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Spartan (English Edition)



Par Valerio Massimo Manfredi
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Par Valerio Massimo Manfredi :
Spartan (English Edition) before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Spartan (English Edition):

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Description : Description du produit These eyes...he'd seen them before, staring at him, but he didn't remember where, or when. He remembered, without knowing why. In this epic story filled with passion, courage, and adventure, the author of the internationally bestselling Alexander trilogy tells the tale of two warriors united by blood and torn apart by law. This is the saga of a Spartan family, unraveled by a harsh custom of their people that causes them to abandon one of their own. The elder son, Brithos, strong and healthy, will live comfortably; but Talos, weak and feeble, must be sacrificed to the wolves of Mount Taygetus. Unbeknownst to his grieving parents, however, the child is miraculously found and saved by a Helot -- the once-proud people who now live in servitude to Sparta. While his brother is raised in the mighty warrior caste, Talos, who is now a slave, is schooled in the history of the Helot people by his adoptive father. It is then that he learns of the legend of Aristodemus, the last King of the Helots, whose armor, it is prophesied, will be worn again by the liberator of his vanquished race. When the brothers meet for the first

time since their separation, it is over crossed swords as Talos defends the woman he loves from the brutality of Brithos. But fate has a greater destiny in store for them -- and as war looms on the horizon, their lives become entwined in ways neither could have imagined. They live out their story in a world dominated by the clash between the Persian empire and the city-states of Greece until the voice of their blood and of human solidarity unites them in a thrilling, singular enterprise.

Prsentation de l'diteurHerodotus tells us that not all of the three hundred Spartan warriors died at the hands of Xerxes, King of the Persians, in the battle of the Thermopylae: two were saved bringing a life-saving message back to the city . . . This is the saga of a Spartan family, torn apart by a cruel law that forces them to abandon one of their two sons - born lame - to the elements. The elder son, Brithos, is raised in the caste of the warriors, while the other, Talos, is spared a cruel death and is raised by a Helot shepherd, among the peasants. They live out their story in a world dominated by the clash between the Persian empire and the city-states of Greece - a ferocious, relentless conflict - until the voice of their blood and of human solidarity unites them in a thrilling, singular enterprise.ExtraitCHAPTER 1: Mount TaygetusHis heart full of bitterness, the great Aristarkhos sat watching his son Kleidemos sleep quietly within the paternal shield that served as his cradle. Close by, in a little bed suspended by four ropes from the ceiling beam, slept his older brother, Brithos. The silence that enveloped the ancient house of the Kleomenids was suddenly broken by the rustling of the oaks in the nearby forest. A long, deep sigh of the wind.Sparta, the invincible, was shrouded in darkness; only the fire that burned on the acropolis shot red flares into the black clouds of the sky. Aristarkhos shivered and pushed aside the cloth covering on the window, staring into the sleeping countryside beyond.It was time to do what had to be done; the gods had hidden the moon and darkened the earth. The clouds in the sky were swollen with tears.He took his cloak from the hook on the wall and threw it onto his shoulders, then bent over his tiny son. He lifted him up and slowly drew him close to his chest as the little one's wet nurse suddenly stirred in her sleep.Aristarkhos stood uncertainly for a moment, hoping for something that would force him to put off this tremendous act. Then, reassured by the woman's deep breathing, he braced himself and left the room by the atrium, dimly lit by an earthenware oil lamp. A gust of cold wind invaded the courtyard, nearly extinguishing the weak flame. As he turned to close the heavy oaken door behind him, he saw his wife Ismene standing there like a mysterious divinity evoked by the night, pale, her eyes shining. A mortal anguish was painted on her face; her mouth, taut as a wound, seemed to contain an inhuman suffering. Aristarkhos felt his blood freeze within his veins, and his legs, sturdy as pillars, turned to straw."It was not for us..." he murmured with a cracked voice, "it wasn't for us that we generated him. It has to be tonight. I'll never find the courage again."Ismene's hand reached toward the bundled child and her feverish eyes sought her husband's. The little one woke up and began to cry. Aristarkhos lunged out of the door, escaping into the countryside. Ismene, poised on the threshold, watched the man flee into the night, listened to the faint wail of her child...tiny Kleidemos, stricken by the gods while still in her womb. Born a cripple and condemned to death by the terrible laws of Sparta.She closed the door and slowly