

IMMORTALS' REQUIEM

AN ALTERNATIVE EARTH NOVEL



VINCENT BOBBE



Copyright © 2018 by Vincent Bobbe

All rights reserved.

v.8

The book is sold subject to the condition that it shall not, by way of trade or otherwise, be lent, resold, hired out, or otherwise circulated in any form or by any electronic or mechanical means, including information storage and retrieval systems, without the publisher's prior consent, in any form of binding or cover other than that in which it is published and without a similar condition including this condition being imposed on the subsequent purchaser.

All rights reserved. Copyright under Berne Copyright Convention, Universal Copyright Convention, and Pan-American Copyright Convention. No part of this book may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted in any form, or by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording or otherwise, without prior written permission of the author, except for the use of brief quotations in a book review.

The fonts used as character headers in this book are open sourced for commercial use (www.1001fonts.com), but remain the intellectual property of their creators. The fonts and their creators are: *Caprice* by George Williams; *Viking* and *Cardinal Alternative* by Dieter Steffmann (Typographer Mediengestaltung); *Underworld* by hmeneses; *Armalite Rifle* by Vic Fieger (www.vicfiieger.com); *Donree's Claws*, *Cenobyte* and *Ghastly Panic* by Chad Savage (savagevision@hotmail.com, www.gothic.net/~savage, www.sinisterfonts.com); *Typewriter* by Fonthead Design (www.fonthead.com); *Jo Wrote A Love Song* by Lars Manenschijn (www.larsmanenschijn.nl); *Seraphim* by Dale Harris (www.studioink.com.au); *Survivant* by Brandon S. (www.tepidmonkey.net); *Faraday* by Tom Murphy (Divide By Zero, fonts.tom7.com); *Sickness* by iamboris2000. The author thanks all of them for their creativity and altruism.

To Eve and Eddie.

You are my immortality.

Memento Mori

AUTHOR'S NOTE



DEAR READER. THANK YOU FOR CHOOSING MY
BOOK!

If you enjoy *Immortals' Requiem* (and I sincerely hope that you do), then please don't miss out on your FREE additional content. The link is in the back matter before the **Glossary of Characters**, so please keep reading!

FONDEST REGARDS,

VINCENT BOBBE

PROLOGUE



Around 500 BC

They think I am the god of death. They beg you for deliverance.

‘There is none to be had here,’ the tattooed man said. ‘Get out of my head!’

‘As you wish,’ the giant replied in the True Tongue. Twilight had settled over the fire-blasted glade. The tattooed man stood beneath the skeletal remains of an oak tree at the edge of the ruined clearing. Behind the tattooed man, lush woodland stretched rich and verdant to the banks of a wide river. At his feet, thick black ash smouldered gently while veins of red charcoal slowly settled, occasionally venting wisps of smoke into air already thick with heat and ash.

At the giant’s feet knelt a man and a woman. Shock glazed their eyes and slackened their faces. Their legs had blistered and burned down to raw, blackened sticks. The stink of charred flesh came off them in waves. The man’s mouth twitched madly. The woman stared at the tattooed man with

empty eyes. She called out. Her voice was weak and choked with pain and anguish.

The sound was bestial and ugly to the tattooed man. He did not understand the language of humans, nor did he care to. The kneeling man, old and weathered, echoed the woman, and the tattooed man shut them out.

The giant standing above them smiled. 'You are not going to save them?' he asked.

'I care nothing for them or their kind.'

The giant smiled again. At eight feet tall, he was a spindly ogre. Despite his height, he appeared almost human: white skinned with lank black hair that fell to his shoulders and framed his narrow face. The tips of vaguely pointed ears eased out from his tangled mane, and weird eyes – hard crystal, ringed with black sclera – glittered above his nose.

His long fingers gently caressed the heads of the man and the woman kneeling at his feet. 'There could be a Ring here – can you feel it? The potential?' asked the giant.

'It would not do you any good.'

'Really?' The giant gripped the hair of his captives and pulled their faces up so he could look down into them. 'They are a fey race, these Brigantes, though there are not many of them. I have had to slaughter their entire village to gain enough power to escape you and your bitch mistress.'

'There is nowhere you can run, Cú Roí,' the tattooed man growled back.

Cú Roí did not appear to hear him. 'This one here,' he said, jerking the head of the man, 'was their leader. He has a strange gift – he can see the future. The tales he has spun to me ... quite extraordinary. And this one,' he said, pulling at the female, 'is a healer. Sores, colds, breaks, sprains ... she lays her hands upon them and they fade away. Yes, a powerful race these Brigantes. With their sacrifice, I shall have enough magic to leave you behind.'

'My life is tied to yours, Cú Roí. While you live, I live. Where you go, I go.'

