

## The Journey

### Journey's Beginning

Vindex Appian stood on the bow of the Greek merchant ship looking out at the horizon. Dressed in the attire of a Roman noble, he could almost pass as a senator, but pomp and ceremony weren't needed or wanted on this voyage. Vindex squinted at the horizon, his intelligent eyes looking for movement, a cover for the deep thought that he was engaged in. He reflected on the secrecy of his mission, and his array of employers, all wealthy nobles and senators. Not the sort of people he liked or aspired to be.

A slight breeze picked up, propelling the ship ever onward. As the playful wind messed his black hair, Vindex reflected. When he had paid for passage on the merchant ship, the captain had seemed honest enough. Although passage on cheaper ships could probably have been organised, sailors had a notorious reputation and corners were often cut. On his mission it was always best to pay extra for reliability. The only other passenger on board was another young man. It was hard to tell what his background was, and Vindex didn't really care, but he was certainly not of noble birth. He may have been in the employ of a noble or rich merchant, but either way he looked as though his intentions were not entirely above board, and Vindex decided that caution and vigilance might not go astray in this instance. It was only a couple of days' journey till they reached the Roman port of Ostia, but this was often when dishonest deeds were done. Waiting until the last moment increased the chance of success, and reduced the risk of being caught. Being as widely travelled as he was, and mixing with all different sorts of people, this was a lesson that Vindex had learnt well. Timing was crucial.

As the sun started to set on the horizon, Vindex thought about going below deck and turning in for the night. Having one last glance at the horizon, he took a deep breath and headed toward the cabins. The air smelt of seawater and rain. Noticing the heaviness of the air around him, Vindex stepped into his quarters.

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Almost in silence, rain started to fall around the merchant galley as it slowly ploughed through the Tyrrhenian Sea. In the main quarters, Vindex rested lightly. Never a heavy sleeper, he didn't trust the people sleeping all around him and this added to his insomnia. Outside more rain fell on the sea and the boat gently rocked as a wind picked up outside. Vindex noticed one of the men slowly rise from his bunk. Without moving his head, he watched the path that the man took as he crossed the planks and headed for the single chest that held Vindex's belongings. Vindex allowed himself a smile, albeit an empty one. There was nothing in the chest worth stealing, but its contents were destined for the Emperor in Rome, and were of the utmost secrecy.

With the skill and ease of a cat, Vindex rose from his bed. Under the cover of the movements, creaks and groans of the ship in the rain, Vindex crept up behind the man as he struggled to try and pick the lock on the chest; he obviously was not a professional. Silently Vindex reached for the knife that never left his side. It was Roman, of good quality military issue. Vindex tapped the man on the shoulder, causing him to spin around with a startled look in his eyes. With the knife clutched in his right hand, Vindex pushed the blade up under the rib cage, and into the heart. This caused immediate death, which was both silent and efficient. It was a simple

technique created and perfected by the Roman soldiers and even children who watched the soldiers in the fields knew how to do this move. With a final squeeze, Vindex checked the man was dead, lowered him to the ground, and turned him over. He recognised the man as being one of the youngest sailors on board. Obviously he had tired of the small pay sailors were given and decided to supplement his income, thinking no one would know until the cargo was offloaded and they were safely on their way to whichever port had trade for them next. Of course, questions would be asked in the morning, but that was all the more reason to get some sleep now. Turning the body back over, Vindex once again crept back to bed and attempted to sleep.

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A pair of large burly sailors roused Vindex from his slumber. After a minor struggle Vindex was held firm and carried up to the deck where he was tied to the mast. The entire crew of the ship yelled accusations at him in Greek and one man stepped out of the crowd, brandishing a whip with nine ends. The dreaded cat o' nine tails! As the man stepped forward to strike the first blow, Hippias Pelapos, the ship's captain stepped forward and took the whip from his hand. Pelapos was not a large man, but he held himself well and it was easy to see that he was in command of his men. His most distinguishing feature, the big black beard that covered most of his face, bristled as he leant close into Vindex's face and spoke in rudimentary Latin.

