

Clash of Empires

NZCYA
AWARD
WINNING
SERIES

The stunning sequel to 'Rampage at Waterloo'

BRIAN FALKNER

Clash of Empires

For Sandra and Mick Thornton,

who added a little madness.

And for Mike Rehu,

who added a little magic.

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Prologue
September 24, 1815

Château De Brest, France

The young French soldier shivers, and not from the cold, although here at the parapet of the castle the wind is icy and pitiless.

From behind him and below come deep grunting sounds and the rattle of chains. That area of the castle courtyard is covered with hastily erected screens of sailcloth to keep out prying, spying eyes. He cannot see what is there. But he knows what it is.

A bellow rumbles around the stone walls of the courtyard, loud enough to shake the tarpaulins and tremble his sword in its scabbard. The devil's creatures walk the cobblestones below him but even they are not the reason for his terror. The soldier does not fear the creatures as much as he fears the devil, and the devil surely stalks the castle this night.

The castle is old. Some of the stones of its walls were cut by Roman slaves, fifteen centuries before. It stands at the mouth of the Penfield River in Brest, at the westernmost tip of France, isolated on a rocky outcrop, protected on three sides by the sea and on all sides by high walls, towers, and ramparts. The stonework is dark and imposing, rising on a sharp angle from the rock-strewn shore.

At night the castle has a presence of its own, as if it has absorbed the souls of those who have died defending and attacking its thick walls.

The young soldier stands at attention at the battlements, his musket beside him, stock on the ground, barrel nestled in the crook of his right arm. He faces the sea, which smolders with embers of moonlight.

He is grateful for the moon. Without it he would have nothing but the flickering amber of the storm lamps that line the wall.

The silvery light falls also on the ships, moored at the wharves in the river mouth below the castle. Their masts sway in the strong breeze. The creaking and groaning of wood and rope is relentless.

More ships lie at anchor in the middle of the river. Many ships. Enough for an invasion, the soldier thinks, but he does not express this thought out loud, not even to Corporal Joubert. Words can be overheard, and to talk to anyone of an invasion fleet, or of the monsters caged below him, would surely lead to the separation of his head from his body.

Where is Joubert? He disappeared many minutes ago and has not yet returned.

Desertion of duty, even for a moment, is an offense punishable by the most tortuous death. Joubert knows this, but as a veteran of the Peninsular War, and of the recent victory in the Southern Netherlands, near

Waterloo, Joubert thinks himself to be untouchable. He is wrong.

The young soldier stands guard alone, shivering.

On the far side of the river are the taverns and bawdy houses of the town, and as the wind shifts occasionally, it brings the shouts, laughter, and music of the sailors making the most of their shore leave.

Now there are footsteps on the walkway behind and the soldier immediately turns and presents arms.

“Halt,” he says. “Who goes there?”

“Put away your bayonet before you stick yourself with it,” comes a hushed voice and suppressed laughter. Then out of the shadows of the staircase swaggers Joubert. He is not alone. He has his musket in one hand, and the other hand is entwined in the smock of a girl. She is perhaps seventeen, slender but womanly. As they approach, the soldier can see that she is both attractive and afraid.

“I caught a stray,” Joubert says. His words are a little slurred and the soldier thinks he has shared rum with some of the sailors.

“Parisian pig,” the girl says.

Her beauty is marred by a crooked nose, broken and long-healed. Perhaps this girl is not unused to a fight.

“She must leave,” the young soldier says. “We must attend to our duty.”

“Why should the ship rats have all the fun tonight?” Joubert asks. “There is no danger to guard against.

Europe is ours and Napoléon has the British cowering like pups on their lonely rock.”

“If . . . he . . . was to see this, your death would be an unpleasant one,” the soldier says.

“You are too serious,” Joubert says. “He is tending to far more important matters, or is asleep in his warm bed. Come, we will have our fun tonight also.”

He wrenches at the girl’s smock as he says this and there is a ripping sound. The girl spits at him and slaps his face. He laughs drunkenly.

“I will even stand guard and give you the first kiss,” Joubert says.

“I will not,” the young soldier says, and turns back to the battlement, standing again to attention.

“As you wish.” There is another tearing sound.

“You should pray that the devil does not see you,” the soldier says.

Joubert begins to laugh but stops abruptly as a new voice intrudes.

“Who is this devil you speak of?”

The soldier spins, raising his musket. “Halt,” he says. “Who goes there?”

“Colonel Valois,” is the reply.

Joubert lets go of the girl, who falls to the ground and then picks herself up, trying to piece her clothing back together. He snatches his musket, which he had leaned against the battlements.

Valois is the commandant of the castle. He emerges slowly from the darkened staircase as another figure comes into view behind him.

Valois says, "And General Thibault."

The young soldier freezes, unable to move or speak. The devil stands before him on the castle wall.

This was a handsome man once. He wears the uniform of a general in the imperial guard, yet without the bicorne hat that befits his rank. Three parallel scars extend from the top of his head diagonally down his face, taking with them his right eye and ear. On his scalp they plow furrows where no hair grows. His sideburns are thick and he has an earring of gold in the ear that remains. He has one complete arm: his right, the left is a withered, scarred stump, ending just below his elbow. His skin is black, not all over like an African, but in patches around the scars, perhaps from infection, or disease. His only hand is encased in a black leather glove.

