

PATROCINIUM

Roman Patronage

or How to Get a Party Together

One of the most challenging aspects of role-playing games, especially games such as Call of Cthulhu where the players take on the personas of real people, is inventing a reason for a disparate group of people to work together beyond the nebulous “saving the world from horrors nobody sees” or the trite “who knew we were all second cousins?” Luckily, the Roman patronage system can provide a substantive reason for the party being together.

“A Day in Rome” in *Cthulhu Invictus* briefly touches on Roman patronage, specifically in the custom of the *salutatio*, where a *cliens* greets his *patronus*. To delve deeper into the patronage system, it’s necessary to understand that Rome was a very status conscious society. A wide gulf separated the powerful from the powerless, and the powerful enjoyed making sure everyone knew it. It didn’t matter how powerful a Roman man was if people couldn’t tell just by looking at him. Among other things, sumptuary laws (*sumptuariae leges*) ensured that an equestrian wore the *tunica angusticlavia* while a non-citizen wasn’t legally allowed to wear a toga at all.

This visual status cue helped reinforce the publicly acknowledged inequality between patron and cliens. Roman society had two forms of patronage, either of which can be used to bring investigators together.

First is public patronage. In this case, a patron is a benefactor of a group. This group can be a *collegium*, a religious association, or even an entire city. A group of likeminded investigators can easily become a public cliens of a powerful

man. Normally, public patronage provided large sums of money for public works, entertainment, or food distribution. The patron, however, can also provide protection and advocacy for the group if they find themselves in trouble.

Private patronage was a relationship between one man of higher status and another of lower status. The patron provided his cliens with money, gifts, legal advice, invitations to dinner, advice, and protection. A private patron can bring a group of disparate investigators together, keep them together, and even provide a method to involve replacement investigators. Since patronage can extend from one generation to the next, both on the patron and cliens side, players can draw the children of investigators into the party. It’s up to the Keeper how much the patron knows about the Mythos, but the patron should be at least mildly aware that something other than the accepted world view exists and feel an urge to investigate it.

Not only did patrons help their clientes, but the clientes also had responsibilities to their benefactors. Public patrons expected to receive acknowledgment from their clientes in the form of statues and inscriptions. Personal patrons expected various forms of public displays of deference such as the *salutatio* described in *Cthulhu Invictus*; accompanying the patron to the Forum; and sometimes lending political or military support, although the latter was more common during the Republic.

Although patrons were typically male, powerful women also took on cliens. To prevent salacious rumors of male clientes sexually serving female patrons and the questions of inherent male superiority that this particular social construct engenders, women most often served as public patrons.

Gnaeus Antonius Tremulus, age 53, Equestrian

STR 10 CON 13 SIZ 14 INT 14 POW 10
DEX 12 APP 13 EDU 15 SAN 50 HP 13

Damage Bonus none

Skills: Accounting 50%, Bargain 67%, Civics, 65%, Empire 55%, Insight 60%, Listen 45%, Occult 30%, Other Language (Aramaic) 55%, Other Language (Greek) 43%, Own Language (Latin) 75%, Spot Hidden 43%, Status 75%, Write (Aramaic) 30%, Write (Greek) 20%, Write (Latin) 50%

Weapons: Dagger 25%, damage 1D4+1D4

Tremulus comes from a long line of grain importers. His family holds estates in both Italia and Hispania, so he travels frequently between the two. On one such trip a few years ago, Tremulus saw field workers building a strange pyre in a field. He approached them under the cover of darkness, ready to berate them and punish them for not working, when a burning eye appeared in the darkness. The eye bore straight into the center of his being. Terrified, Tremulus ran from the field and never confronted the workers about what he witnessed.

Tremulus began reading what few writings he could find on the religious practices of his workers, but none of the histories or geographies contained accounts about the eye. He eventually stumbled across a scroll in Athens that made passing reference to “He Who Waits Outside” and the destruction it could unleash. He also read that the eye is not alone.

Knowing that he was too old and untrained to deal with matters directly, Tremulus began searching for clientes who shared similar experiences with the unnatural. He now provides funds for people who agree to battle what no one else will and offers advocacy if his cliens find themselves in trouble.