

## = The Stolen Eagle =

" The Stolen Eagle " is the series premiere of the British @-@ American historical drama television series Rome . Written by series creator Bruno Heller and directed by Michael Apted , the episode first aired in the United States on Home Box Office ( HBO ) on August 28 , 2005 , and on the BBC in the United Kingdom and Ireland on November 2 . Rome was given a budget of \$ 100 million , making it the largest amount both networks had ever spent on a series . Heller centered the series ' narrative on the perspectives of two common soldiers , similar to Rosencrantz and Guildenstern from Shakespeare 's Hamlet . Apted shot the episode at Cinecittà , the Roman studio where the epic films Ben @-@ Hur and Cleopatra were filmed . On the set , realism and authenticity were emphasized more than grandiosity , with depictions of a cosmopolitan city of all social classes .

As the wars in Gaul come to an end , Julius Caesar ( Ciarán Hinds ) is faced with both triumph and tribulation . On the heels of his victory comes news of his daughter 's death . Awarded with the adulation of the people , he also garners the enmity of politicians in Rome , including Pompey the Great ( Kenneth Cranham ) . In Rome , Pompey must balance honor and politics as he is urged to betray his former friend . Meanwhile , Caesar 's niece Atia of the Julii ( Polly Walker ) tries to steer her family on the dangerous path between the growing divisions of power . In the Gallic countryside , two unlikely allies ( Kevin McKidd and Ray Stevenson ) journey to reclaim the stolen standard of the Roman legion .

HBO described its marketing strategy as " its largest , most aggressive for a new series , " and media outlets estimated its cost at \$ 10 million . On its first broadcast , an estimated 3 @. @ 8 million US viewers watched the episode . On its first airing in the UK and Ireland , it secured an estimated audience of 6 @. @ 6 million people . Critical reception was largely mixed , with several reviewers writing that the episode suffered from slow storytelling . " The Stolen Eagle " garnered four major awards , including the Primetime Emmy Award for Outstanding Special Visual Effects and the Directors Guild of America Award for Outstanding Directing ? Drama Series .

## = = Plot = =

During the Siege of Alesia in 52 BC , Centurion Lucius Vorenus of the 13th Legion commands his men as Gallic warriors fall on his line . In contrast to the Gauls ' chaotic charge , the Roman files fight with precision , until one drunk legionary , Titus Pullo , breaks ranks and charges into the crowd of Gauls . Vorenus angrily orders him back into formation , but Pullo hits him . Later , the assembled soldiers watch as Pullo is flogged and condemned to death for his disorderly conduct . The day after , Vercingetorix , " King of the Gauls " , is brought before Julius Caesar and made to surrender , ending the eight @-@ year @-@ long Gallic Wars . Caesar 's niece , Atia of the Julii , orders her son Octavian to deliver a horse she has purchased straight to Caesar in Gaul to ensure that he remembers them above all other well @-@ wishers . Caesar himself receives news that his daughter , married to his friend Gnaeus Pompeius Magnus with whom he shares power in Rome , has died in childbirth along with her stillborn daughter . A blood tie broken between them , Caesar orders a new wife be found for Pompey .

In the Roman Senate , Cato the Younger moves that Caesar be stripped of his command and recalled to Rome to answer charges of misusing his office and illegal warmongering . Pompey , as sole Consul present , vetoes the motion , insisting in trusting Caesar . At the theater that night , Scipio introduces his daughter Cornelia Metella to Pompey as a prospective wife , while Cato warns him that he must ally against Caesar before it is too late . Pompey again asserts that Caesar means no harm , although privately , he is troubled by Caesar 's rising prestige and power and gives orders to one of his slaves who is leaving on a trip to Gaul . At night in the encampment of the 13th Legion , the Aquila ( Eagle Standard ) is stolen by brigands . To avoid a potentially disastrous drop in morale , Mark Antony orders Vorenus to retrieve it . As Vorenus feels the mission is doomed to failure , he has the condemned Pullo released from the stockade to assist him .

In camp , Caesar welcomes Marcus Junius Brutus , his unofficial stepson whose mother is Caesar 's lover , Servilia of the Junii . Later , at a party hosted by Servilia , Brutus confides to Pompey that

the loss of the eagle has made Caesar unusually vulnerable as his men are on the brink of mutiny . On the road to Caesar 's camp in Gaul , Octavian is taken captive by brigands . For Caesar 's request , Atia instructs her daughter Octavia to marry Pompey by first divorcing her husband Glabius , despite Octavia 's protests that they are deeply in love . Atia then presents Octavia to Pompey at a party and offers her for premarital relations , which Pompey takes advantage of .

