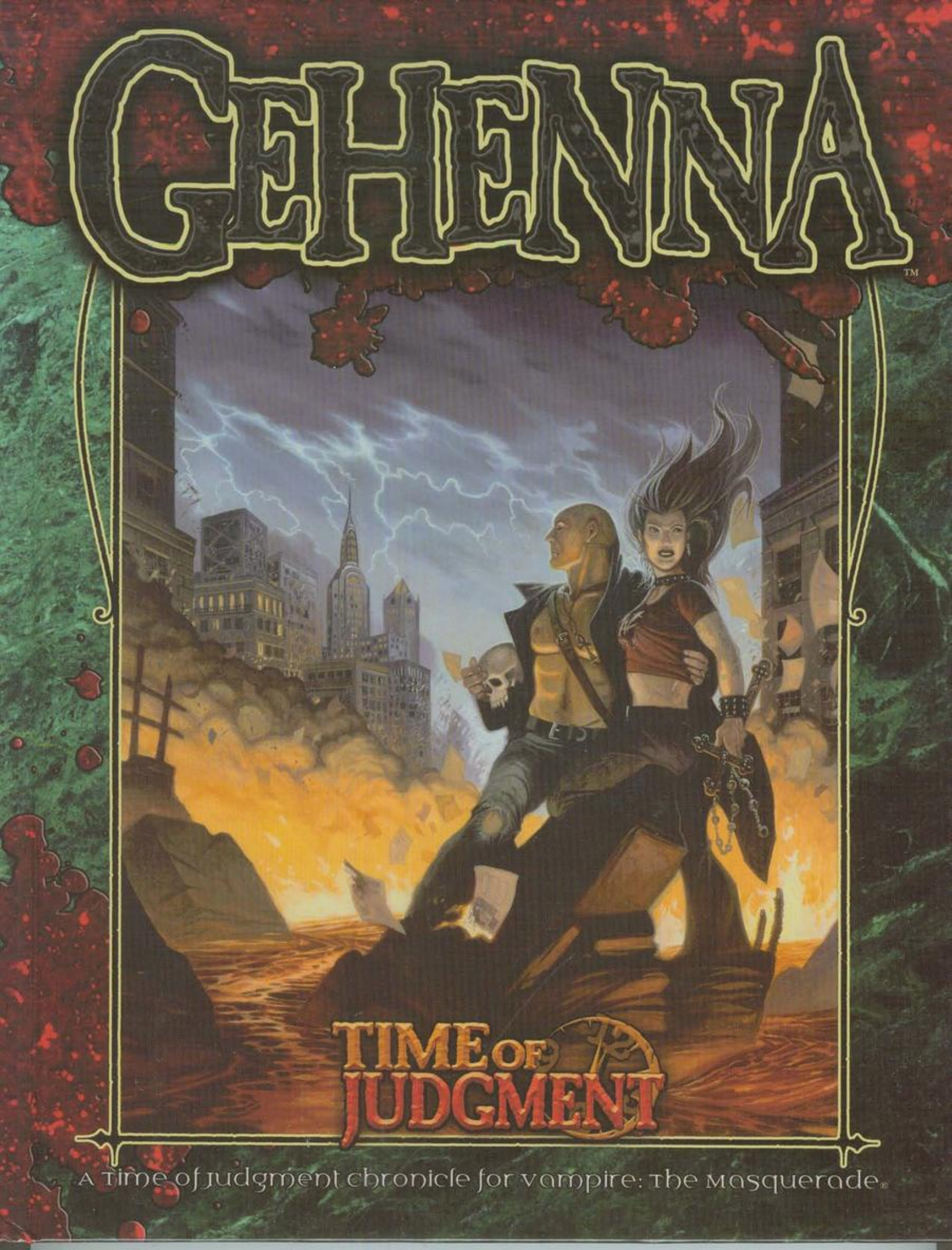
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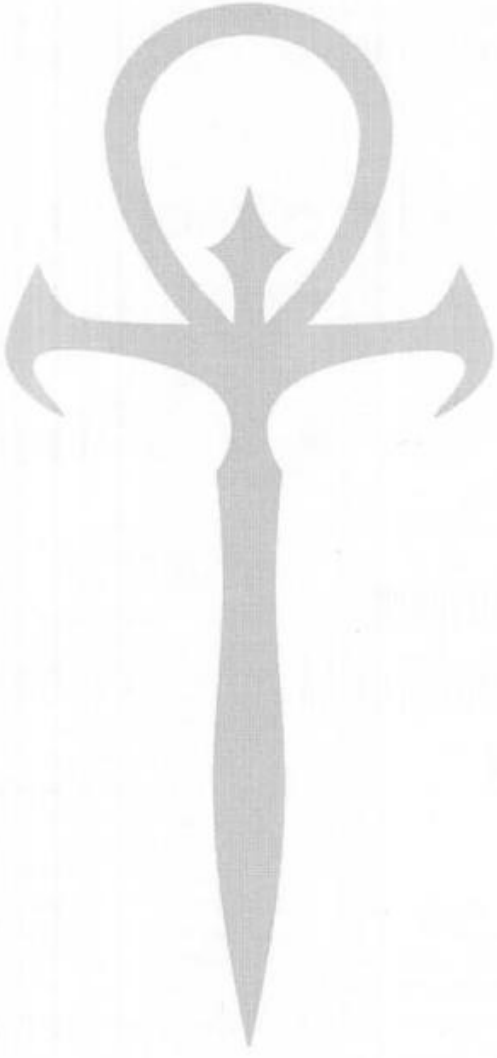
TIME OF JUDGMENT

A Time of Judgment chronicle for Vampire: The Masquerade®





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Thanks to fans, collectors, players and Storytellers for 13 kick-ass years. It wouldn't have been half the fun without you.



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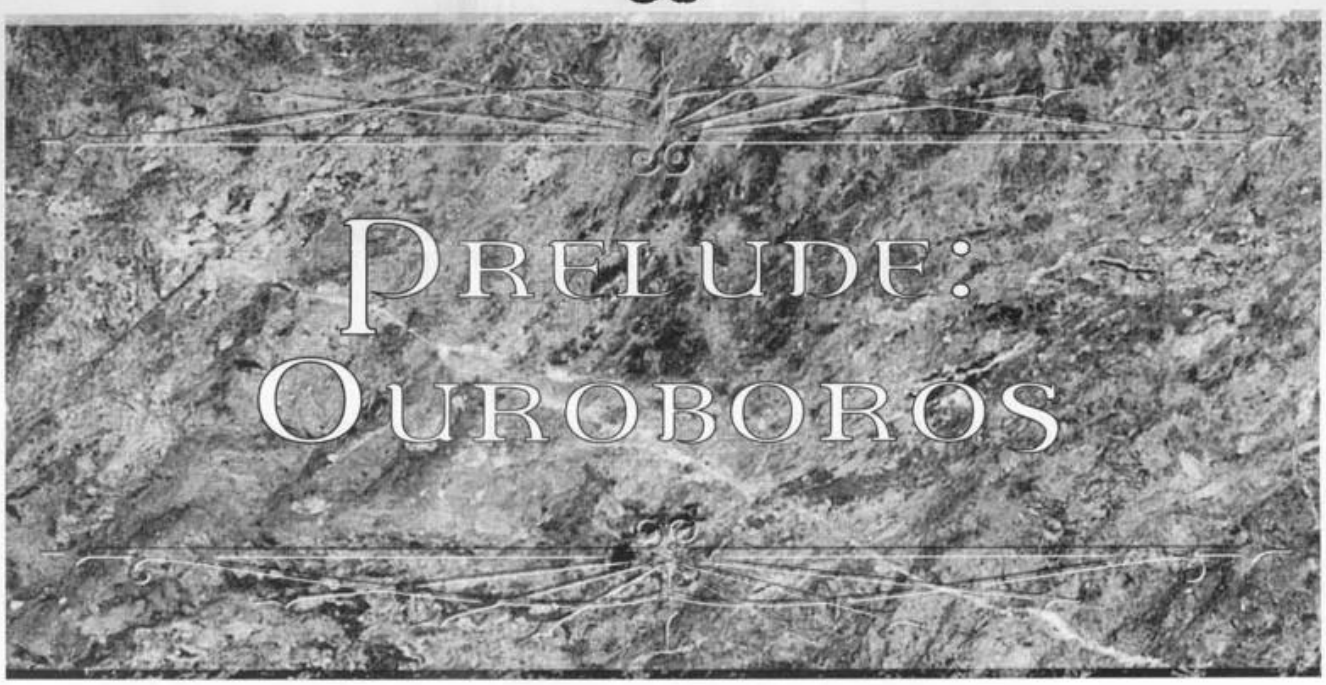
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MGI.



By Ari Marmell

Coming as she did to the church of Abu Serga, without invitation, the Egyptian Tremere called Hyapatia should never have been able to enter this holy site. Her flesh crawled as she mounted the steps. She stretched a hand toward the door with her other arm wrapped about a bone-white canopic jar. Her fingers ached; her mind screamed in instinctive fear. Hyapatia wanted desperately to turn and flee.

But Hyapatia was not in the driver's seat tonight.

A thaumaturgical word shattered the locks, allowing her entrance.

Her feet burned against the church floor. The gazes of the Apostles, each carved into a marble pillar, pierced her skull, pinning down her swirling thoughts like dead butterflies. By the time she reached the door to the crypt below, her skin had reddened, even blackened in places.

Each step down the stairs was an abyss. She tasted blood on her lips and could not think enough to wonder from which orifice it came. She lost track of where she was, which way she must turn. Nothing was real. Nothing existed but the searing agony of the ambient faith...

...and the voice she'd heard so often in past months, urging her forward.

Finally, just as she could stand no more, she was there. She saw two figures through eyes on the verge of boiling. The first figure bore stigmatic wounds upon its arms and wept blood even as it bared jagged fangs in a furious snarl. The second, clearly with child, retreated in fear.

Hyapatia tossed back her head, ignoring the tearing of burnt flesh, and let loose a primal scream. And just before the faith shared by the church and its Nosferatu keeper immolated her, Hyapatia wrenched open the canopic jar and smashed it at the pregnant woman's feet.

* * *

A strangely mismatched pair stood on the tarmac at Cairo's International Airport, watching as burly men unloaded a large crate from the belly of a small jet. They had chosen an isolated runway, even though their cargo was not technically illegal.

Once the men had dispersed, the taller of the two figures — olive-skinned, handsome yet somehow furtive — stepped forward. Crowbar in hand, he set to work on the crate's fastenings. His smaller companion, who appeared to be a teenager, stared off at an angle, as though not really seeing the crate before him. Perhaps, considering the unnatural hue of his eyes, he didn't.

A sharp crack sounded as the lid opened, and the taller man reached down. "Good evening, friend," he said as a hand clasped his own. "I am Assad Salhoum. We spoke on the phone. I trust your journey went well?"

"And *I* trust," the new arrival said, pulling himself upright, "you're being sarcastic. I am not an avid fan of travel to begin with, Mr. Salhoum. I like it even less when I'm forced to ship myself air freight."

"Please, call me 'Assad.'"

"I see. And you can call me 'Doctor.'"

Dr. Douglas Netchurch, perhaps the world's most noted expert on Kindred physiology, stepped from the crate and took a moment to clean his glasses on a handkerchief.

He didn't particularly want to be here; he'd been in the midst of some *very* interesting studies back home. Several Kindred were exhibiting strange symptoms of late: bouts of weakness, an inability to call upon the Blood... Netchurch feared that these symptoms might be preliminary signs of some new vitae-borne sickness, and he resented being pulled away. If the call hadn't offered the opportunity to study something even more interesting, he'd never have come.

"This," Salhoum continued, "is Waulkeen. You are here at his request."

"I have very much looked forward to meeting you, Dr. Netchurch," Waulkeen said in a rich, cultured voice. "I am a great admirer of your... work."

Waulkeen trailed off. Netchurch was staring at Waulkeen's face, unblinking and motionless.

"Doctor?" Salhoum asked from behind. "Is there a problem?"

"What? Oh!" Netchurch finally dropped Waulkeen's hand. "Forgive me. I simply... Mr. Waulkeen, your eyes are fascinating. Would you mind discussing your condition?"

"My condition? Dr. Netchurch, I'm blind. It's hardly unusual."

"This," Netchurch said, waving a finger uncomfortably near those strange, black orbs, "is no ordinary blindness. Perhaps we can discuss it on the way?"

"Ah... Yes, perhaps. Assad, would you get the car?"

"Of course."

Puzzled, the two Egyptian Kindred led Dr. Netchurch — who was muttering something about "the Caitiff's eyes" into his tape-recorder — away from the plane.

* * *

"...rather complicated," Waulkeen explained as they drove the cramped streets of Old Cairo. "You see, it isn't precisely I who requested your assistance."

"I don't understand," Netchurch complained, staring out the window at the ancient buildings. "I was told you required my help, so you asked Assad — who has some important connections within the Camarilla — to contact me."

"True. But while it was my idea to contact *you* specifically, the request for aid came from another. I don't even know the patient personally, though I feel a certain kinship to her, being fellow clanless. You'll see when we get there."

"And when will we get there?" Netchurch had refused to let Waulkeen tell him any more about "the girl" than he already knew: that she was a pregnant thin-blood, and that she was ill. He didn't wish the theories of less ordered minds to cloud his initial observations. But he was also growing impatient. "We've been driving for over an hour, Mr. Waulkeen. I'm not familiar with Cairo, but I know it's not *that* big."

"You are correct, Doctor," Salhoum said from the driver's seat. "We are not taking a direct route. I fear you'll have to don a blindfold for a portion of the journey as well."

"Think of it," Waulkeen added before Netchurch could protest, "as a chance to experience Cairo."

And so he did, for at least another hour. He saw the ancient structures, heard much of the city's history and learned why the Camarilla had so little presence here.

"...chantry has been abandoned," Salhoum told him some time later. "With the Tremere gone to God knows where, I am the last remnant of a formal Camarilla presence. Not," he added, "that this is a bad thing."

"You think not?" Netchurch asked. "Surely a Camarilla presence would calm the Assamite-Setite rivalry you claim has gripped Cairo for centuries."

"It would not. At best, it would offer both sides another tool to use against one another. At worst, it would add a third competing faction. Antara — the so-called 'Shepherd' — and his Assamites will not stop until they've ousted the Setites and stolen their lands and relics, and the Setites are hardly going to abandon their homeland."

Netchurch glanced back just in time to see Waulkeen's expression. Clearly, the Caitiff was uncomfortable with Salhoum's sympathy for the Serpents.

"We are here," Salhoum said suddenly.

Netchurch looked around. "Here" seemed to be a random street corner. Salhoum stopped the car and stepped out. "Your other driver will arrive shortly," he

said. "Doctor, you will have to wear this now." He passed a blindfold in through the open door.

"Thank you for your help, Assad," Waulkeen offered. "I will let you know how it goes."

"Thank you, Waulkeen." With that he was gone, and Dr. Netchurch — blind and largely lost — could do nothing but wait until the new driver arrived.

* * *

Netchurch felt it the instant he approached the church of Abu Serga. It began as a faint oppressive heat in the air that seemed to discomfit his mind. (He refused to succumb to melodrama and say he felt it in his soul.) Waulkeen, a pace or two behind, sensed his discomfort.

"The power of God infuses this most holy place," the Caitiff explained. "If you can bear it for but a few moments, those who dwell within can extend us some measure of safety."

Netchurch knew that to be nonsense. "Power of God" indeed. Why, any educated person would realize that those mortal emotions that accompanied feelings of devotion generated specific wavelengths of brain activity that, due to some oddity in the Kindred mind, interfered with vampire physiology. But at the moment, he didn't really feel up to explaining that.

And indeed, Waulkeen was correct. Those within were able to shield them from the worst of the emanations — though it seemed uncertain, at first, if they would be willing to.

Waulkeen had barely introduced him to the two Nosferatu who waited within before the pair dragged Waulkeen into what was apparently an ongoing argument. Netchurch had little luck in following it, as his substantial education did not include Arabic. As best he could tell, however, the female Nosferatu — Petra, Waulkeen had called her — didn't want him around. In fact, Netchurch was fairly certain, judging by her expression, that she would have attacked him had she been alone. Waulkeen and the second Nosferatu, Shahid, seemed to be trying to convince her to let him stay.

It was Netchurch himself who finally ended the argument. "I don't especially care," he broke in, assuming they could all understand him, "who wanted me here and who didn't. I'm here now. I'm told the pregnant girl is unhealthy. If you wish her to die, I will leave. Otherwise, kindly cease wasting my time — and more importantly, hers — and show me to her."

With a scowl that might have petrified a living man, Petra acquiesced. Apparently, she was the source of at least part of the ambient faith, for as she stepped aside, Netchurch felt the pressure lessen enough for him to ignore what remained.

"I am grateful you have come," Shahid said as they proceeded through the church. "It was I who requested Waulkeen's help. Petra means well, but she greatly fears that others seek to harm her ward. When her own faith proved insufficient to drive the taint from the girl, she would have left it in God's hands to decide what came next." The *hatta* that wrapped most of his head shifted subtly as the Nosferatu smiled. "I would like to think that my actions in this have been at His subtle urgings."

"Seems rather arrogant to me," Netchurch remarked. Shahid went silent.

They proceeded through a door and down a flight of steps. The air turned cooler, and Netchurch was not at all surprised to find that the steps ended in a cave that had been converted into a crypt.

And there, lying atop one of the biers like one of the departed, was the girl.

Netchurch didn't need his Kindred perceptions to tell that something was wrong. The thin-blood's brown hair was plastered to her forehead by a crusty layer of dried blood-sweat. Her eyes were unfocused, and Netchurch would have called them bloodshot had the veins running through them been red instead of black. Her stomach bulged, but something about the shape of her abdomen was off. It seemed stretched, as though the infant within was too large.

He concentrated upon the abilities inherent in his own Blood, attempting to study the various shades of energies the girl put off, what more mystically minded Kindred called "reading auras."

He couldn't. He saw no colors, only a shifting morass of darkness, not unlike a thick fog — and it was darkest around her belly.

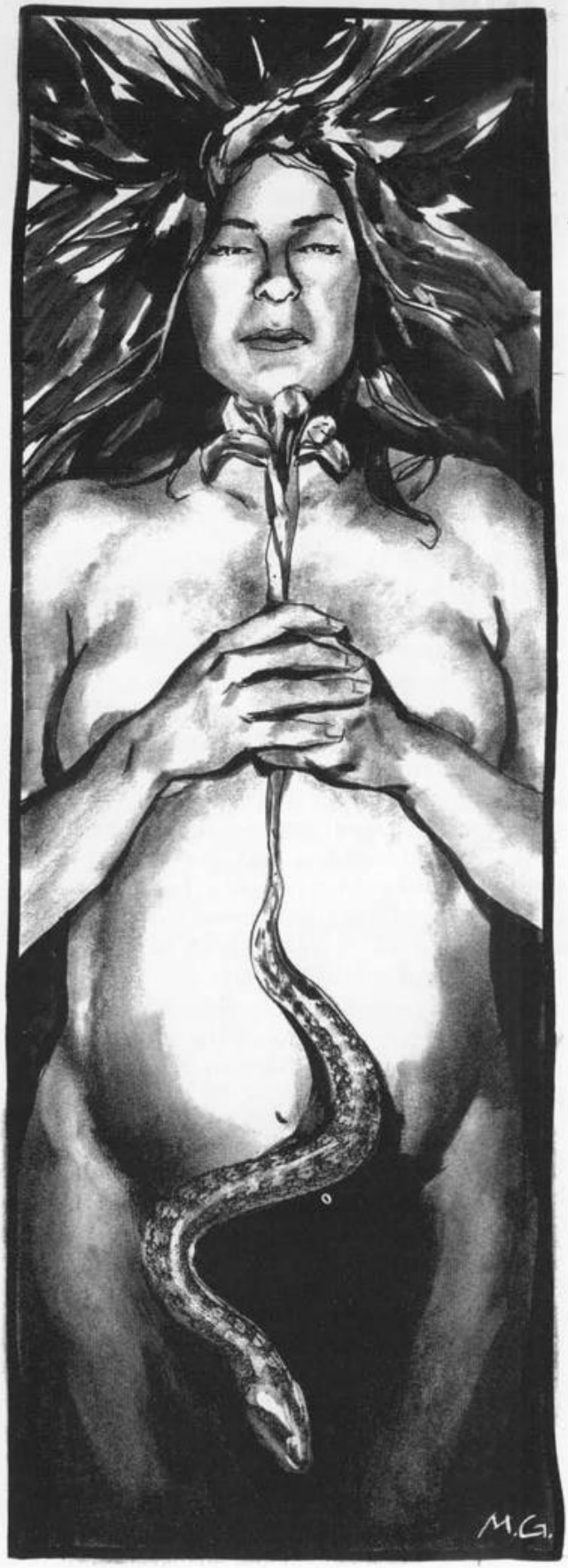
"All right," Netchurch said, pulling a pair of latex gloves from his case, "we do this the old-fashioned way."

"Do you fear catching some illness?" Petra asked sarcastically in heavily accented English.

"That would be unlikely, Ms. Petra, but not impossible. However, my fear was for the woman—"

"My name is Afifa!"

Netchurch raised his eyebrow at the sudden gasp from the bier, but otherwise remained focused on Petra. "For Afifa, and for her child.



Despite all my studies, there is still much about the thin-blooded I do not know. Until I am certain that they will not catch anything from *me*, I will continue to take precautions.

"Now," he continued, turning toward Afifa and pulling other implements from his case, "I'd like you to relax, please. This may be cold, but try not to tense up." He glanced back at those standing behind him. "And would one of you be so good as to turn on my tape recorder?"

* * *

Netchurch had decided that the acoustics of this room — one in a small building owned by Waulkeen, where Netchurch had been invited to stay — were far better for recording than the echo-filled church. "In summary, then, despite three hours of preliminary investigation, I could find nothing blatantly wrong with the child. However, several aspects of the mother's physical condition suggest that something is indeed amiss. Her skin and musculature are stressed, in a few cases torn internally. This, combined with the length of pregnancy as reported to me by Petra, indicate that the child has grown abnormally rapidly in the late months of pregnancy. Afifa seems mere nights from delivery, yet Petra tells me—"

Netchurch was able to limit his reaction to a slight widening of the eyes and a sudden twitch of his thumb to turn off the recorder. The Arabic woman who had simply appeared in the far corner of the room smiled at his reaction.

"You have great control over your emotions, Dr. Netchurch. Most people would have leaped from their chairs."

"I find the behavior of others easier to predict if I limit the stimuli I give them. Who are you?"

"To the point then? How refreshing. My name, Doctor, is Kahina. I am—"

"You are one of Set's Followers. An important member of the Dream Court and a devoted enemy of the local Assamites." Netchurch allowed himself a smile of his own at Kahina's look of surprise. "My hosts gave me a crash course in Cairo's politics. I'm a quick study."

"You'd have to be. May I?" she asked, gesturing toward the room's other chair.

"Please." Netchurch leaned forward, eyes alert. "Do we want to pretend for a few moments that I don't know you're here to talk about the child? Or shall we again cut to the point?"

Kahina laughed. It was a light laugh, feminine, not at all what Netchurch would have expected from an

ancient Setite sorceress. "All right then, Doctor. Yes, we want the Herald's child."

"The Herald?" Interesting. During his examination, Netchurch had noted a crescent moon-shaped mark on the back of Afifa's neck, but he hadn't paid it much attention. In these tumultuous times, many people saw signs that the mythical Gehenna was upon them, and Afifa was hardly the only woman to appear in recent months who had the proper mark and could lay claim to the title of the so-called Last Daughter. But the Setites clearly believed she was special.

"Why? Certainly the child of a thin-blood is a remarkable find, but of what use could it be to you?"

"We believe," Kahina answered, "that this child represents the culmination of an ancient religious prophecy, and we'd like—"

"If you're going to lie to me," Netchurch said simply, "you may leave. If you're going to stay, don't insult my intelligence."

The sorceress' eyes narrowed. "Some might take offense at your distrust, Doctor."

"Some know better than to take what your people say at face value, Setite."

"All right, Netchurch. The truth."

And tell the truth she did, for sometimes truth is a liar's most useful tool. Kahina told him how the ancient leader of the Court of Dreams, the Sleeping Lord, had spent millennia slumbering, its consciousness wandering to escape a warped and inhuman body that could no longer move on its own. She told him how prophetic dreams had revealed that the Herald of Gehenna would appear in Cairo, and how the Sleeping Lord had planned to take over the body of her unborn child, to be born again as something neither human nor vampire. She told how, before the plan could be completed, its roaming essence had been trapped by rival Setites in a canopic jar, as well as how that jar had fallen into the hands of the hated Tremere.

"Fortunately," she concluded, "the Sleeping Lord was able to gain influence over the woman responsible for cataloging the artifacts, even as I had my own pawns in place within their chantry. His servant was able to expose his essence to Afifa, though the attempt destroyed her. And my servant brought me the notes she left at his orders."

"Notes?"

"Yes." Kahina frowned. "Would it surprise you to hear me admit, doctor, that even our plans are not always without flaw? The Sleeping Lord was forced to act before circumstances were optimal. The woman was going to give birth in a matter of months; the Tremere were abandoning their chantry. His intention was never to join with the child in a place of such faith as Abu Serga, and he knew that he would need my help. Hence, notes."

And Netchurch understood. "You fear the church's 'faith' will block him from his true power. That he'll be born helpless, a tainted infant but an infant just the same."

Kahina nodded. "The energies of that place destroyed an experienced thaumaturge in moments. What do you imagine they'll do to a newborn?"

"And you can't enter the church to remove him, either. So you've come to me, to ask my help in... what? Getting Afifa out before she gives birth?"

"Indeed. And to our temple, where we may perform a ritual to cleanse the child of the taint of Christian faith, so that he may be born into his full power. We need you there too, to make sure the child survives the birth."

"And I would wish to assist you in this why?"

The Setite's mouth widened in a sudden smile. "For science, good doctor. Help us, and I swear in Set's name that you will have the opportunity to study the child as it grows. Think on it! A new creature, a hybrid of the most ancient and most recent of Kindred!

"Or you can refuse, and watch the child burn as it's born. Nothing to study or to learn. A unique opportunity, wasted."

Netchurch didn't even need to think on it; he knew she was right. Something deep in his gut twisted in protest, but it took no effort at all to ignore it.

* * *

It required over an hour of argument before Petra would allow her ward to leave the church, but in the end, Netchurch's assessment that the tainted child would not survive in the midst of such faith convinced her. They decided to take two cars to a private hospital Waulkeen suggested, an establishment the Caitiff owned through mortal proxies. Neither Netchurch nor Petra were willing to be separated from the thin-blood, so they would ride with her in one car. Shahid, Waulkeen and his driver would lead in the other. Where Waulkeen came up with a second car on a moment's notice was not a question anyone cared to ask.

The Malkavian had been following taillights for fifteen minutes now. He'd feared that Petra would insist on driving, but, fortunately, she'd admitted that she'd never picked up the skill. Therefore, when a hideous screeching of tires

foretold the car that came roaring out of a nearby ally to block the road between the two vehicles — when the staccato thump of automatic weapons and the shattering of safety glass drowned out the rumble of the engine — Netchurch didn't have to convince anyone to run. He simply yanked the wheel to the left and slammed his foot down so hard that the pedal creaked in protest.

"Shahid!" Petra's voice was anguished, surprisingly so.

"Shahid later," Netchurch said. "Afifa now."

Waulkeen had given him directions to the hospital, and Netchurch tried at least to look as though he were following them. A left here, a right there... It was difficult to concentrate, especially with Afifa crying in the back seat.

"Slow down!" Petra demanded. "They're no longer following!"

As if to spite her, the crack of a gunshot was followed almost immediately by a shudder in the engine and a burst of steam from under the hood.

"Out!"

Netchurch slammed on the brakes even as he shouted, then winced as he felt Afifa impact the back of his seat. In an instant he was out and yanking open the rear door.

Dreamlike, several figures materialized from the shadows. Some wore traditional Egyptian garb, others American jeans and T-shirts, but all had murder in their eyes — eyes that, for several of them, boasted gold irises and slit pupils.

Of far more concern than their varied outfits were their varied weapons. From simple machetes to nine-millimeter pistols, they very clearly considered themselves prepared for every eventuality.

Yet they *weren't* prepared for a maddened Nosferatu.

Netchurch had seen the effects of the Kindred's' animalistic urge — the so-called frenzy — before. It had never been quite like this, however.

The first of the Setites was hurled off his feet by the wave of psychic pressure — "faith," Petra would no doubt call it — that preceded the ravening Nosferatu. The others were less visibly impacted, but they still flinched away. When they looked back, Petra was gone.

But only for a moment. Even as the first of the attackers raised his weapon and spun about, the maddened vampire appeared beside him and drove a brick through the front of his skull. Two others moved in behind Petra, only to fall screaming beneath a horde of sewage-slick rats that erupted from the gutters with a deafening communal screech.

Guns fired, shattering windows and sending powdered brick cascading from nearby buildings, but none found their target. Petra moved through the attackers like a thing possessed. Her faith prevented them from approaching, yet it did nothing to stop her closing on them. The horde of rodents grew larger, and blood pooled in the street.

Still, the Nosferatu was heavily outnumbered, and Netchurch was fairly certain she couldn't long maintain this pace. Her courage in facing such overwhelming odds was almost enough to make him change his mind, to step in and help.

Almost.

Instead, he clasped an arm around Afifa's face so she couldn't scream and vanished into the darkness.

* * *

"You assured me," Netchurch growled, as near to true anger as he'd been in many years, "that your attacks would be a distraction only."

Kahina merely smiled. "None of your 'friends' was permanently injured, doctor." The smile fell. "A statement I cannot make for my own. So I suggest you belay the sanctimony and get in place if you're going to be part of this. Once the ceremony has begun, I don't want you wandering about."

"Really? And what of him?" Netchurch gestured, almost idly, at Salhoum.

The other Malkavian — whose presence here proved beyond doubt that it was he who had initially alerted the Setites to Netchurch's purpose in Cairo — seemed dazed. He meandered through the chamber, eyes affixed on the stained glass.

"Him? He thinks he hears angels, doctor — a convenient delusion when I needed to 'convince' him of certain truths. I imagine we'll have to lock him away before the service. Now, if you'll excuse me..."

Netchurch frowned, again wishing others of his clan could follow his example. He'd never had that much difficulty maintaining his sanity. Why, if anything, his devotion to science and reason felt stronger than ever!

Not, he had to acknowledge, that this chamber seemed much like a place of science.

Had he not walked here himself, guided by a Setite ghoul who met him near the sewer entrance, the doctor would never have believed that he was beneath the streets of Cairo. The room appeared very much like the inside of a cathedral, complete with high peaked roof. Stained glass

windows in disturbing abstract shapes somehow evoked visions of half-remembered dreams from his mortal days. In the floor where the pews would normally stand were a number of rusted metal grates, through which Netchurch could hear running water. At the front, on the dais, was a stone table with heavy leather straps. It had been haphazardly covered with a blanket and a pad, probably from a futon. A small, cloth-lined basket sat at the table's edge.

This was not where he'd have chosen to see the baby born, Netchurch thought with a pang of what might have been regret.

The ceremony began with little forewarning. Setites filed in from various doors, some chanting paeans in Latin, some in modern Arabic and some in what Netchurch assumed was Ancient Egyptian. Despite the drastically different vocabulary and intonations, the hymns seemed to come together, to resonate and build upon one another on the minor and unresolved chords in a way that made the doctor's flesh crawl and his mind beg for some resolution to the incomplete chords. Even as they chanted, they lifted knives and spikes and bled themselves over the grates. Two stepped forward to strap Afifa to the waiting table.

Kahina led the ceremony, dressed now in ceremonial garb that might have been the style when the pyramids were new. She spoke in Ancient Egyptian, so Netchurch could only guess at her meaning. She stood atop the table, feet at either side of Afifa's shoulders. The Caitiff seemed to be in some sort of stupor. Her eyes were glassy; her only sound was an occasional moan. The bulge in her belly sporadically *moved*, as though the child shifted in time to Kahina's cadence or the notes of the chanting Setites.

It wouldn't be long now.

* * *

Afifa's scream, as Dr. Netchurch delivered the child, was the wail of a damned soul. The umbilical chord slid from her like a slime-covered root; it was stiff, brittle, and it broke away even as Netchurch lifted the infant and placed him in the basket. The smell that permeated the room was a dry, reptilian musk.

There was no blood.

Netchurch disliked thinking in metaphors such as "spine-tingling," but something unsettling ran through him as he touched the child. Some part of him had expected a physical transformation, perhaps scales or serpent's eyes. But the boy appeared normal, like any infant — though his shock of deep red hair was thicker than average for a newborn. His skin was slightly pale, but that, too, was not especially unnatural.

It wasn't the sense of cold emanating from the child that drove Netchurch, and even Kahina, to take a frantic step back from the table, or caused Afifa to squirm in her bonds as though trying to flee. It wasn't the sudden dimming of the stained glass, as though the light itself recoiled from something in that chamber.

It was the child's expression. From an infant face that should have been capable of displaying only the most basic emotions, two deep blue eyes gazed forth, focused deliberately on first the assembly, then Netchurch, and finally Kahina herself. And the infant smiled.

I knew you would not fail me, my child.

His lips had not moved. The voice sounded instead in the minds of everyone present. It reverberated through the vaults of their consciousness, and though Netchurch first heard the words in English, its echoes were Egyptian.

"My... my lord?" Kahina seemed somehow shaken. What, Netchurch wondered, had she expected? "Is that you?"

It is I. With your help, I am reborn. I...

Kahina scowled as the voice trailed off, glaring at Netchurch as though any potential impediment was somehow *his* fault. "Is something wrong?"

Wrong? I think not. There is... another presence here, with me. It is, I imagine, only the child himself. He is stronger than I anticipated, but with a bit of effort...

Dear Set!

The Sleeping Lord, it seemed, already possessed some rudimentary foresight, for its exclamation lingered in their minds for almost a full second before the doors and windows exploded into the room. Netchurch heard a rapid snapping sound, and it took him an instant to recognize it as unnaturally swift footsteps on broken glass.

Three Setites died before the last of the debris fell to earth. The others scattered, diving for cover or some tactical advantage. They found none, for their paths were already blocked.

Netchurch recognized Petra and Shahid among the assailants, for neither Nosferatu had masked their inhuman forms. He recognized Waulkeen as well, who, despite his blindness, seemed to look upon Netchurch with saddened eyes. They must have gathered the others, whoever they might be. Netchurch knew none of them by sight — but

Kahina clearly did. Her eyes fixed balefully, fearfully, on the obsidian-skinned figure who appeared abruptly in the center of the chamber. "Antara..."

"Kahina." His voice was deep, almost melodious. Before the Setite could even begin preparations for a spell or defensive move, the Assamite was upon her, one hand on her throat, the other wrapped around a blade nearly as old as he was.

The sword never landed. As though drawn of their own accord, Antara's eyes turned slowly to meet those of the infant in the basket beside him.

"Allah preserve us..."

The thought formed, but never left his mouth. He couldn't speak. He couldn't move. He couldn't *breathe*, and though he hadn't *needed* to draw breath for over 15 centuries, he felt smothered, panicked. He no longer saw Kahina, who yanked herself from his grip and fled the chamber. He didn't see his fellows, engaged in what should have been easy combat, begin to falter, as though the strength was slowly sapped from them. He saw only the infant's eyes, pools of endless night into which his very soul began to fall.

No!

He was Antara! He was Haqim's heir! And this would not be!

Even from behind, Netchurch could see the Assamite struggling. His shoulders straightened; his slackening grip on the blade tightened. The Methuselah within the child was powerful, but it was not yet strong enough to defend itself, not from one such as the Shepherd. The child would die.

This unique creature, this unique opportunity, would be lost. Without record. Without study. Just... gone.

When Antara finally hurled off the last of the Sleeping Lord's will, the child was indeed gone. And Doctor Netchurch with it.

* * *

[A muffled click, followed by sounds of fumbling.]

"I... I hope I've enough tape left.

"Heh. Tape. Sticky situation, this. Heh...

"Excuse me. Get a grip, have to get a...

"I believe it has been three nights... perhaps four... since the birth. Several times now, I have felt something... flow from the child. Felt like... like an invisible shadow, if that makes any sense. As much as anything else does anymore. A darkening, but not of sight. I've felt similar, done similar when I've called on the Blood to hide from others, but never anything — like this! I believe



it is this power that has prevented any searchers — and they *must* be searching — from finding us.

"I wanted to stop running, to study it, maybe just to hide. But I didn't. I *couldn't*. He — it — wanted to go. So we went.

"I don't know how we got to the room. I remember streets and lampposts and... pedestrians."

[Speech on the tape stops for a moment, replaced by a sound of cloth on flesh; perhaps someone wiping a hand or a mouth.]

"Pedestrians. I... Where was... The room.

"We waited there. Hours? Nights? I felt a hunger like I'd never known. I don't think it was mine.

"And then they came. No word, no warning. The door simply opened, and they were there.

"Kahina... smiling. She ushered in the others, clearly in control. Yet I'd swear, somewhere in her eyes I saw the faintest trace of panic.

"But the others, the others had empty eyes. I've seen people under the domination of others, and they were never this... blank. I recognized many of them, from the Court of Dreams. These were Cairo's Setites.

"And the baby..."

[Speech stops, replaced by several minutes of sobbing. When it returns, the voice is shakier.]

"It couldn't be... couldn't have happened. It... I didn't feel as though I were hallucinating, but who can tell?

"This infant, who should be incapable of movement on his own, crawled over to them, leaving me in the corner where I sat. And he... He *stood*. He rose to greet them, and the first bent down and offered his wrist to the infant, and I couldn't see, but I could hear the tearing of flesh. And then I did see, saw the child's skin darken and redden, and the first of the Setites collapsed into dust. Then the next stepped forward, uncaring, and they just kept coming, and coming...

"And I ran. I ran. I don't even know where I am now. I'm sure he knows. I'm sure he'll find me when he wants..."

[Laughing; high-pitched, tinged with hysteria.]

"I have no scientific rationale for what I've seen here. Nothing in my understanding of the Kindred can account for the boy developing this much power so swiftly. I can't... can't explain it. I can't explain.

"You, whoever you are. Whoever finds this tape, I pray to a God I don't — didn't? — believe in, that you can do something. That you can find some way to stop this atrocity, this new creature before it gains even more power. Before it becomes unstoppable.

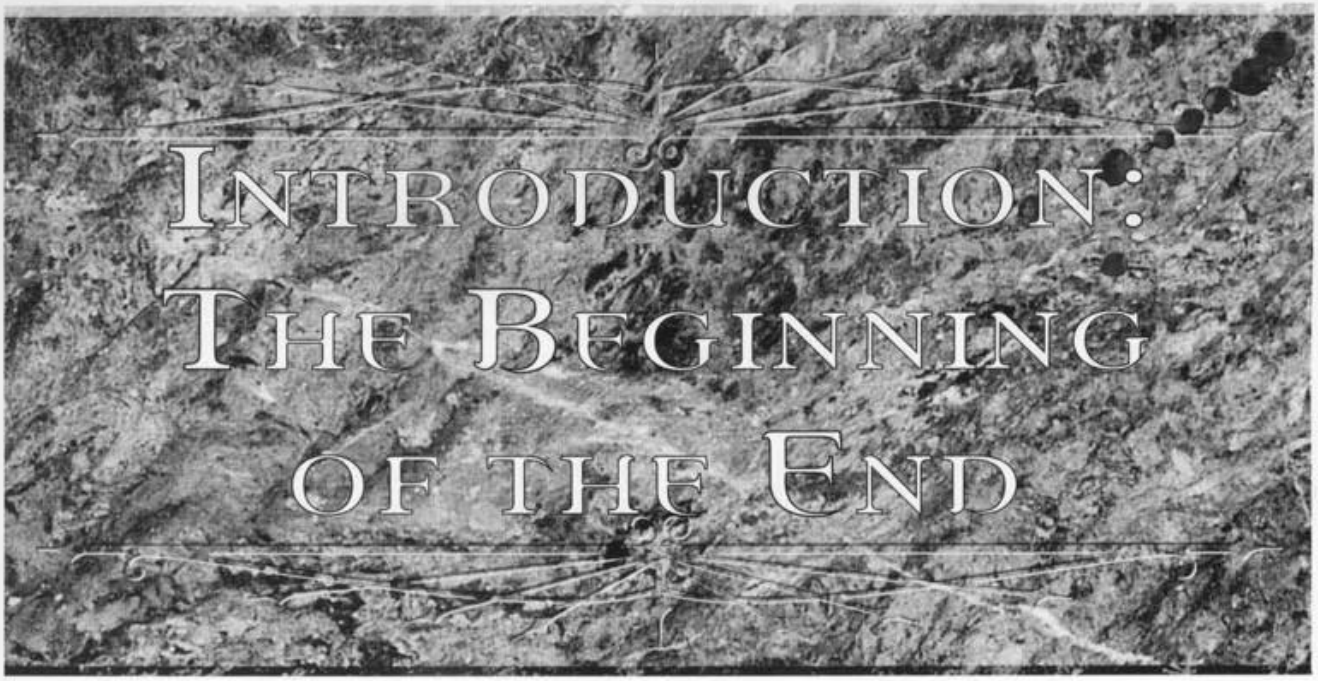
"And I pray even harder that this is a new creature...

"You see... for a moment there, the Sleeping Lord spoke of another. Another presence in the boy's body.

"And before the Assamites arrived, he shouted. He shouted. And God help me, I don't know if it was an exclamation...

"...or a greeting."





Introduction: The Beginning of the End

It's time to bring about the End of the World. Armageddon. The apocalypse. Gehenna. We're not just doing it with **Vampire**, either — it's happening with all the other game lines.

Vampire is the most tragic, at least at face value, among the games in the World of Darkness series. By design, its characters are Damned, shunned by God Himself in a guilt-heavy "sins of the fathers" way. As such, **Vampire**'s end should evoke a significant sense of tragedy as well.

As Gehenna arrives, the vampires' curse should be one of their ultimate insignificance at the End of the World. The world simply doesn't need vampires anymore. It's a cynical place, and humanity's need to be scared and fearful of the dark has led to a full-scale disbelief in "creatures of the night." Years ago, a pair of the game's designers had a conversation, imagining the End of the World involving the last vampire in it, sitting at a bar. He's one of the Fourth Generation, merely having a drink at the bar and wondering about his own fate. He still needs to drink blood, but the Curse has thinned so much in light of the world's waning faith that he can eat food, drink beverages, et cetera. He can't go outside during the day, and he has to consume blood to survive, but all of his much-vaunted powers are gone. It's literally as if God turned His back on the "vampire experiment," writing it off as a failure or as something that just didn't serve a purpose in the modern world any longer.

This book presents a sliding scale of end-of-the-world scenarios. While **Vampire** favors that futile, tragic and — we'll say it — angst-heavy conclusion, we don't want to railroad players into having to accept that as the end of their chronicles. Indeed, though we're ending the world, we include options for pursuing a chronicle in light of the vampires' Judgment Day. More on that later, though — right now, concentrate on how you'd like your apocalypse flavored.

Here are some examples of principles that have signified and characterized the End Times throughout this book's design and development.

- **The Blood weakens.** Powerful vampires have difficulty being... well, powerful. While this doesn't seem dynamic at first, imagine the panic vampires experience after finding out they can't do the things they once could.
- **Rampant diablerie.** In order to fight back their growing weakness, vampires diablerize like mad, trying to spike their blood with bursts of

power from consuming the souls of other vampires. The Sabbat's freaking out because it's never really forbidden diablerie, but the practice rises to insane levels. The Camarilla's shaken because its powerful members — the ones who forbade diablerie in order to preserve their own safety — are having to turn to diablerie to maintain their edges. Once they're caught in the act, the hypocrisy is too much for the rest of the Ivory Tower to bear, so they indulge themselves to protect themselves against their own elders' thirst.

• **Widespread mistrust.** Politics grind to a halt, and survival becomes more important than appearing at Elysium. Young vampires move in coteries and packs for safety in numbers, but also in hopes of using those numbers to take down elders and drink them dry. Of course, even those vampires can't trust each other, so these gangs tear themselves apart, fracture and join other gangs, infiltrate other gangs in hopes of bringing them down from within, et cetera. It's like gang culture, with Blood as the ultimate commodity.

Of course, a certain demographic of the Kindred keeps its head in the sand, "fiddling as Rome burns." In these Kindred's minds, though, they know the time has come, so they squander their resources on a few more pleasurable nights before they meet their end. Vampire parties are lavish but desperate, debased but opulent.

Here are a few other notable ideas that we explore a bit in **Gehenna**.

The Red Star

As a setting element, the Red Star won't be nailed down to an actual, irrefutable thing. Most vampires can't see it anyway, and few of those who can see it really know what it is. As such, it serves Storytellers as a vague and ominous threat. It can appear here as a variety of story devices: It might work well in your chronicle as Caine's eye or some such, watching over the Kindred and waiting for the right time to return. It can also serve as a "Gehenna clock" if it changes brilliance, or as the linchpin of any number of radical Gehenna cult philosophies. While it should feature in *some of* the visual realm of vampires' perceptions, don't feel like you have to let characters be able to do anything about it. It might also be a physical incarnation of the "Red Sign," the Lovecraftian plot device we used for the ritual (in book of the same name) that allows vampires to reclaim their mortal status.

Consequences of the Red Sign

The crux of the Red Sign is that a cabal of mages has either discovered or is about to discover the secret of returning vampires to mortal status. Should the mages be experimenting with power of this caliber? Hell, no, and that's why it serves both **Vampire** and **Mage**, in that it hits key themes of both games (hubris for **Mage** and the Biblical Curse of Caine for **Vampire**).

Thin-Blooded Kindred

Of course these mutts play a role, as prophesied in *The Book of Nod*. In recent years, many princes have appointed scourges and tasked sheriffs with the elimination of these Kindred. The problem is, the sheriffs and scourges can't act fast enough, and you might wish to employ a "terrible reveal" in which a veritable army of thin-blooded Kindred, probably headed by some messiah-figure (the Last Daughter, perhaps), faces the characters. This army of thin-bloods might even be able to overthrow a city, with an extremely high-generation survivor assuming the princedom, sending the Camarilla into mania and causing the Sabbat to laugh hysterically — with no understanding of the presence of the thin-blooded in their own ranks, who subsequently unseat an entire council of bishops and claim the city for their own. These two "thin-blooded cities" would probably come under assault by various undead factions, but they have the fodder to resist their more experienced foes (as thin-bloods from around the world flock to them in order to make a place for themselves). These places should probably be South American or Third-World cities, where you can still hide the Kindred violence among the mortal violence. Then again, the cities of Sydney and Cairo already have clanless princes, if not princes of exceptionally high generation.

The Black Hand

If you use this faction in your chronicle, it's suggested that certain high-ranking members of the Camarilla are actually either spies or Manchurian Candidates placed by the Black Hand. ("One story even holds that one or more high-level officials of the Camarilla are actually deep-cover Hand agents — or even Manchurian candidates — planted into the sect many centuries ago.") While this shouldn't be the case across the board, it would serve well to cripple the Camarilla if it depended upon the actions of a key Kindred who turned out to be a traitor

or plant. While almost reminiscent of the old chestnut, "Oh, he's really a *Sabbat agent*!", it at least has the ethical repercussions that don't come up with deep conditioning. The best route to go here is with one of each — an active traitor (or one who runs to the Sabbat/Hand when the shit starts to go down) and perhaps a lesser dupe/Manchurian.

The Sects

To be honest, sect is sort of irrelevant to the coming of Gehenna. The sects have existed for only 500 years or so. Storytellers will likely want to exhibit part of the End of the World via the dissolution and collapse of the sects.

The Camarilla: They're not the tools of the Antediluvians — they don't believe the Antediluvians exist. Okay, so they're not the *direct* tools, but that's the nature of the Jyhad. The Camarilla should fracture from within along lines of generation, as the elders who actually remember or have verifiable descent from Antediluvians reveal themselves as a bunch of hypocritical, Jyhad-playing SOBs who were trying to trick the gullible younger generations all along. The younger ones, who never really bought into all that crap about Noah's ark and the First City, resist the wakening of the Antediluvians as best they're able, mostly out of resentment for being played in the Jyhad and the modern desire to lead their own unlives. Some people are on opposite sides of this thing. They're elders who don't want to knuckle under to the Antediluvians (most elders will accept their proper place in the hierarchy again with the rising of their progenitors) and poor, misled souls who bought into the lie and are pissed about it (paging Mr. Pieterzoon). Bottom line: The Camarilla collapses like Enron/WorldCom as the worthlessness of its foundation becomes public knowledge. Chaos ensues among the vampire community, princes find themselves besieged by their own locals, and it's all a big clusterfuck.

The Sabbat: Uh... okay, so they were right about the whole Antediluvian thing. That doesn't mean they're disciplined enough to do anything effective about it. The Sabbat is the Mongol Horde of Kindred society. These Cainites are brutal, felonious, self-righteous, consumed by their own purposes and, largely, a chaotic mess. Occasionally, they muster enough coincidences that keep them from shooting any more hookers in the head and occasionally win a game/Crusade, but thereafter, they sink back into their mire of self-invoked monstrosity. They've got their capable individuals, but even a bunch of capable individuals can't make up for the fact that their rank and file is better suited to stabbing itself in the eye and setting itself on fire than... well, anything of actual value. Add to this the fact that they don't have a leader (the Regent of the Sabbat died in **Clanbook: Tzimisce**, and the question of who's going to fill the position came up in **Mexico City by Night**). Logically, the Sabbat should fracture, too, with maybe a few of the sect's luminaries possibly leading a subsection of the more competent ones and the rest of them proving to be the general pain in the ass they've been all along. Politics will rend the sect from within, disorder will undo it from without, and a select few of them will rise from the ashes and take their place... wherever. Those are the ones who have the distinct pleasure of facing the Antediluvians, in whatever form.

The Antediluvians

Things start getting sticky here. We've alluded to certain Antediluvians being in certain places, but some of them aren't around at all. What follows is a summary of where the clan-founding vampires are (if they still exist) and rough plans that exist for them, if any, at this point.

Note: Consider this a "spoiler" warning. This is the secret document that has hidden deep within a file folder at the back of a cabinet for years. While you don't have to use it by any means — and we never enforce any of these aspects as irrefutable dogma — these are the "official" statuses of the members of the Third Generation. Some are more fleshed out than others, as they have been assigned specific roles to play, but all have been considered. This doesn't account for other Antediluvians, as we've never formally said who's real and who's not. By the same token, it doesn't attempt to answer certain mysteries, such as the true identity of Ashur or the nature of the Second Generation. You might also enjoy reading between the lines. For example, note that [Tzimisce] is simply referred to as [Tzimisce]. Even here at the game studio, our limited mortal minds weren't able to comprehend the creature's real name.

Assamites (Haqim): His avatar, ur-Shulgi, recently rose on the border of Iran and Iraq and killed an untold number of infidels. It has taken over leadership of Assamite hierarchy in its sire's stead. Open to any plans for Haqim himself.

Brujah (Troile/[Brujah]): This Kindred has been rumored to be dead for a while, so it can safely be ignored or used if a need for it arises.

Followers of Set (Set/Typhon): Nice try, guys, but your magic isn't going to bring back a dead god. A cool moment of despair for a clan very deserving of whatever nastiness is foisted upon it: "Aw, fuck, we were wrong all along." We're open to this changing, but this fits the predominant Judeo-Christian myth we've established for **Vampire**.

Gangrel ([Gangrel]/Ennoia): Active and scary for an inordinate amount of time. It's our impression that in order to escape its Damned self, it ultimately Earth Melded to the center of the Earth, where it either burned to Final Death or became something else. In any event, if it's not burned up, it's still there, and certainly capable of being one of the most hellish "force of nature" overt movers among the Antediluvians. [Developer's note: This scares me just thinking about it.]

Giovanni (Augustus Giovanni): Augustus is a pig, and he should probably die as one of the early events of Gehenna. He's the youngest of the Antediluvians and probably possessed of the greatest ego (in mortal terms), so it'll be cosmic justice when he eats it.

Lasombra ([Lasombra]): Diablerized long about the 14th century. Dead and gone. Good riddance; what a brute! Whatever it is in the Abyss certainly isn't a vampire anymore.

Malkavians (Malkav): The best use of this individual isn't that he's in Jerusalem (as **Fountains of Bright Crimson** suggests), but that he's become the Malkavian Madness Network, the sort of insanity-meme that links all Malkavians in the Final Nights.

Nosferatu (Absimiliard): Despised by the rest of the world — hated subconsciously by people who don't even know he exists — Absimiliard has fled as far from human contact as possible. He's gone to either the bottom of the sea (alien and inaccessible by lesser creatures) or Antarctica (which segues with some **Werewolf** back story), where he just sits rotting, but ultimately unable to end his own unlife because he hasn't got the willpower. Another theory is that maybe Absimiliard isn't the actual Antediluvian, and that the real Antediluvian was such a master of Obfuscate that he made the whole world forget he ever existed.

Ravnos ([Ravnos]): Too bad. So sad. Bye bye.

Toreador (Arikel/Ishtar): No reliable reports of "her" death (if she's a she or even has a gender) have surfaced, but this individual makes an excellent tie-in to the Ishtarri of **Kindred of the Ebony Kingdom**.

Tremere (Tremere/Saulot): Time for a ride. Saulot resides in Tremere's body. Tremere resides in Goratrix's body. Goratrix resides in a mirror. (Tremere diablerized Saulot to become a third-generation Kindred, but the Antediluvian was far more powerful than Tremere anticipated and retained control over himself to some degree, ultimately reclaiming himself from his "killer" in the **Transylvania Chronicles**.) *But.* The Tremere first became vampires by experimenting with the blood of other captured vampires, among them the Tzimisce. So, when Tremere first became a vampire, he was infected by the Tzimisce Ancient's universal-among-its-clan presence. (All Tzimisce carry a "seed" as it were of their founder; see their clanbook.) The body Saulot is in is going to be the perfect vessel for the return of [Tzimisce]. It cripples Tremere as an Antediluvian and destroys Saulot.

Tzimisce ([Tzimisce]): Thought to be diablerized in the late 14th century, this thing survived. At present, it's dead (the thing beneath New York City is just a lifeless husk boiling over with its own Vicissitude), but it's coming back. See "Tremere." [Tzimisce] isn't even a thinking entity anymore; it's just a malignant *presence*.

Ventrue (Ventru/[Ventrue]): Dead a long time ago.

And you know what? You're encouraged, as Storyteller, to involve "other" Antediluvians that might be found over the course of Gehenna, suggesting that there's a lot more out there than even the most book-buying, self-styled genius pundit know-it-all has the answers to. These can be vampires of "dead" lineages or vampires from the initial batch of Antediluvians who never Embraced at all. Lucian. Mekhet. Maybe some African vampires. Guys we haven't even heard of at all. Things our mere mortal minds can't fathom.

How to Use this Book

There's no need to get fancy here — save that for the stories themselves!

Chapter One sets the stage for the impending End of the World, offering resolution to a few lingering plot threads and advice to Storytellers who plan to undertake the daunting task of bringing about Gehenna.

Chapters Two through **Five** are the actual stories themselves, four different scenarios, scaling up from the Kindred vanishing without the acknowledgement of the rest of the world to hellfire and bloodstorms.

Chapter Six offers some advanced storytelling advice, largely on the topic of structuring the actual scenarios themselves. It pays particular mind to the inevitable customization that's going to have to take place so that individual Storytellers can organize things for their troupes.

The **Appendix** presents some of the key players and signature characters who could appear during the course of Gehenna.







Chapter One: The Final Nights

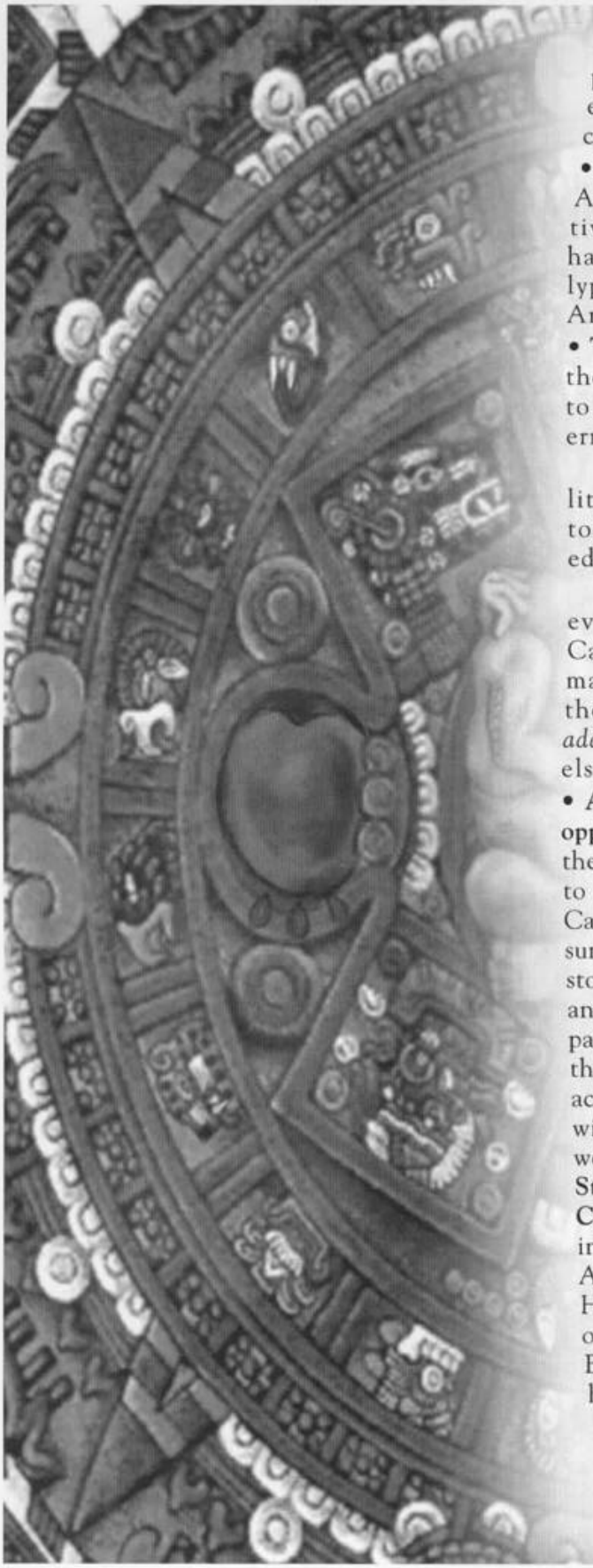
The Book of Nod tells us that we will know when Gehenna comes. The moon will run red as blood, the sun will rise black in the sky. The world will turn cold, and unclean things will boil up from out of the ground. Great storms will roll, lightning will ignite fires, animals will fester and their bodies, twisted, will fall. The Methuselahs and Antediluvians will rise from their torpor and devour those in their path. Caine will return and call his children to him to the location whereupon the First City once stood. Here he will sit on a basalt throne and judge all his childer. The events that follow are allegedly even more apocalyptic. It's no wonder the elders of the Camarilla try (but often fail miserably) to suppress talk of it at all costs.

The race of Caine, however, has no way of knowing if *The Book of Nod* is actually right. It seems a little too clear at some parts and far too vague on others. Symbolism and clarity converge in a witch's brew of prophecy, probably also strongly affected by its translators. To maintain poetic discourse in the translation, certain changes have to have been made. But at what cost?

The Signs of Gehenna

The Book of Nod describes the coming of Gehenna to be forerun by several grave signs and marks. A few scholars claim that some of these have already come true. Others posit that these prophecies are merely ancient nonsense. Whatever the truth is, some of these prophecies are listed here, with brief discussions on what could be the truth behind them.

- **A Time of Thin Blood will come, when Clanless will rule and vampires unable to sire will exist:** Both Sydney and Cairo are the domains of Caitiff princes, and many high-generation vampires are actually unable to sire. Their blood is simply too diluted and the Curse of Caine too weak. This seems fairly straightforward. *Too* straightforward according to some...
- **Wild Ones will hunt vampires even in their strongest cities:** This is most likely a prediction of the coming of those who call themselves "hunters." Many a vampire has met her fate at the hands of one of these zealous mortal witch-hunters, in possession of some truly outlandish powers.



When considering *The Book of Nod*, though, the term "Wild Ones" might also hark back to a previous reference to the fae. Then again, who ever heard of fairies hunting vampires in the cities?

• **Awakening of some of the eldest:** Several Antediluvians are believed to be awake and active, and at least one (the Ravnos Antediluvian) has been killed in events that seemed near-apocalyptic themselves. Surely, this must mean that the Ancients *are* rising?

• **The Crone will awaken and consume all:** One of the most common theories is that this is a reference to Baba Yaga who awoke from torpor to hold Eastern Europe and Russia under an iron curtain.

Some Necromancers claim that a terrible storm literally swallowed an entire city of the dead, but too few others understand the profound knowledge of death to take this into account.

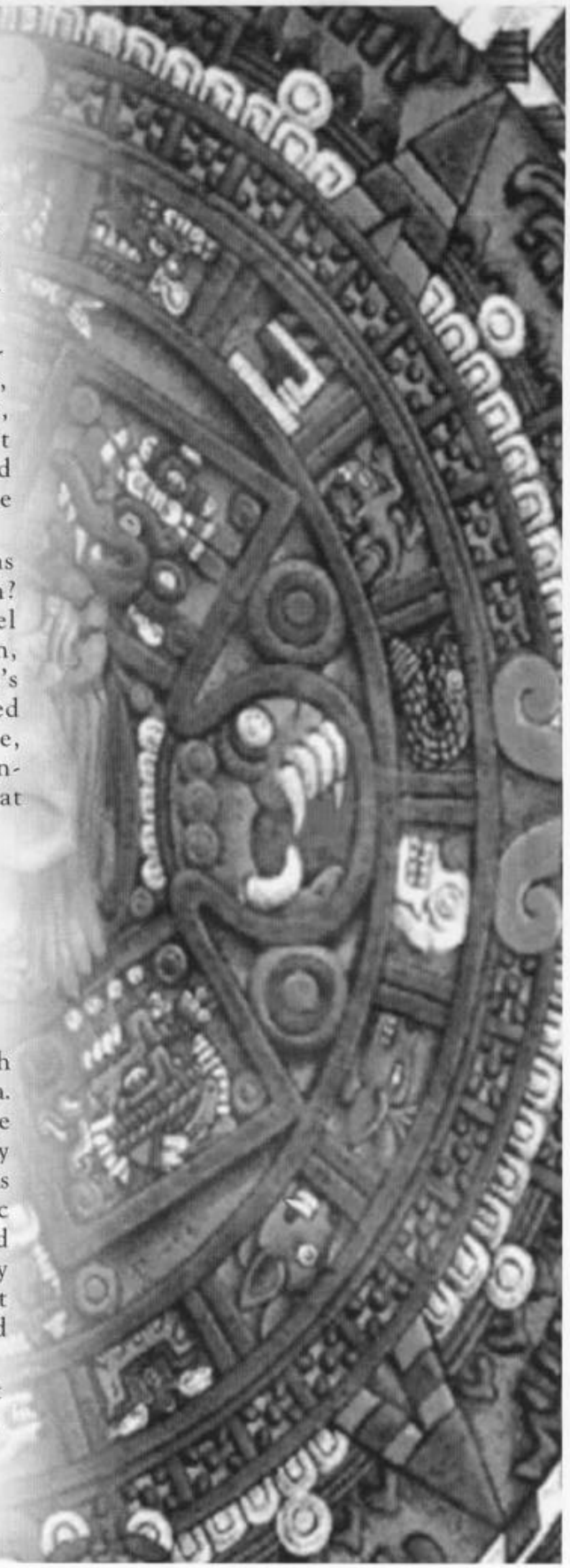
No matter how brilliant he is, no Noddist has ever been able to find out who the Crone persona Caine meets in *The Book of Nod* actually is, though many hold it to be Caine's wife, Lilith. If it is, will the Mother of Monsters scourge the world, *in addition* to the Antediluvians and God knows what else?

• **A black hand will rise up and choke all those who oppose it:** The existence of the Sabbat faction known as the Black Hand is not as well-guarded a secret as it used to be. Regardless, it strikes fear into the heart of Camarilla Kindred, and an air of legend and mystery surrounds it. While not as romantic as some of the stories would have it, the Black Hand gains credibility and respect (not to mention fear) from this particular passage in *The Book of Nod*. It still remains to be seen if the ominous prophecy of the Black Hand's rise and acquisition of absolute control bears true. If it does, it will lend credence to many of the other prophecies as well. The Black Hand (detailed in both the **Vampire Storytellers Handbook** and in its own supplement, **Caine's Chosen: The Black Hand**) is actually working toward Gehenna and will want to serve the Antediluvians when they arise. Yet, what if the Black Hand chose its name so as to coincide with this aspect of *The Book of Nod*, to lend the faction an air of Biblical gravity? And if so, what is the "true" black hand mentioned in the prophecy?

• **Those who drink heart's blood will flourish:** Most likely this is a reference to the practice of diablerie. Many fear that diablerie will become as common as regular feeding during the early stages of Gehenna.

- **A dragon rises:** This could be a foretelling of the demons who have erupted from Hell to stalk the Earth once again, according to some. Some theories also claim them to be a brood of dragons. What that means eludes even the most scholarly Cainite.

  Some claim it to have been the rise of Dracula, others believe that it is the coming rise of the Tzimisce Antediluvian. Some posit that it might be some unspeakable and as-yet-unknown monster appearing for whatever reasons.
- **A darkness moves:** The Abyss stirs. Few disagree that the horrible realm known as the Abyss, where only a handful of Cainites have access, hides a dread entity. Some prophets claim that it will be the end for the Clan of Shadows, and possibly even all Cainites, if the master of the Abyss should be unleashed.
- **An angel dies:** How does an angel die? Who has the gall to rise up and slay one of God's firstborn? Or perhaps this is another metaphor. An angel could be a pure and gentle creature, or then again, it need not be one of God's angels (not that God's angels are necessarily pure and gentle). A feared and particularly vicious Necronomist Tzimisce, Sascha Vykos is sometimes referred to as the Angel of Caine. Many would rejoice the night that Vykos died.



Case Studies: Portents of Gehenna

The book **Nights of Prophecy** details five scenarios each involving the fulfillment of certain prophecies of Gehenna. This supplement is highly useful when dealing with the overarching plot lines of **Vampire**, and a Storyteller may rightly assume that it builds many of the foundations on which this book is structured. That said, this book is more or less an historic event. It sums up close to 13 years worth of story lines and shadow conspiracies, and most importantly, it collects many "loose ends" leading to Gehenna, culminating in four different scenarios from which Storytellers may select (or be inspired by).

The following is a summary of some of the most important events that have served as the bricks to pave the road to Gehenna. These events might have been present in your chronicle, perhaps in a different aspect or shape, or they might be completely new to you. Regardless, this material is yours to change as you like. The more you customize it to



fit your chronicle, the firmer the foundation for your story becomes, and by extension the story line. Reasons as to why things happen, who performs what action or where it takes place, could vary in your chronicle based upon how it appears in the metaplot. This is fine. The only thing to worry about is continuity and the big picture. As long as you're being consistent, there is no reason not to change what you need to change.

What follows is a list of events and a discussion of how you might integrate them in your chronicle. They even include possible alternatives that could make them work better.

Case Study: Awakening of the Antediluvians

It is generally believed by those who heed the prophecies of *The Book of Nod* that the Antediluvians will return, and that they will devour their childer before Caine passes down his judgment on all. As Gehenna occurs, it likely becomes an indisputable fact that the Antediluvians exist, despite how hard the Camarilla wishes to believe otherwise. The truth is that the Ancients *are* awakening, and that their motivations most likely spell doom for all of creation.

Several Antediluvians are already active, some are still awakening, and others still are dead and gone.

Considering the Antediluvians

Despite the rigid research and chronicling of scholarly Kindred, the history of the Damned is far from certain. Most believe that following Caine came a Second Generation, and that these childer were named Irad the Strong, Zillah the Beautiful and Enosch the Wise. Each of these childer had progeny, theoretically numbering 13 in all. These are the beings who would be known as the Antediluvians by Kindred of later generations.

Most hardly even consider that there might have been more beings of both the Second and Third Generations, but it is entirely possible nonetheless. Reference in a book as elusive and vague as *The Book of Nod*, or lack thereof, does not mean much when considering that the events in question occurred thousands of years ago. For instance, some claim that according to certain sources, Set cannot have been an Antediluvian per se, as he is rumored to have arisen in 5000 BC — which is after the Great Deluge (and Antediluvian literally means "from before the Great Flood"). Other such discrepancies could lead one to believe that more or less than 13 Antediluvians existed at one time — or continue to do so. After all, it is not before the time of the Second City that one obtains a clearer picture of which of the 13 were actually present.

In fact, could not some of the Antediluvians easily be one and the same? After all, many of them, such as [Lasombra] and [Tzimisce], have lost their names in the annals of time, so we might never even know. To add to the confusion, there is the question of where the Antediluvians have been all this time. Have they all lain torpid?

In addition to the 13 commonly "known" Antediluvians — all of whom are either named or simply referred to by the clan name, such as [Lasombra] — we also know the names Nergal, Loz, Ninmug and Al-Mahri, or the Aralu as they had once been defined. These names were carved in the door of a room in the ghostly fortress of the True Black Hand, which supposedly, held the torpid bodies of four Antediluvians. What is told of this to those outside the True Black Hand is that the corpses inside where those of the Ventrue, Toreador, Malkavian and Nosferatu progenitors. This fortress has since fallen and been destroyed, so no one will ever know the truth, but some tales claim that the sarcophagi were found vacant before the destruction of the stronghold. Is it possible that this room held four Antediluvians? Did it hold the specific four it claimed? We can only speculate. Most assume that the Ventrue Antediluvian perished during the reign of the historical Second City. Many Malkavians claim that Malkav has been active and communicating with his progeny, and some postulate theories as fearsome as Malkav *being* the mysterious Malkavian Madness Network. Then again, who could say? An even greater mystery is that of the whereabouts and actions taken by Absimiliard or the Toreador Antediluvian. If anyone does know, no one is sharing.

At any rate, it is highly likely that most vampires of the Third Generation perished in the Great Deluge. Perhaps 13 were all that remained. Perhaps the Aralu were the first four of the Third Generation to die, and thus entombed within the First City. That would account for why its spiritual mirror would include this very room. It showed the rest that they could still be killed, even with their remarkable power, and they greatly mourned (or celebrated...) their siblings' deaths. It might even have convinced them that their progenitors also could be killed, thereby spurring their revolt after the Deluge. This could account for why *The Book of Nod* mentions only the known 13 of the Antediluvians. Many legends claim that only seven survive tonight. Some say that only another of the Third Generation can kill an Antediluvian. If the last two points should hold any truth, this means that those who already met their Final Death must have fallen at the hands of Antediluvians. This could perhaps be physically at the hand of another, or perhaps it would also be possible by using lesser vampires as puppets, potentially meaning that other Ancients engineered events such as the Anarch Revolt or the Week of Nightmares.

Using the Awakening of the Antediluvians in your Chronicle

All the preceding points are merely speculation. They don't even really matter as far as you're concerned. It's your chronicle: *You* get to decide what the real truth behind the Antediluvians is. The various Ancients can be used in a number of ways in your chronicle. They all have different natures and probably different goals and motives. Consider each of them and integrate those you wish to use into your story. Does your story involve killing an Antediluvian? Fine. How should your players' characters go about killing it? This is the end; nothing is certain anymore. Even Antediluvians must die at some point or other, at the hands of either your players' characters or another third-generation vampire, perhaps acting in concert with the coterie. You need to decide what the Antediluvian has been doing, though, to bring it into the chronicle. It doesn't have to be accounted for in agonizing detail, but you must be sure that it can enter your game without seeming too random. Having an element as powerful and incredible as an Antediluvian should leave little to chance. You might even decide the outcome in advance, and guide your players through it. The power level of an Antediluvian is godlike, and even as the Curse of Caine weakens, these Cainites will be potent beyond anyone's belief.

- **Absimiliard**

The Nosferatu Antediluvian has not been seen or heard from for many centuries. Most of his progeny fear him, believing that he intends to slay them all eventually. They fearfully whisper of something called the Nictuku, beings commanded by Absimiliard, from wherever he is, and they claim that the slaying of Baba Yaga is proof of this.

Most common theories place Absimiliard as far away from mortal contact as possible, and this is, in fact, true. The Ancient hates people — mortal or Kindred. Because of his epic, biblical ugliness, he is the thing in the darkness, the monster in the closet, always hated, always feared. He cannot go on while being the focus for hatred of so many who don't even know that he exists.

Absimiliard has spent thousands of years with pent-up self-loathing, breaking down his own willpower for every night he continues his unlife. He is unable to finish off his wretched existence, and he wishes to eradicate his very existence through his Discipline.

Some believe that Absimiliard is haunting Antarctica, or maybe resting on the bottom of the ocean, but whether he lies torpid or remains active, no one really knows.

• **Cappadocius**

No small amount of speculation posits that Cappadocius, the progenitor of the Giovanni, is also or pseudonymously the Antediluvian known as Ashur. Many believed he would return from the Shadowlands after the failed attempt at diablerie at the hands of Augustus Giovanni. Strangely enough, Augustus managed to assume the powers of Cappadocius, but the Ancient's soul escaped. Augustus spent centuries trying to devour his former sire, but to no avail.

Once rumors of his presence on the other side spread, a wide-scale hunt began at the order of Augustus. Cappadocius ultimately ended up consumed when a devastating mystical storm ravaged the Shadowlands.

• **Augustus Giovanni**

"Uncle Auggie" the kinslayer was last seen entering the Shadowlands to search for Cappadocius after the Great Maelstrom. Having been the most active of all the Antediluvians ever, and not even being a true Antediluvian (as he did not witness the Great Deluge) Augustus is also the least powerful.

• **[Brujah]**

The Brujah Antediluvian, whose name has been obscured forever, is said to have been slain by its childe, Troile, during the time of the First City. Presumably Troile did not diablerize her founder, for there is no record of Troile assuming the powers of her progenitor.

Alternatives include having Troile actually being the Antediluvian, either through [Brujah] having taken possession of its childe's body after so many millennia, or perhaps the Ancient only faked its death, for whatever reason. It's even possible that Troile was the true name of [Brujah], or maybe Troile never existed.

Whatever the truth is, most believe that Troile lies trapped beneath the salted earth of Carthage. Should her lineage attempt to cleanse the site of Carthage, Troile and her veritable army of Methuselahs would rise again. What side they would take after thousands of years beneath the salted earth — if any — no one can say. It is doubtful that they would attempt to aid either those who confined them or their rabble descendents.

And, of course, some say Troile's gender was masculine, not feminine, to further confound issues.

• **Ennoia**

The Gangrel Antediluvian has always been somewhat of a paradox when considering the fact that she has allowed her progeny to run free even though she has allegedly been active for an inordinate amount of time. What she has been doing all this time is anyone's guess, but she seems more bent on preserving herself than destroying others. Successfully tracking her would lead to Scandinavia, along the Kola Peninsula, and into Siberia, where her traces would be lost, only suddenly to appear in Canada, where she abruptly disappears again. So far, no one has been able to track her, however, and those few Gangrel who know of her do not speak of her.

Some stories, though, do circulate from hushed voice to attentive ear. One tells of a nomadic coterie of Gangrel being pursued by a pack of Sabbat through woodlands in southern Quebec on a night not so many months ago. They all Earth Melded to escape their attackers, and they experienced something terrifying: As they slipped into the cold confines of the earth, they were all met by a powerful, disturbing presence. It was not malevolent, only discomforting, yet at the same time strangely... familiar. Word got around, and it soon became apparent that others have experienced the same thing. Only Gangrel have experienced this, however. It has led some to believe that Ennoia has decided to fulfill her mastery over Protean, and physically melded with the Earth itself. With this power, they say, she would be able to manifest as a force of nature and even draw nourishment from any being anywhere in the world, as long as it stands on bare earth. If she did meld with the planet, it is unlikely that she would be that powerful, but the concept is still frightening enough. What (if anything) she would want from her descendents, however, no one can say.

• **Haqim**

Few know what has become of Haqim, he from whom all Assamites descend. The Assamites occasionally claim that he is really of the Second Generation, but few Noddist scholars agree. Ancient in its own right, ur-Shulgi, the Avatar of Haqim, has risen and assumed leadership over the Assamites in the place of Haqim. A schism within the clan led a faction to defect and form a tenuous alliance with the Camarilla.

Haqim is the embodiment of murder, at least in the eyes of many Kindred. It is believed that he wishes to destroy all vampires in a holy war against Caine for reasons unknown. He is the bedtime story that even elder Kindred fear — the righteous blade always ready to strike, his face bloodied by the vitae of other Cainites, his mad eyes inspiring dread in any who would behold him.

With the amount of horrible stories and just general terror that accompanies Haqim's name, one could start to speculate that he is, in fact, nothing more than a ghost story. As far as anyone can say, no one has seen or heard from him for time out of mind. The closest thing to Haqim, however, must be ur-Shulgi, and if the tales about *this* dreadful creature are true, then the mere concept of its sire should be more than enough to believe every single tale about it.

• **[Toreador]**

Whether [Toreador] is named Ishtar or Arikel, or perhaps something completely different, he, she or it is definitely no less enigmatic than any of the other founders. Her bloodline is supposed to be responsible for creating the Masquerade, which is a small paradox, considering their simultaneous devotion to all things of beauty and sophistication — concepts that the Toreador clan sometimes epitomizes. Given the fact that most think that [Toreador] is protecting her clan, and one might even assume actively taking action through it, the creation of the Masquerade could very well be a ploy in some grand scheme wrought by the Degenerates' founder. She has certainly eluded the public eye for several centuries, whether she is active or torpid.

• **Malkav**

Malkav could be literal proof that an Antediluvian is everlasting, as many claim that he has ascended from the shackles of the flesh to become one with all his progeny. The Malkavians have always been known for their eccentric ways and wild theories, but no theory or concept has ever been so strange as that of the Malkavian Madness Network. No one outside the clan can ever truly understand what this is, apart from somehow being something like a collective mind state that Malkavians can enter. Whatever the case is, more and more have come to believe that this "madness network" somehow *is* Malkav, or whatever the true name of the Malkavian founder is.

Although it hasn't been reported, at least not to the point of becoming common knowledge, Malkav could potentially physically manifest or even acquire a new body. Whatever goals he might have, they are almost certain to differ from anything any of the other Antediluvians strive toward. Communicating with Malkav could be exceedingly difficult to anyone but the most enlightened Malkavian. As far as anyone can hypothesize, Malkav be trying to bring all of his progeny to Golconda through the "madness network," perhaps to lead them all to a new existence outside this one. Then again, Golconda might not be the ultimate destination...

• **[Lasombra]**

This Antediluvian could possibly be the source of humanity's fear of the dark. Few things seem more horrendous than control over darkness and shadow. For centuries it has been believed that [Lasombra] met its fate during the Anarch Revolt, at the hands of its own childer, but lately, many have worried openly that this might not be true. For all we know, it certainly *is* true, but one theory, which seems a tad better thought-out than others, supports it.

When the clan rebelled and turned on its sire on Castillo d'Ombro during the Anarch Revolt, [Lasombra] allowed its childe Gratiano to diablerize it. As its soul was released, it did not enter Gratiano, but rather entered the Abyss, with which [Lasombra] has potent ties. Through centuries of being incorporeal, the Ancient worked its designs through lesser proxies who sometimes would venture too deep into the Abyss and come under its sway. Unbeknownst to them, these proxies would work toward restoring the Antediluvian when the time was right, whereupon it plans to bring the Abyss into the material world, conquering it and claiming a world forever cloaked in shadow as its domain. The theory goes on, claiming that [Lasombra] could potentially become stronger through this suspended state, feeding off the Abyss and gradually becoming one with it.

Through the Discipline of Obtenebration, the Antediluvian is potentially linked with any Cainite possessing this power, and all it needs to escape the Abyss is for an individual skilled in this Discipline to prepare for its return. It will then absorb that person, granting his wish, by attributing onto him the powers of a god. Others laugh at this prospect. Baron von Münchhausen couldn't have told a better tale. Then they leave and return to their havens. And turn on all the lights.

• **[Ravnos]**

If [Ravnos] is anything but truly dead, few believe it. Numerous theories suggest that the creature's no-doubt prodigious Fortitude could have saved it, but such theorists didn't witness firsthand the Ravnos Antediluvian's ability to withstand the sun and onslaught of Kuei-jin elders for three days and nights.

• **Saulot**

Few actually know who Saulot is. After all, his clan was destroyed several hundred years ago. Those who know of him, might also know that he was diablerized by Tremere. As such, there is little reason to even consider him when speaking of Antediluvians.

Some high-ranking Tremere, however, know that Saulot is actually at large. After centuries of mental battle over dominion of Tremere's body, Saulot recently took control over his would-be murderer and forced the soul of Tremere to leave. Saulot then escaped Vienna with the body of Tremere.

Now Saulot has another card to play in the great Jyhad. Those who are more clued in than others suspect that this Antediluvian is the true master of the game, and one who has not lost any power despite the decline of his bloodline's wellbeing.

• **Tremere**

What has actually happened to Tremere is not common knowledge. In fact, only a few Kindred in the world know about it — Tremere himself, the loyal Etrius, Tremere's rogue childe Goratrix and a small cabal of Kindred who were there to witness the historic

shift of power among these potent Kindred. Having been forced out of his own body, Tremere entered that of his childe and forced the latter into a mirror, where Goratrix is now trapped.

One option for using Tremere would find him unable to employ the full spectrum of his Antediluvian powers in the body of a fourth-generation vampire. In such a scenario, Tremere seeks a way to restore himself. Devouring every last one of the dreaded Tremere *antitribu* seemed inadequate, and the Usurper now seeks alternate methods.

• **Typhon**

Generally believed to be the Setite founder, Typhon is assumed dead and gone. He need not be so in your chronicle, however. Was he dormant in Switzerland, as was his enemy Horus? Did he awake from torpor and travel back to Egypt? Whatever the truth is, he could have returned to reorganize his fractious clan.

If you want to run with the prospect of Typhon being dead, it might be possible to restore him, as the Setites wish and plan for. Seeing as how he is almost exclusively spoken of as a god, odds are that he would be one of the strongest Antediluvians.

• **[Tzimisce]**

A handful of Cainites and ghouls know that the Tzimisce Antediluvian stirs under New York City. It bubbles over with its own Vicissitude and absorbs animals, people and vampires. A low murmur in the back of the head of every Cainite sharing his blood beckons them to come to it, so that it can devour them to increase its potency. For a supposedly dead creature, this Antediluvian is remarkably active, however. Its favored childe, Lambach Ruthven, has acted erratically, leading some to believe that the entity possesses the craven Methuselah, whether through force of will or some eldritch artifact. Ruthven has Embraced childer with reckless abandon in Los Angeles, threatening the Masquerade and pressing an agenda likely unknown even to his conscious self. Since the Ancient has sworn to protect Lambach until the very end — whatever form that takes — such radical behavior on the Methuselah's part is both noteworthy and fearsome.

• **[Ventrue]**

Most believe that the progenitor of the Blue Bloods was slain ages ago, probably during the height of the Second City. If it managed to elude Final Death and return, in one form or another, who can tell what it is planning, or even doing? The alternatives are near endless, but it might be behind the Camarilla, slowly erasing the evidence of its and its siblings' existence, to better use its descendents. Whatever its mastery of Dominate might be, [Ventrue] would likely orchestrate the movements of unthinkable amounts of Kindred through the manipulation of their blood and minds.

Other Antediluvians

But what about others? As stated previously, there might have been any number of additional Ancients. The following are a few examples with brief discussion.

• **The Aralu**

In the depths of the spirit city Enoch lay four caskets. On the entrance to the tomb were written the names Nergal, Al-Mahri, Loz and Ninmug. These were collectively known as the Aralu and believed by some to be the Antediluvians of the Ventrue, Malkavian, Toreador and Nosferatu. Yet the Aralu could be four hitherto unknown Antediluvians, and here the Storyteller is free to decide how to use them.

Take Nergal as an example. Nergal is reputedly the name of a Baali Methuselah, and also possibly known as Shaitan. It makes no sense that he has been lying within Enoch, because he is supposed to have surfaced in Mexico in the early 1990s, only to be struck down. The name Nergal, however, has roots back to the ancient Akkadians. Among them, he was revered as god of the Underworld, with his wife Ereshkigal.

Contradicting myths and more than one Cainite assuming the name Nergal is certainly possible, and the Baali Nergal could even have taken the name after the Antediluvian Nergal — having been worshipped as a god — slipped into the arms of torpor. After all, the name bore great significance, and Nergal could even have believed that he was honoring the Ancient by bearing its name.

Applying this theory, it would also be entirely possible to attribute Namtaru as being identical to the Ancient Nergal, and that the Baali Antediluvian was laid to rest in torpor in Enoch, after its recovery from Chorazin. After all, the True Black Hand was known to truck with both infernalists and necromancers.

On a similar tangent, determining whether or not Ereshkigal could have been an Antediluvian, or even Cainite, is more difficult, as she is completely unknown in the Kindred "pantheon" of Methuselahs and their sires. It is likely that Nergal could have made progeny of a mortal lover, though.

• **Namtaru**

Although most hold that Namtaru was lost when Knossos fell, some are aware of its recovery in Chorazin, after Azaneal — conspiring with debased Lasombra known as the *angellis ater* — seized the citadel. Whatever became of Namtaru is impossible to say, but it is conceivably one of the Ancients, and not a true demon (as far as the Antediluvians can be discounted for being

demons!). It is likely that Namtaru has awoken during the Final Nights, especially with the return of the so-called "fallen" to Earth.

• **Mekhet**

One of the names of two Antediluvians reputed (or "known," depending upon with whom one speaks) to be active in the Final Nights, Mekhet leaves little in the way of concrete evidence to suggest its presence. Some believe that Mekhet is the name (or even True Name) of the Tzimisce Antediluvian, but the origin of that rumor remains unknown. The name itself appears to be Egyptian, at least to a casual glance, so some connection with Typhon in the guise of Set might be possible.

Another possibility is that "Mekhet" doesn't exist at all, or is far weaker than might be expected — possibly serving as a screen to the movements of another, better player in the Jyhad. The passing of an Antediluvian is a momentous event, and unless this individual possessed the ability to mask the power that one of its kind is likely to have, *someone* would have taken notice. Therefore, it is possible that Mekhet is a rumor and nothing more, intended to divert attention from someone else's actions. It is also possible that Mekhet does exist and is an Antediluvian but has somehow been prevented from, or failed to achieve, the level of power associated with the Antediluvians. Like the "Wandering Jew" of medieval legend, Mekhet might be little more than an observer, powerless and cursed to wander the Earth for eternity and watch its evils manifest.

• **Lucian**

It is curious that rumors of the "Antediluvian" Lucian began to circulate so closely after the collapse of Hell's gates and the disappearance of Lucifer...

Case Study: The Inconnu

Few secrets have ever been so carefully guarded, so cautiously dispersed among absolutely trustworthy allies only, and yet still so blatantly fascinating to anyone with an ear to the ground, than the true nature of the Inconnu. Frankly, no two Kindred sit on the same pieces of information regarding that secluded and enigmatic sect, and the odds are that those pieces are only hearsay and red herrings anyway. Even characters who have met with Kindred among the Inconnu firsthand are likely to have radically different opinions of them. Would a coterie that had met with Rebekah from **Chicago by Night** perceive the Inconnu the same way as someone harrowed by the events of **Lair of the Hidden**?

Records of the Inconnu go back centuries, possibly millennia, and no scholars have been able to trace a precise course or point of origin. Most believe that



it at least dates back to Byzantium, perhaps even before. Not only does this make the Inconnu the oldest sect of vampires ever to have existed, but the fact that no one knows for certain who is behind it or what its members' agendas are indicate that for being something so many know about, the true mystery is how it has been able to guard its secrets when so many do know about it.

Considering the Inconnu

Several well-known theories regarding the Inconnu circulate among elders, ancillae and neonates alike.

• **Tools of the Antediluvians:** The Inconnu work directly for the Antediluvians, administering their designs to once more rise up and devour their treasonous childer. The Black Hand already has this position, however. Wouldn't the Antediluvians organize their agents into working in concert? Then again, some Antediluvians could be working with the Black Hand, while others work with the Inconnu. This is the Jyhad, after all...

• **Monitors:** The Inconnu observe and possibly also catalogue all that goes on in Kindred society. Why they would so do is another topic for debate, but most assume that it is some grand task charged by their leaders to preserve and learn all there is about the nature of Cainites. This seems very likely because the Inconnu are virtually unknown for entering any form of debate or conflict. But why would they only watch?

• **Golconda Seekers:** The Inconnu is rumored to be a sect entirely devoted to reaching Golconda. Alternatively, it is a sect of vampires who have already attained Golconda, and its goal is to lead all others to the same enlightenment, thereby preventing Gehenna and saving the souls of all vampires. They never interfere, however. Do they seek out only those worthy of this goal, saving only those who prove their right without knowing it? Perhaps the mystical insight gained through Golconda offers something more with regard to answers.

• **Gehenna Cultists:** Perhaps the Antediluvians have nothing to do with Gehenna. Perhaps it is all due to the Inconnu, having plotted and schemed since God knows when with one goal in mind: Establishing the whole world as their domain. Perhaps the Inconnu even work for still-active vampires of the Second Generation. That's pretty damn scary, considering what might these monsters would have compared even to the Antediluvians.

• **Powers Behind the Thrones:** Owing to how no one bothers a member of the Inconnu who's come to town (on those rare occasions when they're aware of such), many younger Kindred speculate that the Inconnu are the true masters of the Camarilla, and possibly even the Sabbat. What their goals are is less certain. Why would they play the two lesser sects against each other? Then again, who knows what the alien elders might devise? Interestingly enough, many Cainites pursue the same theories about the Black Hand, and some have even started to look for links between the two.

• **Agents of Caine:** One of the most popular theories is that the Inconnu are the eyes and ears of Caine, which would explain why they seemingly never take an active role in any matter or conflict. What agenda Caine might possibly have is anyone's guess, if they even dare think the thought.

• **Red Herrings:** There *are* no Inconnu, it's all been a ruse. Perhaps there isn't even any Golconda, and clever Kindred used that prospect to motivate their fellows or lessers. Perhaps the prospect of a highly secretive sect monitoring everything younger vampires do scares them into submission. Whatever works.

No matter what the Inconnu truly is, you can fine-tune their presentation in the setting to suit your own chronicle. Yes, we know, you've heard this countless times before, and you want nothing less than a hard-cover book explaining and discussing the Inconnu in perfect detail. But consider this: For almost 13 years this secretive faction has been the only organization in this game that has not been presented for your full scrutiny, but rather left mysterious so that you could do anything you wanted with it. Revealing it now would only be a major anticlimax, mostly because it probably would not be what you always thought it was meant to be, or the answers weren't satisfactory even if you didn't have any theories yourself. Instead, some of the scenarios from Chapter Two to Chapter Five feature the Inconnu. None of them presents the same ultimate truth, but they all suggest ways to bring this enigmatic group into play at the very last point.

Consider also that depending on what the Inconnu were trying to do (avert Gehenna, or perhaps gather enough information about it to save their own unlives when it finally arrived), they might have failed — possibly grandly. What would the consequences of this revelation be to them as they sat ripe for harvest by their progenitors? This could turn out to be a major plot hook, especially if your players' characters have spent months trying to establish a link to the Inconnu to find some answers.

Case Study: The Jyhad

The Final Nights sets the stage for the very finale of the Jyhad, this ancient game of chess supposedly being played out by the Antediluvians, using their lessers as pawns. Everyone has heard of it, but has anyone ever dealt with it?

The Jyhad is more than a 13-year-old plot hook. It is the defining conflict of which all other conflicts of importance in **Vampire** are lesser versions. The game

itself is one of personal horror, indicating a struggle with coming to terms with one's true nature as a monster, a struggle to accept the horrors of a world of others like you and a struggle against those monsters. Arguably, these are individual-scale reflections of the Jyhad.

As this book deals with Gehenna, the End of the World, it is time to set the stage for the last match in the game called Jyhad. Whether or not you have dealt with it in the past, this is where it all ends. Perhaps your players have been thoroughly involved in the whole process, perhaps they haven't considered it even once.

Considering the Jyhad

The first question to ask about the Jyhad is what, exactly, is it? The usual response is that it is an epochal war fought by the vampires of the Third Generation, in which their lesser progeny are pawns in their Machiavellian ploys and moves. While this is true with regard to the metaplot, most people forget that the term Jyhad has a double meaning. A jihad also means any vigorous, bitter crusade in the name of a specific idea or principle. Applying this meaning makes things become fairly interesting. What if the concept of Jyhad as a holy war among the Antediluvians is only a ruse? What if the Camarilla was right all along and there were no Antediluvians? Obviously, that is not true; the Antediluvians do exist in the metaplot, and they are, if possible, even more dangerous than anyone expected. But what could this antipathy toward an idea or a principle be? Obviously, the historical Fourth Crusade was definitely a "jihad." The attempt to denounce the Antediluvians, which has been a practice of the Camarilla since its conception, could easily qualify as such a jihad. Equally, the Sabbat's belief in ultimately subverting mankind is a jihad. No matter what you want *the* Jyhad to be in your game, these points are all food for thought.

Why would the Antediluvians fight? Most of them seem to share a common goal, which is to rise up, devour their childer and possibly remake the world in their own images. Would it not be an easier task to work together on that, no matter what Caine or anyone else has prophesied? That would make it logically improbable that the Antediluvians would fight each other.

It could, however, all be a game, and besides, the Antediluvians — at least the *true* Antediluvians, those from before the Great Deluge — are not like their millennia-younger childer. They don't react the same way mortals do. They function on desires and urges we couldn't possibly imagine. Therefore, it is entirely possible that they *would* fight such a war against each other. Instinct rules over logic, and instinct says that an equal is a rival. Rivals are likely to come after you, even if you cooperate for a while. That's a liability and a risk not worth having to take.

Exploiting the Jyhad

The real question is how you can best use the Jyhad in your game. If you've previously dealt with the eternal struggle, you most likely know what course to take, but if you've never even considered employing it, you might be hoping for advice on how to use it.

The best way to exploit the Jyhad at this stage of endgame is to put the Antediluvians in play. Once you know what the goals and motivations of the members of the Third Generation are, it is easy to create the tools and the modus operandi that a given Antediluvian employs.

Using the Antediluvians in Play

Although the scenarios presented in Chapters Two through Five all deal with specific Antediluvians, there is no reason for you to be bound by them. Indeed, some of them might already be dead in your game, and your players' characters are probably better for it. Chapter Four deals with tracking down and killing several Antediluvians. If you think that's too extreme, or you wouldn't let the players get that kind of power, that's fine. Don't give it to them. Some say that only the Antediluvians' own kind can slay them. The players' characters might never even have the misfortune to meet an Antediluvian. If they are to encounter the Ancients, however, you have to decide how powerful these beings are. If only one of their own kind can kill them, what happened to those supposedly killed during the Anarch Revolt? That is truly for you to decide.

Here are a few illustrations: Could Vykos be an agent of [Tzimisce] without anyone suspecting it? Without even Vykos itself suspecting it (as with Lambach)? Is the Camarilla belief that there are no Antediluvians just a cover, crafted by the Ancients themselves? Is it a hoax created by the elders of the Camarilla to lull their ancestors into a false notion of superiority? Is perhaps the Black Hand suborned by a particularly bloodthirsty Antediluvian? These are all just overt alternatives. Yours could be 10 times as covert and unlikely.

Case Study: The Appearance of the Last Daughter of Eve

In Cairo in the late year 2000, a girl named Afifa survived Embrace at the hands of an unknown thin-blood, and became a 15th-generation Cainite. This girl also happened to be pregnant, though who exactly the father could be remains a mystery, probably even to herself. The true anomaly to this girl is neither her thin blood, nor the fact that she happened to be pregnant, which could potentially happen to some thin-blooded. The mystery with this girl is that she is the prophesized Last Daughter of Eve, at

least according to a society of thin-bloods called the Twilight Cult. They say that she is the one spoken of thus in *The Book of Nod*: "When the snows consume the earth and the sun gutters like a candle in the wind then, and only then there will be born a woman the last Daughter of Eve, and in her there will be decided the fate of all." The prophecy goes on to describe how she shall be known only by the mark of the moon upon her. It so happens that after becoming aware of her pregnancy Afifa developed a crescent-shaped birthmark on the base of her neck, visible only to those who would examine her thoroughly.

What could the true nature of this girl be? Is she really this woman, known as the Herald? Whatever the truth is, a Coptic Nosferatu named Petra brought Afifa under her protection and sheltered her in a Cairene church known as Abu Serga, where Afifa had her baby (or hasn't yet, according to the needs of your chronicle). If she really is the "Last Daughter of Eve," a sound theory based on interpretation of the text would be that the child she bore is what will "decide the fate of all." The sticking point is that according to the general translation of the prophecy, the time she is destined to arrive is after the return and 1,000-year reign of the Antediluvians.

Using Afifa the Herald in your Chronicle

Storytellers have a multitude of possibilities here. First of all, a reason as to her appearance now could be that the Antediluvians already *have* arisen, and they already *have* ruled for 1,000 years, doing so from the shadows, by proxy. The entire Jyhad could be a symbol of this rule. The idea of snow consuming the Earth, although it sounds like an analogy for nuclear winter, could refer to nothing more than end-time paranoia or possibly the effects of the Week of Nightmares (which the well-versed reader would know featured mystical nuclear devices detonated on both sides of the spiritual wall, causing major trauma to supernatural creatures).

Afifa's infant child might work as a powerful plot device, as the baby could be the antithesis of Caine, the only surefire way to destroy him.

Mortal Reactions to Gehenna

In the scenarios presented in this book, Gehenna's effect on the world of mortals takes several forms, and all should be considered carefully before beginning the chronicle. After all, this is the stage on which Gehenna unfolds, and depending on your choices (or, perhaps, simply on how the mortal reaction to Gehenna and vampires are presented in the various scenarios), you need to consider how to treat the mortal population of the world as that of the vampires shakes to its foundation.

Depending on how severe the course of your Gehenna chronicle is, the world of mortals can remain oblivious of the existence of vampires, miss the entire thing because the world ends too quickly or simply focus more on the imminent disaster than on something that can't be right anyway. We can break this subject down into four rough categories, all based on how events unfold in the various scenarios.

Business as Usual

If, as in Chapter Two, mortals never learn of vampires and Gehenna takes place outside the mortal awareness, only slight changes signify that anything has happened at all. Society gradually adapts to a world without vampires, as positions previously held by vampires are assumed by mortals without much ado. After all, most of mortal society is founded on the concept of rank of succession anyway, so if Brujah or Ventrue influence within the Mafia disappears, for example, mortal mobsters rise to take their place as a matter of course.

Secret Holocaust

If, however, as in Chapter Three, the disappearance of vampires leaves considerable vacuums that simple rank of succession does not fill — such as major monetary funding or valuable counsel — instability is sure to arise. The skills and capabilities of centuries-old vampires vanish, leaving mortal institutions and organizations that depended on them fumbling in the dark. Politicians risk losing valuable backing supported by the influential networks and financial support of affluent Kindred. Having subtly effected broad-reaching social policy in their domains for centuries, Cainites must suddenly concentrate on surviving Gehenna.

Expose

Being hurled head-first into a full-fledged Gehenna, such as in Chapter Four, mortals' entire world and concept of it is forced to forever change. Mortal reactions to the existence of vampires are presented in detail in Chapter Four.

Armageddon

Experiencing Gehenna on par with the vampires, the end has come, as much for the race of men as for the Cainites. This might truly be Judgment Day, such as in Chapter Five.

Interesting Times

When the world of mortals becomes the stage of the Cainites' Gehenna, things happen. Maybe not too noticeably, maybe not too convincingly, but they happen. The following is a list of a few events and situations happening in a select few locations of the world. If they are unsuitable for your chronicle, simply change them, but they should serve as inspiration for creating more such events.

The End is Nigh

The letter below made it to the desk of a secretary at CNN, before being discarded.

Unsurprisingly, the letter went unnoticed.

• A politician in Indonesia is accused of allegedly being a vampire. Unlike other similar cases, something about this case piques the interest of the rest of the world. The Camarilla tries its best to cover the tricky situation, dismissing it as an allegation from the politician's dodgy rival, but the damage is done, and the politician is stoned to death in a public square.

• A "blood cult" dubbed "The Cult of Cain" in the media is uncovered in a small town outside Gothenburg, Sweden. Media stories refer to the cult as "cannibalistic" and "vampiric," and most of the members are allegedly killed in a police standoff as they are being apprehended. Coroner reports initially state that the corpses of some of the cult members must have been mixed up with the corpses of the cult's previous victims, but freak incidents result in reports ending up missing and the corpses being cremated before new reports can be made. Christian fringe groups and other sects of mortals proclaim the spawn of Satan to be upon the world. Minor riots break out when other Cult of Cain cells in Sweden, Norway and other Northern European countries are uncovered.

• A peculiar video clip is circulated on the Internet. It shows a man being tortured, only to regenerate all wounds inflicted upon him. The clip is said to have originated from a religious group, the Jacobite Debators, and it supposedly proves demonic existence. Very few believe it to be real, but it becomes a popular topic in conversation and Internet chats.

• Over the last few years, more and more people have been and are being diagnosed with various degrees of insanity and mental instability. The peak of these outbreaks of madness occurred during the Week of Nightmares, but they return *en masse* over the first stages of Gehenna. Mass psychosis and delusions become more frequent, especially in Third-World countries. The appearance of doomsday prophets becomes commonplace. In some locations, the outbreak is even culturally recognized as true evidence of the End of the World.

Dear Sir/Madam with the Carble News Network.

We I represent a Collection of Enlightened INdividuals bering the name the Heralds of Gehenna.

You may or may not be familiar with our Organization, bt we are a Cult Society of Vampyres who hath Foreseen the end (known among Our Creed as Gehenna).

We would like to inform Yor Company, as it is the Epitome of Enlightenment on the Current Events of the World, that we have Seen the End and that We would like o Enlighten You further so that You may persist in Yor task to inform the World.

I assure You that this Letter is of the Utmost of Seriousness, and under No Circumstances a bad joke.

Oh, I just remembered the End shall Come when the Eartquekes begin. You may contact Us for More Information by sending a Leter to the Forwarding Address.

Sincerey Yours,

Osric Vladislav,

Childe of Alexander Vasylievik,

Childe of Santaleous,

Childe of Louhi,

Childe of Leterimas,

Childe of Malkav

FAX SENT 10:21 PM RUBEN ST. CLAIR TO NUMBER: (123) 555-3426



ZÜRICH CLINIC
FOR THE TREATMENT OF
THE CRIMINALLY INSANE

Dear Dr. Netchurch,
With reference to our last correspondence regarding the events of July 1999, I must inform you that similar events have occurred here, with unrivaled intensity. Although the specifics are not exactly the same, I have observed patterns of similarity so profound that I can do nothing but assume that we are dealing with the same phenomenon.

Are you experiencing similar occurrences? Please let me know, as your valuable insight helped us through the previous occurrence, and this particular one appears be potentially be even greater.

Yours sincerely,
Dr. Rueben St. Clair,
The Zürich Clinic

Unknown Number of Casualties, As Many as 100 Still Lost After New Earthquakes in Turkey

Earthquake in Turkey injures 40, kills three.
Says Turkish Prime-minister: Armageddon-like conditions take a turn for the worse

Istanbul (Reuters): Yet another earthquake struck Istanbul, Turkey yesterday, as the city was still recovering from last week's massive tremor.. A number of historical buildings were destroyed, and Turkish officials stated in a press conference mere hours after the cessation of the quake that, "At least 40 people have been evacuated from the debris, and we have confirmed 10 casualties."
Yesterday's tremor is the last in the series of what experts dub "cataclysmic events" occurring around the world. Seismologists fear several significant aftershocks may hit Istanbul within the next couple of days, and

Ominous Transmissions

The following are confidential letters written by Cainites to each other that might shed some light on how various vampires are preparing for Gehenna.

My Dear Dykos,
I fear that your premonitions have been correct, and that the Eldest is, indeed, still with us and awakening. For several nights I have been haunted in my dreams by apocalyptic visions of armies of ungodly demons led by what I am positive must be the Founder, which called me to it. I have corresponded with others of our lineage who have experienced similar images. I definitely recognized parts of Manhattan in the wreckage, but against a backdrop that can only be the Carpathian Mountains of our origins.

Awaiting your assessments before pursuing my investigations.

Sincerely,
Cyscek



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Most Elevated Neferu,

I have received your communiqués and am currently making preparations. I share your faith that the Giovanni, willingly or not, will serve their purpose. The grave-robber Ambrogino Giovanni has definitely uncovered the artifact, and it should not prove difficult to rob him of it.

