Glory to Rome

Reviewed by Pevans

Glory to Rome is part of the first crop of games from new US publisher Cambridge Games Factory. All their initial games are card games and include *Splat!*, a new edition of food fight game *Kersplatt!* designed by Ed Carter, the main man behind the company. *Glory to Rome* was designed by Carl Chudyk and Erek Slater and is about rebuilding the great city after Nero burnt most of it down (allegedly).
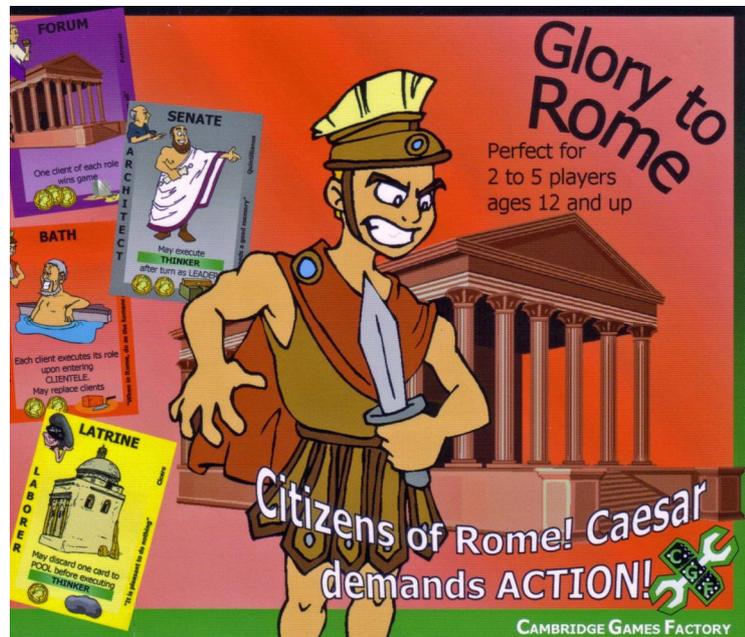
Each player starts with some cards and a board ('Camp') that helps organise the cards they collect and gives the different roles available each turn. In *Puerto Rico* style, the first player ('Leader') chooses a role for the turn. However, in this game they must play a card showing the role (on the left side) in order to choose it. Clearly the cards in your hand can be a huge limitation on which roles you can take. 'Jack' cards get round this by allowing you to take any role. There's also one role – Thinker – that doesn't require a card. This simply allows the player to take extra cards and pass the Leader to the next player. At the end of a turn, cards played go into the 'Pool' on the table, where they can be drawn when required by other roles.

When the Leader chooses a role other than Thinker, the other players can choose, in turn, to play the same role (or a Jack) to take the same action. If they don't, then they're Thinking and get to draw cards – a nice touch that means players aren't short of cards. Then players carry out the action of the role. The aim of the game is to complete structures, increasing your influence, which is worth victory points at the end of the game. You can also stash cards in your 'Vault' as another way of scoring points. And there are bonuses for whoever has the most of each colour of card in their Vault at the end. The game usually ends when all the cards have been drawn, but certain structures can change the end of the game – and who wins – once they're complete.

The first thing to get your head round with this game is the multiple functions of the cards. I've already mentioned that each card shows a role that can be taken in a turn. The most noticeable thing about each card, though, is its colour. This matches the role. It also matches the raw material (shown on the bottom right) that the card

represents. The top of the card indicates which structure it is. This must be built of the material shown on the card. There's a picture of the structure in the middle of the card and any special ability the completed structure provides: a road allows its owner to "use any material in Stone structures," for example. On the bottom left is the value, in influence, of the completed structure, which is also the number of material cards required to complete the structure. This is the same for all structures in that material. Finally, there is an improving quote on the right hand side of the card. Phew!

I've found that players initially struggle to separate the various functions of the cards. Then, of course, you have to work out whether a card is more valuable as a role, a material or a structure. This will vary as the game progresses, too. The inter-relationship of the various uses makes this trickier. The bulk of the cards in the game are these multi-function 'Orders' cards. There are also 'Site' cards, used when starting structures, Jack cards, which I've already mentioned, and the one Leader card to indicate the first player.

As structures are the heart of the game, let's see how they get built. First you play either a Craftsman or Architect card and use that role to lay a foundation. To do this, you play the card for the structure you want to build from your hand and add it a Site card of the same material from the table. In subsequent turns you can add further cards of the correct material from your hand (Craftsman role) or your 'Stockpile' (Architect). (Cards get into your Stockpile by taking them from the Pool using the 'Laborer' role.) When enough cards have been played, the structure is complete. You take the Site card to show the extra Influence you've just earned and the structure's special ability takes effect. This can be a one-off or something that lasts for the rest of the game. Or even something that ends the game!

