

Archons & Templars



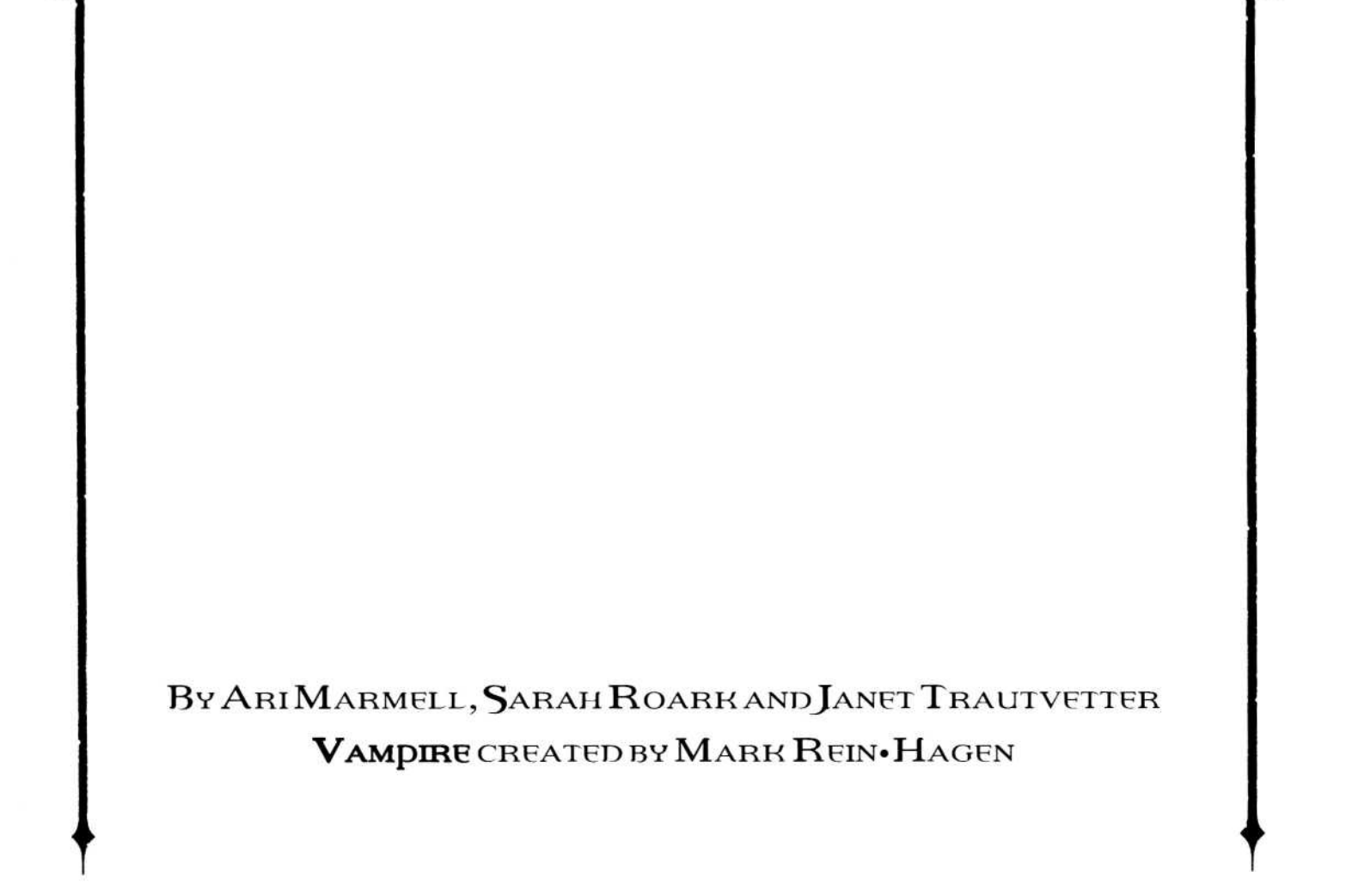
SNELLY 2001

A SOURCEBOOK FOR VAMPIRE: THE MASQUERADE®



Anchons & Templars™

By Ari Marmell, Sarah Roark and Janet Trautveter
Vampire created by Mark Rein-Hagen



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OVERHEARD

I would cancel all my business trips if we could find the dwarven citadel.

— Chad Brown

Was that a giant cat? There were people inside.

— Rebecca Schaefer

I do not know zee meaning of zee word "eraser"!

— Mike Chaney

I just remembered that monkey that can run 40 miles per hour.

— Justin Achilli

CORRECTION

Due to deadlines, an Additional Material credit for Vis Sierra was omitted from **New York by Night**. In recognition, we credit those contributions here and in future printings of that book.



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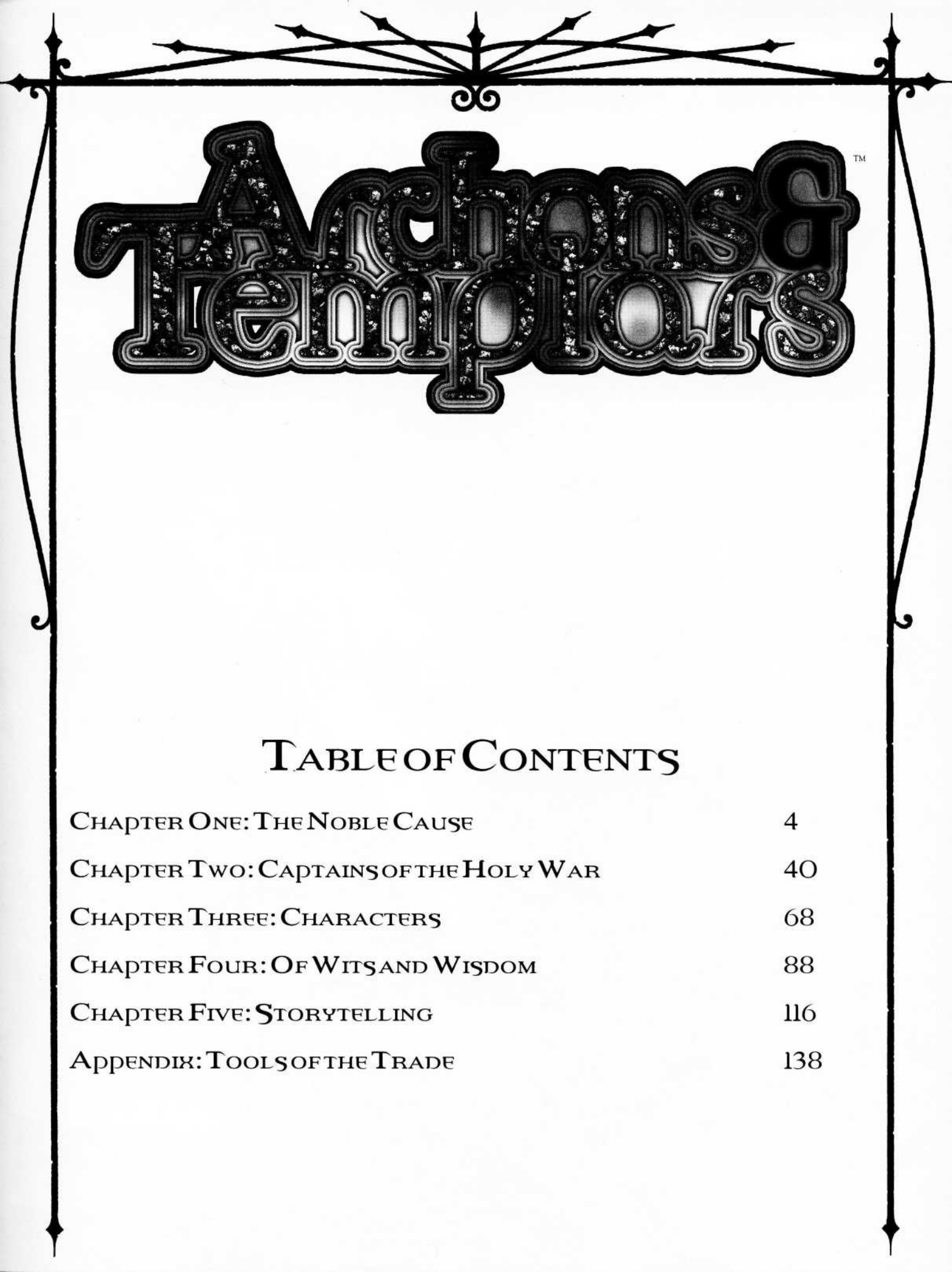
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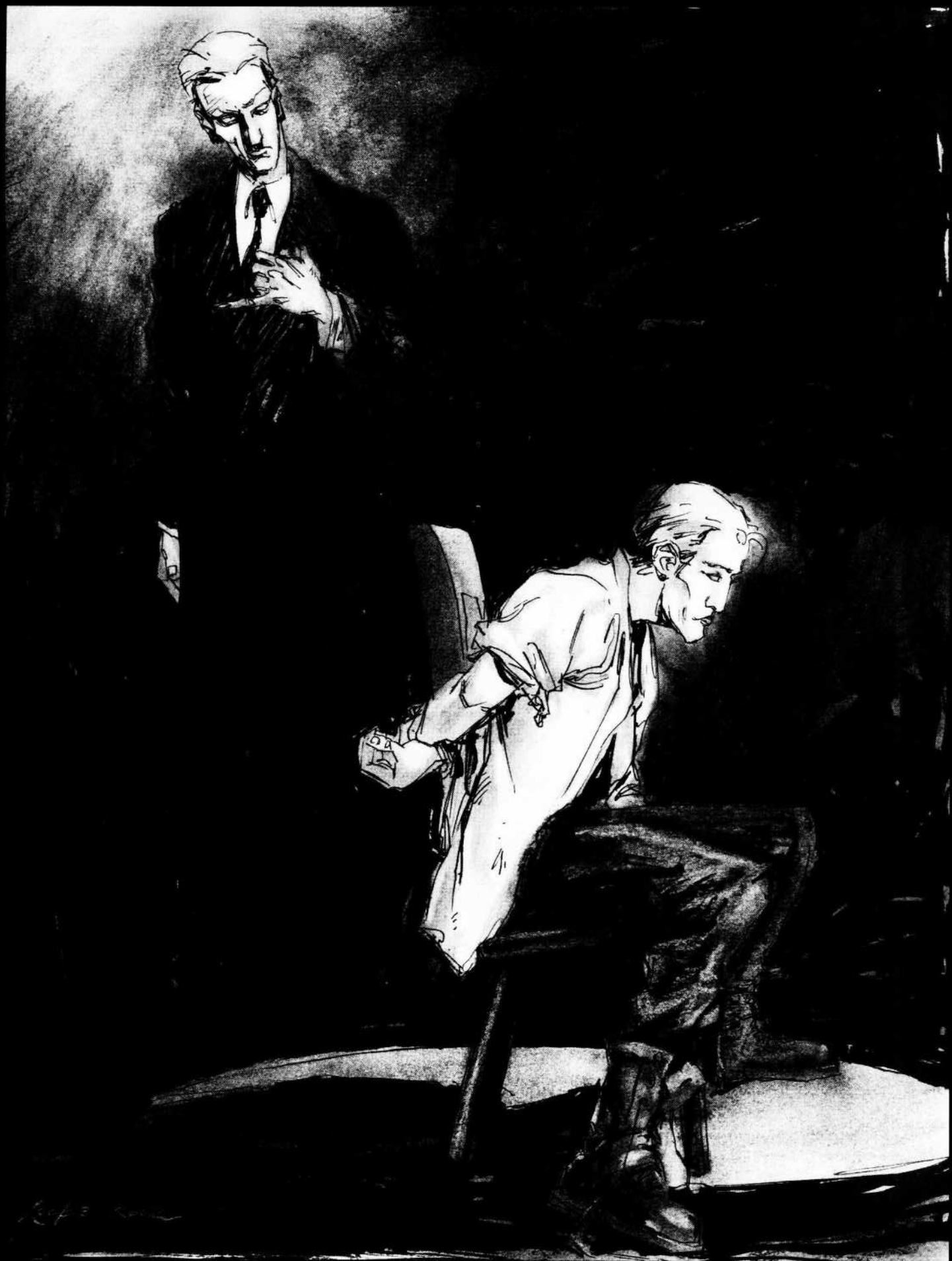
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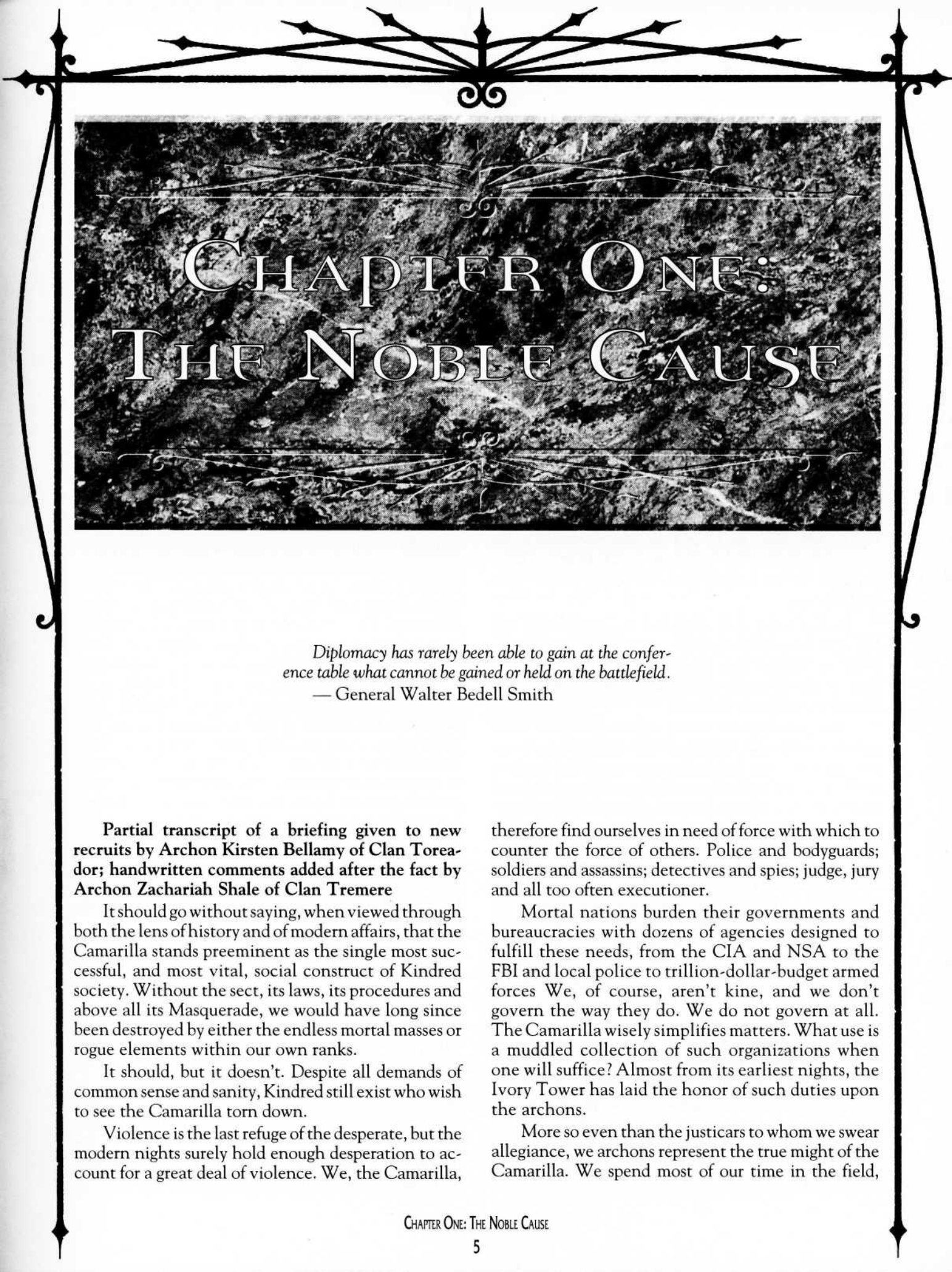


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CHAPTER ONE: THE NOBLE CAUSE

Diplomacy has rarely been able to gain at the conference table what cannot be gained or held on the battlefield.
— General Walter Bedell Smith

Partial transcript of a briefing given to new recruits by Archon Kirsten Bellamy of Clan Toreador; handwritten comments added after the fact by Archon Zachariah Shale of Clan Tremere

It should go without saying, when viewed through both the lens of history and of modern affairs, that the Camarilla stands preeminent as the single most successful, and most vital, social construct of Kindred society. Without the sect, its laws, its procedures and above all its Masquerade, we would have long since been destroyed by either the endless mortal masses or rogue elements within our own ranks.

It should, but it doesn't. Despite all demands of common sense and sanity, Kindred still exist who wish to see the Camarilla torn down.

Violence is the last refuge of the desperate, but the modern nights surely hold enough desperation to account for a great deal of violence. We, the Camarilla,

therefore find ourselves in need of force with which to counter the force of others. Police and bodyguards; soldiers and assassins; detectives and spies; judge, jury and all too often executioner.

Mortal nations burden their governments and bureaucracies with dozens of agencies designed to fulfill these needs, from the CIA and NSA to the FBI and local police to trillion-dollar-budget armed forces. We, of course, aren't kine, and we don't govern the way they do. We do not govern at all. The Camarilla wisely simplifies matters. What use is a muddled collection of such organizations when one will suffice? Almost from its earliest nights, the Ivory Tower has laid the honor of such duties upon the archons.

More so even than the justicars to whom we swear allegiance, we archons represent the true might of the Camarilla. We spend most of our time in the field,

doing whatever must be done, policing the top of the food chain, judging the Damned and trying — with varying degrees of success — to bring some semblance of order to these chaotic nights. Sabbat slaving at the door, howling to come in? Rogue prince needs slapping down, hard, before his behavior encourages others? Diablerists running loose in the streets, stomping on the Traditions and shredding the Masquerade like so much tissue paper? We can take care of it for you. We can make it all go away.

If you're willing to suffer the consequences for admitting you can't handle it on your own. This is the Camarilla, after all, and asking for help against even an obviously superior foe is a sign of nearly inexcusable weakness. Of course, we can't tell our new recruits that, can we?

The whole thing's a load of horseshit anyway. We don't "represent the might" of the Camarilla; and while the Camarilla's definitely a good thing in principle, and by far the best of the choices given us, if the sect as it stands now represents the utmost heights of Kindred achievement, we're screwed. We can barely keep the Ivory Tower from toppling over.

Boiled down to its simplest form, an archon is any Kindred who serves a justicar. We have no prerequisites, no fitness tests or Civil Service Exams. If a justicar thinks you're useful, and if you're willing to serve her, you're an archon.

The justicars are rarely so casual about their selections, though. We're not merely a justicar's eyes and ears, but her hands, her voice and her fangs as well. Since we're the Camarilla's penultimate force of order, not to mention internal affairs and the closest available equivalent to a standing army, an ineffective archon threatens not only his fellows and the justicar he serves, but also the safety and sanctity of the entire sect. Not every one of us has to be a buffed out, chaingun-toting combat warlord, but each archon must be eminently skilled at what he does — whatever that might be. A hacker, a cat burglar, a mechanic or even (Caine forbid!) a lawyer are all archon material, if they've the proper temperament and level of proficiency — and if that happens to be what a justicar requires at the moment. Don't embarrass your boss and don't bollix your assignments; everything else is negotiable.

That said, many archons are more than able to lay a serious beat-down on someone who needs it. When all is said and done, when all the pretty layers are stripped bare, one of our primary duties is still to go toward whatever the justicar points at and either tear it down or blow it up.

THE LINE OF DUTY

So what do we do, exactly? It's easy to say "Ooh, archons! These guys are the bad-ass secret (or not-so-secret) police of the Camarilla! Break the rules and they'll mess you up! Oh, and they fight the Sabbat a bunch, too."

We do police the Kindred, but we aren't a "police force" in the sense that most kine use the term. We don't travel around in squad cars looking for trouble. We don't operate out of a central headquarters, and we sure as hell don't carry badges. Archons are proxies for the justicar we serve. Sure, we may be more numerous than those esteemed judges of the Camarilla, but there still aren't enough of us that we can waste our time with every petty complaint that comes our way.

HUE AND CRY

Because of the recent war on the East Coast, some younger Licks tend to think of the archons entirely as a paramilitary organization, the special forces units who drop in out of nowhere to deal with Sabbat crusades and Lupine sightings. The truth is that conflict with "the enemy" makes up a relative minority of our night-to-night activities. Yes, we spend most of our time cleaning up our own backyard. Few of us operate regularly in hostile territory. (What? Well, yes, *most* territory is hostile to an archon, but you know what I mean.) Most archons never see the inside of a non-Camarilla city, and those who do are probably involved in one of the Camarilla's few military-style offenses. Yes, some of us specialize in warfare, and a few serve as intelligence agents and spies, but the majority are far too busy dealing with internal Camarilla issues.

Standard police procedure in the United States maintains that local police handle local crimes. Only if a case violates certain specific national laws, or crosses borders between jurisdictions, are the government cops — the FBI — called in to deal with the situation.

As archons, we function in a similar manner, though you ought to be careful spreading that around, since some of us don't appreciate being compared to mortal agencies like that. A prince who runs crying to the Camarilla every time something goes wrong in her city is going to find herself out of power — and quite possibly working on an unseasonable tan — in short order. Cities are, in the eyes of the Camarilla, loosely allied autonomous entities. If a prince can't handle her own affairs, she's not worthy to be prince. Only in the most extreme cases is a justicar willing to dispatch archons to deal with a local matter.

FOR THE STORYTELLER: PLAYING THE NUMBERS

Each of the six justicars has as many archons as he or she sees fit. No formal regulations limit their options, nor does a review board or oversight committee keep track of such things. As the justicars aren't required to report specifics even to the Inner Circle or each other, often no one knows how many archons are active at any given time.

Certain estimations are possible, though. It is highly unlikely that even the most hyperactive, work-obsessed justicar could reasonably coordinate the activities of more than a few dozen such agents, and many justicars — such as Lucinde of Clan Ventrue — spend enough time in the field that they probably can't manage more than a few archons. Simple mathematics suggest, then, that the Camarilla probably claims somewhere between 50 and 250 archons (more during periods of intense conflict such as the recent war against the Sabbat on the East Coast, when the justicars become a lot more lax in their requirements).

Not a lot, when you consider the vast area they have to cover and the vital nature of their work, but it's been sufficient to this point. With any luck, it will continue to be so into the Final Nights....

The unfortunate fallout of this method of operation is that many princes, terrified of losing status in the eyes of their fellow Kindred, hesitate to call for help when the situation does warrant it. My own boss, the Nosferatu Justicar Cock Robin, has a number of analysts ferreting out patterns from the past hundred years of conflict. They've determined that at least three of the cities the Sabbat took in the last century could have been saved if the local prince and primogen had called for help when things got too hot to handle.

Frankly, most princes — or primogen, or other elder Kindred — don't want archons poking around their city. While some few elders don't have anything to hide — they're called "dead" — most vampires don't want The Man catching even a hint of what they're up to. The mere suggestion that a problem might attract the attention of an archon is often enough to motivate a lackadaisical prince to get off his ass and deal with the situation.

How a desperate prince (or other local Kindred) calls for help is an issue, too. The justicars don't sit at home in their stately manors waiting for a call on the Camarilla-phone. While several justicars, and most archons, have of necessity grown more familiar and more comfortable with modern technology than many other Kindred of comparable age, this doesn't automatically mean we're easily reached. Princes are not issued business cards with the e-mail and cell phone number of the nearest justicar. Granted, a given prince probably has enough contacts in high places that he knows someone who knows someone who can get in touch with a justicar, assuming he can't do so himself. Even then, justicars are moving about constantly, dealing with this problem or mediating that dispute, and are often out of contact for nights or weeks at a time. Some of us are easier to reach than our bosses, but we rarely have the authority to act in a substantial manner without at least a nod from above, unless the situation is clearly of such vital import that the entire Camarilla is threatened if someone doesn't take action now. Under the best of circumstances and for all but the highest levels of the Camarilla, calling in archons or a justicar from outside is a process that takes several nights, or longer. A Kindred who needs help immediately is pretty much SOL. She should have picked up on what was happening sooner, shouldn't she?

In recent years, and in light of events that have rocked the Kindred community, the justicars have made a few adjustments to the way their archons operate. Although most of us still serve as roving troubleshooters, the justicars have identified several specific "problem areas." To these they have assigned a more-or-less permanent enclave of archons. These "fixed" coterie are responsible for maintaining order (or, in the case of those assigned to the newly acquired Sabbat territories on the East Coast, communicating intelligence) in their designated theater of operation. The Brujah Justicar Jaroslav Pascek and the Tremere Justicar Anastasz di Zagreb — a strange partnership, to be sure — have suggested that these localized cells be given full autonomy, maintaining that they'd be far more effective if permitted to work with whichever justicar is most geographically convenient. The other justicars have, to this point, opposed such a radical notion.

What do I think? I think that whatever the justicars decide is the best option, of course. I also think you should shut up.

oh, yeah. Great way to encourage creative thought there, Kirsten. Fool.

INTERNAL SECURITY

As I've stated, most of the threats you'll face over the course of your (often woefully short) career as an archon come from within the Camarilla itself. Astonishing as it may often seem, some of our Kindred simply fail to grasp the vital importance of the Camarilla and act, either through malice or ignorance, against its best interests.

oh, woe. Look at the big mean nasties who "fail to grasp." It's not like this is a rare thing, and not even the most idiotic new recruit is going to buy into the idea that it is. Considering the ungodly amount of political maneuvering and cold (or not so cold) warfare that goes on behind the facade of the Ivory Tower, many outsiders find it nothing short of a miracle that the Camarilla hasn't collapsed entirely.

The truth is that the tower is more stable than it looks; enlightened self-interest is a powerful motivator for even the most selfish and power-hungry Kindred. That said, the walls do buckle on occasion, and it falls to us to shore up the breach.

PETTY CRIMINALS AND TRADITION VIOLATORS

We don't deal with this sort of thing on a regular basis (with the obvious exception of Masquerade violations). Calling an archon to deal with Kindred who violate domain rights or sire without permission is akin to calling the FBI to deal with a string of ATM robberies (assuming we could be bothered to respond to such a summons in the first place). This is, after all, what the prince, the sheriff (and, to a lesser extent, the scourge) are for. If local authorities aren't capable of handling such piddling details, the prince either needs to find a new sheriff, or the city needs to find a new prince.

Occasional exceptions are made for violations of the Sixth Tradition. Kindred killing Kindred is still very much a local affair, but should the problem grow to epidemic proportions (as happened in Houston in the mid-1990s), or should a victim happen to possess extreme political clout or powerful allies, an archon may be "loaned" to the local prince to assist in the investigation. This is a double-edged sword, so far as the prince herself is concerned. True, she's got a better chance of finding out who's slaughtering the Kindred in her domain, but word's going to spread quickly that she needed outside help to do it. Furthermore, the archon is almost certainly there as much to determine why the prince couldn't deal with the issue

herself as he is to catch the killer. The arrival of an archon to deal with internal matters such as these has presaged the fall of the current prince on more than one occasion.

Kirsten and I were in Houston when those murders took place. It wasn't pretty. We may not normally get involved in local affairs, but don't be afraid to do just that if you feel something's off-kilter. I'd hate to think how much we'd have lost if the two of us hadn't gotten involved.

Yes, I'm glad she was there with me. And yes, if you tell anyone I said that, I'll swear blind that you're lying.

Nothing kicks over the anthill, of course, like a potential break of the Masquerade. A breach of the First Tradition sets any of us who happen to be nearby scurrying about along with the local power structure (with or without a justicar's approval, as a threat to the Masquerade falls into the aforementioned "clear and present danger" clause). Witnesses are hushed up, evidence is buried or destroyed and the violators — well, they're normally buried or destroyed, too.

once the fissure has been plugged, all jurisdictional cooperation goes right out the window, and the archons who got swept up in the hustle are going to take a long, hard and very uncomfortable look at the local Cainites who allowed such a near-catastrophe to occur in the first place.

This happens a lot more frequently than Kirsten implies. Breaking the Masquerade may be one of the greatest crimes a Lick can commit, but it's also the most frequent. Sometimes it's accidental; some whelp loses control in the middle of a nightclub, or didn't realize that some old lady was staring out of her apartment window two stories up when he suddenly decided to turn into a bat. Others are deliberate. Kindred break the rules for personal gain, or even just for fun. We're still working on inserting agents into the so-called Thrill Kill Club. These idiots violate domain, tradition, the Masquerade and almost everything else you can think of, and they do it for the rush. Let them come forward and identify themselves, I'll give them a thrill....

ANARCHS

Although the first instinct is often to lump the anarchs in with other ignorant or immature Kindred as simple violators of Tradition, most of us consider them a threat unique unto themselves. Some of our elder brethren still remember the Anarch Revolt and the nights when "anarch" meant something a lot

more dangerous than some dissatisfied punk on a motorcycle hurling Molotov cocktails and kitchen-chemical pipe bombs (not that a well-aimed Molotov can't ruin your whole evening regardless of who chucked it at you). Even those of us unhindered by the definitions of the past see these young (quasi-)radicals as a danger to the stability of the Camarilla, at least on a local level. Their tendency to cluster together and rally around their pitiful ideology makes them more of a threat than the average petty thug, and their desire to bring down the whole system makes them particularly tenacious.

None of which means we automatically jump every time someone yells "Anarch!" We'd still prefer to let the local Kindred deal with such matters, and nine times out of ten, that's exactly what happens. Still, because the anarchs are specifically interested in bringing down the local "authority" (which usually means the prince and/or primogen), they're more likely to draw the eyes of a curious archon than are other, less driven rogue elements. The Camarilla, as a body, doesn't really care who the Prince of Little Rock might be, but that doesn't mean they want to see the city without a reliable figurehead (Camarilla-loyal, obviously) of *some* sort. Occasionally it turns out that no one on the local scene has sufficient capability to take over if the current prince is ousted or sent to Final Death. This, primarily, is where we are most willing to step in and take a hand in defending the current power structure against "mere" anarchs.

The fact that "anarch activity" is sometimes a cover for much more serious Sabbat action is also enough to inspire a fair amount of archon scrutiny, though our interest is usually limited to fact-finding and intelligence gathering until and unless the situation crystallizes into a true threat (either from the Sabbat or for reasons described above). Fortunately, the years have taught us the differences between Sabbat and anarch techniques; if the Sabbat is trying to sneak in the anarch's door, we're usually in a pretty good position to spot it.

A schism exists among our ranks as to how best to deal with anarchs who operate in Camarilla domains. Some, a faction spearheaded by Cock Robin (whose predecessor, Petrodon, was vehemently anti-anarch) still insist that the anarchs be dealt with as fiercely and as brutally as any other enemy faction. Others, such as Madam Guil and those suck-ups Theo Bell and ha-ha torpid Federico DiPadua, insist that the anarchs must be treated fairly, if not gently, lest they be driven into the arms of the Sabbat

and transformed from a minor threat into a major one. An anarch cell in Belfast recently escaped punishment entirely by fleeing into the night when the coterie of archons dispatched to deal with them wound up in a physical altercation with one another over the question of what to do with the apprehended troublemakers.

FOR THE STORYTELLER: THE LESSER EVIL

In the wake of the Cathayan invasion of the West Coast and the crumbling (for all practical purposes) of the Anarch Free State, a large number of anarchs have come skulking back into the fold. These Kindred have reluctantly come to understand that the iron fist of the Camarilla, while odious, is sometimes preferable to other available options. While many of these prodigals have returned to their old ways, stirring up trouble and attempting to improve the situation of "the people" by sowing dissent, some of the others have come to two uncomfortable but inescapable conclusions. One, that the system has to be changed from the inside; only those with power can make things better for those without. Two, that the Camarilla must survive long enough for said changes to be implemented, and that means it must be defended from a list of foes that seems to grow on a nightly basis.

It is from this stock of ex-anarchs that the justicars have recently begun drawing many of their newest archons. Already intimately familiar with the techniques of violence and the constant stress of night-to-night conflict, minds blazing with their newfound conviction that the Camarilla is again the best option left to them, they seem to have molded themselves into exactly what the justicars need. More than a few have also begun to abuse their newfound authority, but that's hardly unique among archons. Some justicars, like Cock Robin and Jaroslav Pascek, are less than thrilled at this particular turn of events, but the ex-anarch archons are quickly proving themselves to those justicars willing to give them a shot. Several of the justicars and elder archons have even discussed offering a general amnesty to any anarchs who wish to "come in from the cold," as it were, and offer their services, but such a plan has been shelved until the elders can figure out a reliable way of enforcing terms of service on so many potential converts.

Can't expect Kirsten to mention any of this, of course. God forbid we give anything less than the appearance of complete accord on everything. This is why we lose archons.

WIGHTS

No Kindred, however humane or strong-willed, however ancient or powerful, can forget the Beast that lurks just below the surface of her conscious mind. It can never be escaped, never be appeased. Every Kindred fears that dreadful night, however near or far into the future it may be, when she loses her final struggle with the Beast and becomes forevermore a ravening, blood-starved animal. Many Kindred, myself included, would gladly choose Final Death over such a fate.

Some hapless Kindred aren't given that choice. A truly degenerate vampire, one fallen to her Beast beyond all hope of salvation, is a fearsome thing to behold and even more fearsome to combat. These wights, as they have come to be called, represent one of the greatest dangers to the Kindred community, all the more so because it's frighteningly easy to become one of them.

Although exceptions exist, wights tend to be either very young or very old Kindred. The most youthful fledglings lack sufficient knowledge of their new natures to ward off the cravings of the Beast, and more than a few elders have so lost touch with the *humanitas* they once knew that they can no longer hold their monstrous natures at bay. While a fledgling wight is certainly dangerous and an undeniable threat to the Masquerade, the forces available to a local prince or sheriff are probably sufficient to bring it down. Should an ancient Cainite fall to the Beast, however, even the mightiest prince may not have the resources to contain the creature.

The elimination of a degenerate Kindred is one of the duties archons look forward to the least. No peaceable resolution is possible, no negotiation can prove effective, and the battle cannot be won by routing the enemy as it can with the Sabbat or even the Lupines. When it comes to dealing with a wight, the battle is over when the creature meets its Final Death. No other resolution will serve. Aside from the sheer carnage such an entity can wreak before it's brought down, the Masquerade must again be considered. Even the Sabbat, who regularly violate the First Tradition in their war with the Camarilla, know better than to rip the veil so wide open that the mortals learn *en masse* of Cainite existence. Wights have no such concern, being nothing but bestial — though hardly mindless! — predators.

Wights tend to be handled by coterie of archons rather than single agents, and almost always from a distance. "Firepower" is the watchword of the night, and you're always going to have a mess to clean up afterward. We usually try to arrange things with local Kindred media contacts *before* undertaking such operations, to ensure suitable cover stories are prepared well in advance as explanations for the inevitable collateral damage, or merely glossed over in favor of more sedate news.

ROGUE ELDERS

Sometimes the Kindred in the highest positions are the ones causing the problems. Some elders have simply decided that the rules and regulations of the Camarilla no longer apply to them. No, I'm not talking about minor infractions; I mean schemes that can damage an entire domain, or the Camarilla, or even the Masquerade itself. Some of these elders predate the sects entirely and refuse to bow to what they view as arbitrary, newfangled notions. Others haven't been stupid enough to turn away from the Camarilla, but their plots and schemes have reached the point where they threaten local stability beyond acceptable levels. Such threats are often outside the capabilities of even the mightiest prince to curtail. What's he to do against an enemy of equal power, who knows the city as well as he does and has just as much local clout? What if the troublemaker is, in fact, the prince himself?

Such things are hardly unheard of. The prince may interpret the Traditions in his own domain, but he's no more *above* the Traditions than anyone else. An unstable prince can destabilize a city or even an entire region, tying up resources, crippling other elders and leaving the gates wide open for a Sabbat crusade, Giovanni expansion or Cathayan invasion. Elders may plot against those who must remain sacrosanct: the justicars, or even the Inner Circle itself. Those Methuselahs guilty of diablerie in their younger nights sometimes find that the blood of kine no longer sustains them, and turn their hunger loose on the Kindred around them.

Archon involvement in these circumstances isn't always physical action. If the rogue is the prince of a city who needs to be overthrown but not necessarily slain, we may never make our presence known. The prince simply wakes one evening to find that her influence in the city government has been partially usurped by someone even more manipulative than she, or that her chief rival for the principedom has somehow come up with a vast network of informants and contacts he didn't have the night before.

For the Storyteller: ...Lest a Beast I Become

Wights are not mindless automatons wandering about with arms outstretched and biting everything they come across. Though they have lost any sense of humanity and sentience, they should be treated like cunning predators, not slobbering zombies. Wights know better than to attack when they're greatly outnumbered. They tend to choose the weakest prey available. They are cunning enough to stalk from the shadows, patiently hunting their next meal until an opportune time to strike presents itself. They are fully capable of using most of the Disciplines they possessed before the Wassail. Disciplines that require detailed thought — Mask of a Thousand Faces, The Spirit's Touch, Telepathy, Dominate or any form of blood magic, for instance — should be denied, but anything else within reason is permitted. A nasty Storyteller might even allow certain Disciplines — Feral Whispers, Celerity or Shape of the Beast, for example — to function better or more cheaply (or just *differently*) due to the wight's closer link with the Beast.

The unleashing of the Beast in a wight alters the creature's emotional responses as well as reaction to pain and outside stimuli. In game terms, a wight *always* enjoys the benefits normally conferred by frenzy (save for the immunity to Rötschreck; see the section on frenzy in **Vampire: The Masquerade** for more details). The wight does not suffer the loss of control normally associated with frenzy, though its bestial nature often causes it to act in a similar fashion.

A wight, like any other predator, is rarely willing to risk death over a meal. Wights will run from an opponent that proves too much of a challenge, though such foes are understandably rare. Thus, the hunt for a wight isn't over the first time the creature is engaged in combat. If it escapes, the hunters will have to seek it all over again, and wights *are* clever enough to learn from experience. Some wights have relearned how to operate simple mechanical devices like doorknobs, window latches and even firearms, though anything more complex than these is outside the creature's capability.

The Storyteller should run a wight like any other dangerous predator cunning, clever and willing to use all of its formidable abilities to either kill or escape from its enemies. If you need inspiration, go rent *The Ghost and the Darkness*. Watch how the lions operate, and mimic them shamelessly. A wight is not something you throw at a weak or unprepared group. Run properly, in fact, a wight can serve as the primary antagonist in a long-running story, despite its apparent inability to comprehend the Byzantine machinations of other Kindred. Imagine, for instance, the sort of terror a wight with a taste for diablerie would generate among the Kindred community of a small or isolated city. "Hunters hunted" takes on a whole new meaning here!

only a fool would believe that such interference on the part of the archons is limited to the "greater good." Justicars and archons, despite rules to the contrary, are no less partisan than other Kindred. Princes have been inconvenienced, weakened and even removed for no better cause than that a justicar or independent-minded archon owed the target's rivals a boon. No sane archon would do such a thing without his superior's consent if there were any chance of being caught, or of destabilizing the city beyond acceptable limits; they may not be willing to completely forego their own agendas, but most aren't willing to put them too far ahead of the Camarilla's interests. Then again, not all archons are wholly sane, and even those who are sometimes make mistakes.

I'm not condoning such things, but you'll have to be aware of them if you're going to survive more than a week.

The same situation often holds true in reverse. Justicars and archons who do support a specific prince — either for personal reasons, obligations of debt and prestation or simply because they feel that she's the best thing for the city — bend the rules on occasion and interfere in order to keep her in power. More than one potential usurper has been put down hard when the threatened prince or primogen suddenly received vast amounts of aid from unanticipated quarters. Such aid often comes with the steepest of prices, of course. A prince who owes her continued reign to an archon finds herself in substantial debt, and God forbid an elder should actually owe a boon to a justicar!

FOREIGN POLICY

Threats from outside the Camarilla, though less frequent than turmoil from within, are often far bloodier affairs. We spend relatively little time battling forces that would see us — or all Kindred, for that matter — wiped from the face of the Earth, but that doesn't make the task any less vital. The Camarilla has enemies everywhere, and the war of the sects rages endlessly. Whatever flaws the Camarilla may have, the sect is vital to our continued existence; our way of unlife depends on it.

Of course, archons don't serve as the Camarilla's only soldiers. Under dire circumstances, we can field an enormous number of Licks. Your common Kindred doesn't have the training or the skills to stand up to a Sabbat crusader or a rabid Lupine, however, and there simply aren't enough archons to stand alone on the battlefield. When open warfare erupts in the modern nights, it frequently means the Camarilla's preferred tactics have already failed.

THE SABBAT

The Bad Guys. Damn near every fledgling, if they learn nothing else, learns this. The Sword of Caine, the Black Hand, a horde of ravaging, psychotic lunatics who practice regular diablerie and would like nothing better than to see the entire Camarilla washed away in a bloody deluge of Biblical proportions. These are our greatest enemies, revelers in violence and blood who will tear us down with no thought for the repercussions unless we crush them first.

Not entirely true, of course, but what do you expect from the world's second-oldest propaganda machine? And anyway, it's not entirely false, either.

The justicars do not throw hordes of archons at every city with a rumored (or even confirmed) Sabbat presence, as much as some might like to do just that. There aren't enough of us to go around, and we're not expendable. The truth is, recent dramatic instances aside, Sabbat crusades fail more often than they succeed, due to the entrenchment of the target city's prince and other Kindred. There's some sense in the upper echelons of the Camarilla that a prince who can't hold his own city against the Black Hand doesn't deserve it anyway, but that attitude costs territory.

We'd like to think we're not expendable, but most of us know better.

Justicars, therefore, carefully select which cities they're going to help defend against Sabbat aggression, based on the resources of the community and its

strategic value. Should the Sabbat make a grab for Madison, Wisconsin, there would probably be little reaction from the Camarilla's highest levels. They don't *want* to see the city fall, and with any luck the prince would be able to hold her own; but if not, resources are needed more urgently elsewhere, and the city can always be retaken later when a more competent elder comes to the fore. Should Houston or the newly taken New York City be threatened — both heavily populated cities that stand as bastions against nearby Sabbat strongholds — some of us would almost certainly be dispatched to help the locals handle the problem. Even small border towns like El Paso can be vital.

This does *not* mean that we show up in units of 20, marching in lockstep and armed with M-16s and sabers. The greatest assistance an archon (or group of archons) can supply a beleaguered prince comes in the form of tactics, resources and knowledge. One of us might impose night-to-night "martial law" over the city's Kindred if she outmatches the prince in strategic planning ability. Perhaps she has information from her justicar and knows precisely who leads the current crusade, meaning she can that specific Cainite for extermination. Maybe she's there to guard the prince himself, though such personal consideration is rare indeed. Yes, she will take the field should the need arise — and quite effectively, more often than not — but that's not likely her primary function.