The girl is rigid, paralyzed at the sight. She sways, then General Thibault takes two steps toward her, surely more swiftly than any human could move. He grabs her. He tucks the remains of his left arm under her legs and lifts her effortlessly, murmuring soothing words into her ear.

"This is how you guard my precious creatures?" Thibault asks. His tone is light, but his voice is a rasp, the scars across his throat evidence of why.

Neither Joubert nor the young soldier speak.

“By making whores of the young women of the town?” Thibault asks.

Still there is silence.

“This is the daughter of the baker,” Thibault says. “I know him and I know his family. His baguettes and brioche are the best in Brittany. You would sully the daughter of my friend?”

“Your names,” Valois demands.

Now Joubert finds his voice. “Joubert,” he says, and with a nod at the soldier, “and Lefevre. But I am at fault. Lefevre had no part in this.”

The young soldier, Lefevre, leans his musket against the castle wall. He withdraws his sword, kneels, and offers it hilt-first to the general.

Thibault sighs. “Put away your sword,” he says.

Lefevre bows his head before rising, sheathing his sword, and retrieving his firearm.

“But this is the last time you will neglect your duties,” Thibault says.

“Yes, sir,” Joubert manages in a shaky voice. “Never again, sir.”

“I know your names, Joubert, Lefevre,” Thibault says. “I know you.”

Lefevre can barely breathe.

Thibault stares at them with his one good eye. It burns into the young soldier. Thibault says, “This eye sees you when I am standing before you.” He turns his

face, bringing his eye patch into the light of the storm lamps. "And this eye sees you when I am not."

A cold shudder shakes the young soldier so violently that he almost drops his musket.

The girl wakes, staring at the soldiers as if she cannot bring herself to look at that which holds her.

"Rest, girl, these men will not bedevil you again," Thibault says.

She turns her head toward his face and freezes, rigid like a statue.

Thibault turns to the sea, taking a deep breath of the salty sea air and gazing over the forest of masts in the river and at the wharves below.

"Come, Valois," he says, turning back toward the staircase, the girl struggling in his arms.

Valois turns abruptly after glaring fiercely at the two guards.

Another bellow comes from the courtyard below and Thibault stops. He turns in that direction, smiling, as if he approves of the sound. He leans out over the inner wall and casually opens his arms. There is no sound from the girl as she hits the topmost sailcloth with a flat, smacking sound and slides off the edge.

There is another sound, a moist thud as she hits the cobblestones of the courtyard, far below, followed by the rattling of heavy chains and the scraping of immense feet.

Then come the screams, but they are brief.

“She would not have seen anything, General,” Valois protests as they descend into the shadow of the stairs.

“You can be sure?” Thibault asks.

“No, General, I cannot,” Valois says with sadness. “What about the guards? Are they to escape punishment?”

“You would rather I took their heads?” Thibault asks.

“Their offense was great, yet they seem to have escaped lightly,” Valois says. “You have frightened them, no more.”

“Scared men I can use,” Thibault says. “Dead men are no good to me.”

BOOK ONE

Invasion

September 25 - October 4, 1815

Saur-Killers

The officer at the Royal Artillery Barracks in Woolwich, southeast of London, wears the uniform of an artillery major of the Third Netherlands Infantry Division. But he is neither a soldier nor Dutch.

His papers identify him as Major Johannes Hendrik Lux. But that is a lie.

Willem Verheyen is the name he has used since he can remember although even that is not his true name.

Playing the part of a soldier and an officer came awkwardly at first to Willem. But now he wears the role as comfortably as another would wear a cloak. "Major Lux" is merely an illusion and Willem is a masterful magician.

The sky is overcast, a typical dull London morning. In the dismal shadows of the high-walled courtyard at the rear of the Royal Artillery Barracks the cold air bites like saur-bugs and every breath hangs in crystalized white.

Willem stands in the centre of the courtyard, observing as a group of six artillery lieutenants approach a line of tethered herbisaur.

Today is the final day of their training. It is Willem's last day also.

In a week he will be behind enemy lines.

He puts those thoughts out of his mind and watches. The nervous, wide-bellied, duck-billed herbisaur rear up on their hind legs as the soldiers draw near. Not to attack, for that is not in their nature, but to flee. They cannot: the leather collars, chains, and heavy metal stakes keep them in place. They emit warbling calls of alarm and thrash their necks from side to side, but the stakes are strong and deep in the ground.

These saurs are imported especially from Asia. They are large, nearly twice the height of a man. They were the largest known saurs in the world before Waterloo, although still not nearly as big or anywhere near as ferocious as Napoléon's battlesaurs.

If the circumstances were different Willem might smile at the awkward-looking creatures with their wide, childlike eyes. But he does not smile. He knows what is coming.

"Ignite," Willem calls.

The soldiers strike flints, creating a constellation of tiny stars.

The British soldiers call these "sparkle sticks." A mixture of gunpowder, magnesium, and glue along a stiff wire. They burn like the souls of sinners in the misty morning gloom.

"Begin," Willem calls.

The stars begin to move as the soldiers weave an intricate pattern with the sticks. Bright lines fade slowly on the gentle mist of the soldiers' breath.

The saurs pull away in fear, then settle slowly as their attention is captured by the dancing lights.

“Approach,” Willem calls.

With one exception the soldiers are young men, most not much older than Willem. Willem watches their faces as they move even closer to the large saurs. He pays particular attention to a tall Scotsman, Hew McConnell. McConnell has a feeble moustache and a thin strip of beard down his chin.

