



The Thirteenth Disciple

Samuel Kennedy

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Chapter One

Past the campfires the men marched with the hooded man between them. The wind was blowing sparks around them as they moved toward the center of the camp and the general's tent. As they walked by, the men huddled around the fires look up and stare at the stranger and quietly go back to the blank gaze of despair into the flames. When the men finally reach the general's tent, they are stopped by his personal guards. Clad in purple plated armor and tunic whipping in the wind, clasp to their armor with figurehead clasps. Their helmets were half helms with purple feathers running from front to back. "Halt! Who goes there?!" Commands the guards as they lower their spears to bar the entrance to the general's tent.

"We are sentries on the eastern side of the camp. We bring this stranger who wishes to speak with the general. He says he has information that could help us with the upcoming battle." Replies the two soldiers who were escorting the hooded man.

"You have no idea who he is, yet you dare to bring him straight here to the general? What if he is an assassin and you two have just led him straight to the general?!"

The hooded man looks at the guard and speaks, "If I was an assassin, your general would be dead already. How many assassins ask to come in to kill the general? I am quite sure

that with men like you surrounding the general, I could do him no harm. I merely seek an opportunity to speak. Ask the general if he would speak with me and let him make the decision.”

The two guards look at each other and the right one step inside the tent for some time. After a few minutes, he comes back outside and looks at the other guard and says, “The general has agreed to see you, but you must remain on your knees the entire time you are in his presence.”

“That is a wise decision.” The hooded man says as they lead him into the main tent. The tent is blood red; large enough to fit a king size bed, dressers, and a large table that sits twelve. The bed is ornate, the bed post engraved with gold and pearls. The sheets are of gold thread and silk with red dye. The dressers were hand carved with lions and iron rings as the dresser handles. The dresser itself was of hard oak shipped in from Cyprus. If the dresser is any indication of the cloths in the dresser, then this man is probably the richest man in the entire world. The table was perhaps the simplest thing in the tent. It was a simple pine table, easily military issue. On the table lay maps of the surrounding area with blocks laid on it of various sizes and colors in formations around a single point on the map. Next to that map is a map of the world. Surrounding the maps are simple wooden goblets filled with red wine, many barely touched. It is obvious that the men who were drinking them had more on their mind than the need for drink. The general was standing stooped over the maps studying them

hard. Weariness working hard on his features as many nights was probably spent in the same position studying the same maps. As the hooded man was guided into the tent, the general looked up and took a position in the center of the tent and took a seat in one of the chairs that surrounded the table.

“My men tell me that you have information that may be of service to me. Before you speak, know this, if you think that you can give me half-truths or wish to misguide me in any way, then I will have you executed. Now, speak and tell me of this information.”

“First off, I think it is only courteous if I introduce myself so you may know to whom you speak and how I have come to have this information. Some of what I tell you may be hard for you to understand and is intended for your ears only. Can you promise me that sir?”

“If what you say bears fruit, then it is a small thing to ask, sure.”

“Thank you sir, I guess introductions are in order. MY name is Flavius Copernicus Octavio Julius and I used to live on the river where your men are camped over a hundred years ago. This is how I know of the information I am about to provide you.”

“You dare think you can insult me with this fantasy tale!?”

“No sir, I do not, but if you think I lie then kill me now.”

“I will guards!” As the general exclaims, the two guards draw their swords and attempt to stab the man in the back.

As the sword slides out of his back, the man lies on the ground for a few seconds and then raises back up.

“Now that we have that out of the way, know this, no mortal can kill me, many have tried to include my own son Octavius.”

“Impossible! How can you still be alive?! What form of sorcery is this?!”

“I assure you it is not sorcery sir. I am an immortal. I was put on this world to guide it and you humans toward an ultimate goal. The goal of which I myself do not know.”

“How can you guide us if you yourself do not know the outcome?”

“I myself am guided by messengers. They visit me from time to time and give me important missions. Now I am fulfilling one of those missions.”

“What would the gods want with me?! Am I meant to be Emperor of the world?”

