



## Rome's Executioner

*Robert Fabbri*

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## **Rome's Executioner Robert Fabbri**

Thracia, AD30: Even after four years military service at the edge of the Roman world, Vespasian can't escape the tumultuous politics of an Empire on the brink of disintegration. His patrons in Rome have charged him with the clandestine extraction of an old enemy from a fortress on the banks of the Danube before it falls to the Roman legion besieging it. Vespasian's mission is the key move in a deadly struggle for the right to rule the Roman Empire. The man he has been ordered to seize could be the witness that will destroy Sejanus, commander of the Praetorian Guard and ruler of the Empire in all but name. Before he completes his mission, Vespasian will face ambush in snowbound mountains, pirates on the high seas, and Sejanus's spies all around him. But by far the greatest danger lies at the rotten heart of the Empire, at the nightmarish court of Tiberius, Emperor of Rome and debauched, paranoid madman.

## **Rome's Executioner Details**

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# From Reader Review Rome's Executioner for online ebook

## Lance McMurchy says

This is one of those books that is brilliant in some places and very ordinary in others. What do I mean by this: there was some places where there were so many ideas being thrown around with people I knew nothing about that just left me befuddled; while at other times, the prose and character interaction was just wonderful. Such befuddlement was when Antonia had those meetings to discuss those involved in the conspiracy against the emperor, they were just painful. At one time I remember saying to myself: oh, no, not other one of Antonia's meetings. While, on the other hand, the interaction between Caligula and Tiberius while on the island of Capri was just absorbing - I never wanted it to end.

If the plot was just simplified a bit would have made this a better book. The last half of the book works nice to a quite gruesome conclusion, and is done really well. i just wish overload of detail in the first half of the book - some of it quite unnecessary, I think. If this was tidied up it would have given the book even greater readability.

Still a great book. Looking forward to the next book in the series.

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## Krystina says

I cannot tell if the author is improving or if I have become immured to his writing style. This book is an improvement over the first: clearly, Magnus (Vespasian's right hand man) is the star of the book and his dialogue is one of my primary reasons for continuing to read this series.

On the subject of dialogue, I know that the author is an award-winning screenwriter and OxBridge graduate but I have hard time believing it when, in attempting to describe a night spent with Caenis after being away from her for years, he writes Vespasian as saying "complete her to massage to the happiest of endings." My number one complaint continues to be that female characters are not at all fleshed out and end up saying and doing things no woman would do...I don't care how patriarchal Roman society was.

The flip side is that I'm going to read the third book...begrudgingly

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## Robin Carter says

### Review

When i saw book one of this series last year i was very interested, Vespasian , a name to get any Roman History lovers pulse racing, this is a man involved in some very interesting points in Romes long and chequered history.

When you add to that the glimpse we have had of this man in Simon Scarrows Eagles series, im sure his future appearance in Henry Venmore-Rowlands new series (starting with the Last Caesar in June). This is not just an interesting figure, this is a man of the moment, it seems the time of the 4 emperors is something

that we are heading towards in multiple books, and what an amazing ride it is.

Vespasian: Tribune of Rome in 2011 was an amazing book, and with every book two you worry that it cannot be repeated by a new guy on the block, was it a flash in the pan? Well certainly not in the case of Robert Fabbri and Rome's Executioner.

For me the highlight of this series is similar to Conn Igguldens Emperor series, it's taking a major figure from history but not from the record books, but taking him from birth, from the unknown years, breathing life into him filling in the details, the actions the thoughts the intimacies, the loves, the losses, the victories and the friends that might have shaped this person into the man he became, a Great Emperor who shaped an empire, and a dynasty.

The Emperor series launched Conn Iggulden into one of the shining lights of the Historical Fiction genre, and in my opinion the Vespasian series is its equal in writing and its superior with some of its characters. Fabbri's battle scenes are simply brilliant, starting with a sudden ruthless explosive violence when needed, but also a slow steady burn, building in intensity for the major battles which leaves the reader the option of tearing through the chapters at light speed to get to the dramatic conclusion, or savoring each and every slash and cut and political maneuver (which in this book there are many).

to quote my good friend Kate forwinternights.wordpress.com "The False God of Rome is the next in the series and it can't come soon enough."

