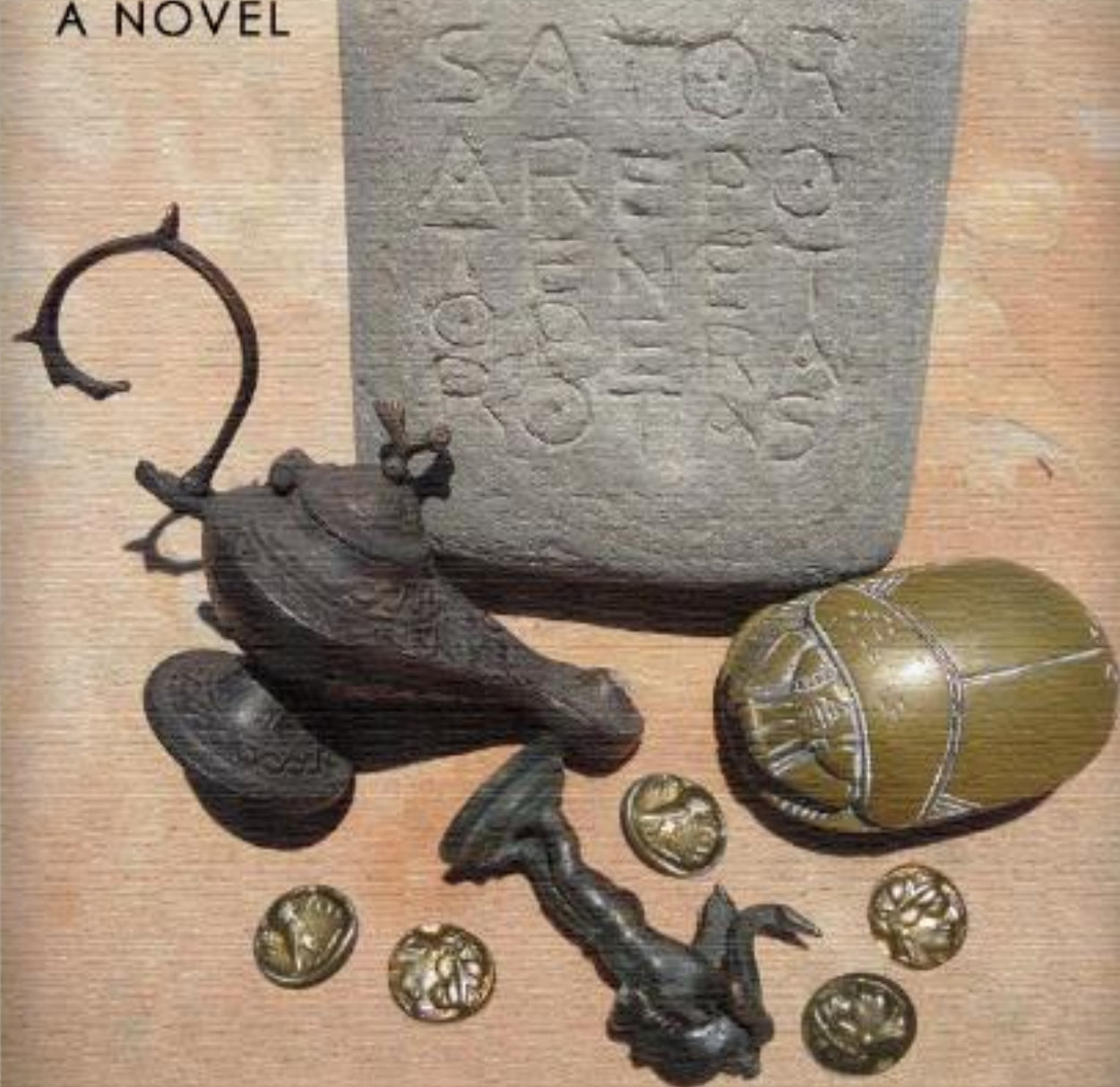


# SUB ROSA

## SANCTUARY'S END

A NOVEL



PATRICK SEAN BARRY

# Sub Rosa

## Sanctuary's End



Patrick Sean Barry



Sub Rosa – Sanctuary's End

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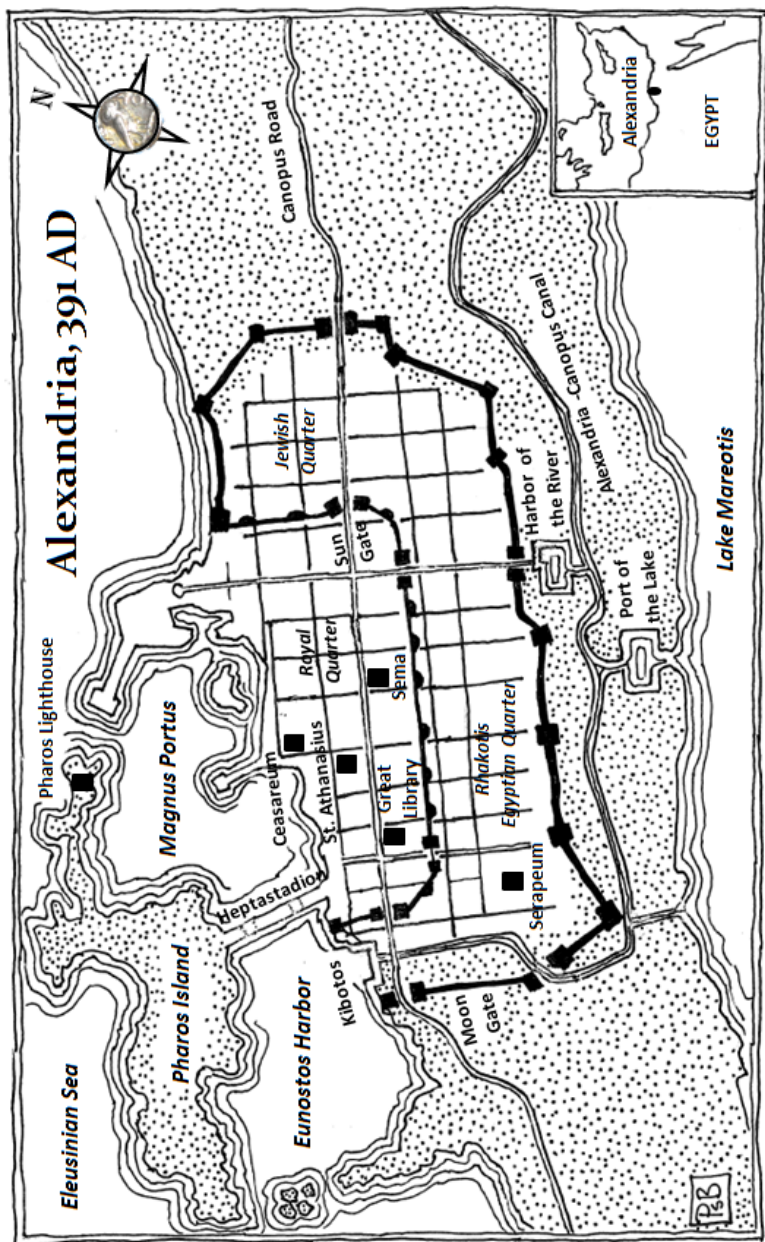
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*For my wife Brigitte—  
Endlessly inspiring, encouraging,  
and a wise analytical eye.*

