

ARTHURIAN TALES:  
AMBROSIUS  
AURELIANI

Leon Mintz



Erie Harbor Productions  
Pontiac, Michigan

Arthurian Tales: Ambrosius Aureliani

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My many thanks go out to Dan, Jen, John,  
and the ladies of New York for helping to  
to point out the errors of my ways.

Please do not fault them for not finding them all.

*Note from the Author*

*For the most part, modern names of the various locations have been used in Arthurian Tales: Ambrosius Aureliani. The notable exception is the use of Aureliani instead of Orléans. The intent is to reinforce Ambrosius' connection to this Gallic city, or more specifically to a villa in the nearby region. The reason for this is further explained in the section entitled The Making of Arthurian Tales.*

*It is truly hoped that the general reader will not find it necessary to read anything after page 352 to enjoy Ambrosius Aureliani. If it is needed, then I have failed as an author.*

*The point of the pages past the end of the story is to explain why certain key elements in Arthurian legends were portrayed in non-traditional fashions.*

*Ambrosius Aureliani is this author's vain attempt to present a historically plausible, "World-Restorer" scenario for King Arthur while utilizing a vast majority of the sources in a synchronized manner.*

## Note from the Narrator

Greetings. I am Merlinus or simply Merlin. It is the latter that I have been called of late. The trappings of Rome have fallen away like the features of a fading leper. The sights are horrid, and the losses sting with great regret. And though I am a Roman at heart, I have not lived under Roman rule in quite some time. Still, I possess documents revealing my legal claim to a large imperial villa on the shores of the Loire River near the city of Aureliani. It was many, many years ago when I first received that vast estate.

During the consulship of Constantius and Constans, a Roman senator and my father made a deal. In this deal, the Spaniard signed over his Gallic lands to me. In return, my father vowed to escort another nobleman's daughter and her newborn son to Barcelona. In addition, after a short stay, Father would bring her back to her home in Armorica. That was the plan.

But then, Father caught an ill vapor and died before he could execute his part of the deal. I stepped forward to fulfill Father's obligations to the senator. It was at this point that I became privy to the other elements of the plan. Father had agreed to exchange the daughter's child with the son of the self-proclaimed restorer of Rome, King Aduolphus. So I did what Father had arranged to do.

Shortly after this secret switch took place, the daughter's child became ill and died. Her baby was mourned as if he were Theodosius, the son of King Aduolphus and Princess Placidia.

So the son of the *Restitutor Orbis* lived on as Ambrosius. It was not until years later after gray strands had crept into his brown hair that he died. Many may scoff at what I write, but they are fools if they do. Life is not always simple, and I have no interest in telling lies. So become aware of the truth about Ambrosius Aureliani by your own free will or stumble into enlightenment as I did.



# CHAPTER 1

The sun poured across the eastern horizon as I neared the end of my long walk. My destination was a certain church near Barcelona. The overpowering sun rolled over me. I closed my eyes, but still I could not block out its light. Blindly, I kept going until I tripped over a stone. On my hands and knees, I looked up and saw the church.

A line of people flowed through the church to pay their respects to the dead child. I joined their line and entered the church. Its center aisle divided two rows of benches. Ten of them, wooden and backless, sat in each row. People filled them all. Some stood behind them, waiting for an available seat, while others observed from afar. I took a seat when I could. The church had never held so many mourners at one time.

Some time later, Princess Placidia entered. The hurt in her face tore at my heart. I looked away, knowing I had caused it. Or, at least, I was partly to blame. I tried to forget about the young lady kneeling in front of the silver-plated baby casket. I tried to forget her beautiful face, her slender cheeks, soft dark eyes, raven hair, and olive skin. She moaned, reminding me that she was still there, crying her last good-byes to her baby, Theodosius. I felt nauseated. My hand trembled as it rested on my knee. I wanted to vomit. Sweat slithered down the sides of my face.

Her king, Adaulphus, stood behind her. He looked more Roman than Gothic. He sported a black toga with gold sashes. Though not tall in stature, Adaulphus was distinguished in beauty of face and form. Placidia's weeping grew; King Adaulphus placed his hand on her shoulder. She looked up at him with sad red eyes. Tears streamed down her soft cheeks. They had shared a lifetime, though they were together only four years.

For the first time in centuries, barbarians had sacked Rome, and this man standing behind the Roman princess had led them. As the brother-in-law of Alaric, Adaulphus fought and killed many Romans. He had captured countless prisoners for his Lord Alaric, but none so precious as Placidia. After Lord Alaric had perished in Italy, Adaulphus took control

of their mobile empire. Though barbaric and Arian, this great man left few doubting his self-proclaimed title of the restorer of Rome.

Originally seized from her home as a hostage, in time Placidia fell in love with Aduolphus. From the plunder of Rome, he gave her wedding gifts of jewels and gold. Together, they had united the greatest elements of their cultures. Now, they mourned their fate. The hope of a grand dynasty had passed like the spirit of the child in the closed coffin.

Imperial pleas and threats arrived continuously, all centered around Princess Placidia. Many of them came from men like Germanus, the Bishop of Auxerre. The bishop stood in the inner imperial circles. He was a friend of Budicius, a Spanish senator and cousin of Emperor Honorius.

Already that day, I heard the whispered words of divine judgment, as if the death of baby Theodosius was God's wrath against the Roman-Gothic union. His death fulfilled the prophecy of Daniel. Though joined, there would be no future heirs to keep the two empires together.

*What would the masses say if they knew Theodosius lived? What would they say if they knew that the baby boy was being kept out in a nearby villa waiting for me to take him to the fringes of Armorica?*

I needed to leave. I stood. My movement caught Germanus' attention, and he looked at me. The bishop had a light complexion. His face was long but not ugly. He was well-groomed, not a single black hair out of place. He kept it short. It glistened from oils in his hair. His beard ran thinly along his jawline. His regal attire revealed that Germanus spent more time primping than praying. His moral demeanor, which I had witnessed, didn't seem to warrant such a pious position. He smiled, knowing that I was leaving, finally, for the villa. Earlier, he had told me that I shouldn't have come to the service, and I should have left for Armorica instead.

I had inflicted the queen and her king with something worse than pain. I wanted no part of my father's circle of friends now. My father's friends were not mine. Sadly, I questioned the true character of my dead father. I had been suddenly pulled into this conspiracy with his death less than a month ago. Now it was my duty to complete what he had begun. With his dying breath, my father begged this from me: "Save the family."

I didn't return Germanus' smile. It melted into a frown, and he moved toward me. I didn't alter my pace as I made my way to the aisle. Germanus caught up with me before I could reach the doors of the church.

Though only fourteen, I was noticeably taller than the bishop.

“Why the long face, young Merlinus?” Germanus whispered.

Still walking, I glanced at him with the same sour expression.

“You act like you’ve done some terrible injustice,” he hissed lowly.

“Haven’t I?” I replied.

“No,” Germanus replied. “Your actions shall save Rome and all of Its Glory. You’ve shown that you’re a true citizen. As true as Caesar.”

“He was a dictator. Spare me your lies. The Empire is in greater peril than ever, if you think a baby could cause it to self-implode,” I barked as we stepped free of the church and into the light of day.

“You must see that if we didn’t do this, the Empire would be torn apart. None of the nobles of Rome would honor Adaulphus or any son Placidia might bear him, not even one named after her great father, Theodosius. For God’s sake, Adaulphus is a barbarian. And worse yet, Arian.”

“What’s not barbaric or unholy about our actions?” I asked.

“The boy is not dead,” Germanus answered.

I continued to walk in the direction of Budicius’ villa where the baby, Theodosius, was kept.

“Do we have a problem?” Germanus called out as he stopped.

“If we did, that whole church would know by now,” I replied.

“Good,” he replied, “so, don’t worry. Your family shall be rewarded for serving the Empire in this task. Budicius is a wealthy landowner. He has the ears of Honorius’ advisers. His Gallic holdings near Aureliani are immaculate. Your father would be truly honored.”

“My family is the only reason I am going through with this,” I declared.

My words and hard stare melted his false smile once more. Convincing him of my intent, I turned and continued in the direction of the villa. I had made a terrible error in judgment, and now I had to deal with it.

As I walked, I wondered why they insisted on handling it this way. If the child was a threat to imperial authority, then why not kill the child or leave him at the crossroads where some animal would do what the authorities couldn’t. Maybe Father was supposed to kill the child, and they thought that he had told me to do the same. He had never mentioned such a thing.

## CHAPTER 2

After some time, I finished the long walk to Budicius' villa near Barcelona. I toiled over how my father fit into this dark conspiracy. I saw his part as the enforcer. Father had retired from the legion, but lacked the luxury that he sought. Father had convinced Mother that this imperial assignment would secure our family's future. Mother and Father had argued over the issue for some time before she finally conceded. He was dead now, and I stood in his stead.

Slaves tended to the upkeep of Budicius' land as I arrived. Several worked the large garden next to the outer wall that enclosed the living quarters and several barns. Others washed clothes while still more fed the tame fowl and wandering livestock. My appearance went unnoticed, or at least not acknowledged, by the workers.

When I had first arrived weeks ago, I was amazed and envious of this large, winged-corridor villa. The long buildings subdivided into the living quarters, kitchen, dining room, and audience chamber. They enclosed an immaculate courtyard. Fine ceramic tiles covered the various buildings' roofs and the rim of the outer wall. Many fine horses resided in its stables. Budicius had everything that I wanted. At that time, I wished to obtain a place such as this. Eventually, if I owned such a posh villa, then I would have achieved my dreams.

Now I knew that I might be on a path leading to material success, but I had strayed far from being an honorable man. I traded integrity for an income and sold grace to feed my greed. The workers felt the same as I did about this place. Sick of it. I made my way to the inside.

"Merlinus," a loud thick voice called out. "Where have you been?"

I saw Budicius. He had dark olive skin and short black hair. It was thinning heavily on the top of his head, giving the impression that it was tonsured. He walked toward me with an honorary *cingulum* draped over his white toga. The richly ornamental belt identified people of more pomp than power. His cold gray eyes glared at me.

“I was at the service,” I replied.

“There was no reason for you to go. You should have left at dawn.”

“Theodosius and I shall leave in the morning,” I replied.

Budicius backhanded me. My bottom lip bled, cut from his jagged ring. I tasted blood in my mouth.

“Don’t you ever call the baby by that name. His name is Ambrosius,” Budicius hissed. “Don’t make me regret honoring an old friend’s dying wish.”

Anger raged in me. I wanted to lunge at him and pound his face with my fists. Thoughts of my family barely restrained me from attacking him. Instead, I said nothing and walked away.

“Am I understood?” He barked as if I were a slave.

I wasn’t powerful, but I was still proud. I refused to reply.

“I said —,”

“I heard you the first time,” I walked off toward my quarters.

Ahès sat quietly holding Theodosius in her arms. The baby boy slept peacefully. She cared for him as if he was her own. He was a good baby, quiet most of the time. His pudgy legs lay motionless. I looked at the birthmark above his right ankle as he slept in her arms. Affectionately, she brushed away a lock of hair that hung over his face. She glowed with innate beauty. She was a vision with her long brown wavy hair, small frame, and soft curves.

Ahès had fared childbirth well. The extra weight gained from carrying a child had turned the girl into a young woman. Her plump breasts enticed my glance many times. She did not strike me as being promiscuous as Lord Grallon had portrayed her. The innocence was stripped from her soft brown eyes, though. However, I didn’t see the wanton glare I expected. Instead, when she showed joy, her smile was genuine and warming. Her beauty was naturally enchanting. Her thin eyebrows accentuated her high cheeks and full lips. Her small ears were hidden under her long curly locks of dark brown hair.

With a whisper, she asked, “Where have you been?”

I just shook my head as I walked toward her.

“Oh, what happened to your lip?” She asked.

“Politics,” I plainly replied. I sat down on the bed next to her.

“Huh?”

“It’s not important,” I added. “How long has he been sleeping?”

“Only a short while,” she whispered with a smile.

She had been too free with herself; too free for her father’s liking. For this reason she was sent to Barcelona. Ahès and her baby had to travel here with me. Now her baby laid in the silver coffin at the front of the small church near Barcelona. It fit all too well. Grallon, Ahès’ father, rid himself of a bastard grandson and the Empire lost a great threat to their authority.

*How many people were involved? Whom could I trust? Would my deeds even be honored? Did they have to be? How could I force them?*

I walked over to the table in the corner of the large rectangular room. I stared at the sealed documents, which I had viewed often since I had received them from Budicius. The property rights listed on the scrolls would provide substance and safeguard my family well beyond my own lifetime. What more could I do for them? All I prayed for was their safe journey to our new home in Aureliani.

## CHAPTER 3

“Lord Grallon is aligned with unscrupulous associates. His ties run deep with imperial salt, *garum*, and wine,” Ahès whispered after laying the baby down. “You and I are mere victims in this debauchery.”

“Only you are,” I declared. “I am as foul as the fish in spoiled *garum*.”

“Your actions come from noble intent,” Ahès stated.

“That’s easy to say, but that still doesn’t justify the means.”

“Merlinus, you are up against something much larger than any one person. Budicius, Germanus, and Grallon are all part of the imperial network. They are part of the elite. Your father never was. He was an errand boy like you are, now.”

Ahès didn’t mean to sound cold but her words cut me. She walked over to me and then caressed the back of my arm with her hand.

“You’ve done the right thing under the circumstances,” she added. “Though tainted by treachery, take this moment and secure a future for your family and the child.”

“What if I leave the boy at the crossroads?” I questioned.

“I believe they expect as much from the likes of you, a poor provincial struggling for the sheer survival of his family. How easy would it be to neglect the delicate care of a child?” Ahès remarked.

The fate of the child lay with me. My father’s associates’ hands were clean and the Empire was safe for now. No. I wasn’t making it that easy for them. Theodosius would make the trip west to the Bay of Douarnenez. Lord Grallon would be forced to deal with the child. He would have to bring an early demise to this child, for I would not.

“What are you thinking? Don’t be foolish, Merlinus. You lack an army for your dreams of justice. Long, spirited speeches do little to stop short, shiny swords.”

Placing her hand on my shoulder, she asked, “When do we go?”

“In the morning,” I answered.

“I thought Budicius said we were leaving today.”

“We’re leaving in the morning.”

Several days had passed since Ahès, the child, and I had left Budicius’ villa with some of his men. Traveling light, we covered much ground. At first, we traveled northeast from Barcelona toward Narbonne on the Via Domitia. We rendezvoused with an armed escort at Alenya. Then, we cut cross-country with the regiment of Alans. Budicius’ lead man, Valerius, wanted to avoid the Goth-controlled town of Narbonne.

Ahès cared for the child. She took a big burden from me. She made the journey easy. From what Lord Grallon had said, I figured she would be more of a problem than the baby. Instead of keeping a close eye on her and the child, I kept it on Valerius and his crew of merchants.

Valerius was an ox of a man, about two hundred and fifty pounds. His body had no fat, from endless work on the docks. He kept his head shaved but maintained a wide beard trimmed short. It was mostly gray revealing the merchant’s age. His arms were thick and his chest was wide. He was so much like a bull that if Valerius went to the mithraeum, he’d be wise to remain on the benches or he might be sacrificed in the *tauroctony* instead of the wild bull.

My limited contact with Valerius and his crew left me feeling that they were like thin ice. On the surface, they were cold and expressionless. But if crossed, they would consume all that risked it.

Stopping for the night, the wagons had been drawn up into a circle. The sun had fallen behind the mountains long ago, and with it the temperature. Now the remanence of its light had all but faded away. Already, I felt the deep chill in the air. It was much colder than any night so far. I gathered up wood and placed it in the center of the camp.

“What do you think you are doing? No fires. There will most likely be no fires for the next couple of nights,” Valerius ordered.

“What? What about the baby?” Ahès questioned.

“That baby is not my concern. Besides, I am not the one that delayed our departure from Budicius’ villa. Direct your anger at Merlinus. He’s the one that held up our departure. I wanted to leave several days before we did. Merlinus refused to leave earlier.

“This is no-man’s land,” Valerius added. “Survival goes to the sharpest. We can’t expect protection from anyone out here. We are on our own until we reach Alaigne. There will be no burning fires to show the

demons of the night where I sleep.”

I thought to when we first went to Barcelona. That time, the rendezvous point was at Alaigne, which was twenty-five miles southeast of the Garonne River. We had traveled cross-country that time, also.

“Why wasn’t this an issue the last time we passed through here?” Ahès questioned.

“We were traveling in the middle of the summer. Therefore, a fire wasn’t necessary. You didn’t notice it, but we did the same thing at the time,” Valerius stated.

“It’s true,” I remarked.

I drew near her.

“I brought extra blankets. It will be all right, Ahès.”

Finally we reached Alaigne without incident. We stayed there for the night. As we joined their festivities and enjoyed their warm hospitality, the people acted as though there was nothing to fear. We toured the Alan settlement. It was truly enlightening to see how my people lived as they had before serving the Romans. I was twice removed from the old way, the ageless Alan traditions, nomadic in nature. My grandfather was the first to fight for Rome from my family’s clan.

Ahès halted before a small group of people huddled around an old man who was sitting on the ground. He had a long white wiry beard. He mumbled words, and I struggled to gather his meaning.

“What did he say?” she asked. “What is he saying now?”

“Shh,” I remarked. “I’m trying to figure it out.”

The old shaman directed his comments at a boy who sat facing him. The boy appeared nervous. He wasn’t even half as old as I was. His long black hair was pulled back from his face in a ponytail. His eyes opened wide as he waited for instructions from the old shaman. Though his face revealed fear like a misbehaving child about to be caught, the boy did not look away. Instead, he waited with his small hands in his lap.

“‘Your future waits for you,’” I translated the old man’s words for Ahès. “‘It shall find you if you lag too long. Pick up the osier sticks. Roll them in your hands until I say stop, then drop them. From them, I shall glimpse into the world beyond here and see you in the days of tomorrow. Your future shall be seen.’”

“What’s the young boy’s name? How old do you think he is?”

Ahès asked, cradling Theodosius in her arms while he slept.

“I don’t know,” I remarked.

“The boy’s name is Draco. He’s my younger brother and he’s only six years old,” remarked a young girl. “My name is Metelli.”

She had long black hair and wore a cloth that tightly bound her head. The tail of the fabric hung down behind her as her hair did. This custom had clung to the people, though they were far from their traditional home in Central Asia. She finished with a shy smile that quickly slipped away. Ahès smiled, seeing the girl’s interest in me. Although having the customary drawn head, she was still pretty to my Roman eyes.

Pointing at Ahès, I politely announced, “This is Ahès. And I am Merlinus. It is a pleasure to meet you, Metelli.”

With a bright smile, she added, “Draco begins his journey on the warrior’s path tonight. He must wander into the darkness of the night and maintain an all-night vigil. Besides his own wits, he shall have no assistance except for what the shaman tells him now.”

She fell silent, waiting for her brother to cast his destiny. Metelli and Draco had several similar features. Besides the indigenous dark eyes and hair, they shared the same high, thin cheeks and short noses. Both had long narrow ears, which their long hair would conceal if they weren’t in ponytails. The young boy quickly rolled the thin, straight sticks in his hands, but he seemed uncertain if he should keep up his pace. His eyes were fixed upon the old man. One eye twitched.

“Stop!” Commanded the old man.

Draco’s eyes grew wider. His nose flared. He dropped the sticks. They scattered across the sand in-between the boy and the old man in a random manner. One stick from the bundle stuck straight up while another slowly fell. Many of them crisscrossed each other.

“You’ll serve a good king, but save a greater one,” the old man said. “Your future waits for you now. It is here. Watching, watching us.”

The old man turned and looked directly at Ahès. She smiled and he leaned back from Ahès’ glance. Spooked, the shaman got to his feet and left without a word. The group of people scattered along with Metelli. Only Draco remained. He said nothing. He stared at us, studying us. And then, the young boy got to his feet and sprinted off into the night.

“What just happened?” Ahès asked.

“I don’t know,” I replied. “We should return to our wagon.”

The next morning, our group picked up the Roman road from Narbonne to Toulouse. Far enough between the two cities, there were no issues with the Goths. Our crew was vulnerable. Vandals still insulted authority in the area, whether it was imperial or Gothic. Although mostly driven farther south, some lingered, leeching a living like common thieves.

Our travels took us northwest to the Garonne River. The group met up with the ships that would sail us to Armorica. With careful timing, the ships past Toulouse at night. It was a Roman town, but the Goths held more and more influence there since they sacked Rome four years ago.

The boat sailed for the sea. The journey was peaceful and helped to clear my thoughts. Though winter approached, the weather wasn't poor. A breeze sped us on our way and took the edge off the strong sun. All seemed consumed by their own thoughts or tasks at hand. Few spoke, only Ahès remained vocal. She sang to the baby, whispered soft words, and treated his every need. She had grown attached to Theodosius. It was great for the child, but I worried for her. What would happen once we made it to Armorica? Did she think she could keep him? There's no way Lord Grallon would allow Ahès to keep the child. What would happen with the child, then? Who would care for him?

I felt sadness. She glanced at me. My expression soured hers.

"What's wrong?" She asked.

"Nothing."

"It has to be something. That look is from something."

With no one in listening distance as we stepped off the docked boat, I said, "What will happen to the baby once we reach your father?"

A surprised look formed on her face.

"You're not keeping him? Since you said you weren't going to leave him at the side of the road, I thought he was going to Aureliani."

"I was simply told to bring the child to your father," I replied.

"You're not keeping him?" she asked again.

"No."

The baby squirmed and fussed slightly. He drew Ahès' attention.

"Oh, it's okay, baby. It's okay," she cooed. She fluttered his lip with her finger. "See, it's okay, baby."

"It's hard to say what will happen," I remarked. "Grallon might give him to the church."

"If that was the case, Bishop Germanus would have taken him.

Grallon would want to keep him away from educated eyes, though. He might give the child to a peasant family to raise.” Ahès stated.

“Is there a chance that he might . . .” I paused as I thought the worst. Looking up from the baby, she peered at me to see my intent.

“No. I don’t believe he would do that. More likely than not, he will end up pawning the boy off on my stepbrother, Vortimer,” she answered. “Maybe I can talk him into allowing me to raise him.”

“Maybe,” I replied. Though, I doubted it even as I said it.

Lord Grallon would not allow such a scandal to live dormant under his roof. He had used his daughter in this conspiracy; he would not allow anything to go to chance.

With the baby in her hands, Ahès and I stood on the shore waiting for the men to unload the wine. They moved quickly as night grew more complete. It had been a long journey. The crew and ship had labored against the tidal bore of the Garonne River. The sea wasn’t any easier. Still, we had reached the Bay of Douarnenez safely.

Grallon had not come to the shore to greet us. His men stated that Lord Grallon traveled to Vorgium. They expected that he would return by late tomorrow or early the following day.

“Merlinus and Ahès, go ahead and get on the lead wagon,” Valerius ordered. “The driver will take you to the villa. We will follow after we unload the rest of the wine and load the garum and salted pork.”

“Okay,” I replied.

I took the baby. Ahès climbed onto the wagon. I carefully handed the sleeping child to her, then got on. The driver set the oxen in motion with a snap of his wrists. The wagon rolled forward with a light tug.

At a slow pace, we moved away from the sea and inched toward the villa. The night consumed the remaining light. Stars brilliantly lit the sky by the time we reached the villa.

Servants quickly gathered with torches in their hands as the wagons pulled through the gatehouse. After climbing down, I reached for the baby. Ahès got down, afterwards. Though tired, she smiled at me as I held the boy peacefully. I gave the boy back to her without a stir.

We walked quietly through the courtyard. Torches filled the open lawn with a strong flickering light. An older woman led us to our quarters.

“Sweet dreams, my lady.”

With a smile, she added, “You, too.”

# CHAPTER 4

The next morning I rose early. My thoughts kept me from sleeping. I wandered through the quiet villa. Eventually I exited it by following the scent of the sea. I stood at the back end of the Roman building. The outer perimeter walls ran north and south and abruptly ended at the sea cliff. There was no outer wall running east and west to serve as protection at the back of the villa. Instead, the sea and a large statue stood guard. Curious, I walked up closer. A massive marble man towered at least fifteen feet tall. He held his hand out as if to stop the sea while in the other one he grasped a trident. From the tailbone of the statue a fish's tail curled out around the man's right leg forming part of the base. Standing directly in front of the statue, I read the inscription on its base:

To the divinity of Augustus and to Neptune Hippius, Caius Varenius Varus, of the Voltinia tribe, curator of the conventus of Roman citizens for the fourth time, has erected this.

I hadn't seen the statue's equal. I glanced once more toward the sea. From my elevated view, the harbor and this villa appeared lower than the bay in the distance. The harbor's shoreline stretched toward the northern horizon and nearly touched in the center. Its rising slope formed a natural dam. The docks and the area around bustled like a thriving city.

"The sight is enchanting if you have any love for the sea," a man called out from behind me. Turning I saw Grallon.

He stood regally dressed. It seemed odd seeing him this way, so early in the morning. His wavy hair was gray with remnants of black roots. It gave Grallon a dignified look. He had a narrow face and greenish-blue eyes. A thin beard covered his soft features. Even though I was extremely tall for my age, Grallon was still taller. This made him at least six and a half feet tall. He had a thicker frame, also. Thoughts of him snatching me and pitching me off the nearby cliff didn't seem unrealistic. A silver cape of fur draped his broad shoulders. A cardinal red cloth lined the inside of it. His silver wool tunic had red plates of light armor fastened

to it. He looked as though he was dressed for an imperial procession.

After slightly bowing, I remarked, "Good morning, Grallon, lord of Vorgium."

"Greetings, young Merlinus," he replied as he walked toward me. "I hope all has gone well?"

"As good as can be expected under the circumstances," I remarked. "I don't believe Valerius will report that things went as smoothly as they did. Our Alan escorts never filled me with a moment of doubt. They knew the lay of the land as if they had held it for a lifetime. No one was hurt or even harassed."

"Good. Then everything went as well as can be expected. Something always comes up and the plan must be altered to fit the present conditions. That's life," Grallon said as he walked past me. He walked closer to the cliff. I moved up but stayed out of arms length.

"You see this? Mark yourself as one of the fortunate few. For many have not seen things like these and some never will. Only powerful men of the Empire have stood where you do."

"And servants," I added with light conviction. The silence and the look from Grallon made me think I would have been better off saying nothing. Father said to never correct a superior.

Seeing no malcontent in the sharp remark, he fired back, "Even emperors have been called from the farmer's fields."

He turned back toward the sea, dignified with his hands drawn together behind his waist.

Without looking back at me, he called out, "Your father would be proud of you. You have handled things in the best possible manner. There is just one more thing I would like you to handle. If you agree to it, I will order a generous supply of salted pork and garum to be sent to Aureliani, today. In addition, a small chest of coins will be included."

"What task could warrant such an offer?" I inquired.

"Nothing you haven't done already," the lord of Vorgium remarked. "I wish you to sail to the western shores of Britain. I have honorary holdings there. I gained them when I served in the legion sent by General Stilicho. Instead of leaving when we turned away Britain's enemies, I stayed. The bulk of the men returned to the continent. Recently, in return for honorable service, I've given much of the lands to my men who still fight for me. At the holdings near Gloucester, I have stationed my

son, Vortimer. I want you to sail with the child, Ambrosius, to Gloucester. Once there, simply give the boy to Vortimer. And then, you shall be richly rewarded.”

“You have lands in Britain?” I asked.

“Yes,” Grallon said in a strong, proud tone. “I have many holdings here and on the island. Even in tough times, I have prospered. Times are changing. People must adapt or die in poverty. I have served the Empire well and I have been rewarded with wealth and prosperity. I am more powerful than Carausius and less blinded by pride than he was. Learn from my example, Merlinus. Use the Empire. Don’t fight against the system. It has consumed kingdoms before us. It has consumed Christ. It could easily consume you or I if we step out of line. So don’t, and you could gain all the riches you desire, as I have.”

After pausing for a moment, Lord Grallon added, “Let me level with you a moment. Few have realized it and I have done nothing to inform more, but I have never stood with my sword drawn on a battlefield.

“I served my time as a quaestor in the army,” Grallon said with a smile. “I helped to coordinate the transporting of Stilicho’s army to and from Britain. I am a rare Roman. I am renowned for my sea legs. Instead of taking payment for services rendered, I obtained parcels of imperial lands in various ports on the island, and on the shores of Armorica.

“In addition to these imperial grants in London, Portchester, Topsham, and Tintagel, there are family holdings in Demetia and Gloucester. And as I said, it is to Gloucester that I want you to take the boy. My son, Vortimer, stays at the villa in Gloucester.”

“That’s it?” I asked.

“That’s it,” Grallon replied. “Do this and you shall be richly rewarded.”

“Done,” I quickly replied.

## CHAPTER 5

I watched and listened as Ahès and Grallon argued on the shore the next morning.

“You can’t send Ambrosius away. If you do, I’m going with him.”

“You can’t, child. What would you do, live as a slave mother, raising Ambrosius as your own? Impossible.”

“Absolutely,” Ahès cried out. She broke free of him. Ahès waded out into the water as the boat pulled away from the shore. Her eyes stared at me. Her lips shivered from the chill of the water. Still, she trudged through the deepening tide.

“Ahès, turn back before the waves pull you under,” I called from the boat as I held the baby. With no expression, he looked up at me.

“Ahès, stop,” Grallon ordered.

She did not halt. High waves rolled over her, as her hand frantically clawed at the stern of the boat. She spat out water and gasped for air, but still she reached for the boat.

“Give it up, Ahès,” Grallon shouted as he walked out into the waves after her. “Don’t force me to drag you in.”

“I shall wreak havoc upon your city if you force me to stay.”

“Young lady, I’m your lord and father,” Grallon barked, charging deeper into the rushing water. In no time, he was out nearly to Ahès.

Her nails dug at the side of the boat. The ribs of the boat flared up at such an angle that it made it difficult for Ahès to climb aboard.

Not wanting her to drown, I called out to her, “Let him go, Ahès. Let Ambrosius go.”

Releasing what little hold she had of the boat, we separated quickly as the drift of the sea set in. Ahès sank like a rock underneath the waves. Moments passed, but she did not surface. Lord Grallon watched for her. His face grew more frantic. He reached down into the water, first with one hand then with both. Calming himself, Grallon stood still and scanned the water. Spotting her silhouette, he shot into the water and a moment

later hauled her up from the depths of the dark blue sea.

The oarsmen got situated and worked the sea. The high waves heaved the boat up and down as it crawled across the choppy water. The rough ocean wore on me. I tried to keep Ambrosius as comfortable as possible. I turned into the center of the ship to help shield against the splashing waves. Still, its mist was inescapable. In time, we made it to the mouth of the Severn and eventually docked near Gloucester.

No one was waiting for us. The docks were bare and deserted. The merchants acted like nothing was wrong. I moved away from the shore. My eyes followed the road up toward the horizon. In the distance, a wagon rolled toward us.

After some time, the large oxen-driven cart arrived near the docks. I moved to climb aboard. He yelled something. I struggled to understand. The words had to be in one of the Brythonic dialects.

“What are you doing?” the husky driver barked in broken Latin.

“Are you not from the house of Vortimer?” I questioned.

“Yes,” the heavy-set man replied as he lumbered down from the wagon’s seat.

“Well, that’s where this child and I are heading. I am here by order of Lord Grallon. Vortimer will be expecting my arrival.”

After an odd look, the driver looked back and replied, “This may be true, but you cannot ride. There is no room. You will have to trail behind the wagon.”

“Won’t it be a long walk carrying a baby,” I declared.

“That’s not my concern. I’m just here for the wine,” the man stated.

“You can’t be serious,” I barked back at him.

“I am,” the man replied as he walked by.

“This is insane,” I began. “I will not –.”

