun*, that the locals thought

impregnable, Vespasian had, at one point, picked up a legionary's discarded shield and joined the main battle line during the final push. With their artillery ammunition expended and all units committed to battle, there had been nothing left for him to coordinate. As he had told the master centurion who led the assault, "I am just another blade on the line, and right now you need all you can get!"

That was twenty-four years ago, back when Vespasian was but a few years older than his son was now. Titus had learned well from his father's lead-by-example style of leadership. Of course, this brought with it the additional danger of being killed, wounded, or captured. But, a true leader acknowledged the risk and accepted it without hesitation.

As for the prisoner, Vespasian later had a change of heart and had him crucified in full view of the city. He did not trust the intelligence the man had given him, knowing full well the resolve of the Jews and the loyalty these particular defenders had for each other. As the man hung upon the cross, he looked down at the Roman general and simply smiled at him.

Chapter XXXII: Betrayal and the End

Jotapata, Galilee
15 June, 67 A.D.
The forty-seventh day of the siege
***

Titus and his small contingent crept past the line of siege engines about two hours before dawn. His chief tribune, Domitius, had insisted on coming with him, and so he left Master Centurion Ralla in command of the legion. Indeed, it seemed as if everyone of importance was taking part in this attack, for Placidus was personally leading his auxiliary infantry who were in support of Titus. Trajan, along with several cohorts of the Tenth Legion, were arrayed on either side of the main body of the Fifteenth. Only the Fifth Legion, which was not yet returned from Mount Gerizim, was absent. Vespasian was at the center of the Fifteenth. That his son was leading the raid upon the wall weighed heavily on him.

The predawn made it easy for Titus and his men to see. As they approached the compromised section of the wall, they did not spot a single sentry. They soon found the rise of ground and saw that, in fact, there was a small section of the rampart that had been blasted away by the catapults. A pair of legionaries took a shield and held it flat, which the legate then stepped up on. With a quick push, he was high enough to easily grab onto the remnants of the rampart. He gave it a good tug, to make certain it would not give way, before pulling himself up and over. He then reached back and helped the next legionary up onto the rampart before making his way towards the gate, which lay several hundred meters away.

He came upon a sleeping guard, whose head lay against his shoulder, snoring loudly. Titus drew his gladius and quickly placed a hand over the man’s mouth as he slashed his throat. The rebel’s eyes grew wide in terror as blood spurted from his mouth onto the Roman’s hand, but soon he lay still. It was the same as they crept along the wall. The number of sentries was surprisingly few, adding credence to the prisoner’s claim about how understrength the garrison now was.

The sun had just broken over the hills in the east when Titus and his men

reached the gate. They quickly descended the steps and threw the gates open. Legionary cohorts had crept forward, getting ever closer as they saw no resistance materializing. Placidus had taken some men and were moving along, slaughtering the rest of the slumbering guards that manned the wall. As the gates were thrown open, Titus stepped forth and waved to his waiting soldiers.

"Let's go!"



Sleep had at last come for Josephus. After weeks of endless insomnia, brought on by the severe strains of the relentless siege, his exhausted body, at last, fell into a deep slumber. He found himself in the darkened room once more, with the bright light shining upon him.

The time is coming, the Voice said to him. *Soon the Beast will fall, and the strong will arise.*

"I don't understand!" Josephus cried out in his mind.

The world needs a strong leader, the Voice continued. *You have faced the strongest-of-the-strong. The Number of the Beast will fall, as will his successors, until the strongest assumes his place.*

Josephus attempted to speak again, but suddenly the room was black once more.

A hand was furiously shaking Josephus, and he was immediately alert, the words of the Voice still pounding within his mind. He saw it was Yaakov who had awoken him. His young guard commander's face was filled with dread.

"The Romans are in!" he said. "Jotapata is lost!"

Josephus leapt from his bed and raced down the steps of the inn. Down the long street he could see scores of Roman troops breaking into houses, the screams of the denizens within resonating.

"Come on!" he said, grabbing Yaakov by the shoulder. They ran along a side street towards the citadel, only to see that it was already crawling with legionaries. "This way!"

There were numerous caves and wells which they could attempt to hide in. Devorah soon joined them, and the three made their way into one of the central buildings with the large cisterns. Josephus knew the well within

contained a side cave. Shouts and screams echoed along the hallways, and they knew they had little time.

"We'll be trapped!" Yaakov protested as Josephus removed the cover of the well.

"It's our only chance," his friend replied, helping Yaakov and the young woman down the hole before jumping in himself. He landed with a short splash. The well waters were indeed all but empty.

As he turned and got his bearings, Josephus saw the large natural cave off to the side, where thirty-eight men, both warriors and prominent councilmen of the city, lay hidden. His loyal captain, Ephraim was amongst them. Somehow they had managed to get their hands on some bags full of bread, and being within the well, they would at least have some water. A torch was thrust down the hole, and Josephus and the others held their breath, hoping the Romans could not see the cave entrance.

"Doesn't appear to be anyone down there," a voice said from above.

Safe for the moment, Josephus recalled it was the forty-seventh day. He had faced the strongest-of-the-strong and lost…



All throughout the city, like so many before, the slaughter continued unabated. The people were dreadfully weakened by fatigue and thirst, and thus unable to mount hardly any resistance. Many Judean fighters, at least those who had not already gone into hiding, seemed to almost welcome their fate as they were cut down, and the Romans almost escaped the day without loss.

The Tenth Legion's Fifth Cohort had stormed the citadel, quickly clearing all floors and killing what few defenders there had been. Herein they found another well, yet this one was clearly occupied.

"Shall we torch it, sir?" one of the men asked Centurion Antonius.

"Hold on," he replied. "We need to find Josephus first. Nicanor! Do you recognize any of the men in there?"

The centurion grabbed a torch and shone it down the hole. "No," he replied.

"Still, one of them may know where he is," Antoninus conjectured. He then spoke to the men hiding below. "If you surrender now and come out, I

promise no further harm will come to you."

"What can you offer to guarantee our safety?" one of the men spoke up.

"Here," Antonius replied, extending his right hand. "I offer you my hand in peace, and also as a means of helping you up. Now come on." One of the men clasped his hand, but as soon as he did so, he pulled hard, nearly upending the centurion, while another warrior stabbed his spear into his armpit, where his armor did not protect him. Antonius cried out and fell to the floor.

"No!" Nicanor shouted, racing forward. His cohort commander's eyes were open, blood trickling down the side of his mouth.

The enemy's thrust had been accurate and severed an artery, killing him almost instantly.