We're also found in the vanguard of Camarilla strikes on Sabbat territory. The recent taking of New York is a prime example, with one of the fronts being manned by Archon Theo Bell. Marshaling all of the Camarilla's prime advantages, Bell hit the Sabbat in New York from directions they never expected using resources they hadn't anticipated. Between the mortal waves during the day, made up of everyone from police and firemen to sanitation workers, and the war coterie that had been assembled at night, Bell himself was actually involved in only a relatively small proportion of the violence. One extra gun rarely decides a battle; most of our people know this, and normally place themselves in positions of tactical command during military operations.

I don't like Bell. Yes, he's done a lot of good for the Camarilla, and I respect him a great deal.

He's still a self-righteous dick.

Finally, some of us are occasionally sent on deep-cover "fact-finding" operations into Sabbat territory. Trained to handle themselves under extreme duress and usually better informed about

Black Hand practices than most other Camarilla Kindred, such archons have a reasonable success rate in anti-Sabbat espionage.

This is not to say that they have a high success rate. Most Sabbat infiltrators never return.

Some justicars fear to risk their pets in such a manner. Not because they dislike the prospect of losing so skilled an agent — we're expendable, remember? — but because they worry that we may be swept up in the Sabbat's group blood bonds and falter in our loyalties. The justicars — many of whom blood bond their archons, though this is not a universal practice — have heard rumors that these rituals may be able to shatter old loyalties, and prefer to send more expendable, if less knowledgeable, spies into Sabbat ranks.

INDEPENDENT CLANS

Although they pose a far less frequent threat than the Sabbat, the independent Kindred clans are quite capable of causing no end of trouble in Camarilla cities. Again, the prince is expected to be able to handle her own issues, but we do sometimes get called in to help deal with these outsiders.

The Giovanni and Followers of Set both operate in Camarilla cities without much notice from the prince and primogen. Both clans are wise enough to keep their heads down most of the time and avoid attracting hostile attention (which means *all* attention, more often than not). Although we've had occasion to hunt specific criminals of these clans, we've rarely engaged them in any true group vs. group conflict, clan vs. archons. If a large contingent of Necromancers or Serpents abruptly moves into a Camarilla city, the prince may dispatch an agent — or an archon, if he can call in the right favors. Normally, the agent simply makes his presence felt and lets the new arrivals know they're being watched, though smart sheriffs and archons usually take the opportunity to ensure that the newcomers aren't being paid to smuggle Sabbat into the city. Several of the justicars have given their archons contingency plans and tactics to be used should open conflict ever erupt with one of these clans, but so far there has been little need to use them. Yes, I'm fully briefed on at least two such plans. No, I won't tell you about them. Didn't I ask you to shut up?

Save for those given bodyguard duty, we've had, until recently, very little professional contact with — gag — the Assamites. Those who were in a Camarilla city by invitation posed no threat (to the Camarilla, anyway), and those who came to assassinate a



Camarilla target were most often long gone by the time we learned of their presence. This situation has changed drastically in recent nights, with the tentative adoption of a marginalized faction of Assamites into the ranks of the Camarilla. I say again, gag. More on this later.

Surprisingly, we're required to deal with the Ravnos as frequently as any other independent clan, if not more so. Unlike the Giovanni and the Setites, Ravnos often make little effort to keep themselves inconspicuous, and they tend to hang around a given city far longer than any Assamite liaison. They often come across as mere vagrants and thieves, causing their unwilling hosts a great deal of consternation but little real harm — but those hostile to the Camarilla or who hold a grudge against the local Kindred are truly dangerous. Between their powers of illusion and their utter disregard for established rules, the Deceivers make excellent spies, saboteurs and assassins. Although reluctant to do so for the usual reasons of status and reputation, a prince whose normal operatives are less than effective at hunting such a master guerrilla may find herself forced to call on outside aid.

Some of our more bloodthirsty or vicious brethren actually relish the prospect of hunting a rogue Ravnos. The Deceivers' lack of clan cohesion — particularly now, in light of the recent drop in the clan's population — grants these archons the opportunity to really cut loose on a victim with no (or at least few) commensurate risks or political repercussions. Some truly sadistic Camarilla Kindred, including several "bad apple" archons, have harried and even slain Ravnos who were innocent of any wrongdoing, simply because they make easy victims due to their lack of an establishment to back them up. "Easy" is a relative term, however....

Every Lick I've ever put to death was guilty of serious crimes, of course.

LUPINES

Things lurk outside the confines of the cities that even the Kindred do well to fear. Princes who would prefer to lose their thrones to an upstart or their cities to the Sabbat rather than swallow enough pride to call for help show no compunction about screaming like little girls when a pack of werewolves comes to town. These fur-bedecked Cuisinarts make an unfortunate habit of tearing through Kindred like Kleenex, and no one wants to be standing alone — or nearby — when they arrive.

Such occurrences are rare; the Lupines know well enough that the city is "Leech" territory, just as the vampires know better than to set foot outside

the metropolitan area if they can help it. Every now and again, however, the local howlers get a large burr up their collective rear and go tear-assing through downtown, chewing up anyone who smells like a worm, or some such thing. When that happens, the archons are often summoned — and we come loaded for bear. Most of the time, you'll find that the only way to deal with the werewolves is in the way that most Kindred *think* we deal with the Sabbat. In other words, a *great* deal of firepower. Unfortunately, violence of this nature is not so easily explained away, though most mortals seem unable or unwilling to remember the werewolves when they see them, so cleanup is nominally easier than it should be.

I've dealt with Lupines, more than once. They're not animals; they're thinking, planning opponents. Nasty as they are physically, they're often just as smart and just as supernaturally powerful as we are. Forget that, and you're going to wind up very dead.

Sometimes, if you're very lucky, you can even negotiate with them. Just make sure you're standing at least a hundred yards away while you do it.

HUNTERS

What? Mortals? Threatening us? Okay, sure, the occasional super-lucky Van Helsing- or Buffy-wannabe dusts the occasional ignorant Lick, but that's an isolated thing, right?

So goes the prevalent attitude among neonates. Those of us who have faced organized hunters, or who still remember the blazing pyres of the Inquisition are less quick to dismiss the dangers posed by well-prepared — and well-informed — kine. These fears of times long past, coupled with an alarming surge in the number of hunters who show mysterious powers of unknown origin, ensure that those Kindred with any amount of common sense grant these mortal predators the respect they're due.

She's actually taking the hunters seriously. I'm stunned. I've got to lie down.

As archons, we deal with hunters infrequently, unless we happen to be the next vampire selected as a random target. Only in a handful of cases through the years have we, as archons, felt the need to involve ourselves in the, ahem, removal of a hunter. Most of them simply don't achieve a sufficient body count to make them a priority. To date, there have been no confirmed instances of an archon dying at a hunter's hands, though enough

FOR THE STORYTELLER: SMASH IT UP

Vampire can be a game of personal horror all it wants. Occasionally (if it happens more than occasionally, maybe you should rethink your choice of games) you really do just want to whup up on something. In an archon chronicle, Lupines provide the perfect opportunity to do just that, so long as you're willing to let your characters come home bloodied (if they come home at all).

While werewolves make excellent "combat monsters," though, you shouldn't limit their activities to such mundane procedures as "Find. Stomp. Kill. Eat. Lather. Rinse. Repeat." These are intelligent beings — even though they're capable of a rage to make the Kindred's own frenzy look like a temper tantrum — and many of them possess mystical abilities the equal of all but the highest levels of Disciplines. Individual Lupines are just that: individuals. They have their own goals and desires, their own loves and hatreds, their own tactics and techniques. Nobody is surprised to see a blood-drenched werewolf standing in an ankle-deep pool of body parts. They *might* be surprised when the corporate raider who's been cutting the prince's connections off at the knees sprouts fur and fangs when they burst through the door of his corner office.

Even if you are using them primarily for combat, give the Lupines reasons for what they do. Not even werewolves fight without purpose. Don't neglect the potential stories to be told when preparing for such a conflict, either. The search for a source of silver bullets ought to require a hefty amount of effort in its own right, and the werewolves haven't even been engaged yet.

of us have vanished mysteriously over the years that we can't be sure it's never happened.

CROSSED WIRES

The purpose of a bureaucracy, or so it often seems to those on the outside, is to maximize the potential for error while minimizing the potential for actual accomplishment. In simpler terms, mistakes are frequently made in such ponderous organizations because not only does the left hand not know what the right hand is doing, but the ring finger isn't on speaking terms with the thumb.

Add to this a constant personal Jyhad and political infighting between individuals, factions, clans and families, and you have the Camarilla. Now consider that the Camarilla claims six justicars, with no real authority over them. There's always the Inner Circle, but even their clout over the justicars is limited. Each justicar, though presumably doing what she feels is best for the Camarilla, has her own notions and ideas of what must be done, her own personal agenda, her own allies, obligations and responsibilities...

...and, most importantly, her own team of agents.

This lack of a central control causes problems. At times — more often than we're willing to admit — archons find themselves working at cross-purposes. Even by the most conservative estimates, over 50 archons operate in the Camarilla, in service to six different leaders. None of us can claim to have met every other, nor could he likely remember them all by sight if he had. A coterie of archons might work behind the scenes to cripple the resources of a particular elder as a prelude to bringing him down, only to learn that a second coterie has been supplying the target with information, contacts and other intangible support. Sometimes the archons involved never learn of the other party, each simply succeeding or failing at her assigned task, ignorant of her contemporary's involvement. On extremely rare occasions, archons have even ended up on opposite sides of a violent conflict, as the philosophies of one justicar clash headlong against the personal agenda of another.

While the justicars, the archons and the Inner Circle would love to take steps to mitigate this problem, there has been absolutely no consensus on how to accomplish this. The justicars flatly refuse to submit to any sort of review or oversight committee, or to offer regular reports on their archons' activities. Nor is any single justicar anxious to accept "observers," archons loyal to another justicar, into his retinue. As it is, some justicars spy on one another and their archons with almost the same degree of paranoia as they spy on the Camarilla's enemies, switching personnel around continuously in attempts to introduce a mole into a fellow justicar's entourage. As each guards against such attempts with equal suspicion, however, such efforts result in bare trickles of information at best and outright failure (and

possibly even the Final Death of the archon in question) at worst.

So the problems and miscommunications continue, and archons continue to unknowingly expend valuable effort working against one another that could be put to far more productive use.

Would have been nice of Kirsten to mention something of this, wouldn't it?

End transcript

THE RANK AND FILE

Not all archons are created equal. Rank and status are a vital part of what defines an archon in the eyes of his allies, contemporaries and rivals. Some of these titles are official designations, formally recognized by the Camarilla at large. Others exist only in the argot of the archons, tags they've attached to each other (or themselves) to better aid in identification.

JUSTICAR

Not technically a rank of archon, the justicars are the supreme judges, generals and peacekeepers of the Camarilla. Only six exist at any given time, one for each of the Camarilla's primary clans. The duties of the justicar are much the same as those given for the archons who serve them, save that the justicars operate where even the archons have insufficient authority. None but the members of the Inner Circle supersede the justicars in rank, and none may gainsay their decrees. A justicar is, in fact, the only outside Kindred who is capable (formally if not always personally) of setting foot in a prince's domain and giving orders. The elders of the Camarilla often harbor an intense love/hate relationship with these supreme magistrates. They know that the justicars keep the Kindred in line and keep the Camarilla functioning, but each certainly has her own schemes and dealings that are threatened by the justicars' keen and hidden eyes. Fortunately (?), even the justicars find themselves wrapped tight in webs of prestaton, and even their much-vaunted position fails to render them immune to partisan politics and political backbiting.

While a chronicle based around the activities and exploits of a coterie of archons, hands (see below) or some combination of the two can be a great deal of fun, you're probably not going to want to allow players' characters to function as justicars unless you're dealing with a *seriously* high-powered and heavily political elder chronicle. Even if you *do* allow such a thing, it shouldn't turn into an elder slugfest. The justicars

don't wade into combat with fists and bullets flying; that's what their archons are for.

And Then There Were Six

Seven justicars have served throughout most of the Camarilla's history, until Xaviar, Justicar of Clan Gangrel, departed the Ivory Tower along with a preponderance of his clanmates. Only a few scant years have passed since the Camarilla was shaken by the toppling of one of its pillars, but already the Kindred scramble to shore up their weakened ramparts.

A movement — or, more precisely, several movements — to reinstate a seventh justicar is currently making the rounds of Camarilla salons, conclaves and courts. Some Kindred, mostly members of smaller, less represented bloodlines, wish to see an "ex miscellanea" justicar appointed, one whose duties would include watching out for the interests of the Caitiff and the scant few Samedi, Gargoyles, Lasombra *antitribu* and other "minorities" of the Camarilla. While those who support the notion argue with impressive and impassioned vigor, the notion of such a thing actually coming to pass is improbable.

The second movement, and one far more likely to eventually bear fruit, is the push to endow an Assamite justicar. The notion is terrifying to most Kindred, who still tend to think of all Assamites as bloody-minded killers despite rapidly growing evidence to the contrary, and is still many nights away from serious consideration, let alone implementation, by the Inner Circle. Nevertheless, in the face of the Gangrel departure and the recent Sabbat activities in the East, a growing number of voices clamor for a formalization of Assamite ties with the Camarilla. Many of these support the inclusion of the Assassins not out of trust — obviously — but from a "better with us than against us" mentality.

Of all the standing justicars, only Anastasz di Zagreb has spoken openly on the issue, loudly following his clan's party line and denouncing the very notion of an Assamite justicar. The feelings of the other five justicars, whatever they might be, remain their own.

As for the Assamites themselves, they too remain relatively silent on the issue, following the lead of their leader-in-exile. Al-Ashrad, apparently unwilling to rock the boat, has abstained from any formal discussion on the matter — publicly, at least.

PRAETOR

A temporary designation, normally assigned for the duration of a particular operation, praetor is the title bestowed on an archon who has attained

The Justicar's Oath of Station

I, [name], (childe of [sire], childe of [grandsire],)* do swear:

The Camarilla is all, and all are Camarilla. In service and in faith to the Camarilla do I submerge the greatest part of me. Let none, enemy from without or Beast from within, challenge my loyalty. Let none, enemy from without or Beast from within, shatter my faith.

I have no interests that are not the interests of the Camarilla. I have no goals that are not the goals of the Camarilla. I suffer no threat to the Camarilla, from within or from without, Kindred or kine. Any who place their own cause above the Camarilla shall be struck down, and I beg of the Camarilla to strike me down should I advance my cause above its own.

Though I am a childe of [clan], and I represent the interests of the [clan] to the Camarilla, yet I place the good of the Camarilla above even the needs of the [clan]. For without one, the Camarilla survives; but without the Camarilla, none survive.

The friend of the Camarilla is my friend. The ally of the Camarilla is my ally. The Kindred of the Camarilla are my Kindred, unto the end of nights.

The enemy of my Kindred is my enemy. I am relentless in discovering him, implacable in hunting him, merciless in destroying him. Yet I welcome all who confess their malfeasance and seek to mend their ways, for they grant strength to me, and to the Camarilla.

If I shed blood, it is for the Camarilla. If I take life or unlife, it is for the Camarilla. If I die, it is for the Camarilla. Let the Camarilla raise up its mighty fist and strike me down should I violate this sacred trust.

This I swear, by my blood, by my sire's blood, by my unlife and by the unlives of my childer, for so long as the Camarilla honors me to serve.

* The recitation of sire and grandsire is not an ironclad requirement of the oath. Those Kindred who know their lineage and still respect pedigree — that is, the vast majority of those who become justicars — include it. Those who are ignorant of their lineage, or do not wish it known, are not required to speak this portion of the line, though failure to do so is frowned upon by the other justicars and the Inner Circle.

Some justicars require their archons to take a similar oath when they enter service, though the Traditions of the Camarilla itself do not mandate this. Some among the elders believe that the line "by the unlives of my childer" also includes archons; that is, the archons of a justicar found guilty of treason (though such a thing has happened only once) should share in his punishment. This sentiment is strong, but not strong enough that a truly valuable archon couldn't argue his way out of trouble — or at least out of execution — should such an unlikely scenario occur.

a position of leadership over his fellows. The Ventrue note that it is a distinction of their own elaborate system of honorifics, adapted for use by the Camarilla as a whole. Although the "rank," such as it is, doesn't formally stick with the recipient after the relevant endeavor is completed, some archons have indeed borne the honorific long after it was first appended, at least in the minds of their contemporaries. Theo Bell retains the title in the minds of many archons, though the taking of New York is still fresh enough that the designation may or may not last. Others, including the Nosferatu Federico DiPadua, the Brujah Anna Petrova and the Malkavian Rüdiger Kleiss also hold the title informally.

Because she has specifically been given command over an operation by a justicar, a praetor is considered to outrank all other archons. Those who retain the title informally once the mission has ended hold a slightly more ambiguous position. No formal tradition requires other archons to submit to a praetor after his official stint in that position has ended, but serious social consequences might result for those who refuse to do so. The rank of praetor means nothing to anyone outside the archons, and grants the holder no special privilege when dealing with other Kindred. Of course, a praetor of the Ventrue distinction might have something to say should a Kindred choose not to afford her the respect she is due....

In situations where a praetor or project leader has not been formally assigned, the archons involved usually defer to the eldest present, though a younger archon with a better reputation or more specialized knowledge might be chosen instead. Struggles for command over an operation are uncommon, but entire missions can collapse when they do arise.

ARCHON

This is the "standard" designation. It applies to any archon who does not specifically fall into a different rank or category.

SERVIRE

An informal title, a servire is simply an archon's archon. Just as the justicars require agents to go where they cannot and handle tasks to which they can't devote their immediate attention, so too do archons often feel the need for assistants. Servires can be anyone — Kindred, ghoul or even mere kine, though this last is uncommon — and are chosen for a variety of skills and needs. Ghouls serve frequently as servires, and are particularly useful due to the loyalty enforced by the blood bond. An archon investigating the prince of an unfamiliar city might recruit a local coterie as servires so that they can guide him around the area, pass along inside info and, if necessary, watch his back in a firefight. A Nosferatu who is a talented hacker might be "deputized" to assist the archon breaking into the local Giovanni's encrypted files. Becoming a servire doesn't bestow any particular rights or privileges, though some degree of status is implicit with the responsibility, and most servires serve only for the duration of a specific endeavor. Some archons use the same servires regularly, however, building up a set of skilled agents over the course of time. These servires are watched closely, by the archon herself and, eventually, by her justicar superior. Many new archons are chosen from those who have proven their value over the years as servires.

SPECIAL UNITS AND BRANCHES OF SERVICE

Most archons are just archons, if "just" is a word that can reasonably be applied to these Kindred. Like police and military forces the world over, however, some tasks simply cannot be left to the "average" agent. Operations of such a specialized nature require specialized personnel.

These divisions are not large; many of them consist of only a single coterie of archons at any given time, and some cease to exist for years on end. As with the ranks above, some are formal

designations, fully recognized and acknowledged by the Camarilla's political body. Others are informal titles, granted to the archon specialists by their fellows or by other, usually younger, Kindred.

Feel free to create other divisions or departments beyond those listed below, but beware of going overboard. There doesn't need to be a specialized unit of archons for every tiny eventuality that might crop up. For the vast majority of tasks, "normal" archons should prove sufficient.

ALASTORS

Easily the most renowned "branch" of the archons, alastors are those Kindred who hunt the Red List: those criminals, called Anathema, who have made the Camarilla's Most Wanted. Calling the alastors a subset of the archons is not entirely accurate, though the vast majority of alastors are indeed taken from the ranks of the justicars' appointees. Any Kindred who brings one of the Anathema down is automatically recruited as an alastor (with or without her consent), and is expected to devote herself to continuing that practice. Alastors answer personally to the Inner Circle, not to the justicars, and are rumored to serve other purposes besides stalking Red List criminals. Alastors are technically above local princes' interpretations of Traditions and, unlike archons, are given means to prove it: a blood-and-ink tattoo on the right palm, called alternately the Trophy or the Mark of the Beast. This mark, usually hidden beneath a pair of gloves, grants the alastor certain benefits and immunities from local persecution.

The alastors are technically a secret organization, though the secret grows more and more open as time passes. Even though only a select few — justicars, high-ranking archons and praetors, as well as some princes — recognize the mark for what it is, no organization that uses a tattoo for identification can remain entirely hidden. While most Kindred remain ignorant of the exact nature and purpose of the alastors, the existence of a group of archons devoted to hunting Anathema is now widely recognized.

For more on the alastors, the Anathema and the Red List, see the **Guide to the Camarilla**.

DOGCATCHERS

Obviously an informal classification, this designation is attached to those archons who have proven their knowledge of and ability to combat the Lupines. This isn't a simple matter of surviving battle with the werewolves, or even emerging victorious. Dogcatchers (also called the K-9 unit by modern Kindred) make a habit of such practices,

CHAIN OF COMMAND

The justicars clearly outrank every other Kindred in the Camarilla, with the exception of the Inner Circle and possibly (at present) the Warlord Karsh. In theory, as the justicars' proxies, archons should share that exalted position.

Such is rarely the case. As with every other aspect of Camarilla society, politics and status overshadow all other considerations. The archons regularly deal with several specific offices and positions of authority, and they have no hard and fast rules on how to go about it. For more on the interaction between locals and archons, see Chapter Four.

Prince

The prince-archon relationship is nebulous at best. On a theoretical level, the archon speaks with the voice of his justicar, and the prince should acquiesce if she knows what's good for her. In reality, few but the weakest and most harried of princes suffer an archon to march in and start giving orders. Most princes treat archons with no small amount of respect, and will usually take their *suggestions* under advisement. They expect the same in return, however. When they don't receive it (or feel as if they're not receiving it), things can turn ugly.

A prince never wants an archon to leave her city unhappily. The last thing she needs is for the justicar to decide that she's hiding something and thus send *more* archons to investigate — or, Caine forbid, choose to investigate personally. At the same time, a prince who is particularly concerned with appearances (that is, most of them) or a particularly powerful ruler is unlikely to relinquish even a semblance of influence. Most archons are wise enough not to push the issue, and are willing to serve as advisors or field commanders when working in a prince's domain. Those who do push — either because they are operating against the prince, because they feel they are better suited for the job, or simply out of ambition or egotism — occasionally don't leave the city. The risk of angering a justicar by "vanishing" an archon is great, even if the prince can construct a believable cover story, and is likely to result in the arrival of additional investigators, but at least it buys the prince (or other guilty party) some time to hide the evidence.

Primogen

No easy way exists of determining whether or not an archon functionally "outranks" a member of the city's primogen. Such interaction is essentially no different than that between any other two Kindred. Whoever has the greater status is due the greater respect. Again, the archon technically has authority, but most realize that alienating one of the primogen — and possibly, by extension, the local majority of an entire clan — is rarely worth the hassle.

Sheriffs and Scourges

Archons have a substantial amount of contact with Kindred occupying these positions, in much the same way federal agents and local police work together — and often with the same degree (or lack) of mutual admiration. Sheriffs and scourges often feel, correctly or not, that the presence of an archon indicates a failure of some sort on their own part, and sometimes grow resentful. Unlike the situation with prince and primogen, it is quite clear that an archon outranks the local peacekeepers, and a scourge or sheriff who openly flouts an archon's orders is likely to find himself in seriously hot water. It is not unknown for the locals to subtly hinder operations on which they're supposed to be assisting — often at the behest of the prince, should she also be involved in whatever event the archon is investigating. Nor is it completely unheard of for archons to suffer "accidents" in the field when working with reluctant sheriffs, though such attempted backstabbing more commonly results in the sheriff finding himself peeled like an onion and left for the sun.

Sheriffs and scourges cooperate with archons for the most part, simply because it's the most logical policy. Given a choice between disobeying an archon or the prince, however, most of them choose to side with the prince (unless they see a way to advance their own agenda by doing otherwise, of course). The archon may speak for a more powerful master, but the prince is the one they've got to work with and answer to on a nightly basis.



deliberately seeking out those Lupines that infringe on Kindred territory and either "convincing" them to leave or slaying them outright. Archons who fit this description — and they are, for obvious reasons, very few and far between — know far more about werewolf behavior, culture, belief and powers than most, if not all, other Kindred. The dogcatchers often operate as a single coterie, even though they formally serve separate justicars. Despite their unofficial status, word of the dogcatchers' skills has spread far enough that many princes ask for them specifically when requesting assistance in dealing with "wildlife" incursions. The justicars and the Inner Circle are very near to declaring these werewolf specialists a formal and recognized division of archons (though they will presumably establish a more dignified title for the position).

Rumor insists that the dogcatchers hold at least one Lupine prisoner in a hidden haven of some sort. This is supposedly the source of the dogcatchers' detailed knowledge of and familiarity with the Lupines. How the archons managed such a feat, and what methods they could possibly use to keep such a vicious prisoner in check, are details that said whispers conveniently neglect, and few Kindred with a modicum of common sense believe such things.

Then again, those Kindred with substantially more than a modicum of common sense know better than to dismiss anything out of hand....

DOPPELGANGERS

Another informal designation, "doppelganger" refers to a very deep-cover agent. They are all masters of disguise, impersonation and intelligence gathering, both of the mundane variety and through mastery of Disciplines such as Auspex, Dominate, Obfuscate and — in the case of one specific archon, if hearsay is to be believed — Vicissitude. Most doppelgangers have willingly gone through intense indoctrination and mental conditioning to avoid giving themselves away under questioning, torture and even Dominate, and nearly all are blood bound to their justicar to further strengthen their ties of loyalty.

Although doppelgangers are sometimes used to gather intelligence on the Sabbat or other non-Camarilla factions and clans like the Followers of Set, the justicars and the Inner Circle normally prefer to risk less valuable agents than archons in such endeavors. By far the most common operation undertaken by a doppelganger is internal security,

gathering information on the activities of Camarilla Kindred. This most frequently focuses on princes and other elders in positions of authority, though doppelganger presence among anarchs is not unknown. The favored technique of a doppelganger is to observe a particular individual who is already a close ally (or believed to be a close ally) of the Kindred under suspicion. This individual is studied and researched until the archon believes she can pass herself off as that individual, convincingly and under moderately close scrutiny. At this point, the subject is “removed from play” (a euphemism that usually means staked and stuffed into cold storage until the exchange act is complete, though some who were deemed guilty of sufficient wrongdoing against the Camarilla are simply executed), and the doppelganger takes her place. In this fashion, the archon can quickly get close to the true target of the investigation and uncover details that could not be learned through other means. Some of the most successful doppelgangers have spent years in an undercover identity without being exposed.

Even the most well-trained and alert observer cannot learn every detail about a subject, of course — if they could, there would be no need for doppelgangers at all, for they could learn all they needed simply by studying their primary target. Charades of this nature unravel as often as not, even when attempted by the best of the best. For obvious reasons, many other Kindred who have heard of them loathe doppelgangers with a violent passion. A doppelganger whose true identity is exposed had better have one hell of a tight escape plan set up, since the odds are overwhelming she’ll be dead before the night is out.

E DIVISION

The newest classification among the archons, E Division — Enigma — was initiated only within the past several decades at the behest of Karl Schrekt, the former Tremere justicar. (Schrekt was not responsible for naming the division — that honor was granted the younger Kindred who organized and implemented the plan — and was moderately dissatisfied with the chosen title. He’d be even less happy to learn that many of the more flippant neonates refer to E Division as the “X-Files.”) E Division’s *raison d’être* is the investigation of paranormal or unidentified phenomena that may threaten the Camarilla, but fall outside the general experience of the sect. This can include anything from fae or the new breed of “immortal” (about which E Division knows almost nothing) to truly bizarre and possibly unique horrors that lack both precedent and context.

Less focused on combat-related abilities (though still fully capable of holding their own against many opponents), most archons of E Division are investigators and detectives of the highest ability. E Division is made up primarily of young ancillae. They often focus their efforts on amassing a variety of useful skills and abilities rather than specializing in any given area, and make use of modern technology that elder Kindred fear to touch. E Division operatives must be capable of reacting instantly to peculiar or unexpected phenomena, and are rarely given the opportunity to repeat mistakes. Most other archons do not accord E Division much respect, tending to look down on its members as the “babies” of their order. This attitude slowly changes on a nightly basis as the Camarilla discovers that more mysteries are left in the world than even their wisest members had imagined, and many stagnant elders grow thankful that some archons are already prepared to deal with such oddities.

JOSIANS

Named for the Biblical King Josiah, who put an end to the sacrificial worship of the god Moloch in the Vale of Gehenna, the Josians are an order of archons who focus on rooting out the various Gehenna cults that spring up throughout the Camarilla. Recruitment as a Josian demands no prerequisite set of skills, though most are familiar with a fair amount of Noddist lore, the better to uncover those who believe in such things. They are united by purpose, rather than by ability. Standard procedure is for a single agent to slowly work his way into the membership of a Gehenna cult, biding his time until the opportunity arises to catch all (or at least most) of the participants in a single location. At this point the rest of the team is called in to excise the heresy.

To the vast majority of Kindred who know of them — and, indeed, to most within their own ranks — that’s the end of it. The Josians have, however, a hidden purpose, known only to the Inner Circle, the justicars and the eldest and highest-ranked members of the order itself. They do seek out Gehenna cults, but their true purpose is not to halt the spread of such “heretical” beliefs and practices. The leaders of the Josians use the opportunity afforded by these operations to study the lore and the practices of these cults, searching for evidence that *they might be right*. While the Camarilla maintains its disbelief in the Antediluvians and the coming Gehenna when dealing with its own rank and file, those at the highest levels suspect otherwise. Not all believe that Gehenna is imminent (though many who doubted have begun to question their skepticism in

the face of the Week of Nightmares), but all admit the necessity of being prepared. Thus the eldest of the Josians abscond with any true evidence or valuable lore confiscated in their raids on the cults, swiftly passing the materials on to the justicars and the Inner Circle.

The Inner Circle knows full well that the Camarilla would collapse from the bottom up if word spread that the "myths" of Gehenna and the Third Generation might not be so mythical after all, and that the masters of the sect have known it since the beginning. The true purpose of the Josians, therefore, is one of the most closely guarded secrets of the Camarilla, and the mere hint that someone might have been loose-lipped has occasionally resulted in mass assassinations.

QUAESITORS

Unique among the factions of archons, the Quaesitors are a single-clan (or at least very nearly single-clan) group. Made up mostly of Tremere thaumaturges, the Quaesitors serve the Camarilla as roving judges, mediators and tacticians in all matters magical. Their forte lies in dealing with Sabbat *koldun* and Setite sorcerers, mortal mages and even rogue Tremere within the Camarilla's own ranks.

If any group of archons is less trusted than the doppelgangers, it is the Quaesitors. Few among the Kindred believe that these Warlocks have truly placed the good of the Camarilla above their own objectives and those of their clan. Some vampires maintain that the Quaesitors' true purpose is to hunt down and destroy all non-Tremere thaumaturges. Even the name "Quaesitor" comes from the Tremere, having been both the name of a now-defunct secret society within the clan and that of a House of Hermetic mages centuries before that.

As the Quaesitors often stand alone while holding the line against sorcerous threats, the justicars are taking steps to make the group seem more trustworthy to other Kindred. Quaesitors only rarely serve under the Tremere Anastasz di Zagreb, and the justicars require them to submit to blood bonds more frequently than other archons. The justicars are also attempting to increase the non-Tremere presence in the faction, but as a Quaesitor is required, by definition, to possess a mastery of blood magic, these efforts have so far proven largely difficult. Those few blood sorcerers in the Camarilla who aren't Tremere are unwilling to put their unives in the hands of companions who see them as little more than rivals.



PERSONNEL

Partial transcript of a briefing given to new "recruits" by Archon Kirsten Bellamy of Clan Toreador; handwritten comments added after the fact by Archon Zachariah Shale of Clan Tremere

It takes a very special sort of Kindred to become — and succeed as — an archon. It's a vicious, dangerous task. The best rise to the top, often by climbing over the bodies of their predecessors who weren't quite good enough. This is the unlife you've opted for: to serve the Camarilla in ways that your brethren are too weak or too cowardly to do, and to put the good and the glory of the sect above your own petty needs. I commend you for having the courage to choose this path, though it remains to be seen if you'll have the skill, the fortitude and the will to follow it.

You represent the epitome of what it means to be Kindred. You have all been chosen, for whatever reasons, to stand beside the justicars and your fellow archons and bring order and stability to

a society that doesn't always desire it. You have recognized, as I did, that the Camarilla must survive, and must flourish, if we are to survive these tumultuous nights.

Pull the other one, Kirsten. It plays Mozart.

No single or specific type of Kindred becomes (or seeks to become) an archon. Unless they've instituted a policy of cloning while I wasn't watching, we're all individuals, just like everyone else. This means we've all got our own reasons for "enlisting." Still, most archons and potential archons can be broken down into four basic types. Listing these primary "reasons" for becoming an archon is pretty close to an exercise in futility, but it provides a good starting point for you to analyze your compatriots.

Some of us actually do believe the patriotic, jingoistic ya-ya Kirsten's spouting. These Kindred believe to the depths of their souls that the Camarilla represents the ultimate good for all

WHO WATCHES THE WATCHMEN?

A seventh division supposedly exists, heard of only in rumor and spoken of only in the softest whispers. These archons answer to no justicar but, like the alastors, serve the Inner Circle directly. They have no fixed appearance or identifiable characteristics; they bear no "Mark of the Beast" to show who they serve. They can be any Kindred on the street, from the skankiest nightclub-hopping Brujah to the Toreador supposedly enraptured by that garish painting at tonight's Elysium. You'll never know they're around — unless you step too far out of line. Then you won't be around either.

They are eyes, the Inner Circle's internal affairs division. Emissaries of the Inner Circle recruit each individually; some are drawn from the ranks of the archons, some from other positions such as sheriff or scourge, and some held no official capacity before they were summoned to serve.

Despite the fearful whispers of the neonates, and even paranoid ancillae and elders, eyes (the term is singular when referring to the bureau as a whole) has no real interest in the activities of the average Kindred. They don't police the streets to prevent breaches of the Masquerade, nor do they battle the Sabbat or bring down scheming elders. That's what sheriffs and archons are for. Eyes polices the archons themselves.

Archons go bad sometimes. Power corrupts, and Kindred are more susceptible to such enticements than most mortals. Eyes keeps a careful watch over the Camarilla's peacekeepers, waiting for the slightest flicker of disloyalty. Should one of the justicars' agents — or even a justicar himself — have to be brought down, eyes is responsible for doing it.

Even in action, eyes stays in the shadows. Skilled at assassination, sabotage and the fatal set-up, open conflict in the streets is not their way. Chances are that no one knows it when they *do* involve themselves. The traitorous archon simply vanishes under mysterious circumstances, or else runs up against a Sabbat pack or den of Lupines just a bit larger than he was led to believe.

This doesn't mean that archons simply drop dead if they try to pursue their own agendas; the Inner Circle isn't foolish enough to expect *any* Kindred to completely ignore her own ambitions. Only if the archon's actions prove dangerous to the Camarilla as a whole — if, for instance, she's sold out to the Sabbat or has been compromised by the Setites — is eyes likely to step in. Nor can even a secretive force like eyes be everywhere at once.

Nevertheless, even for archons, it pays to remember that there's *always* someone bigger. Someone who watches....



Kindred, and must be protected from all threats, internal and external, foreign and domestic. For all I scoff at them, these fanatics often make the best archons, at least when they're willing to think for themselves. Others buy into the mentality so deeply that they can't blink without written permission in triplicate from their justicar. Those don't tend to last out their first year, and that's the sort I'm afraid Kirsten's closed-minded diatribe is most likely to create.

The second sort become archons for the same reason other Kindred become sheriffs, seneschals, primogen or princes: power. Few positions of authority in the Camarilla have as much leeway as that of archon, and there are fewer still that ancillae and young elders can reasonably hope to achieve. Don't assume that means archons of this type are bad at what they do. Most know that if they want to maintain their rank, let alone achieve more, they've got to hold up their end. These can be the most relentless archons, in fact, since they're more concerned with racking up successes than they are with following the finer points of the Traditions.

Bullies and thugs make up the third grouping. These Kindred like to hit things and make them die. Now, if some random Lick does that to some other random Lick on the streets, it causes problems. In addition to drawing attention, it may violate some silly edict the prince or sheriff established in order to (gasp!) keep order. The risk of running into someone who's bigger and meaner than you are is something to consider, as well. If you're an archon, though, you're not only allowed to do this sort of thing, it's encouraged (so long as you're pounding the right heads). You've even got a group of other bruisers to back you up if you bite off more than you can suck. I don't know which is sadder: the thought that this is actually a viable reason for people to become "cops," or the fact that the Camarilla rewards them to do it.

Then we have those of us who can see that the emperor has no clothes, but are willing to acknowledge that he's still the emperor. Ve... er, they, realize the Camarilla has more than its share of flaws, that the Ivory Tower is cracked and twisted, but also that it's a far better alternative than anything else the Kindred have cooked up in thousands of years. If anything, these archons fight even harder for the Camarilla than do the fanatics mentioned above, since they know that the sect teeters on an abyss the

militants are unwilling or unable to see. On the other hand, they're less likely to forego their own personal agendas in the process; no reason not to pad one's bets, yes?

CLANS

Even though some Kindred pedigrees are clearly superior to others, the Camarilla has not yet established any restrictions regarding the acceptance or rejection of archons based on clan. I suppose that, if one is going to permit every clan its own justicar, one must permit archons as well, though I can't fathom why the Inner Circle tolerates some of these... people.

Still, each clan brings its own advantages (and shortcomings) to the position. These are all heavily based upon stereotypes and similar assumptions, of course, but I imagine this will at least give you an idea of what to expect from your coterie.

We'll pretend not to notice that the hypocrite maintains with one breath that certain "pedigrees" should be restricted from holding the position of archon, and in the next warns her audience against putting too much stock in clan stereotypes. Or that some of those pedigrees got where they are tonight by murdering others. We're generous that way.

I imagine I ought to do this alphabetically, if only for clarity's sake. That starts us with the Brujah.

What should I say about the Brujah that you don't already know? I don't believe anyone's taken a formal census, but I'd not be surprised to learn that more archons claim descent from the Brujah than any other lineage. They're some of the best soldiers we have. A lot of them are stronger than your average ox, and they're almost as fast as we are. Not necessarily the best when it comes to planning, but few Kindred are better at implementation. I wouldn't volunteer to follow their orders, but you could do worse than to have several of them standing beside (or before) you when the lead and the fists start flying.

What a crock. Yes, we've all met the "street punk" Brujah, the sort who enjoy nothing so much as beating their enemies — or their own heads, if you get them pissed enough — against brick walls. They're a minority of the clan, though, and definitely a minority of Brujah archons. Much as I hate to hold him up as a positive example of anything, I'm forced to once again mention Theo Bell, who not only led the assault on New York but planned much of it out as well. Their favored

Disciplines are no hindrance in battle either. Although her assessment is pathetically naive in its details, Kirsten's ultimate conclusion is fairly accurate: the Brujah are a good bunch to have at your side, and a bad lot to be facing off against unless you're behind something very solid.

Due to, ahem, recent reorganizations of Camarilla positions, the Malkavians come next in the list. The very notion of Malkavian archons makes me shudder, and I can only assume it was members of that same clan who pushed to allow such a thing, since no one else would be crazy enough. The best thing I can say about Malkavian archons is that they aren't common, so you shouldn't have to deal with them often.

While it's true that proportionally few archons are Malkavians, claiming that clan members are automatically unable to function in the role is ludicrous. Plenty of Malkavians are adequately functional (at least in all ways that matter), and as determined to fight for the Camarilla as anyone else. A Malkavian agent actually brings several advantages to an operation. The so-called Lunatics are nearly as good at sneaking about as the Nosferatu, and aren't quite as obvious when spotted. That, in combination with their Auspex and their rather horrific mental abilities, makes them amazing spies and gatherers of information. They're unpredictable, which can cause problems for their allies as well as their enemies, but you take what advantages you can find. Perhaps their greatest strength, though, is the one that Kirsten has unintentionally hit upon in her foolish tirade — nobody expects a Malkavian to be an archon. Assuming their mental quirks don't interfere, a Malkavian can stay undercover far longer than anyone else no matter how skilled, simply because no one ever suspects them of being a "cop."

I must acknowledge that the Nosferatu have their uses. The Sewer Rats have means of acquiring information that astound even those of us who know to expect it, and they're no slouches when it comes to fisticuffs either. One could even make a case that Nosferatu agents and archons are directly responsible for many of the Camarilla's victories over its foes, bringing us vital intelligence that would otherwise have been impossible to acquire.

Now if only they could be convinced to restrict their presence to the sewers and enemy territory, and not the conclaves and Elysium, I think everyone would be happy.

Someone's not taking her own advice. She's talking about a clan that has mastered the arts of sneaking and eavesdropping, and that can even send their pet rodents to listen in on a conversation and report back. Perhaps, then, Kirsten ought be a bit more circumspect when explaining how she feels about the Nosteratu. Who do you suppose gave me this transcript in the first place?

The ironic thing is that the Rats have developed such a reputation as informants-for-hire that they don't even have to sneak to learn what they need. There's this neat little trick I've seen Gracie Velasquez pull more than once. She's actually walked up to her quarry (or his underlings), obvious as you please, and told him something like, "Ve understand you've got something working under the table. I may be able to help you — for a price." Most Kindred can't tell one fugly from another, so they all tend to assume she's a local, out to make a buck or a boon in standard Nosteratu fashion. No one's yet spilled their entire scheme, but you can pick up a lot by listening to the questions they ask — or avoid — when trying to purchase information to aid their cause.

Some people are surprised to learn that the Toreador make up a substantial number of the Camarilla's archons. I can't imagine why. We, of all clans, have the most vested interest in the peaceful coexistence of Kindred and kine, and it is this way of life (or unlife) that bloodthirsty heathens like the Sabbat would destroy. Is it any surprise that so many of us turn our not-inconsiderable talents toward the protection of this greatest of social constructs?

It would be the height of arrogance to claim that we make the best archons, and I'm certainly more than willing to acknowledge the contributions of others. The Toreador do bring benefits to the archons, however, that no other clan can boast. We, even more than the Ventrue, have substantial contact and influence in mortal society. As the taking of New York so eloquently demonstrated, the teeming masses of kine make powerful weapons, to say nothing of informants. They are our keepers in many ways, for it is their society in which we must dwell — and, of course, their blood on which we feed. The Kindred who most easily moves among the kine has, by definition, all tactical advantage. Our speed makes us deadly in physical combat, our Auspex proves invaluable for scouting and investigation, and our use of Presence allows us mastery of social arenas.

You blithering, self-aggrandizing muckraker.

Don't get me wrong, every benefit Kirsten mentions is viable enough. My amusement stems from the fact that she's made absolutely certain to leave no advantage unturned when it comes to the Toreador, yet she barely touches on the positive attributes of the other clans.

