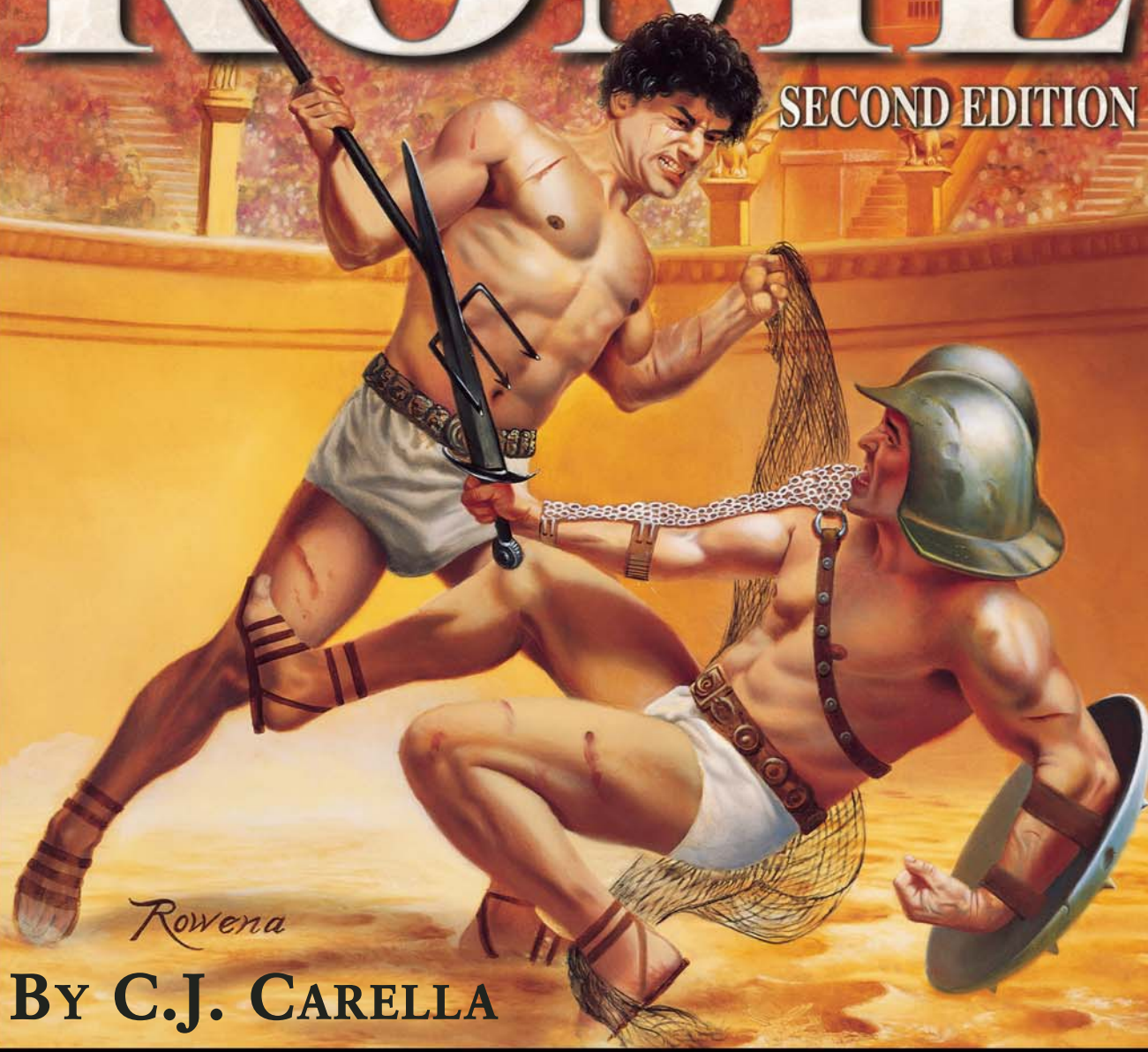


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IMPERIAL ROME

SECOND EDITION



Rowena

BY C.J. CARELLA

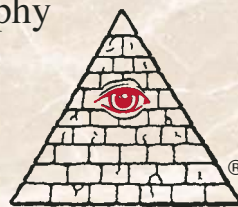
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GURPS Basic Set, Third Edition Revised and Compendium I: Character Creation are required to use this book in a *GURPS* campaign. *GURPS Imperial Rome* can also be used as a sourcebook for any roleplaying system.