"Damn their treachery!" Gaius snarled. He signaled to a pair of legionaries who grabbed some chairs and parts of a broken table. Gaius took the torch and lit the dry timber, and as each piece caught fire, the legionaries cast it into the nearly dry well. There was no cavern for the men within to flee to, and they cried out as more burning implements were tossed down into the cramped space. Soon gouts of flame were shooting up from within. The men screaming in anguish as they slowly burned to death.

Nicanor knelt next to Antonius, placing a hand on the shoulder of the man who had led them to victory at Ascalon, who had endorsed his promotion to centurion after Marius fell, and had further kept the good order, morale, and discipline of the entire cohort intact during the siege, as well as the subsequent attack on Jaffa. Centurion Pilus Prior Sertor Antonius would be their only loss that day, and would further be the last Roman to die at Jotapata.



"How's the foot?" Titus asked, as his father walked over to him hobbling slightly.

The two generals stood near the gates of the city, which was now fully occupied by their soldiers. Vespasian was grinning broadly in appreciation.

"The foot's fine," he said. "To think, all of our brutal assaults, bombardments, and all it took was a little added cunning to bring this place down." He was then serious, but still smiling as he nodded at his son, in whom he was filled with great pride. "You did well today. Now to see if we

can find Josephus.”

The remainder of the day was spent with the Romans ransacking the city, taking what they wished as plunder, while killing every man, as well as any women who either resisted too much or were deemed unfit to be sold into slavery. The raping of many of the women was a foregone conclusion following such a brutal siege. After what his soldiers had been through, Vespasian felt it best to indulge them somewhat. Only one thousand two hundred women and infants survived the bloody rampage. Like those captured before them during the campaign, they could expect to spend the remainder of their lives in bondage, with their children being taken from them to be raised as slaves.

The men of the Tenth Legion’s Fifth Cohort were especially brutal, given the treachery that had cost their pilus prior his life. Many of those they captured were beaten to death, rather than slain quickly with their swords. And while some cohorts were tasked with providing garrisons for the town and many of its buildings, the others returned to their camps. All that was left was to root out those who remained within and to try and find the elusive Josephus.



It was completely dark within the cavern Josephus and the others hid themselves within. Once he was able to surmise night had come, he whispered to the others that he would sneak out and see if he could find a way for them out of the city. He removed his sandals, so his feet might not make unwanted noise, and he crept along the building until he reached an outer balcony. He despaired when he saw soldiers patrolling the streets below, as well as others who manned the defensive wall. After several hours, he returned to let his companions know the situation was hopeless, and that he would try again the next night.

The following day, the Romans spent their time searching the Jewish dead for signs of Josephus, while the Judean leader remained safely hidden. That night he emerged once again, this time with Yaakov and his woman companion, Devorah. The three of them went as far as they dared from their hiding place, only to find that every possible means of escape was blocked by Roman sentries. They scarcely escaped notice by the patrols before making it back to safety.

“We will try once more tomorrow,” Josephus whispered to the survivors. “Soon the Romans will begin leveling Jotapata, and when they do, there will be no escape for us.”

On the third night they went out again, this time determined to find a way out of the city. Josephus had made a note of the guard shifts on every street. They did not necessarily need to get out through the gates, but if they could make their way down the outer cliffs, there was a chance of escaping that way.

As they crept along an alleyway, Yaakov suddenly turned to Devorah, grabbing her gently by the shoulders. “If we find a way out of here,” he whispered, “I want you to take the cliff path into the ravine. We’ll come find you as soon as we tell the others.”

“I don’t want to leave without you…” she began to protest, but Yaakov placed a finger over her lips.

“Please, do one thing for me,” he said. *“Live!* Do not let death come to you in this forsaken place.”

He took her by the hand as they followed Josephus. They were getting close to the southernmost edge of the city. The paths were treacherous that led into the ravine, but still preferable to waiting in a cave for the Romans to burn them out.

“There,” Josephus said in a hushed voice.

The flickering light of a torch on the cross street alerted them, and they started to back away.

“Hold!” a voice shouted behind them.

It was another patrol, made up of a squad of auxiliary infantry. They drew their swords and started running towards them.

“Go!” Yaakov shouted to Devorah. “This may be your only chance!” He kissed her quickly and shoved her towards a side street, hoping the Romans did not spot her. He and Josephus then fled up another path, the auxiliaries in pursuit. Being fleet-footed and more familiar with the city, they were able to elude their pursuers. What they did not see, and what would have torn out Yaakov’s heart, was as Devorah ran as fast as she was able towards the cliffs, she was suddenly tackled from behind by a patrolling soldier.

“Well, well, what have we got here?”

Chapter XXXIII: The Josephus Problem

Jotapata, Galilee
19 June, 67 A.D.
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With the fall of Jotapata, Vespasian was a in a much fairer disposition, despite the fact that Josephus remained free. He had taken the time to send a dispatch to Rome, detailing the sacking of both Jotapata and Jaffa, as well as the immediate suppression of the Samaritans. It was, perhaps, fortunate he had not yet captured Josephus, given the events that would transpire in the coming days.

"Most of the outer wall has been brought down, general," Titus reported, as he and Vespasian stepped out into the morning sun. It promised to be another hot day. "As we search each area for the elusive Josephus, we burn and dismantle every building after it's cleared."

"Excellent work," Vespasian replied. "Whether or not we find his body, I think we can safely say that General Josephus is no longer a viable threat to Rome. Once we have this place flattened, I am sending you to Scythopolis with the Fifteenth Legion. I'll take the Fifth and Tenth and head for Caesarea. Gallus sacked the southern coastal city of Joppa last year, yet now it appears to have been rebuilt and infested with pirates."

"Yes, sir," Titus nodded.

A rider soon approached them; it was Placidus coming up from the city.

"General, sir!" he said with a quick salute as he dismounted.

"Any word on Josephus?" Vespasian asked.

"In a manner of speaking. We caught a tasty little bitch last night who was trying to make a run for one of the cliff paths at the southern end of the city. We suspect she knows where Josephus is hiding."

"Has she talked?" Titus asked.

"Not yet," Placidus answered. "But she will."



It only took until midday before the young woman broke. Though exceptionally brave and loyal, there were few who could withstand Roman

torture for long. In her case, she was tied to a raised stake by the wrists and lashed with corded whips until she passed out from the pain. A bucket of stagnant water was then splashed upon her face, and if she refused to talk, the scourging began once again. Torture was more about mentally breaking someone rather than the infliction of physical pain and so, after three durations, when Devorah's back was completely bloodied and covered in wicked gashes, the soldiers left her alone for an hour. She remained on her knees, with her hands tied to the whipping post. She whimpered in sorrow and agony for some time before fainting from the exhaustion of the torment.

When she was awoken, her hands had gone numb from the bonds, and her back ached terribly. As the senior Roman officers entered the room, it was Titus who knelt beside her.

"You know where Josephus is," he said gently.