She also hasn't mentioned that the Toreador propensity toward sudden fascination can prove a hindrance on the battlefield. Odds are that Toreador archons aren't going to find anything "beautiful" in the midst of combat, and most of them have sufficient will to avoid succumbing to their bloodline's affliction. Still, you don't want the Toreador to be guarding your back when circumstances conspire to render him catatonic.

I'm not entirely certain what to say about the Tremere archons. On the one hand, they're abominably effective at what they do. That Thaumaturgy mumbo-jumbo they do is scary as all hell, but it's a lot scarier to whoever it's aimed at. You'll find very few contingencies a Warlock can't get you out of — if he's got the time to prepare.

On the other hand, they're not nearly as effective in the midst of a firefight or an unanticipated conflict, since so much of what they do requires all sorts of chanting and symbols and burned feathers and funny clothes. They're a creepy bunch, make no mistake. More importantly, I'm never entirely certain how far I can trust one of the Tremere, archon or no. The clan is way too insular, and too fanatical about loyalty to their "Council of Seven" for my tastes. It's hard to work with someone when you can't be certain they've got your best interests — or those of the Camarilla — at heart.

How little she knows of us. While our rituals are rather time-consuming, it's not as though they're the only form our magic takes. Like any Discipline, Thaumaturgy is as effective in combat — or ineffective — as the practitioner. Nor is it the only Discipline we have to draw on, no matter that it's all we're known for.

She has some valid points, though. A lot of archons are less than thrilled to work with me because of such a trifling matter as whose blood passed my lips at the time of death. It's silly, but it means that our uses are often limited. Tremere archons rarely serve as praetors or coterie leaders, and often find themselves relegated to advisory positions or sorcerous "heavy artillery."

Ve are, of course, fully as loyal to the Camarilla as any other archons, and anyone who tries to tell you differently is lying her obnoxious ass off.

We come, finally, to the Blue Bloods. The Ventrue like to think that they run the entire show — and they do, to the extent that the other clans allow them to shoulder the burdens we can't be bothered with — so it should come as no great shock that a pretty good number of them serve as archons. Ventrue can be surprisingly effective on the battlefield, since they can take a pounding like you wouldn't believe, but their main strength lies in organization. Planners and plotters extraordinaire, the Ventrue have almost as much pull amongst the kine as the Toreador. Kings and diplomats, the Ventrue are often the most effective archons at dealing with Kindred in positions of power such as local princes.

Kirsten has, for a change, roughly covered the bases. Ventrue archons often prefer to serve in

FOR THE STORYTELLER: FAMILY TIES

Every once in a while, someone — be it a player of the game or a character in it — brings up the notion of “clan-matching” justicars and their archons. That is, Brujah archons with Pascek, Ventrue with Lucinde, and so forth.

While this consideration seems logical at face value, don't feel the need to be limited by it. To the Kindred, restricting a justicar to archons of her own clan is no more logical than for a police captain to work only with officers of his own race or religion. The Camarilla didn't actively decide against such a policy so much as never considered it. Justicars choose their archons based on ability; any other restriction causes problems and weakens the Camarilla as a whole.

Exceptions, of course, have occurred over the course of history. Some justicars have indeed chosen their archons from the ranks of a specific clan — or, more commonly, deliberately avoided archons of a specific clan. This is an individual choice, however, and does not represent any sort of cohesive policy on the part of the Camarilla or the Inner Circle. Justicars who show a marked preference for archons of their own clan tend to be mistrusted (why limit their options so severely if they don't have some outside agenda?), and rarely find themselves reelected at the end of their thirteen-year term.

leadership positions — which is not a bad thing, since many of them have an undeniable skill at command. About the only downside I've seen to working with Ventrue archons — other than the assumption that they call the shots for the coterie — is the occasional danger of finding yourself in the field with a starving Ventrue who can't locate a store of his blood of choice. I've seen it happen, and it's not fun to be around.

I find it distressing that Kirsten fails to elaborate further on the clans and bloodlines. While the Camarilla's six primary clans certainly account for the majority of archons, they are hardly the only ones who serve.

Until the unfortunate departure of the Gangrel — and no matter what spin-control our superiors may put on the matter, it is unfortunate — the outlanders made up a substantial portion of our forces. Travel from city to city, see the world, work alone or in small groups, tear the ever-loving crap out of people; is it any wonder the role of archon appealed to so many Gangrel? Since Xavier threw his tantrum and stormed off, his clan's presence in our ranks has diminished dramatically. Some Gangrel remain in the Camarilla: those who had the brains not to mindlessly follow their brethren. They are distrusted, looked down on, mocked. Still, some of them serve the justicars as they did before this whole fiasco began, and they are, to all evidence I can acquire, just as faithful as ever.

Some of the Gangrel archons who left were privy to certain information to which no one outside the ranks of the archons — let alone outside the Camarilla — should have access. Suffice it to say that these particular Gangrel may have left the Camarilla, but we've quite thoroughly ensured that they didn't go running to the Sabbat. Sometimes I hate this job.

Other Kindred claim membership in the Camarilla as well, though they are often overlooked. Many of the so-called independent clans and bloodlines have representatives in our ranks. Again, I have no knowledge of any formal count, but I know that Lithrac, with whom I've worked in the past, is one of at least two or three Samedi archons employed by the justicars. I imagine that Kirsten, given her unfortunate prejudices regarding the Nosferatu, would quite probably have a fit of some sort if she was forced to work with one of these less-than-cohesive archons. I'd pay to see that. Accuracy

forces me to mention that the Gargoyles also have representatives among us, though I'd be shocked if there were more than two or three of them either, and I question their ability to serve in any capacity other than muscle.

Madam Guil once employed a Setite among her retinue, hideous as the thought might be. I've no way of knowing if he works for her still, since I have little enough to do with her on a regular basis. I can only hope that she's seen the danger in such an arrangement and taken steps. Everything ignorant Kindred say about trusting a Tremere as an archon is true when spoken about the Serpents.

I have even worked alongside one young(-looking) woman who may have been one of the so-called Lasombra antitribu. She was certainly capable of all sorts of interesting tricks with the ambient shadows. If she is Lasombra, she is the only one to hold the position of archon... to my knowledge, anyway.

If any of the other clans and bloodlines — Ravnos, for instance, or that strange little singing clan — serve as archons, I've never had the opportunity to meet them. No self-respecting justicar would ever permit one of the clanless to serve her, but I suspect that some of them have shed their self-respect, since I'm starting to hear rumors about Caitiff archons.

oh, yes. There's always...

THE ASSAMITE EQUATION

By now you've all heard at least some of the rumors. "The Assamites have joined the Camarilla!" "The Camarilla has allied with the Assamites against the Sabbat!" "The Assamites have conquered the Camarilla!"

No. What has happened, as best I can determine, is that a faction of Assamites — they call themselves "schismatic" — have abandoned the fold and sought refuge in the Ivory Tower. After a substantial amount of debate and consideration, such refuge has been granted, at least on a provisional basis.

For the record, I believe this is one of the most dangerous notions the Inner Circle has ever pursued.

That said, I am forced to admit that these so-called Assassins have surprised me. It seems there's far more to them — well, to some of them — than mindless blood-thirst and violence. I have recently met political- and corporate-minded Assamites to give any Wentrue a run for his money, and I have been introduced to blood sorcerers who, while probably

inferior to Tremere thaumaturges, nevertheless show a startling amount of promise and power.

oh, we got the ravening psychopaths too. I was just saying that they're not all we got.

These Assamites, for all that they cannot be trusted, represent an opportunity too valuable for the justicars to ignore. Even before the schism, Assamite archons were not unheard of. Justicars have, in the past, employed the Assassins as archons to undertake tasks that the justicar's other agents were either unable or ill-suited to perform. Such arrangements were usually short-term, bought and paid for in the same fashion as any other Assamite contract.

Tonight, with the schismatic Assamites apparently desperate to prove their loyalty, this system changes. All sorts of Assamites — blood sorcerers, warriors and so-called viziers — have volunteered or been selected to take on the role of archon without the standard demand for payment in blood. They are behaving just as would any other Kindred of the Camarilla who felt the call to serve. At least three of the six justicars have already accepted Assamites into their service, and their operational record — what little exists of it so far — has been phenomenal. Unless something changes, it looks like the Assamites, and therefore Assamite archons, are here to stay.

I still don't trust them, though.

End transcript

CONFLICTS OF INTEREST

A concern shared by all archons, the justicars and even the Inner Circle itself: how can you trust a Cainite, an inherently self-serving creature, to put the good of the sect above his own? How do you ensure loyalty?

Some justicars make a practice of blood bonding their archons, but this approach doesn't always work. First and foremost, a large number of potential archons are simply unwilling to submit themselves to thralldom. The justicars could reject such candidates out of hand, but this would seriously deplete the talent pool from which they draw. All too often, the sort of Kindred the justicar requires for the job is exactly the sort of Kindred most likely to refuse a blood bond.

Even should a justicar's archons willingly submit to thralldom, these bonds are notoriously difficult to maintain. Most archons spend a great deal of time traveling the world, troubleshooting and keeping the peace throughout Camarilla territory. While some archons travel with their justicars

on a regular basis (as is the case with much of Madam Guil's entourage), most of them go for months or even years without ever seeing their justicar. Blood bonds weaken over time, and archons tend to be relatively strong-willed, circumstances that conspire to make blood bonding an archon an unreliable proposition at best.

Some justicars have taken to regularly questioning their archons under Aura Perception, Bone of Lies and other lie-detecting Disciplines. This sort of interrogation often results in resentment on the part of those questioned, however, and particularly savvy Kindred know ways of getting around even these techniques.

The truth of the matter is that most archons really are loyal to the Camarilla. It's the precise *definition* of that loyalty that causes most internal conflict.

Is an archon who spends her free time scheming for her own advancement guilty of any real wrongdoing? How does it harm the Camarilla for an archon to advance her own cause in the games of politics and prestatation played by other elders? What if an archon truly believes that the best thing for the Camarilla is for the Tremere to rise to unquestioned dominance over the sect, or for the schismatic Assamites to be driven from the Ivory Tower before they've had the chance to develop a real foothold? If one archon cedes territory to the Sabbat in order to fall back and plan a more viable defense, but another insists on shedding blood for each square inch of domain gained, is one more loyal to the Camarilla than the other?

Archons are individuals. The Storyteller should never feel constrained to make every archon a "good little soldier," following orders and spouting rigid "for the good of the sect!" doggerel. Entire stories, even entire chronicles, can be set up around the conflicts of interest faced by even the staunchest of archons. Let the characters advance their own agendas when they aren't "on duty," only to find that the boon they owe is being called in — and what they're being asked is entirely inappropriate for an archon. Maybe they've been caught between what they know is the best solution to a problem and the conflicting orders of a distant justicar who can't be bothered to examine the situation first-hand. Perhaps they're even trapped between *two* of the Camarilla's judges. Do they obey their own superior or the justicar who happens to be present at the time?

Self versus sect. Clan versus clan. Clan versus sect. Archon versus archon. Archon versus justicar. Any or all of these make for a rich storytelling experience, and there never has to be an identifiable "bad guy."

EX-ARCHONS

Archon is not an unlife-long title. New justicars usually dismiss their predecessors' agents, either because they have others they prefer to work with or out of a paranoid fear of lingering hostilities or spies. Other archons simply tire of the position and request permission to resign. While some justicars have refused requests to retire, few wish to risk the repercussions of forcing Kindred into service. Better to find a new archon, even if he's not as skilled or experienced, than to chance a disgruntled agent acting out and causing more problems than she solves.

Some archons, such as Lucinde, leave the post only when they're promoted out of it. Almost half of the justicars who have served the Camarilla over the centuries have been drawn from the ranks of the archons. This held true even in the years before the position of archon was formally acknowledged. Rumor states that at least one current member of the Inner Circle was an archon. Then again, listen hard enough and you'll also hear rumors that the Inner Circle are all Methuselahs, diablerists, Inconnu, demons and even aliens, so take it for whatever it's worth.

What many retired archons learn, unfortunately, is that their former position still imposes a significant number of responsibilities and causes more than a few problems, without granting the ex-archon any mitigating privileges.

Justicars, princes and other officials often expect former archons to step up and resume some burden of responsibility in emergency situations. "The Sabbat has begun a crusade against my city? Well, that's not a problem. Peter here was an archon! He knows how to deal with this sort of thing, don't you, Pete?" The justicars are unlikely to forget who served them (or their predecessors), and while an ex-archon isn't formally required to obey a summons to assist a current archon or justicar, the social repercussions for refusing a call to service can be severe.

The flip side of the coin is that many ex-archons are met wherever they go by a veritable tidal wave of hatred and suspicion. Justicars and other archons keep their eyes on their former comrades, alert for the first hint of disloyalty or "untoward" ambition. After all, there must be *some* reason they were dismissed from service (or chose to retire). Can't trust them, obviously; they're up to something.

Other, local figures such as princes and sheriffs but also including any random Kindred off the street, mistrust former archons for exactly the opposite reason. Who's to say that they've *really* left the service, hmm?

Maybe they're still archons, working undercover. Better not say anything, just in case.

(This is still preferable to the alternative. Several ex-archons have been severely injured, or even killed, in retaliation for things they'd done back when they were archons. No matter how tough they may be individually, they become much easier targets when they no longer have the entire Camarilla backing them up.)

Most ex-archons find their best option is to completely conceal their former position from those around them. This isn't necessarily all that difficult. Unless he happened to be an alastor (and it's questionable whether they're ever allowed to retire), most archons don't have any distinguishing marks on their persons. Princes and sheriffs don't have access to a computer database of former archons, and most archons aren't so well known that anyone's likely to know them by sight. Still, it only takes one chance encounter or one misspoken word to blow an ex-archon's past wide open. Most of those who retire from the justicars' service become reclusive, paranoid figures, even compared to other Kindred. This isn't universal, and some few have even managed to turn their former profession into a selling point to acquire other local positions (more than a few sheriffs and scourges of the largest cities are ex-archons, and the politics make for savvy primogen). Still, it's common enough that many archons who consider retiring take a good look at the alternatives, and elect to remain in service.

ACROSS THE YEARS

Partial transcript of a briefing given new "recruits" by Archon Kirsten Bellamy of Clan Toreador; handwritten comments added after the fact by Archon Zachariah Shale of Clan Tremere

ANCIENT HISTORY

If you would be fully prepared to deal with what is to come, you must be familiar with what has gone before. As archons, we are the bearers of a proud tradition, one as ancient and as revered as the Camarilla itself. You must understand that tradition, our history — and the history of those we serve, the justicars and the Inner Circle.

The title "archon" actually comes from ancient Greece; Athens, to be precise. The list of archons can be dated back to 682 BC, when a group of nine magistrates first assumed executive and judicial power that had formerly been held by a single king. Sounds more like a proper title for the

position we now call "justicar," or maybe even a member of the Inner Circle, doesn't it? I can't honestly say why the title of archon was chosen for the position you and I now hold, though I'm willing to bet it was one of those so-called idealistic Brujah who suggested the term.

Kirsten utterly dismisses a small but relatively important historical footnote with a wave of her hand. I'll be generous and assume the lie by omission is due to ignorance on her part, rather than deliberate dishonesty (mostly since she's got nothing to gain by hiding the truth).

The term archon, even as applied to Kindred, actually predates the Camarilla entirely, though the meaning has changed. During the Middle Ages, well before the birth of either of the modern sects, an organization of Cainites called themselves Prometheans. Made up largely of Brujah who were still all lathered up about the fall of "great" Carthage, the stated goal of the Prometheans was the recreation of a utopia in which Kindred and mortal could dwell together in peace.

Yeah, I know. But they believed it.

The sect had multiple unstated goals too, of course. One of them was to bring down most of their elders — particularly the Inconnu (apparently, they were around back then). The Prometheans believed, correctly or not, that the Inconnu consisted largely of elder Cainites who had pulled the strings of the Roman Empire and were, in fact, responsible for the fall of Carthage (which, to hear the Prometheans speak of it, was a tragedy second only to the expulsion from Eden).

Now the Inconnu had a nasty habit of knowing (or at least seeming to know) everything that went on, everywhere. Some of the more paranoid Prometheans began to suspect almost everybody of being an agent of the Inconnu. The problem became, how to warn your fellow Prometheans of a suspected plant? If the Inconnu agent overheard you or somehow learned you were on to him, he'd just disappear and be replaced by someone else — and you'd be marked as a Kindred who "knew too much." (Again, this may all have been paranoia on the part of the Prometheans. I haven't been able to determine if the Inconnu really gave a rat's ass about them or not.)

For whatever reason, the Prometheans settled on the term archon as a code word. It was originally used to refer to a suspected Inconnu agent, but it grew over time to refer to any servant of an elder Lick



who was (or might have been) working against Promethean interests.

The use of the term archon by the Prometheans lasted for a few hundred years at most. I don't know why they stopped using it, although I suspect the term had become so commonly known that it was no longer valid as a secret code word. Whatever the case, it seems likely to me that some of the Kindred involved in the founding of the Camarilla had either been Prometheans themselves, or had been in contact with those who were. Our use of the term archon is probably some elder's twisted notion of ironic humor; I've addressed this a bit more below.

It's always possible, I suppose, that the use of the term by both sects is coincidental, but what are the odds of that?

CONCEPTION

The Camarilla didn't spring up overnight. We're talking about the single largest social construct that the Kindred have ever created. Years upon years went into the planning and evolution of the Camarilla; if anything, it's a wonder it happened as quickly as it did.

Although certain powerful Cainites had made previous attempts at forming local alliances that

would bring disparate princes and lords together into a single cohesive body, it required a common enemy before more than a handful of elders were willing even to consider such a radical concept as a formalized Kindred social order. Many Kindred who have studied Camarilla history already know that those who would become the Founders first drew together in order to plan a defense against the violent uprisings of younger Kindred, frustrated with a shortage of domains and their lack of advancement in Cainite society. What you may not already know is that the Founders had their own archons — though they didn't call them that — carrying out their agendas well before the Camarilla was officially founded in 1435.

In 1335 or thereabouts, the anarch Tyler launched an attack on Hardestadt, an elder Ventruue who would go on to become one of the primary forces behind the creation of the Camarilla. He and the other Founders, inspired to greater efforts by the eloquence of the Toreador Rafael de Corazon, had spent the previous year in the early stages of planning their new alliance. After Tyler's futile but frightening assault, the Founders-to-be realized that they needed a unified force to resist the increasingly violent tactics of the anarchs. True, each had his or

her own childer, ghouls and agents, but that obviously wasn't sufficient. They were going to have to coordinate their efforts and work together if they were to survive long enough to convince *others* to coordinate and work together.

While they never gave this "task force" a formal title (since there was yet no official organization to which they belonged), I am given to understand that the Founders privately referred to their soldiers as "myrmidons," after the soldiers who followed Achilles in the Trojan War (here we see another Greek connection; interesting). These myrmidons were drawn from the ranks of the Founders' own elite childer, and were commanded jointly by the seven elders. They were responsible for protecting the Founders whenever they met to further discuss their plans and objectives; but more than that, they were regularly dispatched on missions of terror and assassination, their targets the most well-known anarchs. No fewer than four attempts were made on the unlife of Tyler herself. While some astonishing luck on Tyler's part rendered all four attempts failures, the myrmidons had more success with other anarch leaders.

Don't believe a word of it. Someone like Tyler doesn't survive long with so many enemies if she relies on luck.

There's a reason you don't hear about these "pre-archons" tonight. The myrmidons were a good idea, but the Founders were still getting their feet wet in terms of this whole notion of cooperation, and things were executed very poorly. For all their supposed unity, the myrmidons were still very much creatures of disparate loyalties. They were encouraged to watch out for their sire's best interests above and beyond the needs of the group, they were given conflicting orders and they were often mired in old grudges and political conflicts that should have been left behind when the Founders first sat down around the same table. If the anarchists had ever learned how truly disorganized the myrmidons were, they'd have swept over a meeting of the Founders like a tsunami and Kindred history would look very different. If the myrmidons proved successful at anything, it was by providing a negative example. By examining their failures with the myrmidons, the Founders and other early Camarilla authorities learned some valuable lessons in how not to organize the institution that would eventually become the office of archon.

The last mention history makes of the myrmidons is 1435, immediately before the Founders

formally announced the Camarilla for all the Kindred to consider. As suspicious as all Cainites were of one another, the Founders knew that they had to step softly and carefully coax others into the sect. Had the other elders and other clans learned that the Founders had been making use of personal armies in the years before the Camarilla was openly declared, they'd almost certainly have suspected Hardestadt, Corazon and the others of duplicity... more so than they already did, even. So the Founders disbanded the myrmidons, sending them back to their individual sires once more.

BIRTH

For five decades and change, the nascent Camarilla was without a formal order-keeping body of any sort. This wasn't because the nights were calm and peaceful. On the contrary, conflict and war raged all around the newborn sect. The Anarch Revolt continued to grow, as young and foolish Kindred rebelled against a new order that granted leadership to those elders who had the power and experience to most effectively lead. What a shocking concept! The fires of the Inquisition burned brighter, rising to a fever pitch with the distribution of the *Malleus Maleficarum* in 1458, and the Assamites swarmed into Europe on the heels of the advancing Turks. Obviously the Camarilla had more than its share of difficulties, but it was the forces fielded by elders and princes on an individual basis, rather than any formalized military force, that defended the sect from such threats.

Had the archons or something like them already been an established presence at the time, able to pass intelligence and defend less able Kindred, it's possible that many elders could have escaped the Inquisitors' pyres without the need to sacrifice their own childer in the process. Imagine how much weaker the Sabbat might be tonight if the ranks of the anarchists hadn't been swelled by that "great injustice."

The Founders spent most of that time dashing pell-mell around Europe, trying to put out brushfires of various sorts before they could grow into conflagrations that would consume the sect. The Camarilla nearly died in those distant nights, not due to any external threat (though there was certainly no shortage of those) but out of neglect. Most of those elders who claimed allegiance went about their nightly activities as though nothing had changed, giving the Camarilla little thought as they set their servants to protecting their own domains and advancing their own agendas. The Founders — now tagged with the title of justicars, since they seemed to be doing little else besides

policing the Kindred — were unable to advance any of the great visions they had for the future of the sect; they were too busy keeping everything from bursting apart at the seams.

Desperate to change the situation at hand, the justicars called the first global conclave to order in 1486. Through long nights of vicious debate, they were able to convince the other elders that things could not stand as they were. The justicars were granted extensive powers to punish any vampire found guilty of violating the Traditions. It was here, too, that the formal establishment of a "constabulary organization" under the justicars was first considered.

These agents of the justicars were called by many names — including archon, a title preferred by several of the Founders — but were officially titled sheriffs. This was done so that local princes, who had their own sheriffs, wouldn't feel that their authority was threatened by these new peacekeepers.

And because no few elders involved still remembered the original implications behind the Promethean use of the title.

These new sheriffs were instrumental in the forthcoming Camarilla triumph. Now able to field a force unified by ideals, unencumbered by conflicting loyalties, the Ivory Tower began to achieve victory after victory against the forces of both the anarchs and the Assamites. Although I've heard of no concrete evidence one way or the other, rumor states — and I believe it — that the Nosferatu spy who discovered the Assamite fortress of Alamut was one of these agents of the Founders. With the Assamite surrender, the Camarilla and the justicars were able to turn their full attention to the anarchs alone. The young rebels quickly realized the hopelessness of their position and sued for peace.

"Victory after victory"? Not necessarily. Try stalemate after stalemate. I'll not deny that the advent of the sheriffs definitely turned the tide of the war, but it hardly granted us the sweeping conquest Kirsten seems to imply. Had that lone Nosferatu not accidentally stumbled upon Alamut, we might still be fighting the war to this night. I still find it astonishing that a single clan, even one as martial as the Assamites, could battle the might of seven clans to a draw. Granted, we were dealing with the Anarch Revolt as well, and were unable to direct our resources entirely at one or the other. Still, when I consider such things, I start to think that maybe I ought to be a bit more graceful about allowing the schismatic Assamites into our ranks. The phrase

"better with us than against us" once again springs to mind....

THE COUNCIL OF THORNS AND BEYOND

October, 1493. I trust I need not remind you of the significance of that date? The Council of Thorns saw the surrender of both the anarchs and the Assamites, as well as the casting of the Tremere ritual designed to bring the Assassins to heel. The specific events of this six-night convocation are well known, and I see no need to rehash most of the details here.

One point debated at Thorns, however, bears closer examination. One of the questions put before the delegates by the Brujah Master of Ceremonies Eleanor de Valois was as to whether the current system — that is, the authority of justicars and their sheriffs — should continue, and how to best determine who would hold those offices.

Initially the decision was made to allow the Founders to continue as the Camarilla's justicars, and no higher power was mandated to watch over them. There was to be no "Inner Circle." The justicars were the sect's highest authority, and the position was to be renewed after a period of 30 years.

The Founders-turned-justicars realized very rapidly, however, that while their sect had come through its ordeals with a newfound strength, their own position had not markedly improved. The duties required of them as judges, magistrates and peacekeepers still kept them from their true goals of advancing the cause of the Camarilla itself. Over a very short span of time — in Kindred terms — the Founders decided that things had to change.

A special conclave was called by all seven justicars in the early months of the year 1504. By the Founders' own order, this particular gathering was kept largely secret from those not specifically invited to attend. At this assembly, held in a small town outside Vienna, the Founders explained to the gathered Kindred that they could no longer fulfill the duties required of them as justicars if they were to successfully lead the Camarilla to its rightful place of dominance. Seven new justicars, one of each clan, would be chosen by a vote of all those present. Because these new justicars might not hold as strong a commitment to the Camarilla as the Founders themselves, the Founders would form a supervisory council, one that had the power to overrule even the decrees of a justicar. Furthermore, rather than the initial 30-year terms, the justicars would henceforth be reviewed, and possibly replaced, every 13 years, and this would be done by a vote of the new supervisory council — the Inner Circle. Some elders present at the conclave ob-

jected to so small a faction holding so much power, but the Founders were able to call in sufficient boons and debts that the vote to modify the Camarilla's structure passed by a reasonable margin. The justicars elected to office at this conclave were Targin of Clan Brujah, Griga of Clan Gangrel, Lethe of Clan Malkavian, Anachriss of Clan Nosferatu, Lenore Braundice of Clan Toreador, Holtz of Clan Tremere and Democritus of Clan Ventrue. Thus was formed the Camarilla as we truly know it in the modern age.

I know for a fact that at least two of these early justicars, and possibly more, survive to this night. Lethe, on her more coherent nights, serves as seneschal and advisor to Prince Ritter of Munich, and Anachriss still serves the Inner Circle directly as one of its oldest alastors.

Also for the record, it's partially because of Eleanor de Walois that we're now called archons and not sheriffs. Selected as both announcer and mediator for the duration of the Council of Thorns, de Walois handled her responsibilities with aplomb despite being thrown headfirst into a veritable feeding frenzy of some of the most powerful elders in all of Europe. Very few present at the time realized that she was nervous as all hell, and she only slipped up in one minor detail.

De Walois' sire, you see, had been a die-hard Promethean, and he'd indoctrinated his child with constant tales of that dead sect's noble purpose. He schooled her in their goals, their techniques — and their terminology.

When addressing the conclave, Eleanor de Walois used the term archon when she meant sheriff. Multiple times.

In the seventeenth century, when the Camarilla was looking for a new designation for its agents that would differentiate between them and the sheriffs who served the princes on a local level, someone in the Inner Circle remembered de Walois' faux pas from so many years before, and decided that archon was as good a title as any.

As the Sabbat rose from the ashes of the Anarch Revolt and turned its mindless bloodlust against the Camarilla, these new justicars and their sheriffs stood on the front lines. For over a century, the vast majority of the sheriffs' attention was directed to the war effort, with very little emphasis placed on internal matters. Consider that the Sabbat wasn't yet firmly established even to the extent it is tonight, and the elders of the Camarilla viewed this as something of a civil war. Because the Black Hand

wasn't recognized yet as an autonomous entity, the justicars and sheriffs tended to look upon them as nothing more than the same sort of rebellious childer who had been put down once already.

Then, at the conclave held in September of 1595, the Sabbat very nearly won the war.

Haven't heard of it, have you? The Inner Circle and the justicars have kept what happened that September secret from the greatest portion of the Camarilla for over four centuries.

The Sabbat leaders at the time, despite having made some initial gains, had to face the fact that they simply couldn't equal the numerical might of the Camarilla. The larger sect included most of Europe's elders, and these venerable Kindred were too well entrenched and too well protected to be easily unearthed (sometimes literally). The Ventrue had tightened their influence over their domains, making it almost impossible for Sabbat agents to set up shop within their borders. With the aid of the sheriffs, this policy quickly spread to other Camarilla territories. Means of conquest other than open conflict exist, though, and the Sabbat hit upon one of them.

You've probably never heard the name of Jean-Paul Pierre LaMont. We don't like to talk about him much, since he became perhaps the greatest shame the Camarilla had ever experienced to that point. LaMont, you see, is the only justicar to this night to turn traitor to the sect and throw in his lot with the Sabbat.

I don't know what incentives they offered him, what his price was for denying his oath. I do know that he betrayed the location and the security precautions of the 1595 conclave to an enormous Sabbat war pack. Had they succeeded in launching the surprise assault as they planned, they might well have slain the entire Inner Circle in one fell swoop.

It was then that the sheriffs truly came into their own. Acting without orders from any of the justicars, Federico DiPadua and his coterie chose to investigate a subtle but sudden change in behavior on the part of LaMont, and were able to discover and intercept the Sabbat's main force. Although too small a unit to take on the war pack on their own, these noble sheriffs nevertheless engaged the enemy in order to delay them long enough for DiPadua himself (he drew the short straw, apparently) to race back to the conclave and warn the assembly. The justicars, sheriffs and even the Inner Circle were forced to battle their way through some elements of the Black Hand's soldiers — at least one member of the Inner Circle fell that night

— but because they fled before the enemy's main force arrived, they were able to win freedom. DiPadua was commended by the Inner Circle, as were the other members of his coterie, though their recognition was posthumous.

The astute observer will have noticed that Kirsten "neglected" to mention which clan the traitorous LaMont belonged to. Gee, I wonder why she might have done that?

LaMont himself was granted the distinction of one of the highest positions on the Red List, an honor he carried with him as a Sabbat bishop until some time in the 1740s, when Anachriss finally tracked him down and, as I understand it, physically ripped the betrayer's head from his body. LaMont had a small brood of childer who turned traitor with him. If you ever find yourself operating in Sabbat-held territory, you may want to keep half an eye open for evidence of them; they're not quite Red List material, but you can still earn yourself a heap of brownie points by taking them down.

The elders of the Camarilla were outraged at both the betrayal and the assault on their persons, and they retaliated enthusiastically. Never in all the years since have there been as many archons in service at any given time as there were sheriffs in the years between 1595 and the early 1600s. The justicars drafted just about every capable Kindred they came across and sent them against the Sabbat. Sheriffs infiltrated cities taken by the Black Hand and began feeding information to their justicars at a prodigious rate. The Sabbat was forced further and further into retreat, first into the wilds of Scandinavia, and later across the Atlantic to the New World.

THE NEW WORLD

Despite multiple agents in the Spanish Court, the Founders never could determine with any degree of certainty if Lasombra influence played a part in the decision to finance Columbus' voyages. Whatever the case, the Sabbat clearly benefited from the discovery of the Americas to a far greater extent than the Camarilla, at least at first. As the Sabbat fled across the ocean in ever-increasing numbers throughout the seventeenth century, the justicars and the Inner Circle grew sharply divided over what actions, if any, to take in response. Most Kindred still held an intensely Euro-centric worldview, and many felt that the Sabbat should be permitted, even encouraged, to withdraw to the New World, and good riddance to them.

Wiser heads prevailed. Many elders recognized that expansion into new territories would provide opportunities for younger Kindred without threatening the stability of the old, and thus lessen the chances that the Camarilla would ever see a repeat of the Anarch Revolt. Childer and grandchilder of European princes and primogen made their way westward, and several sheriffs went with them as protection and the eyes of the Inner Circle.

The reports that drifted back across the Atlantic made the elders sit up and take notice. While the war between Camarilla and Sabbat remained fairly low-key at the time, consisting primarily of rhetoric and insignificant border skirmishes, the Sabbat was entrenching itself in the Spanish and Portuguese colonies at an alarming rate. The Camarilla ancillae, on the other hand, quickly became wrapped up in their own power struggles. Suddenly free of the watchful eyes of their sires, their commitment to the sect was superseded by their own desire for personal advancement. If war did come to the Americas, with things as they stood at the time, the Sabbat would sweep over the tentative Camarilla enclaves without even slowing down. The Camarilla had to make their presence felt in the New World — as a unified sect, not a gaggle of struggling wannabe-princes — and they had to do it fast.

The term archon finally came into formal usage at the conclave of 1660. No longer was the Inner Circle concerned with individual princes feeling threatened by a Camarilla-wide force that might challenge their own sheriffs, scourges and other soldiers. The Inner Circle wanted its agents to stand out (as a unit, not as individuals). They wanted the princes to know that the Camarilla, as a sect, was taking a hand in guiding its own affairs. The title of sheriff was dropped in favor of the more recognizable archon, and the justicars were granted even more leeway in selecting their agents than they possessed already.

The seventeenth and eighteenth centuries might have been relatively quiet ones in terms of the Camarilla-Sabbat war, but that hardly means it was a peaceful era where the archons themselves were concerned. In fact, it was partially due to our efforts that the war didn't flare up any higher than it did. While most New World Kindred were busy stabilizing their positions and scrabbling for power in a political arena that barely existed, archons were keeping an eye on the entire powder keg to ensure it didn't ignite. The orders of the justicars and the Inner Circle were explicit: keep the conflict from escalating into full-fledged war by any means necessary, at

least until we were in a better position to fight it. More than one Sabbat city suffered an abnormal number of accidents during the settling of the colonies and the evolution of the United States as a nation. Fires destroyed substantial portions of many towns, including Sabbat havens. Diseases ran rampant among the mortal populations, depriving the Black Hand of healthy herds. Even the occasional encounter between the Sabbat and a pack of native Lupines was less accidental than it seemed.

Several of our own Kindred were quietly eliminated as well. Some of the more hotheaded ancillae, drunk on their newfound power, would have provoked the local Sabbat into attacking, or even initiated the war on their own, had several archons not been present to quiet the agitators. Others had actually begun trying to make private accords with the local Sabbat, as the Black Hand's "freedom for the young" spiel appealed to several of the more gullible newcomers. Few of us particularly enjoy assassinating our own sect-mates, but we do what must be done.

THE OLD WORLD

Because North America has become the primary battleground between the sects in the modern nights,

most Kindred historians focus almost exclusively on that continent from the 1600s onward. The greater portion of the Camarilla still occupied Europe, however, and the Inner Circle, the justicars and the archons had more to deal with than the goings-on in the New World.

The Turks continued to threaten Eastern Europe almost until the turn of the 1700s, and the Assamites came with them in obvious violation of the Treaty of Thorns. They came not as ravening hordes of diablerists, but as shadow-stalking assassins. Many had already begun their tradition of killing-for-hire, but others still sought redress for what they saw as the injustice inflicted on their clan. Camarilla elders, especially Tremere, were marked for the Assamites' blades. Archons were often employed as bodyguards and sentries during this period, and for a time several Tremere chantries harbored more archons than they did Warlocks.

When the Giovanni declared in 1680 that they'd slain the last of their parent clan, the entire Camarilla blinked. The Tremere, with their great mystical powers, had been hunting the diabolical Salubri for over six centuries and couldn't claim complete success. The Giovanni hunt had lasted less than half that time. Even with outside aid (rumor has it that some Camarilla Kindred assisted the Necromancers in their



efforts), how could they have achieved such a victory so rapidly? This, more than any threat posed directly against the Camarilla, convinced the Inner Circle and the justicars that they needed to focus on more than just the Sabbat (and, to a lesser extent, the Assamites). Any Kindred group that held no loyalty to the Ivory Tower was a potential hazard. Justicars began selecting their archons for a wider variety of skills, focusing less on martial abilities and seeking more perceptive and intelligent candidates. Investigation became as great a portion of an archon's responsibilities as combat, if not greater.

That's muddy history, though I think the benefit of hindsight is choosing Kirsten's words. The Giovanni, I don't believe, ever formally declared, "Ve whacked 'em all!" Why would they? What better way to redirect all those hungry eyes toward yourselves?

In any event, while it's difficult to pinpoint exact dates, it was also about this time that the notion of different "branches" of archons arose. The alastors had existed long before this, but other specialist units first began to appear in the early eighteenth century. I can't document it, but I have reason to believe that the Quaesitors appeared before the other formal branches, though the Josians are almost as old. With the sudden ascendance of the Giovanni, a clan that focused on blood sorcery almost to the extent the Tremere did, the need for magically proficient archons became undeniable.

In 1724, one year before the next regular conclave, parties unknown assassinated the Wentrue Justicar Mary Anne Blaire through the use of a very large keg of gunpowder and a very short fuse. Her murderer was blown to paste right along with her, so the investigation was pretty much stalled from the get-go.

That's the official story. Some few of us have been told that the assassination was ordered by the Inner Circle itself and was carried out by an archon under the command of one of the other justicars. I've never heard the official reason for Blaire's removal, but she possibly posed some sort of threat that needed dealing with. My theory is that the Inner Circle had somehow received intelligence that she was about to pull a Jean-Paul LaMont, but that's just guessing on my part.

REVOLUTION AND THE 1800S

I'm not going to spend much time on either the American or French revolutions. Both of them were

FOR THE STORYTELLER: MARY ANNE BLAIRE

Actually, Mary Anne Blaire was quite loyal to the Camarilla. She was removed for precisely that reason.

One of the Inner Circle — none but the other members and the justicars know who — was replaced by a fleshcrafted double just before the Sabbat migration to the New World. That was the main reason the Sabbat never launched an all-out offensive on the Camarilla in the Americas. They figured they had the upper hand whenever they needed it, and could afford to take the time to fortify their position first.

What the Sabbat infiltrator didn't know was that he'd been found out almost the instant he entered the presence of the other members of the Circle. He was allowed to continue so the Camarilla could feed the Sabbat false information via a source they'd never think to question. Unfortunately, Blaire found out about the deception and assumed, when she realized that the Inner Circle wasn't taking steps to eliminate the mole, that they'd all been compromised. Upon learning that the justicar intended to bring the matter up before an emergency conclave of all the local elders — and realizing that such a revelation would get back to the Sabbat almost immediately — the Inner Circle reluctantly decided to dispose of Blaire.

They continued feeding the mole false information that allowed the Camarilla to strengthen its position in the New World for another several years, until the traitor was rendered torpid in an unrelated carriage accident, at which point the Circle executed and replaced him.

primarily mortal conflicts, with Kindred interests represented only peripherally. If you want to be technical about it, the Camarilla lost them both, though they were defeats of relatively little importance.

Although we lost some territory on the East Coast, the Camarilla greatly overwhelmed the Sabbat during the westward expansion. It's unfortunate that we were forced to give up several established cities, but the opportunities for expansion on the frontier more than made up for that shortfall.

Actually, we lost a large number of very powerful elders in the French Revolution and the Reign of Terror. We'd have lost a lot more if several

coterie of archons hadn't been dispatched for the sole purpose of aiding the escape of any and all Kindred fleeing France.

Ve grew complacent after the American Revolution. True, the Sabbat had taken a hand, but to far less a degree than we'd expected. Ve weren't prepared, then, when they made a grab for the Eastern seaboard during the Var of 1812. Then, much as now, the Sabbat took a great deal of territory from us, but wasn't able to hold onto all of it.

I must admit that the local archons were caught as much by surprise as anyone else. The part they played in the Var of 1812 was minuscule at best.

Nor did we "overwhelm" the Sabbat in the west. The Sabbat defeated itself. Our infiltrators report that the sect was caught in the throes of civil war at the time, and simply wasn't able to devote sufficient resources to battling us. Granted, we had some hand in that. You'd be astonished at how easily a single well-placed archon or other agent provocateur could turn packs against one another in those nights. Still, it wasn't until the rise of the Industrial Revolution that the Camarilla could honestly claim to be the dominant sect on the continent. If we'd had to face the undiluted might of the Sabbat in the 1800s, we'd have lost the west, if not the entire country.

THE TWENTIETH CENTURY

Not since the nights immediately following the founding of the Camarilla has the sect come so close to tearing itself apart as it has throughout the past century. The abdication and assassination of Czar Nicholas II and the rise of Soviet Communism nearly ignited a war between several European Ventrue and Brujah. The First World War damaged Camarilla stability. Because the worst of the war was localized in Camarilla-dominated Europe, it allowed the Sabbat unprecedented latitude to launch their own invasions of our domains without providing us the opportunity for counterattack. Fortunately they were able to maintain precious few gains in the wake of the economic devastation that followed. The Sabbat was particularly hard hit by the Great Depression, since few of their herds and mortal pawns were of the proper economic demographic to ride out the crisis.

Kirsten neglects to mention the war that the Camarilla almost waged with the Raynos, of all Kindred. In the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, British colonial expansion had claimed a substantial portion of the Indian subcontinent, and

many English Kindred went along in search of new territories. Although these Kindred expected to deal with the mysterious Cathayans, they didn't realize that India was home to the Deceivers as well. By the time the Camarilla realized that they'd waltzed into territories claimed by a clan believed homeless and nomadic, more than a handful of elders had already fallen in retaliatory strikes by the native Kindred.

Events elsewhere in the world prevented the Camarilla from turning a hostile gaze toward India, and for their part, the local Raynos quickly realized that they couldn't possibly win if they called down the wrath of the entire sect on their collective heads. Both sides gratefully settled on a peace within a matter of months, but the Camarilla stationed several archons throughout India's largest cities to watch for any resurgence of anti-Camarilla sentiment among the local Raynos. Most of these archons had been reassigned by the late twentieth century, but several disappeared during the typhoon that struck Bangladesh two years back and haven't been heard from since.

World War II pushed the sect even nearer to collapse. While many European elders, particularly among the Ventrue, Toreador and Tremere, supported the Axis powers and made some truly revolting use of the concentration camps, many Kindred opposed the Nazis with all the might and influence they could muster. Some horrors, it seems, even "soulless vampires" want no part of. The Inner Circle refused to pick sides, and several justicars whose views of "the greater good" differed from their fellows' found themselves working against each other as they attempted to either support, thwart or manipulate Hitler's war machine. By the end of the war, it had become obvious to all but the most deluded Kindred that Adolph Hitler was a danger to everyone, completely uncontrollable — but by then, of course, the syphilitic madman had solved the problem for us by putting a gun to his own head. Still, the war and the Holocaust had driven rifts between many Camarilla clans and Kindred, and as long as the war raged it seemed as though those wounds would never heal.

They healed quickly enough when the United States dropped the bomb on Hiroshima. Not since the days of the Inquisition had there been so great an argument for the preservation of the Masquerade. The Inner Circle, the justicars and their archons came down hard on those who too loudly expressed the belief that the Camarilla's time had passed. Individual differences lingered, but those factions that had begun

to form and threatened to shatter the Camarilla from within quickly faded away, and the sect once more became a relatively unified entity.