So in Summary: An action packed tour of the Roman world and its politics at its worst. And one of its greatest Success Stories. Vespasian.

Highly recommended.

(Parm)

Synopsis

Thracia, AD30: Even after four years military service at the edge of the Roman world, Vespasian can't escape the tumultuous politics of an Empire on the brink of disintegration. His patrons in Rome have charged him with the clandestine extraction of an old enemy from a fortress on the banks of the Danube before it falls to the Roman legion besieging it.

Vespasian's mission is the key move in a deadly struggle for the right to rule the Roman Empire. The man he has been ordered to seize could be the witness that will destroy Sejanus, commander of the Praetorian Guard and ruler of the Empire in all but name. Before he completes his mission, Vespasian will face ambush in snowbound mountains, pirates on the high seas, and Sejanus's spies all around him. But by far the greatest danger lies at the rotten heart of the Empire, at the nightmarish court of Tiberius, Emperor of Rome and debauched, paranoid madman.

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## Mr. Matt says

Rome's Executioner continues the story of the young (early twenties) Vespasian. It also continues the great cloak and dagger, life and death struggle between Sejanus, and Antonia. With the Emperor Tiberius aging and increasingly disinterested in the business of running the Empire, Sejanus, the ambitious prefect of the

Praetorian Guard, is moving in the shadows to make himself Emperor. Antonia, the sister-in-law of Tiberius, mother of Claudius and grandmother of Caligula is likewise moving in the shadows to thwart him and place her own bloodline on the Imperial seat. Caught up in this struggle is Vespasian.

Vespasian heads back to Thrace once again to collect evidence against Sejanus. If he can capture the wicked priest Sejanus had bribed to stir up troubles in the frontier province, then Antonia's faction will have the power to destroy the upstart Prefect. Unfortunately, capturing the priest is only the first of Vespasian's problems. The priest must be returned to Rome and then smuggled to Emperor on his island retreat of Capri. Of course, throughout all this Sejanus knows that something is amiss and is moving to capture Vespasian and kill the priest.

Clearly, this book had Imperial politics in spades. That was OK for me, as I like this stuff. I like the twists and turns and the back-stabbing involved in the cut-throat politics. When the entire plot reached its climax on the Senate floor between Sejanus, the Praetorians, and the Senate I was on the edge of my seat. I generally knew what was to happen, but it was none-the-less a thrilling read.

All of that being said, as I read I wondered if the author had really missed his mark. Certainly Vespasian is a great historical figure - one of the truly great Emperors - but does he make the best protagonist? Not 100% sure. I came to find Antonia a far more interesting character. Although women had many rights in Rome, they were clearly not the equal partners of patriarchal Rome. None-the-less, Antonia deftly maneuvered Senators, Patricians, soldiers and public officials in her gambit to have one of her off-spring (Caligula or Claudius) succeed Tiberius. She is a strong, intimidating woman who sees two or three moves in advance of Vespasian and other men. Her foes legitimately fear her. I would love to have had the series focus on her. Maybe it wouldn't have worked, but it is rare to see a supporting character shine so brightly. Color me impressed.

The ending of the book was also interesting. To my surprise it did not end directly with the end of Sejanus' plot. Instead, Tiberius lives on, taking retribution on those in the Senate that he perceived to have been ... weak ... in their enthusiasm for him. The ensuing bloodbath is eye opening and gives the reader a sense of the chaos that the Empire is heading towards. This turmoil is only supplemented with news of trouble with the Jews in distant Palestine and the increasing excesses of young Caligula.

IV stars out of V. A fun read of Imperial politics that does a good job of immersing the reader in the period.

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### **Kris Van Laer says**

great second book, less fight and war action and especially second part of the book more intrigues, politics about the age of first Roman emperors. Not only Fabbri tells a tale about the rise of Vespasian ( partly fiction), it also describes the emperors and their rise/fall that came before him. It really describes how decadent the emperors at that time were and you understand how they finally ended up as mad men. Must read for historical fiction lovers!