*For my children Caitlin and Brian—  
who make it all worth it.*

*And in memory of my mother,  
Dorothy Hardin Barry—  
The Artist of Life.*



*“We should always be disposed to believe  
that that which appears to us to be white  
is really black,  
if the hierarchy of the Church so decides.”*

St. Ignatius of Loyola  
under of the Society of Jesus

*“It is my will  
that he should remain  
until I come.”*

John 21:21



**Magnus Portus – Alexandria, Egypt**  
**17 Augustus, 391 A.D.**  
***Hora Duodecima* (12<sup>th</sup> hour)**

**F**ar outside the protected waters within the Magnus Portus—and well beyond Pharos Island which formed the great harbor’s northern perimeter and hosted the towering great Lighthouse of Alexandria—a storm was building in the Egyptian Sea, just beyond the horizon. Heavy clouds and dark brooding waters seemed to warn of an enduring turmoil to come. Local fishermen and merchant ships, their broad triangular lateen sails glinting amber in the last rays of afternoon sun, pressed to port, intent on gaining safe harbor before the rise of turbulent seas.

From the window of a second floor room overlooking

the Emporium which skirted the stone waterfront along the harbor's southern edge—and with a superior view over Alexandria's busy eastern main harbor, Marcus Seanus scanned the black clouds of the dark horizon with a deepening frown. Well-tanned from his travels, dressed in the two-layered tunics and mantle of a Roman citizen, and with the appearance of a lean fit man in his late thirties, Marcus stroked his close-cropped deep brown beard pensively. A dominant streak of snow-white bleached discoloration distinguished the hair of his right eyebrow, making his naturally handsome features more striking and unusual.

"So, young sir, we are agreed?" the gray-bearded grain merchant queried.

"Yes, agreed. Your ship leaves at dawn on the morning tide, correct?"

Dressed in a fine robe, with elegant and colorful embroidery, which identified him as a member of the upper tier of the local Jewish merchant class, Timon Maizada followed Marcus's stare to the stormy horizon, then glanced at him. "Weather permitting of course. In a hurry to leave the city, but don't want to attract too much attention, eh?" The merchant's eyes sparkled as his lips pursed with the slightest knowing smile. "A lot of people like you these days."

Marcus's eyes narrowed as he studied Maizada with guarded concern. "Jacob Silvenus said you were a man to be trusted."

"Salve, brother, there's no worry here. We Jews all need to stick together. Without that, we have nothing, especially now. While I do commerce with them all—the Romans,



Greeks, Egyptians, Arabs, and the proud Nicene Christians, I know where my bread is baked. Whatever secrets your movements are meant to conceal, they’re safe with me, son. I am a man of discretion and a contract is sacred to me. Jacob spoke truly.” Timon placed his hand on Marcus’s shoulder reassuringly, in a fatherly manner. “And did Jacob not tell you he and I are now blood kin? My daughter and his son have blessed us with a precious granddaughter: Miriam... And Jacob tells me you have known his family for some time: that you too are regarded as family. So go, son. Go now in peace. But don’t be late tomorrow. My boat departs with or without you, after first light: whenever the captain gives the word to sail.”

“I’ll be there,” Marcus assured him.

As Timon began to peruse a set of cluttered shelves behind him, Marcus picked up and studied a small beautifully crafted bronze statue which stood upon the merchant’s desk—a young naked cherub boy holding a dolphin over his shoulder, his wings spread ready for flight. Timon finally found what he was searching for among jumbled stacks of parchment and rolled papyrus scrolls: a small wooden box. From it he retrieved an ivory-colored disk—a bone token—and handed it to Marcus. “Don’t lose this. Give it to the captain. He won’t provide you passage without it. Ship’s name is *Argo*. You know the location, yes?”

“I do. North of the Kibotos.”

Taking the token, Marcus nodded his thanks and headed out the door of Maizada’s work chambers, down the wooden stairs to the waterfront. As he descended the stairway, he studied the tessara, a coin of carved bone,

polished by years of use: on one side, engraved in relief was a merchant sailing ship, on the other Marcus recognized one of the traditional patron deities of Alexandria: Poseidon, the Roman sea god. Marcus slipped the disk into a small leather pouch hanging on his belt and headed out onto the broad stonework street overlooking the Magnus Portus.

Outside, amid the sprawl of people hailing from cultures all around the Mediterranean Sea, and all strata of society, Marcus considered the time he had before tomorrow morning and weighed his options. Even though he had booked passage on the grain ship headed for Rome, he still was not certain this would be his ultimate exit route from Alexandria. He knew he needed to remain flexible and have multiple options available. He knew his one critical mission must be achieved first, and everything else would follow that. And he knew he was a wanted man. It was good to have the *Argo* as one more exit option.