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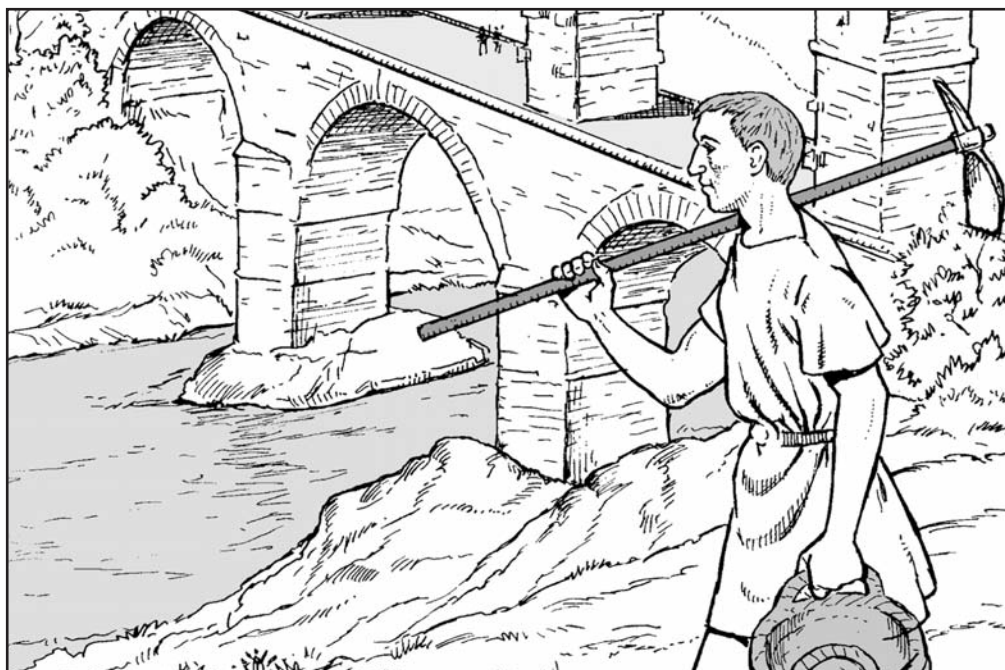
INTRODUCTION

The Roman Empire was the most impressive civilization the Western World has ever seen. Never before – and never since – have so many different nations, peoples, and cultures been united under a single government. Rome is legendary for the might of its legions, its decadent nobility, and the barbaric blood sports that entertained its people. The Roman world is rich in adventure, intrigue, and history – elements from which nearly any type of campaign can spring.

Several science fiction and fantasy empires have been patterned after Rome – why not base a campaign on the *original* Evil Empire? Rome can be depicted as either a heroic nation where stoic citizens did their duty with the determination of Japanese samurai, or as a corrupt, destructive society to resist or from which protagonists must escape . . . or join if that's where their passions lie.

This book describes Rome from its humble beginnings through the Republican days, the rise of the Empire, and the days of its division and downfall. This book provides several character types, along with advantages, disadvantages, and skills appropriate to the Roman period. Also described in detail are the Imperial legions, the arena games, the city of Rome, and the many provinces united under the massive empire.

Great battles, courtly intrigue, cloak-and-dagger action, and deadly arena fights await as you enter the greatest Empire in the world.



ABOUT THE AUTHOR

C.J. Carella's love affair with *GURPS* began with the publication of *Man to Man*, and he has never looked back. His fascination for Roman history dates back even further, and owes much to the works of David Drake and Harry Turtledove. C.J. has a B.A. in Medieval History from Yale University. His hobbies/obsessions include science fiction and fantasy, comic books, and gaming, all of which he laughingly calls "research material."