walked to the center of the atrium, pausing to consider the images of the gods to whom she had always brought generous offerings before the child was born and to whom she had continued to pray, over these long months, to instill strength into that stiff little foot. In vain.She sat at the hearth in the center of the huge, bare room and unwound her long, black braids, pulling her flowing tresses over her shoulders and breasts. Gathering up the ashes at the base of the great copper tripod, she spread them over her head. By the tremulous light of the oil lamp, the statues of the gods and the Kleomenid heroes stared at her, their immutable smiles carved into cypress wood. Ismene soiled her beautiful hair with ashes and slowly gouged her face with her fingernails as her heart turned to ice.Aristarkhos fled across the wind-battered fields, his arms clutching the small bundle close to his chest. His cape whipped around him, animated by Boreas's powerful breath. He trudged up the mountain, struggling to open a path through the thick undergrowth of blackberry bushes and shrubs. Sudden flashes of lightning cast frightening shapes onto the ground. The gods of Sparta were far away in that bitter moment; Aristarkhos had to proceed alone among the dark specters of the night, among the evil creatures of the forest who lie in wait for the traveler and drag up nightmares from the bowels of the earth.Freeing himself from the grasp of a large bush, Aristarkhos found the trail and stopped for a moment to catch his breath. The little one cried no longer, hoarse from his long wailing. Aristarkhos felt only the convulsive movements of tiny limbs within the bundle, like those of a puppy enclosed in a sack, waiting to be thrown into the river.The warrior lifted his glance to the threatening clouds that filled the sky. He murmured an ancient oath under his breath, and then started off along the steep path as the first heavy drops of rain fell

with dull thuds against the dust. Past the clearing, the bushes surrounded him again, the branches and the thorns clawing at his defenseless face as he held the bundle against his chest. The rain, dense and heavy now, penetrated even the blackberry bushes, and the ground became spongy and slippery. Aristarkhos fell onto his knees. He was soiled by the mud and the dead, rotten leaves and cut by the sharp stones that jutted up along the steep and narrow footpath. Calling up the last of his strength, he reached the first of the great mountain's wooded summits, and entered an oak grove that rose in the middle of a clearing of thick, low cornel and broom. The rain pelted Aristarkhos, but he continued his slow, unfaltering walk on the soaked, pungent moss, his hair pasted to his forehead and his clothing drenched. He stopped before a gigantic holm oak, older than the ages. Aristarkhos fell to his knees between the roots and deposited the small bundle within the huge hollow trunk. He paused a moment, grimly biting his lower lip, watching the small flailing arms of his son. Water streamed down Aristarkhos's back, but his mouth was dry, his tongue stuck to his palate like a piece of leather. That which he had come to do was done. His son's destiny was now in the lap of the gods. The time had come to silence forever the voice of his blood. Rising to his feet slowly, with immense effort, as if carrying the mountain upon his shoulders, he returned the way he had come. The fury of the elements seemed to have spent itself as Aristarkhos descended among Mount Taygetus's abrupt crags. A light fog rose, spreading between the trees, covering the dripping bushes, skimming the footpaths and the clearings. The wind continued in stiff breezes, shaking the water from the foliage. Aristarkhos shuddered with every breath; his muscles cramped violently in the cold. Stumbling down the mountain, he left the forest behind him and reached the plain. He stopped again, for just a moment, and directed a last somber glance at the mountain peak. The glimmering waters of the Eurotas River ran through the damp fields before him, illuminated by the moon, whose frigid rays cut a broad gash between the clouds. As he began to cross the river's wooden bridge he heard a sudden noise on his left. Aristarkhos turned sharply; the faint moonlight revealed a horseman, his face hidden by a helmet, sitting erect on his steaming mount. The emblem of the royal guard flashed for an instant on his burnished shield. Sparta...Sparta already knew! At a sharp blow of the rider's heels, the horse reared and began its gallop, disappearing with the wind, far off in the fields. "Krios, Krios! In the name of the gods, won't you stop for a moment? Come back here, you rascal!" The small mutt paid no heed; trotting decisively down the footpath, he splashed through the puddles as the old shepherd followed him, swearing, with his uncertain step. The little dog headed resolutely toward the trunk of a colossal holm oak, howling and wagging his tail. "Damn you!" grumbled the old man. "You'll never be a shepherd's dog...what is it this time? A porcupine, that's what it'll be, or a baby blackbird...no, it's too early in the season for the blackbirds. By Zeus and Hercules, could it be a bear cub? Krios, are