I'll say little about the years of the Cold War, except that the efforts of the Camarilla and its agents were bent largely toward preserving the fragile peace. We didn't want nuclear war any more than the next combustible creature.

No less than four attempts (that I'm aware of) were made by the members of Gehenna cults to use their influence to cause a war between the superpowers. In two of those instances — once in 1954 and the other in 1974 — Josian agents within the cult were able to pass word of the cultists' intentions to the justicars, who then proceeded to make short work of the cults themselves. Kindred who vastly underestimated the intelligence of their kine pawns made a similar attempt in 1967; we didn't have to get involved in that one at all.

The fourth occurred in the mid-80s, and was actually halted when the cult fell under the combined assault of a coterie of archons and a Sabbat war pack who recognized the magnitude of the threat at hand. Makes you think, doesn't it?

THE MODERN NIGHTS

We have seen more changes in the balance of power and the status quo in the last decades than in the history of the Camarilla to date. Sheriffs and archons across the world report a sudden, fratricidal insanity sweeping over those Ravnos dwelling within our cities. Although the attack passed shortly, it has left the Deceivers with a fraction of their former numbers. The Sabbat has succeeded in taking a number of cities along the East Coast, but those inroads are tentative at best, and our reclamation of New York renders their victories so much ash. Having discovered the faithlessness of the Gangrel, the Inner Circle and the justicars wisely encouraged Xavier and his people to depart, keeping only those few Outlanders whose loyalty to the sect is unquestionably greater than their loyalty to their bestial clan. An enormous portion of the Assamite clan, having finally seen the error of its ways, even now

petitions us to take the Gangrel's place. Let the Sabbat and other foolish childer speak of the Final Nights and the mythical Gehenna; this is truly a glorious time to be Camarilla. This is a glorious time to be an archon.

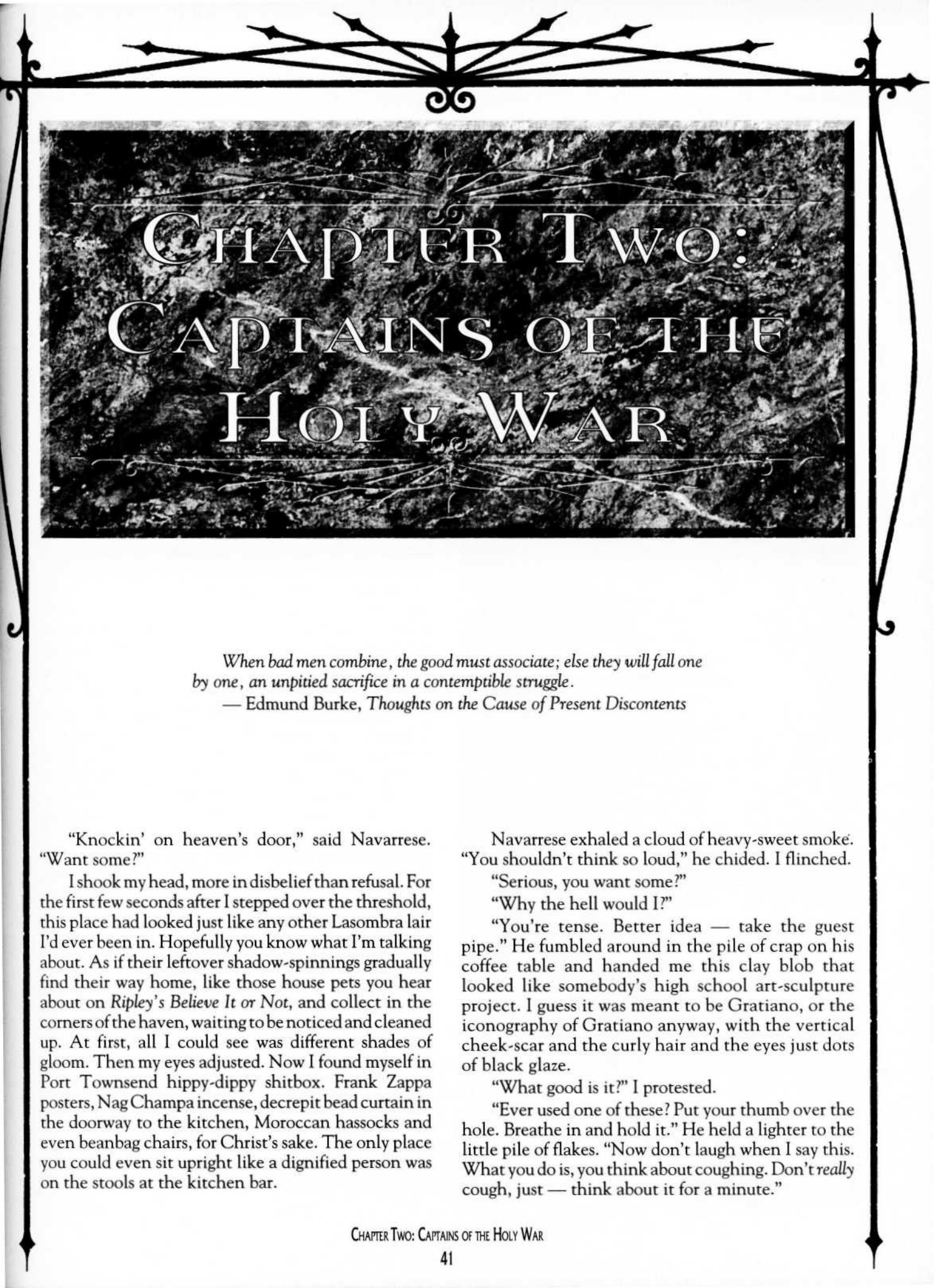
This is a damn busy time to be an archon.

We didn't "encourage" the Gangrel to leave. Christ, within a decade we'll be claiming that we kicked them out. Unbelievable.

As yet, no stable Camarilla order has formed in New York. We hold onto the city by our fingertips, and a handful of archons whose presence is desperately required elsewhere are forced to remain in the Big Apple to ensure that the Sabbat doesn't steal it back from under our noses. Semi-permanent enclaves of archons operate across the Sabbat-held seaboard, and while vital intelligence emerges from that newly hostile territory, many of our brethren never do. Those of us left are supposed to keep an eye on all remaining Gangrel, since we don't know why they stayed; all departing Gangrel, since we don't know why they left; and all arriving Assamites, since we don't know why they're here. Certain of the Giovanni are suddenly expressing an interest in aiding us (covertly, of course) against the Sabbat, which would be good news if we didn't have to spare yet more archons to investigate their motivations for this sudden goodwill. I never thought I'd be grateful for the Followers of Set, but at least they've remained consistent through all this; you know what to expect from them. Through it all, more and more archons, and even the justicars themselves, are wrapped ever tighter in the webs of prestatation that are, I think, all that holds the Camarilla together anymore.

We haven't heard a peep from the Inner Circle since they elected this new batch of justicars in 1998. I hope they've got something up their collective sleeves. We're doing the best we can, but I really don't know how much longer we can hold the line. If the Camarilla falls, the Masquerade falls, and even the return of Caine himself can't help us then.





CHAPTER TWO: CAPTAINS OF THE HOLY WAR

When bad men combine, the good must associate; else they will fall one by one, an unpitied sacrifice in a contemptible struggle.

— Edmund Burke, *Thoughts on the Cause of Present Discontents*

"Knockin' on heaven's door," said Navarrese. "Want some?"

I shook my head, more in disbelief than refusal. For the first few seconds after I stepped over the threshold, this place had looked just like any other Lasombra lair I'd ever been in. Hopefully you know what I'm talking about. As if their leftover shadow-spinnings gradually find their way home, like those house pets you hear about on *Ripley's Believe It or Not*, and collect in the corners of the haven, waiting to be noticed and cleaned up. At first, all I could see was different shades of gloom. Then my eyes adjusted. Now I found myself in Port Townsend hippy-dippy shitbox. Frank Zappa posters, Nag Champa incense, decrepit bead curtain in the doorway to the kitchen, Moroccan hassocks and even beanbag chairs, for Christ's sake. The only place you could even sit upright like a dignified person was on the stools at the kitchen bar.

Navarrese exhaled a cloud of heavy-sweet smoke. "You shouldn't think so loud," he chided. I flinched.

"Serious, you want some?"

"Why the hell would I?"

"You're tense. Better idea — take the guest pipe." He fumbled around in the pile of crap on his coffee table and handed me this clay blob that looked like somebody's high school art-sculpture project. I guess it was meant to be Gratiano, or the iconography of Gratiano anyway, with the vertical cheek-scar and the curly hair and the eyes just dots of black glaze.

"What good is it?" I protested.

"Ever used one of these? Put your thumb over the hole. Breathe in and hold it." He held a lighter to the little pile of flakes. "Now don't laugh when I say this. What you do is, you think about coughing. Don't *really* cough, just — think about it for a minute."

This all had to be some kind of penny-ante test. What the fuck was I supposed to do? But I decided to play along, and what do you know: something filtered through. It wasn't the hit of the century, but I felt it. Something opened up in there and grabbed the smoke.

"That's because you just brought blood up into the alveoli." Navarrese looked satisfied. "Where the blood touches the air. Some Tremere showed me that trick years ago. Modern medicine. Better?"

"Jesus. I haven't had pot since I was a kid. Probably still take me all night to get stoned."

He tossed me the baggie. "Knock yourself out."

Here was one of the rising stars of the West Coast Inquisition.

He went over to his big bay window and sat in it. "Too many Cathayans in Tacoma now, too many Ventrue in Seattle. I like the pace of things here. I'm at that age where slow is good, you know?" He flicked a glance at me. Of course I didn't know. I figured if I wasn't dead by then I hadn't been good for much. "Nero Wolfe had his orchids. Holmes played violin. I smoke Mexican Red and watch the water. It's not evocative, but it works."

I took him in. Baggy jeans, knobbly bare feet, and a black T-shirt with a huge pink triangle on it. The Birkenstocks were mercifully absent. This was not at all the picture I'd gotten of the man at Baltimore's *Palla Grande* last year. Then he'd come as Voltaire, bewigged and powdered, and played the part to the hilt. I never thought an infernalism charge could be delivered with such wit.

"I had to wait for the ball. That wasn't just drama."

Damn. I wished he would stop reading my mind.

"Well, guard your mind better; that's the first thing to work on. Brandenburg was a bishop, Nadia. I needed to corner him in a roomful of elders who weren't his buddies. If I'd just accused him to his own council, they'd have dragged their feet and debated each other about how much in my way they should try to get — during which time he'd have scooted up to Alaska, made himself a new face and settled down for a nice little 20-year nap. Besides..." He finished up his joint with one long drag, got up and crossed the room to start rolling another one. "I know he's got an accomplice on that council. Now that he's incommunicado in Vykos' talons, we'll just see how long it takes the bastard to jump."

"Vykos knows you're using it like that?"

"Why should it mind?" Navarrese shrugged. "At this point, it's not a question of what it actually *does* with the man. I could have sent Brandenburg to any sandpaper-dildo-wielding Fiend in the phone book. He'll break. He's a coward by nature. And I already know who most of his cohorts are. They just need to

implicate themselves. Vykos knows its name alone is good for a jolt."

I nodded, mulling this over. He sounded at least lightly stoned, but he was making sense enough.

"The one thing you can count on with Faustus is their overweening selfishness. In fact, it's the defining trait. Go on, Nadia, sit. Relax. Everything's arranged."

"With Brandenburg?"

"With you."

I sat on a stool, took one more hit off the pipe just to be polite, then shoved it away down the bar.

"All right. Where am I going?"

"You're to be anointed templar to Stimson."

"A bishop?"

"A bishop of my close acquaintance down in Nogales."

"Is he happy about it?"

"Actually, *she* was happier than I expected." Navarrese leaned back against the sill. Whenever we shut up the sound of the water came through the glass, making the room feel exposed and yet hidden at the same time, like a secret cove on some vacation island. Pity that wasn't really the case. "It turns out she's begun dabbling in espionage, and your intimate knowledge of the Camarilla sounds useful to her at the moment. I didn't sell you on that point alone, don't worry. She's also aware of your... other qualifications."

"Good, because I don't want to be hired as a snitch," I told him. "That defeats the purpose."

"Yes, it does. She'll keep that part of it quiet. As far as *los vatos* are concerned, you've been appointed to a position of great trust, protecting the bishop from enemies without and within. An official gesture of confidence in the sincerity of your conversion."

"Or a gesture of *your* confidence, anyway." I couldn't help sounding bitter. If drinking down the archon I'd slaved under for 20 years didn't quite qualify me as ex-Cam-a-ree-yah, it was pretty goddamn hard to think what would.

He laughed out loud. "Of course you're wary of a stranger's kindness."

"Are you investigating this Stimson?"

"If I were, Nadia, I'd never be that obvious about it." Evidently this was grand comedy. "No, it's really this simple: your reception at the *Palla Grande* is, unfortunately, the reception you can expect most places. Howsoever you bust your well-toned ass, you just won't convince certain people that you're not biding your time to turn on us. Especially since..." Here he stubbed out his joint into the ashtray he'd brought along. His face darkened. "Milan."

"Giangaleazzo wasn't Ivory Tower alum," I pointed out.

"Point is, anything seems possible right now. The Sabbat's more on its collective guard now than it has been for a century. Which bodes well for some things, but badly for you. And I happen to believe you're a resource we can't afford to waste. Now granted, I won't complain if some good karma comes back to me. But don't sit up days wondering what I want out of you in return."

A little Spanish accent had seeped into his mellowing voice. It suddenly hit me that he must be going through the motions of getting high so I wouldn't be all intimidated by the big bad Inquisitor and clam up. There was no point speculating about motives here. If he had them, I wasn't going to find out about them tonight. And I needed the protection too bad to say no anyway.

"Well, I just hope your Stimson's going to explain about this templar business when I get there," I said at last. "I mean, I know the basic concept, but at this stage of things I'd sure hate to make a *faux pas*."

"I could explain it to you," he said, smiling.

"Go for it."

TEMPLARS

"For *templar* most Sabbat just translate *flunky*," he began wryly. "You may already have noticed it's the fashion among us to pretend, as far as possible, that we're each of us a sovereign nation making treaties with other sovereign nations — that nothing so prosaic as obedience ever enters into it."

"That's the rhetoric, yeah."

"Having been Camarilla," he said it without the soft, Spanish double-l's, "I trust you know servitude when you see it, and that there can be honor in serving when that service is taken as the precious gift it is. In fact, flunky isn't a bad translation, just because it's such a broad word and so is templar — though that wasn't always the case. Short history lesson: the human Templars were an order of knights, quasi-clergy really, pledged to escort pilgrims along the pilgrimage routes. And so we borrowed the term for the bodyguards who traveled with our leaders, for obvious reasons."

"Just keeping up with that cute little blasphemy theme."

"Exactly. What better accompaniment for a bishop than a knight templar?" He chuckled. "But of course our leaders quickly found it useful to have traveling companions that could do more than just guard them on the road. Not to mention the fact that their other assistants were also expected to join them in battle whenever it was called for, which was often in those bloody nights, so it sometimes got very difficult to tell the templars from the other sorts of —"



THE ANOINTING

The Anointing is technically of the *ignoblis ritae*. Some Sabbat, particularly its recipients, feel it deserves better, but it was evidently invented after the original 13 *auctoritas ritae*, and few priests want to disturb the ancient numerology. *Ignoblis* or not, however, it still plays a large part in the creation of certain kinds of officials.

The Anointing consecrates a vampire to the higher service of Caine — it is similar in purpose to a Blood Bath, but conducted on a far smaller scale. Whereas a Blood Bath often involves many participants, along with a few select peers and superiors for endorsement purposes, an Anointing usually consists simply of the candidate and priest; the candidate's new superior; a few of the candidate's new colleagues; a few of the superior's colleagues; and possibly — a mark of favor — the superior's superior. Instead of a bathing vessel, all the participants (including the candidate) bleed into a large goblet, from which the priest proceeds to anoint the candidate upon the forehead, eyelids, hands, feet, and fangs, all the while sermonizing to her about her new duties. The candidate may or may not make a formal oath to her immediate superior, but she usually at least places her hands within the superior's in a silent echo of the old feudal gesture. The cup is consecrated as a Vaulderie cup before the Anointing and shared around the company afterward.

Most templars are consecrated by an Anointing; even those meant to work in great secrecy are treated to at least a two- or three-person version of the ritual with the bare minimum of priest, candidate, and superior (the priest and the superior can be the same person). Many Inquisitors and paladins are also consecrated by the Anointing. Some of the more powerful and notorious among them, however, insist on a full Blood Bath, provided they have the personal clout to command such an attendance. The Inquisitors and their templars usually add yet another element to their Anointings: an oath and "ordeal of faith" upon an Iron Reliquary (see the "Anointed Panoply" sidebar later in this chapter), which they — perhaps superstitiously — believe guards against the induction of heretics and infernalists.

"Caine's Anointed," or simply "the Anointed," then, is the title commonly used to refer to templars, paladins, and Inquisitors. Bishops and other high Sabbat officials, however, have come to like the lofty sound of the phrase, and sometimes apply it to themselves as well.

"Flunky."

"Right. These nights, most of the vees specifically appointed to serve a high Sabbat official are called templars."

"High official meaning a bishop, an archbishop..."

"Bishops, archbishops, Inquisitors, cardinals, prisci — even the regent herself can all appoint templars."

I frowned. "It's got to be a slightly different job depending on which."

CITY TEMPLARS

"Well, yes. The term's a catch-all, but we do observe some distinctions. For instance, theoretically you'll be serving Stimson as what's called a city templar."

"Theoretically..."

"If she ends up sending you out to handle espionage all the time, you'll be a city templar in name only. You'll have to take that up with her. But generally speaking, a city templar is someone who serves a bishop or archbishop, providing both personal protection and assistance with the city's affairs."

"Kinda like a Camarilla sheriff."

"Mmm." Navarrese nodded thoughtfully. "Sheriff, harpy, Keeper of Elysium, even scourge... it could amount to all that and more, really, depending on your abilities and her agendas."

"Care to get any more specific?"

ENFORCEMENT

"Forgive me, Nadia; of course. Let's see. The job usually entails dealing with the packs in the area. Most of the packs in and around Nogales are well-seasoned, so you shouldn't have to do too much advising — luckily, since even the dumbest shovelheads tend to take umbrage at being lectured. However, you'll probably need to mete out discipline on occasion."

"Discipline's always a problem in a border zone."

"The Cathayans'll gladly make you pay for any lapses in that regard, true," Navarrese returned lazily. "And a border is temptation made manifest. But even Mexico City must stand just as vigilant as Nogales. Title guarantees nothing among us. I'm sure many bishops and archbishops would love to claim something like a Caine-given right to rule — you don't think the assumption of clerical honors was just a sick joke, do you? But the fact remains that their only real mandate comes from the blood and approval of their fellow Sabbat. Even more than your princes, they rule at the sufferance of others."

"And the suffering part is where I come in," I guessed.

He smirked. "That's not exactly what I meant. Now your late employer..." He gave me a questioning look.

"It's all an open book. I don't hide anything about the Camarilla from you people."

"He understood the principle, didn't he? He must have been a powerful Cainite. Powerful enough to handle the average scion of the Camarilla, anyway."

"Sure, the average ones. Not the elders, and they were more than half the trouble."

"I daresay. Yet he had you doing a lot of the brass-knuckle work... work he probably could have done himself, perhaps even better?"

I bristled. "He could bust heads when he had to, yeah. But it was so much more comfortable to put my ass on the line."

"Certainly. And if those you disciplined were going to hate someone..."

"It's a hell of a lot easier to hate the one who actually smashed your fangs in."

"Exactly." He half-turned toward me now, dangling one hairy leg off the ledge. "Distance is a strategy, Nadia. The bishops and archbishops know this. Even when they can do something for themselves, they often choose not to. Think about it. If I asked you to pass yourself off as a duchess for a week, could you do it?"

"Pfft," was my only answer.

"But for an hour."

"For an hour, sure, if someone taught me how. I can pretend to be just about anything for an hour. I've done it enough times."

"That's what I'm getting at. The more aloof they are, the easier it is to shape themselves to the needs of the moment when they do put in an appearance... and those occasions will be all the more impressive for their rarity. Our bishops and archbishops have learned to trade on potentiality. Some of them have raised it to an art form." He snorted. "They act only when they're forced to, since any time they take a concrete step in one direction they're closing off a thousand other possibilities, a thousand other things their fellow Sabbat might be ready to believe of them."

MORTAL AFFAIRS

"Sounds way too familiar," I grumbled. "I hope you're not saying Stimson's like that."

"No, no. I wouldn't doom you to a repetition of what you've already suffered. Stimson's much better than most. But even she will probably hand you any number of tasks she's perfectly capable of doing herself, just because that's the game she has to play. Supposing, for instance, some trouble comes up with the local mortals. Obviously someone's got to fix it, and she'd certainly rather it wasn't her. That might look like she felt they were in need of shepherding, which might look like she considered them a threat..."

"And Sabbat aren't supposed to be afraid of mortals." I'd been on the wrong end of a hunter's stake

before, so my faith in this particular pillar of Sabbat belief wasn't exactly such as to remove mountains.

He nodded. "Of course there's a big difference between cowering from and pandering to the mortals on general principle, the way the Camarilla does, and moving to defend yourself and your sect when a genuine threat arises. But unfortunately, the latter can look a hell of a lot like the former. And if Stimson were to make such a move, you can be sure her fellow bishops would quickly get what mileage they could from the ridicule."

"So she'll send me to do it instead. But the other bishops would still know she was taking care of it through her flunky, so what does that help?"

"That's true. It seems like every time a kine problem rears its ugly head in a city that's bishops' domain, the whole thing turns into a silly waiting game — each bishop hoping one of his colleagues will find the matter more personally urgent. Sometimes they wait so long, things get totally out of hand. But for the vigilance of our cardinals over the past few centuries, I strongly doubt the Camarilla would have much of a Masquerade left to worry about by now."

Aha. One of the things I'd always wondered about the Sabbat was, if they didn't really care about the Masquerade, how come the world hadn't found out all about us yet? So that was it. They cared, they just didn't want to call it caring. Your rep rode on how little you could appear to care. That was good to know.

"On the other hand," Navarrese continued, "occasionally a bishop does come along who actually takes on the role of kine-herder for a city. No one approves, but it happens. It's like becoming a vice-lord — sacrificing the respect of your peers for what can actually amount to great power when it's played right. If you can put up with being constantly underestimated, with being a convenient scapegoat, it's not a bad angle. I mention this because I hear that one of Nogales' newer bishops is auditioning for the part. Stimson may ask you to dabble in mortal affairs now and then just to keep tabs on how well he's doing, whether he's upsetting the balance of power."

DOMP AND CIRCUMSTANCE

"Okay." So far it sounded like I was going to be doing a lot of shit-work — surprise, surprise. At least I knew I was good at shit-work. "Isn't there anything a little more, uh... prestigious... that goes with the job? I thought this was a position a lot of Sabbat wanted."

"Oh, no. No, no, no, you're getting the wrong idea," Navarrese exclaimed, sitting up. "Apologies, Nadia. I never meant to imply this thing wouldn't have its perks. Of course it does. I just wanted to warn you... if you learned all you know about the Sabbat from what

filters through via the anarchs and Ivory Tower elders, you might be due for a rude awakening. Despite the Inquisition's centuries of work, you'll still find a lot of romantic heterodox notions floating around among the young of our sect... notions about power without price and freedom without responsibility. Even some longtime Sabbat still buy that shit."

"I had my rude awakening back at the ball, Navarrese, thanks."

"The first of many, no doubt. But yes. The cloud is well-lined. First off, there's the protection, the patronage you'll gain from your bishop — but you know that; that's the whole reason we're doing this. Even if it amuses the *vatos* and *chicas* to give attitude, they can't really ignore who stands behind you. And Stimson will stand behind you. She can't afford to let her templars become laughingstocks. Moreover, many of your duties will bring you honor, if you're good at them. You'll probably at least help in arranging the city's major *ritae*, for instance."

"Everybody likes a gal who can throw a party," I joked.

"Yes, they do. You'll soon learn that there's much more to the *ritae* than that." He looked miffed for a second. Right — Inquisitor. He already knew I wasn't joining up because I gave fuck one about the Antediluvians or anything like that, but I should still watch out about being too flippant with the cult stuff.

"Sorry."

"Forgiven. How can you possibly know what you haven't been taught?" He slowly drew his legs back up into the bay window, un-sprawling. "But that'll be corrected."

"So, organizing *ritae*."

"Yes. And there's a lot of... what you could call ambassadorial tasks. When Sabbat from elsewhere visit, for example, especially Sabbat of rank. Traditionally one of the local templars is appointed as escort, to navigate them safely through the unfamiliar waters."

I was instantly hip. "Uh-huh. I bet you get 'escorted' everywhere you go."

He half-smiled. "Well, yes. For some reason I tend to make the natives restless. But on the other hand, it never looks good for accidents to befall visiting dignitaries. That raises questions most bishops and archbishops would rather not answer. And while the autonomy of our rank and file is one of the treasures of the Sabbat, that same autonomy often leads packs to act rashly when they come across a stranger on their turf — even if the stranger claims to be a legitimate envoy and has papers or something to back it up. Protecting someone from such peril can win you allies, my dear, and you never know when that might come in handy."

"Yup, you never know. But you said ambassadorial tasks, plural."

"I did. City templars also serve as envoys themselves, to neighboring Sabbat cities mostly, but also to enclaves where the unaligned clans hold sway, or even to more exotic venues. Nogales, for example, isn't all that far from both Cathayan and anarch territory, and while they're our enemies no less than the Camarilla, one must occasionally parley with the enemy — as you're well aware."

"Usually when some even bigger enemy comes along who can stomp you both."

"Precisely. I've even heard of templars being sent into nearby Camarilla domains to negotiate, in those very rare instances when there was no other way. There's an old tale of some ancient Camarilla hag in France who lost herself utterly and rampaged over the border into Spain. She was so powerful and depraved that it actually took the combined might of the Catalan Cainites of both sects to bring her down."

"A wight. I've had to help hunt down a wight, now and then."

"Odd that the Camarilla, with all its panting lust for decorum, should give rise to so many of these... intemperate creatures," Navarrese mused.

"I doubt the Sabbat's immune either."

"No... no, not immune. Like I said, there are too many of us who absorb only the bits of our creed that it's most dangerous to isolate. You can't unleash a Beast you don't completely control and expect a happy ending. But at least we possess the tools, the wisdom to exert that genuine mastery. It only remains for us to convince more of our people to take them up."

OTHER DUTIES

He was starting to sound like a real elder, so I guessed it was time for another joint. Two tendrils of shadow snaked out from behind him, stealing across the room. One floated over the coffee table and curled down to pick up a single rolling paper. The other headed over to the baggie I'd left on the bar. When I was a kid at the zoo I used to be amazed how elephants could pick up such skinny little sticks with their trunks. This was a bit like watching that.

"Anything else I might have to do?"

"Anything conceivable, you might have to do," said Navarrese. I was a bit disappointed that he actually rolled the joint by hand. "Ah... yeah. You probably won't have to worry about this much, since you'll be her most junior templar. But bishops and even higher-ranking regional officials do find themselves called away from home, sometimes to attend a colloquium or a special *ritus*, sometimes in wartime — especially if they possess some particular expertise which they've had the bad luck to become famous for. And they usually leave at least one templar behind to look after things in their absence,

because when the cat's away, the mice fuck up everything they possibly can. Since few such officials lack rivals of equal or near-equal rank to worry about, you can conclude this is no small trust. It's almost a bankable certainty that whenever a bishop is gone, some other bishop in the city will make a power grab. Even archbishops get trouble from neighboring cities — particularly if their domains are smaller and look like a good target for annexation."

"Got it." My inner bitch made a silent wisecrack about how I should have brought a steno pad to take notes. "Any more hats to wear, not that there aren't enough already?"

TEAMWORK

"Well, as I said, you won't be Stimson's only templar. But don't hope for anything like a clear division of labor. We're talking about a bare handful of people; and while I'm sure Stimson parcels out tasks with an eye to each templar's talents, there's too much to do to let anyone really specialize. Of course it's a bit different in the households of the great old archbishops, who could wake up to a different templar each night of the month if they wanted."

"I'd hate to have to get along with 29 other templars anyhow."

"That can be a problem," agreed Navarrese. "Even among a handful, you may find you have to struggle, jockey and pit people against each other just to avoid the newcomer's usual fate of getting stuck with all the garbage duties no one wants. There'll be the senior templar, whose name I forget. What you can expect from him depends on how secure he feels in his position at any given moment, but one thing I urge you to remember: his prestige with Stimson rides on his ability to pretend that he has the rest of you in line."

"You're saying I'll be able to get away with things, because it's as much in his interests to cover up anything naughty I do as it is in mine?"

"Um... what I'd been going to say is you could get a lot of political mileage out of helping him preserve that picture, and that'd probably be your wisest course in the beginning. But I see you're no stranger to office politics, so to speak, and I won't lecture you any further on the subject." He grinned.

"I've been around that block more times than I care to count, yeah."

"Well, hopefully you'll all be too busy protecting the border from the sect's enemies to indulge in too much backstabbing — or, failing that, too busy competing with the other bishops' templars to take each other down. Sometimes that does happen, a sort of sports-team mentality. One bishop's templars fail to contain a problem, so another bishop's templars take the opportunity to prove what a well-oiled machine they are.

Which is all fine, and conducive to the Sabbat's welfare, as long as it's actually the templars taking the initiative. When bishops and archbishops start treating their templars like roosters in a cockfight, though, things get messy."

"People who can't see the big picture."

"Exactly." I had hit his jackpot issue. His glance leapt over to me like a stray spark. "Don't get me wrong, Nadia. I uphold the sacred right of each Sabbat to take and defend as much domain as he or his pack can handle. Caine wills it so; let the Camarilla trample the Second Tradition underfoot, but we remain true to our father."

"Nevertheless — all that petty local bullshit must end when the trumpet sounds. I can't tell you how many times I've seen a crusade fail when the cardinal and his warlords didn't obtain the support they were explicitly promised, and all because each of two neighboring archbishops was too worried about how his neighbor might fuck him while his back was turned to fully commit his resources. In the border areas, you get the added problem of people developing these little... 'don't ask, don't tell' arrangements with the nice folks on the other side of the fence. If there's one thing I would beg of you in your new post, Nadia, it's not to succumb to this sort of provincialism."

"I'll do what I can," I told him.

ITINERANT/ROVING TEMPLARS

You want to worry when a Keeper starts waxing sincere on you. There was stuff I could have taken issue with here — it crossed my mind that at least some of these local officials he was complaining about would probably complain right back that the cardinals didn't give shit one about Joe Sabbat and liked to make unrealistic demands that the guys on the ground had to pay the price for. But it seemed smarter to steer the conversation back to academia.

"Okay, so I think I understand the idea of a city templar. You said there were other kinds?"

"Yes, the itinerant templars. Do bear in mind that these aren't formal distinctions, Nadia — city templar, itinerant templar. At your Anointing you'll simply be consecrated a templar, and your duties will consist of whatever the hell tickles Stimson's fancy, no more and no less. I'm just trying to impose a little structure on the ungovernable for your educational benefit. So by itinerant templars I mean those who serve their patrons in less localized fashion. In other words, they rove from here to there."

"Doing what?"

DUTIES

"Name it. Sometimes they're sent to spy on or even assassinate someone—"



"Oh? I thought the Black Hand had the wet work all sewn up," I retorted.

He quirked an eyebrow. "We can get into the Black Hand later, if the light allows. But there are any number of reasons an official might not want to use their services. Roving templars also look after things that affect many cities at once — or even the sect at large. For instance, I know a number who specialize in invasion tactics, advising bishops and archbishops in frontier zones all over the world. Others deal with Lupine infestations, with hunters, and so on. Some are diplomats who are brought in to help calm things down between feuding Sabbat cities, or between us and the unaligned clans. A few even serve as Noddist scholars and Cainite archaeologists, trying to piece together our shared story through the fragments that come to the sect's attention — and stepping in to intervene when an artifact threatens to fall into the wrong hands."

"I have to assume folks like that don't usually work for lowly bishops."

"Not usually, no. Most of these guys work for cardinals and the greatest archbishops — or for the prisci, whose authority isn't measured in square miles anyway. It's not unknown, though, for someone of more modest rank to create a templar and send him out into the world. Now generally the roving templars are given a very specific trust to attend to. But a few act on their master's behalf in all things, serving as his eyes, ears, mouth and talons all at once."

UNDERCOVER WORK

"If I was going to make templars to do that, I'd make at least some of 'em undercover — aces up my sleeve."

"Absolutely," agreed Navarrese. "Cardinals do that all the time. They'll send out their lesser-known templars to an area they're worried about and let them gather intelligence incognito. Then, depending on what they learn, they might instruct the templars to reveal themselves, to act secretly, or to leave. Even with the little guys — when a bishop or archbishop does decide to meddle in other cities' affairs and appoints a templar for the purpose, you can sure as hell expect that to be a covert op."

"And forays into the Camarilla'd naturally be covert too."

"Yes. Most of our really skilled double agents — and there aren't as many as the Camarilla elders like to fantasize — work for our prisci and cardinals. That's dangerous work. There's the risk of discovery, and worse, the risk of conversion. I don't want to get into it tonight, but the measures we've come up with to protect against those risks often need the skill and authority of a true elder to put in place."

"Yeah, I've heard of some really wild Sabbat infiltrations, Manchurian-candidate shit..." That didn't draw him out, though, so I moved on. "So what you're basically saying about these roving templars is, their job description's shorter than mine but they have to go all over the place to do it."

"Right. If you were going to boil it down, that's what it'd boil down to. But that changes everything about it, everything about how you work."

RELATIONS WITH OTHERS

"Well, you'd be on your own more of the time, that's for sure," I mused.

"Yes and no. If you're working aboveboard, under the authority of someone who deserves to be messing around in whatever you're messing around in, you should be able to get help from the locals."

"Which, I assume, is a big if."

FOR YOUR EYES ONLY

Perilous obstacles face the Sabbat vampire who would infiltrate the Camarilla or the Independents:

- **Ignorance of the customs:** The Camarilla is among the least secretive of Cainite societies (to other Cainites, that is), but its structure, rules and mores are among the most complex — even natives frequently trip up. As for the independent clans, they're generally very secretive about their clan cultures, complex or not.

- **The Vaulderie:** It's hard to hear the bishop toward whom you have a high Vinculum vilified like a straw man in the prince's open court. While the Vinculum lacks the power of a full blood bond, it still elicits strong feelings that an undercover agent can hardly afford to express (what if a packmate ends up captured by the enemy?). Moreover, agents used to relying on the Vaulderie as a source of inner strength often feel hopelessly cut adrift when they must go without during a covert endeavor, whether in enemy territory or anywhere else.

- **Strength of belief:** The more devoted a Sabbat agent is to the core beliefs of the sect — and rest assured, agents are rarely considered for this kind of work unless their orthodoxy is unassailable — the harder it is to tolerate the many little "sins" that must be committed in order to blend in with the heathens. Sabbat on Paths of Enlightenment suffer even more than most. If they compromise, they jeopardize their Path standing, and if they don't, they may seem suspiciously alien to the very people they're hoping to fool.

"Oh yeah," he agreed. "And even then the locals don't always cooperate as they should — that provincialism thing again."

"At least you wouldn't have a bishop or archbishop leaning on you every night, like I will in Nogales."

"No, though on the other hand, the patrons of itinerant templars aren't any more tolerant of failure than the patrons of city templars, and they're less likely to believe any excuses you come up with, since they have less way of knowing what you've been up to."

"I notice you didn't say no way of knowing."

He let that pass without comment. "Although of course, not knowing what their templars are up to out in the wide world is useful insulation for them as well."

"What do they call that in the movies? Plausible deniability?"

"Right," Navarrese exclaimed delightedly. "Plausible deniability. Ridiculous phrase. I love it. It's very easy for a roving templar's superior to claim complete innocence of his actions when necessary... which is good and bad for the templar, of course."

"I can sure as shit see how it'd be bad." I'd been on the bad end of such a thing before myself.

"Well, it's also good because it means the superior's usually more willing to grant the templar a wider latitude, since he himself is less likely to be held responsible."

"I guess so. It's a tradeoff. So that's how it is for these roving templars, while in my case..."

"In your case, you'll be more closely watched, but it'll be harder for Stimson to dissociate herself from you if you get in trouble, which means she's got a vested interest in protecting you. Roving templars don't usually have that going for them."

"Sounds to me like the roving templars would want to get dirt on their superiors as quick as possible, then, for insurance purposes."

"Bravo!" he exclaimed. "See what I mean? A resource we can't afford to lose. If only I could send all our would-be templars to the Camarilla for a little training in intrigue. Most Sabbat don't want to think that someone they've shared the Vaulderie with, as most templars have with their superiors, could betray them, but it does happen sometimes. Not as frequently as Camarilla betray each other, from what I understand — thanks be to Caine. Still, you should be aware that many of your fellow templars, particularly the itinerant sort, will have taken steps to protect themselves from just that sort of double-cross."

"I believe it. What about the opposite?"

"Templars betraying their masters? Of course. Our sect doesn't lack for the ambitious, those who would twist or even ignore our most sacred principles just to

feed their lust to dominate. That's why the Inquisition was created, my dear."

"Ah." I'd thought the Inquisitors were supposed to be about catching demon-worshippers. Come back to that later, though; I was still trying to cram all this templar stuff into my brain, and one subject at a time was more than enough.

TEAMWORK

"Don't the roving templars ever work with each other?" I asked.

"Sure, sometimes. They don't cooperate all that smoothly, since they're not as used to the compromises of teamwork as city templars, but occasions sometimes come up that leave no other choice."

"Like war."

"Like war, like schism. As I said, a certain amount of competition keeps us all hale and fit, but when big factions of the sect start shearing apart, it's time to step in. Much as I admired Monçada for his integrity, courage, and intellect, for instance, he did tend to cause stark divisions among his fellow Sabbat whenever he interfered in affairs outside his own domain. We're having enough trouble in the Americas. The last thing we need to do is give the elders in the European Camarilla the idea that the Old World Sabbat might collapse from its own internal squabbles. But that's off-topic, excuse me."

"Not a problem."

"Most of the time when roving templars get together, it's strictly an *ad hoc* thing, favor-swapping. As I was saying, however, crises do arise, and when that happens, someone — usually a priscus or a pair of prisci — may put a sort of templar task force together from the staff of several high officials. Sounds like an invitation to disaster, no? Well, it can be. But a regular Vaulderie helps smooth over a few of the rough edges, and common cause works its own wonders. Actually, I've seen some great Sabbat coups masterminded by templars whose respective masters couldn't stand the sight of each other."

"Sounds like you've got some stories I want to hear another time."

"As you like, Nadia, as you like."

"But most of the time, they're working totally alone?"

AID AND COMFORT

"Well, rarely totally alone. I keep forgetting to mention something very important about templars of all kinds. Most recruit assistants, temporarily or permanently... the way your archon recruited you."

"They're called servires in the Camarilla," I supplied.

"I see. Only I don't know how it is between archons and their servires, but the relationship I'm talking about is totally informal."

"It's pretty informal between archons and their servires, too."

"Ah. Well, then you're on familiar ground there. Except I understand that all good Camarilla Cainites are obliged to cooperate with any archon who commands it so?"

"Yes and no," I said (felt good to fling *that* expression back at him). "Depends on who you ask. The justicars and archons would sure as hell agree. If they can make a case that you stood in the way of them doing their job, they can get your prince to punish you, or even put you on trial if they're really pissed."

"Yes, just so. I'm afraid no templar can really require assistance of his fellow Sabbat — though if you're competent, the Nogales packs will quickly learn it's in their interests to stay on your good side."

"Hopefully."

"And the sweet part is, it is a package deal. If a ductus decides to help you, even the packmates who don't agree usually go along with it. So instead of a gaggle of individuals all looking out for number one, you'll command a group of people who share ties of blood and cooperate every night for survival."

"That's true." Or it sure would be keen if it was. After all, trying to get the locals' help in a Camarilla city was like herding cats. Of course the prince always called everybody into court and told them to be real helpful to the nice archon's servire, now, and everybody would nod so politely and then go right back to doing what they damn well pleased. It'd be a lovely change to only have to kiss five out of 20 asses to get all twenty's cooperation.

"People who work for a templar aren't called anything special?" I asked.

"Nothing uniform. Sometimes in Europe they speak of squires, but our American cousins seem to find such talk obnoxious." He smirked. "And I have to warn you that even a pack of rank fledglings probably won't stay by a templar's side for long, however great their admiration. There's a real stigma about anything that looks like sucking up. For sidekicks, secretaries, valets and such, you'll have to look to your own packmates."

"Oh, so I will have a pack."

TEMPLAR PACKS

"Of course you'll have a pack. Well, almost all the time, that is. Which may or may not consist of Stimson's other templars — I doubt she'll force such a choice on you, even if she prefers her templars to work as a pack. However, it is customary for city templars to take Vaulderie together with their official at least occasionally, even if they belong to different packs."

"Not surprising," I said dryly. "And roving templars?"

"Same thing. In fact, they may have to share the cup even more often, just to remind them that however much time they spend out in the field, they should also feel able to rely on the aid of their colleagues and their master whenever they need to."

"Right. And what you were saying just now, Navarrese, about being able to use my packmates as flunkies..."

"It's a possibility, depending on who's in your pack and what role you play within it. Hopefully you'll be pack ductus. But even if you aren't, you should be able to get at least one little brother or sister under your patronage. Sabbath don't mind playing backup to a packmate nearly as much as to an outsider, because packmates have a sacred duty to be there for each other. Most people would rather think of themselves as a team player than a flunky, and the brotherhood of the pack allows them that fiction."

"And if I'm smart, I won't say or do anything that takes that little myth away from them, at least not in front of other packs."

"Bingo."

TEMPLARS ESCORT

"So is that it for templars, or..."

"Hrm." Navarrese sat up again to crack the window open. Cool marine air bled into the room. I suddenly remembered something my old bastard boss had said about the Lasombra, some legend about their ancestor falling in love with a siren or selkie or something, and diving down into the deep fathoms to search a hundred years for her. Who knows? Fairy-tale garbage, I'd always guessed.

"There's the itinerant templars who wander because their patrons wander," he said at last. "Of all templars, I guess they're most like the old definition. The prisci, especially, tend to move from place to place, and they take their favorites with them, usually as packmates."

"So sometimes templars are in a pack with their boss."

"Oh, yes, particularly the sort of templar I'm talking about. Sorry — a permutation I hadn't mentioned. Anyway, sometimes these 'templars escort' simply serve as bodyguards, secretaries, or priests. Sometimes, though, they're entrusted with administration, diplomacy... you know: spy-work."

"I bet a templar like that's got a hard row to hoe," I commented. "You don't have the help of local people that know you, and you've got your boss right there all the time. It's the bad part of being a roving templar, rolled together with the bad part of being a city templar."