When she tried to look away, tears welling up in her eyes once more, he gently but firmly grabbed her under the chin.

"These men will beat you until you talk or until you die. There is no escape for Josephus, so you may as well tell us now and spare yourself any further unwarranted pain."

Devorah burst into tears, though she found her voice failed her and she could only nod. Titus then snapped his fingers, and the soldiers cut the bonds on her hands. The legate's face twitched as he saw the wicked scourging across her back. If she survived the fearful lashing she'd endured, the remaining scars would cut much deeper than mere flesh.



Upon hearing the news of where Josephus was hiding, a pair of equite tribunes from the Fifteenth Legion made their way into the chamber where the well lay. They shouted promises of safe passage, and that no harm would come to them if they would just come out. Their calls were met with silence.

"I'm telling you, there is nothing down there," one of them protested to Vespasian. "Are you sure we have the right place?"

"There is a cave below," the commander-in-chief said. "You cannot see it from up here, and if you climb down there, you are likely to get knifed. Come, there is only one man who can talk some sense into whoever is down there."

Vespasian then ordered all but a handful of soldiers to clear the area. He

left Placidus in command while he himself returned to his camp to plan the next phase of the campaign. While Jotapata may have fallen, with the leading rebel general within his grasp, Vespasian understood the war was far from over.



"We've been found," a voice said quietly in the darkness. "How?"

No one replied, though Yaakov hung his head and wept silently. He knew then that Devorah had been captured, and God only knew what those vile monsters had done to her.

Josephus understood that it was he who the Romans were after. Resolving to put an end to the ordeal, while trying to save his friends, he closed his eyes and said a silent prayer.

Since it pleases thee, who hast created the Jewish nation, to depress the same, and since all their good fortune is gone over to the Romans, and since thou hast made choice of this soul of mine to foretell what is to come to pass hereafter, I willingly give them my hands, and am content to live. And I protest openly that I do not go over to the Romans as a deserter of the Jews, but as a minister from thee.

"Josephus!" a familiar voice called from above. The Jewish leader gasped as he recognized it, even after years apart and in the echo of the cavern. "Josephus, it's Nicanor."

"Nicanor," he replied, stepping out into the light. His companions did not attempt to stop him, as they knew they were undone.

"It's good to see you," the centurion said, with a mix of feelings. He was glad, not only that they had found the enemy general who Vespasian wanted as a prize, but that his friend lived.

"I wish I could say the same," Josephus replied with a sad smile.

"General Vespasian has been anxious to meet you."

"Why?" Josephus scoffed. "So he can nail us to crosses?"

"The truth is, he admires you," Nicanor explained. "You fought well, far better than any other rebel forces we've faced."

"What about the others down here?"

"What of them?" The centurion's voice showed he was puzzled by the question.

"Can you promise no harm will come to them?"

“I’ll see what I can do,” Nicanor promised.

He stood and walked over to speak with some of the other officers.

“The Romans are offering us a chance to live,” Josephus explained to his men, all of whom looked on him with sudden anger.

“Piss on them!” one man spat. “They promise only slavery or crucifixion. I won’t give them the satisfaction!”

The others shouted similar admonishments.

“Brothers, listen!” Josephus pleaded. “We fought well, and there is honor in that. No one can fault us if we surrender now. God gave us life, it is not for us to pointlessly throw away.”

“Traitor!” another warrior shouted, drawing his blade and holding it against Josephus’ neck. He was only restrained by Ephraim’s hand.

“Alright, damn it!” Josephus relented. “We need not fight each other, not now at the end. But we can help each other to die with dignity.”

“So who will do the killing?” Yaakov asked as he stood. In his mind, Devorah was likely already dead, and so he resolved to join her.

“We kill ourselves,” a fighter said.

“No!” Josephus rebuked. “Suicide is an offense against God. Let us not defile His holy name in this, our darkest hour. Form a circle.” He then paused in thought for a moment, as Yaakov came to stand next to him and all the men drew their blades.

Josephus was a scholar and had an innate ability with mathematics. As he did a quick count within his head he heard the words of the Voice echoing in his mind once more, and so he found his resolve.

“We’ll do this by count,” he said. “Every third man will be slain by the man on his left. At least we know it will be quick. Do this now for each other, my brothers, that we may die with honor.” He then turned to Yaakov. “No, Yaakov, do not stand near me. I cannot kill you, my friend.”

He took the young man by the shoulder. If the Voice was, in fact, God speaking to him, he would say one final silent prayer.

God of Abraham, who determines who shall live and who shall die, grant me one final request before turning me over to my enemies. Spare this boy and let him be tormented by war no longer. Deliver me to the Romans, but let him live!

“Ready?” he asked, as he returned to his place and drew his sword. The men nodded, and he reviewed the count once more in his head.

He started by counting off by pointing his blade at each man in turn. When he got to every third fighter, the victim would throw down his sword and offer his neck. These warriors, who had seen so much suffering and brutality, now committed their final acts in this world with as much dignity as they could muster. As each had his throat cut, his friends would say a gentle prayer, asking God to open the gates of paradise to them. Josephus continued the count, gasping as he came to Yaakov, only to see that he was the second man, and so he continued to the fighter on his friend's right. This man threw down his sword and offered his neck. As blood gushed from his severed artery, Josephus started to count again, passing himself and closing his eyes when his mark fell upon Ephraim. The brave captain, who had stood so loyally by his side through triumph and tragedy, was cut down by the man on his left, falling in a heap, where the remnants of the well water were now running red.

The count continued, and Josephus found himself twice having to slay the man next to him. Soon only three remained, and as Yaakov slew the third remaining warrior, Josephus shook his head, noting the maddened determination in his friend's eyes.

"It's just you and me, Yaakov," Josephus said. He then threw down his sword. "Forgive me, but I cannot bring myself to kill you." Yaakov then brought his sword up to his own neck, Josephus held up his hand. "Wait! It's me they want. Please, do not do this, Yaakov. I will only surrender if they let you go free. Please live; if not for me, then for Devorah."

Yaakov's mouth fell open, and he found himself gasping for breath. Whereas a moment before he was certain of her demise, now he was experiencing doubt. And if Josephus refused to kill him and he took his own life, would God consent to ever allowing him to see her again? He lowered his sword and nodded.

"What's going on down there?" Nicanor asked. He shined a torch down and saw the scores of bodies. *"Fuck!"*

"It's alright!" Josephus assured him, stepping into the light. "There are two of us left. But know that I will not surrender unless you can promise safe passage for my friend. Please, Nicanor, do this one thing for me. Do not let harm come to this young man, nor allow him to be sold into slavery, to die in the arena or the mines. Surely you can allow one man to go free in order to give your general what he wants."

"I promise," Nicanor said quickly. "Now come on up."