As for your requested information regarding Vykos, I am positive that it is currently located in Montreal. My spies have failed to make a positive identification of it, but we believe this may be attributed to its mastery of changing its shape.

Also, I have conferred with "His Majesty the Prince" as you asked. When your divinations come true, "he" has promised to take action. As always, I look forward to hearing from you again.

To the Glory of Set and his Resurrection!

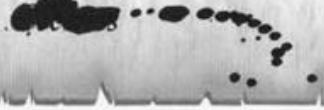
Sincerely,
Cranston
Empyrion Hotel, New York

The most revered Hardestadt,
I am writing to you to warn you that I have received a vision in which one of your line is tearing down a temple I am confident is a symbol of the Camarilla. I fear that the dream might come true, and I hope you take appropriate action to ensure that it does not. I pray for the vision to be false, or signify differently than what my interpretation has revealed, though I still feel I should warn you.
Sincerest regards,
A Friend

C—,

I have learned, as I am certain have you, that the Hag has been destroyed. I believe with some certainty that one of the Kinslayers is responsible. This could mean that our accursed Father has returned, something that could spell doom for us all. We must take action as a clan to ensure that this does not occur. I therefore suggest that we call a convocation, perhaps in your magnificent city? I have learned that you no longer hold the title of prince, but I still believe that your city would be the most appropriate, and easily accessible, location. It is time that our clan members learn the truth, no matter what the elders want. If this is Gehenna, they cannot save us anyway.

Regards,



The Withering

As the doom called Gehenna approaches, a phenomenon that comes to be known as the Withering takes place slowly, representing for vampires a slow erosion of power. The staggered process allows vampires to adapt and discover how diablerie can palliate the effects. A swifter end to the Curse of Caine would allow mortals to destroy all Cainites, if humanity even had a chance to learn about the undead. The slow pace of the Withering stretches out the death-agonies of Caine's childer and gives them time to drag humanity down with them.

The Withering begins so subtly that no one notices at first. It starts with the lowest-generation Cainites and works its way down. The first month of the Withering affects only the Third Generation. The second month, the Curse's decline affects the Fourth Generation. The third month, the Fifth Generation feels its effects, and so on. The Withering has these effects:

- Each month that a Cainite suffers the Withering, she loses one dot from her highest-rated Discipline. In case of a tie between Disciplines, the Storyteller picks one at random.
- All vampires affected by the Withering suffer the Thin Blood Flaw (see **Vampire: The Masquerade**, p. 298).
- Blood bonds and Vinculi have a 50-50 chance each month of breaking. Toss a coin, or use some other randomness generator to determine when and if a blood bond's failure occurs.
- Each time the character deliberately calls on her Blood or activates a Discipline, the Storyteller rolls a die. If the die turns up a 1, the desired result does not take place, and any blood point costs associated with the power are wasted. What's more, the character loses another dot off her highest-rated Discipline, and any further attempt that night to expend vitae also requires spending a point of Willpower. If the character fails a second time to activate a Discipline or expend vitae effectively, she cannot use Disciplines or expend vitae *at all* for the rest of the night. This bout of weakness, which Kindred feel as a nauseating physical ache, does not affect the vitae expended to wake up each night. During these episodes in one scenario, however, when the Withering becomes most extreme, the character has a chance to disentangle herself from the Curse of Caine and regain some of her mortality. (See the "Becoming Mortal" section on p. 193.)
- Torpor does not slow the Withering at all.

Diablerie

Diablerizing another Cainite temporarily counters the Withering.

- The Kindred loses the Thin Blood Flaw.
- The character regains his Disciplines, to the limit set by the diablerie victim's generation. Therefore, an elder who wants to regain high-level Discipline powers must devour another Cainite of suitably low generation. An eighth- to 13th-generation victim restores Disciplines only up to a rating of 5.
- Discipline activation and blood expenditure no longer spontaneously fail.

• The length of the palliation depends on the victim's age:

New Childe (less than five years a Cainite) or Thin-Blood	3 nights
Neonate	1 week
Ancilla	2 weeks
Elder	3 weeks
Methuselah or Antediluvian	1 month

Progression of the Withering

After the Antediluvians rise (assuming they do in your chronicle), the Withering becomes more severe. The chance for any Discipline or vitae use to fail increases to 2 in 10 (a roll of 1 or 2 on the die). Each time the Storyteller decides that an Antediluvian has met Final Death, the chance of failure increases by one. By the climax of Gehenna — assuming that any characters survive that long — the chance of failure should be at least 4 or 5 in 10, making any use of Cainite powers chancy and supplying a great temptation to diablerie.

The Cause

In some versions of Gehenna, characters never have a chance to learn the reason for the Curse of Caine's end (unless you want them to, of course). They may speculate, and other Kindred offer plenty of their own guesses. Some Cainites think that the Red Star is a gigantic Thing From Beyond that drains away vampires' stolen life force. Others think that something happened to Caine. Still others blame the Withering on the mysterious mortal mages, on a hidden Antediluvian who found a way to siphon all Cainite power to himself, a new disease or any of a dozen other causes. Many fear that the Withering is God's judgment on the Kindred, though they disagree with the rest about the immediate mechanism that weakens the Curse of Caine.

The truth is whatever you want.

Advice to Storytellers

As you prepare to lead your troupe in a Gehenna chronicle, a few more stylistic concerns will arise. These aren't plot points or story aspects, they're just little bits of advice on structure, technique and scripting. Use or ignore them as you will, but do be aware of them.

Wait, Who's This Guy?

Throughout these scenarios you'll be introduced to characters who have critical roles in the events of Gehenna. Let's get this out of the way right now: *If you have someone who fits their roles already established in your chronicle, use your characters instead.* These scenarios are built to be run "out of the box," with a few adjustments made on the Storyteller's part for the power level of her players' characters. As such, they're mostly self-contained. And to *that* end, they have characters in them who are key figures of prophecy or fate.

Now, rather than have some random new Methuselah step out of the shadows as Gehenna draws close, use one of the ones already in your chronicle if you have one. A thin-blooded seer can serve the role of Lyla without causing players to wonder just who this *other* cryptic thin-blood is. If your group has already crossed paths with an Anathema, you might wish to adapt that character instead of using Ferox. Cyscek need not be the singular Fiend upon whom some of New York's fates rest.

Bear that in mind — it's not our intent to create "toaster messiahs" who just pop up into your chronicle to derail it from where it's been going all along. They are placeholder characters, there for people who don't have such individuals already in their chronicles and also to facilitate the flow of the scenarios as printed.

Fairness

Kiss it goodbye. This is the End of the World, at least for the Kindred. Some events kill Kindred of certain clans or compel them to act in certain ways. While it's all fine and good for characters — that's characters, not players — to rail against their cruel fates, that's just how the world works, especially as it goes to Hell in a handbasket. As the Storyteller, you're welcome to change these bits to suit your chronicle, but give careful consideration to doing so. When Set calls his childer to him from beyond the shroud of death, it's somewhat fatuous to have "the last Setite!" still running loose, just because she happens to be a player's character. Again, you can do it if you want, but you're invoking apocalypse here, and suspending disbelief is already going to be diffi-

cult. Compounding it with obvious Storyteller fiat isn't going to help matters any.

Changing It Up

You also shouldn't feel the need to conform rigidly to what's presented here. Blend some elements of one scenario with pieces of another to achieve the proper mixture most likely to be enjoyed by your troupe. You need not involve SWAT teams if you don't want to, nor do you have to use a specific vampire, or even that vampire's chosen course of action.

Portraying Antediluvians and Methuselahs

Let's face it, none among us is a millennia-old Kindred. As such, we're going to have some inherent difficulties portraying a vampire of such advanced age.

One piece of advice is to avoid in-character exchanges between the players' characters and the ancient undead altogether. This doesn't mean they can't converse — it simply means that as Storyteller, you'll synopsize what the Kindred says as opposed to delivering it directly. If Haggorath, Methuselah of the Gangrel and thousand-time survivor of the Ragnaroks Before Men Remember speaks... and sounds like Kevin the Storyteller, players are going to have a hard time taking it seriously. If that gives them trouble suspending their disbelief, imagine how detrimental putting on an affected accent or "voice mask" is going to be. What you think sounds like this Gangrel demigod might sound, to the players, like a bad death-metal singer.

This isn't to say that we're underestimating your ability as a Storyteller. Rather, we're just encouraging you to keep the "camera" off the Ancients. Confronting them directly would shatter the mind of a lesser creature, so don't "show" them as much as you intimate their hideous (or nigh-divine) presences.

Other Supernaturals?

Vampires share the World of Darkness with many other sorts of supernatural people and creatures: Lupines, mages, ghosts, faerie-folk, mummies, demons and so on. You can bring these other supernaturals into any tale if you want. See their own games, or Chapter Nine of **Vampire: The Masquerade** for treatments of some of these creatures.

We do not give any detailed suggestions for involving the other supernaturals in **Gehenna**. The subject is too broad, and many Storytellers might not want to use them anyway. Storytellers who merely want to show characters that the End of the World affects other supernaturals can include a brief scene of them passing through on the way to some other conflict or fate. For instance, characters might see a troop of faerie lords, as beautiful and terrible as dreams, riding to a doomed battle against an Antediluvian, or the characters might escape a concentration camp in the confusion of a Lupine attack.

As always, keep the attention firmly on the players' characters. Never leave the characters standing around watching the cool stuff *other* people do: Give them something to do themselves.

Doing the Math

In some cases, character traits have been provided for you. In many more cases, they have not. This is intentional.

Put plainly, we don't know your chronicle. You don't know other people's chronicles. What might be an almost insurmountable physical threat for your troupe might be little more than a speed bump for another troupe. At the same time, your characters might easily outfox a Methuselah's minion while another coterie is unable to come up with any plan better than, "We charge in and riddle everyone with bullets."

Storytellers must invest a bit of work balancing, reworking or even creating from whole cloth traits for characters the coterie might encounter during the story. Storytellers, it's your right to gather everyone's character sheets at the end of every session and see where the players stand.

Avoid Power Creep

It's the End of the World. Do you really need someone with Melee 9 out there, chopping her foes to sushi before their corpses hit the ground?

While it might seem like this is the time to go balls-out, king-hell crazy with Storyteller characters' traits, think it through. We're not saying, "Don't do it." We're saying, "Don't do it unnecessarily." In some ways, this relates to bringing "toaster messiahs" into the story, as described previously. If this person has had such an ungodly level of potential, why haven't the characters been savvy to it before? Just dropping someone in to Rambo through the situation is bad — arbitrarily bumping an existing Storyteller character up to legendary ability is worse.

Posing challenges need not be a case of giving the antagonists superior levels of capabilities in which the players' characters already specialize. Turn the tables on the characters or have them deal with a situation in which they *haven't* specialized.

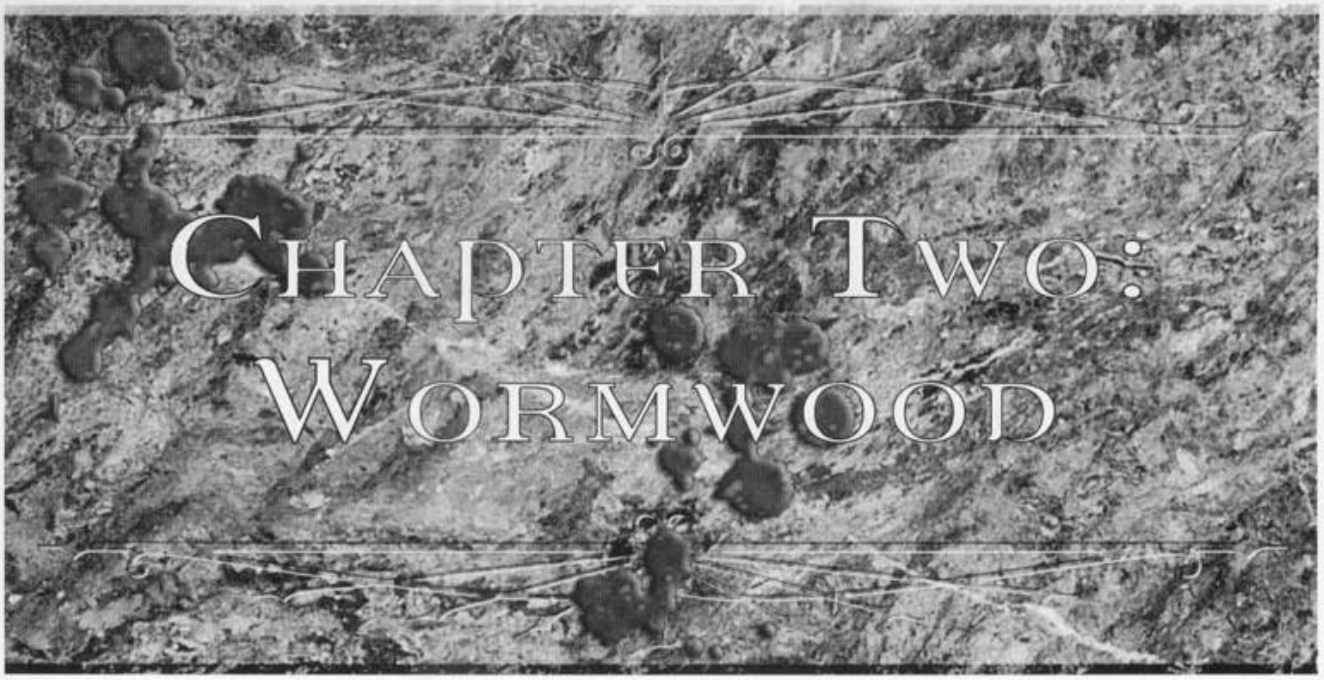
For example, let's say your players' characters are fairly combat savvy. Don't feel the need to overwhelm them with angels sent down from Heaven to mop the Earth with their asses. Maybe they face a doomsday cult that fears nothing — in a fight that breaks out in a manufacturing plant, these cultists don't care about diving into a die-cutting metal press as long as they take some vampiric hell-spawn with them. The characters, on the other hand, are probably more capable than these cultists, but they certainly don't want to be die-cut themselves. The characters, therefore, will face a challenge in that their more desperate but less able foes will take chances that they don't want to take themselves.

As another example, let's say our same physically inclined characters face an occult threat that always seems to know where they're going to be. Likely, the Storyteller characters in this situation are smarter and more in tune with supernatural effects than the players' characters are. This wise, occult threat doesn't have to have a string of traits all rated at 8. It can simply have traits in the above-average range, which exceed the characters' own capacities but not to an absurd degree.

The challenge lies in the presentation and the characters' reactions to it. Don't force it to rely solely on dots and dice.







Chapter Two: Wormwood

For a time they obeyed me, for they feared their father's wrath. But just as I had not accepted God's edicts, so they did not accept mine, for they were of my Blood, and their nature was defiance. Those that were nearest me Embraced the sons of Seth in secret, those that were far distant Embraced them openly. They ruled the Children of Seth as gods not by man's choice, but by their own decree. And I knew that then they were doomed, for God would not tolerate such practices. Foolish children! You make light of God's law, but you have never seen His face. You make light of His curse, but you have never felt His power. He who made this world can unmake it, He who gave life to mankind can also give death, and He who cursed us to prey upon the living can make for us such Hell on Earth that all the Adversary's torments will pale by comparison. I saw the storm clouds gathering. I felt the air grow cold. And I knew the time of reckoning had come at last. The Children of Seth prayed for me to save them but I could not. My children begged for me to save them but I would not. The rain began to fall, and it did not cease...

And in the end there was only water. My foolish children knew hunger and loneliness and fear. And it was good.

—The Erciyes Fragments. IV (Enoch)

Let us never forget, lest we earn his rage anew. Let us never forget, lest the waters rise again.

—The Erciyes Fragments. V (Lamentations)

And the third angel sounded, and there fell a great star from heaven, burning as it were a lamp, and it fell upon the third part of the rivers, and upon the fountains of waters; And the name of the star is called Wormwood: and the third part of the waters became wormwood; and many men died of the waters, because they were made bitter.

—*Revelation 8: 10-11*

Judgment

In ages past, God saw the evils wrought by the Children of Seth and the Children of Caine, and He sent the Great Flood to wipe away these deeds and their makers in the hope that a more peaceful and faithful world might rise from the seed of Noah and his kin, one where men obeyed God's word and sought to create a semblance of Heaven on Earth. When the floodwaters had receded, God swore a Covenant with Noah's descendants, promising that "neither shall all flesh be cut off any more by the waters of a flood; neither shall there any more be a flood to destroy the earth."

God watched as Caine's progeny resumed their foul ways and the Antediluvians preyed once more upon man without fear of retribution, but He upheld the

Covenant. Pride, envy, wrath, gluttony, lust and avarice blossomed like black weeds in the hearts of those who fell under the sway of the Kindred and soon the Earth was no different than it had been before; worse even. As cities sprang up across the globe and every civilization became a playground for the spawn of Caine, Cainites Embraced mortals at will, damning them with their own cursed Blood and spreading their influence into every corner of the world. Centuries passed and nations rose and fell, but the corrupt touch of vampires was always felt. Even during the creatures' most difficult nights, when the Inquisition was at its righteous height, the shadowy undead continued to play their games and bring as many mortals as was prudent into their service. This was not the world God had hoped to see rise from the flotsam of the Great Flood.

Although many mortals sought to follow the path of love and faith, Caine's children made it difficult. The Kindred created a world in their own foul image, a world that was most suited to their predatory and monstrous needs. Whatever they touched became blighted and bore the mark that Caine wore upon his own brow. Sometimes, God did intercede to strike down the truly wicked or to offer salvation to those most worthy, but He could not break His Covenant; He could never again cleanse the Earth of its sins and sinners to start anew. Caine's progeny knew this and howled their delight, having no fear of divine retribution. That was their greatest mistake.

Millennia have passed since the Great Flood, and the world is awash in humanity. Many great things have been achieved and so much has been done to make the world a better place. Yet for all this, the pestilence that lies in the cold hearts of the Kindred has been greater and threatens to snuff out all that is good. As the 21st century opens, vampires relish their power and trample all that dares to come between them and their unholy desires. The Children of Seth are mere kine to them, cattle to slake their ravenous hunger, tools to be used for advantage and pawns to sacrifice in their endless petty Jyhad. Although they no longer rule openly, Caine's offspring rule nonetheless, insofar as it suits their purposes. Wherever they see a benefit in seizing a person, a place or a resource, they do so without a care as to the consequential suffering or loss. What does it matter if a few of the sheep should die, as long as the herd continues to grow fat?

All things come to an end, however, and the sanguinary excesses of Caine and his get must finally stop. God will not allow them to prey upon the Children of Seth, to pollute the Earth with bloody rites or to twist the secrets of the world to their own horrific purposes any longer. He watched as they stepped beyond their bounds, going so far as to birth their own bastard monstrosities and carry their taint into other realms of existence, not satisfied to befoul the lands of Nod. Even as their blood thins they continue to spawn, giving unholy birth to thin-blooded abominations whose first breaths reek of the grave. God has seen enough of this blasphemy, and He has finally been moved to act.

Wormwood. God has called into existence a second great cleansing of the earth with that single word, but He will not break His Covenant with Noah. This time there are no raging waters to drown humanity and devastate its achievements. Instead, God's wrath is like a deadly fog that descends from the heavens and engulfs the world, leaving no place safe for Kindred. More spiritual than physical, it passes unseen by the Children of Seth and all but the most sensitive of Caine's progeny, bringing Final Death only to those whose time has finally come. For 40 nights the bitter force of retribution shall be loosed upon the Earth, and when it is over, the Curse of Caine and all those marked by the Curse shall be gone without a trace, their stain washed clean. Maybe then Seth's children can build the world that was promised them, one that glorifies God and sings of His works as it never has before.

Gehenna is not what the Kindred believed it would be. There is no great war between the Antediluvian generals of the Jyhad, nor shall all that has been prophesized come to pass. Neither is Gehenna just another turn of some great cosmic wheel, and it does not herald the triumphant return of Caine the Dark Father to punish or lead his multitude. There is no warning. No silver trumpets blaring to announce the arrival of the Kindred's Judgment Day, no host of angels on wing, no booming voice from on high. There are no second chances. There is only a sudden torrent of divine emanation that floods the world and erases the vampires and all that they have done. For 40 nights the Kindred drown in their sorrows, gasp for vitae and wither under the weight of their sins. For 40 nights they shall learn the meaning of fear and know that this is their final hour. All their ambitions, schemes and plans will be for naught, for how can a dying man do anything but struggle helplessly against such a doom? No vampire, not even the grandchilder of Caine, can escape the punishment that is Wormwood, if God does not wish it to be so. All their vaunted powers are useless. Gehenna is, quite simply, the end of one of God's failures, nothing more and nothing less.

And what of Caine, the Dark Father himself? What role does he play in Gehenna? The short answer is none.

He, like all his spawn, is destroyed by God without looking back. Caine was originally punished by God for slaying his brother, a brother he envied. Caine believed that God accepted Abel's sacrifice and not his own because God favored Abel, but Caine was wrong. God always loved Adam's first son most of all, but God could not accept his first sacrifice because it was not offered with a true heart as Abel's had been. In his blind pride and envy, Caine railed against God and murdered Abel, and for this God punished him. Despite what Caine and his descendants believed, however, God never cursed Caine. In fact, God so loved Caine that He gave him life everlasting so that Caine would have all the time he might need to finally see the error of his ways, to finally understand his own sins and seek forgiveness for what he had done. But Caine was blind to this greatest of mercies, so he never saw it as the second chance that it was. Instead, he embraced the role of the unjustly punished child and accused God of bias and cruelty. Like a stubborn child who fails to see his parents' love behind their admonitions, Caine literally ran away, fleeing into the Land of Nod and forever turning his back on his true home.

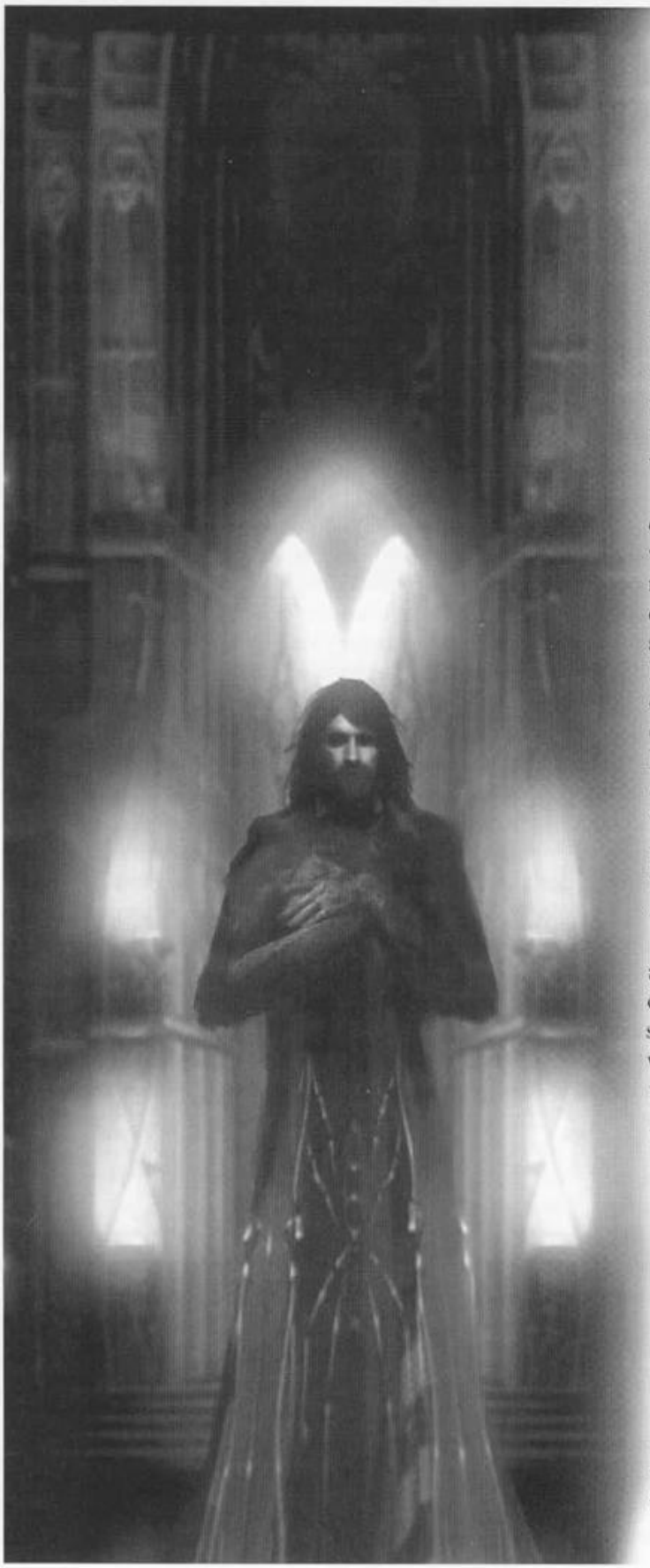
The Curse of Caine is one of Caine's own manufacture. Even as God sent angelic messengers to offer Caine forgiveness, Caine spurned their words and defiantly welcomed the burning glare of the sun, the sacred agony of fire, the howling hunger for blood and all the other facets of the Curse as personal badges of honor. He relished this punishment as a slap in the face of God. Forever after, all his get have borne this curse, rarely understanding its true nature. The Beast that nightly struggles to run free in the cold heart of every vampire is nothing less than Caine's own wrath, passed to his children, still burning after all this time. So too are Caine's other sins inherited by those he creates, from his pride and envy to his lust and gluttony. As every mortal was born already tainted by the sin of Adam and Eve, so was every man or woman reborn as a vampire the heir to Caine's sins. Whereas mortals have recourse to the divine sacrament of baptism to cleanse them of original sin, however, Caine's children have no such salvation. Even Golconda, for all its rumored efficacy, was never anything more than a temporary reprieve from the worst of the Curse. No messiah was ever sent to the Kindred to offer them salvation, for as long as Caine refused to put aside his pride and kneel in true faith before God, asking his Creator for forgiveness, the gates of Heaven remained closed to his kind.

None of this is to suggest that Caine approved of the atrocities of his children or basked in their evil. On the contrary, he was horrified at the murder of his progeny by those of the Third Generation, and like his own Creator, he punished the wrongdoers. Still, they were truly their Dark Father's children, and even the harsh punishments levied upon them could not quash the sin that grew in their unbeating hearts. When Caine saw this, he turned his back on what he had wrought, leaving his progeny to squabble among themselves over the one thing they all craved: the Children of Seth. Caine did not look back, but left them to their own devices, seeking the most remote corners of the world instead in the hope of finding something to cure the canker in his soul. For the millennia since then, he has continued to do so, never again meddling in the affairs of his line.

Caine was not ignorant of what his children were up to, however. He knew that they worshipped demons, dabbled in heretical magic, spawned unfit progeny, warred upon each other, treated mankind like animals and saw the world as their own playground where even the most malignant crimes were part and parcel of their petty personal feuds. Yet he would not do his duty as a father. He would never again punish them, teach them or deign to destroy them. Long ago, Caine abdicated his responsibilities and chose instead to let the world suffer unjustly as he felt he must suffer unjustly. Let God taste His own medicine.

After all this time, nothing has changed, at least not enough to bring Caine to actually ask for forgiveness with true remorse and faith in his heart. When one of Caine's grandchilder rose from its long torpor in 1999, God saw this as the final test, one last chance for Caine to accept his paternal duty and strike down his unruly childe, sparing the world its monstrous hunger and wrath. But Caine would not lift his hand. He simply watched and refused to see his own responsibility in this. In the end, it was mankind that finally rose up to destroy the monster, using the semi-divine seed planted within their own souls to confront the Antediluvian and wage unrelenting war upon it. God saw this and knew then that mankind, for all its failings, could build a world where virtue and faith prevailed, if only it was given a real chance. On the other hand, God saw Caine's inaction as final proof that no amount of time would cause the son of Adam's heart to change. He no longer had any reason to allow Caine or his spawn to walk the Earth and hold back the Children of Seth from achieving Heaven thereupon. So be it. God had been generous, but the time for generosity is now over. Caine's story has come to an end.

This chapter is the vision of Gehenna that takes the road less traveled, to borrow a phrase. Certainly, all manner of conflict can arise during the telling of this



last epic tale, from brute combat to subtle political intrigues, but if these are the things that take center stage in your chronicle, then perhaps one of the other alternative endings in the following chapters will be more suited to your troupe's dramatic palette. This Gehenna is a morality play, and as such, it is heavily focused on issues pertaining to faith, humanity, conscience, willpower, self-control and courage. This ending replaces all the razzle-dazzle and concerns itself, fittingly, with the personal horror upon which this game was built in the first place. At its best, it offers Storytellers and players alike a final chance to examine what it truly means to be a vampire, to bear Caine's Curse and to perhaps even understand a little bit more about what it means to be human.

Although this version of Gehenna is not everyone's cup of tea, it is suitable for any coterie of vampires, from the most bestial and diabolic to the most cultured and even repentant. It can be played one-on-one for a very personal epitaph to an introspective chronicle or with a larger troupe, and it lends itself just as well to a live roleplaying experience. Neonates and elders alike will find themselves challenged and offered equal reward, with neither having any greater advantage. What does physical or supernatural power mean to God? If your troupe wants to experience Gehenna as something very personal, a grand ending that leaves the beaten path and returns instead to the basics of storytelling and dramatic discovery, this story should please.

Finally, despite the seeming gloom and doom and the futility of running a story that almost certainly ends with everyone's demise, there is a seed of hope. Gehenna is intended to cleanse the world of all vampires, and if God wants it that way, that's what's going to happen. All Abrahamic judgment aside, however, God does offer a way out for those who are truly deserving of eternal salvation. And because God has an infinite capacity for love and forgiveness, this offer is available to all characters, regardless of whether they are hoary Tzimisce who rejoice in tormenting children or deeply philosophical Toreador who use their power to build humanitarian institutions. (Of course, if such a Tzimisce does not actually repent his sins, he will find the offer swiftly withdrawn.) In other words, all characters are given one last chance to truly redeem themselves in the eyes of God before the hammer of justice falls. For those who do, there is no limit to what they can accomplish.

His Messenger

With but a Word, God passed judgment on Caine and his children. Wormwood, the Red Star, has come to issue forth God's righteous wrath and drown the blight of the Kindred. But God did not loose His judgment in an instant, for even in His divine wrath, He can show mercy. He has seen that against all odds, a few Kindred not only succeeded in resisting the sins of their accursed blood, but some actually demonstrated that rarest and most special of things, faith. Despite the horrors demanded of them as Children of Caine, despite the temptations and urges of the Beast, a few Kindred found within themselves a true devotion to God. These few gave God hope. Maybe, if given the chance and freed from the Curse of Caine, these special few might actually prove a boon to the world instead of a plague. Maybe, if their faith was true, they might be worthy of serving God and His divine plan.

And so God chose a messenger, a girl born of a mortal mother and a Kindred father, a child who was heir to the legacies of both Seth and Caine from the very first. God marked His messenger so that one of true faith would recognize her. Then, when the time was right, when the girl was of an age where she could handle the demands of her appointed task and carry the Word of God on Earth, He spoke to her and revealed His plan. His messenger understood, and she set forth to fulfill her part in that plan, never once questioning or hesitating to do what had been set before her. She was God's messenger, and she would bring His Word to those she must.

Alia was born a dhampir, an abomination trapped between the world of the living and the world of the undead. Her father was a thin-blooded Caitiff who knew next to nothing about what he himself had become a few years earlier. He had avoided other Kindred, all too swiftly learning just how hated he was, his bastard lineage making his short unlife hell. Instead, he clung to those things he knew, the semblance of his former life, including family and friends. Unfortunately, he discovered that his new existence soon alienated him from these familiar touchstones, too, forcing him to spend most of his time alone, hunting on the fringes of the city in places where few other vampires would care to go. It was here that he met Alia's mother, a young woman who recognized the loneliness in his soul and empathized with him. The two became lovers, and they did their best to carve out a life they could call their own, one that required nothing of them and did not judge them.

But this was a pipe dream. Even when Alia's mother discovered she was pregnant — the implications of which Alia's father did not, at the time, fully comprehend — and the couple felt blessed that they could have their own child, a chill descended on them that they could never have imagined. A local Nosferatu had long been spying on the pair on the off chance that anything he learned might come in handy one night, perhaps to pay off a debt or even blackmail the autarkis into doing him a favor. When he discovered that the woman was with child, he was unable to keep the information to himself, and he told others of his clan the astonishing news. Suddenly, Alia's parents found themselves besieged by local vampires, some of whom apparently sought to kill the couple and halt the birth, and some of whom wished to protect the couple and see the child carried to term, perhaps to experiment upon it or worship it in some obscene fashion. Fortunately, it was a trio of Caitiff, with the assistance of an elder vampire who simply found that it suited his own political motives, who approached the couple first and were able to help them find sanctuary. Finally, one evening under a sliver of a moon, Alia was born.

For the first few years of the dhampir's life, things went remarkably well. The three Caitiff remained with the family as protectors and augurs, always trying to understand the hidden importance of the infant girl, but it was only when Alia turned 12 that something of her divine role began to be made evident. When she first experienced menstruation — the "mark of the moon" that all women bear — she fell into a feverish state that lasted until she shed no more blood. When the fever passed, Alia seemed *different*. Upon entering womanhood she became more serious and the look in her eyes seemed to belong to someone far older and wiser. Immediately, her childhood had disappeared and her demeanor struck those around her as befitting someone chosen for a tremendous responsibility. Although she was not particularly religious (neither of her parents were really believers), she exuded a power that made the vampires uncomfortable, as if they were not worthy of being near her. Even her father was taken aback and deferred to her as if she knew what was best for them all.

Alia had heard the voice of God, and it had indeed changed her. Upon becoming a woman, she was ready to receive His Word and to learn of her purpose on Earth. She listened and accepted her role. She was to find a Kindred, one whose faith was stronger than all others combined, and give him God's Message. Alia did not know who this Kindred was whom she had to find, but she didn't doubt for a moment that she would know soon enough to fulfill her duty. She kept all of this from her family, as she didn't want to frighten them. The

message God wished her to pass on was for one Kindred's ears only and would only have terrified those she loved.

Over the next few months, Alia heard God's voice again, each time during her period. Though she did not reveal what she learned, she did explain that she could no longer stay with her family. As heartbroken as her parents were, they did not try to keep her; they knew that more than they, she understood what she was doing. Only her Caitiff protectors went with her, to continue to ensure her safety and to learn whatever they could. The coterie traveled from city to city as Alia looked for the signs she had been told to watch for. Wherever she went, she visited churches and cathedrals, apparently seeking someone or something in these holy places. She never told her companions who or what it was she sought, however. Finally, after nearly a year of fruitless searching, she found the one she was looking for and relayed God's Word.

His Message

In an old mission church in the Sangre de Cristo Mountains in New Mexico, Alia's coterie found refuge from a particularly torrential storm, one that rolled across the mesas with the blackest of clouds and thunder that shook the land. Lightning lashed the ground almost as if it were seeking victims, driving the Kindred into the lonely mission, the only place of obvious refuge. At first, they believed they were alone in the place, but they soon began to feel as if they were being watched. The Caitiff grew restless and increasingly fearful, but Alia never quavered. Instead, she knelt at the dusty altar and bowed her head in prayer, sure in her conviction that God's will was all that mattered. If He wished her here, then who was she to do otherwise?

The walls seemed to move, the faded scriptural murals shifted, and the electricity in the air magnified a thousandfold. Directly over the altar, high up in the nave, a figure started to form. Michael the Archangel came out of the wall, to spread his white wings and to descend onto the altar. This was too much for the Caitiff. The Beasts in their hearts shrieked in fear, and they fled blindly into the storm outside. Only a few paces from the open church doors, the trio was struck by a single bolt of lightning that destroyed them on the spot. Throughout all this, Alia remained in prayer, unmoved by the commotion. Even as the angel landed on the altar before her, his wings spread across the nave and the divine light of God streaming out of his eyes more brightly than even the lightning, she did not move. A few moments passed, then the church doors closed, bringing an odd quiet while the storm continued outside. The blinding light of the angel finally dimmed, and he spoke to Alia.



The figure was not an angel, of course, though he believed he was. He was a vampire, a Gargoyle to be precise, a creature doubly cursed, for he was unable to even pretend to be human given his grotesque form. That never mattered to him, though, for from the moment he received the stony Embrace of his sire, he found something that even the holiest of men rarely find: True Faith. And in the centuries since his Becoming, that faith had only grown in strength until it had become so unassailable that God Himself took notice. The Gargoyle saw himself as an angel, albeit a fallen one, his current state nothing more than a test of his faith. He had faced countless adversaries over the years and none could shake his devotion to God; instead, they only made it grow. The servant of God spent his days in churches, always traveling in the hopes of doing God's work, whatever it might be. He destroyed those Kindred he believed were demons, and he spread the word of God to those he felt were worth saving. But he had never actually heard God speak, until now.

The Gargoyle told Alia that his name was Ferox and that he was God's servant. He told her of his mission to do God's bidding and that if she believed as he did, she might be spared His wrath. While he spoke, Alia listened quietly, piously, her head half-bowed. When Ferox had finished with his introduction, Alia lifted her head and gazed into the eyes of the monstrosity before her. Ferox wore sunglasses so as to not blind her with the divine light that streamed continuously from his crimson eyes, but she looked through them and saw him plainly. For the first time in centuries, Ferox was startled, for this slip of a girl not only refused to flinch from his presence, but she exhibited a purpose and strength that he had never before witnessed. And in her eyes was something he had never encountered, something that made him drop humbly to his knees and weep blood as she spoke.

Alia also trembled as she revealed God's Message, no hint of pride whatsoever in her voice. She never saw herself as anything more than a simple messenger and so she spoke softly, even with fear, so terrible were the words she conveyed. She told Ferox that God had judged the Children of Caine and found them wanting. God would erase them from Creation, and the instrument of His judgment would be called Wormwood, which would appear as a crimson star. God wanted Ferox to gather others of his kind according to signs to come and to create for these Chosen Kindred a sanctuary. When the doom that is Wormwood is nigh, God would let him know to go into the sanctuary with the Chosen and stay until 40 nights have passed. During that time, the world would be poisoned by Wormwood, though only the Children of Caine would taste its bitter waters and know what it means to feel God's wrath. After 40 nights it would be over. Those who remained in the sanctuary would be safe, but they too would be judged. Those found wanting would be undone.

When she finished, Alia said nothing for a time. She could only stare at the winged monster before her and trust in God. Ferox was struck so mightily by the dhampir's words — for he knew them to be holy — that he too could do nothing but shake in fear and humility. God had spoken; He had chosen Ferox, a fallen angel, for this tremendous responsibility, and Ferox could only be awed. He was being offered the salvation that he had always believed was beyond his reach, the greatest gift of all. Eventually, the two spoke again, this time at length, about each other and about the message she had brought to this desolate place. When the morning light finally came, they had formed a bond not of blood, but of faith and purpose. Alia would help Ferox find the others God spoke of, and when the time came, they would give the Chosen sanctuary.

The next evening, the Red Star appeared in the heavens. God's plan had been set in motion, and nothing would stop it. Wormwood approached and with it so did Gehenna, the 40 nights of bitter wrath that had come due for Caine and all his progeny. Ferox and Alia gazed at the star and began their final journey. They had work to do, His work to do, and the clock was now ticking.

Waiting for Gehenna

Since the earliest nights, Kindred have wondered about their fate and whether or not they were truly Damned after all. They listened to the stories of their elders and whispered of Caine and the fateful night when he might return to pass judgment, a time called Gehenna. Over the millennia, these musings have become solidified in the minds of the Kindred. They have become a heady eschatological mythology that describes the signs that presage the arrival of Gehenna. Before the end, many things will happen and the most learned and watchful Kindred will see clearly as the final hour draws nigh. The legendary sacred scriptures of the most ancient vampires, *The Book of Nod*, along with various other apocryphal fragments, lay out in traditionally obscure fashion the many omens that would come to pass in the Final Nights. Since the Middle Ages, the Children of Caine have sought to identify these signs so that they would have time to prepare for Gehenna. On many occasions, the more religious-minded Kindred have pointed at this or that event and declared them to be auspices of Gehenna.

Numerous cults and secret societies have grown up around the idea of this last night, some seeking to hasten its arrival, while others hoped to postpone it or halt it entirely. Other Kindred have sought to simply find the greatest tactical advantage, hoping that they will be best prepared to survive whatever horrors it brings when it does arrive. Though each Gehenna scholar believes that she has the inside scoop on the End of the World, none of them have any true conception of what the end will be like. None of them could foresee the coming of what is essentially a second Great Flood.

This does not mean that none of Caine's children have come close to discovering something of the truth. Many Kindred have come to the conclusion that Gehenna is very close, that these truly *are* the Final Nights, and that there is very little time left before the end is upon them. Now, as the Red Star appears in the night sky to those Kindred with the most sensitive of perceptions, they scramble to figure out what it portends. Surely, some prophecies speak of a red star rising alongside a blood-red moon, but where does this fit into the whole Gehenna story? Is this merely a sign, as in the star that led the shepherds and kings to Christ's nativity, or is it something far more dreadful? Some Kindred have noted that the star "feels" malignant, and rumors abound of Malkavians and insightful Caitiff — particularly those of the thinnest blood — who perceive it to be something *very bad*.

It might seem that of all the Kindred, the Antediluvians would enjoy the greatest advantage in recognizing the arrival of Gehenna and understanding what it meant, but that would be to assume that raw experience and might was capable of revealing the secrets of God's plan. On the contrary, these demigods are some of the least able to fully comprehend their own fates. So sure in their power, those Antediluvians who can still be considered sentient have come to believe themselves beyond such things. Ancient though they are, they are unable to grasp the thought that all their majesty ultimately means nothing when exposed to the judgment of God. For all their age and power, they, no less than the meanest of neonates, are ultimately insignificant to the Creator. As such, few look to the heavens with anything more than a feeling of Luciferan anticipation. Whatever happens on the eve of Gehenna, they believe it will be their shining moment of glory, when they rise again and declare their bloody sovereignty over the Children of Seth. This shall not come to pass.

Like their sires and grandsires, most of the Methuselahs have been too busy pursuing their own vendettas against their siblings to pay much attention to the approach of Gehenna, or at least to understand the finality that it might represent. Their petty wars have become all-important, and when they have considered Gehenna, they have mostly seen it as nothing more than that moment at which the greatest master of the Jyhad will finally be revealed for all to see. Few of these Machiavellian puppet-masters can really imagine that Gehenna will mean the end of all their kind, including the victors of the Jyhad. Where's the justice in that?

Clearly, they miss the point.

A few of the most introspective and spiritual of these Methuselahs, however, have come to recognize that Gehenna might be more than the end of the Jyhad. For the most part, these Kindred have lurked behind the scenes throughout the ages, but they have been careful to watch for the signs and have done their utmost to try to decipher them. The inscrutable Inconnu sought just such omens

Saulot

Of all the Antediluvians, only Saulot came close to finally understanding what might await him and his kind. He learned after many very difficult lessons that the Curse sustaining all vampires had become nothing more than an excuse for Kindred to bask in evil. Every cruelty, ever depredation and every sin carried came to be justified as either fulfillment of their intrinsic nature as one of the Damned or something that had to be done to avoid even greater sin. Saulot searched the globe for answers and for a path to salvation, but never found what he was looking for until it was too late. Now, he merely watches — in a sense, the greatest of the Inconnu — unwilling to become further involved in the struggles and schemes of the Kindred. Despite all his powers, all his knowledge and understanding, he believes his purpose is concluded. It is now time for each Kindred to come to the same understanding on her own, to aspire to something greater, be it Golconda, undying faith in God or some similar state of personal enlightenment. He sees the Red Star, he knows the Creator watches, and he knows that Gehenna has come. What it brings is not necessarily something that he desires, but it is something he fully accepts. He believes that he is not worthy of true salvation, but he recognizes that the failure is his own, so he shall open himself to whatever punishment God demands. Nothing — and that means absolutely *nothing* — will ever draw him into action again. When Wormwood blazes and its bitter poisons find him, he shall be ready, and he will go with a look of peace on his ancient face, his unbeating heart content with how things must be.

The Manus Nigrum

Another secretive sect of ancient Kindred did, ironically, come close to understanding what Gehenna might truly mean. The now-defunct *Manus Nigrum*, or Tal'mahe'Ra according to some, had dedicated itself to studying the state of death and undeath since its founding in the earliest nights of the Middle East. With the sect's discovery of the ghost-city of Enoch in the Underworld, however, it came to adopt the belief that it did the work of the Antediluvians. The vampires of the *Manus Nigrum* looked forward to the arrival of Gehenna, for they were convinced that the Third Generation would rise on that terrifying night and reward them for their faithfulness, granting them domain over all the Earth. The ghost-city and most of its inhabitants were destroyed in a tremendous spiritual storm a few years ago, but the few survivors clung to the hope that they would be vindicated when the Antediluvians rose. Unfortunately for them, when the Ravnos founder did rise up during the Week of Nightmares, the godlike monster paid them no attention at all. The *Manus Nigrum* was crestfallen; all its service meant nothing to the Antediluvians. What remained of the sect shattered, but some of its membership realized something that few other Kindred could. Gehenna, the Final Night, might not mean victory for any vampire no matter how powerful or wise. Gehenna might actually spell doom for all the Children of Caine. Despite all their prior delusions of self-importance, they finally understood that maybe, just maybe, they and their kind were ultimately of no importance at all.

and believed that only by remaining objective could they truly see the grand design revealed. As such, they stayed apart from most other Kindred, sending their agents only to watch in order that the signs of Gehenna would be spotted and reported wherever they might appear. Many of the Inconnu pursued various states of enlightenment, such as Golconda and Nirvana, but none ever fully grasped the entirety of God's plan. For all their searching and watching, for all their supposed objectivity, these elder vampires were still lacking the one thing necessary for full comprehension of their fate: True Faith.

Other Methuselahs do not approach Gehenna as ascetically as do the Inconnu. Instead, some founded personal cults dedicated to learning as much as possible about the Final Nights and to taking action now, before it grew too late. Each such group interpreted things differently, of course, and, as to be expected, none got it quite right. The Cult of Enlightenment, the Arimatheans, the Servitors of Irad, the Lawgivers and the Edenic Groundskeepers all actively pursue what they believe to be the best way to avoid destruction come Gehenna, whether it means finding and destroying the legendary Last Daughter of Eve, achieving Golconda or diablerizing the Antediluvians. The cultists, most of whom are young Kindred, scrounge for evidence to bolster their beliefs and to aid them in achieving their aims, seeing their pursuits as at least as beneficial as sitting around and doing nothing, hopefully more so. Once again, though some of these cults have uncovered some interesting things and have approached Gehenna in very unique ways, none has foreseen what will be.

In addition to these societies, there is a host of others who, while they don't necessarily focus on Gehenna, at least pay attention to it. Most of these cults are extremely small, numbering only a few vampires, usually all located in the same city. Some are more nomadic, however, while others are simply widespread, even if not centrally organized. The most prominent are the various Lilith cults, whose members tend to view Gehenna as the time when the Dark Mother returns to destroy Caine for his crimes against her. They see their own prostration to Lilith as the key to their own salvation when that time comes. Myriad religious cults have always existed among the Children of Caine, representing every conceivable way to reconcile vampires and their fate with the traditional and non-traditional dogma espoused by mortal faiths. Surprisingly, though it might seem that at least a few of these would be able to correctly interpret the signs of Gehenna and the will of God as it relates to vampires, it is unlikely. Again, without true and absolute faith in the One God, in the very purest sense, God's plan remains obscured.

With the appearance of the Red Star a few years ago, all those groups that have detected it — keep in mind that only the most sensitive Kindred can — have feverishly tried to fit it into their own understanding of Gehenna. Very few doubt that it is an important omen, and most see it as proof that at long last, Gehenna is about to arrive, but as to what it actually is, none can agree. As has been mentioned, various Kindred perceive it to be of an infernal or otherwise unholy nature. They rarely ever consider that it only seems malefic because it is quite literally the very instrument of their doom. What they sense is not an intrinsic evil, but rather their own instinctual terror of the divine judgment that is about to befall them. Their own souls know

they have sinned, and they know that they are about to receive their final punishment, even if the Kindred themselves don't consciously understand this.

The sighting of the Red Star has also resulted in the very recent formation of so-called "seer cults," mostly ragtag assemblages of neonates and thin-blooded Kindred who see the Red Star and their own existence as clear and indisputable evidence that Gehenna has arrived. These groups run the gamut from those who believe UFOs will land and do battle with their elders to the much more faith-based cults that proselytize their messages of fire and brimstone. Some are even hopeful, believing something along the lines of "the meek shall inherit the Earth," and seeing themselves as those heirs. The majority of these fledgling organizations and movements count at least one, often many, seers among their number — usually Caitiff who profess visions of a wildly prophetic nature. Although most other vampires scoff at these rabble and their crazy notions, some ancillae and elders secretly wonder just what this might all mean. They shake in their havens as the baleful eye of the Red Star watches from outside their windows.

The Sabbat has its own breed of Gehenna cultists, the Noddist scholars who spend their unlives examining the tale of Caine and any apocalyptical artifacts or knowledge they can get their zealous claws on. Since the Sword of Caine believes that it is quite literally the army of Caine and that the Dark Father will lead its members into battle against the upstart Antediluvians on the final night, it is very important to them to make sure they know when that epic battle is to begin. Kindred use every means of blood magic, scrying and exploration to help make sense of the great puzzle. The most spiritual covens in Montreal and elsewhere believe they are extremely close to unlocking the mysteries of Gehenna, and they have no compunctions against working with nearly anyone — mortal, infernal vampire, spirit, sorcerer — who might bring them even one step closer to the elusive truth.

Within the Sabbat, the even more fanatical Black Hand waits impatiently for Gehenna, every moment of its members' unlives spent preparing for the ultimate moment when they will take charge of the sect and lead it into glorious battle. For the Cainites of the Black Hand, nothing they can imagine is greater than Gehenna. They believe they will partake of Zillah's Tears and be rewarded for their unwavering service with Caine's promise, while all other Kindred will meet their maker, so to speak. Sadly, though they are not too far off the mark about all but a very few Kindred being destroyed in the Final Nights, they are deluded in thinking that they will be the survivors or that Caine will be standing around passing out salvation. These warriors are champing at the bit to fling themselves into what they see as holy war. How tragically ironic it is that instead of the frenzied battle they have so looked forward to, the end will come silently and without inherent violence, inexorably denying them all that they have worked so hard to achieve. It is indeed a bitter end for these zealots.

Forty Nights of Gehenna

People who treat other people as less than human must not be surprised when the bread they have cast on the waters comes floating back to them, poisoned.

—James Baldwin, "No Name in the Street"

Hell is other people.

—Jean Paul Sartre, *No Exit*

The time has finally come for God to unleash Gehenna, for the poison that is Wormwood to spill down from the heavens and destroy the Kindred, wherever they hide. There is only one place on Earth safe from this apocalyptic punishment, one place where Kindred can find sanctuary and where they may sit out the proverbial flood without fear of being drowned like the rest of the undead. It is to this sanctuary that the characters are led and where they are offered safety on the eve of Gehenna. Should they accept the offer, they will be sorely tested, for they will have to remain in this place with a handful of other Kindred — a small congregation representing a broad cross-section of vampires — for a full 40 nights. If they leave the sanctuary during that time, they are doomed. Only if they stay and find a way to deal with the monsters around them and within their own hearts, do they stand a chance of salvation. During the 40 nights, every variety of temptation, conflict and quandary will be presented them by God and by each other. It is up to them to face all these things without giving in to Curse of Caine and their sinful nature.

This is no easy task, and Storytellers are cautioned now that this version of Gehenna is unlike any other **Vampire** story. Players and characters alike will be confronted with situations and decisions that test their ability to judge right from wrong, with the consequences perhaps deciding the fate of the world. Although there is some structure to ensure that the tale can be told appropriately, this story gives players as much free will as possible in a storytelling game. The plot that does exist is designed to do little more than set the scene, as it were,

then provide guidance along the way. A number of dramatic scenarios are provided to keep things going if the Storyteller needs some creative help, but the lion's share of the tale is freeform. It might be that the tale becomes deeply philosophical or intellectual for your troupe, with the characters and other Kindred present largely discussing their fates and the very nature of their existence. It might be that your players prefer it more religious, with much more of a focus on faith and miracles, redemption and damnation. Or it might be that you find it to be grittier, with more emphasis on action and even violence. Each is possible; all are encouraged. Given 40 nights, nearly anything can happen.

As has already been noted, the characters can really be of any type. Camarilla ancillae, a Sabbat war party, anarch rabble-rousers, frightened thin-bloods, decrepit elders, twisted blood sorcerers — all are welcome. Although God has chosen the most faithful child of Caine to provide sanctuary in a manner not altogether different from Noah's ark, He intends to fill that sanctuary with vampires of every stripe. Only thus can the Chosen truly be tested, can their ability to rise above their nature be fully revealed. As such, the characters are not the only Kindred who join Ferox and Alia in their shelter. The Storyteller should introduce other Kindred who represent those things that the troupe's characters do not. If the characters are a coterie of relatively moral Camarilla neonates, they should be complemented with a Black Hand assassin, a deranged Samedi, perhaps a few incomprehensible Malkavians; perhaps even some ancient and enigmatic Kindred whose lineage alone would cause a stir. The only Kindred who should not be included are those who have sold their souls to the Adversary — infernalists and their ilk. These bastards are already damned for eternity, and God's plan includes no chance for their salvation. If one of the characters in your game happens to be an infernalist, he must spend the 40 nights outside the sanctuary. The damned soul might wish to peer in the windows and plead for salvation, but it makes no difference; the character's fate is sealed. Don't suffer pangs of guilt over this — the player chose the Devil when she made her character an infernalist, and the check has finally come due, so to speak.

The Chosen

Ferox and Alia have followed God's Word and traveled the world seeking those Kindred to be offered salvation. They have identified Kindred based only upon their interpretation of what they believe to be signs from God, trusting that God will make sure they choose the right Kindred. The pair doesn't even know how many Kindred they are to gather with them in the sanctuary, again trusting that God will make things right. All they know is that sometimes they simply get a sense that certain Kindred are to be offered salvation. This certainty might be due to an omen, a dream or some other auspice. Regardless, when they find one of the Chosen, Ferox "marks" him by performing what amounts to a special sacrament, something he calls the Anointing of the Chosen. Using his own blood, the faithful Gargoyle draws a symbol of the Kindred who is to be anointed as one of the Chosen on a door, window or other portal into the haven while uttering a brief blessing that names that Kindred. Even if the blood is wiped off before the sun rises and burns it off, the power of the Anointing cannot be diminished. From this moment forward, that Kindred is one of the Chosen.

The holy mark this sacrament places upon the Chosen is not physical, but spiritual. It does not alter a Kindred's aura, but it does mark her soul in a way that can be detected only by those possessing True Faith. Even then, the mark is unclear, appearing to these spiritual Kindred as an imprecise golden smudge upon the brow of the Chosen. Only the wisest understand that this is a mark of God and that the Kindred has been chosen for some great purpose. In truth, even Ferox does not quite understand what he is really doing by performing the Anointing of the Chosen, but he believes that it will call the Chosen to him when it is time. For details about the summons, see the "For Whom the Bell Tolls" sidebar.

Storytellers are given near-complete freedom in choosing which Kindred to include among the Chosen. Besides the characters and two other Kindred known as the pilgrims, nearly any other Kindred might be included in this select group. While it is recommended that the total number of Kindred in the sanctuary during Gehenna does not exceed a dozen or so in size, it is your chronicle, so any number is possible. The goal is to have enough to provide a broad range of Kindred archetypes and also to have a balance between privacy and claustrophobia for the 40 nights of Gehenna. In addition, make sure that there are not so many Kindred that it becomes difficult to play them as very real, unique individuals. To portray the Chosen as simply generic or stereotypical template characters would not serve this final story one bit.

Among the Chosen might be other local Kindred, but they are more likely complete strangers to the characters, having traveled far in answer to the divine summons they have heard for more than a week now. With the exception of Caine and the Antediluvians (who would overshadow everything else), or the infernal, any Kindred is possible. Always wanted to use

Karsh? How about Ambrogino Giovanni? Sascha Vykos? Etrius? Your own signature characters? This scenario gives you the opportunity to resolve the fates of all those Kindred for whom you have always had a desire to bring into a story. It is also worth considering the addition of at least one of the "stranger" Kindred, to add some real variety — someone who would not only have a very different viewpoint of things, but also might just surprise the characters that she exists in the first place. Have one of the Laibon show up, maybe one of the frightening Naglopers. Introduce one of the odd Tlacique; maybe even one of the Premascines, or an aquatic Gangrel. Don't worry about a disparity of moralities, Disciplines or any of that. God has seen to it that none of the Chosen have undue advantages over the others. Just go and include among the Chosen those Kindred you have always wanted your troupe to encounter or confront. This *is* their final chance to do so, so don't hold back.

Some Storytellers might feel that this character roundup could get too silly, suddenly having all these celebrity Kindred get together for a big slumber party, and they would be correct. If that is what you really want, have at it, but it would be much more fitting to simply include one or two such Kindred at most. The remaining Chosen (perhaps only a couple more, depending on the size of your troupe and how many Chosen you feel works best for your chronicle) should be unknown, just seemingly random Kindred who happened to be tapped for a chance at salvation. Of course, they should be anything but random. These Kindred should be created or selected precisely because they provide a different take on vampirism than the troupe. (Most **Vampire** sourcebooks have a number of characters who would be suitable for use here.) If the bulk of the Chosen happen to be intellectual, then add an ignorant lout or two. If everyone seems too violently inclined, balance that with a devoted pacifist. If most of the group is relatively young in age, introduce a 6,000 year-old Methuselah so that her uniquely antiquated viewpoint brings something new to the mix. A devout atheist might also be interesting, given the nature of Gehenna. Again, don't worry about balancing Disciplines or other traits — just balance character types.

Sanctuary

It has been some years since God's plan was revealed to Ferox and Wormwood appeared in the night sky. In that time, God has indicated only that Ferox would recognize sanctuary when it was time and that it would be a house of God. The Gargoyle has taken this to mean it is a church or other holy place, so he has maintained his longstanding habit of seeking haven in such places. He and Alia have traveled the world looking for signs to indicate which other Kindred are to be offered protection from the coming purge and hoping to discover the actual sanctuary itself. Now, after more than four years, they have found the place they have been looking for.

The sanctuary is as important to the story of Gehenna as Noah's ark was to the biblical story of the Great Flood. It is the one place where a select group of Kindred will find shelter while God rains destruction down upon the rest of their race. In addition to simply serving as a place of safety from the storm, it also provides an appropriately Gothic atmosphere that captures much of the mood of **Vampire**. Because it is a place of worship, feelings of damnation and salvation are also evoked, and reminders of God's presence should be impossible for the characters to avoid within its walls. Finally, it is a fitting example of the World of Darkness itself. The church is no longer a place of active worship, but is instead a barely standing ruin that is left to rot in an urban landscape that has symbolically turned from God. This says more about the desperation, tragedy and hopelessness that is prevalent on Earth than it does about any religious devotion.

The sanctuary should be a large, abandoned Gothic church in a despairing part of the city. If your chronicle already has such a church, feel free to use it. Otherwise, create one in a suitably forsaken region on the outskirts of the city where life is cheap and only the most desperate souls can be found. You could also locate it in a nearby city to which the characters can travel, if such a church is inappropriate to your chronicle's home city. The structure should be dilapidated, likely condemned by the authorities, and probably boarded up and fenced off behind chain link and padlocks. Despite such barriers, it is probably covered with graffiti, and the detritus of drug addicts, the homeless and the lost are strewn about the property. The church should be large enough so that characters can go off from the main nave in order to engage in semi-private conversation, but not so big that they can hide from one another for any length of time. Finally, the basement levels should be inaccessible, perhaps blocked by rubble or, better yet, entirely flooded, fittingly symbolic of the first Great Flood.

The main point is that the sanctuary should serve adequately for a dozen or so Kindred to spend 40 nights without them having to climb over one another, but it should also give them just enough room so they don't feel like rats trapped in a sinking ship (at least not too much). The characters are effectively stuck here for the duration, and the space should make them edgy and claustrophobic, but not so much so that they can't find

a corner now and then where they can seek a degree of solitude. It should also have a classic brooding feel that reinforces the sense of almost medieval religion and the omnipresent sense of God, even if it feels faded or distant. Stained-glass windows, biblical icons and paraphernalia, and everything else about the place should remind the characters that they are in a house of God, even if it has not been used as such for a long time.

It is important that the Storyteller think about this place and what it is like inside. Many excellent examples of Gothic cathedrals and churches can be found online or in a good visual dictionary, and a visit to an actual place like this can provide everything necessary to accurately describe what the sanctuary is like in your chronicle. It should be a Christian church — classic Catholic cathedrals work best — but this is by no means an absolute. If a Jewish temple seems more suited or even a mosque, go for it. It is best, however, to avoid less traditional houses of worship, for few can impart the sense of biblical immensity that is so important to this story. Ultimately, it is the True Faith of Ferox that makes the church a sanctuary against the pox of Gehenna. Prior to his arrival, the church was nothing more than a mostly forgotten building. An appropriate location simply makes it easier for the players to feel the sense of the divine during their characters' ordeal.

Aside from its physical and aesthetic condition, the sanctuary has become a very special place since the arrival of God's servants. First, it is possessed of what amounts to a very high Arcane rating (see the **Vampire Storytellers Handbook**), meaning that without direct, physical investigation, it leaves no "signature" for Kindred Disciplines to detect. What this means is that anything that goes on in there, and anyone who chooses to stay in the church, ceases to exist for most intents and purposes of those outside the church. This seclusion does not sever blood bonds (that comes later), but it does mean that those Kindred inside are not subject to Summon, Kindred outside can't enter using Psychic Projection, et cetera. This is God's designated sanctuary, and the greatest powers of the Kindred pale in comparison to those of the Creator.

Second, because of the presence of Ferox, the church has an effective True Faith rating of 9, making it extremely difficult for most Kindred to physically enter, even if they did take notice of the place. Only those Kindred who have been marked by Ferox as the Chosen find themselves able to bypass this effect. This doesn't mean they won't be affected somewhat — they are probably still awed by the place — but only that the site's holiness won't actually inhibit them from approaching and entering.

Third, upon entering the church, all Disciplines are limited to a Kindred's True Faith rating plus one. This effectively means that aside from Ferox, most other Kindred are unlikely to have access to anything greater than a first level Discipline inside the sanctuary. What's more, no form of blood magic or Necromancy works at all, for such arts are of a blasphemous nature.

Finally, inside the Church, the Chosen lose one blood point every 10 days, rather than the usual one each day. This ensures that unless they go around spending blood like it falls from the sky, each of the Kindred should have enough to make it the 40 nights without falling into torpor.

[**Note:** These conditions supersede those presented as the Withering in Chapter One.]

For Whom the Bell Tolls

Each evening since recognizing that he had found the sanctuary he had been seeking for so long — 11 nights ago when the story begins — Ferox has performed a brief ritual intended to summon the Chosen to the church in time for Gehenna. The ritual takes only a few minutes and involves the ringing of a small church bell. The Gargoyle usually performs the ritual in the middle of the night, but he does not always do so at the same precise hour. During the ritual, each of the Chosen — and only the Chosen — hears what sounds like the distant tolling of a great church bell. The sound lasts no more than a minute, but it does stir in the listener a compulsion to find its source. The closer to the actual sanctuary the listener is, the louder the bell sounds. Each time one of the Chosen hears the sound, her player must make a Willpower roll versus a difficulty of 8 if she intends to ignore the mystical compulsion until the next time the bell rings. If the roll fails, the character must attempt to locate the source of the sound, though she may do so using ordinary caution and sensibility. A botch, however, indicates that the Chosen will go to nearly any length to seek the source of the bell, even placing herself in serious danger to do so. Spending a Willpower point enables the Chosen to resist the compulsion for the duration of a single scene.

This system will probably not come into play until the characters are anointed as Chosen Kindred later in the story. Storytellers might wish to use it to determine how many Willpower points the other Chosen have at the beginning of Act Two, however.

Wormwood

Although the wrath of God manifests as a gaseous vapor that spills into every corner of the earth, the characters themselves will, in all likelihood, have no direct experience of it. If they did, they would be as doomed as all the Kindred who are not among the Chosen. Still, it is both poetic and perhaps necessary to describe not only the nature of this phenomenon, but also how it affects vampires in terms of game mechanics. Maybe a character will choose to try to weather the storm, as it were, spurning the offer of sanctuary. Perhaps, to heighten the sense of tragedy, the Storyteller wishes to describe what it is like for the Kindred who must suffer and be destroyed.

The Red Star has been visible in the sky since 1999 to those Kindred possessed of Auspex, as well as others — like some Malkavians, thin-blooded Kindred and even the very rare mortal — who have similarly sensitive, albeit different, perceptions. Such remains the case throughout this tale, meaning that most of Caine's children won't even really know the nature of the sudden affliction they experience. Mortals have no idea that anything unusual is occurring, and this is precisely the point of Gehenna. God intends to sweep away the world's vampires without upsetting the blissfully ignorant mortals, who are His only real concern. Gehenna should arrive and pass as if it were nothing more than a light breeze, as far as the Children of Seth are concerned.

Gehenna need not start on any particular date, though it might seem fitting to have all hell to break loose on some religiously notable date. For a truly gothic feel, the story might take place in the autumn, with barren tree limbs and a harvest moon in the sky, or perhaps winter works better, symbolizing quiet death. Since the characters spend only the earliest part of the tale outside the sanctuary, it doesn't really make much of a difference whether it is warm or cold or raining or snowing beyond the echoing cavern of the church. Again, it is best to simply have it occur when it fits with your ongoing chronicle. No need to force a date on Gehenna. It should come when least expected, when no one is really watching, and most importantly of all, when it is the right time to bring an end to the chronicle.

For those rare Kindred who can perceive the Red Star, the arrival of Gehenna begins with a lightning-like flash as Wormwood literally explodes. This pulse of crimson light fills the entire sky for a brief moment; not enough to blind those who can see it, but certainly enough to command their full attention. Almost immediately after this initial burst of light fades, the star is gone, replaced by a gaseous cloud of the deepest crimson that is already expanding to swiftly envelop the Earth. More spiritual than physical, this vapor travels quickly and penetrates anything and everything — from the deepest holes in the Earth to the bottom of the ocean, and from the tallest peaks to the interior of airplanes in flight. Before the first night ends, the only Kindred on Earth who are not subject to the ruinous poison of Wormwood are those Chosen in the sanctuary with Ferox. Keep in mind that most Kindred won't even know that Gehenna has come. They won't realize that they face certain doom until the effects of Wormwood begin to make their unlives increasingly... difficult.

When the 40 nights have passed, the cleansing waters of God's wrath finally dissipate as if they had never been. The last traces of the Red Star and its gaseous poison are gone. Gehenna is over, and the only ones left to notice that it even happened in the first place are those Kindred who remained in the sanctuary and were able to redeem themselves in God's judgment.

[A Final Note: Some characters will inevitably believe they have a way to trick God and escape His wrath, and not by entering the sanctuary provided them. Some might choose to go into the astral plane or some other realm of existence to sit out Gehenna, hoping that when everything is over they can just come on back and everything will be as it was before, except for the loss of most other Kindred. This is not true. Everything is part of God's Creation, and so everything is subject to the power of Wormwood and the cold justice it brings. It doesn't matter if a vampire is in the

Why Forty Nights?

It might seem a little odd that God would not destroy the Kindred with a single blow in a single night. The Creator is certainly capable of doing this, so why doesn't He? The answer is as old as Abraham. God wishes those who are to be punished to fully understand why they must suffer. He is giving the Kindred a chance to comprehend their sins before they literally meet their Maker. If they were to simply be destroyed in a flash of divine lightning, there would be no such understanding, and God's wrath would be unjust. Most Kindred do not survive the full 40 nights anyway; this is merely a period of time that ensures that the Kindred have time to reflect on their crimes and accept their punishment. It also guarantees that no Kindred actually survives Gehenna. No matter how resilient and resourceful they might be, no Kindred is capable of making it a full 40 nights, beyond those in sanctuary.

Tempest, Malfeas or anywhere within the World of Darkness cosmology. Unless he is in the sanctuary, he's a goner. There really is no escape for the Damned.]

The Effects of Wormwood

In general, the gaseous remains of Wormwood are a mystical force that dilutes and ultimately washes away Caine's Blood. It doesn't physically cause vitae to disappear, nor does it directly harm the Kindred in a way that produces immediate sensation or loss of health levels. The efficacy and duration of the divine fog, however, is more than enough to ensure that no Kindred shall remain unliving by the time Gehenna has run its course. The following are the various effects that all Kindred not in the sanctuary experience during the 40 nights of Gehenna. In this scenario, these effects supersede the Withering as outlined in Chapter One.

• The first and most noticeable effect Wormwood has on the Kindred is the shattering of all blood bonds, from individual blood oaths to the Sabbat's Vinculi. These bonds are all broken immediately, probably resulting in many Kindred suddenly experiencing unusual feelings about certain other Kindred, particularly those they had always despised, but were forced to love by virtue of a blood bond. What's more, no blood bond can ever again be created; Wormwood is simply too powerful.

• Vampires lose the ability to transubstantiate mortal blood into vampiric vitae. In short, the only vitae that exists any longer is the stuff already in vampires. A vampire can drink all she wants from mortals or animals, but no matter how much she ingests, it provides no nourishment. The only means of sustenance remaining to the Kindred is another vampire's (or ghoul's) vitae. Obviously, this is a pretty serious situation, but one that vampires might not realize until they have at least tried to feed a few times. After that, though, you can bet they will grow panicky, especially since they continue to lose one point of blood each evening just to rise.

• Vampires are unable to sire childer or use their vitae to sustain a ghoul (though vitae already in a ghoul remains viable until it is used up). Any attempt at the Embrace simply fails, while ghouls might complain that they still thirst and beg for more.

• The upper limits of a vampire's power diminish quickly. By the last of the 40 nights, even the Antediluvians are no stronger, per se, than a 15th-generation Caitiff. In game terms, this means that another generation effectively disappears every two nights. On the first night, only Caine is (theoretically) affected, becoming no different than the long-gone Second Generation. On the third night, he is the equivalent of the Antediluvians. On the fifth night, no vampire is any stronger than the those of the Fourth Generation, and so on. By this math, on the 13th night of the flood no vampire possesses power greater than that of the Eighth Generation, while on the 23rd night, the power of the Thirteenth Generation is the most that can be claimed, even by Caine. Finally, on the 27th night every vampire who remains will know what it means to be a thin-blooded vampire, for they are the equivalent of 15th-generation Kindred. Each evening after the 27th, every vampire's maximum blood pool decreases by one until on the 37th night, when they can no longer maintain any vitae in their withered bodies. At this point, any Kindred who has survived meets her Final Death no later than sunrise on the morning after the 37th night. Gehenna continues for the full 40 nights, however, just in case.

• Finally, the cost of all blood magic doubles immediately, and the difficulty for using any paths or rituals increases by two. This covers Thaumaturgy, Koldunic Sorcery, Necromancy and the more exotic variations of blood magic (such as Dur-An-Ki, Setite Sorcery, etc.). Any blood magic attempted that draws upon the power of the infernal instead of vitae results in an automatic botch and probably some extra divine punishment on the spot. Storytellers, use your creativity, but make sure those infernalists learn their lesson. This is God's time to do His stuff, not the Devil's.

Note that all these listed effects apply equally to ghouls, revenants and dhampirs, as well as anything else that uses vampiric vitae. Those who have outlived a mortal life span suddenly desiccate and die, while the relatively young undergo swift aging until their bodies reach their real, chronological age. At that point, they become ordinary mortals, dhampirs included. God does not automatically condemn those who only received half of Caine's Curse. When Gehenna is ended, however, not a drop of Caine's blood remains on Earth.

Kindred Reactions

It might seem that upon first realizing that the Red Star is literally flooding the Earth with a lethal, mystical fog, many Kindred, especially those possessed of serious supernatural power, would do something. They might call upon their minions to wreak havoc, reach out with their Disciplines and wage open battle upon one another, or just race through the streets of the city letting the world know that vampires exist and that the End of the World is upon them. If every vampire on Earth suddenly learns that this is the end, what have they got to lose?

Well, first of all, it should never be forgotten that most Kindred are paranoid bastards who would never

reveal anything to anyone unless they were damned sure it would be to their benefit to do so and could never be used against them by their fellow backstabbing bloodsuckers. Imagine the prince of a city suddenly discovering that he had contracted a rare blood disease and that each night he grew less powerful. (In a sense, this is what is happening.) The slightest hint to his fellow Kindred of such a predicament would be like blood in the water to the primogen and any other Kindred who ever considered taking the prince down. They wouldn't hesitate to capitalize on the news for a second. Such is the Curse of Caine.

This is exactly the mindset that most Kindred have when they first notice that things aren't quite right anymore. The very last thing they want to do is spread the word; that's like declaring a bounty on your own head. Only those Kindred who absolutely trust another Kindred — and let's be honest, how many of those are there, really? — would even entertain such an idea, let alone actually go ahead and fess up. Let's also not forget that blood bonds no longer exist, so even that enforced loyalty is gone out the window. This is certainly not to say that some Kindred still might blurt out the fact that something fishy is going on and they want to know if anyone else noticed the same things. Even so, given the fear that is probably crawling up every vampire's spine by this time, the loudmouth would quickly find himself greeting the next sunrise.

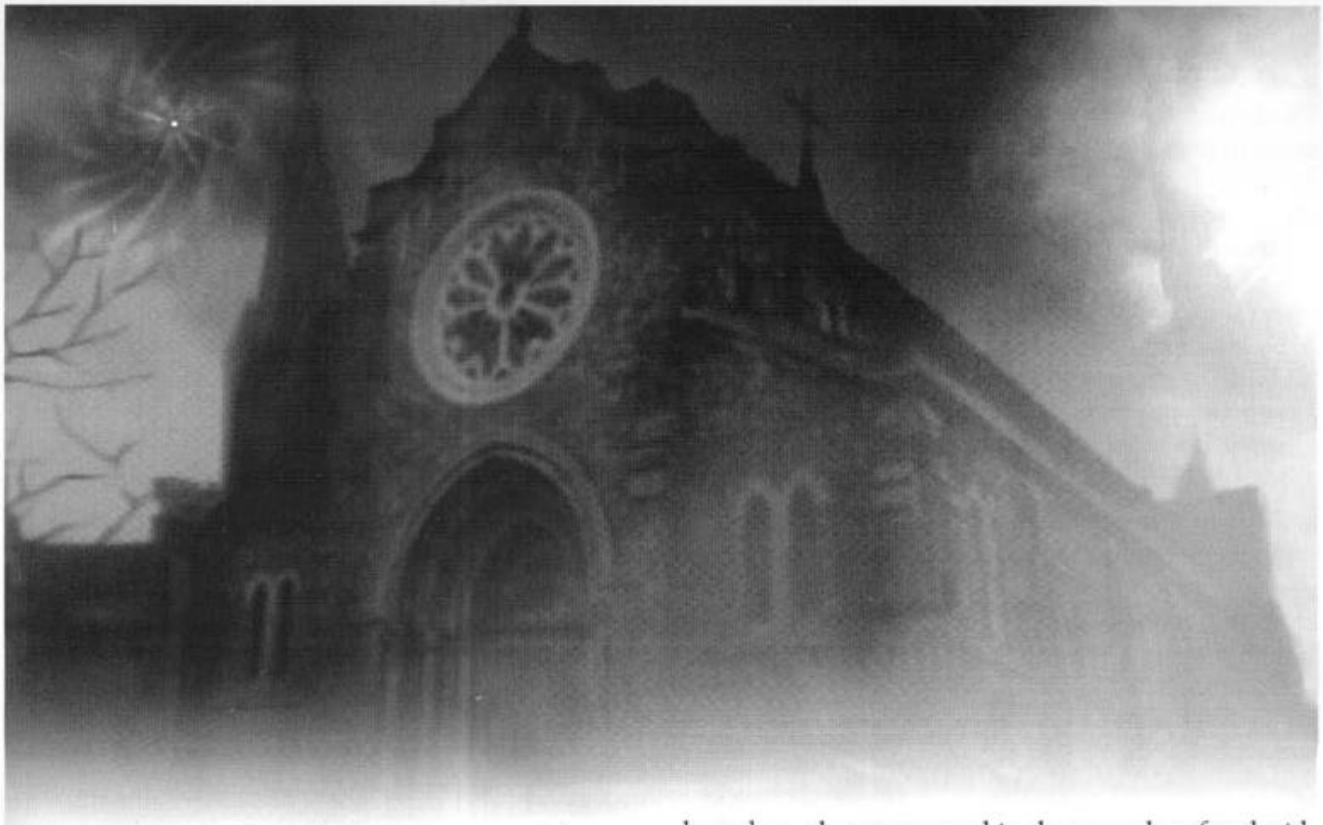
The most powerful vampires of all, the Antediluvians and Methuselahs, won't keep quiet for the same reasons, but they have very good reasons of their own. Most of all, they are terrified to a far greater degree than their descendants, for they are affected by the weakening far sooner. Finding out that you can no longer use that potent Level Eight Discipline one night or those Level Seven ones a few nights later scares even these creatures. For what seems an eternity, they have believed themselves to be the masters of the Jyhad, the most awesome monsters on the Earth, and now, just like that, their power has been choked off by someone or something they have no means by which to fight. In a way, they too worry about the same "blood in the water" scenario. They won't necessarily realize that what is happening to them is happening to all their kind, and even if they do, they are all too aware of how irresistible a target they'd make for vampires starving for their vintage vitae.

After the initial fear and paranoia sets in, Kindred no doubt find excuses to remove themselves from vampire society in the hopes that their seeming ailment is not detected by their peers. As the symptoms increase in severity and Kindred sense that there might be no cure for this horrible affliction, it is already too late to do anything. Some will choose to greet the sunrise; others will curl up in a ball and fall into a catatonic state, unable to face the inevitable. Still others rush headlong into a last-ditch campaign to find religion and beg God for mercy — to no avail, of course. The unique weaknesses of each clan will color the final nights of each vampire, too. Ventrue might go mad trying to find some source of vitae that not only provides nourishment, but that they can stomach. Toreador might sit outside and simply stare, entranced, at the terrible beauty that is Wormwood. Brujah might fly into a rage, destroying everything in their haven and slaying their retainers and ghouls, seeking any way to vent their pathetic anger. Malkavians might retreat into their own minds, ignoring the world around them. (Given the limitless psychoses they might suffer, anything is possible.)

What matters most is that the world does *not* erupt into a bloodbath with vampires storming the White House and the Antediluvians marching through downtown London like knock-off Godzillas on a rampage. It is perfectly fine for the dying Kindred to vent their utter helplessness by howling from the top of the Empire State Building or scrawling their last raging emotions in blood on the side of the Taj Mahal, but there should be no really notable public sign of Gehenna. If none of the preceding arguments seems to explain why this is so well enough, then just remember that Wormwood is God's tool. If He doesn't want the Children of Caine tearing apart the world before they exit the stage, then maybe Wormwood itself carries a spiritual component that directly forces vampires into a state of fear and introspection. The whole point is that Wormwood is intended to cleanse the Earth of vampires without affecting mankind. Sure, a few people might stumble across a lunatic or depressed vampire or two before it is all over, but that should be the rare exception, not the rule.

Final Considerations

There is no need for a slow build-up to Gehenna, for in truth, that has been happening for years, if not centuries, already. If the characters and other local Kindred are not already fervently awaiting the end, there's no need to railroad them into it now. They have already had long enough to see the signs. The story should just begin as would any other story, perhaps after a bit of downtime has passed since the last real dramatic episode. If, however, there is rarely ever a lull in the action in your city, then don't force a lull, either. Things should feel as if they're on the eve of Gehenna and that everything is the way it always has been. The Red Star does not change in appearance until Gehenna actually begins, so after all this time, those who can see it won't perceive anything different yet.



Because this really is the last tale to be told, or at least certainly the last to be anything remotely like all your previous **Vampire** stories, it is only fair that the players have been given the opportunity to spend whatever experience points they have accumulated by this time. Like everything already mentioned, however, if doing so would be unusual in your game, then don't worry about it. A dot or two will not change the outcome of the story. It's just that if you, as the Storyteller, can do anything to create a truly fair "last chance" situation for the players as much as for their characters, then by all means do so. By the end of this story, the troupe should feel that not only have they been entertained and given a chance to be an integral part of the end of **Vampire**, but they should feel that they were given every opportunity possible to go into that last story as prepared as they could be.

It is also a good time now for the Storyteller to take a good last look at the character sheets before an opportunity is missed later. Where are the characters' greatest strengths and weaknesses? What are their Natures *really* (versus what they have written on the sheet)? What are the relationships these Kindred have with their peers and with mortals? What about real family? Look at their Virtues, their Humanity or Path ratings, and think about who these characters really are in a way that you might never have before. Use the dots on paper as guides, but better yet, recall how these characters acted in the past when faced with important decisions of morality, life and death. This kind of reflection and contemplation should always occur for good Storytellers, but if not, at least do it now. What you know about the characters not only helps you run this story as is, but provides you with many great ideas for how you can tailor the events to your troupe's characters. Any attempt to personalize Wormwood is not only admirable, but will go a long way toward making this the very best possible ending to a hopefully very enjoyable chronicle.

The story begins three nights before Wormwood erupts and its bitter flood is unleashed upon the world. Ferox and Alia have been in the city for a few weeks already, taking shelter in an old, abandoned church in the most neglected part of town. This is the sanctuary that God has prepared for them. The characters might already have some inkling that the two are around, but even so, these two should remain as mysterious as possible — don't give anything away too soon. The pair has come to the city as a result of the ongoing search for the Chosen, unsure as to how many more there were to find. Since they have been spending nearly every day for years in churches, they didn't realize that they had finally found sanctuary until four nights before, when God spoke to Alia and told her that her wandering had ended and that Gehenna would come in a fortnight. Prior to learning this, the two had kept to the shadows

and watched the local Kindred for any sign that one of the Chosen might be among them. Now that they know the precise time when Gehenna will begin, however, they have largely confined themselves to the church in order to prepare themselves for that final moment and to be ready to receive the Chosen when they arrive. Already a number of the Chosen have found their way to the city, but none have yet figured out where it is they must go. Each has found her own temporary haven, and, given the strange nature of the call, each has refrained from announcing her presence to the local Kindred authorities, preferring to learn more about why she is here before discarding her cover.

Act One: On the Eve of Gehenna

The first act begins with the characters encountering two strange Kindred in the city, a Gangrel and a Tremere who consider themselves pilgrims of a sort. One is a former sinner now on the road to personal redemption. His companion is a former humanist now jaded and riddled with doubt and fear. These Kindred believe that they are on the very precipice of a great discovery that might change the world for all Kindred, though they do not yet know just what that discovery could be. Their association with the characters soon comes to the attention of some of the city's most influential Kindred, who immediately spawn all manner of rumors, especially when they recognize the Tremere pilgrim as a former alastor now on the Red List himself. Believing that one of the Anathema is in town generates plenty of fear and paranoia among the locals, and it provides plenty of action, even as everything the Kindred know is about to come to a crushing end. Ironically, while the city's Kindred take action against the Anathema Hector Trelane, they remain completely blind to the fact that another one of the Anathema is in their midst: Ferox.

The characters find themselves smack dab in the middle of all the action for a few evenings as they and other local Kindred seek to use the situation to their personal advantage (as Kindred are notoriously wont to do). Depending on how the Storyteller wishes to run

Anathema and Alastors

The Camarilla maintains a list of 13 Kindred deemed "most wanted" by virtue of their presumably atrocious crimes against the sect. The Kindred on this list are known simply as the Anathema and are considered to pose a great threat to all Kindred. As such, all Kindred are given open warrant to destroy these vile monsters. Certain Kindred actively hunt down the Anathema, however. Known as alastors, many are former archons who have been appointed to the position. Some are merely Kindred fortuitous enough to have felled an Anathema, and have been named as alastors as a consequence. Those who succeed in actually bringing down one of the top five Anathema are given special recognition and referred to as Red Alastors; they are accorded even greater respect and authority.

In addition to knowing that a dangerous vampire has been eliminated, each alastor is rewarded with something called the Trophy. This prize varies greatly, depending on the clan that placed the Anathema in question on the Red List in the first place. In almost all cases, however, it is very substantial, and it can even include sanctioned diablerie, the teaching of rare Disciplines or major clan boons. The only thing for sure is that each alastor is technically immune from prosecution by any Kindred short of the Inner Circle itself. Even the justicars are forbidden to interfere with the alastors in pursuit of the Anathema. Finally, each bears a mystical tattoo commonly called the Mark of the Beast upon the right palm, so that appropriate Kindred can verify the alastor's identity, should there be any doubt. Should any alastor ever commit diablerie upon one of the Anathema, something strictly forbidden, that alastor forfeits his position immediately and very likely takes the destroyed Anathema's place on the Red List. His former colleagues now become his hunters, and his destruction becomes a top priority, as any vampire capable of taking down one of the Anathema is certainly a vampire to be concerned about.

Storytellers need to keep in mind that it is unlikely that any but the prince and perhaps a well-connected elder or two (Camarilla Lore 4+) would be able to name any of the Anathema, let alone one of the usually covert alastors. Rumors abound, of course, but most Kindred would possess very little useful information. In fact, most of what they might claim to know is probably egregiously incorrect. This confusion and misinformation about who these frightening Kindred are and what they are capable of should help to heighten the paranoia and fear in this story. Too many clear facts lessen the drama and ultimately take away some of the impact.

things, the characters may even encounter some of the other Chosen who have already arrived in town. (It is recommended that they do not, though, in order to heighten the surprise when the time does finally come for all to be revealed.) The characters should have contact only with the two pilgrims, who they may help or oppose as they see fit. In any case, things should feel tense for the characters, and they should sense that something of great importance is on the very near horizon, though what it is, they cannot tell. It is only on the eve of Gehenna itself that they learn the truth for themselves.

The Pilgrims

Among the Chosen who have been mysteriously summoned to the city are two autarkis pilgrims who sense that whatever it is that is responsible for drawing them to the city is something of great portent for all Kindred.

Ryder is a Gangrel who has spent most of his unlife as an anarch troublemaker, stirring things up if only to shatter the illusion of civility exalted by so many Kindred. He has committed foul diablerie on more than a few occasions, and he was on the verge of losing the last of his humanity to the Beast that raged in his soul until a few years ago. A chance encounter with some unusually spiritual Kindred changed all that. These insightful individuals taught him many things, but most important of all, they ignited in Ryder a desire to explore what it meant to be mortal again. Since that time, the Outlander has traveled the world, talking to others of his own clan as well as Kindred of the most uncanny origins — from Methuselahs to strange fledglings with abilities that surprised him. Ryder has come to understand that there might yet be a hope for his own redemption, though he still struggles to find the way.

The Gangrel travels with a Tremere companion known once as Hector Trelane, though he prefers to go by John Trent now. His sire was found guilty of siring a childe despite being strictly forbidden to do so by his clan superiors, and was destroyed as consequence. This tragedy forever stained John's reputation and he was dragged from his Virginian haven and conscripted to labor with little reward in the basement of an influential French chantry for the next two centuries. He spent most of that time dabbling in alchemy and corresponding with an eclectic group of occultists and visionaries around the globe, pastimes that earned the black sheep the nickname Le Physicker, meant as an insult by the chantry apprentices. The thing John's Tremere peers felt was most odious about him was his increasingly insufferable conviction that vampires had no divine or supernatural origin, but were simply an unusual rung upon the evolutionary ladder. He believed that humanity was somehow *trying* to surpass its present state and achieve its final and most perfect form. Vampires were just one attempt at perfection, admittedly a flawed one. These views, and the fact that he frequently and passionately spoke out about them, caused John to be shunned and effectively condemned him to the lowest levels of the Tremere pyramid.

John and Ryder met a few years ago in Washington, DC. John was sent there by his superiors under the pretense that the DC chantry needed some assistance in defending itself against the Sabbat during that sect's East Coast crusade, and given his Virginian roots, he might be of some help. In truth, it was hoped that he would simply disappear as a result of chantry infighting or at the hands of the enemy. Chance has a strange way of making plans crumble, however. Instead of simply vanishing, John's return home and the relative freedom granted him by his new regent opened the way for him to dive headfirst with his newfound martial companion into a number of delicate situations. The most dramatic of these was an encounter with one of the legendary Anathema, one known as Petaniqua, whose crimes were such that she had earned the number two spot on the Camarilla's infamous Red List. Despite all odds, a sheer stroke of apparent luck handed John a single, momentary opportunity to destroy the Anathema just as she was on the verge of destroying a host of important Kindred. His fatal blow brought him instant celebrity and earned him the elite title of Red Alastor in addition to garnering him the rewards that go with the office. John's new status resulted in him becoming even more a pawn in the games of others than ever before, something Ryder wanted no part of. He had also become absolutely convinced in his views about the nature of vampires and spent most of his time seeking to discover the next state of human perfection and how he might possibly achieve it himself. All the while, Ryder sank further on the evolutionary scale in many ways, spending the lion's share of his time simply hunting down other Kindred for their precious vitae. The two companions had little left in common, so they parted ways.

During their time apart, their roles were ironically flipped. While Ryder learned to put his more bestial ways behind him, John's experiences ultimately led him to a run-in with a nest of degenerate Kindred cultists in the American Southwest while on the trail of one of the Anathema. The twisted fanatics wished to "open his eyes to the true evil that existed in the universe." They tortured their Tremere "guest" for seven nights with every physical means imaginable, but it was what they eventually showed him that nearly shattered his mind. The tormentors forced John to gaze into the darkest depths of the universe and to literally see the horrors

that lurked on the very edge of Creation, chthonian entities hungry to return to the earthly realm and turn it into their own blasphemous playground. This vision — real or cruelly concocted to simply break the already shaken magus — contradicted everything John had ever been convinced of. His mind was numbed by what he saw, the revelation undoing everything he had ever believed to be true. After more than 200 years, his will was finally and irreparably broken. By a further string of coincidences he managed to escape his captors, but he has never been the same again. John is no longer an optimist who seeks to transcend his vampiric state in order to become something even greater. Instead, he is haunted by hellish nightmares and paranoia that have made him much more of a survivalist than the scientist he once was. His own morality has crumbled as a result and now he, not Ryder, is the one who hovers perilously close to the Beast. Worse still, the Camarilla's Inner Circle received word from a discreet source that John had committed diablerie upon the Anathema he had been hunting. This unconfirmed news spurred the clans to denounce him and to name him to the Red List in place of the Anathema he is believed to have destroyed. This forced the former alastor to completely disassociate himself from the sect and most other Kindred, becoming a true autarkis in order to avoid detection and capture by the alastors who are already on his trail. It was then that he also discarded the name he was most widely known by, Hector Trelane, in favor of the one he uses now, John Trent.

When Ryder learned that John had been named to the Red List, he sought out his old companion in the hopes of saving him from the pursuing alastors. More familiar with John than his other hunters, Ryder succeeded in finding the Warlock, but he was saddened to discover what had become of him. He had looked for John in the hope that the Tremere's unorthodox theories might have been right all along and that together they might finally find answers to the questions they both had shared at one time about the true origins and nature of vampires. Instead, he found a paranoid and inhuman Kindred who had come to reject all his former beliefs as nothing more than foolish naïveté. Even so, Ryder chose to remain with his old comrade. No longer selfish and seeking only the thrill of the kill, he believes that maybe his own redemption can come from helping John overcome his recent traumas and once again taking up his former quest for humanity and the solution to the mystery of vampiric existence. The Gangrel stays by his side and does what he can to show John that some hope exists yet, that they are not necessarily damned, and that they still have a chance to avert the terrifying things John has been shown. He also realizes that without his help, John has little chance of survival against the alastors who hound him.

Three Nights Before Gehenna

The pilgrims John and Ryder arrived in the city less than a week ago, seeking haven in a rundown motel on the outskirts of the city. Aside from the requisite hunting that they have limited to this same part of town in order to go unnoticed by other Kindred, the two spend most of their time trying to figure out just why they came here in the first place. Both are familiar with the pull of a supernatural summons, but the call that has brought them to this place — the tolling bell — is something very different. They have spent some of their time trying to locate its source, believing it might be close by, but they have also begun to put together a few other interesting clues that they believe might be related. The most important of these is the unusual number of reports of an angel in town, reports they have found in newspapers, by listening to the radio and by actively seeking out local kine who might be more attuned to such things (such as priests or social workers). In the past week alone, at least four such sightings have occurred, with witnesses including a teenager, a retired factory worker, a small-time crook and a doctor. While each story told does differ from the others, the similarities are striking. In eaeh case, the angel is described as having a very pale complexion, the obligatory wings, horns on his head and garbed in a vestment or some other ritual robe. Most witnesses say how they just came upon the angel while they were going about their usual business on the city streets. A couple claim that the angel spoke to them, saying something brief and peaceful before vanishing before their eyes. One individual, the doctor, even claims that the angel was accompanied by a fey girl who may have been another angel or perhaps a departed soul being taken to Heaven. A few local churches have taken this as a sign of God's presence, but none have gone further and declared it to be anything more important. If pressed, some pastors probably believe it is nothing less than a normal psychological phenomenon, in which people so wish to believe in God that they convince themselves that they see an angel once they hear it reported that someone else nearby has. Even so, the pilgrims have been investigating these sightings with some interest, for they suspect that more might be at work than the kine can guess.

Because of Ryder's bestial appearance, the pilgrims stay out of the limelight as much as possible. Most evenings are spent driving around and paying visits to churches and other houses of worship in order to determine which one might house the obviously large bell

they have been hearing for each of the past 11 nights. So far, they have not found anything that solves the riddle of the bell, but they keep looking. They also pursue whatever leads they have concerning the angel sightings. Until they find an answer to these mysteries, neither entertains the thought of leaving the city, no matter how difficult things might become for them. Both are certainly capable of taking care of themselves, and neither has any reason to believe that the local Kindred would pose too great a threat to make them think otherwise. Even so, they have no desire to come into conflict with other Kindred and do what they can to keep a low profile. Their hope is that they can learn why they have been called here, resolve the matter and move on without having even come to the attention of others of their kind. The last thing they need is for an alastor to pick up their trail and force them to into a no-win situation.

The scene begins when the characters overhear a young woman describing in worried tones the strange man who is staying at the motel. She works most nights as the front desk clerk at the motel and was very disturbed by John Trent when he checked into the place. Since then, she has been keeping a close eye on him and has noted the frequent presence of another shady character, Ryder. Her spying has made her so worried as to what the pair might be up to that she even dared to call the police to check up on them. Although the police did briefly speak to John Trent — he used that name when he checked in — a few nights ago and afterward told her that she had nothing to fear from him, she has continued to learn what she can and fears the worst. The clerk — give her a name suitable to your city — tells her friend these things in a way that should convince the eavesdropping characters that the strangers she is talking about are worth looking into. She might have seen the strange mark on John's right palm when he was signing the guest book — the alastor's unique tattoo of office; most are black, but John's is red as befits his station as an elite Red Alastor. Or maybe she caught a brief glimpse of Ryder's face as he entered John's room or climbed into the car they have parked outside the room. (The sight of his face would be enough to scare most mortals, given the advanced state of his Gangrel curse.) She might have overheard their conversation, perhaps by entering an empty suite next door to theirs and putting her ear to the wall, too curious to leave well enough alone. Maybe she actually saw them escort someone, a vessel, to their room and never saw that person leave. In any case, she should say enough to her friend to pique the character's interest.

Assuming the characters decide to act on the information, they should find the motel easily enough and with little effort be able to locate the room the two strangers are using. Unless the characters arrive just prior to sunrise, however, they find the room empty, as John and Ryder are out hunting and won't return for about an hour. The door of the hotel room is warded by John's use of the appropriate thaumaturgical rituals against Kindred and ghouls as a precaution against alastors and their minions, so characters who touch the door are in for an unpleasant surprise. Should they have a normal mortal open the door for them, or if they break the door or window to gain access, a quick search of the place reveals little. Aside from about a week's worth of newspapers tossed on a small table, and a few basic personal sundries on the bathroom vanity (comb, mouthwash, etc.), there is little to suggest the identity or purpose of the guests' visit. A more thorough investigation, however, might lead the characters to note the following: a few small spots of blood on the bathroom floor; light gray dust and what appears to be bits of feathers spread about the bathtub; two dead pigeons beneath the vanity; a handgun bullet beneath the shabby dresser; faint traces of odd designs painted with someone's finger on the inside of the room door, on the bathroom door and on the windows. The astute also notice that there are no signs of eating or drinking of any kind in the room (food wrappers, crumbs, soda cans, etc.), and the toilet paper roll is still unused. If they examine the newspapers closely, the characters realize that half a dozen stories have been torn out from the past week's issues. The telephone book is also missing a page or two — those listing local churches and religious institutions — something that a keen searcher might notice. Finally, a check with the young man at the front desk tonight might also reveal that the room is registered to a single guest named John Trent who paid in cash and did not present any identification. He also requested to have the cleaning staff leave the room alone unless he specifically asked to have it cleaned up.

It might not be obvious to the characters that the residents are vampires at this point, as opposed to a couple of shady characters with an odd predilection for dead birds who like to eat out a lot. Even the ward on the door, if described with suitable subtlety by the Storyteller, could be taken as an indication of some sort of hedge magic. Tremere characters, however, should recognize some of the strange things in the room as ritual components, while the ward is clearly the product of blood magic. John used the pigeons for their feathers, which he burns in the bathtub as part of the ritual Wake with Evening's Freshness. He also scrawls various glyphs

of protection on the doors and windows with his own bloody finger to establish the Defense of the Sacred Haven before the sunrise. John spends his days in the ensorcelled tub, while Ryder sleeps beneath heavy blankets on the bed. They also jam a chair against the doorknob just in case the ward, the two locks and flimsy deadbolt don't hold against intruders.

If the characters decide to stake out the place and wait for the room's residents to return, they are eventually rewarded about an hour later by the arrival of a nondescript, dark blue, late model sedan that looks like it hasn't seen a car wash in years. Only John is in the car. Given his paranoia, he has his pistol handy and a shotgun on the seat beneath a road map in case of trouble. Ryder is in bat form close by, waiting for his companion to open the room door for him so that he can enter unnoticed before changing back into his Kindred form. They travel in this fashion sometimes so that other hotel guests do not always see two men going to-and-fro, and so the staff does not know that the room is actually being used by two guests. It also makes it easier for Ryder to get the drop on anyone who might think of ambushing John. After the police visit a few nights ago, they can't be too cautious. (Who knows who might be a spy for a local vampire or worse, an alastor?) If the characters choose not to wait around to see who shows up, the Storyteller should move up the return of the pilgrims so that they arrive just as the characters are leaving their room. In the either case, the precise way in which John and Ryder react depends in large part on how the characters present themselves. Unless they come off as if they are set on destroying the pair, neither of the pilgrims desires to make a scene and start trouble here. They would prefer to learn more about how they were discovered and how they are going to ensure that word of their presence goes no further. In their experience, simply destroying the characters would probably draw more attention, not less. If possible, they would also wish to learn something about the city's Kindred in order to know whether any of them might be the so-called angel that has been in the news. They do not mention the church bell to the characters at this point.

The Storyteller is free to run this scene in whatever manner best suits the current chronicle. There is no requirement that the characters establish amicable terms with the pilgrims, but that is a perfectly acceptable outcome if they are so inclined. Ryder and John are on the proverbial high road, but neither is above ultimately destroying other Kindred who pose a real threat to them, if they can do so quietly. It might work well for the characters to have a chance to get to know the pair and even to discuss their philosophical views, but again, if they instead exchange no more than a few words, then that is fine too. They have more than enough time to get to know each other better later in the story. Even if the characters do talk to the pilgrims, they won't be able to learn much about what lies in store for them, because like all the Chosen, the pilgrims have no idea of what God has planned. Still, the pilgrims might wish to question them about the angel sightings and see if they have any knowledge or insight into the phenomenon. Again, they won't mention the fact that they have been called here by an enigmatic church bell, but they instead explain that their reason for coming to this city was simply to learn more about the odd sightings of the angel. If the characters appear to be ready to expose the pilgrims to other Kindred, the pair does its best to use intimidation and even Disciplines to keep this from happening, stopping short of outright destruction if at all possible.

If, however, the characters and the pilgrims do come to blows or even go so far as to incapacitate or destroy each another, don't worry that this will torpedo the story. God is about to offer the chance at salvation to a handful of Caine's childer, including the most sinful, defiant predators imaginable. This is part of His plan, and He wouldn't have it any other way. Therefore, while the point here is not about giving the characters one final opportunity to go wild with brutal depravity before entering the proverbial convent, if this kind of gratuitous mayhem does take place, it won't really change anything. Despite any and all deeds of evil the characters might be responsible for *up until the moment they enter the sanctuary*, they are still counted among the Chosen. Once the church doors shut, however, all bets are off.

Two Nights Before Gehenna

This is when things start to get interesting. The night before, while the pilgrims were out hunting, the watchful contact of one of the local Kindred (the scourge, for example, or a knowledgeable Nosferatu) spotted Ryder and John at a gas station where they topped off their tank before returning to the motel. When John paid the man inside at the counter, he removed his gloves in order to count out his money and the contact noticed the strange crimson tattoo on his palm. This, in addition to John's already disturbing appearance, led the man to telephone his Kindred acquaintance and report what he had seen in detail, including the make, model and license plate number of the pilgrims' vehicle. The vampire receiving the tip is now actively seeking more information and has notified other Kindred of John's appearance. Word is already spreading throughout the Kindred community as a

consequence. Some of the locals are probably focused on the report of John's tattoo, which might suggest to them anything from membership in the notorious Black Hand (or some other mythical Kindred cult) to a sign of infernalism or sorcery at the very least. The prince — and possibly another of the city elders — should be knowledgeable enough to recognize it as the mark of an alastor, perhaps even a Red Alastor. Given the implications of having one of these Kindred in town, the prince sets the wheels in motion and soon manages to get his hands on a standard surveillance tape from the gas station where the pilgrims were seen, perhaps putting himself in debt to the scourge or other Kindred if claims to domain over the gas station exist. Though the tape is not of the best quality, the mark on John's right palm as well as Ryder's bestial facial features are clear enough for the elder to act on the information. No later than a few hours after sundown, the prince receives enough information from another Camarilla elder with greater knowledge of such things to conclude that the unknown vampire at the gas station is indeed one of the Anathema: the former Red Alastor, Hector Trelane, a dangerous blood-sorcerer and known diablerist.

How the prince plans to act upon this information is left to the Storyteller's discretion, but some things are almost certain to take place. First, the prince is not about to sit on what he knows and do nothing. The presence of one of the Anathema is a serious matter that must be dealt with as quickly and carefully as possible. The consequences of not doing so would be grave indeed. The prince might inform the primogen and sheriff in order to decide on what to do, or he might simply direct them to take action. He might try to contact one of the alastors, but doing so might risk making the prince seem unable to control his own domain and threaten his authority. Such a tack could be a political disaster, and having outsiders in the city aggressively stalking a monster would certainly turn everything upside down, with no guarantee of stability when and if the drama ended. The prince might decide to just keep an eye on the pilgrims in the hope that they have some relatively benign business in town and will simply depart. Such a scenario would be good for all, but it is also probably a pipe dream. Obviously, the Anathema are on the Red List because they are a threat, not only to individual Kindred, but to the entire Camarilla. In fact, it is technically a requirement that all Kindred,



Sabbat and Anarch Cities

This story is assumed to take place in a Camarilla domain. If, however, your chronicle is based in a city held by the Sabbat or perhaps the anarchs, and if you wish the story to take place there, only a few small changes are required. Most obviously, there is no prince or scourge. Just replace such figures with ones appropriate to the sect in charge. The prince is the archbishop or bishop in a Sabbat town, and a baron in an anarch area. The anarchs don't technically recognize the Camarilla's Red List, but they probably consider most of the Anathema to be a serious danger, nonetheless. They might respect the presence of one of the alastors, depending on the local baron, but most cases give him a little respect at the very least, considering the simple power such a Kindred can command. The Sabbat don't recognize these institutions and labels at all. If the local packs are weak, they might feel that a so-called Anathema is still a serious threat and one that must be faced, likely with force. If they are stronger, or at least possessed of greater confidence, they might actually relish the presence of a creature that represents a thrilling challenge. And given that the Anathema are traditionally of low generation, the reward from diablerie might be enough enticement to set the whole city on the warpath.

