

The First Man in Rome Study Guide

The First Man in Rome by Colleen McCullough

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Plot Summary

The First Man in Rome is the story of Marius's rise to power in the Roman republic and the story of his friendship with Sulla. The book takes place over eleven years and shows Marius's journey to become the First Man in Rome with epic scope and historical accuracy.

The novel begins with Marius, lacking political distinction and seemingly at the end of his career, forming an alliance with the Caesar family in marriage to their older daughter Julia. With his alliance to the Caesars, Marius gains the political nobility that he needs to attempt to become consul. While in Africa fighting under his rival Metellus, Marius meets with a prophetess who informs him that he will be consul seven times and become the First Man in Rome. After receiving this news he returns to Rome and is elected consul. He takes as his assistant a young man named Sulla.

Sulla is from one of the oldest and most noble families in Rome, though without any money. He is forced to live with his stepmother and mistress. After a meeting with Julilla, the younger daughter of the Caesar's, she gives him a grass crown, whereupon Sulla decides that he must try to rise to political distinction. After murdering his stepmother and mistress, he inherits their fortunes and becomes a senator and assistant to Marius.

Marius relieves his rival of command in Africa and pursues the war against Numidia. He wins the war after Sulla captures the Numidian king Jugurtha. He is elected consul again and is tasked to repel the German threat. Several Roman armies led by notable Patricians have already been destroyed by the German army. Needing troops, Marius recruits the poor, a decision that threatens and angers the Patricians. Marius eventually defeats the Germans after several years, all the while continuing to be elected consul.

After the defeat of the Germans, he returns to Rome where his political opposition has been working against him. The Patrician class, thinking that Marius is an upstart and dangerous man, has been maneuvering to oust him from power. Marius, believing that the only way to save Rome is to improve the lot of some of the poor, introduces several bills into the Senate which anger and frighten the Roman upper classes. Marius uses one of his clients, Saturninus, to introduce these bills.

Eventually the Patrician senators force Marius to renounce some of the elements in the bill that Saturninus has helped him pass. Saturninus, feeling betrayed by Marius, begins to start to use the power of the mob to oppose both Marius and the Patricians. Eventually he tries to use the masses to lead an uprising against the Senate and to have himself declared king. Marius is called in to put down the revolt and to restore order. The novel ends with Marius in full control of Rome and the undisputed First Man in Rome.



Chapter 1

Chapter 1 Summary

Chapter one introduces all of the main characters of the novel, starting with the Julian clan. Gaius Julius is the head of a family that has an illustrious name. The family claims to be descended from the goddess Venus through Aeneas and his son, Iulus. This gives them one of the oldest and most revered of Roman lineages.

The chapter begins on New Year's Day, 110 B.C. The new consuls for the year, Marcus Minucius Rufus and Spurious Postumius Albinus, are being sworn in at the temple of Jupiter. Many important Romans have gathered in the city to witness the ceremony. One of these men is Gaius Marius. A rich, ex-praetor from an undistinguished family, Marius desires to be consul, but lacks the lineage necessary to win the consular election. He is ambitious and dreams of being the "First Man in Rome," or the greatest among equals in Roman society. Also present is Lucius Cornelius Sulla. Unlike Marius, Sulla comes from one of the most distinguished Roman families, though he is poor and has been forced to live with his stepmother and his mistress, both of whom are his lovers. His life is filled with drinking and sex, and he has lost any real ambition to be a distinguished Roman citizen. Also present in the city, though not at the ceremony, is king of Numidia, Jugurtha. Some Roman senators, including Albinus, are wary of Jugurtha and are trying to put his rival, Massiva, on the throne of Numidia. Jugurtha is in Rome to try to buy whatever senators he can and to secure his position.

Marius, though from an agricultural family outside of Rome, joined the military at an early age and was recognized by the great Scipio Aemilianus, who took Marius under his wing. Marius is a natural leader and while in the service of Rome he led a successful war in Spain, which led to Marius collecting a fortune in booty from the campaign. In the army, Marius also became good friends with Publius Rutilius Rufus and Jugurtha. These three were all great soldiers but were also outsiders to one degree or another. They ridiculed and humiliated another of their number, not an outsider at all but rather a son of a very good family, Quintus Caecilius Metellus. Metellus has never forgiven the three for their insults, and while Metellus has become an important member of the Senate, the three still remain outsiders to one degree or another despite their talent.

After the ceremony, Gaius Julius Caesar invites Marius over for dinner. After the dinner, Caesar asks Marius if he would be willing to marry one of Caesar's daughters. Caesar has two daughters, Julia and Julilla. Julia is older, well educated and refined, whereas Julilla is younger, beautiful, and less intelligent. Marius accepts the offer and decides that he will marry Julia. By marrying a Caesar, Marius will be connected to an important and revered Roman family. This will help him get the consulship he so desires. In return, he must dowry Caesar's younger daughter and provide Caesar's sons Sextus and Gaius with enough money to become senators and consuls when they are of age. Marius, however, is already married, so he must first divorce his current wife with whom he shares a loveless marriage.



Meanwhile, the new consul, partially directed by Metellus, is about to begin a military campaign to Numidia to remove Jugurtha and put his rival on the throne. Knowing this and being trapped in Rome, Jugurtha decides to assassinate Massiva, who is also in Rome. He gives his half brother and Baron, Bomilcar, the task of finding an assassin. In the slums of the Roman Subura, Bomilcar finds Lucius Decumius, head of the college of the crossroads, to do the deed. During the triumph of Marcus Lucius Drusus, Decumius kills Massiva with a dagger in the crowded streets of Rome. Agelastus, a member of Jugurtha group, informs on the plot to the Senate and Bomilcar is arrested. While in jail, Decumius visits Bomilcar and Bomilcar asks Decumius to assassinate Agelastus, which he does. Lacking their key witness, the Senate releases Bomilcar who immediately flees home to Numidia with Jugurtha. Jugurtha then begins raising an army to deal with the impending Roman threat.

Meanwhile, Sulla is having troubles in his stepmother's household. His stepmother's only relative, her nephew Stichus, is set to inherit Sulla's stepmother's fortune. Stichus is a vile man and Sulla constantly quarrels with him, which puts strain on his relationship with his stepmother. Sulla, tired of the fighting, leaves Rome for a month. While he is gone, Stichus moves in to Clitumna, his stepmother's house. When he returns, Stichus slowly dies of a stomach ailment, which was caused by a poison that Sulla put in his drink. Growing tired of his stepmother and his mistress, Sulla begins to talk with Julilla, who falls in love with Sulla despite his attempts to insult her and to turn her away.

The chapter ends with Marius, now happily married to Julia and moving up the social ladder, advocating to his friend Rufus the expansion of citizenship to all Italians. He is also considering whether to accept the offer from Metellus to join the military expedition against Jugurtha. In the final pages of the chapter, both Rufus and Marius accept the invitation to join the expedition.

Chapter 1 Analysis

Chapter one is primarily spent introducing many of the main characters and developing some of the key themes of the novel. The key theme in chapter one is the importance of family history and money in Roman society. Marius and Sulla are perfect types to illustrate this theme. Sulla is from the noblest Roman family, but cannot join the Senate or engage in Roman politics because of his poverty. Marius comes from a family that lacks any nobility, yet he possesses great talent for politics and war and is also incredibly rich. While both money and a good family name are necessary for political power in Rome, neither is sufficient. Marius forges an alliance with the Caesar so that their good name will be associated with him; in so doing, he believes he can combine his fortune with the nobility of the Caesars.

Marius is extremely ambitious and he desires to not only be consul, but also to become the "First man in Rome;" that is, the acknowledged greatest man in Roman politics. Sulla, though he comes from one of the best families, has no money and has all but given up any desire for public greatness. His lovers, who provide him his home and his money, are effectively holding him hostage. Towards the end of the chapter, one can



see Sulla begin to realize that he is destined for greatness, though it is still not clear how he will get the money he needs to move into the Senate.

In the person of Marius one also sees a man who deserves political honors because of what he has accomplished, but is barred from them because of the accident of his birth. Sulla, who by right of his birth, should have political honors, but because of the accident of being born to a drunken father who sold what little he had for wine, he cannot achieve greatness. Both of these men are contrasted with Metellus who is born to a good family with money but is clearly inferior to both Sulla and Marius. That is, he doesn't deserve what he has and Marius and Sulla deserve more than they have. One can also see this theme exemplified in the person of Jugurtha, who is by birth a bastard but through cunning and skill has taken control of and built up his native kingdom.



Chapter 2

Chapter 2 Summary

Chapter 2 takes place in 109 B.C., one year after the beginning of chapter one. Metellus has been elected consul and has been given command of the war in Africa against Jugurtha. He asks Marius and Rufus to join his expedition to Africa, claiming that he has forgotten all about the harassment they subjected him to as a youth. Marius and Rufus agree to join him in making war against their friend and travel to Africa.

Before Marius leaves, however, Julia goes into labor with their first child. Gaius Julius Caesar, Julia's father, is present and is worried that Julia's noble blood will lead to complications with the birth. Indeed, there are complications with the birth and a great deal of bleeding but, in the end, the baby is delivered. Julia begins her recovery and Marius is able to see his son before he leaves for the African war.

Directly after Metellus leaves Rome with many of her legions, news reaches the city that the Germans are streaming over the Alps, threatening the city with invasion. Barbarians have invaded Rome in the past and it is the greatest fear of all Romans that someday it will happen again. With Marius gone, however, Rome is ill-equipped to defend herself. The renaming consul, Silanus, was intentionally left at home because he is believed to not have the talent necessary for war. Given the circumstances, though, he must arm new legions and lead them to battle the Germans.

The Caesar's other daughter, Julilla has been starving herself to force Sulla to acknowledge her. Sulla continues to ignore her and her condition becomes worse. She writes Sulla love letters, but Sulla does not return any affection. Eventually, worried about the health of her neighbor's daughter and not knowing anything about the relationship with Sulla, Clitumna comes to Julilla's aid. None of this works, however, and Julilla continues to get worse and worse.

