

IMPERIUM



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著者:Robert Harris

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Book Description

IMPERIUM

A CAUTIONARY TALE OF CICERO, THE GREATEST ORATOR OF ALL TIME, AND HIS EXTRAORDINARY STRUGGLE FOR POWER IN ROME.

When Tiro, the confidential secretary (and slave) of a Roman senator, opens the door to a terrified stranger on a cold November morning, he sets in motion a chain of events that will eventually propel his master into one of the most suspenseful courtroom dramas in history. The stranger is a Sicilian, a victim of the island's corrupt Roman governor, Verres. The senator is Marcus Cicero -- an ambitious young lawyer and spellbinding orator, who at the age of twenty-seven is determined to attain imperium -- supreme power in the state.

Of all the great figures of the Roman world, none was more fascinating or charismatic than Cicero. And Tiro -- the inventor of shorthand and author of numerous books, including a celebrated biography of his master (which was lost in the Dark Ages) -- was

always by his side.

Compellingly written in Tiro's voice, *Imperium* is the re-creation of his vanished masterpiece, recounting in vivid detail the story of Cicero's quest for glory, competing with some of the most powerful and intimidating figures of his -- or any other -- age: Pompey, Caesar, Crassus, and the many other powerful Romans who changed history.

Robert Harris, the world's master of innovative historical fiction, lures us into a violent, treacherous world of Roman politics at once exotically different from and yet startlingly similar to our own -- a world of Senate intrigue and electoral corruption, special prosecutors and political adventurism -- to describe how one clever, compassionate, devious, vulnerable man fought to reach the top.

From Publishers Weekly

Bestselling British author Harris (*Pompeii*; *Enigma*) returns to ancient Rome for this entertaining and enlightening novel of Marcus Cicero's rise to power. Narrated by a household slave named Tiro, who actually served as Cicero's "confidential secretary" for 36 years, this fictional biography follows the statesman and orator from his early career as an outsider—a "new man" from the provinces—to his election to the consulship, Rome's highest office, in 64 B.C. Loathed by the aristocrats, Cicero lived by his wits in a tireless quest for imperium—the ultimate power of life and death—and achieves "his life's ambition" after uncovering a plot by Marcus Crassus and Julius Caesar to rig the elections and seize control of the government. Harris's description of Rome's labyrinthine, and sometimes deadly, political scene is fascinating and instructive. The action is relentless, and readers will be disappointed when Harris leaves Cicero at the moment of his greatest triumph. Given Cicero's stormy consulship, his continuing opposition to Julius Caesar and his own assassination, readers can only hope a sequel is in the works. Until then, this serves as a superb first act. 350,000 announced first printing; 10-city author tour. (Sept.)

From School Library Journal

Adult/High School—The tumultuous history of Rome from 79 to 64 B.C. comes alive in this fictional biography of Marcus Tullius Cicero, the politician and superb orator who rose to the empire's highest office after starting as an outsider from the provinces. His first legal case drew him into a long battle with powerful Gaius Verres, the dangerously corrupt governor of Sicily. Cicero displayed his wit and talent for oration and strategy to triumph over Verres and other opponents in high-profile cases. Harris has written a fast-paced tale, the first part of a trilogy. He examines the full spectrum of Roman society, including its dark side of corruption, class divisions, betrayal, and cruelty. Cicero, who sought imperium, or ultimate power of the state, is portrayed as a sympathetic figure whose allegiance was to the idea of Republic. The author paints a vivid picture of everyday life, and the courtroom dramas are, at times, riveting. Readers will recognize other famous Romans who pop up in the story, including Julius Caesar and Pompey. They may also recognize the timelessness of the pursuit of power.

—Susanne Bardelson, Kitsap Regional Library, WA

From The Washington Post's Book World /washingtonpost.com

I sure could have used this book while taking third-year Latin. Robert Harris reminds readers that Marcus Tullius Cicero was more than just a writer of tormenting prose. He was also one of the Roman Republic's consummate politicians, a self-made lawyer

who took daring chances and usually succeeded.