Placidus entered the room just as Yaakov came up the rope, where he was grabbed by a pair of legionaries.

"Nice," the general said with a sneer. He then punched the young man hard in the stomach.

"Damn it, Placidus!" Nicanor snapped, drawing a wide-eyed glare from the general.

"Say again, *centurion?*"

"Your pardon, sir, but I gave my word that no harm would come to this man, and he would be released."

"Did you now?" Placidus retorted, still angry at the breach of protocol. "Overstepping your bounds of authority a bit, don't you think, *centurion?*"

"Perhaps," Nicanor concurred, "but it has gained us Vespasian's prize." He then nodded towards the well, where Josephus emerged.

Placidus then forgot the centurion's burst of insubordination, and grabbed Josephus by the scruff of his tunic. "So this is the famous General Josephus," he said, apprising him for a moment. With surprising calm, he handed him over to a pair of legionaries. "Have him bound and taken to Vespasian."

As he was escorted away, Josephus shared a final glance with both Yaakov and Nicanor; two friends from different worlds whom he loved in equal measure like brothers. He then closed his eyes and lifted his head as he was led towards his destiny.

Father, into your hands I commit myself. Thy will be done…

Appendix A: Roman Military Ranks

Legionary – Every citizen of the plebian class who enlisted in the legions started off as a legionary. Duration of service during the early empire was twenty years. Barring any promotions that would dictate otherwise, this normally consisted of sixteen years in the ranks, with another four either on lighter duties or as part of the First Cohort. Legionaries served not only as the heart of the legion's fighting force, they were also used for many building and construction projects.

Decanus – Also referred to interchangeably as a *sergeant* in the series, decanus was the first rank of authority that a legionary could be promoted to. Much like a modern-day sergeant, the decanus was the first-line leader of legionaries. He supervised training, as well as enforced personal hygiene and maintenance of equipment. On campaign he was in charge of getting the section's tent erected, along with the fortifications of the camp.

Tesserarius – The first of the *Principal* ranks, the tesserarius primarily oversaw the fatigue and guard duties for the century. He maintained the duty roster and was also keeper of the watch word. On a normal day he could be found supervising work details or checking on the guard posts.

Signifier – He was the treasurer for the century and was in charge of all pay issues, so was much-loved on pay days. On campaign he carried the century's standard (signum) into battle. This was used not only as a rallying point, but also as a visual means of communication. Traditionally he wore a bear's hide over his helmet, draped around the shoulders of his armor. (A signifier wearing a wolf skin is a Hollywood invention). Because of his high level of responsibility, the signifier is third-in-command of the century.

Optio – The term *optio* literally means *'chosen one'* for he was personally chosen by the centurion to serve as his deputy. He would oversee all training within the century, to include that of new recruits. In battle the optio would either stand behind the formation, keeping troops on line and in formation, or he would stand on the extreme left, able to coordinate with adjacent units.

Aquilifer – This man was a senior signifier bearing the eagle standard of a legion. (*Aquila* means eagle.) This standard was the most important possession of the legion – losing it brought shame and humiliation to the entire legion. This position carried great honor, though it is debatable whether or not he wore any headdress or animal skin. It is known that he

carried a small, circular shield called a *parma* instead of the legionary scutum.

Centurion – In addition to being its commander, the centurion was known to be the bravest and most tactically sound man within the century. While a stern disciplinarian, and at times harsh, it is borne of a genuine compassion for his men. The centurion knew that only through hard discipline and sound training could his men survive in battle. He was always on the extreme right of the front rank in battle; thereby placing himself in the most precarious position on the line. Mortality rates were high amongst centurions because they would sacrifice their own safety for that of their men.

Centurion Pilus Prior – Commander of a cohort of six centuries, the centurion pilus prior was a man of considerable influence and responsibility. He not only had to be able to command a century on a line of battle, but he had to be able to maneuver his cohort as a single unit. Such men were often given independent commands over small garrisons or on low-level conflicts. A centurion pilus prior could also be tasked with diplomatic duties; such was the respect foreign princes held for them. At this level, a soldier had to focus not just on his abilities as a leader of fighting men, but on his skills at diplomacy and politics.

Centurion Primus Ordo – The elite First Cohort's Centuries were commanded by the centurions primus ordo. Though the number of soldiers under their direct command was fewer, these men were senior in rank to the centurions pilus prior. Men were often selected for these positions based on vast experience and for being the best tacticians in the legion. As such, part of the duty of a centurion primus ordo was acting as a strategic and tactical advisor to the commanding general. Generals such as Caesar, Marius, Tiberius, and Agrippa were successful in part because they had a strong circle of First Cohort Centurions advising them.

Centurion Primus Pilus – Also referred to as the *chief* or *master* centurion, this is the pinnacle of the career of a Roman soldier. Though socially subordinate to the tribunes, the centurion primus pilus possessed more power and influence than any and was, in fact, third-in-command of the entire legion. He was also the commander of the elite First Cohort in battle. Upon retirement, a centurion primus pilus (and possibly centurions of lesser ranks as well) was elevated into the patrician class of society. He could then stand for public office, and his sons would be eligible for appointments as tribunes. Even while still serving in the ranks, a centurion primus pilus was allowed to

wear the narrow purple stripe of a patrician on his toga; such was the respect Roman society held for them.

Tribune – Tribunes came from the patrician class, often serving only six month tours with the legions. Though there were exceptions, many tribunes stayed on the line only long enough to complete their tour of duty before going on to a better assignment. Primarily serving as staff officers for the commanding legate, a tribune would sometimes be given command of auxiliary troops if he proved himself a capable leader. Most were looking for a career in politics, though they knew they had to get as much experience as they could out of their time in the legions. In *Soldier of Rome*, Pontius Pilate is an example of a tribune who elects to stay with the legions for as long as he is able, preferring the life of a soldier to the soft comforts of a political magistrate.

Laticlavian Tribune – Most commonly referred to as the *chief* tribune, he was a young man of the senatorial class starting off his career. Second-in-command of the legion, his responsibility was incredible, though he was often aided by the master centurion, who would act as a mentor. A soldier's performance as chief tribune would determine whether or not he would be fit to command a legion of his own someday. Given the importance of military success to the future senator's career, he would no doubt make every effort to prove himself competent and valiant in battle.

Legate – The legate was a senator who had already spent time in the legions as a laticlavian tribune and had proven himself worthy of command. Of all the possible offices that a nobleman could hold, none was dearer to a Roman than command of her armies.