McConnell is the son of a nobleman. The others called him Sir Hew behind his back, although he does not hold that title. They do it because of the way McConnell wears his birthright like a badge of honour. McConnell has the potential to be a good soldier, Willem thinks, but he has a weak character, which he covers with bluster and bravado. He will pass this training, but Willem worries that he will be found wanting on the battlefield.

For different reasons Willem keeps a close eye on the exception, the oldest and largest of the lieutenants, Joe Hoyes. He is Irish and a grizzled veteran of many campaigns, a former sergeant promoted (against his will) in the aftermath of Waterloo. A battlefield commission, like many, to help fill a shortage of lieutenants after so many were killed in that hellish encounter. Big Joe, as they call him, sports a bushy moustache and a cleft chin. His face bears a jagged scar. He has a healthy disrespect for everything military, but

has impressed Willem with his great steadiness and determination.

“Hold,” Willem calls as McConnell reaches too soon for his scabbard.

The saurs are ready, but Willem wants the men to see how long they can be held this way.

“The longer the dance, the deeper the trance,” he says. Then, finally, “Draw.”

Now the soldiers pull swords from their scabbards, holding them ready in front of them. Still the sparkle sticks etch their patterns on the cold air.

“Strike,” Willem calls.

A flash of steel as the swords jab upward at the soft tissue on the underside of the herbisaurs’ jaws.

Blood gushes.

A short, sharp thrust up into the brain, as Willem has taught them, then a quick extraction before the head can fall and trap the blade.

The herbisaurs remain standing for a moment after they are dead. They look at their killers with startled, confused expressions, if that is possible for a saur.

Almost in unison they collapse, to the front or to the side, falling in awkward piles of flesh and pools of blood.

He should feel bad, Willem thinks. But these lieutenants will face much worse in battle and this is the only way they can truly learn. Besides he has done this often enough now that he has ceased to feel

anything, his heart is as steel at the sight of the slaughter. At least that is what he tells himself.

“Withdraw,” Willem calls.

Stepping back, the soldiers drop their exhausted sparkle sticks and wipe blood from their swords with oilcloths.

One of the lieutenants, a prematurely balding eighteen-year-old named Weiner, is smiling, but Willem thinks it is not happiness at the kill. Weiner’s expression is a permanent smile that might be mistaken for insecurity, or even a lack of intelligence. But Willem has found it to be a reflection of a constant good humour.

Already the butchers’ carts are moving in to dismember and remove the carcasses.

“Good work, gentlemen,” Willem says. “Stand down.”

“They seem . . . efficient,” a voice says behind Willem. He turns to see the young blind army officer, Lieutenant Hunter Frost. He had not heard Frost arrive. Next to him stands an equally young subaltern, clearly acting as his guide.

“You saw this?” Willem asks, although he knows this cannot be true. Frost wears two eye patches.

“I smell the smoke and hear the sound of the scabbards,” Frost says. “I hear the rupture of skin and the quieting of the beasts’ breathing. I smell the blood.

It paints a picture for me almost as clear as your eyes do for you.”

Willem nods. Frost has not let the loss of his sight affect his spirit or his career. Such is his character. He has earned special dispensation from the War Office to remain a serving officer. He no longer serves in the artillery, nor even in the infantry. A soldier without eyes cannot sight a cannon, aim a pistol, or fight with a sword. Instead he now reports to Lieutenant Colonel Grant, of the Intelligence Service. Willem has heard that his incisive mind and sharp wits have already proved invaluable in analysing information gained from spies and intercepted enemy dispatches.

“Thank you for coming, my friend, it is good to see you,” Willem says. “How is Whitehall?”

“A battlefield of a different sort,” Frost says with a smile. “I would not bore you with the details.”

“And you got my letter?” Willem asks.

“I did,” Frost says. “But do not let me interrupt your training session.” He turns to the subaltern and dismisses him with a quiet word.

Willem turns back to the line of soldiers.

McConnell is bragging about his fighting skills. He was born with a sword in his hand, it would seem. He demonstrates with cuts and thrusts and appears, to Willem’s eye, genuinely talented, although the other lieutenants conceal their disdain behind fixed expressions.

“Gentlemen,” Willem says, recapturing their attention. “Take a break. Go and select a trojansaur. Join me on the parade ground in an hour.”

McConnell sheathes his sword and all six lieutenants stand to attention and salute before making their way from the courtyard.

“You look and sound quite the dashing young major,” Frost says when they are out of earshot.

“An illusion,” Willem says. “Smoke and mirrors, nothing more.”

“So what do you really think of your new saur-killers?” Frost asks.

“Do you enquire as a friend or as an officer of the Intelligence Service?” Willem asks.

“Does it matter?”

Willem shrugs. “I think they are well equipped for an attack by an army of herbisaur.”

“And battlesaur?” Frost wonders.

“There is only one way to find out,” Willem says. There is more that he could say, but he doesn’t. Not even to Frost.

“Hew McConnell?” Frost asks. “Is he ready?”

Willem is amazed at how little escapes Frost’s notice, even without eyes.

“He is the one who worries me most,” Willem says. “He is a braggart, and I think of very little substance.”

“He may surprise you,” Frost says. “My father knows his father. We spent time together as children.”

“I apologize,” Willem says quickly. “I did not realize he was your friend. I meant no offense.”

