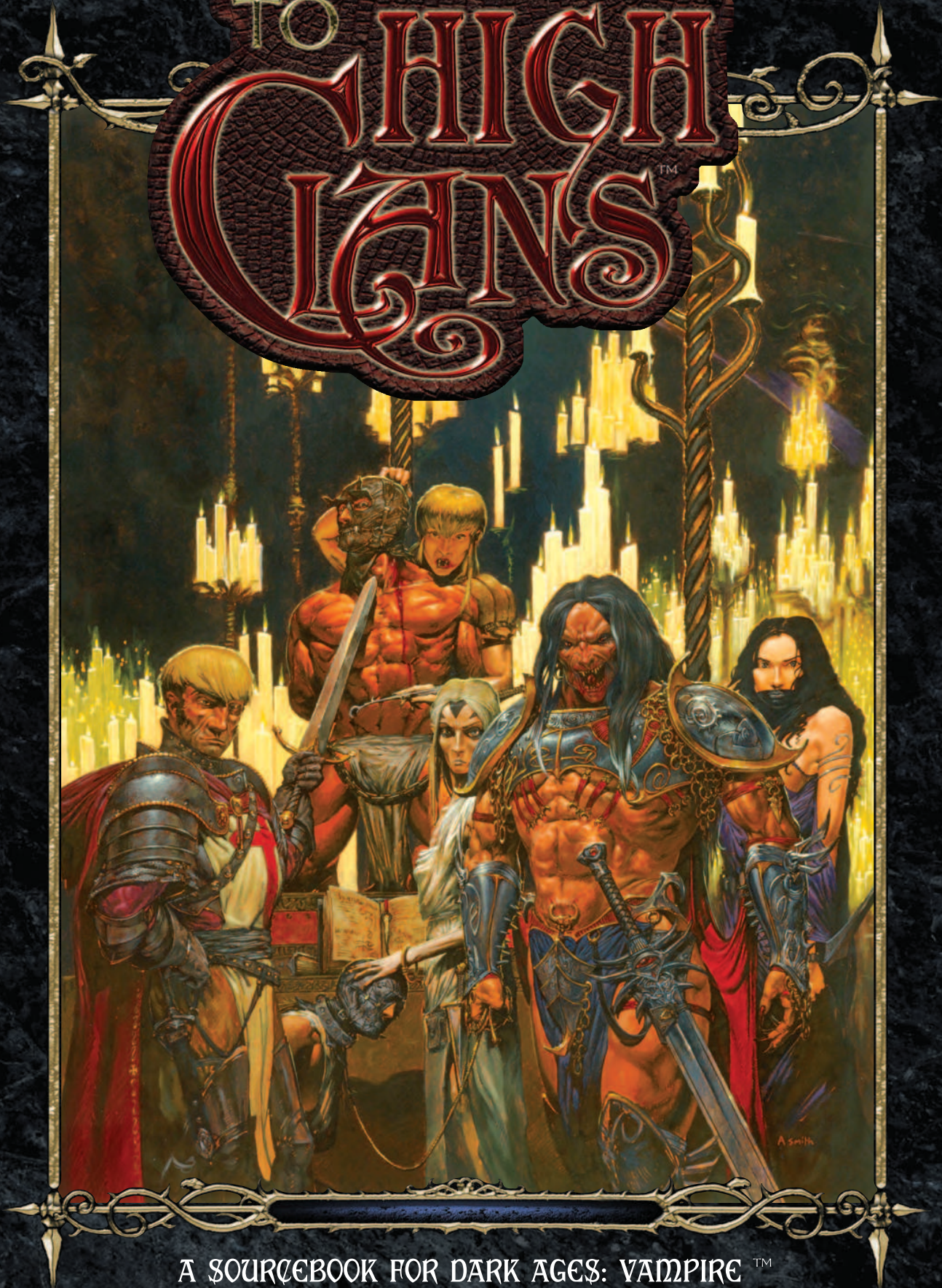




PLAYERS GUIDE TO HIGH CLANS™



A SOURCEBOOK FOR DARK AGES: VAMPIRE™






PLAYERS GUIDE
TO
HIGH
CLANS™

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PRINTED IN CANADA.

Acknowledgments

The authors and developer would like to acknowledge the fine work of the authors of **Clanbook: Cappadocian** and the **Libellus Sanguinis** series: Justin Achilli (Cappadocian), Craig Bolin (Ventrue), Richard Dansky (Lasombra), Robert Hatch (Tzimisce), Richard Stratton (Brujah), Cynthia Summers (Toreador). Your work was invaluable to ours.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Prelude: When the Waters Stop	5
Introduction	13
Chapter One: Once and Future Kings	17
Chapter Two: Playing the HighClans	93
Chapter Three: Noble by Association	125
Chapter Four: Birthrights and Bitter Secrets	147
Chapter Five: Those Who Rule the Night	211





PRELUDE: WHEN THE WATERS STOP

I still fear sleeping in silence. When I was little, I needed silence to sleep. My room in Lisbon faced the ocean and when I learned to fear death, the waves reminded me that the water would flow even after I died. From that time, I slept in my mother's room — I couldn't hear the water there. Mother told me not to fear death, and she told me stories of women who sacrificed their lives.

I was nine when Mother died. My father and I left our Lisbon manor for a small cottage outside Venice. Unlike the waters of Lisbon, the waters of Venice had no sense of control, and they often flooded our land with moisture and muddy smells. My new room was dank and looked out over an unruly creek. The coarse wooden walls were always moist, and mildew shared its pungent stench with the rotting leaves from outside.

Though I missed the salty clean scent of Lisbon, I enjoyed listening to the creek at night as I studied. Father would interrupt me when it was time to rest. He'd placed a cup of water on my table.

"Good work yesterday," he'd say. "But not perfect." I'd nod. "Blow out the candles before you sleep." I would watch him walk to the door. "Drink your water," he would say over his shoulder.

This was our evening ritual. He would leave and I'd drink the water, lie down and listen to the creek trickling over rocks. Unlike the ocean, the creek's melody changed. I would wait for the water to stop. It never did, and its ebb and flow lulled me to sleep.

†††

My father and I lived our lives structured by a water clock, or clepsydra as he called it. It told us when to start a task or when to change studies. My studies were endless, and they were the most important things. Besides that, my only chores were resetting the clepsydra and preparing the food. That included going to market and gathering the food.

"For your husband may not have slaves to cook for his family," he'd say.

I had trouble in the market after I questioned Christianity before the vegetable peddler. I didn't know anyone was listening and I never thought my words would bring such repercussions. The next time I went to market, Christobal approached me. I knew him to be a scholar but avoided him because he was a crusader.

"Tell me your name," he demanded.

"Mary of Nazareth and you stole my son!" I replied in Greek. I was gone before he translated my words.

When I told Father what happened, he laughed. "I'll send the slave girl from now on." He took my hand. "Soon you will marry and go with your husband to my estate in Lisbon."

†††

Father never found me a husband. He was an exceptional physician, and often away. Even foreign courts requested his talent. He traveled to far-off places and told me of the waters he saw. He described to me surreal and dangerous worlds. I sometimes worried that he might leave forever, but he always returned with a story to tell and a book to read.

His return from Aragon, my eighteenth year, was different. There were no stories, and he had no books. "When you're 20, I will send you to a friend at a university in Lisbon," he told me. "I can't leave you behind anymore."

I asked to go with him.

"No, no," he finally said. "My work can wait two years."

†††

A year later, Christobal came to my father and demanded to see me. I stayed in my room and listened to them talk.

"She is not here," my father said.

"She's wanted for heresy," Christobal replied. "The clergymen want to execute her. If she marries me, I will protect her."

"Would you marry a Jew?"

"She inspires rebellions with a few words," Christobal replied. "You know well that I can use her talents in our courts."

Courts? My head suddenly spun with questions and I kept listening for answers.

Father wasn't confused. "And you would curse her to that?"

Christobal spoke next. "If you give her to me, she will endure a long and vibrant existence under my protection." I heard the floor rock beneath someone's footsteps. "If you want her to exist at all, bring her to me." The door creaked open as he continued. "Otherwise I will have to deliver her ashes to the Church." The door slammed.

†††

Father booked passage to Byzantium, and I didn't need to ask why.

Yet a Byzantine came to us. My father tore me away from my studies to introduce me.

"Issachar, I'd like you to meet my daughter, Floretta." My father rattled in Hebrew. "He is not married," he whispered to me in Portuguese. "He's from Byzantium." I studied this stranger as he tinkered with our clepsydra. He was androgynous and his face wore the feminine features of a youth. Yet he carried himself like a man. Like my father, he wore a purple physician's cloak, but his was velvet to indicate his nobility. Besides his youthful beauty, he looked ill. His skin was a sickly pale, and even his breath was so shallow as to be unnoticeable.

The Byzantine emptied the water from the clepsydra. I hated him.

"Welcome, intruder," I spoke Portuguese, believing he would not understand. "Are you too ill to figure out why that clepsydra needs water, or does time mean nothing to the dead?"

Issachar's face twisted. "Pardon?" He understood well. I had offended him and I would have smiled if his eyes weren't invading mine. I refused to look away.

"My daughter thinks you're sick," my father stammered in Hebrew. "She knows my work. She's already delivered two children, though her Portuguese is rusty."

Issachar ignored my father and broke away from my eyes to streak the table with the water from the clepsydra. I had won.

"Get out," I finally said.

Issachar moved to me. His wet hand held my chin up as his eyes raped mine. He said I would never marry. I didn't care.

Issachar looked to my father. "Your daughter's knowledge is a threat to the community and if you do not go to Britain, I will turn her in for heresy."

"You're too late for that," I snapped.

"Silence," Issachar whispered. I listened.

"Floretta." My father spoke. "Why don't you go to bed? I will bring you your water before you sleep." I looked to the stranger. He turned away.

†††

After Father left, I began to have nightmares that the waters stopped. In my dream, the silence woke me. The room was always murky and a body blocked the moon from my face.

"You didn't drink your water." The body had Issachar's voice. He handed me a small metal cup. I swallowed its liquid and grimaced at its filmy metallic flavor.

"It won't taste so bad if you drink it right after you pour it," he said.

"I thought I told you to leave."

"You need someone to watch you."

†††

My nightmares often began with that, but each ended differently. In the first, Issachar left. In the second, he held me, and in the third, he took my virginity and allowed me to experience the passion my father had taught me to fear. That passion made me soft. For the first time in years, I slept in silence. I believed that I finally had the husband I needed to save me. Yet when I woke, Issachar was gone, and there

was no sign of virginal blood. I still felt the passion and it began to destroy me.

In the fourth dream, I asked Issachar to marry me. In the fifth, he said no. In the sixth, he left before I fell asleep, and he continued to do so from then on. From then on, I'd often wake feeling lost and disoriented. My studies drained me and a dizzying sensation stirred my gut. I chose to waste away in bed and listen to the stream. What kept me alive was the water I drank.

†††

The night I decided to die was the last night I dreamt of Issachar. I didn't pour the water as usual. Instead, I took an old knife to my room and cut my wrists the way my father did to end the pain of the dying. I snuffed the candle and rested on my bed. I lowered my wrists to the floor on either side of me and imagined my blood flowing to the watery chorus of the creek.

When the chorus stopped, Issachar held me. It was the first time I saw him in candlelight.

"Let me die," I whispered.

"I can't," he replied. "You're a philosopher, not a woman." His hand reached for the knife. "That is why you can't marry."

"Then stay with me." I watched him bunch his wide sleeve under his arm.

"I can't." He cut his wrist.

I felt a heated ball knot in my throat. "You're cursing me," I snapped.

"I won't curse you tonight." He brought his bleeding wrist to my lips. "Drink."

"Blood?" I wanted to drink. My soul was a mess of desire for the liquid, but my craving was irrational. "You are corrupting me."

Issachar smiled. "Only a true philosopher would go against her irrational desires."

"By that logic, I shouldn't drink."

"You need nourishment."

"Blood won't save me."

"Jesus saved thousands with his blood."

I managed to laugh. "You are not a savior." Issachar's regal presence looked ridiculous in that plasma-hued candlelight. In noble velvet, he sat posed on my dirty bed as if it were a throne. He even slit his wrists for me.

"I could be," he answered.

"Then save me!"

"Drink."

I drank.

†††

When it ended, he stood and told me he had to let this moment go. I told him to stay.

"If I do, the sun won't rise."

"You can't stop the sun from rising." I laughed. "If you can stop the sun and the waters, end my desires for you."

"Ah, but then I can't return."

"Fine," I said. "Leave and let the sun rise. I'll burn like a demon and prove that you aren't my savior."

"You haven't had enough blood to burn in the sun." He approached the door.

"Then give me more." The desperation in my voice scared me. "I hate that sun."

Issachar glared at me. "You are blind, Floretta. I am from a cave of shadows and I won't bring you here until you see the sun itself." He left.

†††

When I woke, things weren't as I remembered. My wrists lacked scars, but blood stained my floor. The cup sat on my table and the candle had burnt down. The knife was gone. I wondered if the nightmare had been real, or if I was mad. Nightmares sometimes did that.

I decided to ignore these dreams and move on. That day I left the house for the first time in weeks. The sun rejuvenated me and I ignored the clepsydra to enjoy its warmth. Like a child, I swam, ran, danced, sang and napped. I felt reborn, but that was the last day of my youth.

That evening I sent the slave girl to market and fell asleep in the common room, waiting for her.

A loud thud broke my slumber.

The door broke loose as I opened my eyes. Five men stared at me from its frame.

One soldier pointed to me. "She's the one who started it!"

I stood as they approached. Their leader pinned my neck to the wall and began interrogating me. I recognized him as Christobal.

"Did you or did you not deliver Yuliette Giovanni's child?" I nodded. That wasn't a crime. He tightened his grip. "Yuliette died in the sun yesterday. Only demons die that way."

I smirked. "Do you really believe in such things?"

He slapped me. "We've heard rumors about Ezekiel Cohen's daughter. She can heal, she can think, and she can enchant people to forsake the Church."

"I'm guilty." I mocked him, realizing that my respect would get me nowhere.

He pressed at my throat.

"Are you a creature of the damned?" I spat at him but he continued. "Did you call yourself Mary of Nazareth or not?" Despite his grasp, I smiled and nodded eagerly.

He released his hand and I collapsed.

Christobal addressed his soldiers. "Take what you want and bring her to me tomorrow night."

These men advanced. Their armed bodies blurred in my vision as I looked for an escape.

"Christobal!" A female voice broke the chaos of the room. "That's not what a true Christian would do!" I looked to the front door and saw a girl younger than me. She wore her hair in braids that crowned her head, and her gown was a creamy silk. "Shame!" Her voice was theatrical and she reminded me of a carnival girl who demanded attention.

"Ah, Katarin, the virgin whore of Thessalonica." Christobal sneered.

She smiled back. "I demand you release this woman."

"She answers to you?"

"She answers to Barcelona's court. I am to deliver her to Prince Mireia."

"Perhaps you'd like to deliver to me first!" a guard near the door chided. All but Christobal snickered.

"Silence!" The girl commanded. "You call yourselves men of Christ? That Jew is more chaste than you." I saw one man bite his lips as another looked to his feet. All but Christobal froze breathless, and even I had difficulty breathing. Katarin approached Christobal and locked her steel-blue eyes with his. They stared at one another for a long time. I backed to the stairwell and watched the other soldiers ease to the door. We watched the duo as if they were performing a dance. They seemed to glow and I didn't know who was the fairer.

Christobal drew his sword, but another met his chest. Katarin held its hilt, her arm steadying the blade as if it were part of the sword itself. She smiled. "Floretta would make a fine Brujah." The tip of her sword unlatched Christobal's blade from his hand. It fell with a clank. "But she's not yours." Katarin advanced Christobal to the door, and her eyes never left his. Her voice demanded his submission. "Get your sheep out of here."

†††

When they left the front door, Katarin latched my wrist with her free hand and yanked me to the back door.

"We must go," she said.

"What?" I stammered. "I can't go. Who are you?"

"We don't have time to stop now." She allowed her dress to tear for the sake of opening the door. She amazed me. "Prince Mireia needs you."

"Who is he?"

Katarin smiled wryly as she shoved the door open. "She, and I promise to tell you later." Katarin stopped. "I almost forgot." She ran back to the front door to pick up a book; she must have dropped it before when talking to Christobal. "Your father is waiting for you too." She handed me the book. I read my father's inscription as I followed Katarin out the door.

"About Mireia," Katarin stopped again to whisper. "I think she's a harlot!" I watched her face twist into a smile so childish that I forgot her stale eyes.

†††

We spent twelve days sailing to Barcelona. I watched the sunrise against the watery horizon every morning and awaited the reunion with my father. Yet my nights were bothersome. I heard the water, of course, but Katarin's odd habits kept me awake. She also avoided the sun and she drank the blood of rats.

I asked her why she didn't eat the herring instead.

"If I were an animal, I'd be a fish," she replied as she flung a dead rat over her shoulder. She drank at least ten rats a night and then gave me my water.

The first few days were comfortable. Katarin wrote about the movement of rocks, and I read the copy of the *Aeneid* my father had given me.

"Who is Dido?" Katarin asked one night as she twiddled a pebble between her fingers.

"She's the philosopher queen of Carthage."

"Right." Katarin closed her eyes and tossed her back against the wall. "Carthage," she sang. "I remember Carthage."

Katarin was mad.

On the fifth night, I found her staring at the ceiling.

"There are no more rats," she whispered. "I ate them all."

On the sixth night, Katarin disappeared. On the seventh, I found her with a dead man. She stared at me in the moonlight, her eyes wide in shock. She released the corpse to lick her fingers. Blood stained her gown, and the angry wind tore at her long auburn curls.

The next night, I tried to hide from Katarin, but she found me. When she did, she sat a cup next to me and fell quiet until I looked at her.

"I've been unfair to you," she confessed. "I am a Cainite — a vampire. Issachar is my mentor and you crave the water we mix with our blood."

I wondered if I was still dreaming.

In the end, it didn't matter. At least Katarin seemed real. She was there when I fell asleep and she was there when I woke. She never harmed me and instead became my sister.

†††

When we docked, we bathed, dressed and went to court.

Barcelona's court was make-believe. Its members were androgynous and destructively beautiful. Beings in gowns of satin and velvet wore their hair in long silken tresses. They stood, unmoved, and stared at us as if ready to fight. They were too strong to be women. I saw other beings with cropped hair, or beards. They wore glistening armor or tunics shaded in deep crimsons, violets or emeralds and their eyes clashed against their skin. Yet they were too beautiful to be men. Whether strong or beautiful, all moved with precise grace.

Three beings, two beautiful and one strong, walked to a platform in front of us. The strong one, a girlish figure with onyx hair, sat in the chair and smoothed her hands over the ruby brocade of her gown. She beckoned us forth, and as we approached her, the sea of her audience parted to allow us passage. I felt their eyes destroy me only to reshape me in their image.

I glanced to Katarin. Her earthy voice made me realize that she was different. She was real, and they weren't. She whispered. "Pretend you're Dido."

The woman in red scrutinized us. Even this woman was a mirage amid this theatric carnival. Everything was too perfect not to have been rehearsed. The scene was set and my line was up.

"So, this is the famous Floretta of Lisbon?" I don't remember the woman approaching me, but her fingers now cupped my chin. She whispered, "And you're the illuminator Issachar's ward promised us?"

I didn't know what an illuminator was, but I felt the need to nod.

"She's in training, Prince Mireia." Katarin saved me from this woman's eyes. "She's talented at penmanship."

"But she's not trained?" Mireia smirked as she shoved me. "Dearest Katarin of Thessalonica, I asked for a trained

illuminator, not some farm girl." Mireia was sitting again. "You failed me, and in failing, you need to meet up to our agreement." I watched Mireia grin like children do when reporting the scandalous secrets of their siblings.

"Tell this Court what you really are."

The silence felt so thick that it seemed as if time stood still. I looked to Katarin and then to the sea of eyes drowning us. It didn't bother me because these noblemen performed everything. Even the dialogue seemed hollow.

"Brujah," Katarin finally confessed.

Mireia laughed. "Fellow Cainites, Katarin isn't what you think."

"Her words are true, your highness!" Issachar followed his voice to the throne. "I saw to it myself that Floretta is as good as any scribe you've had. Katarin is indeed Brujah, and she wouldn't be my ward if she weren't."

The two of them fought a battle with their eyes. Mireia dropped her gaze first.

Issachar looked to the sea of curious spectators before us. "Friends of Aragon," he began. "I present to you my prospective childe, Floretta of Lisbon. Her father died and he willed her to my care. Yet I shall leave her for five years so she may repay whatever burdens her father and I have bestowed upon you. I wish to thank your prince and your council for their hospitality."

†††

The next night Katarin left with Issachar. A week later, Mireia instructed a young man to see to me. He called himself Tobias and he was gentle, if not passive. He claimed to be a Toreador but I called him a fop. He laughed.

"Ah, the lady has spark! No wonder the Brujah want you."

"Brujah?" I asked. "Katarin, you mean?"

Tobias shook his head. "Christobal sent me to fetch you."

I felt ill. "The crusader?"

Tobias grinned. "He had me watch you from afar, but he didn't expect me to fall in love with you. If only I could claim your beauty for Clan Toreador."

"Clan Toreador?" I finally shouted out of frustration. "What are these clans that are trying to claim me?"

"Have they not told you anything?"

"You're blood-drinking corpses."

"We are, yes. I thought your father would have told you by now." Tobias offered me a chair, but I didn't sit. "He mentioned you when he first came to Iberia," he continued. "He has since served our kind, and he sought this existence for you as an alternative to marriage."

I couldn't believe him. "My father wouldn't condemn me to damnation."

"You can't believe in damnation if you don't believe in God."

I lost my voice.

Tobias continued. "Issachar offered to Embrace you, but Christobal said he would let me marry you if he got to you first."

"What?" Tobias was a fool. "Christobal wants me dead."

Tobias pulled my hand to his chest. "I humbly apologize! I loved you."

I wanted to believe Tobias was acting, but he seemed to be the only genuine man in Barcelona's court. I looked at Tobias as he began to explain himself.

†††

We talked all night. Tobias told me what he desired and he asked me what I wanted. I became compelled to tell him everything. I told him about my mother, my father and our slaves. He comforted me in my mourning, and he tried to enlighten me in the ways of Cainites. Though confused, I paid attention. I in turn spoke of my academic endeavors, which were beyond his understanding. He listened anyway, and his patience was so earnest that I even told him that I feared silence.

"I'll sing you to sleep then." he winked at me.

"What's an illuminator?" I finally asked.

†††

An illuminator artistically copies manuscripts. She is responsible for preserving the words of bygone days, but she is to preserve only. She doesn't read, think or ask questions. She only imitates. I was not an imitator.

Tobias told me to pretend. "If they ask," he said, "tell them you can't read."

Because I claimed to be illiterate, Mireia allowed me to copy everything from tawdry laws to esoteric philosophies. It was in this way that I learned of Brujah's betrayer and the fall of Carthage. I learned too of Philo the Jew, the Noddist fragments, the Koran, the *Amici Noctis* and the War of Princes. I learned of the heresies, the names of other princes, the secret libraries and their forbidden lore.

†††

When Tobias asked me to be his courtesan, I agreed as long as I could continue my studies. The life of a courtesan was one of perfected courtly love. I admired Tobias but I didn't love him. I grew bored with this existence and boredom led me to seek out the hidden libraries during the day when the nightly court slept.

†††

The fifth year came, but Issachar didn't. Mireia assumed that Tobias was enough to keep me obedient. I therefore avoided her presence and spent more time in her stone libraries.

Dido was my new obsession and I spent hours reading the first book of the *Aeneid*. I craved her power and I would fall asleep dreaming that I was the queen of Carthage.

"She kills herself, you know." My chest began to clot with air as a chilled voice melted my dreams. The rich voice itself urged me to roll on my back and seek its source. The speaker was a man whose body shaded me from the torch. He held his hand out. Though his face remained obscure, I recognized his posture as that belonging to Christobal.

"When her love leaves, she falls to her passions and abandons her land." I looked to the man and he continued. "I saw you do that." Christobal stepped back, and I watched

the torchlight shower his body. His skin reminded me of polished marble and contrasted beautifully with the onyx that polished his eyes. He wore a brilliant crimson cloak, and the torchlight dusted its folds in iridescent shades of gold and copper. He was my murderer, and for the first time, his presence consumed me.

"Dido forgot the fair lessons of stoic philosophy. In the end she lost control and killed herself." He smirked. "You'll do the same."

I shook my head. "I can't read such lessons."

His shadow loomed over the cracked stone floor. I told myself that this floor was all we shared, but now his hand took my chin and he forced his eyes into mine. "Never deceive me again, my child." His eyes were divine but his voice twisted in cruelty.

"I am not your child," I stammered.

Christobal smirked and looked to the door as he yanked a folded piece of parchment from his belt.

"Here are the directions to this chamber, Floretta," he announced as he unfolded the parchment before me. "You transcribed them, and followed them. If you can't read, how did you get here, and why do you come?" He pushed the paper to my face. "That is your handwriting, is it not?"

I nodded as I studied my scrawls. Christobal scoffed. "You lied before the Prince of Barcelona." His gaze shifted to the door and then he was on top of me. He yanked my head to the side and I felt two sharp needles pierce my skin. I cringed from the sound of my scream as it pounded against the stone walls. The scream ended in an abrupt gurgle when he forced his blood down my throat.

†††

When it ended, Christobal again looked to the large oak door. I felt purged as my stomach twisted in hunger. I forced my eyes closed. Christobal's voice echoed in my mind.

"When I killed your father I promised him you would be purified." I forced my hands to my ears to shield off his infuriating words, but I still heard his voice. "Only the sun can cleanse you now." I opened my eyes and saw him laugh. Anger tightened my jaw. "Good girl," he cooed. "Feel the true rage of Brujah while you can, for you will never feel it again."

"You can't do this." I stammered. The hunger was killing me. "Prince Mireia will kill you too, and if she doesn't Issachar will."

Christobal tousled my hair as he looked to the door. I followed his gaze and expected someone to walk in.

"Do you really think Mireia wants another one of Sheri's brood frolicking around Iberia?" His hand went down to yank at my tunic. I screamed and watched him smile. "So impure. A liar, a harlot and an abandoned vampire hiding from her masters. The court will be pleased that I exposed such a criminal." I shrieked as he tore off my dress. His eyes caged mine as he gashed his neck. "Drink."

I drank. He screamed. I moaned. I kept drinking as he pulled my legs around his waist. The room passed me in circles as we turned.

"Amaranth!" His voice stirred my thirst. "Amaranth!" he shouted again.

I heard the door open as I moaned. Mireia was framed in the doorway, and her guards approached us. I felt pain for a moment, but nothing after that.

†††

"It's your turn." Christobal's voice woke me. "Pay attention and wake up!" I opened my eyes and saw Mireia that stood at the podium.

"Let the defendant plead her case," she said as she smiled to me.

I wasn't sure if I was dreaming, but this time it did matter.

"What case?" I looked around. The room was small, shadowy and sparsely populated. The few who watched did so with judgment. They were hard to see.

"What am I being tried for?"

"You should pay attention," Christobal said. I tried to recall what was going on, but hunger threatened my rationality.

"I'm innocent."

"But I found you attempting Amaranth against Christobal," the prince replied.

"What do you mean?"

People laughed.

"Your blatant act of incompetence," Mireia continued, "is enough offense to hold you prisoner." I tried to question her but she cut me short. "Who Embraced you?"

"Christobal," I answered, guessing at what she meant.

People laughed again.

Mireia silenced the voices. "We've heard four witnesses testify. A woman Embraced you two weeks ago and you've avoided us to keep this fact hidden. I saw it myself." She paused. "Do you have anyone here to speak in your defense?"

I looked for help among the unfamiliar faces. They wore masks of mockery and smiles.

"Tobias will speak for me," I finally replied.

"Tobias was exiled," Mireia answered before turning to her audience. "Will anyone else speak for this Caitiff?"

Silence slid from the room and bloated my chest with terror.

"Well then," Mireia finally said. "I hereby charge Floretta of Lisbon guilty of attempted Amaranth, dishonesty and incompetence. She is a traitor to the Court of Barcelona and to the Holy Church. I sentence her to purification by sunlight."

Before I could question, Christobal grabbed my shoulders and looked into my eyes. He spoke. He told me to sleep, and somehow, I did.

†††

I woke curled up on the stone floor of a tower. The knotting hunger in my stomach drove me to search for life. This tower was a tomb that ended existence, and only the moonlight hung on its walls. The room inhibited motion and even the rats avoided its nihilistic weight.

Time must have stopped and I waited in agony for motion to continue. I sometimes cried for Tobias, and at other times I hoped a god would answer my prayers. No one answered, and at some point even the moon abandoned me. Soon it would be dawn. I looked to the sky. Time indeed continued. The sun would replace the moon, and I would die in its rays. I was already dead and I wondered how I could die a second time. A second death meant nonexistence. I would stop thinking and even time would abandon me. This was why I feared the silence. I closed my eyes and chose this fate for myself. In the end, it didn't matter.

†††

"I can't speak to you after tonight." I opened my eyes. There was no immediate light. A roof protected me from the sky and Issachar blocked the torchlight from my face.

"Did you save me from the sun?" I asked.

"Does it matter?"

It didn't.

I sat up and surveyed the room. It was my room in Lisbon, but it was far smaller than I remembered. It brought back memories of my early childhood, but the waves no longer bothered me.

Issachar spoke. "Katarin will stay with you." I thought of Katarin and smiled remembering her fabricated joy.

"Am I Brujah now?" I asked. "That should make me family, right?"

Issachar said nothing and I somehow felt that he didn't think so. I suddenly wanted to die again.

"Well, you're already dead," he replied. "But would you really commit yourself to nonexistence just because you're not of my blood?"

I was angry. "So, you're going to leave me. And then what?" My shoulders sank and I felt as if someone were covering my torso with sand. "Do you always leave? Or was I dreaming when you brought the silence to Venice?"

"I don't bring silence."

"That creek stopped," I snapped.

"Creeks don't just stop."

"So they were dreams," I concluded.

"Does it matter?"

It didn't.

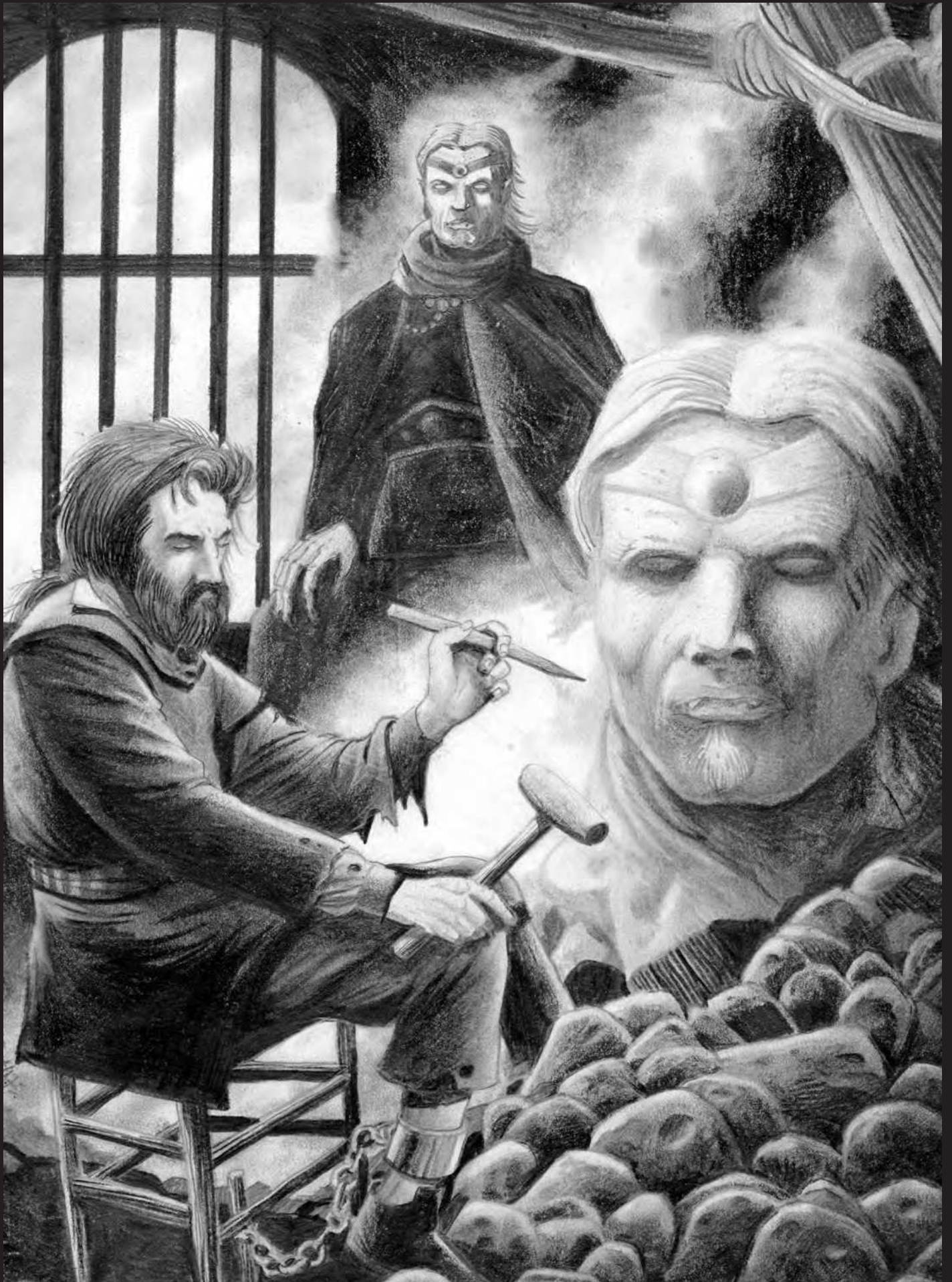
†††

The next night, Issachar refused to speak to me. Katarin and I escorted him to his boat. We didn't say a word but I watched Katarin's face as blood spilled from her eyes. He embraced her for a moment. She begged him to stay but her pleas didn't persuade him. He gave her his sword and kissed her cheek. He stroked her hair and held her until she stopped crying. He promised to return to her, and then he left. I felt disowned, but I wasn't jealous of Katarin. I knew that this time, her emotions were real. I took her hand and led her back to my manor.

†††

As time passed, I taught Katarin how to heal from those emotions. She in exchange helped me understand what I was becoming. She taught me how to catch rats, seduce prey and smile when I felt nothing. For ten years, we shared everything from our possessions to our blood. We spoke of our pasts, our studies and our ambitions. Yet we never mentioned Barcelona, and I never slept without the melody of the ocean.







INTRODUCTION

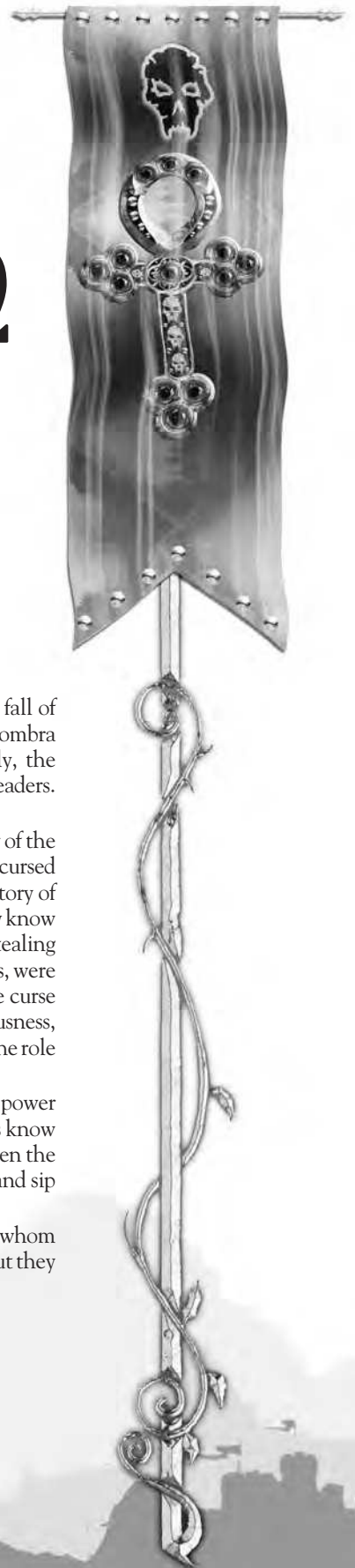
His brood shall bend their knees to me in fear
And come when I do call them, and obey,
Dead or living, willing or no.
— The Erciyes Fragments. I (Genesis)

The Cainites of the High Clans have ruled the Dark Medieval nights since before the fall of Rome. Ventrue princes claim domain over the vast majority of the cities of Europe, with Lasombra and Toreador both running close seconds... Although they claim cities much more rarely, the Cappadocians and Brujah occupy respected positions as scholars, philosophers and spiritual leaders. No one can dispute that in their own lands, the Tzimisce are the only true power.

An unbroken lineage of blood and power extends back from the youngest neonate of any of the High Clans straight to one of the clan founders, and from there to Caine himself. Most first cursed vampires can recite that lineage, and even those who can't have a good, solid grasp of the history of the Damned. They know Caine's words to the three angels who offered him redemption. They know the sad story of the fall of the Salubri, and the shock of the "truth" about the Unicorns' soul-stealing ways. They know why the Low Clans are called "fallen" — because they, unlike the High Clans, were unable to shoulder the burdens of rulership. They crumbled under the heavy demands of the curse of vampirism, and each of the Low Clans labors to this night under its punishment — hideousness, madness, sin, bestiality. The High Clans know that their own "weaknesses" are simply part of the role that God expects them to play (at worst) or marks of refinement and taste.

The first cursed Cainites know, as do mortal rulers, that they are destined for their seats of power because God Himself wills it so. Any question of that is therefore blasphemy. These Cainites know that the turmoil caused by the War of Princes, the Tremere's usurpation of the Salubri and even the horrific chaos of the Crusades is ultimately going to pass, and they shall sit on their thrones and sip the blood of their herds once more.

The Cainites of the High Clans know all this because their sires told them. Their sires, whom they must eventually destroy if they wish to have any chance of taking power for themselves. But they must take this power, for God Himself ordained that the High Clans must rule.



Written by the Victors

Older Cainites remember Rome and before, and know that the divide between “High” and “Low” Clans is artificial and comparatively recent. Cainite elders of the Low Clans bring this up occasionally, but even the Brujah who remember fighting infernalists alongside the Assamites or the Ventrue who once took council from Malkavian seers feign ignorance and indignation at the suggestion that the first cursed were ever anything but. Centuries of the six (seven, until the diablerie of Saulot) High Clans working together to cement their rule, agreeing on their stations if nothing else, have made difference between High and Low very real in practice, even if the theory behind it is profoundly flawed. Even if the Tzimisce might consider the Ventrue contemptible imperialistic dogs, the Fiends recognize the Warlords as fellow nobility. The Nosferatu might be more loyal, more useful and more honest . . . but they are still lower, still weaker and *lower* than the Ventrue. This system, wherein the High Clans give consideration to each other before any of the fallen, drew anger from some of the low-blooded and resignation from others, but it could only last for so long before something gave.

The Peasants Revolt

Saulot’s destruction by Tremere was probably the beginning of it. To be sure, a Low Clan Cainite or two might have claimed a domain before that terrible night, but that typically only happened in Outremer, where the “rules” were different anyway, and Iberia, where the humans had allowed Moors to conquer. But when the Usurpers stood up to claim their place as a true clan, fallen all over Europe grew more brazen (or so it certainly seemed to the High Clans). Furores attacked High Clan Cainites and took their domains, their blood and their souls. Still the divide remained in place, perhaps because the most important cities in Europe — Constantinople, Paris, London — remained firmly in first cursed hands.

Then came the Bitter Crusade.

That, in the aftermath of the Fourth Crusade, Constantinople remained the domain of a High Clan vampire (though now a Lasombra rather than a Toreador) did not change the fact that Michael the Patriarch, arguably the most powerful active vampire in the known world, was laid low. If Michael could die, then no one — not Mithras of London, Hardestadt the Elder or any other prince — was safe. True, Saulot had met his Final Death years before, but that happened in a remote haven, far away from kine population centers, and as such word took years to spread throughout the Cainite community (and by the time it did spread, word about the Salubri’s penchant for stealing souls traveled with it). Michael’s death came amid the fires of the Fall of Constantinople, and if the Low Clans were brazen before, they now became downright incorrigible. The War of Princes began as the Cainite monarchs of Europe battled to keep what’s theirs (and perhaps take a bit more), but the war is by no means a High Clan-only affair. When the dust settles, everything might be different. Even if the first cursed *know*, through years of tradition and experience, that the status quo of nights past will return, they *feel* in their undead hearts that nothing will ever be the same again.

Theme and Mood

The **Players Guide to High Clans**, as the name suggests, is designed to give players of High Clan Cainites more options and information. While the themes and moods described in **Dark Ages: Vampire** are applicable for all vampire characters (obviously), a few stand out where the High Clans are concerned.

Theme

- **Damnation:** The High Clans, being on the whole better educated than their fallen brethren, wonder more often about the disposition of their immortal souls. Are they *truly* chosen by God to be rulers of the night? Are they not just as Damned as the Low Clans? And doesn’t God prize humility? If it is easier for a camel to pass through a needle’s eye than a rich man to get into Heaven, what chance does that leave the first cursed?

Regardless of what road a vampire might follow, the prospect of degeneration is still present and still terrifying. The High Clans, so often concerned not only with their own unives but the existences of others, also have more responsibility weighing on their souls . . . and more targets for their Beasts.

- **Ambition:** The High Clans are, in many ways, defined by their ambitions. These ambitions have subtle layers — a Ventrue might seem merely power-mad, but that desire for power stems from a sincere belief that he is the best person to rule. A Cappadocian seeks knowledge, but that knowledge is ultimately to be used for performing rituals to *raise the dead*. An ambition-themed story has the potential to be quite rich if you and your Storyteller consider not only what a vampire wants but also *why*.

LANDS BEYOND

Stute readers may note that the High Clan/Low Clan distinction is entirely artificial, as evidenced by the fact that it falls apart entirely in Outremer, and even in Iberia. This is true — the High Clans spent centuries cementing their own positions as the holders of power and simultaneously keeping the Low Clans down, but the distinction exists only because so many Cainites acknowledge it. In parts of the world where the clans in power are different, the High/Low distinction does not apply (or at least, the clans marked as “high” and “low” vary).

This book (and the previously released **Players Guide to Low Clans**) focuses on Europe, rather than Outremer, and thus assumes that the social structure presented in **Dark Ages: Vampire** is, if not valid, then at least prevalent. Storytellers running chronicles set in Outremer, Iberia or other places where the social structure is different should keep in mind that vampires of the “Low Clans” in such places are not likely to labor under the same difficulties presented in this book. Likewise, first cursed Cainites in such places may find themselves bereft of their “High Clan” status. Please refer to **Veil of Night** and **Iberia by Night** for more information.

• **Divine Right:** Hand in hand with damnation is the theme of divine right. Some Cainites are completely convinced of their own superiority and righteousness, having bought into all of the rhetoric their sires have given them. For some Cainites (including many Tzimisce), the right to do as one wills stems not from God but from the vampire herself, which puts another layer onto this theme: Is God even necessary for the first cursed to claim power? A secondary theme here is arrogance—the High Clans’ smug self-assurance that their beliefs and practices are the “correct” ones make them more enemies than they know, but they aren’t behaving that way to annoy other Cainites, they’re doing it because they *know* they’re right. The rude awakening a coterie of first cursed Cainites receives when it arrives in, say, Granada is worthy of a story in itself.

• **War:** Pragmatically speaking, the only way to gain power as a Cainite is to destroy one’s superiors. Uriel’s Curse says as much. Neonates don’t always realize it right away, but a few decades as a vampire teaches that lesson. The rules of Cainite society and the tenets of the *Via Regalis* (probably the most common road for High Clan Cainites, all told) make taking such drastic steps difficult, however. When the War of Princes erupted, many seconds-in-command inwardly rejoiced. The war is a dangerous time, between the Low Clans rebelling and other forces destroying careless vampires, but it is also a time of immense opportunity and desperation. After all, if one can’t seize power now, then when?

Mood

• **Terror:** Low Clans games lean more toward dirty, bloody, visceral horror. That sort of thing certainly has a place among the High Clans (and that place is “the Tzimisce”), but on the whole, the first cursed lend themselves to more cerebral, mental and spiritual terror. The High Clans can reorder a person’s mind and heart as well as his body—how would he even know if he were doing their work (a question that vassals of powerful first cursed Cainites ask on a regular basis)? As for more tangible example of this element of terror, consider the shadow-crafting Lasombra or the Cappadocians and their zombie servants. Blood isn’t necessary; the High Clans bring other forms of Hell with them. Ask yourself: What about your character is frightening? Her cold, fanged smile? The way the shadows always lengthen around her? The way her retinue flinches whenever she makes a sudden movement?

• **Paranoia:** Mentioned in **Dark Ages: Vampire**, this mood is extremely appropriate for the High Clans. The Low Clans can safely assume that everyone is out to get them, but the first cursed are surrounded by servants and vassals who have taken oaths to protect them. Those oaths, which should be comforting, only lead the Cainites to question those who would swear fealty. Why would they swear themselves away? Are they merely waiting for the best time for betrayal?

Chapter by Chapter

The **Prelude** shows High Clan society from the underside, as a young woman is slowly Embraced into a world she is not permitted to understand.

Introduction: The section you’re reading now. Themes, moods, and sources of inspiration can be found here.

Chapter One: Once and Future Kings presents the histories of each of the High Clans, along with a player’s toolkit providing character creation and plot hook inspira-

tions. You’ll also find information on the domains of the first cursed, some tactics they use to make their way in the Dark Medieval, and the ways in which they twist and pervert human customs.

Chapter Two: Playing the High Clans offers an in-depth look at creating, conceptualizing and developing High Clan characters.

Chapter Three: Noble by Association provides information on some minor bloodlines associated with the High Clans—the Giovanni branch of Clan Cappadocian, the remnants of Clan Salubri, the Graverobbers’ Lamia bodyguards and a strange lineage claiming to be the True Brujah.

Chapter Four: Birthrights and Bitter Secrets gives players and Storytellers a multitude of new Discipline techniques, as well as new Mortis rituals, details on Koldunic Sorcery and advanced Disciplines suitable for elder characters.

Chapter Five: Those Who Rule the Night introduces notable characters from the ranks of the High Clans, presents five template characters suitable for use as Storyteller or player-controlled characters, and details several High Clan sects.

Sources

Numerous sources of inspiration about the burdens and pleasures of rulership exist. Don’t feel restricted to only period-appropriate materials—these themes are universal. In particular, consider the following.

Books

Hamlet, by William Shakespeare. The nobility is mad, corrupt and in conflict with itself. A rival army is on the way. The only ones capable of telling the plain truth are gravediggers and clowns. What more do you need?

The Canterbury Tales, by Geoffrey Chaucer. “The Knight’s Tale” and “The Nun’s Tale” especially are rather stilted classical fables, but some nastiness is tucked away there if you look for it.

The Prince, by Nicolo Machiavelli. For obvious reasons.

A Lion in Winter, by James Goldman. Intrigue, plotting, backstabbing, nobility...it’s all here. The film version is good, too.

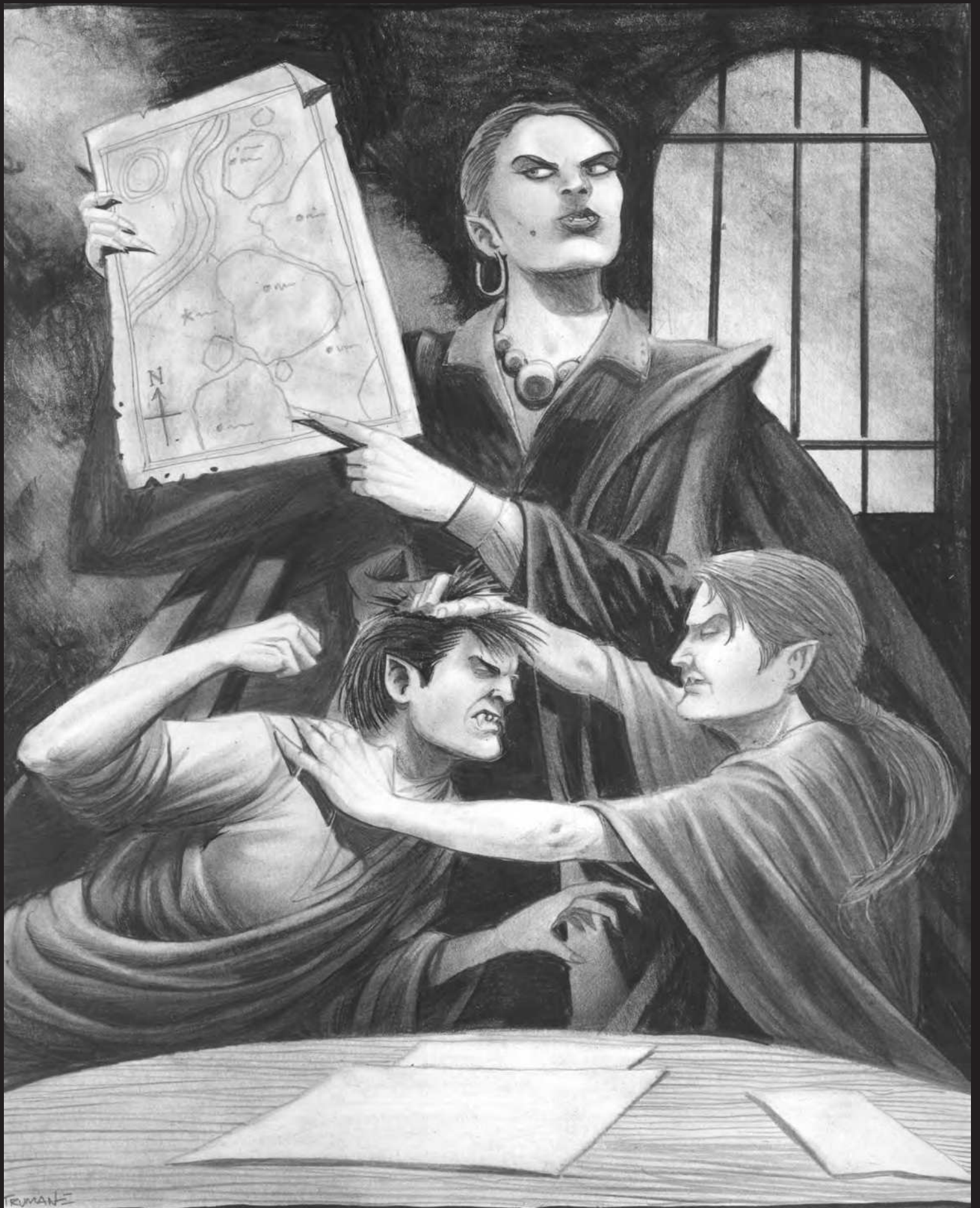
Films


Braveheart. The nobility might be chosen by God, but they can sure become ruthless quickly when the need arises. Picture Edward Longshanks as a Ventrue.

Gosford Park. Not period, but a great look at arcane rules of etiquette and the way that those in power completely ignore those beneath them, both of which are appropriate for High Clan games.

Joan of Arc. The mini-series, starring Leelee Sobieski. Again, a bit out of period, but beautifully done, and the details of the French court, the politics of the time, tactics of war and diplomacy, the reaction to a girl in armor, and strong religious beliefs are all handled well. The knight who accompanies her is a perfect Path of Chivalry follower.

Elizabeth. It’s out of period and not terribly accurate historically, but the political backstabbing is absolutely wonderful for the mood of a Cainite court, and Geoffrey Rush’s portrayal of Walsingham is the epitome of the Lasombra Elder behind the Throne.





CHAPTER ONE: ONCE AND FUTURE KINGS

“Good fortune will elevate even petty minds, and give them the appearance of a certain greatness and stateliness, as from their high place they look down upon the world; but the truly noble and resolved spirit raises itself, and becomes conspicuous in times of disaster and ill fortune.”

— Plutarch

The High Clans claim domain over much of the world. Theirs is not a rule supported only by supernatural might or the beneficence of their sires, but by an unbroken history stretching back to the Third Mortal himself. The High Clans take great pride in relating that history to their childer, to ensure that their lineages remain strong and proud.

The Low Clans find many of the claims that the first cursed make in their histories to be spurious or even offensive ... but of course the peasants would feel that way. It's natural to be somewhat bitter, after all.



Brujah

What all Cainites feel — anger, fear, hunger, the yearning desire for Grace — we Brujah feel manifold. We are called Zealots for a reason. We cannot be otherwise.

— Louis of Glastonbury, Brujah ashen priest of the Road of Heaven

The History of the Brujah, as told by Yitzhak ben Avraham, Ashen Rabbi of the Road of Heaven

Ah, *erev tov*, my friend. See? I told you last night that you would come back to hear more. I know people, my son, and no matter what others of our kind may tell you, we are still people.

I believe, before we were so rudely interrupted by yesterday's dawn, that you were telling me how big a fool I was, that I dream of the impossible. You think I do not know how it looks? That I believe it will be easy to unite Poland once more into a single nation, to make it a home for all people, Jews or anyone else, who lack a homeland of their own? I go into this with my eyes open, knowing that the task I have set myself is the work of a hundred lifetimes — but knowing, too, that this is the objective that God has set before me. Besides, I am Brujah; I come from a lengthy tradition of impossible dreams.

Yes, I think we'll do this. Tonight, I shall tell you not of my own history or goals, but of my bloodline — and, I am inclined to think, yours as well, although I doubt we shall ever know for certain. I shall tell you of the Brujah, and you will see that I come by my penchant for chasing dreams honestly.

In the Beginning

if I may borrow an opening from a storyteller far more skilled than I, was Brujah himself. Accounts of this ancient are as fraught with uncertainty as any legend. Was he a philosopher, a warrior, a scholar, a poet, a raving madman to rival Malkav? Was he, as some claim, the instigator of the third generation's patricide against Caine's own children, or was he a reluctant participant who knew full well the consequences of his actions? Tales describe him as any or all of these, and I do not flatter myself to think I have a greater insight than anyone else on the matter. Suffice it to say that he was what he was, until one of his own childer laid him low in the time of the Second City.

The childer's name was

Troile

and about this one we know as little as we do of Brujah. Accounts differ even as to Troile's sex, but I shall

refer to him as male purely for ease of conversation. The legends seem to agree that, at least for a time, Troile loved his sire, yet the Amaranth is hardly a sign of love, wouldn't you agree? Did some great argument cause a falling-out between them, or did Troile somehow believe he was doing right by his second father in consuming his essence and his power? Some scholars even theorize that Brujah was Troile, for few trustworthy accounts ever place them together in the sight of others. I myself doubt this notion, as Troile was clearly of a different temperament than his sire, and while the original childer of Brujah were said to be dispassionate, the descendants of Troile possessed the legendary temper with which my brethren and I suffer to this night.

And it is here that we find the earliest of the many contradictions that plague our clan. If we are the descendants of Troile, rather than Brujah, why do we retain Brujah's name? Others who have taken the places of ancients do not retain the epithets of those who came before. If you wish to test this, feel free to approach the next Usurper you see and call him Salubri. If he's kind enough simply to kill you outright, I will sit *shiva* for you.

I believe that Troile loved his sire still, even after diablerizing him. I believe that he slew Brujah not out of hatred, but either because he was temporarily overcome with rage over some small slight, or because he felt — for whatever reason — duty-bound to do so. Whether he was doing Brujah himself a service, or acting for the good of his clanmates in destroying a crazed progenitor, or for some other reason, I know not. But I believe it was Troile himself who insisted that he and his descendents maintain the Brujah name, in honor of what his sire once had been. But this is, after all, only my opinion, worth little more than the empty breath with which I speak it.

Despite the Amaranth of our founder, many consider our time in

The Second City

to be the highest and greatest era in our clan's history. Here, Cainite and kine dwelt in harmony, at least for a time. We ruled over them as gods and kings, and they gave themselves to our hunger happily. There was blood shed, certainly, but little bloodshed, if you understand me. We walked openly among the kine, and they welcomed us. And in truth we welcomed their presence as well, not merely for sustenance, but for the creative spark and the breath of life that we ourselves lacked. We ruled civilization, but it was they, not we, who birthed it and moved it forward.

HISTORY OR TRUTH?

Even Yitzhak is not entirely unbiased when it comes to his view of the Second City. Though he has his doubts, he has more or less accepted the notion that, while it may not have been the paradise so many Brujah proclaim it to have been, it was certainly the closest Cainite and kine have come to living in harmony with one another.

Not everyone agrees with that viewpoint. Some see the Second City as a bloody autocracy in which the Cainites kept the mortals ruthlessly enslaved, barely more than food. Others see the Second City as a hotbed of infernalism, just as they believe Carthage itself would one day become. To hear them tell it, the Cainites of the Second City engaged in regular debauchery, torture and blood orgies, all for no better reason than they could.

Perhaps the most moderate viewpoint — and one that is near to being lost completely in these nights of fanaticism and ironclad views — is that the Second City was nothing special at all. It simply happened to be the first true community after the First City that housed both undying and mortal inhabitants. All the various traits attributed to the Second City since then, they say, from the utopian view of the Brujah to the hotbed of sin espoused by others, are myth and political propaganda masquerading as historical fact.

Considering that even those few Ancients who might conceivably *remember* the Second City can't seem to agree on the details, it's unlikely that anyone will ever learn the whole truth.

Alas, the Second City proved less immortal than those who ruled it. It is the memory of that city that drives many of my brethren even to this night, and as much as any single clan — let alone one so fractious as the Brujah — can be said to possess a goal, ours has been the recreation of the near-paradise that was the Second City.

After many years of precious little movement in that regard, the first attempt at doing so was

Hellenistic Greece

Some of my brethren are so enamored of the memories of this time, my child, that they would have

words with me even for calling it thus. “Always Hellas, never Greece!” they would say. Yet Greece is how it is known tonight, and I would rather make my point understood than cling to antiquated terms.

To hear these same “scholars” speak of it, Greece — and specifically Athens — was very nearly perfection for our clan. We ruled the night, they say, and the other clans set foot on Grecian soil only with our generous dispensation. We dwelt among the kine, observing them as they created an artistic, philosophic and politically perfect society, years and even centuries ahead of anything that came before or has come since. We watched, and learned, and reveled, but never interfered, making Athens and all of Greece our experiment in social construction, granting the mortals such concepts as democracy to play with, yet never influencing what they did with it.

Oi! Such arrogance! I tell you truthfully, when one embarks upon an impossible quest, as I have done, one must do so with open eyes, observing everything, lest the dream obscure the reality with which you must work. I have examined our history with open eyes, child, spoken to many who were present, and I tell you that what I have just told you is a popular fairy tale among my clan, but that, alas, is all it is.

Greece *was* a good place and a good time for the Brujah, I'll not deny that. We held the greatest influence there, as compared to the other clans, and more Greek princes claimed the Brujah name than any other. Many of our greatest philosophers learned much from, and perhaps even gave much to, the Greeks.

But anyone who believes that we in no way interfered with our “great experiment” knows nothing of Cainite nature. No clan acts as a single entity, and certainly not the Zealots. Many Brujah had little interest in social development but instead shared the same goals as most of our kind — to acquire vitae to drink and power to play with. Even those who were interested in studying the social development of the kine, perhaps in the hopes of recreating the Second City, rarely took a hands-off approach. They meddled, they influenced, they prodded the kine this way and that, all in an attempt to “prove” whatever their pet theory of societal development might have been. While I believe that the vast majority of cultural and philosophical advancement in Hellenistic Greece came from the mortals — as it almost always does — the irony is that the Brujah may have been responsible for more of it than we take credit for, simply because we are so determined to convince ourselves that we did not “interfere” at all.

Would you like proof, child, that the Brujah did not “control” Greece so thoroughly as we like to tell ourselves? The Brujah of Greece were, at least nominally, allied with the Brujah of Carthage. Yet Greece and Carthage were vicious rivals, enemies nearly as hostile as Carthage and Rome in later years. Surely, had we as much influence in Greece as we like to pretend, we could have prevented our mortal underlings from squabbling with one another, could we not? But more on Carthage in a moment.

I find it interesting that so many of my clanmates rage against the Ventrue for the fall of Carthage, yet the memory of Greece — which also found itself annexed into the empire that was Rome — elicits barely a murmur of dissatisfaction. The truth is, many of the elders of our clan had long since abandoned Athens, and indeed all of Greece, before the coming of the legions and the Ventrue and Malkavians lurking in their midst. Those same Brujah who swear by the “Greek experiment” maintain that the elders departed because they’d learned all they could from the kine of Greece. Codswallop! The elders abandoned the region because they knew it was but a matter of time before all who remained would be Roman citizens, and they would rather find new havens — possibly in Carthage — and begin anew than bend knee to the Ventrue.


Many outsiders find the Brujah to be a contradiction — warriors and philosophers, focused and patient yet violently short of temper. Nowhere in our history has this contradiction been more blatant than during our years in

Carthage

To hear most Brujah tell it, Carthage was the next best thing to Heaven, a near-perfect recreation of the Second City. Brujah walked side by side with mortals, and with several other clans as well — most notably the Assamites. We reigned above the leaders of the kine, we protected them in exchange for regular offerings of vitae, and only rarely did a mortal life actually end beneath our fangs. It was the single greatest success we’ve ever had in our attempts to rebuild the Second City, and undeniable proof that not only Cainites and kine, but Cainites of different bloodlines, can dwell together in relative peace, overcoming the hostilities and distrust that so often seem inextricably tied to our undead heritage.

This, they claim, is the paradise denied us by the Roman Ventrue, who grew jealous of our power and our rapport with the kine, and set out to destroy all we had built. It was they, along with their Malkavian and





Toreador allies, who turned Rome against Carthage, they who corrupted some of our greatest minds to debauchery and even infernalism. Worse, it was they who were ultimately responsible for the death of Troile who — according, at least, to some legends — remains trapped beneath the salted earth of the battlefields around Carthage.

Outsiders such as the Ventrue have a different version, of course. By their account, Carthage was a pit of corruption, demon-worship and debauchery of the worst sort. Brujah and Assamite walked hand in hand with the dreaded Baali, and held blood orgies and sacrificial revels in which dozens of mortals were slaughtered in the name of fiends from the deepest Pit. Carthage, they claim, was a blight upon the land so foul that even most of the damned could not abide its presence, and when the legions and the Ventrue destroyed it, they did the entire world a service.

As with everything else, I believe the truth lies somewhere in the middle. I've no doubt the Baali were present in Carthage, nor that several of my clanmates were involved in practices that were, to say the least, distasteful. In the latter days of the Third Punic War, the government of Carthage threw vast orgies for its soldiers to distract them from the fact that it could not afford to pay them. Much of the missing money had gone to corrupt mortal politicians, of course, but much more was taken by Brujah and other Cainite overlords, determined to enrich themselves at the expense of those on whom they fed.

It is true too, however, that many Brujah — and, to a lesser extent, Assamites — did indeed dwell in Carthage and maintain at least relatively good relations with the kine. I rather doubt that the mortals were falling over themselves in eagerness to feed their Cainite neighbors, as some would have it, but they knew of and even accepted the presence of “vampires” in their midst, in exchange for the protection we offered and, for the fortunate ones, the near-immortality we might grant.

As to which faction was in the majority, the cultural architects or the debauched infernalists, I will not speculate, except to say that I imagine it was the former initially, but the latter by the end.

Incidentally, you will also hear some of us lay the blame for Troile's death at the feet of the Baali; some claim they corrupted even our great ancestor himself. This may be so. If it is, I find it unlikely that they were working in concert with the Ventrue, as some maintain. I am no supporter of the Warlords, but I find it unlikely that they would ally, en masse, with such as the infernalists.

While we're on the subject, I believe both factions' antipathy toward the Ventrue to be misplaced. Yes, the Patricians swooped in like vultures to feast upon the cadaver left by Carthage's fall, and they took full advantage of the war between Carthage and Rome, but to claim that they were *responsible* for the fall of Carthage is to grant them far more credit than they deserve. The Punic Wars were, like most conflicts, of mortal instigation, and the fate of Carthage ultimately rests not on the shoulders of any Cainite but on those of the kine. As accurate to say that we ourselves are “responsible” for Carthage's fall, by dint of those who raided the governmental coffers, as to lay the blame at the feet of the Ventrue.

Don't go about proclaiming that to other Brujah, however. We enjoy our little conceits, and our temper, as I mentioned, can be lethal.

Carthage was the last time the Brujah had any particular center of influence. We scattered after that, winding up in all manner of places across Europe, the British Isles and beyond. Travel to Outremer, you will find Brujah dwelling among the Saracens in the Holy Land; to the Papal States, you will find us ensconced in the Church hierarchy, though in far fewer numbers than the Lasombra or Cappadocians; to Norway, you will find us side by side with the Gangrel among the pagans of the North. And, though many Cainites do not know of our presence, you will find us here, in

Eastern Europe

These lands have, of course, long been the traditional demesne of the Tzimisce, and when Cainites think of Hungary, the Carpathians and the like they imagine the Fiends, the Ventrue and the Tremere, engaged in their constant struggles for dominance. In terms of who holds the power here, they would be correct. By population, however, we Brujah have nearly the numbers of any of these other clans. The unfortunate truth is, we have little influence in many of the lands to which we spread after the fall of Carthage. The native Cainites maintained their power and authority with an iron grip, and we were able to peel away but a meager portion of it. From philosophers and cultural leaders, we have, in many lands, fallen to a mere subsistence level, or at best serve as advisors to those less well equipped to rule than we.

There, you see? Even I sound bitter when I speak of it, and I care little for such matters. Such is the power of our clan's rage and frustration.

At any rate, here in Eastern Europe, some of the Brujah refused to reconcile themselves to powerless-

ness. Led by a number of Brujah who were still filled with rage for the fall of Carthage — you have, perhaps, heard of Dominic? — they utterly refused to yield to the Ventrue who already held power in the region, let alone to Jürgen the Swordbearer and his invaders. Allying with the Tzimisce was not much of an option either, for the Fiends had little interest in sharing their demesnes and would have insisted the Brujah take a position so subservient as to make them little more than slaves. An alliance with the Usurper Tremere might have been possible, until they, too, allied with the Ventrue against their common enemy.

The wise thing to do would probably have been to lie low and let things run their course, but my brethren are not so well known for that sort of wisdom. Dominic and his supporters lashed out against *all* fronts, striking from concealment, attacking with surprise, never remaining in one location long enough for an organized counter assault. Ventrue, Tremere and Tzimisce forces fell to these Brujah warriors. The Brujah were not so numerous nor well organized that they could cause *major* damage to any one faction, but in a war such as the one that rages through these lands even tonight, even a minor loss can tip the balance if it occurs in the right — or perhaps wrong — place and time.

Interestingly enough, these “rebels,” for lack of a better term, are no longer limited to just Brujah. Neonates and even some young ancillae of other clans have joined them as well, seeing in their actions a crusade to carve a niche for all those who have remained powerless and disenfranchised in the face of Ventrue and Tzimisce dominance of the region. The

movement, if it can be dignified with such a title, has slowed in the last several decades, ever since the disappearance of Dominic himself, but it is hardly gone. It fades for years at a time, lost against the far larger and more violent backdrop of the Tremere/Tzimisce conflict and — until recently — the war against the invading Ventrue, but it never vanishes completely. Knowing the tenacity of my brethren, perhaps it never will.

Of course, the Slavic nations do not account for the entirety of Eastern Europe. Many of my clan hold much influence in Byzantium — or, excuse me, what *was* Byzantium. Mortal politics, who can follow?

As might be expected, the Brujah princes and nobles of the region are no more immune to chasing dreams than the rest of us. Hektor, Prince of New Lacadaemonia, has attempted to turn his isle into a new Carthage, where Cainites rule openly over mortals — with, I can assure you, some mixed and often ugly results. Natalya Syvatoslav of Thessalonica seeks to take Constantinople and turn it into a recreation of Carthage. (I trust you are seeing the pattern here?) Others exist as well, such as Herleva of Durazzo and ... *oi*, you'll have me going on all night.

My point is that we still hold much power in many parts of Europe — and we stand on the brink of losing it all. Our clan is too disparate, too busy pursuing individual and in many cases impossible dreams, to prepare ourselves properly for what is to come. I am guilty of this myself — I know this, I see this — yet I would not turn aside now for any price.

And that, child, perhaps more than anything else, encapsulates the history of the Brujah. The urge to reach for the impossible is in our blood, as much a part of us as Troile's rage. And if my own quest to reunite Poland is just another incarnation of our ever-burning desire to see the Second City restored, I accept that, for whether the notion comes from my ancestry, my own mind or the voice of God, it remains a noble purpose. I hope to make you see that as clearly as I do.

Perhaps we should go and find something to eat while we discuss it. I'm famished.

Points of Contention

Despite the scattered and unfocused nature of the Brujah — as a clan, not as individuals — certain ongoing events and elements of the Dark Medieval world affect them all.

YEARS YET UNSEEN

Yitzhak speaks a greater truth here than he realizes. The conflict — which is swiftly expanding beyond a mere Brujah grudge into a true, if nascent, war between generations — only grows as the years pass. For now, it remains overshadowed by the many other conflicts that grip the region, an unimportant little skirmish in the War of Princes. In years to come, however, the neonates among the Tzimisce join with the Brujah, and this “little” movement sparks the single greatest struggle in Cainite history. These are the seeds of the Anarch Revolt, watered in the blood of the slain and nourished on the neglect and indifference of elders who might have stopped it if they'd only paid attention.

HISTORY FOR BRUJAH CHARACTERS

In nights past, it was as uncommon to see a Brujah with no knowledge or appreciation for her clan's history as a Ventrue who couldn't name his sire. Ignorant Zealots are growing more and more common, however. Those Embraced by Brujah who remember Carthage, or even Constantinople, are much more likely to educate their childer, but other Brujah who hail from cultures not quite so refined don't always see the point. Why pass on the anger of Carthage to a generation of Cainites who never saw it, they ask? The Brujah blood allows for anger to simmer for centuries, even anger for slights that the Cainite in question can only appreciate second-hand. Why inflict more rage upon the young?

Elder Brujah have been known to fly into frenzy when faced with that question. History must be taught, the rage must be carried, because the instant that Clan Brujah stops caring about what it has lost, the clan loses any chance of ever reclaiming it. Of course, some cynics state that this has already happened.

Brujah tend to learn from their historical studies that the history of humanity and the get of Caine are inextricably intertwined. Whether this is presented as a symbiosis wherein the Cainites help guide humanity or a parasitical relationship wherein the vampires pervert and steal all they can from the kine depends entirely on the temperament of the instructor.

Byzantine Plotting

As hinted at by Yitzhak above, the Brujah may hold substantial power in the Byzantine Successor states, but it's less certain that they can hold it. One is a dictator of an island community that history itself suggests cannot possibly last. One seeks to take possession of a city that is perhaps the single greatest prize in the region, one inextricably linked with centuries of Cainite history. Herleva of Durazzo is too wrapped up in Greek/Latin conflict to concern herself with much of anything else. Other, less notorious Brujah seem equally embroiled in their various petty conflicts as well.

It's all very normal, very much in character. And it may all be deliberate.

Several younger Brujah, particularly those seeking to expand their own growing power bases in the region, have run up against substantial opposition.

While this often comes from other Cainites already entrenched and unwilling to share power, some other Zealots have suffered attacks from unexpected quarters. Brujah uninvolved in Herleva's conflict, for instance, have been attacked by Greek Cainites with no obvious reason to assume the new arrival should be hostile. In the last few months, some Brujah have been attacked merely for setting foot in Constantinople, whereas others remain undisturbed. Small groups of mortals, who have never before undertaken anything of this sort, have begun showing signs of rebellion on Hektor's island.

Coincidence? Possibly. But more and more young Brujah are beginning to think that these scattered events represent a concerted effort against their clan as a whole. They can't yet imagine *why* — all other major powers of Eastern Europe have far greater enemies than the Zealots — nor have they any real theories as to *who*... Further, none of these younger Brujah have had any luck in convincing their elders that this may, in fact, be far more than scattered difficulties; and that in itself seems suspicious, given the normally paranoid nature of Cainites in general. Ambitious younger Brujah in the region are starting to fantasize about the reputations and power they might gain by uncovering the true power they believe to be orchestrating these events, but so far none has made any real headway.

Other young Brujah have realized that the situation is rife with opportunity. Because their elders are all distracted by other concerns, they can more easily step in and carve out their own little slices of power. Of course, they'll be subject to the same seemingly random attacks described above, but some feel that the opportunities are worth the risk.

How the Mighty Are Falling

The Brujah are of the High Clans, the first cursed, the elite of Caine's people. Why, then, do they seem to hold less and less power as time goes by? Why are Brujah princes suddenly worthy of note, rather than simply an assumed fact of Cainite society? Why do so many of their childer — far more than any outside the clan, or even many within, realize — break from the old ways and rebel against their elders?

The truth, though few admit it, is that the Brujah are slipping. They have already begun a slow but steady decline that will eventually lead them from Zealots to Rabble, from respected leaders and philosophers to just more mouths among the masses. The elders do not see it, or do not acknowledge if it they do. This supposed "downfall" is the problem of others, not

theirs. Obviously, *other* elders are proving incapable of maintaining their positions and their authority. It's an individual, not a clan, problem.

Younger Brujah are less jaded, less blind — and less scared to admit the truth, that a clan with no real focus and as many pet causes as it has members is simply too scattered to remain one of the night's preeminent powers. Unfortunately, they are still unable to agree on how best to respond. Some turn against the power structure of their homeland, determined to place themselves — or some other “worthy” Brujah — on the throne, regardless of consequences or the cost to the region's stability. A few take their rebellion a step further, seeking to tear down the entire power structure itself so that they may put something else (though nobody's yet decided *what*) in its place. The Furores are perhaps the most well known of these insurgents. Made up entirely of younger Cainites, the Furores seek the end of elder rule and equality among the damned regardless of age. Even they, however, cannot agree on the details of a replacement system to the one they intend to take down.

Other Brujah prefer to ingratiate themselves with those who are already in power, serving as advisors, assistants, generals and the like. They hope that by making themselves indispensable to lords and princes, they, and their brethren, will have allies who can bolster their wavering positions.

Unfortunately, what none of these Brujah yet seem to realize is that by taking these actions, by building a self-identity based entirely on their relations with those around them, they are hastening their own decline. The Brujah were a clan of philosophers and leaders, perhaps the brightest the Cainite race had to offer. In these nights, however, they have begun to define themselves purely by what they stand *with* or *against*; precious few of the clan still devote any real thought or effort to what they stand *for*.

Player's Toolbox

The Brujah have a rich, conflict-filled history from which to draw. It would be a shame not to take at least some of it into account when building Brujah characters.

Crusaders for a Cause

- Your character is a stout believer in the tales and myths of Carthage and believes fervently that such a Cainite “paradise” can be recreated. You bear the Ventrue an intense hatred for their part in the destruction of Carthage; whether you seek to destroy them

and all they hold dear or whether you recognize the power they wield over many kine institutions as a vital tool for achieving your dream depends on your specific view. In any event, you're probably driving your companions mad with your constant preaching of glories long gone — and glories to be found once more — but if even one pair of ears opens to your call, one pair of hands joins you in your labors, it's worth it.

- You are a hunter of the twice-damned. Though the Brujah bear less of a burning hatred for the Baali and other infernalists throughout Cainite society than do some other clans and sects, some Zealots remember still the part these foul creatures played in the fall of Carthage, and — if rumor is to be believed — in the disappearance of Troile himself... Whether you seek the recreation of the Second City or Carthage, or whether you have no illusions about the future of Cainite society, you still believe firmly that this unholy scum must be purged from the night before your race has any hope of advancing itself.

- You, like our narrator, have inherited the Brujah drive for chasing dreams — but you pursue your own, not one chosen for you by the obsessions of your clanmates. Your dream could be almost anything, from Yitzhak's unified Jewish and Christian state to a cure for vampirism itself. In fact, though you'd never admit it to anyone, the goal itself may actually be less valuable to you than the sense of importance and purpose you gain from pursuing it.

Echoes of the Past

- You see yourself as more akin to the Brujah scholars of old and believe you would have felt more at home in Hellenistic Greece than you do in 13th-century Europe. You seek knowledge, not power; you would rather understand the philosophical ramifications of the Cainite condition than learn how best to put one over on your rival in the next domain over. More powerful Cainites may scoff at your efforts now, but you know that in 50 or 150 years, when you have truly begun to *understand*, that it is they who will be coming to you and begging your assistance.

- You have turned against almost *every* faction of Cainite society and are part of a small but growing band of rebellious neonates and ancillae operating primarily in Eastern Europe. It's possible that this is entirely an act of rebellion against the way you've been treated for most of your young unlife, but you're probably also inspired — and enraged — by the various injustices, real and imagined, that your clan has suffered throughout the centuries. You aren't entirely certain what you're fighting *for*; you know only that most Cainites in

power, from the Ventrue to the Tzimisce, represent everything you're fighting *against*.

• Alternatively, having seen the lack of success that violent rebellion has brought in the past, you seek to become the rarest of Cainites: a visionary who would prefer to lead with words and deeds, not the threat of violence and power. You face an uphill struggle, and you know it. In a world where Cainites and kine both scramble over the corpses of their enemies on their quest to dominate all those around them, how can you hope to attain any position of respect without doing the same? Perhaps you turn to religion, seeking to become a priest, ashen or otherwise. Maybe you turn to those already in power, hoping to move up in their estimation and their ranks through faithful service and good advice. Whatever your choice, both your innate temper and the actions of those around you will constantly serve as temptations to devolve to their level and to take satisfaction in bloodshed.

Cappadocians

Is Hell upon us because the dead walk? And because they walk under my command, am I then God?

— Cesaré, Scion of the Cappadocians

As told by Najya bint Maizah bint Hadeel, deceased

Interesting. "Why are we as we are?" Not a simple question, Aurelio, not a simple question at all. But then, few who would drink of the knowledge of this Well seek simple answers.

I have *two* answers for you, little vampire. It is the short one you seek, but I believe I shall grant you the longer. You may well find additional answers therein, answers for which you do not even know the questions. In either case, we rarely have the chance to speak to anyone but our keeper, Constanica, and I grow weary of her.

I shall begin at the beginning of your clan, vampire, and the ancient you know as

Cappadocius

How mysterious! How enigmatic! An ancient without a name, only a description. The names of most of the third generation are lost to history, but Cappadocius' name is unknown even to his contemporaries. To hear Cappadocian scholars tell it, the priest who would become Cappadocius chose to abandon his original name and take this one even before his Embrace, and this is the only name he offered to Caine and the second generation.

Nonsense. Cappadocius goes by no true name because *he himself no longer knows it!*

Why think you that none can determine which childe of Caine sired Cappadocius? It is because the Embrace went wrong, little vampire. In his days as a mortal priest and man of faith, Cappadocius had his own dealings with the dead, a conversation here and there with spirits of those gone, and he had made several enemies in his time. When your Antediluvian died briefly, as all your kind do during the Embrace, those spirits were waiting for him in the lands Beneath, and they attempted to cling to him, to prevent him from returning to his body when the curse of Caine took hold.

To an extent, they succeeded. You know of ancient Egyptian myth, which claims the soul has multiple parts? I know not if their beliefs are accurate, but they clearly have *some* degree of truth, for part of Cappadocius never returned from the underworld. Much of his knowledge and self-awareness were lost in that faulty Embrace, and the being who returned was not quite he who began the journey. Cappadocius' very soul is fragmented, and *that* is why he harbors such a fascination for the dead: Even if he himself does not realize it, he is constantly seeking the missing portions of himself.

This flawed Embrace is also the reason for Cappadocius' deathly appearance, you see. Because

ASHUR

Some scholars believe that Cappadocius *does* have another name, the name Ashur. Others believe that Ashur is the name of Cappadocius' sire, although no second-generation Cainite exists in any myths or records by that name. Did he exist at all? Is this, in fact, the name of Cappadocius? If so, is it his *true* name, or just another alias this most enigmatic of ancients picked up along the way?

None can say for certain, of course, but it is worth noting that at no time has anyone heard Cappadocius himself make use of that name; it has always been ascribed to him in writing by others.

It is also worth noting that some credit a vampire by the name of Ashur with the creation of the depraved Baali. If this is true, would that make the Cappadocians and the Baali cousins who share the same grandfather? Brothers who share the same patriarch? Or could their bonds run more closely still?

the spirit that returned to his body was incomplete, it was unable to fully stave off the decay of the grave.

You question, little vampire. You wonder why clan legend claims that the Cappadocians' pallor is a curse of Caine's, if it occurred naturally. It *was* a curse, child... Until your progenitor cursed him, Cappadocius alone bore the mark of death; the rest of his descendants did not. Think on that. To curse the ancient, Caine laid his hand upon the ancient's childer alone. That, if nothing else, should say something about your progenitor, should it not?

In any event, Cappadocius spent most of his time in

The Second City

seeking answers to his various and sundry questions of the nature of life and death, studying ways to question the spirits, and — in his spare time — advising the other Cainites on any matters about which they chose to query him. According to all official Cappadocian doctrine, the ancient did not sire a single child during all these years. Not a one. Doesn't sound likely, does it? Even we, who are unbound by the limitations of the living, cannot see the truth of that matter. Any question we ask along those lines is met with a deafening silence in the voices of the underworld. Something prevents us from seeing, child, something that does not wish anyone to know whether Cappadocius *really* remained childless during his years in the Second City. An awful lot of trouble to go through if he did nothing worth hiding, would you not agree?

When the Great Deluge came and destroyed most of the known world, then did Cappadocius flee the Second City, and only then did he begin to Embrace. His first childer was Caias Koine, followed closely by Japheth, Lazarus and others. And for the next several thousand years, the great Cappadocius accomplished ...

Nothing.

He wandered. He Embraced others to help him in his quest to understand death, even though the curse of Caine had now fallen, and his Embrace carried with it the very appearance of death. He questioned leaders and priests and philosophers and wizards. His progeny spread outward to all corners of the Earth — or to most, at any rate — and they constructed marvels. Two entire cities, carved into the Earth, called Derinkuyu and Kaymakli, owe their construction to Cappadocian architects and artisans. Yet Cappadocius himself was no closer to understanding death than he had been the night he rose as a Cainite.

Then, less than a hundred years after the death of Christ, Cappadocius had

A Vision

He had spent many years merged with the rock of a mountain in his homeland of Cappadocia, his heart grown despondent over his failed search. While thus entombed, Cappadocius experienced a vision of an angel, one who informed him that God Himself wished Cappadocius' quest to succeed, and one who offered of its own blood to grant him strength.

Cappadocius burst from the earth, sending stone flying in all directions and leaving behind him a gaping pit that seemed to have no bottom. He feasted upon a passing caravan, merchants and their families from Baghdad who had hoped to begshelter for the night within the monastery atop the mountain in which Cappadocius slept.

Do I sound bitter, little vampire? I was but a young woman when your Antediluvian set upon us, slaughtering us like sheep in a land far from home. When he had slaked his thirst upon us, sparing not even our children, our empty bodies he hurled into the pit from which he had emerged

I see understanding dawn in your eyes. Yes, child, the Well of Bones marks the spot on which Cappadocius slept, within spitting distance of the Erciyes Monastery he would shortly claim as his own. And the first of the bones in this pit were my own, mine and my fellow travelers.

This was the experience that transformed Cappadocius into a devout Christian — without, it seems, the tenets of mercy supposedly espoused by that faith.

It was not long after this vision, perhaps some time in the second century, while new purpose and despair still warred within him, that Cappadocius experienced what he later called his

First Revelation

When wandering the lands of the Hebrews, not far from his homeland, Cappadocius set upon a lone Jew in a tent and would have slain him to slake his thirst. The Jew, however, in his supplications to God, sparked a sudden understanding in the ancient. He had wasted thousands of years seeking the answers to life and death by questioning mortals, when it was God, and God alone, who could provide the answers.

IGNORANCE IS BLISS

To be fair, Cappadocius probably didn't know, when he departed the slopes of Mount Erciyes after experiencing his vision and subsequently feasting upon the caravan, that his actions had created the spiritual pit that would come to be called the Well of Bones. When Caias and the other Cappadocians discovered it while searching for a place to put the bodies of the hundreds of monks they'd just slain, the ancient was likely just as surprised as the rest of them. In fact, given his state of both rapture and intense hunger when he first emerged from the earth after his vision, it's entirely possible that he never even made the connection between his own actions of years past and the existence of the Well of Bones.

The Monastery atop Mount Erciyes

suffered most and most immediately from Cappadocius' "revelation." The ancient led nearly his entire clan in a march on the monastery, where they would take it as their own holiest and most central place. Cappadocius told his progeny that they must be nearer, spiritually and physically, to God. He did *not* tell them that this mountain was the sight of his conversion, nor that the mountain beneath the monastery now contained a conduit to the realm of the dead, a conduit that he himself had created and baptized in the blood of innocents.

Using the newly constructed Temple of Erciyes, built upon the framework of the old monastery, Cappadocius and the other believers swiftly spread Christianity through the ranks of the clan, until it was a rare Cappadocian indeed who didn't follow some form of that faith. The clan turned much of its effort to preserving and spreading the religion, granting persecuted Christians safe haven in Derinkuyu and Kaymakli, and assisting in the funding and building of churches. For hundreds of years they continued thus, digging ever further into the riddle of death, barely aware as history passed them by. Cappadocius himself took up residence in Derinkuyu, to be nearer so many who shared his faith (and, not coincidentally, because an underground city provided excellent protection from the sun).

Certainly, a great many of your departed clanmates would have wished that he had not made his home there. For if he had not, he would not have seen how sorely the presence of the Cappadocians taxed the

mortal inhabitants of the city. He would not have seen how sickly they became providing nourishment for so many Cainites. He would not have seen how frightened they were of their masters' studies of the dead, how fearful they were for not merely their bodies, but their souls. He would not have realized how vast the clan had grown, how careless he and the others had been in bestowing the Embrace. And he would not then have embarked upon what since has been dubbed

The Feast of Jolly

Cappadocius convened the entire clan, or as near to its entirety as he could make it, in a special gathering within the city of Kaymakli. There he and his helpers, Caias and Japheth, slowly culled the numbers of Cappadocians, leading all those who were not deemed "worthy" into the underground portions of the city. Worthiness is, of course, a relative thing. Any Cappadocian who had not assisted in the planning or construction of a church or temple, who was not literate, who had not conducted research into the riddle of death — all these, and more, were doomed. When finally only those who met the ancient's criteria remained, Cappadocius sealed the entrance to the city with a great stone portal and lay upon it a powerful ward. "Let no childe of Caine ever leave through this passage; let no son of Seth enter."

Imagine it, little vampire. Literally thousands of your kind, trapped together underground, with no

EGYPT

The lands of the Nile beckon to the Cappadocians with a siren's song. For a clan obsessed with unearthing the secrets of death and the dead, Egypt is perhaps the greatest treasure trove the world has to offer.

Unfortunately, it is also the home of the Followers of Set, a clan with whom the Cappadocians have had more than one conflict. Cappadocians still make regular attempts to infiltrate that land and study the secrets within, but most inevitably draw the attentions of the Serpents, who do not desire to share their knowledge. The Setites have corrupted more than one Cappadocian; even Lazarus himself turned traitor to his clan in exchange for Setite knowledge and power, and slew Caias Koine before he himself disappeared into the earth. The answers may lie there still, buried beneath thousands of years of sand and blood, but the Cappadocians have not yet found a means to reach them.

hope of escape and nothing on which to feed save each other. The carnage, the hunger, the agony must have been unbelievable, so great that even the God who damned your kind must have felt a swell of pity for those who suffered.

Cappadocius sent the mortal residents of Kaymakli out into the world, telling them the city was cursed and they should never return. He and his surviving progeny then returned once more to the various tasks that lay ahead of them.

The Second Revelation

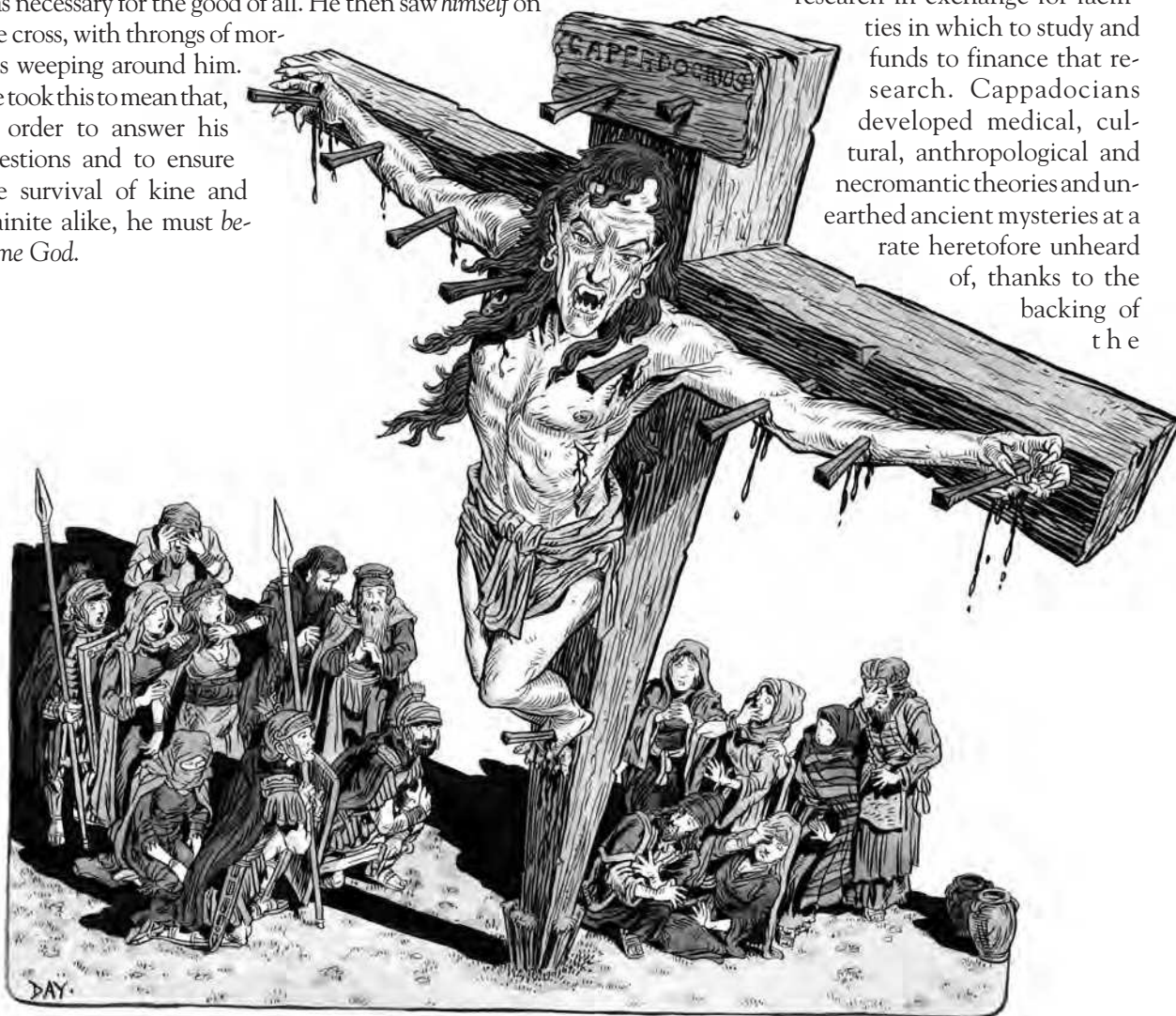
came to the ancient not terribly long after the Feast of Folly, in the form of another powerful vision — one, I might add, that has made more than a few of us question the sanity of your progenitor. Apparently, he witnessed the Crucifixion, followed by the thousands of screaming and starving Cappadocians trapped beneath Kaymakli, which he took to mean that the sacrifice of his childer was necessary for the good of all. He then saw *himself* on the cross, with throngs of mortals weeping around him. He took this to mean that, in order to answer his questions and to ensure the survival of kine and Cainite alike, he must become God.

Cappadocius and several of his closest childer began researching ways of obtaining divinity and hit upon the notion — inspired by various Gnostic and Zoroastrian writings — of performing a ritual that would allow Cappadocius to consume God, to diablerize Him if you will, and thus ascend the throne of Heaven. From there, he might bring Heaven physically to Earth, combining life and death into a single unending existence free of pain and evil.

And you vampires call Malkav the mad one.

While the ancient was involved in his lunatic quest for these answers, most of the surviving clan was spreading throughout the known world. It is an irony, I think, that the Cappadocians attained true power and status within Cainite and mortal institutions only after the vast majority of the clan was entombed.

Many of your brethren made alliances with the Ventrue and other powerful Cainite lords, offering their sage counsel and information gleaned in their research in exchange for facilities in which to study and funds to finance that research. Cappadocians developed medical, cultural, anthropological and necromantic theories and unearthed ancient mysteries at a rate heretofore unheard of, thanks to the backing of the



FATHER CAPPADOCIAN

Despite the drawbacks our narrator has just enumerated, some few Cappadocians did indeed attain power within the Church, either as priests themselves or by bringing churchmen under their influence. Church records and tomes provided these Graverobbers untold insights into religious matters of life and death, to say nothing of offering substantial power over governments who knew better than to ignore the “requests” of their Church leaders.

A small number of these religious Cappadocians, however, have decided that their founder’s quest to supplant God qualifies as blasphemy. As of yet, these Cappadocians have taken no action against their founder, for they love and respect him still, and pray nightly that he will come to his senses and turn from this path that is not only foolish but sinful. As the years creep on, however, and Cappadocius shows no sign of changing his objectives, these faithful among his flock begin to consider that their only option will be to take steps and somehow stop their progenitor from damning himself — and possibly all his clan with him.

Some few of these Cappadocians, desperate and seeing no other choice, have even begun communicating regularly and clandestinely with the newest family of Cappadocians, the Venetian Giovanni. Perhaps these newcomers, whom Cappadocius appears to hold in abnormally high regard, can talk some sense into the Antediluvian before it’s too late ...

Patricians and others. Almost despite themselves, the Cappadocians found themselves in positions of status, wielding authority — in their patron’s name, if in no other manner — over other Cainites.

Other Cappadocians found themselves drawn to the Church. Given both the religious leanings of your clan and the fascination with the dead and the after-life, I find it surprising only that more of you did not heed the call to serve. Most Cappadocian churchmen remained in lowly positions, monks and friars, rather than attaining any high ranks. Partially this was due to the presence of Lasombra and Brujah who had already taken such positions, but mostly it’s because few priests or parishioners are quite so trusting as to accept a walking corpse as their spiritual shepherd.

Cappadocius himself, his mind nearly overwhelmed with all the ideas and knowledge he’d acquired, began spending a great deal of his time in torpor while his most trusted childer — specifically Japheth and Constancia — continued to delve for more information on acquiring divinity.

Not long after the turn of the 11th century, the Cappadocians discovered

The Giovanni

At the time they ... would you prefer I said “you,” little vampire? Very well. *You* were a family of necromancers and merchants, based in the city of Venice but with ties and connections throughout much of the European continent. Your patriarch was a loathsome, power-hungry beast of a man by the name of Augustus.

Oh, *do* be still. You know it to be true.

The Giovanni had accomplished wonders with the arts of necromancy, delving far more deeply into the world and secrets of the dead than most, if not all, who had come before. The Cappadocians who discovered them, elated at the possibilities they presented, returned immediately to Erciyes with the news.

Japheth, always cautious, wanted to wait and observe these Giovanni before bringing them to the attention of the slumbering Antediluvian, but Constancia — Allah bless her black and impatient heart! — refused to wait. She communed with Cappadocius through his dreams, and the ancient was overjoyed at the news. He had Japheth take a jar of Cappadocius’ most ancient blood and set it aside for use in Embracing Augustus Giovanni, should he decide to accept their invitation.

For his own part, though he took almost a year to consider it, there was never any real doubt what Augustus’ answer might be. The power he was being offered — especially considering that the Cappadocian messengers rather downplayed the disadvantages of the vampiric condition — would have tempted a far less ambitious and more scrupulous man than he. Augustus traveled to Erciyes where, over the strenuous objections of Japheth and even Constancia, he received the blood of the Antediluvian and became Cainite.

Augustus went on to begin Embracing selected members of his mortal family, bringing them into the fold as well. I think it likely that someone, perhaps Japheth himself, must have told the old man of the Feast of Folly, for the numbers of his Embrace dropped off sharply after his first few nights. Still, by that time, a substantial number of Giovanni was no longer mortal.

JAPHETH'S CURSE

“He who partakes of this boon shall for ever be judged by this blood and by the will of God. Color this vitae with the deeds of its drinker. Let him sup with his soul every time he feeds. Deliver this blight unto him as the founder delivers this stigma unto us.”

Thus spoke Japheth over the vessel containing Cappadocius' blood before delivering it to Augustus. The precise meaning of his curse yet remains unclear, for neither Augustus himself nor the Giovanni he has Embraced seem to suffer any ill effects. Perhaps Japheth's curse, for all the anger with which it was spoken, has no real power. Or perhaps its power has simply not yet manifested . . .

It is also worth noting that Japheth and Constancia kept a vessel of Augustus' own blood, drained from him during the process of Embrace. Where that vessel is now, none can say, but the power it would grant a knowledgeable sorcerer over the Giovanni patron is considerable. Augustus himself remains ignorant of the existence of that jar, else he would surely have bent all his efforts to retrieving it by now.

Some of the Cappadocians objected to the inclusion of the Giovanni in their midst, but for the majority of the clan, it was just another detail, one hardly worth considering until and unless Giovanni *nigrimancy* succeeded in bringing them closer to the secrets of death. Japheth himself fell into torpor not long after the Embrace of Augustus; this left the Giovanni patron in command of the clan, but given the informal structure of the Cappadocians, such a position had no real meaning.

While he slumbered, Cappadocius experienced yet another vision,

The Third and Final Revelation

In it, Cappadocius himself, along with all his childer, were consumed in a bloody conflagration, an inferno of unimaginable size. Just beyond the flames, shadowed figures laughed as Cappadocians died. From the ashes of the Antediluvian, a single spark rose of its own accord and floated — or was raised — into Heaven.

Cappadocius jolted awake from torpor, certain that he and his entire clan were doomed. He fled Erciyes to Rome, where his allies in the Church

granted him access to the secret library of the Vatican. There, the ancient searched madly for documents that would set him firmly on the path to godhead, for he knew that he must work swiftly if he was to forestall the doom he now saw lying before him. Once he'd assembled all the books, scrolls and other relevant documents, Cappadocius vanished from Rome. None has seen him since that night, and even the dead cannot pinpoint his location.

It was left to Japheth to deliver the news of their dark fate to those Cappadocians who could attend their yearly gathering at Erciyes. From there, word has spread throughout most of the clan, although some few still remain ignorant of their doom. Some Cappadocians have abandoned all hope, growing listless and despairing. Others work with renewed vigor, seeking either to overcome destiny itself or at least to leave the largest mark they can before the end. I know that your own family labors hard, deep in congress with the spirits of the dead.

It is another irony that the Cappadocian clan, at least in terms of Cainite and mortal culture, is more powerful now than ever. Its alliance with the Ventrue remains strong. Several of your clanmates have risen to positions of prominence; I understand the new Prince of Sofia is Cappadocian. Yet all this power is meaningless, if the clan itself is soon to perish.

And now, little vampire, let me grant you a

Final Answer

You asked, “Why are we as we are?” I have told you why — but I have not truly answered your question, have I? You wished to know why the pallor of death seems lessened within the Giovanni bloodline, why your elders grow *less* corpse-like when other elder Cappadocians grow more so?

It is because, little vampire, *we* wish it thus. The spirits who yet cleave to a portion of Cappadocius' soul — and to the souls of all others of your clan, after Caine's curse — we ourselves keep away from you and yours. You see, we *wish* to distance the Giovanni from their parent clan, for we know what it is you are capable of. We know what you plan. And we wish you success, for only with the death of the monster that slew us and trapped us in this hole between life and death can we ourselves be free.

Of course, I cannot let you leave knowing that, child. You might speak to the wrong person and interfere with what must be. You will join us here, your bones mixed with ours. But take heart, child... Your imprisonment, if your family and your patron play

HISTORY FOR CAPPADOCIAN CHARACTERS

Graverobbers tend to learn the history of their clan from their elders as most first cursed Cainites do. Most sires place great emphasis on the failings of other clans and how mass deaths among the kine tend to result when vampires clash. While Clan Cappadocian has certainly caused its share of human fatality, these events tend to be somewhat glossed over. It isn't that the Graverobbers feel guilty or even embarrassed about the mortals they kill, but the fact that the founder of the clan is a "good Christian" makes the rest of the clan reluctant to present events such as the destruction of Carthage or the sack of Rome in a favorable light.

Whatever specific lessons they are taught, Cappadocians almost always have a deep respect for history. They know that the bodies of the dead, to say nothing of the artifacts they leave behind, tell their stories for those intelligent enough to look. Many Cappadocians wonder what future generations of vampires will glean from the records they leave behind. Very few Cappadocians harbor any fantasies about true immortality.

their parts well in the final act of Cappadocius' little drama, will be far, far shorter than ours.

Points of Contention

The Cappadocians are a clan driven, spurred on by the knowledge of their fate and the hope that they may yet avoid it. As such, while many work individually as best they are able, certain events and activities impact the clan as a whole.

Hidden Alliances

In their desperate quest for knowledge and a means to save their clan, whether they know of their founder's quest for godhood or are merely seeking some arcane secret that might lead them into the (metaphorical) light, some Cappadocians have chosen to deal with *anyone* who might harbor such knowledge — whether or not interaction with them is wise. The past few years have seen a marked increase in Cappadocian interaction with Setites and Tremere. Other clans who learn of these connections may wonder at the repercussions (particularly with regard

to the Tremere, as the Cappadocians seem to be setting themselves up for an eventual conflict with the Tzimisce), but the Cappadocians seem to have succeeded at keeping these exchanges purely on the level of information trading. What ancient lore they might have obtained from the Setites, however, or what mystical secrets from the Usurpers, is anybody's guess.

Rumors persist that some desperate Cappadocians have even made contact with enclaves of the Baali, but this remains unconfirmed — possibly because any guilty Graverobber knows that her own brethren would likely tear her apart for such a transgression.

A Final Pilgrimage

A small but growing number of Cappadocians have returned to the sunken city of Kaymakli, where — despite knowing full well that they will be unable to leave — they have willingly stepped through their progenitor's ward and disappeared into the depths. Some claim that they are seeking a place of safety, that they intend to wait out the destruction of the rest of their clan and then emerge once Cappadocius himself is dead and the ward has fallen. (Where they developed the notion that the ward would automatically fall with its creator's death is unclear, but these pilgrims cling to it as gospel.) One or two of these individuals have made oblique comments about "being called to safety," but if they *are* responding to some call that others of their clan cannot hear, nobody has been able to detect it, even through the use of Auspex and other Disciplines.

The Purge

The Cappadocians have managed to keep relatively secret the fact that a small number of the clan is engaged in actively hunting those fugitives who failed to appear at the Feast of Folly. Though Cappadocius never specifically ordered such an act, some of the clan figure that finishing the job their founder began can only please him. Furthermore, they argue, they might be protecting the clan itself; what if it's these fugitives who are responsible for the dark fate awaiting them all? Who would be in a better position to harm the clan than those who know its ways and secrets?

