

# Blood Slakes The Sand At The Circus Maximus

Bal-Sagoth

[Thoughts of an Iceni gladiator, awaiting the opening of the arena portcullis:]

[Memories of rebellion (Carnage at Camulodunum):]

[Iceni Messenger:] Hearken! The Ninth Legion has been put to the sword! The war-Chief of Queen Boudicca: Onwards to Camulodunum... wet your swords! Redden the earth with Roman blood!

I remember the carnage at Camulodunum...  
The glorious clash of Celtic sword against Roman gladius,  
The pride in the eyes of our war-queen  
As we hacked down the Imperial Eagle,  
And the severed heads of centurions gaping atop our spears.

[Bloodshed and Battle: 61 AD (C.E.)]

They had gone too far, these invaders from the east, with their imperial eagle which they dared to drive into our sacred soil... pompously claiming our island as their own. They who marched across the world expanding their empire all for the greater glory of their succession of debauched emperors, reclining upon their ivory thrones in the heart of sweltering Rome. Aye, they had gone too far... After their brutal annexation of our sovereign Iceni lands and the vile rape of our Queen Boudicca's royal daughters, the Romans had the sown the fields of carnage and they would reap a grim harvest of slaughter, without doubt! They had enraged the Red Queen, and by the gods, they would pay! We certainly taught the arrogant invading dogs a lesson, at any rate. The omens and portents spoke of vast bloodshed and great carnage, and after our slaughterous victories at Camulodunum (the Temple of Claudius burned wonderfully!), Londinium and Verulanium, the cursed Romans finally dared to meet us honourably upon the field of war at Mandeussedum. They sent fifteen thousand legionaires, their armour gleaming like gold in the sun... but it would still yield to our swords and spears, no matter how it sparkled. The Roman scoundrel, Governor Suetonius Paullinus, battle-scarred from his campaigns against the Druids, was able to choose the ground upon which to make his stand, and so it was that he selected as the battlefield a narrow valley, fronted by a flat plain, with dense woodland at its rear. Aye... Mandeussedum, "the place of the chariots"... I remember it vividly. The Governor's army looked unnerved as we took the field. I'll never forget that, iron Roman fortitude or not! We were one hundred thousand strong, infantry and cavalry, both men and women warriors, as is our Celtic custom, in the ranks together, all annointed with woad, all roaring oaths and vows to our ancient gods, who were surely grimly watching the epic confrontation from their great thrones and vast halls. Our war-chariots thundered up and down the Roman front, the charioteers screaming abuse at the grim legionaires, decurions and centurions, and hurling spears and other missiles which

clattered against the Imperial shield wall. And not one Roman javelin or pilum was hurled in response, not one arrow was loosed in retaliation. They were disciplined, I'll give them that. We were swelled by our victories, empowered by our noble cause, enraged with the battle frenzy; thirsting to take as many Roman heads as our bright blades could sever! And yet we were perhaps somewhat overconfident that day...

[Abducted from the Iceni:]

In the aftermath of our defeat at Mandeussedum, I was captured by Romans with a veiled intent... (though three of them died at my hands in the attempt!) Nero was growing bored with the gladiators, slaves and lion-fodder at his great Circus, and so had requested Suetonius Paullinus to provide the citizens of Rome with new entertainment... The Emperor had heard much of the wildness and fighting spirit of these barbaric Britons who had brought such woe to his far-famed legions; these painted, pagan tribesmen who had resisted the Empire's iron fist where the glorious phalanxes of the East had not. "Agents of the Imperium... hearken to my words", Nero had demanded. "Bring to Rome some of these tribesmen for the Games. Let us pit them against our most ravenous beasts and our greatest gladiatorial champions." And so I was taken in fetters aboard a Roman trireme, the blood of slain legionnaires still crusted upon my thighs, I was taken far from the fens of my beloved homeland, to tread the sun baked sand of the Circus Maximus... to fight for my life in the Imperial Arena.

[Arrival at the Circus Maximus:]

The Circus Maximus was certainly a splendid sight, I'll admit. A vast colosseum with great stone columns and tiers, huge ornate arches and mighty statues of grey marble. Countless people filled the seats surrounding the sandy floor of the Arena... and in his opulent royal enclosure, flanked by gleaming guards and grovelling lackeys, sat the great Emperor himself...

[Emperor Nero:] Fight, barbarian outlander! Please us, and mayhap Mars will smile on thee this day!

[Iceni warrior:] Bah! I do not hail to your Roman gods, and you are not my emperor! By Cernunnos, the blood of my enemies shall stain the sand of this cursed arena red this day!

[The Combat Commences:]

They unleashed the lions first. Hunger maddened beasts, goaded into a frenzy by the cruel point of many a pilum... And yet my own hunger, the hunger for revenge, was greater, and my honed steel was sharper than bestial fang and claw. And so they ranged their finest warriors against me. Three more iron gates around the arena yawned open, and they strode from the colosseum tunnels amidst a cacophony of cheering from the assembled Roman spectators, urged on and showered with martial adulation from the massed arena crowd, who howled their bloodlust without cessation. I studied my opponents... there were two trained gladiators, champions I was told, who had never met defeat in the Games... and then there was another like me, a captured warrior forced to fight for his life. This one was a towering reaver from the Northlands with a bright yellow beard, hefting a crude axe

with a single iron head. I lifted my iron bladed Celtic shortsword with its bronze hilt (the same sword which, mere days before, had been slaked with Roman blood... and its blade would soon be red once more with the blood of my captors, by all the gods!) and nodded to the reaver. An understanding passed between us... we knew we were here simply as sword-fodder, and we knew we would both fight these Roman dogs to the death!

The first gladiator moved towards me; he was a giant of a man, standing nearly seven feet tall and clad in dark leather and bronze armour from head to toe. His full-face visored helmet was set with ornate metal fittings and encrusted with jewels of various hues, and a vast black horse hair plume rose from the metal crown. Strapped on to his forearms were two black vambraces, to each of which had been secured twelve inch serrated blades, and they gleamed brightly in the hot afternoon sunlight. He began to circle me slowly, his eyes hidden beneath his great helmet. To his left, I saw the second gladiator begin to close on the Northman. The yellow-bearded axeman's opponent was a huge steel-helmeted Nubian, wielding a wickedly pointed trident and carrying an embossed iron buckler with a great spike jutting from its polished centre. Far above, upon his great dias, the Emperor gave the signal for the combat to begin, and with the battle-lust engulfing me, with the red mist swirling before my eyes, I vowed to my northern gods that I would show these leering Romans the fighting spirit and battle prowess of my people... I would leave the arena littered with the bloody corpses of my opponents... I would cast off the imperial fetters and return to the fens! Aye, I would escape, and make all Romans fear my name, and compel Nero to rue the day Julius Caesar had first ordered his legions across the grim grey sea to my ancient island... BLOOD FOR BOUDICCA... CARNAGE FOR CERNUNNOS!!

To be continued...