



Hannibal's Epic Elephant Journey



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Chapter 1

Hannibal's Challenge

The sun beat down on the beautiful seaside city of Carthage as Hannibal followed his father, Hamilcar, into the cool shade of the temple. The year was 237 BCE.

Hamilcar, a commander of the Carthaginian army, was preparing to fight in the war against Rome.

“Take me with you this time,” Hannibal begged.

He missed his father terribly when he was away.

Hamilcar shook his head. “You’re just a child, my son.”

“I’m nine years old,” Hannibal argued, straightening his shoulders. “And I’m brave and strong.”

“You’re right,” Hamilcar smiled. “You can come with me on one condition.”

“Anything!” Hannibal cried eagerly.

“Lay your hand on the sacred objects,” Hamilcar said.

Hannibal obeyed.

“Now swear you will never be a friend of Rome.”



Hannibal stood tall
and looked his father
right in the eye.

“I promise,”
he said solemnly,
“I will never be
a friend of Rome.”

Years passed. Hamilcar died in battle, and young Hannibal grew up to become leader of the Carthaginian army.

Hannibal was clever brave, and ambitious. He never forgot the promise he had made to his father, but now that he was leader of the army he decided that he would do even better.



Not only would Hannibal never be friends with the Romans – he would attack them in their own country! That would make his father proud.

He told his brother Mago about his plan to invade Italy.

“But how will we get to Italy?” Mago asked. “The Roman fleet protects both the coast road and the sea.”

“Then we must go over the Alps,” Hannibal said.

“The Romans will not expect that. We will have the element of surprise.”

“But that is a 1500 mile journey,” his brother protested.

“Besides, we don’t have enough men to fight the Romans.”

“Not yet,” Hannibal replied, smiling. For he had already begun to assemble an enormous army of professional soldiers from lots of different countries and, best of all, thirty-seven war elephants.

Hannibal and Mago gazed up at the largest elephant in wonder as it trumpeted loudly, swishing its mighty trunk.

“How fast are they?” Hannibal asked.

“These elephants can charge at speeds of up to forty-five kilometres an hour, killing anyone unlucky enough to be trampled beneath their enormous feet or impaled by their sharp tusks,” Ali, the elephant’s handler, replied, patting the elephant's trunk. “This is Surus, the best war elephant I have ever trained.”

Hannibal smiled. “Then he shall be my elephant.

Together, we will defeat the Romans.”

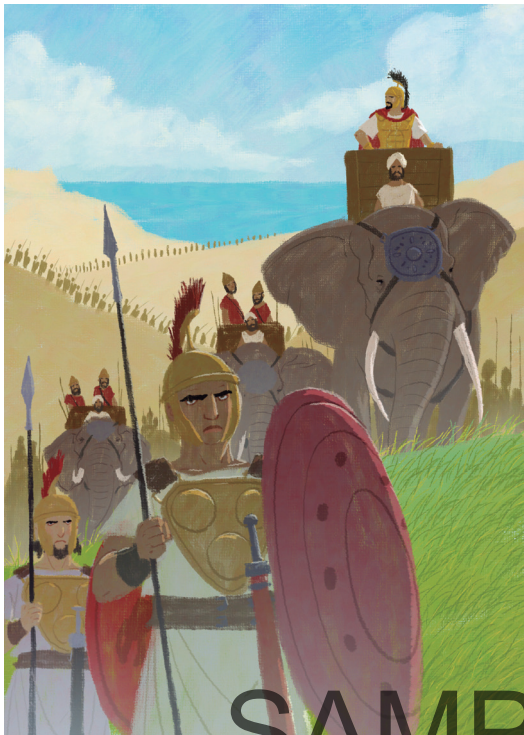
“My brother, this is madness!” Mago protested. “The war elephants may be fearsome in battle, but you cannot take elephants over the Alps. The path is narrow, steep and icy, and they are used to open plains. It is impossible!”

“That is just what the Romans will think,” Hannibal smiled.

“I will catch them off-guard.”

Ali helped Hannibal climb onto Surus' back. Then Hannibal spoke to his troops: "My men, thank you for your loyalty. Our journey will be long, but the rewards will be immense. There is nothing that a brave heart and a strong sword cannot win! To Rome and victory!"

