

# BOOK II



# BRITANNIA™

IN THE YEAR 60 A.D., THE ROMAN EMPIRE, UNDER THE RULE OF NERO, STRETCHES FROM JUDEA IN THE SOUTH TO A WILD NORTHERN COUNTRY CALLED BRITANNIA. MEN BELIEVE THAT THE GODS RULE THEIR DESTINY AND BEND TO THE WILL OF THE FATES. ONE SUCH MAN — A CENTURION NAMED ANTONIUS AXIA — IS ON CAMPAIGN IN ITALY WHEN A VESTAL VIRGIN PAYS VISIT.



THE POWERFUL VESTAL, RUBRIA, ASKS ANTONIUS TO SAVE A FELLOW VESTAL KIDNAPPED AT THE HANDS OF DEMON-WORSHIPPING CULTISTS. AXIA AGREES, AND SAVES THE GIRL, BUT THE EVENTS OF THE MISSION SHATTER HIS MIND.

THE VESTALS REHABILITATE ANTONIUS, PERFORMING SACRED RITUALS AND ALLOWING HIM TO READ THEIR CODEX — WRITINGS THAT OFFER REASONS FOR WHY MEN DO WHAT THEY DO. CAUSE, EFFECT, AND MOTIVE, CENTURIES BEFORE MODERN PSYCHOLOGY.



SIX YEARS PASS. AXIA HAS BUILT A REPUTATION FOR SOLVING MYSTERIES. MANY CALL HIM A DETECTIONER.

IN BRITANNIA, THE DARKNESS CALLS...



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LOOK AT THIS BLOODY SLAUGHTER FIELD. FORT PAULINUS...IT'S BEEN DESTROYED.

NO, SOMETHING ELSE HAPPENED HERE. SEE HOW THE EARTH IS SCUFFED. IT'S BEEN MOVED, BRAN. PIECE BY PIECE.

AND THESE DEAD, THEIR TATTOOS, THEIR BEARDS...THEY'RE NOT ROMAN.

YOU'RE RIGHT! THEY'RE LOCALS. BRITS. BUT WHY WOULD THE ROMANS MOVE THEIR FORT?





I HAVE SEEN THE TERRORS OF GERMANIA, BUT NOTHING LIKE THIS.

THESE MEN... HUNG OUT TO FEED RAVENS.

OR MAYBE... IT IS SOME OTHER CREATURE...THEY ARE LEFT HERE TO TEMPT...

ANTONIUS, LIGHTS! HORSES!



STAND FAST. THEY ARE ROMANS. FRIENDS.



WHAT ARE YOU TURDS DOING HERE?

I...I AM ANTONIUS AXIA, A FREE CITIZEN OF ROME.

I'VE BEEN SENT BY NERO CLAUDIUS CAESAR AUGUSTUS GERMANICUS...TO INVESTIGATE THE TROUBLES IN BRITANNIA.

AND I DON'T GIVE A DAMN.