After a long season of rain which forces everyone to be cooped up in their houses, Sulla asks Nicopolis to join him on a picnic in one of his favorite spots. She accompanies him and after spending the day basking in the sun, they come upon some mushrooms. Nicopolis, excited by the mushrooms and believing them to be safe, gathers them up and brings them home to eat. Everything seems fine until several days later when Nicopolis dies of kidney failure. On Sulla's trip with Metrobius in the previous year, he found a mushroom, the Destroyer, which looks like a non-poisonous mushroom. Realizing that this could help him get Nicopolis out of the way; he led her to eat the mushrooms.

After her death, Gaius Caesar, who had prepared Nicopolis's will, notifies Sulla that Nicopolis has left her significant savings to Sulla. He inherits enough money to qualify him to become a knight, the lower class of nobility. Clitumna becomes morbidly depressed after the death of Nicopolis and Sulla takes her to her villa outside of Rome.



Once they arrive, he tells her to sneak out into the woods in the middle of the night in eight days for a surprise. He returns to Rome to plan a party. He invites Metrobius and many of his friends as well as Hercules Atlas, a notorious strongman known for his violent behavior when drunk. At the party, Sulla confronts Hercules, who grabs Sulla and drags him back to Hercules's house in the Subura.

It is clear that this stunt was arranged and as Sulla is paying Hercules, he slips some poison in his drink. Sulla leaves and finds a mule that he rides all night to Clitumna's villa. Once there, he finds Clitumna in the woods waiting for her surprise. He kisses her, breaks her neck, and then throws her body off a cliff, making the death look like a suicide. He then returns to Rome and stumbles back to his house where everyone believes Hercules has kidnapped him. In a day, news comes telling him of Clitumna's death and Gaius Caesar informs Sulla that he has inherited all of her wealth, enough to qualify him for a seat in the Senate. Sulla then asks Caesar if he may marry Julilla. Caesar, upset with the deceit that Julilla has maintained, tells Sulla that he will think about it.

The chapter ends with Caesar sending a letter to Marius telling him of the news. The Germans have defeated Silanus's army, though after the defeat, the Germans retreated to their homeland. Caesar is also appointed censor. The chapter ends with Sulla leaving Rome with Metrobius for a vacation.

Chapter 2 Analysis

Chapter two consists primarily in Sulla's scheming and acquisition of wealth. This parallels chapter one in some ways. Chapter one showed Marius attempting to build up his noble prestige in marriage with Julia and alliance with the Caesar clan. Sulla has noble pedigree, but lacks wealth. Ever since his travels in chapter one, Sulla has decided that his current predicament of poverty is not befitting of his noble background and he will do whatever it takes to rectify that situation. It was Julilla's gift of the grass crown, one of the highest honors a Roman general can earn, which snapped Sulla out of his apathy.

His desire for wealth and, ultimately, power has led him to commit four murders in the last two chapters. First he murdered his rival Stichus so that no one else but Sulla could inherit Clitumna's fortune after her death. He next murders his mistress, Nicopolis. Although he inherits her fortune, Sulla was unaware at the time of her murder that she had any wealth at all. Her murder then was not for money, but rather to eliminate her because she presented an inconvenience to his future career. The money from Nicopolis is an unexpected bonus of her murder. Sulla then murders Hercules so that the drunken strong man can provide Sulla with an alibi that will prevent anyone of suspecting him in the murder of Clitumna. He next murders his stepmother by breaking her neck and making the murder look like a suicide.

All of these murders are committed without remorse, seemingly by a man who almost revels in the acts, not for their own sake, but from the effects of the crimes. It is clear



that Sulla, once he has decided on a certain aim, is ruthless in the acquisition of his aim. His path to power is contrasted with Marius, at least at this early point in the novel, which achieved his wealth and nobility honorably. No doubt, these two character traits will develop throughout the novel.



Chapter 3

Chapter 3 Summary

Chapter three begins with Marius still in Africa, reduced to serving as an aide to Metellus's twenty-year-old son. Marius and Rufus, frustrated with Metellus's mishandling of the war, advises Metellus that he should capture Jugurtha as quickly as possible to end the war. They discover, through an informant, that the best way to capture Jugurtha is to employ Bomilcar as an agent. Bomilcar is unhappy with Jugurtha because the king will not make Bomilcar the regent of the kingdom because of Bomilcar's lack of royal blood.

Meanwhile, the man who claims to be the rightful king of Numidia, Gauda, is unhappy with Metellus and asks to see Marius. Marius prostrates himself before the African king and forges an alliance with the king in the event of Marius taking over Africa. Marius then goes to see the King's prophet, Martha. She reads his palm and tells Marius that he will be the First Man in Rome and consul seven times. She also tells him that his nephew, Gaius Julius Caesar, will be the greatest of all Romans. Gratified by this prophecy, Marius goes to Gauda and asks him to begin a letter writing campaign to the Roman Senate, exposing the incompetence of Metellus. He then travels throughout Africa, meeting with notable Romans and asking them to do the same. In no time, thousands of letters begin to flood Rome.

Marius, desiring to return to Rome so that he can stand for consular election, asks Metellus to release him from his duty in Africa. Metellus, in order to prevent Marius's consular election, declines his request. Meanwhile, the letters sent from Marius's supporters is undermining Metellus's authority in Rome.

Jugurtha, only narrowly escaping several Roman capture attempts and ambushes, realizes that there must be a traitor in his midst. He seeks out any irregularity and eventually finds someone he believes to be an agent. After torturing this man, he discovers that Bomilcar was the traitor and has both men executed. Jugurtha is now without his most trusted advisor and becomes increasingly paranoid and lonely.

In Rome, Metellus's credibility has been undermined. To make matters worse, he is locked in a stalemate against Jugurtha and implicated in the treason of an Italian ally. Finally, twelve days before the consular election, he releases Marius to return to Rome. Metellus doesn't believe that Marius will make it back to Rome in time for the election, but Marius, aided by luck, arrives in Rome five days before the election. Despite his status as New Man, he is elected consul.

After the election, Marius is invited to dinner at the Caesar's, where he is introduced to Sulla. Caesar has agreed to allow Sulla to marry his daughter Julilla, which means that Marius will now become Sulla's brother-in-law. In private, Caesar confides to Marius that he is somewhat wary of Sulla but that he also believes he will become an important



Roman. Caesar asks Marius to make Sulla his client and ensure that he is elected quaestor. Marius, though also somewhat wary of Sulla, agrees.

Marius, in his first meeting with Sulla, informs the younger man that he is planning to use the power of the Tribune to bypass the Senate in deposing Metellus as general in Africa. This will allow Marius to take over the African war. This move is extremely unorthodox, though technically legal. He wants Sulla to join him on the expedition. The chapter ends with Sulla convinced of his destiny, though becoming increasingly restless and bored in the proper circles of the upper nobility.

Chapter 3 Analysis

In chapter three one begins to see more clearly the fates of Marius and Sulla. Marius receives a stunning prophecy from Martha that he will one day be the First Man in Rome and will be consul a shocking seven times. This news, however, does not seem to shake Marius and only confirms what he already believes—the he is destined for greatness. Still, hearing the prophecy seems to empower him. Somehow, the confirmation of his own beliefs by an external source has the effect of shoring up his convictions. After the prophecy, he thrusts himself into work to undermine his chief rival Metellus and to gain the consulship.

One also begins to see the inklings of distrust of Sulla from his father-in-law, Caesar. Although he tells Marius that he has no evidence that Sulla was involved in the deaths of Clitumna, Nicopolis, and Stichus, it all seems too convenient. Marius, though, recognizing the sparks of greatness in Sulla, takes the younger man under his wing. By the end of the chapter, though, one can see Sulla uncomfortable with the sober, upright life of the patrician. He still longs for his wild parties and the embrace of his young boyfriend, Metrobius. No doubt these urges display the kind of man Sulla is and will cause tension down the line.

As for now, Sulla will get the military and political training he never received as a youth, directly from his new mentor Marius. Underneath their mutual affection and respect, however, there are deep differences between the two men. Marius is sober and upright whereas, given to his desires, Sulla would engage in the most bestial pleasures. Marius is a New Man whereas Sulla, despite his original poverty, is of the noblest lineage. For now, the two men are allies, though.



Chapter 4

Chapter 4 Summary

Chapter four begins on the first day of Marius's consulship. After staying up all night to ensure that there are no bad omens for his inauguration day, Marius proceeds to the temple of Jupiter to be duly inducted into the consulship. The very next day, Marius calls the Senate together to hear his proposal. The Senate is packed to hear him. Most senators don't approve of a New Man being consul and they instinctively fear Marius, so they want to make sure they keep an eye on him and hear what he has to say.

Marius begins by recounting many recent defeats of the Roman army at the hands of German barbarians. In the last fifteen years, sixty thousand Roman soldiers have been killed in battle. Of course, this is a stunning loss of human life, but beyond that, it also means that Rome cannot fill the conscript forces she has relied on for so long. Metellus, recalled from Africa, brought his legions home; however, just as soon as they arrived, they were needed to defend Rome again against the Germans.

Marius, if he plans to successfully defeat Jugurtha in Africa, needs a way to raise new armies. He tells the assembled Senate that he has introduced a bill into the lower, plebeian and also law-making house, a bill to allow the property-less members of the proletariat (also called the head-count) to enlist in the army for regular pay. This suggestion scandalizes the senators present, who begin to argue vehemently with Marius. Marius, claiming that he doesn't need the blessing of the Senate since he has the law of the Plebeian house, defends himself briefly and then leaves triumphantly.

The lower house passes Marius's bill easily. Marius and Sulla then go off to find the thousands of men they will need for their upcoming African campaign against Jugurtha. Aiming to raise a total of six legions, Marius raises four very quickly. After raising the four legions he takes those legions with him to Africa, leaving Sulla in Rome to raise the other two and join him later. Marius also changes some of the structure of the legions and institutes the practice of golden eagle standard for each legion.

Julia has another son, though he dies shortly after birth. Julilla has a daughter for Sulla, though the daughter is sickly. The sisters have grown further apart over the last year and Julilla has adopted some of the opinions of her class regarding Marius; namely, that he is an upstart to be despised.