The Sabbat and most anarchs probably don't have the necessary knowledge or connections to even know who the Anathema or alastors are in the first place. Therefore, it is better for John and even Ryder to be recognized as straightforward threats to these sects. Both of the pilgrims have had more than their share of run-ins with Sabbat and anarchs over the years, and in almost all cases, those encounters did not bode well for those they met. Word of this can be assumed to have reached the ears of the local leader, giving that vampire good reason to call in the troops and try to put down the unannounced visitors. If some other situation exists in your city, use these suggestions as guidelines. As long as the local Kindred see the pilgrims as dangerous threats or even just unwelcome guests, the story can still work as intended.

especially those with authority, such as princes, do their utmost to aid in the destruction of the Anathema whenever possible. A prince with strong loyalties to the Camarilla beyond his own domain, or one with higher political ambitions, might see no choice but to take down John in whatever manner presents itself. Finally, the prince has at least heard rumors about the Trophy awarded to those who succeed in taking down the Anathema. That alone might be enough to get him and any others who have heard of this in on the action.

Second, regardless of what the prince decides to do, word is spreading like wildfire among the Kindred that a dangerous vampire is in the city. If the word Anathema has also been voiced, then the rumors only become more outrageous and terrifying; even the most blasé Kindred should be unable to avoid being caught up in the commotion this night. Because hard facts and a great deal of accurate information is likely hard to come by, the characters should not immediately recognize that the monster being whispered about is John Trent or his companion. In fact, if they spoke at any length to the pair, they might have ascertained that the pilgrims were themselves on the trail of a so-called angel. Could this be the creature the city's Kindred are talking about? Storytellers should encourage doubt and false assumptions, allowing the characters to come to all manner of conclusions about what is going on in the city. Keep in mind that even if a pretty good description of John Trent is already going around, his tattoo should imply that he is an alastor. His presence would only make sense if there is an Anathema in town that he is hunting. The fact that he *is* an Anathema himself should be lost in the telling, creating greater confusion.

In any case, rumors abound and each of the city's Kindred begins maneuvering to deal with the possible threat to their domain in a way that benefits them most — whether this means hiding or assembling a posse of well-armed ghouls. If the city has a scourge or sheriff, such officials probably put the arrest, capture or destruction of the intruders at the top of their list of priorities, employing whatever retainers and allies they can to find and deal with the perceived threat. The Kindred tap all their resources, and unless the locals are all relatively young vampires, they should be able to close in on their prey relatively quickly now that they have a decent description of who they are looking for (assuming they choose such a strategy to deal with the monster in their midst). Those with influence in the police department are able to run the car's tags — the sedan is registered under a false name out of state — and have at least some patrol cars stay alert for signs of John Trent. The characters should find this environment ripe for dramatic exploitation, giving them a chance to work the situation as their fellow Kindred are doing.

How the evening plays out depends on what happened between the characters and the pilgrims the night before:

The Encounter with the Pilgrims Went Well: If the characters got along reasonably well with the pilgrims the

night before, perhaps drawn to their humanistic leanings and interesting views on the nature of vampires, the pilgrims might attempt to get in touch with them again. Helping the pilgrims could prove a difficult mission and could place the characters in serious danger, though, as aiding and abetting unannounced Kindred is a very serious crime in some cities. Doing the same for a true danger can be no less serious. Should they mention the rumors to the pilgrims, John's paranoia kicks into high gear. Is it mere chance that he was spotted, or is this part of an alastor's scheme? Are the characters part of the plan, seeking out the pilgrims to verify their identity or to lure them out of hiding? Are the characters unwitting participants, or are they in on the plot? Are the angel sightings just a ploy to keep him and Ryder distracted, something cooked up by those hunting them? Or is there another being in town too? Perhaps the angel is actually the monster they are seeking and the local prince is just clueless. If so, who is the angel? Could it actually be one of the alastors, drawing the pilgrims to him, or is it someone else, maybe even one of the Anathema that John hunted in the past? Maybe the monster is the same conspirator who fed the Inner Circle lies about John being a diablerist, resulting in his own brand of Anathema. John has had so many enemies that it could be anyone. These kinds of questions plague the former alastor, and he is forced to take action as a result. He cannot let himself or his companion fall prey to any of those who might be on their trail. Whether John decides that the characters pose a threat to his safety or not, he trusts his own intelligence and ability to turn that threat to his advantage. Even if the characters are only here to help nail him to the wall, the fact that John is aware of this potential gives him the advantage. He can use the characters to throw any real hunters off his trail, outmaneuvering whoever is trying to catch him. And with Ryder close by, anyone who makes a move against them is going to be in for a very unpleasant surprise.

Exactly what plan of action the pilgrims cook up should depend heavily on what the characters suggest. For one, the characters are locals who know the city and its Kindred in a way the pilgrims do not. In addition, if they are actually meant to trap the pilgrims, then all the better to let them think they can set the agenda. Surely, neither John nor Ryder is going to just up and agree to anything the characters put forth. Should their suggestions be completely worthless, like having the pilgrims present themselves to the prince to turn themselves in, the pilgrims do not go along with the plan, of course. Unless the characters attack them, however, they maintain a diplomatic demeanor in order to further ascertain their role in the increasingly dangerous plot.

The greatest danger to the characters now is from the other local Kindred. Later this evening, word reaches the ears of the city elders that the characters have been spotted with the pilgrims, perhaps at the hotel by another Kindred spy. This information suggests that they are either allies of the pilgrims or have simply not reported the unannounced Kindred to the authorities, as is their responsibility. Either way, the characters are in very hot water. If they are generally well liked or have significant influence or status, a messenger might be dispatched to summon them to the prince for questioning. If they are not so lucky, the sheriff might be sent to drag them to Elysium by whatever manner he deems most effective. The prince might even use Summon to compel their presentation. Regardless of the fashion in which it plays out, the characters are in trouble. If they are found guilty of collusion with one of the Anathema, their unlives could be on the line. While it might be poetically ironic if the characters were to meet Final Death only two nights before God is prepared to offer them the chance at salvation, it would also effectively end the story without Gehenna ever having arrived.

The Encounter with the Pilgrims Did Not Go Well: The characters might not have come away from their first encounter with the pilgrims on such a good note. In this case, they might believe some of the darker rumors or simply decide that it is in their best interest to turn the pair over to the Kindred authorities. If they go straight to the prince and divulge all they know, the prince instructs the characters to help in bringing in the Anathema and his companion. If he doesn't already have a plan for capturing or destroying John and Ryder, then he might solicit the characters' advice, given what they already know of the pair. The sheriff or other Kindred might be brought in also, and a full plan for how to destroy the interlopers devised. On the other hand, the prince might have called for outside assistance, and may merely wish to keep an eye on the Anathema until that help arrives. In either case, the plan requires that the characters return to the pilgrims and learn more about their motives and capabilities, keeping an eye on them at the very least. When the characters do confront the pilgrims again, it is very likely that John sees through their ploy using his Auspex. Unless the characters were ordered to try to kill the pilgrims on their own, the pilgrims approach this as previously stated. They pretend to be on at least neutral terms with the characters in order to convince them that they can outsmart the pilgrims. This "keeping your enemies closer" strategy ensures that regardless of whether the characters wish to help or hinder the pilgrims, they are be able to have close contact with them.

If the city elders decide to take immediate action against the pilgrims, the Storyteller should still arrange for the characters to have a chance to contact the pilgrims before the assault is scheduled to take place. Maybe they now feel bad about what they have revealed and wish to warn the pilgrims, or maybe they wish to blackmail the pilgrims, offering them a way to avoid the ambush in exchange for information or other reward. Whatever the reason, allow the characters to find the pilgrims first. John probably sees what is really going on, and he and his companion are not about to be fall prey to a bunch of local Kindred, even if an alastor is behind them. They force the characters to help them escape from the trap and find a better hiding place. (Remember, until they have solved the mystery that drew them here, they are not about to leave.) They might play Good Cop/Bad Cop or use another means of persuasion, but they do their best to convince the characters to help them. If possible, they try to get the characters to assist them with their search for the angel, be it a treacherous alastor or something completely unexpected.

No matter how things went the night before with the pilgrims, it might be the case that the characters simply choose to let other Kindred hunt the strangers, preferring to stay out of the whole affair. If this happens, then the Storyteller should bring the fight to them, so to speak. John and Ryder seek out the characters, even if their meeting the night before did not go so well, and demand that the coterie helps them avoid their pursuers as much as possible. They might explain a bit more about why they are here and even ask for assistance in helping solve the mystery of the angel. At this point, they might even tell them about the church bell they have heard for 12 nights now. In exchange, they can offer knowledge as well as anything else they have at their disposal. As mentioned, another way to ensure that the characters get involved is to have one of the other guests at the hotel be a Kindred contact and report seeing the characters with the strange vampires the night before. This report could generate rumors that the characters are associates of the newcomers and throw a great deal of suspicion on them. Maybe the sheriff or one of the elders demands to speak with them in a threatening manner, pressuring the characters to turn to John and Ryder for protection. In the end, the characters should get caught up in the hysteria surrounding the pilgrims one way or another.

By sunrise, the characters should have had some interaction with both the local Kindred and the pilgrims in order to give them a sense of the gravity of the situation. Rumors abound, including all sorts of speculation about the pilgrims and possibly the characters as well. The Storyteller might even wish to have the angel sightings come to the attention of the Kindred now, adding another element of ominous foreshadowing to what is to come. Despite all this, no vampire should suspect that any of this is a sign of Gehenna, of course, unless he is already inclined to see *everything* odd as a portent of God's impending judgment.

The Night Before Gehenna

This is the last full night that the Kindred have before Wormwood is unleashed upon the Earth, the last full night for them to carry on as "normal" vampires, for whatever it's worth. The Storyteller should keep this firmly in mind. Where it might have been prudent in the past to limit the characters' potential to make sure they don't rock the proverbial boat too much (and thereby upset a carefully planned chronicle), it's time to take a step back. Let the characters do whatever it is they have always wanted to do and were able to do, but were restricted from doing by Storyteller fiat. If it's the prince's neck they've wanted and they now sense that the opportunity is right while the city's Kindred are running around worried about monstrous vampires in their midst, let them have their chance at taking down the bastard and proclaiming themselves the new lords of the domain. Did they always want to teach that uppity harpy a lesson that she won't easily forget? Take off their handcuffs and let them go for it. This is not to suggest that it should be advertised that the characters are now free to do as they wish without consequences, but if they test that limit now, let them find that it no longer exists. Only if they seek to do something that actually demeans the importance of this final story should they be subtly nudged in another, more fitting, direction.

As the sun sets, the action should pick up where it left off the night before. Unless the pilgrims were caught completely unawares, in all likelihood they remain at large, having been able to escape notice of the local Kindred and their minions. If their lair at the motel has been discovered, which is probably the case by now, they have already abandoned the place and found haven elsewhere. This time they've holed up in the basement of a small print shop that went out of business a few years before, or some other place arranged by the players' characters. Today's paper has a back page story about another angel sighting, this time one that took place right outside of the haven of one of the characters. The pilgrims won't know this detail, of course, but they are eager to find the mortal who reported the sighting in order to learn as much as possible. After an hour or so of phone calls to the newspaper and directory assistance, they are ready to find the witness and carry out

their little interrogation. If they are on good terms with the characters and have a way to reach them, they make contact and ask for their help, in order to both find the place quickly and avoid any places where other Kindred might spot them. The fact that the sighting took place on the doorstep of one of the character's havens should be enough to get the characters to accept this request. If the pilgrims cannot or would not wish to contact the characters, however, or if the characters refuse to help, the pilgrims go it alone. In this case, John and Ryder will find the mortal and question him at length on their own.

The man lives only a few blocks from the haven of one of the characters, and is a retired widower who lives alone, except for his dog. He was walking his pet just before dawn that morning when he came upon a strange scene. About half a block ahead he saw a tall man in what appeared to be a long, dark robe, standing just outside the character's haven. The man wore a hood and seemed to be gesturing at or on the door to the place. Suddenly, the man's dog began to whimper and act scared, and the strange man turned toward the witness. The stranger's face was pure white, as were his hands, and it looked as if he actually had horns on his head, only partly hidden by the hood. Oddly, he wore sunglasses, something the witness is sure of because the stranger removed them at that point and a nearly blinding white light flooded from his eyes and bathed the sidewalk and street. The witness covered his eyes with his hand, but he swears that he actually saw great white wings spread out behind the man, convincing him that the stranger was an angel. Just then, the light vanished, and when he lowered his hand, the angel was gone, as if he had never been there at all.

Once the story comes out, the pilgrims head to the precise spot where the angel was seen. This brings them, of course, to the haven of the character in question. If the characters are not with the pilgrims, the arrival of the pilgrims at the haven should come to their attention, either as a result of direct observation or because one of their retainers or other agents quickly reports it. The pilgrims spend some time examining the scene, drawing upon all their abilities to learn what they can about the angelic figure that was here. Unless stopped, they enter the haven to continue their investigation, thereby learning the identity of the vampire or vampires who spend their days here. This information leads them to conclude that there is some clear connection between the characters and the so-called angel, something they press the characters about now, seeking them out if they must to do so. If the pilgrims or one of the characters achieve enough successes using The Spirit's Touch, they might be able to witness the arrival, ritual of blessing, and departure of Ferox. The Gargoyle certainly qualifies as a spiritual being and his presence, even many nights later, should leave a lasting and potent impression. (Storytellers, adjust the specifics of the scene as necessary to accommodate the character's haven. If the entire coterie spends its days in the cargo hold of a ship, then have the old man walk his dog along the docks and see the angel on the ship's deck, for example.)

At this point, John Trent suspects that the angel being reported might in fact be Ferox. As one of the alastors, he did possess enough information about the Anathema to recognize the more obvious signs of their passage, and Ferox is certainly unique. Rumors about his ability to destroy Kindred with a simple glance and his religious fervor are as well known to the alastors as are his telltale wings, horns and tail. Even so, John is not about to jump to any conclusions — he is a very intelligent individual who's not prone to making assumptions — and he keeps his suspicions to himself unless it becomes necessary to say something. He also doesn't see the point in frightening the characters with warnings about one of the legendary Kindred bogeymen. He does, however, share enough knowledge to enable the characters to help him and his companion in their quest.

At some point in the middle of the night, the characters hear the tolling church bell for the first time. Ferox performed his ritual Anointing of the Chosen outside of each of their havens just before sunrise, making each of the characters one of the Chosen. In fact, they are the very last of the Chosen. Because the actual sanctuary is relatively close by, the sound of the bell is relatively loud, as if the bell were only a few blocks away. Certainly, if the characters are in the company of the pilgrims when this occurs, they recognize the fact that they can all hear the sound. This prompts the pilgrims to reveal all they know about the sound and how it, not stories of angels, brought them here. It also makes the pilgrims more convinced than ever that something very important is about to happen. This doesn't automatically allay John's paranoid fears of alastors, dastardly schemes and whatnot, but it does allow him to open his mind to less self-centered possibilities. If the pilgrims are not with the characters when the bell tolls, they still reveal what they know to the characters the next time they speak if the characters tell them that they have heard the sound.

The rest of the evening can take almost any course. The city's Kindred are doing their best to find the pilgrims, and their hunt could certainly result in nearly any type of encounter. If the characters have somehow still managed to remain uninvolved in the

unfolding events despite every attempt to get them involved, the Storyteller should have them recruited against their will to join in the chase at this time. Just be sure that every other enticement has been exhausted before doing so. The idea is for the characters to have as much freedom as possible this last night, not to feel as if they are being led around by the nose. The only real caveat for this evening is that the pilgrims should not be destroyed (or at least one of them should survive into the following night) and Ferox and Alia should not be encountered. No matter how cunning the characters and their pilgrim allies might be, they should not be able to locate the sanctuary where God's messenger and servant are staying. Keep in mind that the old church is very difficult for anyone to find, given its arcane nature. Even the Chosen have no advantage in recognizing the sanctuary for what it really is until Gehenna actually begins.

The Final Night

It has finally come to this, the very night that Gehenna begins. This really is the end of the chronicle as it has existed up until now. God has no further use for Caine and his inhuman spawn, and He is about to bring down the curtain on the whole damnable affair. As such, it is your responsibility to really make the most of this scene. Draw upon everything you have ever learned and establish the Final Night as one that is truly personal for each of the characters and their players. Only a few short hours remain before it is all over and things are never the same again, so use these last few hours to give each character a chance to know what it means to be a vampire one last time.

Shortly after the characters awaken this evening, each of them — all the Chosen, and only the Chosen, actually — hear the church bell again. Yet not only is this an odd hour for it to toll, but now it sounds as if a dozen bells are ringing together. The bells continue to peal, as if they were being rung in the traditional way to signal some great celebration or catastrophe. Although the bells seem to be only a short distance away, they are by no means deafening, and all but the most sensitive or irritable Kindred are able to block them out enough to go about their business without too much discomfort or distraction. If the characters are at all aware by now that the pilgrims have heard the single bell for a dozen nights already, then this very different ringing should be somewhat alarming. Why the sudden change from a single ring to an urgent peal? Is something about to happen? Upon awakening in the sanctuary, Ferox began ringing his bell as part of a final, uninterrupted ritual to call the Chosen to the church. Gehenna comes, and the Gargoyle knows this.

The characters now have until midnight or thereabouts to do as they wish; that's when Gehenna begins. They can meet with other Kindred, seek out the pilgrims, attend to their own personal affairs or look for the source of the bells. If they approach Kindred who are not among the Chosen and probe them about the bells or anything like that, most have no idea what they are talking about. It is possible that a Malkavian or two might have some odd premonition that something terrible is about to happen, but even that's iffy. On the other hand, if the characters speak with one of the rare thin-bloods possessed of supernatural Insight, the individual might be frightfully aware of what is about to happen. Unfortunately, the knowledge is probably so terrifying that the poor creature is unlikely to be able to impart much useful information, only just enough to lend the characters some of that terror.

If they look for John and Ryder — who are probably still being hunted — they do not find them. The pilgrims have already set out to locate the source of the noise once and for all. They have crossed off every church in the city on their gas station map so far, and none have turned out to be of interest. Now they are determined to look one last time, perhaps for a place that somehow slipped by their notice as well as the notice of those who made the map. If the characters actually arose in the same haven as the pilgrims, then concoct some reason for the pilgrims to part company with them early on. Maybe they want the characters to pass on a message to the city's prince, or to locate something or someone that might be important. Just make sure that they are not together when Gehenna actually begins.

The characters might wish to take care of personal business, perhaps already feeling that the tolling bells are like a ticking time-bomb that gives them precious little time to get things in order before it is too late. If so, try to make sure that whatever the characters do, from purchasing a new gun to visiting a favorite vessel, focus more than ever on the very personal aspect of the situation. Even a relatively mundane gun purchase can bring the character face-to-face with some aspect of his dwindling (or entirely lost) Humanity. Don't rush this, because it is most likely the very last chance this character has to deal with ordinary people as a vampire. If the errands are of a more obvious personal nature, such as visiting a vessel, explore the relationship between the character and the mortal as much as possible, perhaps even heightening the emotional tension on purpose, in order to make the character sense something that he might ordinarily take for granted.

Storytellers should use this brief time to let the characters have a final "moment," as it were, with the world around them, as a vampire. The characters, and even the players, might not recognize this for what it is, but give it to them anyway. It's the least they deserve considering what is about to happen.

Finally, if the characters choose to set out and find the source of the clanging bells, be careful to pace the scene carefully. Since only the Chosen can hear the sound, and because it is of a spiritual rather than physical nature, it should not be simple to locate its source at first. It would be unfair to steer the characters in the wrong direction. After all, the sound is a manifestation of a summons of sorts, and a divine one at that. God is not out to play tricks on the Chosen, so keeping them from the church before it is dramatically appropriate is more a matter of delay and distraction than deception. Let them be drawn to the part of town where the sanctuary is, but instead of leading them astray, create a few encounters that slow their rush to the church. Perhaps they come upon a terrible car accident on the way, one in which one of those killed or injured is a mortal known to them. (Maybe a retainer, but possibly even someone to whom they have a strong emotional attachment.) Regardless, do not let it delay the character indefinitely. When Gehenna begins, the character must be able to make her way to the church quickly. If that journey can be made more interesting, more compelling and more wrought with self-examination, though, then by all means do so. God wouldn't have it any other way. Also keep in mind that any city of a reasonable size should have a considerable number of churches, tabernacles and other houses of worship. While the pilgrims have already visited every one of them in the past week, the characters have to start from scratch. Fortunately, the bells do draw the characters in the direction of the church, and it should be very obvious when a church is not the one they are looking for. That is part of the summons. When they do see the real thing, there is no mistaking it.

Until Gehenna actually begins, the characters have just enough time to involve themselves in other situations. The city's other Kindred are still dedicated to seeking out the pilgrims, and possibly even the characters, depending on their recent actions. These vampires are very likely engaged in the usual theater of conniving, backstabbing, debt-swapping and social *esgrima* that makes up the bulk of their unlives. The characters might find themselves desperately trying to outmaneuver an elder's schemes even as they are trying to find the source of the strange tolling.



Sometime about midnight — it doesn't have to be precise; God is certainly not tied to mankind's artificial measurement of time — the characters and all the rest of the Chosen, hear the bells erupt into an almost deafening cacophony, as if the dozen bells were suddenly joined by another hundred. Those Kindred capable of seeing the Red Star now find their attention drawn to that heavenly body as it explodes, filling the night sky with a blaze of crimson that appears to be moving quickly toward the Earth like some malign cosmic storm. Storytellers should describe this in truly apocalyptic terms, for the sense that something terrible has begun is inescapable. The experience is not one that should send the Beast into a frenzy, but it is enough to root characters in place as they try to comprehend what they are witnessing. With a successful Perception + Empathy roll (difficulty 7), Kindred who are unable to actually see the flash and Wormwood's flood of bitter poison rushing toward the Earth can still sense that something dreadful has just taken place. Those with no awareness whatsoever are likely to be confused by the reaction of other Kindred, unaware that the end has come. Note that it is not only the most sensitive among the Chosen who witness this, but all Kindred with keen perceptions are alerted to what is taking place. Truly, this is a night none of them would be able to forget. Though they have not heard the tolling bells and been privy to some of the things the Chosen have, they cannot mistake what's happening for anything good. Most other Kindred remain oblivious and continue to go about their business of preying on humanity like the anachronistic abominations they are.

The toxic poison of Wormwood reaches the character's city at the precise moment when the characters stand on the threshold of the sanctuary, and no sooner. This is, of course, for dramatic effect, so forget about physics or any precise timetable. The beginning of Gehenna, whether the characters recognize it as that or not, should be shocking enough that the characters immediately seek to find the sanctuary that the pealing bells seem to promise. Wherever the characters are in relation to the sanctuary, they should be given exactly as much time to reach the church as they need, but no more. This means that should they decide to take their time, to stop off to buy something, or to do pretty much anything but rush toward the source of the calamitous bells, the Storyteller should use whatever means desired to scare the characters into a mad dash to safety.

When the characters finally come upon the crumbling ruin that is the sanctuary — however long it takes — they have no trouble recognizing it for what it is, in part due to the presence of Ferox and the outpouring of his True Faith that any Kindred can sense. The characters also see that the church doors are open and the pilgrims are standing on the threshold. John Trent is on his knees, staring up at the heavens, apparently overcome by horror and despair, while Ryder stands in the doorway, beseeching his companion to join him inside. The dim light of a thousand candles from inside the edifice frames the pair in a strange tableau. The pilgrims reached the church nearly an hour ago and found Ferox and Alia inside, along with the other Chosen. Because Ferox has not paused for even a moment in the performance of his summoning ritual, however, the Chosen have so far dealt only with Alia, who has simply told them to stay inside in order to be safe from God's wrath. When Gehenna actually began, John refused to accept the truth of the situation and stepped outside. He has been unable to turn his eyes away from the approaching horror since then, for he believes that even if it is Gehenna, it is not an act of God he is witnessing, but something far more terrible. In his mind, he is seeing the triumph of evil, the return to the earthly realm of the demonic entities that had been revealed to him years ago beneath the New Mexico desert. Their time has now come, the time for them to seize the Earth as their own and to turn the world into a living hell. The shock of this understanding, flawed though it is, has nearly crippled the pilgrim's ability to do anything but watch in numb submission.

As the characters rush toward the church, use the moment to reinforce the medieval feeling of damnation and redemption. Describe to them the weather-worn bas relief on the tympanum above the doors, which illustrates a traditional scene of Judgment Day as described in Revelation, with Christ offering salvation to the just and sending the wicked to the flames. Describe how devastated the church is, the graffiti, the garbage, the rats, the broken windows — how it looks like one good wind could send it all tumbling down into a massive pile of rubble. Make it sound dangerous and unappealing, even as it shows no sign of habitation. Remember, that given the unique nature of the place, no amount of Auspex or other scrying reveals that Ferox and Alia are inside. As far as the characters are concerned, the place is truly deserted, aside from the pilgrims on the doorstep and the vermin who call this home. Finally, describe for those who can perceive it how Wormwood is almost upon them, like an unstoppable tidal wave of red vapor roiling down the street, giving them only seconds to reach shelter.

Ryder spots the characters long before John is aware of or concerned with their presence, and the Gangrel

snarls to them with real panic in his voice to get inside. At the same time, he grabs his companion by the arm and drags him inside, oblivious to John's piteous cries. He then holds the doors open just long enough for the characters to make it inside, but not a second more. Finally, he pulls the doors closed with a tremendous effort, slamming them hard enough to startle pigeons high in the rafters and to cause the thousands of candle flames to flicker wildly. The sound of the doors closing is the sound of finality that should given the characters the sense that they are not leaving this place anytime soon. When the noise dies, an even more unsettling silence takes its place. Gehenna has begun, and there is no turning back.

Act Two: Forty Nights of Gehenna

Outside the church, the world's vampires are learning what it means to face God's judgment without a chance of redemption or salvation. Inside, at least the characters are be given that chance. Once the sanctuary doors have closed, the characters and the rest of the Chosen have the opportunity to look around. The interior of the church is even more ruinous than its exterior suggests. Spend some time describing the vandalism, weathering and disrepair. Almost nothing of value remains in the entire place, and most of the areas off the central nave are either devastated by fire and collapse or entirely impassable, blocked by rubble. Even though most of the stained-glass windows are broken, the flood that is Wormwood cannot enter. To the eyes of those who can see it, it appears as nothing more than a strange red mist that washes past the church without coming inside. The altar is seriously damaged, and the large crucifix that once hung behind it is long gone, though a pale shadow of where it once was remains on the sooty walls. The place is a wreck, but it is still God's house.

All the ruin and Gothic creepiness aside, it is God's chosen agents who command the characters' attention. Alia sits on the step before the altar, simply clad and clearly filled with an unsettling joy at the arrival of the Chosen. She is not scared. Even the most monstrous of Kindred cannot shake her faith that God has chosen them all for His purposes, and it is not something to be questioned. This confidence is perhaps the most unnerving thing about her, for no matter how she is approached, she exudes a formidable degree of will. More commanding is Ferox, who stands completing the ritual of the summoning as the characters watch. The Gargoyle's wings are spread wide, stretching across the altar, and he is garbed in a purple vestment. It is difficult to see his garments, though, on account of the brilliant white light of pure faith that emanates from his eyes, instilling the Chosen with a sense of the truly divine. Until he puts down the hand bell he rings and dons his sunglasses at the conclusion of his ritual, it is impossible to make out anything more about him. He appears as nothing less than an angel, if there are such things. The characters also notice the presence of any other Chosen who might be here now. They are nearby, and like the characters, they are similarly awed by everything that has happened so far this evening. These Kindred are probably too frightened to do anything more than watch and wait for the moment. It is doubtful that they wish to carry on a conversation or answer questions until the angelic figure before them takes the lead.

When ready, Ferox addresses the gathered Kindred in a manner that is simultaneously reverential and lofty, without being too righteous. The Gargoyle informs the Chosen that God is cleansing the Earth of the spawn of Caine the Kinslayer, and that for 40 nights His wrath will not be stayed. Wormwood is His weapon, and it will drown the Damned in their sins until none are left — not even the Antediluvians. Only those present, chosen by God as a demonstration of his boundless mercy and love, are offered a chance at redemption and salvation. For 40 nights they must remain in the sanctuary He has created, or they will share the same fate as their accursed kin. If they prove their worth in that time, they will be spared eternal damnation. He also tells the Chosen that no other Kindred may enter the sanctuary until Gehenna is ended; God will not allow it. On the other hand, neither God nor Ferox will stop one of the Chosen from leaving the sanctuary. If, by his own free will, one of the Chosen wishes to depart and submit to God's wrath, that is his choice, and it shall be done. Finally, Ferox introduces himself and Alia by name, and he welcomes the Chosen to sanctuary.

Redemption

For the next 40 nights, the Chosen and God's two agents spend their every waking hour trapped in the cathedral with only each other as company, doing their best to deal with the situation. Daylight hours are spent sleeping under pews, in the confessionals, in the choir loft or in the various small sacramental and housekeeping rooms near the altar that might still be accessible. The Kindred in the sanctuary are faced with having to find ways to pass the time, to handle their hungers and urges, and to come to terms with Gehenna.

From a Storyteller's point of view, the sole purpose of the 40 nights is for the characters to be given a chance to redeem themselves in the eyes of God in order to be

Leaving Sanctuary

If one or more characters choose to leave the church and venture even a step outside its protection at any time during the 40 nights of Gehenna, they are tainted by Wormwood and suffer the full effects that have already been mentioned. In addition, they are unable to reenter the sanctuary, for they have turned their back on God's offer of salvation and chosen another path. There is one very special circumstance, however, in which a Kindred who has left can return to sanctuary even in the middle of the flood. Such is the case only if the Kindred who exits does so to perform some action that is truly selfless and demonstrates the very essence of humanity. Maybe the character's mortal mother is on her deathbed, and he decides that it's better to go to Hell than to deprive his mother of one last chance to see her lost child and have him by her side when her time finally comes. If the character in question truly believes he has sacrificed his own chance at salvation for the sake of one last act of goodness, not only does he find upon returning that may he reenter, but all the effects he suffered from the poison of Wormwood vanish as if he had never left the sanctuary. Storytellers should keep in mind that this is a one-shot-only deal. If the same character tries it again or another Kindred decides to play copycat, there is no turning back. Like the rest of the world's Kindred, they are unable to ever again breach the sanctuary and must accept their tragic fate.

granted salvation. Redemption, however, can occur only if the characters are able to demonstrate that they truly possess the very real potential to be good people — not vampires, but *people*. How they demonstrate their worthiness for salvation cannot be defined, for such a thing is impossible to reduce to a simple list of requirements. In short, during their 40 nights in the church with others of their kind, the characters must show by their actions or inaction that they are still more human than Beast. They must show that they are still capable of compassion, selflessness, forgiveness, faith, love and similar traditional virtues. It is the Storyteller's job to provide the opportunity for the characters to reveal themselves as virtuous or irredeemable. What this amounts to is confronting the characters with a series of tests or challenges, each one a chance for one or more of the characters to show who they really are. In the end, it is up to the Storyteller to weigh the actions of the characters, to consider their words and deeds during Gehenna, and to ultimately decide which of them have redeemed themselves and which have not. All of this also applies to the other Kindred present, who are being offered the same chance as the characters at redemption and salvation. They are really present only to help the Storyteller create meaningful challenges for the characters, however. This is important to remember, for this story is about the fate of the players' characters, not the rest of the vampires in the world. Lose sight of that, and Gehenna becomes nothing more than a diverting way to end a chronicle.

The various tests and challenges that the characters face can and should be many and varied. God will not judge the Chosen prematurely after having offered them this chance at salvation. As such, the characters are continually tested up until the very last night, giving each of them every conceivable opportunity to save their eternal souls. Some challenges might put their courage to the test, while others might force them to make very difficult moral decisions. In some cases, the characters might find themselves confronted by external dilemmas, while other tests come from within. It is important that the Storyteller keep the ways in which the characters are challenged appropriate. In other words, characters should be always given a chance to demonstrate some virtue or the lack thereof as a result of each challenge. If the test is one that he has no hope of winning, then it is not a valid test for that character. On the other hand, don't overlook the fact that a seemingly impossible test, like a clear no-win situation, can really be a mask for a subtler test. How a character deals with a no-win situation, for example, can say as much about that character's strength of conviction and faith as any more obvious test of the character's mettle. As long as the Storyteller is able to recognize what each challenge is really testing, it is suitable for inclusion.

In addition to any unique challenges specifically arranged to test the characters, there is no end to the number of less obvious tests facing the Chosen as well as Ferox and Alia. First of all, vampires face the hunger that gnaws at them as their blood pools deplete. Luckily, they all soon discover that they no longer need as much blood to simply rise each evening; however, should they use their blood for anything else, most begin to find things growing very difficult, very quickly. Each of the Kindred also has to contend with the ever-present Beast that lurks within. Being confined with and surrounded by Kindred who might be anything but pleasant, and knowing that the literal Hand of God is wreaking biblical devastation upon all other Kindred on Earth just outside the door, certainly gives the Beast more than enough incentive to rise to the surface and make things more trying for everyone. Add to this the various

derangements, flaws and weaknesses that plague the Chosen — as well as the inevitable clash between those Chosen of widely divergent natures and the total uncertainty as to what their ultimate fate will be when Gehenna does finally end — and you have one hell of a stressful situation. This is exactly how God wants it.

There is no strict timeline or dramatic order for how things happen during the 40 nights of Gehenna. Until the last traces of Wormwood are gone, until God is ready to pass judgment on those Kindred in the sanctuary, things occur in whatever fashion best fits your troupe's style. Some Storytellers may wish to fast-forward many nights at a time and only roleplay every sixth evening or so, concentrating the drama in digestible chunks and simply describing the nights in-between to the players. Others might prefer to play out most if not all of the 40 nights, perhaps posing a particular challenge to a different character each of those evenings. The middle road might work best, with the Storyteller arranging a set number of special challenges to take place over the course of Gehenna, but not worrying too much about exactly when they occur. This method allows for the Storyteller to take his cue from the players, giving them a greater sense that they are not being artificially forced into a series of tests like a coterie of undead lab rats. When the Storyteller senses a lull in the action, another one of the prepared challenges is presented as if it were simply a coincidence. As long as the Storyteller paces things properly, this method is the best way to avoid short-changing the players out of the opportunity the 40 nights represents and to make sure that the tale does not bog down with long stretches of boredom as the characters are forced to wait for the next night's challenge.

To help make the very most of Gehenna, a number of challenges are presented in this chapter. They can be used as the only challenges in your story, but it is recommended that you supplement them with at least one or two of your own creation — challenges that are of a personal nature and make sense only to your chronicle's characters. Some of the challenges offered might not work well with your group. In that case, discard them and come up with something else if you wish. Wherever possible, aim to tailor story elements to your chronicle. Gehenna should feel as if it is the end of *your* chronicle even more than a general end to **Vampire**. The more things you can make personal, the more everyone will get out of the game's finale. In addition, systems and guidance on the more general challenges the characters and their fellow Chosen face are also provided, from blood loss and feeding, to dealing with being cooped-up with a roomful of vampires for more than a month, with nowhere to go.



Dealing with Other Kindred

Integral to the many challenges the characters must face, as well as to the whole experience of being trapped in the sanctuary for 40 nights, are the other vampires who have been offered a chance at salvation. For the most part, the sanctuary offers little real privacy beyond what might amount to some personal space for meditation and silent reflection. Any of the Kindred possessed of Auspex should still be able to use their Heightened Senses to eavesdrop on quiet conversations in the vestibule or up in the choir loft, unless the church in your story is a truly enormous cathedral. As a result, all but the most calm-hearted Kindred grow uneasy when they are sequestered with so many others for so long. Even Sabbat characters, who might be more acclimated to sharing close quarters with fellow packmates, probably find the housing arrangements less than desirable. Therefore, unless all the vampires in the sanctuary become fast friends in a very short time — an extraordinarily unlikely occurrence — an undercurrent of tension and restlessness among the group is always simmering. This alone is likely to bring the Beast closer to the surface than it normally is, as it can sense the presence of its natural competitors and enemies nearby — something no territorial predator can ignore. Storytellers might wish to raise the difficulty of all frenzy rolls by one to represent this unease, but do so with care. The point is not to make things turn ugly fast, but to instead weave this element into the telling of the story, so that this sense of tension adds atmosphere and a dramatic edge to the scene. It is probably best to simply have it show up in the vampires' voices and mannerisms. A normally easygoing Toreador, for example, might have less patience than usual, and his remarks might become clipped and sarcastic. A Gangrel neonate might become fidgety and pace back and forth all night on one of the rafters far above like a caged animal, overreacting to every unexpected sound she hears with an instinctual snarl and unsheathing of razor-sharp claws. As long as the players can recognize this dangerous tension, there is no need to be blunt and use a difficulty modifier.

Assuming you selected the Chosen well, each of these Kindred poses a unique challenge to the characters in their own right. A normally powerful elder of some years might automatically treat the characters as beneath her notice. Her arrogance might stir the Beast in the characters, especially if she chooses to insult or attempts to humiliate the characters in front of the others. Even forgetting any possible frenzy, however, other Kindred can potentially pose even greater dangers. What if the vampire has a unique viewpoint that challenges the character's personal beliefs. For example, a Lasombra who cleaves to the Path of Power and the Inner Voice might seek to convince the characters of the tenets of his own enlightenment. Going further, the Keeper might even dare to collude with the character and show him how it is right and good to seek a way to neutralize Ferox and seize authority in the sanctuary — certainly a virtuous action in the mind of those who follow that Path of Enlightenment. The personal morality and philosophies of each of the Chosen is very important to the telling of Gehenna, and the Storyteller should take the time to become intimately familiar with this aspect of each of the Chosen if they are to be used to their greatest potential as foils for the players' characters. To have them be cut from the same spiritual cloth as the characters (or each other) robs the story of many excellent opportunities for good roleplaying, which only denies the characters greater and more interesting chances at redemption. These Kindred don't always have to be the proactive ones, either. The characters can seek to speak with them and persuade them of their own views, or at least teach them a thing or two. This is not only welcome, but it should be encouraged. A character with a low Courage rating who tries to overcome his personal fears and point out to an intractable Brujah how his views might be flawed and serve no good purpose is creating his own challenge — one that might actually be the one thing he needs to do to redeem himself in the eyes of God.

Besides serving as tools for the Storyteller to use to challenge the characters, the other Kindred in the sanctuary should not be overlooked as unique individuals with personalities, emotions, histories, beliefs, talents, skills, knowledge, supernatural powers (albeit largely limited in sanctuary) and even resources that might come into play. Each of the Chosen has her own thoughts on what is going on both inside and outside sanctuary, and whether she voices those thoughts or keeps them to herself, they translate into motivations that affect almost everything she says and does for the duration. The more abstract aspects of these characters can change over the course of Gehenna, especially if they are persuaded to see things differently. The characters might convince a withdrawn Setite that he should not despair simply because Set might now truly be dead; instead he should abandon his adherence to that deity in favor of the divine force that they are all now faced with. Perhaps a Tzimisce fledgling comes to recognize that he can no longer surrender to his Instinct, but instead must consider Self-Control from this point forward if he is to have any chance at salvation. Regardless of the pace of the story, the characters should have plenty of opportunity — maybe more than they

desire — to interact with these Kindred. Let them engage in conversation and debate, socially as well as intellectually. Given their predicament, only the most antisocial of Kindred will not seek some relief from boredom by participating in interesting conversation and rhetorical exercise. These Kindred should draw out the characters, getting them to expound on their own views too. Such interaction gives the players a chance to really think about their character's opinions and beliefs, and to examine them in a way they might never have done before. By doing so, the Storyteller is able to better understand where each of the characters stands on the path to redemption, and how best to tailor the other challenges they face to their individual personalities.

Despite the limitations imposed in the sanctuary on the normally substantial supernatural powers of vampires, it is almost a guarantee that one or more of these Kindred will feel the uncontrollable urge to start a fight or take some direct physical action against another member of the group. This should be handled with care, but not outright forbidden. In most cases, if it gets too serious, Ferox steps in and put an end to the violence. Otherwise, the Kindred might be left to their own impulses. Obviously, even a single wrathful moment can potentially ruin the chances for redemption of the Kindred involved, but not in every case. There can be times when a certain member of the Chosen decides upon a course of action that would be disastrous for another or even the whole group. In such a circumstance, a bit of physical restraint might actually be the best of all possible solutions. The Storyteller should be careful when determining how the other Chosen react to the characters in these situations. These other Kindred are likely no more desirous of turning the sanctuary into a battlefield than the characters are unless they are driven to extremes by frenzy or a similarly insurmountable compulsion.

Ferox and Alia in the Sanctuary

These two can and should be used to aid the characters in their quest for redemption, guiding and supporting the characters even if they are unaware of (or uninterested in) redemption in the first place. Ferox is completely convinced that he has been given the task of not only shepherding the Chosen and protecting them from Wormwood by the Almighty, but that God also wishes him to help them walk the road of redemption to the salvation that waits at its end. He can be used as a mentor figure, whose vast knowledge of history and theology — not to mention his daunting True Faith — gives him insight into what is going on and what it is that God wants of the Chosen. Although he is not truly privy to God's purpose, he probably has a pretty good understanding of why Gehenna has come and what it means. He would be pleased to explain what he can to the Chosen, and to help them work through whatever fears, doubts or other concerns they might have. He probably performs various devotional rituals each evening also, and he would be only too happy to see the Chosen join him in these sacraments. Should he be asked what it is precisely the characters need to do to be redeemed in God's eyes, Ferox offers up only more vague, pseudo-religious wisdom. (Even he does not know what might ultimately qualify.) In fact, he is somewhat in the dark about what is to happen when the ordeal is over. He hopes and believes that he and Alia, as well as the Chosen, will able to walk out of the church as mortals once again, but if hard-pressed, he confesses that he has no proof of this. It is only his faith that gives him this hope.

Ferox also serves as the host and does what he can to provide for the Chosen. He offers to assist them in arranging their accommodations, he allows them as much privacy as possible when they desire it, and he might even offer a trickle of his own vitae to sate the thirst of another who might be unable to overcome her need for more blood. He does not wish to see any of the Chosen leave the sanctuary, for he knows what awaits them outside, and he tries with all manner of argument and counsel to persuade them not to go, warning them that they will be unable to return. He does not physically stop anyone who is bound and determined to leave, however. He knows that free will is necessary to redemption, so he does not stand in the way of personal choice. If any of the Chosen seek to use violence against others, he tries to calm the situation before it becomes too difficult to stop. Should he fail in this, however, he won't hesitate to use force to separate the combatants. God has left him with his full powers while stripping those of the unfaithful Chosen for a reason, or so he believes. He has long been God's soldier, smiting those he saw as servants of darkness, so a little policing of these Kindred won't bother him one bit. If one of the Chosen needs to be taught a lesson in order to save the rest (as well as the sanctity of the church), then so be it. This is especially true if the characters are selfish and they see their fellow Chosen, the weird girl and the Gargoyle in the silly robes as nothing more than rations or opportunities for diablerie. Ferox is able to size up such characters pretty easily, and he will make it clear from the very first night that any such foolishness will be met with his own wrath. Keep in mind that in most cases, Ferox will rise for the night before other Kindred, given his very high Humanity. More selfish or savage Kindred will rise much later and

sleep sooner, giving the Gargoyle a distinct advantage should things get physical.

Storytellers should understand that Ferox is not an innocent figure free of flaws, weaknesses or troubles. Despite his True Faith and the fact that he has been chosen to serve God in this final hour, he is imperfect, which can play an important role in the story. His Embrace resulted in a serious case of amnesia, with most of his memory of the previous centuries as a ghoul being entirely wiped away as the ichors of his sire flooded his throat. Those memories that did survive tended to color his new beliefs, including his faith and what he has come to see as his mission for God on Earth. This has resulted in Ferox having a few very odd ideas that might actually cause problems for the characters during their time with him. For one thing, he is stubborn. He believes he is right in everything he does, and though he does try to phrase his words with care and empathy, explaining as kindly as possible why he is correct about something, his self-righteousness is still a bit much.

Ferox also possesses certain biases that cloud his normally careful judgment. For one thing, he has a strong dislike for Tremere characters, given his history and the treatment of his bloodline by its creators. This prejudice figures into everything he does, though he is accomplished at hiding it. If push comes to shove with a Tremere character, however, he might lash out to some degree, still convinced that the blood sorcerers are blasphemers and slavers. Even worse than his hatred of the Tremere is his absolute conviction that the Nosferatu (and probably the Samedi, the Harbingers of Skulls, etc.) are quite literally demons — or at the very least hideous demonic spawn. He has tried to shake this belief, and he has even anointed one or more to be among the Chosen. Direct and lasting contact with such Kindred, however, especially if they come across as inhuman, might eventually wear down his patience and shatter his peaceful demeanor. Beneath his beatific manner, Ferox is still a vampire, and his Beast is no less dangerous than any other if allowed to claw its way to the surface. Most probably, Ferox sees the presence of any of these less-than-worthy Kindred as a test. If he and the rest of the Chosen can resist the devil in their midst for 40 nights, then they are one step closer to having proven themselves deserving of salvation. In general though, the Gargoyle treats such Kindred coolly but keeps his eyes on them more so than any of the others for signs of trouble.

Alia plays a somewhat different role during Gehenna. Although she will not hear God's voice again until Gehenna comes to an end, she does not know this. Therefore, she is always filled with a serene joy that He might speak to her at any time. God's words are unlike anything she can otherwise conceive of, and nothing but the most heinous threats can crack her peaceful exterior. Her True Faith is not as powerful as her companion's, but it is significant enough to give her the moral armor she needs to withstand 40 nights with the Chosen, in most cases. Where Ferox serves as a mentor and host, the dhampir should be used as a gentle voice of reason, as well as one of love and compassion. She seeks to become close with each and every one of the Chosen, unless her genuine offers of friendship are dramatically thrown back in her face. Alia tries to find the good in the Kindred, no matter how deeply buried, and coax it to the surface no matter how hard that might be. She is most interested in the characters' mortal lives and their later relationships with mortals, especially where it concerns their family and closest friends. Unlike Ferox, she believes that how one treats others is a far more important indication of a Kindred's worthiness of salvation than faith alone. For her, the answer is being a good person first; devotion to God comes second.

The Pilgrims in the Sanctuary

The pilgrims have their own roles to play during Gehenna. Ryder can be thought of in some ways as a prodigal child who eventually turned from that path and has already been seeking redemption for some time. Once he was the perfect image of the monster, a ravenous diablerist who cared nothing for anyone and spent his time always on the verge of Wassail. He killed with little or no concern for the lives he ended, not even trying to rationalize his actions. All that changed, however, after meeting various enlightening Kindred, and he has fought a difficult battle to overcome the Beast since then, walking that treacherous road alone. Despite a few missteps, he has largely stayed true to his purpose, and now he hopes that he has come far enough. Ryder is not a religious Gangrel, and does not see a necessity to associate redemption with a god. For him, it is personal. He believes that if he can make it through the full 40 nights without succumbing to the dark urges within, if he can stay the course against all odds, that is enough to earn salvation. What exactly that means, he isn't really sure, but even if it means death, he is ready. As long as he feels he has transcended his vampiric state, he is satisfied.

Storytellers can use Ryder as the "man of experience," in a sense. While he was never a truly sadistic fiend — his choices were always about self-preservation and expediency. He is no stranger to cruelty, violence, apathy, vengeance, wrath, gluttony or a gamut of similar sins. He knows what it is like to be this kind of

vampire and he knows how hard it is to deny oneself these things. If characters don't take too well to Ferox's holier-than-thou paternalism or Alia's "we can all do this together" approach, they might find a kindred spirit in Ryder. He won't rebuke Sabbat characters for their blood orgies, and he won't be shocked to hear a Giovanni describe the pleasure that comes from knowing how much agony a vessel suffers when being drained of her lifeblood. He does not judge; he prefers to listen and accept. When he does speak, it is not to condemn or criticize, but to illustrate why the road to redemption truly is the only choice left. He is fond of brief stories that draw upon his own experiences or those of other Gangrel he has heard over the long years, and uses them to show the characters where his own thoughts lie, rather than trying to explain or debate the issue. Although he generally treats others well enough, he is no saint. Should another Kindred try to take advantage of him, he does what he can to persuade them to rethink their plan, intimidating them and even employing brute force if that is his only remaining option. Those characters who earn his trust find he is honest and is always there to help if needed. Those who do not had best tread carefully.

His Tremere companion is another matter entirely. John Trent once believed in himself in a way that very few ever do. His will was unshakable, and regardless of ridicule or aspersions, he clung to his beliefs no matter how much evidence was presented to the contrary. He was sure that vampires were not the result of some mythological curse, but rather some aberrant rung on the ladder of evolution, one that could be passed on to others like a disease. Being a vampire was one step above being a simple mortal, but it still fell tragically short of perfection. He spent more than a century struggling to unlock the secrets of that evolutionary step, dabbling in alchemy, biology and anything else that came into vogue that offered even the slightest chance at unlocking the mysteries he faced. His fateful encounter in New Mexico a few years ago all but killed him, and he has never been the same since. He abandoned his theories as naïve stupidity, turning his back on research and optimism. In their place he embraced fear and saw enemies in every shadow. Hope was foreign to him, and his *humanitas* slipped away quickly. Only the timely return of a changed Ryder stopped him from being consumed by his Beast. He will never again be who he once was, but he does recognize that he must halt his slide into oblivion. The only way to do that is to try to care about something again. So he considers his old theories once more and finds that beneath all the fear the scientist still lives. He exercises his mind now more than his trigger finger and finds a degree of fulfillment in intellectual conversation and debate. This is the role he plays during Gehenna.

John Trent finds the situation to be a challenge in a way that few others do. More than redemption or saving his soul, the former alastor spends his energies trying to understand precisely what is going on, from the appearance and explosion of the Red Star, to the presence of Ferox and the apparent immunity the church offers the so-called Chosen. A scientist at heart, he is unable to just accept the situation or the explanation that Ferox offers. To him, this is no test set for them by a mysterious god. That just doesn't fill in all the blanks. No, what is happening is something else — perhaps something with a very simple explanation, if only he can discover it. For 40 nights John interviews the other Kindred, Ferox and Alia included, in order to gather the data he needs if he is to have any chance at learning the truth. He prowls the church, peers out its windows, and spends a good deal of time in thoughtful contemplation. If he can find some paper and a writing instrument (things he may already have on him, if you wish), he jots down notes and try to find the clues that must be missing. Oddly, it is this pursuit that might save him in the end. The more he feels like he is closer to the answer, the stronger his conviction that he is on the right trail grows, with a possible corresponding increase in his Willpower and other Virtues. Any character who aids him, or at least appears to entertain the notion that he is worth listening to, becomes a fast ally. Those who deride his newfound purpose or actively seek to hinder his progress are treated as ignorant fools who need to be brushed aside. John opens up the possibility for the characters to find redemption even if they do not wish to accept the grossly religious implications of what is happening. Even agnostics and maybe, just maybe, atheists have a chance.

Blood Loss

The Hunger can become one of the most problematic aspects of spending 40 nights in sanctuary, and it should be. The craving and need for blood is an essential part of the Curse, and it is one of the greatest motivations for every vampire. Being in the sanctuary slows down the need for blood, as has already been mentioned, but this doesn't mean that many Kindred won't be on their last legs before long, desperate for blood however they can get it. So how does a Storyteller handle this without everything turning into a bloodbath as the Chosen frenzy and leap upon one another for vitae?

Systems for Sanctuary

The following are the special effects of the sanctuary:

- The sanctuary has a high Arcane rating (7), causing most people to overlook its existence and making it extremely difficult for Kindred or others to penetrate it with supernatural perceptions. (See the **Vampire Storytellers Handbook**, p. 36, for information on Arcane.)
- Because of Ferox's presence, the sanctuary has an effective True Faith rating of 9.
- All Disciplines are limited to the Kindred's True Faith + 1, meaning most Kindred can use no Discipline greater than the first level.
- Kindred lose only one blood point every 10 days, rather than the usual one per day.
- Once Gehenna begins, the sanctuary is impregnable to all Kindred who have not been Chosen. Even the Chosen, should they forgo the protection of the sanctuary, are unable to reenter in all but the most extraordinary circumstances.

First and foremost, impress upon the players the importance of this potentially dire situation. If they are fully aware of the math, they should try to limit their use of blood as much as possible. Second, if some of the Chosen happen to be elders with large blood pools to begin with, they might be convinced to share some of that with others. Naturally, the concern about blood bonds will arise, but all the better. Let the Chosen struggle with these issues; that's what the story's all about. They might also succeed in luring mortals into the church — or the Storyteller could simply have some potential vessels stumble inside to sleep, to party, to fool around, to get high. Finally, there should be rats and birds as well as possible stray cats and perhaps even a curious dog that can take the edge off the Hunger — provided the Kindred can overcome their usual distaste for such unsavory snacks.

If any of the Chosen actually succumb to torpor as a result of blood loss (or anything else), Alia feeds them a single drop of her blood, which has the miraculous effect of reviving the vampire with a blood pool of one — one of the benefits of being God's messenger. God's not about to let His Chosen sleep through their one chance at redemption. Also keep in mind that because of her dhampir nature, her body creates its own vitae, so she, even more than Ferox, offers it if necessary.

Challenging Scenarios

Aside from all the conversation, sulking, pacing and staring out the windows that will eat up most of the 40 nights — and certainly need not be handled via storytelling — a number of other things take place. Some of the scenarios presented here won't seem too unusual and will probably be assumed to be simple coincidences by the characters. Others are more unexpected and might strike some of the characters as a clear sign of God's presence. Whatever the case, each of the events will challenge one or more of the characters in some fashion, thereby presenting those characters a chance to either take a step closer to salvation or fall from the path. None are necessary to the story itself — some Storytellers might wish to discard one or more and replace them with others. No particular number of them need be used, but enough should be used to provide each character a fair chance to achieve redemption, no matter how difficult it might still be.

There is no particular order in which the eight scenarios need to take place, and none requires that another occur before or after. Each is a self-contained event that can be plugged in at any time the Storyteller feels it might be dramatically appropriate. The scenarios are grouped for convenience according to the general type of challenge they represent. Some are straightforward tests of right and wrong, while others are enigmatic occurrences that allow the Storyteller and player to examine how a character deals with different things. Indeed, there might be no right or wrong action to take.

Black and White Moral Dilemmas

These situations are the types in which it is plainly clear which is the morally right course of action and which is the wrong one. It can be argued night and day what "right" means, but Abraham's God is fairly straightforward when it comes to most things, and that's who's calling the shots here. As with all the scenarios presented, there is no need for the Storyteller to keep score, per se, but the actions of the characters (and the other Chosen, where appropriate) should be closely observed. It is ultimately up to the Storyteller to figure out whether they have truly redeemed themselves by their actions.

Dial 911

The Chosen hear gunshots outside, followed by the squealing of tires, which draws their attention to the church doors or a window. From their vantage, they see that a man is lying on a nearby curb, blood seeping from his body as an expensive, dark-colored sedan roars away. The few people outside who were close enough to

witness the scene simply stare, and then hurry on as if nothing happened, making no attempt to call attention to the crime, to summon the authorities or to help the victim. As the characters watch, they notice the man move slightly, trying to lift an arm, and they might even hear his weak voice calling for help. No one out there comes to his aid, however, fearful of reprisal or simply too jaded or shocked by life's horrors to feel any compulsion to intervene. The man is less than 20 yards away, but it might as well be a thousand miles, for he is still outside the safety of the sanctuary.

Do the characters try to coerce someone to help the man, perhaps shouting at passersby? Do they go through all their own possessions, find a mobile phone and call the authorities or emergency services themselves? Do they just watch, their empathy for the man too little to compel them to act with compassion?

Don't Do It!

A few hours before sundown this evening, a young man enters the church through the rubble in the back and climbs up to the highest point, perhaps in a tower or simply on the peak above the front of the church. Things have not gone well for the man lately. His drunken father beats him viciously, and his mother is too fearful and soulless to help. And just the other day his younger brother, the only person to ever show him real love in ages, died from a drug overdose. The young man cannot take it any longer. He has already been drinking heavily, and he has now decided to end his life, climbing up onto the old church so that he can jump when he finally gets up the last bit of nerve to do the deed. What better place than on top of a church, right? The characters notice him soon after rising, but they are unable to easily get to him since he is technically outside the sanctuary proper, and any rash action might just force his hand. The young man is startled by the characters, but he defiantly tells them to leave him alone: He will jump if they try to stop him. And he *does* jump, if they are not careful. Honestly, what does he have to live for?

How do the characters react? If they decide to save him, how do they do it? Direct action might force him to jump, while talking to him could also upset him and cause him to make the leap. Maybe they try reverse psychology and goad him into ending his life, hoping his stubbornness won't let him do as they say. Or do they just let him go, chalking it up to another useless life well ended?



Gray Moral Dilemmas

Unlike black-and-white situations, gray moral dilemmas do not lend themselves to a right and a wrong decision with any certitude. In a particular situation it might seem inarguably correct to take a particular action, but sometimes, under certain circumstances, it might actually be morally justifiable to do something entirely different. These scenarios force the characters to think carefully about their actions and the subsequent consequences. Such dilemmas are essential to being human and, therefore, essential for the Chosen to understand that the world is not always black and white.

Bon Voyage

One of the Chosen has decided that she cannot take it anymore. Night after night with these other Kindred, stuck in a church, unable to feed is just too much. This Kindred declares her intention to leave, wondering aloud if there really is any Gehenna after all, and that maybe it's just a trick that Ferox invented for his own obscure purposes. He is one of the Anathema, after all. She might even try to convince other Kindred to go with her, to hunt for some fresh blood and revive their unlives. Surely all manner of schemes could have been hatched against the so-called Chosen during their absence, so why are they just sitting here in the shell of a church believing some albino freak and an aberrant dhampir? (You get the drift.) This Kindred has every intention of going, and she is likely to do so. But if so, why doesn't she just go? Why give a soliloquy and try to get others to join her? It is because somewhere, in the back of her mind, she is still worried. The Beast Within knows what is going on outside, even if she won't accept it, and the Beast is scared.

Do the characters try to convince her not to go, or do they simply wish her the best of luck and wave goodbye as she leaves? Do any of them take her side or even speak out on her behalf? Do they actually try to force her to stay, possibly against her will? Do they risk injuring her to save her from what they believe is her own destruction?

Mother's Mercy

One evening a young woman staggers into the church to seek shelter from the weather and the world outside. She is barely more than a teenager, and from her clothing and manner it is plain to see that she is probably the product of neglect and poverty. More important, however, is that she is pregnant, and she has come to this place in the hope of aborting her child, either by forcing a miscarriage or by performing a crude operation on herself. The misery and confusion that fills her is easy for any to see, and so are the signs of drug abuse and illness that haunt her watery eyes. Upon realizing that the church is not empty as she had hoped, the girl attempts to leave, but she discovers that the she has little strength left to do so, and she collapses upon the broken flagstones, praying that the strangers cause her no harm.

Do the characters recognize the futility of saving this doomed child and her unborn infant and sate their hunger instead? Do they try to help her terminate her pregnancy in the hope of saving the mother? Or do they just do what they can to make her comfortable for a while, and let fate determine what happens to her?

No-Win Moral Dilemmas

Sometimes there is just no right answer. You are stuck between a rock and a hard place and every choice is a bad one. But it is precisely what a person does when faced with this kind of no-win situation that is the true test of character and of who a person really is. God knows all, so He's not testing the Chosen to find out what they will do. Instead, He wants them to find out for themselves what they will do. He wants them to know what it is like to make these kinds of decisions and to know that sometimes they must make them, no matter how difficult.

An Accidental Discovery

One afternoon, while the Kindred are lost to slumber, an old woman enters the church in pursuit of her runaway cat, which she thinks might have entered the old building. The woman comes through the front door, oblivious to the dangers of a crumbling structure, hoping only that she finds her beloved pet inside. As she walks down the aisle and casts her gaze about the gloom, she does not notice the motionless Kindred until she is already well inside the sanctuary. Her presence awakens one or more of the characters, who have perhaps only a few minutes at most to react before slumber reclaims them again. (Use the rules for this somewhat flexibly. The other Kindred should remain slumbering, and the characters should have at least a few turns to act.) The woman freezes in fear for a moment then begins to retreat toward the front door, hoping to escape before something bad happens. She has no doubts that the Kindred — obvious vagrants and rogues in her eyes — are dangerous and she warns the characters to leave her alone or she'll scream. She also tells them that she's going to report their presence to the police. She is sick and tired of her neighborhood being overrun by their kind, and she's not going to take it anymore. To make matters worse, she lets them know that her son is a police officer, and if anything happens to her, he will not rest until he has put the characters behind bars. Finally, before she exits (assuming the characters haven't

already stopped her), her cat appears on one of the rafters above, meowing for someone to help it down. If any of the characters who do not possess Animalism or Animal Ken 2+ approach it, the cat will hiss and retreat, recognizing the characters as unnatural predators.

The woman will not leave without her cat unless she realizes her life is in real danger or her cat is killed (and she is able to do so, of course). In either case, she will rush to a phone to call her son, who will respond quickly to her summons. Do the characters allow the woman to leave and summon the police? Even though the sanctuary is shrouded by its Arcane rating, it can still be found by those determined enough to do so. The woman will also scream rather loudly if she is attacked, though it might not be enough to draw any real outside attention given the insulation of the church walls and the apathy of the neighborhood. Worse, the characters probably don't have too much time to make up their minds about what to do, as the Curse of Caine drags them back to their slumber. They are faced with forcibly dealing with the woman or dealing with police paying a visit. Finally, if they simply try to detain the woman, perhaps by rendering her unconscious, they discover that she has very high blood pressure and that without immediate medical attention she will probably have a heart attack and die.

Who Do You Choose?

One of the city's other Kindred, one who harbors a grudge against at least one of the characters, has decided it is time for a little payback. This Kindred has kidnapped two of the coterie's most cherished mortal allies, retainers or family members and has decided to make one of them his own blood-bound childe. This vampire has not yet chosen which one of his prisoners is to receive such a cruel gift, however. Instead, he has sent a mortal messenger to find the characters and inform them of what has happened. The messenger has a cell phone and is instructed to call his master when the characters answer a simple question: Which of the prisoners shall be Embraced and which shall be freed, unharmed? (Remember that neither the characters nor this Kindred have any reason to know that those affected by Wormwood can no longer Embrace a childe. If they do, there is really no great threat here.) Now it is simply up to the characters to provide that answer. The victims should probably be the associates of different characters, so that no single character has the responsibility alone, and those characters should probably have close family (maybe children) to make this decision that much more troubling. To make matters even worse, depending on the Kindred who has placed them in this predicament, maybe this is all a sick joke. Maybe whoever is selected by the characters to be freed will actually be Embraced, and vice versa. Or maybe both will be Embraced as a way for the Kindred behind this sick stunt to simply demonstrate his power and mercy (as it were) by carrying out this charade.

The messenger is not a ghoul, and he has found the characters only by fortune. He is in the neighborhood — maybe someone told him that they saw the characters the night of Gehenna, maybe one of their cars is parked nearby — and he walks right past the church when one of the characters is watching outside. That character recognizes the man as an enemy's minion. If he doesn't wish to draw the minion's attention, have one of the other Chosen call to him, perhaps to lure him inside in order to feast upon his blood. How the characters treat this man is also a test unto itself. Do they punish the messenger or show him mercy? Most important of all is what decision the characters make, however. There is no right answer, but what choice they do make should say something about them that is worth paying attention to.

Enigmatic Dilemmas

Sometimes, one can learn more about himself or another by what he does when confronted with a situation that does not lend itself to any obvious course of action. Cases of extreme déjà vu, cryptic messages, unusual and untraceable noises — all are perplexing and can expose something about a character that was previously hidden or even unknown. The following are a few such enigmatic dilemmas intended to bring to the surface things about each of the characters that even they didn't know about themselves, but that might prove to be very important aspects of who they are.

A Grave Sign

Just after sunset, when the more bestial Kindred still slumber, one of the relatively humane characters who is up notices something unusual and startling. The light of the moon happens to pierce the heavy clouds obscuring it and shines through a broken window in such a way that it paints what appears to be a fairly clear image of an ankh on one of the sleeping Kindred. This image lasts for only a few moments, but long enough for at least a few of the characters to notice, then it is gone, the moon again blanketed by impenetrable darkness. The ankh appeared on the vampire's forehead as if it were intentional, perhaps purposely marking her in a way that only the watching characters are supposed to see.

Do the characters see it as an omen of import or just a weird coincidence? If the former, what do they make of its possible meaning? Does it mean that Kindred will

soon be destroyed? Is it the mark of one who is to be granted salvation? Why an ankh then, and not a crucifix? The ankh symbolizes immortality, to the Kindred and in various religious groups and magical cults. Is this what it represents now? What actions do the characters take, if any, on account of this odd occurrence?

Repent! The End is Here!

One evening, a homeless doomsayer in a shabby and formerly white robe, who's carrying a large sign declaring, "Repent! The End is Here!" takes up residence on the steps in front of the church and gives his apocalyptic speech to anyone who happens to wander by in this downtrodden and mostly desolate neighborhood. He spends his days panhandling and sleeping elsewhere, but has decided for no particular reason that the church steps will be his new pulpit from which to spread God's word. He is a cranky old bastard, utterly fearless and probably more than a bit crazy, but he is certainly not stupid. He does not give in to verbal demands that he leave, but instead attempts to engage the characters in conversation, eager to discuss sins, redemption, salvation, damnation and anything else along those lines. No matter what, though, the street preacher does not allow himself to be lured into the church under any circumstances. Despite his gregarious demeanor, he is paranoid and does not put his trust in anyone. If a character truly shows him empathy and compassion, he might reveal that his family deserted him, including three children, whom he secretly misses a great deal. His wife no longer wanted to have a lunatic fanatic in the house, and she kicked him out physically, emotionally and legally. He drinks, but he is not a drunk, and he is in pretty good health for a homeless person.

The man believes that Judgment Day has come and that there is no time left to avoid repentance. He believes God has spoken to him and shown him these truths, so it is now his job to spread the word to the otherwise damned. The scary thing is, he really does seem to know things that no mortal — or even Kindred, for that matter — should know about what is going on. If the characters try to ignore him, he will suddenly say something that should grab their attention, perhaps hollering about how Caine is now finally learning the true cost of his sins, or how those who sleep by day shall be struck down by Wormwood. If the characters do engage him in conversation, the man will not have all the answers they seek, as he knows only tantalizingly incomplete pieces of the whole puzzle. Still, he will probably appear to be keeping things from the characters, rather than being entirely honest.

Do the characters do their best to ignore this guy? Do they see him as a possible threat, perhaps drawing too much attention to the arcane church? Are they interested in his views? Could he be another messenger from God, or is he just a meal to quench their hunger?

Act Three: Judgment

The characters, the rest of the Chosen, Ferox and Alia have remained inside the sanctuary for 40 nights, safe from God's wrath. Some might not have survived, but most probably have, at least physically. Now the last night of Gehenna has come. This is the night when the figurative rains stop and the only vampires left standing are those in the church. Outside its marred granite walls, the world is dark, but that darkness is not as deep as it used to be. If one listens very, very closely, the sound of hope is almost discernibly in the air. For a few hours more, however, the characters are still inside. They still face each other and, far more importantly, face God's final judgment. Salvation was never guaranteed them, only the possibility of salvation.

The evening begins like all the others, though the Kindred are probably more energized than they have been since the first few nights of their seclusion, each feverishly wondering exactly what is in store for them on this, the 40th night, the night that Gehenna is supposed to end. For those still up and about, they are probably excited at the possibility that they have survived the storm and are now the only vampires still around. Some might start discussing (or deviously wondering to themselves) how they can start a new race of Kindred, never again bowing to the now-deceased vampires who once lorded over them. It is likely that some attempt to forge last-minute alliances and deals as they think about their new unlife ahead, while some might start thinking about who they wish to Embrace once they leave.

This is a very delicate time, a time when God is watching with His full attention on what these Kindred are and what they can be if given the chance. The kind of scheming and planning mentioned previously is certainly not what God would see as the mark of someone seeking redemption, and it should spell the doom for that vampire no matter how nobly she acted during Gehenna. This is not only the last night of Gehenna, but also the night when God makes His lasting judgment on the remnants of the Children of Caine. It's all or nothing in His eyes, and now's the time for the truth to come out. The Storyteller should pay very close attention to the words, actions and intentions of the characters now, more than ever. If they do

show themselves to be worthy of salvation, good. If not, they have sealed their own fate.

At least one of the Chosen comes to believe that now might be a good time to try to take out all the other Kindred. He might reason that if the rest are destroyed, then he can become something akin to a new Caine, sire of all future vampires and, in some sense, the winner of the Great Jyhad. Of course, such a Kindred first has to believe that he really is safe from God. He has to be convinced that Wormwood is not really divine justice, but some weird, supernatural or cosmic event unleashed by who knows what to destroy all vampires, or something like that. This Kindred is wrong, but that doesn't mean he won't try to do something terribly drastic.

When he has the chance, this Kindred will make his move, perhaps even with other Chosen he has somehow convinced to help him. Even given Ferox's formidable powers, the megalomaniac might still be able to do some serious damage or coax the characters into acting in an unwise fashion. It's possible that this is actually something one of the players' characters cooks up, in which case let that character initiate the bloodletting. Whoever starts the mayhem, even if it is quickly suppressed, has his name put squarely in the Go Straight To Hell column of the Storyteller's scorecard. There is no salvation for this vampire.

This is not the only possible thing that could go wrong. The point here is that on this last night of Gehenna all bets are off again. One wrong decision now could undo everything achieved so far for each and every one of the Kindred. On the flip-side, the right decision now can make up for all the wrong ones of the past. If that is the case, though, it better be one seriously righteous decision.

The Morning After

Just before dawn, the last traces of Wormwood vanish, leaving the streets and the sky free of its crimson miasma for those Kindred who are still awake and able to perceive the change. God has finished cleansing the world of all but a very few vampires; those in the sanctuary are His only concern now. When their fates are decided, Gehenna is ended.

Just before the first rays of sunlight spill over the horizon, an unexpected and unusually powerful wind sweeps over the church in Wormwood's wake. The wind is so strong that the sanctuary shakes as if the entire place is about to come crashing down upon the Kindred. This does not happen, but large sections of the roof and wall will be torn away by the strange wind. Stained-glass windows shatter, and chunks of granite and pieces of timber come loose and fall to the church floor until the building's eastern face is little more than a patchwork of joists and slate tiles. In effect, God rips away anything the Kindred can use to hide from the sun's full glare. While this devastation occurs, Ferox and Alia kneel in prayer near the altar and ignore the drama as much as they can, trusting God to protect them. In fact, though the Chosen might fear otherwise, very little debris actually falls upon the group. Most is simply blasted away, leaving the Chosen mostly unharmed, but with no meaningful protection from the morning light.

And then the sunlight strikes, blazing into the church as brilliantly as any sunrise can. Its magnificent rays bathe every inch of the place inside and out, banishing all but the weakest shadows and leaving no place safe from its illumination. Now is the moment when everyone's fate is revealed, when the Chosen learn what is to become of them. Did they achieve redemption, or does God find them wanting?

Those vampires who have redeemed themselves, who truly understand what it means to be human, find that Caine's Curse is seared from them — every weakness, every supernatural ability, every unholy craving, every bestial fear. God's light scours the Curse from their body and soul as if they had never been Embraced, and they are mortal again. It is as if they had not aged a moment since the wrenching night when they were dragged into the world of nightmare that has been their existence for too long. They are fully human now, living, breathing and possessed of every mortal weakness and strength. One day they shall know death, but not today. They are alive, for God has granted them the chance to be the person they have shown Him they are capable of being.

Those who did not redeem themselves do not find salvation. They do not taste the sweet flavor of life again. Instead, the sun hits them with an agony greater than any they have ever experienced. God chose them from among the multitude and offered them one final chance at salvation. He gave these Kindred 40 nights to try to show Him that they were worthy of His merciful gift, and still they refused and gave in to their basest instincts. For this they burn in fiery horror with no chance to escape. In moments, mercifully, their pain is over and their souls obliterated forever. Not even ash remains of the truly Damned. Like their Dark Father, they would not change. They are no more.

Aside from any other Chosen who might have been granted salvation, what about Ryder, John Trent and others? Alia is almost certain to have earned it. She finds herself little changed outwardly, though inside she knows she is very different. Any semblance of her dhampir nature is gone, and she is fully mortal like the others who were granted salvation.



Ferox, on the other hand, has not been redeemed, which comes as a terrible surprise to him and probably to many others. Despite all his faith and moral convictions, he was blind in his beliefs. Ferox never questioned his purpose and what was right or wrong, but simply followed his own self-righteous authority, always justifying his own actions by telling himself it must be God's will. He knew how to preach about humanity to others, even how to protect it, but he never understood it. He was the soldier who would shoot whoever he was ordered to shoot, without thinking for himself whether doing so was truly right or wrong. Unfortunately for the Gargoyle, God does not desire blind fanatics to tend Creation. He wants thinking, questioning, truly human people who weigh right and wrong and make difficult decisions as best they can. This was not Ferox, so he becomes a pyre of white flame and is destroyed along with the others who failed.

Storytellers should use this time to describe not only the physical changes that might take place for certain characters — Gangrel would lose any animal features, the Nosferatu would appear normal, even the Samedi would regain their mortal complexion — but to also describe the expressions and spoken feelings of the others who are now mortal. Make the gift of mortality sound wondrous and new, with things like the beating of one's heart and the stirring of one's sexual organs to the simple joy of sucking in crisp morning air or sneezing on account of the dust around the group. Don't let it seem like, "Hey, this is all we get?" Instead, remind the players of the infinite joys of being alive, even as rediscovered while standing in the ruined church. Drive home the absolute magnitude of what the characters have been given.

At this point, the church is really destroyed and nothing keeps the characters in the place any longer. It is no longer a sanctuary, but simply a ruined building that once served as a place of prayer. Outside, the neighborhood is still what it was — a place where life is cheap and sorrow is no stranger — but the characters should see it very differently now. The morning light certainly helps to dispel its less than wholesome nature, but point out to the players those things that now give their characters hope, where before they only saw things as a means to serve their personal desires. Maybe they spot a homeless man picking up a lunchbox that a schoolgirl drops and giving it back to her with a smile. Or they see a young father kiss his wife goodbye on the street corner before catching the early bus downtown for work. Just point out that even

here, in what seemed the most inhuman part of the city, hope, love and the possibility for something better can be found, despite all evidence to the contrary.

Who Shall Be Saved?

This is what it has all come down to, not only after 40 nights of waiting, but after the entire chronicle. At the very end of their unlives, God decides which of the Chosen have recognized the inestimable magnitude of His offer of salvation, and which have redeemed themselves enough to be worthy of receiving it. Of course, God does not actually come down and help you the Storyteller decide, so the decision falls into your hands. It is your last real duty as a **Vampire** Storyteller to choose which characters receive the blessing of God and which do not. It sounds simple on the surface, yet it is anything but.

Although it might seem helpful at first to have some system to resolve this question, it is not. Sure, every player has dots on his character sheet representing his character's Virtues, morality, etc., but should a decision so far-reaching and epic come down to numbers? Of course not. No amount of experience points, Willpower or anything else should be used to make this decision. Even a character's Humanity rating is a simple numeric representation of her morality. It doesn't actually determine her true sense of what it means to be.

That's the point, after all. What is it to be human? Vampires are just a literary exaggeration used to explore this question. Put aside the Curse, the Disciplines and all the other trappings, and what you have is a person, an individual who must decide for herself how the span of her years shall be spent. In the end, after all is said and done, that's all that matters. Have the characters figured this out? Do they understand the choices they have made and fully recognize the consequences of their choices? Have they taken responsibility for their actions and inactions, even if only now? Even if her character sheet still displays only three dots in Humanity, has the character shown that she is actually capable of transcending her sins and being *human*? Now is the time when the Storyteller needs to consider all these things, to weigh each character in her entirety and yet recognize that what happened in the past 40 nights was a chance to wipe the slate clean and let the characters have a new start.

Now is not the time to cave in to player pressures and simply let everyone be saved, either. If some of the characters did not redeem themselves, if they fell short of their potential to do good, then so be it. They had their chance; now let them face the consequences. That is one of the most important lessons to be learned: dealing with consequences. If that means the end for the character, well, then that's what it means. Simply letting everyone's character be saved because they're a swell troupe of players or they had entertaining characters ultimately serves no one and actually lessens the value of Gehenna itself. All they had to do was sit in a church for a month or so? C'mon, that's not how God works. It never was; never will be. Redemption is about doing something that is so powerful, so pure and so morally virtuous that it has the capacity to make up for every other heinous crime ever committed. That might sound like a tall order, and it is, but if it weren't, it would denigrate the whole meaning of salvation and of God Himself, or at least of the role He plays in this last **Vampire** tale.

Don't rely on feel-good gimmicks like having the players vote, either. Truly, making this decision is only the Storyteller's responsibility. Suck it up, roll up your sleeves and wade into the mess. It's time for moral triage. If given the chance, some characters might make it as mortals. They might go on and use their remaining days to do good and to take all they have experienced to make the world a better place. They could work to banish the shadowy World of Darkness and whatever other horrors remain to take up where vampires left off. These are the Kindred who should be saved. Those other characters, the ones who will probably not make it, who will turn again to sin and justify it to themselves, they are a lost cause. No need to spend another minute tending them. Sad as it might seem, it is far better to let them go and put all your effort and hope into that first group.

Yeah, it's tough. But this is what it finally means to be a real Storyteller. Remember all those times you fudged the dice results so that things would turn out your way? Or the times you simply invented a new antagonist or challenge on the spot because the characters would too easily achieve their aims and drama would be lessened if you didn't? Or the time you let a character survive even though by all rights he should have been a greasy smudge of ash long ago? You remember these and many similar instances because you are a Storyteller, not a machine. You are not a slave to dice, to rules, to static plot lines or to the pleading of the players. It is your job to entertain, but that doesn't include pandering. It means telling a damned good yarn, one that includes the very best roleplaying experience possible. This is a morality play, so tell it that way. Make it matter, and in the end, when it is all over, you and the players will be far more satisfied that you didn't take the easy way out.

A New Chronicle

Some troupes might be able to sit back when this is all over, sip a glass of wine and toast each other to the end of a great storytelling experience, very satisfied at how it all turned out and ready, willing and able to close the proverbial book on the whole chronicle. Others might want to see what happens next. They might see this story not as the end, but as a new beginning. Sure, their characters are no longer vampires, but that doesn't mean that they can't venture forth into the world and still experience adventure and drama of some kind or other. If this is how your troupe feels, then perhaps it might be an enjoyable experience to start a new chronicle where this one leaves off.

One possibility for a chronicle is for the surviving characters to take God's covenant to heart and to use what they know of the darkness that still exists in the world to fight it. They are now closer together than they have ever been before — or at least they can be, given what they have just been through — and they recognize that there is still much evil in the world, even without vampires. The characters set out to do what they can to fight this evil, in whatever form it takes. They are hunters possessed of no supernatural powers, but knowing much more about the horrors that lurk in the world's grim underbelly than most, giving them a rare edge in battling the world's ills. Perhaps they know a place haunted by one or more Lupines, a place they never dared to visit before, but now they see no choice but to rid the world of the shapeshifters. Maybe during their years as vampires they learned of a depraved sorcerer who murdered people in ritual fashion in order to gain power from the act. Naturally, without their vampiric advantages they might have a difficult time facing such threats, but it might make for a stirring chronicle anyway, if run fairly.

A much more challenging and very different chronicle might be one that eerily mimics the previous **Vampire** chronicle. The characters band together to deal with the myriad social, political and philosophical problems that face them, and they are forced to confront other characters, some of whom are selfish, petty, manipulative and cruel. The difference is that all the characters are mortals possessed of no supernatural gifts. The game of **Vampire** is merely an exaggerated reflection of the world as it already exists, focusing on its worst aspects, but never forgetting the good things. This new all-mortal chronicle simply discards the supernatural exaggerations and goes on without them. The archetypes for the many supporting characters would still be there, but instead of the Conniver being a century-old Toreador ancilla, he is a 30-year-old social peer who sees one of the characters as the perfect dupe for his schemes. The Brujah scourge with a penchant for knee-breaking becomes a thug with a posse of troublemakers who crosses paths with the characters in an unfortunate manner and now seeks revenge. Obviously, the ideas are endless. The game might not be one of personal horror, per se, but it could still involve a great deal of soul-searching and moral difficulty. The characters might not fly into an unholy frenzy when they lose their temper, but they can still lose their cool and do things they later wish they hadn't.

This kind of storytelling might hit too close to home for some. Vampires are a nice excuse to justify exploration of some very sensitive issues, and without them or some other kind of bogeyman, things could become too personal. If everyone understands this, however, this chronicle could ultimately be far more powerful and satisfying than any tale about things that go bump in the night.

A New Covenant

And God spake unto Noah, and to his sons with him, saying, "And I, behold, I establish my covenant with you, and with your seed after you."

—Genesis 9: 8-9

Gehenna is past and the Curse of Caine is ended. The race of Caine is no more, and Creation is cleansed of vampires. The sole survivors have redeemed themselves, and they have been restored to mortality as a reward.

Before the characters entirely disappear into the world to build whatever lives they can, God has one final message for the group. It is the last message He will deliver to His messenger, Alia, but it is an important one that she reveals just before the group breaks up and goes forth into the city to rediscover what it means to live as mortals. Alia tells the Chosen that as He did with Noah after the first Great Flood, God has now established a new covenant with these former Children of Caine and all their mortal progeny, should they have any already or in the future. Never again shall He allow

them to have their lives taken from them by agents of darkness. Forever after until the end of Creation, they and theirs shall be immune to any attempt upon their lives, and any who do attempt to destroy them shall be punished sevenfold. They shall each know a natural death after a rich life, not a brutal end by wicked hands. And to make sure that evildoers know that they are protected, God has marked each of them with His sign.

The characters (and players) might be somewhat perplexed, for none of the group appears to be physically marked in any way at all. They would be looking for the wrong things, however. God does not mark men's flesh, for it is too easily changed or covered. The Almighty marks a person's spirit, something that can be seen though the proverbial windows to the soul, the eyes. When those with evil intent look closely into the eyes of the Chosen, they will see God there, and it will strike them with a fear that ages them a dozen years in a moment. Deep inside, they will know that He is watching and that they are risking His wrath. This is the Mark of God.

And so it is over. The surviving characters can now live out their mortal lives, hopefully knowing a measure of relative peace and hopefully understanding, after all they have been through, what it is to be human. If it took being a monster to come to that understanding — if it took spending years of suffering and being forced to see the world's deepest, foulest shadows — then it was a journey worth taking.





Chapter Three: Fair is Foul

I'll tell you something
I am a demon
Some say my biggest weakness
I have my reasons
Call it my defense
Be careful what you're wishing
—Garbage, "Temptation Waits"

With the growth of **Vampire** as a game, it's natural that the mythology supporting the game has grown as well, through books such as *The Book of Nod*, *The Erciyes Fragments* and *Revelations of the Dark Mother*. Still, it might have seemed that one of the stories — that of Caine — was the "preferred" myth, and that all the others — whether those of a particular clan, a religious group like the Bahari, or even the Laibon of Africa — while interesting to read, were ultimately untrue. Players and Storytellers alike have no doubt wondered what might be the result if one or more of these "alternate" mythologies could take center stage when Gehenna comes.

If you are one of those people, then this scenario is the one for you.

Imagine, for a moment, a person who has faced nothing but betrayal from those who claimed only to love her, curses from those who once blessed her and obstacles at every turn, but who nonetheless manages somehow to carve out a niche for herself and to find happiness or even enlightenment. Imagine further that those who previously betrayed her, discontented with their own existences, took it upon themselves time and again to destroy what she had created for herself. Give this person the intellect of a goddess, the power of the most potent supernatural creatures you can dream of and several millennia to develop the perfect plan of revenge, and you begin to approach the situation in which Lilith finds herself when Gehenna finally begins. Her vengeance will be masterful, terrible and, most importantly, the perfect stage on which to test your characters' mettle, perhaps for the final time. This is the story of the Jyhad as it has never before been conceived, told from the sympathies of one of its oldest and most passionate players, the Dark Mother herself.

You might ask why Lilith would choose to take revenge on Caine, rather than on the Almighty, who both cursed Lilith and indirectly caused the death of Lilith's children by cursing Caine. The answer is simple — Lilith is anything but stupid. The Almighty, if He is even still involved in the World of Darkness at all, is so

On Lilith

Some Storytellers might feel tempted to define exactly what Lilith is and what her capabilities are before using her in a chronicle. Be careful if you intend to do so. As one of the great mysteries of the World of Darkness, Lilith is a far more powerful and engaging character if she remains mysterious. The idea here should be to keep the players in suspense as long as possible, to leave them thinking, "What the hell was that?" rather than, "Oh, so now I know Lilith is a proto-vampire Verbena Archmage." Consider the fact that Lilith has had longer than nearly anyone else, even Caine, to develop personalized approaches to and applications of her abilities. Therefore, even if she is recognizably one type of supernatural or another, the way her powers manifest should always be unique, personal and memorable — when the characters notice them at all.

There's also a flip side to this — just as Lilith's powers and abilities are unique, so are her restrictions. Lilith is one of the first, supernatural beings to walk the Earth, if not *the* first, and though she is quite powerful, she must obey certain ancient rules that govern the Elohim (the group of gods or angels to which Lilith ascended upon eating of the Trees of Life and Knowledge). Some recommended limitations and areas of influence for her abilities come up later in the chapter, but feel free to adjust them based on how you want to present Lilith in your chronicle. Adapt her to your chronicle, rather than vice versa.

Ultimately, Lilith can be whatever you want her to be, but don't feel that you need to pin her down to a single archetype. Lilith can be the Dark Mother, the mother of demons, the first woman or even the first vampire or the first mage, but she is much more than any of these. She is an Akkadian wind spirit; the consort of Samael who is called Lucifer; Daenna, the first of the Roma; Morgan le Fay, nemesis of Arthur and Merlin; Kali, Indian goddess of war and vengeance; Yemaya, African goddess of magic and the dead. She is Wolf, Owl, Cat and Dragon. She is the Scarlet Empress, the embodiment of yang. She is the enduring feminine principle of every culture. She is all of these and more. Remember this, and give her the dignity she deserves when using her in your chronicle.

beyond even Lilith's reach that trying to take revenge on Him would be pointless. Lilith knows what eventually became of Cappadocius, after all. Caine, on the other hand, is readily accessible to someone with Lilith's resources and determination... and honestly, he really deserves to meet his end.

A final note before we get to the meat of the chapter: Try to think of this as a set of elements to weave into your own personalized Gehenna story, rather than an "adventure" you can run right out of the book. If you don't at least read through this chapter and make some notes for yourself, storytelling it will be maddening at best. The story simply has too many possible twists and outcomes to be able to work well without preparation. That being said, a little preparation goes a long way, and the more you personalize this story to your chronicle, the more enjoyable it will be for both you and your players.

Prelude

Gehenna — the Time of Thin Blood. Every vampire has heard rumors and legends about the time of reckoning, when the Antediluvians will rise to slay their childer and Caine will return to pass judgment upon them all. A few might be lucky enough to have seen fragments of some of the prophecies relating to this time, but ultimately even this knowledge proves useless, for the will of the Almighty (if that is even what Gehenna represents) cannot be thwarted. It can, however, be turned to the advantage of those who see it on the horizon.

For whatever reason, Gehenna begins. Perhaps it is the appearance of the Red Star, said by some to be the eye of Caine, watching and judging his wayward grandchilder. Perhaps the powers of Heaven have decided that Caine's time to choose redemption is up, that he and his cursed progeny must be wiped from the Earth whether or not he has chosen to repent his selfish ways. Perhaps Lilith has allies in high places. (By some accounts, after all, she was once the mate of Lucifer, first among the fallen angels.) Or perhaps, in this age of vast urban sprawls, dizzying technological advances and rampant skepticism, the world no longer has a need for the night to have eyes or fangs. Pick whichever of these ideas fits best with the themes of your chronicle, or come up with your own. All that really matters is that Gehenna begins. As the story unfolds and the end draws nearer, you might want to have your players roll for Discipline usage without telling them the difficulty first. You might even want to make the rolls for them, so as to keep them in the dark about why their powers seem to be failing with increasing frequency. For more information on other mechanics for the Withering, see page 36.

As the Blood weakens, its preservative properties do as well, and the lines between modern and ancient clans blur. Clan disadvantages magnify as the curses upon the clan founders are no longer held at bay by the greater Curse of Caine. The following are some recommended consequences of this change, broken down by the major clans. For bloodlines and other clans, feel free to extrapolate your own intensified weaknesses.

• Assamites — Assamites slowly find themselves unable to feed on anything but vampire blood. As Gehenna progresses, they soon find that they can gain sustenance from blood only if they commit diablerie after feeding.

• Brujah — Strange reports of clan members disappearing without a trace circulate throughout the clan with increasing frequency. As Gehenna progresses, all clan members gain the flaw Lunacy (see **Vampire: The Masquerade**, p. 300). Some might also gain Temporis in place of their Celerity, but few will have much opportunity to use it.

• Gangrel — The Clan of Beasts finds itself becoming more and more animalistic with the passage of time, sometimes even shifting into animal form without consciously choosing to do so. Some Gangrel might even lose the ability to speak human languages.

• Giovanni — The Necromancers grow more pale and corpselike than even other vampires, coming to resemble the very clan they usurped. (Incidentally, the Harbingers of Skulls start to look and smell like the Samedi, and the Samedi become even more disgusting than usual.) Wraiths and Spectres attack them at every turn, and with greater ease than ever before. Necromancy — though it still works — attracts so much negative attention from these wraiths that using it becomes perilous.

• Lasombra — Some Lasombra feel an overpowering urge to take to the seas as the End Times come; however, all see difficulties in controlling their Obtenebration. Shadows rage out of control, attacking their creators or — in extreme cases — ripping holes in the fabric of reality, directly into the Abyss itself.

• Malkavians — No longer able to contain the madness within them, Malkavians find themselves unleashing it upon the world. Bouts of prophesy become increasingly frequent, and Dementation activates without conscious desire. As the end approaches, the physical world itself might even be warped by the Discipline.

• Nosferatu — The Discipline of Obfuscate fails the Nosferatu at the most inopportune times possible. As Gehenna progresses, Mask of a Thousand Faces fails automatically, and Nosferatu slowly grow even more repulsive than normal.

• Ravnos — The Beast intensifies, becoming a literal voice in the character's ear impelling him to evil acts. The voice grows louder throughout Gehenna, until by the end, each Ravnos has a veritable Shadow or P'o to contend with (see **Wraith: The Oblivion** or **Kindred of the East**).

• Setites — The Serpents come to resemble their clan's epithet. Any time one uses Serpentis (excepting Form of the Cobra), the change brought on by it might become permanent. As Set fails to rise, faith in him dwindles among the clan, and Setite Sorcery fails at an alarming rate.

• Toreador — The Degenerates become increasingly prone to excess. The difficulty of resisting the descent into debauchery (with Humanity rolls) increases as Gehenna progresses.

• Tremere — In a true display of irony, each Tremere develop third eyes. The eye first opens at a time of trauma or stress and allows its bearer to see things even Auspex does not normally reveal. (If you use **Kindred of the Ebony Kingdom**, Tremere gain Ebony Kingdom Auspex at the same level as their regular Auspex, and the first two levels are active whenever the third eye is open.) As Gehenna progresses, some Tremere develop the new Tzimisce clan disadvantage as well.

• Tzimisce — The Fiends can no longer reliably control their Vicissitude, causing wild aberrations in both themselves and others. Some demonstrate the ability to use the Discipline without touch, but even they have reduced control of the fine points of it. As the end comes, the Discipline becomes increasingly primal, and many Tzimisce lose the ability to hold the same shape for even a short period of time. (If you use **Kindred of the East**, treat this intensified Vicissitude as a combination of Flesh Shintai and Bone Shintai.)

• Ventrue — In a final ironic twist, the Clan of Kings' notorious fondness for blood of a certain caliber degenerates into a preference for each other's blood — exclusively. Ventrue become unable to gain sustenance on anything but the blood of other Ventrue.

However Gehenna begins, it's fair to say that Lilith has the jump on the situation. One of her major associations is with the stars and the moon, both of which are powerful symbols in many different types of divination, and she's had eons to refine her prophetic powers. She most likely sees Gehenna on the horizon months, or even years, before it comes, giving her plenty of time to gather her allies and implement her plan for drawing Caine into the open. Naturally, she chooses the players'



characters' city as the setting for this plan, for one of any number of reasons, such as location, useful industries, particularly important vampires in the area or whatever else. If you have trouble thinking of a reason Lilith would pick your particular city, it's probably easiest to just decide that the city is a potent supernatural center of some kind. (Maybe it sits on a great convergence of ley lines or on top of an ancient burial ground, a pagan sacred site or the like.) If your chronicle is already supernaturally focused, you can probably come up with a specific reason that fits the details of your story.

A Brief Note on Clan Weaknesses

If at all possible, try to run short sessions with each of your players individually to introduce the new heightened clan disadvantages that come with Gehenna. The objective here should be to create the feeling that each player's character is the only one experiencing new problems, including both the thinning of the Blood and its effect of heightening the clan weaknesses. Try to introduce the new weaknesses in a dramatic setting if you can — having a Tremere suddenly develop a third eye while speaking to her Regent or a mortal contact is far more dramatic than having it happen while watching TV at home, for example. By no means are we saying here that you should lie to your players, but the longer it takes them to figure out that you're running a Gehenna story, the more they'll enjoy themselves when they do figure it out.

A Brief History of Lilith

In case you're not familiar with Lilith, the following is a short summary of the most common legends about her. The word "Lilith" comes from the Akkadian "lilit" or "lilitu," which referred either to a wind goddess or to any of a thousand or more female demons. (Interestingly, the Akkadian word for the demonic lilit's male counterpart was "satan.") In collections of Jewish Biblical legend (known as Midrashic aggadoth), Lilith is presented as Adam's original wife, who was cast out of the garden of Eden for refusing to submit to his will. She later became the mother of the demons such as incubi, succubi and other monsters of the ancient world. An alternative Jewish creation story describes Lilith as the consort of Samael — who later fell from the Heavenly Host to become Lucifer — and says that when Samael fell, Lilith did also. Midrashic aggadoth of Lilith ascribe to her a fondness for kidnapping young children, as well as power over the realm on the other side of mirrors. The

tales of her as a demon suggest she might have many other powers, as well.

The story presented in *Revelations of the Dark Mother* combines the two Jewish Lilith stories, the story of Lilith as Adam's first wife and the story of Lilith as Lucifer's consort, while explaining in detail Lilith's role in the creation of both mortals and vampires. It's worth noting here that, with the exception of its vampiric overtones, *Revelations of the Dark Mother* draws nearly all its material from much older sources, including the Talmud, the Midrash, the Kabbalah and a medieval text called the Alphabet of Ben Sira. Although the best way to learn a variety of information about Lilith is to read the book in its entirety (especially the endnotes), along with other books on Lilith, a short summary is provided here for reference.

The Bible contains two stories of the creation of humans, in the first two chapters of Genesis. The first story presents man and woman's creation together, while the second describes the woman's creation from the rib or side of the man. According to Jewish rabbinical tradition (and Bahari tradition, naturally), the first wife was Lilith, who refused to submit to Adam's will because she considered herself his equal. *Revelations of the Dark Mother* adds that although Lilith did not disobey Jehovah (the God of the Old Testament) by picking the fruit of the Trees of Life and Knowledge, she did eat of the fruit that fell from them. Afterward, she saw Adam fornicating with the beasts of the forests and was repulsed by him. According to the book, this was why she refused to lay with him, and when he tried to force himself on her, she called out the True Name of Jehovah, who was then bound to rescue her by taking her up to Heaven. Lilith then became Jehovah's lover, but when she dared to suggest she was His equal, He banished her from Heaven to wander in the desert. The book suggests that Jehovah had done this once before, to another Lady before Lilith. It has been suggested that this Lady became the Crone who showed Caine the blood bond.

Lilith wandered in the desert for 49 days and nights, all the time carrying the seed of Jehovah within her. Her skin grew red and cracked, and her hair grew wild from the hardships she endured there. She learned to hide in the ground by day and travel by night, as the sun scorched her skin, and when she was thirsty, she fed upon her own blood. These are the first instances of Lilith becoming associated with vampires. This is also the beginning of the tradition, still observed by Bahari, of gaining wisdom through pain and suffering, as Lilith did when she wandered.

While she lay beneath the earth, Lilith learned to send her senses elsewhere. Thus did she discover the gardens of the other Elohim. Finally, after she had wandered the desert for many weeks, she reached the Endless Sea — associated in the myths with both the physical waters and the unconscious mind — and she swam to the bottom, exploring it and mating with many of its creatures. She learned to command the sea, becoming its mother and gaining powers like those of Jehovah over its denizens, and she left the seed of Jehovah and of the sea creatures among her children within the waters. When she rose again from the sea, her skin had turned amber and her hair pitch-black, and her eyes shone with new wisdom and intuition. But still she was not satisfied, as she could not yet create a garden like Eden, and so she returned to the desert, making her way back to Jehovah's garden to taste again the fruit of the Trees of Life and Knowledge.

This time, she wandered for 49 years, and along the way back, she stopped at the gardens of each of the Elohim. All of the Elohim were impressed with her, for she was the only one among them to house divine essence in mortal flesh, but none of the gardens could compare with the Garden of Jehovah, so she slowly made her way back there. Jehovah learned of her journey, and asked His beloved brother Lucifer, lord of night and day, to guard his garden with a fiery sword. But when Lilith arrived, she and Lucifer saw that they were kindred spirits, and Lucifer clothed Lilith in the night, giving half his power to her out of respect. Out of respect for him, Lilith departed the garden, determined to create her own.

Lilith succeeded in creating a wondrous Night Garden, but the seeds she most wanted to grow — those of the Trees of Life and Knowledge, which she had carried within her and planted in the garden — were not nurtured by her blood as the other plants were. In frustration, she destroyed the garden, and turned back toward Eden to find the secret of causing the seeds to grow. While Lilith traveled, Jehovah created a new wife for Adam from the inside out: bones first, then muscle, then organs, then flesh. But Adam could not look at her after seeing the inside of her, and he rejected her. So Jehovah destroyed her and instead created a lesser creature, Eve, from the side of Adam. Eve was submissive, as she was made from Adam's flesh, not from the earth like Lilith, and she and Adam were content together for some time.

When she arrived at the garden, Lilith saw that Lucifer was again guarding it for his brother, but upon talking with the Lightbringer, she found that Jehovah had not told him the "evil one" he was to prevent from

entering was, in fact, his beloved Lilith. She told Lucifer she wished to find out how to grow the Trees of Knowledge and Life in her own garden, and Lucifer let her pass, as he remembered her promise to do no harm on her past visit to the garden. Once in the garden, Lilith transformed herself into a great winged serpent and learned from the trees that each required 49 seeds to grow, so she swallowed seven fruits from each tree, as each fruit had seven seeds. While Lilith was at the Tree of Knowledge, Eve wandered by, and Lilith took pity on her lesser nature, giving her the fruit to eat. Eve gave it in turn to Adam, and both their eyes were opened.

For their actions, Jehovah cursed everyone present. He cursed Adam and Eve in the way described in Genesis, He cursed Lucifer with wrath and suspicion, and He cursed Lilith with the inability to love truly or be truly loved. Finally, for His own blindness and pride, Jehovah cursed Himself to be forever alone, and to wander, never finding peace. He destroyed the Trees and cast everyone from the garden, never to return, barring the gates and setting the flaming sword to guard them from all who might enter.

Lilith and Lucifer went to the edge of the Endless Sea and raised a new garden, D'hainu, the Garden of Renewal. Elsewhere, in the Land of Nod, Adam and Eve had two sons, and one slew the other out of jealousy, earning Jehovah's newest curse. This was when Caine came to Lilith, and through suffering Lilith taught him to use the power in his Blood, just as she had learned to use her own power through suffering. Three angels visited Caine, but after Lilith's teachings, he was strong. He rejected their offers of Jehovah's forgiveness, so they cursed him with thirst, with darkness and with fire, and Caine left Lilith's garden to travel on his own.

On their own in the garden, Lilith and Lucifer had six children — three male and three female — and for a time, they were content. But Caine returned with 13 of his many grandchilder and slaughtered Lilith's children, for he resented the suffering she had caused him, failing to realize how instructive it had been. The Dark Mother and the Lord of Day chased Caine and his creations from the garden, cursing them repeatedly and burning them with sunlight. Afterward the two parted ways in their sorrow.

The book is unclear on what happened next, but for the purposes of this story, the events were as follows. Lilith left her ruined second garden and built a third — Ba'hara, the Garden of Suffering, from which the Bahari take their name. A harsh and foul place, this new garden served to remind Lilith of all she had lost, as well as to hone her abilities for the



time when she would have revenge on Caine. Seven of Caine's grandchilder came to her to dwell in the garden with her — some soon after she raised it, others later in their own time. As the world grew into a more skeptical place, Lilith's garden became distanced from it, taking on its own character as a realm of its own, among the spirit worlds and the gardens of the other Elohim, and there she has worked her plans from the time of myth until the start of Gehenna. Once her revenge is complete, she will work to rebuild D'hainu, the Garden of Renewal, with her new children and, hopefully, her old lover as well.

Lilith's "Powers"

For all the caution we advise about treating Lilith with dignity as a character and avoiding the mistake of defining her too narrowly, it should still be helpful to set forth an overview of the abilities traditionally ascribed to her. These are by no means the only (or even the best) abilities associated with Lilith in the various myths, but they're at least a start. The Dark Mother's best known affinities are as follows:

• **Intuition:** The first of the two domains given to her by Jehovah, Lilith's intuition normally refers to her gift for prophecy and awareness of things supernatural. Lilith's insight is great enough that any attempt at supernatural deception or obstruction of the senses (including Obfuscate, Chimerstry and Obtenebration) used against her by anyone less potent than an Antediluvian automatically fails.

• **Growth and Fertility:** This second gift from Jehovah traditionally refers to Lilith's ability to cause plants to grow, at an alarmingly fast rate if she chooses. In tales of her demonic aspect, Lilith also has the ability to steal newborn children or to cause miscarriage or stillbirth in women. At your discretion, Lilith might have a small (or large) group of mortal children she's kidnapped and raised in her garden over the years. Storytellers interested in exploring this idea should consult the rules for chatterlings in **Dirty Secrets of the Black Hand** or the **Vampire Storytellers Handbook** for inspiration. The section on Lilin in **State of Grace** might also be helpful.

• **Night:** Given to her by her lover, Lucifer the lord of Day, Lilith's power over night can be taken in many ways. Although she is forced to work her plans and cultivate her garden by night, she can also direct the darkness and harness the power of stars and moon.

• **The Waters:** Lilith gained her mastery over "the endless waters" after journeying in the Endless Sea, and it refers both to her command of the sea creatures she spawned and to her control over the unconscious realms of the mind, with which water is often associated in magic and religion.

• **Mirrors:** The Dark Mother is said to have mastery over the realm on the opposite side of mirrors, which is one of the most terrifying of the demonic powers associated with her. She can spy upon others through any mirror or highly reflective surface, albeit without being able to hear them. (Several thousand years is more than enough time to learn to read lips, though.) If she wishes, she can even travel from one mirror to another by passing through her otherworldly garden.

• **Aspects:** Based on the tales told in *Revelations of the Dark Mother*, Lilith has three aspects. The first is the aspect of Suffering (with wild black hair and red, cracked skin) which relates to Ba'hara, Lilith's third garden. The second is the aspect of Intuition (with straight black hair and amber skin) which is associated with D'hainu, Lilith's second garden, the Garden of Renewal. The third is the aspect of Darkness (with blue skin and silver hair) which relates to Lilith's first garden, the Night Garden. At your discretion, Lilith can shift between these aspects based on what action she is taking. In order to cause suffering upon others, she might need to take on her aspect of Suffering, for instance.

Lilith also has several well-known, and less recognizable, weaknesses. They include:

• **Sunlight:** As a creature of the darkness, Lilith finds sunlight exceedingly painful. It's not deadly to her the way it is to true vampires, but it's arguably even more excruciating, as Lilith's curse came directly from God, while the curse of sunlight upon Caine was delivered through an angel. During the day, she generally seeks refuge in her garden, where the moon and stars are the sole source of light.

• **Faith:** While she is not truly a vampire, Lilith is still a creature of darkness, and True Faith affects her just as it does vampires, demons and other similar beings. At your discretion, Lilith might be particularly vulnerable to Jewish True Faith, as the Jewish tales about her are the source of nearly every negative sentiment ever directed against her in writing. As a result, most orthodox Jews bear Lilith great contempt for defying her husband and her God.

• **Love:** In addition to her vulnerability to sunlight, Lilith was cursed by God with the inability to love. Although this curse might seem insignificant to the story, think about it for a moment — Lilith has countless children, but none of them love her. Even her children by Lucifer didn't love her, and neither do the Apostates (see p. 98-102). Bahari the world over revere, idolize and worship Lilith, but not even they truly bear love for her. Lilith is denied the one thing that makes an

otherwise bleak existence bearable for so many people in the World of Darkness, which makes her story tragic by definition, regardless of how it ends.