Navarrese shrugged. "Having the boss there isn't all bad. For one thing, the boss is usually no slouch in a

fight, and might — *might* — stand up for you if you're being ill-treated. Although I'll warn you that among us, needing a superior's help is a blow to personal honor, so most superiors won't interfere unless their own prestige is threatened by what's happening to you."

"But these prisci, if they're packmates with you and sharing the cup and all, wouldn't that... I mean, doesn't that mean anything to them?" I objected. "Or does it only mean something to the templar, because—"

"Of course it means something. It means a great deal," he broke in. "The Vaulderie..."

"Is sacred."

"Right. Smartass. But the Vaulderie is not the slavery of the blood bond, Nadia. You must understand that it won't force you into things, not in the way you're regrettably used to. Nor does it force anyone else, older or younger, to lay down their unlife for you against their will. I'm sure you'll agree that's preferable."

"Well, you know how I feel about the blood bond, so yeah." I'd already shared the Vaulderie a couple times with different people... a small Vaulderie with Bishop Drew in Buffalo right after I cried sanctuary and a huge one at the Baltimore *Palla Grande* a month later. So far I didn't feel anything from it. On the other hand, I hadn't seen any of those folks again since, except for Navarrese, and he was just one of a hundred bleeding into the goblet that night. So I felt a little suspicious that a pack Vaulderie was a lot stronger than he was trying to make out. If he read my mind and saw that, oh well.

ADVANCEMENT OPPORTUNITIES

"One thing I'm sure you're wondering about," the Lasombra added thoughtfully. "A fine templar — right now I'm thinking of the templars escort, since they know their patrons most intimately of all, but this also goes for city templars and even some roving templars — can end up being considered a sort of heir apparent. Then, when the priscus or what-have-you is killed, that templar tries to assume his place. If he hasn't made too many local enemies, he'll probably succeed. Unless of course the priscus was killed by a rival Sabbath, in Monomacy, say; in which case the rival assumes the post, and the ex-templars now have a little problem on their hands."

"I can imagine. Or if an official is just thrown out or disgraced or something, the templars have a little problem then too."

"Indeed they do."

"Let me tell you, I got real sick of heirs apparent in the archons' servires — I mean people who joined up hoping to get made archons themselves. They were fucking obnoxious... some of 'em even tried to get other servires killed, just to be rid of the competition."

"Some even tried to get the archon killed, I bet."

"Shit, yeah. And when you work for the guy, it's a lot easier to arrange. Well?"

"Well? Yes. It happens in the Sabbath too."

"I kinda figured it did. Can templars whose bosses get killed get a new boss and go on being templars?"

"There's nothing stopping them, if they want to. It all comes down to politics. It's traditional, though, that when an official dies honorably in service to the Sword of Caine, the surviving templars are taken in, either by the replacement or by some other allied official."

"And a good time is had by all."

"Hey, career moves come in many forms."

PALADINS

A patch of shadow had been lurking behind and under me, kind of like a really good attack dog that would never actually bite you without the go-ahead, but it'll sure as hell sit there and menace you on general principle till it gets that word. I don't know why, maybe it was just the light shifting as the moon moved, but now the shadow started oozing over me all cool and damp, stirring the little hairs on my arm.

"Uh... Navarrese... *Señor Inquisitorio*..."

"Apologies." Navarrese flicked it a glance and it poured back into the corner.

"Must come in handy when you need to put the fear of Caine into the infernalists..." I kidded him.

"Fear of the true dark, is more like it." It sounded like he was smirking again, but when I looked over his face was straight as a judge's. "I do hope your Spanish is a bit better than that?"

"Nope. How long do I have?"

"Three months."

"Do what I can. I learned French pretty fast when I had to. The old bastard said it was better than my English."

"Sounds like a tightass," he remarked.

"He was." Let Navarrese just get those details himself if he had to. I'd already told my sad story to Bishop Drew and it was on record for whoever wanted it bad enough. "Okay. What about paladins?"

"You mean, what is a paladin?" he asked.

"Well, I thought paladins were templars. Or vice versa. Am I screwed up?"

"No, no. It's a mistake, all right, but an easy one to make. Actually I suppose in a way paladins are templars."

"Okay, now you sound as confused as I am."

"It's... complicated. I'll try to explain."

"Shoot."

ORIGINS

"Well, again, the name is stolen. We'll know the Cainites have regained their true place when mortals

start stealing words from *us*, like they did in ancient times. Charlemagne appointed a council of 12 paladins, great knights and peers charged to attend and advise him. Roland, for example, was his paladin. And he took the word in turn from the Latin word *palatinus*, 'of the palace' — as in the old Roman emperors' *scholae palatinae*, their elite guard." He gave me a look.

"If it wasn't in *Ben-Hur*, *Cleopatra* or *Gladiator*, I'm not gonna know about it."

"You must've been a hit in the Camarilla salons."

I was, in fact. "So these guys are elite."

"Yes. By long tradition, the only Sabbath with a right to the title of paladin is one who sits on a cardinal's Table of Twelve — 12 paladins, in homage to Charlemagne."

"Or to Jesus and the Apostles."

"She shoots, she scores. Sometimes they are called Apostles as a snide reference. Anyway, you can think of them as joint chiefs of staff, a privy council, champions of the realm — whatever. The paladins' main duty is to assemble at Table, debate policy, and advise the cardinal of the results. There's no set interval for Table meetings. It could be anything from once a year to once a week, depending on the current state of the union, so to speak. Most of them are able war-chiefs too, and serve as such when needed. They also get sent out on special assignments. I should mention that there are a few very old, very powerful archbishops who've gained the customary right to a Table of Twelve as well. Monçada was one such, for example."

"Okay. So the paladins do for the cardinals and these couple archbishops what the *prisci* do for the regent?"

"That's not a bad way to look at it," he agreed. "Except that even more paladins than *prisci* are warriors by trade and nature. First, since it's only right that anyone called paladin *should* be a warrior, and second, because most of them get picked from among the templars of the area."

"You mean the cardinal snatches up some archbishop's templar, like, and says 'hey you, come be a paladin'?"

"More or less."

"Doesn't that piss off the archbishop?"

"Sometimes." Navarrese looked amused. "Although it can be a blessing as well, not only to the archbishop but even to the cardinal. More than a few of those chosen to become paladins were chosen because they proved themselves dangerously competent and ambitious... they have that 'lean and hungry look,' as the Bard put it."

"So the cardinal makes 'em a paladin to keep 'em honest."

"Exactly. That, and it's a fairly high honor to have a paladin drafted from your own retinue. Kind of like

being a teacher who tutors a prodigal student. Being anointed paladin brings great fame, thus great public scrutiny. Even young Sabbat try to learn the names of their cardinal's Table of Twelve. And the cardinal sees to it that those paladins who pose a real threat are kept the busiest. I hate to go back to ancient Rome in light of your... cinematic understanding of the subject, but actually the movies can demonstrate my point. Ever notice how Caesar seems to wind up sending his most brilliant and charismatic generals out into the godforsaken hinterlands of the Empire to fight the massing barbarian hordes?"

"Sure. Because if they were home, they'd just be whipping up a big batch of trouble, trying to become Caesar themselves."

"By George, I think she's got it. Now, this little strategy can backfire, just like in the movies. If your general actually routs those barbarians, he's coming back home to a hero's welcome at the head of a blood-forged army, and then what do you do? Now I've also seen a cardinal take exactly the opposite tack, appoint a certain templar paladin and then ensure that he never got the first opportunity to shine at his new job. His political career withered on the vine in short order. Then there are those who believe the old saw about keeping your enemies closer; fortunately, a cardinal can just as easily order a paladin to stay by his side every waking moment. It's really his prerogative."

"Nice guys, the cardinals."

"They dance the same dance we all do, and it's rather better for the sect if they're good at it, don't you think?" Navarrese asked pointedly. "A leader who can't put down potential rivals deserves to be stripped of the position. I admit I do prefer it when the cardinals can find a useful destination for their troublemakers — throwing them against the aforementioned barbarian hordes, for instance, benefits the Sabbat as a whole."

"Okay, I think I get the difference now. Paladins aren't templars, but a lot of them are former templars so people get mixed up about it."

"I'm afraid the confusion runs a little deeper than that." He shook his head. "You see, in the past century or so, a bunch of less lofty officials have started anointing their most senior templars as paladins. A few have even tried to get a Table of Twelve together — 'tried' being the operative word there."

"So what? I thought moxie was a good thing in the Sabbat."

"Sure, but you have to understand the etiquette. If some backwater bishop wants his top templar to be called paladin and you need to flatter either of them, go right ahead and do it, because there's no holy writ anywhere that says you can't. Just don't let a cardinal's paladin overhear you."



"I see what you mean. Or a cardinal, or anybody else who might care about the convention."

"There's a mindset there, Nadia, a mindset. Most of these people are not modern. To them, being paladin means unimpeachable honor, valor, and might. A stain on one paladin is a stain upon them all. So they get real unhappy when they see dimwit whelps prancing around pretending to the title."

"Got it." Another nice pitfall to know about. There are always pitfalls. I just hoped it was in Navarrese's interest to steer me straight. You'd think it was. He'd publicly stuck his neck out for an ex-Camarilla girl nobody wanted to touch back at the ball, and now he was getting me this job... it wouldn't look good for him if I flopped. I kept telling myself that.

THE INQUISITION

"Are you in need of refreshment, Nadia?"

I've always hated the way Kind—Cainites say 'refreshment.' It used to be such a nothing word, but now I can't hear anybody say it in that special tone of voice without suddenly getting thirsty.

"Yeah," I admitted.

"A moment." He finished off the joint and dropped it in the ashtray with its late brothers. There was a veritable fog bank in the room by now — I bet the whole building stank of pot. He'd probably been at this for several hours, and maybe it wasn't my business, but it looked like a losing battle to me. From what I could tell, the man was only capable of staying so calm when he talked about sect stuff.

I sat quiet while he went in the other room. There was a low moan, mumbled conversation. Damn, he'd had somebody back there the whole time?

"*Bon appetit.*" He resurfaced with two big pint glasses in each hand and handed me one of them. "HIV-negative, just like I asked for in the ad. Or at least he thinks he is."

"I'm not real worried about it either way."

"It's the guest's duty to propose the first toast," he reminded me.

"To... new horizons."

"Hear, hear. To what lies beyond them."

"Fair enough." He drained his first glass in good style. Mine was good, rich, warm — and laced with a dash of something in the barbiturate family, not that that should come as a big shock. That voice had sounded pretty damn calm given that Navarrese was unburdening its owner of a good deal more than most people liked to part with. But it didn't seem strong enough to really fuck me up if I just had the one, so I drank.

"Okay," I began. "So we've now been through every kind of templar there is, except for two."

"I was wondering if you caught that," he replied, the corners of his eyes crinkling up a little.

"Like a steel trap, *señor*," I tapped my temple. "Templars who work for the regent and templars who work for the Inquisitors."

"Right. Well, with your kind permission, I'll skip over the ones that work for the regent. Most of her templars really *are* flunkies — bodyservants, bodyguards. She has the prisci, not to mention the cardinals, bishops, and archbishops, to call on for more advanced favors."

"True. That works. I'm happy to hear about your templars instead — and about you, while we're at it."

"Me specifically, or *inquisitores* — excuse me, Inquisitors in general?"

"Yes."

INFERNALISTS

He snorted. "Well, you know at least some of what I do. I strain pond scum like Brandenburg out of the pool."

"Right. And he's an infernalist. I know you guys catch devil-worshippers. But you were saying some other stuff that made me think there's more to it."

"Oh, there is. So many dangers face the Sabbat, Nadia. The Camarilla is only the most obvious of them. Nor are the Cainites of the Camarilla quite as dangerous to us as their ideology is. We can survive their outright attacks — we have for centuries, despite their huge advantage of numbers — but if their blasphemies ever manage to infect us and rot us from within, we're done for."

"So you... what, protect the Sabbat from bad ideas?"

"Mm. That's a little strong. I don't try to control what other Sabbat think, though I could name other Inquisitors who do, even a few who certainly ought to know better by now. But the sect is founded on certain basic principles, which it must not abandon — it would die if it did, or, at the very least, cease to be the Sabbat. So it's my duty to make sure those principles are being upheld."

"Ah." I wasn't sure how to navigate here. If I just let it go, that might not look good.

"It may seem hard to understand." He tried to catch me with his eyes. The instinct to look in elders' eyes deferentially was pretty much ground into my undead lizard-brain. "You're coming from the Camarilla perspective. The Camarilla has the strength of sameness: a hierarchy that gives precedence to age and ancestry rather than merit, and thus, rarely changes personnel. Our strength is the opposite. We're smaller, fleeter. Just when you pin us down we shift; come back to a Sabbat town five years later and the bishops'

council might have completely turned over. Which is as it must be. But without *something* constant to cling to, we'd disintegrate into a scattering of separate packs, ripe for crushing. Our sacred cause, fortunately, serves that need. The cause and the faith that fuels it. So long as those endure, we endure."

"And that's what holds the Sabbat together. Lose that focus, and you lose everything."

"Well put. So you see why our ideas are of such profound importance to us."

"And everybody having the same idea."

"All having the same faith. Yes."

"And worshipping demons fucks that up."

"It's not hard to see why. Remember Gospel? 'You cannot serve both God and Mammon.' Any demon you call up is looking to suborn your loyalty, your energy, your very soul. Whatever you promise to them, you cannot give to the cause—even if it's for the sake of the cause that you're dealing with them. The Sabbat needs power, yes. We must tap the deepest reserves of strength that we can find. But the demons—and, while we're at it, the failures who serve them and seek constantly to tempt us into their vile slavery—ask a price we can't afford to pay."

FOLLOWERS OF SET

"Well, you get no argument from me about that. My archon had to take down an infernalist once. Some things are just flat wrong."

"Good. The same, by the way, goes for the snakes... the brood of Set."

"I thought you had those in the Sabbat."

"Yes, but they're *antitribu*, just like our Brujah or our Toreador. Even so, they do warrant keeping an eye on—but no matter. I mean the faithful Followers of Set, those still working the will of their father... demon, dark god or Hell-touched Damned, I don't care what he really is. They're constantly baiting little traps for the foolish among us. Sometimes it's my duty—and a sad duty, let me tell you—to prosecute a Sabbat who's done wonderful work for the sect for years, all because he let himself get twined in the coils of one of those idolaters."

So getting in bed with Setites was actually against the law, sort of. That was a distinct improvement over Camarilla policy.

But I wanted clarification. "So you just mean actually getting into debt with the snakes... not just talking to them."

"I don't even talk to them if I can help it; I like to remove as much temptation from my existence as possible."

"I'm just trying to figure out what I am and am not allowed to do."

"Well, you're not going to find it carved in stone or even written on a cocktail napkin anywhere, my dear. Sorry to disappoint. The list of things Sabbat are specifically, formally forbidden to do is pretty damned short. But watch yourself. Any Inquisitor has the power to make a judgment call about your dealings. If they seem hazardous to the sect at large, you could be brought to trial. As the ex-toady of an archon, you've already got a strike against you, and any enemies you make will be well aware of that."

"Yeah, so'm I."

"I know you are."

THE BLACK HAND

"What about the Black Hand?" I said after a minute.

"The Hand? They're Sabbat."

"Are you sure, because somebody told me that the Hand and the Inquisition hate each other."

"Ah. Well, that's a common misunderstanding. The Hand certainly harbors some heretics, just like there are heretics among all Sabbat, but we're not against the Hand *in toto*."

"Yeah, but misunderstandings come from somewhere," I prodded.

He considered. "The Inquisition and the Hand observe a sort of apartheid. They don't join our ranks and we don't join theirs. Templars are also forbidden, by the way, to join the Hand. It all has to do with the balance of power. The Hand is a powerful weapon, permitted great secrecy, great latitude in carrying out its missions. So is the Inquisition. So the question arises, who watches the watchers? The divide other Sabbat see is nothing more than the old Lasombra principle of checks and balances at work."

"Lasombra principle?"

"Yes. In nights long past the princes of our clan learned how to keep the throne, and the peace, in a city by making sure every faction had a rival faction other than the prince's own dynasty. Of course the Ventrue were quick to steal the trick..." I gave him my *do stop shitting me* look, but he soldiered on. "The cardinals, archbishops and bishops have power, but the Inquisition can strike them down as heretics if they betray the sect. The Black Hand can be set against rogue Inquisitors. The cardinals, archbishops and bishops command the Hand's obedience. And all of the above are answerable to the regent, so she can treasure some small hope of knowing where the balance stands at any given moment. See my point?"

"Can the Inquisition try members of the Black Hand?"

He started to say something, stopped, started, and stopped again.

"Very good, Nadia. The answer is technically yes, largely no. Powerful interests have protected the members of the Hand for a long time now."

"I gather the Inquisition would love to change that."

"There are those of my brethren," he said somberly, "who have wondered if they might be hiding something."

My good old woman's intuition told me that's where I should leave that subject.

OTHERS

"Okay. Anybody else I should watch out for if I want to stay in good with you?"

"Well." He thought about it. "All the independent clans have their own strange blasphemies, but most of them don't go out of their way to ensnare us. The Assamites... my worries about them are more mundane than philosophical, especially if some of them really are falling in with the Camarilla now."

"I've heard the same rumors everybody has." I shrugged. "The Camarilla is worried, too. And the Tremere are metaphorically shitting themselves."

"Well, that does my old heart good. As for the Giovanni family, they make the occasional fortuneteller's pitch to us, dropping dark hints about all the secrets they could tell us. They're still so Venetian, they think everyone is a political juggling ball that they can keep in the air forever. I treat them as I'd treat any charlatan sorcerer: I give them nothing of myself to work with, and if I catch them trying to meddle with my younger brothers and sisters in the Sabbat, I remind them that there are things in this world worth fearing, too."

The shadows in the room contracted in agreement. "Then," he went on, "there are viler heresies... I doubt you'll see hide or hair of them in Nogales, so I won't go into the dreary details. But those wild maenads, the bitches of Lilith, I'm afraid some of them are hiding among us still, even after the purge a few decades back. And I have a brother who insists that the blood-heresy that haunted our clan in the Long Night isn't dead either. The last thing we need is some evangelist of pseudo-Gnostic bullshit getting everyone too focused on their inner godling to pay attention when Gehenna knocks."

ANTEDILUVIANS

"Sounds rough." I chewed on this. Lilith who? "You said the Camarilla's ideas are dangerous too, but that's got to be hard to guard against. I'm not the only defector in the sect, Navarrese."

"That's true. Luckily, the defectors don't have the rosiest opinion of their former colleagues, and most of them are youngsters anyway... the true poisoning of mind and spirit takes time. But you can be sure we take extra care to teach our converts their catechism."

"Still."

"Yes, still," he admitted. "We can't be sure of them all; we can't even be sure of our own. The Ancients are crafty. That's why we Lasombra killed ours. It's why the Tzimisce killed theirs. If only the others would follow us..."

"If everybody else killed theirs," I pointed out, "your clanmates'd lose one of their excuses to lord it over everybody like they do."

"Caine forbid," he murmured ironically. "But surely the logic of it appeals to you. It's only right that we and our trans-Danubian colleagues should take a leading role. We've cleansed ourselves of our ancestors' puppeteering. Who else has accomplished that?"

"What about the Brujah?"

"According to the legend, that was a different matter entirely."

Well, to be honest, I wasn't clear on the legend either.

THIN-BLOODED

"Speaking of legends...what about all the weird-ass Caitiff that have been appearing lately, the ones so weak-blooded people say they aren't even real Cainites?"

"What about them?" he returned coolly. "They just prove what the Sabbat's been saying all along... that the prophecies are true and Gehenna will be upon us soon. Their coming was foretold."

"Well, but wait. You make enough Licks, soon enough they're going to get weak-blooded. That's just eschatological fact."

"You're the one who brought it up," he challenged with a small smile.

I didn't want to shoot my mouth off about something he obviously thought he knew a lot more about, but it was too late to get out of the dare.

"Well. There've been stories. Nostradamus kinda shit... vees less than 10 years old knowing things they can't possibly know about what elders have been doing. I've heard a couple justicars say they should all be made Anathema just to calm everybody back down."

"Ah."

"But I don't guess that bothers the Sabbat. You'd like knowing all about elders' dirty little secrets."

"Most of us would, yes. Not the elders with dirty little secrets, though." The smile became a grin. "Actually, I've been asked several times now to submit a formal recommendation to my Inquisitor brothers and sisters on the subject, but I haven't weighed in yet because I think further study is needed. It's possible these strange babes are a gift from Caine himself to lead us to our destiny. It's just as possible they're sent by the Antediluvians or, more likely, the fucking Inconnu to throw us into chaos. Sometimes the devil tells a little

truth to begin with, just to trap you with a lie later on. If I come across one in person, which I haven't yet, I'll question the creature, certainly, but I won't kill it until I understand what I'm dealing with."

"What about the other Inquisitors?"

"Well, a few are absolutely convinced the Caitiffs must be the catspaws of the Ancients, and right now they're making a lot of noise about it — I won't add the obvious bit about protesting too much. Most of the rest believe they could be of great use to us, properly taught and guided. If you stumble over one in the course of your duties, you should probably bring it to Stimson, and then write a letter to me, if you would."

I nodded, promising nothing. "Noted."

NODDISM

"But anyway. We were talking about the fact that the Lasombra and Tzimisce are the only clans to rise up *en masse* against their founders, and so the only clans that can call themselves free of the Ancients' meddling. Many Inquisitors come from those two clans for that very reason," he explained. "But it's also because both clans have always taken such interest in the old lore. After all, an Inquisitor is not an executioner. Not by nature. Punishment is the necessary result of failure — and I count every execution as my failure no less than the condemned's — but our true purpose is to redeem. We go among the packs as missionaries, and we send our templars among the packs as well, to aid the training of the priests, illuminating the Sermons of Caine, passing along the *ritae*."

"And checking up on things."

"Of course." He frowned and reeled himself in, cast a thoughtful glance at the bottom of empty glass number two. "Unfortunately, our... heavenly choir doesn't always sing in good ensemble. Most Inquisitors consider themselves Nod's own scholars, and they all have their pet theories. I wish they could keep their academic squabbles out of the public forum. It just confuses everybody. But there you go."

"Sometimes academic squabbles get not so academic."

"Yes. Orthodoxy is the crown of the soul, but I fear it's also a valuable political weapon."

"Especially when the unorthodox have to worry about getting a little visit from you guys," I pointed out.

RESISTANCE

"True," he allowed. "And I'm afraid that in the past, there've been corrupt Inquisitors — and even some well-meaning but overly rigid ones — who treat the word 'heresy' as an umbrella term for anything they don't consider proper conduct. While I agree that we should expect no less than perfection in the faith from every Sabbat, it is a bit counterproductive to go around

burning people for peccadilloes and starting hysterical witch-hunts. We don't have enough congregation as it is, and while it's doubtless easier to punish the ignorant than to instruct them, that engenders a lack of trust which, in the end, makes it impossible for the rest of us to do our fucking jobs."

"I have noticed people get antsy around Inquisitors," I said dryly.

"Yeah, well, that's why. A few bad apples spoil the barrel. Infernalism is the one bailiwick no one begrudges us — nobody really argues that any contact with demons is too much. On the other hand, much as they might agree about the need to cut out every speck of the demonic cancer among them, not all Sabbat like to throw open the doors to their souls on demand. Some do, though. The young innocents, in whom the flame of ardor burns so high that it's honestly never occurred to them to think a disloyal thought," he said wistfully. "They challenge me to find fault with them. If only there weren't always at least one Inquisitor happy to take advantage of that innocence. For my part, I try to leave them as I found them. Still, most resist me. Not necessarily because they're afraid of looking like infernalists, but because they have some other little secret they don't want found out. Half my job is simply ferreting out the sins I'm actually interested in. A guilty look under questioning could mean anything; the most dangerous thing is to assume."

He lay down on his back, putting his feet up on the wall of the bay window's box.

"And it gets worse whenever we announce that we're looking for heretics, not just infernalists. Some Inquisitors have gotten into the terrible habit of always saying they're looking for demonolaters, even when they're really looking for something else. Then they end up bringing someone to trial for heresy. Gets people paranoid."

"I have to admit I'm a little paranoid about being found heretical, myself."

"Apply yourself to your education, Nadia, and I'll do what I can to protect you."

"And what you said about enemies I might make, what they might do."

"I know of few Sabbat with no cause to worry about that," he informed me. "All I can tell you is that most Inquisitors really don't like playing the tool in someone else's vendetta. That makes fools of us. We honestly do try to ensure that any accusations brought to us are sincere. Last century there was a tremendous scandal over an Inquisitor named Csaba, which you may hear about — we discovered he'd been taking orders from a certain elder archbishop who preferred not to dirty her own hands."



"And?"

"And? They burned as quickly as anyone else. I myself extracted and signed their confessions."

INQUISITORIAL TRIALS

"How exactly does the trial work?" I asked. "Is it like a conclave, or..."

"I couldn't say. It's not like a mortal trial, not in this country anyway. The Inquisitor sits as judge — actually, when the problem's really severe, or we expect to turn up multiple culprits, several Inquisitors might go to an area and sit in panel at trial, but usually it's just the one. The Inquisitor can be the accuser as well, which already makes things irregular by most mortal standards."

"Pretty much."

"Well, sometimes it happens that way because the Inquisitor discovered the crime in the first place. Sometimes, though, it's because the real accuser is too afraid of reprisal to step forward publicly. Ah... let's see, what else? Burden of proof isn't formally put anywhere, but it certainly tends to fall on the shoulders of the accused. The accused can have someone to speak for him if he wants, however that may muddy the waters. All the Sabbat in the area are invited to attend and can enter themselves as witnesses for either side, as long as they're willing to swear on the reliquary."

"Which is that thing you pointed at Brandenburg at the ball when you charged him."

"Exactly."

"So, the witnesses speak; I assume the accuser and the accused speak..."

"And the Inquisitor questions them all. There's no real set order of things. If people start making trouble, the templars bounce 'em. At any point the accused can request a trial by ordeal, or by Monomacy, which is fought either against the Inquisitor or a champion chosen by the Inquisitor. The Inquisitor doesn't have to grant the request, though."

"Then I don't see why they ever would grant it..." I knew there were plenty of old-fart Camarilla Cainites who still believed ordeals could prove something for real, but it always seemed like utter bullshit to me.

"Oh, there are reasons." He rubbed the three days' growth of beard I guess he died with. As Voltaire he'd shaved it off, of course. "Sometimes the Inquisitor really isn't convinced of the case against the accused, and decides to put the question to Father Caine instead. Sometimes when popular opinion sides with the accused, it's wiser to provide what's seen as a fighting chance. And — alas! — sometimes Inquisitors knuckle under to considerations of age or prestige, not that I blame them. For instance, I wouldn't have needed the permission of Brandenburg's

THE IRON RELIQUARY

The Iron Reliquary is a badge of office presented to an Inquisitor upon her appointment. It looks much like the traditional Sword of Caine symbol, but is modified into something more like a real sword's proportions, so that it can be held and brandished like one. It is forged of blackest iron, generally by an elder Tzimisce priest. Small, precious items of Noddist interest — anything from the fangs of famous Sabbat martyrs to "fragments of the Black Basalt Throne" — are embedded into the hilt, thus the name. Faithful Sabbat regard the Iron Reliquary as a "holy" object, imbued with the collective spirit of the struggling Cainite race.

The Iron Reliquary has several practical and ritual uses:

- **Identification:** The badge of office positively identifies an Inquisitor. The Inquisition takes a dim view of anyone who steals or fakes an Iron Reliquary, particularly to impersonate one of their own.

- **The *accusatio*:** When charges are formally leveled against a miscreant, the Reliquary is brandished at him like a sword. The recitation generally ends with a prayer for Caine to bend ear and lend his strength and wisdom in proving the charge.

- **Oaths:** An oath on the Iron Reliquary is sacred; to break it invites the malediction of Caine himself. Witnesses in an Inquisitorial trial are required to swear on it if they wish to speak. An oath on the reliquary is also sometimes used as security for other formal promises between Sabbat, such as declarations of alliance between neighboring archbishops, for instance. To be binding, the reliquary must taste the blood of the oath-taker (from a small cut, usually on the palm of the hand).

- **Ordeals:** The accused in an Inquisitorial trial cannot simply swear to innocence on the reliquary. He can, however, request an ordeal on the reliquary to settle the question. The Inquisitor may choose whether or not to grant the request (a prerogative some contest the honesty of). If she grants a trial by ordeal, she also has the right to choose its form. Common forms of the ordeal involve heating the "blade" portion of the reliquary until it glows red, then requiring the accused to grasp it for a count of 13 without entering Röttschreck; suspending the reliquary above the accused's neck or heart by a few hairs from the accuser's head; and bodily retrieving the reliquary from a pit occupied by some sort of threat (Arms of Ahriman just don't cut it for this kind of thing). Needless to say, the Inquisitor can fudge the ordeal one way or the other, altering the conditions or doctoring the components and so on, if she wants to see a certain result. Whatever the result, though, the ordeal is considered to show the will of Caine. Unless a skeptic can produce very good proof that someone cheated, it's far better to be silent about any doubts that arise.

In a chronicle that takes its Noddism very seriously, the Storyteller may at her option grant all or some Iron Reliquaries the equivalent of a True Faith rating, which is effective against infernalist or "heretic" vampires, Lilins, those in blood-thrall to regnants who serve the Antediluvians, and other such "traitors to Caine." (Note that simply being a Camarilla vampire does not count as a "traitor to Caine," whatever most Sabbat may think on the subject. An element of conscious or deep-seated subjection to the Antediluvians, Lilith, or demonic powers must exist. A member of the Servitors of Irad Gehenna cult, for example, would count.)

fellow bishops to prosecute him there in his own city, but they certainly could have made it hell on earth for me to try — and they might well have forced me to grant him an ordeal in the end."

"So what would you have done then?" I shifted on the barstool. "What do you do if you have somebody you know is guilty, and they ask for an ordeal or a duel, and for some reason you have to let 'em have it, but you're afraid they'll win?"

"Brandenburg wouldn't have. But to answer your question — in such a case, I wait to grant the request until I've set out all the facts of my case, and hope that the sensible folk in the area will take matters into their own hands after I lose and leave." Empty glass number three tumbled to the sill beside him.

If it was *me*, I might just decide to do a little fixing on the contest instead, but then my respect for doing things by the book was at an all-time low.

"Have you ever had to fight a duel with someone far more powerful than you?" I asked.

"More powerful? A few times. *Far* more powerful? No. I've never seen the point in getting anyone killed for no conceivable benefit, particularly myself. But that's when it becomes very important for an Inquisitor to have high-ranking supporters, those who can provide appropriate champions when needed. Frequently," he grinned at me, "such champions are templars."

"Ah-hah. And if things don't go to an ordeal or duel or whatever..."

"Then I decide based on the facts as presented and pronounce sentence."

"Which is always burning?"

"Which is burning, yes. I have some latitude for granting leniency, but even then the sentence of burning still stands; and if for whatever reason the accused falls afoul of us again, the full penalty is reinstated."

"Now by leniency, you mean..." I prompted.

"The Wild Hunt, for example, which carries a slim chance of survival — base, cowardly, pointless survival, but survival. Or I can set a task which earns the convict a *ritus* of Contrition."

"Oh, I get how that would kill a lotta birds with one stone."

"Rest assured I don't bring people to trial frivolously just so I can impose a task on them, Nadia..." He waved a cynical hand. "But I've learned not to promise anything to my brothers and sisters."

"Are you allowed to torture people, like the real Inquisition used to do?"

He looked tickled at that. "The 'real' Inquisition! That's good! You talk as if there's some leather-bound codex sitting on a bookshelf at the regent's haven saying what I can and can't do. Some Inquisitors use torture, sure. But the ones who survive to celebrate their victories think very carefully before they settle on who to torture and how, since there's nothing stopping anyone from taking revenge."

"Except the Code of Milan." I was real proud of how I'd wangled a copy of that code out of Bishop Drew.

"No, look down in the addenda. They can claim the Inquisitor abused authority, and all is kosher."

"Yeah, but only if a quorum of *prisci* approve," I fired back.

"Do you think a quorum of *prisci* are going to stand up for an Inquisitor who's already gone home to glory, unless there's some compelling reason to do so?" He looked astounded.

"I'd think just the bad precedent would be pretty damn compelling."

"Huh." He picked up his glass again and swabbed his middle finger around the bottom of it to pick up the last little bit. "If there's one thing most Sabbat don't give a fuck about, my dear, that would be precedent."

INQUISITORIAL TEMPLARS

"I'm starting to get the idea."

"Good. I worry about you getting confused on that score. Sometimes I get confused. I suspect that in many ways our modern Sabbat resembles the Camarilla more than it should, and more than it cares to admit, definitely. I know many young Camarilla flout the bastardized Traditions handed down to them. Meanwhile, many elders among us thought rebellion a fine thing when they were doing the rebelling."

He shook his head. "Still, there *are* real differences, differences you can't afford to dismiss. Among us, hierarchy is the necessary result of personal striving, not an end to be served in itself. Revolution is not a doom to be avoided at all costs but a purgative to be prescribed as needed. And apart from what Caine himself handed down — a matter still under some debate — no law of ours is eternal."

"Yeah, okay. I'm working on this. I really am. If it hadn't sounded good I wouldn't have joined."

"Of course not."

"Uh, back to the Inquisition."

"Yes?" he said mildly.

"Your templars."

"Right. Our templars do many of the same things other templars do. They travel with us, act as companions-in-arms and packmates—"

"They're bouncers at trials —"

"Bailiffs, yes, and they go out among the pack priests as missionaries, like I said before. A very few spend most of their time chasing the lore and artifacts of our ancient history, bringing it back for their patrons to catalog and study. But I'd say their main duty is to help investigate infernalists and heretics."

"Aboveboard or undercover?"

ANATOMY OF A WITCH-HUNT

What follows is a short discussion of some of the archetypal features of a witch-hunt. Note that most Sabbat Inquisitors aren't demagogues, and relatively few of their prosecutions blossom into full-blown witch-hunts. This information is intended for stories where things are truly meant to get out of hand; incidentally, it can just as easily apply to stories set among the Camarilla (or even the independents, though the independents don't really have anything like an in-house Inquisition in place).

Ever-Widening Scope

Terminology often provides the first foothold for a witch-hunt. In real-world history, the mortal Inquisition had little power to prosecute witchcraft until the *Malleus Maleficarum* convinced the Pope to formally expand the definition of "heresy" to include it. During Joseph McCarthy's twentieth-century

reign of terror, "un-American" was the exceedingly flexible word that started out referring to Communists and Soviet collaborators and ended up including homosexuals and Hollywood personalities who dabbled in socialist activism.

"Heresy" is no less conveniently broad for the Sabbat Inquisition. After all, it seems futile to worry only about those enslaved to demons when, in fact, it's just as dangerous to the sect to harbor the stooges of Antediluvians, or the Inconnu, or the Setites — to say nothing of Camarilla spies and those unnumbered silent weaklings who lie awake days considering a defection to the Camarilla.

Collaboration

A recurring feature of any witch-hunt is that once it's started, most folk go along with it no matter how ridiculous and voracious it becomes. Why do people collaborate in their own oppression? The solution to the paradox lies in the fact that there are actually two oppressors, not one: the witch-hunter himself, and a vague but plausible threat to the social order. The people must choose their poison, and they have historically opted for the former. In other words, they accept the Inquisitor because they have been taught to fear heresy more.

Furthermore, as chaos compounds and accusations mount, all the resulting fear is again redirected to the chosen scapegoat. In such a climate, it becomes ominously easy to turn citizen against citizen, to make of the populace one vast spy network that learns to do most of the witch-hunter's work for him. They bring him captured "criminals" and beg him to dispense justice. What can he do but gravely oblige them?

Demagoguery

A witch-hunter is, above all, a demagogue. Personal power, however great, can start to seem a lackluster thing once you get used to the rush of converting a mass of apathetic listeners into bloodthirsty fanatics happy to tear their own to pieces on your say-so. Add to this that an Inquisitor's personal staff may not always be sufficient to capture and subdue an accused heretic — sometimes the blessings of the local populace are not only desirable but indispensable.

Thus, whatever persona such an Inquisitor adopts, it will be with the deliberate purpose of wooing the crowd. Some maintain a quiet, scholarly air, shaking their heads in seemingly genuine regret as they consign their victims to death. Others are ranting muckrakers. Some, capitalizing on the hysteria of the Final Nights, adopt mystical, apocalyptic pretensions and refer to themselves as prophets. Needless to say, this makes other prophets their first targets for persecution....

The God Complex

Given the fear and respect most Inquisitors receive from inferiors, peers, and even superiors, it becomes understandably difficult not to succumb to delusions of infallibility and invincibility. Judgments are quite often carried out without a murmur — perhaps the people obey out of devotion, perhaps out of fear. It all looks the same from up on high.

This is a recipe for moral disaster. No matter what atrocities an Inquisitor may sink to, a justification can be found. Eventually, the order of decision-making is reversed: The action comes first, and the reasoning second. It's a much easier way to do things, once you know you're always right.

Onward to Hegemony

It's disheartening to realize just how little stands in a witch-hunter's way once he's truly gained some sway. Armed with the "will of the people," he has amazing political resilience. And once his jurisdiction grows to encompass his own superiors, even they have no choice but to follow him. Archbishops and cardinals who could step in to contest a verdict too often refrain for fear of looking "soft on heresy," so to speak; they do so only when the victim is someone they have an interest in protecting, the case looks weak or politically motivated, and the majority of Sabbat in the area seem unenthused about the proceedings.

Storytellers planning a story or series of stories centering around a witch-hunt would do well to read up on the great witch-hunts of mortal history. The mortal Inquisition and the Salem witch trials are preeminent examples of institutionalized, organized witch-hunting, but the McCarthy era is an excellent modern adaptation (and only one among many). The rhetoric of famous rabble-rousers betrays again and again the same techniques for manipulating popular hysteria. Tonight's witch-hunters have many models upon which to base their craft.

"Either. It's actually quite easy for Inquisitors or their templars to go undercover if they want, since they're usually masked and robed at formal proceedings. Some agents of the Inquisition have never revealed their real identities to anyone, not even to their fellows."

"Creepy," was my verdict.

"Well, it's dangerous work. I've seen and orchestrated plenty of ruses organized around the convenience of the disguise. Inquisitors and their templars posing as each other, taking each others' place at strategic moments and so on."

"Do you ever make your templars pretend to be infernalists?"

"Eh." Navarrese shook himself, or was it a shudder? "Sad experience taught us to avoid that enterprise. It's been done, and once or twice it's even succeeded. But there are demons so poisonous you can't even hear their names aloud without being compromised. Waste of a faithful servant. It's more cost-effective just to find a stupid amoral fledgling who seems vulnerable to promises of easy power, steer him in what you think is the right direction and spy on the results. But that has its own perils, not least to the Inquisitor's own soul."

"You know what they say about fighting with monsters."

"Well, we *are* the monsters. But that doesn't insulate us." He looked rueful. "Not all Sabbat realize that — maybe that's why infernalism is so hard to root out, let alone eliminate. We encourage our young to strive for domination; we say compete or die; we tell them they were made to enjoy such freedom as no other creatures know. But sometimes we forget to tell them things are still out there with the power to enslave them. Sometimes we forget to tell ourselves."

"Yeah. I guess it's a real bad thing when an Inquisitor goes bad."

He just nodded.

IDEOLOGY AND POLITICS

The guy was off in never-never land. I let my mind wander too, to the subject of where was I going to spend the day. The little Victorian waterfront hotel I'd checked into was pricey, considering its genteel charm hadn't been treated to a renovation since about 1930. I didn't even know if there were other Sabbat in town or if this was pretty much Port Navarrese. I hoped he wouldn't offer me haven. Anything I could lie down on would smell like a Led Zeppelin concert and the whole place had an overdeveloped sense of mood anyway. The fucking shadows were on the move again, like

they were just waiting for him to get distracted so they could misbehave.

Or like the things he was thinking were getting them excited.

"Hey... Navarrese." I should either say goodnight or get him back talking, one of the two.

"What?" His head snapped around. It looked a mite wobbly in motion. Maybe he was more toasted than I'd figured.

"You were saying... about how people take things you try to teach them the wrong way?"

"Yes." He frowned. "They understand that they've been freed — freed of the Camarilla, unshackled from any duty to the kine or to their own 'humanity' — a contradiction in terms anyway, right? What they don't understand is that they've been freed for a reason, and that reason isn't just to indulge every petty-ass lust they've ever entertained. They don't understand the burden of freedom, Nadia. A slave, as long as he stays a slave, can do nothing to stop his master's evil. We don't have that excuse anymore. But they think they can take the rewards and leave the responsibility."

"Well, but is there any way to stop 'em from taking it that way?"

"You can't force anyone to be virtuous. You sure as hell can't and stay True Sabbat yourself." He reached up suddenly and yanked the window the rest of the way open. Hopefully that'd let the smoke filter out quicker. "But you can be a better teacher. I blame myself — I blame the Inquisition, which has its own litany of shortcomings — but I also blame the other officials. All of us should be doing more, walking the walk. 'Do as I say, not as I do' is not going to make the grade."

"Did it ever?"

He made a so-so gesture.

"It's not so clear cut. It's not as simple as this official helps the Sabbat, that one hurts it. If it were that simple I'd be burning somebody every week."

"That'd be cheery," I commented.

"Maybe not cheery, but productive. Excuse me. I'll try putting it another way. You have your officials who want to do the right thing for the right reasons, and they're capable of doing it. You have the ones who want to do the right thing for the right reasons, but they're incompetent. The ones who want to do the right thing for the wrong reason — how do you handle that? Help them along because it's for the greater good, even if you know you're just giving them ammunition for some bullshit vendetta?" He clenched his fists. "The ones who want to do the wrong thing for the right reason — do you have any idea how hard it is to have to cut down somebody who you

ANOINTED PANOPLY

A few words about the ceremonial trappings for templars, paladins, and Inquisitors:

- **Templars:** Templars are, almost without exception, sworn in by the Anointing (described elsewhere in this chapter). Beyond that, there are very few uniformities. Some ranking Sabbat provide their templars with signets, badges, or jewelry (including jewelry for piercings). The use of actual livery was never very frequent, and has now virtually died out even in the most pompous contexts. Most high officials give their templars letters of credence, which include a written description of the templar and contact information for the official, to use as identification when they must travel away from home. Tzimisce officials with Koldunic Sorcery may even use a special ritual to enchant a wax seal on the letter so that it can't be broken without the sorcerer knowing where and when. Other templars employ signs and countersigns, of which neighboring Sabbat are made aware at the grand regional *ritae*.

Templars dismissed from duty, either temporarily or permanently, are simply sent on their way with thanks — unless they have failed so miserably as to warrant an actual deconsecration. This is another *ignobilitas* in which either the templar or an effigy of the templar is anointed in reverse, this time with mortal urine, and a mocking formula of repudiation recited. A ranking Sabbat who subjects a templar to this formal shaming would be wise to expect either a Monomacy challenge or a stake in the back — depending on the ex-templar's temperament — at some point in the near future.

