

# **The Ghosts of Cannae: Hannibal and the Darkest Hour of the Roman Republic Study Guide**

**The Ghosts of Cannae: Hannibal and the Darkest Hour of the Roman Republic by Robert L. O'Connell**

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# Plot Summary

Robert L. O'Connell describes how Hannibal wiped out the majority of the Roman army in a single battle, the battle at Cannae, in "The Ghosts of Cannae: Hannibal and the Darkest Hour of the Roman Republic" in approximately 200 years B.C. Historians of today research ancient historians and try to figure out where the infamous battle took place, but aside from knowing the general area, they cannot pinpoint a spot since the topography has changed so much over time.

Polybius and Livy were ancient historians who wrote about the battle at Cannae. Polybius knew about battle and he studied historical writings, including some by Fabius Pictor, the Roman senator who was sent to the Delphic oracle to analyze what went wrong after the defeat at Cannae. Livy wasn't a soldier and he wrote history more as a storyteller. The two historians offer many details about Cannae, although there are some inconsistencies in each of their writings.

There were many other historians who wrote about Rome, Carthage, and Cannae. Some of their writing was most likely based on reality while some was not. The author pieced them together with other accounts to glean what might truly have happened.

Rome was a city with soldiers bred to fight. Carthage was a city of merchants. It seemed like Carthage was a true underdog, but it had Hannibal, a brilliant soldier and tactician on its side. When he went into battle, he was prepared. He knew the layout of the land and how to put his adversaries at a disadvantage.

Hannibal only lived in Carthage until he was nine years old. He then moved to Spain with his father, but swore an oath before he left that he would always fight against the Romans. He led an army of soldiers, along with elephants over the Alps into Italy. In addition to battling the elements, they also had to contend with humans. The Gauls, who lived high up in the mountains, opposed them, trying to set up a trap for them, but Hannibal thwarted them by burning fires at night after they had gone home and sneaking over the narrow passes in the dark of night.

Hannibal's army had to forage for food. While some wanted to attack his army, Fabius wanted to corner him until his food ran out so he tried to evade Hannibal and resulting battles.

As Hannibal marched on, some men left. He encouraged them to leave realizing that these would not be strong soldiers and would not be tough enough to handle the rougher parts of the journey. When Hannibal prepared his men for the battle at Cannae, he had his tactical maneuvers carefully planned. He trapped the Romans in a brutal battle, killing the majority of the troops.

Rome struggled to rebuild its army. Meanwhile, it turned its back on the survivors of Cannae who then became the ghosts of Cannae. Scipio, a great leader, recruited and added to his army, rising up against Carthage. Fourteen years after the battle at



Cannae, Rome had its revenge as its armies destroyed the Carthaginian army. Hannibal escaped and lived another 20 years but in exile, akin to a ghost of a Roman soldier from Cannae.



# Chapters 1-3

## Chapters 1-3 Summary and Analysis

Robert L. O'Connell describes how Hannibal wiped out the majority of the Roman army in a single battle, the battle at Cannae, in "The Ghosts of Cannae: Hannibal and the Darkest Hour of the Roman Republic" in approximately 200 years B.C.

### Chapter 1 - Traces of War

Polybius of Megalopolis was crossing the Italian Alps, viewing a scene Hannibal had looked upon 73 years prior. His goal was to write books for his fellow Greeks showing how the obscure city-state had come to dominate. Rome fought hard, constantly rebounding after being knocked down. Polybius recalled the horrible battle at Cannae on August 2, 216 B.C. In a knife-fight battle 120,000 men fought each other, resulting in the death of 48,000 Romans. However, one important survivor remained, Publius Cornelius Scipio. Also known as Africanus, Scipio would one day rise up to help Rome defeat Hannibal.

The author addresses the question of why this battle is relevant today. He points out that our knowledge today is very limited and it is based on opinion. Historians of today's world cling to their history by clutching at remnants such as the inscription they believed commemorated the capture of Tarentum. Only Hannibal's name was on it. Historians went out to find the spot where the great military battles took place, but no one really knows the spots, even for Cannae and the other battle in the Second Punic War. The land itself is a detriment to these findings since rivers change and construction efforts change the landscape. Historians can only count on literature, and with that, comes much speculation. Parts of the story are missing and they might be missing forever.

On a positive note, ancient historians believed strongly in their wars so their battles were the centerpieces of their writings. Many in their time were illiterate so the few that wrote made their works entertaining and dramatic so it could be shared with the others. Polybius was one of these writers so his accounts were some of the best for today's historians. He was a hostage cavalry man who was brought to Rome in 167 B.C to keep the Greeks under control. His patron was Scipio Aemilianus who was the grandson of one of the two losing consuls at the battle of Cannae. This gave Polybius access to wonderful research materials and sources as he gathered materials to write about Roman success.

He hiked through the Alps, examined state archives, read treaties, browsed through correspondence and personal papers of important individuals, visited battlefields, and explored important locations. At one point he examined a tablet that Hannibal had inscribed. The bronze tablet told the story of Hannibal's achievements before he left Italy. Giving his story further credence, Polybius interviewed other individuals who took part in the battle at Cannae. As part of his research, Polybius read historical writings,



including some by Fabius Pictor, the Roman senator who was sent to the Delphic oracle to analyze what went wrong after the defeat at Cannae. Polybius made a concentrated effort to report events objectively, yet he had biases. His close friends came across well. There were several other factors that were off in his writings such as the fact the number of dead he listed was more than the amount of soldiers who could have fought in the battle.