Running from 79 to 64 B.C., the story is narrated by Tiro, Cicero's slave and secretary, who is credited with inventing shorthand, living to age 100 and writing a life of his master, now lost. *Imperium*, the first volume of a planned trilogy, is an imaginary recreation of that missing work, and Tiro makes a useful narrator: He can ask about matters for which a slave (as well as the modern reader) needs background information even as he sits in on high-level strategy sessions.

The first of the book's two parts pits Cicero against Gaius Verres, a hoggishly corrupt governor of Sicily. Students of Latin will recall that the case inspired Cicero's Verrine orations, and that as a villain Verres comes in second only to the egregious Lucius Sergius Catilina, who himself appears in these pages, just prior to attempting the coup that Cicero exposed in his most brilliant series of speeches.

Harris, who has also written *Fatherland*, a thriller that reimagines German history, sets up formidable barriers between Cicero and a successful prosecution of Verres, especially time constraints (if the case doesn't finish soon, a new and hostile judge will take it over, and Verres's lawyer is a master of dilatory tactics). Then Harris shows Cicero using cunning and bravado to knock those barriers down.

Along the way, both author and protagonist evince a flair for politics that will remind many Washingtonians of what originally brought them here. "Politics? Boring?" Cicero rejoins to a jaded relative. "Politics is history on the wing! . . . You might as well say that life itself is boring!" The second part of the novel depicts Cicero making the moves that win him election to the republic's highest office, the consulship. Here again Harris's zest for political machinations serves the material well. Toward the end comes a walk-on by Publius Clodius Pulcher, the most beautiful man in Rome, who figures prominently in another splendid novel of antiquity, Thornton Wilder's *The Ides of March*. I can think of no better endorsement of *Imperium* than to mention those two books in the same breath.

Reviewed by Dennis Drabelle

From Booklist

Harris, author of the best-selling *Pompeii* (2003), returns to ancient Rome in this historical tour de force. Tackling as his subject the brilliant orator and senator Marcus Cicero, Harris adopts the voice of Tiro, Cicero's faithful manservant and confidential secretary. Based on his real-life counterpart, Tiro, often credited as the inventor of shorthand and the author of a biography of Cicero tragically lost during the Middle Ages, narrates the story of his master's rise from relative obscurity to imperium, attainment of supreme power in the state. Thrusting himself upon the tumultuous Roman political scene at age 27, Cicero, an ambitious provincial lawyer, matches wits and wills with political and military heavyweights Caesar, Pompey, and Crassus. The author paints a brilliant portrait of Roman senatorial intrigue and corruption, proving that the more things change, the more they stay the same. Harris spins a crackling good yarn, made all the more powerful by the fact that it is thoroughly grounded in history. A brilliant fictional biography of one of antiquity's most complex and triumphant characters.

Margaret Flanagan

From Bookmarks Magazine

Quoting extensively from the extant works of Cicero, Robert Harris makes much of his most famous political battles (sometimes drawing awkward parallels to present-day events) and his search for a sufficiently wealthy and well-placed wife. Tiro is a good choice of narrator: in addition to his historical qualifications, he has reason to ask questions that help explain the plot. Except for the Pittsburgh Post-Gazette, which expressed an utter lack of excitement over a slow plot, critics generally agreed that Imperium is a compelling portrayal of a man and a place 2,000 years gone, made relevant and interesting for modern-day readers.

From AudioFile

Crooked senators, rigged elections, bribed judges. Sound familiar? No, it isn't Washington circa 2006. It's Rome 2,000 years ago. Into this governmental murderous melee comes young Marcus Cicero, determined to attain his imperium--the ultimate power. His slave, Tiro, chronicles Cicero's rise to that power. Portraying Tiro, as well as Cicero, and other superstars of ancient Rome, including Julius Caesar, Oliver Ford Davies is unsurpassable in making all the historical events and players as accessible as today's headlines. No easy feat since Cicero is considered one of the world's greatest orators. Robert Harris's epic is presented here in a fitting epic production, but it is Davies's pacing, phrasing, and emotionally peaked presentation that make this the best historical listening experience of the year. M.T.B. Winner of AudioFile Earphones Award

Book Dimension

length: (cm)23.4 width:(cm)15.4

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