“Did you kill one of my sailors last night?”

“No” Vindex replied coldly.

“Liar!” the captain yelled as he swung the whip, catching Vindex across the shoulder and cutting open the loose toga that he wore. Vindex winced as the bright red line showed itself.

“Why did you kill one of my men”, Pelapos continued after a brief pause. Vindex raised his head in a proud and defiant pose.

“I didn’t kill your man. I don’t know how he died.” He stated coldly and arrogantly.

Once again the whip came down, cutting further down the surface of the toga and bringing more of Vindex’s blood to light.

“For the last time, if you don’t tell me why you killed my sailor I will hand the whip over to the men and they will not be so good to you as I, Roman”, the Pelapos stated without emotion in his voice. Vindex Appian looked straight ahead and didn’t say anything. With a wince, Vindex received another lash from Pelapos, who turned around and stalked away, handing the whip to the large brute that had originally held the whip.

“Wait!” cried Vindex. Pelapos turned around and regarded Vindex coolly.

“You will tell?” the captain asked.

“Yes, I will tell. But not here, not in front of everyone. Just to you”, Vindex said, looking straight at the captain. The captain looked at Vindex for a second, then issued a few orders in Greek. The two men who had originally woken Vindex untied him then bound his wrists and started leading him to the captain’s cabin.

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Vindex was seated roughly in a wooden chair facing the captain’s desk. The two thugs stood at attention behind him until the captain turned around from the small

dresser and dismissed them. Without a word they filed out, and Pelapos seated himself in his chair, behind his desk. The cabin was comfortable but cramped and very dark, with only lamplight and a porthole to illuminate it. In the darkness the captain seemed less imposing and more relaxed, leaning back in his chair. He sat and regarded Vindex, and then stood and took the drinks that he had been pouring on the dresser and handed one to Vindex, resuming his place in his chair. The captain sat and waited until Vindex had finished drinking and then said slowly:

“So now are you ready to tell me why you think it was necessary to kill one of my crew, and why the secretive way you have been acting?”

“The young man was trying to break into my chest and rob me” Vindex said, glancing at the captain to see if he would be offended by this accusation. Palapos sat back listening, waiting for Vindex to go on. Seeing what was expected of him, Vindex continued more calmly:

“I am in the employ of a Roman Senator and have been abroad on business. I learned of an assassination plot against the Emperor, and being loyal to the Roman Empire I set off to warn him, carrying the message, both to my employer and to the Emperor himself.”

“Do you have any evidence to back you up?” asked the captain in his crude Latin.

“Yes, on my left hand you can see a ring. If you look at it, it is the seal of Marius Gambino, The Roman Senator” said Vindex quickly.

Hippias quickly rose from his chair and stepped around the desk. As he lifted Vindex’s hand, he bent over, examining the seal. After a minute he sat back down.

“Very well,” the captain continued, in tones that showed he probably believed this new evidence. “This still doesn’t explain why you killed one of my crew”.

“As I said,” continued Vindex, “the young man was trying to break into my chest. Inside is the message for my employer and the Emperor, and also some documents relating to the security of the Roman Empire. I can’t allow anyone to see them, let alone steal them. This is why I have been so secretive”.

Satisfied with the explanation, the captain rose from his chair, and taking a knife that was sitting on the desk, cut the rope binding Vindex’s hands.

“Very well”, said the captain, “you are free to go about your business, but remember that this could have ended differently”. Turning back around, the captain signalled that their meeting was over. Without another word, Vindex headed for the door.

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Vindex Appian again looked out to sea from the bow of the ship. Ever since the incident two days ago the crew had treated him with wary suspicion and resentment. Although no one had said anything it was obvious from the looks that they kept giving him that the general consensus was he would be dealt with severely the next time he set a foot out of line. All the same, Vindex held his head high. He was a paying traveller and no matter how well liked he was by the crew, the young sailor had been attempting to steal Vindex’s possessions. He was well within his rights to protect his property. The captain didn’t say anything else about the incident but warned him that many of the sailors aboard didn’t think that justice was served and that it might be in his best interests to keep a low profile.

