

Imperium (Book One)

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From the bestselling author of Pompeii comes the first volume in an exciting new trilogy set in ancient Rome - an imaginary biography of Cicero, Rome's first and greatest politician.

Of all the great figures of Roman times, none was more fascinating or attractive than Marcus Cicero. A brilliant lawyer and orator, a famous wit and philosopher, he launched himself at the age of twenty-seven into the violent, treacherous world of Roman politics. Cicero was determined to attain imperium, the supreme power in the state. Beside him at all times in his struggle to reach the top - the office of Consul - was his confidential secretary, Tiro. An accomplished man, Tiro was the inventor of shorthand and the author of numerous books, including a famous life of Cicero, unfortunately lost in the Dark Ages.

In Imperium, Robert Harris recreates Tiro's vanished masterpiece, recounting in vivid detail the story of Cicero's rise to power, from radical young lawyer to first citizen of Rome, competing with men such as Pompey, Caesar, Crassus and Cato.

Harris's Cicero is an immensely sympathetic figure. In his introduction to this imaginary memoir, Taro states: "Cicero was unique in the history of the Roman republic in that he pursued supreme power with no resources to help him apart from his own talent... All he had was his voice, and by sheer effort of will, he turned it into the most famous voice in the world."

From the Hardcover edition.

Robert Harris was born in Nottingham in 1957. He has been a BBC journalist, Political Editor of the Observer, and a columnist for The Sunday Times and Daily Telegraph. In 2003 he was named Columnist of the Year in the British Press Awards. He is the author of the number one bestsellers *Fatherland*, *Enigma*, *Archangel* and *Pompeii* as well as five non-fiction books.

It had been my intention to describe in detail the trial of Gaius Verres, but now I come to set it down, I see there is no point. After Cicero's tactical masterstroke on that first day, Verres and his advocates resembled nothing so much as the victims of a siege: holed up in their little fortress, surrounded by their enemies, battered day after day by a rain of missiles, and their crumbling walls undermined by tunnels. They had no means of fighting back. Their only hope was somehow to withstand the onslaught for the nine days remaining, and then try to regroup during the lull enforced by Pompey's games. Cicero's objective was equally clear: to obliterate Verres's defenses so completely that by the time he had finished laying out his case, not even the most corrupt senatorial jury in Rome would dare to acquit him.

He set about this mission with his usual discipline. The prosecution team would gather before dawn. While Cicero performed his exercises, was shaved and dressed, I would read out the testimony of the witnesses he would be calling that day and run through our schedule of evidence. He would then dictate to me the rough outline of what he intended to say. For an hour or two he would familiarize himself with the day's brief and thoroughly memorize his remarks, while Quintus, Frugi, and I ensured that all his witnesses and evidence boxes were ready. We would then parade down the hill to the Forum -- and

parades they were, for the general view around Rome was that Cicero's performance in the extortion court was the greatest show in town. The crowds were as large on the second and third days as they had been on the first, and the witnesses' performances were often heartbreaking, as they collapsed in tears recounting their ill treatment. I remember in particular Dio of Halaesa, swindled out of ten thousand sesterces, and two brothers from Agyrium forced to hand over their entire inheritance of four thousand. There would have been more, but Lucius Metellus had actually refused to let a dozen witnesses leave the island to testify, among them the chief priest of Jupiter, Heraclius of Syracuse -- an outrage against justice which Cicero neatly turned to his advantage. "Our allies' rights," he boomed, "do not even include permission to complain of their sufferings!" Throughout all this, Hortensius, amazing to relate, never said a word. Cicero would finish his examination of a witness, Glabrio would offer the King of the Law Courts his chance to cross-examine, and His Majesty would regally shake his head, or declare grandly, "No questions for this witness." On the fourth day, Verres pleaded illness and tried to be excused from attending, but Glabrio was having none of it, and told him he would be carried down to the Forum on his bed if necessary.

It was on the following afternoon that Cicero's cousin Lucius at last returned to Rome, his mission in Sicily accomplished. Cicero was overjoyed to find him waiting at the house when we got back from court, and he embraced him tearfully. Without Lucius's support in dispatching witnesses and boxes of evidence back to the mainland, Cicero's case would not have been half as strong. But the seven-month effort had clearly exhausted Lucius, who had not been a strong man to begin with. He was now alarmingly thin and had developed a painful, racking cough. Even so, his commitment to bringing Verres to justice was unwavering -- so much so that he had missed the opening of the trial in order to take a detour on his journey back to Rome. He had stayed in Puteoli and tracked down two more witnesses: the Roman knight, Gaius Numitorius, who had witnessed the crucifixion of Gavius in Messina; and a friend of his, a merchant named Marcus Annius, who had been in Syracuse when the Roman banker Herennius had been judicially murdered.

"And where are these gentlemen?" asked Cicero eagerly.

"Here," replied Lucius. "In the tablinum. But I must warn you, they do not want to testify."

Cicero hurried through to find two formidable men of middle age -- "the perfect witnesses from my point of view," as Cicero afterwards described them, "prosperous, respectable, sober, and above all -- not Sicilian." As Lucius had predicted, they were reluctant to get involved. They were businessmen, with no desire to make powerful enemies, and did not relish the prospect of taking starring roles in Cicero's great anti-aristocratic production in the Roman Forum. But he wore them down, for they were not fools, either, and could see that in the ledger of profit and loss, they stood to gain most by aligning themselves with the side that was winning. "Do you remember what Pompey said to Sulla, when the old man tried to deny him a triumph on his twenty-sixth birthday?" asked Cicero. "He told me over dinner the other night: 'More people worship a rising than a setting sun.'" This potent combination of name-dropping and appeals to patriotism and self-interest at last brought them around, and by the time they went in to dinner with Cicero and his family they had

pledged their support.