Vorenus and Pullo set off in search of the eagle , encountering and rescuing Octavian from his captors . Octavian thanks them and promises that they will be rewarded . Vorenus and Pullo discover Pompey 's slave with the eagle hiding in the bandit cart and kill him , realizing the bandits were hired by Pompey . A politically astute Octavian explains that their mission is only a gesture , since the theft of the eagle is actually a blessing in disguise to Caesar . Civil war between Caesar and Pompey is inevitable , but Caesar needs Pompey to make the first move so as not to appear the aggressor ; Pompey is likely to do that if he believes Caesar 's soldiers are on the verge of desertion . The trio returns in triumph to camp , where a surprised yet grateful Caesar takes the eagle back and more than adequate proof of Pompey 's hostility . He sends Pompey the head of his slave and informs him of his next move , to winter the 13th Legion at Ravenna on the Italian border , in preparation for pressing his rights to the Consulship . Pompey breaks all ties with Caesar and takes Cornelia as his wife . Octavia , humiliated at being used by Pompey and heartbroken over her pointless divorce , says she wants him dead .

= = Production = =

= = = Conception and writing = = =

" The Stolen Eagle " was written by executive producer and co @-@ creator Bruno Heller and directed by Michael Apted , who also directed the following two episodes . Heller said the era of the Roman Empire was " pivotal in Western history . If things hadn 't turned out the way they did at that particular point , the world that we live in now would be very different . " He decided to tell the story of the series from the perspectives of two common soldiers , Lucius Vorenus and Titus Pullo . According to Heller , " They are the only two ordinary soldiers mentioned by Caesar in his book , so the idea was to do a sort of Rosencrantz and Guildenstern take . I essentially took the seed of that idea to try to tell a big historical epic , but from the street level , the everyman 's point of view . "

The episode title is a reference to the standard of the Roman legion , a symbol that represents the legion 's unity . While the storyline detailing its theft was based on fiction , Heller believed that it showed how Caesar could turn " misfortune into opportunity . He was always one step ahead of his enemies . " Certain characters were changed from their traditional images ; for instance , while Brutus has been portrayed as the noblest Roman , Heller and historical consultant Jonathan Stamp thought it would be interesting to have him forced into his later role through his ancestry . Alluding to the fact that Brutus ' great great great grandfather " drove the last king out of Rome " , Stamp said that " his family history was pushing him in one direction , his emotions in another . "

= = = Casting = = =

The producers cast relatively unknown British actors for the series . Scottish actress Lindsay Duncan , who was cast as Servilia , believed that she and other UK actors " can do old , can do classic , and you believe it . " She also said that because of long distances , American actors or those of other nationalities were avoided : " Transporting actors from [ Los Angeles ] to Rome on a regular basis does not look good for the budget . We 're quite cheap . " Stamp described Servilia as " the great love of [ Julius ] Caesar 's life , his mistress and by all counts the only woman he truly loved . " Irish actor Ciarán Hinds was cast as Caesar . Hinds first thought it was " silly " to be offered the part , but then " you think it 's quite an honour to be chosen to play it . And then you think , ' Oh shit I 've got to do it ' , and then , well , ' I suppose someone has to do it ! ' " Heller had believed that Hinds would make " a great Caesar " for a long time , and considered the series " extremely lucky "

for being able to cast him .

Scottish actor Kevin McKidd , who had never appeared in a television series that necessitated over twelve months of filming , was cast as Lucius Vorenus , one of the lead characters . McKidd said , " What was different about this show is you get 14 months to really get into every nook and cranny of the character , in a way you don 't get a chance to explore when you do a movie or a theater play . Initially , it was a terrifying prospect . But once you got over that , you realize what a great opportunity it was . " Heller described his character as " very much a Roman of the Old School , a stoic man devoted to duty and religion and the legion . " Ray Stevenson played Titus Pullo , a soldier who befriends Vorenus . McKidd said that " they 're kind of thrown together by fate , by chance , but somewhere along the line they start to stick ... [ They ] keep finding themselves accidentally at the epicenter of tumultuous events and immense change , so they 're kind of clinging to each other . "