In spite of it all, Vindex smiled as he looked toward the horizon. The coast of Italy was drawing ever nearer, and now the port of Ostia was in sight. Ostia served as

the main port for ships from all over Europe and Asia which came to trade goods with the capital of the Roman Empire. It was a reasonably wealthy city, although it attracted many of the seedier occupants of the empire, like any major port.

Yesterday seagulls had started to fill the sky above the boat as they had drawn closer and closer to the coast. Today there was a veritable flock overhead diving into the water to catch fish or catching the scraps that were thrown overboard. Seagulls tended to follow ships as they were a source of food and Vindex winced at the piecing cries of the birds. Seagulls constantly annoyed Vindex on the ocean voyages that he took because they were such noisy, inelegant creatures, always squabbling and fighting over the scraps that were thrown out, making a fuss about the smallest fish. Vindex contemplated one of the smaller seagulls that had lost a leg, probably in a fight with other seagulls. It wasn't getting any food and when it did it was attacked and mobbed by other seagulls. Vindex thought about survival of the fittest. Did the weakest members of society deserve to die? With disdain, Vindex regarded a large group of seagulls fighting over a fish, in his mind comparing them to a group of fattened senators, playing games in public to fatten their bellies in private. Surely the selfish, those who had the power to help society but only helped themselves, deserved to die? With a dejected sigh Vindex turned away from the approaching coastline. They should arrive in Ostia tomorrow and after a meeting with his employer he was off to Rome. With one final deep breath of sea air he resolved to go below to pack up his belongings before they entered harbour.

## Ostia

Stepping off the gangplank, Vindex carefully studied the docks of Ostia. Gazing around he saw the warehouses and shops that proved that this was indeed a

maritime city. Walking down one of the main streets leading into the centre of town he saw brothels and taverns which the sailors would be patronising as soon as they had received their pay. This type of seedy entertainment catered to the sailors and soldiers in every roman city, not just Ostia, and as a port of call to just about every merchant ship in the Mediterranean and Africa it was doing a roaring trade. As Vindex kept walking he saw Ostia's amphitheatre rising up before him. From it emerged the type of noises that 3500 bloodthirsty spectators made when they were seeing the delights of lions, slaves and gladiators. Vindex scowled; this was the type of decadence that would bring the Roman Empire to its knees. No, something calmer was more Vindex's style. With the amphitheatre behind him Vindex approached the Forum of Corporations, which held the offices of 64 maritime companies. Doubtless this was where the captain headed as soon as he was finished at the wharf area, so he could report to his superiors.

Finally, Vindex reached his destination, the baths of Neptune. He would require all of his strength for what was on the agenda this afternoon, and a few hours in a relaxing bath was just what he needed. Vindex looked up at the huge mosaic of Neptune that dominated the baths, the sea god riding a chariot drawn by four raging horses, pawing at the air. Although it wasn't a good idea to say it, Vindex wasn't too trusting in the gods. It seemed that every Roman, high or low born was patron to several gods, fearing lightning bolts if they weren't good and living their life in fear. It wasn't that Vindex violently opposed the gods; he ignored them and they seemed to ignore him. Still, Neptune certainly had a big following in this town; sailors were a superstitious lot. Shaking himself mentally, Vindex headed to the bathing area and resolved not to think another thought of burly sailors and vengeful sea gods.



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Marius Gambino was a short, fat man with black curly hair and brown eyes. He was arrogant and pompous, and being a senator of Rome he assumed that he was well liked. On the contrary, his piggy features and rude air insured that he left a less than favourable image in the minds of most people he met. Due to his power he did get a sort of false respect, and because he took things at face value, false respect suited him fine. As far as he knew, he was a well-liked and respected member of the community and in his own mind he was more intelligent and important than everyone around him. Such is the manner of many people born into power.