Sulla, arriving in Africa with his two legions, finds Marius in control of the Numidian war. Marius has successfully trained his troops and has conquered several Numidian cities. Jugurtha is on the run. Marius destroyed most of Jugurtha's army in a pitched battle and Jugurtha retreated to his castle in the middle of the desert. Marius eventually marches on this stronghold and, seeing that they cannot withstand the Roman onslaught, the castle surrenders after Jugurtha has fled. Despite their surrender, Marius has everyone in the castle put to death and sets fire to the stronghold.



On his arrival, Sulla brings news of Marius's co-consul Cassius's defeat at the hands of the Germans. After an initial victory, Cassius stupidly pursued his enemy deep into German territory where he was eventually attacked. Unable to defend themselves, the entire army was destroyed. Popillias Leanus, the only remaining officer, surrendered and was given amnesty with whatever troops were still alive to return to Rome. Upon returning home, the Senate decides to try Leanus for treason. The chapter ends with Marius and Sulla vowing to finish off Jugurtha quickly so they can return home and take the war to the Germans.

Chapter 4 Analysis

Much of this chapter is spent in Marius explaining to one group or another why it is important to allow the proletariat to join the military and with rebuttals of this view from other senators. The argument is important because Marius is proposing a complete change from the way Rome has traditionally recruited her soldiers. A key principle in republican Rome was the importance of a citizen army. Paid, professional armies were seen as a symptom of tyranny. Furthermore, if the lowest classes were armed, it would be possible for them to threaten the republic with unrest or revolution. A professional army would also tend to be loyal to their commander, leading to the possibility that the commander could use the army to further his own aims, rather than those of the republic as a whole.

Indeed, this is exactly what did happen later in the history of Rome, so the senators are right to be wary of Marius's proposal. Marius realizes that he is a man of competence and vision, two qualities sorely lacking in this period of Roman leadership. To defend Rome and to return her to her former splendor, Marius believes it is necessary to side-step the Senate. By appealing directly to the lower classes, he is able to make the policy changes that he desires. His popularity gives him power but it also makes enemies in the Senate. The Senate realizes that Marius does not need their assent to make policy and this frightens them. All Roman senators fear a return of the monarchy as much as they fear any diminution of their prestige and power. This tension, between the higher and lower classes in Rome, embodied in the persons of Marius and Sulla, will become a central theme in the rest of the novel.



Chapter 5

Chapter 5 Summary

Chapter five begins with the new Consul, Quintus Servilius Caepio, being tasked to subdue the Germans in Gaul. As he makes very clear in his first address, he will not be using the methods of Marius in raising his army. Rather than using head-count troops, he will raise his army the old-fashioned way—by conscripting small, land-owning farmers and merchants in Italy and Rome. Still, after all of the recent defeats of the Roman army, suitable men are hard to find. Caepio's men take to kidnapping young boys and old men to staff his legions. Soon enough, though, the legions are staffed and they head off to Gaul. After marching to Gaul, Caepio find that the Germans residing there have quarreled with the native peoples and have left. Caepio deals with the small number of barbarians left and busies himself trying to find the gold that is supposedly hidden in the area.

While leading his men on a fishing expedition at a local lake, Caepio sees what he thinks is a flash of gold in the water. Believing the famed gold to be hidden at the bottom of the lake, the consul has his engineers drain the lake. At the bottom they find huge amounts of gold and silver. The gold is much or more than the entire treasury of Rome. Caepio sends the gold in a wagon train to a city closer to Rome so that it can eventually be sent back to the capital. Along the way, a barbarian raiding party kills the guards and steals the gold. Caepio, devastated by the loss of all his gold, takes some comfort in knowing that the silver is still safe.

Meanwhile in Africa, Marius is still camped outside the town of Cirta. Marius is sticking close to Cirta but also sending expeditions out to the surrounding towns to rape and pillage them. In this way he hopes to incite Jugurtha's neighboring king to join Jugurtha's cause, forcing Jugurtha's army into the open and precipitating a battle where Marius can end the war once and for all. Marius moves his troops to camp under the high citadel of Mauretania, Jugurtha's western headquarters. The fortress is completely unapproachable because it is located on a high cliff. Marius knows that if he doesn't take the fortress in the next month, he will have to wait until next year.

A common cavalry trooper, Publius Vagiennius, finds the solution. Publius is an expert on and obsessed with snails. They are his favorite food and some day he hopes to go into the snail trade. While sitting around one day, he smells the distinct odor of snails coming from a nearby cave. After crawling and climbing into the cave, Publius finds the greatest cache of huge snails he has ever seen. Greedily looking around the cave for more snails, he accidentally finds an easy route through the cave to the fortress.

After several days of feasting on snails, Publius informs Marius of the secret route. Marius immediately builds a wooden staircase in the cave so his men can safely approach the fortress. Marius takes the citadel, with all the gold that it holds. King Bocchus, Jugurtha's neighbor, feeling the danger of the Roman advance, allies himself



with Jugurtha and they attack the Romans as they head back to Cirta. In a series of pitched battles, Marius completely destroys the Mauretanian and Numidian armies. Only the two kings, Bocchus and Marius, escape. Sulla fights valiantly and earns several honorary crowns for his service. After the battle, Marius is confident that Rome will now respect his head count army.

Chapter 5 Analysis

Chapter five is divided into two parts, both showing different results of military luck. The first part focuses on the campaign of Caepio in Gaul. There he has the luck of not needing to engage his enemy in battle and the luck to find the treasure at the bottom of the lake. His luck ultimately turns sour, however, when he tries to transport his treasure back to Rome. Barbarians overtake his wagon train and steal the gold he has only so recently stolen from the Gauls.

Marius, however, has similarly good luck, but with a better outcome. Just as Caepio's troops are looking for food, in this case fish, when they find the gold and silver, so too is a trooper in Marius's army looking for food when he finds the secret route to the citadel. Of course, Marius recognizes the importance of luck; he knows how important good fortune can be to the military man. Still, he prefers to make his own luck when possible as the skill that he has shown in the African campaign clearly illustrates.

The two episodes also highlight the differences in character between Caepio and Marius. Caepio is obsessed with money and with seeking treasure. Once his treasure is lost, there is nothing left for him to do but mourn the loss. Marius, on the other hand, seeks fame and distinction. If Marius encounters a setback, he tries to rectify the problem and look for solutions.

Another theme that comes through in this chapter is the mentorship of Sulla by Marius. Marius clearly sees Sulla as a great man who is benefiting from the training that he is receiving from Marius. They seem to be getting along well and complimenting one and other. Still, underneath the surface, their substantially different characters remain. The author tells that when things are going well and when Sulla is engaged, his cold-bloodedness is kept in check. The reader is left to wonder how long this feature of his personality will be checked.



Chapter 6

Chapter 6 Summary

Marius has decided to sit out the winter in Cirta, while Sulla holds Utica. Jugurtha is still on the loose, but King Bocchus of Mauretania has finally decided to formally ally with Rome. Sending his ambassador to Utica, believing Marius will be there, rather than Cirta, Bocchus's man finds Sulla, not Marius. Sulla sends word back to Marius, who in turn tasks Sulla with telling King Bocchus that he needs to deliver Jugurtha alive to Marius if he wants forgiveness from Rome. Sulla sails to a town held by Bocchus, but instead of finding the king, who has fled, he finds an advisor to the king Volux.

Volux informs Sulla that the king has fled because Jugurtha, aware of Sulla's visit, is in the neighborhood. Volux offers to take Sulla to the king's camp outside of town. Sulla asks Volux to ride at night with him through Jugurtha's camp to prove his trustworthiness. They both successfully ride through Jugurtha's camp at night and Sulla, trusting the Mauretanian, proceeds on to Bocchus's camp. The king, however, balks at the idea of giving up a kinsman to the Romans, though, after much cajoling, the king agrees. Through subtle maneuvering, Sulla captures Jugurtha and rides with him back to his men and ultimately back to Marius. The African war is over.

Meanwhile, in Rome, Gaius Julius Caesar the elder is dying of a malignant throat tumor. His son Gaius, set up by Rufus, is engaged to marry the most sought after woman in Rome, Aurelia. Not being rich enough to buy his own home, the Caesar's and Aurelia's family agree that it will be best for the young couple to buy an insula in the Subura where they can live cheaply and draw a rent from the other tenants. After the marriage of Aurelia and Gaius, they do move to the insula and begin their life together. Shortly after, Gaius the elder dies.

Still in Narbo, Caepio receives a letter from young Marcus Livius Drusus asking for a marriage alliance between their two families. Drusus will marry Caepio's daughter and Caepio's son, a friend of Drusus's, will marry Drusus's sister. Caepio agrees to the arrangement. Drusus's sister, Livia, is appalled at the notion, despising the younger Caepio, though her brother eventually persuades her that the marriage is in her family's interest and she relents.

News of the Germans spilling into upper Italy has once again reaches Rome. Consul Gnaeus Mallius is given a head count army and marches north to meet them. Caepio, still in Gaul, is asked by the Senate to join forces with Mallius's army when they meet on the Rhodanus River. Caepio, insulted and disgusted that he must give up command to a New Man, flatly refuses to give up command and sends a request to the Senate that he should be put in command of the united army. The Senate refuses to honor this request and sends six senators of a lower order north to make sure the earlier command is followed. Caepio, still insistent that he will not take orders from a New Man, makes his camp to the north of Mallius's, leaving the army divided.



After an attempt to persuade the Germans to leave, the divided army is totally annihilated by the German hordes in less than an hour. Caepio escapes before he is killed, joining up with his son who has fled the battle dishonorably. They both race back to Rome to make sure their side of the story is heard. Amid the slaughter, several Romans still live. Sextus Caesar, though injured, still lives. The sons of Metellus and General Mallius are also injured. Marcus Aurelius, another survivor, races back to Rome by boat to beat Caepio, committed to making sure the Romans hear the truth about the disaster. Aurelius does beat Caepio back to Rome and tells Rufus his story before Rufus addresses the Senate. They both tell the Senate of what has happened and Rufus proposes to the Senate that Marius and his army, the only ones who can defend Rome, are recalled to Rome and that his named are entered into the upcoming consular election in absentia.