“God does mean for you to be Emperor, but not for the reasons you think and not the gods in which you refer. The god I speak is of the Jews. I need you to spread the sect of Nazarene and stop the prosecution of its followers in the Empire. Then there is much and more I need from you, but that will come later.”

“I have heard of this Nazarene sect, but I would never believe that they were right. So this God, is he the only one as the sect teaches and is the rebel Jesus truly his son?”

“All of which you speak is truth. I have walked this earth from the beginning and spoke with God himself; I can assure you that he is the only God. As for Jesus being his son, this I can attest is also true for I served with him in Palestine.”

“You will have to tell me all that you know. To have lived so long, you must know everything!”

“I know a lot, yes, but I do not know everything. What I can share with you, I will if you agree to my terms. What do you say, will you allow me to give you victories against your enemies and in return make Christianity the official Roman religion?”

“If it means that I will be Emperor, then yes. I would be a fool to not take you up on your offer, especially after what I have seen and heard here tonight. How will you give me victory, kill my enemy yourself?”

“No. I cannot interfere so blatantly. While I guide you, I will never rule you or so directly interfere. I will lead a company of your men across the river at a spot I doubt yourself or the enemy knows about. I will then proceed to attack the rear of your enemy once they are in position. I will need you to attack the enemy on the bridge and lure them onto the bridge. Once on the bridge, we will crush the enemy’s army between us. The enemy will be so demoralized that they will flee the field and Rome will be yours.”

“This sounds like a brilliant plan. When will I know when to attack?”

“I need you to attack at dawn, so the sun is rising up at your backs. It will be another part of my plan. I need you and your men to paint crosses on your shields. This will give reason to your sudden conversion to Christianity. If you are asked, tell them you saw a vision.”

“I will inform my generals at once. Is there anything else that you require?”

“No sir. I will leave immediately with your men to ensure I am in position at the appropriate time.” As Flavius exits the tent, the General gives orders for all his subordinate generals to come at once. Flavius is then escorted to a company of men which he will be leading. As he approaches the tent of the company commander, he notes the insignia of the standard. They certainly had not given him any old unit; they had given him the very best. The tales of the companies exploits had even reached his ears while he was making preparations on the fringes of the Empire. The Black Dragons, a name that evoked fear in most enemies, would be perfect for what he needed them for. He lifted the flap and entered the commander’s tent. Unlike the previous tent, this one was plain and decorated in only the bare minimum issued cot and officers chest with an armor stand in the corner with the officer’s armor on it. On top of the chest was a stack of papers, like every officer in the Roman army, this one was required to keep certain documents and maintain certain records to chronicle the exploits of his unit. The company commander was sitting on his cot when Flavius walked in. He looks up and states, “Who are you to

enter my tent so carelessly?”

“I am Flavius, and I have a mission for you and your men from the General. Flavius says while the men escorting nods in agreement of Flavius’ statement.

“What sort of mission is this? I find it strange that the General did not send the mission himself in official correspondence. Who are you to the General for him to send you to task me?”

“I am but an informant that can guide you and your men to the rear of the enemy lines, but the opportunity is a small window of time, that is why the General did not send it in official channels. I know you might have some reservations about this mission, but rest assured, your men will survive today to gain new honors.”

“It is not the honors my men care about. What are honors to them when they sleep with Hades? They prefer the warmth of their wives bed and the joyful sounds of their children’s laughs.”

“Then I can assure you, all of your men will return home to their wives and children. If you are successful than more of the General’s men will return to their wives than not. In that you and your men should be proud.”

“We shall see. How did you come to learn of this intelligence?”

“I am from the local area and happen to support the General’s cause”

“The General trust you? How does he know you are not some spy sent from the enemy?”

“I convinced him otherwise. Do you not trust the judgment of the General?”

“I do, I just do not trust you.”

“Understood, I do not care if you trust me, but as long as you do as I say, you will lead the General to victory.”

“What is the plan?”

“You will ready your men to leave immediately. I will lead you to a secret crossing across the river. Once we are across we will infiltrate the enemy camp and assassinate the enemy general. Once we are done, we will rendezvous and wait for sunrise. Once the General’s main forces attack we will slip in behind the enemy’s forces and attack.”