The Giovanni have devoted much of their efforts toward assisting this purge and account for at least half of those Cappadocians undertaking it.

The Face of God

An enormous portion of the Cappadocian clan is currently devoted to the acquisition of various types of knowledge, from the mystical to the religious. Perhaps the most ambitious research is also the most secret;

several Cappadocian scholars are actively engaged in an effort to understand God fully and completely. To that end, they are accumulating all the writings ever created about God, or the gods, in *every known religion*... This monumental task could easily take hundreds of lifetimes, but those participating in it have reason to hope they may still have sufficient time. Their methods of acquisition range from the legal — through purchase or trade — to the violent. Their researches have caused them to delve into tomes that various religions have declared anathema or heretical, as well as to participate in some of the above-mentioned contacts with the Setites.

Unfortunately, some of these Cappadocians have unearthed ancient “faces” of God that, apparently, were better left forgotten. Several small cults that resemble infernalist sects are cropping up throughout the ranks of the most learned Cappadocian religious scholars. The remainder of the clan is desperately trying to stamp them out and hide all evidence of their existence before word leaks out to the other clans.

Player's Toolbox

After the Feast of Folly, few Cappadocians remain who aren't actively engaged in some sort of activity on behalf of — or at least approved by — the elders of the clan. We strongly suggest you undertake one of these, or at least something like them; after all, you saw what happened to the others

Scholarship and Studies

- Like so many of your brethren, you are fascinated with knowledge, particularly ancient secrets of death and beyond. Whether it's in the hidden libraries of abandoned monasteries or the private collections of idle noblemen, no tome will escape your thorough investigations, though it may take many mortal lifetimes. You have made it your unlife's mission to collect all such tomes and knowledge — and the wishes of their current owners be damned. Mortals are too short-lived to understand such things anyway, and other Cainites lack your devotion. Surely, most will see that; if they don't, well, they may serve as your scouts and emissaries to the great beyond.

- You seek knowledge of death, not from musty old books, but from musty old corpses — and, in some cases, fresh ones. You study the effects of death, from the precise moment when the soul departs the body to the prolonged process of decay. You aren't especially popular with your brethren; you often smell of death, and you've probably taken more lives than even most Cainites would consider strictly necessary. Your quest

for understanding runs a very real risk of crossing the line into obsession — if it hasn't done so already.

Religious Pursuits

- You feel a deep spiritual connection to God, probably but not necessarily the God of the Catholic Church. You may dwell in a monastery or other religious institution, or you may simply practice your own brand of faith, but in either event, veneration of the Almighty is your primary activity. Of course, the fact that you revere God doesn't mean you *like* Him; your spiritual connection could just as easily be anger at what He's done to you as love for His works. Still, you acknowledge that you are part of His plan, even if you play a part you'd rather not have, and seek to understand what that plan might be.

- Perhaps because of your specific skills and education, or maybe just because your sire was someone of importance, you are in on Cappadocius' greatest secret — you know that he intends, eventually, to ascend the throne of Heaven and take God's place. Your researches into religion are inspired not by any devotion to God but by a desire to assist your progenitor in bringing his dream to fruition, for the good of all Cappadocians, and all Cainites. Of course, you must keep your goals, if not your activities, a closely guarded secret. Were other Cainites to learn of what you're doing, those who didn't dismiss you as mad as a Malkavian would certainly seek to do you harm in their failure to comprehend.

Political Aspirations

- You stand at the right hand — or perhaps just over the right shoulder — of a prince or lord. You might have no official rank yourself, but your advice on matters mystical, political and/or religious is of vital importance. You might be happy to remain in the background, asking favors and pulling strings behind the scene. Alternatively, you may see this as your stepping stone to real power, taking your cue from Bela Rusenko — the new Cappadocian Prince of Sofia — and seeking power that, until recently, few of your clan have ever held.

I Regret That I Cannot Attend ...

- For whatever reason, your sire was unable to attend the Feast of Folly — and you have no doubt that, had she gone, she would never have left and you would never have received the Embrace. You spend your nights looking over your shoulder, convinced that your surviving clanmates are coming after you to ensure you follow your errant brethren (and sire) into torpor or Final Death. Whether or not this is actually

the case is arguable, of course, but you don't intend to stand still long enough to prove the point.

Lasombra

Fear of the dark is bred into the Children of Seth, just as it must be bred out of the Childer of Caine. The darkness is your home now, so you had best make your peace with it, and learn to make fear your friend and ally.

— Ambrosio Luis Monçada, Keeper of the Faith
From *The Shadows of History*, author unknown

What is truth, except what we choose to make of it? For some truth is the light, for others, a fleeting shadow, without substance. Some claim that these words are the truth, but I do not. They are but words. The truth, if it exists, lies elsewhere, but these words may prove a path toward it, if you are willing to follow it and be mindful. Do not mistake words for truth, or else you will fall into a web of your own lies. Know that truth is not found in words, or even in deeds, but only in the stillness of the darkness, alone with yourself.

This is the truth that has been revealed to us, the Lasombra, the Friends of Darkness, Nobility of the Night, since the first nights of the world.

The Shadowed One

The Shadowed One was reborn into darkness through blood and pain. His mortal life, like his mortal name, is of no consequence. Sufficient to say that it was unremarkable in nearly every way. It is his immortal existence that concerns us, when he rose as a grandchilde of the Dark Father, one of the first of the third generation of the childer of Caine. He arose in the First City, ruled by the Dark Father and those of the second generation.

From the very beginning, the Shadowed One remained close to the darkness that was his by right of blood. Shadows clung to him and the night was his home. Great cats stalked at his feet as he hunted and feasted, and slaves and servants feared and worshipped him. So it was for many nights, until the coming of the Great Flood that washed away the First City, showing the Shadowed One a greater darkness than even the starless night, the depths of the endless sea.

How long he wandered its depths, none can say, existing wrapped in the arms of darkness, like being submerged in ink, beyond the reach of the sun. He existed and he hunted, the Shadowed One of the Deeps, in darkness and silence profound, the most feared predator of the seas, until the time when the floodwaters receded and the childer of Caine embraced the dry land once more.

They sought to rebuild the glory that was the First City, but the second generation did not rule with the wisdom or strength of the Dark Father, who left his childer before the coming of the Flood. The Cainites of the third generation grew restive under the oppressive yoke of their elders and in time plotted against them. They rose up in rebellion and there ensued a great and terrible slaughter. So it was that the second generation met their ends at the hands of their own childer, who sought to take the Second City for their own.

Then Caine, the Dark Father, returned from his wanderings and saw the work of his grandchilder, saw the city they had built lying in ruins about them, saw the blood of their sires upon their hands and lips. And the Dark Father's anger was great at the sight of this, and he cursed and banished his progeny from the city they had built, demanding that they learn to rule with both wisdom and strength to prove themselves worthy of the power that they claimed. So the Shadowed One—never truly content in the city his brethren built—returned to the darkness and to the sea.

The Sea Peoples

The Shadowed One's people were the People of the Sea, rootless and wandering like the Antediluvian, preying upon others as he did upon mortalkind. The Sea Peoples, or Hyksos, as they were known, were great warriors, sailors and raiders. They settled lands on the shores of the Mediterranean Sea, the sea in the center of the ancient world. They dominated commerce on the waters and along the shore, demanding tribute to stay their wrath, raiding those ships that dared to defy them.

The Hyksos even raided and conquered inland, bringing them into conflict with peoples and lands influenced by the other Antediluvians and childer of Caine. They conquered and ruled the Black Land of Egypt for two successive dynasties, wresting control from the scions of Set and forcing his childer into exile. They raided into the lands of Greece and Italy, weakening the strongholds of Brujah, Toreador, Ventruue and others.

The Cainites of these lands suspected the hand of one of their own behind these fierce and determined raiders. They became certain when the Sea Peoples offered up their prayers and battle cries to the power of darkness that they named Laza Omri Baras, "The God of the River of Darkness." The Greeks and Thebans gave the Sea Peoples' god the name Lau-Som-Bheu, meaning "profiting by knowledge" or "profiting together through domination,"

for such was the way of the raiders and their dark lord. So the name that would become “Lasombra” was first spoken among mortals and Cainites.

Still the Shadowed One himself was seen little in those days. He dwelled upon an island, some said, or in the depths of the wine-dark sea, rising from time to time to hunt and to guide his worshippers. Occasionally, he granted his Embrace to a chosen few, but less and less often as time passed. For centuries, the Sea Peoples were strong under the watchful guidance of their dark god.

The destruction of the isle of Thera in the Mediterranean Sea signaled the beginning of the end for them. Was it the work of a rival of the third generation or of the Hand of God? None can truly say. The tremendous eruption spread darkness across the sea and the land with a cloud of ash and dust. The devastation to the island and coastal settlements of the Sea Peoples drove many of our kind to seek their fortunes elsewhere, and even the Shadowed One, the god Lau-Som-Bheu, abandoned his chosen people to travel under the pall of the eruption’s shadow, in the depths of the sea. It was during this time that our clan spread far and wide, as the Shadowed One Embraced childer in distant places and lands, many of whom also Embraced, creating legends of walkers in darkness in places such as Africa and parts of the distant East.

FROM THE COMMENTARIES OF JULIA ANTASIA:

While I have my own suspicions as to the identity and agenda of this history’s author, I cannot fault the scholarship of this early history of the Lasombra. It does not even overly romanticize the nature of the Sea Peoples and their raids of conquest throughout the Mediterranean, merely states them as fact. Other clans did indeed believe that an Antediluvian was behind the Sea Peoples, worshipped by them as a god (or, perhaps, goddess; the tales vary). If anything, the only supposition that I cannot support is the author’s assertion that the Lasombra Antediluvian traveled the world following the destruction of Thera, Embracing childer in distant lands. Still, the Lasombra are known in many places, so it is at least possible that he did so. Certainly, the Antediluvian travels far less in these nights than he did then.

In the Shadows of Rome

The power of the Sea Peoples declined, until the Roman general Pompey took it upon himself to rid the Mediterranean Sea of piracy altogether, to protect Roman shipping. In a matter of months, he made the Latin name *Mere Nostrum*, “Our Sea,” the literal truth, wiping out pirates and raiders upon the Mediterranean without mercy. Rome became the preeminent power on the sea, and many havens and strongholds of our clan fell to Roman raids and conquest. The subtle hand of the Ventrue or some other clan may lie behind Pompey’s work and support in the Senate, but the truth was that Rome was supreme on the sea that was once ours.

So our clan moved onto the land, and into the lands that were Rome’s. The Roman Republic gave way to an empire, ruled by the Caesars, and we found our way into the shadows of the Empire, throughout all the lands where it stretched its influence. In those shadows, we discovered mortals sheltering a small light, a secretive cult that worshipped an executed Jewish prophet and called themselves Christians after him. Their fear of the darkness and their willingness to stand against it was intriguing, and many Lasombra were drawn to them.

By the time that Constantine adopted Christianity as the official religion of the Empire, we were already there within the ranks of its hierarchy, influencing the nascent Church and its doctrine. More often, our clan was the source of various heresies that the Church fathers outlawed, but many survived in the shadows as we have always done, including the Cainite Heresy that spread the worship of our Dark Father. By the time the Ventrue realized that the Empire was crumbling and the Church remained its sole bastion of strength, our influence was already too strong for them to displace, although they tried.

So darkness descended over the world again, as it always does, with the Cainites of the Clan of Darkness sheltered in the last stronghold of the light. Where the Church has spread the word of God, we have been there, watching from the shadows. Most of our clan remained close to the Church in Rome rather than fleeing with many Cainites to Byzantium, although some Lasombra chose to seek their fortunes in the East.

Friends of Darkness

Perhaps it was the influence of the orderly Romans or of the Christians and their hierarchy. Maybe it was the will of the Antediluvian, or some combination of these factors, but Clan Lasombra changed during its time in the Empire, becoming more than scattered bands of pirates. It was during this time that

FROM THE COMMENTARIES OF
PARSIFAL:

The Lasombra influence over the Mother Church has always been greatly exaggerated, most likely by the Lasombra themselves, who would have us believe that they hold the Cardinals and His Holiness the Pope himself in the hollow of their hand, to do with as they will. The truth of the matter is that the Lasombra have always imitated the ways of the Church — its rituals, ranks and ambitions — but their actual influence over Church affairs is quite limited, as is that of any Cainite clan. The mere existence of the inquisitors and secret efforts by certain factions within the Church to exterminate our kind should be proof enough of that. Would they even exist if the Lasombra wielded the sort of power that they claim? Though some might believe the inquisitors are merely tools of one clan or another, they have left none untouched in their zeal, not even the Lasombra.

the *Amici Noctis*, the Friends of Night, came into being and extended their influence over the clan through the Courts of Blood. The *Amici* were empowered — perhaps by Lasombra himself, perhaps only by their own ambition — with the authority to mete out judgment and settle disputes among members of the clan. They further the goals of the clan and decide who is worthy of survival and who is not. Moreover, they have the right to sanction the Amaranth, passing the power of the blood to those worthy of it, which has ensured their continuation and influence.

Although the *Amici* wield considerable power within the clan, they are by no means the sole power. If anything, that title rests with the Shadowed One himself, with the Lasombra, who still dwells among us. More accurately, the Antediluvian dwells within the walls of Castel d'Ombro, the Castle of Shadows, on the isle of Sicily. There also dwell two of the most influential of Lasombra's children.

The first is Montano, Embraced by Lasombra before the birth of Christ, a favored child of the Antediluvian since that time. While Lasombra slumbers in the Castle of Shadows, Montano is its master, and he dispenses justice to his kin with a fair and even hand. This has earned him few friends among the *Amici Noctis*, and Montano has banned the Friends of Night from conducting their business on the Isle of Sicily under pain of Final Death, a threat that the

Amici are wise to take seriously. Apart from seeing to the affairs of his sire's haven, Montano has little involvement in the business of our clan, although he could exercise considerable authority, if he chose to do so.

The other, more recent, inhabitant of Castel d'Ombro is Gratiano de Veronese, a young bishop Embraced by Lasombra less than a hundred years ago. Gratiano was born to a noble family in Italy. An ambitious young man, he entered the priesthood, and his family's wealth and influence bought him a bishopric by the time he was in his twenties. His skill in oratory from the pulpit raised the righteous anger of his congregations, which Gratiano was often able to direct against his family's rivals. He intended to do far more, ultimately hoping to unite the disparate city-states under one rule, his rule. He failed and began plotting to betray his family and his land to certain nobles in Bavaria and Bohemia. In return, he would receive control over much of Italy.

His family discovered Gratiano's treachery and the authorities arrested him. He was tortured and interrogated, then left alone in his dank cell. That was when Lasombra first came to him and offered the young bishop the Embrace. Gratiano refused at first, but further torture and the promise of execution left him with little choice. He accepted the Antediluvian's offer and took the Embrace, spirited away from his cell into the shadows. Now Gratiano is Lasombra's favored child at the Castle of Shadows, and he continues his efforts at meddling in the political affairs of his homeland. Some wonder about the Antediluvian's favor for the rabble-rouser Gratiano, but never openly.

FROM THE COMMENTARIES OF
JULIA ANTASIA:

And so we see one reason why the author of this work remains anonymous. I think it would be fair to say that the author is someone involved in the inner circles of Lasombra affairs to have gathered so much knowledge about them, particularly about the goings-on at the Castle of Shadows. Why the desire to share the history of the clan with others? While I cannot say for certain, it seems to me that the author wants certain things known before they are changed, fully aware that history is often the work of those in power. It seems to me that changes may be coming for the Lasombra, whether they know it yet or not.

HISTORY FOR LASOMBRA CHARACTERS

Like many things about the Lasombra, their history is made up of shadows and half-truths. Whether or not any of it is actually true is in question, although the Lasombra maintain it as the absolute truth. After all, how many of the clans have such close contact with their Antediluvian founders and can claim to be in the presence of so much unliving history?

The Shadowed One's influence is felt throughout the clan, directly or indirectly. Lasombra sires tell their childer tales of the Antediluvian's power and what he does to those who fail in their duties to the clan and their sires. The Lasombra founder is like a bogeyman to the younger generations, but he is also a presence for the elders of the clan, who cannot predict what their progenitor may do at any given time. While the *Amici Noctis* control the nightly affairs of the Lasombra, they are keenly aware that they do so at the Shadowed One's sufferance and that he could take away their power, if he wished. His occasional comings and goings are of grave concern. What plots does the Antediluvian hatch in his long slumbers in the Castle of Shadows?

For many younger Lasombra, recent history is of greater interest. The *Reconquista* in Iberia concerns them, as do the activities of Pope Gregory and the Church in Rome. Both events have embroiled the clan in conflict, but they also offer opportunities for ambitious Lasombra willing to take risks to secure future power.

Points of Contention

A number of potential conflicts brew among the Lasombra. Most are just beneath the surface, waiting for the time when they will bubble over.

The Reconquista

Many Lasombra are occupied in the current nights by the events of the *Reconquista* in Iberia as Christian kingdoms slowly drive the Muslims from that land. Officially, the Lasombra have nothing to do with the *Reconquista*, but everyone knows that is merely a front, since the Cainites cannot possibly remain neutral with the future of so many mortal kingdoms hanging in the balance. In recent years the *Amici Noctis* have made it increasingly clear that they favor the Chris-

tians in the conflict and believe that a Christian Iberia will be both more united and more easily influenced.

Despite the long association between the Lasombra and the Catholic Church, more than a few Muslim members of the clan feel abandoned by their elders. Some are torn between loyalty to their faith and their homelands and loyalty to their clan, or at least the sufficient appearance of loyalty to advance their cause. Indeed two of the greatest leaders on opposite sides of the conflict — Badr, Sultan of Granada, and Reinaldo de Rubio, Prince of Compostela — are both Lasombra.

Although the clan maintains an outward stance of neutrality, the conflict behind the scenes is becoming fierce, with Muslim Lasombra seeking alliances with the Assamites and any others who will support them in their struggle and the Christian Cainite lords of Iberia gathering support from the other courts of Europe to oust the Saracen Cainites altogether and claim their domains for themselves.

See *Dark Ages Europe* and *Iberia by Night* for more details on the *Reconquista* and its effects on the Lasombra and other Cainites.

The Church

The Lasombra have been associated with the Christian Church almost since its founding, and many Lasombra are devout Christians of one sort or another. Of course, just as many are cynical manipulators who see the Church as little more than a tool, but the strain of religious fervor, and fanaticism, runs strong in Lasombra blood.

In addition to the struggle between Christian and Muslim Lasombra in Iberia and elsewhere, numerous factions among the Christian faithful of the clan maintain their own rivalries and struggles. Followers of various heresies, particularly the Cainite Heresy, are common. Orthodox Christian Lasombra (if they can truly be said to exist) are often split on their relationship with the Church and with God.

Lasombra in Italy cultivate influence within the hierarchy of the Church but do so with great care, since they have rivals within the Ventrue and other clans that also claim churchmen and clergy as allies. More importantly, only a rare few within the Church's ranks are aware of the existence of the Damned and actively hunt them to purge the Mother Church of their influence. The Lasombra have run afoul of some of these self-proclaimed inquisitors and tread cautiously when dealing with them. Tales of miraculous powers of the faith

wielded against younger and more foolish members of the clan are spreading throughout Europe.

Lasombra's Favor

The plans and goals of the Antediluvians have always been mysterious to Cainites of the younger generations, none more so than with Lasombra, the Shadowed One. Although the Antediluvian is more involved with his progeny than most, he is still given to long periods of torpor and works his own will on the occasions when he walks the night.

One of the odder acts of Lasombra in recent memory is the Embrace of Gratiano de Veronese, who apparently holds his sire's favor for the time being. Although Gratiano is a relative newcomer to the Castle of Shadows, the mere fact that he is the childe of the clan's founder grants him considerable status, nearly rivaling that of Lasombra's chosen viceroy and other favored childe, Montano, who rules over the citadel when its master lies in torpor. The potential conflict between the two "brothers" is clear, and elders of the clan have begun quietly to take sides.

Gratiano has drawn the attention of many ambitious Lasombra, particularly those frustrated by Montano's cautious and neutral stance on so many things. As vampires within the Castel d'Ombro jockey for favor and position they also keep a close watch on the Antediluvian's comings and goings, wondering what Lasombra's plans may be for his new protégé (if that is what he is), and if any other favored childe may be awaiting his Embrace.

For his part, Gratiano is most interested in building influence in his homeland of Italy and eventually realizing his dream of uniting its disparate city-states under a single rule. Although Gratiano is well aware that he will not occupy that throne, nothing prevents him from being the power behind it, and he has made it clear that those who aid him will be richly rewarded when the time comes.

Player's Toolbox

Players can work history and current events involving the Lasombra into their characters' backgrounds in a number of ways:

Tests of Faith

- As a Muslim Cainite in Iberia, your position is a tenuous one, particularly as it has become clear that your clan supports the *Reconquista*... You are

torn between loyalty to your sire and clan and to your faith and your own ambitions to ascend through the ranks. Which must you betray?

- Your faith in God has never wavered, not even when He laid this curse upon you as a supreme test of your worthiness. You will not be found wanting. Not all Cainites are so true in their faith, however, and you know that the Church is riddled with their corruption. Your clan is the worst offender of this sin of pride — using the Holy Church for ignoble ends. Though it may cost you your blood and whatever remains of your soul, you are the Lord's avenger of sins and you will carry out His will.

- Some within the Church know too much about the existence of the childe of Caine and about your strengths and weaknesses. These inquisitors pose a threat to you and your kind and to your future plans for the Church. Your elders would reward any who provided them with insights into the activities and identities of these mortals, and perhaps their zeal for hunting the Damned can be harnessed and turned toward more... productive ends.

Friends of Night

- Your sire or mentor believes that you may have the potential to join the ranks of the *Amici Noctis* and has made it plan that they are watching you closely. You are being carefully groomed for a position of power within your clan. Can you swing matters in your favor? Do you even *want* to join the Friends of Night?

- After your Embrace, you were buried and left for three days in the dark and dank earth. In the darkness, a voice whispered to you, saying you were destined for greatness among the childe of Caine, that you must accept your heritage and your destiny, accept the darkness within and without. That experience has left its mark upon you; you still fear confinement and still sometimes hear a voice, whispering to you from the shadows, telling you what you must do.

- Your sire is a cruel and vicious taskmaster, but he taught you the skills needed to survive in the society of the Damned. Each torment inflicted upon you has been a lesson, and you have learned well, hiding away your hatred and playing the role of the dutiful childe. That has earned you a measure of your sire's favor, if not his mercy. That is good, since it is only a matter of time before you will bring matters to the attention of the Friends of



Night and petition to drink your sire's vitae before the elders of your clan. Your chance will come, if only you are patient.

Crowns of Shadow

- Gratiano de Veronese is seeking Cainites to aid him in interfering in the political affairs of Italy and has made it clear that the ultimate rewards will be great. Gratiano holds Lasombra's favor for the moment, but he also has many enemies even within his own clan. Gratiano has also made it clear that those who do not stand with him may regret their decision when he comes into his own. Which side will you choose?

- You thought yourself far from the conflicts in Iberia and Italy, in a humble but secure position in another court. Now your liege has honored you with the role of ambassador, acting as his eyes, ears and voice in the courts ruled by other members of your clan. You would rather avoid such entanglements, but now you have no choice. You wonder, does your liege believe you well suited for the task as he says, or does he hope to test your loyalty and mettle, and find you wanting?

- You play a dangerous game, outwardly a loyal servant of the *Reconquista* and the Christian lords of Iberia, but secretly sworn to the faith of Islam and the cause of the Moorish Kingdoms. It has become clear to you that your Embrace was the will of Allah, placing you in the hands of his faithful servants and allowing you this opportunity. You will earn the trust of the enemies of your faith, knowing that to face True Death at their hands will only ensure you a place in Paradise.

Loreador

We are like works of art, each unique and eternal, capturing fleeting feelings of beauty, passion, ugliness or pain. Moments frozen forever in time.

— Isouda de Blaise, Queen of the Court of Love in Blois

From On the History of the Artisans, by Katherine of Montpellier

It is the duty and the fate of our clan to shelter and nurture beauty, and a part of beauty is truth, but truth also contains ugliness, so many of us turn away from it. We embrace beautiful lies instead, and truth is allowed to wither on the vine, like a rose caught in the grip of the first frost. We should know the central truth of our nature: that the birth of beauty is often fed by ugliness. How much decay gives the rose room to grow? How much blood, sweat and tears have gone into the great works of the past? How many lives have been sacrificed to raise monuments to challenge eternity?

In my experience our kind tries too often to make history a thing of beauty, when instead it is the ugliness out of which beauty grows. It should be acknowledged no less for that and recognized for what it is. So I set pen to paper to record the ugliness, and the beauty, of our past, in hope that it will seed greater things to come for our clan and our kind.

The First City

In the First City dwelled she who is the founder our of line, the source from which our blood flows down through the ages. As might be expected, she was a thing of beauty, one of the great beauties of the First City. She was also courageous and daring, for she was a bull-dancer. She practiced the ancient art of dancing with death, leaping and soaring high above it, bringing grace and beauty to ugliness and danger, laughing and celebrating life amid the threat of death, and so she caught the eye of one of the Three, the childer of the Dark Father, Caine. Her Embrace was intended as a gift, to preserve her beauty and grace for all time. Her name was Ishtar, though she has been known by many names in many lands since those nights.

FROM THE COMMENTARIES OF ETIENNE OF POITOU:

What utter nonsense! Though Lady Katherine is known and respected as a scholar, her interpretation of our noble clan's history leaves much to be desired, and it is clearly seen through her own interests and with a bias toward her own sex.

It is well known that the founder of our clan was Arikel, a sculptor in the First City, whose work so captured the majesty of the second generation that they granted him the immortality of Caine's blood so that his genius would endure forever. Noddist lore tells us of his words and wisdom to his childer, whom he considered his greatest and most beautiful creations. This tale of a *woman*, a poor dancing-girl, as the founder of our clan is a fancy, even a heresy. Katherine accuses others of prettying history to cover its flaws, but of that particular sin, she is as guilty as any of us may be.

Still, the remainder of her history is not without merit. Her facts beginning in our line's time in the ancient world are generally correct, as long as you ignore her wild tales of our beginnings and consult true and reputable sources such as the words of the *Book of Nod*.

Of all the thirteen childer of the second generation, Ishtar clung most fervently to life and to the vitality she once knew. She understood the power of the Embrace to preserve beauty and the bitterness of the gift of immortality. She was lover and companion to her sire and sought to temper his moods and those of her brothers and sisters, but she could not hold back the flood forever. The wrath of God fell upon the First City, and the Great Flood washed it away. Still the childer of Caine survived and, in time, tried to recreate what had been lost.

The Second City

The Second City was an act of creation. Ishtar sought to make it a thing of beauty, better than the First City had been, without its flaws. Her efforts were doomed from the very start, doomed by the plotting and scheming of her brothers and sisters of the blood. For the rest of the third generation was not content to serve or to obey their sires. They chafed under their edicts and their rule until they rose up in rebellion against the Three. Though she tried, Ishtar could not stem the tide calling out for blood any more than she could in the First City. The childer slew their sires, and in the end the Second City, the glory they had built together, lay in ruins around them.

So it was that Caine returned from his wanderings to find his childer dead and the lips of their progeny dripping with their blood. So great was his anger that he cursed the upstarts and banished them from his sight. The founders of the clans were scattered to the four winds, having gained nothing from their patricide other than bitter exile. All save for Ishtar, the only one of the 13 who did not partake in the rebellion.

The Dark Father spoke gently to the graceful dancer, telling her to flee the site of so much carnage and betrayal. For her loyalty and devotion, he blessed her with a gift: She would never lose her vitality and thirst for beauty, and a measure of this would be passed on to her childer. Her quest to create and preserve beauty would not be in vain, as long as she persevered.

Ishtar left the ruins of the Second City and traveled to Sumer, where the mortals worshipped her as a goddess. It was there that she took her consort (and later childe) Tammuz, who sacrificed himself to protect his beloved from her enemies. Ishtar left Sumer and its bitter memories behind and made her way then to Crete, where she taught them the art of bull-dancing and sought to recapture some of what was lost in the First City.

She was successful for a time, until King Minos demanded that she grant him the immortality of the

FROM THE COMMENTARIES OF
RODRIGO:

Nowhere except in the works of Toreador scholars do I find claims that their clan alone escaped Caine's curse. Indeed, every clan seems to claim to hold the Dark Father's favor, except perhaps the Nosferatu (and who would believe that?). What of the ancient tales that say Saulot the scholar was the sole member of the 13 to escape Caine's wrath? What of the Ventrue scholars who believe that their line was predestined by Caine to rule over his other unruly childer? For myself, I cannot say whether or not the Toreador line escaped Caine's curse, but I doubt whether or not any of us who are of his blood can rightly make such a claim.

Embrace or face exile. Instead, Ishtar granted the Embrace to Minos' son, who was unworthy of it and was driven mad by the Beast, becoming as hideous as Ishtar was beautiful. Minos had a complex laby-

rinth built to hold his mad son prisoner, sacrificing beautiful youths and maidens to sate his eternal bloodlust, until the Greek hero Theseus came and put an end to his wretched existence.

The Ancient World

The Toreador herself disappeared from Crete, some say in the company of the inventor Daedalus, builder of the Labyrinth. From here she vanishes from history as well. Most likely the Antediluvian entered torpor at some point, after creating progeny in Greece such as the musician Amphion. From these childer are descended the current members of our clan.

The civilization of the ancient Greeks suited the nature of the Toreador's progeny well. The arts were in their fullest flower in Mycenae, Athens and other centers of Greek civilization. Sculptors, playwrights, poets and musicians were there aplenty, along with philosophy, weaving, woodworking, architecture and all the many other wonders of the ancient world.

For a time our kind prospered and their numbers multiplied. Artisans were Embraced to preserve their genius and their works. Mortal rulers were bound by blood to the Cainite masters and mistresses who ruled



Jim Di Bartolo

from the shadows. Our kind molded mortal society to suit them and to fulfill the ideals passed down by the Toreador. Unfortunately, the curse of Uriel took hold and the Cainites of Greece began to squabble and fight among themselves. Many met Final Death in those days, while the rest were driven into torpor or forced to leave behind all they had built. The Golden Age of Greek civilization faded like the blush from a rose and was no more.

The Glory and Fall of Rome

The failure of the Greeks scattered and disheartened our clan. For centuries, Artisans preserved and recalled their glory days, keeping ancient knowledge and achievement alive but losing sight of the living world around us. I'm told that time passed strangely for those Toreador; the nights dragged by one by one in an endless procession, then, suddenly, mortal lifetimes had passed. It was as if the Toreador had entered torpor as a clan, and many elders did so in truth.

What caught our attention and collective imagination was the rise of Rome under the guidance of the Ventrue. Though able leaders, the Ventrue and their Roman pawns lacked the spark of genius that the

FROM THE COMMENTARIES OF CAMILLA:

Ratherine would have us believe that the Toreador have abstained from vulgar matters of state throughout time when in truth they have been among the most pervasive manipulators of all Cainites. The Toreador stood in the thick of things in Rome. They became "patrons" of more than just artisans and scholars. They held senators, generals and even emperors under their sway. Their orgies of blood were legendary even among their Ventrue allies. Rome was a time of unrivaled decadence for the Toreador, when more than a few of them chose to walk the Road of Desire (now called the Road of Sin).

Before the Ventrue struck an alliance with the Toreador and allowed them free rein in the Eternal City, Rome was strong. Toreador decadence and corruption spread like a poison throughout the city and the empire. It weakened the patrician families and the emperors; it even tainted the Ventrue and their works. The Toreador may have sought to build in Rome, but in the end they destroyed everything that they touched, until Rome fell to the barbarian hordes.

Greeks had held. They sought it out and we offered it to them, seeing the opportunity to create once more. The Ventrue no doubt believed that they secured our cooperation through guile and majesty, but the truth is that the Toreador saw the potential of Rome and had little interest in the Ventrue's games of power.

The Long Night

The fall of Rome struck at the heart of our clan. Even before the Long Night fell, there were signs. The growth of Christianity in Rome was as a blight to the Children of Caine, since the Christians devoted themselves to destroying our kind wherever they encountered us. They were even willing to burn Rome to the ground to cleanse it of our presence. They weren't entirely successful, but many elders still burned or were sent into torpor.

Then came Constantine and his battlefield conversion, followed by the victory he was promised if he took up the Christian faith. The founding of Nova Roma in Byzantium split the empire as the Church was also split into east and west. Some Toreador, such as Menippus and his childer, and those of Hesiod, who burned in the great fire, chose to flee to the east, to Byzantium. My own sire Theophano remained in Rome with her childer and vassals, in an effort to preserve what remained.

In the end, her work and that of our clan failed to protect Rome from the barbarians. It was not a desire to maintain the Empire's political power. What did the Toreador care which mortal wore the crown of Caesar and claimed the Empire? Such rulers came and went. It was the glory and beauty of Rome that our clan sought to protect and preserve. Eventually even the city itself, its monuments, buildings and aqueducts, were of little importance compared to the essence of Rome, its art, literature and ideas. As the barbarians swarmed over the remains of the Eternal City like flies on a corpse, many Toreador did what was necessary to preserve that which remained.

The Flowering of Chivalry

The darkness that descended over civilization after the fall of Rome almost seemed to smother the spirit of our clan. Although we continued to seek out and preserve beauty where and when we found it, it seemed that the world grew increasingly ugly. What remained for us to preserve? What beauty could we create? I know that some found solace in the works of the Church, while others sought artistry wherever they could find it in the world. Much of what has survived in the Long Night has been

through our efforts, although the world may never know it.

Perhaps this devotion to the cause of preservation led to our clan's interest in the ways of chivalry. Some might say that it is a natural step from defender of beauty and truth to champion of the oppressed and the needy. Mayhap our keeping of the old songs and tales helped it along. Whatever the case, the knightly vocation fired the blood of many a Toreador with a faith and passion not seen in many years. We have taken to the ways of chivalry as if made for them, and Toreador are found in knightly orders throughout the world. Indeed, our clan founded most of the Cainite orders of knighthood and we maintain them still.

The Albigensian Crusade

The Crusade against the Cathar heretics of Albi must have seemed a noble cause to Cainite and mortal knights alike at first. But as with so many noble causes over the centuries, this one proved inexorably entangled with politics. It was shortly after the massacre at Béziers that King Etienne accused Esclarmonde the Black of treason and conspiring with the Lasombra of Aragon. That she chose not to appear before the Grand Count to answer his charges only confirmed those charges in the minds of many.

So it was that many neonate knights, Toreador and Venture alike, took up arms and joined with crusading forces from the north and east to march into Toulouse and the surrounding lands. They struck deep into the Pyrenees, seeking heretic Cathars and supporters of the Cainite Heresy as well. They fought against those loyal to Queen Esclarmonde, pitting Cainites of the same blood against each other on the field. Many met Final Death in the Crusade on both sides, in a war lasting for 14 years.

FROM THE COMMENTARIES OF ETIENNE OF POITOU:

This work was written before the invasion of Labécède and before the king's regent chose to negotiate with Raymond VII. Not one bit of the ugliness of the Albigensian Crusade has been overlooked or forgotten. Certainly not the evidence of Esclarmonde's collaboration with the Lasombra or her sympathies for the Cathar Heresy — and other heresies besides. The Courts of Love have not forgotten how to make war, and the keepers of beauty must be willing to shed blood, if need be, to preserve it.

Now the Crusade draws toward a fateful conclusion, with the Grand Court calling upon its allies to support the royal army in its attack on Toulouse and Count Raymond VII. Whichever side is victorious, much Toreador blood will have been spilled on either side, and the Courts of Love have been rent by war. How will our troubadours and poets record these deeds, and will those who fought for both sides be remembered? What will we, the keepers of beauty, choose to discard from our history because of its ugliness?

Points of Contention

The Toreador maintain the outward appearance of harmony, but they are also among the most passionate of Cainites, which can lead them into various conflicts, often before they're even aware of it.

HISTORY FOR TOREADOR CHARACTERS

As Katherine of Montpellier notes, the Toreador have a tendency to romanticize history as they do everything else in their existence. That does not change the events that individual members of the Toreador clan have experienced, however. Some Toreador elders recall history in all of its gory detail, even if they, too, have a tendency to romanticize any retellings of it.

History can have a subtle influence on younger Toreador characters in the time of the War of Princes. More than a few Toreador have chosen children based on a resemblance to someone — mortal or Cainite — whom they knew long ago. That history may end up repeating itself in one way or another. Storytellers can make an interesting tale out of two parallel stories, one in the past, one in the present, comparing the events of a Toreador's unlife in both.

Their romantic attitude toward history is often reflected in how Toreadors choose to retell their history through their art. Such scholarship as artistry may have unexpected effects in the modern nights. For example, a particular interpretation of the events before and after the Great Flood intended for a play may arouse the interest (or ire) of the local prince. A great historical poem, song or play about tragic love may have echoes in the current situation facing the character, or Toreador artistry might even go beyond stirring just the emotions. Perhaps a particular performance incorporates elements that awaken an elder Cainite from torpor by recalling elements of his own ancient existence.

Knighthood and Chivalry

Although the Toreador have embraced the ideals of chivalry wholeheartedly, not all Cainites achieve those ideals. As mortal rulers and potentates do, elder Cainites often use knighthood and chivalry to keep the young and passionate occupied while they go about their business. Knightly orders are a fine place to put fiery neonates to give them purpose in their unives beyond plotting against their sires. It also inculcates qualities of loyalty and honor into them, which their elders may be able to manipulate toward their own ends.

That is not to say that Cainite chivalry and knighthood are shams created by the elder generations, only that they are not as pure as some Toreador wish to believe. Rivalries between different knightly orders, or between individual knights, are sources of conflict in a chronicle. Knightly orders have become more important than ever since the start of the War of Princes, and Cainite nobles seek to curry their favor or maintain their loyalty.

Toreador knights are often followers of the Path of Chivalry (belonging to the Road of Kings), although the Road of Humanity is also well represented among the flower of Cainite knighthood. For more on Cainite orders of knighthood and the roads, see **Ashen Knight** and **Road of Kings**.

Courtly Love

Another human custom that the Cainites have adopted is that of courtly love, which the Toreador have embraced with their usual enthusiasm. Most scandalously, this practice has encouraged Cainites to take on mortal paramours and to become completely (some say slavishly) devoted to them. It has also led to Cainite ladies gaining power and influence within the Courts of the Damned and within mortal society as well. This dangerous game risks exposing the existence of the Damned, especially in noble circles where powerful forces may be moved against them.

Even as chaste as Cainite courtly love of necessity is, romance and passion are also powerful forces. They add an additional layer of complexity to the oaths of fealty and other demands placed on a Cainite's loyalty in the Dark Medieval world.

The Albigenian Crusade

In the Toreador stronghold of France, the Albigenian Crusade against the Cathar Heresy has ended only recently. The struggle provided cover for crusades against the Cainite Heresy as well, which did not always prove as successful. In particular,

Esclarmonde the Black, Queen of Toulouse, is besieged by her enemies for her support of Cathar heresy. This has helped unify other courts against a common enemy but has also led to conflict among the Cainites of the Courts of Love. Neonate knights may have seen combat during the Crusade or may have been Embraced during that time to strengthen the ranks thinned by war and the fires of the inquisitors.

Esclarmonde has fortified her position in the Pyrenees, besieged by both mortal crusaders and by Cainites loyal to Etienne of Poitou and Matriarch Salianna. The accusations of treason against Esclarmonde may prove a self-fulfilling prophecy as she is forced to seek allies wherever she can find them, to gather the strength to take the conflict to her accusers.

Player's Toolbox

Players of Toreador characters can use the following ideas as inspiration for different character story hooks:

Oaths and Duty

- You love a beautiful and noble lady with all your heart and have sworn yourself to her. This lady fair is a mortal, and you have broken Cainite law by telling her of your true nature. As proof of her mettle she had not recoiled from you but loves you still, and has willingly accepted the gift of your vitae to keep her youthful and beautiful for all time. She is the source of your strength and inspires you toward what you might achieve.

- You are a sworn vassal of the embattled Queen Esclarmonde, called "the Black" by some. Although considered a heretic and traitor by outsiders, you know your Queen to be a woman of strength and wisdom. Her domain stands against Cainite crusaders and mortal inquisitors. Though it may require allying with Cainites of the Low Clans or even stranger forces that lurk in the Pyrenees, you will do what you must to serve your rightful liege.

- Though of low birth you feel that your Embrace into one of the High Clans has elevated you, such that you can fulfill your lifelong dream of knighthood. You will do whatever it takes to prove yourself worthy to earn your spurs, and you have been faithfully studying all the skills you will need to become a true knight. More importantly, you adhere to the code of chivalry with all your heart.

Passion and Love

- Your Embrace snatched you from the arms of death from illness and gave you eternal unlife, but it also separated you forever from your mortal beloved, who

believes you dead and gone. You cannot bear to reveal the truth, knowing that the two of you can never be together. So instead you have sworn to watch over your love from afar and act as silent guardian angel. Woe betide those who threaten your beloved.

- As a mortal, you chanced to fall in love with a most beautiful Cainite, who in time acceded to your wish to take the Embrace, to enter the nighttime world of your lover. Now your love has withered on the vine and your beloved has rejected you for another. You are bound by oaths to obey your sire, and you do not wish to harm your love. The focus of your righteous anger is this new paramour who has stolen away your lover's heart. You are certain that once this distraction is no more, things will be as they once were, forever.

Faith and Heresy

- Your passion for scholarship and devotion to God have not changed since your Embrace, but their focus has shifted somewhat. You believe you have discovered a hitherto unknown Noddist fragment, which may have great import for the Cainite Heresy in particular. Now you are torn between revealing your discovery and keeping it hidden from those who might use it to fuel further heresy.

- You were a part of the Children's Crusade, though you never reached the Holy Land. Instead, you met Regis, the Prince of Marseilles, before you took ship in that city. Your youth and beauty sorely tempted "Saint" Regis, and he fed from you like a starving man. Then, moved to repent for his heinous deed as he crouched over your dying form, the Prince fed you a measure of his blood, giving you the Embrace. Now you will remain a child for all time, and your new father has rejected you as a reminder of his terrible sin. You have only your faith in God, and the beauty that Prince Regis so admired, to sustain you.

- Though the mortal Cathars are now mostly martyrs to their faith, you are not. Instead of remaining true to your faith and being willing to die for a greater reward in Heaven, your cowardice has led God to curse you with this unliving existence, bestowed upon you by one of the Devil's own. You have repented your sins and you will redeem yourself in the eyes of the Lord by both preaching His word and seeing the monsters that made you destroyed.

Tzimisce

Give nothing to the dragon that he does not ask for. Not praise, not advice, not even a glance. To do so might attract his attention too closely.

— Advice traditionally given to Cainites visiting a Tzimisce *voivode*

As told by Oszkar Gergo Obertus, Former Book-

keeper at the Library of the Forgotten:

Sit down and be silent. Sit, damn you! What I've done to deserve this I cannot even imagine. I've a thousand and one things that need doing before sunset, and lecturing you bastards is not one of them. The master says I must teach you, so I teach you, but you damn well better learn swiftly, for I've no intention of repeating a single word!

Right. Let us speak of your masters and mine, the Tzimisce — called Fiends by those who would denigrate their accomplishments and their inherent nobility.

What? Yes, like the Tremere. Interrupt me again, brat, and I'll have your tongue permanently affixed to the roof of your mouth.

I'm not going to bother you with stories of Caine. You've heard them all, and frankly, they're boring. The history of the Tzimisce really begins with

The Embrace of the Eldest

None knows his original name, if indeed he possessed one, so we call him by our own name, Tzimisce. It is said that he was an oracle when he was yet mortal, a magician and seer even before he was a Cainite. Ynosh, who Embraced him, chose him as the only worthy recipient of the power he had to offer. The Eldest's Embrace was not like those of other, normal Cainites. Ynosh focused his will and drew forth the most primordial part of himself, saturating his vitae with everything that made him more than mortal before bestowing this gift upon Tzimisce.

This great Embrace made the Eldest far more than his brothers among the third generation. Where they were tainted, he was pure. Where they were still tethered to their human frames and their past lives, he was able to combine his earlier magics with the power bestowed upon him, and to use them both to begin, even in his earliest nights, the metamorphosis that would enable him ultimately to transcend all mortal limitations.

Enoch

did not remain in the Eldest's home for long. Tzimisce's brethren never particularly liked him — the jealousy of the inferior is a powerful emotion. Only Arikel, the first Toreador, made any pretense of caring for him, and that was only after he used his flesh-shaping abilities to grant her the unearthly beauty that her foppish descendants now claim was hers by birth. It was not long after he'd done precisely the opposite to Nosferatu — and they claim, laughably, that their ugliness was a curse from Caine himself, so determined are they not to acknowledge the Eldest's

YNOSH'S CHOICE

Some Tzimisce scholars maintain a slightly different version of the Eldest's Embrace than that accounted above. According to them, Ynosh the Lawgiver hadn't intended to create a viable child. He was hoping to free himself of the Beast. If he could rid himself of the spiritual impurities that tethered him to the Beast, he could escape it, for it would fade away without any link to his soul. Tzimisce, then, was to be the repository of all this corruption, a scapegoat who would carry the worst of Ynosh only long enough for the Lawgiver to kill him. It was only when he realized that the Eldest had come through the Embrace largely intact, that he had proved strong enough to master the horror foisted upon him, that Ynosh relented and allowed his offspring to survive.

Most who do not believe in this account point to a single, glaring inconsistency. Why, if Ynosh intended simply to slaughter his offspring outright, did he choose an oracle and a magician to be the repository of his seed? Surely he could have chosen a more expendable and less useful mortal to carry his waste.

This has led some of the Fiends to develop yet a third theory of their genesis, one that combines the other two into an even more frightening concept. Perhaps Ynosh did indeed deliberately infect the Eldest with the vilest and most corrupt parts of his soul. But suppose, they say, his purpose in doing so was *not* to kill the bearer of his sins out of hand? Suppose he intended from the beginning to let his offspring survive, and he chose Tzimisce precisely because he had the necessary capabilities to master the Lawgiver's impurities?

If this is true, it means that Ynosh deliberately created the clan of Cainites often credited with being the most cruel and inhuman creatures ever to walk the Earth. What his motives for doing this might have been, even the eldest Fiends hesitate to speculate. They are certain, however, that the Eldest himself knows, and that he will reveal their purpose to them when the time is right. Until then, they see no need at all to rein in their darkest impulses, for they are truly no more and no less than they were born — or, rather, made — to be.

power over them! — that Tzimisce decided that he could no longer remain in the city with his inferiors. They were too tied to their mortal lives, too bound by mortal limitations. If the Eldest and his eventual descendants were to grow beyond those limitations, to truly discover their potential, it would not be within the streets of Enoch.

The Eldest's

Years of Wandering

proved only moderately useful. During this time, as his gifts as an oracle waned, he walked where his instincts led him. He Embraced for the first time, not for companionship, but so he might have additional eyes and hands to search the world and experiment with means of rising above the limitations of the mortal form. Additionally, after consuming his first child, Gallod, from within, he began traveling with a mortal entourage, to ensure a ready supply of vitae. During these travels, he Embraced many of the most famous and infamous Tzimisce: Demdemeh, Yorak, the Dracon. And one other who should be famous, but is not: Ionache. I'll come to him later.

THE DARK CONTINENT

It is a closely kept secret of the clan, known only to those few ancient Tzimisce who accompanied the Eldest on his journeys and some of their childer. Tzimisce left Enoch long before any of the other Antediluvians, or so the clan's legends claim. Yet when the Eldest reached the edges of Africa in his wanderings, he made a discovery so frightful it disturbed even so powerful a being as he.

Africa already boasted its own Cainite population!

Where, and from whom, they could possibly have come from is a mystery that burns in the minds of those few Tzimisce who are aware of it. Surely none of the second or third generation could have reached those lands before the Eldest! Were these African vampires a separate lineage, birthed from Caine during his wanderings in the land of Nod? Even worse, did they come from some other source entirely, bearing no relation to Caine at all?

To date, the Tzimisce have found no answers, and those few Laibon to whom they have spoken have not been particularly forthcoming.

In all these travels, however, the Eldest found no lands, no demesne, that called to him as strongly as

Transdanubia

particularly the area of the Carpathian Mountains and the regions now known as Hungary and Transylvania. At first, the Eldest was not certain what precisely it was that drew him here. A simple instinct? The last lingering traces of his prophetic abilities? Simple aesthetics?

As Tzimisce himself searched and experimented, even returning to the practice of magics he had not once used since his Embrace, his clan spread beyond the Transdanubian lands to claim the entirety of the European continent. Where the other Cainites still stagnated in Enoch, our masters controlled entire demesnes, some as large as any modern nation. No roads yet existed, but the travel and migration of the kine had pressed natural trails into the earth, and over these the Tzimisce watched, collecting a “toll” of vitae from those who passed. Had they not been challenged, and in some instances beaten back, by the werewolves native to the European wilds, the Tzimisce would truly have been masters of the entire known world.

The Eldest, whose magics had grown more potent than ever and whose oracular dreams had returned to him, empowered by something in the Carpathian region, finally discovered what it was that had drawn him to this place.

It was called

Kupala

a demon and a god of ancient nights, buried in the earth, bound to the Carpathian soil. For many a night, the Eldest and the demon held discourse, and the sorcerous powers of the Eldest — and his childe — grew mighty indeed. They developed the true power of the *koldun*, magic that draws strength from the very earth. Was this a gift granted by Kupala, taught to the Eldest by a creature older even than he? Or did the Eldest himself develop it by observing and even stealing power from that imprisoned fallen god? Does the sorcery of the *koldun* stave off Kupala’s infestation and infection of the land, or spread it ever more swiftly?

If the Tzimisce *koldun* themselves cannot agree on an answer, I certainly would not dare hazard a guess.

It was during this period, due to the Eldest’s interaction with Kupala and his practice of drawing on the power of the earth around him for use in *koldunic* sorcery, that Tzimisce and his descendents developed their permanent tie to the land itself. No “curse of Caine,” despite the superstitious blathering

NO PLACE LIKE HOME

Some Tzimisce doubt the existence of the demon Kupala — or, at the very least, doubt that he is responsible for most of the evils and the power attributed to him. They have a different theory regarding the Eldest’s attraction to the Carpathian region, and a different explanation for both the taint in the land and the growth of *koldunic* sorcery.

They believe that it was here, far from Enoch itself, that Ynosh first located the Eldest; that Tzimisce was a seer, not of the kine population of that great city, but of the nomadic tribes of Eastern Europe. Why Ynosh would have traveled so far to find his childe depends on which version of the Eldest’s Embrace one believes. If Ynosh intended to gift his offspring with concentrated power — or concentrated evil — perhaps he wandered out here in search of a worthy candidate. If, as others maintain, he intended to kill his childe after ridding himself of all his worst features, perhaps he simply wished to complete his task well away from his home, for fear of corrupting it.

In either event, by this account, the Eldest’s Embrace occurred not on the streets of Enoch but in the shadows of the Carpathians. The power Ynosh released in this unusual Embrace went not only into Tzimisce himself but soaked into the very land around them. Thus, it was only here that Tzimisce could come into his own, only here that he could develop his powers to their greatest extent. Kupala, if it exists at all, is merely a byproduct of that power, Ynosh’s own worst traits bound to the land and given sentience. It is, in effect, a part of the Eldest himself.

of the other clans, this was simply a byproduct of the Tzimisce’s sorcerous attributes and is a sign of purity, not a weakness.

It was then, as the Tzimisce were truly consolidating their power over the mortal tribes of the region, that God, in His “infinite mercy,” sent

The Great Flood

Cainites and kine alike fled to higher lands as the rivers overflowed their banks and the floodwaters rose, until the peaks of the Carpathians became nothing shy of a small island kingdom, ruled over by the

INBREEDING AND EVOLUTION

By all accounts, none of these earliest revenant families — in fact, none who predate the Basarab, who existed at the time of the Roman legions — survive to the 13th century. Their own masters slaughtered some of them as punishment for some crime or disobedience, real or perceived. Others presumably bred themselves out of existence, inbreeding generation upon generation until they could reproduce no longer.

If this is true, then the current revenant families, including the Obertus to which our esteemed narrator belongs, can look forward to nothing but eventual oblivion. The Dark Medieval world holds a surfeit of secrets in its shadowed corners, however, and it remains possible that some of these earlier revenants survive still, hidden away either by their Tzimisce masters or at their own instigation. If so, even the most inhuman Fiend must shudder for a moment at the attempt to imagine what such hideous creatures might have become after so many years of both mortal and Cainite corruption.

native Tzimisce. They demanded tithe from all who would dwell there, taking at least one child from each mortal family. In some instances, a particular lord would claim entire families as his own, and it was this practice that eventually resulted in the revenant families as they exist today.

This period of near ultimate power, when the Tzimisce ruled the only land for hundreds of leagues and newcomers living and undead alike had to bow to their will or find themselves quite literally adrift, developed the clan's taste for power into the form it has taken in these modern nights. For some, it was a potent enough addiction that they abandoned their search for the means to expand themselves beyond human and Cainite limitations. What need had they to "make" themselves superior to others when they already clearly *were* superior by dint of their social position? Others maintained the Eldest's quest but determined that they could better do so if they might command the resources of others. The Tzimisce began to divide the "Carpathian Islands" up into a series of individual demesnes, each ruled by either a single Cainite or a council of Tzimisce. Each lord could command others who were younger in age and possessed less status within the clan, but he was obligated in turn to obey those above him — in theory, at any rate. This near-feudal arrangement, created long be-

fore the kine ever developed such a system, would eventually give birth to the *voivodate* that rules much of Eastern Europe now.

It was also during this period that the Tzimisce developed their refined sense of hospitality. With so many dwelling in so limited an area, an elaborate and ironclad system of etiquette was the only way to prevent constant bloodshed over the slightest perceived insults... Much of that intricate style of interaction has been lost, for it faded away when its use was no longer required, but portions of it — including the Tzimisce notions of a host's obligations to his guests, and the reverse — remain.

After the Flood

As the waters receded, the Tzimisce looked down upon the vast demesnes that should be theirs and were angered to see vast human tribes, accompanied by Nosferatu, Gangrel and other Cainites, moving into and usurping their lands. (Precisely where these human tribes come from I cannot say; apparently God's flood was not as effective as the Bible would have us believe.) For a time, the Tzimisce slaughtered all Cainites who encroached upon their lands, but eventually the numbers became such that some form of accommodation was required. The Tzimisce made it very clear to all newcomers that these lands were theirs — but as long as the other Cainites would acknowledge their dominance, and did not encroach on any individual demesnes, the Tzimisce would allow them to pass through and even make homes in the region.

For their own part, the Tzimisce had grown so accustomed to the near-feudal system they have developed in the Carpathians that they maintained that way of unlife even after the flood. *Voivodes* and other lords ruled over relatively small territories absolutely but felt little concern for anything that occurred beyond their borders. Each was a king and a god, but only within a very limited area.

You recall, I trust, my mention of a "forgotten" elder by the name of Ionache? Good; I'd hate to think your memories were *that* poor. It was he who proposed the pseudofeudal system the Tzimisce followed during the nights of the flood. It was also he who first claimed the title of *voivode*, and who established a private and individual demesne once the floodwaters receded. His demesne was never the largest, but his rule was absolute. Remember, I speak of a contemporary of Yorak and the Dracon, so you have some inkling of the power Ionache wielded.

THE ELDEST VANISHES

It was during this period that Tzimisce himself disappeared. Theories of what might have happened to him run rampant through the clan. Was he attacked by some outside force, perhaps another Cainite clan or the area's werewolves? Did he decide he had learned all he could from the region and move on? Or, just perhaps, did he successfully transform himself into something greater than mortal and Cainite both?

As of yet, none can say with any certainty.

I cannot say with certainty what might have happened to Ionache. His territory was located in Western Hungary, very near the lands now claimed by the Ventrue whose Nova Arpad, and he disappeared less than a year before she first came to prominence in the region. Whether he fell victim to Ventrue treachery or some other doom, I know not. It is, I suppose, possible that he yet survives, but I cannot imagine anything other than Final Death that could prevent one such as he from making every effort to take back his land.

It was this policy of relative isolation on the part of individual Tzimisce that allowed such major mortal societies as Hellenistic Greece and then Rome to flourish, for much travel across the continent, and even the resettling of much of the world after the Flood, passed through the Transdanubian lands. Far be it from me to criticize our masters, but perhaps they might have been better served to take a slightly more active role, for with the growth of Rome came

The Ventrue

I have mentioned the cursed name of Arpad once already. Nova Arpad, Geza Arpad, and others — Ventrue claimants to Tzimisce power in Hungary. Arpad is a Hungarian name, of course, but if one traces back the lineage of the Ventrue who Embraced them, one inevitably finds oneself drawn to Rome. All roads lead, as they say. At any rate, the Ventrue formed the first true challenge our masters had for ownership of this land. The Tzimisce were stronger, their ties to the land unbreakable, their determination greater. Alas, what the Ventrue had were unity, something the fiercely independent Tzimisce lords and *voivodes* did not. Western Hungary and other territories, areas the Tzimisce had always considered their own but made little effort to maintain, became Ventrue demesnes.

Even after Rome itself fell, the Ventrue remained. Local Tzimisce were not strong enough to expel them from their lands, and the Tzimisce of Transylvania and points east were more concerned with protecting their own demesnes than in aiding their clanmates in recovering lands already lost.

The Tzimisce whose territories had been taken might have found willing allies in the Brujah, for many of them had fled here when Carthage fell, and they harbored a burning hatred for the Ventrue clan. Unfortunately, while some few Tzimisce welcomed the Brujah into their demesnes, many others saw the newcomers not as potential allies but as just more competitors for land and blood, and they spurned all attempts at contact. Thus the Brujah became just another Cainite minority in the region, where they might have been so much more.

Some of the *voivodes*, such as great Yorak himself, realized that they must expand their influence and expertise beyond their traditional arenas. They must acquire childer who knew the lands beyond the Transdanubian lands, and those skilled in the changing face of kine cultures, governments and the like. Yorak himself Embraced the infamous Shaagra of the Vroi tribe, an indicator of the Tzimisce interest in the various Hun, Goth and Slavic tribes, which they hoped might prove useful in regaining territory lost to the Ventrue and Malkavians. While these efforts were successful in expanding Tzimisce influence geographically, and in bringing new skills and specializations into the clan, it proved less effective in shaking the Ventrue grip on Western Hungary.

Still, the Ventrue could have been dealt with, eventually, had they been the only threat worrying the Tzimisce. This was not to be. Our masters' greatest rivals came from an unexpected source, a small cabal of human wizards who had set up a chantry in the Carpathian Mountains. They were called

House Tremere

As mortal mages, they were a curiosity, little more. Though neither side likes to admit to it now, they even had occasional dealings with the Tzimisce, trading their magical acumen on one matter for ancient knowledge possessed by the Tzimisce on another. I have even heard rumors that one or two Tzimisce Embraced during that time bear the name Tremere, a fact that they hide — with good cause — in modern nights. They dwelt within our masters' territory, but as they showed little interest in temporal power and weren't competing for the same resources, the *voivodes* let them be.

And how did the bastards repay our lords' munificence in allowing them to live freely in Tzimisce lands? Through betrayal, through theft! They stole Tzimisce blood, slaying some of the eldest and purest of the clan to gain it, and with it concocted some vile, unholy substance that duplicated the Embrace, bestowing upon themselves the curse of Caine. Not enough that they possess great mystic powers, they must have immortality as well — immortality they did not earn, they did not deserve, that they stole from their betters!

Some of the Tzimisce saw it coming. The *kolduns* read omens in the waters and the earth, heard the earth cry out beneath the weight of the great evil that was even then taking place in the peaks of the Carpathians. This, they said, was a doom laid upon the Tzimisce for their failure to maintain the land as was its right, a doom that would cost Tzimisce blood, Tzimisce lands, Tzimisce — assuming they ever had such a thing — souls.

Most of the *voivodes* ignored these warnings until it was far, far too late. Some few, led by Vladimir Rustovitch, responded, launching strikes against the Tremere chantry of Ceoris

THE WAR WITH THE SWORDBEARER
For more on Jürgen's invasion, the war between the Tzimisce and the Ventrue, and the formation of the Obertus State between the warring parties, see **Bitter Crusade, Under the Black Cross, Dark Ages Europe** and, of course, the Ventrue portion of this chapter.

and their other, smaller chantries as well, within weeks of the Usurpers' unholy transformation... Had Rustovitch moved with the might of the entire clan behind him, the scourge of the Tremere would assuredly have been wiped from the Earth. Alas, he had no such power. He had only the forces and the magics of a bare portion of the clan, as well as several Gangrel and Nosferatu who were wise enough to see that the elimination of the Tremere was in their best interests. It was might enough to slaughter many of the Usurpers, to destroy a number of their chantries, to drive them back very nearly to Ceoris itself. It was not,



HISTORY FOR TZIMISCE CHARACTERS

Most Tzimisce are Embraced from the kine population of Eastern Europe, the Fiends' ancestral home. As such, neonates typically know some of the history of their clan in the form of old folk legends. In places where a Tzimisce *voivode* has ruled openly for centuries, educating a *childe* is often simply a matter of telling him which stories are true, rather than retelling the stories.

Tzimisce take great pride in their history but do not waste time reciting their lineages all the way back to Caine as the Ventrue do. It is enough that they know what wisdom is in the history. A story about a battle in a swamp might serve to illustrate several different lessons — topography and its effect on tactics, why a particular area is of enough importance to fight over, etc. — but knowing the exact date of the battle is rarely significant.

This approach to history causes some outsiders to feel that the Tzimisce fabricate much of their history. Of course, mentioning this theory to a Fiend and expecting any response other than a brisk application of flesh-crafting is foolish. Not only is questioning the honor of one's host extremely rude, the Tzimisce feel that the other clans are the ones lying about the past, and simply inserting dates or names (with no way to verify them) in order to lend credence to their boasts.

however, sufficient to finish the job. Ceoris stood. The Tremere endured. And their power grew behind stone walls as they developed sorceries alien even to the *koldun*... When they emerged once more from Ceoris, they wielded a might the likes of which the Tzimisce had never seen. They were now clearly a threat, obvious enough to make all but the most apathetic of *voivodes* finally take notice, but it was too late. The time of their greatest vulnerability had passed, and the Omen War, which rages even tonight between the Usurpers and the land's rightful masters, began.

For many years, the tides of the Omen War shifted back and forth. First the Tzimisce held the advantage, their *vozhd* and mortal armies holding the field; then the Tremere struck back, dropping armies of Gargoyles reinforced with Hermetic magics. The Tzimisce gained ever more Nosferatu and Gangrel as allies, due to the Tremere use of those clans in the experiments

to create the Gargoyles. The Tremere, however, gained allies as well, not the least of which was Clan Ventrue, which had been waiting for another opportunity to expand its influence.

At first, the Warlords simply provided the Tremere with funds, information and friendly lands from which to operate, but their involvement was not to remain so inactive. When King Andreas II requested the aid of the Teutonic Knights in battling Cuman aggression in Hungary, it was precisely the opportunity for which the Ventrue had been waiting. When they finally came, they came in the form of

Jürgen of Magdeburg

Also called Jürgen the Swordbearer, this *childe* of Hardestadt came with his entire court, uncountable Ventrue agents and companions, allies of other clans and the might of the Teutonic Knights. From 1211 through 1225, the Omen War was actually overshadowed by the struggle between Jürgen's Ventrue and the Tzimisce, led — nominally — by *Voivode* Rustovitch. The Tremere, of course, took advantage of the situation like the vultures they are and strengthened their growing ties with the Ventrue, striking at our masters from all sides.

I've no time to waste with you describing the ins and outs of the war, when we've so many other records of the details. Suffice it to say, it ended without any real victory on either side, due to the efforts of Myca Vykos and our own Obertus Order. Jürgen and the Teutonic Knights are gone, but his Ventrue still hold substantial territories in the Tzimisce's rightful lands — territories they must and will be driven from once the Tremere are well and truly dealt with.

And that, in essence, is where the Tzimisce stand this night. Their grasp on Transylvania is strong and unyielding, but much territory that was theirs in the past yet suffocates beneath the bulk of the Ventrue and the Tremere. The war with the Patricians has paused, the conflict with the Usurpers continues unabated. The battle will be long, but in the end, it is the *voivodes*, the ancestral lords of this land and the rightful masters of Caine's legacy, who will prove the victors.

Now, attend to your chores, you accursed larvae, or you may bear witness to some of our masters' more imaginative proclivities. Go!

Points of Contention

It would be redundant to address the Omen War or the war with the Ventrue here, given the attention

already paid to these conflicts above. Still, the Tzimisce are involved in more than just these two conflicts.

Preserving the Dream

Though the Toreador Michael is dead, the Dream that was Constantinople lives on. Through Michael's lover, called the Dracon, and the Obertus Order of monks, the Tzimisce were to play a major part in the creation of the Patriarch's perfect society. In their own way, many Tzimisce are still pursuing that Dream.

The Obertus are still determined to preserve the lore and learning of the Library of the Forgotten. Though it no longer stands in Constantinople, its treasures have been spread out among various Obertus monasteries and other hidden lairs. The position of the Obertus "state" between Tzimisce and Ventrue lands in Eastern Europe does not merely serve as a buffer between those warring factions, but also as a means of protection for the Obertus themselves. The monks know that each faction is aware of the great knowledge they possess; they know, too, that if either side attempted to acquire or destroy that knowledge, they could count on the other for protection.

Some of those Obertus, and indeed many Tzimisce who pursue their metamorphic studies, do so out of reverence for Michael's memory. The Patriarch believed in his eventual ascension to divinity, and many Tzimisce believe that their ability to alter their own shape gives them a head start along that same path. The Obertus are the only known faction to practice this belief, but a number of Tzimisce — particularly those who revere the Dracon — do so individually. Whether the Dracon himself is encouraging this behavior is unclear, as he has not personally been seen in some time.

The Voivode of Voivodes

Vladimir Rustovitch is a Cainite in a bind. His war with the Ventrue did not end in anything remotely resembling a victory. He may have prevented the Warlords from occupying his lands, but he cannot take credit for defeating them. Further, he has indeed lost some territories, and the fact that they were taken by the Obertus rather than the Ventrue doesn't do much to mitigate the sting.

He's not fairing much better in the Omen War. Not only has he failed to crush an enemy that many of his clan still see — despite all evidence to the contrary — as a nuisance rather than a threat, the Tremere have actually made substantial gains in recent years. Even with the Ventrue incursion over and his atten-

tion not so severely split, he has been unable to deal the Usurpers any substantial blows.

Many Tzimisce know that Rustovitch's position is precarious, with many other *voivodes* scheming to replace him. Not so many know that he is taking steps to shore up his position. Rustovitch is using the Obertus monks to feed false information to anyone who might come to them seeking knowledge of Tzimisce actions. He has sent secret emissaries to Brujah, Gangrel and even Lasombra lords of Eastern Europe, subtly trying to recruit assistance or, at the least, prevent alliances between his enemies and outside clans and factions.

Rumor is slowly spreading through the clan, however, of what may be Rustovitch's most ambitious efforts. If hearsay is to be believed, the *voivode* is attempting to either find or create new *koldunic* techniques of transformation. Supposedly, he seeks a means of reversing not only the rituals that allow the Tremere to create their Gargoyle and homunculus minions, but perhaps even a way to undo the rite that granted the Usurpers undying status! After all, the Tremere did not become vampires by "natural" means; perhaps magic can undo what magic has done?

Rustovitch has loyal agents among the clan seeking these secrets, but they are not the only ones. Fiends from other factions have begun the search as well, hoping that, if they can uncover so potent a secret, they might elevate *themselves* into Rustovitch's position.

Beyond the Forest

Though the Tzimisce are inextricably linked with the Slavic East in the minds of most Cainites, some few of their number do indeed leave the region and travel elsewhere in the world. Some of these, as discussed below, seek to emulate the Ancient's travels. Others have decided that, if the Tzimisce are going to survive, let alone win, their current conflicts, they must learn of the world outside in order to do so. The Tremere may be local, but the Ventrue were an outside threat; better to see the next one coming than to be caught once more by surprise.

A surprising number of Tzimisce who depart the region are the young, neonates and even ancillae who have determined that they will never gain the power they crave in their homeland. Old Tzimisce, more even than other elders, are disinclined to relinquish power. They have held their traditional demesnes for centuries and see no reason to share those territories with newcomers — even their own progeny. The population of the region is simply too scattered for carving out a new demesne to be particularly attrac-

tive; where's the prestige in ruling a "fiefdom" of a single farmstead? So those young Tzimisce who wish to expand their own power seek other lands, places where the power structure may not be so entrenched or, at the very least, where some of the unclaimed lands may yet be worth pursuing.

Thus, while few areas outside of Eastern Europe boast Fiends in positions of real power, a growing number of these nations *do* claim Tzimisce as part of the populace. These Tzimisce haven't established themselves yet, for the most part, and are often forced to fraternize with the Low Clans, Cainites whom they would never have given a second glance back home. A few have even become part of various Low Clan movements devoted to increasing the power of the fallen as a whole; these Fiends support such efforts not out of any belief in the cause, but because they have the foresight to recognize a unified group of Low Clan Cainites as a powerful tool. Better to have such a mob grateful to one for efforts on their behalf than to have them consider you just another first cursed oppressor.

Player's Toolbox

Considering the number of conflicts and other events in which the Tzimisce are currently engaged, it seems unlikely for a Fiend character *not* to be involved in at least one of them.

The Omen War

- You are active in the war against the Tremere and spend a great deal of time in battle with the Usurpers. Unfortunately, their mystical defenses are often more potent than you expect, and their might seems to be increasing rather than fading. You must study them, learn a way to penetrate the chantry you are currently assaulting — or at least prevent any of them from escaping your siege and going for aid.

- You are war-weary, tired of battling on so many fronts. You have begun to wonder if it might be possible to negotiate a treaty with the Tremere and have even gone so far as to put out feelers to locate others on both sides who feel as you do. You must be *extremely* cautious, however. Many of the Tzimisce consider the war a matter of personal honor and would happily kill you — or far, far worse — if they knew you even contemplated such an act. Can you truly open negotiations with the hated Tremere? Even if you can, how much good will it do when so many of your own clan would certainly refuse to abide by any such agreement?

- You are part of a small cabal of *koldun* working on a desperate plan to attack the Tremere from within. You have discovered that the Tzimisce blood used to

create the Usurpers still runs through them. If you can just discover the proper rituals, perhaps you can use your own vitae as a focus to destroy — or at least enspell — the foe. Unfortunately, blood magics of that sort are far more the purview of the Tremere than they are yours, and in your researches you've accidentally alerted some of them to your actions. Can you not only research the proper procedures, but also find the proper materials and the time to execute them, before the Tremere catch you and your companions?

Jürgen's Invasion

- You were a soldier on the front lines against the Ventrue, fighting alongside — or perhaps even commanding — kine troops and war ghouls. The war itself may be officially over, but border skirmishes are still *de rigueur*, and you participate as enthusiastically as you did during the war itself. Those weak *voivodes* and traitorous Obertus may have accepted Ventrue presence in your lands, but you have not, and you damn well never will.

- You are part of the Obertus order, smack-dab in the middle of all the hostile parties. Your only real goal is the preservation and acquisition of knowledge, but can you ever really concentrate on that with the thunder bearing down on you from all sides?


- Publicly, you maintain that as the war with the Ventrue is over, it's time to make complete peace with those who remain, to encourage the *voivodes* and the Arpad Ventrue to cooperate and increase the power of both clans. Privately, you know this will never be, but you hope that by ingratiating yourself with the Ventrue, you'll have an unexpected ally in your future efforts to increase your standing among the Fiends.

The Footsteps of the Eldest

- You seek to follow the Eldest, not in a spiritual sense — or at least not *merely* in a spiritual sense — but also in a very literal one. You travel the world, even as he did, hoping to understand all around you so that you may someday either dominate it or ascend beyond it. Ultimate goals aside, however, for the time being you are content to see all that can be seen and to learn all that can be known.

Ancient Nobility

- As far as your sire is concerned, the rest of the world has no right to interfere with him at all. He wishes no part in these foolish wars, nor in the strange mystical rites of your clanmates. He rules his demesne from his family's ancestral keep, commanding the peasants below as is his right and due. Of course, that means that he needs *someone* to serve as his eyes, his



hands and in essence his errand boy throughout the rest of the world. Guess whom he's chosen? You may serve him loyally and willingly, as a dutiful childe should, or you may bitterly resent his demands on your time and effort, but either way, you've no choice but to obey. For now

• You are member of the ancient *koldun* traditions. You seek power, not through politics or military conquest, but by understanding ancient cultural magics and elemental traditions. You are aware of the presence of mystical forces — so-called demons — in the Eastern European countryside, but whether you consider these curiosities, threats to be overcome or potential allies is entirely up to you.

Ventrue

It may be easier to be feared than respected, but not better. A true leader is not measured solely by the power he wields, but also by the love and admiration of his subjects.

— Julia Antasia, Prince of Frankfurt

From A History of the Kings of Kings by Acindynus

Since the earliest of days, God has placed in the hands of particular men the right to rule over others. Even Our Lord Jesus Christ said, “render unto Caesar that which is Caesar’s,” making clear that Heaven supports the divine right of kings. Alongside mortal emperors, kings and princes have always been the Princes of the Night, chosen by Our Dark Father Caine to rule over the night as men rule over the day. We rule over the mortal herd, just as Adam was given dominion over the beasts of the fields. So it has been, so it shall always be.

The Chosen of Caine

In the First City, Caine bid his childe of the second generation to go forth and create progeny. Some he specifically selected to receive the gift of his blood through their Embrace, choosing them based on whatever special qualities they possessed that the Dark Father wished to cultivate and preserve. The first of his chosen was Veddartha, a foreign prince, who impressed the Lord of the Night with his wit, his noble bearing and his darkly handsome features. He was given the Embrace by Enosh, the first childe of Caine himself. Caine called Enosh’s childe Ventrue and he was most favored by Our Father.

Shortly after his Embrace, Caine took Ventrue from his sire Enosh, to dwell at his side and observe as Caine ruled over the First City and his progeny. Veddartha’s siblings of the third generation saw Caine’s favor toward him, and some of them grew envious of

him. In particular another of Enosh’s childe, named “the Shadowed One” by Caine, watched all that Ventrue said and did with jealousy festering in her heart, slinking in the shadows of the night. Still the Cainites of the third generation respected and honored Ventrue as the Chosen of Caine.

The second generation Embraced mortals other than Caine’s chosen ones and the Dark Father permitted some of these childe to continue to exist. Others he destroyed, or ordered his faithful servant Ventrue to destroy to maintain the purity of his blood. So our founder became feared as Caine’s Hand among his progeny, weeding out the unworthy.

In time, Caine revealed his intentions to Veddartha, telling him that he intended his grandchilde to succeed him when Caine departed the First City to find his destiny elsewhere. That very night, Caine disappeared and the first rains of the Great Flood began to fall. The rising waters washed away the First City and the childe of Caine as well, but Ventrue remembered Caine’s words and the duty placed upon him, to rule over his siblings and their childe in the Dark Father’s name.

FROM THE COMMENTARIES OF RODRIGO:

What a pleasant child’s tale! The noble Veddartha, chosen by Caine himself to rule over all of his progeny for all time, unswervingly loyal to his grandsire, his terrible hand among the Cainites of the First City. Naturally the Ventrue would have us believe that they are Caine’s Chosen Ones, but who of us can say what passed between Our Dark Father and his childe in those nights? Who can say for certain that Caine truly intended Ventrue (a member of the third generation, no less!) to rule in his absence? I could just as easily suppose that Caine found Ventrue ambitious and meddlesome and so *seemed* to groom him as a successor, the better to keep him close where he could be watched for signs of treachery.

Even if the Ventrue claim of rulership by right of bloodline to Veddartha is entirely true, nobility is more than a matter of blood, and lines of rulers, even of our kind, are not forever. Noble bloodlines have been displaced before, and will be again if they do not fulfill their duties. After all, are we not all of the blood of Caine, and therefore fit to rule in his name?

The First Reign

As the floodwaters receded, the surviving childer of Caine sought to rebuild all that they had lost. Ventrue knew better than to put forth his rightful claim to rule, since the Cainites of the second generation were jealous of how he had held their sire's favor. Instead, he allowed the second generation to claim leadership over their progeny, and, as he expected, the progeny quickly tired of their sires' heavy-handed rule, for the second generation did not hold the same respect or wisdom as Caine.

Ventrue's brothers and sisters of blood came to him and asked, "What can we do?" So Ventrue advised and counseled them. They met in secret and decided to rise up against their tyrannical sires and overthrow them. Ventrue plotted each step of the war that engulfed the Second City in fire, and brought down the second generation at the hands of their vengeful childer. In the end, they were victorious, and Ventrue's kin of the third generation proclaimed him the rightful ruler of the city. So it was that our line first came to rule over the night.

Ventrue brought order to the Second City and laid decrees upon his siblings, establishing the bloodlines that would become the Thirteen Clans of Caine. Like his grandsire, he carefully controlled who was Embraced, but even still, the hunting was plentiful, and the ranks of Cainites swelled. They grew restive and chafed under Ventrue's lawful rule. Petty jealousies and slights blossomed into hatred and war between the leaders of the clans. Finally, Ventrue had no choice but to impose his will upon his subjects and rein them in. Returning to his days as the dreaded Hand of Caine, he destroyed many upstarts and banished others, including Set, from his dominion. He restored order and maintained it by force of will and strength of arms.

Although peace finally reigned over the Second City, Ventrue grew weary and longed for the guidance of his grandsire, Caine. For many years, his agents searched the world for any sign of the Dark Father's whereabouts, and Veddartha heard many rumors and tales. Finally, he chose to do much as Caine had done. He entrusted his loyal childer to care for the city in his absence and set out to find Caine and bring him back.

The Blood Rebellion

It did not take long for the hatred seething beneath the surface in the Second City to come to a boil once again. Almost before Ventrue had departed through the city gates, the Shadowed One gathered the sires of the other clans and began to plot the overthrow of his rule.

FROM THE COMMENTARIES OF FIORÉ OF GENOA:

So Veddartha's rebellion against his elders in the Second City was rightfully ordained by Caine, since the Ventrue was his hand-picked successor, but the rebellion that supposedly rose up against Ventrue was base treachery perpetrated against the lawful ruler of the city. Interestingly enough, most versions of the fall of the Second City that I have heard say that it occurred when the third generation — Ventrue included — went to war with the second. Caine returned and cursed all of the third generation when he found their hands — Ventrue's included — stained with the blood of their sires. Nothing at all about Ventrue's supposed rule over the Second City.

Fires burned and blood ran in the streets. Veddartha's loyal childer and subjects fought valiantly, but they were vastly outnumbered and overwhelmed. Eventually, the survivors were forced to flee the city.

Just as the usurpers celebrated their victory, Caine himself returned. The Dark Father's anger against his wayward childer for violating his will was great, and he cursed the founders of the clans, scattering them to the winds as they had done to the Ventrue. Their victory was short-lived as the Second City fell into anarchy and ruin. Of Ventrue himself, we cannot say. Some believe that he found his grandsire and accompanied Caine on his travels for a time (or that he may still). Others say that he was betrayed and destroyed, either upon his return to the Second City or even shortly after he departed, ambushed in the desert by the treacherous Set or Brujah.

Greece and the First Brujah War

The scattered childer of Ventrue survived as best they could after the fall of the Second City. Most wandered, sometimes Embracing childer but mostly avoiding the mortals they once ruled over, who demonstrated their ability to destroy even one of Caine's chosen from time to time, if the Ventrue became careless. Many Ventrue found their way into Greece and were drawn to the hardy city-state of Sparta. The mortals of that city honored and mastered the arts of war, and the Ventrue saw great potential inherent in them. They helped guide and encourage the Spartans, who soon conquered many neighboring city-states. The Spartans established the Peloponnesian League,



Jim Di Bartolo

an empire held together by trade and force of arms, tools the Ventrue learned to use well.

In time, the Delian League arose around the city of Athens, a power to rival Sparta's Peloponnesian League. Athens was a stronghold of the Brujah, drawn to the city's love of philosophy and democracy, which they shared. The Ventrue of the Peloponnesian League watched helplessly as Delian League merchants outstripped them and stole away their profits. They whispered in the ears of Spartan generals, and Sparta came to see Athens as a great prize. So began decades of war between the two city-states under the guidance of their Cainite patrons. Eventually, Spartan military genius sank the Athenian navy and conquered the city. By the time the Ventrue arrived to inspect their new prize, the Brujah of Athens had already fled, setting in motion the undying resentment that their clan has held against the Ventrue to this very night.

Rome and the Second Brujah War

The glory of the Spartans passed, as all mortal kingdoms do, but the Ventrue moved westward along the Mediterranean Sea and there they found other mortals with as much, if not more, potential than

their former protégés. They settled among the Etruscans and were there when the city of Rome threw off the shackles of its Etruscan rulers and established the center of what would become the greatest empire the world had ever known. As Rome grew and prospered, so did the Ventrue dwelling within its borders. They did not rule openly but worked quietly behind the scenes, influencing enough mortals to ensure both the empire's growth and their own safety.

Rome's conquests of Greece infused new vitality into the somewhat staid Ventrue of Rome as they learned from their Grecian cousins. Eventually, the Ventrue came to act more openly in Rome, exercising more control over the Emperor, the Senate and the legions to suit their own designs. They still worked from the shadows, influencing key figures, whispering advice into the right ears and cultivating their influence like a farmer cultivates a garden. Their knack for subtle politics proved far more effective than the crude methods of many other Cainites and allowed both Rome and the Ventrue to prosper.

As in Greece, a power eventually arose to potentially rival that of Rome, and the Brujah stood behind it: Carthage, the capital of the Phoenicians. Conflict between the two great cities was inevitable and came when Carthage attempted to annex Sicily and Syracuse, leading to the First Punic War. Although it ended in victory for Rome, both cities were untouched. The Second Punic War involved the mortal general Hannibal and his army, pursued back to Africa by Rome. Carthage surrendered and ceded Iberia to the Romans.

Many Romans, both mortal and Cainite, were not satisfied with this victory. The Roman orator Cato the Elder ended each of his speeches with the words *Carthago delenda est*: "Carthage must be destroyed." The sentiment was echoed by many Cainites, leading to an alliance among the clans in Rome, led by the Ventrue, to destroy Carthage and the Assamite-Brujah alliance that ruled it. The Third Punic War resulted in a massive siege of Carthage and an invasion by Roman troops and Cainites. The carnage was tremendous, and, in the end, most of the Cainites of Carthage were destroyed and its people led away into slavery. The Romans razed the city to the ground and salted the earth. Carthage was no more.

The Ventrue Schism

After the Punic Wars, the Ventrue continued to solidify their hold over Rome and their own clan. The Ventrue became increasingly organized under the leadership of the Roman elders, who assumed greater power and instituted a hierarchy of vassals beneath

them to administer to the far-flung holdings of the clan throughout the empire. As the Ventrue became more powerful, they also became more set in their ways, truly believing that, with their guidance, the Roman Empire could last forever. It was not to be.

The empire did not truly fall with the invasions of barbarians that brought it low, it merely changed, transformed by later men who ruled it, and the Ventrue were forced to change with it. The humbling of the empire that had held their fortunes for so long broke the unity of the Ventrue as a clan. Some Ventrue remained in Rome (some in torpor, others where they could influence new rulers). Others fled eastward, taking their broods with them and becoming part of the sprawling Byzantine Empire that had claimed a portion of Rome's legacy. The Ventrue that remained in Rome were also witness to the rising power of the Catholic Church and were drawn to take some of that power for themselves, although they found the Church was already influenced by other Cainites, such as their rivals, the Lasombra.

So the Ventrue split into two factions, one remaining in Rome and changing as the empire changed, the other moving east and taking up the cause of Byzantium, attempting to re-establish the glory of Rome elsewhere. The two disparate branches of the clan went about their own plans, largely ignorant of each other for some time.

The Lines of Kings and the War of Princes

The Western Ventrue quickly attached themselves to the lines of kings and nobles born out of the decay of Rome and the rise of new powers and nations in Europe. They also adopted the truth of the Catholic Church, although often through various heresies, including the Cainite Heresy. While some believe the rise of feudal states in Europe to be the work of the Ventrue, it is more likely that they simply took advantage of it, as they have many political developments in the past. The ways of kings and princes suited the Ventrue well, and they kept their status as Lords of the Night. The system of oaths and loyalties instituted in Rome adapted to follow feudal ways, and the Ventrue-influenced Road of Kings did the same.

For centuries the Ventrue have established new fiefdoms, new hierarchies and new alliances to support their claim of power over the progeny of Caine, as granted to their Antediluvian ancestor. The Crusades brought the clan into conflict with itself as Western and Eastern Ventrue clashed through the proxies of the crusaders and the Saracens, but the fall of Constantinople dealt a terrible blow to the Eastern Ventrue and sealed the victory of their Western cousins.

FROM THE COMMENTARIES OF NATHANIEL OF CARLISLE:

The Ventrue tout the destruction of Carthage as one of their greatest victories, when in fact all they accomplished was to destroy the greatest hope of our kind existing in peace with mortals and each other. Rather than trying to understand Carthage and what it represented, the Roman Ventrue could see it only as a threat to themselves and their influence. Rather than being satisfied with their victory in the Second Punic War, the Ventrue had to push for the total destruction of the city and the Cainites who dared to challenge their supremacy. Let Carthage and its fate be a lesson to all: The Ventrue destroy what they cannot bother to understand if they feel that it is a threat to them.

FROM THE COMMENTARIES OF
JULIA ANTASIA:

How typical and shallow a view of our once-noble clan! The so-called “divine right” of kings is nothing of the sort, and the War of Princes nothing more than a waste of the talents and skills and our kinds. Rather than fighting among ourselves for control over a blighted plot of land or a collection of mortal hovels, we should be working together to recreate the glory that was ours once. There was a time when the Ventrue set an example for all Cainites, an example of even-handedness, fairness, justice and equality. In the Eternal Senate of Rome, all voices were heard equally. If it were not for the shortsightedness of some, that might still be so today. It could still be so, if we truly wished it.

To be Ventrue is to be heir to an ancient and most noble heritage, but the greatest lineage in the world means nothing if it is spent on grasping for power and dominion, squandered on ceaseless and senseless war with our own kind. To the Ventrue, and all others reading this, I offer a challenge. If you truly wish to test your courage and valor, consider taking the harder road to peace and understanding, rather than the glorified path to dominion and hollow power over others. Help create the future that awaits our Eternal Society.

Now the victors seek to divide the spoils as the War of Princes is fought across Europe in the dark of the night, and the struggle of the Ventrue, the struggle for power and rulership, goes on.

Points of Contention

The Ventrue are a divided clan in many ways, between different lands, traditions, bloodlines and ways of existence. Nearly the only things its various factions agree upon are their noble heritage and that they should have unity, but with which faction in charge, and toward what end? These remain the greatest points of contention among the Ventrue.

East Versus West

Although the Bitter Crusade and the fall of Constantinople largely ended the long conflict between the eastern and western branches of the Ventrue, the Eastern Warlords were by no means

HISTORY FOR VENTRUE CHARACTERS

The Ventrue place great stock in history, since it is their history, their proud lineage, which makes them what they are. A Ventrue character is almost certain to know his lineage back to Caine himself, if at all possible, and Ventrue keep careful track of their childer. Of course, the occasional “cadet bloodlines” spawned of carelessness, along with the unclaimed wretches who may or may not have ties to the ancient blood of Ventrue, spring up from time to time. Some Ventrue — like other Cainites — also Embrace without the express permission of their lieges, which can lead to the destruction of both sire and childe if they are not careful.

The history of the Ventrue is full of unsettled debts and grudges. Lords and nobles in the War of the Princes may fight over territory or dominion, but their struggle may also be fueled by ancient insults or slights between vampiric ancestors or between the nobles themselves. Ventrue memories are long, and they’ve learned that revenge is a quality that is best cultivated slowly and savored over time.

The history of a character’s bloodline may be a source for heraldic imagery for the character’s personal crest (see Heraldry, p. 79). Perhaps the neonate has inherited a particularly famous (or infamous) blazon, or one with elements that trace back to the ancient empires of Sparta or Rome (and the wars that they fought). More recent Ventrue history may involve the Crusades and the conflict between east and west, culminating in the fall of Constantinople, a potential source of “bad blood” between members of the clan.

wiped out entirely. Many still maintain strongholds, and many other former Eastern Ventrue (or their progeny) have found their ways into the domains of their Western counterparts. This has kept the conflict between the two distant branches of the Ventrue bloodline simmering slowly behind the scenes in Europe. Former Eastern Lords, or their childer, seek opportunities to avenge themselves upon the Western Ventrue, even allying with Cainites of the Low Clans in order to do so. Treasures for the east find their way into the hands of Assamites and Setites willing to do the Ventrue’s bidding.

The Patrician Gambit

The Ventrue of the Holy Roman Empire are divided between the Patriarch faction, led by Lord Hardestadt, and the Antasians, named for their leader and teacher, the Methuselah Julia Antasia.

The Patriarchs are conservative Ventrue cast in the classical mold. They consider themselves the chosen nobility of the night, favored by Caine himself and destined to rule. They adhere strongly to the tenets of the Road of Kings, for the most part, and cling to the old ways of doing things (which is to say the feudal traditions of Europe, which is what most of the Patriarchs knew from their mortal lives). They promote Ventrue power and do not trust change. Why should things change, after all, when they are as God and Caine ordained them from the beginning of time?

The Antasians are guided by the ideas of Julia Antasia, a Roman Venture who was a member of the Eternal Senate in that city before its decline. A paragon of the Road of Humanity, Antasia teaches her followers the importance of equality and mutual cooperation for the greater good of all. She holds to the true “old” ways of the Roman Cainites and the glory days of the Empire and hopes to recreate the achievements of the Eternal Senate. Needless to say, the Patriarchs consider the Antasians deluded at best, a dangerous rebellion in the making at worst. The Antasians see the Patriarch Ventrue as arrogant, selfish elitists concerned with their own power and positions and nothing more.

For the time being, neither faction has sufficient influence or cohesiveness to make their struggle anything more than a philosophical argument, but both sides are watching and waiting for an opportunity to press their goals and eliminate the opposition, what Julia Antasia calls “the Patrician Gambit.” For more on this conflict, see **Dark Ages Europe**, p. 61-62.

Traders and Merchant Princes

A rising power within the Ventrue is members of the clan who make their fortune as merchants and traders rather than seeking land and domains of their own. Most of these so-called Merchant Princes are followers of the Path of the Merchant (see **Road of Kings**, p. 69) and find their strength in wealth rather than land and vassals. Not tied to any particular locale, and profiting (for the most part) from the War of Princes, the Merchant Princes have organized into various guilds and networks of contacts across Europe.

Whereas many Ventrue disdain the Merchant Princes with their “money-grubbing” and “usury,” the merchants have slowly been gathering power and

influence over the years in addition to wealth. Like the Antasians (above), the Merchants seek to reunify the Ventrue as in the days of Rome, but under a mercantile guild rather than a senate or emperor. They have begun supporting certain Cainite lords to create the right environment in Europe where they can flourish and become the power behind the thrones.

The Daeva

Some Ventrue believe that Caine chose their progenitor Veddartha because of a prophecy. It said sinister beings known as *daeva* would bring about the ultimate destruction of civilization for their own ends, bringing all supernatural forces under their rule and leaving only scattered remnants of the Childer of Caine as survivors, hunted across the blasted wilderness. Belief in the *daeva* has spawned a few minor cults and heresies among the Ventrue over the centuries, but most of the younger generations of the clan pay the story no heed, and other Cainites consider it the wildest of fancies.

Still, some Ventrue believe the *daeva* exist and that they are twisting the world for their own mysterious ends. They believe that their clan is destined to unite all Cainites against this terrible threat and preserve order and civilization in the world.

Player's Toolbox

Players of Ventrue characters can use the following ideas as inspiration for character concepts and stories:

Respect Your Elders

- You are the child of an influential Ventrue merchant who Embraced you to become his agent across Europe, gathering information and seeing to his many business affairs in distant lands. Already you know that some Cainites consider you a money-grubber, but others understand that your way is the future of the Ventrue. Those who don't realize it are relics who will soon be swept away, or become puppets to the wealth they disdain.

- Your sire is a Norman lord, sworn to Mithras, but one who remembers the nights when the Norman Ventrue ruled England, not the Methuselah and his upstart supporters. You have been taught to remember those times well, because your lord and sire tells you that they may come again one night, if all goes as planned. Your lord has not yet taken you into his full confidence, but if you prove yourself worthy, you know that he will.

- You come from a noble bloodline. Your lineage can be traced back to the Roman Empire. But your sire

was destroyed in the fall of Constantinople and you were left with no reason to return there. Instead, you seek to make your way in another land with opportunities for an ambitious Cainite who understands the ways of both the court and the battlefield.

The Path to Glory

- You hold a position of responsibility within the domain of Mithras, the Monarch of England. Even though you are quite young, only a neonate, Lord Mithras has entrusted you with this responsibility and you have sworn your undying allegiance to him. You know full well that many Cainites in England are jealous of the favor you now hold and will move against you, if they can. You must defend your domain and show that your liege's trust in you is not misplaced.

- Domains and honors wait to be won in the War of Princes, and you intend to win them for yourself, given time. Your liege has granted you the opportunity to clear a nest of heretics out of a distant corner of his domain, promising that it will be yours if you are successful. You need to find allies willing to aid you in exchange for places in your new domain, but be careful not to place yourself into too much debt, since Cainite allies don't often come cheaply.

The Rights of Princes

- Julia Antasia has recently agreed to be your teacher and guide on the Road of Humanity. She offers a vision of what the Ventrue, and Cainites, could be that fires your imagination and gives you hope for the future. You are devoted to the Antasian cause but frustrated by the thick-headed denial of the Patriarchs, the so-called "traditionalist" Ventrue. Your teacher counsels patience, but you are eager to tear down the arrogance of the Patriarchs so that the work of creating something better can begin.

- As a younger son of a noble family, you were expected to show obedience and respect for your father and elder brothers. You were often reminded that your inheritance would be humble in comparison, if you inherited anything at all. Your father arranged for you to become a novice at a monastery, where you eventually took vows as a monk, happy to leave the world behind and find comfort in God's grace. What you did not know was the nature of the monastery's abbot. He saw great potential in you and has cultivated it since your Embrace. Your piety has begun to give way to a new ambition. Perhaps the inheritance you were denied in life may be yours in unlife.

- A marriage of your choosing was never meant to be. You have always known that, as a daughter of a

noble, you would be wed as your parents saw fit. Still the reality of wedded life with a man twice your age who cared nothing for you and everything for your dowry was more difficult than you imagined, even more so because of your husband's cruelty and lechery. You found solace in your dreams of a dark stranger who visited you in the night. Then you learned they were not dreams, and your handsome paramour offered you an escape from your miserable existence. Now your brute of a husband and his domain are yours to command, until you choose finally to dispose of him.

High Clan Tactics

Some believe that Cainites were involved in the introduction of chess to Europe, since the game is such an embodiment of their way of existence: move and countermove, strategy and gambits, all with the goal of capturing the opposing king (or prince, as the case may be). Certainly the existence of the Cainite nobility during the War of Princes is like a vast game of chess, played on a scale that most mortals can scarcely imagine. If a member of the High Clans wishes to survive as anything more than a mere pawn, to be used and discarded as a part of some stratagem, then he had best learn how to play the game — and play to win.

Courtly Tactics

The most important battlefield for High Clan Cainites is not an empty field stained with the blood of the fallen, but the courts of the princes of the night, where they scheme and plan and play at the games of power and politics as only the undying can.

Vampires learn the essentials of courtly behavior from their sires, and High Clan Cainites in particular learn to navigate the dangerous waters of the court. Those who do not understand how to succeed in courtly matters are not likely to go far, assuming they survive their first nights at all. Just as in the mortal world, some Cainites have the advantage of famous, influential or generous sires, while others are saddled with sires who are cruel, stingy or infamous. Still, ambitious vampires have been known to rise above such challenges, and even the most privileged can fall victim to a more cunning adversary if they are not careful.

The very structures of the Cainite courts are intended to maintain the High Clans' prestige and position. Fledgling vampires have a great deal of courtly etiquette to learn, and they are only likely to learn it from another Cainite well acquainted with the ins and outs of the court. So High Clan Cainites learn early how to survive at court as well as how to spot

those who don't belong there by their social gaffes and *faux pas*... A Cainite of the Low Clans must work hard to be taken seriously as anything other than a member of a High Clan vampire's retinue.

The Cainite court is an ongoing game of power and influence, both over the mortal world and over the court itself. In order to play the game Cainites need pieces to maneuver on the board, strategies for moving them, insight into their moves of their opponents and, most of all, ambition, which is found in abundance among the High Clans.

Mortal Vassals and Allies

Although the Cainite courts are carefully hidden from mortal eyes, they also rely heavily on the support of mortal vassals, retainers and allies for their continued existence. Cainites are helpless during the sunlit hours and so must have mortal eyes, ears and hands to do their bidding and ensure their safety. Therefore, mortal retainers are vital to a Cainite intending to find a place of importance at court.

The lowest ranks of mortal retainers and servants can be obtained with little more than wealth and a deft knack for dealing with human greed, which most High Clan vampires possess in abundance. The primary concern is ensuring that the lowliest retainers are either loyal or (preferably) kept ignorant of their master's true nature. More than one careless vampire-lord has been trapped in a burning manor house or dragged into the daylight by treacherous servants. The wise courtier does not underestimate the danger the mortal rabble poses, if it feels threatened.

The best intermediary between the lowliest of mortal servants and their Cainite master is a trusted mortal vassal or ally, particularly a ghoul bound by the blood oath. In fact, members of the mortal gentry or nobility make ideal vassals in this respect because they already have servants and vassals of their own, which the vampire can co-opt with none of them realizing that their master serves another master in the dark hours of the night.

Of course, the number of would-be masters outweighs the number of potential noble thralls. Many are firmly in the grasp of the most influential Cainites at court already, leaving few options for neonates in search of mortal toys of their own. This makes gaining a powerful mortal vassal a social coup of great importance, which can elevate a Cainite's status at court and inform others that she is a force to be reckoned with.

Some rare mortals are fully aware of just how valuable they can be to the Cainites of the court. They hold sufficient wealth or power to make them desir-

able and have managed to avoid the ensnaring wiles of the vampires whom they deal with. These worthies manage to deal with vampires as allies, if not equals in Cainite eyes. They are morally bankrupt, since they are willing to endanger their immortal souls by dealing with the Damned, but also wily enough to arrange the most beneficial deals that they can. Courtly viziers and counselors, sheriffs, ambitious courtiers and the like have all been known to deal with the nobility of the night.

Cainite Vassals and Allies

While mortal vassals form an important part of a Cainite courtier's power base, any High Clan vampire intending to survive and prosper at court also needs allies among his fellow Cainites, and those who intend to achieve greater power must cultivate vassals from among their number.

A Cainite's first ally may be her sire, although not all sires are interested in the welfare of their childer. Most High Clan neonates are vassals of their sires, owing them their very existence as Cainites. They remain so for as long as their sire sees fit or until the fledgling spreads her own wings, or catches the eye of a higher-ranking vampire (such as the prince) and earns a commission of some sort. A wise sire usually grants his childer a measure of freedom to feed their own ambitions and opportunities to further them. Oppressive and tyrannical sires, like liege lords, may be overthrown.

Thus the ability to Embrace is a vital one in literally creating new vampire vassals. Little wonder that this right has been in the hands of the ruling prince since time immemorial and that the prince who fails to enforce the Right of Progeny often finds himself deposed by its violators once they have created their own brood of loyal childer.

Princes often use the Third Tradition as a means of maintaining their power at court, including some creative interpretations of it. For example, those petitioning the prince to Embrace a particular mortal may find that the prince has chosen to Embrace that mortal himself, in hopes of depriving a rival of a potential ally. (Naturally this leads to double- and triple-blinds as ambitious courtiers try to trick their prince into Embracing an unwise or potentially rebellious new childe, and so forth.) A prince may favor Embraces by her own clan while declining those of others. A change in prince often results in a change in the fortunes of the court's clans as well.

Cainites often find allies among their peers at court, vampires of similar age and background, possi-

bly belonging to the same road or clan. With the practice of fostering fledglings to other courts, neonates may even acquire allies from distant places useful to them years later. (See **Road of Kings** for more on the Cainite practice of fosterage.)

Like many things, Cainite allies can be two-edged swords. Vampires dance a delicate waltz of waiting and watching for opportunities to betray their allies, and their allies do much the same, each wanting to make sure that they are not themselves betrayed before they have the opportunity to do so. Although some vampires have true friendships and senses of honor, ultimately the Beast taints all that they do, and any Cainite who trusts anyone too much is likely to pay for it in the end.

Playing the Game

The goal of Cainite politics is to rise in power in the court while making as few enemies as possible. This is easier said than done, and vampires spend many mortal lifetimes mastering the art of courtly intrigue.

The two basic means of advancement within the Court are promotion granted by a superior or achieve-

ment of a superior position through the accumulation of power. Both are entirely viable approaches used by Cainites, although the first tends to be more common among neonates and the latter becomes all but required of elders, who have few, if any, superiors.

At first, a vampire courtier seeks the favor of a more powerful patron at court. This may be the prince, the Cainite's sire, another more influential courtier or all of the above. Generally the more popular and influential the Cainite, the more sycophants and would-be protégés are drawn to support her. "Devoted allies" are often quick to abandon courtiers who fall out of favor, rushing to attach themselves to a new rising star in the court.

Younger Cainites therefore compete for patronage and recognition, sometimes even from their own sires, who might have several childer competing for their attention. Their elders use them as agents and cat's-paws in their own games. If the neonates acquit themselves well, then they advance in the esteem of their elders, being granted greater responsibility and influence. They might even begin to attract followers of their own, and be given authority over them in their liege's name.

Vying for political favor is not always easy, since patrons often have a tendency to claim the lion's share of any successes on the part of their underlings while laying blame for any mistakes or failures squarely at their feet. Good and loyal service is not always enough; sometimes Cainites must take steps to ensure that the right parties at court are aware of their achievements to gain the credit they are due. If not handled carefully, this runs the risk of arousing the ire or jealousy of the patron, who may find the vassal too ambitious for his tastes and seek to do something to remedy the situation.

Affairs of Honor and Dishonor

"Honor" among Cainites is far more often a measure of "face" or social standing than any devotion to a personal code. Although honorable Cainites, or those who believe themselves so, do exist, honor is far more often a tool of ambition and simply a way of keeping score in the great game of politics. A vampire with many accolades is in an enviable position of strength, but honor can also become a subtle trap as the need to defend and maintain it grows.

As with mortals in the Dark Medieval world, most Cainites — especially those of the High Clans — take matters of honor quite seriously. An accusation of dishonorable behavior must be met and answered or else the vampire risks losing status in the eyes of the court.

KNOWING THE PLAYERS

Storytellers intending to run courtly affairs in a **Dark Ages** chronicle should take extra care in detailing the various important figures within the court and their relations to each other. By creating several major characters, giving them different goals, personalities and agendas, and setting the troupe's characters loose in their midst, stories begin to write themselves. Consider how the goals of the characters intersect with those of the supporting characters at court and how they oppose each other. Consider what the agendas of the various characters are and how they may entangle or draw in the coterie.

Events in court are often fluid, since the characters are free to interact in different ways. They may advance the plot of a particular court character while interfering with another and being totally unaware of a third. Their actions will also cause changes as the characters adapt their plans accordingly. Take careful notes on how these things affect the different hidden agendas of the court. Done properly, this can create a rich, engrossing story for the players and their characters.

