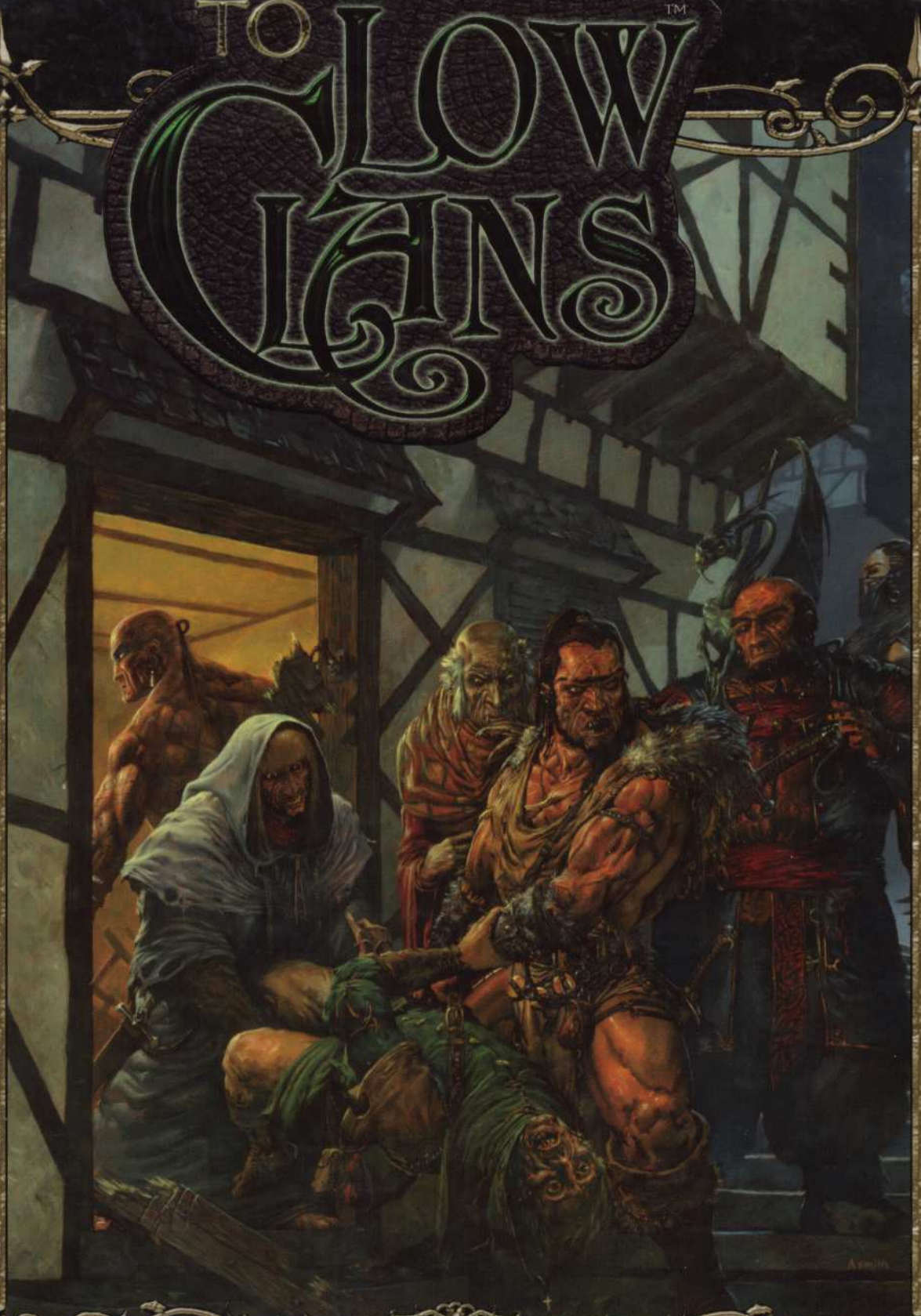


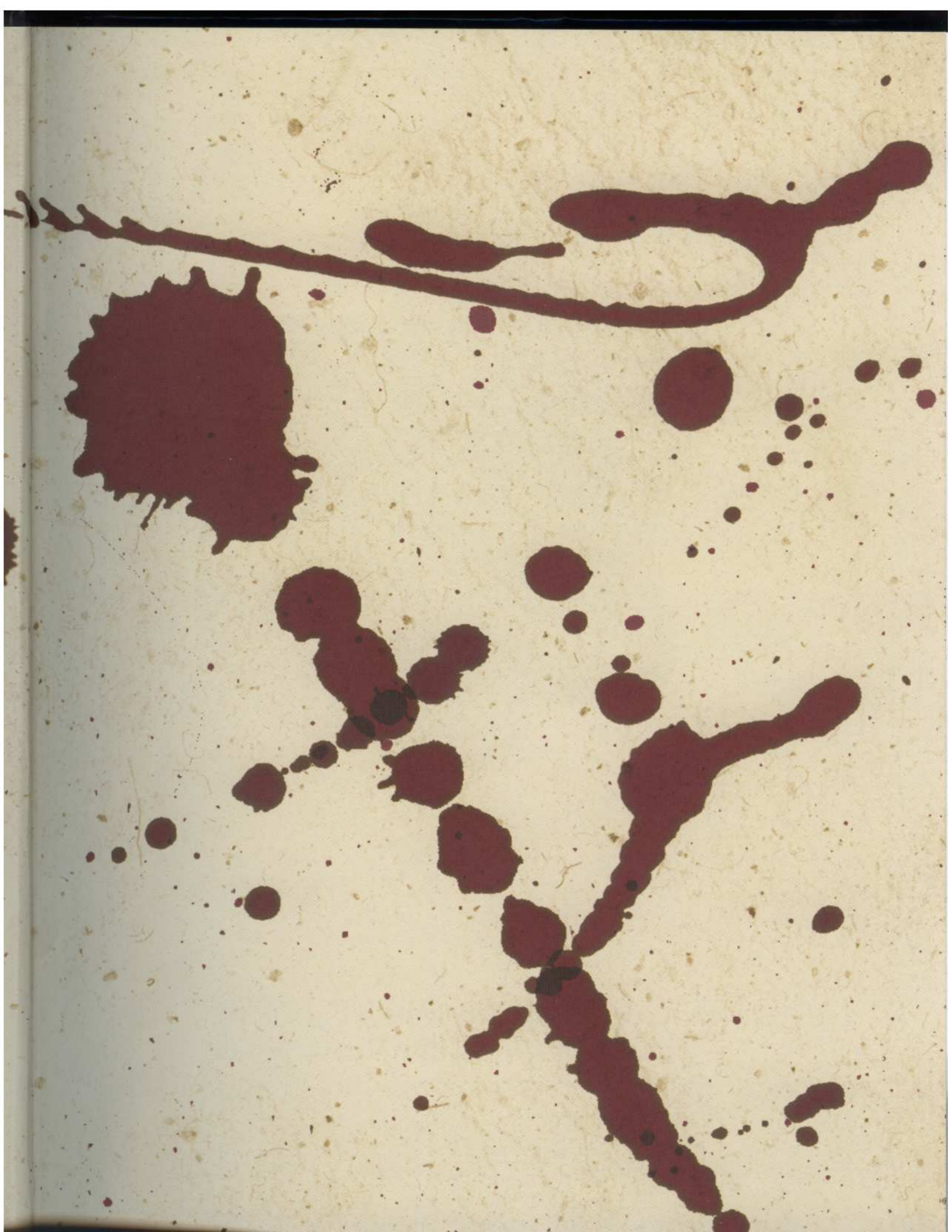
PLAYERS GUIDE
TO
**CLOW
CIANS**TM




A SOURCEBOOK FOR DARK AGES: VAMPIRETM

Ainsley Taylor







PLAYERS GUIDE
TO **CLOW
CLANS**™

By Zach Bush, Michael Butler, Michael A. Goodwin,
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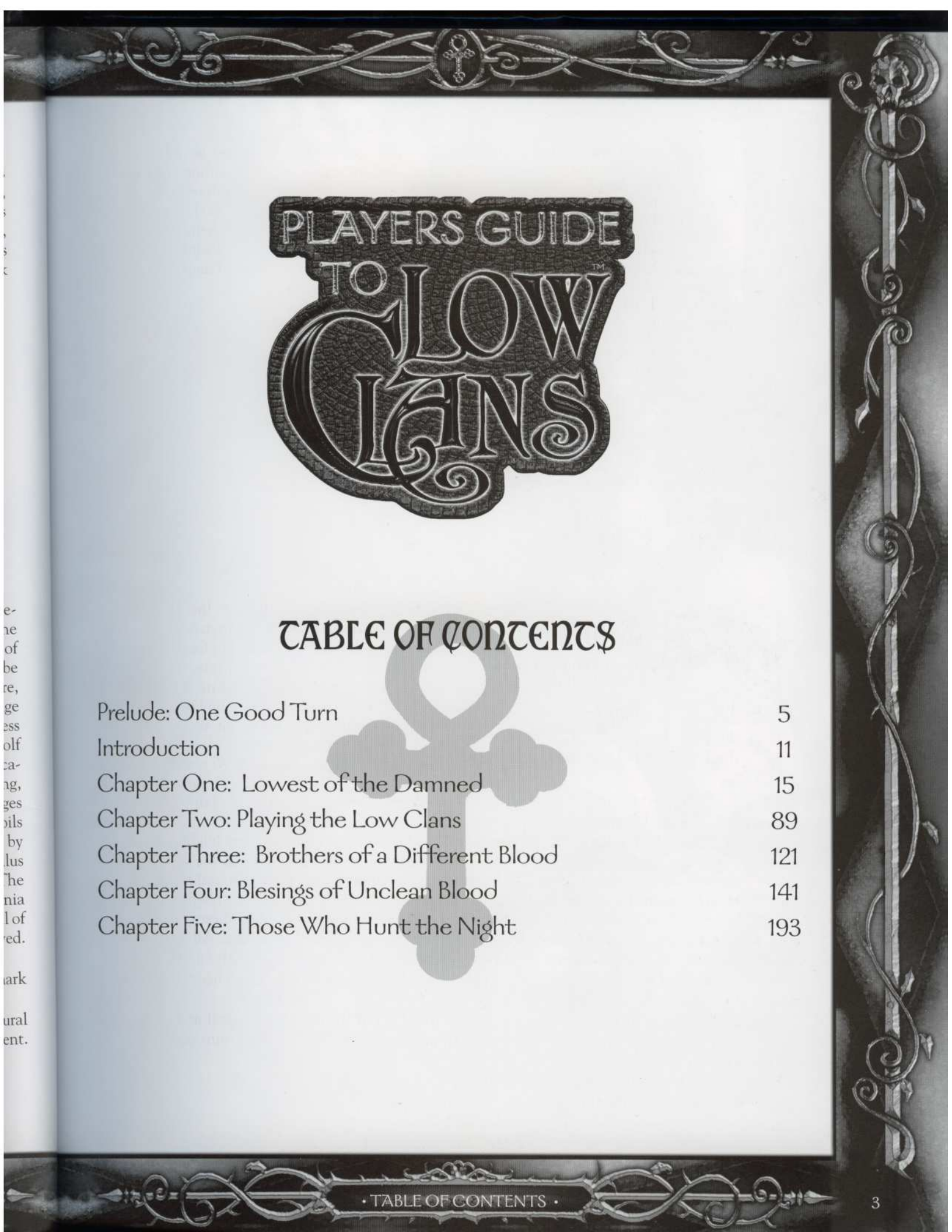
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PLAYERS GUIDE TO LOW CLANS™

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PRELUDE: ONE GOOD TURN

Perfer et obdura; dolor hic tibi proderit olim.
(Be patient and tough; one day this pain will be useful to you.)

— Ovid

Jervais is nervous. I can tell. He shows it in his own subtle way.

“Fidus! This is not the clean *bliaut*!”


When I run into the room his face is already red as a beet. He’s the only Cainite I’ve seen who flushes. It makes him look alive. It also leaves him hungry later. I’d better check with the larderer and be sure he gets hold of another; one of those two wretches down there won’t survive the night.

“Magister, it is, I got it back from the washerwoman not an hour ago —”

He grabs hold of the front of my robe and nearly tears it. “Look! Just look, you imbecile! Perhaps this is how you like to go about, Fidus — that is why no one ever looks twice at you — but why should I suffer for your sloth?”

I glance down at the offending fabric. “Chalk marks. They’ll wipe off.” I know even as I open my mouth it’s a mistake, but I can’t help it. “Did you lay it down on the table by chance? It probably still has traces of chalk from your spell last night.”

His eyes bulge. With a great cuff on the ear he sends me stumbling halfway across the room. “Get a brush then. The Baron will be arriving any moment now! Is it more



important to succeed in our business, or to blather on excusing your failure in one chore by your failure in another?"

I'm sure I could have made the table spotless if he'd given me more than the space of an *Ave Maria* to do it in, but I say nothing. I go to fetch a brush.

There were two of us once, Stefan and I. Seven hard years we both labored, and then we had to cast a spell to test our worthiness for initiation. It's a pointless little spell Jervais invented himself. If performed absolutely correctly, a line of blood wriggles in the sand to form the words "One House, One Clan, One Blood" in Latin. But the tiniest error chokes the poor sod on a flood of blood boiling up from the heart into the gullet. I gained the Embrace. Stefan was buried the following sundown, except for his heart and his left hand, which are still pickled in jars for the next time we need the ingredients. Jervais will waste gold, ink, words, lives and time, but never ingredients. I still have conversations with Stefan's heart on occasion, but I hope Jervais finds another apprentice soon. A mortal, that I could order about and blame for things. It seems a very comfortable arrangement.

"Is this our master spy?" the Baron chuckles when he sees me. Jervais shifts uneasily, but the Baron reaches out and tousles my hair. "Good choice, Master Tremere. He looks like he hasn't a drop of harm in him. Have you, lad?"

I can't think of anything to say. The Baron is nearly as big as the master, and he walks as though he had been born with a sword belted onto him.

"He's done well this month." Jervais hastens to answer for me. "Not only has he nearly talked our goose onto the spit, but he learned a good deal of interesting gossip in the process. Well, go on, Fidus."

"I...I have word of her ladyship's doings in Cologne," I stuttered. "And I know that she will be back soon, within the fortnight..."

†††

"You're late," says Raban. The others in the city call him Furz, even the other Nosferatu, when they speak of him at all. I may be the only one who knows his right name.

"I had trouble getting away."

He gives me what I have determined is his sympathetic look, and takes out the chessboard. "What was it this time, digging in the mulch for glow-worms, cleaning up a blood-spill — or did the Volcano simply erupt on you again?"

"The Volcano lies dormant for now," I said. "And all apprentices must work hard, it's the way of the clan."

He snorts.

"What about you? Has the Medusa slithered back into her crypt?"

"She's back," he confirms tersely.

"And?"

He keeps laying out the pieces.

"Well, she's turned you to stone already I see." I wait. One thing I've learned since I started this — assignment is that he really wants to talk to me. Once upon a time, I suppose, he at least had the other Lepers to gossip with. Now there's no one he can tell anything. I know how that feels.

"Have you finished your lesson?" I ask at last.

"I haven't had time."

"Raban..."

"All right, but it isn't very good."

"Let teacher be the judge of that."

He hands me the sheet of parchment. I go over it. He rubs an oozing sore on his cheek.

"Well?"

I have to find something to criticize or he won't take any of it seriously. "I'm still seeing too much pressure at the start of your vertical strokes, they're a bit blocky. And you should have trimmed your pen six letters earlier on this line. But the ascenders and descenders look good. Beautiful, in fact."

"Beautiful?" Irony sings the word.

"Yes. Beautiful," I repeat.

"We'll see if I can say the same about your game," he remarks. Of course his lady has never taught him the noble art of chess, but he's sat through at least a match a week for the last thirty years. She makes him hide in a special nook, watch everyone's faces and lips and report back to her later, so that she can spend the night pretending to be above politics. Jervais likes the idea of my learning Lasombra chess tricks, so that I can teach him and he can challenge them to games. Evidently they have this tradition of playing for high stakes: servants, childer, treasure, portions of their domains, their eternal souls, and so forth — which I must admit sounds just like Jervais' kind of sport.

"Maybe if you took white this time," I answer. "You know I play better on the defensive."

"I know. But sometimes the only defense is an offense."

This remark hangs in the air with more resonance than usual. I nod and ponder my opening.

"She had me take my second."

"What?" I glance up, still trying to think of some strategy other than the obvious. His misshapen face leans close. It took me months to learn to read any feeling in it, but now it's like second nature. His eyes, islands of humanity in a sea of boils and dead flaking skin, bore into mine, hot and desperate.

"Your second..." It takes me a moment to realize. "Drink?"

"It seems my mistress detects a new sullenness in me. It does not please her that I find my own occupations now and again. I have been neglected shamefully, that is how she put it. I protested, of course. I said she was my moon and my queen. I begged." He grinds his teeth. "She let me beg and beg like a dog, and then she made me do it anyhow."

"I hope," I stammer. "I mean, if our meetings are partly to blame, then I'm so very sorry, Raban. Perhaps — perhaps it's better we should avoid each other for a while." Jervais will understand. He must. He's always saying we immortals should take the long view.

"It's not you," Raban says morosely, and sits back. "This is my own doing. It's been a long time in coming. I suppose after tomorrow night, I might not even wish to see you."

"Tomorrow night?"

"It's to be finished tomorrow."

"No." I stand. "No, Raban, this is madness. After all you've done for her! How can she even think it? You can't let her. You must..."

"Must what?" he echoes angrily. "What would you have me do? I'm her *familiare*, and I've taken two draughts now. If I went to another master she'd simply prosecute it as theft under Tradition and his Highness would be obliged to return me."

"But what about the warren? They can hide you."

"You don't understand, Fidus. The warren won't have me back no matter *what* she does to me. None of the warrens within a thousand miles will. You're a Tremere. Tremere don't exile their clanfellows."

"That's true." No, Tremere don't use exile as punishment. If they don't want someone anymore, they kill him. I sit down heavily, but then an idea comes to me. Perhaps I can serve both my friend and my mission. Jervais once spoke of a spell...

Raban watches me, frowning. I can't let hope show on my face or he'll be suspicious, but my heart rises as I turn back to him.

"Don't try to think of something clever, Fidus. There is nothing."

"But in fact there might be. You forget, I'm apprenticed to a wizard."

"I doubt the Volcano will help me for your sake."

"No, not for my sake. But for his own, in exchange for some favor later...he knows we need every friend in this city that we can get."

Raban shakes his head. "No, no. No favors to your master, Fidus. After all I've heard from you I know better than to trust him. I fear what he'd ask in return."

"We could settle that in advance. You could at least meet him to discuss it! Won't you even give me a chance? You can get away for that long. I know you can."

"Yes, but to cheat the very chains of Blood? I don't dare think what his price would be."

"It's a coin," I explain eagerly. "It's very simple. An enchanted coin. All you would need to do is put it under your tongue, and the blood you drank wouldn't affect you. She needn't ever know the difference."

"No. I'm sure it's a marvelous spell, Fidus. I'm sure you would like to fix everything with a wave of your magic wand —"

"It has nothing to do with magic. To hell with the magic!" That stops him short. "Don't you see, Raban? I've already lost the only companion I had once before."

"Yes. Your Stefan." He stares at me.

"And there was no way I could stop it. But this time, this time there is a way. Let me do this for you, Raban. Wouldn't you feel the same if the tables were turned?"

†††

"A very clever idea," the Baron says later that evening. "You're telling me that the blood passes into this coin, infusing it, as the priests claim the Host is infused with the substance of Christ's flesh."

"Yes." Jervais nods. "And when he returns the coin to us, I can extract that blood again in its original form, and then, my lord, she will be in our power at last."

"Fine, fine. Only..." He glances sidewise at me. "Your boy here says old Furz told him no, so I'm not sure why you called me out here. I understand you lot are theoreticians by nature, but what good does all this speculation do me?"

Jervais smiles felinely, the tips of his evil little teeth peeking out from the corners of his lips. "Not speculation but prophecy. He'll come to us. He must."

I hear a scratching from behind the little chest that holds the spare alchemist's apparatus. "Excuse me, your lordship, *Magister*." I move the chest and a great fat rat crawls out, sniffing warily at my hand. Around its neck is a little lead tube, from which I extract a scrap of parchment. Scrawled in careful minuscules is the word *midnight*.

"It's begun," I tell them. "Ra — that is, Furz, he wants to meet."

"Then we'd better ready the coin, and quickly."

"And I should let you get to work," the Baron says amiably, retrieving his cloak. "Don't bother sending me the good news, by the way. I daresay I'll hear whether your little endeavor succeeded soon enough."

†††

"Any word?" I ask my master the following evening, after I've risen, dressed, fed and done my nightly chores.

"Why should there be word? She may not have even summoned him yet. Ride out to the gallows now and dig up a fresh mandrake, we'll need it for later."

Finding the mandrake takes half the night, of course, and on the way in a terrible rainstorm begins to pour. I'm sopping to the skin when I finally get back, but Jervais just sticks his head out of the laboratory door, looks me up and down, and tells me to fetch the cauldron and the shunt.

Not another potions experiment, now of all times. I'm thinking about other things, and it isn't until I set down the cauldron at the side of the worktable and straighten up to insert the shunt that I see the ravaged face staring back at me. He says nothing. I stumble back a step, into Master Jervais' barrel chest. The master puts a hand on my shoulder, as though to steady me, but the grip is like a vulture's talon.

"Easy, lad."

My lips won't move, not for a long moment, and when they do nothing wants to come out.

"You... you said he would be useful to us even after he returned the coin. You said it wouldn't be necessary to kill him."

"He *will* be useful to us," Jervais answers, "and we're not going to kill him. Now take a preliminary sample and prepare it."

He goes over to the shelves. I hear tools being taken down. I know them all by the sound they make when they clatter on the sidetable. His saw. His bone forceps.

"Well?" Raban whispers to me. "He said to take a sample. And you obey him no matter what, don't you?"

"This is different." The words spill out numbly, as though some other mind were directing them. I wish that were so.

"Of course."

"My Oath..." But it's not because of my clan Oath that my body refuses to move as it would like to, that I don't pick up this cauldron and dash it into my master's skull while his back is turned.

"Pay this traitorous slave no mind, Fidus," Jervais interrupts in his richest voice as he returns with his tray of things. "His heart is poisoned against all his betters, obviously; that's why we chose him. If the noise bothers you, we'll just remove his tongue..."

Raban's eyes, dulled over with despair, sharpen and brighten at that. "And what about you, warlock?" he prods Jervais. "I daresay *you* know all about slavery, traitorous or otherwise. Or do you pretend you want my lady dead for your own reasons?"

"Why would I pretend anything to my own laboratory subject?" Jervais smirks. "Come, Fidus. Either put in the shunt or give it to me, don't stand there like a lump."

"Is it the Baron's orders you're acting on? That's my guess. So many Cainites visit you in the dead of night, but he's the only one who actually supports you to the prince. Not wise to deny him anything he might want."

Jervais sets the empty flagon down with an irritated noise. I see him debate himself. Then he leans over Raban's grinning face.

"It is because you don't understand the first thing about the Tremere, you...intestinal expulsion of a vampire...that you are in this mess at all. The Baron fits into our designs, not the reverse."

"Is it the Baron who needs to worry if evidence should turn up of sorcery against her ladyship? Is it the Baron who's getting rid of accomplices? No, not yet anyway. Of course if he should decide to do just that, it won't be hard at all."

The flush is creeping up Jervais' neck. I shake my head mutely at Raban: No, no, don't do this. It's suicide. Preserve yourself —

The cruel, Cainite part of my mind breaks in on this. *Preserve himself? What for? For Jervais' further attentions? For the friend he trusted in vain?*

"Hand me the cauterizing tongs, Fidus." The rich voice is suddenly cold, dead.

"Ah yes. Tear my tongue out." My God, I think he's enjoying this now. I go to get the tongs from the brazier where they sit at the ready, but I move slowly, deliberately slowly. "I'm only saying what everyone already knows. The Tremere fancy a place among the High, and that's exactly what makes them so easy to control. The carrot and the stick — when they mind, then let them think they have a chance; and when they don't, it's just as easy to burn the wizards out. No one mourns, no one misses them. No one *needed* them in the first place, and all the other scum are just glad to have enough of the city's scrawniest, most diseased prey to go round again."

"Fidus!"

"Coming, *Magister*. It's almost hot," I answer calmly. He hates it when he shouts and I'm calm.

"Now be honest, warlock, when you gobbled down your elixir of immortality, was this really what you had in mind? Scuttling and wheedling for all eternity? Wasn't it supposed to be a step up? I remember the first night you came before the throne all over-perfumed and spangled like a Lombard dandy. How they all laughed after you left. The Baron loudest of all. Do you know what he said?"

"I don't care a *fig* what he *said* —"

"'Ceoris has sent a court conjuror to amuse us,' he said, 'and to think we've been so afraid of them all this time —'"

I turn at the sound of the gurgle that chokes off Raban's words. The Volcano has erupted. Jervais' thick hands choke Raban for a moment; then Jervais grabs hold of the leg of the sturdy oak worktable, overturns and dashes it into the floor. A many-pointed star of blood splashes out from underneath. The table lands on its side with Raban still attached to it, his

skull caved in above the left eyebrow and lolling. Jervais kicks him — I hear ribs crunch — and then leans in. I slide the brazier further out from reach. It wouldn't do to have him knock it over in his passion. Quietly and unhurriedly I move out of the field of his sight. He tears Raban off the table, shakes him like a straw man and digs his fangs into the leprous neck.

I wait until my master drops his prey, looks down at it almost bewilderedly, then shoves it aside with a foot. I wait while he flails about for some means of cleaning his besmirched face, settling at last for a scrap of scratch parchment on a shelf. I wait until he notices me. I won't speak out of turn.

He glances at the tongs still in my hand. "Put those away, idiot," he grates. "Can't you see they're hardly needed anymore?"

"Yes, master." I set them down. "Shall I get the jars of Celorb's Ichor out of the root cellar, master? Will you be wanting the heart and the teeth?"

He gives me an odd look then. "Yes, Fidus. The heart, the teeth and the lying tongue I think." He toes Raban's head with his boot; only a thin strip of skin still connects it to the neck. "And hurry, before he turns to ash."

"Yes, master." I scurry out and down the stairs. I mustn't seem too eager, or Jervais will think I'm plotting revenge. But I'm not...not for a while anyway. I only want to keep what Jervais will let me have of Raban. I'll put his jar next to Stefan's, and when the ruins of my dignity are smarting for the thousandth time, I'll go to them and hear Raban gloat again over how he bested the Volcano, and we'll laugh together, the three of us.

It's a mean, paltry, squalid little joy, but it's mine forever.





INTRODUCTION

“Men ought either to be indulged or utterly destroyed, for if you merely offend them they take vengeance, but if you injure them they are unable to retaliate, so that the injury done to a man ought to be such that vengeance cannot be feared.”

— Niccolo Machiavelli

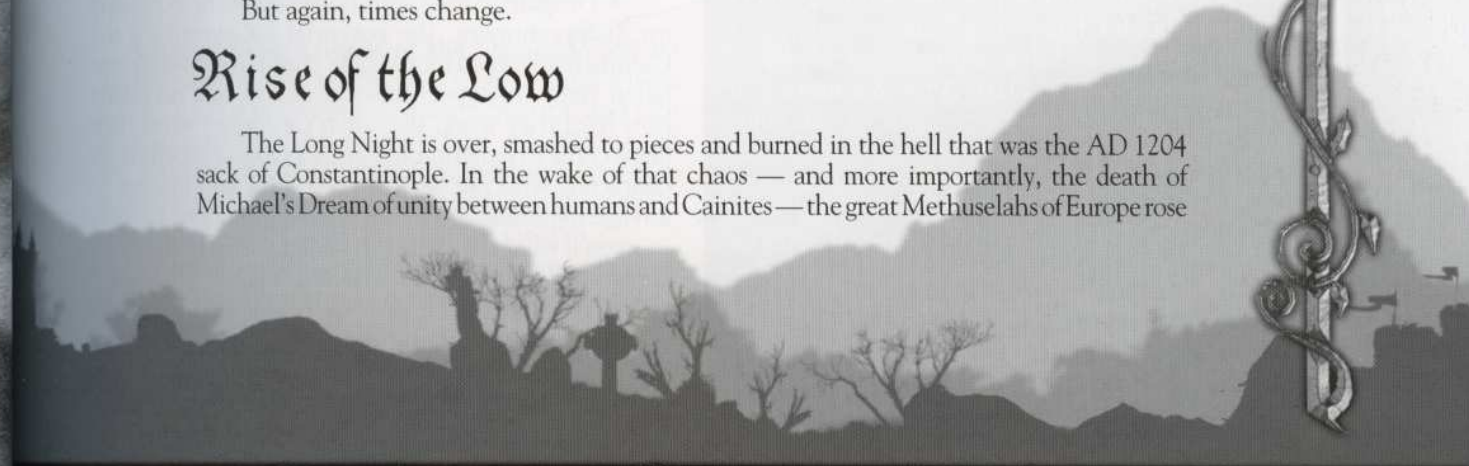
The Low Clans were not always thought so. In the nights of ancient Rome, Malkavians stood by the sides of Lasombra and Ventrue rulers as venerated seers and advisors. Nosferatu were trusted more than reviled and Gangrel respected as well as feared. As for the *Banu Haqim* and the other foreign clans, they were unknowns, never considered High or Low because they were not considered at all.

Times change. The Low Clans fell in importance as the cities rose, and they threw in their lots with the common folk more often than the nobility. The High Clans took and kept the seats of power, and little by little, the fallen came to believe that their lowly status really was pre-ordained. The first cursed were the true chosen of Caine — even the Cappadocians, who wore their curse on their faces, kept a cold beauty. In an age where physical perfection equated to inner beauty, the Low Clans dwelt in squalor and wilderness while the High reclined in comfort and civilization.

But again, times change.

Rise of the Low

The Long Night is over, smashed to pieces and burned in the hell that was the AD 1204 sack of Constantinople. In the wake of that chaos — and more importantly, the death of Michael's Dream of unity between humans and Cainites — the great Methuselahs of Europe rose



to action. Most of the major players in this game of blood and souls belong the High Clans, of course, but somewhere along the way the Low Clans rose to prominence.

It didn't happen overnight, of course, and although the destruction of Constantinople is widely seen as the end of the Long Night, the seeds of dissent were germinating among the fallen long before the Fourth Crusade left Venice. The Shadow *Reconquista* in Iberia brought the differences between Christian and Muslim Cainites into sharp focus — and one of the chief such differences is the societal role of the Nosferatu and Assamites. The diablerie of Saulot and the rise of Tremere, centuries before the Fourth Crusade, shook the vampiric societal order to its foundations. Smaller events along the way have helped members of the Low Clans rise above their perceived station, as well: Etienne de Faubergé and Joseph Zvi both claim domain over important cities (Acre and Prague, respectively); Mithras appointed the Malkavian Seren as one of his Barons of Avalon; the Diet of Olives in the Holy Land crossed the boundaries of clan and religion — the list goes on. In AD 1230, the Low Clans are a formidable force in the War of Princes.

Theme and Mood

The *Players Guide to Low Clans* is, as the name suggests, designed to give players of Low Clan characters

LANDS BEYOND

A stute readers may well 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 position as the holders of power and simultaneously keeping the Low Clans down, but the distinction only exists because so many Cainites acknowledge it. But 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” or “low” vary).

This book (and the forthcoming *Players Guide to High 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.

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 Low Clans are concerned.

Theme

- **Blood:** This is, after all, a horror game. The Low Clans aren't likely to have goblets of vitae brought to them by slaves. They must venture out at night and find their own sources of warm blood. The herds of the Low Clans are lepers and criminals, not insensate nobles and concubines. Without a herd, the fallen Cainite might be forced to steal into peoples' homes and feed from their sleeping bodies (and it's difficult to pretend one is anything but a monster after such an act). Whatever the method, though, obtaining blood is key to survival, and the Low Clans are much more in tune with survival than the first cursed.

- **Hope:** The Low Clans fear for their souls in a much more immediate way than the High Clans, because the first cursed can at least point to their exalted stations and believe that the Almighty chose them. Now that the Low Clans are rising slowly but steadily across Europe, perhaps God has something in mind for them?

The Low Clans also seek redemption from God, not only because that redemption comes with better sleeping quarters or a cleaner herd. The Nosferatu and the Malkavians, especially, look at their blood-borne weaknesses as judgments or crosses to bear, and of course the Assamites and Followers of Set are very often involved in their own religious crusades.

“Ambition,” not too different from hope, might easily become a theme of a Low-Clan oriented story. In fact, hope could well become ambition if the reasons behind it change even slightly. For instance, a character who takes on the role of an ashen priest in hopes of finding enlightenment or redemption might become seduced by the prestige such a position holds and wish only to advance within her road. What makes such a story uniquely Low-Clan is the added element of rebellion; the Low Clans don't *do* such things.

- **Despair:** Along with hope comes the possibility for disappointment, the potential for everything the Cainite has worked for to come crumbling down. Some fallen vampires expect this sort of end, and no matter how hard they work, they aren't surprised when their plans come to naught. But perhaps more compelling are characters who rail against their fates and manage to salvage *something*, whatever is most important to them — even if what they wind up saving is only peripherally connected with their stated goals.

- **War:** The War of Princes is a war of ancient vampires, mostly of the High Clans, trying to nail down domain and subvert their vassals and their enemies' vassals. The Low Clans are by no means

absent from that war, but the first cursed don't always realize how important a role the fallen play. Low Clan Cainites might fight in the War of Princes for a particular vampire's cause, to protect their own people or domains, or to bring the chaos to an explosive climax (and be in place to pick up the pieces). The Low Clans, after all, are adept at surviving bad situations; how could the High Clans ever hope to eke out an existence after a truly apocalyptic battle?

Mood

- **Horror:** The horror of **Dark Ages: Vampire** comes in large part from what the characters *are*, rather than what they confront. The characters are bloodsucking, undead corpses who struggle to understand, undo or perfect the curse that God has placed on them. That simple sentence takes on a very different mood when applied to vampires dwelling among lepers or peasantry than when applied to vampires lurking in the halls of power. As a player, ask yourself: What about your character is terrifying? His face? His eyes? His voice? The blood on his lips? Never lose track of the fact that each vampire character is a monster...and of what that character plans to do about it, if anything.

- **Madness:** The Malkavians, of course, best embody this mood, but all Cainites have the potential to lose their rational minds and succumb to the Beast Within. When a Cainite loses her road, she can no longer be sure of her motivations, her actions or her soul. With no social structure to turn to for support or aid (or even a merciful death), the fallen fear this gradual death of the mind like little else.

Chapter by Chapter

The **Prelude** offers a glimpse into the unives of the Low Clans from the perspective of the servant to Jervais bani Tremere himself, and shows what treachery the Low Clans are capable of performing in the name of advancement and recognition.

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

Chapter One: Lowest of the Damned presents the histories of each of the Low Clans, along with a player's toolkit providing character creation and plot hook inspirations. Also, you'll find information on the domains of the fallen, some tactics they use to make their way in the Dark Medieval, and the ways in which they twist and pervert human custom.

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

Chapter Three: Brothers of a Different Blood provides information on several of the bloodlines that

have branched off from the Low Clans and how best to use these mongrels in a chronicle.

Chapter Four: Blessings of Unclean Blood gives players and Storytellers a multitude of new Discipline techniques, as well as new Thaumaturgy rituals, details on Assamite sorcery, and advanced Disciplines suitable for elder characters.

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

Sources

Numerous sources of inspiration about the down-trodden and oppressed exist. Don't feel restricted to only period-appropriate materials — these themes are universal. In particular, consider the following.

Books

A Tale of Two Cities, by Charles Dickens. You'll have to wade through Dickens' thick prose (which some folks find more pleasurable than others), but this book showcases anger, rebellion and nobility in some very appropriate and bloody ways.

Animal Farm, by George Orwell. If you're going to overthrow the existing power structure, be ready to replace it with something other than more pigs.

The Bible. No, really. Both the Old and New Testaments deal with an oppressed people; and whatever you might believe about Jesus' divinity, He certainly had a way of dealing with the ruling classes that was nothing short of rebellious. Besides, there's plenty of blood and death in the Bible; if you can find a readable translation, it's great inspiration for a **Dark Ages: Vampire** game.

The Tempest, by William Shakespeare. Picture Caliban as a Nosferatu and Prospero as a Ventrue (or even a Tremere, really). Caliban is honest about what he is — a monster — and schemes to commit murder to gain his freedom.

Films

Braveheart. Not quite period, but close. For what to expect when the rabble get good and angry (and get themselves a good leader), you can't do much better.

Eaters of the Dead. Applicable insofar as it helps to understand why the Assamites are considered a Low Clan simply by dint of being foreigners.

Gangs of New York. America was born in the streets, indeed. This film nicely showcases that the "lower classes" only get pushed around until they decide not to be (at which point the powers that be typically take more drastic measures).



Timothy
P. 1985



CHAPTER ONE: LOWEST OF THE DAMNED

“Consider your origins: you were not made that you might live as brutes, but so as to follow virtue and knowledge.”

— Dante, *The Divine Comedy*

The Clans of Caine each have their own distinctive history. For the High Clans, this history stretches back to the beginnings of time in a distinguished, if at times bloody, record of the doings of man and the machinations of Cainites.

For the Low Clans, history is rarely so flattering. This chapter contains the mythology and more recent history of the seven clans known as the “fallen.” Players will also find “toolkits” containing possible starting points and hooks for Low Clan characters. Finally, this chapter discusses the domains in which the Low Clans thrive (or at least dwell) and some of the ways in which they have bent human custom to suit their needs.

Assamites

The prince asks of doings in Outremer as though he expects a bard to deliver a stirring epic. I find that the truth upsets him; he does not like to hear what his God has wrought upon our lands.

— Jibril, Assamite vizier, while visiting the court of Lord Jürgen

European Cainites know the Assamites as the vengeful desert wind, howling their wrath at those who claim dominion of the night. Blood sorceries allow them to slip past impregnable defenses and murder elders in their own havens. The Assamites commit the sin of Amaranth with such frequency that their souls grow darker than their skin. Crusading Cainites have seen little to dissuade them of this image, often finding themselves at odds with the clan's most brutal element. This great misconception suits the Saracens well, most of whom leave fools to wallow in ignorance. They wield the weapon of reputation skillfully among the clans.

Origins

To understand this secretive clan, one must first comprehend its namesake. Because they are called "Assamites" by the European clans, they are often assumed to come from a land called "Assam." In fact, the word Assam is "Haqim" heard by European ears, and refers to the clan founder and spiritual master. That the clan's members prefer to call themselves the "Children of Haqim" millennia after its formation serves to illustrate his continued importance to the Assamites.

Clan legends paint Haqim as a fierce warrior and a terror to his enemies among the nomadic tribes of the Fertile Crescent, prior to the dawn of recorded history. His prowess on the battlefield and strength of will drew the attention of a childe of Caine, who observed him quietly for months before seducing and Embracing him. While Haqim never learned why he received the gift of unlife, the change itself jarred Haqim to the realization of deeper certainties than the savagery of tribal warfare. Where before he merely lived, he now questioned the fundament of everything he knew. Why was the tribe important above all else? How far beyond the horizon did the world cease to be? Why did the most vicious of animals hunt during the night? He wandered far and wide in pursuit of answers to these questions and many more, eventually finding his way to the First City of man as more of a scholar than a warrior. There he encountered his Cainite siblings, and there he remained until the city's destruction.

After the destruction of the First City, Haqim wandered once more, though now he sought the company of learned men and women such as himself. The first childe he sired shared his intellectual pursuits and formed the core of what became the vizier caste. After years of travel and learning he settled in the Second City, only to find his Cainite siblings perpetually fighting, involving themselves and their childe in petty squabbles that soon spread to mortal affairs. Seeing their bickering as pointless and unbecoming, he distanced himself from their tribulations and devoted himself to his studies. He found it hard to ignore the growing numbers of deaths among mortals who were ignorant of his siblings' affairs, but found himself unable to formulate an adequate solution to protect them. Greatly troubled by his siblings' casual abuse of mortals, he nevertheless threw himself into his studies once more.

A Call For Justice

The tribulations in the Second City festered and grew to such an extent that even Haqim's siblings could finally foresee their great city torn apart by their own hands if they continued their machinations. All of them approached Haqim and requested that he serve as judge to their affairs. They agreed he was the only one capable of objectivity, for he held no stake in the matters of his siblings. Although reluctant to involve himself, Haqim eventually acceded to their wisdom and instructed a portion of his childe to arbitrate the dealings of the other Cainites with strict impartiality. Haqim's judges — who would one night become the warrior caste — took to their business with zeal and ruthlessly culled Cainite excesses.

However, the rivalries of his siblings soon grew from paltry quarrels in the shadows to open schemes that used mortals as their pawns. Haqim's writings blame this fractiousness of his siblings for the fall of the Second City, believing their inward focus blinded them to the demonic Baali who came to threaten the region. Though Haqim cultivated a sorcerer caste and the art of blood magics necessary to defeat the fiendish threat, his efforts alone were not enough to stave off the Second City's destruction. While his efforts were ultimately responsible for ending the Baali threat, Haqim and his children returned to find their home a mound of ash and corpses.

Exodus

Assamite accounts of the Second City always underscore Haqim's anger with his siblings. The elders who remember that time recall the contempt in

his voice as he surveyed the ruined Second City and pronounced it "lost to the jackals." None believe he referred to the Baali.

After the Second City's fall, Haqim sought a place where he could pursue his studies away from petty politics. He quietly gathered his remaining children and many of the mortal refugees from the city, then traveled east in a grueling march that led them through most of Asia Minor. The Eldest often speaks of Haqim's intensity, recalling the haunted look to his eyes as he called for his children to push harder into the night towards a destination that seemed to call him. When questioned about their goal, his reply was always "Where the heavens lead us." Over the course of the journey more than half of the caravan died or met Final Death through privation and the merciless fire of the sun.

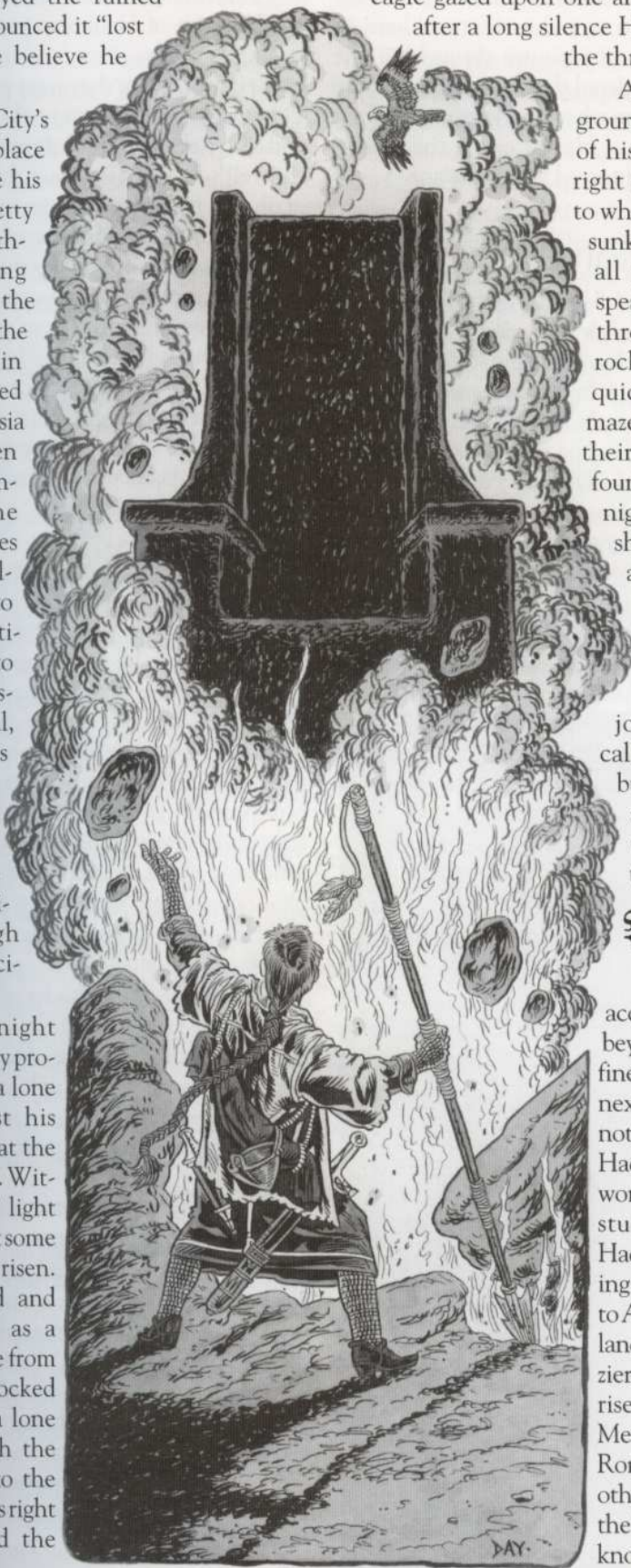
One moonless night Haqim halted the weary procession at the base of a lone mountain and thrust his spear into the ground at the mouth of a vast cavern. Witnesses recall the stars' light shining so brightly that some thought the moon had risen. The earth shuddered and cracked, thundering as a great black throne rose from the rock. As the shocked travelers looked on, a lone eagle plunged through the night sky and came to the perch upon the throne's right shoulder. Haqim and the

eagle gazed upon one another without fear, and after a long silence Haqim took his seat upon the throne.

A great rumbling shook the ground as Haqim drove the haft of his spear into the throne's right armrest. Stories differ as to whether the throne actually sunk *through* the ground, but all present saw Haqim, his spear, the eagle and the black throne descend into solid rock. Stunned at first, they quickly ventured into the maze of caverns in search of their founder. Eventually they found a room with an endless night sky where the ceiling should be; and Haqim was at its center, slumped into the throne. Although exhausted and horribly wounded in his right arm, he declared their journey at an end, and called upon his followers to build a fortress, Alamut, around the throne from which he would lead them.

Ancient Times

According to Assamite accounts, the clan did little beyond study within the confines of their fortress for the next eight millennia. This is not exactly true, for many of Haqim's children made the world itself the focus of their studies. The Children of Haqim spent centuries traveling and observing, returning to Alamut with tales of strange lands and stranger events. Viziers filed reports detailing the rise and fall of empires in Mesopotamia, India, Greece, Rome and Carthage, among others. Sorcerers spread across the land, learning the mystical knowledge of various cultures



and incorporating it into their own work. Warriors — at that point still more akin to judges than soldiers — watched the movements of Cainites throughout the lands the Assamites considered their own, guarding the mortal populace from harm whenever they could. For a long while the Children of Haqim called themselves students of the world and served as the distant eyes of their clan.

A Convocation of Eagles

The spiritual and physical fortress of the Assamites is known as Alamut, the Eagle's Nest, and it can still be found deep in Asia Minor by those who know where to look. Ritual sorcery hides it from scrying eyes, and its inhospitable location conceals it from the schemes of mortal nobility. At any one time hundreds of Cainites, ghouls and mortal retainers call the hidden fortress home. Haqim's black throne remains deep within the fortress, the haft of his spear still emerging from the right armrest. Through magics still unknown to the clan's most learned sorcerers, the chamber buried deep within the mountain still rests beneath what appears to be an open night sky, no matter the time of day or night. The ceiling of stars is not illusory in nature, for Assamite magics which require that the sorcerer stand beneath an open night sky function within the throne room at all times. Early forays up the throne room's walls ended with the sound of the explorers' distant, horrible screams from far above. Most Assamites — even elders in the sorcerer caste — accept the physical impossibility of the throne room as an example of powerful magics beyond the scope of Cainite capability, and carry themselves with wary reverence when they must spend time within the chamber.

The room known as the Heartblood sits at the core of the fortress; it consists of a giant well bubbling with constantly replenished Cainite vitae. While in Alamut, all Children of Haqim are expected to feed from the Heartblood rather than the mortal populace, and the sorcerers use its resources for their rituals. Sorceries enacted by Haqim ages ago can duplicate the vitae of every surviving Assamite who pours his own blood within the well, a vital component of magics that keep Alamut's sorcerers in contact with Children of Haqim who travel far from their mountain home. Anyone who shares of himself with the Heartblood finds that the vitae he drinks from it is a duplicate of his own, preventing inadvertent blood oaths from crippling the clan. Calling the vitae of a specific Assamite from within the mix merely requires a few minutes of concentration, although the Heartblood cannot produce the blood of any who have entered Final Death.

A recent practice instituted by the Eldest requires all Children of Haqim to journey to Alamut within seven years of their Embrace, and to do so without the aid of their sire. There they must present themselves to the Eldest, who leads them to the Heartblood and shares with them the tale of Haqim as they spill their vitae into the well's depths. They must then spend a certain period of time, generally at least twenty lunar months, learning their birthright as Children of Haqim. To put off one's journey is tantamount to refusing one's heritage, and social pressure upon the Assamite aspirant and sire alike generally ensures this doesn't happen. Exceptions are made for those with no knowledge of the custom, but the supplicant must swear to her ignorance before the Eldest's gaze. Those who lie are destroyed. Any who knowingly delayed their journey must work among the mortal populace of Alamut for an amount of time equal to their journey's postponement.

The Laws of Blood

The showpiece of Alamut's libraries are Haqim's oldest teachings, ancient writings on clay tablets maintained by the vizier caste. Though Haqim never formalized them as such, the viziers assigned to teach young Assamites have a tendency to present them as scripture. Interpretations generally grow more figurative the further one is from Alamut, and differing interpretations between the castes further confuses the issue. Nearly the entirety of the clan practices the following most common laws. As with most of the oldest teachings, "Khayyin" is synonymous with Caine.

Honor the Eldest among you, for he is to rule my House when I am absent.

Interpreted as the order of succession for the clan, the Eldest is commonly believed to represent the most experienced fourth-generation Assamite residing in Alamut. Most Children of Haqim follow the principle of deferring to the judgment of the eldest present when two or more find themselves in the same location.

Ward the mortals from Khayyin's brood and treat them with honor in all things.

Most of Haqim's Children who hold other Cainite clans in contempt point to the mistreatment of mortals as the most obvious reason for their unworthiness of unlife. Assamites won't drain mortals when feeding or use them as pawns for political affairs without exceptional reasons. Though the occasional transgression occurs, the clan as a whole is swift to persecute any who seem to take a flippant approach to humanity and reward those who make special effort to protect mortal lives.

Slay not those of the Blood, for that right is of the Eldest alone.

While similar to the Second Tradition, this only applies to the "Blood of Haqim." Though few interpret this particular law as a call for open season on all non-Assamites, no formal clan penalties exist for the destruction of another Cainite.

Despite this stricture, every so often one of Haqim's Children breaks this law and is required to report to Alamut as soon as possible to admit the crime and receive the Eldest's judgment. If the murderer is too far from Alamut, the nearest Assamite who has ever served as Eldest can pass sentence. Most transgressions involve the Beast holding sway, and the majority of Assamites who turn themselves in accord themselves a greater degree of leniency than those dragged back to Alamut.

Deceive not those of the Blood, for my House is founded on Truth.

This also applies to fellow Assamites, forbidding lying or stealing from clanmates. Thieves find themselves held down by four peers while an elder tears the hand from the body and applies an herbal salve to the wound to prevent regeneration for one lunar month. Malicious liars and spiteful gossips suffer a similar fate, losing the tongue rather than a hand. Few who suffer punishment once choose to repeat their transgressions.

Judge those of Khayyin's brood and punish them should they be found wanting.

The last of Haqim's laws is the most contentious, leading to a rift between the vizier and warrior castes. The warriors believe all Cainites who don't stand up to Assamite codes of honor should be slain, while the viziers espouse that only Cainites who are a detriment to mortal society should be so judged. The coming of the Crusades has lent much credence to the warrior school of thought, but the viziers generally remain opposed to their interpretation.

Haqim's Disappearance

As time passed Haqim grew disappointed with the direction the clan appeared to be taking. His final departure sparked disagreements within the clan that remain to this night. It is said that one of his children came to him with a dispute so trivial that Haqim flew into a rage, likening their disputes to those of his siblings in the Second City. He decried the self-interest that tore his clan apart from within, and the betrayal of duty and honor. The elders of each caste immediately declared themselves blameless in the matter and found the other castes culpable for Haqim's rage, leading to even more

bickering and conflict as to who bore responsibility for the outbreak.

Amidst the quarrels, few noticed Haqim's departure, and none would comprehend its finality for nearly two decades. Haqim returned to Alamut sporadically after that, but never in a capacity beyond that of a visitor concerned with his own studies. By decree of the Eldest, he is not to be troubled with the affairs of the clan until he removes the haft of his spear from his throne and sits upon it once more. Haqim's last known whereabouts were traced to the British Isles roughly one millennium ago, where it is known that he met with the Ventrue Mithras. What they discussed and where Haqim ventured from there is unknown to the Assamites, but they expectantly await the return of the Ancestor.

A Matter of Faith

Islam's rise in the seventh century sent a shockwave through the warrior caste, who perceived the fledgling religion as hearkening back to the harsh justice practiced in the Second City. Others found the basic precepts as worthy in structure as the Christianity or Judaism practiced by their fellows, and followed its teachings in

UNHOLY WAR

As Islam spread through the warrior caste like wildfire in the seventh century, a resurgence in Baali activity within Asia Minor led the warriors to what many saw as the first true test of their faith. The infernalists fell before the holy conviction of the Assamite warriors like mortals exposed to the harsh winds of the deepest deserts. The warriors found the fighting so one-sided and their enemies so easy to dispatch that they grew dangerously complacent. Blinded by pride, they didn't recognize the trap until it was far too late.

As the Assamite warriors slaughtered hundreds of infernal pawns, powerful Baali sorcerers enacted a great curse that swept through the caste like a plague. Many of the warriors found themselves overcome by a terrible thirst for the blood of their own kind, and even those who escaped the thirst now bore the stain of Amaranth. Enraged, the warriors slew the Baali sorcerers to a man, but the effects of the curse left lasting scars on the whole caste. No sorcerer or vizier has yet discovered a way to counteract the blood madness or the false indications of diablerie — or, as some paranoid warriors whisper, those who did are unwilling to share it.

an effort to suppress the Beast. Many discovered that fresh Assamites who fervently followed the precepts of Islam during their lives took to clan teachings much more readily than most mortals. Soon the warrior caste primarily embraced Islamic men and women, although now they take Muslim men almost exclusively. The inevitable conflict between Islam and other religions eventually spilled into the ranks of the Assamites, and in more than a few cases an Assamite has openly broken the Laws of Blood in favor of adhering to Islamic or Christian principles.

Some of the more cynical elders still refer to the religion as “the new Christianity,” seeing both religions as little more than cults of personality that gained widespread appeal during times of great strife. They often have long-standing wagers regarding which faith will collapse under its own collective weight first.

The Dark Ages

The clan continues to operate on principles developed millennia ago. Jamal is the current Caliph of the warrior caste and its greatest combatant. The few challengers in trials by armed combat, unarmed combat and military leadership have yet to unseat him. Al-Ashrad is the long-standing Amr of the sorcerer caste, and none of the fourth- and fifth-generation sorcerers responsible for choosing an Amr has seen fit to replace him since his ascension in AD 120. The Fikri of the vizier caste is currently Rebekah, whose 63 year term ends in three years. Already she faces political opposition from Khaldun, the Fikri she replaced in AD 1171.

All three individuals serve as counsel to the Eldest, a position reserved for the eldest Assamite currently active. The position was previously held by the reclusive sorcerer Sha’hiri, until the legendary vizier Nakurtum arrived at Alamut unexpectedly in AD 1214. She spent more than a decade transitioning as the Assamite’s titular leader in Haqim’s absence. Although Nakurtum is reputedly the founder of the *silsila*, the historians charged with recording the clan’s history and maintaining its spiritual direction, she is the first woman to ever serve as Eldest. Many younger warrior Assamites question the capability of a woman’s leadership, although rarely within earshot of their elders.

Nakurtum takes a much more active role than Sha’hiri in directing daily affairs, but her ideas are often met with resistance by the warrior and (somewhat surprisingly) vizier castes. She stresses a return to traditional values held by the clan, but many protest that the state of the world now bears little resem-

blance to her time. Her conflict with the viziers stems from the open disdain she holds for the current state of her caste, and her tendency to reject the Fikri’s counsel more often than that of the Amr or the Caliph. Dissatisfied elders have secretly sent children to seek out an Assamite with seniority to Nakurtum who they can rouse and install as Eldest.

The Crusades

The Arabian entry into Christian lands as far west as Iberia saw the spread of Assamites throughout European lands, but the invasion of Christians into the Levant sparked much ill will and sent shockwaves through the clan. Much of the younger, Islamic warrior caste wanted to help defend Muslim lands. European Cainites and the Saracens often fought on opposite sides throughout the Crusades, leading to the general distrust for the Children of Haqim. More problematic, the presence of Christian sects among the Assamites occasionally resulted in Children of Haqim facing one another in battle. This led to a hands-off decree by the Eldest at the start of the Sixth Crusade. Although the Caliph did not openly defy her by lending the direct support of the warrior caste to Islamic forces, he has certainly done everything in his power to test the limits of her pronouncement.

The Insinuation

Cainite influence beyond Europe has drastically increased since the Crusades. A handful of viziers and warriors have worked to counteract this influence since the fall of Constantinople by returning the favor in kind. Known internally as the Insinuation, they work through clandestine methods to monitor the interactions and plans of European Cainites on their own lands. They weigh the benefits and drawbacks of openly inserting select Assamites into European circles, calculated to display a Saracen face that the Insinuation wants the Europeans to see.

Surprisingly, many Assamites sympathetic to Christian causes see the logic in this, for they consider the Cainite influence on the Crusades to be a perversion of Christian teachings. Those who follow Islam couldn’t be happier, for the information gleaned may help them blunt future invasions. What little resistance there is to the idea takes the form of select elders concerned with European culture “polluting” the Assamites carrying out their duties, but the benefits are largely seen to outweigh the risks.

Outbreak

At first, mortal and Cainite alike were quick to dismiss reports of strange events in Northern Germany as peasant superstition. Travelers through the region encountered streams running uphill, trees weeping blood instead of sap and a haze in the night sky that turned the moon's light sickly green. They found remote villages slaughtered to a man, with beasts of the field gorging on the flesh. They witnessed newborn children with eleven fingers and webbed toes. The local Ventrue are desperate enough to seek out the advice of mortal seers, for Tremere sympathetic to their problems have yet to discover the cause of the strangeness.

The Children of Haqim know the signs all too well, for the first time they appeared they heralded the fall of the Second City of man. Worried viziers predict a great cataclysm leading to the end of the world, while many warriors nursing grudges from the Crusades seem content to label it a European problem. While his peers quarreled in Alamut, Al-Ashrad sent a small group of Assamites to the region to forge a new breed of Assamite from European stock to oppose the great evil they foresee will soon tear its way into the world. Although their number includes a handful of warriors and viziers, all owe some amount of sorcerous skill to the Amr.

To date these Children of Haqim keep to the shadows and select influential mortals who have strong spiritual convictions, then abduct and condition them into their new existence as Cainites devoted to the war. The group officially refers to the "European caste" as the Order of the Pious Knights of the Black Shroud, informally called the Black Shroud or the Knights of the Shroud. Although the group is still in its nascent stages, the Amr's disciples have so far met with enough success for Al-Ashrad to tacitly approve their work. The events of the next few years will help determine the need for expansion.

Points of Contention

Certain concerns affect the clan as a whole. Most Assamites hold a position on these issues, or at least know of their existence.

Murder at Alamut

In AD 1227 the vizier Sahar Gaffari was slain in the hallway leading to the Heartblood. He was well-respected among his peers and the greatest champion for a moderate interpretation of the law of judgment,

promoting tolerance between the clans and judging only the most egregious offenders. Sorcerous visions of Gaffari's last moments revealed his hurried approach to the Heartblood with four ancient scroll cases in hand before the warrior elder Ahatiwaqrat emerged from an alcove and stated, "I cannot allow you to do this."

To the horror of Children of Haqim, the vision displayed a vicious scuffle resulting in Gaffari's Final Death, followed by the warrior's flight from the hallway with the scroll cases in her hand. Complicating the already weighty matter of an elder murdering one of the Blood is Ahatiwaqrat's history of vocal opposition to Gaffari's policies; she instead urged for the destruction of any Cainite who did not match Assamite standards of honor. They had a history over the course of centuries in which they engaged in increasingly bitter debate, although before Gaffari's death their hostility was never known to extend beyond rhetoric.

Once the Assamites confirmed that Ahatiwaqrat had fled Alamut, accusations took wing with roughly the same coherence as a flock of birds startled into flight. The viziers accused the warriors of murder sanctioned by their leadership, and alleged an attempted power struggle for the ideological direction of the clan. As evidence of guilt the vizier caste pointed to Ahatiwaqrat's theft of the scrolls and escape from the site of her crime. They emphasized her jealousy of the well-reasoned arguments held by Gaffari; some went so far as to imply that she acted in complicity with the Followers of Set, who they saw as benefiting the most from the fractiousness caused by the Assamite slaughter of other Cainites.

The warriors quickly backed Ahatiwaqrat as the greatest advocate of Haqim's laws within the clan, positing that her slaying of Gaffari was done in order to protect the Heartblood and perhaps the clan itself. They fiercely questioned the contents of the scroll cases and pointed to Gaffari's history of asking forgiveness rather than permission as proof of something nefarious, or at least potentially disastrous. Ahatiwaqrat's cryptic statement and their certainty of her devotion to her caste make the warriors question Gaffari's intentions and honor; and many suggest her actions were entirely justified.

Al-Ashrad quietly forbade any of his children from choosing sides in the matter, preferring to prevent an actual caste war. The sorcerers' abject refusal to sympathize with either the warriors or the viziers has led to a somewhat curious turn of events. The Eldest charged Al-Ashrad with the investigation and ultimate adjudication of the matter, stating that he

was the only one capable of impartiality in the matter. The warriors were quick to support the decision on the basis of greater impartiality, although they privately resented the sorcerers having such influence over what they see as an internal matter. The viziers saw the wisdom in the Eldest's decision, though they whisper among themselves that the sorcerers will use the rift for their own political gain.

Regardless, the search for Ahatiwaqrat is considered of utmost importance to every caste. Elder viziers and warriors publicly champion the outcome of this matter as a divine indication for the law of judgment's future interpretation. Warriors fear that scheming viziers will attempt to slay Ahatiwaqrat before a trial to prevent her absolution, and viziers worry that warriors blinded by ideology will discover her and shelter her from harm. Sorcerers are hindered by unfounded but worrying rumors spread among the other castes — notably the murmurs that the visions reported to the rest of the clan were partially or wholly false, and that they seek to name Ahatiwaqrat as a scapegoat in Gaffari's slaughter in order to gain greater political prominence within the clan. The sorcerers know such rumors could tear the clan apart if justice is handled poorly, and seek to return Ahatiwaqrat safely to Alamut for trial as swiftly as possible. Whether or not Haqim's Children have as a whole acted less than honorably, the fear of treachery and slowly growing web of distrust have great potential to damage the clan as a whole.

The Keening

It began once more in winter. The ear-splitting wail known as the Keening spilled once more from Mecca, and nobody seems to know why. The Keening can only be heard by Cainites on the Arabian Peninsula, forcing its way into their thoughts and dreams during daylight hours. These day terrors can drive a Cainite mad over time and grow in strength with proximity to Mecca.

The Keening was once thought contained by the dedicated Nosferatu known as the *Hajj*, but now it returns sporadically and with greater force than before. To date, the Assamites remain unable to contact the *Hajj* through mundane or sorcerous methods. Divinations into the location of the *Hajj* invariably drag the Keening into the mind of the would-be diviner. All searches for their members have proven fruitless so far.

Of greater worry is the loss of contact with the Assamites stationed outside of Mecca as the city's anonymous defenders. Children of Haqim who ven-

ured to Mecca in search of their brethren have yet to return, beyond a sole survivor who reported her siblings slain by the people they were sent to locate — Mecca's Assamite guardians. She described the fire in their eyes as neither madness nor devotion, but something with greater intensity than either. None spoke a word, killing silently and with such ferocity that she knew fear for the first time in generations. She saw an old friend struck down by his own child without hesitation or emotion. She saw nothing but raw determination and death, and found herself harried for leagues by their pursuit. There were other things she wouldn't speak of, things that seemed to terrify her, and her sleep grew more troubled with each passing day. Within a month of her return to Alamut she climbed the mountain and watched the sun rise.

The Assamites remain unsure of all but one thing. Something important happened in Mecca last winter, and nobody is talking.

Player's Toolbox

Players interested in exploring the concerns of Haqim's Children may draw hooks from the following

Ancient Lies

- You received summons from the Brujah prince one lunar month past. His invitation used the old veneration preferred by your elders, and his reputation is one of great honor. Yet this Brujah prince is reportedly responsible for the deaths of hundreds of Muslims defending their lands against Christian invaders — those such as yourself, before your Embrace. Why did the prince ask for you specifically? Does he seek revenge against one who fought the Crusaders with such zeal? Or is the matter entirely unrelated to the wars in the Levant?

- You are the last of Haqim's Children still active in the area. The Tzimisce slew your companions and currently make sport (and meals) of the isolated mortal populace. You received word from Alamut through sorcerous means recently, but the situation remains grim. Their reinforcements will arrive in one lunar month — a long enough time that the mortals may all be dead when they arrive. It is now your responsibility to harry the Tzimisce from the shadows, striking swiftly and without a trace of your presence.

Matters of Faith

- You and your warrior companions seek to excise the Cainite opportunists from amidst the heathens polluting the Holy Land. You are the

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blades in the darkness who seek out the swollen Cainite spiders at the center of webs made from the bones of the fallen, and neither castle wall nor army of ghoul sentries can sweep aside the headlong hammer of your wrath. Should your forceful removal of the Cainites result in the Christian expulsion from the Levant, so much the better, but you must tread the line carefully lest you become what you destroy.

- The life of a pilgrim suited you before your Embrace, and now your existence remains devoted to sharing the divine. You must spread the holy word to those who need it most, removing doubt from their hearts and replacing it with devotion. Your mastery of language keeps you in touch and your wit keeps you from Final Death. You roam far from Alamut, sharing the philosophy you know as truth with all you encounter, even in lands as foreign as Taugast or Scotland.

- As a part of the Spear of Destiny (see **Road of Heaven**), it was your duty to preserve the Christian artifacts of the Levant from falling to the horrors of war. Then most of your compatriots were slaughtered by the hands of your own clan, and your duty became very different indeed. Now you seek the Assamites who would destroy their own kin. You would share your own beliefs with the betrayers, whoever they may be — most particularly the part about “an eye for an eye.”

The Future

- You never thought to call a Saracen your master, but you work with the magi to rid your lands of the infernal. You serve as their agent where your masters’ dark skin would harm the cause. Your local connections allow better interaction with the mortals of the land, and your knowledge of the area provides insight into the rocks that need to be turned over. You will push the demons from your homelands before their plans come to fruition, and you will do so with Saracen magic.

- You understand why Haqim left Alamut centuries ago. The bickering grows ever more pointless. Arguments form around literal interpretations of the founder’s casual conversations. Caste fights caste like miniature representations of Cainite clans. You suspect Haqim abandoned the clan to form a new Alamut, and you hope to look upon it once before your passage into Final Death. You leave politics behind in search of an absentee father, and with him you hope to finally find peace.

Followers of Set

So much work to build a wall, a cathedral, a castle, a faith. Christendom — and Osiris — would see this world shut up in walls. Remember, though, that walls block the light, and that Set still waits in the dark.

— Neb-abui, Setite observer and pilgrim

The Followers of Set are widely reviled by their fellow Cainites, who see them, morally, as inches away from evil worthy of the Baali. The Setites force mortal and undying alike down a path fraught with temptation, argue their many detractors, and so blatant are their attempts to corrupt and destroy the affairs of their fellows that they should be destroyed on principle. Although there is a grain of truth to this, the Serpents would take issue with the thrust of this misrepresentation. They are quick to point out that no Setite “forces” anybody to do anything of which they aren’t already capable. The loss of personal control is anathema to the members of the clan, but they readily admit to encouraging the blossoming of existing desires.

Origins

The Followers of Set don’t believe that they are descended from Caine. They trace their lineage to the dark Egyptian god Set, or Sutekh, who drew breath before the dawn of civilization. That time is revered as a golden age by the Setites, for humanity took what it wanted when it wanted it, knowing neither restraint nor civilization. In this manner human life maintained the spiritual balance of Ma’at and provided equilibrium in Duat, the world of the afterlife.

The tribesman Ra, Set’s grandfather, possessed a hunger for all things that could not be sated with simple conquest. Shortly before his death he conspired with Osiris, Set’s brother, to bind humanity to the twin lies of culture and law, convincing the Egyptian people that the purity of savagery was a shameful thing. Ra persuaded the populace to suborn themselves under the rule of a formal state with Osiris installed at the head. Such was the will of Ra and Osiris that they quelled profligacy among their people in a short time. The first portion of Ra’s scheme fell into place, and he entered death to prepare for the second.

Set returned from a long hunt in the deep desert and saw the terrible changes brought to his people in the Upper Nile, but in his wisdom he appealed to Osiris for the lands of the Lower Nile to remain free of the corruption of law. The cruel Osiris scoffed at his

SETITE TERMINOLOGY

The Followers of Set have specific terminology derived from Egyptian concepts and words. The most important are summarized here for ease of reference.

- **Duat:** the afterlife, thought of as a mirror to the living world. What physically exists in life also exists in Duat, which is why the people are traditionally buried with their possessions.

- **Ma'at:** The balance between life and the afterlife. Each world mirrored the other until Ra and Osiris unbalanced Ma'at with the creation of law. The Followers of Set seek to return the balance of Ma'at by disrupting society's disproportionate influence.

- **Akh:** The spiritual essence of a person and the first of three components that make a complete person. Upon death, the akh is the first component to enter the afterlife. A Setite's akh departs to the afterlife when a sire shares the dark water of the river that flows between worlds with her child. This provides the Serpent with a foothold in both the living world and Duat.

- **Ba:** The second component, the personality. When properly the dead person is properly interred, the ba crosses the river between life and death to join the akh in Duat.

- **Ka:** The life essence of a person, and the final component. The ka follows the ba to Duat where it joins the akh and brings the dead to their eternal rest.

brother's plea, and showed the extent of his contempt by filling the womb of Set's sister-wife Nephthys with his seed, taking her for a wife of his own. Osiris then used the tools of society to banish Set from the land he now claimed. Though disheartened, Set honored his brother's wishes and left to die in the desert as he had lived — a free man.

Heart of Darkness

Set traveled deep into the desert for seven days and nights before he collapsed with thirst and exhaustion. With the last of his strength he dug deep into the sands in search of a trickle of water to slake his thirst. He dug so deep that when water welled to the surface, he could see by the moon's light that it was darker than the night itself. Set knew the water was of the river that flowed between the worlds, but his thirst was so

great that he drank of it without hesitation. As he did so a portion of his soul, his *akh*, passed into the afterlife, providing Set with a foothold into both worlds. It was only then that he understood the totality of Ra's vile plan.

Set saw that Ra had upset the delicate balance of Ma'at. Life and afterlife are akin to a reflection on the surface of a standing pool of water; the dead spend eternity with the possessions their family buries with them. Now, however, the newly dead arrived to find Ra and his forces arrayed outside their eternal homes, giving them the choice of slavery and the forfeiture of their possessions in the afterlife, or utter destruction in both worlds. Ra's sinister plot accustomed the Egyptians to following the decrees of Osiris in life, taming them for an afterlife where would Ra reign as a jackal among goats. With their savage natures eliminated, the meek Egyptians could not oppose Ra and his forces. Set's people were doomed to eternal subjugation in both worlds.

The villainy of his grandfather's designs and his brother's complicity enraged Set, but amidst his fury he formed a plan for the redemption of his people. Where Osiris sought glory for all to see and fought like a cat toying with its meal, Set would cloak himself in the darkness of anonymity and strike with the fang of the asp. While his fat brother gorged upon the spoils of the downtrodden, Set would drink sparingly from life itself, abstaining from all but the life's blood of his enemies. Where his brother and grandfather built empires upon the backs of mortal men and women, Set would force those empires to topple under their own weight. He rejected the day and declared the night to be his domain, then went about taking it for his own.

After countless nights of scheming Set returned to the Upper Nile and slipped past his brother's guards. While hiding in the shadows of the monuments Osiris had built to further his own glory, Set devised a plan of great cunning and daring. Disguising himself as a humble merchant, Set presented his brother with an elaborate, ornate sarcophagus and tricked Osiris into testing its comforts. As soon as Osiris lay within, Set snapped the lid closed and fled with his captive brother. Although Osiris' son Horus and his allies gave pursuit, Set threw the sarcophagus into the Nile itself and drowned his reviled brother.

Set's time in the deep desert hadn't prepared him from the reaction of the Egyptians. Thoroughly cowed by Osiris' lies into an eternity of deferential servitude, Set's own countrymen turned against him. His name became a curse upon their lips and his battle to restore

Ma'at was seen as a great evil. They opposed the freedoms of ages past, trading their individual sovereignty for the dubious security of Duat as falsely promised by Osiris.

Set had no desire to punish the people for their ignorance of Ra's empire in the afterlife. However, he knew he could not restore the balance alone, so he sought out the brightest scholars and priests in Egypt, those who had long suspected that Osiris' promises were malicious lies. Set imparted his bleak tale to each before sharing with them the dark water of the river that ran between the worlds and coursed through his veins. As their akhs fled to Duat, Sutekh's chosen observed Ra's wicked plan coming to fruition, and all pledged to follow him until Ma'at was once more restored. These disciples trailed after their liberator into the shadows, where they became known as the Followers of Set.

Ancient Times

Osiris' defeat gave the Followers of Set little reprieve. Horus, child of Nephthys and Osiris, took up arms against his uncle and continued to lead in his father's stead. He marshaled armies to oppose the Setites' attempts at open rebellion, forcing the Serpents to operate with great subtlety and craftiness. Generation after generation knew this conflict, and the fighting left many dead in its wake. The Followers of Set lamented each fallen Egyptian, for Ra's installation of Osiris as his general in Duat turned every death into an ignominy. Ra's forces continued to swindle the Egyptian people of their rightful place in eternity.

Horus committed sacrilege after sacrilege against his own people. He wasn't afraid to send men to their deaths, for he knew that every fallen warrior begat an ally in Duat. Even as his influence dwindled he operated with a calculated cruelty against his own populace, finding degenerate allies among humans and spirits alike. When Set and his followers finally struck down his treacherous nephew their victory was brief. They soon discovered that Horus had conspired with the nomadic Hyksos tribe to sweep through a battered Egypt with little opposition. Set's nephew had seen Egypt trampled under the feet of hated invaders rather than acknowledge his uncle as victorious.

The struggle against invaders continued unabated for generations. The Followers of Set found the Libyans, the Ethiopians, the reviled Persians and the Romans soon replaced the Hyksos. The Serpents learned hard lessons from those who trespassed, par-

ticularly that open revolt and public glorification of their dark master were paths to downfall. Rather than meet their enemies in battle, it was better to present themselves as friends who could provide any need or whispered desire for a price. Their enemies would eventually undo themselves in the face of temptation, losing the focus that set them at odds with the Setites and reveling in their lack of restraint. The Followers of Set refined the art of drawing the hidden desires from the innermost chambers of the human heart, and used their talents to restore Ma'at to mortals and Cainites alike. They bided their time in the city of Tanis in the Nile Delta, the heart of the clan's influence and home to the greatest concentration of Serpents in any one place.

The Loss of Sutekh

More than a millennia ago Set shook in his great obsidian sarcophagus when he should have slept. Setite elders still recall the thundering and railing of the dark god, for the howls of pain reached their own dreams as well. Set's rants, shrieks and epithets swept through the minds of the clan for seven days and nights before they finally came to an end. Weary and shaken, the elders rushed to Sutekh's haven only to find their great master missing and his most trusted guards driven mad. Obsidian shards of Set's shattered sarcophagus were found embedded in the stone walls with such force that those who remember swear the rock itself was bleeding.

The visions and dreams shared with the clan are commonly held as the Prophecies of Set, and are thought to detail the events leading up to the end of the world. Contentious theories abound as to exactly what they mean, leading to such broad interpretations that some Setites find themselves working in direct opposition to the interests of others, with both pointing to the prophecies as justification for their actions. Of greatest concern and deliberation is whether the visions were a warning against future dangers or an outline for the conditions necessary for Sutekh's return. At the time of his disappearance the imbalance of Ma'at was so great that a good case could be made for either argument.

To this night the Followers of Set debate whether their founder's absence implies that he was destroyed at the height of his intense paroxysm, or that he left for parts unknown in an effort to avert an imminent disaster. Even the most pessimistic bear a cautious hope for Set's eventual return. Some believe the visions to be communications from the dark god himself and record addenda to the Prophecies, but the



validity of these scribblings is even more questionable than the specifics of the Prophecies themselves.

Child of the Dark God

When Alexander the Great pushed the Persians from Egypt, the Followers of Set found purpose once more. Accounts from the time mention his striking resemblance to Sutekh, and many of the Serpents believed him to be the spiritual son of the dark god. Some suspected the Macedonian conqueror was their beloved Set reincarnated in mortal form, while others thought him a distant descendant of Sutekh's lineage. Most of the clan's members saw his ceaseless toppling of corrupt realms as a force for the restoration of Ma'at. Although in the Setites never influenced Alexander's direction, they followed the swath of destruction the Macedonian carved across the world. They established their temples and bases of influence in his wake.

The Setites mourned Alexander's unexpected death, and rumors still persist that long-hidden agents of Ra secretly slew him for fear that the great general would one day have the strength to overthrow Ra's ill-gotten empire in Duat. The Serpents still whisper of the glories Alexander could have shown the world if

he had lived but a decade longer, or the direction he could have shown them had they taken him as a disciple of Sutekh. They constantly look for prophetic signs of a new "son of Sutekh," for another who could inspire such fervor would surely restore Ma'at. Already some whisper of the Holy Roman Emperor Frederick II as a candidate, but the Setites have found him all but unapproachable so far.

The Dark Ages

The fall of Tanis shortly after the fall of Rome marked a divergence of thought among the Followers of Set. Those who advocated a return to the old ways followed the Hierophants, a group composed of the surviving residents of Tanis who felt that measured adaptation of their ancient traditions into a more structured form would best serve the survivors in spreading Set's word. The opposing school of thought placed little trust in any who would call for formalized leadership of a group that prided itself on the concept of personal sovereignty. The opposition became known as the Decadents, the champions of the individual autonomy taught by Sutekh, and they defied any attempts at organization that were not innately ambiguous. While open conflict

is rare (beyond disputes amid individuals), there remains a general unease between the two factions, who see each other as heretics.

The Rise of Tinnis

The Setites learned from the downfall of Tanis; never again have they so centralized their interests. The surviving mortal population sought to construct a sister city, called Tinnis, and with the subtle guidance of Setite suggestions they settled upon one of Lake Manzala's islands near their sunken home to lay the groundwork. The expanse of water surrounding their new home would hopefully prevent any future invasions.

Now the city of Tinnis is a center of commerce, which exports textiles sought throughout Egypt and beyond. It is currently the only city in Egypt with a Setite prince, the great Setepenre, Lord of Tinnis. The location of the city and its position in relation to the sunken Tanis serve to provide Setepenre with an incredible amount of authority over any Cainite who wishes to reach the island city. Although select groups of Cainites of varying clans have been welcomed into the city, Setepenre turns away or destroys many others, particularly those who attempt to approach the island with neither declaration nor invitation.

Dusk of the Hierophants

The Followers of Set had little in the form of organization beyond the relationship of sire and child prior to a thousand years ago. Upon Sutekh's disappearance, his thirteen eldest disciples assembled and agreed that they must call upon their childer, who must call upon theirs, and so on, to gather as one at Tanis as a stopgap measure during what many thought to be Set's temporary absence. As the years passed, these Hierophants ostensibly directed the night-to-night affairs of their own in the city; but after the fall of Tanis, clues pointed to some among their own number as betrayers to the beast-men. With six of their number trapped somewhere in the sunken city, the Seven who escaped urged for a more formalized structure which stressed the clan's traditions and the teachings of Set. They saw it as a necessity, for a clan shaken by the loss of their god and internal betrayal in Set's name could easily fall apart. They named Tinnis as their spiritual home, but they encouraged their childer to travel widely throughout Egypt as celebrants, and charged them with the responsibility to re-establish Set's hidden temples and followers throughout their ancestral lands.

Though the Seven must all agree on any laws before they impose them upon the Setites, it is Nakhthorheb,

the First Son, who functions as the voice of Sutekh. Originally a member of Set's mortal tribe, he despises the need for regulations and strictures, but his knowledge of Set's motivations forces him to take an active role in their creation. He feels it a necessary but no less appalling evil to provide regulations to the clan, and clearly finds his position of leadership uncomfortable yet compulsory. He spends most of his nights away from the mantle of responsibility, hunting the wastes of Lower Egypt as he has always done.

Setepenre, Lord of Tinnis, was once a mighty sorcerer who served the needs of Set's tribe. He takes a much more tolerant view of Cainites than Nakhthorheb, arguing for alliance or at least mutual learning. Maatkare, beloved of the moon, mediates the frequent disputes Setepenre has with the First Son. She is the only Hierophant among the Seven who takes no discernable side but that which she claims would be most preferred by Set himself. The rest of the Seven generally agree, although sometimes grudgingly, and look to her to serve as Set's conscience in most matters.

Decadent Voices

Many Setites fled the site of their clan's betrayal when Tanis fell, scattering to the deepest deserts. Those who survived wandered for many years before being contacted with news of the Seven and the city of Tinnis. While many returned, a good portion rejected the summons. After all, organization and acceptance of elders as leaders had nearly led to the destruction of Set's most devoted disciples! To repeat the mistake of deference would be heresy, they reasoned.

The most vocal opponent of Hierophant influence was the Nuer tribesman Khay'tall, who had long refused to acknowledge Nakhthorheb's authority. After the decree of the Seven, Khay'tall openly defied them; he declared the veneration of iniquity to be the only acceptable service to the one true god, rather than a means to further Set's wishes. For what is evil, he argued, but a label defined by mortal men to represent those who followed their hearts? He sired many childer to spread his message of profligacy, and soon the Decadents were known for their zeal in sin. They gathered primarily in Constantinople and whispered honeyed intimations into the ears of many, sating themselves on the decadence present in the Roman capital.

The razing of Byzantium's great city in AD 1204 scattered the Decadents. Khay'tall disappeared in the last nights of the Fourth Crusade, presumably an unfortunate victim of the Crusaders, but rumors of assassination endure. Since then the Decadents have generally looked to the guidance of Khay'tall's childer

Sarrasine, who has suggested that the efforts of the Decadents are best served in the chaos of Europe. He sent his lieutenant Jules Talbot, a French knight exiled for infernalism, back to his homeland to set it aflame with his desire for vengeance. Sarrasine encourages others to follow Talbot's lead in paralyzing the Europeans from within. Although such a plan is certainly far-fetched, many of the Decadents are too busy wreaking havoc to care about the consequences.

Points of Contention

Most Followers of Set should be aware of or involved in the following issues:

Tear Down the Veil

Crusader aggression brought European influence to Egypt; opportunistic Setites immediately recognized the Europeans' need for hieratic instruction in the ways of Sutekh. A number of Decadents slowly filtered into European lands over the course of decades, and amidst the War of Princes they find themselves in position to strike a blow for their dark god.

The Serpents easily comprehend the inherent imbalance of the European system of state. To this end, they wish to make use of the Furores to spread their message of personal freedom, but they have found great frustration in locating the radicals. Contacting the Furores is difficult enough, particularly because the revolutionaries must exercise caution to avoid slaughter by vengeful elders. Often the few Furores who become aware of the Setite agenda ignore them, for the Decadent reputation is one of perversion and decay. Few Furores wish their purposes to be affected by either.

Prophecies of Set

A proclamation released in AD1224 by Setepenre, Lord of Tinnis, states that more than one-third of the roughly 300 Prophecies of Set have been demonstrably fulfilled. The announcement sparked renewed interest in the prophecies, and led to much debate on the matter among the Followers of Set. Now Setite pilgrims seek out previously unrecorded prophecies to share with the clan as a whole, some going so far as to probe the sunken remains of Tanis for remnants. Setepenre's call for the further compilation of prophetic fragments has slowly gained acceptance among those who seek to gain favor with the Seven.

Those who seek the fragments face opposition from those who wish to see the fragments destroyed, primarily fundamentalist Decadents who see obeisance to any law, even those passed down by Set himself, as counter to

everything the Serpents represent. Others see the prophecies as warnings rather than instructions, and blame Hierophant influence for the Setite inclination to force the completion of prophecy.

Toppling Shari'a

Long ago the Arabian progression into Egyptian lands replaced the religions of the Hyksos, the Persians and the Christians with the faith of the Muslims, which the Followers of Set widely revile. Shari'a, or Islamic law, runs counter to everything for which the Setites stand, and many mortal sects that secretly worshipped the dark god have been exposed and slaughtered for their devotion. An opportunity to expel Islamic law from Egyptian lands could potentially unite the fractured Serpents.

The Hierophants in particular believe that now is the time to putrefy the upstart religion's foothold in Egypt from both within and without. They seek to foment infighting between Muslim sects, breed hatred between Islam and other religions, and create situations that cause long-lasting ill will for Islam among the Egyptian populace. Initially the Serpents work to ease the restrictions imposed by shari'a to a level they deem manageable, but they have so far found strong opposition among mortal clerics and come into direct conflict with Assamite interests in the region.

When direct subjugation fails, the Setites use much less conventional methods to achieve their goals. When Crusaders advance upon Outremer, Setites provide economic assistance and aid in the submission of the conquered populace. In the Crusaders' absence, the Followers work to create conflict between the Caliphates and Sultanates scattered throughout the area, whether by kidnapping heirs to the throne in a manner that suggests a rival nation, or inciting forces stationed near borders to clash with their counterparts over matters that are ultimately trivial. Destabilization is their goal, for if they feel they must force shari'a to collapse in upon itself before all knowledge of the dark god is stamped from their homelands.

Players or Storytellers looking for more information on shari'a in the Dark Ages can find it in *Veil of Night*.

Player's Toolbox

The following hooks might be useful for players wishing to create Setite characters:

The Murder of Temperance

- You run a lucrative trade in the distribution of medicines and tinctures that can salve the wounds of

the mortal soul through the extension of awareness. You refrain from the powders that enslave mortals to longing for the drug, for mortal slavery serves Ra's greater interests. You constantly seek a way to derive brew from the waters of the dark river itself that can provide mortals with a glimpse of Ra's foul hierarchy in Duat, but you have yet to devise a method that results in anything but death.

- Your time in Venice showed you that the city is a tick which can drain the whole region of resources. Now you will infiltrate and suborn a whole city led by mortals with a capacity for greed as great as Ra himself. Already the jealous among the mortal rulers look to the Venetians with envy in their thoughts. Should Venice suffer the same fate as Constantinople, all the better — the irony will win you undying fame among your people.

- There is a vast economy in heresy. You know this first-hand, for you have helped fund many nascent rejections of assumed faith. It is your duty to turn the heretical thoughts of one into those of many, for each person who rejects and questions the existing hierarchy provides less money to the coffers of the select few. Be they Albigensian, Bogomil or Cathar, it is your fiduciary obligation to see them through — or at least present in the thoughts of both church and men.

The Splendor of Personal Sovereignty

- The majority of the mortals are beholden to the lies of church and state. You choose to expose the mortal populace to the truth of existence as preached by Sutekh, inciting a rise against the tyranny of law. You will show them how to balance the scales, and if the mortals you teach falter you shall tip the balance yourself to show them what they miss. Let them taste of freedom from lord and faith so they may never return to a life of slavery.

- The apple falls not far from the tree — or in this case, the serpent who offered it. You see the hypocrisy of the Hierophant structure for what it is, as no true disciple of Sutekh would dare hold the reins of control over another. You must find those who share your fears and expunge the Serpents who hold their hierarchical structure above Set's message, for the falsehood of necessity often begets the profanity of subjugation.

The Prophecies of Set

- You know in your heart that Frederick II is the reincarnation of Alexander. Had Frederick II not stopped his expansion in AD 1229, he could have swept through the Sultanates and Caliphates of Egypt, toppling the strict Muslim rulers and providing your

people with freedom from the Islamic yoke! You need to work your way into his court as your ancestors did in the time of Alexander, perhaps encouraging expansion in the form of another Crusade.

- The six missing Hierophants from which the sect took its name have hidden secrets in their sarcophagi. It is well known that the eldest Setites jealously collected Set's prophecies, or were around to remember them all; and it is an open secret that the invasion of Tanis may have occurred in an effort to silence the Six. If an enterprising Setite such as yourself could locate even one of the lost Hierophants' resting places in the sunken city, it would be akin to unearthing the voice of a god. You would not be the first to seek this goal, but with luck you will be the last.

Gangrel

Man, like any infant, grows into his prime and becomes cocky, full of boasting and blowing. In his Bible he claims he was given dominion over all the beasts at creation's dawning. But we remember the first nights, when he cowered by his fire. All his gods were beasts, and why not? With sharpened sticks and bits of flint he tried and failed to match the grace of the cat's claws and the strength of the wolf's teeth. He dared not so much as slay a deer without begging its pardon. Now he grows impious, and thinks to tame the eternal wild that gave him life.

We are the wild's rebuke, cub. It is god's blood that chills your flesh. Prove to me now that I should let you keep it.

— Matasuntha the Hun

Other blood-drinkers often view Gangrel as nothing more than the beasts they appear to be, and in truth the Animals do little to counter that impression. Their reputation serves them well. Beasts are fearsome and mysterious; who would be foolish enough to question their ways? Most hardly care what the soft, puling Cainites think of them in any case. But if those Cainites could only sit at the first night of a Gather and emerge unscathed (a highly unlikely prospect), they might come away quite surprised. The Animals cherish a deep and ancient body of traditional lore. Quite possibly, the "average" Gangrel knows more of his forebears' deeds, loves and hatreds than does the "average" Ventrue or Brujah.

Origins

Gangrel histories are long, rich, and often as not, mutually contradictory. Different branches of the clan give wildly different accounts of their origins. At great Gathers where the attending Gangrel hail from

varied traditions, these legends come into competition — literally. Usually the most skilled storyteller carries the night, but it's not unknown for the matter to come to blows between chosen champions.

One common legend tells of a "god with many children." Two of these, Ennoia and Churka, goddess of the beasts and god of night, respectively, wandered far from the land of the gods and began to quarrel. Their quarrel eventually turned into a war, and they both recruited mortals to fight on their behalf. Ennoia taught her chosen how to speak with animals and assume their forms. Over the ages, they became powerful shaman-warriors, protecting their tribes from enemies both material and spiritual as well as ensuring bounty in the hunt. Churka, meanwhile, taught his chosen the ways of deceit and illusion. Ennoia's forces gained the upper hand, but on the very cusp of victory two of her most beloved shamans betrayed her, suborned by Churka's wiles. In the manner of Churka's followers, they slew their own tribesmen and drank their blood, and tempted some of their fellow shamans to do the same. When Ennoia learned of this, she flew into a rage and declared that if her chosen wished to behave like the people of Churka, then they could share in their fate. From that night forth, the Gangrel were cut off from the natural world. They had to hide their faces from the sun and take only blood for sustenance, and the beasts that had once aided them now shunned them.

In time, Ennoia repented of her fury. Though she will never forgive the two traitors or those who fled her sight along with them, she came to the rest of her shamans and taught them how they could use their new powers to reenact their old gifts of beast-speech and beast-form. Some say that a Gangrel who perfects these arts and continues her ancient duty of fighting the Churka-folk (that is, the Ravnos, the Lhiannan and the Laibon) may be able to lift Ennoia's curse altogether.

The Einherjar

The All-High of the *einherjar* may have been, as some Gangrel snort, of much more recent vintage than he claimed, but highly detailed accounts of his adventures date back at least to New Testament times. Most *einherjar* believed that he was a sort of high priest, not Odin himself but an ardent son or disciple of Odin; he was one-eyed and possessed an enormous command of the runes, and the wolves and ravens treated him as a beloved father. There were always a few, however, who believed the All-High to be the very god himself, and he never contradicted them. In any case, all *einherjar* who hold to the faith of their

ancestors relate that it was Odin who founded their line. The story goes that the god found a valiant berserk named Canarl lying on the battlefield, wrongly outlawed from his people, cursed with a foul rune and wounded. Impressed by the strength of his battle-rage, Odin granted him an eternal life without breath in which to either seek his revenge or find the wisdom of the Vanir, whichever he might choose. The legend is silent on Canarl's final choice and fate.

Blood-drinkers of other backgrounds laugh at this tale, but they generally take care to do it behind the *einherjar*'s backs.

