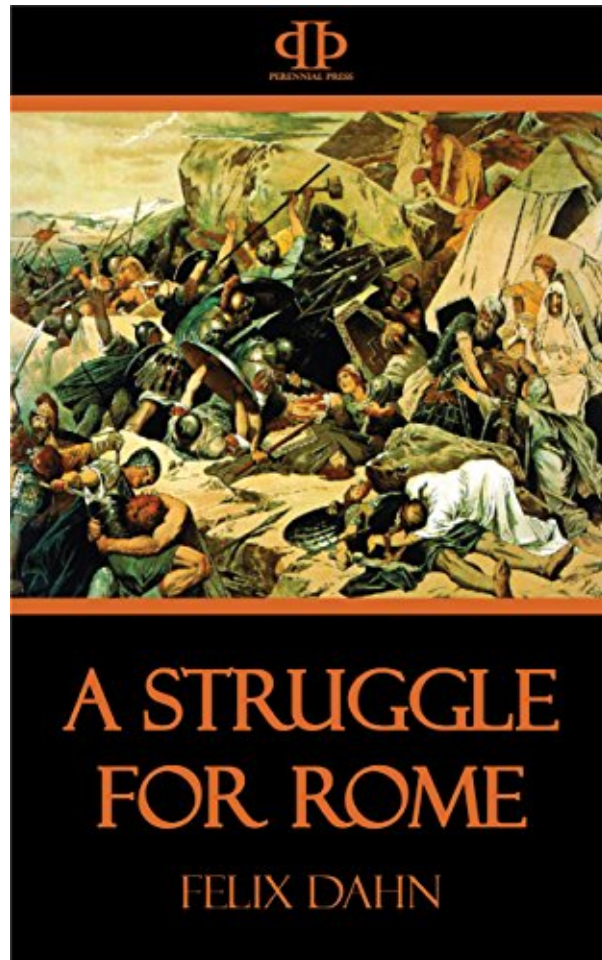


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It was a sultry summer night of the year five hundred and twenty-six, A.D.

Thick clouds lay low over the dark surface of the Adrea, whose shores and waters were melted together in undistinguishable gloom; only now and then a flash of distant lightning lit up the silent city of Ravenna. At unequal intervals the wind swept through the ilexes and pines on the range of hills which rise at some distance to the west of the town, and which were once crowned by a temple of Neptune. At that time already half ruined, it has now almost completely disappeared, leaving only the most scanty traces.

It was quiet on the bosky heights; only sometimes a piece of rock, loosened by storms, clattered down the stony declivity, and at last splashed into the marshy waters of the canals and ditches which belted the entire circle of the sea-fortress; or a weather-beaten slab slipped from the tabled roof of the old temple and fell breaking on to the marble steps—forebodings of the threatened fall of the whole building.

But these dismal sounds seemed to be unnoticed by a man who sat immovable on the second step of the flight which led into the temple, leaning his back against the topmost step and looking silently and fixedly across the declivity in the direction of the city below.

He sat thus motionless, but waiting eagerly, for a long time. He heeded not that the wind drove the heavy drops which began to fall into his face, and rudely worried the full long beard that flowed down to his iron belt, almost entirely covering his broad breast with shining white hair.

At last he rose and descended several of the marble steps: "They come," said he.

The light of a torch which rapidly advanced from the city towards the temple became visible; then quick and heavy footsteps were heard, and shortly after three men ascended the flight of steps.

"Hail, Master Hildebrand, son of Hilding!" cried the advancing torch-bearer, as soon as he reached the row of columns of the Pronaos or antehall, in which time had made some gaps. He spoke in the Gothic tongue, and had a peculiarly melodious voice. He carried his torch in a sort of lantern—beautiful Corinthian bronze-work on the handle, transparent ivory forming the four-sided screen and the arched and ornamentally-perforated lid—and lifting it high, put it into the iron ring that held together the shattered centre column...

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Most helpful customer reviews

5 of 5 people found the following review helpful.

Highly recommended!

By George Pratts

This book was one of my more memorable reading experiences. The story takes place in Italy during 6th century AD, and spans just a few vital decades in the violent and lesser known history of Italy at that time. It describes the power struggle between the Goths wanting to preserve their past glory and retain their rule in the Italy they already occupy, the Byzantines who want to take over Italy, and the Romans who want an Italy free of both.

This is an extremely well written book, and the translator has done an admirable job in rendering the English

version. As the translator indicates, it is not a history book, but a historical novel. It is based on fact, with the author having taken liberties based on his own convictions and prejudices. The book succeeds in creating lasting impressions of the Goths, the Romans and the Byzantines of the time, which are difficult to dispel.

The initial chapters are a bit hard going, mainly attributed to the unfamiliar names. But the plot picks up rapidly, and becomes gripping to the point of not wanting to put the book down. A high level of excitement is maintained throughout, and it reduces in a seemingly appropriate manner on the approach to the inevitable finale.

A very large number of key characters continuously weave their way through the story, and the book delves deeply into the minds of these key players, creating the impression that the reader is actually there and part of the goings on. There is a constant turning of events, which is extremely surprising. Hardly anything turns out as planned. A large number of acts of war took place in those years accompanied by extreme barbarity on all sides. Brutality is part of the historical reality, and it is portrayed with quite active descriptions, but thankfully without undue emphasis on the gore. The number of casualties was huge, with many of the victims were innocent civilians.

The central figure of Cethegus could have served as a blue print for Machiavelli's *The Prince*, displaying all the traits advised in the latter. I couldn't help but fantasize that Machiavelli must have had Cethegus as a mentor! At every turn of *The Struggle* my mind kept going back to *The Prince*. In order to achieve his goals, this man constantly resorts to a high level of underhanded and devious behaviour that never ceases to amaze the reader. At the same time, one warms to the character, while constantly wondering whether such repugnant thinking is really possible of a human being. Thankfully, the character is a creation of the author, but evidence abounds through the centuries that the world has such people

I recommend this book to lovers of historical novels.

2 of 2 people found the following review helpful.

Once Upon A Time In Rome...

By Robert Kvinnesland

It's high time that this forgotten classic of German Literature was again translated and made available to the English speaking world. (In 1878 an English version was published, now long out of print and virtually impossible to find.) It's not only one of the finest examples of the historical novel genre, it's simply a downright gripping tale, a sweeping epic chock-full of memorable heroes and villains and compelling events, most of whom and which are based upon the actual history that has come down to us from that era. Hat's off to Herb Parker for resurrecting this tour de force, a book which should be in every public library and personal collection of those of Germanic heritage.

2 of 2 people found the following review helpful.

Greek tragic meets Sword&Sorcery Bloodshed

By Cornelius Kappabani

A struggle for Rome is about the Goths who lived and ruled in Italy, in particular Theoderich of Ravenna and his heirs and their struggle against Cethegus the roman who desires to rule the nation. It's a story full of betrayal, forbidden love, war and heroes who need not fear to take the lyre.

It's a story about raising your fist against an impending doom, to grin death in the face and keep true to your oaths, about friendship and mortal enemies.

Interestingly this book, written twelve years before Tolkiens birth, is also a good source when studying the *Lord of the Rings*.

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