Vindex grimaced as he recalled the last time he had met this man. If only it had been in a professional capacity! He approached the villa that was home to Marius when he wasn't in Rome spreading about his own self-importance. Vindex sighed. 'Still,' he reflected 'the customer is always right. I only have to feign respect for this pitiful excuse for a man until I am paid. Or maybe not even for that long...'

Vindex knocked on the door and it was promptly opened by one of the servants of the house. "My name is Vindex Appian. I am here to see Mr Gambino. He should be expecting me."

"At once, Sir" the servant replied, and indicated that Vindex should follow him.

The two of them approached a sitting room furnished with the finest that money could buy. Through a pair of open doors, a flowering dogwood tree could be seen standing in the middle of a courtyard. A breeze blew through the branches of the tree, filling the room with the wonderful scent of its blossoms. A fountain in the centre was trickling water into a pool, adding a calming effect to the well-lit and airy

room. Vindex reflected that whoever had designed this room had a lot of taste and skill, but he inwardly winced at the thought that most of this would have been paid for by back alley politics and corrupt deals. A buffet table ran the length of the wall opposite the door that Vindex entered through. Here, Marius Gambino reclined on a sofa laughing at a comment he had just made to a pretty young woman who was feeding him grapes, one at a time from a bowl. The woman giggled and fawned on Gambino's every word, and it was obvious to Vindex that giggling and fawning had served this girl well all through her life. Just as well, he thought; if she had to use that brain of her's, she might hurt herself. Upon seeing Vindex, Gambino looked up and addressed the servant:

“Yes”

“A Mr Vindex Appian to see you sir.” the servant responded.

“Oh yes, yes” Gambino said, accompanied by an unorganised scrambling. “I shall see you later, my dear” he said addressing the girl. And with a few more giggles the woman left the room. “You can leave now” Gambino said, referring to the servant.

“Very good sir” the servant replied and left the room.

Gambino looked at Vindex, pretending to be regarded him and thinking.

Vindex on the other hand *was* regarding Gambino and *was* thinking.

“So you are Vindex Appian? You looked different to what I expected. Still, did you have any trouble on your journey here?” Gambino said with mock authority.

“Nothing I couldn't handle” Vindex replied, with clipped words and silences that he calculated would unnerve Gambino. “Now about my payment”

“You will be paid when the job is done. Half in advance, for expenses, which you should have received already, and half when the job is completed. That is what we agreed on, and that is how it will stay.”

Vindex paused staring at Gambino and looking him down. He had to control himself and keep the sneer on his face, which was hard because he was smiling on the inside. He could already tell that he could get the money out of Gambino by the man's nervous twitching and the look on his face. He just liked seeing Gambino squirm. After a couple of minutes Gambino started to stutter something else to fill the awkward silence and this was when Vindex cut him off:

“That is what *you* agreed. I had no say. I am doing your dirty work so my conditions will apply. My condition is that you pay me now. I won't see you again after the job and you won't mention me or talk to me again. I am assassinating the Roman Emperor for you, probably the hardest job in the whole of the Roman Empire so if you try to make my life difficult now the price will start going up.”

Gambino was visibly shaken.

“That's all very well but what if you decide to take off with my money? I know what you rogue types are like...”

Vindex's eyes visibly flared as he cut him off.

“If I wanted to steal from you I would kill you and take all that you own, not just the pitiful sum that you are paying me. As for my character, it probably wouldn't be wise for you to think about it too much. I am, after all, an assassin and it wouldn't be wise to offend me. I might decide to do a little freelance work to keep my hand in. Then again I could just report you to the authorities. That certainly wouldn't look good for your public image, would it? I hear that the Emperor is well liked among the people.”

Stuttering in disbelief, shock and outrage, Gambino gave Vindex a pouch, heavy with gold. With the faintest flicker of a smile, Vindex pocketed the pouch and stalked out the room. He knew he didn't need to count the money. If Marius Gambino

was that easily intimidated he wouldn't have the guts to try and short-change an assassin.