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### **Andy says**

Less Legionnaire fighting in this one & more politicking which was a little hard to fathom in the early

exchanges as is oft the way with Roman politics as the experienced campaigners play the “long game”..... it all works through in the end & is still a decent enough adventure tale after the opening skirmishes as it centres mostly around the two brothers Vespasian & Sabinus rise in Rome’s echelons. Full of scheming, hedging bets, switching alliances, duplicity..... its all there & when you can keep up its an enjoyable read, certainly not as good as the first book in terms of action & adventures, but it definitely gives you more depth & background as it sets the scene for the series by fleshing out the players. The final chapters where it all comes together, is well played out as it all becomes clear, as much to Vespasian (he’s mostly a pawn which he alludes to) as it does to this reader.

High 3’s rounded upto four stars for me & on to further stories about Vespasian.

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## Speesh says

There’s action a-plenty in ‘Rome’s Executioner (Vespasian II)’, on and off the pitch. Ranging from the outskirts of the Roman empire in Dacia in AD 30, to the very centre of power and those who hold it or want it, in the eternal city itself. From full-on combat at the point of a sword to daggers in the back in the dark of Roman side-streets and back alleys. All in all, just what you want to find in a book set in Roman times. However (the good sort) what elevates this one above - the most of - its competition, is the sparkle, invention and wit Robert Fabbri imbues his characters and their stories with. It manages to hold my interest and rapt attention, even in the (totally necessary) political skullduggery set-pieces back in Rome. No mean achievement that. Robert Fabbri really does seem to hit the right balance between intrigue, politicking and action in this series and Vespasian himself, is developing into a very interesting character indeed.

Along with the battles and brawls, intrigue and dirty-dickery, there are also interesting comments on the state of Roman ‘civilisation’ and the intricacy of its politics woven subtly all the way through. As well as thoughts on those pre-Christian festivals that just so happened to take place at the end of a year, involve the giving of gifts and celebrating the birth of a god... To compare it with another long-running Roman series, the ‘Empire’ books of Anthony Riches (of which I’ve just passed #7), I’d have to say it comes out easily on top. Better written and plotted, even after only having read two of them, that’s clear (though to be fair ‘The Emperor’s Knives’ does show a lot more ambition on Riches’ side than has previously been evident). However, some things are clearly taken as read, by writers of books set in the Roman period - Greeks are obviously all homosexual. Here, as a character called Magnus says, “And it’ll be sometime before he can chew on a decent Roman sausage again; being Greek, he’s partial to sausage, if you take my meaning?” Seems Robert Fabbri’s Romans share much the same opinions of Greeks as Anthony Riches’ boys over in Britannia.

And, though in a different way to the Empire series, you’re going to need a strong stomach while reading ‘Rome’s Executioner.’ There, it’s mostly about what happens on the battlefield, but ‘Vespasian II’ is warts and all Roman depravity. Prepare to have your mind - and stomach - tied up in knots trying to follow all the ins and outs of who is trying to stab who in the back trying to out - or second - guess an aged Emperor who has clearly gone stark staring, raving, yip-yip, barking at the moon mad and can - and does - do whatever his skittish mind takes a fancy to. As you would.

As with a lot of the series these days (does no one ever write one-offs any more?), I find myself asking: “do you need to have read #1?” Here, I’d say maybe not really, but it will help increase the enjoyment. All I thought was that the relationship between Vespasian and his brother Sabinus, does perhaps need a glance at

#1, otherwise, you can certainly begin here, no problem.

So, and despite a(n interesting) new twist on the eyebrow raising device, so beloved of Roman period writers, here we have Secundus raising a 'monobrow,' I really enjoyed the book and rate it very highly indeed. In my view, the Vespasian series along with Douglas Jackson's '...of Rome' series are the best of the many Roman series I've read. 'Vespasian II' is up on the podium of the top three Roman novels I've read so far. In fact, it will have to be the best, most convincing, most captivating Roman-period book I've read since 'The Lion and the Lamb.' I'll admit, I actually found myself holding my breath at one point. (P117) and I'll go along with another of the book's characters' comments that "This is more fun than arse-licking back in Rome..." Then, as now, I guess. Go away and start this series now, if you haven't already, I'm sure you'll agree.

