



SPQR VIII: The River God's Vengeance

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He would rise up as savior of the State, but Decius Caecilius Metellus the Younger already has a lot on his mind. In the year of his aedileship, Decius is expected to stage elaborate and expensive games out of his own pocket. Along with his duties of pleasing the crowds with the feats of gladiators and wild beasts, are the more practical, and commonly neglected, ones of maintaining the city and its laws. It is these more mundane duties that call him to the scene of a recently built and more recently collapsed tenement building. Determined to punish the greedy parties who used cheap materials and caused the deaths of hundreds, Decius sets out to exact justice. It is easier said than done, especially when bodies and evidence go missing, and his family pressures him to cease the investigation. As he seeks out the politicians, philosophers, and tradesmen of the day, it becomes clear that the collapse of the building was deliberate, and Decius could be going after some of the most powerful men in Rome.

In this eighth installment of the series, Roberts once again provides authentic detail in the everyday Roman customs, as well as a fascinating picture of the growing unsteadiness of this famed Republic.

SPQR VIII: The River God's Vengeance Details

Date : Published February 1st 2005 by Minotaur Books (first published January 1st 1997)

ISBN : 9780312323202

Author : John Maddox Roberts

Format : Paperback 304 pages

Genre : Mystery, Historical, Historical Fiction, Fiction, Crime

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Joyce Lagow says

Now aedile, an elected office which basically oversees the maintenance and repair of Rome's streets, sewers, and public buildings as well as the supervision of brothels, Decius Caecilius Metellus is frantically busy as well as frantically worried. As aedile, if he is to have a prayer of winning the important election to praetor, he must put on during his year in office lavish games and celebrations, guaranteed to beggar him financially. Many candidates obtain financial help from wealthy benefactors but at the price of becoming those benefactors' dependents; Decius refuses to do this, thus throwing himself on the (mostly absent) tender mercies of his relatives. Brooding over this problem, in addition to his other duties, he is overseeing the details for his games, which will take place in the Amelia theater, a recently built structure within Rome's boundaries.

But all problems are forced out of his mind when a five-story insula--a housing structure --comes crashing down, killing hundreds of residents as well as the owners. Clear evidence of shoddy construction sends Decius into a righteous wrath, and he vows to hunt down and prosecute those who are responsible for what he views as mass murder. But since this is our boy Decius, the investigation becomes more complicated.

On top of all these headaches, rivermen are predicting that Father Tiber is going to flood again and worse than usual; a warm wind from Africa is melting the much larger than usual snow pack in the mountains, and the tiber is sure to overflow at record heights. To add to the problem, the city's sewers have not been cleaned in ages, blocking many, threatening to keep the contaminated waters flooding the city until dried out by the sun, ensuring the occurrence of pestilence with accompanying death of thousands within the crowded city. And of course, his investigation is rubbing powerful people the wrong way, and Decius has to fight for his life.

Disappointing. For one thing, the book could have used better editing--there's too much repetition and too many unnecessary passages. There isn't enough of real interest to sustain the usual thin plot; construction fraud doesn't have quite the same cachet as religious festivals, intriguing culture, and foreign wars. It's actually Decius himself, along with his loyal slave Hermes who provide the real interest in the story, since by this 8th book, we have a lot invested in his character and his prospects. We already know that he will live until the reign of Augustus Caesar, but *how* he gets there is of lively interest.

Good but not up to par.

Norma says

It's easier to hide an elephant under a bed than a conspiracy in Rome""

Another delicious Roman romp as our hero, Decius, seeks to uncover shortcircuiting in the building industry as the water level rises and threatens to seriously flood the city.

Written with panache and humour, full of fascinating detail and robustly read by John Lee, this is a book to thoroughly enjoy

Flemming says

John Maddox can do no wrong in my book, so to speak - His SPQR pulp novels are really something apart, and I still devour them as fast as I possibly can whenever I get my hands on one.

His ability to use major Roman events as backdrops for his story on one of the many Mettellius' is awesome, and a great way to both be entertained, but also learn something about the events we know happened in the last days of Roman Republic.

Denise says

The author does a very good job setting the stage for each of these books. Details about the city, names of the roads, types of buildings (temple, apartment block, gladiator training school, etc) are given so the reader feels a part of the story. The occasional humorous comment ("sheerness" of a woman's dress or the "perfection" of her breasts) leaves no doubts in readers' minds that the author is a male! And the never-ending family "political" discussions and machinations remind me of my own family (do things ever really change?).

A very good series. Puts me in mind of the "Marcus Didio Falco" series written by Lindsey Davis. As with that series, be sure you read the SPQR series IN ORDER or you will loose the "flow" of the stories.