'Yes, that has been difficult these last few centuries. You are quite the zealot.' He smiled without humour and the tattooed man saw rows of sharp, tiny teeth nestled in his gums. 'It was this one who finally solved the problem for me.' He dragged the man's head higher. 'Where can I go that you cannot follow? The answer is quite simple, once you think about it. The magic of your mistress is powerful, but what happens to you when I cease to exist?'

'Then my purpose is complete, and I will die.'

'Exactly,' hissed the giant. Silence filled the clearing. Mercifully, the man and the woman had fainted. Their legs were unrecognisable; flesh and sinew were burned away by the red-hot ash. Only Cú Roí's grip on their hair prevented them from falling flat onto the searing ground.

'Enough of this,' said the tattooed man. Raising a huge hand above his right shoulder, he gripped the sigil-branded leather hilt of the sword that was slung across his back. He pulled it free in one smooth motion. The sword was called *Camulus*, and it had been crafted by the Maiden of Earth and Water, blessed by her and engraved with runes, which shimmered and skipped like rainbows in a tempest. It was a blade of power. It had been designed to destroy the towering laconic man at the centre of the devastation.

'It is time to die,' the tattooed man said.

'That is a pretty toy you have there, zealot, but what exactly do you expect steel to do to me?'

'Silver, monster. This is silver, blessed by both Courts, and etched with the words of your death.'

'Ah, you have been paying attention. Fortunately, so have I.' The disconcerting smile got broader.

The tattooed man stiffened. The skin between his shoulders itched and his hackles rose.

Something was watching him. Gripping the hilt of Camulus tighter, the tattooed man inhaled deeply. There it was. Beneath the stench of seared meat, burned wood, and acrid smoke he could smell putrescence and blood. The tattooed man spun around to face the forest. He scanned the tree line but could see nothing. They were there though, and he cursed himself for being led into an ambush so easily.

The voice of Cú Roí drifted to him from over his shoulder. 'You are familiar with my Barghest?'

Branches swayed as two huge forms moved silently from the forest. Their squirming bodies shuddered with anticipation. Behind them came a slim man, his pale skin slick beneath the uncured furs that he was wrapped in. His head was too big for his body, and his eyes bulged out uncomfortably. He stared blankly at the tattooed man, never blinking, even in the smoke that choked the air. He held the Barghest on ropes.

'This changes nothing, Cú Roí. These ... cubs ... cannot kill me.'

'But they can hurt you, can they not? I give Leach there the word and they will tear you to pieces. I only regret there are not more, but as I said, I needed most of the humans for a different kind of sacrifice.' The giant's face twisted in sudden rage. His voice rose to a shout. 'You used to worship me. You and the four races knelt at my feet in awe and wonder. I was the Miracle Child, and you have the temerity to hunt me?'

The tattooed man turned back to face Cú Roí. 'You are an abomination that should never have been spawned, and my mistress never saw you as anything more than a dangerous curio. The blame for your continued existence can be laid at the feet of the Satyr of Fire and Air, and it is his mistake that I am here to rectify.' He took a step towards the giant, the sword held ready.

The pale man named Leach let go of the ropes, and the

Barghest swarmed in with hungry, reverberating roars. The tattooed man slipped smoothly out of their way, ignoring the pain of barbed tentacles sliding into his skin. The sword flashed, and pieces of coiling pink flesh fell to burn in the drifts of ash. His tattoos writhed, and sinuous painted blue bodies shifted to cover the wounds, leaving nothing but ink scale where before there were open wounds. The Barghest backed away cautiously, and the pale man in furs stared malignantly at him. The tattooed man held his ground.

'They have learned a lesson,' Cú Roí said, nodding towards the lurking Barghest. 'It will stand them in good stead when I am gone.' Then his hands slipped down and in one smooth motion, ripped open the throats of both humans.

Blood spurted into the air and onto the ground. Impossibly, the liquid did not steam away. Instead it twisted and flowed through channels until it met in a single pool just in front of Cú Roí. The surface was still and stygian. The corpses slipped to the ground in puffs of ash. The woman's hair caught on fire.

Cú Roí stepped towards the pool. The tattooed man pulled back his arm and threw the sword with all his strength. It flew straight and true, point first towards the giant. Cú Roí's left foot touched the surface of the pool and it held his weight. His right foot joined it, and he turned and smiled triumphantly at the tattooed man.

The smile slipped when the blade plunged into his stomach. Cú Roí raised his head to scream, even as the puddle lost solidity. The giant's body dropped from sight, vanishing into the non-existent depths of the blood pool.

The tattooed man took a step towards it, but the magic had faded, and the blood was already soaking into the ash. The viscous substance boiled and steamed away in seconds. Cú Roí was gone.