Likewise, accusations are not offered unless the accuser is willing to prove them, with blood, if necessary.

High Clan Cainites have long maintained the tradition of trial by combat, which has become increasingly more common in the War of Princes as accusations of treachery and betrayal fly back and forth. The accuser and the accused (or their champions) meet on the field of honor, and the victory decides the truth of the matter. The more cynical Cainites know that trial by combat has little to do with the truth, but many firmly believe (or at least assert) that a true cause lends strength to the sword-arm and to the heart.

Honor is also an important quality to followers of the Road of Kings, including many of the nobility of the night, so at least the *appearance* of honor must be maintained. This allows Cainites who ferret out secrets about their rivals (or even their allies) to use them to their advantage by threatening the rival's honor and reputation. Such coercion is often more effective than revealing the truth outright and risking a confrontation.

Another aspect of honor in Cainite society is the ability to control the Beast, which equates to advancement along a road. Evidence of advanced understanding of a particular road can gather a Cainite accolades and followers, eager to learn his insights. Of course, roads such as the Road of the Beast are not always suited to the ways of court, but their most advanced followers are still respected. On the other hand, a clear lack of control over the Beast shows a Cainite who is potentially unstable and therefore dangerous no matter what his intentions.

The Proper Time for Betrayal

It is a truth of Cainite existence that sooner or later vampire vassals must betray their sworn liege lords if they are to be anything other than mere vassals. Occasionally, a Cainite is elevated when the destruction of a prince or lord leaves a vacancy in the upper ranks of the nobility of the night, but these are rare exceptions. Vampire lords can and do rule for centuries. So an ambitious Cainite must eventually create opportunities for advancement rather than waiting for them to come along.

Elders know this. After all, most of them came into their current positions by eliminating *their* elders and others who stood in their way. The younger generations chafe under the rule of the older, as it has always been since the nights of the Second City. One of the reasons the tenets of the Road of Kings so strongly support loyalty and a reluctance to break a

sworn oath is to help keep this part of Cainite nature at least somewhat in check. Ambitious vampires still find means of disposing of their rivals and their enemies, but they are forced to be more circumspect about it, and the ranks of vampire society remain at least somewhat stable.

With all this in mind, it's not so much a matter of *if* a vampire will betray his liege for the sake of his own advancement and more a matter of *when* it will happen. It's often a long time in coming. Cainites are ageless beings; they can wait mortal lifetimes for things to change and conditions to favor them. They plot intrigues that unfold over the course of generations rather than mere months or years. It may be quite some time before a loyal vassal grows restive in the service of an elder lord and begins to seek new opportunities and challenges, and elders are expert at finding things for troublesome youngsters to do to keep their minds off rebellion and usurpation.

The War of Princes has upset that balance somewhat. As the great vampire lords of Europe struggle against each other, their vassals and protégés have followed their example, and many are not content to wait patiently until the time is right. Some are satisfied with opportunities to win glory for themselves and their masters on the battlefield or in court. Lords promise their vassals rich rewards for claiming the domains of rivals, and many seize the opportunity (with just as many meeting Final Death for their efforts).

Others see the War of Princes as their chance to work within the court to achieve their own ends. A prince, lord or even monarch occupied with the affairs of war may not always pay close attention to matters at home, and so might be caught unaware when formerly loyal vassals, waiting for the right moment, seize upon a weakness and exploit it. Of course, the possibility always exists that a prince or liege lord might feign such weakness in order to lure potential traitors out of the shadows and into the open where they can be dealt with once and for all. A few such examples in the vampire courts of Europe have only made other plotters more cautious, and so the game of move and countermove goes on, with courtly power as the prize.

The Art of Warfare

Not all battles are fought and won at court, with words and speeches. The War of Princes, like all wars, requires bloodshed and soldiers to fight. The princes of the night have both in plenty, although they choose their pawns, and their battlefields, carefully.

Mortal Soldiers

To wage their wars, the Childer of Caine require soldiers, and most of them must by necessity be mortal. How do vampires induce mortal soldiers to give up their lives willingly for the very creatures who prey upon them? A number of ways exist, each used with varying success by the nobility of the night.

The simplest and most effective means of acquiring a mortal army is through influence over the mortal nobility, who have armies of their own. Many Cainite nobles have mortal vassals who owe them allegiance (whether or not they know it), and these mortals in turn have vassals of their own, allowing their Cainite lieges to command their loyalty. By issuing commands to their mortal agents, vampires can move armies about like pieces on a game board.

Of course, it is not quite so simple. Few Cainites thoroughly dominate their mortal vassals, and, even when they do, they cannot simply send armies off hither and yon with no explanation. Thus they must often concoct worldly conflicts to cover their true actions and intentions. A manufactured slight from the agent of a rival Cainite, for example, allows their forces to move openly against him. Evidence of treason on the part of an otherwise loyal vassal might encourage his liege lord to sanction war against him, and so forth.

Cainites use cults and secret orders as a means of gathering and influencing the human herd. In addition to slaking their endless thirst, such groups can also supply a vampire with loyal and eager soldiers, ready to die in the name of their master. Cultists are often fanatically loyal, particularly if they believe their master is a divine power. While cults may attract the attention of the Inquisition, they are also powerful weapons in the hands of the lords of the night.

Finally, mortal mercenaries and soldiers work for anyone willing to pay them, without asking too many questions as to the whys and wherefores of their work. As long as a Cainite's coin is real, these men will go where they're told to go and fight whomever they're told to fight. Some mercenaries and free-lances are aware of the true nature of their patrons (and don't much care), but most are not. They know only about battles to be fought and riches to be won, which is all that they need to know.

Ghoul Soldiers

The next ranking of Cainite soldiers is made up of ghouls, mortals given enough vitae to grant them strength and power beyond that of ordinary men while

keeping them both loyal to and dependent upon their vampire masters... Ghouls are extremely useful soldiers, able to fight with great ferocity and defeat ordinary mortals, but they are a costly army to raise.

The difficulty lies in the amount of vitae needed to create and sustain a ghoulish army. It requires only a fairly small amount of blood to create ghouls. The sacrifice of two human victims is enough to create as many as ten ghouls while also slaking the Cainite's hunger for a time. Those ghouls, however, require blood to sustain them and particularly to fuel their own Disciplines. Without regular amounts of vitae from their masters, ghouls are limited, although they still have greater strength and durability than mortals, and Cainites cannot spend the blood required to empower a vast legion of ghouls without a commensurate sacrifice of many mortal vessels.

Therefore, Cainites tend to limit the number of ghouls in their service. They extend the number by including ghouls bound to their own vassals (see below), but even then the numbers are small compared to the ranks of mortal soldiers. Ghouls are most often placed in positions of authority or used as elite shock troops by their Cainite masters. The promise of ghoulishness is often held out to mortal soldiers, particularly commanders and mercenaries who seek the power of vampiric vitae.

Hell-beasts

Men are not the only mortal creatures that Cainites see fit to make into ghouls for their armies. Oftentimes, they will also feed vitae to various animals, making them into "hell-beasts" that can serve them, and their soldiers, either as spies or on the battlefield.

Cainite knights often bind their horses to them with vitae, overcoming the steeds' normal aversion of undead riders and infusing them with supernatural strength, speed, stamina and loyalty to their masters. Such "blood-steeds" often undergo a darkening of their coat, turning either coal black or developing red spots or dappling. Some already dark-haired horses develop a reddish sheen to their coat after becoming ghouls.

Hell-hounds are another common type of ghoulish beast. War-dogs with a taste for Cainite blood make fierce fighters on the field of battle, loosed to savage and soften up the enemy before the mortal and ghoulish troops charge in. They're also more easily made and then put down if they become troublesome to their master.

The Tzimisce are known to use birds, feral cats and rats as spies and messengers, since even the most basic knowledge of Animalism is sufficient to speak



with and command them. More advanced practitioners of the Discipline can even see with the eyes of their bestial servants. Most other High Clan Cainites disdain this tactic as a trick associated with the Low Clans, although few can deny that the Fiends seem to have eyes and ears everywhere throughout their domains, which has proven a considerable advantage in the past.


Cainite Soldiers and Vassals

Finally, the most valuable soldiers in a Cainite lord's army are those vampires who have sworn allegiance to him as vassals, often his own childer (and perhaps their childer and vassals, for the most powerful of lords)... The highest-ranking officers of an army belonging to a Cainite lord are most often Cainites as well, although some are known to rely on ghoul or even mortal generals and captains.

Cainite soldiers have many advantages, not the least of which are the supernatural powers that allow them to shrug off injury and cut down mortal foes like a scythe through wheat. They do have limitations, however, including their tendency to fly into frenzy on the battlefield and their predisposition for treachery against their sworn liege. The Road of Kings helps ameliorate these concerns somewhat, since it emphasizes self-control and loyalty, another reason it is most favored among the nobility and their vassals.

As ghouls are rare compared to mortal soldiers, so are Cainite soldiers rare compared to ghouls. A company of a hundred men may have a ghoul commander with a few ghoul lieutenants. An army of a thousand may have a Cainite commander and a few vampire lieutenants (each with ghoul underlings of his own). Common soldiers rarely undergo the Embrace. The Cainites in an army's ranks are most often knights or officers in command. They are elite troops and leaders, sometimes used as shock troops, depending on the strategies of their liege lord.

One disturbing practice among Cainites is to grant the Embrace to as many soldiers as possible before a battle to raise an army of vampires, believing that such a superior force can overwhelm any opposition. While it has been done from time to time, even with great success, the mass-Embrace tactic has a number of drawbacks. The first and foremost, of course, is that most battles take place during the daytime, and vampiric soldiers are limited to fighting only at night. It also requires at least a small amount of time for the newly Embraced to acclimate to their new state of being, so it is not a tactic suitable for mere hours before a battle. Worse still, even if many of the newly made Cainites meet Final Death on the battlefield, the number of undead in the region increases considerably. This can lead to a plague of vampires that must be put down by the local prince before it grows out of



control and endangers the hunting grounds of all. Such tactics are seen as a flagrant disregard for the Third Tradition, even when done by a lord or prince who holds the right, and likely to unite that noble's enemies against him. Thus it is a rare tactic even in the War of Princes.

Mobility

An important quality of an army is its ability to cover great distances quickly, to move into position at the command of its liege. A great deal of warfare consists of armies moving to the right places at the right time to secure a strategic advantage over their enemies.

The mobility of a Cainite army is limited by the inability of its vampire officers to move about during the day. Armies almost never move at night in a world where illumination comes solely from torches and lanterns. Ghouls are capable of overseeing the movement of troops during the day, while their masters rest, but must also see that the Cainites are not left behind. This usually requires wagons to move boxes or coffins where the vampires rest, slowing progress and making it nearly impossible to cross rough terrain.

Thus Cainite armies sometimes do travel at night, albeit slowly, given the hazards that abound in the dark. While vampires with *Auspex* or *Protean* are at home in the darkness, others still require some light, and their mortal and ghoulish soldiers certainly do. Clear nights with a full or nearly full moon are the most common times for the armies of the night to be on the move, and wise Cainite tacticians are aware of this.

Intelligence

Although strength of numbers and arms are vital, just as important — if not more so — are information and insight into the enemy's strengths and weaknesses. Cainites have means beyond those of ordinary mortals for scouting out their opponents in warfare and learning all that they need to know before their forces strike.

A vampire or ghoulish spy can make effective use of *Auspex* and *Obfuscate* to slip past enemy lines and learn more about the opposing force's composition and strength. Of course, Cainites on the opposing side may be able to spot a careless spy and are likely to deploy spies of their own. Users of *Animalism* have birds and beasts as their eyes and ears, watching for the approach of enemy troops and picking out the locations of their main force even from a great distance away.

Auspex allows a Cainite scout to notice things no mortal could, but true masters of the Discipline can also snatch important tactical information from the

minds of prisoners (or even those who come to parley). They can also scry the enemy camp or even the strongholds of their enemies from a great distance, spying and learning much about their plans.

Battlefield Tactics

All the strategy and tactics practiced by the greatest generals find their uses in the War of Princes, particularly since many Cainite lords and monarchs witnessed these strategies being used for the first time in battles fought centuries ago. The greatest Cainite tacticians have lifetimes of experience behind them.

Certain conditions tend to prevail in a clash of Cainite armies, and wise leaders use them to their advantage. First is the fact that a battle involving Cainites must take place between sunset and dawn. This makes darkness both an ally and a hindrance, since it hampers mortal and ghoulish soldiers. Bonfires and torches can help somewhat, but they may invoke *Rötschreck* among the Cainites in the force. The need for the cover of darkness tends to limit the size of battles between Cainite forces and encourages skirmishing and hit-and-run tactics.

Some commanders prefer to send their mortal soldiers in first, keeping ghoulish and Cainite shock troops in reserve for a cavalry charge to break the enemy's lines once they are weakened. Others take the opposite view, sending their elite troops out in a lightning strike to weaken and demoralize the enemy before having the bulk of their force follow through the gap in the enemy's lines.

Battles are usually fought in open terrain, but archers are only rarely employed, since darkness hampers their abilities considerably, and it is possible (although unlikely) for a misfired arrow or crossbow bolt to pierce the heart of a Cainite warrior, leaving him helpless on the battlefield. Such weapons are almost as great a threat to the attackers as they are to their opponents. A sharp-eyed mortal or Cainite archer with a bow of exceptional quality might find use in the battle as a sniper, but ranks of yeomen are all but unknown in the armies of the night.

Battles between Cainite forces are also necessarily short, compared to some mortal campaigns. This is because of both the inevitable rising of the sun and the danger of outsiders involving themselves in the conflict. Therefore, sieges are rare in Cainite warfare unless a mortal-led army can be guided into laying siege or burning out an enemy. Battles tend to be fought away from mortal holdings and domains, to avoid both notice and intervention. Tactics are aimed at a swift and decisive victory, whereas defenders

often try delaying tactics to prolong the battle, hoping that the dawn will grant them respite.

Note that these tactics apply to battles where Cainites are present and expected to participate in some way. In cases of mortal armies maneuvered against each other (with or without ghoul vassals present), the rules and strategies of mortal warfare hold sway. Battles may be long and bloody, armies are often much larger, and sieges are common. The nobility of the night influence these battles indirectly at best, relying on their vassals and focusing their attentions on their nighttime activities.

Disciplines on the Battlefield

Little doubt exists that a Cainite's gifts of blood are of great use in battle. Disciplines such as Celerity, Fortitude and Potence have obvious applications in warfare, making their wielder into a virtual engine of destruction, but it is often the more subtle and wide-reaching powers available to Cainites that can turn the tide of battle in their favor.

THE BEAST IN BATTLE

Cainites in battle must often wrestle to control the Beast, which exults in violence and bloodshed. The chaos of war is meat and drink to it, and many vampires lose control of themselves in the heat of battle. A check to avoid frenzy is appropriate during a battle, with a difficulty ranging from 4 (for an ordinary battle) to 7 or 8 if the character is hungry or if the battle involves something particularly dear to him (from an ideal to a loved one). Note that this is for Cainites directly participating in battle. A leader behind the lines needn't worry about frenzy unless hungry (less than a quarter of her usual blood pool).

Some Cainites choose to "Ride the Beast" in battle (**Dark Ages: Vampire**, p. 265), giving in to their frenzy and drawing strength from it, becoming almost unstoppable killing machines. This can make the Cainite unable to tell friend from foe, however. Since it is also possible only for Cainites who favor Instinct over Self-Control, it is not a common ability among the nobility of the night (most of whom follow roads that favor Self-Control, such as the Road of Kings or the Road of Humanity). Riding the Beast in battle is most associated with Low Clan barbarians and savages of the Road of the Beast rather than the noble rulers of Cainite domains.

Presence in particular is a useful tool for a Cainite captain on the battlefield. Wreathed in glory, the vampire can rally soldiers and inspire them to fight fiercely and well in his name. Such powerful presence ensures that his soldiers will follow him into the fires of Hell, if necessary (and, in fighting a Cainite's wars, it may be). Some masters of Presence can even use it to inspire supernatural strength or determination in their troops (see **Road of Kings**, p. 72, for an example).

Other Cainite powers can influence the outcome of a battle. Certainly Obfuscate is useful for surprise attacks and slipping past enemy sentries. Both Obtenebration and Protean provide means of both attack and escape, if faced with possible defeat. The arts of Mortis can raise unliving soldiers, while the secrets of Vicissitude can craft living monsters and war-beasts.

For a detailed look at medieval warfare as it relates to the Cainites, see **Spoils of War**.


Domains of the High Clans

It would be easy to answer the query "What sort of territories attract the High Clans?" with the answer "all of them." To a large extent, this response is entirely accurate.

As is always the case with Cainites, however, the situation is substantially more complex than it appears on the surface. At a cursory glance, the first cursed do indeed seem to be everywhere, involved in every aspect of mortal and undead existence, lords of the vast majority of Cainite domains.

Closer inspection, however, reveals that the High Clans only *appear* to have it all, because they make such a point of acting as though they do. Substantial territories remain outside their grasp, and as the Low Clans begin to realize that they need not remain the bottom rung on society's ladder, additional regions and arenas of influence slip away from the first cursed, who have dominated them since time immemorial. Additionally, the constant conflict among and within the High Clans renders their power in many regions less than it might otherwise be, allowing other clans — including Low Clans — to step in and steal power from those who once held it.

The High Clans' situation has grown even more tenuous now that the War of Princes has fully erupted. Ventrue battle with Tzimisce, Toreador with Lasombra, Ventrue with Ventrue. On the fringes, the Low Clans are not only repulsing the first cursed's attempts at ousting them but are making unprec-



edented territorial gains, such as the constant conflict between the Assamites and several High Clans in Outremer, or the recent Tremere gains in Hungary. Conflict between the High Clans weakens their hold on power and offers far too many opportunities for the fallen to advance beyond their “rightful station.” By definition, because the High Clans already hold most of the power, they benefit only by maintaining order and the status quo. Chaos favors those who do not yet hold power, those who have nothing to lose and everything to gain from social upheaval, and the War of Princes is nothing if not chaotic. For the first time that even the deathless Cainites can remember, the High Clans must focus as much on retaining the power they have as on gaining more.

So, while any and every area attracts the High Clans to some extent, the reality of the world is that their influence is limited to specific (albeit numerous) regions and requires that they focus their efforts on specific objectives.

First and foremost, the High Clans are most powerful in regions where the High Clans have always been powerful. That may sound blatantly obvious and not even worth stating, but it’s worth considering for a moment. Far more than the kine, Cainites are creatures of habit, inertia and tradition. Most elders dislike change, and the inevitability of death, which *forces* change on mortal leaders and governments, is far less of a factor. In many parts of the world, in many institutions of mortal life, the first cursed maintain power not because they are necessarily better suited to it, or even because they are particularly active in defending it, but simply because everyone — High and Low Clan alike — is so accustomed to thinking of that domain as theirs that it would never occur to them to challenge that claim. The High Clans may struggle among themselves for dominance, such as the Ventrue-Tzimisce conflicts in the Slavic East or the constant struggle for dominance of the Church, but for the most part, the Low Clans have little chance of acquiring their own share of that power.

It’s also worth noting that the High Clans frequently take advantage of numbers. The first cursed do not by any means outnumber the fallen; in fact, if one considers the entirety of the known world, the Low Clans are significantly more numerous, partially because many of the Low Clans are less selective in choosing their childer, and also due to the simple fact that more of the clans are Low than High. The advantage the High Clans have, however, is that they tend to be more *concentrated* than the fallen, and they tend, on the average, to congregate within the most

politically powerful and culturally central communities. London, Paris, Rome, Buda-Pest and many other large and important cities account for an enormous portion of the High Clan population, granting them an influence far out of proportion to their overall numbers. The Low Clans — many of whom are nomadic and therefore rarely found in great numbers, others of whom hold power in lands considered uncivilized by most of Christendom — simply lack the resources or the strength to compete. This is not, by any means, coincidental. Because many of the High Clans seek power, they flock to where that power is centered; because they have been doing so for years, they now outnumber any newcomers who might seek to take that power from them.

Just as the first cursed tend to prefer communities and geographic regions that offer a degree of political power, they prefer organizations and institutions that claim either cultural authority or economic influence. Government and royalty, merchants’ and craftsmen’s guilds, and of course all levels of the Church present tempting targets for any Cainite with even the slightest interest in manipulating the mortal world around her. These have long since been claimed by the High Clans. Let the fallen pull the strings of tiny provincial mayors, lone traders and merchants, and even the kings, sultans and governors of lands not yet civilized and brought under the yoke of the Church. Let them enjoy their tiny portions of power while they have them, for they will be forced to surrender them to their “betters” soon enough.

In fact, such territories account for an enormous amount of High Clan efforts and activities. The first cursed are inexorably drawn to those regions where they hold little or no power — in Assamite-dominated Outremer, Setite Egypt or the Scandinavian wilds where the Gangrel hold domain, for instance. Their efforts here may be less intensive, either because the territory has little of value to offer or because they know they have little real hope of dislodging the current fallen lords, but they make those efforts nonetheless. It is a matter of principle, insofar as vampires *en masse* can be said to have principles. The High Clans cannot permit the Low Clans to maintain control of *any* region, for such a state of affairs calls into question the basic societal norms on which all Cainite interaction is based. If the Low Clans rule anywhere, successfully and effectively, might they not cease to acknowledge the superiority of the High Clans elsewhere?

It would be impossible in a work this size — or even far larger size, for that matter — to address even

a substantial portion of the cities, communities and regions in which the High Clans dominate. For all their recent troubles, they still hold the vast majority of power and influence throughout Europe. What follows, then, is an examination only of those areas that are of particular significance to the High Clans, either due to the importance of a particular individual (such as Prince Mithras of London) or a city (such as the Court of Paris), or due to their intensive efforts in that region (such as their participation in the *Reconquista* against the Assamites). These entries are, of necessity, somewhat brief. Players who seek more information are directed toward **Dark Ages Europe** and **Iberia by Night**.

The British Isles

Few cities are as tightly clenched in the grip of the High Clans as London. Mithras is not only Ventrue to the core, determined to maintain the domination of the first cursed in general and the Warlords (and himself) in particular, but is also one of the oldest and most individually powerful princes currently operating in Western Europe. Mithras himself wields most of his political power in the Court of Avalon due to his extensive network of contacts and allies across the island, and in cooperation with Britain's Cainite barons and lords. Two entire councils of advisors support Mithras' rule. The Privy Council, consisting of the Barons of Lincoln, York, Carlisle and Canterbury and representatives of Bordeaux, is the land's highest authority and can even overrule Mithras himself with a unanimous vote. The Grand Council consists of all the Cainite barons of England, as well as representatives of the Welsh, Scottish and Irish fiefdoms. The membership of both these councils is almost entirely High Clan, with the vast majority hailing from the ranks of the Ventrue.

None of the barons is strong enough individually to wrest Mithras' power from him, and they have sufficient rivalries between them that any alliance against their Prince is unlikely at best. Where Mithras' power wanes, such as in the ranks of the Church, the Toreador — many of whom have connections to Prince Geoffrey of Paris — hold sway. For all their constant political battling (the Toreador Walter de Vézelay is a particular rival of the prince, and Melusine d'Anjou, Baroness of Winchester, is easily the most powerful lord on the isles besides Mithras himself), the rivalries rarely devolve into open conflict. Some few young Cainites of both High and Low Clans make occasional attempts to carve their own territories out of the English countryside, or throughout Scotland and Wales, but so far the distraction provided by the Toreador hasn't been sufficient to


prevent Mithras or his subordinates from reacting swiftly and decisively to any encroachment on their domain.

Even those fallen Cainites who hold positions of power within Mithras' domain do not truly represent a challenge to the domination of the first cursed. Baroness Seren of Gloucester is a Malkavian, but her oaths — both blood and otherwise — to Mithras make her a Ventrue for all practical political purposes. Richard de Worde, Mithras' Nosferatu spymaster, is absolutely loyal to his prince and enjoys the status bestowed upon him by his position. And should the prince's warlord, the Gangrel Aethelwulf, ever turn on his lord — an almost inconceivable notion for a devout member of Mithras' cult — the Ventrue Valerius waits eagerly for any excuse to usurp his position.

For all his power, Mithras' rule has not gone unchallenged in these nights of upheaval. The disenchanting coterie of young Cainites discussed above have yet to cause the prince any *serious* difficulties, but they continue to crop up. The machinations of the Toreador do not threaten his rule, but they do constantly chip away at the outer edges of his influence. Setites based in Cardiganshire have infiltrated several of his more distant fiefdoms and seem to be pulling the strings of the Ventrue Lord Edwyll, Mithras' envoy to Seren's court. Furthermore, the prince's own hatred of the Tremere may eventually inspire him to move against Meerlinda and the Lion's Gate chantry in Durham. A war between the Ventrue and the Tremere in Britain would not only provide unprecedented opportunity for the Low Clans to wrest some measure of control away from the first cursed, it might also jeopardize Warlord-Usurper alliances elsewhere in Europe. Both the Cardiganshire Setites and a band of Prometheans led by the Benedictine Toreador Brother John are engaged in various schemes to widen this schism, spreading false rumors about the Tremere where Mithras' agents are likely to hear them and vice-versa, and even going so far as to sabotage Tremere activities in the guise of the prince's minions. Mithras' seneschal, the Cappadocian Roger de Camden, and Spymaster de Worde are currently engaged in covert investigations into the Tremere's activities. They are becoming suspicious that someone is indeed attempting to stir the Usurpers up against the Prince, but so far Mithras, in his hatred of that clan, refuses to acknowledge any possibility that does not bear out his suspicions of Meerlinda and her chantry.

France

As France, and Paris in particular, are so central to the culture of Europe, it is no surprise that the High Clans have long maintained an unbreakable claim on



the region... France is, in many ways, the heart of European culture; it is not only a rich and militarily powerful nation, it is the home of no fewer than three major cloistered orders, the mother-house of the Knights Templar and one of the earliest chapterhouses of the Knights Hospitaler. Culturally and artistically, Paris has already begun to attain the position at the forefront of fashion that it will retain, to a greater or lesser extent, throughout the coming centuries. Young King Louis IX — supported by his mother, the regent Blanche of Castile — is not only growing into one of Europe's most powerful monarchs, he is also a devout Catholic; this makes him an extreme threat to any Cainite who wishes to move against or influence him directly, but it also means that he remains sufficiently distracted for enterprising Cainites to manipulate his court at lower levels without much fear of discovery. Despite numerous conflicts and even open warfare between France's barons and other nobles, few are willing to risk royal ire by ignoring or working against the king himself — although some of the barons follow royal proclamations only reluctantly, such as those who sent only a token force when Louis demanded knights for use in his campaign against Brittany.

At the present time, most of the High Clans in France are too busy squabbling and politically fencing with one another to take full advantage of the wealth of opportunities the nation provides. The Grand Court, a Ventrue-Toreador alliance currently ruled by the Ventrue Prince Geoffrey of Paris, is swiftly losing the power it has held almost since the fall of Rome. The young prince enjoys support from a number of powerful Cainites — including the Toreador Salianna, Matriarch of the Parisian Courts of Love and an ally of both Prince Mithras of London and Hardestadt of the Court of the Black Cross — but his relative inexperience at matters of leadership and the many bargains he made during his efforts to overthrow his predecessor now conspire to limit his effectiveness. The individual Courts of Love across France, most of which are heavily dominated by the Toreador, are gaining power, and some have come to rule their local provinces or cities with almost complete autonomy. Geoffrey is currently making efforts to regain his authority, and several of those to whom he owed substantial debts have vanished in recent nights; for the first time, Geoffrey's name is spoken in some quarters with a hint of fear, rather than the tinge of condescension which had become commonplace.

Despite their constant internecine strife, however, the High Clans are in no danger of losing their grip on the region. From the Brujah Véronique

d'Orléans, a staunch supporter of the Grand Court despite her opposition to the Ventrue, to the rebellious Toreador Esclarmonde the Black, Queen of the Court of Love in Toulouse and treasonous ally of the Lasombra Lucita of Aragon, all of the most powerful factions of France are firmly controlled by the first cursed. Not even the chaos and bloodshed of the Albigensian Crusade have provided sufficient societal upheaval for the Low Clans to claim much of France.

Rather, none of the Low Clans has any *official* power in France. The High Clans are so wrapped up in their own struggles, however, that they have, to date, failed to notice the activities of those beneath them. The streets and the catacombs of Paris are home to a surprisingly large population of Nosferatu. Worse still, the Setite Jean Batiste de Montrond and his coterie seek to enflame the anger of those barons who object to the growing power of King Louis and Blanche, yet who have not — to date — displayed any willingness to move against them directly. He feeds false rumors to both sides, provides entertainments for the jaded elders of France that distract them from his covert activities, and ever so slowly pushes France's kine and Cainites both nearer open war. (For a bit more on de Montrond's activities, see the **Players Guide to the Low Clans**.)

Finally and perhaps most strangely, a small coterie of Cappadocians has recently taken up residence among the Cistercian monks. Led by a woman called Margot, who bears the mark of far more advanced decay than most Graverobbers, these Cappadocians seem less interested in studying the secrets of death than in acquiring information on all the various Cainite goings-on throughout the country. They seem, in fact, almost more Nosferatu than Cappadocian in outlook. What they intend to do with the information they gather remains unknown, although they have, to date, offered to assist all the various Cainite factions in gathering intelligence on their rivals.

The Holy Roman Empire

Just as the power of Emperor Frederick II slowly wanes and crumbles — as will be evidenced in a mere two years, when his own son Henry VII, King of Germany, openly revolts against him — so too has the power of the Ventrue, easily the dominant clan of the Empire, begun to fray. The Holy Roman Empire is home to some of the greatest active members of the Warlord clan, from Hardestadt the Elder and his Court of the Black Cross to the militant and expansionist Jürgen the Swordbearer. To the outside world, the Ventrue of the Empire present a united front, desperately trying to maintain the illusion

that their authority is as monolithic and unshakable as ever it was.

It is an effort that grows more difficult by the night. The Patriarchs, a traditionalist faction of Ventrue represented by Hardestadt, Jürgen and others of like mind, constantly struggle against the growing power of the Antasian faction, who believe in recreating the glory of Rome and the Eternal Senate. Their leader, the Methuselah Julia Antasia, proclaims the value of such concepts as equal voices and equal votes for all, and the right of humanity to govern itself — notions that practically qualify as heretical in the eyes of the Patriarchs. To date, the traditionalist faction, based in Magdeburg, retains the upper hand but has proven incapable of obtaining a decisive victory due to the other threats and fronts with which it must deal.

Those threats are many. The power of the emperor himself wanes, as the endless cycle of war between the Guelph and Ghibelline factions continues to divide the empire, and as Frederick II continues to make greater and great concessions to the Church. The Promethean Brujah seek to recreate Carthage in northern Germany and concentrate on acquiring sufficient territories in which to do so. The Lasombra Montano on the isle of Sicily looks to expand his own power and the might of his clan, both within the Church and in more secular arenas, and the divided Ventrue lack the unity and focus necessary to keep the Magisters out of their domains. The Low Clan presence grows throughout the Holy Roman Empire as well, particularly in the region of Germany and its surroundings. Gangrel appear in the woods in ever-increasing numbers, and of course the Tremere — represented by Lotharius, Prince of Vienna — are so thoroughly entrenched that the Ventrue could not hope to drive them out even if they suddenly reunited into a single faction. The Warlords make great shows of alliance with the Tremere, “allowing” them to remain in exchange for their support in various efforts, but all parties involved know that this is at least partially a sham. In Prague, the Ventrue Prince Brandl has been slain and usurped by Joseph Zvi, a Nosferatu. Even were the first cursed to learn that the Leper is, in fact, a thrall to the Tzimisce Shaagra, they would not be inclined to accept the notion of a Nosferatu prince, especially in such an important city.

The truth, although none of the Ventrue would admit to it, is that the Warlords have seen the last of their nights of true power in this region. Even their greatest efforts cannot now halt the slow dissolution of the Empire, or their status within it. Jürgen’s constant attempts to expand into other regions may be moti-

vated by a number of factors, but in his unbeating heart, he knows the truth — he seeks some means of regaining the power that he and his brethren even now feel slipping through their fingers.

Iberia

Due to the ongoing efforts of the *Reconquista* — Christianity’s attempt to drive the Muslim Moors out of the region — the Cainite conflicts of Iberia often follow religious lines, rather than standard political or cultural divisions. In this part of the world, the Assamites, considered a “Low Clan” in most of Europe, hold at least as much power as any of the first cursed. To those High Clan Cainites outside the immediate vicinity, this is a frightening, almost blasphemous prospect. For native Cainites, however, this is simply the way of things, and an Islamic Lasombra is far more likely to ally with a neighboring Assamite, regardless of any considerations of High or Low, than she is to work alongside a Christian Ventrue or Cappadocian.

Other Low Clans beyond the Assamites are prevalent here but pose little threat to the first cursed. Neither the Gangrel nor the Ravnos are particularly involved in the *Reconquista*, and most Nosferatu and Malkavians prefer to keep their heads down and avoid notice.

The Lasombra hold the greatest power in Iberia, as far as the High Clans are concerned. The religious warfare of the region attracts Magisters on both sides of the conflict, as those Lasombra with positions and influence within the Catholic Church lock horns with their contemporaries among the Ashirra. If the Lasombra were to suddenly forget their religious differences and decide to combine forces with their clanmates, they could easily dominate almost the entirety of Iberia; even the Assamites would be hard-pressed to stand up to them. As such an occurrence is about as likely as Caine returning as a convert to Confucianism, the conflict that wracks the Lasombra of the region is certain to continue for years to come.

To confuse matters further, the mortal governments of many of the *taifas* — independent Muslim cities, most of which have Assamite or Lasombra sultans — enter into vassalage relationships with Christian kingdoms in order to avoid attacks by crusaders and other holy warriors. This generally does not sit well with the Cainite sultans, who are less willing to bend knee to Christian Lasombra or Ventrue; thus, even in regions where Muslim and Christian mortals live in relative peace, the so-called shadow *Reconquista* continues as fiercely as ever.



The situation in Iberia is extremely complex; thus, even more so than the other regions discussed here, the description of the region is of necessity abbreviated. Readers are encouraged to see **Iberia by Night** for a more comprehensive look into the area.

Italy

The northern Italian states, allied with one another as the Lombard League, are bracing for war. Frederick II has long laid claim to Italy's northern regions as part of the Holy Roman Empire, a claim the Italian lords dispute. Pope Gregory IX watches the coming conflagration with great interest as well, for if the Lombard League falls, the Papacy itself may find the armies of the Holy Roman Empire massing at the gates. Through it all, the constant warfare between the Guelphs and the Ghibellines — a split that cuts through every layer of Italian society — continues unabated. Rare indeed is the Italian province that has not been touched by violence in some fashion.

It is, of course, a situation perfect for Cainite abuses. Italy boasts vast riches and powerful merchants, enticement enough for many of the undead, and the constant warfare provides more than sufficient opportunity for making alliances and attacking

rivals under cover of mortal conflict. Guilds — a concept relatively new to European society — attract High and Low Clans alike. Although many Cainites Embraced from the upper classes disdain the guilds as just more grubby merchants, many others, particularly among the Ventrue and Brujah, recognize the power such institutions might wield and are making concerted efforts at infiltrating the guilds. The Followers of Set have also made substantial inroads into the merchant guilds, using these as a stepping-stone for further movement into Italy. Only recently has an odd alliance of Lasombra and Assamites recognized the threat these Serpents pose, and the two factions are even now spiraling rapidly toward open conflict.

The city of Florence provides a perfect insight into the nature of Cainite existence here. Two rival Lasombra princes — Anicius the Golden, who has strong Guelph sympathies, and Panfilo the Cruel, who sides with the Ghibellines — war for control of the city. Each has numerous allies, and many Cainites serve as information brokers or mercenaries to both sides. If either could ever achieve victory, he would easily be one of the greatest of European princes, but to date the struggle has remained, like the mortal conflict it mirrors, largely a stalemate.

Rome itself is a hotbed of Cainite struggle, despite the danger posed by the great faith of the mortal population. A faction of Cappadocians wars with two competing factions of Nosferatu for control of the catacombs beneath the city, while a small population of Tremere — who might well be responsible for aggravating the conflict — use the chaos to plunder Rome's stores of ancient lore. The Usurpers themselves also maintain a chantry in the city of Siena, where they find themselves in the middle of a High Clan conflict — in this case, the struggle between the Ventrue Prince Henricus Germanus and two Lasombra claimants to the city.

Italy is also home to one of the few Cappadocian-intensive cities in the form of Venice, where the Giovanni family held much power even before it was Embraced into the clan. For the most part, the Graverobbers couldn't care less that, along with their family of necromancers, they also inherited a substantial degree of influence in Venice, but some few of the clan have begun filtering into the city, hoping to take advantage of their new members' insights into death. The Cappadocians are also attempting to gain further influence in the Church, here at the heart of the Papacy, but have run headlong into the Lasombra and Brujah who were here before them. Prince Guilelmo Aliprando is himself Lasombra, and his reign is solid enough that the Cappadocians, despite their sudden influence, aren't likely to prove the dominant clan in the city any time soon.

Hungary and the Slavic East

Nowhere else is the tradition of High Clan dominance so deeply engrained as it is here, in Eastern Europe, and nowhere else is it facing so great a challenge.

The Tzimisce have claimed these lands since before recorded history; clan legend maintains that the Tzimisce Antediluvian settled here in the nights before most of Caine's other grandchildren had even departed the Second City. They rule as openly as any Cainite dares, for these lands have belonged to them for so long that even many of the kine accept their presence as just another part of the world around them.

Their rule has, however, begun to fade in the past few centuries. The Ventrue now hold a majority of western Hungary and other domains traditionally belonging to the Fiends. The recent war with Jürgen the Swordbearer, who invaded Transylvania under the cover provided when King Andreas II invited the Teutonic Knights into his lands, may have ended in a relative defeat for the Ventrue, but the Tzimisce still lost territo-

ries they have yet to regain. The existence of the Obertus State between Tzimisce and Ventrue lands rankles Vladimir Rustovitch and the other *voivodes*, as well as Nova Arpad and her Warlord allies.

But at least the Tzimisce-Ventrue conflict follows what the Cainites consider to be the natural order. Of far greater concern are the recent gains made by the Tremere in their so-called "Omen War" with the Fiends. The Tzimisce still hold far more territory than the Usurpers, a state of affairs that might make it appear to uninformed outsiders that the Tzimisce are winning the war. Yet the fact that the Tremere not only survive but have expanded their domains beyond their original borders is a major sting to Tzimisce pride, for the Tremere are a smaller, far younger clan with fewer resources to contribute to the war effort. If the Omen War continues as it has, the Tremere may soon claim a vast stretch of Transylvania and the Carpathian region, turning it into one of the few Low Clan-dominated regions in Europe.

The Usurpers gain more power still through their many alliances with the Ventrue. The Warlords see only an ally in their own conflict with the Tzimisce and dismiss the Tremere gains as unimportant. Nova Arpad and her brood, as well as the now-absent Lord Jürgen, both assume that when (not if) they take Transylvania from the Tzimisce, the Tremere lands will fall under their jurisdiction as well; it has never occurred to them that a Low Clan such as the Tremere would challenge their right to land taken from the Fiends. The Usurpers, for their own part, simply smile, entrench themselves even further and continue to engage in covert activities intended to keep the rivalry between Ventrue and Tzimisce at a fever pitch — ensuring that the Warlords continue to need them as allies and the Fiends cannot turn their full attention to the Omen War.

For the time being, of course, the grip of the first cursed is still the strongest. Nearly every major city in the Slavic East rests in High Clan hands. From the Ventrue princes of Buda-Pest, Esztergom and Mediasch to the Tzimisce *voivodes* of Bistritz, Kiev and Krakow, and even the new Cappadocian prince of Sofia, nearly all the region's recognized Cainite rulers are of the first cursed. Even those figures who hold no official power but substantial undeclared territories, such as the Brujah Yitzhak ben Avraham of Krakow, hail from those clans. That situation appears on the verge of changing — the Tremere hammer at Tzimisce gates, both Geza Arpad of Esztergom and Bela Rusenko of Sofia are mad and consort with demons, and the Anda bloodline of Gangrel who ride with the Mongols are but a few years away from their invasion — but for now, the High Clans maintain their dominance in the Slavic East.

Scandinavia and the Baltic

The Scandinavian states are, for the most part, a study in contradictions when it comes to Cainite balance of power. Due to their political acumen and their close association with mortal rulers and merchants, the High Clans hold a majority of the power in the region. Most of the area's princes are Ventrue, although a sizable minority are Brujah and Lasombra. Surprisingly few are Gangrel, despite the fact that the Animals — along with the Nosferatu — represent the most numerous of Scandinavia's clans.

As a (very) rough guideline, the High Clans of the region tend toward Christianity, while the Low often maintain Wotanist and other pagan beliefs. This religious friction often erupts in overt violence (save in Denmark, where the Treaty of Arkona maintains a relative peace among the clans). Fortunately, those among the Gangrel and other fallen who would see all Christians — including most of the High Clans — purged from Scandinavia are, while fanatic, few enough in numbers that they have no real chance of success. They are distracted still further by the region's werewolf population, a threat that most of the first cursed manage to avoid by remaining within the boundaries of the major cities.

Still, Scandinavia is a nerve-wracking place for many of the High Clans who dwell there. An awareness exists among them, even if it is largely unconscious, that they rule only at the behest of their so-called inferiors, that the Gangrel and Malkavian princes, along with their many brethren who hold no official positions, have both the numbers and the authority to oust the first cursed should they ever choose to unite behind that purpose. Such an event is unlikely, considering that they would have little to gain from such efforts and Cainites rarely unite for anything other than that, but the mere possibility is enough to set High Clan fangs on edge.

In fact, several different factions — including a group of Wendic Tremere and a coterie of Lasombra and Toreador led by the Magister Gunnar Jacobson — seek to take advantage of that subsurface tension. The Tremere merely wish to restore their chantry, which was previously destroyed by the Nosferatu Absalom. By making themselves valuable to the Ventrue and other princes, they hope to obtain High Clan support and protection. As such, while they wish to stir up enough trouble to keep the Warlords nervous, they do not actually seek to ignite open conflict. The Lasombra, on the other hand, seek to regain some of the power they held when they were among the earliest Chris-

tians to arrive, power now in Ventrue hands. Along with their Toreador allies, they wish to ignite an open religious war between the dominant Warlords and the local Low Clans, in hopes that they can step in afterward and pick up the pieces. To facilitate this, they have staged a number of attacks on well known pagan Cainites, attempting to implicate the Christian Ventrue in the violence.

The Byzantine Successor States

The self-proclaimed successors of Rome, the people and Cainites of Byzantium maintain a cultural elitism that, perhaps unsurprisingly, leaves little room for outsiders to obtain any degree of power. Even the destruction of the Empire of Byzantium during the Fourth Crusade and the dissolution of the region into a number of independent states has not weakened that ingrained cultural arrogance, though the Cainite world was shaken to its very foundations by the death of the Toreador Methuselah Michael. As such, the dominance of the High Clans is nearly as unshakable here as it is in countries like France.

The Ventrue hold a substantial amount of power here, much of it left over from the nights of Rome herself. The Toreador find their grasp on power in the region, formerly bolstered by their close association with Michael, to be on the wane, and the Brujah — many of whom see the restoration of the glory of Constantinople as the first step toward recreating the paradise of Carthage — are all too happy to pick up the slack. The Lasombra claim fewer of the region's princedoms than the Ventrue or Brujah, but because one of their own now lays claim to Constantinople itself, their influence in the region belies their numbers. The High Clans of Byzantium have grown substantially more covetous and ambitious in the past decades; without the presence of Michael as a unifying factor, many of them have focused their efforts on carving out the largest possible pieces of the former empire for themselves.

The only true threat to the power of the High Clans is the various cults that have sprung up around the Methuselah Michael since his Final Death during the sack of Constantinople. Many of these cults consist largely of Low Clan Cainites (alongside grieving Toreador), and several seek to unite all Constantinople — or even all Byzantium — under a new Cainite rule in honor, and following the teachings, of Michael. Even those first cursed who might agree with the concept balk at the notion of the fallen in positions of

authority and struggle to prevent these cults from gaining power. Several outside factions, including a coterie of Setites led by one Yavo Abdelahi, want to ride these cults into the upper echelons of power for their own ends.

In the past several years, rumors have swept through the Cainite population of Constantinople, rumors that even death itself could not prevent Michael from arising once more to fulfill his destiny. Sporadic sightings of the powerful elder have been reported, and while no hard evidence has yet turned up, many of the Michaelite cults take this as proof that their divine patron has returned.

In fact, the Lasombra elder Mandirali Sotko of Turkey and his brood have very carefully staged these “Michael sightings.” A master not only of Obfuscate but also of Presence, Mandirali hopes that he might eventually adopt the Methuselah’s identity, at least long enough to establish an unshakable base of power in the region. He has already approached several Michaelite cultists, stirring their religious fervor into a frenzy that will, he hopes, incline them to do whatever he asks of them when he finally appears publicly and openly as the Patriarch.

Outremer

In addition to being a place of perpetual and often bloody conflict, Outremer also holds some distinction as one of the regions in which the High Clans aren’t even remotely the only dominant power. Then again, considering the sheer number of competing factions here — Christian versus Muslims, Frederick II loyalists versus those who seek to throw off his influence, and of course the usual differences between kine communities and Cainite clans — the entire region is too volatile for any specific group to maintain a substantial degree of dominance.

In Outremer, clan lines rarely match up with religious ones. The Assamites, who are the greatest obstacle to High Clan domination and possibly the single most powerful clan in the region, are largely Muslim, but a significant minority are Christian and side with the crusaders against their brethren. The Lasombra, possibly the most numerous first cursed vampires in Outremer, are evenly split between the sides of Christian and Ashirra. The Ventrue and Brujah are largely Christian, but even a few of them can be found fighting on the side of Islam. The split between those who support Frederick II’s claim to Outremer and those who oppose it is even more varied, with members of all clans on both sides.

The constant attempts by Ventrue, Lasombra and other Christian Cainites to gain power in the region certainly appear genuine, even fanatic, in their execution. The truth is, however, that many of the High Clans feel, deeply in what’s left of their souls, that Outremer is a lost cause. The reputation and the might of the Assamites are so heavily ingrained that few truly believe they have any real chance of taking the Holy Land from them. As such, many of the High Clan Cainites of the region do not devote their full efforts to battling the Assamites or the Ashirra, thus turning their own doubts into a self-fulfilling prophecy of failure.


The other High Clans aren’t quite ready to relinquish their grip on Outremer yet either. The Brujah Nehemiah still rules “his” island of Cyprus, and while he has little interest in standard Cainite politics, he is also determined to rule his isle as he sees fit — and that means that other vampires encroach only at his sufferance. Zarathustra, the Lasombra Prince of Antioch, maintains substantial influence not merely in his own province but also in the neighboring state of Tripoli.

The Ventrue, however, are losing even more influence in the region due to the actions of the Ravnos Etienne de Faubergé, vassal to the Ventrue Lord Jürgen and Prince of Acre. Until recently, the

THE DIET OF OLIVES

Since 1228, many of the Cainites of Outremer have enjoyed the protection of a treaty called the Diet of Olives. Named after the Mount of Olives, where the convocation that adopted it met, it ensured a certain degree of peace and mutual protection between various Cainite courts and states within the region. The Salubri warrior Qawiyya el-Ghaduba hosted this gathering; it was her vision that led to the Diet in the first place. The treaty was agreed to last for at least 10 years, so the Holy Land should — assuming nobody has the poor taste to violate the pact — remain relatively quiet for some time yet. (Of course, the Diet hardly prevents the scheming and personal conflicts that are part and parcel of Cainite nature, but at least they most likely won’t boil over into open war.)

Though the Salubri have fallen in numbers and grace, the High Clans still offer them substantial respect and accolades for arranging the Diet of Olives, one of the few truly successful accords of its kind.



presence of a fragment of the True Cross prevented Etienne from even entering his own domain. Now that he can, he appears to have undergone some form of religious transformation. He has begun refusing to follow some of the more extreme of Jürgen's orders, and some of the Swordbearer's advisors believe that the Ravnos is simply awaiting the right time to cut ties completely. They are currently encouraging the Ventrue to take steps to prevent this desertion — or, if necessary, to replace Etienne with someone more pliable.

Traditions and Perversions

The Damned are creatures of habit and tradition. A least part of the Cainite devotion to tradition is to help keep the Beast at bay, to give them the illusion that they are noble creatures with their own society rather than parasites feeding on the blood and culture of humanity. Another part of Cainite tradition is the fact that vampires are static creatures. They do not grow or create as the living do. They are undead, unchanging with the passing of years. Once the childer of Caine have adopted a particular way of doing things, they are slow to change, and some traditions stretch back to the earliest nights when the Damned walked among mortals, back to the edicts of Caine himself in the First City.

Although vampires often speak of “Cainite society,” the truth is that vampire society is merely a twisted reflection of the mortal society upon which they prey. While Cainites aren't especially adept at creating, they do take mortal ways and twist them to suit their unliving existence. Much of Cainite society is made up of perversions, twisted memories of their mortal lives, macabre imitations of a living, breathing world that no longer belongs to them.

Sacraments

To even call the rituals of Cainite existence “sacraments” is to blaspheme against the Church and all that it represents, but to the vampires of the Dark Medieval world their rites and rituals are just as important as the sacraments of the Church, if not more so, since it is the complex web of ritual and tradition that holds Cainite society together and allows the Courts of the Night to continue to function. Their traditions are all that stand between Cainites and the endless, gnawing hunger of the Beast, so they take their sacraments as just that.

The Embrace

Hans' eyes widened as he entered the hall. It had been transformed from the place that he knew by day into a realm of darkling shadows broken by the wan golden light from a few scattered candles. Rich velvet draperies covered windows and alcoves, while freshly cut lilies and greenery spilled over the tables and sills. Men and women dressed all in black blended with the shadows, and the room was eerily silent, all eyes turned to watch as Hans and his mistress entered. Even in his wine-dark doublet, he felt like the only source of color in the hall.

What truly drew his eye was the low table that was draped like an altar, surrounded with carefully placed flowers and a dark, folded shroud, but otherwise empty. Upon seeing it and the mourning clothes of the others, he turned sidelong to Frieda, who smiled confidently on his arm.

“What is this?” he whispered.

She replied without looking at him, smiling and nodding as she led him toward the altar at the head of the hall. “It's a funeral, my dear.”

“A funeral, whose?”

This time Frieda turned to face him, her smile widening and showing her very white teeth against her red lips.

“Why, yours, of course, darling.” Later Hans was grateful that he didn't have time to scream before Frieda sank her fangs deeply into his throat.

The Embrace signals the end of mortal life and the beginning of a Cainite's unliving existence as one of the Damned. It is a pivotal moment, when much about a vampire's future is decided: sire, clan, lineage and the face and form that the childe is to wear throughout eternity. For the High Clans it is a moment to be celebrated and savored rather than carried out hurriedly in some dark alley or dirty hole in the ground. It is a time to welcome a fledgling into the society of the night and to acknowledge the primacy of the new Cainite's sire.

The High Clans are of two minds concerning rituals surrounding the Embrace. For some, the Embrace itself is a private matter, not unlike childbirth. It is best conducted away from the eyes of others, an intimate moment between sire and childe. This is because the Embrace is known to strip away both dignity and the façade of nobility from both parties. It can be a potential embarrassment if a childe struggles or begs for mercy at the last moment or if either sire or fledgling should lose control to the Beast and frenzy. Clans such as the Brujah, Cappadocians and Tzimisce often conduct their Embraces in private, or in the company of a select few other than sire and childe.

Others see the Embrace as an opportunity for spectacle, drama and honor in the eyes of their peers.

The opportunity to Embrace publicly shows the favor of the ruling prince, and a properly done Embrace can speak volumes about the character of both sire and childe, particularly if they comport themselves well. Such an Embrace is talked about for years and brings prestige to those involved. The Toreador and Ventruë particularly favor such pomp and circumstance, showing both their support for the Traditions and their nobility in the face of so pivotal a moment.

The public rituals surrounding the Embrace mock the mortal fear of death and rites of birth and baptism. Typically it is staged as a funeral for the fledging, honoring his passage from the mortal world into the realm of the undead. The neonate may be expected to attend his own wake and funeral before receiving the Embrace or may attend these rites shortly after the Embrace, to emphasize the transformation from mortal to Cainite.

As with mortal funerals, Embrace rites are solemn and somber. The ruling prince or lord often oversees the rite and grants formal permission for the sire to Embrace (and some have been known to revoke their permission at the last minute in order to embarrass a potential sire in public). If the Embrace has already taken place, then the lord welcomes the neonate to the Court and accepts her fealty. An ashen priest of the sire's road may also be present to carry out certain rites or readings before and after the Embrace.

The neonate may be expected to lie in a coffin or upon a bier for a time before or after the Embrace, to feel the closeness and touch of death. Some sires have been known to have their newly Embraced childer buried or entombed while they undergo the transition from mortal to immortal. Some believe that this strengthens a childer's mettle, others that it induces madness, or at the very least gives childer reason to hate their sires. A few simply don't care but find the struggles of the neonates amusing and wish to remind them pointedly who rules their unliving existence. This practice is particularly well known among the Cappadocians.

The Embrace rite may also include the so-called "baptism of blood," wherein the neonate is touched with the blood of her sire, who makes a mark on her forehead, echoing the mark that God placed upon Caine. The sire recites God's pronouncement upon Caine or that of the Archangel Gabriel when Caine refused the redemption that he was offered. The neonate is expected to bear this pronouncement of doom and damnation with pride and stoicism, the sign of a noble Cainite. A childer who frenzies at the sight

THE FUNERARY PRELUDE

The rites associated with the Embrace make an excellent part of a High Clan character's prelude. Consider playing them out with each player, showing how the different High Clan characters were brought into vampire society and how they comported themselves. Perhaps something that took place during the character's Embrace still haunts or follows her, or perhaps the ritual went so well that the character is honored and respected by her peers, accounting for reputation or status within Cainite society. Contrast the Embrace of High Clan characters with that of Low Clan characters and how those experiences have helped shape their ideas and attitudes toward Cainite society.

or touch of the sire's blood may lose face and gain a reputation as weak-willed.

Marriage


"In this cup, as in this place and time, two become one, now and forever," the ashen priest intoned. The razor edge of the knife caressed their wrists, and a thin trickle of dark blood poured from each into the silver chalice beneath their extended hands.

The taste of it was hot and cold at the same time, like molten lead on the tongue. Their eyes met, as if for the first time, and something passed between them that could not be put into words. The cup was passed to the priest with scarcely a second thought. The two of them had eyes only for each other in that moment.

"You are mine now, my lady," he said, "now and forever, and I am yours."

"I would not have it any other way, my lord," she replied. He took her in his arms as the priest pronounced them husband and wife, and she rested in his cold embrace, tears of blood—hers and his combined—rolling unheeded down her cheeks.

The sacrament of marriage is a rare one for Cainites, who do not feel the same passions as those who live and breathe. It is the thrill of the hunt and the satisfaction of their hunger that stir their dead hearts, not romance. Still, some vampires' hearts are not altogether dead and can still feel the touch of love (or at least they believe that they can). Even more Cainites understand that marriage is not always undertaken for reasons of romance. Mortals use marriages to seal alliances and to further their social positions. Much the same is true of Cainites, except their marriages are



free from dynastic concerns, and the covenant of a “lifelong” partner has very different connotations for the undead.

Marriage for a Cainite usually means one of two things. The more common is a formal alliance of some sort. For example, a male and female prince might choose to join their domains formally together through the rite of marriage. Unlike mortal society, the wife retains as much control over the marital property as the husband has (otherwise few Cainite women would ever agree to such an arrangement). These sorts of political marriages are almost entirely for show and form’s sake. Two princes can just as easily swear oaths of alliance rather than marriage vows, and most prefer to do just that. If nothing else, it allows them to keep their options open and dangle the potential promise of marriage as a reward for new allies.

The more rare Cainite marriage is one based on passion, perhaps even love, although for vampires love is more of a matter of satiating a hunger for another than it is anything else. A vampire may choose to take a consort from time to time. This is most often a childe whom the sire has grown infatuated with and offered the Embrace. Such liaisons are best known among the Toreador but crop up among the other High Clans as well. They’re generally considered foolish, but they’re not forbidden, although the prince can always deny the right to Embrace (leading to tragic consequences if the Cainite chooses to defy the prince’s edict).

Such romances never end well. At best, the partners drift apart, their passion growing cold as the years pass by until nothing is left of what they once shared except perhaps some fond memories. More often, Cainite passion tends to turn to bitterness and jealousy, turning once-passionate lovers into hateful enemies. Ancillae may have former mates or lovers as their worst enemies, while elders tend to avoid all such entanglements, their hearts having long since hardened and grown cold.

When Cainites do choose to marry, their rituals are often similar to those of the Church but lack any holy sacraments or symbols. Wedding rings are often exchanged (and may become either treasured or bitter reminders years later). A Cainite union is usually solemnized with a blood oath. In formal circumstances, the couple mixes vitae in a chalice and each drinks from it, having each drunk of the other’s blood at least twice before. In less formal or more passionate rituals, the couple feeds directly from each other’s veins, but this is considered somewhat vulgar and

unwise, a sign of youthful indiscretion. An ashen priest conducts the ritual, and the roads of the couple heavily influence the form that it takes.

Baths

“I do become your liegeman of life and limb and earthly worship. Faith and truth I will bear unto you, by my blood, my name and my honor, for as long as you will have me, my lord.”

“I accept your service, and swear that I will render faith and truth unto you as my vassal and liegeman. I shall provide for you and your faithful service will be recognized and rewarded. This I swear, upon my blood, my name, and my honor.”

Oath-taking is a serious matter for the High Clans. Feudal Cainite society is built upon a pyramid of oaths of fealty and service, between childe and sire and between vassal and lord. Oaths are central to the Road of Kings in particular, which many vampires of the High Clans follow.

High Clan vampires are typically oath-bound from the moment of their Embrace. Childer swear oaths of loyalty and obedience to their sires, to accept their sire’s guidance as they learn what they need to survive in Cainite society. Fledglings must swear fealty to the prince of the domain they inhabit before they are recognized as neonates and released from their sire’s service. Knights and nobles swear allegiance to princes, princes to lords, and lords to the great monarchs of the land. Oaths bind a Cainite to coterie, road and whatever vassals the vampire might have.

Although vampires generally do not swear their oaths in the name of God (save for followers of the Road of Heaven), they still consider them as binding as those sworn on holy relics. On one level Cainites recognize the fact that oaths must be taken seriously or else their society will turn to anarchy, but it is not mere practicality that binds the devious nature of vampires. As do mortal folk of the Dark Medieval world, Cainites believe in the almost mystical power of an oath, particularly one sworn before witnesses, on whatever the oath-taker may hold sacred. For High Clan Cainites this is typically a vampire’s blood, name, honor or all of these. The blood represents both the blood of Caine that all vampires share as well as a particular Cainite’s bloodline or lineage. An individual’s name is an important part of his reputation and has a mystical significance, and honor is vitally important to the High Clans, particularly followers of the Road of Kings. A Cainite without honor cannot be trusted and faces rebellion, overthrow and possibly exile or Final Death. High Clan vampires must maintain at least the

appearance of honor if they are to rule effectively, so honor is an important component of upholding oaths.

Since oaths are taken seriously, they're not sworn lightly, particularly since an ill-chosen oath can haunt a Cainite for decades or even centuries. Stories circulate of vampires who swore to carry out a particular task and were then faced with doing so forever. While these stories are doubtless exaggerated, they warn of the dangers of hasty or ill-considered oaths. Young Cainites, particularly those on the Path of Chivalry, are often given to extravagant oath-taking and a desire for heroic quests or causes to prove their mettle. They may find such opportunities their undoing.

It is worth noting that most oaths Cainites give or accept are not enforced with the power of a blood oath. If oaths are serious then the blood oath is the most serious of all, enforced as it is by the power of Cainite vitae. It is not a power that the scions of the High Clans exercise lightly, since it creates strong feelings and powerful ties between regnant and thrall. For more on oaths and blood oaths among the nobility of the night, see **Road of Kings**.

Final Death

"For dust thou art, and unto dust shalt thou return," the ashen priest intoned. With a sweep of his hand, he scattered ashes over the dry and brittle grass of the hillside. The dark shapes of the trees loomed overhead like mourners, the cold wind whispering through their nearly bare branches.


The remaining mourners stood as silently and still as the trees, watching as the ashes of their lord and master were allowed to scatter on the wind. Each wondered silently as to the disposition of his soul. Did it fly on the wind with his remains? Did it writhe in eternal torment in Hell as payment for his earthly sins? Or was it, too, no more than ashes and dust, the last traces of what was once a powerful and influential Cainite washed away and forgotten?

None of them knew, nor much cared. They knew only that their liege and lord had met Final Death at last, and that one of them who stood and mourned his passing was responsible.

Although vampires like to consider themselves beyond death, it is possible for even a Cainite to meet a final end. Final Death has come to vampires increasingly often since the end of the Long Night and the beginning of the War of Princes, and Cainites have different ways that they choose to recognize and deal with the destruction of one of their own.

This is because the true purpose of Cainite funerary rites is not only to honor and respect the passing of one of their own, but also to ensure the transition of power





and domain into the hands of the destroyed vampire's successors, whoever they may be. A High Clan funeral is often the signal for the beginning of a much larger conflict, as the childer and former vassals of the deceased begin to divide the spoils and some try to claim more than their share.

As with mortal nobility, Cainites often leave wills or appoint successors in the event of their destruction, but others choose not to think about it either, most often because they believe themselves eternal or because they care not a whit what happens after they are gone. Of course, nothing ensures that a Cainite's survivors feel obligated to carry out any last wishes, save for their own sense of honor.

Heraldry

With knights covered from head to toe in armor, usually with helms obscuring their features, distinguishing friend from foe on the battlefield becomes difficult. So mortal knights developed heraldry, the practice of painting symbols on their shields and wearing them on their tunics and surcoats, so that their identities could be clearly seen even while in full armor.

Like the code of chivalry, the mortal practice of heraldry quickly caught on with the Cainite courts of Europe, with knights and princes adopting their own coats of arms and colors to distinguish themselves from their peers. The practice grew steadily throughout the 12th century and since the start of the War of Princes has blossomed. The Embrace of many mortal knights and nobles familiar with the practice has encouraged it further, so that heraldry is now a common part of the courts of the night, and most Cainite lords, princes and knights have their own unique coats of arms to identify them.

Heraldry is governed by a complex and growing set of rules and strictures. Vampires have added their own imagery and style to the mortal conventions on heraldry, but these are mostly small variations. A mortal would recognize the style of a Cainite coat of arms and vice-versa, although mortals are generally not able to identify Cainite arms for what they are. A mortal particularly well versed in heraldry might gain some hint as to a Cainite's true nature from seeing his coat of arms, which some princes claim is a violation of the Tradition of Silence.

A coat of arms consists of a colored or multicolored background called a *tincture*, upon which is placed the arms or *device*. A written description of the coat of arms is known as a *blazon*, and it is common for coats of arms to be written down and recorded so that

a court may know who bears which coat of arms, in case of potential disputes. The coat of arms is traditionally displayed on a knight's shield, although some knights travel with their shields covered, revealing their arms only when they go into battle. A coat of arms may also be displayed on a surcoat or tunic, on badges worn by vassals and on tapestries or other ornamentation that helps mark the owner's domain.

Tinctures

Tinctures are the colors used in a coat of arms. They are divided into three groups: colors, metals and furs. They tend to describe general hues, since pigments must be mixed by hand and vary from artisan to artisan. The colors are *azure* (blue), *gules* (red), *sable* (black), *vert* (green), *purpure* (purple), *tenne* (orange) and *sanguine* (reddish-purple). The metals are *or* (gold or yellow) and *argent* (silver or white). The furs are actually patterns, based on *ermine* and *vair*, two furs commonly used in royal or noble garments. Ermine is a pattern of upward-pointing arrows, their tips surmounted by three dots, in gold or silver on a black field or vice versa. Vair is a wavy pattern of blue and either white or silver. Among Cainites *gules*, *sable* and *sanguine* colors often predominate, combined with metals (particularly *argent*). Ermine is far more common than *vair* in Cainite coats of arms, particularly combined with a *sable* background.

The basic rule of tinctures is that a color must be combined with a metal or fur, and not another color, and likewise for metals and furs. This helps the arms stand out clearly, so they can be seen and recognized from a distance. As with most rules in the Dark Medieval world, exceptions exist. First, some fields (like *vair* and various checked patterns) are considered "neutral" and may have any tinctures placed upon them even when the combination is "illegal." Charges may also be presented in their natural colors, even if this would normally be an illegal combination with other tinctures. Finally, some blazons simply break with convention because the combination looks good (such is often the case with a color like *gules*, *vert* or *tenne* against *sable*, which stands out quite well despite being "improper").

The Arms

The arms include everything else that goes into the blazon other than the basic tinctures. It includes placement of the various elements, partitioning the field into different sections (*partitions*), placing various geometric shapes or patterns on the field (*ordinares*), symbols or figures (*charges*) and special

COMMON TERMS OF HERALDRY

- Addorsed:** Creatures placed back to back.
- Alerion:** A spread eagle lacking a beak or feet.
- Augmentation:** A change to a crest or shield to mark a particularly important deed or achievement.
- Bar:** A horizontal line across a shield.
- Base:** The bottom third of a shield.
- Bend:** A diagonal line across a shield.
- Blazon:** A written description of a coat of arms.
- Bordure:** A border around the edge of a shield or crest.
- Cadency:** Changes to a coat of arms to indicate different members of a family. Used among Cainites to mark lineage and childer of a particular sire.
- Charge:** Anything placed on the field of a coat of arms.
- Checky:** Checks of alternating color and metal.
- Chevron:** A line like an upside-down V pointing toward the top of the shield.
- Chief:** The upper third of a shield.
- Cinquefoil:** A flower with five petals or leaves.
- Combatant:** When two or more charges appear to be fighting. It is common for a charge representing the owner of the coat of arms to be fighting (and winning) against another creature or creatures representing the owner's enemies.
- Couchant:** An animal charge sitting or lying down with its head up.
- Courant:** A charge running.
- Dexter:** The left side of a shield.
- Fess:** The middle third of a shield.
- Field:** The background color of a coat of arms.
- Guardant:** A charge facing forward (toward the viewer).
- Lozenge:** Diamond shaped.
- Marshalling:** Combining the coats of arms of two different families after a marriage or alliance.
- Pale:** A vertical line down the center of a shield.
- Passant:** A charge walking.
- Quarter:** One fourth of a shield, usually divided vertically and horizontally through the fess or center point.
- Quatrefoil:** A flower with four petals.
- Rampant:** A creature with its right leg fully raised as if to attack and the left is in a partially raised position.
- Regardant:** A charge looking back over its shoulder.
- Respectant:** Two charges facing each other.

symbols related to the owner's clan, deeds or status (*abatements, augmentations and cadency*).

Shield Points

Shields are traditionally divided into different points, used to describe the areas where tinctures or arms are placed. The *field* refers to the entire surface of the shield. It is divided in two vertically by a centerline. The *dexter* side of the shield is the left side (right from the wielder's perspective) while the *sinister* side of the shield is the right side (left from the wielder's perspective). Cainite coats of arms often have charges facing

toward the sinister side. The shield is divided horizontally into three equal bands. The top third of the field is the *chief*, the middle third is the *fess*, and the bottom third is the *base*. In the middle of each of these bands along the centerline are three points, the *honour* point, the *fess* point and the *nombriil* point, used for positioning various elements in blazoning.

Partitions and Ordinaries

The field may be divided by a number of different sorts of partition lines. These may be as simple as the *party per fess* or *party per pale* (dividing the field evenly

along the horizontal or vertical) or as complex as patterns of checks, lozenges or stripes.

Similar to partitions, ordinaries involve the placement of different shapes on the field, such as borders (*bordure*), a cross, chevron and so forth. Some partitions and ordinaries commonly found in Cainite heraldry include the following:

- **Bend Sinister:** A diagonal division from the chief sinister to the base dexter.

- **Checky:** A checkerboard pattern denotes chivalry and so is often adopted by Cainites following the Path of Chivalry or pretending toward chivalrous ideals. It is associated with the Knights Templar, among others, who have a sable and argent checky field as part of their banner.

- **Chief:** The top third of the shield is a different color from the rest of the field. This denotes authority or rulership, so it is something Cainites of the High Clans and followers of the Road of Kings often aspire to in their personal coat of arms.

- **Cross:** The traditional crusader's shield is a white field with a red cross. Cainite arms tend to stylize the cross and downplay its religious significance, except among the most devout, such as followers of the Road of Heaven. The *party per cross*, which divides the field into four quarters, is also quite common among Cainites (allowing them to display charges in each quarter).

- **Escutcheon:** A wide border around the edge of the shield.

- **Pale:** A wide vertical band down the center of the shield.

- **Party per Saltire:** Two diagonal lines dividing the field into four triangles of alternating tinctures.

Charges

All figures, objects, symbols, etc. displayed on the field are known as *charges*. An almost unlimited number of different charges can be placed on a coat of arms, although they generally break down into five main categories: animals, fantastic beasts, flora, human figures and symbols or objects. Each charge has a particular meaning associated with it, and a knowledgeable individual can learn a few things about the bearer of a coat of arms by studying its symbolism. Some charges are more common among Cainites than others, including the following.

- **Animals:** Bats, boars, crows, falcons, foxes, lions, ravens, serpents, tigers and wolves are all common in Cainite coats of arms. Cainites tend to favor predatory animals as their charges for obvious reasons, although some have been known to choose more

peaceful creatures, either to represent their desire for peace or the peace that they lost in the Embrace. In the latter case the animal charge may be shown *dormant* (sleeping) or *cowed* (head down, tail between the legs).

- **Beasts:** Chimera, cockatrice, gryphon, hydra, phoenix, wyvern and various other creatures out of myth and legend. Dragons are considered symbols of the Tzimisce and so are rarely used by other Cainites. The alerion, an eagle without a beak or feet, is associated with the fall of imperialism and so with the Brujah.

- **Flora:** Although specific flora are associated with certain clans (see Clan Charges), flora in general tend to be rare in Cainite heraldry. The most common are plants associated with death and the dead, including lilies and ash trees. Roses are common in Toreador heraldry. Trees shown on Cainite coats of arms are nearly always *blighted*, without leaves or other foliage.

- **Human Figures:** Full human figures tend to be rare in heraldry in general, and Cainite heraldry in particular, but various human body parts often show up as symbols. Among the more common for Cainites are hands (often red or bloodied), eyes (reddish or beastlike), mouths (with very red lips) and hearts (sometimes with swords or stakes through them). Hearts in colors other than gules, particularly argent and sable, are also known in Cainite heraldry.

- **Symbols and Objects:** A large number of objects and symbols are used in heraldry. Perhaps the single most common symbol for Cainites is the ankh, an ancient Egyptian symbol otherwise rarely seen in Dark Medieval Europe. Small (or even prominent) ankhs may be worked into a Cainite coat of arms. Other prominent symbols include weapons (particularly swords and daggers), gauntlets, crescent moons, stars, chains, crowns, pillars, towers and castles.

Clan Charges

In addition to the charges used by mortals and those adopted for use by Cainites, each vampiric clan has particular symbols and charges associated with it. Cainite nobles belonging to that clan may add these charges to their personal coats of arms. It is considered questionable when a Cainite includes a charge of another clan in his coat of arms. Cainites are by no means required to display any particular sign of clan affiliation in their coats of arms, but a total lack of clan charges tends to be viewed with some disdain, since it denotes either a lack or pride or a vampire with something to hide.

- **Assamite:** Heraldry is practiced among some Assamite knights and followers of the Path of Chiv-

ally, but charges are generally limited to symbols and shapes rather than any sort of pictures (which are forbidden to Muslims). Common charges include the crescent and star of Islam and a field with a *chief gules*, a red band across the top to show the primacy of blood among the Banu Haqim.

- **Brujah:** Common Brujah charges include open books, broken chains, crossed swords and joined rings (a sign of both perfection and eternity). Eagles and lions are their most common animal charges.

- **Cappadocians:** The Cappadocians favor charges with a death motif such as skulls, bones and scythes, and animal charges associated with death, particularly the crow and raven. Lilies are by far the most common flora in Cappadocian charges.

- **Gangrel:** Animal charges are the most common for the Gangrel, particularly creatures the owner feels a particular kinship toward. Oftentimes an animal's head will be placed at the fess point of the shield, usually gardant. Bears, boars, wolves and other predatory animals are the most favored.

- **Lasombra:** The Lasombra prefer eagles and other majestic birds or owls (for their wisdom and nighttime associations). They also make the most use of religious symbolism, such as crosses, in their blazons. Dark tinctures are common, and the Lasombra are the most likely to combine two colors in their arms, such as sable and either vert or tenne.

- **Malkavian:** Crescent moons, mirrors (often cracked or broken), strange mythical beasts (particularly those made up of multiple creatures like the cockatrice or chimera) and teardrops all decorate Malkavian arms. The Malkavians show the least regard for the rules of heraldry, and their arms are sometimes nonsensical or apparently chosen at random.

- **Nosferatu:** Masks or helms, locks, chains, keys, gateways and doorways appear on Nosferatu crests. Openings like helm slits, keyholes or windows may have eyes staring out from them at the viewer.

- **Ravnos:** Horns, trumpets, stars and unicorns are the most common Ravnos charges, although Ravnos coats of arms — genuine ones, anyway — are relatively rare. More than a few Ravnos lay claim to a particular coat of arms and a noble heritage one night, only to abandon it when it no longer suits them.

- **Toreador:** The Toreador embrace heraldry as any other art. Roses and rosy crosses, fleur-de-lis, and swans or doves decorate their coats of arms. They favor beautiful things as their charges: flowers, majestic beasts, a spangling of stars and so forth. Fine

heraldry is an art that many Toreador neonates (particularly those on the Path of Chivalry) pursue.

- **Tremere:** The charges of the Usurpers include various astrological and magical symbols (particularly the astrological symbol for Mars), serpents (usually coiled with the head raised to strike) and tied bundles of sticks (representing clan unity).

- **Tzimisce:** Dragons, particularly shown rampant (forepaws raised, facing dexter) and usually gules or vert are the most common Tzimisce charges, rarely used by any other clan. Other Tzimisce charges include hills or mountains, castles and towers, and disembodied hands or mouths.

- **Ventruue:** The Ventruue have adopted heraldry wholeheartedly as part of their heritage. Their charges include lions, eagles and other noble beasts, crowns, fleur-de-lis, swords and spears.

Abatements and Augmentations

Princes and lords have some authority over the heraldry of their vassals and followers. In addition to the right to approve and award blazons, Cainite rulers can also modify their followers' coats of arms as either reward or punishment for their deeds. These modifications to a blazon are known as *abatements* (for punishments) and *augmentations* (for rewards). In essence, the ruler adds a particular element to the coat of arms, or perhaps even changes it significantly, to show what the bearer has done.

In the case of abatements, the modification serves as a warning and a sign of public shame for the bearer. Nobles consider it a fit punishment when they do not wish to destroy or brand the offender, usually because capable vassals are valuable and difficult to come by. Abatements tell others at a glance of a Cainite convicted by his liege lord of anything from lying to being prone to frenzy, siring without permission, cowardice, oath-breaking or even diablerie. Removing or attempting to conceal an abatement is a serious crime (as well as extremely dishonorable) and can result in Final Death if the Cainite's liege hears of it.

Augmentations, on the other hand, are signs of great pride for Cainite vassals, showing their good and loyal service to their liege. A ruler has free rein to add any sort of augmentation to a follower's arms. The most common are special charges that proclaim bravery, valor and loyal service. In some cases a smaller version of the liege's own arms are added as a charge on the vassal's arms, demonstrating the liege lord's trust and respect. In the most extreme cases, the liege may order a complete redesign of the vassal's coat of

HERALDRY IN PLAY

In the **Dark Ages: Vampire** rules, heraldry falls under Etiquette. Knowledge of court and courtly manners includes how to read and recognize blazons and coats of arms, both mortal and Cainite. Storytellers may request an Intelligence + Etiquette roll to recognize a particular coat of arms or to understand its symbolism or meaning. The “language” of heraldry can help provide subtle clues and foreshadowing to the players when they read the blazons of their allies and enemies alike. The moment when a stranger reveals his shield may be a revelation for characters versed in heraldry.

Heraldry is also a great opportunity to create something unique for your High Clan character (or even a Cainite knight or follower of the Road of Kings from the Low Clans). Start with the guidelines and advice given here and create a coat of arms for your character. The artistically talented may be able to draw or paint it, while others may be able to create it using computer graphics or simply write it out as a blazon. It gives your character an immediately recognizable element, both for your fellow players and for other characters within the chronicle.

Finally, the Storyteller can use heraldry to good effect within the chronicle. Rulers can award blazons and augmentations to existing arms to characters in exchange for their loyal service. Alternately, a liege lord may add an abatement to a character’s coat of arms as a punishment, creating tension between character and liege. Consider creating unique blazons for important rulers and nobles in the chronicle for characters to recognize, even drawing them out for players to see. Finally, disputes over heraldry are known to happen, such as when two nobles claim the “right” to a particular blazon. Such a conflict can easily involve the characters, particularly if it’s one of *their* coats of arms in dispute!

arms, incorporating various elements approved by the ruler. This is also the case when a ruler grants a coat of arms to a vassal (usually along with a title and possibly a domain) in exchange for outstanding service.

Cadency and Marshalling

In mortal heraldry, the members of the same family use the same coat of arms, marked with symbols

known as cadency marks that show the bearer’s place in the line of succession (first son, second son and so forth). Since Cainites have no true children, and few have any need of successors, this practice is not used in Cainite heraldry, except to establish bloodlines and the relationship between childe and sire.

A childe may bear her sire’s arms with a cadency mark to indicate her status in her sire’s view. This is typically a matter of age, but not always, and a sire can choose to award the primacy in cadence to whichever childe he favors, and can even revoke it and award it to a more favored childe later on. This has led to infighting among childer for the outward sign of their sire’s favor, and sires have been known to use cadency as a goad to manipulate their childer.

Generally upon achieving sufficient rank as a knight or noble, a Cainite adopts her own coat of arms, which may be passed on to her childer. The new blazon may incorporate charges or other elements from the sire’s (with the sire’s permission, of course). It is considered a sign of respect to one’s sire to adopt at least one element of the sire’s coat of arms as one’s own, but cases exist of Cainites indicating a break with their sire by taking an entirely new coat of arms.

Marshalling is the practice of combining two coats of arms together into one, usually to represent the union of two families through marriage (and generally only when the woman’s family is of noble or royal blood). This may be as simple as partitioning a field and placing the individual arms of each of the couple to either side or as complex as creating an entirely new blazon that incorporates elements from both crests.

Among Cainites marshalling is rare, occurring only in cases of marriage (see *Courtship and Marriage*) and then only when both partners have blazons of their own. It is also known for a noble who takes a particular domain to incorporate a charge or element from the arms of the previous ruler into his own coat of arms, to show his new mastery of that domain.

Heraldry Example: The Learned Lion

Tom wants to create a blazon for his Brujah character Charles, known among some as “the Lion of Loire” for his bravery and his regal appearance. He starts with the idea that a lion is a part of Charles’ coat of arms.

First, Tom chooses the tinctures for the field. He decides that the majority of the shield is gules, representing the red of blood as well as the passion for which the Brujah are so well known. The chief of the

shield is argent, a white band representing purity of intention. On the gules portion of the shield, Tom places a golden lion (or) in rampant pose, standing on its hind legs, paws raised, facing the sinister or left side of the shield. This represents Charles' fierce reputation as a warrior and his well known sobriquet. In the argent band, he places a sable chain stretching from side to side, with an open book centered above the lion's head. This demonstrates that Charles' intellect, scholarship and love of learning temper his lionlike qualities. He is a peaceful man but willing to fight fiercely for what he values.

Looking over the design, Tom decides to add a pair of joined rings or at the nombril point of the shield, below the lion's feet. This common symbol of Clan Brujah shows his devotion to the clan and how it lies at the root of his identity. Charles clearly feels supported by his clan and honors his heritage.

The coat of arms completed, Tom writes it out as a blazon: *gules, a lion rampant or, two rings or nombril, a chief bar argent, a chain sable, an open book honour...* So recorded, the blazon of the Lion of Loire heralds Charles as a presence to be reckoned with in Cainite society.




The Court

The court serves as more than just a political mechanism in the Dark Ages. For the noble, it is the center of entertainment and secular festivities. For High Clan Cainites, it provides a place to compete to earn status in ways that aren't entirely political. Instead, they rely on their particular talents to prove their honor and superiority over others.

Aside from allowing a Cainite to present herself in an honorable way that earns the respect of elders and rules alike, etiquette also serves to maintain the state of peace necessary to hold courtly events. This is especially important in the presence of Brujah, as even a small slight can trigger their frenzy. Though Cainites rarely speak of it, such an incident poses a threat to the existence of all present. Therefore, most find it in their best interests to enforce mannerly behavior, and even the most minor offense can result in severe punishment.

Courtly Conduct

Most princes hold court in their private domains. Many Cainites treat these establishments in the same way a pious Christian treats a church. Most courts prohibit vandalism, and acts of violence against another guest, unless done in sport, are acts of violence against the prince herself. Feeding also has a code of conduct. Though vampires don't need to worry



about dessert forks or slouching at the table, they nevertheless adhere to appropriate feeding habits. Because frenzy is a serious threat to all present, feeding in public is reserved for feasts when the host provides an ample supply of blood. A vampire may also drink blood if he is taking a blood oath before the court. Otherwise, feeding at court is prohibited, and Cainites are expected to feed in private.

A well mannered Cainite presents himself with pride and dignity. He dresses in clean clothing that is as fashionable as he can afford. He speaks polite words with gentle grace and clear articulation. He even walks with poise to demonstrate his physical potential... Yet a vampire must be careful not to present himself with too much pomp and grandeur before his superiors. Therefore, the proper Cainite also maintains a humble demeanor. He speaks to his superiors only when they address him first. Though some Cainites feel they sacrifice their status when adhering to these manners, the wise know that their superiors respect them only when they habitually prove their dignity.

The Prince

Those fit to attend court hold more status than the common serf or merchant. They also know how to respect their superiors, and their status only further obligates them to display utmost respect to their superiors.

The prince, of course, is the primary recipient of this respect. Her word is final and she has the power to punish any offender at whim. Some suffer grave punishments for simply talking out of turn, and others may meet Final Death if they fail to request hospitality from a prince of extreme authority. Cainites of the High Clans therefore take the word of their prince seriously when residing in her domain, and they often go to great lengths to uphold the customs of her court. A prince expects all within her domain to uphold the Traditions (or her interpretations thereof), and any visiting Cainite must swear to do so before she grants him hospitality. Ideally, this means all Cainites take such an oath, as all Cainites are to inform the prince of their presence as soon as they arrive in her domain. Furthermore, the prince expects all Cainites to address her appropriately, using titles such as “my prince,” “your highness” or even “your majesty” if the prince is a true monarch. Some princes may take this a step further, expecting those within their domains to greet them in more specific manners... A prince on the Road of Heaven, for example, might expect others to address her with “your grace” or “your eminence,” and a chivalrous prince could require his people to bow or kiss his hand when first greeting him. Leaving the

room in the prince’s presence or turning ones’ back to her is always considered rude.

The Council

Members of the prince’s court, such as the seneschal, sheriff and scourge, also expect Cainites of lesser station to pay them the respect their title deserves. Though official members of the court are not subject to the same stringent rules as the prince, most vampires typically address them with appropriate titles (“Seneschal Montgomery” or “Sheriff Anton,” for example), and they may take other courtesies such as bowing or kissing their hands as well.

The Elders

The tradition of respecting one’s elder is common in mortal societies because it ensures people protection as they become defenseless due to their old age and the illness that comes with it. In Cainite society, however, age equals power, and a prince’s rank holds little clout if an elder from behind the throne can kill him with little effort. A wise prince therefore respects his elders and realizes that he would not be prince if they disapproved of him. Other Cainites of lesser ranks also feel the weight of their elders’ scrutiny, and one of the only ways younger Cainites earn status is by cooperating with the vampires directly above them. Often the opinion of a neonate nobleman falls on deaf ears if it is not voiced by an ancilla ally, and she must in turn earn the respect of an elder if she wishes to be successful in aiding her neonate pawn. Therefore, neonates answer to ancillae, and ancillae to elders, and younger vampires pay respect to their elders if they hope one night to hold the esteem their superiors now have.

Sport

Vampires are naturally competitive creatures, and even in times of peace they continually struggle against one another in any way that earns them even the smallest amount of prestige. Sport and gaming are two ways for vampires to do exactly that, and most Cainites participate if they believe they can display their talents and earn respect over their opponents. Though one such victory cannot offer an individual Cainite much in the way of prestige, he might earn fame and respect if his successes are plentiful. In this way, he can draw the attention of esteemed Cainites who might find his skills useful to the court. Though such occurrences are rare, a champion of swordplay can become a scourge, and many princes find their keepers at debates. In this way, game and sport can become

integral tools for ambitious Cainites to climb the social ladder.

Only the most confident Cainites compete at such events, as they risk losing some of their social integrity (at least) if they suffer defeat. Though Cainites earn cowardly reputations by avoiding such competition, many of higher status do not bother to compete. Though most Cainites of established status have the power to hold their positions, they do not want to embarrass themselves at some silly competition before the rest of the court. To skirt this dilemma, many ranking officials bribe ambitious vampires with power or status to fake defeat. Any shrewd prince would be wise to do the same if he wanted to convince his court that he is worthy to rule the domain.

While court offers recreation, princes use courtly diplomacy to settle disputes, enforce their positions and levy punishments. Yet, when diplomacy fails, violence threatens to serve as a negotiator, and Final Death is usually the result. Even though vampires are petty and ambitious, some disputes are too trivial to chance Final Death over, nor are they important enough to disrupt the peace of the court. As long as the dispute exists, however, the vampires in question rarely surrender their positions. Sport or game might work as an alternative to solving such disputes, and vampires do not hesitate to risk the lives of their ghouls if they feel the dispute is too minor to risk their own social integrity.

Games of War

Cainite sportsmen do not worry about wounds or bloodshed because they can easily mend their undead flesh. Cainite sports are therefore lengthy and brutal. In addition to mortal sports such as jousting and wrestling, Cainites create sports that cater to their needs and tastes. Most Cainite jousting tournaments require that the sportsmen have enough mastery over Auspex or Protean to see well enough to function, although a Cainite without such skills may request that his opponent wear white. This request immediately marks the one who makes it as being in over his head, however, to say nothing of the fact that Cainite sportsmen prefer that their blazons be visible during games, not covered with a white tunic.

Some Cainites duel with their Disciplines. These events are as unique as the Disciplines used in them. The object of a Discipline duel varies; a duel in Presence might require both Cainites to coerce a young mortal girl to their side; whichever she chooses wins the duel (and typically uses her to slake his thirst). Most Discipline duels use Potence, Celerity, Fortitude (typically with-

standing fire) or Presence, as these Disciplines are common enough that both combatants can reasonably be expected to be able to participate. More esoteric Disciplines such as Obtenebration, Vicissitude and Mortis also work well for these duels, but only when both parties belong to the appropriate clan.

Dominate duels typically involve both parties dominating a mortal into a given task, with the winner being the one whose mortal “puppet” performs the task with the least amount of hesitation. Rarely, though, two Cainites will lock eyes and attempt to force each other to perform some mundane task, such as walk across the room or close a door. Only very brave vampires agree to this sort of duel, because masters of Dominate can wreak lasting damage on their opponents even if they “lose” the contest.

On rare occasions, vampires also observe sports that either tame or fire their Beasts. Mortals are usually the acting contestants of these sports. Whether their participation is willing or by force, most of these sportsmen die in competition.

Dueling in the Dark

Duels are similar to fencing matches, but they are held on nights when no moon shines or the moon is clouded over. Sportsmen therefore have only sound to guide them. Though these duels commonly have an audience, the spectators must remain absolutely silent so the competitors can hear their opponents’ movement. As a result, most Cainites can only observe the sport aurally. The competitors fight with swords, and they duel in a large arena enclosed with ropes and posts. Sometimes obstacles such as large barrels, wooden structures, boulders or even trees stand within the roped fence. The goal is to subdue the opponent, and Cainites must rely on their senses and grace to succeed. Use of Disciplines to compensate for the darkness is generally permitted, and as a result Gangrel make common champions of these duels.

Hunting the Hunter

In the Dark Medieval, hunting is a common activity for noble mortals, and many lords have vast landscapes set aside for hunting alone. Yet trespassing on another nobleman’s property to hunt is a punishable offense, and many lords kill peasants they catch poaching. For this reason, noble Cainites have no qualms hunting men brave enough to hunt at night. This sport is similar to normal hunting, only the vampire avoids killing the mortal hunter before capturing him. Because the Cainite is also hunting on land belonging to mortal noblemen, the Cainite is careful to figure out who his captive is before killing him. He physically restrains his captive and interrogates him (such hunts are therefore serious tests of



SHADOW DUELS

We stood facing one another in an elaborate garden with only the moonlight to guide our sight. We both wore white, but our only weapons were the shadows we conjured. There were, of course, rules as in any tournament — we could not directly touch each other, nor could we direct our shadows to entangle or otherwise immobilize each other. Our goal was to open a door at the far wall of a torchlit courtyard, which would only open from the inside if you could solve a puzzle made from iron. Once we entered the courtyard, we would be trapped until one of us solved the puzzle.

I looked to the moon, which shone unchallenged in a cloudless sky. I then glanced to Makhloth. Menacing shadows circled her face. In the distance, we heard the courtyard doors slam shut. That was our cue to begin.

I walked backwards as I kept my eye on Makhloth. My shadow, stretching before me, lengthened at her command and enveloped her. It didn't matter — I called the shadows around me to cover my form, and both of us, now invisible, moved deeper into the courtyard. I kept quiet and soon saw the moonlight reflect off a marble fountain. Makhloth stood in its waters looking for me. I dashed to the shadows cast by a statue near a large tree. I looked up and allowed my eyes to roam the looming branches of the tree and then the palace walls. I ducked into the shadow of the statue and emerged in the branches of the tree, looking down at Makhloth. She searched for me at the edge of her shadowy wall. I wondered why she didn't run for the entrance. She must have thought such a solution too easy in my absence. She was right.

I already saw the courtyard from my height. It was brilliantly lit, with at least twenty torches on each wall. I smirked and called two tentacles from the shadows. One swatted at Makhloth from be-

hind while the other tugged at playfully at her robe. Both were sufficient to distract her long enough for me to look up, and then to the ledge of the palace wall. I dropped myself into the Abyss once more, savoring the icy caress slipping under my robes and cooling my skin.

When I emerged, I stood on the wall of the courtyard. The wall's ledge was too narrow for me to run along. Makhloth would enter any minute. I knew once she saw me, I wouldn't stand a chance — while she did not have my capacity for walking the Abyss, her skill in using shadows as weapons far surpassed mine. I enveloped the entrance in darkness as soon as I saw Makhloth's white form reach its frame.

All she had to do was run in the direction of the door. She didn't run, and I watched her hands reach from the shadow to feel out the perimeter of the walls. I allowed the courtyard to become a pool of shadow, and I carefully walked toward the door, willing my footsteps to fall soundlessly into the Abyss. When I stood above the door, I broke concentration to look over the right side of the wall. When I looked back to the left, I saw Makhloth release a set of tentacles toward the door... I smiled as I created another tentacle to my right and slid down its shaft. I had escaped the courtyard, and I stood facing the door as I heard Makhloth tinkering with the iron puzzle on the other side. I pressed the lever and pulled the doors toward me. I heard her shout in victory, but she fell silent as she stared back at me, her eyes wide in disbelief. Behind me, I heard the congratulations of the prince and the other Cainites. Someone ordered a ghoul to bring forth Micah — Makhloth's great-granddaughter and my soon-to-be-Embraced child. Makhloth's shadow fled the courtyard in shame, and she could do nothing but stand there as bloody tears stained her white robes.

most vampires' command over the Beast). On most occasions, the captive is usually an expendable poacher or a commoner, and his captor devours him immediately. In other cases, the Cainite may have caught another trespassing vampire who has not sought sovereignty of the prince or permission to hunt his land. In that case, the captive vampire is either killed or diablerized upon permission of the prince. If the vampire finds the captive valuable, he might let the captive go if the captive can repay him in one way or another (presuming that neither party falls to frenzy during the course of the hunt and capture, of course).

Racing

In this game, groups of captive mortals race one another as vampires bet boons, goods or money on the winner. This is similar to races where mortals place their dogs, horses or women to race against one another. Unlike mortal races where the competitor chases something he desires and ends the race by beating the other contestants to a finish line, however, most of these contestants run out of fear. In some courts, archers might strike at a mortal who stops running, and in others, trained wolves, flesh-crafted monsters or other vampires

wait to feed on them. Furthermore, at some races the mortals might not even know that they are performing a spectacle.

Sometimes the race begins when a vampire coaxes a large group of civilians to follow him to his courtyard, garden, arena or maze. Once the party arrives, beasts or other vampires ambush them. The mortals run as they try to escape the beasts, and the vampires watch from elevated balconies or towers. Other times, vampires might invite mortals to compete in a race, but the mortals do not know what kind of racetrack awaits them until they arrive. Commonly these mortals run around an arena as archers or trained beasts drive them. The race ends when all but one mortal collapses, either from fear or fatigue. Those who do not run themselves to death later serve as part of the next feast. Some Cainites reward their victors by turning them into servant ghouls, and others simply have their victors join their competitors in the feast to come.

Ghoul Driving

Ghoul driving begins when two vampires turn two expendable mortal servants of approximately the same skill and strength into ghouls. Once the ghouls learn how to strengthen themselves through their blood, their masters place them before each other and compel them (with Disciplines, if necessary) to fight to the death. The event is not elaborate — it usually occurs in a simple field or an agricultural arena lit by torches. Sometimes ghouling is just spectacle, but more often Cainites use it to settle a dispute they share with one another. Though the Cainites themselves are not fighting, they understand that their own blood determines the strength of the ghouls they make. The ghouling's victory will decide which Cainite wins the dispute. If the ghouling loses, it says very little about the vampire's own virtue, and the vampire doesn't risk his integrity.

Vampires Among the Academy

Elders who remember Rome and Greece now act as patrons to growing universities, and those who remember Carthage see this intellectual awakening as an opportunity to rebuild their city in Europe. Even younger Cainites find value in the growing scholarship. As they strive to enrich their ability to rule, noble vampires often study the speeches of Roman orators. Others discover new political theories and later use them to inspire reform and revolt. Cainites who find value in the words of Caine also seek answers in religious doctrine and fragmented texts.

Cainite courts also use literacy as a tool to strengthen their power. Cainites have begun to com-

municate with the written word, and they value mortals who can read and translate messages arriving from other courts. These mortals often become ghouls or childer, and they serve the courts by inscribing doctrines or by spying on other courts and reading their written plans.

The Educated Childer

Though vampires among the High Clans tend to carry out their existence in the same way as noblemen and aristocrats, few limit the Embrace to mortals of such status. Many neonates are therefore illiterate. Furthermore, whether one can read or not, she still needs to learn the ways of Cainite existence. For many, this includes learning the expectations and traditions of the Cainite court as a whole as well as clan traditions and history. It is also important to know the tricks of the trade, so to speak — how to hunt, use Disciplines and survive. Though not all sires teach their childer how to read, literate individuals can serve a court in many ways.

Liberal Pursuits

As literacy and scholarship increase, some ambitious Cainites study in hopes that their knowledge and intellect will earn them status over weaker-minded vampires. Yet some Cainites seek knowledge for the sake of knowledge alone, and they often earn prestige without effort as many begin to come to them for information and tutelage. Regardless, both parties often organize or participate in scholarly events, which draw attention to them or their work.

The Assembly

Sometimes members of Clan Brujah organize an assembly to bring Cainite scholars to one place and present their treaties on science, math and philosophy. This event offers an opportunity for scholars to present new ideas and discuss old beliefs. The assembly is also a peaceful event, and its speakers use rhetoric to prevent unwanted attention to new and radical ideas. Many Brujah revived this custom believing it would permanently establish young universities.

The assembly is another chance for Cainites to compete with each other. Some intelligent vampires even manage to impress their princes in the process. Though Brujah individuals tend to organize this event, Cappadocians and Tzimisce often present their discoveries on death and physiology. Lasombra arrive to develop and enumerate their political ideals, and even some Ventrue use this opportunity to outwit Brujah colleagues.

Less humane Cainites also host versions of the assembly called symposia. In ancient times, the symposium began as an intellectual gathering and usually ended in drunken debauchery. Similarly, a Cainite

symposium consists not only of vampires but mortals (though these mortals aren't typically told the true nature of the event). The ones who do not agree with the host's word are usually the ones who provide the meal later. Some tyrannical princes hold symposia to weed out zealous minds that pose threats to the community. In this event, these princes do not discriminate between mortal and vampire when they decide the fate of a budding idealist.

The Debate

Some Cainites hold debates to display their rhetorical skills. The chief establishers of these competitions are members of Clan Ventrue who value oration and political rhetoric. Though many Cainites possess the intelligence to succeed in these competitions, only high-ranking advisors, seneschals and princes receive the invitations. The debate was originally established as a diplomatic solution to war between courts. Yet now many princes hold debates to present their political skill orally before foreign leaders, and many others persuade such leaders to fight in their favor if war breaks out. Usually the debate is a peaceful event, but it can also act as a trap, and a wise prince will always question an invitation from an unallied court.

Bards, Poets and Minstrels

Given that the vast majority of the populace is illiterate (and books are rare as hen's teeth anyway), song and storytelling are the favored methods of entertainment. Some princes call upon poets to inscribe or glorify the legacies of their reigns. In addition, many troubadours travel from court to court and attempt to earn a prince's patronage through their art. Many of Clan Toreador grasp this opportunity to expose their talents and advocate the arts. A number of princes even appoint Artisans to establish artistic development within courts. Though some princes find art obstructive to their power, other princes use art to bring fame and virtue to their domains. Some courts across France continue to earn respect and protection from their neighbors who value their artistic contributions. Artisans from these cities often travel to other domains and offer their talents in exchange for diplomatic or military protection. Several princes accept this trade and they in turn ask these artisans to paint, perform and write. Although skilled artists are certainly valued for their talents, they do not enjoy any special status — a master poet is a tradesman, just as a master carpenter is.

Natural Science

As undead creatures, Cainites often become fascinated with the dying bodies of their victims and with death in general. Some Cainite scholars dissect and study their drained victims because they feel the moral



pressure to prevent waste. Some Cappadocians study corpses in many stages of death, and they may gather with each other to discuss their discoveries.

Others, however, are not as fascinated with death as they are with the process of dying. Such vampires study living humans, and most of their subjects die painfully slow deaths. Many Tzimisce even perform heinous experiments with their use of Vicissitude. These scientists study muscle tissues, organs, skeletal systems and circulatory systems. It is this knowledge that sometimes allows them to create their armies of flesh-crafted monsters.

The Calendar and Cosmos

Although most noble Cainites recognize Christian holidays and adhere to the Julian calendar, they also pay attention to celestial movement. Because Cainites dwell under night skies, they pay attention to astronomy, the moon and the stars.

Comets

A comet hanging in the night sky is an ill omen for mortals and Cainites alike. Comets even earned the nickname “bloody stars,” because they often appeared red to their observers. Some Cainites, however, are familiar with the prophecies in the Book of Nod, and one such prophecy marks the red star as the beginning of Gehenna. Therefore, a comet rising in the night sky shakes many courts into chaos whether they believe the prophecies or not. If a prince is skeptical of the prophecy, he may use this opportunity to exploit the fear of others around him by promising them safety if they obey him. With this kind of power over other Cainites, a prince can send them to battle other courts or hunt unwanted members of the community.

If a Cainite actually believes in these prophecies, he could threaten the court’s stability as he attempts to save himself and other Cainites. Such Cainites may form followings or cults, and a prince who perceives these cults as a threat to his power does what he can to demolish them. Finally, if Cainites lack faith in their leaders, they might use this time to inspire revolt against the throne. All of these situations provoke bloodshed, and this chaos presents itself to vampires and mortals alike. It is for this reason that both mortals and vampires see comets as omens of civil strife, bloodshed and loss.

Eclipses

Cainites believe either that eclipses are bad omens or good signs. Though Cainites must act only at night, they still need light to see. Since fire and moonlight serve as the only source of light at night, many Cainites revere the moon because it does not pose the same threat as fire. For these vampires, a lunar eclipse is a sign of loss, deprivation and destruction. For example, some Cainites fear that an eclipse is an omen of war, and others believe

that it might mark a future plague, which would deprive them of healthy blood. A few suspicious Cainites also mark the eclipse as a sign of drastic change such as a neonate or Low Clan revolt. These Cainites are especially wary of an eclipse occurring at the same time as a comet, and they believe such an event could only mark Gehenna’s approach.

The Lasombra have a different take on eclipses. Many Magisters see eclipses as a chance to celebrate shadows, and some claim that an eclipse marks the promise that they will reign over all Cainites.

Carnival

Carnival is not so much a single event as it is a season of festivities and customs. It begins at Christmas and ends on Ash Wednesday. For mortals, Carnival brings a sense of abundance, warmth and security to the darkest and coldest days of the year. For vampires, these long winter nights only amplify their bloodlust because poor weather usually keeps their enemies away. Vampires are inclined to indulge as long as fresh blood is available. Winter is often a threat to Cainite food supply, however, as mortals stay at home to avoid the chill unless they have a strong reason to venture outdoors. Therefore, Carnival is important for most vampire courts, and many Cainites promote festive events, if only to bring throngs of mortals from their homes after sunset.

Carnival is often a time of antithesis when the wise would play the part of fools, and the peasant would assume the role of noble men. Games, contests, dances and small skits called farces adopt this reversal as part of their comedy. The Church even tolerates harmless diversions from religious morality as the people assume the stereotypes of pagans, Muslims and Jews. Vampires move about this environment, and they might even stage their own farces where they maintain their own roles. Masquerade is integral to the idea of Carnival, and Cainite princes commonly arrange or attend masquerade balls to find and seduce prey.

Despite the joyous events surrounding Carnival, mortals who are carried away often disappear. As Carnival earns acceptance, vampires bring danger to the festivities and disguise it as fun. Wine, pranks, burlesque processions, dance, illusions, magic, costumes, gluttony and music work to entrance mortals. Vampires therefore help fund these costly events. Many even perform themselves and openly use their supernatural powers to draw future victims to their acts. Other vampires may invite groups of select individuals to a feast and fail to mention the entree. On the rare occasion that Cainites serve food to mortals, the host taints the wine with blood to bring the mortals to his favor. Sometimes, Cainites even pick servants from this select group and complete the oath of blood with those individuals.

Cainites of the Low Clans also come out with the peasants and the street performers of Carnival. Though many of the first cursed might feel threatened by their Low Clan cousins crashing their party, the jovial mood of illusion and folly allows noble Cainites a chance to spy on their inferior cousins. An ambitious vampire from the fallen may even attempt to prove his abilities in hopes that a High Clan Cainite might discover his value and grant him status. Yet Low Clans must be careful that they do not attract unwanted attention, as they do not know if their fellow outcast is nobility in disguise.