With a tug on my arm, I stopped talking. Glancing down, I saw the baby pulling at my sleeve of my wool overcoat. The grumbling man’s words faded in the breeze. The wind blew a cold hard truth. Winter was settling quickly. I took the excess cloth of my tunic and cradled the baby in it so I would have both hands free while walking. I marched from the wagons and headed for the crest forming the immediate horizon.

*Where had I promised to take this child? Though I would not personally kill him, was I not ensuring his doom by bringing him here?* I walked to the town of Gloucester. Though not far, I struggled to

swallow the fact that no one was sent to greet our arrival. *But why would they? Vortimer could not be too happy.*

Luckily, it wasn't difficult finding lodging there.

For the next three days, Vortimer refused to meet with me. We walked out to his nearby villa. Each time, we were greeted by the same servant, Allectus: an elderly man with refined manners. His slate gray hair was trimmed short. The lines of age were quite visible, though his face lacked all other emotions. He had no facial hair to conceal this. Each time I asked for Vortimer, he repeated his same response.

"Lord Vortimer is unable to meet with you, today. I shall inform him that you have called upon him."

Each time, I gave the same reply, "Please inform your master that I shall call upon him tomorrow."

"I shall," he answered before closing the door.

On the fourth day, as I walked through the courtyard toward the front entrance, the door opened and Allectus appeared.

"Greetings," I called out to him.

With a reserved nod, he acknowledged our presence.

"I —," I started.

"He will not see you," Allectus cut in. "He has instructed that you leave the child with me."

"I —,"

"Young man, my lord, Vortimer will not see you," the old servant added. "You have done all that you can for the child. It's time for you to get on with your life. Go to your new home in Gaul and seek peace."

After hugging the baby, I kissed his forehead. Unfortunately, I had my own attachment to him.

"Take care, Ambrosius," I added.

Allectus took the child. The servant turned and walked away. As they entered the villa, Allectus closed the door without looking back. A strange emptiness invaded me. I had thought that once I was done, a burden would be lifted from my conscience. I was wrong. I didn't feel free. I felt worse. The uncertainty of his future pained me. I could do nothing to alleviate it. I lacked the resources to buy his freedom. I truly doubted that Grallon would allow me to do that, anyway.

With nothing left to do, I walked back to the inn where I had stayed the last few nights.

## CHAPTER 6

I debated my next step. *How should I get to Gaul? Taking a ship from here would be outrageous. I could walk to Dover, see the island and then catch the short ride to Gaul from there.* I left the room and went downstairs. I sat at a table and ordered some roast and ale.

Nearly finished with my meal, I noticed two soldiers enter the quiet inn. Their eyes scanned the empty tavern. They were looking for someone. They saw me sitting in the back corner of the wide room. I looked back at my plate to finish off the final bit of roast. As I glanced back at them, they moved straight for me. My hand casually dropped below the table. My fingers slowly inched over the hilt of my dagger hanging on my right hip.

*Why were they here for me? Were they Grallon's men? What did they want? It couldn't be good.*

The soldiers stopped at my table. Remaining silent, I looked up. A dagger and a gladius mounted their right and left hips. Both wore red tunics underneath their *lorica segmentata*. This legionary-style armor was fashioned from a leather vest and protective bronze bands. Each man sported a cardinal cape fastened to their shoulders by golden brooches. They wore red trousers to stand the damp chilly weather.

The soldier on the right had short black hair and a thick beard like Hadrian. The other was clean-shaven and had wheat-colored hair.

“Greetings, young man. I’m Falco and this is Bellus,” stated the soldier to my left in Latin. They were both bigger than I and well armed.

“Hello,” I replied as I glanced at both of them, gauging their intent. I grew nervous in the silence that followed. The bartender behind his counter stopped what he was doing when he noticed their presence. His concerned look matched my feeling.

“Sorry about interrupting your meal. My men and I have recently been transferred from Lord Grallon. We’re heading for York. We’ve been instructed to contact you. I am to inform you that you may travel with us

to York. Once there, you may leave for Aureliani on a ship scheduled to depart in a short while. Your service has been greatly appreciated. Would you want to travel with our detachment?" asked Falco.

I said nothing. His offer made me leery. Grallon had said nothing about any men going to York. I didn't know what to say. Was this a trap?

"You are Merlinus, are you not?" Falco impatiently asked.

Bellus laughed and declared, "Falco, I don't think he trusts us."

*I didn't.*

Falco laughed and added, "You're right, Bellus."

"If we meant you harm," Bellus began, "who's stopping us from doing what we want with you? Who are you to anyone in Gloucester?"

As he finished, Bellus glanced around the tavern to see if anyone was stepping up in my defense. Looking at the bartender, Bellus smiled as the man's glance fell away as if he hadn't even seen us.

Seeing his point but sensing no ill intent from them, I asked, "When are your men pulling out of Gloucester?"

"Tomorrow," Falco answered.

"So are you interested in going to York with us," Bellus asked.

"Yes."

The next morning, shortly after sunrise, I met up with Falco and his men at the tavern's stable located behind the inn. The group contained fifteen men including Falco and Bellus. All of them were several years older than myself.

"Greetings, young Merlinus," Bellus called out from some distance as soon as he had noticed my approach.

"Hello, Bellus. How are things?" I asked.

"As well as can be expected," he replied with a light nod.

"Good," I added.

"So are you ready to head for York?" Falco said with his hand outstretched to greet me.

"Yes, sir," I replied as I grasped his hand.

"Good. We shall ride to Fosse Way and take that northeast to Lincoln and from there we will ride north to York," Falco finished.

"Will we make it to Lincoln tonight?" I asked.

The majority of the men laughed.

"No," Bellus added. "It will take a few days to reach Lincoln. It's over thirty leagues from here."

“Mount up, men. It’s time to ride out.” Falco shouted.

Days later, after spending a night in Lincoln and continuing north, we arrived in York. People from miles around crowded the forum, selling, buying, and bartering goods and services.

“So, have you ever been to York?” Bellus asked.

“No. Actually, my arrival in Gloucester, two weeks ago, was the first time I set foot in Britain,” I declared. “I like what I have seen so far.”

“If that’s the case, you should go with us to meet Duke Coel. He resides in the palace of Septimius Severus. He was the emperor that had the palace built over one hundred years ago.”

“It would be all right if I went?” I asked.

“Sure. Why not?” Falco remarked as he dismounted.

“I will gladly go,” I remarked.

“Good.”

Proceeding through the bustling town, we headed toward a spectacular stone building at the north end of the forum. Ten white columns supported the portico, six for its façade and two for each end. Servants greeted us as we walked under the open awning.

“Welcome, Falco,” called out one of the male attendants.

The four servants wore white ankle-long tunics. Each had a gold-embroidered V-shaped collar with a matching tassel belt. Leather-strapped sandals clad their feet.

“Lord Coel has been expecting your arrival. Your men may leave their mounts with us.”

“Very good, Cato,” Falco replied.

As I handed over the reins of my horse, Cato looked at me oddly.

Seeing the young man’s expression, Bellus laughed and added, “This young man is with us.”

“Of course,” the young man commented as he took the reins from my hand. “Please accept my apology.”

“There’s no need for it,” I answered.

Cato nodded and led the horse to the side of the building with the other men’s horses. I followed close behind the small group of soldiers as Falco led the way into the magnificent palace. Numerous sculptures filled the grand building ranging from alabaster busts to larger-than-life statues. As we neared an open room that housed one of these colossal emperors,

a regal attendant approached us. He appeared as the others did, in a white linen tunic with gold tassel belts and leather soles. He was older and taller than the others. He also had their bowl-shaped haircut.

“Greetings, Falco and Bellus. Lord Coel shall be glad that you’ve brought him so soon,” the young man announced.

A sinking feeling consumed me. I glanced at them, and their shifting eyes confirmed my suspicion. Instantly, my pace slowed. Noticing the change, a regretful look formed on the attendant’s face. He knew he had said something he shouldn’t have. Before anything could be said, a man appeared as if he had walked out of the statue behind him. The sculpture was a mirror image of the old man. I stopped some distance from him. His attendant stood to the right while Bellus and Falco were at my left. He was a man of average height, an inch over five and a half feet. He commanded respect with his presence. He had lived twice as long as most folks. “He’s one of the last Romans remaining on this island,” Falco had stated before we made it east. Though old, Lord Coel gave no impression of being frail. Instead, his manner presented a good-natured, youthful vigor. He appeared more as a scholar than a soldier. He wore a light gray robe with flowing sleeves and a V-cut collar. Bands of royal blue lined the edges. He wore a thin white tunic underneath the robe and a wide black leather belt drew them in around his waist. Because of his snow-white hair and beard, Coel looked like he could be Grallon’s old uncle.

Smiling at me as if we were old friends, he bellowed, “Greetings, young Merlinus. I hope your travels in my province have gone well.”

“All is well so far. Your lands seem quiet civil.”

“Ah yes, we’re far from the troubles of Spain,” the duke said. “Do you know why I asked you to be here?”

My fear deepened as I naively replied, “I thought I had come of my own free will.”

The old man smiled and, while glancing at Bellus, Falco, and his attendant, he remarked, “Leave us.”

They bowed their good-byes and walked out the way we came. It was a strange feeling that overtook me. I didn’t fear for my life. In no way had this man tried to intimidate me. In fact, it was quite the opposite.

“Will you take a walk with me?” The man asked.

I nodded yes.

# CHAPTER 7

Lord Coel led me through a labyrinth of corridors. The treasures of the palace became more and more splendid as we went. More gold-laced vases, gold diadems, and gold-tipped spears for the statues. It appeared as though they had problems with flooding. I noticed water damage at the base of the walls. Various attendants smiled as we passed them. He saved his words and didn't speak.

He took me to the central courtyard of the palace. Full-grown trees lined its borders, and a fountain stood center stage. With her hands up in the air, the female stone statue looked like a Y. Water poured out from her raised palms and splashed into the pool below her. It was nearly winter and still birds sang in the courtyard, drowning out the noisy sounds of the street.

"This is where I go to get away from the craziness of the world," the old man remarked as he stepped out onto the grass. I stopped as I took it all in. Its beauty was breathtaking, a serene oasis within the busy town. Though no tropical paradise, its tranquility soothed me.

"This courtyard is incredible," I replied. Glancing back, a pure joyful smile brightened his face.

"I'm glad you appreciate such things. That says something about your character. Also, your coming to Britain really says something."

"I don't understand," I remarked. "Why does my coming to Britain say something about what type of person I am?"

The duke smiled at my question. I noticed an attendant approached us.

Turning, Coel remarked to the boy-servant, "Balbus, fetch my young friend and I some fresh water from the well."

"Yes, my lord," the young attendant replied.

"Would you like to take a seat?" He asked.

"No, thank you, sir," I smiled as the grass comforted my sore feet. Only sand would have felt softer on my leather soles. "I actually

would prefer to stand.”

“What I have meant was, you didn’t leave the child’s welfare to chance and brought the child to Britain,” he added.

“What child?” I asked.

He smiled. Taking a couple steps toward the approaching attendants, the duke took the two silver goblets off the serving tray. The young man turned and walked away. The duke handed the cool, long-stemmed cup to me. The water chilled my throat as I took a long drink.

“How old were you when Rome was sacked?” The old man asked.

“I was ten. I was living in Lyons at the time,” I declared.

“Everyone remembers where they were when the news reached them. I was having a banquet at the time. It was a grand celebration.

“So, you are only fourteen, now? You’ve done a lot of growing up since then,” the duke declared.

“Yes, a lot of things have changed. My father died earlier this year. That was more difficult to deal with.”

“Your father was a good man. He served Rome well. It’s unfortunate what happened to him,” the old man remarked.

“You knew my father?” I asked. I couldn’t hide my surprise.

“Yes, we served in the imperial legions together. I imagine you don’t know this, but I knew your father even before that. Your grandfather served under King Crocus back when the Alemanni chieftain was still alive and stationed in the Vale of York. My father was a magistrate of York. This is how your dad and I crossed paths.

“Your father and I joined the legions at the same time when we came of age. Ironically, we swore allegiance to a dead emperor. The same year we joined the British ranks, Maximus was executed in Aquileia.

“In truth, it mattered little. Rome was and is always in need of able, fighting men and willing to pardon some when misled by usurpers. It’s usually the leaders that lose their heads just as Marcus, Gratian, Constantine, and Gerontius have recently demonstrated. And those are just the British honorable mentions. Revolt seems to be Rome’s greatest export at the moment. It is being churned and cured everywhere as we speak. This chaos is not isolated to this island. At the moment, the Irish and the Picts remain checked at the fringes of the western shores of Demetia and the northern frontier. But this was only after much hardship and bloodshed.

“Your father and I served in defending this province. We both rose to leadership positions when the regiments sent by Stilicho arrived to help against the plundering Picts and Irish.”

“I wonder why I never remember living in Britain,” I remarked to Lord Coel as he drank his water.

“By the time you were five, your father’s unit had been withdrawn from Britain to counter the hostilities of Radagaisus and his Gothic army. Your father gained great honors in the battle of Fiesole serving under Stilicho. At the time, he only had a few more years to serve before retiring from the legion. But all that he had rightfully gained was wrongfully stripped away and confiscated when the Vandal Roman general met his demise and your father was punished through association. Your father kept his life, but lost half of his pension. That is the only reason that he got sucked into this mess with Grallon and his imperial cronies. I wish your father would have accepted my invitation to return to York. He was too proud for that. He thought it was a handout, but it wasn’t. I would have been thrilled to have your father fighting by my side once more. I still could use him if he were still alive.”

“I wish you would have been able to convince my father otherwise,” I remarked.

After a short laugh, he added, “I bet you do. I bet you do.”

Lord Coel paused as he looked skyward. For the first time, I noticed the coldness hovering in the courtyard. The standing torches and braziers threw off only so much heat. The stone walkway in and around the courtyard was hypocaust, which most likely kept the fountain water from freezing.

“I’ve seen and done many things but know much more. I know that you escorted Grallon’s daughter and a child from Barcelona. I know that you brought this child to the Isle and have given him to Vortimer. I have been told rumors about the boy. Are they true?” The man asked.

“That all depends on what they said,” I replied.

The smiling, old man nodded in agreement.

“I will stop needling you, son,” the old man remarked. “I already know if I ask you what the boy’s name is, you will say that it’s Ambrosius when it’s Theodosius. I could use this to know that you are willing to lie to me, but the truth doesn’t save a martyr.”

He let his words sink in. His candidness amazed me. It set me

at ease, but I didn't say anything. Instead, I waited.

"The sacking of Rome was like a pebble dropping into a pond. Its rippling effects have touched the shores of Britain. No longer can people choose what's right or wrong. Free will has been given a death sentence even before its appeal can be heard. And a close friend's son, Pelagius has been called a heretic by lesser men. Now the radicals are becoming the orthodox."

The old man turned away for a moment. A cold breeze blew down into the courtyard. The old man looked up and watched the few clinging leaves rattle in the trees. The chill of winter settled in deeper. I shivered.

Noticing this, the duke asked, "Do you want to go in?"

"No, not just yet," I added. "I would like to talk a little more if you don't mind."

With a little smile, he replied, "Sure. That's fine. So what's on your mind?"

As I walked over to the stone bench and sat down, I asked, "So why am I here?"

Casually following my lead, the duke sat down next to me.

"I called you here for two reasons. The first you already answered and the second I have accomplished so far," the old man declared.

"And what would that be?" I asked.

"I have maintained your safety," he answered.

"Huh? What do you mean?" I asked.

"Do you really think that Grallon plans on allowing you to leave the island?" The duke asked.

"I —,"

"You're no longer a boy. Merlinus, you can't afford to be naive. The debt I owe your father for saving my life is paid by saving yours."

His words stung like a dagger. I stood up and stepped away. Turning back, I asked, "What's saying I can trust you?"

"Nothing," he stated.

"What's stopping you from killing me, now that you know what you want to know?"

"Nothing," he added.

"You're not helping me feel at ease," I finished with a half laugh.

"Good."

"Huh?"

“Merlinus, what are you trying to achieve in this life?”

As his words sank in, I could think of nothing. This year had flashed by, though I had been living day-to-day. I hadn't had the luxury of thinking of the future. I had been forced into facing and solving my father's problems.

“You are not your father,” the duke declared.

“What?” I asked as I turned and looked at him.

“You are not your father, like I was not mine. We must face our own mistakes just as they did. We must know what our weaknesses are so we can be wiser men. I know you are old enough to know the faults of your father. You have taken on a heavy burden, but I believe you've completely miscalculated how long you are going to have to deal with it. You know it is going to be a lifetime.”

I looked down at the grass, knowing he was right. After a laugh, I replied, “Hopefully, I get to carry it until I am old and gray.”

“It doesn't matter if the quality isn't there. Merlinus, I promise to do everything in my power to get you back with your family. I will provide an armed escort to Aureliani. This escort is already headed for Armorica.”

“Refuse the protection of an armed escort? Who would be so foolish? Not I? When does it leave?” I asked.

“In two days,” the duke replied.

“Thanks. I appreciate the help you have given,” I replied.

“You're welcome,” he finished. “Your father would be proud.”

For the first time, those words felt good to hear.

## CHAPTER 8

From York, I headed for Aureliani. I wanted to make sure my family was fine and there were no problems with them moving into the villa. I had anticipated problems, but there were none. It was as agreed. I had escorted Ahès and the child back to Armorica; in return, I inherited a villa in between Aureliani and the Loire River.

I arrived at the villa. It was early morning. Following the imperial directions from Aureliani, I approached a fifteen-foot-tall wall that ran east and west for as far as I could see in both directions. Within fifty yards either way, the trees blotted out the view of the wall. Though it had a thick double-door gate, it stood open for anyone to enter. I hesitated as my heart raced. For some reason, I was scared. Building up nerve, I took a step but stopped. My eyes had locked onto the villa's resident plaque. With immaculate craftsmanship, the bronze plate identified me by name as the owner of the estate, Budicius Merlinus Aurelianus.

Suddenly, I thought of Budicius in Barcelona and how the wealth of his villa had impressed me at first and then sickened me by the time I had left. Then, Grallon's words of advice sang in my ears: "Learn from my example, young Merlinus. Use the Empire. Don't fight the system."

I realized that I had done just that, and I felt sick. Though all the distinguished men said I had done my father proud, only shame filled my heart. There was a chance that Ambrosius was already dead. I had no clue anymore and that didn't make me feel good. I had traded my soul for this villa on the Loire River.

"You know you can go in. It is your place," someone remarked in a Gothic tongue. Surprised, I spun around to find my grandmother standing behind me. She had a bright, wide smile as she stared at me. Smiling back, I went to her and wrapped my arms around her. Grandma Sunilda felt tiny in my arms as I hugged her. She had her long silver hair bundled up with a hair pin. Though I could not recall her previous hair color, it seemed whiter than the last time I saw her. She was of average

height, hovering just over five feet tall. And though she was in good spirits, Grandma Sunilda seemed so fragile.

“It’s good to have you here, finally,” my grandmother continued in her native Gothic tongue.

“It is good to be here,” I replied in her native tongue. As I still hugged her, I whispered, “Is everything okay?”

“Now it is. Now it is,” she added with a brighter smile. “Let me show you around your place.”

“Sure, that would be nice,” I smiled.

Keeping my arm around her shoulders, I walked next to her through the open gate. Upon entering, I noticed a wooden staircase going up to the elevated walkway that ran along the length of the upper wall. A well-worn dirt path led from the entrance to the start of the long colonnaded portico that joined into the verandah of the winged-corridor villa. As we walked closer, two large oaks stood guard in the front yard in between the main gate and the portico. To my left on the other side of the one oak stood the barn. I heard the horses stirring in the stables. My horses stirring. Chickens and ducks strutting and waddling about were mine. White plaster coated the walls of the various buildings while rusty-red, clay tiles capped the roofs of them.

“You have some horses, but your horses need training,” Grandmother remarked as she guided me out around the villa.

“Aren’t we going in?” I asked.

“Most of the household still sleeps. We’ll go in later,” she replied.

“Okay. Sounds good.”

Quietly, we walked past the stand-alone kitchen, furnace, and bathhouse. Tall straight trees quickly consumed the otherwise vacant land. We strolled through the loose leaves for quite a distance. The enclosed land ran for a half mile before it terminated at the river. The slope of the bank made it nearly impossible to scale from the river whether the approaching party was swimming or sailing.

We circled back from the river’s edge. As we hooked back toward the villa, Grandmother guided me through a small orchard. It was far enough away so people on the river didn’t see it but still close enough to bucket water to all the fruit trees without much difficulty.

Returning to the front, we entered the villa. It still slept quietly. We did not wake it. We walked into the audience chamber, which led

into the dining room. These two rooms formed the center of the H-shaped villa. The center corridor ran east and west while the long wings went south toward the river and north toward the main gate. Grandmother took me to the southwest wing.

“This is where your quarters are located,” she whispered. “It’s closest to the library. My room is in the northwest wing so I’m not bothered by the sun and can sleep in.”

“Like you did, today?”

“Yes,” she replied with her heartwarming smile.

“Thanks,” I remarked as I leaned down and kissed the top of her head.

“No, thank you, my sweet Merlin,” she replied. Getting up on the tips of her toes, she kissed my cheek and added, “You’ve done what you have promised. You are a man of your word. Find peace with that.”

“I’ll try, Grandma. I’ll try.”

As I stood alone in my own quarters for the first time, I knew I could not find peace here. I didn’t deserve this wealth and prestige. I had taken a child from a loving mother.

This imperial estate had turned me into a monster.

## CHAPTER 9

Mother treated me as if I was some lord that deserved the utmost respect. It felt unnerving. My conscience would not let me rest. Guilt weighed heavily on me. I didn't want to expose Mother to it. She had too much to deal with already and didn't need more. I had hired some skilled workers for various duties. When I was certain that all would be taken care of, I left them. I could not stay in Aureliani.

I gathered my things and started out for the stables.

"You weren't actually going to leave without saying good-bye?" Called out my grandmother in her native Gothic tongue. Every time she spoke to me, she used her native language. She loved that I had learned it at a very young age. Actually, she could have been the reason I had excelled at languages.

Suddenly, I felt guilty. I turned to her.

"Awh, don't look at me with such a sad face," she said as she raised a thin bony hand to my cheek. Her hand was cold. As I looked down into her warm eyes, I realized that this would be the last time I would see her alive. I wrapped my arms around her and held her tight.

"I'm sorry, Grandma. I know no other way," I whispered in her native tongue.

"Don't worry, my dear. You lead with an honest heart. Don't lose that and you will have no real regrets. You are a strong young man. You have proven that by what you have done. Most would have failed.

"Merlinus, you remind me so much of your father. You have a similar cowlick. When you crop your black hair short the way he liked to keep his, your hair sticks up in the back. Though you don't have a war-tempered physique as he did, you are somewhat taller.

"Your father hoped that you wouldn't have to serve in the imperial legions. He had higher aspirations for you. That's why you had a tutor whenever he could afford one."

Looking up, she added, "You even have his slate-blue eyes, but you

are much more than what he had become. He could never say no to women. He bent to their will. Maybe it was my fault, but regardless of the past, don't fall victim to the same.

"He found a good woman in Alicia. I still don't know why your mother waited for my son. She should have found a better man. Or he should have stayed with her when he had first met her. I guess the time wasn't right."

"What are you two doing out this early in the morning? What are you talking about?" Mother called out as she walked up behind us. Mother was only a couple of inches taller than Grandma Sunilda, but she was somewhat heavier. Mother and Julia, my sister, shared many of the same features. Both had light brown hair with dark brown eyes. Each had round chubby cheeks, but they were not ugly, or at least they were not in my eyes. As usual, Mother's hair hung loosely, free of any bows or pins. Her ankle-long tunic wasn't drawn in around her waist.

"Nothing," Grandmother replied in common Latin.

Mother just shook her head. She looked back at me and noticed I was ready to leave.

"Merlinus, what's going on?" Mother asked. "You are going already? You just mentioned it, the other night. I figured that you would give it a little more thought."

"I've been thinking of it since I left for Barcelona," I replied blankly.

A small smile grew on my grandma's face while a frown formed on my mother's.

"Everything shall be fine. I shall go and see the world. I promise to return," I declared.

"You'd better. You'd better," Mother whispered. "You know you should say good-bye to Julia. She would be heartbroken if you didn't."

"Your mother is right, my dear," grandmother said in her native tongue.

"I know. I know," I replied in two different languages.

Both of them smiled.

I wandered the lands of the Roman Empire and beyond. I traveled as far as the eastern ocean, farther than Alexander the Great had ever seen. Searching for enlightenment, I met countless people, both wise and foolish. From a wizard of steel, I learned the secrets of the forge. He showed me how to make swords fit for the God of War. I absorbed

all that I could and left nothing of importance behind. There was nothing I didn't want to know, nothing I couldn't learn. Many languages I learned and many secrets I gained. I even spent time with the monks of Egypt before heading for the eastern sea.

Fourteen years later, I longed for the faces of my family. *Would they even be familiar?* I could stay away no longer. As I headed for home, I heard news of all sorts.

By this time, Placidia had become a widow for the second time. Less than a year after I had originally left, Adaulphus had been assassinated in his personal stables by a servant named Dubius. Valia, the new king of the Visigoth, traded Princess Placidia back to the Romans for a large sum of food. Emperor Honorius had then forced Placidia to marry Constantius, a great imperial general. Within five years, though, Constantius had died, but not before siring a daughter named Honoria and a son named Valentinian the third.

Following the death of Constantius, Emperor Honorius pushed his half-sister and her two children into exile. They sought asylum in New Rome. That same year, Emperor Honorius died of dropsy. Factions within the Empire surfaced. Civil chaos followed. The whole chain of command was questioned and challenged. Power struggles ensued between the western military officers and the imperial family. At the regional level, the praetorian prefect of Gaul, Exuperantius of Poitiers was killed by soldiers in Arles. No one was brought to justice for his murder. Joannes the usurper might have secured the support of Gaul against Placidia's claim if Castinus or Aëtius had sought justice. Instead, the military leaders were impotent to the outrageous offense.

So with an army of Alans sent by the Emperor of New Rome, Placidia marched back to Italy and elevated her little boy, Valentinian, up as the Western Emperor. She stood in command as his regent and as Augusta, the Empress of the West.

And now, four years after the civil war, I was home once again.

## CHAPTER 10

I returned to my villa south of Aureliani. The silence of night greeted me. Oddly, inside, so did radiating heat. It rose from the hollow floor beneath my feet. Someone had repaired the hypocaust system. It made me smile. This type of heating of a room highlighted Roman civilization. A furnace outside warmed my soles by heating the air under the villa's floor.

A couple of candles still burned. I picked one of them up and carried it with me. I headed for my chambers without announcing my arrival. As I opened the door, an unexpected smell greeted me. It was a sweet soft smell. It wasn't the stale air I had been anticipating. Instead, incense and flowers welcomed me.

Surprise filled me as I neared the bed. A woman lay there, sleeping. The flickering light of the candle showed a face that I never thought I would see again.

It was Ahès. I looked at her silently as she slept. She looked peaceful. I figured she would have looked much older. It appeared that the years had been kind to her.

*Why was she here, then? Why was she sleeping in my villa instead of some place in Vorgium? What had happened? It could not be good.*

I wanted answers, but I didn't want to wake her. I stood there for a moment. Thoughts from long ago consumed me as I stared at her. I lost myself in the past.

"Who are you?" Called out a young man from behind me. I turned slightly but stopped as I felt the tip of the blade in my back.

"I am the owner of this villa," I declared.

"You lie," the young man answered as the point needled my spine. "Now, who are you?"

"I am —," I started.

"Merlinus," Ahès declared as she sat up in the bed. "Merlinus, is that really you? We thought that you had died. No one has heard from

you in many years. Not even a whisper. Where have you been?”

As she spoke, the tip of the sword dropped away. I pivoted slightly so I could see the person standing behind me. He was a tall young man, just shy of my height of six feet. He was much stockier than I. Dark hair covered the top of his head. His dark eyes studied my every movement. He looked familiar. He looked like King Adaulphus. As Ahès leaned against the wall behind her bed, I sat down on the edge.

“Hah, look at you, Merlinus. There’s nothing the same about you except your slate-blue eyes. You have eyes like those of Vortimer,” Ahès said. Leaning forward, she ran her fingers through my black beard and added, “What is this? You leave with a baby-skin face and return with the waist-long, wild beard of a hermit. Have you been growing that thing since you left fifteen years ago?”

Laughing lightly, I replied, “No, just for the last six.”

“So where are the rest of your things? Are they still outside?” she asked.

I lifted the leather sac I had slung over my neck and shoulder. It hung down to the side of my hip. With my right hand, I lifted up my long walking stick.

“These are my sole possessions,” I declared. “Well, that is, besides this robe I wear.”

“I guess that explains why you brought that sapling into the villa. You didn’t want to take the chance of someone stealing it,” she finished with a smile. “I would say I like the robe, if it didn’t look like you wore it every day since you got it.”

I looked down at what I was wearing, and I laughed when I realized that she was right. I had been wearing the same robe since I received it nearly four years ago.

Memories of the last six years of my life washed over me suddenly like the waterfalls of Mount Shaoshi in the Far East. I thought of the old grand master for the first time in months. From all of my teachers over the years, I could easily say that the lessons learned from Dom Fu had been the most valuable. And it was after he taught me the art of the forge that I received this blessed robe.

“Merlinus, are you still with us?” Ahès asked, drawing me back from distant memories.

“Yes, it has been a long time. Too many years. It doesn’t seem

too much has changed around here,” I remarked. “Well, except for the hypocaust system actually working. Who fixed it?”

Even in the darkness shrouding the room, I saw her smile.

“Ambrosius repaired the system last fall,” she remarked.

“Ambrosius? You mean . . .” I started and stopped, amazed that he was now a young man instead of the baby with the birthmark that I still pictured.

“Yes,” she replied, “he repaired it. Ambrosius is very clever. There are probably a couple of things he could teach you, Merlinus.”

“Please, Mother, even a fool can show what not to do,” Ambrosius remarked. “Besides, you’re making more out of it than what it was. I simply replaced a damaged pipe. The furnace was in good repair already.”

Quietly, I listen to him. The baby boy had turned into a young man seemingly overnight. Amazingly, he still lived. And it seemed he’d grown into a good person. I found it difficult to say anything. There was much I wanted to ask, but I didn’t know what to say. My thoughts were too guarded, so I said nothing as I studied him.

“It’s a pleasure to finally meet you,” he began, “I am Ambrosius.”

“Hello, young man. It’s good to meet you,” I replied reaching out to shake his hand.

“Ambrosius, why don’t you head back to bed. Everything is all right. The two of you can get better acquainted in the coming days.”

“Of course,” the young man replied. Turning to me, he added, “Once more sir, it’s an honor to meet you. Sorry that it was at the point of my sword, though.”

“Forget it. It’s completely understandable.” I remarked.

With a slight bow, he turned and walked out of the room. He closed the door upon his exit.

Crawling across the bed, Ahès wrapped her arms around me and hugged me tightly. Pulling away, she kissed me on the cheek and hugged me again.

“Oh Merlinus, there is so much we need to talk about. It has been too long and so much has happened since we were last together. Where do I begin?” She asked.

“Fourteen years ago on the shore of Armorica,” I replied.

With a light smile, she replied, “Right.”

# CHAPTER 11

I remained silent as I waited for Ahès to begin her story. Her wild, youthful beauty had been reined in by the years, but she glowed with a refined beauty now. Her dark brown hair showed only a few strands of gray. Within her soft brown eyes, a sadness lingered. Time hadn't made her face or her plump breasts sag. They still enticed my eyes.

"Did you know that Grallon isn't my father? My real father passed away when I was very young. He was such a big man, but gentle. He would toss me up in the air lightly and catch me. For hours it seemed. I would just laugh so hard for so long. He smiled the whole time. He loved me very much," she stated with a bright smile. The warm glow faded when she added, "Everything else is a reflection on a rippling pool.

"Grallon was a young officer under my father. They served Maximus and then Stilicho.