you set on my ruin, you little beast? His mother will show up and kill us both." The old man finally reached the point where Krios had stopped. He stooped to pick up the dog and turn back, but suddenly stopped still, bent double. "It's no bear cub, Krios," he muttered, calming the dog with a rough caress, "it's a cub born of man. He is not even a year old!" "Let's see," he continued, unwrapping the bundle, but when he saw the little one, numb from the cold, barely moving, a dark, grave expression passed over his face. "They've abandoned you. Yes, you were left to die...with that leg you'd never have become a warrior. And now...what shall we do now, Krios?" he said, scratching his beard. "Shall we abandon him, too? No. No, Krios, the Helots don't behave this way, we Helots do not abandon children. We'll take him with us," he decided, gathering up the bundle from the hollow of the tree. "And you'll see that we can save him. If he hasn't died yet, it means that he is strong. Let's go back now; we've left the flock unguarded." The old man set off toward the house as the dog joined a flock of sheep at pasture nearby. He pushed open the door of the cottage and entered. "Look what I've found for you, daughter," he said, turning to a woman past her youth who was intent on curdling a great vessel of milk. The woman, with expert movements, lifted the curd with a cloth and hung it from a hook on the ceiling beam. Drying her hands in her apron, she curiously drew closer to the old man, who had laid the bundle on a bench and was carefully unwrapping it. "Look, I've just found him in the hollow of a big holm oak...it's one of them. They must have abandoned him last night. Look at his little foot, see? He's not moving it. That's why they did it. You know, when one of them is born with some defect, they just leave him to the wolves! But Krios found him and I want to keep him." The woman, without speaking, went to fill a bladder with milk, tying one side to create a swelling and pricking it with a pin. She brought it to the lips of the little one, who began to suck slowly at the warm liquid, and then more avidly. "Ah, I said he was strong," exclaimed the old man with satisfaction. "We'll make a good shepherd out of him. He'll live longer than if he'd remained among them. Doesn't great Achilles tell Odysseus in the Underworld that it is better to be a humble shepherd in the land of sun and life than a king among the shadows of the dead?" The woman stared

at him, her gray eyes veiled with a deep sadness. "Even if the gods have stricken his leg, he will always remain a Spartan. He is the son and the grandson of warriors. He will never be one of us. But if you wish, I will feed him and help him grow." "Of course I want you to! We are poor and fate has made us servants, but we can give him the life that was taken from him. And he will help us in our work; I'm getting old and you have to do almost everything yourself. You were denied the pleasure of marrying and having children, my daughter. This little one needs you, and he can bring you the joy of being a mother." "But look at his leg!" said the woman, shaking her head. "Perhaps he'll never be able to walk, and our masters will have given us only another burden to bear. Is this what you want?" "By Hercules! The little one will walk and he will be stronger and more clever than the other boys. Don't you know that misfortune makes men's limbs more vigorous, their eyes more piercing, their minds quicker? You know what must be done, my daughter; you take care of him and never let him want for fresh milk. Steal the master's honey if you can, without letting him know. Old Krathippos is further gone than I am, and all his son thinks about is the young wife he sees once a week when he can leave the barracks. None of the family cares anymore about the fields or the flocks. They'll never notice another mouth to feed." The woman took a large hamper and arranged some sheepskins and a woolen blanket inside. On these she rested the child, exhausted and full from his meal, already nodding with sleep. The old man stood for a moment to watch him and then returned to the flock. Krios greeted him joyously, barking and jumping at his feet. "The sheep! You're to stay with the flock, not with me! You dumb little mutt...do I look like a sheep? No, I'm no sheep; old Kritolaos, that's who I am, foolish old man. Away from here, I said! That's it, bring back those lambs headed for the ravine. A deranged goat would do a better job than you!" Thus muttering, the old man reached the field where his flock was grazing. The valley opened wide before his gaze, divided by the silver ribbon of the Eurotas River. At the center of the plain glittered the city of Sparta: an expanse of low houses covered by small terraces. On one side rose the massive acropolis; on the other, the red-tiled roofs of the temple of Artemis Orthia. On the right, one could make out the dusty road that led toward the sea. Kritolaos contemplated the beautiful countryside, resplendent with the dazzling colors of early springtime. His heart was elsewhere; his thoughts went back to the ancient times when his people, free and powerful, occupied the fertile plain: the old times, preserved