Hannibal and Scipio

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Two great generals of history meet upon the battlefield, in the balance is the fate of two empires.

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It was October 19th, 202 BC, and on this day the battle of Zama would be fought; in the balance was the fate of two empires which would be decided during the decisive battle of the second Punic war when two great armies met upon the field. One empire, Carthage, was an ancient civilization which had carved out a sphere of influence in North East Africa. The other was the Republic of Rome; though not yet an empire which would one day conquer most of known world, it has at this time become the strongest power on the Italian Peninsula; and is still a young republic. Upon the fields of Zama that day, in the plains of northern Africa; history would be decided.

The forces of Carthage where led by Hannibal, an aged yet masterful tactician who had for the past years waged a successful war against Rome and had become the scourge of Italy. His armies consisted of almost 50, 000 infantry men, most of which where hardened veterans of his campaign in Italy. There where as many as 6, 000 soldiers on steeds. Yet Hannibal's most fearsome asset where his 80 war elephants, the giant beasts carrying archers and could smash through any lines.

The Roman's forces where led by Scipio, who had fought in the legions against Hannibal upon the lands of Italy, and had survived three disastrous battles where the armies of Rome had been massacred the Carthaginian general. Though not as experienced as Hannibal or as well known, Scipio had risen through the ranks and now led the forces of Rome. His army was made up of around 35, 000 infantry and 6, 000 cavalry and is the weaker force.

During a cold brisk morning, these two men met. They each rode out from their forces and met alone in a field; each of the massive armies they led on either side. They would speak, knowing that one would achieve victory and the other would be defeated.

Hannibal, no longer young, was a large man with dark skin and a thick beard upon his face. He wore gold colored armor and rode a large white stallion as he waited for the approaching Scipio. A grim expression was on Hannibal's face, for he knew a river of blood would flow within the next hours. But emboldened by the fact that Rome had yet to best him, he felt sure that most blood which would fall upon the ground would be Roman. His steely eyes watched as Scipio approached.

Scipio, though not really a young man anymore, was younger then Hannibal and was more diminutive in stature and had begun to prematurely lose his hair. Scipio rode upon a black steed and was dressed in Roman Armor. As he brought his horse to a halt before Hannibal, the Roman general seemed confident yet somehow at unease.

They faced each other and just stared at each other in silence for a moment until it was finally Hannibal who spoke first.

â You know who I am Roman, though I do not know you.â

Scipio nodded. â I am Scipio Africanus, commander of the legions of Rome.â

Hannibal looked over Scipio then talked. â Daring gambit, sending most of the Roman legions here to Carthage; forcing me to return here with my armies. How did you not know that I would not have simply attacked the city of Rome while it was vulnerable?â

Scipio replied, â I wagered that you would not want to see Rome conquer Carthage again, as we did during the first Punic war. I see that I was right.â

Hannibal frowned and seemed angered. â Roman, I remember very well the first Punic war; I witnessed a general of the legions extort our people of a great deal of gold and robbed us of the island of Sicily. As a child I saw this and vowed from that moment to spend my life; devoting all my fury to destroying Rome.â

Scipio sighed. â And that you have almost done. For more years then I care to remember, you have marched your forces across Italy and slaughtered more members of the legions then can be counted. But today we will settle this for once and for all.â

Hannibal looked towards Scipio's army and said, â I see that Rome has gathered a force smaller then my own. Why do you think you will best me today roman when your people have failed to do so even when I have been outnumbered?â

Scipio slightly smiled. â Because I am your equal Hannibal, and after today the world will know that I am your superior.â

Hannibal laughed. â I see like most Romans, you are most arrogant Scipio.â

â Perhaps arrogant, but just as masterful upon the battlefield as yourself.â

Hannibal then looked directly at Scipio. â You may die today, how is it knowing that these might be your final hours.â

Scipio frowned. He then explained, â you will be defeated today, but Hannibal, I will take no pleasure in this victory.â

