

# 'Crescent Cove, The Romans'

## *'A Tundra-Wolf Story'*

### *Part Three   'Crescent Cove'   'The Romans'*

The General heard a loud thunderclap that shook the canyon walls as he rode back through the lines. Men all around him looked to the sky, but there was not a cloud to be seen. He looked back over his shoulder towards Crescent Cove and saw the trail of red smoke going high in the air and ending in an angry blood-red ball. He turned his horse suddenly, scattering soldiers all about him and rode fast for the cove's entrance. His guards and Tribunes screamed at soldiers around them to move as they tried to follow. The General suddenly felt ill as he maneuvered his horse around marching Legionaries on his way back to the front. He knew the wrong man was leading the First Legion against whatever threat this red cloud represented.

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Legatus Lucius watched the red streak climb up and up. He nor his horse were prepared when the arrow exploded shaking everything on the ground underneath it. His horse reared in terror along with all of the others on the little sandy island as men cursed and fought to regain control of their mounts. All of the soldiers in the cove stopped their march to watch the red streak climb into the air. Everyone became very still as they looked around for whatever was to come next.

Lucius started screaming at his men to resume their march, yelling at the Centurions to get the Legionaries moving. He could see only five centuries had entered the cove so far, just five hundred men. He wanted many more than that around him to be ready to face whatever threat this might be. He was not smart enough to worry about the threat, his only concern was being victorious over any barbarian attack, no matter how many men it cost him. In minutes, under the bright red cloud of smoke, and much against the advice of his scouts and Tribunes, men were once again moving out of the narrow canyon and into the sandy cove. Before long almost eight hundred men were in the cove with the lead elements approaching the other side. When over a thousand men stepped onto the sands of the cove another arrow left from behind the tall shrubs at the far end. It trailed a red streak of smoke even more impressive than the first.

Even under this second red angry cloud of smoke the young Legatus ordered more men into the cove as he ignored the pleas from his Tribunes to hold and form defensive fighting squares. Soon his little island became surrounded as the Legionaries marched their way to the opposite end. It looked like a sea of red around the little island because of the red cloaks

the men wore, they matched the crimson cloud above. Almost twelve hundred men were now in the cove when the sky started to fall at the entrance to the little canyon. Tribunes around Lucius did not wait for his orders as they started commanding the Centurions around them to set up defensive positions that should have been done when the Legion first entered the cove. The men were well trained but with so many in a small space they were bumping into one another. The sky kept falling in the small canyon cutting off any chance for retreat, or help.

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The General just managed to pull the reins on his big Spanish courser as a bundle of tree branches and brush the size of a horse hit the ground in front of him. Dust and dirt followed the bundle down and billowed up from the ground when it hit. He could still see the entrance to the cove but it was at least a hundred paces away as bundles of brush, branches and wood fell on the men before him. He yelled for the Legionaries to retreat as the wood fell but many became trapped by the bundles. It became harder to see through the air as it filled with dust and he had no idea what was happening in the cove ahead or on the cliff tops above. As he watched the falling bundles come down a terrible thought came to him. He began screaming orders urging the men around him into action. They needed to get the men out from under the wood and away from the choke point of the canyon before they suffered a horrible death.

He dismounted as did his guardsmen who finally caught up with him and started pulling men out from under the bundles. Their rescue attempts became hampered as darts fired from crossbows above started following the falling bundles. Whoever was shooting at them were very accurate as men began dropping around the General from the feathered bolts piercing their bodies. The only good news was the dust in the air was making it hard for the attackers above to find their targets. The General tied a cloth around his face and went back for more trapped men. He feared there was not much time before something terrible happened. The situation was going from bad to worse and the narrow confines of the canyon walls did not leave much room to do anything about it.

Several men came to the General with shields raised high over their heads. They held them over him to help protect from the crossbow fire. He was furious at first but as he saw more men falling from the bolts he realized he needed to stop helping for the moment. He knew he must start giving orders to get the situation under control. He ordered archers brought to the front and fire on the assailants above. He told one of his Tribunes to muster the auxiliary cavalry and ride to the tops of the cliffs to eliminate the threat. The last order he gave was for more men to raise their shields and others to work underneath to clear the road. As he looked on the bundles of brush, branches and wood were now piled so high in the little canyon he could not see out into the cove beyond. The dust and dirt filling the air did not help either.

He had no idea how his scouts missed what must be at least a hundred men on top of the cliffs. It would have taken days, maybe even weeks, to set up an ambush this thorough. He could only imagine what might await the Legionaries on the other side of the barrier.

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A week before the Roman army came marching down the coastal road the Mangers were hard at work carving out caves in the limestone cliff tops above the entrance to Crescent Cove. The scouts who came to explore the cliff a day ahead of the army found nowhere for enemy soldiers to hide and stage an ambush. They found the tops of the cliffs covered in tall dense thickets of buckthorn shrubs growing at least ten feet tall. They could see no way anyone could hide in these thorn covered bushes. The scouts had no idea the Mangers were tunneling under the buckthorns even as they were looking at them. The Little Miners did a very good job of hiding the entrances to their quickly constructed caves.

