

Apocalypse
The Sword of Fire, book three

Chapter 1
PREPARATION

*To be prepared is half the victory.
Miguel De Cervantes*

When you kill a man, do not look into his eyes,” ordered the grizzled old sergeant. “Instead, keep your eyes on your enemy's chest. This will do two things. One, it will turn your opponent from a man into a figure, just a moving thing of armor that you must fight until it falls. Second, it will spread your vision so that you can better see what his arms and legs are doing, and these are the things that can kill you: so watch them, not his eyes.” The younger ones among the foreign volunteers glanced at one and other and smiled confidently. They looked a bit too eager for the sergeant’s liking. *These are men who have only read of war, but have never seen it up close, never felt a man die on their blade, heard the cries of the wounded, tasted blood in their mouths or smelled the stench of a battlefield,* he thought. Well, if he couldn't show them (they would see and taste and smell it all for themselves soon enough), at least he could try to prepare them. “If you forget my warning and look into your enemy’s eyes when you slay him, then those eyes will haunt your dreams for the rest of your life.” The sergeant’s face left no doubt what *he* saw in his own dreams at night. The smiling stopped now. They were paying attention.

The volunteers were placed on the northern wall of Ierosolyma, sent to aid the main force of soldiers there. The north side of the city was where an invading army was most likely to begin its attack, as the land beyond the wall held no steep downward slope, as it did on the south, west and east sides. The sergeant had been told that most of these Yeshuan volunteers were experienced hunters and were good with a bow. He supposed that was better than having no experience at killing at all, but still it was a far different thing to thrust a man through the heart with a sword while standing face to face than it was to shoot a deer with a bow from twenty paces away.

“You see those clay storage pots spaced every ten steps along this parapet and the sand that covers the floor. They are here for a reason,” he said. “When you get your first sight of the enemy, half of you will wet your tunics and a quarter of you will soil yourselves.”

There was some nervous laughter at this; most believing that while this might be true for others, they themselves would never show such fear.

“This is nothing to be ashamed of,” said the sergeant. “It is just your body's way of getting rid of unnecessary ballast before the storm of battle. Ask any of us older veterans—we have all been through it. That is why we have the pots, so you can empty your bladders and bowels at the first sign of the enemy's approach. And if you can't do it then, well, that is what the sand is for, to keep you from slipping on your own dung that will drop when the enemy's ladders begin to hit this wall. By that time the pots will be full and gone anyway,” said the sergeant with

a chuckle.

“Gone where?” asked a young man, an Asulonian by his accent.

“There are three things the Ishmaelites consider the most unclean,” said the sergeant, “the flesh of a pig, the saliva of a dog and the urine of an infidel; and we,” he said, grinning a wicked grin, “are the infidels. That's why, once the pots are full, we put a lid on them, set them on the catapults and throw them at the enemy. Once the pots shatter on the ground and what's inside goes all over, the Ishmaelites won't set foot upon the spot: at least the first rank or two of foot soldiers who see what's going on won't. Disrupt their first ranks and it slows the advance of them all.”

“When they get closer, do you just pour the stuff on them from the walls?” asked a volunteer who looked like he must be a farmer back home.

“No, our priests forbid that,” replied the sergeant. “Keep your camp clean, for the Lord walks among you.' That is what the priests would say. So once the enemy hits the wall, well then, that's what those swords and shields you carry are for, aren't they. What I am trying to tell you is that war is a dirty business. They clean it up for the theater or no one would see the show. But on these walls expect to get bloody and dirty and to see things worthy of nightmares. Do not loose heart. I'm here to tell you that it is possible to get through it. You are here because you volunteered to be here. Most of you Westerners are Yeshuans, who I am told hold this city as holy as we Abramim do. Well my friends, hold these walls and protect this holy city.”

An older Abramim wearing a priest's prayer shawl across his shoulders approached. “Now our priest would like to say a prayer over us,” said the sergeant.

The priest covered his head with the prayer shawl, raised his hands and looked about to speak, but a wind came and blew across the stones. This seemed to bring a new thought to him and he began to pray in a loud, strong voice.

*Thou art not afraid of fear by night, Of arrow that flieth by day,
Of pestilence in thick darkness that walketh, Of destruction that destroyeth at noon,
There fall at thy side a thousand, And ten thousand at thy right hand, Unto thee it cometh not nigh.*

*But with thine eyes thou lookest, And the reward of the wicked thou seest,
On lion and asp thou treadest, Thou trampest young lion and dragon.
Because in Me he hath delighted, I also deliver him -- I set him on high, Because he hath known My name.*

*He doth call Me, and I answer him, I am with him in distress, I deliver him, and honour him.
With length of days I satisfy him, And I cause him to look on My salvation!*

While the Abramim repeated the prayer in their language, the Yeshuans followed aloud in Westernness.

“You did well with our holy prayer,” said the priest in accented Westernness to the Yeshuans once he had finished. “Did you translate the words in your heads?”

That prayer is famous with us too,” said the oldest of the Yeshuans. He nodded to his men. The Yeshuans smiled and turned their shields around. Upon the inside of each shield in Western lettering written in blood red paint were the words of the prayer.

“I think they will fight well for this city,” said the priest to the sergeant.

“Yes, I believe they will,” said the sergeant. He thought then of Immanuel, the

ambassador from Unicornia, said to be an Abramim, but who had fled Ierosolyma at the first news of the enemy's approach. Somehow Immanuel had gotten permission from the judges of Eretzel to take charge of the old fortress at Masada along with his personal guard. *Immanuel likes to call himself 'The Good Shepherd,' as if that will make the people love him*, thought the sergeant. *Well, some shepherd he turned out to be.*

The Sword of Fire
Book Three

APOCALYPSE (part 1)
by
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Scripture verses used in the story are taken from Young's Literal Translation, The King James Bible or the Douay-Rheims Bible.

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