

Secret Societies of Thialh: Book Five

Los Vagos



Sea

Los Vagos

The Faceless Champion



“Vivimos para Castilla. Sangrarémos por su pueblo. Morirémos en su nombre.”

– The Motto of Los Vagos



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— Marcelo Andres Figueroa - March 1st, 2001

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Recently it had seemed to Don Andrés Bejarano del Aldana that someone was watching him. He did not normally concern himself with specters or shadows; he was confident in his ability to defend himself in any situation, against any enemy however substantial. He knew that some were jealous of his wealth and position, but the Castilian code of behavior required one to treat one's enemies with elaborate, if sarcastic, public courtesy; if insulted, one issued a public challenge to a duel. This strange new feeling seemed to speak more of furtiveness and hidden agendas, of dark corners and whispered secrets. It made him anxious and wary, sensations he enjoyed not at all.

There was, he mused, the very real possibility that his recent actions had been discovered. He attended church regularly and supported his local parish with great generosity. He saw to it that no one on his lands ever went hungry, and that even the poorest *campesino* family had plenty of firewood and blankets during the winter. He celebrated all the festivals with enthusiasm, but was careful to display as much fervor during *La Noche Divinos* as he did at *Los Borrachos*.

He was always careful to couch his public advice to Good King Sandoval in such a way that he appeared to be musing about alternatives rather than speaking in direct contravention to Cardinal Verdugo. It was crucial that he maintain his relationship with the throne, even if it meant having to share that position with the wily Cardinal who would like nothing better than to control the King without

interference. Aldana always made certain to present even the most vehement arguments with respect and the necessary deference to the churchman's exalted position.

Perhaps the Cardinal had instructed his minions to monitor Aldana's travels throughout the countryside. Hopefully they could report nothing more irreverent or heretical than the sight of the Don stripping off his boots to wade into a stream with local fisherman or throwing off his doublet to help a young couple raise a new barn.

Of course, there was really only one thing of which the Cardinal could be suspicious, he knew. But how could the churchman possibly suspect? No one knew that the dashing Don Andrés Bejarano del Aldana, one of the young King's closest advisors and Castille's chief diplomat, was also the masked savior of the people El Vago. Only one other person had seen Aldana slip out of his private chambers through a secret door and down long-unused corridors to an abandoned stable on the far end of the Rancho; that person would rather cut out his own tongue than betray his beloved master. Even Aldana's own daughter Maria-Soledad had no idea of her father's true activities. He would take his own life – and hers – before allowing Verdugo's rabid curs to get their hands on her. *Ay mio*, he thought. *What a dilemma – my daughter or my country!*

The Don fingered the tiny silver medallion under his camisa. It was a talisman given to him by his *abuela*, his grandmother, who was well versed in the ancient ways. A devout churchgoer, she also believed in the forces of the spirit world and told him it never hurt to have extra protection. "One never knows," she would say. *Que vero*, he thought, *que vero*.

He had received a few odd looks lately. The man loitering by the fishmonger's stall in the square seemed a little too casual in his manner. And the local innkeeper had stared very pointedly at him when he dismounted from his horse. Tiny signs, to be sure – certainly nothing to become alarmed about – but there they were. Aldana sighed. He would not renounce his promise to Prince Javier, but perhaps he would need to be more careful in the future...



Cardinal Ésteban Verdugo sat erect in a high-backed chair, the tips of his elegant hands steeped under his chin. Despite the small fire that crackled softly in the hearth, he had drawn a great black cloak around his spare shoulders. He watched the light dance on the great amethyst ring he wore as a sign of his position and mused on the implications of performing Theus's work.

He was a man who could listen with equal patience to a sweet old *abuela* giving her confession and a heretic screaming for release from the rack. He had learned long ago to keep his turbulent emotions deeply submerged and few people had ever seen him lose his temper. Despite his relatively humble beginnings, he displayed the manners of a true courtier, standing confidently at the side of Good King Sandoval and providing what he deemed to be wise counsel to counteract the influence of the King's other advisor Don Andrés Bejarano del Aldana. It was a difficult life, he concluded, but necessary for the good of humanity.

The soft snick of a secret door opening brought him out of his contemplation as a familiar scent of orange and jasmine wafted into the room.

"You're late."

"You are nothing if not observant, Your Eminence. However, I am late only by your method of keeping time."

"Is there another method that should perhaps concern you, Doña Urraca?"

The magnificently beautiful woman knelt before him and kissed his amethyst ring. Dubbed *La Princesa de Hielo* at Court, Doña Urraca de Rioja's pale, ice blue outfits stood in stark and deliberate contrast to the dark hues common among Castilian nobles. She moved easily through the halls of the Royal Palace with a grace and disdain one normally associated with the Montaigne. A combination of great intelligence, feral cunning, and complete remorselessness

flashed across her face, freed for the briefest of instants. The Cardinal noted the emotions, marked the speed with which they vanished beneath her mask, and silently promised to remind her of who she worked for.

She rose and stood in front of the fire, warming her delicately gloved hands. He knew she loved this room. It was neither particularly spacious nor opulently furnished, but intimate and comforting – as intimate and comforting as anything could be that reflected the most powerful man in the Vaticine Church. Urraca smiled wryly – a little too wryly for Verdugo's tastes.

"You should have a care for your immortal soul, my daughter."

She laughed and glided to the chair opposite his. "Are you so certain that I still have a soul, Your Eminence?"

"Everyone has a soul. Perhaps yours is simply buried a little deeper than most, but there are always ways to bring it to the surface." He looked at her with his dark piercing gaze.

"Is that a threat or an observation?" She maintained casual indifference, but he thought he could hear her voice quaver ever so slightly.

"I never threaten, my child. I merely remind you of the lessons taught to us by the blessed Prophets. We can debate theology another time, however. Your note sounded promising."

Urraca languidly poured herself a goblet of wine, took a sip of the dark purple liquid, and held the crystal up so that it caught the reflection from the fire. "I know who El Vago is."

His face remained impassive, despite the shock he felt. If she had hoped for a visible response from the Cardinal, she must have been disappointed. Then again, she had served him so long that the tiniest signs – a slight twitch of a thick eyebrow, the faintest intake of breath or the barest tilt of his dark head – might come across like a shout. He watched her measure his reaction, then guardedly continue.

"Has it never struck you as strange that this ridiculous apparition never appears more than a day's ride from

Rancho Aldana? Or that he obviously has a *caballero's* training? From all reports, he sits a horse like he was born to it and his skill as a swordsman is exceptional."

Verdugo's forehead furrowed. He had once told her that he believed this El Vago was a disgruntled soldier or some rebellious *campesino* who sought to make a name for himself by defying the Church. Verdugo initially assumed that this public annoyance would be unmasked sooner or later, but it became clear that he was dealing with a skillful adversary. It would appear that once again she had earned the outrageous amounts he paid her for her services.

Her soft voice rose again. "Consider, Your Eminence. We appear to be looking for a man who is well built, skilled at swordplay, an exceptionally good rider and able to appear at a moment's notice in the environs of Rancho Aldana. I took the liberty of assigning several of my men to watch the Rancho and not surprisingly, Don Andrés has never been present when El Vago makes his appearance."

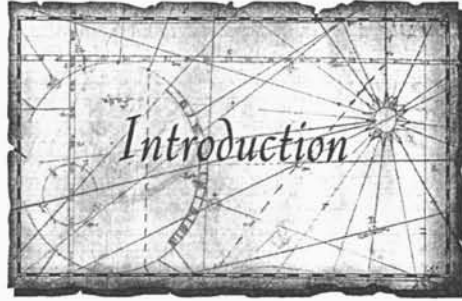
Verdugo curled his fingers below his beard. "Interesting..." he mused. "Most interesting indeed."

He turned slowly to face her. "You present me with a unique dilemma, my daughter. Don Andrés is one of the most important and powerful men in Castille, an advisor to His Majesty, and a respected name even in the court of Montaigne. We must take steps to tighten the net around this self-appointed crusader without arousing his suspicion. I must have incontrovertible proof before I reveal him as a traitor to the crown and kingdom. Proof... or a speedy and untraceable demise."

The woman smiled. "I am, as always, your most humble and obedient servant, Your Eminence. If you wish for proof, I can provide it easily. If you wish for something more permanent, however..."

"No." He held up his hand. "You have done enough. This matter requires some delicacy, and I must attend to it personally."

She rose in a rustle of satin and offered a deep *reverenza* before the Cardinal. "As you wish, Your Eminence..."



It is Castille's darkest hour and she needs a hero to save her. Enemies surround her on every side, lunging and tearing at her like jackals, their hungry eyes gleaming with bloodlust as she struggles for her very life. As the nation of Montaigne marches eastward, intent on avenging the insult to *l'Empereur*, its army ravages the Castille countryside, sending the people fleeing in any direction that will take them out of harm's way. Looking back over their shoulders at the pursuing invaders, they find themselves running into the waiting arms of the Inquisition, which stands ready to rid the land of heresy at any price. Even the most devout Castillian fears the night when he will hear a knock at the door and be dragged off the street by the Knight Inquisitors. From without and within, Castille is bleeding. What can be done to stem such injustice? Where can the people turn for safety? Who will rescue them from their tormentors?

One man is trying.

He rides a dark steed, his cloak billowing behind him like a demon. He dresses in an imposing outfit of black and violet, his face hidden behind the powder-white mask of a grinning madman. He wields a sword like he was born to it and he has saved countless Castillians from fates worse than death. They call him "El Vago," the Vagabond, and from his deeds, Castille has gained new hope.

No one knows where El Vago comes from, although Cardinal Verdugo would pay a hefty sum for his capture. A

masked crusader does not fit in well with the Inquisition's plans, nor does it help him wean the young King away from those who would have him reign as an independent monarch. There is no question, however, that the people of Castille have embraced him as their protector. His superhuman exploits might have ancient magic at their source, he could be benevolent spirit given shape, or he might truly be Theus's chosen, a guardian angel in human form.

Then again, he might be a simple man who made a promise. And he might have organized a secret band of heroes to help him keep it.

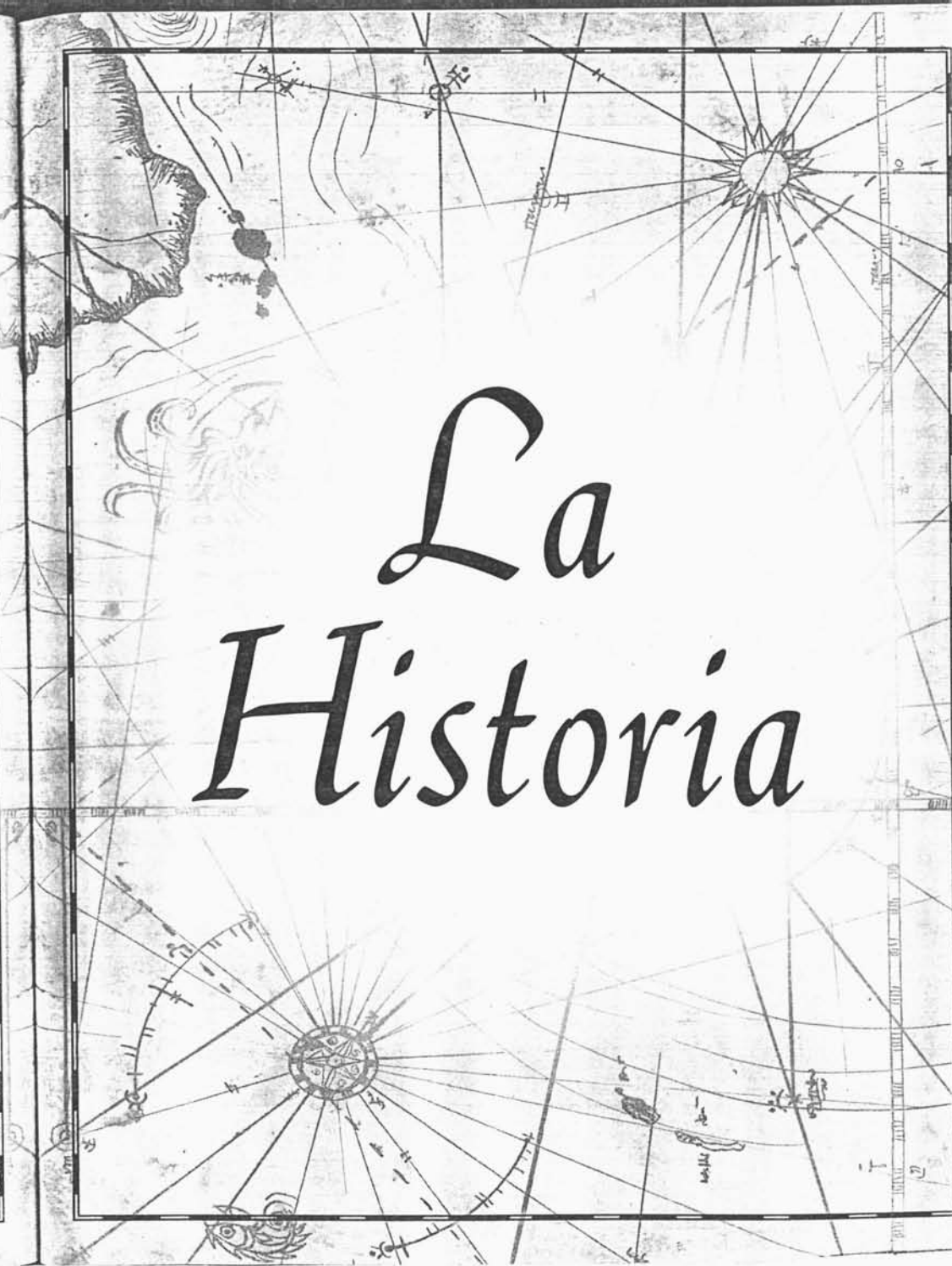
This book details the secret society known as Los Vagos — the clandestine swashbucklers devoted to protecting Castille and its beloved young King Sandoval. It is organized into five chapters. The first chapter, **La Historia (History)** recounts the initial appearance of El Vago and the formation of Los Vagos. It explores the influence of the Inquisition under the direction of Cardinal Ésteban Verdugo, as well as the war with Montaigne. The second chapter **El Héroe (Hero)**, reveals the many faces of El Vago and the brave men and women who risk their lives for their King and country. Chapter Three, **Dramatizar (Drama)** describes a pair of new Swordsman schools, as well as new Advantages, Backgrounds, and Equipment necessary for roleplaying a group of Los Vagos. Chapter Four, **El Juego (The Game)**, presents rules for running a member of Los Vagos, as well as information for *El Maestro de Juego* (the Game Master) that includes suggestions for a variety of adventures and a complete mini campaign. Finally, the Appendix provides a map of an appropriate Los Vagos setting and a trio of new character templates.

Darkness is falling and a nation struggles against an increasing number of foes. Justice comes only from those who risk everything in the name of their people. Now it is time for you, *mi amigo*, to join their ranks. Don the white mask and see if you have what it takes to ride among the heroes of Los Vagos.





La Historia





It has been a good morning, Don Andrés Bejarano del Aldana said to himself as he gazed out of the king's throne room window. Young King Sandoval had arrived safely at the palace with his entourage, following a short trip to the countryside. The monarch seemed genuinely pleased at the fiesta Andrés had prepared in his honor. Everything had gone smoothly... making him wonder if his lingering sense of dread were not grievously misplaced.

A soft swishing noise interrupted his thoughts. Turning his head slightly, he saw the Cardinal approaching. Preparing himself for their usual polite exchange of nods, Don Andrés was surprised when the Grand High Inquisitor stood directly at his right side and also looked out the window.

"It can be gloomy here, Don Andrés, can it not? With the king gone and the court quiet, the palace is like a tomb. I am not surprised that you prefer spending time at Casa Aldana to languishing in these dark halls."

"Thank you, Your Eminence, but I do not mind my time in the King's service in the slightest." Don Andrés felt his stomach clench: was it possible that the Cardinal had somehow discovered the truth?

Without turning, Verdugo paused briefly to breathe in the scented air, then continued in a lower voice.

"Who are you, Aldana?"

Don Andrés' bowels turned to ice as he tried to respond as innocently as he could. "I am a loyal subject of King Sandoval and a faithful believer in the Prophets."

"And, I think, a man who has taken up a very dangerous new game. You should be more careful, my son. It would be quite unfortunate if I had to question your lovely young daughter regarding her father's apparent need to interfere in the affairs of the Inquisition."

A finger of fear ran down his spine. His first instinct was to drive his sharp Aldana blade through the Cardinal's heart, but he knew that even the tiniest movement would be an admission of guilt.

At that precise moment, the doors flew open, and the King and his courtiers entered the great hall. Don Andrés breathed an inward sigh of relief, then made an elaborate formal bow to the Cardinal and moved to greet his young monarch. He had escaped... for the moment. Verdugo watched silently as his rival bowed before the king, then turned and stalked away.

Sandoval motioned his chief advisor to be seated, then plunked himself down on the throne near the older man.

"Ah, Don Andrés! It's good to be home! The countryside was beautiful, but I always like sleeping in my own bed and your courtiers were so friendly..." The boy stopped briefly, his face covered in a most unregal blush. He cleared his throat self-consciously. "I wanted to thank you personally for the reception this morning. I enjoyed meeting your people very much. I had, uh, heard about how, uh, courteous they were. Oh, I said that already, didn't I?"

"Your Majesty is most kind," Andrés spoke evenly. "The Aldana family are your loyal subjects. I am glad that you enjoyed the festivities we prepared for your return."

"*Verdad, sí*," Sandoval replied. "I most definitely enjoyed them. As a matter of fact, I was wondering whether perhaps you could persuade your charming daughter to, uh, remain at the palace for a few days? I'm certain that the other young ladies at court would benefit from meeting such a... such a... uh, remarkable and noble Castilian lady."

Aldana could not help but smile at the stammering King. Underneath the jewels and the velvet, he was a young man in love. Aldana's normally willful 15-year-old daughter, Maria-Soledad, had conducted herself with unaccustomed grace and dignity. Andrés had watched the King looking intently at the dark-haired beauty as she moved through the fiesta. Was there the possibility of an alliance — even a marriage? There was no question that Maria-Soledad would make an excellent queen, but could Andrés bear to part with her so soon? And what would happen if the Cardinal were successful in unmasking El Vago? The King could hardly marry the daughter of an apostate criminal!

He brushed such thoughts aside for the moment and smiled warmly at his king. "She is due back at Rancho Aldana, but I think we could arrange for Maria-Soledad to attend you for a while longer, Your Majesty."

The young King breathed a sigh of relief. "*Bueno!* I mean, we would be most pleased to welcome her for as long as she chooses to stay. Most pleased."

A loud crashing caught their attention as the windows down the hall shattered inward. A group of black-clad men bearing wicked swords swung in through the impromptu entryways and immediately charged towards them. "Who—" exclaimed the King as he rose up from his seat.

"Assassins, Your Majesty! Get to safety! Now!" Don Andrés shoved the King behind him. Courtiers screamed and scattered like sheep as Aldana leaped forward to engage the masked men. A few noblemen tried to join him, but the invaders acted with alarming speed. They cut down their foes in an instant, expertly felling guardsman and don alike. Don Andrés quickly found himself alone, facing half a dozen skilled swordsmen.

Sandoval staggered backwards against the throne, torn between his natural instinct to join the fight and his training as a ruler to protect himself. Thankfully, the latter won out and he dashed for the rear doors, calling for the guards. His liege secure, Andrés turned to face the black-clad interlopers whose weapons were already seeking his heart...





contain an element of horror. The chill of a winter's night is heightened by tales of *La Llorona* who wanders the countryside, wailing for her children. The Castillian year is full of festivals and celebrations which have their origin in the ancient ways of Acraga. The Gallegan region is dominated by *La Sierra de Hierro*, where jagged cliffs and deep channels hide legends of all varieties.

In addition to their reverence for Theus and love of superstition, Castillians have also devised a rich and unique cultural identity untainted by foreign influence or even the petty tyrannies of its own rulers. Castillians take personal responsibility for the welfare of their beloved nation and believe that with Theus' help, they can save her from those who seek to destroy her. All of these factors combined to create the figure known as El Vago.

The Vagabond first appeared in 1665, just after the death of the old King of Castille. In a small town on Rancho Aldana, the Inquisition was preparing to burn a peasant girl who had been found guilty of witchcraft. Despite the outcries of her family and neighbors, the Inquisition would not be swayed from its appointed task. As a priest lit the wood surrounding the helpless girl, the sound of thundering hooves could be heard on the plaza's cobblestones. Seemingly out of nowhere, a white-masked man rode his horse right up onto the pyre, slashed the girl's bonds with a single slice of his rapier, and sped away from the scene with the terrified villager clinging to him for dear life. He acted so swiftly that neither the Inquisition's soldiers nor the town militia could stop him.

This was only the first exploit of this mysterious person. In the weeks and months that followed, the masked rider appeared all over Castille, always coming to the aid of someone in need. At first, he seemed limited to the area of Rancho Aldana, but as time went on, his heroics spread to every corner of the nation. People talked of seeing him near Vaticine City, saving a village from a band of ruthless brigands. Others swore that they had spotted him near their town even though it was far from Rancho Aldana holdings. The legends grew swiftly, fueled by the desperation of a people in the midst of turmoil: in 1666, the Vaticine



Hierophant died, freeing the Inquisition to act with near-impunity. Less than a year later, Montaigne invaded, cutting the nation in half and threatening to place every Castillian under the yoke of a conqueror. In these dark times, this strange hero's exploits gave the people hope to fight on. Some of the stories were simple tales of a masked rider who dropped a bag of gold on the doorstep, while others were dramatic renditions — with appropriate reenactments — of the crusader holding off a cadre of Knight Inquisitors intent upon dragging away an innocent merchant in the dead of night. Even some of the soldiers on the front claimed that they had seen him standing on the earthworks, exhorting the troops to stand against the Montaigne invaders.

By 1668, all of Castille was talking about this strangely attired person who seemed to appear at just the right moment to protect the just and pious folk of the nation, no matter how lowly their station. Clad in purple, his black sombrero casts a rakishly angled shadow over a strange white mask adorned with a grinning clown smile. With a pistol in one hand and a rapier in the other, he can ride like the wind, perform feats of great acrobatic prowess and fight like the most accomplished swordsman the nation has ever seen. Given the erratic nature of his appearances, he has been dubbed *El Vago* (The Vagabond) who can come and go almost as if by magic — there are even reports that he can somehow manage to be in several places at one time! He has thwarted at least three assassination attempts on the king, and his status as a living legend has long since been assured.

There have been efforts to capture him, of course. The Inquisition has branded him a heretic, and the Montaigne army has posted a reward of 1,000 sols for proof of his death. Several imitators have actually been captured and unmasked, only to be shown up for the frauds they are. The true El Vago has yet to fall before his numerous enemies. Every trap set for him, every grim Inquisitor who swears to take his head, only increases his bold heroics. El Vago has become legend, and as Cardinal Verdugo is learning, legends can be notoriously hard to kill.

While the people of Castille see El Vago as a near-mythic figure — a god-like apparition who can move through the nation at will and strike down evil-doers with near-impunity — the truth is far less fantastic. The Vagabond depends on an extensive organization to assist him in his endeavors, allowing him to appear whenever and wherever he needs to be. This organization, Los Vagos, has blurred the identity of the figure at their heart, until even they cannot tell where El Vago ends and his secret cadre begins.

History

The history of Los Vagos begins simply, as most histories do. It has its foundations in a life-long friendship, and in a promise made between two honorable men caught in circumstances beyond their control.

The Promise

In 1663, Castille's old King Sandoval was struck down by a mysterious illness. His eldest son, Prince Javier, was forced to return from his position as Admiral of the Castillian Navy to take over the duties of governing the nation. The Prince turned out to be an excellent ruler and even the skeptics at

court found that his edicts were reasonable and fair. The council began to make plans for Javier's formal ascension to the throne. Under his guidance, they said, the nation would achieve new levels of peace and prosperity.

However, the Inquisition feared that a strong king would weaken the Church's control over the Castilian people. There was no question that they needed to find a way to remove him, but they could not act openly. Although Cardinal Verdugo believed that he had enough influence to bring the popular heir to trial as a heretic, the repercussions from such an action might prove devastating. Javier was smart, canny, and popular with the people. He had political connections to the Hierophant, and wasn't afraid to use them if he needed to. Toppling him would devastate the nation, and give Castille's enemies an opportunity to cause no end of mischief. Verdugo had to figure out some way to tip the balance of power back in his favor without losing his ability to appear completely innocent.

Prince Javier was not unaware of the precarious political situation in Castille. Although he feigned trust in Cardinal Verdugo, he knew the man for what he was, a self-righteous fanatic whose dark eyes focused intently on an agenda of absolute oppression. Ever since his father's illness, Javier remained in a state of personal alert, always ready to defend himself from attack. But after a few months the strain was beginning to wear him down. Late one night, he summoned his closest advisor and best friend, Don Andrés Bejarano del Aldana, and suggested that they pray together.

As the two men knelt before the little altar in the Prince's private chambers, Javier began whispering about his fears for his life, for his younger brother, and for Castille. He reminded Andrés of a pledge they had taken at school — a pledge of fraternity and brotherhood that they swore they would keep until they died. Now, Javier said, it had to become a sacred promise. Should anything happen, he asked Don Andrés to protect young Prince Salvador and the people of Castille. Andrés offered to stay with the prince as a bodyguard, but Javier shook his head. He did not want to run the risk that both of them might be harmed. With tears in his eyes, Andrés vowed to do as Javier asked.

The two men embraced for what would be the last time; then Don Andrés slipped out of the chambers through a secret corridor and made it safely back to his own room.

A few nights later, when Don Andrés and the prince's levee arrived to attend Castille's incipient king they found his chambers empty. His bed had not been slept in and his traveling clothes were gone, but there was neither a farewell note nor any visible signs of a struggle. The Prince had vanished without a trace. A search was conducted, but no sign of Javier was found, and Don Andrés knew that his friend's worst fears had been realized. It was time to take up the burden of the promise he had made.

Young King Sandoval

In early 1665, with his father dead and his brother still missing, 13-year-old Salvador Bejarano de Sandoval found himself ascending the throne as King Sandoval of Castille. Although somewhat timid and uncertain, he was bright enough to know that he needed help if he wished to hold on to his position. Although there was a coronation ceremony, the Church refused to grant him the formal title Rex Castillium, severely limiting his power. Sandoval believed that his brother would eventually return to take the throne, and resolved to do the best he could until then.

Three years later, Good King Sandoval has managed to survive the invasion by Montaigne, the loss of the



Hierophant, and the inexorable rise of the Inquisition, not to mention pressure from all sides to run the kingdom according to the direction of those in power. His edicts are either rewritten or dismissed, and any attempt to actually rule is treated as if he were some child who had wandered into the throne room and was trying on his papa's hat. He has survived no fewer than three assassination attempts against him — that is, three about which he has direct information.

To survive these crises, the young King looked to his two closest advisors, Cardinal Verdugo and Don Aldana, to guide him. The Cardinal's advice was usually good, although it tended to be delivered with admonishments and sermons. Don Andrés has become more than a trusted advisor; he has actually become a surrogate uncle who has taught him much about the ways of the world.

Despite his status as advisor, however, Andrés did not feel he was truly living up to the promise he had made Javier. Certainly, he could advise Good King Sandoval, but his old friend's words loomed far larger in his mind. "I know that what I am asking you will not be easy, my friend, but you are the only person I can trust. You must protect Salvador and the people of Castille." He had given his word and there was no question that he would honor his pledge; but how could he do that while continuing to advise the king? He could not simply ride up to a group of Knight Inquisitors and challenge them all to a duel. Even if he were successful, Cardinal Verdugo would have him burned as a heretic faster than the wind.

Then one spring afternoon, he set out through the streets of San Cristóbal to pick up a gift for his daughter, Maria-Soledad. It was a beautiful day and the people were in a jovial mood as they prepared for *La Fiesta de las Llamas*, the Festival of Flames. Here and there, groups of citizens were making *los niños*, giant papier-mâché figures that would be burned the night of the celebration. The figures reminded Aldana of the puppet shows he had seen while living abroad. The broad *comedias* that originated in Vodacce always included Arlecchino, a grinning white-faced clown who was actually the mastermind behind the

Javier's Fate

Although many believe that Prince Javier was kidnapped and murdered, his final fate remains unwritten. The Inquisition wanted the crown prince safely out of the way, but wished to keep him alive in case they could use him in the future. Soon after his disappearance, a cadre of Knight Inquisitors delivered a prisoner to the hideous island prison of *la Bucca*. Some time later, this man, who called himself "Allende," led a successful revolt against the prison guards. The inmates seized *la Bucca* for themselves, and formed a new nation — calling themselves the Brotherhood of the Coast.

More information on Allende and the Brotherhood can be found in the *Pirate Nations* sourcebook, the *7th Sea* CCG, and the upcoming *Waves of Blood* sourcebook.

convoluted plots. White-faced clown... a white mask... the image struck a chord in Aldana's brain.

How could the Inquisition catch him if they didn't know who he was?

The Appearance of El Vago

Aldana made his first appearance as El Vago in the incident outlined above. He heard of the young peasant woman condemned to burn at the stake and resolved to rescue her from the Inquisition's flames. The incident went off better than he could have planned. No one seemed to have the slightest idea who he was and his bizarre appearance shocked the Inquisition thugs long enough for him to save the girl. The next day, the entire area was abuzz with the story. He was exhilarated, and resolved to try it again as soon as he could. Thanks to his frequent travels around the countryside and his genuine interest in the people's welfare, he had a good idea of where he would find those who needed his help. On one occasion, he saved a woman from bandits who had overtaken her on the road; on another, he helped the poor *alcalde* of La Pasienga defend himself from a group of murderous thugs (see pages 25–26 for more

details). Each time he managed to slip out of the casa, perform the task and return home unharmed and (hopefully) undetected.

The Dilemma

Committing himself to the twin goals of protecting the King from all his enemies and the people of Castille from the grasp of the Inquisition had not been the difficult part of his promise. After figuring out what this protector of the people would look like, he found that riding about the countryside made him feel like a young man again. He thrilled to his escapades and watched with satisfaction as stories of "El Vago" slowly spread. However, after several escapades and one incredibly close call, he came to a sobering realization: he could not do this alone. The Inquisition had hundreds of agents throughout Castille, and one person, no matter how powerful or well-intentioned, could not hope to make a significant dent in their activities. He also realized the cost that his promise would mean to his family; his identity, if discovered, could destroy them. But in light of the sacrifice made by Prince Javier, he felt that it was the least he could do for his beloved Castille. So he set out to find a solution to the problem.

The Formation of Los Vagos

Andrés realized that he needed to build an organization of like-minded people, a secret cadre of aristocrats and commoners, similar to the Knights of the Rose and Cross but far more clandestine. These followers would become a flame that would ignite all the people of Castille, a beacon to commoner and nobleman alike, and a brand to be thrust in the faces of all who would oppress them. They would also serve to carry on his work if he were killed.

Late one night Don Andrés formed the first plans for what he hoped would become an organization of patriots. He resolved to continue his activities as El Vago, representing *la cara pública* – the public face – of the movement and acting as its chief recruiter. He would also gather an inner circle of his closest and most trusted friends who would

pursue the same vision of freedom and support for the Crown. As the secret head of the organization, he would be responsible for planning and coordinating their activities. On the rare occasions that the group needed to meet, they would be masked or veiled, to preserve their anonymity. In this way, they could not be forced to reveal each other's identities if questioned by the Inquisition. Any one of these people could, and would, serve as El Vago if the situation called for it, whether to take a direct action or simply to act as a decoy while another person donned the mask and galloped through Castille as its guardian.

Beyond the inner circle, he would need to recruit a larger group of nobles, each of whom would lead a group on missions or provide the needed supplies and financial support to keep the movement going. These groups would form *Los Compañeros del Vago*, serving as provisioners and conduits of information, and providing safe havens on land and sea for their fellow patriots. With such an organization in place, El Vago could truly become the hero that Castille so desperately needed.

The first person Don Andrés approached was his lifelong friend Don Hector Ontiveros. Andrés knew Hector to be a wise and noble man, and trusted him implicitly with his secret. Hector was fascinated to learn that the mysterious vigilante haunting Rancho Aldana was none other than his old friend, and vowed to help him in any way he could. They discussed the formation of an inner group they called *El Corazón del Vago*, representing the heart of the movement. Together they drafted *El Manifiesto de Los Compañeros*, a document which would guide their future actions and allow them to quickly convey their philosophy to potential allies.

The First Assassination Attempt

Unfortunately, Cardinal Ésteban Verdugo, the Grand High Inquisitor, had not sat idle during this time. His most trusted spy, the devious Doña Urraca de Rioja, reported that almost all of the activities of El Vago had been within a day's ride of Rancho Aldana holdings. She observed that no one had ever seen El Vago and Don Andrés in the same place. The

The Legend of El Vago

The Gonsalves children were tucked snugly into the large bed they shared. The sweet smell of Papa's pipe mixed pleasantly with the lingering aroma of the soup they had had for dinner. The family was poor but at least they were not beggars. Papa worked hard at the docks all day and Mama washed clothes for other people. The children had their chores as well, so at night everyone was always very tired. But not too tired for a story.

"Tell us about El Vago, papa!" They snuggled down and pulled the threadbare blankets up around their necks. Papa was the best storyteller, even better than the old Fhidedi woman who had told their fortune at the fair last summer. He could make different voices and knew just when to pause and when to jump up, slashing at the air with an imaginary sword.

"Ay, El Vago. I saw him with these very eyes." Papa Gonsalves pointed dramatically to his own dark eyes as his four children stared back at him in wonder. "It was the day that poor Lucina Garcia was almost burned at the stake. We all stood in the plaza but we could not do anything to save her. The town guard was there and," he paused for dramatic effect, "the soldiers of the Inquisition." The children hunkered down even further under the covers, clutching at each other for protection from the dreaded Inquisitors.

Papa continued. "The priest had just lit the fire and there was much weeping and wailing from the Garcia family when suddenly we heard the sound of thunder! It was a man on a horse riding like the wind! But not just any man, oh no. It was a man on a giant black horse. A man with a white mask and a flowing black cape. It was..."

"El Vago..." The children whispered as one, their eyes shining at the thought of the hero of Castille.

"*Es verdad*. It was El Vago himself and he rode right into the fire and cut poor Lucina free. Before any of the soldiers could move a muscle, El Vago lifted her onto the horse and rode away. But I tell you, just before he left the plaza, he looked at me. He did, and he touched his sombrero in greeting, like I was a don. I will never forget that day."

The children were amazed into silence. Their own father and El Vago. It was amazing.

"I want to be El Vago when I grow up, papa," Jaime, the youngest, muttered as he drifted off to sleep.

"You're too little, *perrito*," retorted his older sister.

"No one is ever too little to love his people as El Vago does," said their father.

Inquisition, which had already declared El Vago an enemy of the state, began closing in.

At the same time Don Andrés struggled with the realization that he was putting his family, especially his daughter, in the highest danger. The King had expressed an interest in meeting Maria-Soledad, and the prospects for a romance seemed likely. It would not do, Don Andrés realized, to have a father regarded as a traitor. Furthermore his uncle, Don Francisco, the patriarch of the Aldana family, probably

could not survive the shock of learning that his nephew had been arrested and killed by the Inquisition. Andrés vowed to keep his family clear of his exploits, but concern for their welfare continued to gnaw at him, even as Hector began organizing a rudimentary support network.

Things came to a head a short time later when Good King Sandoval was attacked in his own palace by a ruthless band of assassins. Aldana managed to get the ruler to safety, but would have lost his life to the extremely skillful attackers



The Vow

Everyone who joins Los Vagos must take the following oath:

"We, Los Compañeros del Vago, on our Honor, our Families and on the Heads of the Prophets, pledge to devote our efforts, our fortunes and our lives, if necessary, to the protection of His Majesty King Sandoval, the undoubted ruler of Castille, against all enemies of any nation, even our own. We affirm our belief in the Prophets and pledge our loyalty to the Holy Vaticine Church, vowing to see it cleansed and renewed. Until that glorious day we shall extend our hand to all of the people of Castille to protect them with our swords, our lives and our honor from those who would oppress and persecute them unjustly. We swear to support and protect our companions-in-arms even unto the death."

were it not for the timely intervention... of El Vago. The Vagabond appeared seemingly from nowhere, pressing the attack against the would-be killers while a stunned Aldana did his best to help. He had no idea who was behind that mask, nor could he conceive of any member of Los Vagos taking such an action without consulting him first. Nevertheless, he took the mysterious impostor's help for what it was, and together they foiled the assassins' attack. El Vago took a fairly severe wound during the fray but managed to disappear before the royal guards or any of Don Andrés' servants could catch him. The lone surviving assassin managed to flee; Cardinal Verdugo was enraged by the failure. Doña Urraca de Rioja had assured him that Aldana and El Vago were one and the same. Obviously, if the two had been seen together, they couldn't both be the same person!

With the King safe, an exhausted Don Andrés went to tell his daughter about the King's rescue. Upon entering her

chamber, he found his personal servant bandaging up a wound on his daughter's side — a wound identical to the one El Vago had received during the duel! He knew that Maria-Soledad was a fine fencer, but he never dreamed she would behave with such effrontery. Andrés was furious. How could she endanger herself that way? What kind of a good daughter skulked around behind her father's back, endangering herself by dueling assassins? To his surprise, Maria-Soledad came back at him with equal vehemence. Had he taught her the skills of a *caballero* as a lark or because he really wanted a son? Did she not feel a love for her country as strong as any man? Confronted by her scathing logic, Don Andrés was forced to accept his daughter's argument. Moreover, he allowed her access to his secret plans, and shortly thereafter (after defeating him in two out of three practice duels) she took his place once again and donned the white mask of El Vago.

The Formation of Los Compañeros

Their mission clear, Don Andrés, Don Hector, and now Maria-Soledad went looking for additional support. Finding friends among the nobility who could be trusted and who were prepared to risk all to protect the King and the people of Castille was easier than they had expected. The recent assassination attempt on the young King and the rapidly-swelling power of the Inquisition caused a great deal of concern among the nobility, and they welcomed Andrés' appeal to loyalty and courage. In addition the country was now flooded with young dons who had been displaced by the war, and who were looking for an opportunity to do something useful for their beloved country.

With their help, the legend of El Vago began to grow steadily as the members of the secret organization took action throughout Castille. Near Vaticine City, El Vago, aided by members of Los Compañeros, saved a village from marauding bandits. On the road from San Cristóbal, El Vago attacked a cadre of Knight Inquisitors transporting an innocent noble to Vaticine City for trial. Even in the relatively peaceful port of La Pasiega, El Vago was seen on the docks at midnight, protecting a young woman from a gang of street ruffians. In many of these cases, the man

wearing the white mask was not Aldana at all, but an impersonator serving in his stead. Often, it was Don Hector or Maria-Soledad, but other members filled the role as well. Their efforts allowed El Vago to appear wherever he was needed, regardless of Aldana's present whereabouts.

If the organization had stopped there, Los Vagos would have been little different from the other secret societies throughout Theáh. But it did not stop there. The legend of El Vago turned the masked man into a major folk hero from peasants all the way to the royal court. People all over Castille became enamored with the exploits of El Vago and his battle against the Inquisition. Don Andrés began to hear reports of stories that the Vagabond was responsible for all kinds of daring affronts to the Inquisition and Montaigne. Some of the exploits were clearly fictitious, while others were so plausible that he began to wonder if people outside the group were taking it upon themselves to join in the crusade. Were there people who were so motivated by the actions of their compatriots that they felt compelled to don the white mask themselves?

Fueled by Maria-Soledad's passion and Don Andrés' renewed confidence, Los Vagos focused their attention more closely on helping the lower classes, where El Vago had a large and growing following. The girl encouraged the recruitment of innkeepers, smiths, stablemen, shopkeepers, and the like into Los Compañeros so that the members of Los Vagos could move about the country more freely, while Andrés went about his duties secure in the thought that should he fall, his daughter could take care of herself.

Soon there were almost daily sightings of El Vago all over the nation. Some of these were clearly untrained people acting alone — peasants or dons who had lost so much to the Inquisition that they no longer cared what happened to them. These "lone swordsmen" were usually captured and put to death before they could have much effect, but a few eluded capture, and began to build groups of followers around them. Many of them believed that they were supporting the real El Vago, and in a very real sense they were.

There have been problems from time to time, particularly when two groups of Los Vagos are operating in the same area. In typical Castillian fashion, there has been at least one duel fought between two El Vagos to determine which one was the true Vagabond! There have also been a few Vagos who have used the mask to disguise criminal activity, but these attempts have been surprisingly short-lived. The true spirit of El Vago made itself felt all over Castille, providing Don Andrés and his cadre with invaluable (though indirect) support. Today, nearly half a dozen groups imitating the Vagabond are active within Castille — only a few of whom have any direct contact with Don Andrés or his organization.

