

RISEN

The Novelization of the
Major Motion Picture

A Novel by

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Based on the Story by

Paul Aiello

and Screenplay by

Kevin Reynolds

AND **Paul Aiello**



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Angela Hunt, *Risen*

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Once you eliminate the impossible, whatever remains,
no matter how improbable, must be the truth.

—Arthur Conan Doyle

PROLOGUE

Clavius

Quick-moving shadows of clouds scuttled over the barren landscape as wilderness gave way to civilization. An inn, if one could call it that, lay upon the horizon, so I adjusted my angle of approach in order to reach it without wasting energy.

The building I trudged toward was built of sunbaked stone the same color as the sand beneath my feet. The place did not appear large enough to offer overnight accommodation, but if it could provide water and food, that would suffice.

I pushed on the wooden door that swung on leather hinges, revealing a table, a bearded man with a curved back, and a floor of stones set into packed sand. The owner bobbed before

me and gestured for me to enter as if I were royalty and his establishment fit for a king.

I walked inside, stepped over the roughhewn bench, and sat. The man placed a cup of tepid water before me. I swallowed it in one long gulp.

A ghost of a smile flickered across the man's face as he refilled my cup. "Roman, eh?"

For an instant I considered giving a snide reply, but then realized I did not resemble my usual self. I had not been able to shave in days, and I had ditched the red *paludamentum* of a Roman officer weeks before. I now wore a tunic and a brown cloak, my only protection against the blowing sand. Perhaps my manner gave me away, or perhaps this man was more observant than he appeared. "Yes," I said.

His eyes widened as he lowered the pitcher. "And . . . is that a tribune's ring?"

I lowered my weary gaze to the silver circle on my left hand, a ring engraved with X FRETENSIS, the name and number of my legion. No wonder the innkeeper looked surprised. Not often did a Roman tribune wander about dirty, disheveled, and alone.

The man slid onto the empty bench across the table. "Have you come far, Tribune?"

How could I answer? I had spent the last forty days wandering in Judea, crossing and recrossing the same territory. But moving from the man I was to the man I had become was a journey of enormous length and breadth.

I lifted my cup and drained it again, then studied the innkeeper. With no other customers, he had to be bored. And like all bored men he thirsted for a story.

Perhaps I was finally ready to share mine.

Clavius

Under Tiberius Caesar, Rome's armies controlled a vast empire—from Britannia in the north to Aegyptus in the south, from Mauritania Tingitana in the west to Mesopotamia in the east. But no post was less desired than the wasteland of Judea. Pontius Pilate governed Judea for Caesar, and as prefect Pilate commanded me, as *tribune cohortis*, to wield the military might of Rome and keep the peace.

The winds of revolution were blowing strong, however, and at no time more so than the yearly ritual of the Passover, when the Jews celebrated their supposed exodus from enslavement in Egypt. The Jews prayed to their single god, Yahweh, for

the arrival of a mystical messiah who would free them from the yoke of Roman rule. Yet there were zealots who were not content simply to pray but foolishly desired to die challenging the power of Rome. So we granted their wish. With our swords and spears we taught a lesson they had failed to learn: Rome was always right.

A few days before the festival of Passover, Pilate left his palace in Caesarea and traveled to Jerusalem to be nearby in the event the Jews' fervor instigated turmoil. Along with my men—the Augustan cohort of six hundred auxiliaries and one hundred mounted cavalry—I had prepared not only for the prefect's arrival but also for the battalion of Italian legionnaires that always accompanied Pilate from Caesarea. The Italians would stay at the praetorium and be under Pilate's direct command, and my commander and I would be responsible for making sure they were fed and housed.

The Jews' holy city, ruled by religious men who scorned nearly every aspect of Roman civilization, grew louder and more clamorous during religious festivals, the population increasing as thousands of Jews came to celebrate the Feasts of Passover and Firstfruits at their Holy Temple. Jews from birth and proselytes; Jews from Crete, Arabia, Parthia, and Mesopotamia; from Cappadocia, Pontus, Phrygia, Pamphylia, Egypt, Libya, and Rome; Medes and Elamites—the streets were overrun with them.

Within hours of Pilate's arrival, my commander summoned me. I found *Tribunus rufulus* Gaius Aelius in full battle dress, his molded cuirass gleaming with medals and the insignia of his rank. His slave stood behind him, adjusting the folds of the scarlet paludamentum, without which no commander would ever set out for war.

Who would we be sending to the underworld today?

I saluted my superior, then removed my helmet to receive my orders.

“*Salve*, Tribune,” he said, acknowledging me with a cursory glance. “I trust the new arrivals have settled into the barracks at the praetorium?”

“They have. And their horses have been stabled.”

He nodded. “Good, because Pilate may need them later today. A zealot, name of Yeshua Barabbas, has robbed the high priest and several members of the Sanhedrin. The council has called for blood.”

I lifted a brow. “Have we located this thief?”

“Oh, yes.” Aelius’s mouth curved in a mirthless smile. “The brigand knew Caiaphas would not stand for such a violation, so this time he’s gone beyond thievery and committed murder. He and his men have taken control of a tower outside the city.”

