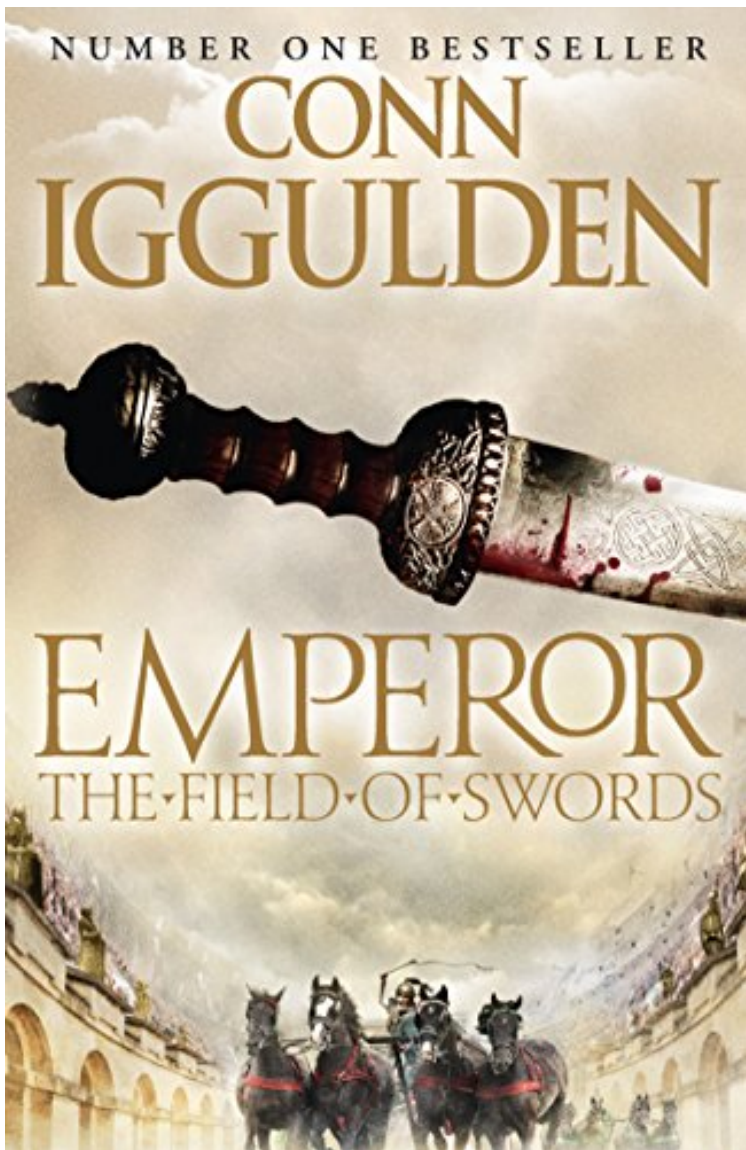


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Emperor: The Field of Swords



Par Conn Iggulden
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Description :

Prsentation de l'diteurThe ultimate Rome storyJulius Caesar has taken his legions north to battle the Gallic tribes. But as his successes mount, overwhelming ambition and new alliances begin to threaten his one true friendship.Marcus Brutus was instrumental in the conquest of Gaul and so in restoring Caesars reputation as a hero of Rome. But after decades standing side by side, will they choose to cross the Rubicon together? Are they both willing to take the fight to Rome herself?The third instalment in the bestselling Emperor series..co.ukEmperor - Field of Swords takes Colin Iggulden's sequence of novels about the rise of Julius Caesar to a point where Caesar is forced to bid for mastery of the Roman world. Iggulden is intelligent and precise about the internal dynamics of the triumvirate of Caesar, the elderly rich Crassus and the proud