Legion Infantry Strength (estimated)

Legionaries – 3,780
First Cohort Legionaries – 700
Decanii – 610
Tesserarii – 59
Signifiers – 59
Options – 59
Aquilifer - 1
Centurions – 45 (approximately 80 men to a century)
Centurions Pilus Prior – 9
Centurions Primus Ordo – 4

Centurion Primus Pilus – 1
Tribunes – 6
Chief Tribune – 1
Legate – 1

Appendix B: Full Text of King Agrippa's Speech

(The following text is taken directly from *The War of the Jews – Book Two*, by Flavius Josephus. It is his account of what was said by King Agrippa during his speech at the house of the Asamoneans)

Had I perceived that you were all zealously disposed to go to war with the Romans, and that the purer and more sincere part of the people did not propose to live in peace, I had not come out to you, nor been so bold as to give you counsel; for all discourses that tend to persuade men to do what they ought to do are superfluous, when the hearers are agreed to do the contrary. But because some are earnest to go to war because they are young, and without experience of the miseries it brings, and because some are for it out of an unreasonable expectation of regaining their liberty, and because others hope to get by it, and are therefore earnestly bent upon it, that in the confusion of your affairs they may gain what belongs to those that are too weak to resist them, I have thought proper to get you all together, and to say to you what I think to be for your advantage; that so the former may grow wiser, and change their minds, and that the best men may come to no harm by the ill conduct of some others.

And let not any one be tumultuous against me, in case what they hear me say do not please them; for as to those that admit of no cure, but are resolved upon a revolt, it will still be in their power to retain the same sentiments after my exhortation is over; but still my discourse will fall to the ground, even with a relation to those that have a mind to hear me, unless you will all keep silence. I am well aware that many make a tragical exclamation concerning the injuries that have been offered you by your procurators, and concerning the glorious advantages of liberty; but before I begin the inquiry, who you are that must go to war, and who they are against whom you must fight, I shall first separate those pretenses that are by some connected together; for if you aim at avenging yourselves on those that have done you injury, why do you pretend this to be a war for recovering your liberty?

But if you think all servitude intolerable, to what purpose serve your complaint against your particular governors? For if they treated you with moderation, it would still be equally an unworthy thing to be in servitude.

Consider now the several cases that may be supposed, how little occasion there is for your going to war. Your first occasion is the accusations you have to make against your procurators; now here you ought to be submissive to those in authority, and not give them any provocation; but when you reproach men greatly for small offenses, you excite those whom you reproach to be your adversaries; for this will only make them leave off hurting you privately, and with some degree of modesty, and to lay what you have waste openly. Now nothing so much damps the force of strokes as bearing them with patience; and the quietness of those who are injured diverts the injurious persons from afflicting.

But let us take it for granted that the Roman ministers are injurious to you, and are incurably severe; yet are they not all the Romans who thus injure you; nor hath Caesar, against whom you are going to make war, injured you: it is not by their command that any wicked governor is sent to you; for they who are in the west cannot see those that are in the east; nor indeed is it easy for them there even to hear what is done in these parts. Now it is absurd to make war with a great many for the sake of one, to do so with such mighty people for a small cause; and this when these people are not able to know of what you complain: nay, such crimes as we complain of may soon be corrected, for the same procurator will not continue forever; and probable it is that the successors will come with more moderate inclinations.

But as for war, if it be once begun, it is not easily laid down again, nor borne without calamities coming therewith. However, as to the desire of recovering your liberty, it is unseasonable to indulge it so late; whereas you ought to have labored earnestly in old time that you might never have lost it; for the first experience of slavery was hard to be endured, and the struggle that you might never have been subject to it would have been just; but that slave who hath been once brought into subjection, and then runs away, is rather a refractory slave than a lover of liberty; for it was then the proper time for doing all that was possible, that you might never have admitted the Romans [into your city], when Pompey came first into the country. But so it was, that our ancestors and their kings, who were in much better circumstances than we are, both as to money, and strong bodies, and [valiant] souls, did not bear the onset of a small body of the Roman army. And yet you, who have now accustomed yourselves to obedience from one generation to another, and who are so much inferior to those who first submitted, in your circumstances will venture to oppose the entire empire of the Romans.

While those Athenians, who, in order to preserve the liberty of Greece, did once set fire to their own city; who pursued Xerxes, that proud prince, when he sailed upon the land, and walked upon the sea, and could not be contained by the seas, but conducted such an army as was too broad for Europe; and made him run away like a fugitive in a single ship, and brake so great a part of Asia at the Lesser Salamis; are yet at this time servants to the Romans; and those injunctions which are sent from Italy become laws to the principal governing city of Greece.

Those Lacedemonians also who got the great victories at Thermopylae and Platea, and had Agesilaus [for their king], and searched every corner of Asia, are contented to admit the same lords. Those Macedonians also, who still fancy what great men their Philip and Alexander were, and see that the latter had promised them the empire over the world, these bear so great a change, and pay their obedience to those whom fortune hath advanced in their stead. Moreover, ten thousand ether nations there are who had greater reason than we to claim their entire liberty, and yet do submit. You are the only people who think it a disgrace to be servants to those to whom all the world hath submitted.

What sort of an army do you rely on? What are the arms you depend on? Where is your fleet that may seize upon the Roman seas? And where are those treasures which may be sufficient for your undertakings? Do you suppose, I pray you, that you are to make war with the Egyptians, and with the Arabians? Will you not carefully reflect upon the Roman Empire? Will you not estimate your own weakness? Hath not your army been often beaten even by your neighboring nations, while the power of the Romans is invincible in all parts of the habitable earth? Nay, rather they seek for somewhat still beyond that; for all Euphrates is not a sufficient boundary for them on the east side, nor the Danube on the north; and for their southern limit, Libya hath been searched over by them, as far as countries uninhabited, as is Cadiz their limit on the west; nay, indeed, they have sought for another habitable earth beyond the ocean, and have carried their arms as far as such British islands as were never known before.

What therefore do you pretend to? Are you richer than the Gauls, stronger than the Germans, wiser than the Greeks, more numerous than all men upon the habitable earth? What confidence is it that elevates you to oppose the Romans? Perhaps it will be said, it is hard to endure slavery. Yes; but how much harder is this to the Greeks, who were esteemed the noblest of all

people under the sun! These, though they inhabit in a large country, are in subjection to six bundles of Roman rods. It is the same case with the Macedonians, who have juster reason to claim their liberty than you have. What is the case of five hundred cities of Asia?

Do they not submit to a single governor, and to the consular bundle of rods? What need I speak of the Henlochi, and Colchi and the nation of Tauri, those that inhabit the Bosphorus, and the nations about Pontus, and Meotis, who formerly knew not so much as a lord of their own, but arc now subject to three thousand armed men, and where forty long ships keep the sea in peace, which before was not navigable, and very tempestuous? How strong a plea may Bithynia, and Cappadocia, and the people of Pamphylia, the Lycians, and Cilicians, put in for liberty! But they are made tributary without an army. What are the circumstances of the Thracians, whose country extends in breadth five days' journey, and in length seven, and is of a much more harsh constitution, and much more defensible, than yours, and by the rigor of its cold sufficient to keep off armies from attacking them?

