

Hidden in darkness, a mysterious visitor offers to save a desperate young king from the invaders on his doorstep.

LEGION: AN ARMY OF ONE

By J. R. Schell

**Order the complete book from the publisher
[Booklocker.com](https://www.booklocker.com)**

<https://www.booklocker.com/p/books/10172.html?s=pdf>

**or from your favorite neighborhood
or online bookstore.**



J. R. SCHELL

LEGION:
AN ARMY OF ONE

Copyright © 2018 J. R. Schell

ISBN: 978-1-64438-022-2

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical, recording or otherwise, without the prior written permission of the author.

Published by BookLocker.com, Inc., St. Petersburg, Florida.
Cover Art by cheriefox
2018

The characters and events in this book are fictitious. Any similarity to real persons, living or dead, is coincidental and not intended by the author.

Printed on acid-free paper.

Booklocker.com, Inc.
2018

First Edition

The Intruder

In the stillness of the night, young King Ikthos of Chios pulled the pillow over his head. Just days before, his father had fallen in battle and the youth had suddenly found himself leader of a nation. Since then, there had been little time to grieve. With his father's death, things in his small kingdom had only gone from bad to worse and his choices seemed grimmer by the day.

What is to become of me? Worse, what will become of Talia?

Prime Minister Gustavo had suggested that he distract himself with a concubine and some drink, but he was unable to escape his problems so easily. Now after a few hours of troubled sleep, his anxieties were upon him again. Gustavo had called his anxiousness a fatal flaw that could destroy both his legacy and that of his great grandfather, High King Torreon.

Ikthos wrestled with the criticism in his soul. Certainly, Gustavo was a master of court intrigue and had been a trusted advisor to his father. Frankly he was much more suited for the throne than the young

monarch - in the young monarch's opinion anyway. Still, Ikthos had always been popular with the people - as had his sister Talia. The people loved their royals, and he felt that they deserved a good king.

"That everyone should eat and drink and enjoy the rewards of what their hands had wrought."

His great-grandfather had been just such a king. Early in his reign he had introduced the ways of Adriel the Nurturer, who believed that the realm at its core was the people. On the other hand, Gustavo and the followers of the Avar-Piter believed that the realm was an entitlement from the gods.

In short, Minister Gustavo wanted Ikthos to be the man his father had been. That, however, was the very course of action that had led them to the present predicament. King Ikthyon had perished in battle and taken much of their remaining might with him. While the nation was still reeling from his loss, the Chiosian navy had then been defeated so soundly that it had virtually ceased to exist. Overnight, Chios had found itself between the proverbial anvil and the hammer.

The little realm sat upon the fertile interior of a rounded peninsula, but with their losses in the west, their enemies had a strangle hold upon the economy. To the north, the nation of Garros was busy conscripting peasants and repairing the roads - a prelude to invasion.

To the northeast, the state of Minos had extended its reach across the northern shore. To the south, Saros owned the opposing shore and the balance of the peninsula.

Chios had a good harbor, but to trade beyond the bay, they now had to pay high tariffs to either Saros or Minos, and sometimes both. For now, that was a secondary problem. The immediate issue was how to repel the Garrosian invasion with the tattered remnants of his military.

Additionally, Saros to the south was far from idle. If the truth be known, Chios' forces were capable of defending little more than the capital. To this point, Saros had only annexed some lands and demanded tribute, but their intentions were all too clear. It seemed only a matter of time until his enemies divvied up the spoils.

Minister Gustavo recommended seeking help from Minos, but the idea galled the young sovereign. They would be all too willing to help. To the new king, they were like a dog that had once shared his bed. The animal was content at first with an out of the way corner, but by morning, it was sprawled across the whole thing. And he had woken up with fleas.

Suddenly he was pulled from his musings. Had something moved? It had been a long time since he was

afraid of the dark. At the same time, he had many enemies. He wasn't sure if it was just his imagination, but it had given him goosebumps. He reached out with his spirit and discovered the magical protections were down.

"If we wanted to hurt you, you would never have awakened. Even so, be very careful, boy king. We intend you no harm. We wish only to offer our services." The voice was barely above a whisper but cold

Ikthos' bodyguard was within earshot. He could easily be upon them in an instant.

The voice said 'we'. How many were there?

"What is to prevent me from calling for help?" the young monarch asked very quietly as he rolled onto his back.