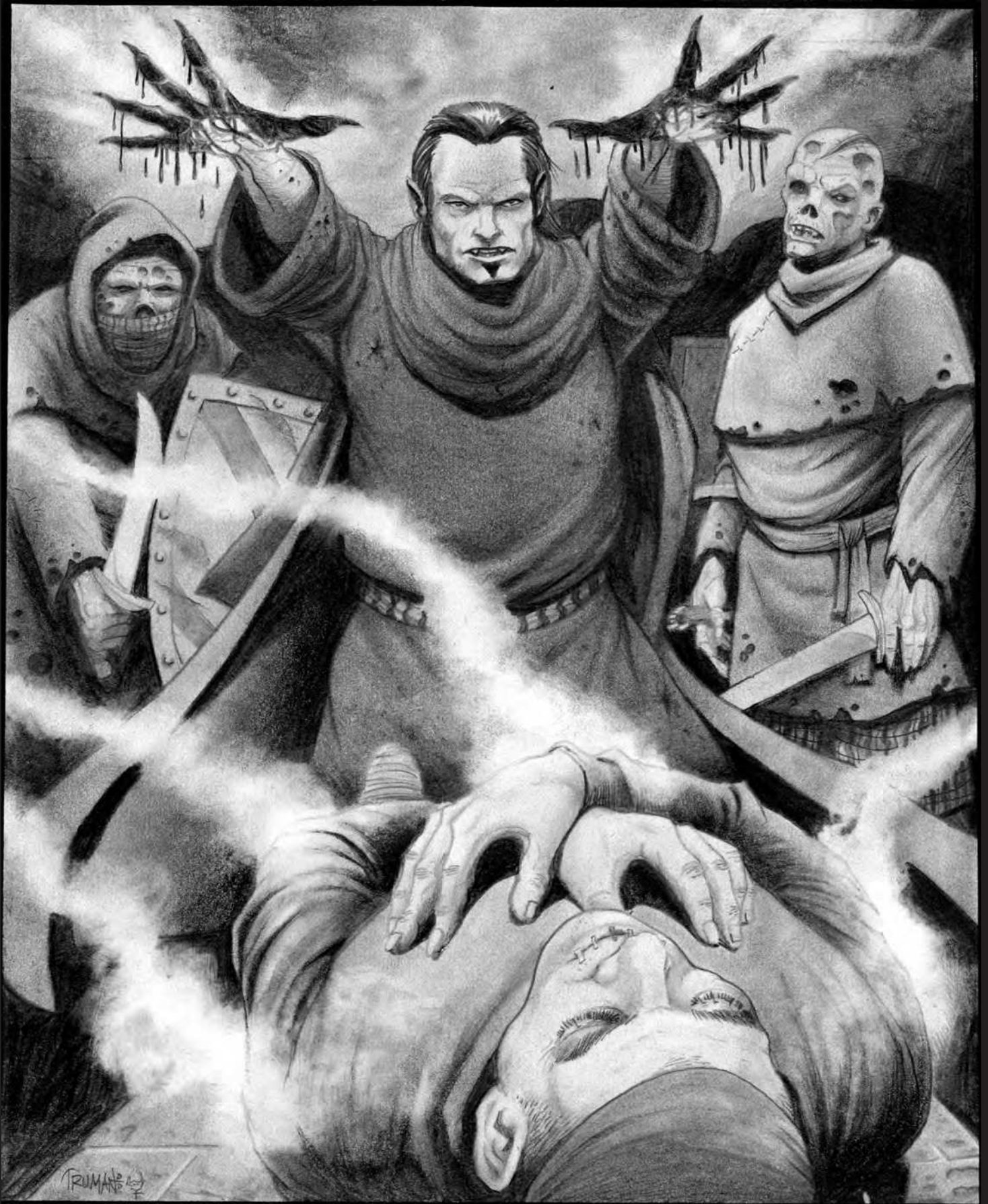
Carnival is also a time to consider select individuals for the Embrace, because it gives mortals a chance to demonstrate their natural talents in public. Though most vampires usually watch their prospective childer for some time, Carnival is sometimes a final test. A Toreador can see her prospects perform, and a Ventrué orator may stumble upon a charismatic merchant luring bystanders to his booth. Tzimisce Cainites might discover a fiendish streak in a poor craftsman, and a Cappadocian may see promise in a scholar who is fascinated by the morbid


symbolism in much of the Carnival. A Zealot would not ignore an unrivaled tournament champion, and a Magister might deem her student worthy of immortality when he constantly turns down the temptations of Carnival altogether. In many courts, these prospects become ghouls or Cainites before the final three nights of Carnival, and it is certainly convenient to hold a ghouling if two vampires seek the same mortal.

Though vampires are abnormally cruel throughout this season, they usually reserve the majority of their brutality for the last few weeks, as mortals would stop celebrating if loved ones disappeared. At the closing of Carnival, many courts (especially those ruled by Sinners) dedicate the last three nights to the Beast. As mortals burn effigies in the streets to symbolize death to the evils of Carnival and prepare for Ash Wednesday, vampires give way to their Beasts and unleash all kinds of torment upon the captives they've accumulated during the festivities. They might torture mortals and watch races, gladiatorial combat and ghouling. More temperate vampires outwardly justify these crimes by claiming that they must punish indulgent souls, and some Faithful and Prodigal Cainites even protest these atrocities, but it's a rare vampire who doesn't let her Beast slip its leash during at least one Carnival.



Jim Di Bartolo





CHAPTER TWO: PLAYING THE HIGH CLANS

Nobly to live, or else nobly to die,
Befits proud birth.
— Sophocles, *Ajax*

The High Clans sit atop the Cainite social order, looking down upon their poor Low Clan brethren with a mixture of pity, disdain and even outright contempt. As the “first cursed,” it is their right and privilege to exert dominance and maintain the traditions of the night, for without the division between High and Low, king and peasant, ruler and servant, the world would be consumed by the fires of anarchy.

Since the first nights, some have been called to lead and some destined to follow. The Long Night found this worldview becoming entrenched in the minds of not only Cainites but also the children of Seth. The feudal system of lords and vassals solidified the powers of the nobility and firmly established the rights and freedoms of an ever-growing peasantry, while the expanding influence of the Church created a new distinction between the learned clergy and the ignorant laity. It was a time when the nobility lived high off the toil of the masses and when one’s station in life was determined long before birth.



The start of the War of Princes struck a blow to the foundations of power and continues to chip away at the solidity of High Clan control. While younger members of the High Clans seek to overthrow their elders and princes seek to undermine their rivals, the Low Clans begin to see chinks in the armor of the social order. As the High Clans war against one another, dominions and havens are thrown into flux, creating opportunities for the fallen to seize power.

Almost as disruptive as the open military conflict, the rise of the merchant has made many nobles anxious, as cunning members of the gentry have gained enough economic strength to alter the course of wars or courtly intrigues. While some members of the High Clans have begun to exploit this path to power, it has provided yet another inroad for Low Clan Cainites to challenge the authority of their betters.

Changes come increasingly quickly to Europe, as kingdoms rise and fall and trade routes connect distant lands. The political climate shifts, and even the most secure princes understand that the winds can turn against them at any moment.

A Noble Birthright

Almost invariably, those Embraced into the High Clans simply move from one position of power or status to another. While some clans such as the Ventrue and Lasombra tend to seek out those involved in the affairs of church or state, others such as the Brujah and Cappadocians tend toward learned thinkers and philosophers. Whatever the traits sought, rarely are servants or peasants Embraced into the ranks of the first cursed.

Exceptions to this rule do of course exist. Some individuals are chosen for their promise or potential rather than their official status. Noble ambition and a keen mind often draw the attention of the Cainites, for given the eternity of undeath and the close attentions of his sire, even a bright stable boy can be molded into a savvy player in courtly affairs. Rare exceptions aside, those Embraced into the High Clans come from some elevated station or another, even if it is nothing more than the fourth son of a disgraced baron. They led lives of privilege and have formed certain opinions of the world as a result. Many have never wanted for food or shelter a day in their lives, and some are so far removed from those lower on the social scale that they have no grasp of the cost of a sack of grain or side of meat.

Before thinking about how the first cursed view the fallen, it is important to understand how they viewed those of lesser station while their hearts still beat in their chests. After the spark of life is gone, Cainites become far more static and set in their ways,

falling back on worldviews and opinions they formed during the years before their Embraces.

While High Clan Cainites may have had different origins, one commonality is that each had advantages over others lower on the social scale. While a king feels superior to all in his kingdom, even his most lowly servant looks down on the beggars and vagrants in the street. While that servant may not be seen as much by the nobility whom he serves, he nevertheless has a roof over his head, clothes on his back and food on his plate. His master has entrusted him with a measure of responsibility, and one day he might be placed above other servants or given charge of the kitchens or pantry.


LIE DOWN WITH DOGS, WAKE UP WITH FLEAS

Some characters may not care about the social hierarchy and may feel that they should be able to associate with whomever they please. While myths abound concerning benevolent kings and princes who walked freely among their people, disregarding the strictures of the feudal hierarchy, they are almost without exception just that — myths.

If a king wishes to speak with a merchant or commoner, that individual is summoned to appear before the king by a lesser functionary and is expected to pay the king all proper deference. Some characters simply do not abide by these conventions and feel it is their prerogative to speak with those of lower station at any time in any place. While this may not seem so out of place from a modern perspective, such meetings tend to draw a great deal of attention during Dark Medieval nights.

Nobles jealously cling to their titles and enforce the social structure that grants their rule. If a character of high station should stoop to conversing with the base peasantry, it would mar the image of superiority that the nobility so eagerly tries to protect. Such a character might find herself excluded from noble circles or scandalized behind her back, and relationships with barons and kings might become strained as word gets around that the character prefers the company of commoners. In extreme cases, this disregard for station might strip a character of title entirely, ultimately placing her no higher than the peasants with whom she socializes.

While informal meetings between the nobility and those of lesser station are not unheard of, they are best kept discreet, lest the noble's reputation be irrevocably blemished.



To this servant, the masses in the street begging for food or peddling their wares are beneath him, scratching at their lice-infested clothes and scrabbling in the dust. While on an errand for his master, he would be no more likely to fraternize with beggars than he would be to attempt conversation with the lords at court. His place in the hierarchy is very important, for without the meager status conferred him by his master, he would be scratching at the same lice and scrabbling in the same dust. His self worth is based greatly on the notion that he is elevated above others. To linger among the “common” folk would jeopardize his station.

By the same token, princes and barons rarely commingle with the gentry, and wealthy merchants do not fraternize with menservants — at least not openly. The strict stratification of society is based heavily upon appearances. Private meetings between lords and merchants are common, however, as are more informal conversations between ladies and their handmaidens. Such interaction at formal affairs or in public would be cause for much gossip, with the member of higher station being lowered in the eyes of her peers and the member of the lower station becoming more respected among hers.

The Embrace adds a new layer of hierarchical structure, and most Cainites of the High Clans simply extend their prejudices and opinions of the peasantry to members of the Low Clans. If a knight looked with open disgust upon lepers and beggars in life, it is likely he will have the same feelings toward the Nosferatu once Embraced as a Ventrue. Likewise, if a merchant engaged in peaceful trade with tribes of barbarians and woodsmen, he may be more inclined to look more favorably upon the Gangrel if Embraced by the Lasombra.

Nevertheless, even a firm understanding of a character’s background does not necessarily dictate exactly how he will react to another character or situation. You shouldn’t assume that because your character is of noble blood that he has to look down upon servants as having no worth; nor should you assume that since your character is a lady that she should automatically have contempt for beggars and thieves. While these sorts of interclass relationships may not weigh heavily on your mind during character creation, it might be a good idea to ask yourself how a character handled the status and station of life before the Embrace. Was the knight aware of his elevated station, or did he simply take it for granted? Was the lady a kind benefactor to those less fortunate, or a harsh mistress?

The answers to questions like these help round out a character beyond mere dots on a page and allow

more appropriate interactions with other characters during game play — especially when it comes to interaction with members of the various clans. Of course, the information provided here is only a guideline around which you can build a character, meant to raise issues you might otherwise neglect.

Attitudes of the High Clans

As the War of Princes rages, previously held beliefs in the unassailability of the social order have come under attack. Constantinople has fallen, Alexander has been driven from Paris by his child Geoffrey, and the Usurpers gain firmer footing with each passing night. The assumed power that the High Clans have enjoyed over the past several centuries can no longer be taken for granted, and the attitudes of several clans have shifted in response.

The stasis of the Long Night has ended, and the Cainites have been thrust headlong into ongoing conflict not seen since the nights of Rome and Carthage. The collapse of Constantinople and the death of Michael in the Bitter Crusade sent shockwaves of doubt through the Cainite community. If a Methuselah of such power and influence could be toppled in the very heart of his domain, what hope did princes of lesser domains have in avoiding similar fates? As anxiety grew, so did ambition. While it was possible for princes to lose everything, it was also possible to topple their rivals and greatly expand their domains.

MERCHANT KINGS AND SILKEN ROADS

Another threat to the delicate balance of power among the noble princes is the growing power of wealth and the rise in popularity of the Path of the Merchant. Most kings and other nobles concern themselves little with ledgers and finances, allowing their seneschals and stewards to handle that aspect of their rules. Armies are ineffective without sufficient food and equipment, however, and more frequent military conflict has steadily increased the costs for such supplies.

This being the case, he who controls the purse strings often controls the fates of kings and princes, and ambitious merchants and trade organizations have capitalized on this new development. While those of noble blood still look down on this burgeoning group of wealthy merchants and gentry, it has become more and more difficult to deny their steadily increasing presence.

More information on the Path of the Merchant can be found in **Road of Kings**.

The High Clans have begun a complex game of chess, subtly maneuvering their pawns and bishops in an attempt to remove the opposing king from the board entirely. Pawns have become just as dangerous as knights, however, and the Low Clans have seen avenues to power open before them. While the first cursed struggle among themselves, they have grown ever more anxious about attempted coups from the ranks of the fallen.

This section addresses the High Clans in terms of how their mortal opinions of those of lesser station color their relationships with the Low Clans. What follows are generalities only, as are all other blanket statements made in this book. Every Cainite has individual opinions and outlooks, and while the majority of a specific clan may feel a certain way, that prejudice in no way governs the actions of each of its members. More on the ambitions, objectives and general attitudes of typical High Clan Cainites can be found in the section entitled Goals and Ambitions (p. 106).

Brujah

While these warrior philosophers may be among the most tolerant of those beneath their station, the proud and passionate blood of the Brujah does not suffer fools lightly. Even slaves may be Embraced into the ranks of the Brujah if they show a depth of thought and intensity of spirit, for royal blood does not always mean strength of character. This “mixed” lineage lessens their status among others of the High Clans, who often dismiss their claims to nobility. The Zealots, for their part, care little for the subtle deceptions of the Lasombra and Toreador, preferring direct action to meaningless prattle.

This lust for battle engages the Zealots with members of the fallen more often than some of their High Clan brethren, fighting with and against them in any number of military clashes. They make uneasy allies with these low-blooded Cainites and often gain a measure of respect for those fallen who show valor and courage in the field. This camaraderie is not rare, but if two erstwhile friends find themselves on opposite sides of a battle, those feelings are secondary to the ultimate cause. Cainite relationships are hardly set in stone, and the Brujah justify many strange bedfellows in the quest to further their ideals. So while a Brujah may hate and despise a clan as a whole, she may find herself fighting their battles as a means to a greater end. Zealots seek to lead through example and conviction, and follow those who speak with passion and follow through on their words. Deserters and cheats, cowards and traitors — of any clan — receive only malice and spite from the Brujah.

Cappadocians

On the whole, the Graverobbers have little interest in the affairs of Cainite society or the struggles

between the clans. Often Embraced from priestly orders, as their Antediluvian founder allegedly was, the Cappadocians have little understanding of the base and ignorant masses. While the clan may see no distinction between a king and a beggar, as one corpse holds no status over another, a measure of inborn prejudice against the uneducated pervades the Cappadocian mindset. Many of the Low Clans, specifically the Gangrel and Nosferatu, spend their unlives among outcast groups that care little for the expansion of the mind — a concept entirely foreign to Cappadocian sensibilities. Similarly, the Ravnos’ tendencies toward lies and deceit run counter to the Graverobbers’ quest for ultimate truth.

The clan values the pursuit of knowledge above all else, which requires a modicum of peace and stability. One cannot plumb the depths of the abyss while begging for food on the street or rushing off to battle, so the Cappadocians tend to support those clans that offer the space and seclusion necessary to their studies — explaining their close connection to the High Clans and relative disdain in the fallen.

Lasombra

The Lasombra look upon all other clans with a mixture of pity and derision. Feeling as though their superior blood supercedes that of even the loftiest of the High Clans, the Magisters draw the jealousy and ire of those Cainites who deign to seek dominance over the night. The Lasombra tend to have firm opinions about class and status before their Embrace, which translates to dismissive treatment of the fallen at best. Those hailing from noble families often see themselves as the world’s hidden lords and rulers,

WHAT ABOUT THE GIOVANNI?

While most of the Cappadocians are content to spend eternity in quiet study and contemplation, the recently Embraced Giovanni necromancers are not as prone to inaction. As interested in wealth and power as they are in the secrets of death, the Giovanni family enjoys more active involvement with Cainites of other clans. Rather than surveying others with dispassionate eyes, this branch of the Cappadocian clan often seeks to engage and manipulate those fallen Cainites seeking to control the trade routes and merchant organizations. This quest for influence brings the Giovanni into frequent contact with Low Clans and other unsavory characters of the Dark Medieval world. For more on the Giovanni, see Chapter Three.



governing those beneath them at whim, while those Embraced from the clergy tend to establish themselves as shepherds to the ignorant flocks of Europe. Most meaningful interactions with Cainites of the Low Clans take place privately, in an attempt to preserve the Lasombra's highborn image. During such meetings, the Magisters often manage to hide their disgust beneath a thin veneer of civility, if only out of need for information or a favor. Though they rarely suffer prolonged contact with the Low Clans, aside from use as servants and spies, the Magisters have a somewhat unique relationship with the Assamites embroiled in the *Shadow Reconquista*. Those of the Christian faction hate the Children of Haqim with unmatched intensity, while those of the Muslim side consider themselves among the Ashirra, a brotherhood of Islamic Cainites that transcends clan divisions. This is not to say the Lasombra trust their fallen Saracen allies implicitly, but their shared religious beliefs do grant a degree of solidarity uncommon between High and Low Clans. More on the Ashirra can be found in *Veil of Night* and in the *Players Guide to Low Clans*.

Toreador

The Artisans' feelings toward the Low Clans do not stem from their mortal relationships nearly as often as those of other first cursed. Many of the Toreador come from the ranks of artists, musicians and simply even strikingly beautiful mortals, thus encompassing a great cross-section of society. While most painters and sculptors find sponsorship from either the Church or some wealthy patron, giving them a modicum of status unknown to other commoners, the Artisans also Embrace exceptional singers, musicians, dancers and others who show talent or skill in the arts, regardless of their social circles.

While this does not set up a noble vs. peasant dichotomy like that of the Lasombra, the Toreador penchant for exceptional artistry creates definite prejudices against the unrefined or "uninspired." Artisans are exacting in terms of style, bearing and demeanor and demand perfection at all times. Even those jewels Embraced from among the vilest of families must learn quickly how to carry themselves with refinement and poise, lest their own sires destroy them to avoid embarrassment. Knowing that the peasantry is capable of such feats, the Artisans see little worth in those clans whose members continue along base and crude existences even after their Embrace.

Tzimisce

The Tzimisce change very little in their attitudes after their Embrace, as their number comes largely from revenant families aware of the politics of the

Cainite world. The familial organization of the Fiends creates a social structure different from the rest of Europe, as they have no kings or courts. The peasantry recognizes the vampiric nature of their lords, allowing a rule by fear unknown in the lands west of the Carpathians. All other Cainites, be they of Low or High Clan, are seen as outsiders and not to be trusted, though certain exceptions are made dependent upon which of the several revenant houses a given Tzimisce hails from. The bestial Bratovitch family has some greater understanding and acceptance of the Gangrel, for example, while the Szantovich show attitudes similar to those of the Lasombra and the Krevcheski fall more in step with the Cappadocians. Aside from holding particular disdain for the Tremere and Ventrue, however, the Fiends often care little for the divisions between clans outside their own, as all trespassers into their territories are met with equal ferocity.

Ventrue

Perhaps more than any clan, the Ventrue were born to lead. Embraced from powerful noble houses and great warrior lines, the Warlords often view those beneath them with feelings of duty and responsibility. The Low Clans are so obviously unequipped to handle the reins of power that the Ventrue must fill that role, steering the Cainite community along a course that both protects and controls the kine. The Warlords do not harbor ill will against the fallen, as the Lasombra do, nor do they ignore their power and ambition, as the Cappadocians. The Ventrue see the Low Clans much as a shepherd sees his flock, in need of protection and in no way able to survive without firm outside direction.

Those Ventrue seeking control of mercantile interests share this mentality, seeing it as their duty to take the lead in this new area of power and influence. While this brings them into contact with fallen Cainites far closer to their own level of influence, the Warlords view these pauper kings as children playing at war with wooden swords.

Unlife in the High Clans

It is no accident that the first cursed enjoy such command over the Low Clans and the kine, nor was it the product of circumstances beyond their control. The High Clans actively seized the reins of leadership during the earliest nights and have jealously guarded their power, carefully selecting their childer from among the mortal elite. This is further proof that the fallen are not fit to lead Cainite society, as they lacked the agency and power to take control when they had the opportunity, and for the most part this is still the case. While recent nights have seen upstart princes

from the Low Clans arise in Europe, the first cursed view them as they would a servant who dons a crown at Carnival and then refuses to take it off.

But these “upstarts,” some of whom have incredible bases of power outside Europe or have recently gained a foothold on the continent, threaten the traditional hierarchy. They are knocking at the castle door, at times with a battering ram, and the High Clans have become even more adamant about keeping them in their place.


While feudal and traditional Cainite attitudes play a large role in maintaining the status quo, the un lifestyles created as a byproduct often serve to maintain the social order far more effectively than any one vampire’s will. Those with privilege have the time and inclination to educate themselves and learn the secrets of war and politics, while those who do not have more pressing concerns, such as meeting Final Death through starvation or exposure. This creates a nigh inescapable cycle that the first cursed tend with exceptional care.

As mentioned before, the information that follows is offered as a guideline only, in an attempt to give players a better grasp of how the average High Clan Cainite exists from night to night. That being said, the stereotypes which follow may or may not apply completely to any given character, but they do represent prevailing attitudes. If you plan on being the exception to the rule, at least try to have a good reason for your decision and account for its consequences, rather than refusing to conform simply out of a desire to buck the system.

Learning the Ways of the Night

While most neonates are usually passing familiar with the ways of the mortal world, at least in their given region, their knowledge of Cainite society can range from sparse to intricately detailed. What does your character know of the War of Princes? Of Caine and the history of her clan? Or of the myriad unnatural creatures that stalk the world?

Unlike the fallen, the High Clans find great importance in history and social awareness, and do their best to impart their vast knowledge to their childer... While most newly Embraced Cainites among the first cursed are already quite comfortable in refined mortal society, the intrigues of the night can be far subtler, requiring a firm guiding hand. Some neonates need only slight instruction, as they are wise in the ways of subtlety and manipulation. Others — those from less sophisticated backgrounds — have a truly Herculean task.



It is not enough for a young Cainite simply to survive among the High Clans. She must exhibit grace and competence, lest she bring shame on her sire. An overly eager word at court reflects as much on her sire's guidance as her own reputation, and more serious missteps can even cause a childe's destruction to spare greater embarrassment. Because of this, a sire takes great pains to educate his childe in every possible area, for an exceptional childe also reflects upon her teacher.

The relationship the High Clans have with Caine and God is paramount, since more than any mortal they know that God exists. A childe is instructed as to Caine's life and unlife, along with her clan or road's philosophy regarding the nature of vampirism and possible exposure to the Erciyes Fragments allegedly written by Caine himself. The histories of the First and Second City establishes the relationship between the first cursed and the fallen, giving a more tangible understanding of the divide between the clans already apparent to most childer through their sires' tones when discussing the subject. Of course, specific clans emphasize different aspects of their respective histories. The Ventrue expound on the glories of Rome, while the Tzimisce speak of a grand history of rule before the Usurpers and Warlords besieged their territories. The Brujah explain in great detail their utopian Carthage, though reports of that storied city have grown more fantastic as the centuries have progressed.

It is important to note that almost all members of the High Clans are literate, often in more than one language. Even the nobility are usually illiterate, but their sires almost undoubtedly teach them during their first nights. That said, a great many works regarding the history and role of the Cainites have been written, and texts by the likes of Julia Antasia, Rodrigo the Feral and Acindynus find a place beside the works of Herodotus, Plutarch and Tacitus. Not at all uncommon among these texts are discussions of God and the place of the Damned within his plan. Because of this, fledglings of the High Clans are generally far better informed than those of the fallen.

The first cursed also make their childer incredibly conscious of subtle strategies and the ultimate goals of far-flung plans. Piecing together the intentions of opponents is often the difference between success and violent overthrow, and pains are taken to unravel the complex maneuverings of elders and Methuselahs. Given this obsession with motives and obscure intentions, it is no surprise that High Clan Cainites spend much of their time determining where they fit in God's grand scheme. This curiosity leads some to the Road of Heaven in its various iterations, or conversely the Road of Sin. Scholars on the subject can be found among all of the High Clans, with as many different


viewpoints as vampires. A childe Embraced into any of these clans gains a strong sense of at least one of these philosophies from his sire, and in the case of the Brujah, several theories may be studied and debated before a fledgling is released from her sire's care.

Study and religious contemplation, however, are the province of the nobility and clergy, rather than the common serfs and peasants. Living off the largesse of the masses grants those in power free time in which to ponder the mysteries of the world. The lower classes do not enjoy this luxury, as most are illiterate and too overburdened to care about more than plowing the next field or managing to stave off starvation for another day... The first cursed mock the ignorance of the Low Clans and point to their lack of education as one more reason the fallen are not fit to lead Cainite society. Of course, the High Clans carefully manipulate the situation so that the Low Clans have no time to concern themselves with intellectual matters, for the less the fallen think about their place in the world the less likely they are to rise against their masters.

Quality of Unlife

The majority of those Embraced into the High Clans come from lives of affluence and comfort, and they seek to maintain those luxuries into unlife. Having lived in castles and manses, monasteries and cathedrals, these Cainites lead unlives of relative ease, making their havens in relatively well protected, well trafficked areas. Their mortal lives may have provided them with great wealth, extensive contacts throughout the noble families of the region and expensive fineries such as gold jewelry and silken garments. Even those unaccustomed to such opulence find themselves sharing the havens and raiment of their sires for their first several years, learning the ways of the nobility and amassing wealth of their own. It is rare for any of the first cursed to remain poor, as even those who lose their holdings and position during their unlives often have powerful contacts and allies on whom they can call for aid and safe havens.

Coming from such high station, however, the High Clans stand to lose much after their Embrace. It is often difficult to maintain a hold on the wealth and power of their mortal lives, as they are now cut off from the daylight world. Courts and fairs, festivals and tournaments, and the general business affairs of state almost invariably take place while the sun shows brightly in the sky. Direct interaction and control of past holdings grows difficult and eventually impossible, and this push to the fringe of mortal society often weighs heavily on their minds. With the help of their sires, most Cainites learn to handle their affairs through ghouls and faithful servants among the kine, manipu-



lating their wealth and holdings indirectly. While it takes some time to adjust, this removal allows a Cainite a modicum of freedom from her responsibilities, having delegated duties to subordinates.

Coming from the halls of power, the first cursed see the Embrace as yet another opportunity for advancement and growth. Their newfound longevity serves to stoke the fires of ambition and avarice, as they have no foreseeable end to their quest for power and wealth. Plans spanning decades which before seemed impossible become short-term goals, and schemes encompassing centuries begin to construct themselves in the newly Embraced mind. Much like the acquisition of a new territory or alliance, Cainites of the High Clans view their abilities and relative immortality as yet another asset to be exploited to their advantage.

Some choose to increase their holdings and influence, while others seek enrichment of the mind and spirit. The Ventrue use their strength to forge empires and conquer territories as the Cappadocians explore the vastness of death's mysteries with a mind to achieving true enlightenment. Conversely, the Lasombra and Toreador spend their nights weaving webs of favors, promises and deceit in an attempt to control the leaders of the kine through guile and subterfuge. Regardless of the method, the High Clans are apt to use the benefits of Caine's blood as a rung in the ladder to greatness, building on goals of power or knowledge retained from their mortal lives.

Each clan, however, still retains some embarrassments hidden from their rivals, concealing Cainites who for some reason or another tarnish the respectability of the clan. These closeted skeletons may have been Embraced without a prince's permission, or may have gone mad when presented with the realities of unlife. Such vampires may fall from the heights of mortal power to the lowest ranks of their new clan, unable to adapt to their changed state. The greatest of barons may lose ambition, seeing no avenues for advancement in the stagnant social order of elders. Such a failure may become a hanger-on to more accomplished Cainites or seek out some small hamlet over which to rule, giving up on greater goals. More often than not these lesser nobles become pawns in the games of their more ruthless brethren or meet an untimely end at the fangs of an ambitious neonate.


In an attempt to maintain their dominance over the Low Clans, the first cursed maintain that mortal station has no bearing on Cainite society and that all status is conferred with the Embrace. Even the most humble scullery maid taken into the Toreador has more status than an emperor Embraced by the Nosferatu (at least in the Courts of Love). While this

may seem to conflict with earlier statements regarding nobles associating with peasants, the fact is this mentality only adds another layer onto the complex structure of Cainite society.

Recent nights have seen some upheaval to the previously accepted social strata. Low Clan Cainites have maneuvered themselves into positions of power. Rudolph Brandl's Final Death at the hands of the Nosferatu Josef Zvi set the Cainite world on its ear, yet the general instability of Europe has so far allowed the perpetrator of this act to retain control of his stolen domain. Members of the High Clans have grown very wary of their fallen neighbors, even making concessions in an attempt to retain their power and positions. Powerful Low Clan Cainites like Zvi have become a major factor in the political landscape of the continent and can no longer be ignored, leading to mixed reactions of anger and fear from the ranks of the first cursed. The world has changed rapidly over the last few decades, and the peasantry has made great strides toward gaining the rights and privileges of their betters, notably through the signing of the Magna Carta in 1215. Strife between those of low and high birth grows with each night as the first cursed and the mortal nobility fight to maintain control.

With this in mind, the appearance of unity and purity of blood among the High Clans has become exceedingly important. In theory, even peasants and craftsmen Embraced by the first cursed are on equal footing with those coming from royal blood, though this is often a façade maintained for purposes of social order. In truth, the High Clans hold very elitist views and tend to maintain their opinions of those who are lowborn. The Toreador are notorious for capriciously conferring status and stripping it away, dependent on fashion, style and appearance. Obviously, those raised to wealth have far greater knowledge of such things than the scullery maid mentioned earlier, possibly making her the brunt of subtle jokes and deprecations. This scullery maid, however, would still be held in higher esteem than even the most dazzlingly arrayed Malkavian, simply because of the clan divide.

Newly ennobled Cainites often have a difficult time adjusting to their new status, struggling to unlearn a lifetime of bad habits and misconceptions. While princes and dukes may understand the ways of power, most peasants never concerned themselves with such things, focusing more on keeping food on the table and roofs over their heads. Being thrust into the intricate dance of unlife among the High Clans can be bewildering, and not all have the ability to rise to the challenge. Sires do their best to educate and guide these childer, hoping to find diamonds in the rough, but the sad fact is many of these neonates are sentenced to Final Death after prov-



ing themselves unworthy of their clans. Those who do succeed in adapting to their new circumstances may spend far longer under the tutelage of their sires, only becoming neonates when they have finally mastered the etiquette and protocol of Cainite society. Newly Embraced Toreador taken from among the peasantry often have the hardest time, as the Artisans are particularly exacting in terms of courtly manners. These talented commoners are kept on a short leash by their sires for many years, staying in seclusion until their manners have been suitably refined.

That said, some of the most ambitious and clever members of the High Clans came from the common

PRIMOGENITURE AND INHERITANCE

Perhaps the most common method of advancement among mortal nobility is to wait until those above them on the social ladder die. Princes wait patiently for the day when the kingdom will be theirs to rule, and kings groom their sons as replacements upon their eventual deaths... As the average lifespan at this time is approximately 45 years for those surviving early childhood, most young nobles need not wait long to come into some form of power. Unfortunately, this road to power is closed to Cainites, as natural death has been removed from the equation. A cautious prince may hold his position for centuries, leaving his second-in-command eternally one step away from power. Ambitious Cainites must therefore actively to remove those above them if they are to have any hope of attaining the positions they ultimately seek. While the practice of subtle maneuvering and careful strategy persevered throughout the Long Night, the War of Princes has intensified the competition for status among the Damned, leading to assassinations and outright political coups. Princes have grown increasingly wary of their subordinates and rivals, often pitting them in heated conflict against one another in attempts to distract them from looking to advance beyond their stations.

In the decades leading up to the War of Princes, many Cainites removed themselves from this situation entirely, seeking alternate avenues to power. With the more frequent use of coinage instead of barter, the accumulation of wealth has provided ambitious Cainites with another means to topple princes, or better yet surpass them entirely. These merchant lords have gained greater attention in recent nights and continue to build their influence across the continent in the coming decades.

ranks, be they merchants, craftsmen or thieves. Having been oppressed by lords and ladies their entire lives, these Cainites take to their new station with zeal. Social mobility is virtually unheard of in the Dark Medieval, with strict divisions between the highborn and the low. Leaping the great divide, these Cainites rarely look back, voraciously learning all they can from their sires about courtly intrigue and the ways to rise through the ranks of the High Clans. Some, of course, reach too far too fast, growing power-mad and avaricious only to be stifled or eliminated altogether by a cautious elder or prince, but more often lives of hard work and toil imbue these Cainites with the patience and diligence required to amass great fortunes and estates.

Havens

High Clan characters tend to have lavish homes, replete with servants and ghouls to handle daytime concerns and security. These havens may be expansive mansions, secluded monasteries or even fortified castles, and are chosen to fulfill certain needs of their Cainite owners (though since most vampires tend to dwell in mortal constructions and simply make use of them by night, “tenants” might be a more accurate term). Some clans, such as the Lasombra and Toreador, establish havens in populous areas, such as the lower levels of a mansion in the center of a city, providing them with access to their prey and worldly connections. These Cainites stalk by night the courts and halls mortal kings and princes walk by day. The Cappadocians, on the other hand, search for more secluded havens far from bustle and distraction, often in the dungeons or ramparts of castles or the hidden chambers in grand universities. The Tzimisce choose looming castles to inspire fear in their subjects, while the Brujah lean toward training halls and universities close to the kine — the latter bringing them into conflict with both Cappadocians and Tremere seeking access to libraries and scholars. Regardless of clan, the first cursed tend toward well protected havens with convenient access to a sizeable population of mortal prey, generally large enough to accommodate at least one and often several servants. After all, a Cainite’s haven confers a certain status among the High Clans, and competitions over the quality of these abodes and the servants therein can grow fierce.

Exceptions exist, of course, who do not have the money or influence to manage such havens. Such an individual may find a more powerful Cainite to serve in return for space in a larger haven, becoming a minor functionary of a greater lord. Once cut loose from their sires, neonates often seek such benefactors in the hopes of some night being granted small domains and havens of their own. Most of the first cursed enjoyed



some measure of affluence during their mortal lives and have grown accustomed to comfort and security; their havens tend to be dark reflections of their homes before the Embrace.

More information and detail on Cainite havens can be found in **Right of Princes**.

Social and Environmental Concerns


While the relatively simple concerns of the fallen may seem crucially important with regard to immediate survival, those of the High Clans are far more complex, as they must rarely struggle to fulfill basic needs. The nights of the first cursed teem with intrigue and responsibility, for those without a firm grip on the reins of power often lose their seats. A Venture has less to fear from starvation and exposure than he does from betrayal by his servants or overthrow by his subordinates. With this in mind, the High Clans take great pains to maintain the feudal order, ensuring that each link in the chain is strong.

Far from ignoring the peasantry, the nobility of the Dark Medieval depends heavily upon their prosperity. A thriving community trusts its lord implicitly, while one that struggles blames him for its woes. Those in power may not consider the individual rights of the common people, but they strive to keep order and stability within their domains, solidifying their power base against threats from within and without. Townsfolk who respect their lord are more likely to reveal a traitor or take up arms against an invading army, while those who are discontent may harbor spies and welcome the removal of their lord by force.

What follows are some of the more pressing concerns the typical High Clan Cainite faces from night to night. This is by no means a complete list, as the intricacies of power are too extensive to relate so simply, but it tries to give some idea of the concerns the first cursed regularly handle.

The Tradition of Domain

As more Cainites vie for power across Europe, the size and number of domains fluctuates considerably. More wary of disruption to their holdings in recent nights, princes scrutinize their guests with increasing care. Greater princes take considerable pains to monitor the activities of newcomers to their domains, while at the same time offering them every courtesy. It would not do to offend the emissary of a powerful neighbor, though one must be ever watchful for spies and assassins. More than ever before, the positions of chamberlain and scourge have become vitally important in rooting out and disposing of interlopers and other undesirables. Michael met Final Death in his own city, and Rudolf Brandl in his own bedchamber, forcing powerful Cainites to rethink their security and defenses.



Less powerful Cainites have gone so far as to close their domains to visitors, growing more protective of their lands and herd. Those who do allow guests to enter their domains maintain strict protocols on feeding and illicit activities, lest plague wipe out a village entirely or turn it into an angry mob seeking to destroy their demonic overlord. Beyond this, small domains are easy pickings for powerful neighbors, and their masters may quickly find themselves vassals to nearby Cainite princes or exiled from their own territories entirely.

Players who choose the Domain Background should make themselves aware of the intents of their characters' neighbors and any princes with eyes to expand their own domains, as well as decide how visitors should be handled. The decision to cut off a domain utterly is not to be taken lightly, however, and the social and political ramifications of that act should be taken into full consideration. Though isolated from the world, the domain will gain the notice of ambitious Cainites and require vigilant defenses.

Often a character's domain is a portion of a larger domain, parceled out as a reward for service or through promise of fealty. Such allotments are common, though they carry with them the duties and responsibilities of vassalage in addition to those of maintenance and security.

Fealty and Favors

The feudal structure of lord and vassal relies upon the concept of fealty, and Cainite society is little different. As smaller domains are absorbed into larger ones, their masters are often allowed to maintain control of their territories with the promise that they will serve their new lords... This oath of fealty lends those controlling smaller domains protection against invasion and violent removal in exchange for aid in protecting the whole of the larger domain. Often enforced by the blood oath, this commitment robs the vassals of a measure of their autonomy, but it provides more secure borders, a greater stake in the welfare of their neighbors and more of an investment in the protection of the feudal structure. Ruling lords use the system of fealty to boost their martial resources, while vassals may call on greater resources to protect their borders. This system breeds conflict among the various vassals, as they each struggle for the attentions and favors of their lord. Those most trusted may receive boons or increased privileges, while those whom the lord finds suspect may find themselves at the mercy of their fellow vassals.

Beyond the more regimented blood oaths and fealty of the princes, ambitious Cainites construct less formal webs of favors designed to grant them a modicum of respect or clout in Cainite society. While lords may grant boons to their vassals for increased loyalty,


those without such power may grant favors to Cainites or kine in positions of particular influence in the hopes of calling in those favors at a later date. The Toreador are masters of this subtle art, often crafting intricate systems of favors asked and granted involving dozens of individuals. These schemes may include kings, barons, merchants, servants, priests and soldiers both Cainite and mortal, all delicately balanced to provide the Artisan with access to the halls of power. Teaching a nursemaid a lullaby to sooth a restless child, for example, may place her in an Artisan's debt — enough so that she may be convinced to eavesdrop on her master's clandestine meeting with a Cainite prince. Power in the Dark Medieval is often less about land and wealth than it is about allegiances and debts of gratitude, as the members of the High Clans are acutely aware.

Court and Politics

The favors owed between Cainites are valuable commodities on the political stage of Europe's courts. Unlike the scions of mortal society, vampires struggle less for direct control over land and territory, instead fighting to seize the strings of mortal puppets and expand their influence over shadowy domains unknown to the kine. This divides a Cainite's attentions between the courts of the mortals and those of the Damned.

Overflowing storehouses and arable farmland are of little use to those who feed only on blood, but they represent the marks of status and wealth in the Dark Medieval world and as such must be respected. Mortal kings and nobles gain power by expanding their holdings and territories into the unclaimed wilds and neighboring lands, and the Cainites who influence these men use this expansion to eliminate rivals and expand their own domains. While attendance at mortal courts is impossible, key figures can be manipulated to carry out a Cainite's will. Calling in the right favors can send an invading army into a rival's territory, with specific instructions to burn the heretics found in her monastery haven. The reverse can just as easily happen, which is why Cainites keep a close eye on the rumors and gossip of the kine. Knowing that a baron in one's own domain owes a potent Ventrue prince a favor may save a character's unlife — after all, forewarned is forearmed.

Perhaps more important to Cainite affairs, however, are the courts of the night, wherein the true currents of influence can be monitored and imperceptibly altered. Far more so than in mortal courts, these gatherings of the Damned have complex rules of etiquette and propriety that wise Cainites take pains to follow. For every bow and curtsy displayed publicly, a hundred covert messages are sent between emissaries for the purposes of espionage, blackmail and any number of multifaceted



deceptions. Characters who are not especially careful in these environments may easily betray their plots and schemes to those with an eye for subterfuge, and elaborate designs can fall apart in a single night if too much is revealed. This is one of the many reasons why sires keep a tight rein on their fledglings, even keeping a close eye on them once they become neonates — one so newly Embraced is largely ignorant of the ways of Cainite courts and may betray knowledge better kept hidden. Contrarily, some sires feel that telling a neonate some false information is a good way to throw enemies off balance, if they know their childer have difficulty keeping their mouths shut.

The Lasombra are especially suited for the political arena, watching their rivals as a spider might watch flies buzzing carelessly near its web. Such savvy Cainites often seek out neonates with offers of alliances and favors, hoping to place the newly Embraced firmly in their debt. A character new to court is likely to garner such attention, though his sire has no doubt warned him of the consequences of hasty alliances.

War and Conquest

Midnight meetings with kings and secret alliances between Cainites often lead to action on the battlefield, and as the War of Princes gains momentum, political agendas tend toward the expansion of domains and destruction of rivals. The alliances forged and broken by means of favors, subterfuge and politics are tested with the sword and shield as the High Clans struggle for control of Europe. While the Ventrue princes of England and the Holy Roman Empire seek to dominate the land itself, the Lasombra bishops of the Church make plays for power and control over the emperors and kings under the Warlords' sway. The entrenched Tzimisce *voivodate* wages a unified war against those pressing into its territory, while Brujah fight wars on all fronts for all factions.

Primarily, the War of Princes affects the lower vassals and servants to greater lords. Sworn fealty to a common lord finds rivals within a domain standing shoulder to shoulder against their enemies, lest the entire structure fall. While Methuselahs may drive martial campaigns and ultimately enjoy the spoils of victory, the various skirmishes and battles take place between lesser Cainites. Characters embroiled in the nightly conflict may hope to gain vacant havens and smaller domains as reward for their aid, or even use battles as diversions for secondary objectives such as assassinations, espionage and revenge. Those engaged in combat would be wise to consider the larger picture and understand their lords' motivations — it is not uncommon for unfaithful vassals to be sent into combat for the purpose of blamelessly removing them from the political tapestry.

Soldiers and knights of the High Clans also have far more contact with the fallen, and may have stronger opinions regarding the Low Clans. While one Ventrue knight may grow to despise the Gangrel barbarians he fights against from night to night, another of his clan may have grown to admire the resolve of the Assamite warriors he encountered in the Holy Land. Coterie developed on the front lines generally share a similar view of the Low Clans, either banding together intentionally apart from (and above) the fallen soldiers working with them or setting aside their differences long enough to vanquish a common foe. Cainites of the Low Clans may be seen and used as shock troops against an enemy, with the loss of an entire coterie of Nosferatu being more acceptable than the loss of a single Brujah knight.

Noblesse Oblige

As little as the High Clans value the Low, wantonly sending vassals and subordinates to Final Death jeopardizes those in command. Princes and their more influential stewards and vassals have a responsibility toward those pledging fealty and seeking protection. A lord who allows his military to die in futile skirmishes may find the loyalty of his troops waning over time, just as a lord who starves his peasantry may find an angry mob at the gates with torches and pitchforks. Without a standing army to turn back invaders and a willing peasantry to tend the fields a lord loses all power and influence, for these assets carry far more weight in the Dark Medieval than coinage and mere wealth.

Perhaps most concerned with duties to their lessers are the Ventrue, who assume roles as guides and protectors of all Cainites. Not only do the Warlords seek power and dominance over the night, they feel it is their duty to the other clans to take control and lead from the fore. In return, the Ventrue strive to be responsible leaders, looking out for the wants and needs of their subordinates. Contrarily, the Tzimisce enforce their indomitable will upon a populace too weak and timid to object, though the tyrannical *voivodes* protect their territories fiercely and protect their domains and revenant kin just as zealously as the Ventrue, presiding over their herds as familial heads.

With the end of the Long Night, the concerns of the common people have been thrust into the Cainite consciousness. As domains rise and fall across the continent, it is often disgruntled servants or resentful villages that topple princes. Bearing the possibilities of betrayal in mind, powerful Cainites keep a watchful eye on their inferiors and make every effort to fulfill the responsibilities of nobility. If a prince acts with blatant disregard for her duties, she may not need to bother with such concerns for long — for her reign will be brief.

WHAT ABOUT THE CHURCH?

The Church fulfills a similar role to the nobility in many respects, though the details may differ greatly at times. The leaders of the Church see themselves as shepherds of their congregations, protecting them from spiritual evil and asking for faith (and tithes) in return. While this relationship is less tangible than the fealty system of kings, the bonds created are no less important. Spiritual favors and indulgences parallel their political counterparts, and popes and bishops call upon incurred debts no differently than princes and kings. For example, while a baron may request the loan of horses or livestock from his feudal lord, he may also seek the prayers and blessings of a priest or abbot before going into battle.

In this way, the kine are divided between their loyalties to the Church and their respective lords, providing more opportunities for Cainites to manipulate mortals to their wills. Specifically, the Lasombra use the influence of the Church in much the same way as the Ventrue use the rights of nobility — often resulting in both attempting to control a given mortal through different means.

Retainers and Servants

Princes and other powerful Cainites cannot handle all the responsibilities of leadership alone. Many tasks and duties fall upon trusted advisors, retainers and servants hand-chosen to fill certain roles and handle particular concerns. The High Clans by their very nature have great need for servants to handle their daylight affairs, tend to mortal visitors and keep them abreast of the news of the day. These retainers do not always know of their master's dark secrets, but all are chosen for their loyalty and discretion. Daytime servants of the Damned, especially those who serve for long periods of time, often learn enough to destroy their masters, and Cainites must place a great deal of trust and responsibility in these mortals. Needless to say, the selection process for these rare few is undertaken with extreme caution.

Blood oaths are common among the highest ranks of a Cainite's mortal servants, ensuring greater loyalty and devotion to their lord. It is possible to bind a servant in this manner covertly, mixing blood with wine for example, though some of Caine's more compassionate or moralistic children frown on this practice, feeling that such duplicity only breeds mistrust. The most faithful and promising of a Cainite's servants may even be given enough blood to become a ghoul, gaining access to the secrets of the night and offering

greater protection and service to their masters. This is often the first step on the road to the Embrace, and Cainites observe their ghouls very closely for signs of greater ambition.

Mortal servants come from a wide array of stations, ranging from stewards and messengers to barons and dukes. Cainites of the High Clans often have an entourage of high-born kine, many marking this as a measure of individual status. A High Clan character may begin a chronicle as a mortal or ghoul retainer of a powerful lord, or even a servant who has been recently Embraced. Such a character may have provided decades of service to her sire and would generally begin her unlife with far more knowledge of the Cainite world than other fledglings. See *Liege, Lord and Lackey* for more information regarding the roles of servants and mortal retainers.

Mortal servants of a prince may continue as retainers after their Embraces, but other Cainites also seek those prestigious positions. While a faithful steward turned childe may become a valued chamberlain or seneschal, these coveted stations are ordinarily reserved for more experienced Cainites who have proven their worth to a prince over time. Those closest to the prince find themselves with the greatest opportunities for gain, featuring heavily in their master's grand schemes. An ambitious warmaster may seek to conquer a domain of his own in foreign lands, hoping his lord will grant him such a boon in return for his fealty. It is not uncommon for lesser Cainites to have retainers similar to those of a prince, though in a less official capacity. A character recently Embraced by the prince's sheriff, for example, may perform the duties of a seneschal for his sire. For a more complete list of positions and duties of Cainite retainers, see *Dark Ages: Vampire*, p. 38.

Wealth and Finance

While coinage and money-lending have grown in popularity over the last century, the true wealth and power of the nobility still come primarily from the land. A noble's wealth is seen in full storehouses, herds of cattle, teams of horses, a well equipped military force and a fortified castle or manse. Taxes come in the form of livestock and portions of the harvest, and peasants work noble land in return for protection — their serfdom parallel to the vassalage of their betters. Only recently has coinage begun to replace goods and services as a form of payment and have taxes gradually become more focused on money.

Regardless of its form, however, the burden of management for a noble's wealth falls upon his servants, most often a steward or seneschal. Those of noble blood find themselves above such trifling matters as accounting and maintenance of lands and

estates, and Cainites are little different. Influence and control over key mortal figures weighs more pressingly in the minds of most princes than how the coffers are filled or how well their domains are tended. Many Cainites have no wealth or direct control of property themselves, instead claiming wealth vicariously through those lords over whom they hold sway. This offers a measure of freedom from the responsibility associated with maintaining wealth, though many of the first cursed have begun to understand the growing importance of money.

Characters skilled in commerce can make themselves indispensable through their manipulation of merchants and trade between empires and domains, even amassing small fortunes of their own separate from their masters' coffers. While bribes may hold little or no sway with royalty, merchants and commoners are often lured by their desire for wealth into performing a Cainite's will. In this way, ambitious neonates may quickly gain a measure of influence among mortals, which can be cultivated over years. Petty bribes to palace guards may grow to massive loans to kingdoms, creating a lattice-work of debtors seeking to repay their generous benefactors. Some High Clan Cainites focus on this route to power almost exclusively, following the Path of the Merchant along the Road of Kings. Such characters often find positions as viziers and counselors to princes and mortal nobility, becoming the powers behind the throne.

Goals and Ambitions

Any attempt to outline all the possible goals held by High Clan Cainites would be futile. Enough similarities exist amid the infinite possibilities to discuss generalized categories and groups within each clan, however. A given High Clan Cainite might begin her unlife with ambitions close to those of other fledglings and neonates of her clan, though undoubtedly her attitudes will become more refined over time. Goals are discarded and replaced as a Cainite grows in power and understanding, and it is not uncommon for a fledgling's initial ambitions to fade completely over the centuries, or change so radically as to be unrecognizable.

It is important to set goals for a character at the outset to give him some direction for growth and development. Ordinarily, characters have one or two primary long-term goals and several that are more easily realized in the short term. While these goals may change drastically over the course of a chronicle, you shouldn't worry about how and when those alterations will happen. If you have a firm grasp of your character's ambitions and motivations, these changes

will occur naturally as the result of the conflicts and encounters offered by your Storyteller.

This section describes some of the more common goal groupings within each of the High Clans and provides some insight into how characters may grow and progress with experience. These portraits are intentionally painted with broad strokes, with suggestions given as to how finer detail may be applied. Many of these ambitions evolve directly from those held before the Embrace, though decades of unlife often alter a character's goals. As always, these suggestions are not meant to be definitive; they are merely guidelines and springboards for ideas.

The first cursed seek not only power and domain, but recognition among their peers for the same. As such, High Clan characters often have ratings in the Status Background, whereas their fallen counterparts do not, simply because the value of image and reputation is of the utmost importance among the first cursed. This prestige may come in many forms, depending on clan, road, sire, mortal station or other social factors, and typical methods of accruing status are mentioned for each clan. The information listed also contains ideas for the mechanical development of a character. Obviously, your focus should be on those Attributes and Abilities used most during the chronicle, but your character's long- and short-term goals should also be considered when spending experience points. A character's growth should loosely follow his current motives and objectives, after all.

Brujah

The most unifying aspect of the Brujah may be their utter lack thereof. Having such passionate opinions and keen minds, the Zealots hold widely disparate views on almost every conceivable topic, and even more contrary strategies to address those issues. Brujah sires might choose to Embrace mortals with ideals that run parallel to their own, but childer almost invariably break away after their philosophies or attitudes evolve. Not all Zealots champion idealistic causes — rare individuals exist who would rather focus on personal betterment through training and study, but their sobriquet makes it clear that these introverts are the exception, not the rule.

Three rough groups begin to appear upon closer inspection of the Brujah: crusaders, world-builders and scholars. The crusaders tend toward the more martial stereotypes of the clan, truly adopting the "warrior philosopher" mindset and effecting change through direct action. The world-builders channel their passion into more constructive efforts, often in an attempt to regain their Carthaginian utopia. The scholars search for greater insight into the world, finding knowledge to

be the best means of accomplishing their goals. Not all Brujah easily fit into one of these groups, and by no means must Zealots with similar outlooks share even remotely similar methods, but these divisions account for the vast majority of the clan.

As a rule of thumb, more recently Embraced Brujah lean toward the crusader outlook, while elders of the clan tend toward more of a world-building mentality. As the Long Night came to an end and the War of Princes began, passion stirred in the breasts of the younger Zealots. Actions on the battlefield effected truly remarkable changes in the world, and clashes between Christian and Muslim ideologies stirred the hearts of the people. Neonates of the clan champion the causes of many conflicts across the continent, often fighting for diametrically opposed forces. They hope that through their actions they can unify the world, as did Alexander the Great and Charlemagne.

Those Brujah who remember the nights of Rome and Carthage, however, are not as easily swayed by the tumult of Europe, seeing it as just part of the ebb and flow of empires and kingdoms. These elders find the current instability refreshing and useful, allowing more opportunity for revolutionary ideas and popular movements to take root. As princes fall or flee collapsing domains, they leave power vacuums ripe with possibility. Many older Brujah seek out these openings in the hopes of prompting change among the mortals living within their boundaries, a strategy that has worked to their advantage in Portugal.

Scholarly Brujah can be found among young and old, though elder scholars have generally used the years to counterbalance intellectual pursuits with physical and martial training. These Zealots show a thirst for knowledge rather than martial accomplishment or political restructuring, often traveling Europe searching for lost tomes and engaging in debate with monks and friars. Many such scholars provide their services as keepers to princes in the hopes that their convictions might sway these powerful Cainites, while others walk among the kine in an attempt to inspire the people to push toward the democratic ideals lost with ancient Hellas. The dispassionate True Brujah fall under this final grouping most often, lacking the inner fire that drives the Zealots to more active pursuits.

On the whole, the Brujah often set idealistic goals without much concern for practicality. The clan's hunger for knowledge and passion for debate and philosophy find long-term ambitions changing frequently as the Zealots move from one cause to the next, and short-term goals change just as rapidly. Two Brujah may find themselves as allies and opponents several times during their unives, constantly revising their views of the world and gaining new motivations from night to night.

Development

The Olympian ideal held by most Brujah seeks to strike a balance between the mind and the body and is reflected in their development. During character



creation, Mental and Physical Attributes almost invariably become primary and secondary, with Social Attributes falling a distant third. Those with more crusading attitudes often choose Physical as their primary focus, while those more interested in political or scholarly pursuits generally place Mental Attributes above all others. In either case, Brujah characters tend to be brusque in social situations, as the complexities of courtly intrigue are of little importance to their ultimate causes. While Social Attributes may be neglected from time to time in pursuit of other ends, Zealots do not ignore them entirely — the Brujah are just as proficient with the Presence Discipline as the Ventrue, after all.

Crusaders tend toward more martial Natures and Demeanors, such as Defender and Survivor, and occasionally Rebel. Those recently Embraced often leave Knowledges as their tertiary Abilities category, though their sires invariably insist that these failings be shored up over time. Talents and martial Skills may take precedence at the start, but balance is supremely important. A Brujah ignorant of the world around her is little different than a barbarian Gangrel or Ventrue man-at-arms; it is only her emphasis on learning and philosophy that truly sets her apart from and above her fellow Cainite. Those Zealots with the crusading spirit are also more apt to develop the Disciplines of Potence and Celerity to a greater degree than those more concerned with world-building or scholarly pursuits.

The world-builder Brujah gravitate toward Natures such as Caretaker and Judge, and place great importance on Knowledges, particularly those of Law, Politics and Theology. Their endeavors to build communities and kingdoms in the image of Carthage also make them more apt to concentrate on their Social Attributes and Talents such as Empathy, Expression and Leadership. Many such characters have clear memories of Carthage and have occupied themselves in the intervening centuries with attempts to restore their former glory, leading to Background points spent on Generation, Resources and Domain. As these Zealots tend to be passionate orators in the tradition of Pericles and the Athenian senate, they tend to focus on the Presence Discipline more than others of their clan.

Naturally, scholars focus on Knowledges, particularly Academics, Linguistics and Occult. Natures and Demeanors such as Pedagogue and Penitent are common. Those who wander between monasteries and libraries seeking debate with other great thinkers may also focus on Talents such as Expression and Empathy, while those serving as viziers and keepers to princes may spend points in Leadership and Etiquette. These Brujah also temper their intellectual pursuits with

physical training, lest they become weak and withered like the Cappadocians. The mind and body share equal importance, as stated before, and a wandering Brujah scholar may be surprisingly efficient with a quarterstaff or cudgel.


Those characters who begin with some form of imbalance between physical and intellectual pursuits will seek to rectify that over time. While a Brujah soldier obviously focuses on Talents and martial Skills, his time spent away from combat may well be spent reading accounts of great battles of antiquity or refining his strategic thinking over a chessboard. Status among the Zealots often comes by exhibiting great proficiency at arms, generally over the course of many campaigns, or showing true depth of understanding, such as by producing a notable work in philosophy or theology. Those with the greatest reputations may excel in both these areas, showing mastery over both mind and body. Zealots show great depth and roundness of character and tend to be the most multifaceted of all the High Clans.

Cappadocians

Most Cainites view the Graverobbers as reclusive scholars, sequestering themselves away in chambers filled with moldering books and ancient scrolls. Their nigh-obsessive interest in the mysteries of death removes them almost entirely from the notice of those with political or martial ambitions, which allows them the freedom to pursue their research and study.

These reclusive scholars tend to have similar practical goals and ambitions, while those more ephemeral in nature may vary considerably. Most seek protected havens away from the distractions of the living world, where they can perform experiments and delve into forgotten tomes. Some find these havens on their own, using resources from their mortal lives or favors owed them to establish themselves in the cellars of monasteries, dungeons of abandoned castles, or any other location undisturbed by trespassers and the elements. Others of the clan make their way as keepers and advisors to princes, offering insight and knowledge in return for the peace needed to continue their intellectual pursuits. These individuals may have slightly more connection to the politics and intrigues of the night, though their attentions are rarely drawn to these matters.

While the image of the studious Cappadocian diligently researching in a dungeon vault pervades Cainite society, this is not always the case. Some in the clan prefer to seek knowledge firsthand. Those Graverobbers who venture forth among the people of Europe in their eternal quest for answers contrast with their reclusive brethren in many ways, shedding the



stale atmosphere of underground chambers for the vibrancy of the open air. It is not uncommon for these Cappadocians to have some form of central haven, if only as a place to store the texts and artifacts collected on their travels. Such members of the clan stalk ancient ruins looking for insight into the past and unearthing long-forgotten treasure, following in the footsteps of their progenitor before he founded the temple at Erciyes.

In either case, the Cappadocian search for knowledge from beyond the grave almost invariably leads to theology and religious practices. While Cappadocius is himself Christian, not all in his line adopted that faith. Jews, Muslims and pagans exist among the Graverobbers as well, albeit in lesser numbers. Members of this clan spend much of their time struggling with their individual relationships with God, examining why they were spared from death and what power binds them in their state of unlife. Many Cappadocians are Embraced from among the clergy and continue their studies of theology throughout the centuries, seeking either redemption or understanding in the mysteries and rituals of religion. More reclusive members of the clan often serve as clergy or monks in churches or monastic havens, while those with more adventurous bents sometimes travel as wandering mendicants or itinerant priests.

Development

Understandably, Cappadocians focus primarily on Mental Attributes and Knowledges, especially Academics, Occult and Theology. Their Natures are generally subdued, such as the Caretaker and Penitent, while their Demeanors tend to be cold and aloof. The clan focus on texts and protected havens finds points being spent on Backgrounds such as Resources and Allies during character creation. Status within the clan often stems from showing great insight into the mysteries of the grave, though the Graverobbers also develop great reputations among the other High Clans as scholars and advisors. Princes across the continent may vie for the attentions of a prestigious Cappadocian keeper, often a notable ashen priest of the Road of Heaven or a scholar particularly versed in matters of the occult.

Reclusive characters tend to have more of a focus on Knowledges, sometimes even allowing their Abilities in other areas to atrophy over time. Medicine is popular among these Cainites, as they have the time to dissect corpses and study the connections of sinew and bone. Graverobbers serving as retainers or keepers may develop some knowledge or interest in Politics over time. Such influential vampires may control Retainers of their own to help perform secretive rituals. These cloistered Cappadocians explore the

clan Disciplines ad infinitum as well, providing yet another intellectual pursuit.

The truth seekers of the clan develop differently than their isolated clanmates, placing more importance on practical and survival skills. While Knowledges are still paramount, specifically Investigation and Linguistics, Talents such as Alertness and Skills such as Survival and Etiquette benefit these Cainites in their travels. Such wandering scholars are more apt to learn methods of defending themselves against bandits and thieves, leading to higher ratings in Physical Attributes and more martial Talents and Skills.

Cappadocians are also prone to specializing in their Knowledges, or even having several specializations. For example, a character with four dots in Medicine might spend points in specializations such as Diseases, Poisons, Anatomy and Decomposition — or combinations of these and others. It is important to remember that spending points in a given Knowledge gives general information only, even with four or more dots. The Graverobbers pride themselves on their in-depth knowledge of many subjects, which prompts Cappadocian characters to take multiple specialties (to a maximum of three).

Lasombra

Among the most ambitious and cunning of the Cainites, the Magisters often draw a disparaging eye from their rivals. A Lasombra's goals are rarely apparent to those outside his most trusted inner circle, and any obvious plans are often feints made in an attempt to draw out opposition. The overt avenues to power do not often tempt the Magisters, for they draw more satisfaction controlling those avenues from the shadows. Though they do not claim outright dominion over the lands surrounding the western Mediterranean, the *Amici Noctis* hold great sway over Italy, Iberia and parts of Northern Africa. While infinite methods exist for Magisters to gain power, the two most dominant routes are through the Church and through the nobility.

The Church is the single most powerful entity in the Dark Medieval, and as such has become the prime target of the clan. Lasombra priests and bishops abound within the walls of monasteries, churches and cathedrals, each using the guise of the clergy to manipulate faithful mortal pawns into enacting his will. The Christian kings and dukes of Europe rely heavily on the guidance and approval of bishops and abbots, allowing the Magisters to direct armies against their enemies and acquire lands willed to the Church, and high-placed Lasombra can even levy the scrutiny of the papacy upon their rivals.

CAINITE MERCHANTS

Merchants find a place among all of the High Clans, and the Cappadocians are no exception. The recently Embraced Giovanni family differs drastically in ambition from their clanmates, and such characters develop along different paths. What follows are some insights into the goals and ambitions of merchant characters and some suggestions as to mechanical development.

The growing importance of the coin in Europe has allowed the merchant class increasing freedom, and Cainites have seen the growing influence of wealth upon the nobility. Kingdoms accept loans from wealthy organizations, such as the Knights Templar, in order to fund military campaigns, leading to large debts and owed favors. Jewish merchants profit both from interest on loans and fees for changing foreign and local coinage. Specifically, the Ventrue have seen the immense potential in controlling the continent's wealth and have set about co-opting various mercantile groups throughout Europe. Others, however, such as the Giovanni family of Cappadocians and the usurping Tremere, have also seen the power available for the taking. This has brought the ire of those Cainites who rule their domains by right of blood and nobility, as the coin has slowly begun to replace the farm as the unit of power and influence. A gray area has developed between the High and Low Clans where money is concerned — those of the first cursed who dabble in money-lending and trade lose the favor of the more high-minded members of their clans, while the

fallen have used the opportunities of the coin to gain power and force a measure of respect. This ambiguity has served to increase tensions between Low and High and has made this burgeoning merchant class a target of Europe's elite.

Development

Those Cainites focused on trade and commerce place primary focus on Mental and Social Attributes. Clans such as the Cappadocians and Brujah place more emphasis on Social Attributes than their fellows, and merchants of these clans tend to attract the mistrust of their fellows. Skills and Knowledges take the fore, with importance placed on those that aid social interaction. Commerce, Crafts and Etiquette are emphasized, as are Law, Politics and Seneschal. Linguistics also takes a prominent role in a merchant's development, for it is impossible to trade in foreign lands without at least a basic understanding of their languages. Many merchants who skirt the edges of the law focus on Talents such as Intimidation, Legerdemain and Subterfuge, and these scoundrels often find themselves on the run from town to town once their schemes are discovered. Status among the merchant class often relies on simple wealth, though particularly honorable traders or guileful connivers gain a measure of notability. Quite a few clan Disciplines lend themselves toward less-than-legal advantages in trade, allowing ambitious Cainites — of both High and Low Clans — to dominate the markets of Europe.


Those Magisters who operate outside the charter of the Church often do so as advisors and viziers to those of noble blood. Rather than using the tools of faith and prayer, these Cainites construct systems of favors and debts designed to provide them with influence over key military, social and political figures. The Lasombra involved in matters of state seek to spread their domains across all of Europe, either by directing mortal pawns to conquer their enemies or by gaining power over neighboring lords through blackmail or webs of favors.

Younger Magisters spend some time as servants or retainers to their elders before gaining power of their own, and many of these act as spies or messengers during these years of service. Training in the art of subterfuge and deception, these fledglings and neornates act as the spiders connecting strands of their sires' webs, learning first-hand the complexity and intricacy of these masterful schemes.

Conflict on the Iberian Peninsula has divided the clan along religious lines, as the Christian and Muslim Lasombra fight for control of the region. Many of the short-term goals of the clan involve regaining or defending specific territories or cities from their enemies and eliminating specific pawns of their opponents. This *Shadow Reconquista* prevents the Magisters from presenting a unified front against the other High Clans struggling for control over Europe. Many Lasombra are so embroiled in their short-term ambitions in Iberia that they delay more far-reaching schemes against the Ventrue and Toreador across the continent.

Development

Magisters may be knights, orators and scholars as well as assassins, spies and thieves; the only commonalities truly shared among the varied clan members is a commitment to excellence in their respective fields and a belief in the clan's supremacy over all others. Status within the clan may stem from some form of



excellence, be it mastery of courtly intrigue or true insight into theology, though most reputations are gained through the cunning acquisition of power and influence. The Magister with the most important contacts and pawns often garners the most prestige among her peers. Natures and Demeanors tend to be more elitist, such as Autocrat and Pedagogue.

Abilities provide an open field for the Lasombra, as a knight may focus on excellence in Melee and Archery while a thief practices Legerdemain and Subterfuge. Talents such as Leadership and Expression are common, however, as the Magisters feel it is their right to rule over Cainite society and that the spoken word is vitally important in that pursuit. Many members of the clan spend their time studying the Occult or dabbling in Politics, as well as indulging in any of the other Knowledges, as knowledge truly leads to power for those who know how to use it. Obviously a Lasombra fledgling whose sire is a bishop spends his nights studying Theology, while a neonate vizier to a feudal lord focuses his energies on Seneschal and Law.

A Magister character is less likely to be well rounded and have passing ability in several different areas than he is to concentrate on a single area of expertise, or at least in a group of related abilities. Whether a Lasombra is an expert tactician or a religious scholar, he seeks to develop abilities that are invaluable to those he serves. A prince is more likely to keep a vizier who excels in his field, and that prince is far more malleable if he feels the Cainite's advice is coming from a place of supreme knowledge.

Toreador

The Artisans' quest for beauty and perfection is similar to the Lasombra pursuit of excellence, though their appetites for power and domination are not quite so voracious. More than Cainites of any other clan, the Toreador are social creatures, retaining close ties to the mortal world. Aside from pursuing their own artistic endeavors, they lend patronage to those who show great natural ability and talent, forging an intricate latticework of social connections among artists and patrons alike.

Toreador goals frequently revolve around more social endeavors, such as unveiling a masterwork to popular acclaim or discovering the next major sculptor in a region. Sometimes these assume epic proportions, such as finding the perfect rose or writing the perfect aria, and an Artisan may spend centuries of his unlife in pursuit of a nigh-unattainable goal. The intervening nights may be spent pursuing any number of diversions, assembling cadres of artists, singers and dancers to pit against those gathered by rival Artisans.

Competition among Toreador is fierce, as each one attempts to prove he has the better eye or ear for artwork or music. The Courts of Love are rife with such displays of one-upmanship, and the Artisans keep a close watch on who has gained greater prestige in each respective field, as well as what manner of influence their clanmates have on their mortal contacts. The Toreador see the world of politics and favors as nothing more than an intricate dance, one they perform more beautifully and expertly than any of the other clans. Careful placement of courtesans and minstrels in courts and taverns across much of France and nearby regions has made the clan privy to sensitive information and granted it a measure of control over much of the nobility. Balancing complex networks of informants and debtors becomes yet another way to show their superb craftsmanship and attention to detail, subsequently allowing the Artisans considerable influence over both Cainite and kine.

Aside from maintaining a presence in courts across Europe, maneuvering their way into the confidence of kings and barons, the Toreador have managed to establish an impressive foothold in the Church. One of the primary reasons for this interest stems from the fact that the Church is the largest single contributor to the arts during the medieval period, commissioning numerous works for its myriad cathedrals and churches. Hymns, murals, statuary, stained glass, architecture and a host of other artistic endeavors gain sponsorship from the papacy, and the Artisans find their presence in the ranks of the clergy as a means of promoting such patronage.

Beyond mere interest in furthering the arts, the Toreador use the Church as an avenue to power. Just as the game of politics requires precise attention, so does the wrangling of bishops and clergy to pull the strings of kings and princes. The Artisans maintain almost as strong a presence in the ranks of the Church as the Magisters, though they tend to remain among the priests and abbots, going unnoticed by the Lasombra and Ventrue bishops warring at the highest levels of power. The bottom rungs of the hierarchy have great sway over the people, however, and even a single recalcitrant priest may confound the vast schemes of a potent cardinal. Many Cainites disregard the power of the spiritual connections between the kine and the priests or monks they see and pray with every day, and a wise Toreador takes advantage of this fact. The greatest painters pay close attention to the canvas beneath their grand designs, lest their intricate details and brilliant flourishes fade or lose their luster.

Development

Artisan characters place great importance on Social Attributes and Abilities, as they pride themselves in maintaining close relationships with mortal society, and their Natures and Demeanors tend toward the flamboyant, such as Gallant and Celebrant. As a character is most often Embraced based on his artistic and social abilities, Talents and Skills such as Performance and Crafts should also be given attention. During character creation, it would be wise to consider what drew the Toreador's sire to him at the outset. In what area did he show such prowess as to capture the Artisan's eye? This focus should provide the basis upon which all other Abilities are based. For example, an accomplished singer might focus on Abilities such as Empathy, Expression, Performance and even Linguistics, while an exquisite swordsman might lean toward Athletics, Dodge and Melee, with added emphasis to his Physical Attributes. Toreador characters are not always effete socialites, as sires may find beauty in combat, scholarship, piety, strategy or even thievery.

Sires expect their childer to handle themselves flawlessly at court and in all other social situations, forcing those without such Abilities to develop them over time. The aforementioned swordsman may train heavily as a fledgling in the ways of Etiquette and Subterfuge so as not to embarrass his sire. If Social Attributes were not primary during character creation, no small amount of attention should be paid to them as a chronicle progresses. Socially inept or awkward Artisans draw the attention of the clan elders and may be destroyed, or removed to a remote location where they can be trained properly. For this reason, Backgrounds such as Mentor and Status are popular among those less socially adroit as a means of compensating for initial failings. Status among the Artisans may grow from extraordinary artistic ability or access to the same. Architects who design massive cathedrals or patrons who sponsor many renowned artists gain great reputation within the clan, as well as among other Cainites. Other common Backgrounds for Toreador characters are Contacts, Herd and Influence, reflecting their connections to the kine.

Tzimisce

Ruling from strongholds surrounding the Carpathian Mountains, the Tzimisce epitomize the image of ruthless tyrants. The Fiends believe that they were born to rule, claiming the lands of Eastern Europe as their own to cultivate and command by right of might and strength of will. Left to their own devices, these vampires focus their energies on earning respected positions in their familial hierarchies and attaining lands and domains to rule as their own.

Recent nights have brought conflict to this powerful clan, however, besetting them with Ventrue and Tremere invaders and spies, threatening their ancestral homelands and stealing their precious domains from beneath them.


The Fiends rule through fear and intimidation, rarely masking their vampiric natures. Mortals are seen as subservient cattle and treated more as a resource than anything else, making the Tzimisce *voivodes* highly protective of their flocks. These Cainites stop at nothing to retain control of their lands and herds, inflicting heinous atrocities on trespassers and rivals invading their territories. It is not enough for the Fiends to thwart an enemy; they must make their foes shudder to think of opposing them ever again. As the War of Princes rages, many Tzimisce turn their attentions to stopping and punishing those who think they can oust them from their domains. If, in addition to settling the conflict, a given Fiend can manage to eliminate rivals for her sire's attentions and claim territories of her own, all the better.

The rough familial structure of the Tzimisce clan grows directly from its practice of breeding revenant families born as servants to the *voivode* princes. Many prominent Fiends are Embraced from the revenant houses, assuring the clan of fledglings wise in the secrets of unlife who understand the ways of Cainite society. This creates an even stronger bond between the Tzimisce and those populating their territories, which is compounded by their blood ties to the earth itself passed down through the centuries. It is no wonder that the Fiends aggressively defend their lands from raids and incursions by outsiders. For more on the revenants see **Dark Ages: Vampire**, pp. 286-287.

Development

The Tzimisce value Mental Attributes highly, though some few characters set Physical or Social Attributes as their primary group depending on their concept. The Fiends defy categorization in terms of Natures and Demeanors, though they often lean toward the more powerful and potent, such as Autocrat and Judge; their many possible concepts may range from "Monstrous Warlord" to "Beautiful Seductress," often reliant upon which of the revenant houses a Cainite was born into, if any. Abilities should relate closely to your character's concept. Given the previous examples, the former would likely concentrate on Abilities such as Brawl, Melee, Intimidation and Leadership, while the latter would hone the more subtle arts of Empathy, Subterfuge and Etiquette.

Special attention should be placed during character creation on which Backgrounds a Fiend possesses, as these often define her goals and ambitions more than Attributes or Abilities. The obvious



choice would be to concentrate on Domain, Herd and Resources, but those may not work for every character. While these Backgrounds are highly prized and regarded among the Fiends, starting characters may use the acquisition of such as a long- or short-term goal as something to be roleplayed rather than simply bought with points. Not all Tzimisce control their own domains, and sires parcel out scraps of land to those children who prove themselves worthy over time. Be aware that the possession of several dots in Domain or Resources might draw the envy of your clanmates, and plots to take your land for their own. Less contentious Backgrounds such as Mentor or Influence may be better suited to a younger Cainite. Status among the Fiends may stem from other Backgrounds, as Tzimisce controlling extensive domains and herds enjoy great prestige among their fellows. Especially cruel or tyrannical Fiends may gain widespread notoriety for their brutality, while those embroiled in conflict with the Tremere and Ventrue may gain reputations for martial prowess and strategy.

Those characters well versed in the use of Vicissitude often train in Body Crafts — and even Animal Ken if their fleshcrafting leans toward the bestial. By the same token, *kolduns* would be well served studying the Occult and developing their social Talents (such as Empathy, Intimidation and Expression) with a mind toward conjuring and controlling demons and spirits.

It is not uncommon for Fiends to develop a wide array of Abilities in the quests for power. For example, a lady of the Szantovich revenant family may be proficient in social Talents and Skills, use Vicissitude to increase her Appearance and be knowledgeable about Politics and courtly affairs — all while training diligently in the use of poisons and knives for the subtle removal of her rivals.

Ventrue

The Warlords are perhaps the closest Cainite parallel to the mortal nobility, as they feel they not only have the right to rule by merit of their blood and actions but the responsibility to defend and protect those beneath them in station. The Ventrue come from long lines of kings, emperors, princes and senators. Having ridden Rome to the height of its glory, they understand the only true way to establish order is through a dynastic rule that spans the whole of the continent. The feudal system of Europe allows them the structure to build powerful kingdoms and fiefdoms, with which they can conquer the Cainite tyrants and schemers pretending to power and seize the control that is their due.

The clan Embraces those who prove themselves strong and competent, both on the battlefield and off. Many fledglings have been selected from the various orders of knights found across the continent and directly from among nobility trained as leaders and tacticians. Younger Ventrue may have ambitions to power or command, though they acknowledge that dues must be paid to their elders before such honor is bestowed. These neonates serve as scouts, men-at-arms, sheriffs and warmasters to princes in the hopes that their diligent and faithful service will earn them domains of their own. Princes often grant trusted retainers small domains on the far fringes of their territory, perhaps bordering an enemy or stretch of wilderness, in the hopes that a new vassal will serve as a buffer against invasion in her zeal to protect her newly won land. Those neonates and ancillae who have not been granted domains may grow impatient, as the rules of primogeniture do not apply to those whose elders do not die. It is not uncommon for such a Cainite to plot her master's destruction or exile with the intent of filling the resulting power vacuum herself.

Elder Ventrue almost invariably have attained their own domains and built systems of allies and vassals to support their reigns. While the ambition to increase their personal holdings is ever-present, taking on greater proportions as they fight in the vanguard of the War of Princes, these staunch leaders also concern themselves with the responsibilities and duties they owe their vassals and subjects. It is not enough simply to rule by fiat; the Warlords wish to maintain their power through the respect and trust of those beneath them. While such duties often fall upon retainers, such as a seneschal or sheriff, princes must tend to the affairs of state just as much as to the strategy of the battlefield.

Besides the thrones of kings and dukes, the Ventrue also occupy churches and monasteries across Europe, vying for positions and power alongside the Lasombra and, to a lesser extent, the Toreador. Unfortunately, the discovery of this avenue to power came long after the Magisters had entrenched themselves in the papal hierarchy. The Ventrue understand the immense influence of the Church, as evidenced by the Crusades triggered by the papacy, and many establish their domains and holdings as bishops and abbots — constantly struggling against the strong Lasombra presence. Subsequently, a portion of the clan has learned from their mistakes with the fledgling Church and, noticing the growing importance of trade, has taken

it upon themselves to conquer this industry early in its development.

Development

Physical Attributes and Skills tend to receive the most attention when creating a Ventrue neonate, though Warlords of lower generation may be more prone to Social Attributes and Knowledges, as they concern themselves more with the responsibilities of their stations than the requisite skills for combat. Natures and Demeanors are varied, though most adopt martial or noble archetypes, such as Defender or Autocrat.

Ventrue characters rarely travel alone and most support an entourage of retainers, servants and brothers-at-arms. The burdens of leadership cannot be carried alone, and these Cainites understand the importance of keeping strong friends and allies close at hand. For this reason, Backgrounds such as Allies, Resources and Retainers are common even among fledglings, as those Embraced into the clan often come from the mortal nobility. Status among the Warlords is generally accrued through actions on the battlefield, though the Ventrue also take great pride in both their mortal and Cainite lineages. A vampire Embraced into a long line of legendary generals and men-at-arms, for instance, enjoys considerably greater prestige than one with an unknown lineage. Characters beginning a chronicle at a lower generation may also want to consider Domain as an option, though this may not be the case for those with Concepts such as Deposed Prince or Exiled Magistrate. Much the same as for Tzimisce characters, players may choose to make the acquisition (or recovery) of domain one of their goals at the outset of the chronicle.

While Dominate is a clan Discipline, Warlords often look down on those who use it to keep their subordinates in line, feeling that such respect should be earned rather than commanded. Still, many Ventrue spend time mastering this gift, likely with the intent of using it against rivals and enemies rather than their servants and herd.

Downtime and Maturation

Not every night of a Cainite's unlife is spent infiltrating a rival's inner circle or clearing a forest of a suspected Lupine presence. High Clan characters may spend decades in preparation for a single night of action, biding their time patiently while all the multifarious aspects of their schemes achieve fruition. Just because a character isn't spending every night on the battlefield or storming a fortified citadel doesn't mean she is sitting in her haven in a state akin to torpor, however.


Chronicles that take place over several centuries often give players a considerable amount of maturation points to spend during the long years between

major events. An unfortunately common reaction is to use these points to accelerate a character from novice to expert in a given skill or double one of her Attributes between stories. While this temptation may be great, it is important to keep in mind that Cainites are not prone to drastic changes even at their most active, let alone when they have removed themselves from circulation for several decades.

Of course, characters do change over time, and evolution during downtime differs only in its pace. A wise player considers her character's recent direction and goals when spending maturation points, carefully deciding what improvements the *character* would find important rather than determining how to maximize her success on dice rolls. A neonate Toreador who has been attempting to gain notice in the Courts of Love during the chronicle would likely continue this pursuit between stories, which may justify his player adding dots to Etiquette, Expression or Politics, or the Presence Discipline. Similarly, a Ventrue knight spending his downtime away from battle may focus on improving his sword technique or prowess with a bow, leading to a dot spent in Melee or Archery (or Celerity).

It is also important to keep in mind what opportunities are available. A Cappadocian character sequestered in a monastery in Scotland would have little chance to improve his Linguistics rating by learning Arabic, nor would a Brujah spending several years in a secluded village in the wilderness have much of a chance to increase her Academics or Politics rating. By the same token, it would be nearly impossible to learn a new Discipline without access to a practitioner of the same (with the exception of Celerity, Fortitude and Potence, which are instinctive enough for Cainites to learn on their own), to gain access to an arcane Knowledge, or to achieve more than basic understanding of an entirely unfamiliar Talent or Skill. Such improvements on a character would be hard to justify in game terms, and Storytellers should make every effort to curtail such out-of-character decision making.

An effective method for rationalizing character decisions, and keeping yourself involved in the motivations of your characters, is to write out in paragraph form what your character has been doing during her years of downtime. This record could be anything from a journal-style in-character account to a brief summary or synopsis, but it should factor in a character's motivations, recent history, long-term goals, environmental concerns and available materials. This expansion of a character's backstory helps you as a player by giving greater insight into your character, and it aids the Storyteller with her chronicle by providing plot hooks and accounting for each



character's whereabouts and activities. See the **Dark Ages Storytellers Companion** for more information on downtime and maturation.

Rank and Privilege

As much as the mortal circles from which the High Clans were Embraced value birthright and pedigree, so do Cainites value rank. As well regarded as a neonate may be, she does not garner the same respect as an ancilla of far fewer accomplishments. Rank signifies more than potential and ambition; it serves as proof that a vampire can handle the rigors of unlife and survive the slings and arrows of her rivals over the decades. A neonate may become a great hero or attain great power in a few short years, but only time will tell if she can continue to prosper or fall just as rapidly from grace. In the swirling power struggles of the High Clans, only staying power is truly worthy of respect.

That being said, age is not the sole factor in determining rank. A neonate who enters torpor within her first twenty years may remain in that state for several hundred more, though this time does not exactly constitute "survival" in any true sense. A Cainite of higher rank has proven she can withstand the nightly struggle against her enemies and, perhaps more importantly, her Beast. It may be difficult to prove that one has overcome such obstacles, or even to prove one's actual age... With this in mind, a vampire's status becomes vitally important.

The reputations of powerful vampires precede them, and their ranks are well known. Some Cainites are entirely unknown to any members of a prince's court, however, which can cause doubt or debate as to their true status. An elder, for instance, might pretend to be a neonate for purposes of espionage or in an attempt to appear as less of a threat, while a neonate might pretend to higher rank in a foreign court to gain privileges and respect. Both of these ploys have their dangers, as perceptive chamberlains make every effort to determine the rank and status of each visitor to their masters' domains, and subtle mannerisms may belie one's true age. Either way, what matters is a Cainite's "provable" rank, rather than her actual age.

To this end, the Status Background becomes important and sets High Clan Cainites apart from the fallen. The first cursed are more apt to keep records of sires and childer, tracing their lines back to their Antediluvian founders. Also, vampire scribes chronicle all manner of deeds and events, ensuring that the true rank of any High Clan Cainite can be determined, given enough time for research. The fallen have less reliable records, when any are available at all, and have a more difficult time gaining respect among other Cainites, as their ages and ranks may not be

readily known. While a Nosferatu ancilla may be several centuries old, he may easily be treated as a neonate without proof to the contrary... Contrarily, the first cursed often have detailed pedigrees, even carrying documents proving their identities for presentation upon meeting a prince or attending court—though nothing says these documents cannot be forged. The need for proof of identity establishes a strong link between rank and status that further divides the High Clans from the Low.

Another factor to be considered apart from simple age is the time spent by a Cainite as a fledgling under her sire, or as a ghoulish servant. One childer may adapt to his new unlife quickly and be brought before the prince in his first year, while another may have spent several decades as a ghoulish and an equal time under the tutelage of her sire. A Ventrue neonate who spent only a few months as a fledgling will therefore be recognized as an ancilla that much more quickly than another of his clan who spent fifty years sequestered by her sire. The acceptance of a neonate by the prince clearly marks his entry into Cainite society, though he may have existed more than a hundred years before that point. Until the time that he is proclaimed a neonate by a prince, he cannot rise in rank in the eyes of other Cainites. Many of the High Clans, particularly the Ventrue and Toreador, hold lavish ceremonies when a Cainite is accepted as a neonate, often involving a recital of the history and lineage of the vampire being honored. Other clans, such as the Cappadocians, confer rank without such pomp.

It is also not uncommon for a Cainite to be accepted as an ancilla once a prince gives him more expansive responsibilities, such as those of chamberlain or seneschal. An ancilla may even be officially recognized as an elder upon securing a powerful domain as her own. High Clan Cainites, more often than their Low Clan counterparts, mark these milestones of their unives clearly, for they alone show true acceptance and respect among vampiric society.

Roads

High Clan Cainites are found along each of the five major roads, though some roads are decidedly more popular than others. More than just a means of controlling the Beast, a road allows one of the first cursed to retain some piece of his mortal life. Most Cainites Embraced into the High Clans came from lives of affluence and education, and often of power and prestige; their roads are frequently chosen to maintain some modicum of that prosperity, even as they realize their souls have been eternally damned. Contrarily, some Cainites adopt roads that (to them) symbolize a separation between their former lives and

GOLCONDA

Recent nights have seen a marked decrease in the number of Cainites who still believe in Golconda, the mystical and spiritual belief that the Beast can somehow be ultimately controlled and brought into balance with a vampire's human nature. The Dark Medieval has been good to those of the High Clans, placing them in positions of immense power and influence across Europe and establishing them as the true rulers behind kings and emperors. With such a high quality of unlife, the first cursed have become content and complacent, no longer striving for an ideal balance that may or may not exist.

In truth, the High Clans have ascended to such an incredible height that, to many, returning to mortal life would constitute a step down. Scholars among the first cursed have moved away from more fanciful ideas and superstitions toward more academic research and experimentation, putting to rest the myths and legends of the ancient world. The fact that the fallen still cling to this desperate hope for redemption and exaltation further proves they are unfit to lead Cainite society, for childish fairy tales have no place among kings and queens.

Some do still believe in Golconda, and even strive toward that ideal, though these Cainites are likely to keep this goal secret from their High Clan brethren lest they become the subject of ridicule.

their new existences, finding their Embraces as true rebirths or turning points.

The first cursed were keenly aware of their place in the world before they became vampires, and their choices of road reflect their need for order and structure. For this reason the Road of Kings is by far the most common preference, as their previous mortal titles blend with their newfound Cainite power and status to create a sense of superiority and a desire to rule.

Roads by Clan

While a Cainite's choice of road is a personal and individual thing, each clan tends to prefer some roads to others. These decisions often relate to which subsection of society a Cainite was Embraced from, as a priestly scholar will likely choose a different path than a hardened soldier.

Some Cainites walk roads in direct opposition to their mortal natures, however, struck deeply with the notion of their damnation and continuing down a path opposite that which they followed in life as some

form of punishment or submission to their loss of humanity. For example, a pious and devout Christian may turn toward the Road of Sin with the thought that God has forsaken her entirely, or a malicious and grisly warrior may turn down the *Via Caeli*, feeling as though his damnation came as punishment by God. The clan tendencies that follow do not focus on such aberrations, seeking to provide insight into the norm rather than the exceptions.

Brujah


Along with the Toreador, the Brujah have retained the closest connection with mortal society, fighting alongside the kine in the pursuit of one cause after the next and looking out for the welfare of the common people. For this reason, many Zealots follow the Road of Humanity, hoping to reunite Cainites and mortals in some semblance of balanced coexistence. Prodigals of the clan are often great philosophers and thinkers able to modify their worldview easily to incorporate the truths of their new unlives... The Brujah attraction to philosophy and theology also leads many toward the Road of Heaven, and these Faithful, many on the Path of Retribution, can be found in the front lines of Crusades. Some elder Brujah seeking to rebuild Carthage, as well as Zealots Embraced from the nobility or knightly orders, may instead follow the Paths of Chivalry along the Road of Kings.

Cappadocians

The Cappadocian obsession with death and the afterlife finds these Cainites most often progressing along the Road of Sin or Heaven. Many of the clan discard all sense of morals or ethics in their search for answers, placing little if any value on human life and hardly caring about the pain and suffering of mortals. The Road of Sin allows these Graverobbers far more freedom to experiment with death and the dead, as Sinners are not bound by the restrictive conventions of the living. Some Cappadocians with this attitude follow the clan's own Road of Bones, however, probing the mysteries of the grave with a colder detachment than that of the Sinners. By contrast, a large portion of the clan follows in the footsteps of their founder, seeking answers through the study of theology and the Cainite relationship with God. A fair number of Cappadocians were holy men before their Embraces and continue in their faithful service on the Road of Heaven in unlife.

Lasombra

The Magisters seek power and influence primarily through two areas, the Church and the nobility, which makes it hardly surprising that these Cainites primarily follow the Roads of Heaven and Kings.



Lasombra operating within the hierarchy of the Church may truly believe in the faith or simply see Christianity as a means to power. The former tend to be adherents to the Road of Heaven, often on the Path of Divinity, hoping to discover or fulfill their place in God's plan. Christian and Muslim Magisters on the Road of Heaven comprise most of those fighting tenaciously in the Shadow *Reconquista* plaguing Iberia, though those pursuing the Road of Kings have involved themselves heavily in the conflict. Lasombra Scions often choose the Path of the Vizier, manipulating those in power from the shadows rather than overtly taking command. The subtle direction of these Scions has urged the mortal *Reconquista* forward just as aggressively as the fanaticism of the Faithful. Some Lasombra work to bring humanity to redemption by beating repentance into them, following the Road of Night.

Toreador

Arguably not as close to mortal society as the Brujah, the Toreador take great pains to preserve what little emotion and passion remained after their Embraces, leading many in the clan toward the Road of Humanity. Without connection to the kine and the vibrancy of the living, the Artisans feel that they will lose their creative flair and appreciation of artistic skill. The painstakingly crafted webs of favors common among the clan may also lure these Cainites away from the *Via Humanitatis* to the Road of Kings, particularly the Path of the Vizier. The clan's close connection to the Church may lead more Christian-minded Toreador to the Road of Heaven, struggling to find salvation alongside the mortal artists they inspire.

Tzimisce

Almost invariably, the Tzimisce find themselves drawn to the Road of Kings, and often the Path of the Tyrant. These vampires have not grown fully accustomed to the Dark Medieval, relishing their former days of glory and unrestricted dominance over the kine. The Fiends feel it is their unquestionable destiny to rule, using the Road of Kings to keep control over their Beasts while they struggle to expand their domains. Similarly, the Tzimisce sometimes feel drawn to the Road of the Beast, refusing to be confined by the strictures of the feudal order rapidly dominating the continent. Throwing away the fetters of civilization, these Fiends enforce their rules through brute force and raw instinct, harkening back to nights when subjects worshipped members of the clan as dark gods. Certain aspects of the Road of Heaven may also entice the Tzimisce, though the subservience of that road often repulses the more dominant Fiends (meaning that the Path of Divinity speaks to them most clearly).

The Road of Humanity is repugnant to the clan, and those following this weak and yielding path draw the enmity of their brethren, particularly if they follow the inhuman and monstrous Road of Metamorphosis.

Ventrue

Much like the Tzimisce, the Ventrue feel it is their right and privilege to lead, though they are less bound to the ancient ways and horrific methods of the Fiends. Other Cainites often assume that any given Ventrue walks the Road of Kings, as the clan itself adopts many aspects of that road with regard to the rights and responsibilities of leadership. The Path of Chivalry finds favor among those Ventrue Embraced from the knightly orders, and a growing faction of the clan chooses the Path of the Merchant as the means to power. Many Warlords follow the Road of Heaven as well, believing it is God's will that they lead the other Damned and protect the mortals dwelling in their domains, and such Ventrue often find themselves embroiled in holy wars and crusades across Europe and in the Holy Land. Likewise, some seek to retain the simple nobility and mortal status that was taken from them in the Embrace and progress along the Road of Humanity.

Moments of Truth

Cainites of the High Clans spend many of their nights questioning their places in the world, in society and in God's plan. For this reason, roads popular among the first cursed, particularly the Road of Kings and the Road of Heaven, have developed in much the same way as mortal religions, complete with ashen priests to aid in the instruction of each road's followers. Unlike the fallen, the vampires of the High Clans have more time and freedom to pursue the philosophies and theologies of their roads. These Cainites often seek out the ashen priests of their roads in order to gain better understanding and control of their bestial natures.

While the Low Clans often rely on personal epiphanies and sudden revelations to progress along their roads, the first cursed favor more guided instruction, developing a firmer grasp of the Beast alongside a trusted teacher and advisor. The reason for this is twofold. Of more importance is the outward image projected by those aspiring to high stations, which may be damaged by sudden frenzy or loss of composure. Besides this, Cainites of High Clans are less inclined to leave such things to chance, instead taking direct initiative to test themselves and their convictions.

One of the more common epiphanies experienced by members of the High Clans is the realization of what they lost with the Embrace. For instance, a prince

THE ASHEN PRIESTHOOD

Some few Cainites step outside the feudal order of the Dark Medieval and dedicate themselves wholly to their roads, becoming members of the ashen priesthood. These vampires care little about matters of wealth and holdings, instead staking their domains among their Cainite followers... An ashen priest may have more control and influence over those in her flock than the prince she advises, and this spiritual domain carries with it as much power as one bound to a particular territory.


Ashen priests can bring ruin on even the most influential Cainite lord by citing sins against his road or throwing their support behind a major rival. The political axe swung by these individuals is a potent weapon, ignored at an ambitious Cainite's peril. For this reason, many princes retain the services of the ashen priesthood as keepers in their domains, consulting them on matters of morality and ensuring that such potent figures are kept under a watchful eye.

A character dealing with an ashen priest of her road should guard her words, just as a Christian would when speaking with an inquisitor of the Church. Even if she has nothing to hide, truly adhering to the teachings of her road, a reckless word or statement might bring more scrutiny than she desires.

returning in glory from the crusades may be Embraced by the Ventrue and adapt to an unlife of further glory, military conquest and relative comfort without truly acknowledging the loss of his mortal life. The sudden awareness that he will never have children of his own, or ride with a noble lady under the noontday sun, or even enjoy the cornucopia of food at a harvest feast may trigger a rush of doubt and sorrow that leads to a moment of truth. Hearing of his father's fall in battle and finally understanding that he can no longer truly serve as heir, or watching the last member of his family succumb to death — these reminders of lost nobility are tragedies best experienced under the guidance of a mentor, someone who can help him through his loneliness.

Other moments of truth come in relation to the fallen, or more specifically the divide between the clans. A Lasombra foiled by the cunning of a sly Ravnos, or a Toreador stunned by the exquisite beauty of an Assamite warrior's balanced movements, might take a moment to reassess his place in the Cainite order. The understanding that one's place in a High Clan does not necessarily make one better than the fallen comes as a shock to many of the first cursed and may trigger a moment of truth.





Those Cainites on roads without as much structure, such as the Road of Humanity or Road of the Beast, may seek out instruction but more commonly search for answers on their own. As an example, Brujah on the *Via Humanitatis* may indeed have a mentor or advisor, but a Tzimisce follower of the same road most decidedly will not. Contrarily, those adherents to roads other than the major five likely find mentors or ashen priests to guide them, as these paths are less intuitive and more rarified.

The Coterie

Before going into detail about how Cainites work together in coterie, it might help to discuss why such groups are formed in the first place. While it may seem like High Clan vampires are self-sufficient enough to carry out their own plans or rely on subservient intermediaries, some situations call for a group of vampires working together toward a common goal, even going so far as to associate with the fallen as a means to some ultimate end.

Followers of each of the various roads find different justifications for banding together. Scions may need the assistance of brothers-at-arms in battle or aides to ease their way to power, while Prodigals may look to band together for companionship or a sense of community. The Faithful often seek the aid of others to carry out the Lord's work, while Sinners band together to watch each others' backs and carry out more difficult schemes. Even the Ferals understand the wisdom of operating in a pack for strength and safety.

Cainites may spend decades in solitude or shuttered within the halls of power, but most are far from being loners or recluses. Vampires seek the company of others at some point in their unives if only to feel as though they aren't alone in the world, that others of their kind stalk the night. Beyond this, many goals and ambitions are more easily achieved with the aid of a companion or two from time to time.

High Clan Coterie


Understandably, when the first cursed seek companions, they look to their own. Unless she were in dire straits, a Toreador lady would not deign to travel alongside a Nosferatu, instead seeking out those more in line with her refined sensibilities. The fallen are treated as inferior in almost every way, and no self-respecting member of the High Clans would freely associate with them unless circumstances offered no alternative.

Members of the High Clans band together for several different reasons, though most involve mutually beneficial arrangements for all parties. Perhaps the most common single type of coterie among the first cursed is that formed for purposes of domain. While a single

neonate may not have enough power to hold and protect a secure haven and domain, three or four neonates stand a far better chance. Younger Cainites sometimes carve out domains to be shared with others while they develop plans and contacts designed to catapult them into power. Such arrangements often find vampires sharing resources and establishing rules for hunting and interaction with the kine. Once one (or more) of these vampires becomes an ancilla or attains considerable power as a neonate, the coterie normally dissolves, often when the newly dominant member claims the domain as her own. Some coterie continue to exist beyond this point, with the remaining members of the group performing seneschal, sheriff and other duties until the time when they can make a play for control or establish domains of their own.

Another common reason to form a coterie, similar in intent to those centered around the protection of a domain, involves Cainites in contested territory or on the borders of an escalating conflict. These groups come together in the hopes of self-preservation, banding together for safety and mutual protection. While a single haven or small domain can pose little resistance against an invading force, a few domains working in concert may stand a better chance of repelling incursions into their territory. Such coterie are more loosely structured, coming together less often than others and with more of

PLAYING WELL WITH OTHERS



While concepts such as Asocial Cappadocian, Hateful Tzimisce and Overbearing Ventrue may make for interesting characters, these stereotypes, when taken to an extreme degree, can ruin the game for everyone. This game is designed so that everyone can be actively involved and have a good time, but players who insist on making their character the center of attention in every situation make that impossible. Granted, vampires stalk the Dark Medieval who wouldn't spit on a fellow Cainite if she were on fire, but deciding to play such a character may not be in everyone's best interest. Try to keep in mind at the outset how your character will work within a group and whether certain decisions will negatively affect a chronicle by focusing all the attention on her antisocial personality traits. This reminder also holds for those players who find it necessary to create a "loner" character whom a Storyteller finds impossible to include in her story. The intent is for all to enjoy themselves and participate in the game, not for one player to steal the limelight by intentionally not fitting in. So have compassion for your fellow gamers and respect their desire to have fun and be a part of the group — being unduly difficult spoils the game for everyone.

a definite purpose, planning strategies to protect their holdings and herds. These alliances may involve Cainites of higher rank and may be incarnations of past coterie formed as neonates.

Such stability is far from the norm among coterie, as most groups are formed to perform specific tasks or accomplish definite goals. It is common during the War of Princes for Ventrue and Brujah, for example, to form more battle-oriented coterie, often centering around one knightly order or another. Such comrades-at-arms may serve alongside one another for a single battle or for many years, at times forging lasting friendships or alliances that continue long after the fighting has subsided. Other groups may form for less overt tasks, focusing more on stealth and espionage. As an example, a coterie of Lasombra and Tzimisce may come together for the sole purpose of raiding a Tremere chantry to retrieve a stolen tome, or to rescue or destroy a specific elder. Still other coterie form to go on quests for lost artifacts, hunts for escaped criminals or any number of other reasons.

At times these less permanent coterie members develop more lasting relationships, seeking one another out throughout the years for aid in specific missions. It is not uncommon for a successful coterie of neonates to call upon one another decades or even centuries later as ancillae to achieve once again some difficult goal or eliminate a potent threat to their domains or sovereignty. Some of the staunchest allies of princes are those who fought and served alongside them when they were neonates new to the ways of the night.

Mixed Coterie


One might wonder, considering the deeply rooted class divisions involved, why Cainites of the High Clans would ever consider forming coterie with the fallen. Surely the wastrels and vagabonds of the Low Clans have nothing to offer the first cursed, nor have they the manners to function in civilized society; what use would one find in forging even temporary alliances with them? Granted, the trials facing High and Low Clan Cainites differ greatly in scope, and success in one area does not assume prowess in the other, but at times vampires of such disparate clans are forced to work in concert. Such groupings have appeared rarely in the past, but the War of Princes has forced unorthodox alliances and made strange bedfellows, prompting the creation of mixed coterie with more frequency. Fallen Cainites have gained a greater foothold in the realm of politics, claiming vacant domains by force and toppling weak and unsuspecting members of the High Clans. The first cursed find themselves on such a defensive that they must ally with all Cainites in their domains, regardless of rank or clan.

Of course, these groups are by no means equal partnerships ruled by democratic principles, for unavoidable social stratification still serves to divide high from low. A vampire from a High Clan will undoubtedly attempt to establish herself as the coterie's leader. If a group has more than one such Cainite, they often struggle for dominance and position with one another, ignoring any claims of leadership rising from their Low Clan fellows. For example, if a Ventrue and Lasombra find themselves paired in a coterie with a Gangrel and two Malkavians, the Ventrue will likely make a play for direct control while the Lasombra may curry the favor of the fallen members of the group to undermine the claims of her rival. Neither would accept the Gangrel as leader willingly, unless circumstances absolutely demanded it — such as the coterie being stranded miles from civilization in Lupine territory.

In many cases the fallen Cainites in a group already owe their fealty or allegiance to one of the High Clan members, playing the roles of servant or retainer. In the example above, one of the Malkavians may serve the Ventrue as a spy or messenger, possibly bound by a blood oath. This is perhaps the most common arrangement for a mixed coterie, when the fallen members of the group already serve the first cursed. In such a scenario, vampires of the Low Clans are prone to be used as bodyguards, scouts or thugs while their High Clan fellows handle more complex social and political issues.