La Guerra Montaigno

When the war with Montaigne began, Don Andrés resolved initially that El Vago would have nothing to do with it. The Vagabond was the protector of the King and the enemy of the Inquisition, which seemed quite enough for him to handle. Even after forming the rest of Los Vagos, the group had its hands full just trying to stifle the increasingly powerful heretic-hunters of the Vaticine Church.

The proliferation of different Los Vagos groups changed their minds. It occurred to Maria-Soledad that in Los Vagos the nation had, in essence, a built-in guerrilla army, and in El Vago the perfect symbol to strike fear into the hearts of the foreign invaders. She once again brought Don Andrés around to her point of view, this time with the help of many of the other members of El Corazón, especially Don Lorenzo de Zepeda.

Don Lorenzo de Zepeda

Among the initial recruits to Los Vagos was Don Lorenzo Zepeda del Acedo, the son of one of Don Andrés' deceased comrades. Andrés took the young don under his wing and counseled him prior to his entrance into military service. When Andrés initially developed Los Vagos, Lorenzo was once of his first recruits. When the invasion came Don Lorenzo offered to become El Vago in the war against Montaigne, since he was going to be at the front in

any case. As El Vago, he appeared everywhere, cheering on the soldiers as they fell back towards San Juan, and leading small raiding parties against the Montaigne encampments. His appearance on the front lent the soldiers of Castille renewed hope.

But Don Lorenzo's past caught up with him in a most peculiar — and Castillian — way. He had quite a reputation in his home city of San Juan as El Amante Rojo, the Red Lover. It seems that he had seduced and abandoned countless young ladies, leaving each a scarlet kerchief on her pillow before making his escape in the early hours before dawn. Each kerchief was stitched with the insignia of the Zepeda family and accompanied by a brief but well-crafted poetic declaration of devotion.

His family hoped that once the war began, his energies would be directed to the battlefield, but it appeared that the capable Don Lorenzo had not only enough energy for war, but plenty left over for romance as well. Soon ladies throughout his home territory were finding red kerchiefs on their pillow. Angry male relatives of dishonored ladies dubbed him El Malvado, "The Wicked."

It took a personal and tragic catastrophe to end Don Lorenzo's escapades. When General François Étalon du Toille slaughtered the town of San Juan (see *Castille*, pages 23 and 77–78), Lorenzo was there. Most believed that he died in the battle, and Los Vagos immediately began searching for a replacement. Andrés approached a Castillian captain named Don Cristian Acedo de Lopez del Torres, with an offer to join. Don Cristian had been visiting the court at San Cristóbal when the war broke out and was unable to join his family in war against Montaigne. He leapt at the chance Andrés offered him, and has since proved himself a loyal member and fierce fighter

against the invading armies. He hopes to carry the spirit of Los Vagos to his family and cause such havoc along the Montaigne lines that they will be forced to withdraw from his lands.

A short time ago, General Du Toille received a red kerchief similar to the ones which El Malvado had sent his lover — only his was accompanied by a quote from The Book of the Prophets that warned him of retribution. Soon, Montaigne soldiers who had participated in the destruction of San Juan went missing, only to be found later as charred as the bodies of the Zepeda family had been. Du Toille has posted a reward for the capture of El Malvado, and even members of Los Vagos are making every effort to find El Malvado and stop him (although some feel that the Montañños are merely getting what they deserve).

El Vago Today

Today, only a few short years after Andrés made his promise, Los Vagos has become an enduring symbol of hope to the people of Castille. Maria-Soledad and the rest of El Corazón travel into the countryside as frequently as they can without raising suspicion, doing their best to get in touch with all the disparate groups, to weed out the misguided ones and encourage and train the good ones. They continue their efforts to harry the Inquisition, and ensure that the soldiers of *l'Empereur* learn to fear their name. Andrés continues to don the white mask, but he realizes that the figure he created has grown beyond any one individual. Whenever the Inquisition catches one Vagabond (and occasionally they do), another one appears. El Vago is no longer a single person. He is the expression of the Castillian people's loyalty to their King, their revulsion for the Inquisition and their love for their country. Andres does not know if he will ever see Prince Javier again, but as he watches Los Vagos thrive, he knows he has kept his promise.

Viva El Vago y Castille.



Los Vagos is not a secret society in the way most Théans think of the term. In some respects it isn't a society at all. Although it has a loose command structure, it has no universal set of procedures, and even contains some groups who don't even know that there are other groups! It is better thought of as a loose organization of like-minded cadres, all fighting for the same cause.

Structure

The current structure of Los Vagos is both fragmented and highly fluid, but essentially breaks down into a set of concentric circles:

The Inner Circle

The inner circle of Los Vagos currently consists of Don Andrés Aldana, Doña Maria-Soledad, Don Hector Ontiveros, and Don Cristian Acedo. Don Andrés serves as the overall leader of the organization. Don Hector is responsible for information gathering, coordinating the efforts of spies all over Castille. Doña Maria-Soledad acts as the public face of El Vago when her father cannot and lends her swashbuckling skills to the most important missions. Don Cristian handles the anti-Montaigne part of the movement while stationed at the front. They are the only four people in the world who know the true identity of all the members of Los Vagos... and all four would die before revealing a single one.

El Corazón del Vago

The next circle — El Corazón del Vago — consists of 22 nobles of both sexes who ride with El Vago on missions that require more than one person. Two members have already fallen in the line of duty, and the rest have learned to act with extreme caution. Each one has assumed the identity of El Vago on at least one occasion, and some on many more. El Corazón never meets all together and no single member (outside of the Inner Circle) knows the identities of all of the rest. When they meet and/or ride together, they wear white masks and refer to each other as *compañero* or *compañera*. El Corazón is primarily concerned with two things: the protection of King Sandoval and the organization of the resistance against the Inquisition.

To insure the safety of His Majesty, El Corazón sees to it that at least two members remain near King Sandoval at all times. The fact that any noble is generally permitted to attend King Sandoval's court at any time makes this job significantly easier. Although it can sometimes be a hindrance when the two Corazón do not know each other, the benefit of security for the overall movement makes it worthwhile.

In organizing the resistance against the Inquisition, members of El Corazón constantly travel throughout Castille, spying on their foes, spreading information as they receive it, and trying to contact the various independent groups of Los Vagos that have sprung up around the nation. They plan and lead missions in their local area and keep the inner circle comprised of any developments. They usually report only to Don Hector, and only the tiniest handful know his true identity.

Affiliated Bands of Los Vagos

The next circle is made up of the various bands of Los Vagos who have sprung up in support of the organization. These bands are affiliated with each other through El Corazón, which attempts to coordinate their efforts, more or less successfully. These bands are usually small (3–10 people) and led by a single person, who has contact with a member of El Corazón. As mentioned above, many of the these groups are unaware that there is more than one El

Vago, or assume that if there is, the others are all frauds. The extent to which each El Vago encourages this belief varies from band to band, and to some extent effects how cooperative a group is with other groups.

Los Patróns

The next circle consists of Los Patróns, the rich nobles who, without actually riding around in the dark attacking churchmen, support the cause in their own way. A Patrón provides support, money, protection and information, either to El Corazón, or to one of the independent Los Vagos groups. Information is particularly important to Los Vagos, and can come from something as simple as a conversation between two bishops, or as complex as a complete spy network within the local office of the Inquisition. Patróns are usually called upon to perform these functions. They have the resources to properly organize them and can run the risk of capture without revealing the organization. Sometimes, Patróns are called upon to act more aggressively as well, manipulating a fellow noble into telling what he knows about a plot against His Majesty or insuring that a particular bishop's peculiar tastes are revealed to the public.

Los Compañeros

The next circle beyond this are Los Compañeros, mostly middle-class Castellians (haberdashers, maskmakers, smiths, innkeepers, etc.) who have pledged their lives and fortunes to supporting El Vago. They serve in supporting roles: hiding exhausted horses in the stable while the Inquisitors search the inn, bandaging the arm of the wounded man in the dark cape and white mask, and otherwise taking care of the thousand tiny details which allow Los Vagos to function. They provide equipment, shelter, and much-needed supplies to the Patróns and El Corazón, and sadly must often face the fury of the Inquisitors whenever El Vago slips through their fingers yet again.

Independent Bands of Los Vagos

Beyond *this* are a number of even smaller independent groups who have no contact at all with the original Los Vagos and who are just doing their best to fight against the Inquisition however they can. They often imitate the

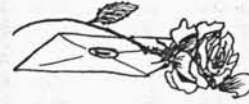
Vagabond and emulate his tactics as best they can, but have no contact at all with El Corazón or the Inner Circle. Many of these groups fold after a short period, but a few continue to survive, doing El Vago's work as best they know how.

It is important to understand that these latter two categories are almost exclusively concerned either with circumventing the Inquisition or throwing the Montaigne out of Castille. While they certainly regard themselves as loyal to King Sandoval, they don't consider his safety as their paramount duty since there is very little they can do to directly protect him.

Funding Los Vagos

Running a guerrilla movement is quite expensive. Weapons and horses must be bought and maintained. Compañeros must be recompensed for their efforts. Informers must be paid. All of this requires money, which can come from different sources. El Corazón has access to a great deal of funding through its individual members. Each member is expected to contribute as much as he or she can to a general fund that Don Hector Ontiveros handles. He parcels it out among the members of El Corazón who use the money to help support their operations, fund affiliated groups, and woo the unaffiliated ones.

Many members have other sources of income. Some have their own Patróns, wealthy local landowners who believe in the cause of Los Vagos and are willing to back up their



Midnight Romance

Eighteen-year-old Isabella Rios del Rivera was in love. On a warm summer night, she stepped out onto the small balcony outside her bedroom. The moonlight fell softly around her slender body, highlighting her waist-length black hair. Tomorrow she would marry the son of a neighboring nobleman. Her husband-to-be was tall, dark and handsome, in the manner of Castilian men. He rode well and fought well and even wrote fairly decent love poetry. He could also dance quite well and was unfailingly polite to her parents. But she was not in love with him. No, the object of her affections was an older man who rode as if he were a centaur, fought with the heart of a lion, and loved his country with undying passion. She had never seen his face, but she was certain that he was the most handsome man in Castille. Maybe tomorrow, just as she was climbing the steps to the church, he would appear, sweep her onto his horse and ride off with her clinging to him for dear life. Maybe he would ride past her window this very night and his white-masked face would look up and see her silhouetted in the moonlight and he would climb the trellis to her balcony...

support with money. Others, however, have no Patrón and for one reason or another are not affiliated with El Corazón. These groups must make their money in other ways. A few, a very few, resort to becoming highwaymen, preying on the rich and giving to the poor. Most, however, resort to the far more pragmatic practice of smuggling. This may involve luxury goods from Montaigne, untaxed baubles from Vodacce, or even Church-proscribed goods from the Crescent Empire. Sometimes, it turns a group from fighting for what they believe in to a purely moneymaking venture, but on the whole most groups have managed to add to their income without tainting their morals *too* badly.

Joining Los Vagos

The alcalde of La Pasienga was very very tired. If it was not a rowdy band of borachos, it was some stealthy Montañño chanchito who had swum across the river to cause mischief on the docks. He could not remember the last time he had settled down next to his plump wife for a pleasant siesta. And the cannons. The infernal never-ending sound of the cannons. If this did not stop soon, the alcalde would be forced to resign his position and take up residence with his brother-in-law near La Selva de Fendes to save his sanity and his hair. He would miss the privileges of his position, but at least he would be able to get some sleep.

He was so deep in thought that he didn't pay attention to where he was walking and suddenly found himself at the end of a dark alley in the worst section of town. The alcalde had a passing skill with the sword, but never had to defend himself with it; that was, after all, the purpose of the town militia. He could step into the nearby tavern but he suspected that his presence in El Cubo de Sangrè ("The Bucket of Blood") might prove even more life-threatening than whatever dangers lurked out here.

As he turned to retrace his steps, he was confronted by three large and rough-looking men. "Well, well, well. What have we here?" The largest of the thugs was bald and had a large gold loop in his right ear. The lower lobe of his left ear appeared to have gone missing some time ago, along with one of his front teeth.

The alcalde drew himself up to his full height, which was significantly shorter than the thug. He tried to look forceful and dignified. "Have a care, my good man. You are addressing an officer of the King."

The three ruffians burst out in raucous laughter as they drew their sabers.

"How convenient for us, then, eh? An 'officer of the King' will bring us even more money than, say, the alcalde." The middle thug poked his saber into the alcalde's ample stomach. "This one is nice and plump, I see." The alcalde found himself pressed against a short wall with nowhere to run. He began to sweat profusely.

"Ay, the chanchito is sweating. I think he's afraid of us. Three harmless men of business just looking for a little cargo..."

The alcalde's eyes widened as he saw what the thugs did not – a man had appeared out of the shadows and now stood silently behind them. A man with a black sombrero, a grinning white mask, and purple attire who quietly drew his sword and cleared his throat. The three ruffians looked over their shoulders, annoyed at the interruption. Their annoyance quickly turned to surprise as they came face to face with El Vago.

The voice behind the mask sounded politely threatening. "Surely you gentlemen have business elsewhere in the city that needs your immediate attention?"

"Surely you can count, you white-faced clown. There are three of us and only one of you." The men looked at each other confidently.

"Perhaps you cannot count so well, amigos. There are two of us and we currently have you surrounded."

The alcalde was stunned to hear El Vago mention him as part of his own defense. Somehow, the hero's words made him feel a little bit taller and he placed his hand on his sword with a bit more confidence.

The leader snarled angrily and drew a vicious-looking sword. The duel began quickly, and the alcalde soon found himself shoulder to shoulder with the masked vigilante. Fortunately, the combat was over as rapidly as it began; the thugs were no match for El Vago's skill. The alcalde even got in several well-placed thrusts. Bleeding and demoralized, the ruffians broke off combat and ran off down the alley.

"Shall we pursue them, señor?" Though winded, the alcalde felt exhilarated at the victory.

"Nay, they are not worth the effort. May I accompany you home, alcalde?" El Vago bowed deferentially to the shorter man.

"I would be most grateful, Señor... uh, Señor Vago," the alcalde stammered. The masked hero laughed and put an arm around the man as if they had been friends for years. Together they left the dark alley and headed for a safer neighborhood.

As mentioned above, Los Vagos is very different from other Théan secret societies. For one thing, Los Vagos is a fairly new group – less than a decade old – unlike many of the Societies, which have roots going back to the time of the First Prophet. Secondly, most Secret Societies have a clear structure and a coherent methodology for accomplishing their goals. Los Vagos is a patchwork of groups, some of which work together while others remain isolated and independent. Only their common determination to defend Castille from her enemies holds them together.

With the groups that comprise Los Vagos so different from one another, the conditions for joining them vary considerably. Becoming part of El Corazón is very different from joining one of the guerrilla bands that operate away from the big cities. If a character wishes to join the partisans who fight against the enemies of Castille, he or she must first find such a group – often a difficult task in itself. Most Los Vagos cabals do not actively recruit members, reasoning that a person needs to come to this decision for him- or herself.

The fact that all Los Vagos groups operate in secret also discourages potential members. The amount of such secrecy differs from group to group, but all of them are constantly on the lookout for agents of the Inquisition. Different groups handle the problem of new recruits in different ways, but often the best way to join such a group is to carefully watch areas where El Vago has made an appearance. Sometimes, it helps to casually drop hints with the locals (ask about "un vago," quietly speak ill of the Inquisition, etc.), although such tactics have been known to backfire.

Assuming someone in the organization takes notice, the potential recruit will be watched closely, often for several days, while the locals decide if he or she can be trusted. If so, an intermediary will make contact and arrange for a rendezvous. This is one of the most dangerous aspects of Los Vagos, for Inquisition spies have been known to capture members by posing as a recruit. The rendezvous will accordingly be in some area away from the town where watchers can tell if a person is being followed. If the local

leader is convinced of the recruit's genuine desire to join, he will allow the meeting to occur. The potential member will be blindfolded and brought before someone in the grinning white mask and purple cloak of El Vago – usually a proxy or underling rather than the actual leader. The sham-Vagabond will ask them some or all of the following questions:

- Who are you? Where are you from?
- Who is your family?
- How did you find us?
- Why are you here?
- Are you loyal to King Salvador?
- Are you a true believer in the Vaticine Church of the Prophets?
- Have you lost any family or loved ones to the Inquisition?

- Have you lost any family or loved ones to the Montaigne?
- Do you know what it means to become a member of Los Vagos?
- Are you willing to swear loyalty to the King, death to the Montaigne, and pledge yourself to the cleansing of the Church?

- Are you prepared to sacrifice your family, your fortune and your life to maintain the secrets of El Vago?

If the potential member gives satisfactory replies (and this exchange should be played out by *El Maestro de Juego* and *El Jugador*), the questioner will signal and the true El Vago of the group will step out of the shadows and welcome the new member to their number. If the group is in touch with El Corazón, the newcomer will receive a copy of *El Manifiesto de los Compañeros* and be asked to swear to it. From then on they are part of Los Vagos.





The Old Cobbler

Festivals and parties are an important part of Castillian life, and at many of them, people like to wear fancy masks and disguises. A good mask-maker who can manipulate papier-mâché and items like feathers can make a nice living. A true artist who can create fine masks from butter-soft leather so that it fits like a second skin will do even better. One of the most talented mask-makers in Castille is actually a modest little shoemaker named Rafael Alfonso. Although he could earn a fortune for himself by setting up a large storefront (complete with apprentices and servants) in the most fashionable area of San Cristóbal, he prefers to remain in a tiny little shop on a side street, working happily in the middle of what appears to be utter chaos. But Rafael knows where everything is, every scrap of leather, every single iridescent feather, every mask he has ever made. His prices are very high but considering that each mask is a work of art, his customers feel that they are well worth the expense.

Unbeknownst to most, the middle-aged balding little man is really Rafael Alfonso Nuñez de Velasquez, a refugee member of the lesser nobility whose artistry comes from both sides of his family. Forced to flee from the Inquisition with only as much as a small wagon could hold, he came to San Cristóbal where his old friend Gervaso Ortega offered him shelter. Always a quiet man, Rafael did not wish to draw attention to himself, preferring to set up shop in a quiet and less affluent neighborhood of town. It was Rafael Alfonso who actually crafted the first El Vago mask for Don Andrés and continues as a member of Los Compañeros to provide his services when requested at no charge.

If, on the other hand, a character wishes to become a member of El Corazón del Vago, they have a much more difficult time ahead of them. It is ironic that in Castille today it is actually easier to become El Vago himself than it is to become a member of El Corazón. One cannot simply apply to join. For one thing, the identities of the twenty-two members are kept completely secret, so there is no one to whom one can approach. Instead, potential members are closely observed for many months before being contacted through one of the Compañeros. At that time they may only be told that El Vago is "considering" them for membership, and that he may have a task for them to accomplish at some point in the future. When that time comes, a messenger appears and asks him to perform a simple job: pass along a copy of *The Book of the Prophets* to a bookseller in Tarago for example, or leave a sealed bag in a confessional in Vaticine City. Assuming he performs well (and doesn't turn traitor), the messenger will reappear from time to time with new tasks, each growing more difficult and more demanding. It is hard to tell when a person actually becomes a member of El Corazón, since even the most senior members are kept in the dark about the long-term plans of El Vago. At some point, however, the recruit realizes that he has become more than just an errand boy, and that El Vago has placed him in his confidence — a member of El Corazón at last.

Living as a Member of Los Vagos

Once a person joins Los Vagos, his life changes forever. He must live in constant fear of the Inquisition, while still being ready to leave his family and friends at any moment to strike a blow against the enemies of Castille. These two elements — secrecy and preparedness — are the true watchwords of Los Vagos.

The life of a Vagos is a very dangerous one. Not only must he contend with the physical danger inherent in the midnight raids against Inquisition strongholds or Montaigne military positions, he must also deal with the ongoing threat of discovery by agents of the Inquisition, who have been specifically charged with learning the whereabouts of El

Vago. Anyone suspected of supporting the Vagabond can be detained and questioned (tortured) without provocation. Sometimes the Inquisitors are not satisfied with torturing the individuals, but actually torture family members and close friends in an effort to force a confession. A character who joins Los Vagos puts more than himself on the line: he also puts his family at risk.

This threat, the threat to the family, is the strongest motivator for the obsessive secrecy that shrouds Los Vagos. The Inquisition is everywhere. Everyone is suspect, anyone could be a traitor. It could be the neighbor you have known for years. It could be your best friend. But the threat must be acknowledged and addressed if the organization intends to survive. Different members react to this threat in different ways. Many have abandoned their homes and families altogether, preferring a life of exile to the possibility of endangering their loved ones. Others, particularly those in the more urban areas and those in touch with El Corazón have developed elaborate safety precautions, including hand signals, drops, and a signal-flag system which can move a message across miles of terrain.

El Corazón carries this obsession with secrecy even farther. Stronger than their concern for their own safety, stronger even their concern for their families is their concern for protecting El Vago, and through him Good King Sandoval and all of Castille. This has nothing to do with a lack of trust — the members of El Corazón trust each other with their lives — but they know that the skilled torturers of the

Inquisition can break anyone, no matter how brave or how strong. Sadly, even if a Vago does not know anything, he or she may make up a story to save their skins that could result in the capture of fellow member of the movement.

The twenty-two members of El Corazón never meet altogether, and (except for the inner circle) do not even know everyone's names. When members must meet, they are informed individually, in a different way each time. Sometimes it is a note left under a pillow, a come-hither look by a lovely señorita at a party, or a whisper through the window of a confessional. Members are expected to wear plain clothing and a plain black mask across their face at any meeting. Each meeting is held in a different place, usually somewhere with no connection to any member of El Corazón. Only those directly needed for a particular mission are invited, and information remains on a strictly need-to-know basis. Even the most senior members of El Corazón won't know the details of their mission until they arrive at the meeting place. Sometimes, they must leave the meeting location to begin their mission immediately, with no time to collect equipment or inform their subordinates.

This leads to the second factor in the lives of Los Vagos: constant preparedness. Every member must be constantly on alert at all times, awaiting the inevitable call to action. They must be constantly armed and have access to a dark cloak, a dark mask, and a fast horse (most likely hidden from prying eyes). This preparedness means more than just being ready, however. Los Vagos must keep themselves well trained and physically fit, for their duties are invariably fraught with peril. Fortunately with the war raging on, most have secure alibis: no one questions a Castillian who spends his time exercising and practicing his sword work.

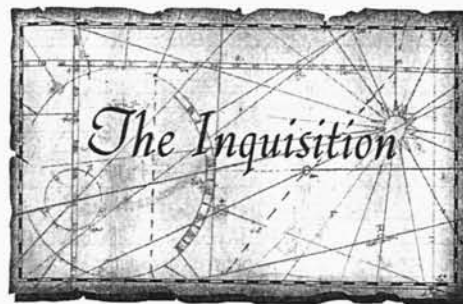
Donning the Mask of El Vago

Regardless of a member's status within the group, one task signals the ultimate sign of trust. Whether he operates in the most primitive mountain town or the court of King Sandoval, sooner or later the time will eventually come when they are handed the Mask and told, "Tonight, you ride as El Vago." Almost everyone who puts on the Mask



for the first time, whether a crude papier-mâché version or the original Gallegan leather mask made for Don Andrés, considers it a deeply spiritual experience. One feels “the weight of Castille” descend upon one’s shoulders, while at the same time being filled with a sense of power and grim determination. Those who don the Mask seem somehow taller, more agile, and infinitely more sure of themselves. There also seems to be something about the Mask that inspires loyalty. Only a few *Compañeros* have ever refused an order by anyone wearing the Mask of El Vago, a fact which the society uses to its advantage.

Of course, the Mask is never given out lightly. In many bands, only the leader wears it, or a trusted lieutenant when some sort of trickery is called for. In other groups the Mask is handed around sequentially, with each senior member assuming the role of El Vago for a different mission. Nor is the Mask given out for every mission; in order to maintain El Vago’s mystique, the organization ensures that he only appears every now and then. One independent cabal in northern Castille has *all* of its members wear the Mask, although this is considered excessive by most (it ruins the conceit that only one true El Vago exists, a conceit that many people in Castille firmly believe).



Deep within the Vaticine Church in Castille, the Inquisition lies like a coiled serpent with sharp fangs and a swift deadly poison. During his rise to power, the Third Prophet created this secret organization, which he charged with destroying sorcery and heresy wherever they may lurk. Members of the Inquisition answer only to the Hierophant and demand complete compliance from the priests and lay members of the Church.

Despite the potential for abuse, the Inquisition has been kept more or less in check by the previous Hierophants, who took care to remove overly-ambitious Inquisitors whose interests lay beyond their assigned duties. As the Church has grown more conservative, however, the line between its public and private faces has become considerably blurred. The mysterious death of the current Hierophant threw the Church into turmoil, creating an ideal situation for an ambitious person willing to take bold action. Such a man is Cardinal Esteban Verdugo.

While displaying the appropriate amount of public dismay over the Hierophant’s mysterious disappearance, the Grand High Inquisitor did not actually find it that sorrowful because it provided him with several unique opportunities. Although his crusade against Montaigne’s *Empereur* failed thanks to Montegue’s Stand, the disappearance of the Hierophant meant that he could solidify his position within the Church and exert his reactionary philosophies over Vaticine dogma. He would have direct access to the

Church’s rich coffers, which would nicely finance his campaign to end scientific learning and stifle dissent anywhere in Théah, especially in Castille.

Vaticine dogma holds that science is a worthy and acceptable way in which to worship Theus and to understand the wonders of the Creator’s world. This forward-thinking philosophy has enabled Théans to make great scientific discoveries but it also gave religious approval to independent and – according to the Inquisition – dangerous thinking.

The Inquisition has become an extension of Verdugo’s power-hungry fanaticism and he has filled its ranks with like-minded people. He has also made the group more visible by piously attacking the universities of Théah, declaring them breeding grounds for those who seek the destruction of the Church. The actions of the Inquisition have ranged from burning books to dragging scholars from their beds in the dead of night to stand “trial” for their misdeeds. Many a wagon has pulled away from the iron gates of a local Church carrying the bodies of these “enemies.”

With the position of Hierophant vacant, the Inquisition has closed its fingers around the throat of research and slowly but inexorably choked the air out of it. Adding to its insidious power is the fact that the Church is still recovering from the effects of the War of the Cross; its relative instability only increases the Cardinal’s opportunities.

The Inquisition and Los Vagos

The Inquisition has made its position about El Vago perfectly clear. He is a wanted enemy of the Church and subject to severe penalties – as soon as someone can catch him. Likewise, anyone who helps him becomes an enemy of the Church as well and is similarly subject to the most severe penalties available. Although normally only the Hierophant has the ability to excommunicate someone, the Church has prevailed upon Cardinal Verdugo to “advise” them on such matters until a new Hierophant is chosen.

The Church will use any and all means at its disposal to apprehend El Vago and his cohorts – and those means are

legion (if not Legion). The Inquisition has at its disposal a vast network of spies and informers who immediately report on any suspicious, irreverent, or heretical activities. Theoretically this network is supplemented by the entire clergy of the Vaticine Church, who are expected to inform their superiors of anything they learn about the enemies of the Church. Actually, because the Inquisition acts secretly in most of Théah, many of its members also hold "normal" positions within the Church, sometimes as ordinary priests or Vaticine officials, which enable them to move undetected.

However, in Castille, the Inquisition acts openly; in some cases it actually has governmental control over local areas. Only the Invisible College and Los Vagos have organized resistance movements against the Inquisition, although some clergy within its ranks are highly sympathetic to the aims of the secret societies and covertly help them in any way they can.

When El Vago first appeared on the scene, Cardinal Verdugo dismissed him as an annoyance, a random lunatic who would either die at the hands of the Inquisition or simply go away on his own. But as he became more successful, and bolder, in his affronts to the Church, the Cardinal became more and more obsessed with determining his identity. Verdugo is anything but stupid. He knows that the lower and middle classes revere the Vagabond, and that with each "heretic" rescued, El Vago's popularity grows. He hopes that if he can find and destroy the true El Vago, he can kill the heart of the movement and prove to the peasants that they cannot flout the will of the Church.

It is important to remember that the Inquisition in general and Verdugo in particular still labor under the delusion that El Vago is one person. Perhaps there may be a few peasants who think it's romantic to wear the mask and cape, but they truly believe that a single man carries the Vagabond's identity. This will be Cardinal Verdugo's fatal mistake. Early on he assigned one of his best spies, Dona Urraca Rioja, to learn the Vagabond's identity, and he thought she had succeeded until the attempt on King Sandoval when Don

Andrés and El Vago fought side by side against a band of trained assassins. Since then he has captured several "El Vagos," but none has proven to be the original.

The Cardinal has provisionally declared El Vago excommunicated, although he has made it clear that he only acted upon the request of his Church brethren and was not trying to usurp the Hierophant's power. Verdugo has also offered a huge sum of money for the traitors' capture, and assigned an entire chapter of the Knight Inquisitors to the sole purpose of catching this malefactor, whom he sees as a servant of Legion. The division is headed by Bishop José del Avila, a rotund, stupid, cowardly man who attained his post through the influence of his family. Finally, recent rumors hold that the Cardinal has brought in El Camaléon, a highly skilled Vodacce assassin for whom he has great hopes. One of these methods, he believes, is bound to finally snare the elusive vigilante.

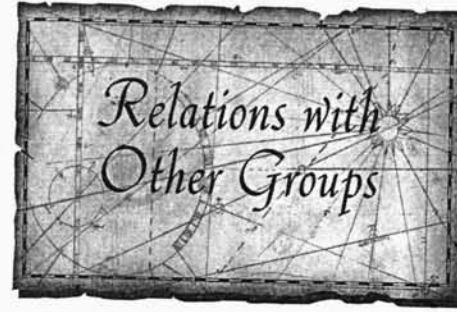
Los Vagos Inside the Inquisition

Despite all of the Church's precautions, members of Los Vagos have managed to infiltrate Cardinal Verdugo's cadre of heretic hunters, and use their positions to acquire knowledge which guides the movement as a whole. Members of Los Vagos operating inside the Inquisition have the advantage of knowing what their compatriots on the outside are doing and what the Inquisition is planning as well, but also puts them — and all of Los Vagos — at an increased level of risk should they be discovered. That would be regarded as more than treason; it would be heresy of the highest kind and punishable by a slow and ugly death.

These moles have no single leader; it would make their operation far too vulnerable. Instead, each individual spy passes on his information or receives her orders from an elaborate and convoluted communication system of notes left in prayer books and whispers in confessionals. They conduct these transactions without ever knowing the true identity of fellow agents. Because their work requires them to be as unobtrusive as possible, they never don the white mask of El Vago; rather, they appear to be intensely devout

adherents of Cardinal Verdugo's campaign to rid Castille of heresy and sorcery. Infiltrators concern themselves primarily with the workings of the Inquisition; the war with Montaigne is of very little concern to them, beyond their basic Castillian patriotism.

Don Andrés keeps close watch on the infiltrators to insure that they remain true to the pledge they took when they accepted the Manifesto and to be sure to pull them out of their positions rapidly should their commitment weaken or their fellow clergy begin to suspect something.



The Nations of Théah

By its very nature, Los Vagos is a politically insular group. It concerns itself solely with Castille and the Church of the Prophets. If a matter does not involve either of these entities, then Los Vagos has little interest in it. On a personal level, most members of Los Vagos feel the same way about the other countries of Théah as do their fellow countrymen.

Many people are therefore surprised to learn that Los Vagos has a presence outside of Castille (albeit a small one). After all, they reason, if Los Vagos concerns itself only with the welfare of Castille, what is it doing in Montaigne, Vodacce or Vendel? This reasoning, while sound, is also shortsighted. Castille is one of the major trading nations of Théah, with interests in all of the other nations from Avalon to Ussura.

This means that small enclaves of Castillians live in most of the major trading centers. Wherever there are Castillians, Los Vagos will be there, watching out for their fellow countrymen.

This concern for the welfare of their nation is particularly evident in the activities of Los Vagos in Montaigne. While the Montaignois who occupy most of western Castille are generally content to leave the conquered peasantry alone, they sometimes capture nobles deemed worthy of a trip to Montaigne. There, they can be questioned "more intimately" and paraded in front of *l'Empereur* as battle trophies. When this occurs, Los Vagos do their best to rescue the captive before he is removed from Castille. Should that prove impossible they have no hesitation about entering Montaigne and snatching the noble directly from the lion's jaws. Other members of Los Vagos enter Montaigne on a regular basis to spy on troop movements, ferret out the enemy's plans, and perhaps do a little sabotage while they are there.

The other thing that draws Los Vagos out of Castille is the Inquisition. The Vagabond has pledged to combat the schemes of the Inquisition wherever they may take place; although headquartered in Vaticine City, Verdugo's followers have enclaves in every nation in Théah. Some remain deeply hidden and dare not reveal their true intentions, but they are there nonetheless. Stopping some particularly heinous Inquisition plot often requires help from outside of Castille. They also repatriate many of the victims they have saved from the Inquisition to Objectionist strongholds in Eisen and Vendel.

To aid them in these various pursuits Los Vagos has established a series of secret outposts throughout Théah. The best known is the Fox Den Club in the city of Freiburg, but there are also establishments in Stutzung in Eisen; Buche, Echine and Arisent in Montaigne; Surluse and Carleon in Avalon; Kirk and Vasteras in Vendel; and Lucani, Villanova and Numa in Vodacce. Most of these outposts are safe houses where members of Los Vagos hide from pursuers, rest and make plans. They also use them to keep fugitives from the Inquisition safe, and to provide

Castillian exiles with a means of support until they can rebuild their lives.

Knights of the Rose and Cross

The Order and Los Vagos have crossed each other's paths on more than one occasion. Both have similarly honorable philosophies, and both dedicate themselves to protecting those who cannot protect themselves. Members of Los Vagos deeply appreciate the Order's efforts on behalf of the common people, but feel that they are so hemmed in by their relationship with the Church that they cannot act effectively against enemies other than the Inquisition.

The Rilasciare

As good members of the Church, members of Los Vagos generally agree with the Rilasciare in their feelings about sorcery, but that is where the similarities cease. The passionate Castillians feel that the Rilasciare are entirely too theoretical, pursuing an otherworldly dream which cannot possibly come to fruition, when there are real problems facing the world that need to be addressed immediately.

Nevertheless, this hasn't stopped them from accepting quiet aid from the Free Thinkers very now and then. The Rilasciare seems to consider El Vago an admirable role model, and while Aldana refuses to let the Free Thinkers get too close, he's more than happy to use them as an occasional means of support.



Die Kreuzritter

Most members of Los Vagos are unaware of die Kreuzritter, believing that the order perished in 1411. For their part, the Knights of the Black Cross are aware of Los Vagos, and fully approve of their efforts against the hated Inquisition. Their leaders are seriously considering an alliance with the Vagabond. Together they would prove a formidable foe to Cardinal Verdugo. Many Black Crosses still wish to keep their existence a secret, however, and may content themselves with supporting Los Vagos from a discreet distance.

Explorer's Society

Los Vagos feels the same way about the Explorer's Society as it does about the Rilasciare. While it is all very well to go digging up artifacts and toys – sometimes even interesting artifacts and toys – Castille has too many pressing problems to worry about such abstract pursuits. Unless these artifacts are likely to make a major difference in the immediate future, Los Vagos would rather see the Explorers' efforts put into something more concrete. Nonetheless, Doña Aranxta Grijalva has found the Explorer's Society to be a valuable source for transmitting and collecting information, and makes use of them as clandestine couriers from time to time.

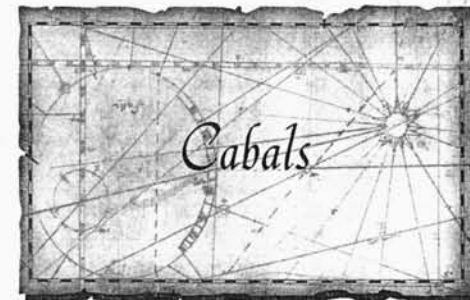
Sophia's Daughters

Los Vagos has no interest in the public face of Sophia's Daughters, and no awareness of their secret agenda. On the other hand, the Daughters keep watch over the more prominent women of Castille – including certain members of Los Vagos – in hopes of including them in the cause of women's rights in Théah.

Invisible College

Los Vagos and the Invisible College have worked quite closely in the past, and will continue to do so in the foreseeable future. Both organizations fervently fight the Inquisition, and each has resources that the other can use.

The Vagabond's order has saved more than a few scientists from the Inquisition's flames, and the scientists have repaid them by providing access to some of their wondrous inventions. Like Los Vagos, members of the College work in secret and do not know the full complement of the membership (in fact, they usually only know the person who recruited them and the person they recruit.) One of the major forces in the Invisible College is the noted Castillian scientist Alvara Arciniega (see *Castille*, pages 81–82, and *The Invisible College*, pages 71–72). As one of the Inquisition's most wanted men, he is by default a supporter of any movement that strives to restore the natural order to Castille. Los Vagos has received quiet aid from this imposing scientific genius, though he never reveals himself for reasons of his own.



Although the following is not an exhaustive list of established Los Vagos groups in Castille, it provides a good starting place for Heroes to begin their adventures as Castillian patriots. It includes both affiliated and unaffiliated groups, along with brief information about the leader, the group's headquarters, its membership, the focus of its activities, whether it has a Patrón, how it survives, how it communicates with El Corazón, and who among its members rides as El Vago.

Rancho Aldana

It stands to reason that as the founder and head of Los Vagos, Don Andrés would regard Casa Aldana as the logical location for his Inner Circle. With Don Cristían Acedo currently stationed at the front, and the only other members of the inner circle being his own daughter and his best friend, they can meet regularly at his home without raising suspicion. The rest of the organization is not quite so easily disguised. Rather than meeting them at his home, he ensures that members of El Corazón gather in a variety of times and places around Castille, both to protect his secrets and as a precaution against possible surveillance by agents of the Inquisition.

Money Talks — Tarago

The important coastal town of Tarago serves as the primary base for the Castillian Navy. In fact, only the children, the infirm and the elderly still take the siesta there because every able-bodied person is hard at work maintaining over 200 warships that call its docks home. The Los Vagos group in Tarago consists of dedicated and politically savvy nobles and merchants who are outraged by the encroachment of the Inquisition which has disrupted the war effort. Well trained in the political arts as well as swordplay and riding, they are very useful members of the movement. The leader of this chapter is Don Guillermo Lopez, a childhood friend of the beleaguered alcalde Don Luis Rios de Bejarano. Don Guillermo has dedicated the group to assisting the alcalde, although Don Luis does not know that his beloved town is under the protection of Los Vagos. All he knows is that things suddenly got better.

In the Tarago group, only Don Guillermo wears the white mask of El Vago, except on very rare occasions when he feels the need to alleviate suspicion. In these situations, the second in command, Doña Leandra Guzman de Lopez (Don Guillermo's sister-in-law and an accomplished swordswoman) wears the white mask. Don Guillermo is in direct communication with Don Andrés through Mauro Luna, a loyal messenger who has worked for him for many years.

All of the members of the Tarago cabal have the full financial support of their families and estates to draw upon. They also use their political power to fight the Inquisition even without the protection of the white mask. In addition, many *Compañeros* live in the area, and help this chapter any time they are needed. A member of the wealthy Cordoba family, Octavio, does a thriving business in Tarago. Due to an old battle wound, he is confined to a rolling chair, but continues to act as a valuable member of Don Guillermo's group and also functions as a *Patrón* of the Los Vagos del Mar group (see below).

Vagabonds of the Waves — La Pasiega

This group — "Los Vagos del Mar" as they style themselves — acts as Los Vagos' sea-borne branch. They are led by Joaquin Orduño (see pages 58–59 and 106) who captains *La Venganza* ("The Vengeance"), a swift little ship that can skip nimbly in and out of coves along the coast. It operates out of La Pasiega with small outposts of two or three individuals along the many miles of La Boca del Cielo. They oppose the Inquisition whenever a situation presents itself along the coast or out at sea, but their main focus is in foiling sea attacks from the evil Montañones and running their blockades. They sink or capture every ship they can that flies the Montaigne flag or carries any passengers from the hated nation. Under Orduño's exceptional leadership, Los Vagos del Mar also transports other members from place to place, thereby avoiding "interference" from roving Knight Inquisitors. This ability to spirit members from one place to another without detection has added to the mystique of El Vago.