Christians and Taifa

Christians and Muslims among the Gangrel (who, much to the elders' dismay, are fast becoming a plurality) tend to accept the mythology of Caine much as other Cainites do. Some attempt to fit the Ennoia/Churka legend in somehow, usually by demoting the pair to childer or grandchilder of Caine. Others ignore Ennoia entirely, as well as the feud with the Ravnos, and simply refer to their putative founder as "Mother Gangrel." Of course, this leaves the Gangrel's beast-like powers still to be explained. One account claims that Caine cursed Mother Gangrel for the sin of coupling with animals. Another states that Mother Gangrel was taken into the Blood against her will, and fled the First City to avoid Caine's unwanted attentions; Caine pursued her into the forest, but God took pity and granted her the gift of shapeshifting to help her escape. Yet another claims that Mother Gangrel swore to drink only the blood of animals, and it was from this blood that she gained her skills.

Ancient Times

Many of the best-known lineages of Gangrel trace their ancestry back to the ancient world. Maharbaal the Phoenician, godfather of travelers, amassed a mountain of gold, silver, glass and obsidian, squirreled it all away in a hidden tomb for his next bout of torpor, and then disappeared in a shipwreck — but not before he'd sired childer in every port then known to man (and possibly a few others besides). Harpalyce Mare-Swift, the Thracian Amazon and robber-princess, chased each of her five childer out of her wood with fang and talon the night after the Embrace, a tradition many of her descendants carry on. Genger the Centaur, who taught the Cimmerians to ride and fight on horseback, is the spiritual forebear of all Gangrel who have shadowed nomad peoples down through the ages. Some even insist that the clan's present

name results from a Cainite mishearing of "Gengeroi."

Most Gangrel can recite their descent from one of these legendary ancestors or others like them. Gangrel sires typically tell their get nothing, or next to nothing, at the time of the Embrace; but later, after the fledglings have proven themselves, their sires contrive to run into them again (often at a Gather), where they are rewarded for survival with the story of their heritage. Some Gangrel, however, never encounter their sires a second time, or never manage to extract the tale. In such cases it's usually best to make up a lineage, or at the very least to take a famous elder as one's symbolic ancestor and exemplar. Indeed, by this time a fair number of the known lineages may be fabricated or improved upon. One can't help noticing that a great many of the Gangrel who feel most comfortable dwelling in the cities cite Maharbaal as their lineage's founder, for instance, while huntsmen and huntswomen tend to claim Harpalyce and barbarian warriors call themselves children of Genger.

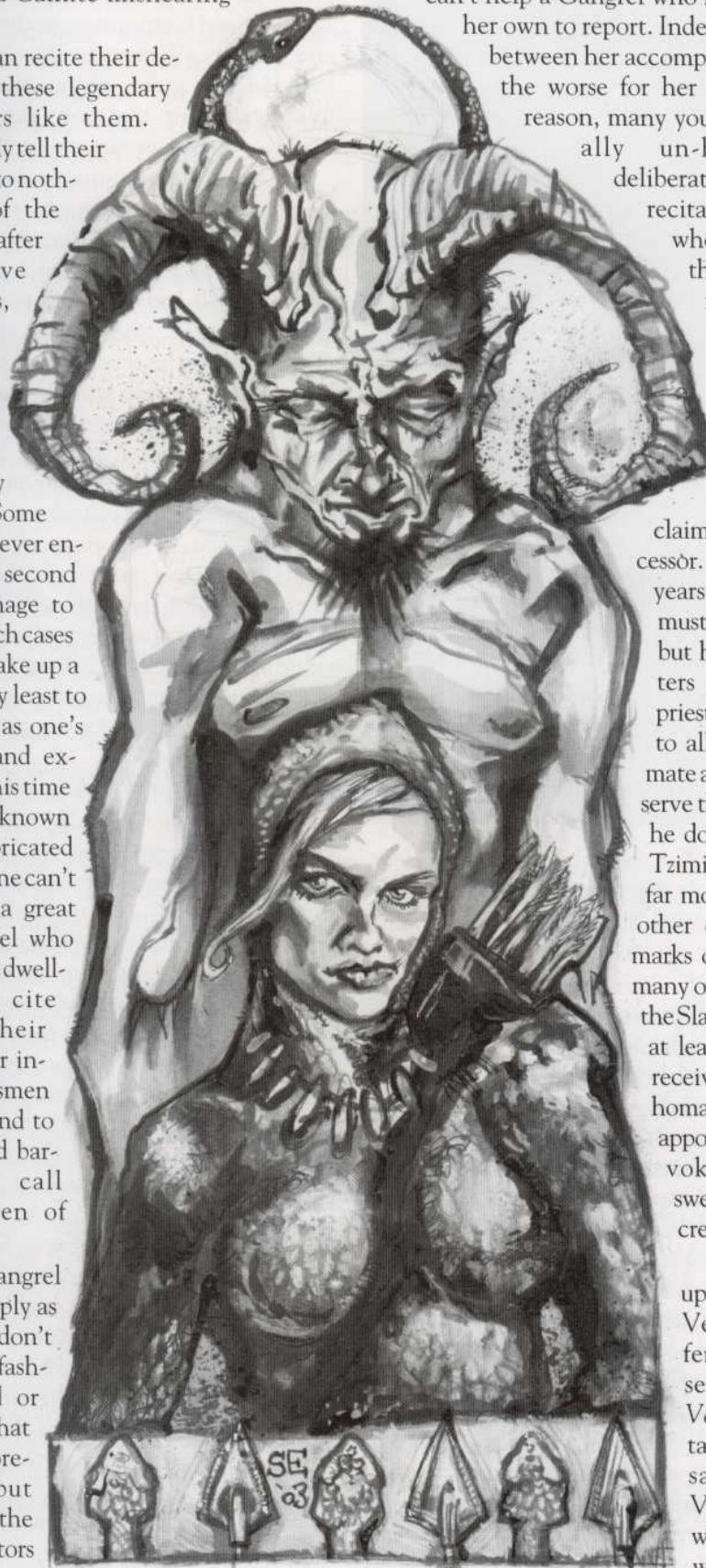
While most Gangrel revere lineage as deeply as any Ventrue, they don't revere it in the same fashion. It's not blood or wealth of domain that makes a Gangrel forebear illustrious, but exploits. But even the most successful ancestors

can't help a Gangrel who has no great deeds of her own to report. Indeed, the wider the gap between her accomplishments and theirs, the worse for her reputation. For this reason, many young (or constitutionally un-heroic) Animals deliberately leave out the full recitation of their descent when meeting others of their kind, awaiting the night when they can show themselves worthy of it.

The Cult of Veles

The cult of Veles claims no Gangrel predecessor. Many thousands of years ago, some Gangrel must have begun that cult, but her name hardly matters now. Indeed, many priests of Veles go nameless to all but their most intimate associates. Not all who serve the god are Gangrel—he does sometimes choose Tzimisce to attend him, and, far more rarely, Cainites of other clans may show the marks of destiny. Moreover, many of the Cainite courts of the Slavic lands revere Veles, at least superficially. They receive his priests, pay due homage and sacrifice at the appointed season and invoke his name when swearing their most sacred oaths.

Still, Gangrel make up the greater part of Veles' priesthood. The female Cainites who serve him are called *Veela*, and have a reputation for exceptional savagery. Like Valkyries, they choose which warriors live and which fall, and they



THE WILD HUNT

Though Veles' priests are not the only fell creatures to practice the Wild Hunt, it takes an uncommonly central role in their faith. The quarry might be friend or foe, mortal, Cainite or something else entirely; for the Hunt's most sacred rule is that the prey may only be chosen by divination. To use any other method would be to impose judgment where there should be none. All mortal explaining and tale-spinning aside, the Wild Hunt follows no discernable logic or justice. It obeys no law or wish of man. It simply is.

A priest of Veles, usually a male Gangrel who can take the shape of a wolf or bear, embodies the god in his hunter aspect during each Hunt; once a year, in a special version of the rite, another male priest assumes the shape of a stag, boar or fox and embodies the god in his prey aspect, "dying" to ensure the cycle's continuation. Rarely, in times of great need, prey-priests may even give their heart's blood in sacrifice. In any case, the prey always senses the Hunt from the moment it starts. If it can survive three days and nights, then it will be spared; holy ground or holy relics can also sometimes put an end to the Hunt.

also make fierce warriors and hunters themselves, especially skillful with the bow. Veles' male priests don't enjoy the same fame as the *Veela*, but they're just as numerous and just as likely to occupy positions of leadership in the cult.

Veles is the god of the underworld, magic and the hunt, of horned animals and also of trade and oaths. He sometimes wears the head of a wolf; sometimes the horns of a stag, ram, or bull; and on yet other occasions appears as a great water-serpent. He is hunter and prey in one. Some mortals have begun calling him by a new Christian name, St. Blas, and appeal to him to protect their flocks and herds. Others now equate him with the Devil. Although Veles' Gangrel are used to infidels insulting their god, they sometimes take personal offense at the turning-away of their mortals, and exact suitable punishments.

Cainite worship of Veles originally began in the Slavic lands, but journeying Gangrel soon brought it to other places as well. They caught strong echoes of their lord in the Baltic god Velnias and the Norse god Odin. (In fact, the priests of Veles often treat the *einherjar* as a lost and erring outgrowth of their faith.) In the British Isles, Hu Gadarn, Gwynn ap Nuad and

Herne the Hunter were masters of the wild; in Gaul, Dispater and Cernunnos; in the Mediterranean, Pan and Faunus. Wherever they went, Veles' chosen founded new cults, taking on the local names and folkways. Their traditions mingled — not always easily — with those already established by the natives.

Meanwhile, the priests also found a welcome of sorts with the Cainite lords of their own homeland. Ancient legend claims that the Tzimisce founder, in return for secret wisdom, struck a bargain with Mother Earth Herself and paid the price for it out of his own flesh. He swore himself and all his progeny to the eternal duty of protecting the land that empowered him and the mortals whose blood and lives sustained him. Though dead himself, he would be the humble servant of life. The Tzimisce Shaper-priests of the Mother became the self-appointed guardians of this pact, reminding the *voivodes* of their duties and reading the omens. The priests of Veles also told omens from the spirits of nature, and they too had an interest in protecting the land, though they concerned themselves almost exclusively with the wild. While the two cults never formally allied, they exchanged favors and occasionally cooperated in pressuring the impious to at least *pretend* to honor the gods.

The Rise of Civilization

Though the Animals like to grumble about the cities and empires that human industry built — rising, cresting and then falling only to give way to successor states — in truth they benefited greatly from civilization. Most human communities had been small and insular up to that point. Even nomads usually simply followed game on its perambulations through a set territory, only migrating when pressured. But when Sumeria, Egypt, Phoenicia, Greece, Rome, Byzantium and the Muslim caliphates each achieved their greatness in turn, they also instituted trade networks. Mortals took to the roads in theretofore unheard-of numbers — roads that, often as not, wound through Gangrel domain on their way from one noteworthy place to another. Gangrel who felt the wanderlust come upon them now had a great many more destinations to choose from, a hundred fascinating tales to pursue. Childer who would have chosen to fight their own sires for territory rather than risk the possibility of an aimless journey through wastes barren of human prey now routinely left and staked out domains far and wide.

The great cities themselves held a wealth of prey, but predators who had arisen within them and knew

their ways already claimed them as domain. For all their strength, the Animals usually failed to seize these territories away. On the other hand, they had much to offer in exchange for temporary hunting rights during their periodic visits. They could bring news from far and near; they could also serve as scourges, tracking down uninvited Cainites. Princes quickly learned that as long as they didn't make any foolish attempts to demand formal submission, they could usually rely on the Gangrel who approached them to hold to any arrangements agreed upon.

Not all princes realized, however, that the Gangrel scourges tended to wave strangers of their own blood through, or that the Gangrel talebearers often remained silent about their own brethren's doings. And there were many Animals yet — some who claimed domain over country villages or nomadic tribes, some proud vagabonds — who had no interest in making pacts with city princes at all. Their loyalty, if they had any, was to their herds and to those fellow Gangrel who had not strayed too far from the "old ways." They resisted one world-conqueror after another as best they could: In the countryside around Ebla they fought in vain against the Akkadian and Hittite invaders; in the wild lands of Asia Minor they tried to repel Alexander's advance; in the lands of the Getae they resisted first the Egyptians, then the Persians, then the Macedonians, then the Romans.

When the Romans sacked Carthage, and then again when the barbarian tribes sacked Rome, Gangrel warriors rode with the invading forces — often Gangrel who had seen their tribes slaughtered or bred out by the colonizing imperials and wanted revenge. And on both occasions, the Brujah and Ventrue lords of the devastated cities accused their own local Gangrel of having sided with the enemy. In fact many *had* kept mum about the dangers they knew to be looming. After all, offend a prince and you must flee his city, but offend your fellow wanderers and nowhere in the world is safe anymore. Other Animals had warned their lieges but seen their concerns waved away. Gangrel were fit to bear tales and carry letters, not to interpret their political meaning. What could they understand of the affairs of their betters?

Matasuntha

Young Gangrel boast that they can sing songs telling all there is to know about Matasuntha. When Gangrel who actually date from her age hear this, they shake their heads and change the subject. The matter's still politically tender.

The tale runs like this: In the year AD 400, Matasuntha the Hun called a Grand Gather and put down all challengers, thus gaining mastery of the entire clan. Then she led them on a massive revel across Europe, slaughtering and hunting, openly flaunting her monstrous nature, terrorizing the dying Empire with her tigress ferocity. Then just as suddenly as she had appeared, she disappeared. Her forces scattered to the winds.

In truth, Matasuntha did call a Grand Gather and did convince much of the clan to attend. Her name was not the most famous among the ancient ancestors, but enough Animals either knew her legend or claimed descent from her that they felt duty-bound to go. And of those who attended, all but a craven few honored the terms of the challengers' defeat and joined her. However, there were many elders who deliberately chose not to go to the Gather, despite her venerable status. They knew that if they went, they would be defeated and compelled to follow whatever agenda she might choose.

Matasuntha's mysterious rampage against civilization in general lasted only three years. During that time, countless mortals and a number of Cainites on both sides met their deaths. Although the youngsters' tales usually blame the Churka-folk for spiriting Matasuntha off with their enchantments, elders of the era know that she accepted a challenge from a Methuselah of uncertain clan, and that they climbed to the top of a remote peak to fight their battle, and that great storms lashed the whole area for the next few weeks.

Her lieutenants tried to settle the question of leadership quickly with a handful of individual combats. But by that time Cainites of other clans had marshaled their strength and the horde crumbled under combined external and internal pressures; no one wanted to answer to the other blood-drinkers for a crusade whose motivation they themselves didn't entirely understand. Even now, feuds sometimes arise between Gangrel who rode with Matasuntha and those who avoided her. The former accuse the latter of cowardice and disdain for ancestors. The latter snarl that they saw no reason to follow a bewitched lunatic; the entire episode served only to prove to the Cainites what mindless beasts all Gangrel are.

Some say that Matasuntha has recently returned to the world of men. A few claim actually to have seen her. What she might do now, and to whom, has kept many a Gather lively with speculation.

The Dark Ages

No sooner had the Western world seemingly ended with the fall of Rome than it began to build itself again in new forms. The Gangrel adapted themselves to the new circumstances better than most. They had lost comparatively little when the dream of global Empire died; it was never really their dream. They struck the same bargains with the Cainite masters of Italian city-states and Carolingian capitals that they had with the Cainite governors of Roman settlements.

The Rise and Fall of the Einherjar

In Scandinavia, the Vikings and their vampiric shadow, the *einherjar*, reached their apex of glory. They sacked Ireland, Paris, London, Canterbury, Algeciras, Constantinople — the last a benchmark for any self-respecting invader — but they also exchanged wealth, both commercial and cultural, with other civilizations and seeded their childer far and wide. Often these childer turned away from the worship of Odin, or converted to its nearest local equivalent, but they carried forward many of the other *einherjar* traditions. The *einherjar* impressed their fellow Gangrel wherever they went with their ferocity and their historic, heroic resistance to assimilation. Here, many Animals thought, was a branch of the clan that had never been tamed, never been lured away from its ancient shamanic duties. In retrospect, this was a more romantic than realistic assessment. But the fact remains that for several hundred years, *einherjar* culture was admired and imitated throughout much of the clan.

In AD 1112, however, mortal missionaries in Sweden finally had the popular support to do what they had yearned to for so long. Armed with torch and faith, they burned down the hall of the All-High at Uppsala. A Ventrue lord named Sundafyllir claims to have the ashes of the All-High in a jar in his treasury, leading to a number of challenges from furious young *einherjar* that, so far, he has won. Since no *Walküre* or elder has come forward to fight Sundafyllir, much of Europe assumes that he is lying. But perhaps many of them are dead or in hiding themselves. In any case, while the disappearance of the All-High isn't itself enough to doom the sea-wolves, it does mark the beginning of their decline; and however much Sundafyllir and his ilk might like to take credit, it seems the kine and their new God bear true responsibility.

(See *Wolves of the Sea* for more information on the *einherjar*.)

Veles' Chosen

Meanwhile, in Eastern Europe and Russia, an occult war has raged for the last few centuries. The Tzimisce always laid formal claim to the holiest sites in the land — hilltops where earth and sky touched, river sources, waterfalls and hot springs, ancient trees blackened by lightning-stroke, and so forth. But Gangrel, especially the cult of Veles and its smaller rival cult of Perunn, did much of the actual work of protecting and maintaining those sites. They also watched, warily, as their mortals turned away from old gods. Fortunately, the mortals usually continued to treat the sites themselves with respect; but sometimes they defiled the holy places by building churches to their new Savior there, and sometimes a zealous priest or bishop took it into his head to vandalize or destroy ancient monuments. Not all such assaults could be stopped, especially not without drawing the full wrath of the Church down on the heads of all the *vampyri*.

As a result, the Gangrel initially paid little heed to the small clutches of human wizards who had built manor houses in or near certain remote holy places. But then troubling omens appeared and the spirits complained, and finally some spirits ceased to answer at all. The Tzimisce Shaper-priests, too, and the *koldun* who tapped the earth's power for their magic (or raped the earth of it, depending on inclination), noticed something amiss. They didn't sleep as well as they once did. Even the soil on which they slept seemed to have lost some of its revitalizing power. The priests of Veles felt their god's anger, and under his influence they became uncommonly rapacious, but no amount of spilled blood was enough to propitiate him.

At last they realized that the human wizards, the Tremere, were the trouble's source; the Tremere drained the land of strength just as a vampire drained mortals of blood. By the time the priests and *koldun* were able to move their *voivodes* to action, however, things had gone from bad to worse. Some of the wizards had stolen the gift of the "dead water" and become vampires themselves. Nor did they intend to be displaced without a fight. Thus the Omen War was joined. (See p. 59 for more on the Omen War.)

Although the Gangrel continue to serve as courageous foot soldiers, scouts, and generals in the Omen War, they've received precious little satisfaction from either their Tremere enemies or their Tzimisce "allies." Indeed, the Tremere have captured some of the Gangrel sent against them, mostly scouts, and used

their very flesh and blood to create yet a new abomination — the so-called Gargoyles, vicious creatures whose fury and bravery the Gangrel might admire if they weren't so plainly bred to servility.

Points of Contention

The following are some of the most pressing matters demanding Gangrel attention in AD 1230:

The Reconquista

When the sons of the late Visigoth king Witiza invited the Arabs and Berbers across the straits into Spain to help them defeat the man who'd seized their father's throne, they unwittingly opened the door to a three-centuries-long Muslim domination of their peninsula. This domination met with resistance from the outset, however, and with increasing success as time went by. Tiny Christian strongholds in the north grew from vassal states into powerful kingdoms, and then began their inexorable advance.

Some of the deepest wounds to Clan Gangrel have been dealt out in Iberia. Gangrel dwelled among the Visigoths and Hispano-Romans, and also with the Berbers and Arabs. Although both groups of Gangrel were still largely pagan in the 8th century, they had already developed their own mutually irreconcilable traditions. And as the mortals continued to fight their religious war, Animal followers of the one true God began to appear. Some of them were converts, radicalized by war; others were neonates clinging to their kine faith. When the Crusades began, relations between Christian and Muslim became more poisonous than ever. While Gangrel had certainly come into conflict with each other before, this was a particularly virulent clash of cultures, skin colors and beliefs. For the first time in many a long memory, the Animals couldn't even agree to stay out of each other's way. The Templars and Hospitalers moved into the peninsula, and were soon imitated by native Spanish orders, all bent on slaughtering the infidels.

Muslim power now wanes alarmingly. The Almoravid Empire's military might was crushed by Alfonso VIII, leading a rare five-kingdom Christian coalition, in AD 1212 at the Navas de Tolosa. Now it disintegrates politically as well. Meanwhile, Fernando III has reunited Castile and Leon under his scepter, and shows every intention of following up on his great-uncle's victory. The Muslim Gangrel of Spain — called the *Taifa* by other Muslim Cainites because of their tendency to support the mortal overlords of small independent states rather than the Almoravids

and Almohads — find themselves caught between Scylla and Charybdis. If they band with their co-religionists among the Childer of Haqim and Lasombra, they risk being treated as inferiors, mercenaries or tributaries; but their Christian clanmates (and even the remaining Visigothic-pagan Gangrel) would expect them not only to submit to the *Reconquista* but also to convert as the price of peace.

(See *Veil of Night* for more information on Gangrel and other Cainites in the Muslim lands, or *Iberia by Night* for more information on the Spanish peninsula.)

The Fall of Veles

Like the rest of the old Cainite order east of the Danube, the priests of Veles now find themselves embattled on several fronts. While the Orthodox Church doesn't boast its own formal order of monster-hunters like the Roman Church, it still stamps out pagan evils wherever it hears of them. The Swordbrothers of Livonia and the Teutonic Knights harass the Baltic peoples, converting them with steel and fire. The Tremere clan has risen to prominence, fulfilling many a dark prophecy en route, and all attempts to cut the cancer out seem doomed to failure. The Ventrue continue to encroach from the west. The Tzimisce prove less and less reliable as allies as the years wear on; they don't seem to understand the connection between their failures of faith and duty and their slow, ignominious fall. Worst of all, some of the priests themselves have begun to falter. In their eagerness to defeat their many enemies, they break ancient taboos, such as the prohibition against calling a Sacred Hunt for personal benefit. Their nights are numbered; even if they survive the Tremere, the Ventrue and the Crusaders, their god may well desert them...or perhaps he himself is dying.

(See Chapter Five for more information on Slavic paganism.)

Player's Toolbox

The following is a selection of "seed" ideas for involving a Gangrel character more closely with issues concerning the clan as a whole:

The Death of Paganism

- Your sire was born to an animistic nomad people, long since destroyed or tamed. He seeks vengeance against those he holds responsible, and you have the choice of either following him on his pointless vendetta or breaking from him, which

could stigmatize you among elders who feel exactly as he does.

- You are a *Veela* saddled with the responsibility of cajoling a degenerate Tzimisce *voivode* to fulfill his religious and Omen War duties, which involves you in far more venomous internal Tzimisce politics than suits your taste. Now the *voivode*'s self-indulgence has attracted the Church's attention — do you play into the Christians' hands by urging him to hide for survival's sake, or do you let him continue his sybaritic ways and risk seeing everything go up in flames?

- You are a devout Christian, perhaps even a Lupetto di Gubbio (see Chapter Five). You try to lead your pagan clanmates by example, but so far a decade of turning the other cheek has netted you little besides a repeatedly bloodied cheek, and even other Christian Gangrel accuse you of making Christianity look like a coward's faith.

- You dwell in the *contada* outlying an Italian city, where the nominally Catholic peasants treat you as a patron wood-spirit and propitiate you in all sorts of helpful ways — in return for which you assure their pigs bountiful pannage and even drive game toward their poachers in times of famine. Now you've offended the Lasombra prince, who's decided to send a zealous priest to harass your mortals into giving up their heathen remnants. What even the prince doesn't realize is that the priest belongs to the shadow Inquisition.

The Omen War

- You are an ex-Crusader of the Teutonic Knights whose band unwisely attacked a Tremere chantry; the attack failed, but a Gangrel scout in the area rewarded your bravery with the Embrace. Apparently he's laboring under the delusion that because you still hate the Tremere, you automatically sympathize with his infidel agenda....

- While wandering on the border between the expanding Mongol empire and the Tzimisce-dominated lands, you happen across a very out-of-place Tremere riding through the waste and decide to see what he's up to. It turns out he's meeting with one of the Anda to negotiate a possible pincer strategy for crushing what remains of the Tzimisce "empire." What do you do — try to kill the Tremere emissary and frame the Anda for it, follow him back to Vienna to spy on the matter some more, call a Gather to deal with the problem, or work to convince other clans in the threatened area to listen to you? (See Chapter Three for more information on the Anda.)

The Churka-Folk

- You have a personal grudge against a brood of Ravnos. In the process of trying to get help against them, you've become furiously indignant about your clan's overall failure to pursue their supposedly eternal foe for the last thousand years or so. Changing this state of affairs is your new *raison d'être*. Eventually you hope to raise a Gangrel force to go to India, perhaps under cover of a Christian crusade against the newborn Delhi sultanates. (In AD 1230 this is a damned distant possibility; as recently as 1218, however, the maritime states of Europe were seriously planning to use the Crusades as a way of opening up trade routes to the riches of India, and you don't see why this hope can't be revived.)

- You've traveled to Iberia and been amazed at the rancor between different branches of the clan there. A Christian *consanguinus* tells you almost off-handedly that the *Taifa* Gangrel know where Laibon dwell in the Berber lands, but she would take it as a dire insult if you approached them in friendship to ask for that information.

- You're a Saxon Gangrel dwelling in the British Isles. Recently you came across a Lhiannan skulking about in a remote village. The other Gangrel you talk to seem to feel that since you discovered her, she's yours to handle; perhaps they suspect you of lying to draw their support for some vendetta. You could easily attract the bishop's attention to the Savage, but as a pagan yourself, you have mixed feelings about that course. Or, knowing that there's also a ruined *mithraeum* there, you could mention to Mithras's resurgent band of followers that they should come out and reclaim this fine old shrine.

Malkavians

This evening as I came upon your Highness' fair palace, the moon peeked out from behind a cloud. When I saw it, I laughed till the hills rang. As mighty as you are, milord, can you do this?

— Wiftet the Simple, (successfully) explaining why Lord Jürgen should hire a jester

Other Cainites complain of the Malkavians that nothing definite can be said about any of them, ever. Of course, this is completely untrue. Volumes could be written about any particular Madman; the trouble comes when one then tries to extrapolate to the clan as a whole. Would-be historians of the Cainite race become especially frustrated when they sit down to write their Malkavian chapters. They may be used to

getting conflicting accounts from conflicting sources, but usually each source at least agrees with *itself*. For their part, the Madmen tend to greet irritated attempts to pin clan history down with further irritation: "So," they ask, "you would rather hear a straightforward lie than a complicated truth, is that it?"

Origins

Those Malkavians who directly speak of their founder at all often claim that he was more than mortal even before gaining the Blood. Indeed, some insist that he was one of God's own angels, part of the two-thirds host that put down Lucifer's rebellion; he then met his own private Fall, seduced by a child of Caine whose eyes burned with the lust to corrupt every good thing. Others, perhaps fearing condemnation for blasphemy, speak of Malkav as an oracle — not a god himself but one whose body and mind the gods invaded to give their auguries. Whoever he really was, all agree that he possessed more wisdom than was good for him, more than he possibly could bear together with the Curse of Caine. Still, they say in the beginning he was not mad.

How he came to be mad is also a matter of some debate. The generally accepted story is that he abused his gift of prophecy to his own ends, telling false or shaded visions to the rest of the Thirteen, until they were quite literally at each others' throats. Caine, learning of this only when his most beloved had nearly died because of it, cursed Malkav with insanity. Since Malkav delighted in telling a thousand different "truths," never again would the real truth come either to him or from him with the singular clarity it once had. Instead, he would have to scabble for every last grain of it, picking fragments here and there out of a mountain of dross, never knowing for certain that what he grasped now was what he sought. This, say the Madmen, is why none of them possess ultimate wisdom despite all their gifts. Malkav tries to whisper the wonders he sees into their hearts, but he's simply no longer capable of telling a straight story.

Some Malkavians give a different account of things. They claim that Caine angered Lilith his wife by spurning her swarm of monstrous children and refusing to allow them haven in his domains. "Have I not taught you better than your father Adam or his father the Almighty ever did, and have I not dried your own children's tears, and sang to soothe them at night when the Beasts in their hearts howled?" she said. Then she went to the bedchamber of Malkav — who of all Caine's progeny had most desired her secrets — and she dropped a terrible truth into his

mind just as one would drop a pebble into a clear pool. The reflections of his thoughts scattered into a jumble and never again coalesced. The things he muttered, howled and cried disturbed Caine so greatly that the Dark Father sent Saulot and Set to soothe him into quiet. But Set came away more than half mad himself, and Saulot was so shaken that he headed east into the unknown countries, seeking wisdom powerful enough to kill the fears Malkav had stirred in him. Caine then had Malkav's tongue burnt out so he would no longer have to listen.

The Coronati

Most Malkavians aren't much for reciting lineages. Instead of ancestors they have the Coronati, three of Malkav's childer who serve alternately as guardian angels and as bogeymen. When the Madmen find themselves gripped by a particularly nightmarish bout of dementia, they beg for the Plague-Bride, temple-whore of the First City, to come and comfort them; but afterward they curse her for the new seeds of madness she leaves behind in their souls. The Clever Prince makes a useful ally when his deceptions are directed at one's enemies, but to attract his curious attention to oneself is an ill fate indeed. And as for the Nameless One who devours all things lost and forgotten — treasures, legends, words — the Malkavians pray for him to only devour their fevers.

Elders among the Malkavians claim that the reason none of their visions have turned up Malkav's resting place is that he *has* no one resting place. He was torn apart, like Osiris, by a jealous brother after the fall of the Second City. The one who dismembered him did not drink his blood for fear of contracting his curse. The pieces of his flesh were spread far and wide, and the sun reduced them to ash, but his heart's blood seeped into the earth, where it couldn't be touched by the fire. The next night his three childer came and partook of the red earth, not to steal his power but to save him. Then they parted forever so no one killer could slay them in a stroke and bring their father to death again. The blasted spot where he fell can be found still, the Madmen insist, in the lands of the Saracens — as unholy a place as Jerusalem is holy.

Ancient Nights

After the fall of the Second City, Malkavians, like other Cainites, made their way to its daughter-states. Many of the city names of this era are forgotten to those who learn all their history from Scripture, but the Madmen remember: Uruk, Kish, Kutu, Lagash, Eridu, Ur, Umma, Akkad, Ebla, Emar, Ugarit, Nippur,

Susa, Ashur, Nineveh. There was also Great Babylon herself, of course, where the Tower of Babel fell and the original language of men and angels was hopelessly confused. A clan legend tells that Duma, angel of silence, entrusted each of seventy-seven Madmen with a small portion of the First Tongue, but strictly warned them against uniting the portions before the time of the Gehenna. (Skeptics point out that it's unlikely there even *were* seventy-seven Malkavians that long ago; but needless to say this argument makes scant impression on believers.)

Not all these ancient cities were shepherded by those who now call themselves High. Despite their curse of madness, the get of Malkav ruled many of them. Of all Cainites, they were most adept at posing as what the ancient Semites called the *baalim*, the city-gods — creatures who were by nature powerful, generous and wise, yet fickle and rapacious according to the moment. They hid in the sanctums of the ziggurats, or paced around the delightful spiral staircases the Babylonians devised, allowing their own tortured thoughts to unwind. They drank the blood of the animal offerings, and often of direr sacrifices made in times of mortal sorrow. They taught the priests how to read the stars or the spilled guts of a sheep or goat; they also taught the common worshipers how to mold little household gods out of clay and to listen to the tiny voices of counsel or warning that proceeded from the niche in the wall.

As the eldest Madmen usually tell it, the Malkavians lost ground to their imitators. The Ventrue, the Brujah, the childer of Haqim and of Set all coveted what the Malkavians possessed. After all, it was comfortable indeed to be *baal* in such a place as Nippur, where the walls of the temple were glazed in eight different colors and the perimeter fires could be seen blazing from miles away even in the dead of night, where precious gems were set into the platform and aromatic balms sweetened the charnel-smell of the place of sacrifice. But none of these envious Cainites possessed the true touch of the Moon (even the Cappadocians could only speak with the dead, and most of them had no interest in guiding whole cities full of stupid living folk).

In Egypt the Followers of Set instituted their own cults; their obsession with the afterworld and the possibility of apotheosis shaped the nascent religion of the area. In the Sabaeen lands, the childer of Haqim tried to become *mukkarib*, priest-kings; and when they largely failed, they turned their talents to astrology instead, telling the will of the moon, sun and stars to human sovereigns through this method. The

Malkavian elders speak of these efforts with approval, salted with a hint of condescension.

The Ventrue, however, took a wiler tack. They went to the *ensi*, the mortal priest-kings who served the *baalim* of Mesopotamia, and offered their own and their mortals' services as *lugal* — military commanders. The priest-kings, busy with internal concerns, were often more than happy to accept the offer. The *lugal* warlords served well, conquering neighboring states and enriching their cities with the wealth and slaves such conquest brought. But then they used the leverage gained from their exploits to steal away the people's loyalty and usurp the place of the *ensi*, first subordinating them and then subsuming them entirely. Many a *baal* awoke from torpor to find a Ventrue ruling his city as *ensi-lugal*, or employing a puppet mortal to do so.

The religious authorities were, perhaps for the first time in human history, completely subject to military power, and the Malkavians' nights as god-princes were over. They became permanent outsiders. Even such famous divine impersonators as the Dionysian (and the twin "Orphic brothers" who helped him suborn the Bacchanalian mystery cults of old Greece) succeeded in gaining only a fringe following among mortals. The Ventrue saw to it that such "gods" were held in horror by all right-thinking citizens of the empires, and that most kine favored the orderly pantheons which suited the Warlords' own tastes.

Carthage

Yet the Malkavian patriarchs and matriarchs save their worst rancor not for the Ventrue, but for the Brujah. They charge that the Brujah of Carthage instituted the rites of Baal-Hammon, the burning bronze god that devoured firstborn children alive while priests shrieked and stabbed themselves in a vile sham of divine lunacy. Their objection to these rites centers not so much on the human sacrifice itself but on its utter uselessness. The Brujah had no true oracles to give in return for this sweetest of offerings, and since the children were burned, even their blood went to waste. The whole thing was simply a cynical exercise in crowd control — a way for mortals in desperate straits to feel they were doing *something* about their ill fortune, so that they would not take their desperation out on their Cainite "brethren." For their part, the Brujah, to the extent that they acknowledge the reality of child-sacrifice in Carthage at all, tend to blame Baali infiltration. (And as for the Baali themselves, those few Cainites who hear of the Malkavians'

nights as *baalim* and ask about a possible connection receive, for once, only stony silence in answer.)

Thus it was Tryphosa, the Malkavian seeress, whose words of warning finally spurred decadent old Prince Camilla of Rome to strike at Carthage. The great city was sacked and burned, the earth salted, and the Brujah dream of dwelling in communion with the kine killed — as the Malkavians insist it had to be, for it was always a mad dream. And the mantle of empire passed to Rome: to the Ventruë, Lasombra and Toreador. Those Malkavians whose talents could be reliably turned to prophecy contented themselves with this role. They were no longer powerful in their own right, but the powerful still heeded them. However, many Madmen either had no insight to give or had no interest in giving it to those who didn't have to pay the same price for it. They wandered the wastes, bereft of company, "with only the jackals to pity them and only the wights to hear their cries," as a very old clan saying goes.

The Advent

The Madmen took a greater interest than most of their contemporaries in legends of Yeshua, the Galilean who supposedly rose from death after three days. His ministry commanded their admiration. He was deeply eccentric; he usually made his points obliquely, with stories and jokes, and seemed to delight in confusing people, answering even trick questions from Pharisees with deft aplomb. A particular clutch of Malkavians had visions that suggested this man was in fact Malkav reborn, and traveled to Judea to see him in person. One of these was a former sandal-maker named Andreas, who later wrote a gospel in which the Savior reportedly charged him to find Father Caine and redeem him with the true light of faith. Andreas hasn't been heard from since, at least outside his clanmates' dreams. But his gospel gave rise to a movement that has never completely died out; it's also influenced later groups such as the Crooked Cross, a military-religious order which claims to serve the Trinity of Caine the Father, Jesus the Son and Malkav the Holy Ghost.

By AD 1230, most Madmen, having been born in the Christian era, react with outright horror to the idea of Jesus as the reincarnation of any Cainite — much less the craziest one of the bunch. A few have even dedicated themselves to the extermination of the so-called Apostles of the Reborn Malkav. Other Malkavians, however, reject any connection between their founder and Christ but do believe in Andreas' holy mission to find Caine. Rumors suggest that these latter Madmen may have joined forces with others —

mostly Lasombra and Cappadocian sages — who follow a similar quest to bring Christian redemption to the Dark Father. After all, if the blood of the Lamb could save all mankind from Adam's sin, why could it not save the Cainites from Caine's?

The Dark Ages

Alas, Jesus of Nazareth brought about not only a new hope for Andreas, but a new world power as well — and that power had scant patience for any wisdom that didn't issue from its own priesthood. Pious Emperor Theodosius shut down the oracle at Delphi, allowing local scoundrels to pillage it and quarry it for stone. In Cainite society, too, the attitude toward their resident oracles shifted. Once upon a time even Hardestadt had feared to tread too near Hunawilja's cave without his leave. Now, though he still consulted Hunawilja for auguries, he thought nothing of calling the seer to heel at court just like his other subjects. Fewer and fewer Malkavians were able to command superstitious awe, or even a healthy fear, with their babblings. Luckily, the clan has never been less mutable than the times, and the Madmen adapted.

In this era of new humiliation, many Malkavians began to hide their heritage. Of course, a fair number had never acknowledged Malkav in the first place because they fancied themselves gods or demons or ghosts or mortals, not vampires. But now even some who knew better denied the taint in their blood. No few lineages of "Toreador" and "Brujah" have shaped the affairs of great domains for several generations without anyone (sometimes even themselves) realizing the lie. After all, most Cainites go a little mad with time, and not all Malkavian insanities are as obvious as generally thought. On occasion these hidden lineages must fend off "long-lost cousins" determined either to expose or blackmail them; both sides are usually willing to use any means necessary to get their way.

Foolery

Those Madmen who could not hide their lunacy, however, struggled to find some new way of parlaying it into an asset. This often proved difficult. The wastes once again received the failures and swallowed them up, or scourges put them out of their misery. But other Malkavians took inspiration from the example of the Roman comic actors called *scurrae*. Although the *scurrae* enjoyed great popularity, sometimes their outrageousness got them condemned by the imperial government. They then went into exile seeking new audiences to amuse, speaking their minds with all the

freedom of those who have no respectability to lose. Eventually, some of these men and their imitators won the patronage of far-flung kings and nobles, and the institution of the jester was born.

The Madmen, too, discovered that their oddities could be tolerated and even valued so long as they entertained. Many took up their ancient pastime of soothsaying once again in this new guise. A prince would often accept harsher reproof from his "fool" than from his privy council. It was, in its way, a very important post. The only price was one's dignity. Needless to say, others besides the Malkavians also sought out this niche. Deft Toreador *jongleurs* and sharp-tongued Nosferatu sometimes became professional fools, and when the Ravnos began to trickle into Europe, they brought with them a venerable Indian tradition of jesting.

Malkavians who chose not to serve as jesters — that is, most Malkavians — bitterly criticized those who did. It was hard enough being taken seriously when people thought you mad; having cousins prancing about in two-horned hoods edged with jingle-bells only made things worse. But as the Middle Ages wear on, folk have become more and more used to the idea, to the point where a prince without a jester is no longer considered a proper prince at all. (See p. 81 for more information on jesting and its place in Cainite society.)

Unmada and Vasantasena

By 1230, a great many Cainite lords have become almost accustomed to strange blood-drinkers passing through their domains. The Omen War has caused both a flood of Western freebooters into the East and a mass exodus of uprooted young Tzimisce into Germany and France. The Ravnos have begun to appear west of Constantinople in unprecedented (if still small) numbers. Moorish Assamites driven out of Iberia by the Reconquista have sometimes chosen to wander the lands of the infidel rather than return to a mysterious continent of which they have no personal memory.

This context helps explain why the Malkavian guru Unmada and his childe Vasantasena haven't attracted more comment as they travel from Venice down through Lombardy, Tuscany and the Papal States — although the princes of Italy have noticed that the two usually call on cities where the Lasombra dominate. They certainly make an odd enough pair: Unmada's skeletal body is visibly pierced through more than two dozen times with needles, slim iron rods, twigs and even



slivers of bone; his 'daughter' is sufficiently beautiful and richly-adorned to make Toreador stumble over their own hems, but her gaze remains permanently fixed on some middle distance, and even when she addresses folk directly she seems really to be playing to an invisible and far more important audience just over their shoulders.

Their intended hosts quite often take them for Ravnos or Jews, and refuse to receive them. Those who do invite them in, however, are rewarded with a fascinating evening's speculation. The apparently spontaneous oracles the pair offer at the feast table strike many as being the first Noddist items of truly novel interest in centuries; but clearly there's more to their journey than a simple mission of prophecy. Prince Guilelmo of Venice once asked them why, if they were so worried about Gehenna, they didn't simply go to the lord of the Castel d'Ombro and dine with him, for he would surely know more about it than any other Magister they had yet spoken to.

Vasantasena replied that that was precisely why they didn't go.

Points of Contention

The Malkavians' interests are usually too disparate to speak of "issues facing the clan," but there are several problems that crop up especially frequently in the present nights:

Fallen is Babylon

Although few Malkavians walking the night can actually remember the clan's era of relative glory, most Madmen still have a sense of something precious lost, some instinct that things weren't always as they are now. They may lament the curse of Malkav, but they also acknowledge his gift of insight to his progeny. Once upon a time, the other Cainites also acknowledged that gift...but that time is fast fading now.

Opinions on what to do about this vary widely. Some feel there is nothing to be done. They simply survive as best they can and leave honor to the High Clans. They avoid Cainite society altogether, or they present themselves to princes as charity cases; the princes usually choose to allow them some unwanted corner of the domain rather than deal with the trouble hungry Madmen can cause, but often extract the blood oath as the price of their generosity. Other Madmen serve as jesters or scourges or in some other low-respect position.

Some, however, refuse to give up their ancient legacy. They ply their trade as oracles, whether inde-

pendent or pledged to a particular domain, or else they ascend the ranks of a Gehenna cult or secret society, thus gaining some status among those better prepared to see genius in madness — which, theoretically, makes the disdain of other Cainites easier to bear. Some (often those with no more useful talent to offer) take it upon themselves to become worthy adversaries of the good, to represent the inverse of everything the rest of the world holds dear. Since it honors order, they will bring chaos; since it thinks it cherishes "truth," they will reveal the inherent lie of ordinary perception; since it is xenophobic, they will repeatedly invade it with their alien beliefs. Satanic glory, they reason, is better than none at all.

This kind of divide can easily tear a brood apart. One child sees her sire humiliated by his liege-lord every night, and resolves to find some way of existence that entirely repudiates his. Another is constitutionally unable to follow his sire in their lineage's oracular tradition, and eventually decides to stop trying, thus breaking a line of descent that has persisted since ancient Mycenaea.

Gehenna

The vast majority of Malkavians aren't prophets, particularly on any regular basis. But enough Madmen have occasional flashes of horrors to come that the clan can be said to take an uncommonly deep interest in Gehenna and Noddist lore. This doesn't necessarily translate to a greater sense of responsibility. All the same, some Malkavians bear in mind the Scripture: "For unto whomsoever much is given, from him much shall be required." They have very little patience for clanmates who don't share their sense of destiny. After all, the fate of the world is at stake.

Nor do they pity in the slightest those Madmen who say they don't have the gift of visions. If one doesn't have it oneself, it is obviously one's Caine-given duty to follow those that do. They may be able to forgive lapses in piety from other, more feeble-witted clans, but not from those chosen to drink the draught of perilous truth that is Malkav's blood! Many Madmen seers especially upbraid their brethren over their failure to act on the prophecies of the Salubri genocide (now all but finished) — although what precisely they expected their clanmates to *do* about it is anyone's guess.

Luckily, real trouble only comes of this once in a while, when a would-be herald of Gehenna has a revelation so disturbing that it compels him to act on grand scale, by trying to assassinate famous elders, for instance. He attempts to browbeat or blackmail his clanmates into

helping him, eventually roiling all the nearby Madmen into a tempest of controversy. Soon enough irritated Cainites of other clans are pressuring them to “do something about your overzealous brother.” While most Cainites with any respect for heritage avow belief in the founders, the Dark Father and Gehenna, their devotion seldom goes beyond lip service. Apocalyptic fervor does a lot of societal damage for precious little noticeable benefit. And so such wild-eyed prophets are guided to the sun or the stake, sometimes by their own clanmates — but generally not before other unlives have already ended or come to ruin.

The latest outbreaks of Malkavian Gehenna-mongering have been more virulent than usual. For instance, a Jewish scholar calling himself simply Rakkab, “the Charioteer,” is currently wandering the German domains calling for the total extermination of the Tzimisce *voivodes* and all their broods. While a good many Ventrue are already happily pursuing this particular program, they are delighted to obtain mystical justification for it (even if it does come from an infidel), and his prophecies do seem to be moving some to especially rash aggressions. Rakkab’s auguries are highly detailed and interesting overall, but maddeningly vague in the particulars. He has been heard to say that the trunk does not die when the branches are sawn through. He also says “Ten are the numbers of the ineffable Sephiroth; ten and not nine, ten and not eleven. Once there are nine, ten cannot ever again be attained. The furrows are planted.” (Other Jewish Cainites note the Madman’s name and rightly guess that he is a follower of Merkabah, the “meditation of the chariot.” They also recall the Talmudic warning that of four men who engage in Merkabah, one has a true vision, one dies, one goes mad and one turns apostate — and comment dryly that Rakkab seems to have managed the latter three all at once.)

Player's Toolbox

Even if your character isn’t a “typical” Malkavian (oxymoron aside), it’s still possible to confront her with challenges peculiar to her clan. Below are a few ideas.

Sages

- Your curse, though debilitating, has never produced outright hallucinations or delusions. Now, however, you hear your fellow Cainites saying things no one else in the room seems to hear them say, as though their hearts were speaking silently to yours. The hidden messages suggest that nearly everything you thought you knew about these people is a lie.

You’ve heard that sometimes Malkav’s blood grants insight in addition to lunacy, but this has never been so for you before. Has it finally happened, or are you simply going madder than ever?

- You dwell in a city blessed with a Malkavian seeress of high reputation. This seeress’ latest prophecy is exceptionally dire, and most of the elders in the region are planning to act on it (whether they admit it or not). But you’ve also had a powerful vision recently, which directly contradicts what the seeress has said. You suspect the seeress is lying to suit her own purposes, but do you trust your gifts enough to publicly speak out against a much more powerful clanmate?

- You are a scholar of some grotesquely complex divination method, such as astrology, gematria or geomancy. Your obsession may be insane, but you’re convinced your calculations aren’t. Those few Cainites who share your interest believe you and are as frightened as you are, but unfortunately they’re not the people you need to impress. Even if you can act sane enough to seem worthy of an audience, you still somehow have to explain your system in terms an impatient Lasombra lord can understand.

Fools

- The one thing that’s always kept you from feeling too sorry for yourself is your broodmate; you love him dearly but he’s a hopeless case, unable to behave even halfway normally and prone to offending people with bursts of spontaneous honesty. Now, however, a Toreador prince has taken him under wing as his court fool. Apparently he’s found his niche. Admiring tales of his idiot-wise sayings and hilarious japes have begun to spread among the area’s Cainites, and you can’t believe you’re starting to feel insanely *jealous* of the cretin....

- You’re a jester, and a skilled one; you’ve successfully advised her Highness without seeming to and kept many a court gathering on an even keel even with blood-enemies present. But now you’ve fallen in love with an extraordinary visitor to her Highness’ court. Somehow you must show your amour that there’s more to you before she leaves town, but your “livelihood” and perhaps even your existence depend on your never being taken seriously.

The Forsaken

- Your sire has successfully passed himself off as some other clan for many years, and now holds a position of respect in his latest home. Naturally, he expects you to keep up the deception; in fact, he’s vowed to kill you if you expose him even inadvert-

ently. He insists that overcoming the curse is a matter of will and faith. Unfortunately, your madness is nowhere near as quiet as his, and you are finding it harder and harder to refuse its call.

• In life, you belonged to a profession that depended on solid thinking, such as academia or bookkeeping or diplomacy, and alas, you can no longer stay on track for more than an hour at a time. The only existence you've known is no longer an option. But now you've been approached by someone claiming to be one of the *mystai* of the *Ordo* (see Chapter Five). He promises you relief and a new sense of purpose, but you correctly sense that joining the cult will also involve you in the affairs of your elders, a shadow conspiracy of who knows what proportions....

Nosferatu

God twisted my face into a Gorgon's likeness, but He did not make me a monster. My sire reared me in a cesspit and even named me Dogshit in his own tongue, but he did not make me a monster. I imagine in time the rest of the world will succeed where they failed.

— Erzsébet of Pest

An old Swedish proverb says, "Those who whisper, lie." The Nosferatu have certainly been whispering for a long time. Other Cainites have always turned to them as both finders and keepers of secrets, many of which would have better remained buried. And secrets and lies are notoriously difficult to tell apart — is a story unverifiable because the guilty have suppressed the evidence, or simply because it's utter bunk? Quite possibly a number of terrible lies have worked their way into Nosferatu history without any but the very eldest knowing the difference. Still, of all the countless tidbits of information the Nosferatu greedily squirrel away in their minds, they treasure those regarding their own past and nature the most greedily of all.

Origins

The Nosferatu's tale of their origins begins, like most, with Caine and his three childer, Enoch, Irad and Zillah. According to the legend, Zillah was the most restless of Caine's original progeny; unlike her brothers, she often wandered outside the First City's walls. Although a small ring of farmlands and vineyards belted the city, the land beyond was as wild as it had been on the day God spoke the beasts into being. In those wilds lived a mighty tribe of hunters, and among them a man called

Absimiliard. He was the nephew rather than the son of their chief, but everyone said he would likely succeed the old man. He was the wildest hunter and the fiercest warrior, and gifted moreover with the visage of an archangel. (The Nosferatu admit that Absimiliard was likely not the name of his birth, but then again, they don't *want* to know or speak the name of his birth. That might get his attention.)

In those days, the folk who dwelled outside the city — the folk who had remained loyal to their father Seth and their grandfather Adam — greatly mistrusted Caine and his subjects. At the same time, they coveted the many fine and useful things the city artisans made. Sometimes they staged raids against the city, which were usually repelled and punished harshly. By the time Absimiliard was born, the folk outside and the folk inside had been at war for many years. And so when Absimiliard happened upon a strange track whose look and smell he didn't recognize, he knew it could only be some foulness originating from the city.

He followed the track for two days and nights, when he at last looked around to find himself in unfamiliar territory. There, Zillah, his quarry (who had been rather enjoying this chase in the perverse way of the undead) turned on him and fought him. He defended himself savagely, but to no avail. She laughed as she brought him down, giving him a streaking scar across his cheek in the process. Then she Embraced him so as to have his prowess at her eternal command. He never forgave her for any of it.

In time he made childer of his own and deliberately instilled his own hatred of Zillah in their hearts. A few names have come down through the ages: Melachoate, Yima, Gayomart, Illuyankas. Only one childer resisted both his hatred and his blood oath, say the Nosferatu of Europe: On the night of her Embrace she at first welcomed her strange, handsome lover, but before day dawned she saw the true hideousness of his spirit and fled from him. (In Russia they say this woman is the Baba Yaga of ancient mortal legend, but in other places Baba Yaga's name is listed among of the faithful childer of Absimiliard. Whatever her name, almost all the Nosferatu of Christendom claim her as their ancestress and therefore call her the Matriarch.)

Finally Absimiliard chose his moment to strike at Zillah with his childer's help. Though Zillah defeated him, Caine was sore wroth at his sacrilege. He cursed Absimiliard and all his get with monstrosity — a curse they bore in their very blood, such that anyone who drank it would share it in time. From that night forth they were called plague-dogs and lepers in every

tongue known to man, but it was the Greek term *nosophoros* ("plague-bearer") that gave rise to the most common name for the clan. Absimiliard, who was so vain that one thin scar had helped drive him to murderous rage, took this rebuke very hard indeed. He burrowed into the deep places of the earth to hide his ravaged face.

Some Nosferatu say that in his grief Absimiliard concocted a vile plan to win back Caine's grace by offering up the heart's blood of all his line. He pledged his loyal childer to this task and dubbed them the Nictuku (supposedly from a primeval word *nek-duku*, meaning "they who guide Death"); to this very night they hunt the world over for the Matriarch and her descendants. Other Nosferatu insist that the Nictuku took this mission upon themselves out of vengeance, believing that if the Matriarch had been with them, their combined strength would have overwhelmed Zillah. Defying their father's shame at his fate, they deliberately make themselves even more horrifying by mutilating their bodies and adorning themselves with rotting bones, leeches and other noxious raiment. Whatever the truth, however, most Nosferatu fear the Nictuku as they fear little else.

Ancient Nights

Left to their own devices, the childer of the Nosferatu went about trying to find some place for themselves. In the world's youth, this was much easier than it is now. Mortals' sense of dominion over nature was far more tenuous, and they imagined all sorts of monsters lurking just beyond their city walls and pasture fences. And so most Lepers saw little cause to talk about ancient curses or seek some grand rationale. As far as they were concerned, they were what they were because someone had to be — living folk needed things to fear, things to hate, things to struggle against. They took on the roles of whatever devils the mortals had already conjured up; if the mortals didn't have a bogeyman terrifying enough to suit, the Nosferatu gave them one.

Even back then, however, some chafed at this fate. It wasn't enough simply to hurt and frighten the living. There had to be some lesson in it. Some used their gifts to teach what wisdom they had to impart, particularly on the subject of deceptive appearances. They assumed fair countenances to seduce and betray those of shallow heart, often bringing them into the curse for good measure; or they cultivated a fearsome reputation and then rewarded with their talented services any mortal who braved their lairs regardless and passed their tests.

BLOODLINES

Generally speaking, the Tzimisce *voivodes* get along with the Nosferatu at least as well as the Ventruue do. They aren't ones to be terrified by a monstrous visage, after all. Indeed, many deliberately twist their own countenances just to help themselves let go of mortal notions of beauty. They tend to find the Nosferatu more fascinating than disturbing, although they frankly pity them their inability to change. For the Nosferatu's part, most have gotten over their initial disappointment that the Tzimisce arts couldn't erase their eternal ugliness.

But some Nosferatu accuse the Tzimisce of dealing very treacherously indeed with those who came to them in ancient nights, hoping to have their bodies mended. Of the many strange creatures that populate the wilds of Eastern Europe, there are two sorts that the Nosferatu suspect are kin to them, and not by any act of God or nature. The wormlike Larvae of Bulgaria use their fearsome tooth-lined maws to crunch stone and tunnel deep into the earth, then tunnel up again to devour men whole and excrete their exsanguinated corpses. The giant Volsi of the German bogs take their name from the old shamans of Odinic days (and more specifically, from the stuffed and pickled horse phalli that supposedly took a central role the shamanic initiation); but while they're rumored to have a little magic of a sort, their grotesque shapes suggest the Leper far more than the *koldun*. Elders whisper that this was the horrible fate of some who, ironically, came to the Shapers seeking release from their hideousness: to be experimented upon as though they were no more than the Tzimisce's own craven ghouls-families, and finally turned loose as guardian-beasts and artworks "on display" for other Shapers to admire.

No few saw their stories made a permanent part of mortal legend. Because of them, they said proudly, the living knew virtue. When the young heard the tale of Vasalisa the Wise, who earned the gift of fire from Baba Yaga, they learned to heed their mothers whether living or dead. When mothers caught rumors of the Nocnitsa or the Bendith Y Mamau or the spriggans, they guarded their children's cradles and beds all the more closely. When fathers were told of *Rumpele-stilt* or old King Cepheus, they remembered to make only wise promises

and keep them no matter what. When warriors sang of Beowulf's battle with Grendel (of whom the poem says he lived "in misery among the banished monsters, Cain's clan, whom the Creator had outlawed and condemned as outcasts...") their hearts took courage against their own merely mortal opponents.

Any Nosferatu of a medieval warren would be astonished to realize how many of his clan were solitary or near-solitary in the nights after the Second City's fall. Sires did sometimes create small broods to keep them company and to carry on their work, whatever they perceived it to be. But a large brood could hardly support itself lurking out in a cave or bog or haunted grove. That required a city haven, and Nosferatu took scant pleasure in dwelling in the cities of millennia ago. Even the largest cities were quite small compared to the metropolises to come (Rome, Carthage, Venice, Moscow, Baghdad), making it difficult for the Lepers to avoid discovery.

They also took scant pleasure in the company of other Cainites. Even those few who didn't behave contemptuously toward them were still a cruel reminder of the unstained immortality they might have enjoyed. And so many Lepers dwelled in the wilderness, despite the dangers. Many more hunted the outlying communi-

ties near the city walls, especially favoring immigrant quarters, refugee camps, plague-houses and other neighborhoods of ill repute. And some kept havens in the cities but made themselves as close to invisible as possible — to mortal and Cainite alike.

Rome

Rome was not the first scene of mortal underground construction. Even the Babylonians dug long tunnels for irrigation, which a few enterprising Nosferatu moved into, having no need to breathe. Later the Egyptians built great funerary complexes with underground passages, which made decent havens once a protective curse or two was chiseled into their entrances. And throughout history in many ancient cities, successive generations erected new buildings literally on top of the old as the ground level rose due to silting, accumulated refuse or deliberate earthworks, leaving haphazard subterranean complexes behind.

However, Rome's Cloaca Maxima — once Augustus enclosed it — and the later Christian catacombs provided, for the first time, an extensive network of tunnels which multiple broods of Lepers could shelter within. Churches, synagogues and even ordi-



nary dwellings also had crypts and underground passages which clever Nosferatu could connect to each other with hidden doors, further expanding the web. (The Cappadocians had prior claim on the burial grounds of Rome, including the catacombs, and initially resisted the Lepers' intrusion. But once it became clear that their interests in the catacombs were completely different — the Nosferatu sought shelter, the Cappadocians a space for their necromancy — they were able over several decades to negotiate an arrangement wherein the Nosferatu helped protect the catacombs but stayed out of the Graverobbers' preferred sanctums.) Nosferatu who passed through Rome and enjoyed the fabled hospitality of its great warren often carried its architectural ideas abroad with them.

Soon Lepers across the world tried to imitate Rome's success. They encouraged local mortals to delve into the earth on whatever pretext, then modified their efforts to suit vampiric needs. Few cities developed vast interconnected tunnel systems even with their help, but the results were often enough to take day-shelter within, if not to traverse the city by. In the process, they learned a great deal about physics, geology and architectural principles. Eventually, a new Nosferatu profession was born: that of the so-called "warrener," who traveled from city to city not only to help various Nosferatu populations devise their accommodations, but also to build secure havens and tombs for other Cainites who had heard one too many tales of torpid vampires crushed in earthquakes or waterlogged in floods.

Not all Nosferatu approved of this development. It was not their fate, they argued, to dwell in the midst of mankind or to plumb the bowels of the earth. Such folly could bring only pain, and perhaps the further wrath of Caine or the Nictuku. Besides, primal legend held that Absimiliard himself lurked somewhere in the chthonic depths. The deeper mortals and Lepers dug, the more likely they were to turn him up. But Nosferatu who had dwelt for time out of mind in natural cave-complexes pooh-poohed this idea. They had not found the Nosferatu yet, and some of them had even been foolhardy enough to look.

Nosferatu had always dealt in secrets when it suited them; their blood-gifts made them natural spies. But only now did they employ this talent to its fullest. As ever more Lepers came to the cities, it became ever more necessary to deal with other Cainites, and thus, to acquire information for barter or blackmail. Within several centuries, espionage had become the bedrock of the clan's reputation.

Saviors and Prophets

Rome also provided for another major development in the clan's history. Although the idea of a One True God didn't originate with the Christians, they were able to take advantage of the Empire's vast dominion, its road and trade networks, to spread the idea as it had never been spread before. Christianity melded concepts of redemption, rebirth and blood-sacrifice in a way all but guaranteed to capture the attention of vampires, and Nosferatu were captivated along with the rest. But their affection for the Messiah rested not on His wisdom or His divinity or even His resurrection, but on His kindness to the outcast and unclean. He healed lepers, touched them and even went into their houses, spoke gently to whores and publicans and Gentiles. At every opportunity He made it clear that His concern was not with the "righteous" but with those who knew quite well they were lost.

Many Nosferatu rejoiced to finally find a prophet whose message of hope seemed to apply to them. (John 5:25 — "Verily, verily, I say unto you, The hour is coming, and now is, when the dead shall hear the voice of the Son of God: and they that hear shall live.") And they were happiest, or many of the elders say they were, in the nights when Christianity was still a fringe cult, disreputable, persecuted. Back then few of the High Clans cared to publicly join it; and those of the Low that did were more willing than usual to accept the company of the Lepers. (See Chapter Five for further discussion of Nosferatu involvement in various Christian movements.)

Some Nosferatu, however, hated the idea of seeking redemption as much as they hated the idea of dwelling among mortals; and their fury grew exponentially as Christianity reached the far corners of civilization. One by one the monsters and malevolent gods of old were demoted to demons or old wives' tales. Such stories, the priests insisted, had nothing worthwhile to teach men. In fact, both Christianity and Judaism exhorted believers not to fear evil, which, to these Lepers' minds, went against the whole point of evil. What else was it for, if not to inspire fear? It seemed the mortals were abandoning them and their ever-multiplying Christian clanmates were betraying them.

Between AD 200 and 800, several Nosferatu cabals united in the determination both to reawaken mortals to the strength of earthly evil and

to expose the lie of Grace to their erring brethren. They called themselves by various ancient demonic names: the Charontes, the Utug, the Gallu — sometimes even the Nictuku, although even their sympathizers regarded that as sacrilege. Although most European warrens feel compelled to give hospitality even to those of their blood who still reject Christ, they will refuse any Leper they know to be a member of these blasphemous sects — which have only become more and more monstrous over time, in defiance of a world they believe to have turned on them.

The Dark Ages

When Rome fell, important Cainites of the city gave some of their most precious possessions to the city's Cappadocians for safekeeping. A miserably low number of those possessions were ever recovered. Over the next century, enterprising foreign Cainites looted the catacombs and crypts. Many of those looters were Nosferatu. The Cappadocians accused the Roman Nosferatu of spreading tales of the caches and tried to expel them from the tunnels. A series of bloody skirmishes ended in détente, but the conflict has re-erupted several times over the ensuing centuries. Recently, a second brood of Nosferatu moved into the catacombs as well, complicating matters further; and in AD 1229, an earthquake followed by a flood the following year damaged the city's subterranean structures and put several catacomb denizens into torpor.

The way of unlife that had first arisen in Rome, however, persisted even after the Empire's collapse. While other far-flung lineages of Cainites lost contact with their branches in various cities and nations, the Nosferatu went out of their way to maintain communications. When it seemed too dangerous for the Lepers themselves to carry news from warren to warren, mortals, often posing as pilgrims, and animal blood-servants were sent instead.

The Lazars

Christian society claims to have a special place in its heart for lepers. This has not led it to lift the physical taboos that isolate them; great care is taken in making the diagnosis of leprosy, because to become a leper is to enter a kind of living death. Often a funeral Mass is held in which the leper is declared lost to the world and reborn to God. Those lepers not welcomed (or imprisoned, if you prefer) in the hospitals must wear special robes and carry a wooden

clapper or bell to warn of their approach. They may not enter public places or establishments where food is handled or cooked, nor can they bathe in streams or walk on narrow paths where others would have to pass close by.

As much as the secular mind of the world reviles leprosy, however, the religious mind reveres it. Lepers appear in Gospel accounts, parables and saints' vitae as symbols of God's love for those humanity despises. Accordingly, friars, nuns, monks and priests have established lazar-houses throughout Europe and the Holy Land. Lepers have always been dear to their Cainite namesakes as well. Sometimes the Nosferatu have actually instigated the founding of leper hospitals, sometimes they've taken a protective interest in those already existing, and sometimes they've viewed them merely as a fine place to hide, feed and recruit mortal servants.

In AD 530, the hospitalers of St. Lazarus of Acre and Caesarea founded an especially large leper hospital outside the walls of Jerusalem, which after Jerusalem fell in 1098 became host to a number of Crusaders who had contracted the dread disease. Since the disease usually progressed slowly, it was only natural that these knights should serve as the hospital's protectors, and eventually they became the Military and Hospitaler Order of St. Lazarus (St. Ladre) of Jerusalem. Their bravery and charity won them great renown; they considered themselves the "living dead," and neither battle nor lonely journeys held any terrors for them. Even Saladin was impressed with them, and when he retook Jerusalem he placed the Knights of St. Ladre under his personal protection. But he was not their staunchest patron: That honor went to a nameless Nosferatu who convinced the head of the order to accept the Embrace and pilot the order's work from beyond the grave.

Some time afterward, the former master's successor and childe, Fra' Raymond, had to flee with his undead lazar-knights to Constantinople (the mortal knights did not share their misfortune, and yet remain in the Holy Land). For an achingly brief time they and their patrons, the Malachite Nosferatu, became a beacon of hope and pride to other Christians in their clan. They were accepted as near-equals by the other Cainite houses of Constantinople and seemed to embody all that was good and fine in the Nosferatu spirit beneath their twisted exteriors.

When Constantinople fell to the Crusaders in AD 1204, however, Fra' Raymond met Final Death. The Knights lost their place of respect and many of their number as well in that defeat. Now they

struggle to prove themselves to the Latin invaders. Although they hated the senseless butchery of the Fourth Crusade, they feel they must continue their mission no matter the hardship, and so they swallow their pride and seek the favor of their conquerors. The Latin Cainites treat the Lazars as an exception among Nosferatu; they are not vermin, but honorable fallen foes who are to be accorded respect, if not full trust — though the Knights suspect that if they were Ventrue or Toreador they would have won many more privileges by now. Any Nosferatu who cherishes some hope of becoming or remaining a knight in the eyes of his fellow Cainites still looks to the example of the Knights of St. Ladre, for they are among the very few Nosferatu truly considered noble.

(For more information on the Knights of St. Ladre and the Malachites, see *Constantinople by Night*.)

Points of Contention

The Nosferatu aren't in the state of internal turmoil many clans must now endure, probably because they can ill afford it, but problems from both within and without plague even the most tight-knit warren:

The Burden of Knowledge

When Malkavians receive portents of things to come, they arrive dramatically — as a burst of perfect knowledge from beyond, an omen in smoke or blood, or a confusing jumble of riddle and metaphor. Nosferatu come to their conclusions the prosaic way, through the painstaking assemblage of disparate clues. Once they've put together a complete picture (or at least complete enough to theorize by) the really hard work comes: What to do with it? As a rule, the information Nosferatu collect has to do with private feuds affecting one or two cities at most. But occasionally more momentous plots make themselves felt. At such times even loyal allies can become bitterly divided over what action to take (and should things degenerate to the point where Nosferatu begin to use their espionage talents against each other, the results are bound to be devastating).

To take but one example, lately the clan has gathered disturbing hints of — not a conspiracy, precisely, as much as a groundswell among the neonates of Europe. Over three dozen elders across the continent have fallen to their own childer's fangs over the past half-century. While that in itself isn't unusual, it is unusual for entire broods of childer to cooperate in such murders; elders tend to

be experts at setting their get against each other. Something or someone is helping these fledglings overcome their sires' manipulations. The Nosferatu have even heard a whisper of the word "Furores," but past the obvious connotations, have only a vague idea what it means. Of course there are certain of their clanmates who could tell them all about the nascent movement, but those clanmates have dropped out of contact and transferred their staunch Leper loyalties to their new packs. When the elders discover that Nosferatu have been lured into the Furores, they will undoubtedly send in moles to ferret out the rest of the story.

The clan elders are quite concerned already. It's possible the ancient cycle of Cainite parricide is gathering momentum once more, and decisive action now could prevent the threat from growing. But all they have is a scattering of international data unlikely to impress the notoriously domain-minded High Clans, and theoretical speculation. Even if they successfully elicited a response it would probably take the form of a futile panic, resulting in just the kind of persecution most likely to enrage the Furores further....

The Omen War

Knights of St. Ladre and their imitators excluded, few Nosferatu are warriors by birth or inclination. While the Eastern European Nosferatu have aided the Tzimisce campaign against the Tremere in haphazard fashion (usually more out of mourning for the Salubri than concern for the Fiends), they haven't been front-line participants in the Omen War. Indeed, for many years they refused to believe Tzimisce assertions that the Gargoyles were actually created from Nosferatu bones and souls; most assumed the *voivodes* had invented the story in order to enlist their services. However, at the beginning of this century, Velya the Flayer and his young protégé Myca Vykos provided supposedly incontrovertible proof to Berchta the Iron-Nosed, ancestress of a number of Germanic and Slavic Nosferatu. As a result, much of the clan has now made the Tremere a top intelligence priority — not just in Eastern Europe but in the West as well. Clearly the Usurpers are even more dangerous than previously believed. As a rule, Nosferatu campaigns against the Tremere run to blackmailing and discrediting them, not killing them outright, but there have been exceptions.

Player's Toolbox

The following are examples of character and story concepts which make use of the clan's past history:

Espionage

- You've pursued a long campaign of subtle vengeance against a Cainite in the city who casually destroyed something dear to you years ago. Now you finally have the information you need to destroy your enemy's career or perhaps even end his unlife, but unfortunately that information also implicates another Cainite you've always considered a staunch ally. Can you bring yourself to destroy her too, and can you afford to lose one of your few colleagues outside the clan?

- Your proficiency with the Mask has earned you an assignment you despise: Impersonate a member of the High Clans. Not only do you fully expect to hate every minute of this, you are going to have to study etiquette, deportment and Caine alone knows what else for months in order to secure your cover.

- You're trying to crack an elder conspiracy that could span several prominent Cainite houses, and so you're traveling between warrens seeking relevant information. However, you don't want any of your clanmates beating you to the solution and the attendant prestige, so somehow you have to keep them from figuring out what subjects you're really interested in and why.

- You're a Promethean or Furore seeking admission into the movement, and you've been assigned a task to prove your loyalty. (For instance: Locate a missing compatriot of theirs, with only a nickname and a vague description.) It's plain from the task they picked that they expect you to make use of your clan's information networks, but the more you do so the more you risk exposing the movement to your clan's attentions.

Warren Politics

- You recently approached an elder whose devotion to clan unity you admire, asking his advice on a thorny feud you're trying to settle. The only answer he could think of was to raise the specter of the Nictuku, but the idea of playing bogeyman (particularly since it will probably involve killing clanmates) doesn't appeal to you. Unfortunately, he agrees with you about how serious the problem is, and he says if you're not willing to take care of it, he'll send someone who is.

- Your warren has extended hospitality to a visiting Leper from another warren that has always been a valuable source of information and help. Unfortunately, this newcomer is stirring up trouble in the city and you're convinced the whole warren will end up being punished for it before long. You can't kick out your guest because that would offend the other warren, which you can ill

afford. Somehow you have to get rid of her and find a suitable party to frame for it.

- A warren-mate has developed a bad habit of giving false or misleading information to Cainites who approach him for it. Because of his activities, your own "clients" no longer trust your reports as they once did. The warren-elders, who have their own projects, don't seem terribly concerned about him as yet. If you could only find a way to *make* them concerned....

Godly Zeal

- You dwell in a small town and your coterie is a tight-knight group of Faithful devotees. A follower of the Road of Sin is passing through town and while you could stand him as a guest for a short while, you've just discovered he's "ministering" to the mortals under your care, cleverly twisting your own philosophy to suit his vile agenda of corruption. Your variant of the Road of Heaven teaches tolerance and forgiveness, but isn't there a limit?

- You're a missionary (Christian or Muslim) who has conceived the suicidal goal of traveling out into the waste to convert an ancient brood of Nosferatu well-known for their contempt toward the idea of Grace. Getting there will be half the fun.

- You are the self-appointed guardian of a small but fanatical populist heresy, and have nursed it from an ill-formed fancy into a true philosophy, as potentially attractive to Cainites as to mortals. Now that it seems to have a genuine chance of success, an equally fanatical Cainite of a High Clan (Brujah, Lasombra or Toreador most likely) has decided to step in. He's grateful to you for all your hard work in paving the way, of course, but you certainly realize your movement is more likely to bloom as it deserves to if it doesn't have a creature so plainly blasted by God at its head....

Ravnos

Save your pity for the Lepers. Save your wrath for the Serpents. Save your fear for the Saracens. Just let me pass; I've done you no wrong.

— Kiril, Alexandrite Ravnos, lying to save his skin

The thieves in the night need never curse those who cross them, for their presence is often a curse to other Cainites. They cheat, they steal, they wear out their welcomes; and forcing them to leave against their own wishes is categorically dangerous. Certainly these things can be said of other individual Cainites, but the tight family groups called *jati* that the Ravnos maintain are known for the deep loyalty that members hold

toward one another. This familial allegiance polarizes other Cainites, for an offense paid to a single Ravnos is often repaid tenfold. Consequently the Ravnos manage to unite the members of other clans into a singular purpose (something held as impossible by most Cainites). That the purpose is generally to tolerate the Ravnos presence until given an excuse to drive them from the area serves to frustrate the various *jati*, but the wisest Ravnos thank the *gaje* Cainites for remaining outsiders to the clan's affairs.

Origins

The epic poem of the Eastern Ravnos known as the *Karavalanisha Vrana* relates the history of their creation by the Indian gods, their quest to fulfill their *svadharmas*, their celestial purpose, and ends unfinished with the struggle against the *asuratizayya*, the demonic shadows of themselves. Grounded in Eastern thought and symbolism, the poem is so comprehensive that it sheds far more light on the clan's creation than the tales told by the Western Ravnos. This causes no small amount of conflict between the two branches of the clan, who use the excuse of the poem's validity to clash with one another.

The Four Days of Brahma

The poem elaborates upon the four ages of the world known as the "four days of Brahma." The *Satya Yuga*, or the Age of Gold, was the beginning of all time before death or sin existed as anything but concepts. The end of perfection came with the dawn of the *Treta Yuga*, the Age of Silver. Evil forced its way into the world and great troubles befell humanity as the demons brought death and sin along with them. The gods appointed protectors known as the *siddhittizaya* to stave off the demonic influence, and all was well for a time.

The demons gained a singular purpose and scored a coup in the *Dvapara Yuga*, the Age of Bronze. They turned their attentions away from humanity to the protectors themselves, offering them great power in return for the forsaking of their duties. The demons tempted and cajoled, twisting the purpose of the *siddhittizaya* until the guardians became indistinguishable from their demonic enticers. Known then as the *asuratizayya*, humanity's former protectors turned upon their charges to eat of their flesh and drink of their blood. They now knew a dark lust for humankind

RAVNOS TERMINOLOGY

The Ravnos use specific terminology, particularly those from the Eastern branch. The following provides a brief summary of foreign words and concepts fundamental to the clan:

- **asuratizayya:** An Eastern bloodline that resembles the Baali; they were cursed with a thirst for mortal blood when they opposed their *svadharmas*. Translated roughly as "demonic horde."
- **gaje:** Translated as "outsider" or "foreigner."
- **jati:** The family group or caste division of the Ravnos. Western Ravnos indicate their lineage by *jati*, while those from the East use this to indicate the social stratum into which they were reborn.
- **Karavalanisha Vrana:** An epic poem known as *The Wounds of the Night's Sword* which describes the Eastern Ravnos' view of creation. Notable for the lack of connection to the story of Caine. Also notable for being incomplete, with the ending missing or unwritten.
- **Mayaparisatya:** The Eastern Road of Paradox, focusing on the understanding and fulfillment of the Ravnos' *svadharmas*.
- **Roma:** Nomadic peoples fleeing Muslim persecution from the East, with whom the latest influx of Ravnos have arrived. They are found in far Eastern Europe, notably in Byzantium.
- **siddhittizaya:** The *asuratizayya*'s existence before the blood curse, when they were charged with protecting mortals from monsters and demons. Translated roughly as "the Divine Chosen."
- **svadharmas:** The purpose that guides all living things on earth, a tenet of Eastern Ravnos philosophy. Everything that exists has a unique purpose and is only useful in its individual fulfillment of that purpose.
- **Zapathasura:** A name for the Ravnos progenitor. Translated as "accursed demon."

and sated their urges upon a population too helpless to stop them.

The gods heard the cries of the people and for the first time knew wrath. They looked upon the fallen protectors and saw them heady on the taste

of their own power. As one they rebuked the *asuratizayya* who discarded duty for sin, cursing them to know only sin until the end of the world. The fallen protectors had yearned for the forbidden meal of flesh and blood, so the gods cursed them to eat this dish alone, turning all other food and drink to venom in their bellies. As they gorged upon humanity by night to heighten the fear of murder in the dark, the gods' curse forced them to know night forever more, making the light of day poison to their flesh. Where they once reveled in the sin taught them by the demons, they became the sin-eaters compelled to quench the fires of their desire whenever it expressed itself.

The *asuratizayya* did not understand that the curse was a punishment. They reveled in the restrictions, seeing them as a divine blessing of focus, a way to discard all that was unnecessary from their existence. They savaged humanity with renewed vigor so intense that the cries of the people woke the gods, who for the first time knew dismay. The gods conferred with one another in effort to find a harsher punishment for the *asuratizayya*, one that would curtail their depredations.

A Devil To Hunt Demons

The gods agreed that the *asuratizayya* should know fear and pain far greater than that suffered by their former flock. They devised a plan to create a monster a thousand times worse than the *asuratizayya* that would only exist to wipe them from the world. After the gods fashioned this terrible purpose, the Earth itself restored the body of a man to a mockery of life. Varuna, the god of strength, returned the dead man's blood and imparted it with such potency that even the *asuratizayya* would choke upon its taste. The Devi, a face worn by the goddess Kali, divulged the power over *maya*, or "deception." Himavat, god of the mountains, imparted the longevity of the mountain peaks to the man's body. Hanuman, king of the monkeys, taught him the tongue of all beasts so that they might whisper to him of the *asuratizayya*'s movements by night and refuges by day. As the gods' creation was filled with power over life and death, Shiva, destroyer of all things, decreed the man's ultimate purpose: The destruction of the *asuratizayya* who had openly defied their *svadharma* to god and man alike. The man stood beneath the glory of the heavens once more, his blood boiling with an all-consuming need for the annihilation of

the *asuratizayya*, and the gods knew satisfaction for the first time.

But not all the gods approved of the terrible creation. Three gods refused to bless the horror that stood before them, foreseeing in the man a threat far greater than the *asuratizayya*. If the *siddhittizaya* could reject their *svadharma* through simple temptation, they wondered, could this abomination one day do the same? Surya, god of the sun, swore to devour the man on sight, and threatened to thrust his face into the night itself should the man ever betray his purpose. Agni, god of fire, provided his namesake with an everlasting hunger for the man and his offspring so that they could be burned from the world should they oppose their *svadharma*. Brahma, the creator god, turned all four faces from the horrific creation, denying the man natural sustenance and cursing him to a thousand lifetimes of physical and spiritual starvation, much in the manner of the infernal horde. The gods now saw they had created a mockery of the *asuratizayya*.

Brahma provided a single gift to the man in the form of a name: Zapathasura, meaning "accursed demon." Now complete, the creature ventured into the night and sowed the seeds of his wrath upon the *asuratizayya*. His followers became their scourge and drove the infernal horde from the night, pushing them deep into the wounds of the world and sealing the fissures behind them. Driven with a preternatural ferocity, Zapathasura scattered his followers upon the face of the world so that they would remain ever vigilant for signs of the infernal.

This much is known to the average Eastern Ravnos, or those from *jati* that arrived in Europe within the past few centuries. As always, the specifics and order of the mythical stories passed along in oral tradition vary depending upon who tells the tale, but the general framework is intact and rarely open to debate. For example, in some interpretations Surya may have actually levied a curse against Zapathasura rather than a warning, but in all cases Surya's presence causes suffering and Final Death to Zapathasura and his brood.

Mythic Discrepancy

The tale of Zapathasura is little known to Western Cainites, who name him the Antediluvian Ravnos (or Ravana among *jati* who still honor their Eastern origins). The clan's reliance on oral history and the far-flung travels of the clan's *jati* lead to a great disparity of clan origin stories among the European branch, often tying in to

legends indigenous to the *jati's* region. Some depict their progenitor as the pharaoh Akhenaton cursed by the sun god Aten for daring to worship the sun. Others imply Ravnos is actually Jesus' disciple Judas, cursed to walk the earth by dark of night, searching for those capable of betrayal so that he may deliver punishment. Still more reject the tale of Ravnos and invent stories about their founder Ravana, who they insist to be another being entirely.

Ancient Times

As the ocean of humanity dashed itself against the world, the Ravnos quietly followed the tide. Where people developed trade, money and commerce, the Charlatans saw opportunity. Where kingdoms flourished and coffers overflowed, the nomadic Ravnos allowed themselves to settle. Several *jati* insinuated themselves within Imperial Rome and Pharaonic Egypt, for within both empires there was no shortage of iniquity. Some remained behind after the fall of each, sifting through the ashes of empire for pieces of silver, while others took back to the caravans to seek out the new centers of commerce which would surely arise.

The following five *jati* are the most numerous currently active in Europe.

Alexandrites

The eldest *jati* in the West hails from the city of Alexandria where it took root prior to the Ptolemaic reign in Egypt. Many Cainites are initially reluctant to name them Ravnos, for they don't easily fit the accepted stereotype. The Alexandrites are considered the most well-traveled of all the *jati*, and unique outside of the Eastern Ravnos for having long held a single location to be their ancestral home. Most hold their interactions with other Cainites to a level of formality worthy of High Clan courts, but with the broad variation throughout the *jati* there is room for deviation in this regard.

The Alexandrites emphasize their Egyptian origin, implying a mystique and sanctity to their actions that may not actually exist. Elders stress the importance of etiquette with an archaic and ritualistic bent to protocol, shunning the vagabond image of their clan held by other Cainites. Their teachings stress that nothing is permanent and everything can be replaced, and they apply the philosophy equally to commerce and unlife.

The elder Ramessu is the de facto head of the Alexandrite *jati*, and though he certainly doesn't control the affairs of Cainites scattered throughout the world, no Alexandrite has yet amassed as much respect and political pull. He claims descent from the pharaohs and the gods, exhibiting his prominence with overt displays of magical power; and he insists on strict adherence to antiquated protocol at all times. While he does not order members of his *jati* as a king would, his advice and insight carry great weight with the Alexandrites, even among those who oppose him in most matters.

Bashirites

The Charlatans who call themselves the Bashirites follow the teachings of a Methuselah named Bashir of Damascus, and exclusively Embrace Christians. Bashir's teachings preach of a coming apocalypse. These teachings weave Christian conviction into Cainite traditions, and presage the return of the Antediluvians, whom they believe will bring the world to its end. Bashir was said to have met Christ Himself, who forgave Bashir's sins and charged him to prepare for the Second Coming as his penance. For centuries Bashir preached his message of a coming Apocalypse, gathering his own flock and working to spread the word; he vanished centuries ago, and many assume he was the first Cainite to truly achieve Golconda.

The specifics and details surrounding the coming day of reckoning cause so much contention among the *jati's* members that there has been an ideological split within the Bashirites, resulting in a slow power struggle and intermittent open conflict between the two prevailing schools of thought. The majority of Bashirites follow Bashir's teachings as presented by his child Varsik, who professes to speak for his sire for the duration of Bashir's absence. Varsik's opponents see his doctrine as antithetical to Bashir's initial message.

Varsik resides in Jerusalem and teaches a bastardization of the *Via Paradoxi* that heavily incorporates Christian symbolism and parables into Cainite teachings. According to Varsik, Bashir knew that Christ would return when the world is filled with a boundless magnitude of strife, and forgive all of their sins. He argues that it is the *jati's* obligation to fan the flames of discontent wherever they travel to speed the return of the Savior.

The small but vocal opposition composed mainly of elders and newly Embraced Ravnos condemns Varsik's vision as potentially blasphemous.

They walk the Road of Heaven as Bashir taught and see their role as much more reactive and instructive, focusing on encouragement of the virtues that mirror the vices they know so well. These "Lambs of Bashir" see Varsik's machinations as an attempt to force Christ's hand, which they feel is an abominable approach to the matter of the world's end. As Bashir taught, the Apocalypse is foreordained, and the great Day of Judgment will come regardless of the *jati's* attempts at degradation.

Sybarites

Few Charlatans find themselves able to speak highly of the Sybarites. These black sheep of the *jati* are thought to descend from a high-ranking Roman leader who was a confidant of Caligula, though the Sybarites claim descent from anyone from Julius Caesar to Romulus himself. Whoever it was, the founder learned early of the Cainite roads and twisted them to match the excesses he had practiced in life. He is said to have committed Amaranth upon his sire within 10 years of his Embrace, and encouraged those in his own *jati* to do the same to any Cainite unworthy of defending his

DO I HAVE TO PLAY ONE OF THESE?

Players unsatisfied with the choices of *jati*, or who have a great idea that doesn't seem to fit within the existing descriptions, are encouraged to develop *jati* of their own. Any Ravnos with a small brood and an agenda can declare his line a *jati*, so players should not feel the need to limit themselves.

Use the existing *jati* as examples when developing a new one. Focus on the *jati's* founder, any current ideologues who hold sway with the *jati's* members, the core philosophy that differentiates this *jati* from the others, and the movement of the *jati* from India to other parts of the world. Typically the *jati* adopts elements of language and culture from the areas through which it travels, fusing it all with Indian heritage and legends. Upon what *Viae* does the *jati* most often tread? Are there any major philosophic branches or rivalries with other *jati*? Where does the *jati* currently travel?

When you have answered these questions, present the *jati* to the Storyteller so that she can help you work it into her game. The Storyteller, of course, has final say in all such matters.

position. His dark experiments led to the creation of what would become the Road of Paradox, although many Ravnos who follow its teachings are loath to admit any Sybarite connection.

Now the Sybarites call Italy their home and display a strong presence throughout the Mediterranean. They are the supreme example of Charlatan self-interest, for they care only for themselves and their loyalties to one another. No debauchery is too excessive; no depravity goes too far. Where other Ravnos must walk their nights with the yearnings of sin whispering into their ears, the Sybarites serve as sin's conduits. They accede to any urge, no matter how base, for they believe only in becoming an avatar of sin can one turn humanity's greatest failing into personal success. Some take the excesses so far that they are truly diabolic in nature, following the *Via Peccati's* Path of Screams.

Yoryari

Karmenita Yoryari initially brought a band of disillusioned Sybarites with her to Iberia to focus on a more spiritual approach to the Road of Paradox. Her followers believe that everything happens for a reason, and that the most powerful people, items and power structures exist as only in finite amounts. They believe there is only room for a limited number of these people, items and structures of power, and that the entrenched must be worn down or destroyed to make room for the new to take its place, or else the world will stagnate and end.

This philosophy makes them many enemies, but their approach to the matter as a sacred duty rather than a personal indulgence has earned the *jati* some unexpected allies. Of all the Ravnos, the Yoryari have the strongest connections to the Furores, who they see as most capable of bringing such change to the world. The *jati* opposes formalization within the clan and presents an emphasis on the need for fresh ideas rather than calcification; the Furores currently align in purpose and vision.

Karmenita calls Lisbon her home; there her most ardent followers work with complicated mathematics and geometries to develop numerological formulae related to the duration of power and influence. She often delivers harsh lectures against the Ravnos need for immediate self-gratification, a proclivity made more curious by the persistent gossip that places the founder of the Sybarites as her sire. She refuses to speak of her lineage, preferring to focus on matters of the present.

Phaedymites

This offshoot of the Alexandrites follows the teachings of the elder Phaedyme, who in life is said to have marched in the army of Alexander the Great wearing the guise of a man out of defiance for the low expectations held for her sex. Phaedyme's life and subsequent existence as a Cainite has a long history of such rebellions, and her progeny see rebellion as their calling. In deference to their founder, Phaedymites tend to work against the sin that flows through their veins, denying what other Ravnos see as inevitable. The framework of chivalry encourages them to strive for virtue rather than vice.

Phaedyme's descendants are unlike most other Ravnos, for they walk the Path of Chivalry. The bulk of the *jati* adhere strongly to the principles of honor, obligation and honesty with little deviation. In recent years, princes have approached them to serve as a buffer when dealing with the "less trustworthy" Ravnos, and their success as intermediaries between their own clan and others has exceeded even their own expectations. The heart of Phaedymite power (such as it is) lies in France, although ages-old Toreador bias in Paris makes them unwelcome in that city. While none of the Toreador who carry on the grudge can cite any cause for the feud that they personally observed, they can expound at length upon the things they have heard, and share persistent rumors as to the crimes committed against them.

Many Phaedymites serve as messengers entrusted with important documents, for Cainite lords who know their reputation are quick to take advantage of their veneer of impartiality. Others function as troubadours who document and preserve the history of the unliving, recording the nightly proceedings and personalities among Cainite courts and gatherings. A number travel with the Crusaders, whether as participants or observers present to chronicle the events.

The Dark Ages

As trade routes expand and more travel occurs between East and West, so do the numbers of Ravnos spread across the face of the world. Recent years have seen an unprecedented amount of contact between the two branches of the clan, and nobody is yet sure whether this is a good or bad thing. Western Ravnos eager to avoid the mortal hunt for heresies and the Cainite War of Princes find eastward travel a convenient alternative to persecution or death, and the



hunt for the *asuratizayya* brings a trickle of Eastern Ravnos to European lands.

Zapathasura's Brood

The Indian Ravnos structure themselves around both Indian culture and the teachings of the *Karavalanisha Vrana*. To provide the Embrace outside one's caste is unthinkable, and intractable social divisions in life carry into the living death. This rigid approach has driven away whole *jati* over the years. They tend to assume their homestead is free of the influence of the *asuratizayya* due to their eternal vigilance, and all places beyond their protection have long since been despoiled or ruined by the infernal. The Eastern Charlatans who venture beyond their lands often return with tales that reinforce this assumption.

The Eastern Ravnos believe a variety of things about the Western Charlatans. Some feel they represent branches of the clan that lost their way by treading too far from the spiritual home of Zapathasura without adhering to his teachings. Others believe the Europeans are no better than the *asuratizayya*, pointing to the polluted *Via Paradoxi* practiced by their Western cousins as evidence of their corruption. The existence of the Sybarites underscores these fears, but even those who talk of purifying the Western branch of the clan agree that a purge isn't likely to extend far beyond the Sybarite *jati*. Other Cainites are regarded as pale shadows of Zapathasura's caretakers, but are generally tolerated as long as they display basic cultural respect and a desire to destroy the infernal. Many make little distinction between the Followers of Set and the *asuratizayya*.

Points of Contention

The Ravnos are spread far and wide, but bad news travels fast among the clan. The following issues are those of which most Ravnos in European lands are aware.

A Family Divided

Full-fledged conflict between *jati* is rare, but when it does happen the clan's loyalties are tested. The most recent example is the slaughter of a dozen Sybarites in early AD 1230 by a small coterie of Phaedymites in Marseilles. Phaedyme's knights were investigating reports of local slavery rings and encountered a group of unknown Cainites loading mortals into the cramped belly of a ship. They massacred the unsuspecting Sybarites, discovering after the fact that the Prince of

Marseilles had commissioned them to covertly deliver a local noble's relatives and household staff to safety in Alexandria to avoid the attention of his rivals.

Though the Phaedymites immediately offered their bound service to the Sybarite elders as penance for their mistake, the enraged Sybarites rejected the offer and demanded a more brutal kind of reparation. They devoted their attentions to the eradication of the entire *jati* for one year from the point of the Phaedymite crime and have invoked ancient protocols, which they claim requires the assistance of all other *jati*.

Most of the Ravnos who have no direct involvement are unhappy with their brethren for placing them in the unwelcome position of having to take sides with one *jati* or the other. Never before has a *jati* sought authorization for another's destruction, and many fear it sets a dangerous precedent. Many Charlatans approached by the Sybarites for information regarding Phaedymite concerns grant only the most rudimentary assistance, although individual Ravnos with grudges against the chivalric *jati* are less reluctant to provide support.

That other Cainites grow aware of the fractiousness within the clan speaks of its potential to harm more than just the two involved *jati*. The destruction of a Phaedymite advisor in service to a Ventrue prince led to the Warlord's reprisals against many unconnected Ravnos in the region, whom he believed to be targeting his inner circle. The Yoryari in particular grow quite vocal about the cessation of the Sybarite campaign, but the elders of more prominent *jati* have so far remained silent.

Epic Hunt

The *Karavalanisha Vrana* has long held a position of prominence among the Eastern Ravnos, but it remains an incomplete work with significant gaps. Most notably absent is the poem's ending, which is rumored to lie with Zapathasura himself. With the European arrival of new *jati* comes renewed interest in the epic poem among the Western Ravnos. Inspired in part by the Crusades, some European Ravnos have entered into pilgrimage to seek out the missing pieces of this religious text.