Searching in his mind's eye for alternatives, Marcus outwardly surveyed the open plaza of the Emporium—the main business district of this Roman port city—which faced the bustling Magnus Portus. With various buildings for merchant establishments, colorful signage with symbolic graphic icons publicized their wares in Latin, Coptic Greek, and even Egyptian hieroglyphs. Grain, papyrus and cotton exporters, as well as specialists of exotic and rare imports from all around the Mediterranean Sea, Arabia, deep Africa, India and beyond, were represented here.

On the far side of the Emporium the busy Agora stood—the city's market place. The stalls and booths covered by broad sun bleached canvas awnings were filled with a melting pot of Alexandrians perusing and bargaining

over fruits and vegetables, freshly slaughtered chickens and lamb, the day’s catch of fish, octopus and shellfish, as well as sundry furnishings, pottery, glassware, metal tools and household utensils, animal hides, sacks of grain, ingots of metal and a bounty of other goods in ample supply which were available here at prices based on vigorous negotiations.

Also overlooking the harbor, and straight ahead just beyond the Agora, stood the Grand Caesareum: a glistening white marble and stone plaza with its two towering obelisks—the famed ‘Cleopatra needles’ etched with Egyptian hieroglyphs. The temple was originally built to honor Julius Caesar, over four hundred years before. Now it was dedicated to the current sovereign of the Roman Empire: Theodosius. Flanked by the two majestically imposing obelisks, and perched atop an inscribed polished red granite pedestal, stood the emperor’s massive and regal bronze statue on horseback.

The statue dominated the imperial square which was also populated with smaller bronze statues of preceding emperors, aligned in two rows standing on either side of the plaza, including, Julius Caesar, Augustus, Hadrian, Marcus Aurelius, Claudius, Trajan, and Nero. The broad plaza dominated this central location of the great harbor. One could not arrive in this greatest of ports in the world without beholding this striking, seemingly luminous marble temple. The focal point in front of the temple and plaza was Theodosius’s equestrian themed statue, depicting the emperor with the scepter of power resting in his left hand, as he peered out to sea in the direction of the lighthouse and grand harbor—his right hand outstretched—welcoming and somehow commanding the arriving ships as well as the

myriad of craft at anchor in the vast and busy waterfront.

This impressive display of imperial civic infrastructure made Marcus Seanus reflect on the broad-reaching power of Rome, as well as the newer influence in the empire exerting its growing authority: the Christian church along with its newly enhanced powers which were actively impacting lives of the empire's entire population. The setting of the harbor front, nonetheless, exerted its overwhelming and eternal charisma as he studied a waterfront he had seen grow and change over the years since he first experienced it.

The pyramid-shaped tops of the obelisks, capped in thick gold leaf, were bathed in the last rays of rose and saffron-tinged sunlight. Four Roman war galleys stood at the stone pier directly opposite the Caesareum, and at the end of this quay a century of legionaries was disembarking down a ramp from one galley as their centurion barked orders to form up into lines on the pier behind their standard bearer. Marcus wondered if their presence was a normal deployment, or if they had arrived to support some undisclosed operation, of which there had been so many over the last few uncertain and unstable months in the city.

Further to the west, along the stone walkway of the waterfront, was the Navila with warehouses and ship sheds facing stone piers and wooden docks hosting various lower class steerage vessels, as well as select merchant craft bearing their exotic imports. Bare-chested slaves in loin clothes unloaded raw lumber from one ship, barrels of wine from another nearby, while a ship carrying bales of Egyptian cotton was being loaded the next pier over.

Finally, even further west along the waterfront, the sun was now setting over the impressive Heptastadion, a mile

long stone mole, effectively joining Pharos Island to the mainland and dividing the Magnus Portus from the smaller Harbor of Eunostos, the western, and lesser port of Alexandria. It was on that far side of the Heptastadion that Marcus reflected was the avenue of departure from the city that he had just secured with Maizada the grain merchant. On the surface, Marcus noted to himself, all looked calm and orderly. But appearances can often be so deceiving he silently observed from past experience.

The famed lighthouse stood at the extreme eastern tip of Pharos, overlooking the northern entrance of the main harbor. One of Philo of Byzantium’s *Seven Wonders of the World*—all of which Marcus had seen in his many travels—the legendary structure was a source of deep pride for the city. Marcus contemplated how much Alexandria had meant to him these many years since the beginning of his story, so very long ago: how this city had been the gateway to so many possibilities, so many new vistas of knowledge, so many people of learning and wisdom.

Now all he could see in the surroundings of the Magnus Portus was a labyrinth of passageways blocked, with little hope of escape. He assessed his circumstances pragmatically, that he had delayed too long, but at the same time he recognized the decision to stay was not his to make. The work needed completion and leaving now would mean everyone depending on him would lose out due to his premature and safe departure. Indeed Marcus needed to maintain his trust in some divine plan that was being mapped for him, and to have faith that his actions would ultimately bring success for all involved.

An immense pyre was just being lit by a special team

atop the massive seventeen-story, 365-foot tower enclosed within a fortified perimeter overlooking the harbor entrance. Built on a foundation of massive limestone blocks, the three-stepped tiered design incorporated a circular spiral stone ramp upon which mule led carts carried oil-soaked logs to the top. The first tier was wide, rectangular and ten stories high, the second was octagonal and five stories. The crowning top section was two stories, and on top of it sat the pyre berth, with an open-topped wrought iron cage into which lumber was placed by crane. Surrounded by tall marble pillars, topped with a bronze roof, positioned well above the flames, the pyre berth was backed by a highly polished bronze mirror which faced out to sea and was housed between three of the pillars. A venerable bronze statue of Poseidon, green with age, stood atop the pointed roof.

The brilliant reflection of these flames was a legendary and welcome sight for wayfarers from near and far. The famous Pharos beacon, the first lighthouse in history, could be seen over forty miles out to sea. Across the harbor entrance from the Pharos lighthouse, on the mainland shore, stood a small stone citadel housing the mechanism controlling the Chain of Alveus Taurus—the gateway into the Magnus Portus. Atop the main parapet of this strategic fortification a small detachment of Roman legionaries stood at attention, their brass legion horns blaring in unison in accordance with an honored daily ritual of the illumination of the lighthouse fire, a centuries-old tradition, even before the Roman imperial occupation.