"I knew if I had them in your company for a few moments," whispered Lucius, "they would do whatever you wanted."

I had expected Cicero to put them on the witness stand the very next day, but he was too smart for that. "A show must always end with a climax," he said. He was ratcheting up the level of outrage with each new piece of evidence, having moved on through judicial corruption, extortion, and straightforward robbery to cruel and unusual punishment. On the eighth day of the trial, he dealt with the testimony of two Sicilian naval captains, Phalacrus of Centuripae and Onasus of Segesta, who described how they and their men had escaped floggings and executions by bribing Verres's freedman Timarchides (present in court, I am glad to say, to experience his humiliation personally). Worse: the families of those who had not been able to raise sufficient funds to secure the release of their relatives had been told they would still have to pay a bribe to the official executioner, Sextius, or he would deliberately make a mess of the beheadings. "Think of that unbearable burden of pain," declaimed Cicero, "of the anguish that racked those unhappy parents, thus compelled to purchase for their children by bribery not life but a speedy death!" I could see the senators on the jury shaking their heads at this and muttering to one another, and each time Glabrio invited Hortensius to cross-examine the witnesses, and Hortensius simply responded yet again. "No questions," they groaned. Their position was becoming intolerable, and that night the first rumors reached us that Verres had already packed up the contents of his house and was preparing to flee into exile.

Such was the state of affairs on the ninth day, when we brought Annius and Numitorius into court. If anything, the crowd in the Forum was bigger than ever, for there were now only two days left until Pompey's great games. Verres came late and obviously drunk. He stumbled as he climbed the steps of the temple up to the tribunal, and Hortensius had to steady him as the crowd roared with laughter. As he passed Cicero's place, he flashed him a shattered, red-eyed look of fear and rage -- the hunted, cornered look of an animal: the Boar at bay. Cicero got straight down to business and called as his first witness Annius, who described how he had been inspecting a cargo down at the harbor in Syracuse one morning when a friend had come running to tell him that their business associate, Herennius, was in chains in the forum and pleading for his life.

"So what did you do?"

"Naturally, I went at once."

"And what was the scene?"

"There were perhaps a hundred people crying out that Herennius was a Roman citizen and could not be executed without a proper trial."

"How did you all know that Herennius was a Roman? Was he not a banker from Spain?"

"Many of us knew him personally. Although he had business in Spain, he had been born to a Roman family in Syracuse and had grown up in the city."

"And what was Verres's response to your pleas?"

"He ordered Herennius to be beheaded immediately."

There was a groan of horror around the court.

"And who dealt the fatal blow?"

"The public executioner, Sextius."

"And did he make a clean job of it?"

"I am afraid he did not, no."

"Clearly," said Cicero, turning to the jury, "he had not paid Verres and his gang of thieves a large enough bribe."

For most of the trial, Verres had sat slumped in his chair, but on this morning, fired by drink, he jumped up and began shouting that he had never taken any such bribe. Hortensius had to pull him down. Cicero ignored him and went on calmly questioning his witness.

"This is an extraordinary situation, is it not? A hundred of you vouch for the identity of this Roman citizen, yet Verres does not even wait an hour to establish the truth of who he is. How do you account for it?"

"I can account for it easily, senator. Herennius was a passenger on a ship from Spain that was impounded with all its cargo by Verres's agents. He was sent to the Stone Quarries, along with everyone else on board, then dragged out to be publicly executed as a pirate. What Verres did not realize was that Herennius was not from Spain at all. He was known to the Roman community in Syracuse and would be recognized. But by the time Verres discovered his mistake, Herennius could not be allowed to go free, because he knew too much about what the governor was up to."

"Forgive me, I do not understand," said Cicero, playing the innocent. "Why would Verres want to execute an innocent passenger on a cargo ship as a pirate?"

"He needed to show a sufficient number of executions."

"Why?"

"Because he was being paid bribes to let the real pirates go free."

Verres was on his feet again shouting that it was a lie, and this time Cicero took a few paces toward him. "A lie, you monster? A lie? Then why in your own prison records does it state that Herennius was released? And why do they further state that the notorious pirate captain Heracleo was executed, when no one on the ...

Other Books

Dictator (Book Three), 'Laws are silent in times of war.' Cicero There was a time when Cicero held Caesar's life in the palm of his hand. But now Caesar is the dominant figure and Cicero's life is in ruins. Exiled, separated from his wife and children, his possessions confiscated, his life constantly in danger, Cicero is tormented by the knowledge that he has sacrificed power for the sake of his principles. His comeback requires wit, skill and courage - and for a brief and glorious period, the legendary orator is once more the supreme senator in Rome. But politics is never static and no statesman, however cunning, can safeguard against the ambition and corruption of others. Riveting and tumultuous, DICTATOR encompasses some of the most epic events in human history yet is also an intimate portrait of a brilliant, flawed, frequently fearful yet ultimately brave man - a hero for his time and for ours. This is an unforgettable tour de force from a master storyteller. ? ? ? ? ? . This is an unforgettable tour de force from a master storyteller."