The War of Princes has seen benevolent princes deposed by tyrants, previously placid territories besieged by invaders and relative order thrust into utter chaos, provoking High Clan Cainites to seek any and all help to regain power or withstand adversity. In such situations, the help of the fallen can prove indispensable. Mingling with the Low Clans can save a Cainite's unlife, as pursuers and assassins often disregard the leper quarter or sewers in their hunt for a deposed prince. The Low Clans have spent centuries going unnoticed and unmolested beneath the noses of the first cursed, and these skills can mean the difference between eventual return to power and a violent end. In return, the fallen gain allies higher in the social order on whom they may call for favors at a later date.

At times, mixed coterie form without such dire need, normally when a High Clan Cainite requires a specific service from one or more of the fallen. A group of Brujah knights may seek the aid of a Gangrel to serve as a scout or wilderness guide, for example, or a coterie of Lasombra expanding their domain might employ the services of a Nosferatu spy to ferret out a rival's plans. It is not uncommon for the first cursed to develop working relationships with local members of the fallen, as their assistance may be invaluable at some later time. A Ventrue prince who occasionally retains the services of



a local Tremere merchant may find need to call upon this ally at a later time, to smuggle her out of the city after a successful coup, for instance. Such interaction between High and Low Clans may or may not lead to the formation of a coterie, but these working relationships grant the first cursed that possibility if the need arises.

On the European continent, it is almost unheard of for mixed coterie to be led by members of the Low Clans, though it is possible. Even if circumstances were such that the only clear path to survival is to allow a Ravnos to take control of the coterie, for example, most High Clan Cainites would resist at all costs, even if the retention of leadership meant certain death. Those rare instances when one of the first cursed acquiesces may place a Low Clan Cainite in control, though only for as long as it takes to return to less dire circumstances. High Clan vampires resent even temporary subservience, often for decades or centuries, and some compensate for their submission by excessive dominance after the fact.

Those High Clan vampires in foreign lands, however—Egypt or Outremer for example—might willingly join coterie led by Assamites or other powerful local “fallen” until such time as they can return to Europe. For this reason, the first cursed may cultivate allies and contacts within regions held by the Low Clans, so as to have protection and guidance when traveling in those lands. Vampires of the High Clans may look on such humbling experiences as opportunities to see how the fallen conduct themselves when allowed power and influence, and may use their newfound understanding to their advantage once they return to their own territories.

Beyond the Borders

While the information in this chapter may lead one to believe that all the various members of a clan behave a certain way or possess certain attitudes, this is not exactly the case. Two Ventrue on the Road of Kings, for example, may have similar ambitions to lead and relationships with their servants and retainers, but their culture, customs and language may be entirely different. The first may have been Embraced from among the sons of a Norse king and gained his domain in the northlands of Scandinavia, revering tales of legendary heroes and wise gods, while the second may hail from a noble line of soldiers in Naples, instructed by his sire in the histories of proud centurions and Roman senators. These two characters share basic commonalities, i.e., their clan and road, and may have other mechanical similarities, such as comparable levels in physical Talents, martial Skills and other Abilities such as Leadership and Occult, but beyond the dots on their character sheets are layers of less tangible differences rooted in language and culture.

Speaking in Tongues

Even with all their disparity, the two previous examples would more than likely be able to relate to one another, simply because they were Embraced as Ventrue. The Warlords, as all of the High Clans, generally choose their childer from among the educated classes, or at least from among those who have the potential to elevate themselves. This means that most of the first cursed can speak and read some combination of Latin, French or Greek, in addition to the local languages of their regions — those who fought in the Crusades for the Holy Land may even have learned rudimentary Arabic. While quite a few fledglings among the High Clans do not meet this criterion before their Embraces, it is a fair assumption that these Cainites learn at least one of the major scholarly tongues before they become neonates. After all, most texts at this time are written in one of these languages, and Church services are conducted solely in Latin.

While two High Clan Cainites are most likely able to speak with one another, communication with the fallen is more of a problem. The Low Clans are less likely to engage in scholarly pursuits, though a fair amount do make an effort to learn Latin at some point during their unives. These Cainites may learn more than one of the peasant languages in their travels, but unless their ambitions lead to study or the Church it is unlikely that they will acquire proficiency in these academic languages. This serves to drive a further wedge between the High Clans and the Low. The first cursed feel that the fallen are not only uneducated but unable to rise above the “gutter” languages of the commoners. If these vampires cannot even learn civilized language with the eternity of unlife, then they certainly have no right aspiring to positions of power or authority. Particularly cruel and intolerant members of the High Clans may issue orders or commands to fallen Cainites in Greek or another educated language with the intent of punishing their victim when such words are not carried out to the letter.

The High Clans may ordinarily enjoy the luxury of communication among their own kind, but quite often these Cainites find themselves needing to speak with someone totally ignorant of even the most rudimentary Latin. While this most often happens when dealing with peasants and townfolk in foreign lands, it also becomes a problem with other vampires, sometimes even others of the first cursed.

Particularly powerful or wealthy Cainites solve this problem through interpreters. Seneschals may serve in this capacity, and those who excel at language are prized retainers whose services are sought by many princes and lords. If for some reason a Cainite of a High Clan finds herself stranded in a foreign land, with none among her

LINGUISTICS AND ACADEMIC STUDY

While local languages may be sufficient to live and work in a given region, they are all but useless to those who wish to read classical works and theological texts. To study the ancient philosophy and drama of Athens, the holy scrolls and tomes of Jerusalem or the theses and treaties of mortal and Cainite theoreticians, one must have linguistic knowledge beyond the common tongues of the peasantry. Truly advanced study may call for the understanding of Syrian Aramaic, ancient Hebrew or Norse runes; even translations of popular works require the ability to read Latin and Greek.

Characters wishing to excel in specific Knowledges should bear in mind that such research by its nature requires considerable linguistic ability. In order to speak and understand Latin, a character must possess at least one dot in Linguistics, but this is hardly sufficient for superior knowledge in any given subject. Renowned philosophers are undoubtedly versed in Greek, while skilled biblical scholars often understand a host of ancient languages, both active and defunct, from the Outremer. Remember, in order to advance beyond the first dot in Academics, a character must have at least one dot of Linguistics, and depending upon the level of specialization in a field, she may require a Linguistics score of two or three. At the Storyteller's discretion, this may be applied to Knowledges other than Academics, such as Law, Medicine, Occult, Politics, Theology or even the higher levels of Seneschal.

Also, the average person living in the Dark Medieval is not literate, as books are both costly and rare. A wealthy noble may own only a handful of texts, while extensive libraries are mostly exclusive to universities, monasteries and those among the highest economic echelon. Therefore, it is assumed that a starting character cannot read or write unless she takes a dot in Academics. Without taking the time to study letters and grammar, even the most fluent speaker of a language would have no way of deciphering it when written on a page. As mentioned earlier, members of the High Clans are rarely illiterate, and their Academics scores should represent this.

retinue who speaks the language (or cut off from them entirely), her first instinct would be to seek someone to serve as interpreter, often in exchange for money or favors.

While fallen Cainites may have recourse to immersion in a language, the first cursed may find this option difficult, if not impossible. Even if a High Clan Cainite had no retinue or servants, the opportunity for fraternization with commoners might not easily present itself. The first cursed find speaking with such uneducated peasantry distasteful in the extreme, and extended periods of forced interaction border on torture for those accustomed to the manners of court. Compounding this problem even further, nobles stranded among the peasantry might find their efforts at communication met with deaf ears or outright defiance; it is not every night when a poor man can watch a rich man suffer.

Another option available for those faced with a language barrier is to try *Auspex*. While *Steal Secrets* mostly gleans thoughts in the form of incomprehensible foreign words, some images and feelings can be read as well. This sort of fumbling communication may be useful in determining intent or basic ideas; it cannot penetrate to deeper meaning or complex thought without a more complete understanding of the subject's language. A Cainite may attempt to learn a language this way through observation and eavesdropping on the thoughts of others, but this is a hard road that yields meager results. As an aside, High Clan Cainites at court might intentionally think in obscure or foreign languages to foil those attempting to listen in with *Steal Secrets*.

Language barriers and difficulties in communication can provide interesting story hooks and make for fun roleplaying, but these devices can become tiresome if used too often. If, for example, a Cappadocian from the Holy Roman Empire is in a coterie with five Assamites who speak only Arabic, the lack of communication between players can limit the enjoyment of a campaign. Storytellers should be wary of this possible isolation of players and find ways to ensure the entire group enjoys the game.

When Cultures Collide

Far more common than barriers of language are the cultural edifices built from religion, regional customs, local political systems and simple differences in manners and appearance, for the Dark Medieval is not known for its tolerance of diversity. From kings to bishops to the common peasantry, it is common for people from all levels of society to believe their way of life is the only option, and that those who differ too greatly from that norm are heretics, rabble-rousers or criminals. Cultural differences prompt a wary and cautious eye at the very least, though hatred and violence are also common reactions.

For example, a Christian knight of the Holy Roman Empire traveling in Saracen lands is likely met with open



hostility. Even if he makes every attempt to conceal his religion and martial nature, other differences set him apart enough to cause suspicion, from his style of dress to his (lack of) observance of local customs regarding interaction with women, warriors or the priestly caste. Spending time studying his new culture and language may limit these outward appearances, but his skin, hair and eye color, his accented speech or his ignorance of local slang and idiom will still betray him. Only those perceptive few who are particularly skilled in etiquette and performance can flawlessly blend into a foreign culture, and the High Clans are not especially known for their ability to fade into the background.

Characters who do stand out from the crowd may experience difficulties in social interactions and in their attempts to pass unseen, as they conjure feelings of mistrust and anxiety among locals. This alienation should be emphasized during game play, and players should take the time to determine how their characters react to such obstacles and adversity. Though not represented by dots on a page, cultural attitudes and biases can create more depth and breath for a character, offering a more fulfilling game experience. Outsiders can be fun to play and offer numerous story hooks, often enriching the Dark Medieval environment and setting it apart from a campaign set in the modern era.

As mentioned in the sidebar earlier in this chapter, however, players should be careful not to allow the outcast nature of their characters to drift too far to the extreme, as that detracts from the experience of others. A single Christian Cainite may easily find herself ostracized by a coterie of Muslims or Jews, and, while intolerance does exist in 13th-century society, players should take pains to overcome these rifts through game play — lest in-character tensions become more serious out-of-character clashes. It makes sense that the Christian character would experience mistrust and even hatred from others in her group — perhaps even escalating to intracoterie violence — but extended interaction during a story or campaign should go a long way toward building a sense of acceptance or, at the least, tolerance.

The Tzimisce and Ventrue often express the most prejudice against those they consider outcasts or foreigners, and the Iberian Lasombra have divided their very clan along religious and cultural lines. Contrarily, some Cainites become intensely curious of others, rather than xenophobic. Scholars and philosophers are most prone to this reaction, and certain Cappadocians or Brujah may be more tolerant of the cultures and views of others. These open-minded individuals, however, are the exception rather than the norm among the High Clans, and mortals with such broadmindedness often draw the attention of the aforementioned clans, as they generally have above-average intellectual ability and adapt more easily to new ideas.





CHAPTER THREE: NOBLE BY ASSOCIATION

Backbiters, haters of God, despiteful, proud, boasters,
inventors of evil things, disobedient to parents.

— Romans 1:26

Even lords have wayward, rebellious children. Even the greatest can fall from their station. Even the wise scholars need petty mammon. And every lord needs guards. This chapter deals with bloodlines that are, in one way or another, associated with the High Clans. The True Brujah claim to be the scions of a power usurped in ancient times. The Salubri were once counted among the High Clans, but the Tremere have cast them down. The Giovanni were Embraced into Clan Cappadocian to serve a specific purpose, and the Lamia adopted, or were adopted by, the same clan, now serving as bodyguards and warriors for the Graverobbers.

TRUE BRUJAH

True Brujah at a glance

Sobriquet: Sages, The Unfeeling

Appearance: Most True Brujah wear simple and functional clothing. They usually shun armor, preferring not to limit their movement, and, being as pragmatic as they are, tend to wear clothing in keeping with the area and their station. Most True Brujah are in very good physical shape, since the Sages choose healthy people for childer, and prefer to keep their hair short for practical reasons (long hair can be grabbed or fall into your eyes), cutting it every night if they were Embraced with longer hair.

Haven and Prey: True Brujah havens vary, but they are generally simple, functional and unassuming. Many havens have a room set aside especially for reading and contemplation. True Brujah often try to maintain a herd, as this makes feeding more efficient. Otherwise, they try to limit their feeding to healthy people, as they are more likely to survive. This isn't necessarily out of any humane desires; if one's vessels survive, they can provide vitae another night. Some True Brujah feed often from many different vessels, seeking to experience emotion in the only way they can.

The Embrace: It is tradition among the True Brujah to watch a prospective childer for no less than a year and frequently for a decade or more before offering the Embrace. Few True Brujah force the Embrace upon their childer, preferring to inform whom-ever they have chosen of what will become of them. The actual Embrace is usually swift and as passionless as possible. Should the prospective childer refuse, the True Brujah usually kills the mortal in order to preserve the Silence of the Blood.

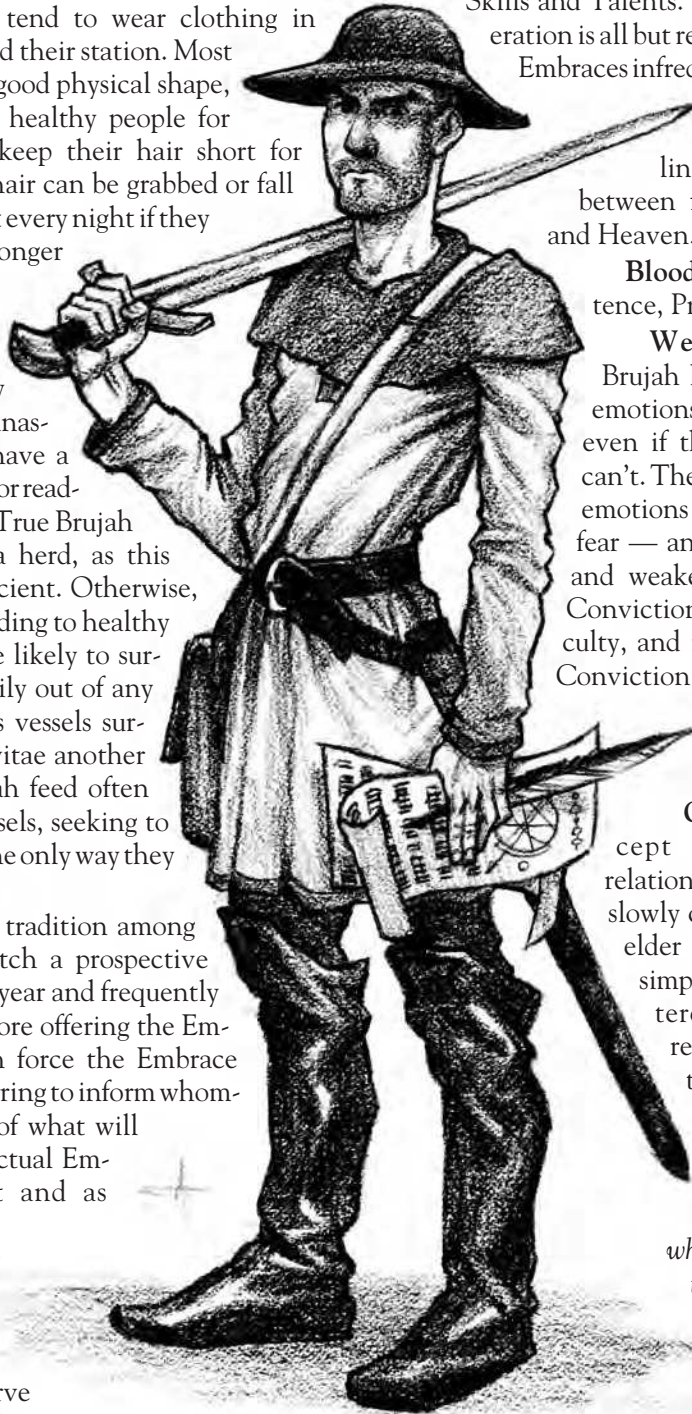
Character Creation: Physical or Mental Attributes are typically primary, with the other being secondary. Social Attributes are rarely primary. Knowledges are usually favored (all True Brujah have at least one dot in Academics), along with physical Skills and Talents. For Backgrounds, Generation is all but required, as the bloodline Embraces infrequently. Mentor and Retainers are also common. The bloodline is split almost evenly between followers of Humanity and Heaven.

Bloodline Disciplines: Potence, Presence, Temporis

Weakness: The True Brujah have long denied their emotions, to such an extent that even if they want to feel, they can't. They feel only the strongest emotions — typically rage and fear — and even they are muted and weakened. All Conscience/Conviction rolls receive a +2 difficulty, and increasing Conscience/Conviction and Road scores costs double the usual experience or maturation points.

Organization: None. Except for sire-childer relationships and the letters that slowly circulate between a few elder Sages, the bloodline is simply too small and too scattered to have anything resembling an organization.

Quote: *Stop begging for mercy. You will receive none from me. You knew the laws. I was there when the prince explained them. You violated them anyway, and now you must face sunrise. Just accept your fate. The pain won't last long.*



True Brujah

The True Brujah are a small, ancient bloodline that claims to be one of the original clans, brought low by a treacherous childe of an Antediluvian. According to their histories, they are the true childe of the one now known as Troile, who lost his blood, soul and very name to a treacherous childe. To support this claim, they assert that they have the cold, emotionless wisdom that Troile possessed and that his childe lost that wisdom after the act of diablerie, gaining the blood fury that the current Brujah possess. The True Brujah also claim their control over time is a gift from the original Troile, something that his treacherous childe could not steal.

The True Brujah are an obscure bloodline, but many of those who know about it, mainly elder Brujah, claim that in fact the True Brujah are an offshoot of the Brujah line, a philosophical branch with delusions of grandeur and a warped version of Celerity.

History

The most ancient historians of the bloodline tell a tale of a master warrior grown weary with battle who was Embraced by an unnamed childe of Caine. This warrior saw his new state of being, his new immortality, as a chance to go beyond the mastery of his physical self. He became a sage and a scholar and eventually developed the ideal of the perfect union of body and mind to achieve a state known as Perfection. It was this warrior who would later be known as Troile.

The wisest of the clan freely admit that they know little or nothing about Troile before the Deluge. Afterward, however, he began searching out worthy people who, like him, would be interested in achieving Perfection. Troile was aware that he himself had not yet achieved this state and thus wanted other perspectives. Most of his childe took up his cause of Perfection, while others disliked the way it distanced them from humanity (even more so than other Cainites) and instead chose other paths, usually becoming great sages and scholars.

Stories differ when it comes to the unnamed childe of Troile who took his blood. According to most True Brujah, the traitor was Troile's last or second-to-last childe (some stories mention a last childe by the name of Jonas), a powerful warrior who had already achieved physical Perfection. Troile Embraced him despite his lack of the self-control and discipline that Troile valued.

It later became obvious that the Troile's Embrace was a mistake. While Troile had always told his childe

"QUI SUMUS?"

From the journal of Themistocles:


We are the true childe of the ancient Cainite once known as Troile, whose name was usurped by a childe. We are orphans, severed from our legacy by the most heinous of crimes, our lineage usurped by the rude and impatient get of the false Troile. We are scholars, philosophers and seekers of Perfection, of the union of body, mind and, should such a thing exist, soul. We are seekers of ancient knowledge, guardians of secrets, masters of time. We are the True Brujah.

Some would deny our claim that we are the true descendants of Troile, proposing instead that we are merely a splinter, split from our parent clan in the nights of Carthage. Since my Embrace came later than those nights, honesty compels me to admit that I cannot know the truth. However, I doubt that my sire purposefully lied to me, or his sire to him. Why should we claim to be something we are not? We strive towards rational wisdom and practical behavior. As such, I see no reason why my elders should claim a legacy that is not theirs.

Yet, I cannot know.

All I do know is that we do not have the same passion as the Zealots. Instead, we are cursed with a lessening of emotions. I say cursed, despite the claims of Rathmonicus that our callousness is a gift to be used. We can no longer truly love God and only in the vulgar act of feeding can we find pleasure. This, I say, is truly a curse. We know, beyond any shadow of a doubt, that we are no longer human.

to Embrace sparingly and with great care, his new childe chose several warriors and beautiful women as his childe. Where Troile taught the rest of his childe the self-control and wisdom necessary to master Temporis, his last childe's temperament and restlessness prevented him from learning it. Where the rest of Brujah's brood slowly, but surely, found themselves growing more rational, pragmatic and controlled, this childe was always angry, emotional and restless. Troile tried to counsel and guide his wayward childe, but in the end, it became clear that he was impossible to redeem. Most believe that it came to a confrontation, but many True Brujah say that Troile's childe had secretly plotted against him for years. Whatever the truth, this childe ended up slaying his sire after a mighty battle and then committing Amaranth upon him. After this heinous act, Caine punished the



new Troile with a curse that he would never achieve the same wisdom, unclouded by emotion, as his sire. The new Troile and his berserker childer led a purge of the True Brujah. This purge happened when the power of the Second City was waning and the other clans were too occupied by other concerns to take action. The True Brujah claim that they were betrayed by the other clans who were jealous of their knowledge, while the Brujah say that the original Troile had grown far too callous and cruel and the other clans stepped aside (or even helped the purge).

After this great betrayal, what little remained of the true lineage of Troile scattered. Never a numerous clan, they were now reduced to little more than a handful, existing either alone or with only a broodmate or childer. Some swore vengeance against the False Brujah, as the Sages call the get of the Traitor Troile, while others did not see the merit of such action. Instead, they continue on their own, honing their physical skills and gathering knowledge.

Of course, others (especially of the Brujah clan, but also a few scholars from other clans) tell a different tale. They claim that the so-called True Brujah were a splinter group in Carthage, devoted to the gathering of knowledge, to philosophy and to fighting against the rage that was the lot of their blood. This group also conducted experiments with their Celerity Discipline, probably aided by Assamite sorcerers. They foolishly blamed the destruction of Carthage, which resulted in the Final Deaths of many of their elders and the destruction of many of their volumes and much of their research, on their parent clan and declared themselves True Brujah. The tale of betrayal came only later, as justification for even greater hatred for their parent clan. In reality, say the proponents of this theory, the original Troile's cruelty was what brought him low at the hands of a courageous and righteous childer.

The Dark Medieval

For centuries, the True Brujah continued much as they had always done, with many of them pursuing the Perfection that Troile had espoused through mastery of their mind and body. Others simply focused on survival. They Embraced sparingly, choosing their childer with great care, and slowly faded into obscurity. By 1230, only scholars of the Cainites, as well as those Brujah whose sires deemed it necessary to tell their childer, know of the True Brujah. Some think that the bloodline has died out, but in fact, recent centuries have been kind to the Sages.

Up until roughly a century ago, only 10 True Brujah dwelled in Europe, with maybe twice that

number scattered around the rest of the world. Then came the blossoming of the great universities. From Salerno, Bologna, Naples, to Paris, Toulouse and Montpellier and on to the schools in Iberia, learning and knowledge have begun to flourish, something that has attracted the attention of the majority of Europe's True Brujah. In the last century or so, the number of True Brujah in Europe has doubled. The True Brujah are attracted to the treasures of knowledge being compiled at the universities, to the debates and discussions between the teachers and students and to the possibilities that this system of education is offering. The universities are ideal places for a True Brujah to search for a prospective childer, as these places have a great number of intelligent, dedicated students and teachers (among all the rabble). As a result, many of Europe's True Brujah make their havens in or near universities. Some of these Cainites were recently Embraced for that purpose, having been students or teachers in life.

Apart from this interest in the places of learning, the True Brujah continue much as they have always done, their nights dedicated to study, contemplation and training. A few have taken an interest in the plight of the Salubri, while others have taken advantage of the chaos of the War of Princes to strike against the Brujah. The newly Embraced immerse themselves in the emerging class of scholars produced by the universities. Finally, some have taken an interest in the Gnostic heresies, such as the Bogomils and Cathars.

Perfection

Many True Brujah search for a state they call "Perfection." Just what this state of being really is, no one can answer completely. It is commonly held that it is the perfect union of mind and body and a state of pure logical reasoning and pragmatic rationality. Some True Brujah (such as Rathmonicus and his followers; see Notable True Brujah) espouse the purging of emotions as a key to Perfection, while other hold that while strong emotions might be a hindrance, one cannot be perfect if one is devoid of emotions. It is said that Troile himself stood upon the threshold of Perfection when his childer betrayed him. As a result of this quest, most True Brujah spend their nights either exercising their bodies and their physical Disciplines or training their minds and mental Disciplines. Mental training is mainly listening to lectures from elder vampires and reading when the opportunity arises, though playing chess (often against multiple opponents) and debating philosophy are also favorites. Physical training is more difficult, as the undead body cannot be trained the way the living can. Change must come through the blood and, as such, the training

usually consists of increasing strength, speed and endurance with blood. Then this increased capacity is trained by lifting heavy weights, subjecting oneself to pain and punishment, running and training in armed and unarmed combat (many True Brujah have learned the ancient Greek wrestling form called pancrætium).

Most True Brujah see the mind as more important than the body. After all, the Embrace vastly enhances the body, but it does little immediate good for the mind. Reaching the peak of physique and skill can be accomplished more easily than reaching the mental apex, and with fewer tools. In order to truly reach perfection of mind, one needs access to varied works on as many topics as possible — philosophy, theology, medicine, astrology or other topics — and to study and debate them in detail. As such, most True Brujah seem to the casual observer to be scholars, spending their nights either reading or searching for new lore to add to their collections.

Perfection is never an easy road to walk, which is why a prospective True Brujah childe is watched so long and so carefully. Emotions and emotionally influenced actions are part of what it means to be human and to put those aside is never easy, not even with the dulled emotional response that the Embrace brings the Sages. The True Brujah teach that practical, logical thoughts must replace emotion; most people feel more comfortable letting faith guide them, rather than logic. The True Brujah would be, and most likely were, more at home among the stoics of ancient Greece than among the ignorant masses of the Dark Medieval.

Considering Others

High and Low Clans: The Sages remember when the Malkavians held respected posts as seers and the Assamites fought side by side with the Brujah against the Baali. They therefore consider the High/Low Clan divide foolish and an artificial social construct that props up people who do not deserve it and keeps down several worthy Cainites. They feel that individuals should be judged on their merits rather than their clan and that respect must be earned — and should not be withheld if appropriate. While they scorn the High Clans for their assumed superiority, they also consider the Low Clans weak for allowing such a state to come about.

Brujah: Among the elder True Brujah, even the most emotionally cold and callous have trouble not feeling hatred for the Brujah, though the more recently Embraced are slower to take up the old feud. Most elder True Brujah oppose the Brujah either actively or passively, most of them explaining it as just punishment and retribution. Interestingly enough, the True Brujah rarely

judge Brujah as individuals, but rather based on clan. The few Brujah who know about the True Brujah call them liars, fools and worse and most try to destroy them if possible.

Cappadocians: The True Brujah respect Clan Cappadocian as fellow scholars. The lack of emotions promoted by the *Via Ossium* and the singular drive that many Cappadocian scholars exhibit is something that many True Brujah can relate to. In return, those Cappadocian scholars who have allied themselves with the True Brujah often find them full of useful insight and wisdom.

Followers of Set: The True Brujah see the Setites as enemies of civilization and thus adversaries. While some elders have met elder Followers of Set who seem to be above the doings of their younger clanmates, and have traded valuable and ancient lore with them, this is a rare state of affairs.

Tremere: Many True Brujah see history repeating itself when they look at the Salubri. Add to this the fact that, in general, the True Brujah respected the Salubri clan, and it is easy to see why they view the Usurpers as enemies. While the new blood magic that the Tremere wield is interesting and their libraries undoubtedly filled with precious lore, no known True Brujah has yet allied herself with the Tremere.

Playing a True Brujah

Having a True Brujah in a campaign requires more than just making sure that the coterie does not contain any Brujah. The bloodline is small, obscure and, frankly, requires a good deal of talent to portray well, since the curse of the True Brujah makes them more alien than many other Cainites.

Character Development

True Brujah are, above all, pragmatic. They have a practical approach to their unives and as such are likely to learn any Abilities and Disciplines they find necessary and useful. With their lack of emotions, Social Attributes and Abilities such as Empathy are usually not prominent, but nothing stops a True Brujah from being coldly manipulative or having insight into other's emotions. Those True Brujah who keep up a regiment of training, either pursuing Perfection or merely trying to prepare themselves for any challenge, advance in Abilities such as Athletics, Brawl (often with a specialty in wrestling), Melee, Academics, Linguistics, Occult and Theology.

Politically speaking, most True Brujah care nothing for the War of Princes. Some of the more vengeful try to take advantage of the battles to hurt the Brujah, while others hold that involvement in these political struggles is foolish and risks exposure.

Downtime for a True Brujah is often spent searching for new lore or experiences. Older True Brujah rarely have much in the way of Backgrounds that need tending to, while a younger Sage might be tied to a university and need to maintain contacts within the halls of knowledge.

Many True Brujah find moments of truth harder to experience than other Cainites, as these moments are usually at least somewhat emotional in nature. The practical and pragmatic approach is of little help when one tries to gain an instinctual understanding of something. This is not to say that the True Brujah cannot experience moments of truth, merely that they are usually more elusive than is the case for other Cainites. The codex that Rathmonicus has compiled is written in a way that can trigger a deeper understanding in the reader, though only if that reader is prepared to accept the tenets of Perfection.

Role Within the Coterie

True Brujah work well in a coterie based in or near a city with a university or in a coterie dedicated to seeking out knowledge and understanding. Since most True Brujah are selected for intelligence and skill as scholars, they can act as founts of lore for a group. With their lack of emotions, they make good advisors and diplomats.

Prominent True Brujah

The True Brujah bloodline is a small one and most of the members either try to hide their true nature or prefer to avoid too much contact with Cainite society in general. As such, few True Brujah are truly prominent.

Rathmonicus, The Perfectionist

Many True Brujah have come to see Rathmonicus as the embodiment of Troile's ideals about Perfection. After traveling extensively and talking to all the members of the bloodline he could find, Rathmonicus made his haven close to Jerusalem and began to codify all the information he had gathered concerning Troile's quest for Perfection. During the last century, he has distributed several copies of his Codex, which he claims is far from finished, to interested Sages around the known world.

Nehemiah, Prince of Cyprus

Over a century ago, the Jerusalem elder Nehemiah (believed, even by himself, to be of Clan Brujah) left his home city and made Cyprus his private sanctuary, a place for contemplation and introspection. Here, he could study a text given to him by an agent of Rathmonicus, a text that contains the basis for a new

road. Nehemiah finds this road more suited to his temper (or lack thereof) than his former Road of Heaven. His studies and conversations with other Cainites have also revealed to him that he might be of a different bloodline than he originally believed. When other Cainites arrived on Cyprus, Nehemiah simply required them to obey the Traditions and leave him alone. His lack of direct involvement with the Cainites of his island has led some to call him the "Soft Prince," but Nehemiah is quite willing to deal harshly with those who bring trouble to his home. He desires nothing but peace and solitude, but has continual trouble with a Tremere-backed militant order on Cyprus and has recently accepted a houseguest, a Cainite of unknown clan, into his small court. Nehemiah has begun a correspondence with said Cainite's sire, something that has awakened his interest in matters beyond himself.

Themistocles, Scholar of Languedoc

Among the scholars and sages of the Cainites, few names are spoken with as much respect and reverence as "Themistocles." Making his well defended haven near the city of Foix in the Languedoc, Themistocles is known as a wise and learned lore master. During the Albigensian Crusade, he aided many Cathar scholars and added their books and scrolls to his own considerable library (rumored to contain works thought lost when Alexandria burned). Themistocles himself is not a Cathar, though he does cleave to a dualistic and Gnostic view of the universe. He walks the Road of Heaven, and most of those who know of him thinks that he is of Brujah clan. He is sometimes seen in the company of Esclarmonde the Black.

Salubri

The Salubri were once a High Clan, but with the diablerie of Saulot by Tremere, the line fell from grace. Now they find themselves hunted, betrayed and outcast. Although the Salubri were once one of the first cursed, they now find old allies scorning them or selling them out to the Tremere, who desire not only their blood but also their utter destruction.

History

Since the Salubri line was once a true clan, its history can be traced back all the way to the mythical Second City. The founder is commonly called Saulot. His descendants portray him as a holy man, a defender and a wise sage, one of Caine's favored grandchilder. He soothed his brother Malkav's madness and, in turn, Malkav passed on his insights and revelations.

SALUBRI

Sobriquet: Cyclops, Unicorn, Luminaries

Disciplines: Auspex, Fortitude, Valeren

Weakness: Both warrior and healer Salubri are bound against doing harm, although in different ways. A warrior Salubri who refuses to help someone is at -2 dice to all pools until restitution is made. A healer Salubri who injures anyone is at -2 dice for the rest of the scene. At Valeren 2, all Salubri develop third eye.

Before the Amaranth of Saulot, most other clans were willing to admit to this interpretation. Current stories, though, paint Saulot as a sycophant, a sorcerer and a madman. Some have even gone so far as to pass along the Tremere propaganda that Saulot spawned the foul Baali line, ignoring the fact that the Salubri have long fought against the Baali.

According to Salubri scholars, Saulot left the Second City on a quest of contemplation and self-discovery. When he returned, he had learned strange abilities from beings encountered in the east. A third eye had developed on his forehead and he demonstrated a Discipline that was nothing like what Caine had passed on to his descendants. Saulot taught this Discipline, the Healer path of Valeren, to his childer. All but one of them rejoiced and took up Saulot's cause of healing and giving of succor. Saulot's childer Samiel was not satisfied, however. Though he was devout, pious and concerned with working for the good of all, he was also aggressive and, many warrior Salubri say, a realist. The Path of Healing was useful and worthwhile, but Samiel pointed out that while healing the wounds inflicted by evil was all very well, striking at the root of evil would rid the world of it forever. With his sire's blessing, Samiel developed a new version of Valeren, one suited to those who wanted to fight evil with the sword, rather than the gentle touch. It is said that Samiel had a vision from an angel (some hold that this angel was the angel Samiel and that the Salubri warrior took his name from this divine visitation) and that this vision guided his hand when he wrote the Code of Samiel. This Code prescribed the proper way to initiate a newly Embraced warrior (by a ritual known as the Bleeding) so that he would walk the warrior path rather than the healer path. The Bleeding was also supposed to reveal the new warrior's angelic name and grant him a mystical communion with an angel who would bless him with special powers to combat evil.

MI ANACHNU?

Rashiel, refugee warrior Salubri, speaking to Prince Radu of Bistritz:

I was Embraced before the great atrocity was committed upon my clan. My sire chose me for my piety and my zeal. He found me on the verge of being burned as a possessed man. Those around me thought that I was mad, for I saw the workings of Lucifer in this mortal realm. The host of demons plaguing my native town was obvious to me, yet when I accused the bishop of being corrupt I was locked up.

My sire freed me. He told me that I was not mad, but blessed by the Lord with a sight and a mission. He taught me the Code of Samiel before my Embrace and gave me a choice: I could remain mortal and make with my life as I wanted or I could join the holy cause and fight against Satan and those who serve him. I chose the war, and my sire trained me well for it.

For years, I fought alongside others of my kind, and alongside others who knew the true evils of the world. I participated in many battles, fighting not only fallen vampires but also demonic spawn of Satan and creatures that looked like they had been warped by the craft that your clan practices, my Prince. I saw pits into which babies were tossed to lie among the entrails of their parents. I saw rites so blasphemous that they made me want to tear out my eyes. It seemed an impossible task to root out all the demonic influence in the world, but I had eternity in which to shoulder this burden.

Or so I thought.

Now we are reduced to a mere shadow of our former glory, scattered, divided and hunted. We have a new enemy to hate, an enemy whose name I will not speak, but with whom your clan is also in conflict, Prince Radu. I offer my services to you in this battle, for protection against this new enemy and those who seek to profit from my demise.

For centuries, Saulot's healers and Samiel's warriors fought against the evil of the world in their own ways. With the rise of the Baali, the Salubri found an enemy as powerful as themselves. The Assamites and occasionally the Brujah soon joined them in the struggle against the demon-worshipping bloodline. The healer line, however, lost a great deal of its focus when Saulot slipped into torpor. The warrior line

fought on, but they suffered an even heavier blow with the Final Death of Samiel and the loss of the Code. It is generally accepted that Samiel died at the Battle of Chorazin, where the power of the Baali bloodline was broken. One obscure legend suggests that the Tzimisce Eldest killed him after discovering that It was corrupted by a demon (if this is true, it might help explain why the Tzimisce have not been more forthcoming with help after the tragedy that befell the Salubri).

After the fall of Rome, the Salubri line concentrated in the Middle East, but as the Catholic faith spread, some Salubri took an interest in and traveled to Europe. In the Islamic world, the Assamites and the Followers of Set kept the Baali in check, so after the First Crusade, a large number of Salubri felt that they could do more good in Europe. Many Salubri turned to Christianity, and new Embraces were frequently chosen among the devout. The warrior Salubri especially were quick to adopt this religion, though many of them worshipped the archangel Michael with almost heretical fervor. In the feudal Cainite society that was forming, the role of the Salubri clan was set — they were advisors and healers or holy warriors and defenders of the faith. Although they did not rule, they were counted among the High Clans for much the same reasons as the Cappadocians.

Then in 1133, something happened that forever changed not only Clan Salubri but all of Cainite society. Tremere, leader of a bloodline of mages turned vampires, found and diablerized Saulot. How this was done remains a mystery to all vampires — Saulot was Tremere's elder by millennia, a master of Auspex and grandchilde of Caine. Several Salubri have reasoned that Tremere must have worked together with the Baali, receiving demonic powers that allowed him to defeat Saulot. In fact, Saulot did not fight the diablerie, but very few people know this.

After Saulot's demise, the entire clan felt the Amaranth as a psychic shock and many went insane or became erratic and unstable. Some Salubri found themselves losing their Valeren, while others were unable to control it — their third eyes remain open and glowing brightly, rendering them unable to disguise themselves. Some of these unfortunates starved into torpor; others were destroyed as threats to the Silence of the Blood. The other clans soon realized that something important had happened to the Luminaries. Then the Tremere informed other vampires of what they had done, stunning the entire Cainite society. Cainites, even Antediluvians, falling to their own childer was perhaps to be expected, but the fact that *Tremere* had taken his blood and soul was an act that prompted a great outcry.

At first, it seemed that the Salubri would gain huge support in their quest for vengeance against the Usurpers, but then the general opinion shifted and the Salubri found themselves hunted, shunned and betrayed. The reasons for this are manifold. The Tremere were quick to spread propaganda about the Salubri, claiming that they were master conspirators and that their offers of healing were merely part of a plan to dominate the other clans by capturing their souls. Rumors of the Salubri founder creating the Baali also resurfaced around this time, with tablets and stories from elders of other clans to lend nominal support. Also, many Cainite lords had grown weary of the Salubri and the unrest they created in their quest to battle the enemies of the Lord. Finally, the suspicious and devious nature of Cainites made them suspect the Salubri, especially the healers — anyone being so selfless and altruistic had to have a secret agenda. In 1230, the Salubri find themselves with few allies, many enemies and nowhere left to run — even those Salubri who previously had some support find that support failing, as the War of Princes promotes a feeling of “every Cainite for himself.”

Salubri in Cainite Society

The Salubri face a precarious existence — while they still have allies among many clans, enough powerful Cainites are willing to betray them that they cannot truly trust anyone but each other. Warrior Salubri often band together in coterie for mutual protection or to exact revenge against the Tremere, while healer Salubri have taken up positions as menders of mind and body, advisors and confessors for more or less powerful vampires. Some warrior Salubri trade their martial skills for protection, either joining with the Tzimisce in their struggles against the Tremere and Ventrue or striking further afield. Warrior Salubri may be found serving ambitious princes and Cainite lords in such diverse lands as Britain, Languedoc and Hungary, as well as Outremer, though they move more openly there, as the Usurpers hold no true sway in the Holy Land.

The al-Amin, the Salubri of the Islamic world, have so far weathered the Tremere's storm best. Long-time allies of the Banu Haqim, Bay't Mushakim (Brujah) and the devout Muslim sect known as the Ashirra, the al-Amin found themselves less ostracized than their western brethren, at least at first. While the al-Amin did suffer from the death of Saulot, the Usurpers did not move into the Holy Land until quite recently (as Cainites reckon time), and they recently suffered a blow to their presence

there, with all Cainites of the Jerusalem chantry (save a single Gargoyle) suddenly being destroyed one night by the powerful al-Amin warrior Qawiyya el-Ghaduba.

Many Salubri have taken up a wandering unlife, trading secrets of the road with the Gangrel and Ravnos for whatever services might be needed. The Salubri find that staying only briefly in any given domain lessens the chance of discovery or betrayal, but the road is lonely and harsh. Some Salubri join traveling coterie, though few allies can be fully trusted and are willing to risk the wrath by association of the Tremere and their Ventrue compatriots.

Some Salubri masquerade as other clans. Hiding the third eye is easy enough, although the Salubri must then wield her Valeren powers cautiously. The Salubri are not used to deception and guile, however... Many of them pretend they are Malkavians (which has driven more than one Salubri truly

insane). Warrior Salubri sometimes pretend to be Brujah, having discovered that the importance the Ventrue place on pedigree precludes a disguise as one of the Warlords. Some few Salubri disguise themselves by wrapping their bodies in robes and veils and claim to be Cappadocians; often this claim is supported by one or more Cappadocians willing to substantiate the claim in return for services. In some place, the Salubri use the same method to pass as Nosferatu, aided by Lepers who have their own reasons for defying the Usurpers.

Factions

While all Salubri recognize that their clan has two distinct bloodlines (healers and warriors), they rarely make that distinction themselves. They are, they say, all children of Saulot. The Unicorns' defining factor is their persecution, and therefore any factions within the clan are largely based on how they choose to react to that factor.



The Fugitives

This is currently the largest Salubri group and it consists of those who masquerade as vampires of other clans, depend on powerful Cainites for protection or in some other way have sought primarily to protect themselves. Most other Salubri look them upon with scorn, yet they are undoubtedly the ones who have the greatest chance of survival in nights to come.

The Vengeful

This group is made up of Salubri who seek to avenge the great betrayal of their clan by fighting the Tremere and whoever allies himself with the Usurpers. It is a small group that suffers from great attrition. Recently, a young, charismatic Cainite calling himself Adonai has risen up to become a kind of leader of this group. He has become something of a hero among the Vengeful, but his abrasive and brusque behavior has alienated several of Europe's more powerful Cainites. Adonai is rumored to have discovered several fragments of the Code of Samiel, which in itself has rallied others to his banner.

The Martyrs

This group follows the Path of Tears (see **Road of Heaven**, p. 67), an ideology under the Road of Heaven that teaches that a Cainite's duty is both to suffer and smite evil, specifically supernatural evil such as the Baali and the demons, combating the plans of Lucifer upon Earth. Though not all followers are Salubri, the path did originate with them. Some Salubri took their beliefs to such an extreme degree as to invite demonic possession and then end their own unives, hoping to take the possessing demon with them into Hell. The path has recently found a large number of new adherents, especially in the Middle East.

The al-Amin

The al-Amin (the Virtuous Ones) are the Salubri of the Islamic world. Until recently, they did not face the same kind of trouble and distrust as the Salubri of Europe, but recent expansionism by European clans (the Tremere among them) and the troubles this has brought the al-Amin's greatest allies, the Assamites, mean that they are now beginning to experience many of the same difficulties that their cousins have. Since the Baali are stronger in the Middle East than in Europe, it will likely not be long before the al-Amin find their ancient enemies striking at them.

The Seven

This is a group of seven Salubri on the Healer path. Heeding the old tales that Saulot often sought the

wisdom of Malkav, the Seven began to seek out old and powerful Malkavians and learn wisdom from them. In recent nights, the Seven have abandoned the battle against both the Baali and the Tremere and have instead begun a journey toward Golconda, espousing some rather bizarre ideas of salvation and diablerie to those of their fellows who have spoken with them. Apparently, these Seven believe that every Salubri should seek out Golconda, Embrace a worthy childe and then let this childe commit diablerie upon him.

Those Who Abandoned Us

High Clans: The Salubri were once counted among the High Clans, in the time before the Amaranth of Saulot. After their fall, the Salubri saw their "fellow High Clans" abandon them. To make matters worse, several first cursed in exalted positions are now exacting heavy prices to shield refugee Salubri in their domains.

Low Clans: The Salubri, though they rarely admit to it, were just as prone to arrogance as any Ventrue or Lasombra. As such, some among the Low Clans feel that it is only fair to watch how far the mighty can fall. Some pious Nosferatu and Malkavians, however, have taken to sheltering Salubri.

Assamites: The al-Amin have long had a common cause with the Banu Haqim, and those western Salubri who made their way into Assamite lands quickly learned to respect them. The Assamites might be the only allies that the Salubri have left — a fact that earns the Assamites the enmity of the Tremere clan.

Cappadocians: The healer Salubri and the Cappadocians have a long history of working together, investigating the nature of life and death. They also have a long history of falling out, when the healers grew appalled at the pragmatism of the Cappadocians and the Cappadocians grew exasperated with the healers' reluctance. This continues, as Cappadocians shield healer Salubri for a time, only to betray them to the Tremere when they no longer need them.

Followers of Set: Enmity between the Setites and the Salubri has always existed. Even now, hunted as they are, it is rare for Salubri to accept a Setite's offer of assistance — they know that the price is usually more than they are willing to pay. The Followers of Set, for their part, are content to see what will earn them the most: protecting a Salubri or selling her to the Tremere.

Tremere: Little needs to be said about the hatred that the Salubri bear for the Usurpers or about the desire that the Tremere have for the total destruction of the Salubri bloodline.

Tzimisce: While many Gangrel and Nosferatu see the Tremere as their enemies, Clan Tzimisce is the only one where a majority are direct enemies of the Usurpers. This should make the Salubri and Tzimisce natural allies. Since most Tzimisce are pagan and most Salubri are devoutly Christian, alliances seldom last very long.

Ventru: Of all the clans, the Ventru are the one to have turned most harshly against the Salubri. The Salubri aren't terribly surprised; they were never willing to play the role of talented lap dog, lending their singular talents to the Ventru in the wars of conquest. The Tremere are, however.

Playing a Salubri

Both warrior and healer Salubri can fit into a chronicle quite easily, as long as the other players understand that openly associating with a Salubri will earn the characters the enmity of at least the Tremere and the Baali.

Character Development

Both warrior and healer Salubri are likely to focus on survival first and foremost. In addition to this, warriors tend, naturally, to learn martial Abilities such as Athletics, Brawl, Archery and Melee, while healer Salubri lean toward Abilities that can help heal body and mind, such as Empathy, Hearth Wisdom and Medicine. Both the warriors and the healers are likely to know at least a bit of Theology, and those who study their enemies might look to Academics and Occult.

During chronicle downtime, a Salubri most likely develops whatever Attributes, Abilities and Disciplines help him survive and make him more useful to whom-ever he is allied with. Most Salubri avoid increasing their Backgrounds (especially such Backgrounds as Influence and Status), as this makes them too visible.

By far most Salubri follow the Road of Heaven, with the path (if any) determined by the temper and beliefs of the individual. Some Salubri walk the Road of Humanity, and a small number of warriors might be found following the Path of Chivalry.

In addition to the normal ways of experiencing moments of truth (see p. 266 of **Dark Ages: Vampire**), Salubri often find themselves fascinated by religious debate, contemplation and celebration. A Salubri praying to God may receive an epiphany, while one reading the Bible may find enlightenment in its words. Warrior Salubri sometimes receive moments of truth while engaged in intense battle, while a healer can gain new insights when curing someone who is mortally wounded.

Role Within the Coterie

On the most basic level, warrior Salubri can be a great help in battle, and a healer Salubri can be a great boon afterward. The Luminaries are not limited to these roles, however... Salubri tend to be, if not scholars, then at least learned in matters such as theology and philosophy. Being a hunted bloodline, they associate freely with clans High and Low. With their tendency toward religious fanaticism, they can find themselves at odds with pagan characters, but most Salubri are able to see past their beliefs, especially if it means their continued survival or gaining allies in their battle against the hated Tremere clan.

Prominent Salubri

Considering that they are a hunted bloodline, one might consider the concept of a prominent Salubri something of a contradiction in terms. While it is true that most Salubri either masquerade as other clans or try their best to remain unnoticed, some still manage to make a name for themselves and avoid persecution — at least for a time.

Matthew of the Holy Isle

The Scottish knight Matthew came to the Holy Land with the First Crusade, intent upon fighting the enemies of Christ. His Embrace opened his eyes to the fact that it did not matter what name mortal men gave to God — all that mattered was piety and zeal. For years, he fought the enemies of the Lord and became known and respected by both Christian and Muslim vampires. Then, one night, Matthew descended upon a Baali lair with a group of Assamites. What happened there no one knows, for he alone emerged. From that night on, Matthew quit his fighting and turned upon a road of contemplation, seeking the elusive state of Golconda. His wandering brought him to Lindisfarne in England, where he settled for reasons unknown. While Matthew might have quit the fight, he is still a warrior to be reckoned with, as the few Tremere expeditions to Lindisfarne have discovered.

Aksinya

Little is known about this raven-haired beauty who wanders Scandinavia and the Baltic. She is presumed to be a healer, very old and exceptionally skilled at Auspex. Her goals appear to be the protection of normal mortals against the evils of other vampires and the destruction of such groups as the Baali and the Scandinavian Setites (known as the Followers of Jormungandr). Her actions during the Danish and German Crusades into the Baltic have earned her the

undying enmity of many prominent Cainites, including Hardestadt the Elder. Aksinya's prophetic powers have so far allowed her to keep one step ahead of all enemies.

Where to Find More Information

More on the Salubri, including both forms of the Valeren Discipline, can be found in the **Dark Ages: Storytellers Companion**.

Giovanni

The Giovanni family is one of the newest additions to the ranks of the Cainites. This Venetian merchant family was brought into the night by the scholarly Cappadocian clan for two reasons. First, the Giovanni family's vast wealth helps pay for books and other items needed for the continued research of the

Cappadocians. Second, the Giovanni were, and still are, masters of *nigrimancy*, magic capable of interacting with and controlling the spirits of the dead. The Cappadocians, renowned both for their scholarly pursuit of the secrets of death and their curiosity, could hardly afford to pass up such an opportunity.

History

The history of the Giovanni family can be traced back to the Roman empire. Ancient scrolls and tablets record transactions made by the Jovian family in the time of Mark Antony, and the family even managed to place one of its members on the throne for a short time. It was in those days that the family began to delve into *nigrimancy*, probably as an extension of basic Roman ancestor worship. The Jovians were not the only ones communing with the dead in those days, but they were the only ones who managed to turn their

GIOVANNI AT A GLANCE

Sobriquet: Graverobbers. Within the Cappadocian clan, the Giovanni are sometimes called *Nigrimancers*.

Appearance: The Giovanni like to show off their wealth, dressing in fine clothes and wearing jewelry. Many of them are also slightly on the heavy side, a sign of good living, though the Embrace strips away some of it. Almost all Giovanni are Italian, though this runs the gamut from blondes descending from natives of the Po plain to those so black-haired and swarthy they could almost pass for Arabs.

Haven and Prey: It is rare for a Giovanni not to have enough resources or family contacts to afford a house. Those who serve or tutor other Cappadocians make their havens along with said Cappadocians. Some Giovanni prefer drinking from corpses, while others often frequent the whorehouses of whatever city they occupy.

The Embrace: Almost all Giovanni are Embraced by fellow Giovanni, often one who is closely related. Most Giovanni prospects are given a lengthy, though usually somewhat edited, introduction to what is to happen to them.

Character Creation: Giovanni who specialize in *nigrimancy* favor Mental Attributes and Knowledges, while merchants tend to focus on Social Attributes as primary and possess a good mix of Skills and Knowledges. Except for Generation and Status, all Backgrounds are appropriate for a Giovanni, though Resources and Retainers rank

highest, followed by Contacts and Influence. Most Giovanni follow the Road of Humanity, while a few follow the Road of Kings (especially the Path of the Merchant; see **Road of Kings**) or the Road of Bones.

Bloodline Disciplines: Auspex, Fortitude, Mortis (usually the Path of *Nigrimancy* is primary, but this is not a requirement)

Weakness: The Giovanni are Cappadocians and suffer the same weakness listed on p. 67 of **Dark Ages: Vampire**. In addition, a surprisingly large number have manifested the Grip of the Damned Flaw (p. 309 of **Dark Ages: Vampire**), for unknown reasons.

Organization: The Giovanni are a merchant family and organize themselves as such. Those who are serving or tutoring Cappadocians become part of the parent clan's organization, but others report to higher-placed members of the hierarchy, sometimes actually answering to some old and experienced mortal. The current mortal patriarch is Paolo Giovanni, the mistress of the *Nigrimancers* is Gianneta Giovanni, and the ultimate leader is, of course, Augustus.

Quote: *It may interest you to know that the Warlord that you have expressed such antipathy against has been meeting secretly with several prominent Nosferatu. How do I know? That is of no concern. However, I would like a small favor concerning the dockside taxes....*

MORTAL NIGRIMANCERS

The Giovanni family practiced *nigrimancy* before they were brought into Clan Cappadocian. Many mortals in the family still practice the black art. The Embrace, however, facilitates *nigrimancy* immensely. Augustus laid the groundwork for the *Nigrimancy* Path of Mortis along with Cappadocius and powerful members of the Cappadocian clan and Giovanni family, making it much easier for vampires to perform the basics of *nigrimancy*.

In order to simulate mortal *nigrimancy*, use the rules for the *Nigrimancy* Path presented in Chapter Four, but with the following changes: A mortal *nigrimancer* has a special Trait called *Nigrimancy*, rated from 1 to 5. Merely possessing this Trait does not allow one to use *nigrimancy* powers. Each power described for the *Nigrimancy* Path is instead treated as a ritual of equal level. The time it takes to cast such a ritual is either five minutes or twice the time it takes to use the power normally, whichever is greater. In addition, ritual tools (which vary from practitioner to practitioner but usually include bones, crucifixes, ancient texts, etc.) are always needed. Mortal *nigrimancers* can also use Mortis rituals of *nigrimancy*, but these take three times the time they would for a Cainite.

Mortals cannot learn standard Mortis powers as rituals.

powers to financial gain, calling up the spirits of dead rivals and past masters of trade alike.

With the fall of Rome, many of the Jovian family fled, along with hundreds of other Romans. They settled on islands in the north of Italy, and toward the end of the fifth century AD, these islands had begun to unite into what would become Venice. It was also during this time that the loose federation of families that shared the Jovian name united to present a more common front, turning them into the merchant family they are in current nights.

The true emergence of the Giovanni family began in the early eighth century, during the schism between the Iconoclasts and the Iconodules, the two factions within the Church who debated whether or not the use of pictures and statues as objects of worship was a sin (the Iconoclasts believed it was, the Iconodules did not). The Jovians found themselves in dire straits because their family name came from the Roman god Jove, so after much deliberation, the leaders of the family decided to side with the Iconoclasts (and the Pope), changing the family name to Giovanni. This “new” merchant family

allied itself clearly with the papacy and began to curry favor with Rome, going so far as to remain Catholic when the rest of Venice was Orthodox.

The power, wealth and influence of both Venice and the Giovanni family were steadily growing when, in 975, a man named Augustus Giovanni became patriarch of the most powerful branch of the family. Augustus was not only a master *nigrimancer*, a genius and an expert in trade, he was also ruthless, ambitious, possessed of an iron will and, above all, a visionary. He united the factions of the Giovanni family like none before and he made them the most powerful merchant family in all of Europe. While doing this, he also researched many foreboding secrets, adding greatly to the *nigrimancy* rituals known by the family.

GHOSTLY SERVANTS

It is possible, through the use of the Path of *Nigrimancy* and either rituals, threats or cajoling, for a Giovanni to bind a ghost to herself, making it her servant. With the Storyteller's permission, a Giovanni's player may declare that one or more of her character's retainers is a ghost. Certain stipulations apply:

- A ghost is considered a remarkable retainer (meaning that one ghost represents a Retainers rating of 3 or more).
- A character needs to have at least three dots in *Nigrimancy*, or a Mentor or Ally who does.
- Ghosts have certain powers, but also limitations. All ghosts possess Heightened Senses (as *Auspex* 1). They can walk through solid objects, though doing this often weakens them. Common powers for a ghost include low to medium levels of *Auspex*, *Chimerstry*, *Dementation*, *Mortis* (*Cadaverous Animation*) and *Thaumaturgy* (*Creo Ignem* and *Rego Motus*). Some more powerful ones might have *Vessel* (*Dominate* 5), high levels of *Chimerstry* or the power to manifest solidly for a few seconds. Ghosts need to expend *Essence* to power their abilities, specifically those that affect the living (or undead) or would cost blood or *Willpower*. Ghostly *Essence* is usually regenerated at the rate of one point per day, though rituals exist that can transfer *Essence* to ghosts. The Storyteller sets the power level for a ghostly retainer, usually a single common power in addition to Heightened Senses. Ghost cannot enter areas of holy ground and shy away from both holy persons and demons. See pp. 297-298 of *Dark Ages: Vampire* for more on Ghost Traits.

CHI SIAMO?

Massiliano Giovanni instructing his new childe, Bajamonte Giovanni:

Welcome to Clan Cappadocian. You are now one of the undead, but do not forget your family. You may be a Cappadocian by Embrace, but you are a Giovanni by name and it is important that remain loyal to your family. How, you ask, do you do that? Well, the Cappadocians brought us under their so-called “control” because they wanted our knowledge of the dead to add to their own and our money to finance their studies. So, make money, study *nigrimancy* and pretend to be a good little neonate. But keep an eye out for anything that may benefit the family as well as the clan. After all, what is good for the family is good for the clan, right?

Then, in 1004, Augustus received an offer he could not refuse: the offer of the Embrace by one of the most powerful beings in the world. Augustus and the leaders of the Giovanni family treated this as a business proposal, and the deliberations lasted an entire year. In the end, however, Augustus’ lust for power meant that he could not ignore this chance. Augustus was brought to Mount Erciyes. There, despite the protestations of several of Cappadocius’ closest advisors and childer, he was Embraced.

Giovanni in Cainite Society

After 1005, the Giovanni family experienced an increase in wealth and power that they had thought impossible. Where before they had found themselves dealing with the agents of those Cainites influencing trade, they were now able to deal directly with these Cainites and move against rivals in entirely new ways. Initially, the Giovanni committed more than one *faux pas* stemming from their ignorance concerning Cainite affairs. More often than not, the Cappadocians punished the transgressor while instructing her in the proper behavior (although occasionally they stopped with the punishment). The Giovanni came to the conclusion that they were on the bottom of the pile and, on reflection, decided this was for the best. Apart from Augustus’ Brood (see below), exceptionally few Giovanni care to play the Cainite game of power. They know that they are newcomers and instead focus on either the realm of the spirits of the dead

or on the world of the living, specifically the burgeoning power and influence of the merchants. The only real move toward power has been Augustus’ request to Guilelmo, Prince of Venice, that a Giovanni be made Prince of Modon, a Venetian trade colony with no Cainite lord.

Fewer than 50 Giovanni Cappadocians exist. Of these, about half reside in Venice, Salerno or one of the Venetian trading colonies (see Chapter Five of **Dark Ages: Europe**). The rest serve either as trade agents or the associates of Cappadocians who seek to learn *nigrimancy*... The mercantile part of the Giovanni bloodline has a single representative in Troyes (to deal with the Champagne Fairs), two in the Hanseatic League (Hamburg and Visby), one in Britain (stationed in London), one in Barcelona, one in Buda-Pest, one in Krakow (dealing with the all-important salt trade) and five scattered about the Islamic world, from Tunis to Basra. The family recently quit its presence in Kiev. These Cainites deal with others of their kind who seek to dominate trade, hammering out alliances, deals and agreements. Mortal and ghoulish agents can also be found in several cities and areas not considered as vital, most notably Samarkand, York, Denmark and the newly Christianized Baltic states, dealing with both mortals and Cainites. Augustus and his closest advisors are currently debating an increase in merchant Embraces, though the general opinion is against this at the moment. An increase in Embrace of members of the Giovanni family by other Giovanni is a possibility, however. Venice’s former Prince, Narses, was less than enthusiastic about the Giovanni and severely limited the Cappadocians’ right to Embrace within the family. The new prince, Guilelmo, seems to have other things on his mind than to curb the growth of some Graverobber experiment.

The Cappadocians generally leave the Giovanni to their own devices, demanding only two things — money and knowledge. The research that the Graverobbers carry out is rarely profitable and usually requires at least some funds (for paper, especially); as such, the Giovanni are expected to provide for their parent clan. This is rarely a problem, as wealth flows into the coffers of the Giovanni at an unprecedented rate since the sack of Constantinople. In fact, many Giovanni are somewhat surprised at the low demands of their parent clan. It is quite apparent that the Cappadocians do not know much about the world of mortals and disdain the luxury that they could enjoy, should they so choose. As for knowledge, this comes in the form of instruction into the mysteries of *nigrimancy* and various texts about the afterlife.

The Giovanni and the Mortal World

The Giovanni are still, first and foremost, a merchant family. Their goal is an increase in profit, a decrease in the influence of their rivals and the spread of Venetian influence. Augustus, as most powerful Venetians, is interested in expanding Venice's control in the Mediterranean and beyond. The Giovanni family is widely recognized as the most powerful and influential of the Venetian merchant families, their fate and fortune intimately tied to that city. The Giovanni bloodline focuses on the mortal world (and those Cainites who are merchants even answer to a ghoul of Augustus'), seeing the power and influence of the merchants and guildsmen in Italy. Being such a young addition to Cainite society, they have a great advantage over most other Cainites. The elder Cainites who have the power and influence to try to guide trade affairs tend to be so out of touch that they have only just begun to realize the potential of merchants. Many of them still focus on the nobility as a source for wealth and power. Younger vampires have the same insights and the same understanding of mortals as the Giovanni but lack the large power structure necessary to put that knowledge to good use.

In general, the power and influence that the Giovanni family wields in the mortal world is the result of its wealth and contacts. The family members are extremely rich and able to dominate much of the trade between Venice and its colonies and the rest of the world. In addition, many members of the family hold positions as podestás, guild leaders, council members, popolo leaders and other influential members of Italian society (a Giovanni even sits in the governing committee of Negroponte). In some areas, however, the Giovanni find themselves outclassed by other Cainites, notably among the nobility and in the Church. The Giovanni family is, unfortunately, a family of commoners. Only a few of them have any connection to nobility beyond trading with them... This could lead to a good deal of influence if it weren't for the fact that even the Italian nobility has a tendency to look down upon the Giovanni as little more than peasants with too much money. When it comes to the Church, the Giovanni are known to be faithfully Catholic, and many members of the family have achieved positions as clerks, abbots and bishops (and even once an archbishop). Now that the Giovanni have been "adopted" by Clan Cappadocian, the High Clans who typically pull strings in the Church (namely

the Lasombra and Toreador) are keeping a sharp eye out for any family member trying to gain religious authority. In this case, the family's connection to the Graverobbers actually hinders them by gaining them the notice of the other clans.

The Unquiet Dead

While their mortal influence and wealth are certainly impressive, what really distinguishes the Giovanni is their power over the spirits of the dead. What started as ancestor worship quickly became another tool for the family to spread its power and influence. Ghosts can be called upon to spy on rivals, to reveal secrets they knew in life, to create trouble for enemies, to share of their wisdom and experience and even, in the case of ghosts that can affect the living, to serve as guards. *Nigromancy* was what allowed the Giovanni family to become one of the most prominent merchant families, and family members have only refined their skills after Augustus' Embrace.

Most of the spirits that serve the Giovanni do so because they are compelled in one way or another. This can be anything from *nigromantic* control to bribery. Most ghosts have agendas of their own. Since ghosts have only limited ability to affect the living, a Giovanni can easily "pay" her spiritual servant by helping it fulfill its goals. A few ghosts, usually spirits of dead Giovanni, serve freely, but even these tend to have separate agendas in addition to their loyalty.

Factions

While the Giovanni family presents a united front, various divisions, factions and groupings still exist within. These factions rarely oppose each other but merely serve as handy labels used by those who enjoy classifying people, as well as by the chroniclers of the family.

Augustus' Brood

This is a small group of vampires, less than 10 strong, which includes such people as the Earl of Stavlachia Claudius Giovanni, Augustus' right hand Ignazio, the always-ambitious occultist Ambrogino Giovanni and his child Lucretia. So far, this group consists only of fifth- and sixth-generation vampires, all of whom were exceptional mortals and who are now not only powerful Cainites but also completely loyal to Augustus. They are dedicated to expanding the power and influence of the Giovanni family within Clan Cappadocian. To this end, they tirelessly research both *nigromancy* and other black arts, and seek ways to weaken other factions within the clan.

The Nigrimancers

These are relatively young Giovanni vampires who were Embraced for their skills with *nigrimancy* and chosen either to instruct Cappadocians or to aid in the studies undertaken by the clan. They tend to be of relatively high generation, as few elder Cappadocians bother with the Giovanni family, and the majority are women. This is because becoming a merchant (see below) is generally held to be a man's trade; as such, the women of the family turn to the occult.

The Merchants

About half of the Giovanni Cainites are *nigrimancers* and about half are merchants (with a small percentage being both or neither). A merchant Giovanni is someone Embraced for his (or, rarely, her) business acumen. These vampires spend their nights managing the most important parts of the Giovanni empire and dealing with those Cainites who influence trade in various areas of the world.

Competition

High Clans: The Giovanni are High Clan Cainites, since they are Cappadocians. The Giovanni are quite happy about this, as they find themselves dealing mainly with Lasombra, Ventrue and Toreador vampires, in addition to their Cappadocian patrons. Some first cursed look down their noses and wonder who let these merchants into their circles, but some Giovanni do act the part of nobility of the night.

Low Clans: Most Giovanni know enough *not* to call an Assamite a fallen Cainite to his face. In the eyes of many Giovanni, the concept of High and Low clans is rooted in outdated ideas about feudal society and the rights of nobles. As such, they have no problem "lowering" themselves to talking to a Gangrel or Nosferatu as an equal.

Assamites: Being Venetian merchants, the Giovanni have substantial interests in lands that are under strong Assamite influence. They frequently find themselves brokering with the Saracens and have come to respect them as skilled opponents, if often somewhat blinded by religious fervor.

Cappadocians: The Giovanni love their parent clan — they granted them eternity to pursue studies in *nigrimancy* and develop business interests. All they asked in return was some petty cash for their own research and some instruction in the black arts. The best part is that the Cappadocians often leave the Giovanni to their own devices. The Giovanni easily cope with those few times where a Cappadocian actually order them around, knowing that, in all

likelihood, said Cappadocian will be back to her studies shortly.

Lasombra: In Italy, Lasombra rule is a fact of unlife, and the Giovanni have quickly learned to give Caesar his due, so to speak. The Lasombra tolerate the Giovanni, as the Magisters often have little interest in merchant ventures, preferring to build their power bases elsewhere. The Giovanni are happy with this and try their best to maintain friendly relations with the Lasombra.

Tremere: So far, the Giovanni have had little contact with the Tremere clan, but it seems Augustus' Brood has taken quite an interest in the Usurpers.

Ventrue: When Giovanni and Ventrue meet, the result is always a great show of mutual respect and friendly words, yet the words drip with poison and the respect quickly wears thin. The Giovanni and the young merchant Ventrue are rivals and enemies, pure and simple. While they do not strike at each other with swords or minions wielding stakes, their battles of influence and profit are nonetheless fierce and sometimes deadly.

Playing a Giovanni

Being Cappadocians, the Giovanni can fit into any chronicle where a Cappadocian could. In addition, they tend to be less insular than the scholarly Cappadocians, and any chronicle involving trade can easily accommodate a Giovanni.

Character Development

Growing up a member of a large and wealthy merchant family naturally lends itself to certain Abilities, especially Commerce, Etiquette and, with all the maneuvering for position that happens within the family, Subterfuge. Merchant Giovanni build on this and usually add Empathy, Intimidation, Leadership and, if looking to travel, Linguistics to that list. More scholarly Giovanni tend, naturally, toward Knowledges, specifically Academics, Linguistics, Medicine and Occult. Of course, even a merchant Giovanni will need some occult knowledge if she wishes to use her *nigrimancy*.

When it comes to the War of Princes, the general Giovanni attitude is to keep out of it, possibly selling services to anyone willing to pay. Individual Giovanni can and do become involved, and with the resources (monetary or spiritual) at their command, they can do quite well for themselves.

During chronicle downtime, a merchant Giovanni will probably have to tend to an extensive network of Backgrounds, hoping to

increase his wealth and influence. Scholarly Giovanni normally focus on learning more (increasing their Knowledges) and possibly binding spirits to their service.

Moments of truth come to the Giovanni in much the same way as to other Cainites. Their studies of ghosts and the underworld can result in some powerful stimuli that lead to insights, especially for those Giovanni who follow the Road of Bones.

Role Within the Coterie

A scholarly Giovanni can fill much the same role as any other Cappadocian, a sage and master of esoteric powers. Indeed, *nigrimancy* allows them access to even more options, since they can use ghosts to perform a number of services. Merchant Giovanni make good patrons for Cainites who have no income of their own and great partners for other Cainites with mercantile interests... If the coterie contains another Cappadocian, a Giovanni is most likely required to teach said Cappadocian or provide her with money to finance her studies.

Prominent Giovanni

Considering that the eldest of the Giovanni has been a Cainite for less than three centuries and that the family seems more interested in pursuing influence among mortals and ghosts than among the undead, it is no wonder that few Giovanni can be considered prominent among Cainites.

Augustus Giovanni, Patriarch of the Family

In 1005, the founder of the Cappadocian clan ordered Augustus Giovanni Embraced, using a vessel of his own, powerful blood. This act sent shockwaves through not only the Cappadocian clan, but all of the established Cainite society. The question everyone asks is: What could motivate an Antediluvian to Embrace someone in this age? Of course, Augustus Giovanni was no ordinary mortal. He'd managed to become patriarch of the Giovanni family at the age of 30, while at the same time learning *nigrimancy* to a sufficiently advanced level to be considered a master. He was one of the most powerful, wealthy and influential men in all of Western Europe. He had entertained offers from both Ventrue and Toreador Cainites considering the Embrace. So, it is whispered, he knew enough about Cainite society to hold out for better offers. These nights, Augustus divides his time between Mount Erciyes and Venice, managing his family and Brood while simultaneously teaching and learning from the most powerful members of Clan Cappadocian.

Markus Musa Giovanni, The Seeker

This bear of a man was once the Giovanni representative in Constantinople. When the city fell, his desire for knowledge conspired with events beyond his control to send him to Egypt, searching for the fabled *Sargon Codex*, purported to grant godhead to the one who could unlock its secrets. Once in Egypt, he fell afoul of the heretical Lazarenes before being rescued, and put under the blood oath, by Constancia, the Priestess of Bones. After these events, Markus was asked to accompany the Nosferatu Malachite, a task he took up while contemplating not only the destruction of the *Sargon Codex*, but also new and interesting aspects of the spirit world that he learned during his adventures.

Justus Giovanni, Emissary to the Hansa

Justus was born to a prominent member of the Giovanni family and at an early age showed a remarkable intelligence and eagerness to learn. His father first sought to make a merchant out of his son, but Justus showed little skill with money and goods. He was then sent to Salerno to study medicine and *nigrimancy*, and while he excelled at the former, he was unable to learn even the most basic rituals. In despair, he was sent north to Lübeck as an emissary to the emerging Hanseatic League. Justus soon realized the power and influence that the Hansa Cities were likely to wield in years to come and advised his family to pursue closer ties. His predictions paid off, and Justus was Embraced in order to deal better with the Cainites pulling the strings of influence behind the Hansa. After this, Justus finally began showing a talent for the Black Art, and he is now considered a valuable member of the bloodline.

Lamia

The Lamia are as much a religious cult as a bloodline. They are almost exclusively female, guard the Cappadocians, have developed their own path of Mortis and are said not only to follow a heretical road but also to engage in rites so foul and perverted that they rival those of the Baali. They train women in the manly arts of war and carry a deadly plague, yet by their association with the Cappadocians they have earned recognition from the High Clans. They may be the oldest of all bloodlines and are certainly one of the most enigmatic.

History

The history of this bloodline is said to stretch back to the first daughter of Lilith, called Lamia.

LAMIA

Sobriquet: Gorgons, Witches

Disciplines: Mortis, Potence, Fortitude

Weakness: The Lamia's bite carries a virulent disease. Anyone the Lamia feed on must make a Stamina roll (difficulty 6 for women, 8 for men) or contract a fever much like the Black Plague, fatal within several days.

She founded a cult worshipping the power of women, the moon and her mother. The term Lamia became the name given to the high priestess of the Cult of Lilith, and this cult persevered and grew through the ages, discovering many arcane secrets and practicing rites both terrible and mystical in order to further their understanding of the world.

The cult grew largest in the eastern Mediterranean. Here, the cult had its most holy of places, temples and places where the magical power of the world was strong, and here High Priestess Lamia herself presided over midsummer and midwinter rites. In other lands, the cult remained secretive, but in the east, the cult grew large, though not very influential. While the cult was tolerated, it was never accepted, and it remained an enigma to those who were interested in such matters and a secretive and perhaps dangerous group to those who feared the power of women. From time to time, a ruler or high priest attempted to exterminate the cult. When this happened, the women of the Cult of Lilith put to good use the teachings of war given to them alongside their spiritual lessons. So the cult endured.

It is unknown when and why Lazarus, child of Cappadocius, came upon the holiest of rituals, the Midsummer Rite. The Methuselah himself refuses to speak of it. It must have been in very ancient times, for none of Cappadocius' grandchilder remembers a time when Lamia was not a Cainite. As to why, speculations abound. Most Cappadocians believe he was investigating rumors of the cult, trying to learn whether or not their bloody rites could add some knowledge of death's mysteries to his own. Others say that he was drawn there, able to sense the power of the ritual. The Lamia, however, claim that Lilith guided him there, to serve as Her tool in bringing High Priestess Lamia over into the darkness. The Lamia also claim that the reason Lazarus fell upon Lamia was that Lilith had possessed her, making her so beautiful that not even an ancient vampire could resist her. Whatever the truth, Lazarus Embraced Lamia and then fled, after she

revealed some terrible secret to him. To this night, Lazarus cannot look upon Lamia without a shudder. Lamia simply made her way to Mount Erciyes and presented herself to Cappadocius, pledging herself and her followers to Clan Cappadocian.

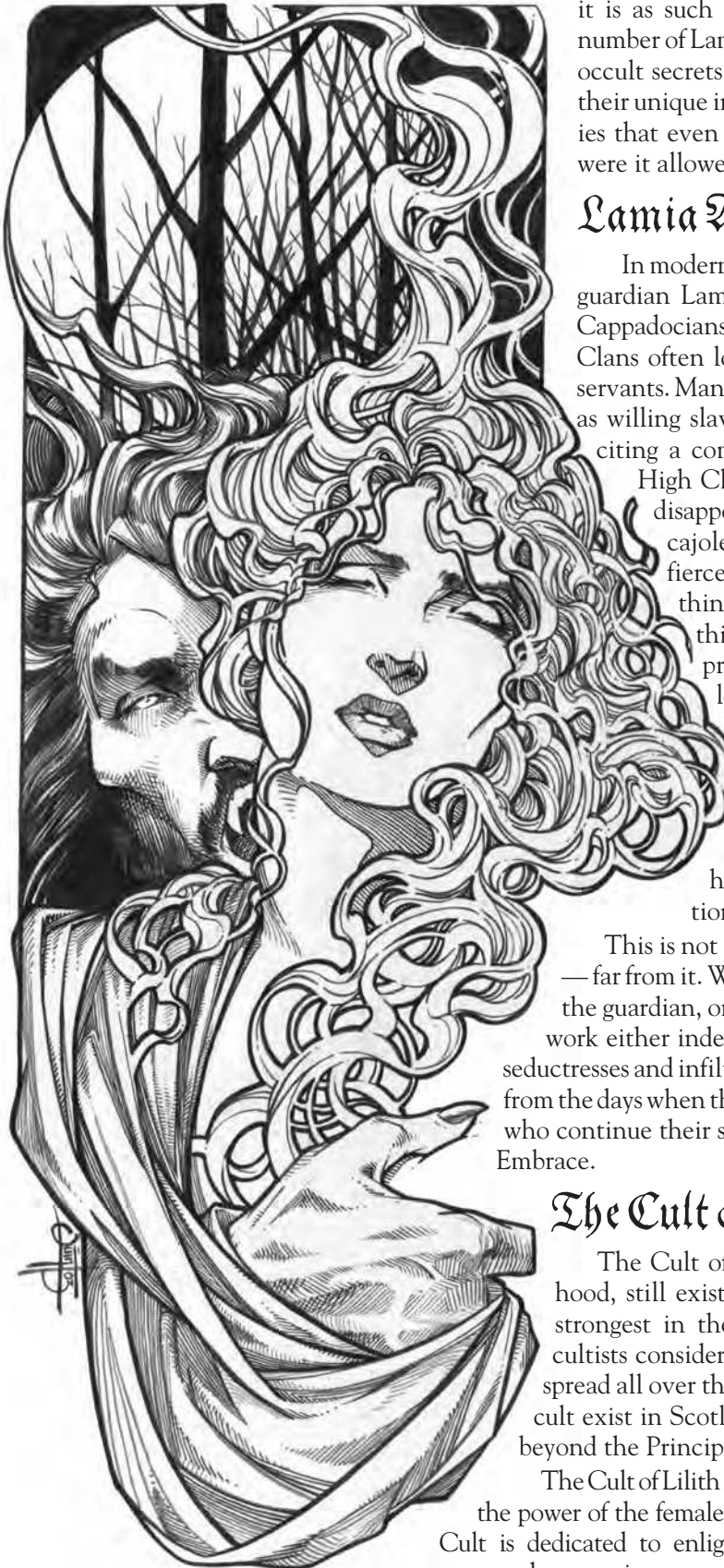
Through the ages, the Lamia have been closely linked with the clan they serve. They stand mainly as bodyguards and warriors, defending the scholars, and

TINES EIMEN?

Medea, priestess of Lilith, lecturing mortal followers of the cult:

Our sisterhood is an ancient one, created by the daughter of Lilith. In nights gone by, women gathered often and freely to worship the Dark Mother: Lilith, first wife of Adam and Jehovah's equal. They performed rites in her name, such wild dances under the full moon, where pleasure and pain came together in a beautiful celebration of life and blood. As women, they understood that nothing comes without suffering and that suffering is but another face of pleasure. They knew that growth came through the realization of one's frailty, through pain and then release into ecstasy. When men grew fearful of the power of these women, they tried to destroy the cult. Although many women took up the sword, the men found themselves aided by the servants of the patriarchal Jehovah and they almost succeeded in their grim task.

Then, one midsummer night, under the light of the full moon, a pale man, a blood-drinker, approached the holiest of our temples, where the high priestess Lamia was presiding over the great Midsummer Rite. The great power of the High Priestess called to him and he bore down upon her. She refrained from destroying him, for the Dark Mother spoke to her, telling her that this was the next step on the way to true knowledge. As she was brought to the other side of death, she laughed, and the pale man, powerful as he was, found himself shaken and overwhelmed by the power of the High Priestess. He fled and Lamia, guided by Lilith, made her way to the master of the vampire who had made her, safe in the knowledge that these vampires were, in their own way, servants of the Dark Mother. He accepted her and requested her to bring over other powerful women of her kind. Remember always that, if you serve the cult well, you may be given this gift.



it is as such that the other clans know them. A number of Lamia are mystics, however. They use the occult secrets of the Cult of Lilith, combined with their unique insights of Mortis, to delve into mysteries that even their patron clan might frown upon, were it allowed to see.

Lamia Among the Clans

In modern nights, the other clans only know the guardian Lamia, those who serve and defend the Cappadocians as warriors. Members of the High Clans often look down upon these Lamia as mere servants. Many Low Clan Cainites despise the Lamia as willing slaves, while others try to recruit them, citing a common cause in rebellion against the High Clans. These latter Cainites are always disappointed, as are those who try to bribe or cajole a Lamia into betrayal. Most Lamia are fiercely loyal. The Cappadocians like to think that the Lamia are loyal to them, and this is also the image that the bloodline projects, but in reality, the Lamia are loyal to their High Priestess and to the Cult of Lilith. For now, these loyalties do not conflict with loyalty to the Graverobbers. The Cappadocians have proved to be generous sponsors, mentors and patrons, and the Lamia have gained much from their association with the clan.

This is not to say that every Lamia is a bodyguard — far from it. While the face most often seen is that of the guardian, one might also find Lamia scholars who work either independently or with the Cappadocians, seductresses and infiltrators who use their carnal knowledge from the days when they were alive to great effect and Lamia who continue their service to the Cult of Lilith after their Embrace.

The Cult of Lilith

The Cult of Lilith, a dark and mysterious sisterhood, still exists, much as it has for millennia. It is strongest in the eastern Mediterranean, which the cultists consider the most holy of lands, and it is still spread all over the known world. Small branches of the cult exist in Scotland, Scandinavia and even the lands beyond the Principality of Kiev.

The Cult of Lilith is a mystery cult that reveres women and the power of the female through Lilith, the Dark Mother. The Cult is dedicated to enlightenment, ascension and heightened awareness and uses various means to achieve this. Cult rites are usually centered around pain, orgies or both. Pain and pleasure are the central themes of

OF MEN AND CULTISTS

It may seem that the only Lamia are women who have been members of the Cult of Lilith. This is not entirely the case, though they do form the bulk of the bloodline's members.

From time to time, a woman who is not a member of the Cult of Lilith catches the eye of a Lamia and, should the prospective candidate hold up to further scrutiny and testing, she is given the Embrace. Such women are usually rebels against the patriarchy, though women who excel in physical pursuits or who seem to have some deeper understanding are also chosen. These women are watched and evaluated more harshly than their sisters. Men are exceedingly rarely Embraced and then normally only those who are members of the Cult of Lilith. A man needs to prove himself twice as much as a woman in order to be Embraced, and even then he receives less respect and trust than a female Lamia. In very rare circumstances, a man from outside the cult is Embraced, and it has happened once or twice that a powerful Cappadocian has requested that a certain man be Embraced as Lamia.

As an optional rule, the Storyteller may decree that noncultist Lamia suffer a +1 difficulty on social interactions with cultists and that male Lamia suffer a +2 difficulty with female Lamia and members of the cult. These penalties are cumulative, so that a male from outside the cult faces a +3 difficulty.

existence, say the teachings of High Priestess Lamia, and by dispensing pain and pleasure one may guide one's brothers and sisters toward understanding. The Cult also holds rites on midsummer, midwinter and the equinoxes, worshipping the power of nature as opposed to a single god.

The Cult is mainly made up of women. Male members exist, but they are never given positions of power and influence. Women are more in tune with the world, the Cult asserts, better able to understand the greater mysteries, better equipped to dispense pain and pleasure and, through the miracle of childbirth, much better equipped to endure pain. The Cult recruits secretly among the women of a community, usually approaching those who seem rebellious or malcontent. The Cult stresses secrecy, lest the patriarchal Church try to strike it down.

As noted, the Cult of Lilith reveres Lilith as the Dark Mother. She is the female counterpoint to Jehovah, who grew jealous of Her power and tried to lord over Her. When She refused, He, being stronger, cast Her from Heaven. This is why all members of the Cult of Lilith receive training in fighting, so as never to suffer a similar fate. The cult is also quick to use local female deities and mythological heroes when setting up in new areas, from the Roman Magna Mater to the Celtic Scathach (whom the Lamia claim was actually one of theirs) to the Nordic Sif and Hel.

Ashen Cults provides an in-depth look at cults in the Dark Medieval, and information from this book can be of great help in designing an individual branch of the Cult of Lilith. Chapter Three of that book introduces a new Background, Cult, which is appropriate for a Lamia.

Caine's Children

High and Low Clans: Among those who take an interest in such things, some confusions exists as to whether the Lamia are High or Low Clan. They are associated with the Cappadocians, but unlike the Giovanni, they are most definitely a separate lineage. As such, the Lamia occupy a kind of "middle ground," and while they might be scorned somewhat by the High Clans, the first cursed must admit that the Lamia know their place. Members of the Low Clans sometimes curse the Lamia as lap dogs to the nobles, but they cannot deny that the Lamia sleep more comfortably than they do.

Cappadocians: The Lamia are taught loyalty to the Cappadocian clan as a whole and to any individual Cappadocians they may be asked to serve. To some, this loyalty is a burden, to others it is something taken for granted. Whatever an individual Lamia's thoughts on the matter, the bloodline as a whole is loyal. The main problem comes when Cappadocian clashes with Cappadocian — where does a Lamia's loyalty lie then? Usually, a Lamia caught in such a conflict tries to minimize damage to the clan as a whole and also to remain loyal to her charge.

Gangrel: The Lamia retain more than cordial relations with a large number of female Gangrel who have more or less the same beliefs as the Lamia. Some are even inducted into the service of the Dark Mother.

Nosferatu: More than even their parent clan, the Lamia often find themselves in conflict with Nosferatu over territory. Also, the Lamia distrust the Lepers in the extreme, doing their best to prevent them from spying on the Cappadocians. For their part, the Nosferatu usually just watch and wait.

Ventruë: Several Cappadocians, especially in the Baronies of Avalon and the Fiefs of the Black Cross, serve as advisors to powerful Ventruë lords. The Lamia have seen how the Ventruë treat their servants when their usefulness expires, and therefore Gorgon bodyguards to these advisors watch the Ventruë princes very carefully.

Blaying a Lamia

With most Lamia serving one or more Cappadocians, it requires either the presence of a Graverobber or a well thought-out background story in order to introduce one into a chronicle. This said, however, if the conditions are right a Lamia can be a perfect choice for a player's character.

Character Development

Lamia tend toward a broad spectrum of Attributes, Abilities and Disciplines. Physical Attributes, especially Stamina, are good for warriors and mystics who regularly attend painful rituals. Social Attributes are an asset for the more sensual Lamia, and Mental Attributes, particularly Perception, are important for mystics. Those Lamia who act as bodyguards for Cappadocians of course require some martial skills. Hearth Wisdom and Occult are important to Lamia who want to rise within the Cult of Lilith. Clan Disciplines are important, of course, but many Lamia also find the study of Auspex worthwhile.

During chronicle downtime, a Lamia is likely to focus more on Abilities and Disciplines than Backgrounds. Lamia tend not to have extensive contact with mortal society, and their place as servants of the Cappadocians restricts their ability to gain status somewhat. Instead, focusing on the martial and the mystical is what takes up most of a Lamia's time.

Most Lamia experience their moments of truth during rites and rituals. As part of the Lamia belief of knowledge through pain and pleasure, torture, mutilation and sensual feeding can all help a Lamia cope with her Beast.

Role Within the Coterie

It is easy simply to delegate a Lamia the role of a warrior and bodyguard who is required to follow the orders of the coterie's Cappadocian. This, however, is selling the Lamia short. They are mystics as much as warriors and they, too, have an interest in learning

about death. A Lamia can be both an advisor and a fount of knowledge, in addition to adding another Potence-backed sword in times of conflict.

Prominent Lamia

Most Lamia keep a low profile, preferring to be seen simply as Cappadocian guards. Their pagan practices might attract too much attention from the wrong people if the bloodline were to try to involve itself too much in Cainite society.

High Priestess Lamia

Little is known about this ancient and enigmatic Cainite, save that she is the childe of Lazarus and rumored to be both the lover and guardian of Cappadocius. She leaves his side infrequently, either to perform some sort of task set her by him or to attend one of the great rites of the Lamia. The only rite she is sure to attend is the great Midsummer Rite, but sometimes she can be found presiding over minor, yet still important, rituals. She is known for her enmity toward Augustus and the Giovanni, the only known difference of opinion she has with her master. The one thing that those who have met High Priestess Lamia remark upon is her looks — where one might expect otherworldly beauty or horrid ugliness, Lamia appears as a normal-looking woman with a shapely body, extremely long hair and a classic nose.

Hippolyta

In Venice, one of Prince Guilelmo's childer is staked and left in the sun, his ghouls watching helplessly in chains. In eastern Hungary, 12 monks are found poisoned and defiled in an Obertus monastery. In Magdeburg, a prominent Lasombra visitor is assassinated, prompting increased tension between The Fiefs of the Black Cross and the Sea of Shadows. In all these cases, one name is whispered with mixed hatred and dread: Hippolyta. Believed by most to be a renegade mercenary Lamia, Hippolyta is known to be an expert swordswoman, a master archer and privy to the deepest secrets of her bloodline. She is rumored to associate with devil-worshippers both mortal and Cainite, have mages as her servants and hunt Lupines for sport. Some believe that she is not a renegade at all but answers to some of the most powerful members of the Cappadocian clan or possibly High Priestess Lamia herself.





CHAPTER FOUR: BIRTHRIGHTS AND BITTER SECRETS



A prince ought to have no other aim or thought, nor select anything else for his study, than war and its rules and discipline.

— Nicolo Machiavelli, *The Prince*

The High Clans have history, tradition and millennia of practice on their side when it comes to supernatural power. Every application of their Disciplines is a refinement of the gifts that Caine himself gave to their Antediluvian forebears, and every year brings the discovery of a technique long forgotten or a new secret revealed from sire to childe.

This chapter contains new Discipline techniques and advanced Disciplines developed by the first cursed. Also, the secrets of the *koldun* are revealed, allowing players to create characters from this arcane tradition of sorcerers. Mortis receives treatment, as well — the reader will find two new Mortis paths and a host of rituals for use by Cappadocian characters.

Arsenal of the Elders

A young Cainite avoids the eyes of an elder, only to find that her voice carries as much command as her gaze. An Assamite strikes at his Cappadocian target, only to find that his weapon breaks. With but a simple push, a Brujah elder sends a raging Lupine flying backward.

While younger vampires might think that they possess great powers with their command of the Disciplines, they are but impotent dabblers compared to those elders who have moved beyond the normal boundaries of Cainite gifts. Those of sufficiently powerful blood and an advanced enough age may call upon truly devastating effects and even break some of the established rules of the Disciplines. Some elders find themselves driven insane by the incredible power they have at their disposal, however. With great power comes greater risk, especially among Cainites.

The Diverging Paths

In general, the first five levels of a Discipline have set effects of increasing efficiency. Some small variations may be possible (as with the Animalism power *Cowing the Beast*, which can also be used as *Song of Serenity*), but this is a rarity. Once a Cainite goes beyond the standard powers obtainable by any vampire, no matter what generation, several different powers become available. One Toreador might learn *Farsight*, enabling her to see places and people far off, while another will learn the *Mind Revealed*, focusing on people nearby.

Why this happens is unknown, but it is a hotly debated topic among Cainite scholars. One theory, previously supported by many Salubri, says that all levels of all Disciplines have the potential to be as diverse as the

higher levels. They point to their own two-fold Valeren, the variation possible with *Cowing the Beast* and the fact that Gangrel with enough skill in the Protean Discipline may manifest many different combinations of beastly shapes. These nights, this theory is dismissed as Salubri boasting. Instead, many scholars support the idea that only those of powerful enough blood can alter the powers of Caine. Another theory is that these more advanced powers are in reality nascent Disciplines waiting to be fully developed. Whatever the truth is, one fact remains: Whenever a vampire advances beyond the fifth level in a Discipline, new and interesting possibilities develop.

The greatest change comes with the three physical Disciplines: *Celerity*, *Fortitude* and *Potence*. At the less advanced levels, each increase simply brings a standard boost in effect (another action, another soak die, another Strength success). Beyond level 5, special powers become a possibility as an alternative to the standard increase. Gaining both effects (a special power and a standard increase) requires a player to buy that level twice.

What advanced power is developed depends very much on the Cainite in question and somewhat on the tutor, if any. A Lasombra of a martial bent is likely to manifest *Aegis of Shadows*, even if his mentor knows only *Walk the Abyss*... The Storyteller sets the time needed to develop a high-level power (which should be dependent on the type of chronicle being run; anything from a few months to a decade or more). Self-training takes at least twice the time that studying with a tutor would require. The new power that manifests is usually something that complements the personality of the Cainite, though sometimes a mentor succeeds in driving home whatever power she knows instead, even if it may be inappropriate to the student.

Vampires are not limited to a single power at any given advanced level. They may continue to train a Discipline to develop additional powers of the same level, if desired. For example, a sixth-generation Lasombra with *Shadow Armor* may choose to learn *Walk the Abyss* as well, instead of trying to advance to *Fortify Against Ahura Mazda*. In other words, if a character has six dots in a Discipline, her player can pay 25 experience points to buy another level 6 power or 30 experience points to buy a level 7 power.

The powers later in this chapter, as well as those in **Dark Ages: Vampire**, are by no means all the advanced powers that exist. Those in the main book are the most common powers, while those presented here are emblematic of the High Clans. Other powers may manifest in a newly enlightened Cainite. With the Storyteller's permission, a player may design a new

DIFFICULT CHOICES

As described below, when a character advances beyond level 5 in one of the three "physical" Disciplines (*Celerity*, *Fortitude*, *Potence*), the player has the option of choosing either an increase in the usual effect or learning a special power. You *can not* choose an increase in the usual effect unless you also have done so at the previous level. For example, a Brujah who gains *Potence 7* cannot choose to gain seven automatic Strength successes if his only level 6 power is *Master of the Forge*. He must first learn the "standard" *Potence* effect at level 6 before he can learn it at level 7.

CELERITY AND POTENCE PROBLEMS

At high levels, Celerity and Potence become very powerful. A Brujah elder with Celerity 6 and Potence 6 is able to wade through a sea of enemies and dispatch coteries of ancillae by herself. If a Storyteller wants to limit the power of these two Disciplines, the following two options are offered. Storytellers might also want to use the Potence option regardless, as it is somewhat realistic (as realistic as anything pertaining to undead bloodsuckers can be).

With advanced levels of standard Celerity, the mind and body of the Cainite possessing the Celerity may not be able to keep up with the increased speed the Discipline grants. Any character with Celerity 6 or more must have a Dexterity + Wits at least equal to her Celerity rating in order to take advantage of it fully. If a character activates Celerity beyond her Dexterity + Wits, all actions are at +3 difficulty due to disorientation. If the character increases her Dexterity via blood expenditure, her Celerity limits are likewise increased.

With advanced Potence, one incurs the risk that weapons and tools may break. If a character has Potence 6 (automatic successes rather than other powers), any nonbladed melee weapon (except for a morning star) she wields shatters on a successful hit, unless its haft has been specially reinforced. At Potence 7, even thrusting weapons and blades other than daggers break. At Potence 8, morning stars' chains break and daggers snap. A character with such strength can safely wield only special weapons. Any weapon forged with the Potence power Master of the Forge is safe. Weapons made by a master (at least Crafts 4 and an Area of Expertise in Weaponsmithing) might be able to withstand such force. For every success beyond four the creator of the weapon achieved when it was made, the weapon can withstand one level of Potence higher than normal.

Some Storytellers might want to apply this rule to characters with boosted or natural Strength above 5. This, however, requires a lot of bookkeeping, as a player needs to keep track of whether or not her weapon is in jeopardy at any given moment.

power for her character instead of choosing one of the powers already published. This will likely require a good deal of tinkering, as the Storyteller and player must work together to ensure that the new power is neither too powerful nor too weak, that it fits within the framework of the chosen Discipline and that it is indeed appropriate to the character.

The Refined Methods

The following high-level Discipline powers are mainly found among the High Clans, though those of the more common Disciplines are known by members of the Lower Clans. High Clan vampires tend to favor powers of control, refinement, expertise and dominance. Celerity Refinement is a good example — this power increases a vampire's control over Celerity. An Assamite warrior might manifest a much more offensive Celerity power, which is likely to be a good deal more efficient in combat, but a Toreador with Celerity Refinement might scoff at such an unrefined, brute-force approach.

The Perils of Power

While a Cainite who possesses advanced levels of one or more Disciplines might have incredible power at her disposal, such power can (and often does) also begin to affect her mentally. Just as some mortal lords become corrupt and degenerate because of the power they wield over their fellow humans, a Cainite might find her sanity eroded by the powers of the Gifts of Caine.

When to afflict "Discipline derangements" is ultimately up to the Storyteller. Below is a list of conditions that indicate that a Discipline derangement might develop. In general, only characters who have a Discipline at level 6 or above are in danger of developing Discipline derangements, but if the player and Storyteller agree, such a derangement might come at earlier levels. If a character fulfills three conditions, she is in serious danger of receiving a temporary derangement. Fulfilling five or more conditions might inflict a permanent derangement. The derangements appropriate to each Discipline are listed below.

- The level of a clan Discipline is higher than the other two clan Disciplines together.
- The level of a nonclan Discipline is higher than any clan Disciplines.
- The character has multiple powers of the same level of the Discipline.
- The character has reached her maximum potential in the Discipline without reaching at least level 5 in another.

- The character has botched uses of the Discipline several times recently.

- The character has repeatedly achieved phenomenal results (six or more successes) while using the Discipline recently.

- The character relies heavily on using the Discipline, even when it is not necessary.

- The character has learned or advanced in the Discipline as a result of diablerie.

Temporary Discipline derangements fade when the conditions that brought them about no longer apply, while permanent Discipline derangements are just that. They may eventually be overcome just as other derangements, but the character cannot find a cure by simply refraining from the use of the Discipline that brought on the derangement; it lingers on.

An Insane Start

Yes, it is possible to start with a Discipline derangement, by taking the Deranged Flaw (p. 305 of **Dark Ages: Vampire**), or by deciding that the character begins insane if the optional Merits and Flaws system isn't being used. This derangement should be keyed to the highest in-clan Discipline the character has (and it is especially appropriate for a character who has all of her four starting dots in a single Discipline). Taking this Flaw at character creation could indicate that something went wrong during the first few uses of the Discipline, or that the character is not mentally strong enough to handle it.

Auspex

High levels of Auspex are a favorite not only of the clans who possess the Discipline as one of their clan specialties, but of any elder Cainite wanting to play the games of power. Being able to see invisible attackers, read the minds of enemies and see into the future are all incredible advantages in the War of Princes. The expanded perceptions of Auspex can easily affect the mind of the user, though. In fact, any botched Auspex roll may, at the Storyteller's discretion, inflict a temporary derangement. Auspex can induce derangements of Fantasy (especially from excessive mind-reading), Paranoia, Sanguinary Animism, Visions and Unconscious Thought Reading.

••••• The Mind Revealed

This power expands upon the abilities granted by Steal Secrets. Though it does not allow the user to probe deeply into the mind of her subject, it does allow unlimited access to surface thoughts. These thoughts are generally so fully formed that they do not appear

UNCONSCIOUS THOUGHT READING

A Cainite who is accustomed to using Auspex to read the minds of people in any situation may suddenly find herself unable to shut the mind-reading down. She finds herself overwhelmed with "background noise" or, if only in the company of one or two people, answering unasked questions. When this derangement is active, the character suffers a +3 difficulty on all Mental and Social rolls, as well as a +1 difficulty to resist frenzy, unless she is in the company of one or two people.

as images or illusions, but as vague sentences and direct impulses. Knowing the language of the subject is not necessary — the vampire automatically understands the subject's thoughts and intentions.

The Mind Revealed can be a boon in social situations (as lying to the wielder of this power is quite difficult and it's easy for the user to know appropriate things to say) as well as in combat (where the user can know her enemy's next move).

System: Using this power on a mortal or ghoul requires nothing more than a single turn spent in concentration. In order to use it on vampires, the player spends a point of Willpower and rolls Perception + Empathy (difficulty of the victim's Willpower). When in use, the power reveals the foremost thoughts in the target's mind. In most situations, it is either what the target is just about to say or, interestingly, what she is deciding *not* to say. In combat situations, the surface thoughts normally appear as an image of the action that the target is about to take. This power affects only one target at a time and lasts for one scene.

If used to detect lies, all Subterfuge difficulties against the wielder increase by 3 (to a maximum of 9). If used in order to convince or seduce a target, the user of this power gains three additional dice. In combat, the user gains -1 difficulty to hit her target and -1 difficulty on defensive actions. The user must concentrate on her target, increasing the difficulty of all actions not related to this person (dodging an attack from another enemy) by 3.

••••• Ecstatic Agony

This power, which changes the user's perception of pain so that it becomes pleasure, is known to be possessed by the Tzimisce elder Mazikheen. Always looking for ways to transcend the flesh, she found a way to switch two of the most primal sensations. When this power is in effect, all the

pain that the user feels is transformed into a feeling of bliss that invigorates the user and makes everything seem clearer. Fighting someone who uses this power is a rather disquieting experience — slashing someone with a sword and then having him utter an orgasmic moan in response is not what one normally expects.

While Ecstatic Agony seems to appeal mostly to the Fiends, members of other clans, especially those who have traveled through the lands held by the Tzimisce and who have taken an interest in their arts, might develop it. It is also a power one might find among some elder warrior Salubri, who gain a great deal of understanding of pain through their Valeren.

System: The player spends a point of Willpower to activate this power, which lasts for a scene. Any wound penalties the user suffers become bonuses instead, adding dice instead of subtracting them. This bonus is applied to almost all rolls, except for those dealing with concentration or self-control. The user does not suffer from movement penalties due to wounds, unless limbs are severed or the body suffers similar structural damage. When the user reaches the Incapacitated health level, she is overcome with ecstasy and collapses. Torpor and Final Death are handled normally.

The blissful sensations induced by this power are quite powerful and, at the Storyteller's discretion, may be addictive to frequent users. In addition, a user might not want to heal wounds while this power is in effect — the Storyteller might deem that a Willpower roll must be made before the user may spend blood to heal.

••••• Carnage of the Mind

The Cainites of the High Clans know that their minds are far superior to those of the fallen. Thus, it is only logical that they should be able to overwhelm weaker minds if they are in direct contact with them. Carnage of the Mind allows the wielder to make a direct attack upon another person's psyche with her own, often with devastating consequences. Carnage of the Mind also lends itself well to the Malkavian clan, as a normal mind cannot handle contact with the fractured psyche of one of the Lunatics.

System: The character must either touch her target or make eye contact. The player spends 3 blood points and rolls Manipulation + Intimidation (difficulty 6) opposed by the target's Willpower (also difficulty 6). Assaulting a vampire or other supernatural being costs a point of Willpower as well as the blood. The result depends on the number of successes the attacker achieves after subtracting the defender's:

No. of Successes	Effect
Botch	The target becomes immune to further uses of this power from the attacker for an entire month.
Failure	The target is unharmed, though she is aware that the attacker tried to affect her somehow.
1 success	The target is shaken, unnerved or momentarily stunned, but otherwise unharmed. She loses a temporary Willpower point.
2 successes	The target is badly frightened and loses three temporary Willpower points. If the target is a vampire, her player must make a Courage roll (difficulty 6) to avoid Röttschreck.
3 successes	The target's mind fills with horrid visions, chaotic images or booming voices and she loses six temporary Willpower points and must roll Courage as above. If this causes the victim to lose all of her temporary Willpower, she loses a permanent point of Willpower and suffers three health levels of bashing damage. This damage can be soaked normally.
4 successes	The target loses all temporary Willpower and half her permanent Willpower, and suffers three levels of lethal damage, which can be soaked as normal.
5 or more successes	The target's player must roll Willpower (difficulty 7). If the roll succeeds, the target is affected as described under four successes. If she fails, the terrible power of Carnage of the Mind kills her (if mortal) or drives her into torpor (if vampire).

If the target loses all her temporary Willpower as a result of this power, she is rendered unconscious for the rest of the night, in addition to any other effects.