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## **Jasper says**

Originally posted at: <http://thebookplank.blogspot.com/2013...>

Rome's Executioner is the second book in the Vespasian series written by Robert Fabbri, just a short while ago I read Robert Fabbri's debut and the first book in the series Tribune of Rome. I was immediately hooked into it, Tribune of Rome begins with an most interesting promise and all along the story you are really in for some good action and betrayal. This first book offered a few glimpses in to the live of young Vespasian and I was certainly quite eager to see how the beginning of his legendary story would continue.

The second book in the series starts off a few years after the events of the first book. The focus is again on Vespasian and how he is navigating himself through a treacherous time in and out of Rome. Vespasian still serves in Thracia and the beginning of Rome's Executioner actually sees him in the normal runs of business. He is hunting animals and hasn't seen that much action over quite a long time. But it soon seems that his "boring" days have come to an end and Vespasian has a new task set out for him. I really liked how Vespasian was set out on a mission to do things. This way of showing the story gave for me the feeling that we are looking at a character in the making. It's a bit hard to describe but I hope you catch my drift. Like I said Vespasian is a soldier and his higher ups set him on a course to complete and by this Robert Fabbri invites the reader onto a journey of how Vespasian came to be an important character in Roman history. He didn't receive everything with just a blink of his eye, but he had to fight for his life, already quite a few times. This idea inspires a sort of "coming-of-age" for Vespasian and fits very well into the lines of the story. OK so, let me get back to his mission. Vespasian has to find a specific person into the Thracian camp and bring him back to Rome that will help him to remove Sejanus, the leader of the Praetorian Guard, out of the picture. The Thracian might seem like simple savages, but the camp that Vespasian has to infiltrate proves to be quite the opposite and added to this comes the daunting task to keep the prisoner alive during the long track back to Rome, which brings Vespasian and cohorts across dangerous mountains and deadly waters. It might seem a simple mission when telling it about on paper but the way that Robert Fabbri describes all the events, it shows to be quite the contrary.

With almost five year in between books, Vespasian's character has been quite shaped and changed by his time spend in the military and you hardly recognize the farmboy easy living attitude in him, that he once was. He now seeks the thrills of adventure and battle but he might get more that he had bargained for in Rome's Executioner. Vespasian development mostly took place off the paper but there is also plenty still

taking place in in the book itself. On the battlefield he is now a seasoned warrior, he knows how to fight and it pretty good in it but his development goes much deeper than just being good on the battlefield. Robert Fabbri has done a nice thing by involving the brother of Vespasian, Sabinus, into the story and showing their relation. Vespasian and Sabinus are quite opposite and even though Vespasian is the younger one, it does seem to be that he is the wisest one. Vespasian is growing up to be a responsible person, but he still has something that makes him this young boy, he one through love back in Rome. However for Vespasian it is hard to see how he should tackle this romance of him, bound by the Roman laws... this proves to be difficult. Robert Fabbri shows Vespasian in a diverse surroundings from the battlefield of Thracia to the political web of Rome and these parts make Vespasian's character great, he is adapting, growing and learning.

Now another thing where the first book excelled in is the action. Well Rome's Executioner isn't an exception either. From start in Thracia to finish in Rome you are in for quite a ride. The story has a great pacing that owes one part to the way that Robert Fabbri writes his story and a second part to the actual events that are happening. Robert Fabbri writes with a definite confidence and this is often seen in the outings of several characters, he is letting officers and other people use some strong language that helps bolster the current situation, now whether this was going on in the Roman times, I don't have a clue, but in the context of this story and the events that were unfolding with particular misfortunes is fits spot on and really helps set the mood straight. So that's his writing but what about the events? Well, you are taken through some colorful surrounding and happenings, from the forests of Thracia through snow covered mountains and if you thought it would go directly to the walls of Rome your wrong. Vespasian is traversing a pirate infested sea... Now this is one thing that I haven't seen being told to this level and the action that takes place on high sea, well it's just amazing. How these scene was setup and in particular the scenes with battle is just top stuff and will be something that I will keep recounting in my mind for a long time.