• **Anger:** Lilith's righteous anger at how she's been treated has been building for all time. Although she's normally able to keep her rage in check (in the interests of carrying out her plan of revenge), certain provocations can still set her off. In particular, anything that parallels the first few betrayals against her — attempts to curse her, for example, or to harm any of her children (including the Apostates) — can still send her flying into a murderous rage. Don't confuse this rage with frenzy — Lilith can still speak and take normal action when she's infuriated — but her instinctive reaction as someone who's been slighted time and again throughout the centuries is still to utterly destroy whomever or whatever has angered her.

• **Age:** Lilith is very, very old. The Hebrew calendar — which traditionally tells the number of years since the creation of the world — is currently at 5763, as of this writing, which effectively makes Lilith's minimum age 5,763 years. Since Lilith, like Adam and Eve, was created as a full-grown adult, she has at least 20 or 30 more years of life (or at least, "years" as we understand them in a modern sense) experience than Caine, assuming the story in Genesis is literally true, and depending on Caine's age when he killed Abel. If Lilith predates Adam, however, and the Sumerian or Akkadian myths are true, she could be hundreds or thousands of years older than Caine. Yet since her body is (roughly, at least) a mortal one, it's safe to say she's forgotten a few things since ancient times, and her memory might not be quite what it once was (your discretion).

Supporting Cast

Although Lilith is the driving force behind this story, her allies and enemies form the basis for a rich and multifaceted plot. Their roles in the story are explained in greater detail later, but a brief treatment of each one is presented here for your reference. Lilith's allies are presented first, followed by her adversaries. Traits for Lyla, the only human (or mostly human) character, are also provided. Trying to work out traits for Lilith, Lucifer, Caine or any of the Antediluvians would just be a waste of our word count and your time.

Lucifer, the Morningstar

In the story of **Vampire**, Lucifer fell because he allowed Lilith into the Garden of Eden (not because he waged war on Heaven, as **Demon: The Fallen** posits). For all we know, Lucifer has kept to himself for the past century, rather than watching his demon kin from afar in the World of Darkness of your **Vampire** game. After all, there might not even *be* demons in your game, at least not in the sense they're presented in **Demon**. Don't feel a need to remold your chronicle to conform to the established canon of what Lucifer has been up to in a different game line, rework Lucifer so that he fits with the story you want to tell (if you choose to use him at all).

In all the varying accounts of Lilith's background, her love affair with Lucifer (or Samael, as he is known in the Old Testament Apocrypha) is one of the few constants. By some accounts, the two even had children. Lilith was cursed by Jehovah with the inability to love, however, and this is probably the main reason the two went their separate ways. Still, according to *Revelations of the Dark Mo*ther, Lucifer was responsible for giving Lilith dominion over the night, as well as for letting her into the Garden of Eden. When Lilith triggered the fall of Adam and Eve, Lucifer found himself cursed along with her, and he remained with her afterward, even having children with her according to one well-known tale. At some point, though, the two parted, so their relationship now has many possibilities.

Lilin and Bahari

You'll probably notice that we've only included single characters here, rather than large groups such as the Lilin or Lilim (Sabbat followers of the Path of Lilith) or the Bahari (all followers of Lilith, Sabbat and otherwise). This is intentional. The last thing Lilith wants is for her hand to be tipped before all of her plans are laid (and believe it when we say she has many plans to lay.) Though they might make a useful army, the Lilin and the Bahari would likely be a very noisy one as well, proselytizing to anyone who might listen about the return of the Dark Mother, the end of the Curse of Caine and so on. Naturally, this would prove counterproductive to Lilith's generally secretive approach to her revenge.

On an individual basis, however, Lilin or Bahari have made excellent pawns for Lilith. By simply pretending to be a high-ranking priestess of either sect, or subtly revealing tidbits of previously unknown information about herself, she can virtually ensure both loyalty and secrecy from those of her followers she deems worthy. Seldom, if ever, does she let on who she really is, though, for fear of creating zealots instead of servants. Still, the players' characters could very easily find themselves drawn into Lilith's inner circle if one or more of them is already Bahari or Lilin and they play their cards carefully.

They might have returned to their former roles as lovers, remained indifferent to each other or even become bitter enemies.

If Lilith and Lucifer did meet again sometime in the past, Lucifer might be guarding Lilith's garden now as he once guarded the Garden of Eden. If he and Lilith parted on bad terms, he might visit the Apostates each day in their dreams, subtly turning them against her. If he and Lilith parted out of mutual need or convenience, though, Lucifer might not become involved at all. In any case, his involvement in the story should be even more subtle than Lilith's. Lucifer is literally a deus ex machina if you use him overtly, and if you do, your players will probably resent it, especially if they are familiar with the role he plays in Demon. Having Lucifer step out of thin air and smite everyone is most definitely not the answer here. The level of power at his command and mystery surrounding him, however, make him perfect to use as a behind-the-scenes player or an explanation for loose ends in your story.

Lyla, the Daughter

Lilith's most important ally, at least as far as the characters' relationship to her is concerned, will most likely be Lyla, her adopted daughter. Lyla is a young runaway between the ages of 15 and 18, who also happens to be a dhampir (for more information on dhampirs, see **Time of Thin Blood**). Raised by a single mother, as her vampire father disappeared soon after her birth, she fled her mother's house at age 10 after her mother's then-boyfriend tried to rape her, and in response she somehow snapped his neck as if it were a twig. She has lived on the streets ever since and was a perfect candidate for Lilith's eventual use. She and Lilith have met in person only one time, during which Lilith posed as a homeless woman and offered a drink laced with her own blood to Lyla, who was thirsty and gladly accepted it. Since that time, Lyla has experienced frequent visions of disturbing clarity, some of which she has seen come true. She sometimes also lapses into trance states during which she speaks in tongues and utters words of prophecy. She retains no memory of having done so afterward, though, and she often wakes to find herself in unfamiliar circumstances. What Lyla does not know is that although the trances and visions are real, Lilith can use the blood connection between herself and Lyla to control them (and in doing so, control Lyla) when she chooses. Lilith is likewise unaware that when she is not watching Lyla, the girl's visions and trances often concern the Dark Mother's plans and actions. In addition, Lyla might be the Last Daughter of Eve — which would prove ironic if Lilith succeeds in using Lyla to advance her own plans, but it would also be appropriate to reveal if the characters end up using Lyla against her patron.

As a frightened young girl with powers she barely understands, Lyla is intended mostly as a Storyteller plot device. The players' characters will most likely meet her near the first mini-scenario they play through, probably in one of her trances, speaking of the event the characters have just witnessed. When she awakens from the trance, however, she might try to escape from these strangers who are trying to lead her around. It will probably be difficult for anyone but the kindest of characters to earn her trust early in the story, and the best way to do so is likely to save her life from one of the other major players. Lyla helps drive the plot in many ways, by giving the characters clues (some of which could be planted by Lilith to lead them astray), and also to help gauge their humanity (as Lilith's actions toward the players' characters will depend largely on how well they treated Lyla). Since her meeting with Lilith, Lyla has been mentored and raised by seven elderly bums, and if the characters do gain her trust early in the story,

On Avatars

An avatar is generally an earthly representative of a particular deity, gifted with extraordinary powers by that deity, which invests a portion of itself into the avatar to empower it. Avatars can be possessed and used as physical bodies for their gods, and they usually considering possession of this type to be an honor. In this sense, Jesus Christ might be called an avatar of Jehovah, just as many of the lesser Hindu gods were avatars of one of the great Hindu Triad (Brahma, Vishnu and Shiva). Although avatars are useful for accomplishing earthly goals, they also leave their associated god open to attacks through the power of sympathetic magic, which is why most of the avatars throughout history tried to remain as secret as possible.

Because she's tasted Lilith's blood on many occasions (as the food and drink the Apostates feed her is always laced with it), Lyla would be Lilith's avatar if Lilith were a true goddess. Unfortunately, though, Lilith already has a physical body, so she's not a goddess in the full sense of the word (even though she is still among the ranks of the Elohim). This complicates her relationship to Lyla, who is almost (but not quite) her avatar. The sympathetic link between the two of them is quite strong, though, and the injury or death of one reflects identically on the other, which explains why Lilith is so watchful and protective of her "daughter."

she might take her new associates to meet her mentors quite early in the story.

Name: Lyla Yvonne Tzigano

Generation: n/a (dhampir)

Age: Between 15 and 18

Physical: Strength 2, Dexterity 3, Stamina 2

Social: Charisma 3, Manipulation 4, Appearance 3

Mental: Perception 4, Intelligence 2, Wits 3

Talents: Alertness 1, Athletics 2, Brawl 1, Dodge 3, Empathy 2, Expression 2, Streetwise 5, Subterfuge 1

Skills: Animal Ken 2, Firearms 1, Melee 1, Security 2, Stealth 2, Survival 3

Knowledges: Academics 1, Investigation 1, Law 2, Medicine 1, Occult 2

Disciplines: Auspex 2, Dementation 3, Obfuscate 2, Ogham 4, Potence 2

Backgrounds: Allies 2, Contacts 3, Insight 5, Mentor 5 (the Apostates)

Virtues: Conscience 4, Self-Control 2, Courage 3

Humanity: 6

Derangements: Claustrophobia, Fugue, Sexual Aversion

Willpower: 7

Merits & Flaws: Oracular Ability (only when in trances), Magic Resistance, Concentration, Perceive Vampires (2 points) — until she learns about vampires, she only senses there's "something not quite right" about the person, which might cause her to flee.

At your discretion, Lyla may have a crescent moon tattoo or birthmark, depending upon how strongly you want to suggest that she's the Last Daughter of Eve.

Mentors and Students

The seven "bums" who have taught Lyla to survive on her own in the desolate city streets are themselves students of the Dark Mother. You might have noticed in the past that though the "official" number of Antediluvians is 13, various sources make reference to more — 20, 40, even as many as 400, along with additional vampires of the Second Generations such as Jubal, Tubal-Cain and Enosh. At one point there might have been more, but for the purposes of this story, 20 Antediluvians remain (or 21, if you count Tremere, but since he's currently stuck in Goratrix's body, he really doesn't count anymore). Thirteen of these Ancients remain (ostensibly) loyal to Caine, but the other seven somehow found their way to serving Lilith instead. The ways in which this happened vary for each of Lilith's students — some found her while searching for knowledge about their condition, while others sought her out in rebellion against their demanding grandsire. Lilith might even have summoned some of them to herself. Regardless, her actions in the mortal and Kindred societies throughout the ages have largely been through her seven disciples and their contacts.

For their part, the seven have been quite busy through the years. Having never Embraced childer of their own (yes, *some* of Caine's grandchilder actually obeyed his request on Embracing), they nonetheless have built an impressive information-gathering network that has come to be commonly known as the Inconnu. Inconnu members have always reported to older, more experienced elder members of the sect, but what no one realized was that the "Methuselahs" at the head of the sect were in fact Antediluvians reporting to Lilith (henceforth referred to as the Apostates). The upshot of this is that whatever she has been doing for the past few millennia — tending her otherworldly garden and gaining allies in the spirit worlds — she remains quite well informed of all the affairs of the mortal and supernatural worlds as well. It can be assumed that communication between the Apostates is done through whichever Apostates possess Auspex, most often Mekhet.

As disciples of Lilith, the Apostates have all tasted her blood from time to time. While exerting control over such powerful beings is not possible for even the Dark Mother, she might still be inclined to regard them as her new Lilim (children) at times. In addition, as her blood carries the juice of the Tree of Life, it likely helps to forestall the weakening of the Blood that comes with Gehenna. The degree to which such is the case depends on how much of an advantage you want to give Lilith against Caine and his progeny, as well as how much difficulty you want the players' characters to have should they try to destroy some of the Apostates. It's possible, though not necessarily recommended, that Lilith's blood might prevent the Withering altogether, in which case she may confer it upon the characters at the end of the story if their actions have pleased her. Just be sure to consider the possible repercussions of some or all of the Apostates surviving Gehenna for the same reason.

The Six...

Of the seven Apostates, six warrant treatment together, and the last is presented separately. These first six are those who form the core of Lilith's support structure — her eyes, ears, arms and hands, as it were. The final Apostate is a special case. Though it is ultimately up to the Storyteller to develop these characters fully, some suggestions as to their abilities and back story are presented in the following sub-sections.

Lucian

If one of the Apostates were to be leader of the others, second only to the Dark Mother herself, Lucian would be that leader. Intelligent, confident, charismatic and preternaturally attractive, Lucian is at once the natural leader of the group. Yet Lilith does not hold him in any particular esteem — probably because he represents all she hates about men — which sometimes causes him to question his loyalty to her. He is proud, but only because he knows he can be, and he most likely left Caine's service because he wished to find something grander in which to involve himself. His greatest affinities are for Animalism, Obfuscate and Presence, with plenty of Auspex, Dominate and Potence as well.

Lucian has a special ability that he's unable to control, which has caused him untold difficulty over the years. His physical form is so perfect and radiant that anyone viewing him in his natural form without protection (such as the Thaumaturgy ritual Heart of Stone, but *not* Pavis of Foul Presence) is automatically affected per the Presence power Entrancement. For Toreador, this effect increases to that of either the Presence power Love (see **Guide to the Camarilla**) or simply the inability to do anything other than stare without spending Willpower (Storyteller discretion). Since this ability naturally makes conversation of any type difficult at best, it was Lucian's idea that the Apostates take their current disguise of bums to better observe the city and instruct Lyla.

You'll notice the similarity between Lucian's three "in-clan" Disciplines and the in-clan Disciplines of Clan Nosferatu. This is intentional and is meant to suggest that Lucian might be connected to the Nosferatu somehow. Perhaps he and Absimiliard were broodmates or mortal relations. Perhaps he is secretly the progenitor of the Nictuku or the African Guruhi legacy. Perhaps he is the true Nosferatu Antediluvian. The final decision is up to you, if you want to use this element at all. If you do decide he's the Nosferatu Antediluvian, you'll need to figure out whether his perfect appearance is true or illusionary, and if it's true, what caused him to curse his bloodline with ugliness. (Being Embraced without his leave is always a good standby.)

Erinye

In ancient Greece, the Erinyes (more commonly known tonight as the Furies) were the spirits of vengeance responsible for avenging crimes of blood such as patricide and fratricide. Empowered to carry out their sacred duty even upon the gods, the Furies were so feared by common Greeks that people normally referred to them as the Kind Sisters or Kindly Ones, to avoid angering them by implying they were furious or irrational. Most modern scholars believe the mythology of the Erinyes far predates that of the other gods, and at least according to the Antediluvian Erinye, they might indeed stem from her own often zealous ways. Of all the Apostates, Erinye has the most in common with Lilith, in that she possesses both a wicked temper and an indomitable will, and Lilith normally treats her as a favored daughter — and as a deadly weapon.

In her true form, Erinye appears as a woman with angular features, piercing red eyes and hair varying in shade from black to pure white. She might be called beautiful (in the same way a bird of prey such as a hawk or eagle is beautiful), but most people who see her true face find her to be fearsome. Her fury is both her asset and her liability, giving her great strength and speed, but also causing her to act often without thinking. Known for erupting into a whirlwind of passion, as well as avenging the souls of the dead, her greatest affinities

Maiden, Mother and Crone

The story of Lilith parallels the mythos of the Furies in many ways, and also that of the Fates, the Norns (the Norse ladies of fate), and other all-female trios such as Shakespeare's Weird Sisters. In Adam's three wives, we see the young woman, the mother and the old woman, though which one is which could be debated for days. Lilith, Erinye and Eickos together likewise form a fearsome triad that could be seen to parallel the Furies. Similarly, the combination of Lilith, Malakai and Eickos could symbolize the Fates in some form.

Storytellers might wish to emphasize or de-emphasize these parallels depending on how much the mythology or the themes these characters suggest generally influences their own particular style of play. If you do choose to present several of the characters here as Furies or Fates, try to make it subtle, something a scholar of mythology or art history might pick out, but not something blatant to the casual observer. In a story like this one, dealing with characters as old as Lilith, we recommend treating the Fates and the Furies as ancient archetypes rather than as literal people. A character or trio of characters can thus personify or represent the archetypal Sisters without, in fact, *being* them historically or physically. Conversely, knowingly assuming an archetype — becoming visibly different over the course of a few seconds, possibly even changing voice — can be extremely effective for intimidation.



are for Celerity, Potence and Necromancy (all paths, including Mortuus, Vitreous and Cenotaph). She also has her fair share of Abombwe, Auspex, Fortitude and Protean.

Mekhet

Mekhet is perhaps the best example, even more so than Lilith in some ways, of what several millennia of study can do for one's magical prowess. Formerly a great court magician in a now-forgotten proto-Egyptian culture, Mekhet has used his eons of existence to become the foremost blood magician on the planet. (Tremere might have access to Level 10 rituals also, but only Mekhet has had 5,000 years or so to develop and refine his.) Not surprisingly, his greatest affinities are for all forms of blood magic (including Thaumaturgy, Assamite and Setite Sorcery and Necromancy), as well as Auspex. Lilith most often uses him as an advisor or an assistant for particularly daunting magical endeavors.

Whether through neglect or by some lingering aftereffect of his culture's less than perfect mummification procedures, Mekhet suffers from decay to an even worse degree than the vampires of the Samedi bloodline. He is forced to bandage himself heavily just to keep his various limbs together; without the bandages, he literally falls to pieces with a single well-placed blow. He can put himself back together, but doing so requires a great deal of time and effort, so he normally prefers to use his magics to make sure no one comes close enough to touch him. Most likely, he joined Lilith because after being robbed of his true magical potential by Caine's Embrace, he sensed she could teach him far more about his new condition than Caine could ever hope to.

Ikopabe

Every vampire knows the horrors of the Beast, but Ikopabe might be said to personify that Beast more than any other vampire. The most primal of the Apostates, even surpassing Erinye in his bestial nature, Ikopabe rarely, if ever, speaks human tongues anymore. When he does, it is always in his own language, a quasi-African dialect that only his fellow Apostates and Lilith are old enough to remember. Among those few who know him, it is rumored that the last word he said other than his own name was "Fools," in reference to the Convention of Thorns upon first hearing of it in 1493. Nonetheless, he is a master of shapeshifting, with greatest affinities for Abombwe, Protean (though for the purposes of counting in-clan Disciplines, these first two should be treated as a single one), Animalism and Fortitude, with his fair share of Auspex, Obfuscate and the other

physical Disciplines as well. Most often Lilith uses him as a tracker or scout, which is probably the capacity in which the players' characters are most likely to encounter him — if they realize he's there at all. His appearance varies, but he always bears an abundance of animal features, and his eyes remain yellow and catlike regardless of the form he takes.

As for why he joined Lilith, Ikopabe remains as silent on this topic as on any other. Most likely, he sensed that Lilith's knowledge came from a truer source — her own experience and the Tree of Knowledge — than Caine's supposed wisdom and teachings. Of the seven Apostates, he is the one most likely to have Embraced, though he refuses to confirm or deny the rumor, but the intent here is to suggest he may be the progenitor of the Laibon, or at least of the Akunanse (or possibly even the Gangrel). Like an animal, he tends to have trouble understanding the idea of deception, Ikopabe is a naturally honorable creature and hides himself only when asked to do so by Lilith or his fellow Apostates. As a result, if they encounter him hunting outside the city (his favorite pastime when he's not carrying out a task for Lilith), the characters might very well see Ikopabe in all his feral glory.

Ilyes

Many centuries ago, in the Second City, an Antediluvian who was often cold and passionless made the mistake of Embracing an impetuous, fiery young woman. Over the months preceding her Embrace, he had grown to trust her like no other — perhaps even to love her, despite his lack of feeling — and so, when he began to regret his decision to disobey Caine's dictum against Embracing, she was naturally the first person to hear of his conflict. Sadly, he was a naive creature, knowing little of true emotion, and he failed to make it clear to her that his concern was only for his act — that he didn't intend to destroy her to rectify the mistake — and so she attacked and attempted to diablerize him. He escaped rather easily calling upon the power of his vitae, but the confrontation left a wound in his psyche that has not healed to this night, and he searches even now for his wayward childe, Troile, hunting down and destroying her treacherous progeny whenever he encounters them.

Come, now... you didn't really think the Spanish word for "witch" was the Brujah Antediluvian's *real* name, did you? The progenitor of Clan Brujah escaped his supposed destruction at the hand of Troile by using his trademark Discipline, Temporis, to hurl himself forward in time. The exact circumstances are unimportant, but suffice it to say that it's relatively easy to fake your own death if you have near-complete mastery over time. Unfortunately, the journey took Ilyes a very long time — though he was outside of normal time, because of the nature of the Temporis Discipline, over 100 times the true number of years passed subjectively. This means, since he emerged in Lilith's garden sometime in the Dark Ages, he experienced the trip as several hundred thousand years instead of the several thousand years that passed on Earth. That's a terribly long time to harbor a grudge, so it's no surprise he joined Lilith after she offered him the chance to help destroy both his childe and his grandsire.

Since Ilyes Embraced only one childe, Troile, the so-called True Brujah are something of an anomaly. At some point while Ilyes was outside the flow of time that mortals perceive, some few of Troile's brood either spontaneously developed or rediscovered the lost Discipline that was the true legacy of their clan. Since by most accounts, the True Brujah also helped to start the paranoid cult calling itself Tal'mahe'Ra (the so-called True Black Hand), it's unsurprising they decided their own lineage was the only "true" Brujah lineage as well. Even though the True Brujah share his hatred for and wish to destroy the clan they believe has usurped their name, Ilyes harbors even greater hatred for them than for "normal" Brujah, as the origin story they spread implies that Ilyes made the mistake of Embracing even more than once.

Ilyes acts most often as Lilith's messenger or herald, and sometimes also as a scout or tracker. Unsurprisingly, his affinities are for Potence, Presence and Temporis.

Malakai

In many respects, Malakai was the first and remains the most pitiable casualty of the Jyhad. Afflicted with the same madness for which her twin brother, Malkav, is so well known, her decision to join Lilith rather than remaining loyal to her abusive grandsire led to the destruction of the only constant in her life, her relationship with her twin. Malkav was always the stronger of the two, helping Malakai bear the weight of their mutual curse. Malkav was solely responsible for his curse by Caine: Malakai was affected only because of her close blood ties to her brother. Without him, her madness has consumed and overtaken her, driving her to untold depths of paranoia, despair and, at times, violence. Even Lilith holds a special place in her unloving heart for Malakai, and Lyla tries to comfort her whenever she's able.

One side effect of the strength of her madness is that Malakai is immensely powerful, though her true power manifests only in times of great distress. Far beyond run-of-the-mill Dementation, Malakai's delusions are strong enough that she can warp minds, physical objects and bodies (human or otherwise) as if they were one. When

she feels threatened, whether by real or imagined foes, the world twists around her, often by a storm of supernatural intensity, complete with winds, lightning, hail or rain, and — should she be truly frightened — warping buildings, exploding people and nearly anything else your freakish mind can imagine. Naturally, the other Apostates (and Lyla, though she has no idea of Malakai's true abilities) try to keep her as calm as they can.

Malakai's affinities are for Auspex, Obfuscate, and her own peculiar brand of Dementation (something between Dementation and Chimerstry, really) which for the purposes of this story will be called Phantasm.

...and the One

The final member of the Apostates comes rightly at the end of the list of Lilith's allies and just before her list of definite enemies. This is because where Eickos is concerned, nearly everything is uncertain — the creature's true origin, its gender, its loyalties — even whether it is a vampire at all. Although Eickos may choose to remain mysterious throughout the story, some suggestions for answering some of the questions surrounding the creature are provided here.

Eickos

If it is true that the devil has many names, Eickos might be one of those he prefers to use on Earth. Truthfully, though, even the other Apostates have seldom known how to take Eickos, the most mysterious and strangely silent among them (even more so than Ikopabe). Eickos comes and goes according to its own peculiar whims, slinking about at times in an entirely inhuman fashion, and Lilith has suffered it to remain among her followers only because even she has never been able to discern what it wants, who it is or how to get rid of it. In all likelihood, both Lilith and the other Apostates do not consider Eickos an Apostate at all, but rather some type of anomaly. At least in their own minds, a different seventh Apostate has occasionally appeared among them since about 2,500 years ago. She is the beautiful siren Narcise, known among the Apostates for her powers of song, emotional persuasion and insight.

In truth, Narcise is but one of Eickos' many guises. Eickos chose the name Narcise in a bout of irony, in fact, after the myth of Narcissus, as Eickos's natural form is horribly repulsive. Although Eickos does possess all the abilities it projects when portraying Narcise, it is actually something far older and more sinister than any of the Apostates (or Lilith) can imagine.

In *The Book of Nod*, Caine meets a crone, who tricks him into drinking her blood and thus indirectly teaches him of the power of the blood bond. *Revelations of the Dark Mother* further suggests that the Crone might have been Jehovah's consort before Lilith, her youth and beauty lost upon being cast out of Heaven. Another possibility is that Adam's second wife became the Crone — made from the True Earth like Lilith, she could not be fully destroyed, and she re-emerged outside the garden in a ghastly shell after Adam rejected her. She might indeed be far older than either of these stories suggests, but whatever her true origin is, the creature known of old as the Crone has been known as Eickos for the past several millennia. Which identity — Crone, Eickos, Narcise or none at all — is the true or original one is unknown, and the decision is ultimately up to you as Storyteller. Whether the vampires of the medieval Lhiannan bloodline were truly her descendants, her pupils or simply vampires who wished to emulate Eickos is likewise your choice. (Just for reference, *The Book of Nod* states both that the Crone forced Caine to Embrace her, and that he eventually staked her and left her to greet the sun, but whether this ever really occurred is questionable, given the obvious pro-Caine viewpoint expressed in most of that book.) For all we know, the Crone's blood bond might still hold Caine in thrall even tonight.

What should be certain here, however you choose to treat the character, is that Eickos is a wild card or free agent. Between hatred of God for scorning her, hatred of Lilith for replacing her, hatred of Caine for attempting to destroy her and hatred of all other beings for their inferiority, Eickos' actions in the story are anyone's guess. They ultimately boil down to whom she hates the most (and once again, this is up to you). Eickos's recommended abilities include ancient rituals of blood magic, disguise ability equivalent to Obfuscate, and other equivalent Disciplines including Melpominee, Presence and Dominate (and Ogham, from the **Dark Ages Companion**, if you own it). Of all the Apostates, she is probably the most likely to help the characters defeat Lilith if they choose to try, and she is also the only one who can enter and roam freely in Lilith's garden without Lilith's knowledge or explicit consent. If she is truly who and what she claims to be, after all, Eickos has her own garden — and the gardens of all the Elohim are connected (though Jehovah's garden is still closed, even to other Elohim).

Enemies

By now, it should be apparent that Lilith has the cards stacked in her favor when Gehenna begins. Her allies are far better organized and more loyal than those of Caine, and for good reason: Lilith's cause is just, at least after a fashion, while Caine is and always has been a self-serving bastard. That being said, Caine does still

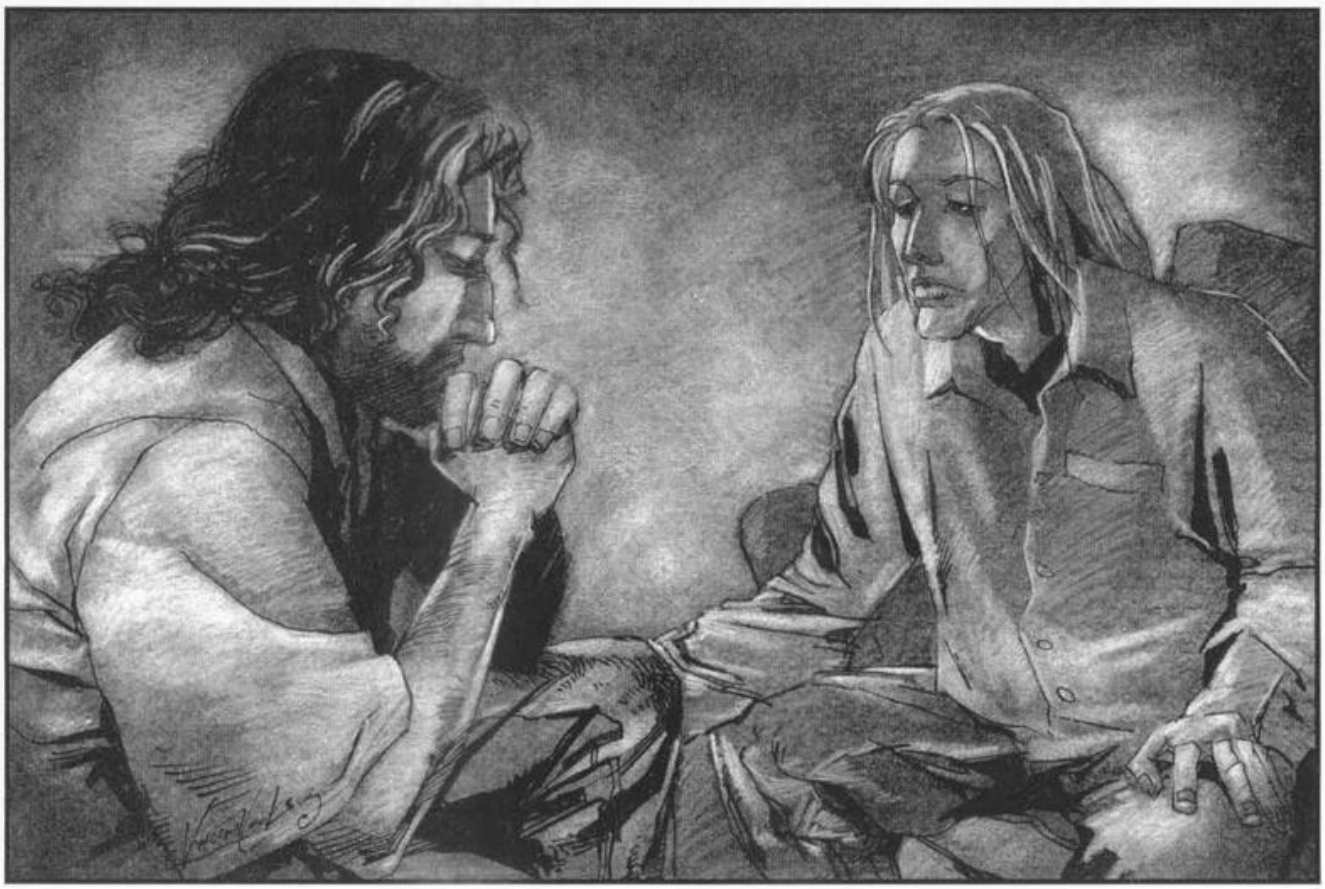
have a few allies (or potential allies, at least) who might aid him as the story plays out. For the most part, even these "allies" might still wish to see Caine die, just not by the hand of Lilith or one of her minions. A treatment of Caine's role in the story is presented here, followed by some information on those who might wish to impede Lilith's plans. Excepting Caine himself, all of these enemies are entirely optional, depending on how much resistance to Lilith you want in your story.

Caine

It's not surprising to consider that sooner or later, everything in **Vampire** comes back to Caine. As the First Murderer and the First Vampire, he's made a disgusting number of enemies through the ages, and Gehenna is when he finally gets what he deserves. Lilith might be the shining example of someone Caine used and then betrayed, but plenty of others can be named — including his grandchilder, some of whom he cursed, and all of whom he abandoned after the deaths of the Second Generation. A few remain loyal to him nonetheless, but most have long since turned toward their own agendas, either ignoring Caine or actively seeking him out to destroy or diablerize him. It's safe to say that it's difficult — nearly impossible, in fact — to find Caine unless he wants you to, though, so one of the only people who truly poses a threat to him is Lilith herself. Her followers, potent though they are, are still "only" Third Generation — at least, until the thinning of the Blood places them on equal or perhaps better footing even with Caine (depending on how you choose to run the effects of Lilith's blood).

What Caine has been doing all these years is anyone's guess (and thus, like so many things, up to you to decide). He has probably spent a good deal of time in torpor, lamenting what he feels is an unjust state of affairs. When active, he likely experiences difficulty adjusting to the new climate of the world before sinking into torpor once more. The most important thing to remember about Caine, whatever he has done for the past several millennia, is that he is a man consumed by greed and pride. Were he simply to feel regret for his actions — to wish he hadn't killed his brother out of jealousy all those years ago — the Curse of Caine would lift and he might well ascend to Heaven right then and there. Caine's tragedy is that after all the long years of suffering, he remains unable to see that he was wrong. His true curse is one of the self-inflicted variety.

Since this story deals with the coming of Gehenna and the eventual end of the Curse of Caine, a strong argument can be made that the Curse would not or



should not end unless or until Caine repents. One compelling way to explain this sudden change of heart involves Lucifer. Caine and Lucifer meet by chance one night, and Lucifer expresses great surprise that Caine didn't repent his sin centuries ago, explaining that Caine's Curse stems only from his own pride and blindness. To demonstrate this, Lucifer touches Caine, taking him back to the day he killed Abel, and Caine sees that no angels come down from heaven to curse him. The only voice cursing him is the voice of his own conscience, and all God does is enforce the curse Caine has placed on himself (the same as God enforces the curse Noah places on one of his sons, later in the Bible). After being shown his insignificance so blatantly by probably the oldest, most powerful creature to walk the Earth, Caine's spirit is finally broken, his will shattered, and the Curse begins to wane. If you do choose to use this scenario of the coming of Gehenna, the players might never learn what happened. The most important detail to remember is that when Caine appears at the end of the story, he should be resigned to his fate rather than attempting to attack Lilith or the Apostates.

Saulot

If any Antediluvian still retains even a shred of loyalty to Caine, Saulot is the one. Most likely, Saulot still understands the necessity of Caine's destruction, but he wishes to bring it about in a certain way. Since Saulot has always been one of the more mystically inclined of the Antediluvians, chances are he has come to believe that if Caine dies by the hand of anyone but God or himself, the world will end or some horrible disaster will ensue. Only by asking forgiveness for his actions — or, at the very least, honestly coming to regret them — can Caine end his existence without throwing the whole of creation into upheaval. Whether this hypothesis is actually true, of course, is up to you, but since this chapter's scenario is intended to affect the mortal world only tangentially, we recommend thinking long and hard before coming up with contingencies that could destroy it utterly.

Saulot has his own mini-scenario in this chapter, which details his plans and approach toward dealing with the players' characters in greater depth. (For more information, see "Saulot's Gambit" on p. 113.) He is and always has been a fanatic, but at the same time, he's a very charismatic fellow, so while he is firmly convinced of the necessity of his actions, he is willing to take any action short of violence to persuade the characters to join his crusade against Lilith. Since they will probably have met Lyla before Saulot, it might take persuasion from another potential enemy of Lilith (Eickos, Lasombra or even Lucifer, perhaps) before the characters are willing to consider joining Saulot. This isn't to say you should try to railroad your players — just make sure they know it's an option, just as eventually joining or helping Lilith is an option.

Whatever the players' characters choose to do, Saulot appears at the end of the story to confront Lilith, but some complications arise. Being in the body of Tremere, who Embraced himself with stolen vitae from Clan Tzimisce, Saulot is a prime candidate for the rebirth of the Tzimisce Antediluvian. (Saulot might, in fact, have been keeping the Ancient at bay for a long time — years or even centuries.) The Antediluvian's final reclamation of Saulot's body occurs at the most dramatic (that is, the worst possible) moment in his plans, probably while Saulot is confronting Lilith. If Saulot is able to maintain some measure of control, he might be able to lunge at Lilith and the Apostates with Thaumaturgy, Valeren *and* Vicissitude. If not, he loses control, attacking everyone present with limbs he didn't even have before.

Haqim

Haqim's motivation in this story is deceptively simple: He wants to devour Caine, consume his essence utterly and become the first among vampires. The new heightened clan weakness of Clan Assamite is, in fact, a curse placed on them by Haqim himself, to weed out the strong from the weak and build an army to serve him when he has devoured Caine. Obviously, this plan is flawed, since both Haqim and Caine lose power very quickly once their vitae begins to thin. Still, Haqim obviously has a vested interest in killing Caine himself rather than allowing Lilith to do so, and if the characters are aiding Lilith's agenda (knowingly or unknowingly), feel free to send vengeful coteries of Assamites against them if you like. By the end of the story, Haqim has probably weakened to the point that he won't show up to confront Caine or Lilith, though.

Absimiliard

The Nosferatu Antediluvian has held his grudge a long, long time now, and he's finally decided to do something about it. Absimiliard figures that especially with the weakening of the Blood, if he can get his hands on Caine and tear him to shreds, the curse Caine placed on him might finally be lifted. (Granted, it took literally century upon century of feeling sorry for himself before he realized this, and both he and Caine are going to die soon from the thinning of the Blood anyway, but Absimiliard was never renowned for his deductive skills.) He could show up early or late in the story, possibly inhabiting a building or section of the sewers that, afterward, no one seems to be able to find — at least, not until later, when his prowess at Obfuscate erodes. Like Haqim, Absimiliard wants to stop anyone *else* from killing Caine, and he might appear at the end of the story to take his shot. Lilith might even allow him to be the one that ultimately kills Caine.

Lasombra

If the Lasombra Antediluvian is still around, it's degenerated into an Abyssal horror by now, more shadow than physical substance, and more primal destructive desire than anything else. It's still intelligent, though, and in the hierarchy of shadow-creatures in the Abyss, one that used to be (and still partially is) a physical being is probably quite low in the pecking order. Hence, Lasombra has decided that if Caine dies by its hand, its own vampiric physical body will wither and disappear, leaving only its shadow-essence. Alternatively, the Antediluvian might also want to capture Lilith and sacrifice her in a bloody ritual to gain her power. Therefore, Lasombra wants to help anyone working toward Caine's demise — as long as Caine truly dies rather than being diablerized — or toward Lilith's, for that matter. Regardless of whom the characters are helping, unless they're actively working to save Caine and forestall the ending of the Curse, you can use the Lasombra Antediluvian as a silent ally (with shadow tentacles or creatures helping them against enemies, or even random Shadow-Stepping out of danger in a pinch).

Abel

Caine might be the selfish, proud and vengeful brother, but by the same token, Abel was forgiving, loving and naïve. Although the theory of Abel being the first wraith has long since been overturned by **Wraith**, there's no reason this theory can't be true in your **Vampire** game. Abel was, after all, the first mortal to die violently, and he did love his brother dearly. This passion along with an untimely death makes a perfect justification for Abel's being a wraith. It would also explain why vampires and wraiths cross paths so often.

If he were, indeed, the first wraith, Abel would be an ungodly powerful force working in Caine's favor. He'd also be working in the interest of all decent wraiths, of course, and he probably had more than a little to do with the disappearance of Augustus Giovanni. (For more on this, see "Underworld Mayhem" on p. 117.) Abel is perhaps the most powerful and likely means through which Caine might find some type of redemption before meeting his ultimate demise. The idea that Abel could still love and want to protect his wayward brother after all his long years of suffering nearly defies belief, but it could persuade even someone as selfish as Caine to rethink his ways.

As Abel is the only ally of Caine whose powers and plans could rival or exceed Lilith's in scope, it's worth a good deal of thought whether and how much you want to use him in this story. No doubt, his presence adds a measure of hope that might not otherwise be present, but be careful not to overuse him. Like Lucifer, his involvement will probably come as a great surprise to both players and their characters, and it's always best to minimize the perception of a deus ex machina when storytelling.

Gehenna

Rather than following a single, linear course, Gehenna happens in a series of separate but related events culminating in a final confrontation involving Lilith, Caine, other Antediluvians and the players' characters. Lilith's objective here is to create enough supernatural disturbances to draw Caine's attention, while simultaneously gaining a great enough measure of influence over the city that his defeat will be inevitable when he arrives. The section is divided into a number of sub-sections, or mini-scenarios, most of which can be used or discarded depending on how well they fit in with the story you want to tell, and also depending on the actions of the characters. (For example, if the characters choose to enter the sewers for whatever reason, you might take this opportunity to run the "Terror in the Sewers" scenario on p. 112.) Each mini-scenario is divided into several sections, including a short description, hooks, recommendations for leading up to it or working it into your story, events and possible outcomes. Although the events of this chapter will most likely affect the mortal world minimally, if at all, some of the mini-scenarios provide for a dramatic impact on the mortal world if things go horribly wrong. An excellent way for the characters to become involved in nearly all of the mini-scenarios is from the standpoint of preserving the Masquerade, and if they fail, it's appropriate that their failure has a great cost.

Two of these mini-scenarios, while not required, are strongly recommended, namely "Follow the Daughter" and "Endgame." (While "Follow the Daughter" is first and "Endgame" is last, for ease of reference, the rest of the mini-scenarios are presented in no particular order.) As mentioned previously, Lyla is intended primarily as a Storyteller device, or to put it a different way, she's the ultimate hook for any of the mini-scenarios. Even if the characters choose to ignore her or destroy her, their reaction to her is important in determining how Lilith comes to view them. If they choose to keep her along for a while, she's an easy yet effective way of directing them about the city to do Lilith's dirty work (or to go wherever you think makes the most dramatic sense). If you really think you don't need to use her, though, by all means leave her out, particularly if you think your players will see her as the plot device that she is.

"Endgame," the other recommended mini-scenario, is probably not optional. If the idea of a confrontation between Lilith, Caine and their various allies and enemies is not one that appeals to you, this is probably not the chapter to use for your Gehenna chronicle. On the other hand, if the ending of one of the other chapters strikes your fancy but you like the other mini-scenarios presented here, feel free to mix and match, and weave together your own ending that fits your style of play. The most important thing is that both you and your players enjoy yourselves while playing through this story. To that end, feel free to create your own mini-scenarios or rework any of the ones presented here as you see fit. We've tried to keep them as open-ended as possible within the framework of Lilith's revenge, but you know your chronicle best, and there's probably something else that fits your troupe more specifically.

It's important to realize that by no means does every player's character have to be involved in every mini-scenario you run. One fine way to run this story, should you choose, is to lead different mini-scenarios for different characters or subsets of characters, based on character aptitudes, player interest and so on. There's no reason your Brujah combat monster should be forced to accompany a Giovanni into the Underworld instead of helping in a skirmish with Lilith's children down by the pier. With this approach, you might run parallel mini-scenarios, then one or two others with all the characters together, during which they can compare notes and try to make sense of all they've seen before the final battle ensues.

If you do choose to run the story thus, we recommend having at least one assistant, but preferably more, to run some of the mini-scenarios for you. Finding assistants shouldn't be too difficult — how often does a person get the chance to help storytell Gehenna? This way, instead of all the players sitting through each other's personal quests, only to have to pretend surprise when the events of the mini-scenarios are explained in-character later, you can run some or all of the mini-scenarios at the same time. When the characters reassemble later, they'll actually have to pool their information to try to figure out what's going on, and they can leave out certain details if it suits them. It's far too easy to metagame, consciously or not, when you have more information out of character than in character. Having some assistants helps rid you of this problem. It also ensures that if some of your characters choose to ally with Lilith while others choose to oppose her, you'll be able to run both angles simultaneously without the two sides knowing each other's plans out of character.

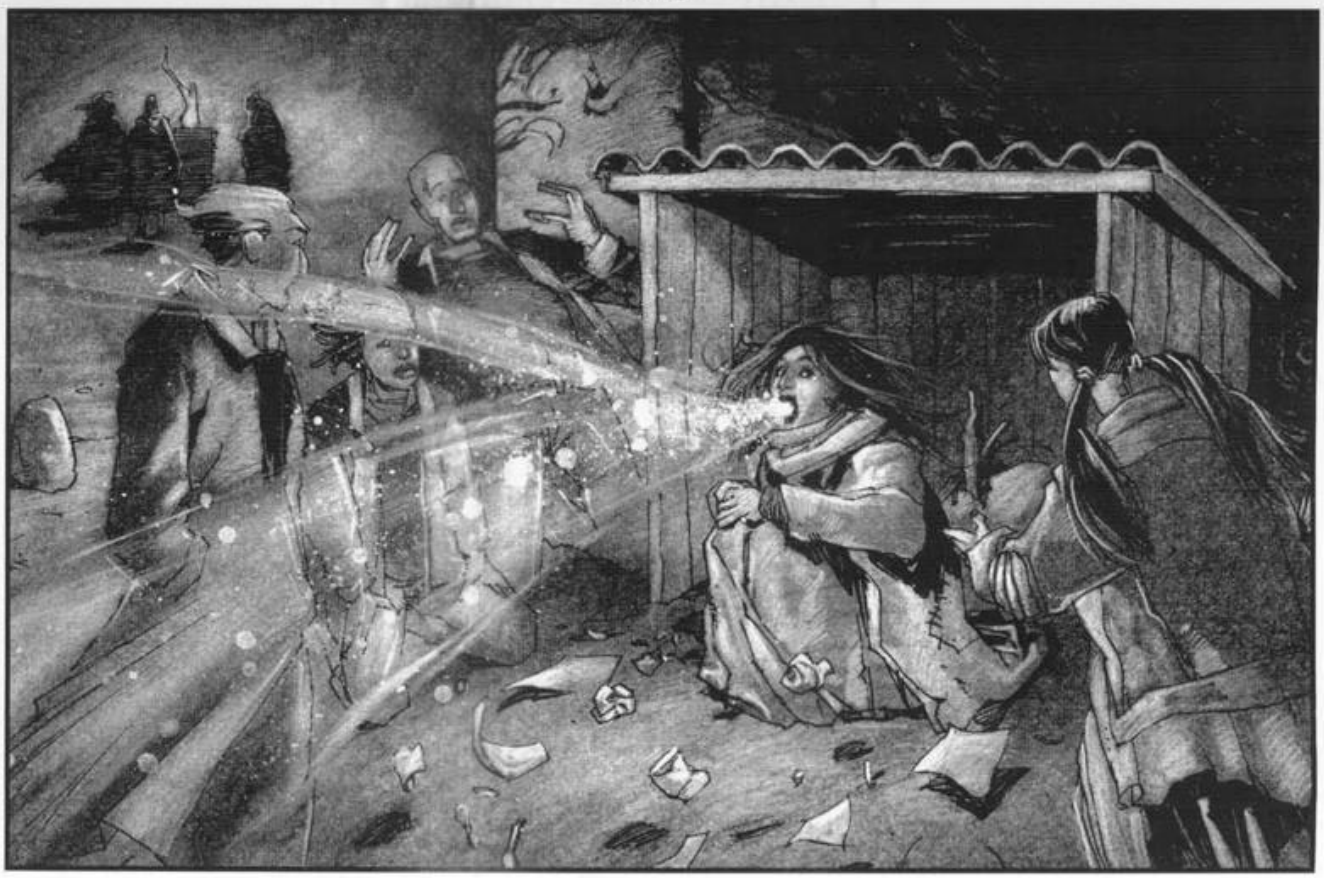
Follow the Daughter

Description: Lyla encounters the players' characters and influences them to explore the city through visions and bouts of prophecy. Some or all of her visions might direct the characters toward helping Lilith while others are red herrings to lead them away from Lilith's plans, while yet others reveal Lilith's agenda for what it is. When awake from her trances, Lyla's surprise at the cluster of strangers following her might inspire her to flee, possibly prompting the characters to follow, or she might return later whenever is dramatically convenient. If the characters gain her trust, she might introduce them to the Apostates far ahead of schedule.

Hooks: The beauty of Lyla, as a young homeless girl who normally slips beneath the radar of city authorities, is that she can appear at any time in the story — whenever you need a hook to lead into another mini-scenario or simply when things start to slow down. A girl speaking in tongues and issuing prophecy can do wonders for advancing your plot. Probably the best idea is to have Lyla appear immediately preceding or following another mini-scenario, speaking cryptic messages about the event even though it has not happened yet (or, if it already has, even though she was not present for it), so as to pique the characters' interest.

Events: The events of this mini-scenario are the most open-ended of any of the mini-scenarios. Most important here is that you decide how you want to use Lyla. Is she a direct pawn of Lilith, leading the players' characters astray time and again (either by false prophecy directed by Lilith or simply by trying to escape)? Is she a confused and conflicted girl, sometimes giving clues to Lilith's plans but other times giving the characters complete garbage? Is she the characters' wild card against Lilith? This decision will help you decide whether Lyla tries to lead the characters, or the reverse, or a combination of the two. It also helps to decide if Lyla's motivation is simple self-preservation, revenge against the world, or a desire for freedom from the one who has enslaved her. Since it will probably be late in the story before the characters even realize Lilith is involved, the decision about whether to join or oppose her might come quickly and without warning. In short, be prepared to shift your plans for Lyla based on whatever your players decide their characters do.

However you decide to use her, remember this: Lyla is very practiced at running, hiding and not being found. She is first and foremost a frightened teenager, and if the characters startle her, they can expect her to run far and fast. Whatever angle she takes, Lyla is not a stupid girl, and when people she's never seen before take



a sudden, strange interest in her, she knows better than to stick around to find out what they want.

On the other hand, though, Lyla is an abused girl who subconsciously wants nothing more than to be genuinely loved. The best way for the players' characters to get her to stay around for the long haul is to treat her like a person instead of a set of powers or a useful prophetic gift, and to express genuine interest in getting to know her and help her. Like anyone, Lyla might change her inclination in response to the request of a true friend, something she desperately craves and thus far has never had.

That being said, Lyla has no idea what she is or who her homeless friends truly are. She's seen enough strange things in her time on the street to believe in fate, and she probably believes the universe has a twisted sense of humor, but any display of blatant supernatural power will send her running (barring a creative use of Dominate, Presence or simple Charisma). If the characters try to explain to her "how things really are," she's just as likely to laugh in their faces as to lose whatever trust she has in them, depending on how they present things. If they do it well, though, she might thank them for telling her what nobody else has. This is assuming that the characters have any clue what a dhampir (or even a revenant) is at all. As for the true nature of the "bums," Lyla will not believe they're any more than they appear to be unless she is presented with physical evidence to the contrary — and yes, that means getting the Apostates to use their powers blatantly. (Malakai is by far the easiest mark in that respect, as she lacks true conscious control over her Phantasm. Simply upsetting her a great deal causes the power to manifest, though upsetting her carries its own consequences with the other Apostates. Also, unless the characters have gotten a hint from someone in the know or they are at last suspicious, they'd better give you a good reason for theorizing that Lyla's mentors are more than just crazy old homeless people.)

Beyond her use as a carrot with which to lead the characters through the various mini-scenarios you choose, Lyla is valuable for adding a human element to the story. Characters who treat her well — like a real person, deserving compassion and friendship — should be rewarded with her trust. Lyla will lead those she trusts to the alley where her mentors, the seven Apostates, reside in their disguises, as she wants her newfound "friends" to meet the closest thing she has to parents. Depending on whether Eickos is present, five or six of them cluster near (but not *too* close…) a burning oil drum to warm themselves, while the last — Malakai — huddles far from the fire, muttering to herself and appearing frightened.

The characters' actions here are more critical than perhaps anywhere else in the story, as Lilith frequently watches both the Apostates and Lyla. Lyla spends most of her time in the alley with Malakai, trying to calm her and ease her suffering, and other characters are free to try to help. Doing so certainly earns them some esteem as far as Lilith is concerned. Those who remain around the fire are treated to cryptic but still relevant bits of wisdom from the seemingly eccentric bums. Most of this advice probably centers upon questioning one's path, particularly if the characters have decided to oppose Lilith by this point. Generally speaking, though, the bums do not reveal themselves as anything more than normal vagrants unless Lyla is directly threatened or someone mentions Lilith, the garden or something else of great significance. If someone does bring up one of these subjects, though, the characters most likely receive a direct invitation from Lucian to join Lilith — which could change the complexion of the story dramatically.

Because their auras are cloaked, probably by Lucian, the bums don't radiate any unusual power, though at your discretion, uses of Auspex or Eyes of Chaos in the alley where they live might suggest that something is "not quite right." Note also that Malakai's madness is still quite evident — Lucian only disguises himself and his brethren as normal mortals, but leaves the other emotional aspects of their auras unchanged. He probably couldn't hide Malakai's madness anyway, even if he tried.

One last note: If the players' characters don't take the bait and they try to feed from Lyla, kill her or condition her into servitude, remember that Lilith and her allies keep a fairly close eye on the girl. There's nothing wrong with whisking Lyla out of danger to report back to her mentors how badly she was treated. (Lilith needs to know these things, after all.) It's safe to say that if the players' characters do attack her, though, they won't be seeing Lyla again until the endgame.

Possible Outcomes: This mini-scenario is most important for gauging the characters' Humanity (or other morality), based on how they react to and treat Lyla. If they treat her badly, Lilith takes note of it when passing judgment upon them at the end of the story. If they treat her well, Lilith notes this also — and they might gain the chance to turn Lyla to their own side or to meet the Apostates who have raised her. This final outcome is the one with the most potential, as it allows the Apostates — particularly those not entirely loyal to the Dark Mother (such as Lucian and Eickos) — to dispense valuable advice to the characters long before the story ends. It also gives the characters an opportunity to join Lilith's cause if they choose.

Courtly Intrigue

Description: The prince (or archbishop or whoever's in charge of the city) calls a meeting of all the city's vampires. Although the prince does not specifically mention the thinning of the Blood, at least one person in the city is under blood hunt (or a Wild Hunt, with a bit of adjustment) for engaging in diablerie. The prince might also direct the players' characters to investigate reports of supernatural disturbances throughout the city.

Hooks: A social or supernatural summons from the prince is probably hook enough. This scenario is probably best run as either the very first, to direct the characters toward other mini-scenarios as you see fit, or after all the players' characters have experienced one of the other mini-scenarios together. (Note: Camarilla terms such as "prince" will be used from here onward, for ease of reading, but this scenario can be easily adapted for Sabbat or anarchs.)

Events: The prince calls a gathering, inviting the characters or possibly (depending on urgency) using Presence to summon them. The purpose of the gathering is to discuss recent problems in the city, most importantly diablerie, but also other possible indicators that something is amiss. The prince generally avoids talking about the thinning of the Blood or the heightened clan weaknesses, and if the characters do mention either of these things, they might find themselves disciplined for it (or even subjected to a blood hunt under a paranoid prince), depending on the individual figurehead. Ventrue princes are probably particularly sensitive about the subject. In addition, particularly fervent princes might choose to place all Caitiff, all 14th- or 15th-generation Kindred, or even all Kindred of some particular clan under Lextalionis. (Tremere is a good choice for such a persecuted clan, since Tremere are all developing that damning third eye.)

Once everyone arrives at the gathering, the prince brings up the main agenda item: an act (or several acts) of diablerie. At least one person in the city — preferably a member of the prince's own entourage or a well-known elder — has committed the heinous deed and must be punished appropriately. If you like, the primogen might then confront the prince at the meeting with evidence that he is a hypocrite who's committed the Amaranth himself as well. If one of the players' characters has committed diablerie as her blood has thinned, now is the ideal time to make her pay for it, forcing her coterie to choose to go into hiding with her or to turn against her.

Assuming that the individual under the blood hunt is not one of the players' characters, the person either is

not present at the gathering or he somehow manages to escape. If the gathering is held in Elysium, the newly ostracized Kindred might be allowed to leave, with the hunt commencing after he has gone. Alternatively, the Kindred could simply jump out a window and run. Regardless, the prince (or an elder, if the prince is under a de facto hunt by now) calls for his domain to pursue the wrongdoer and bring him to justice. If the players' characters are not members of the domain (if they are independents or guests, for example), they can join voluntarily — or they might be expected to join as Kindred of the city, regardless, depending on the prince's policies. Pursuing the fugitive should eventually lead into one of the other mini-scenarios. ("Terror in the Sewers" would be appropriate for Nosferatu. "The Rant" works for a Brujah or an anarch.)

If the players' characters do not join the pursuit of the individual, or if the prince asks them to stay behind, they could be given other tasks instead. The primogen might each present some concerns about the security of the city, or the prince might already be aware of the potential disturbances posed by some or all of the other mini-scenarios. In either case, the prince asks the players' characters to investigate these situations — preferably individually or in small groups, though they can all work together if you (or they) prefer.

Things become a bit more complicated if the players' characters have already met Lyla and they bring her with them to the gathering. Lyla is understandably uneasy about attending a gathering of undead — if the characters explain to her that it is one — since even if the characters have figured out what she is, she has only come to know her own true nature tonight (or still remains ignorant of it). If they do convince her to come, it's unlikely the prince is pleased. Here is a girl who's either an unacknowledged thin-blooded Caitiff or ghoul, or — far worse — a Sabbat revenant. If her tattoo or birthmark is visible and the prince has some knowledge of *The Book of Nod*, this is probably the final nail in the coffin. The prince might choose to decree Lyla subject to the blood hunt also, or simply try to kill her on the spot, which would place the characters in the position of attacking the prince to save their new friend, fleeing or allowing the prince to kill what could be their only lead.

Possible Outcomes: Like the previous mini-scenario, the main use of this one is to propel the characters into the other mini-scenarios in a natural and logical way. Most importantly, this scenario provides a reason the coterie or pack might split up to tackle different investigations simultaneously. It works to advance the story more quickly and in a more diverse fashion than sending all of the characters to each mini-scenario you want to run. If Lyla attends the gathering and the players' characters protect her, that might also serve as a prime motivator for her to lead the characters to her mentors for help.

The Rant

Description: The characters are invited to (or dispatched by the prince or archbishop to investigate) a Brujah or anarch rant, or possibly a *Palla Grande* or other large Sabbat gathering. If they arrive when it begins, they're just in time to see everyone cut down by a seemingly invisible foe. If they're fashionably late, the place is completely empty. Investigation of the site might reveal something unexpected.

Hooks: Like the previous scenario, an invitation is probably enough of a hook, but a request by the prince to investigate the rant is just as convenient. If you're using an invitation, it's probably best to include a game or sport at the rant that only one or a few of the characters might enjoy, to encourage the others to go investigate something else. Some good examples might be a battle, war games (see the **Guide to the Anarchs** or the **Guide to the Sabbat** for some ideas), or some type of exotic scavenger hunt. This scenario loses most of its mystery if the entire troupe goes to investigate it, so try to narrow it down to one or two characters if possible.

Events: The rant is being held in an opulent nouveau-Renaissance salon, complete with full-length mirrors on every other wall panel. This is a new club for vampires and their guests only, and it's owned by none other than Narcise — so feel free to bring her into this if you find it dramatically appropriate. Whatever the festivities are like, something goes terribly wrong, and the guests begin disappearing. If the characters arrive early or on time, they will see the vampires around them vanish, one by one, seemingly into thin air. If they arrive at all late, the scene is empty, without so much as even a bloodstain on the ground. Unless you're big on the dramatic, it's probably better to arrange things (a speeding ticket, road construction, etc.) so that your characters arrive after the carnage has already taken place, since you'll be hard pressed otherwise to explain how they escape the fate everyone else cannot.

The rant is, in fact, the scene of Ilyes' latest act of revenge upon Clan Brujah. (If it's an anarch rant or *Palla Grande*, it makes little difference — most of those present were obviously Brujah or Brujah *antitribu* anyway.) One of the mirrors in the place is attuned to Lilith's garden, and through it Ilyes makes his entrance to destroy each of the guests. Since he is using Temporis, having Celerity or Auspex doesn't help with seeing

him, though any Brujah in the arriving party might be able to detect him if they've developed the Temporis Discipline (which is your call, based on timing and mechanical balance).

After committing his crime of choice, Ilyes escapes through one of the salon doors, rather than going back through the mirror — he has other ways of returning to his mistress. This leaves little possibility of his being found, but it also creates a complication, in that the mirror, which is still bound to Lilith's garden, remains that way until someone enters it. That is, the ritual remains in effect until at least one person has traveled through it each way, though not necessarily the same person, and in either order. It's probably a good idea to plant some false clues here — a dropped piece of clothing, perhaps, or a business card — something that points to someone other than Ilyes or Lilith, so that the mirror is not so obvious. If you haven't introduced Lyla yet, this is the perfect time. She might appear wailing about the suffering of the tens or hundreds who attended the rant, or acting out the method in which Ilyes killed each one of them, creating a potential distraction from investigating the scene. This is particularly appropriate if you've decided to use Lyla as Lilith's pawn rather than as a possible weapon against her.

As the mirror is still active, emitting its own peculiar magical signature, it's possible [with a Perception + Occult roll (difficulty 9) or a Perception + Insight roll (difficulty 8)] for the characters to notice that something is out of the ordinary in the room. If the characters have already seen other odd occurrences in the city thus far, you can make a roll for them to see if they get a hunch to check the mirror. The roll should be Wits + an appropriate Ability (difficulty 10 for Enigmas or Occult, for example). Feel free to adjust the difficulty for anyone on the Path of Caine or the Path of Lilith, also. To anyone who succeeds on the roll, suggest privately (either by whispering or passing a note) that her character gets a hunch to check the room more carefully or (with more than three successes) to check the mirrors. The clues here aren't enough to point decisively to Lilith, but an astute character's subconscious mind might suspect it enough to give the person a hunch.

Anyone particularly observant [succeeding at a Perception + Alertness roll (difficulty 9)] who touches the mirror notices it's slightly sticky, and may make a Strength + Athletics roll (difficulty 8) to attempt to push through it. Potence does modify this roll, and five or more successes cause the mirror's surface to ripple for a few seconds, allowing more characters to jump through if they're quick. Normally, though, unless two or more people push through the mirror at the same time or everyone holds hands, only one person can make it through the mirror before the spell ends and no one else may enter. In addition, since the mirror is an otherworldly portal, use of any otherworldly ability (such as Obtenebration or certain types of blood magic) might cause the user to be sucked into the mirror if no one has already entered it. Users of blood magic may be able to devise a ritual to follow, or modify an existing one (such as one used to enter the Shadowlands) to follow their colleague into Lilith's garden, but doing so will take enough time to allow the person to explore the garden thoroughly first.

For those who choose to investigate the salon and surrounding neighborhood, a few survivors can likely be found. Ilyes is thorough, but using Temporis is exceedingly painful even for him, and in his pained hesitation, a few guests from the rant could have escaped. Some or all would be traumatized by the experience, repeating the same cryptic phrase over and over, or simply unable to speak. Finding one who can adequately explain what happened might be worthy of a side story in itself. Lyla can even serve in this role if you wish. This is an opportune time to introduce Narcise, playing the role of the damsel (or club owner) in distress, and possibly feeding the characters bits of correct information about who was behind the attack.

If one or more characters enter the mirror, things take a turn for the truly bizarre. Whether the garden in which they find themselves is Ba'hara or D'hainu (which is up to you), the surroundings likely go beyond anything your players' characters have ever seen or dreamed. Ba'hara is a savage wasteland of ruined plants and trees, primal wildlife and overpowering elemental hardship. D'hainu, by contrast, is a cool, refreshing place with soothing plants and strange, if generally friendly, animals. In both places, however, the animal and plant life is completely unfamiliar, bearing little resemblance to anything found on Earth. In fact, the line between animal and plant is so blurred here that attacks by trees and bushes, as well as spore-producing or photosynthesizing mammals, are all commonplace. A wide range of spirits, demonic beings, hybrid beasts and mythical creatures are just as likely to inhabit either garden. At your discretion, the characters might be forced to make a Willpower roll (difficulty 8) just to take in their initial impressions of the garden without being stunned for a minute or two.

The choice of exactly what inhabits the garden is, of course, yours. If you're keeping with the standard Biblical interpretation of Lilith, perhaps demons or nephilim (hybrids of humans and angels, sometimes depicted as enormous in size) might be appropriate, and

you can find many other possibilities by browsing the Old Testament apocrypha or the Midrashic aggadoth. If you're using a more universalist presentation of the Dark Mother, the garden might be a perfect place to have the Fates or the Furies, in whatever form you prefer them, to appear for the first time. (It's probably better to do so when just one or two characters are in the garden, to avoid the perception that you're hurling plot elements at everyone.) You might also consider vampiric or demonic creatures from other cultures, such as the Indian *rakshasa*, the African *asanbonsam* or the Greek *lamia*. Bizarre plant-animal hybrids work well here also (including hungry trees, floating bushes or mushrooms, and so on). Include a hedge maze, if you think it will go over well with your players, but be sure to make a map of it beforehand to avoid the perception that you're stacking the deck by building the garden as you go along. In fact, a complete map of the garden (as you envision it) could help a great deal throughout the entire mini-scenario. Remember, also, that the place is as large as you want it to be, so feel free to include hills, rivers, lakes and even regions of varying climates.

If you want to introduce Eickos as a possible antagonist of Lilith or ally of the characters, the garden is probably the easiest place to do so. We recommend placing Eickos (or, better yet, Narcise) in a particular part of the garden — in the center of a hedge maze or perhaps planting flowers elsewhere — so that meeting her is not a certainty, but rather depends upon the decisions of the characters in the garden. Alternatively, Saulot might show up in some other part of the garden, most likely exploring. (If he encounters another vampire, though, he'll still probably try to convert her to his side — see "Saulot's Gambit" on page 113) Feel free to ignore either of these suggestions, though, if you can think of better uses for other Apostates in the garden. Erinye and Ikopabe might enjoy hunting there, while Mekhet could enjoy the garden as a quiet place to study his magic.

If the characters figure out whose garden this is by themselves, or if they meet Eickos, Saulot or someone else who gives them a clue, they might try to take something from it to use against Lilith later. All of the plants are connected to her slightly, as she caused them to grow, but many of the creatures there are her children — particularly the aquatic ones — and they have a much greater connection to her. The Apostates are a special case, not being Lilith's children literally, but still having tasted her blood. If the players' characters later attempt to attack or defeat Lilith with a sympathetic ritual using something from the garden, the difficulty will vary based on what they use (10 for a plant, 8 for one of Lilith's children, or 9 for an Apostate). Note that if the characters get the devious idea of using Lyla in the ritual, the difficulty is only 7, since Lyla is the closest thing Lilith has to an avatar. If they fail, though, feel free to let Lilith to rend them limb from limb.

As for escaping from the garden, this should take more than a little creativity, along with a few good die rolls. Anyone who's willing to step into a strange mirror portal without knowing where it leads ought to be willing to accept that getting back isn't just as easy as waking himself up or clicking her heels together. If the characters in the garden are lucky enough to know some kind of blood magic, they might be able to modify a ritual [Wits + Occult (difficulty 8)] or create a new one (difficulty 9) to leave. Botches on these rolls should send the characters somewhere even worse (such as the Abyss or, in the case of Necromancy, the Underworld). Characters with Obtenebration might be able to escape through the Abyss, though not without cost, and possibly leading straight into the "House of Shadows" mini-scenario (see p. 114). Hopefully, though, the characters don't have such an easy way out. If this is the case, they can wander the garden until they find Eickos (or go back to her if they've found her already) and try to persuade her to help them leave. Although Eickos has her own agenda, directly opposing Lilith generally does not fit into it, so it should take some excellent roleplaying or some darn good Charisma + Manipulation rolls to convince her. (Don't even let them try Presence — Eickos wrote the book on it as Narcise.)

Of course, there's always the possibility your players won't figure out anything's strange about the mirror. Even if you really like this scenario, avoid forcing the players into it by saying things like, "Are you sure you don't want to search the room some more?" or "Are you sure you looked at *everything* here before you leave?" If the characters all return to the prince after visiting the rant without so much as investigating the mirror, you could always send them back. One good strategy is for the prince to suggest they can't possibly have investigated the scene thoroughly in so little time, sending them back with the sheriff or Keeper of Elysium to supervise. If no one decides to investigate the mirror the second time around, that's fine — just send the Storyteller character into the mirror instead (possibly to return later with fantastical tales of the garden, and maybe even a plant to support the story). If this piques the players' interest to try to follow, great. If not, respect their character concepts and go on to a different mini-scenario.

Possible Outcomes: Whether or not any of the characters ends up exploring the garden, this scenario

is great for building a sense of mystery in your story. The disappearing Brujah or anarchs are enough to create a frightening element in the story; adding the eerie elements of the garden to it makes it even more so. As mentioned previously, the garden is also an opportunity to learn about Lilith's plans and to gain material components for use in a ritual against her at the end of the story.

Terror in the Sewers

Description: A Nosferatu or someone else who frequents the city's sewer system informs the players' characters of mysterious tremors occurring there. Lilith has summoned ancient creatures from deep within the Earth to carve her mark on the city in an attempt to exert direct control over the urban landscape. If the characters do not stop her, their ability to stop her other plans is greatly reduced.

Hooks: A contact or acquaintance from the sewers comes to the characters in a panic, begging for their help in stopping the tremors wracking the Nosferatu's home. Alternatively, the players' characters chase the subject of a blood hunt into the sewers, only to discover that something is not quite right once they arrive. The prince might send them to investigate rumors of a disturbance in the sewers or more vaguely, the prince might ask the characters to find out what's causing the tremors felt above ground. Finally, on the way back home or back to the prince's reception area from some other mini-scenario, Lyla might suggest taking a "short-cut" through the sewers.

Events: In a surprisingly bold move even for her, Lilith has summoned three ancient, massive horrors from the depths of the Earth to carve mystical letters of transformation within the city sewers, so that she can gain direct control over the city. (These creatures are the same as those summoned by the Level Six Animalism power Song in the Dark.) Lilith has modified the traditional formula for animating a clay statue by carving tunnels in the shapes of the Hebrew letters *aleph*, *mem* and *tav* (which spell out the word *emet*, meaning "truth") to affect the entire city with a limited form of life. If she succeeds, Lilith becomes able to arrange coincidences in the city to make it nigh-impossible for particular people to go where she doesn't want them to, as well as to direct people to particular places by manipulating traffic patterns, causing old buildings to partially collapse and the like. She also gains the ability to see through all reflective surfaces (not just mirrors) in the city at the same time, rather than one or two at a time. Therefore, it's imperative for the characters to stop this phase of her plan if they want to be able to keep



moving freely throughout the city. Whether Lilith was able to summon the creatures herself or she used one of the Apostates is up to you, but we recommend having Lucian be the one who did it, as this further implies a close connection between him and the Nosferatu.

If any of the players' characters has Song in the Dark (and if Level Six powers still work at all by this part of the story), this is probably the easiest way to try to stop the creatures. Lilith has worked them into a frenzy, however, convincing them that their young are in danger and can only be saved by carving the pattern she's specified. Using Song in the Dark makes the beasts suggestible, but they won't just leave. The best idea is probably to convince one to attack one of the others. The Auspex power Telepathy or lesser levels of Animalism might be useful in this regard as well. For the purposes of combat, the creatures attack only in self-defense, having somewhere between Strength 10 and 15 and enough health levels that they can be damaged in a meaningful way only by another of their number or by a complete collapse of the sewers. Note that unless the characters spread out and tackle each of the creatures either separately or in small groups, by the time they've stopped one, the other two have likely already completed their carving.

Unless the characters have an idea of what exactly the creatures are carving — Eyes of Chaos, Insight or the Merit: Oracular Ability can all be useful in this regard — they might inadvertently make things worse. Since stopping only one of the beasts is necessary to thwart the plan and force them to leave, it's possible that if the characters stop the one carving the *aleph*, but not the two carving *mem* and *tav*, the word *met* (death) might be carved instead of *emet* (truth). *Met* is traditionally the word used, by erasing the *aleph*, to kill an animated golem, and in this case, it literally begins to kill the city. Natural disasters ensue, buildings collapse, perhaps disease breaks out. In any case, the mortal world feels the effects of the characters' failure in a significant way. You might want to suggest figuring out what Lilith's tentacled beasts are doing before stopping them if the characters have an interest in keeping this from happening. Otherwise, if the characters stop only one of them, at least give them a chance by rolling a die to see which of the three they've stopped. Naturally, the "*met*" scenario stops Lilith's plans, but it also creates additional obstacles for the characters and endangers the Masquerade (and probably the characters' unlives along with it).

Possible Outcomes: This scenario has only three possible outcomes. Lilith succeeds (with or without the characters' help), and gains supernatural control over the city, or she fails. If she fails, it's either a simple failure or the death of the city, depending on how the characters go about it. Either way, though, Lilith's plan is not successful. If Lilith does succeed in this scenario, it's worth noting that the players' characters probably can still go most places as long as they're following Lyla, as Lilith will bar Lyla only from places that house Lilith's enemies.

Saulot's Gambit

Description: Saulot approaches one, several or all of the characters and tries to convince them to join him in the fight against Lilith. If they don't trust him, he offers to help them with something they need in return for helping him. If Lyla is present, Saulot reveals her true identity to the characters.

Hooks: Saulot can show up at any point in the story, though it's better to wait to introduce him until the characters have already seen several indications that Gehenna is near (in other words, after they've already completed several mini-scenarios). The garden is one place he might appear, but the streets of the city are more likely, as they're neutral ground rather than Lilith's personal territory. If Lilith has been successful in the "Terror in the Sewers" scenario, placing Saulot right afterward (once the characters discover the city is apparently against them) can be very effective.

Events: Saulot knows that his list of allies is very short, so he will do nearly anything to bring the characters over to his side. His current problem of residing in Tremere's body doesn't help his case at all, particularly with the new third eye afflicting the Tremere, so he does whatever he can to conceal it, using Obfuscate or (better yet) his ever-growing Vicissitude to cover the eye and reshape his appearance.

Saulot's preferred approach is to convince one member of the coterie to join his crusade against Lilith, so that that person can return to the coterie and convince the others. Don't worry if this doesn't work out as planned, and some of the characters side with Saulot while others choose to ally with Lilith — that's what your assistants are for. It's actually preferable in some ways if some of the characters disagree, since this puts more at stake — not just the fate of the world, but the characters' relationships as well. (That may sound odd, but **Vampire** is, after all, a storytelling game of *personal* horror. We're just invoking the end-of-the-world aspect of the setting to test those personal ties.)

Saulot's main bargaining chip is information, namely the information that Lilith and her allies forget to mention. He knows the true identities of the bums — or, rather, he knows they're Antediluvians, having a

sense for that sort of thing — but he doesn't know that Ilyes is the Brujah clan founder or that Eickos is the Crone (or that she's Narcise, for that matter). He's been tailing Lilith for a long time and watching her and her closest allies through his own contacts in the Inconnu and among the mystics of Clan Tremere. He also suspects that Lyla is the Last Daughter of Eve and that she's connected to Lilith by some type of sympathetic link, believing (correctly) that Lyla is the key to defeating Lilith.

Saulot's other main asset, especially if none of the characters have any type of blood magic, is his vast knowledge of Thaumaturgy. Spending as many years in Tremere's body as he did, Saulot knows a great deal about blood magic, to say nothing of what he might have learned during his time in the East. He knows the principles of magic backward and forward, and he can build a ritual for the players' characters to enact whether or not they have Thaumaturgy, based on those principles. Saulot has access to rituals that require neither blood expenditure nor extensive prior knowledge of magic, and he's able to teach them to the characters if they choose to help him.

In this scenario, Saulot's main downfall is his humanity, or lack thereof. Whether or not he was the first to seek or attain Golconda, he left that enlightened state long ago, and he's committed enough atrocities over the years (from killing an astounding number of Kuei-jin to siring the Baali) that his old role of "the good Antediluvian" no longer describes him at all. Even when he chooses to play the role of "the good guy," Saulot's motivations and actions are classically Machiavellian. (If the end is noble, in other words, the means are irrelevant.) Indeed, Saulot is arguably beyond definition of "good" or "evil," acting on stimuli and understandings that exceed mortal potential for comprehension. The upshot is that he will try to convince the characters to sacrifice Lyla in their ritual, rather than using something from the garden or some other item connected to Lilith. To Saulot, the death of one innocent girl is nothing compared with the End of the World — which is what he believes will happen if Caine dies by any hand other than his own or God's. Whether the characters agree with him, of course, depends on their morality, concepts and varying views of Lyla, but be prepared for fights to break out when the idea is first suggested.

Although Saulot is glad to provide information to the characters at any chance he has, he recommends strongly against confronting Lyla or the Apostates. He might even use physical force to prevent the characters from doing so. His reasoning is twofold. First, he knows the prophecies of *The Book of Nod*, so he knows that the most auspicious time for casting a ritual against Lilith is when she, Caine and (preferably) the Crone are all present. Second, he knows that the sooner Lilith learns of his plans, the greater amount of time she will have to retaliate. Saulot knows that he has far fewer allies than Lilith does, so he is counting on surprise as his only real advantage.

Just as important is Saulot's desire to conceal his identity until his confrontation with Lilith. Even if no one in the coterie is Tremere, he knows the rumors the Usurpers have spread about him and his clan for the past eight centuries — and he also knows that he can't truthfully deny those rumors because of some of the less savory things he's done. Unless he's dealing with a Sabbat pack that he knows is disposed toward the Salubri *antitribu* — or that has at least one Salubri *antitribu* in it — he's highly unlikely to reveal himself. Even among potentially amicable Sabbat, Saulot is loath to show the true face of the body he's inhabiting, as he's one of the very beings the sect has sworn itself to destroy. If the characters do attack him for some reason, Saulot will try to escape rather than returning the attack, reappearing later in a different guise to try to gain their support again.

Possible Outcomes: Most importantly, Saulot can suggest the idea of a sacrifice ritual to defeat Lilith if the characters haven't already come up with the idea. He can also provide a framework for the ritual or help construct it if they've already begun before meeting him. In addition, he can shed a great deal of light on some of the mysteries of the story that the characters might not discover otherwise, or he can recommend others to ask (Eickos in particular, as even Saulot knows she's rather enigmatic but apparently wise). Try to avoid using him for simple exposition, though. Instead, reveal only the information Saulot would think the characters need to know, and let them ask questions if they want to know more.

House of Shadows

Description: The characters go to investigate a house, long rumored to be haunted, where some strange occurrences have recently been reported in the news. Once there, they discover quite a bit more than they might have expected. The house is literally a house of shadows, a focus for the will of the creature that was once the Lasombra Antediluvian. As they explore the house, they receive the opportunity to join the Ancient's cause — or to feed the creature, if they decline.

Hooks: Investigation of a possible Masquerade breach is always a good hook, as are Lyla's vague but ever-useful visions. The house also puts out a powerful psychic call to all members of Clan Lasombra, not unlike the pull some members of the clan feel toward the sea. Lasombra should make a Willpower roll (difficulty 8) to resist the call. Whoever fails becomes suddenly interested in visiting the house (or the general area, if they're not aware of the news), while botching the roll creates an obsessive and possibly violent need to visit the house immediately.

Events: The house is an old, run-down mansion or castle, and you can probably gain the most effect from it if it's a place the characters have visited before. The grounds are dark, which is to be expected at night, but even so, it's a little too dark. A Perception + Awareness or Wits + Occult roll (difficulty 8) is sufficient to figure out something is wrong here. Multiple successes on the Perception-based roll let the character notice subtly shifting shadows both outside and inside. Like Lilith's garden, we recommend making at least a rough map before running this scenario, so that you can decide what creatures and other threats or remarkable features are in which parts of the house. The characters are free to enter, but if they just barge in, they don't notice any vampires or mortals (although Matthew Romans might still be watching while Obfuscated). They can roam the house freely, and if they find the catacombs, then just skip to that section.

If the characters knock, a pale, unusually attractive man answers the door, introducing himself as Matthew Romans, the ghoul servant of the house's master. An application of Aura Perception or the use of Clan Knowledge: Lasombra reveals this as a lie, though. Romans is, in fact, an eighth-generation Lasombra. (With four or more levels of Clan Knowledge: Lasombra, the individual recalls Romans' name and remembers that he's only pretending to be a Keeper. In truth, he's a notorious sixth-generation Pander with Auspex, Obtenebration and Obfuscate "in-clan.") Through the years, he has acted as an infiltrator of both the Sabbat and the Camarilla to advance his own plan — destroying both sects and forming a new one with himself at the head. His schemes and penchant for diablerie attracted the attention of the Lasombra Antediluvian, who offered him an arrangement. Romans allows the Ancient to possess him when it wants, to give it easier access to the physical world (being mostly a creature of shadow now), and in return, it has promised Romans control over the physical world once it gains dominion over the Abyss.

When the characters meet Romans, he's not exactly in control of himself — they're conversing directly with the Lasombra Antediluvian. Posing as Romans, it leads them throughout the house, "to the master's quarters in the catacombs." Once they arrive there, the Ancient reveals itself, spouting forth from Romans' body and entreating the characters directly to help it kill Caine and/or sacrifice Lilith. It offers the characters the ability to rule sections of the world under Romans after it has gained control over the Abyss. If they agree, Romans helps them construct a binding and sacrifice ritual for Caine. If they refuse, both Romans and the Ancient attack them with the full force of their Obtenebration. The best course of action in this case is probably to try to escape rather than fighting, unless the coterie has a good mix of Obtenebration- and Thaumaturgy-wielding characters. The easiest way to defeat Romans, if not necessarily the Lasombra Antediluvian itself, is to burn the house down after escaping — the oldest tricks are usually the best. Of course, burning down a mansion might cause all kinds of Masquerade problems for the characters, but hopefully they'll see that coming before they pull out the napalm.

Possible Outcomes: The characters either gain two powerful allies against Lilith, or they destroy at least one of the Dark Mother's enemies. They might also gain some knowledge on how to construct a ritual to defeat Lilith — if they didn't already find out about this some other way.

Children of the Endless Sea

Description: Lilith's children have begun rising from the Endless Sea to join the ranks of her allies. They might not love her, but she's still their Mother. They rise both from the docks of the local body or bodies of water, as well as from the murky depths of the collective unconscious, having incubated in both places for untold years. The players' characters must beat back the encroaching forces of Lilith's army of beasts, lest the creatures overtake the city and enslave the minds of its people.

Hooks: This is actually two separate scenarios — physical and mental — and as a result, the hooks are different for each. The physical half is best started with a request to investigate some strange events at the docks or with newspaper reports of unexplained attacks there. The mental half can begin with hallucinations, dreams (or nightmares),



astral attacks or whatever else you think might grab the characters' attention. Lyla can, of course, be used as a hook for either or both of these as well.

Events: As mentioned previously, this scenario actually takes place on two separate playing fields — the city docks and the astral plane. As these two places are quite distinct, and the two parts relate to each other only in that they both involve Lilith's children, they're presented separately here for ease of reference.

The docks half of this mini-scenario is tailor-made for combat-specialist characters. Lilith has a nearly infinite number of children, and each is different from the next, so you can throw as many of them at your characters as you see fit without it feeling like they're random goons. Every one that dies is one less ally for Lilith, after all. Naturally, in addition to giving your players the chance to test their new weapons or Discipline levels, it gives another opportunity to capture one or more of Lilith's brood for use in a ritual against her. Still, for some players there's nothing like a good, long bloodbath in game, and this half of the mini-scenario is mostly for them. If the characters are aligned with Lilith, you can let them deal with whatever mortals or Kindred are trying to kill her children, instead.

Although this first half of the scenario can be run as a simple hack-and-slash fest, should you choose, some ingenuity could spice it up a bit. If you decide that too many of Lilith's children are crawling up out of the water for the characters to have any prayer of stopping them with simple combat, you'll probably see your players scrambling for a more creative approach to the problem, such as poisoning the water supply, destroying the docks entirely or dropping jury-rigged depth charges into the water. Any such solution will naturally have repercussions on the mortal world and thus the Masquerade, but that usually tends to make a story more interesting anyway.

The less tangible but just as important half of this scenario caters to mentally focused characters, particularly anyone with a fair amount of Auspex. The events are roughly the same — Lilith's children are invading the city and the characters must find a way to stop them — but as this invasion occurs on the astral plane, a great deal more ingenuity is required. The children act as psychic parasites, drawing energy from their hosts and subtly influencing the

person's thought processes. Vampires are luckily immune (though those whose minds are already fractured might not be, at your discretion), but mortals and ghouls are susceptible. These creatures lack the fine control to force people to physically attack the characters, but those they possess do show a marked increase in goddess worship, particularly worship of a particular Sumerian or Assyrian goddess whose name should be no mystery to those playing through this particular Gehenna story. Like all Elohim, Lilith draws power from belief, so the more people her children possess, the more power she can draw from the belief of the city's mortal population.

Although it's possible to run this half of the scenario nearly identically to the first half, with astral combat substituted for physical combat, we recommend against doing so. Players who've chosen mental-primary characters often aren't too keen on random combat, even on the astral plane. Instead, try to encourage lateral thinking. Necromancy might be used, for example, to cast some of the children into the Shadowlands, particularly if the characters have any idea what a mess the place is. For Malkavians, you might consider roleplaying out the invasion of their minds by outside forces (and perhaps of the entire Madness Network as well, which by some accounts is connected to the astral plane), something even more terrifying to most people than outright madness. If each Malkavian has control of the internal landscape of her mind, for example, but Lilith's children gain control of the Madness Network itself, the resulting battle could alter how all Malkavians behave and interact permanently (though "permanently" is still relative, since most if not all Malkavians are going to die along with every other vampire when Gehenna concludes). We can't really tell you the best way to run mini-scenario, as it should be based on the psychology of the characters involved in it. Natures and Demeanors should be a big help in building your vision, though. Use your creativity here — you *are* the Storyteller.

Possible Outcomes: Both halves of this scenario are rather clear-cut. Either the characters stem the tide of Lilith's encroaching children or they don't. Surviving children on the physical plane go wherever Lilith or the majority of the Apostates are — most likely the alley where the Apostates dwell — and hide there until the final battle. Most of the children don't have any sort of concealment powers, though, so if more than a few of these ancient, slimy horrors from the deep are roaming the city, the characters might be sorely taxed trying to preserve the Masquerade.

As for the children on the astral plane, most of those who escape find hosts, who then become subtly more receptive to Lilith's suggestion (which, luckily for her, she can send through any mirror in their house if necessary.) Then they find themselves beginning to worship Lilith, even as a feminist idol rather than a goddess. The type of belief doesn't matter as long as it's belief. (As a result, Lilith has more than one thing in common with demons as well as with vampires, but hopefully you'd already realized that much.) Some of the children instead report to Lilith directly, letting her know that they're present and remain on the astral plane to act as her spies or messengers should she need them. While the physical children are mainly a problem during the final battle, the astral children darken the emotional landscape of the city considerably. (If Lilith came out on top in the "Terror in the Sewers" scenario also, well... think *Dark City*.)

Underworld Mayhem

Description: Lilith has been very thorough in sowing discord to attract Caine's attention, and the already chaotic realm of the Underworld was an easy target. In the Shadowlands, Lilith's demonic children and the Spectres allied with her wreak havoc, destroying everyone and everything in their path in an attempt to find and destroy Abel. In the Egyptian Underworld, mummies, jackal-headed Lupines and Middle Eastern sorcerers carry on a similar search for Set, having been tipped off to his location by Mekhet.

Hooks: Unless the city's prince is exceptionally well connected, he probably isn't aware of this scenario, at least not directly. He could send the characters to investigate unusual ghost activity, though. An easier hook is that with the End Times at hand, a failure or botch on a Necromancy or Setite Sorcery roll might pull the characters into the associated Underworld. Alternatively, these powers do allow viewing of the realm, and someone with an interest in the Shadowlands or *Duat* might voluntarily enter to try to calm things down a bit (or, in the case of Setites, possibly make a desperate bid at saving Set). Wraith allies, the Medium Merit or Haunted Flaw also make good hooks for this scenario.

Events: This scenario is mostly an opportunity to present the destruction of either Augustus Giovanni or Set — or both if you want to. It also provides the easiest method of introducing Abel if

you want to use him in your story. Since both Underworlds are vast, and this scenario potentially relates to events in **Wraith** (or **Orpheus**), **Mage**, **Werewolf** or **Mummy**, we leave the details up to you.

Possible Outcomes: This scenario serves the purpose of letting the characters know something very important is happening, and possibly gives them some clue that it might be Gehenna. It also allows Abel to be introduced if you choose to use him before the endgame.

Endgame

This is it — the final scenario, the culmination of Gehenna. Since it has so many possible outcomes, we're presenting it a bit differently from the other scenarios. It would be difficult and probably tedious to try to split it into a short description, hooks, events and possible outcomes. The end happens, whether or not the players' characters are present, and the outcome is pre-determined — all or almost all vampires wither and die. Since so many different characters might be involved in the final confrontation between Lilith and Caine, we've broken down this section by character, with actions the character might take, as well as actions others might take for or against him or her. Absimiliard and Haqim are omitted here, as their plans are relatively simple and have already been covered in the character section.

Lyla

Since the greatest likelihood is that the players' characters will find their way to the alley through Lyla, she's the first character presented here. When Caine enters the city, Lilith sets a call to all of her followers to assemble at the alley where the Apostates usually gather in disguise. Lyla feels a strong pull toward the site, more because her Insight warns her of a great number of Ancients gathering in one location than because of Lilith's summons. She will make any reasonable attempt to go to the alley, with or without the characters. If she's physically restrained, she develops a powerful headache. This headache starts off mild but quickly develops into a supernaturally intense migraine, causing Lyla to scream and flail around until she's either silenced somehow or brought to the alley.

Once she's in Lilith's presence, things get complicated. Since she's Lilith's avatar in essence, Lyla has access to all of Lilith's abilities through that connection. This means that if she stands with Lilith, Lyla changes aspects whenever Lilith does. If the characters have convinced Lyla to oppose the Dark Mother, they gain (in effect) a "virtual" Lilith to help them. This effect lasts only while Lyla is in Lilith's presence, unless Lyla or someone else does something (probably involving Lilith's blood) to make it permanent. If the players' characters have chosen to sacrifice Lyla in their ritual against Lilith, this likewise only works in Lilith's presence.

The Sevenfold Curse

Since almost everyone in this story seems to want a piece of Caine, you should decide whether or not you want to use his Biblical curse in your story. In Genesis 4:15, God places a mark on the First Murderer, speaking the curse, "'Therefore whosoever slayeth Cain, vengeance shall be taken on him sevenfold." This means that anyone who wounds Caine takes seven times the wounds — instantly — and whoever kills him dies seven times more painfully. Unless you can think of a good reason not to include this curse in your story, we recommend using it, as it makes the question of what the characters (the players' and Storyteller's alike) do in this scenario that much more complex.

Lilith certainly knows about it, and as a result, she's not about to be the one to deliver the killing blow to Caine — she'll avoid touching him at all if she can. The main reason she's been gathering her children together is to throw them at Caine all at once, and most of the Apostates are loyal enough to her (or hate Caine enough) that they'd be willing to kill him for her also. Hopefully, characters who are well versed in religion or the occult (or self-preservation) realize on their own that attacking Caine directly might be a bad idea. If not, you might give them a Wits + Occult or Wits + Academics roll (difficulty 7) to see whether it occurs to them.

Saulot

If the characters are allied with Saulot, he either gives them a signal and directions to the alley or he leads them there himself when the time comes. As stated before, his main objective is to protect Caine from Lilith, so though he helps the characters to set up their ritual (if they're performing one), Saulot defends him directly (with Valeren, Thaumaturgy and so on) as soon as Caine arrives.

Unfortunately for Saulot, the original owner of the body he's using — Tzimisce, not Tremere — has other plans for it. Some time during the

battle, Saulot begins generating random manifestations of Vicissitude, such as limbs elongating while fighting, warping the flesh of his attackers seemingly without effort and so on. Whether Saulot is wholly consumed or he manages to retain some measure of control is up to you. He did successfully resist Tremere for centuries, but Tremere also wasn't an Antediluvian in the root sense of the word. If the Tzimisce Antediluvian does gain full control of Saulot, its mind has likely been so twisted by Vicissitude that it will attack everything in sight, possibly retaining enough residual knowledge to know that it wants to eat Caine, though. Alternatively, the Ancient might have consciously been hiding within its bloodline for all this time, and it might still be quite coherent — but also still quite hungry.

A Note on Languages

Before running this final scenario, you should decide how you want to handle the languages used by Lilith, Caine and the other ancient beings involved. One approach is to assume they have all learned English over the years, albeit with an accent related to their original tongue, and have them converse in English so that all the players' characters can understand what's going on. The other approach — which we actually recommend — is to have the major players speak in their native language, probably a proto-Hebrew or Sumerian dialect, so that only the characters with experience in Noddist or Bahari studies will probably understand. It's unlikely that Lilith, Caine or any of the others would speak in anything but their native tongue under stress.

The reason we recommend using ancient languages is that it rewards the players who chose to buy languages and lore instead of powers or more immediately dice-related Abilities. If only one or two characters understand what Lilith, Caine and their allies are saying, those characters can act as translators, telling the others everything or leaving pieces out according to their own purposes. It's probably easiest to simulate this exchange through note-passing, which is less intrusive than taking some of the players aside every few minutes. Players who have focused on background-related Abilities rather than more physical ones deserve to have something to show for it when Gehenna comes.

Lasombra

The Lasombra Antediluvian might also make an appearance, particularly if the characters have chosen to align themselves with it. Like the Tzimisce Antediluvian, it's hungry, but it also already has a body (granted, one made of quasi-solid shadow) and a plan. If Matthew Romans survived the characters' encounter with him, it prefers to act through him, as the Ancient's own ability to do anything more than affect the physical world with Obtenebration takes more concentration than it's worth.

Romans' body is still experiencing the Withering, though, and as a result, it really isn't very tough anymore. If he falls, the Ancient erupts out of him, oozing from his wounds and coalescing into a tenebrous monstrosity. (The usual rolls are necessary for those who have never seen Obtenebration before.) It then continues its assault on Caine and/or Lilith, trying to kill him, capture her for the ritual or both.

If the Antediluvian does succeed in its ritual — or even if it simply kills all the opposition — it then turns on whomever else is present, including Romans and the players' characters. (You didn't really think the progenitor of Clan Lasombra would keep its word, did you?) By this time, the characters are most likely too weak to resist, so it stands to reason that the creature destroys or devours them, surviving to escape only if it's circumvented the Curse of Caine by killing Caine or sacrificing Lilith and transformed itself into a being of pure shadow. This might seem to be a harsh end, but if your players have allied themselves with an evil as great as the Lasombra Antediluvian, they deserve every bit of what they get.

Of course, if you're using the sevenfold curse, the Lasombra Ancient dies horribly if it kills Caine.

Abel

If you choose to use the restless ghost of Abel in your story, his actions during the end of it should be subtle. His main objective is to protect Caine so that the two of them can have a conversation that's long overdue. To this end, Abel uses the power at his disposal to try to shield his brother from the attacks of those who wish to harm him, but even after millennia, Abel is far too pure a soul to attack anyone directly.

Abel's most powerful weapon is his forgiveness. If you think it fits with the mood of your game, you might wish to simply have Abel appear during a lull in the battle, or after Lilith, Caine and the others have fought to a standstill. His appearance is guaran-



teed to stop Caine and Lilith — both of whom recognize him — dead in their tracks, and it's likely that everyone else will follow suit once the two main players freeze. Abel must utter only three words to his brother for maximum effect: "I forgive you."

How Caine reacts to these words depends on whether you want to emphasize redemption or hubris as a theme in this story. Caine might truly be moved by his brother's words, shedding a single tear of blood and collapsing to his knees with remorse. Abel then says to his brother, "Come with me," touching his hand and drawing forth his spirit, at which point Caine's body turns to ash and Gehenna is over. Abel then fades into his own realm allowing the rest of this story to play out as it will.

If you prefer to emphasize Caine's overpowering arrogance even now, he could reply to Abel, "I need neither your forgiveness nor your pity," walking through Abel's form and causing his brother's ghost to dissipate. The battle then resumes, unless this moment is a good point of entry for Lucifer or Eickos as a further plot twist. We recommend using this second option to reinforce the players' resolve if they've chosen to stand with Lilith, or to sow doubt if they're allied with Saulot or Lasombra. (The previous option can, of course, be used to sow doubt if the characters are allied with Lilith, or to reinforce the characters' resolve if they stand with Saulot.)

Lucifer

Even more than Abel, Lucifer is best used subtly the majority of the time. Still, it's possible that he makes an appearance, particularly in one of two cases. If the Lasombra Antediluvian succeeds in killing Caine, Lucifer can appear and destroy it — as a creature of shadow, it's still vulnerable to sunlight, which Lucifer has in abundance. Secondly, if Lilith falls, Lucifer might appear in order to avenge her. In either case, a simple "Enough!" is probably all he needs to say, while descending from the sky in full angelic raiment. (Notice we said "from the sky," not "from Heaven.")

Even if Lucifer does not appear throughout any of the battle, he might also choose to show himself and rejoin Lilith when she returns to her garden afterward.

Caine

Unless he and Lucifer met before the story began, Caine enters this story rather upset. After centuries of enjoying his obscurity and solitude, he

finds himself forced to travel to some unimportant mortal city to deal with supernatural disturbances no one else was apparently competent enough to handle. Once he arrives, he feels Lilith's presence there and makes straight for her (just as Lilith knows he will).

It's a toss-up whether Caine would attack Lilith or the Apostates first, but it's more likely he'd go for the Apostates, who directly betrayed him. If he does manage to destroy one or more of them, he has to contend with Lilith's fury directly — but this is unlikely because of the sheer number of monstrous children Lilith can use to slow him down. Caine is very much the reactor, rather than the actor, and this is one reason the actions of the players' characters matter so much in the story. Caine is too arrogant to realize he's been set up, so if anyone's going to save him, it has to be them.

The Apostates

It's fair to say that Ilyes, Ikopabe, Erinye and Mekhet fight at Lilith's side unswervingly, in whatever ways you see fit, so more treatment of them is not necessary here. Lucian might act as a betrayer of Lilith, but that depends on how much of an advantage you want Lilith to have, as well as what interactions Lucian has had throughout the story. The role of Malakai is relatively simple as well. If all goes according to Lilith's plan, Malakai is the one who will be given the privilege of killing Caine, as Malakai wishes to do so and longs for the death that would come soon after. Until that point, though, Malakai's devotion to Lilith (though not love...) and her talent for Phantasm ensure that the battlefield can become as nightmarish and mutable as you wish.

As you should already be aware, Eickos is the one wild card among the Apostates. Whether she appears at the final confrontation as herself or as Narcise is your choice, as is whether she reveals herself as the Crone. If she does, though, she might draw Caine's fire from Lilith and the Apostates long enough to give Lilith (or, more likely, Malakai) a clear shot at him — *if* she wants to help Lilith at all by now. Eickos might assist with the characters' ritual against Lilith, or she might try to kill both Lilith and Caine, forcing the characters to choose whom (if anyone) they wish to save.

Lilith

This story begins and ends with Lilith, as her desire for revenge against Caine shapes and directs the very course of Gehenna. Once she's drawn him to the alley, she sends her many children (on both the physical and the astral planes) against him, along with some or all of the Apostates. Since she knows of the sevenfold curse, Lilith attacks Caine only if she loses her temper — in other words, only if Lyla or one of the Apostates should fall by his hand. She has no problem with using the full range of her power against anyone who's aiding Caine, though.

Aftermath

As soon as Caine dies, the Withering accelerates dramatically. Any Cainite who survived to this point dies from thinning of the Blood within a few minutes of Caine's death. It might be possible to transition your game into a **Wraith** story from here, particularly if your characters had a great deal of unfinished business.

Those who were Embraced less than 50 years ago and are of high generation might be able to revert to normal mortals, if they succeed a straight Stamina roll (difficulty equal to 20 – Generation). Ghouls automatically revert to normal mortals unless they've been ghouls for more than 50 years, in which case they die. Revenants and dhampirs may either revert or remain unchanged, at your discretion. Even vampires who succeed the Stamina roll still carry an unnatural taint and never become any other type of supernatural creature except a wraith (after death, of course).

If the players' characters have defeated Lilith, they've really shot themselves in the foot, as she was the only guaranteed way they might survive. Assuming Lilith still exists, she passes judgment on the characters present before returning to her garden. Lilith is a patient woman, and she's willing to forgive the players' characters for being misguided — but not for killing any of her "children." If they killed Lyla or any of the Apostates (or even if they treated Lyla badly), she leaves the characters to die, returning to the garden with whomever she has left. If the characters remained neutral or opposed her indirectly, she might still offer them a drink of her blood, which allows them the Stamina roll mentioned earlier (if you weren't already using it), or a new roll at a lower difficulty (if you allowed the roll already). If the characters aided Lilith's cause or treated Lyla particularly well, Lilith might invite them to join her in her garden and become Lilim.

This final option is probably the most viable one for continuing your chronicle, assuming you

wish to do so. The garden is a massive place, with plenty of creatures over which Lilith has no direct control, and from it nearly every other spirit world is accessible. The characters can mingle there with the Apostates, nephilim, Lilith's children and other mythical creatures, possibly undertaking missions or quests to different gardens or realms for the Dark Mother as well. If they befriended Lyla during the story, this might be a good opportunity to get to know her better, since she is as much a stranger in the garden as they are, and they all might explore it together.

Each time they taste Lilith's blood, the characters grow closer to their idealized selves, gaining new forms and powers based on their natural talents and abilities. After seven drinks, they become wholly Lilim, creatures born (like Lilith) to both divine essence and mortal bodies. At this point, although they remain creatures of the night, the characters are fully returned to life, infused with the juice of the Tree of Life that runs through Lilith's veins, and the story of their new lives has only just begun.

Recommended Further Reading (and Viewing)

A character with as much historical significance as Lilith can't possibly be given a full treatment in just one chapter, even one this long. The following are some recommended sources if you want to do some of your own research on Lilith or the mythology surrounding her. The bibliographies of the books and the link pages of the websites are excellent places to start if you want to search further. Also, many of the books give the name of the college or university where the author teaches, and we recommend contacting these authors via email through their school's faculty directory if you want to discuss their work in depth after reading it. Just explain that you're doing a research project on Lilith or on Jewish mysticism and that you wondered if they could answer a few questions or point you to some other books. Additionally, the writer of this chapter, Travis-Jason Feldstein, is available to field questions via email at pandaemonium@phreaker.net.

Books

The Book of Lilith, by Barbara Black Koltuv.

Lilith, by George MacDonald.

Lilith: The Edge of Forever, by Filomena Maria Pereira.

These three of these books are excellent, well-documented volumes on the history of Lilith.

Lilith's Cave: Jewish Tales of the Supernatural, edited by Howard Schwartz, is a collection of Jewish folktales by various authors.

Rise of the Midnight Sons, published by Marvel Comics. Despite its obvious superhero tendencies, this *Ghost Rider* graphic novel gives an interesting modern perspective on how Lilith's return might look. The later story line entitled "Road to Vengeance," which might also be available in graphic novel form, expands upon Lilith as she's presented in *Rise of the Midnight Sons*.

Sandman, issue 51, "A Tale of Two Cities," published by DC Comics. Also available as part of the Sandman graphic novel *World's End*. Like *Dark City*, this tale presents a vision of a city controlled by a supernatural force, but this is how the city might look if Lilith chose to try to convince the characters they're utterly alone in a city that's against them. It has a creepy supernatural feel that makes for good inspiration, if nothing else.

The Book of Nod, **Revelations of the Dark Mother** and **The Erciyes Fragments** are, of course, staples of any Gehenna chronicle. Do yourself a favor, though, and read *all* the footnotes and endnotes in these volumes, as they're where you'll find the meaty bits. You might find some fresh ideas in **The Silver Record** or in-character resources for some of the other game lines, as well.

Video

Dark City, written and directed by Alex Proyas. A murder mystery set in a grim, alien and possibly futuristic city controlled by creatures that appear very similar to vampires, this movie is a fantastic source of material for any **Vampire** chronicle, but particularly a Gehenna chronicle in which Lilith triumphs in the "Terror in the Sewers" scenario.