Marius returns to Italy a consul. Caepio barely avoids treason charges, but his son-in-law Drusus is still trying to hold Caepio to some account. Marius, realizing that the head-count army needs more incentive to serve, decides to have the Senate allocate land in Africa for head-count veterans. He bribes a tribune, Phillipus, to introduce the first part of a bill to lead to this change. Several senators, fearing that Drusus is becoming too radical, believe that if they give him the title of Pontifex Maximus he will become more conservative. The chapter ends with Marius preparing for war against the Germans.

Chapter 6 Analysis

In Chapter six one can see some of the tensions that have been bubbling beneath the surface in the last several chapters begin to raise to the surface. The dispute between Mallius and Caepio over command is a microcosm of the dispute between the upper classes and New Men in the Senate and, eventually, the dispute between Marius and Sulla. In the persons of Caepio and Mallius, the dispute is between two men, both undeserving of honors and both lacking in merit. In the persons of Marius and Sulla one will see the dispute play out between two of the most excellent and deserving men in Rome. The question, as one has seen, is whether or not class and family come before Rome. The patricians of the noblest cities believe they are Rome. They see themselves as the caretakers and defenders of everything that Rome stands for.

Marius and his upstart New Men are a challenge to everything they hold dear. For now, the Senate believes it is better to give more power to Marius than to put Rome at the mercy of the Germans. There may come a time, however, when giving more power to Marius may seem just as bad as watching Rome be destroyed. Marius has already made, in the eyes of the patricians, radical legislative changes and they fear he will take away their power and nobility. Nobility and prestige are necessarily stingy. If more are allowed into the nobility, those that are already noble will see their prestige diminished. Therefore, Marius's seemingly democratic and populist impulses are very frightening to the nobler senators and families.



Beyond the tension developing between the classes, one can also see the superb skill of both Marius and Sulla on display in this chapter. In the capture of Jugurtha, however, one begins to see the pride of Sulla starting to come out more clearly. He consciously wishes to get the credit for the capture not Marius. In the future, this desire to outshine Marius may cause more serious problems.



Chapter 7

Chapter 7 Summary

Chapter seven begins with Sulla organizing Marius's Triumph in Rome. Marius wants a short triumphal march so as to concentrate on the banquet in the temple of Jupiter afterward. Sulla considers this wish a mark of Marius's lack of patrician origins, because a true patrician would want to focus on the triumph itself. Sulla, learning that the captured Jugurtha has been sowing discord aimed at him, decides that instead of the customary hanging, Jugurtha will be executed by being buried alive.

After his triumph, Marius addresses the Senate. He argues that because of the many recent wars, the Italian allies of Rome have had their male, farmer population decimated. It is time, he argues, to free all slaves of Italian descent so that they can again work the farms of Italy and, if needed, serve in Roman legions. The Senate debates the measure and are not at all happy about the prospect, but eventually the bill is passed. Marius then leaves with Sulla to march his troops to Gaul and to meet the Germans.

Marius decides to take the longer seaward route to Gaul rather than traverse the Alps. He does this because it provides a better strategic position and he heavily fortifies his position, assuming he may need to stay there for a while. Digging in, he has his men repair roads and bridges in the vicinity of their territory to aid the movement of Roman troops. Sulla, realizing that the army will be encamped for a long time fortifying their position and awaiting the Germans, starts to feel a strong desire for excitement and drama. He proposes to Marius that he be allowed to disguise himself and become a spy among the Germans. From two captured slaves, Sulla has learned the German languages and he believes his plan will give the army much needed information and him much needed excitement. He takes Quintus Sertorius along with him on this adventure.

Meanwhile in Rome, incompetence and intrigue surrounding the manumission of Italian slaves in Sicily has led to a slave uprising there. This has exacerbated the already serious grain shortage in Rome. Scaurus the censor, suspecting intentional grain price manipulation for the shortage, accuses a quaestor, Saturninus, of the crime. Saturninus, stripped of his Senate seat for the crime, flees to Marius in Gaul to see if Marius can help. Marius believes that Saturninus is innocent and says he will support him in the upcoming tribunal election.

Sulla returns from his espionage mission with the Germans to tell his story to Marius. Sulla returns with a captured German prince who tells Marius that the gold supposedly stolen from Caepio by Germans was, in fact, stolen by German troops hired by Caepio. The gold is now under Caepio's control, hidden in a distant location. This means that Caepio not only stole gold, some of which was rightfully Rome's, but he also intentionally allowed a cohort of his own troops to be murdered.



A year has gone by and Marius successfully convinces the Senate to allow him to run for consul again in absentia and, of course, he easily wins the election. Saturninus, his client and now tribune, begin to introduce some of Marius's legislation into the assembly. He takes off the table the bill previously introduced by Phillipus allotting the African land for retired head count soldiers. The bill passes and Marius has his land. Saturninus, fresh from this victory, starts spreading the rumor about Caepio stealing the gold and allowing his troops to die. Slowly, he also begins to introduce bills to make judicial reform, specifically to relocate the treason court into the lower house of the plebeians.

By the time Caepio is brought to trial, his verdict has already been decided in the court of public opinion and he is easily convicted. His punishment is exile eight hundred miles from Rome and the stripping of his Roman citizenship along with a fine of fifteen thousand talents, the money he is thought to have stolen. All of this angers the patricians, who fear for their privilege. Saturninus, however, is also at the same time finally exonerated from the charge of price fixing that originally stripped him of his Senate seat.

In his report to Marius, Sulla tells his general that the Germans are divided into three groups: the Teutones, the Cimbri, and the Tigurnini. Sulla has been living among them and has even taken a German wife with whom he has begotten twin boys. Sulla informs Marius that the German king Boirix plans to invade Italy early the next year, with each tribe taking a different route of attack. Knowing that the only way to stop the Germans is to be elected consul again, but learning from a friend in Rome that the Senate will not elect him in absentia again, he hurries back to Rome with Sulla to inform the Senate of the German threat.

In Rome, after hearing the news, the Senate elects Marius consul again. Sulla has grown cold to Julilla. She become little more than a drunk, neglecting her children and quarreling with her mother. Julilla, distraught at the lack of love from Sulla, commits suicide after seeing her beloved Sulla in the embrace of Metrobius. Sulla leaves his children in the care of his mother-in-law as he accompanies Marius back to Gaul.

Marius's co-consul, Catulus Caesar, leads another army to face the German threat coming directly through the middle pass of the Alps. Marius plans to deal with the Teutones first and then to join Catullus's army before Boirix can cross the Alps. Fearing that Catullus will endanger his army, Marius sends Sulla to watch over the other army. The Cimbri cross the Alps before Marius can meet up with the other army and Catullus is intent on meeting them in a narrow mountain pass. Sulla, realizing that this strategy means suicide, institutes a mutiny to force Catullus to retreat. The threat works just in time as the Cimbri pour out of the mountains just as the last legionnaires are retreating over the bridge. A last minute charge by a solid centurion saves the entire army.

The Teutones finally attack Marius, all 113,000 of them against Marius's 37,000 soldiers. In one day Marius massacres all the Germans and sells the rest into slavery. He sends news of the victory back to Rome. The people are overjoyed and vote Marius consul for



the next year in absentia. Marius takes his troops to meet up with the other army and to face the rest of the German horde.

Chapter 7 Analysis

Chapter seven is very long and covers three years of action, so there is much to discuss. In this chapter one sees Marius in firm control of both the army and the Senate. Despite the fact that his army has been holed up in Gaul for two years, he has been keeping his troops busy and their confidence and trust has only grown. His agents in Rome, especially Saturninus, have been keeping his legislative agenda relevant and moving forward.

Establishing land for his soldiers after he retires is a real coup because, as one senator remarks at the time of the bills passage, every one of those landed soldiers will become a client of Marius. His rising dominance in Rome is causing more and more consternation among the Boni, however, some going so far as to threaten assassination. The Boni need a champion, someone of similar skill and ability to Marius who can champion their cause. Sulla will eventually become that man, though he is still currently happily working with Marius.

Although Marius is in control of his affairs, Sulla has let his affairs slip out of control. Not only has he married a German woman and sired two children by her, he also lets his current wife learn this fact. Julilla has lost control. She is drinking constantly and neglecting her children. Sulla has lost any love and affection for her and even briefly contemplates murdering her. He has asked Julilla's mother, Marcia, to come and watch his children hoping that her presence will help Julilla.

Of course, Julilla only drifts further and further into wine-soaked despair. Sulla will not even sleep with her. This causes massive despair in Julilla, who knows that if Sulla is not interested in her sexually he has lost all affection for her. The last straw comes when she spies Metrobius and Sulla engaged in more than an embrace in his office. Sulla is still unable to restrain his homosexual desires and Julilla is unable to bear the thought of her husband loving Metrobius. She ends her marriage to Sulla by impaling herself with his sword. Sulla, happy that his marriage is over, sets his mother-in-law to the task of finding a new wife while he is gone.

Sulla the incontinent, rakish, yet completely able Roman is the perfect contrast with the sober and proper Marius. The irony here is that Marius lacks nobility only in name; in his character and action he expresses are the greatest properties of Roman noble. As one has seen over and over in this novel, the sons of the noble families have more often than not behaved disgracefully, yet these same nobles regard Marius with disgust because he lacks the nobility of their lineage.

Sulla, with as noble a bloodline as a Roman can have, lacks many of the Roman noble characteristics, save arrogance. He is still an able and ambitious man, despite his other failings. This chapter shows the brewing storm between the Patricians and New Men

that is now starting to come into the open. Eventually the wars between Sulla and Marius will exemplify this dispute. For now it is still in the background.



Chapter 8

Chapter 8 Summary

The next year begins as Sulla suspected, with the Germans dispersing to collect food from the surrounding countryside rather than continuing the invasion into Italy. Marius, realizing that once the Germans run out of food they will continue the invasion, consolidates the army to prepare to repulse the horde. Just as feared, the Cimbri do resume their invasion and the Romans are forced once again to repel them. Marius, through superior discipline and planning, destroys the entire Cimbri army in one afternoon. All eighty thousand Germans are killed, including the king Boirix, with minimal losses on the Roman side. Finally, the German threat is no more.