"Father was killed in a battle against the Irish in western Britain. He left Grallon in charge of his affairs in Armorica, at the time. Mother said Father wasn't much of a thinker. He didn't have time for such things. He was too busy making sure imperial plans were put into action. Father was a man of action, while Grallon was a handsome sailing merchant.

"She was candidly honest at the end," Ahès said as her voice trailed off to a sad look of silence.

"My mother relied more and more on Grallon's support as time went by. Through my mother, Grallon became lord of Vorgium. You see, my mother had come from an old, distinguished family," she remarked.

"The Voltinia tribe," I replied.

"Yes," she remarked with a surprised look, "How did you know?"

With a smile, I answered, "I recall the statue overlooking the bay."

She smiled and stated, "Mother's family controlled the salt tanks and garum trade on the Bay of Douarnenez for well over a hundred years."

She added, "Unfortunately, after the death of my father, Mother and I had fallen on hard times. The schools weren't what they once were.

The market hasn't been lucrative in years. Mother spoke of prosperity back when the Empire was still pagan and the worshiped Neptune kept our family strong. Mother watched as her beliefs and family's status became nullified.

"Grallon slithered into her soul and stripped her of what he wanted. At first, it seemed that he cared, but it soon became clear that he was only concerned with my mother's claims to Vorgium. With seven Roman roads radiating from there, Grallon wanted it for his shipping empire along with her family's properties in the ports of the Gallic Sea.

"And after taking claim to everything she had, he humiliated her by having an affair with a Saxon whore. The German slut bore a bastard," she added.

"So, is Vortimer your half-brother, then?" I inquired.

"No, Grallon and my mother had no children. Grallon was previously married. He had three sons from his first marriage. His wife died when she was giving birth to his youngest boy, Paschent. From what I have been told, she died a year before my father. Mother of Mary, so much has happened since we last spoke. Some of it hurts, so please bear with me and I will try to tell you as best as I can."

"Take your time," I replied, "we have all night."

"Hah," she laughed. "It will take longer than that."

"I'm figuring on being around for a while," I answered.

She smiled and pulled up the linen sheets around her. She fell silent as her eyes drifted down from mine. She struggled with something. Something that she wasn't sure that she wanted to tell me.

"I wonder if that statue is still standing," I joked.

"It's hard to say, with it being underwater," she declared.

"What? What happened?"

"A mile inland past the city of Ys has been submerged by seawater for quite some time. One night, the sea gate was unlocked and opened fully. The ocean engulfed everything. It was quite the spectacle."

"How could Grallon let that happen? Didn't he have the only key to the sea gate's lock?"

"Yes," she replied.

"So what happened, did he lose his mind?" I asked.

"You could say that," she mumbled. "In another drunken frenzy, Grallon forcibly took me. Luckily, the last time, his seed did not take."

“What? The child that you took to Barcelona was his?” I asked.

“Well, not really,” she replied.

“I don’t understand, Ahès, you’re not making sense,” I remarked.

“The actual child that went with us to Barcelona was the child of Hope, a girl that I knew. She lived in the village southeast of the Bay of Douarnenez. She had become pregnant and I helped her as she helped me. She could not keep her child and I really didn’t want to get rid of mine. So before you and I left, the girl and I switched our sons. She tended to Faustus while I brought her sickly child to Barcelona.

“It was Hope’s child that laid in that little silver coffin not mine. For the first couple of years, Hope’s family cared for Faustus. Without Grallon’s knowledge, I paid for the arrangement with coins from his personal coffer. In time, though, Grallon saw me stealing the money and I let him know why I was taking it. He was furious when he found out. He vowed to send the boy away. Fearing the worst for Faustus, I sent a letter for help.

“When Grallon tried to take Faustus, I told him that Bishop Germanus knew and that the bishop was heading for Armorica with a small imperial delegation. The redness in his face boiled past his eyebrows.”

“Bishop Germanus?” I cut in. “Hah, it’s a wonder he confronted Grallon for you.”

“It’s strange,” she remarked. “It may seem hard to believe, but Germanus seems truly committed to the Faith. Something happened after the episode with the baby Theodosius. A real transformation. He wears a hair shirt now and regrets his part in the conspiracy. Periodically, he drops in to check up on Ambrosius and every time he asks about you.

“Anyway, after I told Grallon, a short while later, Germanus arrived with a delegate of men. He brought charges against Grallon. They were not the charges you would expect; they had nothing to do with Ambrosius or Faustus. Grallon had grown neglectful in his duties to the Empire. The Bishop of Auxerre used my situation to temper the provincial council into righteous action.

“Grallon knew the nature of the charges that were being levied before Germanus publicly announced them. Trying to discredit the bishop, Grallon forced me to take Faustus and sit him on Germanus’ lap. I did as Grallon ordered, fearing for my life and that of my son’s. At the council meeting, I told the group of clergy and laity that Bishop Germanus was the boy’s father.

“Germanus called out, ‘Like a true father, I shall care for you, child, and never send you away. This is my promise as father of Armorica’s abandoned children. I will show you the world and its heavenly spectacles. It shall be this way unless your father of flesh says otherwise.’”

“Faustus glanced at Germanus and then at Grallon,” Ahès said as she continued her story. “While sitting in Bishop Germanus’ lap, the four-year-old boy called out to Grallon, ‘I go bye-byes? Papa, I go bye-byes?’”

“Grallon stewed as he stared at the boy,” Ahès added. “Faustus, then, hugged Germanus. Grallon stood up and stormed out of the hall. Germanus publicly condemned Grallon.

“It wasn’t much later that Grallon took me. In a drunken rage, he did it. When Grallon raped me the first time, I swore that if he ever did it again, I would finish him.

“He wasn’t gentle with me. The alcohol and the stench of fish from the garum he had consumed seeped from him. It didn’t discourage him that I wouldn’t let him kiss me on the lips. His slimy tongue licked my cheek.

“I struggled, but he had my arms pinned to the bed. With all my strength, I twisted and thrashed trying to break free. This was to no avail. He lay on top of me. I had trouble breathing from his heavy weight. With his body holding me down, he snatched my wrists in one hand and yanked up my dress with his other.”

She stopped. She could not hold back the pain that Grallon forced upon her. Tears streamed down her face as her hands covered her eyes. I went to her. I wrapped my arms around her and tried to comfort her.

“Ahès, you don’t have to tell me more,” I whispered.

“I know,” she said. “I’ll be all right. Just give me a moment.”

“Of course,” I remarked as I wiped away her tears with my thumb.

After a sigh, she continued, “As he was on top and having his way with me, I noticed the key for the sea lock dangling from his neck. And at that moment, I stopped resisting him. Soon after he had soiled in me, he passed out. As he began to snore, I slipped the gold necklace holding the key from his neck. He began to stir and I thought he would wake. Luckily, he did not. He simply rolled on his side, making it easier for me to escape.

“Immediately, I got out of the bed and raced through the villa. I did not stop. Once outside, I ran until I reached the shore. The salt in the air burned the inside of my chest. I stared out across the water. The full moon hovered close to the shimmering surface of the sea. The night seemed so peaceful as I stood at the water’s edge.

“After my rapid breathing slowed, I quickly walked toward the sea locks. I went to the dock on the other side of it. Getting into the small boat, I rowed out to the sea gate. I took the key and without hesitation unlocked the chains holding the spoke-wheel crank from lowering or raising the sea gate and I lowered the stone gate. The sea did the rest. It rushed over the edge like a waterfall and pounded the water below. The sea flooded through the opening.

“I heard my name repeatedly called out. Looking toward the villa, I saw a lone man racing along the shore. Slowly my name grew louder and his face became clearer. It was Grallon. I smiled watching him veer to higher ground as the sea swallowed up the land beneath his feet. That was the last time I saw him in Armorica.

“I began to row away from the gate before the sea could pull the boat through it. To this day, I still don’t know how I made it to the western shores of Britain in that little boat. I figured the sea would have swallowed me whole. As I grew tired from rowing, I laid in the belly of the boat and hoped the sea would consume me.”

She went silent. As her head fell in shame, she stared at her kneading hands. I reached up to comfort her. As my fingers touched her shoulder, her whole body shivered. Breaking her from her past, she turned with a sad smile and said, “I’m sorry. I must be a little cold.”

“I can remedy that,” I said as I rubbed her shoulders.

## CHAPTER 12

After stoking the hypocaust furnace, I returned to Ahès' quarters with a plate of salted pork, cheese, bread, and some wine. She had put on a pullover tunic and placed on her feet some fur-lined slippers. She walked over to the small round table. It sat next to the window. Together, we settled in the chairs by the table.

As I prepared a light meal for us she continued, "After I lowered the gate and flooded the city of Ys, I headed for Britain in search of Ambrosius. Sometime later, I made it to the island. I don't know how long it took. By the time I had reached the shore, I was beyond delirious. Luckily, I was found and cared for by a gentleman named Constantine. He was from the rural districts of Cornovia above the Severn Valley.

"Constantine and his entourage had taken a different route home from the market. They had a good return in wool and had decided to visit kin in Gwent. Traveling the shores of the Severn Sea, he discovered me in my grounded boat. He placed me in one of his covered wagons and nursed me back to health as they made their way to the villa of Honorius in western Britain.

"Emperor Honorius?" I questioned.

"No. He is somehow related, though," she replied. "Constantine and Honorius were high officers on the island. They each commanded a cavalry unit in the island's mobile army. Regrettably, they both retired shortly before the last British revolt by the usurper named Constantine. The two men remained distant from the mounting revolt, having fulfilled their obligation to the army. Neither one of them was naive enough to believe that a usurper worthy only by the name would succeed when they had witnessed a better man fail.

"After regaining my health, I was informed that we had been at Honorius' villa for awhile. It didn't take long for my caretaker to realize who I was. Word of me had already reached the island. His son, Cai, rightfully warned him. Still Constantine assisted me.

“While at the villa in Gwent, Honorius told us how Grallon’s honorary titles were confiscated. Germanus returned with imperially endorsed orders and the backing of Agricola, the praetorian prefect of Gaul at the time. Residing in Gaul, Agricola controlled and provided security for the region, and at times, in the northwestern provinces. Grallon could not scoff or ignore this imperial mandate.

“Grallon went to Demetia in western Britain. He hides out now in the mountains of Snowdonia, in the lands that remain under his control. Even in those lands, Grallon falsely lay claim to holding. He gained them from his first marriage. The villa in Gloucester where Vortimer still resides was where his mother was born and raised.

“Now as the High Commander of the British Council, Grallon has hired Saxons to guard the remaining interests of the nobles. And so, the shepherd has the wolves tending the flock.”

“What has happen to Agricola’s troops? Have they been re-stationed in the East,” I inquired. “What happen to him?”

“Agricola died the year after the third consulship of Constantius. That same year, Constantius died. It had been only seven months since Honorius had made the tri-consul a colleague in power,” she stated.

“When did you leave the island?” I asked.

“Three years ago,” she replied.

“When did you catch up with Ambrosius?” I asked.

“The same year that I flooded the city of Ys was the same year that I met and married Constantine,” she added.

“You’re married?” I asked between bites of bread and pork.

Sadness returned to her face, the same sadness I saw before she sank into the sea when I sailed away with Ambrosius fourteen years ago.

“Constantine never looked down upon me. He was like you in that aspect. From the day that we shared our vows to the night he died, he loved me as if I was his princess and he were my king.

“When I first made it to the island, I relentlessly searched for Ambrosius. Constantine did as he promised; he helped me find him. Vortimer no longer sheltered the boy. Tired of being used by Grallon, the young nobleman rid himself of his father’s unfair burden. Choosing a worthy regent, though, Vortimer sent Ambrosius to stay with a nobleman and his wife in Ribchester on the eastern shores of the Irish Sea.

“At an early age, Ambrosius gained self-reliance and learned

horsemanship and hunting. He is quite a remarkable young man. Highly intelligent, but still cordial and polite.

“For Ambrosius’ safety, Constantine convinced me to allow the boy to stay in Ribchester,” she stated.

Pausing, she asked, “Merlinus, why did you go away for so long?”

Falling silent, I realized that I was holding my breath. I knew the answer and didn’t like it. I released the sudden pressure I felt.

“For all the good that I had done them, my family’s well-being reminded me of my own wrongdoing. I left everything that I knew and loved behind. I wanted to absolve myself of all my sins,” I remarked.

“Don’t punish yourself, Merlinus. Though you kidnapped the boy, you saved him. Look what happen to King Adaulphus. They killed the boy’s father in his own stables. There was no way that marriage was going to last. It is unfortunate that Ambrosius had to grow up so quickly. But what strife he has encountered has simply made him stronger,” she declared. “You gave him a chance, though.”

“He is definitely big for his age. I would never have guessed that he was only fifteen years old. He appears just shy of twenty,” I remarked. “Nearly a man ready to marry.”

“Yes, that’s truer than you know,” Ahès added. “After staying several years up in northern Britain, Ambrosius came back to Constantine’s lands in Cornovia. And for a few years we knew peace. Constantine treated the boy as his own. He taught Ambrosius to be a true man, honorable. And shortly before we were driven out of Britain, Ambrosius met the sweetest girl named Priscilla at a festival sponsored by her grandfather, Honorius of Gwent.

“Even now Ambrosius talks about her. And with the passion of his first love, he swears that he will marry her if he ever sees her again. It’s so adorable,” she added with a bright, warm smile.

“I’m sure it is, Ahès. You’re such a good mother,” I teased.

She blushed with guilt.

“I’ve told him that I am his mother,” she remarked. “Was it wrong that I told him I was his mother?”

“What kind of a person he is today is a direct result of your upbringing. That’s what a mother does,” I remarked.

She looked up and smiled at me.

“Hopefully, he will be able to overcome that,” I teased once more.

“Awh,” she cried as she swatted at me.

“No. Honestly, it seems like you have done a terrific job. He is well behaved,” I declared.

“I cannot claim what I haven’t done. He is innately that way,” she answered. “This is apparent in how he treats Geraint. He is the son of Constantine and me,” she added.

“How old is he?” I asked.

“Geraint is six and a summer’s child. He lives without a care in the world. He’s only down when he’s bored. That one is a handful,” she declared. “He idolizes Ambrosius, though. Ambrosius doesn’t mind. I think he enjoys teaching Geraint what he can. The boy is attached to his hip when Ambrosius is outside doing something. Only inside does Geraint avoid him. He fears that Ambrosius might try to make him sit still long enough to work on his reading and writing. Geraint does not enjoy the books the way that Ambrosius does. There are times when I swear Ambrosius has left the house, but then I enter another room and find him silently reading near an open window. He can speak a couple languages and read Greek. He speaks highly of Pelagius and warily about Caelestius,” she remarked. “You will enjoy speaking with Ambrosius. I guarantee it. Just ask for his opinion on a sinless life.

“One night, after we had been here for a while, he astounded me. He asked, ‘If a baptized man and a baptized woman have a child, does the child need to be baptized? And if not, then is there a true need for the Church when the grace of God is given at home?’

“I had no response,” she remarked as she shook her head.

The young man had touched on one of the key elements in the heresy surrounding Pelagius. The orthodoxy that the African bishops were preaching held little logic for me. It locked the believer into continuous servitude. A debtor of alms from past generations. No reprieve for self-control and personal actions.

“In truth, Ambrosius is like Geraint’s father,” she continued, “Unfortunately, Geraint doesn’t remember Constantine. It has been two years since Cai was here. That’s when Constantine’s oldest boy came over from the island to visit and check up on us. He stays in Britain fighting against Grallon.

“After the death of Emperor Honorius, or more important, the deaths of Agricola and Exuperantius, Grallon tightened his grip of power

over the British and Armoric provinces. He controlled the Gallic Sea, already. In an effort to consolidate his land holdings on the western side of the isle, Grallon helped his youngest son, Paschent, gain a foothold in Buiith. Soon Grallon's raids crossed into the lands of Gwent and into the rural districts of Cornovia. In the southern part of the island, he holds sway in Topsham and Tintagel through his shipping empire.

"Packs of German wolves infest the forests and fords of Britain. Grallon has done little to restrain their growing numbers. In fact, he has encouraged them as they help to consolidate his power.

"It all fell apart three years ago. I still wake up suddenly from dreaming about that night. In those nightmares, just as it happened, Constantine wakes me, saying that the house is on fire. I still hear him clearly. 'Wake, Ahès. Get up! Get up! My love, our home is on fire. Awake!'

"From the dream, I sat up in bed. My heart raced, just as it did that autumn night. Getting out of bed, I picked up Geraint and followed Constantine. Ambrosius followed us as we made our way outside.

"Even if there wasn't a full moon, I would have had no trouble seeing; the long stable stood fully ablaze. Though twenty yards away, the heat of the inferno pressed heavily upon my face. The horses circled restlessly in the corral. Our assailants moved up as we exited the villa. The large group of horsemen walked their mounts forward. As Constantine stepped up, he turned and whispered, 'Run.'

"At that moment, he drew his sword and engaged the horsemen. As I cradled Geraint in one arm, I snatched Ambrosius with my other hand. At first, Ambrosius resisted but stopped when Constantine ordered, 'Go! Go! They cut Constantine down right in front of us. Lifeless, Constantine dropped to his knees, and then fell face forward.

"We would have all perished if Cai and his friends hadn't returned as this happened. Cai had left with them earlier in the week. They had gone on a hunting trip. That night, though, Cai and his friends rushed in on horseback. Four of them threw up interference, while Cai swept up me and Geraint. Cai's friend, Kyle, snatched up Ambrosius.

"I was never so scared for my life as I was then," she whispered.

I poured the last of the wine into her goblet. Without a word, she picked it up and finished it off in a single draw.

"Once they killed Constantine, I brought Ambrosius here. Of course,

he wanted to stay, but I would have none of that,” she remarked. “For God’s sake, he was only twelve years old at the time. There’s no way he would have survived. I am not even certain if Cai is still alive. It’s been some time since we received a letter from him.

“Here, we have found peace. Britain seems a world away. There’s no way we would have made it if it wasn’t for the help of your family. Your mother, Alicia, has been incredible. Ambrosius and Geraint adore her or at least her cooking,” Ahès finished with a smile.

“Mother is good? What about my little sister, Julia?” I asked.

“She’s little no longer. She is engaged to a Roman soldier named Probus. They’re supposed to get married this summer. He has family near the Waal River; that’s north of the city of Cologne. I believe that they will move there.

“Your mother and sister are simply going to be amazed to see you. It’s funny that you’ve shown up as you did. That’s the way they said it would be. No grand, glorious entrance for Merlinus,” she replied.

“Well, I’m glad I didn’t disappoint them,” I replied.

“You must have some stories to tell,” she remarked.

“I might have one or two to tell, but not tonight,” I added.

“So how did you get here? Did you ride a horse?” She asked.

“No. Not for the last hundred miles. I had to sell the beast because I could not bring myself to eat it,” I answered. “Betsy was sold and I was full. Of course, I regretted it when I began walking the final hundred miles nearly a month ago.”

“Why didn’t you use it for hunting?” she asked.

“The animal had gone lame. Besides, I came upon a town with an empty stomach and smelled roast on a nearby spit. That’s all it took,” I replied.

“Merlinus, sleep in here for the night. I will take the guest quarters,” she replied.

“No, I couldn’t,” I replied.

“I insist,” she added. “I know where everything is. This way the household isn’t woken up and you actually get to sleep tonight. Fair enough?”

“Sounds good,” I remarked.

As she stood up, I did the same. With a smile, she moved close, kissed me on the cheek, and hugged me tightly.

Letting go and stepping back, she remarked, “It’s really good to have you home, Merlinus.”

“It’s good to be home,” I smiled.

## CHAPTER 13

I woke with the sudden thought of moving — *wasting daylight. Get moving. Get home.*

I'd been dreaming. With a heavy sigh of relief, I told myself that I was home. I'd been here for a week now. I sat there in my bed letting my surroundings sink in. It felt good to be back. Out in the world, I had to be ready to fight to the death. The cities of men were far more dangerous than the deserts of God.

I got up and went out of the villa and did my daily exercises, which I had learned from Master Dom Fu. Afterwards, I drew some cold, well-water. Surprisingly, I found Mother out near the well. She just stood there, watching the birds flying by singing the song of spring. I viewed her differently after growing up and being away for so long. She seemed so small, so frail. Mother had lost much of her excess weight. I could only assume that the hard work at the villa had worn that away. Her hair had lost its dark brown hue a long time ago. Still, she kept her hair long and loose, though it was now snow white.

“Mother, is everything all right?” I remarked.

She turned with a warm smile, melting away my worries.

“Yes,” she said as she walked to me and hugged me tightly. I leaned down and kissed the top of her head as I towered over her.

“I've been thinking that we should have a grand celebration. We shall have it at Easter,” she declared.

“Mother, we shouldn't. Times are too tight for some extravagant party,” I remarked.

“My baby boy has come back to me. We're celebrating and that's final,” she remarked sternly. I smiled, knowing that it was.

I heard a noise and looked toward the gate. In the far distance, a large, impressive train of people, horses, and wagons rolled down the tree-lined lane toward the villa. My heart sank. The fear of losing the villa weighed on me.

I sprinted to the main gate. I quickly shut the large thick wooden doors and barred them, then I climbed the stairs to the wall's elevated walkway. There was no way to defend against this approaching party. The horsemen were four wide and at least ten rows deep as they rode in front of a center wagon while another ten rows guarded the rear. A line of infantry marched single file on both sides of the wagon. The army halted, holding formation. I noticed their standard-bearer. He carried a large wooden pole capped with a X encircled by an O. As the dust settled from the train, my eyes took it all in. It appeared more like an army than a church procession. It left an uneasy feeling within me. I waited, watching from the wall. A man exited from the back of the enclosed wagon. I wondered if it was Germanus.

As he walked closer, I realized that it was. Though he had gray hair and a worn look, I recognized him immediately. Germanus' long narrow face was unmistakable. His short coal-colored hair had smoldered to an ash gray. His beard was fuller and covered more of his face. His hazel eyes were more serene and less scheming. He was less primed but still proper. His attire lacked the pristine condition it had in Barcelona. He wore a off-white tunic with a hair shirt underneath. He sported an old red cloak. It was Bishop Germanus, only older.

*What does he want?*

"Greetings," he called. "I am Bishop Germa . . ."

He stopped and stared hard at me as if his eyes were deceiving him. I knew that I didn't look like I did before. The last time he saw me I was only fourteen years old. Now, after nearly fifteen years of growing and minor trimming, my beard covered much of my face and my bones had more stock. I felt like a changed man.

"Merlinus, is that really you? It's been nearly fifteen years since I saw you last! I prayed for your well-being but feared for your health. I'd thought that you were beyond this world," Germanus remarked.

With a smile, I remarked, "I've heard that quite a bit recently. Well, I guess we both know to not believe everything that we hear."

"It's amazing to see you. Whenever I stop here, I ask if anyone has heard from you. I was planning on doing it this time, too," he added.

"One moment, Bishop," I called down, "let me open the door for you and your men." I quickly walked down the stairs and went to the barred gate. Removing the wooden beam, I pushed the door outward.

As I walked toward him, I inquired, “What brings you this way?”

“Anymore, it’s never good,” he started. “Church business takes me to Britain. With my diocese in northwestern Gaul, I’ve been selected by Bishop Celestine of Rome to uproot the heresy preached by Pelagius. When Pelagius was alive, he wasn’t the problem. He bore all of the fruits of the spirit: charity, gentleness, joy, patience, and good nature. He did not think like a lawyer or a theologian. He was not Caelestius who is still stirring up trouble. Pelagius was concerned about actual events and consequences, not things that could possibly happen and their potential results. It is the implications and ramifications that the Church cannot and will not allow men to preach under the veil of the orthodoxy.

“A while back, a British deputation informed a synod that the heresy thrives on the island. Agricola, son of Bishop Severianus, has corrupted British Christians with his Pelagian beliefs,” Germanus remarked.

All of the infantry and troopers remained at least forty yards behind us. As Germanus spoke, a younger man similarly dressed walked up. This man had much thinner features than Germanus. It appeared that this boy of a man had lived his entire life behind the walls of aristocracy. His eyes were a gentle green, not hard and jaded like the majority of the upper class. He had no facial hair, and he kept the brown hair on his head extremely short. There were no streaks of gray, and oil made it slick and wet. His white tunic appeared bleached to a snow white. A red tassel drew the tunic around his narrow waist.

“Ah yes, this is young Lupus. He’s the Bishop of Troyes. He was also chosen to go to Britain. Bishop Lupus, this fine gentleman is Merlinus. This incredible villa is his. I hope Merlinus will offer us his hospitality for the day,” Germanus remarked as the young man approached.

“It is granted. With it being this early in the morning and no prior notice, however, very little can be offered immediately. It will take time.”

“Everything does,” Bishop Lupus added. “We must find the patience to deal with it and the wisdom to accept it.” Pausing, the young man glanced around and added, “This is a beautiful place, like a temperate Eden. You are a lucky man, Merlinus.”

“Thanks. I appreciate this place more and more,” I replied.

“Good morning, Bishop Germanus,” Ambrosius’ voice called out.

Turning, I noticed Ambrosius for the first time. If the bishops had seen him, their body language gave no indication of him. Mother stood

near the villa with a worried look on her face. As I smiled to her, she turned and walked away.

“Dear Bishop, what’s the need for such an army? I promised that my friends and I wouldn’t take anymore of the imperial cattle and we haven’t,” Ambrosius stated.

“I know, young man. It is true; I haven’t heard of any more trouble. I am proud of you, Ambrosius,” Germanus remarked with a slight bow. “Besides, this army is not here for you and your friends. We have business in Britain.”

“That sets my mind at ease,” Ambrosius replied. “At first glance, I thought we were being invaded.”

“No. Nothing like that,” Bishop Germanus replied. “As I explained to Merlinus, we are heading for Britain. Myself and Bishop Lupus have been sent by Bishop Celestine of Rome. There have been several reports of the Pelagian heresy thriving on the island and word of it has spread to the mainland. It appears that Agricola is the main heretic.”

“Hah,” Ambrosius laughed. “You make it sound like the plague.”

“Well, it is,” Bishop Lupus interjected. “It’s the plague of the soul.”

“Well stated, Lupus,” Germanus added. “It’s unfortunate that a better Brit wasn’t found to fill the see when Bishop Guithelinus died.”

“So, are you going to use this army to bleed the heresy out of the island?” Ambrosius asked.

I knew I should correct Ambrosius’ tone. I knew why Ambrosius was giving them a hard time, and I felt the same questioning cynicism. They sought to suppress the very beliefs I held high. Their orthodoxy had little regard for individual grace, free will, and self-control. I didn’t want to hold back his cutting tongue.

“If need be,” Germanus replied.

Germanus’ comment convinced me not to correct Ambrosius. Surprise filled Ambrosius’ face. He didn’t think that the bishop was capable of such extreme measures.

“There’s no way that the sword of God would be used against Christians led astray if they reconcile with the orthodoxy. The troopers will be used against the repentless heretics,” Lupus declared.

“So are you expecting trouble, then?” I asked.

“In all truth, they are simply the *armati* for the Church,” Germanus replied. “Numerous reports tell of a surge in the Saxons numbers, though.

The Saxons have been arriving continually by the boatload. It has alarmed and appalled many people on the island. Grallon has grown less and less receptive to the Council's concerns regarding the Saxons."

"The Council is a bunch of fools for electing Grallon High Commander in the first place," Ambrosius barked.

His sharp, bitter comment seemed to surprise only Bishop Lupus.

"That's beside the point, Ambrosius," Germanus added.

"We must still prepare for the worst-case scenario. I do not foresee a warm reception on the island for us." Bishop Lupus declared.

"How long are you going to spend on the island?" I asked.

"As long as it takes to uproot this heresy," Germanus remarked.

"What about the Saxons? Are you going to do anything about them?" Ambrosius asked.

"They are not our concern," Lupus replied.

"What?" Ambrosius barked. "How can you say that? They are pagans. I thought you stated that you were going to strike down all non-believers with God's sword," Ambrosius remarked in a sharper tone.

"We shall never seek out a fight," Lupus returned strongly. "That's not Christ's way. We shall unleash God's wrath only if we are physically confronted. The blood of the enemy shall only be shed in self-defense."

Ambrosius mumbled something as his foot pawed at the ground. His disposition soured. In these last few days since returning home, I hadn't seen this side of Ambrosius. There was true anger in his eyes. From what Ahès had stated, I didn't fault him for his hatred. Vortigern had killed the only father he had known and driven him out of his home. I would want Vortigern's head on a pike, also. Maybe Lupus was unaware of this. I wondered if Germanus knew the truth.

"Young Ambrosius, I know of the flames that consumed your home and now engulf your heart. Vengeance is not God's way," Germanus remarked.

"But I thought justice was," the young man quickly replied.

Silence fell between us; only the sound of restless horses filled the air. Their hooves shuffled, and the horses sputtered their sighs as the soldiers held their formation.

"There is only a fine line that separates the two when a passionate heart guides the hand of justice," I dropped in.

My comment broke Ambrosius' hold over the silenced bishops.

With a tilted head and a raised eyebrow, he gave me a queer look.

“A very thin one. One that is easily blurred,” Germanus remarked.

Once more, silence fell upon us. Once more, I broke it.

“Ambrosius, head back inside and get things started. Have some food prepared for our guests. Start with bread and some cold cider.”

As my words sank in, the bitterness in his eyes faded away and he replied, “Yes, sir. Right away.”

Ambrosius turned from us and headed back toward the villa.

“Although truly fortuitous, our meeting is very fortunate, Merlinus. Lupus and I are in need of you,” Germanus remarked.

“What do you mean?” I questioned. My stomach sank.

“Nepos,” Germanus called out. “Keep the men in formation.”

“Understood,” the man replied in a deep accent. It was hard to tell how tall Nepos was while he sat on his black mount. Nepos appeared to be the size of Ambrosius, but thinner. He sat with ease on his mount. His long, straight blonde hair was held in a ponytail. It was nearly as long as his horse’s tail. His natural tan gave an enhanced shine to his light-colored eyes. They were keen as a hawk. He wheeled his mount and called out Germanus’ order in an Alan tongue.

Germanus moved closer to the open gate. I drew closer, and he went a little bit further.

“These men you see behind us,” Germanus replied in a whisper, “were assigned to us by a decree issued by Bishop Celestine. In the beginning, we had left a council in Arles with a small unit of Alan warriors. Just recently, though, we met up with a large squad of men brought by a man named Carbo. As we travel, all of these men are under the command of this young man behind us named Nepos. He seems to be a reasonable man, but it has been brought to my attention that he ultimately answers to Goar, one of the Alan kings, and his son, Euthar. I don’t recall the Celestine’s deacon, Palladius, mentioning this. We thought that the Roman named Lucian was the commander of this small unit from Arles, but we were mistaken. Worse yet, Lucian acted as though he never expressed such a suggestion. Though he could fluently speak the Alan’s native tongue, he has departed for his homelands in Autun as we traveled north. Shortly after Lucian left for Autun, there was an incident. Some of the Alans from our group raided a villa in the nearby area. When this was brought to my attention and the men were confronted, the Alans argued

that there was a misunderstanding. They argued further that there was nothing out of the norm with their behavior. They argued that Euthar and his men engaged in raiding parties when he escorted the Church officials at previous times. Nepos has ensured me that this will not happen again. Still, we are at a tremendous disadvantage. This language barrier is unacceptable. Lives are at stake. I must be assured that my commands are understood and followed. Regrettably, I was going to ask Ahès if I could take Ambrosius with us.”

“What? He’s just a boy, Germanus,” I barked.

“I know. That’s why I’m hoping you will go instead,” he finished.

His words stopped me in my tracks. It was as if he asked me to walk back to the great eastern sea. As I stewed in silence, I knew I had to go. Either way, Ambrosius would go. At least if I went, I could try to protect him as best as I could.

“You can speak these barbarians’ tongue?” Lupus question.

“What was that?” I asked.

“You can speak the Alan’s native language, right?” Lupus asked.