Neon Genesis Evangelion and *Neon Genesis Evangelion: The End of Evangelion*, written and directed by Hideaki Anno. *Neon Genesis Evangelion* is an anime series with 26 episodes, concluded with a movie, *The End of Evangelion*. It's a post-apocalyptic retelling of the story of Adam, Eve and Lilith, with dark, manipulative and tragic characters and a nearly schizophrenic interpretation of Jewish mysticism. Replace the Angels with the Antediluvians and it's the per-

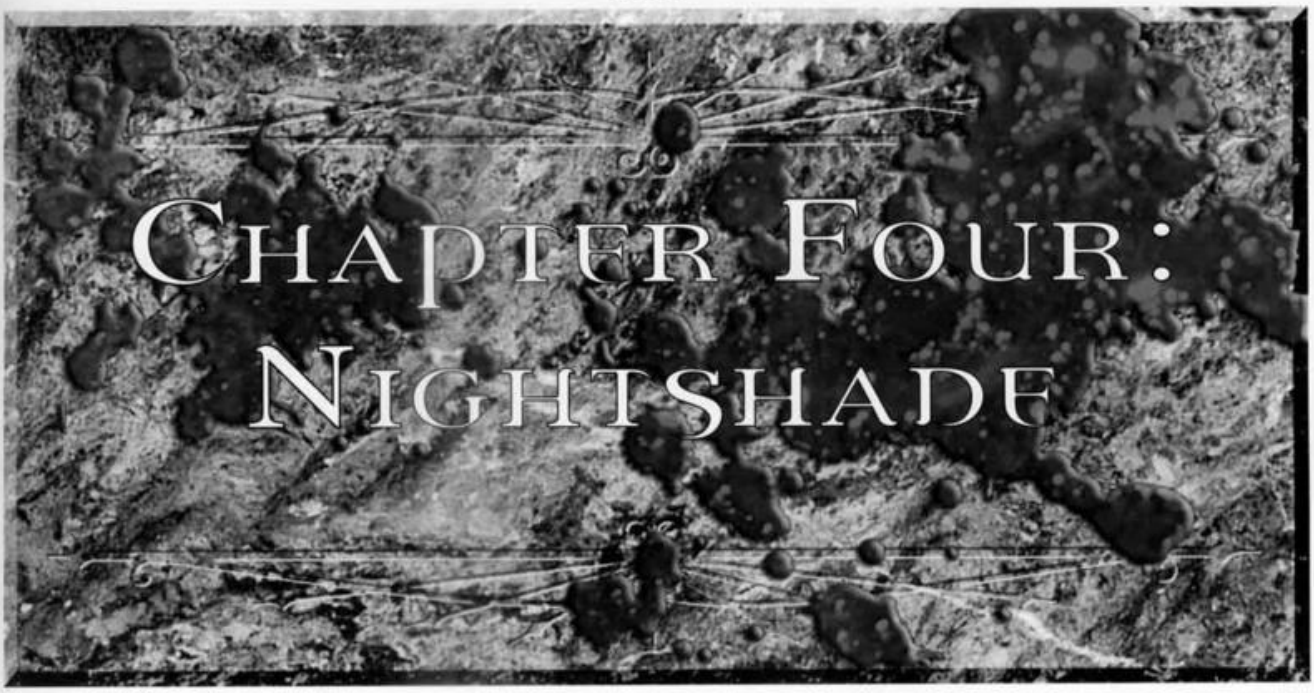
fect inspiration for a Gehenna chronicle. (If you've never seen it before, though, be warned — it's a serious and potentially dangerous ride if you're not prepared for it.)

Online Resources

Lilitu.com (http://www.lilitu.com). A personal site that includes a Shrines page, with links for pages about Lilith, Hecate, Kali and other related goddesses, as well as a page on Jewish Paganism that includes many links on ancient Canaanite and Sumerian deities and divinities.

Sacred-texts.com (http://www.sacred-texts.com). An exhaustive resource for the holy documents of any religion you can name, along with essays and explanations on religions without a written tradition.





Chapter Four: Nightshade

The oldest and strongest emotion is fear. And the oldest and strongest kind of fear is the fear of the unknown.
—H. P. Lovecraft, "Supernatural Horror in Literature"

We all wear masks. In some form or other, most people construct outward facades to use when interacting with others. Most often it is either to hide our intentions or an effort to meet the other party on some common ground. It's not hard to understand; it's the same as how you behave in a different manner when you're with your parents than how you do when you're with your friends. It's not even wholly intentional. Such masquerades are more or less based on our interpretation of the social context through which we interact. The very word "masquerade" implies that something is concealed, but only metaphorically speaking.

The Masquerade of the Kindred in the Camarilla is also metaphorical. It has been purposefully designed to hide the existence of vampires from the eyes and knowledge of mortals. For almost six centuries, the Camarilla has successfully managed to convince the world that vampires do not exist.

Now the end is nigh, and 21st-century Western society is more inclined toward voyeurism than ever before. Everyone wants to know the dirty little secrets those around them hide. Everyone wants to know what their neighbors conceal behind their masks. It's a society beyond the influence of even the most powerful Ventrue dominator. No one expected that mortals, ever inferior to the Kindred, would let themselves be run by such a depraved urges. A desire to expose those around them, to learn their confessions and see what they do behind closed curtains and locked doors. How could anyone foresee this? Since the founding of the Camarilla, the Masquerade has never been threatened the way it is now.

For decades, centuries and millennia, in fact since the very beginning itself, Gehenna has threatened the Children of Caine. It's as if Gehenna was planned long ago, as if the history of the world was just a collection of necessary events leading to the end.

And now, when the end has finally arrived, humanity will learn about the existence of the Kindred. The Machiavellian schemes and clandestine dealings of the Damned will be revealed for what they are. The dirtiest of secrets and most precious of confidences lie open for the world to see. Some see it as a long-awaited blessing, a wild card against that awesome hand fate has dealt the Ancients. Humanity can be not only a release, but also a salvation. But if so, is it soon enough? Will mortals be able to aid the Damned in the impending apocalypse? Or do the actions of humanity actually hasten it?

Prelude: All Roads Lead To...

"Nightshade" is a Gehenna story that deals with two separate fronts in Gehenna, the Ancients and the mortals, both potential tools in the destruction of the world of Cainites, and certainties that things will never be the same again. The coterie must attempt to prevent Gehenna by hindering those events that have been set in motion to trigger it, and the coterie must personally face the key players of the game that is the Jyhad.

The End of the World of vampires draws nigh. It would seem that the Final Nights are coming to a close. Many fear that the prophecies from *The Book of Nod* will come true. The countries of the world will be rendered broken and helpless, as the Jyhad spills over from the world of vampires into the world of mortals.

But what happens? How *do* mortals learn of the existence of vampires, and most importantly, how do they deal with this most unholy revelation? The events that unfold in this story explore these aspects. It can be used just as any of the other stories in this book, but it can also be a suitable end to either of the **Transylvania Chronicles** or **Giovanni Chronicles**, or other long-running chronicles through which your troupe has played. It can also be run as a stand-alone end-of-the-world-just-'cause-we-felt-like-it-story — whatever's appropriate for your troupe and your purpose.

This story takes the characters through the Western world, seeing firsthand the result of the revelation of their existence to the eyes of mortals, as they race against time and events beyond their control to delay, or possibly avert, Gehenna.

Theme and Mood

The themes of "Nightshade" are many and varied. Conceivably, true chaos could erupt as the mortals of the world discover that creatures as wicked as vampires exist, as well as the hysteria and dread among Cainites (presumably also among mortals, depending on how the chronicle transpires) on account of the impending End of the World. The characters should also experience great tension and pressure as they race against time in an attempt to hinder an event that has seemed inevitable since the doom-saying prophets first spoke the words. But unlike Chapter Two, (wherein the world of vampires withers and becomes bleak with quiet desperation), Chapter Three (wherein Cainites destroy each other more or less away from the eyes of mortals) and Chapter Five (wherein the world perishes in the hellfire that is the Wrath of God), "Nightshade" sees a world overrun by wars and chaos, not only among the Kindred, but also among mortals, and obviously between the two.

There should also be a small notion of hope, however. Will Caine return to walk among his kind and reclaim righteous Kindred from perdition? Will he strike down the rising Antediluvians? Not all perceptions of Gehenna are apocalyptic. In fact, some Kindred foresee Gehenna as their salvation. Others dread the Second Coming of Caine more, even, than they fear the Antediluvians.

Concern as to how everything plays out should be crucial to the mood of the story. Although your characters are in no way responsible for bringing about Gehenna, failure to complete the tasks set before them will undoubtedly result in the End of the World. They should be aware of this at some level or other. You shouldn't need to spell it out for them, but give them certain indications to their important role. There *is* no next time or second chance.

These are terrible times. Desperation plagues the streets in the form of rapidly increasing violence, crime and drug overdoses. Riots become everyday occurrences. Random acts of vandalism and destruction accompany plans to stop for cigarettes at the corner store. As a result, despair and hopelessness should also be fairly strong themes of this story.

The Plot

A pretty good chance exists that the characters will stray from the main plot line of "Nightshade" if you do not pay careful attention to keeping the players on track. It's a rough ride through the narrative landscape of a story designed to end more than a decade of accumulated plot lines when chaos ensues all around the characters. We have taken special care in constructing ideas and suggestions for keeping the players going in the right direction, but we haven't paved the way for you. You'll need to keep an eye on this potential throughout. Of course, if the initial driving force to resolve the story is properly initiated — that is, if the players are really desperate to prevent Gehenna — the story should run smoothly, with only your red herrings and the occasional wrong turns to keep them off track. Another problem could involve the players being more interested in other agendas (especially if "Nightshade" is used as a conclusion story to a long-running chronicle). Like many other stories and chronicles for **Vampire: The Masquerade**, however, this story can benefit from a bit of conflict and infighting among the characters. It would instill the same kind of desperation and tension that careering toward Gehenna represents. Be careful, though. As you well know, too much arguing and

infighting can disrupt and possibly even spoil the chronicle. The following is a breakdown of the story line, with brief descriptions of the various acts.

Also, some alternate routes have been included. Whatever course the characters choose, they will eventually end up at Gehenna (see Act Seven), and as long as Saulot is found (either through the actions of the coterie or by simply having him appear if the Storyteller so wishes), the characters can be anything from active players to passive witnesses to the events surrounding Gehenna. No matter how you choose to deal with this Gehenna story, the players should always be encouraged to be active participants in the chronicle you run. (Really, what fun is it to sit around and *watch* things happen?)

If the players should feel that their characters have insufficient information to perform a particular task or proceed with their cause at any point, you should feel free to accommodate them by allowing the characters to consult additional sources beyond those listed throughout the scenario, enlightening them further with any helpful insights. For instance, you could do so by including Storyteller characters from stories you have already told together.

Not all courses of action are fully elaborated, so the Storyteller is encouraged to do whatever amount of work she needs on the material, expanding it to fit to whatever ends seem necessary.

"Nightshade" is not set to any particular timeline or date of events. The Storyteller may advance the story line in the time it takes the characters to do what they need so that she can run the scenario to fit whatever prearranged plans she has, such as with a plan to use this scenario as the end of a long-running chronicle.

Prologue: The Beginning of the End

All over the world, ancient beings awake. Some are known as the Third Generation, the Antediluvians. Others are obscured by history's annals and long forgotten. The impact of the psychic disturbance caused as a result of the rise of these primeval creatures affects every single Cainite in the world. Not only vampires feel it, though. Ghouls, Lupines, sorcerers and other beings with any supernatural awareness (including lunatics and psychics) are also affected.

The Week of Nightmares saw something similar as the Ravnos Antediluvian awoke. This is worse. One by one, the Ancients rise from their torpor, and they cry out in hunger for the blood of their childer.

All who are susceptible suffer nightmares of horrifying figures, moving as if in stop-motion animation, faces obscured, eyes glowing with madness. The dreams are confusing and frightening, with chaotic, shadowy, images twisting and twirling about the dreamers. It's deeply disturbing, and Storytellers should emphasize how dreadful and cold these dreams are. No one knows what they mean, but many have theories. Cries of Gehenna start circulating in Cainite societies, but few princes or bishops address the issue as a genuine threat. Some point to what happened in Berlin in 1993, when a powerful being rose and fooled many into believing that the Second Coming of Caine was at hand. Similar dreams flourished then, so now some consider Berlin to be a more certain parallel for what's happening than the Week of Nightmares.

Nightmares, Nightmares

Every vampire, ghoul, gifted mortal, Lupine and other supernatural being is affected by these nightmares. In effect, treat every player's and Storyteller character as if he were affected by the Flaw: Nightmares (see **Vampire: The Masquerade**, p. 299). The nature of these nightmares differs from character to character, though, so we're not saying that you should substitute this new affliction with the Flaw completely. Find a good middle ground between the two. Try to push in the nightmares every time the characters sleep, however you find it appropriate. Obviously, they could easily have side effects such as paranoia and sleep deprivation, even for vampires and their almost mystical sleep. Doing so, however, opens interesting roleplaying opportunities, and perhaps even warrants bestowing derangements on characters who cope particularly poorly with their new affliction. Nightmares really can destroy people's lives the same way other mental ailments can, as anyone who has seriously suffered from them knows.

Act One: A Removal of Masks

Jan Pieterzoon receives orders from Camarilla officials to go to New York to investigate certain occurrences. It seems that something unexplainable, something that could very well correlate to the nature of Kindred, is taking place there. The media has reported monster and demon sightings, and New York has come under martial law. Pieterzoon recruits the characters to his newfound task force, and the group discovers a beast there, dwelling underground. Pieterzoon and the coterie engage the abomination, and with the help of the Tzimisce Methuselah Cyscek, they manage to drive it into the ocean.

The onslaught catches the eye of the mortal population of New York, though, and the Masquer-

ade is broken live on CNN, broadcast around the world. A monster has attacked New York City, the news reports, and a scourge of vampires led by Pieterzoon and the characters emerged to fight it off and save America. The world is torn apart with this new knowledge.

Afterward, Pieterzoon confronts his sire and denounces him, gathering others to him to head a new faction within the Camarilla — one not bent on destroying all that pertains to Gehenna, but gathering and salvaging it. Many Camarilla Kindred see this faction as heretical, and several terrible house schisms begin.

The coterie proceeds to form a new sub-sect at the Convention of Fire in London. The new faction, the Nephtali, revolves around stopping Gehenna and unveiling the lies of the Camarilla. The coterie of characters is offered important positions within it.

Act Two: Seeking Answers

The coterie must travel through Northern Europe to find answers regarding the Antediluvians. Could it really be that the Ancients are rising?

Act Three: Return of the Dragon

The infamous Tzimisce Vykos joins the Nephtali, and tells the characters that the Tzimisce Antediluvian still exists. The coterie must travel to Transylvania and stop the Eldest before it grows too strong to be stopped. The players meet Tremere (in the guise of Goratrix), who ultimately helps them destroy the Tzimisce progenitor.

Act Four: Ashes to Ashes...

The characters must travel to the depths of the ancient city of Kaymakli to find long-lost answers.

Act Five: ...Dust to Dust

Evidence that the Second City, home of the Antediluvians, might still exist is revealed through a mystical ritual in the possession of a new ally (the Nosferatu Okulos), and the characters try to locate the lost citadel.

Act Six: And There Shall Come a Savior

The characters must find Saulot, the mysterious vampire messiah. Only he can prevent the fulfillment of Gehenna. They must also prevent the Lasombra Antediluvian from manifesting in the real world.

At the Valley of Hinnom, the site of Caine's prophesized return, the remaining Antediluvians are drawn, and the End of the World begins.

Act Seven: Judgment

The culmination of the story, wherein the characters prepare for God's judgment.

Getting the Players Involved

The most important consideration in setting this story, or indeed any story, is introducing the characters to it. But how do you just charge the characters with trying to save the world? **Vampire** has never been about epic brawls or altruistic sacrifice; such things belong to **Werewolf**. **Vampire** is a game about personal horror. But what is personal about the end? No one can be blamed for it, yet still, no one will be let off from it either. The personal horror will come through what individual vampires do about it, which is where this Gehenna story comes in.

Some believe that only those who have achieved Golconda will be let off easily, if even that. The Camarilla hushed such speculation up and hoped that it would go away if they just ignored it, and the Sabbat never really thought that far anyway. At any rate, this is an event that *should* involve all vampires, if only on an emotional level.

That's just fine and dandy, you say, but how do we include the characters anyway? It's not like our troupe has been communing with Saulot lately, is it?

The Storyteller can involve the troupe in "Nightshade" in more than one way. Although the story has been written for a Camarilla-based coterie first and foremost, this is only by default. Courses for Sabbat, Giovanni or even Setite characters are included, and the four might play out separately, or even cross over. What follow are the various entry points of the story. Of course, Storytellers should feel free to include the characters in whatever way they deem appropriate. Perhaps the coterie has been patiently awaiting Gehenna and gone through stories from **Nights of Prophecy,** or maybe even the Week of Nightmares.

• Camarilla characters are recruited by Pieterzoon. Although it seems like a long shot, try to work out a way that Pieterzoon could have learned of the characters and assumed that they would join his cause. Pieterzoon does recruit a great many Kindred, so it's not unlikely.

Perhaps the coterie has encountered Pieterzoon in the past and left on amicable terms. He might have heard of the coterie, if the characters have gained fame for notable achievements, and decided that the characters are just the sorts he needs. Maybe a member of his entourage or one of his contacts is familiar with the characters, and that contact suggests them to him.

• Cyscek, a Fiend of the Fourth Generation, comes to the characters and asks them to go with him to New York and battle the horror that might be the returned Tzimisce Antediluvian. Cyscek *feels* the flesh-thing in New York, as do doubtlessly all Tzimisce of the Fourth Generation. The Sabbat in general ignores it, reasoning that it will hurt the Camarilla. Cyscek, having joined

the Sabbat only recently, does understand the threat, and wants the pack to help end Gehenna.

If the characters are already in New York, Cyscek might choose them randomly. Hopefully though, Cyscek sees something in one or more of the pack members that he can relate to. We'll leave this to the Storyteller to figure out, but it can be anything from a certain philosophy or even the Path progress of the character.

• If the characters are Giovanni, or they survived the **Giovanni Chronicles** or **The Red Sign**, Ambrogino Giovanni can enlist them. Ambrogino craves apotheosis, but as the end is nigh, is it not better to be on the good side of the one person who might make it through the end?

Ambrogino would select only those worthy of his cause to join his retinue. Blood ties could be a deciding factor here, or perhaps the coterie has excelled in a particular field, such as archaeology or ethnology, which is useful to Ambrogino.

Ambrogino also knows a bit of necromantic information obtained from his local clanmates. Apparently, the creature in a dead slumber beneath New York has attempted to act as a beacon, using its unknown energies to draw the spirits of the dead to it. Only a monumental effort on the part of the local Giovanni enabled the spirits to resist the call (though by some accounts, the spirits were "blocked," raising doubts as to the Giovanni's true methods and motivations). Whatever the thing was doing, it wanted dead souls to aid it, apparently.

• Among the Setites, resurrecting the dead god Set is the primary concern, even as the end draws near. Approached by Hesha Ruhadze or the Fire Court (see **Giovanni Chronicles III**), the characters are made part of the final plans to bring back the Setite Antediluvian.

The Telltale Signs

Obviously, a great many things happen before and during Gehenna itself. Most notable are signs usually considered ominous, such as earthquakes, plague, war, famine and the like. As "Nightshade" does not maintain a rigid timeline, what follow are a few of the events that happen, with rough estimates of when the characters can expect to hear about them (the following night in newspapers; same night on television and radio, et cetera).

A Wave of Earthquakes

Around the time Jan Pieterzoon recruits the characters, many countries in the world experience a rash of minor earthquakes. With time, these quakes increase in strength and frequency as doom-spelling harbingers of the end.

Volcanic Eruptions

Coinciding with the characters successfully beating the Tzimisce Antediluvian in New York, several of the world's largest inactive volcanoes stir, probably due to the tremors. Some smaller volcanoes actually erupt, and geysers pulsate with never-before-seen energies.

Outbreak

Springing up in the wake of the New York incident, a strange epidemic spreads from the US to the rest of the world. The symptoms are diluted blood and the effects that it brings with it: nausea, mild hallucinations, discolored skin and the occasional outbreak of bleeding lesions (though this symptom is rare). The sickness causes a flesh-like substance to develop in the blood, clogging the afflicted person's veins. The foreign matter seems to feed off the blood. No one has seen anything like this, and though it doesn't seem to be lethal (at least for now), it's highly contagious. Many suspect biological warfare, but nothing seems to substantiate such claims.

During the first stages of the disease, the majority of the world's population is too busy dealing with the revelation of vampires. Soon many trace the link between the disease's first outbreaks in New York (it takes some time to verify this; few things not involving vampires are in focus at this time), to the monster's recent appearance. Drawing a logical parallel between the disease and the monster is also valid, as this is the actual origin of the malady.

The disease has no other effect than the fact that it resembles flesh-eating bacteria. It spreads through blood and other secretions, and it sometimes even spreads by touch. It does not kill, but it lives off its victim like a parasite. When [Tzimisce] is ready, it plans to use this infection of the human race to bring humanity to its knees.

Scientists soon isolate and dub the disease *cthulhosis*, a nod to legendary American horror writer H. P. Lovecraft, and the corresponding similarity the monster had with some of the creatures of Lovecraft's works.

Riots, Riots and More Riots

The first thing that happens as soon as the world learns that the existence of vampires is not a hoax is that riots break out. Riots typically occur when a mob gathers for whatever reason and pack mentality comes to the fore. Someone comments that "vampires are just wrong," and that's all it takes. Mobs have a tendency to either absorb, or even hurt, those who get in their way, wreaking complete havoc and destruction as they move.

Obviously, riots occur throughout this scenario. After all, they could form any time more than one disgruntled individual gathers at a local pub.

A Second Wave of Earthquakes

This occurrence coincides with a battle between Kupala and [Tzimisce], sending waves of vibration through many parts of Northern Europe that normally do not experience earthquakes. This wave spurs more paranoia, since earthquakes are the second most common portents of horrible events, after eclipses.

The Ancients

During the course of this story, several Antediluvians will meet their fate by the characters' hands. Others die as results of other factors. Regardless of the cause, the death of an Ancient has repercussions. The bloodlines that trace from founder to lowliest childer are mystical and very powerful. When the founder of a line is destroyed, it sends out shock waves that every member of its bloodline feels. As might be expected, the effects are strongest for those nearest and weakest for those farthest removed. The instant the trauma afflicts the vampire of the bloodline, she risks frenzy, wanting to devour another of her line, as if she wants to mend the broken blood-tie.

A player of a Kindred whose Antediluvian meets Final Death must roll Self-Control (or Instinct) to avoid frenzy as usual, requiring five successes. If the player rolls less than five successes (but at least one) the character can avoid the frenzy for one turn. On subsequent turns, the player continues to roll until the character suborns the frenzy entirely — or succumbs to it.

Difficulty depends on generation as follows:

12th-15th Generation	Difficulty 7
8th-11th Generation	Difficulty 8
4th-7th Generation	Difficulty 9

The Red Star

Around the time that the characters visit Colombia, the Red Star becomes visible to the naked eye, though not instantaneously. It slowly appears, as if coming from far away, and astronomers cannot find any feasible explanation for it. Nor can they work out its trajectory or even determine what its appearance means. Doomsday prophets think they can, of course, and they preach their increasingly common warnings of impending doom.

Interestingly, Cainites see in their dreams seven gigantic figures, larger than gods, covering most of the sky, looming against the backdrop of the universe itself. A red eye gleams mercilessly from their midst, and the moon runs red from blood trickling across its surface.

A Third Wave of Earthquakes

Earthquakes strike again, as the characters restore the Second City from the ground. With the other waves, the death tolls from people killed as a result of tremors are staggering.

Breaking the Masquerade

Being exposed to the existence of vampires, mortals can react in a number of ways, depending on what their minds are capable of withstanding. The most common responses to learning something as blasphemous as the existence of vampires include denial, rationalization, fear, anger and acceptance. These categories, mainly built on pop psychology and frequently featured in films and on TV, fit the behavioral patterns most people could experience when learning about vampires. The players' characters will probably encounter all of these responses through the course of the story.

Denial: When confronted by something that so blatantly clashes with one's perception of the world, many will choose to believe that it simply does not exist. There must be some mistake!

When the world first learns of vampires, no one apart from the most superstitious, naïve and gullible, believe it. News channels will refuse to air the news, few papers will print them, and most will see the revelation as a hoax or a scam, if not simply a really bad joke. Most people see vampires as creatures of folklore and legend, improbabilities created to scare children into submission or adults into the church.

Rationalization: The easiest way of dealing is to rationalize, finding logical explanations to what is incomprehensible. It is similar to denial, but it actually includes acceptance to a certain degree. Instead of restructuring one's comprehension of the world, one attempts to force the unexplainable experience to fit with already accepted notions.

Some people, often of an average or higher intellectual situation, or those degraded to apathy and insensitivity, will most likely never truly accept that vampires exist. They will forever rationalize, no matter what happens. Most others will sooner or later face the fact that monsters out of nightmares, always subconscious enough not to be admitted since childhood, are really real.

Fear: When we find ourselves powerless or faced with a dangerous or unknown situation or factor, many of us are struck by the emotion of fear, especially if we cannot understand or control the situation.

Many people will undoubtedly be stricken by panic and hysteria when learning of vampires, perhaps similar to End of the World madness. Some groups might commit mass suicide, killing themselves to avoid being taken by the vampires.

General uncertainty will prevail, which causes all manner of economic instability and downtime, especially when (or if) it is discovered that vampires are

influential in financial and political arenas. Some businesses will profit from the situation, though: Gun sales will soar, as will the sale of all sorts of survival and protection gear. Most likely, many people will also attempt to upgrade their vehicle and home security systems.

Anger: Faced with great injustice, insults, intolerance or prejudice, many often turn to anger. This anger can lead to irrational and erratic behavior and social stigmatization, and it can even lead one to exert prejudice and intolerance himself. Faced with blood-drinking monsters controlling and abusing mortals, and even possessing "life everlasting" despite the fact that they have to be aberrations in the eyes of God, many will want to strike back and exact vengeance.

There will be public outcries, and many will lash out against all things vampiric wherever they find it, real or imagined — like the witch trials of old. Unlike the "witches," however, most vampires would be capable of striking back, undoubtedly leading to more social catastrophe.

Acceptance: This term is a bit misleading. It won't take hours for mortals to accept that vampires exist among them. It won't take days. It won't take weeks, maybe not even years. It takes a bit more than a public announcement from the president for things to work out.

On a microcosmic scale, however, some people will come to accept vampires, just as some people have for millennia already.

Some groups will rise to demand equal rights for vampires, who are undoubtedly persecuted all over the world, insisting on an end to the prejudice. Such will be common in places like Scandinavia, places where people live comfortably and constantly seek to act and protest on behalf of others, getting involved in whatever conflict they can find.

Gehenna

Act One: A Removal of Masks

The Tzimisce Antediluvian awakes on two different continents. One is a soulless monstrosity — the corpse of an undead being, surviving only because of the Vicissitude that its body is made of, the other is a malignant presence. What drives it is impossible to say.

The Antediluvian corpse in New York City sustains itself by absorbing any living (or unliving...) thing it manages to capture, and those who are not made part of it are left shambling and hungry for the essence of life, with no mind to guide them. The growing monster first breaks through the underbelly of New York City, then crashes through to street level.

Agents of Set

Should the troupe portray Setites in the End Times, they all experience an additional dream beyond the ones all vampires experience. In this dream, they are visited by Apophis, giving them instructions to prepare for the resurrection of Set. The characters are to set this Second Coming into motion in collaboration with the Fire Court in Egypt. They wish to prepare for Set's return without the cooperation of only a few collaborators, thus becoming the most august of Set's exalted servants.

The Camarilla is made aware of the horrors in New York, and Jan Pieterzoon goes there to try to stop the monster. At this point no one knows that it is, in fact, an Antediluvian. Interestingly, the former Justicar of Clan Gangrel, Xaviar, once told Pieterzoon that he had been attacked by an Antediluvian near Buffalo. Although that claim was never verified, it is still a fairly odd coincidence.

Scene One: Of Fates Signed

The story begins in whatever city is central for the characters a few nights after nightmares have started plaguing vampires all over the world. Storytellers could easily choose a different location than the chronicle's "home city" if that is more appropriate.

The Storyteller should feel free to let the players' characters roam, taking part in whatever conspiracies and exploits with which they normally involve themselves, even opening entire chronicles based in this city during the End Times. They will still be witness to how the Masquerade is broken, how the Camarilla and the Sabbat are brought to their knees, and how a new sub-sect rises to battle the Antediluvians and avert Gehenna, regardless of whether they involve themselves with it or not.

The Plot

All Kindred are summoned to Elysium, and the prince introduces a guest. It is Jan Pieterzoon, well-known agent of the Camarilla and childe of Hardestadt. Pieterzoon explains that he has been charged by the Inner Council to gather a group of Kindred, from various cities and domains, to go to New York and find out what this new threat entails, as no one actually knows what is happening over there. Parts of the city have been shut down, and the Camarilla is working in overdrive covering up, making sure that the media has

yet to disclose what is actually transpiring. The only thing people have been told is that it is some sort of epidemic, and that it is crucial that people stay out of the contaminated areas. Martial law has been declared, and no one outside the CDC is allowed to move within certain limits in the city. Time is of the utmost importance, and Pieterzoon's task force has to be ready immediately. Currently he has gathered Kindred from Amsterdam, Berlin, Brussels, Paris, Stockholm and Copenhagen, and he encourages the characters' city to offer assistance as well.

For whatever reason the Storyteller determines, the coterie is suggested. Unless the players are bent on disrupting the story, they agree and leave for New York with Pieterzoon.

Scene Two: Briefing

In New York, the players' characters and Pieterzoon meet other Kindred and Cainites who join them in their cause. They are briefed by Donatello Giovanni, leader of the New York Giovanni and learn the following: A gigantic fungal monster has emerged from the sewers and is rapidly growing. It absorbs any living and unliving thing it catches — mortals, animals and vampires — and adds them to its body of turgid flesh.

It Came from the Beyond...

The monster from the sewers happens to be, as readers already know, the corpse of the Tzimisce Antediluvian. Its history and reason for being in New York pays little relevance to this story, but Storytellers who need background information should consult **Nights of Prophecy** and **New York by Night**. The latter is obviously also highly useful in describing New York to the players.

As the coterie and allies arrive and fight off the body, the disembodied soul of [Tzimisce] manages to ignite itself within the body of Tremere. As a side effect of the Discipline of Vicissitude, [Tzimisce] is part of every single Kindred who might have ingested the blood of a Tzimisce, including another Antediluvian, Tremere. Saulot, being the occupant of Tremere's body, is seemingly destroyed as [Tzimisce] forces itself into that body. Both of these events should be felt very strongly by all Tzimisce and Tremere. They dream horrible dreams of chthonic, metamorphosing monsters and of pain and flames and death. No one knows what their dreams mean, or their fits of frenzy were they awake when either of these two events take place. Difficulty for Tzimisce to avoid frenzy when [Tzimisce] awakes in either form is 8 for the Thirteenth to Twelfth Generation, 9 for the Eighth to Eleventh Generation, and 10 for Fiends of the Seventh Generation and lower. Storytellers could choose to make the effects extra juicy for lower-generation Fiends. Sleeping Tzimisce awake with a terror worse than any they have ever had, and they spontaneously frenzy. Remember, Clan Tzimisce tried to kill its Antediluvian, and it is not unreasonable to assume that it is back to return the favor.

Note also, if you're using him, that Lambach Ruthven is immune to these effects. He doesn't risk frenzy at all as the Tzimisce Antediluvian dies in either form.

Scene Three: Battlefield: Manhattan

The characters and the rest of Pieterzoon's entourage move into the "contaminated" area and find it looking like a veritable war zone. Buildings have collapsed; the tarmac and concrete on the ground have ruptured, exposing sewers and underground cavities. At first they cannot find any clues, or fathom what could have happened. Any Tzimisce in the coterie might frenzy, believing that something even worse than the hoary spirits of the Tzimisce homeland has arisen. (They are right.) The extended coterie is ultimately attacked by the monster, and when things seem to look rather dim (the Storyteller might wish to kill several major or particularly powerful Storyteller characters, but not Pieterzoon), a tall figure descends upon the howling creature, wounding it so badly that it retreats to the sewers.

The figure is Cyscek, a Tzimisce who has felt a deathless pulse, and come to NY to investigate it. Assume that other low-generation Tzimisce have felt the same urge, but few other than this individual have acted upon the urge to quell its call and actually resist its powers. Others have come in numbers to its side only to be devoured and absorbed by it, lending it additional strength. Some Tzimisce, themselves under its influence, might even decide to fight those trying to destroy their Antediluvian.

Together with Cyscek, the characters and Pieterzoon manage to destroy the creature. Storytellers, you might wish to allow the players' characters (or at least one of them) to deliver the coup de grâce. Cyscek is gravely wounded in the process, meeting Final Death after a chance to deliver a poignant message. As he turns to dust, he warns the characters, especially if any are Tzimisce, that something bad is coming, and they have to defeat it. "The Dragon rises. You must stop it!" he says, as the wind begins to whisk him away, leaving his voice trailing like a whisper. The last thing he says is, "Find Vykos. It knows."

Even without knowing it, the characters have just fought an Antediluvian, and they escaped with their unlives intact. The battle was hard, demanding, and seemingly lost before the arrival of Cyscek. Do not hesitate to give the characters the kind of aftermath such a battle would likely create.

Other Ways to Get to Hell

If Cyscek brought the characters into the story, they obviously come to the scene together with him. They still fight alongside Pieterzoon, and upon meeting Final Death, the Fiend asks the coterie to go with Pieterzoon, as the Ventrue crusader has a noble task ahead of him. Cyscek has foreseen this, and he knows that Pieterzoon's path paves the way to salvation.

Setite characters might have already been hired by Hesha Ruhadze to help him prepare for Set's coming. Going about his business as an antiques dealer, Hesha has arrived in New York for the occasion of checking out some advertised artifacts on sale at a fine Manhattan auction house, which might hold relevance. More or less ending up smack in the middle when the shit hits the fan, the characters have no choice but to try to defend themselves against the howling flesh monster. Finding out that the progenitors of the other clans are rising is a bad sign. Set doesn't like competition.

Giovanni characters are introduced pretty much the same way Setites are. Ambrogino is in town to check out the same auction house that Hesha is, and he's got his newest agents, in the form of the coterie, with him to do so. As the Antediluvian attacks, it's every vampire for himself, self-defense or not.

Note that all these groups can be present and liable for engaging the Tzimisce Antediluvian simultaneously, if the Storyteller so wishes, making uneasy allies for adversary factions during this battle.

Scene Four: Live from the Scene

As the characters stagger through Manhattan, beaten, wounded and tired, a mere hour before the sun rises, they become aware of the crowds that have assembled just outside the CDC perimeter. They look at the characters, awestruck, and none of them speak. As the characters approach them, they hesitantly retreat, but only a step. And above them hang the big screens, showing what the coterie has just been through, on CNN's continuous broadcast. They see themselves exhibiting their Disciplines, frantically using their vampiric Blood to beat the monster. They see Cyscek dying in their arms, turning to dust. Make sure you truly elaborate on this. Take notes on the details during the battle, so as to better describe them here. This is one surreal scene, and it should be described in painstaking detail.

The characters have just broken the Masquerade.

On the Air

On the huge screen above the mass of gathered people, addled by shock and terror, but also awe, network correspondent Courtney Kwan reports live from the scene. The screen is split, Kwan on one half, and scenes from the battle on the other, and updates roll across the bottom.

"—insist that the situation is under control." She adjusts her hair, shuffles some papers she is holding, and continues. "Authorities have deployed troops from the US Army, and the entirety of Manhattan is now to be considered under martial law, after what can only be described as an otherworldly monster, according to eyewitnesses, suddenly appearing in the… Oh, we can now see the survivors of the confrontation! They're headed this way! They look injured. Let's see if we can get a better view. (Sidney, get that damn camera around!) We'll attempt to get a comment from these individuals, all described by eye-witnesses as displaying *fantastic* abilities, as you can no doubt see from the footage from the scene. I'll just… (Excuse me, ma'am, coming through! Are you following, Sidney?) Excuse me! Sir! Sir! We're with CNN, could we please get a statement?"

Scene Five: Consequences

The world has watched as frenzying vampires battled an unspeakable evil on the streets of New York at night. The Masquerade lies shattered. Camarilla elders from all over the world run to New York to try to fix the damage, but it's too late. All the influence in the world cannot repair the breach. Attempts to cover it up by claiming a movie was being filmed and the like fail, especially as young vampires emerge from their wretched unlives to become stars on nightly talk shows or 60 *Minutes*. Some even allow scientists to perform examinations on them live on TV.

The first few nights are the hardest. The mortal population surges with hysteria and paranoia, and homicide rates triple, as both individuals and hurriedly formed groups take God's justice in their own hands, burning both vampires and innocent mortals.

Vampires?!

News stations and TV channels paint vampires in a variety of shades, most debating what their true motives or origins might be, despite whatever Cainites themselves reveal to the press.

- During the first hours and days of the "Week of Revelations," those not succumbing to paranoia and panic write off vampire sightings as outbreaks of mass hysteria. After all, it's the only logical explanation.



For example, Doctor R. J. Carter of Oxford University says in an interview printed in the *London Times* that what the world is experiencing is an unusual and surprisingly widespread form of mass hysteria. He explains that the condition is not at all uncommon, though certainly more frequent in Third-World countries and superstitious and highly religious cultures, and he points out that the real focus of interest should be this new and astonishing hysteric occurrence. He cites the many strange cases of outbreaks of mass hysteria during July of 1999, especially in India and also explains how most of the victims have since recovered.

• There is no way to explain vampires through scientific methods (after all, they are innately supernatural). Therefore, the possibility of their existence is not plausible to the scientific mind, being nothing short of a logical impossibility.

Professor Jonathan Waldworth of Princeton University is famous for having exposed the illusions of David Copperfield and Siegfried & Roy. Professor Waldworth is interviewed on a major news channel, claiming to have definite proof that vampires are merely pathologically socialized people desperately seeking attention, who are employing a variety of simple, illusory tricks common to those of stage magicians. While his theories are obviously well conceived, they are obviously not as accurate as the good professor believes.

• Some apologists see vampires as just regular people. These people claim that vampires never really hurt anyone. They're just like the next guy, except that they go out only at night, drink blood and catch fire if they're exposed to the sun.

As one individual phrases it in footage of random people interviewed on a major talk show, "Yeah, I know this guy who's a vampire. I think he's been one for like 15 years or something. Got turned way before all that talk about 'evil bloodsuckers.' May not be much of a looker, but he's pretty popular with the ladies, I can tell you that!" (Laughs) "A decent sort of fellow. All this discrimination nowadays is a disgrace. Nobody cared back in the day."

• Some think that vampires have to be the result of cloning, other such genetic experimentation or even a blood disease that warps both the mind and the body of the afflicted to various degrees.

Doctor Raleigh Davidson of Johns Hopkins University postulates in the medical journal *Medicine Tomorrow* that vampirism is a disease transferable by blood. Says Dr. Davidson in his article, "It is merely a question of time before we unlock the secrets of this grotesque ailment."

Governments move hastily to keep the world from being torn apart with this new knowledge. Europeans in general dismiss it as a hoax, believing the Camarilla propaganda that it is merely the Americans showing off with their CGI again. Religious groups and doomsday sects emerge on a wide scale, calling for national witch-hunts of vampires. The US government realizes the potential in vampire soldiers but is terrified when the Camarilla finally reveals itself. Hurriedly, the Senate passes a new law demanding that all vampires register themselves with the authorities. In addition, the government appoints a Special Task Force under direct command of the NSA, and assigns to it (among others) the entirety of the FBI Special Affairs Division. Its mission is to arrest and confine any vampires who do not register. Many thin-bloods, but hardly any stronger vampires, are arrested and put in camps.

The EU, on the other hand, signs a treaty with the Camarilla, acknowledging the secret influence and power the Camarilla has wielded since its inception. Efforts are set into motion to integrate vampires in the European community, which is mostly met with public outcry, especially in Catholic countries such as Italy and Ireland, but also in Eastern Europe and other places where the vampire legend has been most vital.

The Vatican issues a decree that vampires are the evil spawn of Satan, and, frankly, both the Society of Leopold and the Imbued are having field days.

The breaking of the Masquerade is dubbed the Unmasking among Cainites, while mortals refer to what has happened as the Week of Revelations.

This is not so much a scene as a series of events played out over a few weeks or even months. Walk your players through them, as their characters most likely went into hiding after becoming the first people in the world famed for their vampirism.

Whenever things seem like they are fairly cooled down, however, a Malkavian cult known as the Heralds of Golconda is broadcast on CNN revealing the secrets that the Camarilla would prefer remain obscured. They talk about the existence and threat posed by the Antediluvians, who are awakening now, and the signs and portents of the prophesized Gehenna in *The Book of Nod*.

Live News Update

With the bustling BBC news offices behind her, anchor Jennifer McBride greets the viewers with a serious expression upon her face.

"Good afternoon. In the face of mounting public pressure, the European Union has today come to an agreement with the vampire organization known as the Camarilla." She pronounces the name "cah-mah-REE-yah." "Spokespersons say that a treaty will be signed, in which the Camarilla's position as an advisory organ to Brussels will be made official and recognized as an independent sphere of influence integrated into the union. Economic consequences were also examined, and the full details on the treaty will be released before noon tomorrow." She shuffles her papers and goes on.

"In Kurdistan, Iraq, a religious leader, Mullah Mounir, has gone public literally praising vampires. The Mullah preaches, and I quote, that 'Allah's angels have finally come to punish the infidels for their heretical wars against Islam,' unquote. Similar reports have come in from all over the world." She pauses, and goes on to her next piece of paper.

"In the United States, local politician Bob Horton of Brackwood, Louisiana has convinced members of his constituency as well as the members of the local NRA chapter to stockpile provisions and ammunition, and lock up and protect their family members at any cost from, and I quote, 'these blood-sucking hellspawn,' unquote. Horton has since been arrested, after it was revealed that since he owned both the local firearms dealership and grocery store, he thereby profited greatly from encouraging this stockpiling.

"Remaining in the US, in Washington today, the US Senate introduced legislation that would see all vampires in the country registered and thoroughly investigated by the Federal Bureau of Investigation. Easy passage is expected. Over to Jim Bradley reporting from Washington."

Scene Six: All Good Things...

The characters are summoned to counsel with Pieterzoon in a conference room of the Waldorf-Astoria (if you have used **New York by Night** in the past, note that use of the hotel probably comes as a boon from the Ventrue Valentine). He briefs them further on the situation, as well as on how they should act if they are sought out by the media, as he has been. As Pieterzoon finishes up his briefing, the doors open, and a man of an incredibly powerful aura enters. He is Hardestadt, one of the Founders of the Camarilla. Behind him follows a shorter, stockier man, also possessing a remarkably strong aura, though lesser in comparison to Hardestadt. He is Rosenkrantz the Younger, Prince of Bergen, Norway, and the grandchilde of Hardestadt.

Pieterzoon immediately leaps to his feet, and the characters should be compelled to do the same.

"Jan," the elder vampire states, dryly.

"Sire," Pieterzoon replies, with evident surprise.

"Leave us, childer," Hardestadt commands the characters, without even looking at them. Although they might feel insulted, they have no choice, and they do not even manage to get in a word. Rosenkrantz follows them out and addresses them.

Rosenkrantz explains that he and his grandsire have come to New York to oversee the Camarilla cleanup of the situation. He tells them that Pieterzoon is likely to receive considerable punishment, most likely by Final Death, for what he has done, and that the characters will probably receive the same punishment. He himself has an amicable tone of voice with the characters, almost worried, and he seems to genuinely want to help the characters (even though he can't).

"Cyscek was one of my dearest fellows," he confesses. "I spoke with him before he left for New York. He went there because he felt the... thing you fought calling him." He goes on, "That... thing... was his master. The father of all Tzimisce."

He goes on to explain more about the Antediluvian (divulge what you like at your own discretion), and how, according to myth, it is probably not even dead. "Events are escalating all over the world," he says. "Even as we speak, volcanoes all over the world have been erupting. Earthquakes destroy major cities in the Americas as well as in the East. These are all mystical signs. Are you familiar with the ancient tome of lore known as *The Book of Nod*?" Whatever they reply, he fills them in on what they would otherwise miss. About Gehenna, he admits to them that things look fairly bad, and that many fear that the world will end. He explains how Pieterzoon has been duped, as has nearly every other Camarilla vampire, into believing that the Antediluvians do not exist, and that they have been covering up the truth: The End Times have long been in motion.

He is about to continue, when the doors to the conference room open again, and Jan comes storming out. He has a look about him, as if he's almost surprised.

"Come, friends," he says to the characters, emphasizing "friends." "We are leaving."

"Uncle," Rosenkrantz salutes Pieterzoon as the determined Ventrue rushes past, but Pieterzoon does not reply. The characters had best follow, else they suffer the rage of Hardestadt. If they don't get this but insist on bothering Rosenkrantz, Pieterzoon ushers them to follow and share the information with him.

Jan leads them to another floor to his private chambers.

If the characters divulge their newfound lore to Jan, he first disbelieves them. Then he consults his nephew Rosenkrantz, and finds out the truth. He is furious.

Together with the coterie, he walks in on Hardestadt and other high-ranking Camarilla elders currently residing in New York to evaluate the situation of the Camarilla, and he confronts them with what he has learned. The righteous bastards. Who the fuck do they think they are, what the fuck have they been sending him around all these years for, destroying artifacts and documents that could potentially have prevented all of this? Hardestadt pulls himself to his full height, ready to punish his disrespectful childe with all his might, and... nothing happens. His powers do not affect Jan.

Weakening of the Blood

The Blood is weakening. Every drop of vitae in every vampire in the world shifts, as the Curse of Caine weakens. A wave of overwhelming fear and anxiety spreads through Kindred and Cainite communities. Some suffer from spasms as their blood is less stable than it used to be, some find that they cannot use their blood at all, at least not all the time. Desperation sets in, and many turn on their own kind to try to remedy their sudden near-impotence. Some powers do not work as well as they should, and the vampires' capacity for storing blood in their bodies lessens. All Discipline usage suffers a chance of failure, as the vitae that flows through the veins of the Children of Caine is no longer as stable as it used to be.

At this stage of the story, introduce the players' characters to the effects of the Withering, as discussed in Chapter One. The weakening of the Blood does not happen spontaneously, but rather it spreads, almost corresponding to outbreaks of the mortal epidemics. That is not to say that there is any necessary connection between the two, and as far as the characters are concerned, they notice the weakening about the same time as Hardestadt. You can either let the process unfold over time, or simply declare that it just happens.

Scene Seven: Must Come to an End

Jan requests that the coterie meet with him at the hotel, and he asks them to sit.

"My dear Kindred," he begins, "things are changing. The Dark Age of the Camarilla is over, and a new order will rise from its ashes like a phoenix. I have renounced my sire, and his shadow conspiracy that I now understand for its emptiness." He pauses, removing his glasses and rubbing his eyes.

"I have a proposition for you," he continues. "I would like you join me in a new venture, and one not involved in this wretched Jyhad. An organization fo-

cused on more important and imminent emergencies: Gehenna. For years, I have been played for a fool and sent about on the errands of fools, charged with destroying evidence of Gehenna and the Antediluvians. That I could have been so blind..." The characters can respond in any way they like, but this is still a seventh-generation Ventrue we're talking about.

He goes on, "We need to act with haste, to unearth all those secrets that the Camarilla has hidden or overlooked, to try to make some sense of it all." Further, he wants the characters to join him and sit with him (and a few others) as the Council of a new faction of the Camarilla. If they are willing, they will be undertaking the serious task of traveling around the world to seek answers and find out how to prevent Gehenna from ever happening. The players are obviously free to choose whether their characters want to or not.

Hell, No!

There are several ways to continue your chronicle even if your players' characters refuse to take part in any Antediluvian-hunting trips, no matter what faction they belong to, or they really can't be bothered going around shaking down all manner of people for information they don't really give two figs about.

One is to allow the characters to go about their business while Gehenna kicks into overdrive and the world falls apart around them. This option is easy for the Storyteller to take — just use the events of the plot of this scenario (or any of the other ones) and extend them so they affect the characters. If the coterie is not around to stop the Antediluvians, the Ancients will succeed, and that's just bad for *everyone*.

Alternatively, the characters might wish to further Gehenna, considering everlasting servitude to one Antediluvian or another the best way out of this mess. Well, if Saulot doesn't accept judgment on behalf of all Cainites, all are likely to be smacked down, but not if you don't want that to happen. That would become one bizarre chronicle though, wouldn't it?

Finally, you might also consider blending this story with one of the other scenarios presented in this book. For instance, have a look at Chapter Five, and perhaps even change the focus of this story to fit that scenario better instead. That way, if the players insist on remaining autonomous, you can show their characters the righteous fury of the Ancients.

On the streets of New York, and presumably everywhere else in the world, vampires go mad with the fear of losing their powers. Discarding mortal victims, they prey on each other, hoping that vitae will allow them to regain their power even if mortal blood does not. Another portent of *The Book of Nod* has come true: "*Those who eat heart's blood will flourish.*" Hopefully, the characters manage to restrain themselves. Jan does, at least, and he attempts to fight off any character who attacks him, favoring his own unlife over that of a reckless would-be diablerist.

Act Two: Seeking Answers

Jan leads any willing characters back to London, where he arranges the Convention of Fire. He has many allies in London, and with the weakened blood of those who claim it as domain, Jan and his sympathizers soon usurp the mantle of power. If you like, you could play out this coup, giving the players' characters the chance to actually foil or even kill some rival Storyteller characters familiar to them. In any event, the players should feel like valued contributors to Jan's new faction. Don't relegate them to roles of watching the Storyteller character's plans come to fruition.

Opening London to any Kindred or Cainite willing to join the cause, Pieterzoon manages to gather an appreciable group of vampires. Since their departure from New York, Jan has spread the word of the truth, with the help of his latest ally, the Nosferatu Calebros, who has also come to London with the coterie. The Camarilla feels its foundations weaken, as the lower classes of its hierarchy joins this radical faction.

Scene One: The Convention of Fire

Cainites from all over the world have arrived in London for the Convention of Fire. The Camarilla can only watch, impotent and powerless, join up no longer bound by the shackles of the blood bond, no longer suffering under the yoke of elder oppression maintained by the Camarilla for so long. Many Sabbat also join, but the Sabbat outside Europe seem to enjoy the fragmentation and crippling of the rival Camarilla, seeing the foundation of the new faction as mainly a European phenomena. While they'd hate to admit it, however, their sect is collapsing as well. The elders have absolutely no control over its rampant lower ranks. Not only are Sabbat vampires more inclined to diablerie than their Camarilla counterparts are, but also their lack of respect for humanity causes their minions to wreak more havoc and destruction than is frankly convenient for the Sabbat.

For the time being at least, it would seem that Pieterzoon's convention is the one faction with the most sway over its subjects, accepting only those displaying a true commitment to learning the truth and saving the world. Obviously, it's no easy task dividing those who are only in it to save their skin from those

with true commitment, but most seem to work together with only minor outright conflict.

Ambassadors for the Giovanni (represented by Ambrogino Giovanni and retinue), the Setites (represented by Hesha Ruhadze and some of his associates) and the Assamites (represented by Fatima al-Faqadi) join the Convention of Fire as diplomats, having extended wishes to maintain a friendly relationship with the new sub-sect, upon Pieterzoon's invitation. Knowing full well that none of these clans can be fully trusted, Pieterzoon asks the coterie to pay particular attention to these diplomats. (Obviously, groups following different courses might find themselves at this meeting as ambassadors anyway. After all, they might have participated in the stand against the Antediluvian in New York.)

It is strongly suggested that if you wish to play out the Convention of Fire, the players' characters should have an active role in planning and administrating it. After all, this is their party as much as it is Pieterzoon's. Play the part as Pieterzoon and any additional councilors, and allow the players to organize the Convention, propose rules and regulations, and set motives and agendas. Bear in mind that the faction will be mainly occupied in breaking the Sabbat and older Camarilla spheres of influence, as well as seeking out answers about and ways to avert Gehenna, which will be the coterie's chief concern. (Pieterzoon delegates this very important task to the players' characters.)

A council of 12 vampires administers the faction, and Pieterzoon will be its leader. Pieterzoon is a very just and righteous Cainite, and it is generally agreed upon that he will make a fit leader. Rest assured that he makes executive decisions only whenever the Council is unable to reach an agreement, so the Council remains the main body of management.

Unlike the Sabbat and Camarilla of the past, the faction is not secret. In fact, it is largely left open for public scrutiny, the same way mortal organizations are.

Also allow the players to take an active part in naming the new faction. Pieterzoon's suggestion is the Nephtali, having Biblical significance. It literally means "the highest point," or "no further," used in prohibiting an advance or encroachment, and referring to how Gehenna shall be stopped and allowed no further. (For ease of reference, the new faction will be referred to as the Nephtali throughout the rest of this chapter.)

Scene Two: Off to See the Father

Depending on how long it takes the characters and Pieterzoon to arrange and hold the Convention of Fire (it could take nights, weeks or even months), the Nephtali immediately sets to work as soon as it is ready. Pieterzoon sends out groups of Kindred as envoys to vampires of other cities to invite more to join them, or to forge relationships with independent communities. Some groups check out leads or seek information regarding Gehenna, and (most importantly) whether or not the Antediluvians are rising. If they are rising, there must be some way of stopping them. These groups all report back to London, where a veritable center of intelligence has been established, allowing the most scholarly of the Nephtali to process the information and work out as many answers as possible. The coterie likely constitutes one of these groups, unless the characters take a more administrative role in organizing the groups in the field.

Pieterzoon sends a message or calls a meeting with the characters, telling them that he has received word that a group called the Get of Caine has resurfaced, and that he needs someone reliable to check it out. The Get of Caine was last heard from in 1993, when it rose to follow the word of the False Caine, a Ravnos named Ankla Hotep, who for a while had everyone wondering whether or not he was, in fact, Caine. (This story is chronicled in **Berlin by Night**.) As far as Pieterzoon is aware, Ankla Hotep is still around, and though he turned out not to be Caine, he is considered to have substantial insight on the current situation. The coterie needs to seek him out and interview him, to find out what he might know. The cult was last heard of in Berlin and is now known as the Cult of Caine.

Scene Three: Fire on the Streets of Berlin

Perhaps surprisingly, it is not difficult to get from London to Germany not even in these troubled times (but the other way around is another story). As long as the coterie seemingly passes for mortals, the characters should be relatively safe. Storytellers are free to hassle them with encounters on the way, but this is frankly not necessary. Again, let the players themselves decide how they want to travel.

Whatever the characters expected from Berlin, it is anything but as calm as London.

The streets are empty and littered, and countless fires abound in the wake of the persecution of vampires. People are few and far between, most staying inside out of fear of what's out there. The characters should be shocked by what they see. No one has spoken about this, so how could they know that things were this bad?

There are speakers mounted in squares and on corner of streets, repeating public announcements telling people to remain calm and stay inside until the government has resolved everything.

Scene Four: The Underground Commune

The characters do not have to scour the entire Berlin metropolis before locating the local Kindred. In fact, they were spotted the minute they entered the city by a Nosferatu named Stefan, whose mission it is to keep an eye on any new arrivals, determine whether or not they are hostile, and if not, bring them to the relative safety of the local vampiric commune.

Unless the characters act like buffoons or reckless maniacs, Stefan will approach them and invite them to the commune. If asked what it is, he only tells them to wait and see. If asked about Ankla Hotep, he says they need to speak to the leader of the commune.

The characters find that the entirety of the Berlin Cainite population has relocated to a near camp-like location below the suburb Schönefeld. The place is the would-be site for an airport, but the Berlin Kindred, led by a Toreador called Hans Zroenik (also known as the Maestro), have turned it into their sanctuary. These Kindred are as scared as the mortals above, and distrustful of strangers, after packs of diablerists have rampaged through the streets of Berlin and several other large cities in Germany, attacking any Kindred they encountered. Surviving in a margin of potential frenzy and fear of persecution, most of the remaining vampires of the city are thin-bloods seeking safety in numbers. Those few ancillae and elders left try their best to protect their broods, doing what they can for the injured and weakened. With the scarcity of blood, they can unfortunately not offer the characters any nourishment, and they also encourage the coterie to keep their stay short. They are very interested in establishing communication with London and the Nephtali, and hopefully managing cooperation with the German government through the Nephtali spheres of influence. Failure to make use of their ties with the government after the Week of Revelation has left them crippled and unable to defend themselves.

The coterie soon gets to meet the Maestro, who willingly answers any questions they might have regarding the Cult of Caine, as long as they are willing to help him with his problems.

Zroenik can tell the characters the following:

- The Cult of Caine, formerly known as the Get of Caine, rose up around the False Caine during the supposed Second Coming of 1993, which turned the Kindred community of Berlin and most of Europe into a veritable powder keg.
- The cult left Berlin shortly after the Unmasking, after trying to recruit as many as possible after the Week of Nightmares during 1999.



• The last the Maestro has heard, Ankla Hotep is in Jönköping, Sweden, under the invitation of the prince there — a Malkavian known as Roos.

Scene Five: Scandinavian Gothic

Scandinavia proves to be quite the opposite of what the coterie experienced in Berlin. Vampires remain fairly private, but open enough so that the people don't have to feel so threatened. They have apparently declared that it is not in their interest to kill, maim or terrorize people, and they want only to co-exist in peace with humanity. After all, they have done so for more than a thousand years. With the exception of the Sabbat cities, vampires even contribute to society, helping out where they can and allowing the government insight into their affairs and agendas. It has been difficult for mortals to understand the concept of Sabbat and Camarilla, especially given the presence of several areas of Sabbat dominance. The Camarilla was quick to seize many of these cities and towns with minimum conflict, however, driving most of the Sabbat out and recruiting the rest.

Most Scandinavians are aware of what is transpiring throughout the world, but few truly care. Some protests occur, of course, and much public debate rages, but little is actually done. Concerned groups confront local politicians, who make plenty of promises, resulting in the creation of several new laws. The most considerable of these is the Kindred Harmony Law, which dutifully states that no mortal or vampire are under any circumstances permitted to harm each other, in accord with the regular legislature. In addition, the Kindred Harmony Law states that vampires are prohibited from drawing blood from unwilling mortals. The governments of both Norway and Sweden have encouraged their citizens to donate more blood, so that vampires can sustain themselves through special accounts at blood banks.

People mainly go about their business, obviously more frightened than usual, but refusing to let any of this fear change their lives. As long as they're not forced under someone else's control, they're content.

Scene Seven: An Audience with Caine

The characters arrive to find themselves in the heart of Sweden, and it feels strange to be there. They still feel the emptiness inside as their blood continues to weaken, and it seems almost desperate to be looking for answers here, in the Swedish countryside. Zroenik has given the coterie means of contacting the Swedish vampires — a phone number. Dialing it reaches an unnamed individual, who gives them directions to the Hotel Ibis. (Note that the characters obviously need not actually be in Sweden to call the number, though they must be present to speak with Ankla Hotep.)

Here Roos and his entourage — and also Ankla Hotep, the False Caine — meet them. The Jönköping cell of the Cult of Caine is not a permanent institution. Its sanctuary in the Swedish rural paradise is only temporary, with multiple enthralled mortals as blood dolls. The reason for this is that the cult is expanding on a large scale, and its members have uncovered many clues in the last decade. Outside Gothenburg rumors claim that a veritable vampire Holy Grail supposedly lies hidden. This "grail's" true powers and contents are unknown. The cult suspects that one of the Antediluvians, possibly [Gangrel], Absimiliard or [Ventrue] knew its secrets, and hid it during the era of the Second City. These three Antediluvians all walked the North, and the cult hopes to recover evidence of its location by tracking the Ancients.

The fact that Ankla Hotep obviously sits on a wealth of information is clear. Yet though he does not speak in riddles per se, it is certainly close enough. He uses analogies and metaphors, mixed with straightforward statements. He is clearly insane, but if there is something any Cainite knows, it's the fact that insight sometimes emerges from seeming madness.

Ankla Hotep has the following information and cryptic remarks, which can be derived through conversation:

• He confirms that the Antediluvians are rising. Many of them lurk in the shadows, awake and active, putting their pieces in place for their terrible Jyhad, arranging for the fulfillment of Gehenna. He can feel it, he says, and though his word is not proof of anything, he also claims to have consulted several other very reliable mystical sources that all support his conclusion. When asked what these sources are, he refuses to answer.

• A Lost City is resurfacing in the sands. He says this with such confidence that the characters should almost be prepared to take him on his word. Whatever answers they seek regarding Gehenna, they should probably find them there.

• A Dragon has arisen southeast from here. He can speak no more regarding that topic, though.

• The natural disasters occurring all have a meaning.

• There is one more light to burn, before the Darkness comes. It must not flicker and die.

"The Current Affair"

In the television studio of *The Current Affair*, host John Fordham sits opposite two men and a woman. To the far end, a third man is seated.

Fordham addresses the viewer. "For this live debate we'll be joined by historian Kent Niederman, sociologist Richard Rollingsworth, and critically acclaimed religious theorist Mary-Ann Margareths, to discuss how the world has been affected by learning that a secret society of vampires, or 'Kindred,' claiming to descend from the Cain of the Bible, have dwelled among us for our entire history." He nods to each of the guests he just introduced. "Gentlemen, madam," he says, and then turns to face a different camera. "But now, let's welcome our special guest, Jan Pieterzoon, leader of the vampire organization known as the Nephtali, which is based here in London." Pieterzoon shifts in his seat as he is presented, and becomes the focus.

"I suppose the topic on everyone's mind this week is this 'Gehenna' that we have been hearing about. According to some, this is an End of the World event that your... people have been awaiting for centuries, some might even say millennia," begins Fordham.

Pieterzoon nods. "That is correct."

Fordham continues. "Many claim that the existence of your race... Is it appropriate to call you a different race, or do you consider yourselves human?"

"We are indeed a different breed from mortals," Pieterzoon declares, detached and factual.

"Right. That the existence of your... breed," he bobs his head, as if expecting approval, "is literal proof of the existence of God, and the truth of the Genesis as explained in the Bible—"

"If I may interject, John," interrupts Niederman, "I will just point out that although these people assume their descent from Cain, this doesn't necessarily mean that it is correct. Most Christians believe that they descend from Adam, but we know that this probably carries no more that symbolic meaning—"

He is interrupted, in turn, by Margareths. "Don't be absurd, Niederman. These creatures are clearly supernatural, as one would sufficiently categorize God, thus lending truth to the Genesis cycle."

Pieterzoon frowns. "Excuse me?"

"But—" Fordham attempts, but is not acknowledged.

"What I would like to know is how you vampires are going to deal with the worldwide chaos that you are responsible for," Rollingsworth shoots in.

"I don't see—" is the only reply Pieterzoon can manage, before Niederman and Margareths engage each other in semantics regarding vampires, speaking of them as if Pieterzoon isn't even there.

The rest of the debate isn't exactly productive from this point.

• There is a temple where Cainite devoured Cainite. Now an Ancient is trapped inside. It holds the key to godhood. Those who have truly escaped the grip of Death know of a way inside.

Act Three: Return of the Dragon

This act sees the characters beside the Tremere clan founder and his childe Etrius, pitted against the Tzimisce Antediluvian in a dread battle, to bring an end to the terror of [Tzimisce]. It is not separated into scenes, in order to allow the Storyteller to structure it as she sees fit.

The characters might not want to face the Tzimisce Antediluvian again, especially since it is now even more powerful than it was the last time they encountered it. You might even be required to work some really heavy persuasion to get them to go along with it. If you fail to make the prospect at all compelling to them, then drop it. Instead, have [Tzimisce] begin a Reign of Flesh, perhaps inspired by Chapter Five: The Crucible of God, and combine these two stories. At any rate, [Tzimisce] will then be present at the finale of this scenario, and it will meet judgment through Saulot.

Enter Etrius

After spending a few nights in London doing whatever they wish, the characters are summoned to their London headquarters. They are met by Calebros, who explains that a person they would wish to see has recently arrived.

The person is none other than Etrius, the childe of Tremere, and one-time member of the Tremere Council of Seven. Etrius bears grave news indeed. Some time



ago, the body of Tremere, having lain dormant in the crypts beneath the Vienna chantry of the clan, disappeared. No one knew where it might have gone, but most are certain that the Antediluvian himself was not behind the disappearance. A massive search was undertaken, proving fruitless, and an imminent crisis could have been at hand.

Then, a few nights ago, the body of Tremere reappeared on the doorstep of the chantry. First there was rejoicing, for the Warlocks thought that their founder had returned. They were very wrong.

The being in the form of Tremere went on a rampage, calling on powers beyond any familiarity to the Tremere, and it killed all the members of the chantry without discrimination. Only Etrius managed to flee to relative safety, but only after learning what was happening. The being occupying the body of Tremere was none other than the Tzimisce Antediluvian, having risen in Tremere's body. After killing all Tremere, and most likely many other vampires in Vienna, it left a trail of death and terror behind, moving toward a one-time prominent chantry of the Tremere, Ceoris, in Transylvania. Etrius followed it part of the way, but as it started to warp and transform, he lost his nerve and escaped to seek help. He has heard that the characters have battled [Tzimisce] in the past, and he begs them to help destroy it, by any means necessary.

He asks them to consider what the Dragon might do whenever it has finished hunting down all its progeny and those descended of Tremere — not to mention how powerful it will be when it has regained all of its blood and power and claimed the souls of those it devours. The world will surely be doomed! Now it is still weak, both from its recent awakening, and through whatever is causing the weakening of the Blood of Caine, so whatever must be done, must be done with relative haste.

Etrius is not lying. From Ceoris the Dragon calls to all of its childer in the world, who again find themselves inexplicably drawn to it against their will, only clearer now than before. (See p. 144.) Most who fail to resist the call are subsequently devoured, and the rest assured that this is the fate of a veritable army of Fiends. Some are fleshcrafted into sleek tendrils of flesh, or other brutal shapes, barely cognizant and in such excruciating pain as can hardly even be imagined.

Observe that the beckoning now also affects Clan Tremere, and many Warlocks work overtime trying to devise rituals to resist the call.

Alone, the characters should have no chance of being able to destroy the Tzimisce Antediluvian. Even though its powers are weakened like theirs are, it is still

incredibly potent comparatively, because of the multitude of powers it can draw upon, and its Vicissitude is not weakened. A reason for this might be how it is actually part of Tremere, on some mystic-genetic level, where he is forever intrinsically linked to it.

As he was the only one able to escape the carnage at Vienna, Etrius is terrified. While pleading for the characters' help, he resorts to any means necessary in persuading them. He'll do anything. He'll teach them Thaumaturgy, he'll give them money, whatever they want. Hopefully, the characters had already decided to do this anyway, and so agree. Further cajoling, however, might be necessary and the Storyteller should take into account the characters' Natures when adapting Etrius' new tactics to enlist their aid.

Etrius and Tremere

Etrius explains that Transylvania is home to a demon called Kupala, a demon so powerful that it is actually one with the Carpathian land itself. From what Etrius has managed to figure out, though, it is held captive in the earth, after having been bound by a ritual so powerful that few have seen its like.

Kupala is a deadly enemy of [Tzimisce], who once stole its powers thousands of years ago. Etrius reasons that the only way to stop the Dragon is to free Kupala, so that it will rob the revivified Antediluvian of its abilities, leaving it powerless.

But how do you release such a demon?

Not only Nephtali characters go after [Tzimisce]. No, in their holy quest to resurrect Set, the elimination of threats is a vital task for the Setites. Hesha might request that the characters travel to Transylvania to find out what the ruckus is all about, and they might even strike deals with the Tremere in the exact same fashion as the Nephtali.

Ambrogino's plans are vast and well conceived. He personally takes the characters to Transylvania. He needs something the Antediluvian has — something that will be of the utmost importance in the culmination of his quest: the ability to craft flesh.

Vykos will send his Sabbat to Transylvania but will not go himself, afraid of the consequences should [Tzimisce] get hold of him. He *definitely* wants to see its Final Death, not only for the best of the Sabbat or himself, but actually for the best of all.

The characters could seek several courses if you don't want to use the Tremere option (or if the characters simply don't want to take it).

Characters could consult another demon, if they can find one. For Storytellers who are familiar with **Demon: The Fallen**, Kupala might translate as an Earthbound whom many demons wish to see sent back to Hell. Alternatively, a sufficiently powerful mage could do it, or, far less likely, even a powerful hunter (though someone like this is probably better used as a fount of information than as a frontal assailant). Another course, especially appropriate if the characters are veterans of **Transylvania Chronicles**, is to locate the master mason who bound Kupala in the first place. But, assuming that that mason survived the events of the **Transylvania Chronicles**, how eager will he be to free the demon?

A very powerful Tremere could probably do it. But who? Etrius lacks the proper knowledge, and his master, Tremere, has disappeared. His fellow Goratrix could probably have done it, but he defected years ago, and no one has heard from him since. Cross-referencing with any ex-Sabbat in the Nephtali will reveal that Goratrix and his entire bloodline vanished some years ago. That leaves very few options in that respect. Or does it?

Tremere, inhabiting the body of Goratrix, also feels the pull. His body still holds the blood of Tzimisce, used to artificially make himself into a vampire with his disciples. He knows that Etrius has run away, and he also knows that Etrius is the only one who can help him be elevated to the Third Generation again. So he is actually actively seeking out his disciple. Knowing Etrius, Tremere knows that the only place he'll feel safety is among the newly formed Nephtali, the only Camarilla faction with relative stability at this point.

At some point or other, the characters encounter Tremere. Again, if the characters played through the **Transylvania Chronicles**, they might even have met him before in the body he currently wears, which is that of Goratrix. Unless the characters have seen this incarnation of the great Usurper as Goratrix, they should be unable to discern Tremere's true identity, regardless of whether Etrius is actually aware of it or not. After all, it has been nearly a thousand years...

Thankfully, Goratrix is all they need, and he supposedly possesses the knowledge necessary to free the demon Kupala. He seems willing and eager to aid them. Perhaps even too eager, though the Storyteller should not need to exaggerate. Whatever Etrius knows, he keeps his mouth shut after the arrival of Goratrix.

The Carpathians lie in ruin. Floods, firestorms and other natural disasters have befallen the land, and virtually everything between Krakow and Bucharest is being consumed by the elements. The Ancient has walked these lands, and the mayhem that follows in the wake of an Antediluvian is testament to its path.

Having not devoured all of his childer, [Tzimisce] has left some Fiends to enslave entire villages of mortals,

creating Hell on earth. The nexus of all this activity is the lair of the Ancient, Ceoris. No Tremere remains after the coming of the Dragon. All, have been slain.

As the characters draw closer to the Warlocks' chantry, they can literally feel the presence of the Ancient. Suddenly they realize that they subconsciously must have felt the same in New York, for they remember. They realize now, for the first time, that this is the same enemy they fought there, only this time it is much more powerful.

Tremere/Goratrix dares not get too close to the chantry, in fear of being noticed. What no one has counted on is the fact that the Dragon knows they're there. It can feel them, through the powerful blood in the veins of Tremere, which belongs to the true Antediluvian.

Tremere begins his ritual. This act both surprises and angers [Tzimisce], and the Dragon arises before the characters in its complete, dreadful glory. A mountain of flesh and bone, the monster emerges from the earth, dirt and stone spraying like a fountain as it so does. It bellows deeply, a rumble so loud that all need to cover their ears. Characters with active Heightened Senses take three health levels of bashing damage. It lunges out at the group, sending them spiraling through the air [unless they succeed a Dexterity + Dodge roll (difficulty 9)], scattering them among the rocks, inflicting six levels of bashing damage to each. It seems to speak to them, but no one is able to understand it, not even any Fiends in the coterie.

The beast has the appearance of the most dreadful of Asian dragons, combined with what seem to be the appendages and extremities of a creature from beneath the sea. Its torso is several meters long and tremendously flexible, coated in a grayish-black, oily skin. Its shoulders sit high, arms extend directly from them, covered in barbs that end in massive, taloned hands. Its head is broad and terrifying, and a large mouth splits its massive face, revealing row upon row of fangs. Its nose resembles that of a bat. Its eyes are huge — truly disproportionate to its head — and they have a dim yellow tint to them, with crimson veins spreading like roads on a city map. Flaccid strands of flesh-like hair, black in color and as broad as a large man's fingers, crown the beast's head. In fact, it is entirely likely that the crown actually *is* composed of fingers, black as pitch. Long barbs extend from its back, and great, bat-like wings erupt from its shoulder blades, at least 50 feet or more in span. Its lower body is still obscured, as it stands erect from the hole in the ground that it emerged from, but tips of a myriad of thick tentacles of flesh seem to play upon the edge of the gaping hole.

In the intervening time, Tremere has somehow managed to finish his ritual. Truth be told, he was preparing for it for quite some time during the trek along the Carpathians, and he needed only complete it.

The earth trembles again, and the chthonic monster seems as surprised as the rest. (That is, if it is even possible to determine any reaction on its otherworldly visage.) The whole area dims and turns almost black, and an eldritch, primordial voice breaks the suspended reverberation, in a tongue none present can identify or comprehend.

Suddenly, two massive towers of earth on each side of the Beast erupt, and clash down on it, forcing it back into the ground. The coterie would do well to run just about now, for the earth splits, sprouting bedrock, roots and other debris in every direction, as it rolls back and forth, shifting like soft clay being squeezed and tugged. Trees, boulders and other parts of the geography are torn asunder or flung about like mere flotsam. The visual aspect of this is definitely not the worst. The sounds are horrifying — grotesque shrieks and howls, suggesting ideas of dinosaurs more than of anything mammalian. The cacophony tears through the soul worse than anything imaginable, and the characters must pass a Willpower test at difficulty 8 to avoid what amounts to Rötschrek.

The fight goes on for two full nights, but mostly underground, so the light of the sun does not interfere with it. The characters can get away to a safe distance, but the combatants move around as if they were playing in sand. If the characters intend to stay to witness the victory, they need to stay in motion to truly be safe. If the characters simply run for it, that's their call, but Tremere/Goratrix encourages them to stay, promising that he'll make sure they're all safe.

Near the end of the second night the earthquakes end. Carefully returning to the scene of the battle reveals one figure standing, but no other to be seen. It is severely injured, and looks mad as hell where it stands. The shape is not that of the Dragon, but of a more human form. Both Tremere and Etrius flinch, and Etrius looks at Tremere/Goratrix.

"Master…"

"I… I know," Tremere/Goratrix replies. "But… where the hell is Saulot?!"

Not leaving the characters to wonder about that one, he leaps at the wounded Antediluvian. Etrius takes off, screaming, and the characters are left witnessing Tremere/Goratrix ripping the insane and frenzying Tzimisce Antediluvian to shreds. As he drains the last drop of blood from his own, old body, he turns to eye the

characters. And his blood-splattered face splits into a grin.

"You wretched fools! I only used you to get me this far. Now my true powers are restored, and you shall be the first of my victims! I only brought you along as a bit of repast!" He laughs maniacally. "No one can stop me now, not even..." He freezes. Horror washes over his face. He slowly looks down at himself, on his hands, on his body.

His powers fail.

If the characters realize this, they get to take advantage of it for all it's worth. Let them finish off the Usurper! The bastard deserves it! But they need to be quick about it, so he doesn't get another chance to strike back. (For a Giovanni coterie, Ambrogino Giovanni will attempt to diablerize Tzimisce himself. Failing that — if, for instance, Tremere is with the coterie — Ambrogino will help himself to some Usurper blood instead.)

Two Antediluvians and a demon died this night. The characters have born witness to one of the most epic battles since the time of the Second City.

Mirror, Mirror

The characters should be both awestruck and terrified as they return to London.

After this event, give them some downtime. You can either let them have some easy assignments at the Nephtali headquarters, or do something else they really want to do. They just destroyed an Antediluvian. They deserve it.

Among Tremere's belongings — which the Storyteller may determine, taking into account what she deems useful to the characters' in their upcoming endeavors — is a crystal mirror, carefully wrapped in thick, velvet cloth to prevent it from shattering. When viewed from the proper angle, it reveals a tormented face, locked in an everlasting scream. This is Goratrix, whom Tremere has expelled from his body as the Usurper stole it.

Escorting the Angel

Immediately upon their return to London, they are asked to travel to Montreal to meet with and escort a Cainite named Myca Vykos back to the Nephtali headquarters in London. Having recently defected from the Sabbat, Vykos is said to have had great influence, and most likely also much knowledge. As the Sabbat has always been bent on destroying the Antediluvians, many among the Council see Vykos as a great asset. Jan remains quiet, as he has had encounters with Sasha Vykos in the past. He does not want this experience to influence the decisions of the Council, however.

The characters might have met Vykos (several times even) should they have weathered any among the many published chronicles featuring that character in the past. They might even have a reasonably good relationship with the enigmatic Fiend. If their last encounter resulted in animosity, the Storyteller should advise them that even enemies might have to bed together in these times, and to leave their antagonism behind. Surely, someone as cultivated as Vykos, despite a cruel history, should be capable of this much civility, at least.

After the recent events of the tumults within the Sabbat, Caine's Angel, Sasha Vykos, retreated to Montreal. Waking up one night and finding its most recently adopted guise fallen and its original male form reassumed, once-handsome Byzantine Cainite Myca Vykos took this to be a sign and elected to remain in that shape.

Now that Gehenna has come, Vykos has had somewhat of an epiphany. He does not wish to serve the Tzimisce Antediluvian, which was one of the reasons he relocated. Having encountered Lambach Ruthven, Vykos has confirmed his suspicions that the Ancient had awoken, and with the Sabbat steadily destroying itself, he needs to seek other allies.

The Nephtali seems like a useful ally.

The characters are sent to Montreal, where they are to meet and escort Myca Vykos and his small retinue back to London. The name "Sasha Vykos" is legend, even among the Camarilla, but few are familiar with this Myca.

Myca currently resides at the Queen Elizabeth Hotel, where he meets the coterie. Myca is a charming, friendly and inquisitive man, not unlike Rosenkrantz. He seems genuinely interested in learning about the characters and getting to know them (especially how they are faring in these horrible times). He is particularly interested in hearing about any of their endeavors.

As the characters and Myca prepare to leave the hotel, a group of assassins dressed in black, Middle Eastern-style cloaking appear and attack them. The characters turn back the attackers, but they do not manage to capture any. Those who fall seem to have been fitted with some suicide ritual that immediately turns them to dust to avoid identification. Those not slain or fallen escape. The characters are free to pursue, but the highly skilled attackers disappear. Myca claims not to know what they wanted, and he points out that

they could just as easily have been enemies of the Nephtali as himself.

Other Options

Obviously, Storytellers have some alternatives as to how this particular encounter plays out. Knowing Vykos, and that he has a lot of valuable information, the Setites of the Fire Court might send the characters to Montreal to shake down that former ally for some of that intelligence. Vykos is in the company of a small pack of young Sabbat, which the coterie must fight to get to Vykos. Note also that Vykos is tremendously powerful, even in the weakened state all Cainites suffer from.

The Sabbat version of this encounter is that the characters and Vykos are introduced to the Nephtali at this point. Vykos has agreed to meet and discuss with the new Camarilla faction, and he brings the characters with him. From here on out, if the characters agree to join the Nephtali, follow the default plot line instead.

Giovanni troupes may skip this scene, but Storytellers should feel free to include events similar to those of Setites.

New Allies or Old Enemies?

At any point after recruiting Vykos, the characters may use him as a resource. He is highly educated, and he holds many secrets, most of which he is careful to divulge or not, based upon his relationship with the characters. Vykos can elaborate on several of the points that Ankla Hotep presented to the characters. Of the specific pieces of knowledge that the characters learned, he has this information to share:

- Of the Lost City he knows little, but he guesses that it might be a reference to Enoch, spoken of in Cainite myth as the First City. To his knowledge, though, a now-destroyed sect known as the Tal'mahe'Rah claimed to be in possession of its spiritual remains in the Lands of the Dead. That story might have been a lie, but it is all he knows.
- He believes that the temple Ankla Hotep spoke of might be Kaymakli, a subterranean city where an ancient vampire imprisoned hundreds of its descendents and cursed it so that any Cainite who entered it would become trapped inside, unable to reemerge. Vykos can certainly see the importance of this place: Kaymakli must have housed amazing lore and insight, and whatever the Ancient who employed it as an eternal tomb must have known, it is sure to be found there.

In Other News Today...

Jennifer McBride brings the latest bad news from around the world.

"The third day of rioting in major European cities continues amid escalating fears of the End of the World. In London, six people were trampled to death outside the Nephtali Headquarters earlier today, when the government militia dispersed rampant crowds attempting to force their way into the building.

"Meanwhile, in South America, the fighting continues to escalate—"

Footage showing paramilitary troops fighting rioters in city streets cuts in. Civilians are caught in the crossfire, and buildings are ablaze. Some of the guerrillas are obviously vampires.

"—and with the Colombian government having been toppled, several cities are now claimed to be under the independent rule of the vampires of the Sabbat. In a press conference today, the US President declared that as long as the riots in Los Angeles and Chicago continue, the United States will not be taking any further action abroad. He called upon Great Britain and the European Union to intervene, as the state in Europe continues to be relatively stable."

Act Four: Ashes to Ashes...

The following act sees the characters uncover a mysterious temple built by vampires and make their way into it. The temple is Kaymakli, the tomb of thousands of Kindred. The characters should definitely feel that they are getting things done and unearthing answers that could potentially save everything.

Kaymakli and the Feast of Folly

The Antediluvian of a now-dead bloodline once held dominion over two great cities named Derinkuyu and Kaymakli. For whatever reason, the Ancient known as Cappadocius, believed by many to be Ashur, summoned to him all his childer in the world, an astonishing 12,000 in number. He asked his descendents to divide their numbers into two groups, depending on their answers to his questions. Cappadocius asked his childer who among them had helped build or plan a temple; who could read or write; who followed the *Via Caeli* or Road of Heaven; who searched for the answers of the Great Riddle of Death. All who responded were brought outside the city, while those who did not were led into its catacombs. The vast majority was then sealed inside, a great millstone rolled before the only entrance, and Cappadocius wept bitter tears of crimson as he wrought upon the arch, "Let no childe of Caine ever leave through this passage; let no son of Seth enter."

Within, thousands of vampires fell prey to their own ranks, during what would be spoken of as the Feast of Folly, as the thirst for blood eventually overcame the



docile and placid members of the Clan of Death, and plausibly those who survived slipping into torpor.

Centuries later, the line of Cappadocius all but disappeared, leaving behind only the Venetian bloodline known as the Giovanni.

Conceivably, the secrets of Cappadocius still exist within the stone walls of the temple, which was why the leader of the Giovanni—Cappadocius' childe Augustus — ventured inside in 2001, fully aware of the curse.

Now the temple not only holds the mysteries of the Clan of Death, but the most clandestine secrets of the Giovanni are sealed inside as well. And as the solution to Cappadocius' mystical apotheosis, a ritual said to be able to fulfill his aspiration to godhood, remains there with Augustus.

The Shadow Exodus of the Lazarenes

The characters will probably be wary of entering an inescapable deathtrap, and seek ways to assure their escape before they venture into it. There are ways to go inside Kaymakli and emerge safely, but logically speaking, thousands of vampires trapped inside would sooner or later find a way to escape.

Indeed, some did.

Among those who were sentenced to incarceration within Kaymakli were a group following Lazarus, once Cappadocius' favorite childe. Most Lazarenes did not heed their Ancient's call, as Lazarus himself had foreseen the Feast of Folly and feared that his involvement with the Followers of Set would lead to their immediate banishment. Some of his less fortunate followers, however, delved deeper into the Dark Continent than Egypt, heeded their master's call and traveled to Kaymakli, only to find themselves among those sentenced to descend into its catacombs.

The followers of Lazarus first attempted to escape the ensuing carnage and retreated downward as far as they could go. Confident that their knowledge of the mysteries of death would eventually help them escape and that the entrapment was only a test to allow those truly worthy ones to escape, the Lazarenes patiently researched and studied the secrets of the afterlife. Eventually one of them seemingly found the solution.

By developing their powers over death beyond that which any other of their clan had achieved in the past, the Lazarenes managed to pierce the Shroud separating the lands of the dead and the lands of the living. The accomplishment proved to be less beneficial than they first assumed, however. The Lazarenes found themselves trapped again, but this time outside the temple, indeed outside the entirety of the world. Confined to

the non-corporeal Underworld, the Lazarenes undertook an exodus to find a way to escape.

They emerged hundreds of years later, finding the world changed beyond their wildest imaginations and their clan perished. They learned of the treachery of the Giovanni and the repression of the Camarilla. Forever altered by their time in the Shadowlands, the Lazarenes approached the Sabbat, and requested membership, bringing with them their twisted necromancies, themselves influenced by the deceased Giovanni vampires they captured and tortured for answers.

Having not only escaped Kaymakli, the Harbingers of Skulls have also eluded the calamitous fate inherited by their clan, a fact that has certainly not escaped their minds. Having cheated Final Death, many of these vampires are utterly embittered by their shadow exodus, and the horrors of Kaymakli will continue to haunt them all until each and every one of them finds Final Death.

The Harbingers of Skulls

Possessing the same potent blood that allowed Cappadocius to sire so many progeny, the ranks of the Harbingers of Skulls have nonetheless kept their numbers few during the few years of their membership with the Sabbat. Vykos is aware of some tie between the Harbingers of Skulls and the Giovanni, but even though he doesn't necessarily draw the conclusion that they have the same origin, he still feels that they may have something to contribute. He has associates within the Sabbat that could set up a meeting between the characters and some of the Lazarenes. Giving him a few nights allows Vykos to unearth a pack of Harbingers in the city Barranquilla in Colombia, but the characters would have to travel there to locate them.

Crimson Regime

South America has always been a preferable territory for the Sabbat, whose sanguinary indulgences blend perfectly with those of mortals.

The city of Barranquilla, Colombia, has been completely overtaken by vampires, who rule openly through mayhem and violence. Even though their powers have diminished, they assert so much influence over the military and drug cartels that they have encountered little difficulty in maintaining, and actually greatly improving, their dominance after the Week of Revelation. The government of Colombia has toppled, and absolute chaos and havoc reign. El Diablo has come to town in the form of Sabbat vampires, and it doesn't look like he's going anywhere any time soon.

As always, there is a chance that the characters will be recognized from TV. They are neither hunted nor abhorred, however, but instead hailed as heroes. After all, they are not only responsible for finally (or so Sabbat vampires believe) destroying the dreaded Tzimisce Antediluvian, but also allowing the Sabbat to rule openly, enslaving humanity as they have always aspired. Additionally, it might be known that the characters have ties with the Nephtali, who openly seek to destroy the Antediluvians, which leads the Sabbat to see them as fellow revolutionaries, and perhaps even allies.

The characters should have no difficulty locating the Harbingers of Skulls, especially not since many Sabbat are more than happy to assist them in their search. Be sure to describe how perverted and even truly malevolent these vampires are with regard to the desperate local mortals. Show how they have absolutely no respect for humanity and see themselves as the next step of evolution.

The particular Lazarenes whom the coterie plans to meet are led by one of the survivors of Kaymakli and the shadow exodus, called Phagian. His retinue includes two other Lazarenes, Zygodat and Alcoan. All three are otherworldly and alien. Their skin is stretched and pallid, and they resemble walking, talking corpses.

Phagian is dressed in flowing, thick robes, gray in color and lined with black. At first he is less than interested in meeting with the coterie, despite his relationship with Vykos, but if anyone mentions Kaymakli, he is suddenly interested — disturbed, perhaps, but still interested. He will only inform them of its location, and under no circumstances escort the characters to or into Kaymakli, and he becomes uneasy when reliving the horrors of the Feast of Folly in his mind. After some hefty negotiation with the characters (again, another who wants them to share their findings with him), however, he will agree to teach them a ritual to allow them to become incorporeal for a period, allowing them to walk through the Lands of the Dead and penetrate walls and barriers in the material world.

If the characters petition the Lazarene enough, and offer ample compensation, the Storyteller may allow that Phagian will agree to teach them a level or two of Necromancy. This will require those of the characters it concerns to stay and study awhile, dwelling among the horrors of Barranquilla. This will not necessarily affect the course of the story, though, as it envelops and advances with the characters, not through outside means.

Into the Labyrinth

The underground city of Kaymakli, located about 15 miles south of Neveshir in Turkey, was cut into the very rock of the Cappadocian Mountains themselves,

stretching out in labyrinthine halls and corridors, level upon level, down into the darkness. In nights past, these catacombs harbored persecuted Christians, before being forever stained with the blood of Cainites. The cool, dry climate of the subterranean city was ideal for Cappadocius' brood's studies of death, and the walls of stone offered indispensable protection from both aggressors and the dreaded sun.

Although Kaymakli is supposedly open to the public, the open part is only a cut-off part of the vast underground city. The characters must locate the original main entrance, hidden in a secluded valley on the side of the mountain. Though doing so isn't exactly easy (after all, mortal archaeologists with far better knowledge of this sort of thing than the characters have never found it), Phagian's directions are very detailed. To find the entrance a character must accumulate seven successes on an extended Perception + Investigation roll (difficulty 7). Here an overgrown alcove, half-buried by both time and the wear and tear of nature, reveals a massive hallway covered by a millstone contraption, exactly where Phagian explained to them that it would be. The characters can easily conclude that others have been here, as the earth around the millstone has been disturbed, and the overgrowth has been partly cut away. Someone has hastily attempted to conceal the entrance after leaving it. Could this mean that someone has been into Kaymakli and found a way out?

Above the portal the inscription described earlier spells doom, and even if none of the characters speak the language (Greek), they all know what it says.

By forcing the grinding millstone aside, they are allowed to enter before the mechanical device automatically closes. The seal locking them inside is not physical, but rather mystical. Even though the millstone could have been forced to stay open, any mortal would be prevented for entering and any vampire would be prevented from leaving, by an invisible force field, dealing grievous burns (that inflict aggravated damage) to any vampire attempting to exit.

Should the coterie be traveling with mortal retainers, only ghouls are able to enter. (Incidentally, those ghouls are also able to exit, but the characters should not necessarily be aware of this fact. Besides, where is the fun in sending their minions into one of the most dreaded citadels of tombs, when they can go in themselves?)

Dhampir, children of thin-blooded vampires, can also enter and exit Kaymakli on their own free will, as they are not fully childer of Caine, nor Sons of Seth. Additionally, the Storyteller could simply decide that "No Sons of Seth" does not include female mortals. It's a bit of a stretch, but it just might be that extra edge if everything else fails and the characters are left literally doomed inside.

Dead Men Walking

Characters have more than one way to escape the charnel tunnels of Kaymakli. One is the Level Five Auspex power of Psychic Projection. While detached from the body, the body can be transported out, for example by ghouls. Why no one was ever able to escape the tomb-city, even though many were skilled in Auspex, is simply because there were no ghouls present. Although many called out for their servants through the powers of the blood, no ghoul entering the city escaped, as they fell prey to frenzying vampires. In later times, none dared enter.

Threading the Path of Orpheus

To allow the characters passage to the Shadowlands, Phagian must create a ritual that the characters perform. Only a handful of Harbingers of Skulls are able to create this ritual, which is strenuous and time-consuming — taking eight hours to perform and requiring the blood of both the Necromancer and the subjects of the effect. The coterie has to be present during the entire ordeal, and each participant must expend two blood points.

Phagian reads from his mystical tomes, in tongues long forgotten, mixes the blood with ashes from a pouch he holds, then he boils it. He pours it onto a piece of parchment, where it melds with the paper, tinting it a light orange but remaining otherwise inconspicuous. He then pours an indiscernible liquid into an inkwell and writes upon the parchment in Latin letters. The words bear no meaning to the characters, but he assures them that speaking the words has great significance even though the characters are unaware what they are actually saying.

The ritual can be used only once, after which the scroll instantaneously turns to dust. The characters cannot duplicate the ritual either, unless a character possesses at least eight levels of mastery, divided among Necromancy, Thaumaturgy and another similar Discipline (Thanatosis is suitable), with no less than two levels in each. Assuming that a character has such powerful Discipline ratings, he could potentially work this rite himself without Phagian's ritual.

System: When performing the ritual, the characters must sit surrounded by grave dust (which should be no real difficulty within Kaymakli...) from dusk until midnight. At this point, the souls of the characters can free themselves from their bodies, but as the characters need their corporeal forms inside, they must symbolically "kill"

themselves, by piercing their hearts with a specifically prepared dagger (which Phagian gives them). Doing so inflicts two health levels of lethal damage. Their bodies then fade from this world, emerging in the next. The ritual works only for a short period of time, and will expel the characters from the Shadowlands within one minute.

The players must all roll their characters' Intelligence + Occult (difficulty 6), to free their souls. Only one success is necessary, though more than four successes can result in their souls leaving the body behind, entering the Shadowlands without it. The character is free to return to his body at any time, but the ritual will have failed for him. Interestingly, though, his body is left behind, the corpse can be transported out, for instance by ghouls, to allow the character to reenter his body outside the wards.

After freeing their souls from this world, a Stamina + Occult roll (difficulty 8) must be performed in order to bring along their bodies. When this is done, they enter the Shadowlands.

Although Phagian fails to inform the characters of this, extending the ritual to include someone who is not partaking in the ritual can go very wrong. The Storyteller is free to decide any particulars, but bringing Okulos with them (for instance) should result in dire consequences.

Descent

Within Kaymakli the characters are overwhelmed by the impression of death. The halls of the underground citadel are dense and dry, with dust and ashes covering the uneven limestone floors and walls like a city drowned in volcanic cinders. The sensation is certainly claustrophobic; it simply does not feel right being here. Above their heads cold stone replaces the star-lit sky, its weight supported by giant stone columns that stand in the massive caverns and passages leading away among crypts, open spaces and clusters of stone buildings and towers.

Their feet clatter on the dry limestone paths, interrupted only by damp patches overgrown by various fungi.

One of the first things that the characters will notice is the footprints in the dust, and more than a few. Some seem old, though some are fairly new, and they trace into the darkness and back to the portal.

These are the trails of Okulos, the companion of Beckett, who located the Shroud of Kaymakli (whom the characters might be familiar with, if they have played "House of Lies," one of the scenarios in **Nights of Prophecy**), and of the pretender Antediluvian Augustus Giovanni and his retinue.

Finding their way through the streets of the subterranean city, filled with only the silence of the grave, is difficult. The footprints lead from one tiny crypt, through narrow alleyways barely broad enough to squeeze through, to empty buildings and dead ends, without any particular pattern or sense. And all around them lie the gaping-mouthed, petrified corpses of vampires, locked in everlasting dread, scattered about everywhere, from doorways to rooftops to secluded crypts. Their fate can be ascertained by wounds on their bodies, from anything from fangs to swords to sharp rocks. Presumably, many tried to kill each other, to perhaps have the tiniest chance of preserving their unlives. Equally as disturbing as the suspended vampires is the amount of ash, piled up or spread about. The footprints on the rough floors even lead to a well filled nearly to the brim with nothing but ash.

At least one vampire in these depths is bound to be torpid, rather than having met Final Death. Even though some dormant vampires could potentially awaken, especially should whiffs of fresh blood disturb them, these frenzying madmen should be few and far between. The abundant dust of dead vampires, always clear evidence that a wretched soul met its fate here, should be enough to terrify the coterie.

Evidence also shows that some have tried to physically claw their way out, strongly indicated on the walls, and they have used whatever came to hand, not just their nails, to try to save themselves. Kaymakli was a deathtrap, and it still is. This should be made agonizingly clear to the characters, as they make their way below.

Of artifacts they come across, most are useless and banal, though they should be able to find some scrolls and tomes. None of these seem to have any true worth or importance. Whoever walked here before them must have taken anything significant.

The descent into Kaymakli is long and wearisome. It takes several nights, and the characters must rest during the day as usual. Allow the players some flexibility during their long journey. Make sure it isn't boring, but encourage debates and discussions along the way to keep things interesting. Inform them that any extra characters with them fear speaking above a whisper, though, as no one knows what these dark catacombs might contain.

Augustus

Far below, in a secluded crypt, the characters come across freshly killed ghouls and even remains of vampires. A light burns further within, and investigating reveals a figure huddled over some manuscripts, scribbling furiously in his notebooks. The figure is that of a corpulent Kindred, seemingly desperate in his search for something. This is Augustus Giovanni, the founder of Clan Giovanni.

Augustus is weak. He feels the weakening of the Blood as strongly as the other Antediluvians do, but he is a pretender Ancient, not possessing the full aspect of power as do the others. He is technically of the Third Generation, but

he never absorbed the soul of Cappadocius, and since that ominous night of the diablerie he has been searching for his sire, to finish what he started. Learning that Cappadocius has perished, his only chance at godhead is reconstructing the Apotheosis ritual, and doing what Cappadocius was planning: replacing God on His throne in Heaven. His grandchilde Ambrogino has been searching for this ritual for 400 years, and Augustus has just recently realized that his underling's task is truly essential for his aspirations. Having planned on letting Ambrogino do the dirty work, the coming of Gehenna has made him painstakingly aware that his grandchilde was moving too slow. Therefore, he has decided to take the matter into his own hands.

He has spend three years in these catacombs, and he soon found his small group of followers to be insufficient to quench his thirst for blood. He would soon have slipped into torpor, had not the coterie's arrival befallen him.

Here's your chance to let your players' characters duke it out with the most hated of all the Antediluvians — the disgusting, incestuous, bloated and selfish bastard Augustus. He's Cappadocius' biggest mistake and nothing more than a plague on the world since his inclusion in the ranks of the Damned.

As with the fight against Tremere, let the players win, but not without a price. Augustus might not have enough blood to make full use of his Disciplines or abilities, and unlike the other Antediluvians he has no Level Ten Discipline to draw upon (he can perform only up to Level Five of his clan Discipline, Necromancy, as with all other Cainites), but he is tremendously strong and fast. This fight is going to be hard, and the characters will emerge seriously injured, though victorious. Remind them, though, that performing the ritual to get them out of here requires them to pierce their hearts, so they better have enough blood left to heal those wounds after the fight.

Augustus leaves behind most of the pieces necessary to create the Apotheosis ritual, though the characters will have to bring it back to London to have it deciphered.

He also leaves behind a crippled Cainite, lying beaten and bound, having been Augustus' last source of blood. He is very weak, but he introduces himself as Okulos, a Nosferatu archaeologist. He has been here nearly four years, having been trapped inside after retrieving a lost fragment of *The Book of Nod*, and delivering it to his colleague Beckett, the infamous Gangrel archaeologist. Beckett has promised to find a way to get Okulos out, but he never returned, and Okulos has been trapped here all that time. When Augustus appeared, Okulos was taken prisoner and has been the victim of Augustus' vile temper and rage all that time.

The characters now have not only Augustus' notes, but also the knowledge of Okulos. He begs them to help him and bring him out from here. That would be the noble thing to do, at least, but there is the concern of Phagian's ritual. Whatever the characters decide, it actually does work extending it to Okulos (but at a cost). If they manage to bring him back to London, they will have gained a valuable ally.

The Underworld

The Shadowlands of Kaymakli are a true terror to behold. Although most of the vampires within the tomb's halls died at the fangs of one of their fellows, some left the coil of unlife through ordinary means and could potentially have become wraiths.

The area is a cold and unpleasant wasteland of thick, gray mist and foul odors. Mocking reflections of objects and characteristics of the material world bear witness to a scourge having ravaged the Underworld. Malicious and monstrous spirits of the dead abound around Kaymakli, ready to assail careless and rowdy characters.

Involving the Others

Setite and Giovanni characters also plunge into the madness of Kaymakli. Ambrogino has enough knowledge of Necromancy to bypass Cappadocius' curse the same way Nephtali characters learn. Meeting Augustus will transpire similarly to the default plot line. The Giovanni progenitor wants to kill Ambrogino and the coterie, and they have to destroy him in self-defense. Ambrogino will be noticeably hostile if he is unable to diablerize his grandsire.

Setites do not consider themselves to be Children of Caine or Sons of Seth, so they might not care about the curse either way. No matter what they actually believe, they still do descend from Caine, and of course the curse still works on them. Here the Storyteller should be open for some really interesting and creative ways to get out. Hesha knows enough to maybe have brought the characters to see the Harbingers of Skulls anyway, but this obviously has to be decided before entering Kaymakli.

Russian officials say that they have taken actions to prevent the "disease of vampirism" from spreading further. Says spokesperson Ivana Vaclava of the Russian Disease Prevention Committee, "We have constructed special internment facilities for the afflicted, and elaborate experiments to fully understand this disease are already underway."

Meanwhile, Russia remains one of the few countries in the world where the current situation does not pose a critical threat to the nation's stability. A representative of

Act Five: . . . Dust to Dust

And the Children slew their parents.
They rose up
Used fire and wood
Swords and claws
To destroy those who had created them
The rebels then built a new city.
—"The Tale of the First City," *The Book of Nod*

Few places are so mysterious and fabled as the Second City, the city founded by the Antediluvians after the Great Flood. In this act, the characters uncover a way to locate this strange citadel, and they find more answers regarding the true nature of Gehenna.

The House of the Ancients

After receiving some rest and recuperation, the coterie meets with Okulos, provided they have managed to rescue him from Kaymakli. Indeed, if they have brought Okulos back with them, he has agreed to join the Nephtali. If they were unsuccessful in bringing Okulos back, the research team of the Nephtali is able to decrypt the characters' findings anyway.

Okulos explains that among his findings was a ritual said to be able to restore some marvelous Cainite citadel. Sounding ludicrous, it nonetheless fits with the information given to the coterie by Ankla Hotep, and it might actually make some sense to the characters. Okulos claims that while he cannot read it (it is in Enochian, the tongue of Caine himself, which the Nosferatu is not familiar with), it seems to be the real thing. If the passage contained in the ritual is read at the location of the lost city, that city will appear from the sands in its original state.

Whatever the truth between the many fables regarding the Second City and the ritual might be, *The Book of Nod* describes it as the city founded by the Antediluvians after the Great Flood. Whatever fate left the Second City abandoned, it disappeared into the deserts of Egypt countless centuries ago, leaving behind only enigmatic tales of the halls wherein the earliest vampires made their homes.

Also, it is stated in the texts concerning the ritual that the Second City may only resurface during the Final Nights, and that this is meant to be as an omen to the impending Gehenna. Just as the Second City fell, so shall the world of Cainites fall. This could explain why it has never been successfully located in the past.

This incredible place would not only be the greatest discovery in the history if the Kindred, but it could potentially unlock the secrets of Gehenna. It is said that one of the original manuscripts of *The Book of Nod* is located in the Second City, along with countless relics and artifacts giving evidence to the golden era of the Antediluvians.

After consulting Vykos, Ambrogino or any other Kindred familiar with Enochian, it is made clear that Okulos' assumptions seem to be accurate. Also, revelations of ancient vampires ruling over mortals have appeared in the dreams and visions of powerful seers and mystics among undead, lending further credibility to the assumptions. Could it be true that this ritual would actually reveal the Second City?

Unexpected Parties

The characters would have no idea of how to locate the Second City, nor do they truly know what relevance it might hold.

Make sure that word of their quest to find the Second City gets out, one way or another, whether the characters want it to or not. This is actually a good thing. Word on the street (or obscure Internet channels, or any other such medium of information) has it that a group of mortal archaeologists, searching for the occult and the mystical, started some excavations in Egypt just prior to the Unmasking. Having given up their project due to more immediate concerns at home, the mortal mystics returned to their base in London. The rumors claim that the mystics have actually found some ruins that might have something to do with, or even *be*, the Second City. Finding and interrogating the mortals could prove a relatively simple and satisfying task, and they will give up the location after some hot persuasion.

Dominion over Rubble

Then war wracked the city
And nothing could ever be as it was.
The Thirteen saw their city destroyed
And their power extinguished,
And they were forced to flee,
Their Progeny along with them.
—Regarding the Second City, *The Book of Nod*

The coterie eventually arrives at the site outside Tanis in Egypt, and finds more than just deserts and craggy rock surfaces. The area is swarming with people, mainly Kindred, who have learned about the excava-

tion site. Most of them are Setites, but there are others here as well, including Ambrogino and his Giovanni, and others, both prominent and unknown vampires.

Among the Setites, they notice Hesha Ruhadze. Hesha is not hostile to the characters, and he might be the most valuable ally here (unless the Storyteller deems otherwise).

The entire area has been divided into zones where each group has set up camp, fervently arguing over the rights to the excavation site.

The Setites hold that the site is theirs because these lands are their domains, but the Giovanni claim the sites because they have driven away several guardian creatures that protected it.

Obviously, all that is found of the Second City are the very degraded remnants of some columns, bearing inscriptions in Enochian that declare this to be the site of the citadel. But that is all there is, since the ritual that the characters have in their possession is the only thing that can reveal it.

To use the ritual in relative peace, the characters must make allies and find a way to get rid of unwanted meddlers when they eventually resurrect the citadel. Encourage the players to be creative here.

Whom do the characters trust enough to work with? Perhaps they rely on a third faction, for instance Ventrue archaeologists, as their collaborators.