For obvious reasons, this chapter keeps itself very secretive. (Joaquin's cousin is Admiral Enrique Orduño, who currently leads the Castillian navy, and Joaquin wishes to spare his relative any political flak.) Anyone who shows interest in signing on to a ship in Los Vagos del Mar is watched carefully. If they find no connection between the new recruit and either the Montañño forces or the Inquisition, a messenger makes contact with the person and a secret meeting is set. The recruit is instructed to meet a contact in a back alley along the docks of Tarago where he

or she is overpowered, blindfolded, led onboard a ship, and taken to one of the many hidden coves along the coast. There Orduño himself questions the prospective member, who remains blindfolded. Presumably, the prospect answers the questions properly, and is permitted to join the group. If any of his questions are answered unsatisfactorily, the person is abandoned on shore with a flask of water and

several rounds of hardtack, and left to find his way back to Tarago. If Orduño or his sailors suspect that the applicant works for the Inquisition, they brace him for information; if he admits to his duplicity, they painfully brand an "I" on his neck or shoulder blade and strand him on the Vodacce coast.

Los Hermanos del Oro

Roberto Candeloro and Jaime Pintoro are as different as two men can be. Roberto is a respected tavern keeper who runs a clean place and almost never waters the wine. Jaime is an artist of considerable talent who abandoned a lucrative career in order to paint subjects from among the peasants; he says that their faces have character. Roberto keeps regular hours, opening his tavern at the same time six days a week and closing at a reasonable hour so that hard-working men have enough time to get home before their wives grow cross and send the children to fetch them. Jaime would be happy to drink all day and well into the night, and often does, usually under one of the tables in the tavern, snoring happily in his bedroll.

Every Soldi, Roberto Candeloro closes Los Hermanos, puts on his best suit and a fresh *camisa*, and walks slowly to church, greeting his friends and neighbors along the way. He attends the morning mass, sitting piously in a front pew where he sings loudly if not well. He makes a generous donation and shares lunch with one of his many friends. After the meal, he walks home, takes a siesta and rises in the afternoon. He sits in front of the large window of Los Hermanos where he can be seen by all as he studies the Book of the Prophets for several hours and waves to the passersby who call out to him or tap on the glass in greeting. When the sun goes down, he closes the shutters, changes his clothes, lifts a trap door in his bedroom and leaves by a secret underground passage that leads to a dark alley. There he meets up with Jaime Pintoro and together they move quietly about the city, joining other members of Los Vagos who have rescued children from the Inquisition.

Roberto found Jaime one night, huddled in the alley behind the tavern. The artist was feverish, starving and drunk out of his mind. Roberto brought the crazed man inside and attended to what appeared to be the results of a severe beating. As Jaime regained his strength, he revealed his story. He had been a portrait painter, with a growing reputation among the members of the Lesser Nobility. Among his clients was one Don Sergio Ontiveros del Rioja, an outwardly honorable man who held some deeply-hidden vices. Thinking it would be a fun outing for his family, he brought his wife along with him to the rancho. Don Sergio was so taken with the Señora Pintoro's beauty that he set out to seduce her and over the next several months lavished gifts on the family and introduced Jaime to others of his acquaintance, one of whom commissioned a portrait.

While Jaime was away painting the new picture, Don Sergio came in disguise to the Pintoro home with several of his henchmen. He forced himself on the terrified woman and when he was finished, he tossed a bag of gold on the table and left. Jaime returned home several days later to find his wife hanging from the rafters of their bedroom. He joined Los Vagos out of an obligation to Roberto for saving his life, but he is biding his time until he can exact personal vengeance on Don Sergio.

Rancho Gallegos

Because of its reputation as a haven for Crescent-loving infidels and practitioners of the heretical *El Fuego Adentro*, the Inquisition has paid a great deal of attention to Rancho Gallegos. This makes it a major area of concern to Don Andrés and Los Vagos.

Uncertain Saviors — La Sierra de Hierro

A particularly hearty and independent chapter of Los Vagos makes its home amongst the rocky recesses of La Sierra de Hierro. These people have very little to fear from their neighbors because most people are afraid of the legendary outlaws known as Los Nublados (see *Castille*, page 39). Unable to tolerate any sort of disruption, the Inquisition has turned its attention to the mountains, convinced that “men bathed in blue fire shot through with the Shadow of Death” would be no match for pure faith in the Prophets.

Cardinal Verdugo has already sent several low-ranking officials on a “fact-finding” mission to hunt down the truth about Los Nublados, but none have returned. Some inhabitants of the mountains tell horrific tales of Los Nublados emerging from the dark caverns of La Sierra and slaying the priests, while others report the white-masked El Vago coming to the rescue of locals who were about to be tortured by the Inquisitors. The situation is quite confusing and Cardinal Verdugo dislikes nothing so much as confusion.

El Vago in this region started out as an emissary from Don Andrés, disguised as a simple traveler. He saw that the local people needed help (from simple bandits, as well as Inquisitors and other threats) and donned the white mask to protect them. Once he had earned their trust, he was able to recruit several locals to help him. When he left, they continued his work, and today constitute a semi-independent branch of Los Vagos. The emissary was both impressed and a little disturbed by the number of Inquisitors who seem to disappear mysteriously into the mountains and he has made a full report of his findings to the Inner Circle.



The members of this cabal are all local people, mountaineers mostly, who use the rumors about El Vago to keep themselves, their families, and their neighbors safe from the Inquisition (see *Castille*, page 125). The group has very few members, and, like most of the other inhabitants of the mountain range, has almost no contact with the outside world. Under current leader Ubaldo d'Avila, a doughty mountain dweller in his late 50s, the group has no pretensions about their role as protectors of the people and they will do anything it takes to preserve their neighbors from the forces which would harm them. Ubaldo and his chiefs are adept at making maximum use of their natural surroundings, and are especially adept at archery, natural fortifications, camouflage and ambush. They frankly couldn't care less about the “silly pretensions” of the Court, although they are loyal to the King and steadfast in the simple practice of their faith. Courtly intrigue has little place in the stark wilderness of the mountains.

Rancho Soldano

Padre del Vago

Don Alejandro Vasquez de Soldano heads a chapter of Los Vagos from his rancho, located outside of the riverport city of Altamira where he retired after a distinguished military

career. A blunt, outspoken man, he had a habit of loudly expressing his devotion to the young King and his disgust with the atmosphere of suspicion that the Inquisition engenders. Fortunately, his comrade-at-arms Don Cristian Acedo de Lopez del Torres was able to curb his old friend's enthusiastic denunciation of the Cardinal's activities before it put the old soldier in harm's way. An apparently informal evening at Rancho Aldana over several bottles of amontillado brought Don Alejandro into contact with Los Vagos.

Having accumulated a considerable fortune, Alejandro was more than willing to put his resources towards the formation of a new Los Vagos cabal. Although he is in direct communication with El Corazón, he takes very few orders from Don Andrés, and seems most effective working on his own. A natural commander, he has been very helpful in thwarting the Inquisition and recruiting younger members to Los Vagos. Many members of Los Compañeros know him well, and send promising young men and women to visit him at his rancho. If he approves of them, they are inducted into the ranks. He takes very good care of his recruits, frequently offering them employment on his vast rancho, as well as shelter and mentoring for as long as they wish his protection. To divert suspicion from the Inquisition, he makes certain that everyone attends religious services in Altamira and professes their faith with acts of charity and devotion.

The Altamira Docks

The docks of Altamira in Rancho Soldano belong to the powerful de Cordoba family, which has played an important part in shaping Castille's economy. They “earn” 1 doubloon for every 10 that crosses a merchant's counter in the city. Beyond that, they have a thriving shipwright business that specializes in shallow-water craft. Their holdings include businesses, private homes and even public buildings. But their coffers are swelled even further by La Vergaza, the local bullfighting arena which they own. Don Andrés del Aldana is in secret contact with Vivienne de Cordoba, who provides valuable information and financial support for Los Vagos. His cabal concerns itself mainly with

financial matters — providing other groups with funds and equipment which they need. Occasionally, Vivienne or some member of her family will don the mask of El Vago, but they prefer working behind the scenes to all the swashbuckling and swordplay.

Rancho Torres

Breeding of Evil

Don Lorenzo Zepeda del Acedo founded this group of Los Vagos from soldiers whose regiments had been destroyed by the invading army of Montaigne. As happens, some of these soldiers had abandoned their position at the front; fortunately for them, Don Lorenzo did not question their stories. He also took those who had lost anything in the war against Montaigne. This group fought with a ruthless desperation that some in El Corazón felt was endangering the movement.

After the battle at San Juan, Don Lorenzo was presumed dead and the veteran Don Cristian Acedo de Lopez del Torres took over control of the chapter. He reinforced their military training and made it clear that he would not tolerate a lack of discipline. Using skills gained on the battlefield, Don Cristian uses guerrilla tactics to hit the encamped Montañños constantly, appearing out of nowhere to harass them and then melting back into the countryside. Only one group member wears the white mask at a time — usually the one who displayed the most raw courage in the last conflict.

As the member of the Inner Circle responsible for Los Vagos' efforts on the front, Don Cristian does quite a bit of traveling, training other chapters in the art of guerrilla warfare and preparing them for further conflict with the Montaigne. In his absence, he leaves General Reynaldo Duarte in charge of the group's activities. Duarte was a commander at San Juan who was close to Don Lorenzo. His friend's return and subsequent vendetta has only served to harden him and make him a better and stronger leader.

This chapter remains in close contact with the Inner Circle and El Corazón to coordinate large-scale attacks on the

front. As a group they do not concern themselves with the activities of the Inquisition and seek only to rid Castille of the invading army.

Not everyone was happy about the change in leadership from Don Lorenzo to Don Cristian; those personally loyal to the charismatic El Malvado threw their lot in with the dispossessed leader. They have formed their own group, which they dubbed *Los Abandonados*, the Abandoned Ones. They have no loyalty to anyone except Don Lorenzo, entranced by his demented vision of a Castille under his rule. More information on Don Lorenzo can be found on page 111, and in the *Castille* sourcebook.



Rancho Zepeda

Against a Wall

The Zepeda chapter of Los Vagos is one of the largest and most tightly militaristic in the entire movement. Commander Tómas Montoya del Velasquez, another career military man and comrade of Don Cristian, leads this group. Although he runs it separately from the cabal in Rancho Torres, Don Cristian and the Inner Circle coordinate their efforts with him as well as they can.

Initiation into this group is relatively easy. If a soldier (or lesser fighter in some cases) shows particular aptitude and ferocity against the Montaigne, he is offered a chance to continue fighting with people of like mind, ostensibly to receive better training and better protection. If the offer is

accepted, his commanding officer (a member of Los Vagos) closely scrutinizes the prospective candidate. Once the candidate achieves the requisite level of skills, his devotion to the King and the true Church are tested, casually at first, then with greater and greater responsibility until he demonstrates that he has the necessary patriotic fire and trustworthiness to be inducted in Los Vagos.

Las Muñecas

Although Castilians are, as a rule, very pious people, they are also practical about the ways of the world. After all, the Creator made men and women and gave the world moonlight, wine and romantic music. Castilian men are proud of their women's beauty. They know that there is precious little a man can do to resist the flashing eyes of a sultry *señorita* and the man who tries is probably no man at all. Fortunately, this weakness is not limited to Castilians; the Montaigne army has found that one of the rewards for conquering territory is increased access to these beautiful women.

After the massacre of San Juan, a beautiful young widow named Delia Ramirez took it upon herself to protect the innocent wives and daughters of Rancho Zepeda from the invaders. She approached a group of camp followers who had been hanging on the fringes of the Castilian Army and made a proposition. She would help them form a group of jennys who would work its way into the heart of the Montaigne camp and bring back information to the commander of the Castilian forces. In exchange, when the war was over, she would help them find another way of life if they wanted it. She knew that Don Cristian was an honorable man and hoped that he would accept their help. When she told him her plan, he was deeply moved by the dedication of these women and agreed to their terms on the spot.

Delia pulled her *camisa* off her shoulders, laced herself up in a black leather bodice, and painted her lips and cheeks red and her face white. Soon, the locals began referring to her as La Muñeca, "The Doll," and her group of jennys became Las Muñecas. Her rules were strict: women had to do whatever it took to get information out of the *chanchos*

unless their life was at stake. Anyone found fraternizing with the enemy in a non-business situation would be punished. No one was to act independently of the group no matter how terrible the atrocities committed against her or her family. Anyone was free to leave the group at any time, but if one of her sisters found her in the Montaigne camp, things would go badly for her.

As harsh as this sounds, Delia actually took very good care of her "girls," reminding them that they were doing something important for their country. And certainly, the information they have procured has proven invaluable to the Castilian war effort. There are nights, as she lies under some sweating Montaigne *chanchos* who reeks of garlic and cheap wine, that she has to fight back the need to retch, but she calls up the image of her dead husband and rakes the soldier's back with her nails, wishing desperately that she could strangle him.

In a strange way, Las Muñecas regard their white faces as a public display of the mask of El Vago, and some of them have taken to painting small black designs around their eyes and wearing purple and black garments. A few Montaigne have noticed the similarities, but chalk it up to simple patriotism. When questioned by the Montaigne soldiers as to why she would sleep with the enemy, a Muñeca usually shrugs and says that a girl has to live. Delia and Las Muñecas keep a close eye on the commanders and if one of them becomes suspicious, the girls disappear for a while. It would be difficult to identify one of them without her face paint or dyed hair.

Other Groups

The cabals above represent only a portion of the groups operating under the banner of El Vago. The GM is urged to create groups of his own to fit his particular campaign, or allow the Heroes to command their own coalition of Los Vagos. They can be as closely linked or as isolated from El Corazón as you wish, and follow whichever segments of El Vago's agenda that best fits their background. Advice for setting up independent cabals can be found in Chapter Four.



El Héroe



Aldana spun quickly as an assassin's blade whistled a hair's breadth from his throat. His own sword parried the follow-up thrust, but he found himself being forced backwards by the attack. Whoever these black-clad invaders were, they had skill and experience. The center figure, in particular, seemed troublesome — a well-trained swordsman who anticipated Aldana's every move. Under other circumstances, this would have been a most enjoyable encounter, for few fencers matched him for sheer ability. This, however, was an attack on his beloved King — the young man whose safety had been entrusted to him by his dearest friend. He would admire the technique later. For now, the assassins must be stopped.

The remaining attackers pressed Aldana mercilessly, using their numbers to overcome his superior swordsmanship. Their leader had a cloak, so Don Andrés automatically assumed that he was fighting against the Torres School, but the rapier was a top-quality Soldano blade. As he dodged another thrust he tried desperately to analyze the technique. *He has mastered more than one school*, he realized grimly. *The man is more dangerous than I thought.*

He launched a quick flurry of steel, felling another assassin in the process, but the leader seemed to anticipate his every move. The man twisted abruptly and turned away safely from Aldana's oncoming thrust, while simultaneously launching an attack of his own. *Damn!* Andrés thought, *a Gallegos trick!* This hired pig had somehow managed to fuse

multiple Castillian styles into something unpredictable and deadly. The assassin whirled and came at him again, flaring the black cloak in his off-hand. Aldana felt a sharp pain as his opponent's blade raked across his forearm. He knew that he had to find a way to escape both the entangling fabric and the menacing blade.

With a maneuver that came purely from self-preservation, Andrés managed to elude the rapier thrust, only to be cornered by the remaining assassins. They backed him into the wall behind the throne, flanking him so that he could not escape. *Where are the guards!?* he wondered desperately. The assassins' eyes glittered behind black half-masks as they moved in for the kill. *Blessed Theus, please protect the King!* Andrés set his jaw and determined to meet his death like a Castillian.

"*Ay, chanco!*" came a shout from a husky voice. Both the assassins and Don Andrés turned as a wiry figure, clad in purple and sporting the grinning white mask of El Vago, leaped agilely through a broken window.

"A difficult choice, *mis amigos*, eh?" the masked man taunted.

Don Andrés gaped disbelievingly. *Who in Théah is this?!* he almost cried. The situation did not allow the luxury of contemplating the identity of the new combatant, however. Aldana rolled to safety and readied his blade again as "El Vago" charged the assassins. Again, the hallway rang with the sound of steel on steel. He had no idea who was behind the mask, but thankfully whoever it was had enough skill to match the assassins blow for blow. They danced across the hall in an exquisite ballet of swordsmanship, the assassins trying vainly to pin the smiling clown's mask in front of them. El Vago parried their strikes with ease, dispatching a third assassin before Aldana had time to blink.

As he watched, though, the assassins began using the same tactics they had employed against him. The leader established a rhythm, and the masked vigilante found himself on the defensive. *Whoever he is, he can't do this alone*, Aldana thought. Ignoring the pain in his arm, he leapt back into the fray. A fourth assassin turned and was cut down in

an instant by Aldana's blade. El Vago took advantage of the distraction to send the fifth man's blade flying from his hands. The killer growled and produced a knife, but another thrust from the Vagabond and he too crumpled to the floor. That left only the leader... who wasn't retreating without a fight.

The assassin spun his cloak in a wide arc, holding his opponents at bay while he readied his blade again. Andrés tried vainly to pierce his defensive stance, while El Vago was forced backwards again, towards the open window. Aldana closed his eyes, and pushed a button on his rapier which released a wicked eight-inch blade from the pommel. He hoped to disarm the killer without having to strike a deadly blow, but the assassin might not give him the chance. As he raised the weapon in his right hand, the intruder lunged forward and drove his blade straight into El Vago's side. The hero grunted and staggered slightly before steadying himself against the wall. Don Andrés slashed fiercely at the assassin's legs; he felt the steel bite into the right calf and cut deeply through the leather. The assassin cried out in pain and fell heavily against the wall, knocking Aldana's blade out of his hand. Clutching at his leg, the invader dragged himself to the window and out, trailing blood across the broken glass.

The door burst open and a group of armed guards charged in, followed by Aldana's chief servant, Gervaso Ortega, and a wide-eyed King Sandoval. The Vagabond looked briefly at the approaching men, then saluted Don Andrés and leapt out the window.

"El Vago!" the King gasped.

"He saved my life, your majesty," Andrés panted, "and possibly yours as well." He looked at the guards. "One of the assassins has escaped!" They nodded and spread out as Ortega approached his master. Aldana grimaced.

"I'm fine," he said quietly. "It's a scratch."

"Nonsense!" Ortega scolded, as he bound his master's wound with a piece of torn cloth. One of the soldiers stepped up to the edge of the window.

"What do you see?" Andrés called after him.

"Footprints and two trails of blood leading in opposite directions, but no bodies."

Andrés felt a rush of emotion — relief that El Vago, whoever he was, had escaped and regret that he had only winged the assassin but had been unable to kill him. "Are you well, your majesty?" he asked the king.

"Yes... yes, Andrés, I'm fine. But we must tend to you now." Aldana nodded with relief and rose painfully as the adrenaline subsided. It was difficult to breathe and his arm began to throb painfully. "I think I am getting too old for this, my liege."

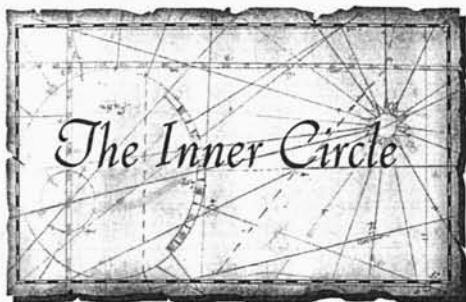


The assassin made it up the sloping hill behind the palace and into the light woods surrounding Vaticine City. Verdugo had assured him that there would be no resistance, that they could enter the palace unopposed. Now he had this damn injury, which meant that he would have to find shelter for at least a week until it healed. The encounter had been a disaster. The guards would be looking for him, and if they learned who he was, he would have to flee the country. His leg hurt like a demon, although the makeshift bandage had stopped some of the bleeding. He would hide in the woods until it was dark and then make his way into town.

He found a small copse hidden from sight and collapsed on a soft bed of leaves, unable to walk any further. He suspected that he had a fever but had survived worse. As he drifted to sleep, he promised the Vagabond a slow and lingering revenge.

He had been dreaming for a while when the sound of heavy footsteps stirred him. Opening his eyes, he saw two Knight-Inquisitors standing before him.

"Thank the Creator!" he began as he rose up on one elbow. One of the Knights drew his sword and drove it cleanly through the assassin's heart. His exalted employer no longer required his services.



Don Andrés Bejarano del Aldana

More information on Don Andrés can be found on pages 47–48 of the Game Masters' Guide, and pages 74–75 and 111 of the Castille sourcebook.

The premier courtier of Castille and closest advisor to the young King, Don Andrés represents the best of his nation's spirit. Born in 1633, he grew up as a member of Castille's noble elite and has known privilege all of his life. As the son of the most prominent nobleman in the nation, Andrés became the childhood playmate of the royal family, especially Prince Javier, who stood to inherit the throne. Many a time, the two young *caballeros* vied for the attention of a beautiful señorita or tried to outdo each other in horse races.

At an early age, Don Andrés displayed a rare gift for swordsmanship; he was forever slashing at curtains, leaping off of fences, or swinging on trees on the vast Aldana estate. When he had learned as much as his instructors could teach him, he began to develop his own style of fencing and is now one of Castille's foremost swordsmen. Slightly older than Prince Javier, Don Andrés actually became his mentor in swordsmanship, teaching him the special moves of the Aldana School.

He learned about justice and the rule of law from his father, a prominent judge who constantly queried his young son

about subtle points of jurisprudence, hoping to instill in him the firm and unshakable belief that the letter of the law should never override its intent. He also taught his son about the uses of power and how tightly compassion could bind the people to a leader. As soon as he came of age, the handsome young Aldana was called into service by his King to serve in the diplomatic corps as an ambassador to Montaigne. He made quite a number of friends at the foreign court and even those who were naturally wary of strangers developed a grudging trust in the open-faced nobleman.

Meanwhile, back home old King Sandoval fell ill. His eldest son Prince Javier was thrust into the position of Regent and requested that his childhood friend Don Andrés return from Montaigne to serve as his chief counselor. The Prince did a splendid job — far better than anticipated — due in part to his own abilities and in part to the wise advice he received from his friend. He comforted the young prince over his ailing father, and together they made plans for reforms and improvements that they would implement following Javier's coronation.

But all was not well with the future monarch. Sensing that he was in extreme danger, Prince Javier met secretly with Don Andrés, and extracted a promise that he would do everything in his power to protect Javier's younger brother Prince Salvador and the people of Castille. Cardinal Verdugo had already begun to exert his influence over the impressionable boy, and Javier worried that he might not be around to protect his little brother. Sensing the solemnity of Javier's words Andrés agreed to watch over young Salvador and the people of Castille. A few days later, Javier disappeared.

As befits a nobleman, Don Andrés took his promises seriously, which lead him to create the figure of El Vago (see pages 15–17). Today, he stands at the head of that secret organization, working to fulfill his vow in every way he can. Publicly, he serves as King Sandoval's advisor, while privately, he ensures that El Vago will always be ready to aid the Castillian people. He worries about the King's lack of confidence, although he understands that the current



Don Andrés Bejarano del Aldana

situation in Castille would try the skills of even a seasoned statesman. He actually likes the young man (who is now 16 and trying very hard to be a regal monarch), though he does not believe that Sandoval is the ruler that Javier would have been. Don Andrés has taken it upon himself to bolster his young King's spirit and encourage him to take possession of his own destiny in true Castillian style.

While Aldana grudgingly respects the Cardinal's intelligence and obvious devotion to his faith, he also knows that the cleric's goals are not necessarily in the best interest of the Crown or the nation. The Cardinal has a vision of himself at the helm of a nation of fanatical adherents, something that Don Andrés would rather die than see come

to fruition. He is well aware of the power that fanaticism wields, especially in uncertain times and as desperate as he is to find a way to protect his fellow Castillians, he knows that he cannot do it alone.

Don Andrés is a devoted family man who respects his uncle, the patriarch of the Aldana family, and serves his king with honor. There are those who might underestimate Aldana, misjudging his gentle voice and hearty laughter as signs of weakness, but under the veneer of jovial behavior is a sharp, incisive mind and passionate love for his nation. A widower for many years, the loss of his beloved wife was assuaged by the couple's only child, a dark-eyed little daughter who constantly reminds him of her mother. Although he made certain that she received the proper instruction in all the feminine graces, he also taught little Maria-Soledad to ride, shoot, and fight as well as any man, much to the horror of his relatives and her *prim duena*.

Aldana is tall and well-featured, infusing his well-built athletic body with an easy grace. He has a warm friendly smile that he bestows frequently on his *campesinos*. He can calm a sobbing child or a skittish horse with remarkable ease, then turn around and step into the role of a formal courtier without missing a beat. Although his court attire is always the height of fashion, he is much happier in the simple clothes of a country squire and prefers to tend to the needs of the Aldana rancho and the people under his care. His promise to Javier always comes first, however, and as much as he may long for a simple country life, the duties of Los Vagos keep him fully occupied. He knows the strength of Castille's enemies, and he will not abandon his country in her hour of need.

Don Hector Ontiveros

When a person dedicates himself to defending his nation from the tyranny of the Inquisition, an unjust foreign invader, and internal political corruption, he generally needs assistance, no matter how secretive the operation may be. When Don Andrés Bejarano del Aldana first donned the mask of El Vago, he had no idea the amount of help he would need to accomplish this goal.

Like most Castillian nobility, Hector Ontiveros grew up on his family rancho on the holdings of Rancho Soldano, where he wanted for little. While not closely related to the ruling Ontiveros bloodline, he has always been afforded the luxury and privilege of his family's station. When the time came to choose a university, he opted to leave the traditional family life of winemakers to study law and diplomacy at La Universidad de San Cristóbal, where he became close friends with two other young gentlemen: Andrés Aldana, the son of the famed lawmaker, and Javier Sandoval, the Crown Prince of Castille. The three of them were renowned among the Universidad's proctors for midnight escapades into the city that usually involved

daring escapes from balconies and angry curses from a number of frustrated dueñas who were valiantly trying to preserve the chastity of their beautiful young charges. Together Andrés and Hector served as a leveling influence for the Crown Prince, tempering the more radical notions of Javier's other university friends.

Hector's talent for finding loopholes, contradictions and inconsistencies in the law made him a perfect debating partner for Andrés Aldana and a prime candidate for a judicial bench. However, he did not feel that the life of a judge, no matter how respectable, could compete with the excitement of being a diplomat. He quietly resented Aldana's diplomatic abilities, and — without ever acknowledging it — wished to prove as capable an ambassador as his friend. Aldana tried to convince him to pursue the legal career for which he had such a gift, but Hector could not accept the fact that he was not as skilled at representing his nation abroad as he was at defending his people's rights. When one of the least desirable diplomatic positions in the Castillian government became available — an Eisen barony currently embroiled in the War of the Cross — Ontiveros requested it.

For the next few years, he served as advisor and dignitary to the court of Baron Hainzl of Eisen. Hainzl was stark raving mad, and diplomats in his territory were often forced to participate in his crazed dramatic spectacles. Hector, however, was not turned aside by the peculiarities of the post or by the fact that life in Eisen was as antithetical to Castille as storm to sunshine. He learned the difficult language and bizarre customs, an approach to diplomacy long thought by Castillian diplomats as beneath their station. He managed to make a connection with the insane Baron and proved an invaluable ambassador without overly damaging his dignity or imperiling his immortal soul. Hector was even able to oversee the building of a permanent Castillian embassy in the Eisen town of Atemlos. Though his service was exceptional, Hector did not have time to accomplish as much as he wanted. His tenure in Eisen ended abruptly with the mysterious disappearance of his friend, Crown Prince Javier.



Don Hector Ontiveros

News of the Prince's disappearance struck a sharp blow to Ontiveros. After all, Javier was not only his sworn *hermano* and friend, but would have become his King. The news that reached him in Eisen was not completely clear, but it was evident to him that the Inquisition and that upstart snake Verdugo had been at the heart of it. Soon after the Prince vanished, Hector received an order from Castille's new Chief Diplomat to return to the capital for reassignment. To his surprise, the new Chief Diplomat was his old friend, Don Andrés Aldana. Aldana had not forgotten Hector's talent with the Castillian legal system, or their pledge of friendship. Upon reuniting, the two men quickly began working together to save Castille from those who would tear her apart. But legal matters were not the only things in which Don Andrés needed Hector's help.

Hector's passion and complete commitment to service had always captivated Aldana. In the dead of night in the innermost chamber of his private quarters, Andrés told Ontiveros about El Vago. Whatever lingering traces of jealousy Hector might have harbored vanished as Aldana reveal his deepest secret. His old friend desperately needed Hector's help in establishing alibis and safe houses, forging papers and most importantly, getting around the Inquisition.

With his usual energy, Hector dove right in and had soon created a viable support network for the fledgling vigilante. He became a brilliant intelligence operative: he had spies placed in nearly untraceable positions, kept careful track of every snippet of news or rumors, and soon discovered an entirely new talent: disguise. He found he could make himself appear as almost anyone, and quickly learned to mimic a staggering array of voices and identities. He believes his time with Baron Hainzl has something to do it, but whatever the reason, Hector's newfound talents easily provided Don Andrés with all the information he needed to thwart the Inquisition time and again.

For a while, everything functioned more or less as planned. Andrés and his daughter kept up appearances as El Vago, while Hector provided them with resources and information. Then one day, assassins in the service of Cardinal Verdugo made an attempt on a young man who had dared to speak

out against them. Through one of his many informants, Hector learned of the assassination plot just a few hours before it would take place. He knew Andrés was in court with the King, and would never have the time to become El Vago and foil the plot. A skilled swordsman in his own right, Hector seized the opportunity to don the mask and take on the role himself. With all the heroics of a child's tale, Hector-as-El Vago smashed through the window of the young man's home, just in time to join the fight and defeat the Inquisitors.

The incident reassured Andrés that the role of El Vago need not be limited to one man. Hector has since made frequent appearances as El Vago, providing unshakable alibis for his friend when away from court and allowing El Vago quite literally to be in two places at once. Though he had to share the spotlight with Andrés and Maria-Soledad, he didn't care. At last, Don Hector found the excitement that he craved in service to his beloved country. He continues in his intelligence work and support activities to this day, but lives for the nights when he can don the mask and ride as the Vagabond.

Don Hector Ontiveros is well-built, with the typical dark and wavy hair and well-groomed features distinctive of Castillian men in his social position. An unabashed sensualist, he always wears the latest fashions, as befits his occupational position. He is a warm and likable gentleman, well regarded for his legal expertise and his fascinating if somewhat risqué stories about life in Eisen. Anyone eating at his table knows that they will have an excellent meal with the very best wines in Castille. But this is only his public face. Deep inside, Hector is a starry-eyed child: embracing the thrill of adventure as his alter ego, enjoying the opportunity to live out his boyhood fantasies and enjoying the adoration, however unacknowledged, of the grateful people of Castille. His commitment to his king, his country and his friends is unwavering.

Maria-Soledad Rivera y Aldana

As the eventual heiress to the important Aldana holdings and the only child of Castille's chief courtier, life could easily resemble a carefully scripted play for Maria-Soledad.



Maria-Soledad Rivera y Aldana

Thankfully, Don Andrés remembered what his upbringing had been like – living in the spotlight of the Court – and could not consign his beloved daughter to such a rigid life without some respite. Out of deference to his vociferous female relatives, he made certain that Maria-Soledad was well-schooled in the “women’s” arts like needlework and decorum, but he also kept his promise to his wife, as she lay dying, that their daughter would be able to ride and fight like a young *caballero* so that she need never rely on a husband to care for her or govern her lands.

Aldana’s efforts have been amply rewarded. Like her father, Maria-Soledad has a gift for swordplay and her abilities have quickly outstripped even his impressive skills. She could

have been born with a blade in her hand, she wields it so well. Even as a small child, she was constantly running up and down the corridors of the rancho, stabbing and feinting against imagined enemies. More than once a harried housemaid had to stitch up the rents in the drapes and bed curtains made by the eager combatant, not unlike those her father had inflicted at her age. Although Andrés professed humility when his scandalized family berated him about his “wild child,” he was actually immensely proud of her. She soon became his prize pupil and eventually became instrumental in helping him develop El Puñal Occulto.

Maria-Soledad had long suspected that her father and El Vago were one and the same, and found proof when she discovered the secret closet in his rancho where he kept the mask and uniform. Initially, she resolved to keep quiet about her knowledge, lest she inadvertently endanger Don Andrés. But during a trip to the royal palace with her father, a situation arose where she could not sit idly by. As she sat by the window in her room, she noticed a group of black-clad men scale the walls and advance stealthily towards the throne room. The king was only lightly guarded at the time, and she knew that her father was present as well. Raiding her father’s chambers, she quickly found a spare El Vago uniform, donned it, and rushed to the throne room – just in time to thwart the assassins and save Don Andrés from their blades.

Since then, she has served as a loyal member of her father’s inner circle. She makes appearances as El Vago quite often these days, and leads the organization’s most important and vital missions. It breaks Aldana’s heart every time he sees his daughter step into danger, but he knows better than to unduly restrict her. The young girl has become quite addicted to the danger and adventure of El Vago’s missions, and would find some way to appear as the Vagabond even if her father forbade her. At least this way, he can control her escapades.

Don Andrés made a promise to his daughter that she will never have to make a political marriage if she does not love her intended husband. This one has become difficult to keep, thanks to the constant prodding by his uncle, Don

Francisco, who takes every opportunity to remark that the girl should be married. Using a series of increasingly feeble excuses Don Andrés had been able to insure Maria’s freedom of choice, but he knew it was only a matter of time before marriage negotiations for the lovely girl would become unavoidable. When young King Sandoval expressed an interest in the Aldana heiress, Don Andrés had a new series of problems to grapple with. Certainly, she would make a fine queen, but her involvement in Los Vagos could compromise King Sandoval politically – and might further endanger his life. Maria herself is not yet fully aware of the young ruler’s affections, but would doubtless find them quite flattering.

Maria-Soledad is a young Castilian woman, approaching 18, of medium height and wiry but muscular build that she disguises quite well under her clothing. She is stunningly beautiful with long dark curling hair and dark brown eyes. She is also a highly skilled swordswoman, having mastered both the Aldana and El Puñal Occulto with breathtaking speed. Maria can ride a horse as well as a man and is diligent about the care of her magnificent mare, La Luz de la Luna (“Moonlight”). Like her father, she is passionately devoted to the Castilian people, and diligently studies history, mathematics, theology, and law. She and her father spend long evenings debating both secular and clerical law. Surprisingly, her normally critical *dueña* does not begrudge her the time or effort spent in her educational endeavors, for which Maria-Soledad is quietly grateful.

Don Cristian Acedo de Lopez del Torres

If there is a perfect Castilian – someone as comfortable at court as he is on the battlefield, whose courtesy and chivalry is a model for others – that man is Don Cristian Acedo de Lopez del Torres. Although his peers called him “El Barbaroso” as a young man (due to his uncharacteristic blonde hair), nothing could be further from the truth. He took to music, dancing and etiquette as gracefully as he wielded a sword and rode a horse. His quick mind grasped the intricacies of warfare tactics and strategy, due no doubt to his early training in war games at his grandfather’s knee.

He took especial delight in a Crescent board game called *Ajedrez*, which involves elaborate strategies moving different shaped pieces on a complicated board. It is believed among Castilian nobility that a mastery of *Ajedrez* indicates a special affinity for warfare. He joined the Castilian army as an officer, and has since distinguished himself time and again during the war against Montaigne.

In addition to his skill with weapons and warfare, Don Cristian can ride as if he were born on a horse, writes beautiful love poetry, and plays the guitar with a flair that makes female hearts flutter. Sadly, his own heart belongs completely and steadfastly to his wife, Doña Rosalinda Arciniega Lopez de Lopez, to whom he has been happily



Don Cristian Acedo de Lopez del Torres

married for many years. They have several children, including twin sons named Andrés and Hector after Don Cristian's friends.

Cristian became acquainted with Aldana and Don Hector Ontiveros when they were studying together at La Universidad de San Cristóbal, one of Théah's foremost institutions of higher learning. Though not as close to them as Prince Javier, he remained a constant presence among their circle of friends. When Andrés and Hector needed a replacement for the presumed-dead Don Lorenzo Zepeda del Acedo, Cristian was the logical choice. They had no doubts about his devotion to the cause of freedom or his fealty to the King and his military experience meant that he could easily fill Don Lorenzo's duties in the war against Castille. They invited him back to Casa Aldana under the pretext of "advising" Andrés on the progress of the war. When he heard what they were up to, Cristian agreed to help them in any way he could.

The three men spent hours bent over maps of Castille, planning how best to use their limited resources and how to recruit more members. Soon after this, Los Vagos operations on the front increased dramatically, and the masked Vagabond began making life very difficult for the invading Montaigne. Cristian's presence on the battlefield was perfectly normal, giving him a valuable opportunity to find new recruits and plan an extended guerrilla war against the enemy. His appearances as El Vago have rallied the Castillian forces as nothing else could.

Unlike many of his countrymen, Cristian's golden-blond hair and blue eyes attest to an ancient strain of Vestenmannavjar blood in his father's family tree. He speaks with the instinctive formality of a career soldier, and carries himself as honestly as he can. He isn't afraid to tell it like it is. While this has ruffled a few feathers in court, his unflinching charm and subtle wit easily repair any damage done. He treats his duties to Los Vagos as he would orders from a commander, and takes his mission as seriously as every other member of the Inner Circle. He has always been a fervent patriot; El Vago simply gives him a means to fully express it.



Gervaso Ortega

Gervaso Ortega has served the Aldana family most of his adult life. He is intensely private about his past. He claims to have been raised on a farm near San Gustavo but does not speak about his family. There are some who think that perhaps he was actually born on the wrong side of the blanket to a high-ranking member of the Vasquez family, but any attempt to confirm this theory is met with a quietly dismissive change of subject.

Prior to entering the employ of the Aldanas, he served in the military, planning to be a career soldier. While in the army he came to the attention of Don Francisco Guzman del Aldana, eventually earning a position as his personal aide-de-camp. Don Francisco was impressed with the young man's calm and dignified bearing, his perfect discretion, and his complete attention to his superior's needs. Ortega became an integral part of the don's family, and when his son Andrés was preparing to leave for a diplomatic position in the court of Montaigne, Don Francisco enlisted Ortega to serve as the younger Aldana's personal manservant.

During their time in Montaigne, Don Andrés came to appreciate Ortega's remarkable range of skills. Although he had known Gervaso as his father's aide, he grew to regard him as a friend and confidante. On more than one evening, they would sit together in their private quarters, sharing a

bottle of amontillado and reminiscing about their sunny homeland. Ortega oversaw every aspect of Aldana's daily life, insuring that his young master's food and drink contained no poison and that his bedchamber curtains did not hide a assassin intent on creating a political incident. He also handled the more delicate task of keeping eager Montaigne noblewomen from appearing uninvited in the Aldana chambers. Don Andrés made it very clear that he was deeply in love with his beautiful wife, but Montaigne courtiers appeared incapable of taking "no" for an answer.

When Aldana first took the mantle of El Vago, Ortega knew. Aldana shared his plans with his trusted servant before telling anyone else – even Hector – and trusted Ortega to keep quiet about it. The old servant no longer had the physical skills for such derring-do, but pledged to support his master in any way he could. He began by providing equipment for Aldana, and keeping his secret safe from the immediate family. Over time, his role organically evolved into a central member of El Corazón. Today he keeps track of El Vago's funding, coordinates missions with other members of Los Vagos, and protects his master as well as he can – while still playing the faithful manservant to the hilt. With Maria-Soledad's entry into the society, his role has lessened somewhat, but he remains as devoted to Andrés as ever.

Despite his station as a servant, Ortega has a number of skills worthy of a nobleman. He is a remarkably adept swordsman, thanks to a natural ability, military service, and training from his employer. Ortega has a genuine love of horses and is a good rider. He personally oversees the care and training of his master's personal mounts, and was responsible for Maria-Soledad's early equestrian lessons.

A vigorous white-haired man in his early 60s, Ortega is fanatically loyal to the Aldana family and would gladly give up his life to save his don or Maria-Soledad. His voice is low and his demeanor quiet, so that he seems to be nothing more than an ideal servant. But he is always vigilant. He knows better than most about the devious methods people in power – and people who want to gain power – will use to achieve their objectives.



Gervaso Ortega

"Lilia"

A young Castillian woman in her early 30s, "Lilia" is actually Madelena Perea, a young woman born and raised in Tarago. Her early life was uneventful; she grew up the daughter of a prosperous merchant, playing with her twin sister Mircea and expressing a naturally inquisitive temperament. From an early age, she showed an interest in learning and her father allowed her to attend a nearby university under the auspices of the Vaticine Church.