“This plan does not sound like one that will ensure all my men will return to their wives! Stating that we will infiltrate the enemy camp and doing it are two separate matters! Even if we are successful, how do you suppose we leave the camp, walk out the front door?”

“As a matter of fact, I do. I have stashed a supply of enemy armor and weapons that we will wear. I happened upon an enemy scouting unit that happens to fit the size of your company. The enemy general is very paranoid about intelligence leaking, so when his scouts return, he only allows the scout commander in his presence. This will be your opportunity to kill the enemy general and for us to escape without notice.”

“This does add an element to your plan, but how are we leave?”

“I will be in the tent with you as a local informant. When we kill the enemy general, I know where he keeps his signet ring. We will write us new orders for us to leave and scout the western flank. We will position the general’s body so that he appears asleep. We will all be long gone before the enemy knows what has transpired.”

“Hmm. You plan does sound good. It appears you have done your planning.”

“You have no idea.”

“Alright, we will leave at once!”

As the company commander said this he rose and began donning his armor. “Tell the platoon commanders that we leave at once!” he said and the two escorts left to deliver his message to the three tents closest to the company commander tent. Flavius bows and leaves the company commander to put on his armor. As he steps outside the tent, he notes the rush as men ready themselves. Everyone is donning their armor and platoon sergeants are bellowing orders to the men. In short time, the entire company is formed up and ready to move. Everyone wore the typical Roman armor, but unlike normal armor, theirs was not polished to a shine instead it was dulled to better allow them to sneak up on enemies at night.

“You ready commander?” Flavius asked as he moves to the beginning of the company commander.

“We are ready, are you?” the company commander said as he motions for his company to begin moving forward. “Where exactly is this river crossing? Our scouts have searched the river for days and have found nothing.”

“Just follow me, rest assured there is a path. It is well hidden. It was made years ago as an emergency escape route from my farm. It is more of a tunnel than a river crossing if I am honest.” Flavius said as he led the company commander and his men out of the main camp along a paved road out towards the east. The road was flanked on both sides by shrubbery and tall trees that started to thin out the further the company moved. Eventually, the trees disappeared and were replaced with open fields on the left side of the road and the river on the right. They came upon a grown up area on the left of the road with a slight mound on the right where the river raised in elevation to form a small waterfall. Flavius motioned for the company commander to halt. “Here it is.”

“We have searched this abandoned farm before, there is nothing here”

“Trust me, there is, you just did not know where to search. It is over here by the mound. I originally built it as a wine cellar that used the waterfall to cool the wine. I later extended the cellar to have an exit on both sides of the river.”

“This is your farm? From the looks of it, the farm has been abandoned for years.”

“Yes, it used to be my farm many years ago. I abandoned it due to political reasons and left for the eastern frontier. I set up shop as a trader, but this war has disrupted it as well as it did my farm so many years ago.” Flavius says as he leads the men toward the waterfall. He starts to clear away some of the brush covering the side of the mound. Eventually he finds an iron chain, rusted but still connected to an iron door. “Gentlemen, I give you the cellar entrance.”

“How do you know it has not caved in?” The company commander asked as Flavius motions for men to help him open the hatch and clear out more of the underbrush around the cellar door.

“Because, I built it myself and the walls are solid stone. It would take some force to make the cellar cave in. Maybe on our return trip your men can take a bottle each for themselves. I assure you my wine is quite good.”

“We might take you up on that offer. Hopefully you have enough for all of us.”

“Oh, I do,” Flavius said as he leads them into the cellar. Once they are inside, the company commander realizes that the cellar is more than it seems on the outside. It has ten foot tall ceilings and is large enough for the entire company to stand with wine racks between them. True to his word, the cellar is filled with enough wine for every man to take a bottle for himself. The walls are solid granite, polished smooth with murals on every surface depicting the great battles of Alexander in Babylonia and Egypt. The bottles of wine are in stone carved racks where each bottle of wine

has its one cubicle in the stone. It is obvious that he cellar is very old, but build to last for centuries.

“Wow! How many years ago did you say you built this? There is enough wine here that to sell it all would make you one of the richest men in Rome!”