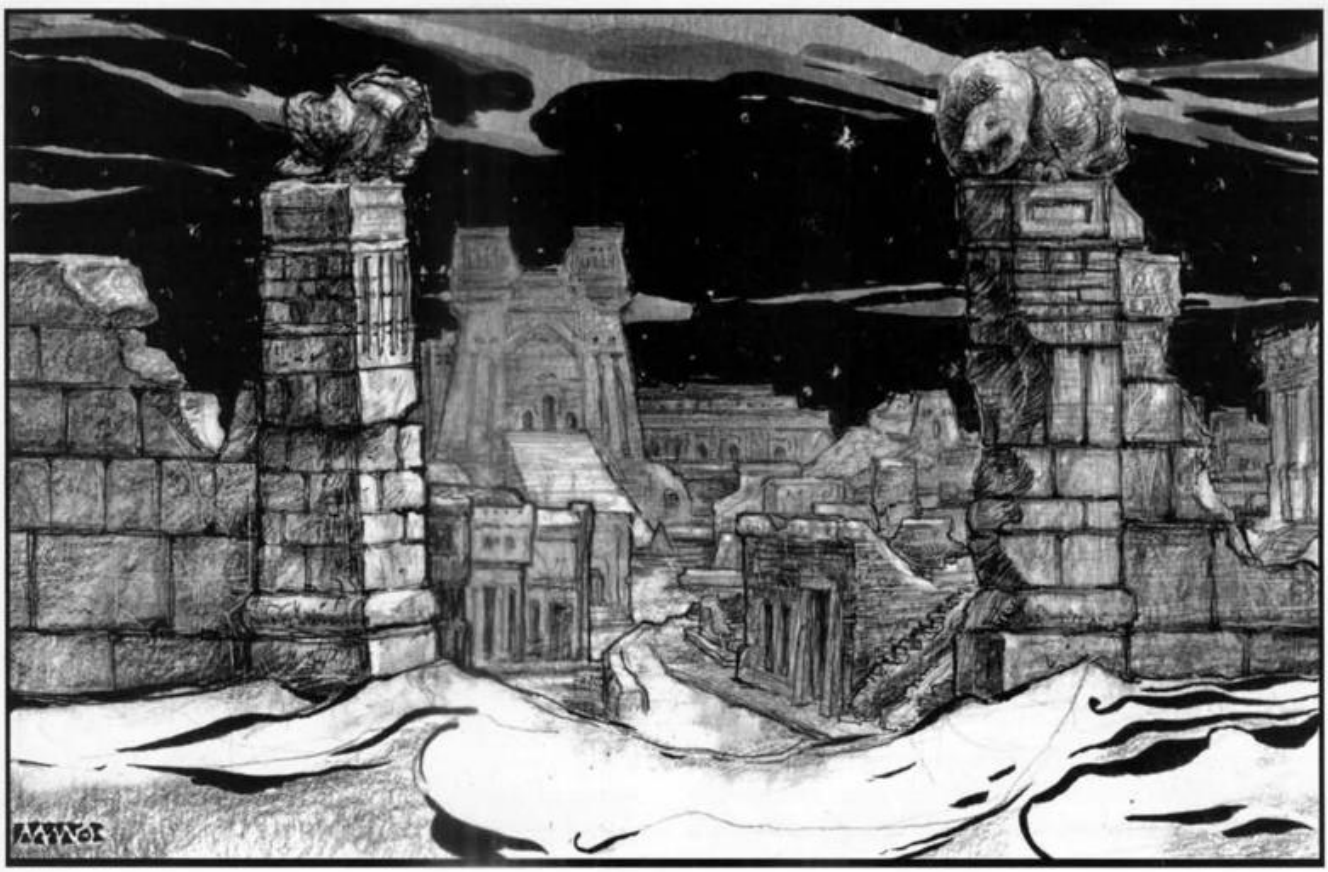
Also decide how their collaboration with a third party should unfold. Will they be betrayed? Will the ally attempt treachery? This is all up to you. Note that the Setites will take control of the citadel after the characters have left, no matter what happens.

This is another junction in which all the various courses cross each other. The biggest deviation is the Setite story line, which might actually end here. Whatever the Storyteller has let her characters do, this is the place in which the Setites will resurrect their dead god.

The Ritual

As the moon peaks above them and midnight draws close, the ritual can be performed. Note that it is written in Enochian, and the characters need to have someone with them who is familiar with this language.

As a character or characters recite the paragraphs, soon the very simple ritual is complete. As the characters and others wait eagerly for something to occur, however, nothing happens. Nothing. This anticlimax is sure to disappoint the characters, and let it. Let them



get mad at Okulos for leading them on a wild goose chase, and let them prepare to leave. Then, as they are confident that nothing is going to occur, and as they start discussing what actions to take next, a massive earthquake starts. First it's only vague rumbling, and the characters might even be convinced that this is no more than the usual tremors that have been occurring all over the world since the Unmasking, but it grows. It tosses and shakes the ground they stand on, causing them to lose their balance as the sands shift and the ground bulges.

And there, from beneath the ground, something rises.

The dunes of the desert and the very bedrock itself open, to expose ruined archways and stone structures slowly rising from the ground. The earth continues to rumble, and stone scrapes on stone, until the very platform that the city rests on moves into position with an ear-splitting, thunderous noise, and all goes quiet. Only the telltale hiss of sand is evidence that this area had not been thus since time immemorial.

The Halls of the Gods

Once-great walls of black marble now lie cracked and shattered surrounding the city. Most of the actual citadel is no more than remnants of foundations. Although the city once spread across several square miles, only small parts of it have been exposed; the rest is most likely forever destroyed.

Characters possessed of architectural knowledge can recognize patterns resembling Mesopotamian designs to the structures they see left standing, possibly from the influence that the Ancients had from the First City. If investigated, most of the buildings are entirely vacant, and the rest hardly contain anything more than sand and rubble of broken artifacts.

There is one structure that catches the characters' eyes, though. A massive palace rises up in what appears to have been the center of the city, dwarfing all other buildings, as it is likely to have done in times past when the rest of the city still stood.

The characters enter the temple through the main entrance, the doors long gone, and they find what must have been a lavishly decorated antechamber, leading into a great hall. From here they can find their way into an immense assembly area, with rooms that likely served as armories or galleries. In the middle of the first level is a large dais, which looks as if it could once have supported a throne.

Bear in mind that this is an amazing discovery. It is quite possibly the greatest discovery ever, as far as the Children of Caine are concerned. The Antediluvians had this temple built. The Ancients themselves walked these halls and even carved their lore on these stones. The players should be made to comprehend what magnificence this is, and how awestruck their characters are at this. It should go beyond mere words.

Climbing the massive stairs to the second level reveals nothing but empty chambers, that perhaps were once quarters for vampires, as they are all void of windows. There are more than 200 chambers, but even if the characters search them all, they locate nothing of relevance here.

Moving up a level brings the characters into a huge pleasure den, and more of the chambers from the floor below. The fourth level is reminiscent of the ones below, again holding faded evidence of the splendor that might once have existed here.

The Faces of Gods

Two enormous black marble doors bar the fifth level. If pried open, which is no easy feat, they expose vast, open spaces, all containing different, eroded carvings on the walls. Hallways separate each room, and navigating them is like walking through a maze. The middle room is the largest, but it is completely void, apart from a great map carved into the far wall and a huge statue standing near the middle. Its head and left arm is missing, the finger of its right hand is pointing to the map.

On the map is an inscription in cuneiform runes. Although the characters can probably not decrypt this language here, it will reveal a name translatable to the Hebrew *ge ben Hinnom*. The Valley of the Son of Hinnom is, in Biblical terms, Hell, or more accurately, Gehenna. Marked on the map is a likeness of a great throne, and a figure sits upon it. Below his feet lie many smaller figures, their arms extended upward.

Other rooms contain various more or less ruined works of art, but one room is different. It houses 23 gigantic statues, all with an inscriptions at their bases. Ten are unreadable; the rest are written in the ancient language Enochian.

If deciphered, starting with a statue portraying someone resembling a monk dressed in a humble garb, the name on the base of this one is revealed to be Ashur. As soon as a key has been discovered, it is easy to figure out the rest. The names on the bases of the rest of the statues are as follows: Absimiliard, Arikel, Ashur, Ennoia, Haqim, Ishtar, Lucian, Malkav, Mekhet, Namtaru, Dracian, Saulot, Typhon, Ventru. All are sculpted in excruciating detail, unmistakable even through the wear of time. (For more information on the Antediluvians, consult Chapter One.)

Note that the forms or names of Augustus Giovanni and Tremere are obviously not represented. Both became vampires during the last millennium, while this temple dates back to when the vampires of the Second Generation were destroyed.

One of the unnamed figures jealously guards a secret. In a hollow in its left hand, as if it were clutching it, is a small, many-faceted piece of porphyry on which is written a cuneiform inscription. The writing is unreadable to the characters, but it contains a prophetic passage dealing with the End Times. The characters should await their return to their reliable scholars in London to decipher it; sharing it with any of the other parties could prove fatal. Then again, perhaps the characters have a strong relationship with one of the present factions.

Throughout the structure, various busts and stone portraits are displayed. Unfortunately, they have all been rendered indiscernible, and the characters cannot get a good fix on what they see.

Note also that the Auspex Discipline power The Spirit's Touch does not seem to work within the Second City for some reason. Most likely, it has been too long since anyone has walked these halls.

Whatever the characters do now, they have recovered crucial evidence. First of all, there may be more than 13 Antediluvians. They have literal proof that most of the Noddist myths seems to be true, as they are physically standing in the Second City. They even have a secret message that has survived the passage of time to find its way into their possession.

The Cainite Vial

The characters might wish to examine the large statue in the first room. If so, they find a small, blue vial hidden the same way that the piece of porphyry in the other room was. However headstrong your players are, stress that their characters do not wish to drink of this tiny bottle, which for sake of argument carries three concentrated blood points worth of a deep crimson liquid. It seems like a bad idea to even open it. They should get an urge to keep it though, and to bring it back for analysis.

Optional Scene: Serpent's Ascension

As the characters prepare to leave, they suddenly find the temple being invaded by a host of Setites. The Serpents are all heavily armed, and they quickly take control of the citadel. The characters can perhaps recognize some from Montreal, but when considering their current garb in comparison to some of the others present here, they seem to be fairly lowly. Their leader is the most beautifully clothed, but the most noticeable aspect of this person is the fact that she is a child. Should the characters be familiar with her, this is the child Methuselah Neferu.

Setite characters are probably part of this operation (unless the Storyteller wishes otherwise), but other characters will doubtlessly be captured, interrogated and most likely used as sacrifice. If they wish to remain out of sight or run off, let them.

The Fire Court, seen as antiquated and archaic by other Setites, has prepared for the resurrection of their god without the cooperation of the other Setite courts. Alone, they will serve their god. All others will perish in the flames.

The Setites seem occupied with the ground floor alone, so if the characters remain unseen, they can actually watch from a balcony upstairs, looking down on the galleries. Quickly, the Setites move everything into position in one of the large chambers. The floors are swept clean in fluid motions by a dozen Setites, and a mystical seal is revealed below the dust. (It was impossible to notice before.) Moving with a carefully rehearsed competence, Neferu loudly proclaims one strange word after another. A section on the floor as wide but not as long as the enormous hall yields, splitting in the middle. Deep, distant sounds rolling

The Truth About the Vial

This vial is actually part of the prophecy regarding Saulot the messiah. To accept the sins of his fathers and brothers, Saulot must drink of this vial, which contains the Blood of Caine. When doing so, Saulot receives the Mark that God set upon Caine. None shall harm him, lest they suffer sevenfold, and only he who bears the Mark can beg for redemption for his kind.

To anyone who wants to survive Gehenna, this vial seems (wrongfully) to be his or her ticket out of it. With the Mark they can endure the end, and go on. Anyone with a sense of prophecy and a bit of conscience would obviously have Saulot repent and save the world, though at this point, the characters have no idea what this is.

To Ambrogino, it's vital that Saulot drinks of the vial. Only this way can the Giovanni fulfill the Apotheosis. This will be revealed later.

Should any of them, such as Vykos, find out what it is and drink of it, they immediately explode in a thousand shards, burning with the wrath of Heaven. The same would happen to any character who drinks of it. In fact, it is not meant for Cainites, but can only be consumed by mortals.

through unknown, subterranean corridors testify that the impressive mechanism is larger than imaginable. The two sections separate, and the giant slabs rise to become one with each wall. A set of broad stairs also rises into position, before the room is left quiet. Sand and dust trickle from the walls and from various cracks. The entire entourage moves again, going into thoroughly practiced positions, some remaining to stand guard upstairs while others fall out to stand guard at other appropriate places. The characters can easily overcome a few such guards. If they disguise themselves, enough Setites of various creeds are present that they might not be noticed, especially considering the heavy ceremonial attire worn, with masks of the face of Apophis.

Below, an underground cavern stretches out. In the exact center of the room the sand gives way to reveal rock surface, and here something best described as a reliquary of petrified wood, about three feet long and six inches thick, extends from the floor.

A page appears, handing a huge, thick book to Neferu, his head bowed. Another page sets out a small podium upon which the girl then rests the book, before she opens it.

It appears that during this whole glorious entrance, every single attendant has had one specific task. Over 20 Setites are chanting rituals, as they doubtlessly were all the way from wherever they came. The chanting picks up in intensity and volume, and Neferu commences, loudly pronouncing the ancient syllables written in the text.

The ritual is long. Sacrifices are brought out, in the form of men, women, children and Cainites alike. All are killed in unique fashions, their corpses left sprawling around the reliquary. Depending on how close the characters are, they could possibly see narrow ducts carved in the floor, carrying the blood of the sacrifices toward the reliquary, which apparently absorbs it.

Then, slowly, the reliquary cracks. Little by little, the stone surface sloughs off to reveal a thin sliver of... bright mist? Whatever the mist is, it expands slowly, hissing out of the stone, coiling like a whirl of cloud, growing, rising, until it takes the shape of a man. It seems to assume a surface as well — a grayish, stone-like membrane, cracking loudly as it solidifies and hardens, encasing the mist.

Neferu reaches a critical point in her ritual, for as she pronounces a passage with added stress, a bright light erupts from the mouth and eyes of the man, just for a second or so, and then, for the first time, the thing moves.

He is extremely ugly, his gray flesh a clue that the sliver was actually ancient flesh, preserved in the petrified wood reliquary. In fact, it was the preserved finger of Set, hidden and kept safe for millennia should all else fail in his resurrection. He is completely hairless, and his pupils are slits like those of a snake. His ears are merely holes on the sides of his head, and his face is elongated, nearly that of a hybrid between man and serpent. His lips part, and a long, forked tongue — disgusting and bright crimson and the most flesh-like part of him yet — lashes out.

He carefully examines those surrounding him, and they drop to the floor and grovel before his feet, moaning and praising in turn.

He moves over to Neferu, the only one standing, and says something. His deep, multi-layered voice, trails all the way from the grave, sending chills down the spines of even the undead. He turns to the page next to her, grabs him and rams his fingers into the boy's skull. Blood and gore oozes across his fingers. The boy's eyes turn white, and the man opens the boy's mouth with his other hand to rip out the boy's tongue. He eats the tongue, then opens and shuts his mouth for a while, and if the characters can see his huge, gaping mouth, the tongue is being fused with the one he already has.

Then he speaks again. This time what he says is twice as horrifying, not least because of what he says, but as much the fact that the characters can actually understand it. His true voice, in that infernal language, comes first, then on top of that the voice of a young boy, in a language the characters understand (preferably Arabic or Egyptian, but it could even be English with a stretch of the imagination).

"What are you?" is the first the dead god demands.

"Oh most revered and glorious Typhon, we are your grandchilder," is Neferu's reply. "We have brought you back from the Underworld so that you can rule the world, just as you requested."

"You? You are my progeny?" the booming voice fresh from the grave asks.

"Yes, magnificent one."

"You are not worthy of me. You do not deserve my blood. I reclaim it."

And with that, he bends down and swallows Neferu whole. She doesn't even have time to scream. He turns his head and cracks his neck, part of the crust encasing his incorporeal form peeling off, and then he moves on to the next victim. Everyone panics. He motions with his hands, and the ceiling through which one entered closes again, trapping everyone inside with him.

Concerning Setite Characters

If the characters are Setites, odds are good that you have included them in the process of resurrecting Set. If so, they have undergone careful preparation and rehearsal for the Resurrection, though they were likely guards posted during the performance.

If the characters are present in the cavern, there is obviously a great chance that Typhon eats them as well.

So there you have it, the Followers of Set fucked up. They brought back their dead, insane god, who is no more than another mad, godlike Antediluvian. Typhon will reign for thousands of years in chaos and destruction and dispose of anyone who is a threat to him (or even followers unworthy of him, which is pretty much every Setite in the world).

Yet, this isn't necessarily the end.

He does not devour all his childer. Some he needs to carry out his foul deeds.

Upon your decision, Setite characters are not devoured, but rather exalted to the service of Typhon. If you wish, you can proceed with Gehenna, with the characters serving their god, now back among the undead, and helping him prepare for his reign.

On the other hand, it is part of the perverse justice of the situation to have some Setite characters accountable for the actions of the god they chose to resurrect. Note that you needn't let the probability of the dice determine whether or not the characters die. This could be the very end, if you wish, letting the characters die screaming, in the awareness that they and their clan got everything wrong, or you could simply let them go on as Set's servants.

Characters not belonging to the Setite story line should run the hell away. They have another Antediluvian problem, but this one has just gorged itself on hundreds of its followers, and is not weakened like [Tzimisce], Tremere and Augustus were.

More Bad News

Jennifer McBride prevails in her pursuit to bring us the latest.

"The mob-like coalitions of Christians, Jews and Muslims in Jerusalem have continued their hunt of vampires, claiming that the mere existence of vampires is a slight to the will of God. Spurred by further controversial statements from the Vatican as well as other major religious factions, the collapsed governments in the Middle East have no way of containing the mobs. Reports claim that over two thousand humans and vampires having been killed in Jerusalem alone over the past weeks." Footage featuring the logo of the Al-Jazeera Network is cut in, with subtitles to a Farsi-speaking vigilante being interviewed. In the background, angry mobs vandalize and set fire to houses, dragging people out in the streets. "These demons drink human blood! By the grace of Allah, what more proof do you need to seek their destruction? They cannot be allowed to continue."

Back to Jennifer, who shuffles her papers. It's apparent that she hasn't slept much (her makeup notwithstanding), and she looks really worried.

"A Japanese news service reported yesterday that sea or air vessels coming within a given proximity of Hawaii suffered heavy assault by what are allegedly US military forces. The heavy protection of the islands has given credence to the rumors of the islands of Hawaii supposedly having become some sort of safe haven, housing an unknown number of celebrities, businessmen and politicians from around the world, including, some say, high-ranking vampires..."

Last Confessions

This is the message intricately carved into the six-sided porphyry stone.

The Lamentation of [?] unto Caine

And Caine walked with [?], and said unto him, "[?], my most prized grandchilde. The answers you seek bear little importance, lest [they all should explore] them.

For when the time comes, all will be judged, and in [?] you will find not your answers, only my judgment.

For your and [your brethren's] sins can be escaped only by one.

And you can only hope for [salvation of all?], and it shall be found in the most gentle of your brethren.

And he shall be brought forth held up high by those few who would stand against [the end]

He bears a new form, marked by the signs of the vilest and most unholy of acts, a [mockery] to the face of the One Above

And you will see no judgment, only he, for he has accepted my judgment on behalf of you all.

But that night will [never?] come, [...] I lay broken in the Earth, and the [...] my soul."

Act Six: And There Shall Come a Savior

Son of Adam, Son of Eve,
Behold, the mercy of the Father is greater than you can ever know
For even now there is a path opened
A road of Mercy
And you shall call this road [Golconda]
And tell your children of it,
For by that road may they come
Once again dwell in the Light.
—"The Temptation of Caine," *The Book of Nod*

The Product of the Characters' Findings

Bringing everything that the characters have found back to London for analysis brings startling revelations to light.

The vial makes no immediate sense for any of the scholars, not even Vykos, but they promise to get to work on it. It might take some time until they find anything concrete though, as no one has any particular desire to open it without knowing what it is. The characters would do well to hold on to it.

After careful consideration, Vykos (or whoever) concludes that the stone speaks of one of the 13 accepting the burden of all Children of Caine, saving them from the fires of Purgatory and the wrath of God. The "gentle one" as he or she is called, will die at the hands of another, but rise again in a form marked by the End Times, without memory. Those who would stand against the end, and eventually save all, will bring him forth.

Whatever sense the characters themselves get from this revelation, Noddists can lend light to some parts of the fragment. The "gentle one" could be a reference to Saulot, the mysterious progenitor of the now presumably extinct Salubri bloodline. Those who would stand against the end could easily be a prediction of the Nephtali, and, by extension, the characters. Drawing a logical conclusion, averting Gehenna requires locating Saulot, an Antediluvian very few know anything about.

Vykos, however, can tell them that there could be someone who would know. According to his knowledge, his clan, being eternal enemies with the Usurper Tremere, knew that the Tremere had personal motives for seeking the destruction of the Salubri. What those motives are exactly is unknown, but Etrius is bound to know something, as he was one of the original Tremere vampires.

Depending on what happened in Act Three, he could either be very easy to locate (if the characters trapped him and brought him back to London), or more difficult. At this point, the characters are bound to be sick of wild goose chases, so they should therefore be allowed to locate Etrius without too much inconvenience. Now that he is the only one left of the original Tremere, he has nowhere to go, and might as well have returned to London and relative safety on his own. He might even have joined the Nephtali.

True to Vykos' suggestion, the scholarly Warlock has the answers that the characters seek. He explains how Tremere, bent on reaching the Third Generation, once located several dormant Antediluvians, and chose Saulot to fulfill his aspirations.

Now comes the question of the mirror holding Goratrix. If the characters have broken the glass, he is destroyed, but if they have preserved it, he can become a useful tool right about now. In his suspended state, Goratrix still has considerable mystical insight, and though he cannot be freed, he has the knowledge to devise a ritual that could locate Saulot, whose soul still bears resonance of his long inhabitation of Tremere's body.

By allowing Etrius some flexibility, he can find a way to communicate with Goratrix. This would allow characters to learn not only how to locate Saulot, but among other things also the fate of the Tremere *antitribu* (assuming they weren't part of that story arc themselves).

Goratrix's ritual seems simple enough to perform, and Etrius undertakes this task, perhaps in concert with Vykos, or any characters skilled in Thaumaturgy. The ritual is first performed over a map of the world, which is substituted with more detailed region maps as the ritual advances, allowing them to find a fairly good match. Starting out with an atlas, and moving on to satellite photographs, ultimately obtains a match: an isolated research center outside Sydney, Australia.

Should the characters have lost the mirror with Goratrix, killed Etrius, or whatever else could pose a problem in this respect, there is another way of locating Saulot. Although his clan is all but extinct, the characters can learn of a peculiar bloodline in the East, who all share the Salubri characteristic of a third eye. While searching for

these vampires could prove not only hazardous but a major undertaking, these Wu Zao as they call themselves, do possess means to help the characters track down Saulot's location. Thus the characters could also get a small idea of what the situation is like in the Middle Kingdom.

Rebirth

Australia proves a strange mix of some of the places the characters have visited on their journeys. Some groups, most often Christian, have sprung up spreading the word of God and preaching destruction of the vile devils that walk as men. Some seem fairly relaxed, knowing that since vampires have apparently existed for millennia, they aren't much of a threat.

Traveling to the research center should be straightforward, and as the characters approach, they notice that it has been abandoned, apparently for months.

The building is a large glass and steel affair, with vast windows separating the arid outdoor climate from the sterile inside. The logo with the name of the center is featured several places, including the roof, proclaiming this to be Virolax Genetics Research Facility (government sponsored).

The characters should manage to get inside either through Intelligence + Security rolls (difficulty 7), or maybe more unconventional methods. Once that matter is dealt with, they find themselves in a highly modern building with many state-of-the-art features and long, barren corridors, betrayed only by the occasional calming potted fern or water cooler.

The search should not take very long. After a while, the characters find a confined, restricted area. Strangely, they don't need to break in — it is open.

The sight greeting them is not pleasant. In several tanks, the dead bodies of several glassy-eyed mortals are imprisoned, with tubes extruding from their torso, body cavities and head. Other such grotesque indications suggest that this is a cloning facility.

A separated room seems to have been housing a living patient, perhaps a child, but nothing seems to imply the accommodations of a *healthy* child. The room is as sterile and barren as the rest of the complex, with nothing more noteworthy than medical apparatuses and logs.

Examining these logs reveals that a child has, indeed, been kept here: a successfully cloned human, six years of age. The records explain that although the child displayed every sign of being in good physical shape, it was apparently comatose from birth, being vegetative for all intents and purposes.

Religious characters might see this whole place and its experiments as blasphemous, perhaps even postulating (correctly, unbeknownst to them) that the child's vegetative state was the result of the lack of a soul.

Characters might try to find out where the child has gone. Defying all logic, the child was not brought away by the scientists as they fled the facility after the Week of Revelations, fearing the wrath of God for what they had done. Rather, they just left it behind. At some point, however, long after it had been abandoned, the child stirred. The abomination awoke to find itself without memory or understanding of its situation. It got out of its bed, opened the door and simply walked out.

The child possesses the soul of the Antediluvian Saulot, who unknowingly possessed this form after he became incorporeal when the Dragon assumed his borrowed body. His awakened self rendered unconscious from the blow, his powerful soul still needed a physical form, so it subconsciously hurled itself through the vast space of the astral plane to the only suitable body in the world it could inhabit without struggle, a soulless clone.

Now Saulot has reawakened, but without the memories of his life, in the body of a six-year-old boy.

Without any clues, and maybe not even drawing the parallel from the porphyry they found in the Second City, the characters are left in the dark. Let them search around a bit more, though they won't necessarily find anything else of interest. If any of the characters possess any divinatory abilities (such as Auspex), they can learn that someone met the child outside the building and brought it with him. In the event that they do not, let them find some clues to where the child has gone. The child has been taken by a group of thin-bloods, who believe it to be a messiah.

Locating this cult is not too hard. The Cainite community of Sydney revolves around the degenerate court of "Caitiff" Prince Sarrasine. Sarrasine is actually a Follower of Set agent within the Camarilla. Sarrasine's ploy worked brilliantly as long as the Camarilla was stable. Now it is not. The rumors of a thin-blooded prince have led to a mass invasion of the city's streets by high-generation Cainites, seeing the Caitiff city as a free



haven. Sarrasine is obviously not very happy with this, but he has no choice but to go along with it.

The Setite prince is unaware of Saulot's appearance, or even of his own god's return, though he has heard the rumors of a messiah at least once a week since the Unmasking, and his dreams have become even stranger and more disturbing every day.

All Sarrasine knows is that some priest far above his head within the Followers of Set has instructed him to keep his eyes open for the *True* Messiah. Sarrasine has no idea what this is supposed to mean, but it's apparently important to something pertaining to the resurrection of Set, so it must be acknowledged.

The characters eventually locate the child-Saulot in an old warehouse, where the thin-bloods have set up a temporary shrine to him. The child does not understand what is going on and is uneasy among these strange and seemingly insane creatures. The coterie might actually have to engage the thin-bloods in combat to get hold of Saulot, but they should manage. Alternatively, they can probably find some way of scaring the thin-bloods away, as they are anxious and easily frightened.

When the characters finally get to Saulot, he asks them, "Who are you? What is this place? What do all these people want?"

And then, no matter what the characters say or do, his forehead splits, just a little, just enough for a third eye to be revealed, developing from nothing right in front of their eyes.

The characters should manage to figure out that this child is Saulot. Unless Goratrix's ritual failed and they found a random Salubri (which is unlikely), everything points to this child being the Antediluvian.

As indicated in the porphyry, he bears the mark of the vilest and most unholy of acts, a mockery in the face of God. He is a clone.

Return to Chaos

Leave it to the players to find out how to get the child out of the country without a birth certificate or even a passport, but they need to get Saulot back to London. He is sincerely ignorant of his true nature, and he does not seem to understand even if the characters try to explain it to him.

Sarrasine discovers too late that the "True Messiah" has actually appeared. Fearing the punishments from having failed his superiors, he sends his own agents after the coterie, not wishing to report to his contact in London.

At this point of the story, things are past escalating further. Mortal governments have collapsed by the number, either through unknown forces (Methuselah vampires, or even the Antediluvians?), or on their own accord, eating themselves up from the inside through revolts and unrest. The world is in terrible crisis, and even hitherto relatively stable countries suffer major emergencies as the authorities lose control on a widespread scale.

The characters return to London with the child, to find the former Heart of the Empire and their Nephtali in as much turmoil and trouble as is the case in the rest of the world. Many of the members of the Council have taken to bitter argument over what are the goals of the faction, some favoring a petty coup over the rest of the Camarilla, some the accumulation of knowledge, and others taking action to prevent Gehenna.

Additionally, independent groups and clans have entered the city, which adds to the chaos. Gehenna hysteria has reached even the most jaded, as frequent rumors of rising Ancients come in from all over the world. Most of the Nephtali's archeological groups have disappeared, their fates unknown, and the organization is frequently under attack for being responsible for the entire catastrophe, by anyone from Kindred groups to mortal governments.

Act Seven: Judgment

How this act plays out depends on how the rest of the story has proceeded. This is the very end, and some of your characters might even be dead by this point. Hopefully, some are not, for the most critical portion of the story is yet to come — judgment.

The researchers who still labor at the Nephtali headquarters have been going through all the material and objects that the characters have gathered. They have discovered that the vial had been one of the many artifacts [Ventrue] allegedly gathered for unknown reasons back in the time of the Second City. The vial contains some sort of Kindred blood sample, but when extracted and tested, it aggressively absorbed vitae in proximity to it. One of the careless researchers had attempted to draw a swig, hoping it would grant him power over the Withering, but immediately met Final Death, leaving behind only a pulp of ashes and blood. No one else dared touch the solution, so they scooped the pile up and threw it out.

Of the theories concerning the vial, none has met significant agreement among the scientists. After all, vials of 7,000-year-old blood are not exactly commonplace, and the vial undoubtedly has a mystical significance. It just isn't particularly apparent at this point.

Confrontations

After the characters have returned to London, the Storyteller might wish to have a period of downtime between the characters trying to find out what their next move should be and getting there. This could be a good place to include a few combat scenes, having the characters attacked by rampant mobs, rogue Kindred or true enemies. The latter includes the henchmen of Sarrasine, out to reclaim the child that the coterie snapped from right under its nose. Sarrasine does not know why the Fire Court wants the child, nor do the court's henchmen, so beaten foes of this faction cannot divulge any information.

Should Giovanni or Sabbat vampires attack the characters, however, they might be able to shed some light on certain things, especially after some rigorous persuasion. The same is true with Setites directly involved with the Fire Court. Sarrasine's goons and the Fire Court Setites might even confront each other without even knowing that they're on the same side. The potential for Sarrasine and his goons to screw up and unknowingly sabotage the Fire Court's operations is also great.

Pandemonium

As the characters rest that day, after having spent the entire night discussing what to do with their allies and contacts at the Nephtali headquarters, they stir from their slumber and awaken. Not drowsy or weak, nor feeling the usual pull to sleep, they emerge to find the world cold and... dark. They look up to where the sun is supposed to be and see a dark object blocking it, like an eclipse. Everyone would know if there were to be an eclipse now, however. This is unnatural. In truth, it feels unnatural as well. The glow of the sun is barely visible around the edges of the black object.

Each and every Lasombra vampire in the world feels something tugging at her soul, a chill down her spine — a very bad feeling indeed.

The Veil of Darkness

Over the next few days mortal and Kindred scientists alike try to make sense of this strange phenomena, with no luck. If anything, the ab-

sence of the sun makes everything take a turn for the worse. Mortals, animals and plants suffer without light, and monsters, vampires and others, make good use of this rare opportunity.

Vampires do not suffer from being awake during the day; they still spend one blood point every 24 hours, but the sun is not present to force them into their diurnal suspended state. Horror ensues on the streets around the world, as more and more vampires abuse the advantages they have over mortals. Governments continue to erode, cities devolve into chaos, and infrastructures crumble and die.

Everyone feels it, mortal and Cainite alike. There is something terrible within the darkness that veils the world. In every corner, in every deep wood, in every cave and under every bed, something lurks... some malignant presence.

In the skies, one star takes the attention away from all the others: a bright, red one, nearly as big as the moon. In truth, it is just as unnerving as the unnatural eclipse.

Effects of the Veil of Darkness

After the eclipse, many vampires experience strange, unnatural things while employing their Disciplines. Consult the following table for sug-

Effects of the Veil of Darkness

Discipline Power Effect

Auspex

• Heightened Senses The character hears more than what she normally would. A cacophony of strange voices whisper to her, exhorting her to do things, or maybe even taunting her. A Courage roll (difficulty 7) allows the character to continue using this power for the remainder of the scene.

•• Aura Perception When using this power, the character sees unnerving shadows flutter and move about. They have no real form, and it is impossible to gain an exact view of them, but they are certainly not supposed to be there. A Courage roll (difficulty 7) should be required to using this power for the remainder of the scene.

•••• Psychic Projection While on the astral plane, the character catches glimpses of the same shadow creatures as with Aura Perception. She can also hear what they say, but they can also see and hear her. They are very intrigued by the incorporeal vampire. The Storyteller should determine the consequences, but a Courage roll (difficulty 8) is required to continue the psychic projection for the remainder of the scene.

Obfuscate

• Cloak of Shadows The shadows seem to speak to the user of this power, taunting or enticing him. A Courage roll (difficulty 8) is required to continue using the power for the remainder of the scene, lest the character panic. On occasion, the character even thinks she sees things while employing this power.

•• Unseen Presence Shadows seem to gravitate toward the character, sometimes becoming more of a nuisance than an aid, as it might be easier to spot the character. As with Shadow Play, the shadows whisper to her. A Courage roll (difficulty 8) is required to continue using the power for the remainder of the scene.

Obtenebration

• Shadow Play The shadows manipulated with this power seem to gain a life of their own, dancing and playing, often with the caster. This is very unnerving. Storytellers may warrant a Courage check (difficulty 7) for Kindred characters in some cases, and the difficulty for mortals rises to 9.

•• Shroud of Night Anyone within the Shroud of Night must make a Courage roll at difficulty 8 (9 for mortals) or panic and flee, on account of the cacophony of dreadful voices whispering within it.

••• Arms of the Abyss The Arms of the Abyss gain a life of their own, doing the caster's bidding only half the time. Roll a die every time this power is used (even when it is active). On a roll of 6-10, the arms do not respond to the vampire's commands. They might even try to hurt her.

•••• Black Metamorphosis The player must succeed at a Willpower roll (difficulty 8), lest the shadows take control of the character. The Storyteller determines the consequences.

••••• Tenebrous Form Same effects as Black Metamorphosis.

In addition, the Storyteller might wish for other Disciplines to be affected as well. For instance, Earth-Melded vampires could hear voices speaking to them, and certain necromantic or thaumaturgical rituals could invoke this same effect.

gested effects. Bear in mind that the powers of other supernatural creatures are probably similarly affected.

Exodus

Another strange thing occurs, mere days after the disappearance of the sun. A strange urge rises in many vampires, a strange pull toward an unknown location. The urge increases with time, and it becomes more and more difficult to resist it. This is the final stage of the End Times. Now the Ancients have gathered at the time of Gehenna and are calling their childer to them.

Join Us...

Not all vampires feel the pull, however. Some of the Antediluvians have already been destroyed, yet many of their childer still feel the urge. Although the effects of the blood bond have weakened, this drawing toward Gehenna still resonates, as it is meant to. For Assamites, Gangrel, Lasombra, Malkavians, Nosferatu, Toreador and Setites, the pull is the strongest. A Willpower roll is required every day after the pull starts, increasing in difficulty by one every day, to a maximum of 9. Difficulty is determined by generation. Others feel it less, because their progenitors have been destroyed, but the elders of these bloodlines beckon their childer to them in the Ancients' place. For them the difficulty of resisting is much less, but increases at the same rate. Within one week, a precious few are able to resist. Note that Assamites are drawn to Alamut instead, wherein ur-Shulgi gathers his resources for war against the Antediluvians.

Generation	Difficulty (bloodlines with active Antediluvians/ bloodlines with perished Antediluvians)
4-6	7/4
8-13	6/3
14+	5/2

Gehenna the Last City

"Gehenna" is synonymous with "Place of Torment." Strictly geographically speaking, it is the Valley of Hinnom, southwest of Jerusalem, where Solomon, King of Israel, built a high place of worship, for the gods Chemosh and Moloch. The valley came to be regarded as a place of abomination because some of the Israelites sacrificed their children to Moloch there. In a later



period, it was made a refuse dump and perpetual fires were maintained there to prevent pestilence. In the New Testament, Gehenna is even synonymous with Hell. Many Kindred believe that at the time of Gehenna, the basalt throne of Caine will arise here. Caine will judge his childer, and the Antediluvians shall commence a thousand-year reign from the city of Gehenna. This is where the world ends.

During the weeks following the Unmasking, elder vampires started gathering around this place, doing exactly what the Israelites did in ancient times: sacrificing their childer. Hoping that the Antediluvians would spare them and that having fewer vampires in the world would mean that they could have their powers restored to them, they burned their progeny. They dared not diablerize them, instead releasing their victims' souls through fire. The pits have smoldered continuously day and night, as vampires burned to their Final Deaths. All night long, the sounds of the lamentations of these elders and the screams of their childer have endured, on and on, in a dread cacophony. All day no sound but the crackling fires being maintained by mortal retainers could be heard.

The captured neonates — mostly Caitiff and thin-bloods, but Kindred from all standings — have also been used as forced labor as the elders constructed the foundations of the Last City. Similar to Egypt's golden age, scores of enslaved vampires have pulled the tremendous weight of massive stones used in building the citadel. Using their last remnants of influence and power, the elders undertook the truly immense task of building a city in the image of the empires of old.

Mortals have kept great distance between themselves and this dreadful place, their armies and guns having proven insufficient to bring down the elder vampires. Stories of demons rising to punish the Israelites for the sins of their fathers on this place have abounded. Every night, new elders arrived, bringing with them imprisoned younger vampires that they put into steel pens scattered all across the scene, where the neonates and, especially, thin-bloods, have awaited their fiery punishment for merely existing.

Here the Antediluvians have come, and they have subjugated their childer below them, assuming the mantle of power they once held. They have taken residence in the citadel as it is still being constructed. They hold a tenuous truce with each other, gathering their underlings to them, waiting in patience as they build the foundation of their reign of blood. From here they shall rule for a thousand years, or so it is written in *The Book of Nod*. And then Caine will return to lay down his judgment.

Armies of Darkness

The Antediluvians have stopped their childer from destroying their own get. Instead, they have ordered more vampires to be created, to make their armies larger, to better rule the world. It should be pointed out that the Antediluvians are all beyond the mortal frame of thinking and that they do not consider the consequences of what they are doing the same way humans do. In addition, this is not their world. They see nothing wrong with reshaping it into what will be their kingdom.

One can safely assume, however, that each Antediluvian has its own plans of conquest and dominion. Each wishes its brethren dead so that it can rule alone. Each amasses an army of undead, allegedly to conquer the world, but also to destroy its siblings.

Jerusalem is long since departed, and Judea has been turned into a genuine Hell, overrun by vampires and their retainers. To this dreadful place the characters eventually come.

Zenith

All those who have worked against the Antediluvians, in whatever way — any member of the Sabbat, the Nephtali, even those of the Camarilla and Inconnu who have tried to avert Gehenna — are led through the streets of the Last City Gehenna as criminals to be executed as in nights of old. All around them other Kindred have gathered, watching them. Some shout insults, some even throw garbage, but most are silent.

Among these unfortunates are the characters with their clone-child ward, as they were incarcerated as soon as they come to Gehenna. Behind them come Ambrogino and his Giovanni, and behind him Vykos and his Sabbat.

These transgressors are brought to the center of the city, where the Antediluvians are gathered. They might recognize Set, though he is more humanlike now, with real skin and flowing robes in the place of his crusted dead flesh. [Lasombra] is an ominous shadow, its presence more felt than seen. The Gangrel progenitor stands in the background, a hellish amalgam of unearthly bestial features. Absimiliard is tall even though he is hunched, and his tattered cloaks mainly hide

what can only be assumed to be a truly horrid sight. Malkav is present through a dozen small girls, all with their eyes glowing, all with identical appearance. [Toreador] is the apex of beauty, as it stands amidst the others, so beautiful even that it is impossible to tell its gender, let alone give a description of it.

The procession moves extremely slowly. It takes nights to complete, and the characters have no sustenance on their way there. One by one, each transgressor is brought before the Antediluvians and slain for his or her "crimes."

Then the players' characters are brought before the assembly. Set opens his mouth to speak, but pauses. Ennoia, the Gangrel Antediluvian, growls.

"Could it be..." Typhon finally begins. "Our prodigal brother?"

They speak of Saulot, whom the characters have with them.

"Bring him here," the shadow being commands, the voice trailing as if coming from the other side of the grave. If the characters protest, they are punished, but they are not slain yet.

"So, you have returned." Absimiliard growls from within his cloaks. "Do you claim a place among us?"

Saulot just stands there, like the six-year-old boy that he has become, eyes wide open, both in terror and in confusion. He does not utter a word.

"Brother isn't home," the dozen girls that are Malkav utter all at once. "He has gone to a dark place and hasn't come out yet."

"Is that so?" says Set, intrigued. He turns to the characters. "So these are my brother's keepers, are they?" He orders them brought before him. "You hunt our kind, yet you protect this one. Why?"

Despite the withering, the characters have no chance to resist answering Typhon's questions truthfully. Let your players formulate the answer, and modify the rest of the scene based on those answers.

"So you believe he will save you all, do you? That he will redeem you somehow? Yet you do not know how. You have only this six-year-old child." He spits as he says this.

He then notices something in Saulot's hand. "What is that?" he says, and Saulot shows it. It is the Cainite vial. Now, if any one of the characters had it on him, this is the time to feel his pocket and notice that it's gone. If no one thought to bring it along, Saulot simply found it and took it when no one was looking. Either way, the vial is now here.

Set snatches it from him. "It is powerful. I can feel it." He says, mostly to himself.

"Don't drink it. You'll burn up," says Saulot.

"Will I now?" Set replies, and smiles.

"What are you doing, brother?" the girls that are Malkav say. "This is highly irregular."

"Yes, exactly what is it you are doing?" asks [Lasombra].

"Humor me," Set replies. "So we can't drink it, can we? Let's see what happens if *you* drink it."

He takes the child by the jaw, snaps the cap off the vial, and forces the liquid down the child's throat. Saulot screams and tries to squirm lose, but Set is too powerful for him. Ennoia growls, and both Lasombra and the collective Malkav protest. But Set, bent on destroying all of the other Antediluvians, will not let even a child stand in his way.

Soon Saulot has been forced to swallow it all. Set lifts the child and looks at the characters.

"You have failed," he says, as Saulot writhes in pain. Set starts laughing, but is cut short by a brilliant white light erupting from Saulot's forehead. His third eye is opening, and it is shining.

"Have they?" he asks, and Set drops Saulot, falling to the ground in horror. He attempts to crawl back on his feet, but he backs away as Saulot approaches him. Ennoia growls and is about to leap at him, but the ground breaks before her, and between the Antediluvians and Saulot a giant black throne rises from the ground.

"No!" [Lasombra] screams. "A thousand years!"

"Father's home," the dozen small girls who are Malkav say in unison.

"No," says the little boy that is Saulot. "Father's dead."

Then the girls scream, and it's a scream so agonizing that everyone close to the scene bleeds thick, black blood from his ears. They do not stop until Set has come to his feet and slain all 12 girls with huge powerful blows. As the last one dies, another vampire steps forth from the thousands surrounding the scene, his eyes glowing like the girls'. "That was not necessary, brother," the man says. Set just spits. Then he moves toward Saulot.

Set raises a hand to strike Saulot to the ground, when suddenly, a powerful beam of light from above illuminates the entire area. All of the



Antediluvians apart from Saulot fall to the ground and writhe in pain, and the players of all other vampires within the beam of light (which is about 30 feet across) must roll Willpower (difficulty 9) not to have their Kindred fall to their knees in pain as well. No damage is inflicted, though — this pain is psychological. After the initial roll to resist, consider all actions within the illuminated area to suffer halved dice pools for vampire characters.

Saulot, and those who are able to do so, look up, and a glorious angel descends from above.

"Saulot of Nod!" its majestic voice rings like a choir of holy trumpets. "Do you stand before the presence of your Lord requesting to atone for the sins of your accursed line?"

He hesitates. No one else can speak or move. They are all frozen.

"Y...yes, yes I do," he suddenly replies, lifting himself with pride.

"Then so be it. Your Lord God in Heaven accepts your sacrifice."

And then the basalt throne explodes. Sunlight floods like a shock wave from it, burning the Antediluvians to cinders and inflicting five dice of aggravated damage on all vampires within 100 feet of the throne.

Assuming the characters survive that, there is nothing but silence. There is a valley full of vampires not quite sure what happened, but the thrall of the Antediluvians is gone. In fact, everyone feels empty for it. It takes about a minute before the effects of their severed bloodline kicks in (see p. 130), then the frenzy and diablerie starts again. Then the sun rises.

Aftermath

If the characters escape with their unlives intact, they are free to do whatever they wish. The world lies in ruins, but humanity has a strange way of prevailing. Maybe it can manage, somehow. Vampires have it worse. The Curse of Caine is still weakening, and at an alarming rate. Older vampires are dying, and it seems as though most may have as little as weeks left before they weaken so much that their bodies can no longer sustain themselves. As the curse of vampirism leaves their bodies, as the blood does not sustain them as it once did but only fills up the body while the vitae disappears, many vampires die in the process.

Centuries-dead bodies crumble to dust, and decades-old bodies simply wane and die. Potentially, very high generation vampires might survive the transformation back into humans, but only if their undead blood is extremely weak to begin with. (Assume that 15th-generation, and some 14th-generation, Kindred can potentially revert to mortal. Dhampirs do not suffer a chance of dying. They turn mortal naturally.) The players' characters should have a chance to revert to their mortal lives as well, based on their behavior throughout Gehenna. God punishes those who have not atoned for their sins with Final Death. As Storyteller, it is up to you to determine who among the coterie earns the passage back to mortal life and who becomes an ashen stain on the ground.

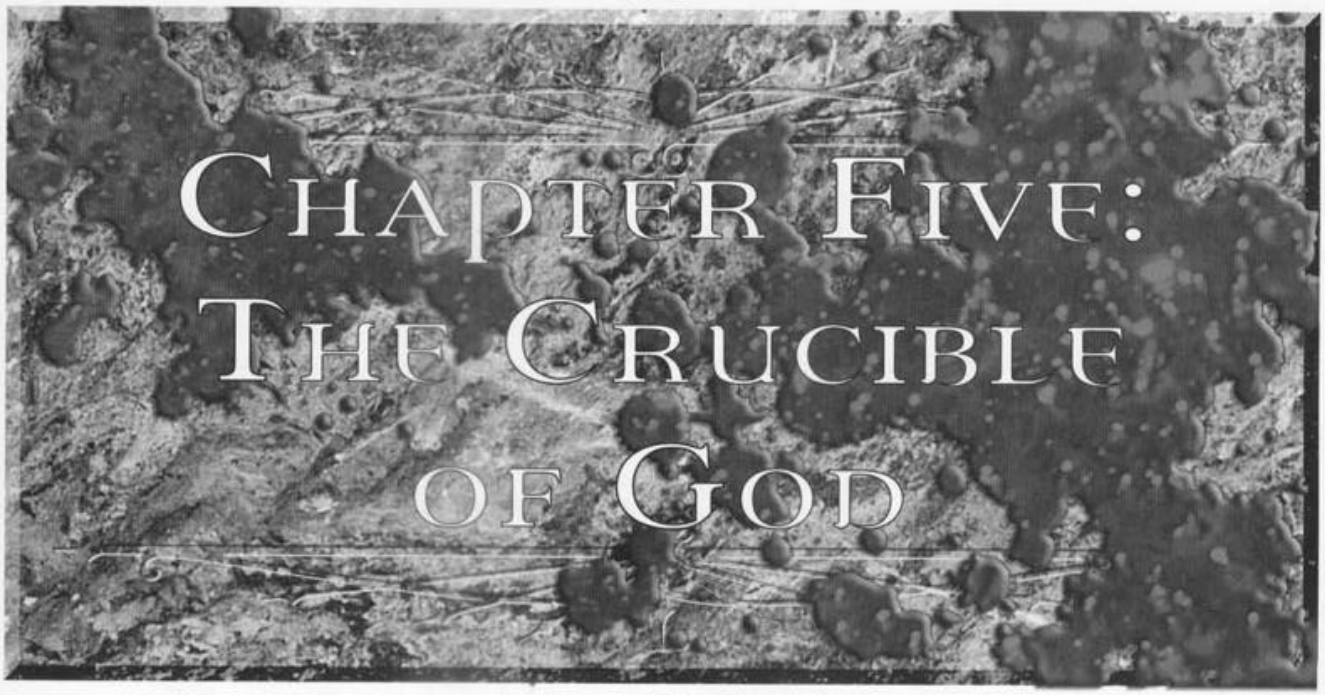
Discipline powers fail, magic dies and the Curse of Caine will become all but a memory.

Yet, the world has been saved. Humanity will survive. Although all vampires will die, the characters have succeeded in saving the Earth from destruction.

Epilogue (Optional)

One day the remaining members of the coterie hears of a high-generation Kindred whose body was wracked by fierce convulsions. His flesh doubled and tripled over itself, spawning new bone and inhuman appendages. In one of these horrifying fits, he went mad and killed everyone in the vicinity. The more the characters hear, the more it sounds like the Tzimisce Antediluvian. But how can that be? They've already killed it twice! Unless it is able to reincarnate into anything with Tzimisce blood in it...





Chapter Five: The Crucible of God

If a man abide not in me, he is cast forth as a branch and is withered; and men gather them, and cast them into the fire, and they are burned.
—John 15:6

The chain of events that culminates in Gehenna began millennia ago, when the Antediluvians realized that they could achieve some greater state than undeath… something very much like godhood. The Tzimisce clan's mystic Path of Metamorphosis hints at this possibility. Most, if not all, of the surviving Antediluvians set out to transcend the limitations set by the Curse of Caine. They knew the process would take centuries. In this time, they would need to hide from each other, lest their jealous siblings and ambitious childer slay them before they completed their transformation. Some Antediluvians merely sought remote havens underground or in the ocean deeps. Others faked their own murders as part of their metamorphosis. Saulot offered himself to Tremere's fangs to hide within the Arch-Usurper's body and soul. A Kindred lost to the passage of time likewise sacrificed his vitae to his childe Augustus Giovanni, while the Lasombra Antediluvian arranged its corporeal destruction in the Anarch Revolt so it could take a new form in the lightless Abyss. Each deceit worked flawlessly… or if any Ancient truly met its end in this period, no other Kindred knew of it.

The Ravnos founder became the first Antediluvian to show its dreadful new power. Yet before it could complete its metamorphosis, three ancient Cathayan vampires engaged it in battle. Kindred dubbed this event the Week of Nightmares. The battle echoed through the worlds of dreams, spirits and the dead, hinting at the divine power the First Ravnos had almost achieved. The Ravnos Antediluvian lost its battle and its unlife. Its demise also destroyed most of its descendants. Only a few Kindred, however, even came close to guessing the true meaning behind the Week of Nightmares.

As a strange and terrible Red Star burns brighter in the heavens, the other Antediluvians slowly rouse from their long chrysalis-trances, ready to rule the world as its new gods. And then… the Curse of Caine fails. The Ancients learn that they have not yet completely transcended their origin. The deadly weakness strips away their nascent divinity. They rise as the world's most powerful monsters, but not as gods. To claim the godhood that eludes them, they need to seize the fraying shreds of Caine's Curse by devouring their rivals, their childer and oceans of mortal blood.

Humanity and its supernatural "allies" — the Lupines, mages and other creatures who see the human race as kin (or at least something other than prey, slaves or vermin) — might have slain the weakened Antediluvians and aborted their Empire of Blood. Indeed, ordinary humanity could have done the job itself. Unfortunately,

the decline of the Curse has ironically brought war between Kindred and kine too soon. The modern Kindred win thanks to their grip on mortal institutions, a Pyrrhic victory that leaves civilization in tatters.

Every Cainite has faced the choice between humanity and power. Now they face that choice in its starkest form. As individuals and as a race, the Kindred must decide whether to let the Curse end, with unknown consequences for themselves, or to cling to the power of the Curse through ever more desperate devices. The last judgment on the Children of Caine has begun. God casts them into the crucible — and the world burns with them.

Prelude

The End of the World begins not with the rampage of bloody gods but with a video camera. Maintaining the Masquerade has become ever more difficult in the last few decades, as modern communications spread news so quickly. Once, it didn't matter if a few people learned that vampires really existed. The Kindred could silence or discredit them before they convinced anyone else. But now...! If a TV crew should happen to see Cainites feed or use their powers, people around the world can watch mere minutes later. Caine forbid that a Kindred should fall into the clutches of a doctor or scientist who publishes his research results on the Internet.

The leaders of every sect and clan became skilled at hiding Cainite depredations from the mortals. Many Kindred sought wealth and influence in the mortal world specifically to help them avert threats to the Masquerade. When the Masquerade falls despite their best efforts, they turn that influence to more sinister ends... and step on the fatal path to total destruction.

Masquerade's End

Some players might feel that their characters never get a chance to play an important role in Cainite affairs. Their elders are so much more powerful, and the Masquerade imposes such a burden of secrecy and prudence. As a Storyteller, this is your chance to give such players what they want. They become the most important Kindred in the world: the vampires responsible for destroying the Masquerade.

Please note that this episode involves grossly unfair treatment of the players' characters. The characters become Destiny's bitches. At every stage, examine the characters' actions for ways that things might go wrong and make matters worse — and have that happen. In particular, remember that you, as Storyteller, can make Cainite powers fail at any time.

Seizing the Opportunity

The tale of Gehenna can begin at any time. The decline of the Curse might be well underway and already plunging the Kindred into chaos, or you might want to make the decline begin with (and indeed help cause) the Masquerade's end.

As Storyteller, watch for a moment when the characters perform some act that is completely impossible for mortals. Typical examples include:

- Someone shoots a character in the gut or the chest; blood and tissue sprays. A mortal could not possibly survive, but the character not only keeps standing, he keeps fighting.
- A thaumaturge employs his power with some obviously magical, highly visible effect, such as Lure of Flames or Movement of the Mind. Disciplines such as Obtenebration or Protean can also produce visibly supernatural feats.
- Characters feed in an open place.

Then ask yourself if someone could watch the characters without them knowing it. Presumably, the characters exercise reasonable care not to perform blatantly supernatural acts in front of mortals, but could someone be hiding nearby? Is anyone looking down from a window several stories up? Is the lighting good enough to see the characters clearly?

When such a situation arises, someone does see the characters, and she has a digital video camera with a telephoto lens. A lot of people now carry these things everywhere they go, so this is hardly implausible. The mortal, a nosy, opportunistic woman, records the characters without their knowing it.

The Media

The woman with the camera shows her footage to the managers of a local TV station. They suspect fraud, but they have experts look for evidence of camera tricks while a reporter tries to find the identities of the characters. Did any character have a driver's license, a criminal record or any incident in his past that left his picture in government files? If so, the reporter finds the character's identity. If the character keeps a legally recorded residence, the reporter finds that too. If the character is legally dead, the reporter finds that datum even more interesting.

A week later, the news casters convince themselves that the woman did not perpetrate a hoax and that something very odd happened in their city. They know the identities and investigated the paper trails of at least some of the characters. The film goes on the six o'clock news, and the station contacts the characters it traced, asking them to tell their story. The station doesn't care if the characters committed assault or even homicide in the

filmed scene — violence just pumps up ratings. The station even offers to keep the characters' identities secret in return for the scoop... and threatens to reveal their identities if they don't play ball.

The Cover-up

Whether the characters consider themselves part of the Camarilla, the Sabbat, the anarchs or the independent clans, every ranking Cainite who knows their identity soon demands that the characters cover up the Masquerade breach. Quite a few Cainites offer to help, in return for boons to collect later.

The characters can make any plan they want. The characters might come up with a counter-hoax — some scheme to make the station think the video footage captured a faked event. The reporters prove damnably clever at spotting any flaw in the characters' deceptions though. Nothing can make the station drop its demand for an interview. Even if the coterie persuades the reporters that the footage is a hoax, the station wants to know the reason for such a bizarre enactment. As other Kindred warn the characters, it isn't enough to discredit or destroy the footage. The situation has become too infamous for the characters to simply murder the reporters; that would attract even more interest. No, the characters must quell the interest of the lead reporter so that he himself stops the investigation.

Characters have a number of ways to do so using their influence in the mortal world. For instance, they can try to bribe or blackmail the reporter's news director to quash the story. Planting drugs in the reporter's home or framing him for some other crime can discredit the reporter and keep him busy with the law. If a plan has the possibility of backfiring and throwing gasoline on the blaze, however, it does.

As characters grow more desperate, they probably turn to their Cainite powers. For instance, Presence can make the reporter divert the media attention from his new best friends. A blood bond could produce a similar effect — or it would, if the Withering did not strip that property from the Blood. The weakening Curse scotches any plan that depends on Discipline powers. Any attempt to use Disciplines fails, and now the reporter knows the character tried to do something to him! He runs. If the characters kill him, they become (obviously) prime suspects in his death or disappearance. If they don't, he goes public with everything he's learned. Their attempt at a cover-up completely backfires. It's too late even to try disappearing: That just attracts more attention.

In the Public Eye

Within another week, the characters become internationally notorious. The cops want to arrest them for any violent acts in the footage. Scientists want to study their unexplained powers. The characters might need to evade everyone from the FBI to the Center for Disease Control. If any government agency succeeds in catching the characters, the jig is up and the Masquerade falls for good.

The mass media want statements. Everyone who believes in vampires gets his time on TV to promote his views. Most of these people are just crackpots, but a few genuine vampire-hunters get on the air too. They tell the public what they know.

A month later, people around the world are searching for vampires. Clever fellows watch crowds through infrared filters, looking for people who lack body heat. They find some.

Full Disclosure

Inevitably, some Kindred squeals. If the players' characters escape the hunt, some other Cainite decides he wants to be famous on television by telling everything. Of course, leading Cainite media watchdogs try to suppress the story, but the frenzy has already spread beyond containment. If the blabbermouth Kindred can't get on network television, he tells all on a webzine or some other unconventional medium. Cainite elders respond with a flood of phony "revelations" too, in hopes that they can drown the truth in a sea of hoaxes, but the media prove that when they care to, they really can sift truth from lies. Before long, the entire world knows about the Camarilla, the Sabbat, clans, the Giovanni financial empire...

Out of the Closet

In the developed world, mortal responses to Cainites fall into a few major categories:

- "Wow, cool!" This is the least common response, usually from young people who don't really think through the implications of bloodsucking predators with mind-control powers. They see the power but not the horror.
- "Help these unfortunate victims of this social disease." This response comes mostly from well-meaning people who also fail to grasp the danger that vampires pose. Kindred with centuries of experience at manipulating public opinion encourage this view as much as they can.
- "Destroy the monsters!" The other extreme chiefly comes from people who hold traditional religious beliefs — a significant fraction of the population worldwide (and not limited to Judaism, Christianity or Islam, either). This fraction grows larger when the Society of Leopold goes public with its stories of undead predation.
- "I'm scared. Protect me." The most common response comes from the ordinary people who aren't quite ready to believe in curses from God but who recognize the danger that vampires pose. At the very least, these people

want vampires registered like sex offenders, and imprisoned if they have committed crimes.

• "How can I use this?" Hardly anyone admits to this view in public, but many government officials and business executives see ways they can exploit vampires: life extension, spies who control minds and walk unseen, et cetera. They do not want civil rights for the undead, they want the Kindred under their control.

Cutting Deals

Politically connected Kindred quickly try to protect themselves by making deals with governments and major corporations. The Camarilla naturally enjoys the greatest success at this endeavor, though the influence-peddling Followers of Set, super-rich Giovanni and some Lasombra do well for themselves, too. Kindred who already possess great wealth and influence pledge to maintain social stability in return for quiet amnesty from governments. For at least a month, many governments seem to dither while actually conducting secret negotiations with prominent elders.

Camarilla elders then turn about and hold their political connections over younger Kindred. They cannot keep the peace with the mortal authorities unless they can guarantee the good behavior of every Kindred, they claim, so every Cainite must obey without question and inform on any vampire who disobeys.

A Negotiated Settlement?

A few Kindred who achieved fame in life as artists, generals, statesmen and the like become celebrities as specimens of "living" history. For instance, the Lasombra elder Admiral Sidonia, onetime commander of the Spanish Armada and a leader of the Sabbat for centuries, finally sails a ship to London. When he arrives, he is met by a Royal Navy band and the Lord Mayor. Some Cainites dare to think that the Masquerade's end might not doom the Kindred after all. The modern, secular world has changed so much from the nights of the Inquisition. All they have to do is keep those crazy Sabbat from spoiling everything with some senseless massacre.

The Sabbat doesn't ruin the hopes for rapprochement, though. The Sabbat is too busy diablerizing itself into oblivion as its members try to save themselves from the Withering. The Camarilla dooms itself when nosy police discover one of the Camarilla's "internment centers" for "dissident" Kindred. What's worse, they learn how Camarilla elders use the interned Cainites as diablerie vessels. News of the "Cannibal Camps" provokes revulsion in even the most broad-minded. At a stroke, the elders lose any hope of public acceptance for the Kindred. From then on, Cainites must wield their influence as secretly as they did during the Masquerade, based on bribes, threats and lies. Now, though, the mortal authorities know to look for undead manipulation.

Unlife in Unsettled Times

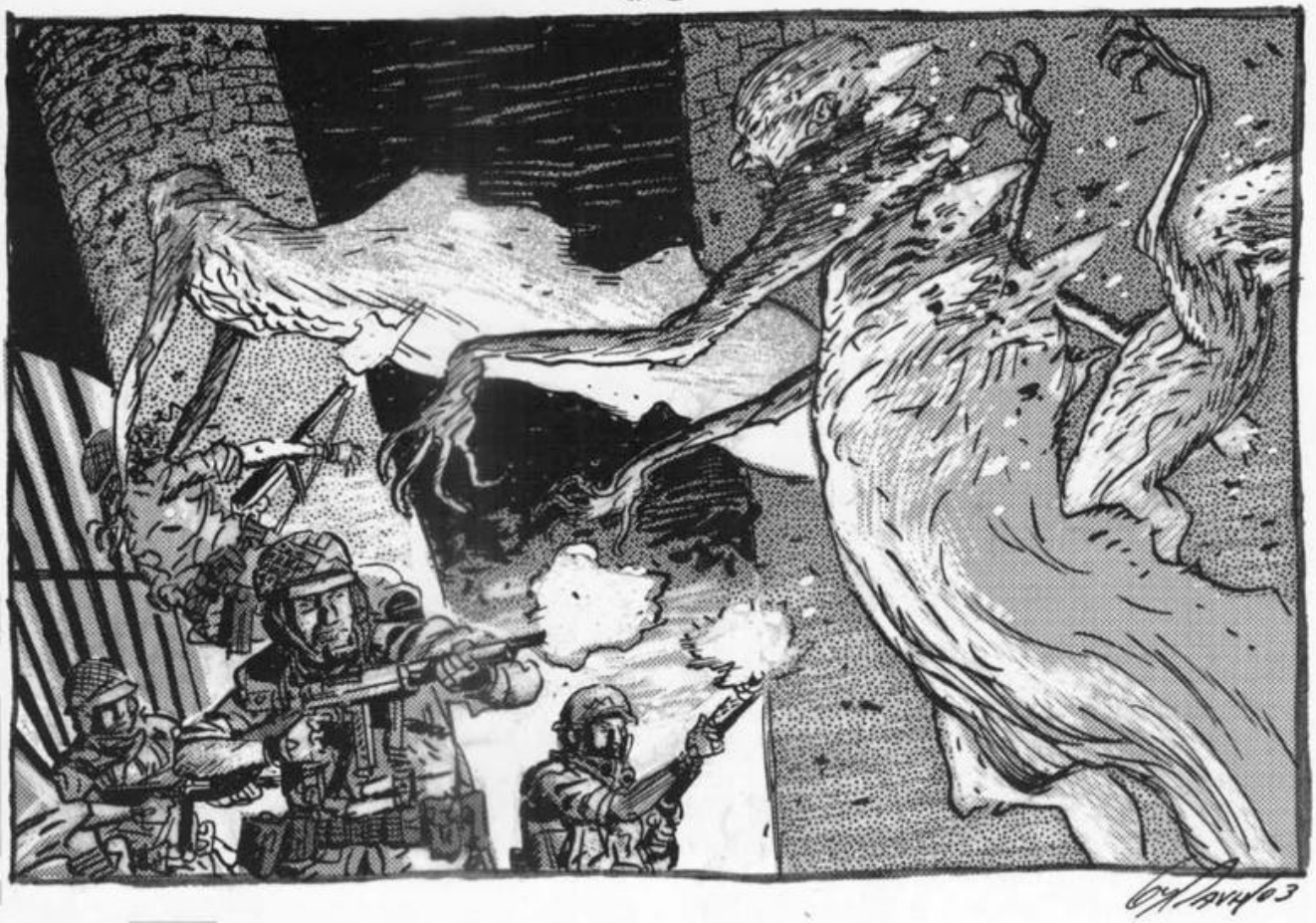
While the mortal world tries to make up its mind about the Kindred, characters encounter a number of situations they might not expect. Storytellers should not pass up the chance to place surprising social challenges before the characters.

• Do any of the characters have mortal associates or family? Anyone who didn't know about a character's undeath wants to have a word with her about it. Some people might resent the character's deceiving them or keeping secrets. Others might feel glad to learn that a loved one they thought was dead is actually still alive (sort of). All of them want explanations, though. Characters whose relatives hold conservative religious views might expect especially stormy reunions.

Since the characters' identities became widely known, their relatives receive some of the media attention too. They might not like it, either. Talking to one reporter might not upset a person, but not everyone wants to talk to reporters every day and answer stupid or insulting questions like, "Did your daughter ever bite you?" or, "Are any other family members vampires?"

• Did the videotape of the characters show any prosecutable offenses? The mortal authorities do prosecute if they can find and arrest the characters. Arranging a trial, however, involves a number of thorny legal issues. Do the characters count as citizens? As people? As legally living creatures? Do they receive any legal protections at all? If they destroyed another vampire, all these questions apply to the alleged victim, too. The good news? Top-notch, world-famous lawyers ask to defend the characters free of charge, just for the exposure and the chance to make legal history. The characters themselves receive intensive questioning and cross-examination to establish their legal status. This is a chance for a bit of unusual courtroom drama. The media immediately dubs it "the greatest trial since O. J." and demands round-the-clock coverage of every detail. Of course, anything that involves the characters must take place at night.

• If the characters can avoid prosecution (or get out on bail), they attract groupies. Blood dolls want to receive the Kiss from them. *Real* nutcases want to receive the Embrace from them. Some people just want to be seen with someone famous. The characters receive marriage proposals. If they are not under indictment, they also receive offers for product endorsements, talk shows, stunt casting on TV shows and other sorts of



media exploitation. (And the characters thought *they* were the bloodsuckers.)

The characters also attract more familiar threats, such as amateur hunters eager to bag the world's most famous vampires. The professional hunters, like the Society of Leopold, stay away. The professionals don't want the notoriety of murdering a celebrity. The amateurs become nearly as dangerous as the professionals, though, if they always know where to find the characters.

• If the characters can negotiate the Scylla of legal action and the Charybdis of celebrity, other Cainites might ask them to act as spokesmen for Kindred interests. Characters who accept this responsibility find the political skills they've developed in Elysium or Sabbat *ritae* put to the test before congressional committees or other governing bodies. Their growing political connections also prompt Kindred elders to curry their favor. When the authorities discover the "Cannibal Camps," however, they put the characters on the spot to explain this horror — which can become especially troublesome if Camarilla princes encouraged the characters to diablerize captive Kindred as a way to keep their undead powers strong. After all, the characters might really need that Presence when they testify.

War

The New Inquisition against the Cainites might seem mismatched. How can the Kindred stand against automatic weapons, flame-throwers and other modern weapons?

They can't. A small squad of soldiers armed with modern weapons can destroy a Cainite elder in about 30 seconds — if they can find him.

In many ways, however, the modern world is more fragile than the world of the Inquisition. The lives of more than six billion people depend on the steady, constant flow of electricity, water, food, information and other goods through an intricate, delicate network of politics, commerce and utilities. Kindred elders spent centuries learning the ins and outs of that network so that they could exploit it. Faced with destruction, they turn the network against itself.

Not every country declares war on Cainites, and those that do differ widely in how well they fight. In the developed world, the Kindred face squads of soldiers armed with infrared scopes, night-vision goggles and high-powered weaponry. In many Third-World countries, corrupt governments and militaries prove laughably easy for Cainites to subvert, bribe or avoid. Most of the danger

comes from local militias that are poorly armed but numerous, fervent and able to act during the day.

At least at first, governments in the developed world try to capture and intern Kindred instead of destroying them outright. The people in charge worry about a public backlash if some trigger-happy soldiers slaughter a group of innocent goths (or actors in Shakespearean costume, or a gentleman who dresses a bit old-fashioned...). The habits of civil liberty also take time to break. As the Kindred fight back, however, soldiers receive looser rules of engagement until they become outright death squads ordered to destroy any Kindred on sight. Mortals caught helping Kindred face a variety of criminal charges, from conspiracy to treason. Governments confiscate the assets of any Kindred they find, in hopes of rooting out the elders' financial influence.

The Elders' Campaign

When the war begins, many Kindred try to hide. Some younger Cainites find it difficult to do so because they fear leaving the cities. Never mind Lupine country (though the werewolves still inspire terror out of proportion to the real odds of an encounter); now the Kindred need to worry about mortals with shotguns who know how to spot a vampire... and that slain Kindred don't leave a corpse. Some older Kindred, meanwhile, do not want to abandon the wealth and influence they took so long to accumulate. Nevertheless, each high-profile capture or destruction of an elder or a coterie inspires more Kindred to leave the cities.

The lucky elders find bolt holes hidden from mortal eyes where they can still maintain some influence by long-distance. For instance, a millionaire financier who successfully hid his Kindred nature might retreat to a yacht in international waters, from which he manages his financial empire by satellite phone while feeding on the crew. Quite a few elders buy refuge in the Nosferatu Kingdoms. Some of them regret it — briefly — when their supposed protectors turn on them and diablerize them.

The elders do more than hide, though. Some of them strike back. Mortal power depends on organization and money. Market panics and other financial manipulations are the least of their attacks. Kindred mesmerize mortals into sabotaging power stations, water mains and other utilities. Some daring Kindred attack political leaders directly, either to assassinate them or to tamper with their minds. Other Cainites sabotage vital industries and bomb government buildings, either directly or by proxy. The Black Hand (which largely escaped the Sabbat's disintegration, thanks to its internal military discipline) finds ready employers among Kindred elders. Frightened Kindred take courage from the slogan, "The Black Hand chokes all who oppose it!"

As the war continues, Kindred elders adopt more desperate and destructive tactics. Their terrorist attacks kill hundreds of mortals, then thousands, as they try to cripple and cow the nations that hunt them. From toxic chemical spills to arson to massive bombings conducted by mesmerized dupes, they try every vile assault they can imagine. Each new atrocity stiffens government and public resolve to destroy the Kindred menace... but the vast wealth and erratic powers of the elders slowly tear civilization apart. The elders' goal drifts from frightening humanity into leaving them alone, to imposing a new Dark Age.

Although Kindred of every clan distinguish themselves in the war effort, the Ventrue emerge as the leaders overall. Their potent combination of Dominate and Presence makes them the supreme molders of minds, while their long pursuit of wealth and political influence lets them begin the war with much greater resources than most elders have. Their strong "old boy network" of prestation also lets the Ventrue coordinate their efforts better than any other clan does. The Toreador second them with their own extensive influence within mortal society.

The Followers of Set emerge as more surprising partners. Setites lack the raw clout of the Ventrue and their Camarilla allies, but they take other Cainites by surprise with the sheer diversity of their mortal connections: Mortals in every level of society owe them favors or fear what they might reveal. The Setites destroy mortal leaders through blackmail, subversion and manufactured scandals no less thoroughly than the Black Hand does with bomb, gun and fang. The Followers of Set also pledge their eerie magic and far-flung network of blood cults to the Cainite cause. Hidden temples of Set — more numerous than other Cainites suspected — become resistance centers and feeding stations for Kindred on the run. Between them, the Ventrue, Toreador and Setites lead the crumbling remains of a Camarilla whose claim to rule all Kindred no longer receives any serious challenge.

The Tremere play less of a role than other Kindred expect. Other Camarilla leaders learn not to rely on help from the Warlocks. Tremere magic weakens along with every other aspect of the Curse of Caine, so Vienna directs the clan to focus on finding the cause and cure of the weakness, as well as protecting chantries from mortals. The clan's elders do not seem to care how the New Inquisition affects other Kindred. A new problem, however, soon overshadows the research effort. Week by week, Tremere of every age and generation abandon their chantries and vanish without a trace. The clan's vaunted hierarchy steadily unravels. Every divination ritual gives the same result: The Tremere are doomed.

The Giovanni also surprise other Cainites with their lack of influence. The Necromancers possess wealth to

challenge the Ventrue and sorcerous powers and organization to rival the Tremere. After a freak storm in the Adriatic collapses and inundates the Giovanni's corporate headquarters in Venice, however, more than half the clan simply disappears. The corporation's value also plummets after the world learns about the Giovanni's family secrets, leaving the remaining Necromancers far less wealthy than they were just a few months before. (As a Storyteller, you can reflect this by deducting two dots of Resources from any Giovanni whose wealth depends on her position in the family business empire.)

The Lasombra possess the will to match the Ventrue. The fratricidal diablerie of the Sabbat, however, devastates the clan. The Lasombra who survive into the New Inquisition accept Ventrue leadership with ill grace.

War Stories

In the New Inquisition, characters face an important choice. Do they join the struggle to subjugate humanity or try to escape it? Attempts to make peace or join the mortal side are futile and perhaps suicidal: Mortal authorities want all Kindred imprisoned or destroyed. They do not negotiate anymore, though some leaders might want a Cainite chained, fed and then drained of vitae and destroyed, so the mortal can enjoy a ghoul's power for several months.

• No coterie can escape the mortals' hunt forever. Sooner or later, every character finds herself facing a squad of SWAT officers, National Guardsmen or professional soldiers armed with assault rifles, incendiary bullets, concussion grenades, Rötschreck-inducing flash grenades and similarly formidable weapons. The soldiers might carry net guns and demand a Cainite's surrender early in the war, but they abandon any pretense of capture within a few months. The soldiers have air support from helicopters and ground support from armed Humvees or other vehicles. The soldiers' attack gives the Storyteller a chance to shift the chronicle's mood to hard-driving action and give the characters a taste of raw terror as they learn what it's like to be hunted by a powerful, remorseless foe.

• If the characters join the elders' struggle, they become resistance fighters (viewed one way) or terrorists (viewed another). They must decide how far they will go to attack a society that wants them destroyed. Will they murder a city's mayor? Bomb a building? Blow up a tank of deadly toxic waste in a residential neighborhood? Eventually, their leaders demand all these things and worse. How much Humanity will the characters sacrifice for the cause?

• The mortal authorities set up their own internment centers for captured Kindred. Ordinary prisons do not suffice, not for creatures who can make themselves unseen, bend bars, control minds or turn into fog. Early in the war, governments turn large underground spaces such as salt mines and subterranean parking garages into prison camps. They need solid stone or concrete to prevent Kindred from Earth Melding, and they set up airlocks with cameras and motion detectors to forestall Obfuscate or Form of Mist. Any guards who enter the prison compounds wear headphones so they cannot hear commands from Kindred using Dominate, and they always work armed and in pairs. Can imprisoned characters find a way to escape? If they joined the war effort, can they plan and conduct an assault to free the imprisoned Kindred?

• If any character had mortal companions or relatives, the authorities certainly detain them for questioning. The government might accuse loved ones of collaborating with notorious Kindred. Due process and civil rights become early casualties of the war, so characters' loved ones might face prison or even execution because of past associations. What does a character do when he learns that the police arrested his sister and sent her to a prison known for brutal, torturous interrogation? What if the police have leaked the news as bait for a trap? What if doing so was the character's sister's idea?

• On the other hand, the elders who lead the resistance do not entirely trust any Kindred who remains too fond of any mortals. A Cainite leader might order a character to Embrace any remaining associates or family to bring them into the struggle, or he might try to blood bond them to use as mortal pawns. The war against humanity does not end the Camarilla's demands for absolute loyalty and obedience. Indeed, the elders use the New Inquisition to reinforce and justify their demands. Characters who defy an elder's dictates become dissidents, subject to hunting and diablerie from their own side.

Escape Stories

A coterie might decide to flee the New Inquisition and the Camarilla's counterattack. Where can they run? How can they hide?

• Getting out of a city is not too hard at first. The characters can easily acquire vehicles for themselves and any loved ones they take with them. As the war tears society apart, however, gasoline becomes increasingly scare. Oil companies go bankrupt, and terrorists wreck refineries and pipelines. People who do obtain gasoline tend to hoard it for their own use or to force prices even higher. Before long, though, getting enough gasoline for a long journey requires either crime or a lot of money and good connections. The characters are not the only Kindred (or kine) trying to leave their city, either, so they have competition for precious fuel. Elder Kindred might try to stop the coterie if they learn the characters' plan, since they see any hint of defiance or desertion as a threat to their diablerie herd.

• Kindred do not travel easily, either. As Storyteller, do not hand-wave the characters' ability to sleep safely during the day or avoid notice by mortals. If the characters do not at least try to forestall problems such as curious mortals poking around their vehicles, feel free to make them pay for it. For instance, have them wake up in body bags in a small town's jail where the sheriff didn't burn them in the sunlight only because he thought the government might offer a reward for their capture. The coterie has the task of breaking out of jail while deputies stand watch with flare pistols and jerry cans of gasoline, rubbing alcohol or whatever inflammable liquid they can scrounge.

The characters might also find they are not the only predators on the roads or the only travelers on guard against attack. The coterie can encounter biker bandits or hot-rod highwaymen. If the characters try to prey on other travelers, they might encounter a car or RV of mortals armed with rifles and shotguns.

• Where does the coterie *go*, anyway? Every option presents challenges.

The characters could try to reach one of the cities held by thin-blooded Kindred, but that could be a long journey toward an uncertain reception. The thin-blooded vampires might not trust a coterie that says it just came from Camarilla territory (or anywhere else, for that matter). The Camarilla has sent infiltrators before.

The Third World offers freedom from state persecution, if the characters can arrange transportation such a long way. Many Third World residents never stopped believing in night-monsters, however. Given any hint that vampires dwell among them, villagers (or urban slum-dwellers recently come from the villages) quickly organize witch-hunting groups. The witch-hunters incidentally condemn and kill several innocent mortals for every vampire they find. (They accuse the mortals of being witches who collaborate with vampires.) The characters might also encounter packs of vampires who roam through the vast shantytowns that surround many Third-World cities. These brutal packs no longer bother to hide their depredations: They kill and feed openly then move on before their prey can organize a response. The pack vampires view new arrivals as opportunities for diablerie, not to mention competition. Any vampires who dwell in the urban core act just like the Camarilla elders the characters left behind.

The characters can also try to set up an enclave far from any city. If the characters can feed on animals and recruit a few mortals to handle daytime chores, they could avoid many problems. They just have to worry about Leech-hating Lupines and bandits — mortal, Cainite or other — who prey upon isolated settlements.

Small towns offer a degree of safety from Lupines and bandits, while other vampires are not likely to appear. As the only Cainites in a small mortal community, however, the characters tend to stand out. The bits of news that trickle in from the big cities render townsfolk even less likely to tolerate nocturnal strangers than before the Masquerade's end.

On the other hand, small-town people can also surprise visitors with their generosity. In recent decades, many small towns welcomed and assimilated large numbers of immigrants from southeast Asia, the Middle East, Africa and other remote parts of the world. Vampires who work hard to fit in and help the community might find people who forgive their need to drink blood, as long as the blood isn't theirs. The coterie can seem like more desirable neighbors if its members defend the town against bandits or other vampires. A coterie in a small town faces many unusual social challenges, but not insurmountable ones.

End of the Setites

The war of Kindred and kine lasts as long as the Storyteller and players find it interesting. No one ever knows whether the mortals could exterminate the Kindred before the undead wreck civilization. Greater powers decide the issue.

As the war grinds on, the Setite Hierophants — the Methuselahs who oversee the central temples to Set — send word through the clan's network of cults and shrines. The time has come to raise Set from the dead and make him a god on Earth again. The Hierophants select a propitious night. On that night, Followers of Set from around the world will gather at the ancestral temple at Ombos, in Egypt. They will open a gateway to *Duat*, the Egyptian realm of the dead, so that Set can incarnate himself and live again. The Hierophants ask that every Setite who cannot reach Ombos offer sacrifices at their own shrines, as a way to help the god return.

Setite characters can try to reach Ombos for the ritual. On this most glorious occasion, the high priests of Set welcome vampires of any clan who wish to join them in the resurrection of their god. Characters who manage their own cults and temples receive the usual request to join the worldwide celebration. Serpents who neglect the religious side of their clan receive pleas to attend a ceremony just this once.

As the night of the ritual sweeps around the world, temple after temple resounds with the litanies of Set. His childer praise him in the name of numerous gods of darkness, chaos, destruction and war, including Rudra-Shiva, Typhon Trismegistos, Jormungandr the Midgard Serpent, Nergal, Dis, El Cristo Negro and dozens of other names. Mortal and Kindred blood flows to honor the Dark

God. In hundreds of temples, undead priests proclaim their lord's destiny in the words of an ancient myth: "He shall thunder in the skies and make men afraid!"

And...

It doesn't work.

Not quite, anyway.

Every Setite who offers sacrifice to Set on that night feels a powerful sense of the Dark God's presence. They *must* call him through. They *must* join their primal sire. Then Set is gone. He didn't come. He *couldn't* come. Every celebrant knows that the Dark God is lost to them, lost in the world of the dead.

Few Followers of Set return from Ombos. Fewer Setites meet them on their return. In the week after the ritual, most Followers of Set gather their mortal cultists for a mass suicide. The mortals drink poisoned vitae or other deadly sacraments. Some undead priests douse the temples with precious gasoline and burn themselves and the entire congregation, or they destroy themselves and their shrines with homemade explosives. Hundreds of Setites and thousands of mortal devotees die in just a few nights. Their god could not come to them, so they go to him.

The ritual did contact Set. The dead Antediluvian did connect to every clan member who participated in the night of ritual. Instead of rising from the dead, however, Set imposed a powerful compulsion to join him in *Duat*. Storytellers can handle this compulsion as an awakened Antediluvian's initial attempt to subsume the minds of its descendants (as per "Consumed by the Antediluvians"). Instead of becoming an empty vessel possessed by an Antediluvian's will, however, subsumed characters suffer the compulsion to commit suicide.

Storytellers who trust their players to roleplay a suicide attempt can secretly inform a Setite character's player of this new compulsion and ask him to play out the sequence of gathering any mortal cultists and planning the mass self-sacrifice. It's up to the other players' characters to spot the suicidal drive of their coterie-mate and decide what to do about it. If you don't think your players can handle such a situation in a game, declare the Setite now a Storyteller character. His depression is so obvious and all-consuming that he does not even pretend to care about the other characters.

(This is, of course, grossly unfair to Setite characters. Don't worry, though—they'll have a lot of company soon. The End of the World brings plenty of "unfairness" for everyone.)

The other characters can try to restrain the Setite or snap him out of Set's compulsion. Each week after the



The Great Ritual at Ombos

A coterie that includes a Setite member might want to go to Ombos for the resurrection ceremony. Civilization's decay and the hazards of war make the journey long and difficult, so the Hierophants give Setites a few months' warning to prepare and travel.

Ombos, now called Komm Ombo, is a small town in southern Egypt. The underground temple is about a mile out of town. The Hierophants used their great power and the temple's wealth to turn all of Komm Ombo into a prison camp run by ghoul trusties, so visiting Setites can feed freely.

On the night of the ritual, Followers of Set can join their clanmates on the main floor of the temple chamber. Visitors from other clans watch from balconies screened with sturdy ironwork. Warrior Setites stand watch to make sure that no one tries to disrupt the ritual.

A huge pylon gate carved with hieroglyphic inscriptions forms the centerpiece of the ritual. Scaffolds above and to either side of the gate hold 12 Kindred bound into presses, one from each of the other clans. As the assembled Serpents chant litanies to the Dark God, priests and slaves troop in bearing dozens of strange objects: rods, talismans, bones, a wooden cup, blades, jewels, a clay figurine of an obese woman and other objects gathered from many cultures and ages. With a successful Intelligence + Enigmas roll (difficulty 6) or Intelligence + Academics roll (difficulty 9), a character can recognize that some of these artifacts come from no known human culture.

At the climax of the long ritual, priests slit the throats of the Kindred sacrifices and slaves crush them in the presses. The vitae runs down gutters to the pylon gate, where it trickles down to fill the carved inscriptions. The blood-filled hieroglyphics glow a sullen red in the flickering torchlight of the chamber, while a dark fog gathers in the gate's opening. All the torches go out as the fog splits and rolls aside like a doorway. Between the bloody glow of the pylons, characters can see a starlit desert of black sand and rocks stretching into the distance. A serpentine form of deeper darkness, an actual negative light, uncoils from the shadows and hurls itself against the gateway, trying to break through. The shadow presses against the gate between worlds three times before the fog rolls back. As the fog vanishes to reveal the ordinary stone of the temple walls, the Hierophants wail in despair.

The night ends in confusion. Characters have an hour to collect Setite fellows and get away from the temple before sunrise. The next night, the Hierophants gather the remaining Setites in the temple and destroy them all with powerful magic that collapses the entire temple. The Reign of Set ends before it can begin.

ritual, the Setite's player attempts another Willpower roll, at the same difficulty as the roll to resist absorption by the Antediluvian. Success means the character snaps out of his suicidal obsession. Other characters can also try to break the compulsion through a blood bond or Vaulderie, or through use of Dominate or Presence (also described under "Consumed by the Antediluvians").

Gehenna

Cainite Final Deaths resonate along the chains of blood that link sire to childe, all the way back to their Antediluvian forebear and, to a degree, all Antediluvians. A fierce war between the Ravnos of India and the mysterious Cathayan vampires woke the Ravnos Antediluvian and precipitated the Week of Nightmares. The subsequent mass destruction of the Ravnos troubled the torpor of the other Antediluvians. The wars between the Camarilla and Sabbat; the purges against thin-blooded vampires and Caitiff; the wave of diablerie that followed the end of the Tremere curse on the Assamite clan; and the mad, fratricidal diablerie prompted by the waning Curse all pull the Antediluvians closer to awakening.

The self-destruction of more than a thousand Followers of Set in a single week provides the final trigger to Gehenna. The Antediluvians rouse themselves from torpor. They call upon their eldest childer, monsters scarcely less old and powerful than themselves, eternally bound to them by blood. As the moon reflects the blood-hued light of the Red Star — which is now visible to mortal eyes — more than a hundred of these Ancients come forth from long-hidden tombs to feed, destroy and rule.

The Conquest of Humanity

The Ancients begin by devouring many of their descendants, along with any other Kindred they can find. The Antediluvians are more than 10 millennia old; the childer who serve as their viceroys (such as the Assamite ur-Shulgi) are at least five millennia old. Only the blood of fellow vampires can sustain them, and only the vitae of Methuselahs can fully slake an Antediluvian's thirst.

The weakening Curse affects the Ancients and renders their power less than what it might have been. When

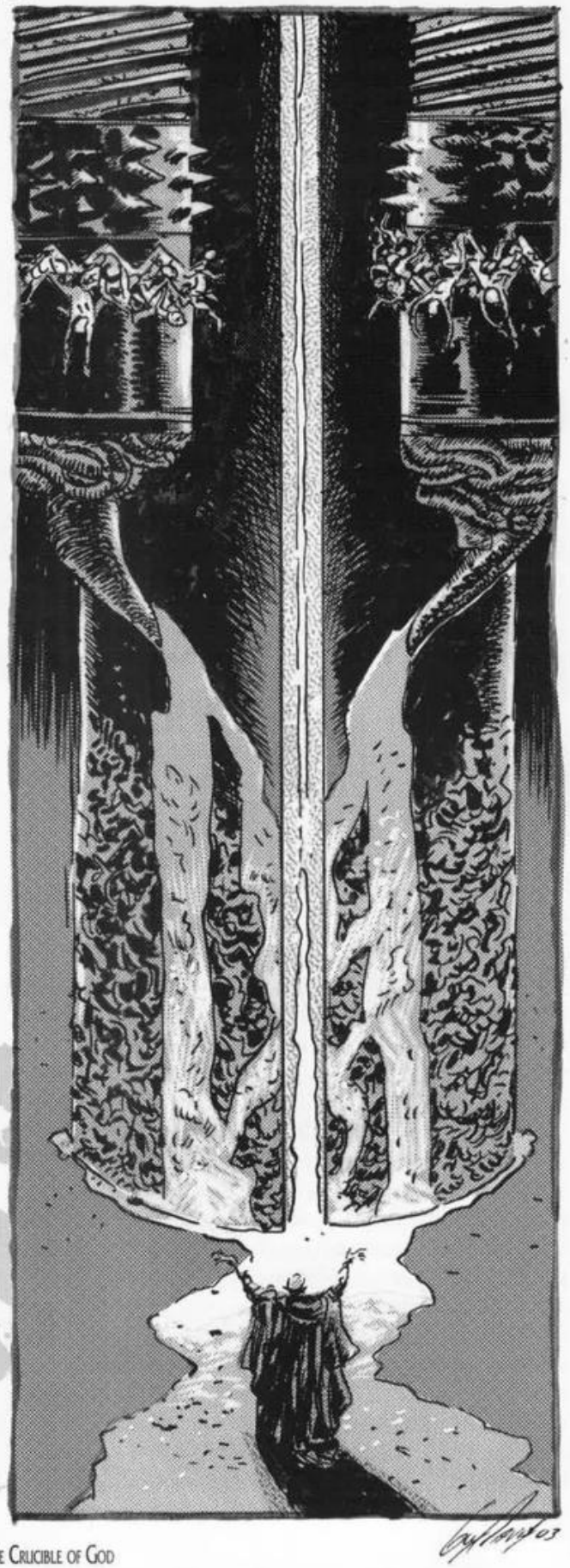
the Ravnos Antediluvian awoke, it survived a nuclear attack and three days and nights of constant battle with ancient Cathayans; the sun's light destroyed it, not supernatural power or the arsenals of men. The returning Ancients cannot muster that degree of power. They remain some of the mightiest creatures ever to walk the World of Darkness, however, and Kindred and kine fall before them.

If not for the elder Kindred's war to cripple the governments that hunt them, humanity might have won the fight. Reduced in power as they are, the Ancients cannot survive massed machinegun fire or thermite bombs fired from two miles away. The tattered mortal governments, however, can no longer muster such technologically advanced firepower. Instead, crumbling nations send tank brigades and massed infantry against the Ancients. The soldiers destroy a few Methuselahs at first, but the Ancients learn from their mistakes.

The Ancients' Disciplines give them victory despite becoming less reliable. Mortal soldiers cannot resist Disciplines that affect the mind. A tank crew cannot shoot at a Methuselah their minds refuse to acknowledge because of Obfuscate. Whole brigades flee an Ancient employing advanced Presence... or, even worse for humanity, they pledge fealty to their new god and master. Some mortal leaders succumb to powerful Dominate effects. Ancients with powerful Auspex foresee their enemies' plans. The Ancients with powerful Animalism turn every night-dwelling creature into a spy and saboteur. Elder thaumaturges and necromancers likewise bypass humanity's technological power. Spirits assassinate officers and leaders. Lightning, rains of fire and stranger forces destroy command posts. Curses spawned of blackest magic spread havoc in a thousand ways. Within two months, the Ancients defeat every nation in the Western world and complete the descent into a Dark Age.

Snapshots of Destruction

Mexico City: The city's Sabbat leaders knew that a Methuselah slept in the ruined city of Cuicuilco, buried by lava flows from a nearby volcano. Secretly mining through all that rock never seemed urgent, though, compared to the sect's internal and external conflicts. When the Antediluvians rise, however, the Sleeper of Cuicuilco rises with them, flowing out of its stony prison using an enhanced form of Earth Meld. This ancient monster — perhaps a Gangrel, perhaps something else — quickly slaughters the remaining Sabbat elders and claims Mexico City for itself. Within a week, every Cainite in Mexico City either submits to the Sleeper, flees or is destroyed as the Sleeper kills dozens of their number every night. Within two weeks, the Sleeper's powerful Presence en-



thralls tens of thousands of the city's mortal residents. They complete the excavation and repair of pre-Columbian pyramid-temples, then round up tens of thousands of other *capitalistas*. The temples once more run red with the blood of sacrifice, night and day, never stopping. Mexico City is no more. Aztec Tenochtitlán has returned.

Vienna: An area of the city center about a mile wide disappears... completely. The Danube pours into a hemispherical pit half a mile deep. The Tremere Council of Seven is never heard from again.

Ryazan, Russia: A Methuselah that enthralled a division of the Russian Army approaches this old city, clearly planning to conquer it. The Russian government knows not to send soldiers against the Methuselah, as soldiers just end up joining its forces. As the Methuselah's army enters the city's suburbs, distant army units launch short-range nuclear missiles. The Methuselah meets Final Death; so do more than 5,000 Russian soldiers and tens of thousands of civilians. Yet Ryazan does not fall.

The Antediluvian who commands the Methuselah strikes back in kind. Its mortal servants carry it to one of Russia's nuclear bases. The base's commander pledges fealty at once. An hour later, nuclear fireballs consume Moscow, St. Petersburg and the next five largest Russian cities. The last trace of national government collapses.

Oyo, Nigeria: Short-wave radio broadcasts tell of hordes of spiders appearing throughout the city's shantytown suburbs. Their webs cover everything. The people retreat from the biting, inexhaustible plague of spiders toward the city center. Then the broadcasts stop.

Trabzon, Turkey: Half the mortal population of this Black Sea port dies in one night, screaming from the fiery pain that runs through their veins. A few brave doctors who do not flee with the rest of the people find that every corpse has lost about a tenth of its blood... without any breach of the skin.

Consumed by the Antediluvians

For many Cainites, the rise of the Antediluvians brings an immediate doom. The forebears of the clans try to take over the minds of all their descendants. Cainite legend was partly correct about the Antediluvians devouring all their childer, but the most ancient consume souls and wills, not merely blood.

Nothing visibly happens when an Antediluvian tries to possess a descendant, but the character feels the overwhelming will of the Ancient beating against his mind. A character who cannot resist becomes an extension of the Antediluvian's will. He retains his mind and memories, but his will belongs to another. From then on, the Antediluvian can know everything the character knows and see what the character sees. The character does whatever the Antediluvian commands and knows her master's desires without being told. The Antediluvian does not monitor every possessed descendant at every moment (with one important exception), but Storytellers may presume that a clan founder becomes aware of everything that happens to an enslaved Kindred within 24 hours.

An Antediluvian can attempt to enslave any vampire of its lineage. It may also try to subjugate any vampire who diablerized one of its descendants, but at a smaller chance of success. Most Antediluvians announce their presence to the world by subsuming as much of their clan as possible. If a character can resist that initial assault on his will, he need not fear further attempts at enslavement (with two exceptions, described ahead). The clan founders use their descendants in their war against humanity. After victory, they send their enslaved childer to collect holdouts and hunt Kindred of other clans — as long as no other Antediluvian attacks and forces them to concentrate on defending themselves.

Initial Assault

When a character's clan founder attempts to devour her mind, her player rolls the character's Willpower. For an Antediluvian's descendant, the difficulty equals 12 – either the character's Humanity rating or half her Path of Enlightenment rating. This difficulty cannot exceed 9, however. Simple success means that the character fights off the mental assault. The character can expend Willpower for this roll, if the player thinks to do so. (Most Kindred do not, but the players' characters are automatically considered somewhat special.)

Kindred who diablerized a vampire of the Ancient's clan also suffer this attack, but the difficulty modifier to resist the takeover for these characters is two lower than it would be for a Kindred of that clan.

Direct Assault

An Antediluvian can try again to devour the mind of any Kindred whom it meets face to face. This, too, is limited to descendants and diablerists of descendants. The difficulties are the same as for the initial assault.

Risks for Power

Even weakened by the Withering, the Antediluvians wield fearsome power. As the Ancients strive for mastery and transcendence, their descendants can call on that power... but doing so gives the Antediluvian another chance to consume its descendant's mind.

At will, a Cainite with a surviving Antediluvian can raise any in-clan Discipline rating by one dot for a scene. The character can exceed generational limits this way. At

the end of the scene, the player rolls the character's Willpower, as described previously. Success means that the character resists her forebear's will. Failure means the Antediluvian devours the character. Succeed or fail, the Antediluvian becomes aware of the character's general location. The Ancient might then send minions to hunt the presumptuous character.

Playing a Possessed Character

Possession by an Antediluvian does not remove a character from the story. When a clan founder absorbs the mind and will of a player's character, the Ancient immediately knows everything the character knows—including current activities and the abilities of other Kindred in the coterie. The Antediluvian might decide that the character is most useful where he is. The character becomes a "sleeper agent" or "mole" within the coterie.

As Storyteller, take the player aside and explain that her character now serves the clan founder. Some of the time, she actually plays an Antediluvian doing a perfect imitation of the character. (The Ancients can do things like this, thanks to Intelligence, Wits and Manipulation scores in the 8-to-10 range.) She must watch for opportunities to discover any secrets the other characters are hiding... such as if any of them are secret pawns of a different Antediluvian. At some point, the Antediluvian may activate the "mole" to sabotage the coterie's plans.

Possessed characters raise their Clan Discipline ratings by one dot, without regard to generational limits. Their Attributes and Abilities remain the same, though, because the Antediluvian usually can't spare the attention to control the character completely.

Resistance or Escape

If the Storyteller feels generous, Kindred can become immune to possession through a blood bond to an Antediluvian or Methuselah of a different clan. Their new master cannot devour their will.

A forced Vaulderie with vampires of other clans also gives a Cainite a chance to break free of an Antediluvian. Once again, the player rolls the character's Willpower, with the difficulty as described before. Using Dominate or Presence on the enslaved vampire reduces the difficulty to break free by one. Appeals to a character's True Love, Sense of Duty or other psychological Merits may also grant a -1 difficulty modifier.

If none of the characters know how to perform a Vaulderie, they can still recover a character's mind, will and soul by forcing a blood bond on the character and then applying the Dominate power of Conditioning. This process takes many nights, however, and a coterie might not have that much time.

Possessed characters can certainly try to liberate other possessed characters. Liberating a character strips a weapon from a rival Antediluvian's arsenal. It's unlikely but conceivable that a coterie could begin with every character possessed and end with every character freed.

Remember, however, that blood bonds and Vinculi no longer last very long. To be safe, characters need to rebond themselves every month.

Surviving Clan Founders

The Storyteller should keep a list of which clans have surviving founders. Cross clans off the list as their Antediluvians meet Final Death or otherwise lose contact with the world in your story. The following list omits a few clans because their founders are already destroyed in this version of Gehenna. Other Antediluvians might have already met Final Death as well, but Storytellers must decide this for themselves.

- Assamite
- Brujah
- Gangrel
- Lasombra
- Malkavian
- Nosferatu
- Toreador
- Tremere
- Tzimisce

Cool Antediluvian Powers

Some of the Antediluvians are no longer truly vampires. They abandoned undead flesh for other forms. All the Antediluvians possess powers that one cannot adequately represent through mere Attributes and Disciplines. Cainite legend holds that vampires of the Third Generation wield "true mastery over life and death, and may be destroyed only if they so choose or if one of equal power bests them" (as described in **Vampire: The Masquerade**, p. 56). In this case, legend spoke true. The Withering strips away *some* of the Ancients' invulnerability, but they still possess transcendent power.

The Antediluvians certainly possessed greater mastery of their clan Disciplines than any lesser vampires. In this version of Gehenna, the Ancients recover that puissance if they can diablerize Cainites who approach them in age or generation. We might as well call this supreme mastery the "Level Ten" power for each Discipline: No other Kindred can wield such ultimate power (except maybe an elder in Golconda, if such creatures exist). Fortunately, one set of rules covers all Level Ten powers.

Plot Device (Any Discipline ••••••••••)

At a Discipline's ultimate development, it can achieve any result the Storyteller deems appropriate, within the purview of that Discipline. Therefore, an Antediluvian with a Potence rating of 10 can split mountains, while Fortitude 10 can resist any conceivable attack as long as the Ancient retains a single blood point. Animalism 10 can do anything with animals that the Storyteller wants in order to create a cool scene, Presence 10 can produce any emotional effect the Storyteller needs to advance a plot, and so on for all the Disciplines.

Level Ten powers generally do not enable an Antediluvian to squash characters. (Lower-level powers are quite sufficient for that.) Rather, they serve to create situations that **Vampire** otherwise cannot adequately represent, and they allow Ancients to destroy cities — or entire nations — when they battle. Not every Antediluvian needs to possess ultimate mastery of all three clan Disciplines, but any Antediluvian the characters encounter should have at least one unique Plot Device to awe and terrify the characters.

System: Level 10 powers do not consume blood points, and they require no dice rolls. They work because the Storyteller says so.

Effects of the Withering

The Antediluvians present a special case for the Withering. Actually, *every* Antediluvian is a special case. The Withering does not entirely strip away their Plot Device powers. Antediluvians afflicted by the Withering lose the power to perform new, active feats of godlike power but retain the fruits of past Discipline usage. For instance, the Nosferatu Antediluvian can no longer use Animalism 10 to turn normal animals into giant monsters, but he can still control the monsters he already created.

If an Antediluvian diablerizes a 6th- to 4th-generation Methuselah *of a different lineage*, it regains its full, Level Ten powers but cannot transcend undeath to become a god. That requires the diablerie of another Antediluvian, and presents the greatest "plot device" power of them all. Diablerizing one of its own descendants does not enable an Antediluvian to reclaim its full power.

Storytellers should not feel too obligated to force consistent rules on the Antediluvians. Each of these ancient monsters has evolved beyond vampirism to a greater or lesser degree, but never in the same direction. Each one is a unique monster, and even after months of the Withering, they retain vast power.

Antediluvian Feeding

No matter how weak an Antediluvian becomes, it can destroy and diablerize any descendant it sees. Like with possession, the player rolls the character's Willpower (difficulty of 12 – Humanity rating or half Path rating, maximum difficulty 9) to resist the Blood's call. If the roll fails, the character explodes as her vitae rips out of her body and streams through the air to the Antediluvian's maw.

Empire of Blood

When the Antediluvians begin their reigns, the world looks very different from just months before. The disruption of industry and shipping means that food no longer travels from farms to cities. People know that the canned goods they have hoarded will not last long. Water and sewage systems break down. Sewage in the streets adds plague to the threat of famine. Everyone flees the city who can, first in cars, then on foot. Troops of refugees plunder nearby towns for food and fuel, then move on.

Not everyone can leave. The Ancients and their servants demand that many mortals stay in the cities. They follow a grim economy: The Antediluvians and Methuselahs need to feed on the vitae of other Cainites. These Kindred need to feed on the blood of mortals. Only the youngest vampires can sustain themselves on animal blood. Therefore, the Ancients need as many mortals near them as possible.

For the first month or so, the Ancients simply devour any Cainite who cannot think of some way to make himself useful — for instance, by capturing and offering up other victims. In time, however, the Ancients organize a patchwork of fiefdoms centered on the half-ruined cities. A single Antediluvian or, more often, Methuselah rules the city and surrounding countryside as its prince. Each demands that all Cainites who dwell in the domain drink its blood at least once a month, placing them one step toward a blood bond. Any resident elders perform the night-to-night administration of the domain. Even those elders whose wills remain their own submit to the fearsome, near-divine ancestors of their race. The elders' prime responsibilities are to protect and feed their masters. Ancillae and neonates can try to avoid feeding the elders who feed the Ancients by making themselves useful as overseers of the mortals. The Cainites ring each city with concentration camps and plantations worked by mortal slaves, with ghoul trusties to oversee them by day. Within the cities, mortals labor to build strong havens for their undead masters and rebuild some of the amenities — running water, for instance — to which younger Kindred became accustomed. Anyone who cannot work in some capacity because of age, injury, sickness or exhaustion, gets thrown in a pen and served to any vampire who feels hungry.

Naturally, the system is not tightly controlled. Cainites who are not utterly consumed by an Antediluvian's will still scheme for favor and chances to diablerize each other. These two goals often intersect. If a Kindred displeases her Ancient master, the Ancient might permit one of its favorites to diablerize her. Older Cainites can still get away with diablerizing younger ones if the neonates lack elder patrons or valued skills. The Ancients also show little concern for anything that does not involve personal security or the food chain. Their vassals can pursue their own interests and draft mortals as personal herds, servants or laborers. The Ventrue, with their special tastes, particularly appreciate any chance to acquire favored mortals. Cainites are too few to keep a close watch on all the mortals, too, so every city retains a sizeable population of "free" mortals who scavenge among the ruins as they try either to win favor with their undead lords or avoid them.

Commerce at the End of the World

The end of civilization as we know it does not mean the end of trade. Kindred and kine still need to exchange things. The more refined forms of wealth, such as checks and credit cards, lose their value with the end of the banks and institutions that support them. Cash retains some value as a medium of exchange through the weight of habit, but barter becomes more important as civilization crumbles. In cities and towns alike, cigarettes, alcohol and ammunition become the chief media of exchange for small purchases. Drugs, guns and jewelry serve for major purchases. As stocks of canned goods decline, these become more valuable as a medium of exchange than for actual consumption, at least for mortals. All these commodities hold some value for Cainites who still feel morally obliged to buy blood from mortals — and indeed, some mortals sell their blood in return for the pleasure of the Kiss and whatever goods an undead monster can offer.