in the stories passed down by old men, when the arrogant Spartans had not yet succeeded in taming his proud and unfortunate people. The sea breeze ruffled the old man's white hair. His eyes seemed to search for distant images: the dead city of the Helots on Mount Ithome, the lost tombs of the great kings of his people, their trampled pride. Now the gods sat in the imposing city of their oppressors. When would the time for honor and revenge return? Would his tired eyes be allowed to see it? Only the bleating of the sheep, the sound of servitude, reached his ears. His thoughts returned to the little one that he had just snatched from a sure death: Who was his family? The mother with the womb of bronze who had torn him away from her own breast? The father who had delivered him to the wild beasts of the forest? Was this the power of the Spartans? The pity that had moved him: Was it only the weakness of a servant, of a defeated race? Perhaps, he thought, the gods mark out a destiny for each people, as they do for each man, and we must walk down that pathway, without ever turning back. What it is to be a man! Poor mortals, prey to sickness, to misfortune, as leaves are prey to the wind. But yearning to know, to judge, to listen to the voice of our hearts and our minds, yes... The tiny cripple would become a man: to suffer, perhaps, to die, certainly, but not at the very dawn of his life. The old man knew in that moment that he had changed the course of an already marked destiny. The little one would become an adult and he, Kritolaos, would teach him all that a man needs to know to step along the pathway of life, and more! He would teach him what a man must do to change the course of the destiny that has been assigned him... the destiny of a servant. A name. The little one needed a name. Certainly his parents must have prepared a name for him, the name of a warrior, son and grandson of warriors, the name of an exterminator. What name could one servant give to another? An ancient name of his own people? A name to remind him of the dignity of an age long past? No, the child was not a Helot, and the brand of Spartan blood could not be canceled. Yet he was no longer a son of Sparta. The city had disowned him. Kritolaos thought of one of the old stories that the children would beg him to tell on many a winter night: In a time very long ago, when the heroes still walked on the roads of the earth, the god Hephaistos had fashioned a giant, all of bronze, to guard the treasure of the gods that was hidden in a deep cave on the island of Lemnos. The giant moved and walked just as if he were alive because in the hollow of his immense body, the gods had poured a miraculous liquid that animated him. The liquid was sealed with a cork, also of bronze, hidden at the bottom of his heel so that no one could see it. So, the weak point of this colossus lay in his right leg. His name was Talos. The old man half closed his eyes. The boy's name would

remind him of his misfortune. It would keep his strength and his anger alive within him. His name would be "Talos." The old shepherd rose, leaning against the crook that was worn down where his large callused hand always gripped it. He rejoined his flock. The sun began its descent into the sea, and wisps of smoke rose from the cabins scattered among the mountains; the women were beginning to prepare meager dinners for their men returning from work. It was time to round up the flock. The old man whistled and the dog began to run around the bleating sheep who clustered together. The lambs leaping across the fields ran to hide under their mothers and the ram moved to the head of the flock to lead them to the pen. Kritolaos herded the animals in, dividing the males from the females, and began to milk, collecting the steaming liquid in a large jug. He dipped in a cup and brought it with him into the cottage. "Here we are," he said, entering. "Here is some fresh milk for our little Talos." "Talos?" repeated the surprised woman. "Yes, Talos. This is the name I've chosen for him. Thus I have decided, and thus it must be. How is he? Let me see...oh, he seems much better, doesn't he?" "He slept most of the day and just woke up a short while ago. He must have been exhausted, poor creature. He must have cried for as long as he had breath! Now he can't utter a single sound. That is, if he's not mute, on top of everything." "Mute? Absolutely not! The gods never strike one man with two clubs...at least that's what they say." Just then, little Talos let out a confused cry. "See, he's not mute at all. No, I'm sure this little rascal will have us jumping with his shrieks!" Saying this, he drew near to caress the little one lying in the wicker chest. Immediately, the baby grabbed the shepherd's knobby index finger and held it tightly. "By Hercules! These legs aren't doing too well but we certainly have strength in our hands, don't we? That's it, that's it: grip tight, little one! Never let what is yours slip from your hands, and no one will be able to take it away from you." From the cracks in the door penetrated the rays of a dying sun. They touched upon the old man's white locks and cast golden reflections of amber and alabaster on the little one's