All the harbor activity seemed as usual as it had been for the many times he had visited this city over the years. Yet

Marcus knew, despite the veneer of normalcy, just a short distance away on a sacred acropolis overlooking the southwestern district of the city—the Rhakotis, the Egyptian Quarter and the old city of Alexandria—actions were in motion that would very likely change the course of history.

With sadness, Marcus ruminated, it would not, it could not, be a peaceful process. Yet before that inevitable seismic event took place, he had one thing he must achieve—on this the lives of his closest companions depended. As the rising winds of the Egyptian Sea buffeted his face, Marcus gazed at the familiar spectacle of the lighting of the Pharos beacon fire, having witnessed the inspiring sight dozens of times, and he realized his experiencing this now would very likely be for the last time. He shook his head, refocusing on his priorities, then turned and started off inland, deeper into the city, heading east, parallel to the sea coast, skirting through the southern boundaries of the exclusive Roman section—the Broucheion—and navigated on toward a part of the city that hosted an immense domed building which dominated this northeastern part of the city: the New Synagogue of Alexandria.



**St. Athanasius Church – Alexandria, Egypt**  
**17 Augustus, 391 A.D.**  
***Hora Duodecima* (12<sup>th</sup> hour)**

**I**t was a commanding view of the great harbor's eastern quarter, with a vantage point looking directly down the length of the busy Heptastadion and the stormy seas beyond. At this rare and privileged promontory above the city, the sun set a little later than at street level, providing an added opportunity of experiencing a grander view of the Lord's panoramic glory. Far off to the right, the lighthouse's celebrated beacon was now blazing.

Not a very tall man, bearded and in his late fifties, the Bishop of Alexandria, also known as Pope Theophilus, turned away from the wide view of his balcony and paced



back into the spacious and sumptuously furnished fourth floor collection of rooms at his headquarters adjoining the largest Christian church in the city: St. Athanasius.

His long multicolor and very sheer silken robes, imported from India, swayed as he walked. He appreciated the light feel of the fabric, especially in the hot humidity of the season. While others might do so behind his back, the Bishop would never think to call his vestments ‘luxurious,’ but he appreciated the comforts God afforded him for his hard work on the Lord’s behalf. Theophilus refrained from wearing anything underneath his robes so his God-given totality could be closer to the One True God. Indeed, the three layers of light silk had an effect of rubbing against him in such a way that he felt blessed that the Lord let him know he still had young and vibrant feelings to appreciate the sensual wonders of God’s creations. A cross breeze from the corner windows swept up under his robe as he walked, touching his sensitive skin and he smiled. The Lord’s loving and healing touch was everywhere, and he took great comfort at it.

Weighty thoughts, however, returned to the center of his thinking as he grasped a large and ornate golden locket, inlaid with cloisonné, delicate silver filigree and personally selected jewels. Indeed, despite the large golden cross that held a piece of the True Cross, which he also wore around his neck, and which displayed a similar lavish bejeweled design, the locket seemed to exert a special power on him. The bishop pensively stroked the small limpid green emeralds which festooned the surface of the object. The preoccupation of his critical thoughts was concerned with ‘the Stranger.’

Word of this mysterious interloper, had reached him, and with it a vague sense of angry foreboding. His name seemed to change with the wind. Some knew of him as Marcus Seanus, others referred to him as ‘Saint Anonymous’ and others had names like ‘The Lord’s Courier’, ‘The Blessed One,’ and even the ‘Last True Apostle.’ Other additional appellations associated with the Stranger made the bishop’s blood boil, and he refused to utter them, because their implication was that this insidious interloper was closer to God than anyone in the clergy anywhere in the Christian world. This man was supposedly a follower of Jesus, but in a disgraceful, reprehensible and heretical way.

Exactly how that heresy characterized itself, however, remained elusive, because no one could or would directly say what his words or acts were. The bishop only heard about the ‘aura’ of his presence, the wisdom of his words... and that he could heal. The fact that this renegade had not presented himself personally to the bishop for the sanction of the church was damning enough. This much Theophilus knew for sure, this phantom troublemaker had two distinctive markings: a bleached white right eyebrow and a wine-colored mark down the left side of his neck—a mark that to some suggested a dragon. This was most certainly the mark of Satan. No other explanation made sense.

Pope Theophilus knew this stranger must be stopped. But this individual was only a small moving part in what he viewed as the grand scheme of events which were unfolding with him at the very center of it all, walking side by side with the Lord. With the deepest certainty, fueled by divine revelation, Theophilus knew his mission was following St. Paul and Christ’s will: to crush, exterminate with bloody

exuberance and destroy all vestiges of pagan worship so the Roman Empire might enjoy a true pristine Christian world unfettered by the obscenities of the tireless and corrosive work of the Evil One.

But still the Stranger was a loose variant factor he could not yet control. The pagans of the city, he felt confident, he could control, now that he enjoyed Emperor Theodosius’s support with the edict forbidding the visiting of pagan temples. The populace of Alexandria had to comply because they needed to protect their homes and families. The Stranger, however, was unpredictable. Where he might turn up, and what his exact mandate was, remained uncertain. The bishop only knew the effect this man had on people, and the stories they told about him. If the stories gained popularity they could threaten his supremacy as God’s highest authority in Alexandria, as well as endanger his personal position in the Church as The One: the bishop ultimately destined to be God’s uppermost representative in all of Christendom, above Rome itself. That reality, as God’s supreme representative, would most certainly manifest itself, with God’s will, after the events at the Serapeum played out per his and God’s plan.

This undefined challenge of the mysterious holy imposter, however, deeply agitated the pontiff. Theophilus reached again to his locket for the sense of security it provided him, but this time, he sat at his large dark wood table, piled with papyrus rolls and parchments, took the locket off, and placed it in front of him with reverence.

The face of the golden jeweled rectangular and box-like ornament was separated vertically by a thin line indicating a closure—two pairs of small golden hinges flanked the

outside edges of the large locket. A small latch held the center closed and secure. The pope turned the latch, and opened the two oblong locket doors, revealing two side by side compartments which each contained a long slender grayish brown object: two mummified fingers. He removed them both, holding one in each hand. The majority of both digits were housed in a protective golden mesh craftwork, one with a small gold-rimmed emerald adorned upon one and a ruby on the other.

