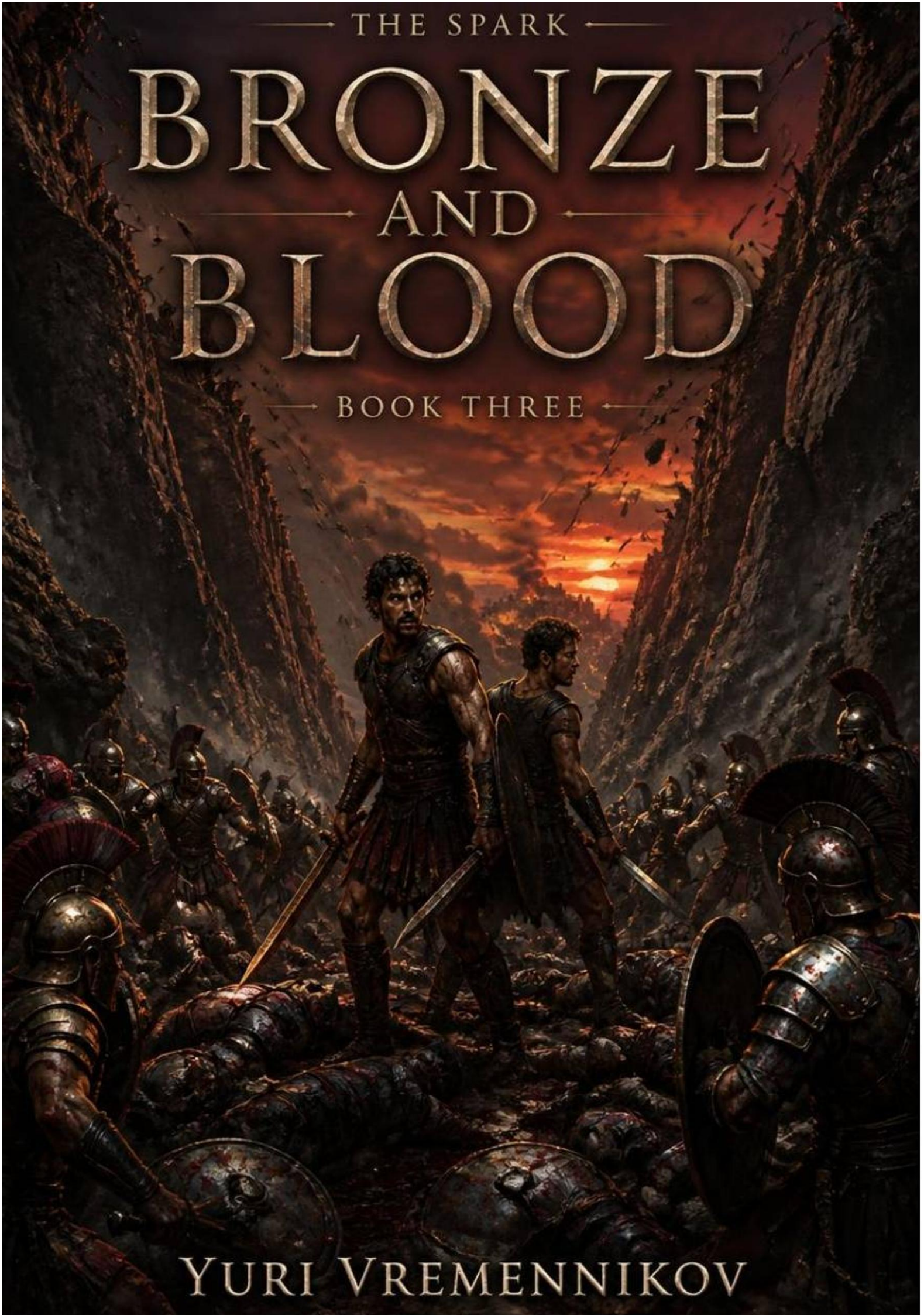

THE SPARK
BRONZE AND BLOOD
BOOK THREE
YURI VREMENNIKOV

Юрий Временников

Volume 4. The City by the River

«Автор»
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Временников Ю.

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Years have passed. The settlement has turned into a real stone city with a library, forges, and powerful walls. The brothers establish trade with the southern kingdoms, adopt writing and new technologies. But the peaceful dawn is disturbed by news of the mighty King Hammurabi, who is advancing north with a huge army. The city prepares for a siege. The fourth book of the series is about how the civilization they created withstands the onslaught of an empire, about the courage of women and children who stood up to defend their home, and about the fact that even in the darkest hour, hope does not die.

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Юрий Временников
Volume 4. The City by the River

Chapter 1. News from the South

Five years had passed since Gurr's death. Five years of peace, trade, and growth. The settlement of the "Grey Lynxes" could no longer easily be called a settlement — it was a real city. The palisade had long since been replaced by a powerful wall of logs and stone, with towers and gates that were locked at night with heavy bolts. Inside the wall dozens of new houses had grown — built of logs, with gabled roofs, with windows covered with oiled leather. The streets were paved with stone so that in the rains one wouldn't sink into the mud. On the central square rose the large communal house where the Supreme Council gathered.