skin, and on the poor, smoke-blackened furnishings of the cottage. Kritolaos, sitting on a bench, took the baby on his knee and began eating the simple meal his daughter had prepared. The bleating of the sheep reached his ears from the pen. And from the edge of the clearing, he heard the deep sigh of the forest, the consuming hymn of the nightingale. It was the hour of the long shadows, when the gods dispel the pain in men's hearts and send them purple clouds that bring the soothing calm of sleep. But down there, on the plain, the noble house of the Kleomenids had already been swallowed up by the cold shadow of the tremendous mountain. From the wooded peaks of the sullen giant, anguish and pain descended upon the valley. In their marital bed Aristarkhos's proud wife stared with glassy eyes at the ceiling beams. In her heart the wolves of Taygetus howled, her ears resounded with the sharp grating of their steel jaws, and their yellow eyes lit up the darkness. Neither the strong arms nor the broad chest of her husband could console her, nor would the tears come to wash the bitter pain from her heart. Limping on his bad leg, Talos urged the flock along the flowered banks of the Eurotas River, his crook held tightly in his left hand. A light wind sent waves through the sea of poppies around him, and the sharp odors of rosemary and mint spread through the air. The boy, soaked with sweat, paused to refresh himself with the river water. The sheep were oppressed by the heat as well, and lay down under an elm whose sunburned branches provided a little shade. The dog curled up near the shepherd boy, wagging his tail and softly yelping. The boy turned to pat his matted fur, clotted with oats and lupines. Krios nudged closer to his young master and licked his misshapen foot as if it were a painful wound. The boy watched the little dog with deep calm eyes, occasionally ruffling the thick fur on its back. His gaze became suddenly troubled as he turned toward the distant city. The acropolis, scorched by the sun, rose from the plain like a disquieting ghost trembling in the sultry air, thick with the deafening screech of the cicadas. Talos drew a reed flute, a gift from Kritolaos, from the pack strapped across his shoulders. He began to play: a fresh, light melody spread among the field poppies, mixing with the gurgling of the river and the song of the skylarks. Dozens of them flew about him, rising dazzled toward the flaming sun and plunging down as if thunderstruck to the stubble and the yellowed grasses. The voice of the flute became suddenly muffled like that of a spring gushing in the darkness of a cave in the deep womb of the earth. The soul of the little shepherd vibrated intensely to the primitive music of his instrument. Occasionally he laid down his flute and looked out in the direction of the dusty road that came from the north, as if waiting for somebody. "I saw the shepherds from the highlands yesterday," the old man had said. "They say that the warriors are returning and with them many of our men who served in the army as porters and muleteers." Talos wanted to see them; for the first time he had brought his flock down from the mountains to the plain so as to see the Spartan warriors he had heard described with so much anger, with disgust, with admiration...and with terror. Krios suddenly lifted his snout to sniff out the still air, and growled. "Who's there, Krios?" asked the young shepherd, suddenly springing to his feet at the edge of the river. "Good boy, quiet now, there's

nothing wrong," he said, trying to calm the animal. The boy strained his ears, and after a while seemed to hear a far-off sound; a sound of flutes like his own but very different, joined by a deep rhythmic noise like distant thunder. Soon after, Talos distinctly heard the rumble of a multitude of footsteps treading the ground, reminding him of the time the Messenian shepherds had passed with their herds of oxen. Suddenly from behind the hill on his left he saw them appear. It was them: the warriors! In the shimmering air, their outline was confused yet formidable. The sound that he'd heard came from a group of men who advanced at the head of the column playing pipes, accompanied by the rhythmic roll of drums and the metallic sound of kettledrums. It was a strange music, unchanging, haunting, made up of taut vibrant sounds that awoke an extraordinary longing in the boy, an uneasy excitement that made his heart beat crazily. The hoplites came behind them, foot soldiers with legs sheathed in bronze greaves, chests covered by armor, faces hidden behind their closed helmets topped with red and black crests. Their left arms carried great round shields adorned with fantastic animals, monsters that Talos recognized from Kritolaos's stories. The column advanced with measured step, raising up dense clouds of dust that covered the crests and the banners and the warriors' curved shoulders. When the first soldiers came close to him, Talos felt a sudden pulse of fear and an urge to flee, but a mysterious force from the depths of his heart nailed him to the spot. The men passed so close that he could have touched the spears that they leaned on as they walked, if he had just reached out a