The men cheered as they followed him, bashing their spears on their gleaming shields. Feeling the mighty Surus beneath him, and gazing round at his ninety thousand soldiers



and twelve thousand horsemen, Hannibal felt invincible. Their epic journey had begun.

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Chapter 2

The Epic Journey

But the journey was tougher than anyone had imagined.

The army crossed vast dusty plains, climbed steep hills and encountered many hostile tribes who attacked Hannibal's army, killing thousands of his men.

Still the exhausted army trudged on, until they reached the banks of the enormous river Rhône.

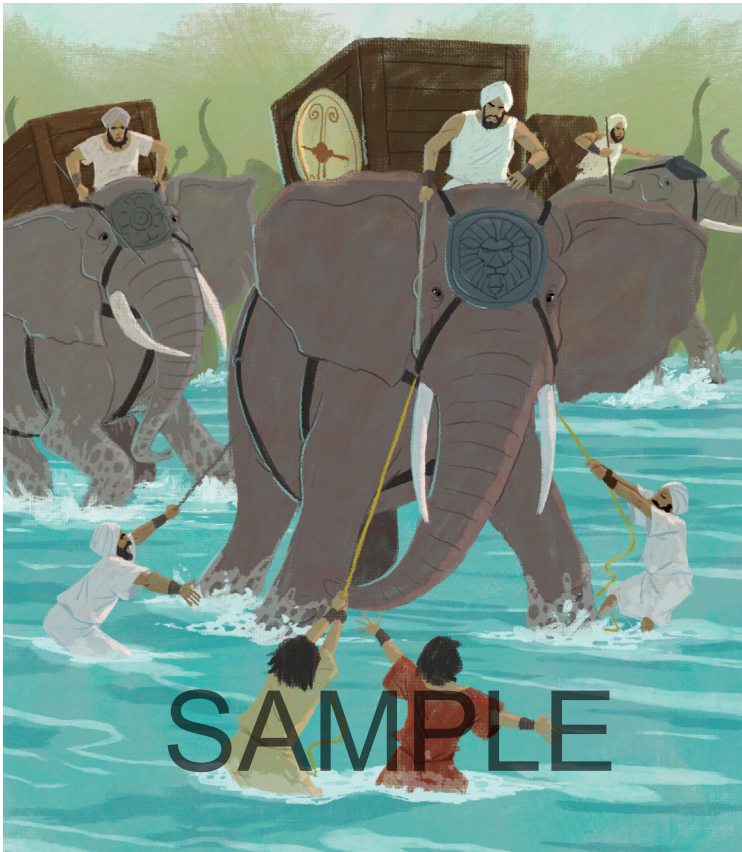
Hannibal stared at the vast expanse of sparkling water.

It was three hundred feet wide. He ordered his men to cut down nearby trees to build rafts and canoes, and summoned Mago and Ali.

"Can elephants swim?" Hannibal asked Ali.

"Yes," the elephant handler said slowly. "But the river is very wide and they cannot see the other side. They would panic."

“We could try to find a shallower part of the river so they can wade across,” a soldier called Titus suggested. Hannibal shook his head. “That will take too long. We must reach the Alps before winter, and September is already upon us. We must find a way to get them across.” Titus and the soldiers tried chasing the elephants into the river, but the beasts just stopped. They tried tugging the elephants with ropes, but that didn’t work either.



Suddenly there was a thunder of hooves and a scout galloped into sight. “Roman ships have landed on the coast,” he panted. “They have heard about our army and are on their way to attack us!”

“We need to get the elephants across the river. Now!”

Hannibal yelled. “If they won’t swim, then build rafts!”

But the elephants wouldn’t get onto the giant rafts either.

As soon as one placed a foot on the bobbing logs, it panicked, trumpeted, and shuffled backwards hastily.

“This is hopeless,” Mago said anxiously. “The Romans could be here at any moment. We have to leave the elephants behind.”

“No,” Hannibal argued. “They are crucial to our success.”

“I might have an idea,” Ali said, thinking fast. “Could we tie the rafts in a row and cover them with dirt and grass?”

“Do you mean to make a bridge?” Mago said. “The river is too wide and we don’t have enough rafts.”

“We don’t need a bridge,” Ali explained. “We just need a way to get the elephants onto the rafts. If we keep the rafts still enough and make the elephants think it is dry land, it might just work.”

