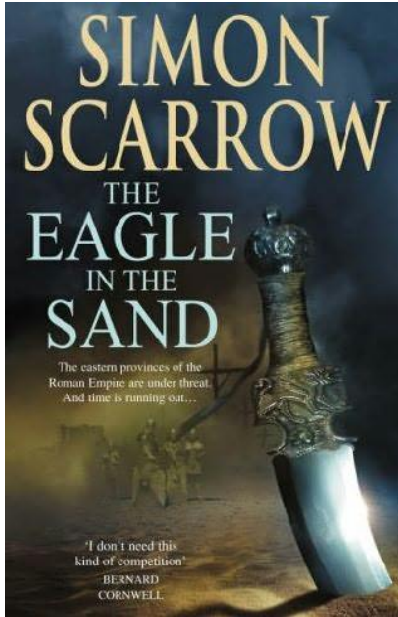


The Eagle in the Sand

By Simon Scarrow

Review by Jonathan Aird

The Eagle in the Sand is the seventh novel in Simon Scarrow's Eagle series, following the adventures of Centurions Macro and Cato as they serve across the mid-1st Century AD Roman Empire. Cato is now four years into his military service and is no longer the callow youthful Optio foisted onto the cynical and blunt Centurion Macro. Both now hold



the same rank, although Macro of course has seniority. They are, since the previous novel 'The Eagle's Prophecy' (which saw our heroes facing up to a galley-borne pirate army), effectively agents at large under the control of their spymaster Narcissus. I have to admit that for me this change of career direction is a bit of a stretch of disbelief as the earlier stories were more rooted in specific army campaigns, particularly in Britain, and they ring a bit truer to me. However, it is what it is and Cato and Macro now have something of a roving commission, which allows them to move from unit to unit and by this means see a larger part of the known world and get into a wider variety of scrapes.

In 'The Eagle in the Sand' Macro at last gets the posting of his dreams as to the Eastern Empire. Unfortunately, the part of the Eastern Empire that he gets to see is the turbulent desert province of Judaea and not the enticing flesh pots of Syria of which he had long dreamed. And, true to form, he and Cato are embroiled into the first of many skirmishes within a couple of pages in a situation which could easily be transferred into a scenario for Songs of Shadows and Dust (the ancient street fighting version of the popular Songs of Blades and Heroes rules).

The two heroes have been sent to Judaea, it transpires, to help prevent a rebellion which could be a major threat to Rome. Not because Judaea is so important, but because to repress such a revolt would require giving half a dozen legions into the command of a man who, if successful in his campaign, might be tempted to try for the Imperial Purple. There are of course lots of twists and turns along the way, but it would be a shame to give too many away as friends are made as are enemies. There are encounters with desert raiders, bandit armies and the followers of a dead prophet who was crucified. Hmm, that sounds somewhat familiar. Throughout the book, there are a number of thrilling battles as many of which are perfect for transfer to the wargames table as and in all cases very inspiring.

Suffice to say 'The Eagle in the Sand' is the kind of satisfying Roman Army romp that we have come to expect from Simon Scarrow. A gripping page turner which is well worth a look.

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