- **Paladins:** Paladins (a statistically older group with more feudal-era cultural remnants than the templars) are given a rich, gilded, ermine-trimmed tabard at the time of their appointment, which many wear to Table meetings, though this is usually not obligatory (*you try forcing a Nosferatu *antitribu* to wear the damn thing*). For a paladin who has worn the tabard faithfully for years to turn up at a Table meeting without it is a silent but effective way to show disapproval of current policy. Some have even been known to resign in protest by burning their tabards in the presence of the cardinal. Among older paladins, however, this is considered a rather churlish gesture unless immediately followed up with a Monomacy challenge.

When a paladin is dishonorably discharged, the tabard is stripped off in a public humiliation (sometimes followed by a deconsecration, as above, depending on the degree of severity. Omitting the deconsecration leaves the paladin more free to join another cardinal's retinue, which is surprisingly often the end result — though few cardinals relish the idea of letting their privy counselors move to another Table, sometimes it's just not wise to so deeply offend either the paladin or the rival high official she's probably been cozying up to). Many young Sabbat are amazed that anybody shows up for this, but among these rarified circles, a cowardly refusal to come and "take your medicine like a man" only heaps further opprobrium on the former paladin.

- **The Inquisition:** As noted elsewhere, Inquisitors and their templars usually wear thick red robes and red hoods with eye-slits at formal proceedings. Some Inquisitors have been gifted by high-ranking Sabbat with fine masks to wear instead, usually exquisite works in bone created with skilled use of Vicissitude. Owning such a mask is a mark of favor and accomplishment. Templars' robes usually differ in ornament or cut from their Inquisitor's, but no set rules exist for the vestments' construction. Some templars are also given a miniature "Iron Reliquary" (small enough to wear like a pendant) to carry as a badge, though many prefer not to keep anything on their persons that might identify them in the event of capture.

Inquisitors' templars generally disappear when their masters become acutely displeased; the sect-within-a-sect seems loath to let the details of its internal practices become known to the ruck and run of the Sabbat, and even those templars who quit their work under more amicable conditions will not speak a word about their former employment, as though still subject to some terrible vow of silence.

know damn well shares your mind on everything but one crucial point? And the fact that the same person might fall into any given category at any given moment, and Caine alone can tell which it is sometimes—"

"Yeah, I think I get it, *señor*." Time to get off this train.

"The ones who've gotten so fucking cynical they use our own ideals against us, and even worse, the ones

who do it because they can't even tell the difference between their needs and the sect's needs anymore!"

PROPAGANDA

Now here was a subject I could go with. "I've known Ivory Tower Cainites who were real good at that too," I exclaimed. "Twisting the truth, making

whatever they wanted seem like the right thing for everybody. I never figured out how they did that."

"Well, it's not difficult," grumbled Navarrese.

"Hey, I thought it was. Maybe I'm just stupid... enlighten me."

"Okay." He got himself back together a bit. "You take propaganda."

"Okay, propaganda. But that's lies, not truth."

"Actually, it doesn't matter either way. Because the first rule of propaganda is that you have to start with people who are pretty much ignorant about whatever you're propagandizing. So they're not going to know the difference anyway. Usually the truth works just fine, better in fact. For instance, you take a fact, which is that Camarilla bind their younger members in blood."

"Me for damn sure. Not all of them, though."

"Right," he agreed. "Not all of them. You and I know that, but most Sabbat don't, do they? So I take this fact to my little brothers and sisters in arms, and I dress it up till they're absolutely convinced that the instant they run to the Camarilla, they're going to be slapped in chains of blood."

"Which they might be, but yeah, okay."

"Meanwhile, your Camarilla elders are busy dressing this fact down till it looks like such a pissant little risk beside all the terrible dangers of running to the Sabbat, which again, most Camarilla Licks are pretty damn ignorant about. Nobody has to flat-out lie to do all this. A fact taken out of context...."

"Can mean pretty much whatever you want. Sure."

"And you just build on it and build on it, and then maybe you start slipping in things that aren't so true, but by that point they've totally shut down their critical faculties and won't even notice."

"So rule number one for propaganda, pick subjects people are ignorant about."

"Right. Make sure you get there first, and if you possibly can, you also make sure you put in at least a little truth, a few juicy-yet-credible anecdotes specially chosen to fit your version of reality. That way, when they do encounter the enemy, they'll see those one or two little true things, ignore the rest and leap to the satisfying conclusion that you were right all along. To put it bluntly, you never give them the option of an unbiased look."

I protested, "You talk like this is a bad thing. Don't we want to keep Sabbat afraid of running to the Camarilla, even if it takes a little propaganda?"

"Yes and no. On the one hand, hate and fear are closely linked in the soul, and hate is powerful fuel in wartime. If you can't arrange for an atrocity of suitable scale to get people all worked up, demonizing the enemy

is the next best thing. But if the price of being able to say whatever you want about the enemy is keeping your own forces ignorant, that's a problem. Even footsoldiers fight better when they understand what they're fighting. And if, Caine forbid, they do realize that you've been creative with the truth... well, you could end up with the same kind of disillusionment that makes nice little Russian-Orthodox girls kill their archons."

"That's in wartime." Did he actually say *arrange* for an atrocity?

"In peacetime," he finished, "it keeps people from running off when they get unhappy, like we said. Knowing they'll end up even unhappier is only intellectually comforting. One less Sabbat is one less Sabbat, and we can't afford to lose people over that kind of shit. Oh — the other good thing propaganda does do is, it streamlines the issues. Even Cainites can take only so much complexity. They don't want to know that most of the Camarilla they're being pointed at are folks just like them who happened to get Embraced on the wrong side of the fence and honestly don't know any better, but they still have to be killed anyway. That is not the kind of speech people want to hear as they're putting on the war paint and staring down the specter of Final Death. They want to know that they are marching against the very talons of the Antediluvians."

"And that's what we tell them."

"When they're in their war paint? Yes. That's what you tell them. Even the ones who know better will be grateful to you."

I nodded. I did understand about war.

"Even infernalists, perverse as it may sound, want to believe they're on the right side, Nadia. Everyone wants to think well of himself, on some level or other. That's what propaganda plays on. 'They' are ultimate 'evil.' Therefore, by inversion, we who fight them must be 'good.' Think of a new Lick's moral confusion. Or maybe you were so sotted with notions of your enduring *humanitas* that you never had to deal with this, but imagine if you were a brand-new Sabbat."

"Okay, I'm imagining."

"Now, you know that you're not mortal anymore, and mortal laws no longer apply to you. But you have nothing to replace them with yet. That takes time and instruction. And so many Sabbat get piss-poor instruction. Their old morality is stripped from them and nobody gives them a coherent alternative. The idea that you are now a killer by nature, destined to feed on the cattle you belonged to just a second ago, can be hard to stomach when you lack that alternative. How can you call yourself 'good' now?"

"By turning around and finding somebody worse than me," I guessed.

"Exactly."

MISDIRECTION

"I can relate. I still haven't come across that coherent alternative, either."

He beamed. A beaming Lasombra is almost as worrisome as a beaming Tremere. "Well, I'm just so glad to hear you say that."

"Figured you would be."

"Your lack in that department is, by the way, the reason you're working for Stimson and not for me."

This was news.

"But that doesn't mean it shouldn't get fixed anyway," he went on. "Stimson knows her catechism. She'll teach you well and I'll pick up wherever she leaves off."

"I'm game. I don't even care how weird it is at this point. It's not like anything else has worked."

"Good. And I'll do my best to make things coherent for you, seeing as that's my whole purpose in existence and all."

"Good, because some of what I've gotten so far about being Sabbat doesn't exactly gel. Not from you, I mean from other Sabbat." I tried to think of some of the gems. "You know... Sabbat stick together, but you can't trust anybody but your own pack. We don't let the elders run us, but our cardinal's six centuries old. We'll die before we betray our principles, but we'll also do whatever we have to do to take what's ours."

"Right. And some officials find that confusion useful. When totally opposite things are true at the same time, you can justify damn near any position. If your bishop screws over some other bishop, that's healthy competition in action, all to the good of the sect. But if the opposite happens, hey, aren't Sabbat supposed to stick together no matter what? No fair!" He barked a laugh. "They'll have you look at the big picture if they think they'll look better from a distance; if the devil they want is in the details, that's the first place they'll direct your attention."

"So the trick is to look at the hand the magician's not waving."

"Usually. You're not obligated to pass on that tip, of course."

IDEOLOGUES

"So, what else?"

"Let's see." He scratched at the beard again. "You also want to watch out for the folks to whom everything is potential grounds for an ideological pissing match. Not all Sabbat can legitimately brag about their bravery or their accomplishments or their cunning, after all. For some, the only thing they're really



good at is looking unholier-than-thou. Where this gets really annoying is the point at which all common sense goes *bzzzzzt!* For instance, there you are patiently taking care of something for Stimson, some mortal mess in Nogales, and Mr. True Sabbath who's supposed to be helping you comes along and rips the scalp off of the police chief's daughter just to show how delightfully liberated he is. Trying to explain to him that he is *off the fucking point* is like trying to get the French to take a damn bath."

"Oh, that does sound like fun."

"And believe me, the malady has subtler but no less counterproductive forms in upper management. Ancient prophecy is the worst. I think the regent should give up letting the prisci debate what the sect is going to do about the latest omens and just call for an elimination tournament. Last one left standing knows what Saulot really meant. Half of 'em think they're Noddists, even the ones who've never so much as set foot in the Inquisition's lending library."

"...What who really meant?"

"Never mind. What you have to understand about these people when you lock horns with them — and lock horns you will — is that for them, the issue is not the issue. We all latch onto the Sermons of Caine, the lore of the First City, Second City, and so forth. It's a wonderful thing to discover you do have roots after all, and believe me, I'd never begrudge anyone that joy. I *want* all Sabbath to understand their heritage and their destiny. But for these vees, the only destiny they see is to spend the rest of their existences treating everything that happens to them as a test to prove how much more orthodox they are than everybody else. That way madness lies. Sabbath should not be fighting and killing each other over these things."

"Right. Because that's what the Inquisition is for."

"Well, it is," he shot back jovially.

Far be it from me to argue.

SABBAT STRUCTURE (OR LACK THEREOF)

"A few last things I should warn you about, because as ex-Camarilla you may get blindsided." He got up to dump out his ashtray and actually had to put out a hand to steady himself. How could he keep on talking like that when he was blotto? The brain was supposed to go *before* the legs. If this was a drunk act put on for my benefit, he was working pretty damn hard at it.

"Okay. Sure. Shoot."

"There's a lot more organization to the Sabbath than you may realize right away."

"Well, hell. It looks to me like you've got a queen, you've got princes and barons and knights and peasants."

"Yes. There's that, which is already more than most Camarilla know. But our hierarchy's much more fluid. More like a wolf pack, where any wolf can fight for alpha status at any time."

"Granted."

"There are a lot of your old sect, a lot of the elders even, who wonder why we don't just collapse into total chaos." He washed up at the bar like driftwood, flopping his elbows down onto the counter. I slid a stool under his ass. He hooked a leg around it for extra insurance.

"This is true."

"Part of it's because of our faith in our purpose, as I've explained..."

"Right. Go on."

"Part of it's because certain people who have a lot to fear from real meritocracy have put other mechanisms in place. What's the saying? Age and treachery will conquer youth and skill?"

"How remarkably modern of you."

"There's truth to it," he went on morosely. "There's the black market trade in Vaulderies, for instance."

VINCULI

I jumped on it. This was the kind of bad news I'd been waiting on all night. "What do you mean, black market trade?"

"Well, because the Vaulderie does affect people's feelings, which in turn influences their actions. Now, any Sabbath's strongest ties will usually be to his pack just on account of sheer repetition, but there are plenty of occasions where you're socially obliged to share the cup with whoever's there... like you were at the *Palla Grande*."

"Right. So?"

"So, it's to the advantage of certain ranking Sabbath that you share the cup with this person and not that person. So sometimes the occasion is deliberately arranged."

"Oh, okay. I'm starting to get you. And guess who controls the guest lists."

"Exactly," he said. "Then elders start trading each other these kinds of favors, and eventually you get this little economy going. And sometimes it's not even that they want you to ally with the people you're sharing the cup with. Maybe they're actually trying to fuck up your alliance with some other person, or they're trying to make it impossible for you to move on a problem by setting you up in a conflict of interests — or maybe it's as simple as they know there's somebody you definitely don't want to share the cup with, and they make it happen so that you understand what kind of power they have over you, and that takes you down a peg."

Well, that made the Sabbat just like the Camarilla in yet another area. You always want to be careful what social invitations you accept.

STAGE DRESSING

"So that's one way the ranking Sabbat keep things like they want 'em."

"Yes. Which—" He put up his hands. "There's no actual prohibition against. It's just most younger Sabbat don't realize when they start playing this game that there's a whole section of the rulebook that nobody's going to show them. If they did realize it, they'd call it cheating. When people say meritocracy, the capacity to fuck people over is not the sort of merit they usually mean."

"And if I understand right, that's the kind of thing the Sabbat was built to fight against in the first place. Maybe your elders get a little scared that somebody's going to do unto them as they did unto their elders."

"And that's why they devote a whole lot of effort to keeping up appearances," he finished. "Fortunately for them, the appearance of meritocracy is fairly easy to arrange, with a little forethought. For instance, a templar I once knew — absolute spitfire of a woman, one of the best tacticians in New England. A certain bishop had a different templar for a protégé, and this protégé needed a little shine on his reputation. They were both sent against the Boston Camarilla, supposedly to work as a team. Well, the bishop leaked a little useful information to the Camarilla in exchange for letting the protégé kill a few worthless Caitiff the Bostonian prince could do without anyway. He had a daring escape and a few more sets of Camarilla fangs to string on his necklace. My friend, however, got a napalm bouquet from the local welcome wagon. As far as the other Sabbat knew, she just slipped. Slowing down, getting sloppy. May the best man win," he said wryly. "He's a big muck-a-muck out there now. They say he may make bishop himself soon."

"Can't you bring 'em to trial?"

"I did. But I couldn't exactly put the Camarilla on the stand to testify, could I? And unfortunately, far as I could tell, the little snot didn't even know what his boss had done for him, so he looked golden. And they already don't like me in New England, for other reasons. I was paddling upstream. If I'd burned the bishop they would have taken it as a personal revenge thing."

"Shit."

"It seemed better to let it go this time. But you can bet I'm watching the fuckers. If I have to catch 'em in the act, that's what I'll do."

I nodded.

"Monomacy duels can be fixed too. Damn near anything can be fixed."

He buried his fingers in his hair, sending tufts of it spiking straight up. The man was deflating before my very eyes — he'd be off the stool in a minute. I jogged his shoulder. Was I actually touching him?

"Hey."

He looked up at me.

"This happened when?"

"Last week."

Oooohhhhhhh.

"Come on, Navarrese...you're baked. Baked couch-potato." I helped him up.

"Persistence is rewarded," he mumbled.

"That's right. Come on..." I dumped him on the sofa. "Let's lay off trying to save the Sabbat from itself for at least a few hours, huh?" Shadows were swarming over me now like ants from a stepped-on anthill. I had to get out of here. But knowing my luck, he'd pass out, the sun'd come up and there goes my sweet new job. I looked around for a minute and found he had a big piece of sheet metal to nail over the window each dawn and pry off each dusk. The other two rooms had covers for their windows too. The guy on the bed was long gone. I went around and did my little light-proofing tango, then came back. Navarrese was watching me, just his eyes moving.

"I'm out of here," I announced. Not one for long goodbyes or unpaid therapy.

"Of course." He held out a hand.

"What?"

"Come here a second." I obeyed. He gestured for my hand; I let him have it.

"This is what makes you so perfect," he said.

"Excuse me?"

"You have a sense of responsibility."

Suddenly I felt very dirty. Damn Keepers.

"Perfect for *what*?" I pressed him. He just clasped my hand in his and closed his eyes.

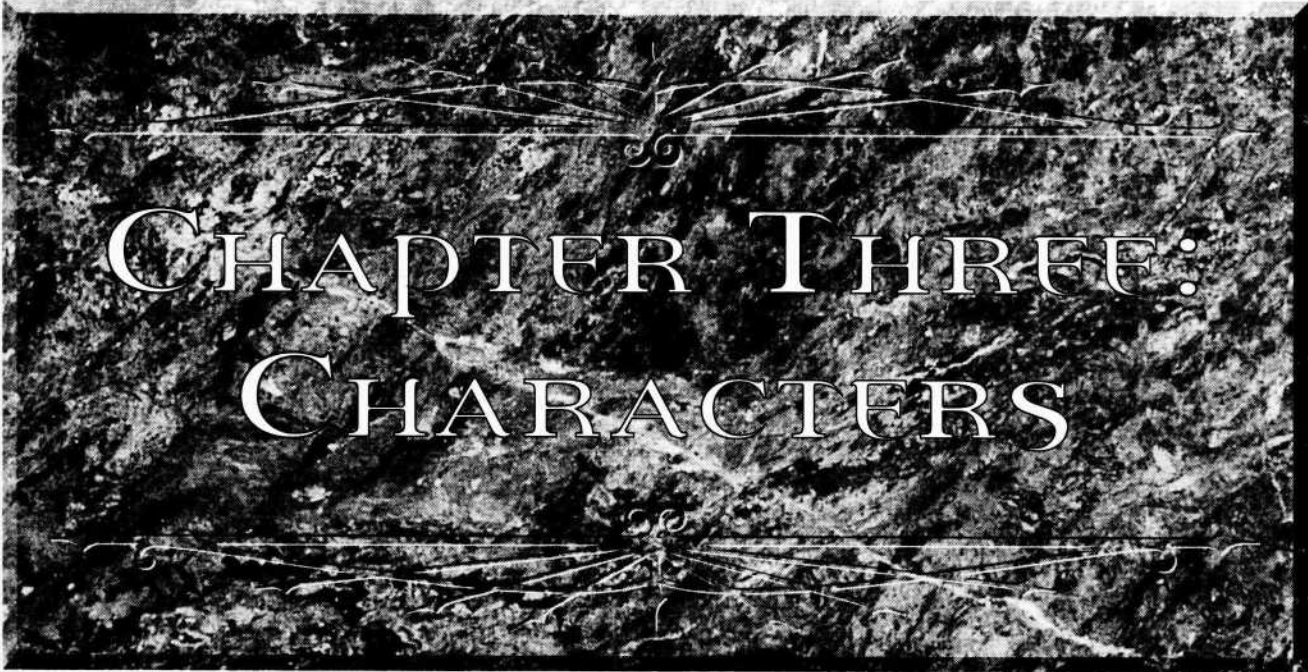
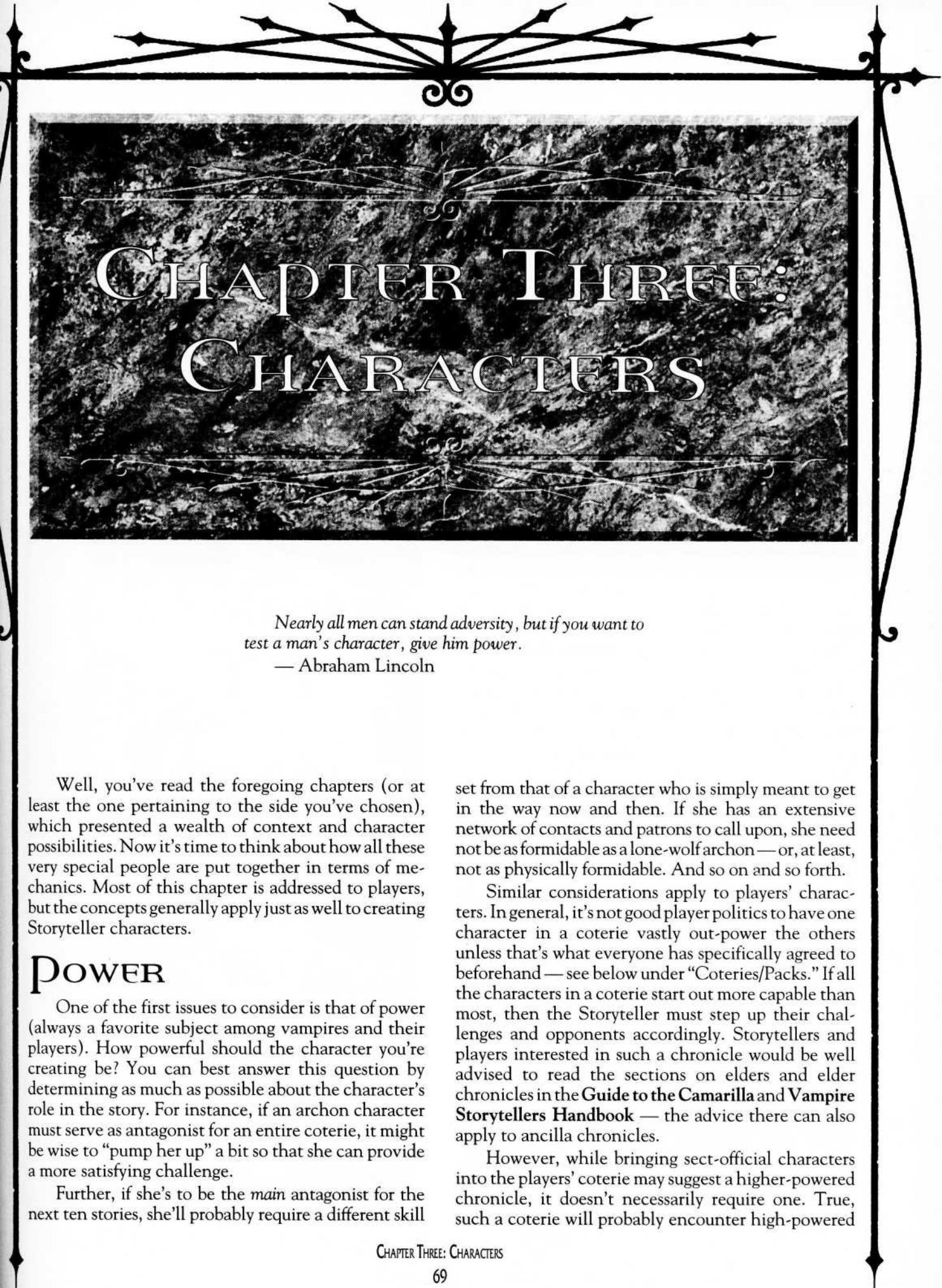
So I peeled him off and left. I guess my sense of responsibility made sure I locked the door.

Now I have a question for you. Between a Lasombra elder who's smart, ruthless, manipulative, fanatical and determined to screw you over, and a Lasombra elder who's smart, ruthless, manipulative, fanatical and convinced you're wonderful, you tell me which is scarier.

I know how I answer that.



Life 2002



CHAPTER THREE: CHARACTERS

*Nearly all men can stand adversity, but if you want to
test a man's character, give him power.*

— Abraham Lincoln

Well, you've read the foregoing chapters (or at least the one pertaining to the side you've chosen), which presented a wealth of context and character possibilities. Now it's time to think about how all these very special people are put together in terms of mechanics. Most of this chapter is addressed to players, but the concepts generally apply just as well to creating Storyteller characters.

POWER

One of the first issues to consider is that of power (always a favorite subject among vampires and their players). How powerful should the character you're creating be? You can best answer this question by determining as much as possible about the character's role in the story. For instance, if an archon character must serve as antagonist for an entire coterie, it might be wise to "pump her up" a bit so that she can provide a more satisfying challenge.

Further, if she's to be the *main* antagonist for the next ten stories, she'll probably require a different skill

set from that of a character who is simply meant to get in the way now and then. If she has an extensive network of contacts and patrons to call upon, she need not be as formidable as a lone-wolf archon — or, at least, not as physically formidable. And so on and so forth.

Similar considerations apply to players' characters. In general, it's not good player politics to have one character in a coterie vastly out-power the others unless that's what everyone has specifically agreed to beforehand — see below under "Coterie/Packs." If all the characters in a coterie start out more capable than most, then the Storyteller must step up their challenges and opponents accordingly. Storytellers and players interested in such a chronicle would be well advised to read the sections on elders and elder chronicles in the **Guide to the Camarilla and Vampire Storytellers Handbook** — the advice there can also apply to ancilla chronicles.

However, while bringing sect-official characters into the players' coterie may suggest a higher-powered chronicle, it doesn't necessarily require one. True, such a coterie will probably encounter high-powered

Storyteller characters unusually early and often, and they might wish to prepare for that eventuality (not that being thrown into water way beyond your depth isn't a fine, wicked, time-honored premise for a story as well). But there's no formal hiring standard for archons or templars — the word of a justicar, bishop, or similar high official is the sole prerequisite. A young ancilla or neonate might be appointed to the post for any of a number of reasons: a specialized skill, particularly one specific to the modern era; the desire for an expendable catspaw; deep personal trust, whether earned or granted by virtue of blood relation; the need for an agent who can blend in with the vampiric *hoi polloi*. Whatever the reason, the Storyteller and player both need to understand it and agree on it, since it will undoubtedly be the hook upon which many a rewarding plot is hung.

On the other hand, the majority of sect officials are formidable folk, chosen precisely because they're exceptional. There are several ways to up the power level of a starting character. For an elder or ancilla game, simply giving characters the Age Background may be enough. (In fact, even neonate characters can be given the equivalent of a dot in Age, trading extra freebies for a Humanity hit which then might or might not be bought back. Just call it something else, like "Competency." Or, don't even bother — simply give all of the players a few extra freebies to allocate as they see fit and call it even.)

Other possibilities include using the Storyteller character generation guidelines or even the "downtime" maturation system, both from the **Vampire Storytellers Handbook**. However, some may prefer to use a character creation system designed especially for archon and templar characters. With that in mind, what follows is a point spread meant for those chosen to face dangers and obstacles far beyond the ken of the "average" Camarilla or Sabbat member.

ATTRIBUTES

Characters receive the usual complement of Attributes (7 dots for primary, 5 for secondary, 3 for tertiary), plus two additional dots to allocate as they wish. Generational maximums for Traits still apply (so unless you're of the Seventh Generation or lower, you may not possess more than five dots in a Trait).

ABILITIES

Characters receive the usual complement of Abilities (13 for primary, 9 for secondary, 5 for tertiary), plus three additional dots to allocate as they wish. The three-dot maximum in Abilities for starting characters at this stage is waived. Remember, however, that a five-dot Ability is meant to represent truly world-class skill; if your character is world-class at something, that's backstory that needs serious explaining.



DISCIPLINES

Characters receive five dots in Disciplines — they'll need 'em. Four of the dots must be put into clan Disciplines; the fifth may be out-of-clan if desired. All five dots may be put into a single Discipline if you wish, but very few archons and templars, young or old, can afford to be so narrow in their focus.

BACKGROUNDS

Camarilla characters receive eight dots in Backgrounds; Sabbat characters receive five. This is to reflect the fact that archons and templars must often maintain a certain level of contact, influence, and investment in the world around them simply to perform their duties adequately. It also gives a little extra room for the purchase of Age and Generation Background dots (since so many archons are ancillae or elders).

VIRTUES

Camarilla characters receive seven dots to distribute among their Virtues; Sabbat characters receive six. While the Sabbat's relative fondness for mayhem and depravity does not exactly exalt virtue, Sabbat officials are generally made of sterner stuff than the average *vato*. The usual restrictions apply if you choose a Path of Enlightenment for your character instead of a Humanity Trait. That is, the Conviction and Instinct Virtues do not come with a free starting dot, and the character that takes either or both must buy them up to at least 1. Starting characters with a Path of Enlightenment must take at least five dots in Willpower and they begin play with a Path rating no higher than 5 (even if Conscience/Conviction + Self-Control/Instinct totals more than 5). If your character is an ancilla or elder with a long history of following his Path (in which case you will also need to buy the Age Background and fill in the relevant backstory), your Storyteller may at her option permit you to spend freebies to buy your Path rating higher than 5.

LAST TOUCHES

Everything else proceeds per the normal rules for starting characters. Starting Willpower equals the character's Courage rating. Starting Humanity or Path rating equals Conscience/Conviction + Self-Control/Instinct (to a maximum of 5 for Path followers, as above). Starting blood pool may be rolled or chosen, per the Storyteller's direction. If your character has a noteworthy Herd rating and begins the chronicle in her home city, for instance, there's no real reason for her to start the game with a 2 blood pool unless that makes for a dramatic opening. Roll a die for, or choose, Vinculum ratings for Sabbat characters — see "On Blood," below, for further consideration of starting

Vinculum scores. Assign Merits and Flaws if you and the Storyteller so desire (bearing in mind that a net deficit can be paid for later with your freebies.) Finally, you receive 18 freebie points to round out your character as you see fit, in addition to any freebie points gained by Flaws or the Age Background.

USING THE NUMBERS

While it's all well and good to transfuse extra points into an archon or templar character, even that won't necessarily fit him for the battles ahead. Traits are nothing more than an approximation of a character's strengths and weaknesses. The key word here is *approximation*: Anyone who's ever created a **Vampire** character knows that there are never enough points to describe *all* the qualities of a person that might someday prove relevant in a story situation. You can gradually fill out the bare spots later, with experience points, but the task at the time of character creation is to establish at least the skeleton and the basic shape of the meat on it. After all, most good Storytellers will look closely at proposed characters' capabilities before settling on a final direction for upcoming stories. Where a player puts his points is a good indication of the kinds of plotlines he expects to participate in, as well as his vision of his character's role in the coterie and the chronicle.

CONCEPT

Nature and Demeanor tell a lot about *your* concept of your character. They encapsulate her attitude toward unlife in general. But if your character is also an archon, templar, or Inquisitor, it's almost as vital to define her concept of *herself* as an official. Below are some sample concepts for various sorts of official, broken down by category (archon/alastor, templar/paladin, Inquisitor) in order to better reflect the general way of things in either sect. Feel free to mix and match, or to steal part or all of a concept from the "wrong" list.

Bear in mind that these concepts will also affect, and be affected by, your character's overall ethics or lack thereof (Humanity or Path of Enlightenment).

ARCHONS/ALASTORS

- **The White Knight:** You see the Camarilla as a society founded upon the highest principles of chivalry — honor among equals, obedience to superiors, benevolence to obedient inferiors, strict maintenance of the Caine-given social order, acceptance of the responsibilities attendant upon power, and above all, courage in fighting for one's ideals. You may or may not truly realize how short of those ideals your fellow-knights often fall

- **The Wounded Knight:** You once were, or wish you could be, a White Knight, but you've seen too

much. Perhaps you've been disillusioned by others; perhaps you've sinned in your own estimation. Now you're simply going through the motions. The embers of idealism still smolder in you, producing an outer smog of cynicism or ennui — but pity your enemies should someone ever to manage to fan those embers ablaze again.

- **The Illuminatus:** You've always longed to be "on the inside," and now you finally have your wish. You honestly feel that most Cainites can't even begin to understand their own best interests; rather, it's your and your superiors' heavy duty to make the tough choices about which people and ideas must be sacrificed for the greater good. You accept the hatred of the ignorant as the price of stability.

- **The Angler:** To you, this post is a sweet deal, the latest in a long series of smooth operations. As long as you keep your boss happy and tout the party line in public, you can do, say, or get anything you damn well like. Sect, schmet; it's probably the same story on the other side of the fence too. All that ever changes are the names of the victims and the victors, and the sooner you realize that, the better for your blood pressure — so to speak. You have a dangerous habit of using blackmail and extortion to get things done. Perhaps you even owe your current position to those techniques.

- **The Steady Rock:** Let the politicians snipe at each other, forever wrangling for the high ground. After all these years, you know your job and you're by-damn going to do it. You make a point of spending more time in the field than in trying futilely to outplay your superiors at the game they mastered long ago. You're not here for their sakes; ultimately, you exist to protect those without the personal power to protect themselves. Not that they always appreciate what you do for them, but you knew it was a tough assignment when you took it.

- **The Malcontent:** Screw it. You've done your best for decades in this thankless fucking job — because you knew it needed to be done. You don't expect any real appreciation from the *civilians*, of course. They hate and fear you, and that's how they must feel if you want to be effective (and the choices are be effective or be ash). But is it too much to ask that your precious justicar, or the prince whose ass you've just saved, or *someone* at least send you a thank-you note occasionally, instead of just hanging a new millstone around your neck and sending you on your way? You keep playing along for now; but if they aren't careful, the next Sabbat who approaches you with a sweet severance package may get a warmer welcome than usual....

- **The Pit Bull:** Nobody really understands your justicar the way you do. Some call her a monster.



That's because they only pay attention to her when she has to punish them. Violence is all some people understand. Fortunately, she has you to save her some of the bloody drudge-work of maintaining order. She points you at a target, you hunt it down and make the most efficient kill possible. It's not for you to question her purposes. You already know all about her that you need to know—she serves the mighty Inner Circle, and you serve her. This concept is particularly appropriate for blood-bound archons.

- **The Prodigy:** You never asked for this. If you'd known your fame had reached such rarefied circles, you would've booked the next cargo flight to Uzbekistan. Unfortunately, you simply happen to be very, very, *very* good at something a justicar finds useful, whether it's high-tech surveillance, spin control, or deciphering ancient languages. You were called to serve Inner Circle and sect, and it's an honor you didn't feel you had much choice in accepting. Now you just keep your head down unless the justicar or your coterie tells you it's safe to do otherwise. Granted, most of what you're doing is the work you like best anyway; but sometimes you worry. What happens if you fail? Worse, what happens if someone comes along who makes *you* look like a mediocrity?

- **The Protégé:** You're just along for the ride. You were appointed (or strongly recommended) to this post by a sire or a mentor. Perhaps you were reluctant to accept; perhaps the justicar was reluctant to appoint you, but succumbed to your pleading, bargaining or blackmail. People—the Kindred in general, the other justicars, but above all your fellow archons—largely view you as a joke and your post as a sinecure. This is especially burdensome if you're actually planning to do your job. At least you can count on the justicar to stand by his decision long after he's lost the desire to stand by you personally... or you hope so, anyway.

TEMPLARS/PALADINS

- **The Hand of Vengeance:** Damn them. Damn them all. You could abide the Camarilla as opponents if they at least fought like the demigods Caine meant Cainites to be, instead of scuttling mortal cowards. So many valiant Cainites whose Vaulderie you once shared have perished from the Camarilla's treachery—and, all too often, from failures of courage among those who should shame to call themselves Sabbat. Well, now you wield the sword of a great official, and you're going to have blood for blood at long last. Let all who refuse to join you go and hide, if they don't want to find their own heads rolling alongside those of the craven "Kindred."

- **The True Sabbat:** How is it that so many can hear the Sermons of Caine year after year and still fail to absorb their wisdom? Why are so few Sabbat truly preparing for Gehenna? Why do they persist in imitating the juicebags

they supposedly despise? Perhaps you think there's still hope of educating your sectmates before it's too late. Maybe you've resigned yourself to being the lonely champion of orthodoxy. In any case, you strive to become the unliving embodiment of all that the Sabbat believes it should be.

- **The Enforcer:** You learned your sect's dirty little secret long ago and to tell the truth, part of you was relieved. For all their yawping about freedom and equality, the Sabbat just couldn't survive if they didn't occasionally bash in the skulls of dissidents and losers. Whether you actually perform said skull-bashing yourself or simply direct it, you accept that you are now forever part of the dirty little secret. You do your best to keep it, working quietly and efficiently behind the scenes while your patron panders to the masses.

- **The Dark Knight:** Once upon a time, the Sabbat was more dream than reality. Sometimes you think you would have preferred it to stay that way. You see the mindless violence and debauchery of modern nights as a horrible perversion of the sect's first purpose—which was, you *thought*, to find a way of unlife fettered neither by Antediluvian agendas nor mortal limitations. On some night so long ago it too seems a dream, you swore to serve the Sabbat faithfully forever, and it's an oath you keep no matter how often your experiences with ally and enemy alike call it into question. So far, it still beats defecting to the Camarilla....

- **The Fossil:** All you ever wanted was a Cainite lord's ancient prerogative—the right to run your own domain without some ridiculous council that's appointed itself sole guardian of the Traditions telling you what to do. Unfortunately, in rebelling against the Camarilla, you were forced to choose the Sabbat, which also—surprise!—thinks it can tell you what to do. Fortunately, you're old and powerful enough to get around them most of the time. You use the Sabbat hierarchy purely to advance your own agenda. Regardless of whether you're an actual elder or not, your outlook more closely matches that of a Dark Ages prince than anything resembling either sect's modern ideology. (This is an especially good concept for older Lasombra and Tzimisce, since few of them had much choice about rejecting the Camarilla.)

- **The Aging Anarch:** Your initial attraction to the Sabbat lay less in its apocalyptic mumbo-jumbo than in its promise of an undead society that truly rewards merit rather than mere age. You yourself were young, lean and hungry at the time and had a vested interest in the idea. Now that you've gained power within the sect, perhaps you've toned down your radicalism (or perhaps you haven't), but you still pride yourself on your sympathy with the little guys out in the trenches, all the Joe and Jane Shovelheads who

take the bloody brunt of their elders' policies. Whether they return that regard, however, is another matter.

• **The General:** You are a linchpin in the Sabbat's war machine. Or at least you are when you have your way. Sometimes you're forced to play politics on your patron's behalf because he can't trust anyone else to do it. Sometimes you have to parley with the enemy; sometimes your bishop even uses you as a big saber to rattle at someone, then sheathes you again, all without informing you that was the plan all along. You put up with it only for the sake of those eagerly-awaited nights where it's just you and the War Parties with a Camarilla city ripe for the taking on the horizon. You're a patriot by definition, and yet sometimes you think you'd be just as happy doing this job for the Camarilla — but you'd never be so foolish as to mention that idle thought to anyone.

INQUISITORS

• **The Fanatic:** Even as a mortal you prided yourself on being rightly guided. Perhaps you were once some sort of clergy, perhaps not. The point is, once you've been converted to a point of view, once you've satisfied your own highly critical mind that the philosophy is true and perfect, you make it your quest to ensure that everyone else sees the light also. To you, ideology is not simply the tool of politics: just the opposite. Ideas are the seat of the soul; ideas are also inevitably expressed as actions. Therefore, a society that would be perfect must make its ideas perfect. When not pursuing heretics, you spend your nights exploring the vast breadth and depth of Noddist scholarship.

• **Torquemada:** You know they're out there — you can *smell* them. Vampires who walk, talk, feed, and jump fire like real Sabbat, but are actually traitors, Camarilla spies, humanists, demonolaters. They'll rot the entire sect from within, given half a chance. It's beyond the faculties of ordinary Cainites to detect these hypocrites, which is why you've been entrusted with your sacred task to ferret them out. You calmly wield the weapons of terror, charisma, and yes, even deception in the course of your duties — sometimes it takes devilry to beat the devil. If the Sabbat must fall, let it fall in glorious battle against the Antediluvians and their stooges. You're not a warrior, but you can at least try to ensure that when that battle comes, the Sabbat is still pure in heart.

• **The Demagogue:** Even the Vaulderie isn't as sweet to you as the rush of mingled hate, love and fear that issues from the crowd as you settle your red-robed frame into the chair of judgment. You may honestly believe that you do this for the good of Sabbat souls everywhere. Perhaps you know yourself better than that. But consciously or not, you thrive on the ability to sway the masses to your point of view. Convincing



them despite themselves that a heretic is guilty gives you great pleasure; an even greater pleasure lies in convincing them that a heretic is guilty despite the absence of evidence. You may have a tendency to exceed your own reach, a hunger to topple more and more powerful opponents — the same Cainites who can actually mount a serious defense against you.

• **The McCarthy:** If the infernalists hadn't come along, you would've had to invent them. You never did do very well at the sort of politics that consists of move and countermove, your pawn takes my bishop, all that *sub rosa* crap. However, you possess a real talent for capturing or creating the moral high ground, so the Inquisition seemed like the perfect venue for your ambitions. Sometimes your act is so good, you almost manage to convince yourself; but in the end you're a politician, and you know it. Perhaps you play this game only to survive in a notably brutal society — what better way to protect yourself from witch-hunts than becoming a witch-hunter (à la Roy Cohn), particularly if you're the sort all too likely to fall under suspicion otherwise? Or perhaps you play it in pursuit of some even more ambitious goal.

ATTRIBUTES AND ABILITIES

Vampire character creation rules rank the three Attribute categories (Physical, Social, Mental) as primary, secondary, and tertiary for any given character. This tends to produce folk whose general forte is rather granular: bruisers, geniuses, politicians. As other creation points are spent, that basic proclivity can be emphasized or evened out — low Attributes can be raised with freebies or simply shored up with dots in relevant Abilities. High Attributes can be pushed to human (or inhuman) maximums and paired with Abilities that allow them to shine even brighter. There are tradeoffs to taking either tack.

Many of the most famous, most senior sect officials do indeed approach the Renaissance-man ideal. Such people seem equally at home pontificating in council, spearheading an investigation, or wading into the thick of battle. Their enemies fret endlessly about how to put them in a position of disadvantage, precisely because there's no position they haven't survived being put in at least once. Younger officials often take these paragons as their models and seek, like them, to excel in every sphere. Conversely, some sect elders select only multitalented recruits for official posts, on the assumption that they have a better chance of survival.

This belief has its merits. Flaunting one's versatility is a highly effective form of intimidation, sufficient to discourage some opponents from even trying. Conversely, hiding it, keeping it in reserve as a hole card, means that the element of surprise is always at one's

disposal. However, it would take most vampires centuries to become a Vykos or a Guil, if, indeed, they ever reached that capacity. To that end, Guil herself started unlife as a concubine, Vykos as a bookish boy. Young characters who try to emulate them can run the risk of falling victim to the old saw about “jack of all trades, master of none.” If they're wise, they'll avoid throwing themselves into too many situations where they must rely heavily on newer, less comfortable skills. In any case, most people end up favoring whatever it is they do the most frequently.

In terms of mechanics, Attributes are expensive but versatile. A character whose player has pumped freebie points into evening out her Attributes is a bit like the mustard seed of the parable. Her relative dearth of Abilities, Backgrounds, and so forth may mean she'll start out less effective than other characters, but as she gains experience, the advantages of her higher basic Traits will become more obvious. Such a character, if she becomes an official, will probably be chosen by a superior who thinks of the very long term and the very big picture — an Inquisitor who grooms his successors to carry his vendettas forward long after his own Final Death, for example.

One-trick ponies can become archons and templars as well. There are situations in which nothing less than the best of the best will do. Again, however, the likely direction of the story counts for a lot. For example, say your character is a hacker god with a personality that goes down like quicklime, appointed by a justicar to handle all things tech. His boss will call him in when she needs to break into a Cayman Islands bank account or put a Trojan horse in somebody's Web server. Period. In between such assignments, she will gently encourage him to take up solitary and time-consuming hobbies. Depending on the nature of the chronicle, this may or may not be a problem. If your Storyteller has decided your coterie's chief antagonists are a Gehenna cult bent on crumbling the Masquerade via the Internet, all you need to do is lock and load. If he's planning a delicate political chronicle with emphasis on elder salons, princely courts and Conclaves, however, that's a different matter.

