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Setting: Palace of Publius Artorius Stabo, Roman Governor of Macedonia
Date: September, 31 BC

Cast of Characters

Roman Court of Macedonia
Publius Artorius Stabo — Roman Governor of Macedonia
Appia Ulupius Stabo — Wife of the Governor
Lucius Porcius Aculeo — Roman Prefect to Macedonia
Aulus Spurio Scipio — Roman Magistrate
Decimus Magnus — Roman Priest
Titus Tiberius Tubero — Legionnaire
Lentulus Amadeus Falco — Legionnaire
Commodius Horatius Gracchus — Legionnaire
Asclepius — Macedonian Surgeon
Calpurnia Gratius — Courtesan
Paulla Naevius — Courtesan
Servius — Roman Slave
Quintus — Roman Slave
Potnia — Macedonian Slave
Nephele — Macedonian Slave

Macedonian Nobles and Servants
Xanthippus — Macedonia Noble
Megacles — Macedonian Noble
Parmenion — Macedonian Noble
Cepheus — Macedonian Noble
Olympias — Macedonian Noblewoman
Arrian — Macedonian Slave
Aktor — Macedonian Slave
Thanatos — Macedonian Slave
Okeanos — Macedonian Slave
Achaikos — Macedonian Slave

Survivors of the Battle of Actium
Tiberius Decius Triarius — General of Marc Antony’s forces
Mareus Gnaeus Cursor — Legionnaire
Gaius Cassius Vetus — Legionnaire
Fulvius Larcius Agrippa — Legionnaire
Ihknaton — Egyptian Priest
Mukantagara — Egyptian Priestess
Nafrini — Egyptian Priestess
Khalfani — Egyptian Officer
Kemnebi — Egyptian Soldier
Panahasi — Egyptian Soldier
Prologue

Originally conceived of as a game script for a large game convention, Arcanum Imperii is scripted to run with more than 30 players. In this format it is wonderful for conventions, party events, or large gaming groups. On a smaller scale, Arcanum Imperii can be run with a smaller group of perhaps a dozen players. Many of the slave and soldier roles listed in the script are designed to provide characters for a larger game group and the core-characters can be handpicked by the game staff to best suit the atmosphere and conflicts they wish to present. In other cases, some background details and components can be combined with other characters to offer a wealth of intrigue and corruption among a much smaller group of players. Whatever the size of the group, this is a great event for over-the-top actors and orators and anyone who loves a convoluted game of intrigue.
Player’s Introduction

After the death of Julius Caesar, the Roman Republic fell briefly under the leadership of three noble Romans known as the Second Triumvirate. Marc Antony was cousin, friend, and military commander to Julius Caesar. Gaius Julius Caesar Octavianus, or Octavian, was the great-nephew and later the adopted son of Caesar. Marcus Aemilius Lepidus was a patrician and faithful supporter of Caesar. Together, the three ruled the republic for a decade before individual ambitions tore the triumvirate apart.

Octavian forced Lepidus from power and sent him into exile. He then turned his attentions to Marc Antony, who had consolidated his power in the east with the assistance of the Egyptian Queen Cleopatra and distanced himself from the politics of Rome. Octavian turned public opinion against Marc Antony and his foreign queen and induced the Senate to declare him an enemy of Rome. War was declared. Octavian summoned his legions and raised more than 200,000 troops. Marc Antony and Cleopatra assembled an equal force of mixed heavy Roman and light Egyptian infantry.

Marc Antony, however, was betrayed by General Quintus Dellius, who defected to Octavian with his former master’s battle plans. Marcus Agrippa, commander of Octavian’s fleet, encircled Marc Antony’s forces and destroyed them at sea in the straits of Actium. Separated from their Roman allies, Cleopatra’s fleet fled without entering the battle. Marc Antony barely escaped with his life and fled to Alexandria.

Up to this point, Governor Publius Artorius Stabo has managed to keep his political distance in the conflict, biding his time to see which commander will emerge triumphant. But his hand has now been forced. A ragged band of survivors from the battle of Actium landed on the Macedonian coast near his palace. They seek his audience, asking for assistance for safe passage and a military escort to take them safely back to Alexandria. They claim that they carry with them the secret of a great weapon that will ensure Marc Antony’s victory if they can be reunited with his surviving army.
Publius Stabo is in a quandary. He was about to throw in his lot with Octavian after the defeat of Marc Antony at Actium, but what if Marc Antony and his Egyptian allies truly do have some sort of secret weapon? Do they truly have something that could crush Octavian’s forces outside the gates of Alexandria or take the fight back to the heart of Rome itself? Stabo hoped to keep the matter quiet until he had personally met with the survivors of the battle and made a decision. Word has spread quickly through his court about their presence, however, and all the local Roman and Macedonian nobles demand an audience to argue their case for Octavian or Marc Antony.
Keeper’s Introduction

Among the survivors of the Battle of Actium are a small group of Egyptian soldiers, along with several priests and priestesses. Nafrini is a priestess of the Black Pharaoh Nyarlathotep, a cult outlawed within Egypt since the fall of Nephren-Ka. Several months ago, she approached Cleopatra and Marc Antony with a plan to help them destroy Octavian. She holds a strange crystal called the Pharaoh’s Heart, a strange relic that would later be named the Shining Trapezohedron. Under the right circumstances, it has the ability to summon a terrible avatar of Nyarlathotep known as the Haunter of the Dark. Nafrini proposed having Marc Antony and Cleopatra’s forces take her to Rome, where she would unleash the horror against Octavian and the eternal city. In exchange for clearing the way for Marc Antony to seize control of Rome, Cleopatra would allow the open worship of Nyarlathotep to return to the Nile and would place the Crawling Chaos above all others.

