

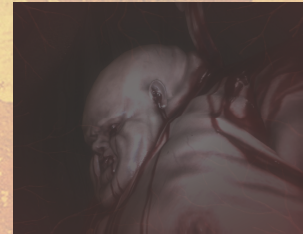
CLIVE BARKER'S JERICHO™

AL-KHALI - A CITY SLICED THROUGH TIME.

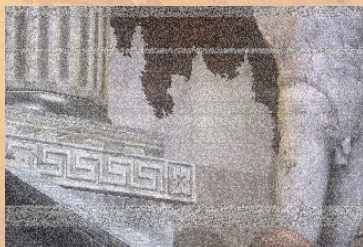
The Roman Empire 38 AD

During the reign of Emperor Caligula, the beginning of the end of Rome's power, Al-Khali lay at the Eastern front bordering the Parthian Empire. Considered politically, culturally and strategically insignificant by Rome, being stationed at Al-Khali was considered exile at best. For the seventh cohort of the first legion, posted to Al-Khali, it was worse: it meant dishonour. It was the worst destination that a legionary could hope for and most of its members had been condemned for some crime, were killers, or fleeing something. But they also had to serve under governor Casus Vicus.

The fame of the tribune Cassus Vicus was notorious throughout Rome. A devotee of all types of orgies and festivities, Vicus was a fan of any excess or perversion. But he went too far. He was surprised while practising cannibalism and condemned to death. However, he was absolved. Partly because of the enormous sum he paid as a bribe, partly because of his personal friendship with the former emperor Tiberius, a bosom companion in his bacchanals.



Cassus Vicus was named governor of Al-Khali, the province farthest from the Empire. At first furious and deeply offended by this forced retirement to this dusty corner that was so totally lacking in the charms of the known world, he soon learned to appreciate the advantages of governing a place so far from civilization. Far from the interests and law of Rome, Vicus' supposed duties boiled down to little more than collecting taxes and protecting the borders. But he came to see a new purpose for the cursed lands under his control: dedicating its resources to his own deification, perversion, and excess. Vicus gave free rein to his basest instincts, behaving more like a criminal than a governor of a Roman province. His cruelty won him the respect of his neighbours who avoided him whenever possible.



The temple was dedicated not to Jupiter, Saturn, Mars or Minerva, but to Vicus himself. The villa and palace were lavishly decorated as they hosted the endless parties, banquets and orgies that satisfied Vicus hedonistic appetite. The seventh legion acted not as representatives of the Roman Empire, but as a devastating extension of Vicus will, forced as they were to commit all types of abuse on the local population and especially with the merchant caravans crossing the territory.

Tax collection gave way to the payment of tolls, protection fees and finally pillaging and sacking travellers through the Al-Khali region. The most fortunate were executed on the road. Those were not ended up in the sumptuous coliseum as slaves, concubines and finally as part of the banquet (cannibalism was, of course, one of Vicus' favourite indulgences.) It was said to live under the rule of Vicus was to be a curse from the Gods themselves. But Vicus instead came to see himself as a living God at Al-Khali, with those who lived, trespassed, or travelled through his lands to live, serve and die at his whim.