Her studies made searching for a suitor slow for her, however, and her twin sister found a match much more readily than she did. The wedding ceremony of Mircea Perea and Rafael Rios de Cordoba was a beautiful one. The

bride was radiant and the groom, a scion of the wealthy merchant family, was obviously infatuated with his new wife. The sisters bid each other a tearful farewell as the happy couple rode off to their new home in Altamira. Madelena returned to her studies and corresponded regularly with her sister, who regaled her with tales of their life in society there.

After several months, however, a disturbing note began to creep into her letters. Mircea, never more than nominally devout, began to talk more and more about heresy and the need to cleanse the Church of sin. Her husband had attained a "position" within the Vatican, she wrote, which would aid in scouring Castille of "heretical" elements. Madelena feared that her sister and brother-in-law had

joined the Inquisition. Though disturbed at the notion, she felt there was little she could do; she would not risk harming her sister, no matter what evils she might be participating in.

One night, in a pounding rain storm, a man arrived with an urgent message for her: Madelena should come immediately to Altamira. Rafael had been lost at sea and Mircea needed her sister right away. When she arrived at her sister's home, she found everything shrouded in black — including Mircea. Huddled in the couple's private prayer chamber, the tearful woman told her sister the truth.

It appeared that Rafael and Mircea were not quite the loyal followers of the Inquisition as they professed to be. In fact, they had both become members of a group called Los Vagos who were working from within the Church; the information she gathered would save the lives of those marked for interrogation and execution. Mircea explained that while her husband was away at sea helping Joaquín Orduño (see page 58) they had almost been captured by a Montaigne ship and now they were holed up along the coast in one of the thousands of caves that dotted the area. Mircea was planning to join him just as soon as she could, but she needed a favor. A very big favor, in fact.

At first Madelena could not believe what she was hearing! Her carefree, fun-loving sister had become a member of Los Vagos? How could this have happened? Then the tears rose in Mircea's beautiful eyes as she described the atrocities committed in the name of purification, and soon it was clear that the enemy within Castille was every bit as dangerous as the enemy on the border. Madelena agreed to help her: she would impersonate her sister for as long as it took for them to return and continue to help Los Vagos in their fight against the Inquisition's tyranny.

She spent the next several weeks in seclusion in Altamira, learning to become her sister. She was a quick student and only a short time passed before the two had managed to switch identities. Mircea became Madelena and Madelena became "Sister Lilia," the role Mircea maintained. A recently widowed sister of the Inquisition, Lilia was known for her piety and intolerance of heresy, and Verdugo's followers had already accepted her as one of their own.



"Lilia"

Madelena never heard from her sister again. According to Orduño, she met her husband and the two left to return home, but they never arrived. They disappeared somewhere on the road from the coast.

Unfortunately, she has not had the opportunity to find out what happened. Her position demands much from her, and she has quickly learned just how important she is to Los Vagos. Her efforts have provided invaluable information to the Vagabond, and saved dozens of lives from the Inquisition's flames. She has asked El Vago (she does not know his true identity) to search for her sister, but refuses to leave her position; she made a promise, and like most Los Vagos members, she intends to keep it.

Recently, Lilia has begun a passing flirtation with a fellow Inquisitor named Largo Gallegos de Aldana. The rotund gentleman is really nothing more than an accountant, but he seems fiercely devoted to the Inquisition cause, and would have her killed in an instant if he learn of her true loyalties. Lilia has grown fond of the man, but refuses to pursue the relationship further. If he gets too close to her, she may have to take action she'll regret.

Lilia appears completely unaware of her stunning beauty, focusing her energies on piety and the pursuit of heretics. She does not participate in the flirtations common at court, professing the depth of her faith, the rigors of a convent education, and her widowhood as deterrents to frivolous behavior. However, there is no escaping the passion of the Castillian spirit, as Lilia and Largo have discovered, possibly to the detriment of their missions.

Mlle. Alexis Dubois du Arrent

Alexis Dubois' talent as an artist has been in demand from the fateful day in her childhood when she first picked up a piece of sketching charcoal. The pretty Montaigne girl was clearly a prodigy, vividly translating the world around her to paper with natural ease and grace. She never took a formal lesson, but her natural skill and aptitude earned her an endless procession of patrons.

As word of her aesthetic gift traveled throughout the artistic community, the young woman found herself in demand not only in her homeland, but also in Vodacce, Castille and Avalon. This afforded her the luxury of travel and the opportunity to experience different cultures, exposing her to the best and worst the world had to offer, often at the same time.

Two years ago, Theodore Lipton, a scholar for the Explorer's Society, commissioned Alexis to provide documentation for a number of valuable items. After she had perfectly sketched all of his artifacts for archival purposes, she discovered the kindly old gentleman could not pay her in full. However, he insisted that she take a piece from his personal collection, a fairly heavy piece of black rock that held an image of a shadowy face. Hesitant at first, the artist finally agreed, thinking that she would at least be able to make some money later by selling the thing.

She returned to her studio in Charouse and resumed her work, the weird relic forgotten. It would likely have remained out of sight and mind if not for her older brother Tristan, who came to visit her one fine spring morning. While preparing for his morning exercise session, he accidentally knocked the rock to the floor, shattering it into hundreds of fragments. To his surprise, among the black shard was a large piece that appeared to be a mask, its visage twisted in a hideous leering grin.

When she heard the crash, Alexis came running to see what Tristan had broken. When she entered the room, she saw her brother pressing the mask to his face. A sound like an angry wind began howling as every shadow in the room flew off the walls and covered Tristan's body. The young man was instantly transformed into something... *else*, a creature of living darkness whose flaming red eyes stared right through the shocked woman.

Terrified beyond words, Alexis was even more surprised when the shadows melted away, releasing her brother's body. Tristan, completely unscathed, was smiling from ear to ear. He put the mask aside and they sat down together over a glass of much-needed brandy. He confided that for the past year he had been helping the legendary El Vago

thwart the cruel schemes of the Inquisition in Castille. He was excited by the possibility that this incredible artifact could further aid the cause. Alexis countered that the shadow creature he became looked anything but helpful, but Tristan believed that fact would actually work in their favor. If the Inquisition was searching for Legion among the innocent, perhaps it was time they found him. Alexis reluctantly agreed to let her brother take the mask.

Tristan returned to Castille with the Obsidian Mask in his possession. Soon thereafter, certain stories of El Vago had a new element, a shadowy figure with a hideous face that looked like it had come from... well, not from heaven. Committed to helping the Castillians, Tristan never took a

life in the course of his escapades, and his acts of mercy (coupled with a supernatural countenance) inspired equal amounts of fear and hope. Whether the creature was a demon or an avenging angel was simply a matter of who was telling the story.

However, the Inquisition was not without its own resources and finally compiled enough information to catch Tristan DuBois in a devious ambush. Despite being mortally wounded, he somehow managed to escape and find his way back into Montaigne. He stole into his sister's studio in the middle of the night and, as he lay dying in her arms, made her promise to take the Obsidian Mask back to Castille, to carry on his alliance with Los Vagos.

The mask concealed Alexis' true identity in the same fashion as it had done for her brother. She contacted the people whose names Tristan had whispered to her and soon she found herself in the unaccustomed position of a revolutionary. She quickly learned, after wearing the Obsidian Mask for the first time, why Tristan had been reluctant to give it up. It filled her with an unbelievable strength and power, as if she could actually see and hear the blood coursing through her body. Although she was not weak in her regular form, under the Mask, she achieved a level of physical strength that equalled the strongest man she knew. The downside to wearing the Mask was that she was completely exhausted afterwards and had to sleep for almost a half-day before she returned to normal.

She stays close to the Montaigne-Castille border, using her power to help fleeing fugitives reach safe haven in Montaigne. She sends Inquisition forces fleeing in terror at the merest sight of her. Though the Obsidian Mask bears little resemblance to the grinning white facade of El Vago, the locals have no difficulty associating her exploits with those of the Vagabond. Andrés Aldana has a few reservations about the source of her abilities, but she acts with such devotion that he cannot bring himself to question her. As long as her heroics continue, she will always have a place in El Corazón.

To see her, one would never accord the lovely artist with superhuman powers. The quintessential flirtatious beauty,



Mlle. Alexis Dubois du Arrent

she has blonde hair and dark blue eyes, fringed with heavy lashes that make her seem like the eternal ingenue. She is, of course, always dressed in the latest fashions and with her reputation already established in Castille, has no difficulty moving through society with ease. To those who look closely, there is something sly in her charming smile, as if she were always enjoying a private joke. Sometimes her eyes glaze over momentarily, changing from blue to almost black. Underneath this lady's lovely exterior, the mask's powers gain dominion over her soul day by day with unrelenting force. Only time will tell whether she continues to control the mask, or whether it will control her.

Doña Arantxa Grijalva

Doña Arantxa was born into the exiled Grijalva family, relegated to an isolated township near La Selva de Fendes after the Inquisition successfully "uncovered" a heretic in their midst many years before. Despite the reversal of fortune, the Grijalva family maintained its fervent support of the Vaticine Church and the principles of the Prophets. Arantxa's mother, Doña Esmeralda, was much younger than her father, Don Placido, who was already a widower when they married. Don Placido was not particularly affectionate towards his only child; she was very young and he always seemed too busy in his library to have much time for "noisy children."

Her relationship with her mother was a different story. They spent every day in each other's company, and the beautiful Esmeralda taught her daughter the skills appropriate to a noblewoman. When the bright little girl showed an aptitude for learning, Don Placido overcame his natural dislike of children and made time to oversee that part of her education. He had an extensive library, preserved and guarded even in the family's darkest hours, and he allowed Arantxa to read as much as she could, which he happily discovered was a considerable amount. Under his stern tutelage, she became an excellent scholar who loved to engage in debates about the nature of science.

There was another side to Arantxa's education, one that she and her mother kept secret from everyone. One day while



Doña Arantxa Grijalva

they were cooking, the fire under the paella pan sputtered and threatened to go out. Doña Esmeralda turned away to reach for some kindling; when she turned back, she saw little Arantxa staring intently at the embers, which suddenly burst into a happy little flame. The Doña did not want to frighten her child but she knew in her heart that her daughter might be exhibiting a terribly dangerous power. Over the next few weeks, she tested Arantxa until she was certain and then began the difficult task of teaching her about this strange and dangerous gift, which she called *El Fuego Adentro*. Above all, she reinforced how very careful they must be, how they could tell no one about this — not papa, not her best friends, and especially not Friar Benecio the local priest.

The lesson took root firmly after the girl witnessed the burning of a suspected heretic in the plaza during one of their trips to market. A white-faced Arantxa could not speak for a full day after seeing the horror of the accused man being consumed alive, and while Doña Esmeralda was devastated at the trauma inflicted on her young daughter, she knew that the memory of that day might save the girl's life someday.

While a high-placed marriage was out of the question (given the family's status) neighboring gentlemen were regularly smitten with the beautiful Arantxa. Sooner or later, however, she tired of their company, especially when they could not hold their own in a philosophical debate. It did not discourage her in the slightest, for she found that her days were active enough without the burden of attending a husband. Her special affinity for healing the sick was very much appreciated by the people in their area. Sadly, her skills were not sufficient to prevent the death of her father (from old age) or her mother (from a lingering illness brought on by a particularly vicious winter).

She inherited her father's estate, such as it was, and went about her business, caring for the people who needed her healing, spending time in her garden or locked away in her private chambers perfecting her secret sorcery. Her physician's skills brought her into contact with a member of the Explorer's Society, Doña Sienna de Guzman del Torres. The woman asked her to attend on a member of the research group who had been injured in the woods. As she worked on the wounded man, she began to talk to Doña Sienna and her people, and was ecstatic to find their conversation stimulating and challenging. She spent more and more time with them, until finally she was asked to join them.

Her affiliation with the Explorers accentuated her ability to pursue certain other endeavors — mainly, her staunch allegiance to El Vago. She never forgot the burning she witnessed as a child or the sorrow her father experienced at the loss of his family's name and position. Arantxa has been using her connections in the Society to set up a network of "guides" to provide important information to Los Vagos, as

well as establishing several hideouts within La Selva de Fendes. Hector knows about her sorcerous powers, as do a few other members of El Corazón, but they keep it a secret. They respect her piety and devotion to the cause, and while her sorcery makes them uncomfortable, they realize that it does not make her an evil woman.

Castilian women seem to retain their beauty and allure well into middle age, and this is especially true for Doña Arantxa. Her long dark hair accentuates her deep brown eye, and she favors practical yet fashionable clothing. Her calm and noble demeanor belies her outspoken views on the current state of affairs in Castille. Although she never raises her deep, rich voice above a conversational level, her people regard her with love and respect verging on awe.

Joaquin Orduño

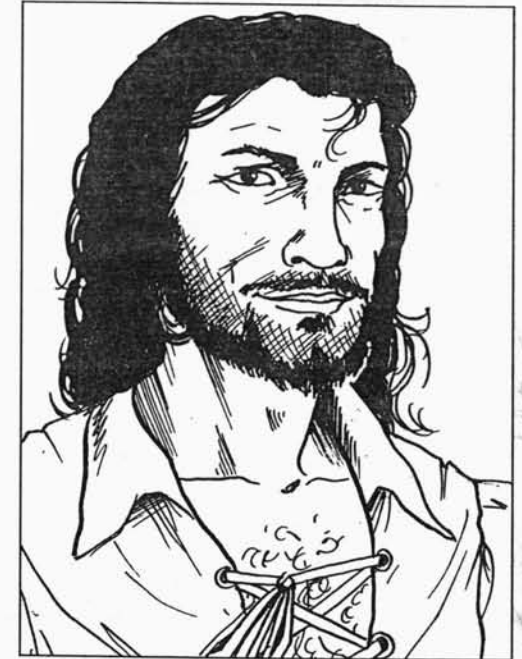
The Orduño family was obviously born with salt water in their veins; they spend as much time on the sea as they do on the land. Regarded as the finest shipwrights in Castille and maybe even in Théah, they have played a significant part in driving the Montaigno army off the eastern banks of El Rio de Delia. Members of the family currently serve as Headmaster of the College of Naval Engineering, Master of the Naval Shipyards, Master of the Royal Artillery Academy, Harbor Master of the Castilian Armada's naval base at Tarago and Admiral of the Castilian Armada. Not everything has gone well for them but they regard the war as an opportunity to set things right once again.

At first glance, Joaquin Orduño appears to be only a minor member of this proud clan. The young cousin of Admiral Enrique Orduño, he serves as a simple merchant trader and doesn't directly involve himself with the Castilian navy. His family believes that he makes his living transporting cargo in his ship *La Venganza* ("The Vengeance"). The cannier ones suspect that he is involved in smuggling as well, and often refer to him as *El Carnero Negro* ("The Black Sheep"). His somewhat tarnished reputation, however, hides a deeply committed young man who does as much for Castille as any of his relatives.

Trained in the ways of the sea from an early age, Joaquin is a pivotal member of El Corazón. He has chosen to serve his nation as a sort of El Vago of the seas, running along the Castilian coast, ferrying members of Los Vagos and rescuing those targeted by the Inquisition. Because he can move along the water with relative ease, Joaquin serves as the contact point for several important Vagos, including Conte Angelo Orsini. He can ferry operatives along the Castilian coast with marvelous ease, provide a clandestine meeting place in the middle of la Boca, and even use his ship's guns as a floating arsenal if the organization needs it. Don Andrés was concerned at first about entrusting so much information to such a young man, but Joaquin has proven his loyalty on numerous occasions. He enjoys the rakish image his duties lend him and chuckles up his sleeve at the relatives who disapprove of his ways. "If they only knew the truth," he once told his first mate, "they'd choke on their medals!"

His contact with the Inner Circle is limited primarily to Maria-Soledad, whom he has met both as El Vago and in her more mundane persona. He has yet to draw a connection between the two, which suits Andrés Aldana just fine. His daughter is smart enough to keep her mouth shut, and tells Joaquin only as much as he needs to know. Aldana was also relieved to discover that Maria-Soledad and Joaquin regard each other strictly as partners. The pair enjoys practicing their dueling skills from time to time, but show no indication of romantic interest in each other.

Beneath his dashing facade, Joaquin is as deeply committed to Castille as any member of his family. He deplores the Inquisition, and secretly believes that the nation should return to the simple religion it had before the advent of the Vaticine Church. This feeling alone would be grounds for his immediate arrest and execution. He has no criminal record (no one has found any incriminating evidence, despite his somewhat seedy reputation) and his family connections ensure that no one pays close attention to his activities. Though as swashbuckling as any Castilian, Joaquin knows better than to risk exposure by taking stupid chances.



Joaquin Orduño

A dark-haired young man in his mid-20s, Joaquin has broken more than his fair share of fluttering hearts among young Castilian noblewomen, but he has yet to settle down, claiming that it will take a blow from *la flecha flamante*, the flaming arrow of love, to get him to give up his rollicking ways. His activities and generally roguish appearance make him a natural suspect as El Vago, but no one has ever accused him as such. Castille is full of hot-blooded young noblemen, and Joaquin seems too attached to the ocean to make an effective Vagabond.



Don Baldovino Montoya de Cardenas

Not all Castilians are cold and distant on first meeting. Don Baldovino Montoya is a large and jovial fellow who confronts life with a relentlessly positive attitude. True to his Montoya heritage, he has a keen military mind and a well-developed physique. Although he would very much like to be serving at the front, the family patriarch has commanded him to guard the family's precious lands. While he complains loudly about it to anyone who will listen, he takes his familial responsibilities too seriously to consider disobeying.

Nicknamed *El Herrero Magnífico* ("The Great Armorer"), Don Baldovino takes out his frustrations in his forge where he creates beautiful armor whose combination of form and function makes it highly prized throughout Castille. He would love to get his hands on some dracheneisen but for now he must be content with metal from La Sierra de Hierro. He is very much a man of the people and like many of his compatriots, he thinks nothing of rolling up his sleeves and throwing his strength into helping the residents on his rancho. He believes that nothing is as good for the spirit as a long day of hard manual labor followed by a hearty communal meal with one's friends.

His activities in the smithy disguise his role as Los Vagos' primary weaponsmith. Whether it's a hidden breastplate

designed to turn an Inquisitor's knife or a fencing sword strong enough to parry the mightiest blows, Don Baldovino ensures that the Vagabond and his followers have whatever they need. He disguises his weapons as "gifts" to various other nobles, and takes care care to forge them without leaving any identifiable marks. Though his "public" works are as ornate as any in the world, his weapons for Los Vagos are as nondescript as they are deadly.

In addition to weaponsmithing, Don Baldovino likes to fashion household items that make life better for those on the rancho. One of his special creations is a large portable cooking stove set on a great wheeled platform drawn by two horses. He enjoys hosting large outdoor feasts at which he



Don Baldovino Montoya de Cardenas

stands in front of the giant rotating *asado*, basting haunches of goat, lamb and beef with a spicy sauce that he claims is an ancient family secret. While no one has been able to ascertain the exact ingredients, everyone agrees that there is no better antidote to the fiery stuff than large glasses of icy cold *sangria*.

In his mid-40s, Don Baldovino's wide face is graced by large dark brown eyes that twinkle beneath bushy brows. Like most Castilian men, he has a beard and moustache, but despite his best efforts, he always looks a bit rumpled. He is very popular with the ladies, but has never married.

Ximena de Gallegos

The lands around Avila in Rancho Gallegos boast some of the sweetest grasslands in all of Castille. Here, Don Miguel de Gallegos and his beautiful wife Ximena oversee the running of their justly famous stables, *Las Joyas del Castille* ("The Jewels of Castille"). The couple have devoted their lives to equestrian pursuits, and their devotion shows. Mounts and breeding stock from *Las Joyas* fetch excellent prices, which help supplement their coffers and enable Miguel and Ximena to continue doing what they love so much. Ximena is a fearless horsewoman who is involved in all aspects of the rancho's business and also serves as the veterinarian.

Selling horses is hardly a suspicious activity. After all, if traveling on land in Théah, you either walk or you ride; and if you ride, you are either on a horse or being pulled by one. Even Cardinal Verdugo owns a horse from *Las Joyas*, a chestnut gelding named *El Espíritu Brillante*. Doña Ximena keeps records of all their sales, but with so many people visiting them each year, she cannot always remember faces to go with names. Or so she claims.

Ximena has strong ties to many of her close friends and would do anything to keep them safe from the hated Inquisition. Her loyalty, coupled with her position as the leaders of Castille's horse breeding industry, placed her in a unique situation to serve as a patron to Los Vagos. No one in the movement will ever be denied a swift mount or



Ximena de Gallegos

shelter as long as she has anything to say about it. The *Las Joyas* steeds are among the best in Castille, and Ximena thrills when the Vagabond and his cohorts put them to such honorable use. She sometimes asks for favors in return, of course, and members of *El Corazón* seeking her aid must sometimes don a leather apron and muck out the stables, but such a task is infinitely preferable to being stretched on the rack. Her creative accounting, coupled with the popularity of her horses, forms an excellent cover; it's nearly impossible to tell who among the horse traders and clients of *Las Joyas* are anything more than they appear to be.

Doña Ximena retains much of her youthful beauty and is absolutely devoted to her husband Miguel. There is a

charming story that her husband won her by beating her in a horse race, though the couple strongly denies it. She has not told him about her connection to Los Vagos, and wishes to keep it that way. Ximena traces her roots back to an ancient Montaigne family, which gives her her honey-colored hair and dark blue eyes.

Profesora Jacinta Navarro del Garcia

Following in the footsteps of her famous uncle, the renowned Salvador Garcia, Jacinta Navarro teaches history at La Universidad de La Ciencia. To meet her, one would never know that the plain young woman is a passionate supporter of freedom for Castille.

Although she usually arrives at class with her papers and books in disarray, her students become enthralled once she starts speaking; her knowledge and ability to find unique connections between apparently disparate events is breathtaking. The crueler students call her *Profesora Solterona* (Professor Spinster) behind her back, but they pay attention in class and rarely miss her fascinating lectures. She has written a number of scholarly papers on various aspects of Castillian history. Her style is very readable and economical, not unlike the lady herself. She would never do anything to lose her position or worse, embarrass her uncle.

Most of the time, she contents herself with her teaching, and the local Inquisitors show no interest in her activities. Her uncle's reputation allows her some measure of freedom from the Church's prying eyes, her chosen field has not been deemed heretical (certainly not the way harder sciences have), and her muted exterior never generates much suspicion. A devout Vaticine, she visits church regularly, and her tendency to carry books and papers everywhere neatly disguises her activities.

Jacinta joined Los Vagos almost by accident, when her uncle asked her to deliver a sheaf of papers to a friend. The papers described a process for creating chemical smoke; intrigued, she delivered them to the requested address — the confessional booth of a nearby church — then waited to see who would pick it up. Eventually a strange man dressed



Profesora Jacinta Navarro del Garcia

in priest's robes arrived; she quietly accosted him and demanded to know what was going on. The man explained that her uncle had agreed to help "a vagabond in need" and that the papers she delivered would do tremendous good for the people of Castille. After listening to his story, she offered to help in any way she could, and has served as a *Compañero* from that day forth.

Her duties to Los Vagos are passive in nature, and her contact with them is limited to two or three meetings a year. She keeps a close eye on the university's students, and singles out those who she feels would make strong candidates for membership. She then passes their names on to Los Vagos, using the confessional to make the exchange.

Most of her candidates exhibit a strong sense of honor, a deep love of their country, and a sense of outrage at the recent actions of the Church. She doesn't know how many of her candidates were approached by Los Vagos, nor does she wish to.

Her other primary duty is to provide Los Vagos with access to some of the wondrous inventions developed by the Invisible College. The two organizations work very closely together (though not through her), and the College has recently begun providing Los Vagos with new devices such as grappling guns, encoding devices, and the like. She gets such devices from her uncle, then passes them on by leaving them in the church confessional. Her regular trips to church make it impossible to tell when she does El Vago's work and when she is simply praying to the Prophets.

Jacinta (who thinks her name is much too romantic) is careful to maintain a serious and demure appearance at all times. She wears her long brown hair parted in the middle and pulled back into a tight chignon. Her figure appears to be quite lovely, but it is difficult to tell. Her dresses are all plain and unadorned except for an immaculate white ruff and a simple gold cross around her neck. She has large brown eyes, made even larger by the glasses she wears. The only indulgence she permits herself is sparing use of *agua del naranja* (orange water), a refreshingly light scent that follows her wherever she goes.

Conte Angelo Orsini

The cause of Los Vagos is not without its sympathizers in other nations of Théah, including the secretive neighboring nation of Vodacce. Conte Angelo Orsini is a relative of the powerful Caligari clan, one of the seven merchant families that rule Vodacce. His aptitude for business and finance appeared early and soon he came to the attention of Prince Vincenzo Caligari. Soon afterwards, he was "fostered" into his wealthy relative's care and raised with all of the benefits of Vodacce nobility. Caligari spared no expense in his education, both formal and informal, and the investment quickly began to show returns. Angelo impressed the old patriarch with his knowledge and cunning, and Vincenzo in

turn gifted him with a title and access to a magnificent fortune.

When the time came, Angelo began traveling with his cousin Vito, captain of the *Amo Stallis*; their seafaring adventures brought them in contact with Joaquin Orduño, the renegade Castillian who captained *La Venganza*. Joaquin and Angelo discovered that they shared a fondness for expensive wine and fiery *zarabanda* dancers. They quickly formed a friendship, and began exchanging news and gossip with casual regularity. Angelo knew that information is every bit as valuable as other trade goods and his experience in the Vodacce court made him a fine procurer of intelligence. He moved between Vodacce and Castille



Conte Angelo Orsini

with great regularity, brokering all manner of useful tidbits on nobles, courtiers, and the comings and goings of the Church. The inside information on shipping and cargo Angelo received from both Vito and Joaquin enabled him to help his family make countless wise investments.

In exchange, he has helped Joaquin with some of the Castilian's extracurricular activities. Although not personally concerned about the Inquisition, Orsini is worried about the effect of its repression on trade and the family fortune. Despite his deep and abiding belief in Theus and the word of the Prophets, Angelo was a true Vodacce, a man of business who deplored the Inquisition's ever-tightening stranglehold on commerce. Today the Inquisition might place a sanction of something relatively unprofitable like Synneth artifacts, but who knew? Tomorrow it might be something everyone used, like wine or salt!

For that reason, he shares what he learns with Joaquin Orduño and Los Vagos in exchange for Orduño's support of the Caligari's seafaring operations. The pair have an extensive list of seaside inns, where they meet and pass information in relative anonymity. Along with Lilia, Angelo has become a vital source of intelligence for the Vagabond.

An accomplished courtier, Angelo uses his charm and good looks to participate in the family business. He knows all the current gossip in Vodacce and Castille and somehow manages to keep the players straight despite their bewildering numbers. He is one of those men who always looks good, no matter whether he is wearing a new velvet doublet or a simple white shirt and a worn leather jerkin. His warm dark eyes have captivated more than one fluttering heart. Tall, dark, and handsome in the quintessential Vodacce manner, Angelo dazzles women so completely that they are unaware that he is extracting information from them; they may give up a lifetime of secrets under the auspices of a harmless romantic flirt. He remains fiercely loyal to the Caligaris, and while he has not revealed his Los Vagos connections to them, he ensures that "Uncle Vincenzo" profits from his spying as well as the Vagabond.

Reynaldo Nuñez del Torres

The proprietor of the Fox Den Club in Freiburg, Reynaldo Nuñez del Torres is a transplanted Castillian who serves the "refined needs" of his fellow countrymen in Eisen's city of refugees. As Los Vagos grew, Don Andrés and the Inner Circle realized that they needed a place far from Castille where members could survive and work in safety. In addition, Los Vagos needed somewhere outside the nation where the Inner Circle or El Corazón could meet with powerful allies who were unwilling or unable to enter Castille. During a secret meeting of El Corazón, Doña Sienna Guzman del Torres mentioned that perhaps the proprietor of the Fox Den Club in Freiburg might be willing



Reynaldo Nuñez del Torres

to aid in the movement. Freiburg's Eisenfürst, Nicklaus Trägue, despised the Inquisition and had no intention of letting them bring their fanaticism into his city. What better place to hide escapees than in a place where the Inquisition has no permanent presence?

Reynaldo agreed to aid the Vagabond, and has since established several alternate hiding places for fugitive Castillians who appear at the Fox Den Club under cover of night. He is extremely careful to protect them from the vile Redmund Erhart whose spy network is extensive (see *The City of Freiburg*, pages 21–22, from the *Freiburg* boxed set). Reynaldo is also especially cautious to protect refugees from Tibold Dedrick, a slaver who knows that the fiery women of Castille bring a very high price on the auction block (see *The City of Freiburg*, pages 18–20). He hides the most important Castillians that Los Vagos bring him in the basement of his club, an area as secure as current technology can render it. This is also the place where high-level meetings between members of the Inner Circle and El Corazón can be held without fear of interruption. Even if traveling Castillians were tracked to the door of the Club, Reynaldo has a number of systems in place to protect the movement.

He communicates with his counterparts in Castille through the use of coded messages delivered by carrier pigeons which he maintains in large coops on the building's roof. He also provides this convenient service to others in the city, so it is not uncommon for him to send messages to many people across Théah, including his family in Castille.

Torres is the archetypal jovial innkeeper in his mid-40s: rotund and cheerful, always ready with a fresh mug of ale and a warm loaf of bread. He wears his hair short in the Eisen fashion but retains his Castillian beard. A scar from some long-ago injury marks his forehead. He loves a good story and can often be coaxed into telling a few of his own, usually more than a little risqué. Beneath the innocence of his twinkling brown eyes and wide smile, he is an extremely clever and insightful man whose services are highly valued by his Los Vagos brethren.



Doña Urraca Rioja

This beautiful Castillian woman serves as Cardinal Verdugo's deadliest and most clever spy. Her parents sent her at a very young age to study at *El Convento de La Reina del Mar* (The Convent of the Queen of the Sea) in the coastal city of Barcino. There she received a classical education, excelling at languages and deportment. She also learned to speak fluent Montaigne to the point where she she could easily pass as one.

When she was 15, she left the convent and headed home to rejoin her family. It was a particularly terrible summer with storms and torrential rains, and she and her *duena* were forced to take refuge at the home of one of her schoolmates in Vaticine City. She ended up staying for quite some time in the metropolis, and quickly fell in love with its bustling rhythm.

During her visit, a son of the wealthy Cordoba family saw her and became smitten. Although his family was most displeased, he resolutely courted her and had every intention of proposing marriage when a mysterious illness struck him down. He died several weeks later, after confessing his eternal love to her. Her heart broken, Urraca fled home to her loving family who consoled her in her sorrow. It took many weeks of wandering alone in the fresh air along the seaside of Rioja before she could return to

normal. Many of her former schoolmates begged her to come and stay with them but she refused all invitations — until one came asking her back to Vaticine City. Her parents were concerned that they might lose her to the bustling metropolis for good, but she believed that it would be good to return and renew her love for the city.

Swept up in a whirlwind of parties and entertainments, it was not long before the stunning and self-assured young beauty came to the attention of Cardinal Verdugo. A remarkably astute judge of character, he made certain that he had ample opportunities to talk with her. The more he heard, the more he realized that she possessed some valuable gifts. Her memory, her manipulative nature, and a streak of ruthlessness running beneath the surface all combined to make her a perfect potential spy. He offered her his patronage in exchange for serving as his eyes and ears, and she readily agreed.

Under his tutelage, she has become all that he could have hoped for and more. Her intelligence sources are impeccable and she almost never steers him wrong. She also arranges for enemies of the faith to disappear when the Inquisition cannot involve itself. Verdugo never mentions such assignments to her directly, and she takes care to keep the details from him.

In the last few years, she has become a dogged foe of Los Vagos, tracking them all across Castille. Her efforts have uncovered several high-ranking members, but have yet to compromise anyone vital to the organization. Her one misstep was assuming that Andrés Aldana acted alone as El Vago. When the Vagabond fought side by side with Aldana to save the king, her theory was apparently proven wrong. The incident earned her a severe reproach from Verdugo, and forced her to rethink her theories on El Vago's identity. She never realized how correct her "Aldana mistake" really was and has never come as close to the Inner Circle again (Maria-Soledad's fortuitous action during the assassination saved Los Vagos in more ways than one). Still, she remains a canny foe. Los Vagos is as ignorant of her true identity as she is of theirs, and she continues to pursue Verdugo's enemies as few others do.

Dubbed La Princesa de Hielo (the Ice Princess) by those at court, Doña Urraca is a cold and reserved woman who dresses only in white and pale blue clothing, and favors diamonds and pearls. Her ability to pass as a lady of Montaigne and her complete lack of remorse makes her a most valuable asset in the Cardinal's stable of operatives. No one suspects her true allegiance; most believe she is just another courtier. After all, she is the daughter of one of Castille's most ancient families, and would certainly never be involved in something unseemly.



Doña Urraca Rioja

El Camaléon

No one knows the actual name of this highly trained Vodacce assassin, but there is no question about his abilities. He has become rich in his native country by working as a killer for hire; the Great Game has rarely seen one so skilled. He works for the highest bidder without consideration for the morality of his client's cause. He has executed mass murderers and innocent children with equal efficiency. Five of the seven Vodacce Princes have called upon his services at one time or another; he can butcher a man like a hog or hide all traces of wrong-doing, depending upon his client's wishes. A significant number of his murders have never been detected: his victims either disappeared or "died of natural causes."

His success depends both on his skill with weapons and poisons, and his uncanny ability to take on any role he chooses. He can appear in any guise and gets close to his victims before they even realize the danger. This latter ability has earned him the nickname El Camaléon (The Chameleon). No one knows his true identity, and even the Princes speak of him with a measure of respect.

Recently, however, he has left his normal haunts in Vodacce and appeared in Castille, though for what purpose none can say. Several deaths in San Cristobal and Vaticine City have been attributed to him, although there is no apparent connection between the victims. His presence out of Vodacce has fueled countless wild theories. Some speculate that he has come to hunt the Church's enemies. Others believe he now works for the Montaigne, slaying prominent nobles in an effort to weaken Castillian morale. A few outlandish stories even claim that he is a servant of Legion, and now strikes at the heat of Théah's most pious nation.

But the most chilling theory has only recently surfaced. It claims that El Camaléon has been hired by the Inquisition itself. Bored by Vodacce's unending politics, the assassin has agreed to Cardinal Verdugo's request and left his country to hunt their selected target: El Vago himself. If El Camaléon can bring Verdugo the Vagabond's head, he will have slain the ultimate target — and perhaps signed a nation's spiritual

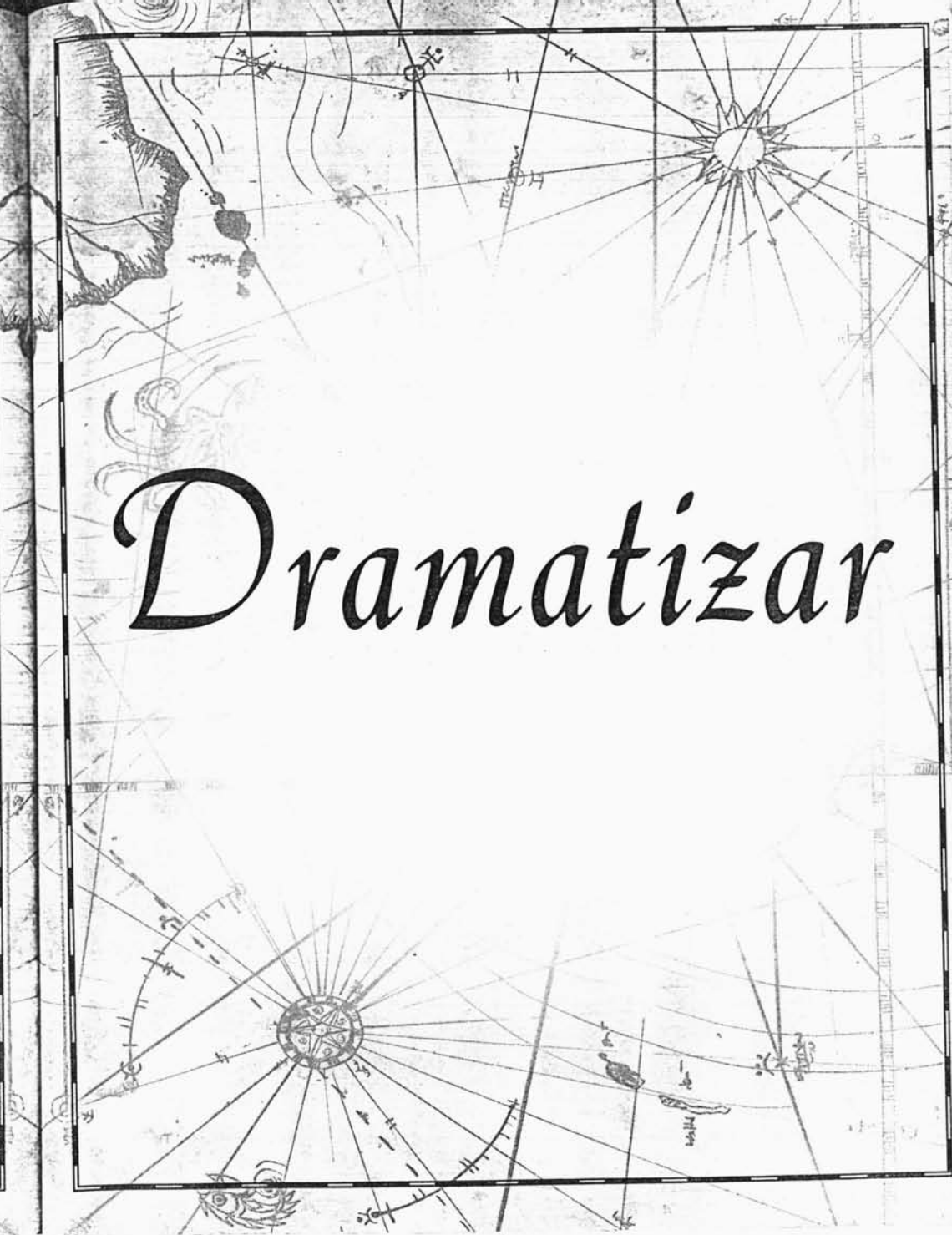


El Camaléon

death warrant. For a killer of his abilities, the prospect of such a prize would doubtless set his blood quickening.

Of course, this is just a theory. No one knows El Camaléon's true intentions... none save El Camaléon himself.

The killer only meets with his clients alone, and always hides his face beneath a hooded cloak. The few descriptions of him place him at about 30 in age, with a thin, muscular build and a smooth, almost featureless face. He never speaks above a whisper, making it impossible to determine any vocal characteristics. His eyes stare with focused intensity and he moves with the easy grace of a natural athlete.





"Mind your own business, *chica*." The second thug's voice smacked of false bravado. "You wouldn't want to get hurt, would you?"

A second pistol materialized in the woman's free hand, which she pointed at the speaker.

"I have you dead to rights, *muchachos*. Move along, or you'll be writhing in Legion's pit before your bodies hit the ground."

The three men considered for a minute, then withdrew back into the shadows. The woman watched them go, then replaced the pistols and slipped silently into the waiting carriage. The driver flicked the reins lightly; the carriage exited the alley and headed for the street in no particular hurry.

Inside, a man in a black great cloak deeply edged in fur sat against one corner, his hands, encased in gloves of the finest black leather, resting on his knees. He appeared unperturbed by the incident with the thugs; it was as if it had never occurred. Across from him, the woman delicately lifted her hands and turned the hood of her cape back from her elaborately-styled hair. Diamonds twinkled at her ears and around her neck.

"Your failure to provide accurate information proved quite costly." The man's voice was deep and low, yet there was a sharp edge of a threat in it, like a finely honed Soldano blade.

"It was only a theory, Your Eminence. A well-founded theory but a theory nonetheless," responded Doña Urraca Rioja.

"I do not pay you for your theories. I pay you for information. The information was incorrect and now I have lost a move to my opponent."

"I gather than Don Andrés is not the man you seek?" Under the folds of her cloak, Doña Urraca clenched her hands anxiously.

"Considering that El Vago appeared out of nowhere while Don Andrés was fending off a band of assassins intent upon murdering the King, no, apparently not. At least I now

A nondescript carriage waited in the alley behind a residence in the wealthiest section of Vaticine City. The driver wore a simple three-cornered hat and a dark cloak, and looked no more remarkable than any of a number of carriage drivers who worked for noble residents in the *de facto* capital of Castille.

As the carriage sat there, a trio of men detached themselves from the shadows of a nearby alley and approached. Their faces were ugly and brutish, their arms decorated with tattoos. Naked blades shone on their belts and their eyes held the gleam of stupid greed. They flanked the carriage like soldiers, looking the sleek horses up and down. The driver did not move.

"Hey *mi amigo*, you look like a friendly man," the leader growled up at him.

