

Rome: Decline and Fall

Campaign Outline

SPOILERS: PLAYERS SHOULD NOT READ

This is an outline for the *Rome: Decline and Fall* adventure series for DMs. Since the campaign is just beginning, this outline is rough in the later parts of the campaign, and may change before the campaign ends. This document describes the current plans of the campaign.

Secrets of the Gods

The doom of the world lies in the behavior of the gods. Although the gods are powerful, they are not greater than the Fates. Destiny restricts the power even of the gods, and that destiny is bathed in blood.

The creator god Uranus was warned by the Fates that he was doomed to be conquered by one of his children. To avoid this fate, threw his children into the elemental chaos (Tartarus). His son Chronos escaped, returning to fulfill his destiny and slay his father. This patricide was the worst crime possible in the eyes of the Fates, however, and the doom of Uranus passed on to his son.

Like Uranus, Chronos tried to avoid his fate, this time by eating his children. Again, one of his sons escaped, and the god Zeus returned to overthrow the Titans, slaying Chronos in the process. As another patricide, Zeus was also warned by the Fates of his doom. To avoid it, he devoured his first wife Metis while she was pregnant. Some time later, a terrible headache overcame Zeus. When the pain became unbearable, Athena burst fully formed from his skull.

Zeus believed that he escaped this doom, because Athena was a woman born only of himself, not his first wife. Therefore, he let the children born of his new wife Hera live. Zeus was wrong, however. Though the Olympians ruled well for millennia, Zeus slowly fell under the bleak influence of the Fates until he finally went insane. In his madness, he neglected to guard the world, opening the door to the dark forces of demon-kind and the twisted evil of the Far Realms.

Athena, in her wisdom, recognizes that Zeus must be destroyed. However, she also knows that if she or one of her siblings does the deed, they will be cursed by the same fate, doomed to fall again in another few millennia of time. Athena now searches for another way to bring down her father without angering the Fates, thereby breaking the cycle of violence.

Secrets of Rome

The founding of the empire also sealed the fate of Rome. Power-mad emperors refused to go quietly to the grave when their time came. Making pacts with dark forces, the worst of the Roman emperors have been able to survive death, living on as various undead creatures.

At first, the power of these undead emperors was weak. As they aged and their numbers grew, however, so did their influence. With the death of Marcus Aurelius, the last vestige of goodness left the empire. Because of the madness of Zeus, nothing stood in the way of the undead. Since that time, the empire has been the play thing of the undead, as each competes to put and keep their pawns on the throne. The corrupt morality of the undead emperors is now seeping into the public sphere. Soon there will come a time when the emperors can step out of the night and rule directly, plunging the known world into a darkness that will never end.

The Heroes

This evil fate can only be diverted by the heroes. The player characters in this game must all have a heroic motive: some reason why they will struggle on against evil, even in the face of insurmountable odds. As the campaign progresses, the heroes will be sorely tested. If they are motivated only by personal gain or a desire for power, the forces of darkness will simply buy them off. They certainly won't be worthy of being chosen as champions of the gods.

When your players create their characters, it is vitally important that you make it clear to them that they must really be heroes. You should ask each player what their heroic motive, and if they don't have one, then have the player re-work their character's motivations. It is not enough for the player to write "Good" in the character's alignment box. The character must have a *reason* to be good. If you or your players don't want to play in this sort of campaign, then you should pick something else to play, or be prepared to modify the adventures from the way they are written.

You should also steer them away from worshipping the older gods (Zeus, Hera, Poseidon and Hades), because they will be villains later in the campaign. The best choices are the gods Athena, Artemis and Apollo. These three are the most likable of the Greek gods, so this may not be a big problem.

Adventure Notes

The *Rome: Decline and Fall* campaign is based on a particular set of house rules. As DM, you do *not* have to use these house rules to run the adventures. The house rules are very close to the core D&D rules. The only place where they appear in the written adventures is the custom DC and success/failure requirements in skill challenges. The DM should be able to adjust those easily.

The most radical of the house rules is that a character's equipment is based on their level. This means that none of the adventures list treasure rewards. If you want to use the normal treasure rules, you will need to decide what treasure the heroes can find in each adventure. How much treasure you give out will depend on how many adventures you plan to run.

Each adventure provides roughly enough experience to advance half a level. Each adventure assumes that the characters advanced to a new level, however. You can simply advance character one level per adventure, or you can double the experience awards (which amounts to the same thing). Alternately, you can run extra adventures (one long or two short) in between each adventure in this series.

The adventures in this series are released monthly and are designed to be played in about 6 hours. This would let you run the adventure in one long session or two short sessions. If you run the campaign as a typical nightly D&D group, you can run the *Rome: Decline and Fall* adventures for two sessions out of the month and adventures created by your DM the rest of the time, advancing at about the right pace.

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The campaign is divided into 6 acts, each 5 adventures long, one per level.

Heroes Found (Level 1-5): The heroes converge on a small border town named Lorraine. There they meet each other, learn about their world and begin their quest to save the world. In these adventures, they witness the suffering of the people of the empire that results from the corruption and neglect by imperial officials. They learn that if they don't face these problems themselves, no one will.

- A01 Defense of Lorraine:** The heroes face goblin raiders which the local legions refuse to fight. The heroes also meet the local people who will be important in future adventures. This adventure introduces the setting and the player characters to each other.
- A02 Day of the Demon:** As the heroes settle into Lorraine, they run afoul of a group of cultists who have sold their souls for power with a minor demon. This adventure introduces the themes of divine and demonic warfare that characterize the campaign.
- A03 Our Neighbor, the Orc:** The heroes learn that the provincial governor for Gaul is quietly inviting Orcish tribes to migrate into the province. They can't stop the migration, but they must divert this threat against the hidden elven village of Briodach.
- A04 Elf-Home's Doom:** A terrible beast from the past threatens Lorraine and Briodach. The heroes must choose between their personal glory and doing what is right.
- A05 Eagles of Varus:** Determined now that they must stop the schemes of the imperial legate, the heroes must find a way to gain access to the center of power. They learn of the location of the long lost imperial eagles of Varus, which they strive to recover.

Rebellion of the Mad (Level 6-10): The heroes move to the provincial capital of Masillia, becoming entangled in the machinations of the imperial legate of Gaul. They must undercut his rebellion before it opens the province to hordes of invading Orcish barbarians, a terrible situation that could lead to the fall of the western empire.

The Hidden Heart of Rome (Level 11-15): Rewarded for their actions in Gaul, the heroes move to the center of power in Rome. There they discover the true evil undermining the empire: the secret undead emperors of the past.

The War for Empire (Level 16-20): The heroes take sides as the war over the destiny of the empire begins. Armies march, and the hands of gods and demons move mortals as pawns to determine the fate of the world. If the heroes can't destroy the demon-lich Caligula, mankind will fall into darkness.

Demon Gates (Level 21-25): As the heroes reach new heights of power, they at last take the fight to outer realms, home of their demonic enemies. They must close the gates through which the demons and the primordials threaten the world.

God's End (Level 26-30): The cosmos shakes as the gods themselves enter into the war. The heroes embrace their ultimate destiny to bring down the corrupt king of the gods, Zeus.