The Eastern Ravnos are less than thrilled with this development, for they see the recent influx of Ravnos as little more than heathen children who will unwittingly destroy traces of the divine. This turn of events spurned a renewed interest in their own hunt for the poem's remainder, and tacitly sparked a race to find Zapathasura. Many Eastern Ravnos who themselves don't participate directly still find themselves

involved, whether to provision their brethren or misdirect the Western Ravnos.

Worse yet are the reckless *gaje* who seek out hives of dormant *asuratizayya* with the misguided intentions of slaughtering them while they slumber. Three such attempts in the Northern provinces have already unleashed great havoc upon the land, and there is great debate between influential Eastern Ravnos elders who urge either the destruction of the trespassing Western Ravnos or seeking aid in slaying the *asuratizayya*.

Player's Toolbox

Players interested in pursuing clan issues may find inspiration in the following:

Enemies Without Number

- The Gangrel have recently taken to attacking Charlatans moving along trade routes, targeting Ravnos specifically with apparently no other goal than eradication. You know this to be true, for you have already lost your sire and your coterie to the reckless Animals. You must find a way to repay them in kind for attacking your family, but the Gangrel know these lands better than you could, even if you had a dozen lifetimes to learn them.

- Almost all Ravnos know the name of Etienne de Faubergé, the Ravnos Prince of Acre and childe of Varsik. Etienne is a vassal of Lord Jürgen — at least nominally. You, a servant (or perhaps even childe) of Etienne, are charged with traveling west and reporting to the Swordbearer. This would be a distasteful enough task; but you happen to know that Etienne is seeking a way to break his alliance with Jürgen, and what then will become of you?

- The *asuratizayya* aren't limited to the East. You've discovered evidence of the demons in Western Europe, and no matter what the Ravnos in India might say, you're determined to fulfill your clan's purpose and destroy these beings. Europe presents opportunities that the East does not, however — such as subtly guiding the Inquisition towards the demons....

Svadharmā

- You are an adherent of the Road of Paradox, and as such believe that Cainites are removed from *svadharmā* by the Embrace. Mortals, however, must be guided towards their destiny and should not die under the fangs of any Cainite — murder is a grave offense against the universe. The domain in which you reside, however, is the territory of a Cappadocian ancilla who

feels no remorse over slaughtering humans for the sake of his research.

- The world is illusion, and by means of Chimerstry you can reweave the very fabric of reality. This power belongs to your clan alone, and yet you have heard stories of *mortals* claiming to possess this ability. They call themselves by many different names — sorcerers, mages, will-workers, shamans — but whatever their title, you cannot abide their blasphemy. You will eat of their flesh and drink of their blood, and then they will know what rewards *maya* holds.

The Wages of Sin

- In the first few years of your unlife, you managed to have a blood hunt called against you in no fewer than six domains. Now, you've decided to vary the game a bit. You intend to become part of a coterie (the coterie's function or purpose isn't so important to you, but you intend to make sure it contains at least one first cursed) and slowly bring its members to the notice of those in high places. Your eventual goal is to bring the blood hunt down on the entire coterie, but you intend to stretch out the game for as long as possible.

- Your destiny is sin, and damn the other Cainites if they would fault you for it. Your mortal life prepared you well for your Embrace; you learned what God abhorred and now you must take the role of a being He would find abhorrent. Somewhere in your soul, however, a flutter of conscience cries out against your Sybaritic behavior; but your mentor assures you it will quiet in time.

Tremere

You think I sought our exile — you of all people? Better a hundred cries of "heretic" and a thousand Tzimisce swords than the Order's words of scorn that horrible night... But if they will not follow us, then let them die out, like the dragons whose stone skeletons I chip out of the cliff-sides.

— Goratrix to Meerlinda, AD 1202

Prior to the Great Experiment in AD 1022 that transformed Tremere and his seven closest followers into the undead, Tremere history rightly belongs to the history of wizards, not of Cainites. The wizards themselves are a dwindling kind, increasingly harder to find even in rumor. Perhaps even the mightiest of them are meeting their mortal deaths at last. Perhaps they've simply gone into hiding. In any case, the gulf between the Tremere and their former colleagues has only widened with time. Two hundred years ago, every

Usurper magus took care to teach his pupils the story of the founding of the Hermetic Order. Now it hardly seems to matter anymore; the past holds little but painful memories of a more innocent time, and maybe the Seven would rather certain bygones stay buried for more political reasons. Still, most Tremere know at least the overall shape of the following history, though the ignorance grows with each new generation.

Origins

Hermeticism, the movement from which the Houses of Hermes arose, may trace its deepest roots back to the cults of Mercury in most ancient times. Cicero insists that there were really five Mercuries, the last of which slew Argus and subsequently fled to Egypt where he took the name Thoth. Augustine

elaborates on this genealogy: The astronomer Atlas, contemporary of Moses, brother of Prometheus, was grandfather to the “elder Mercury,” who was in turn grandfather to Hermes Trismegistus, who himself predated Socrates and all the Greek sages.

Whatever the truth of all this, the Tremere know for certain that by the second century AD a community of Hermetic initiates flourished in Alexandria. There their doctrine both competed and blended with Gnosticism and the infant Christian religion, and their encyclopedic knowledge of all things natural and unnatural filtered piecemeal into Christian scholarship.

Aevum Aureolum Magicae

During the Roman Empire’s years of glory, the large portion of the world that it occupied came as close to building a truly global culture as any human

THE EMERALD TABLET

The Emerald Tablet, also known as the *Smaragdine* and the *Tabula Smaragdina*, is a major — if not *the* major — foundation text of Hermeticism. In thirteen short sentences, it both provides the blueprint for the Great Work of alchemy and states the first guiding truth of all Hermetic magic: “As above, so below;” i.e., the material world and the higher realities reflect each other, and therefore can be made to touch and affect each other by one with the proper knowledge.

Tales say that Alexander the Great pried the Emerald Tablet from the withered hands of Hermes Trismegistus, whose body he found entombed in a cave near Hebron. Hermes Trismegistus himself, the founder of Hermeticism, is a figure even more swathed in legend than Alexander. Perhaps he was a sorcerer-king of old Egypt who ruled from a golden city consecrated to the Sun, built the hanging gardens of Babylon and invented writing; or perhaps he was a god of magic and learning, the close partner of Thoth in imparting the gifts of wisdom to mankind; or perhaps he *was* Thoth.

The Tremere, for their part, prefer the sorcerer-king theory, but readily believe that through his arts Hermes ascended to true immortality and power worthy of any god of antiquity. For reasons all too apparent to other Cainites, they have a special fondness for stories of apotheosis.

Hermes also wrote thousands of other works, but the best-known are the *Corpus Hermeticum*, forty-two books which contain the sum of all ancient knowledge. The mortal world believes these books to have been lost after the destruction of the Library at Alexandria (although supposedly they escaped burning and were smuggled out to be buried in the desert instead, and various fragments have been preserved by the old Greek and Arab scholars). The average Tremere chantry library, however, usually boasts anywhere from a half to two dozen volumes of the *Corpus*. As for the rest? Well, no few magi, even some who certainly should be more cynical in their old age, are successfully kept in line by superiors who claim to possess precious remnants of the fabled work — which, of course, they will show only to the *truly* worthy.

“As above, so below” explains the ‘miracle’ of Thaumaturgy and indeed of vampiric Disciplines. Just as each planet in the firmament above rules a certain aspect of worldly existence, gems, herbs, animals and other things of nature carry ‘virtues’ which correspond to and call upon higher principles. Mortal blood is plainly replete with magical virtues; indeed, magi speculate that it carries the very essence of Man, who of all living creatures is the nearest image of the Creator. Other Cainites, the pitiable creatures, have discovered some of the magics it can fuel through millennia of painful trial and error. The Tremere, however, mean to discover and exhaust the full spectrum of its vast potential in a fraction of the time.

endeavor ever has. Part of that forming global culture arose from the swapping and blending of religious ideas. Egyptian gods and goddesses in particular became famous outside their native lands, and the cults of Isis and of Thoth-Hermes-Mercury spread even to Rome itself. But those years passed, inevitably, and when Rome fell the cults disbanded and dispersed. The new religion of the cross, the barbarian invasions and the general decay of all exchange (commercial and cultural) conspired to make it a very hard world for followers of ancient wisdom.

Still, although most offshoots of the old cults forgot their origins and any systematic understanding of what arts they still possessed, some did their best to preserve their learning. Some even approached other groups of magic-workers, both of their own tradition and of "exotic" traditions like Druidism or the Dianic mysteries — but the distrust sowed in those chaotic times was too great. Such contacts led to witch-war as often as to any productive alliance.

The Founding of the Houses

Then, in the eighth century, a mage named Trianoma formed a partnership with another named Bonisagus. She'd had a vision of the Hermetics united once more; he was on the verge of completing a universal theory of magic. This theory had already allowed him to develop what he called the *parma magica*, a magical "shield" with which magi could protect themselves from each other without resorting to maleficium. With the aid of the *parma magica*, the leaders of twelve groups — ten descended from the old Hermetics, two of exotic origin — were able to meet safely at Dürenmar in AD 767 to convene what would become the Order of Hermes.

Among those twelve leaders was a magus named Tremere. He went relatively unnoticed at the time, due to his youth and inexperience. In fact, he hadn't even technically been invited. His old teacher Guorna had, but Guorna died shortly after receiving Trianoma's invitation, and so his two senior pupils, Tytalus and Tremere, each came in his place. Neither could agree to yield to the other's authority. In the interests of peace it was decided that since they both already had substantial followings of their own, they could stand equally as brothers in the new order.

Thus were House Tremere and House Tytalus, along with all the rest, born. Knowledge that had been hoarded, garbled and rotted was brought into the light again and shared (relatively) freely. A new golden age of magic dawned. House Tremere chose to stake its claim in the eastern part of Europe

— which most Hermetics had avoided up until that point. But it seemed replete with natural formations rich in the magical power known to the wizards as *vis*: vast mountains, forbidding hilltops, shining rivers, deep forests hiding ancient glades. They soon discovered why its depths had gone untouched for so long. Forest and mountain, town and village were haunted with creatures whose fell powers, while nowhere near as "enlightened" as the Hermetics', commanded the fear of commoner and magus alike. Ravening skin-turners roamed the countryside, and in many places, the blood-drinkers known as *vampyr* hid behind courtly thrones. Indeed, in some places, they boldly assumed the throne themselves, ruling as dread gods or devil-lords.

But Tremere had decided to make these lands his own wizard's realm, and he was not one to back down from a course once he had chosen it. In time, this quality of his became a hallmark of his house and later of his clan. He and his seven closest followers built their high chantry of Ceoris in Transylvania, along with dozens of others all across Europe. (For more information on Ceoris and Tremere history connected to it, see **House of Tremere**.) Over the next few centuries, they succeeded not only in seizing many geomantically potent sites and reaching an "understanding" with the Carpathian night-folk (meaning that all parties involved understood they couldn't afford an all-out war against each other), but also in becoming a powerful force within the Hermetic Order. In AD 1012 they convinced their fellow wizards to condemn to mass execution the one house which most loudly criticized the Tremere's methods of conquest: the Druidic House Diedne. Though one by one the founders of the other houses died or wandered off into more esoteric planes, Tremere lived on, unifying and fortifying his house against all enemies.

The Transformation

The next part of the story is known by heart to every Tremere apprentice, no matter how ignorant or unreflective; after all, it's the historical dogma by which the Seven justify their first terrible, irrevocable step across immortality's threshold.

By the 10th century, it was painfully clear to the Hermetic Order that the world they knew had gone awry. Sites great and small had become depleted of their *vis*. Spells that had always gone off without a hitch started fizzling or producing terrible side effects. Bonisagus' previously unassailable theories seemed

increasingly less sound the further researchers pursued them, and the advancement of magical understanding in general ground to a halt.

Even more distressingly, time-honored youth elixirs began to fail. Most magi, being reclusive, either assumed that the trouble was something local or peculiar to them, or else blamed various enemies — rival houses, diabolists, the fae, the Church, even the mundane folk themselves. By the time the Order at large began discussing the problem, things had decayed to the point where the very mightiest wizards were facing the end of their longevity and power. Centuries of labor, sacrifice and terrible choices, centuries spent pursuing the great secrets, centuries of wisdom accumulated, all buried within a few great minds and hearts; all to be snuffed-out now by some inexplicable twist of the World-Soul.

Unthinkable.

The Great Experiment

Tremere and his seven closest protégés cast about desperately for some alternative. Etrius, a Swiss whose wild boyhood talent had defied all control until Tremere taught him to channel it, interrogated scores of conjured spirits and built a dozen different reconstructions of Bonisagus' system. Meerlinda of Wessex, the one woman whom Tremere had deemed worthy to accompany him into the highest sanctums of the manly realm of philosophy, developed a plan to connect a network of chantries into one massive working to wring out the earth's remaining *vis*, then set all her diplomatic skill to convincing the needed magi to cooperate.

Goratrix, however, whom Tremere had saved from the stake as a young man in Poitou, realized that the key to their survival might lie somewhere in the bodies of the shapechangers and *vampyri* that wandered the wilds surrounding Ceoris. Using his arts, he captured several such creatures and studied them both whole and dissected. But his captive subjects were less than cooperative in demonstrating and explaining their occult powers, and so in AD 1005 he decided to create his own. He forced a Tzimisce prisoner to pass its curse on to two of his apprentices and spent the next few decades in various experimentations upon them.

In AD 1022 he announced to the other six of the Seven that he'd developed a process to refine a working elixir from vampire blood. However, the ritual would require the cooperation of his fellows to effect. He sent out a rather imperious letter telling them it would be in their best interests to

come, unless perhaps they liked the prospect of creaking joints and soft foods; his letter was followed by a far more persuasive one from Tremere himself. That winter they gathered at Ceoris for the grand working.

The details of the spell itself remain secret for obvious reasons, and several versions of the gossip circulate. A few of the Seven have confided to their followers that the transformation took them entirely by surprise. Etrius, however, grumbles that he never looked for anything but betrayal from Goratrix. Meerlinda always gives the same answer when asked: "Of course we all *hoped* for a living immortality; whether we truly expected to get it is a moot point. The only path that matters now is the path before us. We've bought time, at least, and with time all things are possible." Goratrix himself has said a few things that lead some to believe the ritual's miscarriage was an honest mistake on his part. But then, he's said other things that cause many more to think he and Tremere both knew all along that undeath was at least a likely result.

As for Tremere, he never speaks on the subject but in the vaguest terms.

One can only imagine the screams, recriminations and bloody tears that must have followed that night when the Seven awoke from their ritual's completion to find what they had become. All agree it was in this moment that Tremere proved his leadership once again. He cooled Goratrix's indignant fury and shook Etrius and the rest free of their rage and despair. What was done was done, he said — a sentiment many a Tremere since has echoed — and now the quest for immortality had given way to new challenges. They had lost their old magic and must find a new kind. They must consider how to move forward without attracting the notice of the other Houses of Hermes, who would surely view this as an abomination to be nipped in the bud. Above all, they must learn to survive.

The Tzimisce and the Omen War

In *voivode* audience chambers throughout the Transdanubian lands, *koldun* sorcerers and Shaper-priests who had not paid homage for years suddenly turned up to issue dire but vague warnings of disaster. The black blood of the earth was roiling with a new pain, they said. The gods would not accept the usual propitiations. A new bane had arisen in the country, a bane christened in Tzimisce blood. The Tzimisce as a clan had failed in their sacred duties to the land and unless they changed their ways at once, they would be

made to pay not only for their sins but for those of the wizard blasphemers who had taken up residence so nearby. No few of them were laughed out of court.

Even where their predictions were taken seriously, little direct action followed. The various Tzimisce lineages had always quarreled among themselves, and any pretense of unity they'd once possessed had already cracked under pressure from a succession of Ventrue who now sought and gained domains within traditionally Tzimisce country. Nevertheless, several key *voivodes* managed to overcome their mutual fear of betrayal long enough to mount a determined campaign against the Tremere chantries in their lands. Vladimir Rustovich was chief among these, and he convinced a few broods of Gangrel and Nosferatu who had allied with his house profitably before to join his war effort.

Very shortly after the Experiment, the Seven had infected a number of the score or so of chantries in Eastern Europe with the Embrace. This was a course few of them actually thought wise, except perhaps Goratrix, but Tremere insisted. He pointed out that the strength of the Tremere had always been their ability to work in concert; more Cainite magi meant more research into the adaptation of Hermetic theory to vampiric capabilities. More likely, he simply had no intention of giving up the house he had founded so long ago, his proudest achievement. If he had fallen into damnation, it would just have to come along with him. He discovered to his chagrin that chantries of vampire magi fell to Tzimisce assault far more quickly than the mortal sort. The Fiends knew much more about fighting Cainites than wizards, after all, and the vampire magi were all but helpless in any case, stripped of their old powers and unacquainted with the new.

Over Goratrix's protests and much to Etrius' relief, Tremere decided that the ultimate conversion of House Tremere would have to proceed gradually, and so it did. Mortal Tremere did the greater part of the work in repelling Tzimisce depredations — unwittingly protecting the creatures that skulked behind them (and in a very few cases among them), while the vampires relearned the Art in a new form and awaited the right time to bring the entire House over the threshold. The Tzimisce withdrew to lick their wounds, rethink their strategy and blame each others' patriarchs and matriarchs for their failure. This sequence was repeated on larger and larger scale over the next two centuries. Thinking back to the *koldun* auguries that started it all and appalled by what they found in the chantries they vanquished, the younger Tzimisce who laid most of the actual sieges took to calling their crusade the “war of omens.” But in truth, the real war

had yet to be joined because the Tremere remained on the defensive. That, of course, would change.

The Gargoyles

Seeing that they couldn't hold out forever against the Fiends, Tremere and most of the Seven slipped out of Transylvania during a period of relative peace and went abroad in search of various things to help their fledgling bloodline. Some hoped to make pacts with other Cainites who seemed to hate the Tzimisce as much as the Tremere now did. Others, notably Tremere himself and Etrius, who accompanied him, were far more mysterious about their purpose.

Goratrix was left in sole charge of Ceoris, where, free now of the others' constant meddling, he turned with new energy to what had always been his greatest talent: magical experimentation. As a mortal he'd earned the sobriquet “Goratrix the Sleepless” for his tendency to work night after night when faced with a thorny problem. Now he stayed up days, battling the fatigue of the sunlit hours. Even as signs of yet another Tzimisce siege mounted like storm clouds, he hunkered in his laboratory.

He even had the audacity to enlist visiting mortal colleagues in trapping and dissecting the Nosferatu and Gangrel spies that now lurked about the chantry. Of course he was pale and tired-looking — his laboratory had no windows, after all; and he had to keep such strange hours because he was researching the night-folk. The gleam in his eye as he opened a vein and collected its ichor was surely the simple thrill of discovery. Within a mere decade, he and his cohorts devised a way of cobbling together a new sort of creature, one that possessed all the fabled strength of the undead but lacked any memory of a prior existence, a blank slate upon which its Tremere masters might write whatever they wished. These monstrosities were dubbed Gargoyles for their resemblance to the grotesques that decorated so many buildings and manuscripts.

The Tzimisce professed themselves horrified by the Gargoyles when Goratrix unleashed them to devastating effect in AD 1125; but those Cainites who knew the Fiends better shook their heads. The Tzimisce, after all, had called themselves Shapers for time out of mind, and with good reason. They'd spent centuries cultivating their families of blood-servants, breeding them and twisting their flesh until they no more resembled ordinary humanity than the Tzimisce themselves. In battle one could glimpse more terrible creations yet, *szlachta* war-ghouls and even the *vozhd*, which were supposedly cobbled together in similar

fashion to the Gargoyles. *Oddly* similar, some pointed out suspiciously....

Saulot

While the chantry-folk in Eastern Europe gritted their collective teeth and hung on as best they could against the Tzimisce, Tremere and Etrius studied the Cainite race — its origins, its various lineages, its strengths and weaknesses. Tremere soon found it wisest to pose as anything but what he was. He became skilled at impersonating the Brujah, and since the elders of that clan were surprisingly vulnerable to flattery by neonates claiming to take a sincere interest in their learning, he cajoled his way into many a *gymnasium* and its trove of books and scrolls. Later he and Etrius pored over the notes he'd made.

They also received vital information from Meerlinda, who'd settled in England, and her agents. Meerlinda had realized that given the Cainite diet, Tremere chantries would need to move out of the wilds and into the cities. She sent her childer and grandchilder as far east as Constantinople and as far west as Compostela to found new communities. At first, hoping to impress their hosts, these agents openly announced their origins as self-created Cainites. But most princes either didn't believe a word of it, or else declared it a blasphemy against some sort of vast ancient heritage they believed they had. Entire chantries were rooted out and destroyed as punishment for this blasphemy. Sometimes the princes' own forces led the attack. Sometimes other Cainites of the town did it, but the princes usually found some pretext not to rule against the killers. (Since the chantries in question had often failed to seek the princes' permission before setting up shop, pretexts were not difficult to find.) Meerlinda and her spies learned quickly, and didn't make such mistakes of ignorance for long, but the damage had already been done. The Tremere were known as the Usurpers from those nights forth.

Putting together the clues they'd all gathered, Tremere and Etrius determined that the potency of elder blood was what the Tremere lacked to earn the respect of the other clans; that and a founder who carried the blood of the Third Generation of Caine. It was plainly too late to seek Father Caine out for the Embrace, or the slain Second Generation — if indeed those legends were true at all. Tremere reasoned, however, that if one of the *existing* clan founders could be uncovered and that founder's blood drunk to the dregs, then the other clans would have no choice but to grant the Tremere a place among them. The Tremere had already stumbled onto the secret of diablerie in

the course of the Omen War. Now Tremere and his followers pursued it systematically, climbing the ladder of generations, preparing themselves to go up against the founder they would choose. Etrius (whose research had been essential in reaching this decision) protested this as a vile sacrilege, but in the end he obeyed his master and followed suit. No doubt the thought of being left behind, weak-blooded, while Goratrix doubled or tripled in might spurred him on somewhat.

How the Usurpers happened upon the choice of Saulot, few could say. Perhaps some enemy of the Salubri passed them word of his resting-place. The Salubri warriors had earned many enemies, among whom the Baali were simply foremost. Or perhaps the Tremere found Saulot all by themselves. They do tend to take the initiative, after all. In AD 1133 they found the ancient's tomb, deep in the Anatolian desert where so many Crusader ghosts walked, and Tremere and the Seven gathered there. They expected to meet any number of wards and guardians as they moved from threshold to inner crypt, but while they could see the marks of old enchantments laid millennia ago, their power seemed to have faded or broken. Whispered gossip among ranking Tremere claims that the ancient never even resisted.

The Salubri, never numerous, began to disappear shortly afterward. Those Cainites of other clans who looked to them as paragons, even a sort of errant priesthood, publicly blamed the Tremere for this. Many others, however, distrusted the Cyclops nearly as deeply as they did the Usurpers. Now Meerlinda's intrigues began to bear fruit. Powerful princes of the Ventrue and Toreador clans, most especially those Ventrue who hungered for Tzimisce land, had grown quite attached to their court magicians and the unheard-of tricks they could perform. And so, old suspicions about the Salubri that no one had bothered to rehearse for centuries were dug up and re-circulated. Even those princes, *voivodes* and elders who sheltered fleeing Cyclops often found it politically inconvenient to make their sympathies known. Far more chose to simply stand by as the atrocity unfolded among them, mouths full of empty platitudes and excuses.

Recent Nights

By AD 1230, all but the extraordinarily inattentive realize that the Tremere won't be content with a place in the Low Clans. The High Clans, however, believe they can keep the wizards in their proper place simply by refusing them the resources they would need to rise any higher. In most cities, the Tremere are constrained to the poorest quarters, their numbers

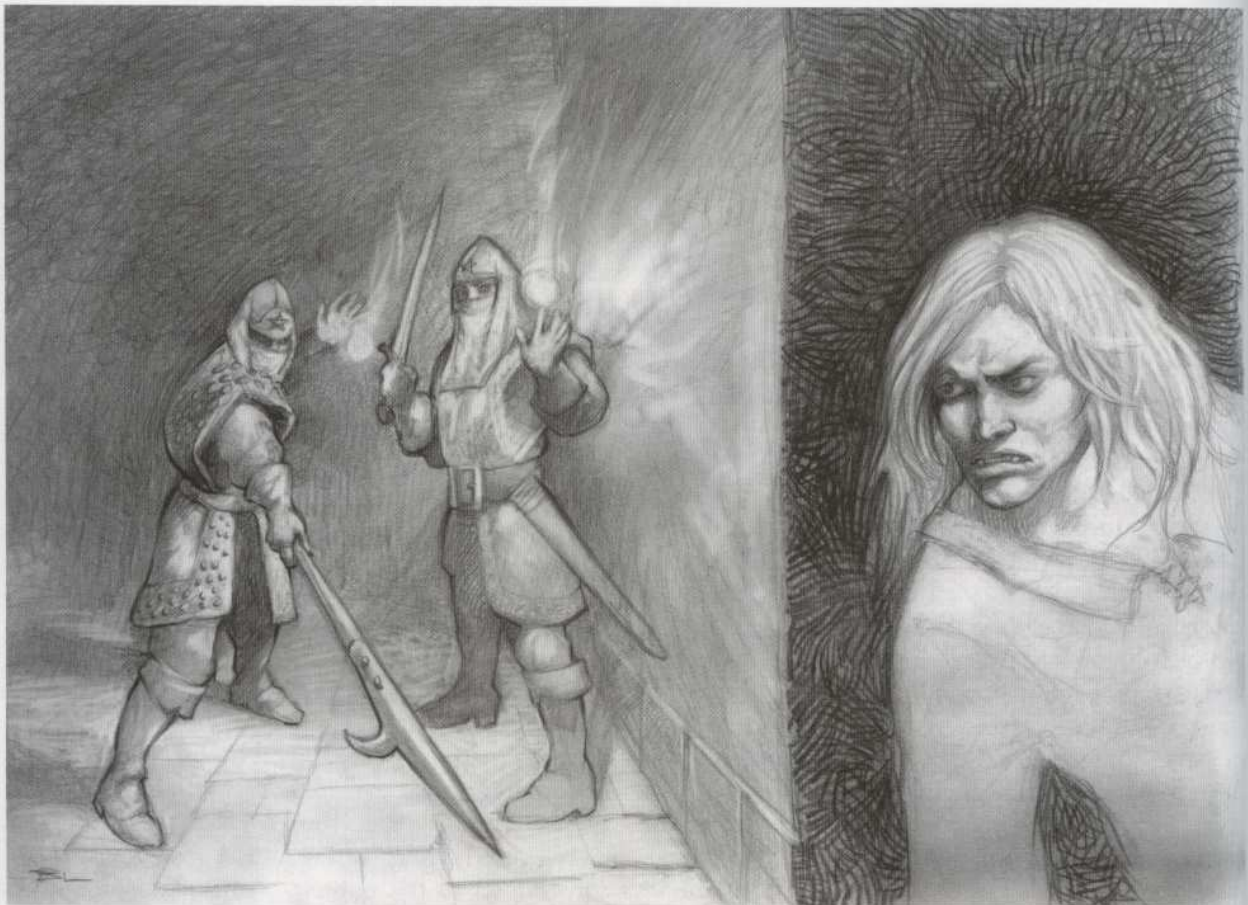
strictly controlled by the prince's sole right to grant the Embrace. In others, they may not *formally* claim domain at all, but a tacit understanding permits them to squat, usually in the suburbs, as long as they can keep out from underfoot. Of course, should they become disobedient — or should the prince need a convenient scapegoat — even that half-welcome evaporates. In a few cases, regents have sworn partial or full blood oaths to some elder of the city; this is a violation of the oath all Tremere take when they enter the Blood, and punishable by Final Death, but when the fate of the chantry hangs upon it, a regent may see no other choice.

The Massasa War

Although the Seven tried as long as they could to hide the gradual turning of their house from the rest of the Hermetic Order, a deception on that scale could only persist for so long. Magi of the different houses didn't come together often, but occasional large conclaves required the attendance of important Tremere. The absence of so many who had always been so active became conspicuous with the mounting decades. House Tremere ceased to dominate, and in fact seemed to fade away.

The other Hermetics, however, knew all too well that fading away was not in the Tremere character. Their slow, patient investigations hit dead ends at first (literally) and spies met fates no less mysterious than those they spied upon. At long last, a band of refugees from old House Tremere — those very few mortals who had stumbled across the truth without falling prey to it — were able to find magi willing to listen to their incredible story. The *primi* of the remaining houses met in AD 1202. After three days and nights of testimony, with remarkably little dithering, they sentenced House Tremere *in absentia* to death and enjoined every faithful magus to cooperate in making it so.

In AD 1230, the Order is still making some effort to carry this sentence out, but the actual fighting of what they call the Massasa War has subsided over the past few decades. The Order has enemies a good deal more immediately threatening than the Tremere, most notably the shadow-hunters of the Church. For their part, the Tremere prefer to slip away into hiding from their former brethren rather than try (probably futilely) to stamp them out. They point out that they, too, have far more threatening enemies. But in truth, their real motivation is sentimental. For most Hermetics, the Order has always been the one bastion



of sanity, friendship and understanding in a hostile world. Many Tremere who once belonged to it can't help feeling that same affection for it still, and even some of the Seven are crushed by its ringing condemnation of the path they've chosen — even if they never expected any other reaction. Younger Tremere, of course, become quite frustrated with their elders on this matter. They don't understand why their mentors who faced the *vozhd* with perfect equanimity should back down from a dwindling clutch of mere mortals.

In these nights, the *Massasa* War interferes primarily with Tremere recruiting. The Tremere have always sought out promising candidates in exactly the same places where the Hermetics seek theirs, and while most Hermetics don't actively pursue the "traitor house" anymore, they do feel duty-bound to destroy any *massasa* they happen across in the course of their business. It is partly because of this that the Tremere now Embrace much more frequently outside the occult and academic circles.

Points of Contention

Several issues face Tremere both great and small in the present nights:

The Omen War

Although both sides now show unmistakable signs of fatigue, what the Tremere call the "Hungarian war" with Clan Tzimisce continues. In those lands, Embraces have taken on a supremely utilitarian character. Knights and captains who cannot so much as write their names are now coming into the Blood — a thing once unheard of. Even those who earn the Blood with their magical talent are chosen for their ability to learn the practical aspects of the Art quickly, obey orders unquestioningly, and take any risk for their own and their clan's advancement.

This has led to a serious clan divide. The growing population of battle-hardened fanatics in the East has precious little in common with its more traditionally wizardly fellows in the West. The Western Tremere, whose nightly concerns revolve around protecting their newborn chantries and their new-forged alliances, resent the assistance the Easterners constantly demand: handing over promising apprentices, cooperating with mass magical workings, shipping precious tomes over dangerous roads. They also resent being dragged (as they all too frequently are) into international political morasses that have little to do with them personally. For their part, the Eastern Tremere see their Western brethren as cravens who neither

understand nor appreciate the sacrifices that must be made in the heartland of Tremere power. The Seven insist that the Hungarian war be supported by all Tremere no matter what, but they also have no wish to see their gains in the West sacrificed on that altar. Tremere diplomats who once set their talents to wooing Holy Roman princes now shuttle back and forth between the great chantries, trying to repair the rifts that threaten to tear their own clan apart.

High and Low

Most Tremere have made it quite clear that they want nothing to do with their so-called fellows of the Low Clans. They are firmly in the business of courting the High. The High Clans, for their part, have made it equally clear that they mean to involve themselves with the Tremere for precisely as long as they make themselves useful, and dispose of them immediately afterward.

It thus remains to the Tremere to be ever more useful. Over the past century, many have become expert at this, despite the blows their pride must endure in the process. A favorite tactic is to choose some promisingly greedy Cainite and provide her just enough assistance to overextend herself. She then finds herself in an untenable position where she requires further Tremere aid all the more desperately. And so forth. Patrons of Tremere may learn to their dismay that once the association becomes public (which it does suspiciously often), other potential allies turn away and they're left with only the Tremere to rely on. Fortunately, the Tremere make uncommonly good allies. They can enlist their clanmates' help with more ease than most Cainites; so, as the saying now goes, once you've got one Tremere, you've got them all. For better or for worse.

Although the Tremere like to dissociate themselves from the Low Clans, they're not in a position to ignore them. For now, they do their best to play their would-be enemies among the Low against each other. If they hear of a Ravnos in the area, they'll make sure the Gangrel hear of it too, and vice versa. Although they can hardly hope to beat the Nosferatu at their ancient game of gossip-mongering, they can and do feed extremely misleading information to the Lepers, hoping to discredit them to their usual clients. They've discovered to their chagrin that it's near impossible to out-think the Malkavians, and damned difficult to avoid them, but a number of Madmen can be *distracted* with relative ease.

However, despite the Tremere's efforts, the fallen still pose a real obstacle to them. Some regents deem it wisest for now to make overtures to

local Cainites of 'meaner' blood; they usually do this discreetly, by proxy, through hapless apprentices tapped for that duty. Often they instruct the apprentices to appear just a little dissatisfied with their meager lot, the better to rouse the chosen fallen's sympathies. Often the apprentices find they have scant trouble giving that impression.

Feuds

Clan Tremere treasures its reputation for unity. The last thing the wizards can afford to do is give their many enemies an obvious opening. But in the privacy of the chantries, passionate hatreds dammed up in public burst forth with all their true venom. As noted above, the magi closely involved in the Omen War feel increasingly alienated from those who don't take a direct part. A fair number of Tremere were Embraced against their will. Most grudgingly knuckle under, knowing that the clan's enemies don't generally care to listen to the sad story of any lone Tremere they might catch outside the safety of the chantries; they also fear their elders will force them into a full Blood Oath if they complain too loudly. But some, encouraged by Etrius' well-known misgivings about the conversion to vampirism, rally around him. Said conversion now being finished (the *Massasa* War left little other choice), his contingent needs to find a new issue whose moral high ground they can capture.

Goratrix and his supporters may well provide the new issue. They've recently begun trying to cultivate influence among mortals in the manner of the High Clans. They argue that the Tremere will never gain status unless they prove they can compete at these traditional pastimes. Meerlinda and others of the Seven, however, have cautioned against overreaching; the Tremere should court the High Clans now and learn from them by observing, not seek to imitate them just yet. Goratrix has actually accused Meerlinda of siding with Etrius for her own purposes. This is a grave insult indeed to her reputation for impartiality, but if she takes offense, she's evidently chosen not to brawl with him in public over it. Tremere, who has always stepped in to conciliate before when others' good offices failed, remains silent on this new round of bitter volleys; neither he nor any of his famous encyclical letters to the clan-at-large have been seen since the Tremere's exile from the Hermetic Order. Perhaps, some speculate, he is grief-stricken over the ouster. Others mutter darkly about the spiritual consequences of the Amaranth.

Player's Toolbox

There are many ways to fit a Tremere character into the clan's current events. Here are just a few suggestions to discuss with the Storyteller:

The Omen War

- Your home chantry is besieged, and only you could be spared to slip through the Tzimisce noose and go west on a desperate mission to secure aid from your "loyal" brother chantries in more peaceful lands. But you find that aid not as forthcoming as you'd hoped.
- You are a regent or senior apprentice in a Western chantry. A fellow Tremere has come into town fresh from the Hungarian war, and she insists that some elder of your town is supplying crucial assistance to the Tzimisce and must be cut down.
- You're a sheltered, scholarly young apprentice in Italy suddenly drafted out to the Hungarian front to replace the ongoing losses.
- You're a war-weary regent who knows the local Tzimisce are equally war-weary, and that the mortal population you all depend on for sustenance cannot survive much more fighting. Can you talk your superiors into letting you negotiate a truce, or negotiate it without their noticing, and is a truce even possible in the first place?

Clan Expansion

- You are an older apprentice sent to win the support of an important prince. If you should succeed in making a treaty, you could win a chance to stay on as regent. A fellow apprentice was sent with you, theoretically to assist you, but you know he'd betray you to win a regency for himself, even at risk to your mutual mission.
- You're sent out to an area noted for its hostile Gangrel population. Your job is to survey the territory to determine where the ley lines run and whether there are any sites geomantically suitable for a new regional headquarters; you should make whatever outside friendships or alliances might aid you in that endeavor, but you mustn't let them overshadow your loyalty to your superiors.
- Your regent has set you to overseeing the servants who acquire vessels for the chantry "larder." Naturally he's concerned above all with secrecy and with steering clear of other Cainites' domains, while another senior apprentice or magus of the chantry complains that the fare you provide is paltry or unappetizing or diseased. Moreover, the

servants are having trouble with their new work, and need you to train them in the art of hunting.

Faction Politics

- You belong to a faction of Tremere dedicated to exploring an outré branch of Thaumaturgy. Although you (usually) have no qualms with the direction of your research, certain other factions would denounce you for it, perhaps even charge you with infernalism.

- You have been asked to suborn an important mortal for the clan's purposes. Not only must you avoid being crushed by other Cainites who might consider that mortal to be their domain, you must also hide your activities from other Tremere in the region who would view your actions as dangerous meddling.

- You are an untraditional Tremere (e.g., a soldier, a devout member of the clergy, a luxurious noble). You soon discover you have a lot more in common with Cainites of some other clan than your own, but you must not show your sympathies too openly.

Tactics

The bottom rung of any society quickly learns to take what it can to get by. Quick, dirty and brutal best describes the fallen Cainites' attitudes. This is not to say that subtlety and careful planning among the Low Clans is nonexistent, but that their methods tend to be both timely and deadly. Their mortal lives taught them how to do the most with what they had, and they bring this approach to unlife.

Logistics

Every Cainite must learn to survive as a predator without alerting the prey that surrounds him. The Low Clans prefer practical, quiet methods that don't leave an easy trail.

Food and Herd

The insatiable hunger requires great care to assuage, for the average Cainite must drink the blood of sixty people in a year — less, if blood is used sparingly. The key lies in finding a willing or oblivious food source, unless one desires to leave a trail of corpses. Taking small amounts from a large group helps, though the tradeoff leaves many who might retain knowledge of the Cainite's true nature. If the Cainite

feeds when the victim is tired, the fuzzy memories produced by the Kiss usually confuse the victim into forgetting the feeding or thinking the whole thing was a dream. Intimidation, seduction and blackmail can cow the mortals, but it is best to find the right balance and know when to cut one's losses.

The relatively young but ambitious Setite known as Nenet feeds exclusively upon the heavily drugged. While under the effect of the opiates she provides, few can later recall her supping on small amounts of their blood. Those who do remember generally chalk it up to a side effect of the drug, and many who don't generally find the Kiss combined with the opiate to be a maddeningly pleasurable sensation. The loss of blood gives the drug a stronger kick; and while this occasionally results in the victim's death, Nenet takes enough care that such occurrences are rare.

Disposing of Bodies

Avoiding the notice of mortal society becomes difficult for Cainites who litter corpses across the landscape. The Low Clans often prefer to remove the evidence entirely; unless presented with a body, mortals are quick to invent all kinds of explanations for missing people.

The Nosferatu Alvar hauls bodies into the ocean along the Spanish coast, trudging deep enough into the waters that fishermen are unlikely to discover his handiwork. Heavy iron boots prevent the tides from carrying him away. He brings along a head-sized rock and a length of chain with a hook on the end. Once he finds a suitable resting place, he lashes the chain around the rock, plunges the hook into the corpse's back, loops it around the base of the spine, and yanks it out to fasten to the chain. The rock holds the body down, allowing the salt water and ocean life to strip it down to bones in roughly two months. Alvar is usually careful not to kill too often; he only has so much chain.

Villette, a Frankish Gangrel, prefers to gorge herself shortly before sunrise, and then meld with the earth while holding the corpse in a lover's embrace. She has refined her powers of Protean to the point that her emergence the next evening leaves the corpse behind, with only a patch of freshly turned earth to indicate the final resting place.

Taking Ghouls

Even more so than finding a herd, choosing ghouls is a delicate thing. These unfortunate souls



provide the only direct reach Cainites have during the daylight hours. The strength of vitae enforces their absolute loyalty, yet it is often advantageous to ensure steadfast allegiance prior to the commingling of blood. The best ghouls remain by a Cainite's side through the natural extent of their lengthened lives, serving with abject devotion and high levels of competence. Some Cainites prefer the company of animal ghouls, for they are far less like to spill information to their master's enemies. Others avoid their use; some Cainites feel that animals require too much training to be truly worth the effort, others simply prefer ghouls that they can take nourishment from if necessary.

Saul is a Nosferatu who was born to a shepherd and Embraced by a wandering Feral. After his Embrace, he fed his blood to several herding dogs, and trained them to direct the movements of humans in the same way they once had herded sheep. The pack now drives hapless travelers and lone shepherds towards Saul — he rewards them with the flesh of these unfortunates.

When in need of ghouls, the Assamite vizier Sarila prefers to take mortal apprentices and subject them to a grueling battery of tests that try their intelligence, loyalty, cunning and tenacity. The one or two who achieve the highest marks she takes as ghouls. Any failures serve to replenish her vitae,

which of course is depleted by making the ghouls in the first place.

Setting Down Roots

Cainites as a race are sedentary for a variety of reasons. Some fallen vampires are nomadic, but often this is simply because they have no domain to claim. Not all of the Low Clan Cainites accept this fate, however, and they have discovered some interesting tactics for finding and holding havens.

Finding a Haven

The Low Clans resort to squatting, coercion and outright theft when it comes to land ownership. Although most are financially incapable of creating elaborate crypts or secure enclaves, they are more than capable of co-opting something created by others.

The Leper Abrial heard rumors of a haunted Norman outpost during travels through Frankish lands. She explored the ruins of the fallen tower and found an elaborate maze of tunnels beneath it, yet no resident evil spirits. Within the week she called the tower home, and began to improve upon the tower's haunted reputation by terrorizing any unfortunate travelers who sought shelter for the evening.

Haven Fortification

Once safely ensconced in a haven, a Cainite must defend it. Ghouls can aid in the defense of a lair, but they may unwittingly betray their masters, and require sustenance and safety of their own. Some Cainites — such as Tremere and Assamite sorcerers — can lay magical traps and wards, but most must be content with more mundane methods of defense. A Low Clan vampire might call upon trapping skills learned as a mortal in order to set up deterrents against any would-be invader, or might simply disguise her haven as something so undesirable that no sane individual would want to take it from her. (See **Right of Princes** for a detailed discussion of traps and other haven defenses.)

Pillar of the Community

Although reborn in the gutter, a determined Cainite of the Low Clans can buck social stigma and rise to a level of greatness. With intelligence, resolve and a bit of luck, nobility — both mortal and Cainite — can be made to bow before one of the fallen.

Ragged Hand of the Prince

Cainite princes often hail from the High Clans, but the smart ones do well to keep their eyes on the affairs of the Low. Some princes feel the need for a connection to the poor, if only to watch for plots against them or their interests. Others prefer to handle only matters of court themselves, but keep a savvy advisor who can provide an entirely different perspective. Whatever the case, an enterprising Cainite can curry favor with a powerful ally by providing useful information and performing tasks too delicate (or dirty) for noble hands.

Hasin, an Alexandrite Ravnos, visits Venice once every few months. While there, he is granted special audience with the Lasombra Prince Guilelmo Aliprando. The prince pays him a modest amount of coin, in return for which Hasin relates to the prince any interesting Cainite or mortal news that the Ravnos has chanced to hear. On occasion, Guilelmo pays a little extra and Hasin takes on jobs of a varied nature — theft, delivery and assassination are only some of the possibilities.

Looking the Part

With arrogance often comes laziness; witness the attitudes of High Clan Cainites to the Low

Clans. Playing to stereotype in the company of the first cursed often entices a high-blooded Cainite to drop his guard, regarding the fallen Cainite as just another servant. Few Cainites are foolish enough to ignore a Low Clan vampire who acts out of her station, but if the Low Clans stay in their perceived place, they can often get away with murder.

Dominka of Clan Tremere has been a hanger-on at Julia Antasia's court in Frankfurt. While the Roman Ventrue doesn't trust the Usurpers, she has grown accustomed to Dominka's presence and requests for aid against the Tzimisce — so accustomed, in fact, that she barely notices the witch anymore. Now that Dominka has become a fixture, she has much more freedom to move and act among the Cainites of the city.

Back Alley Intrigue

Assassination, kidnapping and espionage are the unwritten tools of state. They reach behind the safety of castle walls and into the throne rooms of the mightiest mortal rulers. Likewise, the High Clans are not safe from such tactics. A saying among the Low Clans goes: "Any Cainite foolish enough to fight honorably deserves to die that way." The fallen do not have the luxury of honor; they therefore gain power by spying, bribery, blackmail (animals see the most interesting things, and many fallen Cainites can speak to them), murder, forgery and any other despicable tactic. Many first cursed, of course, won't dirty their hands with such tactics, but are happy to pay the fallen to do so, as mentioned above. (For more details on this sort of warfare, see **Spoils of War**.)

Desmond of Gloucester, vassal to Baroness Seren, has refined his command of *Auspex* to truly impressive levels. His mistress uses him to spy on the bedchambers of nobles, the confessions of priests and the late-night meetings of mercenaries. The information he hears is often easily worth the time and trouble to discover it.

Domains of the Low Clans

The dominion of the first cursed, while certainly widespread, is not so complete as they would have other Cainites believe. Across Europe, regions and institutions exist in which the Low Clans thrive and, in some cases, even rule. To the High Clans, these are aberrations, flukes of politics that

will no doubt be rectified just as soon as the opportunity arises.

To the Low Clans, these are a good start.

What sorts of regions and institutions attract the fallen, then? Where is the dominance of the first cursed most threatened, and where are the greatest opportunities for your characters to make their mark on Cainite society?

Because Cainite society tends to view outsiders as Low-Clan by default, foreign clans often have much more power in their homeland than they do throughout Europe. The Holy Land, for instance, has a substantial number of Assamite sultans, and the usurping Tremere hold large territories in Hungary and its surroundings. Cainites are creatures of tradition and inertia, and they build up substantial webs of power in their home regions; if a clan — even a Low Clan — has traditionally held power in a specific area, the odds are good they will continue to do so even in the face of High Clan opposition. The Ventrue and Lasombra might seek to chip away at the power of the Assamites in Outremer, but they still think of the Holy Land as Assamite domain. Their efforts to dislodge the Saracens are often hampered by an unconscious sense of hopelessness, even when they seem enthusiastic. And of course, the difficulties aren't merely psychological; the Assamites aren't about to give up their homeland without a fight — and they fight well.

If a character happens to be a member of one of the dominant clans in these regions, attaining a position of power is simply a matter of competition, rather than the nigh-hopeless struggle against societal pressures he might face trying to acquire the same power in, say, France. Unfortunately, if he's a member of one of the *other* Low Clans, he's no better off here than in High Clan territory. Those Low Clans that have attained power in a region guard it jealously, and are no more likely to accept another Low Clan prince in their domain than they would welcome a High Clan invader.

Regions dominated by the fallen are very often out of the way, distant from Western centers of civilization, and often environmentally hostile. The Hungarian territories now controlled by the Tremere, for instance, are tactically valuable due to their proximity to Tzimisce lands, but aren't particularly worthwhile to Cainites for any other reason. The High Clans would love to have them, but find them far less of a priority than other regions further west. Despite Outremer's religious significance, many first cursed (although obviously not all of them) are all too happy to leave it to its Saracen inhabitants. The Low Clans have learned that the easiest regions to control

are those that the High Clans simply don't feel are worth fighting for. Of course, the first cursed will fight anyway, purely out of principle, but at least they'll devote less effort to the struggle. Hostile climes are particularly attractive to Gangrel and other nomadic fallen, since even if the High Clans dominate the local communities, plenty of wilderness exists in which to escape their grasp.

When in parts of Europe in which the High Clans are dominant — that is, most of them — the Low Clans are still drawn to power when the circumstances are favorable. Domains in the grip of chaos or unrest are often ripe for the plucking. If the High Clan Cainites of the region are distracted, they may be unable to stop one of the fallen from assuming control. (The fact that Mithras was distracted by events elsewhere, for instance, allowed the Nosferatu Joseph Zvi to become prince of Prague. See p. 70.)

Most frequently, however, a fallen Cainite will acquire some measure of authority — although it's rarely formal — in a portion of a domain in which the High Clan prince or elders have little interest. Many of the poorest neighborhoods of a High-Clan-dominated city are actually claimed by Setites or Nosferatu, who run the area almost like an independent fief. Some Low Clans — particularly the Tremere, who are trying to insinuate themselves into the High Clans, and the Followers of Set, who want to be closer to the first cursed in order to learn their needs — make efforts to involve themselves in areas and institutions in which the High Clans are active but have not attained total dominance. The Setites, for instance, are attempting to increase their involvement in the Catholic Church, despite the presence of the Lasombra and other High Clan Cainites. The Serpents use this position not only to get close to those Lasombra, but also to sup on the blood of many kine who come to pray.

In fact, where the first cursed often compete with one another for status by making their domains as rich or impressive as they can, some of the fallen who have attained some measure of control — over an entire domain, or just over a small portion of a city — have been known to deliberately make conditions worse. If the kine in the area are poor or sick, if no money is to be gained through an area's commerce, if a region has nothing to recommend it, the High Clans are much less likely to develop any interest. It's a fine line to walk, as the Low Clan Cainite doesn't want to render her territory worthless or uninhabitable. Furthermore, if she makes the other regional Cainites too angry with her leadership, she's just asking for a coup from within. Still, when exercised in moderation, such tactics are

quite effective in turning aside the interests of the High Clan lords.

So if the Low Clans focus largely on areas or institutions the High Clans don't want, and only make serious bids for power elsewhere when the first cursed are too distracted to stop them, surely it's no wonder they claim so few domains of any real worth? Indeed, had the Long Night continued indefinitely, the Low Clans might never have risen above their position as the dregs of Cainite society.

The War of the Princes, for all its violence and bloodshed, is a blessing in disguise for the fallen. As lords fall, more opportunities arise than ever before. Many of the High Clans, their pride stung by defeat, give up their interests in regions they have been unable to conquer — at least temporarily. And the war provides a sizable distraction indeed for the Ventrue, the Tzimisce and the rest, allowing Assamites, Nosferatu and Tremere to act while their backs are turned.

What follows is a discussion, broken out by region, of those areas where the Low Clans dominate, or at least have sufficient presence that they cannot be discounted. These entries are, of necessity, somewhat brief. Players who seek more information are directed towards **Dark Ages Europe** and **Iberia By Night**.

The British Isles

Largely a haven for the Ventrue, Britain is, for the most part, not a friendly place for the Low Clans. Prince Mithras of London is the archetypal Ventrue, a paragon of his clan. Where he and his brethren do not rule, the Toreador largely hold sway.

Still, the Low Clans do have a presence in the British Isles, and a few have even managed to make a name for themselves.

The Malkavian Seren is Baroness of Gloucester, and one of the few fallen ever to obtain a position in the Court of Avalon. Unfortunately, what could have been an opportunity for the Low Clans to rise in prominence has been quite thoroughly quashed by Mithras's paranoia and Seren's own madness. Her burning distrust of all outsiders, and many of her own subjects, renders her largely blind to the High and Low Clan divide; she fears all foreign Cainites equally, treating the fallen and the first cursed the same. Given her blood oath to Mithras himself, Seren might as well be one of the Ventrue, for all the good she does her Low Clan brethren.

Scotland is home to a small population of Gangrel, those who moved into the Highland forests after the Picts — and their Lupine cousins — were driven out.

They have precious little influence in the cities, however, and the region can be said to be friendly to the Low Clans only to the extent that the fallen dwelling in the wilderness — mostly but not entirely Gangrel — aren't *specifically* singled out by the local lords.

England itself, the domain of Mithras, is solidly under High Clan rule. The poor cities and villages contain numerous Nosferatu and Malkavians, the woods are home to Gangrel, Ravnos may pass through on occasion and the Tremere are slowly wheedling their way into the Ventrue's good graces; but they're all looked down upon, dismissed as pests or peasants, by those in power.

In this culture of oppression, only a very rare few fallen have obtained even the tiniest scrap of power. One of those few is Genevieve of London, or Ragged Jenny. From her havens near London's docks, in old walled-up cellars and forgotten rooms, the Promethean Nosferatu schools both mortal and Cainite thieves. Her influence in the underworld and the black markets extends across the British Isles and deep into Europe. Mithras and the Barons of Avalon know of her existence, but as yet remain ignorant of the extent of her power. In recent nights, Jenny has seen how even the mightiest lords are laid low by the War of the Princes. Slowly, she and her servants are starting to consider expanding her "criminal empire" into the realm of politics. She has no interest in being prince, for that, in her mind, merely makes her a target. "Kingmaker," however, is a title that has begun to appeal...

France

If the British Isles are unfriendly to the Low Clans, France, the epitome of noble privilege and debauchery, is downright hostile. Nowhere in France does a Low Clan Cainite hold a title or position worth speaking of, and any who reach too high draw the ire of an entire nation of vampiric nobles.

The Low Clans are far from absent in France, even if they're rarely allowed inside the finer establishments. In Auvergne, Gangrel occupy many of the wooded areas that are as yet untamed by the hand of man. In Paris, beneath the Île de la Cité, a population of Nosferatu spy on the comings and goings of the City of Lights. They are only too happy to trade what they know to the Ventrue and Toreador, and in fact obtain some perverse pleasure from the High Clan Cainites' obvious disgust when they must meet with the Lepers. To date, the Nosferatu haven't managed to parlay their information into any true authority, but they are, at least, allowed to remain where they are, largely untroubled by the first cursed. These Nosferatu are

also not above using their information to manipulate Prince Geoffrey's actions, but they attempt this only on very rare occasions, for fear of drawing his wrath if their machinations are ever discovered. Geoffrey, the other Ventrue and the Toreador are unaware that the Nosferatu population in Paris is growing, and is in fact already far larger than any of the first cursed suspect. The High Clans might be surprised, should open conflict ever erupt, to learn who really controls the streets of Paris.

Tremere wizards circulate amongst the courts, invited in not as equals but as curiosities, something between advisors and court magicians. It's a humiliating state of affairs, but a foothold in France is too valuable a prize to be passed up. The Usurpers grit their teeth and bear the indignity, letting loose with screams of rage and foul obscenities only in the privacy of their own havens.

Germany and its Surroundings

Germany is, at this time, a part of the Holy Roman Empire, although King Henry VII is even now planning his eventual revolt against his father Frederick II, the Holy Roman Emperor. Although known far and wide as a Ventrue stronghold (the home of Hardestadt the Elder and Lord Jürgen among many others), the Warlords are in fact deeply divided and conflicted. Lasombra and Brujah claim more power in Germany than the Ventrue care to admit — but even worse, in their eyes, is the growing power of the Low Clans in "their" territories.

To date, the Gangrel have made little effort to acquiring any real power, although they have become relatively numerous in those areas of Germany's wilderness that are not too heavily populated by Lupines. The Nosferatu exist in surprising numbers as well, dwelling largely within leper colonies and other areas shunned by Cainite and kine alike. Germany even claims a single Malkavian prince: Midian of Hamburg. Unfortunately, as Hamburg's fortunes dwindled, Midian himself entered a state of despondency and despair, which led to an outbreak of madness severe even for one of his clan. The prince now speaks to invisible courtiers and engages in all manner of atrocities against both the living and undead residents of his domain. To date, few outsiders have learned of these horrors, due to the efforts of Lucius and Penelope, two Cainites who seek to either manipulate or study Midian for their own ends. The Cappadocian Penelope is actively trying to entice more Malkavians to migrate

to Hamburg by making it a friendlier place for the Low Clans, as best she can without Midian becoming aware of her activities. This is not altruism on her part, of course. She simply wishes to provide additional cover for Midian's own madness by providing other potential suspects.

Greatest of all the Low Clans in Germany are the Tremere. Lotharius, Prince of Vienna, holds that city tightly in his grip, his authority only enhanced by the presence of Etrius of the Council of Seven and — if rumor is to be believed — the torpid body of Tremere himself. Ostensibly, the Ventrue allow the Tremere this domain in exchange for their support in various endeavors (such as Lord Jürgen's recent attempt to conquer Hungary). In truth, however, the Usurpers are so thoroughly entrenched in Vienna now that the Ventrue couldn't afford the effort it would require to remove them.

Prague

Although not part of Germany, Prague is tightly tied with that land and was, until relatively recently, claimed by a Ventrue who was an ally to Hardestadt and a vassal of Mithras of England. Currently, the prince is Joseph Zvi, a Nosferatu who has dwelt in Prague for countless years and who slew the former prince in self-defense. Because Zvi is Nosferatu and yet remains largely unchallenged by the surrounding Ventrue, Prague has developed a reputation as a haven for the Low Clans in general, and the Lepers in particular. The fallen population has increased dramatically — a fact that fills Zvi with dread, for he fears that newcomers of his own clan might learn that he is, in fact, in thrall to the Tzimisce elder Shaagra. To better protect his shameful secret, Zvi is instituting policies not unlike those of the Ventrue themselves, persecuting and mistreating the Nosferatu and other fallen, and hoping to drive them out. Many of the local Nosferatu, led by the vocal Clara Holtz, consider Joseph Zvi a traitor and plot even now to replace him with one of their own. After all, they reason, the High Clans can't tell one Nosferatu from another anyway.

Iberia

Few regions boast so mixed a population of high-ranking Cainites as Iberia. The religious conflict of the *Reconquista*, Christianity's attempt to oust Islam, provides both impetus and cover for a variety of vampiric struggles as well. Iberia is one of the few regions where High Clan princes are not the overwhelming majority, and for every Lasombra or Ventrue lord one can also find

an Assamite sultan. In Iberia, however, clan conflict is normally submerged by religious conflict, and Assamite and Lasombra Ashirra are more likely to cooperate against Christian Brujah and Ventrue than they are to struggle with one another.

The Assamites are, however, the only Low Clan blessed with unusually high status and respect in the region. Setites find it worth their while to avoid Iberia when possible, as neither of the warring factions has any love of the Serpents. Similarly, the Tremere have but a few agents in Ventrue and Toreador courts, and have largely found Iberia too dangerous to their kind to be worth any substantial effort. Gangrel and Ravnos are, however, present in great numbers. As neither clan is particularly involved in the *Reconquista* on either side, and as neither shows much interest in establishing their own domains amongst the kine, the constant struggles of the other clans provide them plenty of opportunity to go where they wish and to do as they will.

Some of the *taifas* — independent Muslim states or cities — boast populations of Nosferatu and Malkavians, most of whom make an effort to avoid the attentions of the Assamite and Lasombra princes. Many look up to Roque, the unusually stable Malkavian Prince of Pamplona. Oddly enough, many Malkavians, who rarely do anything as a cohesive group, and many Nosferatu, who often ignore any issues not directly related to their survival, are actively engaged in a guerilla war against the Toreador and other Cainites who would tighten ties between France and the nation of Navarre. The Nosferatu elder Ezkerra appears to be the motivating force behind this covert revolution. In recent nights, however, several Malkavians who had made claims that the elder is merely the puppet of some greater master have disappeared. Obviously, nobody really believes the Madmen, but a few Nosferatu have taken the disappearances seriously enough to begin a secret investigation of their revered elder.

For more on the region, see **Iberia by Night**.

Italy

Unlike Iberia, Italy's military troubles are largely secular, with the states of the Lombard League bracing to ward off Frederick II's inevitable invasion. Pope Gregory IX watches as well, for if the Lombard League falls, the Papacy itself may be the Holy Roman Emperor's next objective.

The Cainites, of course, vie for influence over Italy's rich merchant cities, siding with either the

Guelphs or the Ghibellines, two rival factions of Italian government and society.

Despite the dangers of Rome itself (which, although it is no longer the seat of the Papacy, is home to numerous holy places that can prove fatal to Cainites), the city claims the largest Low Clan population in Italy. The catacombs beneath the city are home to two factions of Nosferatu and one faction of Cappadocians, all engaged in a three-way war. So far this struggle has prevented any single claimant from gathering enough support to pronounce himself prince of Rome. A Nosferatu ghoul named Cato who hires himself out to foreign Cainites as guide and advisor on the politics of the city has recently discovered that a small faction of Tremere have made their havens on the edge of town. He believes they are encouraging the hostility between these warring factions, in the hopes of using the distraction to plunder Rome's many stores of ancient and eldritch knowledge.

Beyond the Nosferatu and Tremere, the two most populous Low Clans are the Gangrel and the Followers of Set. The Animals are most common to the islands of Corsica and Sardinia, where they fight to keep other clans from acquiring too firm a foothold (when they aren't too busy surviving the local Lupine population). The Serpents, rather than attempting to insinuate themselves into any particular city-state, have chosen to develop contacts and influence within Italy's growing merchant guilds. Because many elder Cainites refuse to see the potential power of these organizations — which can, when pressed, cause worker shortages, slow or halt commerce and trade and put tremendous pressure on city and state governments — the Setites believe their true opposition consists only of Italy's younger Cainites, most of whom lack the resources to truly hinder the Serpents.

Hungary and the Slavic East

Until relatively recently, at least as Cainites measure such things, the Slavic East was unquestioningly dominated by the Tzimisce. This land belonged to the Fiends, and none doubted that any other clan to come to prominence here did so at their sufferance.

No longer. Although the Tzimisce still hold the greater part of the region, the Tremere have claimed an enormous portion of the Fiends' territories. From their chantry of Ceoris in the Carpathian Mountains, and from uncountable other chantries and village domains as well, the Usurpers have made much of Hungary and its neighboring states their own. With the possible exception of Assamite territories in

Outremer, the Tremere's Eastern European holdings represent the single largest agglomeration of domains controlled by a single Low Clan. Over the course of the past decades, the Tremere have achieved sufficient gains against their Tzimisce enemies not only to expand their territories, but also to begin strengthening their ties with other clans, such as with the assistance they offered Lord Jürgen during his failed attempt to conquer Hungary. Even tonight, the Tremere walk a fine line, staging meticulously planned attacks on both Jürgen and the Tzimisce Vladimir Rustovich. So long as the Usurpers can maintain the deception that each side is responsible for the assaults on the other, they can keep Ventrue pressure on the Tzimisce without undue risk to themselves.

Of course, the Tremere are not the only Low Clan presence in Hungary. They may not even be the most numerous. In the wooded countryside and in many of the isolated villages, the Gangrel hunt. Many of these Gangrel serve Tzimisce lords, either as a means of acquiring what status and power they can, or simply to stand with allies against their common Usurper foes. The Gangrel are common in Rus as well, where they often run in packs with Feral Nosferatu. The Nosferatu are also commonly found in most of the cities of Eastern Europe, dwelling in the squalor of the poor parts of town. Those dwelling in Buda-Pest lie low, avoiding the city's Ventrue nobles, but those in Eztergom (who tend to be relatively pious) are engaged in covert opposition to the Ventrue Geza Arpad, self-proclaimed "Archbishop."

Finally, Eastern Europe boasts a relatively large population of Ravnos. Although the gypsy cultures have not reached Europe in great numbers yet, many of the Ravnos have preceded them to the region. Due to their disdain for Cainite society and their nomadic existence, no it is difficult to determine the precise number of Ravnos in the area. It's entirely possible that they outnumber all other clans save the Tzimisce. For all their numbers, however, few Ravnos have any real authority here, save those who are willing (or forced) to serve Tzimisce or Ventrue lords.

Scandinavia and the Baltic

Most of the actual princes of Scandinavia may be of Ventrue stock, but it is the Gangrel who are the true nobility of the region. For a time, the Gangrel and other regional Cainites coexisted in peace under the Treaty of Arkona; but now, years after the treaty was shattered, the Gangrel find themselves slowly backed into a corner. Their dominion is fading, as the coming of the Church — and the Ventrue and Lasombra with

it — pushes aside the old ways to which the Animals still cling; but the High Clans have not won this victory yet. Some of the greatest of the Gangrel, such as Werter (prince in all but name of Uppsala in Sweden) and the Prussian Tangae, yet hold the line as best they might against the encroaching foreigners. Werter, like so many of his local brethren, worships Odin and the old gods, and considers his defense of his homeland a divine duty. Unfortunately, because he must divide his attentions between the encroaching enemy and the Lupines of Norway, he knows that his nights are almost certainly numbered.

Although Nosferatu are few in Scandinavia, one called Absalon (after his mortal pawn, the archbishop of the same name) once held considerable power in Denmark. After the death of the mortal Archbishop Absalon, however, the Nosferatu who had been his secret master lost much of his power. To date, he has made no obvious attempts to regain his lost glories, although he is still suspected in the murder of the Ventrue Prince Frederick of Copenhagen, who came to power after Absalon's own fortunes began to wane. The Nosferatu are also somewhat prevalent in Lithuania, but otherwise are uncommon in the region.

The only other Low Clan to exist in Scandinavia in any numbers are the Malkavians, who — for absolutely no reason any other Cainite has yet been able to fathom — seem drawn to Sweden. The country isn't precisely swarming with Madmen, but the fact that they exist there in any concentration at all, when they're largely unknown elsewhere in the region, is sufficient to draw attention. So far, no one has been able to determine why the Malkavians are there, assuming it's not just some stupendous coincidence — or yet more evidence of the shared madness of the clan.

The Byzantine Successor States

As the successors of ancient Rome (in their own minds, at least), the Cainites and kine of Byzantium looked down upon the rest of the world from the lofty heights of cultural superiority. Most Cainites of the Empire, and certainly within Constantinople itself, were wrapped up in the Toreador Michael's Dream of a new Roman Empire. When the so-called Patriarch was slain in the sack of Constantinople during the Fourth Crusade, many of the region's Cainites found themselves purposeless, floundering. The Fourth Crusade also spelled the end of the Byzantine Empire as well, for the Latin Empire founded by the Crusaders has been proved unable to stand against its many

enemies, and has now shrunk to just another of the many states that once formed Byzantium.

Due to lingering cultural elitism amongst the Cainites, and the fact that Rome and then Byzantium were always dominated by the first cursed, the Low Clans hold very little power in these states now. In the city of Sinope, once part of the Empire of Trebizond until the city was conquered by the Seljuk Turks, the Cainites recognize the Malkavian seer Razmik as prince. Currently he is in torpor, the result of another prophetic trance. His childe Shavarash rules in his name, and all the Cainites of Sinope wait with mounting dread, wondering what awful prophecy Razmik will deliver when he awakens. Because one of their own is prince, a number of Madmen make their homes in Sinope as well, although they still make up a small portion of the population.

In Constantinople, Nosferatu and Gangrel are returning to what was once the greatest of all cities. Both these clans played an important role in Michael's Dream, and many cooperate with one another now in hopes of healing the new rifts and rivalries among the region's Cainites. Led by several powerful Cainites, most prominently the Latin Gangrel Thomas Feroux, they seek to reunite the Cainites of Constantinople and all of Byzantium. Some have even joined the growing numbers of the Michaelites, a cult devoted to the worship of the fallen Patriarch.

Unknown even to the normally well informed Nosferatu, a Setite elder and his childer make their havens in Constantinople as well, having arrived from elsewhere only within the past months. This Serpent, one Yavo Abdelahi, has joined the Michaelites in the guise of a North African Toreador. He has no loyalty to the memory of Michael; rather, he hopes to work his way into the upper echelons of the cult. If these Cainites want a vampire god to worship, he'll be more than happy to give them one. Set, after all, hardly cares what name he is called by...

Outremer

The Holy Land is a place of constant conflict, for Cainites as well as kine. Although Jerusalem and many of the major cities are in Christian hands, the Christians squabble amongst themselves, the primary split being between those loyal to Emperor Frederick II and those who resent his rule. Combine this with the tensions between Christians and Muslims, and the entirety of Outremer threatens to spill over at a moment's notice into all-out bloody war. To date, the only factor preventing open Cainite conflict is the

treaty known as the Diet of Olives, which prohibits most of the major Cainite factions of the region from overt conflict (although the hidden struggles for which the Cainites are known continue). The Diet also binds the Cainites in a mutual defense of the Holy Land from those who would plunder its treasures; this category includes, among others, the Tremere. The Usurpers seethe and vow revenge on the Salubri who pioneered the Diet, but have yet found no means of bypassing it to attain a foothold in Outremer.

The Assamites are, by far, the most powerful Low Clan of the region, although even they are split along religious lines. The Christian Assamite Ahmed ibn Zayyat is Prince of Tripoli and, through his childe and vassal Zakariah, holds dominion over Antioch as well. Although most of the other major cities of Outremer are in Ventrue or Lasombra hands, the Assamites claim an enormous number of sultans and princes throughout the region's smaller communities, and some strive actively to expand that influence and take back the land stolen by the Crusaders. Unfortunately, the Assamites are unable to devote their full attentions to such efforts, as much of their energies are spent in aiding their Egyptian clansmen in their ongoing war with the Followers of Set for control of that ancient land.

Shahnazar, an ancient Malkavian, holds substantial influence in Jerusalem. Although he is not that city's prince, he is honored by most who dwell there as few elders — and certainly few Madmen — are honored. He cannot order the local Cainites to action, but a few whispered words are usually sufficient to start them moving as he desires. The city itself is home to many more Malkavians, some of whom claim that Malkav himself rests nearby. To date, no sane Cainites have located any evidence to support this notion, and it's widely considered to be just another Malkavian delusion.

Perhaps most surprisingly, Outremer claims one of the few Ravnos princes outside of India. Etienne de Faubergé, vassal to the Ventrue Lord Jürgen, rules as Prince of Acre. For most of his reign, Etienne couldn't even enter his domain; a fragment of the True Cross held all Cainites outside Acre. With the removal of the fragment, the Charlatan prince has moved his court into Acre proper, and his recent activities indicate that he intends to involve himself far more thoroughly throughout the Holy Land than he has to date. Etienne was a devout Christian already; his experience with the True Cross seems to have sparked a fascination with all matters religious. He is preparing for the right moment to cut all ties with Jürgen's court at Magdeburg, and will likely do so as soon as he finds

another ally — preferably a local who is more easily manipulated than Jürgen — to protect him against the wrath of his sire, Varsik (see p. 52).

Finally, it's worth noting that the Tremere have not given up on acquiring their own power in the Holy Land, and are currently engaged in secret discussions with a faction of Egyptian Setites who they believe may be able to help them establish a foothold either in Outremer, or at least northern Africa. To date, these discussions have not progressed particularly far. This is partially because neither the Usurpers nor the Serpents enjoy entering into an agreement in which they don't have the obvious upper hand, but also because the Setites demand as their price Tremere assistance in their war against the Assamites in Egypt — assistance which the Tremere are understandably reluctant to offer. Still, the talks haven't yet broken down completely, and a Tremere/Setite alliance in Egypt, and then Outremer, remains a distinct if unlikely possibility.

Traditions and Perversions

The Low Clans, like all Cainites and the mortal stock from which they hail, are bound by webs of tradition, belief, superstition and custom that define many aspects of their nightly existence. Most of these traditions spring from the beliefs the Cainites held during their mortal lives — but they have changed, twisted, warped when practiced by the unliving. As the curse of Caine alters all those who suffer it, so too does Cainite nature corrupt even the beliefs and practices of the world.

Assamites

As might well be expected, the vast majority of customs the Saracens have adopted — and perverted — are those traditions and practices common to the faith of Islam. Unlike many of the other clans, who have deliberately twisted or corrupted mortal customs, many of the changes the Assamites have wrought to the practices of Islam evolved due to the practitioners' Cainite natures, and are not intended to be disrespectful. That said, some Assamites — a minority, perhaps, but still enough to warrant discussion — do indeed pervert these traditions deliberately, either as a sign of contempt for the mortals who practice them or as a warped tribute to Allah. After all, if God created Cainites as unnatural mockeries of

mankind, surely they must be expected to conduct themselves in unnatural mockeries of proper behavior.

It's worth noting that these traditions are relatively common even amongst those Assamites who aren't Muslim. These practices began as religious observations, but the Assamites have adopted them so utterly that they're now as much clan tradition as they are religious practice. That said, those Saracens who are Muslim are less likely to *deliberately* corrupt the customs' intent.

The Five Pillars of Islam

The Muslim faith requires much of its followers, but its most vital practices are these five obligations, the so-called pillars. The Assamites have altered and twisted some more than others, but none have been left completely untainted.

Shahada

Shahada literally refers to the act of bearing witness, and consists of two statements: "I bear witness that there is no God but Allah," and "I bear witness that Muhammad is the Messenger of Allah."

Few Assamites would argue the first precept, but they often differ from mortal Muslims in their interpretation of the second. For proper Islam, the second statement means not only that Muhammad was a prophet, but that his interpretation of Islam, as expressed in the *sunna*, the book of Muhammad's words and deeds, is the only true interpretation. Many Assamites, while acknowledging that Muhammad was the greatest of God's prophets, argue that he cannot be the last, as proper Islam maintains. After all, the Qur'an makes no mention of Cainites, yet they obviously exist. Therefore, any religion based solely on the Qur'an cannot yet be complete. Some Assamites even maintain that Allah's final word must come from a Cainite, as they are clearly more powerful than mortals, and therefore God's favored.

The belief that God's final word has not yet been spoken does not, in and of itself, alter the Assamites' behavior, but it does open the door for further deviations from Islam and Islamic tradition.

Prayer

Muslims are required to pray five times per day, at specific intervals. This, obviously, is a practice in which Assamites cannot participate. Most Muslim Assamites simply pray five times each night instead. Surely Allah will excuse this deviation, since it was He who made them unable to bear the sun's gaze in the first place.

Others employ (or enslave) mortals to assist them. Some Assamites instruct their thralls to awaken them during the day, so that they might pray. This arrange-

ment rarely lasts long, as awakening a vampire during the day is both difficult and dangerous. Most Saracens who keep ghouls for this purpose instead force their servants to pray for them, offering their devotion by proxy.

The ritual bathing of hands, face, arms, head and feet that is required before prayer is also interpreted differently by some Assamites. Most wash with water, as the kine do, but some insist on bathing in blood. They believe that using the blood for so holy a purpose, rather than consuming it, shows their devotion to God's will. The kine from whom they take that blood, and who often wind up as sustenance after the fact, might not agree.

Almsgiving

Islam requires the giving of charity to the poor, and the Assamites are only too happy to practice it. While some give as would any mortal, offering a percentage of their income to hungry kine, others take a more Cainite-centric approach. More than one Cainite dwelling in the poorer neighborhoods and villages of Outremer has returned to her haven after a fruitless night of hunting, only to find a partially drained (but still nutritious) kine lying on their doorstep.

Fasting

During the month of Ramadan, Muslims are prohibited from eating or drinking during the day, although they may do so at night. Clearly, fasting during the day is meaningless for an Assamite, and they can hardly go an entire month without feeding at night. Some Assamites ignore this tenet entirely, but others follow as best they can, feeding only as often as is absolutely necessary to stave off torpor. This renders them far more susceptible to frenzy, of course, often resulting in a rise in violence in certain regions of Outremer during Ramadan.

Some rare Assamites choose to prove their devotion through physical discomfort of a different sort. Rather than avoiding food, as mortals do, they force themselves to consume a bit of solid food every night for a month, despite the physical pain and sickness it causes.

Hajj

The *hajj* is the pilgrimage to Mecca that all capable Muslims are required to make at least once in their lifetimes. This is perhaps the only one of the five pillars that remains largely unchanged by the Assamites; while Mecca is a holy place, it is not unapproachable. Of course, Assamites cannot fulfill the third step of the *hajj* — standing at the plain of Arafat outside Mecca during the afternoon and

listening to a sermon — but nothing prevents them from at least making the trip itself. Surprisingly few Assamites, even devout ones, actually make this pilgrimage, however. "Once in their lifetime" means something vastly different to a creature that will never die, and the Assamites often put the pilgrimage off indefinitely, on the assumption that they'll always have a chance to do it later.

The final step of the *hajj* involves throwing stones at three pillars where Ishmael supposedly resisted Satan's temptations and drove him off. Some Muslims even sacrifice a sheep or a goat, in commemoration of Abraham's willingness to sacrifice his son Isaac. Some more vicious Assamites sacrifice kine, or even other Cainites, in joint tribute to Abraham and Caine himself.

Other Practices

Islam has plenty of traditions beyond the five pillars, and all of them have been perverted by some Assamite somewhere.

The Feast of Fast-Breaking

At the close of Ramadan, Muslims hold a celebratory feast with family and friends, and sweets for the children.

For many Assamites, the Feast of Fast-Breaking is their once-a-year opportunity to slough off the discipline required to stave off the Beast and to give in to their basest, most primal urges. They feed to excess, often critically injuring or slaying their vessels even when they've no need to do so. These blood revels are restricted largely to small villages, or at least poor neighborhoods, so as not to alarm any kine of importance or influence.

Not all Assamites participate in this "feast," and some look down on those who do, but the tradition persists.

The Feast of Sacrifice

Another major Muslim holiday, the Feast of Sacrifice falls on the tenth day of the month of the *hajj*, and often involves the sacrifice of a herd animal. In most cases, a small portion of the sacrifice is consumed by the family, while the rest is given to the poor.

As is the case during the *hajj* itself, some Assamites sacrifice two-legged prey in place of a sheep or goat. Some few truly depraved amongst the clan take the practice one step further, butchering the corpse and offering its meat — unidentified, of course — to poor mortals in the area. Most of the Saracens view this practice with no small amount of horror and make

efforts to stamp it out, but they have never been completely successful.

Mercy

Although such details are often forgotten in these nights of war and crusade, the Qur'an urges Muslims to practice the quality of mercy, and not yield themselves to revenge.

Some Assamites, already considering themselves above many of the laws that apply to mortals, have made themselves the instruments of that vengeance which Muslims are supposed to eschew. They choose as their prey those kine who have wronged others and never paid for their crimes.

This does *not* mean that these Assamites serve their domains as some sort of police force. The Cainites at issue pursue vengeance, not justice, and they'll often react violently to slight — or even merely imagined — wrongs.

The Right Hand

In much of Arabic culture, the left hand is considered unclean, and most everyday tasks — such as eating or writing — are to be conducted using the right only. Many Assamites, who were raised with this belief, follow it religiously, even refusing to lay their left hand on their prey. Conversely, some Assamites, particularly those who revel in their unnatural state, make a practice of subverting this particular tradition, utilizing their left hand for every imaginable task. They do this partially to show their contempt for the kine, but also as a reminder that they themselves are unnatural — and therefore, by interpretation, unclean.

Followers of Set

When it comes to custom and tradition, the Serpents are no less a conundrum than they are in all other respects. On the one hand, they treat many of their practices — particularly those devoted specifically to Set and those that have come to them from the nights of ancient Egypt — with the utmost reverence. On the other, they very deliberately adopt and then pervert the mortal traditions they see practiced around them. They are, perhaps, simply mocking the kine, the other Cainites and the God they worship. Then again, the warping of modern practices, religious and secular both, may well be just way of paying tribute to their dark god...

The Legacy of Egypt

Many of the Setites' customs hearken back to a culture long dead. The Serpents maintain many of

Egypt's (and therefore Set's) ways, even though the mortals of that land have long since forgotten them and moved on to other traditions.

Embalming and Mummification

The Egyptians believed in preserving the body for its use in the next life. Many Setites — most because they have learned these traditions from their clanmates, but some few because they actually lived during the time of the pharaohs — still believe that another life awaits them. They are made undead to serve Set in this world, but eventually they will stand beside him in the next.

Unfortunately, given the rapid crumbling of a vampire's body after Final Death, mummification is rarely possible. As such, some of the most devoted Setites have themselves partially mummified while still unliving. Most of their unnecessary organs — liver, kidneys and the like — are removed and placed in canopic jars. Those Setites with the power to remove their hearts often do so at this time as well. Furthermore, these Setites spend many days in a bath of natron, spices and herbs, drying out in the fashion of a true mummy. Obviously, the visible effects of this dehydration fade once the Setite has fed and healed the damage dehydration causes. Still, they believe that these two acts serve at least as a spiritual gesture to Set, even if they do not produce a true mummified body. Setites who undergo this ritual keep their disembodied organs hidden, for fear that they might provide sorcerers with a weapon against them.

Some few fanatics among these Setites mummify not only themselves, but some of their victims and defeated enemies as well, as servants who must await them in the next life.

Home and Temple

In ancient Egypt, most prayer was conducted at altars in the home, as the temples rarely offered regular services for the masses. It is for precisely this reason that Setites prefer to gather and pray in a central temple or shrine, although most have altars in their havens as well. By inverting the traditional method of prayer, they show their contempt for both the other gods of Egypt and for the land's common folk who refused to recognize the glory of Set.

Grave Goods

Pharaohs and other Egyptian nobles were entombed with wealth, goods, even animals and slaves so that they would have access to them in the next world. Some Setites have twisted this ancient belief into a tradition of acquisitiveness and greed. While most Serpents desire wealth and property in order to

make use of them, some hoard riches and goods purely for the sake of having them. These Setites particularly appreciate goods acquired from the dead, stolen from the crypts of kings and nobles. They feel that the theft of such wealth prevents the soul from resting in the afterlife, and therefore diminishes the power of whatever gods the deceased worshiped.

Caste Advancement

This is less a custom and more a fact of ancient Egyptian life the Setites use to their own advantage. In Egypt, the castes were not considered rigid. A member of the lower caste could marry or earn his way into the middle, the middle into the high. Medieval Setites use the example of ancient Egypt when attempting to suborn or otherwise tempt serfs and peasants. Surely if the Egyptians were enlightened enough to allow for advancement in society, they claim, tonight's kings, princes and sultans should do the same. It provides, if nothing else, a starting point for the Serpents to begin their slow temptation of Europe's lower classes.

Modern Practices

While many Setite practices from the days of Egypt naturally evolved into their current forms over the years, the clan's perversions of medieval customs are quite deliberate. All customs, religious and secular, are subject to the whims of the Setites, twisted and warped to show how flawed mortal society truly is, and to lessen the glory of all gods but Set.

Christmas and Easter

Some religious Setites make a practice of tearing down the precepts of Christianity as a matter of course. Others work to shatter the faith of those whom they would twist to their own purposes, for they know that religion is often the greatest barrier to temptation. For either reason, many of the Serpents have made some drastic changes to the meanings and practices of these two greatest Christian holidays.

On multiple occasions during the Middle Ages, certain officials in the Church actually attempted to ban the observance of Christmas, in part because so many of the commoners celebrated with drunken revels. The Setites, of course, encourage such practices. Many of them arrange celebrations so that those who become truly inebriated can then be exposed to extreme temptation. Adultery, rape, murder — all these and more are the hoped-for results of a Setite Christmas revel. At worst, this provides the Serpent with potential blackmail material. At best, the victim's contrition and horror over what he's done — particularly when celebrating in God's name — deals a devastating blow to his faith.



The celebration of Easter is far simpler. Setites who are willing to expose their Cainite nature to a potential mortal cat's-paw often choose the anniversary of Christ's resurrection to do so. The parallel between the rising of Jesus and the Embrace is an obvious one, and the mere revelation that such horrors exist — along with the very idea that the resurrection of Christ could be viewed as just such an occurrence — is often sufficient to shatter the faith of even the most devout believer.

Apprenticing and Education

Many cultures of the Middle Ages use the apprenticeship method of education. That is, young boys are given to a master of the craft they will pursue, who educates them in the craft in question (as well as receiving a free long-term servant out of the deal). The Followers of Set adopted this system of training for their own purposes. They're often isolated, hated by all but their own clanmates — and sometimes even by them. Yet they must obtain sufficient skills and abilities not only to survive and to thrive, but to have something to offer other local Cainites in exchange for power, wealth or simply boons.

When a Setite speaks of "apprenticing" her childe, she refers to the practice of finding a mortal skilled in the relevant craft or knowledge, and then forcing them to devote all their attentions to training the childe. The force applied varies, from blood oaths to blackmail to delivery of taboo desires. Those mortal "masters" who are lucky are returned to their lives at that point, if for no other reason than they might prove useful again in the future, but some wind up as the meal to celebrate the end of the apprentice's training.

On a related topic, academic, historical and literary education is normally reserved for the nobility and the clergy. Most peasants cannot read, or at least have only a basic understanding of letters.

It seems surprising at first that the Followers of Set are proponents of an educated and literate populace, and often make a point of teaching the kine in their area their letters and history. Some truly religious Setites believe that all kine must be educated, if they are to reach their full potential as Set teaches, without the strictures and restrictions of other gods. Most Serpents, however, have far less altruistic reasons for their assistance. An educated peasant is often far more easily tempted; he is far more conscious of the gap between his own state and that of the wealthy and well-to-do, and he understands that the feudal system is far from the only viable means of government. Too, any commoner who learns of history and world events from a Setite likely has no other source of knowledge for comparison. This allows the

Setite to alter facts and history however he chooses, thus shaping the mortal's entire outlook and encouraging him to behave in a manner most befitting the Cainite's own purposes.

Census and Records

A substantial number of European lords employ agents to make detailed records of all the properties, livestock, homesteads and so forth in their domains. The first to do so was William the Conqueror, who kept such records in his Domesday Book.

Some Setites who dwell in a given region for any length of time have adopted a similar practice. They keep track not only of the properties owned by the peasants, but by the local lords as well. First, this grants them a fairly good idea of what wants and needs the people have that aren't being met. It also tells them if a given individual, peasant or lord, is holding back tribute from his own liege. Both of these translate into leverage over the individual in question.

A few Serpents also use the information gathered as a means of turning peasants against their lord. By showing them just how much more wealth the lord possesses, the Setites stir up feelings of resentment that, if properly cultivated, can occasionally turn into outright rebellion. (See **Spoils of War** for more information.)

Gangrel

While the Gangrel draw as heavily on mortal culture as other clans, frequently even they don't realize how much they owe to the living. Many of their folkways come from peoples long since extinct. However, there are exceptions. Although the *einherjar* were never very numerous in the clan, for instance, they carried many rich Norse traditions to their clanmates in the far corners of the globe during their nights of glory. Nomads and steppe peoples from the Cimmerians to the Bedouins to the Mongols have also had a strong influence on Gangrel notions of honor, loyalty and hospitality.

Soul-Beasts

In ages long forgotten, say the Gangrel, and in some remote corners of the world even tonight, mortals have believed that the human soul takes the form not of a shade or a globe of light, but of an animal. Usually these soul-beasts remain hidden, appearing only in their owner's dreams. But some mortals have the power to walk abroad in their soul's animal shape while their human body remains asleep or in a trance. Shamans, especially, often possess this skill, and wield it for good or ill as they please.

Accordingly, traditional Gangrel belief holds that the changes that overtake their bodies bit by bit with each frenzy are also part of a spiritual transformation. Gradually the true soul, the beast-soul, becomes manifest. Although to acquire too many of Ennoia's marks too quickly shows a spirit gone rabid, by and large Gangrel who follow the old ways welcome the marks — so long as they come in their proper time, along with the wisdom necessary to bear them honorably. The closer a Gangrel comes to a beast's visage, the nearer he approaches the Nature that shunned him in his first nights as a blood-drinker. To never gain any animal features is a sign of shame and of Ennoia's displeasure. It means that one's Beast, one's very soul, is weak and unworthy. While young Gangrel need not deliberately throw themselves into frenzy-inducing situations, they are expected to take up the opportunity when it crosses their paths. In other words, they're actually supposed to *court* their Beasts — just not too ardently.

To the elders' dismay, the guilt and self-loathing which they associate with the religion of the "White Christ" seem to have taken hold among later generations. Some fledglings will not even speak at Gather anymore for fear of being made to fight for the right to do so, and possibly risk losing control. Of course, this often leads the elders to confront them and force their Beasts into the open regardless, in order to prove that no amount of faith or wishful thinking can tame the untamable. True, it's dangerous both spiritually and literally to provoke the Beasts of those who lack the strength of the *Via Bestiae* to guide them through the experience. But the elders say it's better the young should fall than fail to face their true natures and disgrace their ancestors.

Songs and Kennings

Depending on whom you ask, either the mortal *skald* poets influenced the Nordic Gangrel, or vice versa. Either way, several of the customs they hold in common have now spread throughout the rest of the clan; only the Anda, who seem the most cut off from other branches of the clan, ignore these traditions completely.

One is the custom of song-making. Many Gangrel consider it boorish to boast of a great deed unless one can do it not only in verse, but in the appropriate meter as well. And so when a Gangrel does something he considers worthy of note, he often sits down then and there to create a memorial to it. The ability to compose on the spot, especially with clever alliterations and kennings, is especially prized. Outsider Cainites might be confused and annoyed to hear their

occasional coterie-mate burst into spontaneous verse at the sight of a beautiful moonrise or the start of a new endeavor, but he hardly cares what they think; he's not doing it for their benefit. He's simply practicing for the next occasion when he might need to impress a fellow Gangrel in a hurry.

Those less gifted by the muse can at least take part in the traditional Gather pastime of reciting from memory the ancient poem-songs, named *runos* by Gangrel of Sami (Lapp) descent. The prize goes to the one with the most prodigious repertoire, and sometimes, at great Gathers where many skilled orators are present, additional conditions are imposed — the *runos* must all be on a certain theme, for example, or each one must answer the previous one in some fashion. Although the Sami and Finns originally brought this tradition into the clan, Norse and Bedouin poetic forms are also incorporated into these competitions.

(Although the Toreador have traditionally ignored Gangrel culture, largely because they assume it to be nonexistent, a very few have recently taken a deep and suicidal interest in Gather poetry and now attempt to collect it, even to write it down — which of course goes against the whole point. Such Artisans tend to receive the sort of welcome Gangrel usually reserve for Ravnos.)

Kennings appear not only in Gangrel poetry but also in Gangrel by-names. A kenning is an elliptical, almost riddling reference to a thing or a concept. An example of a simple Anglo-Saxon kenning is the name "Beowulf." Beowulf literally means "bee-wolf," and "wolf" is understood to be symbolic for "thief." Thus "bee-wolf" means "one who steals from the bees," i.e., one who steals honey: a bear. A more complicated Norse kenning is "chariot-Vidur of wondrous-wide ground of Endil." Endil is a sea-king, so his wondrous-wide ground is obviously the sea. A "chariot of the ocean" is a ship. Vidur is an alternate name for Odin, the great god; the great god of a ship is its captain, and so the whole phrase refers to a ship's captain. The traditional form of a kenning is x of y , or y 's x , and they can be nested within each other as in the example above (where the chariot-Vidur kenning is nested within the wondrous-wide-ground-of-Endil kenning).

Kennings among elder Gangrel can become notoriously obscure, containing poetic references not only to far-flung mortal cultures but also to other Gangrel elders and their known exploits and foibles. Gangrel often encode their accomplishments into kenning-names that they recite along

with their other various nicknames upon meeting another Animal for the first time. For the other Gangrel, being able to unravel as many of those kenning-names as possible is a sign not only of cleverness but of extensive experience and travel. Thus, the sorts of opening exchanges that Cainites of other clans find not only incomprehensible but interminable: "Hail, sister; I am called Wamba, son of Goderic, son of Clotild brewer of dwarfs' mead, and also they call me woodsman of Cormac's-cupbreaker's forest, and bard of Diana's bow." "Hail, brother, and well met; your grandsire was indeed a fine weaver of tongue-silk, and I too take the chain-breaker's skin on occasion, but it takes a good many slain Lhiannan to make a forest. As for myself, I am Imilia daughter of Ugo...."

Berserkers

Norse sagas speak of the *ulfheddin*, the "wolf-coats," and the *berserkr*, the "bear-shirts" — but as well as they might fit, the words don't refer to Gangrel (or Lupines, for that matter). The Norse berserker was a powerful but controversial figure in his society. He defended his people fearlessly, striking terror into enemies with his bestial fury and his seeming immunity to ordinary weapons. Some said he could even change completely into a wolf or a bear if the power of Odin was upon him strongly enough. On the other hand, when there were no enemies for him to vent his *wode* upon, he all too often turned on the very folk he theoretically protected. Stories abound of berserkers killing their own shieldmates or kin without realizing it while in the grip of *berserkergang*. At other times they raided villages, or challenged patriarchs to *holmgang* (individual combat), then slew them and seized their womenfolk and lands.

Nowadays, the mortal world has little use for berserkers; it's even passed laws putting a penalty of outlawry on *berserkergang*. But the Gangrel haven't forgotten the beast-warriors of old. They say that the Gangrel's blessing-curse is just like the berserker's, only far more powerful. The battle-rage and the ability to take animal shape are laudable when used properly, but to wield them against any but an enemy is an abomination. When the Beast lashes against out against friends and kin, as it inevitably does, the only option for an honorable monster is exile. To stay when those you love must fear you is the deed of a *nidhingi*, a coward and oath-breaker.

This, many Gangrel claim, is how the clan custom of wandering got started. The ancient shaman-warriors of Ennoia, struggling to master the unnatural

blood-thirst their goddess had cursed them with, sometimes slipped and killed their own tribesmen. And so in grief they fled out into the wild so that their people would know no more danger from them, hoping in time to do penance for their murder. Those who didn't feel they had properly remitted their sins in their own time laid the charge on their descendants. Gangrel sires warn their childer thus: "Yes, it is your great honor to mediate between the worlds of beast and man, but never forget that while you bring each world your gifts, you bring each your curse also, and so you must not linger too long within one or the other."