Born in New York, C.J. has lived in Peru, Venezuela, and Connecticut, in that order. His writing credits include *GURPS Martial Arts*, *GURPS Voodoo*, *Witchcraft*, *Armageddon*, *Nightspawn*, and many articles in *Roleplayer* and *White Wolf*.

About GURPS

Steve Jackson Games is committed to full support of the *GURPS* system. Our address is SJ Games, Box 18957, Austin, TX 78760. Please include a self-addressed, stamped envelope (SASE) any time you write us! Resources now available include:

Pyramid (www.sjgames.com/pyramid). Our online magazine includes new rules and articles for *GURPS*. It also covers all the hobby's top games – *AD&D*, *Traveller*, *World of Darkness*, *Call of Cthulhu*, *Shadowrun* and many more – and other SJ Games releases like *In Nomine*, *INWO*, *Car Wars*, *Toon*, *Ogre*, and more. And *Pyramid* subscribers also have access to playtest files online, to see (and comment on) new books before they're released.

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The *GURPS Imperial Rome* web page is at www.sjgames.com/gurps/books/imperialrome.

PAGE REFERENCES

See *GURPS Compendium I*, p. 181, for a list of abbreviations for *GURPS* titles, or for the most recent list, visit our Web site at www.sjgames.com/gurps/abbrevs.html.

Rules and statistics in this book are specifically for the *GURPS Basic Set, Third Edition Revised*. Any page reference that begins with a B refers to the *GURPS Basic Set* – e.g., p. B102 means p. 102 of the *Basic Set*. Page references that begin with CI indicate *GURPS Compendium I*. TI refers to *Timeline*.

I LIFE IN ROME

Rome was the name of both the mighty Empire and of the city that spawned it. For most of its citizens, the two were the same. "All roads lead to Rome" was a literal truth; the innumerable paved highways that linked the Empire had the Imperial city as their ultimate destination.



Hot, warm, and icy cold water were provided through a complex set of subterranean pipes. Also underground was a complex network of service corridors used by slaves to go from one area of the bath to the other without disturbing the guests (these tunnels would also be helpful to anyone planning mischief in the baths).

The Pantheon

This was the temple dedicated to several gods and, most important, to the deified Emperors. The Pantheon was an important center of ritual and worship for the Roman state religion. It was notable for having the largest dome in the ancient world. It was originally built in 27 B.C., and then rebuilt by Emperor Hadrian in 118 A.D.

ROMAN HOMES

Where and how a Roman lived were determined by his social standing and his wealth. The city poor had to make do with small, cramped apartments, while patri- cians owned several large homes.

Apartment Buildings

Apartment buildings (called *insulae*) were the solu- tion to Rome's overpopulation. Landlords tried to build dwellings with as many floors as possible. By Augustus' time, the height of buildings could not exceed 70 feet (six or seven stories). At TL2, buildings that tall were a constant risk; after a few years, they often fell apart, with dire consequences to the occupants. The quality of the *insulae* varied widely, depending on the neighborhood where they were set. The buildings erected in the slums were little more than death-traps.

Apartments were usually built around a central open court. Balconies opened either onto the central court or toward the street outside. Sometimes two buildings on oppo- site sides of the street were so close that you could step from one balcony to the other across the street. The buildings were made of concrete and wood; usually the higher lev- els were made of wood to reduce their weight (also reducing their quality).

The price and the social class of a building apartment varied according to the height of the apartment. Since there were no elevators, the higher an apartment was, the hard- er the climb to reach it. Additionally, the higher levels used lighter materials which were prone to breakage, drafts, and leaks. The lower levels contained shops or the highest- quality apartments. The best quarters were decorated and well-aired in an attempt to imitate the coveted Roman villa (see p. 23). Each additional floor saw a decrease in size, decoration, and comfort. The worst area was always the attic, a leaky, flimsy-walled crawlspace that was miserably hot in the summer (the sun heated the brick roof, turn- ing the attic into an oven) and cold and drafty in the winter. But even the attics were rented at outrageous prices.