Still, the story was real and influenced by the writings of Titus Livius, also called Livy. He wrote history as a storyteller. The man wrote 142 books, of which 32 survived and of 10 of these books focused on Cannae. The books were very readable and detailed, although Livy did take liberties with the speeches. There was another historian named Appian who wrote about Cannae, but his writings appear less genuine. They are so close to reality that there is a slight possibility the facts were true, but the battle scenes depicted were quite unlikely. There were numerous other historians who wrote about Cannae and some of their writings might contain true details, but must be pieced together with other accounts to glean what might truly have happened.

The author asked the question of why it is important to study the history. He compared the Punic War to World Wars I and II. He compared Hannibal to Hitler and Carthage to Britain. When the Cannae battle was over, survivors were banished to Sicily. They were known as the ghosts of Cannae. They followed the commander, Scipio Africanus to Africa to get revenge on the ones who banished them.

Humans had been fighting for survival, hunting both animal and man long before Cannae. This made it difficult to pinpoint exactly when war began. There are archaeological proof of wars throughout history during which man fought over land and water rights. Carthage focused on policing instead of warfare. Rome fought like the Greeks did on land.

## Chapter 2 - Rome

The first sign of an invasion would have been a dust cloud as the Romans came to invade Cannae. It was a large and powerful army, with a quarter to a third of the Roman senate as well as family members of other senate members in the ranks. According to Livy, the military tribunes had sworn an oath of allegiance to the Roman soldiers for the first time in history. They would not abandon their ranks. This was fine for most of the army because they were destined to die in battle. However, the survivors had the next 15 years of their lives shaped by this oath. As they marched into battle, they were feeling optimistic.

At this stage Rome was a confusing jumble of contradictions. There was one area where Rome did not contradict itself: warfare. Rome was devoted to its military. Most likely the city forges made weapons more than farm equipment. The governing consisted of three assembled bodies: the Comitia Centuriata, the Comitia Tributa, and the Concilium Plebis. The Comitia Centuriata was the body that exerted the most influence in decisions regarding warfare. By the time Hannibal rose up against Rome, it was very strong and unified.



When they went into war, their armies had a specific order and at times more than one army fought together. This caused some confusion since the lesser soldiers weren't certain whose command to follow. The battle at Cannae was one of these occasions.

Each man was trained in the military, having to serve in the military with at least 10 years in the cavalry or 16 in the infantry. In times of great danger, they had to serve 20 years. Even before entering the military, young men were trained to run, carry heavy loads, march, swim, and wield their weapons. Religion also came into play. The Romans worshipped the same gods as the Greeks, but were much more pious. Their desire to do what the gods wanted sometimes hindered them in warfare.

The author addresses the history of gladiators to show how strongly the Romans felt about their warfare. Its origins were not for entertainment. A fight between highly trained gladiators was a lesson in how to fight in close quarters and confront death. When Hannibal rose up against Rome, he likely did not fully understand their numbers and strength.

As the Romans grew in power, they assessed their situations. If they liked something, they called it Roman. If something failed, they assessed the situation and learned from it. It had a legionary army comprised of foot soldiers who were trained for single combat. Most likely the Roman soldier would knock down an opponent with his shield, then use his short sword to inflict a series of fatal wounds. This worked when the soldier had space to maneuver in, but it became a problem in the tightly-spaced battle at Cannae. The armor the soldiers wore also inhibited them in this battle. They were overheated and sank due to the weight of their armor when they tried to swim to safety.

As the Romans marched along their roads into battle, they were highly organized. When they camped, it was like a tent city where they could practice their skills and receive decorations or punishments as deserved. It showed order, and gave them stability wherever they were on the road. Their camp was a place to rest and regroup.

### Chapter 3 - Carthage

Hannibal was waiting for the Romans. He spies in Rome told him they were coming. His own army only had 10 days of food left and he was ready for battle. This was not a battle on a whim. Hannibal had prepared, even to a point where he was going to fight with the wind at his back so the dust would blind his adversaries. He had studied how the Romans fought and knew what they would try. It was his plan to use their strategies against them. First he would lure them in so they would divide his troops in their usual fashion, then he would trap them. Everything depended on timing so it was a risky plan, especially since his troops were so outnumbered. His men were used to his strategies, which was very helpful.

Hannibal had not been in Carthage since he was nine, but he was reared to fight against the Romans. The two cities were opposites with Carthage's emphasis on commerce while Rome concentrated on warfare.



Carthage did not have a popular reputation with other nations. The people were considered barbaric and immoral. They weren't artistic and left little in the way of literature. Most of their writings were records of transactions. As a people, they didn't seem to have theater, sports, or any sense of fashion. There was one area they thrived in however, and that was religion. They were extremely dedicated to their bloodthirsty gods, and archaeological finds show that they regularly practiced infanticide.

Romans called Carthaginians "Poeni" since they were considered the heart of Phoenicians. Carthage was thought to have been settled in 814 B.C. when Elissa drove a hard bargain with the natives to claim the land. They set up business and started trading, becoming a mercenary center a century later. Rome expanded and relied on its navy for military protection.

Money was extremely important to Carthaginians. The rest of their world focused on warfare. Historians have differing opinions as to why they expanded into the North African interior. Some say it was political. Others say it was a business move as their agriculture trade grew. The wealth of Carthage threatened Rome. This is why the Romans decided that Carthage must be destroyed.

There was great internal strife in Greece during this time, but the Carthaginians had a strong government and its people generally worked together well. There was little, if any, class conflict. Aristotle said the Carthaginian government was comprised of the best features of monarchy, oligarchy, and democracy. At the time of the Punic Wars, the governmental power appeared to be shifting. Still, warfare was not a important to Carthaginians. There weren't many males and citizens were only called to arms in dire emergencies. They were more likely to hire mercenaries to deal with problems when they arose.