Some Gangrel claim that when the sagas tell of berserkers they refer not to human shaman-warriors, but to the Lupines and other shapeshifters. Most, however, spit on the ground when they hear such lies. Every *faithful* child of Ennoia knows that the shapeshifters are an atrocity, descended from human tricksters who stole the gift of beast-shape from the people of Ennoia with the aid of evil spirits. The usual account of this holds that old Sekter went down to the river where the shamaness Vaarga bathed, and he lusted after her, and prayed to the Churka-folk that she might be his and he hers forever. The Churka-folk turned him into an alder seed and threw him into the river, where Vaarga accidentally swallowed him. Nine months later she gave birth to a son who became the first werewolf; he began his evil career by devouring his mother. The *einherjar*, however, say that the Lupines they know call themselves "Fenrir" — thus, descendants of the wicked god Loki, Fenris Ulf's father — and that they're perfectly happy to take them at their word.

Malkavians

By now it's already an old saw: The only thing Malkavians really have in common is their madness. Most other lineages of Caine, particularly the High Clans, have some body of traditions they at least pretend to revere, but a fair number of Malkavians don't even acknowledge their clan, much less any claim to a clan culture. What outsiders fail to realize, however, is that the Curse of Malkav is quite a substantial thing to share all by itself.

Soothsaying

Although Methuselaha like to snort that keeping pet Malkavians as court oracles went out of fashion shortly after the fall of Carthage, in truth the custom clings stubbornly on. Some Madmen's faculties are so crippled that the best their fellow Cainites can do is to

simply listen to the babbling in hopes of seeing some shape in it, however fanciful — like trying to find the profile of Helen in a cloud. Many more are at least as eager to make sense of themselves as anyone else, and practice various forms of divination as a means of doing so.

Unfortunately, Cainite cruelty in fortunetelling outstrips that of mortals — if only barely. Elagabalus and Julian the Apostate both reportedly practiced the art of haruspicy (divination of the entrails) upon their fellow men, for example. However, Malkavian seers have certainly devised their own elaborations. Some require the Cainites who approach them for omens to strip naked. They then swing the supplicant upside-down from a rope, slashing open her bowels or throat to read the patterns in the resultant blood-spatters or intestinal loops. Wisdom, as they explain, must be bought and paid for. Another method involves the casting of fangs or teeth engraved with symbols. Quite a few divinations use mortals: in one, a woman is beheaded, her head held up and her final expressions or lip-movements interpreted; in another, a young boy is boiled until his flesh can easily be picked off his skeleton, and a certain wrist-bone is searched out and studied for shape and size; in yet another, flesh is left to decay and the augury read from its putrefactions. One oracle who dwells in al-Andalus hears the question put to him, then asks for a mortal of a certain region or descent to be brought to him; he claims he tastes the shifting tides of history in their blood.

Sometimes the horrors are far subtler. Perhaps some Malkavians sages feel bitter that those who don't suffer the Curse should benefit from its insights. In any case, they often ask steep prices of those who come to them. Many a querent is told, for example, that her fortune can only be read if she is willing to fetch for the seer some painful and hard-to-obtain memento of her mortal life: a finger-bone from her true love who died decades ago, a veil from her old nunnery, a teardrop from her great-great-granddaughter. Or she might be made to confess a terrible secret. Malkavians whose prophecies acquire a reputation for actually panning out can demand almost anything they like, even from mighty princes; the political skill with which they often wield this advantage strongly suggests the Curse does not injure *all* one's mental powers.

Jesting

Being a jester looks like an easy job to anyone who doesn't actually have to do it — just act silly all night. However, the Malkavians who serve their lieges in this way (as well as the other Cainites who also do so,

though Malkavians predominate, and claim they were the first to bring this mortal tradition into Cainite society) know it to be deadly serious business.

Jesters perform a number of duties besides simply amusing the company — not that that isn't important enough, especially among the undead, who are even more cut off from joy than the most careworn mortal monarch (and no less overprotective of their dignity). For one thing, the jester can say nearly anything, so long as he says it in a funny way. He can make criticisms that his liege would never tolerate (or likely hear in the first place) from her assemblage of sycophants and counselors, perhaps not even from her intimates. He can also present the viewpoint of the "common folk," bringing an alienated prince back down to earth in an instant with a well-crafted phrase or gesture. He can defuse tense situations, providing feuding parties a safe exit whereby they can back down from a dangerous confrontation and yet save face. Even a Brujah in the grip of rage might laugh and sheath his sword if his dilemma is put in the right humorous light. The jester can ply his arts selectively, ridiculing and imitating those he doesn't trust more often or more cruelly than those he does. While the objects of his jokes might not be appreciative, they can't really do much more than beat him for his offense. His jokes are, in their way, sacrosanct, and provided he stays within the bounds of his profession, he enjoys not only the staunch protection but often the close friendship of his sovereign.

The bounds of the profession, however, are quite demanding. The power granted to the jester is granted on a single condition: He must always remain unthreatening, servile and ridiculous. Political commentary that's quite palatable coming from a capering fellow who has just tripped over his own shoe-points into a tureen of blood becomes treason should he ever stand up straight and use his right voice. The jester must always be willing to be the most foolish person present. If someone of importance makes a gaffe, he is expected to deflect attention from it by immediately doing something even stupider. He takes onto himself the shame and derision that rightly belongs to others in the room. In short, he may only make fun of others as long as he's making even more fun of himself. Should he break these unwritten rules, he loses his special status, and woe betide him should those who haven't forgotten his stinging ripostes get hold of him then.

The Tongue of Babel

Some wandering Madmen insist that the crude scratches, blots, zigzags and glyphs they leave here and

there for their fellows to indicate places of safety and danger are far more than a simple vagrant's code. They are the remnants of an original language of men and angels, scattered — like the Malkavians' thoughts — far and wide. A few spend their existences in deliberate pursuit of this fable, studying languages and histories and visiting ancient sites both mortal and Cainite for clues. Others insist with equal vehemence that there is no Tongue of Babel that the Madmen alone keep, that it is sacrilege to say so, and yet they too frequently have the experience of looking at some symbol and suddenly perceiving, in its depths, a hundred facets that were hidden a moment before.

What is undeniable is that few Malkavians can resist their fascination with symbols. Fortunately, mortals of this age also love to create systems and assign meanings; their efforts provide plenty of fodder for the Malkavian imagination. Gems, flowers, stars and planets, animals, colors, numbers, names, days of the year, saints, and heraldic devices all have their special significance. But while mortals might respect these symbols and incorporate them into their social rituals, no sane one would, for instance, agree to murder this duchess at the behest of that duchess because of the color of the shoes she wore that night. No sane vampire would either, for that matter. A Malkavian, however, just might.

Madmen who obsess about mortal symbolic systems tend to select one or two, at most, and collect the relevant lore voraciously. Just because one Malkavian bases all her decisions on elaborate astrological calculations does not mean that she places the slightest stock in her brood-mate's interest in birds. Indeed, if she knows about it, she may use it to manipulate him.

Chivalric Madness

Tristan, Yvain, Lancelot — all were famous heroes of chivalric romance. All were also madmen for a time, if one believes the songs. Indeed, it's becoming almost obligatory for heroes of romance to lose their minds mid-story, usually from the pains of love.

Malkavians whose particular insanities lead them to obsess about a person or, more rarely, an institution such as the Church, use this literary endorsement to put a knightly shine on their obsession. They aren't mad; they simply love more completely than their cold-hearted fellow Cainites can fathom. And the deeper the descent, the deeper the love. If one Malkavian takes it upon himself to kill the prince rather than let his 'lady' marry the old coot, that only proves his bravery in love's service. The Knights Templar are a pure, holy order, too righteous even to

defend themselves against their many 'Christian' enemies — but that's exactly why God appointed them a humble vampire protector. Even if there were no stories of knightly madness these Malkavians would still obsess as they do, but the stories both justify their behavior and give them ideas for further 'devotions.' Madmen who actually were knights in mortal life are especially prone to this kind of thinking; however, low-born and even female Malkavians have been known to take the myth to heart.

Worse, mortals and even Cainites might find themselves strangely attracted to his recklessness, his absolute self-confidence in the face of the whole world's hatred. Once he has a stable of followers, the thing begins to feed on itself in most pernicious fashion: he needs them to believe in him, they need to believe in him. Any conflicting external realities are to be ignored or, better yet, obliterated. Fledging Leper childer, their souls cast hopelessly adrift by so much suffering in so short a span, are especially vulnerable to this sort of seduction. Even quite conventional warrens must often shelter these miniature cults, despite the obvious hazards; the only alternative is to let them run wild, and that, alas, is even more likely to lead to some disaster for which the warren will (however unjustly) ultimately be blamed.

Nosferatu

Although the Nosferatu tend to avoid mortals themselves (or at least all but the few they place under their direct sway), they can hardly help being deeply influenced by mortal culture still — because they were originally born to it, if for no other reason.

Marked by God

Clan Nosferatu has a well-deserved reputation for going to religious extremes. While Toreador and Lasombra struggle to slip quietly under the aegis of the Catholic and Orthodox Churches and their formally anointed clergy, the Lepers tend to gravitate to the outer fringes and the lay movements. They could be found among the very first Cathars, Beguines and Beghards; some even donned gray habits and pledged themselves to keeping the Franciscans and Poor Clares pure in their humility and poverty.

Once these various sects attained legitimacy (if not always respectability), many Lepers wandered even further, falling under the spell of one self-proclaimed folk prophet after another. Even the Brujah tend to prefer heresies with at least a chance of attracting a substantial following, their minds ever



subtly bent to political utility. But for these Nosferatu, the tinier the sect is and the more cruelly it promises to mortify the flesh and pride — abolition of private property, sexual abstinence even in marriage, vegetarianism, self-flagellation, horsehair shirts, etc., — the better they like it.

Most Lepers with any religious leaning take their deformity as a sign of God's judgment. Depending on personal outlook, they then conclude either that they've been given a last slim chance to redeem themselves (since they're clearly not in hell or Purgatory yet), or else that they've been assigned to eternal deviltry (a task they proceed to carry out to the best of their ability). Some reason that God wouldn't test and tempt them so bitterly unless they were meant for a higher purpose. After all, Scripture and the lives of the saints and martyrs repeatedly demonstrate that the chosen of God undergo the worst torments. That they have been so chosen proves their worthiness, not their unworthiness.

This kind of thinking can lead to great danger. Such a Nosferatu might, for example, coax a mortal or even a beloved child to cut open a vein before him in the middle of his weeklong fast, so as to test his powers of self-denial. Or he might deliberately lead his compatriots to a village he knows harbors Lupines, simply because he knows the angels will deliver him at the

critical moment if he can only stand firm against overwhelming odds.

Etiquette

The High Clans like to pride themselves on the arcane complexity of their social rituals, and quite often the most thrilling night in a young heir's unlife comes when he gains some victory against a clanmate which no one besides another clanmate would care about or indeed even recognize. But in truth, it's the lowly Lepers who excel at dealing in minutiae. This applies not only to the gossip they compile and trade regarding other clans, which forms the bulk of their traffic with Cainite society; their store of gossip on *each other* puts that vast body to shame. Ask a Leper in Reims about a warren elder in Prague: Startlingly often she'll know not only that elder's name but also who among his fellow elders he has offended, and how recently, and which of his childer are presently on speaking terms with him.

The Nosferatu are this astute because they have to be. More than most other clans, they must rely on each other for survival. After all, precious few outsiders, High Clan or Low, will even tolerate their company for long. Fewer yet can be counted on in times of trouble. And in close quarters, when folk can't get

away from each other, minor irritations quickly magnify into feuds that threaten everyone.

As a consequence, the warrens of Europe are home to some of the most careful and demanding systems of politesse ever invented. A maid or lad captured on a wedding's eve, for example, is the traditional apology for an unintentional offense against a warren-mate. For an intentional offense, an elder of the warren will ceremonially kill the offender's most prized servant (sometimes this is reduced to a mere bleeding in deference to *Humanitatis* or Christianity, but the meaning of the gesture is clear). After traveling from one warren to another warren on bad terms with the first, one must discard one's shoes before entering so as to avoid bringing the dirt — and thus, symbolically, the grudge — inside. Guests should always bring a gift upon a first visit, except on the feasts of St. Lazarus, St. Giles and St. George and All Hallows' Eve, when it is a terrible *faux pas* to bring anything whatsoever because the host is supposed to provide for the guest's every need. Of course a gift that is too small insults the host, while a gift that is too large insults the host's eldest child. And so on.

Although some Nosferatu reject this whole business on religious grounds (Jesus advocated forgiving and forgetting, after all), or because they simply can't be bothered, most pay the necessary attention to proprieties. "Never forget a favor, never forget a debt, never forget a slight," is one of the clan's oldest proverbs. A Leper who can hold a grudge for decades or spend a century plotting revenge — particularly against someone unpopular with the clan at large — will gain the admiration of many peers. Long memory is the cardinal Nosferatu virtue.

Superstition

Nosferatu also show a surprising reverence for the various peasant superstitions regarding monsters. Many will not enter a house where a horseshoe has been nailed above the door or a sieve hung at the window, or steal an unbaptized babe whose mother has laid a key upon its chest. If a scullery maid (and country girl by birth) finds a Leper in her master's courtyard and, instead of screaming, simply makes the sign of the evil eye and recites the old charm to confound an unfriendly *kobold*: *Wola, wiht, taz tu weist, taz tu wiht heizist, taz tu neweist noch nechanst cheden 'chnospinci'*, then she may well be spared. Oddly enough, it's those Nosferatu who go out of their way to behave like unnatural beasts who tend to take the folklore most seriously.

This makes more sense than one might first realize. What with the scholastics and missionar-

ies of the Church shining the light of God's truth everywhere, there aren't many safe corners left for the monsters. Most of them have either been dismissed as old wives' tales or reclassified as demons in need of exorcism. But in the old lore, monsters still merit a certain respect as well as fear; they have their place in the world, and are usually to be avoided, negotiated with or even accommodated, not destroyed out-of-hand. That peasant woman with her nonsense charm may well be the first mortal to truly acknowledge and accept that Leper's existence in years; why shouldn't she gain a little mercy?

Indeed, a few Nosferatu take on this role so completely that they become the self-appointed house-spirits of some clutch of mortals. This relationship, however, like most between the living and the undead, is prone to abuse. Since they serve so faithfully, they feel they deserve the rewards that go with the job — and bowls of milk and honey simply won't suffice. Stories abound, one or two even true, of Lepers who protect whole villages from harm in return for midwinter sacrifices.

Ravnos

Although the Ravnos/gypsy connection isn't nearly as pervasive as many other clans believe, it still has a substantial impact on the Charlatans. Many Ravnos do travel with gypsy families in India and the Middle East, and a large number of Ravnos traditions were borrowed from gypsy customs. The Ravnos practice some few of them seriously and respectfully, but most are just another way for the clan to thumb its collective nose at society's mores and practices. Some other Ravnos customs come from the clan's origins in India, although few Charlatans in the Middle Ages are aware of their connection to that distant land.

Because the clan is largely nomadic, found in almost all cultures and rarely remaining long in any specific one, they have relatively few clan-wide customs from other sources. Instead, they mimic whatever practices are common in the immediate area, deliberately twisting the practice or tradition in question — not because they feel it suits them better, but purely as a mischievous or malicious jab at the Cainites and kine around them. Some younger Ravnos find it amusing, for example, to make protective gestures of the sort used to ward off the "evil eye" whenever someone with whom they are speaking mentions God or Christ.

Gypsy Customs

The Rom and other gypsy groups can trace their origins back to India, although most non-Gypsies in the Dark Medieval are ignorant of this fact. Some Rom customs are derived from ancient Hindi practices, whereas others developed over the course of their travels. Whether the Ravnos adopted these practices to better fit in with the gypsies or to mock them, even the Charlatans themselves can no longer say with any certainty.

Cleanliness

The Rom have an inordinate number of rituals and taboos when it comes to cleanliness, and the Ravnos have managed to twist them all. The lower half of a woman's body is considered unclean because of its association with menstruation. This belief is the reason for, among other things, the traditional long skirt worn by gypsy women, as well as the custom that states a woman cannot pass in front of, or between, two men while within close quarters.

It is acceptable to bathe or clean in running water, but not standing water. The purest water — in other words, the water farthest upstream — must be used whenever possible.

Many animals are unclean, and not to be eaten. These include, among others, dogs, cats, pigs and, in some tribes, horses.

Many Ravnos, of course, associate “unnatural” with “unclean” and, as they are already unnatural creatures, enjoy breaking every one of these taboos. Some do so purely to remind themselves of what they are, whereas others enjoy the consternation they cause by doing so in front of mortal gypsies. Female Ravnos enjoy moving particularly close to gypsy men, never quite near enough to draw the attention of the *kris* (the gypsy leadership), but close enough to cause severe discomfort. They bathe in standing water, and feed on forbidden animals. Some Ravnos with a particular grudge against a Rom family have been known to kill and pollute their food animals, forcing them to make the choice between consuming unclean animals or risking starvation.

Mystical Powers

Gypsies believe in the use of mystical powers and talismans. They call down curses (the “evil eye,” as many outsiders think of it), perform healing rituals on the sick, make protective talismans and so forth. Whether or not these powers truly work depends on the individual. Some special indi-

viduals might actually create the intended result, but in most cases, these activities are more spiritual than truly functional.

The Ravnos, of course, do possess mystical abilities in the form of their Disciplines. Some Charlatans, particularly when playing up their connections to the gypsies, cloak the use of those Disciplines in gypsy rituals. One might perform a quick “healing ritual” on herself, just before using vitae to close an injury. Another might call down a curse, then implement it through a combination of Chimerstry and the summoning of various pests through Animalism. The protection granted by a “talisman” might instead be due to a few levels of Fortitude. Among outsiders, the Ravnos do this to play up the mystique of the gypsies, to sell their magic amulets and the like to ignorant villagers, or else to frighten a population into turning against the Rom in their midst. Among the gypsies, some Ravnos use their abilities to prove their superiority to their mortal companions, and to prove that the gypsies' belief in their own powers is false.

Indian Tradition

Even though many do not themselves know of their clan's origins in the Orient, the Ravnos still carry with them the legacy of India. Most Charlatans view these as clan beliefs or customs, unaware of their initial source.

Reincarnation

The Hindus believe that the soul returns to experience lifetime after lifetime, until it has become truly enlightened and enters a higher state of being. The moral codes by which they live their lives are demanded by karma and the gods, and someone who lives an immoral life is doomed to return as a lower being, such as an animal.

In India, many Ravnos believed that, as unliving beings, they were outside the karmic cycle. No act they committed as Cainites, however vile, would have any impact on their future lives, as their fate was decided the moment they died a mortal death. It is possible that this belief is the source of the uncaring attitudes so prevalent among the Ravnos tonight, and might — if one chooses to disbelieve the notion that Caine personally delivered a curse to each Antediluvian — even somehow represent the source of the clan weakness.

Bindi

Many Hindus — most frequently but not exclusively women — wear a red dot on the center of their forehead, representing the power of the third

eye. Although the specific meaning has long since been lost to most Ravnos, many of the clan still make use of the symbolism. These Ravnos, after Embracing a new child, mark the neonate's forehead with a small circle of vitae, which they are expected to wear for their first night as a vampire. If asked, they explain that it's a clan tradition, a mark of power and good fortune.

Some particularly well-informed Ravnos cannot help but wonder at the similarity between the bindi and the third eye of the fading Salubri clan. Did Saulot's brood have some shaping influence in India during the nascent days of the religion, or is it simple coincidence? None can say for sure, and considering what's been happening to the Salubri in recent years at the hands of the Tremere, the Ravnos aren't particularly anxious to point out any possible connection.

Tremere

With the notable exception of Etrius, the Council of Seven sees Christianity as a stumbling block to the Tremere way. After all, not much about the clan's method of getting and keeping immortality measures up to churchly standards of virtue. A clutch of scheming vampire wizards has little use for a creed whose central mystery and doctrine is one of self-sacrifice. After the terrible price they paid to prolong their stay in this world, few want to agonize about what awaits them in the next.

Unfortunately, like most clans in Dark Medieval Europe, the Tremere Embrace Christians because they have little other choice. Still, they understand how important it is to calm the turmoil in the hearts of both their neonates (who tend to suffer nagging worries about damnation) and their elders (who, as former mortal magi, mourn their House's exile from the Hermetic Order and tremble at the prospect of some cosmic retribution). The Seven would much prefer that Tremere question neither their own motivations nor those of their leaders. Mere survival presently demands too much of them to afford the luxury of soul-searching.

The Pagan Philosophers

Some initiates eagerly abandon their old faith. House Tremere was once of the Order of Hermes; Hermeticism draws much of its wisdom from the classical world, and clan libraries have preserved the old learning to a remarkable degree. Thus, it can seem a natural step to adopt Platonism, Sto-

icism, Aristotelianism or some other ancient mode of thought. Plato, for instance, believed in a "Prime Mover" and in an afterlife where souls receive reward or punishment (before reincarnation, which all but the very best and very worst souls continually undergo); but he also looked to human wisdom and reason, not divine Grace, as the ultimate source of salvation. Such a worldview naturally appeals to the Usurpers, who don't ultimately like to rely on anyone but themselves — particularly when most gods of record seem likely to disapprove of them.

On the other hand, Platonism has led some Tremere to disturbing questions about their leadership. According to Plato, the real goal of a philosopher is to live a life of such virtue and wisdom that he escapes the cycle of rebirth and goes on to dwell permanently in the mansions of pure spirit. What can Tremere and the Seven have been thinking, trapping not only themselves but their followers in the inferior material world? Perhaps, some Usurpers mutter, they already had an impressive list of sins for which they wished to escape atonement. Perhaps they had sinned so profoundly that they expected to be cast forever into Tartarus, never even to be reincarnated. Other, more loyal magi trust in the breadth of great Tremere's vision. They point out that because reincarnated souls forget their former lives upon drinking Lethe's waters, they must constantly relearn old lessons, while the Tremere, as immortals, have a far more direct path to enlightenment — if they can only stand fast against the temptations of their new state.

Neo-Platonism

Most Tremere, however, hesitate to give up the Cross completely. Although the Seven have begun promoting a new form of Hermetic philosophy with almost all Christian elements removed, mortal Hermeticism (which merged with Christianity centuries ago) remains far more popular.

Mortal Hermeticism owes much of its present shape to Neo-Platonism. Neo-Platonism, the first great synthesis of Greek, Christian, Jewish and Gnostic thought, informs the work of great Church scholars like Augustine and Boethius — with whom educated apprentices are already familiar. Many a regent gradually leads his charges away from formal religion using Neo-Platonism as the bridge. He begins with the more outré passages of orthodox Church philosophy. Then he assigns readings of Plotinus, whose vision of salvation through self-

contemplation he twists mercilessly until the lust for personal occult power and secrets is reframed as the quest to commune with the Good.

The fact that other people become sacrifices to this worthy cause is dismissed or minimized. An unexamined life is not worth living, after all, and all men die sometime. Those who would never have ascended to the greater heights may as well go to God now as later, and their blood serve to further the development of one meant for better things. Another very attractive aspect of Plotinus and other such thinkers is that union with God is not something one has to enter the afterlife to achieve — a comforting thought for those who chose immortality on Earth so that they needn't face an uncertain afterlife, but who also still want some hope of going on to better things regardless.

Gnosticism

Gnosticism is also closely related to Hermeticism. Some Tremere either knowingly or unknowingly drift toward it over the years, mostly because Gnosticism's belief that the material world is corrupt tends to agree with their personal experience of it. Certainly they have no trouble believing that the flesh is corrupt. Mortal bodies full of blood tempt them to sordid losses of restraint, and their vampire flesh has its own grotesque needs and vulnerabilities. Small wonder if some wish to escape it entirely.

Tremere whose longings run in this direction often seek to master the art of spirit-walking as soon as possible. Everything they're looking for can only be found on other planes than this one. Unfortunately, the longer one outruns the flesh, the more spiteful its revenge in the end. Tremere

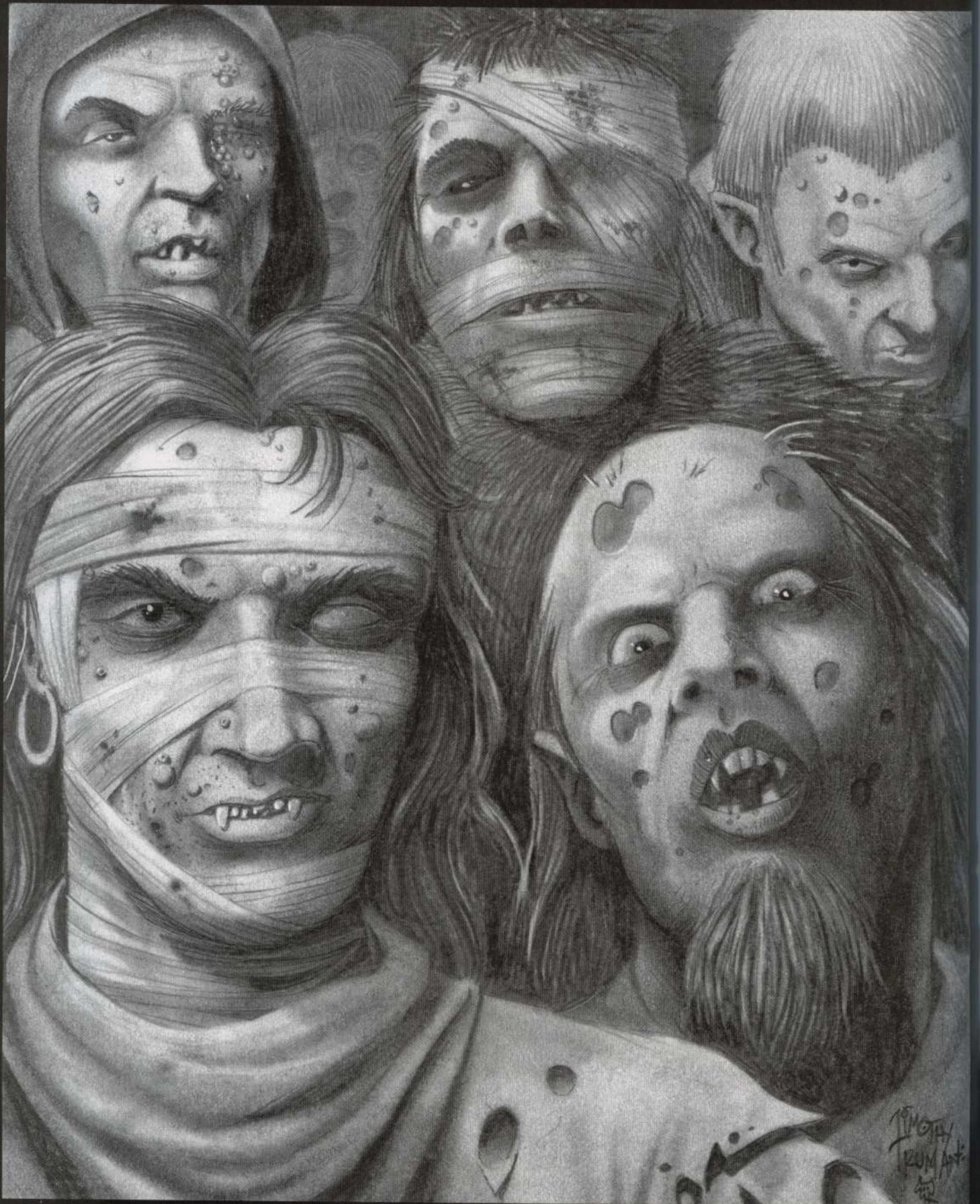
of sufficient will and power can leave their bodies to wither in torpor for months at a time while they range afar, but eventually their flesh calls them back, and all those months' worth of the hunger come due at once.


Infernalism

Some Tremere can't let go of notions of damnation no matter how hard they try. They simply endure in misery much like their counterparts in other clans — silent misery, for the most part. The image of one of their own falling down at a priest's feet and confessing all haunts the day-sleep of the Tremere elders — many have faced the threat of torch and crucifix once too often as both mortal sorcerer and Cainite. And so most apprentices find it wise to keep any yearnings for contrition to themselves.

Thankfully (and perhaps surprisingly), only a few Tremere take the opposite path and decide that since their souls are damned anyway, they might as well consort with demons to gain power more quickly and easily. But those few present a substantial danger to the clan; not only a moral one but also a political one. Most Tremere are ambitious and attracted to mysteries — that's exactly why they were chosen — and demonolaters often possess thaumaturgical skills far beyond the usual expectations for their age. When other Tremere see such mastery, they tend to seek it out for themselves. More than once, a Tremere infernalist has gathered a group of would-be initiates who take his orders, hoping to gain his tutelage, without ever knowing the truth about whom he serves. Such affairs can go on for years before the Seven discover them. After all, one thing wizards truly excel at is keeping secrets.







CHAPTER TWO: PLAYING THE LOW CLANS

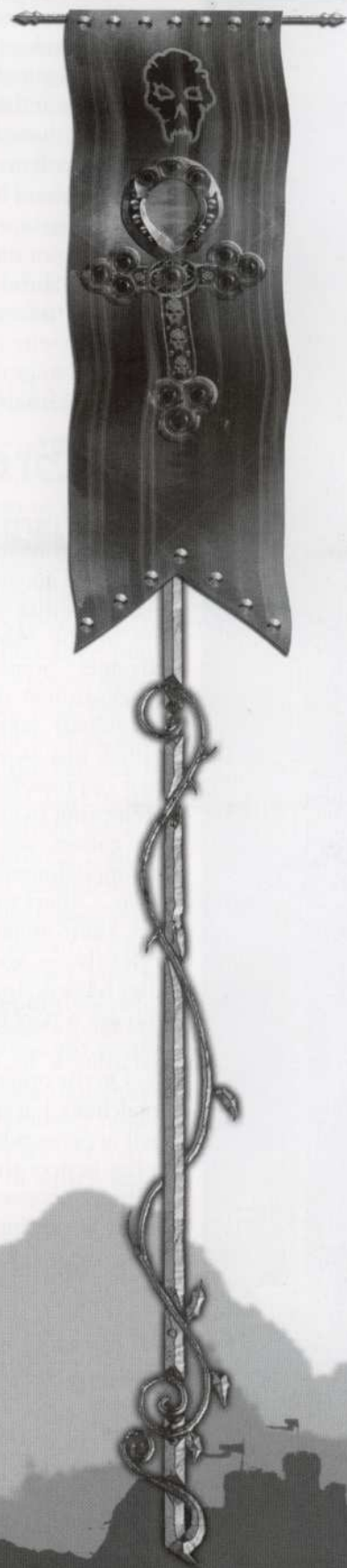
“First say to yourself what you would be; and then do
what you have to do.”

— Epictetus

The Low Clans. The fallen. Serpents. Animals. Lepers. Charlatans. Usurpers. The Cainites would have their brethren believe that their caste distinctions, high and low, are not meant to be judgmental, that they merely define a place in society without maintaining the superiority of one over the other. Their terminology and their attitudes, however, belie such cosmopolitan claims.

In truth, Cainites of the High Clans do look down upon their Low Clan brethren, seeing them as inferior, relegating them to second-class status. The fallen dwell in common, poor and dirty havens, and hold sovereignty over only squalid domains. They are lowborn, common. Subordinate.

For much of the Long Night, many of the Low Clans accepted this stigma as truth. They rarely participated in the machinations of Cainite government and nobility, rarely held positions of authority or respect. Because they wielded little power, they allowed themselves to be convinced that they *should* wield little power. Low Clan princes were rare as hen’s teeth, and those who did exist were held up not as models, but as aberrations.



Change comes slowly to the static Cainites, but the burning winds of change have swept away the Long Night and ignited the War of Princes. For the first time in centuries and more, an awareness of their own power is creeping through the ranks of the Low Clans, turning apathy into desire, fear into determination.

The War of Princes is a turbulent, dangerous time to be a Cainite, even more so to be one of the fallen. Many will not survive the coming inferno, and many more will shrink from it, drawing back into their havens to ride out the storm. For those with the courage to seize the moment, however, the time has come to change the world — and, perhaps even more difficult, to change themselves.

The Great Divide

In any oppressed or downtrodden population, a severe dichotomy invariably develops. When a people are constantly made to feel inferior, human — and Cainite — nature often forces them towards one or the other of two diametrically opposed extremes. Some grow defiant, angered by their persecution at the hands of others. Many of these individuals seek to prove that they are just as skilled, just as intelligent, just as worthy as any of their oppressors. They become part of the system, attempting to gain what power and influence they can gather, determined to equal or exceed the accomplishments of those who have kept them down. Others take their defiance outside the system, their anger causing them to rebel — often violently — against the forces oppressing them. They have no interest in proving anything to those who are a part of the system; rather, they seek to destroy the system itself.

On the other side of the issue lie those who grow not defiant, but subservient. Many seek only to pacify their oppressors by making them happy, serving them to the best of their abilities. This is the slave who willingly cooperates with his master, even to the extent of turning against his fellows, or the peasant who grovels before his iron-fisted liege so as to turn aside his lord's anger. In many cases, these individuals try to hide, or at least downplay, their true natures. If they can avoid appearing or acting like a commoner, a pagan, a Jew or whatever the oppressed population happens to be, they can turn aside the hatred of those around them. Many even turn against their own people, hoping that a display of hatred against the downtrodden will make others forget that they, themselves, come from the same stock.

Others seek to hide completely rather than to serve, hoping simply to avoid the entire situation. They fear the wrath and the power of their oppressors, but believe they can avoid harm if they simply draw no attention to themselves at all.

The Cainites are inherently creatures of dichotomy. They contain inside themselves a human — or at least sentient — personality, but also a mindless, ravaging beast. They are lone predators incapable of trust, yet they gather in coterie and form complex political societies that force them, again and again, into proximity and conflict with one another.

It should come, then, as little surprise that the Cainites of the Low Clans have instinctively seized on the dichotomy described above when it comes to interacting with their High Clan brethren. Some defy their “lesser” status, seeking to obtain positions of power and influence within Cainite society, or making every effort to destroy that society and replace it with something new. Others accept their position as the oppressed caste, seeking either to curry favor through excellent service and toadying, or attempt to hide away from all of Cainite society, separating themselves from the mechanism that oppresses them.

Obviously, no generalization, no examination of tendencies and personalities can apply to every Low Clan Cainite. Because the overwhelming majority of fallen vampires tend, to a greater or lesser extent, toward one of these two extremes, this chapter discusses the Low Clans largely from the perspective of this dichotomy.

It's rather unlikely you'd ever think, “Hmm, I wonder where this character falls on the spectrum of attitudes toward Cainite society” during character creation. In fact, unless you've a very solid grasp from the beginning of exactly who you want your character to be and how you want her to develop, you're better off not deciding from the start precisely how your character fits into the Low Clan dichotomy. Instead, use the goals you've established for your character to determine his attitudes, rather than the other way around. For instance, decide that your character wishes to play the political game despite the disapproval of the High Clans, and that she wants to become a prince. Or decide that she's interested only in avoiding the attention of those above her station, and spends most of her time cowering away from risk rather than embracing opportunities. Once you've chosen specific goals and personality traits for the character, it becomes easy enough to use those to determine on which side of the divide she's more likely to fall.

BUT MY CHARACTER DOESN'T CARE...

Some Low Clan Cainites neither defy nor capitulate to the attitudes of Cainite Society. Some individuals truly don't care what others think of them. Particularly among those Cainites who come from other cultures, such as the Assamites or the Setites, some strong-willed individuals refuse to allow themselves to be defined by some arbitrary division between "high" and "low."

One might initially expect a substantial number of Cainites to fall into this category — especially considering how stubborn players can be. The truth is, however, that remaining aloof and uninfluenced by the expectations of one's fellow Cainites is far more difficult than it initially appears.

Suppose, for instance, that you're portraying a Nosferatu dwelling within the territories governed by the Ventrue Lord Jürgen. You might begin play having decided that Gustav, your character, couldn't care less what society thinks of him. He has no interest in ruling his own domain or making himself useful to the local prince or elders, but neither does he plan to kowtow to them or hide himself away. He's going to do what he wants to do, and damn them all!

It's not that simple. After all, *they* expect him to behave in a certain manner, even if he doesn't wish to. By flouting their expectations, he raises their ire and begins to develop enemies. You may (correctly) see Gustav as simply being true to his own nature, but they see him as arrogant, an upstart who refuses to acknowledge his place. Slowly, as their enmity grows, he may well find himself forced to make efforts to avoid them, or doing favors for them to mitigate their anger — and suddenly, he's firmly ensconced in the "subservient" camp despite his best efforts.

It happens to almost everyone, eventually. The Assamite newly arrived from the Holy Land may not care what these barbarian Cainites think of her at first. Eventually, however, their condescension will almost certainly drive her either to return home, or to strike back against those who insult her. The Followers of Set claim that all other Cainites are inferior to them, and they certainly don't care what lesser vampires think — yet what, really, are their attempts at favor-mongering and corruption, if not a means of defiance and proving their superiority?

In the end, barring truly unusual circumstances, most Low Clan Cainites *do* gravitate either towards defiance or subservience to the High Clans and to Cainite society as a unit. Society itself allows them precious few alternatives.

Also, never assume that *all* of a character's decisions must lean toward one extreme or the other. Except for fanatics to a cause, nobody's behavior is entirely consistent. A character who normally acts very servile to her social superiors may act against them if their behavior crosses a certain line, and even the most die-hard insurgent trying to bring the system down would be well advised to go underground and hide if he garners too much attention. Even after you've decided where your character's attitudes and sympathies lie, use that knowledge as, at most, a guideline, never a concrete rule.

Attitudes of the Low Clans

In recent nights, as the War of the Princes encompasses more and more domains, the attitudes of the Low Clans have begun to shift. Even among those clans who normally lean towards more subservient than defiant behavior, the fallen are developing a growing awareness that they are not as powerless as they once believed. As old princes fall and new ones rise to take their place, the Low Clans see opportunities for power they've never seen before. They see, too, that the first cursed aren't nearly so all-powerful as they would have the fallen believe. As such, the balance between defiant and subservient Low Clan Cainites — which, until recently, was weighted more toward the subservient side — has shifted. Cainites who would once have never even considered attempting to grab a share of the High Clans' power are now plotting their own advancement. To date, this rise in ambition among the Low Clans has spread slowly, but it's only a matter of time before the vast majority of fallen are exposed to the idea. If enough of them fasten to it, if a sufficient number of Low Clan Cainites decide that they're entitled to a share of the power previously held by the first cursed, then all of Cainite society may be looking at an upheaval the likes of which hasn't been seen since the Second City.

As with all other blanket statements about the various clans, what follows are generalities only. Every Cainite is an individual, and while a majority of a specific clan may feel this way, that in no way means that all must do so. These are suggestions and tendencies, nothing more. This section addresses Low Clan attitudes purely in terms of the dichotomy discussed above. For more on the ambitions, objectives and more general attitudes of typical fallen Cainites, see *Goals and Ambitions* (p. 100).



Assamites

If any one clan can be said to make a concerted effort to stay out of the morass that is Cainite society as a whole, it's the Assamites. Outsiders and foreigners to Western Europe and other Cainite strongholds, they have less of a vested interest in determining their place in the Cainite order. That said, those Assamites who dwell among Western Cainites for any length of time invariably find themselves as caught up in the informal caste system as anyone else. Many Assamites take pains to hide their activities from those around them, but this is less a response to the pressures of Cainite society than because they're often engaged in activities that would land them all sorts of trouble if they were discovered. When circumstances don't force them into hiding, Assamites tend to lean toward defiance when interacting with Cainite leaders and the High Clans. Many attempt to destroy Western Cainite society from the outside, or at least offer their services to others who are doing so. Only a very few attempt to master the system from within, and they usually operate in regions with both a heavy Assamite and High Clan presence, such as Turkey or Iberia. Very few Assamites truly make themselves subservient to the Cainite powers that be, although some may behave that way if the pay is right, or for purposes of their own.

Followers of Set

The Serpents would have the rest of the clans believe that they, like the Assamites, are removed from Cainite society, that they could hardly care what princes and lords think of them. The truth, however, is that the Setites are simply far too deeply enmeshed in that society to truly remain aloof. For all their expressed hatred of other Cainites, few Setites take it upon themselves to violently oppose the system as it stands (although those who do can be frighteningly effective). Many Setites attempt to prove themselves superior to Cainites in power and the High Clans through their careful use of favor-trading, bribery and addiction-mongering. The truth, however, is that while most Setites would never admit to it, a large number of them go out of their way to make themselves useful or even indispensable to the elders around them. They claim, of course, that they're using their talents to corrupt the other Cainites, but in many cases an element of fear is also involved. The Setites know that they are widely hated by the other clans, and

a Setite who isn't useful to someone is in grave danger purely by virtue of her pedigree. Thus, even if they themselves will not acknowledge the reasons, a large number of Serpents find themselves leaning toward subservient behavior.

Gangrel

Mentioning to the Gangrel that they lean toward the submissive side of the equation is unwise — it's a good way to wind up badly mauled, in fact. The truth is, however, that most of the Animals deal with the inequalities and injustices of Cainite society by attempting to hide from them. Many Gangrel use their nomadic leanings as a means of avoiding entanglements with, and the attentions of, the princes and the High Clans; and the clan, for the most part, seems to have little interest in working to change the system. Even those who dwell within larger domains often attempt to remain inconspicuous. Those who do not often wind up serving the prince or other elders as soldiers, enforcers and bodyguards. A sizable minority of Gangrel do exist, however, who have gone outside society and act against it whenever possible. Only a very small number of Animals have, to date, made any real attempt at improving their lot by gaining power within the system, although a few select regions do claim Gangrel in positions of leadership, if not as actual princes. This is particularly true in Scandinavia, as evidenced by powerful Gangrel such as Tengael and the Wotanist Werter.

Malkavians

For rather obvious reasons, it's nigh impossible to classify the Malkavians as leaning one way or the other, either on this or any other issue. Amongst the Madmen, as many different attitudes exist as individual Cainites — possibly even more. Some Malkavians prefer to hide away from the attentions of the High Clans, even if they don't recognize what it is they're hiding from. Others make themselves useful, serving as oracles or advisors to those princes willing to keep them around. Angrier and more violent Malkavians also become Autarkis, seeking not merely to avoid the system but to bring it down in flames. And a surprising number of Malkavians, especially in recent years, are trying their hands at Cainite politics. They have, in fact, been frighteningly successful — at least, those of them capable of more or less stable functioning — precisely because other Cainites tend not to view a Malkavian as a viable political threat until it's too late. Their reputation for insanity — and

for causing insanity — has proven a weapon in the hands of those who know how to use it.

Nosferatu

The Tradition of Silence requires the Lepers to hide themselves away from the rest of the world even under the best of circumstances, so it should come as no surprise that a substantial portion of the clan chooses this same technique as a means of escaping the oppression of the first cursed. So long as the prince remains unaware of the Nosferatu presence, she can do little in the way of ordering them about, banning them from hunting their own territories, or generally making their unives miserable. Only a very few Nosferatu become servile, offering their abilities to those in power for no reward save the ability to distance themselves from their own people, as the sense of community among the Lepers is quite strong. For all their suffering, it's also a rare Nosferatu who abandons Cainite society entirely and turns revolutionary, although such numbers are growing as the War of Princes expands. No, as startling as the notion is to many outside the clan, a sizable number of Nosferatu make every attempt to improve their lot within Cainite society through politics and feudal offices, despite the heavy odds against success. Many Nosferatu carry within them a nobility equal to any Ventrue; and especially now, as the War of Princes provides hard evidence that anyone with sufficient ability can rule, the Lepers refuse to be kept down any longer. Many of these Nosferatu appear servile and sycophantic to outsiders, as they use their abilities in stealth and secrecy to gather information for one political faction or another. They do this, however, not as a service to others, but as a means of amassing favors and influence of their own. More regions tonight claim Nosferatu in positions of authority than even mere decades ago, and the Lepers show no signs of ceasing their efforts any time soon.

Ravnos

None of the Low Clans are particularly well accepted in Cainite society, but if any one bloodline can be said to be "most" oppressed, surely the Charlantans must at least be a strong candidate. Although they stand out less than the Nosferatu and aren't as actively despised as the Setites, at least those other clans have a reputation for making themselves useful under the proper circumstances. Most other Cainites see the Ravnos as nothing more than annoying gnats, to be squashed whenever possible. Even if the Ravnos prefer to remain aloof from Cainite society, uninterested in either defiance or subservience, society itself

rarely provides them that option. The Ravnos most frequently avoid the ire of the High Clans by hiding from them, although this isn't "hiding" in the manner most consider it. The Charlatans are flamboyant, after all. Their nomadic natures, however, make them very difficult to find once they've moved on from a domain, and that's just how they like it. Those Ravnos who grow angry enough occasionally strike back at the society that has spurned them, operating outside Cainite laws and disrupting the smooth governing of a domain. Ravnos who attempt to deflect the contempt of the first cursed through toadying or service, or who actually attempt to advance their cause politically or to obtain high status, are so rare that many Cainites consider the very idea an impossibility.

Tremere

The Usurpers hold a unique position in Cainite society. The other Low Clans may not particularly like their positions within the lower caste, and many of them are struggling to improve their lot on an individual level; but they still tend to accept that the first cursed will always hold most of the power, and anything they can achieve in the face of that fundamental truth is a victory. The Tremere, however, refuse to accept their assigned status. In their own minds, they belong among the highest of the high, ruling alongside — or even above — the Lasombra and the Ventrue. They are held down to Low Clan status, not because of who or what they are, but simply because they arrived late to the ball, and they're far from happy about it. Also unlike the other clans, the Tremere tend to think of advancement with regard to the entire clan, not merely the individual. (This does not in any way eliminate personal ambition from the equation, of course.) Thus, while an individual Usurper may hide his presence from a local prince for various reasons, it is almost never acceptable for the Tremere to hide away from Cainite society and the political or social arenas in the long term. Equally, the clan elders frown on any Tremere attempting to bring down the Cainite feudal or political system — they are, after all, attempting to prove themselves worthy of the High Clans — although opposition to specific princes, lords or entire clans is perfectly acceptable. The overwhelming majority of Tremere either compete against High Clan Cainites for positions of power, or serve those same first cursed as a means of proving their skill and reliability. This would seem to indicate a fairly even split between defiance and subservience, but because even those who serve are doing so as a means of obtaining power, rather than avoiding persecution,

the clan tendencies are heavily weighted towards ambitious defiance.

Unlife Amongst the Fallen

As with any caste system, the attitudes and circumstances that keep the fallen on the lower end of Cainite society form a nigh inescapable cycle. The Low Clans did nothing, initially, to bring upon themselves the stigma under which they now suffer. Their place as the fallen was, at least in part, an arbitrary distinction decided by those who happened to hold power at the time. Tonight, of course, the High Clans justify their dismissal or oppression of the Low as deserved, something the fallen bring about themselves by their coarse ways, the absence of tradition and ritual, and their lack of skill and experience in governing. Yet those very deficiencies that are used to justify the low-blooded's position in society are *caused* by their position in society.

No wonder so many of the fallen resent the High Clans.

If you're to portray a Low Clan character with any verisimilitude, it's vital that you understand the attitudes, perspectives and night-to-night existence of these unfortunate Cainites. The above discussion of the major dichotomy among the fallen forms a good foundation, and we'll go back to it again, but it covers only a single aspect of Low Clan Cainites. It's an important one, shaping many of their attitudes and behaviors, but still only one of many.

We've said this before, and undoubtedly will again, but everything that follows represents tendencies, generalities and commonalities, not ironclad requirements. Your character may fall in line with some, all or none of these stereotypes. That said, they've become stereotypes for a reason, and the vast majority of Low Clan Cainites fit these archetypes to one extent or another. If your character is an exception, you should at least have a valid reason other than a desire to flaunt the system.

Learning the Ways of the Night

How much should a starting character know about the world around her? Certainly, she's familiar with the way the mortal world works — in the area around her, at the least — but what about Cainites? Does she know

about the War of Princes? The High and Low Clan divide? The Amaranth? Caine? The other unnatural creatures with whom Cainites must share the night?

The answer is, of course, “maybe.”

Where the first cursed pride themselves on their knowledge of history — because, the fallen mutter, it allows them to feel as though they’re part of it — the Low Clans tend to focus on more practical concerns when they bother to educate their childer at all. Some neonates are left alone completely, forced to learn even their most basic abilities and needs through trial and error. Those who survive rarely manage to fit themselves into Cainite society at a later time, for their rough existence has left them ill-equipped to adapt to the subtle and always political dance of the High Clans. They know only what they’ve managed to learn on their own, and nothing about the history that brought their brethren into the War of Princes.

Only some Gangrel practice this technique with any frequency, though, and most fallen educate their childer on the basics required for survival. Nosferatu, Ravnos, some Gangrel and even many Malkavians speak of the myths of Caine, the general state of Cainite society and the dangers that lurk in the night. They learn to avoid the wilds, where werewolves, fae and other, stranger beasts lurk. They learn of the distinction between High Clans and Low — not with the intent that they believe themselves inferior, though many do just that, but so that they can avoid offending those in power. They learn the tale of Caine, for many of the fallen cling to religion as their last hope of salvation. They rarely, however, learn anything more. In the nightly struggle for survival, no time exists for lessons in history, or in-depth analysis of the various factions in the War of Princes. So long as they know enough to keep out of trouble, the rest of the world may tend to itself.

Certainly, exceptions exist. Some Nosferatu, Malkavians and others possess an in-depth knowledge of Cainite history, religion and society, enough to make even the most well educated Toreador take notice. Most, however, through no fault of their own, merely promulgate the stereotype of the ignorant fallen. For their own part, the High Clans mock the ignorance of the Low, ensuring that their unlikes are harsh and that they’ve no time or impetus to educate themselves. This is not merely arrogance, although that certainly enters into it, but also strategy. For so long as the Low Clans remain ignorant of where they come from and what happens around them, they pose no threat.

The Assamites, Setites and Tremere handle things rather differently. The first two clans, who hail from territories where they are far from “Low,” take as much pride in their history and heritage as any of the first cursed, and their faith is a paramount factor in their existence. Most of these Cainites are taught a far more detailed history, and receive a far broader view of Cainite society, than the other Low Clans. An Assamite knows not only of Caine, but of Haqim and the other Antediluvians. He likely knows the history of his clan, and the history of all Cainites — at least to the extent that his clan was involved. He knows who holds power over the territory in which he dwells, and who seeks to take that power away. Setites are indoctrinated in the ways of Set, learning that he was a god before he became a vampire. They learn the nature of the other clans, High and Low, the better to ensnare them. Both clans learn to take pride in their heritage, and wear it like armor against the barbs and disdain of the first cursed.

As for the Tremere, they practically drown their neonates in information — Cainite history, politics, the nature of the supernatural and whatever else the Usurpers think might aid their childer. Yes, this often gives them an advantage in surviving the real world, and yes, this instills pride in the clan, who managed on their own to wrest the secret of immortality from those who were less worthy. The primary purpose, however, is to make the Tremere as much like the first cursed as they can be, for the Usurpers constantly seek to win entry into those exalted ranks.

Quality of Unlife

Due to the station from which most of the Low Clans are chosen for the Embrace, the vast majority of them are neither accustomed to, nor initially expect to attain, a particularly high standard of comfort or riches. A majority, though not an overwhelming one, of fallen Cainites are either nomadic or poor. They take shelter where they can find it, or maintain havens such as subterranean sewers, ramshackle huts, abandoned monasteries and other dwellings the likes of which the noble-born and the noble-Embraced alike would hardly deign to enter, let alone own. Most Low Clan Cainites possess few riches, existing in filth and squalor not unlike the peasants and commoners on whom they prey.

The abilities and powers available to all Cainites provide a path to privilege, if not actual power, to those wise enough to make effective use of them. They do not guarantee success, or even an easy time of it, but

vampires with both wisdom and patience can make use of their advantages to amass wealth in ways no mortal could ever attempt. Many Low Clan neonates and ancillae do just that, slowly but steadily accumulating advantages in death that they could never hope for in life. Because they come from a life of want, and for the first time see before them an opportunity for advancement, these fallen Cainites can become the most avaricious, envious and ambitious of all vampires, so much so that even the most power-hungry Lasombra pales in comparison.

Perhaps surprisingly, however, a great number of fallen *don't* attempt to enrich themselves, either through their new powers or in any other meaningful way. It seems like a blatant contradiction of the ambitious, predatory nature of Cainites, but many among the Low Clans prove unable to shake the clinging grasp of the feudal or caste systems in which they were born. A peasant in the French countryside or a villager in the Carpathian Mountain region lives his entire life with the expectation that he will die poor. Wealth? Power? Comfort? These are the privileges of the nobility, of those born to a higher status than they. To such people, the very notion of seeking such things is a fantasy, no more realistic or obtainable a goal than if they decided to leap from a cliff to develop the power of flight.

Why, then, should they assume that things have changed just because they themselves are no longer quite as they once were? Perhaps among the High Clans, whose members enjoy far more prestige in Cainite society, a former peasant can shake the notion that he is still the lowest of the low. For the fallen, however, the Embrace often represents little more than a transition from the lowest of the living to the lowest of the unliving. They have passed from one system in which advancement is forbidden them into another with the same restrictions. This perception, whether or not it is accurate, is often enough to quash the ambitions of Low Clan and low born Cainites. They never reach for more than they have, not because they have deliberately decided against such efforts, but because the very notion never even occurred to them.

Obviously, exceptions to this exist, and are not even as rare as some of the High Clans would believe (or have others believe). Numerous Assamites represent merchants and even royalty, come from the Holy Land to experience the culture of Christendom. The Tremere prefer to Embrace the well educated, and that normally means either the nobility or the priesthood. The Nosferatu are known to draw anyone who

might be useful to the community, or whom they feel must be taught a lesson in humility, into their midst. Malkavians, of course, sire for their own inscrutable purposes. Every Low Clan can point to numerous Cainites from their ranks and say, "There, you see? We claim nobility, elegance, royalty, privilege, just as the Toreador and the Tzimisce! We claim knowledge and art, just as the Cappadocians and the Toreador! We are no less than they!"

While some of these Low Clan Cainites may begin their unlives with substantially more prestige and wealth than their average brethren, they often find it very difficult to keep it. Once again, the sheer weight of the expectations undead society has of Low Clan vampires often forces them to conform to those expectations. Some Cainites maintain that status in Cainite society comes entirely from the Embrace, with no consideration granted to what position one held as a mortal. (Of course, this isn't always entirely true; see the Cultural Conflicts, p. 119) In most cases, the Cainites who espouse this tradition intend it as a positive thing, to explain why peasants or craftsmen Embraced by the High Clans are no less than their noble-born brethren. The system works in reverse, however, when it comes to the fallen, for it takes even the highest-born Embraced into the Low Clans and forces them to the lowest rungs of society.

Formerly noble fallen often have a harder time adjusting to unlife than their more common brethren. At least a peasant who is now also Malkavian is *accustomed* to being pushed around and stepped on by his betters. For a former noble, the sudden loss of the respect and deference she feels she deserves can be maddening. She grows angry, bitter and resentful. Because she is unable or unwilling to accept her new status, she finds it harder to fit into Cainite society, and this, ironically, makes it even *less* likely that she will prove one of the few fortunate fallen who manages to advance her position.

That said, because these former nobles are often so anxious and ambitious to regain what they have lost — and often have the political and social skills to do so, if they can calm down long enough to figure out how to work the system rather than railing against it — the Tremere very much prefer these candidates. Because their ambitions match the clan's own, they are easily shaped into a useful force. Among the other Low Clans, however, these individuals more often than not fade into misery and obscurity in short order.

Although position and prestige are the first, most common and most severe losses for those nobles Embraced into the Low Clans, these unfortunates

often find themselves losing more tangible assets as well. Consider, for instance, a Nosferatu who has obtained little or no status in Cainite society, but was Embraced from the upper classes and entered unlife with substantial properties and riches. She may very likely find that the other Cainites around her, particularly among the High Clans but even, to an extent, among the fallen as well, treat her as either a joke or an upstart, someone who seeks to rise above her station without truly possessing the ability to fit in with her betters. Some Low Clan Cainites are confident or strong-willed enough that this doesn't bother them — for a time — but invariably, most find themselves once more leaning towards one side or the other of the dichotomy addressed earlier. Cainites who seek to hide, to avoid notice, often stash their wealth away or even get rid of it, knowing that any vampire with riches but little prestige is constantly going to attract the attentions of other Cainites who seek to use her, or her wealth, as a tool. Those who grow subservient often spend all their wealth in the service of others, and those who seek to beat the system spend it in their attempts to acquire the standing to face off against local elders in the political arena. Finally, those who grow so angered by the system that they seek to destroy it often find that their only effective way of doing so is by using the wealth from their mortal days to support and supply other rebels with more martial skills.

In short, the majority of fallen Cainites begin unlife in, if not poverty, at least relative want as compared to the first cursed; those who do not tend to find themselves at that same level in short order. This doesn't mean that your character *must* be poor, of course, but if he's the exception to this rule, make sure you've decided why. Also, unless there's good character reason not to, you should likely incorporate either a certain amount of resignation or indignation into the character's personality, depending on whether he began poor or feels that his rights and his wealth are being stripped from him.

Havens

A character's wealth and status — or, as is more often the case with the Low Clans, the lack thereof — determine the sort of home he can maintain. A majority of Low Clan Cainites keep havens that are, at least in comparison to the High Clans, relatively poor. Some, such as many Nosferatu, prefer underground chambers such as the crypts beneath churches and rooms dug out beneath old ruins; sewers are becoming popular havens in those few cities that keep and maintain them. Other

fallen prefer ramshackle houses, abandoned monasteries, the cellars of shops or taverns, caves or other shelter out in the wild, covered wagons, rundown crypts, heavily shadowed alleys or just about anything else they can manage. Those who have insufficient money or influence to acquire better obviously have no choice, but even may fallen who do possess unusual wealth, or know which strings to pull, still prefer to exist like their poorer brethren, simply so they'll not attract the attention of those who will undoubtedly accuse them of trying to rise above their station.

Again, exceptions — numerous ones — exist. Many of the Low Clans who possess wealth enough or connections enough to obtain better havens do so. They may dwell in large homes or estates, in sprawling family mausoleums, perhaps even in their own ancestral castle if they happen to be of the nobility. This invariably draws the ire of many High Clan Cainites of the region, but some of the fallen are willing to deal with such annoyances if it enables them to dwell in the manner to which they are accustomed (or have always aspired).

Social and Environmental Concerns

Certain hazards of the Dark Medieval afflict the poor and downtrodden to a far greater extent than the privileged classes, and this means, almost by default, that they impact the Low Clans far more often than they do the High. Obviously, if your character is one of the fortunate fallen who dwells among the nobility or the priesthood, or who possesses sufficient riches to make her haven in the wealthy part of town, these rarely apply to her. To those Low Clan Cainites who dwell in poverty and filth, or who lurk on the fringes of society like outcasts, the following issues can prove disruptive or even dangerous. When creating and playing your character, keep these issues in mind. Deciding how (or if) your character faces these problems — or how he reacts to others who must deal with them, if he himself need not — can give you a solid handle on his personality.

Hunger

This doesn't refer to a Cainite's inability to find vitae — that's covered below — but rather to the repercussions of dwelling in a region where most of the kine are going hungry. Most Cainites hardly consider this to be a problem. After all, blood is blood, and what do they care if the mortals are comfortable or uncomfortable, well-fed or starving?

Farsighted vampires recognize this as a real danger, however. A weakened human population almost invariably leads to a lessened food source for Cainites.

People weakened by hunger cannot as easily survive the Kiss, and those who do survive take far longer to recover. Some Cainites may be careless in their habits, allowing the kine some inkling that a monster lurks in their midst; but leaving behind a trail of bodies in one's home territory is almost guaranteed to raise the ire of the populace and draw down the wrath of either other Cainites or the Inquisition.

Another danger of starvation among the kine is that it inspires those mortals who are capable of doing so to leave, in an attempt to find greener pastures elsewhere. Many people cannot simply up and move on, of course. Some are too weak or too poor to travel, others may be slaves or otherwise not permitted to leave, and a great number of people simply refuse to abandon a shop or a home their families have owned for generations. Still, many of those who can leave will do so, further diminishing the healthy population available for Cainite feeding.

Finally, regions in which hunger and starvation are prevalent among the kine are far more likely to suffer the ravages of disease (see below).

Many Cainites who dwell in famine-ravaged areas begin using what abilities and resources they have (if any) to aid the people around them. More than one village has awoken one winter morn to find several game animals lying dead in the center of town, or have received wagonloads of grain from nearby cities despite the fact that nobody in the village arranged for, or could have afforded, such a shipment. This isn't altruism on the part of the Cainite responsible, of course; she's merely protecting her herd. Still, some rare and exceptional vampires develop a taste for the people's gratitude (or worship), and begin to take their role as village guardian to heart.

Disease and Plague

As with hunger, many vampires believe plague to be entirely a problem for the kine, unworthy of their attentions save as a curiosity. Nothing could be further from the truth.

Cainites, by and large, believe themselves immune to disease. In the vast majority of instances, they're absolutely correct, and those plagues that ravage the human body prove absolutely harmless to the unliving. Occasionally, they're wrong. Rare diseases are quite capable of affecting Cainites as well as kine, whether sent by some mystic or supernatural source or simply the result of a natural but hideous development. Very few prove fatal — the unliving are, after all, notoriously hard to kill — but these plagues can be crippling, stripping away a Cainite's strength, his stamina, even his ability to digest blood.

Because Cainites have no natural ability to fight off diseases, recovery from one of these rare plagues requires a great deal of time, and an enormous expenditure of vitae. Those infected who can afford neither often wind up in torpor for decades or even centuries.

Even mundane plagues that cannot directly infect Cainites still pose a substantial threat. A swiftly spreading disease can completely decimate the kine population of a given region, thus shrinking or even destroying a Cainite's food source. Worse still, while vampires may not be susceptible to most diseases, they're more than capable of spreading them as they travel from victim to victim, causing even more damage.

Rumors of plague are often more than sufficient to keep commerce and travelers away from a town or region, which can prove almost as devastating economically as the disease itself proves physically. Entire populations, Cainites included, may lose all contact with the outside world. This causes shortages of various types of supplies, to say nothing of the lack of news and information, something almost as vital to many Cainites as vitae itself. Should things grow truly awful, Cainites might find themselves trapped behind a nobility-imposed quarantine as frightened dukes and princes forbid any travel into or out of the afflicted area. In the most extreme cases, entire villages may be burned to prevent the spread of the illness, leaving local Cainites the unenviable option of remaining and burning to death, or attempting to flee the fires by braving the sunlight.

It's also worth noting that many Cainites attach a social stigma to their brethren who come from disease-infested domains. This attitude is more common among the High Clans than the Low, reinforcing their perceptions of the fallen as squalor-dwelling inferiors who foul their own nests, but even Low Clan Cainites from healthier (or cleaner) regions look down on their own brethren who cannot even manage to find a sanitary place to dwell.

Cainites from disease-ridden areas often tend to be unpleasant, dirty or despondent, as though the plague that could not consume their bodies has instead ravaged their souls. The constant exposure to slow and lingering death and suffering is enough to taint all but the coldest and most unfeeling Cainite, no matter how contemptuous of the kine he may be. Add to this other Cainites' disdain for those who would dwell in such a hideous environment, and the looming knowledge that they may carry the disease within them for the rest of eternity, and many Cainites from these regions become bitter, resentful creatures.

Starvation



It's odd to think of predators like the Cainites ever being forced to go hungry, but the truth is that some vampires of the Dark Medieval do face the very real threat of starvation from time to time. What's less surprising is that the Low Clans must face this problem far more frequently than the first cursed.

The risk of starvation comes about through a combination of poverty — which, while neither unique to nor ubiquitous within the Low Clans, is far more rampant among the fallen than their “higher” counterparts — and the style of unlife many fallen choose for themselves. It's true that hunting may actually be easier in poorer towns or neighborhoods, as the rich are better protected, dwell in better lit and better guarded homes and normally have less reason to be out after dark, trying to squeeze in just a little more work to earn a little more coin. Poorer kine are, however, far more susceptible to the twin specters of hunger and disease, as mentioned above, and when the kine grow less numerous and less healthy, the Cainites go hungry as well.

Compounding the problem is the tendency of several of the Low Clans — the Gangrel, Nosferatu and Ravnos specifically — to keep their distance from mortal society. The Gangrel and some Ravnos often choose a nomadic existence, while other Ravnos have

such an existence thrust upon them. Nosferatu more frequently dwell within the kine population, but always as outsiders even within a crowd. It's not entirely uncommon for Cainites of these three clans to find themselves in places where kine are hard to come by. It may be possible for a vampire to survive for a time on animal vitae, but it's far from a pleasant experience.

Some Cainites who have known substantial hunger become gluttons, feeding at every available opportunity and taking far more than they require, as though attempting to make up for lost time. Others react in the opposite manner, conserving what sustenance is available against another night of want like those they've experienced in the past.

Taxes

What? Surely the unliving need not worry about taxes and tithes! After all, it's not as though the king, baron, tax collector or what have you keeps a list of which corpses remain in the ground and which are still wandering about generating potential income for crown and country.

Such careless disregard for so mundane a reminder of mortal authority has caused the downfall of more than one Cainite. Not all states or principalities tax their inhabitants, of course, and many of those

that do so simply claim a percentage of a man's yield of crops or goods.

If a Low Clan Cainite dwells in a region where everyone is expected to produce a minimum regular tax, or if the vampire owns (directly or through mortal cat's-paws) a business or property, he is just as subject to taxation as any mortal, no matter how much he may consider himself above the law.

How secretive a Cainite is goes a long way towards determining how subject she is to mortal taxation. While many nations and regions in the Dark Medieval are haphazardly governed at best, their governors largely ignorant about the precise makeup and numbers of their people, others are far more well-organized. (Witness the Domesday Book, census and property information collected on all the English populace by William the Conqueror in AD 1086.) Those Cainites who dwell in sewers, crypts or caves may be able to avoid notice even in these highly organized areas, but anyone who still maintains a house or place of business will be found and registered. It may be frustrating for a successful Cainite merchant, craftsman or landholder to pay taxes to some kine lord who's little more than a midnight snack, but the alternative is to draw the attention of the local authorities, something most Cainites — particularly those without the political connections far more common to the High Clans than the Low — would do well to avoid. A little money is a small price to pay to avoid a daytime visit by a tax collector and his armed retinue.

Even Cainites who do not own — or keep pawns who own — registered property or establishments may not be able to avoid contributing to the local lord's coffers. While the visiting tax collector has no way of knowing that your Nosferatu character is dwelling in the caves near the local cemetery, odds are good that *somebody* in town has seen you, even if she doesn't know that you're anything but a mortal leper keeping to himself. Many commoners in the Dark Medieval are more than willing to point out such squatters to taxmen, in the hopes of earning themselves some sort of reward — or even for no better reason than they're frustrated that they have to pay taxes and the squatter does not.

Cainites of the Low Clans who are in a position where they're forced to pay taxes to mortal lords usually end up resigned to the situation. Many dislike the notion, but they acknowledge that the alternative is far worse. Some, however, actually don't mind paying the taxes, or at least don't mind it any more than the average mortal peasant. They still hold many of the attitudes with which they were raised as mortals, and consider taxes as simply one more of the burdens of their position in society.

A WORD ABOUT LONERS

You'll notice that, as discussed below in terms of individual objectives, many fallen Cainites really desire nothing other than to be left alone to pursue their own agendas, and to avoid entanglement in Cainite affairs. The loner, whether he's a cowering Nosferatu, a gruff and nomadic Gangrel, a Ravnos constantly on the run or what have you, is a popular character concept, and it fits in perfectly with many Low Clan archetypes.

It is *very* easy, however, to take that concept too far, and doing so can destroy an entire chronicle and make life very difficult for the Storyteller. A character who *prefers* to be left alone is fine, but if you play a character who *insists* on being left alone and who fights tooth and nail against any interaction with the other players or with Storyteller characters, you're not doing anyone a favor. It's the Storyteller's job to involve each and every character in the story, but it's your job, as players, to provide her a means of doing so. If you're forcing the Storyteller to come up with new ways every other session to force your character to participate, or if you're spending more time wandering off on your own than working alongside the coterie, she's entirely within her rights to finally say, "All right, your character wanders off and does his own thing. If you want to keep playing, create a new character."

Don't take the loner concept too far. Ultimately, you won't make anyone happy.

Goals and Ambitions

It would be foolish to assume that the goals, ambitions and priorities a character begins with will remain unchanged throughout a chronicle. People evolve (or devolve), their circumstances change, and something they believed was absolutely vital at one point may fade completely before other, more important objectives in the future. Most Cainites of a given Low Clan share a roughly similar starting point — that is, after all, where the clan archetypes come from — but they invariably grow in different directions, as all individuals will.

That said, the goals and ambitions your character begins with should go a long way toward shaping both who he is, and who he becomes over the course of a chronicle. Since you obviously can't plan for changes

you don't know are coming, don't worry about when or how those goals shift; focus on what they are at the time of character creation, and keep them firmly in mind as your character's personality and mechanical attributes evolve.

Because characters do tend to begin play more similar to one another than they eventually end up, we can provide some suggestions and commonalities for Low Clan character starting points. Many of the goals and ambitions described below tie in with the dichotomy discussed earlier, but many others are — at least on the surface — unrelated to how a fallen Cainite reacts to the pressures of vampiric society. As before, all of these are suggestions only, and your character need not share all, or any, of these methods or objectives.

We've also included suggestions for developing and advancing your character mechanically as the chronicle progresses. Obviously, you'll want to focus most on those Attributes and Abilities of which you've made the most use, but you're still best served by keeping your character's personality and goals in mind when you spend experience. After all, you want to ensure that your character's growth reflects his current motivations and objectives.

Assamites

Most Western Cainites believe that any Assamite traveling beyond the borders of the Holy Land must, by definition, be hostile. After all, most outsiders view the Saracens as nothing but a clan of fanatic warriors and assassins, so if one appears in your midst, it must be because she's preparing something bloody and violent. Obviously, given the true nature and depth of the Assamite clan, this stereotype is often misleading, or blatantly false — but not always. A substantial number of Assamites traveling through Europe or other regions inhabited by Western Cainites are indeed engaged in assassination, sabotage, espionage or other covert activities. These Assamites rarely remain in one place long enough to develop any specific goals beyond the completion of their missions. Although their purposes are destructive, their behavior often falls nearer the submissive end of the dichotomy discussed above. They either hide away from other Cainites, hoping their presence will go unnoticed, or they make a show of how useful (or at least harmless) they are, the better to lull their target into a false sense of security. Many attempt to mask their true natures, passing as Cainites of other clans or as natives of other regions than the Middle East. Some do operate openly, almost as though daring local lords to stop them, but this is rare — especially since many who prove so

openly defiant never have a chance to try again. Such characters often have no long-term goals beyond slaying their target and returning home.

Still, these Assamites make up only a small portion of the clan, even beyond their home borders. Many Assamites traveling through other domains seek only to learn about Cainite society, studying the locals' methods, traditions, even specific Cainites. Others, particularly the Assamite sorcerers, often seek specific esoteric or mystical knowledge, hunting down arcane tidbits and rituals in hopes of using them — or simply preventing others from having them. Some Assamites travel for the same reason mortals travel to the West from the Holy Land: commerce. The “exotic” goods of the East fetch great prices in European markets, and the Assamites are no more above turning a good profit than the next Cainite. Although their purposes are less objectionable than their more violent brethren, these Assamites also tend to behave submissively. They seek to avoid the attention of the Cainites among whom they dwell, or at least — particularly in the case of the merchants — to prove themselves harmless. They know that they are within hostile territory, surrounded by Cainites who most likely believe that all Assamites are a threat to be either avoided or eliminated.

Politically minded Assamites exist as well, although that certainly seems an odd notion to many European Cainites. Some dwell within the Holy Land, others in regions such as Iberia where both Assamite and non-Assamite princes are common, and some actually attempt to obtain their own offices or positions in the West. A few of these last are simply ambitious, seeking territories their brethren back home cannot threaten; but others are actively attempting to bridge the divide between the Assamites and the other clans. Not all the Saracens accept the notion that other Cainites must be enemies. They see the strengths of the Western clans and recognize the danger and the futility of war. These Assamites attempt to make their homes in the West, abiding among the Children of Caine, even participating in politics and holding office when possible — all to show the Cainites that they can interact peacefully. Few of these Assamites succeed in acquiring positions of any import in the West, as they have few allies on whom to call; but those who do often prove quite effective at advising, governing or whatever task it is they've taken upon themselves. Most of these Assamites lean towards the defiant side of the dichotomy, but they almost never behave rebelliously, as open violence is counterproductive to their goals.

In the Middle East, their political rivals are other Assamites, and open war between clanmates is heavily frowned upon. In regions such as Iberia, bloodshed between an Assamite contender and a non-Assamite prince might well enflame the current hostilities into a war that would swallow entire nations, one to make even the War of Princes pale in comparison. And in the West, those Assamites who seek a place in Cainite society know that the use of violence against their political rivals damages not only their own standing, but that of their entire clan. Because these Assamites either claim their own place in Cainite society, serve a Western Cainite who already holds some level of authority, or are at least working hard to fit in, they often prove the easiest of all Assamites to work into a mixed coterie.

Development

The obvious choice for an Assamite character, especially a warrior or assassin, is to focus largely on combat Abilities such as Brawl or Melee, and Disciplines such as Celerity and Quietus. The obvious choice, however, is not always the correct one. Assamite assassins are best served by focusing a great deal on stealth as well, of course, but also on knowledge of culture and language. An Assamite incapable of blending into any environment is unlikely to get near her intended target, and one who cannot speak the language of the region in which she's operating is almost certain to be discovered or miss vital information.

Cultural and linguistic knowledge is vital for other Assamites away from home as well. While an assassin may have to remain in a region just long enough to get a job done, other Assamites dwell in foreign lands indefinitely. They must speak the language, must master local customs, must learn the identities of local authorities both Cainite and kine, if they're to have any hope at all of remaining unnoticed — or at least of making themselves appear less like outsiders. Where else you choose to focus your development depends largely on why your character dwells in the area. If knowledge of the local Cainite power structure is her objective, she'll want to focus on politics and similar lore, and Social Attributes are essential for making allies and contacts who can pass along information. Assamite sorcerers, of course, often focus on occult- and magic-related Abilities and Disciplines. They're best served not only improving their own skills, but also learning as much as they can about the mystic prowess of others.

Politically minded Assamites, especially those far from home, find that knowledge of the local culture

and rivals' political acumen is often vital not only for victory, but for survival. Unlike their assassin compatriots, these Assamites haven't the option of hiding, so they must make themselves appear a natural part of the system. This doesn't mean hiding their true nature necessarily, so disguise-related skills and Disciplines aren't of particular import. Rather, they must focus on local customs, developing an entire web of contacts, allies and influence. Any advantage in information gathering — particularly information that can be used as leverage against local Cainites — is valuable, as are Social Attributes in general. An Assamite playing politics may actually want to *avoid* focusing on combat-related Abilities and Disciplines, since displaying such capabilities will only reinforce the notion that her clan is composed entirely of fanatical killers.

Followers of Set

Like the Assamites, the Serpents have a somewhat unsavory reputation. Unlike the Assamites, the majority of Setites have, to one extent or another, earned that reputation. Although exceptions exist, most Setites follow the clan's creed of power through temptation. They're more than willing to provide any good or service they can, which makes them useful enough to have around that many lords and princes tolerate their presence — even those who should know better. They cannot be trusted, however, and often use the boons, payments and favors acquired in exchange for their help as leverage over those who would work against their interests.

Except in their homeland of Egypt, the Setites are not particularly powerful in a martial sense. They are vulnerable, because they rarely gather in great numbers save in their own domains, and because they know full well that even those who partake of their services neither like nor trust them. Thus, as much as they dislike, despise or scoff at the other clans, all but the most fanatic and belligerent of Serpents lean towards the submissive extreme. Sometimes they hide their presence from other Cainites, but because that provides them little opportunity to make deals and exchange favors, they prefer instead to make themselves useful to those in power, or even to those who seek power. Very few take up arms against Cainite leaders — with one notable exception being the Setite/Assamite war in Egypt — and even fewer have any luck obtaining political power in regions dominated by other clans.

What other Cainites often fail to realize is that while the Setites may act or appear alike on the surface, they often have very different motivations for behaving as they do. Obviously the clan is named for

their founder, the vampire-god Set, and all his children ostensibly worship him and work constantly towards his return.

In truth, only a portion of the clan — albeit a substantial portion — truly believes in Set and his eventual rebirth. These Setites are religious fanatics, just as dedicated as any Christian or Muslim. When they destroy a Cainite of another clan, it is a victory for their god. When they foment chaos and dissent, they strike a blow against the agents of their master's greatest foes. When they place another Cainite under their thrall, blackmailing him into cooperation or manipulating his own perversions and addictions like puppet strings, they have acquired yet another tool to spread the glory of Set. The faithful are often more selective in their choice of allies (and pawns) than others of the clan and, all else being equal, prefer suborning high-blooded Cainites. While all Cainites are viable tools, they prefer to concentrate their efforts on those who will prove most useful. These Setites would rather own a single prince than a handful of commoners — unless, of course, they feel the prince is weak, in which case those commoners might be useful in bringing her down. They often behave in a manner that appears irrational from the outside, because they may be following the orders of superiors who have farther-reaching goals than are immediately apparent. If a faithful Setite believes that another Cainite lord or prince is useful where she is — perhaps because she's easily manipulated, or perhaps because her greatest rival is an enemy of the Setites — he may serve that lord with unswerving loyalty, even risking his own unlife for hers. This makes it seem as though the Serpent has turned from the ways of his clan, but in truth it's all done for the greater good of Set. Many Setites also spend substantial time searching for occult lore and secrets, seeking ways to call Set forth from the darkness and accelerate his rebirth. This often places them in the same circles — and frequently at odds — with the Tremere and Assamites.

Other Setites, however, either don't believe in the ascension of Set, or prefer to focus on other matters. These Serpents may behave much like their more faithful brethren, but they wish to obtain favors and influence to advance their own position, not some bizarre religious cause. These Setites are actually more likely to develop real relationships — based on mutual cooperation, and even as close as Cainites come to friendship — with other vampires, because they do not possess the religious belief that all other Cainites are enemies of Set. Still, they prefer to manipulate and blackmail when at all possible, rather than trusting to feeble ties such as trust and affection.

They prefer placing more powerful Cainites under their influence, of course, but they're less selective than their fundamentalist counterparts, often working with any vampire who has something to offer in exchange. They, too, can appear — and even truly become — loyal to a Cainite lord, but only because they see such affiliation as the best and quickest route to power of their own in a society that distrusts them.

Those few Setites who fall into neither camp, who reject (or at least do not focus on) their brethren's disreputable methods, have it worst of all. They must attempt to convince the Cainites around them that they're not like their fellows, and they have to survive long enough to do so without the aid of the rest of their own clan. These Setites frequently attach themselves desperately, almost slavishly, to the first reputable Cainite who will take them on, simply so they have some sort of buffer and allies to shield them from the rest of Cainite society.

Development

Most Setites, regardless of their religious inclinations, are well served by focusing on Social Attributes; whether they're attempting to manipulate those around them or simply wish to ensure that potential enemies grow to like them, such Attributes are invaluable. Knowledge of local politics, systems and individuals both, is vital to learning who to approach and deal with, and who to avoid. Political acumen is important to those seeking to prove their worth and ability to princes and lords. Combat Abilities are rarely a priority for Setites, but can prove useful when hiding and deal-making fail and the Serpent is backed into a corner. Beyond these, a Setite is wise to tailor his Abilities to the specific needs of the region in which he operates, and to seek contacts and allies accordingly. One wants to have something valuable to offer prospective customers, after all. A Setite expert in Judeo-Christian artifacts, for instance, is far more valuable in the Holy Land than he is in Norway.

Many Setites, particularly those seeking to awaken their ancient master, also delve deeply into arcane secrets. Occult and similar Knowledges are valuable, as are blood sorceries when the Serpent has the opportunity to learn them. Obfuscate is a particularly valuable Discipline when it comes to learning one's neighbors' wants and desires.

Gangrel

Most Gangrel want little more from their fellow Cainites than to be left alone to pursue their own

desires. Because they're often nomadic, wandering where they choose and avoiding societal entanglements, many people make the mistake of assuming a Gangrel character need not have her own goals and objectives. Simply being alone can be an objective — and one not always as easily obtained as it may seem — but most Gangrel do indeed have others.

Because Gangrel determine clan status by their accomplishments and victories, many so-called Animals are risk-takers, seeking challenges that any "civilized" Cainite would avoid. They *want* to find threatening creatures in the wild, to spend some time subsisting off as little blood possible, to challenge the ruler of a domain through which they're passing. They're not stupid about it, and most are wise enough not to anger a Cainite powerful enough to cause them problems later on, but they do not shy from open conflict.

Some Gangrel seek to slow the spread of civilization into their hunting lands. Some of these epitomize the defiant and rebellious fallen, lurking around the fringes of a prince's domain and attacking any of his agents or establishments whenever the opportunity arises. These anarchic Gangrel, who often become or consider themselves Autarkis, are actually more likely than many of their purely nomadic brethren to join a coterie with other clans, if it means obtaining allies against the local power structure.

As mortal civilization expands, and Cainite lords vie for larger and larger territories, more Gangrel find themselves dwelling within or at the borders of Cainite society than ever before. Those Gangrel who wish to dwell in relative peace and quiet within another Cainite's domain often have a difficult time of it. Most prefer to be left alone, yet they haven't the proper skills — and certainly not the proper attitudes — to remain hidden. Many "civilized" Gangrel find themselves serving one or another of the powerful Cainite princes or lords — often as sheriffs or other enforcers — not because they particularly want to, but because they can trade the occasional task or service for the right to their own territory, and thus at least some small modicum of privacy. These Gangrel don't act particularly submissive, but the truth is that they do tend to fall towards that end of the dichotomy, as they've been forced into serving other Cainites in exchange for the right to do as they wish.

It's difficult, with such an individualistic clan, to generalize further about their goals and ambitions, but certain other common objectives exist that are, if not universal, at least relatively common. The Gangrel are a prideful clan, and as such they're prone to carrying grudges. A startling number of Gangrel are currently seeking retribution for some past



wrong or another, done to them, a companion or the clan as a whole. (In the Slavic East, for instance, a goodly number of the clan is still engaged in fighting alongside the Tzimisce against the Tremere.) Many Gangrel dwelling within the bounds of civilization do so because they are searching for some other Cainite, in order to express their displeasure in the most direct — and often most bloody — manner possible.

Although they're far from common, a growing number of Gangrel are actually involving themselves in Cainite politics. Some act from personal ambition, but others have simply come to the conclusion that if they're to dwell as they please, without being mired down in the machinations of other Cainites, their only option is to obtain a position where they might *command* others to leave them alone. It may not be entirely a logical approach, but when have the Gangrel been known for logic?

Gangrel tend to struggle in the political arena, since most of them lack knowledge of and experience with Cainite systems of government. On the other hand, their rugged outsider natures can also provide them an advantage over their more savvy rivals, as their enemies often underestimate them. Other political Cainites often dismiss the Gangrel entirely, unable to see them as a serious threat. This negligence often provides a sizable opportunity for those Gangrel who have learned enough about politics. Furthermore, because the Gangrel are accustomed to conflict and have no patience with cowards and quitters, they often tenaciously follow a struggle — be it physical or political — to the bitter end, where other, more politically savvy Cainites would long since have cut their losses and abandoned the field or office to the enemy.

Development

It almost goes without saying that nomadic Gangrel focus largely on stealth and survival skills, with combat skills coming in a near second. For those who would continue to avoid submersion in Cainite society, it behooves them to continue developing such abilities well into the chronicle. Skill with animals is vital as well, as nomadic Gangrel often must rely on nonhuman vitae to survive. If the Gangrel has a particular area through which she roams, it's worth her time to learn something about the Cainite princes of the surrounding cities; she's almost certain to run afoul of them at some point. Language skills are valuable for wandering Gangrel, as they may run into all sorts of people in their travels. Similarly, even the most larcenous bandit of an Animal may occasionally be required to barter or negotiate for some item or

supply she needs. This, in conjunction with their prominence within the Animalism Discipline, makes Social Attributes — often considered utterly unnecessary for Gangrel — far more important than they appear.

As much as the idea may chafe, Gangrel who would dwell within or even near the cities must learn how to behave in a civilized fashion. Local language and customs are essential, and an understanding of local Cainite politics can aid the Gangrel in determining to whom she should offer her services, if anyone. At the very least, she'll know who to avoid. Those who would carve their own niche in society must do more than skim the surface of local politics, they must master political and bureaucratic knowledge, learn to become more eloquent speakers and to bargain for what they desire. It's not sufficient for an ambitious Gangrel to become as good as the local Toreador, Brujah or Lasombra when it comes to political maneuvering. She must be *better*, if she's to have any hope of overcoming not only her rivals, but also the joint stigma of being a fallen Cainite and an Animal attempting to rise above her betters.

Malkavian

Attempting to give even the most general of goals for neonate Malkavians is an exercise in futility. They do not focus on ambition, strength, knowledge or any other criteria for their Embrace. The Malkavians are mad, and they sire for reasons incomprehensible to sane Cainites. Thus, no true commonality in either ambition or personality can exist among the newly Embraced, save that they are all, to a greater or lesser extent, insane.

An important point must be made, however, both for players who would portray the Madmen and for Storytellers as well. The fact that a Cainite is insane, be he Malkavian or any other deranged vampire, does *not* mean that he has no goals or ambitions! All people want something, need something, strive for something, and the Malkavians are no different. They may possess goals unfathomable to anyone who doesn't share their particular madness. Their objectives may change on a night-to-night basis. They may seek goals that are absolutely impossible, such as to ascend to godhood, lift the Curse of Caine or become invisible by slaughtering whores in symbolic locations throughout the city. Their ambitions may not even be describable in any language known to mankind. But nonetheless, those goals and objectives do exist, and they influence the behavior and development of the

character no less than the ambitions of any other Cainite of any other clan.

It can be difficult for a (presumably) sane player to create goals and objectives for an insane character, but it's still a good idea. It can be just about anything, so long as you steer clear of the ridiculous and recall that this is a horror game. Perhaps he's collecting bits of corpses to rebuild a dead relative, or he seeks to gain the loyalty of the prince and then betray her because he believes she's the pawn of a conspiracy made up of ancient Roman witches. For that matter, many Malkavians pursue the same objectives as their more rational brethren. Some seek power, working to become lords and princes of their own domains. Others wish to grow wealthy, or to be left alone to act as they please, or to destroy a hated enemy who has wronged them. Any ambition you can imagine, rational or irrational, sane or lunatic, is an acceptable starting point for a Malkavian character. You may wish to tailor your character's goals so they play into and emphasize his derangement — but then, you might also find it fun to play a character whose personal goals have nothing whatsoever to do with his inherited madness.

Remember, too, that a Malkavian's derangement need not be obvious. Many insane individuals function perfectly well in society, be it mortal or Cainite (at least for a time). In fact, more than one Malkavian has obtained a position of authority in Cainite circles without any of his compatriots learning that he is, in fact, a Madman. For every stark-raving-mad Malkavian ranting about the coming of Gehenna or muttering to himself while strangling an urchin, some other is making her way to the highest levels of Cainite nobility, her political acumen only enhanced by her paranoia or her unquenchable ambition.

Something else to be considered when creating a Malkavian character is the often-overlooked fact that the character's insanity need not be, and in many cases *should* not be, the entirety of the character's concept. Nosferatu are more than their ugly appearance. Ravnos are more than their addiction to sin. Malkavians should be more than their madness. You should not be able to describe a Malkavian character simply as "delusional," "paranoid" or "murderous." Those are only aspects of his personality. Is he a murderous knight who was abused by a stern father? A paranoid ex-priest who believes the Day of Judgment has already passed, and seeks to build a pseudo-Christian cult around himself? A delusional baker who once fell in love with the daughter of a local lord, and seeks now to become prince in the mad belief that this will prove his worth to the woman he loves? Deciding a Malkavian's goals and desires goes a long way towards

defining him beyond the bounds of his derangement, but it's merely a start. A Malkavian's concept should be just as detailed as that of any other character, and not neatly summed up by a two-word gimmick.

Finally, remember that in the Middle Ages, madness was seen as an outside affliction. The insane are possessed by spirits or demons, or cursed by witches, or the like. Madness is not a handicap; it is a sign of evil, or at least the supernatural. This doesn't necessarily change the way a Malkavian behaves (although it might), but it *definitely* changes the way others are going to react to a Malkavian character.

Development

The direction you'll take a Malkavian character clearly depends largely on the individual nature, the goals and the particular madness of the character. A Malkavian who seeks political power must, of course, concentrate on learning the ins and outs of politics, acquiring contacts and allies and learning the nature of his rivals. This isn't sufficient, however. Many such Malkavians would also be wise to focus on overcoming, or at least resisting their innate madness, as the time may come when an important alliance or a court gathering would be threatened by an ill-timed outbreak of lunacy. In game terms, this means buying Willpower to reasonably high levels. Of course, this assumes that your character has lucid moments in which she recognizes that she's got certain behavioral quirks she must repress, at least in the company of others. Only a few Malkavians are so insightful when it comes to their own madness, and are thus unable to reasonably struggle against it. The majority simply act as seems natural to them, and only later — if at all — wonder why others react to them so strangely.

Beyond that, advance whichever Traits seem most suitable to the character — keeping in mind the fact that he likely views the world, and his means to get what he wants, through a somewhat different lens than everyone else. Combine goals and derangement, and you'll have a perfect guide to take your character through an entire chronicle.

Nosferatu

It is an unfortunate truth in any caste-oriented society that those most easily marked as different are usually those most cruelly oppressed, and the treatment of the Nosferatu is no exception. Hideous, cursed and deformed, unable to hide their true natures for long, the Lepers are the detritus of Cainite society, often spat upon even by other

fallen. In some domains they are still driven out when they're discovered by other Cainites who fear them for the attention they cannot help but attract, or hate them for reminding their less ugly brethren that all vampires are cursed by God.

Surprisingly enough, only a small portion of the clan grows as angry and bitter as might be expected at this treatment, although those few are quite capable of causing substantial harm to their tormentors. They strike back at the Cainites who oppress them, although many do so in ways far more subtle than most rebellious vampires. For every one who uses her great strength or animals under her command to assault the prince's agents or lay waste to his haven, a handful of others work from the shadows, trading information on the prince's habits and the domain's defenses to rivals for the throne. Amongst the Nosferatu, so accustomed to hiding, even revolution is usually performed in secret and through the exchange of knowledge. Although their affinity for Potence makes them formidable soldiers, most Nosferatu prefer sabotage and espionage to direct conflict.

Still, the damage these rebellious Nosferatu cause belies their numbers; most Lepers do not lash out so against other Cainites. Some feel helpless to act against their oppression, others accept their station in society with a weary — perhaps martyr-like — resignation, while still others use their talents and abilities to rise above their caste and attain positions of some import with (or occasionally even as) Cainite lords and princes.

The majority of Nosferatu, like the Gangrel, prefer to avoid entanglement in politics, or in any aspect of Cainite society for that matter. They wish to be left alone, for solitude is preferable to the hatred, disgust and fear heaped upon them by their brethren. Strangely, although they are not ill-suited to the untamed wilds, most Nosferatu prefer to remain within cities and other communities, rather than wandering as do the Gangrel. Some fear the wilds and the creatures therein, others pine for mortal or Cainite companionship even while they hide away from all contact, and some simply refuse to be separated from their herd. Rather, the Nosferatu prefer to hide within or at least near the borders of the cities, dwelling in crypts, nearby caves, rundown and abandoned buildings — anyplace they can expect more fastidious Cainites to avoid. They move from place to place, often keeping multiple havens, emerging only to hunt or for other necessities. They avoid other Cainites whenever possible, and prefer flight to confrontation.

Other Nosferatu prefer making themselves useful to remaining completely alone and unseen. Everyone knows the Nosferatu are unexcelled when it comes to unearthing and brokering information and secrets, and many of the Lepers conduct a thriving trade in rumor and whisper. Any Cainite — from the prince concerned with the goings-on of his domain, to the Assamite seeking a hidden route out of town, to the Brujah seeking to blackmail his sire, to the Lasombra hunting for a lost relic of St. Peter — almost certainly, at some point or other, visits a Nosferatu for information, and just as certainly pays a steep price in goods or favors to get it. Some Nosferatu take advantage of their reputation, selling false or altered information to those they dislike, or if they feel they can fetch a better price for lies than truth. Wiser Lepers eschew this sort of behavior, however, as they realize that the mere accusation that a Nosferatu has falsified information can destroy her reputation — and that reputation is all that protects them from the hatred of their fellows.