You might think that when Vespasian delivered the spy to Rome that the story of Rome's Executioner might see it's ending. It's far from that, it seems that the story just start to pick up speed in a new way once Rome gets into the picture. The big question is what will happen to Sejanus? Well, you just have to find out for yourself. You will be surprised by the events that will unfold in the end.

With Rome's Executioner, Robert Fabbri has written another great story. Tribune of Rome was a great start of the series and the sequel had a lot to live up to and it did. The story doesn't falter as you sometimes see in a sequel but Robert Fabbri really uses Vespasian in a great way to show what he wants to tell in his story. We are still seeing Vespasian in his younger years and his learning moments seem to be just as valuable for his character but also for the reader. You keep on seeing more and more of the history of this important character of Roman history. Robert Fabbri's writing style keeps the story on a nice pacing, it's one action-packed story to the finish. Besides the often non-stop action, there are a few scenes in between that allow you to refocus and recount all the earlier events and give them a solid place in the story, before you are once again thrown in the mix of this rich Roman character and his story. Vespasian is definitely a series you want to have read.

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## **Beorn says**

A good, well-written instalment of Fabbri's Vespasian series. Though, for me at least, this episode doesn't feel quite as memorable as the opener, though that may just as easily be because the level of action & bloodshed drops dramatically to leave room for the political intrigue & manoeuvres dealing with Sejanus and his followers.



I guess that this suffers from the typical ills of a second instalment in a series in that rather than being focussed on giving the reader someone and something to immerse themselves or empathise with, it is more simply a case of a continuation of what went on in the previous book, which can be disappointing unless you read the series directly in one go straight through.

The colubrine political wranglings are a little hard to decipher at times though mercifully they become a little clearer as the action reaches around two-thirds of the way through the book.

Overall, well-written and as accessible as the previous book, just far less memorable, adrenalizing (due to the lack of outright military affairs excluding the relatively brief infiltration & abduction of Rhoteces).

Hopefully volume III will combine more action with the political intrigue making it more appealing overall.

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### **M.J. Webb says**

I really enjoyed the first in the series but thought this book a poor sequel. Well written but lacking in excitement for me. I'll still probably read more though and it was an okay read, just not a patch on book 1.

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### **Martin says**

I am biased ...I have been enamoured with the Roman Empire since a child. This book being the second in the series continues the adventures of Vespasian as he makes his way through the trials and tribulations of Rome's ruling families. I am happily transported back to the time and would be very happy if a tv series (netflix ) could make it into a series.

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### **Rebecca says**

Second in the series, this one picks up some time after the last one - but delves right back into continuing some of the plot threads, so hopefully you remember what was going on in the first book. I could remember most of the main characters, but it would be nice to have a recap page for readers who might be coming back to the series after a long break, or who need a refresher. It also makes it difficult for any readers who might pick this book up without having been able to read the first one.

There are times when it gets a bit difficult to keep track of all the intrigues going on. Having said that, the main characters are fairly memorable and you do get a vivid sense of the dangerous world they lived in. The author has made use of ancient sources as well as modern research to help portray the historical characters with a reasonable degree of accuracy (as far as that is possible when dealing with 2000-year old events).

It's an engrossing book - I read about half of it this afternoon - and good enough that I will look for the third one.

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## **Paul Bennett says**

I must confess that when I read Tribune of Rome, the first book in the series, it took a while for me to get enthused as the beginning seemed to go a little slow but once the story gained momentum it gained my attention. The momentum carried over to volume two and this book had me from the start. The main plot concerns Vespasian being sent on a seemingly impossible mission to capture a loathsome renegade Thracian priest who may or may not be the key in bringing down the terror ridden reign of Aelius Sejanus who if I may interject was so wonderfully portrayed by Sir Patrick Stewart in I, Claudius, lo those many years ago when Sir Patrick had hair.

