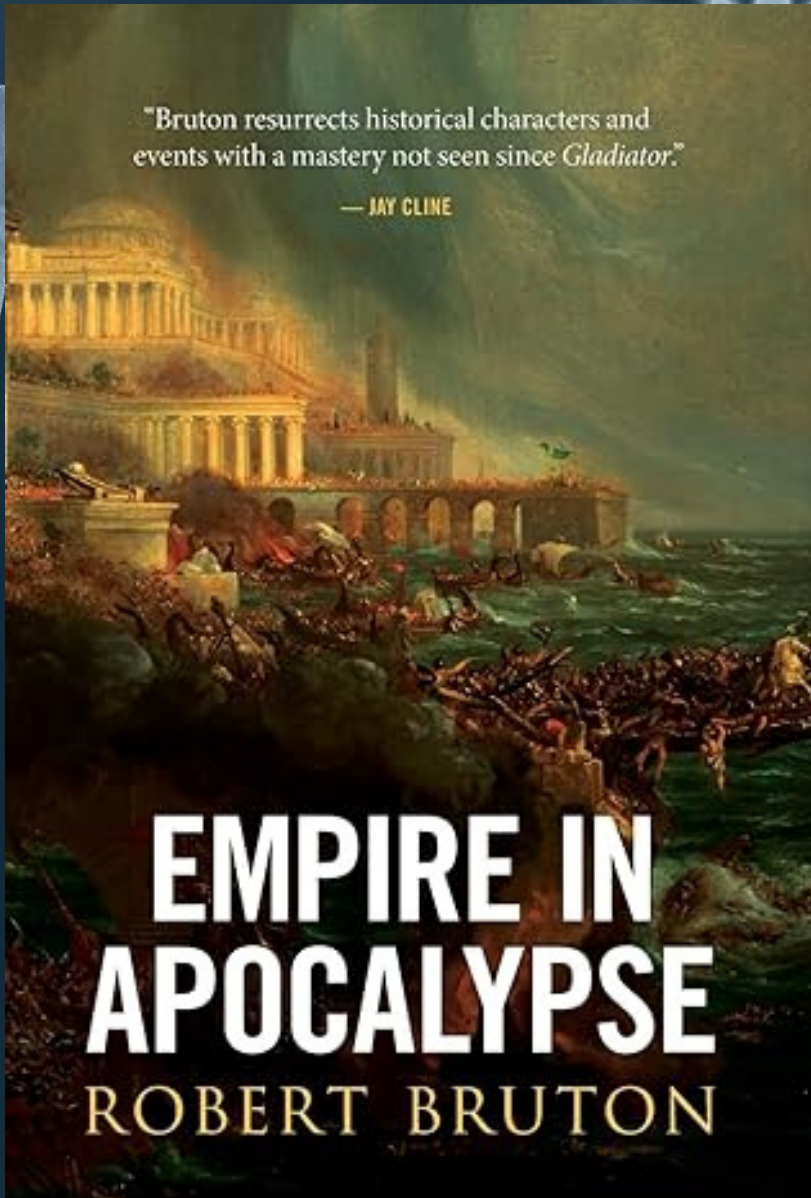


ROBERT BRUTON

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**"UNFORGETTABLE
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EMPIRE IN APOCALYPSE

— JAY CLINE

EMPIRE IN APOCALYPSE

EMPIRE IN APOCALYPSE

ROBERT BRUTON

Belisarius is a talented Roman General and a troubled man. The truth of his wife's deceit follows him everywhere, from the way his servants won't look him in the eye, to the disrespectful smirks from his fellow generals.

To distract himself, Belisarius throws himself into the ominous challenge before him: reclaiming the Roman lands lost in Italy half a century earlier. But soon he is faced with challenges out of his control; challenges that could threaten the very existence of the Empire he fights for.

PURCHASING DETAILS

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Chapter One

A Reason for War

CONSTANTINOPLE
534–535 A.D.