That seemed to amuse his visitor. "Though you call, your protector will not come. Listen to me. It is well known that your kingdom hangs by a thread. I have come with a solution."

"What do you know of my kingdom?" Ikthos said, raising his voice somewhat, thinking it might be heard.

"There is little we do not know."

"What could you possibly do that a king could not?"

"For starters, we could keep the riffraff from our bed chambers."

He's got a point.

“Again, I say listen! Being here is its own testimony. You see that we enter wherever we please. Everyone knows that you have enemies on all sides and no defenses to speak of. Do you think the market squares are not filled with news of an invasion? Fear is undermining your reign, boy king. It is going to end before it has properly begun.”

With no sign of his bodyguard, Ikthos stretched his arms over his head, grasping the hilt of the sword hidden in the headboard and felt better for it. Not a warrior by temperament, he was no stranger to the blade. If he had known what stood before him in the darkness, such confidence would have abandoned him.

“Alright let’s hear what you have to say.” Ikthos acceded. Whoever this was, he was supremely confident, a quality the young monarch begrudgingly admired.

“Legions of battle-hardened men are marching upon you from the north, a force you cannot hope to withstand in open battle. At the same time, on your southern border, Saros threatens, and you do not have the strength to resist either one of them. In short, you are desperate, perhaps desperate enough to bargain with a specter in the night. This is my offer. For a price, I will eliminate the threat from the north.”

The king snorted. “Are you a djinn? Or are you

seeking to become my court fool?"

"We are no fools, nor lovers of Minos. We go where we please and remove whatever stands in our way, like your muscle."

"Ritzgard? If you have hurt him, I will have justice!"

"Other than a lump, he will be fine. Consider, boy king. If we fail, you lose nothing."

"And if you succeed, what will you want, half of my kingdom?"

"My price is that you will give me whatever I ask, but I am not so greedy as to want half. Can we agree that the Garrosian invasion is inevitable?"

"For argument's sake, let's say yes," the king hedged.

"You are inexperienced," the dark voice continued, "but you have the makings of a good leader. If you survive. This is our proposal. You owe us nothing now, except a little cooperation. However, if for any reason your kingdom is not invaded by Garros, you will give us whatever we ask. Up to a third of your kingdom."

"I do not even know your name and yet you brazenly ask for a duchy!"

A bargain in comparison to forfeiting the kingdom and sending your people to the slaughter. This is no more than a hero deserves."

"You are no hero."

“No, I am not. Of what use are heroes to you now? Again, I ask, do we have a deal?”

“Why would I trust you?”

“You have nothing to lose and much to gain, while we gamble with our lives. Even if we only manage to slow Garros by a few days, it will do you no harm. The real question is, can I trust you?”

“Yes. Upon my honor, you have my word.”

“That’s not quite sufficient. Stamp this parchment with your signet ring and we will be at your service.”

“I have no ink.”

“You have blood. I can show you my technique or you could just use that blade you think hidden. I warn you, betraying us would be most unwise.”

How the voice in the pitch black knew of the sword, Ikthos never discovered, but he nicked his fingers, spread his blood over his signet ring and pressed it onto the parchment.

“What shall I call you?”

“Anything you like, my liege.”

“You alone will be my army of the north. Therefore, I name you Legion. I charge you to undermine the Garrosian invasion while I shore up our defenses.” He considered for a moment. “Yes, I suppose I must take the risk. There is a tailor on Weaver’s Lane in Garapos that is loyal to me. His name is Riffian and his daughter

is a house servant for the mayor. If he trusts you, he may be of some assistance.”

“Excellent. One last thing...” Legion replied.

“Speak.”

“Tell no one of our contract. You have a traitor in your court.”

“Who?”

“Who do you suppose?”

“Is it Gustavo?” No one answered.

“It is Vistula?” Again, no response. “Dasani? Is anyone still there? Speak up. Okay, I am going to call for my guards unless you speak up... Ritzgard! Come at once!”

“Ritzgard?”

All was stillness.

“I guess that says something,” he muttered. “And they overcame our magical defenses. But how can a few deter so many?”

Rising the king went to the door and pulled it open. In the foyer, the redoubtable dwarf Ritzgard lay on his stomach, gagged with arms and feet tied behind his back. On his face was impotent fury, but at the sight of his master, his anger faded quickly into embarrassment.