â And why is that roman?â

Scipio told him, â you armies killed men who I called friend, you are the first enemy which has ever threatened the life of Rome; and I should hate you. But I don't, I can't hate a man as accomplished and skilled as yourself. I am a man as great as you, but sometimes a man of greatness does not derive joy from defeating a man as great as himself. No joy gained from defeating your equal. For I know you Hannibal because we are much alike you and I.â

Hannibal grunted. â All the known world knows of Hannibal, yet does it know you Scipio? Do tongues across the face of world speak of your exploits?â

Scipio nodded again. â After today, the world will know that the mighty Hannibal was defeated by Scipio Africanus. But though such a legacy may be desirable, it will also weigh heavily upon my thoughts.â

Hannibal then spit upon the ground and glared at Scipio. Hannibal said, â your attempt at flattery is unwelcome. Carthage, after Rome left her broken and defeated, went through many years of hardship. But for every hardship Rome inflicted on Carthage, I shall inflict on Rome ten fold.â

Scipio looked away towards Hannibal's army. The Roman general said, â I see you have been resupplied with your war elephants.â

Hannibal smiled. â And they will crush your men beneath their feet. They will crush your forces as one day I will crush all of Rome until it is simply a memory.â

Scipio shrugged and seemed unimpressed. â Rome will live to see tomorrow as it will live to see the next century.â

Hannibal laughed. â Carthage was great when Rome was only a barbaric tribe crouching in the hills of Italy.â

Scipio frowned at Hannibal. â You might want to choose your words more wisely Hannibal, when you choose to accuse another of barbarism. It is said you still sacrifice the young to appease your gods.â

Hannibal seemed offended. â As a general roman, I would hope you to be learned enough to know the difference between truth and unfounded accusations.â

Scipio said, â perhaps. But what is to follow will not be a repeat of your victories in Italy. I have studied your tactics Hannibal, and have devised a plan for every maneuver you may attempt.â

Hannibal turned to his army. â You see those men? Most of them have spent more then a decade killing every soldier of the legions they have faced.â He then looked at Scipio's forces. â I doubt your men possess the experience or courage my army does. We have yet to be defeated upon the battlefield by Rome. Are you really so ignorant Scipio to think today will be any different?â

â Hannibal, perhaps it is you who is guilty of ignorance. You and your army are men, and not invincible. You may have an intellect and cunning that even the gods may fear; but you are not a god Hannibal. Just a man, like myself.â

Hannibal suddenly looked right at Scipio. â You seem like a fearless man, are you not even afraid that today Rome's last attempt to rob me of retribution will be thwarted?â

Scipio seemed emotionless. â The fate of all Rome rests within my hands, but it's fate was not misplaced. There are no hands more capable then my own.â

â Know this Scipio, there is nothing you can do to prevent the demise of Rome. After your army falls here in Zama, I shall return to Italy and lay siege to the city of Rome itself.â

Scipio then locked eyes with Hannibal. â What will happen this day Hannibal is that for the first time in your life you will taste defeat. Once I have defeated your army, then I will ensure that Carthage never threatens Rome again.â

Hannibal began to feel somewhat unsure of his coming victory. This Roman seemed completely confident in victory, and yet though at a great disadvantage he appeared unshaken.

Scipio continued. â I have been ordered by the roman senate to capture you after so that you may answer for your insult to Rome.â

Hannibal raised his voice. â Your insolence roman knows no ends! I am Hannibal, you think you would capture me like some common thief!â

â No, not a common thief, but a man I respect. If it where my choice, you would live a long life, but I must obey orders. I have no choice in the matter.â

Hannibal's face seemed saddened. â You may have been correct Scipio in saying we are alike, I know very well that men of our positions is sometimes denied the luxury of choices. For Carthage, I can't relent, and can show neither you nor Rome mercy. Nothing will ever be able to let me forgive the Rome for the harm it inflicted on Carthage.â