Caesar 's niece , Atia , was portrayed by actress Polly Walker . According to Heller , while most auditioning actresses assumed that the character was the series ' villainess , Walker made " [ Atia ] bigger than life but completely real ... She could read the phone book with that kind of brio and joy . " Rather than a villain , Heller wrote her to be " a real life force . Everything she 's doing is for the good of her family , her children . No matter how evil it gets , it 's always for good reason . " Walker was pleased with her " very complex character . I found it exciting to play such massive emotions and deal with such interesting , to say the least , situations . I saw it as a huge challenge , and I have huge admiration for this character . A lot of people might consider her to be sort of evil or bad , but I think she 's wonderful . She 's just a survivor , doing what she 's got to do . "

= = = Filming = = =

The series was given a budget of \$ 100 million ( £ 58 million ) , the largest both HBO and the BBC had ever devoted to a series . The season was filmed between March 2004 and July 2005 , at locations in or around Rome , and on a set considered " to be the biggest and most expensive ever built for television . " It was built at Cinecittà , where the epic films Ben @-@ Hur ( 1959 ) and Cleopatra ( 1963 ) had been filmed . Production designer Joseph Bennett built a set that emphasized authenticity and realism rather than grandiosity . He said ,

People think of Rome as white and cold and beautiful , powerful but distant . But based on the research , I don 't think it was like that at all . If you go to Pompeii , you 're struck by how garish it is , even now . The temples and sculptures were all brightly painted . Rome was like Pompeii , but much bigger . And Rome was so noisy it was impossible to sleep . It was like hell . Think of it as a combination of New York and Calcutta , with insane wealth and insane poverty . It was pretty extreme .

The series begins with opening credits that depict traditional Roman myths , such as Romulus and Remus , the city 's foundation mythos . For inspiration , visual effects and design company A52 explored museums , read the script and researched Roman history . They created the opening sequence entirely in @-@ house . VFX artist Kirk Balden said of production , " On many projects , you start off with storyboards and everyone has a good idea of what it 's going to look like when it 's completed . This project was very experimental right to the very end . The tone of it is pretty much unlike anything we 've done and most of what any of us here have seen . There 's a lot there that creatively sets the stage for the series . "

Heller was responsible for writing the episode 's voice @-@ over , despite his dislike of the task . He said that despite it being his " 400th version , " he was " still not happy with it . " He believed that an early scene in which cart distributes spoils in front of Pompey represented the first real sense of how the series would depict city life . He said , " I think this is the first time that we get sense of the version of Rome that the show is pushing , " which was a very different version than viewers may have been used to . To him , Rome was " colorful and painted " and cosmopolitan . A later scene featuring Cicero the Younger in the Senate proved difficult to film because of the large number of Italian extras who did not speak English . In the DVD audio commentary , he said that " this is one of those scenes where you need really great assistant directors , because all of these Italian extras

who have no idea whatsoever what [ Cicero 's ] saying , so to keep them interested and focused and concentrated on what 's going on is a real trick . "

Anachronistic stirrups were used to ensure the safety of the actors , though the crew attempted to conceal or camouflage them for historical authenticity , as they were not then used by the Roman cavalry . Extras playing soldiers attended a boot camp under the guidance of a former Royal Marine . Those actors portraying legionnaires learned to fight by thrusting , not slashing their weapons . Artisans reportedly handmade four thousand costumes using authentic period materials such as cotton , linen , wool and silk , all of which were hand @-@ dyed on set . Pullo was originally written to be a poor horse rider , a reflection that " Romans were notoriously bad horsemen , " according to Heller . However , Stevenson turned out to be " probably the best horseman on the show , " so they rewrote this characteristic because bad horsemanship is difficult to fake .

James Madigan , the visual effects supervisor , approached the series as a feature film , observing that " every aspect of the production took meticulous care with every detail , the costumes , the set dressing , the acting , and the attention to historical fact . As you worked on it , you really got the feeling that Rome was going to look like something we had never seen on TV before , so our vfx approach very much wanted to respect that . " Madigan attempted to seamlessly mesh the visual effects with the physical sets and depend less on CGI . A friend told Madigan that after seeing the pilot , " he didn ' t see any vfx shots , even though there are dozens of shots throughout episode 1 . That means we did our job well . "

= = Marketing = =

HBO said its marketing plan for the series was , " its largest , most aggressive push for a new series " . The channel broadcast the first three episodes seven days a week at various times during the day . Non @-@ subscribers could preview the first two episodes during the first week of September 2005 . HBO implemented an outdoor marketing campaign in major cities and produced movie @-@ style trailers which preceded a number of films in cinemas . Entertainment Weekly , Vanity Fair , Time , and GQ published full @-@ size articles about the series . The History Channel broadcast five nights of documentaries featuring the Roman Empire , which were hosted by Stevenson , McKidd , and Varma , a collaboration which was the first of its kind between the two networks .