“Yes, that’s one language I speak fluently,” I blankly replied.

“You can speak several languages?”

“Yes.”

“Fluently?”

“Yes,” I answered. “That’s my greatest talent. Latin, Greek, words from the holy lands and phrases from the Orient. Germanic dialects.”

“Amazing,” the young bishop replied.

“Right, and that’s why I’m hoping he will go,” Germanus added.

“I will,” I whispered.

“Good, young Ambrosius won’t have to go,” Lupus replied.

I tried not to laugh but struggled to hold it back. A smirk formed on Germanus’ face. He knew Ambrosius would still beg to go.

“Why do you feel that comment was funny?” Lupus questioned.

“I do not believe Ambrosius will be turned away from going to Britain. Ambrosius will want to see if he can gain any news of his brother, Cai. I know I lack the will and words to deter him. You may try, but I believe you would be wasting your time,” I answered.

“Good. You both shall accompany us to Britain,” Germanus said.

# CHAPTER 14

We prepared to cross the channel. The weather changed drastically. First, the sky became brooding. Dark thick clouds sank low, touching the churning water in spots. Soon, nothing else could be seen except the pounding sea and the pluming sky.

The crew struggled to keep the ships from capsizing. Germanus and the other priests prayed for our salvation while Ambrosius and I held on to what we could so we weren't thrown into the sea. The elements tore at the sails. Pieces of them flapped loosely, ready to fly off into the wind and never be seen again. Cold saltwater pelted our bodies. I have been on some bad voyages, even run ashore one time, but none seemed as rough as this one. The wind screamed wet stinging words. Its coldness ached within the bone. The ship heaved up and bowed down relentlessly to the mercy of the sea. Germanus tried to assure Ambrosius that he had seen worse.

"Any worse than this and we'll be several leagues under the sea," Ambrosius replied with a grumble.

"Hah," Nepos scoffed as he huddled and shivered by us and then added, "Why should London be any different than Arles? The last time my unit went by sea for the Church, it was like this. We were nearly shipwrecked when we were dispatched from Rome. We should have simply taken the land route to Auxerre."

"You must be beginning to dislike sailing," I remarked in his native tongue.

"An Alan always has a horse underneath them, but I never supposed that it would be sea horses. By Neptune, I pray we make it."

The longer the voyage churned on, the worse everyone felt. The sea made many physically sick. In time, Germanus slipped into a fever-gripped sleep. The morale of the priests fell into a questioning squalor.

"The demons of the sea rage on. They have grown stronger since our brother, Germanus, has slipped into his sickly sleep. What are we to do?"

one of the priests moaned as the gale continued.

In truth, I noticed little change in the weather. The only thing I had noticed was the lack of Germanus' encouraging words. Glancing over to Bishop Lupus huddling with his other brethren, I doubted that Lupus had ever experienced anything comparable to this storm. Then I thought of the constant fear of barbaric raids in his region. It had to wear a person thin, but the whole feeling of being trapped on this boat with nowhere to go except into the sea gave a whole new meaning to hopelessness. Lupus seemed to lack Germanus' ability to inspire others in the moment of physical despair. And with the absence of his inspiration, the sea quickly eroded the brethren's solidarity.

Fearing for their lives, the priests woke up Germanus and begged him to hold a vigil that would break the storm's hold on the sea. Together, they prayed through the last part of the night.

Within a few hours, the first rays of hope broke across the horizon as a new day dawned. The brethren cheered that Germanus had saved the ships and all of the men aboard them from certain death with his chanting and prayers.

Oddly, we went past Thanet without incident. I had assumed that we were going to have problems. Since the time that I'd come home, fears and stories of Saxon raids had been a standard topic of conversation. Grallon allowing them to form a base of operation on the island had pleased no one except the Saxons. And he had solved nothing and only made matters worse.

In time, our ships drifted deeper into the mouth of the Thames River. Even before setting a foot on the welcome shore, throngs of people gathered. It was as if the wind had announced our arrival.

# CHAPTER 15

People lined the shore as we sailed past them. They called for us to come ashore. They pleaded. This made some of us leery, myself included. Once adequate space became available, all of the ships dropped anchor and we quickly clambered to shore. All of us, even the crew, were ecstatic to have land under our feet.

“Greetings, people of Britain,” Germanus declared in a clear, powerful tone. “We’re honored by your welcoming. May God bless you with his everlasting grace.”

I still held some bitter memories of Germanus from Barcelona, but I could not deny his talent for talking. Maybe it was his whole attire and attitude. Either way, he cast a spell upon the crowd. People fell silent and stared. They hung upon his words, waiting and wanting more.

“We come with words straight from the Bishop of Rome. It is about the one true God,” Germanus stated then paused.

“For the moment, we would appreciate your hospitality. And, a warm meal would do wonders.” Bishop Lupus added.

The crowd parted like the Red Sea had for Moses. Bishop Lupus was asking for more than these people could offer. The majority of them wore torn, tattered, or soiled clothes. These people were suffering, landless, and forgotten. Now they clung to the shores, awaiting our arrival. Soon, Germanus saw what I saw. He wasn’t blind.

“Or simply a warm fire would do,” Germanus chimed in.

“That is not beyond our accommodations,” called out a middle-aged man and with this came a flood of people talking.

In a loud, joyous manner, the locals welcomed us as Germanus had the men strike camp. He ordered a grand feast to be prepared from our supplies. Soon, it was ready.

Germanus cleared his throat, raised his cup, and called out, “Eat at my table and you shall not know hunger. I shall fast before I take the bread from your fingertips. Please enjoy the feast.”

Only one thing left from the feast early and no one missed it. Hunger had been keeping these unfortunates company for weeks, but left halfway through the long dinner.

The next day, we loaded back onto the ships and finished the rest of the trip to London. In the quiet time that consumed the remainder of the trip, I sat next to Germanus.

“So are you expecting this kind of reception everywhere we go?” I asked him.

“No,” he replied flatly.

“What do you expect?” I inquired further.

“It’s hard to say. The signs so far don’t seem good. So many sad appeals, so soon. And once we reach London we will have to establish our presence there,” Germanus answered.

“Why there?”

“I believe that will be our best place to generate a new spring of faith,” he added in a matter-of-fact tone.

“So you believe that the brethren there will be of the most assistance?” I asked.

“No,” Germanus remarked. “In truth, I am more interested in the town of Verulamium. That’s where Alban, a pagan and ex-soldier, sheltered a Christian priest and then was put to death when Alban took the priest’s place.

“By centralizing on this local martyr, I’ll be able to reach these people. It gives them a focal point of pure Christianity. It’s something that will pull them free from the Pelagian heresy that plagues these people.”

“Germanus, I don’t see the sickness that you speak of in his faith. Pelagius spoke of the love of God, free will, self-control, and the innate ability to feel the grace of God. All else is superficial rhetoric.”

Germanus held his tongue. He had a comment he wanted to make but didn’t. After a heavy exhale, he drew in air and replied, “There must be social order.”

“There would be with self control,” Ambrosius replied.

“Hah, that’s the one thing lacking in this corrupt, sinful world,” Germanus remarked. “Fallen souls can’t stand on their own.”

“Before God, shouldn’t all honorable men kneel?” I mocked.

“Please, Merlinus. Don’t play with words. I left the legal courts behind a long time ago,” Germanus remarked as he rubbed his forehead.

“Have you?” I questioned. “The setting and circumstances have changed, but the heated rhetoric remains.”

He smiled as he listened to my words and saw the logic within them.

“You were always a smart boy,” he remarked. “Your father would be extremely proud of what you have achieved and maintained. And in the purest truths, you and Ambrosius are correct. If everyone had self-control, there would be order, but still the hand of the mighty holds the sword of justice instead of the hand of the righteous.”

“But the stance taken by the orthodoxy is that man is predestined to fail,” I remarked.

“Are we not bound to fail?” Germanus remarked.

“So you will fall from God’s grace,” I remarked.

“Possibly,” he calmly replied. “Even bishops can fall. Just a couple of years ago, the Bishop of Arles, Patroclus, was slain for his sins of simony.”

“Then, what is the use of the Church if it is corruptible like everything else is?” I asked.

“Systematic order,” Germanus added.

“It seems inhuman,” I replied.

“It’s a necessary evil,” he answered.

“That’s debatable,” I countered.

“It will have to wait for another day. London is close on the horizon.” Germanus declared.

I saw the fairly large walled town sitting on the shores of the Thames. A wooden watchtower greeted our arrival. It sat on the northern shore, forming the most eastern point of the massive wall. On the landward side, sandstone formed the base of the wall. Ragstone framed it. Flint rubble filled its core. London’s wall rose up about twenty feet and tapered at the top.

The riverside lacked this imposing wall. Instead, retainer walls and embankments formed its defense. By using the contour of the shoreline, the city seemed open to the riverside but was effectively secure. The first short retainer wall kept the shore from eroding. The second sat further up on the shore, making it much higher than the first. Still, the city was friendly to trade. Wharves lined the thin shoreline of London, waiting for trade ships to drop their loads so the goods could be whisked away. Out of all the pain and suffering, the one grand thing the Romans gave this island was this impressive city.

Through the years, the Empire had its ups and downs. The Empire was in the midst of a major downturn, now. Trade had slumped off. Looking over the city, I saw that several of the Roman buildings were in decay and being demolished. The city had lost its former luster.

## CHAPTER 16

In London, the reception was less cordial. Many questioned why we were there. I didn't involve myself with these debates. As anticipated, they centered around what was and was not orthodoxy. Both missed the point of what Christ was and what he stood for. Neither of them were willing to seek a compromise to achieve harmony within the community. And for that, both Germanus and the heretics were wrong.

I did not concern myself with the unanswerable questions of faith, religion, and the Pelagian controversy. I kept close tabs on Ambrosius and what he was doing. As soon as he stepped on land, he spoke to elderly men who he thought might know something, like the one he approached now. The old man stood watching crowds of people. He wore a tan tunic and matching long breeches. A black leather belt drew in his long tunic. A long brown cape hung loosely by his sides. His hood wasn't up.

"Greetings, sir," Ambrosius remarked as he stood next to him.

"Yes, lad," the old man asked.

"May I have a moment of your time?"

"I don't see why not," the old man replied.

"Have you heard any news of Cornovia? That was my home for a long time. It's been several years since I've been there. Any news you could tell me would be good," Ambrosius finished.

"Unfortunately, that's not true," the old man started, "Not all news is good news. Grallon continues to drive people from their homes and off their lands. The self-proclaimed High Commander is consolidating his lands. He has installed his youngest son, Paschent, in Builth. He picked this son over Vortimer for the simple fact that Paschent would look to Grallon for guidance. Vortimer is a seasoned warrior and disagrees with his father on several things. There is no way Vortimer would simply bend to his father's whim. So from the west in Demetia, Grallon pushes his holdings eastward at the expense of others. He has holdings

near Exeter but doesn't seem to be stirring up trouble in the southwest.

"In my opinion, Britain would be better served if Vortimer were High Commander of the Council's army instead of Grallon," the old man replied after a quick glance around him.

"What about the resistance? Does no one stand in opposition any longer?" Ambrosius asked as he lowered his voice.

"Yes, there are holdouts, but there seems to be too few to really make a difference. Vortigern has endless supply of soldiers. He simply has more Saxons shipped over to take the place of his fallen dogs."

"Do you know the names of these patriots?" Ambrosius asked.

"There are several, but they are scattered among the provinces. In Cornovia, Gerontius and Cai both lead bands of men and none of them recognize Lord Grallon as High Commander of the Council any longer. Both groups have been officially labeled as outlaws, but only Vortigern and his Saxons would arrest them. Neither group steals from, burns out or kills the country folks. Grallon cannot make such a claim honestly.

"He is a . . ." the old man paused, as he noticed that I had remained in listening distance the whole time. The old man grew leery as he remained silent, studying me.

Noticing the old man's eyes shifting, Ambrosius pivoted as his hand dropped down to the hilt of his sword. Ambrosius released it as he saw only me standing nearby.

"Oh," he remarked. "Don't mind him, sir. He is with me."

The tension in the old man's shoulders melted away. He took a wide scan of the crowd of people gathered to meet the bishops and remarked, "Nowadays, you don't know who might be listening."

"Right," Ambrosius agreed. "Is there anymore that you can tell us?"

"These are tough times we live in. Many enemies want to sink their teeth into this island. The Irish and Picts are just some of the troubles we face. More and more, folks feel that Vortigern and the Council made a bad decision in using the Saxons as auxiliary forces. With their numbers increasing daily, they garrison key points throughout the lower island and parts of the north. The people do appreciate that the Saxons have been able to put Drust and his troublesome Picts in check.

"This is probably one of the few things that can be respected about them. Other than that, the people have grown tired and annoyed with their presence," the old man finished.

“What more can you tell me about Cai and the others like him?” Ambrosius anxiously asked. “They are not stationed at some stronghold, are they?”

“No, they are not that strong. They must stay on the move or Vortigern would simply mount a massive assault against them. Their war bands patrol the highlands, serving the region as protection. The locals there look to Gerontius and Cai for help instead of Lord Grallon. Often, Vortigern’s men are the reason the country folk need protection. Besides, some of their sons ride under the banner of the White Boar of Cornovia,” the old man added.

“Is there a way to get word to them?” Ambrosius asked. “Is Cai reachable?”

“I’m sure there’s a way, but I don’t know it,” the old man replied as he shifted his weight from his left leg to his right. He looked past us, watching the equipment, horses, and men continue to exit the ships.

“You travel with distinguished guests,” the old man remarked as he looked at Ambrosius. “Your friends speak for the Bishop of Rome. Their words carry imperial weight. People bend to them. How do you know them?”

“I am serving as an interpreter for the bishops,” I interjected.

“Hah,” the old man laughed. “Until now, I wondered if you could even speak.”

“He only talks when he has to,” Ambrosius joked.

“Thanks for your time, sir. We greatly appreciate it,” I added, trying to end the conversation as I pulled Ambrosius so he would walk away.

“Yes, sir,” Ambrosius added. “We definitely appreciate it.”

“No problem, young lad,” the old man replied. “By the way, what happens to be your name?”

“Ambrosius,” he answered.

“Ambrosius,” the old man repeated. His mind raced behind his squinting eyes as he tried to place the young man’s name. Ambrosius’ name triggered some memory, but the old man could not place where he had heard it before now.

A look of awe suddenly formed on the man’s face as he repeated, “Ambrosius of Cornovia? Son of Constantine and brother to Cai?”

“No,” I quickly answered. “Ambrosius of Aureliani.”

Surprised by my answer, Ambrosius looked at me but said nothing.

Smiling, the old man replied, "Right. Ambrosius of Aureliani."

"And I am Merlinus. This young man oversees my lands. Maybe in the future, when there is more time, we could talk further. But right now, we must be going."

"Good day to both of you," the old man replied with a nod.

Hesitantly, Ambrosius followed me.

"There was more I could have learned from him," Ambrosius hissed as I led him away from the hordes of people.

Out of listening distance, I replied, "You couldn't have learned as much as he could have. First, you tell him that you are from Cornovia, followed up with your asking about the resistance, and then you finally tell him that you have the same name as a son of a dead Cornovian lord. Did I fail to point out any more of your sheer brilliance? Are you intentionally trying to draw attention to yourself?"

"Did you not hear what the old man told you? Your brother, Cai, and others like him, has been driven out and survives only as an outlaw. You must be careful with what you tell strangers, especially when you express sympathies for men labelled as outlaws. Grallon is still recognized as the High Commander of Britain," I preached.

"What does that matter, now? Bishop Germanus is here. If Grallon dares to show his face, the bishops shall have that usurper in shackles," Ambrosius declared in a bitter tone.

"Well, then," I snapped. "Turn around so you can see it happen."

Grallon was there, regally dressed in a purple calico cotton vest with black breeches. He walked up to the bishops as a peer. His hair and beard appeared like snow on his face and his shoulders. The black within it was gone. He looked like Duke Coel. He looked much older, but I knew it was him and I knew what was going to happen.

The throng of people dispersed as Vortigern greeted the bishops. As the people moved about them, they innately formed a wide thick circle around the three important men. The crowd whispered to one another while listening to what the nobles were saying.

"I don't believe it," groaned Ambrosius as he saw them socializing like old friends. The teen just didn't realize that they were old friends or at least old associates. Ahè thought Germanus had changed, but I still saw the same man smiling now as the one I saw in Barcelona. There it was, that self-serving smile of a snake. Or, was I seeing too much into it?

“This is politics, the compromising of principles to achieve one’s purpose or plan,” I lightly remarked. Ambrosius’ hand sank down to the hilt of his sword.

I reached out and grabbed the back of his arm and remarked, “Justice is served little if your head is on a pike.”

“What would you have me do, then?” the young man questioned as the tension in his arm faded.

“Do what you set out to do,” I replied. “Look for your brother, Cai. We must not stay in London. We shall move out discreetly. Tell no one. I will have the bishops informed of our departure. We will move to the north end of the town. The road that we will take is located there. Okay?”

Ambrosius nodded his head and walked back toward the ships.

## CHAPTER 17

What I'd been told and what I'd observed led me to believe that Ambrosius had grown into a highly intelligent, compassionate man. Impatience plagued him at times. For the most part, the young man maintained a positive outlook. Since arriving on the island, he struggled to remain upbeat and cordial. Old painful memories raged in him. He could not hold back the tears as we arrived at his former home in Cornovia, days later.

We reached his old home, or what remained of it. Fire had scorched the walls. The rafters had burned through and caused the roof to cave in. Dried-out vines and brown weeds gave the dilapidated buildings a touch of antiquity; the sadness in Ambrosius' face when he saw it showed a sudden sense of mourning. He refused to set up camp within the protective outer wall of the villa. Instead, Ambrosius rode out alone to the tree line and made camp for that night while we remained near the villa.

He'd been hoping that Cai would have restored the villa, but instead we had found it abandoned. No fires of any type marked the grounds with signs of recent occupancy or activity. So far, Ambrosius' mission had been a complete failure.

We spent the next two days combing the countryside. The last lead regarding Cai faded into the fifth night. With deep reluctance, Ambrosius gave the order to return to Verulamium. Two weeks after arriving in London, we rode into the quiet town where Alban was baptized in the blood of martyrdom.

Word of Germanus' heated debates with Pelagian scions reached us the night before. So did the news of Germanus curing a little girl's blindness. The man telling the story had slurred his words. Either way, her father was a man of high status.

I struggled to accept the miracle. I had seen too much. I was skeptical of all things like that. I wasn't the only one; some of the people that witnessed it firsthand doubted it. Others, like the old toothless drunk,

believed it as if it was the Gospel.

So when we arrived, I sought out Germanus' temporary residence set up near the shrine of St. Alban. Ambrosius followed close behind.

I stopped, turned, and faced Ambrosius. He remained silent.

"Allow me to handle the initial talking. Fair enough?" I asked.

Ambrosius nodded his head, too tired to talk. In the last week, we had rode over a hundred miles. Incredibly, only one of our mounts went lame out the group of twelve horses. The Roman roads only went so far and many sections were in disrepair. Stepping in a pothole in the road was what caused the horse to twist its hoof. The fact that there weren't any other problems with the horses attested to the quality of stock maintained in the stables at Aureliani.

Before leaving nearly fifteen years ago, I had hired an old Alan and his son. They were amazing with the horses. The father had passed away a couple of years after I had left. His son, Aspar, remained and still cared for them. Aspar's young son, Velius, helped him with the horses and stables now. My villa had grown into quite the little community during my sabbatical. And Ambrosius had helped its development in the last couple of years.

As we walked closer to Germanus' tent, a man walked toward us. I recognized him. It was Camillus, one of Germanus' assistants. He was tall and thin, almost sickly thin. He had light brown hair and wore a dark brown robe. His short hooked nose gave him a parrot like appearance.

"Greetings. What's the purpose for such a late call?" the young man remarked as we moved in the dark shadows of the night.

"Hello, young Camillus," I called back. "I was hoping to call upon Bishop Germanus, if possible."

As Ambrosius and I stepped into the light of the torches near the tent's entrance, Camillus' stare melted into a friendly smile.

"Oh," he remarked. "Lord Merlinus, I didn't realize it was you."

"No need to be so formal," I replied.

"Can we speak with the bishop?" Ambrosius asked impatiently.

Camillus glanced at me with an inquisitive look. Seeing this, I nodded in agreement.

"I will check if he will see you tonight. It has grown quite late," Camillus replied.

"Understandable. We would have called upon him sooner, but

we just arrived in Verulamium less than an hour ago,” I replied.

“Okay,” Camillus added. “I will inform Bishop Germanus and see if he can make time for you both.”

“That would be great, Camillus,” I answered.

“Please wait here,” he replied.

“Of course,” I added.

Shortly afterwards, Camillus returned. Holding up the flap of the tent, Camillus revealed numerous candles and oil lamps that lit the reception area. Thick drapes divided the large tent into rooms.

“Bishop Germanus will see you. Please come in,” he announced.

“Thank you, Camillus,” I replied.

Alabaster busts stood in the shadowy corners. As we waited, Ambrosius moved closer and studied the tapestry that had the known world woven into it.

Looking at me, Ambrosius asked, “How far east have you been?”

“I’ve stood on the shores of the eastern ocean. I mostly walked to the east, but I never felt as sore as I do now,” I joked.

He smiled and gave a genuine laugh; it was the first one I heard since we had arrived in Britain.

As we looked at the edge of the world, he shook his head and remarked, “That’s amazing. I would love to travel that far east.”

“You should. It’s a learning experience. This world is incredible. There is so much to it. This map does it little justice. There’s a stone wall in the Orient that runs for over five hundred leagues. It completely dwarfs Hadrian’s Wall,” I replied.

“Weren’t you afraid while you traveled alone? That is how you traveled, wasn’t it?”

“Yes, that’s how I mostly traveled. And yes, I was scared at times, but my curiosity superceded my fear,” I answered.

With a bright smile, he remarked, “I understand. Do you figure you will return there?”

“It’s hard to say,” I replied.

“Hopefully, it isn’t any time soon,” Germanus’ voice called out from behind us.

We saw Germanus coming out of a cloth divider held open by Camillus.

“It would be a shame to lose you when you are needed here,”

Germanus announced.

“Well, you don’t have to worry. There are no plans to go east of Aureliani any time soon,” I replied.

The bishop nodded and added, “Good. Things are becoming more complicated. Any luck in contacting Cai?”

“No,” Ambrosius remarked as his eyes dropped from the bishop’s.

“We just didn’t have enough time to establish contact,” I replied in an even tone.

“True,” the bishop quickly replied.

Switching the subject, Ambrosius asked, “So is it true? Can you cure the blind? I heard, well, we heard that you healed a little blind girl the other day while in London. Word of you has spread like wildfire. Is it true?”

Germanus remained quiet for a moment. Ambrosius’ mouth hung open in anticipation. Germanus’ chest drew in as if to speak, but he paused as he glanced at me. I did not look away, but my stare was not stern. I had simply grown used to people’s lies and expected the same from Germanus. And for a moment, I saw what seemed like remorse within his eyes, or something like it within his serene look.

“I did all that I could possibly do for that child. Following a short prayer I said for her, I removed the reliquary that I carry everywhere and held it before the open eyes of the child. As the crowd squeezed in on us, I prayed out loud, ‘Demons that have stolen the precious sight of this child be gone. By my faith and the true will of God, vision shall no longer be denied this child. If this blindness is the result of divine retribution, the child shall be absolved, and sight shall be restored if it so pleases the Lord. Alleluia.’”

“So what then?” Ambrosius quickly inquired.

“Crackle of thunder and a flash of lightning,” I teased.

A young servant smiled as he attended to the couple of candles that had nearly melted away.

“Nothing that spectacular,” Germanus smiled.

“So what happened, then?” Ambrosius asked.

“The blank stare of blindness faded from her face and her blinking eyes focused on the reliquary I held in front of her,” Germanus answered.

“It was truly a grand moment,” Camillus called out from behind us. “When the child turned to her parents and told them she could see them

for the first time, the crowd erupted joyously.”

Amazement shone in Ambrosius’ face. Skepticism clouded my thoughts.

“So the child turned to her parents, and told them that she could see them for the first time ever? How did the little girl recognize them?” I asked.

Silence slipped among us. Realizing my point, Ambrosius’ expression grew sharp. Germanus didn’t object. He had his own doubts.

“Bishop, do you really think she was blind?” Ambrosius questioned. “Wouldn’t you know if you had cured her or not?”

“I only know what she told us. And only through the grace of God could such a thing occur. I am a true man of the cloth and did all I could possibly do,” Germanus stated in an even tone. “It is irrelevant what I think. It only matters what God knows and God knows all there is to know. I am not his judge. I am only a guide to those who want to see.”

“How does that work when they can’t see in the first place?” the young man smirked.

“Ambrosius,” I said sharply. I gave him a stern stare.

Smiling, knowing the boy’s doubts, Germanus answered, “It was the reliquary. That was the focal point for the little girl. The relics of martyrs drew the darkness from her eyes. I simply held it before her eyes and the relics did the rest.”

A bewildered look hung on Ambrosius’ face. He didn’t know what to say. He looked at me for a word of guidance; I simply shrugged my shoulders. His anticipating stare remained on me. I remained tight-lipped.

“What do you make of it, Merlinus,” he asked.

“It’s difficult for me,” I replied. “I am a man of the here and now. I struggle to accept anything that I do not witness, experience, or believe possible. I have heard too many tall tales to simply accept something without questioning it.”

“Only have blind faith in the grace of God, not in the ways of men,” Germanus remarked. “The Shroud of God has been soiled by the sins of liars before now. And it will again. Men shall fall, but that doesn’t mean you have to, Ambrosius.”

I smiled and nodded in agreement. Ambrosius’ head lightly bobbed as he glanced at us both and accepted our logic.

“I wish there had been more time, Ambrosius. I wish you would have

met up with your brother. There's just no more time. There's whispers of a building revolt. The Saxon dogs of Vortigern grow restless and bloodthirsty," Germanus declared. "Their numbers swell beyond counting. They claim more and more land for their services."

"So what is our next move, Bishop?" Ambrosius asked.

"Home is our destination. We have done what we have set out to do. We have reestablished the Word of God on the isle of Britain once more. The confusing shadow of heresy has been cast away by the all-consuming light of God.

"We leave for London tomorrow. From there, we shall sail home," Germanus remarked.

Ambrosius gave me an odd look.

"There is no need to linger. The heresy has been stamped out, its adherents refuted before the masses, and their books have been confiscated," Camillus remarked. "The Church has won the battle against the Pelagian heretics. This is good news for the Church."

*But not for free will.*

"That's right," Germanus replied.

"Well, it not good for free will," Ambrosius said, voicing my thoughts.

"Ambrosius, we should make our leave and settle down for the night," I replied as I glanced over him.

He nodded in agreement.

"Thank you for your time, Bishop Germanus," I remarked.

"Good night, my friends," the bishop replied.

## CHAPTER 18

The next day, after breaking camp, we rode toward London. With the weather fair and the roads in good repair, we moved fast. Ambrosius and I brought up the rear. We purposely lagged back so we didn't constantly eat the dust kicked up by the horsemen in front of us.

Several hours into the ride, the train had stopped, and we rode up to it. As we approached, I noticed a body on the ground. It was Germanus. He looked unconscious. There was blood on his forehead and his leg didn't appear normal.

His mount thrashed about madly. The horse was seriously injured. It moaned and neighed in agony. One of the troopers pulled out his bow from his nearby mount and shot the maimed animal. Within moments, the beast gave out its last breath and then became motionless.

"What has happened?" Ambrosius asked as we both dismounted.

"Someone constructed a deadfall in the road," Camillus answered while he knelt next to Germanus. "Germanus' horse stepped partially into it and threw him. The bishop jammed and twisted his leg when he hit the ground.

"Can you help him, Merlinus?" Camillus asked.

"I will," I answered. Turning to Ambrosius, I commanded as I held my hands open the length of Germanus' lower leg, "Cut me two thin pieces of oak this long."

"Yes, sir," Ambrosius replied as he went into the woods that lined the road.

I dug into my saddle bags. I brought out a leather sachet of herbs. As I went to Germanus, Camillus moved away to give me room to work. Kneeling next to the bishop, I treated the injury on his forehead. It wasn't much. The little blood was from an abrasion. There was no deep cut. I dressed the wound while I waited for Ambrosius to return.

"Should we try to wake him?" Camillus asked.

"No. We're going to let him rest until Ambrosius returns. I'm certain

that the bishop will come to when I secure the braces on his leg. I'll need to tie the straps tight. Can you get me two long strips of strong cloth?" I finished.

"I can do that," Camillus replied.

Shortly thereafter, they returned at the same time. Both brought what I had asked for. Quickly with one stick, I tied a strap to each end. Second, I laid that next to Germanus' leg. Next, I threaded the straps underneath his leg and looped them around the second stick. Looking up, I noticed that a large circle of people surrounded me. Two soldiers stood together watching.

"You two, come here and help," I commanded.

Looking at each other and then me, they asked in unison, "Us?"

"Yes," I confirmed. "Hold the bishop down by his shoulders."

Kneeling next to him, the two large Alans placed their hands on the bishop's shoulders and wrists.

"Ambrosius, kneel down and help me. This is what is going to happen. I am going to twist his leg back to its natural position. Then, you are going to wrap the strap around his leg a couple of times, pull the slack out, and then tie it off. Do it for both straps and do it fast. Are you ready?" I questioned.

"Yes, sir," he replied.

"Now," I said as I lifted and twisted Germanus' leg.

"Awh!" the bishop screamed. He tried desperately to sit up, but the soldiers held him pinned to the ground. Pain dripped from the corners of his eyes.

"Just give me a second, Germanus," I calmly remarked. "I've placed your leg in its most natural position, and Ambrosius is nearly finished tying off the braces. Just try to relax."

With bloodshot eyes, Germanus nodded and then laid his head back and closed his eyes.

"Camillus, have a wagon prepared. For now, just lay down several pillows so he can ride comfortably. We will lift him up and place him inside the covered wagon," I said.

"We should not remain," Nepos added. "We are only a short distance from that village by the creek. We passed it when we were headed the other way."

"Right," remarked one of the troopers holding down the bishop.

“We will seek shelter there. The bishop will recover more quickly remaining still,” I added.

Sometime later as dusk settled in, we came upon the village. It was a cluster of sunken huts with thatched roofs. A few folks tended to the chickens and swine.

Our presence quickly gained their attention. With a sharp whistle, more people appeared from within their huts. The town elder, a clean-shaven man with gray receding hair walked out toward us.

“Greetings,” he called out clearly.

“Bishop Germanus has been hurt. A few miles back he was thrown from his mount,” I declared. “We seek your hospitality.”

“Granted,” the elder answered.

## CHAPTER 19

“We could have been back in London and in better accommodations by now,” I told Germanus several hours after his riding accident.

“I can’t endure the jarring around in the back of the covered wagon,” Bishop Germanus moaned.

With the bishop not wanting to go any farther, we remained in the nearby village. A family who had two huts gave one of them to the bishop. Camillus brought in some of the trappings of his tent to decorate the dreary sunken hut. I had him on a heavy diet of cheese and goat’s milk.

It had been several days since Germanus was thrown from his horse and twisted his leg. I woke up early. Ambrosius was up and already outside the tent. He wandered near the fast-moving creek. Ambrosius had grown more restless with each passing day. He didn’t notice my approach until I stood next to him. He didn’t say anything once he saw me. I remained silent and allowed him his peace. It was obvious that he thought about his brother. It had to be frustrating to be on the island but still unable to make contact with him. I worried that he might do something rash and leave without anyone going with him.

“We could have stayed longer,” Ambrosius mumbled.

“I know, but there was no way of knowing that this would have happened,” I replied lightly.

“I know,” Ambrosius replied as he kicked a small stone into the noisy creek.

“Maybe we can go back for another try,” I remarked. “There is nothing saying we can’t.”

