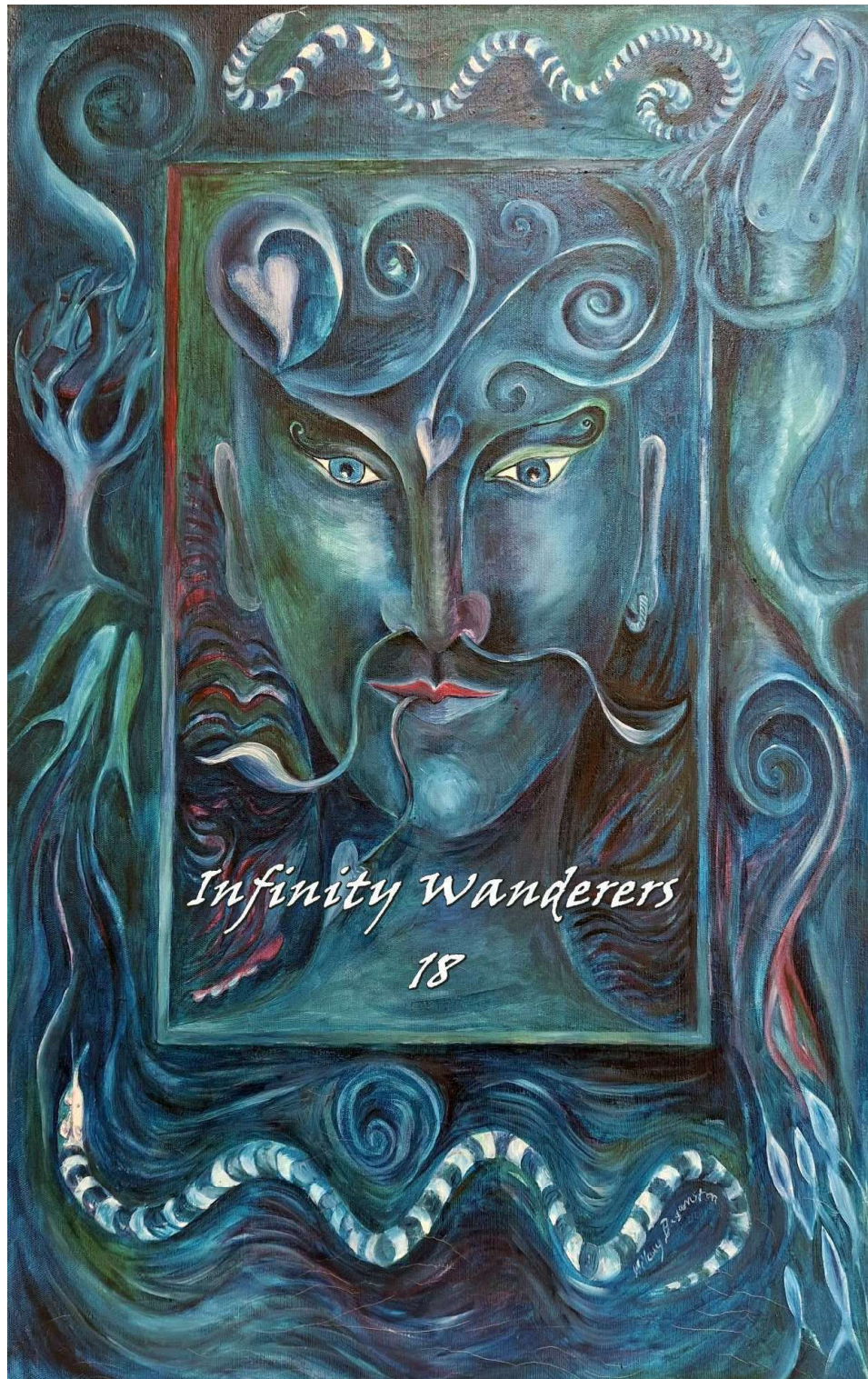
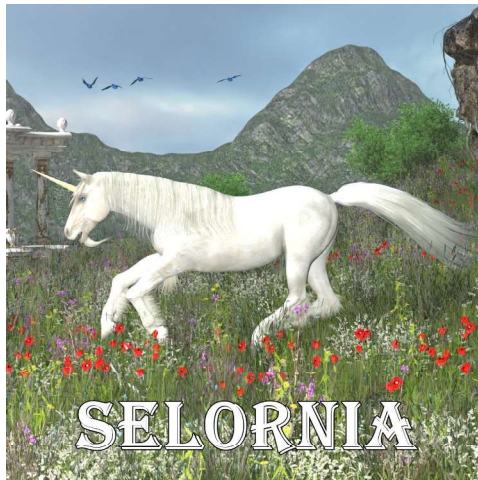




INFINITY WANDERERS

#18

EDITED BY GREY WOLF



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ADVERTS

Augustus' Vision

Matias Travieso-Diaz

Late in 16 BCE, Emperor Caesar Augustus left Rome and traveled to Durocortorum (Reims), the capital of Gallia Belgica, where he set quarters for three years. His extended stay was the result of an incident that came to be known as the *Clades Lolliana* (the Lollian defeat), a military reversal inflicted on the Roman forces in Gaul by a coalition of Germanic tribes that had crossed the Rhine into Roman territory seeking plunder. Marcus Lollius, the Roman Governor, had moved to intercept the invaders and had been defeated in an intense battle. The most significant result of the battle had been the loss of a sacred Roman standard: the Legionary Eagle of the Roman Fifth Legion. To the eyes of the Romans, the loss constituted a great dishonor on the Empire that evidenced military incompetence and perhaps divine disfavor.