"Sí, very friendly," his companion chuckled. "Your *jefe* has a nice carriage. Probably gold too. Maybe you could ask him if he has any for his good friends out here." He slowly drew his knife.

Before he could act, however, a cloaked female figure appeared like an apparition from the shadows behind him. He turned slightly as she raised a cocked pistol several inches from his ear.

"Does your mother know you're out this late, children?" she asked.

know that El Vago is human because he was rather badly wounded before he managed his escape."

Urraca grimaced. She rarely miscalculated but in her profession even one misstep could mean the end of her career and her life. This was, after all, the Grand High Inquisitor and he could have her executed for treason with a wave of his hand. She would have to find some scapegoat on whom she could pin the blame for this and then exact revenge. That was a comforting thought...

"Is the King still alive?"

"Of course."

"Forgive me, Your Eminence, but I do not see how my information caused you a problem. Knowing that Don Andrés is not El Vago should have afforded you some comfort, should it not?"

"Whatever comfort I might derive from that information has been far outweighed by the loss of some of my best assassins."

"Your best... I don't understand." Doña Urraca sounded genuinely puzzled. She assumed that the Cardinal would have taken advantage of this attack on the King to reaffirm his loyalty, and by extension that of the Inquisition, to Castille.

"Surely you don't believe that any ordinary killers could have made it past the guards at the royal palace? That shows a streak of naiveté that concerns me. Perhaps you are not qualified to undertake this delicate mission, my daughter."

She took a deep breath to calm herself before responding. She had no intention of ending up as the object of some torturer's enjoyment.

"Forgive me, Your Eminence. I apologize if I appear to have doubted your wisdom. I still have much to learn. May I ask how your men fared?"

"Sadly, I had to terminate their employment." She suppressed a shudder at the thought. Verdugo was as always, truly distraught over the loss of one of the faithful.

She knew it caused him grief to dispose of the Vaticine's chosen in such a manner — and she knew he would do so as many times as he needed to in order to ensure proper obedience. She herself would be easy enough to remove should she prove troublesome. Urraca noticed the quiet gleam in his eyes and bowed her head in silent assent. *Point taken*, she thought. *Boldness and foolishness are easily confused. I shall take more care in the future.*

"What is the next step, Your Eminence?"

Cardinal Verdugo paused long enough to ensure her undivided attention.

"I believe that you deserve another chance, my daughter. El Vago is a dangerous foe, and has proven impossible to catch, even by a hunter as skilled as you. I have lost many faithful servants this night. I have no wish to lose more. However, be aware that I regard your failure in this new mission as a sign that you may not be a loyal Castillian or a faithful child of the Church. It appears that our young King has taken a fancy to Aldana's daughter and has requested that she remain at Court for a few days. We cannot afford an alliance between the houses of Sandoval and Aldana, so we must be certain that Señorita Maria-Soledad Rivera del Aldana is well received by the gentlemen of the Court. Very well received."

"I understand, Your Eminence."

"I thought you would." The carriage turned down an alley and stopped. "Ah, here we are then. You have been returned to your chambers safe and sound. Do not forget to say your prayers tonight, Doña Urraca. You must remember to give special thanks to the Creator for watching over you."

"Believe me, Your Eminence, I shall." She leaned forward to kiss his ring, then departed the carriage. As it drove off, she slipped inside the nearby door, moving through several empty chambers before collapsing in a chair beside a dying fireplace. Her heart pounded and her hands shook with the knowledge of her narrow escape. She sat there, panting, for a few more moments before composing herself.

Next time, El Vago, she promised. *Next time, it will be you...*

Joining Los Vagos

The cost for becoming a member of Los Vagos varies, depending on which "circle" one attempts to join. Different circles confer different advantages on their members, and are correspondingly more expensive. The resources available to members of each consecutive circle are listed with the group.

Heroes who have already purchased the Los Vagos Membership Advantage are assumed to be Affiliated Members, with the benefits and duties detailed below. If the GM permits it, they may increase or decrease the value of their membership using Hero Points or XP. Joining El Corazón requires 2 Hero Points or 6 XP beyond the basic membership. All other circles give back 1 HP or 3 XP for every Point below 5 which they cost. For example, if an established Los Vagos member wishes to reduce his affiliation to Patrón, he gains 2 Hero Points or 6 XP (5 minus 3 equals 2).

El Corazón (7 Points, Nobles Only)

Heroes who have attained this high position in Los Vagos risk everything. They put their family, their possessions and their honor on the line in the face of two enemies so overwhelming that their full power sends brave men running. Despite the danger, these men and women will do anything to protect those who cannot protect themselves. They have sworn the oath of *El Manifiesto* and are now willing to sacrifice their lives to stop the Inquisition and the Montaigne *chanchos*.

These individuals are unaware of the true identity of the other members of El Corazón (although some may know one or two), but they do know that they belong to a larger group of patriotic Castellians who have sworn the same oath and risk just as much as they do for the same reason. Because of this, El Corazón can draw on an almost inexhaustible source of power. As long as they live, El Vago will always have life.

Since almost all of the members of El Corazón belong to nobility, they do not usually need to depend upon Los Vagos for financial resources. In fact, they are expected to contribute each month to help maintain the organization (the exact amount is up to the players and GM, but it should be a reasonable figure). In addition, they must always keep a fast horse, a dark cloak, and a black mask within ready use at all times; one never knows when the Vagabond will require assistance.

In exchange for these limitations, members of El Corazón receive the following benefits:

- They can count on the support of their fellow Vagos when they are in trouble. Those who have been dispossessed by the invading Montaigne army can rely on their compatriots for funds, provisions, and even shelter if necessary, and the Inner Circle will endeavor to aid them if trouble arises. Every member of El Corazón knows how to contact one of the four Inner Circle members (exactly who is up to the GM) and ask for aid. This is considered the equivalent of a 3-Point Connection Advantage.
- Members who purchase the Athlete skill automatically gain either the Break Fall Knack or the Leaping Knack at Rank 1.
- When acting in the capacity of Los Vagos, members receive one extra Reputation die to spend per story.
- Members may help shape Los Vagos policy: selecting targets, planning missions, and generally guiding the organization's overall path. While this does not give them the right to command Los Vagos as they please, it does grant them certain influence in deciding how and where to expend resources. Exact details are up the GM.
- They may request to ride as El Vago on a particular mission, which entitles them to wear the Mask of El Vago and gain the attendant benefits thereof. This advantage cannot be used more than once every four adventures, and must be used when acting in the capacity of Los Vagos.

Note: The vast majority of El Corazón are native Castellians, with deep roots in their homeland. A Hero from a foreign country who wishes to belong should come up with

a plausible explanation (he saved El Vago's life, he hates the Montaigne or the Inquisition, etc.), subject to GM approval.

Affiliated Member (5 Points)

This is the normal level for most starting Heroes and the "default" membership listed in the *Players' Guide*. At this level, the Hero is in direct contact with a member of El Corazón, although he does not usually know the identity of his contact (the GM should determine the exact details). He receives funding and information from El Corazón, and in return is expected to carry out missions from time to time.

These members have the most resources available to them. They have the information provided to them by any Patróns they may have, in addition to whatever El Corazón may provide. They are also supported by more Compañeros than an unaffiliated Los Vagos group. Specifically, affiliated members receive the following benefits:

- A stipend of 200 Guilders every year, to be used on missions for El Vago.
- Regular contact with a member of El Corazón, who keeps them apprised of upcoming missions and potential threats. Consider this the equivalent of a 2-Point Connection Advantage.
- Members who purchase the Athlete skill automatically gain either the Break Fall Knack or the Leaping Knack at Rank 1.
- Access to the resources of Los Vagos through Patróns. Affiliated members may acquire any personal firearm, bow, crossbow, or melee weapon they wish without cost. This doesn't apply to dracheneisen weapons, Sidhe weapons, Syrneath artifacts, or other magic items. It doesn't include cannons or other heavy ordnance. It may include gunpowder and ammunition, however, and may also include "exotic" but mundane equipment such

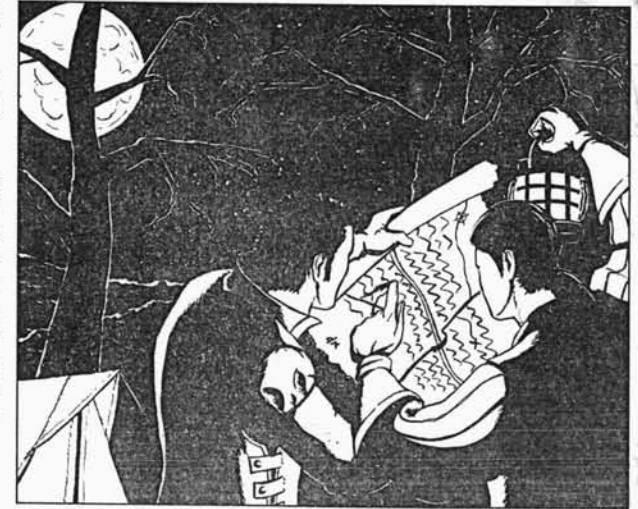
as lockpicks or grappling guns. Only two such weapons or items may be acquired at any given time.

• Finally, if traveling through Castille, they have their expenses paid for: food, boarding, and other incidentals. This represents aid from Los Compañeros. If they specifically request, they may have access to a carriage or a fast horse for the duration of one adventure. They must return such resources at the conclusion of the adventure (intact, if possible).

Unaffiliated Member (3 Points)

At this point, the Hero is a member, or perhaps the leader, of an independent group of Castellians who have pledged their lives to protect their country, either from within, in the case of the Inquisition, or from without, in the case of the invading Montaignes. They have no direct connection to El Corazón, but take inspiration from El Vago's actions and often act as the Vagabond during their escapades.

Unaffiliated members have the same benefits as affiliated members, except that they do not have contact with El



Sample Corazón

Don Stefan Guzman de Rios comes from the wealthy Rios family which has estates along the swift rivers flowing through Rancho Aldana. As a boy, he ran wild through the vast acreage of his family's estates, getting to know the inhabitants intimately. When he was a bit older his father sent him to live with his mother's uncle, Don Francisco Guzman de Aldana. While under Don Francisco's care he came to the attention of Don Andrés who offered to tutor the boy in swordsmanship. Stefan was an outstanding pupil, and one of the first to be taught the secrets of El Puñal Occulto. When Don Andrés began looking for allies to join his fight, Don Stefan was one of the first people he approached. At first he hesitated to become involved in attacks on his beloved Church, but Don Andrés' appeals to his patriotism and loyalty eventually brought him around.

Since then, Don Stefan has become one of the most enthusiastic members of El Corazón. He donates a large portion of his income to the cause, and no one is more eager than he to ride out with El Vago. The Inner Circle has put him in charge of recruiting and supervising the groups around the Rios estates, a task to which he brings his usual passion and energy. His youth sometimes works against him when he meets with the outlying groups, but he wins them over more often than not with his enthusiasm and the obvious strength of his convictions.

Corazón and lack the corresponding 2-Point Connection Advantage. (They do have their own Patróns and Compañeros, however, which accounts for their remaining benefits.)

Patrón (3 Points, Nobles Only)

Membership in the next circle beyond Los Compañeros, Patróns have a fairly low level of direct involvement with members of Los Vagos. Because of their high visibility or their family commitments, they cannot take risky actions, but they still contribute to the cause however they can.

While a Patrón does not actually ride on missions with Los Vagos, he or she may lead a very exciting life: spying on their fellow nobles and keeping out of the way of the Inquisition, and so on. Many Patróns funnel funds and information to the Los Vagos group with which they are affiliated. Some Patróns, like the Cordoba family, provide extraordinary financial support to the movement without otherwise becoming involved.

Though the flow of resources usually travels away from them, Patróns know that they can count on Los Vagos to come and rescue them in their time of need. They can also request protection from Los Vagos if they are in immediate danger, and can make use of any local Compañeros of whom they are aware. Aid may come in the form of shelter or providing money and a means of transportation away from the danger, whether it is on horseback or hidden under a pile of straw on a wagon. In addition, they have regular contact with a member of Los Vagos, either El Corazón or an affiliated member. This is considered the equivalent of a 2-Point Connection Advantage.

Compañero (2 Points)

This is the lowest level of membership in the formal organization of Los Vagos. Compañeros rarely become involved in adventures, and members of Los Vagos work very hard to keep them out of harm's way — not out of lack of respect for their fighting abilities but because they rely so heavily on them for support. Mistakes happen, and the life of a Compañero can be a very dangerous one. They provide shelter, bind wounds, hide fugitives, and perform countless other dangerous duties (see page 24 for more information).

A Compañero or Compañera does not necessarily have access to any specific resources. However, they will be recompensed (usually generously) for their efforts on behalf of Los Vagos, and if a Compañero gets in trouble, he can expect assistance in some form from the organization. The exact nature of this assistance and recompense is up to the GM, but keep in mind that Compañeros who regularly support the Vagabond will be more likely to receive help than those who do not contribute as much.

Sample Patrón

Don Hortensio Gonsalves del Cordoba is a successful merchant and member of the wealthy Cordoba family, living in the occupied town of Barcino. Because he provides supplies for the Montaigne army, he has been forced to stay in business — even though he hates the invaders with all his heart. He despaired of ever getting rid of the Montaigne until a strange man from the town appeared at his door one night, cloaked in black. The local resistance movement was most interested in recruiting Don Hortensio into Los Vagos.

Since Don Hortensio joined up, he has continued to do business with the Montaignes, but more and more of his supplies are being shipped out at night, in darkened wagons pulled by horses with muffled hooves. He has so far managed to cover up the shortages in the Montaigne supplies, but things are beginning to get a bit sticky.

Independent Cabals

The Hero Points listed above are for those Heroes who become members of an existing Los Vagos group. If a Hero (or group of Heroes) wants to create his or her own group of Los Vagos, they can do so by investing up to 10 Hero Points per Hero during Character Creation. The total cost for a group may not be less than 1 HP per Hero contributing to it. Game Masters may also use these rules to create Los Vagos cabals for their campaigns, in which case, they may ignore the Hero Point requirements.

Hero Points for forming a group may be distributed as follows.

Affiliation

It costs 3 Points for the group to be affiliated with El Corazón and have contact (either directly or through an intermediary) with the Inner Circle. This is considered the equivalent of a 3-Point Connection Advantage. Otherwise, they have no direct link with El Corazón or the Inner Circle.

Size (Varies)

1 Point: Small
3–5 members of Los Vagos
No Patron
2 Compañeros

3 Points: Medium
6–10 members of Los Vagos
One Middle Class Patrón (+100 Guilders per year)
3–5 Compañeros

5 Points: Large
10–20 members of Los Vagos
Several (3–7) wealthy Patróns (+500 Guilders par year)
More than 10 Compañeros

Leadership

A cabal relies on its leaders to give them direction and to keep their activities a secret from the Inquisition. A good leader can keep a cabal going for years without any contact from El Corazón. Weak leaders have already brought the Inquisition crashing through their door. Presumably, the Heroes will play the leaders of their respective cabal. If for some reason they do not wish to, it requires the following investment of Hero Points to purchase one.

Hero Leaders: 0 Points
A Hero is the leader of the chapter.

Fair Leader: 1 Point
The leader is fairly competent, and knows when to act to carry out an assigned mission.

Good Leader: 2 Points
The leader knows when to act and how to approach most situations without direction.

Great Leader: 3 Points
The leader knows how best to use each member of the group to their full potential.

Note: If for some reason the Game Master has to play the Leader as an NPC, it will of course add to his or her burden of cautious adjudication during the campaign, along with everything else that has to be juggled to ensure that the group has the best gaming experience possible.

Wealth

Los Vagos operations require money; because they are cut off from El Corazón, independent cabals must depend on their own resources to conduct their missions.

Destitute Cabal: -2 Points

The group has no income beyond that provided by the Heroes. They cannot take the "Secret Entrance" ability or spend any points on a Hideout. This disadvantage may not lower the cost of a cabal below 1 HP.

Average Cabal: 0 Points

The group usually has enough to eat and a relatively safe spot to live. They receive 500 Guilders a year from various sources, which they must spend on Los Vagos missions. The cabal gains one new member every two years.

Secure Cabal: 1 Point

Members have enough to support themselves, and can send a bit of money home to their families. They receive 1,000 Guilders a year, which they must spend on Los Vagos missions. The cabal gains one new member every year.

Successful Cabal: 2 Points

At least one NPC member of the group is a noble and throws the financial weight of his or her family into the group. They receive 2,000 Guilders a year, which they must spend on Los Vagos missions. The cabal gains two new members every year.

Hideout

Though hunted by the Inquisition, most cabals have a regular meeting place where they can congregate and make their plans. The amount of Hero Points spent indicates how secure such a hideout is.

0 Points

The members can go to their own homes and be fairly safe.

2 Points

There is an inn run by a Compañero who offers it as a safe house for the group where they can hold meetings or take refuge when being hunted or chased.

Sample Compañero

Carlos Rioja owns and runs La Posada de las Naranjas ("The Inn of the Oranges"), a successful wayside inn on the coastal road between Avila and Rioja. In addition to the many excellent services that Señor Rioja provides his guests, there are a few additional ones he only makes available to a restricted clientele. For instance, he always keeps at least one horse saddled and ready at all times, and a single room in back he never rents to anyone, regardless of their rank. Joaquín Orduño and other crewmembers of *La Venganza* can sometimes be found enjoying a glass of wine on the room's patio, and every now and then, the fresh horse has been replaced by a winded stallion streaked with sweat and blood. When asked about these things Señor Rioja merely shrugs and pours more wine...

4 Points

There is a farm or rancho belonging to a Compañero or sympathizer that the group can use as a base of action, and can hide in for over a week if needed.

Hideout Traits*High Vantage Point (1 Point)*

The cabal's hideout has a bell tower, is perched atop a high hill, or has some other means of viewing the surrounding territory. All Stealth rolls made to approach the buildings have a +10 to their TN. If it fails, members within always have time to prepare for any interlopers: fleeing, arming themselves, even preparing a hasty ambush if they wish. A guard must be posted in order for this ability to work.

Secret Entrance (3 Points)

The cabal's hideout has an entrance below ground, behind a storefront, or otherwise unseen. Members may enter the building unseen or escape if the cell is compromised. In terms of the Chase Rules (see pages 169-172 of the *GMs' Guide*), it gives members an additional 4 Raise advantage over any pursuers.

Secure Building (5 Points)

The laboratory is in a strong, solid structure, with stone walls and stout locks on the doors. All Climbing and Lockpicking rolls made in relation to the building add +10 to their TNs.

Weapons Cache (2 Points)

The cabal has a ready stockpile of swords, pistols, ammunition, and other weapons hidden somewhere nearby. Members can procure personal weapons for themselves if they need them, provide they return them when they are done. Only one weapon per person is allowed; Heroes can't expect to loot the arsenal at will.

Special Training

It is possible under certain circumstances to reach Rank 6 in certain Knacks. First, the Hero must have a Rank 5 in the Knack to begin with. Then he must find a fellow Los Vagos member sufficiently knowledgeable to instruct him and convince him or her to pass on what they know. Instruction costs 25 XP and can take anywhere from one month to one



year, depending on the circumstances (the GM has the final word). If these conditions are met, the Hero's Rank increases to 6. Keep in mind that the Hero is unable to teach a Rank 6 Knack to others; it simply means that he has it himself. Normally, only NPCs and retired Heroes have a Rank this high.

Three members of the Los Vagos have attained Rank 6 in a Knack, and can teach what they know to others. Their exact location often varies, so tracking them down may take some effort:

Disguise: Don Hector Ontiveros

Footwork: Don Cristóbal Acedo de Lopez del Torres

Ride: Doña Ximena de Gallegos

New Swordsman Schools

"This is the manner in which Castellians fight. They stand bravely with their bodies straight and their feet continually moving, as if in a dance, holding their arms and rapiers very straight against the faces or bodies of their enemies."

— Jorge Argento, *Los Paradojos de Defensa*

El Puñal Occulto (The Hidden Dagger)

Country of Origin: Castille

Background: Don Andrés Bejarano del Aldana is generally regarded (grudgingly so by more than a few Montañños) as a great swordsman in a nation full of great swordsmen. He perfected the Aldana School, the premiere fighting style of all the Castilian schools, but as time went by, Don Andrés became increasingly concerned that, given the current political situation, the school needed a few twists. As more and more swordsmen learned its secrets, practitioners of the Aldana School were at less and less of an advantage. It was getting to the point where even the

Sample Affiliated Los Vagos

Señorita Costanza Delgado was born in Altamira, the fourth child of a wealthy merchant. From an early age, Costanza showed an amazing aptitude as a storyteller; she could take the slightest item and weave an elaborate tale around it. After her first visit to a cousin's casa near La Selva de Fendes, she became entranced with the mysterious forest. Fortunately, her cousin had recently given birth to a baby and Costanza begged her parents to allow her to stay to help with the chores. While there, she began to meet other people her age, most of whom were engaged in all kinds of interesting research in La Selva. One of her new friends introduced her to a fascinating woman named Doña Aranxta Grijalva who was herself quite knowledgeable about the area of La Selva. Soon Costanza came to realize that spinning tales of demons was not the only thing she could do well. She could also prepare cover stories, explain mysterious disappearances, and generally put others' minds at ease. There was a vagabond out there who could use her abilities, and Costanza was only too happy to oblige.

pathetic Montañños *chanchos* could occasionally best a Castilian swordsman, and the soldiers of the Inquisition were becoming positively dangerous. That could prove fatal for members of Los Vagos.

As if in answer to his dilemma, one of Don Andrés' armorers came to him with a marvelous invention – a spring-loaded dagger so compact it could fit into the hilt of an *estoque* (the type of rapier preferred by the Aldana School). Based on this new invention and some knife-fighting tricks he learned as a boy, Don Andrés developed a new style of fighting he named *El Puñal Occulto*, "the Hidden Dagger."

He first tested his new creation on his daughter Maria-Soledad, a remarkably adept swordswoman in her own right. Her acute observations of the minute details helped him refine the style even further. Many of the original members of El Corazón had been Don Andrés' students or sparring partners; even after Los Vagos was formed, they continued to study with the great swordmaster. He quickly

helped them learn the new style in secret training sessions, but Don Andrés didn't limit it to his noble students. As he traveled throughout Castille, meeting with groups of Los Vagos and Los Compañeros, he taught them these techniques. No matter where El Vago appeared, he would wield the same deadly swordsman school everywhere. Its similarities to the Aldana school disguise its origins admirably, and with the war raging against Montaigne, few people wonder at a Castillian fencer with "a few new moves."

Any member of Los Vagos may pay 25 Points for this School or 20 if he knows the Aldana School as well. El Puñal Occulto is only available to members of Los Vagos.

Description: El Puñal Occulto is based on the well-known Aldana School, but adds a second weapon to the rhythmic moves and attacks of the Aldana style, either a *puñal* (single-edged dagger) held in the off hand or a spring-loaded blade in the hilt of the primary rapier (*el puñal del estoque*). The *puñal* is usually held with the blade running back against the length of the arm, so that it can be used in slashing attacks. While this shortens the attack range, it also makes the weapon far less vulnerable to a disarm maneuver. More importantly, it often hides the blade from the opponent's view, keeping it as a deadly surprise until it is too late.

This type of attack obviously requires constant motion by the user. The swordsman tries get as close to his opponent as possible, pin the opponent's blade, and then use either the *puñal* or the *puñal del estoque* to finish off his foe. Since most of the moves of El Puñal Occulto are based on the Aldana School, many foes will initially hang back, waiting for their opponent's moves to become predictable only to receive a nasty surprise when a dagger appears out of nowhere and runs them through.

The weakness of El Puñal Occulto is that it is something of a one-trick-pony. Once a foe becomes aware of the presence of the hidden *puñal*, much of the advantage is lost.

"He who looks for true defense in an untrue weapon may as well look for fish on dry land."

— Jorge Argentó, *Los Paradojos de Defensa*

Basic Curriculum: Fencing, Knife

Swordsman Knacks: Bind (Fencing), Corps-à-corps (Fencing), Pommel Strike (Fencing), Exploit Weakness (El Puñal Occulto)

Apprentice: Students of El Puñal Occulto learn to use both hands equally well in combat, permitting them to use either weapon effectively. The apprentice ability negates the off-hand penalty when using a *puñal*, and grants one free Raise when attacking with a *puñal* in your off-hand.

Students of El Puñal Occulto do not automatically gain membership in the Swordsman's Guild. Instead, they gain an extra Rank in one of their Swordsman Knacks for free. If they purchase membership in the Swordsman's Guild, they are instructed to disguise their technique as the Aldana school.

Journeyman: Journeymen have learned how to attack with their off-handed weapon when fighting close. If you succeed with a Corps-à-corps attack, you may automatically make a 1k2 knife attack without penalty. Your opponent still falls down and becomes prone, regardless of the outcome of this free attack.

"Of all the swordsman schools in Théah, those of Castille are the most difficult to remember, but he who learns their many intricate tricks is a master indeed."

— Jorge Argentó, *Los Paradojos de Defensa*

Master: Masters of El Puñal Occulto have become incredibly adept at timing the extension of the hidden blade to do the most damage to their opponent. Once per combat, a master receives a free pommel strike attack that can only be used after a successful Fencing attack. The damage done with this attack is rolled as a regular dagger attack. After this is conducted, the Hero can make an additional pommel strike instead of a regular attack, which resolves its damage the same way.

"Do not use the sword you honor to kill a chicken. Respect your weapon and it will repay you in kind."

— Jorge Argentó, *Los Paradojos de Defensa*

Sample Unaffiliated Los Vagos

With the school year barely begun, Martín Abravanel and his fellow students were still settling in to their fourth term at La Universidad de La Ciencia. After class, they often walked to the local *posada*, their youthful spirits undiminished by the political and religious crisis in Castille. Over a bottle of wine, they discussed the lectures of the day, until one afternoon, when an older man asked to join them. Never ones to turn down free wine, Martín and his friends agreed. They listened as he spoke in low tones about what he had seen and heard throughout the country – militia and Knight Inquisitors dragging innocent people from their beds in the middle of the night, hunting down honest farmers, even taking the elderly away from their families on charges of heresy.

On their way back to their rooms, Martín and his friends agreed to stop at their favorite *panadería* for some *pan dulce*. The baker's shop was small but his bread was excellent and the students always made a point of overpaying a bit so that the man had some extra money for his family. As they turned the corner, they saw several men dressed in Inquisition robes barge into the *panadería* and begin shouting at the baker. They rushed to the store in time to see the guards force the baker to give them bread for free, claiming that he should be grateful for the opportunity to serve the Church. The young men stood paralyzed at the scene, afraid to lift a finger in opposition to the masked fanatics. They helped the baker clean up his shop, but the incident gnawed deeply in their hearts.

Frustrated with their failure to assist their friend in need, they stayed up all night planning how to prevent such things from happening in the future. They were, after all, only students, but they remembered what the man in the *posada* told them about groups of partisans who follow the way of El Vago.

Three nights later, Martín donned a grinning white mask and stepped out onto the rooftops...

Gustavo Horseman School

Country of Origin: Castille

Description: The proud horsemen of Castille have learned how to use their swords while mounted. The Gustavo school developed out of an effort to create swordsmen who functioned equally well while either mounted or dismounted. It trains its students in the use of a standard blade while on horseback. Though some feel that such tactics lack the honor of classical dueling techniques, more pragmatic Castilians see the value of its versatility... especially those who don grinning white masks in the dead of night.

The main strengths of the Gustavo school are its devastating speed, and ability to remain out of harm's way. Students learn to strike fast and hard, using the size and

maneuverability of their mounts to the best advantage, then escape before their opponent can counterattack.

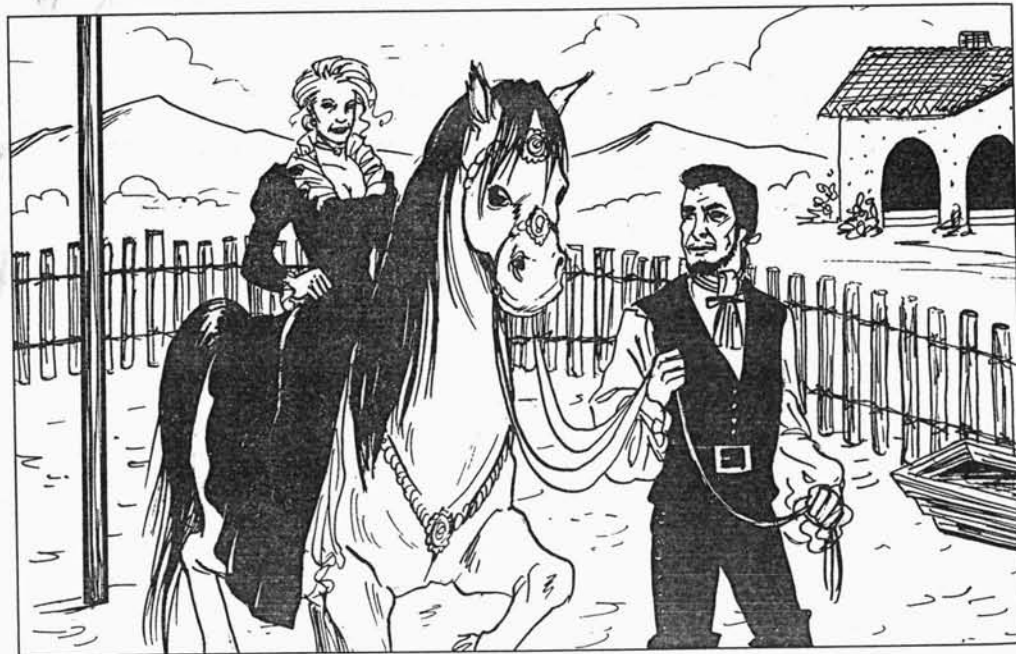
However, if the rider has no means of escape, he's in a great deal of trouble. Gustavo techniques leave a fighter vulnerable after a short period of time, and horsemen without an easy exit may find themselves pulled from their mount and disemboweled at leisure.

Basic Curriculum: Fencing, Rider

Swordsmen Knacks: Charge (Fencing), Cavalry Attack, Trick Riding, Exploit Weakness (Gustavo)

New Swordsman Knacks

Charge (Fencing): Students of the Gustavo school try to hit early and often, then withdraw to a place of safety. You may lower one of your Action Dice by your Rank in this Knack



New Skill

(to a minimum of 1) just before Phase 1 of the first Round of each combat.

Cavalry Attack: This replaces the Attack (Fencing) Knack when using a sword from horseback.

Trick Riding: Trick Riding lets you stand while riding (TN 15), do handstands on horseback (TN 20), hang off one side of the horse for cover (TN 20), and other flashy tricks. A well-trained mount (GM's discretion) may reduce such target numbers by 5 (Miguel and Ximena de Gallegos [see pages 61-62] sell such horses, but they charge over one thousand Guilders apiece for them). This is the same as the Trick Riding Knack in the *Players' Guide*, but is considered a Basic Knack for students of the Gustavo school.

Apprentice: Apprentices of this style learn to use their swords while mounted to keep their enemies at bay. You receive +10 to your initiative total during the first round of each combat. Also, when you use your Cavalry Attack Knack during the first round of combat, you roll and keep one extra die of damage when you hit. Finally, you gain a Free Raise on any attempt to control your horse without using reins. You must be mounted in order to use these abilities.

Journeyman: Journeymen have learned how to use their mounts to the best possible advantage, and can instinctively guide horses into performing amazing feats. You gain a number of Free Raises equal to your Mastery Level (Apprentice = 1, Journeyman = 2, Master = 3) for all Trick Riding and Animal Training rolls, and one Free Raise to any Chase rolls you make while on horseback. In addition, you suffer no off-hand penalty while wielding a sword on horseback.

Master: The true Masters of the Gustavo school know to attack early and often, and they appear as bladed hurricanes as they attack their enemies. At the start of a Round, you may choose to borrow against next Round's Actions. Thus, if your Panache is 3, you may perform up to 6 Actions this Round, but if you choose to roll all 6 Action Dice, then you receive no Actions next Round. You may use this ability only once every other Round. You do not need to be mounted to do this (although it is preferred).

Waylay

A key strategy in the continued success of Los Vagos is the ability to attack a foe from a position of surprise. The Vagabond's followers are often outnumbered; they thrive on finishing the combat before their opponents even know it has begun. The two components of this ability are the ability to plan an ambush and the skill required to make everything go off without a hitch.

Basic Knacks

Lie in Wait: The element of surprise is essential to an ambush; the Heroes must wait undetected for hours until their target is in place. This Knack represents the patience required for such waiting, as well as the knowledge to select a proper spot. It can involve anything from knowing how to conceal oneself in the shadows to blending in with the tall grass along an open country road. It also means that the Hero has the ability to remain perfectly still while in hiding — no matter what distractions he may have to endure.

Set Traps: Numerous snares and traps can aid in an ambush, all of which must be set beforehand — trip-wires, pit traps, self-locking doors, and the like. This Knack enables the Hero to design and set these devices properly. It differs from the Traps Knack in the *Players' Guide* because its targets are human beings, not small animals, and require different techniques to properly construct.

Shadowing: The Hero knows how to blend in with crowds unobtrusively while following a target in a city or other urban setting. If done correctly, the target will never become aware of the Hero's presence and no one will recall having seen the Hero when questioned. This Knack is commonly used as a contested roll against the victim's Wits.

Advanced Knacks

Ambush: You have learned how to spot likely places for an ambush to occur and watch for signs that people have

concealed themselves there. Naturally, this Knack cuts both ways, allowing you to set up an ambush of your own.

Camouflage: The ability to blend in is very important if one wishes to conduct a successful ambush. This represents a knowledge of proper clothes, an instinctive feel for shadow patterns, and the use of nearby leaves, twigs, and grasses on one's person in order to blend in with the scenery. A successful use of this Knack may lower the difficulty of a Lie In Wait check, depending on the TN and the GM's discretion. This Knack functions best in the countryside, and the GM may disallow its use in urban environments.

Land on Target: The best way to surprise someone is to land on them from above. This Knack enables the Hero to leap from a tree, a wall, or a building onto his target — anything from a Knight-Inquisitor to a stack of barrels to a waiting horse. It represents the ability to time jumps properly, ensuring that the Hero arrives at the right place at exactly the right moment.

Snatch and Grab: This knack represents the ability to lean down and grab something from the ground while riding on horseback. The difficulty increases as the size of the object to be snatched decreases.

New Advantage

Area Knowledge (3 Points)

Many members of Los Vagos have an intimate familiarity with the region in which they live, and know the best places to set up ambushes or hide from searchers. Knowledge of a particular locale can be extremely useful when being chased through the countryside or when trying to find the perfect spot from which to observe a Montaiño encampment. Select a particular city, town or segment of the countryside. The character rolls an extra unkept die when making Ambush checks, and receives one Free Raise on any Chase rolls he makes in that particular area.

New Background

El Vago

The Hero has worn the clothing and white mask of El Vago. Whether he is the only member of his particular cabal who wears the mask, or whether he has only worn it once, he has borne the burden and responsibility of this role, and it will have changed him in some dramatic way (to be determined in cooperation with the Game Master). He is probably wanted by the Inquisition (though his identity remains unknown), and his subsequent missions must be very cautious, lest El Vago's enemies swoop down and snatch him up. Note that the mask might not be the same one worn by Andrés Aldana, but is only the one which his or her group uses.

Vaticine Relative

Someone very close to you belongs to the Vaticine Church, serving as a priest, scholar, or some other function. This makes them particularly vulnerable to the Inquisition if your connection to Los Vagos become known. They could be tortured for information or, worse, voluntarily turn you over to Verdugo's thugs. The more points you spend on this Background, the more your relative shares the Inquisition's beliefs... and the more likely he will betray you if he learns your secret.

New Equipment

El Esoque Occulto

The chosen weapon of Don Andrés del Aldana's new swordsman school, this rapier has a spring-loaded dagger in

the hilt. It looks completely normal but close inspection reveals a small button underneath the hilt that can be pressed to release an 8–10 inch blade from the pommel. The weapon is called *el puñal del estoque*, and has the same stats a standard knife.

The Mask of El Vago

Whoever wears the white mask of El Vago — whether it is finely tooled leather or a simple cloth mask — is revered as a savior of the people, which increases his or her natural leadership abilities. The user gains a bonus of 3k2 to any Leadership or Awe rolls whenever wearing the mask.

New Rules

Leaping From Rooftop to Rooftop

The following rules were originally published in the *Knights of the Rose and Cross* sourcebook. Because Los Vagos Heroes often make use of them as well, they have been reprinted here for your convenience.

Heroes, especially members of Los Vagos, do a lot of leaping from one building to another. The distance between buildings is very important in these maneuvers. If it is less than five feet, jumping from one rooftop to another is a free movement if they are both the same height. If the distance between buildings is more than five feet, a Finesse + Leaping Roll against a TN of 15 is required (most urban Castilian settings have distances between five and ten feet; the GM has the final say, and should adjust the figure based on the particulars of the setting). Failure indicates that the Hero falls to the ground. Add 5 to this TN for every additional five feet of distance the Hero is attempting to leap. If the Hero tries to leap onto a building that is taller than the one he is currently on, add 5 to the TN for every Level (see Movement During Combat in the *Players' Guide*,

page 192) of difference. If the building the Hero is leaping to is shorter, then subtract 5 from the TN for every Level shorter it is. However, falling damage from the leap does apply.

Example 1: Maria-Soledad wishes to leap across a 10-foot gap from one Level 3 building to another Level 3 building. Her TN is 20 (base 15 + 5 for the extra five feet).

Example 2: Maria-Soledad wants to leap across a 10-foot gap from a Level 1 building across to a Level 3 building. Her TN is 30 (base 15 + 5 for the extra five feet + 10 for the extra two Levels).

Example 3: Maria-Soledad wants to leap across a 15-foot gap from a Level 4 building to a Level 2 building. Her TN is 15 (base 15 + 10 for the extra ten feet minus 10 for the reduction of two Levels), but she will suffer 2k2 falling damage unless she lands on something soft. (Luckily for Maria, she has the Break Fall Knack.)

Awnings

All awnings are considered to a Soft surface for purposes of falling damage. However, when a Hero falls or jumps onto an awning, roll a die. On an even number, the awning tears and dumps the Hero to the ground below. It still acts to cushion the falling damage he would normally take, but could deposit the Hero in a vat of hot wax or something equally unpleasant. Moreover, if the awning is more than 1 Level above the ground, the Hero must still take damage for the fall from the awning to the ground itself. Lastly, once an awning is torn, it cannot be used to cushion a fall.

Example 4: Maria-Soledad falls off a Level 6 building onto an awning below. She rolls a die, getting a 6. The awning tears and dumps her onto the fishmonger's cart below, leaving her smelly but unharmed. If the awning had been on Level 3 (three higher than the ground's Level of 0), she would still have taken damage as if she'd fallen off a Level 3 building.



El Juego



"Are you certain you're all right?" Sandoval asked again. Don Andrés smiled.

"Please, Your Majesty, I will be fine. I must apologize to you for not anticipating such a threat before it came crashing into your throne room."

The two were ensconced in Sandoval's meeting chambers. A trio of guards loomed by the door while Cardinal Verdugo stood ramrod straight in the corner. He had been absent earlier that evening, but took care to return to the palace in time to attend his rival's conference with the King.

"It is clear that matters in our beloved nation grow more chaotic by the day," Verdugo spoke commandingly. "If even the walls of the palace can be breached, I insist that we cancel your schedule until further protective measures can be taken." He looked adamant, and Don Andrés knew that it was no use arguing with the churchman at this point.

Sandoval took Don Andrés' hand. "I was not afraid, Don Andrés, really. I knew that you would deal with the killers." The young monarch actually seemed energized by the incident, the way all young men did when they believed they were invincible.

"I appreciate Your Majesty's kindness, but it is not I who saved you, sire. It was El Vago who arrived just in time, thank the Creator." Don Andrés caught a slight narrowing of the Cardinal's dark eyes. It was clear that if Verdugo

caught El Vago, things would not go well for the renegade patriot. *Whoever that imposter is I must find him and warn him, Aldana thought to himself. I owe him a debt.*

"Ah, yes, the mysterious El Vago." Sandoval looked starry-eyed. "I have heard stories about this masked champion of the people. I... I had never seen him before today..."

The Cardinal made a harsh sound. "It would have been just as well, Your Majesty. He is no friend of yours nor of the people, but a villain who flaunts your authority. I assure you that he will be caught and punished to the full extent of the law. It is only a matter of time."

The young King shrugged and smiled at Don Andrés. "Perhaps so," he chewed his lip thoughtfully. "But then again, even outlaws may be patriots."

Don Andrés bowed deeply to the king. "I am sure that your Majesty will deal with El Vago appropriately. And now, you must forgive me, but it has been an exhausting day. With your permission..."