Access to the building was through different stairways. The best ground-floor apart- ments sometimes had private doorways to the street. Renters of higher levels had to go into the building and climb one of the staircases. The windows of the lower levels were usually covered with metal bars to deter burglars.

The Domus

Roman city mansions were very large and housed a staff of dozens or even hun- dreds of slaves and attendants. Like most Roman dwellings, it was built around a cen- tral open court (the *atrium*). The entrance was through a corridor. A door was usually placed some distance within the corridor; the exterior part of this hallway was the vestibule, where guests announced themselves to a doorman.

Graffiti

The walls of Roman buildings were often covered with the scribbles of pedestrians, lodging guests, or even the building owners themselves. These scribbles were made with charcoal, knife, or stylus (see p. 42). Some of them, found in Roman ruins in Pompeii and elsewhere, provide an interesting picture of Roman life. GMs can include graffiti phrases in their description of most Roman public establishments. Listed below are a few typical markings.

“(Roman or foreign name) was here.” Found written or carved on or near famous buildings.

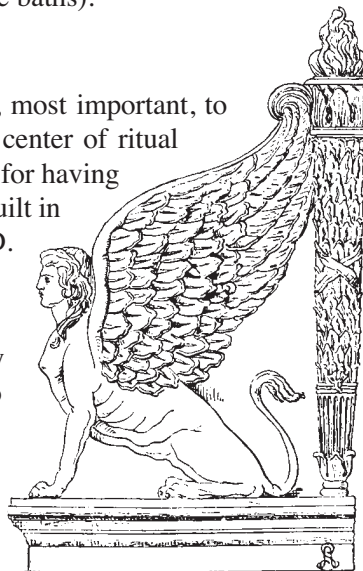
Insults: Many curses or insults were written on the walls of the buildings where the targets lived. A Roman who has antagonized someone should be confronted with such phrases as “Drop dead,” “May you be crucified,” “Vile Wretch,” and more graphic phrases describing impossible sexual acts, all written or painted on the doorway of his *insula*.

Poems and Limericks: City dwellers with artistic pretensions would write poems to their loved ones, dirty limer- icks, and humorous verses. PCs might acquire the Quirk or even the Odious Personal Habit of writing verses that begin with “There once was a man from Londinium . . .” or similar phrase, on every possible surface.

Declarations of Love: Romantic Romans announced to the world their love fortunes or mishaps. Some were verses: “I write at Love's dictation and Cupid's instruction; But damn it! I don't want to be a god without you.” Others were simple phrases like, “Lucia, please love me back!”

Political slogans: During the Republican days, candidates were praised or reviled in wall scribbles. In Imperial times, anti-governmental graf- fiti was sometimes painted, but people discovered doing this could face serious charges. Even in Imperial times, some elected offices inspired such slogans as, “If upright living is considered any rec- ommendation, Lucretius Fronto is well worthy of the office.” Sometimes the support for a candidate came from unlikely sources: “The petty thieves support Vatia for the aedileship.”

Continued on next page . . .



POINT COST

In a historical campaign, characters should be built using 100 points, with a maximum of 40 points in disadvantages and 5 in quirks. In a campaign where the PCs are “movers and shakers” of the Roman world (senators, consuls, or military leaders), a higher point total (150 to 200 points) is allowable. Most of the extra points should go toward Status, Rank, Wealth, Allies, and Contacts.

A “heroic” or cinematic campaign for characters built with 200+ points is also possible. This is appropriate for small parties adventuring in remote and dangerous parts of the Empire, where outside help is scarce and the natives are likely to be unfriendly. Alternatively, if the PCs are “barbarians” taking on mighty

CHARACTER TYPES

Artist

At the height of Roman glory, the wealthy developed an insatiable thirst for Classical art. Sculptures, frescoes, and mosaics were commonly commissioned for private residences and public buildings. Playwrights and actors were also very popular. Large numbers of artists, most of them Greek (or trying to pass for Greek) served this demand. Fortunate artists were able to secure permanent employment with a powerful nobleman, or founded a school for the sons of the rich. Others had to travel from city to city, looking for new projects. These “wandering artists” make good adventuring PCs.

