

KINGS  
RISING

C.S.  
PACAT



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For Vanessa, Bea, Shelley and Anna.

This book was written with the help of great friends.



# CHARACTERS

## AKIELOS

### *The court*

KASTOR, King of Akielos

DAMIANOS (Damen), heir to the throne of Akielos

JOKASTE, a lady of the Akielon court

KYRINA, her handmaiden

NIKANDROS, Kyros of Delpha

MENIADOS, Kyros of Sicyon

KOLNAS, Keeper of Slaves

ISANDER, a slave

HESTON of Thoas, a nobleman of Sicyon

MAKEDON, Nikandros's general and independent  
commander of the largest army in the north

STRATON, a commander

### *Bannermen of Delpha*

PHILOCTUS of Eilon

BARIEUS of Mesos

ARATOS of Charon

EUANDROS of Itys

*Soldiers*

PALLAS

AKTIS

LYDOS

ELON

STAVOS, a guard captain

*From the past*

THEOMEDES, King of Akielos and Damen's father

EGERIA, Queen of Akielos and Damen's mother

AGATHON, first King of Akielos

EUANDROS, former King of Akielos, founder of the house  
of Theomedes

ERADNE, former Queen of Akielos, known as Queen of the Six

AGAR, former Queen of Akielos, conqueror of Isthima

KYDIPPE, former Queen of Akielos

TREUS, former King of Akielos

THESTOS, former King of Akielos, founder of the palace at Ios

TIMON, former King of Akielos

NEKTON, his brother

**VERE**

*The court*

THE REGENT of Vere

LAURENT, heir to the throne of Vere

NICAISE, the Regent's pet

GUION, Lord of Fortaine, a former member of the Veretian  
Council and the former Ambassador to Akielos

LOYSE, Lady of Fortaine

AIMERIC, their son

VANNES, Ambassador to Vask and Laurent's First Advisor

ESTIENNE, a member of Laurent's faction

*The Veretian Council*

AUDIN

CHELAUT

HERODE

JEURRE

MATHE

*The Prince's men*

ENGUERRAN, Captain of the Prince's Guard

JORD

HUET

GUYMAR

LAZAR

PASCHAL, a physician

HENDRIC, a herald

*On the road*

GOVART, former Captain of the Prince's Guard

CHARLS, a Veretian cloth merchant

GUILLAIME, his assistant

MATHELIN, a Veretian cloth merchant

GENEVOT, a villager

*From the past*

ALERON, former King of Vere and Laurent's father

HENNIKE, former Queen of Vere and Laurent's mother

AUGUSTE, former heir to the throne of Vere and Laurent's  
older brother

# CHAPTER ONE

*'D*AMIANOS.'

Damen stood at the base of the dais steps as his name spread in tones of shock and disbelief over the courtyard. Nikandros knelt before him, his army knelt before him. It was like coming home, until his name, rippling outwards over the ranks of the gathered Akielon soldiers, hit the Veretian commoners thronging the edges of the space, where it changed.

The shock was different, a doubled shock, a rippling impact now, of anger, of alarm. Damen heard the first voice in outcry, a swell of violence, a new word now in the mouths of the crowd.

*'Prince-killer.'*

A hiss of a rock, thrown. Nikandros came up off his

knees, drawing his sword. Damen flung out a hand in a motion for halt, stopping Nikandros instantly, his sword showing a half-foot of Akielon steel.

He could see the confusion on Nikandros's face, as the courtyard around them began to disintegrate. 'Damianos?'

'Order your men to hold,' said Damen, even as the sharp sound of steel closer by had him turning fast.

A Veretian soldier in a grey helmet had drawn his sword, and was staring at Damen as though he faced his worst nightmare. It was Huet; Damen recognised the white face under the helmet. Huet was holding his sword out before him the way Jord had held the knife: between two shaking hands.

*'Damianos?'* said Huet.

'Hold!' Damen ordered again, shouting to be heard over the crowd, over the new, hoarse cry in Akielon, *'Treason!'* It was death to draw a blade on a member of the Akielon royal family.

He was still keeping Nikandros back with the gesture of his outflung hand, but he could feel every sinew in Nikandros strain in the effort to hold himself in place.

There were wild shouts now, the thin perimeter breaking down as the crowd swelled with the panicked urge to run. To stampede and get out of the way of the Akielon army. Or to swarm over it. He saw Guymar scan the courtyard, the tense fear in his eyes clear. Soldiers could see what a peasant mob could not: that the Akielon force inside the



walls—*inside* the walls—outnumbered the skeletal Veretian garrison fifteen to one.