hand. He gazed into each face to see, to know, to understand what the shepherds had told him. He saw their staring eyes, stinging with sweat behind the grotesque masks of their helmets, blinded by the blazing sun; he saw their dust-covered beards, he smelled the acrid odor of their sweat...and their blood. Their shoulders and arms were bruised. Dark clots of blood stained their hands and sweaty thighs, and also the tips of their spears. They advanced, impervious to the flies that settled avidly on their tortured limbs. Awed, Talos stared at the fantastic figures who marched past him to the endless cadence of that strange music as it became increasingly distant, unreal, absurd, like a nightmare. The sensation of an unexpected, oppressive presence suddenly shook the boy and he wheeled around: a wide chest covered by a storied cuirass, two huge hairy arms as full of scars as a holm oak that a bear has used to sharpen its claws, a swarthy face framed by a raven beard, sprouting its first white bristles, a steel hand tight around the hilt of a long ash-wood spear shaft. Two eyes as black as night that shone with the light of a powerful and tormented will. "Keep that dog back, boy. Do you want a spear to split apart his bones? The warriors are tired and their hearts are vexed. Call him off, his barking is annoying us all. And go away yourself, this is no place for you!" Talos drew back, dazed as if awakened from a dream. He called the dog and walked away, leaning on his staff to ease his limp. After a few steps, he paused and slowly turned his head; the warrior stood immobile behind him with an astonished expression. He stared at the boy in wild pain. His shining eyes fixed on the boy's deformed foot. Biting his lower lip, the warrior was shaken by a sudden tremor, his thighs of bronze were unsteady as reeds. It lasted but a moment; the man covered his face immediately with the great crested helmet, took up the shield emblazoned with the figure of a dragon, and joined the end of the column as it curved down the road. The tension that had gripped Talos suddenly abated and he felt a hot stream of tears rise from his heart. They filled his eyes and ran down his cheeks until they wet his bony chest. All at once he became aware of a tremulous calling from the path that led down the mountain: it was old Kritolaos, struggling along as fast as his old age and aching legs would let him. "Talos, my son!" exclaimed the distressed old man, hugging the child. "Why did you do it, why did you come here? This is no place for you! You must never come here again, do you understand? You must promise me...never again!" The two of them turned back down the path as Krios rounded up the sheep, driving them toward the mountain. On the distant plain, the long column was entering the city: it seemed like a wounded serpent hurrying to shelter. Stretched out on his straw bed, Talos couldn't sleep that night. He couldn't drive that intense, suffering gaze out of his mind...that hand that gripped the spear as if wanting to crush it. Who was the warrior with the dragon on his shield? Why had he looked at him in that way? That strange music that had awakened so much emotion in Talos's heart continued to play in his mind. At last, the late hour closed his eyelids. The warrior's eyes melted into darkness, the music became slower and then as sweet as a woman's song, caressing his tired heart until sleep settled his head to rest.

Copyright 1988 by Arnoldo Mondadori Editore S.p.A. English translation copyright 2002 by Macmillan Publishers Weekly. Manfredi, author of a trilogy about the life of Alexander the Great (Alexander), here tells an epic tale of Sparta and its rivalry with other Greek city-states in the face of repeated Persian invasions in the fifth century B.C. Two Spartan brothers, sons of a famous Spartan warrior, are separated as babies. One boy, Brithos, is healthy and strong, destined to become a soldier like his father. The other baby boy, Kleidemos, has a crippled foot and is left on a mountainside to

die, in accordance with Spartan law. However, Kleidemos is found by an old man, a Helot (serf), and is raised as a Helot shepherd. As years pass, both boys grow into men, neither knowing of the other. Brithos becomes a Spartan warrior, and Kleidemos the shepherd (renamed Talos by his Helot family) learns a powerful and mysterious secret from his Helot grandfather. The paths of the two brothers cross in several unexpected ways as wars with Persia and conflicts and intrigues between Sparta and Athens inflame all of Greece. As master and slave, the two brothers fight alongside King Leonidas and the 300 Spartans at the battle of Thermopylae, and they develop a bond neither can explain or understand. Brithos's fate is tied to Kleidemos, but the cripple's future is determined by the disturbing secret revealed by his grandfather. When Kleidemos finally learns that he is both a Spartan and a Helot, he is tormented by his divided loyalties. Manfredi is a masterful storyteller, carefully weaving in political and military history, realistically describing the brutality of hoplite warfare and vividly depicting the treachery and betrayal of kings. Copyright 2003 Reed Business Information, Inc.