Gaius Julius Caesar returns to Rome to present news of the victory to the Senate. The Senate and the people rejoice at the news. Caesar and Aurelia still living in their Insula have had two children and are getting adjusted to their new home. Aurelia has taken over management of the tenants and has pacified and befriended the local assassin and head of the crossroads college, Lucius Decumius.

The Senate, having recovered from the initial elation at hearing the news of the victory, has once again begun to distrust Marius. With his popular support and respect, they fear he will become a dictator. To add to this general suspicion is the increasingly erratic behavior of Saturninus, a known client of Marius. The Patricians in the Senate, Metellus chief among them, wish to bring Marius down a peg and instead of giving him two Triumphs for his victory elect, instead, they give Marius and Catulus Caesar two separate Triumphs. Since this would put Caesar on the same level as Marius, the idea of two separate Triumphs is repellent. Instead, Marius suggests a joint Triumph; confident in the knowledge that the people will realize Marius is the real victor.

Marius begins to find that his political skills are less considerable than his military skills as the Senate begins to outmaneuver him in his attempts to pass his expanded land bill to give his soldiers land after their service. Marius, hoping to help his case, has Saturninus stand for election to Tribune. He loses in a close vote until his friend, Glaucia, has one of the other Tribunes murdered, allowing Saturninus to take his place. In the same election, Marius is elected consul for the sixth time.

Saturninus, introducing the expanded land bill added a clause to have all senators swear and oath to uphold the law, whatever it may be. This clause causes uproar in the Senate and opposition to Marius hardens. The law passes and the senators are required to take the oath. When challenged by the other senators to answer whether the law is valid, Marius is forced, on pain of dishonesty, to admit that the law is probably invalid. By admitting this, he enrages and alienates Saturninus.

Saturninus, betrayed and becoming increasingly ambitious, begins to give virulent speeches against Marius everyday in the forum. Marius, deciding to take a short break



from Roman discord, has a stroke in his sleep, causing his face to be slightly deformed, though he is otherwise unaffected. Saturninus decides that he can become the first man in Rome solely in virtue of his ability to stir up the crowd. He claims he will run for tribune again and that his friend Glaucia will run for consul. Marius advises them against this action, but they do not heed his advice. There is a grain shortage in Rome and Saturninus intends to stir up the crowd by claiming that it is the Senate that is preventing a solution to the grain crisis.

Glaucia on his way to stand for election to consul meets another senator on the way. The senator rips his toga off and insults Glaucia. Glaucia in his rage beats the senator to death. Saturninus, realizing that his chance at gaining power through election is over, decides to use the crowd to stage a coup. Saturninus whips up the crowd and tells them to return to their houses so they can arm themselves. The Senate, terrified, realizes that Saturninus intends to take Rome by force and have himself made king. The Senate, still hesitant to give Marius complete dictator powers, gives him complete power to act with legal immunity to solve the crisis.

Marius has an army stationed outside of Rome that he could march into the city, though it is expressly illegal for the Roman army to enter the city limits. Instead, Marius arms the senators around him and marches them in formation into the Forum. With orders to use the minimum amount of force, Marius quickly retakes the forum and imprisons Saturninus and his gang in the Senate hall. Citizens found complicit in the treason are thrown off the Tarpeian rock and the leaders of the coup attempt sit, awaiting their trial. Sulla and a gang of younger senators, with whom he has ingratiated himself, sneak into the Senate house and kill the leaders of the coup. Marius, tired of the violence, pardons the murdering senators. Marius addresses the crowd, informing them that the crisis is over and that he has secured a new supply of grain that will be sold at rock bottom prices. Marius leaves the rostrum content that he is the First Man in Rome.

Chapter 8 Analysis

In chapter eight one finds Marius facing a new and more dangerous challenge than the Numidians or the Germans: politics. Although he has been consul five times already, he has spent almost none of that time in Rome so he has not really had to deal with the Senate or political intrigue for that entire time. His relative political inexperience shows early and he realizes that running Rome is far more difficult for him than managing an army.

In the past, Marius has used the Plebeian assembly to bypass the Senate to pass bills that he thought important. He attempts this strategy again to pass his most important bill to give land to retiring head-count soldiers. He uses his client, Saturninus, to introduce the bill, though as Saturninus becomes more and more ambitious, Marius's strategy begins to backfire. Saturninus has hated the Patrician senators ever since they unjustly stripped him of his Senate seat for corruption. He seeks revenge by helping Marius implement policy that will hurt them.



This difference in motivation highlights the difference between Marius and Saturninus. Marius will often skirt the traditions of Rome, or go around the will of the Patricians; but the reason for his iconoclasm tends to be that he believes his techniques are the only way to save Rome. Saturninus, however, if filled with rage for the Patrician senators that wrongly accused him of corruption and now his burning desire is to destroy them, regardless of the consequences for Rome. Saturninus sees no problem with whipping the crowd into a frenzy and starting a revolution that will culminate in the destruction of the entire Roman system. Marius, despite his hatred of the Patricians and his desire to work with the common man, is horrified by the prospect of a populist revolution.

These different attitudes reflect their different personal constitutions and their views of Rome. To Marius, however, much he may dislike the workings of the Senate, Rome is the most important thing and he seeks glory, in part, for the greater glory of Rome. In that way, despite his differences with tradition, Marius embodies everything that is good and right about republican Rome. On the other hand, Saturninus seeks only his own power, regardless of the consequences. He embodies everything about democracy that the Patrician senators so rightly fear. Part of the point of the novel and especially this chapter is to highlight the differences between two kinds of a "man of the people" with Marius on one side and Saturninus on the other.



Characters

Gaius Marius

Marius is the son of a rural farmer in Arpinum, outside of Rome, who has become a notable Roman senator through hard work and military prowess. Because Marius's family is undistinguished, the older Roman families consider Marius to be a "new man", that is, an upstart. They slander him by saying he is uneducated and that he doesn't speak Greek, both of which claims are untrue. He is rich from the booty of his military campaigns and because of his mine and other commercial enterprises. At the beginning of the novel he is married to Grania, though he divorces her to marry Julia Caesar. He desires to be consul and "First Man in Rome." His alliance with the Caesar family will help him overcome the lack of noble blood. Their marriage is a fruitful one and they have a son together.

Although Marius has held the post of Tribune and other minor posts, he seeks to be consul. While in Africa he meets the prophetess Martha, who prophesies that he will be the First Man in Rome and be consul an unprecedented seven times. He is the friend of and also the brother-in-law of the Patrician Sulla, who serves as his assistant throughout the novel. He first defeats the army of Jugurtha in Numidia before defeating the invading Germans in Gaul and northern Italy. At the end of the novel he puts down a populist revolt after having served as consul for six times and being declared the First Man in Rome.

Lucius Cornelius Sulla

Sulla is the poor son of a drunkard, now dead, who lives with his stepmother Clitumna and his mistress Nicopolis, both his lovers. Though he is destitute and reliant on his stepmother for a house, Sulla comes from one of the four oldest families in Rome. Lacking the money to even qualify for the lowest senatorial seat, however, he spends his time drinking and fornicating. Besides his stepmother and mistress, he also has a continuing relationship with a young boy, Metrobius. In his youth, a tutor educated Sulla, though to raise money he prostituted himself in the streets of Greece and Rome.

Sulla, desiring money to fund a political career, murders four people, including his mistress and stepmother, for their money. The money he gains from these crimes allows him to enter the Senate. After he enters the Senate, at the request of Gaius Caesar, Marius makes Sulla his quaestor. Sulla marries Julilla and then joins Marius on his war in Africa. Sulla is responsible for capturing Jugurtha and instrumental in ending the Numidian war.

After this war he assists Marius in the war against the Germans. Sulla loses interest in his first wife Julilla, who ultimately kills herself after producing two children for Sulla. Sulla remarries, though his primary love interest remains with Metrobius. Sulla greatly



admires and is friends with Marius, though he is still by temperament a Patrician. At the end of the novel he has formed a circle of young Patricians around him that rely on him for leadership. He uses this group to kill Saturninus and the other leaders of the revolt.

Gaius Julius Caesar (the elder)

The head of the Caesar household, Gaius is the descendant of great and noble ancestors, though his family currently has no money. For a Roman paterfamilias, he runs his household in an extremely progressive way, giving his daughters and wife a say in family decisions. He dies of throat cancer after seeing his son Gaius marry Aurelia.

Julia Caesar

First born daughter of Gaius Julius Caesar and his wife Marcia. Well-educated, serious and good-looking, though not beautiful, she is married to Marius. She bears Marius a son and serves as his friend and advisor throughout their marriage.

Julilla Caesar

The younger daughter of Gaius Julius Caesar and Marcia, she is more girlish and less educated than her sister Julia, though she is also more beautiful. Falling for Sulla, she starves herself to get Sulla to notice her. Once her family finds out what she is doing, they cut her off from family affairs. She marries Sulla and sires two children for him before she becomes a drunk and eventually kills herself.

Clitumna

Stepmother and lover of Sulla. Originally from Urbia, she now lives in Rome and is said to have a considerable fortune saved up. Sulla murders her and the death is made to look like a suicide. After her death, Sulla inherits her considerable fortune.

Nicopolis

Greek mistress of Sulla. She was once married to a military man who died in combat. Lives with Sulla and Clitumna. She dies after eating poisonous mushrooms that Sulla led her to in the forest. She leaves her fortune to Sulla.

Metrobius

Young actor and homosexual lover of Sulla; an actor first in comedies and then, as he ages, in tragedies.



Jugurtha

King of Numidia and bastard son of Mastanada. After defeating his relatives and gaining the throne of Numidia, he encounters problems with the Romans and is forced to come to Rome to defend his claim. While in Rome, he has his chief rival, Massiva, assassinated before he returns to Numidia. He fights a war against Rome in Africa for control of the province before being defeated by his childhood friend Marius and being captured by Sulla. Sulla has him executed in a horrendous fashion after Marius's Triumph.