Those who did rise in the military ranks did so by using their wealth and prestige. They worked for tough people, since society frowned upon failure. If they did their job poorly, they were crucified. Romans were a bit more sympathetic. One of the Carthaginian warfare tactics was to use elephants. This worked against them in battle when the elephants panicked in battle and began to kill both friend and foe. Still, the Carthaginians liked their impressive size, and they were easy to obtain since they were all around them in Africa. Hannibal used them in battle even during his disastrous last stand in Zama.

The Carthaginians excelled in their Navy when it came to defense. Most likely their ships were run by their own people, thus creating job opportunities.

Historical references prove that Rome and Carthage got along, with three treaties between the two. Then things began to turn. During the First Punic War, Rome drove through the Carthaginian fleet, but couldn't fight on the land due to the topography and walled cities. The Romans had to learn how to fight at sea. They did this and developed a tactical maneuver in which they would link themselves to enemy ships then climb aboard and fight infantry-style.





In other battles, Carthage fought back and won. They also had the money to keep rebuilding over the next decade of warfare. The Romans discovered that they needed to learn more about the sea if they were going to fight with their fleet. A storm came and wiped out all but 80 of their 364 ships according to Polybius. They rebuilt their fleet and set out again only to be thwarted by tides and more storms that once again wiped out their fleet. Carthage learned to use nature as an ally at sea, and cornered Rome into situations where nature would finish them off. Rome retaliated by resuming ground force operations.

Hannibal's father was nicknamed Barca or Thunderbolt. He was lethal and unpredictable according to historical documents. He didn't fight like the typical non-military Carthaginian. He was an aggressive fighter who met his enemy on their doorstep. When his son Hannibal was nine, he went to Spain. The boy went also and before they left, the child swore an oath of enmity toward the Romans.



# Chapters 4-6

## Chapters 4-6 Summary and Analysis

### Chapter 4 - Hannibal's Way

Hannibal is the center of this story yet there was no insight into his life as an individual other than his oath. Livy depicts him as a solid soldier and fearless leader. Unlike other Carthaginians, he did not appear very religious. He had a reputation according to some historians, for being a monster, yet his actions belied that. He even buried his foes.

He was married once to Imilce, a Spanish chieftain's daughter. The man's friends were mostly soldiers and he was very approachable. He was even willing to take criticism. Hannibal got along well with his brothers and he was well-educated. He spoke Greek and learned all about Greek warfare. No matter what people said about him, there was one fact no one could dispute. He was a brilliant tactician who earned the respect and trust of the soldiers under him.

The Romans already had trouble with their neighbors, the Gauls. They were large and wild in battle. The Romans wanted to annihilate them. In 222, the Gauls finally sued for peace, but they were denied.

Hannibal was concentrating on putting together his land armada. He gathered people from Spain to Africa, ready to take over Italy. The trip itself would toughen and train the troops as they passed through tough terrain with icy cliffs. The trip wasn't easy, but everyone stuck with him including friends and family members. Along the way, they established an inner group of advisors. They obviously worked well together and trusted their leader, Hannibal.

Time was limited as the troops made their way through the Alps. The snow would close the passes by mid-November. They would have left in May or June and foraged for food as they made their way. This was an incredible amount of food since they not only had to feed themselves, but their animals also. Hannibal had a vision that pushed him on.

Some turned back and Hannibal didn't stop them. In fact, he encouraged others to leave, perhaps weeding out those who weren't tough enough to handle the rougher parts of the journey. Hannibal made peace with others along his journeys. In the middle of September things got tough. Aggressive Celts called the Colcae stood in his path. He stationed an attack that warded off the aggressors. He attacked from the back in a move made famous by Alexander the Great, who Hannibal studied and admired.

He crossed the river with his troops and his elephants, which was not easy. However, it threw Romans off his track. The big question that remains today is figuring out where Hannibal's passage across the Alps really took place. It was the first time an organized army ever made the crossing, even with their elephants.



The Gauls high up in the mountains set up a trap for them, but Hannibal thwarted them by burning fires at night when they went home and sneaking over the narrow passes in the dark of night. The next day the Gauls went after the soldiers, hurling rocks and boulders. Hannibal attacked them so his men could pass. The Gauls did not give up and planned to attack the troops. Hannibal sensed what they were up to and re-formed the troops, yet still lost 35% of the troops.

Things were not going well. They lost the men, winter was coming fast, and the altitude was wreaking havoc on their minds, not to mention the fact that they were hungry. They pushed their way on into Italy. Going down on the icy slopes was even more difficult than going up so they called a halt to the descent to figure out what they should do. They forged a new path down the mountain coming up with ingenious ways to deal with anything that blocked their paths. At the base of the mountain, they foraged and found enough food to regain their strength. The army was greatly reduced in size, but they were tough.

#### Chapter Five - The Fox and the Hedge-Hog

The Second Punic was had the distinction of being called "the first world war in the history of humankind," which the author cites as a plausible statement. The Romans were victorious everywhere except for when they were on Italian soil, fighting against Hannibal. Rome finally succeeded by learning to fight like Hannibal.

After Hannibal crossed the Alps, he was met by Gauls who wouldn't help him. He attacked, killing the men and boys and letting his soldiers do what they wanted with the women. The other Gauls in the area were quick to offer allegiance after that.

Hannibal once used some Allobroges captives to teach his troops a lesson. He asked if any were willing to engage in single combat to the death. One would get freedom from life in captivity in the form of death, the other would be the winner, earning true freedom, arms and a fast horse. After the fight, Hannibal told the troops that this was the choice they had. They could die fighting or conquer and both choices were better than living as captured servants.