“That is ridiculous!” Mago scoffed.

“Do you have a better idea?” Hannibal snapped.

Mago sighed, then shook his head. Soon the huge rafts were all tied together and completely covered with mud and grass. But would it fool the elephants? There was only one way to find out. Hannibal watched as Ali led Surus slowly, carefully, onto the first raft. Surus placed one heavy foot on the raft, then stopped. Ali picked up a handful of grass and offered it to the elephant. Surus sniffed the grass, then wrapped his trunk around it and pushed it in his mouth. He munched for a moment, then he took another step onto the raft. And another.

Hannibal breathed a sigh of relief. As Ali led Surus further onto the rafts, the other elephants followed, guided by their handlers and soldiers, ready to paddle the huge rafts across the wide river.

“Cut them loose,”
Hannibal ordered.

“It’s working!” Mago
cried. Hannibal smiled.
But as the rafts
reached the middle
of the river,
the current swelled



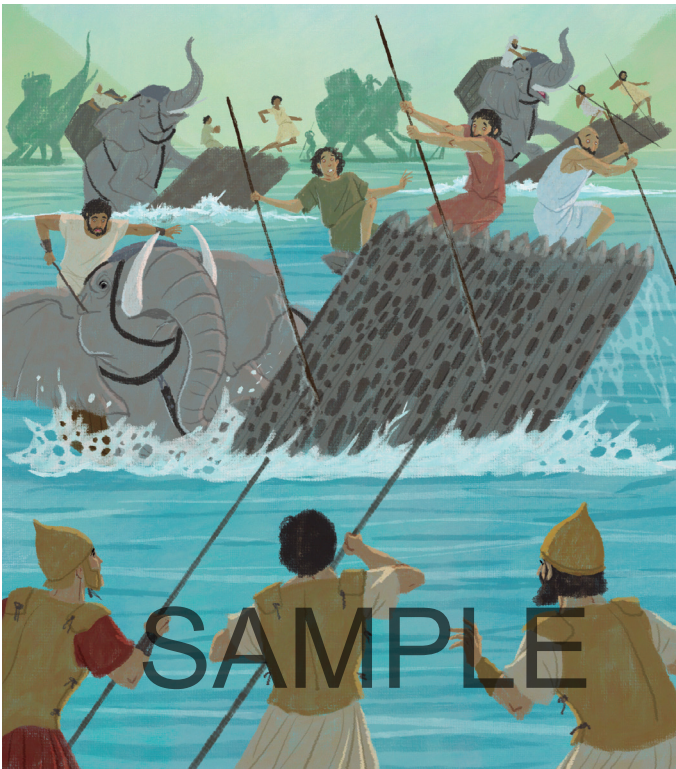
and the rafts began to rock and splash. Panicking, one elephant lifted its leg, wobbled, then fell into the river. Chaos ensued. The whole herd panicked, trumpeting and splashing as they all fell into the river with their handlers.

Water frothed and splashed, desperate grunts and screams filling the air as the panicking elephants scrambled and swam for their lives, lifting their trunks high out of the water so they could breathe.

“They’re swimming to the riverbank!” Mago cried.

Sure enough, all thirty-seven elephants swam safely to the shore. But many of their handlers could not swim.

“Help!” Ali cried, waving and splashing helplessly in the frothy water as the current carried him away.



“Ali! No!” Hannibal yelled, racing down the riverbank.

Hannibal’s men leapt into their boats and tried desperately to rescue the elephant handlers, but they were too late.

That night, the usually noisy elephants were silent.

“They’re grieving,” Hannibal sighed, stroking Surus’s trunk sadly. “Ali told me that elephants never forget. I, too, will never forget this terrible tragedy.”

“It is a tragedy,” Mago said. “But brother, there is no time to mourn. Winter is fast approaching, and so are the Romans. We must reach the Alps.” Hannibal nodded.

“And we must leave the elephants behind,” Mago continued. Hannibal shook his head.

“We cannot take them across the Alps without their handlers,” Mago argued. “It is impossible.”

“It will be harder,” Hannibal conceded. “But it is not impossible.”

Chapter 3

Beyond the Alps

At last the Alps finally loomed into view. Hannibal smiled but his men glanced at each other nervously. They'd never seen mountains so high, jagged or tipped with snow.