All these plans were destroyed and now the survivors are desperate to return to Alexandria and rejoin the remnants of Marc Antony and Cleopatra’s forces. Nafrini believes the Haunter of the Dark could be used to destroy or badly maul Octavian’s army in the field and buy them time to remount an expedition to Rome. Much now depends on Publius Stabo, the corrupt Roman Governor of Macedonia, who is beset by Roman and Macedonian nobles each arguing for a different fate for the battle’s survivors.

In order to help make it clear which of the three factions the various characters are affiliated with, each has an appropriate identifying symbol in the upper right corner of its character sheet. These are an Imperial Eagle for the Roman Court of Macedonia, a 16-ray sun for the Macedonian Nobles and Servants, and an Egyptian Ankh for the Survivors of the Battle of Actium.
**Game Setup**

Arcanum Imperii can be played in one large room, such as a hotel event space, with tables and chairs suitably arranged. It is better if more than one room or gaming area is available so as to make more spaces available for players to hide and intrigue. One area should be arranged as Stabo’s audience chamber with thrones for Stabo and his wife, Appia. Other areas can be set with different table and chair arrangements to suit the game staff. One advantage of playing this game in a hotel or convention room setting is the lack of personal items and clutter found in most people’s homes. This will provide the game staff with large, open rooms as empty stages upon which to set up furniture and props to replicate the Governor’s palace.
Costumes and Props

Costumes for Arcanum Imperii can range from elaborate to extremely simple depending on the time available and resources of the gamers. Some players enjoy costume play and will take the time to fashion the robes of Egyptian priests and priestesses or simulate the armor and gear of Roman soldiers. A number of inexpensive Halloween costumes are available for Romans and Egyptians that can be ordered online or maybe found in a local costume shop.

At the least, the players can be asked to bring white sheets from which to fashion togas for the evening. If all players are in togas, the game staff should consider some detailing items to differentiate certain individuals. Colored cloth or even colored plastic tablecloths from a dollar store, for example, can be used in whole or sliced into long sashes. Red sashes might be used designate the legionnaires loyal to Octavian, while Marc Antony’s forces may wear sashes of blue over their togas. Gold sashes and eye-liner may be used to identify the Egyptian soldiers and clergy. Many of the soldiers are armed and toy foam and plastic swords that can simulate this are readily available, along with a few toy daggers and PVC spears help complete the necessary arsenal.

This is a great party event, so plenty of beverages should be available and refilling drinks is great busy-work for the slaves and gives them a ready chance to listen in on conversations. If the group is all of drinking age, a case of wine for the event will be perfect … although watering down the wine is quite appropriate for the period and might help prevent some players from getting too sloshed during the evening (and game staff need to be ready to politely but firmly cut-off any players during the game who becomes intoxicated).

Food items are a great idea too, especially small finger foods and appetizers. Feel free to embellish their descriptions (e.g., heated, frozen mini-quiches might be a
compote of lark’s tongues and diced sheep’s kidneys, while micro-waved pastry meat pockets might be owl’s liver pockets with exotic spices from Palestine).

A few relic props, including a stone for the Cult of the Black Mother and, of course, the Shining Trapezohedron/Pharaoh’s Heart, will be required. The Black Mother’s stone should be small and able to be carried in a pocket, purse, or fold of a toga, while the Pharaoh’s Heart might appropriately be in a box or small chest. A small bottle or vial containing something like colored water or milk can be used to represent a vial of the Black Mother’s Milk. A mask of some sort is required for Cepheus. Beyond these things, other small props and costume items such as scrolls, purses, gold and silver coins, gems, or whatever else the staff or players feel appropriate are great additions.

Some appropriate costume items and effects should be prepared in advance and tucked away in the event that the Haunter in the Dark is summoned. Even a black body suit, monster mask, and flowing black cap or wings will do the trick in a pinch for a staff member to don if the need arises.

A few players may want small vials or artificial sweetener to represent poisons. In one playtest session, no fewer than four different players were trying to poison the Governor! It became quite a task for the Keeper to keep an eye on several specific cups, but the player in the role of Publius was brilliantly taking fresh cups with each drink and never returned to a cup he set down (of course, the Governor is fully within his rights to identify a slave as his designated taster).
Arcanum Imperii is a very loose and free-form game driven almost entirely by player intrigue and interaction.

After characters are assigned and costumes and props assembled, the Keeper should have the Egyptians and Marc Antony’s forces go off in a corner to quickly introduce themselves and say a few things about themselves that would be commonly known by others in their group. Any characters who need to have extra coordination with specific players should be given a couple minutes to do so. Meanwhile, the Governor’s court and the Roman and Macedonian nobles should go into another corner of the room and do the same. Nobles need not state their position on the survivors at this time, but should merely take a few minutes to ensure that they know one another’s characters and their basic roles in the court. Also, be sure a few minutes are allocated for any players who need some quick additional identification and coordination prior to starting the game play.

The Keeper should have the room cleared of everyone except Governor Stabo, his wife, and the closest members of their court. At that point, every couple minutes, Roman and Macedonian nobles should be allowed to enter, greet the Governor, and begin their conversations. Stabo may wish to have the Egyptians brought forth before their fate is argued. Stabo’s soldiers should leave the room and escort the Egyptians and Marc Antony’s forces into the audience chamber.

When assigning characters, be sure to find a player that enjoys public speaking and isn’t shy to play the role of Publius Stabo. For the first 20 minutes or so, he pretty much runs the agenda… calling forth the survivors to tell their tale and the nobles to state their case. He’ll want to have time to consider his decision, allowing the players time to plot and intrigue.

The game staff should plan ahead for various end-game situations. The most likely might include the summoning of the Haunter of the Dark to destroy the court, an assassination and coup against Publius Stabo, a massacre of the...