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As Vindex once again entered the bustling streets of Ostia, the rapidly growing smirk on his face bloomed, engulfing all of his features in an expression that ultimately ended in a chuckle. Inside, he congratulated himself. Firstly on the supreme job of negotiating he had just achieved in getting paid before he had even seen his target, and secondly for putting himself in a situation where he could tell Marius Gambino, the pompous, self-serving senator, what he really thought of him. Once again, he chuckled at the mental image of Gambino's pudgy face in a look of utter shock and outrage. This had been a good day.

Reaching into his pocket, Vindex pulled out the pouch of gold and looked at one of the gold pieces, turning it over in his hand. He looked at the stamped image of the emperor, looking proud and noble in his silhouette. This was the man that he was supposed to assassinate, a man that most people knew only as the face on the back of a coin, but whose decisions ultimately affected even the lowliest of slaves. Vindex tossed the coin into the crude wooden bowl of a leper begging nearby and continued on his way.

Vindex headed back to the warehouse district of Ostia, in search of a reasonably quiet tavern in which he could find a room for the night. As he just been paid he decided to rent a more up market, clean room and celebrate with a drink or two of strong, fortified wine. In the morning he would have to set out to find a ride to Rome, perhaps with one of the many barges that headed up the river transporting all

manner of goods to the capital of the Roman Empire. With a satisfied smile Vindex turned to make arrangements for the night.

## Rome

As the barge pulled into the dock of Rome, Vindex readied himself to leave via the gangplank. After he got off the boat he would have to get his luggage, find lodgings nearby, and lastly and most importantly, plan the mission he was supposed to do and find suitable escape routes. It would be too easy for Vindex to take Gambino's money and leave but Vindex, despite being an assassin was a man of his word. He reflected with a dry smile that he could apply as a sailor, having spent more than enough time on merchant galleys and transport vessels. If he was going to do the task that he had been paid for he must remain focused and clear headed. Years of working as an assassin had taught him not to think of it as a murder or an assassination, but as a job or challenge. He no longer thought of his targets as anything more than objectives, and this way he didn't let his humanity betray him when a cold calculating mind was vital.

After collecting his sea chest and organising for it to be watched with the other cargo while he found lodgings, Vindex set out to explore the bustling hub of the Roman Empire. All around him people of different colours, creeds and loyalties went their separate paths, interacting with certain people and then continuing on with their business. In various places Roman soldiers stood at attention in the street ready to lend their influence whenever it was needed. It seemed that a lot of the business of the Roman soldier involved standing around and making sure that all the civilians knew exactly who was in charge and in control. After a couple of generations it became accepted that the Romans were the most powerful race in the known world and

intimidation became racially imbedded enough that no-one had the courage or the belief in himself to stand up to the Romans. Soon the only force that could defeat the Roman movement was the apathy and stupidity of the power merchants running the empire. The Roman senators were the only ones powerful enough to break the empire their ancestors had created.

Vindex had never really liked the Roman superiority complex and took pleasure when he saw them faltering. However, he did admire the men that had forged the empire that could control so many nations with force. It had been said that force was the hardest medium to control with because people are more resistant to force and violence. Vindex wondered if the reason might be because people will put up with a lot of hardship but when you pushed them too far it gave them the determination to overcome oppression.

Getting his mind back on track, Vindex began searching for lodgings for the night. Although complete luxury seemed like a waste of money to him, Vindex appreciated the more comfortable room he had stayed at in Ostia, so he looked for something similar in Rome.

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Vindex entered the marketplace the next morning looking for something cheap and quick to eat. Thinking about the problem of how to get a clear shot at the emperor and escape safely, he made a breakthrough. Even though it was early morning the marketplace was buzzing with the news that Blaesus Caesar, the Roman emperor would be speaking to Rome from the Rostra the very next day. Vindex knew that this was the best opportunity that he was likely to get so, with his goal in mind, he started

exploring the forum. The Rostra stood at one end, surrounded by tall buildings and temples. Vindex started to walk slowly around the forum trying to take in every detail. This was mainly a place of commerce and political debate so there was sure to be a crowd. Some would only come to see the Emperor, but there would be many who were peddling their wares or making political speeches of their own.