Do not they submit to two thousand men of the Roman garrisons? Are not the Illyrlans, who inhabit the country adjoining, as far as Dalmatia and the Danube, governed by barely two legions? By which also they put a stop to the incursions of the Daeians. And for the Dalmatians, who have made such frequent insurrections in order to regain their liberty, and who could never before be so thoroughly subdued, but that they always gathered their forces together again, revolted, yet are they now very quiet under one Roman legion. Moreover, if eat advantages might provoke any people to revolt, the Gauls might do it best of all, as being so thoroughly walled round by nature; on the east side by the Alps, on the north by the river Rhine, on the south by the Pyrenean mountains, and on the west by the ocean.

Now although these Gauls have such obstacles before them to prevent any attack upon them, and have no fewer than three hundred and five nations among them, nay have, as one may say, the fountains of domestic happiness within themselves, and send out plentiful streams of happiness over almost the whole world, these bear to be tributary to the Romans, and derive their prosperous condition from them; and they undergo this, not because they are of effeminate minds, or because they are of an ignoble stock, as having borne a war of eighty years in order to preserve their liberty; but by reason of the great regard they have to the power of the Romans, and their good fortune, which is of greater efficacy than their arms. These Gauls, therefore, are kept

in servitude by twelve hundred soldiers, which are hardly so many as are their cities; nor hath the gold dug out of the mines of Spain been sufficient for the support of a war to preserve their liberty, nor could their vast distance from the Romans by land and by sea do it; nor could the martial tribes of the Lusitanians and Spaniards escape; no more could the ocean, with its tide, which yet was terrible to the ancient inhabitants.

Nay, the Romans have extended their arms beyond the Pillars of Hercules, and have walked among the clouds, upon the Pyrenean Mountains, and have subdued these nations. And one legion is a sufficient guard for these people, although they were so hard to be conquered, and at a distance so remote from Rome. Who is there among you that hath not heard of the great number of the Germans? You have, to be sure, yourselves seen them to be strong and tall, and that frequently, since the Romans have them among their captives everywhere; yet these Germans, who dwell in an immense country, who have minds greater than their bodies, and a soul that despises death, and who are in rage more fierce than wild beasts, have the Rhine for the boundary of their enterprises, and are tamed by eight Roman legions. Such of them as were taken captive became their servants; and the rest of the entire nation were obliged to save themselves by flight.

Do you also, who depend on the walls of Jerusalem, consider what a wall the Britons had; for the Romans sailed away to them, an subdued them while they were encompassed by the ocean, and inhabited an island that is not less than the [continent of this] habitable earth; and four legions are a sufficient guard to so large all island And why should I speak much more about this matter, while the Parthians, that most warlike body of men, and lords of so many nations, and encompassed with such mighty forces, send hostages to the Romans? Whereby you may see, if you please, even in Italy, the noblest nation of the East, under the notion of peace, submitting to serve them. Now when almost all people under the sun submit to the Roman arms, will you be the only people that make war against them? And this without regarding the fate of the Carthaginians, who, in the midst of their brags of the great Hannibal, and the nobility of their Phoenician original, fell by the hand of Scipio.

Nor indeed have the Cyrenians, derived from the Lacedemonians, nor the Marmaridite, a nation extended as far as the regions uninhabitable for want of water, nor have the Syrtes, a place terrible to such as barely hear it described, the Nasamons and Moors, and the immense multitude of the Numidians, been

able to put a stop to the Roman valor. And as for the third part of the habitable earth, [Akica,] whose nations are so many that it is not easy to number them, and which is bounded by the Atlantic Sea and the pillars of Hercules, and feeds an innumerable multitude of Ethiopians, as far as the Red Sea, these have the Romans subdued entirely. And besides the annual fruits of the earth, which maintain the multitude of the Romans for eight months in the year, this, over and above, pays all sorts of tribute, and affords revenues suitable to the necessities of the government.

Nor do they, like you, esteem such injunctions a disgrace to them, although they have but one Roman legion that abides among them. And indeed what occasion is there for showing you the power of the Romans over remote countries, when it is so easy to learn it from Egypt, in your neighborhood? This country is extended as far as the Ethiopians, and Arabia the Happy, and borders upon India; it hath seven millions five hundred thousand men, besides the inhabitants of Alexandria, as may be learned from the revenue of the poll tax; yet it is not ashamed to submit to the Roman government, although it hath Alexandria as a grand temptation to a revolt, by reason it is so full of people and of riches, and is besides exceeding large, its length being thirty furlongs, and its breadth no less than ten; and it pays more tribute to the Romans in one month than you do in a year; nay, besides what it pays in money, it sends corn to Rome that supports it for four months [in the year]: it is also walled round on all sides, either by almost impassable deserts, or seas that have no havens, or by rivers, or by lakes; yet have none of these things been found too strong for the Roman good fortune; however, two legions that lie in that city are a bridle both for the remoter parts of Egypt, and for the parts inhabited by the more noble Macedonians.

Where then are those people whom you are to have for your auxiliaries? Must they come from the parts of the world that are uninhabited? For all that are in the habitable earth are [under the] Romans. Unless any of you extend his hopes as far as beyond the Euphrates, and suppose that those of your own nation that dwell in Adiabene will come to your assistance; but certainly these will not embarrass themselves with an unjustifiable war, nor, if they should follow such ill advice, will the Parthians permit them so to do; for it is their concern to maintain the truce that is between them and the Romans, and they will be supposed to break the covenants between them, if any under their government march against the Romans. What remains, therefore, is this, that you have recourse to Divine assistance; but this is already on the side of the

Romans; for it is impossible that so vast an empire should be settled without God's providence. Reflect upon it, how impossible it is for your zealous observations of your religious customs to be here preserved, which are hard to be observed even when you fight with those whom you are able to conquer; and how can you then most of all hope for God's assistance, when, by being forced to transgress his law, you will make him turn his face from you? And if you do observe the custom of the Sabbath days, and will not be revealed on to do anything thereon, you will easily be taken, as were your forefathers by Pompey, who was the busiest in his siege on those days on which the besieged rested.