In one battle, a 17-year-old protected his father, Scipio, by rallying horsemen to surround and protect the fallen man. The boy was known as Africanus and eventually conquered Hannibal at Zama far in the future. For now, the boy suffered at the Carthaginian hand, and he grew, studying Hannibal's tactics. One of the man's most famous maneuvers was pinning the center then attacking the rear using double envelopment.

Hannibal was closely watching the Roman army. He knew their strengths and weaknesses. Historians aren't sure how he knew so much. They attribute it to defected Gauls, but it had to be something else, too. Perhaps some moles. Before the battle, Hannibal set the scene carefully. He planned places to hide, sent troops on to wait, and then hit the Roman army from behind. He also gave orders to harass the Roman



outposts to lure them out before they even had breakfast. They devastated the Roman army.

Publius Scipio had gone after Hannibal, eschewing religious ceremonies in their attempt to get at Hannibal, yet Hannibal eluded them by slipping through the flooded marshes, strengthening his troops along the way. Along the way, Hannibal contracted ophthalmia and lost his vision in one eye. The tactical maneuvers were brilliant. Hannibal let Flaminius see his troops then he slipped away during the night and surrounded the Roman army, attacking them from all sides.

Fabius Maximus figured out Hannibal's weakness. Hannibal's defeat didn't lie on the battlefield, it came from the cutting off of supplies. It was a hard task feeding his army. Crops and livestock had to be destroyed, and foraging parties had to be eliminated. This wasn't easy for the Romans to acknowledge since they were reared to fight in battle. They were also farmers who instinctively protected crops. Hannibal's men were fighting scurvy, and the animals had mange. He encouraged them to gorge themselves on the fresh produce of the area. They also restocked their weaponry before heading south.

Hannibal tried to start a battle with Fabius, but Fabius was avoiding warfare even while burning structures and supplies that might help Hannibal. Continuing on his path, Hannibal struck out with his brutal, wily force, offering deals to those in his path then conquering those who opposed him. Minicus and Fabius had to come to terms on how they would work together against Hannibal.

#### Chapter Six - Cannae

Things began to change in Tiber in 216 B.C. The Romans were feeling strong and ready to crush Hannibal. Instead, the battle at Cannae helped solidify Hannibal's position in Italy. It would be along time before they got their revenge.

The author stated that it was hard to document the political feelings of that era. Some historians inferred that Hannibal used slaves as spies, but it's speculation. Fabius' and Minicus' armies both fought in Cannae. Whether they fought together or as separate entities was impossible for modern historians to know.

The Romans had definite holes in their defenses and Hannibal capitalized in these holes. Historians differ regarding Hannibal's travels, but they agree that his troops were hungry. He captures a grain storage as well as a supply dump in Cannae then he stayed there. He knew the Romans were coming after him, and his efforts to gain ground in Italy were futile. Hannibal needed a spectacular victory. Waiting for the Romans to show up, Hannibal got to know the area intimately. He had a plan, and it utilized his army in a manner that showed his trust in the fighters.

The cavalry was very strong and well-trained. They had one horseman for every four foot-soldiers whereas the Romans had to for every 13. The Romans came in thinking they were strong so they had nothing to worry about. The battle had to come soon since food was running low for both sides. Fabius and Minicius took turns commanding on a daily basis, according to tradition. Hannibal began provoking the Romans, spurring



them into action. Without knowing that they were playing into Hannibal's hands, the Romans packed the middle. It had worked for them before.

The Carthaginian soldiers would stand in a formation similar to a backwards block letter "C." They would draw the Romans in, surrounding them. Viewing the scenario from above, one would wonder why the Romans would let themselves become cornered, but from their vantage on the ground, they had no idea.

On Friday, August 2, The scarlet tunic flew above Varro's tent, signaling battle. The Romans were tired of waiting and very ready for battle. Some were assigned to stay back and protect the camp, an assignment that most likely saved their lives yet most likely sentenced them to becoming the ghosts of Cannae.

Hannibal had everything neatly planned, right down to the using the wind so the dust flew in the faces of the soldiers. In previous battles, cold weather hindered them. At Cannae, they had to battle in extreme heat.

The Roman soldiers dismounted from their horses, perhaps because their general was injured and off his horse. This delighted Hannibal who knew this would make it easier to kill them. Right from the start, the battle began to go poorly for the Romans. They lost an important general and their troops were getting annihilated. They thought they had a chance, then Hannibal gave the order, and his men surrounded the Romans in their trap. The quarters were too compressed to work together as a troop so each man had to fend for himself.

Hannibal's troops came forward with reinforcements and the Romans were struggling psychologically at the magnitude of their defeat. There were too many soldiers to take as prisoners so the Carthaginians pressed on, killing as they went along. It was a massacre that continued all day. It was very possible that in the extreme depression of crushing defeat, the Romans didn't even try to defend themselves as they were boxed in and slaughtered. The heat could have made them pass out so they were in prime position for trampling, and the blood flowing on the ground would have made fast movement impossible.

There were Romans that survived, including 19-year-old Publius Cornelius Scipio. As the bodies of the Romans were piled high, the Carthaginians couldn't get through to kill more. After the battle, 45,500 legionaries and 2,700 cavalymen lay dead in a space that was approximately one square mile. Approximately 19,000 soldiers were taken as prisoners.

Many of Rome's leaders died in the battle, but Varro survived. There was great wailing and lamenting in Rome after the battle. At first, it was believed that there were no survivors. Soon word came through from Varro that he and 10,000 survivors were at Canusium. Hannibal was still at Cannae so they didn't have to worry about his attacking Rome.