Once the Mangers completed the caves on both sides of the cliff tops they dug up into the buckthorn plants. They took out the roots of the plants so they could be easily pushed onto the road below. The strong Little Miners began hauling up bundle after bundle of brush, branches and logs under the cover of darkness and hid them amongst the tall buckthorns. The night before the Romans would be marching down the coastal road two hundred Mangers quietly waited in the small cramped caves they had made. They patiently awaited a signal to be sent by others telling them it was time to attack the men on the road below. The wait in the cramped little caves with the earth around them was just like being at home for the Little Miners.

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A gentle breeze blew through the canyon towards the cove taking most of the thick cloud of dust in the air with it. The General could now get a look at who was attacking them from above, and how much brush and branches needed to be cleared away below. The bundles were too high to see over so he was unable to tell what was happening in the cove ahead. He could hear men trapped under the wood screaming and weeping. He looked at the cliff tops and could see men well concealed taking shots at his men with their crossbows. He didn't understand why they had not set the wood below burning, surely that was the idea. He gave orders to his archers to concentrate their arrows on any man above they saw holding fire. He then had his men redouble their efforts clearing the brush and wood to save his trapped Legionnaires.

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Legatus Lucius paced his horse through the tall grass before the copse of aspen trees watching as the Centurions organized their men into the fighting rectangles, the tortoise formations. They were hindered by too many soldiers in too small of a space. He sent one of his Tribunes to the far end of the cove to find out why his army was not moving forward. He then commanded two of his Centuries to climb the hills to the north above the sea wall and scout the hilltops. He wondered why he was giving these commands and thinking of

these moves, he had Tribunes and Centurions for this. Not once did he think of clearing the road back to the main army. He did not consider any danger to his troops, he could only see a chance for a victory against these barbarians.

Room on the beach started to become more available as soldiers started to climb up the steep hill into the forest slipping on the thick carpet of pine needles with every step. Other soldiers were being moved and organized on the sea side of the little island in the middle of the sandy cove. There were now six centuries spaced along the low cliffs on the land side of the cove from the entrance to the far end. Four centuries were on the other side of the aspens facing the sea. One by the canyon entrance, two on the sea side of the little island and one down by the far end. All of the men on the beach were desperately looking around trying to identify any threats other than the ones coming from the cliff tops at the cove entrance.

Lucius was becoming just as curious as everyone else trying to find where the next attack was going to come from. But unlike everyone else he was not afraid. He was angry that these barbarians were keeping him waiting. He watched as the Syrian horse archers fired arrow after arrow at the enemy on the cliff tops. As men ran in under the cover of shields to pull men from beneath the fallen bundles of brush and wood. He looked out at the sea for any enemy ships bringing barbarians in for a beach landing. Finally he scanned the end of the cove for a charging horde of enemy warriors, but all he could see were the backs of his own Legionaries. The only strange thing that caught his eye were the largest eagles he had ever seen in his life doing lazy spirals far, far up in the clear blue sky.

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The General was just as puzzled as his young General in the cove as to the extent of the attack on his army so far. After the noise of the thunderclaps and the bundles of wood crashing to the ground all the General could hear were the shouts and screams of men as they worked to save those who were trapped and fired arrows at the enemy above. There was no clash of steel on steel or the charging of horses, only the muffled noise of the sea on the other side of barrier as waves broke on the shore. He stood still trying to think of what this could mean as men ran all about him. He looked to the sky and saw two huge eagles high up in the air as he tried to make sense as to why the enemy had not attacked yet.

Then he heard a noise which brought back memories of his home. A low, deep rumble that would come from deep within the earth and was followed by the ground shaking just as it was now. However he did not think this rumble was coming from the earth, he could tell it was coming from the cove on the other side of the barricade.

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Lucius heard the rumble at the same time the General did, but unlike the General he knew where the noise was coming from. Along with a thousand other pair of eyes he looked up to the top of the forested hill facing the cove. As he tried to see through the dust still thick in the air his first thought was only big heavy boulders rolling down could make such a noise

while causing the ground to shake. Yet as he watched he could see the shapes of men sitting upon the backs of monstrous horses. They were charging down the hill much faster than any boulder would roll.

Fire arrows flew by his line of sight as he looked up the hill. They traveled in a straight line from the shrubs at the far end of the cove into the bundles of brush and wood. The arrows flew so fast they appeared to be just shooting beams of light, until he saw the large plumes of flames blossom out of the barricade as if fueled by some kind of dark magic.

Lucius had been the one to instill fear in people his whole life, never having to be the one to receive it. So he did not recognize the sickly feeling in the pit of his stomach as he watched the events unfold around him. It was a feeling that he had been so intimate in giving out to hundreds of people, now he was going to get the chance to know it very well.