••••• Sight of the Oracles

This power brings the possessor amazing insight and visions of the past, the present and the future. In some ways, it brings Auspex full circle — the first thing a user of Auspex learns is to sharpen her physical

senses. With this power, the supernatural senses are sharpened to perfection.

System: Once learned, this power is always in effect. The possessor of this power enjoys the benefits of Heightened Senses at all times but does not suffer from sensory overload. She is at all times aware of everything that happens in her immediate vicinity, as long as it is not cloaked by Obfuscate, or another supernatural power, of equal or greater level. The user may also have visions of things and events that may be important to her, gain spontaneous insights into problems and hear the thoughts of those in her vicinity, possibly finishing their sentences or answering unspoken questions. The exact effects of this power are best left up to the Storyteller, but in general, it is impossible to surprise the wielder of Sight of the Oracles.

For Storytellers, this power is a wonderful tool to grant an important character information that he might not otherwise know ... or to have him take an interest in the coterie, for better or worse.

Celerity

Though the Toreador claim that Celerity has many artistic uses, it is regarded mainly as a martial Discipline, and powers above level 5 tend to reflect this. The distortion of perception that comes with high levels of Celerity can induce derangements such as Hysteria, Saint Vitus' Dance and Disorientation.

••••• Flawless Parry

This power is a boon to those Cainites who are not of a martial bent, allowing them to react quickly to incoming threats and defend against them. More aggressive Cainites may scoff at this power, but Flawless Parry ensures that even a Cainite with only a minimum of combat training can make the most of it in combat.

System: To activate this power, the player decides how many defensive actions the character wishes

to gain, up to a maximum of her character's Celerity rating plus one, and then spends one blood point per action after the first. This blood expenditure is considered Celerity use and as such does not count against the maximum number of blood that can be spent per turn. The character may take no other actions while using Flawless Parry, but each defense gained from this power is considered to have successes on all the dice in the dice pool. The player decides which attacks to use a defense against and which not to before the opponent's dice are rolled.

Example: Lord Raymond finds himself assaulted in the town square by six ghoul ruffians sent by an enemy. He draws his blade, calls out for his nearby allies and then activates Flawless Parry. Raymond has Celerity 6, so he can potentially take seven defensive actions. He is running low on blood, however, so he decides on six (his player spends 5 blood points). Raymond has Dexterity 3, Melee 2 and Dodge 1. Three of the ghouls shoot at him with crossbows, and against these attacks, Raymond has four automatic successes to dodge (as he would normally have four dice to dodge such attacks). The three other ghouls attack him with axes, and against these, Raymond has five automatic successes to parry (because his normal parry pool is five dice).

••••• Celerity Refinement

Normally, a user of Celerity must decide at the beginning of a turn how many actions she will take and pay the cost in blood at that time. Some masters of Celerity have managed to refine the Discipline to the point where they can use their blood-born speed as a reaction to events, controlling how fast they move and how much blood they spend. For Cainites low on blood, this can be a great boon, as they can ensure that no actions (and thus no blood) are wasted.

System: If a character possesses Celerity Refinement, the player need not state at the beginning of the turn how much of her character's Celerity she is activating. Instead, the character may take extra actions as appropriate during the turn — the player simply spends blood as necessary when she wishes the character to take additional actions. She may not take more actions than normally allowed, and the actions cannot be taken at times where Celerity actions cannot be taken (so no nondefensive Celerity actions before all others have acted).

Example: Magdalena the Scholar of Clan Brujah (who possess six levels of "standard" Celerity along with Celerity Refinement) find herself attacked by an unknown Cainite while out hunting. Not knowing the capabilities of her assailant, she chooses a defensive stance and realizes

DISORIENTATION

This derangement afflicts those who rely too heavily on higher levels of Celerity. The mind becomes accustomed to the slow world that it sees when Celerity is active and becomes disoriented when the world "speeds up" as the Discipline ends. The character becomes confused by the pace of the world and suffers a +1 difficulty on all rolls when Celerity is not active. She may insist that the world is moving too fast and that everyone around her should speak slowly and not run.

that her attacker knows some Celerity, as he strikes at her three times in rapid succession. Magdalena dodges the first attack, then her player spends 2 blood points, one for each additional attack. Deciding to finish the battle quickly, the player spends a blood point to gain an additional action for Magdalena, which she uses to draw her stake. The player then spends one final blood point to allow the Brujah to attack, hoping to immobilize her attacker. She succeeds, and her opponent falls to the ground paralyzed. If the player had simply activated Magdalena's full six levels of "standard" Celerity, two actions (and blood points) would have been wasted.

••••• The Unseen Storm

It is said that the hand can be quicker than the eye. For a Cainite possessing the Unseen Storm, her entire body is faster than the eye, provided she is constantly moving. This power offers true invisibility — people are unable to see the user, yet they can still hear and smell her, though her constant movement garbles these impressions. Also, people do not instinctively step out of her way, as with Obfuscate. On the other hand, the user cannot be seen by anyone who does not possess more Auspex than her Celerity, and she can attack and otherwise interact without becoming visible.

System: The player spends one blood point to activate the Unseen Storm and must continue to spend one blood each turn she wants the power to continue. This expenditure *does* count against the maximum number of blood that can be spent in a turn. The character may not use any other Celerity powers (other than taking extra actions) while maintaining the Unseen Storm. A person fighting a character using this power counts as blind, while the user automatically blindsides her opponent (see **Dark Ages: Vampire**, p. 240). The difficulty of all Perception rolls and any physical action except for close combat attacks the character attempts rises by one, because of the user's rapid movements.

••••• Paragon of Motion

For masters of Celerity, almost any physical action, no matter how daunting, becomes a simple thing when focused on properly. With Paragon of Motion, the user's perception of time slows down so that she is able to plan out every movement and correct every mistake before it becomes a problem.

System: The player spends one blood point as the character concentrates for one turn. The character then automatically succeeds on an action that is mainly physical (and doesn't rely upon strength alone),

with no need to roll, as long as the Storyteller does not feel that it is completely impossible. Scaling a smooth, rain-soaked wall, walking along an ice-encrusted ledge in high winds and juggling 15 knives are all simple tasks for someone with this power. Should the Storyteller determine that a roll is necessary (which is generally only if the difficulty would normally be 10 and require multiple successes), the player receives nine automatic successes on the roll. The character cannot use other Celerity powers while employing Paragon of Motion.

If used in combat, Paragon of Motion requires an attack roll (in addition to blood expenditure and a round of concentration), but this roll gains nine automatic successes. The damage roll gains this benefit as well.

Dominate

In a rare case of agreement, both the Lasombra and Ventrue clans inform anyone who wishes to hear it that Dominate is by far the most powerful Discipline and a must for anyone wishing to become a power in the nights of the War of Princes. Dominate also dulls the empathy of the user, and one must take care not to become accustomed to being surrounded by sycophants at all times. Dominate can easily lead to such derangements as Megalomania, Obsession (with an ordered environment), Perfectionism and Empathetic Blindness.

••••• Command Obedience

This power allows a master of Dominate to forego the normal requirement of Dominate: eye contact. Instead, the wielder may Dominate a victim using a slight touch or, with more effort, her voice. This power is known to be ancient and is a favorite among Lasombra and Ventrue in positions of leadership. It is unknown whether or not any members of the Tremere clan have manifested Command Obedience.

EMPATHIC BLINDNESS

This derangement, comparable in many ways to what in modern times is called sociopathy, is found among frequent users of Dominate. The character becomes blind to the needs, wants and ideas of others. She is incapable of understanding why anyone would not agree with her, follow her commands or do whatever they can to serve her. She suffers a +3 difficulty on Social rolls with those who do not follow her every order and must check for frenzy (difficulty 4) if openly disobeyed.

System: With this power, a character may employ all her other Dominate powers through either touch or voice. With a touch, actual skin-to-skin contact is necessary — touching a person's clothing isn't enough. The touch need not be maintained throughout the entire time it takes to issue the Dominate command.

If only voice is used, then all that is required is that the target hears the words and that they are spoken loudly and clearly in a language the target understands. Such attempts are at +1 difficulty and require the expenditure of a point of Willpower, as it is harder to enforce one's will through voice than through touch or eye contact.

••••• Tyrant's Gaze

This power is an unusually aggressive and overt use of Dominate. With it, a Cainite may weaken the mental faculties, social skills or bodily strengths of a target. The use of this power demands eye contact, unless the wielder possesses Command Obedience, but it does not require words.

System: The player spends a point of blood and chooses which Attribute category to affect: Physical, Social or Mental. She then rolls Manipulation + Intimidation (difficulty of the target's Willpower). The target may resist with a Courage roll (difficulty of the user's Willpower). If the player's roll fails, the target becomes aware that the character was trying to affect her. On a botch, the target becomes aware and is immune to any Dominate attempts from the user for the remainder of the night.

For each net success, the victim loses one dot from one of the Attributes in the selected category. The loss is spread as equally as possible, with the user deciding where odd successes go. This loss does not affect reflexive rolls (such as soak and many Appearance rolls), as the loss is purely psychological.

Example: Andreas von Mecklenburg of Clan Ventrue finds that a Toreador named Cassandra has been spreading lies about him and decides to teach the upstart a lesson, weakening her social acumen. During the next meeting of the area's prominent Cainites, Andreas makes brief eye contact with his rival and his player rolls Andreas' Charisma + Intimidation (nine dice) against Cassandra's Willpower (6), scoring an amazing six successes. Cassandra's player resists, rolling Courage (3) against Andreas' impressive Willpower (9), gaining only one success. Andreas has five successes to weaken Cassandra's Social Attributes. One must go into each category, and Andreas assigns the remaining two to Manipulation and Appearance. Cassandra suddenly finds herself less able to be charming (reduced Charisma), much less eloquent

(reduced Manipulation) and unable to flash her beautiful, winning smile and walk with the dignified grace that was her trademark (reduced Appearance).

••••• Carry the Master's Voice

Members of those clans who possess Dominate often rely heavily on ghouls and other servants. As such, it is a small wonder that this power, which allows for a servant to carry a Dominate command from her master, has arisen. This power can be a potent tool for a Cainite lord with a number of trusted servants.

System: In order to grant a Dominate command to a carrier, said carrier must be under a blood oath or Lure of the Subtle Whisper (Dominate 4). The Dominate power imprinted must be one of the first three levels of the Discipline. The player spends a Willpower point and makes the standard roll for the power, noting the number of successes (the difficulty is considered 7, rather than the Willpower of the ultimate target). The carrier must make eye contact with the subject as normal to initiate the power. Then the initial die roll is compared to the target's Willpower.

The power can affect anyone whom the user would normally be able to affect; if the user is fifth generation, then even her ghouls can dominate any Cainite of fifth generation or higher. A person, be it a Cainite, ghoul or mortal, can carry only a single application of this power at a time.

••••• Dominate the Descendants

This power is the ultimate tool of control in the arsenal of the Methuselahs, a powerful weapon in the War of Princes. With Dominate the Descendants, the wielder may issue commands to anyone who is descended from him — his childer, his childer's childer and so forth down to even the weak-blooded 13th generation. Distance and familiarity matter not. A vampire in England can easily affect a descendant of his in Outremer who has no knowledge of his own line.

Dominate the Descendants is rarely powerful enough to cause direct actions in the targets, instead slowly changing their priorities to coincide with the wishes of the user. This change is so slow and gradual, sometimes happening over a period of years, that outside influence is rarely suspected.

System: Dominate the Descendants requires that a permanent point of Willpower be spent, thus it is not used lightly. The player rolls Manipulation + Leadership, with a difficulty equal to 4 + the number of generations who are to heed the command, starting with the vampires one step removed from the character. If the

difficulty is pushed beyond 9, it requires more successes to work. Commands must be very general in terms, such as “work toward the glory of the Baronies of Avalon” or “guard the knowledge of the heretics against those who seek to destroy it.” Dominate the Descendants lasts for one decade per success on the roll, and a vampire in torpor can use the power. Dominate the Descendants is powerful enough to affect even the ghouls of those who are affected by the power, though to a lesser degree (ghouls may roll Willpower, difficulty 6, if they do not wish to act on the impulses that Dominate the Descendants induces).

Example: Tubalcain is a fourth-generation Lasombra who lies in torpor under his former haven in Ostia Antica. He decides to strike against his rival, Mithras, by commanding his descendants to sabotage the trade between England and the rest of Europe. Tubalcain’s player (no, this does not mean we advocate that you play fourth-generation characters) spends a permanent point of Willpower and then rolls Manipulation + Leadership. If Tubalcain wishes to affect only those of his childer who are of the fifth, sixth and seventh generations, the difficulty is 7 (base 4 + 3 generations’ worth of vampires). Should he decide to affect all his childer down to the 12th generation, the difficulty is then 9 and three successes are required. Should the roll succeed, Lasombra all over the world begin working against the trade with England.

Fortitude

Fortitude is a great boon to those who wish to engage themselves directly in the War of Princes. Where Celerity allows a Cainite to overwhelm an enemy’s defenses and Potence can crush an opponent with a single blow, Fortitude allows for continued

LACK OF SURVIVAL INSTINCT

Sometimes, Cainite masters of Fortitude become convinced of their own indestructibility to the point that they disregard even mortal danger. The character is convinced of her own invincibility in combat. She receives a –2 difficulty on all Courage rolls but will not dodge, parry or block an incoming blow and is reluctant to leave combat. If sufficiently wounded, or if friends and allies quit the field, she may decide to withdraw. In order to do so, the player must make a Willpower roll. The difficulty is 9 if friends have quit the battle, 8 if at Wounded or worse with bashing damage, 7 if the damage is lethal and 6 if the damage is aggravated. In cases of mixed damage, use the lowest difficulty.

survival, protecting against the claws of a Gangrel, the teeth of a Lupine and the envenomed blades of Assamite assassins. While possessing high levels of Fortitude rarely leads to derangements, it can induce Megalomania and Lack of Survival Instinct.

••••• Stand Against all Foes

With this power, a vampire may plant her feet solidly on the ground and ensure that she cannot be moved by anything weaker than herself. Even being hit by the charge of a fully armored knight or being pounced upon by an enraged Lupine will not move or knock down the user. This power was first made well known by the Ventrue knight Johann Kriegsmeister, a warrior in the service of Lord Jürgen, who often found himself carried away from his coterie by the ebb and flow of battle. Now he stands firm, often acting as a bodyguard.

System: In order to use this power, the character must be on relatively stable ground — a solid plank floor, a tamped earth basement or even the forest floor is acceptable; a crumbling castle parapet or a soggy marsh is not. The player spends a blood point. Until the user decides to end this power, she is almost impossible to move by normal means. In any roll to avoid being moved or knocked down, the player gains a number of automatic successes equal to the character’s Fortitude rating.

••••• Armor of Kings

This power allows a Cainite to become dangerous to enemies without even attacking them — her body has become so hard that anything striking it might break upon contact. With Armor of Kings, any attack on the character meets with disaster, as weapons are shattered and bones are broken. Interestingly, the name Armor of Kings comes from the Ventrue Baudouin Des Rôaux, who originally learned the power from the Saxon Gangrel Wymer. Wymer called the power Curse the Enemy, but rather than admitting to learning anything from a Gangrel, the Warlord changed the name to something more fitting.

System: Activating this power requires the expenditure of 2 blood points. It lasts for one scene. When an attack strikes the character, the player rolls Fortitude (difficulty 8). If she achieves more successes than the attacker rolled, the weapon shatters. Weapons made with magical powers (such as swords forged with the Potence power Forge) and magically treated or masterfully forged (made by a weaponsmith with at least Crafts 4) weapons receive a resistance roll. Generally, a master-crafted weapon has a “soak” of 3, a

weapon made with Master of the Forge has 5, and a magical weapon can have anything from 4–10, depending on the power of the magic. If the number of successes on the weapon's "soak" roll equals or exceeds the number of successes gained by the player using this power, the weapon survives. A botched attack roll against a character with Armor of Kings activated automatically shatters the weapon. The character must still soak the damage, but all soak difficulties are at –1 difficulty against a shattered weapon.

An attacker who makes an unarmed attack against a Cainite with Armor of Kings suffers lethal damage equal to the damage her player rolled, which can be soaked as normal. If an attacker suffers two or more health levels of damage in this fashion, it results in either a broken wrist (from a punch or claw attack), a broken ankle (from a kick) or a mouthful of shattered teeth (from a bite). The Storyteller can set any penalties she finds appropriate in such a case.

••••• Repair the Undead Flesh

Traditionally, sunlight, fire and the fangs of Lupines and other vampires are the banes of Cainites. As the lesser effects of Fortitude protect against the infliction of such damage, a Cappadocian master of Fortitude long ago developed a way to repair the ravages of these attacks, possibly with the help of a healer Salubri. While that Cappadocian hasn't been heard from in years, the only logical assumption is that she still exists — what could possibly destroy her?

System: This power is always in effect. It makes aggravated damage much easier to repair — the need for Willpower and rest is waived and the player need spend only 5 blood points per aggravated health level.

••••• Arm of Prometheus

Even with the protection afforded by the highest levels of Fortitude, some sources of damage cannot be resisted. With this power, a vampire may temporarily make one of her limbs immune to any and all sources of damage. It is believed that Lazarus of Clan Cappadocian first discovered this power and that it is needed in order to perform a mighty Mortis ritual, where the caster must hold an ingredient in a roaring fire for an hour.

System: The player spends 3 blood points and designates one of her character's arms or legs. The character spends a turn in concentration. For the next 10 minutes, the chosen limb is entirely indestructible. Fire, sunlight, the bite of a mighty Lupine, a wizard's most powerful magics — nothing affects it (though any armor or clothing may still be damaged). Spending

another 3 blood points when the time is up extends the duration of Indestructible Limb. The supernatural hardness of the limb also allows it to be used as a weapon — a punch with such a limb inflicts Strength +1 lethal damage, a kick inflicts Strength +2.

Obtenebration

Obtenebration is the mystical and sinister power of the Lasombra clan. Said to be drawn from the Abyss and associated with evil gods and demons, the shadows of Obtenebration can sometimes be as dangerous to the wielder as the victim. The strain of summoning and controlling Obtenebration can easily shatter a weak mind. Obtenebration can induce derangements of Fantasy (about a world of shadows), Lunacy and Visions, as well as a condition known as Shadow Infestation.

••••• Aegis of Shadows

This power has seen much use during the shadow *Reconquista*. It allows the wielder to garb herself in armor made of semisolid shadow. This armor generally takes the form of highly articulated and ornate knight's armor, though styles vary from one Lasombra to another. The one constant is that the armor covers the entire body. The use of this power clearly marks the user as something sinister and unholy and causes most normal mortals to flee in terror.

System: The player spends 2 blood points and rolls Manipulation + Occult (difficulty 7). Each success on the roll translates into one level of armor, which can be used to soak bashing, lethal and aggravated damage that does *not* stem from fire or sunlight (unless Fortify Against Ahura Mazda is used). In addition, the character gains three dice to any Intimidation pool. Normal mortals and animals flee before the character. Exceptionally strong-willed mortals and ghouls may roll Courage (difficulty of the character's (modified) Charisma + Intimidation) in order not to flee.

If the player botches the roll to form the Aegis of Shadows, the character is infected by the shadow-stuff

SHADOW INFESTATION

This is not a derangement but rather a physical condition that sometimes manifests in users of Obtenebration. The character's eyes become pools of utter darkness, shadows move of their own accord in her presence, and from time to time, spontaneous Obtenebration effects may manifest. A player can suppress this effect by spending a point of Willpower.

of the Abyss. She suffers three unsoakable aggravated health levels of damage as darkness erupts from her body in writhing tendrils.

••••• Fortify Against Ahura Mazda

Normally, sunlight destroys the darkness created by Obtenebration with the merest touch. A single ray of light can ruin even the most well conjured Nocturne, and a Lasombra assaulted in her haven during the day cannot use Arms of Ahriman to reach her enemies standing outside. This power, seen by Abyss Mystics (see p. 175) to be the first step on the way to true mastery of Obtenebration, allows the user to strengthen her darkness against the light of the sun. This power takes its name from the Zoroastrian god of light and fire, the opposite of Ahriman.

System: When the character invokes another

Obtenebration power, the player spends 3 blood points in addition to whatever cost the power in question has and rolls Stamina + Occult (difficulty 7). Each success translates to one turn in which that Obtenebration power is unaffected by sunlight. The duration of Fortify Against Ahura Mazda cannot be extended by the use of additional blood points.

••••• Inner Darkness

Up to this point, all manifestations of Obtenebration are outward.

When a Lasombra reaches this level of mastery, however, she is able to summon the darkness of Obtenebration into herself. Doing so is extremely difficult, and not without a certain element of risk, but the benefits are considerable.

System: In order to summon the Inner Darkness, the character must meditate for 10 minutes.



Jim Di Bartolo

The player must spend 3 blood points and roll Manipulation + Occult (difficulty 7). If the roll succeeds, the player must then spend a Willpower point and roll Willpower (difficulty 9). Inner Darkness lasts until sunrise, though it can be dispelled earlier with another Willpower roll, this one at difficulty 7. When Inner Darkness is in effect, the character's eyes become orbs of darkness, but this is the only visible sign of the power.

A vampire who has activated Inner Darkness may invoke Shadow Play (Obtenebration 1) at any time without spending blood. She also gains three dice to all Obtenebration dice pools. She can see through natural or supernatural darkness at no penalty, including Obtenebration effects up to level 7. If anyone wounds her with a weapon that breaks the skin, the darkness lashes out against the attacker with the same Traits and effects as an Arm of Ahriman summoned by the character. It attacks once and then retreats back into the character. Anyone trying to drink the blood of the character finds herself being infused with the darkness, which ravages the person's body, inflicting three dice of aggravated damage per blood point imbibed. This damage can be soaked only by Fortitude. Finally, the darkness within makes the character unnaturally calm. All Self-Control/Instinct or Courage rolls, as well as Willpower rolls made to remain unshaken, are at -2 difficulty, and any uses of Presence against the character incur a +2 difficulty.

Botching the summoning roll has the same effect as botching the roll to summon the Aegis of Shadows, above. Failing the roll to control the darkness means it runs amok. The character suffers damage as with Aegis of Shadows, above. In addition, she becomes the center of a patch of darkness 30 feet in diameter that not even she can see through, and four Arms of Ahriman lash out from her to attack the nearest targets. Botching the control roll is worse yet — the character's undead body is taken over by *something* from the Abyss. This is usually a sinister and demonic creature of shadow, and its agenda usually revolves around releasing more creatures from the Abyss, as well as causing suffering and destruction. The character remains possessed for 11 weeks minus her permanent Willpower.

••••• Enter the Abyss

With this manifestation of Obtenebration, the user can physically enter the Abyss and stay there for as long as she wants. She can also exit from any shadow anywhere in the world, as long as she has seen her intended egress location. With additional effort, she may also bring another person along (willing or no) and possibly strand him in the Abyss.

System: The player rolls Strength + Occult (difficulty 7) for the character to enter the Abyss. The character may take a willing person along; this requires the player to spend a point of Willpower. If the vampire wants to take an unwilling victim with her, she must first establish a solid grasp on him (possibly requiring a roll to grapple). The player spends a point of Willpower and then enters into an opposed Willpower roll against the target (both rolls are difficulty 6).

The character may exit the Abyss at any time. Anyone taken along must be touching the character in order to exit. Stranding someone in the Abyss is said to be a favorite punishment of a certain Lasombra Methuselah. The user can exit anywhere she has previously seen (including places viewed only through Auspex), as long as a large enough shadow is present.

What exactly the Abyss is, how it is perceived and what lurks there is best left up to the Storyteller. It is a highly disturbing place, and anyone entering it for the first time should roll Courage + Obtenebration (difficulty 9). On a failure, a temporary derangement is inflicted. On a botch, the derangement is permanent. Staying in the Abyss for too long is not a good idea. Demonic creatures lurk in the Abyss and might decide to attack the character. In addition, the Abyss itself has an insidious influence upon those who stay there, and anyone spending too long in it might find himself becoming more and more obsessed with suffering and darkness.

Potence

While the unenlightened neonates of Clans Brujah and Lasombra see Potence as simply a tool to swing a mace with more force, the elders of those clans know more subtle uses. Such elders must also be careful that their great strength does not lead them into disregard for the soft masses of humanity (and younger Cainites). Wielding higher levels of Potence can sometimes lead to Megalomania and Disdain of Weakness.

DISDAIN OF WEAKNESS

A masters of Potence can snap wood and crush stone, flesh and bone with ease and must be careful not to damage items and people around them. Those who suffer from this derangement begin to show complete disregard for what they perceive as the weakness of others. The character constantly remarks upon the fragility of items and people around her and always puts all of her strength into any physical action. A handshake crushes the recipient's hand, a pat on the shoulder becomes a crushing blow, and opening a door likely knocks it off the hinges.

••••• Master of the Forge

Master of the Forge allows the user to make metalwork, generally weapons, of masterful quality by striking the metal with immense, focused force. The power is well known in places like Milan and Damascus, with the Damascene Brujah Wafid al-'Asim ibn Suleiman acknowledged as the foremost master, and a Cainite with this power can command top prices for his work, in money or favors. It is rumored that such luminaries as Lord Jürgen of Magdeburg, Lucita of Aragon and Nastasio the Galician all wield blades made with this power.

System: The player makes a standard roll to forge a weapon (Intelligence + Crafts; difficulty varies according to the kind of weapon being made: 5 for a mace, 6 for an ax, 7 for a sword), though special, reinforced tools are needed when such strength is used. Depending on the type of weapon, the effects vary:

- Any edged weapon, such as a sword or ax, has its damage increased by one. This also applies to spears, but not to arrows, as arrowheads are too small to benefit from this power.

- Any bladed weapon, such as a dagger, is imbued with exceptional durability and will not break when used by someone with great strength. This also applies to the metal chains of morning stars. Hafted weapons, such as maces and axes, can be specially reinforced with this power by adding metal reinforcements to the haft, though this adds considerably to the time needed to forge the weapon.

- Exceptional tools can also be made, such as extra-sharp scythes or hammers that won't break, though most Cainites consider this application beneath them.

••••• Fist of the Titans

With this power, a Cainite may either disdainfully push away an opponent or, with a little more effort, send her flying away with a powerful blow. First of the Titans can be used both as an attack in itself, with a seemingly gentle push, as well as in combination with a normal attack, though it is easier to focus the force when using the power on its own.

System: In order to simply push an opponent away, the character must shove the target, possibly requiring a Dexterity + Brawl roll to hit. The player then rolls Strength + Athletics, with a difficulty of the target's Stamina + Athletics (unmodified by Fortitude, maximum difficulty 9). Each success sends the target backward one yard and she is automatically knocked to the ground at the end. Should the victim hit something (or someone), both she and it take

damage as if she had fallen the same distance (see p. 256 of *Dark Ages: Vampire* for falling damage).

Using Fist of the Titans as part of a melee attack requires the use of a blood point as the weapon connects. The target is hurled back one foot for every health level of damage inflicted by the blow, before soak is rolled, +2 feet if the attack was with a bashing or smashing weapon and -2 if it was piercing, hacking or slashing (see *Spoils of War* for more information on the various types of damage). The target must roll Dexterity + Athletics to remain standing. Hitting an obstacle is handled as above.

••••• Lend the Supernatural Vigor

When a Cainite reaches this level of Potence, she can master it to the point of granting some of her immense strength to others. Rumors abound of Lasombra warrior-ghouls capable of cutting their enemies in half with single swipes.

System: The character concentrates for an hour, focusing her strength. The player spends a number of blood points equal to how much of the character's Potence is to be distributed and then rolls Willpower (difficulty 6). If successful, these blood points pour from the hands of the character, usually into some vessel or the mouth of a waiting servant. Each blood point is "charged" with one point of the character's Potence. Anyone drinking it gains, in addition to the normal effects of consuming the vitae, one dot of Potence per point of blood consumed (which adds to any Potence the target may have already), subject to normal generational maximum. This power lasts for a number of nights equal to the successes on the Willpower roll.

Lend the Supernatural Vigor has two limitations. First, the user cannot grant more Potence than her own rating in "standard" Potence (that is, if the character has seven dots of Potence used for automatic successes and her eighth level is Lend the Supernatural Vigor, she cannot grant more than 7 levels of Potence). Second, the character loses the Potence granted to others until the power expires. This has no effect on special Potence powers, but it does limit the number of automatic successes.

Mortals, including animals, empowered by Lend the Supernatural Vigor frequently overexert themselves. If they botch any Strength roll *before* adding Potence, they suffer a number of bashing health levels equal to their augmented Potence.

••••• Might of the Heroes

History and mythology are full of heroes and gods capable of astounding feats of strength, such as Her-

cules, Thor, Atlas and Samson. Cainites often believe themselves on par with the heroes and demigods of legend. With this power, a vampire is able to perform some incredible acts of pure physical power.

System: Might of the Heroes grant a number of abilities that are always in effect. First, the character's unarmed attacks strike with such force that they inflict lethal damage and the character has no risk of injuring himself from striking hard objects (so a Cainite with this power and no Fortitude can smash his fist into solid rock repeatedly and not even skin his knuckles). In effect, the character is able to destroy just about anything given enough time. This also means that the character is immune to powers that injure him when he strikes his opponent, such as the Fortitude power *Armor of Kings*.

Second, the muscles of the character's legs can absorb the shock of a fall of any length — as long as the character lands on his feet, he takes no damage (generally, a roll of Dexterity + Athletics, difficulty 4, is enough to ensure such a landing).

Third, the difficulty of a *Feat of Strength* (see *Dark Ages: Vampire*, p. 228) is reduced to 6, making it even easier for the character to lift immensely heavy objects, and the increased Strength lasts for an entire scene, though it applies only to lifting and throwing. Still, this allows the character to use tree trunks as clubs (these generally inflict Strength +6 Bashing and are so large that they cannot be dodged and can strike more than one opponent at a time) and toss boulders like a catapult (see *Spoils of War* for the effect of siege engines).

In addition to this, the character can actually strike so hard that the force of the blow travels through the air, hitting a target yards away. In order to do this, the player spends a point of blood and makes a normal attack roll for a punch or kick. The target cannot dodge unless she knows what the character is attempting — for example, if he's just seen the character using this ability on another — and even then, the dodge difficulty is 9. The punch or kick inflicts normal damage for the character (Strength lethal for a punch, Strength +1 lethal for a kick), but loses one die of damage for each yard beyond the first that it has to travel.

Presence

Presence is sometimes called “the weaker brother of Dominate,” yet in many ways it presents less of a danger — users of Presence are less accustomed to having everyone jump at their slightest command. On the other hand, those who possess high levels of Presence sometimes become convinced that they are

UNCONSCIOUS INFLUENCE

As explained on p.204 of *Dark Ages: Vampire*, Cainites with Presence sometimes unconsciously activate their powers of charisma. Those who suffer from Unconscious Influence do so constantly, and to make matters worse refuse to believe that this is the case. When talking to someone whom they would like to influence, they automatically use *Entrancement*, yet if others accuse them of using Disciplines they will deny it, as they believe that their target finds them utterly charming without any supernatural powers being involved.

in truth as wonderful as everyone keeps telling them. For those who rely too heavily on Presence, derangements of Hysteria, Megalomania, Melancholia, Perfection and Unconscious Influence may manifest.

••••• Force of Personality

This power takes the abilities granted by *Majesty* to a new level. The Cainite's personality becomes so powerful that people are actually physically forced away from her.

System: The player spends a point of Willpower to activate *Force of Personality* and then rolls Charisma + Intimidation or Leadership (the player chooses which when this power is first purchased). The roll is then compared to the Willpower rating of each person in the character's vicinity as a difficulty — most mortals have a Willpower rating of 2–3. Each success indicates one step that the person must take directly away from the character and also the difficulty of the Willpower roll needed to advance toward the character. Should a person be unable to retreat directly away from the character (due perhaps to a wall or a deep chasm), she still tries to move away in some direction. After the initial activation of this power, the area of the force shrinks to about six feet, which makes it a quick way to move through a crowd. In addition, the character has all the benefits of *Majesty* (Presence 5) while *Force of Personality* is in effect. *Force of Personality* lasts for one scene.

When first activating *Force of Personality*, the player may nominate any number of individuals who are simply affected by the *Majesty* — a wise thing to do when one has to have allies close by.

••••• Fire of Conviction

With this power, a Cainite may whip a crowd into frenzy, convincing them of the truth in a certain

matter and sending them into action. This can be used by a general to inspire his troops, a firebrand preacher to send peasants after heretics or a shrewd manipulator to send an enraged, devil-hunting mob away from her own haven to that of her rival. The Brujah Furore and diablerist Gonsalves de Cruz have caused problems for princes in both Christian and Muslim Iberia with this power.

System: In order to use Fire of Conviction, the character must first command the attention of at least 3/4 of the crowd she wishes to affect, usually by shouting at them, though other Presence effects can be used. She must then speak passionately about a certain topic (heretics, rich nobles, corrupt bishops), and what must be done about it, for at least one minute. The player then rolls Charisma + Expression. The difficulty varies according to a number of factors. If the character speaks for only a minute, the difficulty is 9. If she speaks for five minutes, it is 8, and if she manages to hold the crowd's attention for 15 minutes, the difficulty is 7. If the character actually does not believe in the cause, or if what is being suggested is especially dangerous, the difficulty rises by one. The power affects a part of the crowd depending on the number of successes, starting with those of the lowest Willpower.

Successes	Effectiveness
1 success	1/10 of the crowd responds
2 successes	1/3 of the crowd responds
3 successes	Half the crowd responds
4 successes	2/3 of the crowd responds
5 or more successes	The whole crowd responds

If the roll is successful, the people affected immediately start on the suggested course of action, generally in a loud and destructive manner. Important characters (such as those controlled by players) may resist Fire of Conviction with a Willpower roll (difficulty equal to the orator's Charisma + Expression). Anyone affected by Fire of Conviction is considered to have a Willpower rating of three higher than normal for the purpose of Willpower rolls and difficulties based on Willpower. In addition, he may draw upon an extra point of Willpower, above and beyond his normal pool, for such things as automatic success or ignoring wound penalties.

••••• Perfect Paragon

Perfect Paragon allows the user to appear as everyone's ideal — a knight sees a master general or virtuous lady, a greedy merchant sees a wealthy indi-

vidual, and a devout peasant sees a saint. This power is subtler than Majesty, but a crafty Cainite can exploit Perfect Paragon for a substantial benefit, especially if using it against other Cainites to appear as an elder of their clan or road.

System: Perfect Paragon can be used in one of two ways: either to affect a single target or to make the character seem exceptional in the eyes of all who see him... If used to target a specific victim, the player rolls Charisma + Subterfuge (difficulty equal to the target's Willpower). If successful, the target sees the character as a perfect example of whatever her ideals are and anything the character says is subtly twisted to correspond with this perception. The player makes all Social rolls against this victim at -3 difficulty and any uses of mind-affecting or emotion-altering Disciplines, such as Dementation, Dominate or Presence, receive three extra dice. Should the character do something that violates the illusion (swearing when appearing to be a pious knight, disrobing in public while appearing to be a noble lady), the victim may roll Perception + Empathy (difficulty of the character's Charisma + Performance) in order to realize that the character is not what he appears to be. If this roll succeeds, the character immediately loses all mechanical benefits of Perfect Paragon, although viewers do not see him for what he truly is.

Note that, unless high levels of Auspex are used, the character does not know what she is appearing to be. For example, if a person sees the user of this power as a noblewoman, the character will only know that she is treated with respect, not that the person in question sees her as a noblewoman (though if he calls her "milady," she might figure it out). A Perception + Empathy roll (difficulty 6) allows the character some idea of how people perceive her.

In order to invoke Perfect Paragon upon all in the character's presence, the player spends a point of Willpower and chooses whether to invoke the power subtly or powerfully. If invoked subtly, all present who can see the character ascribe to her traits and virtues that they find appealing. This translates to a -1 difficulty on all Social rolls while this is in effect (unless she grossly violates people's perception of her) as well as one additional die on mind-affecting and emotion-altering Disciplines, as above. If invoked powerfully, the player must spend a blood point. All who can see the character react as if the character had targeted each of them specifically, as above. This usually results in the character suddenly having a small crowd following her, which is usually a boon but can be troublesome at times. Also, since each person in the crowd sees something different,

fights occasionally break out over the true nature of the being before them.

Perfect Paragon lasts for a single scene.

••••• A Perfect World

This manifestation of Presence is one of the most dangerous — not only to those affected, but also to the user herself. With it, she affects an exceptional number of people, either a huge city or an entire barony, forcing all to act toward making the area the perfect representation of the character's dream. The only Cainite known to possess this power was the Toreador Michael, Patriarch of Constantinople, and it not only drove him mad but also indirectly led to the chaos, death and destruction that afflicted his city when the Fourth Crusade reached it.

System: The exact effects of his power are best left up to the Storyteller. In general, all mortals and Cainites of sixth generation or higher work toward making the area correspond with the ideals of the user. Each month, the player rolls Charisma + Empathy (difficulty 7). If a character has a good reason not to work toward the user's dream, her player may spend a point of Willpower and roll Willpower, difficulty 6. If she gains more successes than the user, she can act normally, but only for one night. The next night, the expenditure and roll must be repeated. Theoretically, this power can be turned off — but why?

A Perfect World can also be used in torpor.

Vicissitude

The ability to alter flesh and bone is the purview of the Tzimisce. Many of them see their power as a step toward transcendence. The ability to change not only oneself but others, as well as to cause the pain that Vicissitude inflicts on its subject, can easily wreak havoc on a weak mind. Fellow Tzimisce look down upon a clanmate who is too weak to handle her powers and frequently use that as an excuse for declaring war, so few Tzimisce with debilitating Vicissitude-induced derange-

UNCONTROLLED FLOW

Believed by some Tzimisce not to be a derangement but rather an inspired state of mind, this condition affects the character's control over her fleshcrafting powers. Spontaneous flesh- and bonecrafting effects manifest from time to time, usually as a response to outside stimuli. An angered Tzimisce might find herself growing claws, while one caressing a favored servant might find herself altering said servant to be more beautiful.

ments survive for long. Derangements of Multiple Personalities, Obsession (with fleshcrafting self or servants) and Uncontrolled Flow are all possibilities.

••••• Graft Life to Life

With normal Vicissitude, a Tzimisce may take the arm from one person and graft it to another, but the recipient is unable to control the arm and it soon begins to decay. With this power, the user may take body parts from living creatures and graft them on to others, living or undead, and allow for the recipient to use the new limb. Exceptionally monstrous and disturbing creatures can be created with this power or one may graft extra organs into others, allowing them to function longer while wounded.

System: Removing a limb requires an Intelligence + Body Crafts roll (difficulty 6). Extracting an organ is an extended Intelligence + Body Crafts roll (difficulty 7), with 10 successes required and each roll representing an hour of work. The process of grafting must then begin within an hour, or the limb or organ dies. Attachment is an extended roll of Intelligence + Body Crafts (difficulty 7), requiring 10 successes and each roll representing half an hour's work. Attaching an appropriate limb, such as a human arm to a human, is difficulty 7. Attaching an inappropriate limb, such as horse legs to a human, is difficulty 8. Inserting organs is difficulty 9. Attaching limbs to a vampire is somewhat easier (difficulty 6). Theoretically, one could put organs inside a vampire, but this has no effect.

The effect of attaching extra limbs is entirely up to the Storyteller. Extra arms might help in grappling and multiple attacks and extra legs might aid stability, but the main effect is generally freakishness rather than effectiveness, since coordinating the extra limbs is very difficult. Extra organs grant the recipient an additional Wounded health level per organ, though a maximum of two can be grafted.

••••• Transcend the Flesh

Initiates to the Road of Metamorphosis knows that the body is irrelevant and can be commanded by a sufficiently strong will. Transcend the Flesh allows the user to exert such delicate control over her body as to expel anything unwanted that might be in her body, be it a stake, a sword in her belly or a poison in her blood. With extreme effort, the user may even walk through solid walls.

System: Expelling large objects, such as a spear in the gut, simply requires a roll of Perception + Body Crafts (difficulty 6). Cleansing oneself of minor object imbedded in the flesh or impurities in the blood is

difficulty 7. Purging a poison requires the expenditure of a blood point (which is then vomited up along with the poison) and is difficulty 8. Excising a stake is immensely difficult, requiring a Willpower point and an extended roll of Stamina + Body Crafts (difficulty 8), with each roll representing 30 minutes and 10 successes required. Without any expenditure, however, the character can actually move while staked. This is not real movement per se, but simply flesh- and bonecrafting oneself slowly into a new position. Such movement is exceptionally slow, but within a few hours a character should be able to move her arm enough to pull out the stake.

Walking through a wall or other solid object requires a minute in absolute concentration, the expenditure of a Willpower point and a Willpower roll (difficulty 8). This also results in a naked Tzimisce, unless the clothing he wears is made from living tissue.

••••• Will over Form

Those who have yet to attain this level of Vicissitude are still bound by proximity when using Vicissitude — they must touch and sculpt in order to use the Discipline. A sufficiently enlightened Tzimisce can exert the same level of control with her mere thoughts.

System: A Cainite with Will over Form can use any Vicissitude power without touching — simply seeing the target is enough. If the character wishes to use Vicissitude on herself, only concentration is necessary. Will over Form even allows for Vicissitude to be used through the Auspex power Farsight or various Koldunic Sorcery effects. In this case, however, a point of Willpower must be spent and all effects are at +1 difficulty.

••••• Perfect Essence

A Tzimisce with this power has near-perfect control over her blood and body. She uses her vitae more efficiently than ever before (and thus need not feed as often) and can alter herself without so much as lifting an arm. The Metamorphosists strive for this state, but only Methuselaha are thought to be able to achieve it.

System: Perfect Essence allows for impressive effects. First and foremost, any blood spent to heal, power Disciplines or boost Physical Attributes counts double. All vitae taken from a mortal victim also counts double; each blood point taken counts as two added to the character's pool. In addition, the character automatically detects any special substances or effects in blood she consumes (such as the Quietus power Ripples of the Heart) and may choose not to be affected by it. Any supernatural effects that seek to control or alter the character's blood are at +3 difficulty, and if an opposed

roll is allowed, the player gains three additional dice. Finally, drinking or draining the character's blood is impossible unless she is in torpor, and even then an opposed Willpower roll must first be made.

The character also has an exceptional level of control over her own body. She need no longer touch herself to use Transmogrify the Mortal Clay and Rend the Osseous Frame. In addition, she may have the effects of these applications manifest themselves in a single turn, simply by concentrating and making the appropriate roll.

New Discipline Techniques

The following Discipline Techniques represent a mere handful of the powers members of the High Clans have devised to maintain their stranglehold on Cainite society. If innovation is not quite so prized as among the tradition-flaunting Low Clans, success still speaks for itself. Only foolish vampires wait complacently while their rivals amass unknown powers. Then too, the precepts of metamorphosis and scholarly obsession drive many Tzimisce and Cappadocians to experiment with the infinite forms of vampiric power.

Aegis of Entropy (Fortitude 3, Mortis (The Grave's Decay) 1)

This power allows a vampire to toughen her flesh with seething necrotic energy in anticipation of a blow. Normal weapons that strike this energy suffer immediate decay, rotting or rusting to uselessness over the rest of the turn. Within seconds, the weapon breaks asunder from its own frailty.

System: The player reflexively spends one blood point and rolls Wits + Crafts (difficulty 6) after a weapon strikes the vampire. Success does not reduce the damage from the attack but causes the weapon to disintegrate by the end of the turn. This power can affect only true inanimate weapons; it does not rot away an opponent's fists, nor may it affect magical weapons or weapons protected by magic of any kind. The attack that triggers the retaliatory use of this power need not inflict any damage. This power cannot destroy weapons used in a surprise attack unless the weapon lingers in the flesh, such as a knife left in the back.

Experience Cost: 21

Armory of the Abyss (Potence 3 and or Fortitude 3, Obtenebration 3)

Once of the few arts created by Abyss mystics (see p. 175) that has spread throughout the Magisters,

Armory of the Abyss allows a vampire to fashion weapons and armor from shadows. Summoned items extrude from every orifice and pore, quickly hardening from darkened phantasm to black crystal even as they assume the desired form.

System: The player spends one blood point and rolls Manipulation + Crafts (difficulty 6). Characters without the appropriate Crafts Field of Expertise to make the weapon or armor with mundane skill (i.e., armory, blacksmithing, woodworking, etc.) may only roll their Manipulation. The item takes one full turn of concentration to form and solidify. If the vampire is disturbed during this period, his player reflexively rolls the same pool at difficulty 6. Any failure or botch abruptly ends the power and dissipates the half-formed shadow creation. A disturbance may include any violent physical contact, sudden loud noise or similar stimulus. At the end of the turn, the weapon or armor completely hardens. Weapons appear in their owner's grasp, while armor forms around its creator. Weapons may take any form and cannot add more dice to their bearer's Strength for purposes of delivering damage than their creator's Obtenebration rating. Shadow armor adds the character's Obtenebration rating in soak dice but provides no protection against sunlight or fire. Objects created with this power last until the end of the scene or an hour has passed, whichever is longer. Characters who learn the Fortitude-only variant can produce only armor, while those with exclusive Potence can fashion only weapons. Vampires with Fortitude 3, Potence 3 and Obtenebration 3 may learn a version that can provide attack and defense. Every use of this power requires a separate activation.

Experience Cost: 21

Awaken the Slumbering Curse (Ausper 4, Mortis 5)

A Cappadocian with this power may project a measure of his undead nature into a ghoul, causing her borrowed vitae to burn at the touch of sunlight. This power is favored as an assassination tool or a flashy means of delivering a challenge to a rival.

System: The vampire concentrates on a known or suspected ghoul in his line of sight, while his player spends one blood point and rolls Intelligence + Occult (difficulty of the target's Willpower). Each success taints the ghoul's blood for one hour, though the power has no effect if a vampire targets a living being without vitae. Ghouls affected by this power feel oddly feverish; most do not suspect they have been mystically altered, and even those who do have no means of identifying the source of the magic. While enchanted with this power, a ghoul suffers damage from sunlight as though a vampire. Each

turn of exposure to sunlight also burns away one point of vitae. After the last point boils away, the former ghoul ceases taking further damage, though she must still contend with massive internal and external burns. Ghouls without Fortitude cannot soak sunlight damage.

Experience Cost: 35

Becoming Kupala (Way of Spirit 6, Vicissitude 6)

Despite its name, this power does not allow a vampire to join with the primordial evil of Kupala. Rather, the vampire melds with and diffuses through the earth of his territory, becoming its master and spirit even as Kupala is the spirit of the Tzimisce homelands.

System: The player spends 10 blood points and makes an extended roll of Stamina + Alertness (difficulty 6). The vampire's pool diminishes by one die for each successive roll after the first. Once the vampire's pool drops to zero, the roll ends and the vampire's flesh melts into a forest of tendrils that spread through the earth. The zone of control extends a number of yards equal to the (successes rolled x 10). Within this zone, the vampire may freely perceive events as though using the Way of Spirit. The vampire may activate the powers of any Koldunic Sorcery paths within the zone of control at -2 difficulty. If the vampire draws victims into the soil of the region with Hungry Earth, he may drink one blood point per turn instead of inflicting crushing damage. This is the only way the vampire may feed unless someone pours a libation of blood into the ground where the *koldun* melded. A vampire dispersed through the earth remains a vampire. It still hungers and slumbers through the day. The veil of earth protects it from sunlight and surface fires, though any flame burning hot enough to char the soil burns the vampire normally. Physical attacks against the vampire require large-scale devastation of the land or potent magic. It is not enough to excavate at the site of entry, as the vampire's essence is spread cancerously through the land. A vampire may remain subsumed in the earth as long as he wishes. If the character exhausts his blood pool, however, he is forced out and into his normal form in a spray of earth and winding sanguine tentacles. A vampire may also voluntarily leave the land for a cost of one Willpower point. After a vampire spends more nights subsumed in the earth than his highest virtue, he becomes bound to its soil and weakens when he slumbers elsewhere. In effect, the focus of the Tzimisce's clan curse shifts to the tainted soil he now inhabits. Some Lupines can scent the unnatural presence of a vampire spread in the earth, though precious few werewolves have any inkling as to the true nature of such a presence.

Experience Cost: 42

Charon's Car (Auspex 5, Nigrimancy 5)

Where masters of Auspex must abandon their physical form to walk invisibly as a spirit, the eldest and most powerful Giovanni Cappadocians may subsume flesh into soul and sojourn among the restless dead.

System: Spend a point each of blood and Willpower and roll Perception + Occult (difficulty 9). Reduce the difficulty by two if the vampire's location resonates strongly with the energies of death: a graveyard, an abattoir, the site of a great battle, etc. This power automatically fails if used during daylight hours. If successful, the vampire's physical form and any possessions on her person dissolve like mist in a stiff breeze and become as a ghost, invisible and insubstantial. While in this state, the vampire has the same statistics as normal and does not substitute Mental or Social Attributes for physical tasks. She has no silver cord and loses health levels if damaged. A vampire slain while using this power suffers Final Death and leaves no actual ghost to recall with *nigrimancy*. While incorporeal, she may move at her normal pace, half-walking, half-gliding across the earth and effortlessly passing through walls and other obstructions. She interacts with the dead as though both were solid, while remaining undetectable to nature spirits and travelers using conventional Anima Walk. Likewise, she cannot affect the material world with Disciplines or physical force, nor be affected in turn by material beings. It is possible for individuals sensitive to ghosts and psychic activity, including vampires with Auspex, to sense an incorporeal traveler's presence with a successful Perception + Occult roll (difficulty 9). Cainites using this power appear as they do normally, with all clothes and possessions they brought with them.

Incorporeal vampires have only the blood they brought with them, for the dead have no blood to steal. Vampires still suffer most of their usual banes during their sojourn. The weight of the sun drives them to slumber and sunlight burns their spiritual form, though flames pass through them harmlessly. They still hunger and gradually deplete their blood, and may fall into torpor and become lost as a forgotten shade resting in some dusty tomb. The only way to materialize once more is to use this power a second time, which requires the same expenditure and roll. Thus, a vampire who exhausts his blood pool is trapped among the dead and doomed unless he can find and take blood from another vampire lurking among the dead.

Experience Cost: 35

Clarity of Emptiness (Auspex 1, Mortis (The Corpse in the Monster) 2 or Obtenebration 2)

Developed independently by Cappadocian scholars and Abyss mystics of the Lasombra, this power allows a vampire to still her passions and think with pitiless detached clarity.

System: The player rolls Wits + Occult (difficulty 7). Each success adds one die to the next Mental dice pool the character makes, although a vampire cannot more than double the pool in question. Unfortunately, the inhuman stifling of passion adds +2 to the difficulty of any Social rolls for the scene. This penalty is cumulative with each successive activation of the power during the scene; however, no Social roll can have a difficulty greater than 10.

Experience Cost: 14

Echo of the Subtle Vizier (Obtenebration 2, Dominate 2)

A Lasombra with this power may silently whisper commands to a target's shadow without ever making a sound. The commands remain silent until the desired duration passes, at which time the victim finally hears the vampire's words and faces the Dominate power employed in the command.

System: The player spends one blood point and rolls Manipulation + Empathy (difficulty of the target's Willpower). Each success allows the vampire to suspend a Dominate power for up to one hour. This power must be immediately activated, with all necessary expenditures and rolls. The target resists as appropriate. Regardless of the results, the target does not remember the brief exchange and nothing actually happens until the duration of suspension passes. One of the more cunning uses of this power is to suspend Reveler's Memory so that it retroactively erases all memories during the time the power was suspended. The vampire then issues commands with immediate uses of Dominate, knowing the servant will remember none of his actions later.

Experience Cost: 14

Effigy of the Sculpted Tomb (Fortitude 2, Potence 2, Mortis (The Grave's Decay) 2)

Almost exclusively wielded by the Lamia warriors in service to Clan Cappadocian, this power allow a vampire to briefly toughen her undead flesh like a stiffened corpse to aid in combat.

System: The player spends one Willpower point and rolls Stamina + Medicine (difficulty 6). A botch makes the vampire's flesh brittle and thin like worn parchment, subtracting one dot each from Strength and Stamina for the scene. Each success adds one dot to the character's Strength or Stamina for the scene, as selected by the player. This power cannot add more Strength than the vampire's Potence rating or more Stamina than her Fortitude. Any successes that should provide bonuses beyond these limits are wasted to no effect. Physical augmentation provided by this power is cumulative with augmentation obtained through blood expenditure.

Experience Cost: 14

Eminence of Shade Conquering Blood (Obtenebration 5 Vicissitude 5, Dominate 5)

These two powers are frighteningly similar in effect, though it is unlikely that practitioners of either know an alternate variation exists. Both powers allow a vampire to become insubstantial and physically enter a host, controlling her from within like an obscene marionette.

System: The vampire assumes the form of living shadow or animate blood with Tenebrous Avatar or Ascendancy of the Sanguine Humor as appropriate, spending one additional blood point during the transformation. In this altered state, the vampire may hunt down and grapple a potential host (requiring a standard Dexterity + Brawl roll). Once the grapple lasts three turns without being broken, the vampire pours into the victim's mouth. The victim can only writhe in agony as the numbing cold of unnatural shadow or undulating blood courses through her veins. From within, the vampire may attempt to suppress the victim's soul and assume full control of the host body with the Dominate power Vessel. If the possessing vampire botches, the victim spends a turn vomiting the shadow or blood of the Cainite's form. The vampire immediately shifts to normal corporeal form, stunned and unable to act for a number of turns equal to (5 – his Wit's rating). If the vampire strips away all the victim's Willpower, he seizes full control. The vampire may relinquish and subsequently regain control at any time, allowing him to slumber during the day and use the host body at night. The only limitation on how long a vampire may remain in a host is his blood pool, which diminishes at its normal rate each evening and for other expenditures. Possessing vampires cannot regain blood under any circumstances. Once a vampire exhausts his blood pool, he is forcibly

ejected from the host as outlined above for a botch. While inhabited by a vampire, a mortal gains the ability to soak lethal damage with his full Stamina. The vampire may heal bashing or lethal damage sustained by the host as usual. Vampires suffer the same damage as their hosts, relying on their husks' augmented resilience to protect them both.

The Obtenebration version of this power may be used to possess living beings as well as other vampires of higher generation. If used to possess another vampire, the tenant may draw on the host's blood pool to fuel healing and maintain the corpse. Any blood consumed replenishes the host's blood pool rather than the parasite.

The Vicissitude version of this power cannot possess a vampire (since it would effectively cause the host to diablerize the tenant). Any mortal so possessed becomes a ghoul that draws on the vampire's own blood pool. The vampire may also employ lesser Vicissitude powers to reshape the host body.

Both forms of this power betray clues as to the presence of the tenant. In the case of Obtenebration, the host's pupils descend into points of infinite empty darkness. In the case of Vicissitude, the host's skin occasionally undulates in a ruddy ripple. These signs are extremely subtle, requiring a successful Perception + Alertness roll (difficulty 9) to notice.

Experience Cost: 35

Eye of Unforgiving Heaven (Ausper 4, Warrior Valeren 4)

Upon invoking this power, a Salubri's third eye opens impossibly wide and burns incandescent gold. The orb becomes as a reflection of the sun itself, illuminating the area and searing the flesh of the undead.

System: The vampire stares in the general direction he wishes the power to illuminate, while his player spends one point each of blood and Willpower and rolls Conscience (difficulty 6). Success causes the Cainite's third eye to open and glow as described. The light has the same effects as direct sunlight and inflicts one to three levels of aggravated damage per turn to all vampires in visual range according to their exposure. As the power's light emits as radiance rather a beam, it knows neither friend nor foe. Even the Salubri is not wholly immune to his light, suffering three dice of lethal damage each turn, soaked normally. Any wounds the Salubri suffers manifest as a torrent of bloody tears weeping from the third eye. This power lasts only one turn, after which its duration may be extended for as many turns as desired (though the player must make

the same expenditure each turn). A vampire who perishes as a result of using this power falls to the earth, his normal eyes closed in an expression of beatific rapture even as his third eye dims. His corpse blazes in searing white light, carrying his scattering ashes upward to the possibility of redemption. Obviously, characters who do not ascribe to the Virtue of Conscience may not use this power.

Experience Cost: 28

Flaying Touch (Potence 2, Vicissitude 2)

With this cruel power, a Tzimisce can tear away a victim's skin as easily as removing a robe, all without disturbing the muscles and other tissue beneath. The Fiend simply grabs a handful of skin and pulls it away or surgically slices it with the artful caress of a fingertip. Regardless of the method used, the target suffers excruciating pain and begins bleeding profusely from the exposed flesh. Even if a target somehow survives the blood loss, the area of skinless flesh soon becomes infected. Cainites have less to fear from the power, though they too suffer blood loss until they can regenerate the missing tissue.

System: This power requires the same roll as a conventional use of Transmogrify the Mortal Clay, though the difficulty is always one higher than normal (maximum difficulty 9). The vampire need not restrain the victim as long as he strikes exposed skin (requiring a Dexterity + Brawl roll as usual), in which case the activation roll is reflexive. Each success inflicts one level of lethal damage, which may be soaked (if the victim can soak such damage) at difficulty 8. If the damage exceeds the victim's Stamina, she can only writhe and scream in pain for the rest of the turn. Victims continue bleeding profusely from their exposed skin. Mortals suffer a number of levels of bashing damage each minute equal to the initial damage, while vampires apply any damage after soak as a loss of blood points. Once any of the original damage is healed or the wound is stanchied (Dexterity + Medicine, difficulty 9), the bleeding slows to one level of damage per hour. Only when the original injury is completely healed does the bleeding stop.

Experience Cost: 14

Fountain of Ill Humors (Potence 2, Mortis (Bath of the Four Humors) 3)

The vampire may use this power to spit the tainted excretions created with Dark Humors, showering her enemies with a forceful spray of the unnatural toxins.



System: The player spends two blood points and rolls Dexterity + Athletics (difficulty 6) as an attack with a maximum range of the vampire's Strength + Potence in yards. This spray can be dodged normally, though its conical spread adds one to the difficulty. The spray cannot be parried. Victims struck by the spray suffer the full effects of the chosen humor unless their players make successful Stamina rolls (difficulty 8). The Path of the Four Humors can be found on p. 41 of the *Dark Ages Storytellers Companion*.

Experience Cost: 21

Glare of Lies (Auspey 2, Valeren 1)

Upon activating this power, a Salubri's third eye opens and narrows in close scrutiny. The Cainite gains the ability to see the harmony of truth and the disharmony of deception. It is virtually impossible to lie surreptitiously to a vampire who knows this Discipline.

System: The player rolls Perception + Empathy (difficulty 6). Players of any characters wishing to tell a deliberate lie in sight of the Cainite must gain more successes than the vampire's player on a Manipulation + Subterfuge roll (difficulty 8). Anyone who fails to meet this requirement may still lie, but the Salubri recognizes the deception. This power cannot sense subtler deceptions by omission or half-truth. As long as those scrutinized tell the truth — however partial or deliberately obtuse — the power detects no falsehood.

Experience Cost: 14

Hand of the Master Artisan (Auspey 1, Celerity 1)

Toreador employ this power to create laborious works of art with impossible speed and precision. Painters casually daub the work of hours in a blur of minutes, while sculptors appear to mold clay as though it were somehow alive.

System: The vampire's player spends one point of Willpower plus a variable quantity of blood. The desired artistic task has its duration divided by the number of blood points spent, rounded up. Thus, a mosaic that normally required three hours to assemble would require only one if the vampire's player spent 3 blood points. The trance of accelerated speed applies only to the single selected task. The vampire may break off and perform other actions without breaking the power, as long as he spends no more than a single hour away from the endeavor. This power may aid only in acts of deliberate artistic creation.

Experience Cost: 7

Jaws of the Dragon (Koldunic Sorcery 7, all five Koldunic Ways at 5)

With this power, a vampire may unleash all the elements in a storm of unbridled supernatural power. The storm scourges everything in its path, raining lightning, fire, hail and grinding earth in a conflagration that defies imagination. The very existence of such a spell lies shrouded in myth and legend; no vampire has cast it in recorded memory.

System: The *koldun* spends an hour standing still on the soil, gathering the energies that will empower the spell. The player rolls Charisma + Occult (difficulty 8) and spends all remaining blood. This drives the *koldun* into immediate frenzy. Tempest-torn clouds build in the sky over the next hour, reaching their apex of size and fury as fire begins to rain. For every success, the storm has a radius of one mile. Everything in that region suffers dice of aggravated damage equal to the *koldun*'s Willpower + Occult. This damage occurs sometime over the span of one hour, after which the clouds part to reveal the devastation. Inanimate objects suffer damage determined by the Storyteller; assume that the storm destroys virtually everything in its path.

Experience Cost: 49

Measure the Will (Auspey 2, Dominate 2)

A vampire with this power may gauge the strength of a target's resolve and identity, often as an exploratory prelude to shattering and reshaping that mind.

System: The vampire's player rolls Perception + Intimidation in a resisted roll against the target's Willpower (both rolls at difficulty 6). The target does not sense any mental intrusion or foreign malevolence unless the roll botches. If the vampire wins, he may precisely gauge the rating of one of the following Traits: permanent Willpower, temporary Willpower or any selected Virtue. The vampire may use this power multiple times in succession to gain further information. Each failed attempt adds one to the difficulty of subsequent rolls. Obviously, the vampire does not perceive such ephemeral concepts as will and valor in terms of numerical quantities. The vampire simply compares the target's force of mind with his own psyche. The player may interpret this information more accurately according to the mechanics of the game. This power does not require eye contact, although the vampire must be able to see the target clearly.

Experience Cost: 14

Penitent Resilience (Fortitude 3, Valeren 4)

With this power, a Salubri may briefly walk in the brightest sunlight without fear of injury. His purity defends him, allowing the sun to burn the Curse within and leave the flesh unmarred. Some Salubri believe a truly penitent vampire may use this power to burn out the Curse of Caine entirely and regain his mortality, but such legends are anecdotal at best.

System: The player may reflexively spend one blood point whenever the vampire is exposed to sunlight. Until the vampire exhausts his blood pool, he may not soak damage from sunlight. Such damage is rolled, rather than applied as automatic successes, and each level of injury burns one point of the Cainite's vitae rather than inflicting actual wounds. Once the vampire runs out of blood, he suffers damage normally and may again soak with his usual Fortitude. Only Cainites who ascribe to the Virtues of Conscience and Self-Control may benefit from this power.

Experience Cost: 28

Quicksilver Contemplation (Ausper 2, Temporis 3)

A True Brujah with this power may dilate his perception of time and speed of thought in response to a crisis situation. Such a vampire may spend half an hour deliberating as the world stands still, re-entering the standard flow of time in order to dodge an attack with perfect precision or deliver a well chosen retort.

System: The player spends one blood point and rolls Wits + Alertness. With a success, time suddenly halts from the vampire's perspective. His mind — and only his mind — has briefly stepped out of the flow of normal time. He cannot physically act or use any mental power that can actually influence the world (though mystical perceptions are permissible). He cannot even shift his vantage point. All he can do is consider his situation and plan the best response while standing frozen in a still and silent world. Once the vampire decides the best course of action, he returns his mind and awareness to time and may act on his deliberations. Reduce the difficulty of the first action he takes by -1 per success rolled, to a minimum difficulty of 3. Some actions and events are simply unavoidable. A Cainite may pause to consider the arrow touching its point to his chest before it stakes his heart, but it is too late to dodge out of the way. A vampire could spend a lifetime contemplating a no-win situation and never arrive at a solution. Some True Brujah imagine that their ancient progenitor spent eternity in the moment his treacherous childer's fangs pierced his throat. Botching this power

gives the vampire a derangement, as he spends decades or even centuries alone and aware in the prison of his private moment.

Experience Cost: 21

Sculpt the Flowing Wound (Fortitude 3, Vicissitude 2)

A Tzimisce with this power may vastly accelerate her healing by concentrating and willing flesh to mold back to its original form.

System: The player spends one blood point and rolls Wits + Body Crafts (difficulty 8). Each success heals one level of lethal or bashing damage. This power cannot heal more health levels per turn than the vampire's generational limit for blood expenditure. Any healing beyond this limit extends into subsequent turns until complete.

Experience Cost: 21

See the True Shape (Ausper 2, Vicissitude 2)

A Fiend with this power may recognize flesh that has been magically reshaped. Although Tzimisce are most adept at noticing fleshcrafting wrought by Vicissitude, they can also recognize the changes brought about by Protean, mortal magic or even the shapechanging of Lupines.

System: The vampire scrutinizes the target and her player rolls Perception + Body Crafts (difficulty 6). The number of required successes depends on the nature of the target's transformation. If the player fails to gain the required number of successes, the vampire senses no alteration and assumes the target is in its natural form. A botch means the vampire mistakes the nature of a transformation or sees alteration where none exists. One success spots works of Vicissitude; two sees through other shapechanging evoked through vampiric Disciplines. The character needs three successes to pierce other magic (including mortal wizardry) and four for "natural" shapechanging such as Lupines use. If the player gains two more successes than are needed, the character not only recognizes the type of transformation but may make an educated guess as to the target's natural form. Even more successes reveal more detailed information as relayed by the Storyteller.

Experience Cost: 14

Stunning Awe (Dominate 2, Presence 2)

This power allows a vampire to slow a victim with a mixture of terror and mystical compulsion. He need only lock gazes with the target and unleash his monstrous will to stun her.

System: The player rolls Manipulation + Intimidation against a difficulty of the victim's Willpower. A botch leaves the target immune to all further uses of Dominate or Presence by the vampire for the rest of the night. Each success imposes a penalty of one die on all the target's actions. This penalty lasts a number of turns equal to the vampire's Willpower, after which it loses one die of potency each turn until the target is free to act normally. If the initial penalty exceeds the target's Wits rating, the duration is measured in minutes rather than turns. If a stunned target suffers any pain, her player may roll Willpower (difficulty 7). Each success reduces the penalty by one die. This resistance roll may be attempted only once per turn and only once for the same stimulus. This power cannot affect vampires of lower generation.

Experience Cost: 14

Unchain the Wrathful Beast (Animalism 5, Vicissitude 4)

A Fiend with this power may project her Beast into a hapless host, where it immediately sets about warping flesh and bone to better accommodate its monstrousness. The host writhes in agony, skin sloughing off and muscles boiling into new and terrible forms. Once the change settles, the host frenzies as a terrible living weapon, wreaking a swath of carnage until the vampire bids his Beast return.

System: The vampire releases his Beast using the Animalism power Drawing Out the Beast. Once the Beast finds a home, it burns two of the vampire's blood points to change the host into *zulo* shape. The painful transformation lasts two turns, after which the host enters immediate frenzy. The Beast will not attack the vampire it rightfully belongs to, but assaults everyone and anyone else in range of its claws. At any time, the vampire may recall his Beast with a successful Manipulation + Animal Ken roll (difficulty 6). Only one such roll may be made per turn. If the host dies before the vampire recalls his Beast, the Beast rises out of the corpse as a black, writhing miasma and flies back to the Cainite faster than mortal eyes can follow. Even after the Beast leaves the host, the physical changes remain. Vampires regain their form over three nights as they lose one die of augmented Physical Attributes. After the third night, all traits return to normal. Mortals and ghouls are not so fortunate, remaining locked in the *zulo* shape indefinitely. Worse still, mortals suffer one die of aggravated damage each day until they perish from rotted bone marrow and unnatural tumors. This decay can be slowed to one die of damage per week if the mortal remains a ghoul.

Mortals (ghoul or otherwise) cannot heal the damage from their degenerating tissue, so this power spells their death sentence without extremely potent curative magic.

Experience Cost: 35

Witness of Abhri-man (Dominate 3, Obtenebration 3)

With this subtle power, a Lasombra's eyes dilate to the infinite depths of the Abyss, filling a target who meets her gaze with fear. Shadows plague the victim's mind, gnawing at his sanity and resolve.

System: The player spends one Willpower point and rolls Manipulation + Occult (difficulty of the target's Willpower). Success means the target begins seeing disturbing flickers of darkness at the edge of his vision and hears whispers he cannot make out. For as long as the phantoms last, the victim adds 2 to the difficulty of all Willpower and Virtue rolls. Once each day at dawn, the victim's player may attempt to throw off this spectral haunting with a Willpower roll (difficulty of the vampire's Occult plus the two-point difficulty increase imposed by the curse). For each day that the target does not throw off the curse, the difficulty on the roll rises by one (maximum difficulty 9). Victims who remain haunted for more days than their permanent Willpower lose the ability to regain Willpower points until they throw off the curse. A mortal victim haunted for more days than his Willpower + Wits grows suicidal and ends his life at the earliest possible opportunity.

Experience Cost: 21

Temporis

The True Brujah bloodline claims a peculiar Discipline that bears some passing similarities to Celerity. It too concerns itself with quickening, and yet also with other permutations of time. The True Brujah claim Temporis was the original Discipline created by the Brujah Antediluvian before his diablerie and that Celerity is only a crude bastardization of the art. The prevalence of Celerity among other clans casts doubt on this claim, as do accounts in the Book of Nod of Caine's inhuman swiftness. It is far more likely that the True Brujah are only half right: Their founder did indeed create Temporis, but as a refinement of the Celerity he learned from his sire and ultimately from Caine. Regardless of its origins, Temporis is undeniably powerful. It channels the mystical force that holds a vampire's body in stasis against the ravages of time. Then too, Temporis is perfectly suited to its cold

masters, for it measures time and so fosters patience. The True Brujah are too few to avenge the diablerie of their progenitor, and so they wait and watch and plan. They are as meticulous and certain as the progression of hours into days and days into years. Masters of Temporis often grow even more detached from the passage of ages, as centuries slip by like sand through an hourglass. Such beings are more alien and terrible in their callousness than bestial vampires in their cruelty, for they do not feel or care or place any attachment on the worth of individuals. Time alone concerns them and then only in its infinite, interwoven entirety...

The Discipline of Temporis lends itself to de-rangements affecting the Cainite's perception of time, distance and speed. Appropriate choices include Amnesia, Regression, Visions and Obsession (with time or the future).

• Hourglass of the Mind

Masters of Temporis value patience and clarity. Time is too complex and dangerous to manipulate incautiously or on a whim. Thus, the first power of Temporis focuses entirely on perception and serves as a permanent alteration of a vampire's senses.

System: Once purchased, this Discipline gives a vampire a perfect sense of time. This duplicates the effects of the Merit Celestial Attunement (**Dark Ages: Vampire** p. 205), save that it is infallible and precise beyond the limits of any physical instrument or unit of time to measure. The vampire knows events to the nearest second or better. Moreover, the Cainite knows whenever the flow of time is mystically disturbed by use of Celerity, greater levels of Temporis, mortal wizardry or stranger things. The vampire remains within the altered continuity of his timeline but aware that events are other than they should be. Sensing disturbances is instinctive and reflexive, though it requires a successful Perception + Alertness (difficulty 6 for most phenomena, as modified by the Storyteller for distance and intensity).

•• Recurring Contemplation

Bridging from perception of time to the alteration of such perception, a vampire with this power may trap a target's mind into reviewing a set of events over and over until disturbed. This power is extremely subtle and ill-suited to combat or other situations rich in sensory stimuli. A cunning vampire can trick a sentry into reliving the tedium of his uneventful watch, however, even as the Cainite draws close enough to strike or slip past. Other uses include the maddening infliction of *déjà*

vu to induce paranoia or make a victim question her senses and ultimately her sanity.

System: The vampire concentrates on a single victim in his line of sight. The player rolls Manipulation + Occult (difficulty of the victim's Willpower). With any successes, the victim falls into a light trance and relives the most recent experiences that preceded her fugue. Alternatively, the vampire may evoke another set of specific memories and circumstances from the victim's past, provided that he has some means of telepathically drawing them forth (such as Auspex 4). The recurring events must be relatively benign, insofar as nothing happens that would demand the victim's immediate action. Thus, in the example of the sentry, the vampire could entrance him and walk past unobserved, but not if the sentry had spotted him before the power was invoked. Ordinarily, the fugue lasts one minute per success. If the vampire's player spends a blood point, determine the trance's duration according to the following chart.

Successes	Duration
1 success	one minute
2 successes	10 minutes
3 successes	one hour
4 successes	six hours
5+ successes	one day

Entranced victims are oblivious to their surroundings and the actual flow of time around them. The fugue ends immediately if the victim suffers any damage or experiences a sudden jolt to her senses, such as a thunderclap or even a gentle nudge. Normal conversation does not break the trance, although shouting does.

••• Leaden Moment

With this power, a vampire may begin to alter the flow of time itself rather than the mere perception of events. The vampire gestures and unchains a fraction of the force holding his unliving body in stasis. This force leaps instantly and invisibly to its target, slowing the desired object while time rushes around it at full speed. This power can enchant incoming arrows to fly at the pace of drifting clouds or cause an enemy warrior to see the battlefield quicken to a blur of dizzying carnage even as his every motion slows to a crawl.

System: The player spends one blood point and rolls Intelligence + Occult. The difficulty depends on the size and nature of the target: A single arrow is only difficulty 4, while a charging knight on horseback has a difficulty of 9. Targets larger than a mounted man cannot be affected with Leaden Moment... It is possible



to affect small, closely grouped inanimate objects of the same nature as a single object, though this increases the difficulty by 2 or more at the Storyteller's discretion. This power may be activated reflexively as a defensive action against projectiles but otherwise requires a full action on the vampire's initiative. Though failure carries no special penalty apart from wasting blood, a botch means the vampire mistakenly slows himself rather than the target, counting every 1 as a success for that purpose. If the vampire succeeds, the object slows to one half its true speed. Every two successes beyond the first reduce this speed by one additional factor, so three successes slow the target to one third its speed, five successes yield quarter speed, etc. The actual mechanics of such slowing depend on the situation. For projectiles, multiply any successes to hit and final damage by the speed factor, rounded down. Similarly apply the speed modifier to the successes of other actions involving Dexterity, Wits or Strength for slowed characters. Characters with Celerity may spend one blood point to negate one factor of speed reduction at the expense of the usual extra action provided. For example, one blood point cancels a reduction to one half speed, two blood points cancel one third, etc. *Leaden Moment* lasts one turn for every two successes rolled, rounded up.

The True Brujah prince Nehemiah faces a fanatical inquisitor wielding torch and stake. For her first attack, the hunter hurls the burning brand at the vampire (the Story-

*teller rolls five successes for this attack). Nehemiah gestures at the spinning torch, activating *Leaden Moment* as a reflexive defense. His player spends one blood point and rolls Intelligence + Occult (difficulty 5), gaining a modest three successes. This is enough to slow the torch to a third its natural speed. The five-success attack now has only one success to hit. Nehemiah dodges the torch quite easily. Had it not struck the wall behind him, the torch would have resumed its normal speed after two turns. Nehemiah takes a moment to consider the hunter's futility, while she lunges at him with her stake. This time, he uses *Leaden Moment* on her. Rolling at difficulty 6, his player miraculously accumulates seven successes. She slows to one-fifth speed for four turns. Her brave lunge at his heart suddenly drops from six successes to one. Nehemiah doesn't bother to dodge; the slowed stake drops from three damage successes to zero, barely indenting his flesh. He shakes his head almost sadly before snapping her neck.*

•••• Patience of the Norns

The vampire can now suspend an inanimate object in time, keeping it frozen in perfect stasis as time passes at normal speed around it. As with lesser *Temporis* powers, this stasis has both combat and noncombat applications. True Brujah warriors may halt arrows outright rather than merely slowing their approach or dive out from under a spray of boiling oil. If any solid object or significant volume of liquid touches a frozen object that did not touch it at the

moment of suspension, the item re-enters time with the same properties and velocity as when it stopped. Thus, touching a suspended object with anything more substantial than a raindrop releases it exactly as it was before it stopped.

System: The player spends 2 blood points and rolls Intelligence + Occult (difficulty 6). The vampire must be able to perceive the object that he's suspending, so the player may need to make a Perception + Alertness roll at a difficulty determined by the Storyteller in order to freeze fast-moving objects. If an object exceeds the speed of mortal perception, superhuman perception such as *Auspex* is required in order to see and stop it. As with *Leaden Moment*, it may be possible to freeze several closely grouped objects of a similar type by increasing the base difficulty. This requires express Storyteller permission and adjudication, however. Objects frozen by this power remain halted according to the number of successes rolled:

Successes	Duration
1 success	one turn
2 successes	one minute
3 successes	10 minutes
4 successes	one hour
5 successes	one day
6+ successes	one week per success over 5

Suspended objects retain all energy in their suspension, releasing none to the outside universe. A suspended arrow has no kinetic energy as far as the rest of the world is concerned and hangs suspended in midair until the power is interrupted or the duration expires. Suspended alchemical or chemical processes also halt, including fire.

••••• Clotho's Gift

With this power, a vampire momentarily accelerates time through himself. In this brief instant, he moves with the preternatural speed of *Celerity*. Unlike that Discipline, however, the time dilation of *Clotho's Gift* permits any type of action. A vampire may still move or strike faster than the eye can see, but also may think, plan and even invoke other Disciplines that require full concentration. Only the last presents a danger, as it overtaxes the vampire's unliving stasis.

System: The player spends 3 blood points (which may exceed the vampire's normal generational limit) and rolls Intelligence + Occult (difficulty 7). For a number of turns equal to half the vampire's *Temporis* rating, rounded up, the character may take a number

of extra actions at her full dice pool equal to the number of successes rolled. These actions follow the timing rules associated with *Celerity* but may be used to take any action. Characters may not take multiple actions until the power runs its course. A vampire may use the actions granted by *Clotho's Gift* to activate Disciplines multiple times, even Disciplines that cannot be used more than once in a turn (such as *Dominate* or *Thaumaturgy*). For every action spent activating a Discipline, the vampire suffers one level of unsoakable lethal damage. Only one important exception exists: Any Discipline that would grant the vampire extra actions, including *Celerity* or subsequent uses of *Clotho's Gift*, causes the same damage but does not function at all.

••••• Kiss of Lachesis

True Brujah with this power gain limited mastery over the physical age of objects and individuals. It is a trivial matter to accelerate time in a compressed rush, aging a target decades or even centuries in the blink of an eye. It is far more difficult to absorb and unweave entropy, lessening time's hold. This power does not reverse history in any way, it merely reverses or accelerates the effects of time in terms of wear and tear. Moreover, a target cannot regress to an earlier or incomplete state of being. For inanimate objects, this is the point at which they were assembled. For living beings, it is either adult maturity or the time of birth (or its equivalent). For the undead and other corpses, it is the moment of death.

System: In order for the vampire to age a target, the player spends 2 blood points and rolls Manipulation + Occult (difficulty 7). The vampire touches the target and concentrates for a turn. If so desired, the touch may be very brief as long as concentration follows. This allows a vampire to strike a foe and invoke the power with multiple actions. The Cainite may age the target a maximum number of years as determined by the following table, although his player may choose to apply a lesser effect. The Storyteller remains the final arbiter of time's effect on an object, but living beings aged past their natural lifespan quickly perish.

Successes	Elapsed Time
1 success	up to one year
2 successes	up to five years
3 successes	up to 10 years
4 successes	up to 50 years
5 successes	up to 100 years
6+ successes	up to one century per success over 5

Removing the effects of time requires greater effort, increasing the difficulty of the activation roll by 1. In addition, the vampire suffers one level of unsoakable lethal damage for every success her player chooses to apply. As noted, objects cannot return to an earlier or incomplete state. A silver coin may lose its tarnish and become as if newly minted, but it will not revert to an unformed block of metal. Likewise, while an adult may revert to the cusp of his adulthood or a child to a newborn, neither could regress to a prenatal state. Also, this power accounts only for damage and wear due to time. A child amputee reverted to a baby will not regenerate her missing arm, nor will a broken sword become anything but finely crafted shards.

In either application, this power does not change a subject's mental or mystical properties. Sentient beings retain all memories and derangements, if applicable. A vampire regressed to the point of death remains a vampire, not an inanimate corpse — and the regressed Cainite still remembers all Disciplines and keeps any changes in generation due to diablerie. A vampire aged far enough loses any signs of diablerie from his halo, however, and may even evince a curious hunger for his own kind.

••••• Cheat the Fates

Whereas a vampire with Clotho's Gift may accelerate time with respect to the world, a vampire with this power may step outside of time entirely. During this brief sojourn, the Cainite perceives the world frozen at a standstill. He can walk about at a leisurely pace to sidestep blows or retreat without being observed. He may even exert force, such as by striking a blow, though no damage is resolved until he re-enters time. This power wreaks terrible destruction on a vampire's unliving body. Used incautiously, a vampire may saunter out of time, only to fall to ash when he returns.

System: The player spends one Willpower point and 3 blood points (which may exceed normal generational limits) and rolls Wits + Occult (difficulty 7). This power may be activated reflexively as a defensive action; such hasty use reduces the maximum duration to a single turn, however. Failure does nothing apart from wasting effort and blood, while a botch inflicts one level of aggravated damage for every 1 rolled. If successful, the vampire steps out of time for a number of turns equal to the successes rolled. These turns occur for the vampire only while the rest of the world stands still. He may take any action or actions during this time, taking as many actions as desired, but he has

no access to Disciplines — even innate or perpetual Disciplines such as Potence. The vampire must direct every aspect of Caine's Curse toward holding back time. If the vampire attacks someone in this state, the target cannot dodge or parry. Resolve the attack normally but do not apply damage. If the vampire suffers injury, however, such as by exposure to sunlight or walking through a frozen flame, apply this damage immediately. The vampire may end his sojourn at any point or wait until the full duration of the power passes, at which point time resumes. Before anything else happens, including resolution of damage inflicted by the vampire, roll one die for every turn the vampire moved out of time. The difficulty is the vampire's Temporis rating. For every success, the Cainite suffers one level of unsoakable aggravated damage. Apply this damage concurrently with damage suffered by halted victims and continue play on the same turn and initiative the vampire left time (if applicable). Outside of combat, a turn still only lasts three to five seconds for the purposes of this power.

A Temporis 8 version of this power called Convocation of Hades' Court also exists. This power follows the same rules, save that the activation roll is made at difficulty 6 and the vampire may include a number of additional passengers up to his Wits. Passengers take no damage from stepping out of time, but the vampire adds dice equal to the number of passengers on the roll to determine the damage he suffers from the sojourn.

••••• Clio's Kiss

One of the most subtle manifestations of Temporis' higher levels, this power allows a vampire to reach into the past and summon events, objects or even individuals. Clio's Kiss, named for the muse of history, is the power to bypass the flow of time and bring something — or someone — forward to the present. Some True Brujah scholars use this to observe history as it truly occurred, while others look to the past for aid or to retrieve lost possessions. At least two coordinated attempts by the True Brujah to summon their Antediluvian progenitor have met with catastrophic failure. No one knows if a Sage capable of this power remains. The hope is that Clio's Kiss has faded from knowledge — the bloodline cannot afford a third attempt.

System: The player spends half of the character's current blood pool, rounded up, and rolls Stamina + Occult (difficulty 8). This power automatically fails if the player spends fewer than 5 blood points. The number of successes determines the maximum amount of time through which the character may reach:

Successes	Time
1 success	24 hours
2 successes	one month
3 successes	one year
4 successes	10 years
5+ successes	one century per success over 4

When a vampire uses this power successfully, the scene she seeks to retrieve materializes around her, briefly supplanting the current environment. This change extends to a maximum volume of a ballroom or similarly proportioned outdoor space (Storyteller's discretion). The power affects everyone inside this area by granting them awareness of the summoned events, but the vampire is the only person who may choose to interact with the scene (though he may remain invisible and disembodied). All others must remain incorporeal observers until time reasserts itself and the scene fades. They may move about to change their vantage point but can take no other action.

If the vampire wants to remove an object or individual from the scene, permanently bringing it or him forward to the present, the player must spend a permanent Willpower point. Once this is done, the conjured scene fades away and present reality returns. Only the summoned object or person remains.

This power can never alter the course of history in any significant manner. Time has its own momentum, and a vampire seeking to divert that force is as a man scooping handfuls of water to change the path of a river. Should an object or person have a meaningful role yet to play at the time it is removed, the weight of time crashes upon the vampire and he vanishes in its current. Whether such folly results in destruction or propels the vampire far into the future remains unknown and likely unknowable. Likewise, any changes the vampire makes to a summoned scene unravel as soon as he departs. Like a play, time may be altered by the removal of extras, but the script stays the same — however cruel a fate, Carthage must be destroyed. As always, the Storyteller remains final judge of what this power can achieve and need not reveal all limitations until a vampire attempts a change. Time is fickle and dangerous, and those who meddle with it risk their very existence. It is possible to summon a person from a point close to his death, assuming he perished without observers. Likewise, a manuscript destroyed when the Library of Alexandria burned can be called after it is last read. Calling the very *library* from Alexandria would be impossible, not only for its size

PURCHASING RITUALS

With Storyteller permission, players who wish to purchase additional rituals for any form of blood sorcery may do so during character creation for a number of bonus points equal to the level of the ritual. As always, character may not learn rituals whose level exceeds the rating of the Discipline upon which they are based.

but also the necessity and significance of its ruins. Finally, the previous form of a currently existing object cannot be summoned, if only because its continued existence validates a role in history. Storytellers need not consider every ramification of paradox, since that is by nature an impossible feat. This power has tremendous potential for abuse and should be adjudicated accordingly.

••••• Tangle Atropos' Hand

This penultimate manifestation of Temporis is at once the most flagrant and subtle twist of time — the power of second chances. The existence of such power is only a theory and a fearfully whispered rumor, for who can ever know when or how time itself unraveled and changed?

System: The player spends a permanent Willpower point and 3 blood points and rolls Wits + Occult (difficulty 8). Every additional point of permanent Willpower spent beyond the first adds one automatic success to the roll. Use of this power is reflexive and may be done at any moment, even on a turn in which the vampire has used other Disciplines. If successful, the Cainite's mind flashes back to his earlier self with full memory of the events that have transpired and now *may* transpire. This rewind encompasses one turn for every success rolled, also inflicting a like number of levels of unsoakable aggravated damage. Assuming the vampire does nothing, every event plays out exactly as before. Once the vampire takes a new action of any sort, time shifts to encompass a new future and fate is no longer fixed.

Abyss Mysticism

As pragmatic as they are ruthless, most Lasombra regard Obtenebration as a tool. It is an important tool and a gift from their founder, but ultimately just one power among many. Only the most eccentric and arcane savants among the clan understand the true significance of their dark art. Obtenebration is more

than mere shadow-play. It is a window to the Abyss itself, that great and terrible unknown that lies at the center of all things. The Abyss gnaws at the heart of the underworld and the doubt in every question never answered. It is present in the absence of light and lurks in every shadow. Ghosts rightly fear its hunger, but they do not understand it. Demons call it Hell, and they only begin to comprehend. No Lasombra knows where it comes from or its purpose or even the purpose of its strange denizens, but the clan's mystics know the Abyss is the ultimate source of their power. So the mystics vainly pry into the dark places in search of secrets and answers and perhaps more questions. For these driven souls, conventional Obtenebration is only the beginning. With rituals they unlock the hidden powers of shadow and summon the unnamed primordial horrors that lie beyond. Either from fear or distaste, the *Amici Noctis* follow a policy of ignoring mystics until times of great crisis. Even the most fervently Christian Lasombra do not hunt or discour-

MORALITY AND THE ABYSS

Immersed in undying study of a force transcending and ultimately opposing all light and life, Abyss Mystics have little use for humanity or mortal precepts of right and wrong. Most adherents of this dark and heavily ritualized faith eventually gravitate to their own Road of the Abyss, a path which bears disturbing and striking similarity to the Road of Bones (*Dark Ages Storytellers Companion* p. 24). While no evidence exists to link the Shadowed philosophy directly with Cappadocian scholars, rumors persist of a strange connection between the Abyss and the Well of Bones. Players may simulate the Road of the Abyss with the tenets and sins of the Road of Bones, modified slightly for its focus on primordial darkness rather than death. Any sin that mentions death applies instead to darkness and the Abyss. In addition, Abyss mystics feel no allegiance or responsibility to adherents of the Road of Bones any more than other outsiders; any sins that encourage cooperation apply only to adherents of their own secretive road. Lastly, the aura of the Shadowed is one of Darkness rather than Silence. This aura modifier applies to blind actions and evocations of Obtenebration (including Abyss rituals). The aura modifier does not affect Stealth, as such darkness is too alien and spiritually disturbing to onlookers.

age Abyss mystics, for it is whispered that the Eldest watches those who watch the void. And so the mystics research quietly in the hidden places, for the Abyss is their calling, their quest, their god.

Rituals of the Darkness

The following rituals do not adhere to the same rules as other forms of blood magic, in large part because they build on a Discipline not commonly regarded as a form of sorcery. Cainites may not learn Abyss rituals rated higher than their Obtenebration or Occult score (whichever is lower). Moreover, characters without the Occult specialty Abyss Mysticism must have a minimum of Occult 3 to learn these rituals and add one to the base difficulty of all castings. As the rituals collectively represent a unique Discipline unto themselves, each costs 3 experience points per level to learn or the usual bonus points as outlined in the sidebar on p. 175. Finally, most of these rituals have side effects associated with their use as befits the alien and malignant nature of the Abyss. Under no circumstances do Flaws obtained from side effects reward the vampire with bonus or experience points.

Owing to the scarcity of Abyss Mysticism and the secretive nature of its practitioners, fewer rituals exist than with most mystical Disciplines. Also, horrific consequences for failure await a careless mystic, from devouring vortices of living shadow to possession by monstrous entities from the other side. Lastly, something is undeniably *wrong* with the black at the center of every Abyss mystic's eyes, as though each has beheld something that should not be.

Pierce the Murk

Level-One Ritual

It is a simple fact that understanding flows from perception and darkness thwarts perception. Most individuals incorrectly assume no answers are to be found in the dark, but that is simply because they do not know how or where to look. This ritual resolves the first paradox, attuning a mystic's eyes to the primordial darkness even as they forsake light.

System: The mystic invokes the Obtenebration power Shadow Play and concentrates, focusing the manipulated shadows to gather into a sphere. She holds this intangible sphere in one hand and gazes into its depths, while her player rolls Perception + Occult (difficulty 8). Success means the vampire permanently gains the Merit Darksight (p. 206), while a botch results in the mystic permanently gaining Darksight as a Flaw. A failure means the Cainite fails to comprehend the lesson and must try again another night.

Side Effect: When a vampire uses Darksight obtained from this ritual, her pupils appear to grow in an inky stain that envelops iris and white in pure black. Those who botch this ritual obtain blackened eyes for the rest of their unlife along with their warped perceptions.

The Shadow of Hands That Serve

Level-One Ritual

This ritual summons the smallest beings that dwell in the Abyss and grants them brief existence in the material world as servitors of the mystics who invoke them. Such entities are not demons or ghosts or true spirits, but rather something else that defies comprehension or classification. All that is certain is that they hate light, hunger for life and bear a malign cognition that would shatter the sanity of any who truly understood it. Although the creatures summoned with this ritual are harmless, they make excellent spies and are so called the Eyes of Ahriman.

System: The vampire crushes and extinguishes a candle in his fist, suffering one level of aggravated damage and prompting an immediate check for Röttschreck (difficulty 4). If the vampire can maintain control, his player rolls Intelligence + Occult (difficulty 6). Botching this roll results in a further level of unsoakable aggravated damage. If successful, however, the vampire tightens his fist until blood drips from his fingers. The blood blackens and burns as it falls, undulating and extending horrible tendrils to reclaim the wisps of acrid smoke. When the blood lands, it shrieks in pain and births a momentary gateway to the Abyss. Out of this brief rift emerges a globe of shadow substance the size of a child's hand. As the vampire opens and upturns his burnt and bloody palm, the orb flies to his hand and licks it clean with extruded tentacles. The creature endures one night per success on the casting roll before returning to the Abyss. Until this time, it serves the vampire's spoken will with unquestioning if unimaginative fervor. It can crudely communicate with material beings in images and emotional impressions, but only while in physical contact.

A level-two version of this ritual exists, known as The Heart That Beats in Silence. This ritual follows the same rules and process, save that the summoned being is twice as large and possesses greater mastery of Obtenebration, allowing it to attack its caster's foes physically. A vampire may not summon more beings through castings of The Shadow of Hands That Serve and/or The Heart That Beats in Silence than his Occult rating.

Side Effect: None

EYES OF AHRIMAN/ HEART OF SILENCE

Attributes: Strength 1/2, Dexterity 5, Stamina 1, Charisma 1, Manipulation 3, Appearance 0, Perception 3, Intelligence 2, Wits 3

Abilities: Alertness 3, Athletics 3, *Brawl* 3, Dodge 3, Intimidation 2, Stealth 5 (In Shadows +1)

Disciplines: Obtenebration 1/3

Willpower: 3/5, **Health Levels:** Equal to Willpower

Other Notes: Traits in italics or after a slash represent the greater power of a Heart of Silence. Both types of creatures may freely invoke their Obtenebration without spending blood, although they must spend Willpower in place of blood to enhance a power (such as lengthening a tentacle grown with Arms of Ahriman). They can fly at 30 yards per turn and are always assumed to be in shadow form as per Tenebrous Avatar (**Dark Ages: Vampire**, p. 200). They suffer no wound penalties, but the touch of fire or sunlight instantly destroys these creatures. Communicating with a material being requires contact and a successful Wits roll. Each success transfers one set of related images or one emotion directly into the target's psyche.

Transubstantiation of Essence

Level-Two Ritual

Supplanting her accursed blood with the substance of the Abyss, a mystic may devour the shadow essence to accelerate her healing.

System: The mystic devotes a full turn to meditating; her player spends one Willpower point and rolls Stamina + Occult (difficulty 8). A botch inflicts one level of aggravated damage. For every success rolled, the vampire may spend one blood point to heal two levels of bashing or lethal damage. For the purposes of this unholy healing, the vampire may even surpass normal generational limits on blood expenditure. The Abyss takes its due, however. Whenever the vampire feeds, the Abyss consumes the blood until it has taken a total number of points equal to twice the number of health levels healed. No blood actually enters the vampire's system until the cost is paid in full. Moreover, this ritual cannot be used again until the Abyss receives its toll and never more than once per night.

Side Effect: The taint of the Abyss never fully leaves a vampire's blood after casting this ritual. As a

result, the mystic's vitae thereafter has an unnatural darkened hue. This effect is purely cosmetic, though few sights are more disturbing than the ebon tears of a weeping Abyss mystic, save perhaps the horrors that make her weep.

Drinking the Blood of Ahriman

Level-Three Ritual

By drawing the shadow essence of the Abyss into himself and fusing it with his blood, a mystic who knows this ritual may undergo a frightening transformation.

System: The mystic summons a Nocturne and cuts her palm with a knife that has never tasted blood. Chanting softly, the mystic flicks blood into the Nocturne, drawing its hunger into her wound. The shadow melds into the palm, traveling through the veins to suffuse the vampire's entire form. This painful process takes half an hour. During this time the vampire is at -2 dice from the cold agony of the fusion. At the end of the ritual, the vampire's player rolls Manipulation + Occult (difficulty 8). Failure means the fusion is unsuccessful and the shadow escapes to the Abyss. A botch means the shadow drinks one blood point per 1 rolled before departing. Success causes the vampire's skin to darken noticeably and her eyes to become the impossibly inky black of the Abyss. In this augmented state, all Physical Attributes lower than her Obtenebration rating rise to that level. All Obtenebration powers up to level three receive a -2 difficulty, and the blood cost to grow or expand an Arm of Ahriman is halved (rounded up). The void-augmented vampire must spend a number of blood points upon awakening each night equal to her Obtenebration rating. Failure to pay this surcharge immediately revokes the transformation. In addition, the vampire's shadowy form takes triple damage from sunlight and her Appearance drops by one dot while this ritual is in effect.

Side Effect: Once a vampire spends more consecutive days in spectral form than her highest Virtue, the darkening of her skin becomes permanent. This resembles the darkening of an elder Assamite and grows more pronounced the more frequently the mystic casts and maintains this ritual.

Calling the Hungry Shade

Level-Three Ritual

Extending his mastery of the Abyss beyond The Heart That Beats in Silence, a mystic who knows this ritual may call forth an actual Hungry Shade into a circle of blood. Such entities are incalculably malicious and resent attempts to bind them into service. If

they break free of the magic that enslaves them, they do not hesitate to drag the errant Cainite to the Abyss or tear him asunder on the spot.

System: A mystic may initiate this ritual any time between dusk and midnight. To begin, the vampire stands at the center of the intended summoning area and slits his left palm. He then turns counterclockwise in silence with bloody hand outstretched to drip a circle of blood. Next he steps out of the circle, taking care to drip no more blood outside its edge. He then begins a whispered chant of invocation as he prowls around the circle in a spiral that winds slowly inward. Multiple Abyss mystics who know this ritual may assist and usually do, circling equilaterally apart from one another in synchronous steps. The total number of participating mystics cannot exceed the highest Occult rating in the group. Make an extended Intelligence + Occult check (difficulty 6) for every mystic involved, rolling once per hour of chant without looking at the dice. The Storyteller should privately keep track of the total number of successes amassed and permit players of the participant mystics to continue as long as they like until an hour before dawn. A botch from any mystic reduces the number of accumulated successes by five. When the mystics choose to resolve their processional litany, they stop and turn to face the center of the circle. Each speaks a syllable of summons in perfect unison and their players spend one point of Willpower. It is at this moment that the air tears asunder and a Hungry Shade rises in the blood circle.

The statistics of each summoned Hungry Shade vary. Each success in casting generates three bonus points that may be used to generate its statistics according to the costs listed on p. 129 of *Dark Ages: Vampire...* The shade begins with a rating of zero in all traits except Obtenebration and may not have Backgrounds, Virtues or a Road (as it has no need of such Traits). Health levels cost two bonus points each and the creature never suffers wound penalties. It can also store more Willpower than its permanent rating for a cost of one bonus point per additional point of capacity and begins with a full pool. None of the shade's traits may exceed the rating of the highest Obtenebration score among the participating mystics. The only exceptions are Obtenebration (begins at five dots; cannot exceed a rating of eight), permanent Willpower (can equal double the highest caster's Obtenebration), total health levels (up to twice the shade's permanent Willpower) and temporary Willpower capacity (no upper limit). The shade may possess only the following Disciplines, or rather analogous powers: Celerity, Fortitude, Obtenebration and Potence. The shade's default state is immaterial as per Tenebrous

Avatar, so its version of that power allows it to solidify for a turn at the cost of one Willpower point. The shade can see in all darkness, natural or otherwise. It regains one point of Willpower for every blood point consumed or health level of damage inflicted, and all its attacks (including Arms of Ahriman) inflict aggravated damage. It has no blood pool and does not need to spend blood to activate Obtenebration powers but substitutes Willpower to augment shadow effects or use Celerity. The shade suffers aggravated damage from sunlight and fire and soaks like a vampire when materialized. It cannot speak but may telepathically communicate at will in images and emotions with any sentient being it can see.

Once the Hungry Shade is built according to the number of successes rolled, the player of the lead mystic makes an opposed roll of Willpower against the sum of the shade's two highest permanent traits other than Willpower (both rolls at difficulty 4). The vampire receives one extra die per assisting mystic. If the vampire wins, the shade must serve him faithfully in all endeavors for a number of nights equal to his Willpower. This duration may be extended by one night per point of fresh human or vampire blood immediately fed to the monster. It is not possible to increase the duration of servitude after the ritual ends, though it is believed that more powerful summoning rituals may exist for such purposes.

If the shade wins the contest of wills, it may freely attack the mystics and usually does, though some have been known to flee the area and wreak havoc elsewhere or even return to the Abyss without incident. A freed shade may remain in the physical world as long as it desires, although it loses points of Willpower equal to its Obtenebration rating each dawn. If it runs out of Willpower, it can no longer bear separation from the Abyss and returns home through the closest shadow.

Side Effect: None

SAMPLE HUNGRY SHADE (160 SUCCESSSES; 480 BONUS POINTS)

Attributes: Strength 3, Dexterity 3, Stamina 3, Charisma 1, Manipulation 3, Appearance 0, Perception 3, Intelligence 3, Wits 3

Abilities: Alertness 3, Athletics 3, Brawl 3, Dodge 3, Intimidation 3, Melee 3, Stealth 3

Disciplines: Celerity 1, Fortitude 1, Obtenebration 6, Potence 1

Willpower: 6, **Willpower Pool:** 16

Health Levels: 12 x -0

Reflections of Hollow Revelation

Level-Four Ritual

By gazing into the sphere of a conjured Nocturne, a mystic with this ritual may reach his senses into the orb to spy through a distant shadow. This is among the more pragmatic powers of Abyss Mysticism, but it too exalts the void on the principle that all secrets do not lie in darkness, but all secrets lie *through* darkness.

System: The Cainite calls upon the Obtenebration power Nocturne and wills the globe to contract (this costs one Willpower point). The sphere shrinks to the size of a man's head and becomes tantalizingly translucent, dimming everything seen through its murky depths. The vampire gazes into the orb and concentrates on a being or location he has previously seen. If the target is within a number of miles equal to the vampire's Obtenebration + Occult and the vampire's player successfully rolls Perception + Occult (difficulty 7), the target appears in the Nocturne as seen through the shadow that has the best view of the scene. The vampire may continue to spy through this sensory portal for the rest of the scene or until the target leaves the vision of the shadow. Any vampire or supernatural being with Obtenebration, Auspex or powers similar to either may sense the thickening shadow that spies upon them on a successful Perception + Occult roll (difficulty 8). Botching this ritual disperses the Nocturne and leaves the mystic confused for the rest of the scene (-2 to all dice pools). Failure releases the Nocturne to expand and act as normal.

Side Effect: A Cainite who sees and plots too far may not see the obvious. For the rest of the night following a successful casting of this ritual, the mystic loses two dice from all Alertness checks to notice events in her immediate presence.

Whispers in the Dark

Level-Five Ritual

All enlightenment returns to the Abyss. The light of life and learning perishes with the death of flesh and soul and no tutelage can pass on wisdom in its entirety. But Ahriman remembers. Ahriman is all that is not, or was and is no more. In the primordial darkness lie echoes and whispers frozen in silent waiting for someone cunning enough to ask the right questions and daring enough to receive the answers.

System: The vampire conjures a Nocturne and forces it to contract as outlined for the ritual Reflections of Hollow Revelation. Rather than staring into the orb and viewing another place, the mystic swallows the darkness and so is swallowed by it. The vampire falls into immediate torpor as her consciousness merges with the

Abyss. The vampire may ask one question of void, which may be as mundane or arcane as desired. The Storyteller assigns a rating for the question from 1 to 10 based on complexity and significance. Truly impossible or momentous questions may even surpass 10, rising as high as the Storyteller deems appropriate. The vampire's player rolls Intelligence + Occult (difficulty 9) at the conclusion of every night the mystic spends in torpid contemplation. Successes accumulate from night to night until they match the rating of the question and the vampire awakens knowing the answer. If the vampire fails to obtain any successes during a night, the interval between rolls increases to weeks. Further failure to obtain successes extends the interval to months, then years, decades, centuries, millennia and perhaps onward to the end of time itself. A fable among Abyss mystics states that the first mystic, a beloved childe of the Eldest, asked the Abyss how he might slay God. It is said that he slumbers still in some forgotten tomb, dreaming the incomprehensible nightmares of that which preceded light.

Side Effect: A vampire who has successfully communed with the Abyss thereafter reduces the difficulty of all Intimidation rolls by one and adds one to the difficulty of all other Social rolls. These modifiers do not apply when interacting with other Abyss mystics. She also suffers the effects of the Flaw Nightmares (**Dark Ages: Vampire**, p. 305). All who behold the mystic instinctively know she bears the touch of something alien and inimical to the whole of creation.