“No,” he answered in an empty tone. “Who knows when Germanus will want to leave. As far as I know, it could be today.”

I said nothing. He was right. It could go either way.

People flocked to the hut just to get a glimpse of the bishop. To me, Germanus seemed to enjoy the attention, relishing people’s whispers of wonder and amazement. Many of them truly believed

Germanus had cured the little blind girl. Maybe if he'd listened to them long enough he would have believed it, too. My doubt still lingered. Ambrosius cared little, either way. He was consumed with finding his brother. Ambrosius was a man of action. Though he excelled at the written word, Ambrosius held it secondary to the merits of one's actions. I could tell that. Good deeds made a person noble, not lands or titles.

His father would have been proud, along with his uncle, Lord Alaric. Adaulphus had no clue that his son had even outlived him. As Adaulphus lay dying in his stables, no hope lived in his heart. His grand Roman-Gothic kingdom had crumbled before his eyes. He would not see his son grow up to be a young, honorable man.

"Ambrosius," I called out as he knelt near the creek. He just stared at it. "I brought over some gold coins."

He turned, looked at me, and smiled. He added, "Are you going to give me a couple coins to cheer me up?"

Laughing, I remarked, "No. I was thinking more along the lines of sending a messenger back to Cornovia. Maybe we can establish a line of communication while we wait for Germanus to recover."

"Really?" he asked, unsure if I was serious or not.

"Yes," I replied.

"Who will you use?" Ambrosius asked.

"I will have Nepos go. I believe he is our best bet. Overall, I trust him to do the task to the best of his ability.

"Do you really think so?" he asked.

"I hope so," I replied.

"It's worth a try," he concurred.

"I will set things in motion," I finished.

Two weeks had passed since I sent Nepos back to Cornovia, and the young soldier still hadn't returned. I grew more and more concerned as the days progressed. I feared the worst for Nepos; maybe another dead fall had been more successful than the one that still had Germanus bedridden.

Ambrosius had written and sealed the letter with the ring of Constantine. Cai would recognize the boar on the shield as Constantine's seal. This was how Ambrosius had arranged it. Now I just hoped Nepos

would make it back alive. He should already have returned. His mount was superb, and he was an excellent rider.

As dusk neared, a rider approached. I hoped and prayed that it was the Alan returning.

“Nepos, what news is there?” Ambrosius called out.

The rider didn’t break stride and rode through the hamlet quickly. It wasn’t anyone I had seen before. It wasn’t Nepos. The wind picked up seeming to trail behind the rider. Maybe it had been blowing the whole time, but I hadn’t noticed it. The swift gust blew in an irregular pattern. No one else noticed it or cared.

The bivouac glowed ember red as the evening fires were lit. The wind and flames whistled and danced across the logs in their pits. There was a coldness in the air and the fires grew larger. Ambrosius and several of the soldiers had good luck hunting. They took down three good-size boars. The camp and the entire hamlet ate well. And now, some of us sat next to a roaring fire.

“This heat feels great,” Ambrosius called as he rubbed his hands and held them out to the fire. “It feels like it is going to be a cold one, tonight.”

“Ah yes, young lad. You’re right there,” Carbo said. He was one of the Alan soldiers. He was an older friend of Nepos. He reminded me of a smaller version of Valerius. His head was round and bald like a melon. But he had a body of a baby bull. He didn’t appear the least bit awkward on his horse.

“It had settled in my bones,” he said in his heavily accented voice.

“Well, you’d better get closer to the fire,” Ambrosius added.

“I’m close enough,” Carbo answered. “It’s nearly blinding me.”

“Well, it’s not as bright as their fire over . . .” I stopped, as I realized I wasn’t looking at a large camp fire. Instead, it was the roof of a hut on fire. The dry reeds burned hot and high, and the gusts of wind fanned the flames.

“Oh my god,” I called out, “some of the huts are on fire. Hurry and get up.”

“Help. Help,” Camillus called out. “The bishop is in danger. Please help me move him.”

As we approached the huts, a shower of hot embers blew toward Germanus’ hut. The wind shifted, though, and the hut was spared. Other homes weren’t so fortunate. The hungry fire quickly consumed

everything in its path. It raced across the roof like an angry will-o'-the-wisp.

One of the campfires must have caused the roof to catch on fire. Terror filled the village.

“Everyone get a bucket and form a line from the creek to the huts,” I shouted. “We will bail water onto them that way.”

Seeing the logic, people quickly followed my advice. Frantically, we passed the wooden pails back and forth trying hard not to lose any of the water.

It was too late to make a difference. The thatched roofs burned and broke their own supports. The roofs collapsed into the shell of the huts and a fiery cloud of embers bellowed up from each one. Fire prevention was the only recourse. Luckily several of the huts had been spared. No one had to sleep under the stars, but the sleeping space would be tight.

A rider galloped out of the night.

“What happened here?” he called out. I noticed that it was Nepos.

“Has the village been attacked?” he further questioned as the people meandered about the smoldering landscape.

“No, nothing like that. I believe some embers from the fire pits floated up and landed on the thatch roofs. From there, the fires began. The wind has been gusting. The fanned flames turned into short-lived infernos. By the time the village realized what happened, it was too late to save any of the burning huts,” I stated.

“I wish I had good news, but I have none. It is the same news that you had before I left. It is as if Cai has gone from Cornovia and hasn't returned in quite some time. From the most reliable sources, he left shortly before you and Ambrosius went to his old estate,” Nepos remarked.

“Maybe he has,” I remarked. “Maybe the pressure from Grallon's men has made it impossible for him to remain in the area. He is in a constant state of transit.”

“Possibly,” Nepos replied. “So what's next?”

“Unfortunately,” Ambrosius added, “sit and wait. Bishop Germanus is still bedridden.”

“I thought so,” Nepos remarked. “That would seem to be the only reason the imperial train has remained here. What about the bishop? He didn't get hurt, did he?”

“No. Luckily, the wind shifted and his hut was spared,” I stated.

“It was nothing of the sort,” chimed in Camillus. “It was a moment of divine intervention. The hands of God shifted the gusting winds away from Bishop Germanus. The grace of God protected him.”

“Just as if the Lord Christ and Jupiter Optimus Maximus were one in the same,” I remarked with a smile.

“Absolutely not,” Camillus barked. Even in the poor light, I could see his disgruntled look. My smile didn’t falter. I let the issue drop. Without saying anything else, Camillus turned from our group and walked away from us. He headed for Bishop Germanus’ hut.

“I wonder why Camillus didn’t like your comparison,” Ambrosius smirked.

I laughed lightly, and added, “I can’t imagine why. I thought that it was a good one.”

“So, do you think I will offend anyone if I made a fire?” Nepos asked. “I’m so cold. I need to get rid of the chill from the ride.”

“I doubt that anyone will have a problem with it. I suggest making it in that pit closest to the creek,” I remarked.

“Of course,” Nepos replied.

“The chill in the air is strong tonight.” Ambrosius remarked. “I’ll help gather some firewood.”

“Thanks,” Nepos replied.

After we had the fire blazing in the fieldstone pit, we sat around it. The flames danced wildly for us. Slowly, the small village fell asleep. Still, we stayed up. For the longest time nothing was said, and each of us took turns feeding the fire.

Breaking the silence, I asked, “So what is next for you, Nepos? What will happen when we make it back to Gaul?”

“I imagine that I will escort the bishops back to Auxerre. Once there, I’m not too sure what I will be up to. I know I will have to return to Goar, eventually.”

“I’ve heard his name mentioned before,” Ambrosius remarked, “but who is he?”

“He’s the king of one of the Alan tribes of Gaul,” Nepos answered.

“How is it that you have joined the company of the bishops?” Ambrosius asked.

“This unit, the group I currently command, acts as an armed escort for

the Church. We protect the leaders of the Church as they go on their travels west of Milan.”

“I see,” Ambrosius replied. “So then, you’re Goar’s right-hand man?”

“Hardly,” Nepos replied, as he poked at the coals of the fire with a long thin stick. “He grooms Euthar for that position. I’m not even Euthar’s first man. Though Euthar looks like Ambrosius’ twin, the young prince behaves like a dog. The privileges of being heir apparent already corrupts Euthar.”

“So the two act alike, also,” I joked. “Who is this Euthar that you speak so fondly of?”

He said nothing more but laughed lightly as he churned up a cloud of glowing ember.

“Your intent might be to avoid trouble, but you will have it if the villagers see you messing with the fire like that,” I remarked.

Nepos slowly glanced toward the cluster of huts. Ambrosius and I could not stop from laughing at his mannerisms. Nepos had forgotten what happened earlier. He meant no malcontent. He gently lobbed the stick into the pit.

“Now everybody can sleep easy,” Ambrosius joked.

“Right,” Nepos replied with a light laugh. “What’s next for you two?”

Home, I hoped, but for Ambrosius’ sake I said nothing. I figured if I were to say that, I would be saying that the search for Cai was over. Ambrosius said nothing and glanced at me with a look of uncertainty. Ambrosius shrugged his shoulders and replied, “Home.”

“Back —,” Nepos began.

“To Aureliani,” I finished.

“Right,” Ambrosius confirmed.

“So Merlinus, that’s your villa where we first met?”

“Correct,” I replied. “That little old villa is mine. The back part of the property sits on a high bank overlooking the Loire River.”

“It sounds incredible,” Nepos replied.

“It is,” Ambrosius added. “He has enough land walled in that deer can be taken at the back of his land. He has fruit trees near the river’s edge and I’ve spent several evenings watching deer scale the nearly vertical bank. Hah, they just can’t resist those trees.”

“There’s no wall back there?” Nepos asked.

“Not that runs parallel with the river,” Ambrosius clarified.

“Picture the enclosure walls of the estate as a horseshoe instead of a square. The tips of the shoe butt up against the Loire. The land forms a promontory into the river. The animals are so keen that they start upriver to account for the current. They can’t fight it and scale the steep bank. A man would have trouble coming to shore from a boat. It would be next to impossible for a person to do while in the water due to the contour of the shore and the depth of the water,” Ambrosius added.

“The deer must be using their hooves as picks, sticking them in the rocks and then hoisting themselves up,” Nepos remarked as he stood up and put some more wood in the dying fire.

“Exactly,” Ambrosius remarked as he mimicked the deer’s method of climbing. He grouped his fingers together to form the tip of the hoof and struck at the air several times. I laughed as I saw my old master suddenly before me. Ambrosius’ actions mirrored one of Dom Fu’s many fighting techniques.

“You don’t like my deer-climbing impression,” Ambrosius remarked. “I thought I was imitating it rather well. You disagree?”

“That’s the whole reason it strikes me as funny. You did it so well,” I remarked. “It reminded me of something I learned while in the forests of Mount Shaoshi. A master enlightened me about many things. One of them was fighting techniques based on the movements of animals. He showed how your deer-climbing impression could be turned into sharp precise punching.”

Mimicking Ambrosius’ motions, I threw a quick punch. The sleeve of my robe snapped in the air from my rapid motion. The two of them just stared at me for a moment.

Laughing a second later, Ambrosius remarked, “That’s impressive. But I don’t remember the deer making that fancy popping sound like you just did.”

“Well, dress them up in a robe and you might,” I replied.

Nepos laughed loudly and then asked, “How effective are they? I’ve heard stories of people fighting that way but never actually saw it demonstrated.”

“When performed by a true master, only the hand of God could bring about their defeat,” I plainly replied.

“So you are saying that you cannot be defeated in hand-to-hand combat?” Ambrosius remarked.

“I don’t ever recall saying that I was a true master,” I answered.

“You said that you learned some martial skills. How long does it take to master them?” Ambrosius inquired further.

“A lifetime,” I replied. “I was only fortunate to serve under Dom Fu for five years.”

“What happen?” Nepos asked. “Did he die?”

“Yes,” I replied.

“Did he teach at some sort of school or temple that you attended?” Ambrosius asked.

“No. It wasn’t anything like that. I don’t know of any place that teaches what he taught me. The man was a visionary. He showed me how to turn simple farming tools or even a walking stick into a deadly weapon. Maybe someday, there will be a temple like that, but I don’t foresee that happening any time soon.” I replied.

“I still want to see some animal tricks,” Ambrosius mocked.

“No tricks,” I replied. “They are refined responses to the actions of an attacker.”

“I’d still like to see a demonstration,” Ambrosius insisted.

“It is getting late and too dark to see anything, anyway,” I replied.

“Too late? Do you need a nap? Your deer technique tuckered you out?” he continued.

“No. I was thinking of your safety,” I answered. “I didn’t want you landing on a jagged rock when you ended up on the ground.”

“That’s it,” Ambrosius said as he stood up. “Now you have to back up your words with actions.”

“Why do you think I said it,” I replied with a smile and then stood up. Ambrosius stepped farther from the fire and waited for me. I stretched the muscles in my arms, legs, and sides.

“So what critter are you going to unleash on me?” Ambrosius teased.

“Snake,” I replied as I closed my eyes and drew in the cool midnight air. Envisioning a serpent, I started to sway and move like one.

“Have you been drinking too much wine again?” Ambrosius asked. “When did you want to begin?”

“I wait for you,” I replied as I continued to clear my mind of everything except for the moment and sounds of my surroundings.

“Are you going to open your eyes,” Ambrosius asked.

As I kept swaying side to side, I shook my head no. In that moment

Ambrosius dashed toward me. I heard his feet hitting the sand. His breathing grew louder as he rushed me. In perfect timing, I swayed to the right but kept my left foot anchored. Ambrosius tripped and flew face first into the sand.

“What the hell?” Ambrosius grumbled as he spit out bits of sand.

“Is that enough, young lord?” I asked.

“No,” Ambrosius barked. I listened to him lumbering to his feet. Unhurt, he still did not sound happy. Recklessly, he charged at me once more.

“That didn’t work the last time. Why will it this time?” I asked.

He came at me with his arms open wide as if to bull me over and take me to the ground. I stood still and reared back my fist like a snake’s head. With a serpentine jab, I struck Ambrosius squarely on his sternum. He dropped to his knees as I stole away his breath. He gasped for air as he placed his hands on the ground to keep himself from collapsing.

“You will be all right in a moment. Just try to relax,” I replied as I knelt down next to him.

Shaking his head, Nepos remarked, “How did you know when to strike with your eyes being closed? That was amazing.”

Ambrosius replied, “If you think so, let him demonstrate on you next.”

“No thanks,” Nepos remarked. “That’s not saying that I wouldn’t mind learning Merlinus’ animals tricks, though.”

“Me, too,” Ambrosius sputtered.

“Maybe someday, but just not tonight, for it is time for me to retire,” I finished.

“Well, then, good night, grand master,” Ambrosius said with a smile.

I knew he tried to compliment me. However, I corrected, “Please, do not dishonor the arts by calling me that. A grand master is another level above and several ranks higher than what I have achieved.”

“With your teacher gone, can you achieve anything higher?” Nepos questioned.

“Besides showing the Way, Dom Fu allowed me to copy the writings of some Oriental authors. Through him, I obtained precise translations of their works. A couple of years ago, I had shipped the codices to Aureliani. I wonder if they ever made it? I had forgotten about them until now. Ambrosius, remind me to ask Lady Alicia about them when we return home. I had them sent to her.”

“If he doesn’t, I will,” Nepos added. “I am fascinated by the Oriental traditions. It would be an honor to be instructed in their ways by you.”

“Don’t you think that might be difficult to do while serving Goar, his boy, Euthar, and the Church?” I asked.

“I would think so,” Ambrosius remarked. “The Way seems at odds with Christianity.”

“Only if you condemn free will,” I replied.

“What do you mean?” Ambrosius asked. “Why don’t you clarify yourself?”

“One is governed by one’s actions,” I replied. “Both Buddha and Pelagius would agree with that statement. It’s through free will that we can find and follow the Way.”

“It is just a guess, but I imagine the Church won’t condone that,” Ambrosius laughed.

“Nor would Goar, I imagine,” Nepos replied. “I wish there could be a way out of my obligations. Lord Merlin, is there anything that can be done? You’re familiar with Roman federation laws, are you not? Is there something I can do?”

Walking back by the fire, I sat down. Both Ambrosius and Nepos followed my lead and returned to their seats. I said nothing. Though an Alan by blood, I was only slightly familiar with the laws and customs of the Alans.

“I could only imagine two ways that such a thing could happen legally,” I began. “It would take a large sum of gold to compensate Goar and the Church for their loss of manpower, or you would have to do something of extraordinary significance and then you may be able to barter for your freedom.”

“Things are looking like they are not going to be changing any time soon,” Nepos replied.

“We’re not off the island, yet,” I replied.

“What does that mean?” Ambrosius asked.

“We haven’t been in London for quite some time,” I remarked. With a wide slow sweep of my hand, I added, “Even at times of peace, danger lurks in the shadows with greed. Security is an illusion that can only be cautiously trusted. The Empire has shown that, time and time again.”

“So are you saying that London may be under siege when we return?”  
Nepos asked.

“It’s possible,” I replied. “Anything is.”

Ambrosius shook his head and remarked, “I’m too tired to think this deeply.”

“It does drain a person,” Nepos added. “It feels like I have walked a mile since I’ve sat down.”

“You have,” I answered.

“What do you mean?” Nepos followed up.

“I’ll save that for another night,” I ended.

## CHAPTER 20

It was the fourth morning after the fire. I woke early. The sounds of folks moving about kept me from falling back to sleep. Near the back of the tent, Ambrosius remained sleeping. Though Nepos was unsuccessful in making contact with Cai, his efforts had set Ambrosius somewhat at ease. It gave the boy the feeling that he had done everything possible to find Cai. The air inside held a chill. I couldn't see my breath any longer, not like when we first arrived in London over a month ago.

Outside, a bustling world greeted me. The birds breezed by, and people hustled about. They worked on repairing the roofs of the huts. They had almost fixed the damage done by the fire.

Germanus had organized the repair work from where he lay in a nearby hut. He was able to do this by utilizing the manpower from the numerous people that came to visit. Needing to open land for the pilgrims' temporary camps, Germanus directed them to clear an area near the hamlet, which the elders had wanted to slash and burn, but until this point, lacked the manpower to achieve it. By clever insight, the bishop cured two problems with one solution. It seemed impossible to count the earthly miracles the locals applied to Germanus. In no way did he dispel them. If anything, he used the mystique and awe they held for him to keep them enchanted.

As I inspected the final repairs, I noticed Germanus outside. He watched them stand up the wattle for the walls and throw the thatch on the roof's wooden frame.

"Bishop," I called out, surprised to see him walking around without support of any sort.

The bishop's face glowed with a joyous humility. Bishop Lupus stood near him and nodded to me.

"Greetings, Merlinus," Germanus replied in a upbeat tone.

"It's good to see you out and about," I replied.

"The morning air does me good. I have no complaints," he replied.

“There’s no pain in the leg?” I asked.

“No. No pain,” he replied.

“That’s incredible. Has Camillus been helping you walk inside the tent for a while now? You seem to be walking smoothly without the usual tender step that follows an injury like yours,” I noted.

“No. This is the first time I tried to walk,” he replied.

“Really?”

“Honestly,” he answered. “You wouldn’t believe me if I were to tell you.”

“Try me,” I replied.

He remained silent for a moment as he looked at me.

“Okay,” he finally answered. “Last night, as I lay on my mat somewhere between wakefulness and a dream, a light began to illuminate the hut wall closest to my toes. The light increasingly poured through it as if a fire grew on the other side of it. A shining figure stepped through the light and into the hut next to where I lay.

“As I looked up, I saw someone that appeared to be a woman. The light and air rippled around the figure, conjuring strange shadows and concealing her features. Her sheer snow-white robe floated as if lighter than air, the same as her flowing locks of silver hair. Her loose, open sleeves, and long train hovered as if suspended by some unfelt wind.

“The energy allowed her to do the seemingly impossible. It was the radiating white light. It felt better than sunlight. It was conscious. Healing. It was God.

“The angel stretched out her open hand and declared, ‘Germanus, my loyal son, take my hand and stand. Stand firm, once more, upon your own two feet. From this moment forth, you shall feel no more pain from the fall.’

“As I reached up simply to take the angel’s hand, there was a sudden surge of light and then nothing, except the darkness of night. As my eyes adjusted to the little light within the hut, I realized that I was standing. I thought I only touched the fingertips of the figure. I didn’t realize that the angel had pulled me to my feet. But at that moment, I was standing and awake.

“I don’t feel any pain, not even when I walk heavily upon it. It feels no different from the other one.”

“Amazing,” I replied.

“Truly,” he answered.

“So what is your plan now, Bishop?” I replied.

“To London and then home. How does that sound?”

“Wonderful,” I answered.

## CHAPTER 21

As we rode down to London, I knew we weren't leaving the island just yet. Countless tents and temporary structures blanketed the grounds outside the city's twenty-foot-high wall. However, it wasn't a siege. People walked freely in and out of London as dusk settled. The gates stood open, or at least the one at Cripplegate did. We went past this entrance.

"We'll enter at Bishopsgate," Germanus remarked.

I noticed that Ambrosius had lagged off to the side of the train. Pulling my mount clear of the slow procession, I worked my way back to the young man. He sat on his mount looking over at one of the camps. Out of the numerous camps flying their family crests, this one had a white running boar upon a black and silver shield. It was the same as a flag that hung in Ambrosius' quarters back in Aureliani.

*It couldn't be Cai, could it? What would be the luck of that? It can't be Cai.*

"It's Cai," Ambrosius declared as he heeled his mount forward.

"Who could have guessed that. I don't have to give back those solidi, do I?" Nepos asked.

"Sure, you can give the gold coins back if you want," I replied.

"What if I don't want to give them back?" Nepos asked.

I laughed and added, "If you rode to Cornovia looking for Cai, then you did what I paid you to do," I answered.

"I did," Nepos answered.

"Then the gold coins are yours," I replied. "Use them wisely. Don't waste them on women and wine. Save them for what you spoke of the other night. What I gave might not have been much. It is a start, though."

"Okay," Nepos remarked with a light smile followed by a nod. "That was easy money."

"It won't always be that way," I replied.

"Right," Nepos replied.

Nepos and I followed Ambrosius' lead. He dismounted and walked the rest of the way to the front of the dark green tent.

"Cai," Ambrosius called out. "Cai of Cornovia."

"Who asks for him?" grumbled some man from within the tent.

"His brother," Ambrosius answered.

"What? Who?" the voice asked as it grew louder.

The flap of the tent lifted and a man with light-red hair walked out. It flowed down to his shoulders and was all one length. He kept it parted on his right side. His thick moustache hung down past the corners of his lips. He was about an inch taller than Ambrosius and a little more stocky. There was no facial resemblance, but I didn't expect to see any. He looked as if he hadn't slept in days or was simply worn down and sick. As Ambrosius looked upon him, the man's concerned look washed from his face. He replaced it with a bright smile.

"Ambrosius?" the man replied. "What the hell are you doing here?"

"I came to Britain to find you," Ambrosius remarked as he held Cai by the shoulders. Ambrosius looked him up and down, adding as he shook his head, "And it's a good thing I did. You look terrible."

Cai broke free of Ambrosius' grasp. Dropping low, Cai bear-hugged Ambrosius and stood up, holding him like a sack of apples.

"Now what are you going to do, little boy?" Cai barked as he spun in place. Halting, Cai extended his right hand in my direction.

As color returned to Cai's face, he added with a smirk, "Greetings, sir. Sorry about my little brother's manners. Father tried to teach him better. The boy simply neglects what he has been taught."

Cai set Ambrosius on his feet. Dizzy, Ambrosius stutter-stepped. He placed his hand on Cai's shoulder to steady himself.

"I'm Cai, son of Constantine," the red haired man remarked.

Before I could speak, Ambrosius remarked, "This is Nepos and that's Merlinus of Aureliani. He's been everywhere. He has seen the eastern oceans. That's farther than Alexander the Great marched."

The man's light smile faded and he stared straight into my eyes. Without looking away, he added, "And you've been to Barcelona."

"No," Ambrosius jumped in. "Not the shores of Hispania. I said the distant shores of the Orient. What did you call the place, Merlinus? You stayed five years in the forests of Mount Sushi? Wasn't that what you called it?"

“Mount Shaoshi. You called it the mountain of raw fish,” I replied.

“No,” Ambrosius replied. “Cai, it was Mount Shaoshi.”

Ambrosius’ correction meant nothing as Cai continued to stare at me. I simply nodded my head, knowing he knew what I had done.

“Right,” Cai added. “The Orient.”

Turning to Ambrosius, Cai said, “I’m sorry, I don’t have my head stuck in a book all day long, so I don’t always get the names right.”

Cai shoved Ambrosius away, and Ambrosius stumbled backwards.

“All joking aside,” Cai started, “Why have you come back, Brother? Is Ahès all right?”

“Oh, Mother’s fine. It’s nothing like that,” Ambrosius added. “Bishop Germanus of Auxerre was coming here to preach the orthodoxy as the Roman bishop has ordained it. I saw a simple opportunity to try to track you down. It wasn’t that simple. With Merlinus and a few other men, we traveled back to the old villa in Cornovia. I’m not too sure I like what you’ve done with the place while I’ve been gone.”

“You went back home?” Cai asked with sadness in his eyes.

Ambrosius nodded his head yes, as he lost his jovial smile.

“When?” Cai asked after a long moment of silence.

“Well, it was . . .” Ambrosius paused as he glanced at me.

“It has been nearly a month,” I answered.

“Amazing,” Cai replied. “We only missed each other by a few days. It was just over a month ago that we headed out for here. Several of the watchtowers on the Saxon Shore have been burned down. Looking back, those watchtowers might be tied into what’s happening here,” Cai remarked.

“What are you talking about?” I asked.

Glancing at me and then looking back at Ambrosius, he said, “Grallon married Hengist’s daughter and Hengist has been given Kent as a wedding gift from Grallon. Hengist has been using his men to forcibly tighten his grip on Kent.

“The Picts that had submitted to the Saxons are also being used against us. There’s word of other settlements revolting besides the ones in Kent. The timing seems too precise to be anything other than a staged revolt. The towers were taken out ahead of time to conceal their troop movement. There are reports of countless ships along the Saxon Shore now.”

“So what are you doing here?” Ambrosius asked.

“People are calling for the Council to convene. The members of the Council finally see the shortsightedness of Grallon’s reasoning. They are calling for a new Vortigern. There must be a new High Commander. Vortimer is the natural choice.”

Noticing that his rhetoric was getting loud, Cai fell silent, glanced from side to side, and replied, “Why don’t you three come on inside and relax for a moment?”

“Sounds good to me,” Ambrosius remarked. “I could use a quick drink. My throat is dry.”

“If Cai doesn’t have a problem with it, why don’t you and Nepos stay here and I’ll come back when I have had a chance to speak with Germanus,” I remarked. “Unfortunately, we need to stay abreast with what he is doing.”

“Oh, right,” Ambrosius answered as if he had forgotten, for the moment, who we were traveling with.

“That’s fine,” Cai remarked. “This way I can make sure Ambrosius stays out of trouble.”

“What about the Council? Won’t it be convening soon? Shouldn’t we attend it?” Ambrosius asked with a raised eyebrow.

I said nothing to question Cai’s character but I had my suspicions that Cai was still wanted and would be arrested upon arrival.

Cai chuckled and replied, “Brother, you are still a little naive.”

Ambrosius stood silent with a hurt look on his face.

“Oh don’t fret, kid. Stay innocent. Don’t follow my lead. At times, I have wandered off the right path.”

Staring deep into the young man’s eyes, Cai added, “Father wouldn’t approve of some of the things I have done. My presence at the Council would not be welcomed, unless you think being escorted away in shackles is welcoming.”

Looking at me and then at Ambrosius, Cai remarked, “At the time it seemed all right. I wasn’t as lucky as some when it comes to crossing a moral line. It just didn’t work out as I thought it would.”

With a light smirk, I added, “It never does.”

Looking back at me, he nodded his head and said, “Right. It never does.”

“Then it’s settled. I’ll catch up with Germanus. Once I know a little

more of the situation, I will come back.”

“Good,” Cai replied.

Turning, I left the tent, mounted up, and went in search of Germanus. I caught up with the bishops’ procession as the tail end of it passed through Bishopsgate and made my way to the front of it.

Noticing my approach, Germanus called out, “Where did you disappear to Merlinus? Where’s Ambrosius?”

“Ambrosius’ brother, Cai, is here. Ambrosius is staying with him,” I replied discreetly as I drew up closer to the bishop.

“Really? Well, that must have made young Ambrosius happy,” Germanus added.

“Yes, it did,” I remarked. “I told Ambrosius that I would touch base with you while he spent time with his brother.”

“Right. I’m happy you did. Lupus and I will be heading for the vicar’s palace soon,” Germanus answered. “I am hoping you will go with us to witness the Council.”

“Certainly,” I replied.

## CHAPTER 22

When we entered the palace, there were numerous men already waiting. A whole gamut of the gentry stood in circles in casual conversations. Some of the faces appeared to be familiar from our time in London, but none of them had I met. Remaining silent, I meandered with the bishops. Germanus drew some of the clergy from the crowd.

“Greetings, Bishop Germanus,” remarked a young man who looked like Lupus. He was thin and somewhat tall. He had Lupus’ green eyes, short brown hair, and his soft features. He didn’t appear sickly like Camillus. “I am Elafius. It is uplifting to have someone such as yourself expressing the orthodoxy so eloquently. Not all here can appreciate it, but I do.”

“Thank you, young man. It is good to see eager souls gathering by God’s light for His guidance and grace. You were the one that traveled to the synod in Gaul?” Germanus asked.

“That’s correct,” Elafius remarked.

More people filtered in. The others took little heed of them.

“When will the Council convene?” Lupus remarked.

Glancing around, Germanus and Elafius slowly surveyed the men in the large open room. For the most part, the nobles remained in small groups of four to five men. There were about ten separate clusters.

“Neither Vortimer nor his father are here,” the Briton remarked.

“That’s right. Nothing will begin until at least one of them arrive,” Germanus added.

Two men came in through the side entrance. Other men close by took notice of their presence. Though their hair color and heights were different, the two men appeared related. They had similar facial features. They shared the same nose and the same dimpled chin. The first had black hair with a short-trimmed moustache that only partly covered his upper lip. His hair was kept short. He had oils in it, giving it a slick, wet look. The other had long hair. It was a sandy brown, bushy, and wavy,

the opposite of Nepos' thin, straight hair, and it was kept in a ponytail. They both wore a short tunic drawn in at the waist by a leather belt and trousers. The first had a dark green tunic; the other a tan one. Both wore dark brown trousers.

"Who's this?" I asked as I nodded toward the side door.

"The lead is Vortimer and I believe the one behind him is his brother, Katigern. Don't you recognize Vortimer, Merlinus?" Germanus added.

"Actually, no," I replied. "I never did meet Vortimer."

"Really? Not even when you —," Germanus started.

"No," I added cutting the bishop off.

Following a brief silence in our circle, Elafius added, "Bishop, you are correct. That is Katigern trailing close behind Vortimer."

"Fellow councilmen, may I have a moment of your time?" Vortimer called out as he went to the center of the large rectangular room. All fell silent as the gathered men recognized him.

"I believe it's quite apparent why we are here," Vortimer began in a calm even tone. "Many — myself included -- have grown tired of the Saxon presence on this island. And now, topping all of his many misdeeds, Grallon has given Kent to the Saxons without consulting anyone in this room. I learned of my father's new wife from a servant boy. Maybe, it slipped my father's mind to tell his sons about his marriage to a Saxon. This is unacceptable. There was no council convened. Something must be done. We don't want his leadership or his army of Saxon dogs."

"Before rendering judgment, can I voice my side of the situation?" Grallon called out. The whole room turned toward him. He walked in from the same side entrance his sons had used moments ago. Two young nobles, a few years older than Ambrosius, trailed behind Vortigern.

Staring at Grallon, Vortimer barked, "If your version was worth hearing, then maybe you should have voiced it before taking the vows."

Grallon's smirk vanished. He quickly realized as he glanced around the room of solemn faces that most felt as Vortimer did.