“It is amazing what a man can accomplish when he works hard and makes everything by himself. Now if you please follow me to the other cellar entrance I will need assistance opening that door as well.” The company of men moved through the cellar, light only with the torches that the men carried, to the other door on the far side of the cellar. Like the door they entered, it was solid iron. Four men pushed hard on the door and eventually was able to force the brush away to open the door. Once they were out of the cellar, they formed back up and closed the cellar door.

“Now where is this armor stash that you mentioned?”

“It is not far from here. The men were snooping around my cellar when I chanced them unawares,” As Flavius led the men to a clearing with a camp fire still smoldering. Beside the campfire lay a companies worth of men, all dead without any noticeable injuries or cause.

“What did you use to kill, poison?”

“As a matter of fact, yes and no, the watering hole they drank from is poisoned, but it happened years ago and is the reason I abandoned my farm. You see, the soldiers poisoned my watering hole, so I had no choice but to abandoned my farm and leave.”

“Oh, I see. So it was chance that the men would die by your cellar. How lucky it is for you and for us that they would decide to drink from your poison well then,” the company commander said as his men started to switch into the other men’s armor. They neatly stacked their armor by the trees surrounding the campfire and extinguished the campfire. “We should be able to find this location in the morning.” The company moved forward toward the enemy camp. As they approached the camp, two exterior guards called out to them, “Halt! Who goes there?!”

“It is us, the scouting party! We have vital Intel for the general!” The company commander said as he led the men into the enemy’s camp. The guards let them pass without harassment. They walked toward the center of the camp toward the biggest tent that obviously belonged to the general. As they walked, they noted the down and despair upon the faces of the enemy soldiers. One of the men asked one while passing.

“What happened? Why is everyone so downhearted?”

The soldier replied, “You must be a scout, so you don’t know yet, but our food supply suddenly got eaten by random group of rats that found their way into it. We have enough food to last the night, but if we do not attack in the morning, then we will starve. If we lose here tonight than we lose Rome itself.” The men continued on past, thinking about what they had just heard. It seemed like the gods were on their side. They came upon the general’s tent. It was large and red with banners streaming on the tent poles.

Outside stood two guards dressed in the Pretorian purple of the Roman Guard. Each man was armed with ten foot pikes made of bended steel. The guards stopped the men as they came upon them. "Halt!"

"I must speak with the general. I have here an informer that has urgent news of the enemy situation." The guards look at each other and the one on the right steps into the general's tent. After fifteen minutes, the guard comes back out followed by serving boys who quickly get lost into the camp.

"The general will speak to you and the informant only! Your men can find warmth by a fire." The company commander turns and says to his men, "Do not get too comfortable, as we will be leaving soon on another recon mission as soon as I am done." Then his men scatter, but link back up at a preplanned campfire to keep them together for the eventual departure. The company commander and Flavius enter into the enemy general's tent. The tent was more ornate than the General's tent. Everything was coated in flake of gold and had ivory and peal inlays. The general was alone, as Flavius said he would be, and sitting at his table staring at the table with a map before him. Desperation showed in his eyes as he knew his options were very limited.

"Please tell me you have something that will stop this enemy," the general said as the company commander and Flavius move to flank him at the table.

"Yes my Lord. Let me show you were there is a river crossing," The company commander said and started point-

ing at the map with his left hand on the left side of the enemy general. With his right hand, he drew his blade and while the general was bent over the map. The company commander positioned the blade perfectly through the small of the generals back while at the same time Flavius cut the general's windpipe to keep him from screaming. Together they moved the general to the bed and took off his armor. They placed him into the bed and cleaned up the table of the maps and the blood that was on them. Next they took off the general's signet ring and Flavius began writing up recon orders for the company commander and his men to leave at once to recon along the river to find a river crossing and inspect rumors of enemy incursions. They melted the red wax of the general and dripped some on the bottom of the letter. Flavius took the general's signet ring and pressed hard into the wax until it was cooled into the symbol of the general's house. The two men moved quickly to leave the tent. Upon exiting they stopped to talk to the two guards, "the general is tied from all the stress and has asked not to be disturbed." The lead guard stepped inside to verify that the general was in the bed.

"Ok, noted."