No one could have guessed how brazen were the intruder’s lies. There was no team of saboteurs to stop the Garrosian invasion. Legion was an army of one.

Legion

Just survive another day, urged the voices haunting
Why? he challenged the long dead hypocrites.
The sky over the Bay of Andropy was tinged with first light when Legion climbed over the rail of the sloop *Reckless*. He was less than five and a half feet tall in his newly tailored black boots, and maybe a hundred and twenty-five pounds, but he looked like he would hit a lot harder. Neither his gray apparel nor his aloof countenance were memorable, even if his presence on the little boat was. He was dressed in a long split tunic that hung over his hips and the loose leggings typical to the area. His face was clean-shaven and slightly rounded while his hair was straight and short and gray like his eyes. There was a sturdy leather belt around his waist from which hung a scimitar and knife of local origin. On his wrists were a pair of worn black vambraces that stretched from his wrists to his elbows.

The quartermaster showed him to a cabin barely large enough to lay down. He took a moment before entering and looked over the rippling mirror of the bay

and the rolling hill country surrounding it. It was beautiful, he supposed. Somewhere, far to the east was the center of everything where the elven city and the dwarven nation flourished. Around them, the lesser kingdoms of humans came and went. Behind him, the mighty Leaden Mountains fell away and far beyond them to the west were the wild lands where dragons and inhumans ruled. To the south, beyond the bay, was said to be nothing except the sea and that which dwelt under it. Beneath it all...

A chill crept through his body as memories asserted themselves.

Perhaps the Eye wasn't so bad after all.

Soon the blazing sun would rise and be almost unbearable in its brightness.

There seemed to be no surprises within his cabin. He felt the lurch of the boat as the anchor came free and soon heard the flap of unfurled sails. Nausea was already beginning to set in. Not a trusting soul, he looked out the tiny window and saw the shoreline, meaning they were indeed traveling north. The *Reckless* should cross the border into Garrosian waters shortly after dusk, and it couldn't be soon enough. He looked at the king's bloody seal on the blank parchment and considered his wild plan - one man taking on a nation.

Why? For himself, of course. Then certainly, for

these idealistic young royals. Beyond that there was a beauty, an indefinable something about Chios that was worth preserving.

Was it that even the poor could touch their dreams?

Legion knew full well what he could do, what he must do. It was hard to contain an enemy that had no name, except Misfortune. Or as they said in the darkness that had been his home, *'War was a lot easier when the other side didn't know they were fighting one'*. This wasn't the first time. No, it had worked before, to orchestrate the rescue of a maiden named Anya.

And preserve her for something much worse...

Somehow I must make my way to the capital. The Garrosian king is the head and the court is his strength. Take the head and the nation staggers. Meanwhile their enemy will have so many faces as to have no face at all.

Whether fighting one or many, his approach was the same. To attack without warning, to unbalance his foes and thus gain mastery over them. To use their own strength against them until their very inflexibility caused their ruin. Ultimately, Legion didn't plan to destroy Garros. He wanted Garros to destroy themselves.

Certainly, he had the skills and the tools at his disposal. Born of a hidden people, steeped in guile and magic from youth, trained in the deadly ways of the

Silent Unseen. His vambraces bore powerful magics, as did the rings on each hand and the strange skin of his face-shifting mask. Legion was confident that no mere human could withstand him on this far frontier. All he needed now was some good sense and an inordinate amount of luck.

No, he realized suddenly. Not sense. There was no sense in this. He had been taught to control all the variables and, in this endeavor, there were far too many. This was more like casting his life upon the waters and seeing how badly death wanted him.

Just survive another day...

With such considerations on his mind, he slept. He awakened in the late afternoon, feeling his stomach rolling. Rushing to the rail, he heaved its contents of over the side. Half a dozen smugglers were watching him with grins on their faces and snide comments on their lips. In a particularly foul mood, Legion saw no humor in it.

“Just take a look, boys” a black-haired knave remarked, “you can see he’s got gold. He had no quibbles about paying double, now did he?”

“Enough of that talk, Brios. You aren’t a corsair anymore. We’ve got a good wind and clear sailing. Don’t be greedy,” Captain Talus said, as if convincing himself. He was a swarthy rascal of a man, with a bright

red sash around his waist and an open sleeveless tunic that showed off his lean physique.