General Flavius Belisarius's father had once told him, "In love, we learn who we hope to be, but in war, we realize who we are." It seemed like good fatherly advice at the time, but Belisarius thought his father had gotten it backward. War was usually simple; the enemies and objectives were clear. Love was more complex, and he had difficulty navigating its treacherous path. Despite a handsome face, a closely trimmed black beard, and ruddy high cheekbones, he never seemed to be enough for his wife. He suspected Antonina was cheating on him, and if her paramour had been his enemy, he would have charged him and cut him down, but her criminal partner was his once-beloved godson, Theodosius. He knew what kind of general he wanted to be and had largely achieved that. The real question that bothered him was: what kind of husband and godfather was he?

Belisarius awoke from an unsettling evening nap on the balcony of his apartment in the Great Palace in Constantinople. He contemplated the challenges of love and war with the contents of a bottle of wine inside him. The general had not meant to fall asleep in a chair.

EXCERPT

"Bruton resurrects historical characters and events with a mastery not seen since *Gladiator*."

— JAY CLINE




**EMPIRE IN
APOCALYPSE**
ROBERT BRUTON

and resolved to go to bed to get a good night's sleep. Although he had a splitting headache, he finished the wine in his favorite chalice, stood up, nearly lost his balance, and hobbled to his bed chamber, following the dim moonlight coming in through the window. As he entered, he expected to find his lovely wife, Antonina, waiting for him, as she often did. He quietly got into bed without an oil lamp so as not to wake her and stealthily moved to the center of the bed, hoping to find her. He reached out an arm, but all he felt was the other edge of the bed. She's not here.

All at once, he recalled that his wife had left him sleeping in his chair earlier and sneaked off with Theodosius, his godson. He got out of bed, lit an oil lamp, grabbed a knife from a nearby cheese tray, and marched down the hallway to find the apartment of Theodosius, swearing to himself that he would castrate the youth right there if he found him in bed with his wife. When he found the door to Theodosius's apartment, he tried to open it quietly, but it was locked. He took a step back and, with the full force of his heel, kicked the door open. The vigor of the door breaking off its hinges and falling to the floor made such a clamor that Belisarius realized his chances of sneaking up on his prey were gone.

Everyone in the palace awoke to the loud crash. Palace guards rushed into the hallway, looking for signs of trouble. Belisarius picked up his oil lamp and rushed into the apartment but could see little. He heard footsteps tiptoeing quickly around the apartment, but the oil lamp failed to illuminate anyone. He went to Theodosius's bed and found the youth, whose handsome face and figure resembled Polycleitus's statue of Apollo, pretending to be asleep. "Theodosius," Belisarius thundered, "don't play me for a fool! Are you the only one who can sleep through the sound of an oak door falling on a stone floor?" Theodosius feigned a look of surprise and quickly covered his nakedness with his sheets. "What?" he asked as Belisarius grabbed him by the throat.

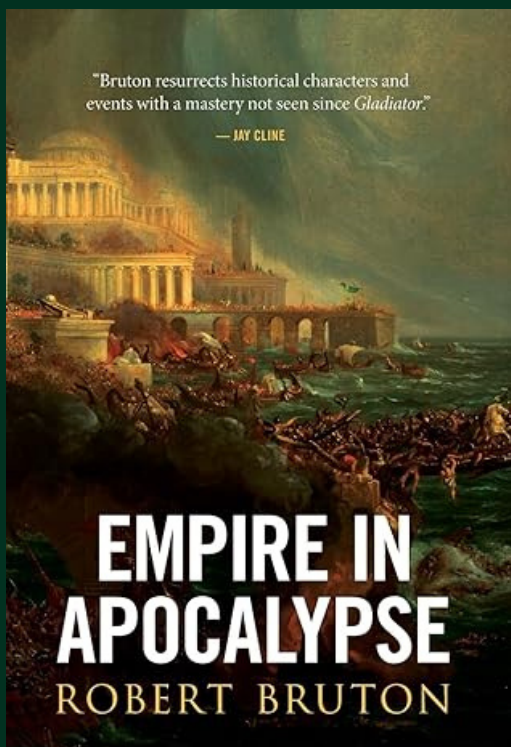
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Q&A



**ROBERT
BRUTON**



Tell us a little bit about your book:

My book tells the fascinating story of General Flavius Belisarius, one of the great military strategists of the Roman world, and the challenges he faced in trying to reunite the lost Western Empire to the East. Those challenges include enemies with larger armies, climate change, bubonic plague, and a wife whom he adores but whose wandering eye becomes a distraction and source of shame.