I glanced at the map on the tribune’s wall. “At the south gate?”

“The very one. I dispatched a century just after sunrise, but apparently the zealots are better fighters than we expected. You and I are going to finish them off.”

Only by tremendous effort was I able to repress an expression of surprise. High-ranking officers usually sent cavalry and infantry to handle small skirmishes, and to my knowledge Aelius had never participated in any sort of battle. But perhaps he wanted to earn glory . . . or hoped I would praise him in a report to Pilate.

Aelius strapped on his helmet and dismissed me with a nod. “I’ll meet you at the tower.”

Upon reaching my quarters, I called for my slave to help me

into my armor. After I donned the padded vest worn under the breastplate, Titus helped me fasten the molded cuirass, which protected the torso. Finally he fixed the paludamentum to my right shoulder and clasped it with a fibula.

“Will we be sparring later today, master?”

“I think this morning’s duty will negate the need for training, Titus. But if you want to practice, one of the auxiliaries might be willing to spar with you. Just don’t hurt him.”

I turned in time to see a half smile cross his face. My slave had been sparring with me for years and was as good a rider and swordsman as any man in my cohort.

“Anything else I can get you?”

“Fill a waterskin for my saddle. It’s going to be as hot as Dis’s oven out there.”

As Titus stepped away, a bloodstained messenger brought a status report: “The brigand Yeshua Barabbas still holds the south tower. They murdered the tower guard and threw his body over the railing.”

“Was the guard a Roman citizen?”

“No.”

No need to worry about retrieving the body then. “Anything else?”

“The centurion was felled by a rock. He lives, but is no longer conscious.”

“Then let us go.”

I rode out with twenty mounted men. We found the dazed centurion at the bottom of a slope, where his legionnaires battled not only the zealots but also the blazing heat and taunts from an angry mob. I shouted a command to the new arrivals, “You six spread out and barricade the crowd from this area. Arrest anyone who crosses the line. The rest of you bring water

to the men who have been fighting.” I squinted and looked up at the tower, where a zealot with wild hair waved a blade and grinned down at us. He held the high ground, but only for the moment.

As I watched, one of the centurion’s men broke formation and charged up the slope, roaring in frustration. For his efforts he was struck with a stone tossed by one of the zealots. The rock slammed into the soldier’s face, knocking him off his feet and sending him tumbling down the hill like a straw doll.

“Dis take you,” I muttered. “Only a fool charges alone.”

With their shields up, the remaining men struggled for a foothold on the scree as stones and curses rained down on them. Battered bodies, both Roman and Judean, littered the slope beneath the swirling dust.

I squinted up at the tower again, then ducked as a javelin sailed past my ear. The zealots had done enough damage; it was time to gain the high ground.

I found the injured centurion, who staggered and looked at me as if confused. “Remain here,” I commanded, noting that Tribune Gaius Aelius had just arrived. “I will rally your men and show this rabble how Rome handles insurrection.”

The centurion nodded, and then a rock from a zealot’s sling-shot pinged his helmet and knocked the man senseless. He collapsed at my feet like an empty feed sack.

To celebrate this small victory, the zealot leapt over the short wall around the tower base and danced on the slope, taunting us. He bent to pick up a helmet from a fallen legionnaire and popped it on his head.

I bent to the centurion and checked the lump rising on his forehead. I picked up his pilum, which he had not yet thrown. Balancing it in my palm, I took aim at a man on the tower wall,

then threw it and nodded when the spear pierced the zealot's thigh and sent a spray of blood arching into the air.

"Form up!" I commanded the troops, who hungered for direction. "*Testudo!*"

On my command, the remaining legionnaires grouped themselves around me in a tight oval configuration. With shields raised to protect the top and sides of the formation, we climbed the slope, the zealots' stones and spears skittering harmlessly off the legionnaires' heavy wooden shields. Once the *testudo* reached the top of the hill, we knelt down. Then the men at the back pulled away and ran over their comrades' shields, scaling the wall by way of our improvised ramp. Out came their *gladii*, double-edged swords designed to be thrust beneath an opponent's ribs, and in very little time most of the zealots lay dead around the base of the tower. Three legionnaires ran into the structure, where I knew they would make short work of any insurrectionists who remained.

"Tribune!"

I turned to see a pair of legionnaires holding up the Judean scarecrow who had worn the Roman helmet as he mocked us. "Meet the infamous Yeshua Barabbas!"

I waited as my men dragged the beaten zealot over and dropped him at my feet. The man lifted his head and gave me a bloody smile. "I know how this ends."

"Then tell Yahweh," I said, lifting my *gladius*, "that you are soon leaving for the underworld, courtesy of Mars."

The fool would not be cowed. "It must pain you," he said, rising to his knees, "to know the one true God chose us over you."

I felt my mouth twist. "Not today, he didn't." I lowered my sword and sliced the tendons at the back of his heels, effectively

hobbling him. He would suffer, but he wouldn't die. Though this man was no citizen and did not deserve a trial, I wanted Pilate to see that we had done our part to maintain *Pax Romana*, the peace of Rome.

Not until I started walking down the hill did I spot Tribune Gaius Aelius among the fallen.