"Well, it seems a little rash to send away the men that have guarded our eastern shores for the last five years," Grallon remarked as he walked closer to the center of the room facing Vortimer and Katigern.

"Well, it seems idiotic to give away the land of a noble that has faithfully served this island longer than you've been High Commander," Vortimer fired back.

Anger burned in Grallon's cheeks. His fists clenched as he came to a halt. Silence filled the room as we waited for Grallon's response.

"So what is it you suggest, oh wise son of mine?" Grallon sneered. "Should we get rid of all of our defenses? You think I am doing something crazy by having barbarians govern our shores. This is standard practice throughout the Empire. Aëtius uses the Huns as we use the Saxons."

"No wonder the Empire is falling to pieces," Vortimer mocked.

"What would you suggest we do?" Grallon barked back.

"These Saxons need to go back to their homeland," Vortimer began. "They've served their purpose. They helped to sustain us in our transition from imperial dependence to true independence. Our people understand the need for protection and have stepped up to provide it."

"I don't believe we have obtained that just yet. I believe we need the Saxons, still. There shall be deadly consequences if they leave prematurely," Grallon retorted.

"I believe we will be worse off if they stay. I do not trust them. They want more and do less," Vortimer quickly added.

"Exactly," a man remarked from the crowd. His words parted the sea of people around him. I had no clue who this man was, but others remained silent as he stepped away from his cohorts. He stood at the same height as Vortimer and had his black hair, but it was much longer. It was thin and hung straight like Nepos' hair. His black hair had receded up his forehead. He had trimmed his goatee short. Glancing at Elafius, I saw a strong resemblance between him and the man speaking. There were several years between the two. Elafius was obviously the younger one.

"I am on the other side of the island in Gloucester, and I am concerned with the growing number of these pagan pigs," the man stated.

"I agree with Eldol," a young man added as he stepped forward. The young man had sandy brown hair and it was shaped like the top of a mushroom. He had a patchy beard and was only a few years older than Ambrosius.

"My brother, Lot, and I have seen firsthand the value of these Saxons are. In the beginning, they served a purpose. It's always better having barbarians killing barbarians. But now it has grown apparent that the Saxons and Picts have banded together in their raids on British lands. We don't want them any longer. Frankly, we don't need them."

“Why did the Saxons have to help if you could handle it?” barked one of the young men with Grallon. He shared facial features with Vortimer and Katigern but had strawberry blonde hair and freckles.

“Paschent,” Grallon barked.

“Well, it’s taken a little bit of time for my brother to reorganize the defenses. Half of the troops left with Lord Kendel, my father, to protect against the Irish raiding in Demetia, since your father has proven either unable or unwilling to tackle the task.”

Paschent went to say something, but Vortigern put his hand up and the young man remained silent.

“I didn’t come to bicker, or to get belittled by a boy. It appears to me that the only issue at hand is if the Saxons should stay on your land or mine. This issue is easily resolved. As Vortigern of this council, I decree that each magistrate can decide how to defend their lands. And as a true lord, it’s your responsibility to defend the people and the lands of Britain.”

“Father, you’ve heard Urian of Moray and Eldol’s opinions. And what about Gorrannus’ opinion? I’m sure we all can guess what his is. Or have you once again forgotten about the noble citizen besieged on his own lands by the Saxon enemy,” Vortimer candidly remarked. A look of spite and growing hatred hung in the back of his eyes. The young man’s stare dropped to the floor and he shook his head. Vortimer seemed ashamed that Grallon was his father. Grallon remained silent.

“Saxons are not the enemy,” remarked the other man near Grallon. He didn’t share any facial features with Grallon’s other sons. He did have greenish blue eyes. His hair was sandy brown like Urian, but his wasn’t thick and it was much longer. He kept it pulled back in a ponytail.

“Hah,” Urian jumped in. “Ceretic, we should have expected such an answer from the bastard son of a Saxon whore. It’s not your fault that Grallon didn’t marry your mamma.”

“You dare insult my mother. She is a queen,” Ceretic remarked as his hand reached for his sword.

“She’s the queen of no one on this council. I speak the truth,” Urian sneered as his hand rested on the hilt of his sword. “If you feel it’s an insult then, take it up with whose fault it is, your parents.”

Ceretic went to lunge at Urian but Grallon held him back.

Vortimer stared at Urian and barked, “Watch your tongue, or I’ll cut it out as if you were one of Conan’s wives.”

Young Urian fell silent.

“Like my father, I didn’t come here to bicker. I came here to work out real solutions to our mounting problems. We don’t want the expense of these Saxons any longer. If you want to maintain them, then, they shall tax your personal funds. No taxes collected through this council shall be used to garrison the Saxons. In the matter of Lord Gorrannus, he must have his lands restored. He should be compensated for what has been unlawfully unleashed upon him.”

“It can’t be done,” Grallon remarked in a dismissing tone.

“It can and it shall be done, either by diplomacy or levied force,” Vortimer calmly replied.

“How can you give me an ultimatum? I will not accept such terms. As Vortigern, I do not have to,” Grallon mocked.

Almost in a whisper, Vortimer remarked, “I was afraid that you were going to say that.”

Grallon smirked as if he thought that he would get what he wanted. Vortimer shook his head slowly in disbelief.

“As a member of this council, I am casting a vote of no confidence in its current High Commander,” Urian loudly proclaimed over Vortimer’s shoulder.

Vortimer merely shook his head as if he knew exactly how things were about to unfold.

“As a member of this council, you should realize that requires the sealed written intent of any absent noble,” Grallon dictated.

“My brother, Lot, personally signed his letter of intent in front of me before I traveled to my father, Kendel, lord of the Powys. Once there, I received my father’s sealed intent,” Urian remarked as he pulled out the rolled letters from inside his tan leather vest.

“There are others on this council not present besides the members of your troublesome family,” Ceretic remarked.

Until now, I hadn’t noticed the man as he filtered through the crowd of people. He was a short, stout man with olive skin. Deep but gentle lines of time chiseled his face. Gray sprinkled his black hair. He held two scrolls in his right hand.

“For those here that do not know me, I am Honorius of Gwent,” the man said clearly but in a low voice. “I hold the sealed intent of Lord Coel of York and his son, Germanianus of Catterick.”

Grallon raised his fingers to his forehead and tried to massage away the mounting migraine. He glanced at Honorius as he held up the letters for all to see. A man standing with Honorius was regally dressed. He wore a woad-dyed tunic with black trousers. A wide black belt drew in his blue shirt. He had black hair, but it was nearly absent on the top of his head. He wore a full beard trimmed short. Though he only had hair from ear to ear on the back of his head, the man didn't appear old. He looked about the age of Elafius, which was no more than ten years older than I.

Grallon called out, "Lord Gorlois, you have not voiced your opinion. What say you?"

"This issue has not directly affected me, so I don't feel it is my place to state my opinion. I do not want my opinion influencing the Council one way or another," Gorlois remarked.

"You're part of this council. It is your responsibility to express your opinion to its members," Grallon ordered. "This is the only way a sound judgment can be issued."

"Well, then," the man began. "I believe your son, Vortimer, has expressed my thoughts on the matter, also. I believe, at this time, we would be better off if we got rid of the Saxon auxiliaries. Since the Empire has cut us loose, we suffered through several bloody years. We have grown strong and no longer need the Saxons' services."

"I believe you're mistaken on this assessment. Therefore, I can not agree to it," Grallon declared.

"In that case, I back the others in their vote of no confidence in you as High Commander," Gorlois replied.

"All of you are sadly mistaken," Grallon remarked. "Who will lead if it isn't me? Urian?"

"I couldn't do any worse than what you have done," Urian barked.

Walking closer to the center of the room, in a low, even tone, Honorius remarked, "I feel that Vortimer should take the position of High Commander."

Honorius' nomination surprised Vortimer. The lord turned toward the elder councilman. A bewildered look hung on his face.

"I don't believe I am the best choice for being the new Vortigern," Vortimer added.

"Vortimer, you have my vote, also," Gorlois added.

"Why?" Vortimer asked. "I want to nominate you, Lord Gorlois."

Gorlois nodded at Vortimer and smiled. Stepping forward, Gorlois added, "I'm not the one on the front line. I'm not the one needing to make decisive decisions without a moment's delay. I have no lands on the east side of the island. Since you reside in London at times, it must be you, Lord Vortimer. Logistically, I can't. There's no time to do what was done when the Kendel clan moved to Powys, while Lot remained near the Wall. And if I know Lord Coel as well as I think I do, I imagine that you were his choice." Shifting his glance to Honorius, Gorlois asked, "Am I correct, dear elder?"

Honorius separated the letters and held one up for all to see. Stepping toward Grallon, the elder remarked, "Here is his sealed intent. If anyone questions Lord Coel's choice, they may read it."

Ceretic reached out and took the letter from Honorius' hand.

"Ceretic, that's not necessary," Grallon remarked as he looked Honorius in the eyes.

"How do you know for certain, Father?" asked Paschent.

Without hesitation, Ceretic broke the seal and unrolled the scroll. His eyes rapidly scanned it line by line.

"Lord Coel speaks of the watchtowers being torched and knocked down. He tells of growing tensions in East Riding. The Saxons are demanding more and doing less," paraphrased Ceretic.

"See. This is proof," Urian declared.

"This is standard rhetoric," Ceretic deemed.

Urian shook his head, put his hand on his hips, and turned away. From my angle, I watched him sputter some slurs.

With an evil grin, Ceretic spouted out, "What do any of these letters matter when we still lack the nobles, Gerontius and Cai. If they still can be considered that. To many they are mere outlaw rabble, but I believe they are still recognized as noblemen of this council. With that being said, they must be present, since this council wasn't convened for the purpose of voting in a new High Commander."

The room fell quiet. They knew that Ceretic quoted their law correctly. Though he obviously twisted it to serve his purpose. I glanced over at Germanus, and he looked away. He knew what I was thinking, but he chose to remain neutral. Ceretic's grin grew as the opposition faded. Honorius simply shook his head and turned away. Gorlois glanced at the others, surprised that no one was voicing a protest.

“Is it really necessary to have Cai and Gerontius present? Their so-called outlaw status is due to their opposition to the Saxon incursion into Cornovia. They were expressing our intent over a year ago in this very room.” Urian declared.

“The issue of a new High Commander is crucial. We must follow the laws as they have been agreed upon. The laws have been instilled to protect against the natural anarchy within a council. Like what seems to be developing now.” Paschent interjected.

“Then,” Vortimer spoke up, “we need only one of them present.”

Paschent glanced over at Ceretic and then Grallon.

“Vortimer’s correct,” Ceretic remarked. “If there’s an unannounced call of no confidence, only one noble’s opinion may be missing, under the premise that death is always among us.”

“No one is greater than the whole. It is that way so civil order can be sustained in troubled times,” Vortimer remarked.

I heard people exhaling heavily; that’s how quiet everyone remained for a moment.

“You’re still lacking them both,” Ceretic lightly objected.

The look of defeat sank sadly into Gorlois’ face. Still, Germanus remained silent. Gorlois’ head dropped down as he turned away.

“Cai of Cornovia can be summoned,” I remarked.

All of the eyes in the room shifted and locked upon me. For a moment, I regretted saying a word. Even Germanus stared uncomfortably at me. Hah, like the time in Barcelona. Suddenly, I knew I was doing the right thing.

“What did you say?” Vortimer asked as he stared at me.

“Lord Cai can be summoned to this council and he can express his intent,” I blandly replied.

“Besides the fact that you are not part of this council, who are you?” Paschent asked as Ceretic took closer notice of me.

Grallon recognized me and shook his head in disbelief.

“Merlinus, you insist on being my destroyer. I have always provided you with fair dealings and safe passage. In return, you remain like sand in my eye. Since you have crossed my path, I have had nearly all of my estates and titles from Armorica stripped away and now people are trying to dethrone me. How fitting.”

“You’ve brought this on yourself, Lord Grallon,” Germanus added.

“It’s done,” Grallon conceded. “Vortimer is High Commander. The fate of this island lies within his hands, now. You can blame me no longer.”

“A notice shall be sent out to the absent nobles informing them of the turn of events,” Vortimer declared. “Meanwhile, I shall march out to support Lord Gorrannus and drive the heathens from his lands. Who shall march out with me?”

“I will,” called out Lord Eldol.

“As will I,” followed Lord Gorlois.

“Good,” Vortimer added. “With that settled, only one more matter needs addressing. As High Commander, I deem it necessary to reinstate the Roman register of offices. This will sustain civil order.”

“Then what’s next, taxes for the boy-emperor Valentinian?” barked Ceretic.

“Hah, that’s not what Vortimer is calling for,” Honorius sneered. “Maybe you’re not old enough, but I remember the time we petitioned the Romans for help. The Empire told us to defend ourselves. Soon after, the Goths sacked Rome.

“As Rome struggled to survive, we sought help elsewhere. We sent an appeal to Agroetius, the usurper Jovinus’ head chancellor. We agreed to be governed by Jovinus in exchange for protection. But when this usurper revealed his own lack of power, we expelled Jovinus’ magistrates and took steps to govern ourselves.

“Rome’s leaders failed us. Roman laws did not. To this day, we utilize their laws to maintain order. If this council I speak at does not have the semblance of the Roman Senate, then where do I find myself at this moment?”

The Council fell silent as Honorius paused. His words caught the nobles off guard. He spoke the truth and his words were sincere. They didn’t know how to object. How could they? I watched Ceretic as he stewed in silence. He was trying to think of some objection that he could voice.

“What’s stopping any noble from objecting to this sub-Roman standard of government?” Ceretic barked. “What’s stopping anyone from appealing directly to an imperial power, possibly General Aëtius?”

“Nothing,” Vortimer fired back. “Just as no one stopped some of the nobles from contacting Agricola, consul and prefect of Gaul, nearly ten years ago. I remember when that happened. At least he sent

a nominal force to Demetia to protect his family's holdings. It's unfortunate that he died that year. His efforts made a slight difference, but not enough. So a third appeal to Aëtius would have little or no consequence, in my opinion. Honestly, what interest would the general have in this island. We are on the wrong side of the current Roman frontier. Besides, he has no family interest here like Agricola did. Our value to the Empire is nothing compared to Africa or Gaul, for that matter. These lands are not free of trouble and cost more to maintain. Our pleas will be neglected.

"We have been on our own since the sacking of Rome," Honorius added as he stared at Ceretic. "Not all of us have accepted this fact but should."

"So by Vortimer being Vortigern of this council, does that also make him the Vicar of London?" Ceretic questioned.

"No," Vortimer answered. "This city is Augusta on the fringe of the western world. London is an open city for all. I don't believe that can be maintained, if I lead as High Commander of the Council's army and Vicar of London. Besides, the duties of Vortigern mirror those of the Count of Britain."

"Awh, this is outrageous," Paschent cried out loudly. "Next, you'll expect us to address you as the Emperor of the British. We don't need any more political charades."

"No," Vortimer retorted. "That's not what I'm saying."

"Lord Vortimer is not trying to instill something radical here. In my opinion, he behaves in a very rational manner," Lord Honorius added in his slow, dignified manner.

"Right, I'm not suggesting anything radical," Vortimer added. "Lord Coel was Duke of the Northern Front before the collapse of Rome and still he remains there with his son, Germanianus, his heir apparent. As I suggested, I shall be the Count of Britain. By de facto, I am doing this by being High Commander of the Council's mobile army."

"This still leaves two of the major offices empty," Ceretic declared. "Naturally, there is the Vicar of London, but there is also the Count of the Saxon Shore. Who are you going to dictate to these prominent posts?"

"No one," Vortimer fired back. "As I have stated before, Britain is ruled by a council, not a dictator. Leaders are elected based on merit and logic. In accordance, I nominate Katigern to be the Count of the Saxon Shore. Currently, he commands the Saxon fort near Colchester and

he has battle-proven skills and handles his army efficiently.”

“Well, so what?” Paschent spouted off. “I nominate Ceretic. He controls Portchester.”

“With Grallon’s help,” Urian stated. “Ceretic has not been tested and proved honorable like your older brother has. Unlike Ceretic or yourself, Katigern has traveled to the Northern Front and participated in the major offenses against Drust and his damn Picts.”

“Then, who shall be the Vicar of London?” Ceretic questioned. “I nominate Lord Grallon.”

“Hah,” Urian laughed. “You can’t be serious.”

“Why not?” Ceretic snapped back.

“When I think of your father controlling London, it doesn’t seem as open and free as Vortimer is intending it to be,” Urian spouted back.

“Then who?” Paschent jumped in.

“Jonah,” Vortimer clearly stated.

“The old Jew?” Paschent scoffed. “Hah, you must be joking.”

“I’m not,” Vortimer confirmed.

“He’s unacceptable,” Paschent ranted.

“Why? What legitimate objection is there?” Vortimer stated. “Jonah is an honorable man and has held the respect of this city longer than you have been alive. I stand by my choices. What says this council?”

The room exploded as everyone voiced their opinions at once.

“Silence,” Lord Vortimer shouted. A wave of grumbling washed through the room.

“Lord Eldol, are these choices acceptable?” Vortimer asked.

“Yes,” the old lord added with a nod.

“And you, Lord Gorlois?” Vortimer continued.

“Jonah is fine,” he replied. “And, there could be no better choice than Katigern to be the Count of the Saxon Shore.”

“They are both acceptable to me,” Honorius added.

“I have my hesitations with the Jew, but none with Katigern or the men that have endorsed them both so far,” Urian remarked. “So I support both choices.”

“Well, they are unacceptable to me,” Paschent barked.

“That doesn’t matter,” Lord Vortimer remarked. “The majority have consented to my choice. The council has spoken. Your objection has been nullified.”

Paschent stewed in silent discontent.

“So Jonah, will you accept this post and serve to maintain order in London on behalf of this council?” Vortimer called out. “A large squad of soldiers will be mandated to assist you in this difficult task.”

“On that note, I shall accept the honor that the Council has bestowed upon me,” an old man remarked as he stepped forward. This man looked like nothing I had expected. He was shorter and older than I had assumed. He might have been older than both Honorius and Grallon. None of the other prominent men were close to their age except Eldol. Still, Eldol was at least ten years younger than the other three. Jonah was the shortest elder at the council meeting. He had short gray hair parted down the middle. His eyes were like little black berries. Underneath his thick nose, Jonah kept his moustache short. It covered much of his upper lip. He wore a tan tunic with brown trousers.

“Good. Then this matter is settled,” Lord Vortimer finished.

As the Council slowly dispersed, I noticed Honorius of Gwent walking toward Lupus, Germanus, and I.

“Greetings, Bishop Germanus,” the old noble remarked as he drew within an arm’s length of us.”

“Hello, Lord Honorius,” Bishop Germanus replied with a smile. “It has been too long since we last spoke. How does life treat you?”

“All things considered, I am well,” he replied.

“That’s good,” Germanus remarked. “I will be sure to let Ahès know. She will be glad to hear that.”

“I’m also happy to hear that,” Honorius added. “In truth, she is the reason I’ve taken this moment to speak with you. It is my understanding that she currently resides at a villa on the outskirts of Aureliani.”

“That is correct,” Germanus replied. “She is still there.”

“Good,” the old noble replied. “Before she left Britain, she had informed me that if I needed to contact her that I should send the message through you.”

“Of course, there’s no problem with that,” the bishop quickly replied. “What message do you need relayed to her?”

“Well, it’s not really a message but a request,” Honorius started. “I have a granddaughter named Priscilla. She and Ahès like each other and have corresponded more frequently than my purse cares for. And due to the current unrest on the island, I would like you to ask Ahès

if Priscilla may stay with her for a while. All cost of accommodations and hospitality shall be well compensated. I hope you would vouch for me.”

Smiling and before I could say anything, Germanus remarked, “How quick of a response were you needing, my old friend?”

“The sooner the better. The Irish are raiding on the west side more frequently. I would be crushed if my precious Priscilla was taken and turned into a slave girl, or something worse. It happen to an associate of mine several years ago. Calpornius was so distraught for so long when his sixteen-year-old son was taken and sold into slavery. Luckily, his son escaped and came back to Britain. The boy is actually in the Order as we speak.”

“I’m sure Bishop Germanus can give you an answer before this night is through,” I jumped in.

Turning to me, he gave me a stern stare and asked, “How is that possible? And who are you? Merlin? Marius? What is your name? Grallon knows you and you know Cai of Cornovia.”

“He is Merlinus of Aureliani,” Germanus said with a smile. “He owns the villa where Ahès currently resides.”

The old man laughed loudly and added, “I feel like a fool.”

“No, no. That’s my fault, my old friend,” Germanus added as he placed his hand on Honorius’ shoulder. “I strung you along for fun. I apologize for that. It was poor timing.”

“Regardless,” I cut in. “Your granddaughter is welcome to visit Ahès at my villa. She can stay as long as you permit. If you so request, I shall put my permission in writing, but I don’t believe that will be necessary.”

“Thank you, young lord,” the old man remarked as he reached out his hand to shake mine. “You cannot imagine the relief you have just provided my old heart.”

“Think nothing of it, sir,” I added. “Besides being a friend of Bishop Germanus, Ahès has spoke of your kindness. So, as I said, think nothing of it.”

“Again, thank you,” the old lord finished with a smile.

## CHAPTER 23

We didn't march out with Vortimer, the other nobles, and their assembled armies. Instead, Germanus had us remain in London, saying that we would be leaving shortly.

"We are not here for that," Germanus told Ambrosius days later in Germanus' tent.

"I thought we were here to protect the British?" Ambrosius questioned.

"Jonah shall help Vortimer maintain order here in London. We are here to protect them spiritually, not physically," the bishop corrected.

"How can they be taught what is spiritually right if they are physically dead?" Ambrosius questioned.

"What truly matters in this world of flesh and corruption? One must strive for harmony with God. That is the true meaning of life," Germanus remarked.

"How is such a holy balance obtained when one must abandon all sense and logic for blind faith?" Ambrosius asked.

"Not blind faith but reliance on the written words of apostles and prophets," Lupus remarked.

"It appears that the new orthodoxy doesn't matter when its servants do not help the very ones they preach to," Ambrosius added.

Germanus went to say something but stopped when the angry young man marched past him and went outside Germanus' tent. The bishop looked at me for an explanation of Ambrosius' actions. Instead of responding, I remained tight lipped and went after the young man.

The young man stood by himself some distance from any tent. He stared at the western skies.

Hearing my approach, Ambrosius called out, "I cannot believe he will not raise a hand to help these people."

"I can," I replied as I finished walking up to him. "It doesn't serve

his purpose. You heard him say that.”

“Why doesn’t it?” Ambrosius asked.

“It doesn’t matter what side he backs. He would be alienating one set of nobles, either way,” I stated. “I believe this is the main reason he hasn’t picked a side. He is here simply to preach Catholicism as Rome views it. Nothing more.”

“So nothing will change his position?” Ambrosius questioned.

“From what I know of him, I doubt it,” I remarked. “There is no reason I know of that would make him handle it any other way.”

“Doesn’t he have any emotional connection with these people, no family, no true British friends besides Grallon?” Ambrosius asked.

“Not that I am aware of,” I answered.

“This is unbelievable,” Ambrosius grumbled. “Isn’t God better served by defending what’s right rather than doing nothing?”

“Not always,” I answered. “It’s never that simple when blood is being drawn.”

“So you are saying that we should do nothing?” Ambrosius repeated as his tone grew angry. “Something has happened. It’s been happening for several years now. Grallon has been stealing lands and giving them to his Saxon cronies.”

“If that’s truly the case, why didn’t you deal with him when we saw him over a month ago,” I remarked. “Why did you let me hold you back?”

When he tried to speak, I interrupted him. “Why didn’t you just walk up to him with your boiling rage and cut him down as if he were Julius Caesar? Explain yourself. Are you a coward?”

As my words sank in, he released a heavy sigh. I knew what he felt, but I wasn’t trying to make light of what happened to him at the hands of Grallon’s men.

I cut him off again when he spoke. “Don’t worry too much about what I just said. I only wanted you to think about what you are committing yourself to. Besides, I’m sure you will get your chance to set things right if we stay much longer.”

“How do you figure that?” Ambrosius asked.

“It would be extremely difficult not to fight if we are under siege,” I remarked.

“Under siege? Here in London? Would they dare?” he asked.

“Yes. The Saxons have to take this city to take the island,” I stated.

“They are using Grallon’s wedding as provocation for their revolt.”

“Merlinus,” a loud voice called out from behind us.

Turning, we saw Camillus running toward us. His cheeks were flushed.

“Sorry for the intrusion, sir,” Camillus remarked. “Bishop Germanus wanted me to find both of you.”

“What’s wrong?” I asked.

“The Saxons are marching to raid the Darenth Valley. Bishop Germanus worries that they shall sack and burn all of the villas that remain in the valley. The bishop was hoping you and Ambrosius would ride out with us.”

“Ride out?” I questioned.

“Yes,” Camillus answered.

“Of course,” Ambrosius remarked.

Glancing at him and then looking back at me, Camillus waited for my response.

“We will ride out with the bishop,” I remarked.

“Good,” Camillus answered.

# CHAPTER 24

Night had fallen. A thick chill hung underneath the open starlit sky. Only Nepos and the other Alan troops rode out with us. Cai and his men had rode back to Cornovia to ensure the region stay free of marauders. We had crossed the bridge over the Thames River. Most of the riders carried burning torches as we galloped along the Roman road that ran southeast. We headed for the villa of Evodius.

Before leaving, Germanus stated that this old imperial officer lived by Episford on the Darenth River. Germanus showed concern for this man's well-being. From what I could gather, the bishop had known him for quite some time.

Eventually as the full moon hung low on the open horizon, we approached the large villa of Evodius as it sat on a low terrace cut into the hill near the Darenth River. Smoke bellowed up above it from a chimney hidden mostly from sight. All seemed peaceful and quiet.

Much of the hedged-off fields had lain fallow last year. A circular building stood nearby. Nothing appeared out of order. A steady curl of smoke sailed skyward from the furnace in the building between the villa and small circular building. It reminded me of coming home to Aureliani earlier this year. My heart sank as I suddenly longed to be home.

"Merlinus, tell the squadron to remain here. We will ride ahead and confirm where they can set up camp." Germanus commanded.

"Yes," I replied.

After translating his orders, I rode out the rest of the way to the villa with the bishops. As we were dismounting, a tall, broad-shouldered man walked down the long portico. He had a full head of hair that was cut short of the base of his neck. His black locks curled slightly close to his brow. A thick beard covered his face. The lines along his eyes and cheeks hinted at his old age. He had little gray hair.

He wore Roman robes and sandals and held a burning torch high to cast as much light as possible.

“Greetings, Germanus,” the man replied. “It has been too long since we last spoke.”

“True enough, Evodius” the bishop replied. “Can we call upon your hospitality for the night?”

“Absolutely,” the man answered. “Set up camp near the villa. Avoid the lowlands by the river. They are saturated from heavy spring rains.”

Turning to me, Germanus remarked, “Merlinus, tell the men. Afterwards, make your way back to the villa if you so wish. We shall be up talking for a while, I imagine.”

“Yes, Bishop,” I replied.

After speaking with Nepos, Ambrosius and I made our way back to the villa. A servant boy waited by the front pillars.

“Sir, I’ll take you to my master,” the boy remarked.

“Thank you,” I replied.

The little boy led Ambrosius and me through the east verandah and into the audience chamber. He then led us into a large apsidal room with a domed ceiling that gave much space to the room. The triclinium in the dining room was empty.

I noticed the mosaic. It was superb. A naked woman rode side-saddle on a bull. I would only be guessing, but it appeared to be an image of Jupiter’s abduction and rape of Europa. Germanus, Lupus, and Evodius stood to the right in the reception room down the west corridor.

“Ah yes, Merlinus and young Ambrosius,” Germanus called out as he noticed me.

The villa’s host turned around and faced us.

“Evodius,” Germanus remarked. “The lad is the son of Ahès and Constantine of Cornovia. This gentleman is Merlinus of Aureliani. He’s serving as our interpreter. He has quite the talent with languages. Besides Latin and Greek, he has mastered a few barbaric tongues, also.”

“Really? Which ones?”

“My mother is an Alan. I learned the Gothic tongue from my father’s mother. I speak certain Oriental dialect. When I lived in the great forests of Mount Shaoshi, I had met a generous elder who was a master of many arts. I stayed five years under his tutorship,” I replied.

“Impressive. It’s a pleasure to meet you and your friend,” the Roman remarked as he held out his hand. With a firm grip, we shook hands.

“This is a very fine villa,” I remarked.

“The finest in the valley,” Germanus added.

“That’s not saying much anymore,” Evodius laughed. “Many of the villas are dilapidated or vacant. They are being stripped of their reusable material like their clay shingles, roof joists, and anything else salvageable.”

“Well, Germanus is right, then. That surely makes your villa the best in the valley,” Ambrosius joked.

“Right, right,” Evodius laughed.

“Merlinus,” Germanus remarked, “Evodius has been explaining current affairs to us. Dover and Richborough have been taken. Vortimer and his men have been pushed back west of Canterbury.”

“I just received a written dispatch shortly before your arrival,” Evodius replied. “It appears that Lord Vortimer is heading back to London. In addition, a large squad of Saxon infantry marched south for Ashford. They are seeking to finish off Gorrannus.”

“Will they succeed?” Ambrosius asked.

“There’s a good chance that the Saxons have already taken him and are turning north for London,” said the host.

“They would not dare such a thing, would they?” Lupus remarked.

Smiling slightly, Evodius observed, “The wolves have grown brave and fearless of the shepherd.”

“London must not fall,” Ambrosius decreed. His spiritedness surprised even me.

“Indeed,” Evodius remarked as his hand palmed his head. “The villas of the Darenth Valley are defenseless. They are outdated and have outlived simpler, safer times.”

“You should go with us to London,” Germanus declared as he rested his hand on Evodius’ shoulder.

With a light laugh, the old host said, “If I were to live my last days in logic I would go to London, but I’m not. This is my home, it may not be much in the grand imperial scheme of things, but I will lawfully hold this villa, just the same. I will not allow it to be taken from me illegally. I will burn it down before I would allow it to be taken. As God as my witness, I swear it shall be done. What will you do, Bishop Germanus?” Evodius asked. “When will you be heading back to London?”

Germanus glanced at Ambrosius, myself, then Lupus and saw the same question on all our faces. The bishop remained silent. He ran his fingertips through his shortly trimmed beard, much of it gray.

“Sides are gathering and boundaries are being defined,” Germanus replied. “Wouldn’t you agree, Merlinus?”

“That is a fair assessment of the situation,” I answered. “It would be good to know all who stood with Vortimer and how they fared at the moment. A truer consensus is needed. Communication is crucial.”

“Right,” Evodius replied. “If the way stations were securely within Vortimer’s command, we could get word to York in half a day. But, it’s difficult to say if that’s true or not. A rider should be safe until he nears Cambridge. From there to Lincoln, no one is safe except a Saxon. We are left open to these invaders. There are no walls here like in London.”

“Being here in the North Downs, the natural terrain acts as somewhat of a deterrent. Besides the headwaters of Darent, are there any other passages through the North Down?” Germanus asked.

“There’s the Stour Valley running south from Canterbury to Ashford and then there is Medway Valley. This valley basically splits the North Downs in half. Hengist will need to at least hold Medway Valley to keep Canterbury secure,” the host replied.

“London will be cut off from the south. I doubt that Ceretic will stop the Saxons from driving north,” I replied.

In a questioning pause, Germanus glanced at Evodius.

“Yes,” the retired officer replied. “There is no doubt what side he is on and the same goes for Paschent.”

“They did side with Grallon on every issue,” Lupus added.

“Who is this Ceretic?” I asked. “He seemed to be abreast with the laws of the Council.”