"Yes... yes, of course, Don Andrés. Sleep well. We will talk more in the morning." The king gave him a cheerful wave, excusing him for the evening.



Climbing the stairs to his chambers was painful and as Don Andrés limped upward, he wondered how many more times he would be able to ride out as El Vago. Who was that masked man in the hallway? Obviously it was neither him nor Gervaso, and the figure had not been as tall as Don Hector (who was, in any case, halfway across Castille right now). The stories must be true, then: people had taken it upon themselves to don the white mask. But how could someone know the precise moment that he was needed? How could this El Vago arrive just in time, unless he had somehow anticipated the attack?

He knocked on his daughter's door and received muffled permission to enter. He was greeted by the sight of Gervaso applying bandages to a wound on Maris-Soledad's side. Had she had an accident, had she fallen or been hit by something, perhaps in the kitchen? The wound was on her right ribcage and from the bloody clothes on the table beside the bed, it appeared to be deep. Deep enough to...

Para los Prophetas!

"You fool!" he shouted. "How could you have endangered yourself that way! What were you thinking? What kind of a noblewoman goes about pretending to be a man and dueling with assassins? You could have been killed!" He was almost blind with anger.

To his surprise, his daughter did not shrink back or burst into tears. She rose and stood unsteadily, hanging on to the bedpost for support.

"How could I *not* endanger myself when you and King were threatened? Should I have stood by the window and watch you be butchered? And how dare you insult me by asking what kind of woman who would do all these things! The kind of woman you taught me to be! Who taught me to ride? To shoot? To handle a sword better than any man in Castille?"

Don Andrés was taken aback by the cold fury — and cold logic — of her argument. Before he could pose a response, she continued her harangue.

"You acted as Los Vagos without telling me. You kept your activities a secret from me. Am I some child to be protected? Am I a delicate flower who will wither in the light of the truth? Tell me, Father, is the danger to Castille only to its men, or are the women also threatened by the Inquisition and by Montañños *chanchos*? Have you not taught me that it is the responsibility of every Castillian to do all she can in defense of our beloved homeland? Do not speak to me of foolishness, nor of duty. Believe me, I know the difference: I was taught by the best!"

With that, she collapsed back into her chair and clutched her right side. Gervaso knelt beside her, inspecting the

bandages from which bright red blood had begun to seep. Don Andrés forgot his anger as he saw the look of pain on her face. He walked quietly over to her and knelt by her other side, tears in his eyes.

"Forgive me, my angel. You are right and I am wrong. You were very brave out there and I owe you my life. But you were also very foolhardy. I do not know what I would have done if I had lost you!"

The young woman smiled through the pain and wiped her father's tears away. "Do not cry, *padre mio*. I will heal in no time and then we can begin to plan our next move. I think it is time you and Don Hector included me in these secret meetings of yours."

Don Andrés looked up at her sharply, as if to reprimand her once again, but a sharp chuckle from Gervaso stopped him. He glared at his servant, who only nodded in silent agreement with the girl then went back to bandaging.

"And why should I allow you to attend these 'secret' meetings?"

"I'll don the mask again, with or without your permission." Her fierceness had returned. "You can't stop me without locking me up, and I know you won't do that. Let me join your crusade, and at least you'll be able to keep an eye on me."

Andrés didn't know whether to kiss the girl or strangle her.

"When did you become so willful?" he growled.

"I told you, I learned from the best."

He sighed. "Very well. You may join Hector and I at our next meeting — just as soon as your injury heals to my satisfaction."

Maria-Soledad beamed from ear to ear.

"Good," she said. "Then it's settled."





Motivation

The first question you must ask yourself when designing a member of Los Vagos is: why did your Hero join the movement? El Vago has caught the attention of Castille as no hero before him. Wherever he appears he is cheered, and many common people have risked their lives to support him (whoever he is). Nonetheless, the actual number of Los Vagos is very small: less than four hundred across all of Castille, including all of the outlying groups.

As mentioned in Chapter One, becoming a member of Los Vagos means imperiling not only yourself but also your family and loved ones. It means being prepared to leave your home at any moment and ride across the countryside to attack a group of men who are better armed, better equipped, and quite possibly better trained than you. It means living in constant fear of the informer, of the knock on the door in the middle of the night, of the grim faces of the Knight Inquisitors as they drag you away for "questioning." Small wonder then, that most Castellians are content to cheer when El Vago rides by and then return to the comfort and safety of their homes. The real surprise is the number of Castellians, both men and women, willing to take the risk and join Los Vagos in their struggle.

So what kind of person joins Los Vagos? Why would your Hero sign on for such a life? What does he or she hope to

gain? Each person has his own reasons, which you should develop carefully with your GM. Most reasons generally break down into a few broad categories, however.

Nothing Left to Lose

This Hero has already lost everything he has to the Inquisition, the Montañños, or simply through bad luck. Ruined men and women, with nothing left to lose, sometimes decide that if they are going to die, they should do it in the service of a good cause. Perhaps your Hero is a noble who lost his estates to the advancing Montañño *chanchos* or a merchant who lost everything when his business dried up. Thousands of peasants displaced by the war now have nowhere to go except the capital, and things are getting fairly crowded around San Cristóbal these days. In desperation to find for something to live for, any of these people may join up with Los Vagos.

Vengeance

Although one normally associates vengeance and vendetta with the Vodacce, they also serve important roles in Castellian life. A Castellian takes his honor very seriously and will die defending it. Vengeance is probably the most common reason for joining Los Vagos. Between the Inquisition and the Montañños, almost everyone in the country has lost someone close. Some people choose to deal with their grief by swearing vengeance against those who caused their bereavement. Riding with Los Vagos offers them the perfect opportunity to settle a score while helping their country at the same time. If you come to Los Vagos solely for vengeance, however, be prepared for some mistrust by other members; they know that people will sometimes lose their heads in their grief and fury, and make stupid mistakes. Such rash behavior can endanger the mission, their companions, and ultimately the movement itself.

If a desire for vengeance motivated your Hero to join Los Vagos, think about who or what your Hero lost, who or what he blames for that loss, and what he plans to do about it. Then don't let *anything* stand in his way.



Patriotism

Castillians as a people are known for their fierce and abiding devotion to their homeland. The nobles in particular display passionate love of their country, their people, and their King (they can also afford to be affected by such abstract concepts as nationalism and patriotism, while the peasants concern themselves with more practical matters). For many nobles, the current situation demands addressing. What true Castellian could stand by and watch while the Inquisition and Montañños destroy everything his nation stands for? Joining Los Vagos gives such characters the opportunity to make a substantial contribution to both

of these causes and put a little excitement in their lives as well.

If your Hero joined Los Vagos in the cause of patriotism, think about how he feels in terms of the Inquisition's activities and what the Montañños are doing to the land. Some members of Los Vagos, particularly the nobility, may have qualms about attacking any branch of the Church, regardless of how evil it has become; nonetheless, having sworn to El Manifesto, they must do as they are instructed. Your Hero should have a firm idea about his feelings towards the Church, and reconcile his patriotic motivations with the very real possibility that he might come into conflict with the Vaticine. Such a dilemma can make for some fine role-playing, and will also help solidify your Hero's patriotism in a specific direction.

Non-Castillian Heroes

Though Los Vagos exists to protect the Castellian people, not all members are Castellian, and not all adventures involving organization take place in Castille. There are plenty of ways for non-Castillians to become involved with Los Vagos — though they require planning and forethought. Players should think carefully about their Heroes' motivations: they need to care about Castille for some reason, or at least oppose the forces currently oppressing her. Then they should consider how they make contact with Los Vagos, and in what sort of capacity they serve. Some examples include:

- The Hero is aboard a ship captured by *La Venganza* and, having acquitted themselves well in the defense of their vessel, are given the opportunity to join the crew.
- Montaigne has many enemies, all over Théah. The Heroes are either from one of the nations that opposes Montaigne (basically all of them) or have their own reasons for hating the Empereur and his forces. They decide to throw in their lot with the Castellians, and either form their own group of Los Vagos or join with Don Andrés.
- The tentacles of the Inquisition stretch long and far; in one way or another they have made themselves felt throughout most of Théah. Heroes in almost any part of the

world may run afoul of Cardinal Verdugo's minions in any of a number of ways. Their experience at the hands of the Inquisition may motivate them to seek out a group of Los Vagos and join them in their fight.

- A non-Castillian Hero being held in one of the Inquisition's numerous *carrels* may be rescued by Los Vagos and subsequently become involved with them out of gratitude and/or a need to repay the Inquisition for the horrors they inflicted upon him.

- As mentioned in Chapter One (pages 34–35), Los Vagos has much in common with both the Rilasciare and the Invisible College. It would not be *too* surprising if some major event brought representatives from all three groups together to work towards a common goal.

The Group

Having decided why your Hero joined the movement, the question becomes which level of Los Vagos did he join, where, and in what capacity? A Hero can be a member of El Corazón, a member of a group connected to El Corazón, a Patrón, a Compañero or part of a group acting independently. Depending upon the player's preference, the Hero may join a band in which the role of El Vago is rotated among the members, or ride as El Vago himself. Which group and which role will work best depend on what kind of Hero is being played and what kind of campaign your players desire.

Castillian nobles have the widest choice of options. They can belong to El Corazón, serve as a Patrón, or conceivably work among the Compañeros. If their rancho or hacienda lies some distance from San Cristóbal and Vaticine City, they might become a member of one of the other affiliated groups in an outlying area, or perhaps take it upon themselves to form a new group, themselves riding as El Vago. Although the Inquisition has yet to figure it out, many of the Los Vagos groups in the outer regions of Castille are actually run by the local dons. If the noble was from one of the ranchos overrun by Montaigne, they will most likely be lending their efforts to the war.

A noble from another country who lacks Castillian blood may run into problems, however. It will difficult to get the locals to join or even support a group led by a foreigner, and the Castillians' natural xenophobia means that the Hero must work long and hard to earn their trust. Unless he has brought a band of retainers with him, he may have to join a group as a member and work his way up before taking over leadership of the group.

Castillian swordsmen can be members of El Corazón, or join or even lead one of the outlying bands. Swordsmen from other countries cannot hope to be more than a member of one of the outlying bands, unless they have Castillian blood.

Pirate characters from any nation can become Patrones (assuming they are successful pirates or are willing to lend their ship to the movement's efforts), Compañeros or members or leaders of outlying bands. Their sailing skills will often be used to transport fugitives, ferry members on missions, or even provide cannon support during coastal raids.

Sorcerers of any type are not generally welcomed in Los Vagos; most members are devoutly Vaticine and deeply distrust the magical arts. El Malvado's ongoing rampage does not help matters in this regard. However, sorcerous powers are too potent to be ignored, and the Inner Circle understands that possessing magic does not necessarily make one wicked. A number of Los Vagos have sorcerous blood (including at least one member of El Corazón, Arantxa Grijalva), and their abilities have benefited the cause immeasurably. Though kept at arm's distance until their honor can be proven, sorcerous Heroes may find a band – possibly somewhere in Rancho Gallegos where surviving practitioners of *El Fuego Adentro* still exist – which is willing to accept them in exchange for the use of their art in defense of Castille.

Priests and other officials of the Church will have a very difficult time overcoming the understandable suspicion of Los Vagos. However, the organization desperately needs informants to tip them off to Inquisition activities. If a priest has a reputation for honesty, he may be able to convince a

group of Los Vagos to allow him to join. Once he belongs, he may find himself heavily depended upon for information, Church documents, or even alibis. Priests who have proven their worth are among the Vagabond's most valuable allies.

The other part of the decision as to which element of Los Vagos a Hero should join has to do with what kind of campaign the players are involved in. The Game Master's section, below, has more details.

El Juego (The Game)

No matter who the Hero is, what his motivation may be for joining Los Vagos, or what type of group he joins, he must follow certain inalienable rules. The cabals which comprise Los Vagos must often act on their own accord, and are far too disparate for any single code of conduct to apply to all of them. Yet all of them follow certain basic creeds, ensuring that the spirit of El Vago remains true regardless of individual circumstances. Of course, a Hero can violate this code, but it will ultimately undermine the game and the organization to which he belongs.

Heroes belonging to Los Vagos are expected to *always*:

- Protect the weak and helpless from oppression by the strong. Defend those who cannot defend themselves from all who would harm them.
- Show respect and deference to one's social superiors.
- Show respect to women of all stations.
- Show respect and devotion to the Vaticine Church, if not its clergy.
- Show respect for one's enemies. A man is judged by the ability of those who oppose him.
- Act in the best interests of the Castillian people, and the nation which they represent.

These "rules" apply whether one is in direct contact with one's enemy or planning a raid from one's headquarters. One must always makes plans to insure the safety of non-

combatants, particularly women, the poor, and (most) members of the clergy. A true Vago always takes responsibility for the consequences of his or her actions, and ensures that the end never justifies the means.



Peligro!

The following section contains material that is intended for the GM only. Players who ignore this warning may spoil countless surprises for them during the game.

Role Models

Many people believe that the concept of El Vago appeared from nowhere, riding out of the night like a demon sprung full-blown from some nether region. In fact, nothing could be further from the truth. El Vago comes from a long line of heroes who have devoted their lives to saving their fellow beings from enemies great and small. The exploits of Robin Goodfellow in Avalon, St. Gregor in Eisen, and the famous Montaigne Musketeers, all form a proud history of which El Vago is merely the latest incarnation. The wise El Maestro de Juego will keep the Vagabond's impressive lineage in mind when creating the game's settings.

Like numerous other vigilante heroes, El Vago operates from behind a mask. Like them, his worth to his cause

would be completely nullified should his or her identity be revealed. Luckily, no single person rides as El Vago; the figure has grown too large for one individual to embody. If Maria-Soledad Rivera del Aldana was revealed as El Vago (the Prophets forbid!), it would crush the movement in San Cristóbal, and heavily cripple the organization... but the Vagabond would continue in the guise of some other patriot. This unique property gives El Vago a certain security which other heroes in a similar vein have lacked.

Goals

It is important to understand that no matter how courageous Los Vagos are — no matter how well organized and intelligent they are in their planning — they will never defeat the Inquisition. They may defeat its specific goals, or even eventually bring down the Cardinal himself, but in a perverse way the Inquisition is as much an expression of Castille as El Vago. It will not disappear until the people's need to destroy what they fear disappears. Nor can Los Vagos, by themselves, defeat the massive armies of Montaigne, who in their own way embody the same thing as the Inquisition. The war against Castille began following the Church's attack on Empereur Léon. They wished to destroy him because he embodied values which they found abhorrent. Léon, for his part, heartlessly condemned the Castillian people for the same reason. Both sides saw something in the other which they disliked... and both sides resolved to destroy it. Until Castille — indeed, all of Théah — can eliminate such urges, the foes which El Vago faces will always exist.

This permanence forms an integral part of the swashbuckling genre. Like those who came before them, the goals of Los Vagos are actually fairly modest. They want to stop the Inquisition's plans where they can, save as many people from the flames as they can, and deal as much damage to the Montaignos as they can. They know that they are not going to destroy the Inquisition or the Army of Montaigne, but they are going to help. Their desire to buck the odds, their need to fight on even though

final victory will elude them, is what defines them as heroes, and what makes their struggle so worthwhile.

What does this mean from a game perspective? The inability to completely rid Castille of the Inquisition or Montaigne also means that in their struggle, groups of Los Vagos are fundamentally reactive rather than proactive. Since the Inquisition can withstand direct attack, Los Vagos must wait until it makes a move and then strike a counterblow. Los Vagos functions far more effectively in terms of immediacy: rescuing a noble who has just been arrested by the Inquisitors rather than planning a long-term campaign that ends with the storming of Vaticine City.

Los Vagos is a political and military movement rather than a social one. Its members act as heroes of the people and fight long and hard for them. They also do their best to see that the people's physical needs are met. But they focus their energies on defeating Castille's enemies, not in



forming social revolt. Not only do they have no interest in overturning the social order whose excesses and inherent evils they fight against, but they firmly oppose any change at all in the overall structure of their society. Castille was happy with its government before the Inquisition changed things, and would be perfectly happy to continue living under that government until the arrival of the Fourth Prophet. Los Vagos does not wish to overthrow a tyrannical ruler or establish a new system of government — it wishes to preserve the Castillian way of life.

The Los Vagos Campaign

One of the great things about the Las Leyendas de Los Vagos ("The Legends of The Vagabonds") is that they lend themselves to many different kinds of campaigns. Since no two groups of players are the same, it helps a GM to have a wide variety of campaigns available. A few prominent examples and guidelines are discussed below:

The Guerrilla Campaign

This is the classic campaign, the one most players think of when they think of playing Los Vagos. In this campaign the Heroes become members of a group of Los Vagos and join the fight to free Castille. Those who choose this type of campaign tend to be tough, fearless caballeros because this work is not for the faint of heart.

Organization

There are a number of variations on this campaign. The first set has to do with the composition of the group, which can be set up in a number of ways.

- The Heroes may be part of a larger group of Los Vagos in which El Vago is a non-player character. This is best for a group of less experienced players with new Heroes, since El Vago can assign them appropriate missions, and the

other NPC members of the group can back them up if they run into trouble. As the players and their Heroes both gain more experience, they can move up the organization until, upon the tragic death of the current El Vago, one or more of them can don the white mask and ride as El Vago themselves. Be warned that this kind of campaign can put an extra burden on the Game Master, who not only has to roll up and play all of the villains, but must now play many of the NPC heroes too.

- The Heroes may be part of a larger group of Los Vagos where El Vago is one of the players and the rest of the gaming group act as the senior members of the band. This is best for a more experienced group that enjoys planning and carrying out large-scale operations. As in the previous type of campaign, it can be quite a challenge for El Maestro del Juego, although the players can take up some of the burden themselves.

- The Heroes may comprise the entire group of Los Vagos, and decide among themselves who will ride as El Vago. This could mean that only one of them is chosen as El Vago, or that all of them share the role. Unless the group of players is very large, the Los Vagos group in this campaign is going to be fairly small, which limits the types of adventures in which they can participate. This type of arrangement works best for players more interested in role-playing and individual swashbuckling than large-scale military raids.

Regardless of the number of Heroes and NPCs, and their position in the organization, the Game Master must insure that the Heroes feel that they are making an important contribution to the group. This can be tricky in a group where the leader and/or senior members are NPCs. If all the players can do is stand on the sidelines and watch other characters swash their bucklers, they will quickly lose interest in the game.

Another problem arises if the players come to rely completely on El Vago and don't develop any problem-solving skills on their own. If they know that El Vago and the rest of the team will always come to rescue them if they falter, they won't have any incentive to behave in a

competent manner. The best way to handle this is to give the Heroes individual missions that allow them to go off on their own but still stay within their level of expertise.

Setting

The second type of variation in the Guerrilla Campaign has to do with the setting. Specifically, you must determine where the campaign is set. There are a number of possibilities:

- The campaign is set in a city, which means that most, if not all, of the Los Vagos group live with their families and have regular jobs. They must be especially careful not to attract the attention of the Inquisition, who will be far more concentrated in the cities than in the countryside. A campaign set in a city will involve a lot of leaping across rooftops at midnight, swinging through windows, and desperate flights down alleyways. Keeping one's identity hidden is far more important in a city where the Inquisition Guards can easily find not only the Hero but his family as well.

- The campaign is set in the country, which means that the Heroes may or may not live with their families, or have regular jobs. If they do not, they presumably act as a classic guerrilla band, hiding out in a secure spot in the countryside and living off the contributions of the local farmers or Los Compañeros. A campaign set in the country involves dropping down onto one's enemies from trees, planning ambushes in narrow defiles, and long night gallops with cloaks billowing in the breeze. While Heroes in this situation do not have to worry as much about hiding their identities, they will have to concern themselves with keeping their supply lines open, not offending the local peasantry (upon whom they depend), and ensuring that their secret lair remains secure and undiscovered.

- The campaign is set in Montaigne-occupied territory. This setting becomes far more militaristic in outlook, requiring a knowledge of military terminology, an understanding of the Montaigne army, and an overall familiarity with warfare. There is not a lot of opportunity for flamboyancy here, but spies in an encampment (and groups

such as La Muñecas, see page 41) have the delicious challenge of going about undetected, gathering as much information as they can, and then making their escape, either in the dead of night (requiring a knowledge of the watches and split-second timing) or in the heat of battle (requiring the ability to dodge fire from both sides). Other missions might include strategic raids against Montaigne forces, kidnapping important enemy officials, or engaging in "counterintelligence" adventures (i.e., stopping Montaigne spies from revealing important information about the Castillian forces).

- The campaign is set on the high seas. The Heroes are crewmembers aboard Joaquin Orduño's ship, *La Venganza*, or another vessel (perhaps their own) which serves a similar purpose. This is a wonderful opportunity for nautical Heroes who wish to be involved in a Los Vagos campaign. High seas adventure, often serve as variants on the countryside campaign, with *La Venganza* (or whichever ship they're on) taking the place of the secure hideout. The Heroes attack Montaigne ships, smuggle supplies (and contraband) to other Los Vagos gangs, transport important persons to clandestine meetings along the coast, and so on.

El Corazón Involvement

The final variation in the guerrilla campaign concerns the group's alliance to El Corazón... or lack thereof. There are advantages and disadvantages to both options. Heroes formally affiliated with El Corazón receive information and financial support, and can request help if they need a larger force in order to accomplish their goals. On a more intangible level, the Heroes will have a sense of being connected to the larger fight, and perhaps have the opportunity to see how their victories and defeats affect the overall progress of the struggle. A Game Master running an affiliated campaign has the advantage of providing easy motivations for the Heroes. An adventure becomes smooth and convenient when El Corazón can come along at any time and drop the necessary clue (and instructions) in the players' laps.

The downside is that players may sometimes become too dependent on El Corazón, relying on the senior members

to do their thinking for them. Players could reason that there's no sense in trying to figure out what to do when they always receive instructions on just what to do next. GMs should work carefully to avoid such a development: provide the party enough incentives to act on their own accord, allow them to glean clues without El Corazón's involvement, and give them a good sense of their foes without having to depend on a superior to provide them with information. El Corazón should be an asset to parties like these, not the sole source of motivation.

While groups unaffiliated with El Corazón can be more difficult to motivate, they also have a sense of acting independently, and usually have the feeling that they have achieved their goals on their own, without the help of outside agencies. Unaffiliated groups are best for players who like to make their own plans and not answer to anybody for their results. Of course, this means that they do not have the resources which El Corazón can provide, and must depend on themselves for nearly everything. Some parties may prefer it this way, however.

Running a Guerrilla Campaign

We have been referring to this sort of campaign as a "guerrilla" campaign, but that is not strictly true, except for those which take place in Montaigne-occupied Castille. Most guerrilla wars have long-term goals, often the expulsion of an invader. A Los Vagos guerrilla campaign asks the question "How do you expel an invader when he lives in your country?" The Inquisition, although extremely unpopular, is not going anywhere soon. It is firmly entrenched not only in the hierarchy of the Church but in the government of Castille. No one but the Hierophant or the King can remove it now. At present there is no Hierophant, and Good King Sandoval lacks the authority (and perhaps the will) to seriously challenge Verdugo's power.

This situation may give some Game Masters pause. If Los Vagos cannot ultimately destroy the Inquisition, what is the point of running a Los Vagos campaign? While Los Vagos may not be able to completely eliminate the suffering caused by the Inquisition, they can do a lot to help. Their quest is

to stop Verdugo's worst excesses, help the people as much as they can, and keep Castille hopeful until a new Hierophant arrives or the King takes it upon himself to challenge the Church's authority. It is also worth noting that, as much as he would like to, El Vago doesn't try to alleviate the suffering of all the people. He keeps his operations local and therefore can do a great deal of good within his restricted area.

Similarly, Los Vagos Heroes should set their sites on curbing the worst excesses of the Inquisition, helping the people as much as possible, and keeping the light of hope burning in their hearts. The darkness can't last forever. Eventually a new Hierophant will be named, hopefully one who will put a stop to the Cardinal's ambitious ploy to rule the land. Even young kings grow up eventually (the Prophets willing!) and hopefully this one will cast off the yoke that the Cardinal has fitted for him, and become the king that Castille needs him to be. Until then, El Vago needs to be there, protecting the poor and defenseless and bringing light to the darkness.

The Game Master should keep the operation of his campaign local. Set up an area of Castille that the Heroes can call their own. If you want to run the campaign in a city, make sure that it has a church, a prison, a home for the alcalde, a military outpost, a rancho on the outskirts of town, dark alleys, several inns and lots and lots of chandeliers. If you want to run in the country, set up a couple of villages (each with its own church and inn), a huge rancho, several deep mountain passes (with plenty of boulders on the cliffs above) and a hideout for the Heroes, especially if they are being actively hunted by the Inquisition or Montaigne. This should be the limit of the campaign. The Heroes must then act to keep this area safe and free from the taint of the Inquisition. A man who fights for a small area which he knows and loves will fight harder and take greater satisfaction in his or her triumph than a soldier in a huge regiment, slogging away in a fight in a strange land.

Another advantage of a "confined" campaign is that it becomes easy to introduce and maintain an ongoing cast of

NPCs. The owner of the local inn who helps when he can, the lovely daughter of the local don, the bumbling captain of the local militia and the cruel head of the local Inquisitors will help build up a history with the Heroes, making each adventure richer and more exciting.

Give some thought to both the location and layout of the Heroes' hideout. It needs to be easily accessible for them while being difficult, if not impossible, for searchers to find. The approach should be defensible if not impregnable, and the hideout itself should be large enough for the Heroes to live in comfortably, even if it is not particularly elegant. The players should have some say in what goes into their "home"; it would be a good idea to sketch out at least the interior, so that they have a proper sense of space. And if they are going to be living off the land, make sure that the area surrounding the hideout can support them.

Villains

The most important part of a guerrilla campaign, of course, is the villain. Villains form a more or less permanent foil to challenge your Heroes and put a human face on the nebulous evils they fight. To give yourself as much flexibility as possible, put at least two different groups of villains in your campaign; that way, the Heroes don't grow bored with the same threat week after week. A Los Vagos campaign has at least one main enemy already (the Inquisition), but perhaps the hills to the north also harbor a desperado who occasionally preys on the locals, or the local don is secretly planning on damming up the local river to keep all the water for his rancho (thereby starving out the local farmers). They may even have a group of Montaigne soldiers, working behind the lines and attempting to disrupt Castilian activities in the nearby area. By adding a second or third threat, the GM can keep the Heroes on their toes and ensure that the campaign never grows stale.

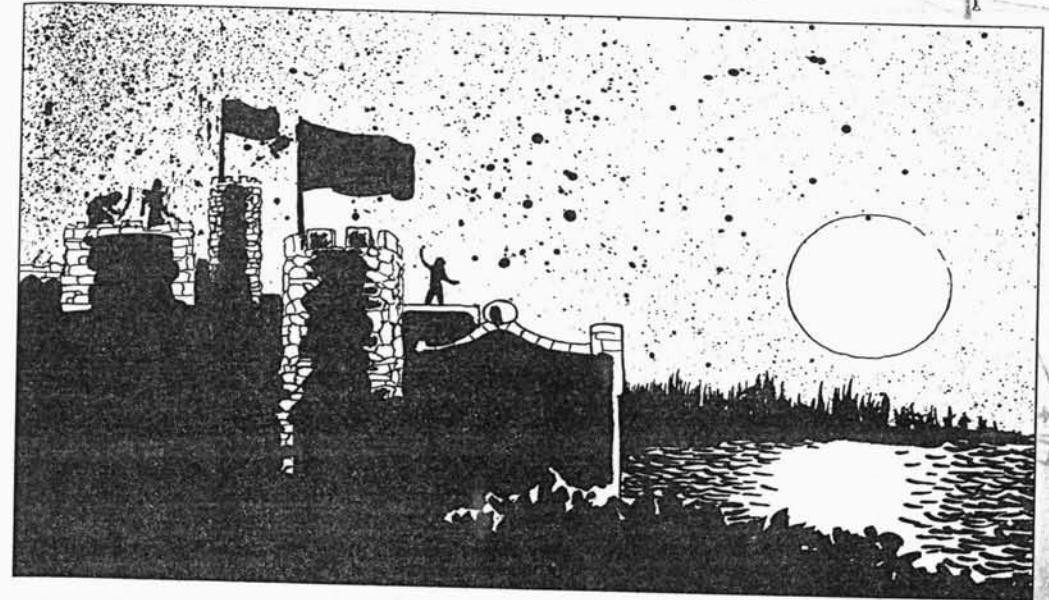
It is rare for a villain to act alone. Figure out the structure of the various groups of enemies that the Heroes will face. In the case of the local don, how many men does he have working for him? How many will follow his orders? Does his wife oppose his wishes or support them? As for the Inquisition, remember that it has well-staffed branches in

every region of Castille and sometimes a *carcel* or prison as well. Inquisition buildings are usually, but not always, attached to the largest church in the region, and they have the power to act as they please with impunity.

The Inquisition is a huge faceless monstrosity, and in a Los Vagos campaign, it is important that evil have a face. The local head of the Inquisition (probably a Bishop or other high-ranking official) has to be an enemy worthy of El Vago. Here again, careful preparation will pay off handsomely down the line. Give some thought to what motivates your villain. Why did he join the Church? Why did he become a member of the Inquisition? Is his loyalty entirely to the Church? To the Verdugo? To the people of Castille? What are his personal goals? Is he motivated by personal aggrandizement or by a desire to further the cause of the Inquisition? How does he feel about the Inquisition? Is he a sincere believer or does he just see it as a means of improving his station? It is worthwhile to draw up a character sheet for all of your major villains, spending whatever points you feel are appropriate, to give yourself an idea of what their capabilities are. Do not necessarily short them on combat skills. The Lords of the Church come from many backgrounds, and some had considerable military training before they received their vocation.

Once you have your main villains fleshed out, do the same thing for your secondary villains, such as the foreman on the rancho or the Bishop's curate. It is very likely (and in fact advisable for good story-telling) that your Heroes will have to deal with the lower ranks first, perhaps for many adventures, before they get the chance to confront the main villain, so pay careful attention to your secondary villains.

Of course, no area is completely populated with villains. Most of the inhabitants of your region will be well-meaning, hard-working folk who just want to live their lives in peace. There will also be heroes in the populations too, although perhaps not of the stature of the players' Heroes. These men and women are also eager to serve Castille, but may not be prepared to dedicate their lives to El Vago. Since the Heroes will inevitably come into contact with some of these



various types of people, it is also a good idea to have given some thought to them too. Possibilities include:

- *Alcalde*
- Priest
- Merchant
- Innkeeper
- Hostler
- Blacksmith
- Servant
- Farmer
- *Vaquero*
- *Caballero*
- *Campesino*

The Campaign

With your campaign area mapped out and populated you should be ready to begin. The campaign's initial adventures should give the Heroes the opportunity to explore the region and develop relationships with its major characters –

parties with the local alcade, a farmer's missing daughter, and the like. The Heroes should also get an opportunity to learn about the best ways to set an ambush, storm an estate, question a captive, etc. As the campaign progresses, you can make use of the relationships and skills to create more complex (and satisfying) scenarios.

As mentioned before, this is mostly a "reactive" genre, which means that adventures will most often seek the Heroes, rather than the Heroes having to look for them. This puts pressure on the Game Master to have a good-sized stock of ready events ready in which the Heroes can involve themselves. In Castille, many of these events revolve around the rescue of locals from the hands of the Inquisition, but that story line will eventually get stale. Consider adding some complications to the standard rescue scenario, such as:

- The Heroes are faced with several problems at once; perhaps you have asked them to choose between rescuing

the local alcalde from a band of ruffians or protecting their hideout from discovery.

- The Heroes make good friends with someone, only to discover too late that their new and seemingly trustworthy acquaintance is actually a Knight Inquisitor. They must rescue a prisoner of the Inquisition without revealing themselves to their new "friend."

- A fairly routine rescue turns out to be a set-up – the person they wish to save actually works as an agent of the Inquisition.

- The Inquisition does not limit itself to the weak or the innocent. The Heroes rescue a kidnapped prisoner who turns out to be a truly wicked sorcerer. They must now recapture the criminal and decide what to do with him; he may even be so powerful that the Heroes will need to temporarily ally with local Knight Inquisitors to defeat the evil creature.

- A less dramatic variant of this scenario has the rescued prisoner ascribing to the beliefs of the Crescent Empire, the Ussuran Orthodox Church, or some other heathen belief. This may cause a serious dilemma to Heroes with strong Vaticine loyalties, and perhaps force them to choose between compromising their beliefs or leaving an "innocent" in the hands of the Inquisition.

- The Heroes reach the location of a rescue or raid only to discover that another El Vago is already engaged in that activity – and appears to be badly outnumbered! Do the Heroes join in the fray? Assuming they all survive, do they ask El Vago to join them, or tell him that they don't need his help?

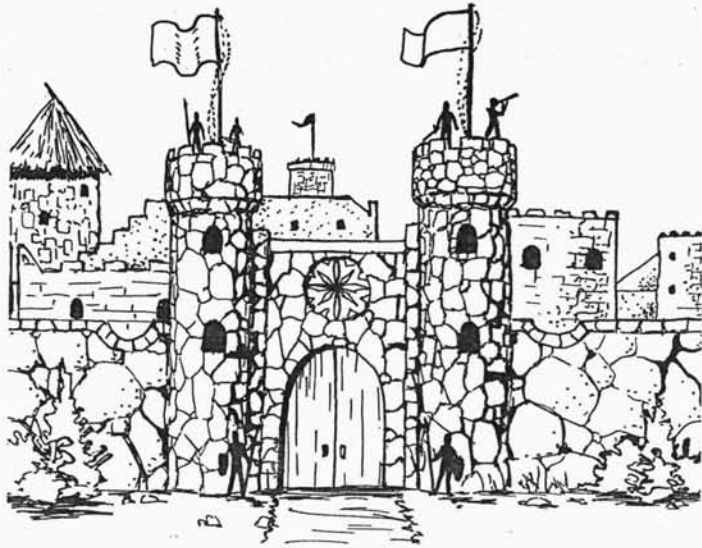
There is no end to such adventures. Perhaps the time will come when Los

Vagos from across Castille will rise up together to put an end to the enemies of Castille once and for all. Until that day, at least we know that the white-masked vagabond will be there, riding out of the night, bringing a promise of hope for all oppressed Castillians.

Other Campaigns

Spies

Two sorts of spy campaigns fit well into a Los Vagos campaign. The first one places the Heroes deep inside the Inquisition itself. Character types in such a campaign would almost certainly be members of the clergy, although there could conceivably be room for a fighter or two, perhaps as members of the Vaticine Guard. Impersonating a Knight Inquisitor may be possible as well, but also raises the danger of discovery. In addition, it could easily put the Hero, especially a priest, in some extremely difficult moral dilemmas, such as agreeing to torture a prisoner in order to maintain their "cover."



Unlike the current spies within the Church the Heroes should start off knowing each other, or perhaps discover each other's identities during one of the first adventures. One of the helpful things about a spy campaign is that it can easily motivate Heroes to undertake any adventure the Game Master has in mind. Players can overhear clues from their enemies which takes them in the right direction or, when all else fails, their superior can give them direct orders.

Most spy campaigns are episodic in nature. The Heroes receive assignments from their secret contact in El Corazón, which they must then fulfill to the best of their ability. Such assignments might include:

- Obtaining a list of the Inquisition's next victims in a city of the GM's choice. They must filch it from the Cardinal's personal office, smuggle it safely out of Vaticine City and deliver it to their contact (probably Don Hector or someone in El Corazón), or a designated middle man.

- Finding (or, if necessary, planting) some evidence of wrongdoing on a bishop or high-ranking official to give Los Vagos some control over him.

- Relaying potential threats to the organization. If, for example, Cardinal Verdugo lets slip that he has finally managed to place a spy in El Corazón, then El Corazón must be informed and the spy's identity must be discovered immediately.

A spy campaign can also involve an extended story arc, working towards a specific overall goal that may take months of game play to achieve. Such a campaign would follow an outline similar to the following.

- The Heroes discover (too late) that a member of the Invisible College has been brought before the Inquisitional Court and sentenced to death. El Corazón wants the scholar rescued; failing that, the party must find out why he was condemned and what he has to say for himself about the situation before the Inquisition burns him.

- Depending on their degree of success the Heroes either rescue the scholar or get to him before he dies, and discover

that he has successfully translated a passage in an ancient tome, which details an artifact known as La Piédra de la Verdad ("The Stone of Truth"). According to the text, the Third Prophet himself once held the stone, and imbued it with a portion of his holy power. The artifact supposedly enables the user to know with absolute certainty whether a speaker is telling the truth or lying. The artifact was lost when a hideous beast attacked the Prophet in La Selva de Fendes, and its current whereabouts are unknown. The text, however, leaves several tantalizing hints about a possible resting place. (This episode can be complicated by having the Heroes reach the scholar too late, and then having to somehow extract the information from his torturers.)

- La Piédra de la Verdad would be of inestimable value to both the Inquisition and Los Vagos, either of whom could use it to discover any spies in their midst. Cardinal Verdugo has already assembled a party of clergy and soldiers to retrieve the artifact. The Heroes do not have time to wait for El Corazón to act. They must either somehow get onto that party, or travel to La Selva de Fendes on their own.

- After a number of encounters on the road (and a few hair-raising adventures in La Selva de Fendes) the party recovers La Piédra. The artifact lies in the midst of great peril and the Heroes must use all of their wits to claim it.

- Now all they have to do is avoid the Cardinal's search party, get out of the forest alive, make it back to Vaticine City without being overcome by brigands (the perfect opportunity to use a local Los Vagos cabal as the cavalry), and get La Piédra de la Verdad into the hands of El Corazón. *No es problema!*

A second type of spy campaign, more military in style, places the Heroes somewhere in the command structure of the Montaigne army, from which they must feed information to a group of Los Vagos. Military Heroes would be the most appropriate here, although the players must work out why a group non-Castillians would act in support of the Castillian cause. Perhaps one Hero's mother was Castillian, and instilled a love of her native country in her son's bosom. Or perhaps the Heroes are Eisen mercenaries, and Castille's plight has moved them to clandestinely switch

sides. Spies working for Los Vagos inside the Montaigne army report directly to Don Cristian Acedo de Lopez del Torres, who receives their reports and issue their orders.

Many of the adventure hooks listed for the Vaticine spies could be used for a Montaigne army campaign with very little alteration. The spy business is pretty much the same regardless of the circumstances, location, or even century.

Patróns

Most Castillian nobles would never dream of swinging from a chandelier unless they were escaping from a jealous husband. Although they never fail to rescue a señorita in distress, they do not go riding about the countryside in search of them. Patrón campaigns are designed for nobles such as these: heroic spirits who wish to contribute to Los Vago in subtler ways.

A Patrón campaign requires an established noble at its heart (although players who wish to can easily find roles as servants, bodyguards, and colleagues). The ranks of Castillian society are more easily scaled than those of other nations, but only those who can trace their ancestry back at least several generations receive the respect (and lack of scrutiny) that a Patrón requires. This is not a hack-and-slash, kill monster/get treasure type of campaign. In Patrón stories, a quick wit is more powerful than a quick draw and a raised eyebrow can sink a fleet. The group definitely needs to be as adept at thinking their way out of a sticky situation as they are fighting their way out of it.

It is tempting to think of Los Vagos Patróns as spies operating at Court rather than inside the Church, and in fact many of their functions are similar to those of their counterparts in the Vaticine Church. Like them, the noble allies of Los Vagos also work to uncover secret information. However, they have another, more active function: to protect their King and their country. Patróns must often watch Good King Sandoval, and ensure that his enemies never get too close to him. They must also monitor allies and enemies at the court, for a passing comment can mean the difference between life and death to those Vagos in the

field. They must do all this in addition to providing funds and resources to keep the organization functions.

A Patrón campaign centers mainly around the Castillian court. Members may be asked to perform a number of clandestine missions requiring tact and diplomacy. A list of pertinent examples is detailed below.

- Ruin the reputation of an ally of the Church.
- Gain a new ally. This might not necessarily be an ally for Los Vagos, but perhaps an ally against the Church (at least one willing to work against the Church's more oppressive policies) or the Montañños.
- Host an event (i.e., hunt, ball, festival, etc.) to either cover up a clandestine meeting or keep an important personage away from one.
- Convince Good King Sandoval or one of his advisors that a specific course of action is not in the best interests of Castille. Similarly, convince an influential courtier that El Vago is not necessarily the menace she thinks he is. Such missions can be very tricky, for the Patrón must achieve his goals without revealing his true allegiances.