“None was taken, and I do not count him as a friend. Far from it,” Frost says. “We were ill-suited to each other’s temperaments. But I know this: Hew has lived all his life in the shadow of a great man, his father. Even as a child he was constantly trying to prove himself worthy. Perhaps he will. He comes from good stock.”

“I hope you are right,” Willem says. “Come, let us warm up for a moment in the officers’ mess.”

He takes his friend by the arm and leads him toward the main entrance of the barracks.

“I have heard many stories about you,” Frost says. “You have achieved a certain infamy on the other side of the English Channel.”

“What kind of infamy?” Willem asks.

“They call you the Wizard of Gaillemarde,” Frost says. “Napoléon’s soldiers fear you. They say you are no conjurer but a sorcerer, capable of true magic.”

“Let them think that,” Willem says. “Perhaps it will work to our advantage.”

“Napoléon of course spreads word that it is not true,” Frost says. “That you are just a boy with a box of conjuring tricks. But his soldiers believe that you can turn yourself into a dinosaur, that you can control the weather, that you can disappear from one place and reappear in another.”

“If that were all true, this war would be already won,” Willem laughs. “I would turn myself into a battlesaur and appear in Napoléon’s quarters during a thunderstorm.”

He mimes picking meat from between his teeth.

“If only this were true,” Frost says.

“But we will have to make do with my ‘simple conjuring tricks’ when we reach the forest,” Willem says.

“When do you leave?” Frost asks.

“Today is the last day of training,” Willem replies cautiously.

Frost stops in his tracks. “Do you not trust me?” he asks.

“Of course,” Willem says, encouraging Frost forward with a gentle tug on his sleeve. “Again I owe you an apology. You are perhaps the one person in this country whom I do fully trust. We sail in seven days.”

“How many men?” Frost asks.

“Just six,” Willem says.

“Six?”

“Six trained saur-killers.” Willem smiles to cover his own anxiety. “Along with the two hundred infantry who will overwhelm the abbey and allow us to slay the battlesaurs in the cavern below.”

“You will emerge through the cave?” Frost asks.

Willem nods. “Right in the heart of the abbey while the French are occupied with the threat from without.”

Frost nods. "The journey to the Sonian will not be easy."

"We go by night," Willem says. "The Royal Navy will create a diversion near Zeebrugge while we slip quietly down the Oosterschelde."

"Surely there are lookouts," Frost says. "Even at night they will see you and raise the alarm."

"You no doubt remember Sofie and Lars, who helped us escape from Antwerp?" Willem asks.

"I did not meet Sofie," Frost says. "But Lars would be hard to forget."

Willem smiles. Lars is a giant of a man.

"I have sent word to her and received reply," Willem says. "The lookouts along the Oosterschelde will be looking the other way, or sleeping. Those who can be bribed, will be bribed. The others will be dealt with. Sofie has many friends in that part of the Netherlands."

"And after you land?" Frost asks.

"Lars will meet us in Krabbendijke," Willem says. "And guide us past any French encampments."

Frost frowns.

"You seem concerned," Willem says. "Is there something I should know?"

"I did not say anything," Frost says.

"And yet you are holding something back," Willem says. "Is it about Héloïse? What have you learned?"

Héloïse, the wild girl, who lived for many years in the Sonian Forest outside Willem's village after her

mother was taken by a firebird. She was one of the few survivors of the massacre at Gaillemarde. She had helped Willem, Frost, and Jack Sullivan escape from Europe, traveling with them through the sewers of Antwerp and sailing out of the harbor under the nose of Napoléon himself.

Within a week of her arrival in England, Héloïse had bitten a British officer and was taken to the St. Luke's Hospital for Lunatics despite the loud protestations of Willem and Frost.. She escaped twice in the first week, recaptured both times, then disappeared altogether.

"Is Jack here?" Frost asks. "I should like to see him."

Now it is Willem who stops walking, which stops Frost as well. He looks at Frost for a moment, trying to read his expression.

"The officers' mess can wait," he says. "Jack builds and maintains the trojansaurs."

"Really?" Frost says.

"But you already knew that," Willem says. "As I think you already knew the details of our mission. Come, let us go find him."

Frost manages to look suitably offended as Willem takes him by the arm and leads him toward the workshops.

Captivity

The abbey is old. Older than Cosette can comprehend. She cannot look at the crumbling walls without thinking of those who built this place so very long ago. It is older than the church in Waterloo or the ancient saur-wall at Brussels. She thinks the world must have been young when men carved out this clearing in the dense Sonian Forest and quarried stone to build the high walls and even higher bell tower.

Who were they? Why did they come here to build a place of worship in such isolation? And why did they build the abbey over the entrance to a vast underground cave? Was it as an escape route if the abbey came under attack?

Napoléon's men have enlarged the opening to the cave, walled it off, and fitted it with great wooden doors. She keeps well away from that part of the abbey. She knows what lies beneath.

A few weeks earlier Cosette and Madame Verheyen—Willem's mother—had been confined to their cell with no reason given. They cowered and held each other as the floor and even the thick stone walls trembled. The light from the high stone window had dimmed as something vast passed by. Then another. And another. She could not see them, but in her mind's eye she had clearly seen the malevolent eyes, cold

steam breath, and huge, jagged teeth of the terrible thing that had lunged at her that night in the village.