Scipio replied, â nor can I forget that you are the greatest enemy which Rome has ever faced and for her I must end your ceaseless march against my people.â

Hannibal told him, â do not forget that it was Rome who decided to wage this fight against Carthage. Fault for the onset of the first Punic war is upon the heads of your people, I will simply end this today.â

Scipio seemed sorrowful as he spoke. â There is more Hannibal. Rome, her senate, and her people will never forget how you have threatened them. After you are defeated, surely we will one day raze the city of Carthage itself. Rome was once ruled by the Etruscans and their kings, we defeated them and now there is barely any history of the Etruscans remembered. It will be the same for Carthage. Rome will be remembered well, the same fate does not await Carthage.â

Hannibal, for the first time in his war against Rome, felt a slight fear that it would be Carthage that would fall. But it was brief.

He said, â history will remember Hannibal, and it will remember Carthage. Scipio, if history remembers you at all, it will surely be as just another Roman general who fell before my armies.â

Scipio look towards the sky and said, â history will remember Hannibal, for history will always have a place for a man as renowned as yourself. But those who write that history will end the story of Hannibal with he was defeated at Zama by Scipio. Nothing you can do will stave defeat, this is the end.â

Hannibal then pulled on the reigns of his horse then turned his steed to face his army. But before he rode off he looked back at Scipio and said, â I know nothing of you general, your exploits are unknown to me, but I get the sense that who are going to be the most worthy adversary I have ever faced.â

Scipio then turned his horse to face his forces but replied, â and you would have been right.â

Then they each rode towards their waiting armies and the battle of Zama commenced.

So the forces of Hannibal and Scipio met upon the field of battle. Scipio correctly deduced that Hannibal's dreaded war elephants would rather run through gaps between his infantry rather then charge dense groups of soldiers. Troops to the back of Scipio's lines then slaughtered the beasts and Hannibal's greatest asset was neutralized. Though Hannibal usually relied upon the cavalry for victory, Scipio had raised cavalry forces from both Sicily and the nation of Masinissa. Their forces waged battle yet despite Hannibal's superior numbers and great tactical wit, he failed to achieve victory. And by days end, the mighty Hannibal was defeated by the forces of Scipio. And so the end of battle of Zama and the second Punic war was decided.

After, Carthage sued for peace to halt the war. But the terms of surrender left Carthage bankrupt and utterly defeated, and would never challenge Rome again. Though Carthage did experience a brief economic recovery, Rome decreed that Carthage may not declare war without her permission. When the nation of Numidia attacked Carthage and she fought back, Rome then called for war and the third Punic War began. During this war Rome razed the city of Carthage and annexed her territories into the growing Roman republic. Carthage after wards ceased to exist, and was relegated to the pages of history.

Scipio, after the battle of Zama, returned to the city of Rome a hero, though the senate was quick to deny him the title dictator for life which surely the Roman people would have given him. Scipio was given a political position, but he decided to retire from political life and lived a silent existence. He later on was involved in a scandal and left the city of Rome never to return. But for much of his life, he tried to prevent Rome from exacting revenge upon Hannibal. Scipio would died eventually but would be remembered as one of histories greatest generals.

Hannibal escaped after his defeat in Zama. He returned to Carthage during her final years, and became a man of much prominence. But his position and Carthage's short economic recovery moved Rome to demand Hannibal's surrender. He decided then to go into self imposed exile and he left his beloved Carthage. With the help of foreign nations, Hannibal attempted to defeat Rome militarily but was unable to obtain victory. Rome hunted Hannibal mercilessly but never could capture him. But finally when Rome was about to capture their deadly foe, Hannibal chose to take his own life by ingesting poison. Hannibal died on the shore of the seas of Marmara, it is said his last words where, â let us relieve the Romans from the anxiety they have so longed experienced, since they think it tries their patience to much to wait for an old man's death.â

Scipio and Hannibal met, and history would never forget their epic battle.

The End

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