

# **SEVERUS**

## **THE BLACK CAESAR**

The first black man to set foot on British soil came not as a slave, but as Emperor.

Behind this little known fact there is the incredible tale of someone who grew from rebellious youth to the most powerful man in the ancient world.

Septimius Severus, *the Black Caesar*, came from humble beginnings in occupied North Africa, born in the Mediterranean city of Lepcis Magna. He would end his days in Northern Scotland, having expanded the Roman Empire further than any of his illustrious predecessors, from Julius Caesar to Marcus Aurelius.

As a boy, Severus hated the Romans. He was involved with local freedom fighters, taking part in daring raids and sabotage against the Empire. But frustrated by this small-time rebellion and its petty violence, the keen-witted Severus embarked on a journey to Rome, taking him to the heart of the power that he despised.

Once there however, the picture changes. Little by little, his exposure to Rome begins to change him and soon he finds himself in an ironic position: sent as a soldier from Rome to fight his fellow Africans, as they cross the Mediterranean and into Spain. His accidental military career gains him a reputation, and powerful friends.

When the much-loved Emperor Marcus Aurelius dies and his depraved son Commodus becomes the new ruler, Rome becomes an increasingly dangerous place. After Commodus is assassinated, the veteran Roman general Pertinax is hailed as Emperor. However, Pertinax manages to hold on to his throne and his head for a mere sixty-eight days, and his murder plunges Rome into bloody civil war.

Severus now commands one of the largest Roman legions in the Empire, and finds himself drawn into a conflict from which he will emerge, ultimately, as Emperor.

The peace that Severus's victory brings is short-lived. Rome's dominions never stay subdued for long. Treachery both from his advisers, and from within his own family, keep the new Emperor watching his back. His unfaithful wife Julia is plotting his death, and his son is emerging as a vicious and disturbed young Emperor-in-waiting.

**7-part historical drama shot for television on location, set around the Mediterranean, France, Britain and Northern Europe and North Africa.**

**The first episode is feature-length at 90 minutes.  
The subsequent episodes run for 50 minutes each.**

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### **EPISODE 1**

The Roman Legate is coming to Lepcis Magna on an official visit, collecting taxes and tributes to take back to the Emperor, Marcus Aurelius. The North African city's officials are busy preparing entertainments and lavish banquets to welcome him, in the hope of winning favour with Rome, and escaping a heavy tax.

The father of fifteen-year-old Septimius Severus is one of the local officials involved in the welcoming party. His son is disgusted by his father's collaboration with the occupying forces. Severus is involved with a gang of teenage rebels led by the charismatic Anno bel Adish, who are intent on disrupting the visit, and sending the Roman delegation home empty-handed.

Severus argues with Anno over the plan of action: Severus favours demonstration and disruptions – Anno errs towards violence. Unbeknownst to all but their leader Anno, the teenagers are being used by the more sinister adult gang, members of the Garamantes tribe. The Garamantes are a nomadic North African tribe, who have been waging a bloody guerrilla war against the Roman colonies. They are planning to assassinate the Legate, slaughter all the Romans and Roman collaborators and claim Lepcis Magna for themselves.

The Septimius family is heavily involved in the life of the Romanised city, and all are expected to play a part. Severus kicks against this, feeling more African than Roman. He idolises the great African leader Hannibal (who had famously defeated many Roman legions) sharing his love of elephants and horses, and spends his free time working at the local coliseum and hippodrome, looking after the animals.

Severus's older brother Septimius Geta is the family favourite, being groomed for a scholarship to Rome. He will take part in the forthcoming pageant in the Legate's honour at the city hippodrome. Geta has been betrothed to Paccia, the beautiful daughter of a local olive farmer. He is awkward around her, and their courtship is stilted. Paccia is wary of Geta – she does not feel affectionately towards him. Geta can be a cold, arrogant young man, spoiled by his parents. They expect Severus to train his older brother in the art of horsemanship.

During the training, Paccia observes the more instinctive, athletic Severus and admires his prowess with the animals. They quickly fall in love, hiding their affections from their families.

Anno and his Garamantes contacts are also keen to take advantage of Severus's ability with - and access to - the circus animals. They hatch a plan to use the elephants to march on the city at night and destroy the Governor's palace, where a feast in honour of the Legate is to be held.

The palace at Lepcis Magna is built on a rocky outcrop at the end of a timber pier, heavily guarded by Roman soldiers. The elephants will be roped and harnessed and used to pull the timber supports, bringing the pier down into the sea. Severus knows that his family are attending the feast at the palace, but is coerced into the plan on the understanding that no Lepcis Magnans will be hurt – only Romans.

As the plan is executed under cover of night, it becomes apparent that a full scale and indiscriminate slaughter is taking place, and panic ensues. The well-hidden Garamantes have overwhelmed the palace guards, and as the pier has been destroyed, no reinforcements can arrive. At this, Severus rushes to save his family, fighting against the rebellion. After fierce combat, the Romans suppress the attack, Severus rescues his family and the Legate notices the teenager's valour – mistaking his motives to be pro-Roman.

As Anno and the fellow conspirators are summarily executed, Severus is held aloft as a hero by the Imperial delegation. The Legate announces that Septimius Severus is to be awarded a full scholarship to Rome. Severus, fearful for his life, does not speak out – swallowing his feeling of defeat and humiliation.

His mother and father's newfound pride in Severus does not last long, however. At a family celebration for the two sons, the festivities come to an abrupt halt when Severus and Paccia are discovered in bed together. His mother and brother stand agape at the sight.

### **END OF EPISODE 1**