Now she hurries through the courtyard with breakfast: a bowl of rice gruel to share with Madame Verheyen in the church that is the base of the bell tower. They spend most of their day there. Their cell is too small, merely a square room with two sackcloth beds and a pail for toileting. After a few weeks of imprisonment Madame Verheyen negotiated with Baston to allow them to use the church. The French soldiers do not use it, except on Sundays for mass.

A soldier is tending one of the vegetable patches that take up most of the courtyard. Private Deloque, a brute of a man with a brute of a beard who seldom speaks except for grunts and lewd remarks when she passes. He is turning earth with a hoe, mixing in manure. It smells like dinosaur dung.

He steps out of the garden as she approaches, blocking her path. She steps to the side but he moves in the same direction and when she steps back, he steps back also. He grins, a gap-toothed smile, and grunts unintelligibly.

“Excuse me, sir, I would pass,” Cosette says.

Deloque grunts again.

Cosette makes to step to the left, but changes direction quickly to the right, stepping nimbly around Deloque. He thrusts out the hoe as she passes,

however, catching her foot, and she falls, sprawling into the vegetable patch.

“What is going on here?” A voice comes from over her right shoulder. Cosette sits up, covered in mud, manure, and gruel, to see Belette, a lumpy-looking sergeant, emerging from a doorway.

“Merely an accident, monsieur,” Cosette says. “I tripped.”

Belette steps swiftly forward and extends a hand to help her up.

“Thank you, monsieur,” Cosette says with a small smile.

Belette has always been pleasant to her, finding her extra rations or treats such as a piece of soft cloth for her bath.

“Private Deloque, back to work,” Belette says.

Deloque glowers but steps back into the garden and resumes his hoeing. Belette picks up the empty gruel bowl.

“Your breakfast?” he asks.

Cosette nods.

“Here,” Belette says, holding out a cloth. It is knotted at the top and filled with something. It smells like bread. “Something fresh for your breakfast for you and your mother,” he says. “And some butter as well.”

Madame Verheyen is not her mother, but it was a necessary subterfuge that they have maintained. Their

belief that she is Willem's sister is what has kept her alive.

"That is very kind, monsieur," Cosette says cautiously.

"I have no doubt that your stay is arduous enough," Belette says. "I am happy to do what I can to ease the passing of the days."

"I am indebted to you, monsieur," Cosette says. She takes the cloth-wrapped bundle.

Belette falls in step alongside Cosette as she continues to the church. "Allow me to escort you," he says. "With both General Thibault and Captain Baston away, I fear the discipline of some of the men is not what it should be."

"It was merely an accident, monsieur," Cosette says.

"But of course," Belette says.

The entrance to the church is a large pointed archway. Belette leaves her there with a smile and a small bow.

Inside the seats are wooden and new, replaced by the French, although the altar is made of stone and as old as the church itself.

Madame Verheyen is waiting there. She looks up, her nose twitching as Cosette enters. "What happened?" she asks.

"An accident in the garden," Cosette says. "Courtesy of Private Deloque." She grimaces. "I smell like the back end of one of their fiendish saurs."

Madame Verheyen uses a foul word to describe Deloche.

“But now we have fresh bread and butter,” Cosette says. “Courtesy of Sergeant Lumpy.”

Madame Verheyen laughs. “Belette is an odd-looking man.”

“He has a kind heart,” Cosette says.

She sets the cloth down on the pew next to Madame Verheyen and wipes her hands as best as she can on her dress.

“Now your dress smells as bad as you do,” Madame Verheyen says.

“I will go to the rock-pool to bathe after breakfast,” Cosette says. “I will wash the dress then also.”

“I will go after you return,” Madame Verheyen says, and Cosette nods.

Only one of them is allowed to leave the abbey at a time.

Cosette sits and they break the bread together. Madame Verheyen sniffs at it.

“It is not fresh,” she says. “In fact I would barely call it bread.”

“But still better than the rest of the slop which they call food,” Cosette says.

“Sadly true,” Madame Verheyen says.

“Deloche grows more impertinent by the day,” Cosette says. “Belette says we must take extra care now that Thibault and Baston are away.”

“Belette is right,” Madame Verheyen says. “These are foul, brutal men. We have been lucky so far. The soldiers fear Thibault and respect Baston but with them both gone I fear for our safety. Horloge is a milksop.”

Lieutenant Horloge is in charge in Baston’s absence. He is a small man, no older than eighteen and still struggling to grow more than a short fuzz on his upper lip.

Madame Verheyen breaks off a crust and dabs it at the butter, then chews it slowly. “When we first came here, what did I tell you?”

“To survive,” Cosette says.

“Whatever it takes,” Madame Verheyen says. “Your honour and your virtue are precious, but not as valuable as your life. This ordeal will end. Do whatever you have to do to survive.”

“How is Monsieur Verheyen?” Cosette asks, uncomfortable with this line of conversation. Back in the village of Gaillemarde, her sister, Angélique, had done what was necessary to survive and had ended up as a meal for a monster.

Madame Verheyen does not answer, but stares at Cosette until the girl nods.

“I will do whatever it takes,” she says. “How is your husband?”

Maarten Verheyen had been thought long dead, until they had discovered him incarcerated here in the abbey.

“I fear for him,” Madame Verheyen says. “He grows weak. He has been a prisoner here too long, without proper food or fresh air. We all have.”