The elephants struggled on the steep, narrow path, their large feet slipping on the shingle, sending showers of grit into the canyon below. With new, inexperienced handlers guiding them, they were very nervous.

Hannibal led his army on through a deep steep ravine.

Suddenly rocks rained down from the cliffs, and boulders smashed and crashed all around. Hannibal looked up in horror to see an army of tribesmen swarming down the craggy slopes towards them. Hannibal yelled at his men to fight back.



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The elephants trumpeted, scaring the tribesmen who had never seen such beasts before. Swords clashed and blood spattered as Hannibal's men valiantly fought off their attackers. But the terrified horses reared up and ran around madly, some slipping and tumbling off the narrow ledge, others fleeing for their lives, knocking many men and vital supplies tumbling into the chasm thousands of feet below.

Then, as suddenly as the attack had started, it was over. The tribesmen scattered up the slopes, and Hannibal gazed sadly down the cliffs at hundreds of his fallen men and animals lying wounded or dead on the rocks below. It was a heavy blow. The army trudged on up the narrow, windswept slopes, walking more and more slowly. Some men ran away, but most died from the cold, disease, starvation or sheer exhaustion.

So far, all the elephants had survived, but unused to the cold weather and short on food, they were beginning to get ill. Then it started to snow. The exhausted army stumbled and slipped on the frozen ground, battling through blinding snow-storms, losing hope with each painful shivering step.

As they set up camp for the night, Mago nervously approached his brother. “We are down to twenty-three thousand men,” he said. “More are dying every day, the elephants are sick, and there is no end in sight. My brother ... should we turn back?”

Hannibal gritted his teeth. He couldn’t turn back. Not after everything his men had endured. Not when they were so close to Italy. Besides, they probably wouldn’t survive the journey home.

“No,” he said, shaking his head. “We will continue. We are close now, I can feel it.” Mago sighed and trudged away.

Finally, a few days later, the men rounded a corner and couldn't believe their eyes. A vast green valley appeared spread out below them. "My men, we have made it! Behold – Italy!" Hannibal cried. "The way is all downhill from here, and soon you will have Rome in your hands!" The exhausted men cheered and sobbed with relief as they reached the valley. Their epic journey was over, and they could finally eat and rest.

"My brother, I am sorry I ever doubted you," Mago laughed, patting Hannibal's shoulder. Hannibal smiled, but looked at his troops with mixed feelings. They had made it across the Alps, but his precious elephants were ill. Thousands of men had died, and also – crucially – they had lost the element of surprise. The Roman army was on its way. What on earth was he going to do when they arrived?

Chapter 4

To Victory!

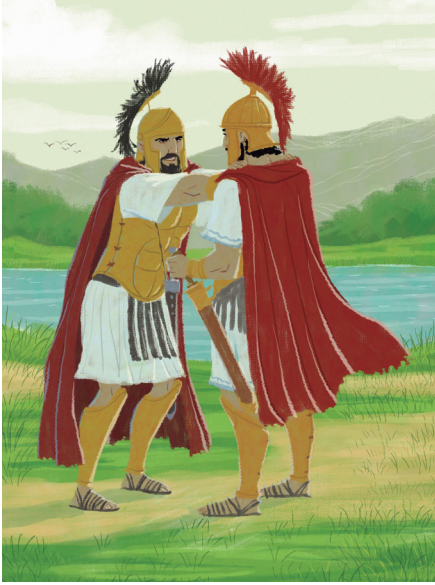
“The Romans are here!” a scout cried. “They’re camped near the riverbank.” Hannibal swallowed hard. “How many?”

“Thousands. The whole Roman army,” the scout replied.

Hannibal paced the floor of his tent, thinking hard. They were outnumbered and out of time. This was not how he had planned to fight the Romans. But it was too late to back out now. He would need to outsmart the Romans to have any chance of survival – let alone success.

“We need to regain the element of surprise,”

Hannibal told Mago. They scoured the surrounding area until they found the perfect ambush spot in the marshes, not far from the Roman camp.



“Take one thousand horsemen and one thousand soldiers and hide here tonight,” Hannibal told Mago. “The Romans will not see you until it is too late. You will be the key to our victory tomorrow.”

Just before sunrise, Hannibal gathered his troops.