Vindex thought about his options. Whenever he performed an assassination he preferred to use a crossbow. This was always effective because a crossbow bolt could even penetrate a Roman breastplate and Vindex rarely missed. He could take his shot from in amongst the crowd. This meant he could be reasonably close, but it would be extremely hard to get a clear shot over the heads of other people, and it would be almost impossible to get away quietly and safely. There was also the fact that he could be stopped before he managed to shoot. A better alternative was to fire out of one of the two story buildings that surrounded the forum. The temples weren't practical as they were mainly at the ends of the forum. That left the Basilicas. This was the best option as far as Vindex could see. He would have to disguise himself as a clerk to get inside but once he was on the second floor he could get into one of the empty archive rooms and fire a clear shot. In the panic he should be able to get away. With the rough sketch of his master plan in his mind, Vindex now needed to make preparations. With one last slow careful look around the forum, Vindex turned and headed off to make his preparations.

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Vindex awoke early the next morning, bathed, and ate a hearty breakfast. Then he took a piece of rough pumice stone and scraped the bristles that were starting to

sprout from his chin. After perfuming himself with some imported spice, he felt refreshed and ready for a big day. After this he went to the large sea chest that had accompanied him on these business trips for as long as he could remember. Reaching in, he started sorting through the various clothes and outfits. Eventually he found the simple tunic of a clerk and looped a belt around his waist. Then he took some soft straw that was in a sack at the bottom of the chest. He stuffed it down the front of the tunic until he looked rather fat. After this, he dug further into the chest and with a special glue applied coarse horsehair to make it look like he had a thin beard. The last item he added was a scruffy looking brown wig, made from real hair. Vindex looked at himself in the mirror and after critically examining himself for a few minutes he decided he looked authentic enough to be passed off as a Roman Clerk. The last item Vindex drew out of the chest was a short crossbow, which he tucked in among the stuffing under his tunic. Checking himself one last time in the mirror, he set out for the forum, running over his plan in his mind.

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Vindex nonchalantly strolled through the paved streets of Rome, purposely slowing himself down so he didn't look rushed and draw attention to himself. He decided to walk around a bit before he went on to the Forum because this would probably be the last chance he would get to see the amazing "Capital of the Roman Empire". Everywhere he turned he could see magnificently towering buildings, with marvellously planned stonework. The Roman Empire was certainly the centre for advances in commerce, science and art. What other society allowed men to just sit around and think in public, sharing ideas and values with other men?



Vindex continued on past the Colosseum, with the roar of men and beasts and the cheer of the crowds. He even took time to look through a couple of the many temples dedicated to the myriad of gods who kept a jealous, childlike, vengeful eye on the city. Although he didn't worship these vengeful gods, he marvelled at a force that could inspire men to create such beautiful buildings and works of art. Everywhere he turned there were monuments to people and gods who were known throughout the Empire for their role in creating this way of life.

Eventually, Vindex found himself in the Forum. Taking one last look at all of the structures in the Forum, Vindex snapped back into professional mode. He strolled slowly but purposefully across the paved ground and entered the Basilica Aemilia, one of the buildings dedicated to law and commerce. He didn't waste any time getting to the archive rooms on the second floor. No-one questioned his disguise and the operation was all going to plan. As long as no-one came up at a crucial time, all would be well. Vindex looked around the room, packed with shelves and old records. This was where all the records of Rome were stored and collected. Even though this building had been burnt and re-built, there was an excess of records. Vindex smiled to himself, thinking, 'This room is overflowing; it looks like time for another fire.'

Looking outside at the sky, Vindex noticed that despite the heat the day was clouding over and the humidity was making his head itch under the wig. Part of him wanted to rip off the wig and the fake beard but he controlled himself and gritted his teeth. No job was easy and this was just a part of his job.