“Why just settle for our shares, when we could have a whole lot more. Besides, he’s in no shape to make trouble. He’s not even wearing his sword.”

Legion looked down. Indeed, in his haste, he had left his sword belt hanging on the bedpost. Clinging to the rail for support, the green passenger turned to face them. “I’m always ready for trouble,” he said stiffly, then he threw up over the rail again.

The coarse men of the sea roared with laughter. Except for Brios, there was a lupine look in that one’s eye.

“Come on lads, don’t go yellow now. Sanders, I know you’ll back me up.” Brios turned his attention to the seasick passenger. “Listen chummy, just hand it over and you walk away. Be difficult and you’ll go for a swim. You might wash up in a week or two, but no one’s going to recognize you.”

He drew a curved sword. Legion wiped his mouth on his sleeve and turned to face the knave. His stomach was empty but didn’t feel any better. He let the rage that was his only companion play across his pallid face and fuel his resolve. One hand crept inside his jerkin as he clung to the rail for support.

“This one is determined to die,” Legion said

hoarsely. “The rest of you, stay out of it and I’ll hold you blameless.” His stomach was still churning with the movement of the sloop and the glaring sunlight made his head throb.

“I don’t need these dogs to carve you up, lubber.”

“Said the coward with the sword.”

Brios smiled, circling toward the cabins trying to open Legion’s back to the rest of the crew. The corsair lunged and fainted, there was the sound of movement behind him and the rasp of steel. Blades flipped through the air and Legion was moving – spinning from the deadly point of impact – vambraces blocking the slashing scimitar of Sanders and then using the brigand’s momentum to flip him over the rail and into the sea.

“Who else?” the passenger asked coolly with Sanders’ sword in hand, but the crew was stunned at how quickly it was over. In the water, Sanders was screaming for help as the sloop drew away from him. Brios was groaning on the deck, two throwing knives buried in his gut.

“Everyone stand down,” the captain said. “It’s over, so let it be over. Let’s focus on helping our people. We good?” he asked the passenger.

Legion head was down as he muttered something with one hand on his stomach. When he looked up

again, the green had faded from his complexion. Only now did the man in gray notice the smoking volcano rising above the rugged shoreline, suggesting that they were near the border.

“Leave the one in the water where he is and let me be. If you’re good with that, I’ll stand down. This one’s done for,” he said as he pulled the knives from the rogue’s abdomen in a fresh flow of blood and picked up the sword. “Do what you want with him.”

“That’s cruel hard.”

Legion locked eyes with Captain Talus, until the smuggler finally looked away.

“I suppose Sanders can probably make it to shore,” Captain Talus acceded.

“Stomach wounds are an awful way to die. It would be more merciful to put this one out of his misery.”

“You’ll do no such thing.”

“Give him this powder then. It’s a sedative. Put it in his drink and it will ease his passing.”

“You’ve done quite enough. By morning we’ll make port and then I want you off my bloody boat.”

“Learn from their mistakes. They came looking for trouble and they found it. Give him the medicine, it’s the merciful thing to do.”

Softening a little, the captain nodded, and tensions began to ease. After that, the crew gave him a wide

berth. The sun drifted behind the ridge to the west and the volcano slowly fell behind them. Legion didn't tell them that he had the means to save the dying man.

With nightfall, the rogue Brios surrendered to his wounds. When the captain came near, Legion called to him.

"What's the beacon I see ahead?"

"The border city of Garapos, we have now crossed into Garrosian waters."

In time, first a fortress and then a small city crept into view. Garapos City was a jumble of dusty flat-roofed homes laid out and dominated by the tall pyramid of the Two-Faced God rising in its midst. On the dusk shadowed hills surrounding it, a thousand pinpoints of light twinkled, raising no end of trepidation in the passenger.

"Something's not right. What are those?"

The smuggler looked his surprise. "Campfires. Are you the only person on the peninsula who hasn't heard that Garros is preparing an invasion?"

"I didn't realize they were this close."

"They certainly aren't wasting anytime."

"How long will it take them to march to the border?"

"Once they are start moving, a couple days, no more. Why?"

"I have friends in Chios. Within a week, Garros will

own the north.”

“Within a week, Chios will have fallen. See those masts rising in the harbor?”

“Sticks at the water line?”

“Yes, that’s a fleet of ships. From the cut of them, I would guess biremes from Minos.”