An interesting variation on a Patrón campaign has the Patrón connected to one of the outlying groups of Los Vagos, rather than Aldana and El Corazón. This works particularly well for a single-player campaign, although multiple noble Heroes can act as Patróns. (Perhaps they all belong to the same family: the younger members form the group and the patriarch or matriarch, who is too old to go gallivanting about the countryside, bankrolls their activities in secret.) Such characters are often the highest-ranking nobles in a given area and concern themselves less with the interactions with other nobles than the interactions with the local clergy, army and peasantry. This can lead to some wonderful adventures as the noble attempts to:

- Smuggle arms, ammunition and other supplies to Los Vagos across enemy territory.
- Worm his or her way into the affections of the local clergy, which would include overt devotional activity as well

as charitable actions (and sizeable donations to the Church, of course!)

- Arrange for diversions to keep the local garrison busy while Los Vagos conduct operations.
- Set up and maintain a network of local spies to keep tabs on the opposition.
- Pass information back and forth between El Corazón and the local group of Los Vagos. Similarly, pass subtle disinformation to suspected members of the Inquisition.

Single Member Campaigns

Some adventuring parties may not have more than one or two members of Los Vagos within them. The other Heroes have their own lives and agendas, usually completely separate from the Vagabond's goals. Such groups rarely remain in Castille for any length of time, and their campaigns rarely mesh comfortably with El Vago and his missions. How a GM facilitate a Los Vagos adventure in such circumstances?

As mentioned in "Non-Castillian Heroes" on pages 89-90, Los Vagos has a presence outside of Castille. Members such as Reynaldo Torres do the Vagabond's work in far-flung

locales, and El Vago's enemies do not limit their activities to Castillian soil. Lone Vagos members in a mixed party will probably be charged with pursuing these foreign interests, performing the Vagabond's duties in lands beyond Aldana's reach.

Members in this situation should be Affiliated (the "default" membership; see Chapter 3), and have a regular connection with either the Inner Circle, or an El Corazón in Castille (members of El Corazón almost never operate outside of their country). The exact method of communication should be worked out in advance: most likely, the Hero has a regular series of meeting places where he makes contact with a middleman, or "checks in" for orders using reliable couriers, coded messages, and the like (Reynaldo Torres makes an excellent facilitator for this, and the GM can easily create similar NPCs located in other countries).

The types of missions for these lone Vagos include:

- Getting a fugitive from the Inquisition out of Castille and to a safe locale.
- Stopping an Inquisition operation in a foreign country.
- Transporting a new Invisible College invention back into Castille for use by Los Vagos.
- Thwarting the Montaigne war effort by disrupting military shipments, misleading spies and other operatives, or lobbying for peace in *l'Empereur's* court. Alternately, bringing pressure to bear on Montaigne from other sources by assisting Vesten raids, arranging for foreign trade embargoes and the like.

Heroes in a "Lone Vago" situation rarely don the mask of El Vago, at least outside of Castille. Though famous across Théah, the Vagabond lacks the same mystique in foreign nations that he has in his native land. Appearing in the guise of El Vago often does little good in, say, Eisen or Ussura, and often has the effect of drawing unwanted attention to the Hero's activities. Despite that, it may occasionally be beneficial for a lone Los Vagos member to appear as the Vagabond in a foreign country. The sight of El Vago foiling their schemes – even in some cold and distant land –



would give even the harshest Inquisition agent pause. If he can appear in such faraway locales, then maybe he truly is something supernatural...

As always, the party's overall composition should be carefully considered before allowing one of them to join Los Vagos. Though a Vago can get along with most types of Heroes (even sorcerers), certain characters may cause friction within the group. A patriotic Montaigne who believes in his country's invasion will have a hard time working with a Los Vagos member, while a devout Ussuran Orthodox party member may see Castille's woes as a just reward for the corrupt Vaticine Church. The GM should monitor the entire party's beliefs, much the way he would for any other secret society, and make sure that everyone's Heroes can work properly together.

It's up to the player whether he chooses to reveal his affiliation to the other Heroes or not. Presumably, they will play a large part in helping him fulfill his duties. Unless they're uncommonly dim, they will probably realize who their companion works for. If this causes no problems, fine. Otherwise, the player may need to come up with some creative solutions to disguise his affiliation. The GM should be prepared to assist him in these endeavors, and prepare some kind of plausible cover story that protects the Hero's secret without marginalizing the other players (no one likes being fooled, after all).

And of course, Los Vagos stories in a mixed party should be balanced with the rest of the campaign. Though the other Heroes can assist their friend in his missions, they have their own goals to achieve and will quickly grow bored if forced to help El Vago every adventure. Lone Vagos in a group of foreigners should expect to serve the secret society on an intermittent basis — once in a while as opposed to regularly — and assist his fellow Heroes in their efforts as cheerfully as they assist him in his.

NPC Secrets

This section contains the secrets of the new characters in the El Héroe section which were too sensitive to give to the players.

Don Andrés Bejarano del Aldana: Hero	
	<i>Brawn:</i> 3
	<i>Finesse:</i> 5
	<i>Wits:</i> 4
	<i>Resolve:</i> 3
	<i>Panache:</i> 5
	<i>Reputation:</i> 79
	<i>Background:</i> Rivalry (Verdugo) <i>Arcana:</i> Altruistic

Advantages: Castillian (R/W), Montaigne (R/W), Théan (R/W), Castillian Accent (Aldana), Castillian Education, Connections (Commoners), Membership (Los Vagos) (Swordsman's Guild), Noble, University

Courtier: Dancing 3, Diplomacy 5, Etiquette 4, Fashion 5, Oratory 5, Politics 4, Scheming 3, Sincerity 5

Scholar: History 2, Law 3, Mathematics 2, Philosophy 2, Research 1, Theology 2

Spy: Conceal 3, Cryptography 3, Disguise 4, Shadowing 4, Stealth 4

Aldana (Master): Exploit Weakness (Aldana) 5, Feint (Fencing) 5, Riposte (Fencing) 5, Tagging (Fencing) 5

El Puñal Occulto (Master): Bind (Fencing) 5, Corps-à-corps (Fencing) 5, Exploit Weakness (El Puñal Occulto) 5, Pommel Strike (Fencing) 5

Athlete: Break Fall 2, Climbing 3, Footwork 5, Leaping 3, Side-step 3, Sprinting 3, Swinging 4, Throwing 2

Fencing: Attack (Fencing) 5, Parry (Fencing) 5

Riding: Animal Training 1, Mount 4, Ride 5, Trick Riding 4

Don Andrés' stats here have been updated from the *Castille* sourcebook, and are considered definitive. As the founder and guiding spirit of Los Vagos — and one of the King's most trusted advisors — Don Andrés plays a dangerous

game in this double life of his. Should Cardinal Verdugo ever figure out his role in the patriotic movement, not only would his life be forfeit, but that of his daughter and possibly the society he helped found. Thankfully, Los Vagos has outgrown his individual sphere of influence, and his capture or death, while harmful, would not spell the end of the Vagabond.

Don Hector Ontiveros: Hero	
	<i>Brawn:</i> 4
	<i>Finesse:</i> 3
	<i>Wits:</i> 3
	<i>Resolve:</i> 3
	<i>Panache:</i> 2
	<i>Reputation:</i> 37
	<i>Background:</i> Vow
	<i>Arcana:</i> Perceptive

Advantages: Castillian (R/W), Théan (R/W), Castillian Accent (Soldano), Castillian Education, Faith, Membership (Los Vagos) (Swordsman's Guild), Noble

Courtier: Dancing 2, Diplomacy 4, Etiquette 4 Fashion 3, Oratory 3, Politics 2

Scholar: History 2, Law 5, Mathematics 2, Philosophy 2, Research 1

Spy: Conceal 5, Cryptography 5, Disguise 6, Shadowing 3, Stealth 3

Streetwise: Socializing 2, Street Navigation 2, Underworld Lore 4

Aldana (Journeyman): Exploit Weakness (Aldana) 4, Feint (Fencing) 5, Riposte (Fencing) 4, Tagging (Fencing) 5

Fencing: Attack (Fencing) 4, Parry (Fencing) 3

Firearms: Attack (Firearms) 3

Knife: Attack (Knife) 4, Parry (Knife) 3, Throw (Knife) 3

Riding: Animal Training 3, Mount 2, Ride 4, Trick Riding 2

Don Hector is perhaps the most valuable member of Los Vagos — moreso even than Don Andrés. As the chief of Los Vagos' intelligence, he knows more about the organization than anyone. He makes numerous appearances in the white mask, and keeps a close eye on the day-to-day operations of

multiple cabals. Should he fall into Inquisition hands, the results would be dire indeed. So far, Cardinal Verdugo doesn't suspect him in the least, but as a friend to Don Andrés and a frequent stand-in for El Vago, that could change at any moment. If the Inquisition captured him, he would happily kill himself rather than endanger the organization.

Maria-Soledad Rivera y Aldana: Hero	
	<i>Brawn:</i> 2
	<i>Finesse:</i> 3
	<i>Wits:</i> 2
	<i>Resolve:</i> 4
	<i>Panache:</i> 2
	<i>Reputation:</i> 58
	<i>Background:</i> Vow <i>Arcana:</i> Courageous

Advantages: Castillian (R/W), Théan (R/W), Castillian Accent (Aldana), Castillian Education, Connections (El Vago), Faith, Membership (Los Vagos) (Sophia's Daughters) (Swordsman's Guild), Noble

Courtier: Dancing 2, Diplomacy 2, Etiquette 3, Fashion 4, Politics 2, Sincerity 4

Performer: Acting 4, Dancing 2, Oratory 1, Singing 1

Scholar: History 2, Mathematics 1, Philosophy 1, Research 1, Theology 1

Spy: Conceal 2, Disguise 3, Shadowing 3, Stealth 4

Aldana (Journeyman): Exploit Weakness (Aldana) 4, Feint (Fencing) 4, Riposte (Fencing) 4, Tagging (Fencing) 4

Athlete: Break Fall 2, Climbing 2, Footwork 2, Leaping 1, Sprinting 3, Swimming 2

El Puñal Occulto (Apprentice): Bind (Fencing) 3, Corps-à-corps (Fencing) 4, Exploit Weakness (El Puñal Occulto) 3, Pommel Strike (Fencing) 2

Fencing: Attack (Fencing) 4, Parry (Fencing) 4

Knife: Attack (Knife) 3, Parry (Knife) 3

Riding: Mounting 3, Ride 4, Trick Riding 2

Maria-Soledad is a member of Sophia's Daughters, having been recruited at age 12 by her seemingly mousy dueña.

Though too active as El Vago to play much of a role in the Sisterhood, her dueña still forwards her diaries to her superiors in the Order, who keep a close eye on her activities. Should anything untoward happen to her, the Daughters may take (covert) action to facilitate a rescue and/or avenge her death.

Don Cristian Acedo de Lopez del Torres: Hero

Brawn: 3
Finesse: 4
Wits: 4
Resolve: 4
Panache: 4
Reputation: 55
Background: Vow
Arcana: Loyal

Advantages: Castillian (R/W), Montaigne (R/W), Théan (R/W), Castillian Accent (Torres), Castillian Education, Membership (Los Vagos) (Swordsman's Guild), Noble, University

Courtier: Dancing 3, Diplomacy 4, Etiquette 3, Fashion 4, Oratory 5, Politics 4, Scheming 2, Sincerity 5

Scholar: History 2, Law 3, Mathematics 2, Philosophy 2, Research 1, Theology 2

Aldana (Journeyman): Exploit Weakness (Aldana) 4, Feint (Fencing) 4, Riposte (Fencing) 4, Tagging (Fencing) 4

Athlete: Break Fall 4, Climbing 4, Footwork 6, Leaping 5, Rolling 3, Side-step 3, Sprinting 3, Swimming 4, Throwing 2

Commander: Ambush 4, Artillery 4, Leadership 5, Logistics 4, Strategy 4, Tactics 5

Fencing: Attack (Fencing) 5, Parry (Fencing) 5

Firearms: Attack (Firearms) 3, Reload (Firearms) 2

Riding: Ride 4

Other than his membership in Los Vagos, Don Cristian has no dark secrets. He is first, last and always a soldier, devoted to his family, his country, and Good King Sandoval. His men are passionately loyal to him and even his enemies hold him in high regard. His Vow is to free Castille from the yoke of Montaigne once and for all.

Gustavo Ortega: Henchman

Brawn: 1
Finesse: 3
Wits: 4
Resolve: 4
Panache: 3
Reputation: 31
Background: Vow
Arcana: Loyal

Advantages: Castillian (R/W), Théan (R/W), Castillian Accent (Aldana), Connections (El Vago), Membership (Los Vagos) (Swordsman's Guild)

Courtier: Dancing 3, Etiquette 4, Fashion 4, Oratory 2

Doctor: Diagnosis 2, First Aid 3

Servant: Accounting 3, Etiquette 4, Fashion 4, Menial Tasks 3, Seneschal 4, Unobtrusive 5

Streetwise: Shopping 4, Socializing 3, Street Navigation 5

Aldana (Apprentice): Exploit Weakness (Aldana) 3, Feint (Fencing) 2, Riposte (Fencing) 2, Tagging (Fencing) 3

El Puñal Occulto (Apprentice): Bind (Fencing) 2, Corps-à-corps (Fencing) 2, Exploit Weakness (El Puñal Occulto) 3, Pommel Strike (Fencing) 3

Fencing: Attack (Fencing) 4, Parry (Fencing) 3

Knife: Attack (Knife) 3, Parry (Knife) 3

Riding: Mount 2, Ride 3

Still vigorous, Gervaso is fanatically loyal to the Aldana family and would think nothing of giving up his life to save his don or Maria-Soledad. A keen observer of behavior and small details, he has proven invaluable to Don Andrés as an unobtrusive gatherer of information. Unfortunately, his advancing age has slowed him down, and lately he has begun to believe that his time on Théah grows short. He has secretly begun to plan his own demise: something that will strike a blow for Los Vagos and keep his master's family safe. He has no idea what that may be, and prays to Theus every day for guidance. He keeps his plan secret from Aldana; the lad has enough on his mind as it is. When the time is right, however, Gervaso will make one last sacrifice for his Don... and all of Castille will remember it.

"Lilia": Hero

Brawn: 1
Finesse: 2
Wits: 4
Resolve: 2
Panache: 2
Reputation: 17
Background: True Identity
Arcana: Adaptable

Advantages: Castillian (R/W), Eisen (R/W), Théan (R/W), Appearance (Stunning), Castillian Accent (Montaigne (R/W), Membership (Los Vagos)

Courtier: Oratory 2, Politics 2, Scheming 3, Sincerity 2

Priest: Philosophy 3, Theology 3, Writing 3

Scholar: History 3, Law 2, Mathematics 3, Research 1, Theology 3

Spy: Conceal 2, Cryptography 4, Forgery 1, Lip Reading 2, Shadowing 2, Sincerity 3, Stealth 2

Knife: Attack (Knife) 3, Parry (Knife) 2

Rider: Ride 2

"Lilia" has no secrets beyond her true identity, but her growing relationship with Largo may present some serious problems. Unbeknownst to her, Largo actually belongs to the secret society of die Kreuzritter, feeding the Black Crosses information much the same way she informs Los Vagos. The tragedy is that neither of them realizes the other's identity. If they joined forces, they could make a powerful team, as well as safely realizing their mutual affection. As it is, they may kill each other before their true allegiances come to light.

More on Largo Gallegos de Aldana can be found in the *die Kreuzritter* book, pages 60-61 and 97.

**Mlle. Alexis Dubois du Arrent: Hero**

Brawn: 2
Finesse: 2
Wits: 2
Resolve: 3
Panache: 3
Reputation: 30
Background: Vendetta
Arcana: Righteous

Advantages: Avalon (R/W), Castillian (R/W), Montaigne (R/W), Vodacce (R/W), Appearance (Stunning), Keen Senses, Membership (Los Vagos), Synrth Artifact

Artist: Drawing 5

Courtier: Dancing 2, Diplomacy 2, Etiquette 2, Fashion 2, Oratory 3

Spy: Lip Reading 2, Shadowing 3, Stealth 3

Athlete: Break Fall 3, Climbing 2, Footwork 4, Leaping 4, Lifting 2, Long Distance Running 3, Rolling 4, Side-step 4, Sprinting 3, Swimming 2, Swinging 3, Throwing 3

Dirty Fighting: Attack (Dirty Fighting) 4, Kick 4, Throat Strike 4

Knife: Attack (Knife) 2, Parry (Knife) 2, Throw (Knife) 2

Pugilism: Attack (Pugilism) 4, Jab 4, Uppercut 4

Rider: Ride 2

Wrestling: Bear Hug 4, Break 3, Escape 5, Grapple 4, Head Butt 4

Alexis's obsidian mask has several potent powers. While wearing it, she rolls 2 extra unkept dice on all Wound Checks and 2 extra unkept dice on all Shadowing and Stealth checks. Her Brawn, Finesse and Panache are all raised by 1. By revealing her glowing eyes, she can generate a Fear Rating of 2 which affects all who look upon her. Once she removes the Mask, all of her statistics return to normal, and she must sleep for at least twelve hours as soon as it is reasonably convenient, or else she suffers a -1 penalty to her Brawn, Resolve, and Panache.

Underneath those frills and ruffles is a formidable woman who can more than adequately take care of herself. Or so she believes. The supernatural mask she uses is fueled by

emotions, and she has yet to fully understand its effect on her. When her brother Tristan wore it, it gained power from his sense of duty and fed that strength back to him. Now that Alexis is wearing it, the mask is charged by her anger and returns it to her three-fold. It is becoming increasingly difficult for her to control her actions when under the influence of the Mask, which presents a danger to her and to Los Vagos. Only time will tell if she can master the powers she wields, or whether they will consume her... and possibly damage Los Vagos in the bargain.

Doña Arantxa Grijalva: Hero

Brawn: 2
Finesse: 4
Wits: 4
Resolve: 3
Panache: 3
Reputation: 42
Background: Obligation
Arcana: Intuitive

Advantages: Castillian (R/W), Thëan (R/W), Castillian Accent (Aldana), Castillian Education, Faith, Membership (Explorer's Society) (Los Vagos), Noble
Courtier: Etiquette 3, Fashion 3, Lip Reading 2, Oratory 2, Scheming 4

El Fuego Adentro (Half-Blooded) (Apprentice): Concentrate 3, Extinguish 3, Feed 3, Range 3, Firestarting 3

Doctor: Diagnosis 1, First Aid 3

Scholar: Astronomy 3, History 3, Law 2, Mathematics 2, Natural Philosophy 3, Occult 2, Philosophy 3, Research 4
Streetwise: Socializing 3, Street Navigation 3, Underworld Lore 2

Firearms: Attack (Firearms) 3, Reload (Firearms) 2

Knife: Attack (Knife) 3, Parry (Knife) 4, Throw (Knife) 2

Arantxa's sorcerous abilities give her the power to keep a fire burning without any fuel to feed it, to control up to three separate fires at a time, to control any fires from a distance of 120 feet or less, and to ignite a fire in anything less than a heavy downpour. She takes no injuries from fire

or heat-based damage, and can grasp fire as if it were a solid object (climb it, scoop it in her hands, etc.) More on *El Fuego Adentro* can be found on pages 98-101 of the *Castille* sourcebook.

Doña Arantxa comes by her skill at *El Fuego Adentro* in a most interesting way. Her mother, a distant relative of the old Castillo family, was actually the secret mistress of Good King Sandoval's grandfather. Although they were very much in love, it was impossible for them to marry. When she became pregnant with the King's child, she was forced to leave court and marry an elderly Gallegan nobleman. Her husband had some doubts about the true parentage of his daughter but never said anything about it.

Arantxa began to display her peculiar abilities at such an early age that her mother taught her to hide from people. Not only would Arantxa be labeled as a sorceress, if it were known that she was in essence a double claimant to the throne from Castillo and Sandoval bloodlines, she would be marked for death. She keeps her talents well-hidden, and has never learned any of the more spectacular techniques which *El Fuego Adentro* affords.

Joaquin Orduño: Hero

Brawn: 2
Finesse: 3
Wits: 3
Resolve: 2
Panache: 3
Reputation: 24
Background: Vow
Arcana: Commanding

Advantages: Castillian (R/W), Thëan (R/W), Castillian Accent (Aldana), Eagle Eyes, Faith, Membership (Los Vagos) (Swordsman's Guild)

Captain: Ambush 2, Cartography 3, Gunnery 2, Leadership 4, Strategy 3, Tactics 3

Criminal: Gambling 2, Lockpicking 3, Shadowing 2, Stealth 2

Courtier: Dancing 2, Scheming 2, Seduction 2, Sincerity 2

Sailor: Balance 3, Cartography 4, Climbing 3, Knotwork 2, Leaping 2, Pilot 2, Rigging 3, Sea Lore 2, Weather 3
Aldana (Apprentice): Exploit Weakness (Aldana) 3, Feint (Fencing) 3, Riposte (Fencing) 2, Tagging (Fencing) 4
Fencing: Attack (Fencing) 4, Parry (Fencing) 3
Firearms: Attack (Firearms) 3
Knife: Attack (Knife) 2, Parry (Knife) 3, Throw (Knife) 2
Streetwise: Socializing 2, Street Navigation 1, Underworld Lore 3

Joaquin's relatives are right: he is a smuggler. He runs all sorts of contraband cargo into and out of Castille, over and above his activities with El Vago. To be fair, the profits from this piratical activity go primarily to fund Los Vagos, but the remaining funds line the personal pockets of Orduño and his crew. After all, a man cannot be a pirate his entire life; given the relative ease with which one can rise through the ranks in Castille, some of them might actually become noblemen someday. Joaquin feels indebted to these men who have helped him through so much, and wants them to enjoy some rewards for their efforts. Luckily for them, an anonymous individual supplies large sums of money to Los Vagos del Mar and appears to have some interest in preventing both the government and the Inquisition from uncovering their smuggling ring.

La Venganza: 30 Point Fleut

Brawn: 3

Finesse: 7

Resolve: 4

Wits: 7

Panache: 4

Hidden Towline (1), Well-Trained Crew (2), Wide Rudder (2)

Draft: 4

Cargo: 4

Crew: 7

Reputation: 24

**Don Baldovino Montoya de Cardenas: Hero**

Brawn: 3
Finesse: 2
Wits: 4
Resolve: 3
Panache: 2
Reputation: 55
Background: Vow
Arcana: Friendly

Advantages: Castillian (R/W), Castillian Accent (Aldana), Thëan (R/W), Castillian Education, Membership (Los Vagos) (Swordsman's Guild), Noble

Courtier: Dancing 2, Diplomacy 4, Etiquette 4, Gossip 2, Oratory 3, Sincerity 3

Hunter: Fishing 3, Skinning 2, Trail Signs 3

Merchant: Blacksmith 5

Scholar: History 2, Mathematics 3, Philosophy 1, Research 1
Aldana (Journeyman): Exploit Weakness (Aldana) 4, Feint (Fencing) 4, Riposte (Fencing) 5, Tagging (Fencing) 4

Commander: Ambush 3, Artillery 3, Leadership 4, Strategy 3, Tactics 4

Fencing: Attack (Fencing) 2, Parry (Fencing) 3

Firearms: Attack (Firearms) 3, Reload (Firearms) 2

Riding: Animal Training 2, Mount 3, Ride 4

There are rumors that Don Baldovino was passionately in love with a beautiful and talented artist named Serenia Ochoa del Nuñez whose family was killed by Montaigne soldiers. After the horrors committed by the invaders, young Serenia wandered distraught and dazed until she found her way to a nearby convent where the sisters gave her shelter and healed her wounds. Although she regained her physical strength, she never recovered emotionally and chose to take the veil rather than marry. Broken-hearted, Baldovino respected her wishes, vowing that he would do whatever he could to see the Montaigne scourge driven from Castille.

Baldovino denies these rumors hotly whenever asked, but there is a female priest named Serenia Ochoa due Nuñez living in occupied Montaigne territory...

Doña Ximena Yañez de Gallegos: Hero



Brawn: 2
Finesse: 4
Wits: 3
Resolve: 2
Panache: 3
Reputation: 28
Background: Courageous
Arcana: Willful

Advantages: Castillian (R/W), Thëan (R/W), Castillian Accent (Gallegos), Castillian Education, Faith, Membership (Los Vagos), Noble

Courtier: Dancing 2, Diplomacy 3, Etiquette 2, Fashion 3, Oratory 2, Politics 1

Doctor: Diagnosis 2, First Aid 2, Veterinarian 4

Merchant: Accounting 4, Blacksmith 2

Scholar: History 3, Mathematics 2, Philosophy 1, Research 1

Fencing: Attack (Fencing) 2, Parry (Fencing) 1

Knife: Attack (Knife) 2, Parry (Knife) 2

Athlete: Leaping 2, Side-step 1, Swimming 1, Throwing 2

Rider: Animal Training 5, Mounting 5, Ride 6, Trick Riding 5

Doña Ximena has kept her connection to Los Vagos a secret from her husband, thought not out of fear that he will betray them – quite the opposite in fact. Miguel is fiery and compassionate, with as much hate for the Inquisition as she has. The only thing keeping him from rushing out in search of El Vago is his concern for her. He does not wish to leave her alone, and wouldn't want a potential connection to Los Vagos to put her in danger. If he learns that she is actively assisting them, he would join El Corazón without a second thought. Ximena loves her husband dearly, and would die if anything happened to him. So she keeps her secret deeply hidden... and hopes he never learns of it.



Profesora Jacinta Navarro del Garcia: Hero



Brawn: 2
Finesse: 2
Wits: 3
Resolve: 2
Panache: 2
Reputation: 25
Background: None
Arcana: Creative

Advantages: Castillian (R/W), Montaigne (R/W), Thëan (R/W), Castillian Accent (Aldana), Castillian Education, Connections (Salvador Garcia), Membership (Los Vagos), Noble, University

Artist: Writing 4
Courtier: Dancing 1, Etiquette 2, Fashion 2, Oratory 4, Politics 2, Scheming 2

Merchant: Calligraphy 1, Scribe 2

Scholar: Astronomy 2, History 5, Law 3, Mathematics 2, Natural Philosophy 3, Occult 2, Philosophy 3, Research 3, Theology 2

Spy: Conceal 3, Lip Reading 3

Jacinta was motivated to join Los Vagos for two reasons: her love for Castille and her even stronger love for Joaquín Orduño. She and Orduño have never met, but she has seen the dashing young captain on her frequent visits to La Pasiega to visit her aging *abuela*. Late at night, after her grandmother has gone to sleep, Jacinta removes her constricting gown, loosens her magnificent long hair and by the light of a candle writes passionate love poetry. She also turns her pen to other subjects – subjects which she believes El Vago would approve of. The poems to Orduño remain in her secret locked journal but other pieces – the ones that sing of her love for Castille – always manage to make their way into the various broadsides to be found around Vaticine City. Purportedly penned by some man calling himself El Patriota, these blatantly partisan, anti-Inquisition verses have put in an appearance at Cardinal Verdugo's breakfast table more than once. He has vowed that one day he will capture the man responsible and burn him at the stake.

Conte Angelo Orsini: Scoundrel



Brawn: 3
Finesse: 3
Wits: 4
Resolve: 2
Panache: 3
Reputation: 25
Background: None
Arcana: None

Advantages: Vodacce (R/W), Castillian (R/W), Thëan (R/W), Able Drinker, Connection (Los Vagos), Keen Senses, Left-handed, Noble, Scoundrel, University

Courtier: Dancing 2, Etiquette 2, Fashion 2, Gossip 2, Lip Reading 4, Seduction 3

Spy: Lip Reading 4, Shadowing 4, Stealth 3

Streetwise: Socializing 3, Street Navigation 1, Shopping 1

Ambrogia (Apprentice): Exploit Weakness (Ambrogia) 2, Feint (Fencing) 3, Riposte (Fencing) 2, Pommel Strike (Fencing) 2

Orsini is loyal to Los Vagos, but in his case, family always comes before friends. Every piece of information he tells Los Vagos also ends up in front of Vincenzo Caligari, for use as the Prince sees fit. Until now, Angelo has not revealed his connection to Los Vagos – he hopes to keep his loyalties separate – but if Vincenzo asks him directly, he will tell his “uncle” everything he knows. If that happens, Los Vagos may find itself serving as the catspaw to a very cunning and ruthless Vodacce Prince.



Reynaldo Nuñez del Torres: Hero



Brawn: 2
Finesse: 4
Wits: 3
Resolve: 3
Panache: 4
Reputation: 22
Background: None
Arcana: Self-Control

Advantages: Castillian (R/W), Eisen (R/W), Vodacce, Membership (Los Vagos) (Swordsman's Guild), Noble

Courtier: Dancing 2, Etiquette 4, Fashion 2, Oratory 2, Scheming 3, Seduction 3, Sincerity 5

Spy: Conceal 5, Disguise 3, Shadowing 4, Stealth 4

Streetwise: Socialize 2, Street Navigation 3

Aldana (Apprentice): Exploit Weakness (Aldana) 3, Feint 2, Riposte 3, Tagging 1

Fencing: Attack 3, Parry 2

Firearms: Attack 3, Reload 1

Reynaldo is more than just a distant relative of Doña Sienna Guzman del Torres. He is, in fact, her brother-in-law and more than willing to help the movement she has joined. Freiburg is by no means the most perfect city in Thëah, especially for a Castillian who craves sunshine and music, but life without the Inquisition breathing down your neck has its rewards. In Freiburg, he is able to provide a sanctuary for those whose lives are at risk while simultaneously raising money for the cause. To some extent it is his practice of what they call *en plein vu* (“in plain sight”) in Montaigne that makes him successful. It is assumed that any Inquisition authorities in Freiburg would never suspect a man who conducted his business affairs so openly.

Reynaldo knows the whereabouts of numerous Castillian fugitives residing in Eisen (indeed, he helped most of them establish their new locales). He tries to keep a close watch on Inquisition activities in the country, and has been known to covertly hire mercenaries whenever a Knight Inquisitor gets too close to a fugitive. He always pays for these activities out of his own pocket.

Doña Urraca Rioja: Villain

Brawn: 2
Finesse: 4
Wits: 3
Resolve: 4
Panache: 3
Reputation: -26
Background: Sect Adversary
Arcana: Greedy

Advantages: Castillian (R/W), Montaigne (R/W), Théan (R/W), Appearance (Stunning), Castillian Accent (Gallegos), Castillian Education, Membership (Inquisition), Patron (Esteban Verdugo)

Courtier: Dancing 2, Etiquette 2, Fashion 3, Gossip 2, Seduction 4

Scholar: History 3, Mathematics 2, Philosophy 2, Research 2, Theology 3

Spy: Bribery 2, Conceal 2, Disguise 3, Forgery 2, Interrogation 2, Poison 2, Shadowing 3, Sincerity 3, Stealth 2

Streetwise: Socializing 4, Shopping 2, Street Navigation 3, Underworld Lore 5

Firearms: Attack (Firearms) 3, Reload (Firearms) 2

Knife: Attack (Knife) 4, Parry (Knife) 2

Riding: Ride 4

Urraca's history as detailed in Chapter Two is a complete fabrication; she made it up to disguise her true origins. Despite her aristocratic manner, she actually comes from an impoverished branch of the Rioja family that scraped out a living in a rundown seaside fishing port. Possessed of a strong will and great determination, she clawed her way up from the docks by making the most of her beauty and wits. When Verdugo met her in Vaticine City, she had already manufactured a carefully detailed personal history, and fooled everyone into believing it — including the Cardinal himself. She has maintained the deception perfectly since then, but the truth is that she comes from a long line of thieves and pirates. Anyone foolish enough to even intimate such, however, will find himself in a dark alley on the business end of a poisoned dagger.

El Camaléon: Villain

Brawn: 3
Finesse: 4
Wits: 3
Resolve: 3
Panache: 3
Reputation: -39
Background: Hunted
Arcana: Adaptable

Advantages: Castillian (R/W), Crescent (R/W), Eisen (R/W), Montaigne (R/W), Théan (R/W), Vendel (R/W), Vodacce (R/W), Linguist

Courtier: Dancing 2, Etiquette 3, Fashion 2, Gaming 2, Lip Reading 5, Oratory 2, Seduction 3

Criminal: Ambush 4, Cheating 2, Gambling 3, Pickpocket 3

Spy: Conceal 3, Disguise 6, Forgery 4, Lip Reading 5, Lock-picking 3, Poison 4, Shadowing 4, Stealth 5

Streetwise: Socializing 3, Street Navigation 4, Underworld Lore 5

Ambrogia (Journeyman): Exploit Weakness (Ambrogia) 4, Feint (Fencing) 4, Pommel Strike (Fencing) 5, Riposte (Fencing) 5

Athlete: Break Fall 3, Climbing 3, Footwork 4, Rolling 2, Side-Step 3, Sprinting 2, Swimming 3, Swinging 3

Dirty Fighting: Attack (Dirty Fighting) 2, Eye-Gouge 2, Kick 4, Throat Strike 2

Fencing: Attack (Fencing) 4, Parry (Fencing) 3

Firearms: Attack (Firearms) 4, Reload (Firearms) 3

Knife: Attack (Knife) 5, Parry (Knife) 4

Rider: Ride 4, Trick Riding 3

Valroux (Apprentice): Double-parry (Fencing/Knife) 3, Feint (Fencing) 2, Tagging (Fencing) 3, Exploit Weakness (Valroux) 2

El Camaléon is such a mystery that the Maestro de Juego should feel free to give him any background he or she chooses. In fact, it would not be surprising if El Camaléon had more than one secret in his convoluted past. He can make a fine recurring villain for the Heroes to cross swords with on a regular basis.

Previously Published NPCs

The following NPCs previously appeared in the *Castille* nation book and *The Invisible College* sourcebook. Because of their importance as potential villains in a Los Vagos campaign, we are reprinting their statistics, along with a brief summary of their connections to the Vagabond.

Don Lorenzo de Zepeda, "El Malvado": Villain

Brawn: 4
Finesse: 4
Wits: 3
Resolve: 3
Panache: 4
Reputation: -72
Background: Vendetta
Arcana: Lecherous

Advantages: Castillian (R/W), Montaigne (R/W), Théan (R/W), Castillian Accent (Zepeda), Castillian Education, Commission (Lieutenant), Dangerous Beauty, Membership (Swordsman's Guild), Noble, Scoundrel, Zepeda Blade

Courtier: Dancing 3, Etiquette 3, Fashion 2, Mooch 5, Oratory 2, Seduction 5

Spy: Conceal 3, Disguise 4, Shadowing 4, Stealth 5

Athlete: Climbing 3, Footwork 4, Rolling 3, Sprinting 3, Swinging 2, Throwing 2

Commander: Ambush 5, Artillery 4, Leadership 3, Strategy 2, Tactics 3

El Fuego Adentro (Adept): Concentrate 4, Extinguish 4, Feed 4, Range 4, Firestarting 4, Flaming Blade 4, Hurl Fire 4

Fencing: Attack (Fencing) 5, Parry (Fencing) 4

Whip: Attack (Whip) 5

Zepeda (Journeyman): Bind (Whip) 4, Disarm (Whip) 5, Exploit Weakness (Zepeda) 4, Tagging (Whip) 4

Riding: Ride 4

Don Lorenzo's sorcerous power allows him to keep a fire burning without any fuel to feed it, to control up to four separate fires at a time, to control any fires from a distance of 160 feet or less, and to ignite a fire in any climate other than a hurricane. He can ignite a sword blade, which adds

8 to its damage rolls. He takes no injuries from fire or heat-based damage, and can grasp fire as if it were a solid object (climb it, scoop it in his hands, etc.) By spending an action to reach into a flame, he can hurl it at an opponent with a Range of 13 yards, using his Finesse + Hurl Fire to see if he hits. The flames cause 3k3 damage and are immediately extinguished once they inflict their damage. More on *El Fuego Adentro* can be found on pages 98-101 of the *Castille* sourcebook.

Don Lorenzo, or El Malvado as he likes to refer to himself, originally served as a member of El Corazón, and the commander of Los Vagos's activities against the invading Montaigne. Then the Montaigne attacked his home town of San Juan and massacred the populace in the center square. Lorenzo saw the invaders burn the townspeople alive; the incident unhinged his mind while simultaneously activating his potent powers of *El Fuego Adentro*. Since then, he has obsessively begun hunting down the Montaigne responsible for the massacres. His brutal murders have led Los Vagos to strip him of his membership, and they have recently begun actively hunting him in an effort to stop his rampage. Thus far, he has eluded all efforts at capture.

Today, Don Lorenzo has the unique distinction of being one of the most wanted men in Castille. The Inquisition wants him for his flagrant disregard for the laws of the Church. Don Andrés wants him because he is a dangerous renegade from Los Vagos. The Montaigne army wants him because he continues to murder its soldiers to avenge the San Juan massacre. The women he has seduced and abandoned want to exact a painful revenge for his deception, while the women he has not seduced yet dream about the dark handsome lover with the whip. Despite the wide-reaching manhunt, he has managed to elude them all because of his natural abilities in *El Fuego Adentro*. Driven by madness and hatred, he is a dangerous foe, a near-literal force of nature. There are those who claim that he has been scarred horribly by the flames he uses so adroitly, but no one who has seen his face has lived to speak the truth.

Cardinal Esteban Verdugo: Villain

Brawn: 2
Finesse: 2
Wits: 5
Resolve: 4
Panache: 4
Reputation: -88
Background: Moment of Awe
Arcana: Righteous

Advantages: Castilian (R/W), Montaigne (R/W), Théan (R/W), Castilian Accent (Aldana), Faith, Indomitable Will, Ordained, University

Courtier: Dancing 2, Etiquette 5, Fashion 2, Oratory 5, Politics 4, Scheming 5, Seduction 4, Sincerity 5

Merchant: Calligraphy 5, Scribe 4

Priest: Diplomacy 4, Mooch 4, Oratory 5, Philosophy 4, Theology 5, Writing 5

Scholar: History 5, Law 3, Mathematics 2, Occult 2, Philosophy 4, Research 4, Theology 5

Servant: Accounting 3, Etiquette 5, Fashion 2, Gossip 4, Menial Tasks 4, Seneschal 4, Unobtrusive 5

Spy: Bribery 3, Conceal 4, Cryptography 4, Forgery 4, Interrogation 5, Lip Reading 3, Shadowing 4, Stealth 4

Knife: Attack (Knife) 2, Parry (Knife) 2

Verdugo leads the Vaticine Inquisition, and with the disappearance of the Hierophant, answers to no one save Theus Himself. He has yet to publicly proclaim his position as Grand High Inquisitor, but his political views leave no doubt that he actively supports such tyranny.

In his own way, Cardinal Verdugo is every bit as much of a patriot as any member of Los Vagos — it is just that his vision of Castille is quite different from that of his foes. In his world, the Vaticine Church, under his direction, is the guiding force of the people's lives which would be dedicated to a new level of devout adherence to eradicating heresy. He truly believes that the Fourth Prophet is coming soon, and intends to save as many souls as he can before then — by any means necessary.

Inquisitors

The following is a brief run-down of statistics and abilities for rank-and-file Inquisitors, which the GM can use as opponents for their Los Vagos Heroes.

The Inquisition breaks roughly into three ranks. At the top is the Grand High Inquisitor, Cardinal Verdugo. Beneath him are the High Inquisitors, who fulfill specific goals at his command. Beneath them are standard Inquisitors — a network of spies, informants, and servants who obey the High Inquisitors in all things. Verdugo issues orders to the High Inquisitors, who then implement them using standard Inquisitors.

Standard Inquisitors

Threat Rating: 1-4

Usual Weapons: Rapiers (Medium) and Muskets (Firearms)

TN to be hit: 5 + (5 × Threat Rating)

Skills: Sprinting +1, Disguise +2

Special Abilities: Inquisitors can operate in Brute Squads of up to 8 members, instead of the usual 6.

Description: Standard Inquisitors — sometimes banded into pseudo-military units called “Defenders of the Faith” — comprise the bulk of the Inquisition forces, and are often used as muscle or spies. The sight of a dozen masked thugs dressed in red Inquisition robes is enough to send even the bravest man scrambling. Defenders of the Faith are Brutes, but they can be any Threat Rating the GM desires.

High Inquisitors

Most High Inquisitors in Castille act more as bureaucrats than anything else. They conduct interrogations, record confessions, and make reports to Verdugo on potential heresy within Castille. The most fearsome among them become Knight Inquisitors, actively hunting enemies of the faith. The rest live fairly quiet lives... doing the Church's darkest business.

High Inquisitors should be treated as Villains, and created using the rules in the *GMs' Guide*. Unless they are Knight

Inquisitors, they do not often excel in combat and serve mainly as “armchair villains” — plotting evil schemes, engaging in witty banter at parties, and generally staying out of the swashbuckling.