Peace descended over the tattooed man. He looked up

into the darkening sky. He could hear the Barghest, but he ignored them. Cú Roí was gone – he could feel it. The monster was dead. With that final realisation, his own death rushed down to engulf him.

By the time the Barghest reached him, his spirit was gone. The man called Leach watched the monsters' frenzy for a few seconds and then faded back into the forest.

The tattooed man's dead body was torn to shreds, his bones cracked and splintered, the marrow sucked into worm mouths, his flesh stripped and scattered. Then the Barghest sloped back into the forest, eager for fresh meat.

Neither Barghest saw the man with flashing eyes who stood and watched from the tree line, nor did they see the red-haired girl beside him, gazing sadly at what remained of the big man's tattooed corpse.

82 AD

THE SWOLLEN SUN WAS MAKING ITS LAZY DIP TOWARDS THE horizon, and its golden face held a blush that coloured the world. Long grass swayed in a gentle summer breeze. Lazy white clouds bunched up in the dying light, their undersides washed with brilliant oranges and gentle reds. The early evening was warm and balmy. No sound came, except for exhausted birdsong and the whisper of grass rippling in steady waves beneath the caress of the soft breeze.

The empty green fields, dotted with bluebells and daisies and buttercups, stretched out in all directions. Clumps of daffodils shone burnished gold around the occasional forlorn willow tree. The great Roman fort of Mamucium stood to the south. Its high limestone walls were grim and

unadorned. The cold grey presence was a monument to the greatness of the expanding Roman Empire and the defeat of the Brigante tribes. In the distance to the east lay the emerald smudge of the great forest. The advancing Romans had chopped it back, eager for the raw materials that the woods held. The tree line began again beyond easy reach of the settlers, a wall of forbidding green and brown that squatted and stared back at the invaders with grim malevolence.

To the west and north, the grass gave way to the banks of a river that meandered through the rolling countryside with languid disinterest for the aspirations of men. Where the rapids ran, it twinkled bright and blue in the dying sun, whitecaps glittering with the flash of a smile. Elsewhere, the deep sluggish waters moved along, silent and black. On the far banks of the river lay more forest. Its thick canopy and tangled undergrowth turned the land within its borders from the ethereal twilight of evening to the grim blackness of night.

Between the fort and the river, closer to the muddy bank than to the squatting wall, was a ring of standing stones. There were sixteen boulders in a rough circle, and they were old. Some stooped at an angle, the earth beneath them having collapsed to send them crooked. All of them were covered in thick moss and lichen, which thrived on their granite surfaces. Beneath the vegetable matter it was still possible to see where runes had been carved, though the passing of time and the ravages of the weather had worn them to near invisibility.

The Brigante tribes and the Roman settlers alike treated the ancient and mysterious stones with quiet reverence and respect. The tribes whispered that they were a place of power – a Fairy-Ring, home of the old folk – and as such, not to be interfered with. The Romans saw them as a temple of sorts, and though the Druidic traditions of the area were

being systematically destroyed, the invaders left it alone. Perhaps they felt its power. Perhaps, remembering the blood and fire of the last revolt, they simply did not want to antagonise the painted tribesmen who lived in the brooding forest only an hour's walk from their walls. Whatever the reason, the stones had remained untouched for hundreds of years.

There was a shout of outrage followed by raucous laughter. Three young men were halfway between the fort and the river. One had tripped and sprawled on the ground in a puddle of wine. Around him lay the shards of a smashed clay jug. He was a big man, in his mid-twenties, dressed in tan hunting clothes. His sandy hair was thinning despite his youth, and his face was round and jowly.

'Galerius, you oaf!' a second man crowed in delight. 'Now you have no wine for our evening swim!' He was tall and emaciated, with wide brown eyes and long hair, braided in the Brigante fashion. He was also wearing hunting clothes, though his were dark green.

'Give me some of yours, Octavius,' Galerius said from the ground.

Octavius laughed. 'Not a chance, my friend. If you want more wine, you will have to return to the fort.' He laughed again.

Galerius turned to face his final companion, a tall, wiry man of around the same age. 'What about you, Marcus?' he begged. 'I can't go all the way back to the fort. It'll be dark by the time I reach the river.' Marcus surveyed Galerius with disdain. His eyes were deep, dark and brooding, and his skin had a swarthy olive sheen to it. Like his eyes, his hair was black. The oiled locks were cut to a medium length that brushed his ears and fell onto his forehead in a wave. His nose was straight, and his stance was haughty and proud.

'Get off the ground, Galerius. You're supposed to be a Roman, even if you have been brought up in this forsaken

wilderness.' Marcus twisted his face up in disgust as he spoke to the prostrate man.

Galerius dutifully pulled himself to his feet. 'What do you say, Marcus, can I share your wine?'