The Trojansaur

Jack is up a ladder working on Harry's face when the lieutenants arrive. Some have blood spatter on their uniforms. Most look a little shocked, although one or two seem exhilarated. He knows this look. They have just killed herbisaur. For most of them this was their first kill of any kind. Not for the tall Irishman, Big Joe Hoyes, though, Jack knows. He has seen much worse on the battlefield.

Jack ignores them and concentrates on his work.

The trojansaur are lined up outside the carpentry workshop, in the open air. Jack would like to see them inside, out of the elements, but they are too large to fit through the workshop doors.

There are six trojansaur altogether, named after the legendary wooden saur of Troy. The upper body of a dinosaur mounted on a gun carriage. A practice dummy. When the trail of the gun carriage is resting on the ground and the dinosaur head raised into the air, each is twice the height of a man. That is where Jack is now. He set the ladder carefully and checked it three times for stability before daring to climb it. He focuses on the face so he won't look down. He does not like to look down.

The faces are nightmarish, bony-ridged brows over eyes foiled with silver. They reflect even the dull light

of the overcast London sky. The nostrils are deep-set and keyhole-shaped. The “skin” is painted with intricate scales. The jaws are open, and white-painted wooden teeth gleam with menace. Each head has taken Jack more than a week to carve and paint in painstaking detail, using skills he learned from his father.

He has styled them after the six men on his gun crew, lost at Waterloo: Harry, Sam, Douglas, Dylan, Ben, Lewis. In his carvings he has tried to capture something of each person: Dylan’s narrow-set eyes; Ben’s single thick eyebrow; Harry’s wide smile.

He misses the lads. They always treated him well. They were like brothers. Here he has no brothers and few he could count as friends. Like other survivors of the battle at Waterloo, he is not regarded as a hero. Far from it.

He marks cuts with a stick of chalk, then holds the chalk with his mouth and takes a chisel and mallet from his belt.

The lieutenants wander along the line of trojansaurs as Jack chips carefully away at the corner of Harry’s smile.

The Scotsman, McConnell, stops next to Jack’s ladder.

“I’ll take this,” he says.

“Harry’s not quite ready, sir,” Jack mumbles through the piece of chalk in his mouth.

“Harry’s not quite ready, sir,” McConnell mimics Jack, and laughs. “They have names.”

“Yes, sir,” Jack says. “After me friends. Who died at Waterloo, sir.”

“Yes, Waterloo,” McConnell says. He takes hold of the ladder with both hands. “This ladder doesn’t look stable to me. Is it safe?”

“Yes, sir, I hope so, sir,” Jack says, not daring to look down at him.

“Let me check,” McConnell says. He shakes the ladder, grinning around at the others as he does so. Jack’s chisel slips and adds a cruel gash to the corner of the wooden lip. He grabs for the huge, carved wooden teeth of the trojansaur. The chisel clatters off the cobblestones below him, landing at McConnell’s feet. Jack had not even realized that he had dropped it.

“Are you afraid, Sullivan?” McConnell laughs. “Like you were afraid at Waterloo?”

Jack says nothing. It is true. He was terrified at Waterloo.

McConnell rattles the ladder again. Jack clings on desperately.

“Well, Sullivan?”

“Sir, yes, sir. I’m a bit afraid of heights,” Jack manages.

“Will you run away?” McConnell asks. “As you ran at Waterloo, leaving your friends behind?”

“I didn’t run, sir,” Jack says.

“I think you did, Sullivan,” McConnell says, shaking the ladder again. “And that’s why you lived and they all died.”

Jack loses one foot from the ladder rungs and frantically scrabbles to find it. He cries out in fear and indignation. “That ain’t what happened, sir!”

“Oh, I’m wrong, am I?” McConnell asks.

Somewhere nearby a horse squeals and a man shouts. The sounds echo coldly off the stone walls of the courtyard. McConnell glances around, then back up to Jack, raising an eyebrow.

“Yes, sir, I didn’t run, sir,” Jack says.

“Are you arguing with an officer, Sullivan?” McConnell asks. “That is insubordination.”

“No, sir, I was agreeing with the officer, sir,” Jack says. “About you being wrong, sir.”

Jack is getting terribly confused now, and sweating despite the cold. He is aware that he is on dangerous ground. Insubordination can be punishable by death.

“You’re a liar and a coward, Private Sullivan,” McConnell says.

Jack is silent. There is nothing he can think of to say that won’t make matters worse.

“I’d be leaving the boy alone, if I was you.”

It is the gravelly voice of Big Joe, the Irishman.

“You stay out of this,” McConnell says, “or I’ll have you for insubordination as well.”

“Now you can’t do that, an’ all,” Big Joe says with a broad grin. “I’m a lieutenant, just as you.”

McConnell sniffs in disdain. “For how many weeks, is it? Three or four?”

“Eight. And I earned my commission,” Big Joe says. The grin is gone. “And it were hard earned. It were not bought for me by my da.”

McConnell clenches his fists and starts to step forward, then stops himself and turns to the other lieutenants. “This is what happens when they allow commoners to become officers.”

The others maintain stony faces. Big Joe may be a commoner, but there is clearly more respect in the group for him than for McConnell.

“If you want to insult me, you’ll have to be doing better than that now,” Big Joe says.

“Oh, I can do much better,” McConnell says. “But I wouldn’t waste my breath on muck like you, or this sniveling, lying coward up the ladder here.”