The Romans turned to their gods, offering human sacrifices. They also sent a senator to Greece to consult with the Delphic oracle regarding atonement. To rebuild the army, the



draft age was lowered and debtors and criminals were installed in the army. The city slaves were granted freedom if they joined the war effort. Ironically, the cost of freeing the slaves was higher than the ransom they would have paid to get their soldiers back from Hannibal. Those at Cannae were disregarded because they were captives and those that weren't had ignored their duty when they fled their camp. They should have stood firm to fight. Their families were forbidden to raise money to free their relatives.

The soldiers who had survived without capture were cut off from pay. They were shipped to Sicily until 204. This forever changed the course of Rome's history because the ghosts of Cannae no longer looked to their country for their future.



# Chapters 7 -Epilogue

## Chapters 7 -Epilogue Summary and Analysis

### Chapter 7 - After Schocks

After Cannae, Hannibal started gaining power as other entities joined him. He split his force for the first time, sending one force south with his brother Mago to gather more support. Hannibal went west where wealthy Capua soon joined him. As former allies of Rome, this was a big victory for Hannibal. Livy wrote that his army weakened after wintering there, however. They enjoyed their hedonism too much and went soft. This might or might not have been true, but the reality was that Hannibal now had a new burden as he took on the task of protecting Capua.

Hannibal needed to find reinforcements. Mago, Hannibal's youngest brother was in charge of getting recruits. He gave a great speech, but Hanno questioned why they needed more men and why they hadn't reached an agreement of peace with Rome. He said they were still at was the same as when Hannibal first stepped into Italy. The others didn't listen and sent Hannibal more troops. Mago was supposed to go to Spain to get more recruits, but he had to stay and fight a bit. That was the only time Hannibal got reinforcements while in Italy.

Meanwhile, Rome rebuilt its army by avoiding battles. The second Fabian followed the first Fabian's idea of avoiding battle and going after provisions, but he was more attentive to geography and local politics. He focused on real leadership for his troops. Hannibal was still strong, but he had forces building up against him.

Philip, the king of Macedon, was broadening his horizons and he was interested in an alliance with the ones who brought Rome down. His men were caught with a treaty in hand. Rome continued to grow stronger, even as their allies joined Hannibal's forces.

Rome fought and tried to take Syracuse, but it was too powerful and well protected. Then the Romans found a weak spot. Part of the wall was lower than they thought, and the Syracusans were too busy celebrating a goddess to notice that they had a breach. Rome took over the city.

Hannibal bucked up his troops and Rome became more complacent. It had trouble feeding its troops , and some defected over to the Carthaginians.

Africa was more focused on supporting Spain than Hannibal himself. Rome realized that Hannibal originated in Spain and they would have to deal with Spain so it wouldn't send reinforcements to Hannibal. Both Hannibal and Rome vied for the loyalty of Spain, and the groups they encountered were fickle. During this time, Rome proved that it now had a fleet worthy of watching as they controlled the waters off the Spanish coast.



Between 212 and 210, the war centered around Italy. There were two occasions when Hannibal could have captured Rome, but he didn't. One time he didn't have the will and the other time, he didn't have the opportunity. The battles raged on.

### Chapter Eight - The Avengers

Publius Scipio was just 25 when he invested with the pro-consular imperium to head to Ileria as the supreme Roman commander. It was highly unusual. Livy suggested that no one else wanted the position. The young man was a strong leader right from the start. He was also very creative. Scipio was great with public relations, and he toured around, congratulating the men on their fighting. His goal was to create a unified, homogenous troop. Realizing that Hannibal's troops were split, Scipio took his chance to attack while their numbers were down. He told his own men that the attack was inspired by a dream from the god, Neptune, who would help them. They were victorious.

Scipio won the respect of the prisoners in the city he invaded by treating them well, unlike their original captors, the Carthaginians. He urged them to write home to tell their families they were well, and he promised to treat their females like sisters. He was given a beautiful girl as a reward, but he didn't touch her, and returned her to loved ones, earning more respect from those around him. The place was now called New Carthage.

Hasdrubal Barca realized he had a problem as his people slipped away to join the Romans. He knew he had to go up against Scipio. He didn't get far as Scipio approached on him, and Hasdrubal turned back.

Marcellus remained in Italy and picked a fight with Hannibal. While they were fighting, Fabius Maximus entered the city and looted it, gaining much-needed wealth for Rome. He also slaughtered many Carthaginians, Tarentines, and Bruttians. Hannibal was too far away to help. At a later point, Hannibal killed Marcellus.

Hasdrubal was now moving into Gaul and planning to cross the Alps. The Gauls welcomed him, and this news was devastating to the Romans. There was a chance he would join his forces with Hannibal's after all. Hasdrubal planned to meet his brother in Umbria, according to a letter. It was very possible that the letter was meant to be intercepted so the Romans would be misled. Meanwhile, Hasdrubal got mixed messages about what was happening with Hannibal. He was forced into a fighting position on June 22, 207 B.C. on the Roman calendar.

The battle didn't go well, and he lost men as well as elephants who panicked and attacked everything in sight. Hasdrubal was killed dying bravely during the fight. The very next day, Metaurus and his men went back to their camp, covering nearly 50 miles a day for six days.

There was great celebration in Rome. Hasdrubal was dead, and Rome had finally had a decisive win on Italian soil. Hannibal wasn't feeling so happy about the situation. He learned about his brother's death when Hasdrubal's head was delivered to him.