“His story is hazier than most, I am afraid,” Evodius replied. “For what it is worth, I will tell you what is generally accepted. It’s said that Ceretic is one of Grallon’s many bastard sons. Hah, I think only Kendel of Powys has more. But that’s besides the point. Ceretic’s mother was one of Grallon’s concubines. In time, Grallon treated Ceretic and his mother well, too well for Ahès’ mother’s liking. Causing unrest between Grallon and her mother while he reigned in Armorica, Grallon sent Ceretic and his mother to reside in Britain. Grallon had lands he gained from former imperial grants. Ceretic grew up in a lifestyle of the privileged. He received a superb education and martial training. Being exiled with his mother, Ceretic retained his mother’s tongue and became fluent in several

other languages. Grallon uses him as his main translator when dealing with any barbarian embassies.”

“Ah,” Ambrosius lightly laughed. “Merlinus, you and Ceretic have something in common.”

“Hopefully, the ability to talk several languages is all we have in common,” I remarked. “Ceretic seems to always be scheming against the Council. To him, the ends justifies the means.”

“That’s funny,” Evodius replied. “That’s the same basic impression I had of him. That boy is a weasel.”

“They are going to drive at London from three fronts,” I remarked. “Push past Rochester, drive down the Darenth, and ride straight up the Roman road from Chichester. They’ll burn and scatter all in their path. They’ll key on the villas. They’ll be the soft . . .” I paused as I realized how candidly I spoke about the looming danger.

“Don’t feel guilty, Merlinus,” the old man replied. “I’ve already said the villas are soft targets. You are telling no bad news that I didn’t already know of.”

“It’s just sad how much is lost in wars and can never be regained. Only an ignorant man would burn this villa down,” I remarked. “And only a fool would die defending it.”

“How could you say such a thing?” Ambrosius remarked.

“This villa is merely a physical structure that can be rebuilt. It is not as though we can be reborn?” I replied.

“Well that depends on who you ask,” Evodius replied. “Spiritually speaking, Germanus would disagree. Isn’t that correct, Bishop? Never mind, let’s not even get started on that subject tonight. The last time we spoke upon it, I swear I heard roosters crowing before we called that conversation finished for the night.”

Germanus laughed, held his smile, and added, “That was a good conversation.”

“I remembered a lot of wine was consumed,” Evodius remarked.

“Indeed, that was a good vintage,” Germanus added. “Good times.” A moment of reminiscence hung quietly among us.

“Do you have the men to protect the Darenth headwaters?” Germanus asked.

“I don’t have the men to protect this villa, not to mention the valley,” Evodius replied.

“Then it is here where we will make a stand against the pagans,” Germanus replied.

I said nothing while I looked at Germanus. I wondered if he was simply playing with his words or if he truly meant to fight the Saxons.

“We shall shed the blood of the barbarians before we allow them to bleed this island anymore,” Germanus added.

“Thank you, Germanus,” Evodius remarked.

“Think nothing of it,” the bishop replied. “Tomorrow, I will handpick a squad of light-armed cavalry and patrol the outworks. We shall go up to the headwaters of the Darenth. This is where, I believe, they will come, as Merlinus has pointed out.”

“Good. Good.” Evodius finished with a relieved look upon his face.

## CHAPTER 25

It had been a few days since our night arrival at the villa of Evodius. The bishops and the bulk of the mounted troops rode south toward the headwaters of the Darenth. The rest of the cavalry remained at the villa to keep watch for activity to the west and east of the Darenth.

Ambrosius and I traveled with the bishops to the headwaters. After we returned from the initial tour, Bishop Germanus had his men build a makeshift church out of leafy branches based on a city church. The bishops set up, filled, and blessed a baptizing font. Germanus figured that we would be spending the holiday out in the field. With Easter a day away, it appeared that the bishop was correct in his assumption.

The night passed. The next day Germanus held service and celebrated the solemnities of Easter. Though the Alan troops were mostly pagans, Germanus convinced many warriors of the sincerity of Christianity. Several of them asked the bishop to baptize them, which Germanus did without hesitation.

As I observed the service, I noticed a rider approaching. Though near the camp, the man's horse galloped fast. As discreet as possible, I stood up and walked out and around the group attending the Easter sermon. I quickly recognized the trooper. It was Nepos. He was one of the scouts sent out on patrol.

"Sir, the Saxons are coming. They will be here no later than tomorrow morning," he remarked rapidly in his native tongue.

"How many men do they have?" I asked in Alan.

"Easily a hundred men, but they are all foot soldiers," Nepos reported. After a long pause, he asked, "What did you want to do, sir?"

"First, dismount and take a moment's rest. I will need to discuss this with Bishop Germanus. He has nearly completed his sermon and then I'll speak with him."

"Okay. Don't worry," Nepos added. "Our mounted cavalry can take position on the slopes of the Darenth near its headwaters. We will bring

thunder down from the mountain.”

I laughed and he joined in. With a smile, he added, “If there is nothing for the moment, I ask to be excused.”

“Of course. I will call upon you when I am ready to speak with the bishop,” I replied. “There might be something that needs a clearer explanation.”

“Yes, sir,” Nepos remarked as he turned and walk away. He headed for the wagons. I moved through the crowd back toward the bishops.

Germanus had just finished. He and Lupus walked toward me.

“What did Nepos say? That was him, wasn’t it?” Lupus asked.

“Yes. He said the Saxons are on the march and will be here by tomorrow,” I replied.

“Come with me, Merlinus,” Germanus replied. “I will need you to translate my words to these people. We will need all the help we can get.”

Besides the soldiers that had sailed with us from Gaul, others had gathered in our temporary camp. For the most part, these people consisted of desolated country folk. More and more people were being driven from their homes south of London. In addition, a large group of Alans had deserted Grallon’s service and Germanus allowed them within our company’s ranks. These were the people Germanus wanted to address.

“People, please allow me a moment of your time,” Germanus called out loudly.

As Germanus spoke and paused, I translated his words for the Alans.

“Great people of Britain,” he continued. “A Saxon army marches as I speak. They come to demand, by force, what does not belong to them. This is unacceptable and must be stopped. These barbarians hold nothing sacred, least of all your lives.

“Shortly, men shall move out against these heathens. At the head of this holy army, I shall ride. We shall take position on the slopes of the valley. From there we shall put the fear of God into these heathens.

“I ask now, those willing to fight on the side of God, please step forward, be baptized by a general of God, and march to smite the Saxons. Alleluia!” Germanus shouted with strong emotion, which I translated and called out with matching conviction.

The ranks of our army swelled. More men fell in line to receive

Germanus' holy blessing. Even the soldiers who had sailed to Britain with us stood in line to be baptized by this self-proclaimed general of God. Like Martin, being a former soldier converted to the holy path, Germanus had great appeal to the Alans. Many of Nepos' men spoke highly of him. Carbo stood in line to be baptized by Bishop Germanus.

With the men still wet from their baptism, the holy army marched out to meet the heathens. Their spirits soared with fervid faith. A wave of hope rolled over me, and I felt invigorated by the bishop's actions.

## CHAPTER 26

The Saxon army advanced through the North Downs. We tried to pick the right position to intercept them. Soft-sloped hills enclosed the Darenth's headwaters. Its valley eventually led down to Episford where Evodius' villa overlooked the river's western bank. We had to stop them here to protect him there.

Stationed on both sides of the valley, we waited for the savage army to draw near. Suddenly something broke over the crest of the distant hill. It was the scouts galloping hard toward our position. The Saxon weren't far now. Our stationed men grew restless as they saw the horsemen quickly approaching.

"They'll break the horizon in less than an hour," Nepos remarked a short while later as he brought his galloping horse to a hard halt.

"What is the size of the army?" I asked in the Alan tongue.

"It appears to be a small regiment," the scout who rode with Nepos added. "I believe it is only a portion of the men under Hengist. From what I saw, we have them heavily outnumbered."

I translated the scouts' report to Germanus.

"Good," Germanus remarked. "Tell them to return, have Nepos order the others to pull back and tell them to take position with the eastern unit. Remind them not to engage the enemy. Wait for my call to arms. I will ride back to the right and start the battle cry from over there."

Quickly, I relayed Germanus' instructions as he rode off.

"It shall be done," said Nepos and pulled his horse around and galloped off at a strong pace. The other scout raced back with Nepos and they disappeared into the cover before the top of the hill.

A short time later, the Saxon army appeared on the horizon. They talked loudly amongst themselves. They did not try to hide their presence. They moved more like travelers than warriors. The Saxons clattered and clambered, lugging their equipment and weapons along the path. Step by step, they drew closer and closer.

The spring rain that year had swollen the headwaters of the Darenth, but still they crossed it. We waited until part of their troops had arrived on the opposite side. With an echoing “Alleluia,” Germanus’ and the army sent a wave of terror through the approaching enemy. Our battle cry soared across the valley like a dragon’s roar. On that signal, Nepos’ cavalry suddenly surged down into the valley. The Saxons acted as though the very sky was falling upon them. The soldiers in the front turned to cut back across the river while the ones wading midway simply wanted to make it to the shore. In their blind panic, many drowned in the river they had just crossed. The Saxons scattered in all directions, unsure which way was safest.

Our cavalry drove the Saxons back the way they had come and east toward the Medway Valley. I wondered how many recognized the Alan’s dragon standard and were thankful for not being skinned alive. The Saxons discarded their shields in an attempt to escape. And through it all, I watched as Ambrosius rode hard against the Saxons. Just revenge was served without striking a blow.

Convinced that the Saxons were in full retreat, Ambrosius rode back with the rest of the cavalry. He wore a bright, proud smile.

“Amazing,” he called out as he rode up. “Merlinus, have you ever seen such a thing?”

With a little smirk, I replied, “I have never heard of such a thing.”

“That was truly divine,” Bishop Lupus remarked. “A defeat of the Saxons with the word of God. Does any nonbeliever need more proof of the power of the Gospel?”

“This holy victory shall be remembered and praised for many lifetimes beyond our’s,” Camillus replied.

“You really think so?” Ambrosius asked as he dismounted.

“Absolutely,” Lupus replied. “This will proudly be featured in the annals of legends.”

“As what? The Battle of North Downs?” Ambrosius asked.

“No,” Lupus replied. “It’s a victory of faith, not force. Alleluia.”

“What was that?” Ambrosius asked.

“Praise be to God,” Germanus replied and added loudly as he rode toward us, “Alleluia!”

“Alleluia!” roared from the army like a monstrous dragon.

Their unified cheer caught me off guard this time.

The unity of numerous voices gave substance to the word and once more, "Alleluia!" echoed across the valley.

Elated, Germanus dismounted where we stood.

"Could Achilles or Alexander say that they achieved such a victory?" Germanus asked with a proud smile.

"No. No, I don't think that they honestly could say that," I replied. "There is no tall tale or sensational story in the scrolls that match such a divine victory."

Germanus laughed loudly and added, "I think it helped to start the battle cry on the western shore of the Darenth. It carried across the valley like a wave. The chant rolled eastward, driving the frightened Saxons in the direction we wanted them to go."

"What's next?" Lupus asked. "Shall we push them back from here?"

"What do you think, Merlinus," Germanus asked. "What does your keen foresight perceive? Should we be concerned that the Saxons might still try to drive down the Darenth? Should we remain stationed or charge after the heathens and make them submit to our divine authority? Tell us your opinion of the current situation."

How many times have I heard that in my life? For a while, I didn't realize that Father had been the first to ask my opinion. We would sit in the inner courtyard of our villa. He had me reading various military treatises to him. By the age of ten, I had read Julius Caesar's commentary on his Gallic wars to Father. There were several others. Those were all I read to him. He required me to read to him every night when he was home from a campaign. Instead of sending me away to school, he had tutors teach me at the villa. Father feared what was happening to the Empire. He said it was falling apart, rotting away with corruption and ignorance.

After his death and after I left Aureliani, Roman commanders in Persia asked for my opinion. On numerous battlefields I'd witnessed much firsthand, but there had only been a few fights where I was anything more than an advisor. I tried to minimize the guilt I felt from the death I helped to inflict by utilizing battle-proven strategies. I figured by helping to overwhelm an opponent quickly, I was actually saving more lives in the long run. I still hated being a part of the madness. But with barbarian federations as the standard Roman garrison, my skills with languages had become more valuable and easy to profit from.

Still, I spoke what I thought. “I believe we would be best served if we send a report to Evodius. If we pursue the Saxons, we take a chance of having our armies’ lines pinched if the heathens circle back or if a separate force drives up through the North Downs in between here and Medway Valley.

“At this point, communication is essential,” I continued. “We should maintain the army in this valley, at least for a few days, while sending a messenger back to Evodius to inform him of what has arisen. In doing so, a rider can be sent back here to the valley. By handling it this way, we will not be needlessly moving the army when it is better served remaining here for right now.”

“I agree,” Germanus replied. “When will you and a squad be leaving?”

“Leaving?” I asked. “You want me to go? You don’t feel that it would be best that you go? Do you really think Evodius will accept my word and deal with me?”

“I have no doubt that he will,” the bishop remarked. “Besides, I can do more here. These people need my guidance more than ever. Anyway, there is no one else I trust.”

“As you wish, Bishop,” I replied.

“Take Ambrosius and Nepos with you, also,” Germanus added.

“Of course.”



## The Making of Arthurian Tales

Arthurian Tales rises up from years of research. The author has sown and cultivated the relevant folklore of Nennius and Geoffrey of Monmouth in a topsoil enriched by various fifth-century and near-contemporary chroniclers. Will Arthurian Tales decisively dispel the mystery surrounding King Arthur? Not likely. Though the author presents a plausible “World-Restorer” scenario, the waters of Avallon remain murky to this day. Even if new historical material surfaced, the author doubts that it would decisively settle the issue. There would be those who doubt its authenticity. Technically, the question – did King Arthur ever exist – would remain unresolved.

Still, a hero stands in the shadows of time. We are left with subjective stories about the man, the events in his life, and the ones leading up to it. We must pick and choose what we believe and build our own legends, accordingly. We must decide what seems more likely than not. There are those that have made a respectable career out of this. Scholars and professors highlight that list. The author does not pretend to be either. But having no ties to certain Arthurian dogma, the author has been able to formulate several unique arguments that have the potential of breathing new life into Arthurian studies. These key elements regarding Arthurian Tales follow the time line of Ambrosius Aureliani.

The time line has various markers that require some brief explanations. The symbol ~ marks an event on the time line that has a small variance in the year that it occurred. These events are mostly taken from the Gallic Chronicle of 452. The symbol \* indicates an event dated conjecturally by the author. Some of these calculations are achieved by not associating the third consulship of Aëtius with the British appeal to Agitius. The basis for the event was developed by the author independently. In some cases, though, the author utilized the theories of noteworthy individuals such as Ian Wood’s opinion on when Germanus became a bishop and Geoffrey Ashe’s view that King Arthur was Riotimus. [ ] mark the author’s conjecture within an event. The author uses them to establish links with events mentioned by Gildas and the other sources. Starting in 425 and ending in 436, (yr1 through12) appears at the beginning of each year. This correlates with Passage 66 of Nennius.

Many may argue that any story based on these key elements would be ridiculous and need no further consideration. Unfortunately, the Arthurian Age is not well-documented or what had been written hasn't survived to modern times. Possibly, it went up in smoke as many books did upon the order of Pope Leo. Whatever the case, many times, only one source tells of an event and we are left with assumptions that cannot be verified by independent sources. This is what we are faced with when dating the British Appeal to Agitius. In its traditional interpretation, there is an inherent time variance spanning from the year Aëtius received his third consulship to the year he died. Some have even argued that the "tri consul" is not to be used as a time marker, but simply to identify the Aëtius being referred to. Faced with a possible margin of error over a decade long, it does not seem ridiculous to take a moment to entertain a different theory for dating the events within the sources. And from this effort, Arthurian Tales comes to light.

### The Chronology of Ambrosius Aureliani

#### Source Abbreviations

- GC** - 382 ~ The British soldiers elevated Maximus up as emperor, then, he halted the invading Picts and Irish.
- GC** - 383 Maximus crossed to Gaul & killed Emperor Gratian near Lyons.
- Gi§13 / PA/N** - 388 Valentinian & Theodosius killed Maximus three miles outside of Aquileia.
- GC** - 391 ~Temples in Alexandria, including the ancient one of Serapis, were destroyed.
- OT9 / JA194** - 405 ~ Stilicho removed troops from Britain to fight Radagaisus at Fiesole.
- OT12** - 406 The British army elevated Marcus to supreme ruler.  
Dissatisfied, the army killed Marcus & elevated Gratian in his stead.
- OT 9** - Various Germanic tribes crossed the Rhine nearly unopposed.
- OT12** - 407 After six months, the British executed Gratian. Constantine took his place.

## The Chronology of Ambrosius Aureliani

### Source Abbreviations

- 407 Soon, Constantine took his army to Gaul to validate his claim. - PA
- 408 ~ Saxons laid waste to Britain. - GC
- 409 The British expelled the imperial magistrates from the island. - Z  
Z /
- 410 British cities received the Rescript of Honorius. - Gi§18  
Alaric & his Goths sacked Rome & took Princess Placidia as a hostage. - OT3  
Disease & raiders hit Spain. Famine forced walled cities to cannibalism. - OT30  
/ H
- 411 Lord Alaric died & his brother-in-law, Adaulphus (Athaulf) became king. - OT10  
Imperial forces killed the usurper Constantine in Arles. - GC  
Jovinus usurped the Gallic imperial government. - GC  
\* The British appealed to Agitius [Agroetius] for help. - Gi§20  
/ GT
- 412 \* The Gallic people removed the magistrates from their offices. - CL/Z  
\* Conscripted, Germanus became the Bishop of Auxerre. - CL
- 413 Jovinus the usurper was killed. Pelagius declared the Doctrine of Free Will. - PA  
~Enormous famine hit Gaul [ & Britain]. - GC /  
Gi§20.2
- 414 Holding his first consulship, Constantius shared it with Constans. - PA  
King Adaulphus married Princess Placidia. - OT24  
She gave birth to a boy & named him Theodosius in honor of her father. - OT26  
Their baby boy died in Barcelona & was buried in a silver coffin. - OT26  
\* The daughter [Ahès] of Vortigern [Grallon] had his son, Faustus. - N/A
- 415 A servant named Dubius murdered King Adaulphus while in his stalls. - OT26
- 416 Goths traded Placidia for grain. - OT31  
Palladius became consul. - PA
- 417 ~Asclepius toppled the statue of Mount Etna. - OT15
- 418 Council of Carthage condemned Free Will & Valentinian III was born in July. - PA  
Honorius established the Gallic Council of the Seven Provinces when - OA  
Agricola was the praetorian prefect of Gaul.
- 420 In Constantius' third consulship, Honorius made him a colleague of power. - PA
- 421 Agricola became consul. Emperor Constantius died. - PA  
\* A plague hit Farther Gaul [ & Britain ]. - / CL  
Gi§22.2
- 423 Emperor Honorius died on August 27. With the help of Castinus & Aëtius, John opposed Valentinian III's claim to the Empire. - OT41

## The Chronology of Ambrosius Aureliani

### Source Abbreviations

- PA-** 424 Soldiers in Arles murdered the Prefect of Gaul, Exuperantius of Poitiers.  
No authority sought to bring the evildoers to justice.  
With an Alan army sent by Theodosius II, Placidia & Valentinian III returned to Italy as the recognized Augusta & Caesar.
- N -** 425 (yr1) \* Vortigern [Grallon, lord of Vorgium] held an empire in Britain.
- OT46 -** The Alan forces defeated John the usurper & established order.
- PA-** Placidia pardoned Aëtius & sent him after the Goths besieging Arles.
- JA196 -** Felix became the master of the soldiers instead of Aëtius or Boniface.
- PA-** 426 (yr2) Barnabus the Tribune killed Bishop Patroclus of Arles.
- PA-** 427 (yr3) Felix waged war upon Boniface. The Vandals entered Africa.
- Gi§23 /**  
**N / GM -** 428 (yr4) Vortigern & the British Council requested the English to come to Britain.
- PA-** Aëtius took Gallic lands by the Rhine from the Franks. Felix was consul.
- PA-** 429 (yr5) Bishop Germanus was sent to Britain upon Palladius' suggestion.
- Gi§23.5 /**  
**N / GM / CL-** \* Bishop Germanus battled the Saxons & Picts in Britain on Easter.
- Gi§25.2 /**  
**N / GM -** \* The Saxons left.
- GM / N -** \* After Vortimer promised to restore the churches, he died.
- GM / N -** \* On May 1st, Hengist and his men massacred many British nobles.
- Gi§25.3 / -**  
**GM / N** \* Ambrosius [& Bishop Germanus] marched out against Vortigern, laid siege to him & burned down his fortress.
- PA-** 430 (yr6) Aëtius put to death Felix, his wife, Padusia, & the deacon, Grunitus.
- PA/N -** 431 (yr7) Palladius became the first bishop of the Irish.
- GM-** \* With Merlin's help, Uther [Euthar] took down the Giant's Ring in Ireland.
- PA-** 432 (yr8) Aëtius became consul. Boniface replaced Aëtius as the master of the soldiers by the orders of Augusta Placidia.
- GC -** 433 (yr9) Defeated by Boniface, Aëtius fled to the Huns after retiring.
- CL/GC-** Bishop Germanus became renown for miraculous deeds.
- GC -** 434 (yr10) Aëtius came under Placidia's good graces.
- GC -** 435 (yr11) Tibatto led a rebellion in Farther Gaul against the Roman state.
- N -** 436 (yr12)\* From when Vortigern first reigned to the quarrel between Vitalinus and Ambrosius, twelve years elapsed.
- GC -** Aëtius & his Huns slaughtered Gundahar & the Burgundians.

## The Chronology of Ambrosius Aureliani

### Source Abbreviations

- 437 Aëtius became consul. - PA  
Tibatto was captured. - GC  
Rome waged war on the Goths. - PA  
\* Uther [Euthar] & Ygerna conceived Arthur after Eastertide. - GM
- 438 \* Arthur was born in the spring. - GM
- 439 Aëtius lost Carthage to Gaiseric & the Vandals. - PA
- 440 Deacon Leo restored peace between Aëtius & Albinus. - PA
- 441 \* Bishop Germanus went to Britain & formally condemned more Pelagian heretics. Afterwards, he helped the son of Elafius. - CL  
~The Saxons subjugated the British provinces. - GC
- 442 ~Aëtius gave Farther Gaul to King Goar & his Alans. - GC  
\* Bishop Germanus parleyed peace with King Goar & vowed to get it imperially endorsed. Bishop Germanus died while in Ravenna. - CL  
Bishop Germanus received an imperial funeral procession back to Auxerre.
- 443 Pope Leo had great piles of books seized & burned in the city of Rome. - PA
- 444 Albinus became consul. By ways of Cain, Attila took his kingship from Bleda the Hun. - PA
- 446 With no true contemporary fanfare, Aëtius held his third consulship. - EC  
\* Majorian & Aëtius battled Clodio, the king of the Franks at the Scythian wedding [of Goar, king of the Alans. King Goar died.] - GT / S
- 448 \* Attila received the Sword of Ares from a herdsman. - PP / Jo
- 450 Placidia died. - GC
- 451 Attila assaulted Aureliani, a city of Gaul. - Jo / GT
- 454 Valentinian III killed Aëtius. - PA

## **Source Abbreviations**

- A** – Vie de S. Guérolé by Albert Le Grand. *The Saints of Cornwall, Part Two* by Gilbert H. Doble. (Felinfach, UK: Llanerch Publishers, 1997), p. 86
- CL** – The Life of St. Germanus, Bishop of Auxerre by Constantius of Lyons. *The Western Fathers*. Edited and translated by F. R. Hoare. (New York, NY: Harper Torchbooks, 1954), pp. 283 - 320
- EC** – Easter Cycle of 457 - Victorius of Aquitaine. Vermaat, Robert “The Text of Victorius’ *Cursus Paschalis* - years 367 - 497 AD” *Vortigern Studies*. <http://www.vortigernstudies.org.uk/artsou/victoriustabel.htm> (accessed March 23, 2010)
- GC** – Gallic Chronicle of 452. *From Roman to Merovingian Gaul*. Edited and translated by Alexander Callander Murray. (Peterborough, ON Canada: Broadview Press Ltd., 2000), pp. 77 - 85
- Gi** – Gildas. *Gildas: The Ruin of Britain and Other Works*. Edited and translated by Michael Winterbottom. (West Sussex UK: Phillimore & Co. Ltd., 2002), pp. 20 - 28
- GM** – Geoffrey of Monmouth. *History of the Kings of Britain*. Translated by Lewis Thorpe. Middlesex, UK: Penguin Books Ltd., 2002), pp. 135 - 199
- GT** – Gregory of Tours. *The History of the Franks*. Translated by Lewis Thorpe. (London, UK: Penguin Books Ltd., 1974), pp. 116; 124 - 125
- H** – The Chronicle of Hydatius. *From Roman to Merovingian Gaul*. Edited and translated by Alexander Callander Murray. (Peterborough, ON Canada: Broadview Press Ltd., 2000), pp. 85 - 98
- JA** – John of Antioch. *The Age of Attila*. Translated by C. D. Gordon. (Ann Arbor, MI: Ann Arbor Paperbacks, 1966), fr. 194, pp. 27 - 28; fr. 196, pp. 47 - 48
- Jo** – Jordanes, *The Origin and Deeds of the Goths*. Edited by Charles C. Mierow (Philadelphia, PA: D.N. Goodrich, 2007) pp. 33 - 43.
- N** – Nennius. *British History and the Welsh Annals*. Edited and translated by John Morris. (London: Phillimore & Co. Ltd., 1980), pp. 22 - 36
- OA** – The Gallic Council of the Seven Provinces. *From Roman to Merovingian Gaul*. Edited and translated by Alexander Callander Murray. (Peterborough, ON Canada: Broadview Press Ltd., 2000), pp. 169 - 171

## **Source Abbreviations**

- OT** – Olympiodorus of Thebes. *The Age of Attila*. Translated by C. D. Gordon. (Ann Arbor, MI: Ann Arbor Paperbacks, 1966), fr. 9, p. 30; fr. 12, pp. 30 - 31; fr. 3, p. 34; fr. 10, p. 35; fr. 24, pp. 40 - 41; fr. 26, pp. 41 - 42; fr. 31, p. 42; fr. 15, p. 35; fr. 41, p. 45; fr. 46, pp. 46 - 47
- PA** – Prosper of Aquitaine. *From Roman to Merovingian Gaul*. Edited and translated by Alexander Callander Murray. (Peterborough, ON Canada: Broadview Press Ltd., 2000), pp. 62 - 76
- PP** – Priscus of Panium. *The Age of Attila*. Translated by C. D. Gordon. (Ann Arbor, MI: Ann Arbor Paperbacks, 1966), fr. 8, pp. 72 - 93; fr. 10, p. 93
- S** – Sidonius. *Sidonius: Poem Letters I - II*. Translated by W. B. Anderson. (London, UK: Harvard University Press, 1996), pp. 77 - 85
- Z** – Zosimus. *An Age of Tyrants* by Christopher A. Snyder. (University Park, PA: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 1998), p. 22

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In the following pages are the seven key elements to Ambrosius Aureliani. Though containing some radical reinterpretations, the elements utilize well-recognized sources to underscore the author's opinions. Their main intent is to provide a way to reconcile the various myths and sources into a more-concise, historical story.

Though brief, each element provides some unique insight on the various issues that shape this heroic genre. The space allotted for these elements does not provide enough room to adequately argue these points beyond a reasonable doubt, but these pages do allow a chance to cast a new light on the subject.

For the novice of Arthurian folklore, little attention to these key elements are required, but anyone familiar with the various works might want to glance through the seven elements. This will help to detach oneself from certain established dogma surrounding King Arthur. By doing so, the known myths and historical events stream together in a more natural flow and Ambrosius Aureliani can truly be enjoyed.

### The Key Elements regarding Ambrosius Aureliani

The British appeal to Agitius did not involve the Roman general, Aëtius

The episcopate of Bishop Germanus ran from 412 to 442

The English/Saxons came to Britain in 428 and revolted in 429

King Grallon was Vortigern

King Goar inspired the legends of King/Ban Bors

There existed an association between Ambrosius and the city of Orléans

The Sword of Power and the Round Table were given historical bases

The British appeal to Agitius did not involve the Roman general, Aëtius

The British appeal to Agitius occurs at §20 in the part called Independent Britain in The Ruin of Britain by Gildas (trans. Michael Winterbottom). Traditionally, Independent Britain ranged from the death of Maximus to the third consulship of Aëtius with a possible nine year variance ending at the year that Aëtius was murdered (388-446/454). This time period is strictly based on the assumption that Agitius is Aëtius.

Various writers have debated over the Roman named Agitius, though. In Professor Christopher Snyder's book, An Age of Tyrants, he tells of the discrepancy in the identity of Agitius, stating that it could be Aëtius or even Aegidius. In the notes section of The Ruin of Britain, Dr. John Morris states that Gildas misplaced the appeal within his own narrative. Professor David Dumville has discussed the issue, also. The corruption within Gildas' text and/or the major inconsistency between the sources seems well-documented.

In the section called Independent Britain, the British enemies were the Scots and the Picts. Both brought war upon the British in §14 and §19. They appeared to be the reason for the appeal to Agitius in §20. Finally in §21, the Irish pirates and the Picts returned to their homelands. During this time of truce, the British slipped further into moral decay. Nowhere in Independent Britain did Gildas portray the Saxons as a major problem for the British. In fact, Gildas does not mention the Saxons at all in Independent Britain. Though the Gallic Chronicle of 452 (trans. Alexander Callander Murray, From Roman to Merovingian Gaul) makes note of a Saxon attack in 408, Olympiodorus of Thebes (trans. C. D. Gordon, The Age of Attila) writes that the British discontent with Rome stemmed from Stilicho removing the garrisons that defended the British from the Picts.

The Gallic Chronicle of 452 states that the Saxons subjugated the British provinces after the British had endured a variety of disasters and misfortunes. It was listed as occurring in 441 or 442. Considering this along with the details regarding the traditional time span for Independent Britain, the apparent problem between the sources can be underscored. With the Saxons subjugating the British, at least, four years before the third consulship of Aëtius, it puts the Gallic chronology at odds with the

The British appeal to Agitius did not involve the Roman general, Aëtius

chronology implied by Gildas' writing. This conclusion is made with the assumption that the British would have appealed for help before they were completely subjugated. Based on this, Gildas could not have seen or copied any appeal specifically mentioning the words, tri-consul, if the chronology of his narrative correlates with the Gallic Chronicle of 452.

It seems more likely that Gildas would have identified the wrong man instead of misplacing a major event within his own narrative. This seems to imply that Gildas relied upon an oral source for the appeal to Agitius or personally added the tri-consul gloss to the letter he copied. Either scenario makes the imperial title appear as a corruption within the text if the general chronologies of the sources do not contradict each other or themselves.

In light of these details, the third consulship of Aëtius has not been used to date the events within the writings of Gildas. Still, it is essential to date the events of The Ruin of Britain to use it with other available sources. Orosius, Prosper of Aquitaine and the Gallic Chronicle of 452 document the execution of Maximus as occurring in 388 (trans. Alexander Callander Murray, From Roman to Merovingian Gaul). Gildas mentions this happening in §13 at the end of the section entitled Roman Britain. Professor David Dumville establishes this as his starting point in his work, "The Chronology of De Excidio Britanniae, Book I" (Studies in Celtic History V - Gildas: New Approaches). The event serves well as a starting point for dating this part of Gildas' narrative.

The beginning of Independent Britain at §14 seems to rehash the events that ended in §13. With this assumption, the tyrant is identified as Magnus Maximus and not as one of the three British usurpers that rose briefly to power in the beginning of the fifth century. In §18 and §19, the Romans told the British to defend themselves and gave little prospect of returning. This is interpreted as the Rescript of Honorius noted by Zosimus (trans. Green and Chaplin, New History).