While most of each finger was encased in the gold and jeweled cage housing, the tips of both were exposed in the meshwork, allowing the bishop to touch each ancient fingertip. With a ritual focus, Theophilus first took the ‘emerald’ finger and brought the tip of it gently to the center of his forehead and closed his eyes in prayer and meditation. As he did, he released a deep sigh.

For him this was literally being touched by God because the 350-year-old finger came from the blessed apostle St. Mark. The bishop had personally supervised the amputation of this holy relic himself from the tomb of St. Mark which was housed below the grounds of this very church, and which was named after one of the most venerable of Alexandrian bishops and renowned church fathers of Christianity itself: St. Athanasius.

Being one of the seventy Apostles after the original twelve, St. Mark was one of the faithful who had been in the presence of Lord Jesus Christ before the crucifixion. St. Mark had then conveyed the good news of the Lord out to the world, even carried the Holy Word alongside St. Paul himself. The Apostle finally arrived in Alexandria where he wrote the sacred New Testament Gospel named after

him—the oldest of the four original Synoptic Gospels. And he ultimately met his tragic martyrdom here, in this city, just a short distance away from the location that would later be known as St. Athanasius Church.

St. Mark’s holy relics and his history here made the city in turn one of the holiest in all Christianity. This very finger, the index finger from the Apostle’s right hand, had most certainly touched the Lord, and each time the bishop touched himself with it, he felt blessed. A renewed and fiery sense of holy purpose flowed through him and in him. With the finger, he then crossed himself, touching the relic to his forehead again, his solar plexus, then on each side of his chest, and concluded with a kiss to the fingertip of the blessed relic.

Still holding the finger of St. Mark in his right hand, Theophilus retrieved the second finger now, and brought it to lightly touch the temple on each side of his head as he closed his eyes passing into deeper prayer and meditation. The second ancient digit, a 714-year-old artifact, belonged to the founder of Alexandria—Alexander the Great—whose tomb, the Sema, was also in the heart of city.

As with St. Mark’s digital extraction, the bishop had personally supervised the removal of this index finger, also from the right hand, and commissioned the bejeweled housings for both fingers, along with the ornate golden locket which housed them, which never left his neck, and rested over his heart. Knowing this was from Alexander’s sword hand, and had carried him to the greatest victories any single man in the world had ever achieved, filled Theophilus with overpowering will and confidence. With both these fingers at his temples, he felt he was receiving

God's grace through St. Mark, and a historic sense of destiny, power and strategic vision from Alexander. Together he felt a surge inside, as he always did from these sacred objects, that his destiny was assured and protected.

A vision, a holy revelation came to him. Pope Theophilus could now see what needed to be done with great clarity and purpose. And he knew it would need to happen tonight. All the pieces were in place, the timing was fortuitous. A crack of thunder echoed from far out at sea.

"God has given his affirmation and ascent," the bishop concluded. His eyes, somewhat clouded by his advancing cataracts, flashed wide open. The bishop smiled with a luminous sense of holy certainty as he returned the sacred fingers to their locket, which he then draped back around his neck.

"God's Will Be Done," the bishop solemnly intoned.

His assistant, the cleric Brother Antonius—a man with unique eyes, one blue and one green—entered with the latest dispatch from Emperor Theodosius. The bishop ordered him to read it, since he was gradually losing his sight to cataracts and he saved the work of his eyes to the most important duties in God's work. He indeed prided himself on his powerful memory and his ability to quote long passages of the Bible with virtual perfection.

The emperor's letter, as he expected, had given him the one last power he required: the ability to command the Roman army forces in the city, due to the emergency that had precipitated these policies some two weeks ago at the Serapeum. The bishop had already successfully displaced the governor of Alexandria, Flavius Julius Graccus. Orchestrating a campaign of scandalous innuendo of

improper activities, from authoritative voices other than his own, his strategy resulted in Graccus being called back to Constantinople for an interview with the emperor. This left the governor’s administrator officially in charge. The administrator, Justinian Bracchius Flodorium, was a loyal member of the devout Christian flock, and under his control. But now with this edict, his power was unassailable against other Roman administrators who might be tempted to resist the bishop’s will. The Pope of Alexandria nodded thoughtfully, pleased that his and God’s plan was coming together so effectively. The thunder in the distance simply confirmed his conviction that God expected him to achieve great things tonight.

As Brother Antonius finished reading the missive, and despite the cataracts inhibiting his ability to read the printed word with crisp focus, Bishop Theophilus could still see the silhouette of the sleek seemingly feline form and slightly feminine features of his assistant’s body. The pope had made a gift of Brother Antonius’s attire, a lighter, gauze-like, sheer, almost see-through Egyptian cotton tunic, for greater comfort in this sweltering humid season.

As the cleric finished and filed the papyrus dispatch in a cubbyhole shelf by the wall, Theophilus reflected how indeed the Lord created a wonderful sense of smooth rhythm in the young cleric’s lithe movements as he tread lightly across the room. The bishop sauntered toward his assistant, who was slightly bent over, storing the document. As the pope moved, the silken garment slid against his skin with an invigorating and sensual whisper. Blood rushed to new locations in his blessed body. Theophilus smiled quietly as he moved yet closer to his assistant, and spoke quietly

and reassuringly.

“God’s Will Be Done.”

Brother Antonius turned to him and looked expectantly into the cleric’s clouded eyes with a tentatively dutiful smile and a hint of trepidation and rage.





Near The Jewish Quarter – Alexandria, Egypt  
17 Augustus, 391 A.D.  
*Hora Duodecima* (12<sup>th</sup> hour)

Crossing over a canal bridge, under which the waters of the Nile flowed north to the sea, Marcus made his way along the wide Meson Pedion, also known locally as the Via Canopia, the main east-west thoroughfare of the city, a grandly appointed colonnaded boulevard of the Broucheion.

