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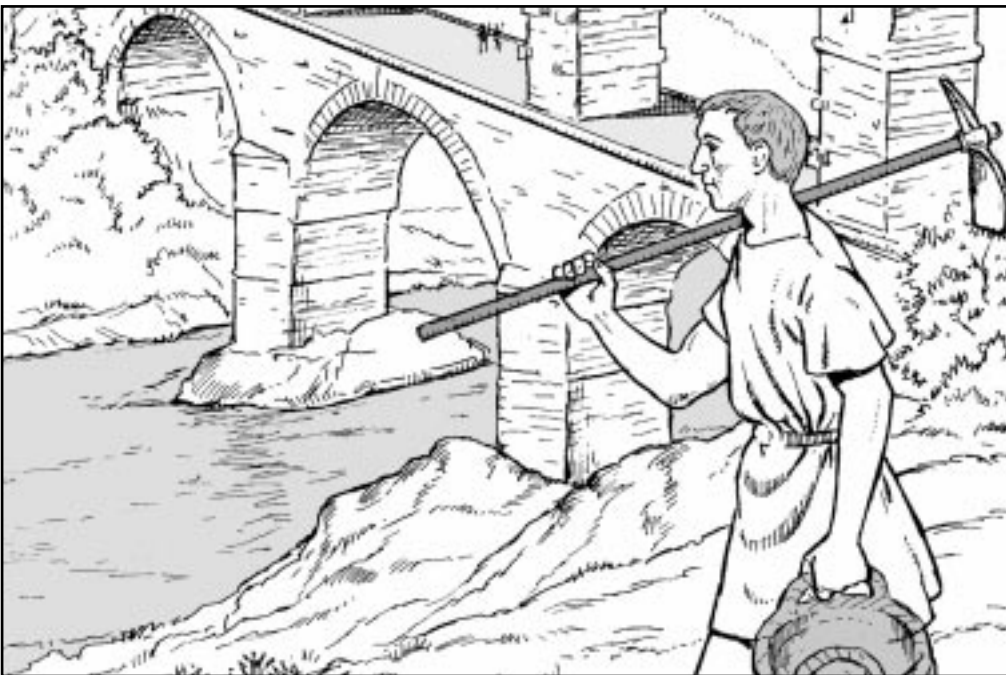
# INTRODUCTION

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](http://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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*GURPSnet*. Much of the online discussion of *GURPS* happens on this e-mail list. To join, send mail to [majordomo@io.com](mailto:majordomo@io.com) with "subscribe GURPSnet-L" in the body, or point your World Wide Web browser to [gurpsnet.sjgames.com/](http://gurpsnet.sjgames.com/).

The *GURPS Imperial Rome* web page is at [www.sjgames.com/gurps/books/imperialrome](http://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](http://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*.



## The Roman Calendar

Romans measured time beginning with the mythical founding of the city of Rome, which was Year 1 A.U.C. (*Ab Urbe Condita* – After the Foundation of the City). To convert a year from our calendar to its Roman equivalent, simply add 753 to the year (so 25 A.D. would become 778 A.U.C.). For dates before the beginning of our calendar (B.C.), subtract the year from 754 (220 B.C. would become 534 A.U.C., for instance).

The Roman year was first divided into 10 months (they started with the third month, *Martius*), which were later increased to 12. There were some changes during the Imperial period, with two months being renamed after Julius Caesar and Octavius Augustus.

The Roman months were *Januarius*, *Februarius*, *Martius*, *Aprilis*, *Maius*, *Iunius*, *Quinctilis (Iulius)*, *Sextilis (Augustus)*, *September*, *October*, *November*, *December*. After Caesar's time, years were divided into 365 days, with a 366-day leap year every four years.

When a disturbance lasted more than a few minutes, a unit of watchmen would usually arrive and try to suppress it. But sometimes the mob numbered in the hundreds, in which case a large unit of guardsmen would wade in, swinging clubs. PCs may be targets of the guards (see the stats for the *vigiles* on p. 10) or might be trampled if the crowd panics and tries to escape. A victim failing a DX or ST roll by 3 or more will fall down and take 1d-2 trampling damage *every turn* until he manages to get up (ST-2 roll).

## Disease

Rome was cleaner than most cities of the time, and a much healthier place than any city of the Middle Ages or the Renaissance. People in the poorer areas still threw their wastes onto the streets, however, and outbreaks of smallpox and plague were not uncommon. GMs with a penchant for realism should make otherwise healthy characters roll for contagion (see sidebar, p. B133) once a month or so, or once a day during a plague outbreak. Smallpox is very infectious; all HT rolls while in an affected area are at -3.

## Fires

Fire was a constant danger in Rome. Although most structures were built of mortar and concrete, they were supported by wooden pillars and had wooden roofs. Also,

many households had a fireplace for cooking, even in small apartments that had no provisions for chimneys. A poor family trying to warm itself in winter could start a blaze. A rioting crowd could also set off accidental or intentional fires.

Fire as a hazard is described on p. B129. Smoke can also choke victims – use the tear gas stats on the sidebar on p. B132 and the asphyxiation rules on p. B91. People can also suffocate in smoke (see sidebar, p. B91). A large fire will start a panic, and the crowd can become as dangerous as a rioting mob. Finally, burning buildings will collapse and rain debris on anybody close to or in the building.