A dangerous silence settles into the mist of the courtyard.

“You can take that back,” Big Joe says with a sigh. “I don’t care what you say of me, but you’ll treat the boy with respect. He was there. He saw the beasts.”

“And he ran,” McConnell sneers.

“Of course he ran,” Big Joe says. “And you’d a done the same.”

“I would not. I am no coward,” McConnell says.

“You’ve no idea what you would have done, because you weren’t there,” Big Joe says.

“I know what Jack did,” McConnell says. “He ran.”

“Did he now?” Big Joe steps forward. Even the mist seems to draw back from him. He closes in, face-to-face with McConnell.

“He saw the battlesaurs and he ran,” McConnell says, not backing down. “He’s a coward.”

“I ran!” Big Joe roars, the scar across his face suddenly red. “I was there and I ran. Everybody ran. If you’d been there, you mewling kitten, you’d have run too.”

From his perch at the top of the ladder, Jack sees that McConnell’s hand has dropped to the hilt of his sword.

“Jack did not run.”

A soft voice filters through the silky mist. Jack knows this voice. Lieutenant Frost is standing with Willem at the entrance to the courtyard. “Lieutenant Frost, sir!” he cries out.

“Jack remained at his cannon when all others ran,” Frost says. He speaks calmly. “He helped me fire the shot that brought down one of the great saurs. He fended off another with nothing more than a ramrod. And then he saved my life. Jack, you are no coward.”

“No, sir. I didn’t think I was a coward, sir,” Jack says with great relief. “I’m a good lad.”

“Yes, you are, Jack,” Frost says. Then he steps forward, led by Willem. He finds McConnell’s ear, and although Jack is not supposed to hear, he does.

“And any man who calls him otherwise will regret it immensely.”

There is such quiet ferocity in his voice that anyone would forget that it is a blind man who makes the threat. McConnell backs away, then turns abruptly and storms off. Hoyes moves to the base of the ladder and steadies it.

“You did not run,” he says as Jack descends. “I did not know that. Would that I had half your courage.”

He steps back as Jack reaches the base of the ladder. Jack looks around once his feet are on solid ground and realizes that Big Joe is saluting him. That is unheard of, for an officer to salute a private without the private saluting first.

Jack quickly returns the salute, and realizes as he does so that the other lieutenants—Gilbert, Smythe, Weiner, and Patrick—have lined up behind Hoyes, and are saluting him also.

“I weren’t brave,” he says, embarrassed. “I just did what I had to because I didn’t know what else to do.”

“And that is as good a description of bravery as I have heard,” Frost says.

Jack forgets himself completely and races over to Frost, wrapping him in a bear hug.

“That’ll do, Jack,” Frost murmurs after a moment.

“Yes, sir, sorry, sir,” Jack says, standing to attention but wiping his eyes. “It’s been a while, sir, and I’ve missed you, sir.”

“It’s good to see you, Jack,” Frost says.

“And don’t you worry about Lieutenant McConnell,” Big Joe says. “He’s as popular around here as a cup of cold sick on a frosty morning. We’ll make sure he doesn’t bother you again.”

Departure

The riggers and topmen are high in the masts unfurling the sails, just the light-air canvas until they clear the river mouth. The bosun barks orders and the dockhands make ready to cast off the mooring lines. The sun has not long risen and the docks are still stirring, like some great animal slow to wake.

Major Thibault stands on the fo'c'sle near to the sheep pen. Hurrying sailors flow around him as around a rock in a seaway. They do not acknowledge him. Many make the sign of the cross after they pass him.

This does not concern him.

The ship is the *Duc d'Angouleme*, a first-rate ship of a hundred and ten guns spread over three decks. She is a mighty and majestic wolf of the sea, with a powerful bark and bite. Beneath Thibault's feet, engraved into the wooden planking of the deck, are the words Honor, Motherland, Valor, Discipline. The same words are found on the deck of every ship in the French Navy. Many of which are anchored here in the harbor, which is a flurry of sails as the fleet prepares to depart.

Thibault glances up at the Château de Brest, the great castle overlooking the harbor, high, strong, and still, now that his battlesaurs have been moved.

He is joined by Captain Montenot, the head saurmater. Montenot is a man who has seen many battles and bears the scars of most of them. He was present at the great victory at Waterloo, and at Berlin and again in Rome. He is a joyless man with skin tanned to leather by years of campaigning. They do not speak, but quietly watch the activity on the dock.

A horse gallops into view around a corner of the riverbank. The rider is hurrying, raising dust from the horse's hooves. More than one person has to leap out of the way. The rider, in the uniform of a captain, pulls to a halt at the gangplank and dismounts, tossing the reins to a shore hand. The horse is led away, breathing heavily, sweat steaming from its sides in the cold morning air. The captain glances up, catching Thibault's eye, then bounds up the narrow plank and strides forward to the fo'c'sle.

"Baston, my friend, it is good to see you," Thibault says, kissing him on both cheeks. "I feared you would not make it before our departure."

"It was a close thing, General," Baston says, after greeting Montenot as well. "I was delayed at Calais."

"By Napoléon?"

"He was sleeping when I arrived. His aides did not dare wake him," Baston says.

"He is not the man he was before Elba," Thibault says. "But you did not hear those words from me."

"I heard nothing," Montenot says.

“Nor I.” Baston smiles. “But if I had, I would surely have agreed.”