Another sword was drawn alongside Huet's, a horrified Veretian soldier. Anger and disbelief showed in the faces of some of the Veretian guard; in others there was fear, looking to one another desperately for guidance.

And in the first spilling breach in the perimeter, the spiralling frenzy of the crowd, the Veretian guards no longer fully under his control—Damen saw how completely he had underestimated the effect of his identity on the men and women of this fort.

*Damianos, prince-killer.*

His mind, used to battlefield decisions, took in the sweep of the courtyard, and made the commander's choice: to minimise losses, to limit bloodshed and chaos, and to secure Ravenel. The Veretian guards were beyond his orders, and the Veretian people . . . if these bitter, furious emotions could be soothed among the Veretian people, he was not the one to soothe them.

There was only one way to stop what was about to happen, and that was to contain it; to lock it down, to secure this place once and for all.

Damen said to Nikandros, 'Take the fort.'

Damen swept along the passage, flanked by six Akielon guards. Akielon voices rang in the halls and red Akielon

flags flew over Ravenel. Akielon soldiers on either side of the doorway drew their heels together as he passed.

Ravenel had now changed allegiance twice in as many days. This time it had happened swiftly; Damen knew exactly how to subdue this fort. The skeleton Veretian force had quickly buckled in the courtyard, and Damen had ordered their two senior soldiers, Guymar and Jord, brought to him, stripped of armour and under guard.

As Damen entered the small antechamber, the Akielon guards took hold of their two prisoners and thrust them roughly to the ground. *'Kneel,'* the guard commanded in mangled Veretian. Jord sprawled.

*'No. Let them stand.'* Damen gave the order in Akielon. Instant obedience.

It was Guymar who shrugged the treatment off and regained his feet first. Jord, who had known Damen for months, was more circumspect, rising slowly. Guymar met Damen's eyes. He spoke in Veretian, giving no sign that he had understood Akielon.

*'So it's true. You are Damianos of Akielos.'*

*'It's true.'*

Guymar purposefully spat, and for his trouble was backhanded hard across the face with a mailed fist by the Akielon soldier.

Damen let it happen, aware of what would have happened if a man had spat on the ground in front of his father.

*'Are you here to put us to the sword?'*

Guyamar's words were spoken as his eyes returned to Damen. Damen's gaze passed over him, then over Jord. He saw the grime on their faces, their drawn, tight expressions. Jord had been the Captain of the Prince's Guard. He knew Guyamar less well: Guyamar had been a commander in Touars's army before he'd defected to Laurent's side. But both men had been ranked officers. It was why he had ordered them brought here.

'I want you to fight with me,' said Damen. 'Akielos is here to stand by your side.'

Guyamar let out a shaky breath. 'Fight with you? You will use our cooperation to take the fort.'

'I already have the fort,' said Damen. He said it calmly. 'You know the manner of man we face in the Regent,' said Damen. 'Your men have a choice. They can remain prisoners at Ravenel, or they can ride with me to Charcy, and show the Regent we stand together.'

'We don't stand together,' said Guyamar. 'You betrayed our Prince.' And then, as though he almost couldn't bear to say it, 'You had him—'

'Take him out,' said Damen, cutting it off. He dismissed the Akielon guards, too, and they filed out until the antechamber was deserted, except for the one man he allowed to stay.

In Jord's face was none of the mistrust or fear that had been stamped so clearly on the faces of the other Veretians, but a weary search for understanding.

Damen said, 'I made him a promise.'

'And when he learns who you are?' said Jord. 'When he learns that he is facing Damianos on the field?'

'Then he and I meet each other for the first time,' said Damen. 'That was also a promise.'

When it was done, he found himself pausing, his hand on the doorframe to catch his breath. He thought of his name, spreading through Ravenel, across the province, to its target. He had a sense of holding on, as though if he just held the fort, held these men together long enough to reach Charcy, then what followed—

He couldn't think about what followed, all he could do was keep to his promise. He pushed open the door and walked into the small hall.

Nikandros turned when Damen entered, and their eyes met. Before Damen could speak, Nikandros went to one knee; not spontaneously as he had done in the courtyard, but deliberately, bending his head.

'The fort is yours,' Nikandros said. 'My King.'  
King.

The ghost of his father seemed to prickle over his skin. It was his father's title, but his father no longer sat on the throne at Ios. Looking at the bowed head of his friend, Damen realised it for the first time. He was no longer the young prince who had roamed the palace halls with Nikandros