Advantages: Very successful artists will be Comfortable or wealthier. A rich Patron is a long-sought goal. Charisma may help secure a contract where actual talent may be lacking.

Disadvantages: Beginning artists will be Struggling or Poor. Diverse Addictions, Odious Personal Habits, and Compulsive Behaviors are common among this temperamental group. Many artists are also Impulsive, Stubborn, or Bad-Tempered.

Skills: Artist, Acting, Bard, Performance, or Sculpting are common. Almost all respectable artists will know the Greek language, and the more they sound like a native Greek the better the reaction of prospective clients will be. Fast-Talk can come in handy. Traveling artists may have picked a Survival skill or two, and may have some weapon proficiency for self-defense.

Arena Hunter

To provide the arenas of Rome and other cities with exotic beasts, professional hunters traveled to remote areas of Africa, Asia, and Europe. Their expeditions can match safaris from any other era in terms of adventure and danger, especially since they had to bring their quarry back alive and in good condition – not an easy feat.

Large hunts were sometimes conducted like military expeditions, with huge contingents of men surrounding herds and packs of beasts and capturing them by the score. The hunting parties included adventurous Romans and natives of exotic lands. A party of hunters should include adventurers with a variety of skills and advantages.

Rome, they need to be as skilled as possible. The arena can also serve as a cinematic setting, where the games provide a hazardous path to glory . . . or an intriguing background from which to escape.

Health and Disease

Rome, like all pre-technological societies, had little to offer in the way of disease control and health care. *Realistically*, people with low HT scores (9 or less) did not live long, killed by infected wounds, the plague, or smallpox – even the common cold! GMs should recommend that players design characters with a HT of 11 or higher, or the Immunity to Disease advantage, or both. Otherwise, they may not last long.

Advantages: Combat Reflexes will help hunters deal with dangerous beasts.

Disadvantages: Bad experiences in the bush could cause hunters to develop Phobias or Alcoholism. Some hunters may have Greed or even Sadism.

Skills: Animal Handling, Net, Stealth, and Tracking. Survival (Jungle and Forest) and the appropriate Area Knowledges and Languages are helpful.

Bandit/Thief

Crime and criminals were not unknown in the Empire even during the most peaceful times. In the cities, muggers and burglars prowled the streets after dark. In the countryside, the more remote roads were harried by gangs of highwaymen. Bandits are not likely to be very successful (or long-lived!), but sophisticated thieves can plan and execute complex schemes to rob the wealthy.

Advantages: Alertness, Acute Senses, and Night Vision are all useful. Common Sense, Danger Sense, and Intuition might keep the outlaw out of trouble.

Disadvantages: Low Wealth levels and Social Stigma are common. Any “negative” Mental Disadvantage would fit. Some thieves will have a Code of Honor and a Sense of Duty to their friends.

Skills: Depending on his area of expertise, a thief will have some or all of the following skills: Climbing, Lockpicking, Pickpocket, Stealth, Streetwise, and Weapon Skills. Fast-Talk can also help.

Barbarian

To the average Roman citizen, the term “barbarian” included everyone from Ireland’s savage Celts to the sophisticated city-dwelling Parthians. In general, anyone who does not dress or behave like a Greek or Roman citizen will be seen as a barbarian. See *Social Stigma*, p. 36.

The stereotypical barbarian is the Germanic tribesman, legendary for his bravery and ferocity. The Goths (*Gutones* in Latin) were a German tribe; they became the greatest threat to the Empire, eventually infiltrating and overrunning it.

safeguard over 50 million inhabitants, and at a relatively low cost. On the other hand, whenever a threat required a large army, the usual response was to move legions from other borders to the threatened one. A war on two fronts could be disastrous.