Vespasian has grown in the years between the two books into a more daunting and resolute individual. Gone for good is the hesitant, unsure boy who now longs for two primary things, the downfall of Sejanus and the continuing relationship he has with Antonia's favorite slave, Caenis. Another example of a character that shines through the pages is Antonia the daughter of Marcus Antonius, mother to Claudius and his vile sister Livilla and grandmother to Gaius Caligula. She is the epitome of a noble family matron, strong, cunning and fixed with an indomitable will and spirit. What separates her from other portrayals of this remarkable woman that I have seen or read is that she is also very human and does not let her age, 60's, curtail her libidinous urges.

The action is crisp, the dialogue well written and with an imaginative take on the whole how do we get to Caprae and tell Tiberius about Sejanus scenario. An inventive vocabulary, a thorough descriptiveness and well-rounded characters make this tale a pleasure to read. One of the things I really like is the author's humorous turns of phrase, for example this reply as to whether he was ready to head into a dangerous situation a Thracian warrior responds, 'We have a saying in Thrace, "A faint-heart never shagged a pig"' I cleaned that up a little for the faint of heart.

I highly recommend this book and series and look forward to the next installment and beyond. I give this book a rating of 4.6.

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## **Deborah Pickstone says**

This series really is excellent! Fast moving, inventive and historically good - I just hope the author can write very fast!

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## **Mary says**

I didn't realize it but I guess I started this series about one of Rome's "good" emperors with book 2 of the series. However, the story, woven around the downfall of the infamous Praetorian Prefect Sejanus, stood on its own quite nicely.

There is no indication in history that Vespasian and his brother Sabinus conspired with the Lady Antonia, Tiberius' sister-in-law, to overthrow Sejanus to protect the reign of Tiberius. However, a successful conspiracy is one in which the participants remain anonymous so Fabbri takes advantage of the lack of documentation to creatively spin this tale.

Sejanus was born into the equestrian class in 20 BCE at Volsinii in Etruria. Sejanus' grandfather had improved the family's social standing by marrying a sister of the wife of Gaius Maecenas, one of the Emperor Augustus' closest political allies. Sejanus' father, Lucius Seius Strabo, also married well and his uncle Quintus Junius Blaesus distinguished himself as a military commander and became proconsul of Africa in 21 CE. Junius subsequently earned triumphal honors by crushing the rebellion of Tacfarinas, a Numidian deserter from the Roman Army who led a coalition of rebels against the forces of Rome in north Africa for 10 years.

It is thought Strabo eventually came to the notice of Augustus through his connection to Maecenas. Anyway, sometime after 2 BCE, Strabo, Sejanus' father, was appointed prefect of the Praetorian Guard.

We know little of Sejanus' early career until, according to Tacitus, Sejanus accompanies Gaius Caesar, adopted grandson of Augustus, to Armenia in 1 BCE. Gaius Caesar dies from wounds supposedly received in a campaign in Artagira, Armenia in 4 CE. Tacitus suggests there may have been foul play involved in the death of Gaius, orchestrated by Augustus' wife Livia to facilitate the accession of her own son Tiberius to the throne of the Roman principate. However, Tacitus does not point an accusing finger at Sejanus. But when Tiberius is crowned emperor in 14 CE, Sejanus is immediately appointed prefect of the Praetorian Guard as a colleague of his father.

Then when Sejanus' father is appointed to the governorship of Egypt in 15 CE, Sejanus assumes sole command of the Praetorians. He centralizes the guards into a single garrison on the outskirts of Rome, personally appoints the centurions and tribunes and increases the number of cohorts from nine to twelve, resulting in a force of 12,000 soldiers now loyal to him.

Sejanus then conspires with the wife of Drusus, Tiberius' son, to have Drusus poisoned. But when Sejanus asks permission to marry Drusus' widow, Tiberius ominously warns Sejanus not to overstep his bounds. So Sejanus sets about sowing unrest between Tiberius and the senate. Tiberius, already deeply depressed over the loss of his son, finally retreats to Campania in 26 CE then the island of Capri, leaving Sejanus to essentially rule Rome in Tiberius' absence. Sejanus then sets about eliminating anyone he deems a threat that includes many of the elite.