It bustled with activity, mule-drawn carts, camels and their masters, foot traffic of all types, including a century of legionaries on the march somewhere further south in the city. Yet Marcus could not enjoy the elegant grandeur of this great city—the jewel of the Roman Empire and effectively the heart and soul of the known world’s culture. He knew

that in the weeks he had been away from the city, to the south along the Upper Nile, much had transpired in Alexandria.

To him it was now a changed city, less evident to the casual eye of a newcomer. But matters here were very different now and he felt an expectant sense of unwanted things to come, of nervous discomfort among the many different kinds of Alexandrians he had dealt with during these two days since his return. The Romans had somehow been more imperious than usual; the Coptic Greeks more wary and cautious with their words, seemingly defensive; Egyptian workers were more overly polite than usual and very careful not to offend; priests and monks from the church were more challenging and authoritarian invoking God's will in the smallest detail of interaction.

His people, the Jews, were unusually more intent to smooth things over wherever possible, to close business quickly, amicably, and negotiating with much less tenacity than he was used to. Everyone he had encountered seemed intent on avoiding any misunderstanding that could lead to disagreement or conflict. That was of course the case, except for a few high-ranking Romans and Christian clergy—with their accompanying entourage of belligerent *Parabolani* monks.

Marcus knew the events unfolding at the Serapeum were on everyone's mind, whether they spoke of it or not. What information he could glean was not encouraging, and he avoided asking too much about it, because it could inevitably lead to questions about what side he was on, and the wrong answers could bring unpredictable and undesirable results. From what Marcus could piece together,

things were coming to a head, which meant he needed to maintain as low a profile as possible. He just hoped he could honor his commitments before that took place. Everything depended on it.

Marcus had also noticed the luxuriant and shady public gardens, with their refreshing and elegant fountains, as well as the temples of Isis Plusia, Saturn and Poseidon, were all essentially deserted. Small knots of Roman legionaries milled around the entrances of the temples, their exact mandate unclear, their manner surly and intimidating.

Despite the bustling activity of Alexandrians in the grand colonnaded streets, everyone seemed driven by an urgent preoccupation, many carrying food and supplies to their homes. Some were leaving the city altogether. The streets seemed emptier than usual and Marcus sensed a hush of dreadful expectation which hung over the city. Alexandria had a haunted quality. Marcus judged most of the city inhabitants were staying indoors, stocking provisions to last through whatever was about to transpire.

Alexandria had seen civil strife before through the years, with a fighting in the city between the Jews and the Greeks, the Christians and Romans, as well as other different factions who found themselves at odds within this multicultural ancient city. Marcus knew the situation now was different, however, on a completely new scale, and with much more at stake. With sober reflection, he believed the actions in process here could affect the balance of religious power across the Roman Empire, and as a result, the world, for centuries to come.

The new developments being felt all across the city were sparked by Emperor Theodosius’s recent edict forbidding

the visiting of pagan temples. At first the law, which was publicly proclaimed in the Agora and Alexandrian Forum, was scoffed at, ignored with dismissive disbelief by most of the people of Alexandria.

It was a city famous for its many temples and its religious tolerance for all faiths. By its very roots from the foundations set by Alexander the Great, this city was conceived to welcome all religious and philosophical beliefs stemming from ancient Egypt, Greece, Rome, Palestine, as well as Babylon and Persia, along with exotic and mysterious India and even distant China. Syncretic forms of religious worship had evolved here from the time of the reign of the first ruler Ptolemy I Soter.

This merging of local Egyptian beliefs with Hellenistic ones resulted in a powerful and influential platform of worship that appealed to a broad base of citizens generations ago in this wealthy multicultural Mediterranean hub port city which supplied the majority of grain for the Roman Empire. Through the centuries under the successive reigns of the Ptolemaic dynasty, originating from Alexander's Macedonia, this merging of powerful religious views and cultures, massive wealth and political influence, brought about an explosion of revolutionary academic, scientific and artistic thought. Scholars, scientists, thinkers and poets from around the known world migrated here as Alexandria evolved into the center of the world for academic inquiry, the result of which was the Museum which hosted the legendary Great Library of Alexandria.

Over the course of centuries, the Museum—dedicated to the Nine Muses—and the Library, overshadowed all other centers of learning in the world. Important scientific

discoveries were commonplace here. Research in history, mathematics, astronomy, geography and medicine were the hallmarks of the most accomplished elite in academia. Literature was highlighted by the resident epic poets and great playwrights—and all the masterworks of the ancient masters were here for all to study. Theatrical performances depicting the foibles and follies of the gods with their sometimes tragic, and their other times comic effect on the common man, were part of the fabric and heartbeat of the city.

Intellectual freedom and inquiry were Alexandria’s lifeblood. It seemed impossible for Alexandrians at first to consider that the comparatively new religion of Christianity could overshadow and overpower a way of life which was centuries older than Christ himself. Alexandrian tradition simply could not allow that. But the reliable endurance of that old, established and traditional view, the people of Alexandria were coming to learn, was now a seriously mistaken one.

Until recent years the most prominent and influential religion here was dedicated to Serapis, protector of Alexandria. The Serapeum was the main temple for Serapis worship and was perched atop the commanding promontory overlooking the Rhakotis, the old town of Alexandria, south of the coast and almost a mile inland. The temple was also called the Pantheon by many in the city because of its being a place of prayer and devotion for so many of the different gods worshipped by the wide range of cultures residing in the city. The Serapeum was a central element of the city’s soul. The Christian cult had of course also been offered their own small temple within the

Serapeum's immense compound. Bishop Theophilus imperiously refused, however, insisting their house of worship could be shared with no other god.

In recent years, with a steady succession of Christian Roman emperors in Constantinople, Alexandria's Nicene Christian patriarch, Bishop Theophilus, had been waiting for the opportunity to strengthen and solidify his influence and power; and he now had the Roman army on his side to enforce his personal will. Theophilus had demonstrated that enforcement of the emperor's edict must be taken seriously, and any doubts would be erased by actions which culminated in the looming crisis at the Serapeum.