“What news do you bring from the Sonian?” Montenot asks.

“The juvenile battlesaurs near maturity,” Baston says. “Their training is complete. And a new batch of eggs has hatched.”

“This is good news,” Thibault says.

“The tricorne riders grow restless with their training,” Baston says. “They wonder when they too will be brought to the battle.”

“Soon enough,” Thibault says. “What of the boy, Willem?”

“There has been no sign,” Baston says.

“You must find him,” Thibault says. “He poses great danger to us.”

“We have been searching for him for months,” Baston says. “He hides in a deep hole, and by the time he emerges it will be too late for him to cause us harm.”

“And if you are wrong?” Thibault asks. He paces back and forth along the railing, thinking. “We never found who helped him in Antwerp.”

“No. We spent months searching and interrogating but found nothing,” Baston says. “But no one knew anything, or if they did, they wouldn’t talk. Perhaps if we started executing suspects . . .”

Thibault shakes his head. “There are only two forces in the world, the sword and the spirit. In the long run the sword will always be conquered by the spirit.”

“Monsieur?”

“These are the words of our great leader. Napoléon believes you conquer with the sword, but to rule you need the spirit of the people,” Thibault says. “He wants to be seen as a father, not a tyrant. He has expressly forbidden executions of those not directly engaged in deeds against us.”

“Then we are no closer to finding the boy’s collaborators,” Baston says.

Thibault stops pacing abruptly. “We have Willem’s mother and sister. They must know something,” he says.

“I have interrogated them myself,” Baston says. “The sister knows nothing. The mother, perhaps, but she would die the most excruciating death before she would reveal it. I could torture the sister perhaps, to force the mother to talk.”

“There will be no need,” Thibault says. “Use the other boy.”

“François?”

“Get him to make contact. Perhaps he can earn their trust.”

“I will see it done,” Baston says.

There is a muted growl from somewhere beyond the stern of the ship, a low rumble that shakes dew

from the canvas sails. The nearby sheep mill around nervously in their pen. One panics and jumps, leaping on the backs of other sheep, which only creates further anxiety in the small flock.

“The battlesaurs are well secured for the voyage?” Baston asks with a quick glance up at the stern of the ship.

“Well enough,” Montenot says. “Although you would not think it from the faces of the sailors.”

Baston nods his understanding. “Which did you bring?”

“Mathilde, Valérie, and Odette,” Montenot says. “The rest remain with the army in Calais.”

Three mighty saurs in three barges towed by three ships. Spreading the risk, should one of the ships founder.

“Just three greatjaws, all females,” Baston comments.

Thibault nods. “Plus some demonsaurs. Napoléon prefers the males. He thinks the size makes them more potent weapons. I prefer the ferocity of the females.”

“He will learn,” Baston says.

They all laugh, a private joke.

“We cast off,” Thibault says, with a glance at the captain. “I will see you in a few weeks.”

“We shall drink champagne together in London,” Baston says.

“In the throne room at St. James’s Palace!” Montenot declares.

Baston does not look back as he disappears down the gangplank.

The high-pitched sound of the bosun’s whistle echoes off the buildings on the dock as the heavy ropes that tether the ship are heaved from their bollards and hauled back on board. Wind tugs at the sails in uneven gusts, easing the ship away from the dockside. The deck takes on a slight lean as the ship begins to move toward the darkened mouth of the river. Thibault turns to the rear, adjusting his footing, watching two heavy towropes on the dock begin to unwind. The ropes uncoil like striking snakes as the ship picks up speed. There is a shouted order from the quarterdeck and the ship slows. The thick ropes slide from the dock into the water, then re-emerge as they tighten further.

“Brace yourself, Montenot,” Thibault says, placing his own hands on the railing of the gunwales.

Montenot is slow to move and is almost knocked off his feet by the shudder as the ropes lift high out of the water and snap tight. For a moment it seems that the ship has stopped, then the barge behind begins to move. The ropes slacken and tighten again as the ship takes the ungainly but stable barge under tow.

The “barge” is little more than a huge wooden box, wallowing in the wake of the ship. There are narrow slits in the sides to allow air for what is chained inside.

The captain approaches. He is plump and short, with a little too much powder on his hair and rouge on his cheeks. He is strongly perfumed. He bows elegantly. "We are cast off," he says in a voice that is strangely rough and deep, and does not seem to suit his elegant countenance. "Might I now be permitted to know my orders?"

"The need for secrecy was impressed upon you, was it not, Captain?" Thibault asks.

"It was. But we are now clear of land and the time for such games has passed," Captain Lavigne says.

Thibault regards him for a moment.

"You will lead the fleet through the Raz de Sein," he says.

Lavigne nods. "Of course, to avoid the British blockade. I am no fool. And then?"

"That I shall inform you once we are clear of the passage," Thibault says.

There is a bellow from the barge behind them. The men instinctively glance to the stern.

"As you wish, General," Lavigne says. "I should warn you that there is foul weather moving in and we must be through the Raz de Sein before it arrives. It is a narrow and difficult passage in the best of conditions, let alone while towing a deadweight."

"Thank you for your concern, Captain," Thibault says.

Montenot sighs as the captain disappears. “A pompous little dandy,” he says quietly.

“We are guests aboard his ship,” Thibault says. “He may be as pompous and as dandified as he chooses, as long as he gets us to our destination expeditiously.”