David Baldwin , the executive vice president of program planning , said , " This is a huge series for us . We wanted to give it every opportunity to be seen by as many people as possible . " Media outlets estimated that the entire marketing campaign cost HBO \$ 10 million , the most the network had spent on marketing a series to that point .

Commentators viewed the success of Rome as crucial for the network , especially after the past mixed reception of Carnivàle and K @-@ Street . In July 2005 , James Hibberd of Television Week wrote that Rome was viewed " as the network 's best shot for adding another literate , must @-@ see drama to its schedule " . Writing for the same publication , Tom Shales said that HBO " has made such a fuss over Rome , and the network itself has put such painful pressure on the show ( and its producers ) to make a hefty impact , that it 'll be scorned like a leper if it fails to make a truly gigantic splash . "

= = Reception = =

= = = Ratings = = =

" The Stolen Eagle " was first broadcast on August 28 , 2005 in the United States on HBO and in Canada on The Movie Network and Movie Central . An estimated 3 @.@ 8 million viewers watched the episode , less than the series premieres of Carnivale and Deadwood but consistent with the series finale of Six Feet Under . In the UK and Ireland , the premiere was broadcast on BBC 2 on November 2 , 2005 . According to The Independent , more than 6 @.@ 6 million viewers watched

the episode .

= = = Critical reception = = =

" The Stolen Eagle " received generally mixed reviews from television critics , many of whom criticized its slow pace . Mark A. Perigard of The Boston Herald wrote , " Less perverse than I , Claudius , more entertaining than American Broadcasting Company 's ( ABC ) toga twister Empire , " Rome " gets off to an uneven start . " Terry Morrow of the Dayton Daily News criticized the premiere , writing that " the opener , like most pilots , is so bogged down with introducing faces and setting up the story that it turns into a long and tedious journey . " Morrow also said the episode suffered from lacking one " standout , signature character " , though he believed that the " flaws in Rome should clear up in time , given HBO 's knack for winning dramas . It 's an epic story , and one worth savoring if you can muddle through the demands of slow storytelling in the beginning . "

The Scotsman 's Robert McNeil thought that the premiere was " shocking , but also rather slow , as characters are established . Maybe it 'll get better . In the meantime , to paraphrase Roger McGough , I came , I saw , I concurred with those who say : Rome wasn 't built in an hour . " Similarly opinionated was The Cincinnati Post 's Rick Bird , who said that like other HBO series , Rome " takes a while to get going . After the first episode you will mostly be confused with a dizzying array of characters , intrigue and subplots . Hang in there . By the second episode things take shape and one should be hooked by episode three with this steamy romp through antiquity and its lusty intrigue . " Bird found some positive elements ; the episode , he said , was " enhanced by marvelous filmmaking including elaborate sets and costumes . Small @-@ screen film art has rarely painted such a realistic picture of ancient Rome . "

Paul English of The Daily Record wrote that " Rome is visually dazzling , full of vim and tantalizingly seductive , " adding that " McKidd 's growling turn as Ceasar 's [ sic ] footsoldier Lucius Vorenus will undoubtedly propel him into the US major league . " Writing for the Los Angeles Daily News , David Kronke failed to find the series very remarkable , writing that " notwithstanding some lurid sex and gruesome violence , [ it is ] as conventional as anything the network has ever done . Sword @-@ and @-@ sandals epics have become familiar Hollywood staples ... and those expecting something that takes up where the legendarily decadent BBC / PBS series I , Claudius left off may be in for something of a disappointment . " Television Without Pity graded the episode with a B.

Some viewers criticized the graphic nudity seen in the pilot , especially in the US . Heller commented , " Romans didn 't have our body shame and fear of sexuality . I think that is part of the modern fascination with that world . There was a lack of shame about those things , that we had to portray with a lack of shame in order to make it work . "

= = = Accolades = = =