The Romans continued their training. Scipio was a tough leading, getting his troops up early and marching early. This forced the other troops out before breakfast - the same trick Hannibal pulled at the River Trebia. The Roman soldiers deliberately riled the elephants, causing them to panic.

Scipio's army began falling apart after a bit of time. Matters became worse as he became ill. When he healed, he took the mutineers to task, and brought the army back together under tight command once again. Scipio met with Masinissa, and the two quickly became friends.

Mago, Hannibal's other brother, received orders to head to Italy. He chose to do a surprise raid on New Carthage. It didn't go well.

Scipio returned to Rome in triumph. Yet even among the celebrations, he knew the battle was not over. Hannibal was still a formidable enemy. Scipio knew he had to lead troops out into Italy, but the Romans didn't feel that they had enough soldiers to spare.

#### Chapter Nine - Resurrecting the Ghosts

Scipio took his time and most likely didn't get to Sicily until the latter part of the spring in 205 B.C. Scipio built up a strong army with newly trained soldiers, nobles, and the able men who had fought at Cannae. It was the first time since the battle that the men had been allowed to winter in a settled area, and Scipio won their loyalty with this move. These men were ripe for revenge.

Before they had their chance, they had the opportunity to help their leader. His enemy complained about him and said his troops were getting lax. The ghosts of Cannae rallied around and put on mock battles as well as other displays of battle preparedness. The senate was so impressed, it authorized an invasion at the earliest opportunity.

The Romans marched on slowly and steadily, conquering along the way. Scipio had a brilliant attack in which he incinerated his opposition as they slept. Fourteen years after the battle at Cannae, the soldiers once again faced Hannibal and his men. Hannibal's army was annihilated. Hannibal escaped and lived another 20 years, but this time it was as if he were a ghost instead of the Roman soldiers from Cannae. Captives from the battle of Cannae were now welcome back in Rome.

#### Epilogue - The Shadow of Cannae

The battle at Cannae had become a historical legend. It wasn't the cornerstone of European battles, and it seemed to disappear in historical writings for a while, but came into the light again in the early 1900s.



# Characters

## Hannibal

Hannibal, whose name means "he who enjoys Baal's favor," was a brilliant tactician. He spent the first nine years of his life in Carthage and then went on to Spain, at his own choosing, with his father. Before he left for Spain, he swore an oath to do all he could to destroy Rome. When Hannibal was older, he led troops over the Alps into Italy. His enemies called him ruthless and barbaric, yet history seems to show another side of him. He soundly defeated the Roman army during a battle at Cannae. The power he got he earned by working with his soldiers, fighting aggressively. He used impressive fighting strategies such as tying wood on the horns of animals and then lighting the wood on fire as the animals ran off so the enemy would think it was his army on the move.

## Titus Livius

Titus Livius, also called Livy, wrote history as a storyteller. The man wrote 142 books of which 32 survived. Ten of these books focused on Cannae. Cannae was born in 59 B.C. and he began writing when he was 30. It was the time of Augustus Caesar, the first emperor of Rome, around 190 years after the battle of Cannae. Researching the battles, he rewrote them, but using a dramatic flair that went beyond the battles themselves. He wasn't a soldier, tactician, or a politician. This was most likely why his writing was so clear and readable according to the author. He had a leaning toward intrigue. His writings, like those of Polybius, are filled with speeches, which could not have been based on reality since there were no recording devices in those days or microphones. The speeches from commanders to soldiers would not have been heard by a large quantity of troops who also would not have probably understood them since so many soldiers came from regions that spoke in different dialects.

## Scipio Africanus

Scipio Africanus was the only commander who gave the ghosts of Cannae a chance at redemption. He led the men into Africa where they got their revenge on those that banished them. This history of warfare was long according to archaeological discoveries. Different places had different methods of approaching war with some focusing on offense while others focused on defense. Cannae didn't stand a chance with the trained soldiers coming its way. Scipio was an impressive leader who became supreme Roman commander at the age of 25. It was rumored that his birth was the result of his mother and a large serpent, and he did nothing to dispel the rumors. It was also said that he consulted with Jupiter and acted according to divinely inspired dreams. He was a shrewd commander who could be brutal when necessary, but also diplomatic in the face of his enemy if necessary.



## **Hamincar Barca**

This character was Hannibal's father. He was a commander during the First Punic War and he established a family empire in Spain. Hannibal most likely got his hatred of Rome from his father.

## **Mago Barca**

This character was Hannibal's brother. He was at Cannae and helped fight against Romans until his death from a flesh wound.

## **Hasdrubal Barca**

This character was Hannibal's brother who stayed in Spain during the Second Punic War so he could guard the family holdings. He was killed during the Battle of the Metaurus.

## **Fabius Maximus**

This character was a Roman dictator and consul who tried to avoid battling Hannibal. He wanted to starve him out.

## **Terentius Varro**

This character was a Roman consul who was defeated in the battle at Cannae. He was popular with his people.

## **Manlius Torquatus**

This character was a tough Roman who turned his back on the prisoners of Cannae.

## **Aemilius Paullus**

This character was one of the two consuls at the battle of Cannae. He was killed during the battle.

## **Quintus Pleminius**

This character was a Roman legate who brought disgrace upon Scipio Africanus.

## Syphax

This character was the Massaesylian king who opposed the Romans as Scipio Africanus invaded North Africa.



## Objects/Places

### Cannae

This was the location of the battle on August 2, 216 B.C. where 48,000 Romans were killed in a knife battle.

### First Punic War

This war lasted 23 years as Rom constantly tried to take down Carthage.

### Second Punic War

This is the war during with the Battle of Cannae was fought. It was also referred to as the "war against the Carthaginians and the Gauls" by the Romans.