But if in time of war you transgress the law of your country, I cannot tell on whose account you will afterward go to war; for your concern is but one, that you do nothing against any of your forefathers; and how will you call upon God to assist you, when you are voluntarily transgressing against his religion? Now all men that go to war do it either as depending on Divine or on human assistance; but since your going to war will cut off both those assistances, those that are for going to war choose evident destruction. What hinders you from slaying your children and wives with your own hands, and burning this most excellent native city of yours? For by this mad prank you will, however, escape the reproach of being beaten. But it were best, O my friends, it were best, while the vessel is still in the haven, to foresee the impending storm, and not to set sail out of the port into the middle of the hurricanes; for we justly pity those who fall into great misfortunes without fore-seeing them; but for him who rushes into manifest ruin, he gains reproaches [instead of commiseration]. But certainly no one can imagine that you can enter into a war as by agreement, or that when the Romans have got you under their power, they will use you with moderation, or will not rather, for an example to other nations, burn your holy city, and utterly destroy your whole nation; for those of you who shall survive the war will not be able to find a place whither to flee, since all men have the Romans for their lords already, or are afraid they shall have hereafter.

Nay, indeed, the danger concerns not those Jews that dwell here only, but those of them which dwell in other cities also; for there is no people upon the habitable earth which have not some portion of you among them, whom your enemies will slay, in case you go to war, and on that account also; and so every city which hath Jews in it will be filled with slaughter for the sake of a few men, and they who slay them will be pardoned; but if that slaughter be

not made by them, consider how wicked a thing it is to take arms against those that are so kind to you. Have pity, therefore, if not on your children and wives, yet upon this your metropolis, and its sacred walls; spare the temple, and preserve the holy house, with its holy furniture, for yourselves; for if the Romans get you under their power, they will no longer abstain from them, when their former abstinence shall have been so ungratefully requited. I call to witness your sanctuary, and the holy angels of God, and this country common to us all, that I have not kept back anything that is for your preservation; and if you will follow that advice which you ought to do, you will have that peace which will be common to you and to me; but if you indulge four passions, you will run those hazards which I shall be free from.

Appendix C: Full Text of Josephus' Speech

(The following text is taken directly from *The War of the Jews – Book Three*, by Flavius Josephus. It is his account of his speech that he gave before the survivors of Jotapata committed mutual suicide.)

Oh my friends, why are we so earnest to kill ourselves? And why do we set our soul and body, which are such dear companions, at such variance? Can anyone pretend that I am not the man I was formerly? Nay, the Romans are sensible how that matter stands well enough. It is a brave thing to die in war; but so that it be according to the law of war, by the hand of conquerors. If, therefore, I avoid death from the sword of the Romans, I am truly worthy to be killed by my own sword, and my own hand; but if they admit of mercy, and would spare their enemy, how much more ought we to have mercy upon ourselves, and to spare ourselves? For it is certainly a foolish thing to do that to ourselves which we quarrel with them for doing to us.

I confess freely that it is a brave thing to die for liberty; but still so that it be in war, and done by those who take that liberty from us; but in the present case our enemies do neither meet us in battle, nor do they kill us. Now he is equally a coward who will not die when he is obliged to die, and he who will die when he is not obliged so to do. What are we afraid of, when we will not go up to the Romans? Is it death? If so, what we are afraid of, when we but suspect our enemies will inflict it on us, shall we inflict it on ourselves for certain? But it may be said we must be slaves. And are we then in a clear state of liberty at present? It may also be said that it is a manly act for one to kill himself.

No, certainly, but a most unmanly one; as I should esteem that pilot to be an errant coward, who, out of fear of a storm, should sink his ship of his own accord. Now self-murder is a crime most remote from the common nature of all animals, and an instance of impiety against God our Creator; nor indeed is there any animal that dies by its own contrivance, or by its own means, for the desire of life is a law engraven in them all; on which account we deem those that openly take it away from us to be our enemies, and those that do it by treachery are punished for so doing. And do not you think that God is very angry when a man does injury to what he hath bestowed on him? For from

him it is that we have received our being, and we ought to leave it to his disposal to take that being away from us.

The bodies of all men are indeed mortal, and are created out of corruptible matter; but the soul is ever immortal, and is a portion of the divinity that inhabits our bodies. Besides, if any one destroys or abuses a depositum he hath received from a mere man, he is esteemed a wicked and perfidious person; but then if any one cast out of his body this Divine depositum, can we imagine that he who is thereby affronted does not know of it? Moreover, our law justly ordains that slaves which run away from their master shall be punished, though the masters they run away from may have been wicked masters to them. And shall we endeavor to run away from God, who is the best of all masters, and not guilty of impiety?

Do not you know that those who depart out of this life according to the law of nature, and pay that debt which was received from God, when he that lent it us is pleased to require it back again, enjoy eternal fame; that their houses and their posterity are sure, that their souls are pure and obedient, and obtain a most holy place in heaven, from whence, in the revolutions of ages, they are again sent into pure bodies; while the souls of those whose hands have acted madly against themselves are received by the darkest place in Hades, and while God, who is their Father, punishes those that offend against either of them in their posterity? For which reason God hates such doings, and the crime is punished by our most wise legislator.

Accordingly, our laws determine that the bodies of such as kill themselves should be exposed till the sun be set, without burial, although at the same time it be allowed by them to be lawful to bury our enemies sooner. The laws of other nations also enjoin such men's hands to be cut off when they are dead, which had been made use of in destroying themselves when alive, while they reckoned that as the body is alien from the soul, so is the hand alien from the body. It is therefore, my friends, a right thing to reason justly, and not add to the calamities which men bring upon us impiety towards our Creator. If we have a mind to preserve ourselves, let us do it; for to be preserved by those our enemies, to whom we have given so many demonstrations of our courage, is no way inglorious; but if we have a mind to die, it is good to die by the hand of those that have conquered us.

For nay part, I will not run over to our enemies' quarters, in order to be a traitor to myself; for certainly I should then be much more foolish than those that deserted to the enemy, since they did it in order to save themselves, and I

should do it for destruction, for my own destruction. However, I heartily wish the Romans may prove treacherous in this matter; for if, after their offer of their right hand for security, I be slain by them; I shall die cheerfully, and carry away with me the sense of their perfidiousness, as a consolation greater than victory itself.

Author's Notes

My intent after finishing ***Soldier of Rome – The Artorian Chronicles*** was to move on to a different historical era, though I intended to return to Rome within two to three years to work on the Great Jewish Revolt. Yet no sooner had the Artorian Chronicles ended then fans were clamoring for more Roman novels. I had originally meant for this to be a single stand-alone novel about the Siege of Jerusalem; however, once I delved further into researching this project I came to realize that at a minimum this would need to be a trilogy. And since this is a single-story arc split into three volumes, I had to decide where the appropriate breaks would come. The Siege of Jotapata seemed the most logical place to end this first book.