That said, a character who makes an awkward fit need not always derail things. Playing a fish out of water can be fun, if you're ready to go along with it and to assist the Storyteller in keeping your character's “growth opportunities” from destroying lovingly crafted plotlines. The hacker character mentioned above, for example, would have to realize his shortcomings and be willing to work on them — or at least to keep his mouth shut when his colleagues tell him to.

More attention will be paid to characters in coterie later in this chapter, but it's worth noting here that

character strengths and specializations (or lack thereof) should complement not only the Storyteller's plans, but also the strengths and weaknesses of the coterie. If you and another player turn in characters who both plainly expect to be the coterie's resident puppetmaster, or its bodyguard or its font of wisdom, that issue needs to be straightened out before play starts. Would the two characters be willing to cooperate in that role, or should one of them branch out into a different area, or should one of them be scrapped entirely to prevent any problem? Consenting players can enjoy intra-coterie friction up to a point, but even friendly rivalries take up a disproportionate amount of time and attention when they get out of hand.

DISCIPLINES

This should go without saying, but it doesn't. In order to maintain some semblance of overall plausibility, the bulk of character Disciplines should probably reflect clan aptitudes, at least initially. Although clan was never meant to straitjacket a character's Traits or personality, it is an important facet of her supernatural proclivities — and there's a particularly strong element of heredity and tradition in the transmission of Disciplines. Even vampires who have as close a trust as the Beast allows often hesitate to teach each other the hallowed arts of their sires; your justicar boss may trust you enough to send you into a contested domain, but even completing that mission probably won't get you an invitation to learn Obtenebration at his knee. Even in the Sabbat, finding someone to teach you the rudiments of a Discipline isn't the same as finding someone good at a Discipline and willing to teach it to you. Disciplines are extensions of the Kindred's undead nature, not simply powers to be picked up and used cavalierly. So making a character a sect official is not *carte blanche* to run amok through the core rulebooks like a bargain-hunter at a distress sale.

On the other hand, simply buying up the maximum allotment in the chosen clan's "signature" Disciplines and leaving it at that is not necessarily the best approach either. For one thing, sometimes points are actually better spent in other areas of the character sheet (see below). For another, Disciplines, like all Traits, help describe your character's particular theater of competency, and competency is an even more critical issue for sect officials than for other Licks.

• Physical Disciplines

Of all out-of-clan Disciplines, these are the easiest to justify for a character who serves as a sect official. Many clans possess them, thus there are many potential mentors to choose from. Characters can also, with considerably more effort, develop them on their own. Officials who belong to the less physically formidable

clans often end up learning physical Disciplines simply to discourage their fellows from getting any bright ideas.

Whether in-clan or out-of-clan, physical Disciplines are bound to prove useful at least occasionally. However, they need not always be taken for the purpose of creating a better overall "fighter." The ability to escape from a battle is nearly as precious as the ability to land the first punch. Simply having the Fortitude to absorb the wounds from a lightning ambush can ensure that the character survives to engage her enemies in a manner more suited to her talents later on.

People also tend to forget about the many non-combat uses of the physical Disciplines. Celerity can be almost as useful as Obfuscate for sneaking around ("I have *how* many seconds to grab all the files before the security camera sweeps back this way?"). A templar *could* use his mighty Potence to pound the shit out of an errant pack of Sabbat fledglings one by one — or he could use it to hold shut the door to the room he wet-mopped with kerosene five minutes before (and later leap to the top of a nearby two-story building, just as the fire engines are pulling up). Also, don't forget the cultural factors. In the Sabbat, for example, where ordeals to prove bravery at a *ritus* or innocence at a trial are common, Fortitude has more than just survival value.

Even sect officials whose physical Disciplines are primary learn to be canny with them, playing to their unique strengths. A Toreador *antitribu* templar with more Celerity than Potence or Fortitude is unlikely to rely on a medieval style of combat originally meant for men wearing full armor and carrying broadswords — even if he was raised to consider that the only proper warfare for noblemen. Long years of contending with bitter enemies and traitorous allies breed a dry pragmatism in even the most stiff-necked of Cainites.

• "Magical"/Unique Disciplines

Plainly, a rare Discipline, one held in fear and awe by the majority of vampires, can be a powerful asset. It can also be a serious liability. As a rule, the use of such arts marks one's clan membership to knowledgeable observers (anyone practicing Necromancy, for example, will go down in most people's books as Giovanni even if that happens to be untrue). The clans that possess such Disciplines often guard them to some degree, if not to the extent of punishing outsiders who dare to appropriate them. Said clans also tend to be the more tight-knit and secretive of the Cainite world. Thus, flaunting such Disciplines is a constant reminder to other vampires that one's loyalties may be divided ("Odd that the Lasombra Inquisitor just turned into a snake... wonder who he owes a favor to?"). Some officials deem it politically imprudent to provide such reminders any more frequently than they must.

The usual caveats about purchasing uncommon Disciplines apply. The characters should have story justification for it — in this case meaning that the Storyteller can use that justification to make unlife hard for the character at some point. Such difficulties can arise from the Discipline itself or the prestatation entanglements involved in acquiring it. And remember that when one is an archon or templar, prestatation can present particularly delicate dilemmas. Any personal debt to another Cainite, whether that Cainite is a member of the character's sect or of its rival, potentially interferes with the character's supposedly higher loyalties.

• Other Disciplines

Sect officials are problem-solvers by definition. Sometimes their duties lean toward the analysis side; sometimes they lean toward application. Officials who work in tandem with their peers can afford to specialize in one or the other. Those operating undercover or far from their bases of influence are not so lucky. Context is king.

Most Disciplines can serve equally well at either end of the problem. *Auspex* is a godsend for a spy character, yes, but it ain't half-bad for an assassin or a scout, either. The first dot of *Animalism* can be un-subtle (making a circus elephant stampede down Main Street) or refined (start a little rat problem at the local harpy's swank Elysium club). Many clever archons and templars have triumphed over adversity not by having a panoply of Disciplines at their command, but by playing up to and then dashing others' expectations of how those Disciplines will be used.

What does this have to do with character creation? Simply put, you don't have to settle for the obvious. Certain clans and their accompanying Disciplines are often thought of as more appropriate for one kind of character concept than another — Brujah make the best sheriffs because of their physical Disciplines, *Auspex* and *Presence* make Toreador the best harpies, and so forth. But that doesn't mean you have to buy a lot of out-of-clan Disciplines to make your Toreador sheriff or Brujah harpy viable. They could just be unusually creative with their in-clan Disciplines. Or if you do buy out-of-clan Disciplines, they needn't be the ones that you assume go best with your character concept.

• Combination Disciplines

Combination Disciplines are a possibility whenever experience or experience-like points are being used in the character creation process (this includes the "maturation" system from the *Vampire Storytellers Handbook* as well as the Age Background. If using the Age Background to buy a combination Discipline power, treat each freebie as worth 3 experience points; don't forget to make sure you've already met the Discipline minimums for the power). That doesn't

mean the Storyteller has to allow them, however, so ask before you set your heart on one. Combination Disciplines are generally unique or obscure and acquired only through long training with a mentor. Yes, they must have been invented by *someone* to begin with, but that someone was very likely a potent wielder of the Disciplines in question.

Whether the Storyteller asks for it or not, you should probably come up with the story of when, how and why your character acquired the power. Was it part of a move against some long-standing enemy? Was it inspired by your character's quest for Humanity or his Path beliefs? Does he flaunt this power or keep it secret? How might other Cainites react to it?

The Appendix of this book lists some combination Disciplines designed with sect officials in mind. They can be used as is or as templates for designing your own. Other combination Disciplines can be found in the *Guide to the Camarilla*, the clanbooks and *Libellus Sanguinus I-IV* of the *Vampire: The Dark Ages* line.

BACKGROUNDS

It could be argued that Backgrounds are the most thought-provoking section of the character sheet. No one exists in a vacuum, not even Cainites (however much some may like to think of themselves as solitary predators with no need for any relationship beyond the hunter/prey type). Backgrounds help define what a character is in relation to society — mortal society as much as undead, the micropolitics of the city as well as the long-spun webs of sect, not to mention the Great Jyhad itself.

AGE

Note: The Age Background appears in the *Vampire Storytellers Handbook*, and is presented as an option.

Most sect officials are ancillae and elders, and so it would be perfectly natural (though certainly not necessary) to take this Background for your character. If you do choose to play someone from a prior century, strongly consider making a quick Internet search, or watching a documentary, or picking up at least a kids' book on "Life in the [X] Age" from the library, or hitting up your neighborhood history fan for information on the period in question. This will provide lots of possible hooks and a satisfyingly different worldview to try on. Also consider how you're going to fill in the backstory. You might choose simply to write it up in reasonable detail. Alternatively, you could convince your Storyteller to run an extended Prelude, or even to insert quick "flashback" scenes and stories here and there into your chronicle. (Other players can take temporary characters during these flashbacks, whose stats may not even need to be determined. Consider it, Storytellers. It can be a lovely change of pace.) The

Age Background isn't simply meant to trade experience points for Humanity. It also profoundly changes who your character is.

Especially important for a sect official is some understanding of the character's past history with his own sect, as well as with its enemies. Does your Lasombra Inquisitor have a burning hatred for Toreador? If he happens to be over 500 years old, perhaps he remembers how the eloquence of a single Toreador forever exiled him from the company of the idealist Brujah whom he'd theretofore considered his staunchest allies. An archon who once saw the Ottoman army camped in siege on her beloved home city of Vienna may well have strong opinions on welcoming Assamites into the Camarilla. And so on.

ALLIES

Allies are a necessity — sometimes a necessary evil — for many Cainites, particularly those who yearn for any kind of political or social career. Still, not all sect officials need this Background. Cainite society may well offer all the support system some want. A paladin whose sole duty is to protect the cardinal whenever he ventures forth from his high-security lair might get along just fine without any real Allies to speak of (at least until that inevitable night comes when she really needs one).

However, many sect officials' responsibility is spread out over a large geographical area or a wide spectrum of concerns, and only those with appreciable levels of Obfuscate or Chimerstry can even *look* like they're in two places at once (see the Appendix). Allies are "people on the ground," and even if they're

AGE BACKGROUND

We reprint this abbreviated Background here for the convenience of those who don't own the **Vampire Storytellers Handbook**, since sect officials are so often chosen from among more experienced Cainites:

- Annuated: 200 years or less active, +30 freebies, -1 Humanity
- Elder: 200-350 years active, +55 freebies, -2 Humanity
- Hoary: 350-500 years active, +75 freebies, -3 Humanity
- Venerable: 500-750 years active, +90 freebies, -4 Humanity
- Ancient: Active more than 750 years, +100 freebies, -5 Humanity

Note that characters on Paths of Enlightenment take the Humanity penalty to their Path rating instead.

"only" mortals, they might have some vital bit of information, keys to useful doors — enough to provide the slight edge that makes all the difference, particularly in unfamiliar territory.

Allies take more maintenance than Contacts, and generally expect their favors to be returned sometime. Itinerant sect officials don't have that much time and attention to lavish on the folks in their home area — assuming they *have* a home area. As a result, they often make fewer Allies. What Allies they do have tend to be influential in national, even worldwide communities (from the Mafia to Amnesty International to the subscribers of *Strad* magazine; again, don't settle for the obvious). More sedentary officials, depending on the exact nature of their duties, usually cultivate a handful of Allies whose power base coincides geographically with their own. That's only a general tendency — even real homebodies need an out-of-town Ally once in a while.

Sometimes archons and templars are chosen on the basis of their mortal connections — particularly when high officials are looking for someone who can serve as Masquerade "fixer" for a major network or contract with Indonesian prostitution rings to provide a steady stream of "forgettable" Blood Feast victims for Cardinal Strathcona's *Palla Grande*. Indeed, it's not utterly unknown for mortals to be Embraced on the basis of such connections.

A note to elders, ancillae, and Sabbat: Be sure to take your character's Humanity or Path into account when buying mortals-centered Backgrounds like Allies, Contacts, Herd and Retainers. A Tudor-era Ventrue archon with Humanity 5 is not, in all likelihood, going to be having a weekly late-night coffee with the city's top homicide detective, nor is his Herd likely to consist of girls from the sorority house two blocks over who like to use his pool. Anybody on the Path of Death and the Soul is going to creep even her arms dealer out. This doesn't mean such characters can't have relationships with mortals, just that those relationships are likely to be chilly, fragile, and based on well-tabulated mutual exploitation — or the ham-handed use of vampiric power (a strategy almost guaranteed to backfire).

ALTERNATE IDENTITY

Note: The Alternate Identity Background appears in the **Guide to the Sabbat**.

Discussions of deep-cover situations for sect officials can be found elsewhere in this book. A character often takes an Alternate Identity in order to serve as a double agent, but consider other possibilities. For instance, a Lasombra elder who has lost faith in the modern Sabbat might decide to defect to the Camarilla, but to come openly declaring her lineage and history

may well earn her the distrust, even the hatred of her new colleagues — particularly if she's been an exemplar for the Sabbat up till now. For such a character, it might be wiser to construct a completely new identity instead, claiming to be a recently awakened elder from somewhere else, or even a neonate (assuming there are no embarrassing anachronisms to give her away).

Elders of both the Camarilla and the Sabbat also occasionally construct neonate identities within their own sects, usually to satisfy their paranoia about what the youngsters are thinking, but sometimes they're simply bored with their own unchanging social circle, and hold out some futile hope that the vigor of later generations will rub off on them. For those succumbing to the elder thirst, an alternate identity can also be a way of getting closer to the prey without scaring it off.

ARCANE

Note: The Arcane Background appears in the *Vampire Storytellers Handbook*, and is presented as an option.

The few spies and deep-cover agents who have this Background derive great professional benefit from it. Remember, however, that a character with Arcane may not take Status, Clan Prestige or Fame, and vice versa. It simply doesn't make logical sense to have a character whom nobody ever remembers, but everyone is eager to help. Also, at the Storyteller's option, other social Backgrounds such as Allies, Contacts, etc. may be limited to 5 minus the character's Arcane rating, either occasionally or permanently. The Arcane must perforce walk a lonely path. For some, of course, that's just the way they like it.

A word of warning: a high rating in Arcane can serve as formidable protection against the natural consequences of your character's actions. Broke the Masquerade? The hunters will find the prince before they find you. Pissed off an Inquisitor? Too bad he doesn't have more Auspex. If you're planning a character concept meant to take advantage of this protection, do yourself a favor and warn the Storyteller. There's nothing inherently unbalanced about an *agent provocateur* for the Sabbat with 4 Arcane dots, as long as your Storyteller is ready to provide the appropriate downsides and tradeoffs — but he may not want to go to the effort, or it may upset his whole chronicle design. Even if he is willing to go with it, he'll need time to come up with ways to keep your moves from derailing the story.

BLACK HAND MEMBERSHIP

Note: The Black Hand Membership Background appears in the *Guide to the Sabbat*.

In short, this Background is almost certainly a bad idea for an archon or a templar, the former because Black Hand are Sabbat, and the latter because templars are specifically forbidden to join the Black Hand as

part of a checks-and-balances plan observed by the Sabbat. Of course, this may be precisely your story reason for wanting this Background. If so, well, you'll never be able to say you weren't asking for it.

CLAN PRESTIGE

Note: The Clan Prestige Background appears in the *Guide to the Camarilla*.

The Camarilla's hierarchical structure of archon/justicar/Inner Circle only acknowledges clan differences to the extent required to avoid charges of favoritism. That is, each traditional Camarilla clan has both an Inner Circle councilor and a justicar, which purports to assure them equal representation (apparently, nobody worth mentioning cares about equal representation for the clanless, lesser bloodlines and certain *antitribu*). Justicars are not, however, given any special restrictions or powers when it comes to dealing with Kindred of their own clans. They can (and often do) select archons belonging to other clans. As a result, Clan Prestige is nowhere near as relevant to most archons' duties as it is to, say, a primogen's.

Justicars do, however, sometimes become informal authorities on matters that especially concern their own clans. This expertise usually springs from pre-existing ties and status, though being appointed justicar does enhance one's Clan Prestige just a trifle. (It also tends to make one powerful enemies within the clan — few justicar elections go amicably.) As a result, archons may find themselves dealing with vampires of their justicar's clan unusually often — particularly if they too belong to that clan. In such situations, Clan Prestige becomes very relevant once again.

Officials of both sects also use Clan Prestige to cut across the many obstacles that alienate them from peers in other administrations, as well as among the local Kindred of wherever they're currently operating — red tape, regional distrust, the ever-changing political landscape, etc. Granted, you can't rely on the fellow-feeling of clan members. Clanmates are related by blood, not usually by choice, and they certainly experience all the sibling rivalry and generational rancor one might expect as a result. On the other hand, it may not hurt to remind a recalcitrant sheriff or the paranoid templar of a neighboring bishop that publicly interfering with his clanmate's sanctioned endeavors could ultimately hurt his own Clan Prestige.

In the Sabbat, Prestige in the "backbone" clans, the Lasombra and the Tzimisce, is nothing to discount. Although they don't technically "rule" the Sabbat, they do enjoy a disproportionate share of *de facto* power.

CONTACTS

Contacts may not be as individually useful as Allies, but they are individually lower-maintenance

(that makes unlife easier for roving sect officials), and collectively, they can prove potent indeed.

All too often, Camarilla officials end up working for low-Humanity elders who believe strongly in delegation. Their superiors may not even have that many mortal Contacts of their own, instead relying on assistants (in this case, your characters) to investigate some facet of mortal society, figure out appropriate liaisons, make them, and report in with the successful results. Archons also do a lot of contending with Masquerade breaches, especially those too drastic or too bizarre for locals to fix alone. As a result, it's not at all uncommon for a new archon to spend several years touring his country or continent, not only to glean a general idea of the state of Kindred society within it, but also to "seed" in strategic Contacts here and there — performing what any Sabbat would consider humiliating favors for various mortals, all to be called in later when the archon happens back that way.

Justicars also encourage their archons to cultivate Contacts in domains claimed by dubious or impudent princes and elders. Such vampires usually scramble to clean up their acts when a sect official actually comes to town, but a mortal sees what's going on when the cat's away. Contacts in border zones between Sabbat and Camarilla territory are likewise very important to official operations — and very dangerous. Should their identities be discovered by the enemy, they will probably be killed or used as a vector for disinformation.

The Sabbat, meanwhile, would love everyone to believe it doesn't rely on human Contacts. Spending decades constructing intricate little shadow-empires is, after all, the stuff of puling Ventrue dastards. Even the Lasombra claim to have left that sort of wheedling backstage aristocracy behind ages ago. Sabbat characters must be careful in acquiring and wielding their Contacts so as not to be accused of cozening with the living; discretion is key. Bishops, archbishops and cardinals, an even less trusting lot than the justicars, can usually be counted on to have at least a handful of suitably discreet Contacts scattered throughout their areas of influence to keep tabs on their underlings. When they do explicitly delegate tasks of mortal association, it's often the most distasteful ones, particularly those involving the acquisition of vessels (such as contracting with the aforementioned Indonesian pimps) and the cleanup of what certainly look like — but must never be called! — Masquerade breaches. This allows them to style themselves True Sabbat while still taking care of business sensibly. How the hapless templars defend their reputations as True Sabbat while they're racking up long-distance calls to Singapore is, of course, their own damn problem.

Templars who wander, either because their masters wander or their duties demand it, frequently turn

to local packs for Contact information. They can also acquire needed supplies or information at oases, just as other Sabbat do. For such a character, at the Storyteller's option, a high Contacts rating might represent her skill at finding temporary Contacts through these sorts of secondhand means, rather than a personal stable of recurrent Contacts. Said Contacts probably won't recognize the character and may be a bit unfriendly when approached, but since Sabbat are far more likely to bully and terrorize their Contacts into submission than persuade them anyway, this may not present too much of a problem.

FAME

...is usually as much burden as boon to a **Vampire** character, but it certainly makes unlife interesting. Mortals and vampires with national or worldwide Fame usually aren't chosen to become officials (exceptions have been made, but often the people in question are those whose names are known far better than their faces — painters, war correspondents, and so on, rather than movie stars). Those with a more localized Fame are often sent far away from the areas where they earned it and instructed not to go home or make official use of their Fame unless truly needed for the good of the sect. On the other hand, a character with vast Fame sees things, knows people and gets into places more ordinary folk (including ordinary Cainites) can't, so it's not beyond conception for, say, a justicar to make an archon out of a Brujah rock star planning a short US tour — with instructions to make sure she accepts any social invitations she may get from certain folk along the way. Hey, she makes her living warbling at teenagers through a layer of glitter and latex... who's going to suspect she's gone *political*? And if she learns to take advantage of that widespread underestimation, well, good for her.

Sometimes characters with Fame have a Discipline like Obfuscate or Vicissitude that allows them to disguise themselves when necessary, or simply a facility with acting, makeup and costuming. This allows Fame to be wielded somewhat more precisely.

GENERATION

The "typical" archon or templar is lower than Thirteenth Generation, so many players will want to set aside a creation point or two for this Background. A high-generation sect official is more than an oddity. In many places, he is a figure of spite, contempt or the nameless, superstitious fear that has recently descended like a polluted cloud upon the Last Generations. On the other hand, there's no question that Cainites of the Thirteenth Generation and above make up the fastest-growing segment of the world Cainite population. Moreover, some of the very youngest possess ominous, unprecedented abilities.



Despite their distaste, neither the Inner Circle nor the *prisci* can afford to ignore these creatures any longer. On the sly, some leaders of both sects have begun recruiting the thin-blooded. Bishop Cicatriz was maintaining faux-anarch Pander templars in the Anarch Free State even before the recent collapse. Nor has he fired them from their posts since. Justicar Maris Streck had reportedly appointed a handful of the Clanless as archons, giving them whatever jobs they could handle, answering her detractors only with that bit from the *Book of Nod* that ends with "Adopt the orphans where you can, but watch them...." A wild story among the Eastern European Sabbat even has Vykos bringing a Seer to Cardinal Velya's manse, with the recommendation that Velya make the little maggot a paladin. Since no such youngling currently sits at Velya's Table of Twelve, most Sabbat consider the rumor a clumsy attempt to discredit both ancient Fiends.

HERD

Generally a rating in this Background represents whatever the character has arranged at home, and will become inactive when he ventures out into the wider world. It is conceivable, however, to build up some kind of rapport with a more scattered group of mortals, such as an occult group with chapters in most major American cities. If you have your heart absolutely set

on an itinerant sect official (mostly archons, but Inquisitors and their templars would also certainly qualify) with a working Herd rating, you might want to devote some thought to how your character could ingratiate himself with such a group. Such a far-flung Herd will necessarily be less reliable than one that rests directly under your character's thumb, and under certain circumstances the Storyteller may decide to penalize your hunting rolls.

Your character's Humanity score (or her Path) will affect not only the quality of her interactions with her Herd, but also how stable the Herd itself is. Don't give your Path of Caine Assamite *antitribu* a big Herd if you're not prepared to spend a certain amount of time in the story finding replacements for the vessels she's inevitably going to kill and maintaining whatever hold she has over them. Even fanatical death cultists start questioning the wisdom of their devotion when they look around and see that they're the only founding member left after six months.

INFLUENCE

Influence is specific to power as it is most commonly appreciated in the mortal world: political, largely governmental power. This sort of power is difficult for any but elders to acquire and hold onto, as there's always someone older, wilier or richer than you who

wants whatever you've got. Anywhere you go, the locals have already done their best to sew up the political machinery for their own uses. However, archons who have earned the trust of particularly senior justicars (those few justicars who have served in their posts for many terms) are sometimes asked to take over their superior's long-standing Influence in this or that area of the world, and end up "inheriting," as it were, a certain amount of personal Influence. Such Influence comes with a long string attached, however, and can be taken back if the character should prove unworthy of it. Many more archons and alastors have Influence collected from the nights before their appointment. The question then is how — or whether — that Influence is being maintained in the face of the character's new duties.

In the Sabbat, as noted, Influence can actually be a sort of stigma. It's taken as read that such worthies as cardinals and archbishops are dread night-lords in whose domains the mortals cower in abject terror, accommodating vampiric interests without ever actually quite believing in vampires, but most Sabbat don't think to question just how this neat little trick is pulled off. Sabbat high officials have the experience and wisdom to ply their Influence invisibly, often using their hapless subordinates as proxies so they can appear all the more aloof from mortal doings. A Sabbat of lesser rank than archbishop who's known to have a lot of Influence actually risks losing Status as a result, so be prepared to explain how your high-Sabbat Status, high-Influence character is keeping his wheeling and dealing out of sight of his fellow monsters.

Influence is valued in terms of geographical area, but at the Storyteller's option it could be meant to represent a breadth of category for a roving character: two dots to give a character Influence with missing-persons agencies throughout Europe, for example, as opposed to a personal friendship with Lichtenstein's ruling family.

As a side note to Storytellers, if you're worried about a character's high Influence rating unbalancing the game, remember that connections work both ways. Just think what lovely things must have happened to all those Ventrue and Toreador who'd spent centuries cultivating ties with the *ancien regime* of France when the Revolution came along. On the smaller scale, every time the incumbent mayor doesn't win re-election, a city's Influential Kindred must scramble to make sure they keep a hand in the changing local politics.

MENTOR

When you become a sect official, you gain access to the upper echelons of vampire society that few Cainites enjoy (if enjoy is really the word); at the very least, you

have a relationship with your immediate superior, who in turn has relationships with others of his rank.

That doesn't mean these people have to take the slightest personal interest in you.

This is where the Mentor Background comes in. Ordinarily, the Mentor rating represents an official's relationship with her own superior, implying at least the sort of mutual respect characteristic of mentor and protégé. Sometimes, however, the Background can represent a sire instead. At other times, it turns out that a character's superior lacks — or loses — regard for her, but perhaps some colleague of his has better taste. This can make for interesting political dynamics, and it's not at all unheard of, particularly after incidents where the archons or templars of various masters have to cooperate in some emergency out in the field. Stories of each other's competence are carried back home, and as a result, some distant elder winds up hearing more about the character's shining qualities than her own superior does.

Particularly high ratings in Mentor might indicate moderate interest from a number of powerful people rather than the deep and abiding interest of one.

Remember above all that the relationship between an official and that official's superior can be much more intimate than you would think, given the frequent separations many must endure (not to mention the difference in station). Twenty, 50, 100 years even of occasional meetings add up. Moreover, we're talking about people whose job is to involve themselves closely, if not always sincerely, with some of the most important questions facing the Cainites. Shall we hide from mortals? Should we behave deliberately like them, or deliberately differently? Why are our opponents so evil? Are they evil, or simply deluded? Is our duty to exterminate them or merely to thwart them? Why are we so afraid of the Ancients? Is an official who uses his office to pursue personal agendas betraying his trust or simply claiming one of the few perks of a hard job? And so forth. The higher your Mentor rating, the more you may want to think about where you and your Mentor both stand on some of these elemental issues, because it's quite probable that at least one of you has uncommonly strong feelings about them.

MILITARY FORCE

Note: The Military Force Background appears in the *Vampire Storytellers Handbook*, and is presented as an option.

The prevalence of this Background varies. In Sabbat-held territories, portions of the official military are occasionally at least somewhat at the disposal of the resident cardinals and archbishops (and whomever they

deem trustworthy to assist them), such as in Eastern Europe or Mexico. In Camarilla territories, particularly in nations with huge, well-equipped armed forces, direct ownership of any military power is frowned on, considered far too great a risk to the Masquerade — especially since in many countries throughout both Camarilla and Sabbat territory, it's already whispered that some top-secret government bureau is about to assemble definitive proof of vampires' existence. However, there may be any number of smaller armed forces that don't formally belong to a nation's military: amateur militias, guerrilla rebels, police SWAT teams, high-tech security companies, veterans' associations, enforcement men for drug cartels, etc. An enterprising vampire can assemble a personal strike force from these sorts of folks — but to be honest, they really aren't all that useful to most officials, except in those rare instances when sectarian conflict ignites so fiercely that vampiric secrecy is more threatened by standing aloof than by sending in Cainite-led soldiery. Assaults on extremely remote havens and elder tombs comprise another sort of occasion for which a mortal strike force could prove handy or even essential — vampires involved in Gehenna cults sometimes maintain such forces for years just in case they're suddenly needed.

RESOURCES

For mortals, Resources are quite literally a matter of life and death. For vampires, they're anything from a personal style choice to the very source of their power (while it's quite true that money doesn't buy everything, there are damned few processes it can't at least ease).

Many Cainites — shovelheads, Gangrel, and Ravnos spring to mind — believe a vampire isn't really in tune with her true nature if she doesn't simply take what she needs when she needs it and discard it when she's done. There is some merit to this position; it's dirt-simple for most vampires to steal from most mortals. Many archons, templars, and especially Inquisitors eschew material possessions past what fits in a suitcase, not only for the esthetics of the thing but also because wanderers travel best when they travel light. Of course, the password to a Swiss bank account doesn't weigh much at all.

On the other hand, sometimes the only feasible answer to an enemy who's throwing all his money into taking you down is to throw more money back the other way.

Officials whose duties are primarily investigative (almost all Inquisitors and alastors, most archons and a fair number of templars) should give strong consideration to taking at least a couple of dots of Resources. It's not necessary to be a millionaire, but bribing a company janitor to bring you the paper trash without shredding it costs money. So does acquiring and altering a designer

gown to wear to your suspect's salon ball, and so does getting fake state ID made up for your trusty ghoul. The vampires in any city an archon visits tend to be a singularly unhelpful lot — but thank Caine, the mortals can nearly always be bought. Some sect officials do get a limited operating budget from their superiors. Still, having Resources of their own both saves them the humiliation of constant begging for funds and permits them the occasional unlisted expense (which their superiors would probably just as soon never know about anyway).

Resources, like nearly everything else, take maintenance. Granted, a bank account stuffed with millions that you can access worldwide over the phone is mostly going to behave itself, unless someone else gets your password. But stocks have to be monitored, shrewdly bought and sold. Houses have to be kept up, lightproofed and guarded. Collectibles have to be placed in proper storage conditions with appropriate security (a fourth-century fragment of the *Cycle of Lilith* is not going to age well sitting in a shoebox under your floorboards). Corporations have to be managed with at least minimal competency. Criminal operations are even more prone to hostile takeovers than the average investment firm. All this takes work, so if your character is going to be too busy torching Setite crackhouses and touring archaeological dig sites to do it, better make sure you saved some points for Retainers.

RETAINERS

In a word, yes. For one thing, almost anything that goes on during daylight requires a mortal, and few vampires will trust any but the most loyal of them to operate in this particularly vulnerable sphere of their existences. Even a mere bodyguard will want allies who can, for example, reconnoiter the layout of the casino-hotel at which her mistress will be meeting the Giovanni delegation tonight. Many Camarilla archons have a Retainer who travels with them as body-servant, daytime guard and gofer. Other Retainers watch their Kindred patrons' holdings whenever sect business calls them away (which is most of the time) or keep tabs on things in an area the archon considers a "hot spot" for traitorous activity or Sabbat stirrings.

Sabbat, by contrast, are not supposed to get friendly with mortals. Fortunately, Sabbat Retainers are seldom motivated by friendship. Templars and Inquisitors usually find it necessary to make ghouls of their mortal servants, since these almost universally traumatized souls might just panic and flee if they get far enough out of their masters' terrifying reach — and that's precisely where sect officials often have to send their proxies. With a blood bond in place, however, Sabbat can proceed to treat their ghouls with exquisite (and appropriately distancing) cruelty without too much fear

of betrayal. As a rule, the more a Sabbat official must rely on a particular ghoul, the more drastic and public the cruelty will be. Appearances must be kept up. On the other hand, Sabbat officials also tend to keep whatever ghouls they do make better-fed than usual, since their enemies will likely target the ghouls repeatedly and mercilessly. (In the Camarilla, there's a general unspoken agreement that baldly killing, maiming, and kidnapping others' ghouls shows poor breeding and threatens the Masquerade. The Sabbat has no such concerns of etiquette.)

Other Sabbat officials prefer to use Disciplines to keep their servants in line. This works well enough for your pack's Lurch-like major-domo or a mousy police dispatcher who never had a personality to begin with. Still other Sabbat swear by animal ghouls. With Animalism, they can make excellent spies. A really large, really nasty ghoul dog is the most portable haven security system on earth, and many others besides the Gangrel know it.

Elder Sabbat officials, almost exclusively Tzimisce, still sometimes employ the ancient revenant families as Retainers. The inhuman Obertuses, Zantos and Bratoviches don't blend into normal society very well, but they're more powerful than most ordinary ghouls, and can be of tremendous assistance in their particular areas of specialty. The Grimaldis make better liaisons with the mortal world, but remember that all Grimaldis are blood-bound to a Sabbat of bishop rank or higher. If you take a Grimaldi Retainer, determine who his domitor is before the story starts. Hopefully, that individual is either your character's superior or some other ranking Sabbat who is generally friendly to your character's objectives.

In addition to their domestic duties, ghouls are also used as scouts by sect officials pursuing sect matters. Although they usually can't divine much about the local Kindred on their own, they can do quite a bit of subtle surveillance if given advance information about where to go and who to watch for. The dirty tricks one can play with ghouls are nearly limitless. Federico DiPadua, for example, stole a spy-tactic from the diplomacy of his breathing days in Italy. He sends an agent into a city ahead of him, bearing a letter for the prince announcing his imminent visit. The letter always concludes with the eminently reasonable request that the ghoul be allowed to stay as a guest in the prince's household while awaiting the arrival of his master — which could take anywhere from a week to a couple of months. A certain Tzimisce Inquisitor keeps a stable of devoted Retainers so they won't be recognized as they tail a mark, tag-team style, from city to city. One paladin to Cardinal Strathcona learned everything

he knows about forensics from a ghoul P.I. he kept for 40 years (and then killed without ceremony).

The bottom line is, let your imagination go wild when it comes to the Retainers of sect officials. Almost anything has a conceivable use. Just bear in mind that ghouls have to either be fed once a month (inconvenient if they're frequently separated from their domitor) or vouchsafed a stored supply of their domitors' blood (hope the local Tremere don't find that out). Ghouls also tend to turn frighteningly paranoid when they're starting to run low on vitae, especially the older they get. If your Retainers aren't ghouls, then you have to decide what keeps them in your service.

RITUALS

Note: The Rituals Background appears in the *Guide to the Sabbat*.

This Background is almost exclusively found among the Sabbat — the only Camarilla with Rituals are Sabbat defectors, in which case they often face never-ending distrust from their new sectmates and probably a Wild Hunt from their old ones, if word ever gets out to either. Camarilla Kindred sometimes make an outsider's study of *ritae* and end up with the Sabbat Lore Knowledge instead, which is wholly different. The usefulness of being able to hold *ritae* whenever one wishes cannot be overestimated. Inquisitors use them to ferret out the impious; templars use Fire Dances to inspire War Parties before an attack and hone the abilities of their companions with Games of Instinct; and Sabbat officials of all stripes swap, finesse, and handicap Vaulderies and Vinculums as though they were a sort of emotional/political coin of the realm. Of course, this isn't far from the truth.

The only catch to taking this Background is that it generally only makes sense for Licks who are, or have been, their pack's priest. Others sometimes can and do learn the *ritae*, but you and your Storyteller should agree on how exactly this came about in your character's case — it's likely to involve prestatation or similarly entangling circumstances.

STATUS AND SABBAT STATUS

Of course you'll be buying Status, right? How can you possibly impress your authority on the philistine masses otherwise?

Well, yes. Even in the hierarchy-conscious Camarilla, and certainly in the relatively meritocratic Sabbat, an official cannot expect to walk into a room and command the immediate awe of everyone present, simply because she bears her superior's token. To the extent that they respect her superior, they are likely to behave politely, but they can be perfectly polite and yet somehow fail to find space in their schedules to do her bidding. Even the offer of a personal boon will far more likely inspire them to

move Heaven and Earth if they believe she truly has status, and thus power, in her own right.

On the other hand, it might be interesting to play, say, a pack of brand-new templars that no one's ever heard of. For these Cainites, the need to prove themselves worthy of their recent honor will serve as admirable motivation for many stories to come. Then there are more experienced officials who work under-cover a great deal of the time. Either they have Status but lose access to it when traveling incognito, or else they're such enigmas that they never manage to gain any Status in the first place and wouldn't know what the hell to do with it if they did. Such characters might want to consider taking the Arcane Background as partial compensation, with a caveat — see above.

Status works somewhat differently in the two sects. The Camarilla prides itself on operating by something like the rule of law (as close as undead parasites can get, anyway), and struggles to instill in its subjects the notion that authority should be respected for its own sake. Camarilla Status might thus acknowledge either the dignity of the office itself, or the personal dignity of the official, or both. The Camarilla also awards points for sheer longevity — a neonate archon would have to work a lot harder to gain three dots in Status than an ancilla. In the Sabbat, which has its hoary roots in youthful rebellion, there's a lot more indulgence toward the ambitious. If a templar, paladin, or Inquisitor falls to the fangs or machinations of an inferior, well, he simply got soft. *C'est la mort*. Most likely, a Sabbat official with Sabbat Status has had to back it up on multiple occasions, possibly even through Monomacy.

Status is most often gained by exploits, and exploits typically end with a grateful party and an injured party. The more Status your character has, the more you may want to dig into the subject of who is and isn't overjoyed with the character's rising fortunes. This includes boons, enmities, and anything along those lines — whether you formally describe them with Merits and Flaws or not.

This is a good place to mention that Backgrounds, Merits, Flaws, etc. are more interesting when they play into each other. Perhaps your Gangrel alastor wound up with an extra dot of Resources because he's getting hush money from a certain Tzimisce who also introduced him to his primary Contact. What if the Nosferatu primogen in the city knows how crooked he is and is working secretly to expose him, thus serving as an Enemy Flaw? It's not necessary to connect all the dots (or even most of them), but the more coherent you can make your character's Traits, the more coherent his backstory is likely to be.

With officials, Status is even more serious business than usual. They're granted more opportunities than

the average character to take part in the sort of sectwide business that earns sectwide Status. On the other hand, the more they have, the more they have to lose, so they must also guard their Status more zealously than the average character. Even if they personally don't mind being laughingstocks at the last Grand Conclave, their superiors are unlikely to take with such good grace the blunting of their precious tools. Unfortunately, sect officials all too often find themselves pitted against Cainites who really aren't much impressed by their Status: members of the rival sect, troublesome Independents, their own elders, and so on. Still, if a templar gains enough sect Status to become a household name to every pack in the Americas, it becomes increasingly likely that even Camarilla vampires will grant her a grudging respect (which may well take the form of signing her up to the Red List, but it's the thought that counts).

MERITS AND FLAWS

Merits and Flaws are, as always, available only with Storyteller permission. Storytellers may wish to consider breaking the seven-point-maximum rule on Flaws in the case of archon and templar characters, to reflect the extraordinary ups and downs of their undead careers. However, any such leniency should be understood as a story enhancement, not a license to abuse the point-based character creation system.

COTERIES/PACKS

One of two things has happened. Either one or more players expressed a desire to play a sect official, or the Storyteller announced that the game will be focusing on the activities of sect officials. Now it's your job to come up with a character that fits within that context. What do you do?

DEMOGRAPHICS

You'll have a better chance of finding your niche within the pack or coterie when you know what its overall makeup will be. If your Storyteller has strong opinions on this subject, there's probably a chronicle reason. If not, you might want to sit down with the other players, put together what you know about the story so far and consider the options. There are a number of possibilities, each with its own considerations.

PEERS

In this setup, all the characters are sect officials, and their relative standing, while not necessarily equal, is close enough that precedence becomes moot most of the time. This can be a good thing, particularly if your fellow players tend to get competitive; people are less likely to feel shortchanged. On the other hand, it

doesn't mean there won't still be a struggle for control — on the character level, the player level, or both — and there won't be any in-game formalities to govern the situation.

But this immediately begs the question of why your characters are together, since tight-knit social groups consisting entirely of officials are fairly rare in vampire society. Sect elders generally do not appoint existing packs or coterie to posts *en masse*. Your group could always be the exception, but the circumstances would likely be something extraordinary — for instance, you've all stumbled over a justicar's deepest secret and this is his clever way of keeping an eye (and a thumb) on you. It's much more likely that your characters were assembled by superiors for some specific purpose. Perhaps they're an archon coterie assigned to expose and prosecute an especially old and wily prince. Or perhaps they're the "fixers" for a cardinal, a crack team of top performers in various areas kept permanently on call. Alternatively, an all-official group might form itself: say, an informal circle united only by their mutual, blood-bond-enhanced devotion to an incredibly charismatic justicar.

Once the group's goal is determined, you have to come up with your character's relationship to that goal. He can love it or hate it, but he probably shouldn't hate it in a way that's going to alienate him from his fellows constantly (that tends to damage player morale). Circumstances will affect attitude. A group thrown together to deal with a crisis, even if it ends up staying together afterward, is going to have a very different feel from one that's been trained together as a permanent unit. For instance, in a crisis, tempers flare — but different personality types are also more likely to want to put aside their differences because of the looming need to cooperate.

OFFICIAL AND STAFF

In this type of group, one character is a sect official while the others mostly support the official in her duties — servires, ghouls, childer, etc., which means that all the players have to accept the idea of one character being somewhat central and even superior. When designing your own character, however, you should still keep the goal of everyone having equal fun in mind. If you're playing the official, try not to pour on the personal melodrama too thickly (otherwise, the Storyteller will be so busy dealing with your duties, your Dark Fate, your True Love, and your estranged sire that nobody else stands a chance). If you're playing one of the subordinate characters, by contrast, don't rely on complaining to the Storyteller to get yourself enough limelight. Go the extra mile to create a character with historical and personal hooks for the Storyteller and your fellow players to exploit. Also

bear in mind that this kind of coterie or pack is usually brought into existence so that the chronicle can focus intently on sect business. You probably won't get much gratification if you create a character whose assistance is only truly needed in one out of five operations.

OFFICIAL AND ALLIES

This kind of group most often consists of an official and the coterie or pack he belonged to before his appointment. In the Sabbat, the Vaulderie can sometimes lead to such intimacy that packmates become reluctant to break up even when the paths of their unlives diverge. This is a great way to set up the group when sect politics are supposed to be one plotline among several. However, it's probably best if the non-officials in the group take more than a passing interest in either the sect's well-being or that of their resident official — since running a lot of solo scenes with the official character will eventually get tedious, even if the other players take temporary characters to portray during them.

Remember that to most high officials in either sect, the allies of their archons and templars are a big security issue. Should they really be allowed along? If they are, how is their loyalty and discretion to be assured? To some extent, archons have latitude to deputize servires and delegate tasks to them, but there's an unspoken limit to that latitude. Bishops and archbishops are notorious for assigning their templars to "sensitive" matters, both political and personal. In other words, it's probably not wise to bring a Caitiff with known anarch sympathies into this type of archon coterie unless everyone in the game is prepared to deal with the justicar's attitude toward her possible "bad influence" on his archon.