### Iliad

This book showed how war was fought between individuals in close quarters rather than on groups who used weaponry from great distances.

### Roads

These were made by the Romans, unifying the people and helping their armies move about more freely.

### The Alps

This was the mountain range Hannibal crossed with his army, including their elephants. Many men died or turned around before they reached the base at the other side.

### Elephants

These were used in battle and Hannibal took them with him over the mountains with his troops. They were powerful in battle, but unreliable since they spooked easily and would rampage agains anyone, friend or foe.



## **Quinqueremes**

These were the boats the Romans built for battle. They used them to get close to other boats then they would latch on and board the enemy ships.

## **Poison**

This is what Sophonisba was given by Masinissa and she called it a wedding present.

## **Bronze Tablet**

This is what Hannibal had carved to tell of his exploits.

## **Hera's Temple**

This is the place where the records of Hannibal's exploits were held.

## **Poisonous Snakes**

These are what some legends say that Hannibal threw onto his enemies' ships.

## **Fire**

This is how Scipio killed thousands of his Carthaginian enemies.



# Themes

## Records and History

The author spends a good part of the book describing historians and how and why they record history. Some like Livy relied heavily on stories, while others such as Polybius, wrote more about strategies and tactical maneuvers. He highlights how the most reliable historians had access to interviews, records, and stories that happened closest to the actual historical event.

The author explains that many parts of history are lost forever, yet thanks to ancient writings and archaeological discoveries, many pieces of history can be put back together. He states that history doesn't repeat itself, but there are times when it parallels itself. For example, he compares the first and second Punic wars to World War I and World War II. Both started small, seeming nearly harmless, then escalated. Both stretched on for long periods of time, and by the end of the first, there were still unresolved issues. Years later the second of each of these wars took the world by storm, guided by one main tactician - Hannibal and Hitler.

There are several points during the book where the author points out how history cannot be recreated because of geographical changes over the past few thousand years. He also shows how the written history itself can be seen from different vantages. In the book, he offers different views from ancient and modern historians then discusses which scenarios are most likely and why. He also explains how cultures change stories. For example, the cultures who were Hannibal's enemies depicted him as a crazy, barbaric madman, when other evidence points to a harsh, yet overly fair man who earned the respect of those around him.

## Differences Between Rome and Carthage

Rome and Carthage were constantly at battle. When Hannibal was young, he swore to fight against Rome, most likely developing his hate from his father. Romans took their fighting seriously. Children were raised to be warriors, and all men had to serve time in the military. They were trained with sword and shield, and floundered at sea initially, but soon became a force to be reckoned with.

On the other hand, Carthage was a city based on commerce, not warfare. If there were strong anywhere, it was in their fleet at sea. The city was Phoenecian after all. The people thrived on their wealth. They didn't have major talent elsewhere. The Carthaginians imported their art and didn't train much for warfare. They did, however, grow their own food and expanded their farms. Hannibal lived in Carthage until he was nine then he left for Spain. Years later, he returned and fought with the Carthaginians in battles such as the one at Cannae.



Rome, the city of soldiers, was soundly defeated in this battle. They were so strict on their standards of warfare that they excommunicated the survivors at Cannae rather than take the prisoners and failed soldiers back. As the years went by, they rebuilt their armies and kept their fleets strong. They fought back against Hannibal and regained their wealth by taking over other cities and looting the remains.

## Naval and Infantry Warfare

One of the main themes of this book was tactical warfare with both the Navy and the infantry. The men of Rome were born and bred to join the infantry or the Calvary. Each citizen was required to spend a certain amount of years in military service.

The Carthaginians, on the other hand, were mercenaries. If they excelled anywhere military-wise, it was with their fleets. Their Navy was their first form of defense. Since their society thrived on commerce, the Carthaginians excelled by putting their own people on their ships. Not only did this provide unity, but it also created job opportunity.

Rome realized its disadvantage on the seas and worked diligently to strengthen its Navy. The Roman fleet was wiped out several times due to storms. However, as the years progressed, the Romans too built up a solid naval force.

On land both forces had brilliant military tacticians on their side. Carthage had Hannibal and Rome had Scipio. Instead of rushing into battles, both men took time to assess the situation and plan accordingly. They both also garnered the respect of the men in their armies. Both were brutal in warfare, yet fair.





# Style

## Perspective

Robert L. O'Connell, the author of "The Ghosts of Cannae: Hannibal and the Darkest Hour of the Roman Republic" has a keen interest in warfare and politics. He spent three decades working as a member of the United States Intelligence community. After he retired, he took a job as a visiting professor at the Naval Postgraduate School. A writer who focuses on history, O'Connell also authored "Of Arms and Men: A History of War, Weapons, and Aggression," which focuses on men and armaments throughout history; "Sacred Vessels: The Cult of the Battleship and the Rise of the U.S. Navy," which focuses on weapons technology; "Ride of the Second Horseman: The Birth and Death of War," which focuses on warfare beginning over 10,000 years before the Greeks; "Soul of the Sword: An Illustrated History of Weaponry and Warfare from Prehistory to the Present," which focuses on various weapons throughout history; and the novel "Fast Eddie: A Novel in Many Voices," which offers a fictional biography of a World War I flying ace.

O'Connell has made a name for himself as a detailed historian with the ability to grab a reader's attention. He is focused on detail and provides facts from a variety of angles. He shows where history is accurate and where it is inaccurate. The man's research seems very thorough and he uses quotes and information from a variety of sources that are well-documented throughout the book.

