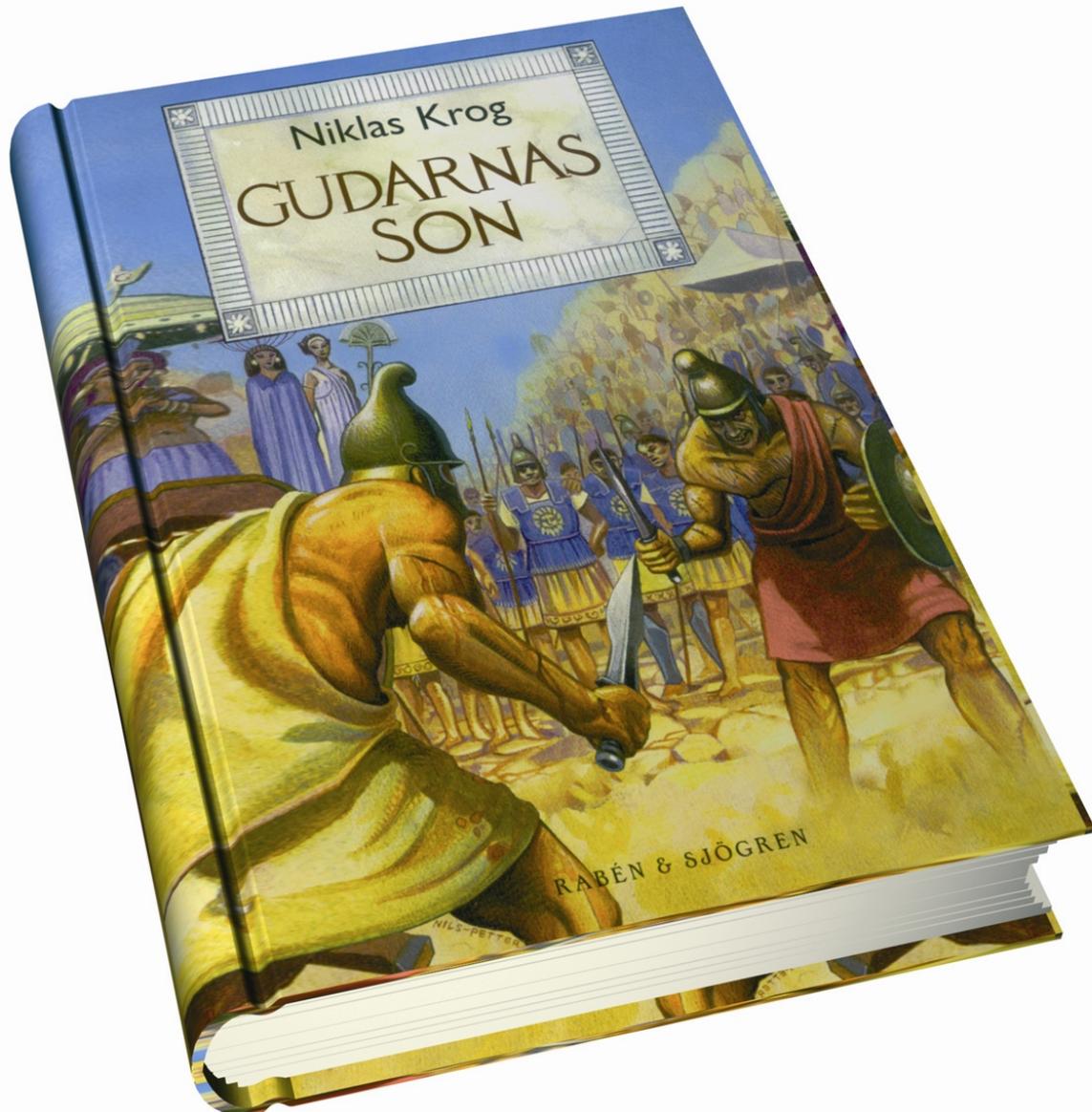


## The Son of the Gods



**This is the story about three boys – Janus, Caleb and Troy - who decide to leave their lives as shepherds in the valley of the river Struma, and try to follow Alexander the Great. The year is 334BC and the young king has gone to war against the powerful Persian Empire. The three boys dream of honour and fame, but their long trek does not turn out as they expected. 161 pages.**

**Towards the end of Alexander's half-year long and vicious siege of the island of Tyre in 332 BC, Troy loses both his hands in an accident on the ramp the army was building to attack Tyre. Troy survives the accident, but lies in the sick tent without hardly moving or speaking. Janus is horribly shocked and doesn't know what to do. Or maybe he does.**

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## Chapter 27

Janus and Caleb crawled into their places in the tent. Janus lay down on his back, without speaking, hardly even thinking. Caleb breathed slowly somewhere beside him.