Below him, Vindex saw a crowd gathering as long trumpets proclaimed the arrival of the Emperor. As he strode out Vindex saw the man in control of the entire Roman Empire, a man that a massive, uncountable army would fight and die for. Underneath him the crowd roared. Blaseus Caesar was his name, and he looked every

bit a Roman Emperor. He had been a military leader before becoming the Emperor of Rome, and he still wore the uniform of a Roman general, his gold breastplate gleaming before the adoring crowd. It was a practice of Romans to elevate their Emperors to godlike status and this man was no different. With this thought in his mind, Vindex aimed his crossbow.

The crowd had gone silent to listen to Blaseus. Vindex couldn't really hear what the great leader was saying because he was too far away, but the crowd were lapping up every word. With no more thought, Vindex pulled the trigger. The crossbow bolt struck home, shearing straight through the breastplate and entering the chest of the great man. His four bodyguards rushed to him, and pandemonium broke out throughout the forum. The noise of people shouting and screaming was deafening, and the crowd swirled below Vindex like a mighty ocean, as people ran in all directions. Vindex stared at the fallen man as people rushed to him, and was shocked to realise that the Emperor was looking straight at him. Although people had surrounded him, the man still stared straight at Vindex with the most penetrating of eyes. With a shudder, Vindex turned and ducked away from his sight. With a mighty thunderclap, the heavens broke, raining water down on the scene. This would surely be noted by the priests, and recorded as an omen.

Quickly, Vindex started preparing himself for his escape, removing the padding from the front of his tunic and dumping the crossbow in a corner. He ripped off the beard and wig and quickly straightened himself up so he looked like a new person. Then he ran out, down the stairs and rushed through the crowd, toward the docks. The news had spread quickly and as he entered the tavern to pay his bill and collect his possessions the place was buzzing with the news.

The innkeeper was talking to the drinkers at the bar. "Times will be bad for a while, I can tell you. I don't know who would want him dead; he was a good man that Blaseus Caesar. There are going to be hard times ahead, you mark my words."

Quickly, Vindex left the tavern and headed for the docks. He took passage on the first available barge to Ostia from where he could go anywhere he pleased.

### Journey's End

Vindex stood on the bow of the merchant galley reflecting, as he stared out to sea. He reflected on the sum of money he had been given. He reflected on the frenzied crowd. He reflected on the death of the leader of Rome and the consequences that it would have for the Roman Empire. He even reflected on how much time he had spent reflecting. As the sun slowly crawled toward the horizon, Vindex shut his eyes and pictured the scene in his mind. In his mind's eye he could see the crowd, hear the screams and most terrible of all, see the eyes of the Emperor staring at him.

Vindex, couldn't understand why this 'hit' had affected him so badly. He was an assassin, and a good one. It wasn't as though he wasn't used to killing people. Was it because this was an incredibly important man? He had killed many important people throughout his career. Was it because the Emperor saw him? He had certainly been seen before, and had made more brazen escapes. Perhaps it was because Blaseus Caesar was a good man and a good leader.

Vindex was visibly shaken, and questioned himself. Why did he kill for a living? It wasn't as though he wasn't capable of other work, or even needed to work. With this in mind, Vindex resolved to stop his trade of assassination. His pockets were full of gold which he could use to make a new start for himself. The merchant vessel that he was travelling on was heading to Spain, and Vindex thought to himself

that he should retire and live a life of comfort paid for by the money that he had amassed.

‘No more.’ Vindex whispered to the Sun as it dipped below the horizon and the stars slowly came into focus, ‘No more.’

## Reflection Statement for "The Journey"

The intent of "The Journey", or rather the purpose is to entertain the responder, and provide basis for thought, especially about human nature. The intended audience is a young adult to adult audience as the responder will need a reasonable level of maturity. This isn't really an appropriate story for children, as there are strong moral questions that are raised and these questions need reasoning and contemplation. It could also be confusing for children to have the main character as the 'bad guy' as this breaks away from the normal ideas of children's stories and in "The Journey" the assassin is portrayed in a good light. It is intended to be a thought provoking piece of writing. The story is very descriptive about the Roman Empire but the main reason for the composition is to examine morals and attitudes in an entertaining and thought provoking way.