## Tone

"The Ghosts of Cannae: Hannibal and the Darkest Hour of the Roman Republic" is written in the third-person objective point of view. It offers a history of the events of the battles between Rome and Carthage in great detail. The author gives the personal history of the historians who wrote about the wars, showing the strengths and weaknesses of both.

The writing reflects facts and opinions written from numerous historians. When the facts contradict each other, the author highlights all the interpretations and then states which interpretation is most likely and explains why. The book is filled with advanced vocabulary and the author frequently alludes to things that will happen in the future before going back in time to explain and describe the past.

## Structure

"The Ghosts of Cannae: Hannibal and the Darkest Hour of the Roman Republic" by Robert L. O'Connell. The table of contents lets the reader know what to expect in the book. After the title page and the dedication there is a list of maps. Perusing the maps before reading helps the reader picture what is going on and they might find themselves

turning back to refer to the map at later points in the book. There are a few maps imbedded in the text, but the maps at the beginning of the book are the most helpful.

Following the maps there is a detailed list of the characters mentioned in the book that are listed in alphabetical order. There are nine main chapters in the book. Each title is labeled and the label is the focal point of the chapter. The nine chapters are subdivided into six sections. Each of these sections is set aside by a numeral. After the nine chapters, there is an Epilogue with three sections. This is followed by Acknowledgements and Notes, which cite resources used in this book. The final part of the book consists of an alphabetized list of Latin, military, and technical terminology. There is a brief one paragraph blurb about the author on the final page.

## Quotes

"Rome, on the other hand, lost—suffering on that one day more battle deaths than the United States during the entire course of the war in Vietnam, suffering more dead soldiers than any other army on any single day of combat in the entire course of Western military history." (Chapter 1, *The Ghosts of Cannae: Hannibal and the Darkest Hour of the Roman Republic*. p. 4).

"And the talisman of all of this change was one lucky survivor, a young military tribune named Publius Cornelius Scipio,\* known to history as Africanus." (Chapter 1, *The Ghosts of Cannae: Hannibal and the Darkest Hour of the Roman Republic*. p. 4).

"Mark Twain seemed to have gotten it about right when he concluded that although history doesn't repeat itself, it does sometimes rhyme." (Chapter 1, *The Ghosts of Cannae: Hannibal and the Darkest Hour of the Roman Republic*. p. 12).

"More to the point, perhaps, is that in both cases the loser of the first conflict seems to have been dragged into the second largely by the actions of a single man, Carthage by Hannibal and Germany by Hitler." (Chapter 1, *The Ghosts of Cannae: Hannibal and the Darkest Hour of the Roman Republic*. p. 12).

"Soon enough, Roman armies would look to their commanders and not the state to ensure their future. And should the commander choose to march on Rome, they would follow him. This is a lesson that should never be forgotten." (Chapter 1, *The Ghosts of Cannae: Hannibal and the Darkest Hour of the Roman Republic*. p. 13).

"But the notorious victims, known collectively as the *legiones Cannenses*, were left in limbo as their lives at home disappeared. They became quite literally the ghosts of Cannae." (Chapter 1, *The Ghosts of Cannae: Hannibal and the Darkest Hour of the Roman Republic*. p. 13).

"In the end he was forced to leave, having proverbially won all the battles but lost the war." (Chapter 1, *The Ghosts of Cannae: Hannibal and the Darkest Hour of the Roman Republic*. p. 14).

"Hunting parties became brotherhoods of killers, prototypes of the squad-size small units that one day would form the basic building blocks of armies." (Chapter 1, *The Ghosts of Cannae: Hannibal and the Darkest Hour of the Roman Republic*. p. 16).

"Logic points to us having enlisted both the characteristics of predation and the aggression associated with reproductive dominance, along with the weapons we developed and the attitudes we accumulated through participation in each, and then



enfolded them in the institution we invented and now call war." (Chapter 1, The Ghosts of Cannae: Hannibal and the Darkest Hour of the Roman Republic. p. 18).

"Phoenicians in the late ninth century B.C. began to plant colonies dotting the shores of the western Mediterranean, the most famous being Tyre's settlement of Carthage." (Chapter 1, The Ghosts of Cannae: Hannibal and the Darkest Hour of the Roman Republic. p. 21).

"This was very much a world where, to paraphrase Thucydides,<sup>38</sup> the strong did what they could and the weak did what they must." (Chapter 1, The Ghosts of Cannae: Hannibal and the Darkest Hour of the Roman Republic. p. 25).

"But these ghosts of Cannae would live to haunt the republic. For one day, legionaries would look to their generals and not Rome for a future, and that perspective would spell civil war and absolute rule. This more than anything else was the battle's legacy." (Chapter 6, The Ghosts of Cannae: Hannibal and the Darkest Hour of the Roman Republic. p. 169).

"So, it seems that in order to save the state from Hannibal it was necessary to generate the very type of individual who would ultimately destroy it. This was the true Barcid curse upon Rome." (Chapter 6, The Ghosts of Cannae: Hannibal and the Darkest Hour of the Roman Republic. p. 169).

"In any age, countries that fight a lot of wars are well advised to take good care of their veterans." (Chapter 9, The Ghosts of Cannae: Hannibal and the Darkest Hour of the Roman Republic. p. 254).



## Topics for Discussion

What was the Roman military like, including strengths and weaknesses?

What was the Carthaginian army like, including strengths and weaknesses?

Why were the Romans at a disadvantage at the battle of Cannae?

What happened to the survivors of the battle of Cannae?

How were elephants used in battle and what were the pros and cons of using them?

Why was Scipio important for the Romans?

How did the Romans get their revenge on Carthage and how long did it take to take?