“A strange coincidence. What’s a bireme?”

“A ship with sails and two decks of slaves pulling at the oars. Minos uses them to move troops around quickly. Looks like Garros has made an alliance. They can be on Chios’ doorstep within a day.”

It wasn’t the first time in his life that Legion saw his schemes consumed by the fires of treachery. The invasion was too well coordinated, too quickly executed to be reactive to the old king’s death. When Legion had told the boy king that there was a traitor in his court, it had been half ruse and half conjecture - a rabbit trail to keep the monarch focused on everything but his visitor in the night. The last thing the assassin wanted was for Ikthos to ponder how he had come by his knowledge, or what had happened to the foreign scholar so curious about old King Torreon’s War Chronicle.

Now a traitor’s influence seemed undeniable and it had made his mission all the more unfeasible. Legion’s contract with Ikthos was to prevent an invasion, not recall one. Since Garros had no viable navy and only

two ports, he had never considered that they might invade by sea. If the army was here on the border - and ready to invade at any moment – he must stop them both here and now. Everything was already spinning out of control, and the rewards that Legion sought were evaporating in the smoky fires surrounding Garapos.

“I need to get to shore. Where can you drop me?” Legion asked suddenly.

“As I said, we dock at Garapos in the morning.”

“Not Garapos, somewhere less public.”

“I see. There is a place I have used in the past, a little south of the city. Only the locals know of it.”

“Here’s what I owe you and more. Drop me off and then take word of what you have seen to the dwarf Ritzgard in the palace. He is the only one you can trust and will reward you generously. I warn you, betray me and I’ll come for you. Now leave me to my thoughts until it is time to depart. I have much to consider.”

Gathering his gear, Legion stood in the bow, watching the land draw closer, his agile mind far away as he coaxed his twisted plans into the landscape taking form before him. At present, there was only so much he could do, but his mind turned again and again to the blank parchment bearing the king’s seal and the body of Brios, his assailant. Perhaps if he framed his request properly, he could convince the smugglers that there

was no need to dispose of the body at sea...

Within the hour, Legion found himself standing alone atop a little crest, the body of the dead man sewn into a bag at his feet. He touched the unseen mask that covered face. There was the tingle of magic and his features shimmered into those of Brios. Reaching into his tunic, he pulled a knot of silken cord from an inner pocket. Once unraveled, he spread it across the ground, where it formed a hoop about six feet in diameter. An extra-dimensional bubble was attached to it, though he had several smaller ones secreted about his person. Dropping within, he landed on a lacquered wooden framework - sort of hemisphere inside the sphere - and shoved aside a cushion that had come loose. Unlatching a drawer, he removed a small vial full of ground mushrooms. From another, he dug out a little jar of ink and a quill. From a rack, he took two short metal rods.

There under the stars, he scrawled a carefully written note upon the parchment that bore the king's seal. Cutting the pirate's body loose from its bag, he tucked the note into an inner pocket and arranged the body upon the ground.

Legion had lied to the smugglers, but then again, he had lied about a lot of things. Brios wasn't going to get a decent burial. What did they expect? He was a desperate spy fighting a vastly superior force. In truth,

only one path led to success. It wasn't enough to attack Garros. He had to utterly break their will to fight on.

It would needs be a bloodier confrontation than he had wanted. With the passing seconds, weights were wobbling on the scales and the lives of men were teetering in the balance. Still, better the surgical death of a few than the haphazard clash of nations.

Perhaps the Veiled Lady would even appreciate that he defended the weak.

He stopped himself. This was not the time to justify his actions. Rather it was the time when compassion must wither, and ruthlessness must rule.

Now was the time to force a nation to its knees.

Revolt

Petrus, Priest of Avar-Piter, looked out over the night and sighed. Once again, he told himself that he was resigned to his fate. In the past, his winning smile and quick wit had often furthered his ambitions. In the course of his duties, he had a way of seeing things that others missed. Then, once something captured his attention, it was totally impossible to ignore. It was like a loose thread that he had to keep tugging at until the whole thing unraveled - no matter the consequences.

The night was warm, and he rolled up the sleeves of his midnight blue robe. He was handsome and tall and accustomed to being the best and the brightest in any given crowd. Here in Garapos City, that had only seemed to foster resentment. Despite the murmuring, he had been tasked by Chief Astir with building a bridge along the southern road. Its early completion had already earned him a promotion to Attaché of the Chief Priest.