What inspired you to write about this particular character and time in history?

Two things: first, the story of Belisarius and Antonina is one of the great love stories of the Roman era, and today, when adultery is often justification for immediate divorce, Belisarius's unconditional love for his wife offers an inspirational challenge. Second, when I finished my Master's thesis on the role of climate change in the decline of the Roman Empire, I wanted to find a way to show this story to people who are concerned about this issue in our times but wouldn't make it through the first chapter of a history book. This novel tells the personal story of the impact from a man whose life ambitions were ruined by cold summers and the world's first pandemic.

What is the most fascinating tidbit that you learned about the Byzantium way of life while you were researching your novel?

"The more societies change, the more they stay the same." I was struck by the fact that while 1500 years of progress separates us from the Romans, the modern world continues to struggle with the very same problems: imperial ambitions of revanchist powers, riots over perceived injustice and inequality, an inability to cope with the challenges of climate change, a pandemic that threatens to destroy our way of life, and an apocalyptic mindset that pervades every new trial.

What was the most difficult part to write in this book?

The most difficult part for me was turning my skill in writing intelligence reports that focuses mostly on objective realities into a skill where you get into the passions of your characters and tell the story from their subjective point of view.

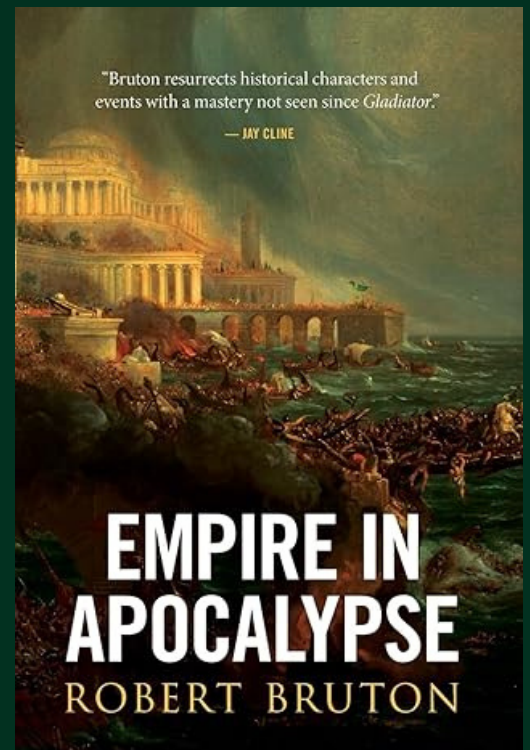
Intelligence tries to see things as they are; novels see things through the lenses of people with blind spots and passions that throw an omniscient point of view out the window.

Who is your favorite character?

Belisarius is George Washington and Jesus all wrapped into one very complex character. He's a military genius who in two campaigns reconquered Roman lands that had been lost for a century but also a compassionate person who would do anything for his troops. He is an anti-Maximus (from *Gladiator*) who, when persecuted by a petty and jealous emperor, does not set out a course for revenge but accepts his fate with grace and inspiring humility.

What's next for you? Are there other books in the series?

I am working on another climate change thriller, but this one is told from the perspective of a Mayan girl in the sixth century whose happy life has been shattered by a volcanic explosion that covers her village in thick ash, destroys their crops, and triggers a megadrought and fires. The leaders decide that the only way to appease the angry weather gods is to use a "ritual technology" that involves human sacrifice. The parents of this young girl must protect her from the horror of what is to come by turning the process into a game.



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