While matters were going thus with Sejanus, many of the other prominent men perished, among them Gaius Fufius Geminus. This man, having been accused of maiestas against Tiberius, took his will into the senate-chamber and read it, showing that he had left his inheritance in equal portions to his children and to the emperor. Upon being charged with cowardice, he went home before a vote was taken; then, when he learned that the quaestor had arrived to look after his execution, he wounded himself, and showing the wound to the official, exclaimed: "Report to the senate that it is thus one dies who is a man." Likewise his wife, Mutilia Prisca, against whom some complaint had been lodged, entered the senate chamber and there stabbed herself with a dagger, which she had brought in secretly. - Cassius Dio, History of Rome, 58.4

Sejanus was so great a person by reason both of his excessive haughtiness and of his vast power, that, to put it briefly, he himself seemed to be emperor and Tiberius a kind of island potentate, inasmuch as the latter spent his time on the island of Capreae. - Cassius Dio, History of Rome, 58.5

Sejanus is wielding this immense power when Fabbri's story begins in Thrace where Vespasian is completing his appointment as tribune. The plot involves Sejanus' funding of a rebellion in Thrace as a strategy to weaken the empire and redirect the attention of the legions from politics in Rome to the provinces. The groundwork for these clandestine activities may have been laid in Book 1 but I had to simply accept them as described as I had not read book 1 and have not found any references to them in the ancient

sources.

Fabbri's pacing of the story is good and the characters thoughtfully fleshed out. The only thing I found a bit distracting was Vespasian's use of colloquial language such as referring to "me mates". I realize Vespasian was born into a rather undistinguished family of tax farmers and debt collectors in a little village northeast of Rome but I think he would have tried to speak in a more educated manner in the presence of military legates and a Thracian queen.

The constant bickering between Vespasian and his brother Sabinus also grew tiresome, especially since I know the two Flavian brothers were actually quite close and during the tumultuous Year of the Four Emperors, Vespasian entrusted the care of his youngest son Domitian to Sabinus during a very dangerous period. But, soon the action kicked into high gear and there wasn't much time for the siblings to snipe at each other any more.

Vespasian's relationship to Antonia's slave Caenis was also more out in the open than it was portrayed in Lindsey Davis' book, "The Course of Honor". Their little trysts did provide the opening for the development of another strong female character, however, so I can understand why Fabbri plotted the story in this way.

Vespasian is portrayed as being a childhood friend of Caligula's and, although there is no evidence of this in the ancient sources, the plot device worked well to provide an inside source in Tiberius' household on Capri to enable the band of rescuers access to the emperor.

Fabbri developed Tiberius' character as described by his detractors, Suetonius and Tacitus - a sinister demented pervert. I personally think Suetonius and Tacitus' accounts of Tiberius' behavior in his last years are full of discrepancies and represent more character assassination than fact. But, from a dramatic standpoint, such a character definitely adds a heightened level of suspense to the narrative.

Fabbri appears to have intentionally changed one aspect of history. Early in his career Vespasian obtained a post as a minor magistrate in the vigintivirate. In the book, Vespasian becomes a *tresviri capitales*, one of three magistrates charged with managing prisons and the execution of criminals. This places him in a key position to be informed of the Senate proceedings surrounding the treason of Sejanus (since he is not a senator himself) and to witness both the execution of Sejanus and his eldest son as well as the tragic execution of Sejanus' young children (and provide the title for the book). Scholars, however, think Vespasian served as a *quattuorviri viis in urbe purgandis* - one of four magistrates charged with road maintenance within the city of Rome. He was so unsuccessful in this position it is said the emperor Caligula publicly stuffed fistfuls of muck down Vespasian's toga because the streets were so filthy.

All in all, though, the novel followed the history of the fall of Sejanus quite closely including the dramatic climax and the fates of key characters. I will definitely add the first book of the series and the sequel to this novel to my "to read" stack!

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