

Paul halted Adrastos hard, almost slipping up on the corbelled road, old broken columns on either side marking the original entrance into the old Roman town. Three large fires burned ahead of him sending thick smoke skyward. Small half collapsed walls hid from view most of what was burning. Rapidly he looked around for any signs of life or movement but there was none other than several crows and large vultures circling high above him. The smell of burnt flesh entered his nostrils as a light wind blew across him and Adrastos, who snorted and backed up slightly. Paul steadied him, sweat pouring from both of them. He quickly glanced back as Percival appeared approaching fast behind. Paul dismounted and rushed over to a raised set of fallen stones and jumped up. He drew his sword as he looked forward to see many bodies of men, women and children lying dead in various grotesque positions, flies beginning to swarm. Many caravans were burnt out already with blackened bodies stuck within them, one looking directly at Paul, its face burnt away around its mouth set in a fixed grin of death. There were far too many people and caravans here to be Alisha's caravan, he thought with a sudden sense of relief despite the carnage before him. Then his heart missed a beat as he wondered if Queen Tamar had come further south than she should have. Percival ran up beside Paul and drew his sword covering his nose from the stench by pulling up his sand protector up over his mouth and nose.

"You take that side and I shall take the left," Paul said and started to slowly walk forward into the main area of burning caravans and bodies.

Percival walked toward several poles that appeared to have severed heads upon them. Paul picked his way through the dead, mainly pilgrims by the look of them. Most had been shot with high velocity crossbow bolts. A woman sat propped up against the remnants of a stone wall, having sought cover behind it. Her eyes were fixed open staring upwards, her mouth wide open left in the position of her last scream. She held a baby across her chest but it was pinned to her, just the ends of the crossbow bolt still visible, sticking out of the baby's back, the rest having pierced through to the mother. Other bodies had their throats cut wide. As he stepped forward past a burnt out caravan, the floor littered with empty luggage chests and boxes, a few silks blowing in the breeze, the smoke made him cough. Several black clad men lay dead amongst several dead Templars.

Paul's stomach churned with anguish and he was nearly sick as he moved closer to see them. They had all been beheaded and he could not tell if they were the Templars who had been escorting Alisha or not. Frantically he looked around to see if he could see any signs of Thomas and his men but they were not amongst the dead near to him. A large caravan was a short distance off completely destroyed by fire, its two horses lying dead in front of it, partially burnt. He looked over to Percival, who was just staring up at the severed heads on the poles. The men had clearly given a good account of themselves for Paul had to step over many more black clad men. He knew they were not Al Rashid's men, which left only one other person responsible. Turansha...and he must have left in hurry as they always took their dead with them. Slowly Paul walked towards Percival looking at all the dead. It had been a large caravan of mainly Christian pilgrims. A sugar cart billowed black smoke as the sugar burned away in thick goutts of orange flame. Nicholas and Upside pulled up beside Adrastos and both dismounted as Abi pulled up behind them. Paul looked at them briefly then back towards Percival, who, he could see through the swirling smoke, was now leaning forwards being sick. Paul's heart exploded seeing him like that. Quickly he ran toward him, Nicholas seeing him move started to run toward Percival too.