The trouble all began, however, at an old temple to Dionysus which had fallen into disuse over the years, and a preliminary target for Bishop Theophilus's grand plan at reshaping the religious landscape of the city and ultimately the Roman Empire. With the emperor's permission, the bishop had taken possession of the temple to rebuild it into a Christian church.

During the course of renovation, hidden entryways to subterranean chambers were found. Discovered in the caves were pagan religious objects used in the worship of Mithras, a popular Roman religious cult with roots said to originate from ancient Persia. The bishop's men dragged idols meant for hidden sacred rituals through the streets and finally to the Forum. There Theophilus personally poured a rain of derision, self-righteous contempt, and damning claims of sedition at the very existence of these 'craven pagan idols', warning they were the work of the Evil One, the Devil.

Included in this display at the Forum were the ancient phalli of Priapus also discovered in the pagan caverns. These

ancient icons of fertility worship common to numerous cultures were then targeted with aggressive insulting scorn which then degraded into a mockery against all the original and venerable religions of the city.

Outraged Alexandrians of the old traditional beliefs rioted in protest. Property of Christians was defaced and destroyed. As Roman legionaries came to brutally support the bishop’s cause, the pagans retreated to the one defensible and sacred symbol of the old religions in Alexandria: the Serapeum.

Here, at this pagan hive on the promontory overlooking the city—the bishop told his faithful masses—was the epitome of craven and satanic worship—which must end forever—in the name of Christ and in the name of the One Almighty God. As devout polytheistic believers took Christians hostage to revenge the desecration of their most holy of objects of veneration, a philosopher named Olympius from the Museum joined their cause. Olympius spoke the clear articulate words they needed to hear to give them heart and comfort, which were essential to reinforce their motivation to protect the religion of their forefathers, and commitment to take a stand. Olympius rallied the pagans and fortified their devotion and resolve. Meanwhile, the bishop summoned more Roman troops from imperial garrisons nearby. Both sides were proud, righteous and unyielding. In the wake of these actions, an uneasy quiet before the storm was felt across the city.

As Roman legionaries arrived and deployed surrounding the Serapeum acropolis, Theophilus stirred the emotions of the Alexandrian Christian cult with fiery speeches of the certainty of damnation for all Christians as long as the

pagans at the Serapeum were allowed to remain in place unchallenged. Any tolerance of worship other than to that of the One True God, the god of the Christ, was the work of the Author of Errors, the Evil One. Anyone worshipping these figures—or supporting those who did—or who was unwilling to convert, was the unholy enemy.

The bishop called for all the brethren of the numerous desert monasteries as far as the Upper Nile to join the sacred cause. As the critical mass of support to Theophilus's cause grew in Alexandria, the Christian crowds of the city became more restless, waiting for something to happen, waiting for a signal. The rest of the population, Jews, Coptic Egyptians and Hellenistic Greeks, and a sampling of people from other Mediterranean cultures, hoped to weather whatever storm might be inflicted on their beloved city.

From the news Marcus received this morning, and having weighed his limited alternatives, he felt the grain ship *Argo* and the sea route might be his only avenue of escape. He had been informed by the man who was more his friend than his faithful Arabic servant—Abd al-Uman—that all the city gates were being watched; all land routes out of Alexandria were being patrolled by the bishop's men.

The Roman centurions of Alexandria were fundamentally taking their orders from the Pope of Alexandria, the title of which the bishop had adopted upon taking his mantle of office. Abd al-Uman explained the bishop's Roman soldiers, as well as his militant and unpredictable *Parabolani* monks, were searching specifically for a man with Marcus's two distinct markings. As much as Marcus preferred a land route, possibly taking a circuitous route to his ultimate destination—visiting his old homeland



to the east once again before heading to the opposite side of the Egyptian Sea, to the seas further north and west—he knew he could not take the chance. Too much was at stake. His way would almost certainly be by sea, as directly as possible to those who were waiting for him in Narbonensis: to deliver the gift, to bring the answer to their prayers they had all been waiting for these many years.

Abd al-Uman explained that in the preceding days the Christian crowds of Alexandria had been worked up into a fever of agitation by verbal encouragement from the bishop’s men, the militant monks known as the *Parabolani*—‘the reckless ones.’ The monks’ name was derived from their original mission, to act as faithful attendants to the sick, which began in the times when Alexandria was cursed by the bubonic plague in 252 A.D. Their fortitude and commitment was legendary; their mandate over the years changed, however, especially with Theophilus’s direction and guidance.

With no official vows or membership to a formal order, they became the bishop’s personal bodyguard numbering well over 500 in the city. Some citizens called them hired thugs. One monk in particular—a Brother Hieronymus—seemed to have the skillful panegyric art of holy veneration woven with base righteous admonition and rebuke and also blended with messages of primal fear and imminent threat. His oratory skill could incite individuals and crowds into emotional and cathartic venting with disturbing, iconoclastic and too often violent results. For Brother Hieronymus, truth was beside the point. The first acts of vandalism against small pagan temples and symbolic defacing of statuary around the city had already taken place. Marcus saw

the anti-pagan graffiti, and Christian crosses painted on numerous walls during his last two days in the city. While comparatively minor, as far as damage was concerned, he knew the bishop was working at picking up momentum, striving to reach critical mass, as more and more people from the outlying areas had been caravanned into the city, agitating, with the bishop's encouragement for something big.

Sadly, Marcus had witnessed this kind of highly emotional blind mass hatred before, and knew how quickly it could go out of control. All it took was a flash point, ignited at the right time. He felt a rare wave of nausea as he repositioned the canvas sack with his meager belongings over his shoulder and headed on his way with an accelerated sense of urgency.

As he left the Broucheion, entering the Delta Quarter, also known as the Judaeorum—the Jewish section of Alexandria, the location of the largest Jewish population in the world—he pulled his hood over his head, shading his features from casual view, and moved on past the less crowded streets, as the darkening gloom of evening set in. Off in the distance, about a mile away to the southwest, on the elevation overlooking the city, Marcus could make out clusters of handheld torches surrounding the Serapeum. Distant voices of chanting crowds carried on the wind, their words indistinguishable; their emotion, however, was clear, passionate and demanding.