The weapons and tactics of the Imperial legion remained for the most part unchanged. Armor quality increased somewhat so that most legionaries were clad in metal armor, either chainmail or the *lorica segmentata* (see p. 43). Auxiliary cavalry ranged in quality from lightly-equipped horsemen to cataphracts clad in mail or scale armor. Stirrups were still unknown, so the impact of cavalry was not as great as in medieval times. Troop quality remained high; with a competent leader, a legion was able to defeat much larger barbarian armies. The statistics of the Roman army remained mostly unchanged. Auxiliary cavalry now ranged from Light to Heavy (cataphracts), and included some mounted archers. Auxiliary infantry provided missile weapons.

Another new element of the Imperial Army was the creation of an elite bodyguard for the Emperors: the Praetorian Guard. The Guard was originally made up of highly trained and experienced troops (Troop Quality of Crack or better), but their quality may not have remained high after being pampered in the city. As the only body of armed men around the Emperor, the Praetorians had the power of life and death over him, a power they exercised several times during Rome's history. By the time of the Late Empire, they actually put the Empire up for sale after murdering the Emperor.

THE LATE EMPIRE

The barbarian invasions, the plagues and famine, and the internal crises that wracked the Empire during the 3rd century had an impact on the Roman army. Civil wars once again became constant; the Romans became their own worst enemies. Legions were moved from the borders to fight for one pretender or another, leaving them vulnerable to the Germans on the north and the Persians on the east.

Emperor Gallienus (253-68 A.D.) managed to bring back some stability after decades of civil war. At this point, the border troops were deficient in training and equipment. Gallienus and later emperors reduced the value of the border troops even more and concentrated on creating a central army that was highly mobile and well-trained. The defensive strategy changed; border soldiers (*limitanei*) were supposed to delay the invaders or just serve as a trip-wire to alert the central government, which would then dispatch an army to meet the threat. The enemy could not be kept outside the borders any more, so the new plan was to defeat it once it had penetrated Roman territory.

Emperor Diocletian (see p. 59) continued to maintain a standing cavalry force, which he divided into four main armies, one controlled by each of the four co-rulers of the Empire. He also tried to return, to a degree, to the earlier policies of secure frontiers. Several new fortresses and road systems were built to allow rapid troop movement. Diocletian also started a conscription system, a radical change from the volunteer nature of the Imperial army.

For mobility, more emphasis was put on cavalry than ever before. The new Roman cavalry included lightly-armed lancers and horse archers, as well as armored cataphracts based on the heavy cavalry of Parthia and Persia. These new units were stationed at strategic points within the Empire, ready to respond to any invasion. Equipment remained the same for the infantry, although in several provinces border soldiers were poorly outfitted. Training suffered, although not as badly as it would during the late 4th and 5th centuries.

Roman infantry suffered a general decline. At first, they lost their *pilum*, becoming Medium Infantry without missiles (TS 4). By the 4th century, they were Light or Irregular Infantry. Cavalry became stronger. There were units of Heavy Cavalry (TS 7), Light Spearmen (TS 3), and horse archers (Light Cavalry with bows, with a TS of 5, or 6 if Persian or Hunnish composite bows were used).

Zama (Continued)

The native Carthaginians were hesitant in assisting the mercenaries, who had to do most of the fighting alone; there was actually some fighting between the mercenaries and the Carthaginian infantry when the Romans pushed the two lines together. The Carthaginian ranks withdrew in confusion, but Hannibal, by threatening to cut them down with his veterans, forced the survivors of the first two lines to reorganize on the wings of his veterans, who so far had not participated.

The battle stopped for some time while both armies reorganized. Hannibal had hoped that the Romans would press on, allowing his fresh veterans to attack the disorganized and battle-weary *hastati*, but Scipio ordered his army to stop its advance and the Romans obeyed (this is proof of the high degree of discipline in the Roman army; troops who see the enemy retreat in disorder want to charge, not stop). Scipio then placed the rear maniples on the sides of the first rank, extending his frontage in an attempt to outflank the Carthaginians. Hannibal also extended his line, using the survivors of the first two ranks on the sides.

The reformed lines met again and the fighting became fierce, without clear advantage for either side, until the Roman and allied cavalry returned to the field and fell on the rear of the Carthaginians; as at Cannae, this action decided the battle. Hannibal's army was routed and the Carthaginian general was barely able to flee.



the city of Rome throughout the ages) and a nice historical overview.