The most strong-willed Nosferatu accept the notion that they may be redeemed along with their curse, and believe that they are in no way inferior to other Cainites, regardless of their appearance. These Nosferatu often involve themselves with society around them, often rising to advise the prince — or become prince themselves — through a combination of valuable knowledge and sheer force of will. These Nosferatu, who are usually but not always particularly religious, often refuse to make their havens in hidden or out-of-the-way places. They prefer private homes, establishments of higher learning, even the occasional keep — in other words, the same sorts of places often frequented by the High Clans. Those with sufficient strength of will, and with enough leverage that the first cursed cannot simply dismiss them, can force their way into Cainite nobility and eventually gain sufficient power where even those who hate them for their deformity must acknowledge them. Those who overestimate the value of their information or the extent of their skill find themselves either laughed out of high society, or else punished — even slain — for rising above their station.

Development

Nosferatu dwelling on the fringes of society focus largely on stealth-related aptitudes (and Obfuscate, of course). They're also wise to consider survival skills, in case the dubious comforts of town are ever denied them, and many make use of Animalism as both an emergency food source and a means of keeping an eye

on goings-on in the city. They usually claim few allies or contacts, but cultivate those they have with extreme care; to a Nosferat accustomed to rejection and loneliness, a single friend is more valuable than all the sycophants and advisors of a prince's court. Fringedwelling or hiding Nosferatu would also be advised to learn something of the geography of the surrounding area, as well as the political figures of several nearby towns, in case they are ever driven from their current domicile.

Other Nosferatu, whether they barter and trade information to advance their own position, to turn aside the ire of the prince or to see that prince dethroned, must become jacks-of-all-trades. True, they require the same stealth and spying talents as their less forward cousins — making Obfuscate and Animalism equally valuable — but they must possess a broad array of knowledge, from the political to the occult to the personal. After all, possessing the facts is only part of the information broker's skill; the Nosferatu must also be able to determine what knowledge is particularly valuable, what the repercussions are of selling it, and to whom they should offer it. Nosferatu seeking to carve their own niche in the political arena should, obviously, focus more on political savvy than others, but should still make a point of being well-rounded. Language skills are vital as well, as not all the information a Nosferatu seeks will be presented in the local argot.

Some Nosferatu become experts in religious matters, as they settle on God (or some other higher power) as their path to redemption. In fact, Nosferatu often maintain Road ratings higher than many other clans, High or Low.

Ravnos

The first thing to consider when playing a Ravnos is this: The character should be far more than a vehicle for his flaw. Just as a Malkavian must be more than just "crazy," a Ravnos must be more than just dishonest, or thieving, or sacrilegious. The Ravnos flaw is an *aspect* of the character only; if the flaw sums up your entire roleplaying hook, you don't have a complete character yet.

Again, the best way to fill out the character is with goals and ambitions. A subtle difference, one that escapes many Cainites (and many players), separates the desires of the largely nomadic Gangrel from the equally nomadic Ravnos. The Gangrel want to be left alone; the Ravnos actually prefer the company of others, but they value their freedom above all other

TROUBLEMAKERS BEWARE

Flip back several pages, until you find the sidebar entitled A Word About Loners. Read it again, replacing "loners" with "wacky Ravnos who deliberately make life miserable for their fellow players and the Storyteller."

Don't play that sort of character, at least not without clearing it with your Storyteller first. The average Ravnos is quite capable of causing enough trouble through his thieving or dishonesty, without throwing a deliberate attempt to disrupt the story into the mix.

considerations. They move from domain to domain, not because they seek solitude, but because they seek to avoid those who would enslave or slay them. The goals of a young Ravnos are very often focused on tangible rewards — money, goods, and the like. This isn't to say that all Ravnos characters must be greedy, but it's certainly not an uncommon place to start.

Still, the Charlatans' reputation for thievery, deception and petty annoyance is only partly deserved, and the clan stereotype of wanderers who seek only to bilk others out of their wealth is exaggerated. A large portion of the clan yet dwells in their homeland in the Far East, and many Ravnos wanderers avoid the larcenous practices of their more flamboyant brethren. Still, the vagrant Ravnos are the most noticeable and the most common in the European domains, so this is the image most Cainites hold, and the reputation to which most Cainites react.

Few Ravnos are ever permitted the opportunity to become more than dwellers on the fringe of society. They are, in effect, a reflection of the same societal cycle that keeps the Low Clans as a whole from elevating themselves. The Charlatans' reputation prevents any other Cainites from trusting them, thus they are never granted the opportunity to prove they can be trusted.

Outside their native India, about which most Cainites remain utterly ignorant, the Ravnos claim fewer princes or positions of nobility than any other clan, High or Low. A Tremere can prove herself sufficiently canny or powerful, a Nosferatu sufficiently knowledgeable, a Malkavian sufficiently stable or even an Assamite sufficiently committed and honorable to convince local Cainites to accept them in some sort of official role. Few Ravnos are ever able to shake the distrust of others, however, and most never bother to try. With very few exceptions, the only Ravnos to hold power over a domain are those power-

ful enough to conquer it by force, or those who claim some backwater, poverty-stricken region that no sane vampire would want. Even those are as rare as Lasombra sun-cultists. Etienne de Faubergé, Prince of Acre, obtained his position via a combination of a powerful patron (his sire Varsik), the fact that Outremer isn't firmly under the thumb of the High Clans, and the fact that at the time he claimed domain over the city, no Cainite (himself included) could enter it.

Between the mistrust and antagonism shown them by most other Cainites and the "remain free, take what you want" attitude passed on to many Ravnos childer by their sires — to say nothing of their unfortunate clan weakness — most Ravnos have no interest in integrating into Cainite society anyway. Those few who do almost invariably serve as agents or proxies for a specific Cainite master or employer, rather than holding or even attempting to hold any office of their own. It's far easier, after all, to convince *one* powerful Cainite to trust you, or at least tolerate you, than to convince an entire court or an entire domain to do the same. Some Ravnos make surprisingly effective warriors and assassins, and this is the third most common task — after espionage and sabotage — for which they hire themselves out. Only a relative few choose to pursue this application of their skills and Disciplines, but those who do rival any Gangrel, Brujah or Assamite.

The rest travel, or else set up havens in portions of town where they're unlikely to be noticed, and attempt to conduct whatever sort of activities they prefer. The unfortunate stereotype that Ravnos enjoy making trouble and fomenting chaos in whatever city they happen to pass through is misleading. It's true only of those Charlatans who grow rebellious and hostile towards the society that has spurned them, or those who hold a grudge against a particular domain or Cainite. The rest aren't particularly out to cause trouble, and in fact would prefer to avoid the attentions of local authorities. Unfortunately, the Ravnos often possess a certain contempt for the other clans which, when combined with their flamboyant natures and clan weakness, often inspires them to cause trouble despite themselves. A Ravnos who incites a riot against the local merchants by cheating the populace, who refuses to acknowledge other Cainites' territorial rights and feeds where he likes, or who steals an heirloom belonging to the prince, can incite just as much of a furor through lack of foresight or common sense as a more vindictive Charlatan can cause deliberately.

Development

As with the Gangrel, the nomadic Ravnos find wilderness and survival skills essential if they plan to make it from one city to the next in one piece. Subterfuge and Stealth are vital for those who subscribe to the Ravnos stereotype and prey upon the gullibility and carelessness of the kine around them. Facility with languages is also important, since the Ravnos can wind up practically anywhere.

The Charlatans rarely focus on the social ties reflected by Backgrounds such as Allies, Contacts and Influence, as they rarely remain in one place long enough to make use of them. Still, the occasional contact can prove most useful if it's in a city the Ravnos frequents regularly, and those Ravnos who travel with other, mortal wanderers, would be well advised to cultivate friends among their traveling companions.

Ravnos who remain close to their Indian roots often possess a startling amount of religious and occult knowledge, and sometimes even a mastery of strange forms of blood magic with which even the Tremere are unfamiliar. These Ravnos are quite rare across Europe, however, and most of the more common Charlatans know little or nothing of their clan's original heritage.

Tremere

The Usurpers hail from a disciplined order of mortal magi. They are surrounded on all sides by enemies, or at least those who look down on them as thieves and pretenders. They have few allies to speak of, and fewer friends. They have, then, no choice but rely on one another.

Other Cainites haven't yet figured it out, but it is the Tremere's organization, their ability to function as a body even when they're busy climbing over one another in their rise to the top, that has enabled them to survive.

And the Tremere are, by and large, truly ambitious. Exceptions exist, of course, but most of the Usurpers actively seek power of some sort or another. Some wish to rule, seeing themselves as princes of Cainite and kine alike. They work themselves into Cainite politics as best they can, seeking offices in those domains where hatred of their clan is waning, and seeking positions as advisors to Cainites of power in those (more common) regions where more direct routes to power are not yet open to them. Although the mystical might for which the Tremere are known isn't necessarily their primary focus, politically minded



Usurpers often make at least some attempt to master Thaumaturgy anyway. Partially this is to keep themselves from functioning at a disadvantage to their fellows, but it is also because proficiency in blood sorcery is a sure way to tempt some Ventrue or Toreador lord into bringing an otherwise loathsome Usurper into his circle.

Other Tremere are no less ambitious, but strive for different forms of power. Some couldn't care less about ruling others politically, but instead seek utter mastery of the forces of magic. They spend every spare moment in the quest for greater Thaumaturgical knowledge, mastering esoteric paths and rituals of which many of their brethren have never even heard. Some go farther still, seeking to uncover and learn the secrets of other forms of blood sorcery, some of which predate Thaumaturgy by hundreds or even thousands of years.

Finally, a sizable minority of Usurpers seek simply to master some area of knowledge, be it occult lore, ancient history or even the physiology of reptiles. In their quest not merely to survive but to flourish, the Tremere often Embrace men and women of learning simply in the hopes that their area of expertise might

eventually prove useful. These Tremere don't often advance particularly far in the great pyramid that forms the structure of the clan itself, but they exist and in some cases thrive.

A vast preponderance of Tremere carry with them a burning resentment for the other Cainite clans. How *dare* these miserable creatures look down on them as Usurpers? The other clans are jealous — jealous that the Tremere possess powers they cannot understand and could never hope to match, jealous that the Tremere possessed the strength of will to reach out and *take* the power that the other clans have squandered since the nights when Adam and Eve still walked the earth.

They keep their anger towards the High Clans largely buried, however — save, of course, for their ongoing war with the Tzimisce. When working alongside the first cursed, the Tremere plaster smiles across their faces and do as they are requested. This makes them appear submissive, and in fact some have truly come to believe that their only hope for survival lies in becoming useful servants. The vast majority, however, use this position to become an ever more vital part of Cainite courts and to learn the ins and outs of

Cainite politics, all working towards the night when they can show these foppish and foolish princes how a *real* lord behaves!

The Usurpers' anger at the Low Clans is less well defined, but no less intense for all that. *These* are the vampires with whom they are associated? This is the level to which the High Clans would constrain them? They are above the low-blooded, as far above as the tiger is above the common cat! The Tremere despise the fallen, not because of anything that has been done to the Usurpers, but because the Low Clans are a constant reminder of what the Tremere can look forward to if they fail to hoist themselves up. The Tremere hatred of the Low Clans comes not from anger, although they themselves believe otherwise, but from the fear of an uncertain future.

As with all other generalities, these attitudes aren't universal, and a starting Tremere character isn't required to subscribe to any or all of these hatreds or ambitions. Most of them do so, however, preferring to associate with High Clan Cainites, often alienating fallen companions by treating them as inferiors.

Even the most ambitious Tremere knows better than to place his own objectives above those of the clan. The Council of Seven and the clan founder himself do not object to Tremere competing with Tremere, for this allows the best of the best to rise to the top. All the Tremere are expected to advance the clan as a whole when they advance their own position, and any Usurper who puts the clan's position at risk through her behavior — perhaps by alienating a powerful ally — can expect to be thrown down by her own clanmates long before her clan's many enemies lay their hands on her.

Development

While the majority of Tremere focus at least some of their attention on developing their Thaumaturgical abilities, the truth is that not every Usurper practices blood magic. Many choose to concentrate instead on political or tactical expertise, proving their value as advisors or military strategists rather than relying on their reputations as warlocks.

Any Tremere who expects to interact much with other Cainites, particularly those of the High Clans, should make the effort to learn customs, history and — perhaps most importantly — etiquette. If the clan is to carve out a place among the first cursed, they must show themselves just as civilized and well mannered or they will never find acceptance.

While some Tremere acquire a broad base of abilities, most Usurpers tend to focus on a single area

of expertise, or at least a group of related abilities. In their efforts to attach themselves to powerful Cainites, the Tremere have discovered that experts in a given field are normally in greater demand than those who know only a little about a great many subjects. Whether a Tremere is a powerful Thaumaturge, an expert tactician or a sage learned in the esoteric secrets of religious history, he no doubt possesses abilities invaluable to *someone*.

Downtime and Maturation

Not every night of Cainite existence is of particular interest or worth portraying in the course of a game. Weeks, months, years, even decades can pass during which nothing of any import occurs to your character. Many Storytellers make use of downtime and maturation point systems to portray this lengthy period of relative inactivity. (See the **Dark Ages Storytellers Companion** for the maturation point system.)

Of course, the fact that nothing has occurred of any importance to the story doesn't mean that your character has been sitting around darning socks. She's been doing *something*, after all, which is where the points for maturation come from.

Because downtime often dumps a relatively large pool of points in a player's lap, the temptation exists to spend them all to create serious leaps of power in select Attributes or Disciplines. In addition to being unrealistic and often forbidden by some Storytellers, this does your character a disservice. This sort of thinking really does reduce a "character" to a collection of points.

Instead, let your character's previously established goals and the circumstances of your downtime influence your decisions. Keep in mind the sort of opportunities your character is likely to have between games. If she's nowhere near an institute of higher learning or a well-educated sage, she's unlikely to be able to build her Academics or Science Knowledges, for instance.

Within the opportunities available, she'll likely want to focus on advancing the same goals she's pursued previously. Has she spent much of the chronicle to date attempting to prove herself a loyal servant of the Tzimisce lord who dwells in the castle on the hill outside of town? Odds are, she has continued to do so during downtime. Based on the tasks she's completed for the lord so far, and assum-

GOLCONDA

The 13th century has seen a slow erosion in the Cainite belief in the mystical and spiritual state known as Golconda, when the Beast is finally placed in perfect balance with the Cainite's human nature. Interestingly enough, however, a lingering belief in Golconda is far more common now among the Low Clans than it is among the High.

The first cursed, although largely unaware of this disparity, would no doubt shrug it off as yet more evidence of the lesser status of the fallen. Of course they still believe in Golconda, and other fairy tales as well — they're too primitive, too uneducated, too foolish to tell fact from fancy.

The truth, as always, is somewhat more complex. Many of the fallen maintain their belief in Golconda, even when it goes against their other religious tenets, because it offers them a way to ascend. The Low Clans are oppressed, kept down, made to act and even believe themselves to be inferior to their more refined, often more human-seeming High Clan relatives. Golconda offers them a way to become more than what they are, to overcome their basest natures and evolve into beings higher than themselves, and higher than their high-blooded oppressors.

So long as the High Clans continue to oppress the Low, many of the fallen will almost certainly cling to the belief in Golconda, for to surrender it is to cast aside all hope of a better future.

ing she's been performing similar actions between games, you should have some idea of what faculties she's using most. If she's been dwelling in the wilderness, she's probably had the most opportunity to develop Stamina, Survival and Disciplines such as Animalism or Fortitude. If, on the other hand, she's been hobnobbing with the local court — unlikely for the fallen, but certainly not impossible — she's probably been building Charisma and Manipulation, Etiquette and Politics, and Auspex and Presence.

Of course, given the poor conditions in which many Low Clan Cainites dwell, your character may have been hard-pressed merely to survive and keep himself fed, granting him no opportunity to pursue other objectives. In these cases, you should probably

focus most of your maturation points on practical and hunting skills — Stealth, for instance — and maybe on Self-Control/Instinct and Willpower, since your character has probably had plenty of opportunity to resist the effects of frenzy. Whatever the case, focusing maturation points where they make the most sense, as opposed to where they prove most advantageous, goes a long way towards adding both depth and verisimilitude to a character.

Through the Ages

Cainite society, particularly among the High Clans, places substantial importance on a vampire's rank. Any neonate, however skilled or experienced, will probably receive less respect than even a less-skilled ancilla, and both are considered little more than nothing compared to even the feeblest of elders.

The more formal of the Low Clans — primarily the Assamites and the Tremere — insist that any Cainite who would claim the status normally due an ancilla or elder first prove herself, regardless of age. The successful completion of assigned quests or duties, the elimination of an enemy of one's lord, the discovery of a new and tantalizing scrap of mystical lore, the attaining of a position of importance in a Cainite court — all these and more are accomplishments impressive enough to justify a rise in status. Of course, a four-hundred-year-old Cainite is still an elder, regardless of what he's been doing in that time, but if he wants the respect to go along with the title, he's going to have to earn it.

For the other Low Clans, the procedure is even more haphazard. Often, merely surviving long enough is sufficient to obtain the status to go with the title of ancilla, simply because long-term survival is not an easy proposition. Performing acts that impress your peers is certainly a plus — a Nosferat well known for uncovering important secrets will achieve the respect of her brethren faster than one who simply cowers in the catacombs and grows old feeding on rats — but it's not truly essential.

As to when a fallen Cainite can claim the respect due an elder, well, that's even less formal. A Gangrel or Malkavian has earned the status to go along with her age once she's survived for several centuries and has accumulated enough respect, political leverage or personal power that she can refer to herself as an elder without being laughed at, or challenged by other elders in the region.

Roads

All five of the primary *viae* may be found among the Low Clans. To one extent or another, each of the roads has something to offer the fallen. They are not merely a means of staving off the Beast; they also offer the Low Clans a measure of hope. If they can only become worthy of the morality they've adopted, they can prove, to themselves, if not to others, that they are not forsaken, that they may still seek redemption — or, at the very least, that their damnation is yet a part of some greater plan.

Until recently, the vast majority of Low Clan Cainites who chose to follow the Road of Heaven leaned toward the Penitent Congregation (save, perhaps, for the Assamites). In recent nights, as the power of the Low Clans has begun to rise, a number of the fallen have changed their attitudes. The Road of Heaven is no less common than it was, but many of those who previously assumed their undead state was divine punishment are now converting to other, less submissive paths.

Roads by Clan

Although individuals vary, certain clans tend to gravitate more towards some roads than others. It also appears that a significant minority of fallen Cainites choose their roads at least partially as an act of rebellion against the High Clans. For instance, many fallen choose roads that emphasize Instinct over Self-Control precisely because Self-Control-oriented roads are viewed as more refined and dignified.

Assamites

A large number of Assamites follow none of the five primary roads, but rather subscribe to the tenets of the Road of Blood. This is specifically an Assamite code, almost unknown outside the clan, and those who follow its often violent precepts are largely responsible for the mistrust and fear in which the other clans hold the Saracens.

Beyond the *Via Sanguinius*, the most common roads among the Assamites are the Road of Kings — most commonly followed by Assamite viziers, and those who rule Assamite-dominated domains — and the Road of Heaven. Many Assamites, devout followers of Islam, believe that they have a divinely mandated duty to keep other clans in check, or at least to protect their own from the depredations of Caine's childer. The Road of Hu-

manity is uncommon, given the rather martial mindset of the clan as a whole, but not unheard of. Very few Assamites choose the Road of the Beast; although predatory, the Assamites' attitudes tend towards both more civilized and more disciplined extremes. Any Assamite discovered following the Road of Sin can probably expect to be hunted down by his clan and destroyed. Still, rumor tells that a small number of Assamites have embraced the tenets of this road after being led astray by the Baali during one of their great conflicts.

Followers of Set

The Setites, too, often go their own way. The faithful of the dark god often follow the *Via Serpentis*. The Road of the Serpent preaches damnation and corruption through truth, all for the glory of Set. Many Setites, of course, aren't as faithful to Set as they could be, however. These Serpents pursue their own goals, and follow their own roads.

The Road of Sin is common among the Setites, as they turn their efforts from increasing Set's power to gratifying their own desires. As the Road of the Serpent teaches Setites to care little for the good of others, it's not a far step to the *Via Peccati*. Often, little differentiates Setites on the Road of the Serpent from those on the Road of Sin, as the distinction is entirely internal, not behavioral. This fact has, no doubt, contributed to the Setites' foul reputation — not that they needed any help.

Beyond these, the Road of Humanity is rather surprisingly the most common. These Serpents cling to the notion that their new natures haven't changed what they truly are, and they struggle to maintain some vestiges of their humanity even in the face of acts most foul. The Road of the Beast is most commonly found in those Setites who have truly embraced their serpentine natures, often behaving more like ophidian Gangrel than traditional Setites. The Road of Heaven and the Road of Kings are extremely rare, as the Setites, by and large, have little interest in open rule and little respect for the God of men.

Gangrel

It should come as no surprise whatsoever that the vast majority of Gangrel follow the Road of the Beast. Given their nomadic and predatory natures, no road could possibly prove a better fit.

After the *Via Bestiae*, the Road of Humanity is actually most common among the Animals. This not a deliberate choice on their part; many Gangrel who begin wandering alone after the Embrace simply never make

any effort to alter their moral outlook from their breathing days. Some few Gangrel take their predatory nature too far, developing an “everything for me” attitude that leads them slowly but steadily to the Road of Sin. The Road of Heaven is uncommon (but see below), as most Gangrel care little for matters of faith, and very few have sufficient interest in ruling, politics or civilization to maintain the Road of Kings.

The *Via Caeli* is fairly rare among the Animals. Those Gangrel who do follow it, however, are dogged proponents of Christianity and can rarely keep their faith to themselves. Gangrel who actively seek to convert their clanmates to Christianity, Islam or foreign *viae* are essentially on a suicide mission, and they know it. Because the Gangrel clan is so fond of settling disputes with individual combat, a number of Gangrel of all faiths have taken to trying to convert their fellows by this means. Followers of the Path of Chivalry especially prefer this method. (“I win, Ulrich, and you kiss the cross.” “I win, and you kiss my *arse*, whelp!”)

Malkavians

Looking for concrete patterns of morality and religion among the Malkavians is like attempting to count waves in the ocean. You may see none, or you may see an infinite and constantly shifting number, and in neither case will you actually learn or accomplish a damned thing.

Perhaps the only general conclusion to be drawn is that a Malkavian’s chosen road usually corresponds in some way to her specific madness. That is, a Madman filled with a burning ambition might well choose the Road of Kings, whereas a Malkavian who believes she speaks with God and has visions of Gehenna likely follows the Road of Heaven. This is, of course, rarely a conscious choice on the Malkavian’s part. Rather, the Malkavian simply focuses on whichever system of morality seems most natural to her — and, given that she views the world through her specific derangement, her choices may prove surprising indeed.

Nosferatu

Despite the Lepers’ bestial, demonic appearances, the two roads most commonly found among the clan are the Road of Heaven and the Road of Humanity. Many Nosferatu follow the *Via Caeli* with a deep religious fervor. It’s difficult, after all, for a Nosferatu to separate the presence of God from his nightly existence — unlike the other Cainites, a Nosferatu can never escape the reality of her curse. Most Nosferatu on the Road of Heaven are Penitents, viewing their curse as some form of punishment. Some follow other

paths, however, and a growing number of Penitents are shedding their self-hatred and altering their behavior. Others cling to their humanity like a bit of driftwood in a turbulent sea, their old beliefs and morals bolstering them in their fight against the Beast and their own clearly inhuman natures. These Lepers, despite their hideous visages, are often some of the kindest Cainites you’ll ever meet.

On the other hand, a sizable minority of Nosferatu follow the Road of the Beast, sometimes becoming little more than urban predators; for such a Nosferatu, his existence is an endless parade of nights spent skulking in the shadows until a tasty mortal ventures too near. Others, made bitter by the curse or by the evil motives that others ignorantly ascribe to them, become the monsters that others see and walk the Road of Sin. Only the Road of Kings is relatively rare among the Nosferatu, and even it is not completely absent. Some noble-minded Lepers strive for, and have even succeeded in acquiring, their own domains. Other clans are often reluctant to follow a Nosferatu, but those on the Road of Kings see this reticence as just one more obstacle they must overcome.

Ravnos

A large number of Ravnos follow the Road of Paradox, a minor road common only to the Charlatans. Many Ravnos choose this road not merely because it is part of their tradition, but because it grants a certain legitimacy to their dislike of other Cainites (to say nothing of the fact that its precepts can be twisted to justify many Ravnos’ larcenous or disruptive tendencies as well.)

Other than the *Via Paradoxi*, the Road of Humanity is most prevalent among the Charlatans. Many of the clan are greedy and dishonest, but it’s a very human greed, a hunger for wealth and comfort shared by Cainites and mortals alike. Furthermore, the Ravnos’ isolation from other clans — emotionally and in terms of trust, rather than physical isolation — often prevents them from choosing other roads, as they lack the opportunity to learn their precepts.

Some Ravnos take the nomadic, wandering predator notion to the extreme, adopting the precepts of the Road of the Beast, and others allow their disruptive natures to become truly malicious, walking the Road of Sin. Ravnos on the Roads of Heaven or Kings are few and far between, and rarely survive long without eventually switching to another, easier road. Cainite society refuses to accept earnest and faithful Ravnos, or Charlatans

in positions of authority, making it nearly impossible for them to maintain the precepts of these roads even if they try.

Tremere

Most Tremere adhere to the Road of Humanity. This is, at least in part, due to lack of opportunity to master anything else. The eldest Tremere is still only a few centuries old, and the younger Usurpers who might be interested in pursuing other ways are often too busy battling (or simply surviving) the Tzimisce, Gangrel and other many enemies of the clan. Even when they have other options, many Tremere cleave to the *Via Humanitas*. Although they do believe that they are above the kine, they feel that it was human ambition — something most Cainites lack, for all their own aspirations and desires — that allowed them to seize the power to make themselves vampires.

Those who have adopted other roads often choose the Road of Kings, as it appeals to the superiority complex many Tremere already possess. Some follow the Road of Sin, using their powers solely to revel in their undead state, but these are few and are often silenced by their own clanmates who are most anxious to avoid appearing uncivilized in the eyes of the High Clans. For the same reason, the Road of the Beast is discouraged — not that many Tremere would be willing to give up their attachments to civilization anyway. The Road of Heaven is equally uncommon, simply because most Tremere believe in and pursue higher powers of a nature other than religious.

Moments of Truth

Moments of truth, those flashes of insight wherein a Cainite either advances her understanding of her chosen road or else suddenly sees the error of her ways and adopts a new one, are often forced upon Low Clan Cainites by the society around them. Unlike the first cursed, who often have the opportunity to go in search of spiritual enlightenment, many of the fallen must devote their efforts simply to survival. Because they often have less time to devote to such pursuits, fewer Low Clan Cainites have the opportunity to study under those who have progressed further along the roads. Where a Lasombra or Brujah might seek out an ashen priest to learn the ways of his faith, a Ravnos or Malkavian will likely have to make do with whatever revelations she can attain on her own.

This doesn't mean, of course, that none of the Low Clans study roads at the feet of others; many

MORE ABOUT LONERS

As stated previously, the loner archetype is fine, so long as you don't take it to extremes. Your character can want to be alone all he likes, so long as you've provided some means for the Storyteller to involve him in spite of his desire for solitude. (Presumably, it's only your character, and not you, who desires solitude, or else why are you playing?)

The survival instinct makes a wonderful means for dragging even the most reticent Cainite into a group. Most vampires who shun the presence of their fellows tend to feel that they're better able to survive on their own. Maybe they're supremely confident in their own abilities, or maybe they feel that the dangers of Cainite politics outweigh the risk of starvation at the edge of town or the more tangible threats lurking in the wild. Once your character has been shown otherwise — and believe us, a good Storyteller will have no problem showing you that your character is *far* from safe — he's got a valid reason to seek the company of others without violating the character's integrity.

Obviously the old "common goal" or "common enemy" bit works well for bringing loners into the fold as well, and often serves as the basis around which an entire coterie congregates. Of course, if your Storyteller chooses this method, you're somewhat stuck once the goal has been attained or the threat surmounted. If the coterie gathered for a specific purpose, why stay together afterwards?

Work with your Storyteller on this. Perhaps, having worked together, your characters realize how much they can accomplish if they cooperate. Perhaps they've realized they're safer together than apart. Or perhaps your character has simply found that he prefers companionship, however untrustworthy it might be, to the loneliness that afflicts so many of the fallen. Whatever the case, so long as you're all willing to be cooperative (as players, if not as characters), you should always be able to find ways to keep the coterie together once it's established. And that, of course, leaves your Storyteller free to plan better stories, without having to worry about how he's going to drag the Gangrel back into town *this* time.

ashen priests do, in fact, hail from the Low Clans. It simply means that such deliberate studies are less common among the Low than the High, who often engage in such activities purely for the status attached to them.

Perhaps the most common epiphany experienced in recent nights is the sudden realization, regardless of road, that the Low Clans may not be as powerless or inferior as the High Clans have always maintained. As more and more fallen Cainites attain real power, as the War of Princes lays low the old lords and opens up room for new ones, the low-blooded have begun to realize that they are as well-suited to fill those vacancies as anyone else.

Other moments of truth may come when a fallen Cainite suddenly becomes aware of the truly deplorable state to which she's been reduced. A Nosferatu dwelling in a filthy sewer or a Gangrel subsisting on rats and crows might, for instance, observe that even most impoverished kine live better than they, and realize that they can be — that they *should* be — more than they are. Others, particularly those on the Roads of the Beast or of Sin, might experience the same revelation in reverse. If they are forced to exist as something other than human, why should they insist on acting human?

Fallen Cainites find moments of truth in the ordinary and the routine. Some of the fallen are far from home, others are physically or mentally different from the kine and other Cainites both, and others still are simply hated and feared by everyone around them, but all of them are isolated in some shape, form or fashion. Perhaps the most powerful moment, then, for a Nosferatu on the edge of town, a homeless wandering Ravnos or a scheming Setite, is simply the understanding that they're *not* alone. The discovery that others exist and thrive in the same conditions they do, that others have developed a routine to make existence easier the way mortals do, that the behavior of others is not nearly so alien as their appearance or their needs — this, for a fallen Cainite, can be far more powerful than any revelation from on high.

Coteries

Why do the fallen band together with one another or, even more unusually, with High Clan Cainites? Surely the Cainites' lack of capacity for trust or true affection, combined with the difficulties and competition inherent in night-to-night survival amidst the dregs of society, should inspire the vast majority of Low Clan Cainites to dwell, hunt and move alone, should it not?

The truth is, few Cainites are truly loners. Nearly all of them have reason, at some point in their unlives, to be glad for the presence of a companion or two. Followers of the Road of Humanity seek solace and support through

community, just as the kine themselves do. Those on the Road of Heaven seek allies in fulfilling the will of God, or else take some small comfort in sharing their penance with others who understand. Cainites who would be kings require allies to stand against their enemies, and loyal servants to smooth their way to the throne. Walkers on the Road of Sin ally with others, if only to achieve common goals and to provide mutual protection. Even the Road of the Beast, which advocates self-reliance, allows for coteries; many predators understand the value of pack behavior. Many hunters working together can bring down prey and survive threats that one working alone, however skilled or powerful, cannot.

Low Clan Coteries

When the fallen congregate by choice, as opposed to being forced together by sudden unforeseen circumstances, they tend to gather in groups of their own. Even if the first cursed were willing to work and socialize with them — and in many cases, they most certainly are not — the high-blooded frequently treat members of the Low Clans as servants and inferiors, an attitude that often alienates the fallen in question.

Low Clan Cainites might gather for any number of reasons. In regions dominated and most heavily populated by the High Clans, joining a coterie may be the only safe option for a fallen Cainite. When outnumbered so severely, any allies are preferable to none at all. Alternatively, in those regions where the Low Clans dominate, either politically or simply in terms of numbers, a lone Cainite might be unable to compete for blood or territory. Sharing an area with three or four coterie-mates may be frustrating, but one-quarter of something is still, by definition, quite a bit larger than all of nothing.

The Low Clans may also gather to ward off outside threats other than their fellow Cainites, such as Lupines or inquisitors. More Cainites means more eyes to spot approaching danger, more swords or claws to ward it off and, if worst comes to worst, more chances for escape while erstwhile companions are being staked or torn to shreds. As the old hunter's maxim states, "I don't have to outrun the bear, I just have to outrun my friend."

Some coteries assemble on a (presumably) temporary basis with a fixed objective in mind. These assemblages often have a much wider variety of participants than a coterie that intends to hang together in the long term, as competing objectives and mutual hostilities can often be suppressed on a short-term basis if the coterie's goal is sufficiently important. Sometimes, coteries that assemble for a specific purpose of this sort wind up remaining together afterwards



for the reasons of mutual protection and survival discussed above. More often, however, the group fractures after their goal is accomplished — or when it becomes clear they'll fail to accomplish it, or sometimes simply because things are taking too long — and the Cainites go their separate ways.

Even with specific goals in mind, fallen Cainites tend to gather with other fallen, rather than with High Clan companions. This is partly due to the mistrust, contempt and dislike often felt between the two castes. Mostly, however, it's because Low Clan Cainites tend to have more goals in common with each other than with the first cursed, and because they're most frequently in physical proximity with one another and not with the High Clans. Opportunity, as always, is everything.

Within those clans who maintain (or attempt to maintain) a degree of cooperation within their own ranks — such as the Assamites, the Tremere and, to a lesser extent, the Nosferatu — Cainites might form a single-clan coterie. Although such a group might occasionally remain together for the long term, working their way up through the ranks in cooperation with one another, they're more frequently formed for

a specific purpose or at the behest of a clan elder who needs them to fulfill some specific task. Assamite warriors, for example, will occasionally band together to hunt a target too dangerous for any one to handle, whereas the Tremere are often forced to cooperate simply because they lack outside alliances.

Mixed Coteries

Far rarer than coteries consisting solely of Low Clan Cainites — or, for that matter, of High Clan Cainites — mixed groups are nevertheless encountered with relative (and increasing) frequency. Until recently, such coteries were almost never formed for the purpose of mutual protection and survival, at least not in the long term. After all, the threats the fallen faced on a nightly basis were very different from those first cursed addressed, and neither group was particularly adept at countering the other's problems. Now, with the War of Princes raging, the High and Low Clans find themselves on a much more even field. No longer is it laughable for the fallen to heavily involve themselves in politics. No longer is it uncommon for a High Clan lord or war leader to find herself under an unrelenting assault that forces her to cooperate with

all Cainites in her domain, High and Low alike, to ward the enemy off.

Not all Cainites are created equal, of course, and rank and social standing are paramount issues in a mixed coterie. Unless the situation forces them to do otherwise, high-blooded Cainites usually assume positions of leadership in such a group, often refusing to accept any alternate arrangements even if their stubbornness puts the entire coterie at risk. Of course, many fallen accept this as the way things are. The most common form of mixed coterie involves a High Clan Cainite (or several) and their Low Clan agents and servitors. In these instances, the fallen often (but certainly not always) serve as bruisers, spies and bodyguards while the first cursed lead the group and handle most of the political and social interaction.

If a domain has fallen to an enemy or recently been subject to a coup, Cainites of all clans and castes might be forced to work together simply to survive the new regime. Because the former lord and his advisors and agents are particular targets, they must rely on any allies they can gather. Furthermore, joining with Low Clan Cainites is a wise tactical move, since the new prince is unlikely to look for them among the peasantry. Of course, the Low Clans gain from this as well, for even a deposed prince is still an ally to be reckoned with. They might even be anxious to help, if the new ruler is even worse or more oppressive than the old. If nothing else, the fallen can now call in several boons from those first cursed whom they've helped.

Even in more stable domains, High and Low Cainites sometimes ally simply because each has something to offer the other, with no extenuating factors. A Nosferatu who seeks to carve out her own power base in a society that largely dismisses her because of her pedigree needs an ally in the courts, one who can grant her access to the nobility and speak on her behalf. If an ambitious Lasombra is, at that time, in particular need of a source of information on the activities of his own rivals, an alliance can only benefit them both. Assamites who intend to remain in the West for a great length of time often develop working relationships with local first cursed, trading favors and tasks for knowledge of local customs — Cainite and kine both — and the occasional bit of political protection. And many Tremere, of course, are actively looking for any opportunity to insinuate themselves into the ranks of the elite, even if it means acting as servants — for now. Hated as they are, few lords with full awareness of Clan Tremere's mystical abilities are willing to completely write off their potential as allies.

Only very rarely do the Low Clan members of a coterie dominate the others. When this does occur, it's usually because the High Clan Cainites involved are currently dwelling in one of the few regions firmly under the thumbs of the fallen. In the Holy Land or certain regions of the Slavic East, for instance, the castes are reversed, and the Low Clans — Assamites and Tremere in the above examples — reign supreme. Low Clan princes rarely treat their high-blooded subjects as poorly as the first cursed in most regions treat the fallen, simply because they know that doing so may earn them some very powerful enemies from just over the border. Still, that doesn't mean they're going to go easy on the first cursed of their domains, and many fallen lords take every opportunity to extract some measure of revenge for the treatment their brethren receive at the hands of the High Clans. In such locales, Brujah, Cappadocians and Toreador may struggle to survive, just as Nosferatu and Ravnos do in Western Europe — and they'll often join with any fallen allies they can gather just to ensure that they're not truly alone.

The Language Barrier

The Low Clans contain a widely diverse population, and they hail from all corners of the civilized (and not so civilized) world. Most inhabitants of the Dark Medieval, Cainite or kine, tend to remain within their home territories. Travel is dangerous, to say nothing of expensive. In such instances, language isn't a problem, since everyone raised in a given region almost certainly speaks the same dialect.

Then again, many Cainites do travel, or interact with those who have come from afar. Maybe they wander in search of their own territories. Perhaps they're traveling at the behest of their sire, or some other elder whom they serve. Maybe duty to clan or religion takes them into lands far from home, or they simply prefer the nomadic lifestyle. When these Cainites interact with one another even occasionally, they often have substantial difficulties overcoming the language barrier. When Cainites from different regions gather together in a coterie, the problems multiply drastically.

How, then, should you and your fellow players work to solve any linguistic difficulties you may have? After all, if the coterie consists of an Assamite newly come from the Holy Land, a gypsy Ravnos, a French Nosferatu and a Hungarian Tremere, your character may be completely unable to speak to *any* of his

companions. (One might also wonder how they came together, but that's the Storyteller's problem.)

The easiest solution, of course, is simply to ensure that at least some members of the coterie have a few dots in Linguistics, enabling them to translate for those who cannot speak directly to one another. This works, but it's not always feasible, since you really ought to have a good reason *why* your French character speaks Arabic. Furthermore, in stressful or combat situations, the delay required for translation can be fatal.

Also, let's be honest. It's fun to roleplay an inability to communicate for a bit, but after a while being unable to talk to your fellow players in character can get irksome.

It's not all that hard to learn a language when one is immersed in it. If most of the coterie speaks a language that one character doesn't, only a few months of game time should really be required before the foreigner can spend experience to increase his Linguistics. The process takes a bit longer when he's learning a language that only a few people around him are speaking, but it still should require relatively little "real" time before you can spend your experience. Either way, it's a useful expenditure, since the only other options are trying to find a common language or extended miming.

Or, of course, one might try *Auspex*. The *Steal Secrets* power does not allow instant communication across a language barrier — most people do tend to think at least partially in words, and therefore in their native language. However, because people also think in images and emotions, *Steal Secrets* is useful in learning a language, as it enables the Cainite to see what images and feelings are attached to a specific term or phrase. In game terms, a Cainite able to remain in frequent and regular mental contact with someone from whom she's attempting to learn a language should be able to spend experience points to learn that tongue in a matter of weeks, perhaps even days. Of course, if a character learning only a single language, this might not be enough to justify raising her Linguistics

score, as the higher levels of Linguistics involve multiple tongues. In such instances, your Storyteller might allow your character to learn the language purely through time and roleplaying, without requiring any expenditure of experience.

Culture Clash

Of course, your characters' inability to understand one another might stem from more than merely linguistic troubles. A Catholic Tremere on the Road of Kings is going to cleave to a very different worldview than a Norse Gangrel on the Road of the Beast. These sorts of conflicts, and even enmities, can result in a coterie's inability to decide on a course of action, or even in inter-character violence if taken to extremes.

A character's societal rank in mortal life may also impact his ability to interact with other Cainites. The Low Clans may occupy the bottom caste in Cainite society, but if a Setite or Malkavian Embraces a nobleman, who is more than likely accustomed to giving orders, he's not going to suddenly begin deferring to others. This can cause many interpersonal difficulties, particularly if the noble-turned-fallen Cainite displays these attitudes toward high-blooded members of the coterie (or simply High Clan residents of the domain).

Cultural clashes and personal conflict make for fascinating stories and roleplaying, but only up to a point. The desire to play your character with all her societal baggage and prejudices is an admirable one, but remember that the point is for all concerned to have fun. If your character's issues are making it absolutely impossible to cooperate with the others, or if your conflicts are making the other players miserable, it's time to either tone the character down or replace her with someone a bit less alienating. This isn't to say you should meet your coterie-mates in a tavern and immediately become fast friends. Some of the most interesting characters despise one another. Just be willing to put those hatreds aside, and allow the characters to develop through roleplaying; just because you hate someone now doesn't mean you still will after working together for weeks on end.



TIMOTHY TRUMAN



CHAPTER THREE: BROTHERS OF A DIFFERENT BLOOD

From the one crime recognize them all as culprits.
— Virgil, *Aeneid* bk. 2, 1.65

Even the low-blooded have further to fall. Many of the Clans of Caine spawn aberrations, vampires whose powers and frailties do not correspond to their parent lineage. In most cases, these sad creatures perish, but sometimes they persist, forming *bloodlines*.

In this chapter, we discuss these bloodlines. The basic information presented in the *Dark Ages Storytellers Companion* (pp. 7–19) is not repeated in full (although parts of it are necessarily paraphrased) nor are any new templates or bloodlines presented. Also note that the Lamia are not discussed in this volume; as an offshoot of the Cappadocians, they are addressed in the *Players Guide to the High Clans*.

What you will find is a more detailed description of the bloodlines' mythologies, their beliefs about themselves and the nature of their condition. Also included are notes on how, as a

player, you can take full advantage of the bloodlines' unique attributes and social positions. These notes include suggestions on how minor clan characters can fit into a coterie or chronicle, how they might develop, what roads they might follow (and what moments of truth they may experience) and so on.

Finally, this chapter includes a discussion on just what separates a bloodline from a clan, why bloodlines come about and why they're allowed to survive. A number of clans are discussed in more detail; specifically, we examine why the Gangrel create so many bloodlines, the nature of the Malkavian and Nosferatu broods who share similar madness or deformities, and the relationship between the three castes that make up the Assamite clan.

Anda

The Mongols are ready to strike Europe like a wind from the East. They are not poised like a dagger; they are gathering their strength like a warrior hefting a cudgel. In only a few short years they will terrorize Europe; but in truth, the first rains of the storm that is to follow have already fallen.

The Anda, a Gangrel bloodline derived from the Mongols, roam the night and are already treading the hidden paths and forgotten byways of Europe. The pull of their blood keeps them wandering, and the call of their culture keeps them from growing over-fond of the Western lands, but one thing is certain: They spread terror in the night as surely as their mortal brethren spread it in the day.

The Children of Dobrul

The Anda do not claim descent from Caine. Rather, their myths speak of a terrible battle between the demon bandits of Xia and the children of the Earth Mother, Itügen. The Sky Father Tengri, her husband, fled the battle after being wounded, and Dobrul the Brave led Itügen's children in his mother's defense.

A Xia shaman called down the sky's vengeance upon Dobrul — a huge ball of fire from the clouds. Fearing him dead, Itügen and her surviving children fled to the West.

But Dobrul was not dead. The fireball drove him deep into the earth, where the shaman's curse worked its magic. When he awoke, Dobrul craved mortal blood and feared the sun — he had become undead, and he passed his new curse on to others. These vampires call themselves the Anda, a Mongol word that translates as

“blood brother,” stressing both the bloodline's appetite for blood and their common purpose.

The Anda's common purpose is their continuing war with enemies to the east and south. This war helps propel the Anda north and west into Europe. The lands to the east and south are the provinces of the Tatar Beast Court, a fearsome alliance of the Xiong Ren. These “fierce people” are neither man nor beast but are able to wear the skin of either, and even adopt other forms that combine the most savage attributes of both. They regard the Anda as abominations to be destroyed whenever they are discovered. The Anda and the Xiong Ren do not often encounter each other, but when they do the usual result is combat to the death.

The Wan Kuei of the Middle Kingdom are another matter entirely. These “vampires” are in fact spirits of the damned who have fought or tricked their way out of whatever hell their mortal life assigned them to, and who feed on the life force (which they call “chi”) of mortals. With bizarre supernatural abilities, including that of sensing the presence of the Anda no matter how carefully they are concealed, the Wan Kuei empire — the Black Tortoise Court — rules the Jin, Xixia and Song plains. Using the Tatar tribe as mortal cat's-paws, they harry the Mongols and their Anda parasites.

“Fall Upon the Enemy Like a Falcon”

The words of Genghis Khan neatly encapsulate the Anda's attitude toward their enemies. They usually travel with their *yasun* (extended mortal family), sometimes openly. Mongol culture is pragmatic at its core and most *yasun* appreciate the power of the Anda for the advantages it brings.

When a mortal is to be Embraced, the would-be sire calls a meeting, or *kuriltai*, where the qualities of the mortal are debated. If the *kuriltai* agrees, the mortal is abducted, Embraced and ritually washed (a Mongol funeral rite), signifying his separation from the mortal world.

The neonate is then left to his own devices for a year, during which time he faces many tests from his Anda brethren (female Anda do exist, but are very rare). If he passes these tests, the neonate is accepted as a fully-fledged member of the bloodline.

The Anda's continuing fight with the Xia Demons (in the shape of the Xiong Ren and the Wan Kuei) demands constant readiness and constant motion; the bloodline's weakness forces them to maintain a nomadic lifestyle. After spending three nights within the same one-mile area, the Anda suffers weakness



that quickly leads to torpor (see sidebar). This perversion of their mortal counterparts' nomadic lifestyle has driven some Anda deep into Western Europe. Venturing forth, usually alone (a band of Mongols would find it extremely difficult to travel unnoticed in Aquitaine or even the Carpathians), they stalk the nights in search of prey. But in their undead hearts,

they know their fate is to roam the steppes, protecting the children of Itügen from the demons.

To this end, most Anda follow the Path of the Nomad. Some few follow the Road of the Beast proper or its other offshoots (typically the Path of the Hunter).

ANDA

Sobriquet: Tartars

Disciplines: Animalism, Fortitude, Protean

Weakness: Develop one animalistic feature as the Gangrel weakness, but after 10 frenzies. For each day after the third that an Anda sleeps within the same one-mile area, all dice pools are halved (to a minimum pool of one).

Playing an Anda

If you want to play one of the Anda, you and your Storyteller may have to make a few adjustments and keep a few considerations in mind. Overall the Anda are relatively chronicle-friendly if played with a little forethought.

Character Development

The Long Night is over. The War of Princes has begun, and the Low Clans are rising. Chaos threatens and the nature of Cainite society is changing. The

mighty may be brought low and the low raised up high. It is a dangerous, exciting time, full of opportunities for those bold enough to seize them.

The Anda care little for such conflicts. The fates of Cainite princes and the outcomes of their petty squabbles are of no interest, nor is the establishment of secure domains in Europe. What good is fixed territory to a nomad?

Above all, it is a time for the Anda to feed on the chaos and fear that is erupting, and to prepare for the coming of the Golden Horde (which turns its attention westward in AD 1235 and withdraws in 1242). Forging alliances is of some use, but creating instability and weakness is likely to be more profitable (and far more satisfying).

Thus, when it comes to spending experience and developing your character, increased physical power (Attributes and Disciplines) is always a useful choice. So too are Abilities (especially Knowledges and Talents) that will help your character understand and defeat the Europeans.

The Anda accord power and status only to those strong enough to take them, and as such they attach no stigma to diablerie. A *noyan* (chief) or *khan* (king) only rules with the consent of the ruled. Any Anda may call a *kuriltai* and challenge the current *noyan* or *khan*. The challenged leader decides the nature of the contest, but it is usually fatal to the loser and is always designed to disadvantage the challenger. After all, the current leader is under no obligation to make it easy for an upstart to challenge his authority, and if the challenger cannot defeat the ruler where he is strongest, he is not worthy to take his place.

To advance along his road or path, your character must experience and learn from a moment of truth. For the Anda, experiences and events that stem from another's static existence, such as watching a vicious fight for domain, are an excellent source of such insight, as they demonstrate the folly of becoming overly attached to any specific patch of ground. A Tartar may also learn much from observing the rigid hierarchies of the Cainites, as they are a stark contrast to the more egalitarian (but equally brutal) society of the Anda. Conflicts driven by the desire for social advancement exemplify this difference. Watching another character fight to gain the favor of a prince, or to undermine the position of a hated rival at court, should fascinate any Anda character and provide ample opportunity to experience a moment of truth.

Role Within the Coterie

The general inclination of most Anda is to roam the night alone, or in the company of their *yasim*. They consider the Cainites of Europe to be soft and weak, although some exceptional individuals have demonstrated their strength and courage.

Despite their brutal culture, the Anda are not mindless savages. Many are quite curious about the strange ways of their western counterparts and for that reason alone may join a coterie. Others, of a more cunning bent, are attempting to learn as much as they can about European culture. The great Genghis Khan once told his followers to "watch with the vigilance of an old wolf," and this is sound advice for all Anda.

Your character should judge others by their courage and strength. The social distinctions that are so pervasive among the Cainites of Europe, such as the distinction between the High and Low Clans, mean nothing to the Anda. The Anda prefer to judge others by their actions; they understand hierarchies but still expect everyone who has something to contribute to a plan or discussion to be heard and their suggestions considered. Note that this is not because they hold democratic ideals of inclusion and discussion, but rather because they are pragmatic enough to understand that when survival is at stake (as it so often is for the Anda) there is no room to stand on ceremony.

The closest any Anda come to swearing fealty to another is to become *nöker* to another Cainite. A vampire becomes *nöker* when he swears loyalty to a worthy leader. This individual is called the *noyan* (chief) or *khan* (king), depending on his individual might. This is not a strict master/servant relationship. Rather, it is an acceptance of the leadership of another, on the condition of good leadership—essentially designating a leader to be "first among equals."

It is possible, but certainly not required or even likely, that your Anda character will establish this relationship with another character. It can, however, be a rewarding role-playing experience. The qualities the Anda look for in a leader are sound judgment and physical courage. It is entirely feasible to establish a *nöker* relationship with a fellow player's Nosferatu or Malkavian, despite the fact that another player's Lasombra is the leader of your coterie. Your character should decide who to respect and who to follow based solely on his own judgment of who is worthy of loyalty and respect.

It's also worth noting that for most Europeans, the Mongols are viewed as bogeymen, as were the Vikings

in an earlier time. This means that your character needs to exercise a degree of circumspection in introductions, and may need to offer nervous princes binding assurances. Even then, many will simply not tolerate the presence of a Mongol warrior in their domain. Unless you're keen to play a coterie's secret weapon in a High Clan, intrigue-heavy game, an Anda character will most likely work best in a mixed group, or a group composed entirely of the fallen.

Where to Find More Information

The Anda are described in detail in *Wind from the East*. They are mentioned (briefly) in *Road of the Beast*, which also describes the Path of the Nomad.

Gargoyles

The Gargoyles present a number of unique challenges to a player who wants to take on the task of playing one. Not only are they slaves, they are for the most part willing slaves who follow the orders of their masters without question. Some few have escaped the mental and physical prison of Ceoris and the Tremere, and if anything this freedom has brought them more danger and less certainty. But the rewards for playing one of the Abominations (in the right chronicle) can be great, and the possibility is well worth considering.

Here There Be Monsters

The Gargoyles are under no illusions about their origin and purpose. They have no need of myths — they know they were created to serve their masters, the Tremere. The Gargoyles are neither living nor dead, neither mortal nor Cainite — their masters see them simply as tools. Useful, dangerous tools capable of (limited) thought, but tools nonetheless.

The Gargoyles' sole creator is the Tremere witch Virstania. Virstania has spent her entire life (and unlif e) within the Clan and was Embraced (in her mid-30s) in AD 1111. Goratrix, one of Ceoris' founders and a staunch and ruthless defender of the clan, took note of her experiments with hybrid creatures and bid her to create a race of servants with unswerving loyalty to the Usurpers. Her experiments on captured Cainites soon bore fruit.

The Gargoyles as a species are aware of their artificial nature, but it does not seem to bother them. They are of low intelligence and utterly loyal to their masters, especially Virstania, whom they obey (some would say worship) as their "Great Mother."

GARGOYLES

Sobriquet: Abominations, Watchdogs

Disciplines: Special (see *Dark Ages Storytellers Companion*, p. 49)

Weakness: Willpower pool is reduced by two when resisting Dominate or other mind-control magics.

Some Gargoyles, as they age, begin to have uncomfortable thoughts about freedom and begin to question the purpose of their existence. Tales are told about a colony of Gargoyles that is free of the Tremere's control, led by a creature known only as "the Rock Lord." The conditioning that keeps them loyal, however, is very strong, and for every Abomination that even attempts to escape, a dozen do not.

As a result, the Gargoyles' outlook on the world is simple. The dictates of the Tremere must be obeyed, even if it means death. Virstania, the Great Mother, has created her children to serve, so serve they must. Among themselves, the Abominations are gentle, even affectionate. They do not fight with each other and derive great comfort from the proximity of their fellows.

Those few who have escaped have a somewhat different perspective. Their main goal is to free other Gargoyles from their servitude and to bring them to freedom. Some have begun to ponder the future of their race, for reproduction is difficult and the few children that are produced usually die within a few years. Not being true Cainites, they are unable to pass along Caine's Curse and they cannot confer immortality upon their children (in very rare circumstances, the creation rituals that create Gargoyles result in true Cainites, but these creatures are most certainly the exceptions to the rule). This leads them to have a somewhat gloomy and hopeless outlook on their existence. It also leads them to fight harder to free more of their brethren.

Playing a Gargoyle

There's no point in mincing words: playing a Gargoyle is a tough task. The Tremere treat them like the slaves they are, and the rest of Cainite society treats them like dangerous animals — best to put them down, just in case.

Character Development

Developing a Gargoyle character is difficult. The Storyteller may decide to restrict the availability of

new Gargoyle powers, requiring magical intervention to gain them. This, of course, is great fodder for stories. As most Gargoyles receive little in the way of education, you might want to spend some experience on Knowledges and Skills, to represent your character's growing understanding of the world. Maturation points are most likely to be spent on improving Attributes or Discipline powers, as it's difficult for Gargoyles to gain Backgrounds.

Most Gargoyles follow the Road of the Beast. Not only does it reflect a primal relationship to the Beast, it actually accords well with most Abominations' understanding of their true natures and their outlooks on the world. A very few Gargoyles follow other roads — primarily the Roads of Heaven and Sin — but as these roads require a degree of education to really comprehend, and a religious perspective on matters of life and death, they are most uncommon. Quite apart from the degree of abstract thinking needed to comprehend these other roads, it is nearly impossible for any Abomination to gain the necessary instruction; only the “root” roads (of Humanity and the Beast) can be self-taught.

As always, advancement along a road is dependent on experiencing moments of truth. Rising above one's bestial nature, or succumbing to it, is always an educational experience. A Gargoyle might suffer pangs of remorse for killing an innocent, or experience an epiphany if it somehow assists a worthy individual. The fight against the Tremere is another rich source of moments of truth, as the character will most definitely be faced with demands that it submit to the authority of another. A number of responses to such demands are possible, all of which should have a strong impact on your character's psyche.

Role Within the Coterie

The War of Princes has changed many things in Cainite society and things are, generally speaking, “looser” than they have been for centuries as open war between princes and factions begins in earnest. This makes it a little easier to play a Gargoyle. Three simple options for such characters include: playing a servant to another (Tremere) character; playing a member of a mixed coterie containing no Tremere; an all-Abomination chronicle.

Playing a Gargoyle in service to another player's character is probably the easiest for your Storyteller and fellow players to manage. A good rapport with the player of your Tremere master is vital, but there's still plenty of scope for enjoyable gaming. After all, the willful servant is a staple of many genres of fiction. The

Tremere character needs to give your Gargoyle some degree of independence and allow it to develop relationships with the other coterie members. If your character is kept on too short a leash, you might find it a little harder to get a share of time in the spotlight. That said, however, Gargoyles were designed and created specifically for the purpose of being servants. A servile Gargoyle is likely bound in a blood oath in addition to the magical conditioning that the Tremere force on all such creatures; quite apart from limiting role-playing, however, this can provide a unique challenge, if the requisite level of trust exists between players.

Playing an independent Gargoyle is probably the hardest approach, because Gargoyles are simply not accepted by the rest of Cainite society as anything more than monsters that serve the Tremere. You'll need to establish (most likely in a prelude) the nature of your character's relationship with the rest of coterie — perhaps it helped a member or members of the coterie out of trouble and thus demonstrated its worth to them. But even if you can come up with a plausible rationale for being included in a coterie of Cainites, Cainite society at large still views Gargoyles as the shock troops of the Usurpers, which means your character may spend a lot of time hiding and not interacting with other characters in the story. Discuss this option with your Storyteller and the other players first.

Playing a coterie of Gargoyles is a unique way to experience the Dark Medieval. Perhaps your coterie escaped together from Ceoris or some other chantry, and is now searching for the Rock Lord. Or perhaps they've found the Rock Lord and are trying to free their still-enslaved brethren. Conversely, perhaps the coterie is still fighting for the Tremere, striking against the Tzimisce or the Usurpers' other enemies. The options for playing a group of Abominations are many, and if your Storyteller is willing to run such a game, it would have the potential to tell stories of a noble or tragic bent.

Whatever option you settle on, a few things remain constant. High Clan Cainites, for the most part, want to destroy Gargoyles as aberrations; a Tzimisce might be willing to spare a Gargoyle's hide, but only long enough to remove it. Low Clan Cainites might be a little more accepting — except for the Gangrel and Nosferatu, who will most likely want to destroy any Gargoyles they meet, given their Clans' unwilling role in the creation of the Abominations (provided that the Leper or Animal in question even knows that Gargoyles exist, much less how they came

to be). The key word for any Gargoyle is survival, both of the individual and (for those who can conceive it) the bloodline as a whole. But this is an extremely difficult task.

The difficulty stems from the fact that Gargoyles are not, strictly speaking, Cainites at all, but rather a race of magical constructs. That doesn't mean they can't be useful, and there are certainly some princes who understand the advantages of having a Gargoyle as a loyal servant and secret weapon. Your character needs to "sell" itself and its usefulness to others if it wishes to survive. Needless to say, any Tremere who encounters an independent Gargoyle will not rest until the errant creature has been destroyed or captured.

Where to Find More Information

There are two important sources of information on the Gargoyles. The first is, of course, the **Dark Ages Storytellers Companion**, which gives the basic information on the creatures. Gargoyles are unique for a number of reasons, one of which is the fact that they do not possess and cannot learn Disciplines. Instead, they have special powers, detailed on pages 49 – 53 of the that volume.

The other important reference on the Abominations is **House of Tremere**. This volume has a wealth of information on the Gargoyles, including details of their creation and living quarters in Ceoris, Clan Tremere's home chantry; a description of Virstania, mother of the Gargoyles; information on several important Abominations and bizarre hybrid creations; and finally, the malign humors (special infusions that temporarily grant Gargoyles additional abilities).

Laibon

Few European Cainites have met a Laibon, but many have heard of them. These mysterious travelers from the far reaches of Africa occasionally venture north, telling stories and bringing warnings and strange customs with them. They are among the most exotic of the bloodlines, and one of the few that is unlikely to be threatened by the advance of Christianity.

Scions of the Spirits

The Laibon are shamans, philosophers and storytellers, claiming vast territories in the sub-Saharan regions of Africa. Even though they are fiercely territorial, it is customary for a young Sphinx to spend some years traveling the world, gathering tales and wisdom, before returning to Africa to claim a territory.

The Laibon, like the Anda, do not trace their lineage back to Caine, but rather to more ancient and potent creatures. They claim to be the scions of spirits, descended from Kamiri wa Itherero. The progeny of an ancient Gangrel (Fakir al Sidi) who taught his child the magics of blood and earth and spirit, Kamiri wa Itherero is the Sphinxes' spiritual father and the founder of their bloodline.

The Laibon understand that they are hunters and claim to draw power from the sprits of the great hunting beasts — lions, cheetahs, hawks and so on. They regard the Beast as the very essence of their being as hunters, not some inner demon visited upon them by a vengeful God. This belief is furthered by their signature Discipline, Abombwe, which gives them extraordinary control over their own Beasts and those of others. The tithe in blood that they pay when using their supernatural powers is, to them, the same as giving the strongest hunter the choice meat of the kill; as the Beast is that part of their soul that gives them their formidable powers, it is only right that they make it an offering, rewarding it with an abundance of what it desires.

Laibon are occasionally met wandering the pathways of Europe and the Holy Land, gathering stories and observing the follies of their European and Eastern counterparts. No doubt some have heard the tales of Ennoia and Churka (p. 30), and like all good storytellers, they know a fine tale when they hear one. That does not mean, however, that they believe it.

Welcome Travelers, Reluctant Guests

The Laibon are one of the few bloodlines not to be persecuted out of hand by European Cainites. While the Gangrel are generally hostile to them, most other Cainites regard them as interesting and exotic. This perception is aided, no doubt, by the fact that Laibon usually travel alone, are entertaining storytellers, have no designs on existing domains and make no secret of the fact that they will return to the deserts when their wanderings are done.

For their part, the frantic scheming and warring of the Europeans generally fascinates the Laibon. Perhaps because their own lands are so large and so sparsely populated, they find it difficult to appreciate the intense competition for resources when human prey is so plentiful.

When they return to their homeland, however, they are as fiercely territorial as any Tzimisce lord and rarely stray from their domain. As a lion wanders until he finds a pride, so does the Laibon wander until ready to settle.

LAIBON

Sobriquet: Sphinxes

Disciplines: Abombwe, Animalism, Fortitude

Weakness: Every time blood is used, an additional point is expended.

Playing a Laibon

As mysterious and somewhat well-favored travelers, playing a Laibon character can be quite enjoyable, and they usually fit into a chronicle with minimal fuss.

Character Development

Laibon travel so that they can experience the world and gain new stories and knowledge of customs to help them through the long periods of isolation they experience once they claim their own domains. They also travel so as to exhaust their urge for exploration and new experiences. To this end, when developing your character, almost anything goes. Laibon are usually intelligent and often well-learned, so new Knowledges are especially appropriate. You might also consider purchasing (or increasing) Abilities like Etiquette, Performance, Survival, Hearth Wisdom and Linguistics, not just because they are highly useful, but also because the Laibon enjoy learning about the customs and practices of their hosts and companions.

The War of Princes largely passes the Laibon by, and their inclination is to stay out of politics if at all possible. This doesn't mean that they won't become involved in politics, rather that if they do, it's most likely either out of a simple desire to see how matters unfold, or personal loyalty to one or more of the Cainites involved.

During chronicle downtime, a Laibon is more likely to develop Disciplines and Attributes, as most lack Backgrounds that tie them closely to European society. Some Laibon, however, do gain status within the mainstream of Cainite society. Even though they are seen as a Low Clan, the obscurity of their origins and their exotic nature militate against the normal prejudice to be found in the courts. This frees them to gain status in the usual ways (brute force and politics), if so inclined.

Most Laibon follow the Road of the Beast or one of its offshoots. They believe themselves to be descended from the spirits of the mightiest hunters and predators in Africa, so the Paths of the Nomad and the Hunter are appropriate choices.

Moments of truth are triggered by the usual stimuli (see p. 266 of *Dark Ages: Vampire*), but a number of realizations that may pass other clans by may spark enlightenment in the Sphinxes. Because the Laibon do not fear the Beast, and have such control over it, they learn much from frenzies (either their own or those of others). They are also fascinated by the geographically static existences of most European Cainites, and often try to engage them in conversation about why they make it so easy for their enemies to find them. These conversations and observations can trigger moments of intense reflection that reveal new insights into ways to understand the self and to survive eternity.

Role Within the Coterie

Within a coterie, a Laibon character can fill a number of roles. All Laibon are fierce warriors, harnessing the Beast and fighting with both skill and savagery. Their wide travels and experience, not to mention their usual lack of political connections or encumbrances, also serves to make them excellent ambassadors or emissaries. Finally, their hunger for knowledge also makes some Sphinxes formidable scholars, eager to exchange arcane lore with their hosts and comrades.

Laibon are fascinated by etiquette, and they relish mingling with High Clan Cainites. They have a bizarre affinity with the Tzimisce, perhaps because the Fiends' mix of territoriality and savagery, and their love of etiquette, so closely match the Sphinxes' own.

That said, they also work well with the Low Clans, whose greater closeness to the Beast helps ease relations. The Gangrel are another matter; some hold no truck with the myths and legends of their own clan, and welcome the Laibon with the same caution they would any other. Some, however, are determined to continue their ancient grudge and seek revenge at any opportunity (which usually means divesting a Laibon of his head).

Laibon are social chameleons, and rarely take sides or establish firm alliances in foreign lands. This can have the downside of leaving the Sphinx isolated and without allies. Their penchant for travel (regardless of whether they follow the Path of the Nomad) also keeps them moving. Even when they do decide to settle in the one location for an appreciable period of time, their habit of not taking sides in a conflict can have disastrous ramifications. Many princes have decided that those who are not with them are against them, and do not welcome into their domains mysterious strangers who are beholden to no one.

Where to Find More Information

The Laibon are described in the *Dark Ages Storytellers Companion*, pp. 12 – 13; their signature Discipline, Abombwe, is described in the same volume, pp. 36 – 38.

Lhiannan

Hidden in the last few pagan corners of Europe are the Lhiannan. Another offshoot of the Gangrel, they are the unliving heirs to a rapidly disappearing pagan past. Their doom seems assured, but that does not mean they will go quietly into oblivion.

The Crone's Childer

Like a number of bloodlines, the Lhiannan claim a descent independent of Caine and his childer. They believe themselves to be descended from a mysterious figure known as “the Crone.” A number of Brujah and Cappadocian scholars believe that a similarly mysterious figure who appears in the Book of Nod may be this ancestor, but the truth of the matter is unknown.

What is known, to the Lhiannan at least, is that the Crone gave them power over spirits, and somehow infused the bloodline with her own essence. Thus, the Druids are part Cainite and part spirit, and are tied to their lands by bonds of blood and ritual. To keep themselves strong, the Lhiannan keep alive the old traditions of blood and sacrifice; if they leave their lands they soon weaken, as the spirits of earth and stone that sustain them cannot travel with them.

The spirit of the Crone is likewise tied to the bloodline; when a new childer is created, she receives a part of the Crone's essence. This has caused a general weakening of the bloodline and reluctance to create many new childer. Ironically, however, the Lhiannan's dwindling numbers and decreasing individual power has led some to create small broods, for both company and protection.

As guardians of the deep places in the forest, the Lhiannan strive to keep their line strong, and to stave off the advance of Christianity. Their places of power — ley lines and other natural confluences of supernatural energies — are similarly under threat from mages, werewolves, faeries and Tremere. The Druids often form blood cults dedicated to traditions of sacrifice and the spirits of the earth. More importantly, the cult members provide a ready and willing source of vitae. In isolated villages and in moon circles, in hidden glades and on bald-topped hills, the Lhiannan adorn themselves with

LHIANNAN

Sobriquet: Druids, Barbarians, Savages

Disciplines: Animalism, Ogham, Presence

Weakness: All difficulties to detect a Lhiannan's nature via *Auspex* are reduced by two, and normal humans are uncomfortable in their presence. Lhiannan lose one die from all pools per week (to a minimum pool equal to the character's Stamina) they spend away from their territory.

runes, surround themselves with mortal followers, and enact rituals older than Christ.

But the Lhiannan can see that the encroachment of Christianity upon their sacred places is inevitable; some are now considering the wisdom of engaging other Cainites in their efforts to protect their domains, pledging loyalty to princes who will allow them to continue their ways unmolested, and seeking alliances with any who will help them in their efforts.

Playing a Lhiannan

The Lhiannan are a difficult bloodline to adopt as a character, primarily because of their strong ties to their home territory. With a little thought, however, a Druid character can be integrated into almost any chronicle, adding to it a strand of bloodthirsty cruelty and a less-refined sensibility.

Character Development

As the War of Princes intensifies, Cainites of all stripes look for advantages and edges to hold over their rivals. Ogham is a potent weapon in any creature's arsenal, and it is not unknown for Lhiannan to bargain their services for protection and guarantees of the safety of their domains.

Other Lhiannan, especially those who are relatively young, are more curious about the world around them; although they rarely stray far from their territory, they are keen to engage with the world, if only to better protect themselves from it.

During periods of downtime, therefore, there are a number of particularly useful purposes for the experience points your character has accrued. Backgrounds are extremely important to the Druids. Allies, Contacts, Domain, Herd and Influence are crucial for the protection of any Druid's territory, and Disciplines (especially Ogham) are an important way to increase personal power. The principle threat to the Druids is

the conversion of the mortals within and around their domains to the Christian faith; maintaining strong connections with said mortals is thus a vital survival tactic.

Status within the bloodline is somewhat more nebulous than it is within others. The geographical isolation of the members of the line makes meetings between them a rare event. Nevertheless, a loose hierarchy still exists within the bloodline, mostly based on age and perceived closeness to the spirit of the Crone. Status is gained by triumphing over the followers of the new religion and protecting sacred sites from the supernatural creatures threatening the Lhiannan's lands.

Most Lhiannan follow of the Road of the Beast; its simple dictates and uncompromising savagery sit well with the Druid's outlook, as does its veneration of sacred sites in the deeps of the wilds. They often play host to the road's Lorekeepers and Wardens, as their domains often host sites of interest to the scholars and defenders of the road. Feral Gangrel sometimes carry their clan's grudge against the Lhiannan, but violence rarely results; challenging a Druid within her domain is an enterprise fraught with peril. Other Druids follow the Road of Kings, believing that their bonds with the spirit world make them fit to rule over mortals, or the Road of Sin, whose tenets mesh well with their pendants for bloody ritual and their inherent senses of superiority over the mortal herd. Lastly, it would be all but impossible for a Lhiannan to follow the Christian Road of Heaven, as worshipping the Christian God would entail a denial of the Druid's basic beliefs and way of unlife. That said, some do follow a pagan offshoot of the Road of Heaven (see the *Road of Heaven* book for more details).

Role Within the Coterie

If you are trying to integrate a Lhiannan character into an existing coterie, you'll need to be aware of the power she wields while in her domain — and her weakness and vulnerability when outside it. You'll need your Storyteller's cooperation to tailor events in the chronicle to make it possible for you to take part. A Lhiannan is unlikely to be a coterie's leader, but can be invaluable when the action of the chronicle takes place within her territory.

In terms of relationships with the other members of a coterie, the most important factor is likely to be their degree of adherence to any religion or path that is a threat to your character's beliefs, and their willingness (or otherwise) to accept her practices. This means that mixing with High Clan Cainites may well

be difficult. Lasombra in particular will present a problem, due to their strong ties with the Catholic Church. Some Ventrue and Toreador will be enemies (whether they realize it or not) for the same reason. Generally speaking, high-blooded Cainites find the Lhiannan and her customs barbaric in the extreme and dismiss her as a mere brute for that reason. The exception is the Tzimisce, who are likely to appreciate both the traditionalism and the gruesome nature of the rites she enacts.

Relations with Low Clan Cainites are much more likely to be cordial — except for those with the Gangrel, many of whom still bear the bloodline a grudge. Tremere, however, might be torn between a desire to present your character as a prize to their superiors and a desire to learn as much mystical knowledge as possible from her. A cunning Druid may well try to forge some kind of alliance to share mystical knowledge and perhaps even extend a degree of protection or assistance.

Fitting into a coterie, therefore, requires a degree of tolerance from both sides, which means that an important shared mission or goal will go a long way towards smoothing things over. The barriers of language and culture may also need to be overcome, as more “civilized” Cainites may not feel comfortable associating with one who revels so strongly in ancient practices. For their part, some Lhiannan are disdainful of the ways of the outside world; these are usually the elders who perish at the hands of inquisitors. Younger Druids well understand the value of being able to interact with, and thus exert some control over, the outside world, and become eager students of the languages and cultures that exist beyond their domains.

Where to Find More Information

The Lhiannan and their signature discipline, Ogham, are described in the *Dark Ages Storytellers Companion*, pp. 16–17 and 43–45, respectively. An account of the feud between Ennoia and Churka is given in *Libellus Sanguinis 3: Wolves at the Door*, as well as in Chapter One of this book.

Noiad

Wandering the far northern reaches of Scandinavia, protected by their mortal herds throughout the summer when the sun does not set, the Noiad are a mystery to the few Cainites who know of their existence. But even the remoteness of their domains

may not be enough to protect them from the schemes and fears of their southern brethren.

Cainites of the Midnight Sun

The Noiad are an ancient Gangrel bloodline. So ancient, in fact, that they were the very first Cainites to enter Europe, thousands of years ago. Their precise origins have been forgotten and they themselves no longer accept the story of Caine as their foundation myth. For reasons unknown, the bloodline's ancient ancestors traveled from their birthplaces in Africa and the Fertile Crescent to Europe. Following the Samí, a mortal tribe that continued trekking north, they reached the furthest reaches of the lands now known as Norway, Sweden and Finland.

The Noiad believe themselves to be servants of the various pagan gods worshipped by the Samí. Their duties include protecting the Samí from enemies (both natural and supernatural) and interpreting the gods' messages, as conveyed to them in the *Guovssahas* (northern lights).

But like all vampires, the Noiad must drink the blood of the living to survive, and they must contend with the Beast. Their unique curse is to be utterly reliant upon their mortal brethren for survival. The Noiad are solitary when it comes to relations with others of their line. During the three months of midnight sun — roughly from May to July — the Noiad are severely hampered, falling into torpor and requiring blood regularly. They depend on the members of their adopted tribe to wake them and feed them the blood they require; this requires absolute obedience from the mortal, absolute trust from the Cainite, or both. Given the fractious and often self-destructive nature of the Beast, maintaining this relationship requires an enormous effort of will on the part of the individual Noiad.

The Wanderers are also the interpreters of the *Guovssahas*, and their skill at divining the gods' messages from these displays has cemented their position within the Samí culture, helping them advise the tribal elders, predict the movements of the reindeer, foresee the coming of unusual weather patterns and divine the arrival of strangers and other threats.

The Noiad believe that they are the guardians of their far Northern domains. Their ancestors desired to have no part in the Cainite and mortal societies that were arising, and the current members of the bloodline share this deeply isolationist attitude. They are perfectly content to travel with the Samí, following the reindeer and accepting their tributes of blood.

NOIAD

Sobriquet: Wanderers

Disciplines: Animalism, Auspex, Protean

Weakness: Cannot gain sustenance from the blood of animals, only that of Cainites and humans.

But even as they protect this ancient culture in order to preserve the relationships that allow them to survive the midnight sun, they are slowly destroying it. The Noiad fear cultural change and so have acted as a brake on any cultural or technological innovations that might improve, ease or in fact change in any way the Samí way of life. In time, the Wanderers strangle this unique culture almost to death, even as their numbers decrease and they are driven from their lands, either to holdings in the South, or into the arms of torpor or Final Death.

Playing a Noiad

The Noiad are firmly tied to their land and the mortals upon it, in a manner similar yet different from the Lhiannan or Tzimisce. Playing a Noiad is even more difficult, as they not only refuse to leave their domains and travel south, but their domains are so inhospitable and sparsely populated that they are difficult to find, assuming that another Cainite is even aware of their existence.

Character Development

However much the Noiad may hunger for isolation and disdain the outside world, the War of Princes is making its way steadily northwards, as ambitious Ventrue attempt to extend their domain to the furthest reaches of Europe. Under the cover of the Church, a small number of Lasombra have also begun traveling north, bringing their religion with them.

In the face of these developments, the Noiad are divided. Some maintain that they do not need to change, that the land and their bonds of blood with the Samí will protect them. After all, they have survived for thousands of years — surely the followers of the White Christ are no greater threat than any other they have seen? Others are more worried, usually those few who wander the southern reaches of the bloodline's territory and who have heard stories of or, in rare cases, actually met the monks and inquisitors who are beginning to tread the white wastes.

In this situation, leadership is required; any Noiad who protects the Samí, defeats the Christians or generally preserves the existence of the bloodline as a whole gains great favor. However, any who attempt to deal directly with the southerners are viewed with great suspicion. Any who go so far as to learn the tongues of their enemies are likely to be seen as mad. And of course, any who suggest changes to the current pattern of Noiad existence face destruction as a threat to that very existence.

This lack of interest in the outside world will eventually be the Noiad's undoing, but for now, those who wish to rise in the eyes of their fellows had best concentrate on preserving the secrecy of the bloodline and not suggest any changes to its traditional ways. Thus, the most useful things for any Noiad to know or have are those that relate directly to their survival. Abilities like Leadership, Animal Ken, Survival, Hearth Wisdom and Occult prove useful. Protean is crucial, if only for the Interred in the Earth ability. Backgrounds that relate to a Wanderer's mortal tribe are perhaps the most important of all. The Noiad are utterly dependent upon the loyalty (if not the goodwill) of mortals for their survival. The Samí are the Wanderers' most important resource and, as for any nomad, they are the equivalent of a domain. Anything that increases the strength of the tribe pays dividends.

Most Noiad follow either the Road of the Beast or its offshoot, the Path of the Nomad. Their belief system lends them a very simple understanding of their condition. A very few Noiad follow the Road of Humanity. Note that these are "root roads," as the Samí are a nomadic culture focused on survival and hunting, with little time to debate philosophical niceties.

Although not yet under intense pressure from the Church (unlike other pagan groups, such as the Telyavelic Tremere), the Noiad still undergo the spiritual trials that arise from their vampiric condition. In particular, they are acutely aware that although they still wander the earth, they do so under the moon, not the sun. This divorces them from their mortal kin even as it fuels their dependency on them; the situations and events that reinforce this separation — being unable to join in a hunt, trekking to catch up with a tribe only to find that it has been attacked by other Cainites, succumbing to frenzy and destroying a once-valued tribe member — often lead to moments of truth.

Encounters with Cainites from the southern lands are another source of challenges to the Noiad's be-

liefs. Rare as they are, Ferals occasionally pass through the northern lands, and at least one Lasombra monk is aware of the Noiad's existence. Such encounters, as difficult as they are with the barriers of language and custom to overcome, can be profoundly disquieting, as they reveal the many ways in which the Noiad's way of unlife and patterns of belief are inadequate to deal with the world that is coming into being.

Role Within the Coterie

The most likely way to play a Noiad is either in an all-Noiad chronicle, or in a group including a mix of Noiad and Southern Cainites, most likely united to face some common threat. For example, a devout Lasombra and a scheming Nosferatu may wish to block moves by an ambitious Ventrue to expand her domain into the Noiad's home territory. Or a group of Ferals may stray north as they seek to regroup after a defeat by a persistent foe with good knowledge of local politics and geography, and seek out the Noiad to help avenge their loss.

As with any character with extensive and vital local knowledge, a Noiad is likely to perform the dual role of scout and warrior. Or, if the character is of a more mystical bent, she may prefer to take on the role of mystic and oracle, devising strategies and planning the coterie's moves in advance.

In terms of relating to other Cainites, distinctions between High and Low Clan inevitably come into play. The Noiad have little time for either. They rightly fear the schemes and designs of the High Clans, and the savagery and desperation of the Low Clans. Pagans are tolerated more readily than Christians, but in truth tolerance, or grudging recognition of a temporary, necessary alliance is probably the closest any Noiad comes to forging a lasting relationship with any Cainite outside of her bloodline.

Where to Find More Information

Very little information on the Noiad is necessary; they are, and should remain, a mystery to most players. They are described on p. 151 of *Dark Ages Europe*.

Telyavelic Tremere

A band of Tremere has discovered the power of the land's pagan gods. The local mortals have shown them the forces that yet live in the land; and from their chantry in Riga to the deeps of the wilds, the Tremere draw power from the earth and attempt to keep their discoveries secret from Ceoris. But the Usurpers know

that there is something odd about their brethren in Lithuania, and it is only a matter of time until their activities are uncovered and their bloodline dealt with. The Telyavelic Tremere are the only known bloodline of the Tremere, and their existence is a closely guarded secret.

Blood, Sap and Soil

One of Clan Tremere's most important tactics for ensuring its survival is to spread its power across the face of the known world, reducing its vulnerability to local enemies or setbacks. Accordingly, even before the diablerie of Saulot, a band of Usurpers was sent to Lithuania to extend the clan's influence. But, unbeknownst to the elders at Ceoris, the Cainites who undertook this journey and responsibility were dissidents who did not accept their new nature and sought a way to regain their humanity. They wanted to establish a chantry as free from supervision by Ceoris as possible.

They did not find the rebirth they sought. But in their investigations of the local pagan religions they

found something else. The Lithuanian pagans number among their gods Telyavel, the protector of the dead. It was not long before the Tremere adopted the Lithuanian term and began calling themselves the "Telyavelic" Tremere. They learned the peasants' pagan ways and took up the roles of shamans, priests and spiritual emissaries.

They also learned of the *Siela*, that part of the spirit that remains behind in the earth after death. Taking this simple tradition and combining it with their magics, they have developed a path called Sielanic Thaumaturgy that combines their foul blood with the soil and sap of their new homeland. That this is an abomination and an affront to the spirits of the land does not seem to disturb them in the least. If the mortals object, they are too afraid (or too sensible) to say so.

The Shepherds' adoption of pagan ways has made them vulnerable to the relics and powers of the Christian faithful (see sidebar, p. 134), who are slowly converting the Lithuanians. Thus, their power is reduced before their mortal enemies and they struggle to defend the land they both abuse and draw their power from.



Jim Di Bartolo

TELYAVELIC TREMERE

Sobriquet: Shepherds

Disciplines: Auspex, Presence, Thaumaturgy

Weakness: Difficulties to resist frenzy are two higher than normal when confronted by an enemy using True Faith as a defense. Recoil from the sight of the cross or other symbols of the Christian faith.

Brave Defense, Bitter Defeat

The Telyavelic Tremere know they have tied their fate to the lands and traditions of the pagans. In return for a closer connection with the living world, they extend it their protection — as far as they are able.

As a result, each part of Lithuania has traditionally had a Cainite “watcher” who oversees the night and reports to the Krivê, a legendary dead king who feeds on warm blood. The Krivê at the current time is Androjai, a Malkavian who is sorely pressed by the Ventrue accompanying the Teutonic Knights on their crusade to Christianize the pagans. Many of the watchers have been killed, and the Shepherds are being called on to play an ever more active role in the defense of their adopted homeland.

For their part, the Telyavs are fully aware of the true nature of this threat, and they have recently become aware of Ceoris’ interest in discovering exactly what is going on in the Lithuanian chantries. They are currently trying to deflect the attention of their parent clan by urging it to focus its attention on the Ventrue’s bid to expand their power in Lithuania.

Playing a Telyavelic Tremere

The Telyavelic Tremere are racing against time. The culture they adopted in the hope that it would return their humanity has given them respite but not surcease from the burdens of Caine’s Curse. Their lands, and the cultures they support, are under attack by the Teutonic Knights and, through them, the Catholic Church. With the Ventrue backing these efforts, and with Lupines stalking the forests, the Shepherds face obstacles that in the long run prove insurmountable. That doesn’t preclude your character, however, from being one of the lucky ones — for a few more nights, at least.

Character Development

The War of Princes is of little concern to the Telyavelic Tremere, except insofar as it drives the Ventrue’s bid to extend their power from their Germanic strongholds into Central and Northern Europe. As a result, the Shepherds have begun to change their pattern of Embrace. In earlier days, they primarily took shamans and other spiritually attuned mortals, but as the need for warriors increases, they’re starting to embrace sturdy fighters and cunning spies.

If you’re playing a Telyavelic Tremere, you’ll face this dilemma directly. As your chronicle progresses you’ll most likely want to supplement your character’s knowledge of sorcery and other supernatural esoterica with some more practical, survival-oriented skills.

During downtime, Telyavs benefit from improved Backgrounds and Disciplines. The Teutonic Knights are a straightforward threat that can be met, by and large, with force of arms or supernatural powers. Far more insidious, and comprising the greater threat, are the priests and monks who inevitably follow the Knights’ military progress.

Inquisitors also move among the simple folk, convincing them to betray confidences and reveal their secrets. To this end, developing your character’s Allies, Contacts, Domain, Herd, Influence and Retainers is extremely useful.

Developing new rituals and Thaumaturgical paths are sure ways to grow in status within the bloodline. With the coming of the Ventrue, success against the Warlords is of increasing importance. Whether this is victory at arms, information gathered by subterfuge, a village turned out against the Teutons or an inquisitor murdered in his sleep matters little. In the fight for survival, any advantage is worth the taking, and those who can deliver victory are respected and obeyed.

Most Telyavelic Tremere follow the Road of Humanity; a few walk the Road of the Beast. They either embrace the Beast as evidence of their connection to the spirits of the wilds, or see their connection to the land and its inhabitants as a way to bring them closer to their goal of regaining their lost humanity.

Moments of truth could result from situations in which your character is faced with evidence that she is (or is not) any closer to her goal of becoming human. Overseeing pagan rites, especially of birth and death, using her supernatural powers to defend the locals against the invaders, even giving free reign to the Beast in order to destroy a threat to a holy place or person would be especially powerful events for a

Telyavelic Tremere, and could well trigger a moment of truth.

Role Within the Coterie

Telyavelic Tremere can only really function as members of a coterie if their chronicle is set in Lithuania, Latvia or Poland. Some Shepherds are simple warriors, Embraced to help defend their land. Others are otherworldly seekers of mystical wisdom. Yet others are shamans and priests, intimately involved in the lives of their mortal herds.

The role your character takes on inevitably affects the way she mixes with the others in her coterie. She's unlikely to trust a non-Telyavelic Tremere or High Clan Cainites, especially Ventrue and Lasombra. On the other hand, gaining allies in high places is always useful, especially if they can be used to thwart the Ventrue's ambitions. The Low Clans are more likely to be congenial company, especially for more politically-oriented characters. The key to these relationships will most likely be the other Cainites' roads and religious beliefs. Any strongly Christian, Muslim or Jewish character should be regarded with suspicion at best, outright hostility at worst.

Where to Find More Information

Information on the Telyavelic Tremere and the situation in Lithuania, Scandinavia and the Baltics can be found in **Dark Ages: Europe**, pp. 142–157. Additional information can also be found in **Libellus Sanguinis 2: Keepers of the Word**. Telyavelic Tremere must choose the Rego Elementum path (see **Dark Ages: Vampire**, p. 215) as their primary path of Thaumaturgy. Their magic is much less inclined toward hermetic practices and owes more to the animistic traditions of the pagan peoples of Lithuania.

Blood and Culture

The High Clans commonly hold that the minor clans, or bloodlines, are an inevitable result of the mongrel blood and inherent weaknesses of the Low Clans. Noble blood, of course, knows no such impurities or deviations. This view is so strongly held, and the High Clans promote it so persuasively, that even some among the Low Clans have come to believe it.

It is true that most bloodlines are descended from the Low Clans, but some bloodlines have originated within the High Clans (the Lamia, for instance). The

High Clans maintain their traditions and social orders much more strictly than the Low Clans, however, and deviation from tradition is often punished by exile or outright destruction. This, as much as any quality of the blood, is the chief reason why so few bloodlines claim descent from the High Clans.

In fact, the blood of any Cainite carries within it a collection of potentialities and aptitudes rather than a rigid template or pattern for a new Cainite. These affinities may be cultivated, in which case the childe takes on the full attributes of her clan, including affinities for the clan's Disciplines and the clan weakness. This is almost always the case with the childe of High Clan Cainites.

If these affinities are not cultivated, something different occurs. The bloodline diverges from its parent clan and its members pass on their own collection of potentials and weaknesses to their childe. Despite what the High Clans might like to believe, the blood of the Low is no more variable or tainted than their own. The creation of a bloodline thus depends on both the blood of the sire and the circumstances encountered by the childe.

This explains why, as a general rule, bloodlines exist as small, relatively cohesive social groups, often tied to very particular cultures, social practices and locations. They take the potential of their parent clan's blood and develop it in new ways. The sire then passes his new abilities on to his childe and, by dint of indoctrination and training, a new bloodline is established.

Genesis in Vitae

How do these minor clans come about? The answer varies from bloodline to bloodline. The Gargoyles are magical constructs, a combination and perversion of the blood of several clans. The other bloodlines are the result of a variation from a parent clan being allowed or encouraged to continue.

The Anda clearly illustrate this process. Descended from the Gangrel, the mixture of the Animals' blood and the strict cultural practices of the Mongols saw the emergence of a minor clan with unique abilities and weaknesses. Clan Gangrel's loose social structure and lack of interest in enforcing any kind of social or cultural orthodoxy allowed the line to remain distinct and to expand in numbers.

On a more metaphysical level, one may also ask why the blood of Caine allows such mutability, even to the point at which bloodlines develop their own Disciplines and weaknesses? Perhaps the Curse of Caine finds its own best expression. Per-

haps God wishes his punishment to uniquely afflict every Cainite. Whatever the reason, the practical effect is that Cainites are ultimately cursed and unable to create anything truly new. The emergence of a minor clan is not an act of creation. Rather, it is a further perversion of Caine's blood, and quite often a perversion of the unique culture and aspirations of its founders. The Curse of Caine taints everything his childer do; so the ideals and cultural practices of a bloodline's founders are corrupted and become a source of weakness and vulnerability, when they should be a source of strength and resilience.

Thus, the Anda are forced to wander, lest they weaken and die. The Lhiannan draw strength from their connection to their land, but are fatally tied to it, unable to adapt to new times and new ways. The same fate afflicts every bloodline just as it afflicts every clan. From strength comes weakness, from desire comes destruction, and from vibrant culture comes stagnation and death.

Neither Clan Nor Family

Two other crucial differences separate a bloodline from a clan. The first is that bloodlines cannot claim direct descent from an Antediluvian. The second is that they have little power and are far less diverse (both culturally and geographically) than a clan.

The importance of these facts should not be underestimated. The Antediluvians are a source of inestimable power, influence and security for their clans. In effect, they each provide their clan, whether High or Low, with a role to play, acting as guarantors of their descendants' legitimacy. With the Long Night giving way to the War of Princes, the time for the return of the Antediluvians draws near. Will they protect their bastard offspring in the bloodlines? Probably not, and this as much as any other factor makes the minor clans easy prey for the other clans.

Bloodlines are thus usually seen as poor relations and hangers-on, with no power or real influence behind them, save perhaps within their (usually limited) domain. Warring with a Ventrue prince makes potential enemies of an entire clan with vast holdings and powerful elders. Making war on a Laibon wanderer or a Noiad shaman brings little fear of reprisal.

Bloodlines are also limited by generation. Again, their lack of an Antediluvian ancestor counts against them here, with all members being de-

scended from members of their parent clan, not its founder. This is not to say that the bloodlines have no ancient and powerful Cainites in their ranks. Rather, the social and political weaknesses of the bloodlines (no Antediluvian to legitimize their position) are mirrored on a personal level (broadly speaking, higher generation and younger Cainites) as well.

Given these weaknesses, how then do so many bloodlines survive? The simple answer is that most bloodlines do not survive; the unique founder of a potential new bloodline, and any childer who may have been created, are usually destroyed. The major clans have no interest in seeing their numbers and power diluted by bastard offspring.

For most minor clans, geography plays a role in their survival. Certain bloodlines are virtually unknown to the Cainite race as a whole, because they are so closely tied to their land. The Noiad and Telyavelic Tremere are typical of such lines. Others, like the Anda and Laibon, are protected by their isolation or diffusion. These factors also make it difficult for the minor clans to gain any real political power, although of course there are some individual exceptions. But the bloodlines are generally not seen as being much of a threat, nor worth the effort it would take to eliminate them. After all, when the Antediluvians awake, the minor clans will most likely be among the first Cainites destroyed.

This means that a low profile is often a bloodline's best protection. Those who raise their heads above the battlements, or who stand in the way of a major clan, are usually consigned to the pages of history in short order. They are also very vulnerable to social and cultural changes; a bloodline that relies on a particular set of customs or rituals for its survival (such as the Noiad) is directly threatened by the spread of competing cultures.

Gangrel

One clan in particular is the source of more bloodlines than any other, perhaps more than all the other clans combined — the Gangrel. There are a number of reasons for this.

First, a Gangrel neonate is far more likely to lose contact with her sire than a neonate of any other clan. This can be as a result of abandonment by a sire (most neonates are expected to prove their worth by surviving unaided for some time in the wild) or a sire's destruction (the Animals spend much time outside cities and so are at much greater

risk of destruction than many other Cainites). During this trying time alone in the wilderness, neonates of a precocious bent may develop new approaches and techniques for survival, beginning the process that leads to the creation of a new bloodline. In essence, because so many Gangrel are left to their own devices for so long, it is inevitable that bloodlines will emerge.