When the Romans left at the beginning of §19, the Scots and Picts wreaked havoc upon the British. The citizens abandoned the towns and the Wall in §19.3 as if to avoid the grips of cannibalism that seized the

The British appeal to Agitius did not involve the Roman general, Aëtius

cities of Spain (Hydatius/Olympiodorus). Echoing the words of Hydatius, the Gallic Chronicle of 452 tells of an enormous famine in Gaul between the years of 411 to 416. Gildas states that disasters abroad increased internal disorder on the island at the end of §19. With the British, also, suffering from food shortages, the famine ran from the Mediterranean to the western shores of the North Sea. This seems like a famine that would still be talked about in Gildas' day.

All the while, the British suffered from attacking barbarians. The British sent out a second appeal. This time it went to Agitius. Gildas mentions the event in the first sentence of §20. Effort should be made to not date this event, at this point. If taken literally, this event had to occur no earlier than 446 based on the year that Aëtius achieved his third consulship. Instead of decades elapsing as traditionally accepted, the dreadful and notorious famine still raged on as noted in §20.2. These events happened within the section entitled Independent Britain and there is no indication that any of these events went past 416 if Agitius is not considered to be Aëtius.

Though still nagged by a spelling discrepancy, during this narrow time period, there was a man of some stature in Gaul with a similar name to Agitius. Agroetius was the Head of Chancery for the usurper, Jovinus, according to Lewis Thorpe's translation of Frigeridus in The History of the Franks.

The second paragraph in fragment 26 of Olympiodorus tells of Roman rule returning to much of Gaul and possibly Britain. It further states that the imperial control remained until the death of Emperor Honorius. Based on this fragment from the Theban historian, this peace would have lasted until 423. Though maybe the conjecture of C. D. Gordon being interjected into the words of the ancient writer, the fragment still notes a small window of time where there was no war mentioned. This lack of fighting could give the illusion that Roman authority had returned to the island. In §21 of Gildas' writings, there is a period of a truce between the British, the Irish pirates and the Picts. Still the British's every action plagued their salvation.

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After §21, a plague swooped brutally upon the British people. This plague fell within the section called The Coming of the Saxons in §22.2. An independent reference to this plague can be inferred from Constantius of Lyons in section VIII of the Life of St. Germanus, Bishop of Auxerre (trans. F. R. Hoare, The Western Fathers). Gildas states that the plague laid low so many in such a short period of time that the living could not bury all of the dead. Constantius writes that the illness first struck the children and then the elders, bringing death in about three days.

The plague in section VIII occurred sometime before 429. This year is established by the ability to date section XII in Constantius' writings. Constantius tells of Bishop Germanus traveling to Britain to combat the Pelagian heresy. Prosper of Aquitaine dates this event to 429.

Though there is no known contemporary writers before Gildas that tell of the coming of the Saxons like he does at §23.3, later sources document the event. Nennius (trans. John Morris, British History and The Welsh Annals) and Geoffrey of Monmouth (trans. Lewis Thorpe, The History of the Kings of Britain) describe the event. Nennius gives 428 as the year that the English came to Britain.

In §23.5, the Saxons revolted after being hired to beat back the people of the north in §23.2. Constantius notes that the Saxons and the Picts made war on the British in section XVII while Germanus preached against the Pelagian heresy [on the east side of Britain] in 429. In §24, Gildas elaborates the destruction caused by the Saxons.

In §25.2, the cruel plunderers went home. Described more as raiders than conquerors, it seems inappropriate to assign this to the last British event in the Gallic Chronicle of 452. The famous mentioning of Ambrosius Aurelianus by Gildas appears in §25.3. All dates provided by Nennius that involve this Roman gentleman take place before 441. Upon the removal of the tri-consul reference, the dates provided by Nennius no longer conflict with the British appeal to Agitius.

In §26, the British and barbarians battled back and forth; both sides scored victories. This lasted right up till the siege of Badon Hill.

## The British appeal to Agitius did not involve the Roman general, Aëtius

With a liberal view, sections 23.5 through 26 date from 429 to the 470's. The revolt of the Saxons erupted in 429. If Germanus' Alleluia victory was one of the four battles of Vortimer against the Saxons, it effectively dates some of the events in Geoffrey of Monmouth, possibly leading to the dating of Uther's first trip to Ireland. A slightly adjusted version of the dates suggested by the Cistercian monk, Alberic, can be inserted here. Geoffrey Ashe mentions these dates in his book, The Discovery of King Arthur.

The last mention of British affairs in the Gallic Chronicle of 452 happens around 441 as previously noted. After enduring a variety of disasters and misfortunes, the British provinces fell under the authority of the Saxons. The Saxons held this control or maintained an upper-hand against the British to, at least, 452. Otherwise, it seems likely that the Gallic Chronicle would have used different wording in the 441/442 entry or would have noted the power shift that seems to occur later between the two sides.

In Charles C. Mierow's translation, Jordanes indicates that the British had become a force of reckoning in section XLV of The Origin and Deeds of the Goths. The Gothic writer notes that the Roman Emperor, Anthemius, requested military aid from the British king, Riotimus. The year that Anthemius rose up as the Emperor of the West is deduced from Hydatius (trans. Alexander Callander Murray, From Roman to Merovingian Gaul). The British return to power would have been recognized by the year 467 but most likely would have occurred earlier than that.

So, by dropping any concern for the third consulship of Aëtius, the sources can be synchronized into a more concise chronology. The variance in the time of the Agitius' appeal shrinks by two-thirds from nine years to three years. The events of the Anglo-Saxon Chronicles and the work of Bede can be linked to the other sources, but some of the dates are null and void. These works color in the elements of the enemy of the British Romans.

Ambrosius Aureliani falls within the time period of Independent Britain and The Victory at Badon Hill.

## The episcopate of Bishop Germanus ran from 412 to 442

In his work entitled “The End of Roman Britain: Continental Evidence and Parallels”, Professor Ian Wood provides a strong argument against the traditional years of 418 to 448 for the episcopate of Bishop Germanus. He suggests that Germanus became the Bishop of Auxerre in either 407 or 412. Comparing the Life of St. Germanus, Bishop of Auxerre, by Constantius of Lyons (trans. F. R. Hoare, The Western Fathers) to other contemporary sources, the latter of the two years has been chosen for Ambrosius Aureliani. It should be noted that F. R. Hoare accepted the traditional years for the episcopate of Bishop Germanus.

In section II, Constantius tells that the populace – clergy, nobility, townspeople and country folk – demanded that Germanus was their bishop. The sentence that follows it states that a war was declared by the people against their magistrate and they overthrew the official. The line seems odd at first glance but it echoes the words of Zosimus quoted in An Age of Tyrants. The cited passage told of Roman officials being expelled from Britain, Armorica, and other Gallic provinces around 409. Four men – Constantine, Attalus, Maximus, Jovinus – tried to usurp the Western Empire during the years 407 to 411. Each had magistrates and military personnel, giving rise to several sets of traitors during this time period.

Three interpretations can be made about the ascendance of Bishop Germanus. The first is that the magistrate stripped from his office was not Germanus and the election of Germanus was at the time that this civil war raged. Secondly, Constantius artistically expressed Germanus' ascendance and it had no historical connotation. Or alternatively, Germanus was a magistrate in one of the usurpers' governments. Removed from office but spared by popular-consent, the divine [imperial] authority conscripted Germanus to an ecclesiastical office. This view would account for his compulsion to receive the religious position. This would, also, explain why Constantius fails to note any of Bishop Germanus' deeds as a duke. It would be difficult even for a talented orator to honorably mention exploits against the Empire.

Sometime after becoming the Bishop of Auxerre, a plague hit the region. With a reevaluation of Independent Britain by Gildas, there is a

## The episcopate of Bishop Germanus ran from 412 to 442

possibility that the plague that hit Britain happen around the same time. Though lacking the year for the plague that Constantius mentioned, it had to occur in between 412 and 429. The end date is based on the bishop's first documented involvement in British affairs, which began in section XII and ran through section XVIII. Much, if not all, these sections occurred in 429 when Prosper of Aquitaine notes Germanus' trip to Britain (trans. Alexander Callander Murray, From Roman to Merovingian Gaul).

The three references to miraculous powers in sections XX, XXI and XXII are dated to 433 by the entry in the Gallic Chronicle of 452 regarding Germanus (trans. Alexander Callander Murray, From Roman to Merovingian Gaul).

In section XXIV, Auxiliaris governed as the Praetorian Prefect of Gaul and warmly received Germanus when he arrived in Arles. Hoare places Germanus' visit between the year 435 and 439 based on his note for section XIX. There doesn't seem to be a reason not to accept this time period.

In section XXV, news of the Pelagian heresy troubling the British reached Germanus at home. This time, he traveled to the island with Severus, the Bishop of Trier. By prior points and with future considerations, the second trip to Britain happen between 435 and 441.

Returning from Britain in section XXVIII, Bishop Germanus confronted King Goar as his Alan tribes and cavalry filled the roads, ready to subdue Armorica. The Gallic Chronicle of 452 places this event around 441/442. The bishop went to Italy seeking a pardon for Armorica. Constantius doesn't give the impression that six years had elapsed between Germanus' trip to Britain and the one to Ravenna.

In section XL, Tibatto incited the people of Armorica to rebel, again. This event does not contradict the events of the Bacaudic revolt in the Gallic Chronicle of 452. Though said to be captured in 437, the Gallic entry does not specifically state that Tibatto was killed like other rebel leaders were. In fact, trouble continued for another eleven years. After being implicated in the Bacaudic revolt, Eudoxius fled to the Huns in 448.

The episcopate of Bishop Germanus ran from 412 to 442

In section XLII, Bishop Germanus died while in Ravenna.

So, Bishop Germanus' expulsion from office and his conscription to the see of Auxerre fits neatly within the chaotic times of 412 while his involvement with the Alan king, Goar, establishes 442 as the end of his life.

The English/Saxons came to Britain in 428 and revolted in 429

The fifth-century events mentioned by Nennius in Passage 66 (trans. John Morris, British History and The Welsh Annals) are taken as being accurate. Many have argued that its elaborate dating is glossed in or false. In either case, it points to an alternative dating for the reign of Vortigern than what is offered by Bede (trans. Judith McClure and Roger Collins, Bede – The Ecclesiastical History of the English People – The Greater Chronicle – Bede’s Letter to Egbert). Through the removal of Aëtius time-stamping in Gildas, the sources fall in sync. Passages 43 to 46 by Nennius and sections [vi.13], [vi.14], [vi.15] and [vi.16] by Geoffrey of Monmouth in The History of the King of Britain fill out this fifth-century time line. Bishop Germanus’ visit in 429 forms the keystone in synchronizing the three sources.

Both Nennius and Geoffrey tell of four battles that Vortimer waged against the Saxons. Geoffrey elaborates on other events in section [vi.14]. Soon after the fourth victory, Vortimer restored the churches as Bishop Germanus requested.

This gives the impression that Bishop Germanus was still in Britain after the four battles. Due to the timing and their general descriptions, it seems possible that the battle Bishop Germanus had against the Saxons and the Picts on Easter Sunday [April 8th] was one of the four battles Vortimer had against the Saxons.

In comparing the details described in sections XVII and XVIII of the Life of St. Germanus, Bishop of Auxerre (trans. F. R. Hoare, The Western Fathers) to the ones listed in Nennius’ passage 44, it seems that the Alleluia victory would have been the battle on the river Darenth or at the ford called Episford. This conjecture comes from the following line by Constantius of Lyons. Many [the enemy - Saxons and Picts] threw themselves into the river which they had just crossed at their ease, and were drowned in it. Other information used to form this conjecture was gathered from Peter Clayton’s A Companion to Roman Britain. He tells of the Lullingstone villa that sat on the Darent River not far from the village called Eynsford. The villa burned down early in the fifth century. Though lacking definitive archeological evidence and not suggested by Clayton, the villa’s fiery end could be attributed to Saxon rage.

## The English/Saxons came to Britain in 428 and revolted in 429

According to Geoffrey of Monmouth, Vortimer laid siege to Thanet in his fourth and final battle against the Saxons. During a parley between the opposing sides, the Saxons sailed off to Germany in their longships. Vortimer was poisoned shortly after ordering the churches to be restored in section [vi.14].

John Haywood cites in his book, Dark Age Naval Power: (with a small professional sailing crew) In fair weather, each voyage across the North Sea would have been measured in days rather than weeks and the risks would have been slight. In terms of traveling time the 300-mile voyage between Jutland and the Thames estuary would have been no longer than a 60 mile-long journey overland.

The Saxons returned. During a meeting set up by Vortigern, Hengist and his men massacred many British nobles on the first of May, the date agreed upon in section [vi.15] and described in section [vi.16] of The History of the Kings of Britain.

It seems possible that one of the four battles of Vortimer, his death and the British massacre occurred in a rapid succession between Easter Sunday [April 8th] and May 1, 429.

## King Grallon was Vortigern

The legends of King Grallon and Vortigern reek with debauchery and incest. As divine punishment for his sinful daughter, Grallon's city, Is [Ys], was submerged by the sea (Muirhead, Findlay, The Blue Guides -- Brittany). Nennius tells of Vortigern's fathering his daughter's son, Faustus (trans. John Morris, British History and The Welsh Annals). Both men lived in the fifth century based sources written centuries later. Though these events may not have occurred, it is still worth gleaning for details. This literary sifting has led to the belief that King Grallon was Vortigern.

King Grallon's activities centered around the Bay of Douarnenez in western France. The Life of Winwaloe written by Wrdisten presents this as an accepted truth in the second half of the ninth century (The Saints of Cornwall, part two by Gilbert Doble). Wrdisten describes Gradlon, Courentinus, and Winwaloe as three great luminaries and pillars of Cornouaille. Tutualus, a famous monk, preceded them. Findlay Muirhead states that the town named Douarnenez owes its name and origin to the priory of St. Tutuarn, founded on the neighboring Tutuarn-Enez, now called Ile Tristan. Allegedly, Is [Ys] was located in a lagoon on the Bay of the Departed. This bay forms the bottom point of the Bay of Douarnenez. Some Gallo-Roman remains are located in the nearby hamlet of Troguer.

Patrick Galliou and Michael Jones in The Bretons state that over sixty percent of the documented salting units in western France are located on the bay's shores. Based on the total volume generated, the authors figure, these fish-salting units produced more than what was locally or regionally consumed. They theorize that the surplus was shipped to other parts of the Empire and to the shores of Britain. They further speculate that the salting industry was extensively developed to supply the military markets of the British and Rhenish *limites*. These units had reached a "corporate-level" by the third century AD. From an inscription of that time, one learns of the worshiping of the Greek god, Poseidon Hippios, in the bay area. Galliou and Jones mark salting tanks just south of Quimper on a map. In Muirhead's Brittany, King Grallon established Quimper in the fifth century, calling the area Cornouaille (Cornwall), a name brought over from Britain. In the neighboring area of Quimper not a great distance from the church of Combrit, the remains of a Roman villa and baths were discovered. Farther south, one will view Ile-Tudy and Loctudy.

## King Grallon was Vortigern

Besides holding sway over land by the sea, the saints associated with King Grallon reinforce his strong link to fish. It has been put forth that St. Winwaloe used a small almost black bell to attract fish. According to another source, St. Corentin had a miraculous fish that he would eat for his daily meal. Afterwards, the fish would reappear in a pool near his cell.

King Grallon could have been controlling the garum industry in the area. If Grallon ran this type of operation, two things become apparent. He dealt more frequently with sea-faring men, ranging from the Franks, the Goths, the Irish to the Saxons. Secondly, he had a source of wealth beside any generated by his lands in Armorica or possibly those in Britain. With this capital available and the increased day-to-day interaction with sailors, it does not seem extreme that Grallon hired Saxons to beat back the people of the north.

Logistically, Grallon's presence in western Armorica and possibly in western Britain would explain the need to hire out the defenses of the eastern shores of Britain. King Grallon's own fleet would have been busy guarding his personal interests. Safe harbors on both sides of the channel would have facilitated patrolling the western waters.

In passage 66, Nennius states that Vortigern came to power in 425. In the Life of St. Germanus, part 3, passages 47 and 48 compiled by Nennius, different stories spell out the eventual end of Vortigern. In one, Bishop Germanus drove Vortigern into exile twice. Vortigern fled first to Gwerthrynion and then to his fortress in Demetia. The bishop followed Vortigern and laid siege upon him. Fire rained down from the heavens and destroyed the fortress of Vortigern. In the last paragraph in section [viii. 2] of The History of the King of Britain by Geoffrey of Monmouth, the army of Ambrosius and the other Brits laid siege to Vortigern's fortress and used weapons of fire to burn up the tower. Another version tells of him wandering about and dying without honor.

In "Princess Ahez and The Lost City", Grallon and his men became lost in a forest. They came upon the hermitage of St. Corentin. The monk fed them with a single fish. Miraculously, the fish regenerated itself. For his hospitality, Grallon made Corentin the first Bishop of Cornouaille.

## King Grallon was Vortigern

Possibly in gratitude, St. Corentin passed down the events of King Grallon's life in a favorable light. Vortigern's incestuous affair with his daughter was cast as the fault of King Grallon's promiscuous daughter.

To help establish a floruit for King Grallon, one could further review the religious figures surrounding him. In the chapter entitled "De altitudine et nobilitate Cornubie", Wrdisten implies that Grallon, Courentinus, and Winwaloe were contemporary while Tutualus was already established in the area and/or was from an older generation. According to Butler's Lives of the Saints, King Childebert insisted that Tudwal should become the Bishop of Tréguier. This occurred when the religious man was in Paris obtaining confirmation of his titles to land from the Frankish lord during the sixth century. Doble notes that the mentioning of Tutual puzzled many scholars due to the assumed association with the Bishop of Tréguier. This has led to the opinion that Tutualus and Tudwal are two separate individuals.

A much later source, the Sanctoral of Quimper of 1500, states that Grallon sent Corentin, Winwaloe and Tudy to Martin [Tours] to have him consecrate the most fitting candidate of the three. Corentin was chosen. Though Gilbert Doble dismisses this information as untrustworthy, his reason seems contested by other details he provides. Doble states that no Breton writer before the twelfth century would have written that St. Corentin was consecrated in Tours due to the primatial dignity of Dol. Still though, Doble establishes strong ties between Cornouaille and St. Martin of Tours. The monks from the abbey of Marmoutier near Tours proudly retained the body of St. Corentin during the Norman invasion of the tenth century. St. Corentin received an honorary mention in the litany of a psalter of Tours used at Christ Church, Canterbury, in the eleventh century. The influence of St. Martin traveled near and far. By the late fifth century, the prestige of Tours seems undeniable based on the letter from Sidonius to Lucontius regarding Perpetuus raising a new church over the shrine of St. Martin (trans. O. M. Dalton, Letters of Sidonius). Dated to the ninth century, the Book of Armagh has the Life of St. Martin copied within its pages according to the book, Saint Patrick – His Origins and Career, written by R. P. C. Hanson.

## King Grallon was Vortigern

Winwaloe traveled to an island called Laurea to learn from Budoc the Zealous. The writer of the Life of St. Winwaloe, Wrdisten tells of Tudual carrying coals across an island. This same feat is noted by Doble being done by Bothmael, a companion of Tudy, in the Vita Maudeti. Gregory of Tours tells of Bishop Bricius of Tours, carrying burning coals in his cassock. In The Western Fathers, F. R. Hoare believes that the design for Martin's community near Tours was that of a laura. St. Martin's biographer, Sulpicius, tells that the hermitage was located on a bend on the River Loire with a high mountain wall behind it with one narrow approach [nearly an island].

This seems to offer a thin chance that Winwaloe traveled to the hermitage of St. Martin which could lead to the following conjecture about the Sanctoral of Quimper of 1500. It seems possible that it provides a general chronology of religious figures in Cornouaille. Tutualus came first and Winwaloe followed. As the Christian element developed even further, King Grallon sent Corentin to be consecrated as the first bishop of the area. The desire of King Grallon to have his bishop consecrate by a Bishop of Tours does not seem hard to fathom.

Albert Le Grand tells us that in his time several parishes on certain days would sing a service to repose the soul of King Grallon according to Doble.

King Grallon and Vortigern appear to be contemporaries operating in the same general region during the fifth century. It seems likely that both had dealings with the Saxons. In turn, the sexual controversies surrounding their daughters, now, seem less coincidental and this portrayal more convincing.

## King Goar inspired the legends of King/Ban Bors

In Bulfinch's Mythology, King Arthur and His Knights, Chapter VIII, the following is stated, "King Ban of Brittany, the faithful ally of Arthur was attacked by his enemy Claudas, and after a long war saw himself reduced to possession of a single fortress, where he was besieged by his enemy. In this extremity he determined to solicit the assistance of Arthur, and escaped in a dark night, with his wife Helen and his infant son Launcelot, leaving his castle in the hands of his seneschal, who immediately surrendered the place to Claudas."

In the book From Scythia to Camelot by C. Scott Littleton and Linda A. Malcor, the authors suggest that Ban is a title much like Riothamus is considered.

Helaine and Elaine were identified as the wife of Ban and Bors in the Arthurian myths. In Chapter VIII of King Arthur and His Knights, the myth tells how, "(Helen) she was joined by the widow of Bohort, for the good king had died of grief on hearing of the death of his brother, Ban. They had two sons."

It seems possible that Helaine and Elaine could be variations of the same woman's name. Bernard Bachrach did suggest that the Alans were polygamous in A History Of The Alans In The West. Bachrach cites Salvian as the source of this information. Salvian was a younger contemporary of King Goar in fifth-century Gaul.

These various details and opinions can be construed as King/Ban Bohort being at war with Claudas. And eventually, his enemy took over all of King/Ban Bohort's territory. Breaking the king's spirit, King/Ban Bohort died of grief. Two wives and three sons survived him. One was his namesake; the other two were Lionel & Launcelot [Lancelot].

In The Age of Attila, Olympiodorus tells how King Goar helped Jovinus usurp the Empire just before Constantine died in 411. Jovinus' reign lasted only for a few years when Dardanus executed him in 413 after his capture. The Alan king ruled for many years though his reign remains somewhat obscure and its true duration uncertain.

## King Goar inspired the legends of King/Ban Bors

Alexander Callander Murray provides the following translation for the Gallic Chronicler of 452 in From Roman to Merovingian Gaul. Murray states, “The lands of Farther Gaul were handed over by the patrician Aëtius to the Alans to be divided with the inhabitants. They subdued those who opposed them with arms, drove out the owners, and obtained possession of the land by force.”

W. B. Anderson notes that King Goar settled near Orléans around 442. Constantius of Lyons tells how Bishop Germanus of Auxerre confronted the Alan king in Armorica.

In A History Of The Alans In The West, Bernard Bachrach states, “With the aid of toponymical evidence it is possible to ascertain the probable location of at least some of the settlements established for Goar’s followers. Allains (Somme) is located some thirty miles to the east of Amiens and protects the roads leading from Cologne to Amiens and Soissons. Twenty-five miles to the south-southeast is Alaincourt (Aisne) which commands the roads from Tournai to Soissons and Tournai to Rheims.”

In The History Of The Franks, Gregory of Tours states that Clodio was a man of high birth and marked ability. It is alleged that he was a king of the Franks that lived at Druisburg in Thuringian. Gregory states that Clodio attacked and captured Cambrai after his spies told him what he needed to know. Afterwards, he occupied the country up to the River Somme.

In the panegyric to Majorian translated by W. B. Anderson, Sidonius orates how Aëtius defended Turoni [ Tournai - instead of Tours as W. B. Anderson suggests - this is based on their geographical position. ] sometime before they fought together where Cloio the Frank had overrun the helpless lands of the Atrebatas.

These lands might be referring to the people of Civitas Atrabatum, Arras, which is about thirty miles northeast of Allains near the Somme River. Since the early part of the fifth century, various Germanic barbarians had troubled the neighboring region.

## King Goar inspired the legends of King/Ban Bors

Sidonius further tells of a Scythian [Alan] wedding party that is attacked near the village of Helena. Though not clearly stated, it appears that Cloio/Chlogio and his Franks attacked in the middle of the ceremony when the Romans arrived in Vicus Helenae shortly afterwards. Interestingly enough, the village bears the same name as Ban/Bors's wife, Helen. W.B. Anderson notes that the date of the attack by Clio/Chlogio and his Franks occurred some time after 440 and may have been several years later.

It has been assumed that it would have been before 451 AD due to the fact that an Alan by the name Sangiban controlled Orléans at the time of Attila's invasion of Gaul according to section XXXVII of The Origin And Deeds Of The Goths.

In the folklore, Bors the younger has been mentioned. He is portrayed as one of the sons of Bors the elder. This legendary son appears as the cousin of Lancelot and a great knight of King Arthur in the various myths.

In The Discovery Of King Arthur, Geoffrey Ashe argues that a man identified as Riothamus was King Arthur. The author goes further and cites Sharon Turner as stating, "Either the Riothamus was Arthur, or it was from his expedition that Geoffrey [of Monmouth], or the Breton bards, took the idea of Arthur's battles in Gaul."

W.B. Anderson states that Anthemius was created Augustus on the 12th of April, 467. According to section XLV in the translation of The Origin And Deeds Of The Goths by Charles C. Mierow, Jordanes states that the new emperor sent his son-in-law, Ricimer, against the Alan king, Beorg, and his army. Ricimer destroyed King Beorg and his army in the first engagement. It is in this same section that Jordanes tells of the events surrounding Riotimus and his activities in Gaul.

By comparing the above details, there seems to be a parallelism between Goar and Bors. It appears that Claudus, the enemy of King/Ban Bors, could have been Clodio/Cloio, the king of the Franks.

## King Goar inspired the legends of King/Ban Bors

This Germanic ruler captured Cambrai and invaded the lands up to the river Somme. Allains on the river Somme was in the lands controlled by Goar, at one time. This site could have been Vicus Helenae where a Scythian wedding party was slaughtered when the Romans, Aëtius and Majorianus, battled the king of the Franks.

About twenty years after these events, an Alan by the name, Beorg, became king and was a contemporary of the British king, Riotimus, who is suspected in being King Arthur, the fabled ally of King Bors.

There existed an association between Ambrosius and the city of Orléans

In §25.3 of The Ruins of Britain, Gildas identifies Ambrosius Aurelianus as the leader of the wretched survivors [of the Saxon revolt], but provides little else about this Roman gentleman. Geoffrey of Monmouth mentions a man named Aurelius Ambrosius in The History of the Kings of Britain. Many assume that these two men are essentially the same man. Another legendary man connected to Ambrosius Aurelianus is referred to by Nennius. The Welsh called him, Emrys.

Various arguments can be presented in regards to the proper form of his name. Many may assume that it is the standard type of name utilized by the Romans. This assumption begs the question. What are the other parts of his name? With no further details provided in the major sources, a different interpretation has been made regarding his name. In Arthurian Tales, this enigmatic figure is portrayed as a Roman named Ambrosius that resided near Aureliani at various times.

Geoffrey of Monmouth presents several interesting details about Aurelius Ambrosius. When Aurelius and Utherpendragon were children, the brothers were originally given to Archbishop Guithelinus to be brought up. After their father's murder and the death of the archbishop, the brothers were taken to Little Britain so Vortigern could not murder them. A lord by the name of Budicius took them in. Though noted as the king of Brittany, Geoffrey of Monmouth states nothing more about this Budicius or the range of his power.

Within this information, a noteworthy point is the lack of similarities between the names of Ambrosius and Uther. It gives the impression that the brothers were actually raised by two separate families, with the first being Roman while the latter possibly Alan. The conjecture regarding Uther is based on the brothers commanding an Armorican cavalry when they returned to Britain, the details provided by C. Scott Littleton and Linda A. Malcor in From Scythia to Camelot about the title Pendragon, and the various spellings for Goar noted by Bernard Bachrach in A History of the Alans in the West.

## There existed an association between Ambrosius and the city of Orléans

Geoffrey of Monmouth states that Utherpendragon and Aurelius Ambrosius still lay in their cradles when Vortigern crowned their older brother, Constans, the king of Britain. This gives the impression that the two younger brothers were both babies at that time and relatively the same age. This raises the possibility that they were twins.

Going with the assumption that a Roman family adopted Ambrosius, his name could have derived from his caregiver or from the region he lived in while exiled. Each scenario could imply that he resided in or around the Gallic city of Aureliani (present-day Orléans, France).

Tangent details provided by near-contemporary writers form the bases to these conjectures. An association between Ambrosius and the locale can faintly be seen in the writings of Jordanes. In section XXXVII of The Origin and Deeds of the Goths as translated by Charles C. Mierow, Jordanes states that the Alani king, Sangiban, promised to surrender Aureliani to Attila the Hun.

A precedent for someone living in the area with part of his name is established in a story from Gregory of Tours that was passed down by Fredegar. In the book, From Roman to Merovingian Gaul by Alexander Callander Murray, it states that Clovis sent a certain Roman called Aurelianus to inspect the king's future wife, Chlothild. Aurelianus lived in the region of Orléans.

Though an example of a name-place in Britain based on Aurelianus seems lacking, Dr. John Morris identifies Ambrosden, Amberley, and Amesbury as examples of locations named after Ambrosius in The Age of Arthur. If these examples are named after a person, it seems more likely that the person was known as Ambrosius or Emrys but not Aurelianus while in Britain.

Considering these various factors has led to the view that the Roman gentleman mentioned by Gildas was widely known as Ambrosius and, at one time or another, lived near Aureliani, but also fought battles in Britain.

## The Sword of Power and the Round Table were given historical bases

Liberties were taken in the development of the Arthurian themes regarding the Sword of Power and the Round Table. Still, fifth-century events anchor them within Ambrosius Aureliani.

Littleton and Malcor bring up two influential points in From Scythia to Camelot about the Sword in the Stone myth. The authors ask why the whole episode is absent from British chronicles, as well as from Geoffrey's *Historia*. Secondly, the authors tell that the earliest appearance of the Sword in the Stone myth occurs in the writings from the regions settled by the Alans around Orléans.

This has led to the belief that the Sword of Power did not originate in Britain but somewhere in Gaul. Interestingly enough, contemporary and near-contemporary writers tell a tale about a noteworthy sword in the fifth century. Based on the known travels of its wielder, this sword rode through the region near Orléans.

King Bleda died in 446 according to the Gallic Chronicle of 452 in From Roman to Merovingian Gaul by Alexander Callander Murray. Sometime afterwards, a herdsman drew the Sword of Ares from the earth and gave it to Attila the Hun. In The Age of Attila, Priscus records this contemporary event and Jordanes passes the tale down in The Origin and Deeds of the Goths.

Gregory of Tours tells that Attila was turned away from Aureliani and that city of Gaul survived the Scourge of God.

In this mist of details, the Sword of Power will appear for the future king to claim.

## The Sword of Power and the Round Table were given historical bases

According to the French writer that introduced the theme of the Round Table, Wace states that the tales of Arthur were not all lies nor all true. Geoffrey Ashe makes note of Wace's statement in The Discovery of King Arthur. This leaves us the task of once more, sifting through the various legends for an underlying history.

Geoffrey Ashe further cites a myth that Merlin made the Round Table for Uther. Geoffrey of Monmouth tells how Aurelius Ambrosius had Uther travel to Ireland with Merlin. They took down the Giant's Ring and brought it to Britain as a monument for the nobles massacred on the first of May [in 429 - based on the documented revolt of the Saxons by Constantius of Lyons].

With the trip to Ireland happening sometime after the massacre, the taking of the Giant's Ring is cast in the context of Palladius' trip in 431. Ambrosius, Merlinus and Utherpendragon [Euthar] take down the Giant's Ring on behalf of the Roman Church. The pagan symbol falls victim to the wrath of Christianity like the ancient temple of Serapis in Alexandria and the consecrated statue of Mount Etna on the island of Sicily. Unlike the others, Merlinus preserved it by moving it to Britain.

In Ambrosius Aureliani, this stone monument is not portrayed as Stonehenge, but instead as an enormous stone hoop, a ring that a giant could wear. Through the process of moving it, the idea of the Round Table develops within Merlinus.