The tent cloth snapped in the wind.

He closed his eyes and tried to think of something other than Troy.

Little more than a year ago, they had still been at home, simple boys with even simpler dreams. He wanted to laugh at their childishness, then he wanted to cry.

They had come far since then, had got to know many people, and had left nearly as many behind them. His mother flickered past, stiff and rejecting. Then grandpa. The old man smiled. When Janus smiled back, the wrinkled face transformed into his father's, tired and scarred.

Quietly, his father stared into the fire beside him, huddled in his mantle, like he had done the night before Issus. They did not speak, and there was no need to do so either. The grumpy face dissolved and all that remained were two empty eye sockets.

Father!

A new face took shape, surrounded by ringlets of black hair. Beneath the hair, a small and supercilious face could be glimpsed.

Drypetis.

But the eyes did not belong to Darius' daughter. They were large and dark, and looked straight at him.

*You are brave, Janus.*

He opened his eyes. The tent was black. Aelia's voice continued.

*You must be braver than you have ever been, braver that you ever thought you could be. For*

*his sake.*

He saw Troy lying among the other sick and wounded soldiers. His will to live had gone – he barely ate, did not swat at the flies, moved only if he had to. The body that had been so full of life gradually collapsed as they days passed.

*The only way.*

Aelia nodded, and he knew what he had to do.

Great Zeus!

Janus glanced sideways. Caleb's eyes were closed, and his breathing was quiet and even. Silently, he got to his feet, took his knife and crept past the prone, sleeping bodies of the other men.

The camp outside was quiet in the warm wind.

His tunic flapped, but he did not feel it. His conviction was growing with each step.

*The only way.*

The hospital tent reared up like a giant monster from the dark in front of him. The opening was the jaws that swallowed all living things.

He walked straight towards it.

The night watchmen looked up as he stepped inside. They greeted him with recognition and he nodded back.

Troy lay with his back towards him, a thin, shrunken figure among all the others.

Janus sank to his knees behind his friend, and only then did it get difficult. No, unbearable. But he could not turn back. He closed his eyes and remained kneeling.

A moment or several hours later, he opened his eyes. Troy had turned towards him. His face was empty, but his gaze was burning.

“Janus...”

He understood. He even thanked him. But Janus' own resolution faltered.

“How...?” He shook his head and grew silent, afraid that his voice would not carry.

Mutely, Troy lifted the stumps of his arms towards him.

With trembling fingers, Janus started undoing the bandages. Troy's gaze did not leave him. Janus had seen when those with healing knowledge had cut away all the bones that protruded from the lacerated flesh, and then pulled the skin over. The last bandage fell, and he looked faintly at the stumps.

“The threads”, said Troy.

In order to stem the bleeding, thin threads had been tied around the largest arteries. They were still there. When the wound healed, they would fall off by themselves.

Janus pulled out his knife. There was so much he wanted to say, so many memories and so much laughter. But no words.

Troy looked stiffly at the knife and the threads.

Janus cut.

The speed with which the blood gushed forth surprised him. It splashed in long pulses over the dry ground. Troy opened his eyes wide.

The pool of blood grew with terrifying speed and Janus felt a growing panic. But when Troy started leaning to one side, he put his arms around him and held him as hard as he could. It helped. Still, his friend said nothing.

The moments rushed past.

The pulses quickly lost strength and Troy's gaze became weaker and weaker. The blood was like a sea around them. So much blood.... Suddenly, the thin body tensed.

"Where am I going?"

There was fear in his voice. But it was too late. Janus could not save him. Nobody could.

"What will become of me now?"

"I don't know..." Desperately, Janus scabbled to find something to say.

The pool of blood had stopped growing.

"Where, Janus?" The head fell backwards, and Troy looked straight up at him.

He forced himself to meet the terror in the gaze.

"To Hades in the land of the dead. Or... I don't know. But I'll follow you. Together with Caleb. Then we'll set off on a new march, just like we dreamed of doing... Troy?"

His friend did not answer.

Blood still trickled forth, but interminably slowly. The body collapsed in his arms, while life was rushing towards its end. He tried to think of something they had done together, something he wanted to remember, but he felt empty. Mutely, he looked down at the pale, worn face until a final shiver moved through numbing muscles, and the boy who had been Troy left this world for ever.

Gone. Just like his father. Just like everybody who had ever lived.

He wanted to cry, but could not.

Carefully, he laid Troy down in the glittering blood and rose on wobbly legs. A night watchman appeared behind him.

"You did the right thing", the man said quietly. "He no longer had the will. I'll take care of him now. You can go and change.

Change?

When he looked down, his tunic was drenched in blood.

Troy's blood.

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