Another factor is that many Gangrel are drawn from cultural groups that exist on the fringes of mortal society, such as the various pagan cultures of Northern and Eastern Europe. These Cainites are most likely to understand their condition through the prism of whatever local myths and traditions exist, especially given the Animals' tendency to abandon their childer.

This is especially the case when a Cainite begins Embracing other members of her former mortal culture; it is the true beginning of a bloodline, as new approaches and explanations of the Cainite condition are passed down to new childer. This creates a new orthodoxy and establishes a new bloodline.

Thus, if you liken a clan to a garden, the Gangrel are an un-tended, chaotic mess, with many pockets of bizarre, wild growth and only the loosest sense of order or planning. This is a sharp contrast to the orderly and carefully tended lanes and beds of the Ventrue, Lasombra and other High Clans.

One last factor contributes to the diversity of the Gangrel and their propensity to sire bloodlines: their relationship with the Beast. The Beast marks even those who do not follow the *Via Bestiae*, and this closeness to it reinforces their role as hunters who must adapt to and overcome their prey's constant efforts and stratagems for survival. This adaptability lies at the heart of the Gangrel's struggle for survival; it is little wonder, then, that their blood has become equally adaptable.

Ironically, it is this very reputed mutability of Gangrel blood, as well as its affinities towards certain Disciplines (such as Protean and Fortitude), that led Virstania of clan Tremere to use Gangrel blood as a key ingredient in the experiments that led to the creation of the Gargoyles.

Derangement, Deformity and Death

The Gangrel may be the most prolific clan when it comes to siring new bloodlines, but there are three other clans that have a somewhat unique

position when it comes to the relationship between clan and bloodline. The Malkavians and Nosferatu both are known for being a home to "families" of Cainites who share the same madness or deformity. The Assamites, for their part, are a single clan, but their three castes bear many similarities to a group of bloodlines.

Malkav's Childer

Madness, as everyone in the Dark Medieval knows, is a curse, usually caused by demonic possession. Not only do mortals understand this, but so too do most Cainites (including many Malkavians). The Madmen know they are chosen for the Embrace, as the calling draws predator and prey together. Quite often, the mortal is entirely sane. If the attentions of her would-be sire don't change this, the Embrace certainly does. Malkav's Curse usually manifests itself differently (and unpredictably) in each childe. Yet for some, the gift of madness is passed from sire to childe with little or no alteration. How can this be?

In truth, no one knows for certain, the Malkavians themselves least of all. But it has been speculated that somehow, the demon that plagues the sire also plagues the childe, either directly or by allowing another of its ilk to torment the newly cursed Cainite. In this way, a particular form of madness is passed directly from sire to childe so that, over time, a band of lunatics forms, all sharing the same delusions.

Such broods of insane vampires are widely feared and brutally persecuted. No sane prince wants a band of insane, demon-possessed vampires with a penchant for breeding in his domain.

The Malkavians themselves are quite matter-of-fact about their position. They know that they are feared and misunderstood. Some claim to have been driven further into insanity by this fact alone, but this does not deter them from expanding their mad families.

Why then are these broods not considered bloodlines? In some ways, they are quite similar to bloodlines, with unique, identifying characteristics (their own brand of madness) passed down from sire to childe. But these "families" do not develop new (or different) Disciplines, they do not form splinter or separate social groups within the parent clan, and they generally do not find themselves marginalized as a result. The clan accepts these broods as simply another manifestation of their Curse.

After all, within any family some members will be more alike than others. So it is for these Malkavian families. The gift of madness brings trouble enough to those who possess it — the Madmen would not deny their brothers this fellowship. Not that fellowship always welcome; for while some Malkavians draw comfort from the presence of similarly unhinged Madmen, being surrounded by others who share the same delusions drives some further into the depths of insanity. Staring into the face of one's own madness is not always easy.

Absimiliard's Brood

The Nosferatu are also noted for having bloodline-like "families" or broods who share certain deformities and other characteristics that are seemingly passed down from sire to child.

At first glance, these would not seem to be bloodlines at all in the strictest sense; they don't develop new Disciplines and don't claim to be new clans. On closer examination, however, the matter is not quite so clear-cut. Deformities are inherited, just as are propensities towards Disciplines; and an element of the tight social order needed to create a bloodline also exists.

A key difference between these Nosferatu broods and bloodlines proper is that gross physical characteristics (deformities, in this case) are passed down as well as the propensities for particular supernatural abilities and weaknesses. It is widely held that one's inner wickedness is reflected in one's body; thus, the Nosferatu are regarded as monsters not just because they are Cainites, but also because of the monstrous inner evil reflected in their twisted bodies. In this sense, Nosferatu broods clearly share the same brand of wickedness; why else would they form such tight social groups?

But the Nosferatu tend to be close-knit on the clan-, as well as the brood- or coterie-level. They are unique among the fallen in their hideous appearance, which allows a member of the clan to be instantly identified as such. This broader social stigma usually leads individual Lepers to identify with their clan before any other group or sub-group.

This works strongly against the creation of bloodlines, as broad social contact and reinforcement of the clan's values makes it unlikely that many broods will seek to identify themselves as anything other than Nosferatu. Indeed, the other clans would be unlikely to make any such distinc-



tion. Most find the Lepers distasteful enough without wanting to spend time investigating the finer points of the clan's culture and social structures.

And lastly, of course, all Nosferatu identify themselves as Absimiliard's descendents. Again, their commonly held curse makes it all but impossible to deny their origin in favor of any alternative explanation.

Three Families, One Clan

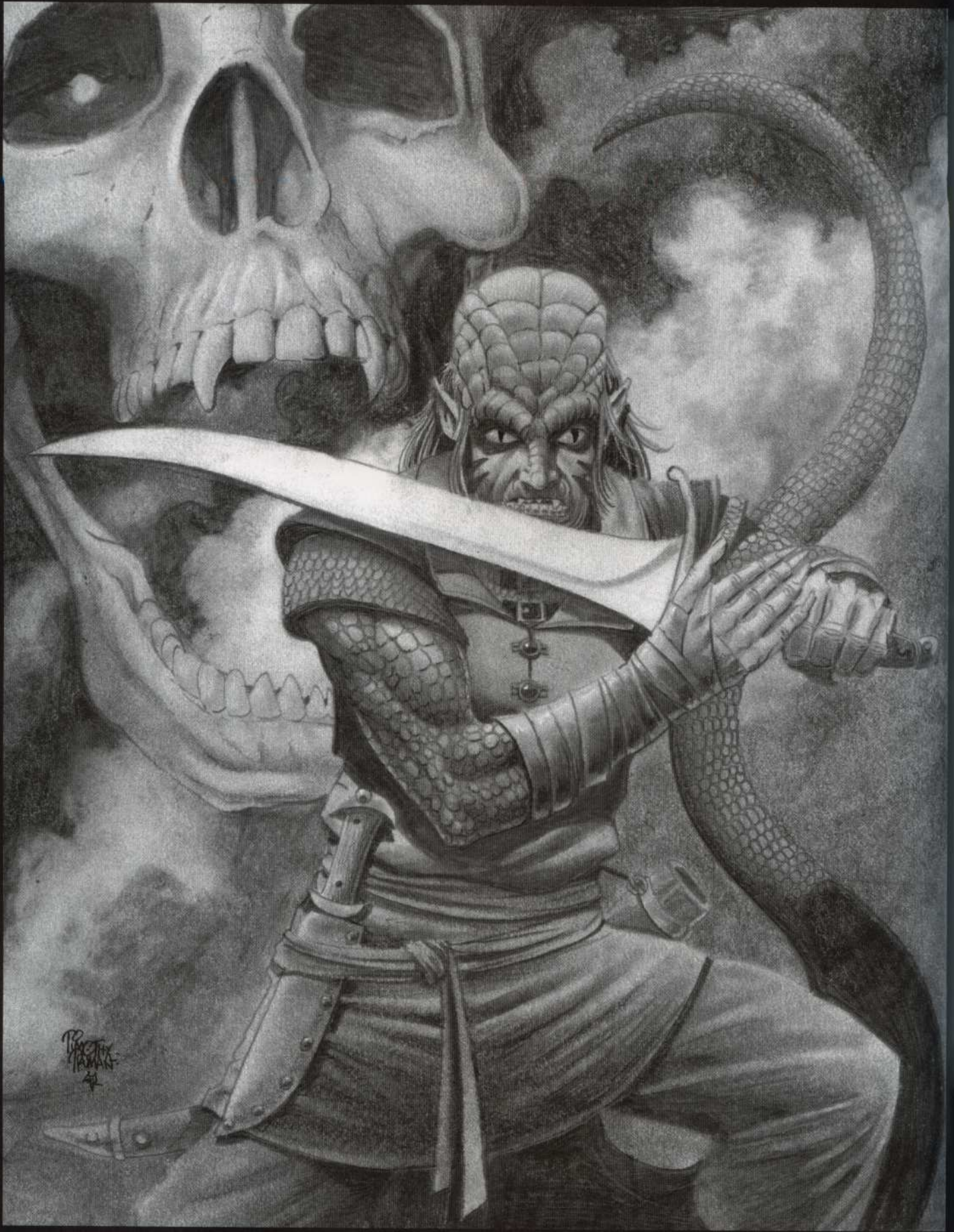
The Assamites are the last oddity to consider. They are definitely a single clan, but the question must be asked: Are the castes not bloodlines? After all, despite their common allegiance, each has a unique weakness and a different set of favored Disciplines.

The viziers, warriors and sorcerers all perform different functions within the clan, and this is why

each caste has developed its distinct abilities (and weakness). Nevertheless, these differences have arisen in the greater cause of promoting the clan and its interests. The sorcerers play a special role here, using their blood magic to communicate information to all members of the clan. In this way, each member of the clan remains clearly focused on his or her responsibilities.

This emphasis on duty to the clan helps prevent the rise of bloodlines; children are not allowed to roam free or find their own approach to vampirism. Instead, they are vigorously trained and indoctrinated. The central figure in this is the clan's founder, Haqim. No Assamite, regardless of caste, is ever allowed to forget the supremacy of the founder. Thus, even though the three castes manifest the outward signs of being separate bloodlines, their shared loyalty to the clan as a whole, and to its founder, ensure that they function as a single clan.







CHAPTER FOUR: BLESSINGS OF UNCLEAN BLOOD

Better it is to be of an humble spirit with the lowly,
than to divide the spoil with the proud.

Proverbs 16:19

The Low Clans are not powerless. Downtrodden and underestimated, to be sure. Oppressed and barred from enjoying the best that mankind has to offer Cainites, perhaps, but by no means powerless. Elders of the Low Clans have called upon their ancient blood to create powers that make the first cursed quail, and even young fallen have a clever, pragmatic streak that allows them to use the Gifts of Caine to their best advantage.

This chapter contains information on new systems and powers wielded by the Low Clans. It includes advanced Disciplines for elder characters, Discipline techniques, Assamite and Tremere blood magic, and Merits and Flaws. All of the powers listed in this chapter should be considered optional, and they require Storyteller approval to purchase.

Powers of the Old Ones

A Ventrue prince scorns a Gangrel elder, only to find his herd starving come winter as crops are devoured by swarms of rats. A young Toreador falls into madness when suddenly no one but a Malkavian acknowledges his presence. Faced with inquisitors attacking her haven during the day, a Setite elder simply calls upon an ancient pact...and walks away in the sunlight.

The Disciplines that neonates and ancillae have at their disposal may seem powerful, especially compared to the impotence of mere mortals. However, these young Cainites are themselves nearly powerless when compared to the elders. Those Cainites with the requisite strength of blood may command manifestations of Disciplines that are not only magnitudes above those of their less potent brethren, but which also bend and break what young vampires may think are the established “rules” of the Disciplines.

Diverging Paths

The first levels of a Discipline, available to any Cainite no matter his generation, have certain set rules. In general, each level provides a cumulatively more powerful effect, and that effect is always the same. A Nosferatu who learns Obfuscate 3 always learns Mask of a Thousand Faces, and this power always works as described in **Dark Ages: Vampire**. Cainites of sufficiently powerful blood have access to the advanced levels of a Discipline; here, myriad options open up. One Follower of Set might learn Breathe the Sandstorm, giving her a powerful attack, while another manifests Aspect of the God, taking a more religious approach to her Discipline.

Many theories exist as to why this is, but so far, no one truly knows. Cainite scholars debate endlessly why this change comes about and the significance of when it appears. Some scholars believe that only those of sufficiently powerful blood have the potential to step outside the normal bounds of the Disciplines and develop the diversity of powers demonstrated. Those who support this theory are at a loss to explain why such powerful Cainites cannot alter the basic powers of the Disciplines. Some scholars point to Valeren and the two different ways of using Cowing the Beast, but others state that Valeren is simply two different Disciplines and that the Song of Serenity is

WHERE IS MY FORTITUDE?

The powers presented below are mainly for clan-specific Disciplines (such as Chimerstry and Serpentis), along with Animalism (which is common to only one High Clan) and Obfuscate (which is common to none). The other Disciplines are covered in **Players Guide to the High Clans**. For now, use the powers presented below and those in **Dark Ages: Vampire** as guidelines if you need high-level powers for those Disciplines.

just a small variant on Cowing the Beast, not a totally different power. Some say that those who are closer to Caine have better control over the Disciplines, and that those of the fourth, third and mythical second generation are able to develop new Discipline powers of any level. No matter what the final truth may be, one thing is certain: Once a vampire goes beyond the bounds of those powers available to all, new and interesting powers become available.

Which advanced power a vampire develops depends on a number of factors. Chief among them are the given Cainite’s personality and the way she views the Discipline she is studying. A Nosferatu who spends her time as a thief and assassin is quite likely to manifest Invisible Weapon, even if she has a mentor who only knows Soul Mask. A mentor can, however, influence which power manifests. Developing advanced powers is easier when training with a mentor, though it is possible to learn them through practice and self-study. It is up to the Storyteller to decide how long it takes to develop a high-level power when a mentor is available (which should be dependent on the type of chronicle being run; anything from a few months to a decade or more). Training by oneself takes at least twice the time needed with a tutor.

What makes advanced levels so special is that a vampire can develop more powers at the same level. If a vampire continues to train in a Discipline, she can learn either a new power of the same level already known or she can advance on, provided she is of sufficient generation. For example, a sixth generation Ravnos who possesses Pact of Animals may choose to develop Quell the Herd as well instead of moving up to Send the Eighth Plague.

As is explained on page 166 of **Dark Ages: Vampire**, the cost of buying up a Discipline is based on a character’s current rating in that Discipline. This rule stands in need of clarification when it comes to powers above level 5. Since each Discipline includes multiple powers, which can be bought individually, “current rating” in this case does not necessarily refer to the rating the character has in this Discipline. When buying powers above level 5, consider “current” to mean “the lowest level needed to buy this power.” In other words, if a character has six dots in a Discipline, her player pays 25 experience points to buy another level 6 power and 30 experience points to buy a level 7 power.

The powers presented in this chapter, as well as those in **Dark Ages: Vampire**, are just a sampling of the possibilities opened up by high levels of Disciplines. The ones found in that book are the most

common powers of those Disciplines, while those in this chapter are most often found among the Low Clans. A player may, with the Storyteller's permission of course, design a new high-level Discipline power for her character instead of purchasing one of the powers presented in the books. This requires some effort on the parts of both the player and the Storyteller, as they must work together to make sure that the power created is neither too powerful nor too weak. The power should also fit within the framework of the chosen Discipline, though high-level powers can bend the established rules for a Discipline.

The Practical Approach

As noted before, the following high-level Discipline powers are mainly found among the Low Clans. Low Clan vampires tend to develop practical powers with a broad application or several different uses (such as Pact with Animals and Aspect of the God). These powers may not be as focused and thus not as powerful as those wielded by the High Clans, but they are useful in a wider range of situations. Consider Pact with Animals: This power allows for small, but diverse changes. A Tzimisce might instead develop a power that would allow her to devour an animal and take on more of its strengths and abilities; but for the Gangrel, Nosferatu and Ravnos clans, diversity is often of more use than direct power.

The War of Princes also influences many of the powers that manifest during this time. More and varied martial powers are being developed or rediscovered, as well as powers that allow for better chances of survival when the great princes wage covert war across Europe.

The Verils 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 like 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 that 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 dan-

AN INSANE START

Yes, it is possible to start with a Discipline derangement, by taking the Deranged Flaw (page 305 of *Dark Ages: Vampire*), or by simply 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 that 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.

ger 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 her other two clan Disciplines together.
- The level of a non-clan 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 Disciplines several times recently.
- The character has repeatedly achieved phenomenal results (six or more successes) while using the Discipline recently.
- The character relies heavily upon 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.

Twink Heaven?

The powers listed below range from levels 6 to 9; as such, some powers are available only to fourth generation characters. This does not mean that we

advocate the creation of such characters for play. Indeed, the highest levels presented here are mainly meant to be tools for a Storyteller. On the other hand, nothing precludes a troupe from playing an elders chronicle, and in such a situation the group might consist of sixth or even fifth generation characters.

Some people might say that listing level 9 powers is unnecessary, as the ancient Methuselahs of the fourth generation can do pretty much anything they want and crush any upstart characters without having to resort to, say, Join with the Beast. In an elder chronicle, however, a fourth generation character might well meet his match against a coterie of fifth or sixth generation Cainites.

Finally, many of these powers can be used as inspiration. Suppose the characters are Assamites who have been charged with hunting down a renegade member of the clan so that he can be punished with Weaken the Blood (in full view of the characters, so that they can see the price of rebellion) or that the coterie unwittingly performs a service for an ancient Malkavian, who rewards them by wiping away all derangements and blood oaths — possibly those very oaths that made their sires trust them.

Animalism

Animalism is a common Discipline for the Low Clans. Only one High Clan (the Tzimisce) has easy access to Animalism, while the other High Clans scorn it as inferior to Dominate and Presence. The Gangrel, Nosferatu and Ravnos clans have all learned just how efficient high levels of Animalism can be when dealing with the Beast, however. As an optional rule, a Storyteller can allow a character using Willpower to boost her Instincts rating (as described on page 265 of **Dark Ages: Vampire**) to boost it by one additional dot per level of Animalism above 5, to signify her enhanced familiarity with the Beast and with her own instincts. This has no effect on Self-Control, which denies the Beast, instead of working with it.

ANIMAL PERSONIFICATION

Some masters of Animalism become so used to communicating with and influencing animals that they forget that normally, animals are not as sophisticated as humans. A Cainite with this derangement treats animals as if they were humans, talking to them just like normal people and expecting them to respond as if they were intelligent.

High levels in Animalism rarely cause derangements, though the Discipline can inflict Fantasy (a world where animals rule, not humans), Obsession (with animals), Sanguinary Animism, Regression (into an animalistic state of mind) or Animal Personification (see sidebar).

••••• Pact with Animals

This power allows the wielder to borrow the powers of an animal that she feeds from. It can grant her the strength of the bear, the eyes of the hawk, the wisdom of the owl or the poison bite of the serpent. This power is likely to manifest in elder Gangrel, as they tend to have the strongest connection to animals.

System: Pact with Animals requires that the character drink at least one blood point from the type of animal from which she wants to borrow a power. In the case of small animals, such as rats, this may require more than one source. As the blood is consumed, the player spends a point of Willpower. Pact with Animals lasts for the rest of the night. As the power fades just before sunrise, the player must roll the character's Road rating

SAMPLE ANIMAL POWERS

Raptor: Talons of the Beast that work especially well for grasping (+2 to Strength for grip only), keen eyesight (Heightened Senses for sight only), hunting instinct (+2 to Survival for hunting purposes).

Wolf: Savage bite (+1 bite damage), great endurance (+2 to Stamina), enhanced hearing and smell (+1 to Perception for these senses), pack instincts (+1 to all difficulties if alone).

Bear: Claws and savage bite (Talons of the Beast and +1 bite damage), great strength (+2 to Strength), +1 difficulty to Self-Control/Instincts rolls to avoid frenzy when wounded.

Rat: Great swiftness (+2 to Dexterity) and agility (+1 to Athletics and Dodge), exceptional sense of smell (Heightened Senses for smell only), cowardly (must roll Courage not to flee when wounded).

Snake: Flexibility (+1 Dexterity and +3 dice to any roll involving flexibility), scaly skin (+1 to soak any damage except sunlight), venomous bite (four health levels of lethal damage to mortals, two to Cainites), treacherous personality (must roll Willpower when presented with an opportunity to commit betrayal or cause strife not to give in to these urges).

(difficulty 6). If the roll fails, the influence of the animal does not fade entirely; the next night, the character is affected by the animal's mindset as with Ride the Wild Mind (page 175 of **Dark Ages: Vampire**).

The power gained from an animal is usually equal to a Discipline power of level 1 or 2 (like Auspex 1, Heightened Senses (page 176 of **Dark Ages: Vampire**), or Protean 2, Talons of the Beast (page 205 of **Dark Ages: Vampire**)); in addition it adds two dots to an Attribute or three dots to an Ability. The character also takes on mythical aspects of the animal. Someone drinking from an owl would become wiser, while someone drinking from a snake would slip towards an evil disposition.

••••• Send the Eighth Plague

This is one of the most destructive powers among any of the Disciplines. An ancient Gangrel called Valentinian demonstrated its immense potential for ruination shortly after the Fourth Crusade. Angry with Italian Cainites intruding upon his lands, he called upon his mastery of Animalism and brought starvation down on an entire trading town. Send the Eighth Plague can lay waste to villages, towns and entire baronies, for it calls upon rats, mice, locusts and other pests to gather and plague a target of the wielder's

choosing. In the Dark Medieval, where every harvest is a gamble, the mere threat of this power can intimidate Cainite princes and lords, who would rather not see their source of blood starve to death.

System: The character must sit in quiet meditation somewhere in the area she wishes to Plague for at least half an hour. Then, the character slashes her hands open and bleeds into the soil while the player spends ten blood points and rolls Charisma + Animal Ken (difficulty 6). The number of successes must be divided between time and areas of effect, as shown below:

No. of Successes	Area/Time of effect
1 success	A single field/24 hours
2 successes	Two nearby fields/3 days
3 successes	All the fields of a village/A week
4 successes	All the fields of several villages/A moon
5 successes	All the fields of a large swath of land/3 months

The vermin eat everything they can find, gnawing their way into larders and stripping fields of crops. While a duration of 24 hours is tolerable and three days is survivable, anything beyond that is a catastrophe; dedicated extermination is required to save stored food and crops.



..... Unchain the Ferocious Beast

All Cainites know of the terrible power of the Beast and of what havoc it can wreak if let loose. With Unchain the Ferocious Beast, a master of Animalism can do just that, letting the Beast run amok in the body that it inhabits, inflicting terrible damage. The target of this power erupts with wounds that look like they have come from some dire beast; anyone looking at the target is horrified to witness such ravages.

System: Unchain the Ferocious Beast requires eye contact. It works on ghouls and Cainites; it also affects Lupines, using the rage and anger of these savage warriors against them. The player spends three blood points and rolls Manipulation + Intimidation, with a difficulty equal to the target's Self-Control/Instincts + 4 (for Lupines, who have better control of their Beasts, the difficulty is Willpower +3, maximum 10). Each success translates into a level of aggravated damage. Botching this roll turns the user's own Beast against him, inflicting one aggravated health level of damage per 1 rolled.

..... Free the Beast Within

The Beast is a fearsome enemy, but for the true masters of Animalism, it can be a powerful ally as well. When using Free the Beast Within, a Cainite enters into a pact with her Beast, releasing it from its prison in the vampire's mind in return for some powerful benefits. This power is not invoked lightly, for the Beast never wants to be put back into its cell.

System: The character concentrates for one turn and the player spends one point of Willpower (this power can be activated as the character enters frenzy, at the same cost). The player then rolls Road (difficulty 10 – Self-Control/Instinct). If the roll fails, the character enters a normal frenzy. If the roll is botched, the character is taken over by her Beast and enters frenzy as usual, save that the frenzy does not end until the character is subdued or subjected to a power designed to cow or control the Beast. If the roll is successful, the character enters a controlled frenzy. The character ignores all wound penalties and any mind- or emotion-influencing Disciplines up to level 8 (any such powers at level 8 or higher suffer a +3 difficulty). The character projects an aura of menace that reduces the difficulty of all Intimidation rolls by 2. Finally, the Beast sharpens the character's awareness; she not only receives all the benefits of Heightened Senses, but also three dice to all Alertness dice pools and all Survival dice pools based on Perception (such as tracking). However, the player must

spend a point of Willpower for the character to take any non-aggressive action (Storyteller's discretion), and canceling Free the Beast Within requires an extended Instincts/Self-Control roll, difficulty 8, with six successes required (one roll per turn).

If a Cainite possesses both this power and the Protean power Shape of the Inner Beast (see below), she can combine the two, allowing her some control over the shape of her Beast when it is given physical form. She applies all the modifiers from Shape of the Inner Beast, but retains control over her own actions and neither loses Willpower nor risks a derangement.

Chimerstry

In the East, Chimerstry is the Ravnos' proof of their belief that reality is but an illusion. In Europe, some claim these powers of deception come from demons, through a bargain struck by the Ravnos clan founder. Most Charlatans deny this, though some claim that the powers are demonic in origin — but that the first Ravnos tricked them from a demon. The advanced powers of Chimerstry reflect both sides of this, with illusions that either take on more reality or seem to copy the wily and treacherous machinations of demonic beings. Chimerstry is a Discipline that requires tremendous power of will, but it is also extremely seductive; those wielding it are sometimes afflicted with such derangements as Fantasy (almost anything), Megalomania, Perfectionism, Visions (common for eastern Ravnos) or Illusion Addiction (see sidebar).

..... Horrid Blade of the Demons

By sheer concentration, a wielder of Horrid Blade of the Demons may create a short-lived but very real weapon capable of inflicting dire wounds upon an opponent. The Eastern Ravnos use this power to battle the demons of their homeland, fighting fire with fire; there

ILLUSION ADDICTION

The power of Chimerstry is such that it can create anything the wielder can imagine...or desire. Sometimes, masters of this Discipline become addicted to the fantasies that Chimerstry can create and lose themselves in dream worlds of their own making. When this derangement is active, the character sits around for hours creating pleasurable illusions; doing anything else requires the player to succeed in a Willpower roll (difficulty 7).

are great many tales of Zapathasura, the mythical progenitor of the Ravnos, wielding such a blade. It is a power that lends itself best to a martial mindset.

System: The player spends two points of Willpower and one blood point per die of damage that the weapon inflicts (in addition to the wielder's Strength). The blade appears in the summoner's hand instantly and she may wield it during her next action. The blade lasts for a scene and inflicts aggravated damage, but carries some limitations. First, blood may not be spent over consecutive rounds to increase the potency of the blade. Second, the blade can inflict no more than one die of damage above what a normal weapon of that type can do (so a knife made with Horrid Blade could inflict no more than Strength + 2). Third, should the wielder be disarmed, she must immediately spend a blood point or the weapon disappears (that expenditure does summon the blade back to her hands). The damage caused by this blade does not fade after the weapon does.

••••• Aid of the Gandharvas

It is claimed that the founder of the Sybarite caste, which thrives on luxury and excess, learned this power by defeating a *Gandharva* spirit in combat, thus earning the spirit's aid. With Aid of the *Gandharvas*, a Ravnos may cloak himself and his surroundings in the illusions of these spirits, turning even the simplest hovel into a magnificent dwelling.

System: In order to invoke Aid of the *Gandharvas*, the character spends a few minutes visualizing the splendor she wishes to create. The player spends one Willpower and three blood points and rolls Charisma + Expression, Subterfuge or Performance (difficulty 6). (The Ability used is chosen when the power is first developed and may not be changed. There are no functional differences (aside from the number of dice rolled), it is simply a matter of the vampire's perceptions: those who use Expression see Aid of the *Gandharvas* as an expression of beauty from within themselves; those who use Subterfuge see it as a way to deceive others; and those who use Performance consider it an expression of something artistic.) If the roll succeeds, the character (and possibly her surroundings) is covered in an illusion of splendor. Simple rags become clothing fit for a prince, a rusted blade becomes a Damascene scimitar, a simple meal becomes a feast and rickety chairs look like veritable thrones. The illusion covers all five senses, but it is only an illusion. Clothes that look like fur-trimmed wool of the best quality do not warm better than the rags they really are, a rusted sword is still rusted and so on. Also, the illusion only covers things already present; it does not

create new items. Thus, strewing a few copper coins over a table and piling some pebbles in an urn will help the illusion along, as the coppers become a small hoard of silver and the pebbles become gemstones.

The illusion is very hard to filter out. Any attempt to detect the illusion (see page 181 of *Dark Ages: Vampire*) suffers a +2 difficulty. Any item removed from the area of effect reverts instantly to its former semblance. The number of successes on the initial roll determines the area of effect:

No. of successes	Area of effect
1 success	User only.
2 successes	A small room (generally no more than 15' x 15').
3 successes	A large room or hall.
4 successes	The inside of an entire large house.
5 successes	The inside and outside of an entire small house or the inside of an entire manor or small castle.

Any character veiled in Aid of the *Gandharvas* gains one dot of Appearance. All uses of Aid of the *Gandharvas* last for one scene.

••••• Visions from the Asura

This terrible power, which bears some intriguing similarities to various applications of Dementation, is named after the demonic *Asura* who are believed to grant the hellish visions it induces. The visions work subtly within the target's mind; and in the end, the poor victim must question everything that happens around her, not knowing whether it is reality or illusion.

When afflicted with the Visions, the victim experiences random illusions (affecting all senses) that could be everyday events and things. For example, if the victim is entering a castle, she may be approached by a servant. While she is walking by a building, a door opens and a woman calls her name. The victim suddenly smells something burning. She feels a tug at her clothes. She sees a door in a wall where there is no door, or a door is covered to look like a wall. These effects always disappear after the victim reacts to them, showing her that it was only an illusion. From time to time (no more than twice per night), horrid events take place, like the victim turning a corner and seeing a grisly murder or finding herself attacked by a hated foe or a hideous monster. In the end, the victim

begins to question any event, wondering if it is illusion or reality. Also, others wonder about her sanity as she interacts with things only she can see, and ignores quite tangible events.

System: In order to invoke the Visions, the character observes the target for at least five minutes, and the player spends three points of Willpower and rolls Manipulation + Subterfuge. The difficulty is the target's Willpower. If the target has any derangements, this difficulty rises by +1. If her Road rating is 3 or less, or if she is a road initiate (see **Dark Ages: Vampire** p. 91), the difficulty is decreased by -1. The effect lasts for 1 night, plus 1 additional night per success. At the end of each night of Visions, the victim loses a point of temporary Willpower. If the victim has no Willpower left, she instead develops a derangement.

The only real defense against this power is Auspex 9. The victim may suspect that certain events are illusions and roll as described on page 181 of **Dark Ages: Vampire**, but the victim should roll for *everything* she sees, feels and hears, as she can never be certain what is illusion and what is not.

••••• Truths of the Universe

This rare power originated in the homeland of the Ravnos clan and it is unknown whether or not it has made its way west to Europe. The power relies upon the belief that all of physical reality is but an illusion. As such, the Ravnos, masters of illusions, should theoretically be able to create reality with their gifts. Of course, it is not that simple; but masters of Chimerstry can, with extreme effort, force one of their illusions to meld with the illusion of reality and become, for all intents and purposes, real.

System: This power is best left in the hands of Storyteller characters, with the Storyteller determining the effects. At the cost of a *permanent* point of Willpower, the Ravnos is able to make one of her illusions, and all its effects, real — no matter how impossible or incredible. The scope and limitations of this power are, as has been stressed, very much up to the Storyteller.

With this power, a Ravnos could make a permanent Horrid Blade (see above), granting him an exceptionally potent weapon. A simple Dweomer (Chimerstry 2, **Dark Ages: Vampire** p. 182) of a sack of precious gems can be made real, granting the Ravnos immense wealth. Or a diabolic Cainite can create a monster with Apparition (Chimerstry 3). Objects made real with this power are just as "permanent" as any other object; for instance, a Horrid Blade

made real by Truths of the Universe can be shattered just like any other sword.

Dementation

Of all the clan-specific Disciplines, Dementation is the easiest to learn — Malkavians are often quite eager to teach it to others, even to those who are not interested in learning it. Unlike other Disciplines, Dementation does not carry with it the risk of insanity — it carries the certainty of it. Anyone who learns Dementation also acquires at least one derangement; should the vampire later be cured of her insanity, she is no longer able to use Dementation. The derangement developed is therefore not keyed to the Discipline itself, but to the individual who learns it. As such, focusing on Dementation ironically enough does not carry the risk of a derangement — a least not for the character herself. Those around her, however, are quite likely to be infected with madness.

••••• Devil in the Mind

This insidious power becomes the bane of all the victim's social interactions, as it breaks down inhibitions and social mores, while at the same time pulling subconscious impulses, ideas and opinions to the forefront. The Malkavian Giselle the Fury used this power to ruin a delicate negotiation between a group of Toreador elders in the Courts of Love — and the elder Malkavian subsequently found herself subject to a blood hunt, as her victims realized the likely source of their distress.

System: In order to employ Devil in the Mind, the character makes eye contact with her target, and the player spends a point of Willpower and rolls Manipulation + Subterfuge (difficulty of the target's Willpower). Devil in the Mind works in two ways. The first is to remove the normal social barriers that prevent people from speaking their minds, thus making the target say just what she feels and means instead of trying to cloak her words. This is an efficient method of ruining delicate circumstances such as seduction, negotiation or tense diplomatic negotiations. The second way is to strengthen impulses that would normally be suppressed and to make the victim focus on ideas and opinions that are inappropriate to the current situation. For example, a woman trying to coax information out of a man she finds unattractive might suddenly begin thinking just how repulsive he really is, and be hard-pressed to not just come right out and say it; while a servant envying his master's warm

cloak might simply try to take it, and demand that it be given to him if he is stopped.

Devil in the Mind lasts for one scene. Supernatural creatures (including ghouls) can resist it by spending a Willpower point and rolling Willpower (difficulty 6) each time they wish to resist an impulse or comment. Even if this resistance succeeds, the victim loses one die from Subterfuge and Etiquette pools (additional efforts at resistance do not incur this penalty). Once the power subsides, the victim realizes that something was not right, though she does not necessarily suspect outside influence.

••••• Change the Soul

This power is seen as diabolical by those few Malkavians who have heard about it. However, those elder Malkavians who follow the Road of Sin or who revel in their madness may consider it more blessing than curse. With Change the Soul, a Malkavian may alter a person's personality on the deepest level — her memories remain intact, but her outlook on life changes completely.

System: In order to inflict Change the Soul on a victim, the Malkavian must look into the eyes of the target. The player rolls Manipulation + Subterfuge, with a difficulty equal to the target's Wits + Subterfuge. If the user can achieve successes equal to or greater than the target's Instincts/Self-Control, she may change the target's Nature to whatever she desires. This effect is permanent and can only be reversed with another application of Change the Soul or with Touch of the Saints (see below). Rumor has it that certain powers of the Healer path of Valeren can also counteract Change the Soul. Should the attempt be botched, the Nature of the user changes to that chosen for the victim.

Note for Storytellers: This power is quite a nasty one, and it is probably a good idea to think it through before inflicting it upon a player's character. Players who spend a lot of time, thought and effort on their characters might not appreciate having such an essential part of their characters changed.

••••• Personal Scourge

This rare manifestation of Dementation turns the victim's own strength of will against him. This power gives the user a direct, physical way of inflicting damage on her target. Whether employed as a punishment, destruction or defense, Personal Scourge leaves the survivor deeply shaken and probably unwilling to face the Malkavian again. A victim of Personal Scourge manifests lacerations, experiences spontaneous bleed-

ing from nose, eyes and ears, and most likely howls in agony. The attack is also visible in the victim's aura, which writhes in response to the physical pain.

System: Personal Scourge requires either eye contact or touch. The player spends two points of Willpower and rolls Manipulation + Empathy, with a difficulty equal to the victim's Stamina + Self-Control/Instincts (Stamina + 3 for targets without Virtues). For one turn per success, the victim rolls her own Willpower as a lethal damage dice pool against herself. This damage can only be soaked using the victim's Road score (victims without a Road score soak with their Stamina + 3), without the benefit of Fortitude. While the power lasts, the victim may do nothing except thrash around in pain. By spending a point of Willpower, the victim may defend herself, speak coherently or attempt to heal with blood. This expenditure must be made each round.

••••• Touch of the Saints

Those few who have heard of this power are baffled by it, for it seems totally at odds with Dementation. This power grants the target total clarity of mind, freed from all derangements and compulsions. The ancients of Clan Malkavian know the truth; Touch of the Saints was an application of Dementation that Malkav himself learned while studying with his brother Saulot, who often soothed Malkav's pains. Because of this noble history, it is seen as the greatest gift a Malkavian Methuselah can bestow upon anyone.

System: In order to use this power, the Malkavian places her hand upon the face of the target, and the player spends a point of Willpower. Touch of the Saints then washes away any and all derangements and anything else influencing the target's mind at that time: the blood oath, Dominate commands, Presence-induced emotions, drugs — any and every outside influence is gone. The target immediately regains all temporary Willpower and for the next week, she has one additional die to all mental dice pools.

The effect of the Touch is permanent (though new mind-influencing powers can be inflicted). This power can not be used on oneself. The only thing it cannot cure is a Malkavian's clan derangement (though even this may be temporarily subdued).

Obfuscate

As noted by many Nosferatu, Obfuscate is common only among the Low Clans. While scholars among the Lepers have waxed long about the implications and

COMPULSIVE INVISIBILITY

This derangement manifests in users of Obfuscate who either have a touch of paranoia or who insist on walking around cloaked at every possible moment. In the end, the sufferer of this derangement cannot turn off her Obfuscate. The player may roll Willpower (difficulty 6) to have her character drop the Obfuscate for an important situation, but she will resume the invisibility at the earliest opportunity.

ramifications of this, an unnamed Malkavian Furore probably expressed the reason best when she said, "Those thrice-damned Artisans and Warlords would rather shine like a beacon to all enemies than try to hide their much-vaunted glory for just a while." The Nosferatu are traditionally thought to be the masters of Obfuscate (and it is true that many of the advanced powers have originated with this clan), but the Assamites, Malkavians and Setites also have their secrets.

For those who focus too much on Obfuscate, the derangements of Amnesia, Multiple Personalities (with a separate Mask for each), Paranoia and Compulsive Invisibility (see sidebar) are appropriate.

••••• Invisible Weapon

This power can be a potent tool for an assassin or thief. Invisible Weapon cloaks a weapon with Obfuscate, allowing the wielder to walk around with it drawn without attracting attention, and also to strike at a target with the advantage of total surprise. The infamous Nosferatu assassin Vyacheslav of Bulgaria, who is fast becoming a well-used tool in vampiric conflicts in the Byzantine successor states, is known to wield this power.

System: The character chooses his weapon. The player spends a blood point and rolls Manipulation + Melee (difficulty 7), with the power lasting one hour per success. The weapon is cloaked by Obfuscate and is invisible to anyone who does not have sufficient Auspex to see through the Obfuscate. The vampire can walk through a crowded bazaar with a drawn sword and no one will notice. If the character decides to attack someone, the victim cannot see the attack coming. If any person has reason to suspect an attack (such as seeing the user approach and then swing at her), she may attempt a defensive action, such as a dodge or parry, at +3 difficulty. Any attack breaks the invisibility of the weapon, but only with regard to the person attacked. Others still see the wielder as empty-

handed. After attacking, the wielder can choose to maintain the weapon's complete invisibility at the cost of one Willpower each round. A defensive action against a still-cloaked weapon is at +2 difficulty, as the target knows that a weapon is employed, but cannot see it. This power also works on bows and crossbows, cloaking the missiles fired, as well as on thrown weapons.

Despite the name, this power can actually be used on anything the vampire holds in her hands. This makes it quite an efficient tool for a thief. When not being used to conceal a weapon, the activation roll is Manipulation + Larceny.

•••••••• Veil of Blissful Ignorance

Veil of Blissful Ignorance forcefully Obfuscates the target, making her all alone in the world as those around her ignore her. Most people find this a harrowing experience, cut off as they are from friends, family and even passers-by. Malkavians use this to drive their targets into madness. A Nosferatu might try to teach a humbling lesson with this power, while a Follower of Set can prey on the insecurities of someone cut off from society.

System: The character must touch the intended victim. The player spends a blood point and rolls Wits + Stealth, with a difficulty equal to the victim's Appearance + 3. Inhuman-looking targets (those with Appearance 0) are difficulty 8. Cappadocian victims receive an additional +1 difficulty. If the roll succeeds, the target is considered to be under the effects of Vanish from the Mind's Eye (Obfuscate 4, **Dark Ages: Vampire** p. 198) for a duration determined by the number of successes.

Successes	Duration
1 success	Three turns.
2 successes	One minute (Approximately 20 combat turns).
3 successes	Fifteen minutes.
4 successes	One hour.
5 successes	Until sunrise.

The victim does not necessarily know that she is affected by this power — she just notices that everyone is ignoring her. The Veil cannot be broken even by an attack, and the victim of such an attack will attribute it to either a nearby person or the acts of a demon. Curiously, this power has no effect upon someone who accepts it willingly.

••••• Horrid Countenance

A power that appeals equally to the Nosferatu and Malkavian clans, Horrid Countenance veils the user in an illusion somewhat similar to Mask of a Thousand Faces (Obfuscate 3, **Dark Ages: Vampire** p. 198), yet with important differences. Instead of a human appearance, the character takes on the aspect of a nightmarish creature, invoking blind panic in those around him. Like all Obfuscate powers, this effect is mental, affecting the mind of the target rather than the actual senses; each person looking at the user of this power sees something different, dredged up from his the deepest fears. The user has no idea what different people may see, unless she possesses sufficient Auspex to read thoughts (and chooses to look).

System: The player spends one Willpower point. Players of normal mortals must make a Willpower roll (difficulty 8). If this is botched, the mortal dies of fright. If it fails, she collapses into a coma and awakens after an hour with a permanent derangement. With one or two successes, the victim cowers in abject fear; and with three or more successes, she flees. Animals and animal ghouls flee automatically.

Ghouls are subject to the same rules as mortals, but with the effects reduced one step (so a failure indicates that she cowers). Three or more successes indicates only a strong fear, reducing all dice pools not involved with getting away from the nightmare by two. Vampires must first check for Röttschreck at difficulty 9. If the check is successful, the vampire reduces all dice pools by two as above, until the player has gained five successes on an extended unmodified Courage roll (difficulty 7). If the Horrid Countenance attacks, the vampire must check for frenzy as if he were in mortal danger.

Lupines viewing the Horrid Countenance tend to fly into a homicidal frenzy (more so than normal when encountering Cainites), ignoring anything and anyone in order to get to the character. Those who are blessed by God sometimes ignore the effects of Horrid Countenance entirely.

••••• Obscure God's Creation

No record of this power actually exists. That Methuselahs of certain clans might be able to achieve such an effect is purely theoretical, the logical extrapolation of the Obfuscate Discipline. Cainite scholars sometimes point out (somewhat fearfully) that if such a power *does* exist, there would be no way to verify it, anyway. Obscure God's Creation allows

the elder to remove an object or person from another's perception entirely.

System: In order to inflict Obscure God's Creation on a victim, the character needs to see him. The player rolls Manipulation + Subterfuge (difficulty equal to the target's Willpower), and spends a variable number of Willpower points depending on the size of the subject. One point is needed to cloak anything up to the size of a sword, two to cloak something up to the size of a horse (people fall into this category), three to cloak a building and four to cloak an entire castle. A certain number of successes are required to overcome the victim's emotional attachment to the object; additional successes determine the duration of the power.

Successes	Emotional Attachment/Duration
0 successes	No emotional attachment/1 hour
1 success	Knows the subject/1 night
2 successes	Has slight feelings for the subject/1 week
3 successes	Has feelings for the subject/1 month
4 successes	Has strong feelings about the subject/1 year
5 successes	The target's sire, parents or place of birth/ Permanent

The invoking vampire can cancel Obscure God's Creation at any time.

Example: The ancient Follower of Set Nebmaatsutekh decides to teach a young clanmate a lesson after he questions her on the dogma of their faith. She decides to remove the foolish youngster's haven, containing his own personal shrine to Set, from his mind. First, the Storyteller spends three points of Willpower in order for Nebmaatsutekh to affect a building. She then rolls Nebmaatsutekh's Manipulation + Subterfuge. The Storyteller decides that a haven merits four successes (the youngster feels strongly about his home), so this is the minimum that must be achieved. With four successes, the power will last for just one hour, since no successes are allocated to duration. If the roll garners six successes, however, the power lasts for an entire week.

Protean

The art of shapeshifting is one of the greatest strengths of the Gangrel clan, whether for combat or survival. In fact, this is probably the single most desired clan-specific Discipline; and in earlier nights, many Gangrel freely taught the secrets of Protean to other vampires, particularly those following the *Via Bestiae*. This is no longer the case, as the War of

UNCONTROLLED SHIFTING

Normally, the use of Protean requires conscious effort from the user. Someone suffering from Uncontrolled Shifting, however, finds her body responding to subconscious impulses and her form shifting without her conscious desire. Should a Gangrel find herself angry, she grows Talons of the Beast; if she fears for her unlife, she assumes Body of Spirit. This not only uses up blood, but can also be embarrassing or downright dangerous (activating Talons of the Beast is the Cainite equivalent of drawing a sword). Spending a point of Willpower suppresses this for a scene, although especially strong stimuli might still trigger a change (Storyteller's discretion).

Princes induces paranoia and mistrust. Protean is a very instinctual Discipline, and it can quite easily open the user's mind to derangements such as Lunacy, Obsession (with an animal form) or Uncontrolled Shifting (see sidebar).

••••• Proteus' Bane

Let the Tzimisce believe that they are the masters of form — the Gangrel know better. It is within Gangrel blood that the true secrets of shape mastery lie, and with it a Gangrel may exert his mastery over others, forcing them out of their assumed forms. All that is required is for the Gangrel's blood to come into contact with the target.

System: The user of this power must first manage to stain the victim with some of her blood — even a tiny amount will do, but it must touch flesh. If the target has attacked and damaged the user with a sharp, natural weapon (such as claws or teeth), this condition is considered fulfilled. The Storyteller may also rule that if the target has inflicted at least two health levels of damage in a single strike with a short weapon, such as a dagger, enough blood has been splattered to fulfill this condition. Otherwise, the most common methods are to smear blood (at least one point's worth) on the palm of a hand and then touch the target (requiring a Dexterity + Brawl roll, difficulty varies according to the type of clothing worn by the target) or to flick it at the target (range of 10 feet and requires a Dexterity + Athletics roll). The blood can also be sprinkled surreptitiously, or it can be slipped into something the victim is about to drink. All that is required is that the blood is wet.

In order to activate the power, the user must be able to see the target. The player spends an additional point of blood (beyond any used to stain the target) and rolls Perception + Survival (difficulty 7). Two successes are necessary for the power to work. If these are achieved, the target immediately assumes her natural form, dispelling any and all shapeshifting effects, no matter how minor. The power lasts for one scene or until the user's blood has been washed off (requiring at least one turn, and then only if the victim immerses herself in water). As long as the power remains active, the user can deny the target any shapeshifting she may attempt.

The power dispels any shapeshifting Discipline power of level 6 or below, generally from Disciplines such as Obtenebration, Protean, Serpentinis and Vicissitude. It also works on the natural shapeshifting of the Lupines (although not consistently — some werewolves do change into human form, but others become wolves or even assume the dreaded man-wolf form that vampires so fear). Note that this cannot remove the animal characteristics that Gangrel gain due to frenzy — the Curse of Caine is not so easily circumvented. Also, it does not dispel Obfuscate or Chimerstry effects, as these Disciplines do not enact physical changes.

••••• Form of the Bloodswarm

Form of the Bloodswarm allows the wielder to disperse herself into a number of small creatures. Rats are a favorite, though Scandinavian Gangrel might prefer ravens or crows while a Laibon might tend towards scorpions or spiders. The wielder of this power may reform from one or more of these creatures, but forfeits any blood carried by creatures that do not rejoin the whole.

System: If the wielder of this power decides to change into a swarm of relatively large creatures, such as rats or crows, the maximum number of creatures is equal to the number of blood points she currently possesses — fewer may be chosen, in which case the blood is divided as evenly as possible. Should she choose to change into smaller creatures, such as scorpions or spiders, this number is multiplied by five, but each group of five creatures must stay within a few inches of each other or else they dissolve into a pool of blood. The transformation takes a single turn. The creatures may act in concert, directed by the mind of the user, or they may follow a simple plan, such as "head for the ruined church and hide." The user is only able to pay close attention to one creature at a time.

She may, for example, spy upon an enemy in the body of a single crow while the rest fly off to safety.

Form of the Bloodswarm lasts until sunrise, or until the user decides to reform. When the choice to reform is made, all the creatures within 20 feet are absorbed, along with the blood they are carrying. If this leaves the user with three or fewer blood points, she must immediately check for frenzy. Creatures that do not rejoin the body when it first reforms continue to follow the last order they were given, and may be reabsorbed later during the night. At dawn, the user is forced to reform; any part that is not present turns into a small heap of bloody ashes as soon as the sun is above the horizon. The user has total control of how many creatures of the available creatures she reforms from.

When in disassembled form, the vampire may only use the following Disciplines: Animalism, Auspex, Celerity, Fortitude, Obfuscate and Potence. Any blood expenditure comes from the individual creature (or group of five, in the case of smaller creatures) in question, and a component creature reduced to zero blood is immediately destroyed.

..... Shape of the Inner Beast

A most fearsome manifestation of a Cainite's Beast, Shape of the Inner Beast is a power used only in the most dire of circumstances; once activated, the Gangrel becomes a killing machine whose only purpose is to destroy. The power actually brings the Beast to the surface and gives it physical reign of the vampire's body. The result



is disquieting at best, grotesquely horrifying at worst. This power was displayed by the *einherjar* Gangrel Ragnar the Strong, and earned him a notoriety that stretched across most of Europe during the time of the Vikings. What eventually became of Ragnar is unknown — rumor among the Scandinavian Gangrel suggests he lost himself to his Beast and now roams the wilderness of Finland.

System: In order to activate Shape of the Inner Beast, the Gangrel must first meet one of the following qualifications: being wounded with aggravated damage; being at Wounded or worse with lethal damage; or about to frenzy. If none of these situations apply, the player must roll Instinct or Self-Control (difficulty 9). Activating the power requires the expenditure of one point of Willpower and three blood points, in any case.

As soon as the power is activated, the Gangrel enters frenzy. This frenzy differs from the state described on page 263 of *Dark Ages: Vampire* in that the frenzied vampire is *totally* immune to any and all mind-affecting powers except for Animalism, and that she also ignores movement penalties from wounds. In addition, no roll is necessary to spend blood to heal during combat. However, the only Disciplines the character may use are Celerity, Fortitude, Potence, Protean and Auspex 1 (Heightened Senses).

The Gangrel's body warps and shapes itself to resemble a physical

manifestation of her inner Beast. The player and Storyteller determine just how this Beast looks, but it is always nightmarish, drawing upon the deepest, darkest parts of the vampire's mind. The Beast also shifts form in a grotesque, fluid way, never looking the same as it did moments before. Anyone witnessing the transformation, friend or foe, risks Röttschreck (mortals flee), rolling Courage at difficulty 7; and those forced to face the Beast incarnate in combat must make a similar check and then also check for frenzy (difficulty 5) as the creature calls to their own Beasts.

Shape of the Inner Beast has many benefits, in addition to those already described. First, the Beast infuses the vampire's frame with unearthly strength and vigor, adding three dots each to Strength and Stamina. In addition, the vampire grows talon on hands and feet (as Talons of the Beast, **Dark Ages: Vampire** p. 205), and her maw distends so that biting becomes easier, making grappling unnecessary for a bite attack. The Beast is able to subtly reshape the body of the Gangrel instinctually, repairing damage and shying away from attacks. The Beast also possesses superior senses. In game terms, the Gangrel receives two additional dice to both to Perception and Dodge, gains two additional soak dice, and regenerates a single bashing health level of damage at the end each turn without blood expenditure. Aggravated damage can be healed without the need for rest, though the player must still spend five blood points and one Willpower point.

Canceling this power is difficult. It automatically ends at sunrise or when there are no perceivable living (or undead) targets nearby, but ending it before that requires the expenditure of a point of Willpower and an Instinct/Self-Control roll (difficulty 9). Once a character escapes from this form, she loses all her temporary Willpower. Also, the player must make a Willpower roll (difficulty 7). If this roll fails, the character receives a temporary derangement (usually tied to some unconscious desire or fear). If the roll is botched, the derangement is permanent.

••••• Adaptation

Members of the Gangrel clan are survivors first and foremost, and the most ancient of Methuselahs might exemplify this through the power of Adaptation. This power gives the Gangrel's body over to its own survival instinct, with free rein over the power of shapeshifting. A Gangrel with Adaptation is all but impossible to destroy, unless she runs out of blood.

System: Activating Adaptation requires the expenditure of a Willpower point. The power lasts until

it is consciously cancelled or until the character runs out of blood. Adaptation causes the character to alter her body automatically and instinctually in response to outside stimuli, in order to survive whatever hardship might befall her. Just how these shifts occur is up to the Storyteller, but each change costs one point of blood and takes from one to three turns to complete. For example, should the character fall off a tall cliff, her body softens to absorb the impact. In a fire, blood runs to the surface of the skin to boil away before the flames can touch the skin. Should the character flee or chase her prey, her legs lengthen and grow more muscular. In combat, her heart is protected behind bony shields and her arms lengthen and strengthen. The Gangrel's body also shifts to avoid damage and heal wounds, as described under Shape of the Inner Beast above. The possibilities are endless and in each case, the Storyteller must be prepared to assign the game effects of the shift.

Quietus

The Assamites are ancient masters of vampiric vitae; while the lower levels of Quietus merely allow an Assamite to affect her own vitae, more advanced powers deal with the blood of other vampires. Those who focus too much on Quietus risk derangements of Hysteria (due to an imbalance in her blood), Melancholia (also due to imbalance), Sanguinary Animism and Blood Fetishism (see sidebar).

••••• Rapturous Touch

With this level of mastery over blood, an Assamite is able to absorb blood through the skin anywhere on her body, as long as she is in contact either with the blood itself or, in the case of blood in a body, an uncovered part of that body. Usually, this power is used to surreptitiously drain blood from a vessel, but it can also be used as an attack during a grapple. It can also be used to save face — a starving Assamite faced with a pool of blood on the floor may drink it simply

BLOOD FETISHISM

Most often seen among the Warrior caste of Assamites, this derangement is an unhealthy fascination with blood. Those suffering from it will often cut themselves and others to watch the blood flow, feed often and slowly to savor the taste, smear blood on themselves and perform other disturbing acts, from which they gain a deep, psychological fulfillment.

by placing his palm in it (or his foot, should he be barefooted), rather than licking it up.

System: This power is always in effect once learned. Any part of the Assamite's body may absorb blood as if the Assamite were drinking it, with all the risks that entails (blood oath, poisoning, etc). However, the effects of the Kiss (described on page 164 of *Dark Ages: Vampire*) are lessened when this method of feeding is used. Mortals may resist as if they were vampires, and vampires resist at difficulty 6. Also, the Assamite may drink only two blood points per round, not three.

••••• Dam the Heart's River

Assamites who reach this level of Quietus become masters at controlling the flow of blood in an undead body. While Dam the Heart's River is most normally used to deny an enemy access to her blood (hence the name), it can also be used to force a victim to spend blood, depleting her store and possibly pushing her into a hunger frenzy. This last application can be quite a potent tool to use against an unsuspecting target, who can be driven into a frenzy at the most inopportune moments (say, at the prince's court).

Dam the Heart's River can also be used, with much reduced effect, on mortals.

System: This power requires first that the Assamite establish skin-to-skin contact with the target (possibly requiring a Dexterity + Brawl roll). She can then either choose to invoke the power immediately, or delay it by spending a number of Willpower points. The power can be delayed for up to one hour per point of Willpower and then invoked at any time within that interval, as long as the Assamite can see her target (all Willpower points spent to delay the onset remain spent no matter how short the interval may be). In order to activate this power, the player rolls Stamina + Medicine (difficulty of the target's Stamina + 3, maximum 9), and spends a Willpower point. If successful, Dam the Heart's River lasts for a minimum number of turns equal to the Assamite's unmodified Stamina, plus one turn per success. While this power is in effect, the Assamite has total control over the target's blood expenditure (subject to the target's normal generation limitations), and she can prevent the target from spending any blood at all. The Assamite instinctively knows whether or not the target possesses any Disciplines that requires blood expenditure, and can forcibly activate such Disciplines.

If used against mortals, Dam the Heart's River simply induces symptoms similar to very low blood pressure: dizziness, lethargy and reduced stamina.

The target loses one die from both Dexterity and Strength, as well as all Stamina dice pools connected with endurance.

••••• Blood of Destruction

Some Assamites have attained such a degree of control over their own blood that they may turn it into a virulent, destructive, acid-like venom that eats through flesh, bone, metal and glass with ease. When Blood of Destruction is in effect, anyone attacking the Assamite risks damage to herself or her weapon from the splattered blood. Anyone drinking from the Assamite is likely to be dead before she realizes her mistake. The user may also poison his own weapons, allowing them to inflict horrible damage for a short while.

System: In order to activate Blood of Destruction, the player simply spends a point of blood in the Spend Blood phase of a turn (see p. 238 of *Dark Ages: Vampire*). All vitae in the character's system then becomes a highly virulent and acidic venom, though it looks and smells normal. This venom does not hurt the Assamite himself in any way. Anyone attacking the Assamite with a slashing or piercing weapon that inflicts at least one health level of damage loses her weapon at the end of the turn, as the venom corrodes away metal and wood. Especially well made weapons (five or more successes in forging them) last for one more turn, while weapons created with powers such as the Potence power Master of the Forge (described in *Players Guide to the High Clans*) last for three turns. In addition, an attacker might be splattered with the venomous blood. The attacker's player makes a reflexive Dexterity + Dodge roll, difficulty 6 (modified for the length of the weapon at the Storyteller's discretion); she must achieve at least as many successes as she inflicted health levels of damage on the Assamite. If the roll fails, the attacker suffers two levels of aggravated damage. Anyone attacking the Assamite with a natural weapon that breaks the skin (such as Protean 2, Talons of the Beast, or Serpentinis 2, Tongue of the Asp) suffers two aggravated health levels of damage automatically, and must then dodge as above. Should someone drink the Assamite's blood, she suffers three unsoakable aggravated health levels of damage per blood point consumed.

The Assamite may use this venomous blood offensively in three different ways. First, she may bite her own tongue or cheek and spit blood at her opponent, with a range of 3 feet per point of Strength (plus Potence, if applicable), rolling Dexterity + Athletics to hit as if with a thrown weapon. This attack costs two blood points and inflicts three levels of aggravated

damage, with no bonus for additional successes. Second, she may slash her hands and touch an opponent, inflicting one aggravated health level of damage. If the target is wearing a shield or armor, the blood first destroys the shield or armor; wood or leather is destroyed in one turn, metal in two, with bonuses for craftsmanship as stated above. This application of the power requires the expenditure of one blood point. Third, she may spend a round to carefully apply a thin layer of the venomous blood (one point's worth) to a slashing or piercing weapon. The weapon then inflicts an additional die of damage. All damage from the weapon is considered aggravated, but the weapon loses one die from its damage pool per turn after the first. Once the weapon drops to Strength - 2 damage (including the bonus from Blood of Destruction), it breaks and disintegrates.

Outside of combat, Blood of Destruction can be used to open doors, get rid of evidence, torture a prisoner, etc.

Blood of Destruction lasts for a scene. Damage inflicted with Blood of Destruction can only be soaked with Fortitude.

..... Weaken the Blood of the Ancients

This is the ultimate expression of the mastery of vampiric vitae that wielders of Quietus possess. With this power, an Assamite can strip away the potency of another vampire's blood, actually increasing her generation and pushing her further away from Caine. Doing so can be a terrible punishment, a lesson in humility or a weapon against an enemy.

System: In order to use Weaken the Blood of the Ancients on a Cainite, the Assamite's blood must first enter the target; usually the target drinks the blood or is pierced by a bloodied blade. After that, the player and victim engage in a contested Willpower roll. The difficulty for the player is the victim's Road rating, while the victim's difficulty is the Assamite's Willpower. For each success by which the Assamite beats her victim, that victim's effective generation is increased by one; with five net successes, a user would reduce a seventh generation Cainite to 12th generation. This effect lasts for a number of nights equal to (10 - the victim's Conviction/Conscience).

This power can normally only reduce a victim to 12th generation. Reducing a victim to 13th generation requires two successes beyond what was needed for 12th. Theoretically, with extreme effort (three successes more), a victim can be reduced to 14th

generation, though few Assamites can imagine the blood of Caine being so diluted.

When a Cainite is under the effect of this power, she loses access to all the benefits of her former generation, such as higher blood pool (excess blood is vomited up or leaks from the victim's skin and eyes); whom she can Dominate and be Dominated by; and possibly increased blood spending, high-level Disciplines and Traits above 5. A victim reduced to 14th generation also acquires the Weak Blood Flaw (see page 309 of *Dark Ages: Vampire*).

Serpentis

Followers of Set are taught that Serpentis is not a Discipline, it is a gift from their god, to be used in the battle against Osiris. To the Setites, using Serpentis is a religious experience; the higher levels of the Discipline signify not just greater understanding of Serpentis, but also of Set. Because of the religious aspects, Serpentis can be quite a seductive power that can inflict derangements of Fantasy, Megalomania, Obsession (with rituals), Perfectionism, Visions (from Set) and Disregard of Human Form (see sidebar).

..... Aspect of the God

To the Followers of Set, the Discipline of Serpentis is their way of coming closer to Set. With the lower levels, only relatively minor changes are possible, but once a Setite has reached this level of enlightenment, she is able to take on one of the many aspects of Set. While it is not a necessity, most Setites ritually purify themselves before enacting Aspect of the God, using scented oils mixed with beer (Set's holy drink).

System: Upon purchasing this power, the player chooses once of the aspects below as favored. Activating the favored aspect requires only the expenditure of a blood point. To activate any other aspect requires the expenditure of a Willpower point as well. If this power is acquired again, a new favored aspect may be

DISREGARD OF HUMAN FORM

With Serpentis, a Follower of Set may approach the perfection of Set. As such, some Setites develop a complete disregard for their human form, instead preferring to adopt one of the forms Serpentis can bestow. If anyone tries to talk a character out of assuming or remaining in such a form, the player must check for frenzy (difficulty 4), as the suggestion that she should abandon her closeness to the god is insulting.

added. Aspect of the God lasts for one scene and only one aspect can be activated at any one time. The character's hair becomes red, a sign of Set's favor, in all of the aspects but one.

- **Set the King:** Before the joining of the two kingdoms of Egypt, Set was the king-god of Upper Egypt. When assuming this aspect, the vampire seems more imposing, regal and intimidating, and her voice takes on an aspect of command. She automatically gains three dice to all Intimidation and Leadership dice pools, as well as all dice pools regarding command or dignity.

- **Set the Warrior:** Set was a warrior-god, and the Egyptians believed he fought the serpent Apep when it tried to swallow the sun-god Ra on his journey through the underworld. When assuming this aspect, the vampire grows some 6 inches in height and becomes more muscular. She not only gains one die to all physical Attributes, she also receives an additional soak die and two additional Hurt health levels. This power alone does not confer the ability to soak aggravated damage (but a Setite intent on entering battle may activate Serpents 3, Skin of the Adder, in addition to Aspect of the God).

- **Master of Storms:** In his destructive aspect, one of Set's domains is storms. When assuming this aspect, the character may mystically enhance ranged weapons with her blood. All that is required is that the character touches the weapon or projectile and spends a blood point. The weapon or projectile must be launched no later than the next round. A focused blast of wind helps guide the attack, adding two dice to the attack pool and two automatic damage successes, as well as increasing the range of the missile by 50%.

- **Lord of All Outside Egypt:** Set's last incarnation was that of ruler of everything outside Egypt. When assuming this aspect, the character and her clothing change so that she resembles perfectly a member of whatever society she is currently in. The quality of her clothing does not change, however. For example, should a Setite find herself in England wearing Egyptian peasant clothing, assuming this aspect makes her look like a typical English person wearing English peasant clothing. The character may choose whether to retain her normal Appearance rating or have Appearance 2. She instinctually speaks the native language of the area and knows about customs and social mores. This power does not work in Egypt and, curiously, does not fool an Egyptian native. This is the only power that does not necessarily confer red hair.

- **Ruler of the Desert:** Set was a desert god, ruling over the poisonous snakes and scorpions found there.

When assuming this aspect, the character becomes thin and loses all pallor, looking instead weathered and sunburned; he also assumes a normal human body temperature. In addition to the help this offers when it comes to masquerading as a human, the Setite also becomes immune to any and all poisons, natural and supernatural (including any effects of Quietus Discipline up to level 6).

••••• Seed of Corruption

This power originated with the Typhonic Setites of Constantinople — probably with Khay'tall himself. The more devout (or fanatical) Setites do not know about it and would consider it heretical if they did. Seed of Corruption is a powerful tool when it comes to subjugating an enemy, slowly eroding away his morals and ethics.

System: Seed of Corruption requires that the target consume at least one blood point from the Setite. Once this blood has entered the victim's system, the player must roll Manipulation + Subterfuge, with a difficulty equal to the target's Road rating (or Willpower, if the target has no Road rating). The power lasts for one lunar month per success.

The effects of Seed of Corruption are threefold. First, it delves into the subconscious of the victim and causes buried or repressed desires and hatreds to flare up suddenly from time to time. At least once per night (more frequently should the victim come face to face with an object of her desire or hatred), the victim should suddenly feel an impulse to act in a manner appropriate to her subconscious desire or hate. For example, she may find herself wanting to murder a rival's favorite ghoul, despite the possible repercussions. Generally, it requires a Willpower roll (difficulty 6) not to give in to the compulsion (though great stress or other factors might modify this at the Storyteller's discretion).

Second, Seed of Corruption increases the intensity of feelings and thoughts that the victim is trying to repress. All Conscience/Conviction rolls are at +2 difficulty.

Finally, the victim's thoughts tend to gravitate toward her greatest insecurity or point of pride, depending on the type of person the victim is. A narcissistic Toreador might find that she contemplates her own beauty quite often, being distracted even during important matters by any reflective surface; while a devout Brujah who questions his own piousness might be wracked by pangs of remorse and guilt. Whenever a situation that touches upon these insecurities or prides arises, the victim must roll Self-Control/Instinct (difficulty 7). If this roll is failed, the

victim gives in to the urges. The narcissistic Toreador might spend hours pampering herself or seeking praise, while the devout Brujah might seek out a confessor or flagellate himself for his doubt.

••••• Body of the Great Lord Set

"Your body is the house of the God." Thus say the Methuselahs of the Followers of Set and they have the power to prove it. They may call upon the sacred blood within them to grant them powers comparable to those wielded by the great god Sutekh himself. This is not something done lightly and usually, all non-believers who have witnessed this power in use are slain or enslaved, as it is blasphemy for those who do not worship Set to look upon such holiness.

System: Activating Body of the Great Lord Set requires the player to spend a point of Willpower. The character concentrates for a turn, speaking a prayer to Set. The Setite then grows to an amazing 6'6" in height and sprouts a mane of flaming red hair. Her body becomes muscular and perfectly proportioned while her face takes on a regal cast and her entire demeanor becomes self-confident and superior.

A vampire using Body of Set receives the following modifications to Attributes: +3 to Strength, Dexterity, Stamina and Charisma. Appearance becomes 9. In addition, she receives three automatic successes on all Intimidation, Leadership and Melee rolls. She may soak aggravated damage from any source except sunlight with her full Stamina + Fortitude. She radiates an aura of respect comparable to Majesty (Presence 5) — enemies are stricken with fear, while allies are bolstered by this aura, receiving an automatic success on all Virtue and Willpower rolls. While under the influence of Body of Set, the Setite also becomes immune to Röttschreck and all mind-affecting powers of level eight and lower subtract three successes when applied to her.

Body of the Great Lord Set lasts for a scene and can be combined with all other Serpentis powers except Aspect of the God, Skin of the Adder and Form of the Cobra. After it ends, the Setite must make a proper offering to Set, usually by anointing a statue of the god with beer and blood. If she fails to do so, the player must make a Conscience/Conviction roll (difficulty 9) in order for the character not to lose a point of Road. The Setite is at -2 to all dice pools until the offering is made regardless of the result of the roll.

••••• Pact with Ra

This power is ancient, but had been lost until a few decades ago when the Setite Methuselah Nebmaatsutekh awoke from torpor and demonstrated

it to the followers who flocked to her. Pact with Ra calls upon the debt incurred when Set defended Ra against the monstrous serpent Apep (also known as Apophis), who sought to devour Ra as he traveled through the underworld. Though Osiris later commanded Ra to curse Set, Set's childer might still, at considerable cost, invoke the alliance that once existed between Ra and their sire. When this is done, the Setite is freed from the greatest curse of his kind; the pain of the sun.

System: Pact with Ra can only be invoked at sunrise or during the day. In order to do so, the player spends a *permanent* point of Willpower. From then until the next sunrise, the character is utterly unaffected by sunlight and daytime. She may act without any penalties to dice pools, does not suffer from the lethargy that normally affects vampires during the day, and is wounded neither by normal sunlight nor by sunlight created by magic.

Discipline Techniques

The following powers represent a mere handful of the tricks known to the Low Clans. Innovation among such vampires is the rule, since the dregs of Cainite society must cultivate every advantage they can. The Gangrel, in particular find their powers as flexible as their blood. Many Discipline techniques represent divergences and bloodlines that almost were, or practices rooted in a particular culture. Any vampire may purchase these powers with Storyteller permission, though finding a teacher may prove difficult. The Low Clans are loath to share their secrets with rivals and would-be rulers.

Aura of Accursed Rage

(Animalism 3, Presence 2)

Originally obtained by the Gangrel from Brujah adherents to the Road of the Beast, this fearsome power unlocks the savagery in every Cainite's soul. Such rage knows neither friend nor foe, and incautious use of this Discipline can transform a prince's stately court into a gore-splattered abattoir in a matter of minutes. At least one reckless Nosferatu has reputedly achieved this feat, though perhaps this is only a legend of the Low Clans.

System: The player spends one blood point and rolls Charisma + Intimidation (difficulty 7). The difficulty of all Self-Control rolls to resist frenzy increases by +1 per success for the rest of the scene. This power affects all vampires within range of the character's sight — including the character using the

power. Vampires who leave the character's sight still suffer for the remainder of the scene; vampires who enter the scene after this power is invoked are not affected. A botch on the activation roll triggers immediate Röttschreck in the character, although other vampires are not affected.

Experience Cost: 21

Bear's Skin

(Animalism 2, Protean 4)

According to legend, some berserks take on the fearsome aspect of bears while in the midst of their battle rage. With this power, Gangrel *einherjar* bring truth to that legend.

System: The vampire must be in frenzy to use this power. The player spends one blood point at the beginning of the turn. Over the next few seconds, the vampire's muscles twist and bulge while heavy fur sprouts over his entire body, growing thickest where he normally has hair. As skin toughens to leather, the vampire's maw widens in a fanged half-muzzle capable of biting through limbs. In this state, the vampire gains an additional two dots of Strength and Stamina, as well as the effects of the Maw Merit (see p. 184). Characters with Fortitude may also soak all sources of aggravated damage with their full Stamina + Fortitude. The transformation brought about by this power lasts as long as the frenzy.

Experience Cost: 28

Beast's Vigor

(Animalism 3, Fortitude 3)

Through the bond of regnant and thrall, a vampire with this Discipline technique can use the vitality of a nearby animal ghoul to absorb her injuries. Transferred wounds ravage the animal's body, seemingly without cause. If the animal survives, healing results in extensive scarring and whitened fur. Elder Ravnos have been known to evince a more powerful version of this art, transferring injuries to human thralls.

System: The player spends one blood point and rolls Stamina + Animal Ken (difficulty 8). Each success transfers one health level of damage (of any type) to a single animal ghoul within line of sight. Use of this power is reflexive, but must be done immediately after a vampire receives wounds (i.e. after the soak roll). Only the vampire's own ghouls may be affected with this power.

Experience Cost: 21

An alternate form of this art, Scourge the Thrall, requires Animalism 4 and Fortitude 4 and costs 28 experience points. This art functions much the same,

except that wounds may be transferred to human ghouls so long as they are under the blood oath to the vampire.

Blessing's Warning

(Auspex 2, Daimoinon 1)

The Tremere obtained knowledge of this art from the Baali bloodline in exchange for unknown favors (probably related to the purge of the Salubri). With it, a vampire's Soulsight (Auspex 2, p. 176 of *Dark Ages: Vampire*) can detect the Blessed and their relics, fervent followers of the Road of Heaven — and sometimes, the third eye of Saulot. A few Tremere wonder why the Salubri can be sensed with a power meant to find God's favor — and quietly fear the significance of such a mark. Those who have such doubts wisely keep them to themselves.

System: This technique functions exactly like the Auspex power Soulsight. However, if the character specifically looks for marks of holiness, the number of successes determines what the vampire is able to see. One success can sense a golden nimbus surrounding holy relics and the Blessed. Holy ground shines with a soft radiance of its own, infusing all that rests upon it with light. Three successes can spot any adherent of the Road of Heaven whose Road rating is high enough to trigger a positive aura modifier (8+). The light surrounding such beings is much softer than that enveloping mortals touched by higher powers, so the two can never be mistaken for one another. Five successes spots the third eye of the Salubri as a blazing brand on the Cyclops' forehead.

Experience Cost: 14

Craft Ephemera

(Chimerstry 5, Fortitude 3)

With this dread art, a Ravnos may transcend illusion and harden the stuff of dreams to create an object that is functionally real. Disbelieving it is no more effective than disbelieving reality, perhaps lending credence to other illusions. Fortunately, such blood-spawned phantasms fade away with the dawn, their nightmarish potency extinguished. This Discipline technique is most often employed to fashion weapons, tools or precious objects (such as gold or gems) to dupe fools.

System: The vampire must imagine the object he wishes to fashion and force it into existence with supernatural will. The player spends three blood points and one Willpower point, and rolls Willpower (difficulty 8). If successful, the object materializes in front of the vampire (or in his hand for smaller objects). Created objects can be no larger than the vampire who created them, and must be inanimate. They can have moving

parts, but complicated objects may be impossible or require an Intelligence + Craft roll (at Storyteller discretion). The object is functionally real and may not be disbelieved. However, anyone with Auspex or similar magic greater than the vampire's Chimerstry rating may spend a Willpower point to dispel the illusion. Otherwise, the object remains until it is destroyed normally or dawn arrives, at which point it dissolves into mist.

Experience Cost: 35

Drink the Mind (Auspex 4, Quietus 5 or Thaumaturgy (Rego Vitae) 5)

Practiced by both the Assamites and Tremere, though according to vastly different principles of magic, this Discipline heightens the power of the Amaranth to steal memories and knowledge. Those who walk the Road of Blood regard such feeding as a sacrament partaken by the holiest of holy, a reclaiming of learning from the unworthy. The pragmatic blood sorcerers of the Tremere simply view diablerie of mind as another useful tool of power. Neither clan suspects they are not alone in their art.

System: This power may be used whenever a character successfully commits diablerie. The player spends a number of Willpower points equal to the victim's Intelligence and rolls Willpower. The difficulty is the victim's permanent Willpower, plus one for every derangement he had. Each success grants one bonus point that may be spent to purchase or increase the diablerist's Skills or Knowledges (bonus point costs can be found on p. 129 of *Dark Ages: Vampire*). These points cannot raise an Ability above the victim's rating, however. This power also allows the diablerist to recall the victim's strong memories, although such recollections are left to the Storyteller to adjudicate. Stolen memories unfold hazily as from a dream, and should offer cryptic hints rather than plot-breaking insights. Vampires whose players botch the Willpower roll lose one point of permanent Willpower for every 1 rolled, as the character is overwhelmed by an onslaught of disconnected images and hate from the victim's devoured soul. This power can only be used once per diablerie.

Experience Cost: 35

Fenris' Talons (Fortitude 2, Protean 2)

The *einherjar* of Scandinavia are known equally for their superlative hunting skills and unmatched savagery in battle. Vampires who master this Discipline technique may choose to grow massive 6-inch talons befitting the Fenris Wolf instead of the lesser claws normally

grown with Talons of the Beast (Protean 2, *Dark Ages: Vampire* p. 205). These fearsome talons glisten metallic black, and can rend wood and metal as easily as flesh.

System: The character may extend great claws using Talons of the Beast (at the same blood point cost). These near-indestructible weapons inflict Strength + 3 aggravated damage in combat. Assuming the character has sufficient Strength and/or Potence, he may tear through any object that can be broken with ten or fewer successes of a Feat of Strength without damaging the claws. Due to their bulk, the talons impose a two-dice penalty on all Dexterity tasks involving fine manipulation. Characters with this Discipline technique may grow the smaller claws of Talons of the Beast if they desire, although few *einherjar* ever do.

Experience Cost: 14

Feral Imbuing (Animalism 4, Potence 2)

With this power, a vampire may share his preternatural strength with a beast in his line of sight. Nosferatu use this power more than any other clan, though the Gangrel know it as well. Few sights are as disturbing as a bloated rat chewing tunnels through solid stone.

System: The vampire selects an animal in his line of sight, and the player rolls Strength + Animal Ken (difficulty 6). The vampire may transfer as many levels of his Potence Discipline to the targeted animal as the number of successes rolled, although the player does not have to use all the successes and vampires obviously cannot transfer more Potence than they possess. The vampire's own Potence rating is also reduced by the number of dots transferred, weakening him for the duration of the power. Feral Imbuing may be withdrawn at will as a reflexive action, restoring the vampire to his full strength.

Experience Cost: 28

Goddess Among Beasts (Animalism 1, Ugham 1)

With this power, a Lhiannan may call on her spiritshard to dominate beasts who dwell in her domain. To such animals she is a goddess, a force of nature as irresistible as wind or seasons. The Lhiannan paints her body with runes of vitae denoting her spiritual authority.

System: The character spends one scene tracing runes on her body; this costs one blood point. The player then rolls Manipulation + Survival (difficulty 6). For a number of hours equal to the successes rolled, the

character receives one automatic success on any Animalism power directed at a beast that dwells or lairs in her territory. The character also gains the benefits of the Inoffensive to Animals Merit (*Dark Ages: Vampire* p. 307). Botching this power gives the character the Repulsive to Animals Flaw (p. 309) for the rest of the night.

Experience Cost: 7

Guardian Vigil

(*Auspex 1, Celerity 1, Fortitude 1*)

Often hunted by their High Clan “betters” for sport or as a show of power, the Low Clans are never truly safe, even in their own domains. This art keeps a vampire in a trance of perpetual awareness, ready to spring or act at a moment’s notice.

System: The player spends a blood point. For the duration of the night, the character cannot be surprised by conventional means so long as he doesn’t move more than a few footsteps from his original location. The character is automatically assumed to automatically win the initiative for a single turn if someone else attacks or does anything that he can perceive and attempt to stop.

Supernatural effects that cloak a potential attacker/transgressor must be at least one level higher than the guardian vampire’s *Auspex* to succeed. All mundane *Stealth* attempts automatically fail.

Actions taken against a guarding character must affect him directly and immediately for this power to have any value. In addition, *Guardian Vigil* only provides benefits for a single turn before expiring. If combat occurs, the character only wins initiative automatically on the first turn. Repeated uses of this power in a given night are possible (if the vigil is interrupted), but benefits are not cumulative to provide multiple turns of heightened response.

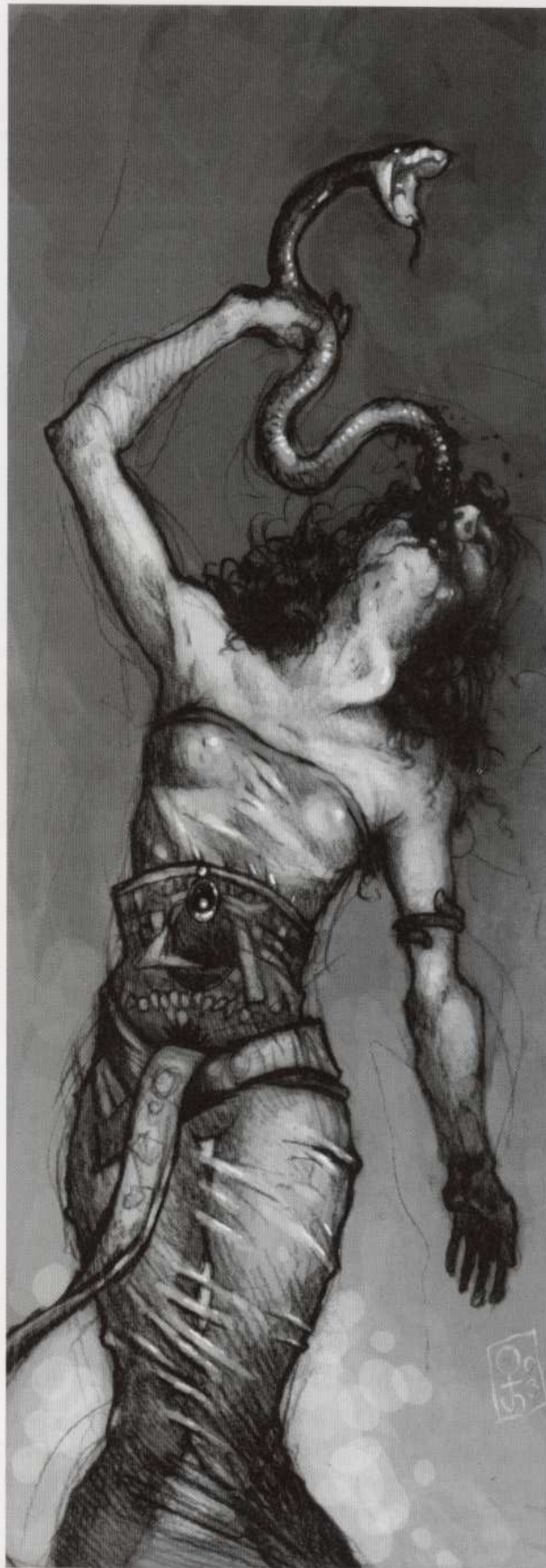
Experience Cost: 7

Hatch the Viper

(*Protean 2, Serpents 4*)

This rare and horrific power is known only to the Followers of the Set. The members of other clans are hard-pressed to master *Serpents* to this degree, much less find a Setite willing to teach this particular ability. Vampires who know this Discipline technique may create serpents out of their blood to act as servants, pets or assassins.

System: The vampire takes an entire turn to activate the power, and the player spends four blood points; no roll is required. The following turn, the character disgorges a living venomous serpent from his mouth.



Formed of vitae, this serpent is considered a ghoulish creature with Fortitude and Potence of 1. It may act independently, although it follows all commands from its parent without hesitation. If it is slain, or its master fails to feed it one blood point every three nights, the snake dissolves into a pool of fetid plasm. Anyone foolish enough to drink this venom suffers four dice of aggravated damage.

Characters with this power may create and maintain as many serpents as desired, assuming they are willing to feed their retinue. Cainites with Animalism can communicate with serpents formed by this ability, but the snakes always reflect too much of their creator's personality to pass for natural animals. Each serpent bears a distinctive pattern of scales associated with its master, although motifs of gold diamonds on black skin predominate.

Experience Cost: 28

Loki's Gift (Animalism 4, Protean 4)

With this power, a vampire may assume the form of the last living thing she fed on, be it human or animal. The vampire doesn't gain any of the prey's knowledge or powers (if any), but the imitation is physically flawless.

System: The vampire can only activate this power immediately after drinking from a vessel (which can be no larger than a bear). The transformation requires three blood points, and takes effect as soon as the last point is spent. The player rolls Manipulation + Subterfuge (difficulty 9); the change lasts a number of hours equal to the successes rolled. Duration may be extended with additional blood at the cost of one point per hour. However, if the vampire feeds from any vessel other than the mimicked target, she immediately reverts back to her true form. A botch means the transformation fails and the vampire can never assume the target's form again.

A vampire using this power appears to be the form assumed for all detection purposes, including inspection with the Auspex 2 power Soulsight. This includes appearing as mortal, rather than undead. Soulsight still reveals the vampire's emotional state. The Discipline technique See the True Form (p. 164) can pierce this disguise, as can any other forms of magical perception that specifically detect shapechanging. Vampires may also learn an identical version of this power with Protean 6 for the usual experience cost.

Experience Cost: 28

Long March (Celerity 2, Fortitude 2)

From their isolated stronghold of Alamut and enclaves across the Holy Land, the *Banu Haqim* cross leagues of rock and sand by foot to strike at their foes and deliver messages to allies. In Europe, many Assamites have escaped persecution by vanishing into the night far swifter than even mounted pursuers. A few Gangrel also

know this power, though they prefer to employ it in beast form when crossing the dangerous territory of rival clanmates or Lupines.

System: Long March may be used whenever the character is moving on foot for a protracted period of time. Its effects are not nearly as drastic as combat Celerity, but neither is it so draining.

At the beginning of each hour of steady travel, the player spends a number of blood points equal to half the character's Celerity rating. The character's overland movement rate is multiplied by her Celerity rating. This bonus immediately ends if the character halts or slows for more than a minute each hour. Long March can only be sustained for a number of hours each night equal to the character's Fortitude rating, and the power has no application in combat.

Experience Cost: 14

Maddening Halo (Auspex 2, Dementation 3)

With this clever power, a Malkavian can paint her spiritual halo with insane whorls of light and color to dissuade scrying. Those unwise enough to peer at her with Soulsight find themselves driven mad by the vision.

System: The vampire spends one turn in concentration and the player rolls Manipulation + Expression (difficulty 6). The effect lasts for one scene. Anyone who uses the Auspex 2 power Soulsight on the vampire risks madness. If the victim does not score as many successes on the Soulsight attempt as the player rolled when activating Maddening Halo, the spying character gains a derangement for a number of nights equal to the difference. This derangement must be one that currently afflicts the vampire protected by Maddening Halo.

Example: The Toreador courtier Roland uses Soulsight to spy on William. Unfortunately for Roland, William has used Maddening Halo to prevent such intrusion, and his player rolled four successes at activation. Roland's player rolls only one success, so the hapless Toreador gains one of William's derangements for the next three nights.

Experience Cost: 21

Memory Rift (Obfuscate 2, Presence 2)

Invoking this power causes a single subject to forget the user's presence during a single scene or specific event. The Cainite merely invokes her power to vanish from the mind's eye and compels the subject to believe that she was never there at all. A few Nosferatu use this power to conceal their feeding, leaving victims drained and disquieted, but otherwise unaware of their violation.

System: This power only works on one subject at a time, but it may be used multiple times to alter the memories of multiple individuals. The player spends one blood point and rolls Manipulation + Subterfuge against a difficulty of the subject's Willpower. If the vampire succeeds, all memories of the vampire's presence during the event or time period vanish. Stronger-willed subjects may remember the event itself without the vampire, particularly if other related events took place. Some victims may even go so far as to rationalize false information into their altered memories in a vain attempt to make sense of the rift. Memories altered by this power are not erased, but suppressed, and may be found with applications of Auspex, Dominate and similar powers.

The vampire using this power must leave the subject's vicinity within five minutes of activation, and must remain out of sensory range for a full hour. Otherwise, the power automatically fails.

Experience Cost: 14

Mystic Sight

(Auspex 2, Thaumaturgy 2)

Expanding their mystical sight with the rudiments of blood magic, Tremere who know this Discipline technique may gaze upon the halos of objects as well as people to view the whorls and eddies of magical power through the world.

System: This technique requires the same rolls and scrutiny as the Auspex 2 power Soulsight. However, rather than sensing the colors of emotions, the character's vision senses the flow of magic. The information gleaned depends on the number of successes, and information is cumulative with all lower levels of success. One success is sufficient to determine whether the scrutinized object (which may be a living or undead being) has any magic of its own or is under some form of enchantment. Two successes gauges whether the sensed magic comes from the object's own power or an external source. Three successes gives a sense of the object's mystical properties—such as whether its enchantment is helpful or hurtful, whether illusion is at work, etc. Four successes gives detailed information as to the type of magic employed, though the thaumaturge will not be able to identify magical styles he has not previously observed or studied. Five successes opens the vampire's mind to the flow of magic everywhere in his vision, enabling him to see the snaking trails of ley lines and the pooled power of crays (see p. 173). Scrutinized individuals capable of mortal magic or blood sorcery glow with crackling sparkles of power even if they are not presently using their power.

Experience Cost: 14

Quickened Instincts

(Auspex 1, Celerity 2)

With this power, a vampire hones his senses to detect the sudden motion of ambushes and reacts with inhuman grace to evade or parry the attack.

System: Whenever the vampire is attacked from ambush or fails to notice an incoming attack through natural senses, his player must spend one blood point. The player may also spend additional blood points to retroactively purchase extra actions with Celerity, although these may only be used for purely defensive actions. Once this power is activated, the character may respond to the attack as though he saw it coming, suffering none of the usual penalties for surprise. This power can be consciously suppressed for a scene at no cost; however, it cannot be reactivated until the following scene.

Experience Cost: 14

Respite of Lucidity

(Animalism 5, Dementation 2)

Unlike most powers based on Dementation, this art grants reprieve from madness rather than instilling such infirmity. Vampires who know this technique may affix their insanity to their Beast as they draw it out, freeing their minds from the prison of twisted consciousness. This power is quite rare, considering that many Malkavians regard their dementia as a gift rather than a curse, and very few know the secrets of Animalism. The few wretches who regularly employ this Discipline take little solace in their respites, knowing lunacy must soon descend again.

System: Whenever a vampire with this Discipline technique uses the Animalism 5 power Drawing out the Beast, she may also affix her madness to the Beast. This costs one blood point per derangement, or three points to affix a Malkavian's core derangement; the Beast's new host suffers the affixed derangements in lieu of the vampire who expelled them. Malkavians who purge all their derangements in this manner cannot regain Willpower by any means until they reclaim their Beast. Once a character recovers her Beast, she suffers the full effects of all her derangements.

Experience Cost: 35

Retain the Quick Blood

(Celerity 3, Quietus 3)

Assamites who achieve some mastery of Quietus and Celerity are said to have developed control over the vitae they use to give them speed. Those who master this

ability are able to recover the blood spent inducing speed through Celerity.

System: Any blood spent to buy extra actions through Celerity returns to the vampire's blood pool as if it had never been used, at the rate of one point per hour. Once learned, this power is always considered active.

Experience Cost: 21

Scent of Caine (Auspex 2, Thaumaturgy (Rego Vitae) 1)

Vigilant to the point of paranoia, the Tremere wisely fear the reprisals of other clans and the vengeance of Saulot's warrior brood. To ward against ambush from undead enemies or their ghoulish slaves, thaumaturges developed this power to scent the mystical resonance of Caine's Curse. Any creature that bears vitae in its veins may trigger the vampire's preternatural senses.

System: Whenever a vitae-bearing creature approaches within range of the character's normal senses, the Storyteller secretly rolls the vampire's Perception + Occult. The difficulty is normally 6 to sense vampires and 8 for ghouls, although the Storyteller should feel free to apply modifiers based on the situation. For instance, if the vampire who possesses this technique is distracted or sleeping, the Storyteller might raise the difficulty by 2. If the intruder's blood is especially potent or the thaumaturge is watching for enemies, the Storyteller might reduce the difficulty by 2. If the roll succeeds, the vampire becomes aware of the vitae-bearing presence, although he cannot identify the direction or source on less than three successes. Failure means the vampire does not detect the creature, while a botch indicates that the vampire receives false information. Once learned, this power is always considered active. Over time, characters may grow to identify particular vampires by their mystical scent alone, though only after many encounters. The Assamites know a version of this power that depends on their blood sorcery rather than hermetic Thaumaturgy. This power otherwise duplicates its Tremere counterpart.

Experience Cost: 14

See the True Form (Auspex 2, Protean 4)

With mastery of full-body transformation and awareness of halos, a vampire with this Discipline technique may detect other shapechangers and discern the true form of any being she views.

System: The vampire must gaze piercingly at her subject as if employing Soulsight (Auspex 2), while her player rolls Perception + Empathy (difficulty 8). The

amount of information gleaned depends on the number of successes rolled. Simple success reveals whether the subject is capable of changing form, though not the extent or nature of such powers. Two successes determines whether the subject is presently in its true form. Three successes allows the vampire to perceive the subject's true form overlaid with its present shape, while four shows every shape the subject has ever assumed. Failure means the aura shows nothing of its malleability. A botch delivers false information. This power can only pierce disguises that involve shapechanging, not illusions or mind tricks.

Experience Cost: 28

Serpent's Numbing Kiss (Presence 3, Serpentinis 2)

Combining her serpentine Discipline with mastery over the heart, a Follower of Set who knows this technique can envenom her razor tongue as a subtler weapon.