The population had passed two thousand. Their own people, former prisoners, settlers from other tribes — all had mingled, spoke different languages, but gradually learned to understand each other. The main language was becoming the one the brothers spoke — everyone learned it, because trade was conducted in it and laws were written down in it.

Miron and Arsen lived in a small house on the outskirts, right by the forest. They liked the quiet, though guests came constantly — for advice, for help, just to talk. They no longer took part in everyday administration, but without their word nothing was still decided.

That morning Miron sat on the low earthen ledge by the house, warming himself in the sun and watching Niya's and Vetka's grandchildren play in the grass. The eldest, Arsen the Younger, had already turned five, and he was bossing the younger ones around — exactly like his namesake in childhood.

"Ir-Tan!" shouted Chick, running up out of breath. "There are guests! From the south! A big caravan!"

Miron rose and brushed off his trousers. Chick was already twenty-two — a grown man, the keeper of the chronicles, as he himself called it. He wore a long shirt of fine cloth woven by the women of the tribe and girded himself with a leather belt with a bronze buckle — a sign of respect.

"What kind of guests?" Miron asked.

"Traders, but not simple ones. They say they're envoys from some king. They want to speak with you and Or-Var."

"Call my brother. We'll meet them."

The caravan was huge — dozens of wagons drawn by oxen, hundreds of people, guards in bronze armor unlike any made here. Ahead rode horsemen on tall horses, in cloaks embroidered with patterns. The leader — a middle-aged man with a wedge-shaped beard, in a pointed cap — dismounted and bowed.

"Peace to your house," he said in a broken but understandable language. "I am Ashur, merchant and envoy of the great king Ur-Nammu, lord of Sumer and Akkad."

Miron and Arsen exchanged glances. Sumer? Akkad? These were names from their past life, from history textbooks. So here, in this world, there existed a real civilization — with kings, writing, laws.

"Peace to you too," Arsen replied. "What brings you to our lands?"

"Rumors," Ashur smiled. "They say far in the north there is a people who know how to make bronze no worse than ours, build stone walls, and live by laws. My king wants to know: who are you? Friends or enemies?"

"Friends," Miron said firmly. "We don't attack anyone, but we don't let ourselves be wronged."

"That's good. My king also wants peace. He proposes to trade, exchange envoys, learn from each other. In return we ask only one thing: don't hinder our merchants from passing through your lands to the northern seas."

"Through our lands?" Arsen repeated. "And where are these lands?"

Ashur unrolled a map — on tanned leather, with drawings of mountains and rivers. It was far more detailed than the one they had drawn themselves.

"Here we are," he poked his finger at a point beyond the southern mountains. "And here," — his finger slid higher, — "are your lands. If we go straight, through the pass, we'll come out at your river. This is the shortest route to the northern seas, where there is much amber and fur."

Miron and Arsen examined the map. It was surprisingly accurate — mountains, rivers, even their settlement was marked with a cross.

"How do you know our places?" Arsen asked.

"Reconnaissance," Ashur answered calmly. "Don't be offended. We must know who we're dealing with. Your people saw our scouts? No. So they're good."

The brothers exchanged glances. This was a serious civilization — with reconnaissance, maps, plans.

"We'll think about it," Miron said. "Stay with us for now, rest. Tomorrow we'll give you our answer."

The caravan was housed on the meadow beyond the wall, guards posted. In the evening a feast was held — in honor of the guests. Ashur turned out to be an interesting conversationalist: he told of his cities, of temples, of kings, of gods. They had never seen how people write on clay, count on abacuses, build arches.

"You have writing?" Chick asked, unable to contain himself.

"Of course," Ashur was surprised. "And you?"

"We do," Chick answered proudly, and brought his birch barks.

Ashur examined them for a long time, clicking his tongue:

"Interesting. On birch bark... We write on clay — we fire it, and it can be kept forever. We'll teach you, if you want."

"We want to!" Chick and Miron said in one voice.

At night the brothers sat by the fire for a long time.

"What do you think?" Miron asked.

"I think it's inevitable," Arsen answered. "We can't close ourselves off. If they want to trade — let them trade. But we must be careful. People like them can come with war."

"With war — not now. Peace is profitable for them. But we must strengthen the alliance with the northerners and the steppe dwellers. So that if anything — we're together."

"Agreed. Tomorrow we'll say yes, but on our terms. Let them go through our lands, but with an escort and a payment."

In the morning they agreed. Ashur was satisfied.

"My king will reward you generously," he promised. "We'll send craftsmen who will teach you to write on clay, build arches, make wheels with spokes. And you will let our caravans pass and protect them in your lands."

"Agreed," Arsen nodded.

The caravan went north, promising to return in a month. And in the settlement a new era began.

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.

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