It was nothing to brag about. Back at the main Temple in Capopas, he had been a rising star in both the

finance and sorcery divisions. His career had been progressing ideally in his young mind, until he had publicly corrected Diana, High Priestess of Enchantments. Overnight, his situation had changed. Though he had never trained in marshal magic, now he was off to the southern front and to war.

A growing clamor in the distance drew his gaze toward the bay.

“What in Piter’s name is that racket down at the docks?”

This is what I was trained to do - hunt men in the night.

The sky was moonless as Legion inched up the bireme’s anchor rope, his nostrils crinkling from the stench. A gentle breeze blew off the bay and chilled him. Almost invisible, he pulled himself silently onto the ship’s deck, crouching as he watched for hostiles. The slave galleys were tied to one another like floating piers, moored side by side in the little harbor. Despite some initial uncertainty, he was on the middle cluster of the ship farthest from shore, with other clusters to his left and right.

The darkness brought back his hard lessons at the hands of the Silent Unseen, the hidden warriors that

stole souls in the night. It was a life he thought forsaken, though in truth, it had forsaken him first. The memories brought turmoil to his soul – a distraction too dangerous to risk – and he throttled them in their infancy.

From his belt, he pulled a pair of forearm length metal rods with a hooked guard to catch blades. There was a Minoan sentry on deck, wearing the ubiquitous helmet, armored jerkin and baggy leggings of a soldier. In absolute silence, Legion's slight form crept up on him. With a dual strike to the back of his neck, the soldier collapsed. Then heading toward the mainland, a sentry fell on the next ship and then another on the ship after that. Lowering this last ever so gingerly to the deck, he took the soldier's cloak. The manhunter was at the very center of the fleet now.

Legion's eyes watered from the smell as he headed for the slave decks. At the base of the stairs, a guard sat with his back to him. In a single bound, the assassin fell upon him and knocked him senseless. Chained to their oars, sitting in their filth, the slaves continued to sleep. Drawing the sword he called *Ruin* from under his tunic, he headed below, looking for any remaining watchmen.

On the bottom deck, the guard had felt the thump and was coming to investigate. As he put his foot to the stairs, Legion lunged suddenly forward and ran him through. Shutting down his magical concealments, the

assassin dumped the soldier's body onto the central walkway with a clatter. The slaves around him were suddenly awake and rubbing their eyes in confusion.

"Piter sets you free! Take whatever weapons you can find and make for land!" Legion ordered.

With a mighty two-handed stroke, he chopped through the long bronze chain that held the captives on his right. "The strongest first! You have to fight for your freedom," he urged them as he clove the other chain. They stared at him blankly. He grabbed an oil lamp and threw it into the prow. "Everybody get off or die!" he ordered as the fire flared into life.

Their surprise transformed quickly into chaotic action, Legion flew up the stairs to free the wretches above. As the slaves began to head topside, he grabbed another lamp and led them into the fight of their lives.

"Head for the shore and freedom!" he yelled as he threw the burning lamp toward the raft of ships to the north. Then leading the charge, he barreled down on the guard of the ship moored next to them with twenty men following. Dropping his spear and shield, the watchman fled, and Legion scooped up the weapons and shoved them into the hands of passing fugitives. Guards from below thundered up the stairs, but Legion was already lying in wait. First one was met with the staccato rhythm of his rods, then the other, and they never knew what hit

them. Then he was into the filth again and cutting slaves free. Smoke began to rise into the night.

When he came up again, flames were becoming obvious on the first ship and the sentries on shore were being overrun by the fugitives. Disappointingly, the fire was spreading slower than he had expected. He threw another lamp toward a neighboring ship. On the galleys, excited soldiers were gathering on deck. A slave hurried past him and he grabbed hold of him.

“Take these keys and free the slaves on the next boat. Understand?”

“Let me go.”

Legion cuffed him hard. “What did I tell you to do?”

“Stop. Stop, I’ll do it. I’ll free the slaves on the next boat.”

“Right or I’ll roast you alive. I’ll be watching, now go.”

