

Proposal for Paper for 'Swords, Sorcery, Sandals, and Space: The Fantastika and the Classical World. A Science Fiction Foundation Conference

All Roads Lead to Rome:

Parallels Between the Malazan Empire and Ancient Rome.

by

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The world of Steven Erikson's ten book epic fantasy, (co-created with Ian C. Esslemont), called *The Malazan Book of the Fallen*, is filled with conniving gods, cunning non-human races, powerful mages, mighty dragons, alien beings, and . . . mortal humans. The gods meddle and wage war with each other (much the way they did in the Iliad and Odyssey), pitting ancient and violent races and humans against each other in a bid for power and supremacy. The humans appear to be the unwitting pawns and disposable fodder for the gods' machinations, only bit players in the clash between more powerful titans . . . but are they?

*The Malazan Book of the Fallen* focuses on human soldiers in the army of the Malazan Empire, an empire that resembles the Roman Empire of Julius Caesar's time, with similarities ranging from imperial governance and infrastructure to military organization and Greco-Roman polytheism and religious persecution. That Erikson models the human element of his tale after Ancient Rome is by no means an accident.

The Roman army was an extremely efficient, disciplined, mobile, and highly successful military force as is the Malazan army - with a few added advantages. This Malazan army evolves, over the course of the tale, into a force able to oppose and thwart godly interference. The parallels between the Roman Empire and the Malazan Empire offer a rich, multi-textured backdrop onto which Erikson's otherworldly creations - of which there are myriad - can unfold. This paper will endeavour to illustrate the many parallels between the Roman Empire and the Malazan Empire and how Erikson deftly works the classical world into his world of epic fantasy.

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