“My friends, we have come a very long way together,” he said. “Everything we have done, all the trials we have overcome, have been for this day. This is the day we have dreamed of. This is the day we have worked so hard for. This is the day we finally fight the Romans!” The men cheered. “Together, victory will be ours!” Hannibal cried, raising his fist. “To victory!” the men cheered, leaping into action.

Hannibal's cavalry charged down the hill, across the river, into the Roman camp, flinging javelins at the sleeping Roman soldiers. Cries of terror and pain pierced the air as the half-asleep Roman foot-soldiers struggled out of their tents to pursue Hannibal's horsemen ... straight into the chest-deep freezing river. They had fallen into Hannibal's trap. A cloud of javelins flew towards them. They didn't stand a chance.

The Roman foot-soldiers vanquished, it was time to face the Roman cavalry and infantry. This was the moment of truth. The Roman forces were famed for their military strength and unbreakable formation. But if Hannibal's elephants could break the Roman ranks, it could mean the difference between victory and defeat.



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On Hannibal's orders, Titus had filled the elephants' water trough with wine. Now, these usually gentle animals were filled with aggression. They stamped the ground and shook their heads, but they were still weak. Hannibal looked up at Surus nervously. Would he and the other elephants be strong enough for one big charge? Hannibal took a deep breath and signalled the elephant riders, who pointed the beasts towards the Roman cavalry and charged.

The ground thundered as the elephants hurtled towards the Roman forces. The sight struck fear into Roman soldiers and horses alike. They had never seen such strange animals! The Romans screamed and their horses fled in panic as the elephants ploughed into them, tusks and trunks sweeping soldiers aside, huge feet trampling everything in their path. Hannibal cheered. His plan was working perfectly!



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He only hoped Mago would succeed in the final stage of the plan. Sure enough, as the Romans fled back to their camp, Mago and his men leapt out of hiding in the marshes and attacked from the rear, sealing the Romans' doom. The Romans were now completely surrounded, outnumbered and outmanoeuvred. Their commander stared around the battlefield, bewildered and horrified. Over twenty-eight thousand Romans lay dead, and those that survived fled for their lives.

Hannibal beamed as he watched the Romans flee. For, thanks to mighty Surus and the other elephants, Hannibal's forces had faced the full might of the Roman army – and won! Victory was his! Hannibal had kept his sacred promise to his father. He knew Hamilcar would be proud.



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Things to think about

1. Why does Hannibal decide to fight the Romans?
2. How do they get the elephants across the river?
3. What dangers did they encounter along the mountains?
4. What does Hannibal decide to do when they reach Italy?
5. Why do you think Hannibal and his men succeeded? Was there a turning point in the story in your opinion?

Write it yourself

This book retells an episode from a journey in history. Now try to write your own retelling of an epic journey of someone from either real history or myth and legend. Make sure you research the subject first.

Plan your story before you begin to write it.

Start off with a story map:

- a beginning to introduce the characters and where and when your story is set (the setting);
- a problem which the main characters will need to fix in the story;
- an ending where the problems are resolved.

Get writing! Try to include details so that your readers get a sense of the time and place of your story. Think about the dialogue your characters would use. Would they use formal or informal language? How would they be dressed? What difficulties do they overcome?

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Notes for parents and carers

Independent reading

The aim of independent reading is to read this book with ease. This series is designed to provide an opportunity for your child to read for pleasure and enjoyment. These notes are written for you to help your child make the most of this book.

About the book

This story retells Hannibal's incredible and daring journey in order to defeat the Romans. Riding mighty elephants, Hannibal and his men must cross the river and navigate a way through the treacherous mountains, before engaging the Romans in battle!

Before reading

Ask your child why they have selected this book. Look at the title and blurb together. What do they think it will be about? Do they think they will like it?

During reading

Encourage your child to read independently. If they get stuck on a longer word, remind them that they can find syllable chunks that can be sounded out from left to right. They can also read on in the sentence and think about what would make sense.

After reading

Support comprehension by talking about the story. What happened?

Then help your child think about the messages in the book that go beyond the story, using the questions on the page opposite. Give your child a chance to respond to the story, asking: Did you enjoy the story and why? Who was your favourite character? What was your favourite part? What did you expect to happen at the end?

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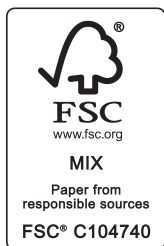
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