Passing one of Alexandria's many fountain houses, Marcus turned off the main colonnaded intersection and continued down to a secondary, comparatively deserted, cross street. As he did, he noticed a group of fifty or so

monks, in loose brown drab robes, dusty from desert travel, making their way deeper into the city. Having apparently arrived through the nearby Canopian Gate, the eastern entrance to the city, they seemed energized and agitated. Marcus observed one stop in front of the fountain house, where a terra cotta water amphora lay broken in a puddle of water and mud. The monk picked up a handful of the mud from the dirt gutter and threw it rudely at a small marble statue of the Naiads—three coy-looking water nymphs—overlooking and protecting the stone waterworks of the fountain.

“Pagan idols!” he bellowed as he urinated on the base of the statue.

His brethren laughed in rude support, as they too picked up mud and threw it, and spit on the statue. Their leader, a fierce-looking monk, with a shaved head, beckoned the group on. As they resumed their march, the light hit the top of his head revealing a jagged maroon scar from the front side of his forehead, over the top of skull and ending near where his thick muscular neck met the stubble hairline of his hairy back. Some brethren said in private that the scar closely mapped the course of the Nile River. The swarm of monks moved off back toward the Broucheion, now loudly singing a chanting prayer in Coptic Greek with an unsettling, almost threatening intensity. Seeing this disturbing spectacle from the nearby sidewalk, two citizens of the district quaked in fear at this robust exhibition of empowered and hateful strength.

Having watched from the shadows, Marcus put more distance between him and the monks as he quickened his pace to a destination a block further. There he finally turned

to enter a two story windowless shop whose doorway was shaded by a brown canvas awning. Above the canopy, the wall facing the street displayed large colorful painted symbols of glassware and jewels; the accompanying words read: *Lips of Isis & Eyes of Jupiter, Heart of Heaven*—a pancultural reference meant to please as many gods as possible. Glancing up the deserted street, Marcus entered the establishment.

Inside Marcus glanced at colorful glassware of different descriptions for all occasions and styled with expert and delicate craftsmanship: large blue decanters, sets of emerald-green wine glasses, large elegant red glass plates, as well as large bowls, jugs, small vials for holding perfume, larger cylindrical bottle containers for precious oils and countless vessels of sundry styles and functions. Off to one side, an alcove was dedicated to jewelry. Refined cosmopolitan tastes were catered to here: Roman, Greek, Egyptian and Persian styles were in evidence. Gold and emeralds were in ample supply, rubies too, as well as other precious and semiprecious gems. Gold, silver and bronze pieces were crafted into necklaces, rings, bracelets, anklets of all descriptions. To another side a fine collection of powder-blue cameo jewelry, as well as delicate cameo containers, were displayed.

Preoccupied with his business, Marcus hardly noticed the elegant and highly esteemed inventory. Dressed in fine embroidered robes, the middle-aged bearded proprietor recognized him, nodded respectfully, and gestured toward the back door of the shop. Marcus walked through the portal, through two curtains of multicolor glass corded beads which brought him out to an elegant and sublime

courtyard.

Supported by two story red granite polished Corinthian columns with white marble capitals, the expansive courtyard was partitioned into two distinct sections and surrounded by two stories of covered walkways which led into various rooms overlooking the cloistered space. The smaller, front area with a fountain and lush gardening, including date palms, had two workshops on either side open onto it. To the right Marcus nodded in recognition to two jewelers at workbenches crafting their intricate and stunning creations by lamplight. One was working on a delicate diadem, the other crafting golden facets to a cluster of mounted emeralds which would ultimately hang on a lovely necklace. To the left was a glass working studio where two apprentices assisted a master artisan who was blowing glowing glass—attached to the end of a long bronze tube—and forming it into a wine bottle.

Marcus passed through the front courtyard, to a thick wooden double door, opened it, and entered the inner, larger courtyard. Here a small idyllic Eden exuded the heady scent of night blooming jasmine which filled the air. Even more lush greenery shaded two fountains; elegant marble statues graced each corner of the courtyard. And in the middle, a large polished stone table stood on a colorful mosaic-floored patio which hosted three generations of family.

The table brimmed with a bounty of a festive evening meal, with all manner of delicious fresh cuisine from the sea, lamb, chicken and roasted vegetables. Many sat around the table talking animatedly, mid-meal; as more of the children played hide and seek in the garden, others splashed in one

of the fountains. Jacob Silvenus, the eldest of the clan and sitting at the head of the table, saw Marcus approach. His face brightened into a broad smile as he stood and welcomed Marcus with open arms.

“Marcus, always my honored guest! Come break bread with us!”

Marcus crossed, and after exchanging a warm embrace with his host, sat at the table. A silver plate of fresh roasted lamb was placed in front of him and a tall green glass of red wine was filled for him. Marcus lifted it and spoke.

“May all God’s blessings be with you and your family, Jacob.” Marcus’s smile embraced all adults of the Silvenus clan, his eyes, however, rested on one in particular, Jacob’s daughter Rachel. A woman of striking beauty with luminous brown eyes, her wavy raven hair was held by a band of braided sapphire blue silk that allowed a few enchanting curls to hang across her forehead. As she casually brushed her locks aside with unintentional sensuality, she met his gaze exuding a radiant sense of intelligent charisma. She returned his look with potent meaning and a sense of expectation. Jacob observed this exchange with a knowing, but sad and troubled smile.

Historical Thriller

# SUB ROSA

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**Alexandria, Egypt, 391 A.D.** The story takes place the day the Great Library burned. As Bishop Theophilus of Alexandria implements the last draconian measures to seize complete control over the restive city, with the Roman Emperor's support, one critical detail remains unresolved. Despite systematic attempts to arrest him, one mysterious stranger remains at large. The man who is a master within an esoteric secret society—the Tekton Brotherhood—also inspires undying loyalty from adherents of a Christian sect targeted for suppression by the bishop. Known by many names, those closest to the fugitive address him as Marcus Seanus. With a spiritual influence rivaling the ruthless and vindictive bishop, Seanus also possesses an ancient secret worth countless lives, while his fate and that of the Great Library of Alexandria are inexorably tied.

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