Knight Inquisitors

The Knight Inquisitors consist of High Inquisitors chosen by Verdugo himself for their ferocity, cunning, and martial skills. Castillians say that they can call on mystic abilities granted to them by Theus Himself, but evidence of this has never materialized. All Knight Inquisitors are Villains with Traits that average at least 3; each should be developed individually by the GM. They are all extremely competent, and more than a match for most inexperienced Heroes. Some of the more senior Knights could even challenge an entire party of Heroes all by themselves. Knight Inquisitors will be examined in more detail in the upcoming *Church of the Prophets* sourcebook.

Possible Mystic Abilities

The following abilities represent some of the possible powers that the Knight Inquisitors might exhibit. It is up to the GM to determine if they exist in his or her campaign, and where their origins lie if they do. They could be the result of the Inquisitor's fanatic beliefs, they could spring from the divine will of Theus, or they could even be the result of a terrible Bargain the Knight Inquisitor made, similar to the one which produced sorcery. Every Knight Inquisitor is different and not all of them have such abilities. You should decide whether other High Inquisitors share them, or if they exist solely among the Knights. Alternately, they could not exist at all, leaving the Knight Inquisitors to operate as other mortals do. Their exact nature is up to you.

Silver Tongue

The Inquisitor has a strangely persuasive voice. He can whip villagers into a frenzy or stall them just long enough to make his escape. The Inquisitor can use this ability once per Act to gain two Kept dice (+2k2) on any one social roll.

They often use this ability to recruit new members of the Inquisition or to plant the seed of doubt in a Hero.

Gaze into the Abyss

This ability represents the almost supernatural dread that many Théans feel towards Inquisitors. The Inquisitor has a terrifying, piercing gaze. Once per Act, he can look into another character's eyes and make a contested Resolve check, to which he gains two Free Raises. If he wins the contest, the losing character treats him as if he had a Fear Rating of 1 for every 5 he won the contest by. Thus, if he wins the contest by 15, he has a Fear Rating of 3 in respect to the character who met his gaze. This Fear Rating lasts until the end of the Story, or until the character defeats the Knight Inquisitor in a fight, whichever comes first.

Fanatic Strength

The Inquisitor can summon up tremendous strength with which to smite the enemies of the Church. Once per Act, the Inquisitor gains 3 Ranks of Brawn for the duration of 1 Action. This ability could be used to break down a door, shatter manacles, bend bars, or just attack a Hero. This ability fails if the Inquisitor uses it to attack a character with the Faith Advantage.

Vanishing Act

The Inquisitor can fade into the shadows in an instant to evade pursuit. Once per Act, when none of the Heroes are looking at him, the Inquisitor can vanish without a trace so long as he isn't being physically restrained and has an unguarded avenue of escape nearby. The precise circumstances are up to the GM, and common sense should prevail. No one should ever actually *see* the Inquisitor vanish; he simply uses his surroundings to maximum advantage. Often, an Inquisitor with this ability will set up a pre-arranged distraction (such as an explosion or fire) to give himself the instant he needs to escape.

A Sample Los Vagos Campaign

Campaign Background

This campaign is set in the Parish of San Simeon, just south of the Rio de Dios, midway between Vaticine City and the fortress of El Morro. The largest town in the area is San Simeon, a walled trading port that is mostly supported by river trade, fishing, and local farming, predominantly from the fertile Rancho Rios. The alcalde of San Simeon is Jorge Aldana, a self-important little man (and extremely distant relative of the famous Aldanas) completely under the control of the local nobleman Don Miguel Ontiveros de Rios. San Simeon is protected by a nearby *fortaleza* (fortress) under the command of Captain Enrique Nuñez de Montoya, who appears to have received the command because his superiors felt that he would do less damage in San Simeon than at La Muralla Ultimo.

The area west of San Simeon consists almost entirely of the rancho of the powerful Don Miguel, a middle-aged widower who lives there with his daughter, Doña Elena Rivera de Rios, and her sultry companion Lupe Velasquez. Rancho Rios is known throughout Castille for its production of fruits, vegetables and excellent wine.

The Parish of San Simeon is run by Monsignor Adolfo Ontiveros de Velasquez, an overpaid and under-intelligent buffoon who oversees the Church's activities in San Simeon itself as well as Valencia, Dos Palos, and La Mirada. Monsignor Ontiveros achieved this position not through the piety of his belief but through the wealth of his family. He entered the priesthood at his father's command and has never quite been comfortable with the idea of caring for a flock. However, as the High Priest of the Vaticine Church in San Simeon, he has surrounded himself with every luxury that money can buy. Thanks to his clever business dealings on the side, his personal coffers are filling nicely.

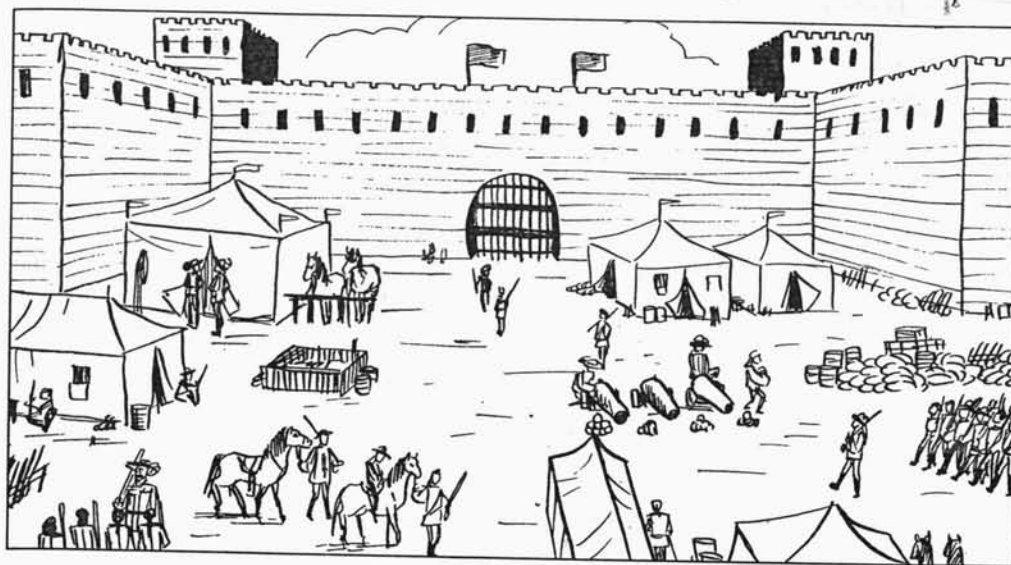
Near the river, on the edge of La Cienega (the swamp), lies the small fishing village of Valencia. Father Luis Rodriguez, the High Priest of the Church there, is mildly in favor of the Inquisition, but perhaps could be brought around to the cause by the right kind of persuasion.

Between Valencia and San Simeon lies the village of Dos Palos. Its residents are mostly independent farmers and merchants, marginally better off than the other villages in the area. The High Priest here is Father Dominic Ortiz, a rigid supporter of the Vaticine Church and a proponent of the Inquisition.

The southern border of the Rancho Rios estates is protected by a small range of hills simply called Las Colinas. While hardly impassible, they can be dangerous, especially at night. Like La Sierra de Hierro, Las Colinas provides a home for outlaws and renegades, as well as a variety of predatory creatures including mountain lions. The 10 mile road between Dos Palos and La Mirada cuts through the hills, providing a relatively safe passage.

The small village of La Mirada, south of Dos Palos, sits at the top of Los Colinas. Its residents are mostly goat herders who want nothing to do with the Inquisition or anything else that does not involve their flocks. The one large building in the town (other than the Church, of course) is El Gallo Rojo (The Red Rooster), a remarkably comfortable inn that serves travelers on the road to San Simeon. The High Priest (and in fact the only priest) of the Church in La Mirada is Father Tomás Grijalva: much beloved by the flock under his care. He doesn't mind getting his hands dirty, working beside his parishioners milking goats or stirring the large vats of rich *queso de cabra* for which the region is famous.

The Parish of San Simeon is famous for something besides goat cheese. Although the Inquisition has built a series of fortified prisons throughout Castille, their strongest and most fearsome lies in San Simeon. Dubbed El Carcél Moreno, it was built on the ruins of an old Crescent fortress, and now stands as a dark and forbidding symbol of the Inquisition's power. Those prisoners who enter its dark gates usually do not leave, and the few who do are shattered people, unable to lead normal lives thereafter. On the rare



occasions that someone has escaped, he or she is forced to take refuge in the hills to avoid recapture by Knight Inquisitors.

The overseer of El Carcél Moreno is Bishop Lucera Yañez de Rioja, a cold-hearted and uncompassionate woman who is fanatically devoted to the Church, the Inquisition, and Cardinal Esteban Verdugo (whom she regards as the closest thing to a living saint in Castille).

Despite their generally taciturn and unfriendly manner, many of the people of the San Simeon Parish are actually fierce patriots who intensely dislike the presence of the Inquisition in their midst. Aware that they lack the financial or political power to rid themselves of its repressive presence, some of the most radical citizens have formed an independent group of Los Vagos. Included in their number are a number of escapees from El Carcél Moreno. The hideout for the group (which they have rather grandly dubbed "La Casa del Vago", "The House of the Vagabond") is located above the road between Dos Palos and La Mirada in an ideal location that gives them complete

protection while providing an excellent view of the road. Bishop Lucera has heard the stories about the local group and does not discount them as legend by any means. She would pay a hefty reward for any information that would enable her to find the secret hideout, and has made it quite clear that she dearly wishes to "question" members of the group personally.

The Heroes

This campaign can be played with two different openings. In Option A, the Heroes may join the existing group of Los Vagos under the leadership of Joaquin el Pescador. In Option B, they form their own Los Vagos group, taking the place of Joaquin's cabal. Any number of adventures could take place in this setting. The campaign offered here assumes that the Heroes will continue to act as the protectors of San Simeon into the future.

Option A

The Heroes start the game as volunteers who wish to join the existing independent Los Vagos group currently hiding out in the Las Colinas. The leader is Joaquin el Pescador, a former fisherman from Valencia who started the group after the Inquisition's unprovoked seizure and imprisonment of his friend, the alcalde of Valencia. Joaquin headed into Las Colinas with his three sons and formed an unaffiliated group of Los Vagos. Joined by a small group of like-minded partisans, he has been waging a guerrilla war against the Inquisition from La Casa del Vago ever since.

Joaquin is middle-aged, but tough as an oak tree from his years on the river. He rarely speaks, and often doesn't appear to be paying attention, but listens intently not only to what has been said but also to what has not been said. The group is in contact with El Corazón through a man who appeared before them wearing a black mask and speaking in a rough voice. When questioned about his identity, he explained that in order to protect themselves and the movement, they would never know his true name — that way, they would have no real information for the Inquisition to torture out of them. (In fact, the masked man who contacted the group was none other than Don Alejandro Vasquez de Soldano, who continues to bring them supplies and teach them the rudiments of the Aldana School and El Puñal Occulto.)

Option B

In this option, Joaquin el Pescador does not exist. The Heroes are the entire Los Vagos group hiding out at La Casa del Vago (though perhaps a few Henchman NPCs might bolster their ranks). They must decide why each of them decided to join Los Vagos, how they came to be together, and which one (or ones) amongst them is (are) El Vago. They must also decide if they are in contact with El Corazón (either through Don Stefan or another NPC of your devising), or if they remain unaffiliated with Andrés Aldana's organization. If you select Option B, you may want to devise a scenario whereby the Heroes form the Los Vagos group. Otherwise, go directly to Part 3: El Fantasma de las Colinas below.

Dramatis Personae

- Don Miguel Ontiveros de Rios (Villain) — The widowed owner of the local Rancho.
- Doña Elena Rivera de Rios (Hero) — The beautiful, fiery daughter of Don Miguel.
- Señorita Lupe Velasquez (Hero) — Doña Elena's sultry companion.
- Jorge Aldana — the alcalde of San Simeon, completely controlled by Don Miguel.
- Father Luis Rodriguez — the High Priest of the Vaticine Church in the town of Valencia.
- Father Dominic Orduño (Villain) — the High Priest of the Vaticine Church in the town of Dos Palos and a rigid supporter of the Inquisition.
- Father Tomás Grijalva (Hero) — the beloved High Priest of the Vaticine Church in the mountain village of La Mirada.
- Monsiñor Adolfo Ontiveros de Velasquez (Villain) — The buffoon in charge of the Parish of San Simeon, who serves as High Priest in the town of San Simeon itself.
- Bishop Lucera Yañez de Rioja (Villain) — A former Mother Superior, now head of the local Inquisition and superintendent of El Carcél Moreno.
- Joaquin el Pescador (Hero) — a fisherman who rides as El Vago (assuming the Heroes don't).

The Campaign**Part 1: Joining Up (for Option A only)**

- The Heroes are all either natives of this region or recent immigrants. They should ideally choose Heroes naturally inclined to join Los Vagos, and appropriate for an Affiliated Membership as discussed in Chapter 3.
- The story begins with the Heroes deciding they wish to join the fight for liberty and Castille.

- By asking around, they discover that Father Tomás in Dos Palos is a good source of help and comfort for those in need of direction. The Game Master should engender the feeling that this may be a trap of the Inquisition (Father Tomás is, after all, a High Priest of the Hieros), but that is the Heroes' only option if they wish to make contact with the Vagabond.

• The Heroes will have to present their case to Father Tomás. This should give them the opportunity to really think about why their Hero(es) wants to join Los Vagos and figure out how to articulate their reasons.

• If the Heroes can convince the good Father of their sincerity, he will tell one of them to return late the following afternoon for Confession.

• The Heroes will be followed for the next day to see if they are sincere. If they do not make visible contact with anyone suspicious, then the Los Vagos cabal takes the next step. When the designated Hero returns to the church for Confession he or she will be told that the group should immediately ride south out of town and into the hills. There they should wait near the base of a cliff at the top of which stands a large spreading oak tree.

• If the Heroes obey the instructions and they are not followed, they will be left waiting in Las Colinas until dark, at which time they hear a disembodied voice telling them to ride west and turn into the second canyon they come to. There they will be met by someone wearing the mask of El Vago and interviewed in the manner described on pages 25–28 (Chapter One).

• If the Heroes pass the interview they will be introduced to the "real" El Vago, asked to take the oath of El Manifiesto, and then welcomed into Los Vagos. If he trusts them enough, Joaquin will reveal his identity to them, and admonish them to keep his secret. This should be played up as a major dramatic moment.

Part 2: Proving Oneself (for Option A only)

Despite the fact that the Heroes are now the most junior members of Los Vagos, adventure quickly comes looking for them. They should have the opportunity to ride with El

Vago on his adventures, and to have some adventures of their own — proving their worth to the Vagabond. Possible examples of the latter include:

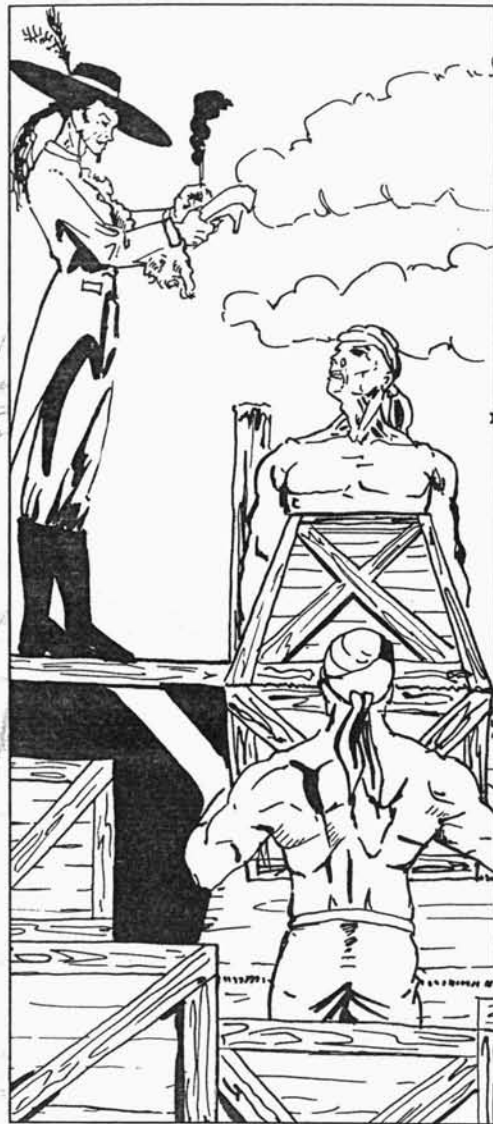
- The Heroes travel to the town of San Simeon to cause a diversion: the local militia must be called into action against them while the rest of Los Vagos, who are waiting along the incoming road, must "divert" a shipment of gold intended for the local alcalde. The Heroes in the town can do anything they need to do, as long as they do not get caught and they keep the soldiers from the *fortaleza* busy.

- Part of the Los Vagos band has ridden off on a mission, leaving the Heroes behind to pick up some supplies in La Mirada. While they conduct their purchases, a rider gallops into the square. It is a local peasant girl, terrified because some men in long robes just tore her father out of his bed and made off with him! The Heroes must now decide whether to complete their assigned task or ride off into the night to rescue the kidnapped peasant from the Knight Inquisitors.

- The Inquisition has ordered the "disappearance" of a local scholar and the Knight Inquisitors are holding him in the *fortaleza* just prior to bringing him before the Bishop for questioning. With time of the essence, El Vago has assigned the Heroes to enter the *fortaleza* and rescue the prisoner while the rest of Los Vagos take on the guards. When the Heroes enter the *fortaleza* they discover that it is full of soldiers lying in wait for them! They must somehow fight their way out of the trap and get word to El Vago before he falls victim to it as well.

Part 3: The Ghost of the Hills (for Options A and B)

It is summer in the Parish of San Simeon. Although this farming region is usually peaceful, there have been disturbing reports of local peasants disappearing around the towns of La Mirada and Dos Palos. Entire families have vanished during the night, leaving no clues as to why they left or where they were going. The local peasants fear that it might be *El Fantasma de las Colinas*, the spirit of an ancient prospector who wandered into these hills and was



never seen again. Father Tomás asks one of the Heroes to investigate. Naturally, Los Vagos becomes involved in the hunt for the ghost as well. If Joaquín is present, he will ask the Heroes to investigate the disappearances; otherwise, the Heroes may use Los Vagos' resources as they please.

The Salinas family, goat herders who lived in the hills west of La Mirada, were the most recent peasants to disappear. If the Heroes investigate the farmhouse and successfully use the appropriate skills they find evidence of a struggle, hoof prints from several horses, and a piece of paper, obviously torn off of a larger one. On the paper is a list in a hand they do not recognize. The list looks like this:

- Alonzo
- Salinas
- Gutierrez

Not surprisingly, the Alonzo family disappeared last week from their farm just east of Rancho Ríos. The Gutierrez farm also lies west of La Mirada. If the Heroes stake it out the following night, they will (after the usual long, tension-building wait) see a group of riders in the long robes of the Inquisition ride into the farmyard and attack the farmhouse, forcing the family out into the yard. One of the riders starts to beat Eduardo, the elderly patriarch, while the rest stand around and watch. His wife and children scream helplessly while being restrained by their attackers. The Heroes clearly need to do some rescuing here.

As soon as the Heroes make themselves known the riders jump on their horses, ride off and get away, but not before at least one of the Heroes notices that the leader of the "Inquisitors" has a tattoo of a flying snake on the back of his left hand.

The Gutierrez family is very grateful, particularly Santina, the eldest daughter. There is an opportunity to comfort the poor girl... which might lead to romance if the GM desires.

• A few days later, the area celebrates the holiday *La Fiesta del Borrachos* (see *Castille*, page 51). There will be singing and dancing and lots of drinking of the famous Rancho Ríos wine in all of the local towns and villages. The main celebration takes place in Dos Palos, where Don Miguel is

sponsoring a huge fiesta for all the local farmers and merchants. If Joaquín is in the game, he urges the Heroes to go, mostly for the fun, but also to see if any of the churchmen present have the flying serpent tattoo on their left hand. He himself will stay behind at La Casa de Vago; after all, fiestas are really for young people.

The celebration gives the Heroes an opportunity to sing, dance, act silly, flirt outrageously, and generally role-play. Three things need to happen during the fiesta:

- At least one of the Heroes needs to meet Don Miguel's lovely daughter, Doña Elena. Dancing provides an easy excuse for such a meeting, when the locals are enthusiastically engaged in *el villano*, grabbing partners and dancing madly while bystanders clap their hands and stamp their feet. One of the Heroes (the most romantic) should suddenly find himself dancing with a gorgeous dark-haired girl with flashing brown eyes. She introduces herself as Doña Elena Rivera de Ríos, the daughter of Don Miguel. She will be obviously attracted to her dance partner and flirt in a harmless way, mindful of her father's watchful eye.
- At least one of the Heroes needs to make a connection (presumably a romantic one) with Doña Elena's companion, Señorita Lupe Vasquez.
- At least one of the Heroes needs to notice a swarthy gaucho standing next to Don Miguel, and see that he has the tattoo of the flying snake on his left hand! Questioning the locals will reveal that the tattooed man is Felipé Guzmán, the foreman of Rancho Ríos. If the Heroes try to confront him, Don Miguel intervenes on behalf of his employee and orders the Heroes to leave the fiesta or risk arrest, a threat he is fully prepared to carry out.

As the sun begins to set, a rider brings a note to Don Miguel who announces that he and Felipé must leave the fiesta and return at once to the rancho. Concerned for her father, Doña Elena offers to go with them but Don Miguel assures her that nothing requires her presence and that she should stay at the fiesta with her new companion. The Heroes will presumably follow the two men. (If they do not, Father Tomás can always give a gentle prod.) Don Miguel

and Felipé will ride west along the road towards Rancho Ríos. Just after they enter the Rancho they turn southwest and ride up into the hills.

It is dark by the time Don Miguel and Felipé (and the Heroes) reach their goal: a collection of huts on the side of a mountain. Well-armed guards surround the enclave, too many for a direct assault. A well-worn path leads up the side of the mountain to a large hole with mining equipment scattered around the perimeter. If the Heroes get closer they can hear the sound of a young child crying from inside one of the huts, followed by a guttural curse and the sound of a kick. It should be fairly clear what is happening here. This is no Inquisition scheme: the families, including the children, have been kidnapped to work in the mines!

What happens here depends on the actions of the Heroes. Most groups will choose to sneak into camp, perhaps using a diversion, and get the families out that way. Some will send back for the rest of Los Vagos and go for a frontal assault. No matter which way they go, the scene should end with a climactic battle between whoever acts as El Vago and Don Miguel, a duel in which Don Miguel is most probably killed.

- If Joaquín el Pescador acts as El Vago, he kills Don Miguel, but suffers a mortal wound himself. After the fight, Pedro, Joaquín's oldest son, offers the Mask to one of the Heroes, saying his father would have wanted him (or her) to have it.
- The enslaved families are released and joyfully return to their homes after profusely thanking their rescuers.
- If the Heroes do not think of it, Pedro, or some other NPC feels honor-bound to return Don Miguel's body to his Rancho. Whoever does so should do it as El Vago.
- Doña Elena, furious at El Vago for killing her father, rejects him and his crusade. This is particularly poignant if the Hero wearing the mask did not actually kill Don Miguel; he can't say anything because El Vago is one and eternal, and denying her rejection means denying the vow he made to Los Vagos.

• If Felipé was not killed during the fray, the Heroes must now deal with the fact that they have a dangerous (and possibly long-term) enemy somewhere out there...

Part 4: La Señorita

Unlike her companion, Señorita Lupe Velasquez had few warm feelings for Don Miguel, and admires Los Vagos for saving the kidnapped families. In a short time, she becomes a *Compañera* and makes frequent visits to the hideout to bring supplies and important information. A few weeks (or perhaps months, depending on the campaign) after the battle at the slave camp, she arrives distraught, and recounts how Monsiñor Adolfo made improper advances to Doña Elena during his bereavement visit. Fortunately, the grieving girl rejected him violently, but Lupe is not sure how long her young mistress will be safe from the lecherous priest.

A few nights later a panting Father Tomás bursts into La Casa de Vago, saying that the Monsiñor, frustrated and furious at Elena's rebuff, has gone to Bishop Lucera with charges of heresy and witchcraft against her. False or not, the charges were upheld, and Monsiñor Adolfo has been ordered to bring the grieving girl to El Carcél Morena to face torture and execution. They have only a short period of time before she is arrested. If your Heroes don't know what to do, you're playing the wrong game.

Regardless of what steps they take, the Heroes reach Casa de Rios too late, finding only a distraught group of workers and servants. Monsiñor Adolfo and a party of Inquisition guards have apparently arrested Doña Elena and her entire household, and are taking them to El Carcél Moreno. Now Los Vagos must attack the party on the road to rescue Doña Elena.

• The rescue is mostly successful, but unfortunately, Monsiñor Adolfo and some of the guards manage to escape. They head for San Simeon with Señorita Lupe in tow. Lupe knows the location of La Casa de Vago and must be rescued before Bishop Lucera can torture the information out of her.

• Now the biggest challenge: Los Vagos must enter the heavily guarded gates of San Simeon, find a way into the

even more heavily guarded El Carcél Moreno, rescue Lupe and make it back to the hideout.

• An alternative challenge would be for Los Vagos to discover, (either before or after reaching El Carcél Moreno) that Señorita Lupe has been taken to the Bishop's estate for her version of "questioning." This would provide a setting for a group that is more interested in swinging into combat on chandeliers and less interested in storming heavily defended prisons.

• If the Game Master thinks that it is more appropriate, either ending could include the Heroes encountering the Monsiñor or even Bishop Lucera herself and having a chance to duel with the unexpectedly martial cleric.

Presumably, the story ends with Doña Elena safe in the arms of El Vago, having thrown her lot in with Los Vagos. Where the campaign proceeds from there is up to the GM. Certainly, many enemies still lurk in San Simeon: a rescue from El Carcél Moreno would bring the Inquisition swarming into the area, perhaps instigating harsh new laws against the local townsfolk. If that isn't enough, perhaps an NPC in the Los Vagos group is a spy, or El Corazón needs their help for a dangerous mission. Then there's the Montaigne... The possibilities are limited only by your imagination and the players' commitment to El Vago.

NPC Stats

Don Miguel Ontiveros de Rios (Villain)

Brawn: 1
Finesse: 2
Wits: 3
Resolve: 2
Panache: 3
Reputation: -15
Background: Hunting
Arcana: Arrogant
Advantages: Castillian (R/W), Théan (R/W), Castillian Accent (Aldana), Castillian Education, Membership (Swordsman's Guild), Noble, University

Courtier: Diplomacy 2, Etiquette 2, Fashion 1, Oratory 2, Politics 1
Scholar: History 2, Law 3, Mathematics 2, Philosophy 2, Research 1
Aldana (Journeyman): Exploit Weakness (Aldana) 4, Feint (Fencing) 4, Riposte (Fencing) 4, Tagging (Fencing) 4
Athlete: Break Fall 1, Climbing 2, Footwork 3, Leaping 2, Side-step 2
Fencing: Attack (Fencing) 5, Parry (Fencing) 5

Doña Elena Rivera de Rios (Hero)

Brawn: 2
Finesse: 3
Wits: 3
Resolve: 2
Panache: 3
Reputation: 17
Background: Obligation
Arcana: Focused
Advantages: Castillian (R/W), Théan (R/W), Castillian Accent (Aldana), Castillian Education, Noble
Courtier: Dancing 3, Diplomacy 1, Etiquette 2, Fashion 2, Politics 1, Scheming 2
Scholar: History 2, Law 3, Mathematics 2, Philosophy 2, Research 1, Theology 1

Señorita Lupe Velasquez (Hero)

Brawn: 2
Finesse: 3
Wits: 2
Resolve: 2
Panache: 3
Reputation: 13
Background: None
Arcana: Friendly
Advantages: Castillian (R/W), Théan (R/W), Castillian Accent (Aldana), Castillian Education, Noble
Courtier: Dancing 1, Diplomacy 2, Etiquette 2, Fashion 2, Oratory 1, Politics 1, Scheming 2
Doctor: Diagnosis 2, First Aid 1, Surgery 1
Knife: Attack (Knife) 2, Parry (Knife) 1

Alcalde Jorge Aldana (Villain)

Brawn: 1
Finesse: 1
Wits: 2
Resolve: 3
Panache: 2
Reputation: -25
Background: None
Arcana: Greedy
Advantages: Castillian (R/W), Théan (R/W), Castillian Accent (Aldana), Castillian Education, Membership (Swordsman's Guild), Noble, University
Courtier: Diplomacy 1, Etiquette 2, Fashion 1, Oratory 2, Politics 1, Scheming 1
Scholar: History 2, Law 1, Mathematics 2
Aldana (Journeyman): Exploit Weakness (Aldana) 4, Feint (Fencing) 4, Riposte (Fencing) 4, Tagging (Fencing) 4
Fencing: Attack (Fencing) 5, Parry (Fencing) 5

Monsiñor Adolfo Ontiveros de Velasquez (Villain)

Brawn: 2
Finesse: 1
Wits: 1
Resolve: 2
Panache: 2
Reputation: 0
Background: None
Arcana: Hot-headed
Advantages: Castillian (R/W), Théan (R/W), Castillian Accent (Aldana), Castillian Education, Membership (Swordsman's Guild), Ordained, University
Courtier: Dancing 1, Diplomacy 1, Etiquette 2, Fashion 1, Oratory 2, Politics 1, Scheming 2
Scholar: History 2, Law 3, Mathematics 2, Research 2, Theology 2
Aldana (Apprentice): Exploit Weakness (Aldana) 3, Feint (Fencing) 3, Riposte (Fencing) 3, Tagging (Fencing) 3
Athlete: Break Fall 1, Climbing 2, Footwork 3, Leaping 2, Side-step 2
Fencing: Attack (Fencing) 5, Parry (Fencing) 5

Bishop Lucera Yañez de Rioja (Villain)

Brawn: 2
Finesse: 2
Wits: 3
Resolve: 2
Panache: 2
Reputation: -15
Background: None
Arcana: Ruthless
Advantages: Castillian (R/W), Théan (R/W), Castillian Accent (Aldana), Castillian Education, Membership (Swordsman's Guild), Ordained, University
Courtier: Diplomacy 2, Etiquette 3, Oratory 2, Politics 3, Scheming 3
Scholar: History 2, Law 3, Philosophy 2, Research 1, Theology 4
Aldana (Journeyman): Exploit Weakness (Aldana) 4, Feint (Fencing) 4, Riposte (Fencing) 4, Tagging (Fencing) 4
Athlete: Break Fall 1, Footwork 3, Leaping 2, Side-step 2
Fencing: Attack (Fencing) 5, Parry (Fencing) 5

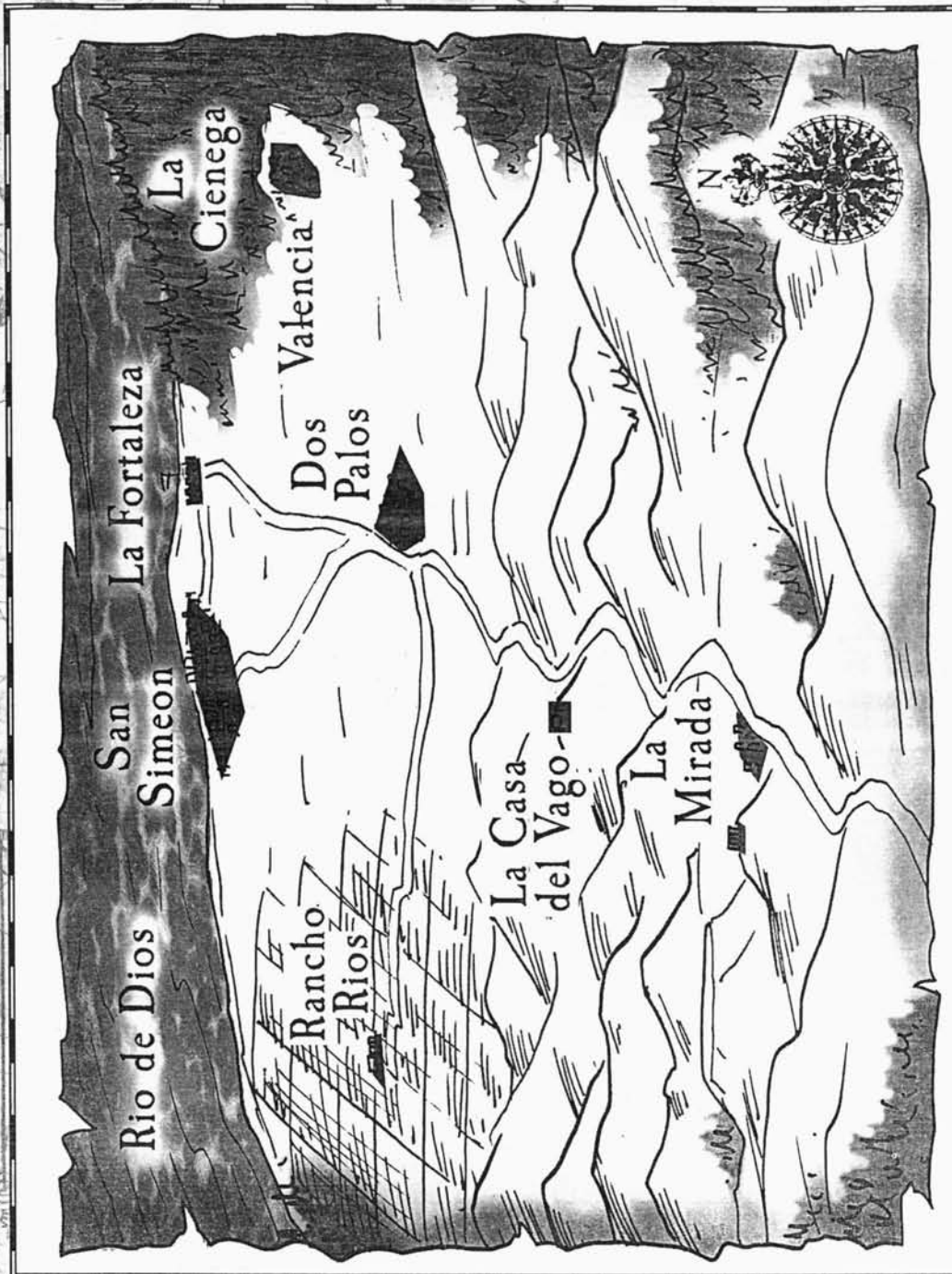
Joaquin el Pescador (Hero)

Brawn: 3
Finesse: 2
Wits: 3
Resolve: 3
Panache: 4
Reputation: 24
Background: Vow
Arcana: Courageous
Advantages: Castillian (R/W), Théan (R/W), Castillian Accent (Aldana), Castillian Education, Membership (Swordsman's Guild)
Criminal: Ambush 2, Lockpicking 2, Pickpocket 1, Shadowing 2, Stealth 3
Hunter: Ambush 4, Fishing 4, Stealth 3, Survival 3, Tracking 3, Traps 2
Sailor: Balance 2, Climbing 2, Footwork 5, Knotwork 2, Rigging 1
Aldana (Journeyman): Exploit Weakness (Aldana) 4, Feint (Fencing) 4, Riposte (Fencing) 4, Tagging (Fencing) 4

Athlete: Break Fall 2, Climbing 2, Footwork 5, Leaping 2, Side-step 3
Dirty Fighting: Attack (Improvised Weapon) 4, Parry (Improvised Weapon) 4
Fencing: Attack (Fencing) 5, Parry (Fencing) 5

Felipé Guzman (Villain)

Brawn: 3
Finesse: 3
Wits: 2
Resolve: 3
Panache: 2
Reputation: -10
Background: Hunting
Arcana: Arrogant
Advantages: Castillian (R/W), Théan (R/W), Castillian Accent (Aldana), Castillian Education
Criminal: Ambush 3, Gambling 2, Shadowing 4, Stealth 3
Servant: Gossip 3, Unobtrusive 3
Spy: Bribery 2, Conceal 2, Interrogation 3
Athlete: Break Fall 1, Climbing 2, Footwork 3, Leaping 2, Side-step 2
Dirty Fighting: Attack (Improvised Weapon) 4, Parry (Improvised Weapon) 3
Fencing: Attack (Fencing) 5, Parry (Fencing) 5
Zepeda (Journeyman): Bind (Whip) 4, Disarm (Whip) 4, Exploit Weakness (Zepeda) 4, Tagging (Whip) 4



City Vago

Traits		Advantages	
Brawn	2	Castillian (R/W)	(1)
Finesse	3	Castillian Accent (any)	(0)
Wits	3	Friend of the People	(5)
Resolve	2	Membership (Los Vagos)	(5)
Panache	2	El Puñal Occulto	(25)

Arcana: Courageous

Background: Vow

Civil Skills

Courtier

Dancing 2, Diplomacy 2, Etiquette 2, Oratory 3

Spy

Interrogation 2, Shadowing 2, Stealth 2

Streetwise

Socializing 2, Street Navigation 2, Underworld Lore 1

Martial Skills

Athlete

Footwork 2, Sprinting 1, Swinging 1

Knife

Attack (Knife) 2, Parry (Knife) 1

El Puñal Occulto

Bind (Fencing) 2, Pommel Strike (Fencing) 2

Income: 24G starting / 8G per month, plus 200 G per year



Country Vago

Traits		Advantages	
Brawn	3	Castillian (R/W)	(1)
Finesse	2	Castillian Accent (any)	(0)
Wits	2	Friend of the People	(5)
Resolve	3	Membership (Los Vagos)	(5)
Panache	2	Membership (Merchant's Guild)	(25)

Arcana: Intuitive

Background: Hunted

Civil Skills

Hunter

Ambush 1, Fishing 1, Stealth 2, Survival 1, Tracking 2

Merchant

Vintner 2

Spy

Interrogation 2, Shadowing 2, Stealth 2

Streetwise

Socializing 2, Street Navigation 2

Martial Skills

Athlete

Climbing 2, Footwork 2, Sprinting 1, Swinging 1

Firearms

Attack (Firearms) 3

Knife

Attack (Knife) 2, Parry (Knife) 1

Dirty Fighting

Attack (Dirty Fighting) 3, Kick 2, Throat Strike 1

Income: 36G starting / 2k2G per month, plus 200 G per year



Spy Vago

Traits		Advantages	
Brawn	2	Castilian (R/W)	(1)
Finesse	3	Théan (R/W)	(1)
Wits	3	Castilian Accent (any)	(0)
Resolve	4	Castilian Education	(10)
Panache	2	Membership (Los Vagos)	(5)
Reputation	17		

Arcana: Adaptable

Background: True Identity

Civil Skills

Courtier

Diplomacy 2, Etiquette 2, Scheming 1

Spy

Cryptography 2, Interrogation 2, Shadowing 3, Stealth 3

Streetwise

Scrounging 1, Socializing 2

Martial Skills

Athlete

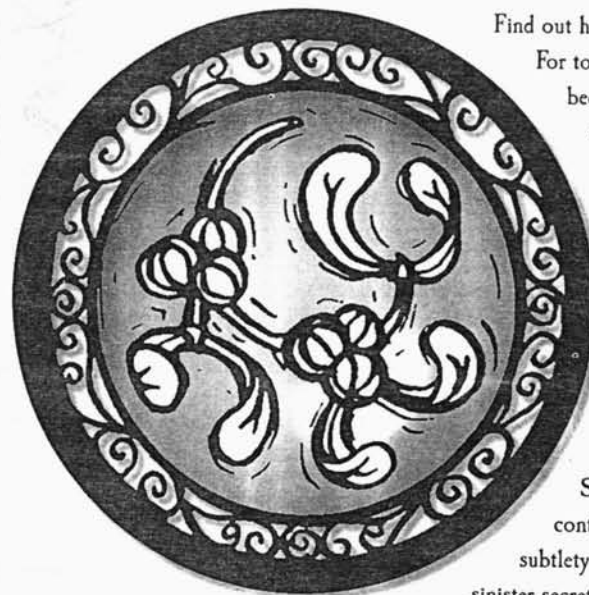
Footwork 2, Long Distance Running 2, Sprinting 1

Dirty Fighting

Attack (Dirty Fighting) 2, Kick 2, Throat Strike 1

Income: 21G starting /7G per month,
plus 200 G per year

SOPHIA'S DAUGHTERS



Find out how seductive danger can be!
For too long, the women of Théah have been relegated to the status of second-class citizens. Sophia's Daughters must move beneath the surface of Théan politics, concealing their activities behind silken gloves. The men they control are powerful, but not as dangerous as the women pulling their strings. Know your enemy; she already knows you. Sophia's Daughters, the final book in the Secret Societies of Théah line, contains potion rules, schools of subtlety and assassination, and the sinister secrets of Sophia's Daughters.

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