When I decided to take on the task of completing a major work I had already formed the basis of a story in my mind. The story was written by looking over the notes I had on the setting that I was up to in the story (for example Ostia or Rome), picturing the scene in my mind and then typing straight onto the computer. I found that this was the method easiest for me and that the story did not really change much throughout the design process. The main changes were due to my research. For example, in the beginning of the design process I was going to set the story on a Viking warship but after some thought and research I found that this was an improbable idea and the coherency of the story would have been questionable. Changing from the Viking to Roman culture meant that a lot of little changes had to be made. For example, instead of having the entire story set at sea, the change to Roman culture meant that it had to be set in the bustling metropolises of Rome and Ostia. I still managed to incorporate the aspect of sea travel into the story by having the journey the assassin made to get to Ostia and the 'reflection period' at the end of the story. Another main change that took place after I had made the decision to switch to the Roman Empire was changing from a real, historical Emperor to a fictitious character that I created. The reason I reached this decision was that it was very hard to find any information about the Roman emperors (except Julius Caesar) apart from their names, let alone their history. It was also impossible to find any historical examples of what I wanted to happen in the story.

The problem with my method of writing the story was a lack of involvement with the journal. The drafts were also altered almost straight away on the word processor so there was a lack of formal drafts. This led to a lack of detail in the journal. I found the journal a hindrance more than anything else because in trying to record the ideas, I lost the wording that I had in my head. It didn't suit the way that I write because I tend to re-write and plan things in my head. I found writing the story easier this way.

The concept of "The Journey" is one of changing morals and boundaries. In the start, the main character Vindex is thought of by the responder as a messenger for a Senator, but halfway through the second chapter he is revealed as an assassin. This was done to provoke a change in perspective in the responder, and it is expected that different responders will see the character in different ways. Some will say that he is the same person and still a good character, and others will say that he is a killer and is a bad character. This is meant to challenge the responder and make them think about character and values (for example, is there any such thing as good or bad characters?). Change was also incorporated in the end, in the form of the change in attitude and morals of Vindex.

The structure of the story is in 4 chapters, each with separate sections showing a change in time and setting. I have tried to use very descriptive language in this story and I think I have achieved this. I have also attempted to draw parallels between man and nature, especially in the first chapter, but this was a minor theme. Strong themes in the story were arrogance, perspectives, reflection and morals as well as change.

As part of writing this story, I spent a lot of time in reflection. This is mirrored in the story in the periods that Vindex sits and thinks about the world, people and the attitudes of people. Vindex has a lot of disdain for people and at the beginning of the development of this story I tended to think along the same lines. In the first part of the story, Vindex looks at seagulls fighting over scraps and reflects about human nature. I thought of this part of the story, after feeding chips to seagulls on Coogee Beach and thinking the same thoughts, so Vindex was often an outlet of my own reflections.

The relationship between my major work and my research was mainly setting the scene for the story. My research techniques involved writing a list of aspects of ancient Roman culture and society that I thought I would need to learn about. This research was then kept with the journal and I utilised the school's books, the history department's textbooks and the library internet facilities to answer the questions one by one. This research took up the first three months of the design process and was quite extensive, even though I already had a good knowledge of Roman society and culture.

The biggest problem that I had with the creation of my major work, was keeping the journal. At the beginning I had trouble keeping regular entries, especially as I was researching. While I was researching my story, I was constantly developing the story in my mind and I didn't write my ideas in the journal, preferring to let them fully develop in my mind.

Overall I have enjoyed creating my own short story. Writing is something that I have always been interested in pursuing and this subject gave me the opportunity that I was looking for. The support that I received was mainly from my two English teachers and my mother, and this was mainly encouragement and proof reading. One of the English teachers showed concern that I wasn't keeping the diary as regularly as I should have, and this was probably my main problem.

I am pleased with my end result and am looking forward to getting my mark. I am glad that I got the opportunity to create this piece of writing, although in hind sight I should have paid more attention to the journal.