There are three other Roles in the game. The Patron role allows you to take a card from the Pool and add its Role to your Camp as a 'Client.' Clients allow you to carry out a Role without playing a card. That is, if you have a Craftsman client and the Leader plays Craftsman, you can Think and use your client to act as a Craftsman. Or play a Craftsman card and use your client, thus getting two Craftsman actions. This is potentially very powerful and it's no surprise that players are limited in the number of Clients they can have. Increasing your Influence allows you more Clients.

This leaves 'Merchant' and 'Legionary.' The Merchant Role allows players to take a card from their Stockpile and add it to their Vault. These are the cards that are worth points at the end of the game. This is another powerful option, which is also limited by the amount of Influence you have. Legionary is rather different from the others. Having played a Legionary card, you then play another card. This allows you to take all the cards of the same material (colour) from the Pool and to demand one from each of your neighbouring players. Potentially very powerful, but you have to have one of the cards you want in the first place.

That's a lengthy explanation as the game is fairly complex – you'll probably need to play it at least once to get to grips with it. It plays quickly, though, because

everybody has the opportunity to do something on every player's turn. This may only be picking up cards, but then you should be in a position to do something on the next turn. Yes, the cards can be a limiting factor (I have been stuck for several turns with just Legionaries in my hand), so you need to manage your hand. This is very much a logistics and management game. The other major factor is the structures you put up. All the special abilities are useful and will probably influence how you play the rest of the game. So keep a careful track of what structures are available to you and what you can do with those you've completed.
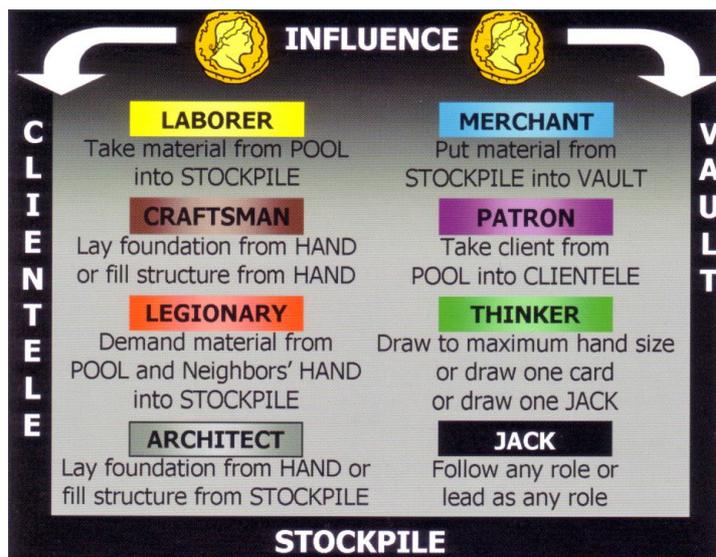
The game starts slowly, as players accumulate cards and start their first structures. It gradually speeds up as players gain Clients and the special abilities of completed structures. Clearly, the main goal is to get some structures completed, but the tactical choice of structure will depend on what cards you have available. Not just the structures themselves, but the materials needed to complete them. So an intermediate goal is getting the cards you need.

Similarly, using the Patron to add Clients boosts your ability to do things in the following turns, so it's well worth investing a few turns in doing this. And don't forget to use the Merchant to stash some valuable materials in your Vault.

Glory to Rome is an ingenious game that provides plenty of fun and will be very different every time its played. The chaos provided by the randomness of the cards means this is not a game for detailed planning. But you do need to think ahead, work out what resources you'll need and collect them. Trimming your sails, of course, to the options available to you. Clever stuff and a game I can recommend. Especially when the new version is available – this comes in a rigid box (rather than the zip-lock bag of the first version) and the cards have rounded corners rather than stabbing players. I give it 8/10 on my highly subjective scale.

Glory to Rome was designed by Carl Chudyk and Erek Slater and is published by Cambridge Games Factory in the USA. It's available in US shops at $20 and the revised edition will soon be available – expect the UK price to be around £18. It's a card game for 2-5 players, aged 12+ and takes about 90 minutes to play.

Pevans rates *Glory to Rome* 8/10 on his highly subjective scale.

This review was first published in *TWJO* 68, September 2006.