Flavius and the company commander made their way to designated fire pit. The company was all there, "Let's go! We have to hurry now to get into position." The men started to leave through the western side of the camp toward the armor stash. The exterior guards stopped them and after inspection of their orders let them pass and wished them

luck on their scouting. The company moved quickly toward the armor stash and changed back into their armor and donned their weapons. Then, they moved west toward the planned location and began to take turns sleeping before the sunrise.

“That worked a little too well. In all my years of service, I have never had an assassination mission be so easy. I think it was more than providence that the rats happened to eat their supply of food. Was that your doing?”

“I cannot admit it, but yes. Like I said, I have planned everything to give the General a victory. I introduced the rats some nights ago to give them time to eat the food supplies. I also hired bandits to attack the resupply wagon so that the enemy would not receive any more food until the attack.”

“You really have planned everything. Why are you doing all this? Do you like the General so much?”

“No, it is my duty is all.” The two men stayed up until sunrise. When the battle horns began to sound, the company commander began rousing his platoon commanders. Everyone began readying themselves for the battle they knew was at hand. The company formed up in standard formations, with the standard flying high and began to march toward the enemy rear. As they approached the battle, they could see that the enemy was having a difficult time crossing the bridge. The enemy catapults were the only thing keeping the General from taking the bridge completely and as luck would have it, the company had

marched directly on them unawares. The company rushed the small unit left to defend the catapults and the engineers that worked them. Being as they were not used to being attacked, the company made quick work of the defenders and the engineers. The company commander ordered the catapults adjusted to fire on the enemy formations. Within thirty minutes, the men had the catapults firing on the enemy troops from the rear. Add into the maelstrom that the General's own catapults were bashing the enemy troops and the General's men were surging over the bridge put the enemy into a complete panic. The company commander left a squad of men to work the catapults and moved the rest of his men to attack the enemy from behind. The General and his cavalry had broken through the enemy lines and flanked to the left and right of the enemy. With the presence of the company at its rear, the enemy was completely enveloped with catapults raining down upon them. The men held their lines and let the catapults do their work until they ran out of ammunition. When this occurred, the General gave the signal for all men to attack. The enemy quickly surrendered as they knew they could not win. The enemy was taken into custody and separated by enlisted and officer. The officers knew they would be ransomed to their families and if they could not afford it then they would be executed. That was the cost of being an officer in the Roman army. The General quickly began the process of making camp and preparing for the victory feast. He ordered the wine to be brought forward and sent out scouts to raid the local countryside for the best

livestock that they could find. Before they could get tasked out, Flavius led the company commander and his men back toward the cellar to retrieve their promised bottle of wine. They found the cellar exactly as they had left it. They lit the torches along the side of the walls and divided up the wine among themselves. The men praised Flavius for his generous gift.

“Are you sure that you do not wish to sell these wines in Rome itself? Seems like it would be fitting after all you have been through.”

“No, it is best that your men should enjoy them. I do not need for money as the Lord provides everything I need.”

“Oh, I did not know you were of that Nazarene sect. I do not understand how you can worship a dead god like you do.”

“Hmm that is where you are wrong my friend. I do not worship a dead god. My god is alive and well. I should know, I was there, you ask how I convinced the General of my sincerity, well here is how,” Flavius said as he drew his blade and slit his throat. Everyone stopped and stared at him with shock on their faces. Like in the General’s tent, the wounds healed up after some minutes and Flavius stood up, covered in blood but not a mark on his body. “You see, I am a lot older than I appear. I dropped hints to you throughout our time together, but you never picked up on them. Did you not think it strange that I said I bottled these two hundred year old wines? This cellar is older than the ‘Nazarene Sect’ as you call it. As I said, I do not worship

a dead god. I know because I was there those many years ago. In fact, I arranged his execution as was his wishes. And I was there when he arose from the dead after his visit to Hades to break the chains that bind men's souls to the underworld. Would you like to hear the story?"

"This would be a story I would be crazy to ignore. After what you have shown me, I think there is much you could tell me that I would not know and would shock me still. Please, we would all like to hear." And so, Flavius begins retelling his tale of his time with the Nazarene.