As for the name of the series, ***Kingdom of the Damned*** is not meant in a derogatory or disrespectful nature, but rather to punctuate the overwhelming tragedy suffered by the Jewish people. I drew the name from the former Kingdoms of Judah and Israel, as well as the Herodian Kingdom of Herod the Great. All of these ended before the region became the Roman Province of Judea, though they still would have been revered by the Jewish people. Indeed, the Jews were still awaiting their messiah / king. The severe brutality of the Roman-Jewish War, coupled with the endless civil war that went on between the various factions who would rather die than stand together, it seemed appropriate that for most of the populace caught in the middle this region would have become like a kingdom of a people damned.

Though many of the various sects are mentioned in detail, one I have not discussed in this work are the Christians. This is simply because they are not even mentioned in Josephus' account of the Great Jewish Revolt. And contrary to what film and popular legend may tell us, Christianity as we know it was in its infancy during this time; for example, the Gospel of John was not even fully compiled until around 90 A.D. The Christians were simply one sect, and a very small one at that, out of many. I admit, I took a good deal of artistic license using the Number of the Beast from Revelations. The Book of Revelation was written either during the reign of Nero or Domitian, with many academic scholars speculating that 666 was in fact numeric code

referencing one of these two. For this narrative I have gone with the Nero theory. And as a scholar, it is entirely plausible that Josephus would have known of its existence and possibly even read it. However, he makes no mention of Revelations in his work; the conduit between the Number of the Beast and Josephus' vision from God that predicted the fall of Nero and eventual rise of Vespasian is entirely of my own making.

Those familiar with the Great Jewish Revolt will note my substantial reliance on the works of Josephus. This is because he gives the most thorough first-hand account of the war still in existence. In many ways, this trilogy is a novelization of Josephus' work. He is sometimes criticized for his inherent bias because he wrote his works years later, under the patronage of the Romans, using it to perhaps justify his own conduct while condemning his enemies. My own assessment of his writings is that he is in fact quite candid in his portrayal of both Roman and Jewish leaders. Granted, his bias and venomous hatred towards former enemies like John of Giscala and Eleazar ben Yair is blatantly obvious; however, I do feel that for the most part Josephus is fair in his descriptions.

Josephus is also sometimes accused of exaggerations, though I personally do not feel these arguments hold much weight. One such example is that historians speculate that Jotapata only had an indigenous population of about 7,000. While this is likely true, it does not take into account the number of refugees who would have fled to the perceived safety behind its walls during Vespasian's onslaught. Also, Josephus would have brought a considerable portion of his army with him. Between his own soldiers, plus men of fighting age amongst the city's population and refugees, it is reasonable to assume that he had between 15,000 and 20,000 men under arms, with about an equal or greater number of women and young children seeking protection.

One minor point that I feel needs addressing: The footnotes in the translation of his work note some puzzlement regarding how few cavalry Josephus had. According to his own account, his army numbered around 60,000 infantry, with just 250 cavalry. This would have been a simple logistical matter. In an era when the vast majority of people walked, the only ones with horses were either the very wealthy, or army officers and cavalrymen. It is highly probable that between the mounts already owned by the Romans, as well as

King Agrippa's army, combined with the incessant refusal of various factions to cooperate and share resources, there simply were not sufficient horses available for Josephus to form a viable cavalry wing to his army.

One challenge brought on while writing this story was the number of characters with the same name, Yohanan and Eleazar being prime examples. Because of this, I either used specific connotations, i.e. 'ben Yair', or else I anglicized the names, such as John of Giscala. Another difficulty was Josephus' confusion regarding Roman military ranks below Legate. For example, he is prone to interchangeably using 'tribune' and 'centurion' when referring to the same person. I therefore had to use my own knowledge of the Roman army structure and determine which rank each individual most likely held, based on their responsibilities. In the end, Josephus is the most thorough and reliable source we have, and so without counterevidence to support the contrary, I feel compelled to take most of his writing at face value.

As I go into the next volume of this series, ***Kingdom of the Damned: Vespasian's Fury***, I hope that fans of my former works will appreciate this series as much as the others. I confess, I enjoyed being able to give readers just a taste of nostalgia by having a member of the Artorius family in this story. I further admit that the very reason why I had the original Artorius' son, Metellus, get married so quickly in ***Soldier of Rome: The Last Campaign*** was so that he could have a son that would be old enough to take part in the Roman-Jewish War.

It is my hope that this new series will resonate with fans, both old and new.

James Mace – May 2014

A Word of Thanks from the Author

Thank you for taking the time to read ***Soldier of Rome: Rebellion in Judea***. The Great Jewish Revolt was one of the most cataclysmic tragedies in Ancient History, with its origins influencing many historical and religious texts.

For up-to-date information about upcoming books, as well as important people and dates in history, please subscribe to my monthly Mailing List.

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If you enjoyed ***Rebellion in Judea***, I would be most grateful if you could post reviews on either Amazon or Goodreads. Reviews are crucial for independent authors. The more substantive and candid, the better, for it helps us improve our ability to write and tell stories.

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Thank you again for taking the time to read ***Rebellion in Judea***, and for allowing me to share stories from history with you.

In gratitude,

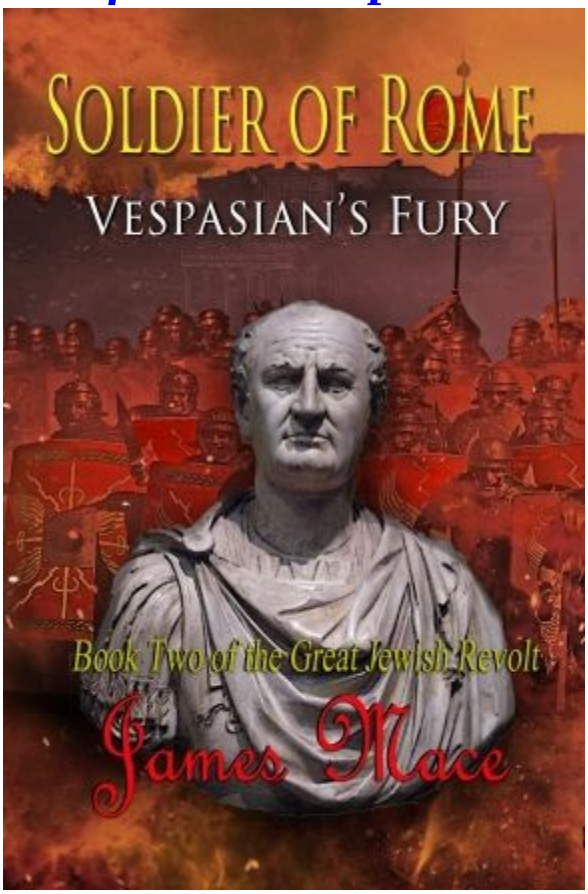
James

Further Reading / Bibliography

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The Saga of the Great Jewish Revolt, along with the adventures of the next generation of the Artorian line, continues with

Soldier of Rome: Vespasian's Fury



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