Augustus had become emperor based in part on his claim that he had ended the Roman civil wars and had brought an unbreakable peace to all the Roman domains. The Clades Lolliana undercut his assurances and needed to become a one-time disaster not to be repeated. Augustus' stay at the Rhine frontier served to better secure the border by establishing stronger military deployments, improving the roads and other logistics arrangements, and creating an infrastructure that would support a more aggressive stance towards the lands to the east of the river in case Rome decided to march into Germania. However, after three years he concluded that bolstering the defenses west of the Rhine was not enough to assure peace and he should undertake the occupation of the lands of Germania.

Before launching an important military campaign, it was the practice among Roman rulers to visit the temple of Janus, the two-faced god of beginnings and endings, and seek to propitiate the god to secure a favorable outcome of the planned conflict. Augustus was eager to carry out such a visit before going to war in Germania, because he was by nature superstitious: he believed that his victory over Mark Anthony at the crucial battle of Actium had been achieved because the night before the engagement he had visited the ancient temple of Apollo on the Actian promontory and had made an offering to the god that had won Apollo's favor.

Thus, upon returning to Rome, Augustus visited the temple of Janus to make a major sacrifice to the god. Before entering, he performed a *suovetaurilia*, i.e., the slaying of three white male animals (a pig, a ram, and a bull). Then, inside the temple, Augustus poured choice red wine at the god's altar out of a shallow sacrificial bowl, and drank a full measure of wine himself to get his thoughts and emotions attuned to the divinity.

Soon after downing the wine, Augustus fell into a swoon and dropped to the floor at the foot of the altar. His attendants, suspecting a divine trance (or an epileptic episode, which ran in his family) made no attempts to revive Augustus, but brought in blankets and a cushion to ease his rest.

Upon reviving after a long trance, Augustus made a startling revelation to his lifelong friend, confidant and right-hand man, Marcus Vipsanius Agrippa: "As I lay unconscious, I was visited by Janus himself. One of the faces of the god transmuted into the visage of my stepson Tiberius and stared at me fixedly at first, displaying no emotions; then, with a deep scowl, the god turned around so that his other face gazed at me directly, taking on the features of Tiberius' younger brother Drusus and nodding approvingly. As you know, I have a strained relationship

with Tiberius, who I find too gloomy and reclusive for my taste. On the other hand, Drusus is charismatic, brilliant, and deeply popular with both the legions and the Roman people. I think the god might have been pressing me to choose Drusus instead of Tiberius to lead my campaign in Germania, but perhaps the vision was only a reflection of my personal affinities.”

Agrippa thought about it for some time and then replied gravely: “Yours appears to have been a prophetic dream, in which case it would be unwise to turn down the boon you have received from Janus on a suspicion that it was merely a reflection of your inner mind. In disregarding such a message, you might offend Janus and have both you and Roma be punished for your disrespect.”

Augustus nodded in recognition of the wisdom of Agrippa’s advice. “Actually, I have been debating who should lead my legions in Germania. You are the obvious choice, but you are too valuable to me to send you away to a perilous, perhaps long-lasting war, so I was pondering which members of my immediate family to trust with the engagement. Is Janus suggesting that Drusus would be a better choice to lead the invasion than Tiberius?”

Agrippa smiled. “I thank you for relieving me of any responsibility for invading Germania. A long campaign against barbarous adversaries in a gloomy, uneven land full of forests and icy rivers, with no cities to plunder and no good food or wine to drink, is a heavy burden that I would rather not assume. But yes, I think Janus is expressing a preference for Drusus, but there may be more to the god’s message.”

“What do you mean?”

“If all Janus wanted to do was indicate his preference for Drusus as the leader of this campaign, he needed not have brought Tiberius into the picture at all. I wonder what he meant by including Tiberius in his message, and to do so in such a derogatory manner.”

“The words of the gods are often unclear” reflected August. “But here, the message seems to be for the most part obvious. I will put the invasion of Germania in Drusus’ hands.”

Drusus did not disappoint his stepfather for choosing him. Over the next three years (12 to 9 BCE) he conducted an exemplary campaign, in the course of which he defeated time and again the forces of numerous Germanic tribes (the Sugambri, Usipetes, Tencteri, Cherusci, Chatti, and others). He also conducted naval operations in which his forces conquered lands bordering on the region’s inland rivers and built a canal known as the *Fossa Drusiana* that connected the Rhine waterways with routes towards the north and east, ultimately reaching the North Sea; he also constructed forts, established supply bases, and built a chain of military infrastructure facilities central to Roman operations in Germania.

In 9 BCE, Drusus reached the Elbe River, advancing farther into Germania than any Roman commander before him, and started his return home. Then misfortune overtook Drusus: his horse tripped on a hidden root, threw him, and fell on him, inflicting severe injuries. The wounds developed gangrene, and Drusus died several days later.

After the death of Drusus, his brother Tiberius assumed command of Rome’s operations in Germania and became the principal architect of Roman frontier policy there for the next decade. Unlike Drusus’ deep military advances, Tiberius did not expand the land’s occupation but merely consolidated Rome’s domination so that resistance temporarily declined. Rome,

however, was never able to fully occupy Germania or establish a stable provincial administration there.

The aim of Janus' prophecy was finally revealed, except for the scowl that the god showed on Tiberius' face. Perhaps Janus was intending to foretell that Rome's conquest of Germania under Tiberius' command would fail – a prediction that eventually came to pass; or maybe Janus, like the Roman people years later, took a dim view of Tiberius as a poor ruler or an infamous human being.

END