Quintus Caecilius Metellus

Son of a notable Roman family, as a youth he joined Scipio Aemilianus in the military. There he was at the mercy of Marius, Rufus, and Jugurtha, who ridiculed him. As gets older he becomes the leader of the Boni in the Senate and the chief foe of Marius.

Bomilcar

Half brother and Baron to Jugurtha. He arranges the assassination of Massiva. Later, feeling left out in Jugurtha's court, he gives information to the Romans. Jugurtha finds out about this and has him tortured and killed.

Lucius Decumius

Custodian of the crossroads college in the Subura. Bomilcar approaches him to assassinate Massiva. After assassinating Massiva, Decumius agrees to also assassinate Agletus. Later he becomes a tenant of Aurelia's Insula and a friend of Gaius and Aurelia.

Gaius Julius Caesar (The Younger)

Son of Gaius Julius Caesar and brother of Julia and Julilla. Distinguishes himself on campaign with Marius and marries Aurelia. Too poor for a house, they live in an Insula while Gaius tries to earn a fortune. He is the person who delivers the news of German defeat to the Senate. Ultimately, Gaius is the father of the Julius Caesar who goes on to be the ruler of the Roman world.

Aurelia

Wife of Gaius Julius Caesar the Younger, wooed by Drusus along with fifty other men. Highly educated and intelligent, she becomes a master landlord of her Insula and friend of Sulla.

Saturninus

Originally a senator who is accused, unjustly, of corruption. He is stripped of his Senate seat and becomes embittered. He becomes a client of Marius who helps Saturninus get elected as Tribune. As Tribune, he helps Marius enact his legislative agenda. Eventually he goes mad with power and tries to use the power of the mob to overturn the Roman government. Marius puts down the revolt and a gang led by Sulla kills Saturninus.



Objects/Places

Patrician

The Roman aristocracy made up of the original families of Rome. An official class in Roman society, no non-Patrician could ever become a Patrician. That is, one is a member of this class based solely on their lineage.

Plebian

All non-Patricians were considered Plebeians. Early in the Republic this class could not hold any office and had virtually no power. Over time, through political reforms, the Plebeians gained more and more power.

Senate

The ruling body of the Roman republic, once only composed of Patricians, some non-Patricians eventually gained membership. One needed considerable wealth to qualify as a member and inside the Senate there was a strong hierarchy based on class.

Toga

The formal clothing of Roman citizens. Non-citizens were not permitted to wear the toga.

Rome

Both a city and a republic. Legend has it that Aeneas, son of Venus, founded the city after his wanderings from Troy. The brothers Romulus and Remus who were raised by a she-wolf founded the city itself in its current form. Romulus killed Remus and founded the city of Rome. Originally ruled by kings, several Patricians murdered the last king, Tarquin the proud, and founded the Republic.

Numidia

Kingdom in Northern Africa made up of parts of what was once the Punic or Carthaginian Empire.



Imperium

The power granted to certain senatorial officials of a certain level. This power gave the holder, for one year, authority, which, within his domain of imperium, could not be overruled. The holder of imperium would be followed and preceded by several men carrying fasces, the symbol of Roman authority.

Fasces

A bundle of sticks tied together by a red ribbon that symbolized Roman authority. Outside of the Roman city limits, the Fasces would have an axe in the center of the sticks.

Auspices

Several varieties of telling the future. Each would have conditions for determining whether a future event would be good or bad.

Subura

The poor section of Rome, densely populated and full of laborers and less affluent merchants.

Consul

The highest political rank in the Roman Republic. Two consuls were elected every year and each had boundless imperium during their reign.

Diadem

Simple crown of lace worn by kings. A sign of the monarchy in Rome and somewhat feared.

Grass Crown

Known in Latin as the corona Graminea the highest battlefield honor a Roman could earn. Awarded only to a soldier who saved an entire legion during a battle. Only awarded several times in Roman history. Julilla gives Sulla a grass crown early in the novel and he takes this as an omen. Sulla would later, during the Social War, be one of the few Romans to earn a grass crown.



Legion

The primary unit in the Roman military. Composed of about five thousand soldiers and one thousand non-combatants.

Tribune

A political position held by a non-patrician representing the interests of the people as a whole. The Tribune held a particular power of the veto, which could be used to stop any political action.

Boni

A name taken on by the Patrician group in the Senate meaning "the good ones", in opposition to Marius and his masses.

Client

A man who becomes the agent of another man known as a patron. The client pledges to do certain things in return for the good will and favors of the patron. The client/patron relationship is very important relationship in Roman society.

Insula

A type of apartment building in the Roman Subura.

Social Sensitivity

In *The First Man in Rome*, McCullough tells her story against the backdrop of the competitiveness, quarreling, and infighting between the classes of Roman society. This society was stratified into very distinct, well-defined classes. All citizens were either patricians or plebeians. The patrician class represented the original Roman aristocracy, and its members traced their lineage to ancient families. Not all were wealthy, yet they were distinguished by a prestige of birth that no plebeian could ever attain. The plebeian class consisted of all Roman citizens who were not patricians and was further segmented into economic subclasses. While membership in the patrician class guaranteed honor, it did not guarantee a more honorable, intelligent breed of men. Some of the most venal men in the novel are patricians.

The political system of Rome was closely linked to and organized around its class system. In following the maze of political debates, intrigues, and alliances, McCullough makes it clear that political corruption is a universal, age-old phenomenon. Ironically, many politicians who claimed to be acting for the "good of Rome," were, in actuality, more interested in advancing their own personal gain. Government could be bought for a price.

Roman government was so mired in tradition and preoccupied with maintaining the status quo, that it inadvertently sowed the seeds of the decline of the Roman republic. The government refused to adapt to changing times and circumstances. This is one reason Marius was so unpopular with many conservatives in the Senate. He was forward-thinking; they were always looking to the past. The old guard felt threatened as their power base was slowly being eroded by the growing strength of the plebeians. They felt the best way to look after the interests of Rome was to retain the government of the many by the few. In *The First Man in Rome* McCullough deftly explores the interconnectedness of the Roman social and political systems, and the integral role they played in shaping Roman life.

Techniques

McCullough's sixth book, *The First Man in Rome*, is the author's first foray into historical fiction, and her extensive historical research is evident throughout the text. In some passages, this information is seamlessly and unobtrusively woven into the narrative. At other times, however, the historical facts are disembodied from the fictional flow. The vast amount of Roman history and culture which permeates the novel is regarded by some reviewers as a strength, by others as a liability.

As in her previous works, McCullough employs a straightforward narrative structure and prose style. Her gift for description and detail create finely drawn portraits of Roman life, politics, landscape, and military operations.

Whether maneuvering the reader through the labyrinthine streets of the Subura or sweeping overland with the Roman legions on the march, McCullough's descriptive and narrative power draw the reader into the scene.

McCullough's skillful use of descriptive language and metaphor create many beautiful and arresting images.

For example, after becoming betrothed to Julia Caesar, Gaius Marius visits the pearl vendor to buy an engagement gift: "She was his pearl beyond price, so to her must come pearls, the tears of a distant tropical moon that fell into the deepest ocean and, in sinking to its bottom, froze solid."

In *The First Man in Rome* McCullough employs a device heretofore unused in her works. She uses numerous lengthy letters, exchanged between Gaius Marius and his dear friend Publius Rutilius Rufus, as a way of giving additional background information, much of it dealing with extraneous events that have little direct bearing on the events of this novel. In fact, the letters often interrupt the plot and impede the action or they divert attention from character development. The author defends their use as necessary to provide a background for events to come in later books in the series. (*The First Man in Rome* is the first of five planned volumes.) Despite these drawbacks, some of the letters of Publius Rutilius Rufus are gossipy and witty reports of the double dealing, intrigue, and crafty political machinations that riddle the Roman senate. His philosophical observations of his fellow Romans offer insight into the attitudes, values, and morals of his day. In his letter to Marius following the defeat of the Germans, for instance, Publius wrote: There is something terribly reassuring about being in politics to enrich oneself. It's normal. It's human. It's forgivable. It's understandable. The ones to watch are the ones who are in politics to change the world. They do the real damage, the power-men and the altruists. It isn't healthy to think about other people ahead of oneself.

McCullough has provided a key to the cast of characters and also compiled an extensive glossary of terms and names which gives the reader additional explanation of the Roman era and its culture. She has devised a pronunciation guide to the many Latin

names and terms which abound in the text. She also drew the maps, charts, and sketches of portrait busts which illustrate the novel.



Themes

Accidents of Birth vs. Merit

Marius, who becomes the First Man in Rome and consul seven times, is born to an undistinguished family of small landowners in Italy. Sulla, who eventually becomes distinguished but starts off as a degenerate loafer, is descended from one of the oldest and most important families in Rome. In both these characters one sees accidents of birth. Marius is not born to a noble family, and because of this fact the Patrician senators will always consider him an outsider. Sulla is born poor, which forces him to prostitute himself at an early age and to live with his stepmother and mistress. He lives a life of vice, a life he never truly gives up, and murders several people to gain the money that he needs to seek political distinction. Sulla, unlike Marius, comes from a noble family. This makes him a Patrician, giving him the status in the Senate that Marius, despite his noble qualities can never attain.

Despite their accidents of birth, Marius and Sulla are both exceptional men. They have the merit to rise as high as Roman society will allow them. Marius is an excellent general and leader of men who attains honor and distinction in battle. He is also a good man who treats his wife well and lives a virtuous and sober life. Sulla, though his private affairs may ignoble, also possesses the powers of leadership and extreme bravery. Throughout the novel, though one can see two characters both of which are the paragons of Roman manhood, struggling with different challenges because of the accidents of their respective births. This theme is played out in several of the main characters in the novel and it is clear that it is not only an important theme in this novel, but it was also extremely important in Roman society.

Luck and Fate

Related in some ways to the previous theme, Luck and Fate played a central role in Roman society and in this novel. Luck and Fate, at least in Rome, occupy almost the same concept of Fortuna, an idea and a goddess. There is a similar idea of fortune in Greek thought as well, where the idea is embodied by the three fates, gods of a sort, that determine the paths of mortal men and gods. The Romans realized that many important things were outside of human control. From outcome in war to economic enterprise or political success, fortune or luck has as much or more to do with the outcome as human design.