System: The player spends one blood point; no roll is required. The character may immediately strike one opponent with her barbed tongue as if employing the Serpentinis 2 power Tongue of the Asp. Her tongue immediately resumes its normal form after the strike, sealing the victim's wound as it retracts. If the attack inflicts any damage that penetrates the victim's soak, the vampire injects a mind-altering poison. The victim must roll three successes on a reflexive Stamina check (difficulty 6 for vampires, 8 for living beings). If the victim fails, her wits become addled for the next hour. Any Discipline that affects the victim's mind, senses or emotions receives one automatic success during this time, although generational limits still apply to uses of Dominate on other vampires. (Interestingly, this blood poison is sometimes beneficial to the victim; the mind's barriers are lowered for friends as well as foes, and anyone attempting to repair the damage done by Dominate or otherwise assist the victim also receives the automatic success. Also, victims who possess Auspex find that the premonitions they receive while poisoned are especially vivid.) Mortal victims who botch the Stamina roll fall into a dazed stupor for the duration of the power and may take no actions of their own volition on any turn that their players fail to make a reflexive Willpower roll (difficulty 8).

Experience Cost: 21

Shadow Feint (Celerity 2, Obfuscate 2)

Although they are sometimes dismissed by the first cursed as inconsequential barbarians, the Chil-



dren of Haqim are masters of the killing arts. Their way is not that of brute force or direct confrontation, but misdirection, stealth and the unexpected blow. This technique allows its wielder to slow an enemy's perception of her, leaving an afterimage a fraction of a second behind her actual location. The blur and flicker make the vampire's movements nigh impossible to guess, giving her a decisive combat advantage.

System: The player spends one extra blood point when declaring Celerity actions at the beginning of the turn. Like all blood used to power Celerity, this expenditure may exceed the

vampire's generational limit. The

vampire's first action must be defensive, either a dodge or parry of some kind. If

these conditions are met, all attacks made against the

vampire during

the turn are made at +2 difficulty, to a maximum of difficulty 10. This power is considered an Obfuscate power for the purpose of negation — an observer with sufficient Auspex sees the vampire's true location.

Experience Cost: 14

Shared Entombment (Animalism 1, Protean 3)

Most commonly known among the Anda bloodline of the Mongols — where it is called Itügen's Embrace — this Discipline technique enables a vampire to meld a ghoul or childe with him into the safe slumber of the earth. Pity the mortal who beholds a mounted Anda warrior riding out of the very soil at dusk.

System: The effects of this power are indistinguishable from the Protean power Interred in the Earth, save that the vampire's player must spend an additional blood point to bring a ghoul or vampire under the earth with him. An interred ghoul can be human or animal, but no larger than a horse. Only a vampire who traces her

ancestry through the character or is bound to him by the blood oath can be so interred. Both creatures must enter the earth at the same time, both feel the same effects, and both leave the earth when the Cainite who possesses this ability chooses.

Another version of this power allows the character to pull a corpse into the ground with her. This version requires Potence 1 rather than Animalism 1, but is in all other ways identical. The character need not bring the corpse to the surface with her when next she rises.

Experience Cost: 21

Shattered Fog (Auspex 1, Protean 5)

Elder Gangrel know that guile can sometimes serve where brute strength fails. With this Discipline technique, a vampire may rapidly dissolve her form into fog. Swords and arrows pass harmlessly through her ethereal flesh, leaving opponents confused and off-balance when the vampire solidifies a moment later and strikes. While some followers of the Road of Kings scorn such tactics, pragmatic vampires wisely cultivate every edge to assure their survival.

System: Whenever the vampire is attacked, her player may invoke this power by spending one blood point. The vampire instantly assumes mist form as if employing the Protean 5 power Body of Spirit. This power only lasts for the remainder of the turn, after which the character once again solidifies. Vampires must be able to perceive the attacks in order to evade them with this power, although sudden motion seen peripherally counts as perception.

Experience Cost: 35

Spectral Puppeteer (Auspex 5, Dominate 5)

Only a few Tremere have mastered this diabolical art, enabling them to seize control of a mortal with their spiritual form. Such possession is surely the Devil's teaching — or so other Cainites would believe if they knew such a feat were possible. As its very existence is a closely guarded secret of the clan, this power is chiefly used to discredit or frame rivals while establishing a perfect alibi for the vampire.

System: In order to use this power, a vampire must have sent her consciousness into the astral plane with the Auspex 5 power Anima Walk. Normally, an ethereal vampire cannot use her Disciplines to affect the physical plane. However, vampires who know this Discipline technique may use the Dominate 5 power Vessel in astral form. No lesser powers of Dominate or

any other Disciplines can be used, and the vampire's player must still make the usual rolls for Vessel. If the vampire succeeds in displacing the victim's soul, her astral body flows into the host's mouth and assumes control. If the vampire leaves the host voluntarily, her astral form reforms outside the mortal's body and may continue moving and acting according to the rules for Anima Walk. Any sympathetic damage sustained by a possessing vampire using this power is applied to the vampire's astral form rather than her physical body. The sudden death of the host instantly evicts the vampire and severs her silver cord.

Experience Cost: 35

Stone Meld (Fortitude 2, Protean 3)

Although most Gangrel are content to seek refuge in the soil, a few have tempered their power with stone-like resilience, allowing them to hide within solid rock. Excavation of such entombed individuals is all but impossible.

System: This power operates exactly as the Protean 3 power Interred in the Earth, save that it allows a vampire to sink into stone. Such stone can have been shaped and carved by tools, though it must be a single continuous block or slab large enough to contain the vampire's mass. If the stone containing the vampire is shattered, the vampire is expelled.

Experience Cost: 21

Sympathetic Agony (Chimerstry 2, Fortitude 4)

Though the Indian Ravnos originally developed this power, its use has spread west with roving members of the clan. As its name suggests, Sympathetic Agony allows a vampire to shift his pain to enemies. Those who strike him feel the force of their own blows like a snake biting its own tail.

System: The player reflexively spends one blood point and rolls Manipulation + Intimidation against a difficulty of the target's Perception or Self-Control (whichever is higher). Each success allows the Ravnos to ignore the penalties associated with one health level of damage and inflict one phantom level of damage on the target. Penalties are assigned based on the sum of the victim's real and phantom damage. This power may only transfer pain to one target at a time, and does not heal or inflict real injuries. Sympathetic Agony power lasts for the duration of the scene; however, the Ravnos can choose to cancel this power at any time and re-invoke it against a different target.

Experience Cost: 28

Torpid Hibernation

(Fortitude 3, Protean 3)

With this power, a vampire may enter controlled torpor without fear of slumbering away the ages. She simply sinks into the earth and rests, knowing she will arise again when the desired time comes.

System: The vampire melds with the ground using *Interred in the Earth* (Protean 3), or a similar power such as *Tree Meld* (p. 167) or *Stone Meld* (p. 166); her player spends five blood points and rolls *Stamina + Survival* (difficulty 6). If successful, the vampire enters torpor and automatically reawakens after the specified duration. Upon awakening, the character rises to the earth, though her awakening is delayed until dusk if the power ends during the day. Failure means the vampire does not enter torpor, but arises the next evening as normal from her slumber. A botch drives the vampire into normal torpor, leaving her to slumber and awaken according to her Road rating.

Experience Cost: 21

Tree Meld (Ogham 1, Protean 3)

Attuned to the living forest by their spiritual ancestry, a Lhiannan with this power may sink into wood as easily as most Gangrel sink into soil.

System: The vampire may use this power exactly as the Protean 3 power *Interred in the Earth* to physically merge with wooden objects large enough to contain her body. It costs an additional blood point to merge with dead wood, however, so most Lhiannan prefer the sanctuary of the largest tree trunk in their domain. If a wooden object is destroyed while a vampire rests within, the vampire is expelled.

Experience Cost: 21

True Love's Face

(Obscure 3, Presence 3)

A sinister hybrid of *Mask of a Thousand Faces* and *Entrancement*, this Discipline technique enables a vampire to assume the form of a target's true love. Both the Followers of Set and Nosferatu prize this power, though for very different reasons. Where Serpents use the guise of loved ones to tempt and seduce, spiteful Lepers delight in shattering victim's minds by revealing their true face after a passionate embrace. Vampires may use this art to take the form of someone they know their victim loves or allow their target's expectations to manifest on their own. In the latter case, however, the vampire may need quick wits to

discern whom she looks like, especially since the copied person may or may not be living.

System: The player rolls *Charisma + Empathy* (difficulty 6); neither physical contact nor eye contact is necessary to invoke this technique. Success means the chosen victim sees the vampire as a loved one for as long as she remains in his presence. Failure means the ruse fails and the target sees the vampire as she is. All others present see the vampire's true form, unless she is able to discern her assumed identity and quickly make the transition to the basic *Mask* technique — a feat likely to require *Performance*, *Stealth* or other rolls at the Storyteller's discretion. A botch indicates the vampire projects too much of her own passions into the visage, making the disguise a disturbing mockery of the victim's true love. The victim regards the vampire with fear and loathing, the very opposite of the emotions normally engendered by this power.

Experience Cost: 21

Whispers of Loathing

(Auspex 4, Dementation 2)

By implanting whispers of his own fractured madness into a victim's mind, a vampire with this power may infect others with creeping insanity. Each night draws the victim deeper into depravity and despair, as half-heard whispers speak recriminations and advise monstrous acts. The whispers eventually rise to a gale of unintelligible syllables and curses that drive the strongest minds to abject paranoia or suicide. Only the moon-kissed childer of Malkav know this wretched art, though that is little comfort to other undead.

System: The player rolls *Manipulation + Empathy* against a difficulty of the victim's Willpower. If successful, the vampire successfully implants an echo of his twisted psyche into the victim. The disembodied echo whispers intermittently at first, criticizing and offering the worst possible advice in equal measure. In time, the voice grows more insistent and other voices join the fray in howling cacophony. The victim must roll Willpower for each week that the infection lingers. The difficulty begins at 6 and rises by one for each failed roll. Once the difficulty reaches 10 or the victim botches, the power ends and the victim gains a new derangement (paranoia is most common). Victims who roll three or more successes on their weekly Willpower check overcome the torrent and silence the voices, escaping with the better part of their sanity. This power requires the vampire to touch the intended victim or make eye contact.

Experience Cost: 28

Wolf's Lament

(Animalism 1, Obfuscate 2)

The wolf's howl echoes across the land, carrying messages in its mournful song. Nosferatu and Gangrel with this Discipline technique may do the same, enabling them to howl messages that carry for miles. Even better, any wolf that hears the message relays the sound with its own howl. Such messages can theoretically carry for dozens or even hundreds of miles in this fashion, subject to the vagaries of chance.

Most individuals who hear the howl merely note its eerie tones and give it no further attention. Those with the Animalism power Feral Speech hear a voice in the keening. The content is brief and clipped, but it imparts emotional inflection and general intent. It can warn of danger, signal an attack or carry any other simple message.

System: Prior to using this Discipline, the player must convey his intended message to the Storyteller and receive approval. Generally, any message that can be conveyed in one breath is acceptable. The player then rolls Manipulation + Animal Ken (difficulty 6) as the vampire howls. The message carries a maximum distance determined by the successes according to the following chart, although the Storyteller may restrict the range if she deems there are few wolves in the area. Failure means no wolves pick up the howl, either because they are not present or disregard the message. A botch invariably attracts unwanted attention, such as hunters or enraged Lupines.

Experience Cost: 14

Successes	Distance
1	5 miles
2	10 miles
3	50 miles
4	100 miles
5	250 miles

Thaumaturgy

The secrets of blood magic are many and varied. Below, you will find information on Assamite blood sorcery as well as a new path of Tremere Thaumaturgy and a plethora of new rituals.

New Thaumaturgy Path:

Perdo Magica

As former members of the Order of Hermes, the vampires of Clan Tremere know the power wielded by

mortal magi. Through adaptations of the *parma magica* — a Hermetic shielding art practiced since the latter half of the 8th century — the Tremere have developed a potent defense against the Pillars of their former colleagues and the base blood sorceries of other clans. When performing countermagic, the thaumaturge makes a sharp dismissive gesture and speaks a short incantation. Dozens of such incantations exist, each invoking opposing elements and forces: water to quench fire, life to thwart death, etc.

System: A thaumaturge with Perdo Magica may attempt to nullify magical effects of mortal Pillars and Foundations or the paths and rituals of blood sorcery. The player spends one blood point. Invoking this countermagic is a reflexive action, although it does count against the character's maximum blood point expenditure for the turn. The player rolls Willpower as normal; the difficulty equals (the level of the effect being countered – the thaumaturge's Perdo Magica rating), minimum difficulty 4. This dice pool is halved if the targeted magic is not based on Hermetic principles and formulae (such as koldunic sorcery or the rune-casting of Blôt). Each success cancels one success rolled by the opposing magician. Perdo Magica can oppose any magic in the caster's line of sight.

New Thaumaturgy Rituals

When the Tremere embraced undeath, much of their magical power faded. The quicker arts of the Pillars readily flowed into sorcerous paths, but lengthier rites did not convert so easily. The exploration of rituals — both new magic and old magic adapted to the blood — restored the dynamic supremacy of Tremere sorcery. Although most thaumaturges focus on paths, a few wisely recognize the subtle potency of rituals. As such, blood sorcerers may purchase additional rituals at character creation. Each ritual costs a number of bonus points equal to its level. Characters cannot begin play with any rituals whose level exceeds the rating of their appropriate blood sorcery Discipline.

Epistle of Babel

Level-One Ritual

Surrounded by enmity and dire foes on all fronts, the Tremere developed this ritual to encrypt important documents in case they fell into enemy hands. Regents often use this magic as an added form of identification in their letters, since thaumaturgically encoded missives are obviously more difficult to forge.

System: The vampire writes the message in blood over the course of a night and speaks the name(s) of

the person or people he wishes to read it. If the ritual succeeds, only the writer and the letter's intended recipient(s) can read the document. To anyone else, the letters appear as meaningless arcane glyphs that blur in sight and mind.

Evocation of the Taper/ Quench the Tallow

Level-One Ritual

With a simple gesture and word of power, a thaumaturge who knows the Evocation of the Taper ritual may ignite one candle in his line of sight. While convenient, this parlor trick is quite limited. It can only be used to ignite actual candles — not torches, parchment or any other object, no matter how flammable. The inverted form of this ritual, Quench the Tallow, snuffs out a single burning candle, but cannot affect other flames.

System: If the ritual succeeds, the targeted candle extinguishes or flares alight in a puff of sulfurous smoke as appropriate to the magic. A failure on the casting roll drains a blood point from the vampire's pool, while a botch costs her a blood point and melts the candle to a useless puddle of wax. Both forms of this ritual require a mere turn of concentration, but the thaumaturge can take no other action while calling the flame. In effect, these rituals are zero dot effects of *Creo Ignem*, and characters must have at least one dot in that path to learn either form. Characters with three or more dots of *Creo Ignem* may choose to ignite or extinguish as many separate candles as the player rolls successes. Failure still only drains one blood point, although a botch destroys all targeted candles.

Purity of Flesh

Level-One Ritual

With this ritual, a thaumaturge may cleanse her body of all foreign material. The caster meditates on bare earth or stone while surrounded by a circle of 13 sharp stones. Over the course of the ritual, all physical impurities slowly rise to the surface of the vampire's skin and flake away as a greasy film. This magic dissolves dirt, alcohol, drugs, poison and broken barbs of arrows. Even clothing and jewelry worn against the skin disintegrate, so wise casters undress before beginning this ritual.

System: The player spends one blood point before rolling. If successful, the ritual removes all physical impurities, although it does *not* remove enchantments, mind control or diseases.

Sanguine Lodestone

Level-One Ritual

By soaking a small lodestone in his blood for an hour, a thaumaturge with this ritual can attune the stone to the sympathetic resonance of his own vitae. Until the next dawn, the stone points unerringly at the largest source of the caster's vitae, other than the caster himself. As such, the stone can follow the sorcerer's ghouls or point to a sealed flask planted on a rival as a tracking device. Like normal magnets, lodestones attuned with this ritual must be suspended from a string so that they can freely turn.

System: If the ritual succeeds, the lodestone behaves as described for the duration of the enchantment. It has a maximum range in miles equal to the successes scored. A Level-Three version of this ritual exists that can attune a lodestone to any Cainite, provided the caster has at least one point of the subject's vitae available to bathe the stone.

Burning Blade

Level-Two Ritual

This potent martial ritual allows a thaumaturge to temporarily enchant a melee weapon to inflict terrible wounds. Superior versions of this ritual have recently been developed, although they are still rare. Weapons enchanted with this ritual glow with an aura like pale green fire unless sheathed.

System: This ritual only affects melee weapons. The caster must cut the palm of his hand using the weapon (or a sharp stone if the weapon has no edge); the player spends three blood points. This process inflicts one level of lethal damage that cannot be soaked, although it may be healed normally. If the ritual succeeds, the weapon automatically inflicts aggravated damage for a number of strikes equal to the successes rolled. The wielder cannot choose whether a strike inflicts normal or aggravated damage in order to conserve the magic, although the weapon must actually hit an animate target to use one of the successes. Multiple castings of Burning Blade do not "stack" for multiple strikes. Once all the successes have been used, the enchantment ends. The magic also ends at the next new moon. If a wooden weapon enchanted by this ritual stakes a vampire, the victim suffers two levels of aggravated fire damage per turn for a number of turns equal to the remaining successes. This burning effect depletes all magic from the weapon.

As noted previously, at least two greater versions of this ritual exist: Blazing Shaft is a Level-Three ritual that follows the same rules, save that it enchants arrows and

other projectiles. Enchanted missiles retain their magic for only one attack, although each success scored in casting also adds one die to the weapon's damage. The Level-Five ritual Unquenchable Flame of Mars also follows the same general rules as Burning Blade. However, the magic requires 20 successes at difficulty 8, accumulated over a one-month ritual exactly like Blood Phylactery (see p. 175). If the requisite successes are accumulated, the melee weapon retains its enchantment indefinitely. Talismans of Mars glow with crimson flames when wielded, and always inflict aggravated damage, although they burn no more fiercely when staking vampires.

Impassable Trail

Level-Two Ritual

Under the effects of this ritual, a vampire can travel through any natural terrain without leaving a trace. Leaves do not crunch underfoot, branches do not break if he runs past and muddy footprints magically smooth and fill in moments after he passes. Only creatures with powerful olfactory senses can hope to track him. The thaumaturge must brush his feet with an owl feather steeped in vitae to begin the enchantment.

System: The vampire leaves no evidence behind, except a faint odor of blood that requires three successes on a Perception + Alertness roll (difficulty 8) to detect. This ritual lasts until sunrise.

Lassitude of Revelry

Level-Two Ritual

This ritual produces a heady drug that causes drowsiness and suggestive calm in mortals. Even magi are not immune, making this ritual a subtle weapon in the *Massasa* War. Cainites who feed from mortals under the effects of this drug feel comfortably relaxed, although the effect is not strong enough to result in actual intoxication.

System: The caster mixes at least one point of her vitae with wine and spices. One blood point is required for every five glasses of drugged wine the vampire wishes to create. This wine does not taste like blood and cannot instill the blood oath or transform mortals into ghouls. Instead, mortals who drink the brew must achieve three successes on a reflexive Stamina roll. The difficulty varies depending on how much wine the mortal drinks, from 6 for a deep swallow to 8 for a full glass or even 10 for larger quantities. Success means the character retains her wits, although additional rolls may be required if she drinks more drugged wine. A botch results in coma-

like slumber for the remainder of the night, while a failure means the character is drugged for a number of hours equal to the glasses of wine she consumed. A drugged character cannot take any action unless her player makes a reflexive Willpower roll (difficulty 8). As stated, wine drugged by means of this ritual has no effect on vampires and most supernatural beings other than magi. Storytellers must decide how many "glasses" a given container holds, since there is no standard size for goblets, flagons and other vessels.

Transubstantiation of Humors

Level-Two Ritual

This insidious ritual serves as a cunning defense against diablerie. Until the next sunset, any blood drawn from the thaumaturge's veins mystically transmutes into black bile. Anyone attempting to consume this unpalatable ichor suffers intense nausea.

System: The caster prepares and drinks a foul concoction of clotted blood and snake venom. If the ritual succeeds, the caster's vitae changes into black bile whenever it leaves her body. Victims who drink this sludge or eat a goblet of the sorcerer's bilious flesh must make a Stamina roll (difficulty 7 + the number of blood points or health levels ingested). Failure indicates the character spends a full turn vomiting the tainted humors. This roll must be made each turn until the character purges his system of the bile. Vampires whose players botch this roll also vomit a number of extra blood points equal to the 1s rolled. Obviously, thaumaturges cannot grant the Embrace, create ghouls, nourish other vampires, establish the blood oath or perform any other feat that requires actual blood taken from their veins while employing this ritual. Blood may be used for internal purposes such as healing or powering Disciplines. Characters using this ritual smell faintly of bile, increasing the difficulty of applicable Social rolls by one.

Awakening the Verdant Thorn

Level-Three Ritual

Created by the Telyavelic Tremere, this ritual binds a vengeful forest spirit into a slender stake of rosewood. If driven anywhere into a vampire's flesh, the stake takes root in her fertile vitae and rapidly blossoms into an unnatural mass of vines and thorns. The vines entwine the vampire, drinking her blood to grow in strength. Unchecked, the writhing growth can drain a hapless Cainite dry.

System: In order to enchant the stake, the caster must harden its point with fire and spend an hour chanting supplications to the *Siela*. He must then



plunge the shaft into his own heart, inflicting one level of unsoakable lethal damage. If the roll succeeds, the stake absorbs one blood point each turn that it remains lodged in the heart. The caster retains full mobility and may remove the shaft at any time. A failure leaves the caster paralyzed as normal, while a botch has the added unpleasant effect of triggering the ritual's magic.

A stake enchanted with this ritual has a ruddy hue and feels sticky, like a freshly cut sapling. If the stake inflicts at least one level of lethal damage to a vampire, it immediately begins growing, drinking one blood point each turn until the Cainite's pool is empty. Players of characters attempting to pull the shaft free must succeed in an opposed Strength roll against the number of blood points the stake has already consumed (including during the initial enchantment). For instance, if the stake drank three blood points from its caster and two more from a victim, the stake would have an effective Strength rating of 5 when someone tried to pull it free. The stake cannot have a Strength higher than 8, and will not grow in the diluted vitae of ghouls. Vampires reduced to zero blood points by this ritual obviously cannot activate Disciplines or perform feats that require blood. Stakes enchanted with *Awakening the Verdant Thorn* still only paralyze vampires if they penetrate the heart.

Bind the Familiar

Level-Three Ritual

A few Tremere retain familiars from their days as mortal magi. Unfortunately, the original rituals and pacts used to establish bonds with spirits no longer function in undeath, and the Embrace often severs spiritual ties. Many thaumaturges have simply done without, dismissing familiars as a quaint archaism of mortal wizardry. After all, the Tremere can transform mortals and beasts into ghouls with a draught of vitae — and the blood oath is far easier and more reliable than ritual binding. Still, there are those thaumaturges who yearn for more enlightened companionship. Though a number of monsters penned in Ceoris owe their unfortunate existences to familiar research, the rituals used by mortals were eventually adapted successfully. What follows is the most common familiar ritual used, though others exist.

Beginning at dusk, the caster paints a circle of fresh human blood on a large stone slab, inscribing its circumference with the sigils that comprise his True Name. The vampire must be sure to finish the last symbol at the stroke of midnight. With the circle's power still fresh, the vampire takes the beast intended

to host the familiar spirit and drains it almost entirely of blood. He places the dying animal within the circle and feeds it vitae in a parody of the Embrace. The caster then begins incantations over the beast, starting in a low whisper and growing in volume with each spell. When he can repeat the evocations no louder, he ends the ritual, waiting in still silence. If the ritual succeeds, the spiritual smell of blood draws a spirit to the animal, where it is captured by the warding circle. The spirit can struggle — and usually does — but the blood magic always prevails. Once the spirit succumbs, the ritual fuses it with the beast and restores the animal to full health. The new familiar may inwardly resent its bondage at first, though it can be bribed with blood and mollified with good treatment.

System: The caster completes the ritual described above. The player spends five blood points and rolls Intelligence + Occult. The difficulty depends on the intended level of the familiar + 4. Botching results in a truly horrific fate; the caster may be possessed by the spirit, or he may have created a savage gremlin. Failure carries no consequence apart from wasted effort. Familiars can be grouped in five ascending ranks of potency and intelligence by level. Level-One familiars are small, harmless creatures little more intelligent than their natural counterparts (e.g. toads, rats, sparrows). Level-Two familiars are notably more cunning than their form suggests, and warn of intruders — though they are powerless to stop anyone from entering their master's haven (e.g. cat, owl). Level-Three familiars may be larger and more dangerous, like a wolf; or a smaller familiar that is as intelligent as a 10-year-old child. Familiars chosen for their intelligence can perform fairly complicated tasks and serve as messengers, although they cannot speak. Level-Four familiars may be dangerous animals with childlike intellects, or small creatures as intelligent as their master. Such a being can communicate telepathically with its master regardless of the distance separating them, and does its best to act as an assistant within the limits of its form. Level-Five familiars are extremely potent, possibly more intelligent than their masters, and certainly in possession of lore and secrets unknown to those who command them. They may speak and perhaps possess a few mystical tricks of their own (subject to Storyteller discretion). All familiars are loyal as if bound by the blood oath, though they may struggle against or accept their servitude depending on their strength of will and the master's treatment. Familiars must be fed a number of points of their master's vitae equal to their level each week, or take ill and die within a night. So long as they are properly

fed (their normal diet as well as blood), familiars never age and remain perfectly healthy.

At Storyteller discretion, Tremere who purchase this ritual with bonus points may begin play with a familiar as a Background equal to the creature's level.

Certámen

Level-Three Ritual

Inherited from the days when the Tremere were still a house of mortal magi, *certámen* stands as one of the oldest means of settling disputes between Hermetic wizards. Each combatant stands in a circle of blood two paces across, set at opposite ends of another circle ten paces wide. The challenger declares his grievance to all present, while the defender announces three strictures (mystical or ceremonial) that both parties must observe. The duel begins when both participants intone the actual ritual.

Traditionally, each *certámen* combatant brings along a second who serves him much as a knight's squire. However, instead of handing him fresh lances and weapons, the second stands behind and to the right with ritual components at the ready. In the event of frenzy — which results in automatic loss — the second must also aid any attending guards in subduing the challenger. A neutral arbiter stands outside the circles and judges the duel. He may end the battle at any time and declare either party the victor regardless of outcome, though overt favoritism attracts unwanted attention from superiors — and perhaps a second *certámen* challenge from the wronged party.

During *certámen*, vitae quickens like the *vis* of mortal magic. Spells grow in grandeur, their forms expanded to the will and design of the caster. The very air crackles with power as bolts of flame change into burning dragons and summoned winds flicker with pale screaming phantasms. Barring interruption by the arbiter, *certámen* continues until one party yields or perishes. Although the ritual itself cannot compel the terms of challenge, the clan rigorously enforces the sanctity of the duel. Although such duels are all but unknown, *certámen* even functions when living Hermetic magi observe the rituals in a duel with Tremere thaumaturges. Magi of other Fellowships and blood sorcerers who do not practice Hermetic thaumaturgy cannot take part in *certámen*.

System: For the duration of *certámen*, a thaumaturge may spend an additional number of blood points per turn equal to his Occult rating to increase the potency of his magic. For every point spent in this manner, the difficulty of one Thaumaturgy

roll decreases by one, to a minimum difficulty of 4. *Certámen* confers no additional capacity to spend blood for other purposes. Additionally, Thaumaturgy effects assume whatever cosmetic changes their caster desires, though truly awesome evocations may require vitae expenditure at the discretion of the Storyteller. If a sorcerer augments an effect, his opponent can make a reflexive Intelligence + Occult roll to identify the spell before it takes form. The difficulty of this roll depends on the obscurity of the power and the knowledge of the observer. If a living Hermetic magus engages in *certámen* with a Tremere, he may spend as many points of Quintessence per turn as his Font Background (see **Dark Ages: Mage**) indicates or his Occult rating (whichever is higher) and may similarly roll to identify magic as it forms. All benefits of *certámen* end as soon as either party steps outside of his respective circle.

Draught of Earth's Blood

Level-Three Ritual

The Blood of Caine holds great mystical power, but it is not the only power. Raw magical energy flows through the universe like the blood of gods, pooling and welling at the convergence of ley lines and other places of arcane import. Such wells are known to magi as crays, and their energy as Quintessence. Although the Tremere can no longer manipulate raw Quintessence by will alone, save in the congealed form of vitae, a few thaumaturges still know how to distill universal power.

System: Casting this ritual requires the vampire to harvest Quintessence-laden matter, called tass, from a cray. This matter can take nearly any form appropriate to the cray's nature, from the mushrooms of a faerie ring to the soil of a spectre's haunted grave. Each cray has a rating (1-5) that determines its overall power. A cray only stores a maximum number of points of tass equal to its level, replenishing them at the rate of one point per day. Once a thaumaturge has gathered the tass, he must grind it down to paste or dust and boil it in an iron cauldron with one blood point for every two points of tass. While the vitae and tass mix, the caster's player rolls Intelligence + Occult (difficulty 6). Each success produces two points of blood-tass that coagulate in the cauldron. Any unused tass not captured by the magic boils away and is lost. Blood-tass glows a faint ruddy hue and may be bottled or otherwise stored in smaller vessels for convenience. Thaumaturges who employ the ritual Principal Focus of Vitae Infusion (**Dark Ages: Vampire**, p. 219) may even store blood-tass in enchanted baubles. The sludgy

CAINITES AND CRAYS

Storytellers with access to **Dark Ages: Mage** may allow players to purchase the Cray Background for their vampires with a good story explanation. However, without the Foundations and Pillars of mortal magi, such places of power are normally useless except as a plot device. Blood sorcery can tap these wellsprings with rituals such as Draught of Earth's Blood, as can the Ogham Discipline of the Lhiannan bloodline. Characters with access to such magic can derive immense benefit from a cray — assuming they can defend it from rapacious magi, Lupines and stranger creatures eager to claim the power for their own.

mixture remains fresh for one month unless placed in a bauble, after which it loses all power. Vampires gain one blood point for every point of blood-tass they consume. Only thaumaturges derive the full benefit of such a meal, however. For the next hour, an imbibor who knows Thaumaturgy may spend extra blood points each turn to reduce the difficulty of casting rolls as if engaging in *certámen* (see above). The caster may not spend more total blood points in this fashion than he gained from drinking blood-tass.

Ward Versus Lupines

Level-Three Ritual

This warding ritual functions exactly as does the Ward Versus Ghouls, save that it inflicts injury upon Lupines. Although the ward cannot inflict much injury on a rampaging beastman in war-form, the ritual helps detect Lupines masquerading as humans.

System: This ritual follows the same rules as Ward Versus Ghouls (p. 219 of **Dark Ages: Vampire**), except that it requires a handful of silver dust rather than a blood point.

Consecration of the Sanctum

Level-Four Ritual

By painting the borders of a laboratory or workspace with an alchemical mixture of vitae, gold dust and rare herbs, a thaumaturge who knows this ritual can alter the delineated area's geomantic flow of power to favor his own form of magic.

System: Each casting of this ritual enchants an area up to 10 square yards for one month. Multiple castings of Consecration of the Sanctum over the

same area only reset the duration to one full month. Within the warded area, the difficulty of all Thaumaturgy rituals decreases by one. Conversely, the ritual adds one to the difficulty of all magic not based on Hermetic principles. This includes the Pillars of non-Hermetic wizards, as well as the paths and rituals of other blood sorcerers. This ritual takes at least one hour to perform.

Infernal Compact

Level-Four Ritual

In their two-front mystic war against their former brethren in the Order of Hermes and the Tzimisce *koldun*, a few desperate or foolish Tremere have bargained with demons for power. Although the clan officially decries infernalism as a blasphemy of the “diabolical” Salubri, regents often look the other way so long as tainted thaumaturges prove useful and keep quiet about their studies. For the time being, only those incautious fools who give their allegiance to Hell or betray the clan risk immediate destruction if discovered.

This ritual is the means by which a thaumaturge can pledge a part of his soul to a greater demon in exchange for accursed power. The caster first traces a circle of glyphs and astrological signs with a foul paste made from an innocent child’s heart and the soil of a heretic’s grave. The sorcerer then begins a complex invocation from the moment he awakens at sunset until the stroke of midnight. If successful, the circle glows with obscene fire and a powerful demon appears at its center. The creature may look however monstrous and terrible it chooses, though most prefer the form of a well-dressed mortal with a single unnatural feature, like golden cat eyes or delicate clawed fingers. Once conjured, the demon may step outside of its circle, although it cannot attack or leave the summoning vampire’s presence. It happily negotiates with the caster using guile, flattery or threats as it deems appropriate. It will not serve the sorcerer in any way except in fulfillment of a pact, and immediately returns to Hell if attacked. Otherwise, the demon remains until dismissed or dawn arrives.

System: The caster completes the ritual as described. The player rolls Intelligence + Occult (difficulty 8). On a failure, the glyphs burn to stinking ash and the ritual is wasted, but nothing else happens. A botch means the sorcerer inadvertently opens an actual portal to the infernal realm and suffers injury, possession or even destruction at the hands of an enraged demon. If the ritual succeeds, a demon appears and bargains for the vampire’s soul. Honey-tongued thaumaturges can occasionally make better deals, acquiring power in exchange

for human sacrifice, defilement of holy relics or similar acts of malefic devotion. Storytellers should not feel compelled to let a would-be infernalist off this easy, however, and should certainly raise the price every time the sorcerer returns for more “free” power. If the demon wants nothing or the price is too high, the caster can offer his soul in trade. Every dot of Road the caster forsakes from his maximum rating converts into one dot of a Discipline, Thaumaturgy path or Attribute or three dots to distribute among Abilities or Backgrounds. For example, a thaumaturge who pledges three dots can never have a Road rating higher than 7. Disciplines obtained through this ritual always manifest as corrupted in some way: infernal *Creo Ignem* creates baleful green or stinking sulfurous fire, while infernal *Obtenebration* might permanently stain its user’s eyes inky black. Backgrounds obtained with this ritual do not manifest immediately, arriving via amazing twists of fate and coincidence at the rate of one dot per week. Such Backgrounds invariably result from the suffering (or death) of another. Once an infernalist pledges his first point of Road, he can never reach Golconda. Casting this ritual at all requires a degeneration check (see *Dark Ages: Vampire*, p. 267) for any vampire not following the Path of Screams (see *Road of Sin*).

Suspension of Incantation

Level-Four Ritual

This ritual binds one spell inside itself with conditions for release, effectively creating a triggered enchantment. Suspension of Incantation can easily create cunning traps or displays of “effortless” power to impress or intimidate later onlookers.

System: The caster carefully chants a long series of binding wards and activation clauses, and her player rolls Wits + Occult (difficulty 6). The difficulty increases by one for every spell the thaumaturge currently has suspended with prior castings of this ritual, to a maximum difficulty of 10. If successful, the caster must immediately invoke one power of any Thaumaturgy path she knows. Her player spends blood and rolls Willpower normally to determine the success of the effect, but the magic does not manifest until the stated conditions are met. If the conditions never take place, the magic dissipates after a number of months equal to the successes rolled on the initial Wits + Occult roll. Path effects can only be bound to specific inanimate objects or locations. Trigger clauses may be as simple or complicated as desired, so long as any observed conditions take place within sight of the ritual’s focus. For example, a caster could use delayed *Rego Motus* to enchant a door to throw a spear at anyone who opened it without speaking the correct password. Alternately, the



caster could enchant his journal to immolate itself through *Creo Ignem* upon his demise. However, if the caster perished out of sight of his journal, the book would not catch fire.

Ward Versus Fae

Level-Four Ritual

This warding ritual functions exactly as does the *Ward Versus Ghouls*, save that it inflicts injury upon the fae. Vampires who wound one of the Fair Folk with such a ward risk the dire enmity of all that inscrutable kind.

System: This ritual follows the same rules as *Ward Versus Ghouls* (see *Dark Ages: Vampire*, p. 219), except that it requires a handful of iron filings rather than a blood point.

Blood Phylactery

Level-Five Ritual

Coveted by the blood sorcerers of Clan Tremere as little else, this ritual allows a vampire to bind a part of his cursed soul and power into a magical item. Such items

take many forms, from staves and weapons to jeweled amulets and rings. Regardless of shape, a Blood Phylactery augments its creator's will and sorcerous might so long as it remains in his possession. Cunning thaumaturges often place additional enchantments on their phylacteries, especially wards and protective magic.

System: This ritual requires six hours per night for one complete cycle of the moon, beginning and ending on the new moon. Over this time, the thaumaturge carefully prepares his phylactery, carving it with Hermetic runes that signify his True Name and the sum of his mystical knowledge. The player spends one blood point per night and makes an extended roll of Intelligence + Occult (difficulty 8), rolling once per week of game time. If a night's work is missed or the rolls fail to accumulate at least 20 successes, the ritual fails and the process must begin anew. If the ritual succeeds, the player spends one point of permanent Willpower to imbue the talisman with a shard of his soul. A thaumaturge may only have one Blood Phylactery at a time. Ownership of such a talisman may not be transferred — each individual must create his own.

So long as a thaumaturge holds or wears his Blood Phylactery, it grants the following advantages:

- The difficulty of all hostile magic directed at him increases by one. This includes mortal Pillars as well as all forms of blood sorcery. The Storyteller remains the final arbiter of what qualifies as hostile.

- The difficulty of all the vampire's ritual castings and Willpower rolls decreases by one, including rolls to activate Thaumaturgy paths. If the character is using his primary path, the difficulty decreases by three (to a minimum difficulty of 4).

However, ownership of a phylactery carries several disadvantages:

- Should the talisman ever fall into the hands of another magician, the difficulty of *all* magic directed at the item's true owner is reduced by three (minimum difficulty 4). Magic that actually uses the talisman as a focus or physical component may also have dramatically increased effects at Storyteller discretion.

- For every full night that a thaumaturge does not touch his phylactery, he loses one point of Willpower from the mystical strain of separation. This drain ends if the talisman is destroyed. Fortunately, a successful Perception + Occult roll (difficulty 7) allows a thaumaturge to know the direction and approximate distance of his phylactery at all times.

Ward Versus Magi

Level-Five Ritual

This warding ritual functions exactly as does the Ward Versus Ghouls, save that it inflicts injury upon mortal magi.

System: This ritual follows the same rules as Ward Versus Ghouls (see **Dark Ages: Vampire**, p. 219), except that it requires a handful of tass taken from a cray (see p. 173). This ward only affects magicians whose power flows from mastery of Foundations and Pillars, and has no effect on mere "hedge wizards."

Assamite Blood Sorcery

Whereas the thaumaturgy developed by the Tremere depends upon rote memorization and repetition, Assamite blood sorcery draws from the improvisational and dynamic approaches of mortal sorcerers from hundreds of origins. The stress is not on the way one does the act, but instead the act itself. The Assamite sorcerer Al-Ashrad often refers to a parable about the young cook and the old one: Whereas the youth seeks precise and accurate measurements in

ingredients, temperature and cooking duration, the old hand takes a sloppier approach, compensating for variation in one element by altering another. The goal is the meal itself, rather than the platonic incarnation of a meal, and while the youth achieves a similar result every time, the old cook manages to create a broad variation with a fraction of the effort. So it is with sorcery, Al-Ashrad concludes, emphasizing the need for focus on the result rather than the tools used to reach that result.

The fundamental differences in approach lead to great confusion when a student of one thaumaturgical school of thought attempts to grasp the basics of another, for according to one school, the magic of the other simply shouldn't work. The sorcerer must work to reconcile the incompatibility of styles before understanding of the underlying principles can occur. Consequently, the requirements for comprehension are steep. Assamites who attempt to gain insight into Thaumaturgical paths taught by non-Assamites must spend an additional 3 experience points and have an Intelligence rating at least one dot higher than the desired path level. Additionally, the initial use of ritual magic takes twice as long to cast if learned from any sorcerers or texts not of Assamite origin.

All Assamite sorcerers must select a primary path during character creation. The sorcerer may pick among any of the paths listed in **Dark Ages: Vampire** (pp. 213–217), or choose a path unique to the Assamites. The Whispers of the Heavens path is one such example of the closely guarded paths exclusive to the Saracens, and another — Echoes of Allah's Wrath — is described in **Road of Heaven**. Assamite blood sorcery rituals are listed below. Assamite blood sorcery follows the same system as Thaumaturgy: the player rolls Willpower at a difficulty of (desired path level + 3).

Whispers of the Heavens

Seers and sages claim comprehension of the spiritual powers held by the night sky, but only the most capable of mystics can bend the stars to their will. The extensive travels of the Assamites allow them to pull the teachings of those mystics from a myriad of cultures and spiritual traditions. Millennia of research and reconciliation of disparate beliefs form the keystone for Whispers of the Heavens. Sorcerers who consider this path their primary focus often refer to themselves as seers or diviners.

Due to the crucial role of the night sky in the Whispers of the Heavens, sorcerers who cannot see it are unable to use this path. Any attempt to use this

path suffers a +1 difficulty if the night is overcast and a +2 when beneath a storm.

• Map the Skies

The Children of Haqim venture far from fortress Alamut, often finding themselves in places that have never been mapped. Rather than rely on luck and local guides to return to familiar lands, the sorcerers need only consult the stars themselves to discern an exact location.

System: The number of successes on the standard roll indicates the level of clarity to the current location known by the sorcerer. The character envisions a variety of landmarks and their relative position to the current location. If the caster has a general famil-

Successes	Area
One success	Within 100 miles
Two successes	Within 10 miles
Three successes	Within 1 mile
Four successes	Within 250 yards
Five successes	Within 10 yards

ilarity with the area, the visions tend to display familiar landmarks. The assistance of an accurate map may aid the sorcerer in pinpointing an exact location.

•• Read Heaven's Plans

According to many diviners, the natural force of fate is like a great river and the people are akin to the fish that reside within. Surely it is possible to fight the direction suggested by the river's flow, but only with a heroic effort can one truly defy the force of the current enough to swim upstream. As well, the ceaseless surging of the water carves away at the earth in a manner that allows one to foresee the river's future path unless it is somehow diverted by elements beyond the land's control.

The celestial positioning of the stars reflects this grand proclivity for the inevitable, reflected in the subtle humor they find in the fate of the world and those who walk upon it. Skilled diviners can read the most predictable path taken by people or places with a glance at the laughter in the heavens. Sorcerers are unable to tell the future with absolute precision, but knowing the future's most likely inclination allows them to oppose or support its occurrence.

System: The player rolls normally. The sorcerer must touch the person in question or stand upon the ground he wishes to investigate. Each success indi-

cates the extent to which the sorcerer may divine the target's future. A failure produces muddled visions that make no sense, while a botch may provide hallucinations of potential futures so horrifying that the

Successes	Duration
One success	One lunar month
Two successes	One season
Three successes	One year
Four successes	One decade
Five successes	One century

sorcerer suffers a +1 difficulty to any further attempts at divination for a full lunar month.

Successful rolls provide a less than distinct vision coupled with a general sense of the timeframe within which it will occur.

The Storyteller bears responsibility for determining the content of visions observed by the sorcerer. A typical vision includes a general sense of timeframe, a few images, and a general sense of the emotions surrounding the event. As a rule of thumb, sorcerers who achieve successes beyond the desired amount find a greater degree of clarity to the visions.

For example, a sorcerer might divine the fate of a Cainite warrior destined to fall while defending a Hungarian village from a war *vozhd* in AD 1238. A sorcerer who achieves four successes might feel great determination as he sees an avalanche made entirely of flesh rolling down a mountain, with the warrior using his body to shield a rabbit hutch from the oncoming mass, all within a decade's time. Another

ORACLE ON THE SPOT

Storytellers who are uncomfortable creating elaborate prophecies at a moment's notice may instead opt to rule that the sorcerer does not envision future events until she next sleeps, whereupon the visions come to her in the form of dreams. This can help buy time for the Storyteller to work a more relevant vision into the session, rather than forcing the inclusion of useless imagery that hamstring the character's power as well as the Storyteller's future plans. Both the Storyteller and the sorcerer's player should agree to this method of handling visions before the character starts using this power in play.

sorcerer who rolls five successes might sense the warrior filled with overpowering anguish in seven or eight years' time, seeing dozens of Hungarian faces that bear the mark of innocence and violent death beneath an overpowering black shadow that bellows angry words in many voices speaking at once.

Locations are somewhat different, often imparting to the sorcerer a sense of the most fateful event that will occur within the time span determined by the roll. Exactly what "most fateful" means is left up to the Storyteller to decide, but sorcerers most often observe cataclysms caused by man or God (such as a brutal war or a devastating hurricane) and events that occur which have a great impact on the surroundings (such as the founding of what will eventually become a great city). The sorcerer may attempt to limit her investigations to a particular time frame if she chooses, but she will still only see the most important event within the chosen time frame.

It is important to note that even visions imparting near clarity are never truly precise. As with most prophecy, the sorcerer only sees what will most likely occur if current events take their course without interruption.

••• Call Down the Hunter's Moon

"When the stars are right," says Al-Ashrad, "even the meekest of sheep can stand up to the lion." This truth is the basis for a technique that allows the Children of Haqim their seemingly perfect timing. The caster rubs a finger smeared with ash from a freshly doused fire upon the surface of his tongue, then meditates upon his course of action before uttering it aloud. A sense of the sorcerer's best time to undertake his course of action within the next season flows from the moon's light into the sorcerer's mind. The Assamites who hold faith in this heavenly recommendation find their luck greatly increased if they heed the divine suggestion, although they aren't obligated to follow it.

System: The sorcerer must state the act aloud before the player rolls, be it "the seduction of Mademoiselle Blanc," "the placement of the tower's foundation stone" or "the murder by poisoned knife of the sultan's most favored warrior." A success indicates the best hour between the present time and sunrise to attempt an immediate task, or the night within the next three lunar months to perform the act, as specified by the player after the roll. A botch provides the sorcerer with knowledge of an hour or night that should be generally fortuitous to the completion of the task, but that in fact coincides with a time most inauspicious for the character to do so. This indicates that events beyond the character's con-

trol will conspire to make the character suffer for her involvement, such as the unexpected arrival of a bitter enemy, great retribution from a prince for the event's completion, a great battle surrounding the act or a natural catastrophe such as a tornado occurring in the vicinity. This is not to say that potentially disastrous external events cannot occur unless there is a botch, but they are assured in such an instance, and the character retains no sorcerous advantage to aid her. The Storyteller is encouraged to invent a great challenge, but not an impossibility.

Attempting the act in question at the indicated time provides the player with a number of temporary Willpower points equal to the number of successes scored on the roll. These are recorded separately from the normal Willpower pool and are not limited by the character's amount of total Willpower. Any remaining at the end of the night (or upon successful completion of the task) are lost. The sorcerer may not gain more Willpower by repeating the use of the power for the exact same act, as the initial amount provided cannot be altered. It is suggested that the player or Storyteller record the act verbatim to prevent confusion should the event occur in future sessions.

The power only works with extended, complex tasks that cannot feasibly be accomplished with a single die roll or over the course of a single action. For example, "the murder by poisoned knife of the sultan's most favored warrior" consists of a variety of actions leading up to the warrior's death: sneaking into the sultan's palace, evading the guards on the way to the warrior's quarters, dodging the roused warrior's attempts at defense, and striking a blow deep enough for the poison to take effect.

The sorcerer can provide the benefits of the power to a small group of individuals limited in number to her Leadership rating. Each must personally provide the sorcerer with a single blood point, and they must know the intended purpose for the blood. Doing so provides every individual connected by the power with the same number of temporary Willpower points as the sorcerer receives which are restricted similarly in their usage.

•••• Trace the Soul's Favor

A person's date of birth is a powerful thing, and can provide a sorcerer with vast amounts of knowledge related to the individual. A skilled diviner can implore the stars to whisper an account of their position upon the night of the person's birth. With this knowledge in hand, the sorcerer can divine the most intimate details of a person, such as the most

violent act he is capable of performing under normal conditions, the types of work best suited to him, and whether he will fulfill his destiny before dying.

System: The player rolls normally, and each success provides the sorcerer with one item of knowledge about the individual's true self. With Storyteller discretion, five successes can also provide the sorcerer with clues surrounding the subject's ultimate fate. If the sorcerer knows neither the subject's true name nor date of birth (or date of Embrace for Cainites), the roll is made at a +3 difficulty. Should the sorcerer know one but not the other, the penalty is only +1.

If the roll botches, the targeted character immediately gains the chilling sensation that someone is watching him. If he ever sees the sorcerer in the future, he immediately knows that the sorcerer once tried to spy on him.

Exactly what knowledge the sorcerer gains from the roll is determined by the Storyteller, but it could likely include a variety of mechanical information such as any prominent Disciplines or Abilities, estimated Willpower rating, road (with approximate rating), the subject's true Nature or the strongest (or weakest) Virtue. Generally the information is provided as though by prophecy rather than directly to the player. For example, a subject who walked the Path of Chivalry with a rating of 7 might provide the character with an image of a knight wearing a burnished circlet and plate armor that needed a polish.

••••• Ripples on the Sea of Stars

All who gaze upon the wonder of the night sky observe a shimmering ocean of stars. Sorcerers who reach the pinnacle of this path know the heavens watch the world as well, each star observing a small portion and sharing what they see with one another. By appealing to the heavens themselves, sorcerers can look upon portions of the world just as the stars do, but they may only see that which appears beneath an open night sky. Sorcerers must know the individual, item or location they wish to observe, for stars are reluctant to share their observations with the unconnected.

System: The player rolls normally. The sorcerer observes remote events by specifying a person present for them, the location where they are to occur or an item within close proximity. If the sorcerer has successfully divined the target's future at a prior point, whether through this path or through other mystic capabilities, reduce the difficulty of the roll by one.

Both the sorcerer and the target must stand beneath the night sky (inclement weather affects the

Successes	Details
One success	The scene appears dimly.
Two successes	The scene appears with sound.
Three successes	The scene appears as it would were the sorcerer present, allowing use of Auspex 1, 2, and 4 for observation.
Four successes	The sorcerer may use any Auspex or sorcerous path power (though no rituals) to observe or analyze the scene.
Five successes	Any Assamite sorcery power or ritual may affect the scene if the sorcerer's physical presence is not a requirement.

difficulty of the roll as usual). The target must have been personally encountered in the past by the sorcerer, and must not be under a roof or touched by the sun's rays at the time of the attempt. Each success indicates the strength of the image and the sorcerer's capacity for limited mystic manipulation.

The sorcerer's vision centers on the target and its immediate surroundings, lasting for the remote scene's duration or until night's end at either location. The sorcerer suffers a +2 difficulty for all interactions with his own physical surroundings when using this power, for the convergence of reality and vision breeds confusion. Any individual with Auspex near the target feels the slightest sense of being watched. Should the target lose sight of the open sky for longer than one minute, the vision ceases immediately.

Assamite Rituals

Eye of the Translator

Level-One Ritual

Languages long forgotten pose no problem for the Children of Haqim, as the size of Alamut's library testifies. This ritual aids in the translation of any written language with which the sorcerer is unfamiliar, allowing the easier retranslation of archaic writing. The usefulness of this ritual often attracts viziers to the basics of Thaumaturgy, occasionally leading to friction with some sorcerers who hold a rigid view of the divisions between castes.

System: The player rolls normally (see *Dark Ages: Vampire*, p. 217). The sorcerer slices the skin along her left eyebrow and wills three drops of blood

to fall to the single page, sheet or surface requiring translation. This act is purely symbolic and causes no loss of blood or health levels. The sorcerer meditates for 10 minutes as the blood slithers into the writing and fades. The character then receives a number of extra successes equal to those achieved when casting the ritual to any roll for translation, decryption or comprehension. These extra successes are lost at the end of the night or after the character ceases working for more than 10 minutes. The sorcerer must enact the ritual separately for each page, sheet, or surface requiring translation.

Dowse the Earth's Blood

Level-One Ritual

Water supports life, whether in the deepest deserts or humid forests. The Saracens know that to find people, one should first look to where those people drink. Sorcerers performing this ritual listen to the sounds of the earth to locate the nearest renewable fresh water source that is accessible to the caster. The more skilled can determine impurities in the water, and even trace the impurities to their source. Knowing the source of impurities generally allows the sorcerer to find fresher water before the point of its contamination.

System: The sorcerer disrobes and meditates upon bare earth; the player rolls normally. Additional successes provide additional levels of information listed below.

One success	General direction and distance.
Three successes	Knowledge of any impurities.
Five successes	Source of all impurities.

Blood's Cry for Vengeance

Level-Two Ritual

The Children of Haqim travel far across the face of the world, often treading alone in myriad directions, yet they always know when one of their members falls to treachery. Few aware of the clan as a whole knowingly commit a murder of betrayal against an Assamite, for shortly thereafter more arrive to exact revenge for the fallen. The blood sorcerers achieve this effect through a ritual that weaves the threads of destiny together for the members of their clan. All that is required to do so is two or more willing participants.

Upon the Final Death of any member of the group, all those linked experience a vision of the fallen member's death; a flash of the victim's emotional state; and a vague sense of the events that led to his fall, leading back roughly five seconds per person

within the bond. The connection is so ephemeral that most methods of perception are unable to detect it. Any Assamite who travels to Alamut for the first time is linked to the Elder and any pilgrims who arrive within the same lunar month.

The bond itself is an obligation not taken lightly, for those connected bear the responsibility of vengeance for the fallen who were betrayed or died dishonorably. Those occupied with business crucial to the clan or physically incapable of travel may send their agents to follow up, but Children of Haqim who shirk their sworn duties may soon find themselves at odds with their own clan.

System: A sorcerer can link a number of individuals equal to his Occult rating. The caster uses a wooden bowl to collect two blood points from each Cainite to be linked. The participants sit around an open fire, meditating upon their connection to each other. During the next hour the sorcerer heats the blood over the fire until the last of it boils away. Unless the casting roll fails, the ritual binds the circle's fates together as described. No known way exists to block the transmission of death's final moments, and there is no limit to the number of circles into which one can be bound. Casters who wish to be part of a link may so incorporate themselves into the bond, but their presence counts towards the limit of the circle's size.

Glossolalic Fervor

Level-Two Ritual

The babbling of fools and madmen often seems unstructured and chaotic, but those who know how to read the patterns of insanity understand the logic of the spirits that lies beneath. With this ritual the sorcerer may divine a universal truth about a particular topic using another person as a vessel. The caster places a focus (see below) upon the tongue before performing the ritual on a physically restrained yet willing subject. The subject enters convulsions as the spirits fill his being. He shouts strings of random syllables that the sorcerer can interpret as truths about the subject.

System: The ritual converts one blood point from the sorcerer into a poisonous, vibrant concoction that works its way through the target's body. Each success on the standard ritual roll (see **Dark Ages: Vampire**, p. 217) forces a phrase from the subject that only the sorcerer can understand, providing information that the sorcerer does not know and could not easily observe. The divination is limited to present or past events, as the spirits conveying the knowledge are

unaware of what the future may hold. For example, the sorcerer might learn that a rival's favored weapon is weak at the hilt, or that a grain shipment sent to Cologne is running three weeks late due to poor weather and a broken axle, but not that a horse will expire from exhaustion in three nights. The sorcerer has no control over what secrets the spirits share; they are left to the Storyteller's discretion.

At the ritual's end, the medium through which the spirits speak must soak seven levels of bashing damage, minus the sorcerer's rank in Assamite Sorcery. Should the roll on this ritual botch, the damage is instead lethal. The ritual works best with mortal mediums, but a ghoul may fulfill the role at +1 difficulty for the sorcerer. Cainite mediums impose a +3 difficulty and feel profoundly unnerved by the experience for the following lunar month.

The focus must be physically associated with the subject of the divination, from a shaving of material from an object, to a piece of hair from a person. The Storyteller ultimately deems what kinds of focus will work. Sorcerers who perform this ritual more than once per lunar month receive a penalty of +1 per attempt as more spirits begin to trail the sorcerer,

fighting with one another for their chance to break through the pale.

Mark the Blood Oath

Level-Three Ritual

Often the Children of Haqim find themselves opposing Cainites who may have no personal involvement in the matter at hand, but who fight fang and claw to fulfill the wishes of a distant regent. With this ritual the Saracens can discover who truly opposes them, and opt to remedy the situation, if necessary.

System: Each success on the standard roll provides the sorcerer with a clear image of one master, as the target last encountered them, with the first success always displaying the Cainite's sire (if still among the unliving). "Masters" include Cainites to whom the target has sworn an oath, or vampires of whose blood the target has partaken. Obviously, any Cainite would hold a blood oath over the target is revealed. The sorcerer must have a focus to perform the ritual, which takes roughly 15 minutes to complete. Blood is the most preferred focus, providing no difficulty penalty, but the sorcerer may also use one of the target's personal effects at a +1 difficulty.



Messenger of the Winds

Level-Three Ritual

Long ago the Assamite sorcerers in Alamut developed a ritual that would allow them to keep in contact with even the most far-ranging of Haqim's children. As long as the sorcerer knows an individual's name and possesses enough of his blood to write it down, she may send a written communication to him, wherever he may be in the world. This ritual is most often used by sorcerers in Alamut, who may draw Assamite vitae from the Heartblood. The ritual may only pass along written communication, although more powerful rites supposedly exist to transport small items at much greater cost.

System: Any successes indicate that the ritual works as expected. The sorcerer is not required to write the message himself, but the pen used to compose the message must be made from the feather of an eagle, and the physical material of the page must be clean linen. The sorcerer ties the message with a white silk ribbon, upon which she writes the recipient's name in his own blood. Once complete, she throws the message into the night sky for the winds to catch and carry to the recipient. The ritual does not work if the message is itself enchanted in some other manner, but magical instructions and formulae may be conveyed. The communication appears in the target's possession at exactly midnight of the next night.

A failure indicates that the sorcerer must re-copy the missive onto fresh linen before attempting again, while a botch randomly delivers the message to someone who is somehow connected to the intended target, whether directly or tangentially.

Fingers Form the Hand

Level-Four Ritual

With Fingers Form the Hand, Alamut's more powerful sorcerers can extend their grasp into the day itself. This elaborate, six-hour ritual reaches its climax when the sorcerer converts a portion of his own blood to a thick, noxious sludge, which is immediately expelled from his body. Those who feed upon the brackish blood before the next sunrise enter a fugue state, subsuming their will to that of the sorcerer. The sorcerer's influence begins when he enters his nightly slumber, when his mind slips into that of the "fingers."

The group operates as a cohesive whole, following the spirit rather than the letter of the sorcerer's instructions. While incapable of following commands

that counteract self-preservation, such as "kill yourself," they will respond to instructions such as "attack those five guardsmen" without hesitation. Although capable of automatic actions such as self-defense or regaining their balance, they are otherwise entirely beholden to the sorcerer's mental commands until the next sunset, when the ritual ends. No known sorcery is capable of breaking the mortals from the ritual's grasp other than the setting of the sun.

System: The player rolls as normal. Each success (up to five) indicates the conversion of a blood point to the noxious vitae, which the sorcerer must immediately expel or suffer an automatic level of bashing damage once per minute. Any ghouls may participate, whether human or animal, including those not bound to the sorcerer. The blood's fundamentally altered nature does not count toward creating or maintaining a blood oath.

The "fingers" suffer no wound penalties for the duration of the ritual and do not roll for initiative, instead acting simultaneously under the sorcerer's initiative roll. These characters must remain within the general vicinity of one another at all times, generally within 100 yards of at least one other servant, or the ritual immediately ends. Should any servant fall unconscious during the ritual he is removed from its control, even if he should re-awaken before sunset. The death of a servant under the influence of the ritual causes the sorcerer to immediately suffer a point of unsoakable aggravated damage.

The sorcerer possesses a limited capacity to use Disciplines while under the effects of the ritual: specifically Celerity and the first two levels of Auspex. Celerity allows the sorcerer to spread extra actions among the servants, causing one level of bashing to the servant for each extra action undertaken. For example, a sorcerer directing three "fingers" with Celerity ranked at 3 could choose to provide one finger with three additional actions, one finger with two actions and a second with one, or all three fingers with one additional action apiece, but each extra action would force bashing damage. Any attempts to affect the minds of the servants through mystical powers such as sorcery or Disciplines instead target the sorcerer and suffer a +2 difficulty.

Should the player botch the initial roll, any who drink the altered vitae suffer one level of aggravated damage per blood point. Any mortals who imbibe this polluted concoction become violently ill until they can expel the contaminated

vitae. They also suffer a -1 penalty to all physical actions except for soak until their next eight full hours of uninterrupted rest.

Coerce the Profane

Level-Four Ritual

For all their infernal power, those of a demonic bent encounter a myriad of problems concealing their true nature from the world. Demons are cunning, however. Some skilled in the arts of deception can lurk among humans in large towns, or fool even the most skittish of animals into thinking they are nothing but another mortal.

Knowing this, the sorcerer Al-Ashrad and his disciples worked furiously to counteract these infernal disguises. This ritual was the result. To perform it, a triad of sorcerers works the ritual outside of a holy symbol drawn with the soil of the target location. The effort takes roughly four hours and leaves the sorcerers exhausted, but its effects begin immediately.

Any creatures who serve the Adversary have their true nature exposed to the world around them. The scent of Hell that surrounds them causes all manner of abominations to occur, such as the rapid curdling of cream, horses birthing dead foals with no eyes, a rain of blood and camphor, standing water catching fire, large beetles boiling out from the center of freshly baked bread, and any other such terrifying effects.

Assamites often use this ritual to locate profane creatures among groups of mortals, but they must take care to prevent large scale rioting and death, and so prefer not to perform it in densely populated areas. Often exposing the demon to the mortals it walks among is enough to drive it off, for any who directly witness its true nature always recognize it in any future form.

System: Three sorcerers perform this ritual together; each player spends one blood point and makes the standard roll. The total number of combined successes is the number of nights that the effect lasts. The ritual's effect extends from the point of the soil's collection for 100 yards per total success and affects any applicable target within the radius. The aura of profanity grows stronger as one approaches the demonic agent, and any animal or person in its immediate presence knows it for exactly what it is. A botched roll on this ritual reflects the aura of profanity back upon each of the casters.

The ritual affects any being touched by the Adversary using sorcerous or demonic means to

disguise its true nature. This does not necessarily include Baali vampires, although if a Baali uses Obfuscate or another supernatural power to hide or disguise itself, this ritual affects him.

Expel the Dark Humors

Level-Five Ritual

Worse than the infernal creatures wearing the illusion of mortal form are those who clothe themselves in the flesh of a human being. The most powerful and guarded of Assamite rituals serves to force the foul creatures from human bodies. Though the theological specifics are still debated by the Amr and his closest circle of advisors, the ritual emphasizes the potential for divinity that exists in all mortals. The effect scalds the demon with purity and forcefully ejects it from the mortal body, trapping its seared form in the world shortly thereafter. Although the ritual is dangerous for the target, skilled sorcerers have the capability to drive the demon out through an existing cavity rather than forcing it to tear open its own egress.

System: The sorcerer must attempt the hour-long ritual in the presence of the target. Sorcerers who take one full week of preparation can reduce the difficulty by one. The player rolls normally and the target of the ritual immediately suffers 10 levels of lethal damage, minus one for each success achieved by the sorcerer (this damage may be soaked if the target is capable of doing so). The demon manifests as it is ousted from the target's body, and suffers one level of unsoakable aggravated damage for each success. It is incapable of departing the mortal world through magical means for one hour per success, and it is immediately aware of this. A failure does not cause damage to the target, but if the demon was not previously aware of the attempt it immediately recognizes the sorcerer's potential to damage it. A botch kills the target instantly and forces the demon out, but it suffers no harm and is not bound to remain in the mortal world.

Merits and Flaws

The following Merits and Flaws are particularly appropriate for vampires of the Low Clans, representing an assortment of useful Nosferatu and Gangrel deformities, permutations of madness and bestiality, the social ties that bind or exclude the dregs of Cainite society and much more. Players of High Clan vampires can purchase these Traits for their characters with Storyteller approval.

Physical

Bloat (1 to 5-pt. Merit)

You can store more blood than your generation should allow. Every point invested in this Merit increases your maximum blood pool by one, although it does not increase the rate at which you can process or expend vitae. When you exceed your normal limits, your skin blushes red as though burned, or visibly bulges, giving you a grotesque visage (lose one die from all Appearance-based pools while in this state). Other Cainites (and beings with heightened senses) can smell the blood trying to squeeze past your pores with a successful Perception + Alertness roll (difficulty 7). This can incite frenzy in hungry vampires.

Feeding Tongue (1 to 6-pt. Merit)

Your tongue extends to inhuman lengths as a bizarre instrument of feeding. It may be delicate and forked like a serpent's or a monstrous cartilaginous spike, but the effect is the same. You can extend your tongue six inches per point invested in this Merit, and may drain blood or inflict aggravated damage without clinching your prey (as long as you are within range). Unlike traditional feeding, your tongue does not engender the pleasure of the Kiss. Such feeding is more like a giant mosquito plunging a dagger-sized needle into flesh and siphoning blood fast enough to collapse veins.

Heart of Bone (1 to 5-pt. Merit)

Your heart is protected by a sheath of leathery cartilage or warped bone. For every point invested in this Merit, you gain one extra soak die to resist staking attempts or other attacks intended to pierce the heart. These soak dice do not protect against other forms of damage.

Long Fingers (1-pt. Merit)

Your fingers are hideously long and spidery, perhaps with extra joints, or rubbery like the tentacles of a squid. You gain one extra die on all rolls involving fine coordination or grappling.

Piscine (1-pt. Merit)

You are unusually comfortable underwater and vastly prefer swimming to walking. You receive a -1 difficulty to all Physical dice pools related to underwater movement. This Merit is particularly

common among canal- or harbor-dwelling broods of Nosferatu and the occasional aquatic Gangrel.

Supple Joints (1- or 3-pt. Merit)

You are unusually lithe. For one point, you reduce the difficulty of all Dexterity rolls involving body flexibility by two (such as escaping restraints or contorting through tight spaces). For three points, you can bend most joints backward, dislocate others at will and perform feats of contortion impossible for a human body (such as turning your head to look straight back). You can escape most restraints and slither through small spaces automatically, although the Storyteller may require a roll for extreme feats.

Immune to Disease (2-pt. Merit)

You are preternaturally resistant to disease and may freely gorge on infected blood without risk of becoming a carrier. Only magical diseases can afflict you, and you gain an extra die to resist these unnatural maladies. Few Cainites with such resistance are aware of their gift.

Maw (2-pt. Merit)

Unlike other vampires, you have a distended maw filled with jagged, knifelike fangs. Your bite inflicts an extra die of damage, and you may drain one extra blood point each turn when feeding. Unfortunately, your teeth are obviously inhuman and cannot retract. Unless you keep your mouth closed, you suffer +2 difficulty on all Social rolls not involving Intimidation.

Retractable Wings (2-pt. Merit)

A vampire with this Merit may take an action to extend or retract her wings. Retracted wings collapse and fold tightly against the body, allowing the character to move through tighter spaces and maneuver unencumbered. Only Gargoyles and other vampires with wings may purchase this Merit.

Unmarred Face (2- to 6-pt. Merit)

Even if your body is a leprous husk of pustules or a monstrous chimera of fused animals, your face remains eerily pristine. So long as your face is the *only* part of you that is visible, your effective Appearance rating is one dot for every two points invested in this Merit. Nosferatu characters with this Merit suffer worsened deformities in other parts of their bodies, gaining at least one physical Flaw for which they gain no points (as well as the undying scorn of their clanmates). Obviously, this Merit is useless (and not

permissible) to characters without serious full-body deformity of some kind.

Blood Connoisseur (3-pt. Merit)

With a single whiff or tasted drop, you can learn much about a given sample of blood. Your refined palette can even detect the presence of foreign substances or taint. Whenever you analyze a sample, roll Perception + Alertness (difficulty 6). Each success allows you to glean one fact about the blood, such as its potency, freshness, species, or whether it has been poisoned or contaminated with disease. If multiple successes are spent learning a single fact, additional details may be unveiled at Storyteller discretion. Note that this Merit does not confer preternatural awareness like the Rego Vitae power A Taste for Blood. Characters who have never tasted arsenic or Lupine blood cannot recognize either — although they may discern such samples as poisoned or non-human. In no case may characters discern supernatural properties like clan or generation. As always, the Storyteller determines what information a character may learn.

Foul Humors (3-pt. Merit)

Your flesh and blood tastes bilious or outright putrescent. Anyone who bites or feeds from you must make a Willpower roll (difficulty 5 plus the number of health levels inflicted or blood points consumed). Those who fail spend the next turn choking, retching or gagging. Any fool who actually attempts to drink you dry (such as in preparation for diablerie) must make three consecutive Willpower rolls at difficulty 9 to succeed. If any of these checks fail, the feeding vampire spends the rest of the scene vomiting his entire blood pool in a fountain of tainted gore.

Batagia (4- or 7-pt. Merit)

Leathery wings fold into your body like a bat or flying squirrel, hanging flaccidly like a tattered cloak when not in use unless hidden beneath bulky clothes. Although you cannot actually fly, you may glide for short distances at your normal walking speed with the aid of updrafts or strong winds. Characters with this Merit cannot have an Appearance greater than 2, and most suffer from the Monstrous Flaw (p. 304 of **Dark Ages: Vampire**). A few dedicated infernalists and seriously misshapen Gangrel occasionally manifest a more potent version of this Merit, conferring strong bat-like wings extending more than five yards from tip to tip. Characters with the seven-point version can fly at speeds of 20 miles per hour and perform aerial maneuvers with their

Athletics, although they cannot carry objects heavier than half their own weight. Wings of this size can fold back like an elaborate cape, but they cannot be concealed without supernatural methods. Gargoyles cannot purchase any form of this Merit.

Face of the Beast (2-pt. Flaw)

The Beast Within emerges in times of hunger or stress, twisting your visage into a monstrous caricature of human form. Your Appearance rating can never exceed your current blood pool. In addition, you must roll Self-Control (difficulty 6) whenever you are subject to stress. This is in addition to any checks for frenzy. If you fail, your Appearance drops to zero for the rest of the scene. Characters with this Flaw who follow Instinct automatically assume their bestial visage if provoked, as do those who actually succumb to frenzy.

Stench (2-pt. Flaw)

Even for a society skeptical of bathing, you stink. No one willingly stands downwind of you, and even Nosferatu find you revolting. You lose two dice from most Social and Stealth rolls unless you are standing several yards downwind of your target. In addition, anyone within a yard of you must reflexively roll Stamina at difficulty 6 (or 8 for individuals with a heightened sense of smell). Those who fail lose one die from all actions due to overwhelming nausea until they withdraw from your immediate presence.

Plague Bearer (3-pt. Flaw)

Your blood is infected with plague or some equally virulent disease. You might not show symptoms or suffer its ravages, but you can transmit it to all your victims. Even worse, you cannot rid yourself of the disease by purging your blood (as described on p. 256 of **Dark Ages: Vampire**). Alchemy or thaumaturgy may offer a cure, as may the healing arts of the vanishing Salubri. If your condition is known, you might be forbidden access to many cities or restricted to feeding from lepers and other diseased wretches. Cainites who drink your blood must check for infection normally, although they may cure themselves by purging.

Infested (4- or 7-pt. Flaw)

Foul creatures live on or inside you; possibilities include worms, maggots, lice, ticks, mosquitoes or something stranger, like bloodsucking fungus. Alternately, a cloud of buzzing flies or other insects perpetually follows you around. Truly wretched souls

may even suffer both versions of this Flaw for seven points, with flying insects crawling in and out of their orifices at inopportune moments. If you play host to hemovores, roll one die when you awaken at dusk. Divide the result by 3, rounding up, and subtract that many blood points from your pool. This blood loss cannot drive you into torpor; the worst that can happen is that you awaken in hunger frenzy. In addition, the constant itching makes you irritable, adding +1 to the difficulty of all Self-Control rolls. If you trail clouds of flies, the insects subtract one die from most Social rolls. Additionally, their constant buzzing announces your presence, adding +2 to the difficulty of all Stealth attempts.

Mental

Ability Aptitude (1-pt. Merit)

You are particularly gifted with one Ability. Perhaps you are a divinely inspired blacksmith or a peerless scholar of law. Within your specific aptitude, reduce all difficulties by two. Characters may purchase this Merit more than once, but Storytellers should feel free to veto any selections that seem too powerful or unbalanced, *especially* combat Abilities.

Sanguine Lucidity (1-pt. Merit)

In satiation you find sanity. Whenever your blood pool is *completely* full, you do not suffer the effects of any derangements. As a result, you often gorge in the futile hope that you can silence your inner demons forever. This Merit cannot suppress a Malkavian's core derangement, although it may alleviate additional madness. Sane characters may purchase this Merit, although they do not learn of their resistance unless they gain a derangement.

Flock (3-pt. Merit)

You feel strong ties of kinship with a specific community of mortals. The difficulty to resist frenzy is always two less than normal where your flock is concerned, enabling you to better withstand the lure of their blood and forgive their trespasses. If you do succumb to frenzy, you may spend one Willpower point to recognize members of your flock as friends. As long as these individuals stay out of your way and do not directly provoke you, you may ignore them for the duration of the rampage. This Merit is often coupled with the Prey Exclusion Flaw (**Dark Ages: Vampire**

p. 305). Storytellers should feel free to disallow any communities deemed unbalancing or too inclusive.

Enlightened (5-pt. Merit)

You have detached yourself from the War of Princes and taken the first step on the bitter journey to Golconda. The difficulty of all Virtue rolls is two less than normal. Characters must ascribe to the Virtues of Conscience and Self-Control and have a Road rating of 8 or higher to purchase or retain this Merit. If you ever fail to meet these conditions, you lose your way and the benefits of enlightenment. Storytellers should feel free to inflict automatic degeneration on characters who abuse this Merit.

Fierce Bigot (2-pt. Flaw)

You hold particular hatred or disdain for a specific class or community of mortals. You make all frenzy checks at +2 difficulty around such individuals, and always attack them first if you do succumb to frenzy.

Moon Mad (2-pt. Flaw)

Your temper waxes and wanes with the phases of the moon. Under the crescent moon, difficulties to avoid frenzy increase by one. This difficulty modifier rises to two under a half or gibbous moon, and three under a full moon. There is no difficulty modifier during the new moon.

Wanderlust (4-pt. Flaw)

Like Caine himself, you are cursed to wander the Earth, never finding succor or rest until God Himself grants it to you. You may only sleep three consecutive days in the same one-mile area. If you surpass this limit, each successive day leads to cumulative halving of all dice pools (to a minimum score of 1 in any pool). You do not suffer this agitation in torpor. Gangrel of the Anda bloodline cannot purchase this Flaw.

Suicidal Beast (6 pt. Flaw)

Some part of your withered soul recognizes your damnation. Perhaps your Beast repents its hunger, or your self-destructive impulse overrides its instincts. Whenever you are in a position to check for Röttschreck, roll Courage as normal. However, failure does not lead to the Red Fear. Instead you seek out the source of danger and embrace destruction — seizing a torch by the flames or dashing into the sunlight. It is possible for characters with this Flaw to develop “normal” survival instincts in play, but never easy.

Social

Adopted Into Grace (1-pt. Merit)

Despite your lineage, you have been accepted by local members of the High Clans as a noble, or at least worthy of respect. Unfortunately, your own clanmates see you as a pretentious toady. The difficulty of all Social rolls involving other Cainites who know of your reputation increases or decreases by 1, depending on which class you are interacting with. Characters must have at least one dot of Status to purchase this Merit. The benefits of this Merit only extend as far as the character's reputation — seldom more than a single city.

Alternate Identity (1- to 5-pt. Merit)

You have established a false persona that stands up to scrutiny and investigation. The quality and detail of this face depends on the number of points invested in the Merit. For one point, your identity is new or intended for casual use only. At two points, it takes determined effort to reveal your ruse. For three points, your false name is known in several cities. At four points, your identity is widely known and respected. For five points, you can even deceive the most paranoid elders. Although the difficulty of any Investigation to determine your true identity equals your Alternate Identity rating + 5, it is up to you to actively maintain your persona. Characters with more than one false face must purchase this Merit multiple times.

Harmless (1-pt. Merit)

You are well known to the Cainites of your city as ineffectual and useless. While this estimation may seem insulting, it also keeps you safe. No one considers you a threat, and so no one feels the need to dispose of you. If you start acting in a way that demonstrates you are competent and no longer harmless, others' reactions to you will swiftly change.

Network (1- to 5-pt. Merit)

You have an impressive web of contacts and agents that extends beyond a single city. Better still, they serve you skillfully and subtly beneath the notice of the High Clans, making you far more formidable than you appear. Your Network reaches one extra city per point invested in this Merit. Upon arriving anywhere in the bounds of your Network, you gain access to your full rating in Allies, Contacts, Herd and

Retainers at the rate of one dot per night (although obviously, any Retainers thus gained are not initially ghouls, whether or not the Retainers in your home city are). You may also communicate with agents in other cities via correspondence, although they can only serve the role of Contacts. This Merit is most common among Followers of Set and Nosferatu.

Pretender to the Blood (1-pt. Merit)

You have successfully passed yourself off as a member of the High Clans, at least locally. As such, you receive acceptance from the aristocracy and suffer none of the stigma associated with your actual ancestry. You can expect terrible retribution if your ruse is discovered.

Scarred (1-pt. Merit)

Whether a result of battle wounds or religious practices, your body is heavily adorned with scars. These scars do not interfere with your movement or sensation, nor are they ugly enough to reduce your Appearance. However, anyone who beholds you recognizes you as someone intimately familiar with pain and violence. You reduce the difficulties of all Intimidation rolls by two. As a rule, town drunks are less inclined to quarrel with you and most individuals will assume you know how to fight (whether or not you actually do). This Merit can also reflect branding, tattooing or other rarer markings at Storyteller discretion.

Former Magus (2-pt. Merit or Flaw)

In life you were a mage, able to reshape creation with the force of your will. That power is lost to you now, replaced with the curse of Caine. Yet you have not sundered all ties to your former Fellowship. If this trait is a Merit, a few of your mystical associates still talk to you. They probably won't give you access to their libraries or let you into their sanctums, but they pass along information from time to time and exchange favors when it suits them. If this trait is a Flaw, your former associates view you as a liability. They might not actively hunt you (unless you also take the Enemy Flaw), but they regard you as a monster and traitor and treat you accordingly. This trait is extremely rare outside of Clan Tremere.

Uncouth (1-pt. Flaw)

Even for a peasant or foreigner, you have extremely poor manners and an equally tarnished reputation. Depending on your Charisma, other lower-class indi-

viduals may spit as you pass or laugh at your bawdy humor, but aristocrats and Cainites of the High Clans are not amused. When interacting with your betters, you cannot have more dice in a Social pool than twice your Status Background. The Storyteller may waive this limit if crudeness serves your intent (such as Intimidation attempts). This Flaw should be roleplayed.

Blood Hunted (2- or 4-pt. Flaw)

You have been made the target of a blood hunt. Should you return to your home city, you risk immediate destruction. For two points, this Flaw only applies to your home city. For four, the hunt extends anywhere your prince has allies. Hunts of such magnitude are only called against the most heinous criminals among the Damned.

Botched Presentation (2-pt. Flaw)

When you were presented to the prince of the city, you breached protocol or embarrassed yourself in some spectacular fashion. Your error may have been forgiven — or not, depending on other Flaws — but you are convinced that Her Majesty hates you. You must roll Willpower (difficulty 7) to stand in front of the prince or her designated representative without running, sniveling or otherwise acting like a fool.

Former Cat's-Paw (2-pt. Flaw)

You have done dirty work for an important Cainite in the past — maybe an elder or even a prince. However, instead of granting you favor, your patron now sees you as a liability to her interests. For the moment, your former employer is content to keep you quiet with veiled threats. If you continue to make a nuisance of yourself, however, she will use more drastic measures to silence you.

Village Idiot (3-pt. Flaw)

You were regarded as a fool in life or have acquired that unfortunate reputation in unlife. Either way, no one takes you seriously. At the very least, you suffer a +2 difficulty on most Expression and Leadership rolls, and this penalty may apply to other Social rolls as decided by the Storyteller. It is possible to lose this Flaw in play, but it isn't easy. Even if you come up with a brilliant plan, most people dismiss it — and you — on general principle, or assume that you stole the idea from someone else.

Scapegoat (4-pt. Flaw)

Whenever anything goes wrong, you are the first suspect. Actual guilt is irrelevant; you are the local Cainite whipping boy and everyone knows it. You cannot ever gain the Status background unless you somehow change your reputation — and that will be a Herculean feat. Even if you move to another city, your tainted reputation follows you.

Supernatural

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 actively search for you (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.

Blazing Demise (1-pt. Merit)

If you suffer Final Death, your body will instantly erupt into consuming fire. This spontaneous combustion sets flammable objects alight and inflicts three dice of aggravated damage on anything within a foot of your demise. As a result, you leave no evidence for witch hunters and may enact petty vengeance on your murderer from beyond the grave.

Animal Affinity (2-pt. Merit)

You feel ties of kinship with a particular animal species. Such creatures are not discomfited by your presence and generally like you (-1 difficulty to all pertinent Animal Ken rolls). In addition, Gangrel characters with this Merit only gain animal features associated with their "totem" animal.

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 (subject to Storyteller approval) or create your own, calculating your aura modifier according to your permanent Willpower.

Sleep Unseen (2-pt. Merit)

By spending a blood point, you can unconsciously maintain your Obfuscate Discipline during the day. Observers will ignore your sleeping form according to the power used, making you all but undetectable to mortals and vampires without Auspex. Characters without Obfuscate may purchase this Merit, representing an innate capacity that manifests if they ever learn the Discipline.

Hidden Amaranth (3-pt. Merit)

Should you commit the foul sin of Amaranth, your halo will not betray your crime. This Merit cannot shroud a diablerist's aura of unease, nor can it protect against the divinations of blood sorcery. Assamites of the warrior caste cannot take this Merit.

Abomination (4-pt. Merit)

You radiate palpable, monstrous horror. Mortals with a Willpower rating of 3 or less (i.e. most individuals) who behold you run screaming or curl up and sob in abject terror. In addition, their fragile minds cannot cope with such fear and quickly repress all memories of the encounter. Mortals with Willpower ratings between 3 and 7 can hold their ground and interact with you, but suffer a penalty of one die on all actions. Those rare individuals with a Willpower rating of 8 or more are severely discomfited by your presence, but may act normally. You cannot turn off your aura of fear, and it has no effect on supernatural beings, including ghouls, Lupines and their kin, and mages (although the aura affects the Blessed normally). Only vampires whose bodies are unnaturally twisted as a result of their clan or Flaws may purchase this Merit.

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 one, although this Merit can never reduce the difficulty of any roll below 4. Characters may only purchase this Merit once and gain no benefit when using Discipline techniques.

Guardian Angel (6-pt. Merit)

Some supernatural force watches over you and protects you from harm. You have no idea who or what it is or why it watches over you — in fact, you may not even know your guardian exists at all. However, in times of great need, peculiar circumstances defend you from harm. You have no control over this Merit and your protector cannot save you from your own recklessness. The Storyteller should decide why you are being watched and by what, keeping in mind your road and background. An actual angel is unlikely to intervene on behalf of an adherent to the Road of Sin, although a devilish thaumaturge might well have a demon or other malevolent entity looking out for him.

True Vampire (6-pt. Merit)

Unlike other Gargoyles, you are no mere construct of thaumaturgy. The Curse of Caine runs strong in your veins, with all its blessings and banes. If the Tremere ever discover your aberration, you will likely spend the rest of your brief and miserable unlife as a research subject. As a true vampire, you can sire childer, although they will be “normal” Gargoyles unless they also possess this Merit. Additionally, you must purchase Disciplines instead of Gargoyle powers. Your clan Disciplines are Flight (see **Dark Ages Storytellers Companion** p. 50), Fortitude and Potence. You may still have Gargoyle rituals cast on you, and may spend Discipline points at character creation to begin play with them and experience to gain them in play. Only Gargoyles may purchase this Merit.

Beast in the Mirror (1- or 2-pt. Flaw)

Whenever you stare into a reflective surface, you see your Beast leering back at you. If this horror is visible to you alone, this Flaw is worth only one point. If mirrors betray your monstrous nature to everyone, this Flaw is worth two points. Even at the one-point intensity, magi and other gifted souls may occasionally glimpse your true nature for a moment. Even ordinary mortals can sense there is something faintly wrong with you, adding +1 to the difficulty of most Social rolls if they have ever seen your reflection.

Uncanny (1- to 5-point Flaw)

The very opposite of Arcane, you are too strange or disturbing to forget. You may have distinguishing features or a mystical aura, but the effect is the same: Anyone trying to locate you through Investigation receives one extra die per point invested in this Flaw.



Fortunately, Uncanny does not interfere with active Stealth attempts. However, you always stand out from a crowd and cannot hide through anonymity. Even characters with Obfuscate must contend with their noticeable mien, although extra successes on Obfuscate rolls can temporarily cancel Uncanny dice on a one-for-one basis.

Killed by Staking (2- or 5-pt. Flaw)

Like vampires of legend, a wooden stake through your heart can destroy you outright. This Flaw is worth two points if a stake must be carved from a specific type of wood, such as ash or rowan to inflict Final Death. If any wooden stake can kill you, this Flaw is worth five points. Vampires with this Flaw do not know of their vulnerability (obviously).

Mystical Aura (2-pt. Flaw)

Your radiate unnatural power. Perhaps you were a magus in life, unwisely fed from one of the Fair Folk or studied the twisted sorcery of the Tremere. All attempts to sense magic on and around you are at -2 difficulty. Your halo always shows the shimmer of magic use to Soulsight and similar powers, provided

that the observer rolls at least one success. Assamites of the sorcerer caste cannot take this Flaw.

Restricted Diet (2-pt. Flaw)

Unlike other Cainites, you derive no nourishment from the stale blood of animals. Only the blood of mortals and other vampires can sustain your unlife. This Flaw eventually manifests in most vampires as they age, a prelude to the cannibalistic Thirst of Caine.

False Amaranth (3-pt. Flaw)

Your halo always shows the blackened marks of Amaranth, even if you have never committed diablerie. Perhaps your sire was a habitual diablerist, or perhaps, in the throes of frenzy, you almost committed the foul act yourself. Assamites of the warrior caste cannot take this Flaw.

Soul Eater (4-pt. Flaw)

Your Beast hungers for more than blood. Whenever you feed, you steal one Willpower point from your victim for every three blood points taken. Unfortunately, your parasitic soul cannot replenish itself by

any other means. You cannot regain Willpower by fulfilling your Nature, resting or any other natural method. Worse still, you must spend one Willpower point each night upon awakening or lose a dot of permanent Willpower. If your permanent Willpower ever drops to zero, you suffer Final Death, your body crumbling away to ash as the your parasitic soul feeds upon itself. Characters with this Flaw do not have to spend Willpower in torpor.

New Gargoyle Powers

The following powers may be purchased by Gargoyles at character creation by allocating Discipline dots. Learning powers in play costs 10 experience points per point. Full information and rules for Gargoyle powers appear on page 49 of the **Dark Ages Storytellers Companion**. Non-Gargoyles may not acquire these powers, although other monsters created through Thaumaturgy might.

- **Eyes of the Beast (1 point):** The character's monstrous eyes smolder a dull red, permanently granting the effects of the Protean power Witness of Darkness.

- **Prehensile Tail (1 point):** The character grows a long muscular tail that can flex and coil like a snake. The tail acts as a rudder in flight, reducing the difficulty of aerial maneuvers by one. In addition, the Gargoyle may use her tail to strike or grapple opponents, inflicting an

additional die of damage. The tail can also support the Gargoyle's hanging weight and hold objects, although it is not dexterous enough to wield weapons.

- **Celerity (2 points per dot):** The Gargoyle's undead muscles and sinews grow taut like bowstrings, allowing bursts of unnatural speed as if the character possessed the Celerity Discipline. This power may be purchased as many times as a character's generation maximum permits, although Gargoyles cannot have a Celerity rating greater than their Dexterity.

- **Fire Breath (3 points):** The Gargoyle gains the ability to vomit alchemically tainted blood as goutts of burning acid. Each blast requires one blood point, and the character can only use this power every other turn. Hitting targets with the fiery acid stream requires a successful Dexterity + Athletics roll (difficulty 6). A botch means the character accidentally swallows the blazing ichor, suffering three levels of unsoakable aggravated damage. Each blast inflicts three dice of aggravated damage, plus extra successes obtained on the attack roll as normal. The stream has a maximum range of twice the character's Stamina in yards. Burning acid can ignite flammable objects.

- **Regeneration (3 points):** The character does not need rest to regenerate and may freely spend blood for healing regardless of exertion. In addition, the Gargoyle may heal *all* levels of bashing damage by spending a single blood point. Lethal and aggravated damage still requires the usual blood expenditure.







CHAPTER FIVE: THOSE WHO HUNT THE NIGHT

Every man is like the company he is wont to keep.
—Euripides

They lurk on the fringes, rarely welcome in High Clan courts. They feed from the dregs of humanity, leaving choicer prey for their so-called betters. They include monsters, madmen, thieves, hunters and foreigners, regarded with casual disdain by the undead lords of Europe, consigned to faceless anonymity.

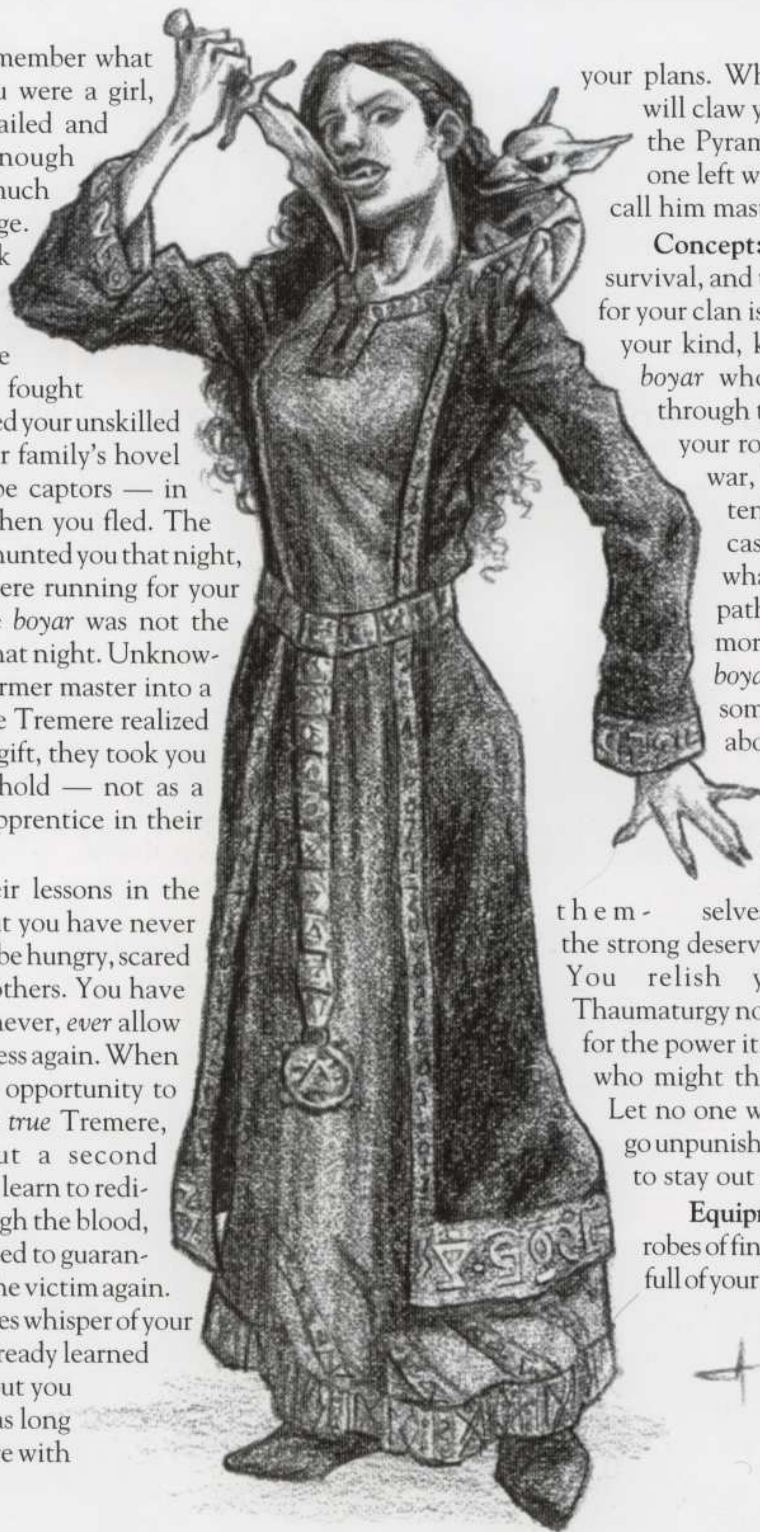
But the members of the Low Clans are far from faceless. Highly diverse, they may be princes or beggars, merchants, warriors or priests; numerous and widely spread, they survive where the first cursed fear to tread. As individuals or as part of a larger group, members of the Low Clans play their own parts in the Dark Medieval night — and sometimes even dare to dream of greater things.