In mortal fear, the man ran from him. Without waiting to see what the wretch did, Legion sprinted down the ship’s length chanting and leapt over the rail. It had to be almost thirty feet to the neighboring ship. Magic gushed from his fingers and lifted him clumsily, extending his leap. With a crashing roll, he landed on the raft of boats to his right. He arose, and his shoulder throbbed, but there was no time for that. Three soldiers were charging him, and he was backlit by the fires.

Word could not get out.

"Shirulah!" he commanded, and sorcery clouded their vision. *"Undulai!"* he cried and one of them stumbled. Circling to his right with a clash of steel on steel, he caught a soldier's blade on one rod, and crushed his larynx with the other. The other soldier wheeled at him, but Legion had leapt away. With a lunge, he drove the pointed tip into the eye of the fallen guard. One now remained and there was pure hatred in his eyes.

The soldier came in fast with a flurry of poised hacks and thrusts, driving the spy relentlessly toward midship and undoubtedly more guards. Stepping into the mast's shadow, Legion flicked his wrist to power on his magical camouflage and disappeared. The soldier swung his sword blindly once or twice and then fled shouting. From behind, Legion took him down with a flying kick and fell upon him with a hidden blade that sprang from his vambrace.

As the fire spread to a second and third ship, Legion checked the docks to see how the fugitives were making out. They had overwhelmed the sentries and were disappearing into the streets. Then, his mind in overdrive, he was below decks and freeing more slaves and setting more fires. Sailors were beginning to push the ships apart. In the little harbor with the breeze against them, galleys blundered into one another. This

was what Legion wanted – mayhem - but it needed to get worse if the naval invasion was to be thwarted.

“Enroq niro despero noicki chuun!” he said slowly as he clapped his right fist twice into his open hand. A lightless, oily ball of Dark Fire erupted on his open palm and he threw it onto the mast of the boat next to him. It spread much faster than the natural fire. Then he was moving towards the bay to free more slaves, the unseen agent of chaos. *“Enroq niro despero noicki chuun!”* and another ship began to burn. *“Enroq niro despero noicki chuun!”*

Not far from where he had first boarded, he turned and surveyed his handiwork. There was considerable damage to the docks. Ships were scattered haphazardly across the harbor. More than a few were dead, but half of the fleet would need repairs and the slaves were on the run. Of greatest importance, his involvement was unsuspected. With a brief sprint, he duplicated his hovering leap off the side of the boat.

Weariness pulled at him, but the night was far from over. There was still the need to impose himself upon Riffian, the Chiosian spy in Garapos city.

Riffian and Rue

Here in the eleventh hour, the God of Adriel has answered our prayers!” Riffian whispered as he hugged his teen daughter. “There is no way the fleet can sail tomorrow. This will set them back a few days at the least.”

He was a balding, slightly built old widower wearing a night shirt and she was a gaunt young thing with an almost non-existent chin and a green dress that hung loosely from her boney frame. They were on the roof of their square little house – as were many others - looking out on the smoky fires that burned around the harbor of Garapos.

“It’s like a miracle,” the girl said, “but we will need so many more if –

“Do not say it, try not to even think it. But yes, in truth this changes nothing. We’ve seen all we need to see. Let’s go back inside and try to get some sleep.”

“Okay, but I am far too excited for that,” Rue agreed.

Hand in hand, they headed down. Near the bottom of the stairs sat a strange man they had never seen before - much less invited into their home.

“Good evening sir,” the stranger said conversationally. “Sorry to intrude, but by any chance, are you Riffian the tailor?”

Freezing in mid stride, Riffian looked down. The ax he used for firewood was by the door and thus beyond the stranger. Rue was a step behind him, but far from safe. The form below him was that of a man even smaller than Riffian and dressed in gray except for a pair of black bracers. He appeared unarmed as he smiled upwards from his chair. His face seemed familiar somehow.

“You found me, son. I am Riffian. but the hour of your coming is a strange one.”

“Strange and yet also fortuitous. Might we have a word? I intend no harm, as long as you and your daughter mind your manners. I have come at the behest of a mutual friend.”

“I am not accustomed to strangers inviting themselves into my home at such an hour. How do I know you aren’t one of the escaped slaves?”

“By the smell if nothing else. We both have our secrets Riffian,” the man of many faces invented, “as do my cousins from the south. If it makes you feel better, bring that light closer and look upon my face. I am told the family resemblance is striking.”

“Cousins from the south?”

“You take my meaning.”