The Twelve Caesars. * Suetonius. The lives of the first Emperors are described here. It has lots of anecdotes, which may inspire adventures and campaigns.

FICTION



Agent of Byzantium. Harry Turtledove. A collection of short stories about a Byzantine secret agent, living in an alternate history where Islam never flourished and Byzantium remained strong.

The *Aquiliad* trilogy (*Aquila in the New World*, *Aquila and the Iron Horse*, *Aquila and the Sphinx*). S.P. Somtow. A tongue-in-cheek alternate history where Rome never fell and moved on to conquer North America, as perceived by a sarcastic Indian.

Ben-Hur. Lew Wallace. Classic novel about a Romanized Jew during the time of Jesus Christ.

Birds of Prey. David Drake. A time traveler and a Roman secret agent team up to fight aliens in 262 A.D.

Envoy Extraordinary. William Golding. A mechanical genius' inventions are rejected by Roman culture. Full of interesting insights on the mindset of the ancient world.

The Eternal City. Edited by David Drake. Stories by several SF authors set in or dealing with Rome.

The *Falco* novels (*The Silver Pigs*, *Venus in Copper*, *Shadows in Bronze*, *The Iron Hand of*

Mars, *Poseidon's Gold*, *Last Act in Palmyra*, *Time to Depart*, *A Dying Light in Corduba*, *Three Hands in a Fountain*, *Two for the Lions*, et al.). Lindsey Davis' excellent series of novels about the adventures of Falco, a private detective in Rome in the 70s A.D.

The First Man in Rome. Colleen McCullough. A novel about the rise of Marius and Sulla to power.

From the Heart of Darkness. David Drake. A collection of short stories, including some set in Rome.

I, Claudius. Robert Graves. A novel about the life of the often underestimated Emperor.

Killer. David Drake and Karl Edward Wagner. A bloodthirsty alien crashes on Earth to prowl the streets of Rome.

The *King of Ys* series (*Roma Mater*, *Galligenae*, *Dahut*, *The Dog & the Wolf*). Poul and Karen Anderson. A mix of fantasy and history set in the 4th century A.D. Rich in historical detail.

Krispos Rising. Harry Turtledove. Set in Videssos, a world that closely resembles Late Imperial Rome or the Byzantine Empire, with the addition of magic. A good source of ideas for GMs wishing to introduce magic in a **Rome** campaign.

Lest Darkness Fall. L. Sprague deCamp. A great look at late Rome, with a time travel/parallel world theme. A good resource.

The *Masters of Rome* series (*The First Man in Rome*, *The Grass Crown*, *Fortune's Favorites*, *Caesar's Women*, *Caesar: a Novel*). A well-written

and well-researched series about Rome's movers and shakers, starting ca. 100 B.C.

Procurator, *New Barbarians*, and *Cry Republic*. Kirk Mitchell. A series of novels about a Rome that never fell.

Ranks of Bronze. David Drake. Roman soldiers are used against low-tech aliens throughout the galaxy.

The Robe. Lloyd C. Douglas. A novel about early Christianity.

The Videssos Cycle: The Misplaced Legion, *An Emperor for the Legion*, *The Legion of Videssos* and *Swords of the Legion*. Harry Turtledove. A Roman army is swept to Videssos (i.e. Byzantium), in a world where sorcery exists.

FILM AND TELEVISION

Ben-Hur. This movie version of the Lew Wallace novel immortalized chariot racing.

Cleopatra. An extravagant recreation of the life of the Egyptian queen.

Gladiator. Russell Crowe as Maximus, a Roman general betrayed by Emperor Commodus and forced to fight in the arena.

I, Claudius. A BBS rendering of the novel.

Monty Python's Life of Brian. A hilarious satire of life in the East during the 1st century A.D.

Quo Vadis? This movie deals with early Christians, the great fire at Rome, and Nero's persecutions.

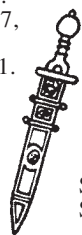
Spartacus. A depiction of the deeds of the famous gladiator.

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