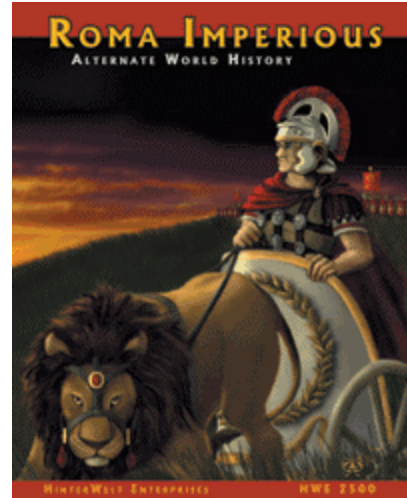


Review of Roma Imperious

By, Will Race and Jade Lee

Overview

Roma Imperious (RI) is HinterWelt Enterprises' fourth role-playing game. In the style of *Shades of Earth (SOE)*, HinterWelt's second book, *Roma Imperious* is an alternate world history. *Roma Imperious* succeeds where *SOE* arguably was lacking, however, and provides a detailed and well-mapped history that provides endless story for history buffs and non-history buffs alike.



RI is what would have happened if Rome had continued to flourish, instead of declining as it did in real history. Also, this world's Rome has magic and strange monsters. Not falling into the trap of trying to do too much in too little space, *RI* concentrates on the area it's discussing – which is, naturally, Rome and the surrounding Kingdoms and Empires.

The book is thorough in its contents, including character concepts in chapter 6 such as Artificer, a tradesman who creates magical tools; Praetorian Guard, a protector of Rome who falls into the rouge category rather than fighter; and the Medicus, a doctor with surgical skills and healer spells. The book also gives examples of game plots and related character backgrounds within chapter 3 that are routed in the Kingdoms and Empires described.

In usual HinterWelt fashion, the game's CHARGEN is available online. The only difference between this and the regular character sheet is that the CHARGEN provides your character with 90 Denarii (a denomination of money for the game). Using the in-book character creation, it is very hard to find out how much money your character starts with. The character creation section's reference to an area of the book on weapons and equipment has an optional rule that allows a dice roll for starting wealth.

While *RI* is not perfect – we all know that no gaming system is – the good of the story outweighs the sometimes problematic Iridium System.

Presentation

RI is HinterWelt's second RPG in hardcover. The book's cover – a Roman Centurion on a lion-driven chariot – is reflective of the alternate world

history by mixing the standard Roman element of a chariot with the fictional element of having a lion in front of it. The colors used are rich and the art is extremely well designed with a picture-like quality.

The interior has a lot of traditional-looking Roman pictures, and some fantasy pictures that incorporate the Roman characters. Though some of the art technically involves nudity, it is done in a tasteful way. Much like the statues of ancient Rome, the art simply seems part of the culture and never over-done.

The detailed maps that appear in the front and back inside covers of the book are reflective of the entire continent, while smaller maps appear throughout the book. The maps are extremely well done, in that they could pass – in all ways but the fictional titles, of course – as real maps from such a time.

A large (24" x 36") fold-out map, a replica of the one in the front inside cover of the book, is available separately. The map does add some clarity and is aesthetically nice, but it is not absolutely necessary for play.

The written content has clearly been put together with a great deal of thought to readability. The first half of the book is background story for the game and the second half is rules for the game. The exception to this, however, is a sample game that appears at the end of the book. The chapters flow together well. Even for those who have never picked up a HinterWelt book before, they should be able to navigate *R1* easily, which is another incentive to play.

The Iridium System

For gamers more experienced with other systems, the Iridium System seems a mix of older games rather than a new system. HinterWelt has been continually improving the Iridium System since their first book, *Tales of Gaea*, and have worked out a lot of the bugs. This includes the addition of an Optional Luck Rule to clear up some of the previous confusion as to when the Luck attribute should come in to play.

Some players, especially those accustomed to other systems, may find a large problem with skill checks, more specifically – unskilled checks. It is almost impossible to perform a task that one is unskilled at because in order to do so the player must roll a percentile against the character's relevant attribute, giving a less than 20 percent chance (since in character creation, no attribute can be above 20).

One Iridium System issue that has been present from the beginning and still remains is the length of combat. The number of dice rolls required tends to bog down combat, especially when there are a larger number of characters. The inclusion of the combat modifiers in the weapon proficiency section of the character sheet makes the math needed simpler than in some other role-playing systems is a plus, but definitely doesn't make up for time lost with so many separate dice rolls for each combat round.

An example of this extremely lengthy combat process is if two characters fight each other they must first roll to hit against the target's defense. Then the other character may roll to parry the attack. Even if the attack goes through, another roll must be made in order to target the correct area on the foe. If that roll is successful, a roll is required to determine how much damage is done, which is first subtracted from the armor points and then the opponents fortitude points. If the targeting roll is unsuccessful, the player must make a roll to find out what part of the body is hit before rolling for damage. Still, if a vital area is not targeted, the foe is not defeated.

The Best

The game-world setting was definitely the best part of *Roma Imperious*. A well thought-out meshing together of standard Roman history and fictional elements brought together a detailed story that is pleasing to those who know what really happened and those who simply want to play the game.

Roma Imperious goes over Rome – and all over the related areas, including Africa, Aegyptus (Egypt), the Jade Empire (most of Asia), and Hispania (the area around the Spanish peninsula). This is good for a couple of reasons – of course it's always good to have background information, but it also allows for setting the campaign in the other areas.

The inclusion of a pre-made game story at the end of the book was very helpful. Especially for those who are new to HinterWelt games and the Iridium System, the story given is a good example of how to incorporate the elements of the story into the game.

With the same idea, the character templates – each including some back story – are useful for a group's first experience with *RI* or to speed up one-shot games.

The Worst

There were mathematical errors in the book. There was even such an error in one of the worst possible places – in one of the examples of combat section. In combat example 2, a damage roll is added and the numbers 16, 17, and 10 are summed to be 38 instead of the correct total 43. This is stated again once later in the section, but stated correctly as 43 at another point.

The need to have skills in each weapon, as opposed to each of the weapon types, seems overly complicated and unnecessary. This may be especially noticeable for the fighting-heavy characters who will eventually learn many weapons.

While some other role-playing systems have converted to being usable with miniatures and mini-boards, this game is definitely not. Having tried playing *RI* with minis, it is our opinion that some adjustments would have to be made or optional rules added in order to do so.

Overall

We recommend that you buy this book. *Roma Imperious* is filled with great story, and it is fascinating and endlessly useful. The story is so good and useful on its own, in fact, that it could be used as a resource for other role-playing game systems.

Whether using it as a source book or playing *RI*, this is definitely a useful book for gamers of varying levels of experience. The story has something to please almost everyone. *Roma Imperious* could definitely be the book that brings HinterWelt well-deserved notice due to its fascinating and detailed game-world.

Rating –

Style: 3 (Average)

Substance: 4 (Classy & Well Done)

The Basics –

Cost: \$39.99

Pages: 336

Year: 2004