Stacey says

This is one of my favorites of the series. Decius in his prime as a Senator and as an investigator. He's an aedile in this book, an expensive & exhausting position for a man to hold in the Roman republic. First he learns just how clogged the sewers are right before the river starts to flood. Then an apartment building collapses killing a couple hundred, including some very unpleasant rich people. So he is dealing with lots of corruption by previous aediles & censors in issuing contracts to clean the sewers and covering up inadequacies in the building trade, then he gets the news that those unpleasant rich people were murdered. All this while planning to throw his (required by the office) funeral games for the entertainment of the masses. Decius is left hunting the murderer, through layers of cover ups and rising water levels in the forum while praying the theater where he is to stage a play stays standing. This is a strong plot with strong characters, well written & fun.

Jane says

Quick, light, fluffy mystery set in late Republican Rome. The protagonist, the Aedile Decius is an appealing character. Aediles were low-level civil servants in charge of public works, games, and brothels. In this mystery, a newly built 'insula' [tenement apartment building] has collapsed and the tenants have been killed, including the owners, a charmless, brutal couple. Decius sets out, with his trusty slave, Hermes, to investigate the crime and also possible building code violations. At the same time, the Tiber is flooding its banks and the sewers are backing up. It's a race against time to solve the mystery. The style was quite casual,

with simple, easy-to-remember explanations of different elements of Roman life. Every once in awhile, there was a flash of sardonic humor. One thing that didn't ring quite true was that Decius treated his slave, Hermes, as an equal. Delightful.

Georgina Ortiz says

Not as enthusiastic with SPQR VIII as I was with the previous installments in this series (e.g. *Nobody Loves a Centurion*). Maybe because I did not care too much for the topic/theme explored (Roman politics is too much like Philippine politics—nothing new about the extent of Roman corruption for me). However, I still liked it, and there were still a lot of shining moments for Decius. Plus, I wouldn't recommend skipping even one book in this series.

Again, the Kindle version of this book leaves MUCH to be desired. Too many typos, and most of them were "repeats" (e.g. flood, which was repeatedly mentioned in this book, spelled ?ood; floor was ?oor). Improvements, please.

Michael says

Entertaining detective story in Ancient Rome with some hearty laughs among the way.

Dorothy says

This eighth in the Decius Metellus series features the attention to detail of everyday life in ancient Rome that we have come to expect. Again in order to seek justice, Decius finds himself pitted against very powerful citizens of the state and it is not clear until the end whether justice will in fact prevail. The character of Decius is a very well written and very appealing one. We want to see him triumph over all his obstacles. Fortunately, he usually does.

Maj says

Very good, as usual. I adore this series, combining my love for the Ancient Rome in the 1st century BC with my love of detective stories. Additionally, I definitely enjoyed the character development featured in this book, especially when it comes to Decius, feels very organic. Well done.

Christopher Taylor says

A satisfying volume of the SPQR series. The characters continue to grow and solidify and by this book the main character of Decius is more mature and solid a figure. The slow development of Roman history in the series is satisfying, particularly for someone familiar with the broad events of the tumultuous time period.

Roberts deftly handles the complex politics of Rome and as much of its culture as we understand and can be conveyed in fiction. The matter-of-fact attitude toward religion and supernatural is well done, as is the limited understanding of science and technology (more advanced than many modern people would think).

Overall the mystery is not the best in the series, but the narration and characters carry the story well and the conclusion in the flood is very satisfying.

Argum says

Decius is serving as aedile, the super expensive position in charge of it seems basically running Rome through public contracts and the like. First, he discovers the sewers are clogged then comes a flood bringing that to a seriously gross and damaging conclusion. An apartment building has collapsed killing a lot of people but someone is covering the tracks of flouting building regulations. He must challenge some powerful people and Father Tiber to solve and survive this case.

Bonnie says

I really enjoy this series. It certainly isn't in the same class as Colleen McCullough's series on the fall of the Roman Republic, but then it doesn't have the same objective. This series is lighthearted fun. Mr. Roberts does know his subject (the Roman Republic) although I don't think he has done extensive research on some of the characters. That's OK. For one thing, we see them through the eyes of Decius Metellus, the hero of the story.

Linda Humberstone says

Another good read featuring Decius Metellus and his investigations involving the underhand bribery and corruption in both the Roman building trade and the Senate. I love the people, their characters and personalities described in these books and the shenanigans they get up to. It is all so relevant to our own times; nothing changes much!

Catherine says

Part of me wonders why I keep returning to this series. It IS full of interesting details of Roman life during this time period, and reflects some of the complexity of Roman politics and relations in the empire. The protagonist is maturing as the series progresses and it is difficult not to like his character. The characters are strongly drawn, and there are usually an interesting twist or two as the story progresses. So I've answered my own question on why I keep returning to this series. It is a quick read for a lazy afternoon or evening, with a core cast of characters and relationships that develop with the series.

Adult material isn't graphic, but it is evocative of a very different time. This particular novel focuses on the murder of a very corrupt couple who happens to also be sadists.