Pompey. This alliance was never more than pragmatic and there was always going to be a settling of accounts--thus far so good, but Iggulden's idealizing of Caesar leads him at times into ignoring the sheer complexity of the affairs of the late Republic. This is a version of Rome which downplays the alliance of street and snob, and treats Caesar as if he were always an apostle of order--it is a historical novel which plays worrying games with historical fact. Iggulden is fascinating on Caesar as governor and general--in the areas, that is, where we have the words of the man himself, rather than the spin put on his actions by his enemies. There is a real sense here of the practicalities of ancient warfare, of hard footslogging in difficult terrain and planning supplies for the long haul of sieges and forced marches - Iggulden may oversimplify politics, but he is intelligent about battle. --Roz Kaveney

Chapter One Julius stood by the open window, gazing out over Spanish hills. The setting sun splashed gold along a distant crest so that it seemed to hang in the air unsupported, a vein of light in the distance. Behind him, the murmur of conversation rose and fell without interrupting his thoughts. He could smell honeysuckle on the breeze and the touch of it in his nostrils made his own rank sweat even more pungent as the delicate fragrance shifted in the air and was gone. It had been a long day. When he pressed a hand against his eyes, he could feel a surge of exhaustion rise in him like dark water. The voices in the campaign room mingled with the creak of chairs and the rustle of maps. How many hundreds of evenings had he spent on the upper floor of the fort with those men? The routine had become a comfort for them all at the end of a day, and even when there was nothing to discuss, they still gathered in the campaign rooms to drink and talk. It kept Rome alive in their minds and at times they could almost forget that they had not seen their home for more than four years. At first, Julius had embraced the problems of the regions and hardly thought of Rome for months at a time. The days had flown as he rose and slept with the sun and the Tenth made towns in the wilderness. On the coast, Valentia had been transformed with lime and wood and paint until it was almost a new city veneered over the old. They had laid roads to chain the land and bridges that opened the wild hills to settlers. Julius had worked with a frenetic, twitching energy in those first years, using exhaustion like a drug to force away his memories. Then he would sleep and Cornelia would come to him. Those were the nights when he would leave his sweat-soaked bed and ride out to the watch posts, appearing out of the darkness unannounced until the Tenth were as nervous and tired as he was himself. As if to mock his indifference, his engineers had found gold in two new seams, richer than any they had known before. The yellow metal had its own allure, and when Julius had seen the first haul spilled out of a cloth onto his desk, he had looked at it with hatred for what it represented. He had come to Spain with nothing, but the ground gave up its secrets and with the wealth came the tug of the old city and the life he had almost forgotten. He sighed at the thought. Spain was such a treasure-house it would be difficult to leave her, but part of him knew he could not lose himself there for much longer. Life was too precious to be wasted, and too short. The room was warm with the press of bodies. The maps of the new mines were stretched out on low tables, held by weights. Julius could hear Renius arguing with Brutus and the low cadence of Domitius chuckling. Only the giant Ciro was silent. Yet even those who spoke were marking time until Julius joined them. They were good men. Each one of them had stood with him against enemies and through grief, and there were times when Julius could imagine how it might have been to cross the world with them. They were men to walk a finer path than to be forgotten in Spain, and Julius could not bear the sympathy he saw in their eyes. He knew he deserved only contempt for having brought them to that place and buried himself in petty work. If Cornelia had lived, he would have taken her with him to Spain. It would have been a new start, far away from the intrigues of the city. He bowed his head as the evening breeze touched his face. It was an old pain and there were whole days when he did not think of her. Then the guilt would surface and the dreams would be terrible, as if in punishment for the lapse. "Julius? The guard is at the door for you," Brutus said, touching him on the shoulder. Julius nodded and turned back to the men in the room, his eyes seeking out the stranger amongst them. The legionary looked nervous as he glanced around at the map-laden tables and the jugs of wine, clearly awed by the people within. "Well?" Julius said. The soldier swallowed as he met the dark eyes of his general. There was no kindness in that hard, fleshless face, and the young legionary stammered slightly. "A young Spanish at the gate, General. He says he's the one we're looking for." The conversations in the room died away and the guard wished he were anywhere else but under the scrutiny of those men. "Have you checked him for weapons?" Julius said. "Yes, sir." "Then bring him to me. I want to speak to the man who has caused me so much trouble." Julius stood waiting at the top of the stairs as the Spaniard was brought up. His clothes were too small for his gangling limbs, and the face was caught in the change between man and boy, though there was no softness in the bony jaw. As their eyes met, the Spaniard hesitated, stumbling. "What's your name,