Into the Chasm

Level-Six Ritual

Other Lasombra elders step from shadow to shadow and audaciously claim to "Walk the Abyss." To the mystic who knows this ritual, such hesitant journeys are as the tottering steps of a child. For as the Shadowed One did before them when his eyes first darkened with understanding, the mystic may stride wholly into the Abyss to be anywhere, everywhere and nowhere.


System: The Cainite spends an hour painting a circle of glyphs with three points of her own vitae. The circle must be as wide as her outstretched arms and may adorn wall or floor, as long as the surface is smooth and unbroken, like polished stone or glass. Her player then rolls Intelligence + Occult (difficulty 7). Failure means the glyphs burn black and vanish in a cloud of foul smoke, wasting the blood and effort. A botch or success opens the portal, causing the oily black of Obtenebration to spiral into a gaping maw of liquid darkness. The portal lasts a number of turns equal to the number of successes rolled. On a botch, the portal remains open for one turn only and disgorges a number of Hungry Shades equal to

the number of 1's rolled (use sample statistics on p. 179). These monsters attack everyone present and may not be controlled. Anything may pass through a successful portal while it remains open, willingly or otherwise. If multiple characters wish to travel together, they must maintain unbroken contact as they enter and throughout their journey. Otherwise, some may become lost in the void or emerge at very different destinations than their companions.

The Abyss is infinite in its darkness. Those with the Protean power Witness of Darkness or any levels of Obtenebration may perceive the shapeless murk in all its dizzying, impossible geometry and thus see the approach of Abyss spirits, vortices or other travelers. Those without such powers are truly blind and must rely on their other muted senses to perceive anything. The only clear sensation is one of soul-numbing cold that inflicts one die of lethal damage to living beings per minute of exposure.

In addition to serving as a profound spiritual experience for Abyss mystics, travel in the void serves a more utilitarian purpose. The shadow realm intersects all shadows and all darkness, allowing a traveler to emerge from any patch of darkness large enough to contain her. She need only break the enfolding silence to speak the name of her destination. Her player rolls Wits + Obtenebration (difficulty 6 for those with the Occult specialty Abyss Mysticism; difficulty 8 otherwise). On a success, the shadow-space stretches and tears around the character, disgorging her at her destination with a feeling of falling from a great height. A character must have seen or visited a destination to name it. Failure increases the difficulty of the next navigation attempt by one, to a maximum of difficulty 10. A new attempt can be made every minute until the character succeeds. A botch means the character's navigation difficulty increases by one and she attracts hostile Hungry Shades as a botch in casting the initial ritual. One character may lead others provided all maintain contact, though this requires the expenditure of one Willpower point from every person led in this manner before they step into the portal. Once a passenger lets go of the group, she must find her own way out. It is worth noting that no denizens of the Abyss bear blood, so any vampire who remains trapped within will eventually starve into torpor and an eternity of forgotten nonbeing.

Side Effect: Vampires who walk in the Abyss risk bringing a fragment of its alien malevolence back with them to the material world. After every sojourn, roll Willpower against a difficulty of trip's duration in minutes (maximum difficulty 9). A failure means the



vampire gains the Flaw Animate Shadow (p. 208), while a botch means the vampire gains the Flaw Harbinger of the Abyss (p. 209). It is possible to gain both Flaws from repeated journeys. Passengers in the Abyss may also develop Flaws from their sojourn, though all such curses fade with the coming of dawn. Only the mystic opening the way risks the eternal mark of that which lies Beyond.

Evocation of the Gubliette

Level-Seven Ritual

With this ritual, a mystic may reach out with grasping tendrils of Obtenebration to seize a victim and cast her into the Abyss. The tendrils may emerge from the caster's fingertips or mouth or perhaps reach from some deep shadow like the arms of a lurking beast. Regardless of their source, the end result is the same. When the oily tentacles withdraw, no trace of the victim remains.

System: The vampire spends a full turn in concentration, focusing upon his victim and the hunger of the void. If the vampire is disturbed during this time or breaks off to attempt any other action, his player must roll Wits + Occult (difficulty 8) or suffer the effects of a botched casting as described below. On the turn following the preparation, the vampire gestures forcefully at the victim and his player spends 3 blood points. The actual attack is made with Perception + Occult (difficulty 6) and may be dodged but not parried. A failed attack means the tendrils simply close on nothing and withdraw. If the attack results in any successes, the tendrils envelop the victim and drag her into a spherical prison of emptiness within the Abyss. The mystic may recall the victim at any time for the cost of one blood point, in which case the nearest shadow disgorges its prisoner with a shuddering sigh. If the mystic does not recall the victim before a number of nights equal to his Occult score have passed, shadows disgorge the victim as near to her original location as possible. On a botched attack roll, the shadows swallow the mystic and keep him prisoner for a number of hours equal to his Obtenebration rating. After this time has elapsed, the Cainite returns to his original location and immediately enters Röttschreck. Weak-willed prisoners of this ritual may go mad as a result of their captivity. If a victim's Willpower is less than the caster's Obtenebration rating, the victim gains a derangement that lasts until cured with repeated Willpower expenditure. It is possible for vampires to drive themselves insane with a botched casting.

A level 8 variant of this ritual exists called Ahriman's Beckoning. This ritual follows the same rules, save that the caster need not see the target. Instead, he may simply speak her name to the Abyss. If the victim is within a number of miles equal to the vampire's Obtenebration + Occult, the tendrils can seize her with a successful attack. It is said that the Eldest once used an even greater ritual to bring guests to his castle from distant nations, although not in recent centuries.

Side Effects: Upon learning this ritual, a Cainite immediately gains the Flaw Grip of the Damned (**Dark Ages: Vampire**, p. 309). The kiss of the Void imparts no comfort, only emptiness and pain.

Cry That Slays Light

Level-Eight Ritual

Representing the penultimate sacrament of Abyss Mysticism, this ritual tears a vortex of the Abyss that blossoms upward and outward to shroud the sky from horizon to horizon. All beneath lies in unnatural parody of midnight, even under the brightest light of sun or moon or stars. The brightest flames below dim their brilliance and warmth, if not their devouring hunger. Use of this ritual imperils the mystic's body, mind and soul, and only one casting has been seen in the past millennium. It is unknown if any Abyss mystics capable of such a feat still walk the earth — apart from the Shadowed One.

System: A Cainite wishing to shout the Cry That Slays Light must spend one week in absolute silence. She may not utter the briefest syllable or she must begin her quiet meditations again. During this time, she spends all waking hours mentally repeating a litany of hatred for the sun and moon and the Creator of light — bringing her wrath to the edge of sound without ever giving it voice. Once the ritual is complete, the vampire's player rolls Intelligence + Occult (difficulty 8). A botch results in the vampire's banishment into the Abyss for a century per 1 rolled, during which time the vampire gains at least one derangement and loses all blood but never falls into the release of torpor. When the imprisonment ends, the Cainite returns to the Earth in a frenzy that may last weeks or even longer. Failure on the casting means the caster fails to channel the dark energies properly and nothing happens. Success means the vampire hears the whispers of Ahriman proclaiming the syllable that is opposed to all being. The syllable remains in the

vampire's consciousness and cannot be telepathically extracted or mystically removed by any power short of divine intervention. At any time in the vampire's unlife, he may shriek this syllable to turn day into night. For one hour, vampires may walk openly without fear — utterly immune to Röttschreck and protected from the sun by the undulating curtain of shadow above. The syllable then passes from the mystic's memory unless he casts the ritual once more to rediscover it.

Side Effect: Upon actually invoking the Cry That Slays Light to blot out the sun, roll the mystic's Road rating (difficulty 4). Each success allows the vampire to retain one dot of her road. If this sudden degeneration reduces the vampire's Road rating to zero, she rampages under the cover of darkness and kills everything and everyone she can find. When the darkness ends, it subsumes her into its being and her hunger is added to the Abyss.

Koldunic Sorcery

Long before the Tremere plundered Tzimisce and Salubri blood to become vampires, sorcerers have existed among the damned. The *koldun* are the oldest of these, or at least claim so. It is clear that Koldunic Sorcery is ancient, as old as the Eldest if legends may be believed. Its magic does not depend on formulae and lifeless, categorized rites. Rather, it draws power from the most unlikely source: the living earth. Koldunic Sorcery excels in manipulating the natural elements in subtle and grandiose ways, yet its paths follow no other directions and so many rituals build on spirituality and vitality thought lost to vampires. Informed stories of Koldunic Sorcery inevitably turn to the demon Kupala that infests the very soil of the Tzimisce homeland. Perhaps the *koldun* once drew power from healthy earth and their corruption brought about the blight that is Kupala. Perhaps the Fiends



found tainted power in Kupala and formed magic around the beast. It is not clear where the sorcery ends and the beast begins, or if the two merely coexist. What is certain is that Koldunic Sorcery is not gentle or kind to the earth, any more than the Fiends are gentle to the beasts and men who walk upon the earth. Just as the Tzimisce fleshcraft servants to tend their masters better, so too do *koldun* warp the land and its nature to serve their own ends. Such gross violations of the natural order offend the Lupines, but the Tzimisce have endured too long to flinch from the ire of cringing dogs.

Ways of Power

As a Discipline rooted in tainted elemental magic, the actual mechanics of Koldunic Sorcery differ from the Hermetic arts of the Usurpers. Simple knowledge of one form of blood sorcery does not permit the learning or casting of another form's paths and rituals, though it is theoretically possible for a Cainite to learn both arts if he separately learns both Disciplines. Given the unremitting state of hostilities between the Tzimisce and the Tremere, however, such a feat will likely remain theoretical for the indefinite future. Like Thaumaturgy, Koldunic Sorcery divides into paths and rituals. *Koldun* speak of their paths as ways, five of which form the core of all their magic. Though not unknown, lesser ways are rare in the extreme and usually build on a specific aspect of a core way. Most *koldun* who have fought the Tremere dismiss the debased sorceries of the Usurpers as nothing more than fragmented lesser ways distilled through lies and misconceptions.

The actual casting of Koldunic ways requires more than a clumsy exertion of will. Such magic demands perfection of form and mastery of the appropriate lore. In effect, the ways of the Discipline more closely resemble a cascade of dependent rituals than paths as understood by Thaumaturgy. As such, the ways do not require a Willpower roll. Instead, the caster's player spends one blood point and rolls (the specific Attribute listed for the given way) + Occult against a difficulty of the power's level + 3. Vampires always use the base Attribute, ignoring any bonuses gained from blood expenditure or other magic. Owing to the Discipline's dependence on ritualized knowledge, characters with the Occult specialty "Koldunism" may add an extra die as normal. Characters without this specialized lore add +1 to the base difficulty of all castings. The rules for koldunic rituals duplicate those for ways, save that the requisite Attribute is always Intelligence and rituals take a minimum of 5 minutes

KOLDUN AND KUPALA

The ancient ancestral domains of the Tzimisce resonate with a spiritual taint older than human history. This taint is self-aware and certainly intelligent, though the diffusion of its consciousness through the land gives it little power to notice or influence events on a human or vampiric scale. Some suggest the foul magic of Koldunic Sorcery warped the spirit of the land to such malignancy, while other *koldun* think their founder chose the homeland for its primordial spirit. A small but vocal faction of Metamorphosists maintains that the Eldest is Kupala, proving their claim that the Antediluvian attained the first stage of its apotheosis. Whatever its nature, *koldun* sense and draw upon Kupala's malignant power. In the lands blighted by its touch, vampires with the Occult specialty Koldunism may reduce the difficulty of all Koldunic Sorcery path rolls by one, but also add one to the difficulty of all degeneration checks. Vampires without the Koldunism specialty do not feel Kupala and so absorb none of the blessings or banes of its taint.

per level to perform unless otherwise noted. Each *koldun* must select one of the ways listed below as his primary one.

The Way of Earth

Capable of great destruction and great healing, the earth is the womb of life and the sepulcher of death. It drinks all blood spilled upon its soil and so mirrors the vampire. It is by association with the earth as a source of strength that a *koldun* enacts his will.

Attribute: Stamina

• Grasping Soil

A *koldun* invoking this power may command earth to rise in a spray of dirt and crawl up a victim's legs. Depending on the will and temperament of the sorcerer, the soil may appear as heaped mounds or sculpted to a parody of clutching arms. Regardless, the end result is the victim's sudden immobility. This power can command only soil, not stone, and may target only victims standing on the earth.

System: The *koldun* may direct any patch of earth within a 100-foot radius to ensnare a target for two turns per success rolled. Animated dirt ascends and constricts midway between the victim's knees and hips, holding her fast unless her player

scores five successes on a Strength + Athletics roll (difficulty 6). It is also possible to use this power as an attack, in which case the grasping earth crushes once and then releases. Used in this manner, each success on the casting inflicts one level of lethal damage. Such damage manifests exclusively as broken legs and crushed feet.

•• Endurance of Stone

Drawing the essence of earth into himself, a *koldun* may gain a measure of its preternatural resilience. Under the effects of this power, a Cainite's skin resembles a horrid fusion of flesh and stone that cracks and flows impossibly with every movement.

System: A successful activation roll grants the *koldun* two extra dots of Stamina for the rest of the scene. These dots are considered part of the character's natural Stamina and may aid in any uses of that Attribute, including soak.

••• Hungry Earth

Expanding on the power of Grasping Soil, a *koldun* may use this power to drag a victim into the earth and crush her with its pitiless grip. He need only gesture and the soil beneath his victim opens like the maw of a great beast. Tongues of cold mud lash forth to drag the victim into the closing pit, leaving her buried to the neck. This power may ensnare any victim who stands upon the earth within 100 feet of the *koldun*.

System: Like Grasping Soil, every success on the activation roll leaves the victim trapped and immobile for one turn. Unlike the lesser power, the difficulty of the Strength + Athletics roll to break free increases to 8 and still requires five successes. As the earth continues to shift and grasp while the power remains active, this roll must be made as a single (though repeatable) attempt rather than an extended test. In addition, beings trapped in the crushing pit suffer one level of lethal damage each turn. Beings capable of soaking this damage may do so, but at difficulty 7. At the end of the power's duration, the earth yawns once more to release the victim.

•••• Root of Vitality

As with Hungry Earth, the *koldun* may direct the land to bury any target standing on the earth within a 100-foot radius. Yet this power is far more benevolent in its intent, if no less disturbing in its manifestation. The soil ripples, parting and closing

like some obscene womb as it draws the target a full yard beneath the surface. Living beings entombed in this fashion do not suffocate, as the enchanted soil pumps air from above in undulating breaths. Better still, the fertile essence of the earth presses upon her flesh and restores it to new health. Still, the process is highly disturbing and unnatural, especially as targets remain wholly aware in silent, helpless immobility for the full duration. It is possible for a *koldun* to heal himself with this power.

System: The player spends as many blood points as desired (which may require multiple turns depending on generation) and makes the activation roll. Each success permits the earth to heal two levels of bashing damage or one level of lethal damage. Healing aggravated damage requires two successes per level. The total number of health levels that may be restored with each use of this power is the number of blood points invested or the number of successes on the activation roll, whichever is lower. Any blood points spent beyond the number of successes drain away to no effect. The actual healing process takes one turn per bashing level, one minute per lethal level and one hour per aggravated level. Once the healing is complete or the power is interrupted through determined excavation, the earth pushes the target back to the surface.

••••• Kupala's Fury

Mortals pray in fear when the mountains shake. They fear the wrath of the Old Gods, and rightfully so. With this power, a *koldun* may rouse the taint of Kupala with his blood so that the eldritch force may gnaw at the roots of mountains and thrash beneath the land like the great dragon of Tzimisce heraldry. It is not a power used lightly or capriciously, but it represents one of the greatest weapons available to Koldunic Sorcery.

System: This power requires a Willpower point in addition to the usual cost and activation roll. The *koldun* smites the earth with his fist or stamps angrily, and his anger flows invisibly through the soil to any target in his line of sight. The quake erupts outward from that point, inflicting 10 dice of lethal damage on everything and everyone in the area of effect. Most wooden structures collapse entirely and even stone buildings may grow cracked and pitted with superficial damage from the shaking earth. This tremor lasts one turn and affects an area determined by the number of successes rolled.

It is not possible to apply fewer successes than those rolled.

Successes	Area
1 success	One shop or simple home
2 successes	Five lesser structures or a medium-sized keep
3 successes	An entire village street or a medium-sized castle
4 successes	An entire village district or a large castle
5 successes	An entire village

The Way of Wind

Subtler than mastery over earth, this way evokes the air in the breath of the living and the last rattle of a dying man. In stillness or motion, *koldun* turn all aspects of air to their unliving design.

Attribute: Perception

• Breath of Whispers

Even in their absence, *koldun* instill deep fear in their boyars. This power carries the vampire's words on a light breeze and returns with the target's reply. The vampire need only address the target by name and forcibly mimic a deep exhalation of breath as he speaks his message.

System: Every time the *koldun* wishes to send a new message via this power, his player makes the usual activation roll. The player need only spend blood the first time the power is used during a given scene. Each success permits one turn of speech. After the vampire concludes the message, swift winds carry it to its destination. Within a minute, the target hears the *koldun* as if the vampire had whispered in his ear. He may reply or remain silent, but anything he says within a number of turns equal to the length of the vampire's message flies back to the *koldun*... This power may bring words to anyone within a mile who is not in a sealed room. While using this power, a *koldun* must concentrate fully. Any disturbance breaks the communication.

•• Biting Gale

Vengeful *koldun* sought to invoke a wind as chill as air atop the Carpathian Mountains. This power achieves that end, unleashing a cutting wind that can freeze a man's blood in his veins as it swirls through an area of his choosing. Besides its obvious combat applications, this power also facilitates a dramatic entrance for those so inclined.

System: With a successful activation roll, the *koldun* summons a freezing wind within a maximum

of a 100-yard radius. Anyone caught in this frigid blast suffers one die of bashing damage each turn, loses two dice from all Dexterity pools and moves at half normal speed. The winds last as long as the *koldun* wills, provided he maintains concentration. Any nonreflexive actions on the part of the vampire cause the winds to still and dissipate. This includes any movement.

••• Breeze of Lethargy

Although they cannot induce immediate sleep, the winds evoked by this power bring growing exhaustion and numbing weariness through every muscle. Victims of this power often smell a hint of bittersweet smoke before they fall entranced.

System: For two turns per success, the *koldun* creates a wind inflicting extreme lethargy within a 200-foot radius. Players of characters caught in this wind must roll Stamina + Athletics (difficulty 8). This roll is made once every two turns of exposure. Failure means the character halves all dice pools involving physical actions for the remaining duration of the wind and halves all movement rates for the scene. A botch puts the character to sleep (or a state of light torpor for vampires) for the scene. Sleeping characters awaken if prodded, shaken or otherwise manhandled, though they move slowly and may suffer halved dice pools if the wind still persists.

•••• Ride the Tempest

A *koldun* employing this power moves at incredible speeds riding along the winds. Such *voivodes* may appear in each of their boyar's homes and the villages of their lands in a single night, instilling fear among the peasants and terrorizing all to fealty. Few mortals of any class dare risk the wrath of a *koldun* who may arrive to administer punishment. While traveling with this power, a vampire assumes a blurred form that coalesces as he reaches his destination.

System: With a successful activation roll, the *koldun* fades into the wind and flies at 250 mph to his destination. This power cannot function effectively in caves, buildings or other firmly enclosed areas, and any vampire foolish enough to try suffers 5-10 dice of bashing damage for his trouble from crashing into walls. Outside, the vampire's flight navigates all obstacles. Once the *koldun* arrives at his destination or the scene ends, the vampire descends to earth and fully solidifies. Such an

arrival is quite impressive, heralded by a flurry of sudden gusts that extinguish candles and blow leaves about.

••••• Fury of the Night Sky

Applying fury magnified by blood and will, a *koldun* may project the full measure of his anger into the night sky. Churning gray clouds blot out stars and moon, unleashing spiraling gusts and a driving downpour of freezing rain. Lightning arcs overhead, each thunderous flash casting jagged shadows.

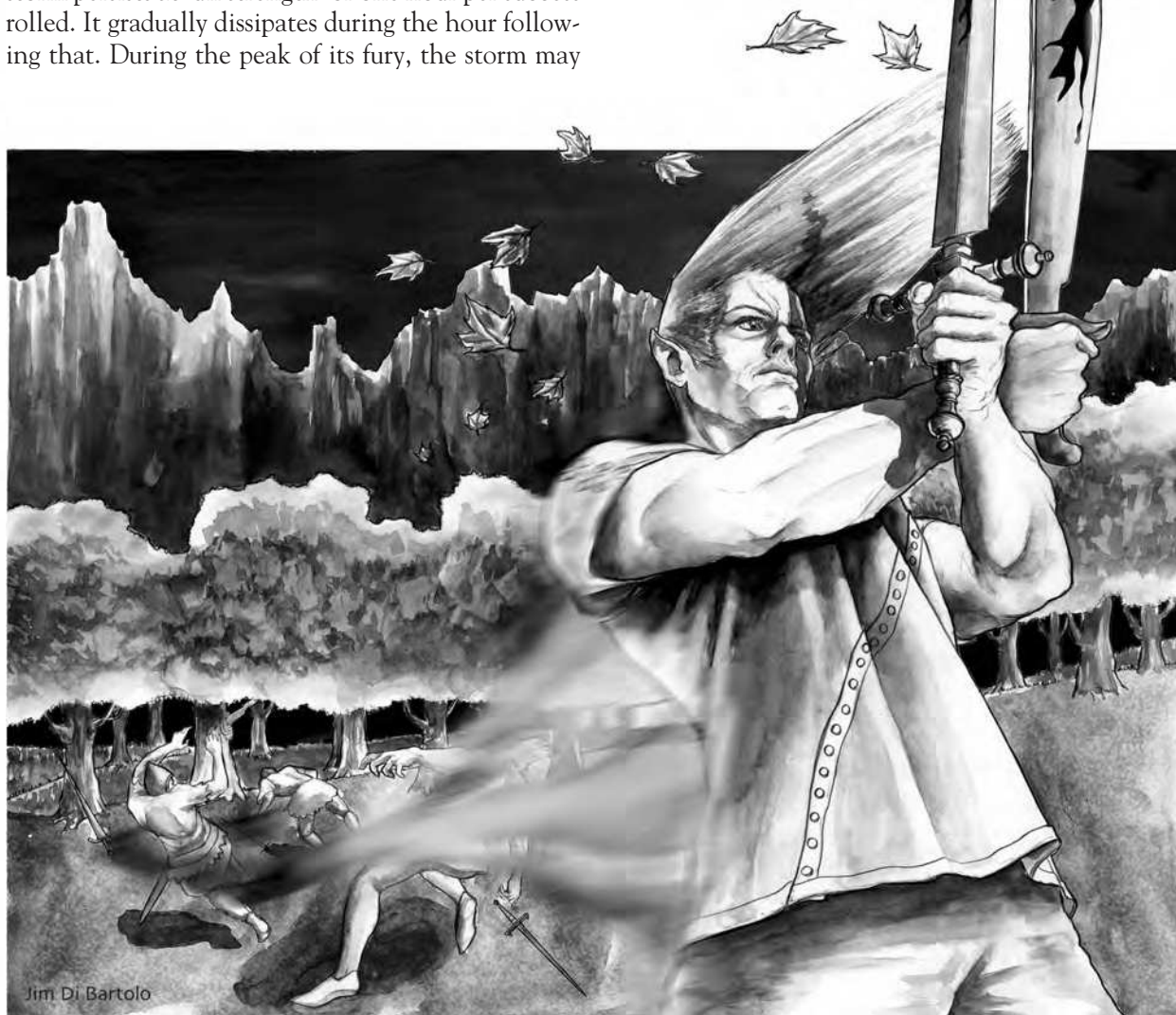
System: With a successful activation roll and a point of Willpower (in addition to the usual blood), a *koldun* may conjure a terrible storm. It takes six hours for the clouds to gather and thicken overhead, minus one hour for every success rolled. If this results in a duration less than one, the clouds blossom outward from directly overhead like a black canopy, filling the sky in mere minutes. Once the clouds form, the rain begins to fall in torrents and the lightning begins. The storm persists at full strength for one hour per success rolled. It gradually dissipates during the hour following that. During the peak of its fury, the storm may

cause flooding and certainly chills any exposed mortal to the bone (one die of unsoakable bashing damage every five minutes of full exposure). Lightning strikes regularly — far more than a usual storm. Indeed, a *koldun* may direct lightning at a foe. This requires the player to spend one Willpower point and roll Perception + Occult (difficulty 6). A successful strike inflicts 10 dice of lethal damage. Only one such attack may be made each turn.

The Way of Water

Largely practiced by *koldun* with havens near large water sources such as the Black Sea or Plain Lakes, this way can raise watery spirit slaves and dash a ship to splinters. More subtly, the vampire may lurk in the depths or conjure illusions to confound and bedazzle his foes.

Attribute: Wits



• Pool of Lies

This versatile power creates three-dimensional illusions along the surface of a water source. How a *koldun* uses such illusions depends on temperament and intent. It is just as easy to feign a divine visitation as a cunning seduction leading to drowning.

System: With a successful activation roll, the *koldun* may project an illusion on any water surface in line of sight. The illusion may speak and move however the vampire wishes, though it has no substance and cannot step beyond the bounds of the water. The phantom lasts one turn per success rolled, after which it slowly dissipates into fine mist. It is possible to extend this lifespan with subsequent activations of the power, each of which stack in determining final duration. Rolls to extend an illusion's duration add one to the base difficulty but require no blood. Once an illusion fades away, it must be cast anew.

•• Watery Haven

As the feral Gangrel meld with the earth, so may a *koldun* with this power gracefully sink beneath the water to escape the sun. The vampire does not so much submerge as merge with the water. Though his slumbering form may be visible at odd angles from above, not even the most determined splashing can disturb his rest.

System: This power requires no blood. If the player gains two or more successes on the activation roll, the vampire sinks into the water as per the Protean power *Interred in the Earth*. A body of water must be at least two feet deep and as large in other dimensions as the vampire's body to contain him. Catching a glimpse of a hidden *koldun* in the water requires a successful Perception + Alertness roll (difficulty 8).

••• Jog over Sea

Moving with the unnatural grace of a ghost, a *koldun* employing this power may stride across water as readily as land, leaving nary a ripple to mark his passing. Some vampires delight in using this power in conjunction with *Pool of Lies* to conjure panoplies of phantasms to attend them.

System: For every success on the activation roll, the *koldun* may walk on water for one scene or one hour, whichever is longer. A *koldun* may choose to drop the effects of this power in order to submerge or swim, but he may not walk on water again unless he reactivates the power.

•••• Minions of the Deep

By dripping his blood into a body of water, a *koldun* may summon or rouse embodied water

elementals to serve him for a night. Such minions are infallibly loyal, if not especially clever. Despite their liquid form, they are solid enough to grab a man and drag him to a watery grave or pummel him as the crashing surf.

System: The player spends one Willpower point and makes the standard activation roll. With success, the player may spend blood to summon elemental minions. This blood must be dripped or flung into a body of water, which may require multiple turns depending on generational limits for blood expenditure. Once the last drop of blood falls, the water rises into whatever form(s) the *koldun* desires. The caster may create as many minions as blood points spent, though not more than the total number of successes rolled. Regardless of their form, the spirits have a rating equal to the vampire's Wits in all Traits. These beings have no Knowledges and no Skills apart from Stealth. Furthermore, their Mental and Social Attributes are considered to have a rating of 1 except in passive or defensive situations (such as to resist persuasion or mind-control). Water elementals soak and otherwise suffer damage as vampires, including from the boiling rays of sunlight. Fire harms them less, inflicting bashing damage only. Moreover, the watery creatures may certainly extinguish flames with their liquid bodies, though not without suffering injury. An elemental that leaves the body of water that spawned it suffers one level of aggravated damage per hour. Minions regenerate one level of damage each turn they remain in contact with a large body of water but do not otherwise heal. Elementals have a number of health levels equal to the *koldun*'s Willpower. Unless destroyed, summoned minions last until the next dawn before collapsing into inanimate puddles.

••••• Doom Tide

Many Turkish ships lie at the bottom of the Black Sea, shattered by the whirlpools of the *koldun*. Victims of this power must fight with every ounce of their strength or fall into the whirling airless depths below.

System: The player spends a Willpower point in addition to the usual blood. For every success on the activation roll, the resulting whirlpool has a radius of five feet, centered anywhere in the vampire's line of sight. Whirlpools have a base Strength of 15, increasing by 5 dots per success after the first. Victims must successfully oppose this Strength with their own Strength + Survival (difficulty 8) in order to break free. Those who fail are sucked into the depths and pounded with crushing currents. Living beings drown normally, while vampires and other nonbreathing

creatures simply remain trapped helplessly in the vortex. This power lasts for one scene.

The Way of Fire

The ancient anathema of vampires, the element of fire offers the most powerful and dangerous tool available to *koldun*. The Way of Fire shares aspects with the Way of Earth in that it focuses more on magma and fiery rock than pure, naked flame. *Koldun* never risk Röttschreck from fire and magma they conjure, though any secondary fires may engender the Red Fear.

Attribute: Manipulation

• Fiery Courage

No vampire can master an element he fears, so this power dims that fear to a mere ember of its former intensity.

System: Once learned, this power is permanent and requires no activation roll or blood. The *koldun* subtracts his rating in the Way of Fire from the difficulty of Courage rolls to resist Röttschreck from exposure or proximity to flame. This power does not aid in resisting the panic that accompanies sunlight or any other causes apart from actual fire. If this reduces the difficulty of a Courage roll below 2, the *koldun* simply does not succumb to the Red Fear.

•• Combust

The Cainite's eyes flash vivid orange with sorcerous power as superheated air coils around the target. In moments, the target bursts into spontaneous flame.

System: For every success on the activation roll, the target suffers one level of aggravated damage. This attack may be dodged, but not blocked, and can affect living (or unliving) beings at +2 difficulty. It is possible to make only one fiery attack per turn.

••• Wall of Magma

The *koldun* raises his hand and the earth splits, spraying a wall of glowing magma 10 feet high. Normally, this wall forms a 10-foot radius circle around the vampire, although the power can raise other shapes with practice and skill.

System: The wall of magma summoned with this power has a lifespan of two turns per success rolled. If the *koldun* wishes to release the magma along a shape other than a protective circle, increase the base difficulty by one. Characters cannot approach a wall of molten rock without a Courage or Willpower roll (difficulty 8), and even then the close blistering heat inflicts a level of aggravated damage. Actual contact with the lava increases the damage to three levels and

OK, NOW I'M CONFUSED

Stute readers will note the rules presented for Koldunic Sorcery in this chapter contradict the basic rules presented on page 217 of *Dark Ages: Vampire*. This is deliberate. It is possible to simulate the five elemental Ways crudely with a combination of the Tremere's Rego Elementum, Rego Tempestas, Creo Ignem and Rego Motus — especially for players without access to this book. This method also serves to illustrate how the Usurpers view foreign mystical practices through the distorted lens of their own hubris. In truth, the elemental power of Koldunic Sorcery transcends anything that conventional Thaumaturgy can match, as represented by separate paths for each element. Assume that the rules in this book supersede *Dark Ages: Vampire* and that Koldunic Sorcerers do not have access to paths or rituals specific to Thaumaturgy except where directly stated.

raises the soak difficulty to 9, assuming any sort of soak is possible.

•••• Heat Wave

The *koldun* acts as a conduit for steam geysers and channels a blast of dessicating air at a victim within line of sight. This fiery wind appears as a rippling heat wave enveloping the victim. Individuals slain with this gruesome power appear as withered, mummified husks.

System: On a successful activation roll, the victim suffers five levels of lethal damage that may be soaked by beings capable of such. Vampire targets also lose 5 blood points regardless of the damage inflicted.

••••• Volcanic Blast

At the final mastery of Way of Fire, a *koldun* commands lava to explode from the ground in a huge geyser. The molten rock spews across a wide swath before crashing to earth and flowing in all directions. Anything in the path of the molten rock burns, melts or vaporizes within moments. The caster may direct the lava to erupt anywhere in his line of sight.

System: This power costs one Willpower point in addition to a blood point. For every success on the activation roll, the initial lava burst lasts one turn. The rivers of burning liquid rock then flow sluggishly for twice this duration before suddenly cooling and hardening. Even if an object survives the heat, it now lies trapped beneath the rock. Anything that makes contact with lava suffers a minimum of three levels of

aggravated damage at difficulty 9. For object that don't have health levels, the Storyteller must decide how many turns they last before melting or erupting into their own infernos. A botch on this power opens the lava geyser under an unintended target, possibly the *koldun* himself.

The Way of Spirit

The element of Spirit binds and transcends the four elements of the material world. Spirit is life in all its purest and most debased forms. It flows sluggishly in the blood of vampires and dances in the currents of wind and water. It burns in every flame and shakes the foundations of the earth. Ancient *koldun* learned to extend the spirit of their blood into the world around them, joining and dominating the ambient living essence for a brief time. Unto itself, the Way of Spirit grants preternatural awareness over a wide area. The true power of the art, however, lies in channeling other manifestations of Koldunic Sorcery. A master *koldun* may whisper his thoughts to the edge of his domain and strike down intruders with tempest, fire and devouring earth. His mystical will is law unto the very edge of his bloated spirit.

Attribute: Charisma

System: No distinct powers exist for each level of the Way of Spirit. Instead, greater mastery widens the domain a *koldun* may claim. Furthermore, this way may expressly exceed a rating of 5, though such incredible power demands equal mastery over the Discipline of Koldunic Sorcery. Elder *koldun* who achieve such an inhuman feat grow detached from individual people and

TELYAVELIC TREMERE

The Telyavelic bloodline of the Tremere combine orthodox thaumaturgic principles with obscure shamanism not too dissimilar in origin from Koldunic Sorcery. This hybrid art forms the basis for the so-called Sielanic Paths. Storytellers may permit Telyavelic Tremere to learn elements of koldunic magic as Thaumaturgy (and thus following casting rules for that form of magic) without learning the separate Discipline of Koldunic Sorcery. Any secondary paths obtained in this fashion cost 8 bonus or experience points to learn and cost current rating x 6 to advance. Koldunic rituals transcribed to Sielanic Thaumaturgy are treated as if they were one level higher. Non-Telyavelic Tremere may *not* adapt koldunic magic without express Storyteller consent, and even then the adaptation process requires extensive and arduous mystical research.

events that do not concern their domains as a whole. Mechanically, this alienation adds one to the difficulty of all Empathy rolls for every two levels above four, to a maximum of difficulty 9. Characters without the Koldunism Occult specialty may not learn any levels of this path.

To activate the Way of Spirit, the player spends one Willpower point and rolls Charisma + Occult (difficulty 4 + the rating of the intended area of effect; see below). Characters may not attempt a range greater than their current mastery of the way permits. A failure has no effect apart from wasting Willpower. On a botch, the earth itself rejects the *koldun* and bars any further use of the way until the sun next sets. Success grants sensory omniscience in the area of effect, lasting one hour per success. Within this territory, the *koldun* sees, hears, smells and even tastes everything at once. His touch flows through the dominion as on a breeze or a ripple in the soil, invisible and so capable of perceiving the invisible and spiritual realm. While such wide-reaching senses can immediately detect the presence and rough locations of intruders and spirits, the *koldun* must concentrate to focus on specific objects or individuals. This requires a Wits + Alertness roll (difficulty determined by the Storyteller). As with Auspex, the mystical senses conferred by the Way of Spirit may confound Obfuscate and other forms of illusion or concealment.

Once a *koldun* extends his senses with this path, he may evoke powers of other Koldunic Sorcery paths anywhere within the territory. Apart from their extended range, such powers operate as normal. No power may be used that has a level exceeding the vampire's rating in the Way of Spirit. For example, it is not possible to create earthquakes many miles distant without a rating of 5 in both the Way of Earth and the Way of Spirit.

Rating	Radius of Effect
•	50 feet
••	100 yards
•••	Quarter-mile
••••	1 mile
•••••	5 miles
•••••+	10 miles per dot over 5

Rituals of Koldunic Sorcery

Beast That Feeds on Dreams

Level-One Ritual

By feeding a point of vitae to a small animal no larger than a cat, a *koldun* may imbue the creature with

a measure of his own predatory spirit. The animal then goes forth in search of a child. It need not feed in any conventional sense — it need only draw close enough to drink the child's breath.

System: If and when the animal finds its prey, the *koldun* regains one point of Willpower and the animal reverts to its normal behavior. This Willpower may not bring a *koldun* above his usual maximum. If the same child undergoes this ritual three nights in a row, she dies from the spiritual trauma. Storytellers must decide when or even if an animal achieves its mission, rewarding the player with Willpower at the appropriate moment.

Hospitality

Level-One Ritual

The most common ritual practiced nightly by *koldun*, Hospitality awakens the spirits of all things in his haven. The spirits manifest in the objects they belong to, granting limited sentience and individualism. The objects speak if spoken to and sometimes even when the Cainite does not command, though always with deference and fear. If directly ordered to silence, they obey. The primary function of this ritual is the perimeter of sentries it creates. As long as the *koldun* does not mistreat his possessions, he can remain assured of warning in the event of intruders.

System: A successful activation roll awakens every object in the vampire's haven to act as described until the sun next sets. This ritual can affect only a single structure, whether that is a crumbing cottage or a towering castle. Beyond the outermost walls, the spirits do not speak or wake.

SHARED RITUALS

R*koldun* have their own versions of the following Thaumaturgy rituals from **Dark Ages: Vampire:** Communicate with Sire, Defense of the Sacred Haven, Deflection of Wooden Doom, Revelation of Blood Lineage, and Ward Versus Ghouls (and all other wards). These rituals do not depend on Hermetic principles and so share none of the procedures. Tremere cannot teach their rituals to *koldun* and vice versa — at least not without massive effort to tear apart and conceptualize the entire ritual anew. Storytellers may allow or disallow any blood sorcery rituals from other supplements to convert to Koldunic Sorcery, though caution and restraint are advised to prevent abuse of the system.

Reawakening Dead Water

Level-One Ritual

With this ritual, a *koldun* may mingle his blood with stagnant water and drink from it, absorbing the vitality and rejuvenation of water and earth.

System: After dripping a point of vitae into the water, the vampire stoops and drinks a full double-handful of the brackish liquid. If the activation roll succeeds, the vampire may drink the water without vomiting and regains one point of temporary Willpower. This cannot bring her temporary Willpower above her permanent rating, and the ritual may only be cast once per night.

Ritual of Death's Embrace

Level-One Ritual

This cruel ritual permits a vampire to extend the process of the Embrace over many nights, offering the pleasure of repeated feeding even as the victim sinks into death and unlife.

System: The *koldun* drinks a goblet containing a foul mixture of wine, ashes and his vitae. If the ritual succeeds, the vampire may begin the process. Each night, he drains one to three points of human blood, replacing it with a like quantity of his own vitae. By the power of the ritual, this blood does not convert the mortal into a ghoul; rather, it slowly kills her as from deepening anemia. Her skin grows wan and pallid, her breathing shallows, and her heartbeat slows. The most skilled healers will assume she suffers a disease of the blood. Though no remedy can truly halt the transformation, bloodletting does slow it. The mortal bleeds one point of human blood followed by one point of vitae, alternating until all the vitae is gone or she dies from blood loss.

Once the *koldun* transfers 10 points of vitae, replacing all the mortal's blood, the victim undergoes the actual Embrace. She dies and arises upon the next sunset as a Cainite. Only cremation or dismemberment may prevent this rise. During the entire ritual, the death of the *koldun* restores the victim to full health within a day. By its very nature, this ritual also confers the blood oath upon the victim.

Blood of Flame

Level-Two Ritual

Developed as a form of spiteful defense against diablerie, this ritual transmutes the blood of Caine into the fiery blood of the earth.

System: If this ritual succeeds, the caster's blood transmutes to a muddy sludge for the rest of the night. All blood costs to evoke healing are doubled, but any

attempt to feed from the vampire yields a mouthful of liquid flames akin to magma. Certainly fatal for mortals, each “blood” point of magma consumed inflicts one level of unsoakable aggravated damage on vampires and other supernatural beings.

Invoke the Lesser Sign of Power

Level-Two Ritual

By invoking his element, a *koldun* may command spirits to lend their dominion. Mortals who behold this sign respond in subservient fear.

System: The *koldun* concentrates for a single turn and his player makes the usual roll. No blood is required for this ritual. If successful, the caster’s eyes glow with elemental power appropriate to his highest-rated way. Whether they dance with flame or shine as bottomless azure pools, any mortal who beholds the sign recognizes the unnatural power of the vampire. The difficulty of all Intimidation and Leadership rolls against mortals while using this ritual are at -2 , provided the mortal sees the piercing radiant eyes. This effect lasts until dawn.

Rouse the Elemental Spirit

Level-Two Ritual

By offering a sacrifice of his own blood and successfully casting this ritual, a *koldun* calls the attention of nature spirits and strikes a bargain with them. Although the vampire bargains from a position of power, he does so courteously rather than as a tyrant who must be obeyed.

System: If the ritual succeeds, spirits in the area who want the blood may appear before the *koldun* and offer service. The *koldun* may accept the offer or propose his own deal; generally, the greater the blood offering, the more serious or even dangerous a task the spirit is willing to undertake. Most spirits will perform only a single short task, such as relaying a message or frightening a mortal with a display of supernatural might. Missions of espionage, let alone a task that could result in combat, require a considerable number of successes on an appropriate Social roll as well as a veritable banquet of blood. Once the spirit accepts the terms of the pact and drinks the blood, it must fulfill its end of the bargain to the best of its abilities before pursuing any other business. Statistics for spirits called with this ritual are left to Storytellers to design, using the rules presented in **Dark Ages: Vampire**. Storytellers with access to **Dark Ages: Mage** or **Dark Ages: Werewolf** may also use spirit rules from those books. Generally, such spirits are weak or relatively insignificant, making them susceptible to flattery.

Conjure Spirit

Level-Three Ritual

As he once bound the least of spirits as spies and aides, so may a *koldun* with this ritual call more powerful spirits. Such creatures answer proper beckoning and oblations of blood, which needn’t come wholly from the caster. They do not make pacts — they trade favors. The *koldun* must pledge something of value to the spirit, which may seem trivial to human or vampiric notions of worth. If the spirit likes the offer, it awaits the price. Should it find the price reasonable for the service provided by the vampire, it drinks the blood and goes about its new business. It does not bargain or haggle, nor does it deign to listen to threats. If the vampire insults the spirit with a poor offering, it will not remain to continue bargaining; it simply vanishes to wherever it belongs and leaves the vampire with a pool of cooling, untouched blood for his trouble. Thus, it behooves a *koldun* to learn the proper etiquette for dealing with beings of such power.

System: A successful casting draws the attention of a spirit as described. The statistics of a nature spirit summoned with this ritual are left to Storyteller imagination but should greatly exceed those of spirits called with Rouse the Elemental Spirit and even the caster in extreme cases.

Invoke the Greater Sign of Power

Level-Three Ritual

With a successful casting, the *koldun* takes on the visage of his most favored element, as determined by his highest-ranked way. Those attuned to earth grow stony skin, cracked and pitted as by the wear of centuries. Their footfalls resound heavily and their voices grate with slow implacability. *Koldun* attuned to air appear to blur along every outline, surrounded by spiraling winds and constant meaningless whispers... Water marks its masters with a wet sheen and footprints of mud. Fire lends a ruddy hue to the skin and the distortion of heat waves rising perpetually from the caster’s body. Spirit’s mark is most subtle, a vague sense of otherworldly power and the flicker at the edge of peripheral vision as of a host of invisible beings thronging about the caster.

System: Regardless of cosmetic effects, this ritual makes all Koldunic Sorcery easier. The elemental attunement makes other tasks more difficult, however, as the caster is too focused on mystical matters to pay full attention to his surroundings. The mechanical effect of this fixation is a reduction of all Koldunic casting difficulties by 2 and the increase of all other rolls by one. This transformation also intimidates

mortals as a Lesser Sign of Power. The effects of this ritual last until dawn.

Sentinels of the Haven

Level-Three Ritual

The *koldun* calls out to the spirits of his haven, demanding their fealty and proclaiming his right by recitation of koldunic descent through five unbroken generations of teachers. At the end of the ritual, spirits awaken as per the level-one ritual Hospitality. Unlike that lesser ritual, the spirits also gain limited physical control of their nature. Doors can open or close, an empty suit of armor may walk about and even fight clumsily, and a chair may scurry to make itself available.

System: The *koldun* completes the ritual as described. If successful, animated objects have whatever statistics the Storyteller deems appropriate. Only one object may move at a time, limiting the ritual's defensive utility. It is a superb weapon of terror, however, especially for repelling the superstitious.

Merging of Souls

Level-Four Ritual

Summoning a minor spirit as with the ritual Conjure Spirit, a *koldun* may trick the being into following its blood offering into the very gullet of a ghoul. Once inside, the spirit remains trapped until the death of its fleshy prison.

System: This ritual requires an hour of continuous chant, in which the *koldun* forces a mortal to consume a mixture of his blood and soil that the Tzimisce has rested in. If successful, the spirit materializes inside the host and inflicts five dice of lethal damage on the ghoul from its struggle to escape. If the ghoul survives, the spirit warps flesh as grotesquely as Vicissitude. The ghoul drops to Appearance 0 and gains three dots each of Strength and Stamina. Unfortunately, the spirit's hate poisons the ghoul's already tainted blood, depleting one point of vitae each day at sunrise. If the ghoul ever depletes its blood pool, it perishes and the spirit escapes.

Pool of Secrets

Level-Four Ritual

Wise *koldun* keep regular watch on their servants and allies, ever wary of treachery and deception. This ritual aids in such endeavors, providing a mystical means of spying unseen.

System: The *koldun* skims his hands over a pool of brackish water without touching the surface. If the ritual succeeds, ripples shake and clear the water, unveiling a

present image centered on a targeted person or place. The *koldun* must have spoken with the target person or visited the target place previously. If targeting a location, the view may not change once the vision unfolds. The maximum duration that can be spent scrying a specific target is a number of hours equal to the successes rolled. If the *koldun* releases the vision, he may return to it during the duration with another pass of the hand.

Refuge of the Thirsty Grave

Level-Four Ritual

Observation of Gangrel led to the creation of this useful ritual, permitting its own form of earth-melding as an escape from the sun's hateful rays.

System: Upon successfully casting this ritual, the *koldun* sinks into the soil as per the Protean power Interred in Earth. This power's use has no upward duration, however. Instead, the earth drinks one point of the Cainite's blood each day until his player makes a successful Strength + Survival roll (difficulty 6) to awaken and dig free in a shower of dirt. The *koldun* may attempt escape any time, though not more than once per hour.

Conjure Demon

Level-Five Ritual

This ritual follows upon the principles of Conjure Spirit, though with greater rewards for success and peril for failure. A proper casting allows an offering of blood to summon a mighty demon of the Old Country. Such a being never shows fear, and perhaps need never show fear, for its powers usually exceed the *koldun*'s by far. Still, demons called in this fashion remember the *koldun* who came before and humbled them with mighty curses and enchantments. Out of memory of those ancient pacts and fear that those pacts might one night find renewal, demons treat *koldun* with respect as equals. Such beings brook no disrespect in turn, however, so incautious *koldun* risk destruction for careless words. A *koldun* may request a favor from a demon and offer a favor in turn. Many times, demons perform a task in exchange for unspecified payment at a later date. It is not unknown for a demon to wait centuries to call a payment due, though not all are so patient.

System: Success summons a demon as described. Demons summoned in this manner have whatever impressive statistics the Storyteller feels appropriate.

The Inmost Tug

Level-Five Ritual

Unlike most koldunic rituals, this requires no blood sacrifice or complicated procedures; a single

word and gesture are all that the *koldun* needs to seize the invisible ties of the blood oath and twist them.

System: After successfully casting this ritual, the Cainite's player rolls Manipulation + Empathy (difficulty of the target's Willpower). The target must be under full blood oath to the caster. If successful, the *koldun* may turn the intense love and devotion into lust, friendship or something yet more perverse. The change lasts only until sunrise, but it can affect targets across the world as easily as ones in the same room.

Nemesis of the Living Earth

Level-Five Ritual

Beginning a long malediction lasting from midnight to sunrise, a *koldun* may name a target as an enemy of nature. At the conclusion of the ritual, the player rolls and the vampire drips a single point of vitae onto the bare ground. If successful, all elements turn against the victim. Sparks leap from bending flames to scorch him, the earth opens pits and muddy sinkholes in his path, branches catch and entwine him, water splashes to drown him, and chill winds blow unceasingly upon him. Such an unfortunate soul will not last long, as one can find no sanctuary from the world itself. Only death or forgiveness of the *koldun* may lift the curse.

System: Any game effects of the curse rest with the cruelty of Storyteller imagination. Though such misfortune always begins subtly enough, the manifestations soon grow into freakish and impossible conjunctions of coincidence.

Create Vozhd

Level-Six Ritual

Combined with Vicissitude, this ritual enables a *koldun* to fashion the great and terrible living weapons known as *vozhd* (see **Dark Ages: Vampire** p. 314). The caster must gather a minimum of 15 ghouls battered on his own vitae, the assembled mass of which each ingest a concoction of mixed blood taken from the group. The concoction need not be drunk willingly. After this preparation, the *koldun* chants continuously while employing Vicissitude to mold the ghouls into a single composite being. Technically, another individual may perform the actual sculpting, but most *koldun* find the task relaxing. This process takes a number of hours equal to the ghouls used minus seven, and fails if the caster breaks off the chant for any reason. If the casting continues past sunrise, the caster must maintain the work and chant while struggling to remain awake.

Mortis

Not as quick or fluid as the blood sorcery of the Usurpers, and yet implacable as death itself, the grim magic of the Cappadocians concerns itself with all aspects of dying, from the reanimation of flesh and evocations of decay to ill humors transmuted by undeath. Still, it was not until recently that the Clan of Death delved at last into the study of the incorporeal and what lies beyond the shroud. It is to this end that the Cappadocians brought the Venetian sorcerers of the Giovanni family into their clan, and with them the fell arts of *nigrimancy*. Unlike the Lamia, the Giovanni do not jealously hoard their proprietary path. They freely barter secret for secret, amassing the rituals of their elders in exchange for power over the restless dead.

Nigrimancy

Abandoning any focus on the flesh, the path of *nigrimancy* concerns itself solely with the spirits of the dead. Though its teachings loosely derive from practices of mortal sorcery, the path is as far removed from such magic as Thaumaturgy from living Hermetic arts. As all Disciplines, *nigrimancy* is ultimately an expression of the Curse of Caine. Vampires embody the shroud that severs life from death and so exist forever suspended between the two. The Giovanni well understand that blood is the life, and the blood of Caine holds terrible power to summon and enslave the dead. All Giovanni Cappadocians must take *nigrimancy* as their primary path if they knew the art in life. Otherwise they may choose their starting path normally. Non-Giovanni Cappadocians may not select *nigrimancy* as their starting path without a remarkable explanation.

• Witness of Death

Before it is possible to control the dead, one must perceive them. This power does just that, attuning a vampire's unliving senses to the presence of the incorporeal. Under its effects, a Cainite sees ghosts as translucent phantoms gliding among the living and hears their whispers and moans. She feels the spectral cold of their touch and smells their musty hint of decay. Yet one can not mistake the dead for the living, as they remain immaterial phantoms without true substance, dimmer and less real than creatures of flesh and blood. When a vampire uses this power, her eyes flicker with pale blue fire that only the dead can see. Ghosts resent being spied upon, and more powerful

shades may use their own powers to inflict their displeasure on the incautious.

System: The player spends one blood point and rolls Perception + Occult (difficulty 5). Success allows the vampire to perceive ghosts as described for the rest of the scene. Failure has no special effect apart from wasting blood; a botch means the vampire can see *only* the dead for the scene. All else appears as shapeless dim shadows. While the vampire's other senses remain attuned to the living, he is all but blind in this state and suffers a +3 difficulty to most vision-based Perception rolls and attacks. Ghosts notice the glowing eyes of a vampire using this power only with a successful Perception + Alertness roll (difficulty 7).

•• Summon Soul

From perception to conjuration, a vampire who advances his knowledge of *nigricancy* may call a ghost to his presence. The Cainite need only speak the name of the shade he wishes to summon and invoke the power of his blood. The spirit then vanishes from its present location and appears before the vampire in a vortex of shadows. The Cainite may perceive this one ghost as though employing Witness of Death, even without using that power. Although the spirit is under no compulsion to answer questions or obey commands, the vampire may employ bribery, threats or simple eloquence to obtain information or favors.

System: The player spends one blood point and rolls Manipulation + Occult (difficulty 7 or the ghost's Willpower, whichever is higher). The vampire must know the name of the ghost or have a piece of the ghost's corpse on hand. If the vampire has both, decrease the difficulty of the summons by one. Provided that the target has died and become a ghost, success means the shade appears before the Cainite as described above. Not everyone becomes a ghost — it requires a strong will to persevere in the face of death, and souls that have found peace pass on to their eternal rewards. Moreover, it is possible for the dead to suffer spiritual dissolution and destruction after they become ghosts. The Storyteller should consider all these factors when deciding whether a particular ghost exists for a vampire to summon. Vampires know if their summons should have succeeded by a feeling of sudden, terrifying descent as they reach too far into the great Beyond, so this power can be used to determine whether a soul has endured beyond death. While a failure means the vampire wastes blood, a botch calls a spirit other than the one sought — usually a malevolent ghost known as a spectre. Such a fiend torments

the one who summoned it with every wicked power at its disposal. Once a ghost is summoned, it may not deliberately move out of sight of the vampire, though it can take any other actions including direct attack. The vampire's player may spend a Willpower point to dismiss the ghost at any time (unless he rolled a botch). Otherwise, shadows engulf the spirit once more and return it to its original location at the end of the scene.

••• Compel the Shade

With this power, a vampire may reach out with the power of his blood to command a ghost directly... Such control is nearly absolute, though the ghost need only follow the letter of its orders rather than their intent. Although ghosts resent enslavement, they seldom seek direct revenge. After all, a vampire who bound them once could do so again, and few spirits wish to suffer another bout of servitude. Still, some shades are angry or powerful enough to pursue retribution, so vampires with this power are advised to exercise caution.

System: The vampire locates and approaches the intended ghost or calls it to his presence with Summon Soul. As with the previous power, he must have a part of the ghost's corpse or its name and gains the same difficulty reduction for having both. His player then spends one blood point and rolls Manipulation + Occult in a resisted roll against the ghost's Willpower (difficulty 6 for both rolls). If the vampire wins, the number of net successes determines the degree of control he has over the ghost as described below. Moreover, the vampire's control keeps ghosts that have been called with Summon Soul from returning to their original locations at the end of the scene. If the ghost wins, the vampire loses a number of Willpower points equal to the ghost's net successes. On a tie, the roll becomes an extended contest that continues each turn until one side wins. If the vampire botches at any point, the ghost is thereafter immune to any use of the vampire's *nigricancy*... If the ghost botches, it must obey as if the vampire's player had rolled five net successes.

One success: The ghost must perform one simple task for the vampire that does not place it in certain danger. It must attend to this task immediately, although it can delay the compulsion and pursue its own business at a cost of one Willpower point per scene. The ghost may not attack the vampire until this task is complete. It is possible to issue the task of answering one question, in which case the ghost must answer truthfully and to the best of its knowledge.

Two Successes: The vampire may issue two orders or ask two questions as outlined for one success. Alternatively, the vampire may demand a simple task with a real possibility of danger, as long as the danger is not certain. The ghost may delay this compulsion with Willpower.

Three Successes: The vampire may issue three orders as outlined for one success. Alternatively, he may demand the ghost fulfill one difficult and dangerous task or a simple assignment that has an extended duration of up to one month. The ghost may delay such orders with Willpower.

Four Successes: The vampire may issue four orders as outlined for one success or assign two tasks as for two successes. Alternatively, the vampire may command the ghost to perform one complex assignment that puts the ghost at extreme risk or perform any number of nonthreatening tasks as the vampire's slave for up to one month. It is possible for ghosts to delay singular tasks, but not if they are ordered to serve for a month.

Five Successes: The vampire may issue multiple orders that have a sum complexity or danger of five successes worth. Instead, the vampire may order the ghost to perform any one action that it is capable of executing within one month. Such a task can place the ghost in immediate peril of destruction, or even force it to betray and assault loved ones. It is not possible for ghosts to delay a singular task of this magnitude with Willpower — they *must* obey.

•••• Fetter the Dead

With this power, a vampire may imprison a ghost within an object or bind it to haunt a specific location for a time. Such a location may be any size, centered on a spot of the vampire's choosing. Some vampires use the threat of this dreaded power to elicit service from the dead without ever employing Compel the Shade. Other vampires use this power as a reward, since a ghost imprisoned within a corpse may speak through the cadaver's lips or possibly reanimate the entire body to carry out some unfinished task among the living.

System: The player spends one blood point while at the location for the haunting or touching the intended prison. She then has the ghost brought to her by whatever means, though Summon Soul is quickest and most reliable. Her player then rolls Manipulation + Occult (difficulty is the target's Willpower if it resists; otherwise it is 4). The difficulty rises by one if the vampire wishes to place the ghost in an object or two if the object is a corpse (maximum

difficulty 9). The difficulty decreases by one if the Cainite has a part of the spirit's corpse in addition to knowing its name (minimum difficulty 3). Each success binds the ghost within the location or object for one night, during which the spirit is physically incapable of leaving its prison. This duration extends to one week if the player spends a Willpower point or one year for a point of permanent Willpower.

Ghosts placed within a reasonably intact cadaver may attempt to animate their prison for a time. This requires a point of Willpower and a Willpower roll. The difficulty is 7 to exert voice alone, 9 to animate the entire body. Each success permits one night of the appropriate level of animation. Once this period ends or the ghost's term of imprisonment runs out, the corpse falls silent and still. The statistics for bodies reanimated in this fashion are left to Storytellers to decide, based on the power of the ghost and how badly the corpse has decayed. By default, such beings are akin to *Athanatoi* with the Mental Attributes, Charisma, Manipulation, Willpower and Abilities of the inhabiting ghost (**Dark Ages: Vampire** p. 312). It is possible to use Fetter the Dead to place a spirit within a corpse and then compel it to rise and serve as walking dead through Compel the Shade, though bodies inhabited by ghosts cannot rise under the influence of the Cadaverous Animation path.

••••• Usurer's Scales

With the final power of *nigrimancy*, a vampire may replenish a ghost's spiritual essence with the power of his blood or devour that essence to feed his preternatural will. Ghosts fear such power as they fear little else, for a vampire who drinks their soul dry casts them into ultimate oblivion.

System: The vampire must be capable of perceiving his target by some means, typically by invoking Witness of Death. He then concentrates and silently reaches out with his power. His player spends one blood point and rolls Manipulation + Occult. If the vampire wishes to transfer essence to the ghost, the difficulty is 5 and each success permits the vampire to donate one point of blood or Willpower to replenish the ghost's own Essence on a one-for-one basis. If the vampire wishes to devour a ghost, the difficulty is the ghost's Willpower. Each success steals one point of Essence and adds it to the vampire's Willpower pool. Any Willpower gained in excess of the vampire's permanent rating dissipates to no effect. It is not possible to gain blood from a ghost's ephemeral substance. Ghosts reduced to zero Essence by this power suffer immediate dissolution and fall shrieking into

oblivion. Note that a botch has the reverse effect, stealing or giving one point of Essence for every 1 rolled. Whenever a vampire uses either form of Usurer's Scales, the transferred energies appear as a cloud of red light that flows from the mouth of the donor to the mouth of the recipient. This light is unmistakable and impossible to hide, though it is visible only to ghosts and beings that can see them.

Path of Haunting

Originally developed as an outgrowth of *nigrimancy*, the Path of Haunting concerns itself less with the dead than the power the dead and death hold over the living. The Giovanni are this path's foremost practitioners, but it sees limited use throughout the clan.

• Morbid Fascination

Layering his speech with hidden subtext, a vampire with this power may infect a listener with an unhealthy fixation on death. Afflicted individuals find themselves drawn to graveyards and lonely, inauspicious places as they sink into mild or even serious depression. Mortality concerns them as never before and they see ill omens in the slightest coincidences. Mortals inevitably go mad and become suicidal if a vampire continues using this power on them for an extended period, while Cainite victims eventually succumb to torpor.

System: The vampire speaks to the target while his player spends one blood point and rolls Manipulation + Occult (difficulty of the target's Willpower). A botch indicates the vampire affects himself as though he had gained successes equal to the 1's rolled. For a number of nights equal to the successes rolled, the target suffers depression and morbid anxiety. This fixation adds +2 to the difficulty of all Social rolls (except those involving Intimidation) and adds +1 to the difficulty of all other nonreflexive rolls. If a target suffers the effects of this power for more continuous nights than her permanent Willpower, she loses a dot of permanent Willpower. The cycle continues after an interval of the new rating in days, with the victim losing one additional dot of permanent Willpower after each such iteration. Once a character drops to zero Willpower, she commits suicide (if living) or falls into torpor (if a vampire). Should the power be interrupted such that the victim goes a night without suffering the power's effects, she recovers her permanent Willpower at the rate of one dot per week. This healing can be halted by further application of Morbid Fascination, but the victim's new bout of depression must last a number of days equal to her permanent

Willpower before that trait decreases. A vampire who falls into torpor from reaching zero Willpower awakens with her original rating.

•• Summon Wisp

Infusing droplets of blood with scraps of memory and energy from the ashen realm in which ghosts dwell, a vampire with this power may conjure a sphere of flickering light that dances and moves at her command. Such wisps have a subtle hypnotic quality that may lure unsuspecting mortals into a trap or provide a clever distraction.

System: The vampire extends his upraised hand in a clutching gesture and focuses blood and will on his palm. The player spends one blood point and rolls Charisma + Occult (difficulty 5). Success conjures an orb of pale light in the vampire's waiting hand that lasts one scene. The wisp can take any color the vampire chooses and has no substance or weight. It may fly about as fast as the vampire can run, casting cold illumination as bright as a candle. Players of mortals who behold the wisp must roll Willpower (difficulty 4) and achieve more successes than the caster. Otherwise, they fall into a mild trance state. They won't necessarily follow the light unless the vampire's successes double their own, but they add +1 to the difficulty of all actions from distraction. Those who follow the light do so without regard for any but the most obvious obstacles. They will walk around trees and rocks, but they can fall prey to quicksand or walk off a high parapet. Any loud noise or other distraction immediately breaks the reverie. If the vampire's player botches the roll to conjure a wisp, the wisp appears and acts with its own malevolent agenda. Such a creature is only a nuisance, but it can display remarkable cunning in luring enemies to the vampire's haven or giving away her position.

••• Harrowing

This power extends the terror inflicted by Morbid Fascination and suppresses it wholly in the victim's subconscious. When she next sleeps, her dreams turn to nightmarish visions of her own death.

System: The vampire makes eye contact with the victim, while her player spends one blood point and rolls Manipulation + Occult (difficulty of the target's permanent Willpower). If successful, the victim feels a slight sense of unease. When she next sleeps, she suffers horrible nightmares about her own demise. Even though she cannot fully remember the content of her visions after she wakes, the emotional trauma prevents her from regaining Willpower. In addition,

her twisted *déjà vu* and unnatural paranoia give her the Nightmares and Eerie Presence Flaws (**Dark Ages: Vampire** pp. 305 and 309) for the day. A botch in casting this power inflicts the same terrible dreams on the vampire when he next slumbers.

•••• Phantasms

At this level of power, a vampire may sculpt entire hallucinations from the energies of the netherworld to terrorize the living. Such apparitions have no true substance apart from a surreal gauzy cold, nor may they speak or perform complicated actions. Still, a swarm of spectral vermin or blood raining down the walls makes its own eloquent point.

System: The vampire envisions the desired apparition, while the player spends one blood point and rolls Manipulation + Occult (difficulty 7). A botch calls the attention of a malefic ghost, giving the vampire the Haunted Flaw (**Dark Ages: Vampire** p. 309) for a number of nights equal to the 1's rolled. Each success allows the vampire to create one phenomenon or add one additional characteristic/condition to another phantom. For example, three successes could animate shadows in all dark corners to shuffle and writhe (one success) and create an illusion of dripping gore that bursts into a spray of flies when someone drew close (one success for the gore and one success for the condition). This power may create apparitions anywhere in the caster's line of sight. The Storyteller remains the final arbiter of what is or is not possible with this power.

••••• Torment

Where a vampire with lesser mastery of this path may simulate a haunting, this power attracts malicious ghosts and thins the shroud separating life and death around the victim. Such unfortunate souls face the torture of invisible merciless shades.

System: The vampire focuses all his bestial anger on the target. The player spends one blood point and rolls Manipulation + Occult (difficulty 8). On a botch, the vampire permanently gains the Haunted Flaw, attracting the vilest and most hateful ghosts. If successful, the victim feels a sudden chill. The difficulty for ghosts to affect the target with any power decreases by one for every success rolled, to a minimum of difficulty 4. Malicious ghosts flock to the target as though drawn by the scent of blood and eagerly inflict every horror at their disposal. The difficulty reduction diminishes by one every day at dawn until the victim returns to normal and all spectres lose interest. Multiple applications of this

power may not be stacked to increase duration or intensity of effect. The statistics and powers of spectres are left to Storyteller cunning, but the experience should terrify the character utterly and may well result in derangements at the very least.

Rituals of Death

As with all blood sorcery, Mortis encompasses powers beyond its paths. Through rites and spells, the Cappadocians hold grim dominion over dying, death and the restless departed. It is an advantage no other clan can match, and so the Graverobbers hoard their lore as they hoard little else. To many Cappadocians and all faithful adherents of the Road of Bones, secrets are more precious than blood and gold. Those with knowledge claim power over those who do not. Giovanni greedily trade their *nigromancy* for such scraps of might, while the Lamia turn their bloody rituals toward veneration of their dark mother.

System: Except where noted, the following rituals use the rules printed on page 196 of **Dark Ages: Vampire...** A number of these specialized rites build on the principles on a specific path. A vampire must meet the listed minimum rating for the foundation path in order to learn such a ritual. If the ritual's level exceeds the minimum rating, the vampire must still have some Mortis path rated as high as the ritual, though it need not be the listed path.

Casting of Bones

Level-One Ritual

By throwing dice carved from the knucklebones of executed criminals, a vampire may attempt to divine and positively influence his fate.

System: The player rolls one die. If the result is 6 or greater, the next roll for the character is made at -1 difficulty. If the result is 5 or less, add one to the difficulty for the character's next roll. Every time this ritual is cast in a given night, reduce the resulting number of the die by one. No matter what, a 10 always yields good luck.

Eldritch Beacon

Level-One Ritual (*Nigromancy* 1)

This ritual takes 15 minutes to cast and requires a green candle, the melted wax from which must be gathered and molded into a half-inch sphere. Anyone carrying this sphere on her person glows with baleful green light that only ghosts can see.

System: Besides calling attention to the target of this ritual, the light also acts as a conduit to the

energies of death. Any ghost using its powers on the bearer does so at -1 difficulty. The enchantment lasts one hour per success rolled.

Howl from Beyond

Level-One Ritual (Nigrimancy 1)

With 10 minutes and a bit of blood, hair or bone burnt in a candle, a vampire who knows this ritual may afflict the charred body part's owner with the power to hear the cries and moans of the netherworld.

System: This curse lasts one hour per success rolled, and the sounds of death come across as distant and distorted. Gleaning any useful information from the din rests with Storyteller discretion. Any mortal victim with a Willpower rating less than 4 finds the experience truly maddening, gaining a derangement selected by the Storyteller.

Knell of Doom

Level-One Ritual

This ritual permits a vampire to hear the act of dying and so find materials and souls for experimentation. Those who use this ritual often tend to gain a faintly distracted look that discomfits anyone who recognizes the significance of their preoccupation.

System: The vampire rings a bell of any size. Before the echoes fade from her ears, she plunges a knife into the palm of her left hand, inflicting one level of unsoakable lethal damage. If the ritual succeeds, the vampire knows immediately if anyone dies within a number of miles equal to her Occult rating. She also gains a sense of the death's location relative to her current position, though it requires a successful Wits + Perception roll (difficulty 6) to discern any measure of distance. The vampire hears a sound as of a great iron bell tolling for every death. The rituals effects last until sunrise.

Eyes of Despondent Revelation

Level-Two Ritual

The vampire covers his eyes in a gesture of lament and chants in a soft whisper. If the ritual succeeds, the vampire withdraws his hands and opens his eyes to the spite of entropy. All things appear overlaid with the touch of decay, aged well past their present forms... All mortals appear gaunt and ill, while vampires assume the radiant flush of their stolen health. The most important truth revealed by this sight, however, is that of ending fate. A mortal destined to die soon appears overlaid with black stains suggestive of her demise. A murder victim shows tarry wounds, while a plague sufferer manifests spectral sores and so forth. It

is impossible to know exactly when someone fated for death will perish. Generally, the stains darken as death approaches, but a truly violent demise may yield deceptively dark stains long before the end. Ultimately, the vampire knows only that death will triumph soon, and perhaps hints as to the manner of that triumph. The information is not nearly enough to prevent that end, assuming fate can be altered at all.

System: The game effects of this ritual, if any, are left to Storytellers to devise. This ritual is largely a matter of increased sensory information, which the Storyteller should take into account when narrating details noticed by the vampire. The second sight granted by this ritual lasts until the vampire next sinks into slumber.

Hungry Mold

Level-Two Ritual

The vampire scrapes mold from a tombstone or grave and boils it in an iron kettle with vitae and raw animal fat. For every success on the casting roll, one cup of the mixture turns a sickly gray-green and thickens to a quivering gel. Any leftover ingredients must be strained away before the ritual can continue. Finally, the vampire drips a single drop of his blood into the gel to awaken it. From this point on, the mold becomes a deadly flesh-eating fungus. It greedily devours living or unliving flesh on contact, leaving patches of naked bone where a growing colony abscessed and ravaged all soft tissue. Even the caster is not immune, requiring his utmost caution in handling the mold. Typically, Cappadocians decant the mold into metal vials or other portable containers for use as weapons.

System: Each batch of mold lasts one full month, after which it loses all magic. Anyone splashed with the mold suffers dice of aggravated damage equal to the total cups that made contact with flesh. This damage continues each turn, reduced by one die until the magic is spent.

Kiss of Ages

Level-Two Ritual (The Grave's Decay 1)

This clever adaptation of The Grave's Decay disposes of leftover bodies even as a vampire feeds. A vampire enchanted with Kiss of Ages may drink a mortal dry and then release her body as it crumbles to ash. This ritual serves chiefly to aid in feeding. Unfortunately, the properties of the ritual make it nearly impossible to administer the Embrace without the aid of some tool or assistant to perform exsanguination.

System: The vampire mixes a handful of ashes or dust from a human corpse with a point of her own vitae



and drinks the potion. The player makes the standard roll. On a botch, the ritual fails to transmute the ashes. The vampire regurgitates the paste along with one additional blood point for every 1 rolled. Success imbues the vampire's bite with entropy until the next full moon. Should he bite an intact corpse, this withering energy flows into the body and rots it to dust over three turns. Such decay mirrors the effects of the power *Destroy the Husk*. The vampire delivers this magic once per success rolled and may not withhold the effect to save it for a later occasion. Upon the full moon, all remaining "charges" dissipate.

Skull of Warning

Level-Two Ritual

The vampire takes an intact human skull and cleans it thoroughly, painting its eye sockets and teeth with her own vitae. She then impales the skull on an iron spike and places it near the entrance of her haven.

System: If the ritual succeeds, the skull stands silent perpetual vigil. Should any being other than the caster or undead minions belonging to the caster enter the room, the skull's jaw drops and it lets out an unearthly howl of rage and pain. This sound awakens even a vampire sleeping during the day, although she must then struggle to stay awake normally. An enchanted skull continues shrieking until the intruder dies or leaves, or a number of minutes pass equal to the successes rolled. A single skull can serve as the focus of this ritual any number of times.

Unearth the Hidden Corpses

Level-Two Ritual (*Nigrimancy* 1)

After tying a human finger bone to a blood-soaked leather thong, a vampire who knows this ritual may speak the name of a deceased individual. If the ritual succeeds, the bone becomes as a lodestone, pointing infallibly to the spot where the greatest quantity of the target's physical remains lie. If no such place exists, such as in the case of someone who was cremated and her ashes scattered, the bone simply twirls in place aimlessly. As many *nigrimancy* powers function more effectively if a vampire has part of the ghost's corpse in addition to her name, this ritual sees frequent use among the Giovanni.

System: This ritual functions exactly as described above. Failure has no effect, while a botch shatters the bone.

Fettered Minion

Level-Three Ritual (*Cadaverous Animation* 3)

By mingling his blood with ashes from a destroyed *Athanatos*, a vampire with this ritual may

imbue a loyal ghoul with necrotic power. the ghoul must be sworn to the caster through a full blood oath for this ritual to function.

System: The vampire creates a potion of vitae and ashes and feeds it to the ghoul. If the ritual fails, the blood nourishes the ghoul as normal vitae but otherwise has no effect. A botch renders the mixture highly toxic, inflicting one level of unsoakable aggravated damage per blood point of potion swallowed. Success transmutes the vitae into something more potent than Cainite blood. The vampire may transmute as many blood points of the potion as the number of successes rolled. While a ghoul retains any of the vitae tainted in this manner, she suffers the effects of the Visage of Death Flaw (see p. 203) but reduces all wound penalties by one die. If the ghoul spends or loses vitae, she loses tainted points first. Should the ghoul perish with tainted vitae in her veins, her corpse immediately rises as an *Athanatos* (**Dark Ages: Vampire** p. 312). The blood oath still binds the corpse, causing the monster to obey its creator to the best of its abilities and limited intelligence. Every evening, the corpse knight loses one of its tainted blood points. When it depletes its pool, it loses all animation (though it may be subsequently reanimated) through standard Cadaverous Animation powers.

Graveyard Mists

Level-Three Ritual (*Nigrimancy* 3)

The vampire chants a paean to the dead and bites his tongue, spitting one point of blood upon the earth. If the ritual succeeds, wisps of luminous fog rise from the spot where the blood fell and spread through the surrounding area.

System: Within minutes of successful casting, the unnatural mist blankets the earth and coils above in tattered streamers, filling a radius of two yards per success. Each minute that passes reduces this area by one yard. Apart from its usual obscuring qualities, the fog also reveals any ghosts as translucent phantasms to all onlookers. The dead may whisper softly at a cost of one Willpower point per minute of conversation, though they vanish and fall silent again if they step beyond the fog.

Implacable Vigor

Level-Three Ritual

By swallowing the ashes of a cremated *Athanatos*, a vampire who knows this ritual may briefly gain some of the creature's strength and resistance to pain.

System: For every success rolled, the vampire may gain a dot in a Physical Attribute or subtract one die from his total wound penalties. Only one success may be applied to each Attribute, and the vampire may not exceed normal generational limits. Unfortunately, the strength of the dead comes with the savage hunger of the dead, increasing all rolls to resist frenzy by 2. A caster who botches this roll immediately enters frenzy.

Malediction of Fetid Veins

Level-Three Ritual

After a turn of fierce incantation, the vampire spits blood in the direction of another vampire or ghoul in his direct line of sight. The blood need not strike the victim, it merely accompanies the invisible spray of vitriolic force. This force rots vitae, making it an effective weapon against ghouls and vampires both.

System: Treat the casting roll as an attack that may be dodged at +1 difficulty but not parried. If the magic hits, roll the vampire's Mortis rating (difficulty 7). Each success rots one blood point into inert sludge. Although vampires suffer no other injury from the spell, ghouls suffer one level of lethal damage for every blood point they lose. This damage may be soaked, provided that the ghoul does not lose all vitae. A ghoul slain with this ritual reeks of sepsis and assumes a terrible visage, every vein bulging and darkened with rot. This ritual has no effect on ordinary mortals or any other supernatural beings.

Mark of Despair

Level-Four Ritual (*Nigrimancy* 4)

The vampire mixes equal parts of blood from a vampire and an innocent mortal. The vitae need not come from the caster, nor must the innocent perish in yielding blood. For especially large projects, multiple "donors" may be needed. After gathering the blood and steeping it in herbs and unguents used to prepare bodies for burial, the Cainite anoints her forehead and eyes with the crimson salve. She then daubs droplets in a scattered ring around the periphery of the warded area. If the ritual succeeds, everything within the circle resonates with the wrathful taint of Caine's Curse and the undying hunger of the Beast.

System: Any ghost that approaches a barrier created with this ritual feels a sense of inherent wrongness that intensifies the closer it gets. Upon crossing the threshold, the ghost feels overwhelmed with soul-searing anguish that drains one point of Willpower each turn until it leaves. A ghost reduced to Will-

power 1 flees in tears and can not even attempt to enter such a ward until it completely refills its Willpower pool. No limit exists on the maximum area a vampire may ward with this ritual, provided he has enough salve prepared for the task. Such wards remain potent for one week per success, although this duration can be extended to a year at the cost of one permanent point of Willpower.

Peek Past the Shroud

Level-Four Ritual (*Nigrimancy 1*)

This hour-long ritual enchants a handful of ergot (a mold that grows on grains prior to harvest in cold, damp weather) to act as a catalyst for second sight.

System: By eating a pinch of the magical mold, a subject gains the benefits of the *nigrimancy* power Witness of Death (p. 193) for a number of hours equal to the vampire's Stamina. Each success on the casting roll creates three doses of enchanted ergot. A botch worsens the natural toxicity of ergot such that each dose inflicts eight dice of lethal damage to anyone ingesting it, even a vampire.

Resurrection of Stirred Blood

Level-Four Ritual

This ritual may be used in one of two ways, to aid in rising from voluntary torpor or to pull another Cainite from her own torpor.

System: To rise from the sleep of ages, the vampire takes vitae and laboriously paints herself with glyphs. If the ritual succeeds, the vampire specifies the duration and immediately sinks into torpor. Once this time passes, the player spends one point of Willpower and rolls Willpower against a difficulty of (10 – the character's Road rating). This roll replaces the usual awakening roll. If successful, the vampire rises to full consciousness. Failure means the vampire remains in torpor but may try again until she succeeds or runs out of Willpower. Willpower lost to failed attempts returns at the rate of one point each decade of rest. A botch means the ritual's magic ends and the vampire must rely on standard awakening rolls to arise.

Pulling another Cainite from torpor requires the same painting of glyphs on the target's body. The vampire lays fingers over the eyes of the slumbering Cainite and concentrates. Her player spends one point each of blood and Willpower and rolls Willpower at a difficulty of (10 – the torpid vampire's Road score). Success means the vampire's eyes snap open and the arisen vampire must immediately check for frenzy at difficulty 5. Failure means the vampire remains torpid and the future difficulty to use the ritual

increases by one (maximum 10)... A botch drives the Cainite performing the ritual into torpor.

Veil That Bars Eternity

Level-Four Ritual

By chanting and soaking a fine burial shroud in her own vitae, a Cainite may enchant the cloth with a measure of her own immortality. This cloth can then be placed over a corpse to suspend decomposition. Rumors persist of powerful Cappadocians with huge underground caverns filled to bursting with human corpses, all carefully preserved against a time when the Graverobber will need to retreat from the world for hundreds of years.

System: The player spends 3 blood points in addition to making the standard roll. If the ritual succeeds, the shroud retains a faint red hue long after the blood dries and flakes away. Placed over a corpse, the shroud suspends all decay. The body remains indefinitely frozen in time as surely as a vampire. Once the shroud is removed, time affects the cadaver normally and the shroud loses its magic. This ritual is often used to keep a well stocked larder of food and fresh material for experimentation.

Draught of Dust and Ashes

Level-Five Ritual

Removing all clothing, the vampire kneels in a place hallowed for the dead. Such a place may be an elaborate mausoleum or an unearched pauper's grave, but the location must have been intentionally built or excavated to house human remains and then used for that purpose. The vampire meditates for an hour, attuning herself to the realm of the dead as she draws on its unhallowed power.

System: If the ritual succeeds, the vampire's player rolls Courage (difficulty 4). Each success yields one point of Willpower that may take the character above her normal maximum. These Willpower points may also be used in place of blood to power Disciplines with such requirements, but the Willpower may not replace blood for any other task. Any Willpower gained from this ritual in excess of the vampire's normal rating fades at sunrise. Once this ritual drains the negative energies of a tomb, that location yields no Willpower for a number of nights equal to the points taken from it. After this recovery duration passes, the vampire may return for more power.

Sanctuary of Living Death

Level-Five Ritual (*Cadaverous Animation 5*)

Rather than animating individual corpses, Cappadocians who know this ritual may enchant

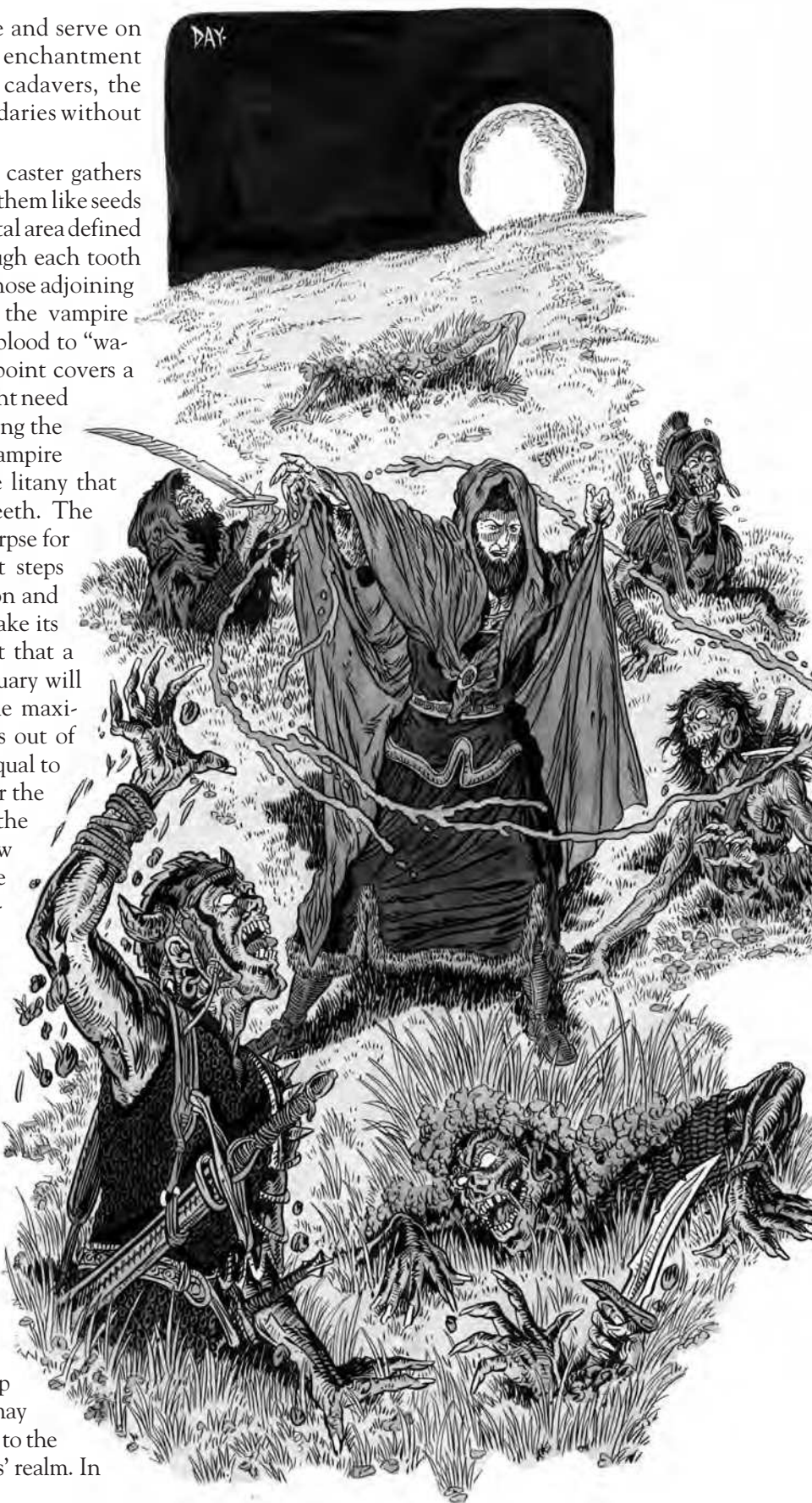
an area so that the dead may move and serve on command. Unfortunately, as the enchantment rests in the place rather than the cadavers, the walking dead cannot leave its boundaries without reverting to true lifelessness.

System: To cast this ritual, the caster gathers the teeth of dead murderers and sows them like seeds at the border of the sanctuary. The total area defined by this “fence” can be any size, though each tooth may be no more than one foot from those adjoining it. Once this process is complete, the vampire retraces his steps, dripping his own blood to “water” the planted teeth. Each blood point covers a strip five yards long, so a vampire might need to feed several times before completing the circuit. After the border is set, the vampire stands at the center and recites the litany that awakens the power of the sown teeth. The enchanted land may animate one corpse for every success rolled. A corpse that steps beyond the sanctuary loses animation and another rises within the borders to take its place. This also occurs in the event that a risen corpse is destroyed. The sanctuary will continue raising corpses to keep the maximum number available until it runs out of corpses or raises a cumulative total equal to the number of teeth sown. Only after the last tooth loses enchantment may the entire lot be reset with blood and a new casting. All bodies animated by the land have the statistics of Corpse Servants (see p. 313 of *Dark Ages: Vampire*) but may attack to the best of their feeble abilities. Their chief strength lies in numbers and their ability to quickly replace those numbers. If the ritual botches, count 1’s as successes in determining the intensity of effect; the corpses raised by the land single out the caster for destruction.

Orpheus' Descent

Level-Six Ritual (*Nigrimancy 5*)

The vampire chants from dusk to midnight, imploring the chthonic gods of death to open a path to their lightless realm. If the ritual succeeds, a deep fissure tears in the earth. The vampire may descend into this crevasse and sojourn to the deepest labyrinthine recesses of Hades' realm. In



HAVEN'T I SEEN THAT BEFORE?

Astute readers will note that a handful of Merits and Flaws have been reprinted and/or modified from *Dark Ages: Players Guide to the Low Clans*. This has been done for the benefit of players who do not have that book, as well as to show alternate interpretations and priorities between Cainite social classes. Where text differs, use whichever is most appropriate for the character concept.

this nightmarish plane, rock and bone conjoin in impossible architecture as from a blasphemous thing never born — and yet the walls themselves undulate as with slow breathing. The vampire may find the oldest and the most wicked of the dead with enough searching, and untold wonders and horrors besides. It is the immutable law of such descent that the vampire finds who or what he seeks before dawn, provided that the object of his desire exists among the dead... Once the vampire finds this thing or person, he must turn his back and climb up the infinite steps and passages that lead to the living world. Such a journey may appear to take hours or days or an eternity compressed into moments, but the vampire arrives at least an hour before sunrise on the night he left. If he never once looked back, the object of his quest emerges with him.

System: Ghosts restored to “life” in this fashion have until the next dusk to enjoy the remembered pleasures of flesh and make their final peace before their souls slip into the great unknown that lies beyond the underworld. If the object is inanimate, it endures and functions according to its nature as if remade. Only objects that once belonged to the living world may be reclaimed with this ritual.

New Merits and Flaws

The following Traits are primarily intended for vampires of the High Clans, either because they tie into particular clans or assume social dominance. With Storyteller permission, however, any vampire may possess these Merits and Flaws unless otherwise noted.

Physical

Controlled Thirst (1-pt. Merit)

Regular time spent among mortals has dulled the hungers of your palette. You reduce the difficulty of any frenzy roll involving the sight, scent or taste of blood by one. You cannot frenzy from sensing blood if

your blood pool is full; conversely, you lose your normal difficulty reduction if your blood pool is less than a quarter full (rounded down).

Mark of Pure Blood (2-pt. Merit)

You have a physical mark that emerged during your Embrace, akin to a birthmark. This mark is part of your lineage and helps establish credibility as an heir to power and reputation of your sire's line. Players should work with the Storyteller to define the mark, whether it is a particular tint of the eyes, an actual discoloration of skin or something more exotic. All such marks are within the bounds of natural possibility and/or easily concealed, ensuring that mortals do not automatically suspect your undead nature. While this Merit has no system per se, you are more difficult to impersonate and your mark may carry status with vampires who know its significance.

Trained Scent (2-pt. Merit)

You have an uncanny ability to smell blood that appeals to you or repulses you, even while it flows in the veins of your unsuspecting prey. This Merit only benefits Ventrue and other vampires with discerning hunger, such as through the Flaws Prey Exclusion (*Dark Ages: Vampire* p. 305) or Selective Thirst (see p. 205). Sensing blood you feel strongly about requires a reflexive Perception + Alertness roll (difficulty 6), and you must actually be close enough to breathe the target's scent — usually within three yards. Picking a single target out of a crowd may require a second Wits + Alertness roll at a difficulty determined by the Storyteller.

Unblinking Vigil (1-pt. Flaw)

Your eyes do not close — ever. Perhaps you stared too deeply into the Abyss or fleshcrafted away your eyelids for better alertness. Your quirk probably makes astute observers uncomfortable (+1 to the difficulty of friendly social interactions with anyone whose player makes a successful Perception + Alertness roll at difficulty 8 to notice).

Disage of Death (2-pt. Flaw)

You bear the stamp of death on your face and pallor, revealing the truth of your undead state for all to see. You cannot mimic the “flush of life” that other Cainites may evince, and your corpse-like mien adds one to the difficulty of all Social rolls not based on Intimidation. Cappadocians may not purchase this Flaw.

Bloodrot (3-pt. Flaw)

You are afflicted with an insidious form of decay that blackens your skin and veins with mold as it

slowly devours your unliving flesh. You may not have an Appearance rating higher than 1 and you suffer three dice of unsoakable lethal damage upon arising each night at dusk. Although your disease is not contagious, your mildewed visage makes other Cainites uneasy and inflicts the same Social penalties as Leprosy in civilized company unless you take great pains to cover yourself. This Flaw is worth only one point to Nosferatu and other monstrous vampires.

Mask of Everyman (3-pt. Flaw or 2-pt. Merit)

You have no face to call your own. Every sunset you awaken with a new visage, an amalgamation drawn from memory and imagination. Your attractiveness and outward sex remain constant, but your apparent ethnicity and features are utterly protean. You can use Malleable Visage and a looking glass or other reflective surface to reconstruct your true face from memory, but this requires at least three successes at difficulty 8 to make you recognizable and five successes for a flawless copy. Characters must have at least one dot of Vicissitude to purchase this Trait. Although this Trait is normally a Flaw for vampires concerned with maintaining recognition and reputation, it may be a Merit for Fiends on the run from vengeful sires or witch hunters.

Poor Digestion (5-pt. Flaw)

Generations of royal inbreeding and minimal activity in life have left you infirm in undeath... Your frail constitution has greater difficulty drawing nourishment from human or animal blood, requiring you to drink two blood points for every one added to your blood pool. Cainite blood still affords full nourishment, which may well lead you to the forbidden hunger of the Amaranth.

Mental

Ability Aptitude (1-pt. Merit)

You are particularly gifted with one Ability. Perhaps you are a poet of great renown or a master fleshcrafter. Within your specific Aptitude, reduce all difficulties by 2. Characters may purchase this Merit more than once, but Storytellers should feel free to veto any Ability selections that seem too powerful or unbalanced, especially for combat Abilities.

Focused Rage (1-pt. Merit)

You have partially transcended the blood fury of your clan by focusing your Beast's anger. Select one frenzy condition from the chart on page 265 of *Dark*

Ages: Vampire... When faced with that provocation, you automatically frenzy. You do not suffer the usual difficulty increase to other frenzy conditions, however. The Storyteller must approve the selected condition. Only Brujah and other vampires who suffer a similar frenzy difficulty increase may purchase this Merit.

Lion-Hearted (1-pt. Merit)

In a moment of great crisis, you may call upon your honor and nobility to fortify your resolve. Once per story, you may spend a point of Willpower to substitute your Road rating for both your Self-Control/Conviction and Courage for the scene. Characters who ascribe to roads that do not venerate heroism and valor may not purchase or retain this Merit, particularly those on the Road of Sin (although followers of the *Via Adversarius* may possess this Merit; see **Road of Sin** for more information).

Artful Visionary (2-pt. Merit)

You are a consummate artist at heart. You reduce the difficulty of any roll to create something new by 1. This can be actual Expression or Crafts rolls, or even the development of a new tactic or torture method... Conversely, you add +1 to the difficulty of any repetitive or menial task. You are ill suited to such labor — surely everyone should see that you are more important than mere drudgery!

Cathartic Fury (2-pt. Merit)

Forced to play the part of the civilized monster, you find solace and strength in periodic outbursts of rage. At the conclusion of any frenzy, roll Courage (difficulty 5). Each success restores one point of Willpower, up to your usual maximum. Vampires with this Merit still suffer degeneration for their frenzy if such anger violates the tenets of their road.

Meticulous Planner (2-pt. Merit)

You are inhumanly thorough in your preparations, weighing contingencies and every course of action with cold, calculating precision. You may substitute Intelligence for Wits in any situation where your dedication may prevent you from being caught flat-footed or unprepared, and the Storyteller should occasionally give you advice as per the Common Sense Merit (**Dark Ages: Vampire** p. 305).

Obsessive Savant (2-pt. Merit)

You have a particular fixation that drives your existence, be it as esoteric as death or vampirism or as mundane as the tactics of chess. You must have one Specialty for an Ability (usually a Knowledge, although

sometimes a Skill) that forms the core of your obsession... For rolls involving this specialty, you reduce the difficulty by three in addition to receiving the usual bonus die (minimum difficulty of 3). Your intensity discomfits those who do not share your obsession, adding +1 to the difficulty of most Social rolls with people who observe you indulging your hobby. Storytellers should feel free to veto any Obsessions that seem too powerful or unbalanced for their games.

Disciplined Eye (3-pt. Merit)

With a point each of blood and Willpower and a successful Willpower roll (difficulty 6), you may force your third eye closed for a full scene. It will not betray you no matter what Valeren powers you use. Other Salubri may regard your with distrust or envy if they know of your unusual gift. Only vampires with two or more dots of Valeren may purchase this Merit.

Well-Educated (3-pt. Merit)

Either through monastic training or determined royal tutors, you are one of the lucky few to receive superlative tutelage in classics, natural sciences and theology... Whenever you attempt a task involving a Knowledge you do not possess, your player may still roll at +1 difficulty as if the required Ability was a Skill. Characters must have at least three dots of Academics to purchase this Merit.

Iron Will (5-pt. Merit)

Your mind is as a castle, daring intruders with towers of ego and walls of raw will. Any attempt to affect you with Dominate or otherwise magically tamper with your mind adds 2 to the usual difficulty. Characters must have a Willpower of 8+ to purchase or retain the benefits of this Merit.

Unimpressed (5-pt. Merit)

You have tight control over your emotions and a monstrous awareness of self. All rolls to affect you with Presence or otherwise magically tamper with your emotions add 2 to the difficulty. Only characters with Self-Control 4+ and Willpower 6+ may purchase or retain the benefits of this Merit.

Noble Arrogance (1-pt. Flaw)

You have never known an existence other than privilege and wealth, either in life or undeath. You fervently believe in your innate superiority over mere mortals and the riffraff of the Low Clans, perhaps too much. You cannot believe that your inferiors could ever pose a real threat. As such, you are prone to underestimating adversaries of lesser station and your haughty bearing adds 2 to the

difficulty of all Social rolls to interact with those you perceive as beneath you. Characters must have at least two dots of Status to purchase this Flaw.

Poor Taste (1-pt. Flaw)

Your aesthetic runs counter to that of society, or perhaps you really are simply a tasteless cretin with pretensions of class. In either case, you add 1 to the difficulty of Social rolls involving mainstream artists or critics. Intimidation rolls suffer also with this penalty — you are graceless even at the art of fear.

Fierce Bigot (2-pt. Flaw)

You hold particular hatred or disdain for a specific class or community of mortals, most likely the common rabble of serfs and servants. You make all frenzy checks at +2 difficulty around such individuals and always attack them first if you do succumb to frenzy.

Enraptured by Beauty (3-pt. Flaw)

Your preternatural senses and aesthetics find beauty supernaturally enthralling. Whenever you encounter music, art or even a pretty face that appeals to your tastes, you fall into trancelike reverie until the object leaves your senses or the scene ends. You may not even break away to defend yourself, though an attack permits a new roll to resist. Characters with this Flaw may avoid or break free of rapture with a Self-Control or Instinct roll (difficulty 6). Toreador may not purchase this Flaw.

Atrophied Heart (4-pt. Flaw)

You have grown cold and aloof, emotionally detached from the ever-changing world around you. You certainly understand good and evil as philosophical concepts, but morality is no longer something you *feel* with any passion. As a result, you add 2 to the difficulty of any degeneration check and pay double the usual experience to raise Compassion/Conviction or Road. True Brujah may not purchase this Flaw.

Selective Thirst (4-pt. Flaw)

Your aristocratic palette prefers the taste of a particular “vintage” of mortal blood, even to the point of spurning all other flavors. You may favor the delicate nectar of youthful virgins, the robust draught of the Norse or the touch of piety in a priest’s veins. Whatever your tastes, you may drink only from mortals who meet your criteria. All other blood tastes foul and rancid to you, and you will immediately vomit it like mortal food even in the

throes of frenzy. Even your exacting sensibilities find Cainite blood sweet to the taste, no matter its source. Ventrue may not purchase this Flaw.

Degenerate (Variable Cost Flaw)

You have already begun your descent into the jaws of the Beast. Reduce your starting Road rating by one dot per point awarded by this Flaw. Characters may not begin play with a lower Road rating than their Conscience/Conviction.

Social Merits and Flaws

Master of Protocol (1-pt. Merit)

Your sire or another mentor has laboriously tutored you in most forms of etiquette, even customs outside your own culture and time. You likely know the proper greeting for a Roman senator or the appropriate bow for a caliph as easily as the titles of address within your own kingdom. As such, you may learn as many Etiquette specialties as your Intelligence + Etiquette, and you receive a -1 difficulty to any Etiquette roll involving those specialties.

Unbroken Lineage (1- or 2-pt. Merit)

You can perfectly recite your lineage back to your Antediluvian progenitor. If this Merit is worth only one point, noble Cainites accept your recitation and treat you more favorably as a true keeper of the Traditions. If this Merit is worth two points, your bloodline has sufficient prestige to warrant an extra dot of Status that remains as long as none of your direct ancestors rejects you. Even if you err and lose face, you always have at least one dot of Status from your birthright.

Former Ghoul (3-pt. Merit)

You spent a number of years as a ghoul prior to receiving the Embrace. As such, you have a better understanding of Cainite society and the powers of the Blood. The difficulty of all rolls to recall such information is 2 less than normal. In addition, you may purchase Potence with your starting Discipline dots, although it is not considered a Clan Discipline unless that is normally the case.

Secrets (1- to 5-pt. Merit)

You know something important — probably something you shouldn't know. You may use this secret for blackmail or simply file it away for use in

some future night. The rating of this Merit determines the importance and detail of this secret. A one-point Secret may be the confirmed existence of a spy from a rival vampire court (without knowing the spy's identity). Five points means you know the spy is none other than the prince himself, or rather, a fleshcrafted doppelganger created by the Tzimisce to destabilize the court in preparation for their invasion. The player should work with the Storyteller to determine the secret, or simply trust the Storyteller to select a secret appropriate to the story. As always, the Storyteller should feel free to disallow secrets that are not appropriate to his games. Note that this Merit can also reflect clan Secrets, such as the resting place of a torpid elder or a particular koldunic ritual known to a select bloodline.

Well-Known (Variable Cost Merit)

Word of your exploits and lineage has spread through the society of the Damned. As a result, your Status applies in a number of additional cities equal to the points invested in this Merit. Should you fail in some task or lose favor with your Prince, however, word of that disgrace will spread just as quickly. Fame is ever fickle. Characters must have at least one dot of Status to purchase this Merit.

Disgrace to the Blood (2-pt. Flaw)

You were Embraced into the nobility of a High Clan. You were given power and prestige befitting your birthright — and you failed. You are now considered among the rabble of the Low Clans, when you are considered at all. You may eventually return to grace, but redemption won't be easy. You must work twice as hard to atone for your prior failure. Obviously, you may not begin play with any Status.

Prestigious Rival (1- to 5-pt. Flaw)

Your success has earned you the enmity of another noble Cainite. Your rival may outright hate you for some real or imagined grievance or simply enjoy the challenge of bringing you low. Treat this adversary as an Enemy (**Dark Ages: Vampire** p. 306), save that she has equal status among the Damned and never moves against you openly. As such, you cannot strike her directly without risking the wrath of your prince. This Flaw is worth a number of points equal to the Status

rating of the character purchasing it. Characters without Status may not purchase this Flaw.

Supernatural Merits and Flaws

Sweet Blood (1-pt. Merit)

Your vitae tastes like the finest wine, sweet and heady without the slightest trace of salt or metallic tang. As such, you may hide your blood in a chalice or feed ghouls without betraying the true nature of their draught.

Darksight (2-pt. Merit or Flaw)

At will, you may invert the meaning of light and dark to your eyes. This requires a turn of concentration and a successful Perception + Alertness roll (difficulty 7). With Darksight active, you may view pitch-black darkness as though it were brightly and uniformly lit, while torches cast a radiance that obscures perception in the manner that darkness interferes with normal senses. The significance of colors likewise inverts, lending a surreal hue to the world without interfering with your ability to separate hues. All penalties for partial darkness instead apply to weak illumination, and the absolute emptiness of sunlight and similarly bright radiance blinds you (and burns you, in the case of sunlight). The Merit does not allow you to see through mystical shadows, such as those produced by Obtenebration. As a Flaw, your Darksight is permanent; you will never again view the universe through any semblance of human vision.

Personal Aura (2-pt. Merit)

You do not project the aura associated with your road. Instead, your aura reflects some deeper aspect of your Nature or personality. You may choose the aura associated with any road or design your own (subject to Storyteller approval), calculating your aura modifier according to your permanent Willpower.

Sanctifying Kiss (2-pt. Merit)

Your lips have a particular crimson luster like roses or fine wine. Whenever you kiss someone, you leave traces of sweet vitae behind. This secretion is not sufficient to create a ghoul or sire progeny, although you may surreptitiously administer the blood oath if you kiss on the mouth or touch your

lips to an open cut. It requires a Perception + Alertness roll (difficulty 8) to notice the slight taste of your blood.

Discipline Prodigy (5-pt. Merit)

You are especially skilled in the use of one of your clan Disciplines. The difficulty to use any level of this Discipline is reduced by 1, although this Merit can never reduce the difficulty of any roll below 4. Characters may purchase this Merit only once and gain no benefit when using Discipline techniques. Prodigies of Koldunic Sorcery or other forms of blood sorcery reduce the difficulty of all paths and rituals. Prodigies of Obtenebration also find Abyss rituals easier.

Promethean Clay (5-pt. Merit)

Your flesh ripples and molds itself to your preternatural will, almost before you consciously invoke the change. The difficulty to use any Vicissitude power on you is 2 less than normal, and you may activate Vicissitude powers reflexively at your full dice pool while taking other actions. Powers that require multiple turns to activate still require the usual duration — the change simply occurs without conscious direction. As a final benefit, you need no physical sculpting to use the first three levels of Vicissitude on yourself, as your flesh undulates and extrudes to its desired shape. Only characters with at least one dot of Vicissitude may purchase this Merit.