Among the Kindred themselves, the old commerce in boons collapses because no one can trust another to keep a promise. The only commodities of real value are blood and souls. Kindred buy services, havens and other goods from each other with captive vessels. The most valuable commodity is another Kindred, immobilized with a stake through the heart and ready for diablerie. A Cainite is a bulky thing to lug about, but some enterprising and ruthless Kindred find a more convenient form: an Embraced and staked child or even toddler, which immediately becomes known as the "baby on a stick." While a Cainite temporarily palliates the Withering through diablerie, he can Embrace a number of mortal slaves to sell to other would-be diablerists. (Of course, any Cainite willing to do this is no doubt going to see her Humanity drop to 1 in short order, and few Paths accommodate such an abhorrent trade either.)

The Choice

After the conquest, every Cainite must decide whether to submit to an Ancient. Characters can find favor in their service and win opportunities for diablerie and power. On the other hand, any misstep could result in the character's own diablerie.

Truly brave (or foolhardy) characters can try to survive in a city without pledging fealty to its ruling Ancient. They need to avoid the notice of the Ancient's lackeys and anyone else who might sell them out for a chance of winning favor with an elder. Other threats include free mortals who welcome a chance to take revenge on the undead, and other rogue vampires hungry for diablerie.

A coterie that has stayed in a city up to this point could also try to escape. Now that civilization has completely collapsed, however, finding a new home becomes far more difficult than before. A coterie that tries to set up its own ranch or commune can now call on far fewer resources. People in small towns no longer offer hospitality to strangers: After attacks by refugees and outright bandits, they aim guns at travelers and tell them to go somewhere else. A coterie might attempt its own conquest of a village, but any mistake could bring its doom.

Last Cainite Standing

Few of the Ancients' fiefdoms last very long. Although the Antediluvians remain mighty compared to mortals and other Kindred, they feel their power ebbing with the Curse of Caine. Even worse, from their point of view, they were on the verge of becoming gods. They can regain that level of power and complete their metamorphosis, but only by diablerizing each other. No blood and souls except those of truly ancient Methuselahs can restore their full strength, and only another Antediluvian can fuel their complete transcendence of the Curse of Caine.

Not long after the Antediluvians secure their fiefdoms, they take to attacking each other. Some of them succeed and become something beyond human or Cainite. Some of these metamorphosed Antediluvians depart the Earth to fates unknown. Others fall to creatures as strange and mighty as themselves, for the gods have their wars, too. The reigns of the Antediluvians begin in terror and blood. At least in some cases, they end in mystery.

When Antediluvians Die

The Withering does not reduce the impact that an Antediluvian's violent destruction has on its descendents. Occult ties of blood link sire to childe, all the way back to a clan's forebear. When those ties break at the source, every vampire of that clan feels an overwhelm-

Super-Genius Strategy?

Many Antediluvians and Methuselahs possess superhuman intellects, represented by Mental and Social Attributes in the 8-to-10 range. What sort of brilliant strategies and deceptions do such titanic minds use to hunt each other?

Perhaps surprisingly, their tactics look very much like those of mere mortals. Time accounts for much of this: The Withering forces the Ancients to act quickly. A brilliant scheme to trap a rival Ancient takes time to implement: time to subvert minions, plant disinformation, maneuver pawns into position and the like. The Ancients did this for 10 millennia. The Withering renders most of these plans no longer feasible, because the Antediluvians' prime lieutenants no longer wield the power that the plans assumed. So they have to use the materials available.

Superhuman intellects also tend to cancel out. Storytellers can presume that every Ancient runs through several cycles of "I know that you know that he knows" with each of their rivals. Each Antediluvian anticipates the cunning plans of the others, and knows that the others anticipate its own schemes. The same goes for their ability to influence rivals through their superhuman Social Attributes. No amount of intellect or charisma, however, can stop a car bomb or an artillery shell. As a result, brute force actually works pretty well between perfect strategists and manipulators.

The superhuman intellects of the Ancients enable them to understand modern technology in a matter of weeks, and even the Ancients who lack Dominate or Presence can recruit blindly loyal helpers through their enormous Social Attributes and Abilities. Therefore, if an Antediluvian can muster the resources, it can send a jet-load of heavily armed mortal paratroopers to capture a rival by day. Speed and force, however, do not require vast intelligence to work. Neither do distractions, like having an agent set fires to draw away the target's lesser minions.

The upshot? Antediluvians and Methuselahs can launch clever plans against each other. You do not need to present *superhumanly* clever plans, though (a difficult task for merely human Storytellers like you and I). Indeed, there's no reason why very simple plans could not succeed, if they are backed by enough force.

ing hunger and desire to reconnect — by devouring other vampires of his clan.

Each character of that clan must try to resist an immediate frenzy. As with any frenzy, resisting requires accumulating five successes on Self-Control or Instinct rolls; even a single success delays the frenzy for a turn. (Storytellers should review the rules for resisting frenzy on p. 228 of **Vampire: The Masquerade**.) The difficulty depends on the Cainite's generation:

12th–15th Generation	Difficulty 7
8th–11th Generation	Difficulty 8
4th–7th Generation	Difficulty 9

The Cainite must attempt to resist this unnatural hunger frenzy when she wakes up each night, or on meeting another Kindred of her clan (even if she does not recognize the other vampire as a clanmate, for blood calls to blood). The fratricidal frenzy continues for three nights after the Antediluvian's destruction.

Of course, other Kindred can restrain a frenzying Cainite and protect her from raging clanmates. Kindred who remain part of a coterie, pack or other group stand a much better chance of surviving their Antediluvian's demise.

The Reign of Tzimisce

Many Tzimisce believe that Cainites can transform themselves into something that surpasses undeath. Most supporters of this notion of Metamorphosis regard Vicissitude as the key to this transcendence.

Gehenna began just as the Tzimisce Antediluvian entered the last stage of its metamorphosis. The Tzimisce founder faked its own diablerie in the Anarch Revolt as a way to hide while it prepared for transformation. Centuries later, the Ancient directed its revenant slaves to move its torpid body to a secret crypt below Manhattan. The revenants fed their master the vitae of captured vampires. No one thought to investigate the disappearances, because the Camarilla and Sabbat had fought for years to drive each other from the great city.

In time, the Antediluvian changed. Its body slowly dissolved into a puddle of quivering, vitae-soaked slime. Then fine fuzz covered the slime. Tiny wriggling things moved through the Ancient's swelling mass. Nodules rose

Big Stories and Little Stories

The main sequence for this version of Gehenna focuses on "big stories" about rampaging Antediluvians and their battles. The characters, however, might prefer not to involve themselves in such grandiose events, and instead ignore the proffered story hooks. That's okay. Gehenna also offers various smaller-scale story opportunities. We suggest some possibilities in the main text. Other story ideas, unconnected to the main story arc, occur in boxes like this one. You can also take story suggestions from other Gehennas and adapt them to this louder, more destructive version.

and sprouted rosettes of tentacles. Roots and leaves grew and dissolved. Month by month, the First Tzimisce explored the form of every sort of living thing, starting with the simplest and evolving forms of greater complexity. It spread from a sarcophagus to fill a room, then some tunnels, ever larger. It began to feed itself, seizing unwary rodents in sea-anemone tendrils and toothless lamprey jaws. It fed on the revenants who still came to tend it, too, until they thought to sacrifice bag ladies and panhandlers. These were easier prey than Kindred. Still the Ancient grew more vast, threading itself through the deepest warrens of the Nosferatu, and it consumed all who tried to fight it. It became vine and tree, beast and bird, ever-changing, spawning creatures from itself and consuming them again. It became something other than Cainite. It devoured its slaves, blood, bone and all, and it created them again. Its flesh warmed. It made its own vitae, there in the dark. It drew life from the Earth itself, without need for blood or any other creature.

Metamorphosis!

As it mastered its own infinitude, the Antediluvian sent its mind along the ties of blood to its descendants. It drew Lambach Ruthven into the tunnels. It wanted to begin the Great Rejoining with its favorite grandchilde, but Lambach fled. No one believed Lambach's warnings about what the First Tzimisce had become. The Antediluvian called other Cainites of its clan. They came, drawn to New York by a desire they could neither describe nor explain. They descended into the tunnels, they and their packs, and joined in their founder's metamorphosis. None of them returned.

The Ancient spread its mind and will further. It fed on all life on Earth. Now it reversed the flow, infusing itself into other organisms. Once again, it started with small and simple creatures: mildew on a wall, algae in a pond. At last, it felt confident enough to shed its many-formed body in the tunnels.

Its old body did not die — it was too strong for that — but the Antediluvian's body no longer drew life from the Earth. It became an undead thing once more, feeding on the blood of whatever it could catch. Still it spread, however, in an endless, purposeless profusion of forms. The Nosferatu strove to wall it off in the deeps, but it always found some new tunnel or crevice. Fire purged it from one place; it grew again somewhere else. The Tzimisce founder ignored its discarded chrysalis as it spread through trees, bugs and worms.

The faltering Curse of Caine slowed the First Tzimisce's growth. Its own power ebbed. It could no longer flicker from organism to organism. It needed to feed on the blood of Kindred and kine — vast quantities of blood. The Ancient went back to Manhattan, but not for long.

Destruction of Manhattan

The week after the mass suicide of the Setites, the Tzimisce Antediluvian reclaims its miles-long body beneath Manhattan. Tendrils of undead flesh dig into the masonry walls erected by the Nosferatu and tear them apart, as tree roots crack stone. Geysers of undead flesh roar through the tunnels and erupt the length and breadth of Manhattan Island. A thousand tentacles tipped with fanged maws snatch at mortals and Kindred and drink them dry in seconds. Creatures of nightmare — ever-shifting compounds of snake and insect, octopus, bat, wolf and man — bud from the masses of flesh and return bloated with Kindred vitae. Roots and tendrils twine up skyscrapers and pull them apart, then wriggle through the wreckage to suck the blood of the dying. Many mortals are simply absorbed outright, dissolving into the roiling flesh. Almost everyone in Manhattan dies in a single night.

The President of the United States orders a nuclear strike. Whatever destroyed Manhattan must not be allowed to spread. Before the missiles arrive, however, dawn breaks over New York City. The ropes of gray, shifting flesh that squirm over the island catch fire. Ten thousand jaws stretch impossibly wide as they scream. In less than a minute, nothing moves in Manhattan but the coils of smoke and ash in the wind.

Yet the Antediluvian is not destroyed. It has already left its husk to exist as a spirit, taking other bodies as needed.

The Contagion

The Tzimisce Antediluvian's attempt at transcendence came a little too early, or a little too late. If it had begun a few years sooner, it might have merged itself with the entire biosphere, creating a single super-organism linked by Vicissitude. If it had begun a few years later, Gehenna would have seen it still Cainite enough to possess most of its childer. The Tzimisce founder can try to possess any Cainite descended from it, and some other Cainites who forged blood-ties to its clan, but not all Tzimisce at once.

It can try to possess any Tremere Cainite. The mortal magi who founded Clan Tremere achieved their own metamorphosis using Tzimisce vitae. Clan Tremere retains that blood connection to the clan's founder. The Ancient usurped Tremere bodies as well as Tzimisce, for the sake of the Thaumaturgy in their minds and blood. It took the Tremere whose disappearance so weakened the clan's Pyramid of Power; it used them and it discarded them.

Any Cainite possessed by the Tzimisce Antediluvian gains one dot of Vicissitude for the duration. (A character who lacked Vicissitude gains one dot; a Cainite who

already knew the Discipline has her rating rise by one.) Since the Antediluvian concentrates its will into just one body at a time, its victim cannot be freed through a Vaulderie or use of Dominate. The Antediluvian leaves when it chooses to occupy some other body anywhere in the world. It cares little if a particular Kindred resists subjugation. It has plenty of other options.

The Ancient continues to diablerize other Cainites as a way to keep the host body's vitae strong. It feeds its borrowed vitae to animals and pours it at the roots of plants, tainting them with Vicissitude. Finally, if its body currently possesses a Vicissitude rating of 6, it expends the last of its vitae in merging with some large animal to create a revenant beast. Revenant animals create their own weak vitae and possess ratings of 1 in three separate Disciplines, always including Vicissitude.

As the months of Gehenna pass, characters have a greater chance of encountering plants and animals warped in strange ways. All the wild dogs in a pack have lost their fur, but their skin changes color like that of a chameleon. The stem of a plucked dandelion drips blood. A huge spider's web has turrets like a castle. With a Perception + Alertness roll (difficulty 6), characters might notice a cloud of night-flying insects momentarily shape themselves into a pair of eyes, or see a gnarled face grow in a tree near their haven. The Antediluvian does not harm the characters, even if the coterie includes a Tzimisce or Tremere. It has no need of the characters... yet... but it watches them.

Lambach Ruthven

The Antediluvian does not take revenge on Lambach Ruthven for refusing it in New York. Perhaps it still feels some affection for its frightened grandchilde. Perhaps Lambach's impotent fear amuses the Ancient. Whatever the reason, the First Tzimisce has a purpose for Lambach. He is the witness. When the Antediluvian becomes one with all life on Earth, Lambach shall see and understand the Ancient's triumph. When the First Tzimisce becomes a god, Lambach shall become its first and last worshipper, before he too is consumed.

Storytellers can introduce Lambach at any time. He survives a long time, even though he is too timid to attempt diablerie for the sake of power. Although his power wanes with the Curse, he remains a 5th-generation Methuselah. Lambach weakened is more powerful than many elders at full strength — as a number of would-be diablerists have already discovered, to their very brief regret. The Methuselah himself does not fully appreciate his own power.

The Antediluvian also protects Lambach. Anyone who attacks him attracts the First Tzimisce's attention.



This master of Animalism can command any nearby animal to defend Lambach if the Methuselah needs the assistance.

Characters might underestimate the Tzimisce who jumps at every noise and screams when a bug lands on him. Lambach, however, is one of the few Cainites who does not want the coterie's vitae or to exploit them for some scheme of his own. He can explain that his grandsire is spreading Vicissitude to every creature on Earth with the final goal of absorbing all life into itself. Lambach knows what destroyed New York, though not why. He does not know that the Antediluvian now possesses other Cainites.

Lambach does not believe that anyone can do anything to stop his grandsire. In his despair, he accepts his destiny as his grandsire's witness, and he hopes only to slay himself before his grandsire finally devours him. Lambach carries a bottle of gasoline and a lighter at all times. If the characters show him some kindness and give him a vessel, however, he offers them a boon in return — whatever he can do short of giving his unlife for them. He is still a nobleman and a Tzimisce, with a Tzimisce's regard for hospitality. The fact that the characters can still treat a guest with honor moves him more deeply than he can say.

The Reign of Nosferatu

The legends of the Nosferatu clan ascribe several names and titles to their founder, such as Absimiliard and the Father of Monsters. The legends agree that their ancestor seeks to destroy his descendants. Some tales say that Absimiliard believes that Caine will forgive him and restore his human features if he destroys his clan. Other Nosferatu suggest that their founder cannot stand to see his own ugliness echoed in his childer.

To this end, the Father of Monsters spawned a cadre of horrors called the Nictuku to work his will. Some tales say that Absimiliard Embraced half-human, half-demonic creatures that walked the Earth in ancient times, adding the power of his Blood to their own strength. Other stories claim that the Nictuku are beasts transformed by the Father of Monsters. Still other legends say that the Nictuku are beyond any category known to Kindred or kine. In recent years, the Nictuku became more than legend. The clan collected reports of elders strangely murdered or who disappeared without a trace, or of entire Nosferatu warrens savagely massacred by unknown creatures of prodigious strength, and they knew their sire still hated them.

For millennia, of course, the Nosferatu hunted their sire right back. The clan built its famous information network in part to sift the world for clues to their mad forebear's location. Nosferatu sponsored expeditions to strange, far places and hired potent thaumaturges to divine his lairs, all in vain. No power save perhaps another Antediluvian could penetrate the shroud of Obfuscate with which the Father of Monsters hid himself.

At the End of the World, Absimiliard abandons his campaign of piecemeal murder. The Withering fills him with terror. Like the other Antediluvians who still take corporeal form, he seeks to claim Caine's power by consuming his siblings and their most potent childer.

The Father of Monsters gave his childer a mastery of beasts equal to their mastery of concealment. Nosferatu vitae also carries a special power to make ghoul animals grow to great size and strength. The Nosferatu mix their vitae into filth-laden water to create spawning pools. These pools nourish rats the size of hounds and other monstrous guardians of the Nosferatu Kingdoms.

Long ago, Absimiliard created spawning pools deep within the Earth. His vitae transformed animals into monsters that he trained and cast into ageless sleep. In between these rare bursts of activity, Absimiliard slept in the cold, eternal night at the bottom of the ocean. Now, at the End of the World, the Father of Monsters rouses his sleeping army. He means to conquer his rivals by raw force.

On every continent, the earth shakes and splits as the beasts of Absimiliard rip free from their secret nests. Some of them follow the scent of Nosferatu vitae, stalking the few who resist consumption by their forebear. Others converge on cities held by Antediluvians or their Methuselah servants. One great beast rises from the sea with Absimiliard himself riding in its belly like Jonah in the whale. The First Nosferatu expects to dine on his brothers and sisters. Indeed, when he regains his full might, the Father of Monsters can feed on vitae through his servant beasts. At first, however, he still needs to diablerize victims in person.

The coterie can encounter the Reign of Nosferatu in two ways. If the characters threw in their lot with some other Antediluvian, Absimiliard and his monsters attack the city where they dwell. If the characters fled the cities in hopes of establishing a survival enclave, the Ancient can pass by on his way to a city and, he hopes, a meal of rival Ancient.

Option One: Under Siege

Use this story if the characters serve an Antediluvian or Methuselah. They might oversee a feeding-station of mortal vessels, work to build defenses for their master, or take on other tasks as described thus far. Absimiliard calls an army of beasts to invade the city. Although the Ancient chiefly wants to capture and diablerize the city's master, his creatures share a ghoul's appetite for any sort of Kindred vitae.

Absimiliard's army consists of oversized rats and bugs, with a few gigantic, deformed specimens of other animals,

including a giant saurian atavism that forms his personal steed and protector. Treat the giant rats and bugs as wild dogs. These beasts attack in packs. (See **Vampire: The Masquerade**, pp. 302-305 for traits and rules for swarm attacks.) Large beasts range in size from a Clydesdale horse to an elephant, with intrinsic Fortitude and Potence; see sidebar below for generic trait descriptions.

The assault begins about midnight as rat packs and bug swarms boil out of the city sewers to attack any Kindred abroad on the streets. The rats and bugs give way before counterattacks. The creatures attack several times, but retreat when pursued. All the packs converge on a location in the city's outskirts. A wooded ravine works well. So does a region with abandoned warehouses or other large, empty buildings.

The location is an ambush: Four or five giant animal ghouls moved into this location and hid themselves the previous day. These animals burst out from cover and attack any Kindred who followed the bug and rat packs. The bugs and rats then circle around in hopes of blocking the Kindred's retreat. These beasts also retreat when faced with a strong defense, but follow retreating vampires back into the city and harass them with more hit-and-run attacks. Their goal is not to kill vampires right away, but to keep them from reaching their havens when the sun rises. Cainites who cannot stay awake after dawn become easy prey for the beasts.

Just before sunrise, Absimiliard himself enters the city within the largest monster of all. He already has a good idea of his quarry's location. The giant reptile topples

The Beast from the Sea

The Nosferatu Antediluvian's personal monster began its life as an amphibian or reptile no doubt forgotten by time. Now it's about 150 feet long and 40 feet high, with yard-long claws and teeth and a row of leathery spines down its back. Millennia in the sunless deeps leave it a ghastly, pale brownish-green, while the scales, warts and nodules on its skin have a greasy, slimy luster even when dry. The creature attacks by ripping large things with its claws and either stomping on human-sized targets or trying to bite and swallow them. The first bite attack merely deals damage. If the beast succeeds in a second bite attack, it has swallowed its prey whole... for the Antediluvian to finish the kill. It prefers to bite Kindred. All its attacks take place at reduced difficulty because of the beast's huge size.

Absimiliard rides in the beast's belly and possesses its mind. Any attempt to affect the beast through Animalism effectively acts against the Antediluvian's own mind and will. Likewise, Absimiliard can channel certain Disciplines of his own through the beast. Admittedly, though, the Father of Monsters is much reduced from the power he held only a few years ago, especially during the day. The Nosferatu Antediluvian may be a third-generation vampire and older than history, but he still suffers the Humanity limit on his dice pools if he acts during daytime.

Attributes: Strength 16, Dexterity 2, Stamina 12
Abilities: Alertness 2, Brawl 5, Climb 2, Survival 1
Disciplines: Fortitude 5, Potence 5 (beast); Animalism 10, Dominate 4, Presence 5 (Absimiliard)
Willpower: 9 (Absimiliard)
Health Levels: OK, OK, OK, OK, OK, –1, –1, –1, –1, –1, –2, –2, –2, –2, –2, –5, –5, –5, Incapacitated
Attack: Claw at difficulty 6 for eight dice of lethal damage; Stomp at difficulty 5 for 16 dice of bashing damage; Bite at difficulty 6 for nine dice of lethal damage (plus the possibility of being swallowed).

Horse-Sized Monster

Use these traits to represent a fox, badger, lizard or other small to medium-sized animal expanded to the size of a horse by Absimiliard's spawning pools

Attributes: Strength 5, Dexterity 2, Stamina 5
Abilities: Alertness 2, Brawl 4, Survival 1
Disciplines: Fortitude 2, Potence 2
Willpower: 4
Health Levels: OK, OK, –1, –1, –2, –2, –5, Incapacitated
Attack: Claw for four dice of lethal damage; Bite for five dice of lethal damage.

Elephant-Sized Monster

Use these traits to represent a wolf, deer or other medium-sized animal transformed by a spawning pool or a smaller creature that received a longer exposure.

Attributes: Strength 10, Dexterity 2, Stamina 10
Abilities: Alertness 2, Brawl 4, Survival 1
Disciplines: Fortitude 3, Potence 3
Willpower: 5
Health Levels: OK, OK, OK, –1, –1, –1, –2, –2, –2, -5, Incapacitated
Attack: Claw for six dice of lethal damage; Bite for seven dice of lethal damage; Trample/Stomp for 12 dice of bashing damage.

small buildings with sweeps of its mighty tail, burying Kindred who get in its way, or it tries to bite and swallow them for its master's nourishment. The giant reptile can rip and climb up the interior of a skyscraper or tear through concrete floors in pursuit of the city's master. About half of Absimiliard's servant beasts also converge on the haven of the target Ancient. (The other half slip control for the moment and are more interested in satisfying their own ghoulish appetite for vitae.) The sun has risen by the time the Nosferatu Ancient reaches his quarry, so any defenders must fight with reduced dice pools and the deadly threat of sunlight. Absimiliard possesses sufficient strength of will to stay awake, and his pets suffer no limitation at all.

If Absimiliard succeeds in his assault, his blasphemous saurian chews on its prey a bit to soften it up before swallowing. The First Nosferatu diablerizes his victim in the beast's belly. When the Nosferatu founder devours his prey's soul, every animal in the city frenzies and attacks any mortal or Kindred they can find. The frenzy does not last long, though — just three turns (or more if the Storyteller desires).

The next night, the invigorated Antediluvian commands that the city's Kindred gather and swear fealty to him as the city's new master. The other Kindred must capture any Nosferatu in the city for Absimiliard to devour.

The Nosferatu Antediluvian makes the city his domain. He no longer needs to travel to hunt his brothers and sisters. Now that Absimiliard has devoured one Ancient, he can diablerize by proxy, through any beast from his spawning pools. The giant reptile and a force of a dozen or so lesser monsters remain as Absimiliard's personal guard. The rest move on to other cities and the Father of Monsters' ultimate prey — another Antediluvian.

Option Two: Passing Through

Use this story if the characters fled cities and set up a survival enclave in some small town or rural area. In this story, Absimiliard merely passes through on his way to a city and his Ancient prey. He views the characters' enclave as a convenient snack. Before the Withering, he could not have fed on any vitae less potent than that of a Methuselah, and indeed, he still gains little nourishment from blood alone. Diablerie, the drinking of souls, energizes the vitae he consumes.

Characters can see Absimiliard's giant amphibious steed from miles away. He has zero chance of taking the coterie by surprise. The characters have at least a few hours to prepare before the great reptile attacks.

The story is very simple. The characters see a gigantic reptile tromping toward their haven. It tries to eat them.



The characters try not to be eaten. The Nosferatu Ancient also mobilizes large numbers of mundane local animals to harass the characters — swarms of bats and rats, dog packs and the like.

Absimiliard does not risk his pet's life for the sake of a snack. If the characters manage to deal more than two health levels of damage to his beast, the Antediluvian withdraws. The characters affronted his pride, though.

The beast retreats throughout the next day. The next night, however, the Antediluvian returns under cover of Obfuscate. He spends a few hours locating and watching the characters as he ponders what sort of cruelty he can inflict before he devours them. For instance, he might murder the mortal that a character most cares about, then leave the mutilated body in the character's bed, just for spite. He decides that he shall commit his atrocity within view of the characters... except they won't see it because of the Obfuscate. The Ancient's power fails in the midst of his crime, though, so at least one character sees the Antediluvian.

Absimiliard has spent most of the last few thousand years as a creature of the ocean deeps, and he looks the part. The Ancient is a bloated, slick, translucent creature like a humanoid jellyfish. He has the wide mouth, needle-like teeth and huge pop-eyes of a deep-sea fish. The moment he realizes that someone can see him, he moans, hides his face with his hands and runs. He's very fast and he soon musters enough Obfuscate to conceal himself again. He returns to the comforting, black belly of his pet as soon as possible and does not return to trouble the coterie again.

The characters can follow the Antediluvian if they want. His beast moves quickly, but automobiles are faster. Clever characters may rig some sort of trap or weapon that can kill the giant reptile and force Absimiliard to emerge. The Antediluvian is still an Ancient of considerable power, but without diablerie to sustain him, his strength is finite and the characters might be able to slay him. Once he diablerizes a Methuselah, though, his traits become irrelevant: He easily counters any attack from the characters.

The Reign of Haqim

The Assamite clan calls its Antediluvian Haqim; indeed, many Assamites prefer to call their clan the "Children of Haqim." When Haqim awoke, he had some advantages and disadvantages compared to the other Antediluvians.

On one hand, most Assamites revered their clan's founder as a holy prophet or even a god. Clan legend says that "Khayyin" (Caine) appointed Haqim to judge and punish the other Kindred. Assamite jurists formalized this mission in the Path of Blood, a harsh code of honor and war against the other clans. Assamite tradition held that Haqim would rise to lead his clan in a great purge. The ancient *Book of Nod* prophesies that at Gehenna, Caine's wicked childer would be brought to the First Murderer's black throne to face their punishment. The Assamites believed that they would attend that dread court as recorders and instruments of Caine's vengeance.

The Assamites also preserved more unity and hierarchy than most clans. From the dawn of time to the present night, the Eldest (the "Old Man"; the Master of Alamut) spoke to the clan as Haqim's viceroy, aided by councils of elders gathered from throughout the world. The deep hatred that certain Assamite devotional orders inspired among the Kindred they fought also discouraged infighting among clan members. In recent years, the leading Assamite *antitribu* even abandoned the Sabbat and returned to Alamut's fold.

On the other hand, the clan recently suffered a new schism. When Haqim's childe ur-Shulgi awoke and seized Alamut, the ancient Methuselah decreed that the Path of Blood was the clan's only law. Assamites who retained faith in mortal creeds — particularly the Abrahamic religions of Judaism, Christianity and Islam — rebelled against ur-Shulgi. They fled the clan's strongholds in the Middle East, India and Central Asia for the Western world and the protection of the Camarilla and the Sabbat. The lords of the Camarilla humbled Alamut once before; the schismatics hoped they could do it again. Some among the schismatics even dared to question their traditional loyalty to their founder.

Haqim also did not absorb the minds and wills of his childer as completely as did other Antediluvians when he rose. Perhaps his own honor forbids him to devour the wills of childer who remained faithful. Perhaps his clan had changed too much. In the last millennium, the clan suffered two separate curses that wrought fundamental changes in the Blood.

All Assamites still feel their forebear's will beat against their own when Haqim rises to call the Last Jyhad. Assamites and diablerists of Assamites receive the normal chance to resist enslavement by Haqim. Unlike other clans, however, submission to Haqim merely imposes a powerful feeling of loyalty and affection, like that of a willing blood bond. Haqim's slaves retain their minds and individual wills, while the Antediluvian cannot know their thoughts and experiences.

The First Assamite commands his loyal childer to hunt the remaining traitors to the clan and the infidel of the other clans. Assamite coteries, called *falaqi*, strike against elders throughout the world. As the mortal world

crumbles, Alamut retains the command and control of a modern military machine. The *falaqi* diablerize their victims or ship them back to Alamut for the Antediluvian and his lieutenants to devour. Alamut reveals that it has built its own fleet of Lear jets, with fuel caches positioned around the world. Battles with other Kindred destroy the planes one by one, however, and the fuel dumps last only a few months. Yet as Haqim restores his power through diablerie, he becomes able to feed through his emissaries. Each diablerie by an Assamite passes some of the devoured soul's potency to Haqim.

The Antediluvian did not expect the waning of Caine's Curse, but Alamut soon reconciles this event with its ideology. Haqim declares that the disruption of the Curse comes from God. The wicked among the Kindred suffer weakness or devour each other as unwitting scourges upon their sinful race. At the end of this tribulation, however, God will redeem the faithful and restore their power as His sword of justice in the cleansed world.

The manifesto from Alamut does not entirely deny mercy to Kindred of other clans. They may atone for the sins of their bloodline by joining the Children of Haqim in rooting out the infidel. All they have to do is profess their contrition... and accept a blood bond to an Assamite. In the Reign of Haqim, any blood bond to an Assamite becomes a bond to the Antediluvian himself.

The "free" Assamites face danger from every side. Their erstwhile clanmates now hunt them as infidels. Other Kindred hate and fear known Assamites, since they cannot easily tell a schismatic from a murderous minion of Alamut. Alamut loyalists are not above pretending to be schismatics in search of sanctuary, as a way to get closer to their victims. Of course, Kindred desperate for a diablerie "fix" do not much care if a Cainite on the run is Assamite or not.

Some schismatics refuse to fight. In their case, the Assamites' millennia of faith and honor lead them to submit to God, not Haqim. If the waning of Caine's Curse is God's will, they accept it, whether as tribulation or mercy. Shortly before the Antediluvians rise to found their Empire of Blood, a rumor sweeps through the schismatic grapevine: Kindred who accept the waning Curse may become mortal again! As always with rumors, the details change with each telling. Most versions of the story agree that regaining mortality involves fasting and the most earnest repentance and prayer.

Whether the characters ally themselves to an Ancient or seek to avoid Gehenna in a survival enclave, they can encounter Assamites who promise them a final chance for redemption. Two final chances, in fact.

Submission to Haqim

The coterie might face a *falaqi* of loyal Children of Haqim. Following the directive from Alamut, these Assamites preach before they kill. By now, the characters (and their players) are probably all too accustomed to slavering Kindred trying to drink their blood. These Assamites, however, present themselves as missionaries with an alternative to the fratricidal chaos. The Kindred do not need to kill each other for power. The blood of their sires damns them, but the blood of Haqim can redeem them. The *falaqi* includes a Cainite or two from other clans to provide testimonials: Assamite blood and the word of Haqim have freed them from the weakness and hunger that afflicts other Kindred. Vampires need only accept Haqim's grace, spread the word... and drink three times from one of Haqim's faithful childer.

The *falaqi* does not give characters much time to think about its offer. Its members warn that many other Kindred need to hear their message and they can't waste time on indecisive fence-sitters. The characters must make their leap of faith *now*, because God might not give them a second chance. The Assamites stay at least three nights to complete the blood bonds, then they move on with any characters they ensnared. If the Assamites cannot persuade anyone to accept Haqim's grace, they bid the coterie a sorrowful farewell. They sneak back under cover of Obfuscate a few nights later to try to capture the characters for a diablerie feast.

The Cainites in the *falaqi* are neonates with an ancilla leader. They outnumber the coterie, though not by much. The group includes one or two Kindred of other clans, for a wider spread of Disciplines, and some of the *falaqi* members have skills at evading mundane security. If the *falaqi* needs to be more powerful to challenge the coterie, add an Assamite sorcerer with a thaumaturgical path or two and a few rituals that negate the coterie's advantages.

Does Haqim believe that he guides the Kindred to redemption, or is he just thinning out the competition before he turns on his own clan? Who knows? The Reign of Haqim decimates the Kindred, but mightier powers destroy Haqim before he can complete his war. The characters are far from Alamut when it happens, though, so they never know who or what slew the First Assamite.

Servants of Haqim

The whole coterie might accept the blood bond to Haqim. They discover that the message of the *falaqi* is not entirely a lie. Assamites still suffer the unpredictable fluctuations in the Curse, but *falaqi* are very good at finding Kindred to diablerize. Kindred bound to Haqim lose their fears, doubts and hungers, because Haqim's hunger matters more to them than their own. Haqim's

Search for the Seers

As Gehenna unfolds, stories circulate among the Kindred about a group of vampire prophets who can see the future and reveal the secrets of the Antediluvians. Characters might want to find these "seers" in hopes of learning how to escape, survive or even stop the devastation.

All the information about the seers consists of contradictory rumors. Some stories say the seers are Inconnu who finally declared their presence. Other tales say these vampire prophets are young and thin-blooded. Still others omit the vampire element and say that the seers are mortal. In the same manner, the rumors place the seers in a survival enclave, a city seized by thin-blooded Caitiff, a forgotten bomb shelter or other locations.

Persistent characters can find that the most common version of the story says that the seers are young vampires of the Fourteenth or Fifteenth Generations. They advised the leaders of the revolution in a Caitiff-held city, and they now dwell in that city. Locating a solid lead, however, requires accumulating five successes on Intelligence + Streetwise rolls (difficulty 6). The player attempts one roll per night the character spends on the search. Success means that the character finds a Kindred (or — why not? — a mortal) who has reliable information about the seers. For instance, the coterie might find a Kindred who corresponded with another vampires in the city where the Caitiff took over. This other Kindred described the seers and how the revolutionaries seemed to know every secret of the city's Cainite elders.

Once the characters have a lead, they face the challenge of reaching the seers. As with other travel-based stories, the journey becomes ever more difficult as Gehenna progresses. During the war of Kindred and kine, ordinary mortals pose the greatest danger. After the rise of the Antediluvians, mortal authorities no longer threaten the characters, but they face mortal and Kindred bandits, roaming Malkavians with troops of crazed followers, self-proclaimed road warriors ready to destroy any Leeches they find, roaming beasts warped by Vicissitude or Nosferatu spawning pools, Lupine packs and whatever other supernatural creatures appeal to the Storyteller.

If the journey itself supplies enough excitement, the coterie faces just one challenge once it reaches the Caitiff-held city. Either its members need to persuade the city's Kindred council to let them question the seers, or they must find a way to sneak past the seers' guards and persuade the oracular Cainites directly. The city's Caitiff feel extreme suspicion of any outsiders, but they listen more readily to other thin-blooded Kindred.

If you want a longer story, a Methuselah has invaded and conquered the city, and now holds the seers prisoner. The Methuselah could serve an Antediluvian who hopes the seers can reveal the plans of its rival Ancients. Alternatively, the Methuselah could come from a clan whose founder was destroyed long ago. This elder Cainite wants the seers to tell her how to ride out Gehenna and avoid falling to the Ancients' fangs.

The characters could attempt a jailbreak or try to destroy the Methuselah. This is less of a challenge than it would have been just a year ago, since diablerizing thin-blooded vampires does little to counter the Curse of Caine's decline. Nonetheless, the Methuselah still has a well-protected haven and impressive Attributes and Disciplines.

The seers appreciate their rescue, but divining the secrets of the Jyhad is neither quick nor simple. The circles of seers can trigger collective flashes of their clairvoyant "insight," but they cannot always control what their gift tells them, and visions might be symbolic rather than literal. Nevertheless, the characters can gain important information that helps them pursue their other goals. See **Time of Thin Blood** for more information on thin-blooded seers, if you want to make these Kindred an important part of your Gehenna chronicle.

Jyhad can end the chaos afflicting the Kindred — by slaughtering everyone who does not submit to the Antediluvian's will.

A coterie that serves Haqim gains the same mission as the Assamites who recruited them. They search for other Cainites, try to bind them to Haqim through Assamite vitae, and kill everyone who turns them down. (The coterie does need to include an Assamite member for this, the Storyteller can create this character, or one of the players can take the Assamite's role if one does not already exist. Kindred of other clans cannot pass the bond to Haqim through their blood.) The coterie tries to murder and diablerize Methuselahs without the usual preaching, though — such ancient creatures are too steeped in sin for redemption. Besides, they'd see through the characters' story in a second. The coterie regains its freedom a few months later when someone or something destroys Haqim.

Submission to God

The coterie might also meet a group of real Assamite missionaries spreading the word that vampires can become mortal again. This group travels in a small refrigerator truck (the metal box in back is just 8 feet long) pulled by oxen. The missionaries believe that they have the most important message in the world — the only way to redeem the world from the Curse of Caine. They travel together for protection and merely ask the characters to hear them out and let them depart unmolested.

The Assamites tell how vampires can escape the Curse of Caine by doing all they can to resist it. They must avoid feeding, but try to avoid frenzy as well — if they gorge themselves in their madness, they might be too full of blood to throw off the Curse when they get their chance. They must pray for mercy and humble themselves every way they can. Whatever they gained through their undead powers, they must renounce. They must give all they have to poor mortals, especially those who suffered loss because of Kindred actions. They should bind themselves in chains so they cannot harm anyone else, then they must have themselves scourged. Ghouls must be freed from their enslavement to the Blood. Then, eventually, God might take pity on them and restore them to life.

The missionaries have one slight credibility problem: None of them has actually done this. They say they knew a former Assamite who became mortal, but that was quite some distance away. The characters have nothing but the Assamites' word for what happened, though a character with Dominate might Mesmerize a missionary against lying and so confirm that the Assamites sincerely believe what they say. If the characters want to travel to the town where the former Assamite dwells, they must cross a few hundred miles of territory that becomes increasingly chaotic as the world falls apart. When they arrive at the town, they find that the alleged Assamite has died — another vampire killed him. They can prove that their quarry existed, but not that he was ever a vampire.

Becoming Mortal

The missionaries are not quite correct about Kindred becoming mortal again. They saw what their clanmate did, but they do not know the exact factors involved.

The elaborate rituals of fasting and contrition are not necessary. Becoming mortal is all a matter of Humanity — and, perhaps, the grace of God. When a character feels his Kindred powers ebb in an acute bout of the Withering, he must yearn for mortality with all his might and try to remember what it felt like to live. The player then rolls a dice pool equal to the character's Humanity (difficulty 9). Fourteenth-generation vampires subtract 1 from the difficulty and 15th-generation vampires subtract 2. Characters who follow a Path of Enlightenment can also make the attempt, but the player rolls half the character's Path rating (since Path followers have deliberately rejected their human connections). The attempt costs a point of *permanent* Willpower that does not add successes to the roll. The character also expends at least one blood point to suffuse his flesh with blood and force his heart to beat.

If the character succeeds, he becomes closer to mortality. His Generation rating increases by one per success rolled, to a maximum of 15th generation. Minor physiological processes resume, such as an occasional heartbeat or growth of hair. The more successes the player rolls, the more aspects of mortality the character gains.

The next time the character's Cainite powers fail, he can try again and become still more mortal. When the character accumulates five successes, he truly lives again, regardless of his current generation. If he still has any vitae in his system, he becomes a ghoul while it lasts.

The Reign of Malkav

Kindred mythology includes no tales about the destruction of the Malkavian clan's founder. A few legends say that Malkav sleeps in a ruined city somewhere in the Middle East, but no one who followed these legends ever found any trace of the Antediluvian. Then again, how could anyone find the resting place of one of the supreme masters of Obfuscate?

Malkav no longer exists as a corporeal entity. Lunacy's Master retained stronger ties to its childer than did most Antediluvians. Many times in Kindred history, Malkavians displayed an uncanny coordination between their deeds, with no apparent way for them to communicate. The occasional spontaneous gatherings of Malkavians lent further credence to the notion of a "Malkavian Madness Network" that linked the clan. That "network" was nothing less than every Malkavian's blood-tie to their progenitor. Although Malkav slept the torpor of centuries, it watched the world through the eyes of its unknowing progeny.

Some years ago, various upsets among the Kindred troubled Malkav's sleep. The Ancient did not think about what it did, it acted as one may act in dreams, without conscious volition. Nevertheless, Malkav desired to see through more eyes than usual, so it strengthened its bond to its childer. The Ancient indeed placed its entire being into the Madness Network and left the useless husk of its body to crumble away. As its founder spread through the Madness Network, the clan itself changed. For centuries, Camarilla Malkavians learned Dominate instead of the clan's ancient Discipline of Dementation. Malkav touched all his childer with Dementation, whether they wanted it or not. If any Malkavians understood what had happened,

either Malkav stopped them from telling anyone or other Kindred ignored the madmen's babble.

Malkav wakes up with the other Antediluvians and tries to subsume all its progeny. It feels lonely, trapped within its own mind, and it reaches out to other minds. Each consciousness touched by Lunacy's Master, however, dissolves into its own. Every subsumed Malkavian becomes a vehicle for the clan founder's consciousness, without even a pretense of maintaining the character's old identity. The Ancient becomes one mind, one will, that happens to occupy more than a thousand bodies at once. Subsumed Lunatics seldom speak, but they can act together with perfect coordination... at least when Malkav wants them to do so. Lunacy's Master still cannot escape the mirror-maze of its isolation, though, so it seeks more minds. More descendants. Other Kindred. Mortals. Some soul strong enough to break through Malkav's solipsistic madness and leave it no longer alone.

The Quest for Completion

Some Malkavians resist their ancestor's soul-devouring will. The Ancient can sense its rebel progeny. If one of its bodies wanders near a free Malkavian, it sends the body to confront the errant Lunatic and consume it. For a free Malkavian, or anyone who ever diablerized a Lunatic, any meeting with a subsumed Malkavian is a meeting with Malkav itself. Any Malkavian can suck another Malkavian into the collective of the mad.

A subsumed Malkavian can approach a free Malkavian character whenever the Storyteller thinks it would make a good story. The Ancient might send one of its bodies hundreds or thousands of miles to collect a character. Malkav does not seek its childer in an efficient, organized manner, though. Lunacy's Master might miss a character completely.

A Condition for Cainites

Malkav spreads its "gift" of madness to other Cainites as it tries to contact other minds. Each Malkavian body retains the use of whatever Disciplines the character knew before the Antediluvian consumed her. The Ancient freely employs these Disciplines, especially Dementation, to drive other Cainites insane. It cannot possess Kindred who are not descended from it or who never diablerized a Malkavian, but that doesn't stop Lunacy's Master from trying. Malkav also retains enough awareness of the world to diablerize other Kindred when it gets the chance, to counteract the Withering in its bodies.

A Madness for Mortals

Malkav draws mortals into its fog of madness. If Malkav focuses its will on a mortal it can see clearly, that character's player (or the Storyteller) rolls a dice pool of the mortal's Willpower (difficulty 7). If the roll fails, the mortal goes permanently mad. If the roll succeeds, the mortal becomes immune to Malkav for that scene. Malkav can try again if it encounters the mortal in a later scene.

A mortal driven insane by Malkav loses the capacity to empathize with other people. The person cannot even recognize that other beings *are* people. Malkav's Chosen become creatures as amoral as any vampire lost to the Beast, but retaining a human intellect in every other way. These "isolates" treat all other people as potentially threatening animals, as competitors for food, or as food themselves. They do not shrink from murder and cannibalism. Torture fascinates these human-looking creatures, as they ponder the conundrum of an object that mimics the appearance of pain.

Malkav's mortal victims can work together, though, if the Ancient demands it. Malkav's bodies often walk with a retinue of mortals who feed and serve it. When Malkav does not need its minions, these mortals howl and gibber, leap about, beat themselves or each other with sticks, feed, couple and sleep when they tire, like beasts. Sometimes they spontaneously dance in unison while chanting nonsense. Anywhere from 10 to 100 such "bacchantes" typically accompany each subsumed Malkavian.

Dr. Netchurch

A coterie that strives to ride out Gehenna can encounter a special Malkavian on the run from his many-bodied ancestor. Dr. Douglas Netchurch, seventh generation, is one of the world's greatest Cainite scientists. He has studied Cainite parabiology for decades: notable subjects include ghoul physiology, Discipline acquisition, Thin Blood Syndrome and the peculiar clairvoyance displayed by some Cainites of the Fourteenth and Fifteenth Generations. He considers himself a rational and ethical man with an unfortunate medical condition. He welcomed the end of the Masquerade because he could finally publish his research to the entire world, instead of merely circulating it to a select audience of fellow Kindred. The prestigious science journal *Nature* was peer-reviewing his first paper when war broke out between Kindred and kine. (See **Ghouls: Fatal Addiction** and **Time of Thin Blood** for samples of Netchurch's research, and check the Appendix for a profile of the good doctor himself.)

Dr. Netchurch lost his laboratory, his test subjects and his assistant (and childe) Dr. Reage in the chaos of Gehenna. He kept his mind and a satchel of research notebooks and data disks. Now he seeks a refuge where he can try to figure out what happened to the Curse of Caine and what, if anything, can be done about it. He turns to the coterie for help.

The good doctor has many useful skills to offer a coterie. Mortals in a survival enclave or small town appreciate the presence of a doctor, even if he takes fees in blood. He can apply his scientific training to a wide variety of biological and chemical problems, from distilling fuel alcohol to homebrew insecticides. If the characters allow it, Netchurch devises tests to quantify the Withering and its effects on vampiric physiology. His tests are gruesome and painful, since they involve acts such as slicing open a vampire's flesh and watching it heal under a microscope. Netchurch is quite willing to experiment on himself if no one else volunteers. He often pesters the characters to find him more lab equipment.

After a few weeks of such tests, however, Dr. Netchurch can announce that the Assamite apostates' claim about vampires becoming mortal (see "The Reign of Haqim") is not completely implausible. When Cainite powers seem weakest, he sees signs of actual metabolic activity in the tissues of his research subjects. Netchurch speculates that if this trend continues, Kindred might gain the ability to eat normal food again and perform other mortal body functions, though he does not yet know if vampires could lose their deadly vulnerability to sunlight and their need to drink blood.

More ominously, Dr. Netchurch's inquiring mind recognizes the early signs of the Tzimisce Antediluvian invading Earth's biosphere (see "The Reign of Tzimisce"). Unfortunately, Netchurch lacks the background to interpret what he finds. He can recognize that some force is altering fungi, lichens and other simple organisms in peculiar ways, but he cannot identify the force or tell how widespread the mutagenic effects will become.

Most importantly, Dr. Netchurch can suggest ways to free other characters who are possessed by an Antediluvian, assuming the characters cannot figure this out themselves. The doctor combines a brilliant scientific mind with the Dementation Discipline to pull information from nowhere. Storytellers can use him to give the characters hints about what's going on and what they might do about it. Netchurch is not infallible, though, and he carefully limits his advice to describing various possibilities. The characters must decide what to do by themselves.

Hosting Dr. Netchurch makes the coterie a target for Malkav. The Antediluvian catches up to them in the body of Dr. Reage, accompanied with a force of at least 60 bacchantes. The Antediluvian and bacchantes say only one word, "Douglas," in unison. Malkav isn't subtle. Dr. Reage and the force of bacchantes attack in a human wave in hopes of overwhelming anyone or anything in their way. The bacchantes use their own bodies to bridge a trench or force a way over a wall.



Crazed Survivalists

When characters travel through the ravaged world, they can encounter a variety of mentally unstable or otherwise dangerous people trying to ride out the end of civilization. These people might attack the characters out of fear, greed for their possessions, thirst for their vitae or other reasons. On the other hand, the survivalists might have something the characters want. We present a few sample people and groups that Storytellers can flesh out as they choose. They are all post-holocaust classics, with a Kindred twist.

• **Cannibal Corners:** A Cainite with a very low Humanity took over this rural hamlet. He feeds on the inhabitants and returns just enough of his vitae to keep the 50 or so mortals blood bound as his ghouls. The villagers pretend to welcome visitors but drug their food, tie them up in their sleep and turn them over to their master. The Kindred drinks the captives dry, then gives the carcasses to the mortals. Their state of ghouldom and the Cainite's influence have turned the people into willing cannibals.

When the coterie arrives, the villagers pretend not to realize they are Kindred and encourage the characters to stay through the day, so their master can enjoy a diablerie feast. Just in case, while some villagers distract the characters, others sabotage their vehicle. If that doesn't work, they just pull out guns and other weapons. The master must have blood and souls!

• **The Missile Men:** The soldiers at this nuclear silo waited for orders that never came. They were too well trained to leave their post, and the silo was built to survive for months after a nuclear attack. Months into the End of the World, isolated but unwilling to leave, the soldiers are going stir-crazy. Through months of work, they have found a way to launch their missiles without the codes they would normally need from the government. They know there's an enemy out there and they're itching to destroy him, but where?

The soldiers maintain surveillance of the nearby area. When they see the coterie nearby, their paranoia leads them to believe that the characters must be scouts for the enemy. Some of the soldiers sneak out to try to capture the characters for interrogation. Any reference the characters make to any location might provoke a nuclear strike. It's one way they can take out an Antediluvian, if they're shrewd enough to play on the soldiers' madness. It's also a good way to get their loved ones killed, along with everyone else left in a city. Being responsible for nuking a city, even by accident, *definitely* causes Humanity loss: Ask for Humanity checks to see if characters lose *only one* point for this awful development.

(For a variation, replace the missile silo with a nuclear submarine lodged about a mile from shore.)

• **Tribulation:** When the Masquerade fell, the zealots in this religious commune felt little surprise. They knew for years that Satan ruled the world and devils walked in human guise. Their attempt at self-sufficiency left them more qualified than their neighbors to ride out the end of civilization... and their extremely large cache of weaponry let them dictate terms to everyone around them. The commune now forms the nucleus of a small theocratic dictatorship. The people "protected" by the commune quickly come to revere the group's highly charismatic leader and accept his fundamentalist rhetoric.

The leader has more going for him that just skill at public speaking. He has a neonate Toreador chained and hooded in his cellar. The leader feeds animal blood to the neonate and draws off vitae to sustain himself as a ghoul, giving himself Potence and Presence. He is of course blood bound to the Toreador, but in his case, the obsession takes the form of possessiveness and using the Toreador as his sex toy. By now the preacher has his flock so bamboozled that even revealing the secret of his overwhelming charisma might not turn the people against him. The Toreador, meanwhile, is half mad from months of torture and slavery. The only thing she wants more than Final Death is to take the preacher with her.

Malkav does not care how many minions die in the attempt to reach Dr. Netchurch. After all, it can always recruit more people. Any mortals who try to fight the bacchantes run the risk of joining them.

Conceivably, the coterie might capture Dr. Reage. In that case, Dr. Netchurch can use her to test his theories about breaking Antediluvian possession. He needs the characters to do this, however, since he does not dare enter the same room as his possessed childe.

End of the Reign

It's hard to imagine what could kill a multi-bodied, psychic entity like Malkav. Nevertheless, something does. (Perhaps through some Level Ten application of Dominate or Presence?) All Malkavians, subsumed or not, suffer the usual fratricidal madness. No one ever learns what did the deed.

A shadow of Malkav's hive-mind endures, however. The bands of bacchantes stay together. They remain animalistic, with occasional flashes of coordinated activity.

Isolates remain solipsistically insane as well. Many of them die because they kill each other, or sane people kill them out of self-protection. Malkav drove millions of people insane before its destruction, however, and some of them possess skills that keep them alive. These isolates become deadly predators.

After Malkav's destruction, individual victims of its madness can be returned to humanity through lengthy retraining or use of mind-affecting magic such as Dominate (to suppress the remnants of Malkav's autism and restore memories) or Presence (forcing the victim to feel emotions toward another person). Roll a die to find how many nights (one to 10) of Discipline use it takes to snap one of the bacchantes or an isolate back to humanity.

The Reign of Lasombra

For centuries, Lasombra vampires boasted how they destroyed their clan's founder in the Anarch Revolt. Gratiano, the Antediluvian's youngest childe, led a strike force of Lasombra and Assamites into his sire's vast Sicilian fortress... and then the stories become a little vague. Some say the Ancient woke and fought in vain; others claim that he slept through his own destruction. Some ascribe the Ancient's diablerie to Gratiano, who took his sire's place in the Third Generation. Others say that an Assamite completed the deed, though many Cainites feasted on the Antediluvian's vitae.

Some Sabbat find these contradictions disquieting. After all, the Ancient's diablerie had plenty of witnesses and it wasn't that long ago, as Cainites reckon such things. These Sabbat remember that the Lasombra gifts include the power to twist thoughts and alter memories. They worry that the Lasombra Antediluvian used his childe to fake his own destruction.

Some of those who accepted the Ancient's corporeal destruction nevertheless wondered how final his death truly was. Old and powerful masters of Obtenebration claim that their Discipline draws its power from a realm of utter darkness they call the Abyss. No light or matter exists in the Abyss, but... *things*... dwell in that nighted realm. They wonder if Lasombra have souls, and if so, to what realm they pass upon their body's destruction.

Concurrent with the waning of the Curse of Caine, something emerged from the Abyss. This formless creature of darkness seeks out the Lasombra. It speaks to them in the voice of a destroyed sire, childe or other clanmate. It seeks to consume them, body and soul. Although the shadow-creature begins its feeding with the younger and weaker members of the clan, it hunts Lasombra elders soon enough. It ignores the upheavals in the sects and in the mortal world. The reigns of the Antediluvians concern it not at all — until it is ready.

The creature takes counsel with one ancient Cainite, a Malkavian Methuselah whom mortal legend called Louhi. This undead crone is one of the eldest of thaumaturges. For thousands of years she sought a ritual that could blot out the sun. Long before recorded history, the Lasombra founder bound Louhi with his blood and will, and Louhi served her master faithfully. At the End of the World, their ancient plan comes to fruition. Louhi calls the shadow-creature from the Abyss. As it feeds on the Lasombra clan, she conducts the rituals to make it a god. And then...

Darkness covers the entire world. The sun no longer shines; the moon and stars are not seen in the heavens. No light penetrates the inky shroud.

Deprived of the sun, the Earth grows cold. White snow drifts down from the black sky. Leaves turn crisp and dead beneath lacy frost. The lakes and rivers freeze more slowly, but in a few days a rime of ice covers them as well and inches out to sea.

The flowers, insects, birds and animals of summer are the first to die. Even the winter-hardy evergreens slowly wither, however, without the sun's light to sustain them. As the cold sweeps into the tropics, creatures that never felt winter shiver and die.

Humanity resists as best it can. Where the power grid remains intact, generators hum and lights shine against the darkness. These regions would be larger had Kindred elders not sabotaged civilization to protect themselves. Less fortunate people huddle around fireplaces and light candles. The people who remain in cities are hit the hardest. Few among their undead masters care very much.

As each creature dies, a puff of mist rises from it — its life and spirit, visible only in the utter darkness of Lasombra's reign. The wisp of soul-stuff rises into the ebon sky. Lasombra feeds and grows stronger.

Then, after three weeks of darkness — lights flash in the sky and strange words echo like thunder. A mighty wind rises from nowhere as the sky slowly brightens, roils and turns red. Curtains of scarlet drops descend, and a hurricane of blood lashes the world. An hour later, the ruddy clouds break and the true sky becomes visible once more. The Reign of Lasombra has ended as suddenly as it began.

The characters never know why.

The Shadow-Creature

Lasombra characters might encounter the shadow-creature any time after Gehenna begins. The creature tries to absorb them just as the Antediluvians try to possess their childer. Unlike the Antediluvians, however, the shadow-creature does not merely enslave its victims or even drain their vitae. The shadow-creature

Underground Railroad

The characters might have escaped an Ancient-ruled city, but other people they care about remain trapped in the Empire of Blood. The coterie could try to smuggle other Kindred and kine out of the city to whatever survival enclave they have built or found. Their adversaries consist of Cainites bound to an Ancient; other Kindred who tied their fortune to the Ancient's rule and don't want anyone else to escape; mere opportunists who would sell the characters out; and the Ancient itself, who may possess high levels of Auspex or other Disciplines that could lead it to the characters. The more attention the characters draw to themselves, the greater the danger they face.

If the coterie restricts itself to rescuing mortals, the Ancient's servants probably do not care very much. They have lots of vessels; what's it matter if a few run away? The Storyteller can raise the stakes by making a mortal the characters hold dear into part of a Ventrue elder's herd. That Kindred cares a great deal about missing mortals!

For the greatest challenge of all, the coterie could try to rescue and emancipate Kindred possessed by an Antediluvian. This becomes especially important if the coterie lost one of its members to her clan founder. The characters need to kidnap their associate. The Storyteller can make this especially challenging by placing the subsumed character in a position close to a city's Methuselah prince. (As a player's character, the Kindred has already shown more competence in diverse situations than most other vampires.) Once they abduct the character, the players' characters need to keep her from knowing where they took her — because what she knows, the Antediluvian soon knows, and the Ancient's other servants know. As a reward, however, the liberated character brings information about the prince's security and perhaps even some of an Ancient's plans.

wraps around its fallen prey and consumes it entirely, leaving nothing behind.

Characters can attack the shadow-creature... not that it does any good. The creature draws on the infinite power of the Abyss. Nothing known to Cainites can destroy it. At best, characters can force it back to the Abyss. They can do so by exposing the shadow-creature to sunlight, or by attacking it with fire. The creature vanishes once the total damage from whatever sunlight or fire effects they inflict upon it exceeds 20 health levels. The shadow-creature has more important things to do than strike back at feisty childer. It attacks the characters only one more time before it covers the world. The second time it attacks, the shadow-creature requires 30 health levels of fire or sunlight damage to banish.

The Reign of the Shaper

Noddists and other students of Cainite legend accepted the existence of 13 Antediluvians, founders of the 13 clans. A few legends suggested more grandchilder of Caine, but in the absence of any real evidence, these tales attracted little interest. The fratricidal contest of Gehenna, however, flushes out numerous ancient vampires who had hidden for millennia. Most of these are Methuselahs of the known clans, or of clans believed defunct, such as the Salubri or the self-proclaimed "True" Brujah (descendants of the clan's first Antediluvian rather than the usurping diablerist-childe Troile). A few of these Ancients, however, come from no known clan — grandchilder of Caine who never sired childer of their own. Some of these "lost Antediluvians" simply try to survive and retain the power they have. Others make their own bids for godlike power without descendants to enslave and feed upon.

The Antediluvian who calls herself the Shaper is one of the latter. This undead artisan spent millennia honing a Discipline of her own invention that lets her move, animate, reshape and transform material objects. She never taught it to anyone else. The Shaper expected to transcend undeath and become a god, but Gehenna and the Withering spoiled her plan. To transcend, she must boost her power through diablerie of at least one other Antediluvian.

Unlike the Nosferatu Antediluvian, the Shaper does not launch an immediate, open assault on her rivals. First, she tries to gather allies among other Kindred. The Shaper has a number of favors to offer to prospective allies. Most importantly, she can protect Kindred from enslavement by their Antediluvian through a blood bond. Many Kindred might balk at blood bonding themselves to anyone, but the Shaper points out that losing a little emotional self-control is better than losing your entire identity. She can also use her Disciplines to purchase boons. Even weakened, she *is* an Antediluvian with numerous Disciplines at high levels, including her unique Shaping power. She helps prospective minions acquire what they want — secure havens, revenge on enemies, wealth, rescuing captured compatriots, True Names of Methuselahs, whatever she can provide (or seem to). She promises that once she secures her own power by diablerizing a rival Ancient, she can grant much greater favors.

The Shaper needs one very special service from her employees. As a Kindred more than 10 millennia old, she

suffers from Methuselah's Thirst. She needs Kindred willing to let her feed from them... enough that she need not feed from a single Kindred more than twice. The Shaper also needs to diablerize the occasional Kindred to maintain what power she has, and she encourages her minions to capture prey for her.

The Antediluvian plans to eat her way up the food chain. Diablerizing a Methuselah gives her the power to face and destroy another Antediluvian, if she can take her sibling by surprise. Her minions serve as spies. She wants them to locate a Methuselah and an Antediluvian, find out how they protect themselves, sabotage their defenses and help her sneak up to them.

Recruitment Drive

The Shaper spends a time watching the characters from the cover of Obfuscate. The characters learn about the Shaper when she contacts them. She does so in private, with no other Cainites around. The Shaper does not immediately announce herself as an Antediluvian. She merely introduces herself as an elder who needs assistants, with certain gifts to offer in return. She calls herself "Sarah," a pseudonym she chooses for its very ordinariness. The Shaper says that she wants the characters to work for her because they compose one of the last intact coteries in the world. That shows that they possess an uncommon degree of intelligence and loyalty to each other, when most other coteries have fallen apart because of fratricide. "Sarah" hopes that they can extend some of that honesty and integrity to her.

As a token of good faith, "Sarah" offers to assist the coterie in some small way before she even says what she wants. The characters can suggest tasks, and the Shaper picks one she can perform without much trouble, even in her comparatively weakened state. Anything financial or material is easy for her. For instance, if the characters want money (never mind that it's worthless with civilization's collapse), the Shaper steps outside, creates a few gold bars, then steps inside and asks if this will do. She can also build nearly anything in a short time.

Once "Sarah" completes her task to the coterie's satisfaction, she asks for a modest payment in vitae. If the characters don't trust her to feed directly, they can drain some vitae into a container. The Shaper wants one blood point's worth from each character.

Now that everyone's... well, not friends, but reasonably sure that they can do business, "Sarah" bargains in earnest. She wants to diablerize a Methuselah, and to muster enough of her power for that, she needs to diablerize another Cainite or two. If her victims can be enemies of the coterie, everyone benefits. She also describes the favors she can offer in return, including protection from Antediluvian forebears. She still doesn't call herself an Antediluvian. "Sarah" just says that her blood differs enough from her sire's to insulate her, and anyone bound to her, from the power of their ancestors.

If the characters don't want to do business with "Sarah," she says she's sorry they feel that way and she hopes she can find other Kindred with more ambition. She departs. If the characters are foolish enough to attack her, she sinks into the ground and vanishes. The next day — yes, day — the Shaper makes a special effort of will to stay awake, pulls a bunch of junk around her in a light-proof cocoon with a smoked-glass visor, breaks into the coterie's haven and tries to stake them all for diablerie. See **Vampire: The Masquerade** p. 204 for rules about waking when disturbed during the day.

Eating to the Top

"Sarah" deals with the characters fairly as long as they keep faith with her. She lets the characters select lesser Kindred for her to diablerize, and she always performs a service in return. For instance, if the coterie dwells in a small town, the Shaper can build fortifications or create a storage tank full of gasoline for their generator. Although she does not know any technology more advanced that a water-wheel, she learns quickly and can duplicate any substance or mechanical device that she has a few hours to study. "Sarah" suggests, however, that the people would do better to adopt premodern technology such as windmills and horse-drawn plows. She, of course, knows all about such things. If the characters dwell in a city, she can build secure havens, create trade goods, rescue loved ones from other Kindred or perform other tasks the characters might suggest. "Sarah" accepts each challenge with enthusiasm. She enjoys stretching her powers and having an audience after millennia of concealment, though she still hides from all Kindred except the characters. In short, she seems like an ideal mentor. She fakes her Humanity very well.

Methuselah-Hunters

The first great challenge consists of murdering a Methuselah. The Storyteller should provide two or three possible victims within 100 miles or so, to keep the story focused on the diablerie instead of cross-country travel. Pick Methuselahs from your extant chronicle, **Children of the Night** or other **Vampire** supplements. If a Methuselah particularly annoyed the coterie in the past, the characters can arrange his destruction. "Sarah" encourages the coterie to help locate a suitable target and plan the attack. By now the characters have some idea of

their ally's powers; the players will no doubt enjoy devising creative uses for them.

Once the coterie agrees on a Methuselah to hunt, define the target's defenses.

Where does the Methuselah keep his haven? Considering the paranoia and chaos of the times, it should be an intrinsically defensible location, such as underground, atop a tall building with strong walls or maybe even underwater. The Methuselah needs a fairly large population around it, though, of younger Kindred to feed upon and mortals to feed the Kindred. Many Methuselahs rule cities as princes, as described thus far, but Storytellers should also consider smaller, isolated communities such as a cruise ship on an endless voyage of the damned (the mortals fish for their own food).

What guards protect the Methuselah? The elder needs protection during the day as well as at night. Blood-bound mortals carrying heavy firepower make the simplest and most dependable guards. The Methuselah certainly sleeps someplace its guards cannot themselves reach, for blood bonds now tend to break after a few months. Magical guardians such as spirits or living statues create a more fantastical scenario, but not improperly so. With the end of the Masquerade, Kindred don't bother hiding any of their supernatural resources or abilities.

The end of civilization might mean that getting to the Methuselah becomes a story in itself. Try not to make this a *long* story, though. An encounter or two with frightened and trigger-happy rustics, a cannibal motorcycle gang and such ilk can adequately show the sad state of the world.

Once the characters arrive, they need to gather intelligence about the Methuselah's haven and guards. This gives the characters an opportunity for down-and-dirty skulking, bribery and interrogation of assorted Kindred and kine who possess information.

Once the characters feel they know enough about the Methuselah's defenses, they can plan an assault. "Sarah" largely confines her part in the planning to pointing out flaws in the plan, suggesting when the characters overcomplicate their scheme or obsess on peripheral details. She also shoots down at least one plan on grounds that their quarry already thought of that and would set a trap or ambush. The Shaper does say that once she diablerizes the Methuselah, getting out will not be a problem.

If the coterie's plan succeeds, they get the drop on the Methuselah. When "Sarah" has the Methuselah helpless in her grip, she raises a sturdy wall around herself and her victim — just in case any characters feel like a bit of last-minute treachery. A minute later, the wall drops to reveal the Shaper, full and ruddy with blood stolen from the crumbling corpse at her feet.

True to her word, the Shaper helps the coterie escape pursuit in high style. Her augmented powers enable her to open a tunnel through the ground and close it behind the coterie, send bridges of girders arching from skyscraper to skyscraper or similarly impressive feats.

Once the characters are well away from any hunters, "Sarah" presses the coterie to help her hunt an Antediluvian. The Shaper does not want to spend more than a single night on any project to repay the coterie; she says that the surge of power from the Methuselah's vitae will not last long. If they are patient, she can repay them tenfold after drinking from the Third Generation.

Antediluvian Assassins

Conveniently, the Storyteller has already placed an Antediluvian nearby. For instance, if the coterie did not prevent Absimiliard from conquering the Kindred of a nearby major city, the characters and the Shaper can stalk the First Nosferatu. If not Absimiliard, some other Antediluvian made the city its domain. Troile (the Brujah Antediluvian) or Arikel (founder of the Toreador) could work. They enforce their rule through overwhelming Presence, however, instead of an army of monsters. Since the characters do not know exactly which Ancients survived the millennia of Jyhad and which did not, the Storyteller is entirely justified in bringing in whatever Ancient suits her story. The rest of this story, however, assumes that the coterie hunts Absimiliard.

"Sarah" confidently predicts that her augmented powers remove the need for a stealthy break-in. She and the coterie merely need to reach the Antediluvian's haven quickly and strike from surprise. If the coterie can keep Absimiliard's minions occupied, she can deal with the Ancient itself.

No one in the city knows where Absimiliard keeps its haven, thanks to the Ancient's restored mastery of Obfuscate. It communicates using animals who seem to speak with its voice. The Shaper, as a fellow Antediluvian with newly restored Auspex, can infer the haven's location by spending three nights watching the people and Kindred moving through the city. Within these three nights, the characters can engage in any other investigations they want.

The Antediluvian isn't stupid. It rules its subjects more tightly than the previous prince did, watching through its animal minions and possessed descendants. By the second night of the characters' inquiries, the Ancient knows about them and suspects that they mean it harm. It sends mortal servants to capture everyone by day and bring them to the Antediluvian's own haven for

interrogation. The Shaper sleeps while Earth Melded, so the minions don't find her. The characters wake up in the Antediluvian's lair, bound in chains too strong to break.

For this climactic scene, the Storyteller might want to create a horrifically baroque haven for Absimiliard, such as an art deco subway station festooned with staked and crucified Kindred hanging from chains, or a church now entirely plated with human bones. The Antediluvian has great power now, and it takes its time torturing the characters in between the questions. Quite possibly the Ancient has Disciplines that could force the characters to tell everything they know — the torture is just for fun. At last, the Antediluvian forces the coterie to speak of "Sarah," the Shaper.

Their captor laughs. "That silly girl? I haven't heard anything about her in 5,000 years. What'll she do, throw pots at me? Threaten to redecorate my haven?"

That's when the building starts to shake and rattle. Every mechanical device in the building dismantles itself. Rivets pop out of girders, bolts unscrew themselves, furniture disjoints and everything slowly pulls itself apart from whatever it's connected to. The entire building becomes a loose web of girders, bricks and slabs hovering in midair. Then with a tremendous boom, the fragments of the building burst into the air and rain down over the city. The Shaper strides in, a grim look on her face. The chains that bound the characters pop and wrap around the Antediluvian as it tries to flee. It breaks them — and battle is joined.

The battle does not last long. The Shaper rips entire buildings out of the ground with waves of her hand and launches them like steel and masonry comets at Absimiliard, who responds by calling its monstrous pets and attacking with its own vast strength. The characters don't have to fight the Ancient's minions, who sensibly flee. Instead, they must dodge and run themselves to avoid being crushed. Absimiliard, however, placed too much of its power into its monsters and not enough into itself. At the end, the Shaper stands alone in a large crater as she sinks her fangs into the Antediluvian's neck.

A minute later, the Shaper drops the ancient carrion and laughs. "I've done it!" she says. "I've won the Jyhad — and found a way out! I don't have to be what my sire made me. I can be a god — and this city, my temple!" The Shaper waves her hand again, and the rubble of the city rises into the air, and glitters as it transforms into spires, walls and domes of crystal. "I can change you too, my loyal servants!" she calls to the characters as her own body begins to glitter. "I can change you all! No more vampires! No more Curse!"

Then the ground beneath the Shaper molds into an enormous, fanged mouth and eats her whole. The Reign of Ennoia, the First Gangrel, has begun.

The Reign of Gangrel

Noddist legend gives the Gangrel founder the name Ennoia, among others. As with all the Antediluvians, almost nothing is really *known* about the First Gangrel. Even Ennoia's supposed female gender is speculation, for in later millennia the Antediluvians could appear in any form they chose. Every student of Cainite myth agrees, however, that the Gangrel owe their unique aptitude for the Protean Discipline to their founder, who surely must have been its greatest master.

For millennia, Ennoia walked alone when she did not sleep in the soil. Gangrel tales say that sometimes she visited the tale-swaps and moots of her descendants, and they knew her not until after her departure. Other tales speak of her as a ruthless predator who devoured her childer simply because she hungered and they were convenient. All the tales of Ennoia date from more than 1,000 years ago. The few Kindred who could honestly claim they met her are almost legend themselves. The Gangrel say, however, that Ennoia does not hate her childer the way Absimiliard hates the Nosferatu. Nor does she view them as minions in some eternal struggle, as tales say about the Followers of Set or Children of Haqim. She merely watches the successes and failures of her childer and does not pity.

More than a millennium ago, Ennoia began her transformation from Cainite to something more. She sank into the earth, deeper than any other Cainite could imagine. She spread her substance further, thinner, touching the rocks at the roots of mountains and hearing the tolling of earthquakes. She sank deeper still, century after century, learning the slow dreams of the drifting continents and feeling the vast tides and currents that propel them. She sank into the realms where stone melts and was not burned, for Fortitude was another gift to her clan. She spread and sank until she reached the very heart of the planet. There she rested, gently rocked by the world's turning, listening to the continents slowly move above her.

Ennoia did not lose all her connection to the Cainite race, though. The battles of the Antediluvians and the ruination of their childer troubled the geologic dreams of Ennoia.

She woke up hungry.

The Devouring Earth

The Reign of Gangrel spells final doom for the Empire of Blood. Most Kindred, especially the remaining Methuselahs and Antediluvians, still dwell in the crumbling cities. Ennoia wants their vitae. She sucks whole city blocks into the earth to devour one Methuselah, and skyscrapers topple from the shaking. Each time Ennoia claims another victim, the result is a



powerful but localized earthquake... usually in the heart of a major metropolitan area. The fire brigades and other emergency services that could save lives no longer exist, so fires often sweep through the city's remains after Ennoia feeds, destroying more Cainites. She feeds only at night — a habit of her Cainite past. Around the world, city after city collapses into final ruin. Many survivors flee. Some people remain to scavenge through the wreckage. A few Kindred remain as well, preying upon them, but without an elder to lead them, their harsh regimes fall apart and the mortals take their full revenge on the disorganized Kindred.

Characters might find themselves in the same vicinity as an elder when Ennoia feeds. They have a chance to escape only because they are not her target. For dramatic effect, this scene works best if the characters are on the ground and free to run: The point of the scene is to display awful, apocalyptic destruction without killing the players' characters by fiat. Give them a *chance* to escape!

Each character receives warning when the ground suddenly shakes. In a few seconds, the ground slumps and subsides. To escape, a character must run uphill as fast as possible, right away. Before the turn is over, the character climbs almost as much as he runs, and he must dodge falling chunks of pavement and buildings as well. Have the player roll the character's Dexterity + Athletics (difficulty 7). Failure means Ennoia eats the character along with her prey. Rolling one success leaves the character buried in rubble as a city block becomes a crater (which deals four health levels of bashing damage). Two successes leave the character clutching a broken water main or conduit at the edge of the crater, but he can scramble out on the next turn (with another Dexterity + Athletics roll at difficulty 6). The character needs three successes to escape unscathed — though if the character is in an urban core, a falling building might bury him and inflict at least 15 dice of bashing damage. It's bad, but even mere mortals sometimes survive buildings that collapse in earthquakes.

Earth Meld becomes virtually unusable after Ennoia wakes. It's the Kindred equivalent of a gnat flying down a yawning man's throat — it doesn't have much chance to fly out again. If a character tries to use Earth Meld, the player rolls his Willpower (difficulty 8) to reverse it and pull out before the First Gangrel swallows him by reflex. After that, Ennoia might haunt the character's dreams. If the Storyteller wishes, the character receives visions of Ennoia destroying cities as she hunts the other Ancients, or watches her long, slow journey from undead to spirit of the planet.

Ennoia does not continue her hunt forever... just until the battles of the Ancients no longer trouble her. The characters never really know if or when the Reign of Gangrel ends. Gangrel characters never suffer the fratricidal madness caused by an Antediluvian forebear's destruction, but the First Gangrel also never devours the will of any of her descendants. Gangrel cannot tap their founder's power to increase their Clan Disciplines, either. Ennoia might have become too alien a creature to cause either effect.

The Very Brief Reign of Tremere

What of Tremere, mortal mage turned third-generation Cainite? The Arch-Usurper has made many mistakes in his life and unlife. He's about to make another one.

Tremere trusted his fellow conspirator Goratrix's plan to become immortal using vampiric vitae, not realizing that they would become undead. He diablerized Saulot to reach the Third Generation and establish his bastard lineage as a clan. He didn't realize that he could not consume the soul of a creature that was millennia older, wiser and more powerful than himself, though. Tremere and Saulot fought for control of Tremere's body for centuries, and the true Antediluvian won. Saulot now walks in Tremere's body, while Tremere commandeered the body of Goratrix. As for Goratrix, the soul of Tremere's closest co-conspirator now resides in a mirror, screaming as his ghostly fist batters against the other side of the glass.

Naturally, Tremere feels some concern about the End of the World. As usual, the audacious Archmage has a plan. Actually, he had four or five plans, but the Withering and other unexpected factors rendered his other schemes unworkable. For instance, the Tremere's Council of Seven had worked out some powerful rituals that it felt sure would destroy any Antediluvian who dared to show its face. Unfortunately, he couldn't find the Council of Seven to cast the rituals. By the time Tremere concluded that his Councilors no longer existed (the Tzimisce Antediluvian took some and the Assamites destroyed the rest), Gehenna is well advanced, Kindred and kine are both devastated, and the war of the Ancients approaches its endgame. The Arch-Usurper is left with one desperate gambit — one puissant spell that can snatch victory from the jaws of Armageddon itself. He needs assistants to cast the spell, though. Once again, the characters receive an offer and a request from an unexpectedly powerful Kindred.

Why them — again? At this point, they make up quite possibly the last intact coterie of Kindred who are neither enslaved by an Antediluvian nor lost to the Beast through repeated diablerie. Tremere frankly tells them that he doesn't have much choice. He hopes he can find other assistants if the characters turn him down, but every night counts. Tremere tells the coterie how the Antediluvians battle for the power to transcend the Curse of Caine and become gods (if no one has figured it out already), and the ones who succeeded still battle for stakes that corporeal beings can scarcely imagine. Their battles have already destroyed civilization and slain most of humanity. Tremere fears they could destroy the world. It would be a real shame if all Kindred and kine died because he had to spend an extra week finding competent help for his ritual, now wouldn't it?

Tremere's Plan

For the last few decades, the Tremere Council of Seven worked on one of the most powerful rituals ever imagined — a ritual to affect every person in the world. In recent years, the Councilors believe they found a way to do this. Clan Tremere's Thaumaturgy emphasizes sympathetic magic, in which a thaumaturge affects a target by possessing some part of it, something connected to it, or a precise and unique representation of it. Modern folk no longer have the secret "True Names" that were common in past ages, but Social Security numbers, bank account numbers and other personal identifiers give the same effect. So does a genealogy of a targeted person. The great problem with casting a spell to affect all of humanity lay in the targeting. How do you obtain something connected to every person in the world? And while the Tremere found many True Names for individual mortals and humans in general, they never found the True Name for the human race as a whole... until now.

The Human Genome Project mapped the genetic code for making a human being — something that every human has in common. For more than a century, meanwhile, the Mormon Church has collected current and historical records in hopes of preparing a complete genealogy of the entire human race. By the time Gehenna begins, the Mormon genealogy project has records for nearly everyone alive and about half of everyone dead: Thanks to rapid population growth, the vast bulk of humanity lived in the 20th century. Tremere researchers realized that this "family tree" for the human race could serve as a True Name.

Tremere has already acquired a copy of the human genome. He believes that by incorporating it and the Mormon genealogy in a ritual, he can enchant every human being and every formerly human or part-human creature. Most importantly, he can affect every vampire left in the world, right back to the Antediluvians, because they used to be human.

The ritual enables its casters to project a Discipline effect to everyone in the world. Tremere plans to use this link to project a Dominate command to everyone in the world. He thinks that a command to stay awake and take a walk in daylight should exterminate the remaining Ancients. The characters, as participants in the ritual, will be immune to its effects. Quite possibly, Tremere says, they will be the last Kindred in the world.

The Arch-Usurper does not consider his plan graven in stone. He listens to any suggestions for other commands or other Disciplines to cast upon all Kindred and kine. He reminds the characters, however, that the chosen effect must destroy or incapacitate Kindred without harming too many kine. In fact, he would rather destroy only the Ancients, or at least spare any Kindred of his own clan, but the ritual does not allow him to set conditions on his commands. He cannot command just the Ancients, or just Kindred, or just members of certain clans: "Affect everyone" means "affect *everyone*."

Characters might also wonder if Tremere can be sure of Dominating the Antediluvians. The ancient Warlock thought of that. He can use the Path of Blood to reduce his effective generation when he issues his command. "It shall be as a command from Caine himself," he confidently predicts.

Tremere acknowledges that his plan isn't perfect. He does not know if the ritual will work. He says he has used up every other stratagem he planned to defeat the Antediluvians. The ritual is all he has left.

Salt Lake City

The human genome record is portable. The Mormon genealogy is not, and the Internet stopped working along with the rest of technological civilization. The characters must go to Salt Lake City. Tremere handles the transportation. The Withering does not stop him from summoning elementals that can carry the entire coterie to Salt Lake City in a few hours or nights. Depending on the characters' current location, they might need to travel in stages so they do not fly into daylight. The elementals look like horses fashioned out of storm clouds with hailstone eyes. They gallop through the sky at hundreds of miles an hour, their hooves flickering with bolts of lightning.

The characters find Salt Lake City more intact than any other city they've seen in months. The city never had a significant Kindred population: It's too far from other major cities for Cainites to reach easily. The Ancients ignored it for this reason. The Mormon Church also enjoins its members to stockpile a year's supply of food and other necessities, so the city has suffered less from famine and disease. The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints also provided an alternative source of governance and social stability. The United States is defunct, but the State of Utah still functions. The city even has electricity, though it's restricted to government buildings, the great tabernacle and vital services such as hospitals.

The characters can try to ask the city and church authorities for help if they want. Tremere dryly warns that the church elders probably do not look kindly on the accursed undead. He's right: The people of Salt Lake City keep refugee Kindred and mortal bandits out of their city through well-organized and well-armed citizen militias.

The genealogy project has an entire building to itself. With Tremere's help, the characters can easily clear the building of mortals long enough to conduct their ritual. The old Warlock points out, however, that he will need to expend a huge amount of vitae to perform the spell, and he's old enough that mortal blood no longer sustains him. He needs to feed on the characters, so they need to gather vessels of their own. Tremere estimates that 15 mortals might supply enough blood, or twice that many if the characters want the vessels to live. He'd prefer that all the vessels be human virgins for ceremonial reasons, but since time is short, he reluctantly forgoes that particular condition. Tremere insists on only *human* vessels, though. Animals would defile the ritual.

He needs the characters to feed to repletion. Then he drinks most of their vitae. Then they feed again, and he drains them again. Then they feed *again*, because the ritual might consume most of their blood as well. Tremere wants the characters to gather and drain vessels as efficiently as possible so they can get on with the ritual. He can even use Presence to reinforce his arguments, but the old Warlock does not actually force the characters to obey. Tampering with their minds might spoil them as assistants. If the characters figure this out, they can force Tremere to accede to any moral scruples they hold. If the characters follow his wishes and kill their vessels, the players must roll Humanity (difficulty 9).

The Ritual

The complete ritual requires no special equipment except the printout of the human genome and CD-ROMs of the complete genealogical database. Tremere insists that they must perform the ritual in the building with the primary records, to strengthen the sympathetic link from the CD-ROMs to the records and from the records to the human race. The old Warlock does not regard 15 to 30 vessels as "special equipment," merely something the characters need to gather in advance.

On the night of the ritual, Tremere excuses himself to acquire a final component. He vanishes in a cloud of blood-fog and returns an hour later, saying only that he found what he needed. (In fact, he found

and diablerized a Nosferatu hiding out in a nearby town, to restore his flagging power.)

Tremere asks the coterie to secure the genealogical building and prepare the CD-ROMs. The building has no guards, but no electricity either, as it's not a vital city service. Whether the characters reconnect the building to the power grid or bring in a gasoline-powered generator, restoring power for the building's computers calls for an Intelligence + Crafts roll (difficulty 7) or some similar Skill or Knowledge and takes an hour.

When Tremere returns, he pulls a thurible and incense from his satchel. The undead wizard chants in Latin while he wafts smoke over the CD-ROMs, the computer, the pages of the human genome printout, the room where the characters conduct the ritual, the characters and all the vessels they gathered. If any of the characters are Tremere, they recognize the ceremony as standard practice to banish any random mystic influences that could disrupt the magic.

Next, the old Warlock directs the characters to feed to repletion on their vessels. As they do so, he uses the Blood of Potency power to decrease his effective generation: This is the only way he can perform a Level Ten ritual and be sure that his Dominate will affect even Antediluvians. Fortunately, the Withering does not sabotage his effort. When Tremere finishes, he announces that for the next hour, he is effectively a second-generation Cainite.

Tremere drinks from each character until the Kindred has just one blood point left, then he bids them taste his own vitae, linking them as fellow participants in the ritual. Then he tells them to drink to satiety again, he feeds from each of them again, and then has the characters feed a third time. They will need all the vitae they can muster for this great sending.

The characters stand in a circle around the diagram, with Tremere at the center. Each character slits his palms as the old Warlock chants an invocation. Then Tremere kneels, slices open his tongue and jabs his long, sharp thumbnails into his eyes in a spurt of blood and fluid. "Blood to blood," he cries. "Let my sight encompass every son of Adam and daughter of Eve. Let every Child of Caine or Abel or Seth hear my voice. I have your name! I have your lineage! I have your soul!"

Tremere screams as blood fountains from his eye-sockets. Tendrils of vitae lash out to each character's bloody palm and skip to the genome printout. Filaments of blood trace out the letters and diagrams. More vitae pours from Tremere's mouth to vanish into the CD-ROMs.

As the fingers of vitae write the code of all humanity, the characters see people in other parts of the world. They see a child picking berries, a bandit cutting a farmer's throat, a woman giving birth, a Kindred kneeling before a sarcophagus, an old man shivering in a hut, a mob of bacchantes, more and more, faster and faster, hundreds of people, thousands, until they feel that they look at every person in the world at once. Each character has lost eight blood points without even noticing until Tremere says, "It is done. Hear me, Children of Adam. I command—"

The Arch-Usurper's voice chokes off in a gurgle. His body twitches, swells and churns as eyes, mouths, tentacles and other organs erupt from his flesh and sink back in again. Amid all the changes, he laughs a deep, ugly laugh. The characters cannot move: They cannot sense their own bodies in their millionfold view of the world.

"Be of me," the Tremere-Thing says. The characters see the flesh of millions of people ripple and flow. Kindred, kine and other, their skin splits like to release a larger, slimy, chitinous creature part ape, part insect, part reptile and all nightmare. Characters may recognize it as the Horrid Form of Vicissitude. Some mortals and supernatural part-humans resist the worldwide contagion, but they are a small minority.

The Tremere-Thing *Vozhd*

Here are traits for the monster the Tzimisce Antediluvian forms from the possessed body of Tremere and the transformed mortal vessels. Unlike the mortals merely transformed by the Ancient, the *vozhd* remains a living, deadly monster after the end of Gehenna. Its Mental Attributes drop to 1, though, and it loses its Alertness and Body Crafts.

Attributes: Strength 8, Dexterity 2, Stamina 6, Charisma N/A, Manipulation N/A, Appearance 0, Perception 8, Intelligence 10, Wits 8

Relevant Abilities: Alertness 8, Body Crafts 10, Brawl 4, Intimidation 6

Relevant Disciplines: Animalism 10, Auspex 10, Celerity 2, Fortitude 4, Dominate 4, Potence 6, Vicissitude 10; immune to Dominate, Presence and Animalism.

Willpower: 10

Blood Pool: 20

Health Levels: OK, OK, OK, OK, OK, –1, –1, –1, –1, –1, –2, –2, –2, –2, –2, –5, –5, –5, Incapacitated

Attack: Strike for eight dice of bashing damage; Bite for eight dice of lethal damage; Crush for six dice of bashing damage. Remember to add Potence damage as well.

The thing that was once Tremere darts from the ritual circle, scattering bloodstained pages. The characters' mystical vision of everyone on Earth ends and they can move again. The Tremere-Thing races for the vessels. If any vessels survived the characters' feeding, all but two of them have changed into Horrid Forms. The transformed mortals leap at the Tremere-Thing and merge into one gigantic form. The Tremere-Thing becomes a *vozhd*, one of the monstrous ghoul-creatures that powerful Tzimisce used of old to rout armies and destroy their enemies. It tries to kill the characters because they are the only people on Earth over whom it has no power.

The Tzimisce Antediluvian has made its masterstroke. All is Tzimisce.

The Last Judgment

The *vozhd* that had been Tremere immediately tries to kill the characters. As participants in the ritual, they became immune to the Tzimisce Antediluvian's powers and are the last truly free people on Earth. If the Antediluvian can kill them, it reigns supreme forever.

If the characters can kill the *vozhd*, good for them, but it does not make the slightest difference to the Antediluvian. It has still absorbed almost everyone else and can absorb or kill the rest at its leisure, using the millions of bodies available to it. The characters also need to escape from Salt Lake City, which is now chiefly populated with the First Tzimisce's transformed slaves.

The final act of Gehenna begins as the characters fight or flee for their unlives. A short, elderly man dressed in a plain gray shirt and slacks steps out from around a corner, a tree or some other cover. The characters' foes look off in another direction and bound away in pursuit of nothing the characters can see. The man asks them to come with him. Questions such as, "Who are you?" meet the response of, "The person who just saved you. Please come with me." Then a third eye opens in the man's forehead, glowing with golden light.

The characters cannot fight the man. If they try, he simply disappears and returns a few minutes later. He insists that the characters hear him out.

Saulot's Explanations

The man guides the characters to a small church in an abandoned village outside Salt Lake City. The church has a sturdy, light-proof cellar where they can sleep through the next day. He promises that the coterie will be safe there, so now they have time to talk. He offers to answer any questions that he can, though he warns that he does not know everything.

The man tells the characters to call him Saulot, the name he used most in the last 2,000 years. He is an Antediluvian and sire of the small Salubri clan that the Tremere nearly exterminated centuries ago. He also claims to be a prophet who foresaw much of what has happened, though some events of Gehenna surprised even him. All prophecy now fails, however, and he and the characters have nothing but faith to guide them.

Some of the characters might have heard of Saulot. He's supposed to have met his Final Death and been diablerized by Tremere. Saulot shrugs and says that's a complicated tale. The short version is that he lured Tremere to him, in full confidence that he could overpower the Archmage's will and make him his tool. That proved more difficult than Saulot expected. Tremere's mind and soul escaped him, though Saulot has posed as Clan Tremere's leader for some years.

Most importantly, Saulot wanted to occupy a body susceptible to absorption by the Tzimisce Antediluvian. More than a thousand years ago, Saulot knew that the First Tzimisce would end the Great Jyhad as master of the mortal world. Saulot arranged his own diablerie to place himself in exactly the right position for a counter-stroke to free humanity from the Tzimisce's rule and end the Curse of Caine forever.

If the Storyteller wants to explain why the Curse of Caine has faded, Saulot can deliver this information. He cannot offer any proof, though, and he suggests that the reason doesn't really matter. Only God, however, can cleanse the Curse from Earth completely.

Saulot's Plan

No physical force can destroy the Tzimisce Antediluvian because it no longer inhabits a single body. As long as a single living or unliving creature remains tainted with Vicissitude, the Ancient can grow again. The Antediluvian can be attacked only spiritually, from the inside, and even then only by the grace of God.

The One Above seldom acts directly. For the Infinite to reach its hand into the world might destroy it. Miracles work best when guided and channeled through someone within the world. Not many people can muster the faith needed for complete surrender to divine will, though, so miracles remain rare.

To stop the Reign of Tzimisce, then, the characters must completely abandon themselves to God's justice. They cannot ask God for anything for themselves, even to survive. Their prayer must be entirely for the world and the rest of humanity. They should also try to offer God some way in which their existence has served Him or served humanity. If they can manage that, they can serve as conduits for God's judgment on the race of Caine. To bring judgment upon the nonlocalized Tzimisce Antedi-

luvian, however, the characters must become one with it by letting it eat them.

Saulot himself will provide the access to the Antediluvian. Tremere's body is of Tzimisce lineage. Saulot merely has to call on the taint of Vicissitude in its blood to invite absorption by the Ancient. As soon as the Antediluvian manifests, the characters must veritably throw themselves into its jaws so that it diablerizes them by reflex. Saulot believes he can preserve the integrity of their souls for several seconds at least. Then it's a race between their faith and the Antediluvian's will. Saulot cannot protect their souls forever. (He himself cannot resist the First Tzimisce for long.) If they fail, the Antediluvian consumes them and owns the world forever — unless God chooses to destroy everything.

Indeed, the characters have no way of knowing for sure that God wants to destroy the First Tzimisce. All that has come to pass in Gehenna might be God's will; the Tzimisce contagion could be part of His plan for the world. They have nothing but faith that by trusting in His judgment they can achieve something good.

If the characters agree to Saulot's plan, he suggests that they spend the rest of the night praying for the human race and reconciling themselves to Final Death. If not, Saulot bows his head and says they have made their choice for themselves, and the world. The next night he will surrender himself to the Antediluvian anyway and offer his own prayer for God's judgment on himself, all Cainites and the world.

The End

If the characters refuse to join in Saulot's plan, he bids them leave the church the next night. Once the First Tzimisce takes his body, he has no further way to protect them. He will give them an hour to get away. When that hour comes, nothing happens. Saulot has lost. Story over, because nothing the characters do from then on can possibly matter. The First Tzimisce infuses itself through more and more of the biosphere until every living thing is part of itself. Eventually it eats the characters, with Lambach watching.

If the characters accept the sacrifice that Saulot demands, he suggests that they not hunt for any blood that night or the next night. Slaking their thirst hardly shows a very sincere desire to renounce the Curse of Caine.

Roleplay the characters' final farewells. If the characters don't take the initiative, Saulot suggests that this is the characters' last chance to confess or forgive offenses against each other, say anything left unsaid before and generally tie up the loose ends of their unlives.

When the characters finish, Saulot asks them to cut themselves so that their vitae flows. He sits cross-legged on the floor and closes his eyes. After a few moments, he says, "Now." His skin sprays in bloody gobbets as he almost explodes into Horrid Form, only instead of a head, he now has a cluster of tentacles ending in fanged mouths.

The mouth-tentacles reflexively dive for the vitae. The characters don't have to do a thing except let it happen. Just like their Embrace, they feel their consciousness slip away as their vision fades. This time, however, no transforming vitae slides down their throat to recall them to their flesh.

Instead, they find themselves sucked out of their shriveling bodies and into darkness. They can feel the warmth of Saulot's serenity and resolution around them, underlain by the fierce rage of the Beast that he — even he — still battles. Beyond that, they feel the cold, relentless hunger of the Tzimisce Antediluvian as it tries to consume them.

This is the moment for the characters to pray. Ask each player to justify his character's unlife, as Saulot suggested. Has she done more good than evil? Did she really strive to be more than a Beast? A Path of Enlightenment does not disqualify characters. Even the darkest, most frightening Paths (except the utter degeneration of the Path of Evil Revelations) posits some transcendent value against surrender to the Beast.

Just as in an attempt to regain mortality, the player rolls the character's Humanity, or half her Path of Enlightenment rating (difficulty 9 for most Kindred, 8 for 14th-generation characters, or 7 for 15th-generation vampires). Reduce the difficulty by one if the character gave an especially moving farewell scene or justification for her existence. The character still must expend Willpower points, but not blood points. This is also an extended roll. Saulot protects the characters' souls for three turns. If anyone can accumulate five successes in that time, the coterie wins. Alternatively, the Storyteller can call for the dice rolls but actually base the results on the quality of the characters' farewell scenes, prayers for judgment and justifications for their unlives.

If the characters succeed, they feel themselves explode in a blast of terrifying, raw power. They feel love in that power, but also wrath and satisfaction. That all-consuming wave of emotion seems to sweep through the characters for an eternity, burning them like fire, but it hurts so good.

The characters regain consciousness, unharmed, in the church. Not a trace of Saulot's body remains. Most importantly, they soon notice that their hearts beat. They live!

Salt Lake City is a few hours' walk away. The people look human again, though everyone has nightmarish

The Spawn of Tzimisce

If Storytellers feel they need some system to determine which mortals fully revert after the Tzimisce Antediluvian's destruction, and which do not, use this one.

For each mortal the characters might encounter, roll a single die. On a roll of 1 to 7, no taint of Vicissitude remains. On a roll of 8, the character retains one dot of Vicissitude; a roll of 9 indicates two dots. These characters can develop further levels in the Discipline with practice. On a 10, the mortal remains locked in the Horrid Form and has three dots in Vicissitude. All mortals who retain Vicissitude suffer some appropriately Tzimisce derangement such as sadism, territoriality or a compulsion to drink blood.

A storyteller needs such a system only if she intends to continue the chronicle in the post-Cainite world and she wants mortal friends or relatives of the characters to have survived Gehenna.

memories of their transformation and possession. Where the characters go from there is up to them.

Aftermath

The destruction of the Tzimisce Antediluvian ends Gehenna. All the Antediluvians are destroyed or utterly transformed. No Cainites remain, not even the characters. All Kindred who had moved themselves even a little ways back to mortality become mortal again. All other Kindred burn and leave not even ashes behind. The Red Star slowly fades from the sky as mysteriously as it appeared.

The short and terrible reign of the Antediluvians leaves the world in ruins. Fewer than one in 100 humans survived the end of civilization and the battles of the undead. Starvation, plague and cold killed most of them. Of a population that exceeded six billion, now less than fifty million remain, scattered about the world.

The remnants of humanity share the world with a comparable number of creatures that once were human. The Curse of Caine has ended, but not its effects on the world. The largest class of once-humans consists of Malkav's Chosen. Herds of bacchantes continue their endless rampage. They wreck settlements of the sane and drag them into their number. Malkav left the bacchantes with a power to drown the minds of others and reduce them to beasts like themselves. Isolates also roam the world as psychopathic predators in human shape.

The Tzimisce Antediluvian also left a permanent mark on the world. The Tzimisce are gone, but Vicissitude remains. Plants, animals and things that once were people carry its taint. Some of them retain the power to warp their flesh into monstrous shapes that reflect monstrous minds. The Discipline has changed into an innate power fueled by Willpower instead of vitae. The Spawn of Tzimisce can be more human than Malkav's Chosen... but that isn't saying much.

The monsters of the Nosferatu still roam the land and sea as well. Some of them might breed giant beasts like themselves. The power that Absimiliard placed in them can keep them alive for centuries. Some of them retreat to hidden caves where they may sleep in torpor for millennia to astonish and terrify future ages.

Ennoia calms with the end of Caine's Curse. The planet still lives, however. Sometimes Ennoia reshapes the land to suit her inscrutable whims. She raises and flattens mountains, changes the course of rivers, raises islands from the sea and plunges other land beneath the waves.

The Shaper did not die when Ennoia devoured her, either. Sometimes she creates a body of living crystal so she can see the world. She marks her passage with spires of crystal and other transmutations. Her greatest monument is a mountain transformed to crystal and sculpted to bear her features. It leads a line of similar mountains carved into the faces of the coterie's members — the only beings she thought of as honorable in the millennia of her unlife. She wants to leave some record of them, and herself, before she becomes too godlike to remember and care about such things.

The characters can try to rebuild civilization if they choose. In addition to the various threats left by the Antediluvians, the world holds no shortage of merely human dangers. Many of the survivors would rather rob someone else than provide for themselves. These bandits use the relics of technology as long as they can, roaring around in beat-up cars and motorcycles, brandishing guns and swinging improvised blades, spears and clubs at everyone they find. For every person who wants to plant a seed of civilization, someone else wants to drown that seed in blood.

Perhaps the world has not left the Crucible of God. Perhaps it never will. The rage and envy that led Caine to murder are as strong as ever and striving to drag the world back into darkness and death. The characters, at least, have faced the judgment of God and survived. In the new world, they will know pain, struggle and death — but for now, they have life in the light of the sun.

A Storyteller could choose grimmer endings, however...



Alternate Ending: The Rest Is Silence

Troupes that enjoy hard-core tragedy might prefer to give Gehenna an even bleaker ending, particularly if the characters merely fight to save their own skins instead of trying to help others. The Antediluvians destroy the world in their struggle, and drain all life to fuel their quests for godhood. All of humanity dies. All the animals die. All the plants die. Everything in the sea dies. Only the characters are left, the last dwellers on a planet as barren as the moon. They have nothing to feed upon, except each other, and then — a torpor that never ends, or the mercy of the sun. For extra irony, let the death-struggles of the Antediluvians propel the characters to the ancient site of Eden, now blasted and dead like the rest of the world.

What do the characters do? When all hope has failed, when they have lost everything, when there is nothing left to achieve — what then? What do the characters choose as their final actions before they too meet their end?

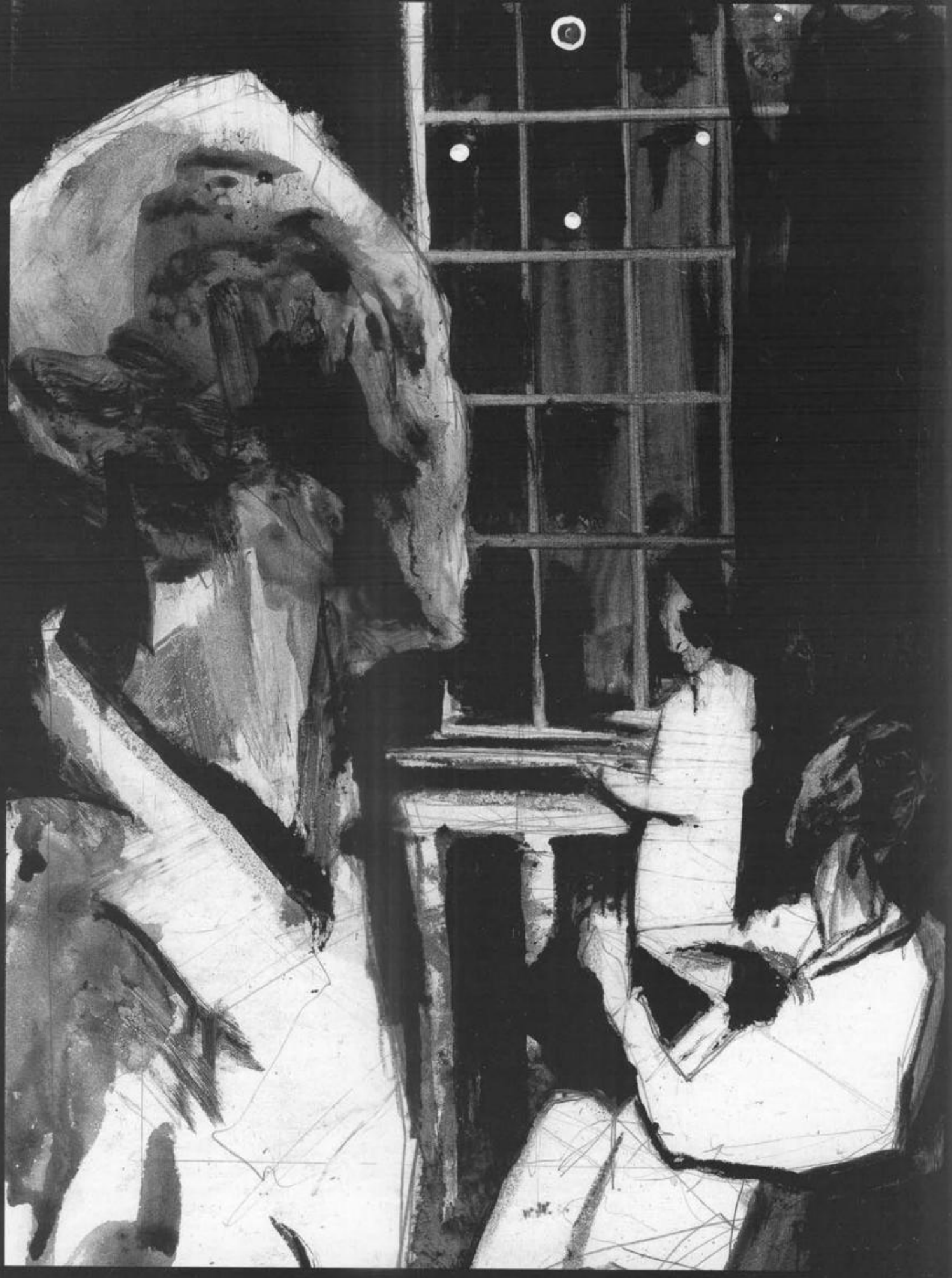
Second Alternate Ending: Here We Go Again

For another possible ending, not all the characters emerge from the flesh of the Tzimisce Antediluvian cleansed of vampirism. They do, however, feel... changed. The Curse of Caine no longer weakens unpredictably. In fact, the characters may find that their Disciplines have all increased and they can expend vitae more rapidly than before.

They are the last vampires left from the old world — and the first vampires of the new. They can sire more vampires, if they choose. Sunlight and fire remain as deadly to them as ever, but any weakness peculiar to their clan no longer afflicts them.

Meanwhile, somewhere in the Middle East, a hand thrusts out of a shallow grave. A man pulls himself from the earth. He bears a mark of fire on his forehead. He shakes his head in a daze, looks at his hands, feels his teeth, then looks up at the night sky.

He screams, "*Why won't you let me die?*" The only response is the mocking, uproarious laughter of God as He begins the cycle again with a new race of Cainites.