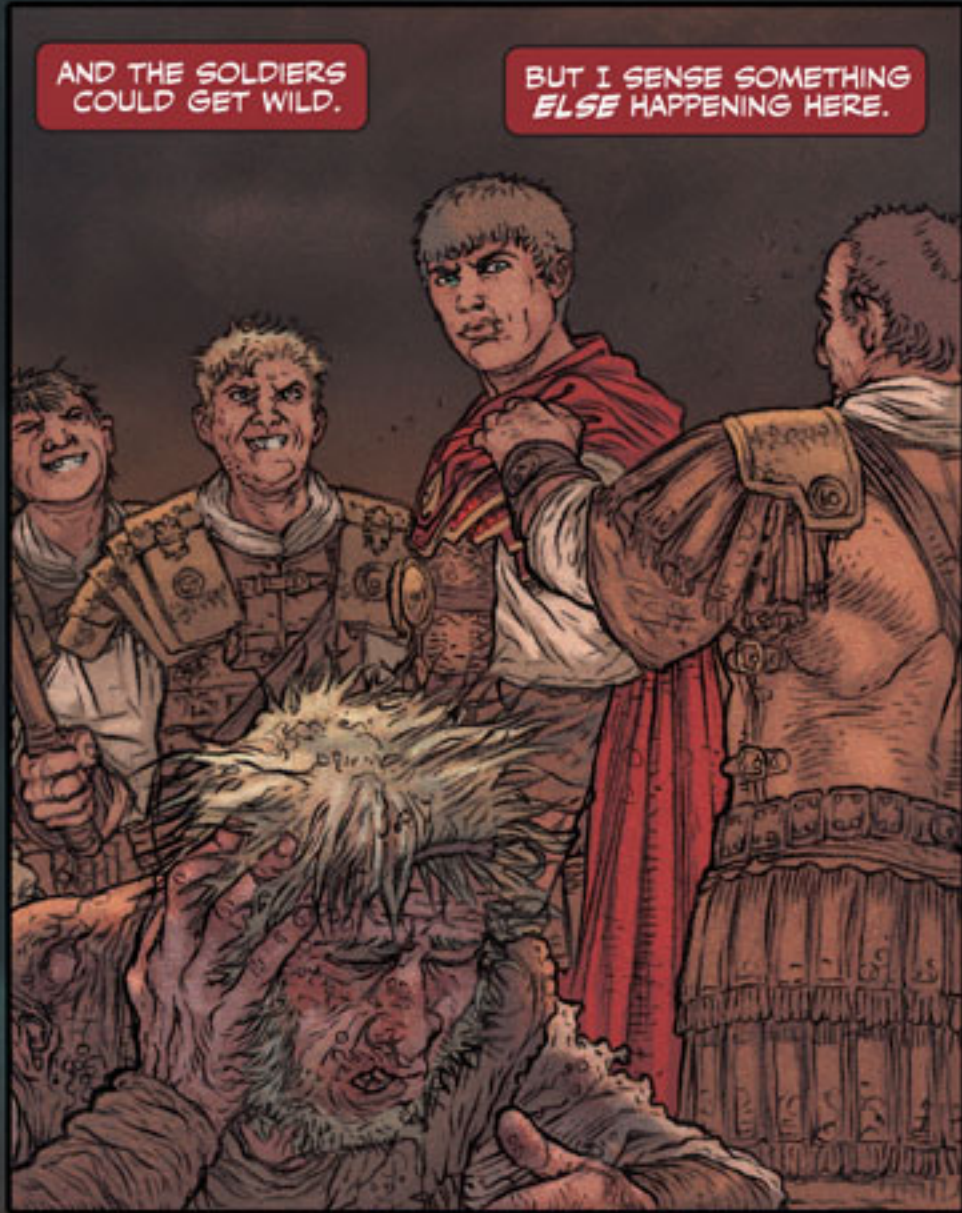




BACK AWAY, SOLDIER.

COME, ANTONIUS. LEGIONAIRES HAVE TO LET OFF STEAM.

IT'S TRUE, I SAW A LOT OF BRUTALITY IN THE ARMY.



AND THE SOLDIERS COULD GET WILD.

BUT I SENSE SOMETHING ELSE HAPPENING HERE.



SOMETHING WRONG.



SOMETHING ROTTEN.



THAT'S ENOUGH FOR NOW, BOYS.

AND YOU, ANTONIUS. GO HOME, WHILE YOU STILL CAN.

A WORD IN PRIVATE, PREFECT.



I'M SUPPOSED TO REPORT PERSONALLY TO LEGATE PEONIUS.

HE WAS KILLED BY THE DEVIL, IN THE FORT...WHICH HAS NOW BEEN MOVED FROM CURSED GROUND.

I'M PREFECT GABINIUS. I'M IN CONTROL NOW.

NEWS OF LEGIONAIRES DYING IS BAD FOR MORALE BACK IN ROME. NERO HAS SENT ME TO LEARN MORE OF THIS BEAST...



I DON'T NEED AN OUTSIDER'S HELP. WE'LL TAKE CARE OF THE DEVIL.

I BELIEVE THIS DEVIL IS UNLIKE THE SUPERSTITIONS THE ARMY USUALLY ENCOUNTERS.

YOU'RE CLEARLY UP AGAINST SOMETHING YOU DON'T UNDERSTAND.



AGGH!

STOP!

HE'S HAD ENOUGH!







YOU DON'T THINK YOU'RE QUITE UP TO YOUR *JOB*...

HOLD YOUR TONGUE!

...COMING FROM SUCH A LOWLY BACKGROUND, YOU *FRET*. YOU WAKE AT NIGHT, GRIPPED BY DOUBT. SEXUAL POWERS WANE, APPETITE GONE...



O-ONLY THE GODS... KNOW SUCH THINGS ABOUT ME.

NERO *PUNISHES* SUCH WEAKNESS. IF I WERE TO INCLUDE IT IN MY REPORT...

DO YOU C-COMMUNE WITH VULTURNUS, DOES HE TELL YOU MY DARK SECRETS?



NO, I DON'T COMMUNE WITH THE GOD OF THE WIND AND SECRETS.

NOR ANY OF THE IMMORTALS.

BUT I DO OBSERVE.



THE BROKEN VESSELS ON HIS NOSE, THE CHEWED FINGERNAILS, THE LESS-THAN-PATRICIAN ACCENT...

DRINKER. ALL-NIGHT WORRIER. CLASS CONSCIOUS.



THE VESTALS' TEXTS SHOWED ME HOW TO *READ* SUCH SIGNS ON MEN.

V-VERY WELL, STAY. JUST DON'T MAKE A NUISANCE OF YOURSELF.

PREFECT GABINIUS OBVIOUSLY DOES NOT KNOW HOW A DETECTIONER OPERATES...