boy?" Julius said as they came level. "Adan," the Spaniard forced out. "You killed my officer?" Julius said, with a sneer. The young man froze, then nodded, his expression wavering between fear and determination. He could see the faces turned toward him in the room, and his courage seemed to desert him then at the thought of stepping into their midst. He might have held back if the guard hadn't shoved him across the threshold. "Wait below," Julius told the legionary, suddenly irritated. Adan refused to bow his head in the face of the hostile glares of the Romans, though he could not remember being more frightened in his life. As Julius closed the door behind him, he started silently, cursing his nervousness. Adan watched as the general sat down facing him, and a dull terror overwhelmed him. Should he keep his hands by his sides? All of a sudden, they seemed awkward and he considered folding them or clasping his fingers behind his back. The silence was painful as he waited and still they had their eyes on him. Adan swallowed with difficulty, determined not to show his fear. "You knew enough to tell me your name. Can you understand me?" Julius asked. Adan worked spit into his dry mouth. "I can," he said. At least his voice hadn't quavered like a boy's. He squared his shoulders slightly and glanced at the others, almost recoiling from the naked animosity from one of them, a bear of a man with one arm who seemed to be practically growling with anger. "You told the guards you were the one we were looking for, the one who killed the soldier," Julius said. Adan's gaze snapped back to him. "I did it. I killed him," he replied, the words coming in a rush. "You tortured him," Julius added. Adan swallowed again. He had imagined this scene as he walked over the dark fields to the fort, but he couldn't summon the defiance he had pictured. He felt as if he were confessing to his father, and it was all he could do not to shuffle his feet in shame, despite his intentions. "He was trying to rape my mother. I took him into the woods. She tried to stop me, but I would not listen to her," Adan said stiffly, trying to remember the words he had practiced. Someone in the room muttered an oath, but Adan could not tear his eyes away from the general. He felt an obscure relief that he had told them. Now they would kill him and his parents would be released. Thinking of his mother was a mistake. Tears sprang from nowhere to rim his eyes and he blinked them back furiously. She would want him to be strong in front of these men. Julius watched him. The young Spaniard was visibly trembling, and with reason. He had only to give the order and Adan would be taken out into the yard and executed in front of the assembled ranks. It would be the end of it, but a memory stayed his hand. "Why have you given yourself up, Adan?" "My family have been taken in for questioning, General. They are innocent. I am the one you want." "You think your death will save them?" Adan hesitated. How could he explain that only that thin hope had made him come? "They have done nothing wrong." Julius raised a hand to scratch his eyebrow, then rested his elbow on the arm of the chair as he thought. "When I was younger than you, Adan, I stood in front of a Roman named Cornelius Sulla. He had murdered my uncle and broken everything I valued in the world. He told me I would go free if I put aside my wife and shamed her with her father. He cherished such little acts of spite." For a moment, Julius looked into the unimaginable distance of the past, and Adan felt sweat break out on his forehead. Why was the man talking to him? He had already confessed; there was nothing else. Despite his fear, he felt interest kindle. The Romans seemed to bear only one face in Spain. To hear they had rivalry and enemies within their own ranks was a revelation. "I hated that man, Adan," Julius continued. "If I had been given a weapon, I would have used it on him even though it meant my own life. I wonder if you understand that sort of hatred." "You did not give up your wife?" Adan asked. Julius blinked at the sudden question, then smiled bitterly. "No. I refused and he let me live. The floor at his feet was spattered with the blood of people he had killed and tortured, yet he let me live. I have often wondered why." "He did not think you were a threat," Adan said, surprised by his own courage to speak so to the general. Julius shook his head in memory. "I doubt it. I told him I would devote my life to killing him if he set me free." For a moment, he almost said aloud how his friend had poisoned the Dictator, but that part of the story could never be told, not even to the men in that room. Julius shrugged. "He died by someone else's hand, in the end. It is one of the regrets of my life that I could not do it ...