There are two fundamental ways of dealing with this fact of human existence embodied in the notions of luck and fate. To believe in fate is to believe that the future is, to one degree or another, written in advance. This is the view of the future that Marius often has in the novel. He feels that he is fated to be the First Man in Rome and the fortune-teller Martha confirms this belief. Sometimes in the novel, Sulla will attribute some



outcome to luck and Marius will correct him by claiming that it is really the work of fate or good fortune.

Luck is related to fate, but admits that the future is not made. To have luck is to be beloved of the gods and Sulla firmly believes that he has luck on his side. The man who believes in fate believes that he is not really gambling when he tries something risky because the outcome is already determined. Often this is Marius's attitude. The man who believes in luck realizes that he is gambling but believes he will come out on top, also fully aware that luck could go against him at any time. Sulla portrays a belief in luck throughout the novel. The interplay of these two related but also different notions is an important theme in the novel.

Elite vs. Masses

Distinction between the classes was very important in Roman society and these distinctions make up an important theme in the novel. Roman society was a Republic ruled by an aristocratic elite known as Patricians. Most of the Senate was Patrician and since the beginning of the Republic they had ruled, for the most part, unopposed. Directly before the action in this novel takes place, several Tribunes of the Plebeians rested a significant amount of political power from the Patricians and invested them in a lower assembly made up entirely of Plebeians.

The Patricians are constantly afraid that a demagogue will arise and use the numerical power of the lower class to strip the Patricians of their privileges. This fear was not unjustified. Roman Patricians made their living primarily as absentee landowners and through other methods that often look exploitative. Eventually, populist leaders did gain control of the government and strip the old families of many of their privileges.

In the novel, Metellus and later Sulla represent the old families and the Patricians. Marius represents the New Man; that is, a Plebeian that has money and distinction but lacks nobility of family lineage. The Patricians fear and resent Marius because he is not a member of their class. Marius does use the power of the masses to oppose the Patricians, although he mostly uses this power wisely. Saturninus, however, uses the masses in exactly the way the Patricians fear Marius will, eventually leading to a revolutionary attempt to impose himself as king. Try as he might, Marius can never get over the fact that he is a Plebeian. This division in Roman society becomes a major division between characters and an important theme in the novel.

Significant Topics

In *The First Man in Rome*, as in her previous writings, McCullough displays an exceptional understanding of human emotion and motivation — the undercurrents of personality which compel men and women to love, hate, succeed, and kill. In *The First Man in Rome*, the politicians and military men are driven by greed, pride, and ambition. Relationships are often held together or torn apart by love.



Foremost among these human motivations is ambition, exemplified in the characters of Gaius Marius and Lucius Cornelius Sulla. Both men aspire to become consul of Rome and eventually to rise to the pinnacle of political greatness and become the "First Man in Rome." This title, which was held by only a handful of Romans, indicated that a man was the first among his equals in rank and opportunity. The pre-eminence and honor of such a title were not bestowed upon a man but had to be earned by him through his climb up the military and political ladders.

Both Marius and Sulla strongly believe they are destined for greatness and have been favored by the goddess Fortuna. Both, as Gaius Marius puts it, have "the luck." Events in each man's life serve to reinforce this belief. While serving in a military campaign in Africa, Gaius Marius meets Martha, a Syrian prophetess, who proclaims he will be consul seven times, save Rome from a great peril, and be regarded as the Third Founder of Rome. In Sulla's first encounter with the beautiful Julilla, she fashions a crown of grass and presents it to him, unaware of its significance. The Corona Graminea, or Grass Crown, was awarded to a man who saved a whole legion or, on rare occasions, a whole army. Sulla regards this episode as an omen of things to come and, from that point on, sees his luck and future inextricably linked to Julilla. These encounters fuel each man's ambition and spur them on to realize their destinies, whatever the cost. Later in the story, while spying among the Germans, Sulla fathers twins (a good omen) with his German wife Hermana, which further reinforces his belief that he has "the luck."

Both Marius and Sulla marry for political gain. Each marries a daughter of Gaius Julius Caesar Nepos for the social rank and dignitas that marrying into one of the oldest, most respected aristocratic bloodlines affords them. To be aligned with the Caesars guarantees political and social esteem. For Marius, it is also, happily, a union of love. For Sulla, who feels himself incapable of love, it is a union fraught with disappointment, pain, and unhappiness. Yet for both men, marriage is a means to furthering their political ambitions.

Ascending the political ladder requires not only the proper class and social standing but also money. Buying the necessary votes and supporters to gain office was an expensive business.

Marius is a very wealthy man, but Sulla, although born into one of the oldest, most venerable patrician families of Rome, is penniless thanks to an alcoholic father who drank up the family's fortune. To get the money necessary to fulfill his political birthright, Sulla murders his mistress, his stepmother, and the stepmother's cousin.

Both Sulla and Marius are singleminded and determined to achieve greatness. Yet to be great and to excel beyond other men does not mean to be without flaw. Sulla is shrewd enough to recognize this in himself and Marius. When Catulus Caesar is on the verge of sacrificing his Roman army to the Germans because of his pride, military ignorance, and poor leadership, Sulla, ordered by Marius to save Caesar's army at all costs, leads the soldiers in a mutiny. In the confrontation that follows, Sulla says to Catulus Caesar, "One day, you know, I'll be the First Man in Rome. The tallest tree in the world, just like



Gaius Marius. And the thing about trees so tall is that no one can chop them down. When they fall, they fall because they rot from within."

Pride and greed are also powerful motivations and McCullough examines these traits through some of the novel's secondary characters. The Roman Senate and political system are rife with politicians willing to sell themselves, their favors, and their votes to the highest bidder. These same politicians are willing to bestow largesse on their clients in exchange for political support and loyalty. The verdicts of juries are often paid for in advance. Some men, like Quintus Servilius Caepio, are willing to sacrifice the lives of innocent men to enhance their own personal wealth. While serving as consul, Caepio commands Roman legions against the Germans near Tolosa. Three years earlier, while serving as the governor of Further Spain, Caepio had heard the tale of the lost gold of Tolosa. After the city surrenders, Caepio becomes obsessed with finding the gold. When he succeeds, he transports the gold to Narbo for shipment to Rome, presumably for the Roman treasury. However, the wagon train is ambushed en route to Narbo, six hundred Roman soldiers are killed, and the gold disappears.

Everyone assumes the bandits made off with the gold, but the ambush was actually arranged by Caepio himself so the gold would be his.

In class conscious Rome, many patricians harbor a snobbish sense of superiority over those who are in the plebeian class or are considered as "New Men." Sometimes this stubborn pride produces catastrophic results. As a consul, Gnaeus Mallius Maximus, a New Man, is in command of Roman forces along the Rhodanus near Aurasio. Quintus Servilius Caepio, a patrician, is ordered by the Senate to join his forces with those of Gnaeus Mallius Maximus and subordinate to the junior counsel. Caepio repeatedly refuses to obey because he, a patrician, will not stoop to take orders from a New Man.

The two commanders squabble and fail to join legions to combat the Germans.

As a result, the Germans brutally defeat the Romans at a cost of eighty thousand Roman soldiers and twentyfour thousand noncombatants — all because Caepio's pride and patrician status made him unwilling to serve under a New Man. As a Marsi soldier who survived the battle so aptly summarizes the situation, so many lives were lost "because some overbred Roman idiot bore a grudge against some underbred Roman idiot."

Julilla, still a young girl, develops a crush on Sulla when she first meets him. Julilla becomes so obsessed with Sulla that she plots to manipulate him and her family through self-imposed starvation. Julilla thinks if she can make Sulla believe she is ill, he will feel sorry for her and give in to her appeals. Although Sulla does eventually marry Julilla, he does so for political advancement. Julilla marries Sulla, though, because she desperately loves him. While awaiting his return from the military campaign in Africa, Julilla surmises about her love for her husband: "any evidence whatsoever of discipline or self-control was proof positive of an inferior brand of love; love of the highest order should overwhelm, invade, shake down the spiritual walls, drive out all vestige of



rational thought, roar tempestuously, trample down everything in its path as if some vast elephant."

Sulla, on the other hand, feels that he is incapable of love. Yet, he does have tender feelings for his German wife, Hermana, who is the polar opposite of his Roman wife Julilla. He does love his children, "and loved them deeply too, a very different kind of feeling from any he had ever experienced for either man or woman. Selfless and pure, untainted and rounded."

Sulla also feels a deep affection for Metrobius, the handsome young actor, with whom he has occasional homosexual trysts. Sulla's unfortunate childhood circumstances have yielded a self-centered, aloof, calculating man.

Burdened by a father whose love for the bottle exceeded his love for his son, Sulla learns emotional detachment and parsimony early on.

Julilla and Sulla are temperamentally ill-suited, yet their lives are inextricably entwined by their need for each other. Sulla needs Julilla for the social prestige she offers, and she needs him because she loves him. Because of the grass crown, Sulla believes his destiny, his "luck," is eternally bound to Julilla.

When Julilla learns of Sulla's German wife, she questions him about his feelings for Hermana and why he liked her so. Sulla replies, "she never expected me to be what I'm not . . . She belonged to herself, and she didn't burden me with herself. You're a lead weight chained about my neck. Hermana was a pair of wings strapped to my feet."



Style

Point of View

The story is told from the point of view of a omniscient, third person, though not impartial, narrator. The narrator knows a wealth of facts about the character's backgrounds and seems to know facts about the future, though the narrator does not foreshadow events very often. The narrator clearly has opinions and opines about the relative worth of certain characters or the importance of certain situations in the novel. This is sometimes disconcerting as it makes the hand of the author too visible and takes the reader out of the novel from time to time. The narrator is reliable, though part of the reliability of the narrator stems from the fact that it is clear that the voice of the narrator is also the direct voice of the author.