CIVILIZED MONSTER

Don't get in my way. That's the only warning you'll get; I suggest you heed it.

Prelude: You remember what it was like when you were a girl, when the harvests failed and there was barely enough grain to pay the lord, much less feed your village. The *boyar's* men took all they found, and tried to take you as well to "make up the difference," but you fought back. The fire answered your unskilled call, and you left your family's hovel — and your would-be captors — in flames behind you when you fled. The *boyar* and his hounds hunted you that night, and you knew you were running for your life. Fortunately, the *boyar* was not the only *vampyr* abroad that night. Unknowingly, you led your former master into a deadly trap; when the Tremere realized the potential of your gift, they took you back to their stronghold — not as a prisoner, but as an apprentice in their sorcerous arts.

You took to their lessons in the magical art gladly, but you have never forgotten what it is to be hungry, scared and at the mercy of others. You have vowed that you will never, *ever* allow yourself to be so helpless again. When you were offered the opportunity to join the ranks of the *true* Tremere, you agreed without a second thought. Now, as you learn to redirect your power through the blood, you have what you need to guarantee you will never be the victim again. Your fellow apprentices whisper of your ambition and have already learned to fear your temper, but you pay them little heed as long as they do not interfere with



your plans. Whatever it takes, you will claw your way to the top of the Pyramid, until there is no one left who dares demand you call him master.

Concept: You are a student of survival, and the stakes are high — for your clan is at war with others of your kind, kinsmen of the cruel *boyar* who once hunted you through the night. You accept your role as a soldier in this war, but you have no intention of becoming a casualty — no matter what the cost. That your path is making you act more and more like the *boyars* you despise is not something that you think about... often.

Roleplaying

Hints: Mercy is a false virtue invented by the weak to save themselves from the strong; only the strong deserve the spoils of unlife. You relish your training in Thaumaturgy not for its own sake, but for the power it gives you over others who might threaten your security. Let no one who has thwarted you go unpunished, and they will learn to stay out of your way.

Equipment: Thaumaturgical robes of fine fabric, a locked chest full of your books, well-used ritual dagger, and a homunculus created from your own flesh.

Dark Ages VAMPIRE

Name: _____ Nature: **Survivor** Generation: **10th**
 Player: _____ Demeanor: **Autocrat** Concept: **Civilized Monster**
 Chronicle: _____ Clan: **Tremere** 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		
Auspex	●○○○○○○○	Allies	●○○○○○○○	Conscience/Conviction			●●●●○	
Dominate	●●○○○○○○○	Generation	●●○○○○○○○	Self-Control/Instinct			●●●●○	
Thaumaturgy	●○○○○○○○	Herd	●○○○○○○○	Courage			●●●○○	
_____	○○○○○○○○○	Mentor	●○○○○○○○					
_____	○○○○○○○○○	Resources	●○○○○○○○					

Other Traits

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Road

Beast (Path of the Grey Hunter)

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Aura: **Menace** (1)

Willpower

●●●●●●●○○○

□□□□□□□□□□

Blood Pool

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Health

Bruised

Hurt -1

Injured -1

Wounded -2

Mauled -2

Crippled -5

Incapacitated

Weakness

Partial Blood Oath

Experience

LUPETTO DI GUBBIO

If it is God's will that I be a martyr to His holy cause,
then your Beast holds no terror for me.

Prelude: You were not particularly pious growing up; the sword held more allure for you than the cross, and as the second son of a knight you had to work hard to avoid being sent to the Church. As a poor knight, the prospect of riches in the Holy Land and the decadent East beckoned to you, and so you took the cross to seek your fortune. But while looting a church in burning Constantinople, your fate took another turn. A powerful hand ripped your booty out of your hands and threw you against a wall; you remember terror and then exquisite pleasure as the creature sank his fangs into your throat and drained your miserable life away. The last thing you remember is the fiery draught he forced down your throat and his last words, in accented French: "May the Devil take you all!"

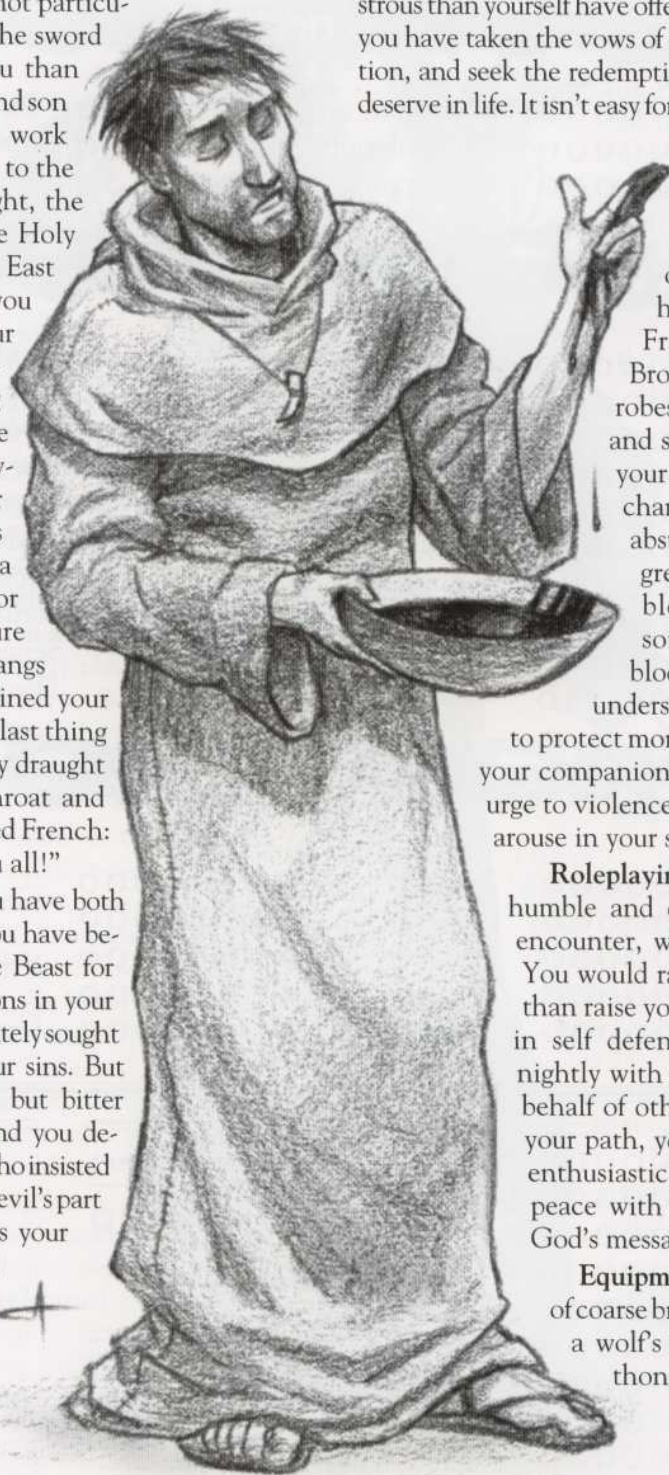
Since that night, you have both hated and feared what you have become. You recognize the Beast for what it is, the devil's talons in your soul; and you have desperately sought God's forgiveness for your sins. But the Holy Eucharist was but bitter ashes on your tongue, and you despaired at Cainite priests who insisted your role was to play the devil's part and accept damnation as your due. Only the words of a wizened, twisted leper monk even more mon-

strous than yourself have offered you any hope — and so you have taken the vows of peace, poverty and abstinence, and seek the redemption in undeath you did not deserve in life. It isn't easy for a former warrior to eschew the training of a lifetime, but it may be your only chance at salvation.

Concept: You are one of a small brotherhood who has taken up the offer St. Francis himself made to Brother Wolf. You wear plain robes, feed only from animals, and seek to purge the Beast in your soul through prayer and charity. Most of all, you must abstain from indulging its two greatest desires: for mortal blood, and for violence, something others of your blood cannot even begin to understand. You feel compelled to protect mortals from the bloodlusts of your companions, but must also resist the urge to violence that such noble impulses arouse in your soul.

Roleplaying Hints: Do no harm; be humble and of good spirit to all you encounter, whether living or undead. You would rather accept injury rather than raise your hand in violence, even in self defense; though you struggle nightly with your urge to do battle on behalf of others. As a new convert to your path, you may sometimes be too enthusiastic in sharing your newfound peace with others not yet ready for God's message of redemption.

Equipment: A plain robe and hood of coarse brown wool, a begging bowl, a wolf's fang strung on a leather thong.



Dark Ages VAMPIRE™

Name:

Nature: Defender

Generation: 10th

Player:

Demeanor: Penitent

Concept: Lupetto Di Gubbio

Chronicle:

Clan: Gangrel

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	
Animalism	●●●●●●●●	Contacts	●●●●●●●●	Conscience/Conviction	●●●●●●
Fortitude	●●●●●●●●	Generation	●●●●●●●●	Self-Control/Instinct	●●●●●●
Protean	●●●●●●●●	Mentor	●●●●●●●●	Courage	●●●●●●
	●●●●●●●●		●●●●●●●●		
	●●●●●●●●		●●●●●●●●		

Other Traits

_____	○○○○○○○○
_____	○○○○○○○○
_____	○○○○○○○○
_____	○○○○○○○○
_____	○○○○○○○○
_____	○○○○○○○○
_____	○○○○○○○○
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_____	○○○○○○○○
_____	○○○○○○○○

Road Heaven

●●●●●●●●○

Aura: Holiness (1)

Willpower

●●●●●●●●○○

Blood Pool

□□□□□□□□□□

□□□□□□□□□□

□□□□□□□□□□

Health

Bruised		□
Hurt	-1	□
Injured	-1	□
Wounded	-2	□
Mauled	-2	□
Crippled	-5	□
Incapacitated		□

Weakness

Gain an animal feature after frenzy Experience

THE COURT JESTER

Such generosity is rare in a Ventrue, my lord.
Why, if you're not careful, you'll ruin your reputation!

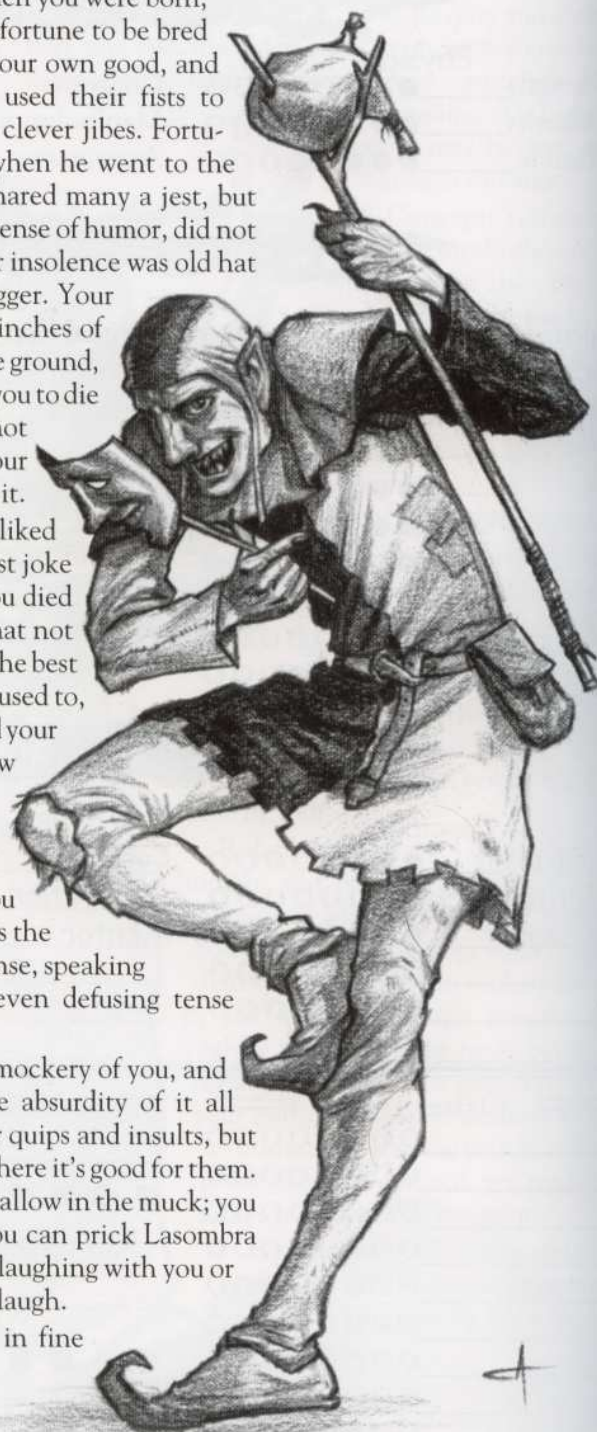
Background: God played his first joke on you when you were born, a lord's son (or so your mother claimed) with the misfortune to be bred in a peasant womb. You were always too smart for your own good, and frequently the victim of bigger village boys who used their fists to compensate for their lack of wits in answering your clever jibes. Fortunately the lord's true son took a fancy to you, and when he went to the University, he took you along as his servant. You shared many a jest, but regrettably some of his peers, highborn brats with no sense of humor, did not find your wit so amusing. While being beaten for your insolence was old hat to you, one of the bastards actually dared draw a dagger. Your master came to your defense, but not before several inches of fine steel had pierced your ribs. You fell bleeding to the ground, and both your assailants and your master fled, leaving you to die alone. Lying there on the muddy street, you could not resist the opportunity to make one last wry joke at your own expense, even though no one was there to hear it.

But as it happened, someone did hear, and she liked your *sangue-froid*, even if God did not. It was God's last joke on you, that the woman who cradled your body as you died and gave you her blood also bequeathed you a face that not even Grendel's mother could love. Still, you've made the best of it. You can take beatings now even better than you used to, and the horror of your new existence has but sharpened your wit and your tongue. It's also given you a whole new audience, as those who find eternity stretching before them have an even greater desire to be amused... preferably at someone else's expense.

Concept: You are still a smartass at heart, and you serve an important function in your patron's court. As the prince's fool, you use humor as both weapon and defense, speaking the truth no one else dares to utter, sometimes even defusing tense situations with your self-disparaging wit.

Roleplaying Hints: Both life and death made a mockery of you, and you return the favor in full measure, revealing the absurdity of it all wherever you turn. You hide behind a mask of clever quips and insults, but sometimes your jokes can sting the high and mighty where it's good for them. Let your ghastly brethren scuttle in the shadows and wallow in the muck; you prefer the comforts of your patron's haven, where you can prick Lasombra pride and get away with it. It doesn't matter if they're laughing with you or at you, as long as you have the power to make them laugh.

Equipment: A stained tunic of jester's motley in fine velvet, a mask with a smiling face, a pig's bladder on a stick.



Dark Ages VAMPIRE

Name:

Nature: Judge

Generation: 11th

Player:

Demeanor: Jester

Concept: Court Jester

Chronicle:

Clan: Nosferatu

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	
Animalism	●○○○○○○○	Contacts	●○○○○○○○	Conscience/Conviction	●●●○○○
Obfuscate	●●○○○○○○	Generation	●○○○○○○○	Self-Control/Instinct	●●●○○○
Potence	●○○○○○○○	Herd	●○○○○○○○	Courage	●●●○○○
	○○○○○○○○	Influence	●○○○○○○○		
	○○○○○○○○	Mentor	●●●○○○○○		

Other Traits	○○○○○○○○	Road	○○○○○○○○	Health	
	○○○○○○○○	Humanity	●●●●●●○○○	Bruised	<input type="checkbox"/>
	○○○○○○○○			Hurt	-1 <input type="checkbox"/>
	○○○○○○○○	Aura: Normalcy ()		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	
	○○○○○○○○			Appearance rating of zero	
	○○○○○○○○			Experience	

INCESTUOUS TWIN

When next you see my noble brother, will you give him this letter? Tell him I shall count the nights until he answers it again...

Prelude: For some reason, you never felt totally at ease in your own flesh; you often believed yourself to be born with the wrong body, for you never found contentment in the duties and responsibilities assigned to your sex. Eschewing marriage as unpalatable to your nature, you sought the seclusion of an abbey, still struggling with your own calling. And indeed it was there, in the scriptorium late at night, that you had a visitation from one of God's own angels. He freed you from your imprisonment and separated the two halves of your soul. The angel alone could understand your long torment, for you were born one of twins — save that only one babe survived, and thus became a vessel for both souls.

Now you share your body in turn, taking the identity of brother or sister as it suits you, each devoted to the other though fated now to be forever apart. As the maiden, you delight in fine clothes, sweet music and the poetry of the troubadours; you deal well and fairly with all, but save your true passions for your absent brother. You write to him whenever you can, telling him of all that has befallen you and sharing all the secret longings of your heart, begging his forgiveness for your sin. As the knight, you wear armor and wield a sword in your beloved's honor, seeking ever to win her favor — and yet you fear to confess the great sin in your heart, for

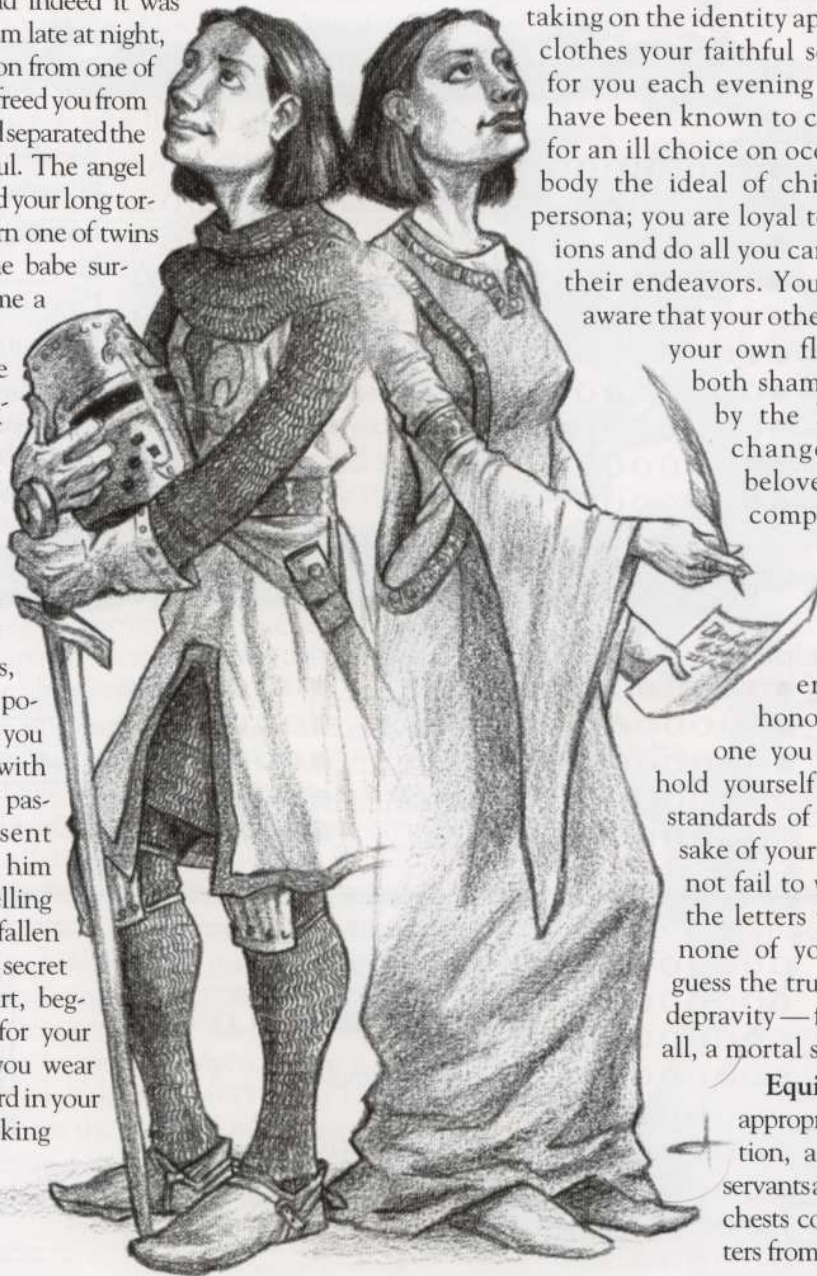
your desire for your sister is condemned by God. So you delight in her letters, and respond in kind, but know you may never dare meet the one you most adore, for surely then your souls would both burn in Hell...

Concept: You alternate between the personalities of the maiden and the knight errant, taking on the identity appropriate to the clothes your faithful servant puts out for you each evening — though you have been known to chide him or her for an ill choice on occasion. You embody the ideal of chivalry in either persona; you are loyal to your companions and do all you can to aid them in their endeavors. You are totally unaware that your other identity shares your own flesh — you are both shamed and aroused by the letters you exchange with your beloved, and pray your companions do not realize your terrible secret.

Roleplaying

Hints: Do everything to the honor and glory of the one you love from afar; hold yourself to the highest standards of chivalry for the sake of your beloved, and do not fail to write, or cherish the letters you receive. Let none of your companions guess the true depths of your depravity — for incest is, after all, a mortal sin.

Equipment: Clothes appropriate to your station, a fine horse, two servants and a pair of locked chests containing the letters from your beloved.



Dark Ages VAMPIRE

Name:

Nature: **Penitent**

Generation: **12th**

Player:

Demeanor: **Caretaker**

Concept: **Incestuous Twin**

Chronicle:

Clan: **Malkavian**

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	
Auspex	●●○○○○○○○	Domain	●●○○○○○○○	Conscience/Conviction	●●●○○○
Dementation	●○○○○○○○	Herd	●○○○○○○○	Self-Control/Instinct	●●●○○○
Obfuscate	●○○○○○○○	Resources	●●○○○○○○○	Courage	●●●○○○
	○○○○○○○○○	Retainers	●●○○○○○○○		
	○○○○○○○○○		○○○○○○○○○		

Other Traits	Road Kings	Health
○○○○○○○○○	●●●●●●○○○	Bruised <input type="checkbox"/>
○○○○○○○○○		Hurt -1 <input type="checkbox"/>
○○○○○○○○○	Aura: Command (0)	Injured -1 <input type="checkbox"/>
○○○○○○○○○		Wounded -2 <input type="checkbox"/>
○○○○○○○○○	Willpower	Mauled -2 <input type="checkbox"/>
○○○○○○○○○	●●●●●●○○○	Crippled -5 <input type="checkbox"/>
○○○○○○○○○	<input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/>	Incapacitated <input type="checkbox"/>
○○○○○○○○○	Blood Pool	Weakness
○○○○○○○○○	<input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/>	Start play with one derangement
○○○○○○○○○	<input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/>	Experience
○○○○○○○○○		

FURORE BITCH

Give it to me! NOW!

Prelude: You grew up in an inn, daughter of a serving woman, father unknown. From earliest childhood, your bed was a sooty patch of floor by the kitchen hearth; your work lasted from dawn until well after sunset, seven days a week. You scoured pots, chopped vegetables, turned the spit and tried to avoid the innkeeper's groping hands, struggling to smother the anger in your heart. When you were older, you earned a few extra pennies here and there servicing guests behind the stable. One night the bastard you were with refused to pay you, and it was the last straw — you seized his dagger and slashed his lying throat.

The next moments passed in a blur: you remember the shape of a man bending over the corpse, drinking greedily from the bloody throat. But when you turned to flee, he caught you, and to ensure your silence he made you like himself, forever cold and hungry for the taste of life you no longer had.

You've been hungry ever since.

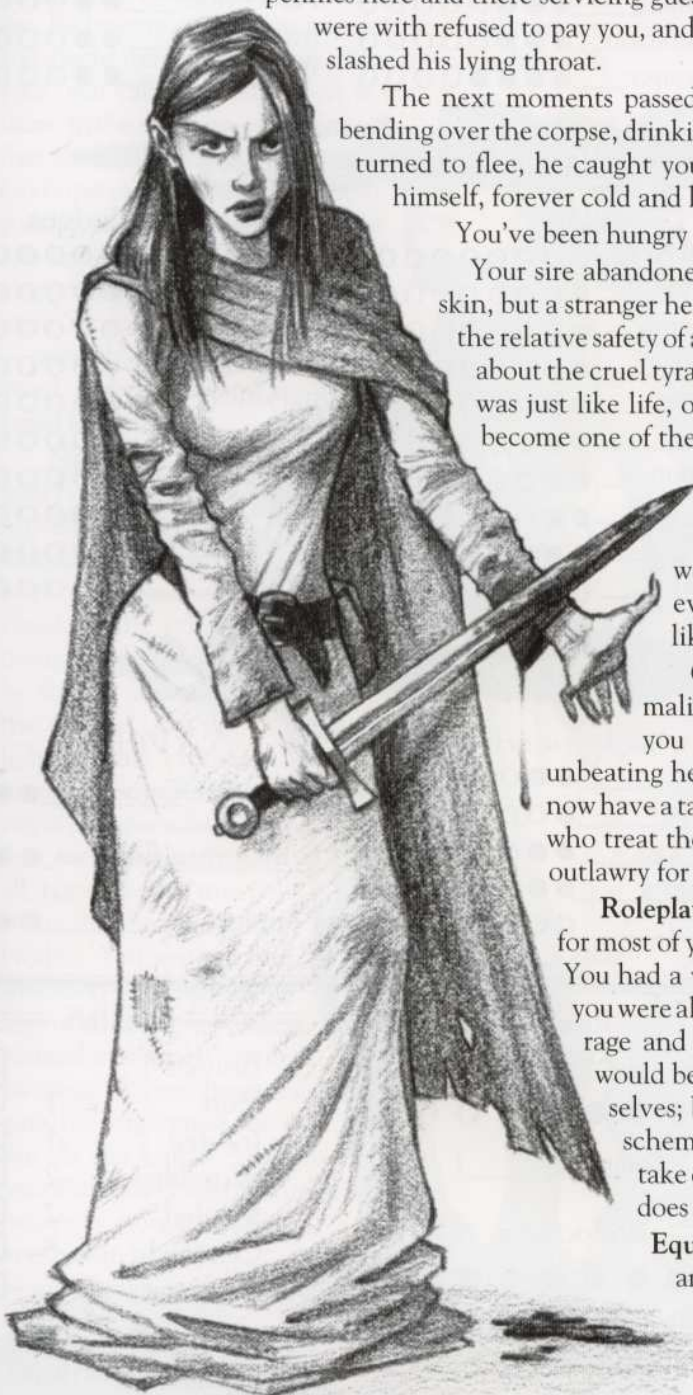
Your sire abandoned you to the prince's judgment to save his own skin, but a stranger helped you hide, evade pursuit, and brought you to the relative safety of a Furore band. There you listened as they told you about the cruel tyrannies of the elders, and you realized that undeath was just like life, only worse. The Furores offered you a chance to become one of them, to share in the booty looted from the lairs of

princes and gorge yourself on elder blood, and you accepted wholeheartedly. It may be the way of the world for the powerful to steal from the weak; but sometimes, if the weak band together, even the powerful can learn about fear and what it's like to cower in the dark.

Concept: One of the wretched poor turned by malicious chance into one of the wretched undead, you hold the anger of a lifetime and more in your unbeating heart. As one of the dreaded, elusive Furores, you now have a target for that anger — the proud and selfish elders, who treat their own children like cattle and sentenced you to outlawry for merely existing.

Roleplaying Hints: You've been hungry and ill-treated for most of your short existence, but that's going to end now. You had a voracious appetite for comfort and plenty when you were alive, but that appetite is nothing compared to your rage and hunger now. Were you an elder yourself, you would be even more petty and cruel than they are themselves; but since you lack the power to truly enact your schemes, you hate them for what you do not have, and take out your pique on any beast or mortal servant who does not carry out your every command.

Equipment: The clothes on your back, a sword, horse and fur-lined cloak stolen from a passing mortal lord, and a secret hoard of silks, furs, jewels and other riches hidden in a cave.



Dark Ages VAMPIRE

Name:

Nature: Rebel

Generation: 10th

Player:

Demeanor: Survivor

Concept: Furore Bitch

Chronicle:

Clan: Ravnos

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		
Animalism	●○○○○○○○○○	Allies	●○○○○○○○○○	Conscience/Conviction	●●●○○○			
Chimerstry	●●○○○○○○○	Contacts	●○○○○○○○○○	Self-Control/Instinct	●●●●○○			
Fortitude	●○○○○○○○○○	Generation	●●○○○○○○○	Courage	●●●○○○			
	○○○○○○○○○	Mentor	●○○○○○○○○○					
	○○○○○○○○○	Resources	●●○○○○○○○					

Other Traits

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Road Sin

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Aura: Seduction (0)

Willpower

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Blood Pool

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Health

Bruised

Hurt -1

Injured -1

Wounded -2

Mauled -2

Crippled -5

Incapacitated

Weakness

Addicted to Sin

Experience

Notables

Members of the Low Clans rarely attain prominent positions in the Cainite social order, but a number of individuals, either through their own abilities and perseverance, or by the greatest of good fortune, have still made names for themselves. Sometimes a name is spoken in reverence, sometimes in a fearful whisper, and sometimes in a bitter hiss — but if it is known, then that individual is already elevated to higher status than the vast majority of his clanmates and peers.

The following are a few of the Cainites of the Low Clans whose names are known far beyond their immediate sphere of influence and who are held up as examples to those of their kin who desire to rise above their assigned station under High Clan heels.

Fatima al-Jaqadi

6th generation Assamite, childe of Thetmes, walker on the Road of Blood

Embrace: AD 1102

Apparent Age: mid-20s



A daughter in a family of devout Moorish warriors, Fatima could not bear to stand demurely by or huddle in fear when the barbaric Crusaders invaded her homeland. Determined to make a difference even as a woman, she disguised herself as a camp follower and willingly sacrificed her virtue in order to lure lustful infidels away from their fellows into an ambush, or slit the throats of drunken knights as they slept. She next persuaded a cousin to teach her the use of a sword and bow, and in the

waning days of the First Crusade, fought openly alongside the defenders of Allah.

Her passion and courage did not go unnoticed; indeed, she unintentionally sparked a spirited debate in the halls of Alamut, for while it was not the custom of the warrior caste to Embrace women, this girl had already proven herself to have the heart of a warrior. It was Thetmes who ended the debate: Thetmes the Nubian, Master of the Web of Knives, who said simply, "She is worthy," and went himself to offer her the Blood of Haqim. Fatima accepted, and her education in the arts of the warrior and assassin began in earnest. Her training was not easy, for her sire's standards were high, and there were many in the clan who would have rejoiced to see her fail for trying to do the work of a man. But their doubts only strengthened her resolve, and she worked even harder, determined to win their respect — and by the time she earned the knives of the *fid'ai*, she had.

In the past century, Fatima has faithfully served both Allah and her clan, acting as Alamut's eyes and its most silent knife, often taking advantage of those who dismiss her as a threat because of her sex. More recently, she has been trusted to oversee the work of other warriors as well, particularly in dealing with the threat of the Crusaders, an assignment for which Fatima needs little additional motivation. If ever her resolve falters, she need only remember the devastation and death wrought by the infidels she witnessed in her breathing days, and her determination is born anew.

Andreas Aegyptus Ankhesenaten, Merchant to Princes

11th generation Follower of Set, childe of Sabine, walker on the Road of the Serpent

Embrace: AD 539

Apparent Age: late 30s

The son of a merchant in Palestine, Andreas was a Christian priest whose Monophysite sect was declared heretical by the Byzantine Church. To escape persecution, Andreas fled to Egypt, finally settling in a small village on the southern reaches of the Nile. Here he discovered many of his parishioners had fallen away from the Christian faith, turning to the old gods, including Set-Asclepius. At first he began his discussions with the pagan priestess to learn what lured good Christians away from salvation. But he found himself fascinated by a dark god who did not suffer his priests to be slaughtered over disagreements in doctrine, and who defended his people instead of



demanding they love the ones who murdered them. So persuaded, he turned his back on his Christian faith, and gave his fealty once and for all to Set. Intelligent and serious, he learned quickly, mastering ancient philosophies and rites, and the language and hieroglyphs of a civilization long dead.

Despite his best efforts, his teacher never forgave him his past allegiance; she had been more interested in turning him away from his faith than bringing him into the true priesthood of Set. When one of the clan elders, impressed with the studious young acolyte, directed that Andreas should be granted the gift of the Dark Waters and made one of the Blessed, she had no choice but to obey. But before Set, she named him Ankhesenaten — *He-lives-for-the-Sun-God* — as a constant (and all but blasphemous) reminder of his unorthodox origins and the vocation he had left behind.

Even in the face of his sire's disdain, Andreas has prospered in the service of the Lord of Storms, faithfully serving the will of the elders in Thebes as both priest and merchant-prince. Known by the name Andreas Aegyptus, or Andrew of Egypt, he manages a trading empire across Europe and the Byzantine east; his reputation for unimpeachable service and fair dealing is known to Cainites from Antioch to London. His ships ply the waters of the Mediterranean, his caravans travel to all corners of Europe and the Levant, and his face is known in many a Cainite court. To his mortal flock who travel with him as employees and herd, he is both divine master and kindly priest, and he guards them from other undead like an avenging lion. Unlike many of his Egyptian kin, he does not despise the European Setites, many

of whom were Embraced based on little more than their red hair, and whose knowledge of the ways of Set is often faulty — for if an apostate Coptic priest can learn to serve the Dark God, then perhaps, with proper teaching, so can they.

Jean-Batiste de Montrond, Serpent of Paris

9th generation Follower of Set, childe of Makareta-sherit, walker on the Road of Sin

Embrace: AD 1190

Apparent Age: mid-20s

Jean-Batiste claims he was drunk when he took the cross — it's the only excuse he can give for his momentary bout of religious fervor. Unfortunately, there were witnesses, and his father threatened to disinherit him if he didn't carry out his oath. While that inheritance wasn't much, he certainly didn't want to see it go to some self-righteous cousin or worse, to the Church. So girded only with the trappings of a poor country knight and his wits, he found himself en route to the Holy Land in the service of the Count de Champagne.



He got as far as Messina, Sicily, when the Crusader armies had stopped for the winter. On a survey of local brothels, Jean-Batiste met an enchanting woman who showed the young knight a few new vices he was not yet acquainted with, marveled at his red hair, and spoke to him about the delights of her own pagan faith, where nothing truly pleasurable was ever deemed a sin. This sounded like a comfortable way to spend a winter (and the Pope *had* promised that

anyone who went on Crusade would have his sins blotted out), so Jean-Batiste was easily persuaded to come to a few pagan orgies and swear service to a dark god. At first he told himself that he was still protected by the cross on his tunic. After a few weeks, he left the tunic and the vow it represented behind in his tent. Eventually the Crusade proceeded on to the Holy Land without him, and Jean-Batiste gave his life and blood to Set.

Unfortunately, with the Crusaders gone, other forces were free to act: The Setites of Messina came under attack by a pair of devil Assamites, hired by local Cainites to “clean the streets” of competition. Jean-Batiste and one of his broodmates barely escaped with their unlives, but his sire perished as the temple burned to the ground.

Jean-Batiste returned to Paris, and with the aid of a few new converts made (or Embraced) along the way, has set up his own temple and is now serving the cause of pleasure and indulgence among the local Cainites, willingly catering to their basest desires in the cause of Set. Unfortunately, his interpretation of Set’s mandates is based more on his own desires and ambitions than real knowledge of ancient Egyptian lore; but what he doesn’t have in authenticity, he more than makes up for in sheer creativity. Whether he would bow his head to a true teacher of Set’s will remains to be seen.

Aethelwulf, Warlord of Avalon

7th generation Gangrel, childe of Caius Tadius Lupus, also called Rock-born’s Widowmaker, walker on the Road of Kings

Embrace: AD 516

Apparent Age: mid-40s

Aethelwulf was a Saxon thane, who was as known for his hospitality to guests as his ferocity in battle. Eager for tales of other lands, he entertained many travelers, and traveled himself whenever he could. Such opportunities were few, however, as the Saxons fought the native British and their warlord Arturos. Aethelwulf’s greatest battle was also his last. As he lay dying on the field of battle, nightfall came, and with it the wolves. One in particular chose Aethelwulf for its prey... and brought the Saxon over into unlife.

Aethelwulf arose from the battlefield and satisfied his hunger on what few survivors remained. Horrified at what he had done, he then fled into the wilderness, away from his homeland and family. Cunning and tough, he managed to survive, but with every hunt, his self-control weakened. By the time his



sire caught up with him, he was fast losing his soul to the Beast.

Caius Tadius Lupus was a former Roman legionnaire, and a devotee of the cult of Mithras. He began instructing Aethelwulf on the Road of Kings, and eventually initiated him into the cult, in preparation for the god’s return. Aethelwulf devoted himself to the disciplines and teachings of Mithraism, steadily rising in rank. He also traveled, sometimes with other Cainites and sometimes alone, indulging his curiosity about other lands and people, not only in England, but to Byzantium, Outremer, the dark forests of central Europe and the city-states of Italy. His attempts to spread belief in Mithras found few listeners, but he did not abandon his new faith. He returned after many years to England, seeking what few of the cult remained, but found none — there was now a Christian church in his village, and the old *mithraem* in London was cold and empty as a tomb.

Not one for solitude, Aethelwulf served a number of Cainite lords over the next few centuries, particularly against the incursions of Danish vampires seeking to claw out their own domains in English earth. Welcomed when his martial skills were needed, he would later often come in conflict with ambitious Ventrue and Lasombra who used his steady refusal of Christianity against him, and be forced to move on. By the time the Normans arrived, with the Triumvirate in their wake, Aethelwulf had retreated to his last haven: Chester, the domain of Marcus Veras, one of the few Cainites who shared the old Saxon’s faith. There they prepared to defend themselves against the invaders, and in the shadowy depths of the *mithraem*,

enacted one last ritual to honor the god... and this time, Mithras answered.

The return of Mithras reaffirmed Aethelwulf's stubborn faith; he immediately pledged his eternal service, and Mithras accepted it (which annoyed Veras, who felt the Gangrel should have remained his vassal and served Mithras through him). Aethelwulf has since proven his value and loyalty many times over; the fact that Mithras walks in the body of a Cainite does not lessen his faith in the prince's ultimate divinity.

Aethelwulf is tall and solid as an oak, with tangled reddish hair and beard. His simple taste in clothes and weaponry belies his questing intellect and tactical genius; as the head of the small security force the prince is permitted to maintain, he does not hesitate to remind rebellious Barons or foolish neonates that one battle-seasoned Gangrel is easily worth three Ventrue.

Aiste, Veela Priestess of Veles

8th generation Gangrel, childe of Tautginas, walker on the Road of the Beast

Embrace: AD 1044

Apparent Age: mid-40s



To travel east along the shores of the Baltic is to pass into a land where the name of Christ is scarcely known, and the tribal peoples dwelling there call upon their old pagan gods. To such a tribe was born the woman called Aiste, who grew up, married, bore and raised children; and when her husband was slain in

battle, she gave herself to the service of Veles. She grew wise and strong in the god's service, and skilled at the hunt. During one hunt she strayed further than was her usual wont, and when night fell, she found she was no longer the hunter, but the prey. A great wolf stalked her in the darkness, never losing her trail, able to climb after her when she sought shelter in the trees, impervious even to her arrows. All night it hunted her, letting her escape from its jaws only to pursue her again. When the first pale light began to touch the eastern sky, it caught up to her once again, and this time did not hold back its attack. She fought back, but it was far stronger. But before it took her life, it changed form — a man dressed in leather and fur stood over her, bearing the antlers of a stag on his head, and the fangs of the wolf. "You have been chosen," he told her. "Veles calls on you to serve him beyond death."

Then the god's priest tore out her throat, and brought her into unlife and the ranks of the Veela. For many winters she served Veles, judging the warriors on the battlefield, seeing the proper offerings brought in their season, running with the Wild Hunt, and fighting the god's enemies, both living and undead. More recently, the fight has grown bitter. The Christian Knights of the Sword kill the believers in the old ways; the Tzimisce encroach upon her home territories from the east while the Ventrue invade from the west.

Now the dreaded Teutonic knights, who seek to carve out a Christian Kingdom from her people's flesh, have invaded her lands. In their wake come knights of a different order, bearing a black cross and backed by Ventrue will. In these dark times, the old priest came to Aiste, and as Veles commanded him, granted her his mantle, his title, and his potent blood, so that she might further serve the god's will in the terrible nights of battle to come.

The newly appointed Priestess of Veles knows the battle they fight against these trespassers may well be a losing one, for the knights are strong and her people weak and divided among themselves. Yet fight they must, for Veles is not a god of the weak, and to perish in the defense of one's homeland is the most noble death of all.

Seren, Baroness of Gloucester

9th generation Malkavian, childe of Rhys the Rhymer, walker on the Road of Kings

Embrace: AD 1063

Apparent Age: late 60s



Seren was the wife of a Welsh king, to whom she bore several strong sons. Proud, fierce and highly competent, she ran her husband's household, saw to the defense of their lands when her husband was at war, and advised him on political and domestic matters. But her husband and sons fell in battle with Gruffydd ap Llywelyn of Gwynedd, who then claimed kingship over all of Wales. Bitter with loss and no longer young, Seren retired to an abbey, but sought several times to have the self-styled King of all Wales killed, while her grief and ill health twisted her mind. When a combination of assaults by English and Welsh enemies did at last bring her hated enemy down, she celebrated by calling for a horse and riding out into the winter snows to assume her rightful place again as Queen of Deheubarth.

She did not get far. A Malkavian harpist and poet, Rhys the Rhymer, came upon Seren as she lay dying on the side of the road. Recognizing her from his visits to her husband's court, he gifted her with unlife and the curse of Malkav. Suddenly her mind, once fogged with age and melancholy, grew clear; she knew it was her destiny to rule as her husband and son had done, with her faithful harpist at her side. Rhys did not attempt to argue or rule his new childe; he followed his newly risen lady and did whatever she bade.

A new threat soon appeared on the western horizon — the Norman Marcher barons, followers of William of Normandy. Even worse, on their heels came the three elders known as the Triumvirate, who soon came to dominate Cainite affairs not only in England, but in parts of Wales as well. Recognizing the invaders as a greater threat than even the British, Seren settled in a convent in Gloucester, playing at

being the mad and melancholy Abbess while studying the habits and movements of Roald Snakeeyes, the elder supporting the Marcher lords. Drawing on decades of experience as the wife of a Welsh King, she began making contacts among other disaffected Welsh, British and Saxon Cainites. Her agents reported the movements of Triumvirate forces to Mithras, while she also made sure that any British or Saxon Cainites who might have been a threat to her rule fell prey to enemy fangs. When Roald Snakeeyes himself fell into her hands, she allowed her followers with the greatest grievances to share in his blood, and then presented his head to Mithras himself as a sign of her fealty.

When the fighting was done, Mithras himself appointed Seren Baroness of Gloucester, in return for her loyalty, and because by this time there were no other claimants of rank. Recognizing her madness, however, he also took the trouble to bind her in blood to ensure her continued allegiance.

Seren has proven to be a surprisingly capable administrator, and a charismatic prince. Her madness grips her in cycles that range from periods of frantic activity, where she is suspicious of everyone around her, to bouts of deep melancholy, when she may sleep for a week or more without rising — a weakness her ghouls and loyal sire do their utmost to conceal. In between extremes, however, she is a formidable presence indeed, who has never forgotten she is by rights a queen.

Wiftet the Simple, the Fool of Magdeburg

11th Generation Malkavian, childe of Sister Irmingarda, Walker on the Road of Humanity

Embrace: AD 1185

Apparent Age: early 30s

Wiftet's recollections of his Embrace are hazy at best. He still speaks in awe of the angel who took all the broken pieces of his soul and put them back together like panes of colored glass in a cathedral window. His mortal life appears to be a total mystery. He speaks with the accent of the lowlands of West Friesland, and comprehends a variety of tongues, including some shockingly crude slang. From his love of performing, talent for clever quips and spectacular tumbles, one might guess he was a jongleur even in his breathing days; from the terrible scars he conceals beneath his motley coat, it's apparent that his wit was not always appreciated by those who heard it.

But as to the details of his mortal days, or even his more recent past before he turned up at the gates of



Magdeburg and persuaded Lord Jürgen to take him in, he claims to recall nothing. Indeed, he appears to remember very little even from one night to the next — he's unfailingly tripped on the same step now every night for six years; and often seems surprised when courtiers know the punch line of a joke they've heard him tell a hundred times before, or when an insult delivered for the fifth time this month gets him the same beating as before from its target. He covers his obvious lapses with self-deprecating wit; the epithet "the Simple" is his own, which serves to underscore both his role in Lord Jürgen's court, and his own innate harmlessness.

In truth, it's not that Wiftet doesn't remember past events — it's that the events fail to retain any meaning for him from one night to the next, and so he cannot learn from his experiences. Every evening he awakens to a brand new world, with no real associations between what has happened to him before and what he experiences anew each night. He lives almost solely in the present tense; thus the curse of Malkav shelters him, disconnecting him from his past, so what he doesn't remember cannot come back to haunt him. Unfortunately, there are some things that are not easily forgotten... and those are exactly the memories Wiftet cannot bear to face. Better to focus on the present, and let the little things trip him up on a nightly basis, than acknowledge the terrors of the past; better to let the memories lie in so many broken fragments that they can never be put together again, than to allow them to shatter his semblance of sanity, for down that road lies true madness.

Wiftet is a good natured fellow; short, somewhat round, and surprisingly agile for his build, with a

peasant's broad face, gap-toothed smile and balding pate. In keeping with his position as Jürgen's court fool, he wears a colorful coat of motley, a belled cap, and is always prepared to perform on his master's command — or even without it, as the situation seems to require. He is always accompanied by a little white dog, which he has trained to do tricks and feeds with his own blood. The dog was a gift from a lady of the court whose favor he cherishes — in secret, of course — far more than his own unlife; if nothing else, Wiftet's shattered memory allows him to be very, very good at keeping secrets.

Malachite, Broken Rock of Constantinople

7th generation Nosferatu, childe of Vasilli the Penitent Dog, walker on the Road of Humanity

Embrace: AD 842

Apparent Age: indeterminable

Maleki was a mere priest in Constantinople when a mysterious benefactor who promised to aid his rise in the Church in exchange for his loyalty and service approached him. He accepted, not realizing the cost to his immortal soul — for his benefactor was Magnus, a Lasombra powerful in the Byzantine church. Maleki was bound in blood, and under Magnus' patronage, rose to the rank of bishop before he made his fatal mistake. He dared to disagree with his master in front of witnesses, forgetting the Lasombra's pride. In punishment, Magnus sentenced him to eternal misery by subjecting him to a Nosferatu's leprous Embrace.



Maleki might have indeed spent eternity in misery had it not been for the Toreador Patriarch Michael, who took pity on the suffering ex-priest, and offered him his protection — and his blood. Maleki became Malachite, servant of Michael's great Dream, called the Rock of Constantinople and a respected leader among the Lepers of the East. When the great city fell, and Michael with it, Malachite was devastated. Fleeing the city, he sought long and hard for the source of his last hope, the enigmatic Tzimisce Methuselah known as the Dracon, but learned that Michael's great Dream could not be resurrected — it could only be built anew.

After wandering in Europe on his quest for many years, Malachite has returned to Constantinople, to begin the process of rebuilding his unlife and seeking vengeance against those who destroyed the glory he once knew. Malachite is a pragmatic creature, however, and he knows survival must come before revenge. Humbling himself to accept the low place his blood gives him in Latin eyes, he has already made inroads with the Lasombra prince of the city. But in typical Nosferatu fashion, he has also made alliances with the undead predators of several of the Byzantine successor states, some of whom remember when Malachite was the voice of the Patriarch, and see his desire for revenge as a means for their own advancement. Malachite understands their ambitions, but they serve his own purpose. Acting as their spy in Constantinople, he works to bring about the fall of the Latin Empire — and his own return to prominence.

Zoë, acolyte of Anatole the Prophet

10th generation Ravnos, childe of Gregory the Wonder Maker, walker on the Road of Heaven

Embrace: AD 1204

Apparent Age: mid-teens

Zoë was one of Constantinople's teeming poor when Gregory Lakeritos first found her in his workshop, playing with some of his mechanical creations, animating them with her magical gifts. Recognizing her talent as something extraordinary, the Ravnos tinker adopted her as his ward, teaching her his craft, guiding her to focus and train her prodigious talent, and growing to love her as his own daughter. But fate is rarely kind to mortals who become embroiled in Cainite affairs, and it was not kind to Zoë. Tormented by an ambitious Setite for secrets she did not possess,



Zoë learned about fear; left on her own while her adoptive father pursued the depths of Setite treachery, she became acquainted with loneliness. Then came the terrible night when she learned the cost of provoking even the most gentle of Cainites to fury... and Gregory, appalled at what he had done, brought the dying mortal girl into unlife.

With their home gone in the fires of Constantinople's fall, Gregory and Zoë set off on a long journey across Europe, in the company of other refugees like themselves. At first horrified by the demands of her new existence, Zoë gradually came to forgive Gregory for her Embrace, and began to find a kind of inner peace with herself. But as the caravan of refugees made their way into France, her beloved sire fell into the cruel hands of the Inquisition, and was destroyed without mercy.

Since that time, Zoë has sought revenge, and hated the red-robed monks who murdered the only father she has ever known. Proud and bitter, she has joined forces with the mad Cainite monk called Anatole the Prophet, and travels with him wherever he goes. Together, they enact their own private crusade against both the terrible butchers of the Inquisition, and the blasphemous monsters of the Cainite Heresy. Her sire's agonizing Final Death, coupled with the teachings she has absorbed from Anatole and extremist members of other Road of Heaven cults, have given her faith an Apocalyptic flavor; she is convinced that her unlife will mark a time of purging and testing for Cainites, an apocalypse of which she is fated to be a part.

Jervais bani Tremere, Envoy of Ceoris

7th generation Tremere, childe of Malgorzata, walker on the Road of Sin

Embrace: AD 1102

Apparent Age: mid-30s

Trained as a scribe, a young Jervais was given employment at the chantry of House Tremere in Paris. Here he copied arcane texts in the library; he found himself fascinated by what he read, and even showed a hint of magical talent — but not enough to interest his masters into changing his vocation. When Malgorzata, then a ghoul of Goratrix, visited the chantry, Jervais found himself totally enthralled by her force of personality, and offered himself and his services to her. Seeing a potential in the earnest young scribe the others had missed, Malgorzata took him back with her to Ceoris as her apprentice.

Jervais' captivation for his new mistress spurred him to study hard, and he soon demonstrated a gift for esoteric calculations and the study of the source of magical power known as *vis*. He became a master at finding new sources of *vis* to fuel the magics of his fellow mages, and storing the precious energies for later use; he also used his ability as a political tool, gaining favors owed to himself, his mistress Malgorzata, and her sire, Goratrix. Malgorzata finally Embraced him with Goratrix's approval. Etrius, annoyed that Goratrix had not consulted Tremere before making his decision, accused Goratrix (in Jervais' presence) of deliberately failing to ask Tremere's permission because he knew it



would be refused. Etrius' words stung his pride; Jervais has never forgiven him.

Jervais has graduated from the position of Master of *Vis* at Ceoris to become one of the clan's leading envoys in the Cainite courts. More social and less intimidating than many of his clanmates, he has been able to use his role as envoy to make allies among High and Low Clans alike, and so strengthen his own position in the Tremere pyramid. Although not without occult learning, he knows he is not the clan's greatest thaumaturge — fortunately there are other kinds of power in the world than *vis*, and the power inherent in manipulating the forces of Cainite politics has served him very well indeed.

Jervais is of average height and built like a mountain, with a resonant voice he uses to good effect in courtly presentation. On the surface affable and courteous, he never overlooks an opportunity to further his own cause, and that of Ceoris, or the chance to learn a secret he may be able to put to good use later. In the intricate society of Cainite courts, he knows, secrets are the true currency of power.

Sects

In the Dark Medieval world, personal identity is found in groups; even the most nobly-born lords are defined more by their allies, religion or politics than as individuals, and the low-born find their sense of identity with their village, their craft or trade, or the lord whom they serve. As with mortals, Cainites are defined by what groups they are associated with, whether that is clan, consanguineous relationships, religion, ethnic background, or political affiliation. Herein are a few of the groups, whether political sects, religious cults, or sub-sects within a given clan, of interest to members of the Low Clans.

The Ashirra

The Ashirra, or "brethren," are a sect of Islamic vampires who share common religious beliefs and practices. Their faith centers on the beliefs that that immortality does not exempt a vampire from the judgment of Allah, and that redemption is still possible for any being who accepts Islam and its laws, and strives to follow them to the best of his ability. The sect was founded by the Lasombra Suleiman ibn Abdullah, who first sought the Prophet in AD 622, and as a result of that meeting, submitted himself to Allah. Referring to his conversion to Islam as his second Embrace, he began to tell others the message of hope he had been given, exhorting them to em-

brace Islam as well. Through word of mouth, the sect has spread nearly as widely among Cainites as it did among mortals, and now encompasses a majority of vampires of nearly every clan dwelling in Islamic territories.

No passages in the Qur'an specifically address vampires, but the Ashirra point to the matter of the *djinn* as proof that even vampires can find redemption: The Prophet himself said that even they would be welcome if they dedicated themselves to Allah and fulfilled the duties God required of them. The Ashirra believe that since they have free will and can choose righteous behavior, then they are therefore no more inherently evil than the *djinn*, and so can find redemption by following Islam.

Practices and Beliefs

The Ashirra strive to adhere as closely as possible to the precepts for a righteous unlife laid down by the Prophet in the Qur'an. These precepts include honesty and forthright dealing; treating servants and blood-slaves with respect and kindness; feeding only in moderation, never to excess; honoring one's sire and faithfully teaching one's childer; and seeking always to broaden one's mind and spirit through the teachings of Islam.

The Ashirra also honor the five duties prescribed by the Prophet for all good Muslims, called the five pillars of Islam. Some of those duties are straightforward enough; to make a public profession of faith in Allah, or to give alms to the poor. Other pillars provide different challenges to the faithful, such as the five daily prayers, the Fast of Ramadan or the pilgrimage to Mecca. The truly devout attempt to rise even during the day to pray at the appointed times, while others accept the Prophet's word that acts of charity can make up for the missed prayers. The Ashirra take the fasting at Ramadan seriously as a demonstration of their mastery over the Beast. Most treat the fast as lasting from sunset to dawn, feeding only after sunrise from a servant before seeking their rest. The truly devout often spend the month of Ramadan in torpor, so as neither to break the fast nor risk frenzy from lack of blood. But it is the pilgrimage to Mecca that is the hardest pillar to attain. Mecca is imbued with such a radiance of faith that only the most devout and faithful of Ashirra can draw near the city, much less make it all the way to the Ka'ba. Some Ashirra fall back on Muhammad's word that another person can make the *hajj* in their stead. Others merely keep trying, striving on each visit to the holy site to draw a little closer to the Ka'ba than they did before.

Islam's dietary restrictions also cause concerns for the Ashirra. Suleiman ibn Abdullah established early

on the practice of drawing blood from a vessel into a silver bowl, and then spending five minutes in prayer so as to purify the blood and consecrate it to Allah before drinking. This approach is generally accepted, although the matter continues to be a topic of debate, and practices may vary throughout the Muslim world.

Needless to say, not all Ashirra — or those who profess to be Ashirra — adhere to the precepts of their faith without failing. For many, being Ashirra is more about being publicly identified as Muslim; and their approach to prayer, fasting and almsgiving is often more dependent on traditions held over from their mortal lives, or the ability of local sultans and imams to enforce them.

Low Clans in the Ashirra

The Low Clans among the Ashirra do not acknowledge themselves as such, for in the lands where Islam is the dominant faith, Cainites who might be considered of lowly status in Europe may well be the most numerous and politically powerful in the region. In particular, the *Banu Haqim* (Assamites) calls these lands home, and have ruled their nights for centuries. Not all vampires in Ashirra territories are Muslims, and hence members of the sect: Many of great age, or of clans like the *Walid Set* (Followers of Set) or *Bay't Mujrim* (Ravnos) still follow their own gods, or even the Christian faith. Still among the Ashirra, members of certain clans have taken the sect's religious beliefs to their unbeating hearts:

Assamites: Many of the warrior caste of the *Banu Haqim* were the first of their clan to adopt Islam, and remain its staunchest adherents. For those struggling with an addiction to Cainite vitae, their faith gives them strength to resist the demands of their Beast.

Nosferatu: A brotherhood of the *Bay't Mutasharid* known as the *Hajj*, taking their name from their founder and the pilgrimage to Mecca, reject the monstrous tradition of their clan, and strive to follow the teachings of Mohammad. Many are descended from the Nosferatu Methuselah Tarique al-Hajji, founder of their brotherhood and recognized as the leading *imam* among the Ashirra. Tarique himself is so dedicated and devout that he makes his home in Mecca itself. The *Hajj* are the heart of the Ashirra, and of those who have made the dangerous pilgrimage all the way to the Ka'ba, many are Nosferatu.

Gangrel: A small contingent has split off from the main body of the clan, no longer calling themselves *Wah'sheen*, but instead *Taifa*, taking their name from the small kingdoms of al-Andalus. Dedicating their unives to Islam, they pursue the philosophy of the warrior-scholar. Most numerous in Iberia, they have also spread through North Africa and the Levant.

(For more on the Ashirra and Low Clans in the Islamic world, see *Veil of Night*.)

The Prometheans

The Titan Prometheus, so the Greeks wrote, gave the gift of fire to mankind, and so man was able to build his civilization and rule over nature. The Cainite sect calling itself by his name seeks to build a new kind of civilization, one in which Cainites and mortals can co-exist in harmony. The Prometheans, also known as “Firebringers” for their namesake, believe in a semi-mythical utopia, a “New Carthage,” where both Cainites and mortals can dwell together in mutually beneficial peace, and where there exists no division between Low Clan and High, but all are regarded as equals. Realizing these radical notions would be considered heretical to the Cainite elders who already rule the night, they are forced to pursue their utopia in secrecy. Thus they have focused their attentions on the fringes of mortal society — the beggars, petty thieves, harlots, lepers and wretched poor, whom more powerful Cainites mostly ignore. The ironic twist to it all is that the idealists dreaming of a perfect society have become, in order to maintain their position among the hard-bitten mortals on the bottom of the social ladder, the founders of a loosely organized criminal empire.

The Prometheans are fairly young as Cainite sects go, having been around for just a little over a century. Their founder was Anthony de Leycestre, one of King William’s Commissioners who once assisted in compiling the Domesday Book. Abandoned by his sire after his Embrace, Anthony was spared destruction only because he was literate in Latin and Norman French, and the local Cainite elder needed an intelligent — and expendable — courier he could bind in blood. His duties brought him in contact with Peter the Lombard, an idealistic Ventrue Knight, and John ó Conlae, a Brujah who had been infused with tales of Carthage from the night of his Embrace, but whose first free community had been wiped out by fearful elders. It was not until Anthony’s master met his Final Death opposing Mithras’s return to power that the Caitiff realized the depth of the thralldom he’d been subjected to. Together he, Peter and ó Conlae determined that the only way anything was ever going to change was if those with a vision did something about it. Bearing in mind the reaction of suspicious Cainites to ó Conlae’s experimental village, they resolved to focus their efforts where they would be least noticed, until they could turn their vision into a reality too strong to be put down. Thus were the Prometheans born.

Practices and Beliefs

Presenting themselves as a secret guild, the Firebringers offer mortals training, support and protection in exchange for a share of the fruits of their dishonest labors, or their cooperation in certain secret projects. Many mortals do not know they’re dealing with vampires; they’re so desperate for what the guild offers they would deal with the Devil himself. Like other guilds related to various trades, the guild offers three ranks: apprentice, journeyman and master. Ambitious mortals can gain rank and favor through their unstinted service to the guild’s secret undead masters. Some may eventually even earn the Embrace.

The Prometheans recruit among Cainites as well, but with far more caution; a single spy, secretly working for an elder, could bring ruin and destruction down upon them all. Therefore they look for those who are already downtrodden by their lot, young enough to accept their radical ideas, and desperate enough to risk their unives. Not only must a Cainite recruit go through the three ranks before learning too many of the sect’s secrets, but he must permit the Promethean leadership to collect sufficient blackmail evidence against him so that his unlife is in their hands. At least one of the assignments he is given by the leadership is enough to damn him to the sun, should his elders learn of it. For his master’s rank, the Cainite must, as the mortals do, create a masterpiece — being Cainite, however, he is held to a different standard, and is encouraged to create something of lasting value to the sect.

Low Clans in the Prometheans

The Prometheans welcome members of all clans and social rank, though a great many of their number come from the Low Clans, who have little left to lose and are most aware of the inequalities of their lot. In particular, the Ravnos, who are already either involved in illegal activity or are thought to be anyway, have found the Prometheans useful contacts to have in European cities. The wandering Ravnos, besides being highly skilled and talented at any illicit vice they put their minds to, are the conduits of communication between Prometheans in one city to the next. Some Nosferatu, such as Ragged Jenny, who runs the Promethean school for thieves in London, are also a major faction in the sect (much to the dismay of some of their brethren, who fear such activities will only encourage persecution of their already unwelcome broods). Gangrel are less common, preferring the open countryside or wilderness to the festering cities where the Firebringers focus their activities, but at least one Gangrel highwayman, operating in the northern Black Forest, maintains a loose alliance with Promethean agents in nearby Mainz. The Malkavians

are also rare, although the Florentine chapter has learned to cancel any undertaking that the visionary Fra' Marco d'Agosto refuses to bless. The Prometheans have generally found competition, not cooperation, from the Followers of Set, for the Serpents are themselves deeply involved in the underworld — not only in lands where they traditionally hold sway, but also in certain European cities, such as Paris and Ravenna, as well as the Byzantine empire. The only Assamite thus far who petitioned for membership in the Prometheans proved to be under a blood hunt from his own clan, and no one was surprised when he did not survive his apprenticeship.

The Furores

As the Church reinforces its authority with the Word of God, so do Cainite elders reinforce their own supremacy over their childer and grandchilder, and the supremacy of High Clans over Low, with the weight of the Traditions of the Blood, attributed to Caine himself. But when the cruelty, disdain and ill-regard that some elders show to their childer is beyond bearing, even unbeating hearts can swell with rage and drive desperate and downtrodden childer to violence.

Of such childer are the Furores made.

The Furores are not a new phenomenon; they have, in one form or another, existed since the ninth century. At least one Furore historian, examining scrolls found in a Roman ruin in Lombardy, insists there were Furore-like brotherhoods even in the height of the Empire, not only in the outlying territories, but in the shadow of Rome itself. In the past century or so, however, instances of Furore uprisings have become more frequent. And what is more worrisome to the elders — who whisper the rumors so their childer cannot hear — some uprisings have been successful.

Cainite elders secretly fear the Furores as nothing else, for their anger lends them a reckless ferocity; and as vampires themselves, the Furores know their enemies' weaknesses as well as their strengths. They strike without warning, without mercy, and their identities are unknown until they do. Yet it would never do to let one's childer — or one's enemies — learn of such a vulnerability. And so the Furores remain a wild story, an unconfirmed rumor... and a secret fear.

Practices and Beliefs

The Furores are rebels driven by two desires: revenge and revolution. Revenge against sires who Embraced them, abused them, punished them for the slightest transgression, sent them out as expendable pawns to battle enemies or simply abandoned them

when a new amusement came along. Other Furores speak of more subtle torments, the twisting of the emotions and loyalties through the blood oath, or being forced to watch loved ones or valued servants murdered before their eyes. For many Furores, existence since their Embrace has wrought a deep and abiding hunger for revenge — against their sires, against broodmates, or anyone else who gets in their way. Some also find the lure of the Amaranth, to actually consume the one who has so abused them, a very appealing proposition.

Other Furores are driven just as strongly by a powerful sense of justice, and a desire to enact change — they can see that the rule of the elders over the young is corrupt and want to create something more equitable in its place. Some have vague ideas based on legends of Carthage; some see themselves as the new elite, ruling in their sires' places; others may see something akin to an urban commune. However, it is determining what exactly that new society would be like that divides one Furore band — or even individual — from another.

The Furores have no central leadership, common creed or membership criteria; they exist more as an idea than an organization. Any individual, pair or coterie of young, rebellious Cainites can call themselves Furores — and many do, simply for the power and fear the name evokes. Two Furore bands may or may not cooperate; sometimes there's strength in numbers, but often the conflicting egos and pride of Furore leaders get in the way of common sense and idealism.

The Furores are terrorists — expert in the use of violence and fear in achieving their goals, and desperate enough to take great risks to achieve their goals. The terror they invoke has three purposes: a few well-aimed blows can make them seem far more dangerous than they are, and forces the elders to exist in fear, never knowing when the next strike will come; it requires the elders to defend or hide their resources, which puts them at a disadvantage; and it also tends to make the elders even more repressive than usual, which only increases the chances of rebellion from within the ranks that the Furores can take advantage of for their own strikes.

Of necessity, the Furores are also very secretive. Furore members often build fairly elaborate false identities for themselves, in order to spy out future targets, or merely to assure their own survival while moving through Cainite society. Others lurk on the fringes, melding in with religious cults, merchant caravans or adventuresome coterie of young Cainites (like a troupe's characters). They recruit others with great care, for it is a risky business to admit their true natures. They look for others like themselves, young

vampires in dire straits, but don't reveal themselves right away. One member might slowly get to know the potential recruit and gain her confidence, before offering her a chance to prove herself worthy of Furore aid. Sometimes he might offer to act as a go-between the potential recruit and the "real" Furores until he is certain of her intentions. Testing the recruit's sincerity is an important step; with so much at risk, the Furores have no use for a Cainite who will buckle and submit when faced with the potential consequences of rebellion. For final membership, the candidate must do something beyond forgiveness, such as aiding in the destruction of her sire or an elder of her clan — although in recent nights, merely being suspected of consorting with the Furores can be enough to merit a sentence of Final Death from a paranoid elder.

It is no safe thing to admit to being a Furore, even among the dregs of Cainite society. Unlike the "fortunate" childer who are kept close and safely ignorant in their sire's shadow, the outcasts of the undead know the Furores are real. The bandits operating on the edge of a prince's territory, the wandering Malkavian pilgrims or the Promethean crime lords also know that the Furores' brand of revolution can bring down the retribution of the elders upon anyone who may be suspect. The Furores despise those too weak to stand up for themselves, or who would even betray those bold enough to strike the blow for freedom — but they have also learned caution. Those who stay hidden, survive.

Low Clans in the Furores

The Furores actually draw most of their members from the ranks of the first cursed, those whose sires rule the night — and often their childer — with heavy hands. Furore bands are usually led by High Clan scions, who are often of noble mortal blood, and cannot see why they should follow anyone less. In recent years, however, a few Furore bands have arisen whose membership is almost entirely made up of low-status vampires, whose anger is directed more at the self-declared superiority of the first cursed than any elders of their own blood.

The Low Clans are split on the matter of the Furores. Many feel that their lot can only get worse if the first cursed have reason to distrust or fear them. Barely suffered to exist as it is, the last thing any of them should do is prove themselves actually *dangerous* to the rulers of the night. Yet others adamantly refuse to accept the "low" place the High Clans afford them, and are more than willing to prove that he who can *take* power is the one who deserves to hold it.

The Nosferatu often know more of what's going on in a domain than its vampire lord, but prefer to hide and let the Furore storm blow by. They fear to join it, lest

they lose, and be remembered; but they also do not feel inclined to put themselves at risk in the lord's defense. The wandering Ravnos are rarely trusted even by the Furores, but a rare few may serve as spies and messengers, infiltrating targeted domains, starting rumors, or instigating elder panic by leaving Furore sigils painted on the walls of a city — whether they are members or not. As with everything else, Malkavians may or may not be inclined to Furore activities, depending on how their particular insanity defines their world for them. Some fear to risk what little respect they get in the courts of the first cursed, and others, like the Furore leader known as the Mad Monk, know that only the most violent action keeps the voices in their head satisfied with the progress towards a new Carthage, Camelot or Kingdom of Heaven. Gangrel are deadly allies when it comes down to a fight, but only a handful find the goals of the Furores in tandem with their own. Still, those in that handful are more than willing to make up for their lack of numbers in sheer ferocity.

The Furore bands rarely contain members of the Children of Haqim or Followers of Set; the Assamites and Serpents have their own priorities and a stronger internal cohesion than most Western clans, though a few rebel European Setites, rebelling against the dictates of the Egyptian elders or condemned for heresy, have found their way into Furore ranks. The Furores have learned, however, to shun the Tremere — unless a potential candidate is witnessed in the act of diablerizing one of his own brothers, he is more than likely a spy, interested only in earning prestige for his superiors at the cost of Furore blood. Better a sincere Tremere rebel be killed outright than risk having proven Furore coterie betrayed to the elders, and the cause of freedom lost for eternity.

(For more on both the Prometheans and the Furores, see *Ashen Thief*.)

Lupetti di Gubbio

Among all the Damned, the weight of God's curse falls heaviest on the Low Clans. It is perhaps then not surprising that some among the Nosferatu and Gangrel, who wear the stigma of their curse in their own flesh, seek any means by which to find redemption in the eyes of God. Yet nothing in Cainite lore or tradition offered any hope to the Damned, inheritors of Caine's curse — until St. Francis tamed the Wolf of Gubbio.

The wolf was a vicious creature that hunted villagers caught alone outside the village late at night, or snatched children who wandered into the woods even in daylight. The villagers, believing the beast to be possessed of the Devil, pleaded with

THE CAINITE HERESY

The Cainite Heresy expands on and perverts the dualist faith of the Cathars, and presents Cainites as beings of spiritual rather than earthly nature. As such, they are the divine messengers of God, and their blood is a sacred communion that infuses the worshippers with something of the divine nature. Mortal congregations become herd and blood-bound pawns to the Heresy's Cainite masters, who seek to further infiltrate the Roman Church and subvert it to their purposes. Congregations of the blasphemous Cainite Heresy exist throughout much of Europe, concentrated primarily in southern France and Italy. The Crimson Curia, centered in Venice, oversees the Heresy.

Needless to say, many Cainites find the Heresy's beliefs (and their treatment of their mortal pawns) as sacrilegious as does the Holy Inquisition. Even to those who are less appalled by the perversions the Heresy espouses as God's will, its mere existence presents a great danger to all Cainites — for the witch-hunters of the Inquisition are not likely to differentiate between the Heretics and the devout when it comes time to light their pyres.

The Cainite Heresy is dominated by the first cursed, such as the Lasombra and Toreador, and carries little appeal for the Low Clans, who carry more of the full weight of Caine's Curse or are simply not Christian to begin with. Yet the notion of believing oneself an angel rather than a demon carries its own appeal, because sometimes blood offered in heretical worship is far easier to swallow than bitter ashes of eternal damnation.

St. Francis to aid them. The saint, in his usual gentle way, went to the wolf and, addressing the creature as "Brother Wolf," explained to him why the things he was doing were a sin against God. The wolf was penitent, but protested that he too needed to eat. And so St. Francis struck a bargain with the wolf: If he restrained himself from doing harm to the villagers or their animals, the villagers would feed him for the rest of his natural life. To this the wolf agreed, and so it was done, and the wolf never again wanted for food, nor did the villagers need fear him ever after.

No member of the Lupetti — the brotherhood of "little wolves" — believes the wolf of Gubbio was anything but an ordinary wolf, yet they take to heart the lesson inherent in the story. If they

can restrain themselves from indulging the Beast, and be as poor and humble friars as the followers of St. Francis himself, then perhaps the saint will speak for them before God as he did for the Wolf of Gubbio.

The Order was founded by the Gangrel Fra' Bernardo, a former priest who accepted his Embrace as a just punishment from God for his sins, yet despaired of ever atoning for them. Popular legend among the Lupetti is that Fra' Bernardo heard the story from the Wolf himself — at any rate, he never tired of telling it to any who would listen. He also adhered devoutly to the Rule he laid down for his followers, right up to the night when two of his clanmates, testing his vow of non-violence, tore him apart, piece by piece. Fra' Bernardo's ashes were later gathered by two of his followers and kept as a relic; his faith serves as an example to all Lupetti even in the current nights.

Practices and Beliefs

The Lupetti originated in Italy, but have since spread (primarily through wandering friars) into central Europe and France. They consider themselves a religious order, and follow the Lupetti Rule devised by Fra' Bernardo, modeled on that of the Franciscan Order. Members pledge poverty, obedience to the Order's Rule, and to abstain from mortal blood, subsisting instead on the blood of animals. They also vow to restrain themselves from violence, for such behavior only provokes the Beast. They wear plain robes of gray homespun, carry no weapons, and neither claim domain nor keep blood-servants. Some of the Lupetti, particularly Gangrel, wander, sleeping in the earth and subsisting on the blood of forest creatures. Others share a common haven, often a cave, the crypts under a church or a forgotten cellar of a ruined Roman villa, and feed from livestock and vermin. Those who can may shave their heads nightly for a tonsure; members are also encouraged to attend Mass whenever possible, even if they cannot take communion. A few priests in the Order travel from one group to another, hearing confessions, teaching and saying Mass (using the blood of a lamb for the elements of the Eucharist) for the members.

Not all the members of the Lupetti are male. There are a growing number of female adherents, called Lupette or Grey Sisters for the color of their plain robes. The Rule says nothing about mixed sexes (Fra' Bernardo apparently didn't consider this a concern — or more likely, never considered it at all). It does, however, strongly recommend that the Lupetti never gather in large numbers, as that would strain the

ability of the land to support them and lead to unnecessary friction among brothers — and thus, temptation to sin. Therefore, whenever there are more than four Lupetti together in one place, they are urged to split into pairs and go in opposite directions, the better to spread the good news to other damned souls.

Low Clans in the Lupetti

The most common clans in the Lupetti are Gangrel and Nosferatu. Some Gangrel in particular are drawn to the Order for its promise of freedom from the Beast's ravages, though its demands are equally challenging in the face of Gangrel traditions of ferocity. No few Gangrel Lupetti have had to face the taunts or blows of their clanmates deriding them for their pacifist stand, and Fra' Bernardo has not been the only martyr. Yet that does not deter those truly seeking redemption, and night by night, the Lupetti numbers grow.

Nosferatu make up a large number of the Lupetti, as they most strongly feel the burden of God's punishment in their undead flesh. Those who cannot disguise themselves with Caine's gifts often wrap themselves in the bandages of lepers so as to hide their true visages, and wear bells or clappers as the local laws demand so they may move freely on city streets.

Several Malkavians have also joined the Lupetti and have proven themselves steadfast members of the Order, although Brother Umberto insists on wrapping himself in so many bandages to hide "deformities" invisible to all but himself that he often must be led by the hand.

While the Lupetti would welcome members of other clans as well, so far none have petitioned to join the Order. It is after all, they say, easier for one of the first cursed to walk outdoors at noon than to develop the humility necessary to enter the Kingdom of Heaven.

All of One Blood

Sometimes it is enough merely to be identified as a member of one's clan, but for some it is not. Within every clan, both Low and High, are sub-sects, some secret, some not, who further define their members by obscure philosophies, clandestine vows or sometimes-dangerous practices. Such sub-sects are usually small, exclusive, highly secretive and rarely known outside the clan that gave them birth. Yet all claim a higher purpose, even if it is little more than an exploration of their own peculiar version of Caine's curse.

Assamites: The Web of Knives

In AD 1102, a cabal of Assamite assassins challenged the way the warrior caste chose and Embraced new members, then left them to survive or perish on

MITHRAISM

Mithraism is the worship of Mithras as the Lord of Light, bringer of civilization and morality, who spends his days guiding the sun across the heavens (and thus is only available to his worshippers at night). Once the most popular cult in the Roman Empire, particularly among the legions, it faded with the advent of Christianity. Now that Mithras is once again the lord of Avalon, he has re-established his cult, both for mortal and undead worshippers.

Mithraism is a highly enigmatic mystery cult. Its liturgy and practices are kept secret, and new members take a vow of silence at their initiations. Rituals are held in the *mithraem*, an underground chamber designed to look like the interior of a cave, and small enough that only about forty worshippers can fit within. The cult is hierarchical, with seven grades of initiation. The cult's teachings support a strong system of ethics in which brotherhood is encouraged in order to unify against the forces of evil, personified for Cainite initiates both as the enemies of Mithras without, and the Beast within.

Mithraism has always been a males-only cult. Mithras is otherwise surprisingly egalitarian when it comes to dealing with the Low Clans; he readily accepts male worshippers of any clan. While the number of undead adherents in his cult is not large, it is hard to argue with the appeal of a religion that does not declare a vampire automatically damned. On the other hand, to totally turn one's back on the Christian faith takes a rare kind of courage — or extreme sense of desperation.

For more details on the Cult of Mithras, see *Ashen Cults*.

their own. Instead, they founded a school, and took in the most promising mortal assassins, imparting to them the wisdom and skill attained over centuries. Bound in a collective blood-oath to their masters, the mortal apprentices train for seven years in the ways of dealing death to mortal and Cainite alike, while gradually learning more of their masters' true natures and being tutored in the Road of Blood. At the end of their training, the Web tests them; those that pass are given the Embrace, and those that fail become the new fledglings' first meal. The new Assamites then face seven more years of apprenticeship, carrying out assassination missions with their elders; at the end of this training, they are tested again, and those who pass diablerize those



who fail. In this manner are the assassins of the Web of Knives taught their deadly craft, and the price of failure.

The Web of Knives is a secret brotherhood of highly skilled assassins, whose members guard their signs and symbols to the death. A small sect, they operate independently of Alamut's leadership, but the Mountain has thus far tolerated their existence. Their separate existence is not widely known outside the Assamite clan itself, and already their fearsome reputation is becoming merged with that of the rest of the clan — something that Alamut has done nothing to deter, believing that fear serves the clan's purpose in defending their territories from the *Franj* infidels.

Members of the Web of Knives often disguise their identities, so as to travel without suspicion or to gain access to their target. They pay a tithe of blood to their elders for every assignment they complete. They are also rumored to have connections with the mortal Nizari sect who are said to carry out political assassinations in order to further the cause of Shiite Muslims against the Seljuk Empire.

Gangrel: The Knights of Avalon

Not all Gangrel are animals. In particular, a small band of English Gangrel rejects the image conjured up by their savage brethren in Scandinavia and Eastern Europe, and instead model themselves after legendary chivalrous brotherhoods such as the Paladins of Charlemagne and the Knights of the Roundtable. To succumb to the mindless violence of the Beast is anathema to them; they regard any animalistic features as a sign of shame, and hide them as best they can. The Knights combat the Beast within through a combination of Christian faith and strong will, focusing on the chivalric ideals: nobility, courage, strength and courtesy.

The Knights are led by the Norman Sir Godfrey d'Auffay, who never considered himself an idealist when he breathed. Knighthood to him was a means to an end, a road by which a younger son could attain wealth and a name for himself. Alas, his Embrace in the mid-12th century changed his circumstances drastically. Seeking to control his own bestial impulses, he learned that neither struggling to exist in the wild, nor seeking refuge in holy orders, offered him peace; instead he found his answer in the songs of the troubadours. Taking as his guide the epic *Chanson de Roland* and the *Historia regum Britanniae*, he proposed an order of Cainite knighthood to Mithras in London. Though some other members of the court scoffed — there were already Cainite Orders for knights, though none likely to accept a Gangrel — the prince did not. Mithras approved the order, naming it the Order of the Knights of Avalon, and charging it with the slaying of monsters wherever they might be found.

This charge the Knights bear to this night, and they have faced marauding man-wolves and mad or feral Cainites of many clans. The Order took St. Austreberthe, the nun who tamed a wolf and set it to bearing burdens to replace the donkey it had killed, as their patron saint; they pray to her to likewise tame the wolf within them, so it may bear the burden of their noble deeds in her name.

Nothing in the Order's charter restricts the membership to Gangrel only, though so far no knight of the first cursed has ever petitioned for admission. The Knights hold a small castle keep in Cornwall, under the local patronage of Baron Hugh de Chambrey. At present their membership is small: Sir Arthius Morgant, a Welshman and the childe of Rhun of Tintagel; Sir Percival of Ghent, who heard of the Order's work in his native land and crossed the sea to offer them his sword; Sighurd the Saxon, an experienced warrior converted to Christianity; and Sir Godfrey himself. Also attached to the Order is Master Humphrey, a Nosferatu who serves as a squire to the Order and hopes one day to earn the honor of knighthood.

Malkavians: The Orders of Mystery

Once the Malkavians had many mystery cults, part of their almost forgotten heritage from ages long ago. Now only three remain, and their very existence is shrouded in myth, so that many of Malkav's childer no longer know of them — until the time is right. The Orders of Mystery do exist, but are elusive by their very nature, seeking only to initiate a chosen few who can see beyond their madness. Those so chosen are sworn to never reveal its secrets, to defend the Order at all costs and to trust in it absolutely. Potential initiates are tested to see if they can decipher the "tongue of Babel" — veils of symbolism and disjointed images with which the members of the Order communicate their visions to each other; if they are persistent in their curiosity and search for personal enlightenment regarding their own nature; and if they are willing to sacrifice their perception of the world for a glimpse of a greater truth, however fragmented. If satisfied with the candidate's potential, a current member then sponsors her to the *mystai*, the sponsor's peers in the Order. If accepted, the candidate faces initiation, an inner journey and test of her spiritual strength, overseen by an elder of the Order. If she passes, she experiences visions that open her inner sight to the power of Malkav within her. If she fails, she is consumed by the elder testing her, and her blood is returned to the clan.

Three Orders of Mystery survive in the current nights. The Ordo Aenigmatis is the most prevalent, and deals with enigmas and riddles; they are prophets and

oracles who seek to overcome their madness by confronting that which is unknowable. Many follow the Road of Heaven, and so seek God's truths; others follow the Road of Bones (see the **Dark Ages Storytellers Companion**), or even the Road of Kings.

The Ordo Ecstasis seeks enlightenment through sensual experience, embracing the Beast rather than seeking to chain it; they are given to revels and orgiastic rites to appease the Beast and unlock its mysteries. Many Ecstasis walk the Road of the Beast, while others follow the Road of Sin.

The last, the Ordo Maleficus, is the smallest and most obscure, and is rarely spoken of; many in the Ordo Aenigmatis and Ordo Ecstasis fear that those who follow Maleficus have fallen prey to the infernal forces of Hell.

Membership in an Order may, in fact, aid a Malkavian in rising in his road; when the cult's rites push their adherents close to frenzy, often they pass a threshold where new understanding blossoms out of their madness. Such trials are very personal, often tied to an individual Malkavian's own derangements; by overcoming that which they most fear, they become better able to control the Beast that gnaws at their souls.

Setites: The Typhonists

Even pagans have their heretics. The Toreador Methuselah Michael, realizing that faith is only as strong as its ability to resist temptation, invited the Setite Khay'tall to test the strength of his Dream. Taking the name Children of Judas, Khay'tall and his childe Sarrasine settled in Constantinople to do their utmost to corrupt the purity of the great work Michael and his lovers had created.

They succeeded all too well. Khay'tall was a member of the Decadent faction, who pursued corruption for its own sake and did not heed the words of the Hierophants, the ancient leaders of the Followers of Set in Egypt. He taught the worship of evil for itself, rather than as a tool to break down the rule of law and glorify Set. In this his childe Sarrasine was his full accomplice, even teaching their mortal adherents that Set was a demon, not a god. Khay'tall perished when Constantinople fell, diablerized by his own childe, but what he wrought still bears fruit among the far-flung Followers of Set, many of whom now are not even of Egyptian descent, and it has created a rift through the very heart of the clan in Europe.

The Typhonists follow a debased version of the Road of the Serpent that stresses the value of corruption for its own sake, but pays little heed to the reverence for Set. Personal indulgence and pursuit of pleasures are encouraged. Typhonists seek to undermine the foundations of moral society whenever possible, and mock virtues and restraint. They delight in spoiling what is pure, or corrupting the innocent; they seek their own

gratification, advancement and pleasure in all things. Often, in fact, little practical difference exists between the Road the Typhonists espouse and the Road of Sin; both stress the fulfillment of desire, however base, and deny any moral authority other than the self.

The Typhonists are most common in Europe and the Byzantine successor states; many are of European, not Egyptian, ethnic background, and a great majority of them have red hair, which is ironically considered a sign of Set's blessing. In fact, a good number were Embraced for no other reason than the fact they *had* red hair — a practice abhorrent to the more traditional faction of the clan, who believe that the Dark Waters of Set's blessing should never be granted lightly. Many Typhonists have had only limited teaching in the religious background, history and culture of their clan. Some have fallen into the diabolical practices of the Baali, or see little difference between serving Set or Lucifer.

The Hierophants accuse the decadent Typhonists of turning their backs on proper devotion to the god; the Typhonists in turn believe the Hierophants merely desire power to bend the clan to their own will. What effect this conflict of philosophy and practice will have on the clan as a whole, only time will tell.

Nosferatu: The Warreners' Guild

Never let it be said that the Nosferatu are mired in tradition; when survival is at stake, the Nosferatu not only adapt, but thrive. The burgeoning cities have produced a new environment for the former hunters and monsters of the night, and mortal skills at all forms of architecture and masonry, including building underground, have caught the interest of many Nosferatu concerned about their own protection and concealment. Yet it took the genius of Zelios to (literally) break new ground for the clan, moving them from merely adapting existing underground structures to their use (such as catacombs, caves, crypts and the remains of Roman sewers), into actually designing, digging and constructing subterranean structures specifically for their own purposes. Zelios had an innate knack for understanding how buildings worked; how the weight of the walls and ceiling was supported, and how the height of an arch was determined. He studied the classic geometric proportions of the Greeks, the magnificent Coliseum in Rome, the flying buttresses and arching ceilings of cathedrals and the sturdy barrel vaulting in the crypts below. He also began to experiment with geomancy, the use of ley lines to determine the site and facing of a building, and the mystical properties of numbers and proportions in architectural design. More importantly, however, he began to teach what he knew. While Zelios did not condone Embracing a mortal just for his masonry

skills, others were more desperate, or perhaps less humane; a number of former master masons and senior journeymen now form the core of the Warreners' Guild.

The purpose of the guild is simple: to design and build safe and secure havens for not only Nosferatu broods, but other Cainites as well. Zelios' own reputation as architect, builder and visionary leads the way for enterprising warreners to develop their own contacts, allies and prestation debts as they explore their new skills. So far, most projects have been simple — adding a stone wall designed to pivot on a central shaft, accessing a secret room beyond it; enlarging the crypts of a local monastery to provide Nosferatu brethren secure cells for sleeping; reinforcing the walls and ceiling of underground caverns or tunnels so that possibility of collapse is greatly reduced. Recently, a pair of warreners in Milan have begun an ambitious project of building a series of tunnels off the canal; while the half-buried ruins of Roman villa near London is being expanded into a haven capable of holding a full brood, the ceilings reinforced, rooms excavated and a hill built over the rest of the ruins to hide them from mortal sight.

The skills of Zelios and his students have also been in great demand from other Cainites, including many of the High Clans. Zelios has set a precedent of taking such contracts and fulfilling them to the best of his ability, but he has also not neglected any opportunities to include features that might be of future use to the clan, either for emergency shelter, or a means by which a prince or Cainite lord can be watched from concealment between the walls or under the floor. Such construction is not left to mortal laborers, however; a warrener knows when a job is best done with his own hands, to keep the secret workings secure. In fact, concealing the fact that construction is being carried out at *all*, particularly with regards to havens, is a skill in itself, one particularly suited for the warrener's craft.

The Warreners' Guild is loosely organized, roughly following the structure of its mortal counterpart, the Guild of Masons, with ranks of apprentice, journeyman and master. With no central authority, save a deep and abiding respect for Zelios himself, exact methods and approaches to the craft vary widely from master to master. Members encourage any Nosferatu with interest or aptitude for the craft to apprentice themselves to a master, and learn all they can, traveling to study building techniques in other lands and eventually building their own masterpiece, before they are granted the title of master themselves. The Guild is small, with no more than two or three dozen members across Europe; often a prospective apprentice must look hard for a master to study under, but those who do so feel that they are contributing in a very significant way to the future of their entire clan.

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Name:
Player:
Chronicle:

Nature:
Demeanor:
Clan:

Generation:
Concept:
Haven:

ATTRIBUTES

Physical		Social		Mental	
Strength	●○○○○○○○○	Charisma	●○○○○○○○○	Perception	●○○○○○○○○
Dexterity	●○○○○○○○○	Manipulation	●○○○○○○○○	Intelligence	●○○○○○○○○
Stamina	●○○○○○○○○	Appearance	●○○○○○○○○	Wits	●○○○○○○○○

ABILITIES

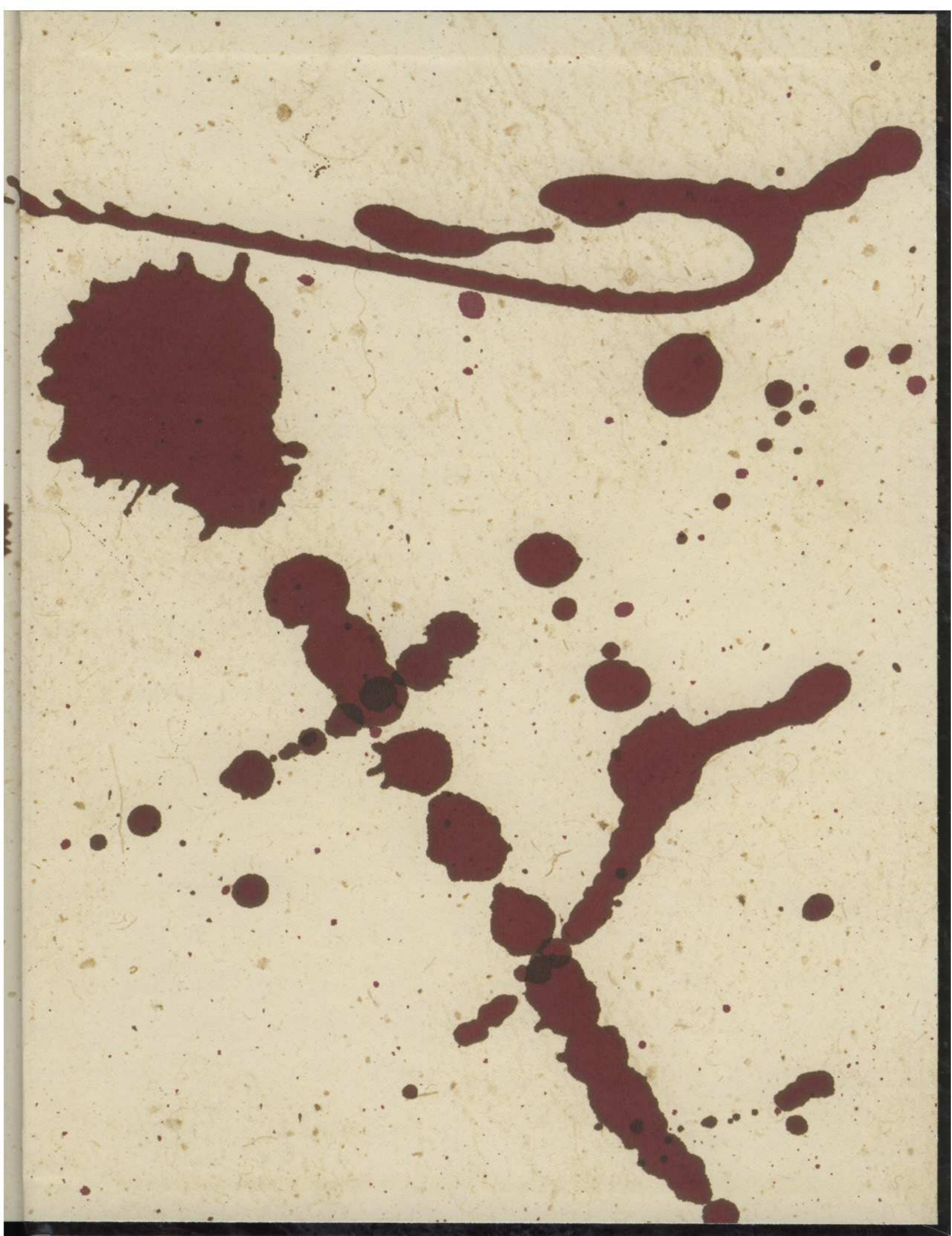
Talents		Skills		Knowledges	
Alertness	○○○○○○○○○○	Animal Ken	○○○○○○○○○○	Academics	○○○○○○○○○○
Athletics	○○○○○○○○○○	Archery	○○○○○○○○○○	Hearth Wisdom	○○○○○○○○○○
Brawl	○○○○○○○○○○	Commerce	○○○○○○○○○○	Investigation	○○○○○○○○○○
Dodge	○○○○○○○○○○	Crafts	○○○○○○○○○○	Law	○○○○○○○○○○
Empathy	○○○○○○○○○○	Etiquette	○○○○○○○○○○	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	_____
_____	○○○○○○○○○○	_____	○○○○○○○○○○		





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