'I'll think about it if you show a little backbone.' Marcus took a swig of wine from the jug he held casually in his right hand. 'Lying there in the filth like a pig and begging like a tribesman; I swear you are barely Roman, Galerius.'

Galerius blinked nervously. 'We haven't all been as lucky as you, Marcus,' he said quietly.

'You call this lucky? Dragged from the colonnades of Rome to sit in some stinking wooden outpost? At least Eboracum has some comforts, but this awful place my father insisted on building is a privy.' He wrinkled his nose in distaste and took another drink of wine. Then he spat the liquid out onto the ground. 'Even the wine here tastes foul,' he announced before upturning the jug and pouring it out at Galerius' feet. The bigger man was wise enough to hold his tongue.

'Look around you: grass and mud. Even the river is small. And those awful forests – they aren't like the forests of home where a man can see. Look at them! Anything could be hiding in them!' Marcus shivered theatrically. 'I was not lucky to be dragged here after my father. Governor? Governor of what? He's spent years conquering this land, and it's nothing but filth and peasants.'

'There's Annaea,' Octavius said quietly.

Marcus's face immediately softened. 'Yes,' he replied simply.

'This time tomorrow you'll be a married man,' Galerius said and slapped Marcus on the back.

An infectious grin spread over the young nobleman's face. 'I will, won't I. Annaea is the one shining light in this mire. Once we are wed, my father has promised me estates in

Rome. I will take her from here and show her a real civilisation. One as perfect and pure as Annaea deserves better. This time tomorrow, she will be my wife.'

'This time tomorrow, she will be on her back with her legs in the air,' Octavius said slyly.

Marcus's grin spread wider, though he tried to show outrage at his friend's words. 'You are talking about my bride,' he said and punched Octavius in the arm. Galerius laughed too, happy that Marcus's grim mood had evaporated.

'We are supposed to be swimming,' Marcus shouted. 'I shall race you!' Marcus began running towards the river. The standing stones were directly in his path.

'Wait,' Galerius called.

Marcus slowed to a halt and turned. 'What?' he demanded.

'You can't go through the stones.'

'Why not? I am the son of Gnaeus Julius Agricola. I can do as I please.'

'Not the stones; they're unlucky,' Galerius said as he caught up with Marcus.

Octavius followed. 'He's right, Marcus. Those stones are cursed. The Brigante say they are the homes of their gods.'

'Well, their gods are no match for ours. My friends, this is exactly the sort of behaviour I am tired of chastising you for. We are the rulers here. We are the conquerors. The tribesmen are little more than animals, worshipping the trees and the earth. If I decide to walk through their holy places, then I shall. If I decide to tear them up and pave them over, then I shall. And if they protest, the legion will march out and cut them down. Look,' he said with a sudden smile. 'I will show you. I will prove to you that these heathen gods have no power.'

Marcus turned and ran towards the stones. His friends

followed uneasily, Galerius gasping breathlessly as he tried to keep up. Once in the circle, Marcus stopped and began to walk around. He extended his arms out to either side of his body, palms up, and began to shout.

'Here I am! Here I am, and I deny you! Gods? I think not. You are the fantasies of a barbarian race, creatures of superstitious dread. You have no substance, no power ... I piss on you.' Marcus moved over to one of the stones and started to tug at his britches. 'I am the Lord here. I am the Master. I will hunt you down, and I will destroy you where I find you!' Laughing, Marcus let loose a thick stream of yellow urine against the side of the stone.

Hot liquid splattered onto the moss and lichen and dribbled down to the ground. Even in the heat of the evening, it steamed slightly. Still laughing, Marcus finished and fastened himself back up. 'You see?' he asked his uneasy companions, as the acrid stink of piss wafted over them. 'There is nothing to fear here.'

'Who are you?' asked a melodic voice from behind Marcus. Galerius turned and ran. Octavius stood his ground, though his face was very pale. Marcus turned around with a sly smile on his face.

Stood within the circle of stones was a willowy girl with long red hair and huge green eyes. She was dressed in a flowing white dress which brushed the ground, and Marcus could see that she had no shoes or sandals on, though her feet were clean. The girl was beautiful. She had a heart-shaped face and soft white skin dusted with freckles. She wore the clothes of the tribes though, and Marcus stared at her with undisguised contempt.

'Who am I? Who are you?'

'I am the Maiden of Earth and Water,' she said simply.

Octavius tugged at Marcus's sleeve. 'She appeared from thin air, Marcus. We should leave.'

Thank You for previewing this eBook

You can read the full version of this eBook in different formats:

- HTML (Free /Available to everyone)
- PDF / TXT (Available to V.I.P. members. Free Standard members can access up to 5 PDF/TXT eBooks per month each month)
- Epub & Mobipocket (Exclusive to V.I.P. members)

To download this full book, simply select the format you desire below