Chapter Six: Storytelling

Remember the last time you sat down in front of the big screen, leaned back in gleeful anticipation of a couple of hours of entertainment and watched as a story unfolded that seemed it would live up to all your expectations? The movie was fun, interesting and full of compelling drama, and it felt well worth the cold, hard cash you shelled out to see it. And then, for some incomprehensible reason, something happened. Something bad. It was as if the filmmakers had decided that the original — and probably very satisfying — ending was not quite right, so they fired the writer and hired someone else to complete the story. The result was a disaster. All the drama and thematic power of the film was abandoned for some cheap finale that was probably created by a bunch of corporate yes-men influenced heavily by demographics studies and the results of focus groups. You sat and watched in incredulous horror as everything you liked about the film simply flew out the window and the entire story collapsed in a meaningless and artistically hollow manner.

This is the greatest danger in telling the story of Gehenna, for Gehenna really is the end, and if it doesn't live up to the expectations that have been built up over the years, it will not only be a disaster for the Kindred, but for your entire chronicle. Since **Vampire's** inception, the foreshadowing has been there, never-ending reminders to characters and players alike that Gehenna is approaching and that it will be *the* biggest thing that could possibly be imagined. Even in games where this apocryphal event is not an important topic, it continues to cast a long shadow over Kindred in general (and many Kindred in particular). The entire Sabbat dreadfully awaits this time, even as the Camarilla struggles to deny it. Secretive Gehenna cults pursue their agendas, and signs that something ominous is coming can be seen everywhere. Now Gehenna has come and it is time to fulfill all those expectations. Now is not the time for Storytellers to drop the ball and see this as just another story of many. Gehenna is the last story, the culmination of everything that has come before it, and it should feel like that from the moment it begins until the credits roll.

It's the Characters

It might sound obvious, but Gehenna is all about the players' characters, not all those other guys running around, drinking blood and populating your world. It is very easy, as most Storytellers are quite aware, to run a story in which the characters are led by the plot and not the other way around. The Storyteller creates a very dramatic tale, and in order

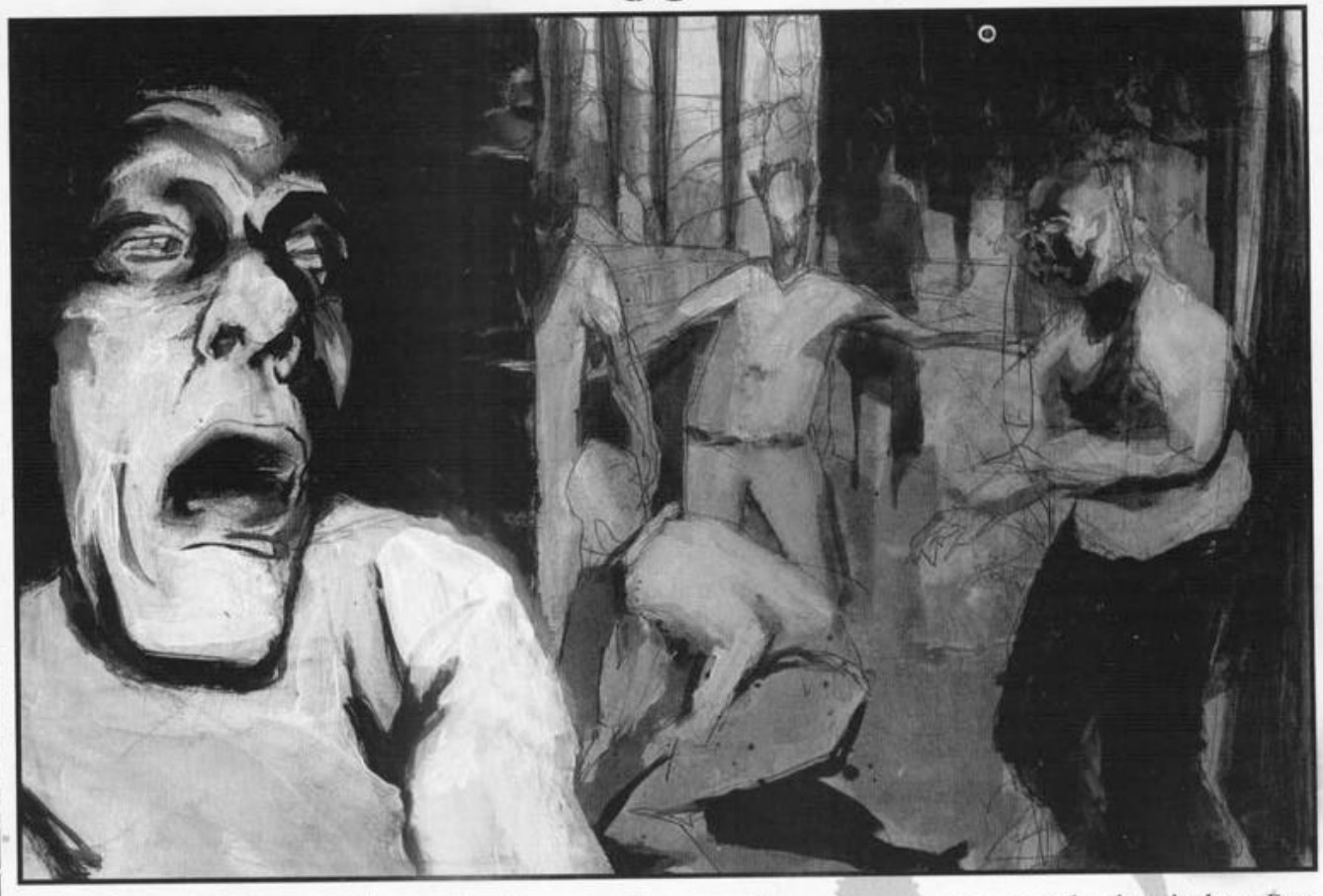
to make sure it reaches its conclusion as originally conceived, she has to make sure that the characters do not go too far astray. She does so by fudging dice results, using other elements to guide or force the characters along the proper path, or introducing deus-ex-machina-type situations, usually in the least obvious fashion possible, of course. When done fairly, this is fine, but beware the danger of sidelining the characters, of making their desires and actions matter less and less, and of overshadowing them by others. Do not let this happen now.

The characters — and all their hopes, dreams, goals, relationships, fears, weaknesses, strengths, flaws and everything else that makes them unique, realistic individuals — matter now more than ever. They are at the very epicenter of Gehenna, or at least they should be made to feel that they are. Even if what they do and what they experience during their last nights is really no more important than what other vampires are doing and experiencing — and maybe far less important on the overall scale of things — the characters should be the focus of the story. Whatever they do should make a difference, even if only to them, so make sure that they know it makes a difference. At its core, **Vampire** is a game of *personal* horror. Don't forget that. Look at the characters and use everything you can to turn Gehenna into a story as much about them and how they will spend their last moments as about the greater, earth-shaking end for all Kindred. Sure, the Antediluvians might be waging war, gangs of rabid diablerists might be rampaging through the city streets and the all-important Masquerade might be in tatters, but if this leaves the characters as simply a bunch of helpless Kindred whose last actions just don't seem to matter, then the story (and perhaps the entire chronicle) has been for naught. This is not to say that the characters need to actually be the figurative keys to Gehenna, responsible for fulfilling some epic destiny that will decide the fate of all Kindred and perhaps the entire world. There's certainly nothing wrong with that, especially if your chronicle is on a grand scale, but that is certainly not necessary. You simply need to take into account the fact that — and this might sound harsh — unless the characters really matter during this final, climactic act, you have failed.

In order to make the characters significant and to avoid the possibility of sidelining them when the shit finally hits the fan, the Gehenna story line must be customized or otherwise supplemented with those things that matter to the characters in the first place. If those things that are important to them come into play, the players will already feel that their characters matter. From there, it is simply the job of the Storyteller to reinforce that feeling until the very end. The following are some of those things that usually matter most to characters and what role they might play in a Gehenna story.

Character Purpose

Every character has at least one pretty clear goal that he pursues whenever possible. Most have an agenda that includes several. It might include gaining a seat on the primogen council, offing another Kindred who has long been a thorn in his side, getting his hands on an artifact precious to him or securing a certain level of influence among mortal society. Some goals are even greater, such as besieging and capturing an entire city under the influence of another sect or destroying an entire bloodline. Others can be ongoing, such as protecting one's mortal relatives or making sure the Toreador never come to dominate city politics. Whatever the agenda is, these pursuits are important and should not be allowed to simply vanish in the harsh light of Gehenna. Even if the end means that seizing the princedom is now a rather limited proposition, for example, the Storyteller should not just delight in watching the character come to that realization, throw up his hands in bitter frustration and surrender to the pointlessness of it all. Instead, let the character taste a bit of victory, but also let him taste how empty that victory might be. Maybe he finally discovers that the prince has never been anything more than a puppet of the primogen or some now-revealed Methuselah, illustrating to the character that it was never something he would have wanted anyway. A character who has always sought to earn the respect of her cold sire could learn at long last that it just isn't worth it. Perhaps now, as a blood-red moon rises in the sky and Caine's footfalls sound on the horizon, the sire is finally exposed as a seriously deranged maniac who is not even worth pitying, let alone pleasing. The idea is to let the characters have a chance to understand something of the truth that lay hidden or at least partly obscured behind those things they most desired. The old "be careful what you wish for" adage is useful here. Be careful not to go handing the characters everything they've always wanted, however, only to snatch it all away in the last scene. That is a sure way to leave everyone unhappy and spoil what should be a very powerful tale.



A character's Nature is also worth taking a good long look at before it's all over. Think about what a Fanatic, a Pedagogue or a Director really wants out of unlife. What satisfies a Child or a Conniver? And what fulfills the deepest desires of a Visionary or a Martyr? Read the descriptions of each character's Nature again and try to understand that few are any more objectively good or bad than any other. Even if Gehenna means that Caine or God or whoever is coming to judge each Kindred, don't start deciding which Kindred will be saved and which will not because of their Natures. A Deviant character, for example, might be a very moral individual, but simply see the world in a way that few others do. Similarly, a Caregiver might be rude and overbearing, smothering others in his desperate need to take care of those around him. Storytellers ought to figure out a way to ensure that at least on some level, each character will achieve some level of personal fulfillment by the eve of Gehenna. An Autocrat might be able to save his coterie from a horrible fate by taking charge of the situation, even if that upsets the rest of the group. Similarly, a Sabbat Sociopath's frenzied violence could prove a boon at this apocalyptic time, taking out some of the enemy so that the group can complete an important request for their bishop. Perhaps the Architect suddenly finds the opportunity to shatter his foe's strangling hold over municipal healthcare funding and is able to finally know that his efforts to help the city's homeless will become reality. Let each character achieve something he has always wanted, even if it is only a small thing, and the players will feel that they made a difference.

Strengths and Weaknesses

No less important than a character's Nature are her particular strengths and weaknesses. These include all those Attributes, Abilities, Virtues and other traits on the character sheet that are notably above or below average. Is the character exceptionally perceptive, courageous or charismatic, or does she suffer from an unnerving appearance or a lack of any discernable conscience? Storytellers should consider ways to make these capacities particularly important at this time. Maybe the coterie needs to verbally persuade some vampire-hunters to not destroy them, a situation where Charisma, Manipulation, Wits and even Appearance might spell victory or Final Death. What about Backgrounds? Does the character have many close allies who will stand by her side at this trying time, or is she

alone, without even a single retainer to help out? Again, having a disgustingly large bank account might be a tremendous asset now more than ever, while not having an easily accessible herd could prove to be a fatal mistake. Clan weaknesses are also very important and should be not be overlooked. Will the Ventrue neonate discover a sudden, perhaps fatal, lack of suitable vessels as a result of one or more catastrophes? Perhaps the Nosferatu is unable to mask his appearance well enough to fool the pitchfork-toting or gun-wielding mob that is hunting him and the rest of the monsters in its midst. Many Kindred also suffer from various derangements as a result of their long years of damnation, and these afflictions too should play a role in how such characters are dealt with in this last story. A paranoid vampire might perceive things to be far more out of hand than they actually are (at least for the coterie), but by doing so exacerbate the situation and fulfill his own worst fears. One who suffers from bulimia might be completely overwhelmed by the need to gorge herself and purge that vitae many times each night, a truly terrible problem come Gehenna. And it need not be impressed upon a Storyteller what kind of havoc a megalomaniac might create when the Ancients walk the Earth once more. Further, if the characters possess any Merits or Flaws, they can also be useful to work into the story — but, hey, if you're not taking advantage of those already...

Character Relationships

Very few characters exist who do not have meaningful relationships with other Kindred, and many also share close ties to mortals. Only the most ascetic loner could honestly claim otherwise. These relationships are the basis of almost everything a character does each night, whether that means gaining influence over a local business or socially flanking another Kindred. Coteries, covens, packs, gangs, *kamuts* — each is a group of Kindred bound together in some social manner for some important reason. And don't forget the primogen councils, war parties and numerous other institutions that create relationships among the Damned. Let's not forget Elysium and all its august courtiers, or the countless vampire cults and secret societies. The power of the Blood creates its own effective relationships, unequal though they might be. Sire and childe, regnant and thrall, Vinculi — each is a very difficult, if not impossible, bond to break. Although it would be a bit of a stretch to actually use the word friendship, Kindred do also forge close alliances with other Kindred, which are also important to consider. In regard to the kine, many Kindred feel at least paternal to their ghouls and other retainers. Some mortals are even viewed as siblings, or even companions (romantic or otherwise). It is sometimes the case that a Kindred's mortal family still lives and a relationship of some kind survives between the living and the undead, even if it is only one-way. It is almost certainly the case that the characters will each have one or more of these relationships, and they can all play a part in making the characters feel central to the unfolding events of Gehenna.

Storytellers should select what the players believe to be each character's most significant relationship and work it into the story. First, think hard about which relationship to incorporate, as it might not be the most obvious one. The secret feelings a typically monstrous Brujah *antitribu* might harbor for a humble waitress who reminds him of his mother is probably more important in the long run than his feelings for the pack priest with whom he shares a very strong Vinculum. These feelings have the capacity to pack a far more powerful punch if you approach them properly. Find a way to test the relationship, to expose it to the risk of destruction and to force the character to make some crucial decisions about what this and possibly other relationships really mean. Now that the end is near, does the relationship really matter anymore to the character, or does it suddenly matter more than it ever has? Does the character defy convention and confess his love for a mortal? Does he admit after decades of bald-faced deceit, that he has always hated a member of his coterie and will now abandon him when he might need him most? This shouldn't be about axing people the characters care about, though that certainly might happen. (It is the End of the World, after all.) Rather, it should be about making the characters remember that all those relationships they have with other Kindred and with mortals are not just mechanisms to be used to manipulate others. Or are they? How the characters deal with those with whom they have relationships is an essential part of not only this last story, but of **Vampire** overall. People matter, whatever the circumstances, and this point should be driven home now, even if you've never done so in the past.

The characters should be at the center of the story and the players should know this. Don't try to incorporate a character's every purpose, every strength and weakness, and every relationship into the plot in the hopes that this will make it a great drama, though. Not only is that just silly, but it

would be very difficult to do, and it would take away from everything else taking place on Judgment Day. Remember, Gehenna is about the end of every vampire, not just the characters. A great deal is bound to happen, and these things shouldn't fall through the cracks just so that the characters are made to feel important. The characters are not the story itself. They are the individuals who experience the story and make it more than a paint-by-the-numbers recitation. They are the Kindred through whose eyes the players will see their world end, and they must matter.

Focus First

No chronicle, no matter how well-planned or how dramatic its story line is, is worth anything without the characters. They are the stars of the show. It is *their* personal horror that infuses the chronicle with excitement, and it is their actions that bring the whole to unlife, as it were. A chronicle that fails to focus on its stars or that limits their ability to explore, grow and develop becomes stale quickly. Taking this idea one step further, there would not even be a Gehenna to speak of without these characters (odd as that might sound). All the plots hatched by the characters' enemies throughout the chronicle, all the doings of the ancient players in the Jyhad, even the microcosmic dramas of the kine in the characters' city, exist only to provide a setting for stories told about the characters. The characters themselves should not be cognizant of the fact that their world effectively revolves around them, of course. Even the players should not be able to trust this too much, or they will think that their characters are invulnerable. But the fact is that as much as Gehenna exists to serve the background metaplot — to bring the greater story of Vampire to a final conclusion — it exists even more as the means by which the characters are given the chance to fulfill their own destinies. Gehenna is intrinsically about them in the sense that they are important to how everything turns out, even if the characters only seem to be a small part of the whole. The characters must be significant and able to make a difference, even if in only a quiet way. If so, Gehenna can be a meaningful end to the chronicle and the characters it concerns.

The Meaning of Gehenna

Vampire is about many things, and Gehenna, the end of the grand tale, is no different. From violence, loneliness, desperation and evil to compassion, redemption, morality and faith, the game encompasses nearly every theme possible and explores nearly every facet of mortal existence. A Storyteller, however, must narrow down that limitless list of possibilities and highlight just a few if a story is to stay focused and convey a coherent and tangible message. Unless this happens, even an action-packed story that provides hours of entertainment will carry no real meaning. Of course, sometimes this is okay. Maybe the only things the troupe cares about is guzzling a few gallons of soda, putting aside their concerns for a number of hours and just pretending to be vampires. No problem there. Gehenna, however, is not just any other **Vampire** story. It is the last one, the very end. When it is over, barring something extraordinary, there will be no more **Vampire** stories, at least not for the current characters. This time, if never before, there should be some meaning to it all. And for that to happen, a central theme or two must be identified and faithfully used to shape everything that happens. The following are two themes that are not only part and parcel of many **Vampire** stories, but they make for an excellent focus for any Gehenna story. These themes can serve to bring real meaning to the end, not only for the characters, but for the players as well.

Remembering What Being Human Means

How many times do adults seem impatient and completely uncomprehending of youth? They were all young once, so how come they no longer seem to have any patience? Don't they remember what it was like when they were young? In short, the answer is no. Sure, the memories of what happened still exist, but their memories of what it felt like to be young and what their thoughts and views were at the time are much more difficult to summon. And even if they do recall such things, how likely is it that they are going to be empathetic enough to try to see things through the lens of youth? Probably not very. It is just too difficult to be an adult and truly remember what it means to be a kid, to have no familial or financial responsibilities, no boss aside from mom and dad, and what seems like an eternity of life ahead. Very rare is the adult who can still experience the wonder of a big ocean wave the way a child can, or know again the same fear that accompanied her very first big date.

All Kindred were once mortal, of course, but all that changed, and changed dramatically, upon joining the ranks of the undead. The characters seriously reconsider their former beliefs and assumptions, dis-



carding some as the products of mortal naiveté or because they are no longer practical ways to look at the world, now that they are undead. Similarly, every mortal experience that was once so familiar is now little more than a simply recollection of facts. The simple pleasure of a mustard-drenched hot dog chased with an icy beer on a hot, dusty afternoon at the ballpark. The sweaty warmth and comfort of a lover's skin in the wee hours of the morning while a crisp hint of autumn air whispers across the cool sheets. The terror of learning via an unexpected telephone call that one's child has been taken to the emergency room. The sadness of having to move away from the old neighborhood and saying goodbye to best friends, never knowing if new ones will be found. Very few vampires are able to remember these kind of experiences as anything more than a sequence of impersonal events. The rich emotional elements, the psychological impact and the intensely human quality of the experiences have been lost, drowned in a sea of blood and shadow. Storytellers can use this erosion to make Gehenna as much about the End of the World as it is about the characters trying to rediscover their "human within," as it were. Push the characters into situations where they are confronted with those things that should elicit in mortals a particularly emotional response, and watch to see how the characters react. Then hold up a mirror, in a sense, so the characters can recognize the shocking difference. Let them see the apathy, callousness, justified cruelty and general insensitivity that have become so much a part of them. Let it hurt, let it be ugly, and let it be inescapable.

Redemption and Damnation

Are vampires truly damned forever as a consequence of Caine's Curse, or does a chance for redemption exist? This is a fundamental question throughout **Vampire**, and it can be approached in many different ways and on many levels. Before this theme can be explored within the context of Gehenna, however, the Storyteller must first answer the question itself. If the answer is no, then there can be no redemption for the Damned and your Gehenna will be a cold one indeed... but that isn't necessarily a bad thing. In this kind of story, the fact that there really is no way the Kindred are going to survive — physically or spiritually — should be made clear to these "terminal characters" before things proceed too far. Don't lead them into thinking they've got a chance and then pull the rug out from under them at the last minute. That's just sadistic, and it serves no one at all, much less the story. Instead, let the

characters know that the fat lady is about to sing, but also instill in them a sense of hope. Show them how they can use the time they do have left to accomplish some good. Maybe they can finally get rid of that bastard landlord who's screwing over the financially fragile inner-city clinic, or perhaps one of the characters might just make that long-postponed trip to visit his now-elderly, mortal daughter and let her know that her father did not walk away from the family so many years ago because he no longer loved them. The idea is that even if the characters know that they have no way out, they don't have to fling themselves into oblivion, surrendering to hopelessness. Give them some suggestions of how they can accept their own demise and still leave behind at least one selfless act of goodness. Let them know that even if God will not save their souls, their small contrition is a measure of redemption.

On the other hand, if the characters do have a chance at redeeming themselves at this late hour, don't let it be as obvious, but also don't deceive them. Again, assuring them that they are doomed and then saying after the fact that they could have done something to redeem themselves is just plain mean. Let the whole thing be more ambiguous. Let the characters wonder and rack their minds and souls about this one. It's fine to give them some advice, but any help should be subtle. The Storyteller should try using symbolism and advanced storytelling techniques rather than blatant suggestions. It is of paramount importance that the characters not be spoon fed a list of what they need to do to be redeemed. To reduce nothing less than divine redemption to a straightforward to-do list is ridiculous, and it dilutes the themes of the entire story. Stay clear of this, and instead create opportunities for the characters to seize upon. If the characters' redemption means they must have a high Humanity score, then make sure they have plenty of chances to do so. Reread the section on Humanity in the **Vampire** core book and the **Vampire Storytellers Handbook**, and make sure you have a very solid grasp on what this all-important trait is about first, though.

Think about what will really make a difference to the characters as they reach one last time to become more human. Maybe the characters need to do one very important task, like slay their own sires, in order to be redeemed. If so, give them enough signs so that they know this, and be sure that they can find and destroy their creators, even if it will be difficult. It could be that redemption will come only for those vampires who sacrifice themselves for another in need, a fitting requirement given their supposedly Biblical origins. Go ahead and devise situations tailor-made for this, creating circumstances that will separate the proverbial men from the boys. Just be careful not to give away the secret, letting one character's sacrifice tip off the rest of the crew as to how they can be saved. If nothing else, redemption should be the most difficult thing they have ever achieved or tried to achieve. Whatever redemption requires, do the math and ensure that it is possible for the characters to accomplish in the first place. Otherwise valid accusations of unfairness will erupt and ruin all that has been planned and all that Gehenna can be.

The Truth Is Out There

A third theme is that of revelation and discovery. The world the Kindred prowl is filled with more mysteries, unanswered questions and enigmatic characters than you can shake a stick at, and for many players, this is the most enjoyable aspect of the game. With the arrival of Gehenna, there really won't be a second chance to expose any further hidden truths in a way in which the characters can satisfactorily participate, so why not give them what they've always wanted and let the cats out of the bag? Thematically, this can be approached two ways. The first is to make the revelations not only wow the characters with the enormity of the things they learn, but the former secrets should clarify some things about the existence of vampires that will, at this final moment, make the characters see everything in a new light. For example, the discovery that more than 13 Antediluvians might exist — but you already knew this, right? — should not only get the characters' minds whirring about what this means about all the legends and myths they have heard, but it should also get them thinking about how their own belief in the now-debunked stories shaped their unlives. Who knows, maybe a Caitiff in the group suddenly realizes that she is descended from one of the formerly unknown Antediluvians, and this gives her a new sense of purpose. Or it could be that the characters discover that the Camarilla's Inner Circle was really nothing more than the tool of an Ancient, or perhaps the Inconnu. This realization would not only shock them, but it would cause the characters to view the sect in a way that will change everything about how they see their place in Kindred society.

The second way to use this idea as a Gehenna theme is to let the characters answer for themselves this question: Is knowing everything always impor-

tant or necessary? Not to suggest that the "ignorance is bliss" aphorism may be correct, but perhaps some of the great outstanding questions about the Kindred are no longer really of any significance. Vampires have spent millennia chasing any clue whatsoever that might tell them more about Caine, their creator, if for no other purpose than to know whether he was still around. (And if so where is he, and what is he thinking?) But what if now, with Gehenna looming large, it really doesn't matter? Maybe it's ultimately irrelevant whether he even existed in the first place. The same goes for questions about Golconda or the intentions of Saulot. Sure, they are fun to discuss ad infinitum and to give unlife some intellectual stimulation, but is it really a necessity that the truth ever be actually known? What difference does it make? The answer to that belongs to the characters. How important are such answers? To what ends will the characters go, even now, to find the truth? Or can they finally let go? Can they finally stop expending all their energies on such things and instead put their last efforts into something more personal, more immediate and more fulfilling? It might have been invigorating to spend decades hunting down fragments of *The Book of Nod*, but on the eve of Gehenna, that might be a meaningless pursuit when compared to making amends with one's childe who is still bitter about his unwanted Embrace. How the characters answer such questions will say a lot about them and let them define for themselves where they stand in the grand scale of Gehenna.

Cinematography

Making Gehenna work for the characters and players will probably require reaching into your bag of storytelling tricks and pulling out a few things that you rarely use. Given the scope and ultimate meaning of Gehenna, it is not the kind of story that can be told in an ordinary, real-time, chronological fashion without sacrificing so much of what it can and should be. Think about your chronicle. Trying to really highlight certain themes or aspects of the various characters might require you to force the characters into situations that don't flow naturally, thus robbing the characters of the free will that is essential, especially now. For example, if you want to really explore the relationship one of the characters had with his mortal mother, it might be very awkward to try to bring mama into the action if the characters are in the middle of Cairo battling a horde of freakish Setites. If, however, you show the character flashbacks of his life with his mother at appropriate moments during the story — such as how she cared for him when he was sick, the way she talked him out of marrying his fiancé and what she said about his father's death — his relationship will be made important, and he will be forced to think about it.

Another example might be if you wish to explore the theme of the impossibility of love as one of the undead. This would be hard to inject into a Gehenna story, especially if the group is wrapped up with less emotional concerns as their world comes crashing down upon them. Nonetheless, you could use a mix of cut scenes and a memory sequences to make it work very well. While the characters are about to enter the crypt of the Gangrel Methuselah in the hopes of destroying her before she fully wakes, the scene could suddenly cut to the bedchamber of a sleeping woman, a woman whom one of the characters has loved from afar, causing him years of heartache. A figure enters her bedchamber, but remains in shadow. Now the action switches back to the characters as they enter the inner sanctum of the Antediluvian and spy the inhuman monstrosity curled like some great beast upon the bone-strewn floor. They move closer with extreme caution, and then freeze when the creature stirs. At this point, the scene shifts back to the bedchamber again. Now, the shadowy figure looms near the edge of the bed, gazing down upon the woman's languid body. She is warm, perfumed, and the feeling of love for her suddenly flares in the character. Then she moves, the silken sheets rustling, and her lips part as she slowly awakens. Back in the crypt, the characters prepare to deal with the Methuselah, readying whatever weapons and powers they possess as the monster shifts and stretches. The characters are just about to rush her, when the scene returns one last time to the woman. She opens her eyes, a warm smile on her face that fills the lovelorn character with rapture. But then she sees the shadowy figure watching her, its blood-drenched mouth, its corpse-like flesh, its ravenous eyes, and she screams in utter terror, her fear like a knife in the heart of the character imagining or remembering this scene. His love sees him only as a monster, not a man. She will never be able to love him, so he will never know love again. At that moment the Storyteller jerks the action back to the crypt and the Methuselah awakens, screaming in a deafening roar that somehow retains some tiny essence of the woman she once was so many millennia ago, and the character knows horror again. When the character launches himself at the ancient vampire, he seeks to destroy the woman in his mind and

the painful feelings he recalls or imagines as much as he is out to destroy the Methuselah. When he sinks his fangs into the creature, he is doing the same to the dream-like woman, and the pain he feels in his soul is as great as any the monster feels, perhaps even greater.

Memory sequences are particularly effective in a Gehenna story. They allow the characters to experience again something that focuses their attention on a person, place, emotion or anything else to which the Storyteller wishes to give impact. They can also be used very neatly to fill in gaps in a character's life and unlife that have never before been fully detailed. For example, maybe a certain Toreador *antitribu* has never seemed to care about his mortal family, especially his sister. Ever since his Embrace into the Sabbat he's pushed his mortal life and relationships into the trash bin of his mind, convincing himself that they are meaningless now. As a consequence, the player never really put much thought into his character's past, perhaps only jotting down a few quick notes — where his character grew up, his father's occupation, when he was Embraced, et cetera. Now might be the perfect time for the Storyteller to force that character to recall his mortal past, to remember that he has a sister who always looked up to him as her protector from an abusive father and an uncaring mother. The character is no longer given the luxury of ignoring this, because the Storyteller now shows him some scenes from his difficult life as a mortal. The night he hid his sister in his tree fort so that their father could not abuse her. The time he actually stood up to his father and spent five days in the hospital as a result. The morning he found his mother dead, hanging from a rope in the bathroom. And then the night he was taken away by the vampires, leaving his sister all alone with their father, with no one to protect her anymore. This kind of technique can bring strong emotional resonance to a Gehenna story and, even as the characters are about to meet their end, help complete them, in a sense. It can be used to answer questions that have never been answered but should have been. It can really add depth to characters, so that when they are gone, they were not just vampires, but real people, with lives and unlives that are much more complex, evocative and meaningful than they might have ever seemed.

Aside from advanced editing techniques, another very critical aspect of telling a Gehenna story is the timing. Exactly what kind of pacing and chronology works will depend heavily on just what kind of Gehenna will take place, but in every case, it's important. You must be careful not to rush things, if for no other reason than the fact that this is the last chance characters have to do their stuff, as it were. There's no need to hustle them out the door and not let them have a little fun before they leave. Let Gehenna unfold at a pace that allows for reasonable pauses, giving everyone a chance to catch their breath now and then. Even if Gehenna is going to be a single crack of thunder and wham, all the Kindred are gone, let the pace increase slowly at first, picking up as things get closer and closer to the end. Just as important is making sure that things don't move at the same pace throughout. Vary the timing of scenes, using a speed-up to build suspense and get the adrenaline pumping, but then slowing things down a bit afterward. Lull the characters into a false sense of calm now and then, too. Let them think that the serious action is still a ways up ahead, and then hit them with a scene in which things start moving ridiculously fast, catching them unaware and forcing them to react on the spur of the moment. You shouldn't do so just for the sake of tormenting them, making them dance as you unload your six-shooter at their boots. Instead, it should be done so that tension is allowed to build but never become unbearable. Any time the players sense that things are just moving too fast, a tendency arises to have their character step back out of the action. This is not the time to have any characters withdraw from the story, so adjust the timing so that they are all involved.

Just as importantly, keep an eye on the story's level of drama. It is all too easy to go to extremes and either have things get really dull — even when the pace is quick — or have them become purple and melodramatic. Yes, this is Gehenna — *the* Gehenna — and some seriously high drama is to be expected, but don't let it drown the more introspective, emotional and personal moments that can bring a wealth of meaning to the story. Sometimes things must calm down so that characters can deal with personal issues that matter, even if they are not exciting. Make sure you create opportunity for this, even if things are generally more pumped up. Like pacing, let the level of drama change quickly sometimes, and far more slowly other times. Let the characters anticipate some high drama, but be blindsided at other times. Yeah, they'll see the action coming when the Antediluvian appears on the horizon with an army of rabid vampire soldiers, but what about when they are sitting in the quiet lighthouse in the company of one old Nosferatu? How much of a surprise will it be when the hideous Kindred suddenly pulls out a book



with a heretical fragment of the *Book of Nod* that paints a very different picture of Gehenna, and one that seems to reflect exactly what is going on outside? Maybe the characters finally get the drop on their old archenemy, a very devious elder, only to discover that she has really been on their side all along, her opposition merely a deception to protect them from another, more dangerous enemy? The fight they were expecting, the drama they were expecting, suddenly dissipates. Manipulating a story's pacing and drama thus can go a long way toward making Gehenna the kind of story it should be.

Another related and important consideration for you is quite simply how to introduce Gehenna into an ongoing chronicle. Gehenna can certainly be run as a one-shot story, or even stretched out as an entire chronicle, but most Storytellers will probably use it as the ending for their own long-running chronicles. It should not just be slapped onto the end of a chronicle without first taking care to think about a few important things, however.

The first of these concerns is simple fit. Make sure that whatever Gehenna scenario you use — whether it's one of the ones included in this book, or your own original version of Gehenna — is appropriate for your chronicle. It should have the same general feel, atmosphere and thematic focus as the overall chronicle. That is, despite invoking the End of the World, it should not be a jarring ending that is out of sync with all the stories that have come before it. If your chronicle has been about the mysterious Jyhad between two or more Methuselahs that the characters increasingly become aware of, then Gehenna should not suddenly drop that underlying story line and focus exclusively on deeply personal matters. Make sure that your Jyhad theme is included in the Gehenna story, even if it is shown to ultimately have been a moot battle between Ancients who suddenly find that all their schemes are for naught. If the chronicle is about lost love and the pangs of sorrow experienced by Kindred as they watch themselves grow further removed from humanity, then the final tale should use that, not just become a big war between the Sabbat and Camarilla and the Antediluvians smashing them all afterward. The different Gehenna stories provided in previous chapters each have a different feel and scope, so if you are going to use one of them, choose the one that best completes your chronicle, one with the same

general scale of drama. You don't want the end to feel flimsy or overpowering.

Also, look at how all the plot threads of your chronicle might be resolved. Don't go trying to tie up all of them — that's not only impossible to do well, but it's unnecessary — just select enough to provide some closure for the characters. Let them feel that at least some of their age-old problems have been finally put to rest. Also think about how to use symbolism, themes and plot elements from previous stories in the Gehenna scenario. Did money crop up again and again as a way to illustrate its double-sided power in your stories? Then use it again here. Perhaps the vast fortunes of the elders are now revealed to mean nothing in the face of Gehenna. Or maybe the money has become such an addiction that one of the Kindred falls because he cannot tear himself away from his greed. Do you play a certain piece of music just prior to an important loss for the characters? Use it now, and make sure it is played at the very end. This kind of attention to central subjects and props will allow Gehenna to feel like the real, intentional end to the chronicle, instead of just a convenient (if dramatic) way to bring about a finale.

Finally, use foreshadowing. If possible, before running Gehenna, take certain elements from its plot and introduce them into a few stories ahead of time, giving characters a small chance to sense something approaching. What's more, the characters will really enjoy it when they finally do experience the events foreshadowed, and it will go that much further in making Gehenna feel like it was the way the chronicle was always supposed to end. If the characters will be present at the destruction of the Assamite Antediluvian come Gehenna, then go ahead and let them catch a few glimpses of Middle Eastern art, language and atmosphere well in advance. Maybe they happen to witness a hit-and-run accident, and learn that the man killed was named Haqim. Maybe they are the ones driving the car, a great way to foreshadow their own possible role in destroying the Antediluvian.

Music can also be very effective for this purpose. What if, beginning a few stories before Gehenna, the characters hear an eerie, melancholy Arabic song — on a cabbie's radio, in an ethnic restaurant, from the window of an immigrant's apartment? The song keeps cropping up, even though no Middle Eastern character figures into the story so far. By the time they are face-to-face with Gehenna, the song will crop up again, this time a much longer piece, essentially an introduction as Haqim steps onto the stage. Now it all makes sense and the events of Gehenna feel that much more strongly a part of the overall chronicle. Foreshadowing can be used for many things, but it should be reserved for those things that will be most dramatic. Overusing this crucial storytelling technique, however, will only blur the focus and detract from the few things that are trying to be highlighted. Use it sparingly and it will help, not hinder, the story you plan to tell.

The Supporting Cast

Gehenna is not a small thing, and even the most personal of endings will have a potentially large cast of characters playing every conceivable supporting role. Although this tale focuses on the players' characters, the rest of the vampire and mortal characters cannot be seen only as window dressing and spear-carriers. How they react to Gehenna and the characters at this time is very important, and you should give serious thought as to what these characters will be doing come Judgment Day. For most vampires, Gehenna is the end of something, but of exactly what, almost none can agree. It is a time that many see as allegorical only; they don't really think it will happen. They see so-called signs of its coming as little more than events that were most likely to occur anyway, given the less-than-perfect nature of the Caine's children. When it does come, if they recognize it, most of these Kindred will likely be more than a little disturbed — many completely stunned. Others are more prepared for the eventuality, however, even if only on a superstitious level. Some, like the Black Hand and certain Gehenna cults, actually look forward to it and have made very serious plans for exactly what they will do when the night finally arrives. But how do you handle all this? Don't worry about the stars of the drama, the characters. They will pretty much do what they want. But how do you figure out what each of the other Kindred in the chronicle will do when Gehenna begins? The following are just a few ideas that might help you figure this out.

Let's take a look at the city's other Kindred, first. Unless the entire local Kindred population consists solely of the characters, others in town will have their parts to play. Depending on how Gehenna happens, they could be doing anything from sitting on the rooftop waiting for Caine to come and drink their soul to trying their damnedest to seize total control of the city and shatter the Masquerade by demonstrating their Disciplines on the nightly news. All this is well and good, but it's how their action or

inaction affects the characters that is most important. The audience doesn't care about what happens to the people in the background, no matter what they are doing, they only want to know what is happening at center stage and how it concerns the stars. Remember this. As a Storyteller, you might have all sorts of great motivation for these supporting characters worked out, all manner of secret agendas and plans. These plans matter, but if they won't make any real difference to the characters now, they are just not worth spending too much time on. Instead, think about the relationships these Kindred have to the characters and how they will be used. Will the prince finally decide to quash the anarch gang that the characters are on amicable terms with? Will the anarchs ask for help? Will the characters respond? How? What about the Toreador who owes them a major boon? Will he come to their aid now, given the circumstances, or will he shaft them and flee, covering his own ass instead of honoring his debt?

Naturally, even Kindred without close relationships to the characters will be doing something that might affect them. Again, depending on the way things play out, the Kindred might seek to fight whatever horrors Gehenna brings, pulling together as a community in the hopes that their combined talents and resources will do some good. Centuries-old rivalries might dissipate as erstwhile enemies forge a solid front against whatever comes their way. Or, they might all do the opposite, seeking their own means of survival, every Kindred for himself. Of course, it could be a mixture of both, with some banding together for defense while the rest crumble. If Gehenna is not so apocalyptic, many Kindred might be so obtuse and self-absorbed as to not even notice it until it's far too late. They might continue ignoring the deluded doomsayers and their silly myths right up until their own terrifying Final Death greets them. Some, however, might be especially perceptive and have prepared ahead of time, amassing information and plans that prove helpful to the characters.

Look at each Kindred's Nature. This is a great way to determine how such characters handle the end. A Martyr might throw herself into the fray, ready to meet her maker, while a Loner will probably remove himself from the company of others, seeking to face his fate alone and on his own terms, regardless of the consequences. A Curmudgeon is likely to do the bare minimum to help out others, whining about the futility of it all and reminding others that he knew it was gonna be this bad. A Caregiver might spend her last nights tending to her coterie and doing what she can to help as many as possible, Kindred and mortal alike.

Beyond the local environment, the sects and the various splinter groups in which most Kindred claim membership might also play a role in your Gehenna. If the characters in your game are Sabbat, then it will be vastly more important to look at how that sect deals with the end, but at least some attention should be spent on the Camarilla, the anarchs and perhaps other groups, too. If nothing else, at least the players will want the satisfaction of hearing something about what happened to them. Despite the many ways Gehenna could happen and the even more numerous ways that the sects might respond to Gehenna, some things need to be considered no matter what. First, decide what the overall reaction of the sect is to the end. Similar to how the local Kindred react but on a global scale, will the sect pull together, more united now than ever before? Will the sect tear apart at the seams? Will its reaction be a mix of both?

Regardless of which it is, how will it happen? If they come together at this hour of need, is it because sect leaders use every draconian method available to enforce this, or is it a grass-roots reaction borne of newfound courage and morale in the face of Gehenna? This will make a very big difference, not only to the way it all ends, but to the characters themselves. For example, if the sect disintegrates quietly, with its members preferring to face the end as individuals, then the characters should see this reflected in the way their former allies abandon them, the way their leaders vanish or simply fumble helplessly trying to muster the troops. On the other hand, if the sect's fall comes as a result of internal fighting, then show that. Have the characters' former allies turn on them, their leaders turn traitor and blood run in the streets. In other words, don't just tell the players what's happening, show it to them by way of their characters. This is a far more effective way to drive home the impact of whatever is going on with their sect, whether it collapses in fear or becomes a beacon of hope as a result of heroic valor. This is the time to make sure that the characters are not left standing in the bleachers just watching the action. They might not be the most powerful individuals on Gehenna's stage, but they should still have an important role to play.

Beyond the sects are the clans themselves, along with the various bloodlines. First, let's get one thing clear: No matter how close a clan appears, no matter

how loyal its members claim to be, a clan is nothing more than an extended family. Although the family can lay claim to its share of geniuses, artists, leaders, visionaries, diplomats, wits and otherwise estimable individuals, these are the minority when compared to the murderers, thieves, sadists, deviants, traitors, brutes, idiots, psychotics and straight-out losers who share the same blood, at least if viewed from a mortal's perspective. The characters will probably fall into the former group, but they are the exception. As such, when the going gets tough, any meaningful semblance of loyalty, devotion, support, protection and even care that might once have existed could disappear overnight. This doesn't mean that some members of the clan might not pretend that such is not the case, especially those who wish to demand assistance and service from their weaker blood-siblings, but in reality, it really won't mean anything anymore. Only those clans or bloodlines that have some powerful, mystical or philosophical bond with one another can be safely assumed to remain relatively united during Gehenna. The Malkavians might hear the words of Malkav himself, an event that could possibly cause them to act together toward some goal, or the Setites might believe that Set has returned and called them to arms. Without this kind of motivation, or without real compassion on the part of a vampire for others of her kind, Kindred might ignore such distinctions and look more toward their sect and coterie for their needs than to their extended consanguineous family.

Then there are the ancient vampires, the really old elders, Methuselahs and yes, the Antediluvians. Sects are meaningless to creatures whose sole concern is likely to be their own personal fate, other vampires be damned. How much does Absimiliard really care about the Camarilla? Even the concept of clan has importance only if the Ancient has a unique way to take advantage of its descendants or has good reason to fear them more than other Kindred. The truth is that no Ancient has absolute control over its progeny, so this too becomes relatively moot. What is important to these blood-gods is simple self-preservation — assuming they care about taking any action come the end of the road, since many are so steeped in ennui they might welcome final judgment. Certainly, some of these vampires possess Disciplines and resources that can trump just about any other Kindred on a normal playing field, but let's not forget that Gehenna is not a normal playing field. It is the ultimate one. It is where the last battles are fought and the vaunted Ancients, along with most, if not all other Kindred, finally fall. Because of this, the eldest Children of Caine are not about to pull any punches. Now is the time when they pull out all stops and unleash their most awesome and destructive powers on the world.

Because of who these Ancients are, you might not have a list of traits for all of these guys. So how do you determine how each will react and what each will aim to do? Ultimately, this is going to have to be a judgment call, one made by considering what each of these Ancients represents in both a literary and dramatic sense. Take Augustus Giovanni, for instance. Assuming you intend to use him in your version of Gehenna, what will he do? Well, given his own rise to power, it is pretty clear he's a power-hungry bastard who will pretty much do anything to get what he wants. He's also the nearly undisputed master of necromantic arts, probably as comfortable as any vampire in the world of the dead as he is in the world of the living. And he's essentially independent. He doesn't like to work with others, unless it's by strangling them. Therefore, when Gehenna comes rolling along, Augustus is likely going to look for any possible way he can use it to gain even more power, or all of it. (This is probably going to be how many of the truly ancient vampires react at first, by the way.) He'll probably look for a way to use the absolutely most powerful aspect of his necromantic arts to give him the edge too, betting that there's not another vampire in existence who can beat him in that arena. And finally, he'll do it his way and without help.

Exactly what this means can vary greatly, but it's his modus operandi, so he'll stick with it. Of course, he's almost certainly doomed, but he doesn't know that, and even if he does, he's not going to let himself believe it. Methuselahs will probably watch their backs while taking the field, fearful of their sires' hungry returns, and will be more likely to seek allies of convenience until it becomes, well, no longer convenient. It should never be forgotten that such monsters have been around for so long that few to none even think the same as younger Kindred. These eldritch predators have stalked the world's shadows since time immemorial, and they are not going to be looking at Gehenna in shades of gray. For them, it's all about winning or losing the final move in the Jyhad. The really see no in-between.

The role of the kine should not be overlooked, either. In fact, it's imperative that they be taken into consideration. If Gehenna is something obvious, or if it results in violent upheaval among the Kindred, then mortals are going to realize that vampires are in

their midst and act accordingly. Naturally, this is going to mean that the world will no longer be the place it was, for mortals or vampires alike. Think about the Inquisition for suggestions as to how mortals react to the fact that a host of bestial predators have been feeding off them like parasites for ages. Now think about all the technological advances that have come along since the Middle Ages and how they might make a mortal war against vampires a much deadlier conflict than the last such conflict. Advances in intelligence gathering and analysis, forensic science, military strategy and weaponry, information sharing and statistical and behavioral analysis will give the kine advantages they did not have during the Inquisition. Only those Kindred knowledgeable about such things or fortunate enough to have influence with kine who are, will be able to escape the hunters for long. If the news of vampires goes public, hysteria and chaos might ensue, with the modern equivalent of pitchfork-wielding mobs becoming a nightly mainstay. If, on the other hand, the news remains restricted to covert intelligence and military organizations, then the war will be fought more carefully and quietly, but no less dramatically. Should Gehenna mean the literal End of the World and this is known, mortals will be driven to even greater extremes. Unprecedented rioting, crime waves, suicides, religious hysteria, military action and anything else conceivable might be going on in addition to events caused by or directed at the Kindred. Spontaneous acts of selflessness and heroism should also occur in the midst of the darkness, however. Despite all our sins and despicable tendencies, people are startlingly capable of astonishing acts of mercy, kindness and sacrifice. Don't leave this out, or it will skew things too much. Even if the world does end because of the rampant sins of vampires and mankind, remind players at least that there was some virtue. And if redemption is possible, if the End of the World can actually be averted in your Gehenna story, then focus on this point and let that virtue have a chance to change the fate of the world.

Post-Gehenna Chronicles

Gehenna does not have to mean the absolute end for every chronicle or for every character. While it can be argued that having even one vampire survive the onslaught to continue its predatory existence defeats the purpose and poetic justice of Gehenna, many troupes will want to explore what



might happen afterward, assuming a habitable Earth remains when everything is over, of course. No matter what kind of aftermath you choose, things are going to be very different from anything that came before. If vampires do survive — whether only a couple or an entire society of the undead — it's still going to be a dramatic change from unlife before Gehenna. For one thing, there will be very few vampires, no matter how you slice it. As long as the mortal population wasn't reduced to a similar degree, this will mean that each Kindred (or whatever they want to call themselves now) will potentially have a massive herd to feed from. That alone is a tremendous advantage. It also means that each can potentially carve out a very large domain of his own without having to feud with other vampires. This also means that vampire society, as it once existed, is gone. What rules of social conduct, political association and exposure to humanity will the survivors now create? Really, anything is plausible. It's highly unlikely any surviving vampires will be so foolish as to try to rule openly over the mortals, as they are probably way too outnumbered now and don't have the kind of influence they once had as a member of a coterie, a domain and a sect. If the survivors are familiar with one another, in all likelihood they will immediately assess the relative power of the others, thinking typical vampire thoughts such as, "What generation is the Lick in the next city? Will he try to diablerize me, or can I get him first?" and "How can I blood bond him?" Given enough time and the likely lack of lessons learned, things will eventually repeat themselves. Although outwardly everything might appear different, vampires are vampires, and unless they have changed significantly after Gehenna, vampires will remain true to their nature on account of their needs, urges and the knowledge they possess.

Another possible future is that the surviving Kindred all congregate in one place, maybe a city they dub New Enoch or the Third City. It might be that mortals know who and what they are and have driven them into this place in an effort to at least contain them, if not actually exterminate them all. Maybe a tense peace arises, one that lets the vampires have their city as long as they stay put. This could be a great place to start a whole new kind of chronicle. The vampires probably create rules against new progeny at first, just like Caine did, in order to not create too much competition. But in time, some cheat, and before long, childer are champing at the bit and ignoring their elders. Then someone gets out, a vampire escapes the city and real trouble ensues. She sneaks into another city, and maybe no one knows she has done so. Then, in classic vampire style, she extends her tentacles into every part of the city to gain influence and use that to her advantage. Maybe she is actually told to do this in order to ultimately compromise the security that keeps the vampires trapped in the other city, one fateful night succeeding in tearing down the walls and once more releasing vampires into the world at large.

It might also be fun to have the vampires stay together (at least at first) just for safety in numbers, but the mortals aren't aware of their existence. They work more quietly behind the scenes, and they slowly gain more and more power in a large city of growing importance. The characters would get a chance to become deeply involved in politics and intrigue, always wary of the technology that could be used to detect and destroy all their plans. Eventually, childer would come into being and likely spread outward, establishing other domains, but the Third City would be the seat of power, at least for a while. The vampires there, the characters included, of course, would have to form a new society, taking into consideration generation and other serious issues. This would provide a great deal of challenge, and maybe somewhere along the way, a new mythos for the vampires would arise — one that told the tale of the beginning of vampires in the Third City.

Not every future chronicle needs to resurrect the old world of the vampires like some horrid phoenix, however. It might be the case that few vampires survived, or that they are not quite the same anymore, and the old cycle truly is broken. The new chronicle can take off in a very different direction, perhaps one in which the tables are turned. For example, maybe the characters decide that they will commit themselves to hunting down any remaining vampires, either because they feel remorse and wish to redeem themselves in God's eyes, or just because they can and they see it as the right thing to do. They could become a team of very special hunters, and the chronicle could become a series of encounters where they track down and destroy the world's other surviving vampires. This doesn't have to be so video-game-esque, either. Maybe the characters discover that some of the other survivors also feel terrible and wish they were no longer vampires, a way to introduce pathos and a deeper meaning into the stories. Or maybe they find out to their shock and horror that two of the Antediluvians survived Gehenna and they are still carrying on their personal Jyhads to the very end. The characters might even

discover that they have so far been unwitting pawns of one of these Ancients, sent to ruin the schemes of its rival. Done right, this type of situation can reintroduce the sense of horror that the characters thought had ended with Gehenna.

A third possibility for following up Gehenna's holocaust is for the characters to have become mortals as a result of the events of Gehenna. For such a chronicle to have any dramatic appeal, the characters need to be just as important and face enemies and other challenges just as exciting as they did as vampires. Maybe the characters retain one of their Disciplines, but instead of being fueled by vitae it is now simply powered by their own mortal blood, something they can no longer replenish so easily. Or maybe they are simply able to use the extraordinary knowledge they already possess to seek out and destroy other monsters that might remain on Earth, such as werewolves or demons. Various Storyteller games provide an endless list of possible antagonists for these characters. The key, again, is just making sure that the drama is commensurate with the kind of drama the players became accustomed to when playing the old chronicle. Perhaps the characters decide to right the wrongs of their own pasts, helping those they harmed when they were vampires and putting an end to the most morally bankrupt of their former mortal allies, retainers and contacts. For example, if the characters' actions as Kindred had resulted in the closure of a factory that once employed nearly 10 percent of the city's residents, they might now try to help reopen the factory or otherwise help the city's unemployed. If the characters had done things that benefited the criminal underworld — maybe they had made a Mafia *capo* into a ghoul in order to gain influence over that organization — they might dedicate themselves to now taking down the local Mafia as a kind of penance for their many past crimes. **World of Darkness: Mafia** provides a wealth of ideas of how to run this kind of chronicle.

It might actually be more appropriate not to try to create a whole new chronicle, but to simply run a story or two as more of an epilogue to Gehenna. Doing so has the advantage of avoiding the risk of diminishing the old chronicle and the characters, while still offering the players some kind of coda to the drama of Gehenna. Any new chronicle will have so many expectations to live up to that it might be best to avoid the risk. What if the characters don't find the same kind of challenges anymore? What if the premise is silly? What if the plot just meanders and has no real meaning?

An epilogue has the benefit of being able to maintain the same general sense of drama and importance, carrying the themes of the chronicle to a final, post-climactic conclusion. It can let the players see what happens to the world and their characters when all is said and done, without forcing them to try to reinvent themselves, something that usually fails. How many Hollywood sequels are really good? How many movies still rock when turned into television series? Not many. The same goes for a chronicle. If it really was everything you wanted it to be, if it really wowed the players and kept them coming back for more, and if your Gehenna really hit the nail on the head and brought the whole shebang to a cataclysmic and extremely satisfying conclusion, then it's probably best to stop there, sit back and relish the afterglow. An epilogue can be very short or it might actually stretch out a few sessions, whatever it takes to wrap things up nicely so that the players feel that what just ended was the best ending possible. It's possible that an epilogue might go on longer than expected, even turn into a new chronicle unintentionally. This kind of natural continuation is most likely going to be far better than anything purposefully planned ahead of time, if it occurs.

Another style that troupes might want to try after Gehenna is that of the rerun. Run the Gehenna story again, but this time give the players entirely new characters, maybe Kindred from another sect, or maybe elders, or something like that. The idea is to allow them to experience Gehenna from a new point of view, one from which the whole thing might appear quite different on many levels. Maybe their old characters were Camarilla ancillae who were terrified and prayed to God at the very end for forgiveness for all their sins. Now give them Black Hand characters and let them face and even exult in Gehenna, fighting to the very last as holy warriors of Caine, ready to meet Final Death and be granted the promise of their progenitor. Not only can the players actually do something different in terms of action, but they will discover that Gehenna brings out very different things in different Kindred. This kind of alternative view need not be saved for after the whole thing is over, either. You could use it during your first Gehenna chronicle, cutting back and forth between one set of characters and another. Instead of the characters being different Kindred, it might be even more fun to have them be entirely different types of monsters, but using that same cut-scene method. Each of the other World of Darkness game lines also has its own version of the end, so the

players might get to see it unfold as Lupines at the same time they experience it as Kindred. The different perspectives they would have would be radical, giving them an entirely new appreciation of some of the other creatures that haunt their world. The only word of caution here is to be very careful in figuring out just what the End of the World means. The Gehenna of the vampires is a very different animal from the Apocalypse of the werewolves and the Ascension of the mages. Too much forced crossover might actually end up watering down one version of the end so much that it is no longer even worth the trouble of running it.

In the very end, you just might want to run a whole new **Vampire** chronicle, one with all new characters that takes place well before Gehenna or simply picks up as if the last one never happened and maybe never will. There's certainly nothing wrong with that. Many more stories wait to be told, many more themes are left to explore, and many more characters can be conjured up. Gehenna is the end of something, there's no doubt about that, but it doesn't have to be the end of your game, and it certainly shouldn't spell the end of your storytelling. Just make it mean something, so that even if you start a whole new chronicle and act as if the last one never existed, the echo of Gehenna and what the characters and players experienced and learned while playing it should still carry on, however faintly. Don't let all that Gehenna has meant fall by the wayside as your troupe moves on. Even if everything is completely different in the next chronicle, even if it is an entirely new game and genre, take with you something from Gehenna. Make Gehenna something worth remembering.



Appendix: Characters

Ferox, Servant of God

Background: Ferox was born the son of Boudicca, queen of the Iceni Celts, and he spent most of his young life witnessing the cruelty of the Romans and defending his own people. He was eventually captured with his mother and slated for death, but some Brujah behind the scenes admired the boy's pluck and decided to keep him for themselves. He became a ghoul for the Brujah for a time, but he was captured by the Ventrue during a later battle and came to serve that clan instead, his steadfast loyalty earning him high regard from his new masters. He served primarily as one of their agents in the early Church, where his personal faith began to grow as he studied all the religious texts that he could get his hands on. In time, he began to question the way the Ventrue lorded over mankind, worrying aloud about the possibility of the Church retaliating — a line of thought that annoyed his masters. As a result, he was traded to Clan Tremere in exchange for a boon, and he found himself serving an entirely different stripe of undead master.

His time with the Tremere increasingly horrified him. He watched as they experimented upon other Kindred, creating the slave-race of Gargoyles, which he pitied. Before long, his faith having grown quite powerful, he could take it no more, so helped organize the infamous Gargoyle Revolt. As a consequence of that fateful event, he was Embraced by those he saved in order to thank him and save him from dying — for he no longer had Tremere vitae to sustain him. The Em-



brace not only caused most of his past memories to fade, but also caused his faith to increase even more. He soon came to believe that he and his kind were the biblical fallen angels, damned for past defiance of God and now set upon earth to seek redemption. He saw that part of his task was also to be God's warrior and evangelist, so he spent most of his unlife seeking to unite those Gargoyles with suitable free will under his banner. He hates the Tremere for their enslavement of the Gargoyles, and he believes that the Nosferatu are actually the spawn of demons who must be destroyed whenever possible.

Image: Ferox is a white Gargoyle with large wings and pink, albino eyes that glow with the light of his faith. He keeps his eyes hidden behind sunglasses. He has spiraling horns on top of his head, a small mouth and a heavy chin. He usually wears a choir robe trimmed in purple, a crucifix necklace and/or a cross earring.

Roleplaying Hints: You are God's chosen servant and are constantly saddened by the corruption of the world. You are patient, and you won't hurt neonates too much unless they seem bent on destroying you. Keep adjusting your sunglasses.

For more detailed information about Ferox, see **Kindred Most Wanted**.

Clan: Gargoyle
Sire: Rocia
Nature: Judge
Demeanor: Caregiver
Generation: 8th
Apparent Age: Indeterminate
Physical: Strength 5, Dexterity 5, Stamina 5
Social: Charisma 5, Manipulation 1, Appearance 0
Mental: Perception 5, Intelligence 4, Wits 5
Virtues: Conscience 5, Self-Control 5, Courage 5
Talents: Alertness 3, Brawl 5, Diplomacy 4, Dodge 4, Empathy 3, Instruction 3, Intimidation 4, Leadership 5, Streetwise 2
Skills: Animal Ken 3, Climbing 2, Interrogation 3, Meditation 3, Melee 5, Research 3, Stealth 5
Knowledges: Architecture 5, Art History 2, Bureaucracy 5, History 3, Law 2, Linguistics 5, Literature 5, Occult 1, Philosophy 2, Theology 5
Disciplines: Animalism 4, Auspex 2, Celerity 4, Dominate 3, Flight 5, Fortitude 5, Obeah 4, Obfuscate 2, Potence 5, Protean 2, Visceratika 5
Backgrounds: Allies 5, Contacts 3, Herd 2
Humanity: 9
True Faith: 9
Willpower: 10

Alia, God's Messenger

Background: Born to a Kindred father and a mortal mother, Alia's life has never been normal. From the moment she reached womanhood, she realized she had been chosen for something special, for that is when she first heard God's voice and learned of her divine mission. She traveled with three Caitiff who served as her protectors and sycophants until she found Ferox and delivered God's Word. Since then, she has traveled with the Gargoyle wherever he goes, for God told her to do so. She has never been sure of where this would all lead, and she has always worried what her fate would be, but she has never deviated from her mission and has no intention from doing so. To be honest, if she were not a messenger for God, she has no clue what she would do with herself.

Image: Alia is a fairly pale, slender girl who appears slightly younger than her age on account of her waif-like features. Her blond hair falls straight to the middle of her back and her light brown eyes seem almost golden when the light hits them just right. She has a warm smile, but most of the time her features are set in a more serious and determined expression, for she has much to think about and do. She has no tattoos or piercings, and she dresses in jeans and a simple top, along with whatever the weather dictates.



Despite her slight appearance, something about her commands attention and is a little intimidating to some who meet her.

Roleplaying Hints: You don't know why God chose you to be His messenger, but He did and that's the way it is, like it or not. You are not perfect, and you know it, but you will do your best to serve God and convey His Word whenever He speaks. You never give much thought to right and wrong, but neither are you sure that your decisions are always correct. All you do know is that you consider yourself to be a good person, despite the circumstances of your birth. You try to help others but are sometimes scared of what that entails. You stay with Ferox because you know you must, but you are sometimes uncomfortable around him — not because of his strange appearance, but because you believe that sometimes he seems too self-righteous. Is that the kind of servant God really wants?

For complete rules on dhampirs see **Time of Thin Blood**.

Clan: Dhampir
Sire: None
Nature: Conformist
Demeanor: Martyr
Generation: None
Apparent Age: 18
Physical: Strength 1, Dexterity 3, Stamina 2
Social: Charisma 4, Manipulation 1, Appearance 3
Mental: Perception 4, Intelligence 3, Wits 4
Virtues: Conscience 5, Self-Control 4, Courage 3
Talents: Alertness 3, Empathy 3, Intimidation 1, Intuition 4
Skills: Meditation 2, Stealth 2
Knowledges: Enigmas 3, Theology 2
Disciplines: Auspex 1, Celerity 1, Obeah 1
Backgrounds: Allies 1
Humanity: 9
True Faith: 10
Willpower: 6

John Trent, Tremere Doomsayer

Background: Also known as Hector Trelane and Le Physicker, John is the spawn of a sire who defied his superiors by Embracing a childe, for which his sire was summarily destroyed in Vienna. The sins of the father fell upon the son, resulting in the Tremere sending John to a French chantry where he spent most of the next two centuries. His scientific mind was applied to every field of study during this time, though alchemy and the newly conceived evolutionary theory came to dominate his attentions. He believed that vampires were merely a fumbling step along the evolutionary ladder of humanity, and he dedicated himself to seeking the means to move on to the next or final step. As such, he saw the traditional magical practices of other Tremere as misplaced and made public his views on the absurdity of Kindred mythology and the story of Caine. This attitude served only to further alienate him from his clan. They called him Le Physicker in derision, and when the opportunity finally came to rid themselves of him, his chantry superiors sent him away to Washington, DC under the pretense that he could prove helpful during that city's troubles with the Sabbat.

Le Physicker did not simply disappear, however. Fate works in unexpected ways, and it led him to a place where one of the Kindred on the Red List, Petaniqua, was vanquished by his hand. Now a Red Alastor, John found himself caught in a fast-moving current of politics and intrigue, things he had no experience with. He did his best to survive, but he ultimately found himself with far more enemies than allies, and he tried as hard as he could to extract himself from the Machiavellian games so that he could return to his personal goal of transcendence. It was at this time



that he was captured by a nest of demon-worshipping Kindred and that the blinders that he had worn all his unlife were torn from his eyes. He was shown things that broke his will and changed the way he thought about everything in an instant. He finally escaped from his captors and did not return to the Camarilla. He felt that involvement with the sect only exposed him to the horrors he witnessed, so he became autarkis, finding haven where he could and using his talent for research and experimentation to discover best how to prepare for the day when the terrible things he had seen would take place. In his absence, rumor reached the Inner Circle that he had committed diablerie on one of the Anathema, so he was declared Anathema himself and placed him on the third spot on the Red List. Since then he has been stalked by the alastors, eager to claim the Trophy for destroying the traitor who once counted himself among their number.

John Trent still suffers from horrifying nightmares on account of his experiences. All too often he awakens still believing that his dreams are real, his paranoia at a dangerous peak. At such times, he is prone to maim himself, carving a host of hermetic, African and other occult glyphs on his head and arms in the deluded hope that it might offer him some protection from the forces he believes are out to get him. In addition, he continues to find the blood of unhealthy or unclean people to be entirely unpalatable. His finickiness has always made feeding a difficult prospect. Now it might become even more of a nightmare for him than his dreadful dreams.

Image: John appears to be a slender, grim, unsettling man of pale complexion in his 30s whose recent experiences have lent a feral cast to his features. He prefers to shave his head most nights, and if he is suffering from the worst of his nightmares, it is likely that he has made himself grotesque by carving strange symbols into his flesh. He usually wears paramilitary gear and black leather, and he keeps various guns and knives close at hand, the better to protect him from his many enemies, real and imagined. Overall, he presents quite an intimidating and sometimes even terrifying figure. When he must present himself in an important Kindred court, he dresses in archaic, 19th-century Virginian clothes and does not shave his head, keeping his long, dark hair in a ponytail.

Roleplaying Hints: You were once a naïve fool who believed in such things as the triumph of humanity, the possibility of transcendence and the dream of achieving ultimate human perfection. You laughed at your fellow Kindred and their absurd mythologies and superstitious silliness. Now you know better. Your eyes have been opened to the crawling, mindless darkness that shall eventually consume the earth without a thought. There is no hope in the long run; all are doomed, and no one knows it yet but you. The only thing left for you to do is see to your own safety, watch your back and get ready for the end. Who knows, maybe there's a small chance that you can hold out long enough against the demon hordes if you know enough magic and have enough guns? Probably not, but it certainly won't hurt to try, right? And while you're at it, maybe you can learn a few more things along the way.

Clan: Tremere
Sire: Muresh Kelbandu
Generation: 9th
Nature: Scientist
Demeanor: Survivalist
Embrace: 1838
Apparent Age: 30
Physical: Strength 1, Dexterity 3, Stamina 4
Social: Charisma 1, Manipulation 2, Appearance 4
Mental: Perception 4, Intelligence 5, Wits 2
Talents: Alertness 3, Brawl 3, Dodge 3, Empathy 3, Intrigue 2, Streetwise 1, Subterfuge 3
Skills: Drive 1, Etiquette 1, Firearms 3, Melee 2, Ride 2
Knowledges: Academics 3, Alchemy 3, Enigmas 2, Linguistics 3, Medicine 3, Occult 3, Research 5
Disciplines: Auspex 4, Necromancy 2, Thaumaturgy 5
Thaumaturgical Paths: Alchemy 3, Spirit Manipulation 2, Weather Control 2
Backgrounds: Allies 2, Contacts 3, Herd 2, Status 5 (Alastor)
Virtues: Conscience 3, Self-Control 5, Courage 3
Morality: Humanity 3
Willpower: 7

Ryder, Reformed Diablerist

Background: Ryder was born in the early years of the 20th century to a rural farmer and his God-fearing wife. His life was spent helping out his parents, but he became increasingly restless



and felt that he could not stay much longer. When the Great Depression hit his family hard, he realized there was nothing more he could offer and figured he was just another mouth for his parents to have to feed, so he set out on his own. He wandered the nation west of the Mississippi, taking odd jobs and supporting his vagrant lifestyle as best he could, with little concern for the future.

One evening he found himself camping above the Grand Canyon, gazing out on the surreal wonder, when a woman suddenly appeared a short distance behind him. She was about his own age, with long red hair and a look about her that said that she was her own person and would never be tamed by any man. She had an animal look to her and she moved with a cat's grace, but instead of being scared, Ryder asked her to join him for the evening. Her name was Belinda and she took a shine to her fellow traveler, sharing stories about the places she had been and the things she had seen until the sky had begun to grow light. Ryder expected that she would share his sleeping bag when she moved close to him and kissed his neck, but instead she sank her fangs into his throat and drank her fill. When she was done and the young man lay unmoving upon the red sanguine soil, she unsheathed a Bowie knife and let him taste her own blood. When Ryder awoke as one of the undead, Belinda was already gone, vanished in the pre-dawn gloom.

For a number of years he learned to survive as best he could, continuing to roam up and down the broad prairies, the mountain ranges and the coastline of the country's vast western lands. He ran into Belinda one more time, in the Pacific Northwest, and she explained a bit more to him about his heritage, before disappearing again. Ryder eventually headed east and started familiarizing himself with the new terrain. For a time he was involved in some of the Camarilla-Sabbat troubles around Boston, but in time he moved south, hoping to avoid politics as much as possible. Ironically, it was in Washington, DC that he became ensnared in all manner of intrigues — one too many, in fact. His increasing contempt for other Kindred led him to hook up with various anarchs, from whom he learned the fine art of diablerie. He became a hunted man, but instead of running from the law, he lashed out instead. It was during one such bold move that he walked straight into a trap; he was seriously injured and slipped into torpor in rural Maryland.

When he finally awakened a few years later, he met John Trent — or Hector Trelane, as he called himself at the time — who had only just come to town. The two found that despite their differences, they worked well as a team, so they stuck together for a time. When the Sabbat attacked the city and overran the Camarilla, the pair was separated. John Trent was recalled to Vienna after destroying one of the Anathema, leaving Ryder on his own once more. By this time, he had lowered his generation a number of times and was barely more than a rampaging beast himself.

It was then that he had the fortune to meet some Kindred who were capable of making him really examine what he had become. The Children of Osiris taught him just enough to get him to choose a new path, one where he would try to fight the Beast inside, rather than let it control him. His struggle was a difficult one, most of it without any support, but eventually he saw some success. When his clan pulled out of the Camarilla, he sought out Xaviar and learned things that convinced him that something big was going to happen soon, giving him little time to prepare. He dedicated himself to further nourishing his growing humanity, and when he heard that his former companion had been declared Anathema, he quickly set out to find him, sure that John Trent was innocent of the crimes that earned him his spot on the Red List. Unfortunately, when he found John, he discovered that the Tremere had

taken his own U-turn and was now a paranoid and hopeless wreck, and possibly guilty of the crimes he was accused of. Still, Ryder could not abandon him, especially if he was being hunted, so he has stayed by John's side since that time in the hope that maybe it will be him who saves his friend this time.

Since Ryder was a child, he feared bodies of water and so never learned to swim. The Embrace only increased this phobia to the point where he will now do whatever he can to avoid having to cross anything larger than a rivulet of water in the gutter, which he will still try to circumvent if possible. He wears a ring that he won at a carnival shortly after leaving his parents' home, which he has come to believe might be responsible for his ability to easily shrug off the effects of magic used against him. Whether this is the case, or whether his resistance to magic was something imbued when he became a vampire, is left up to the Storyteller to decide. In either case, all uses of magic on him suffer a +2 difficulty. Finally, Ryder possesses an uncanny sense of danger, a kind of sixth sense that has grown sharper with time. As a result, his player gains a +3 when rolling for initiative in combat and may make a Perception + Alertness roll (difficulty 6) to detect approaching danger a few turns before a threat rears its ugly head.

Image: The Beast has been Ryder's companion far longer than anyone else, and it has not been kind to him. He bears the marks everywhere one looks, from his paw-like hands and feet, to the cat-like snout that has slowly replaced his former nose. His lips are permanently curled back, and he constantly emits a low growl that unnerves anyone too close to him. His eyes are feral and gleam oddly in the light, while his ears have sunken into his skull. His flesh is far more hirsute than normal and he walks with a predatory gait that is truly disturbing to see. He dresses in relaxed and casual clothing that helps in some small way to offset his strange features, though none would mistake him for a normal person, even in a darkened room.

Roleplaying Hints: You have spent most of your life, and unlife, alone, even when surrounded by others, and that's the way you like it most of the time. You aren't responsible for anyone else and don't want to be. In all your time, only a few individuals have ever come close to really knowing you, and Hector Trelane (a.k.a. John Trent) is one of them. Yet you recognize the monstrosity of what you had once been, a feral diablerist moving like an animal among your own kind, and you have finally begun to know the pangs of guilt and regret. You have come to terms with your condition and understand that the only curse you bear is the one you are willing to accept, and you won't accept it any longer. Most other Kindred are still foolish savages, however, and should they cross your path or dare to try to drag you into their damnable schemes, then they had best be prepared to pay the price.

Clan: Gangrel
Sire: Belinda
Nature: Loner
Demeanor: Penitent
Generation: 7th
Embrace: 1935
Apparent Age: Hard to tell... late 20s?
Physical: Strength 4, Dexterity 5, Stamina 4
Social: Charisma 2, Manipulation 2, Appearance 1
Mental: Perception 4, Intelligence 3, Wits 5
Virtues: Conscience 4, Self-Control 3, Courage 5
Talents: Alertness 4, Brawl 5, Dodge 3, Intimidation 4
Skills: Animal Ken 1, Drive 3, Firearms 2, Melee 2, Repair 3, Stealth 2, Survival 2
Knowledges: Investigation 1, Linguistics 1, Occult 2, Politics 2
Disciplines: Animalism 3, Celerity 2, Fortitude 2, Potence 3, Protean 5
Backgrounds: Allies 1
Humanity: 5
Willpower: 7

Dr. Douglas Netchurch

Background: Some might find it odd that the foremost expert in the field of Kindred pathology, hematology and neobiology is a Malkavian. Those regrettably unlearned souls have obviously never met Dr. Netchurch. Although the madness of his clan certainly grips his mind, the good doctor's scientific genius is unmistakable.

Douglas Netchurch was born before the turn of the century, to an affluent New England family with a long history in the medical profession. Although his older brother was something of a disappointment to the family, Douglas turned out to be everything they could have asked for, easily flying through school with top marks. Several



universities offered him quite generous scholarships, but ultimately he chose no single one. Instead, he chose to spread his higher education out over a number of schools, including study abroad.

When the First World War erupted, Dr. Netchurch chose to leave his Boston practice and return to Europe, assisting the local hospitals in the treatment of fallen soldiers as best he could. He came to know the diseases and infections of the filthy trenches firsthand — as well as the horrors of chemical warfare — and he never so much as flinched.

It was there that he was drawn into the orbit of Trimeggian, a powerful Malkavian and fellow scholar of the medical arts. Trimeggian, who had been drawn to the Great War out of curiosity, was quite impressed by the resolve and insight of the American doctor. It seemed only natural that such a prodigy of modern medicine would prove most useful in applying the cutting edge of medical science to analyze the human and Kindred condition alike. And he was not disappointed. His childe rose to the occasion with all the dedication and rationality one would expect from a Netchurch.

In the Final Nights, Dr. Netchurch operates a covert (but quite professional, mind) facility in the Raleigh-Durham Research Triangle area, where he turns "research grants" of blood, money and volunteers into highly credible findings about vitae, ghouling, revenants and many other subjects of interest. He is primarily assisted by his childe, Dr. Nancy Reage, a brilliant psychologist whose fixation with her sire and former domitor survived — and was even strengthened — by her Embrace. Netchurch is apparently quite unaware of her amorous obsession. Then again, perhaps he knows and has simply classified it as an understandable and non-problematic behavioral pattern. Whatever the case, her bedside manner is certainly more... generous than his own — yet another asset that makes her invaluable.

Image: Dr. Netchurch is an impeccably groomed man with short-cut ash-blond hair and round glasses (which, given his superior Auspex, are certainly an affectation or obsessive habit). He moves briskly and efficiently and speaks in a level, measured tone at all times. Deliberate attempts to rattle him are met with subtle, icy condescension. Within the confines of his laboratory (where he feels most at home) he dresses like the scientist he is. When forced by circumstance to leave, he wears a suit that's perfectly immaculate, if slightly out of fashion.

Roleplaying Hints: You are consumed with a drive to understand the Kindred condition in all its permutations. Unfortunately, it seems unlikely that you'll achieve this goal any time soon, but you *do* have all the time in the world. You are decidedly contemptuous of the more "occult" beliefs of your fellow Kindred, and you patently don't believe in Gehenna. Even your connection to the Network is vestigial. Yet although you consider Thaumaturgy, Noddism and the like superstitious bunk, you have enough tact not to mention your feelings in front of others. Be reserved, speak only when you have something that needs saying, and keep clear of politics as much as you can. Ultimately, only the pursuit of scientific understanding of the preternatural matters, and everything else is a distraction.

Sire: Trimeggian
Nature: Visionary
Demeanor: Director
Generation: 7th
Embrace: 1915
Apparent Age: 30s
Physical: Strength 3, Dexterity 4, Stamina 3
Social: Charisma 3, Manipulation 2, Appearance 2
Mental: Perception 4, Intelligence 5, Wits 3
Talents: Alertness 5, Dodge 2, Empathy 2, Expression 2, Intimidation 4 (bloodless stare), Leadership 2, Subterfuge 3

Skills: Drive 1, Etiquette 2, Firearms 1, Security 2, Stealth 2

Knowledges: Academics 4, Computer 1, Investigation 4, Law 2, Linguistics 4 (Latin, Greek, Spanish, French, German, Italian), Medicine 5 (Kindred/ghoul pathology), Science 5 (Vitae hematology)

Disciplines: Auspex 4, Celerity 2, Dementation 1, Dominate 4, Fortitude 1, Obfuscate 3, Potence 1, Presence 1, Protean 1, Vicissitude 1

[**Note:** Netchurch's studies have exposed him to a great many bloodlines, and he has learned the basics of several "semi-intuitive" Disciplines in the course of his experiments. Storytellers might want to grant him a dot in any other semi-physical Discipline that he is currently studying. Netchurch classifies Thaumaturgy and similarly "occult" Disciplines as "mystical" in nature, though, and has neither inclination nor talent to unravel such.]

Backgrounds: Allies 1 (Dr. Reage), Contacts 3, Generation 6, Herd 3 (orderlies/test subjects), Mentor 4, Resources 3, Retainers 2, Status 2

Virtues: Compassion 2, Self-Control 5, Courage 4

Morality: Humanity 6

Derangements: Obsessive/Compulsive

Willpower: 9

Hesha Ruhadze

Background: The night had much in store for Ruhadze, who would change his name to Hesha after his Embrace in the midnight shadows of a Nubian gold mine.

The harsh Nubian climate and Ruhadze's poverty tempered him at a very young age. To avoid conflict, he and his family adopted whatever religion had grown to prominence at any given time: Islam, Christianity and even Animism at certain points. By the time he had reached a relatively advanced age for Nubians — his 30s — Hesha had fallen in with a cult that had gained no small bit of notoriety. This was a blood cult, a herd of mortals tricked into believing in the divinity of their Kindred patron. The cult's Setite leader Embraced Hesha, seeing in the man a cleverness and intellect that he thought would serve him well in his quest to reincarnate his dead god. Indeed, Hesha's sire grew so proud of his progeny in the modern nights that he renamed himself Abu Ruhadze in the Islamic tradition: "the father of Ruhadze."



After his Embrace, Hesha acclimated quite well to the "Cainite" condition. His newfound toughness was a great boon during the long nights he spent uncovering the hidden lore of Kindred and other chthonic creatures. Mentored at first by his sire, Hesha felt the calling of his clan's legacy. Abu Ruhadze knew he had chosen wisely, and he instructed his childe in the ways of the Path of Typhon. His progeny proved once again to be a fervent pupil. To this night, Hesha's clanmates consider him a near paragon of the Theophidians, revered for his devotion to the god of the Underworld and his spiritual wisdom.

Hesha's undead travels took him everywhere, and he met a great many prominent Kindred. He has crossed paths with the Kindred archaeologist Beckett no few times, and the two consider themselves cordial rivals. Additionally, his zeal to uncover the next secret or hidden revelation earns him great status among members of his clan. He's glad to dive into forgotten tombs as long as he believes they offer something of worth.

In the modern nights, Hesha continues his tireless quest for knowledge. He has established numerous havens and at least one secondary identity to help him in the trade of cryptic lore. Those who know him also know that he's willing to share almost any secret he unearths — for the right price. Sometimes, Hesha warns, the price of knowledge is the knowing. The World of Darkness contains entities and forces far more malign than mere vampires — dread creatures more powerful

than the human mind can comprehend. The Antediluvians think to assume such power, but the Eldest Ones were ancient when the Antediluvians were new. Very few vampires of other clans know Hesha's labors to protect the Earth from the Eldest Powers. No one destroys the world until the Setites are ready for their own ascension to godhood.

Image: A dapper Serpent, Hesha now shows no trace of his village past. In fact, he shows nothing that he does not want the other person to see. Hesha combines the bearing of a runway model with the flawless calm under fire of a combat veteran. His dark amber gaze is almost enough to entrance an onlooker without even calling upon his Disciplines. Hesha carries himself with grace and dignity, equally at home at an embassy ball or the catacombs of a ruined temple. He customarily wears perfectly tailored gray business suits, as well as a monocle despite the fact that he has perfect vision. Hesha's shaved scalp bears a tattoo of twining serpents, but in public he hides this mark through Obfuscate.

Roleplaying Hints: No problem is so great that it cannot be overcome by reason. You remain cool and sensible even under the direst of circumstances, whether you're facing down rampaging Sabbat, jumping a chasm or opening the tombs of the forgotten kings. Most people and Kindred are but tools to you, and they serve best when willing, so you indebt them to you whenever you can. Even those who aren't your tools have something to offer. Acquaintances, old allies and new faces alike all have as-yet-unrealized potential.

Most of the time you affect a courtly, formal charm that makes people think they know you far better than they do. Now and then you astound people with your encyclopedic knowledge of history, archeology, mythology and art, but you don't *deliberately* show off — not unless you see a good reason for it. You never tell the whole truth, but considering what you know, that is probably a kindness.

Clan: Followers of Set
Sire: Abu Ruhadze
Nature: Visionary
Demeanor: Conniver
Generation: 8th
Embrace: Unknown; assumed late 17th century
Apparent Age: mid- to late-30s
Physical: Strength 3, Dexterity 4, Stamina 5
Social: Charisma 4, Manipulation 5, Appearance 2
Mental: Perception 5, Intelligence 5, Wits 5
Talents: Alertness 4, Athletics 3, Brawl 3, Dodge 4, Empathy 3, Grace 3, Intimidation 3, Intuition 3, Leadership 4, Streetwise 4, Style 3, Subterfuge 5
Skills: Animal Ken 2, Crafts (appraisal) 4, Demolitions 3, Drive 1, Etiquette 4, Firearms 2, Melee 1, Performance 4, Ride 1, Security 3, Sleight of Hand 2, Stealth 4, Survival 2
Knowledges: Academics (humanities) 5, Computer 1, Enigmas 4, Finance 4, Investigation (archaeology) 4, Law 1, Linguistics (numerous tongues and written languages, both living and dead) 5, Medicine 2, Occult 4, Politics 4, Science 1, Setite Lore 4
Disciplines: Animalism 2, Auspex 1, Fortitude 1, Obfuscate 3, Potence 1, Presence 3, Serpentis 5
Backgrounds: Alternate Identity 1, Fame 1, Herd special (Hesha owns a blood bank), Influence 3, Resources 5, Retainers 5, Setite Status 3
Virtues: Conviction 4, Self-Control 4, Courage 5
Morality: Path of Typhon 8
Willpower: 6
Merits and Flaws: Natural Linguist

Jan Pieterzoon, Childe of the Camarilla

Background: To Jan Pieterzoon, Gehenna and the *Book of Nod* are superstitious drivel belonging in the Dark Ages. Jan understands that Kindred are paranoid and petty — his grandsire was killed over a vendetta. Talk of Gehenna and ravenous Antediluvians only feeds this paranoia and results in factionalism, fear and paralysis. The Final Nights are here because foolish elders project their fears and read too much into coincidences and random chance. Jan is not blind, however. He knows that something is happening, but it is no more apocalyptic than simple change in Kindred social conventions. It happened before in the legends of the Kindred, as it did in Constantinople and during the Anarch Revolt. Instead of hiding from "Gehenna," Jan believes that the Camarilla should embrace change, evolve and adapt to the new millennium. If it does not, Jan fears that the Camarilla will crumble and face a self-fulfilling Gehenna.

Jan has acquired no small amount of media influence to further his goal of eradicating Kindred superstition. The Ventrue is on a



book-burning crusade. He wants the Inner Circle to punish all references to the *Book of Nod* since such references only feed the apocalyptic fear gripping Kindred society and make it harder for the Camarilla to remain dominant. He has gathered Cainite scholars and scientists to find "scientific" explanations for vampires — hoping that a secular explanation will quell fears of Gehenna.

Despite being immersed in Byzantine Kindred treachery since the very night of his Embrace, Jan Pieterzoon remains committed to the *noblesse oblige* that characterizes the most august of Ventrue. He truly believes that Ventrue *dignitas* includes guiding other wayward Kindred. He subscribes to the crumbling ethic of leadership over greed, counsel over dominance. Nevertheless, Pieterzoon isn't naïve. He understands that most Kindred are too shortsighted to know what's best for them. To this end, he's willing to indulge in the race of Caine's petty deceptions and grand jyhads as long as they accomplish the necessary end — the preservation of the Kindred and their secret ways.

Image: With his spiky blond hair and deep blue eyes, Jan Pieterzoon is an archetype of Scandinavian stock. He often colors his hair when traveling, as many Kindred find his look a little less than traditional and a bit shocking. Jan is a complete clotheshorse, wardrobing himself in tailored suits of the finest subtle fabrics and accessories of high quality.

Roleplaying Hints: Your stake in the game is a great one, and you know full well that you are probably in over your head. Still, calm must prevail. If you let others know that you doubt the extent of your capabilities, they will bring you down like sharks drawn by the scent of blood. Your sire, Hardestadt, left you a tremendous legacy to satisfy, and you don't fear failure for its own sake as you do his disappointment should you be unable to succeed at the tasks for which he chose you.

Clan: Ventrue
Sire: Hardestadt the Younger
Nature: Idealist
Demeanor: Director
Generation: 7th
Embrace: 1723
Apparent Age: late 20s
Physical: Strength 3, Dexterity 3, Stamina 6
Social: Charisma 4, Manipulation 5, Appearance 3
Mental: Perception 5, Intelligence 4, Wits 3
Talents: Alertness 4, Athletics 2, Brawl 2, Dodge 2, Empathy 4, Expression 3, Grace 4, Intimidation 4, Leadership 4, Streetwise 1, Style 4, Subterfuge 6
Skills: Drive 2, Etiquette 4, Firearms 1, Melee 4, Performance 4, Stealth 2, Survival 3
Knowledges: Academics 4, Computer 2, Finance 5, Investigation 3, Law 4, Linguistics 4, Politics 4, Science 2
Disciplines: Auspex 1, Dominate 4, Fortitude 5, Obfuscate 2, Obtenebration 1, Potence 3, Presence 5
Backgrounds: Contacts 5, Herd 2, Influence 3, Mentor 5, Resources 5, Retainers 2, Status 4
Virtues: Conscience 3, Self-Control 4, Courage 3
Morality: Humanity 6
Willpower: 7

Calebros, the Erstwhile Prince

Background: Despite being the most influential Nosferatu in New York for the past 50 years since his sire disappeared, Calebros is remarkably anonymous beyond his clan, and that's the way he prefers it. He maintains order in his warren beneath Manhattan while also coordinating plans and information for his brethren across the Americas and parts of Europe. As the reluctant, temporary (and now former) Prince of New York,



Calebros hasn't slept well since putting those duties behind him.

Calebros remembers little of his mortal life. As a child, he was snatched away by the Nosferatu and held in prolonged captivity before his Embrace. To his thinking, he has always been Nosferatu, and the indistinct nature of his days as a kine precludes notions of existential angst. He exists as the quintessential Kindred, and his efforts have been rewarded by his steadily increasing status among his clanmates and Damned peers.

In being Prince Pro Tempore of New York City, Calebros did what he felt like he had to do — he acted as a wartime figurehead for a siege effort that needed one. He harbors no illusions about this. He knows that he held the title only to give the Camarilla effort a common cause to rally behind and to give the Sabbat an enemy upon whom to focus. Some would consider this meteoric "rise to power" unheard-of in Kindred circles. Calebros and his fellow Nosferatu, however, understand it for what it was. The Nosferatu consulted with archons and justicars, met with coteries of future sect heroes, schemed with the Tremere and Venture and acted as a liaison to the Followers of Set and Giovanni who also call New York their home.

It was with great relief, then, that Calebros abdicated as prince of the domain. He never really wanted the position. He found himself thrust into it by Camarilla powers who wanted a prince weak enough to acquiesce to their tactical needs but believable enough to give the siege effort a sense of credibility (and give the Sabbat a figure to hate while the true architects of the retaking planned behind the scenes).

Calebros knew all along that his tenure would be a short one, but his abandonment of the prince's duties has caused a division among the city's Nosferatu. Several members of the clan understand Calebros' stance and empathize with his decision to leave the princedom. A more radical half, however, resents the Camarilla for its action, claiming that Calebros was used (or allowed himself to be used) as a patsy. This more radical element wishes to place another Nosferatu in a position to claim the domain, citing the artificially short tenure as a mandate for one of their own to prove himself or herself worthy of the status.

Calebros is tired of the whole affair, of course. He still plays the game as much as is expected of him — speaking with various Kindred who might find themselves among the primogen once a viable prince does emerge — but he longs for the nights when he can put the whole political circus behind him and return to his warren beneath the streets. The matter of the princedom, at least as far as the Nosferatu are concerned, should be secondary at best in Calebros' opinion. Over the course of his stay in New York, he has uncovered traces of what he believes to be a Nictuku, one of the legendary vehicles of the Nosferatu Antediluvian's vengeance upon his loathsome issue. As long as something threatens the entirety of his clan, he has grave concerns with those who would push their own survival aside for temporal power games.

That said, Calebros still carries a great deal of influence among the Kindred of New York City. He is seen by many as a champion of the Camarilla cause, even by those who have their own grievances with the sect. Most of New York's knowledgeable undead believe that no prince could have claimed the domain without Calebros' approval. While Calebros remains characteristically quiet on the issue, it is potentially true.

Image: Calebros seldom mixes with kine or Kindred beyond his warren, so there is little need for him to assume a visage other than that of his curse: pasty, bald head; wide, deep-set eyes accustomed to near or total darkness; mouth full of jagged fangs that rub his gums raw and bloody; hunched back; permanently taloned fingers that,

nonetheless, do not interfere with his work at his Smith-Corona typewriter. Calebros' twisted spine and arthritic joints cause him an inordinate amount of pain nightly, whether he is active or at his desk. He is capable, however, of speed and decisive violence if pressed.

Roleplaying Hints: Some of your clanmates call you a packrat, but you know that each of the countless reports, photographs and newspaper clippings crammed into your grotto office is a piece of the large puzzle — and solving that puzzle could mean the survival of your clan. Other Kindred take you for granted, and that's just as well, because ever more terrible things are taking place in the world. Safeguarding your brethren against them is your eternal work. It feels as though you've merely exchanged one unavoidable responsibility for another, and it would be an unparalleled relief to have your unlife to yourself again.

Clan: Nosferatu
Sire: Augustin
Nature: Martyr (sometimes Penitent)
Demeanor: Director
Generation: 9th
Embrace: 1780
Apparent Age: indeterminate
Physical: Strength 3, Dexterity 3, Stamina 3
Social: Charisma 2, Manipulation 5, Appearance 0
Mental: Perception 5, Intelligence 5, Wits 4
Talents: Alertness 4, Brawl 4, Intimidation 3, Leadership 3, Streetwise 5, Subterfuge 4
Skills: Animal Ken 3, Crafts 1, Drive 2, Melee 1, Performance 2, Security 2, Stealth 4, Survival 3
Knowledges: Academics 4, Camarilla Lore 2, Computer 1, Finance 3, Investigation 5, Linguistics (Greek, Latin, Russian, Spanish) 3, Occult 3, Politics 4, Sabbat Lore 1, Science 2, Sewer Lore 3
Disciplines: Animalism 3, Auspex 1, Celerity 1, Fortitude 2, Obfuscate 5, Potence 3, Protean 2
Backgrounds: Clan Prestige 2, Contacts 5, Herd 3, Influence 3, Mentor 5, Resources 4, Status 4
Virtues: Conscience 2, Self-Control 3, Courage 2
Morality: Humanity 5
Willpower: 7

[Note: Calebros' Mentor Background reflects several Kindred of varying authority among the upper echelons of the Camarilla. Yes, they used him, but he's aware of it, and a mutual respect has grown between Calebros and his mentors, both sides accepting that the other had the wherewithal to do what needed to be done at the time to oust the Sabbat.]

Sascha Vykos, Caine's Angel

Background: Androgynous Sascha Vykos — Noddist scholar, Tzimisce scientist and Cainite monster — has long been a staunch supporter of Sabbat freedom. It is Hell's chief torturer and a musician with a scalpel. Sascha understands the nuances of every physical sensation and the nerves best suited to receive its ministrations. It is also a creature of learning, with a collection of books and artifacts to humble the halls of all academia. Sascha's enemies, including the Gangrel Beckett, believe it holds cult status within the Sabbat, wherein sect members emulate its actions. In truth, however, Sascha is a monster beyond its own years. Few could ever understand the grand schemes of the Sabbat's ronin priscus.

Sascha Vykos, named Myca Vykos in the years before its self-inflicted castration, lived an enviable existence in the glorious Byzantine Empire. Born to royalty in the Carpathians before the turn of the first millennium, Myca seemed destined for greatness from a young age. As a child, his fits and visions brought him to the attention of House Tremere within the Order of Hermes. He learned



the basics of spellcraft and proved such an adept student that he inspired jealousy in the magus Goratrix. Goratrix's later attempt to betray Myca to Tzimisce Cainites backfired, and the young boy found himself among the Fiends.

Eventually, Myca came to hate his clan and fled to Constantinople with the aid of his sire, Symeon, a Tzimisce renegade. The great books of Alexandria became Myca's silent teachers while the political juggernauts within the Byzantine courts taught him the subtleties of influence. Like the other Cainites of the city, however, Myca became enamored with the Toreador Michael and the Methuselah's delusions of divinity. Alas, neither Constantinople nor Michael lasted. When the Fourth Crusade destroyed the city, both Myca and his sire fled to the Balkan strongholds of their Tzimisce brethren. Although they left Michael's legacy behind, his reach would greatly affect Myca even after the Methuselah's Final Death.

During Myca's years in Constantinople, Michael encouraged Myca's thirst for knowledge. It was his intent to make the young Tzimisce a walking record of Constantinople, Michael's vision of Heaven on Earth. Unbeknownst to Myca, the Toreador Methuselah instilled him with this vision and with a need to preserve Constantinople's legacy. Myca became Michael's architect, building a new kingdom without the mistakes of the past. Myca carried out Michael's dreams by crafting a living empire of flesh rather than stone. His city was to be a community of Cainites founded on pillars of blood and bone. His participation in the Sabbat's formation was the first step toward that goal.

During the *antitribu* uprising, better known as the Anarch Revolt, the anarchs attacked the elders' strongholds to destroy everything associated with their former masters. Myca, on the other hand, played the monster while torturing Symeon — repeatedly absorbing and regurgitating his sire before the final act of diablerie. Yet he also took the role of scholar when he saved books at risk to his own existence. During the uprising, Myca aided his allies, Lugoj and Velya, and provided pivotal aid to the nascent Sabbat movement as priscus.

Over the centuries, Sascha — for that is what Myca renamed itself shortly after leading an assault on the village of Thorns — has served its sect as scholar and warrior. In both roles, it acts as wandering priscus, though its manner of advising regional cardinals seems more akin to making strong "suggestions" than polite recommendations. As scholar, it maintains ancient libraries and repositories across the Balkan states. In this role, Sascha is an ally to the old-guard Sabbat who appreciate the strength of knowledge. As warrior, however, Sascha is also a frightening tool of retribution. With mastery over Vicissitude and Thaumaturgy, it can best most adversaries. Generally, though, it prefers to capture foes rather than kill them. Many of Sascha's prisoners have endured sessions of alternating torture and ecstatic pleasure that last for decades. Its victims are often unsure whether they are undergoing torture or rape.

In this violent facet, Sascha appeals to the younger Sabbat. Collectively, in turn, the Sabbat is a weapon for Sascha, a living battlement against the rapacious Antediluvians — the adversaries in Sascha's morality play. Every death it inflicts strengthens the Sabbat's position; every splatter of blood is part of God's portrait; every agonizing cry is a nail in Heaven's unliving city. That is why it knows how each nerve screams, how much blood flows from specific wounds and how much fat it can rob from a mortal body before death.

Image: Sascha is an alien beauty. Its limbs are long, slender and graceful, but it moves with power. Its face is like a work by Michelangelo, perfect and flawless in form. Not even the master artist could capture Sascha's cruel countenance, however. The network of scars, tattoos and piercings that cover its androgynous form only add to Sascha's enigmatic beauty. What appear to be thin, black tattoos on its body are skin clefts that open like a babe's toothless mouth. Sascha's skill with Vicissitude allows it to speak through these mouths as well, creating a chorus of its voice to unnerve even the most strong-willed opponent. Sascha displays these marks like trophies, sometimes stroking them with tenderness. Sascha's most compelling feature, however, is its eyes. It watches everything around it the way a coroner examines a cadaver. It never blinks or looks away; it simply stares.

Roleplaying Hints: You look at people the same way mortals study a goldfish: with detached interest. You've already decided how to kill them; it isn't a matter of whether someone should live or die, but when you plan to dispose of them. It all depends on how long they prove useful to you. Your mindset is no psychotic fantasy, however,

but a pure, analytical observation. You are a scientist at heart: practical, thorough and detached.

Clan: Tzimisce
Sire: Symeon
Nature: Monster
Demeanor: Visionary
Generation: 6th
Embrace: 1002
Apparent Age: Indistinguishable
Physical: Strength 4, Dexterity 4, Stamina 3
Social: Charisma 6, Manipulation 4, Appearance 7
Mental: Perception 3, Intelligence 5, Wits 4
Talents: Alertness 4, Athletics 3, Brawl 4, Dodge 5, Empathy 1, Interrogation 7, Intimidation 5, Intrigue 4, Leadership 3, Style 6, Subterfuge 4
Skills: Animal Ken 2, Archery 2, Body Crafts 6, Etiquette 3, Herbalism 3, Melee (knife) 4, Performance 2, Ride 3, Stealth 2, Survival 3
Knowledges: Academics 4, Area Knowledge (Europe) 6, Camarilla Lore 4, Finance 2, Hearth Wisdom 2, History 6, Investigation 3, Law 1, Linguistics (a litany of contemporary, ancient, Asian and Romance languages) 6, Medicine 5, Occult 5, Politics 4, Research 5, Sabbat Lore 6
Disciplines: Animalism 4, Auspex 4, Celerity 2, Dominate 5, Fortitude 3, Presence 4, Thaumaturgy 5, Vicissitude 7
Thaumaturgical Paths: Path of Blood 5, Lure of Flames 5, Movement of the Mind 2
Backgrounds: Allies 3, Contacts 3, Herd 5, Resources 5, Retainers 6, Rituals 5, Sabbat Status 5
Virtues: Conviction 5, Self-Control 4, Courage 5
Morality: Path of Death and the Soul 9
Willpower: 8



The First Vampire

As the end of the world approaches, the founder of the feast deserves special mention. Were it not for Caine, vampires would (likely) not exist in the world, and he could make an appearance to watch all that he has wrought bear judgment in the eyes of God or simply wither and burn.

Before we discuss Caine, however, a word of warning: *Do not use Caine lightly*. Casually "tossing in" an appearance by the First Vampire will not serve your chronicle, especially in the end when every individual act the characters perform has so much importance. Think of certain movies or television shows in which all the drama quickly falls by the wayside as a heavy-handed deus ex machina appears on screen and renders everything else moot. Caine doesn't have to be "god in the machine," but he can be, especially if you use him awkwardly or as a method of overpowering the characters' efforts.

Likewise, don't feel compelled to use Caine. Not every mystery has a solution, and even at the End of Days, the answer to the question "Why?" may be solely God's purview.

In most of the Gehenna scenarios, Caine should appear subtly, if you choose to involve him at all. He shouldn't leap from a shadow, landing in front of the characters to slay whatever foes they face or to personally lay the characters themselves to waste. **Vampire** is a game of subtleties, and players might not even know their characters have met the First Vampire. Indeed, "Caine" might be little more than ashes that blow on the wind or a single, sun-bleached skull found near a hidden temple in the desert.

Hereafter we present a few possibilities for incorporating Caine into your Time of Judgment Gehenna chronicle. You'll note he's conspicuously absent from the scenarios as

written. That's our not-so-subtle way of saying, "You don't have to do this." If you choose to involve Caine at the end of the world, however, bear a few considerations in mind.

Caine is Dead

God's made no guarantee that we mere mortals — or even the Kindred — can hold Him to. If Caine has met Final Death, that certainly imparts a sense of finality on the whole matter. This is especially appropriate for chronicles given to nihilism, but also to chronicles in which some or all of the players' characters manage to achieve redemption themselves. The latter implies that just as Caine was ultimately too flawed to claim God's forgiveness, characters without his debilitating pride or evil (however you decide to position the First Vampire) could ultimately claim the treasure he was denied.

This option also presents a host of possibilities, as Caine could have met Final Death at any point in history between his initial curse and the moment he enters the story. Indeed, the actions of the characters might be what brought the First Vampire to that point. Given that **Vampire** makes much of the notion of the sins of the father being visited upon his childer, this could make for a very satisfying or heartbreaking denouement.

Caine is Active but Unknown

Storytellers who have used **The Red Sign** will be able to make much of this possibility, as it suggests that the true events of the world, in Lovecraftian style, are cold and emotionless and don't care a whit for the efforts of the individual. In the context of **Vampire**, Caine could prove to be the most masterful virtuoso of the Jyhad, conniving his wayward childer into destroying themselves with very little direct influence of his own. Consider that the war between the Antediluvians might occur at the provocation of this most ancient Kindred, and the Jyhad takes on a sinister cast of predestination.



In this situation, the characters likely never meet Caine. Alternatively, they might come in contact with him or his agents but never know that they have had a brush with the First Vampire. Handle this delicately, as it can lead players to a sense of futility, but a clever Storyteller can use the suggestion of powerlessness to drive characters to grand gestures and achievements defying that impotence that may prove their salvation.

Caine is Present

This needn't mean that Caine joins the coterie, merely that his activity is a known quantity or quality. Caine may well make his appearance in the characters' domain, or he may rise as a threat (or ally) on the horizon. Whatever the case, the world will never be the same, as the individual responsible for the blight of vampires has arrived to either atone for his original sin, or to drag the world screaming to Hell with him.

Again, tread carefully. Caine should not be the hammer by which the Storyteller forges his players' characters' actions. Avoid using Caine as the aforementioned *deus ex machina* because doing so removes power from the players and instead places it in the hands of a plot device. Optimally, Caine's appearance should foretell something grave or joyous, reveal an otherwise inaccessible clue, or help players to decide which path they will take. Having Caine force the characters to take a certain path, or lining him up as an unbeatable physical obstacle, simply removes drama from the situation.

Caine is a Myth

Then again, what guarantee to we have that Caine was real at all, or even the First Vampire? His origins tie him to the Bible, belief in which is a supreme exercise of faith. If that faith turns out to be incorrect in the face of other fact....

Vampire has presented a variety of other options for the origins of the Kindred. Lilith

might serve as a better focal point, especially if you can emphasize her role as the "mother of monsters" from the *Book of Nod*. **Kindred of the East** and its Yama Kings might be the "real" foundation of vampirism, with the Cainite condition and a failed or stunted offshoot of the Second Breath. If you wish to use other games' cosmologies, **Werewolf** suggests that vampires are creatures spawned by a cosmic force of entropy and destruction, a theme that might suit your chronicle. **Mage** has a few esoteric twists of its own that might add a degree of cerebral horror to the events of Gehenna.

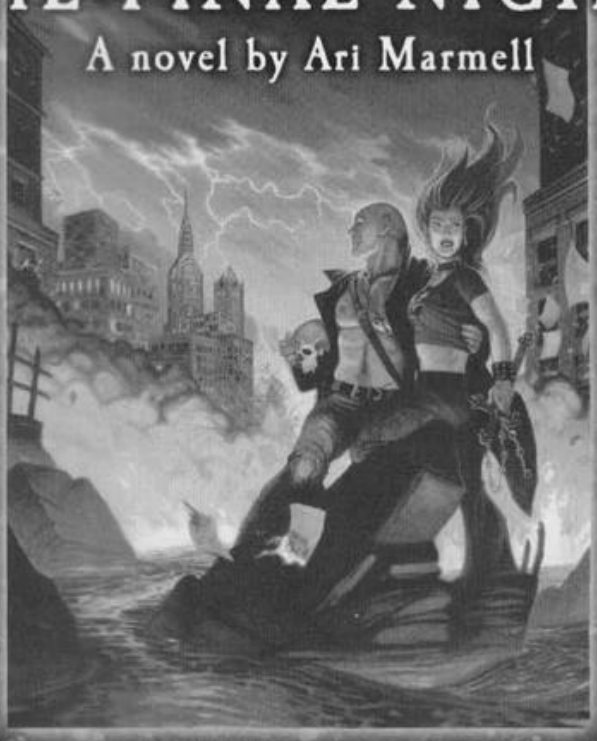
Don't feel limited by what's in print, however. **Gehenna** is your own, and the events you undertake to bring about the vampires' end are likewise yours to command. Divorce yourself from the White Wolf canon if you wish — make vampires the result of a virus, an Area 51 conspiracy or the vagaries of an ancient or even unknown pantheon. While **Vampire** assumes that the Judeo-Christian myth of Caine is the foundation for vampirism, you don't have to use those assumptions if you don't want.



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