Pure Blood (5-pt. Merit)

The Curse of Caine runs strongly in your veins. You may spend one more blood point per turn than your generation should permit. You look especially pale and drawn under Soulsight and yet oddly flushed with abundant health.

Arcane (1- to 5-pt. Merit)

You are mystically unknowable, shrouded from notice and record by the vagaries of circumstance and disinterest. Those who see you seldom care enough to remember you later. For every point invested in this Merit, subtract one die from any dice pool used to search for you actively (typically Perception and/or Investigation). Being anonymous isn't the same as being invisible, however, and Arcane does not aid in Stealth rolls or other active attempts to hide. Characters with Influence or Status may not purchase Arcane or vice versa, and Arcane can also prove a detriment to other



Backgrounds. Mentors may well lose interest in an Arcane pupil, for example. This Merit is less common among the status-conscience members of the High Clans than among the Low, though a disproportionate number of True Brujah possess it (which leads some to wonder how many Sages truly exist). It is thought that meddling with time can make time itself forget the meddler.

Gifts of the Beast (Variable Cost Merit)

Your Beast has a terrible awareness and power all its own that emerges when its wrath or fear overtakes you. You may select additional Traits that manifest only during frenzy or Röttschreck, as approved by the Storyteller. Such Beast Traits cost two fewer bonus points than normal, to a minimum cost of 1, and must be instinctive or physical in nature. In the case of Disciplines, only physical Disciplines are permitted (Celerity, Fortitude or Potence), even if they are not normally associated with your clan. Beast Traits are cumulative with normal traits, although they cannot exceed generational limits. Additional Beast Traits may not be gained or increased with experience. For example,

the Toreador Justinus is normally quiet and reserved. When his slumbering Beast awakens, however, its speed and killing prowess possess him. He gains an additional dot of Celerity and Dexterity and three dots of Brawl. The total cost of the Merit is 10 bonus points (7 – 2 for the Celerity, 5 – 2 for the Dexterity, and 2 – 2, minimum 1 for each dot of Brawl).

Animate Shadow (3-pt. Flaw)

Your shadow has a bizarre unlife of its own, reaching out with claws to grasp the shadows of those around you in a parody of feeding or billowing to a demonic mien when frenzy threatens to overtake you. Some Lasombra believe this curse afflicts only those who delve too deeply into the mysticism of the Abyss; others attribute it to infernal pacts, the wrath of God or a shameful lack of self-control. Regardless, you lose two dice from all Social rolls with other Lasombra who know of your problem. This Flaw occasionally manifests among vampires who do not belong to the Clan of Shadows, but such accursed individuals invariably disappear under mysterious circumstances, perhaps swallowed by their own alien darkness.

Bound to the Earth (4-pt. Flaw)

You feel a deep mystical connection with the earth and must rest amid two or more handfuls of soil from a place of personal significance. The dirt may come from your homeland or your empty grave, as befits your attachment. Every day of rest that you forgo such contact cumulatively halves all dice pools until all actions use a single die. This Flaw occasionally manifests among blood sorcerers as a result of botched magic, tying a vampire to a grave he violated for a ritual component or the tainted soil of Kupala's domain. Tzimisce may not purchase this Flaw.

Hand of Hades (5-pt. Flaw)

You exude the spiritual blight of death. Insects die if they fly too near you, while most small plants shrivel and die within a foot of your presence. Even large trees take on blight in the places you touch. Larger animals, including humans, suffer one level of lethal damage for every hour they spend in close proximity to you. Such damage has no outward sign, manifesting as inexplicable weakness. This neperthe also sets mortals and even vampires ill at ease, adding 1 to the difficulty of all Social rolls not involving Intimidation. Unlike the Flaw Touch of Frost (*Dark Ages: Vampire* p. 309), you really do leave a swath of desiccated grass and leaves as you pass. Cappadocians may take this Flaw in place of their normal clan curse, in which case they receive only two points and suffer their usual social difficulties, but may vainly show a "flush of life" if they so desire. Cappadocians who take this Flaw in addition to their clan curse receive the usual number of bonus points and cumulatively sum their Social penalties, adding +2 to the difficulty of all Social rolls not involving Intimidation.

Harbinger of the Abyss (5-pt. Flaw)

You are a conduit to the ultimate darkness that lies Beyond. Lights dim in your presence and shadows rustle at the edge of vision in dire anticipation of your blasphemy. Small fires extinguish when you draw close and the chill of the Void is in your touch. Your player must roll your Obtenebration rating against the soak difficulty of

any mundane flame within two yards of you. This roll is reflexive and mandatory, and success extinguishes the flame. This dimming is in addition to suffering the effects of Touch of Frost and Eerie Presence (*Dark Ages: Vampire* pp. 308–9). The Flaw conveys one benefit: Your unnatural radiance reduces the difficulty of all Intimidation rolls by 3, to a minimum difficulty of 4. Characters must have at least one dot of Obtenebration to purchase this Flaw.

Geasa (1- to 5-pt. Flaw)

A powerful magical being — a mage, a fae noble or perhaps an ancient blood sorcerer — has placed you under a pact as binding as the blood oath. Rather than commanding your adoration, your geasa compels you to fulfill or avoid certain actions lest some calamity befall you. The severity of the consequence and the ease of keeping the terms of the pact determine the rating of the Flaw. At one point, you must not feed on the members of a particular noble family or else wear the marks of your treachery as boils on your immortal face. For five points, you must remain within a remote forest or the sun will find you wherever you sleep no matter how deep or darkened your lair. As always, the Storyteller has the final say on any Geasa, including the unlikely possibility of its removal. Players should work closely with the Storyteller to develop Geasa that create story hooks rather than being obscure quirks chosen for a couple extra bonus points.

Thirst of Caine (7-pt. Flaw)

By age or some infirmity of your own blood, you derive no nourishment from the blood of animals or mortals. Though you do not immediately vomit such a meal, living blood tastes bland and provides no benefit. Only the vitae of other Cainites can sustain you. The sole advantage to such hunger is that you find no allure in human blood and thus no longer perceive humans as food. As such, the sight, scent or taste of human blood will never drive you into frenzy. If you are not extremely careful, however, your thirst will inevitably lead you to blood oaths and the forbidden draught of the Amaranth.





CHAPTER FIVE: THOSE WHO RULE THE NIGHT

Every Night and every Morn,
Some to Misery are Born.
Every Morn and every Night,
Some are Born to sweet delight.
Some are Born to sweet delight,
Some are Born to Endless Night.

— Robert Blake, *Auguries of Innocence*

The High Clans are the architects of society and the leaders of men. Their domains are many, and few have the resources to flee beyond their reach. They are noble or craven, threatening or comforting, merciful or pitiless. For good or for evil, their influence shapes the world around them through Cainite politics and human institutions. They are knights, priests and princes. As a group, they pull the strings of the Dark Medieval, and the peasants dance to their whims.

Given their stature and influence, the High Clans truly have the ability to rule the world. Luckily for the lowborn Cainites, every first cursed Cainite has his own agenda, which rarely meshes well with that of his brethren. The High Clans are made up of Cainites who are, or fancy themselves to be, chosen by God to rule, and each one envisions himself at the head of all tables. This makes them a fractious group at best, and many have learned the hard way that interfering in their games is not advisable.



THE SADISTIC CHARLATAN

I assure you that the potion will work. Don't be frightened.
Come closer and I will show you.

Background: You were the fabled seventh son of a seventh son, and the entire village sang your praises. They said you were beloved of the Fair Folk and you would bring them untold wealth and prosperity. Unfortunately for them, you had your own agenda, and anyone who dared stand in the way of that agenda earned your ire. The villagers looked the other way for a long time, wanting to believe that you were their salvation, but they finally drove you out after you'd nearly killed one of the village girls. Most young men wandering the wilderness alone would have barely lived a week. But you fell in with a caravan of peddlers who went from town to town, trading for pots and pans, furs and other products. You learned from them what you could, and then you took the caravan over. You disposed of the ones who weren't useful to you. Those who remained were too frightened to do anything but follow along.

You traveled from one place to another, staying only long enough to sate your more unusual appetites. In one city, you broke into the manor house of a lord who was reputed to have wealth beyond compare. You expected to have some fun with the elderly lord and then walk out with a nice bonus in gold. You were more than surprised when he easily bested you. Lucky for you, your audacity and lack of morals pleased him, and the last thing that you remember is a coppersy taste on your broken lips.

After spending a short time with your sire, you went back on the road. Although you ostensibly work as a trader, you could not be less interested in it. As time has passed, you've moved away from actual trading and become more of a charlatan. You sell "religious relics," love potions and miracle cures. Often, these objects are no more than slivers of wood or herbal teas.

Concept: People are always eager to see peddlers and learn the news of the world, and you play along with that enough to ensnare them. You stay in one place long enough to have your fun, and then you move along. Although you are as charming and witty as the greatest of bards, it's really not what interests you. In fact, you're really not happy unless you're proving your superiority over someone else, usually by causing pain.

Roleplaying Hints: People are cattle, and you enjoy herding them. While blood sport has always been one of your favorite pastimes, it can be just as fun to slip some vitae into a love potion and torment your clients by devouring their pretty lasses right in front of them. It's always been your style to hit and run, and if that's the case, why not hit as hard as you can? Although you tend to travel alone, you recognize that safety comes in numbers, and nomadic Cainites would likely find you a willing companion, particularly if they share your interests.

Equipment: Peddler's garb, a gaily covered wagon, horses, potion bottles and herbal teas.



Dark Ages VAMPIRE

Name:

Nature: **Barbarian**

Generation: **11th**

Player:

Demeanor: **Autocrat**

Concept: **The Sadistic Chrlatan**

Chronicle:

Clan: **Tzimisce**

Haven:

ACCRIBUTES

Physical		Social		Mental	
Strength	●●●○○○○○	Charisma	●●●○○○○○	Perception	●●●○○○○○
Dexterity	●●○○○○○○	Manipulation	●●●○○○○○	Intelligence	●●●○○○○○
Stamina	●●○○○○○○	Appearance	●●○○○○○○	Wits	●●○○○○○○

ABILITIES

Talents		Skills		Knowledges	
Alertness	●○○○○○○○	Animal Ken	○○○○○○○○	Academics	○○○○○○○○
Athletics	○○○○○○○○	Archery	○○○○○○○○	Hearth Wisdom	●●○○○○○○
Brawl	●●○○○○○○	Commerce	●●○○○○○○	Investigation	○○○○○○○○
Dodge	○○○○○○○○	Crafts	●●○○○○○○	Law	○○○○○○○○
Empathy	●●●○○○○○	Etiquette	○○○○○○○○	Linguistics	○○○○○○○○
Expression	●○○○○○○○	Melee	○○○○○○○○	Medicine	○○○○○○○○
Intimidation	○○○○○○○○	Performance	●●●○○○○○	Occult	●●○○○○○○
Leadership	●○○○○○○○	Ride	○○○○○○○○	Politics	○○○○○○○○
Legerdemain	○○○○○○○○	Stealth	○○○○○○○○	Seneschal	○○○○○○○○
Subterfuge	●●●○○○○○	Survival	●●○○○○○○	Theology	●○○○○○○○

ADVANTAGES

Disciplines		Backgrounds		Virtues	
Animalism	●○○○○○○○	Generation	●○○○○○○○	Conscience/Conviction	●●●●○
Auspex	●○○○○○○○	Resources	●●○○○○○○	Self-Control/Instinct	●●○○○
Vicissitude	●●●○○○○○	Retainer	●●○○○○○○	Courage	●●●●○
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Road Beast
●●●●●○○○○
Aura: Menace (0)
Willpower
●●●●●○○○
□□□□□□□□
Blood Pool
□□□□□□□□
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Health	
Bruised	□
Hurt	-1 □
Injured	-1 □
Wounded	-2 □
Mauled	-2 □
Crippled	-5 □
Incapacitated	□
Weakness	
Territorial	
Experience	

INNKEEPER'S DAUGHTER

If you don't understand the difference between sin and virtue, I'll have to teach you.

Prelude: Your father kept the largest inn within a day's ride, and that gave you a certain amount of pride when you were growing up. When you spoke with the other girls in the village, you'd work in as many stories as you could about the strange travelers you'd waited on the previous night. You were the envy of all of the other girls, and you had a sheltered existence compared to everyone else. You never wanted for anything.

Everything changed one night when a group of knights traveled through town on the way home after a battle. They had won, and they celebrated their victory with goblet upon goblet of wine. They were the last in the inn that night; your father was ill and had already gone to bed. You thought you'd be safe with a room full of knights, but you were wrong. They beat you within an inch of your life and would have done more terrible things if the girl hadn't intervened. She was half their size, but she threw them around like they were children, and those who could still stand ran for their life.

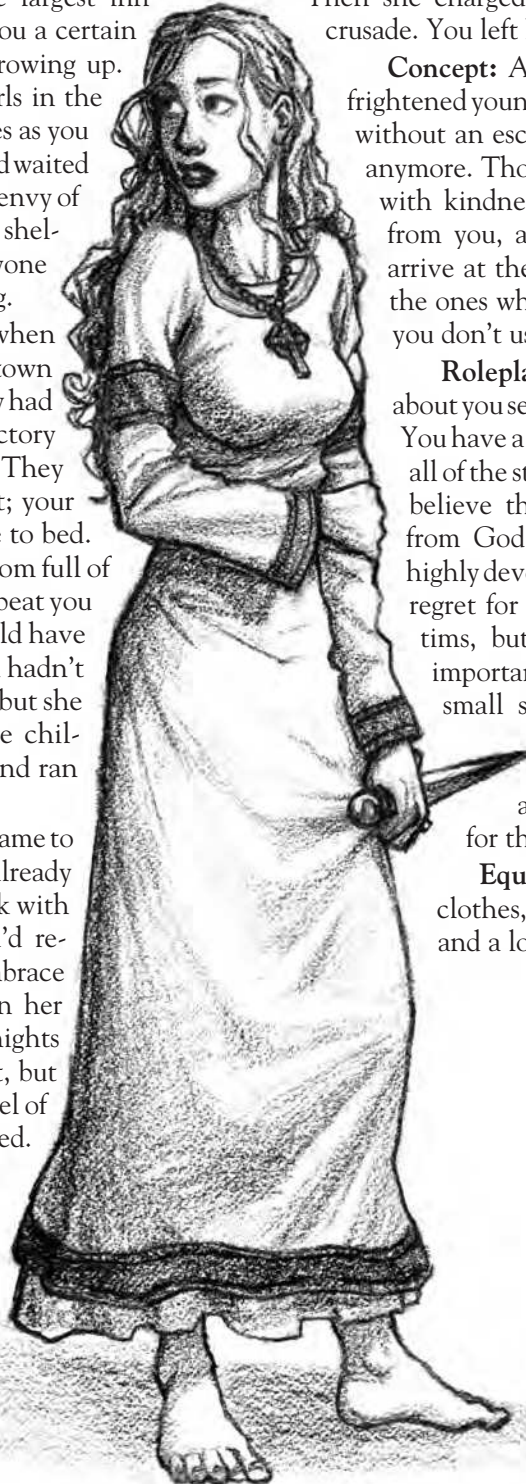
Unfortunately, by the time she came to you, it was too late. Your vision was already going dim, and your hands were slick with blood from the many wounds you'd received. You don't remember the Embrace itself, but you remember waking in her arms and how she held one of the knights for you to drink. She left that night, but first she told you that she was an angel of God, put on Earth to punish the wicked.

Then she charged you to continue on the crusade. You left home the next evening.

Concept: Although you seem to be a frightened young girl, lost in the wilderness without an escort, nothing frightens you anymore. Those travelers who meet you with kindness and offer help are safe from you, and you'll make sure they arrive at their destinations safely. But the ones who try to take advantage of you don't usually live to see sunrise.

Roleplaying Hints: Everything about you seems weak, but it's all a ruse. You have a mission, and that gives you all of the strength you need. You truly believe that your savior was a gift from God, and as a result you are highly devout. At times, you even feel regret for having to lie to your victims, but certainly God's work is important enough to justify these small sins. Regardless, you take every opportunity possible to prove your piety and do good works in thanks for the gift you've received.

Equipment: Simple peasant's clothes, sturdy boots, a few coins and a look of fear.



Dark Ages VAMPIRE

Name:

Nature: Caretaker

Generation: 8th

Player:

Demeanor: Survivor

Concept: Inkeeper's Daughter

Chronicle:

Clan: Brujah

Haven:

ACCRIBUTES

Physical		Social		Mental	
Strength	●●●○○○○○	Charisma	●●○○○○○○	Perception	●●○○○○○○
Dexterity	●●●○○○○○	Manipulation	●●○○○○○○	Intelligence	●●○○○○○○
Stamina	●●●●○○○	Appearance	●●●○○○○○	Wits	●●●○○○○○

ABILITIES

Talents		Skills		Knowledges	
Alertness	●●○○○○○○	Animal Ken	○○○○○○○○	Academics	○○○○○○○○
Athletics	●●○○○○○○	Archery	○○○○○○○○	Hearth Wisdom	●●●○○○○○
Brawl	●●●○○○○○	Commerce	○○○○○○○○	Investigation	○○○○○○○○
Dodge	●●○○○○○○	Crafts	●○○○○○○○	Law	○○○○○○○○
Empathy	○○○○○○○○	Etiquette	●○○○○○○○	Linguistics	○○○○○○○○
Expression	○○○○○○○○	Melee	○○○○○○○○	Medicine	○○○○○○○○
Intimidation	○○○○○○○○	Performance	○○○○○○○○	Occult	○○○○○○○○
Leadership	○○○○○○○○	Ride	●○○○○○○○	Politics	○○○○○○○○
Legerdemain	●○○○○○○○	Stealth	●●●○○○○○	Seneschal	●●○○○○○○
Subterfuge	●●●○○○○○	Survival	●●●○○○○○	Theology	○○○○○○○○

ADVANTAGES

Disciplines		Backgrounds		Virtues	
Celerity	●○○○○○○○	Generation	●●●●○○○○	Conscience/Conviction	●●●○○○
Potence	●●○○○○○○	Herd	●○○○○○○○	Self-Control/Instinct	●●●●○○
Presence	●○○○○○○○		○○○○○○○○	Courage	●●●●●●
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Road
Heaven (Path of Retribution)
●●●●●●●○○○
Aura: Holiness (0)
Willpower
●●●●●●○○○○
□□□□□□□□
Blood Pool
□□□□□□□□
□□□□□□□□

Health	
Bruised	□
Hurt	-1 □
Injured	-1 □
Wounded	-2 □
Mauled	-2 □
Crippled	-5 □
Incapacitated	□
Weakness	
Temperamental	
Experience	

MONKISH SCRIBE

I find solace in such simple tasks. Let us work together and see what peace it may bring.

Prelude: Like most second sons, you were destined for the Church. What made you unique is that you didn't resent it. Power and battle had no allure for you, since you were more interested in solitary pursuits. Your quiet, introspective nature made you popular with the village priest, and it was he who taught you to write. Your natural aptitude with letters made you welcome in the priesthood, and it was with a light heart that you bid your family goodbye and left for the monastery.

There, you spent hours upon hours in the small library, reveling in the written word and the artistry that went into each book. The moment that you first saw the stacks of them, hand-copied, illuminated in bright colors, flecked with gold leaf, you knew that you'd found your calling. By the time you left, you were not only ordained but were a trained scribe and bookmaker.

You were sent to a large monastery in the city, to copy and distribute the Bible to the rich noblemen who lived there. Your work was highly prized and very much in demand, and it was one of your Bibles that caught the eye of your sire. He came to you, much excited, begging to be instructed in the arts of writing and illumination. Sadly, he did not have the aptitude for it, and he was very frustrated as a result. This led to long discussions between the two of you, and eventually he confided his secret to you and offered you the Embrace. After some deliberation, you accepted. No sacri-

fice was too great for an eternity spent with your books.

Concept: Although you are a monk, you are more interested in the here and now than in discussions of virtue and the afterlife. You spend

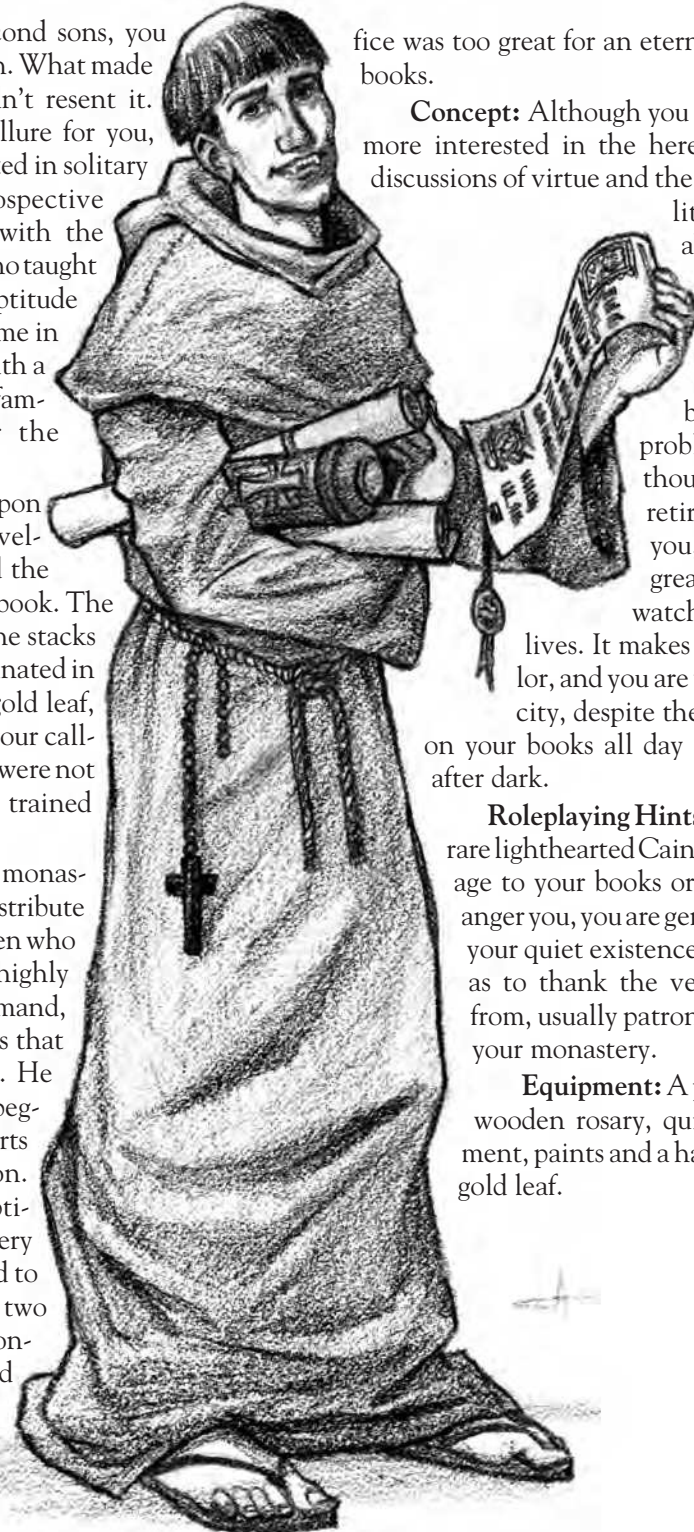
little time thinking about your status as one of the Damned.

After all, you have so much other work to be done, books to be made and problems to ponder. Although you are shy and retiring, people intrigue you, and one of your greatest joys is to sit and watch as they live their

lives. It makes you a good counselor, and you are very popular in your city, despite the fact that you work on your books all day and come out only after dark.

Roleplaying Hints: You are one of the rare lighthearted Cainites. Although damage to your books or your friends might anger you, you are generally content with your quiet existence. You even go so far as to thank the vessels that you feed from, usually patrons or other monks in your monastery.

Equipment: A plain woolen robe, a wooden rosary, quill pens and parchment, paints and a hammer to pound out gold leaf.



Dark Ages VAMPIRE

Name:

Nature: **Celebrant**

Generation: **12th**

Player:

Demeanor: **Caretaker**

Concept: **Monkish Scribe**

Chronicle:

Clan: **Toreador**

Haven:

ACCRIBUTES

Physical		Social		Mental	
Strength	●●○○○○○○	Charisma	●●●●○○○○	Perception	●●●●○○○○
Dexterity	●●○○○○○○	Manipulation	●●●○○○○○	Intelligence	●●●○○○○○
Stamina	●●○○○○○○	Appearance	●●○○○○○○	Wits	●●●○○○○○

ABILITIES

Talents		Skills		Knowledges	
Alertness	○○○○○○○○	Animal Ken	○○○○○○○○	Academics	●●●○○○○○
Athletics	○○○○○○○○	Archery	○○○○○○○○	Hearth Wisdom	●○○○○○○○
Brawl	○○○○○○○○	Commerce	○○○○○○○○	Investigation	○○○○○○○○
Dodge	○○○○○○○○	Crafts	●●●●○○○○	Law	○○○○○○○○
Empathy	●●○○○○○○	Etiquette	●●○○○○○○	Linguistics	●●○○○○○○
Expression	●●○○○○○○	Melee	○○○○○○○○	Medicine	●○○○○○○○
Intimidation	○○○○○○○○	Performance	●●●●○○○○	Occult	○○○○○○○○
Leadership	●○○○○○○○	Ride	●○○○○○○○	Politics	●●○○○○○○
Legerdemain	○○○○○○○○	Stealth	○○○○○○○○	Seneschal	●○○○○○○○
Subterfuge	○○○○○○○○	Survival	○○○○○○○○	Theology	●●●○○○○○

ADVANTAGES

Disciplines		Backgrounds		Virtues	
Auspex	●●●○○○○○	Allies	●●○○○○○○	Conscience/Conviction	●●●●○
Presence	●○○○○○○○	Herd	●●○○○○○○	Self-Control/Instinct	●●●●●
	○○○○○○○○	Influence	●○○○○○○○	Courage	●●●○○
	○○○○○○○○		○○○○○○○○		
	○○○○○○○○		○○○○○○○○		

Other Traits

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Road

Humanity

●●●●●●●●●○

Aura: Normalcy (-1)

Willpower

●●●●●○○○○○

Blood Pool

□□□□□□□□

□□□□□□□□

Health

Bruised	□
Hurt	-1 □
Injured	-1 □
Wounded	-2 □
Mauled	-2 □
Crippled	-5 □
Incapacitated	□

Weakness

Distracted by Beauty

Experience

MASTER INQUISITOR

If you only tell the truth, this pain will end. I promise you.

Prelude: You were the third son of a minor impoverished nobleman, and your father gave you the option of choosing a respectable profession or joining the Church. Piety held no appeal for you, so you eventually apprenticed yourself to a blacksmith. Unfortunately, your constitution didn't suit such taxing work very well. But you did have a keen intellect, and your master was impressed with your suggestions for improvements to his designs. He kept you on to run the business and create designs, and soon he was well known for your innovative designs and his skillful work.



When the local lord needed to outfit his dungeon, your smithy was the obvious choice. You designed new and interesting restraints and tortures, and your partner made them. When you finished, the lord asked for a demonstration. You were more than happy to oblige, and he brought up an accused murderer from the cells for you to work with. By the time you were done, the prisoner confessed to anything you wanted. The lord was so impressed that he offered you a position on the spot, and you took it.

You remained at the same post for more than twenty years, and you became an instrumental member of the household. Your intelligence was well known, and the lord consulted you on all manner of issues, not just the prisoners. One day, the guards brought you an emaciated young woman, claiming that she had attempted to steal holy objects from the local monastery. She was such a wretched creature that you spoke with her at length before beginning. Because she would admit to nothing, you had no choice. To your surprise, the woman watched your work with a critical eye and even made suggestions for improvement. Then, when you leaned in close to fasten a restraint, she bit you.

Concept: You have remained at your position even after your Embrace. Your work in the dungeons helps explain your appearance and the unusual hours that you keep. Furthermore, it's intellectually stimulating, and you're very good at it. You take your work seriously, and in fact you rarely feed from your prisoners, since your lord has entrusted them to your care. Instead, you often leave the dungeons late at night to prowl the city and visit your sire for your discussion and nightly hunt.

Roleplaying Hints: You are polite and refined, as might be expected of a nobleman's son, but you are well aware of your stature in the household. Your political skill is well honed, however, and you are not above putting words in other people's mouths when it suits you. Although you could easily take much of the power for yourself, you are more interested in your work, and you interfere only when it is absolutely necessary.

Equipment: Black robes, a cloak and hood, ring of keys, a quill and parchment to record confessions, and instruments of torture.

Dark Ages VAMPIRE

Name:

Nature: **Survivor**

Generation: **12th**

Player:

Demeanor: **Judge**

Concept: **Master Inquisitor**

Chronicle:

Clan: **Cappadocian**

Haven:

ACCRIBUTES

Physical		Social		Mental	
Strength	●●●○○○○○	Charisma	●●●○○○○○	Perception	●●●○○○○○
Dexterity	●●○○○○○○	Manipulation	●●●○○○○○	Intelligence	●●●●○○○○
Stamina	●●●○○○○○	Appearance	●○○○○○○○	Wits	●●●○○○○○

ABILITIES

Talents		Skills		Knowledges	
Alertness	●○○○○○○○	Animal Ken	○○○○○○○○	Academics	●●○○○○○○
Athletics	○○○○○○○○	Archery	○○○○○○○○	Hearth Wisdom	○○○○○○○○
Brawl	○○○○○○○○	Commerce	○○○○○○○○	Investigation	●○○○○○○○
Dodge	○○○○○○○○	Crafts	●●●○○○○○	Law	●○○○○○○○
Empathy	●●●○○○○○	Etiquette	●○○○○○○○	Linguistics	○○○○○○○○
Expression	○○○○○○○○	Melee	○○○○○○○○	Medicine	●●●○○○○○
Intimidation	●●○○○○○○	Performance	○○○○○○○○	Occult	●○○○○○○○
Leadership	●●○○○○○○	Ride	○○○○○○○○	Politics	●○○○○○○○
Legerdemain	○○○○○○○○	Stealth	●○○○○○○○	Seneschal	●●○○○○○○
Subterfuge	●○○○○○○○	Survival	○○○○○○○○	Theology	●○○○○○○○

ADVANTAGES

Disciplines		Backgrounds		Virtues	
Auspex	●●○○○○○○	Contacts	●●○○○○○○	Conscience/Conviction ●●●●●	
Fortitude	●○○○○○○○	Influence	●○○○○○○○	Self-Control/Instinct ●●●○○	
Mortis	●●○○○○○○	Resources	●○○○○○○○	Courage ●●○○○	
	○○○○○○○○	Retainers	●○○○○○○○		
	○○○○○○○○		○○○○○○○○		

Other Traits	○○○○○○○○	Road	○○○○○○○○	Health	
	○○○○○○○○	Kings (Path of the Vizier)	●●●●●●●●○○	Bruised	<input type="checkbox"/>
	○○○○○○○○			Hurt	-1 <input type="checkbox"/>
	○○○○○○○○	Aura: Command (-1)		Injured	-1 <input type="checkbox"/>
	○○○○○○○○			Wounded	-2 <input type="checkbox"/>
	○○○○○○○○	Willpower	●●●●●○○○○○	Mauled	-2 <input type="checkbox"/>
	○○○○○○○○		□□□□□□□□	Crippled	-5 <input type="checkbox"/>
	○○○○○○○○	Blood Pool	□□□□□□□□	Incapacitated	<input type="checkbox"/>
	○○○○○○○○		□□□□□□□□	Weakness	
	○○○○○○○○			Visage of Death	
	○○○○○○○○			Experience	

LADY OF LEISURE

You are advised to remember that I rule in my husband's absence.
It would not do to displease me.

Prelude: Even as a little girl, you were spoiled. The only daughter of a powerful lord whose wife died in childbirth, you were sickly as a child, and you exploited it as much as you could. The servants coddled and cared for you, and eventually your father found you a rich husband, a nobleman nearly twice your age. At first, you rebelled. You didn't want to marry an old bore like your betrothed, and you'd never been denied your wishes before. In fact, your wedding day was the only time you can remember your father raising his voice to you and denying you your heart's desire. You had no choice but to go through with the wedding.

Luckily for you, you found that the arrangement suited your tastes just fine. Your husband was often away from home, making war with the neighboring noblemen. He generally left you to your own devices, and this meant that you had free reign to sleep as late as you liked, order the servants around and find your fun elsewhere. Your castle was positioned on a busy road, and your frequent guests provided all of the entertainment you needed.

Then the traveler arrived. He was proud and aloof, and he resisted you so easily

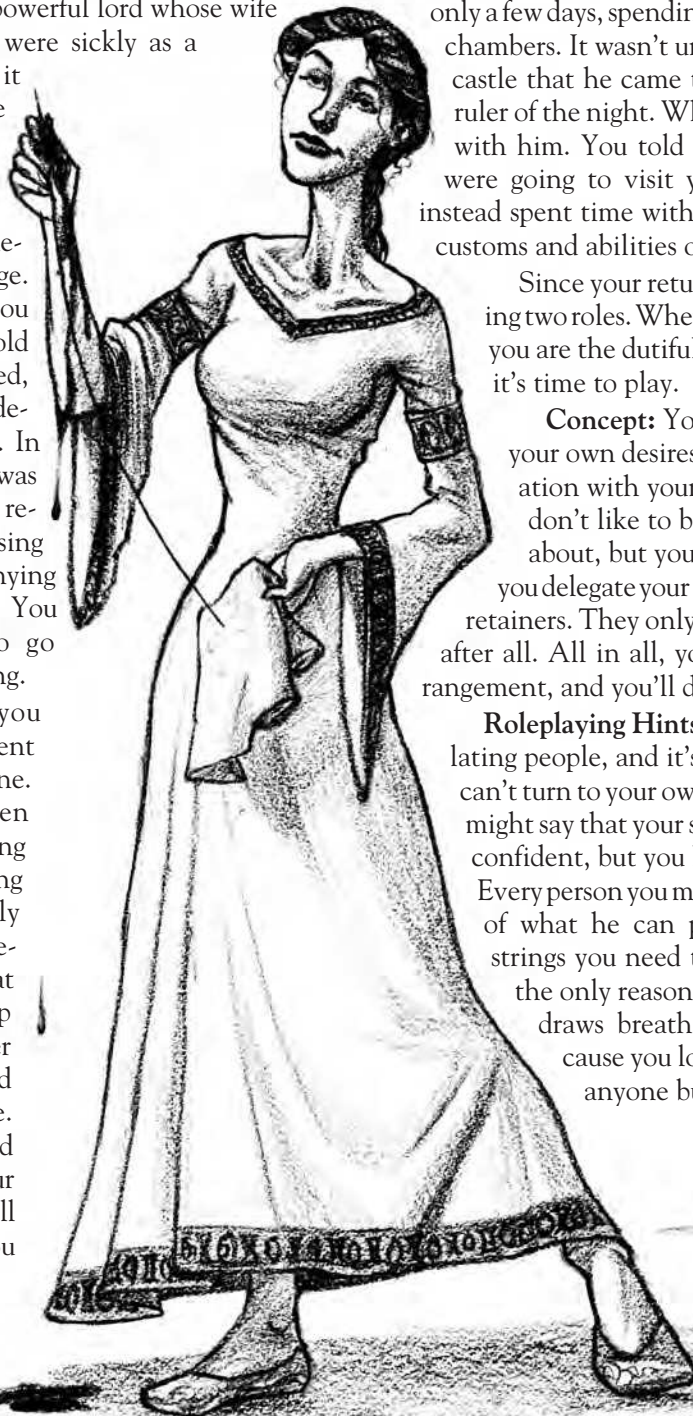
that it made you more attracted to him. He stayed for only a few days, spending most of his time in his chambers. It wasn't until his last night at the castle that he came to you and made you a ruler of the night. When he left, he took you with him. You told your servants that you were going to visit your husband, but you instead spent time with your sire, learning the customs and abilities of the undead.

Since your return, you have been playing two roles. When your husband is home, you are the dutiful wife. When he's gone, it's time to play.

Concept: You are interested only in your own desires, and even your infatuation with your sire has its limits. You don't like to be controlled or ordered about, but you like work even less, so you delegate your authority to your trusted retainers. They only want to see you happy, after all. All in all, you have the perfect arrangement, and you'll do anything to keep it.

Roleplaying Hints: You excel at manipulating people, and it's a rare person that you can't turn to your own devices. Some people might say that your skill has made you overconfident, but you know that it's justified. Every person you meet is evaluated in terms of what he can provide you and what strings you need to pull to get it. That's the only reason that your husband still draws breath. It certainly isn't because you love him. You don't love anyone but yourself.

Equipment: An expensive dress made from imported silk, fine gold jewelry and an unfinished piece of embroidery.



Dark Ages VAMPIRE

Name:

Nature: **Caretaker**

Generation: **12th**

Player:

Demeanor: **Celebrant**

Concept: **Lady of Leisure**

Chronicle:

Clan: **Ventrue**

Haven:

ACCRIBUTES

Physical		Social		Mental	
Strength	●○○○○○○○	Charisma	●●●●○○○	Perception	●●●○○○○
Dexterity	●●●○○○○	Manipulation	●●●○○○○	Intelligence	●●○○○○○
Stamina	●●○○○○○	Appearance	●●●○○○○	Wits	●●●○○○○

ABILITIES

Talents		Skills		Knowledges	
Alertness	○○○○○○○○	Animal Ken	○○○○○○○○	Academics	○○○○○○○○
Athletics	○○○○○○○○	Archery	●○○○○○○○	Hearth Wisdom	●○○○○○○○
Brawl	○○○○○○○○	Commerce	○○○○○○○○	Investigation	○○○○○○○○
Dodge	○○○○○○○○	Crafts	●●○○○○○	Law	○○○○○○○○
Empathy	●●○○○○○	Etiquette	●●●○○○○	Linguistics	○○○○○○○○
Expression	●●○○○○○	Melee	○○○○○○○○	Medicine	○○○○○○○○
Intimidation	●●○○○○○	Performance	●●○○○○○	Occult	○○○○○○○○
Leadership	●●●○○○○	Ride	●○○○○○○○	Politics	●●○○○○○
Legerdemain	○○○○○○○○	Stealth	○○○○○○○○	Seneschal	●●●○○○○
Subterfuge	●●●○○○○	Survival	○○○○○○○○	Theology	○○○○○○○○

ADVANTAGES

Disciplines		Backgrounds		Virtues	
Dominate	●○○○○○○○	Herd	●●●○○○○○	Conscience/Conviction	●●●●○
Presence	●●○○○○○	Influence	●●●○○○○○	Self-Control/Instinct	●●●○○
_____	●○○○○○○○	Resources	●●●○○○○○	Courage	●●●○○
_____	○○○○○○○○	Retainers	●●○○○○○		
_____	○○○○○○○○	_____	○○○○○○○○		

Other Traits

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Road Sin

●●●●●○○○

Aura: Seduction (0)

Willpower

●●●○○○○○○○

□□□□□□□□

Blood Pool

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Health

Bruised

Hurt -1

Injured -1

Wounded -2

Mauled -2

Crippled -5

Incapacitated

Weakness

Prey Limitation

Experience

Notables

The High Clans delight in positions of stature and power, and their clan strengths make them natural leaders. Therefore, it isn't a surprise that most princes, as well as other people in positions of privilege such as knights or agents of the prince, hail from the High Clans. Although some choose to exercise this influence as advisors, such as the Cappadocians, or from among the human masses, such as the Brujah, the desire for control and for power runs deeply within their veins.

The following are a few of Europe's well known first cursed Cainites.

Véronique d'Orléans

9th generation Brujah, childe of Portia, walker on the Road of Humanity

Embrace: AD 1130

Apparent Age: mid 30s

Véronique was the daughter of a prominent apothecary and a midwife. Growing up with six brothers in Orléans, she became a bit of a tomboy and managed to learn the trades of both of her parents, although she was legally permitted to practice midwifery only during her mortal days. Véronique found it difficult to accept the limitations placed on women, and her constant rebellion would have made it difficult for her to find a suitor if indeed she had ever desired to marry at all. But her interests fell elsewhere. It is said that she attracted the admiration of her sire when she cared for one of Portia's mortal servants and that she earned the



Embrace through her coolheaded responses to every challenge Portia could contrive.

In the early years after Véronique's Embrace, she and her sire became entangled with a number of key Cainite political figures, including Alexander, the later-exiled Prince of Paris, and Queen Esclarmonde the Black. These early dealings shaped Véronique into a strong politico, and many Cainites speculate about her supposed involvement with the eventual unseating of Alexander. Indeed, it cemented her status as an influential player in the political machinations of the Cainites.

Over the years, Véronique gained an unusual amount of attention, even for a vampire of her stature. Her main attraction was that pinning down her allegiance was difficult. At times she seemed to be working for her sire, while different circumstances saw her as an agent for Queen Esclarmonde or Julia Antasia. This makes her an unusual Brujah indeed; she spends less time pursuing ideals and more time traveling about on errands for a wide variety of Cainites from various clans. The situation has led to a growing reputation that Véronique and her services are available to the highest bidder, although this has never been verified. Whether she is indeed pursuing money and power or some higher purpose is not known.

Véronique takes her responsibility to her herd very seriously, defending them viciously against threats or interlopers. Unlike the rest of her clanmates, who reside on Île de la Cité, Veronique roams the less-savory sections of the Latin Quarter, offering her services as a physician to whores and criminals. She shares this area with Jean-Baptiste de Montrond, a Franj Setite, pleasure-seeker and con man without peer. Veronique and Jean-Baptiste are, oddly enough, good friends despite their philosophical differences. He is one of the few people in Paris with the ability to make her laugh out loud, and they stopped keeping track of who owes whom for which favors a number of years ago.

Archibald the Feral

7th generation Brujah, childe of Magdalen, walker on the Road of the Beast

Embrace: AD 962

Apparent Age: mid teens

In life, Archibald was referred to, sometimes unkindly, as an innocent. Certainly, he was slow of speech and thought, and he preferred the quiet of his own company to the exploits of the other boys who lived in Exeter, but his powers of intuition were



uncanny. He had a knack for appearing moments before his mother called him, or for leaving firewood on a family's doorstep just before their father fell ill and could no longer cut any. His family's status in town saved him from being persecuted as bewitched or fae-touched; his father was a prominent merchant and controlled most of the trade passing through the city. A few well placed words were enough to ensure that his son was left in peace, and he and his wife raised the simple lad as best they could and endeavored to teach him a trade.

Although it was difficult to engage his attention at all, Archibald delighted in tales of noble deeds, and it was there that his parents discovered a way to pique his interest. They told him as many such tales as they could and sent him with the guards to travel alongside his father's caravans and protect them from brigands. He began to learn the sword under the tutelage of the head guard and actually showed a great deal of promise. Unfortunately, he would never become a knight or even a guard. Thieves on the road from Bristol attacked the caravan, and all of the company was slain. When Archibald attempted to flee, bleeding, into the trees, the sadistic band followed him, hunting him as if for sport.

Little did they know that they were fleeing into the domain of Magdalen, a Brujah from Exeter who regularly patrolled the road to ensure its safety. She easily slew the brigands and was about to put the boy out of his misery when he looked into her eyes and said four simple words: "I forgive you, Magdalen." Shocked and touched at the same time, she Embraced him without quite knowing why.

Since his Embrace, Archibald has grown more wild and nomadic, moving from place to place, finding rest in underground caves and hollows. Certainly, it would be easy to mistake him for a Gangrel except for his preoccupation with chivalric manners. For years, he wandered the wilderness until he eventually came to Cornwall and the cluster of islands that some vampires claim to be the remains of Lyonesse. Few Cainites manage to make their home in the area; they are too often driven off by the fae. Yet the fae don't seem to mind Archibald's presence, or at least they haven't moved to oust him from the area. Still, he rarely spends time there, only returning to rest and recuperate from his injuries when the need arises.

Lately, in Exeter, they tell stories of a ghostly young knight who rips the heads off of brigands and warriors in the woods. This is not far from the truth, since Archibald spends the rest of his time roaming the wilderness, helping protect travelers and fight evil, and he has a strange knack for turning up exactly where he is needed.

Penelope, Elder of Hamburg

7th generation Cappadocian, childe of Baldassare, walker on the Road of Bones

Embrace: AD 540

Apparent Age: mid 20s

Few details are known about Penelope's mortal life, and she claims to remember little about her existence before the Embrace. What is known is that she was a Spartan slave pressed into service in Rome when she was a young girl. Baldassare, a resident of Rome until his demise at the hands of an offended Nosferatu in 1101, purchased the young slave. He Embraced her shortly thereafter, when she was in her twenties. His reasons for doing so remain unexplained, but it is rumored that Baldassare had a tendency to become intimately involved with his young slaves. Further rumors suggest that his untimely demise was no accident at all and was instead arranged by one of his young charges, perhaps Penelope herself.

Early in her unlife, Penelope left her sire and traveled to Ravenna in the company of Lucius Cornelius Scipio, a Roman Brujah. His skilled rhetoric, high-minded ideals and rakish charm attracted the quiet, idealistic Cappadocian, and they quickly became companions as well as lovers. They spent nearly two centuries in Ravenna, increasing their status in Cainite society and pulling the strings of Ravenna through their coterie. They left Ravenna in AD 752, after Livia da Ravenna diablerized her sire



Yusuf ibn Rasheed, Master Poet

8th generation Lasombra, childe of Bilquís, walker on the Road of Humanity

Embrace: AD 983

Apparent Age: mid 30s

In his mortal days, Yusuf was a man of letters. Born to a noble family, he had the privilege of learning to write and read from a young age, and the family library was extensive enough that its sale would feed a small village for years. His boyhood in Iberia was quiet and contemplative, with a supportive and close-knit family. Eventually, he married and settled into his adult life as a clerk and scribe in Barcelona. He spent his days at work and prayer and his nights teaching his children the delights of reading and writing.

In his free time, Yusuf wrote epic poetry. It wasn't out of longing for anything else; it was simply the self-expression of a man who loved words and was content with his life. But the poetry gradually gained recognition throughout the city, and frequently Yusuf would be called upon to recite a poem in glory of Allah or in praise of the simple virtues of his wife. It was one of these love poems that gained the attention of his sire. Bilquís had been very influential in her mortal life because she came from a wealthy family, but after her Embrace forced her to leave her name behind, she found it difficult to obtain what she wanted. Here was a mortal who was highly respected and sought after for opinions. Bilquís decided to seek out his advice. Initially, he refused to teach a woman, but the blood oath quickly overcame that problem. Bilquís soon found

and took his place in their counsels. Livia had her own ideas about how the city should be run, and Penelope and Lucius left her to deal with the Cainite uprising she had created.

Penelope and Lucius moved on to Hamburg, and they spent years establishing a peaceful coexistence with the mortals who lived there. Over the centuries, their love affair slowly dwindled, as Penelope became more interested in joining her clanmates in research and discovery, wanting to back her idealistic beliefs about the necessity of progress with actions. Lucius still preferred to meddle in humanity's affairs, and the difference slowly pulled them apart. They still worked well together, however, and the pair was widely known as the true power in Hamburg, given that Midian, the Malkavian prince, was clearly unfit to rule.

Currently, Penelope and Lucius spend much time caring for Midian, whose madness is clearly worsening. Only these two know the truth: that Midian had been diablerizing visitors, and hallucinating that his victims remained behind as a part of the grand court that he never had. Even more intriguing is the fact that Midian has suddenly stopped his diablerie, claiming that his court is full and no positions are open. While either Lucius or Penelope could easily have Midian destroyed and claim the city of Hamburg, Lucius has no desire to become prince. As for Penelope, the insane prince presents an interesting study, and the Scholar cannot deny her interest in his actions. As a result, she has found herself distracting those who have come too close to Midian's secret and has even gone so far as to commit murder to maintain the secret. Now she worries about what will happen should Lucius ever learn of her own actions.



that she had no talents with the written word, however, and she much preferred listening to writing. Frustrated, she despaired of ever finding a way to achieve the influence she so desperately craved. Under the influence of the oath, Yusuf felt very much in love, and he pledged to use his talents to help her and begged for the Embrace. It did not take much to convince her.

Yusuf has strong ideas about how a man should take care of his woman, and Bilquís wants nothing more than to have someone give her what she wants. As a result, Yusuf has free reign to write whatever he likes, under his name or hers. He is the spokesman for them both, and his verses have successfully created political movements, shaped customs and morals, and destroyed the reputations of political opponents. The two of them have significant influence in the city of Barcelona, and Yusuf deftly maneuvers them through the political dances of the Ventrue Prince Mireia Subira's city. The prince has some unique ideas about how a city should be run, and her open policy allows Yusuf to write what he wants and take interest in the city however he likes. At this point, Yusuf feels indebted to his Bilquís for all that he has, but he does not realize that he is providing for her and not the other way around.

Rosamund of Islington

8th generation Toreador, childe of Isouda de Blaise, walker on the Road of Kings

Embrace: AD 1189

Apparent Age: late teens

A fair English rose, Rosamund was born in Islington, outside of London, to a minor Norman baron and his Saxon bride. Beautiful even as a child, she came to the attention of a wandering troubadour in service to the Courts of Love, who praised her beauty to his mistress, Queen Isouda de Blaise. Through her mortal vassals, Isouda arranged to have the girl fostered in her court. Having other children to provide for, Rosamund's parents bid their 12-year-old daughter an affectionate farewell and let her be taken to France.

Isouda's court in Chartres was an exciting new world for the impressionable young girl, filled with challenges and the education of a young French lady. She learned to read and write, both in Latin and French; learned comportment and etiquette, and to observe and decipher the politics of court. She became familiar with the music of the troubadours and the rules of love, learned to appear both modest and



coquettish, to spar with her wit and charm with her smile. On her seventeenth birthday, she was called once again into Isouda's presence and congratulated on her accomplishments. Then Isouda told her of her destiny: to be initiated into the ranks of the Cainites, to take her place as Isouda's true daughter and protégé in the greater arts of the night. Rosamund's diplomatic mission to Magdeburg was but one of the carefully planned steps in Isouda's training regimen before the Queen put Rosamund to the greatest test of her childe's unlife.

Rosamund was then introduced to the Paris court as part of the Courts of Love's scheme to oust tyrannical Alexander from the throne. Rosamund's impact on the disturbed prince proved to be far greater than anyone expected. So great was his fascination with her that the Queens of Love allowed him to take Rosamund into exile with him — as something of a consolation prize — a decision on which Rosamund herself was not consulted.

The past few years have been the most frightening and difficult of her entire existence. Her faith in the Courts of Love, her allies, even her sire's affection has been badly shattered, and then weakened still further by Alexander's subtle and cruel manipulation of her very perceptions. The ancient Methuselah's obsessive jealousy will settle for nothing less than total possession and absolute adoration from the object of his affections, yet Rosamund finds her heart drawn once again toward Lord Jürgen, Prince of Magdeburg and Alexander's reluctant host.

Now forever seventeen and exquisitely beautiful, Rosamund's Saxon blood shows in her fair skin,

hazel-green eyes and fine hair the color of spun copper. She still retains something of an adolescent passion in her voice and mannerisms, and when in a good mood she chatters and laughs easily. But now she must rely on everything she has ever learned to help her survive the nights to come, for when his jealousy peaks, Alexander has been known to destroy the thing he most loves

Hélène la Juste, Queen of the Court of Love

6th generation Toreador, childe of Salianna, walker on the Road of Kings

Embrace: AD 957

Apparent Age: late teens

Hélène la Juste grew up in Paris, one of three daughters of a noble. Of the three daughters, she was the pretty one, and her naturally flirtatious nature drew suitors perhaps more ardently than her protective father might have liked. Hélène delighted in dancing and music, and it was at a ball that she was introduced to Matriarch Salianna of the Toreador. Although she was only 13 at the time, Salianna watched the girl's deft maneuverings, gentle good looks and high spirits with amusement. Over the next few years, Salianna's interest remained, and it was not rare to see her appear "coincidentally" at functions where the three sisters happened to be in attendance.

Although it was Salianna's intent to wait until Hélène grew well into adulthood before Embracing her, this was not to be. One winter, Hélène quit attending dances, concerts and social gatherings alto-

gether without any warning. Salianna wasted no time in learning that the girl had been struck ill with a fever and was not expected to recover. After some debate, Salianna decided to Embrace Hélène early rather than lose her. That night, she visited Hélène's deathbed, and the next night, while Hélène's family mourned her passing, she was en route to Champagne with her sire.

Because Hélène proved to be a quick study and had a natural flair for the ideals of courtly love, Salianna carefully groomed her to take the position of Queen of Love in Champagne. Under Hélène's supervision, the court has flourished, but it has also gained a reputation for attracting brash young Cainites who are overeager to prove themselves. Perhaps this is simply a reflection of Hélène's personality, since she is still very much a teenager at heart, even after centuries of unlife. Tales of high romance and great adventure are her heart's delight, and those who provide those tales find a welcome in her court regardless of their backgrounds. At times, this has presented a problem, when an inappropriate courtier strikes her fancy.

Although Hélène is whimsical and hotheaded, she has a knack for politics, and Salianna has often asked for her childe's assistance when faced with a difficult problem. Hélène's dealings with Esclarmonde during the Albigensian Crusade are widely speculated upon, and gossips argue over whether or not Hélène acted on orders from Salianna or on her own desires. Certainly it is unusual that Salianna would not chastise her childe for assisting Esclarmonde; after all, Salianna had publicly withdrawn her support for the rebellious Black Queen. Yet it appears that no punishment was enforced, suggesting that the story has more merit than is publicly known. Whether Hélène is acting on Salianna's behalf or on her own desires, her connections, combined with her mercurial nature, make her a valuable yet dangerous political ally.

Dorsteinn, "Prince" of Trondheim

8th generation Tzimisce, childe of Basarab cel Cumplit, walker on the Road of Heaven

Embrace: AD 960

Apparent Age: early 40s

Dorsteinn's mortal life was a series of calamities. He grew up in a poor family outside of Trondheim, son of a farmer and one of seven children. Unfortunately, poor diet, hard work and tough winters took their toll on the family. Dorsteinn and his twin sister, Steinunn,





helped their mother care for the younger children as one by one they fell sick and died. Eventually, their father contracted the same illness, and finally Steinunn died in her brother's arms, leaving only Dorsteinn and his mother alone in the house.

Sadly, his mother never recovered from the strain of losing her husband and children, and she could no longer run the household or do even the most basic of tasks. He cared for her as best as he could. It was difficult for one lone boy to keep up with all of the chores at the farm as well as in the house, and help was scarce. Still, he woke long before sunup and worked until the sky was dark, and they made do.

One cold winter morning many years later, a traveling priest came to their home and offered to sit with Dorsteinn's aged mother while Dorsteinn went outside to do the planting. The priest spoke such words of hope that Dorsteinn began to think that this new Christian God was something amazing indeed, and as he shoveled in the hard earth he began to dream of how his mother would greet him at the door that night, just as she used to when the family was all alive. Yet, when he returned, he found the house empty. The priest was never seen again, but the body of his mother was found frozen in the snow behind the house three days later.

He continued to live as before, but his heart burned with rage. He hated the priest. He hated the villagers for not helping his family. He hated his family for dying and abandoning him. When Basarab cel Cumplit ("Basarab the Grim") came to the village looking for soldiers, Dorsteinn volunteered. They traveled to Bergen, and there Dorsteinn proved him-

self a fine soldier. Although he was not skilled with a blade, he was ferocious and never hesitated to strike. Once he had proven himself, Basarab Embraced him, and the two spent many years together in Bergen, until one year when servants of the Lord found Basarab alone and weakened after a fight. They burned him to cinders — by the time Dorsteinn arrived, he could do nothing but mourn.

Now Dorsteinn is alone, and the knowledge of it eats at his soul. In recent years, he has returned to Trondheim, and he spends most of his time plotting revenge against the cathedral and the God that he feels betrayed him. To him, the Nidaros Dome represents all that he is lost, and he is torn between wanting to possess it and wanting to destroy it in vengeance for his family and his sire. He could probably lay claim to the title of prince, but he wants nothing of Cainite politics. For the time being, he sits in his haven and ponders the demise of the city of Trondheim in revenge for all he has suffered.

Bena, Priestess of St. Stanislaw

9th generation Ventrue, childe of Stanislaw, walker on the Road of Heaven

Embrace: AD 1178

Apparent Age: young child

Bena was a street urchin, daughter of a lowly prostitute in the city of Krakow. Although she never knew her father, Bena's mother told her stories of a nobleman in rich furs who was generous and kind, and Bena often dreamed that this man was her father and



would come for her on a great white stallion and take her to a castle where she would live in splendor and luxury. Certainly, she had an aristocratic look to her underneath the dirty face and tangled hair, with a sharp nose, pointed little chin and clear gray eyes.

Sadly, if she had lived, she probably would have become a prostitute like her mother. Instead, the vampire who called himself St. Stanislaw picked her up on the streets of Krakow. She had gone to the church to beg for a crust of bread and was returning home, hungrily devouring the morsel, when the Cainite saw her. It has never been established why she struck his fancy, although some have speculated that perhaps Stanislaw was her mortal father. Regardless of his reasons, he took her to his haven, a series of underground caves where he was slowly building a church in his own name.

Bena was one of the first to be made a ghoul in the service of Stanislaw, and she quickly became one of his favorites. She followed him constantly and left his side only when ordered to do so, and her devotion soon won her the Embrace. As the cult grew and more worshippers offered their blood to the “saint” who had returned from the dead, Stanislaw became gradually more indolent and haughty, lost in visions of his own self-importance. As a result, Bena took on much of the nightly business. She became adept at picking pockets to fill their coffers and luring prospective cultists into the underground caves with an expertly executed frightened little girl act, and she nurtured the growing cult into a strong, unified group.

In recent years, Stanislaw has reportedly fallen into torpor. The reason behind this is unknown, and Bena isn't talking. She runs the cult openly now, although she does so with a gentle hand, and its numbers have grown considerably since Stanislaw quit making public appearances. Certainly, Bena appears to believe in her sire now as much as she did before her Embrace, but the circumstances of his disappearance suggest that this story may have more to it, and she has been more than willing to take over control of the cult. Rumors suggest that Bena may have diablerized her sire, or at the least put him into torpor. If the latter is true, he will certainly be dismayed to find that his cult has continued quite happily without him.

Sects

Status is highly important, particularly for the High Clans. Whom you know is almost as important as what you can do, and the constant political upheaval makes it necessary to have someone to watch your back. Many Cainites address this issue by joining

with one of many sects or groups. These groups are often based on religious or political views, and they ensure that someone with similar ideals will always be there to turn to if the political climate suddenly becomes stormy.

The following lists some examples of sects that are commonly joined by High Clans vampires.

The Topiarium

The Topiarium (Latin for “gardeners”) is a group of Cainites that is scattered throughout Europe. These Cainites display a marked interest in political happenings in both the mortal and vampire societies. They are unique in that, for one reason or another, they lack the power and prestige to gain entrance into the inner circles. The group was founded in the early 12th century by Ioanna, a newly Embraced Ventrue who quickly grew frustrated at her lack of influence in the Italian political scene. She gathered together a small coterie of neonates, most of whom resided in her native Tuscany. Although the group included a variety of clans, mostly Ventrue, Toreador and Lasombra, they all had one thing in common: They yearned for more. More power. More wealth. Although it can be argued that this is true of most vampires, Ioanna picked these Cainites in particular because they, out of all of the neonates she knew, had the skills of born leaders.

The group spent many a night meeting in secret, since they well knew that their elders would not take kindly to a rabble of young upstarts who were scheming to take influence for themselves. It took them decades to determine their approach and gain enough autonomy from their sires to make it happen. The plan was simple. Since all of the political influence worth having in the cities had been already claimed by elder vampires, they would branch out beyond the walls of the city. In Italy, the country nobility were constantly at odds with the city-based merchants. Yet, in most cases, vampires remained in the relative safety of the cities, leaving only when forced out by political unrest among the vampires or mortals. Few Cainites had significant influence among the rural nobles.

This situation presented an opportunity to the Topiarium neonates. If they relocated directly outside of the city, they could help guide the mortal nobles living there in their attempts to seize power in the cities. Assuming the nobles were successful, this would allow them to take away the Italian princes' domains and then branch out to the rest of Europe (Ioanna assumes that the urbanization currently occurring in her native lands will happen in the rest of Europe as well). As long as they managed to keep these plans secret, the elders would not feel threatened by their

interest in these nobles far from the kine populations. By the time they realized what was happening, the Topiarium would be too powerful to simply dissolve.

The process began slowly, with a few vampires moving out into the country. Now the group has spread throughout Italy, but it has no true power elsewhere (although many other neonates from other lands are willing to lend support when the time comes to act). The vampires tend to make their havens directly outside a city or near a marketplace, for safety reasons. After all, the countryside has proven to be dangerous for vampires who travel alone, and no amount of temporal power can benefit the Cainite who goes to her Final Death.

Practices and Beliefs

Given their need for secrecy, the members of the Topiarium undergo a lengthy apprenticeship, wherein they memorize the codes of conduct, official goals and communication methods developed by the original group. The codes of conduct all stress the need for secrecy, while still providing for communication and support among Topiarium members. Most communication is conducted through loyal retainers who deliver messages in an elaborately constructed code. Given that Topiarium members rely so heavily on their mortal charges, each member marks her humans with a “brand.” The brand is usually small and easily explained. For example, Ioanna marks her humans with a sickle-shaped scar on the palm of their left hand. These marks serve to identify couriers and also to ensure that Topiarium members respect one another’s property.

High Clans in the Topiarium

Topiarium members are predominantly Ventrue and Lasombra. Both clans have a decided interest in political power, and their neonates are usually forced to work their way up the ladder before they are granted any level of autonomy. This leads to dissatisfaction among some younger vampires who want nothing more than to strike out on their own. Additionally, the Ventrue and Lasombra members provide something that new Topiarium members badly need: patronage. Prosperous Ventrue and Lasombra sires often can be persuaded to assist their childer in acquiring such things, providing money or influence as needed. Topiarium members tend to repay such debts as quickly as possible and then turn their attention to gaining influence over the rural nobility, and the skills of the Ventrue and Lasombra are perfectly tailored for such tasks.

Although some of the original Topiarium members were Toreador, the number of Artisan members in the organization has slowly dwindled. Although

the Toreador are often interested in political power and the search for wealth, they rarely have a knack for administrative details. Their talents and interests make them more suited for city unlife, and as such they rarely act directly in concert with the rest of the sect. The Topiarium realizes the usefulness of having a few members remain in the cities as informants, and sympathetic Toreador maintain most of the Topiarium safe houses.

Very few Brujah, Tzimisce and Cappadocians are members. The Topiarium tends to be too highly regimented for the Brujah. They do not take well to rules and regulations, and the Topiarium does not forgive those who break their rules. (These few unfortunates who have done so have found themselves stripped of their resources and subjected to the blood oath by a superior in penance.) The Tzimisce are often too set in their familial clan structure to be useful to the Topiarium, and their fascination with Vicissitude can make it difficult to blend in (besides, the Topiarium operates far from their traditional domains). The Cappadocians generally aren’t interested, although their Giovanni members are notable exceptions.

Regardless of their clan allegiances, most of the members of the Topiarium walk the Roads of Kings or Humanity. Although the group is open to members from other roads, few members belong to the Roads of Sin, Heaven or the Beast.

The Woodwose Savages

The Savages are a group of undead knights who no longer adhere to the rules of chivalry or codes of knightly conduct. Instead, they form nomadic bands that travel from village to village, taking whatever strikes their fancy and punishing anyone who dares to suggest that a given cauldron/ornate gold cross/young woman isn’t theirs for the taking. Most of the Woodwose Savages take particular delight in tormenting any mortal knights that they come upon, and they often challenge knights to tests of strength or courage. Usually, public humiliation is enough to content them, although in a few cases the Cainite in question wasn’t satisfied with anything less than taking a “souvenir” such as the knight’s armor, horse or sword hand.

To hear the Savages tell it, the group had no official beginning. It started with a small band of Cainites, all former knights, who traveled together for reasons of safety. At first, they hired themselves out as guards to merchants and noblemen, but it was difficult to find travelers willing to travel at night and sleep during the day. After a few years of scabbling for clients, one of the knights snapped. He stripped off

every inch of his armor and threw it into the trees. He renounced his knighthood and vowed to take what he wanted, to do as he wished. He howled his frustration into the trees; he rolled in the muddy earth until he was covered from head to foot. Then he went hunting. The Savages tell this story with relish, and every single one of them claims that *he* is the knight in the story, even if such a thing is completely impossible. This is one of the many jokes that the Savages tell, and they tend to be a lighthearted bunch in general, particularly in relation to other Cainites.

The remaining knights followed their comrade's example shortly thereafter, and the group quickly began to grow. They attracted many Cainites who, for one reason or another, had a grudge against the knightly orders to which they had once belonged. Whatever the reason, they were glad to throw away their armor and cover themselves in mud and leaves. They especially welcomed the opportunity for revenge.

Although it would be difficult to find a Savage who has anything positive to say about his mortal life or about knighthood, most of them still hold some measure of honor. Often, they make a point of succeeding where their fellow knights failed. For example, Parien, who died in battle when his fellow knights deserted him on the battlefield, refuses to leave a Savage's side in the middle of combat. Furthermore, all of the members are very loyal to the Savages, and their ability to stand as one unit and work together makes them a dangerous fighting force indeed. Although most of their time is spent looting and carousing, they take on battles of principle if the cause is a good one, or if the whim strikes them.

Practices and Beliefs

Nearly all of the Savages are former knights, although the group has accepted a few squires who have managed to prove themselves over the years. They have no standard method of locating or testing potential members; in fact, Cainites usually seek them out instead of the other way around. Then the Savages all gather together to test the new recruit's mettle. This test is conducted by a different Savage every time. Sometimes, the recruit talks back to a member; other times a particular Savage needs to let off steam. Regardless of the reason, one of the Savages volunteers to test the recruit, and he decides what the task will be. The task in question is rarely combative in nature but is often humiliating or illegal by mortal standards. If the recruit completes it, he can join the group, and he throws away his armor and undertakes his first hunt as a Woodwose Savage. Of course, if the new member proves to be incompetent in battle, he will probably not be a member for long, but the Savages staunchly refuse to coddle anyone.

The Savages currently have one female member, an Iberian Brujah named Urraca. Of all of the Savages, she is the most boisterous, argumentative and assertive. Although she was not a knight during her lifetime (obviously), she lost her entire family in the First Crusade, and she and her fellow Savages deal cruelly with anyone who dares to suggest that she has not earned her place in the group.

High Clans in the Woodwose Savages

The Savages are somewhat unique in that the group includes a wide variety of clans. The Brujah, who are attracted by the promises of conquest and the surprisingly idealistic nature of the members, comprise the bulk of the sect.

Other High Clans with significant representation in the Savages are the Tzimisce and the Ventrue. Both clans are attracted by the group's military bent, and they frequently select knights or former knights for the Embrace. Some members of these two clans have difficulty being considered equal to the other Savages, however. This problem is made worse by the fact that a few of the members come from the Low Clans. Most Ventrue and Tzimisce find it difficult to accept being on the same level as a Gangrel, and more members would likely be from these two clans if the group were limited to only the first cursed.

A few Gangrel are members of the Woodwose Savages. They are attracted by the band's nomadic ways and disdain for societal rules. Most Gangrel are uncomfortable being around so many Cainites for such an extended period of time, however, and it is not uncommon for Gangrel Savages to leave the group unannounced and return some time later.

The Michaelites

Constantinople, the city long praised as the pinnacle of human (and Cainite) society, was the domain of the Toreador Methuselah Michael for many centuries. After his demise at the hands of his former lover, Mary the Black, Constantinople vampiric society fell into a slow spiral of decay. Some vampires, however, pledged to wait for Michael's return, and their fervor and unflagging belief slowly developed into an odd blend of Cainite legend and Orthodox Christianity.

The Michaelites are largely concentrated in Constantinople, although their adherents have begun to travel throughout the lands, looking for any signs of the return of their savior. In their belief that Michael might rise again in the manner of a Cainite saint, their belief strongly mirrors Christian teachings, and many non-Michaelites accuse the sect of blasphemous rivaling the Cainite Heresy itself. Latin

THE CAINITE HERESY

The Cainite Heresy is largely based on the beliefs of the Cathars, who claim that the physical must be overcome in order to harness spiritual power. Because the Cainites have to a certain extent transcended the physical (since they are nearly immortal, do not need food or drink and so on), the Cathars view them as being one step closer to the divine. Some Cainites have chosen to exploit this belief, presenting themselves as the divine messengers of God and developing blood cults. These cults often enact ceremonies that are perverted versions of Christian practices, such as using vampiric blood in a blasphemous communion or enacting sadistic penances for minor transgressions against the sect. As a result, the mortal believers often become herd, blood bound servants or even vampires serving the Heresy's Cainite rulers.

The Cainite Heresy has spread throughout much of Europe, although its major strongholds are in France and Italy. The governing body, called the Crimson Curia, is located in Venice. In these areas, many of the members of the High Clans are attracted by the benefits that the Heresy provides. It allows them to maintain a large group of devout followers who willingly follow the Cainite's orders, often without the need for the blood oath. Feeding is no longer an issue for most members of the Heresy, since their flocks provide all of the sustenance they need. In addition, for those members with sadistic tendencies, the Heresy provides a safe haven from which they can spread assorted murder and mayhem.

The Lasombra and Toreador largely dominate the Cainite Heresy, although it is not uncommon to find members from the other High Clans. Although non-Heretical Christians accuse the Heresy of idolatry and other crimes against God, most members of the sect consider themselves to be Christian. Recent developments have seen significant retaliation from the Christian Orders, and as a result the Cainite Heresy does not have the power it once did. Yet, for the High Clans, the Heresy still holds significant appeal, because it offers them the power and status they so strongly desire and allows them to revel in their divinity as opposed to cowering as one of the damned.

For more details on the Cainite Heresy, see the supplement of the same name.

vampires in particular are strongly opposed to such beliefs, although this may have more to do with the fact that the Michaelites denounce the Latin Prince of Constantinople, Alfonzo, as a demon who is destroying their beloved city. Given their controversial nature, the group remains secretive, and prospective members are highly scrutinized before they are allowed to learn any of the group's secrets. If asked, the Michaelites would say that they are not heretical at all. Instead, they would argue that they believe in the Christian God and that Michael was a savior sent from God to offer the Cainites a chance at redemption.

Michaelites know their namesake as a three-fold vampiric savior; they believe that during his time on Earth he reigned as "the Father," then he gave his life as "the Son," and now he roams the land as "the Spirit." As the Spirit, Michaelites believe that the Methuselah offers special gifts such as prophecy to those who are sufficiently devout. In addition, Michael offers his worshippers the chance to avoid Gehenna, for it is said that he will return and gather up his followers in the nights before Gehenna and take them to a paradise that bests even Constantinople in grandeur and power.

Members of the inner circle, called the Circle of the Three, are privy to more information. They purport to know the details of Gehenna, when it will happen and by whose hand. They claim to have gained this information from the lips of Michael himself. Although most Cainites believe that Michael went insane in the years before he was diablerized, Michaelites believe differently. Instead, they say that he was granted special insight into the end of the world and that his direct link with God allowed him to speak in tongues. They have in their possession a copy of his rants, which they call the Book of the Patriarch, and they consult this book in an effort to unlock the mysteries of Gehenna. It is a great irony that, although they believe they have access to such widely sought information, none of them has the power to understand it. In the meantime, the Circle of the Three has taken a vow to keep the book secret, since they believe it would be discredited or stolen if its existence were widely known.

The Michaelites have three key goals. First, they search out any rumors or signs of Michael's return, since it is only through him that they will be able to avoid the end of all things. Second, they seek to reestablish the glory of the city of Constantinople, a goal that is within sight given that the two main contenders to the principedom, Anna Comnena and Natalya Svyatoslav, are both sympathetic to the Michaelites and their vision of the city. (Of course, this will do the Michaelites no good if the current

prince, the Lasombra Alfonzo, remains in his position, which explains why they oppose him at every move.) Third, they are constantly seeking Mary the Black, the Baali who diablerized Michael. She does, after all, carry some small part of the Patriarch's soul within her, and as a result, they believe that she is the key to unlocking the Book of the Patriarch and the mysteries of Gehenna. To date, their efforts have not managed to discover her whereabouts, although they have heard rumors that she may be somewhere in Outremer.

No one vampire founded the Michaelites, but instead the sect came about naturally among the Patriarch's most trusted companions and confidants. These vampires all kept watch over Michael as he began his slow descent into insanity (or religious inspiration, as they saw it) and heard some of his ramblings firsthand. Currently, a Toreador called Michaela dominates the Circle of the Three, although sect membership is spread out among other clans.

Practices and Beliefs

Members of the Michaelites swear to uphold the ideals of old Constantinople by once again taking hand in mortal doings and directing them to meet their own needs. Vampiric power and prestige are the means to recreating the utopia that was once the Byzantine Empire, and, to this end, all Michaelites are encouraged to increase their stature within both vampiric and mortal society. Given that Michael himself was a Toreador, the arts are a common focal point, although members from other clans often focus on politics or commerce. Because secrecy is such a priority (given that the vampiric prince as well as the Church strongly disagree with their beliefs), no specified mode of dress or common haven exists. Instead, maintaining an appearance of propriety and prosperity is the expected norm, and those members who do not meet these ideals are "encouraged" to do so.

Members are encouraged to visit Michael's shrine as often as they can. As the Michaelites move into each new city, their first order of business is to establish a shrine, which is usually hidden in a haven. They are permitted to attend Christian services to maintain appearances, since belief in Michael does not prohibit belief in God or Jesus. This practice is discouraged, however, given that Michaelites believe that Jesus is the mortal Savior and therefore his teachings are not applicable to Cainites.

High Clans in the Michaelites

The most common High Clans in the Michaelites are Toreador and Brujah. The Toreador of course have a close kinship with their Methuselah, and certainly it inflates the status of their clan to present

him as a messiah. This is not to imply that the Toreador are not fervent believers; on the contrary, they are the staunchest supporters of the sect. Some do have ulterior motives for joining, however, and they seek to turn the group into a tool with which they can wrest political power from the likes of Alfonzo.

The Brujah are often attracted by the ideals of the Michaelites, and particularly their vision of Constantinople. Given the Brujah search for a utopia, the Michaelite movement gives them an opportunity to enact social reform on a grand scale and in one particular area. As a result, the Brujah are often the most active members of the Michaelites, although they are more prone to making reforms than they are to attending services or visiting the shrines. Their crusading natures also make them the largest population of Michaelites found outside of Constantinople.

Several Ventrue are also Michaelites, although few hold significant positions within the society. Some consider the motives of these vampires to be suspect, and they worry that once the Ventrue have gained sufficient political power that they will strike out on their own. Yet, to date, Ventrue Michaelites have insinuated themselves into minor political positions and have shown no signs of leaving the movement.

The Michaelites are not exclusively first cursed, however. Nosferatu and Gangrel, typically disciples of Malachite and Baron Feroux, respectively, both claim membership in the society. As time goes on, however, the Michaelites show themselves to be much less tolerant than their founder was — Lepers and Animals are slowly but surely being regulated to second-class status within the society.

Most members of the Michaelites walk the Road of Heaven or Road of Kings. A small faction belongs to the Road of Humanity; as the Dream requires a fairly clear separation between humanity and Cainites, however, their humanistic teachings sometimes clash with the Michaelites'.

Power Bears Many Faces

The average High Clan Cainite is always looking for a way to feed her desires. Of course, the desires of a Toreador differ greatly from those of a Cappadocian or a Lasombra. As a result, each clan sometimes develops groups or subsects, open only to members of the clan in question. These groups differ from those detailed above in that few Cainites outside of the clan (and usually outside of the subcult itself) know about their existence. Above all, these groups are secret, and they work in the shadows to meet their agendas. It's not uncommon to see them work at cross-purposes, neither group knowing whom or what they are up against.

Brujah: Alchemical Society

The Brujah, in their idealistic desire for a utopian culture, champion many reforms and revolutionary societies. Although they tend to prefer action to words, a small sect of Brujah, headquartered in Lisbon but spread throughout Iberia, believes that the unequal distribution of wealth is the only obstacle to the development of this perfect society. At first, these Cainites tried various direct methods to “liberate” money from the rich and distribute it among the poor. This led to them being exiled from several cities and spawned quite a few legends among the peasantry.

When this approach failed to achieve the effect that they were looking for, the group was forced to turn elsewhere. After some debate, they conceded that perhaps direct intervention was not the appropriate method to enact change, and they began to search for another option. At this time, alchemy was experiencing a great surge in popularity, in part because of the rumors that began to spread throughout the cities and towns. The common folk whispered that alchemists could learn to turn base metals into gold, and interest in this possibility would gradually develop into mania in the latter part of the century.

In alchemy, the Brujah saw the answer to their problems, and they quickly founded the Alchemical Society as a source of study and intellectual debate. Unfortunately, the hot tempers of many of the members turned the intellectual debates into brawls, and few of them made any progress in learning anything about alchemy. Although they were certainly intellectually equal to the task, they simply lacked the scientific temperament to see it through. As a result, some of the members of the Alchemical Society have subjected local alchemists to the blood oath, or even turned them into ghouls so as to prolong their ability to perform the necessary research. One such alchemist, Guaspar Vaaz, has shown such sympathy to the cause that he was offered, and accepted, the Embrace. In general, however, most of the alchemists know nothing about the ulterior motives or true natures of their patrons.

This leaves the Brujah free to speculate about their next steps, and they frequently convene to debate where the money should be stored, how it should be distributed and what ideals should form the basis of the new society. One major issue for the group is the relative positions of Cainites and mortals in the utopian society. Should they be equal, or are Cainites inherently superior? No consensus is in sight. A small contingent within the Alchemical Society advocates approaching the Tremere with the question of turning base metals into gold — surely these supposed sorcerers can help with such a task. The older members of the society, however, refuse to involve the

Usurpers, stating that the price of such assistance would be too high. Younger members mutter that the only “price” would be one of pride and feel that would be a small enough price to pay if the end result is equality of wealth.

Cappadocian: The Women of David

One of the major weaknesses of the Cappadocians is their inability to mingle with mortal society. In most cases, their excessive pallor and emaciated frames make them clearly stand out in a crowd, and are all too likely to draw the attention of unfriendly eyes. This is true for most Cappadocians, but the Women of David have found a way to circumvent this problem.

The Tribe of David is a group of mortals that lives a nomadic existence in the Byzantine Empire. Although some of the Byzantines gradually came to adopt more modern European customs, some of the tribes held true to the old ways. The Tribe of David is one group that maintained traditional customs and modes of dress, and these traditions make it a perfect society for the Cappadocians to infiltrate. Noblewomen in tribes such as this one never appear in public without their full regalia, which includes veils or elaborate makeup. The veils, of course, serve to obscure the noblewoman’s face, and some Cappadocian women (and a few men) choose this option. But the more popular method is to don the elaborate makeup that the tribeswomen wear. They powder their cheeks until they are as pale as parchment, rouge their lips and ring their eyes with poisonous belladonna to dilate their pupils. The effects are strikingly similar to the appearance of a Cappadocian woman, and a simple application of rouge is often enough to allow her to escape notice on the streets.

As a result, the streets of Byzantium, and particularly Constantinople and Athens, are common meeting grounds for Cappadocian ladies. Even if the Tribe of David, or any of the other similar tribes, is not currently in the city, the residents are more accustomed to such an appearance and are more willing to accept the explanation than those who live elsewhere.

The secretive organization known as the Women of David began with the Embrace of one of the mortals of that tribe by the name of Antikleia. After her Embrace, she continued to travel with her tribe, often bringing her sire (whose name has been lost to history) along with her. They had a significant interest in seeing that the traditional customs, and particularly the traditional dress, were not abandoned in favor of their modern counterparts, and they vehemently opposed any efforts to enact a change. It was during these few years that a strange incident decided the future of the tribe. One night, a lone Ravnos spotted the tribe making its way on the road north to Athens. He crept



up on the sleeping form of a young woman and proceeded to feed. Unfortunately for him, he happened to pick Antikleia's favorite cousin for his dinner. The poor Ravnos met a bitter end that night at the hands of Antikleia and her sire. He had walked right past the two Cainites without recognizing their true nature, and he paid the price.

That night, they realized that their disguise offered them the opportunity to move unseen among not only mortals, but among vampires as well. Cainites did not expect to see Cappadocians traveling openly among the humans, and therefore they were just as gullible. Soon after, they quietly opened their doors for business. On rare occasions, they simply gather information from Cainites who, for one reason or another, do not want to employ the Nosferatu. Most often, they are hired as assassins, and their victims rarely, if ever, see them coming.

The Ladies of David rarely take commissions from non-Cappadocians, and it is their policy never to take a commission where a Cappadocian is the victim. Furthermore, it is their policy never to work against a Cainite known to be skilled in the Discipline of Auspex, since such a Cainite could quite easily penetrate their disguises.


Lasombra: The Shadow Waqf

In mortal society, the *waqf* is a Muslim practice by which a wealthy man can provide for his family after

he dies. By designating his property as *waqf*, that property becomes used for religious practices and therefore does not become property of the nation in which the man lives (as is often customary). Individuals who maintain property thus designated — called *saraafin* (singular *saraaf*) — hold a position of some stature, and the extent of their power is more than attractive to the Qabilat al-Khayal (Muslim Lasombra).

Lasombra have been Embracing *saraafin* for years or, in some cases, removing a member and taking steps to be put in his place. Yet they found that along with all of the benefits came quite a few problems. The first problem is the close relationship that the *saraaf* is forced to maintain with Islam. Early Lasombra *saraafin* had a difficult time developing excuses for missing prayers, and many had to drop out of sight to avoid incrimination. This problem led to exposure of several of these Lasombra to a band of *sayyadin* (Muslim vampire hunters; see **Veil of Night**) and eventually to a reevaluation of the proper uses and approaches to the problem of the *waqf*.

Given the many advantages to the *waqf*, the Lasombra put a great amount of effort into developing the correct approach. Not only did the *waqf* provide a significant amount of influence in the Muslim faith (and therefore the Ashirra), it also provided unlimited access to bathhouses as potential havens or feeding grounds. The influence among the locals and access to a nearly unlimited supply of donations only increased



the value to the undead. Yet the members' visibility and importance to the community made it unwise to Embrace them directly, and the Qabilat al-Khayal took steps to exercise its influence in other ways.

As each new *saraaf* is assigned, the local Lasombra spend a few months studying him, learning about his personality and studying his weaknesses. They then assign a Lasombra to act as the *saraaf*'s "shadow." This shadow also spends a short time studying her target, but then takes steps to bring him under her control. For some, the process is as simple as the blood oath. The Muslim prohibition on slavery, however, leads pious Cainites to more benign methods of influence (such as bribery).

Once the bond (in whatever form) has been established the shadow begins to work, asserting her influence and establishing a haven at the local bathhouse (or whatever specific property is declared *waqf*). If other vampires are already in residence there, the shadow either establishes an agreement with them or uses her influence to have them removed. The shadow *saraaf* holds a great deal of power in Cainite society, and those who hold the position are greatly respected. When a mortal *saraaf* dies or is removed, the former shadow retires and enjoys a position of stature at the property. The new shadow then has a close mentor in residence who can assist her with problems if necessary. Although the mentors are invited to remain at the property for as long as they like, most grow weary with retirement within a century or so and find their own pursuits. Therefore, it is likely that only one or two mentors will be present at each property.

Tzimisce: The Skomoriki

In the wastelands of Russia, small groups of minstrels called the Skomoriki travel from settlement to settlement, giving the impoverished peasantry a chance to dance, drink and forget their troubles for a little while. The coming of the Skomoriki is a matter of much excitement among most villages, and the minstrels rarely, if ever, end up paying for anything. The entertainment they provide is exchanged for food and shelter, and everyone ends up happy. Surprisingly, the Church allows such revelries to continue uninterrupted, perhaps because a few nights of excitement is sufficient to prevent full-scale ribaldry among the peasants. Whatever the reason, the Skomoriki go where they like, and no one ever asks questions.

In their wake, the minstrels leave quite a few headaches and hangovers, and more than one peasant lass finds herself in a compromising situation a few months later. (In fact, some village priests conduct a marriage ceremony every morning after the Skomoriki visit, so that any children that were conceived will not

be born out of wedlock, and not a few fathers-to-be are surprised to find themselves married the next morning whether they like it or not.) Furthermore, one or two of the villagers almost always turn up missing in the days after the minstrels leave. The peasants take it as a matter of course, saying that Idik must have wanted to play the pipes, or Jarena ran off to be with the blond-haired singer she had her eye on. When the Skomoriki return the next year, Idik and Jarena are never with them, but the minstrels laugh and say that they are ill, or that they are traveling with a group of singers in distant lands, and they send their love.

What the peasants don't know is that each Skomoriki band works for a Tzimisce. Few Tzimisce have any interest in music, and many are too inhuman in appearance to play in a minstrel show, so they often send out the minstrel groups in the care of a trusted ghoul or retainer. While the minstrels play, the ghoul selects a peasant from each village and persuades her to accompany the band as it travels throughout the lands. On rare occasions, the villager needs to be removed by force, but in most cases they gladly leave their difficult existences behind. They never return home. At the end of each season, the Skomoriki return to their master's castle with a small herd of peasants, some of whom will be kept for food and others who will be molded into acceptable servants with the use of Vicissitude.

The Skomoriki are members of an extended Tzimisce family, and they pass their minstrels down from one family member to the next. This ensures that the minstrels are well trained and loyal to the cause, given that the entire organization depends on their tact and secrecy.

Ventrue: The Last State

The Ventrue hold positions of power in almost every Cainite political organization or sect. They are princes and knights, priests and advisors. Members of the Last State would say that the Ventrue are powerful and just, and they have the means to see that changes happen. So why does Cainite society fall short of the perfect dream? What is the source of all of its flaws? Certainly, comparing the power and ability of mortals to those of the Ventrue is like comparing the abilities of an infant to those of a wise and powerful warrior. Although mortals may struggle initially, they eventually have no choice but to succumb to the whims of the Ventrue. Therefore, the culprits are obvious. If the Ventrue are perfect and the mortals weak, then the members of the Last State believe that the flaws must exist in the other clans.

Members of the Last State seek to create a new vampiric utopia: a city run by Ventrue and inhabited by



mortals who serve them. This state would be free of war, pestilence and poverty through the grace of the Ventrue leaders, and all of its residents would be happy and prosperous as a result. It would also be free of the other clans, who seek to undermine the visions of the Ventrue with their petty squabbles and faulty leadership. A limited amount of trade would be necessary to sustain such a state, but this trade would be limited to mortals only, and certain areas of the city would be restricted to them in the interest of public safety.

Surprisingly, members of the Last State can be found in the highest offices throughout the Dark Medieval. Although the sect is primarily made up of Scions, their secret ranks include two princes, many knights and a handful of powerful figures without title but with significant influence in other areas. Although the Last State does not condone the extermination of other clans, it works to undermine the efforts of non-Ventrue to gain status or influence within their domain, and, whenever possible, drives them out of influential posi-

tions and replaces them with Ventrue or, if possible, other members of the Last State.

Given the relative political power of the Ventrue, it is somewhat surprising that they have not been successful at establishing at least one Ventrue-controlled city. This failure can be explained by the simple fact that the Last State's influence is spread across many cities, most of which are in France and Italy. If its members would agree to concentrate on a single location, it is feasible that the city would fall under their influence. In this case, the sheer egotism of the members works against them. Each believes his city to be the best choice for the utopian society, and each envisions himself at the head and heart of the coup as well as the newly established government. In this manner, their strength becomes their undoing. Still, it is not wise to underestimate the strength of the Last State; its members hold the ability to ruin a Cainite's reputation with a few well placed rumors and favors called in to one of the few Justicar members (see **Road of Kings** for more information on the Justicars).

INDEX

A

Abyss Mysticism 175
Calling the Hungry Shade 178
Cry that Slays Light 181
Drinking the Blood of Ahriman 178
Evocation of the Oubliette 181
Into the Chasm 180
Pierce the Murk 176
Reflections of Hollow Revelation 179
Shadow of Hands that Serve 177
Transubstantiation of Essence 177
Whispers in the Dark 179
Advanced Disciplines 148
Auspex 150-152
Carnage of the Mind 151
Ecstatic Agony 150
Mind Revealed 150
Sight of the Oracles 151
Celerity 152-153
Celerity Refinement 152
Flawless Parry 152
Paragon of Motion 153
Unseen Storm 153
Dominate 153-155
Carry the Master's Voice 154
Command Obedience 153
Dominate the Descendants 154
Tyrant's Gaze 154
Fortitude 155-156
Arm of Prometheus 156
Armor of Kings 155
Repair the Undead Flesh 156
Stand Against All Foes 155
Obtenebration 156-158
Aegis of Shadows 156
Enter the Abyss 158
Fortify Against Ahura Mazda 157
Inner Darkness 157
Potence 158-160
Fist of the Titans 159
Lend the Supernatural Vigor 159
Master of the Forge 159
Might of the Heroes 159
Presence 160-162
Fire of Conviction 160
Force of Personality 160
Perfect Paragon 161
Perfect World 162
Vicissitude 160-163
Graft Life to Life 162
Perfect Essence 163
Transcend the Flesh 162
Will Over Form 163
Aksinya 135
Alchemical Society 233
Alfonzo XX
Aliprando, Guilelmo 72
Amici Noctis 34
Anicius the Golden 71
Archibald the Feral 222
Arpad, Geza 72

Arpad, Nova 72

B

Badr 36
ben Avraham, Yitzhak 72
Bena 227
British Isles 68
Brujah
Goals 106
History 25
Player's Toolbox 24
Byzantine Successor States 73

C

Cappadocians
Goals 102
History 25
Player's Toolbox 32
Cainite Heresy 231
Carnival 90
Carthage 20
Castel d'Ombro 35
Comets 90
Coteries 119
Courtly Conduct 84

D

Diet of Olives 74
Disciplines Techniques 163-170
Aegis of Entropy 163
Armory of the Abyss 163
Awaken the Slumbering Curse 164
Becoming Kupala 164
Charon's Oar 165
Clarity of Emptiness 165
Echo of the Subtle Vizier 165
Effigy of the Sculpted Tomb 165
Eminence of Shade/Conquering Blood 166
Eye of Unforgiving Heaven 166
Flaying Touch 167
Fountain of Ill Humors 167
Glare of Lies 168
Hand of the Master Artisan 168
Jaws of the Dracon 168
Measure the Will 168
Penitent Resilience 169
Quicksilver Contemplation 169
Sculpt the Flowing Wound 169
Sight that Pierces Lies XX
See the True Shape 169
Stunning Awe 169
Unchain the Wrathful Beast 170
Witness of Ahriman 170
Domains 66-75
Dorsteinn 226
Downtime 114

E

Eclipses 90
Esclarmonde the Black 69
Etienne of Poitou 39

F

Feast of Folly 27
Flaws
Physical
Bloodrot 203
Mask of Everyman 204
Poor Digestion 204
Unblinking Vigil 203
Visage of Death 203
Mental
Atrophied Heart 205
Degenerate 206
Enraptured by Beauty 205
Fierce Bigot 205
Noble Arrogance 205
Poor Taste 205
Selective Thirst 205
Social
Disgrace to the Blood 206
Prestigious Rival 206
Supernatural
Animate Shadow 208
Bound to the Earth 209
Darksight 207
Geasa 209
Hand of Hades 209
Harbinger of the Abyss 209
Thirst of Caine 209
France 68
Furores 24

G

Geoffrey of Paris 69
Germany 69
Ghouls 105
Hell-Beasts 63
Giovanni 29, 136
Augustus Giovanni 141
Justus Giovanni 141
Markus Musa Giovanni 141
Golconda 116
Gratiano de Veronese 35

H

Hardestadt 58, 68, 70
Havens 101
Hektor 22
Hélène le Juste 226
Henricus Germanus 72
Heraldry 79-84
Herleva of Durazzo 22-23
Hippolyta 145
Hungary 72

I

Iberia 70
ibn Rassheed, Yusuf 224
Instruction of Neonates 92
Isouda de Blaise 225
Italy 71

J

Japheth 27
Japheth's Curse 30
Julia Antasia 34, 58, 70
Jürgen of Magdeburg 50, 69

K

Koldunic Sorcery 182-193
Ways 183-189
Way of Earth 183
Way of Fire 188
Way of Spirit 189
Way of Water 186
Way of Wind 185
Rituals 189-193
Beast that Feeds on Dreams 189
Blood of Flame 190
Conjure Demon 191
Conjure Spirit 191
Create Vozhd 193
Hospitality 190
Inmost Tug 192
Invoke the Greater Sign of Power 191
Invoke the Lesser Sign of Power 191
Merging of Souls 192
Nemesis of the Living Earth 193
Pool of Secrets 192
Reawakening Dead Water 190
Refuge of the Thirsty Grave 192
Ritual of Death's Embrace 190
Rouse the Elemental Spirit 191
Sentinels of the Haven 192
Kupala 46

L

Lamia 141
Lasombra
Goals 109
History 33
Player's Toolbox 37
Last State 235
Liberal Pursuits 88
Lotharius 70
Lucita 69

M

Matthew of Lindisfarne 135
Merits
Physical
Controlled Thirst 203
Mark of Pure Blood 203
Mask of Everyman 204
Trained Scent 203
Mental
Ability Aptitude 204
Artful Visionary 204
Cathartic Fury 204
Disciplined Eye 205
Focused Rage 204
Iron Will 205
Lion-Hearted 204
Meticulous Planner 204

Obsessive Savant 204
Unimpressed 205
Well-Educated 205
Social
Former Ghoul 206
Master of Protocol 206
Secrets 206
Unbroken Lineage 206
Well-Known 206
Supernatural
Arcane 207
Darksight 207
Discipline Prodigy 207
Gifts of the Beast 208
Personal Aura 207
Promethean Clay 207
Pure Blood 207
Sanctifying Kiss 207
Sweet Blood 207
Michael 73, 230
Michaelites 230
Midian of Hamburg 224
Mithras 59, 68
Moments of Truth 117
Montano 35, 70
Mortis 193-203
Paths
Haunting 196
Nigromancy 193
Rituals
Casting of Bones 197
Draught of Dust and Ashes 201
Eldritch Beacon 197
Eyes of Despondent Revelation 198
Fettered Minion 199
Graveyard Mists 200
Howl from Beyond 198
Hungry Mold 198
Implacable Vigor 200
Knell of Doom 198
Kiss of Ages 198
Malediction of Fetid Veins 200
Mark of Despair 200
Orpheus' Descent 202
Peek Past the Shroud 201
Resurrection of Stirred Blood 201
Sanctuary of Living Death 201
Skull of Warning 199
Unearth the Hidden Corpse 199
Veil that Bars Eternity 201

N

Natalya Syvatoslav 22
Nathaniel of Carlisle 56
Nehemiah 130

O

Omen War 50
Outremer 74

P

Panfilo the Cruel 71

Penelope of Hamburg 223
Prometheans 70

R

Rathmonicus 130
Reinaldo del Rubio 36
Roads by clan 116
Road of the Abyss 176
Rodrigo 40
Rosamund of Islington 225
Rudolf Brandl 70
Rusenko, Bela 72

S

Sacraments
Embrace 75
Final Death 78
Marriage 76
Oaths 77
Salianna 68
Salubri 130
Samiel 131
Scandinavia 73
Shaagra 48
Shadow *Waqf* 234
Skomoriki 235
Sports and Games 85

T

Tactics 59
Telyavelic Tremere 189
Temporis 170-175
Themistocles 130
Topiarium 228
Toreador
Goals
History 53
Player's Toolbox 58
Troile 18, 127
Tzimisce
Goals 112
History 44
Player's Toolbox 52

V

Vassals
Ventrué
Goals 113
History 53
Player's Toolbox 58
Véronique d'Orléans 222
Vladimir Rustovitch 49, 51, 72

W

Women of David 233
Woodwose Savages 229

Z

Zarathustra 74
Zvi, Joseph 70

Dark Ages VAMPIRE

Name:
Player:
Chronicle:

Nature:
Demeanor:
Clan:

Generation:
Concept:
Haven:

ATTRIBUTES

Physical		Social		Mental	
Strength	●○○○○○○○○	Charisma	●○○○○○○○○	Perception	●○○○○○○○○
Dexterity	●○○○○○○○○	Manipulation	●○○○○○○○○	Intelligence	●○○○○○○○○
Stamina	●○○○○○○○○	Appearance	●○○○○○○○○	Wits	●○○○○○○○○

ABILITIES

Talents		Skills		Knowledges	
Alertness	○○○○○○○○○○	Animal Ken	○○○○○○○○○○	Academics	○○○○○○○○○○
Athletics	○○○○○○○○○○	Archery	○○○○○○○○○○	Hearth Wisdom	○○○○○○○○○○
Brawl	○○○○○○○○○○	Commerce	○○○○○○○○○○	Investigation	○○○○○○○○○○
Dodge	○○○○○○○○○○	Crafts	○○○○○○○○○○	Law	○○○○○○○○○○
Empathy	○○○○○○○○○○	Etiquette	○○○○○○○○○○	Linguistics	○○○○○○○○○○
Expression	○○○○○○○○○○	Melee	○○○○○○○○○○	Medicine	○○○○○○○○○○
Intimidation	○○○○○○○○○○	Performance	○○○○○○○○○○	Occult	○○○○○○○○○○
Leadership	○○○○○○○○○○	Ride	○○○○○○○○○○	Politics	○○○○○○○○○○
Legerdemain	○○○○○○○○○○	Stealth	○○○○○○○○○○	Seneschal	○○○○○○○○○○
Subterfuge	○○○○○○○○○○	Survival	○○○○○○○○○○	Theology	○○○○○○○○○○

ADVANTAGES

Disciplines		Backgrounds		Virtues	
_____	○○○○○○○○○○	_____	○○○○○○○○○○	Conscience/Conviction	○○○○○○
_____	○○○○○○○○○○	_____	○○○○○○○○○○	Self-Control/Instinct	○○○○○○
_____	○○○○○○○○○○	_____	○○○○○○○○○○	Courage	_____○○○○○○

Other Traits		Road		Health	
_____	○○○○○○○○○○	_____	_____	Bruised	<input type="checkbox"/>
_____	○○○○○○○○○○	_____	_____	Hurt	-1 <input type="checkbox"/>
_____	○○○○○○○○○○	○○○○○○○○○○○○○○○○	_____	Injured	-1 <input type="checkbox"/>
_____	○○○○○○○○○○	Aura: _____()	_____	Wounded	-2 <input type="checkbox"/>
_____	○○○○○○○○○○	_____	_____	Mauled	-2 <input type="checkbox"/>
_____	○○○○○○○○○○	_____	_____	Crippled	-5 <input type="checkbox"/>
_____	○○○○○○○○○○	_____	_____	Incapacitated	<input type="checkbox"/>
_____	○○○○○○○○○○	_____	_____	_____	_____
_____	○○○○○○○○○○	_____	_____	Weakness	_____
_____	○○○○○○○○○○	_____	_____	_____	_____
_____	○○○○○○○○○○	_____	_____	Experience	_____
_____	○○○○○○○○○○	_____	_____		

Dark Ages VAMPIRE

PERSONAL INFORMATION

SIRE: _____

HAVEN: _____

DOMAIN: _____

OVERLORD: _____

VASSALS: _____

DISCIPLINE TECHNIQUES:

Name: Source/Page: System:

RITUALS:

Name: Source/Page: System:

Moments of Truth:

Goals and Plots:

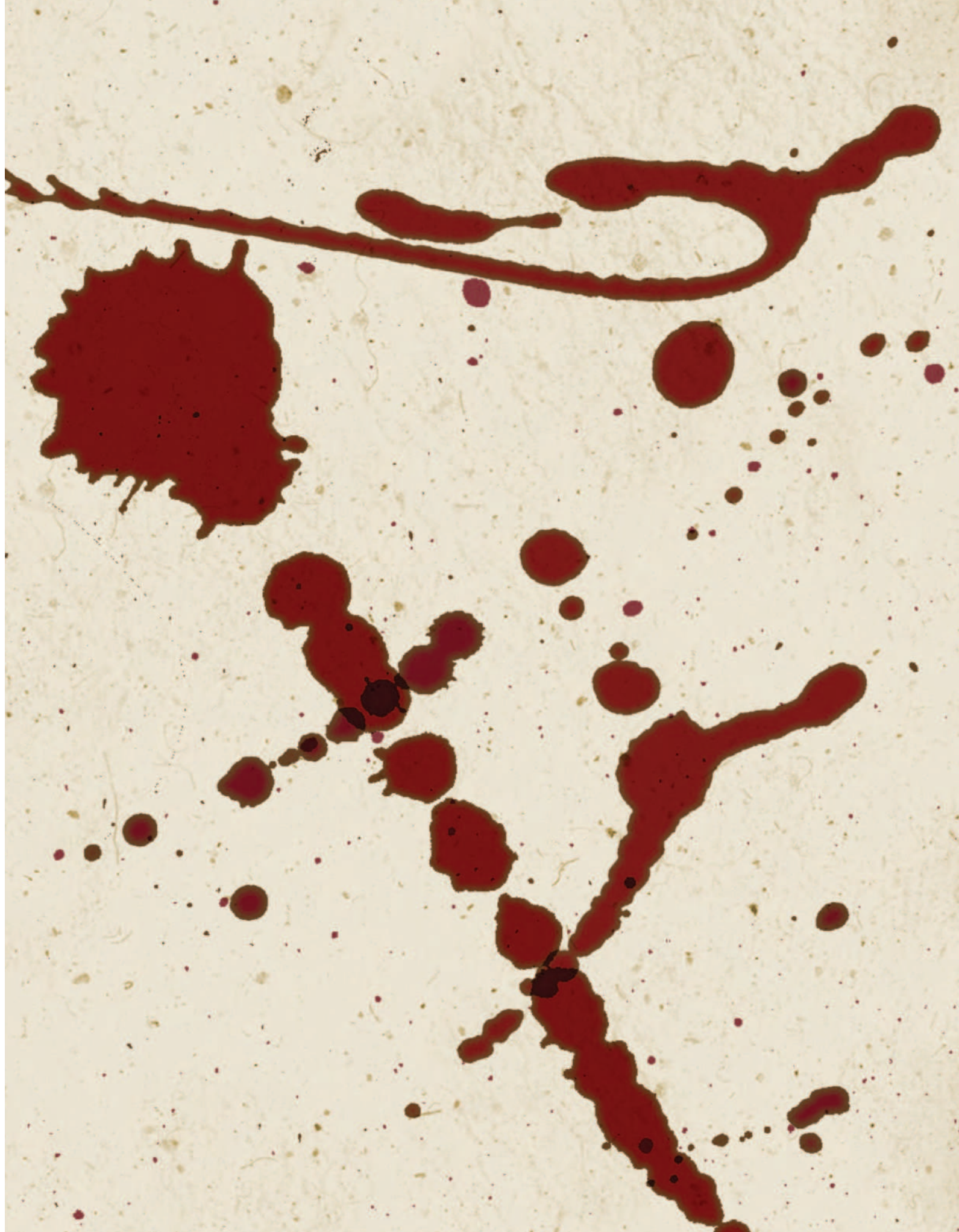
COTERIE INFORMATION

Other Cainites:

Name: Clan: Player: Thoughts:

BACKGROUND POOL:

Background: Contributed by: Rating: Description:



PLAYERS GUIDE TO HIGH CLANS™

IN THE BLOOD IS POWER

The Salubri have fallen. Now we are only six, although we do not stand united. Indeed, kings seldom do. But we are the rulers of the night, by divine ordinance and by the power of Caine's blood. If the Low Clans have forgotten their place, surely it is time we reminded them. The War of Princes will not end with madmen on thrones!

THE LEARNED AND LORDLY DEAD

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