## A TYPICAL DAY IN ROME

For most Romans, the day started at the crack of dawn, and ended at 4:00 p.m., as the sun started to set. The upper classes frowned on physical labor and trade, where most Romans made their living (except for those who survived on the grain dole and their patrons' handouts).

### Morning Labors

As dawn approached, shopkeepers rolled up the shutters of their stores and laborers started walking toward their workplaces. Mingled with them were men clad in togas of dubious quality. These were the lowest clients rushing to pay their respects to their patrons. An enterprising unemployed citizen could have several patrons, whom he would visit in quick succession. The clients would mill around their patron's house until the porter let them in and they could salute their patron. A very servile client might call his patron *dominus*, which is the traditional form of address used by slaves towards their masters. In return, they were given a handful of coins or some food. Later in the morning, the patron would march to see *his* patron to receive a more substantial gift, and so on.

The Colosseum could seat 45,000 with standing room for another 5,000 (not the nearly 90,000 cited by early sources and often erroneously repeated). Still, this size made it the largest stadium built until the opening of the Yale Bowl in 1914.

The seating was strictly arranged by social class, with marble seats for the upper classes down low and wooden seats for the masses up high. The Colosseum had scores of entrances, each with its own number, for careful crowd control as in a modern stadium.

See *Combat in the Colosseum*, p. 90, for more information.

### Getting There

Once a sponsor (usually a powerful nobleman or civil servant, and often the Emperor himself) prepared a game, written announcements were placed in eating houses and bars. Criers would run through the streets, announcing the game and mentioning the names of the gladiators scheduled to appear there. Some announcers wrote the date and gladiator lists right on the walls of buildings; this type of graffiti was found in Pompeii.

People wishing to see the spectacle had to wait in line at one of the entrances to the amphitheater to buy tickets. This area was full of wandering street vendors, offering everything from food and refreshments to cushions to put over the hard stone benches. While they waited, spectators could place bets on their favorite gladiators. They also could procure sexual services from the hordes of prostitutes who loitered about the Colosseum, willing to perform their work semipublicly within the niches of its walls.

Arena tickets were often given away in lotteries; occasionally entrance was free to everyone. Delays in letting the spectators in, rudeness, and hot weather sometimes sparked fights. These could turn into full-scale riots, spoiling (or overshadowing) the event.

The tickets presented the assigned seats with the level and the seat number. Even from the highest level the spectators had a clear view of the event. Sailors would work overhead, fitting out the awnings to provide shade. Women were sometimes segregated to the upper gallery and sometimes forbidden to attend altogether. The lower levels had cushioned seats and were better shaded. Only noblemen of the patrician rank and their guests could sit there. The game sponsor sat in the central box, surrounded by his favorites and special guests. By 10 a.m. or so, most of the seats were occupied and the games were ready to begin.

### The Pompa

The *pompa*, or procession, announced the name of the sponsor and the occasion that had prompted the game. It included a parade of the gladiators that would participate in the game. The audience had the chance to cheer their favorite gladiators and (it was hoped) the sponsor. The gladiators marched around the arena, displaying their weapons and shouting back at the spectators (if a gladiator makes a successful Bard roll, the audience will later react to him at +1). Then they stopped in front of the central box and saluted the sponsor, with the common gladiatorial oath, which included a pledge “to be bound, to be burned, to be scourged, to be slain, and to endure all else required of us as proper gladiators, giving up alike our souls and our bodies.” Afterward, the gladiators marched out of the arena.

The *pompa* provides a dramatic opportunity to develop campaign subplots. As they walk around the arena, the gladiators can spot loved ones, patrons, or enemies and exchange words or signals with them. In a Secret Magic campaign (see p. 116), a witch could use this opportunity to curse some of the fighters. On a successful Vision roll, the contestants might notice something unusual about some spectators, like a cloaked figure making strange gestures, for instance.

### Royal Gladiators

Several Emperors were captivated by the games. Some went as far as to participate as gladiators or chariot racers, an immensely inappropriate act in Roman eyes. To understand the Roman citizens' feelings, imagine how the American public would react if the U.S. President challenged a World Wrestling Federation champion to a match . . . or if a professional wrestler should be elected governor! To Romans, the scandal was even worse because gladiators had the same status as common slaves. Despite all this, several Emperors defied social conventions and went into the arena. Sometimes this was the final straw that precipitated their murder.



The first Caesar to do this was Caligula (see sidebar, p. 55). He liked to appear clad in the trappings of a Thracian gladiator (see p. 96) and loved to drive chariots. He would spar with gladiators, whom he killed for no good reason. Nero occasionally made noble Romans fight in mock gladiatorial contests, and became an avid charioteer. Commodus was another would-be gladiator; he had planned to accept the consulship while wearing gladiatorial gear, but was murdered the night before.

Besides the Emperor, several other noblemen and Imperial favorites went into the arena, or started their careers as arena contestants. Caligula put gladiators in command of his bodyguard, for instance. For common gladiators, these aristocratic opponents were at best an embarrassment and at worst a lethal danger, because if the gladiator killed or hurt them, his life was forfeit.