The plot is also moved forward by two other devices: epistolary narration and dialogue. There are many instances in the novel, at least one or two per chapter, when the plot is moved forward by one character relating events to another character through a letter. This allows the author to literally tell the reader, through the voice of one of the characters, what is happening without having to show all of the action directly. Given the epic scope of this novel, this device is very useful. The author also uses dialogue to tell the reader what has happened. Characters casually recount to each other important events occurring around them, keeping the reader up to date on important happenings. This device is commonly used and much of the "action" in the novel is told through conversation of two or more characters.

Setting

The novel has a wide variety of settings. Much of the action takes place in the city of Rome, but some action also takes place in Numidia and in Gaul. The author uses great detail to describe the settings, focusing on historical accuracy. This is useful because it quickly situates the reader in the alien setting. The author also includes a significant number of maps to help describe the locations. Sometimes the detail is overwhelming, but the detail also helps bring the setting to life. Despite the exotic setting of the novel, most of the actual action takes place in fairly familiar settings. The novel is very much like a play in that the action typically consists in characters talking to one another. The settings for these conversations are often Roman homes or the Senate. Some of the action is recounted in letters, which characters will read aloud to one another in their homes or sometimes in tents.

Whatever the drawbacks of McCullough's dramatic techniques, the amount of historical detail she uses to describe the setting of the action is impressive. The reader gets a sense that they are really reading an accurate dramatization of Roman persons. That is, the characters and the setting feel historically accurate rather than anachronistic. This is important because if the reader felt that they were reading about contemporary



characters in Roman costumes, much of the power and interest of the novel would be lost. The historical detail invested in the setting is one of the key elements of the novel, not merely an addition to the novel.

Language and Meaning

The language of this novel is breezy and colloquial. Much of the novel is spent with the author describing to the reader what a given character is thinking or what their motivation and background is in a certain circumstances. To a great extent, the author "tells" rather than "shows"; that is, she tells us that character X is thinking a certain thing or desires a certain thing, rather than showing it through action in the novel. This is somewhat distracting and distances the readers from the characters, who do not seem as vibrant and realistic as a result of this technique.

The author is fond of exclamatory statements and the exclamation point is used quite often in the novel. It is common for the author to use letters from one character to another to recount large amounts of action quickly. The author also takes great care to make sure that the historical details are accurate. Much of the novel is, of course, fiction, but much of the facts are taken from historical sources. There is painstaking detail in all of the historical descriptions and the nothing feels left out. Because of the historical detail, many Latin phrases and colloquialism are included in the text. A notable example of this is a vulgar, Latin insult that Marius and friends use to describe his chief enemy, Metellus. Many other Latin phrases and terms are used throughout the novel giving a sense of historical accuracy. Some of these are defined either in the glossary or in the text itself.

Structure

The novel takes place over eleven years. Each chapter represents one year except for chapter seven, which takes place over three years, and chapter eight, which takes place over two years. The chapters are long, often over two hundred pages. Each chapter will typically consist of a main plot line and two or more sub plots that will often intersect with the main plot but sometimes will not. Some of the sub-plots, such as those involving Aurelia and those involving Julia, are not strictly relevant to the main plot but are used to fill in the family history of the main characters or to make the setting seem more realistic. Sometimes though, a seemingly unimportant sub-plot, such as the story of Caepio and his gold, will become very important later on in the novel. Sometimes the sub-plots are important for historical accuracy and for continuity with later novels in this series.

The novel also involves considerable use of letters to convey information. The author will use this technique to insert subplots or to keep the reader up to date on action that is occurring simultaneous with the main plot but in a different part of the world. Given the number of characters and the scope of the story, eleven years of action is a very long time and the length of the story, already around one thousand pages, could easily

get out of hand. The author uses letters and conversations about current events between characters to keep the plot moving forward.



Quotes

"The First Man in Rome was not the best man; he was the first among other men who were his equals in rank and opportunity. And to be the First Man in Rome was something far better than kingship, autocracy, despotism, call it what you would. The First Man in Rome held on to that title by sheer pre-eminence, perpetually aware that his world was stuffed with others eager to supplant him - other who could supplant him, legally and bloodlessly, by producing a superior brand of pre-eminence. To be the First Man in Rome was more than being consul; consuls came and went at the rate of two a year. Where as the centuries of the Roman republic passed, only the smallest handful of men would come to be hailed as the First Man in Rome." p. 11

"For if his [Jugurtha] exposure to Romans during the siege of Numidia had taught him anything about them, it was that almost all Romans who aspire to high public office were chronically short on money. In other words, they could be bought." p. 33

"'Birth is an accident!' said Marius with equal passion. 'Why should it have the power to dictate the course of a life?'" p. 72

"I am the paterfamilias, the absolute head of this household. My very word is law. My actions are not actionable. Whatever I chose to do and say within the bounds of this household, I can do and I can say. No law of the Senate and People of Rome stand between my absolute authority and me over my household, my family. For Rome has structured her laws to ensure that the Roman family is above the law of all save the paterfamilias." p. 219

"New Men were a risk. New Men didn't know the noble life. New men made mistakes noblemen did not." p. 283

"Sulla was incapable of defining his feelings for any other human being as love. Love to Sulla was something other, lesser people felt." p. 293

"'Luck is a sign Lucius Cornelius. To have luck is to be beloved of the gods. To have luck is to be chosen...I [Marius] am chosen. And I chose you because I think you too are chosen. We are important to Rome, Lucius Cornelius. We will both make our mark on Rome.'" p. 300

"They had become good friends, Sulla and Marius, for though there were differences between them, there were also basic similarities: neither man was an orthodox thinker, both men were unusual, adversity had honed each of them finely, and each was capable of great detachment and great passion." p. 375

"What does the Senate of Rome honestly mean to a man who had to wipe the pig-shit off his face before he came to Rome to try his political luck? What does the Senate of Rome mean to a man who is at best half Latin from the Samnite borderlands—who rode into his first consulship on the skirts of a patrician woman he bought? And what does



the Senate of Rome mean to a cross-eyed hybrid from the Celt-infested hills of northern Picenum?" p. 631

"I'm too close to earth, thought Marius. It isn't that I mind sending men to extinction, even in cold blood. To do so is a part of life as we know it, and vexes no god. But he [Sulla] is one of the old patrician Romans, all right. Too far above the earth. Truly a demigod." p. 609

"I [Marius] am the First Man in Rome. I am the Third Founder of Rome. And after I die, they are going to have to admit that I, Gaius Marius, the Italian hayseed with no Greek, was the greatest man in the history of our Republic, the Senate and People of Rome." p. 852

"...to be the First Man in Rome at the whim of the gullible is no victory. I have enjoyed the status of First Man in Rome the old way, the hard way, battling the prejudices and monstrosities of the cursus honorum." p. 926

Key Questions

Perhaps the most obvious way of approaching *The First Man in Rome* is to compare its complex historical situation with that of the present day. How are the politics of Republican Rome like those of the modern world? How are they different? What events in the novel have parallels in modern world society?

1. Does McCullough paint her characters in a way that is notably different from depictions of twentieth-century persons? That is, do Gaius Marius and Sulla seem as if they could be modern persons? Or could they only exist 2000 years ago?
2. Compare the dichotomy of points of view between Sulla and Marius: on the one hand, an uncomplicated New Man; on the other, a dissipated nobleman. What are the things in their backgrounds that make each man what he is?
3. Is the attitude of Julilla toward Sulla one that can be seen in modern relationships?
4. What is the difference between the conservative traditional attitudes of a person like Metellus Numidicus on the one hand and a person like Marcus Aemilius Scaurus on the other?
5. Given the polytheistic society of Republican Rome, what do you think of the different gods and goddesses of Roman religion, the borrowing of deities from other cultures, and the role that religion played in the government of the state?



Topics for Discussion

Describe the class distinctions in Roman society. In what way is it possible to overcome one's class in Roman society? Give examples from the novel.

What does it mean to be the First Man in Rome? What does this title say about Roman society? In what way does Marius embody the qualities of the First Man in Rome?

Describe the relationship between Marius and Sulla. In what way are the two characters similar? In what way are they different?

Why do the Boni oppose Marius? In what ways does his justify this opposition?

Explain the differences between Julilla and Julia. What do both of these characters say about Roman society and the role of women?

Describe the similarities and differences between Roman society and our own .

Roman society is heavily religious; describe the importance of religion in the action of the novel.

Literary Precedents

The First Man in Rome is a historical novel, a genre that has been tackled by various writers with varying degrees of success. Robert James of the Orange County Register wrote that "at a time when the historical novel is languishing for the lack of a truly worthwhile writer, McCullough steps in. Michener has lost his mastery of the form long ago, and Jakes never had it in the first place. But McCullough has crafted an education in the Roman Republic, circa 100 B.C., and it reads as good, if not better, than any historical novel written since Michener's heyday in the '50s and '60s." Set in closer proximity of timeframe and civilization, *The First Man in Rome* invites comparison to Taylor Caldwell's *A Pillar of Iron* (1965), whose central character is Cicero, stated Rita Mae Brown in her Washington Post review. She regards Caldwell's writing as "effortless" and preferable to McCullough's historical writing.



Related Titles

In *The Thorn Birds* (1977) McCullough examined the love relationship between Meggie and Father Ralph de Bricassart, the ambitious priest. Theirs was an unequal relationship. While Meggie loved Ralph totally and unconditionally, Ralph loved Meggie, but because of his ambitions in the church, he would never fully commit himself to her. In *The First Man in Rome*, McCullough explores the love relationship between Julilla and Sulla which, like Meggie and Ralph's, is a source of much pain and unhappiness.

McCullough also explored ambition as a motivating force in *The Thorn Birds*. Father Ralph de Bricassart was an ambitious priest who aspired to rise to the top in the church's hierarchy.

While his methods were not as ruthless as Sulla's, his success was realized at the expense of his and especially Meggie's personal happiness.

The First Man in Rome is the first in a projected series of five novels. Published so far are *The Grass Crown* (1991), *Fortune's Favorites* (1994), and *Caesar's Women* (1996). All novels in the series take place in either Rome or the ancient Mediterranean/Near Eastern world and treat the same extended set of characters drawn largely from the late hierarchy of late Republican Rome.

The novels so far span 50 of the last 75 years of the Roman Republic.



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