Picking up a poker from the fireplace, Riffian came cautiously forward. Rue stayed on the stairs. The stranger’s clothes were still wet. He was doing his best to appear harmless and his features –

“It is like the face of King Ikthos!”

“So I am told,” Legion lied. “As I said, I mean you no harm.”

“A cousin?”

“Yes and a bastard as well. You might say I am the one that no one talks about.”

“Then what business brings you to my home?”

“Ikthos sent me,” Legion said quietly. “He said I could rely on you for my mission.”

“Your mission? I am but a humble tailor on the frontier of Garapos. What would I know of kings and of mysterious missions?”

“Cut the crap, Riffian. I’m not here to expose you or trap you or anything else. I am here to stop the invasion of Chios. In fact, I have already begun. Surely you noticed?”

“The harbor?”

“Yes. And now I am badly in need of a place to rest until morning, when I begin afresh.”

“You promise not to harm us?”

“Indeed, truly I will protect you with my life,”

Legion agreed, though his words meant little. “We must depend upon each other. You can always say that I coerced you.”

Riffian considered his options. “What do you require?”

“Not much for now. Some food, a corner of your cellar in which to sleep. Have you daughter bring me something, I am famished.”

“Rue get him the leftover food and a jug.”

“Thank you. Where is the army’s headquarters?”

“Their base is the mayor’s mansion. General Ammon and the top officials reside there.”

“What time does your daughter start her shift at the mansion?”

“You know that too?”

“What time?” Legion persisted.

“Why do you ask?” Riffian asked guardedly.

The assassin sighed wearily, knowing that no good deed ever went unpunished.

“Seeing as we are about the same size, I plan to disguise myself and take her place for a few hours.”

“You’re mad. You won’t fool anyone.”

“I will convince you in the morning.”

“Convince me now.”

“I have magic. Let’s just leave it at that. And I can pay you both handsomely for your trouble.”

“You barge in here in the middle of the night, telling us you are something with no proof. There is no way they would have sent you here without a token of some sort.”

“Ikthos is the one who has sent me, but the letter with his seal is lost. I have only my face and the destruction in the harbor to testify on my behalf.”

“We... can’t.”

“I understand. To this point, you have kept your ears open, passed along some information and pocketed the reward. Now you are being asked to embrace a much greater risk. I wouldn’t even ask, if we weren’t so very desperate. Things are not good in Chios. It’s up to us, Riffian. No one else is coming. Garros must be stopped, and we are the only ones who can.”

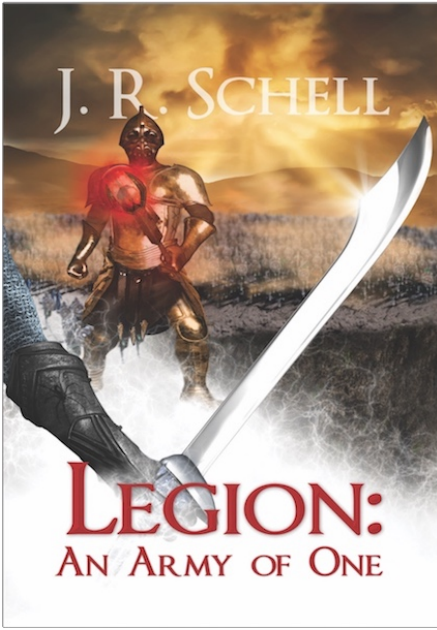
Slowly, Riffian shook his head, but young Rue wrapped her arms around her father and put her head on his shoulder. “If not us, then who? I know its dangerous, but somehow I feel certain that this is the solution we have been praying for. I am willing, papa.”

“No. I will not risk my Rue. Anything but that.”

“My talent is great, my ways subtle,” Legion cajoled the tailor. “It is only for a few hours and I will reward you handsomely. She will be in no danger,” Legion assured, lying through his teeth.

Not that he didn’t want his words to be true.

Nonetheless he had been down this road enough times before to know that even his best intentions meant nothing.



Hidden in darkness, a mysterious visitor offers to save a desperate young king from the invaders on his doorstep.

LEGION: AN ARMY OF ONE

By J. R. Schell

**Order the complete book from the publisher
[Booklocker.com](https://www.booklocker.com)**

<https://www.booklocker.com/p/books/10172.html?s=pdf>

**or from your favorite neighborhood
or online bookstore.**