ODD MAN OUT

You could have a pack or coterie where only one character is a non-official, or only one character isn't the type of person to get involved in sect business. This role can have its little joys. You might end up playing devil's advocate, doubting Thomas or Greek chorus to the rest of the group, for example. If your Storyteller has already stated that the ethical ambiguities of power form the central theme of the chronicle, such a character could help out greatly. Constant ambiguity isn't everyone's idea of a good time, however. If your character is the odd Lick out when it comes to sect business, you'll probably want to have multiple ties of other sorts to the group, so that your repeated involvement stays plausible. Alternatively, you could simply let your diffident character become ever more involved in sect business as the chronicle progresses. He doesn't have to necessarily *enjoy* the process, of course....

ON BLOOD

Sabbat packs are commonly bound together in the Vinculum, though Vaulderie taken with other sectmates may complicate that relationship. When your Sabbat character is an official, it behooves you to contemplate all the Vinculum ties she might have, their relative strengths, and how that affects her dealings with others. If her pack serves one bishop, that's a fairly simple matter. But what if she's the only templar in the pack and her bishop insists on her coming to his Vaulderie at least as often as her pack's? And how will he feel if, in spite of all that, her Vinculum toward him is still secondary to that of her packmates? What if he wants her to join a new pack altogether? What if she's been obliged to share the cup with Sabbat officials she doesn't care for, all as part of some negotiation or joint mission? Storytellers might consider, rather than rolling dice, simply giving the players ratings of four, five or six in the Vinculum for each person the character has shared the cup with, then sitting down with the player and assigning those Vinculi according to what seems like the most fun for the story.

In the Camarilla, blood bonds are usually a more private matter. Yes, Kindred "couples" sometimes flaunt their unity in Blood, and the occasional domineering prince will boast about all the disobedient Kindred he's brought to heel with the oath. But most elders hate to admit they've had to do anything so crass as bind someone in blood in order to control them. Kindred of the Camarilla are supposed to be subtler than that. The question of whether archons are always, never or sometimes bound to their justicars is deliberately kept mysterious by justicars and archons alike — for the simple reason that sometimes it's to their advantage to let people think a particular archon will behave a certain way, and sometimes that's the last thing they want people to think. All one can say for certain is that there's far more trafficking in blood-slavery in the upper echelons of Kindred society than anyone would like to believe. Many archons are already torn between ideal and reality, duty and desire. Bringing in a blood bond to a powerful superior — or an old lover, or an enemy! — adds yet another tragic wrinkle. This doesn't mean you have to give your archon character a blood bond to his justicar, but it's not at all unlikely either. Decide what's best for your story and the overall chronicle, then let the Traits fall where they may.

DAISY CHAINS AND OTHER MISDIRECTION

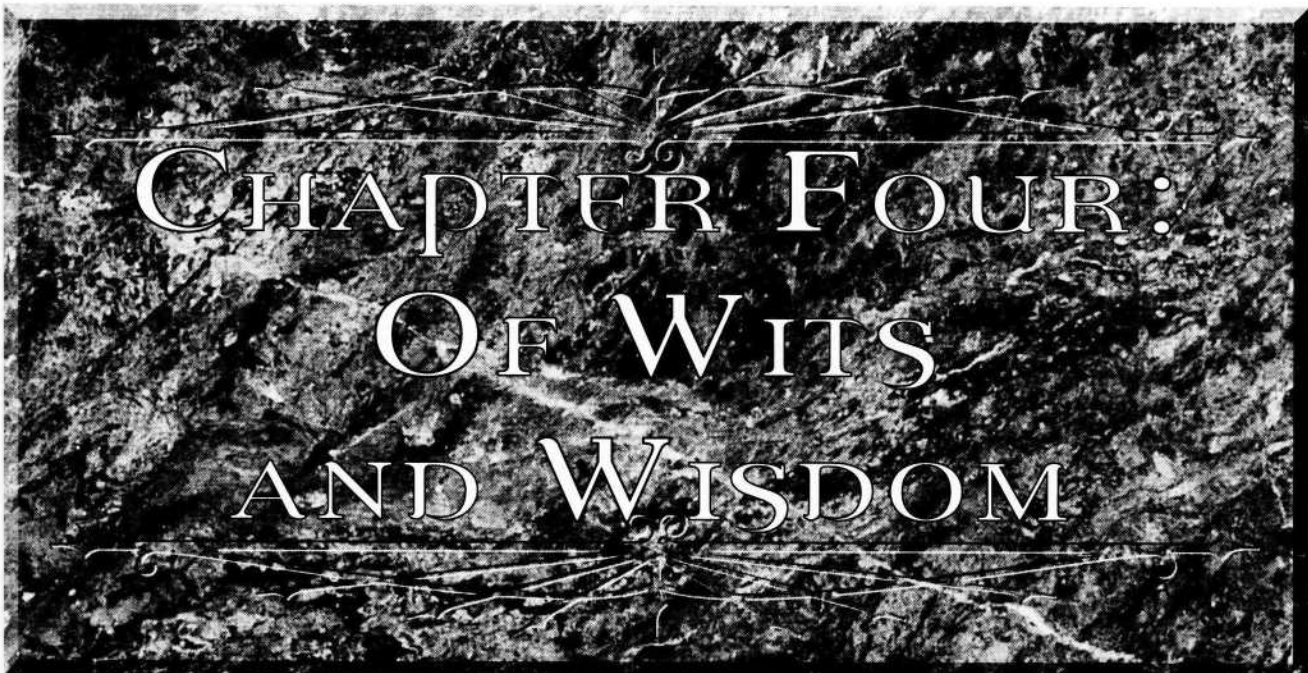
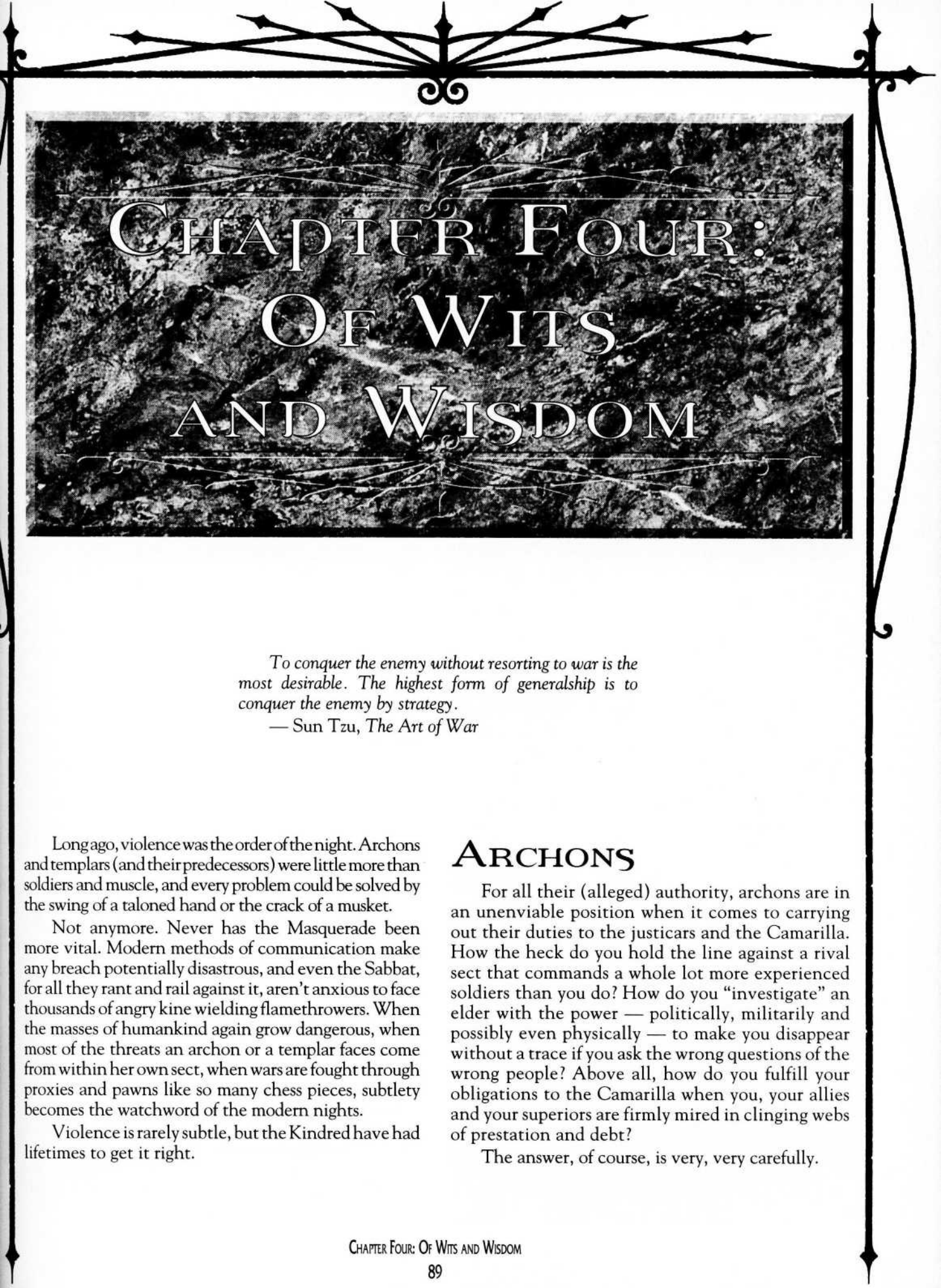
Some archons, as noted elsewhere, don't really cotton to the idea of their loyalty being enforced by blood. Of those archons, a number flat-out refuse to drink. Justicars subscribe to a wide, delicately shaded variety of opinions on binding archons. Sometimes the justicars accept this refusal, sometimes they don't... and sometimes they try to contrive some sneaky way of having their archons bound anyway.

A few new archons are nevertheless well enough acquainted with Kindred treachery to suspect that they might end up bound to their justicars — if they don't take preventive steps. Other archons, particularly those regularly sent against the Sabbat or the Independents, seek such advance protection out of fear of getting captured and bound by the enemy.

One method, pioneered by a praetor archon many centuries ago, involves having one archon bound to another archon, who is in turn bound to another different archon, etc., until the chain of bonds comes full circle back to the first archon. While this may not exactly make for an easy time emotionally (this amounts, after all, to a group of people who all suffer from unrequited affection for someone who devotes it to them or vice versa), it does protect everyone concerned from unwanted bonds. It further assures that if one archon gets into deep trouble, one or more of her fellow-archons will get involved in her rescue. Some archons, on the other hand, simply pair up into mutual blood-bonds (see the discussion on this subject in Chapter Four). More ruthless sorts select some hapless, less powerful vampire, stake and imprison him in some impregnable area, then bind themselves to him.

A recurrent rumor among the European archons holds that several of their number are actually trying to learn the Vaulderie or some muttered, sorcerous rite in order to break themselves of bonds to their justicars, but so far no names have been named.





CHAPTER FOUR: OF WITS AND WISDOM

To conquer the enemy without resorting to war is the most desirable. The highest form of generalship is to conquer the enemy by strategy.

— Sun Tzu, *The Art of War*

Long ago, violence was the order of the night. Archons and templars (and their predecessors) were little more than soldiers and muscle, and every problem could be solved by the swing of a taloned hand or the crack of a musket.

Not anymore. Never has the Masquerade been more vital. Modern methods of communication make any breach potentially disastrous, and even the Sabbat, for all they rant and rail against it, aren't anxious to face thousands of angry kine wielding flamethrowers. When the masses of humankind again grow dangerous, when most of the threats an archon or a templar faces come from within her own sect, when wars are fought through proxies and pawns like so many chess pieces, subtlety becomes the watchword of the modern nights.

Violence is rarely subtle, but the Kindred have had lifetimes to get it right.

ARCHONS

For all their (alleged) authority, archons are in an unenviable position when it comes to carrying out their duties to the justicars and the Camarilla. How the heck do you hold the line against a rival sect that commands a whole lot more experienced soldiers than you do? How do you “investigate” an elder with the power — politically, militarily and possibly even physically — to make you disappear without a trace if you ask the wrong questions of the wrong people? Above all, how do you fulfill your obligations to the Camarilla when you, your allies and your superiors are firmly mired in clinging webs of prestatation and debt?

The answer, of course, is very, very carefully.

INTERNAL AFFAIRS

Some archons actually *prefer* battling the Sabbat or werewolves to dealing with internal threats to the sect, as at least they then know for certain who the enemy is. An archon operating inside Camarilla territory against Camarilla Kindred must beware of eyes in every window and daggers in every hand.

The best methods of dealing with her fellow Kindred are the first things an archon learns after being selected by a justicar. This isn't a formal lesson imparted by lectures and tests. The new archon is given a few pointers, made to comprehend that her former understanding of politics and prestation means little in the face of her new circumstances, and sent on her way. She either adapts quickly, learning which tactics and techniques work and which do not, or she fails, in which case the justicar usually has to find another new archon.

PROBABLE CAUSE

Archons don't just sit around waiting for their justicar to summon them and tell them "Go here and do this." Although archons do receive such assignments, many of them spend their time traveling from city to city, searching for issues that require their attention. Archons require a justicar's approval to take actions that will drastically alter the balance of power in a city or adversely affect a powerful elder, but they have substantial discretion when it comes to other matters. Traveling archons often wander for years, solving problems as they come across them, without ever being given a specific task by a superior.

PULLING RANK

Often the first recourse of the inexperienced or overconfident, this is rarely the best way for an archon to operate. Strictly speaking, an archon does have the authority to stride into a prince's court and begin demanding cooperation. Sometimes, when dealing with a prince with nothing to hide (or nothing *relevant* to hide) and who's more concerned with solving her current troubles than she is with maintaining every last bit of face, this actually works. The archon is almost certain to leave ill will behind when he departs, though, as even these princes don't take kindly to being pushed around.

It's rarely even that easy. As often as not, it's the prince, or one of the primogen or other local elders, whom the archon has come to investigate. Since it's rather difficult to demand cooperation without announcing your presence, you've already thrown out any advantage you might have gained by working undercover (see below). Heavy-handed ultimatums also risk raising the ire of the other elders. At best,

they are less likely to assist you in your endeavors, and at worst you may have driven them into an alliance with your quarry.

Pulling rank is more effective when dealing with Kindred outside the halls of power. The prince and primogen may have the status and political clout to stand up to your demands, but most neonates and ancillae on the streets do not. Most Camarilla vampires are smart enough to realize that it's in their best interests to cooperate, and those who don't can usually be intimidated, bluffed or even beaten into submission. Again, this is only an option if you don't mind announcing to the city at large that there's an archon in town, and it's not exactly subtle.

Although such reactions are inconvenient, clever archons have learned to turn them to their advantage. Many archons operate in coterie. If word appears to have leaked out that archons have come to the city, a single member — or perhaps two — may deliberately make their presence known as a diversion or a stalking horse. This is usually sufficient to divert the attentions of the local Kindred from the remainder of the coterie, allowing them to continue the operation undisturbed. It may also draw out the subject of the investigation, if he sees the opportunity to "deal with" the archons without getting caught. Putting oneself in the crosshairs is obviously a risky proposition, but many archons are willing to take that chance if it means luring their prey out into the open.

Archons are also more likely to announce their presence if their purpose in an area is preventive, rather than investigative or punitive. The presence — or even the rumored presence — of an archon often sends a subtle message to a prince or other elder whose actions have not yet crossed the line from ambitious to problematic. An archon who is simply "passing through," who has arrived to deal with an unrelated issue or simply to pay a courtesy call (yeah, right), is often enough to make a scheming elder think twice before following through on her questionable agenda. This technique works well enough that archons sometimes don't bother traveling to the city at all, instead using various connections to spread false rumors of their impending arrival. No sense in expending unnecessary effort if a few whispered lies will do the job just as effectively.

Many archons also find it very interesting to see which way the elders jump when they start feeling the pressure. An archon who's got a close eye on the locals before she announces her presence can often spot signs of guilt or innocence simply by watching which way the roaches scurry when she steps into the Elysium and turns on the lights.

SOCIAL OBLIGATIONS

As much as most archons despise the political necessities that take them away from their other duties (or their own schemes), sometimes the justicars need to make their presence felt in Elysiums and at social fêtes across the globe. When a stable faction or prince finally reins in the chaos that is New York City, for instance, you can bet that archons will be on the guest list at the early meetings at that table.

Some less experienced archons fail to grasp the purpose of such endeavors. Why should they waste their time schmoozing and being seen when *real* problems demand attention? They don't realize that a show of interest (and force) now can head off potential problems down the road. An elder who knows she counts archons among her guests has received notice that the Camarilla has taken an interest in her activities, and hopefully proves wise enough to moderate her behavior and her scheming accordingly. At the same time, a similar message is being sent to those who might threaten the prince or primogen in question. The archons wouldn't have announced their presence if they were working to undermine the local power structure; since they did, they must be happy (or at least content) with the status quo, and probably won't take kindly to anyone rocking the boat. Thus, the presence of archons at a prince's Elysium can actually stabilize a domain far more effectively than anything the prince himself might have done.

UNDERCOVER OPERATIONS

During internal investigations, archons often operate in secret, announcing their presence (as above) only when they've gained all the information and accomplished all the objectives they can while incognito. By staying beneath the local radar, an archon can keep her ear to the ground and follow up on contacts and leads without the powers that be throwing constant obstacles in her path. Many Kindred who avoid archons like the plague are more than willing to trade information for favors or bribes when the interested party is "nobody special."

Working undercover entails substantial risk, though, enough that some archons still prefer to operate in the open unless that is not an option. Remaining anonymous means that you don't draw the attention (or the fire) of those who are desperate to avoid discovery. At the same time, many Kindred who would fear to thwart or slay an archon have no compunctions about disposing of some nameless Lick who stuck his nose where it didn't belong. Remaining undercover doesn't necessarily mean avoiding attention; it often just means substituting one sort of threat for another.



An undercover archon also has fewer resources to draw on, and less in the way of backup if things go sour. Princes and primogen may resent an archon coming in and throwing his weight around, but they're likely to make at least a show of cooperation, if only to keep a suspicious eye from being turned their way. Any aid they might offer, however halfheartedly, is denied an archon who keeps her presence secret. If you're in town undercover you can't ring up the prince and tell him, "Say, I'm having a problem with some Cathayans near the docks; would you be kind enough to send me the sheriff and his bruisers? Thank you so much." If you're part of an archon coterie, you've at least got them watching your back, but if not....

Well, you may "officially" have the backing of the justicars and the entire Camarilla, but they're not here now. An undercover archon is on her own. Period.

Again, some creative — some would say cruel — archons have developed techniques to turn these apparent disadvantages around. For instance, Gracie Velasquez, great-grandchilde of Federico DiPadua and a well respected archon in her own right, has developed a truly nasty habit of carrying enough fake evidence on her to prove beyond the shadow of a doubt that the bearer is indeed an archon. She remains undercover until it seems the local authorities are beginning to realize there's an archon among them. She then plants her "evidence" so that it points to the person or the haven of some other local vampire. She usually chooses those who are guilty of some wrongdoing unrelated to her current case, or who have given her a hard time in the course of her investigation. By observing her catspaw (and those who decide to take action against him), she often learns precisely who in the city has the most fear of discovery by the "archon," and even how much danger they pose. Armed with this knowledge, she then arranges sufficient support from either her fellow archons or the uninvolved local elders so she can confront her true target.

The foremost difficulty to overcome is an archon's lack of contacts and allies in a strange city. The prince, elder or other subject of his investigation has them. The archon likely does not. Many archons prefer to approach those who are known, or at least suspected, to harbor a grudge against the subject already, perhaps a rival elder or a resentful childe. This is a dangerous ploy — an obvious rivalry isn't always a real one — and the archons prefer to do this through agents or proxies, without revealing their true identity or motives. Some archons arrange to perform a small boon for the potential contact even if it means arranging the situation that will require their aid in the first place to more firmly cement such an alliance. Others ingratiate themselves with their actual suspect through similar

means, hoping to gather evidence by staying as near the source as possible.

Bribes are an archon's friends. Most Licks in a given city don't know much about the goings-on in Elysium, but chances are they know someone who knows someone who does. Archons often make local contacts by bribing their way up these social chains until they find someone who can be persuaded to talk about the current situation.

An undercover archon must have an appropriate cover story. She can claim to be a local, but only when dealing with those same rank-and-file Kindred. Anyone of higher status is likely to be able to pick her out as an outsider — remember how small the Kindred population of the average city really is. On the other hand, while an outsider or new arrival might be easier to pull off, and might get the archon into Elysium and other places that a "local" cover cannot, it's also more likely to draw attention. Kindred are paranoid enough by nature that if a scheming elder notices a new arrival, he's likely to mistrust her simply because she's an unknown element. Many archons favor taking the place of a local figure (as doppelgangers often do), or selecting a number of locals (carefully chosen, of course) as hands and letting them do most of the poking around.

The next problem is evidence. Not that it's hard to find, but that it rarely exists in solid form. Kindred stupid enough to leave paper trails don't stay undead for long. Yes, an archon will occasionally get lucky and find an incriminating letter or e-mail, but this is rare. Archons rely largely on testimony from other Kindred, simply because that's often the only evidence to be had. Sometimes the validity of these statements can be confirmed via Auspex. At other times, the archons are simply required to judge by the same criteria as mortal courts: if enough people claim the same thing, it's probably true. It is preferable for such testimony to come willingly. Archons do have other means of acquiring it — secretly recording conversations, threatening the informant with the wrath of the Camarilla (this is tantamount to breaking cover, so don't do it if you're still investigating), or even forcing the information through brute force or Disciplines — but none of these techniques are as reliable as a cooperative witness. This is actually easier than it sounds. Offered sufficient reward (a piece of the suspect's power base after they're taken down is an old favorite), most witnesses become cooperative indeed.

Still, modern archons do have other means of proving guilt. Wiretaps, electronic eavesdropping, computer hacking — these are all things that many elders are not prepared to deal with, and fail to counter. It may be rude, even politically suicidal, to bug the

PROOF OF OFFICE

No one has assembled any concrete statistics on the subject, but the best guess is that almost one in five archons who have met Final Death in the course of their duties were brought down by “friendly fire” (or “friendly claws,” “friendly swords,” etc.). The Camarilla has existed for over five centuries, and has had archons — or some equivalent — serving that entire time, yet the sect still has no satisfactory method of identifying those archons.

How does an archon who has just arrived in town convince the prince and primogen that she is who she says she is? How does she convince the scourge that she’s not just some border-dwelling autarkis, that it’s only a cover identity, before she’s either forced to kill him or fall beneath his fangs? Most princes have the means of contacting the justicars — eventually. The process takes nights, weeks or even longer, and in the interim the archon’s ability to function is crippled at best. At worst, the archon is already dead.

The alastors all bear the Mark of the Beast, but a tattoo is not a viable solution for the archons *en masse*. For such a symbol to serve as identification, it would have to be widely known — and there goes any possibility of an archon successfully working undercover. Not to mention the problems caused when every anarch from New York to Los Angeles decides it’d be a real boost to get the same tattoo; or when an archon retires, or is forced to retire, from service.

The idea of badges has never been seriously brought up (except once, in 1958, by the Malkavian justicar Matthew Dresden. Dresden was literally laughed out of conclave and was replaced — by a unanimous vote — at the end of his term). Any form of identification so obvious and so easy to forge or steal will clearly not function under these circumstances, to say nothing of the logistical nightmare involved in keeping a record of badge numbers for an organization as informal and fluid as the archons.

The Tremere are currently at work on developing a thaumaturgical mark, not entirely unlike the one inflicted on their late *antitribu*. This mark would be visible only when the archon desired it, and would be nigh impossible to forge by virtue of its magical nature. Unfortunately, the Warlocks haven’t yet succeeded in their efforts, and many archons would surely prove reluctant to submit themselves to such a ritual in any case. Additionally, the Tremere would no doubt create a “back door” to this secret brand, which would allow them to see it and potentially expose an archon to any Tremere who saw her. Putting one’s security in the hands of the Tremere rarely works fully to the satisfaction of the party employing them.

At the moment, several safeguards are in place. The Inner Circle and the justicars have declared impersonating an archon a crime punishable by staking, torpor and even Final Death. It is hoped that the threat of a gruesome end will be sufficient to dissuade many Kindred from making the attempt at all.

Some archons — usually those embarking on a specific investigation — are given a writ of identification by their justicar. Obviously such letters can be stolen, but precautions have been taken to prevent this. Each letter is sealed with the personal signet of the justicar. Within the letter are certain code phrases, which the archon is required to memorize. Should the bearer of the letter be unable to quote the code phrases, or should the seal have been broken before the prince (or sheriff, or whoever) opens it, the individual is assumed to be an impostor. Only if the letter remains sealed and the bearer knows the proper codes is his identity established.

Even this procedure is far from foolproof. Such letters must be replaced by the justicar each time they are used, as the seal has now been cracked. Not every archon possesses such a writ; in fact, fewer than half possess one at any given time. Even those who do have such identification don’t always carry it on them, especially when working undercover, for fear that the letter will give them away should it be discovered. It is extremely difficult to forge the justicars’ sigils, or to open them and reseal them without any obvious alteration; the symbols are extremely intricate, and contain details too small to be seen without the use of *Auspex* or a microscope. Nevertheless, a few attempts have succeeded in the past, proving that even these precautions can be thwarted.

Until the Tremere prove successful in their labors (and trustworthiness), or some other solution presents itself, the archons must continue to make do with what options they have, and hope that their unlives never depend on instant identification.

prince's haven, but if you're an archon, it's not technically a violation of Kindred Traditions. You'd best have a good reason for it, though; otherwise, you may find yourself MIA the next time you pass through that prince's domain. Some archons operate much like the archetypal private detective, tailing the subject for nights on end, recording her every move, until they finally accumulate enough evidence to act.

Cardinal sin number one among undercover archons is relying too heavily on Disciplines. The powers possessed by the Kindred are mighty, but they are fallible. It might seem easier to create a cover identity by rearranging the memories of a local Kindred to make her believe that you're an old acquaintance from way back, but you'll think otherwise when that memory implant wears off in the middle of a conversation with the local scourge. Mundane deception, when it's skillful and believable, is always a better option.

LONE WOLVES AND COTERIES

The Kindred are solitary creatures, lone predators who stalk the night and find it nigh impossible to trust others of their own kind. It is an instinct, a tendency shared to some extent by even the most gregarious vampire.

Archons regularly buck this trend, not because they find it easier to trust their fellows — they must, if anything, be *more* suspicious than other vampires — but because it's often the only way to survive. Few Kindred have more enemies than an archon. From every elder with his own agenda (read: all of them) to every vampire not of the Camarilla, the justicars' agents meet hostile stares and whispered threats wherever they go. Is it any wonder they prefer to operate in numbers?

Strategic concerns influence the size and makeup of archon coteries. These are not inviolable laws, and are often adapted (or discarded outright) to fit the circumstances, but they are common enough to be considered the standard method of operation.

Lone Agents

Despite the inherent dangers, sometimes a single archon really is the best response to a situation. Infiltration of a cabal of conspirators or a Gehenna cult is a difficult enough undertaking for an individual; it often proves impossible for more. Such a deep-cover operative often stays under for months or years, slowly gaining the trust of the organization and passing intelligence to her justicar or coterie. Few archons enjoy working like this, since there's no aid immediately available should their cover be blown, but sometimes there's no help for it.

A single archon is sometimes assigned bodyguard duty. The archons don't make a practice of protecting just anyone, but when an elder of particular status or authority is threatened, the justicars are occasionally

asked to take a hand in her defense. Most such elders have their own childer and ghouls protecting them as well; the presence of an archon in such circumstances is largely symbolic. The logic behind this is twofold. First, it indicates to those who might threaten the subject that the justicars and the Inner Circle have a vested interest the subject's wellbeing and will take a very dim view of anyone who harms him. Second, if the threat is such that a single archon (and the elder's own agents) cannot protect her, it would likely require a sizable coterie to do a better job, and no Kindred (well, *very* few) is important enough to drag an entire coterie of archons away from their other duties.

An archon might also be assigned to bodyguard duty when an important elder becomes convinced that one of her own childer (or other protectors) is out to kill her, but has not yet determined which one. When a Kindred's own agents cannot be trusted (even as much as normal), he has little place else to go but to the archons. Most vampires don't have the clout to call for such assistance, but those who do are taken very seriously indeed. This is a particularly dangerous assignment, as the archon does not know from whom the threat will come, but the enemy almost certainly knows that an archon — or at least an outsider of some sort — has involved himself.

Finally, the justicars often assign a single agent to missions that have a low probability of survival. Most Kindred, even archons, lack the selfless sense of loyalty that would inspire them to volunteer for suicide missions, but occasionally a truly exceptional archon will act for the greater good. In other cases, the justicars or the archon's superiors simply don't tell her that the mission is a one-way ticket. In either case, there's no sense in wasting resources. While kamikaze coteries aren't unheard of, the vast majority of such operations are undertaken alone.

On the rare occasions that an archon actually survives such an operation, he can probably expect accolades and commendations from his superiors when he returns — unless he was specifically intended to die in the line of duty, in which case he may find things growing unpleasant upon his unexpected arrival.

Partners

Archons operate in pairs only slightly less frequently than in small coteries. Although two archons are sometimes thrown together by a justicar due to the particular requirements of the endeavor, more often than not these partnerships are long-lasting relationships. Some justicars and archons are made uncomfortable by the notion that these pairs might develop a stronger loyalty toward one another than they have for their patron and their fellows, but the remarkably successful operational record of such

pairings offsets this risk. Many of these partners become at least semi-trusted allies or even lovers over the course of their career, and those who survive long enough to establish such a relationship have usually learned to work exceptionally well together. More than one pair of archons has taken the blood bond to each other, though the practice is officially frowned upon, and even forbidden outright by several justicars. These "couples" are particularly effective, lacking even the low-grade scheming that goes on between most Kindred allies. At the same time, such archons have been known to abandon an operation entirely should something untoward happen to a partner.

Paired archons are assigned to many long-term undercover operations. Two archons can follow up leads that a single agent working alone cannot, and each is able to support the other and watch her partner's back should an investigation turn troublesome. At the same time, it is far easier for partners to remain hidden where a larger group would be uncovered and exposed.

Partnerships of this nature are also widely used in a social capacity. A single archon is vulnerable, and is often taken as an insult by particularly status-minded princes or other elders. A sizable coterie, on the other hand, is usually interpreted as a show of force, breeding anger and resentment on the part of its hosts. The assignment of a pair of archons to such endeavors is a compromise between the two extremes. Occasionally, one of the partnership will announce her presence while the other remains undercover to ferret out information and serve as hidden backup. Because Kindred tend to clam up when an archon is around, however, this technique isn't terribly effective; more often than not, in social circumstances, these archons either operate openly or remain undercover as a pair.

Archons who are known to work in partnerships, such as the team of Hamilton Cross and Tamara Nayibé, sometimes exploit their reputation as inseparable. Nayibé has, on occasion, deliberately gone to social functions alone. By standing back and watching as the paranoid locals try to kiss up to her while making a mad scramble to locate her absent partner, she often learns who has the most to hide.

Small Coteries

Defined for these purposes as any group numbering three to five archons or servires, small coteries are the single most common operational group of archons in non-warfare environments. As with partnerships, some groups are drawn together for specific purposes, but most act together on a regular basis and have established working relationships, if not better, among their members.

Coteries are deployed most frequently in circumstances that require a combination of techniques. Should both an undercover and a

THE RULE OF THREE

Although the size of an archon coterie is determined by a number of considerations, the rule of thumb when dealing with internal investigations is to assign a group of three archons, each with her own specific part to play in the operation.

The first functions as both scout and information-gatherer, and normally remains undercover for the duration of the operation, even should the other two archons reveal themselves or be exposed. This first archon enters the city nights or even weeks ahead of the others. This is so she will already have intelligence to pass to the others when they arrive, but also to distance her from the others in the minds of any observers who might have somehow detected the archons' arrival. Her primary goal in the first nights of the operation is to develop a feel for the city itself: who the important elders are, who holds the city's offices (assuming such information wasn't provided before the mission began), where the Elysiums are and so forth. This grants the other two archons a working knowledge of the city so that they don't automatically give themselves away as outsiders.

The second member of the team is responsible for coordinating the coterie's activities. An expert in the twisted ways of the game of prestation, his job is to ensure that the team doesn't cause any more damage to the local power structure than is absolutely necessary. Every Kindred the team interacts with is analyzed in terms of her position in the local arena and dealt with accordingly. This member of the team is the one most likely to reveal himself to those local authorities who have been deemed "safe," in order to arrange for support or information.

The last archon in the coterie is the team's muscle. Once the other two have determined who the "problem Kindred" is (or are), it is the third archon's task to deal with the subject by whatever means necessary. This doesn't mean that the other two archons aren't capable of holding their own should violence erupt, simply that the third member of the team is the expert at such things. Although hulking bruisers or other "ass-kickers" often fill this position, the smart coteries prefer an enforcer who has as strong a grasp of the tactical aspects of combat as he does the physical ones.

For more on how archon coteries are put together, see Chapter Three.



military presence be needed, for example, an archon coterie that contains specialists in both fields is best suited to handling the situation. While individual infiltrators or pairs are more appropriate for long-term deep cover investigations, small coterie are often employed for shorter operations that have a smaller risk of discovery. "We've detected a pattern of Sabbat behavior in and around Denver that makes us think there may be a collaborator somewhere in the city. Find out who it is and what damage they've done," would probably be assigned to a partnership, considering the potential length of the assignment. On the other hand, "The Ventrue primogen is up to something with the local Setites. Find out what it is and put a stop to it," is a shorter and more concise mission objective and might well be assigned to a coterie.

Coterie are also useful when social concerns are less of an issue and the justicars no longer care if the locals take umbrage at a show of force. Should a Camarilla elder or a prince be found guilty of violating one too many Traditions, or otherwise need removal, a coterie of archons is the answer (especially since most such elders have the means to defend themselves — lethally — from a single operative). Should a prince call for help from the archons, due to Lupine incursions, an anarchy uprising, a power play among the primogen that has raged out of control or the like, a coterie not only has sufficient might and skill to handle the situation, it also makes the point that the justicars are going to be taking a very close look at all parties concerned.

Large Coterie

Also called "war coterie," these are groups of six or more archons working together. Unlike the other designations, these are almost never deployed in non-combat situations (hence the name), and rarely consist of long-term associations, having instead been assembled for a specific operation. The vast majority of war coterie have been deployed in the war with the Sabbat, but they are occasionally assigned to battling Lupines, hunting wights and even eliminating Camarilla elders gone rogue.

Even during wartime, such massive coterie convene rarely. Considering that a single war coterie can account for at least an appreciable minority, and possibly over 10 percent, of all active archons (depending on which estimates are accurate), the justicars are loath to put so many agents together as one large target unless circumstances permit no other solution. Most of the time, operations that could be handled by a war coterie are instead given to more numerous smaller groups, reinforced with a large number of servires and ghouls.

Some justicars, such as Madam Guil, regularly travel with an enormous entourage of archons. This could technically be defined as a large coterie, though this is perhaps a misleading designation for such a group, as "coterie" normally implies a group of relative equals.

PLAYING POLITICS

Many archons have a preference for subtlety and manipulation that belies other Kindred's perceptions of them as nothing more than a violent brute squad. It's true that some play the game for their own reasons, but many archons develop their political acumen in order to better serve the needs of the Camarilla. Nobody wants a gunfight in the streets, much less a spectacle of dueling Disciplines. If a dangerous prince or renegade elder can have his power base kicked out from under him without a single violent confrontation, it's safer

for the archons, the local Kindred, the Masquerade and the city in general.

That's worth emphasizing. Unless they require a public sentencing in order to make a point to others, archons almost always prefer to weaken a rogue from behind the scenes and let the elder's rivals finish the job of taking her out. A domain is generally far more stable if it appears that the status quo was shaken by locals acting alone, whereas an elder who obviously gained his authority with outside aid is just asking to have his newfound position attacked the instant the archons turn their backs.

More important than the stability of the domain, at least in their own eyes, is the safety and reputation of the archons themselves. For all that they supposedly have the authority of the justicars behind them,

THE BOSS IS WATCHING

Most archons work autonomously. They have little regular contact with their justicar, save when they're given or debriefed on specific assignments. Some justicars don't even do this; they simply wind up their archons, tell them to "solve problems," and let them go. Some archons, however, receive the distinct honor and pleasure of working side-by-side with the justicar herself.

This arrangement definitely has its advantages. First and foremost, the problems normally associated with identification are completely eliminated. What need have you for a letter of credentials when the justicar is standing five feet behind you? The job is also substantially safer in many respects. Most justicars are hesitant to put themselves in the midst of a violent situation, and elders who would be willing to eliminate an inconvenient archon under normal circumstances think twice before acting with a justicar on the scene. For an archon with political ambitions, the opportunities to meet elders who seek to curry favor with the justicar are endless.

The majority of archons feel, however, that the drawbacks far outweigh the perks. Archons in a justicar's entourage can expect to be assigned the most menial tasks. Sure, your job is to investigate the prince's underlings while the justicar talks shop with "his Highness," but while you're gone, would you be so good as to fetch the paper, arrange for a limo, give this note to the Brujah whip and bring up a juicy mortal and a pot of coffee to flavor him with?

Few firefights or brawls may erupt in the presence of a justicar, but you're expected to deal with any that do — and to protect your exalted patron in the process. It's bad enough being an archon knowing that every other Kindred is gunning for you. Try doing it while you've got to protect someone else at the same time. God help you if you *don't* take that bullet, knife, stake or whatever that was aimed at the justicar — your "failure" to protect her may well cause you a lot more pain and anguish than you'd have suffered if you'd just thrown yourself in front of the assault.

You can also forget working undercover in the future, at least in this part of the world. The Kindred are always looking for ways to curry favor with those in power. That means your patron, and that means they're going to be paying very close attention to you, in the hopes that you can serve as a conduit to your boss. Every elder within a hundred miles knows your face now. Ain't fame a bitch?

Most troubling is the fact that your boss is watching over your shoulder, keeping very close track of your activities. You can probably expect to have every little mistake dragged out and examined with a microscope, whereas all but the most extraordinary successes will be dismissed as simply part of the job and unworthy of extra attention. The most impressive accomplishments will be claimed by, and credited to, the justicar, but guess who shoulders the burden for the failures? An archon has tremendous difficulty advancing her position in terms of record or reputation while working in the shadow of a justicar. Considering the ambition of most Kindred with sufficient strength of will and purpose to become archons, this quickly becomes an intolerable situation. Unfortunately, it's also nearly impossible to get out of.

archons learn quickly that they cannot simply declare an elder guilty of wrongdoing and expect her to meekly submit to judgment (though neonates and ancillae are often another matter). Unless an archon has overwhelming evidence of an elder's crimes — a rare circumstance indeed, considering how carefully most scheming Kindred cover their tracks — he's got to be a lot more circumspect in his efforts to remove her from power.

Some would-be politicians among the archons actually look forward to these internal investigations. Any assignment that allows them to dig through the sordid pasts and schemes of a city's elders justifies their own position. By learning where the bodies are buried, these archons grant themselves carte blanche to deal with these Kindred as they see fit. Many an elder has been ousted from his position of power on the grounds that he was a "traitor" to the sect, and replaced with someone the archon found less objectionable. Many more have been permitted to retain their authority, but only at the price of doing the archon the occasional favor. Blackmail is no less a weapon in the hands of the Camarilla's social hierarchy than in any other Kindred's.

STIRRING THE POT

Particularly enterprising archons, and even the justicars, have been known to deliberately stir up trouble in a prince's domain in order to force the local Kindred to cry for help. This allows the archons to sweep in, doing favors and collecting boons from the prince and the primogen, as well as digging up whatever secrets they can find. More than one prince has become a veritable puppet dancing to an archon's (or justicar's) whim because she needed aid in quelling troubles the archons themselves instigated.

It's a fine line to walk. Too little pressure and the prince may be able to handle the situation without outside aid, in which case the archon has wasted precious time and resources that could have been better used elsewhere. Too much, and the upheaval spins out of the archon's control, mushrooming from a manufactured catastrophe into one that's all too real. Princes have been toppled, entire regions destabilized and cities very nearly lost to the Sabbat when such power plays have gone awry.

The justicars and Inner Circle frown on such agitation (unless they've ordered it), and punish the archons responsible when they're caught — unless the situation becomes better under the archon's influence, of course.

How, then, does an archon — an outsider — weaken or destroy an elder's influence in his home city? While plenty of techniques are available to Kindred who seek to build their own clout and steal power from their fellows, most of these are lengthy, painstaking processes, and archons rarely have the time for them.

The wise archon cultivates a relationship with her target's rivals. The archon may not have an established base of power in her quarry's home town, but surely other Kindred do, Kindred who wouldn't be averse to helping the archon out in exchange for a piece of the deposed elder's pie. This strategy provides the added benefit of showing the archon who else holds the power in the city, information that will become useful in the future should the new power structure require policing in its turn.

Another favored tactic is to hinder the target and let his rivals take him down without letting anyone know there's an archon in town. More than one elder has been approached with offers of aid from an anonymous stranger, and some have even found their own resources augmented or enhanced without ever meeting the responsible parties. Personnel suddenly have access to information, equipment or even weaponry they could not previously obtain, and balky boards of directors and city officials suddenly begin cooperating. At the same instant, the target discovers that his haven has been condemned and his favorite ghouls arrested for possession of child porn and assaulting a police officer. After several weeks of this, all but the most powerful of elders has usually fallen in a feeding frenzy of his peers, and while some of those involved may harbor suspicions, no one will ever be able to say with certainty that the archons were involved at all.

When it comes down to the wire, though, archons are willing to ditch the subtle approach and engage in overt practices that native Kindred simply wouldn't condone. A rival seeking to claim the prince's influence over the local steel industry might take years inserting her own pawns into the industry's lower echelons and working them upward, slowly undermining the prince's influence. An archon whose only concern is weakening the prince enough to facilitate her removal and replacement with someone more sympathetic to the archon's own desires might simply eliminate the prince's industry contacts in a series of "accidents." It's messy, and it does bad things to one's Humanity, but it is effective, and if it leaves the other elders to pick up the pieces, so what? The target is weakened, the objective is accomplished and the Masquerade wasn't threatened.

GET WITH THE TIMES

One edge the archons have been developing over other Kindred of comparable age is their growing use of modern technology. Most elders and even some ancillae have difficulty keeping up with the whirlwind progress of the past decades. Some ancients aren't comfortable dialing a phone, much less punching up records on the Internet or tracking a rival with a planted transmitter and a GPS locator.

Archons don't inherently find high tech any more comprehensible, but the justicars and praetors are now suggesting that their agents become familiar with the options the modern era has to offer. Those who have proven adaptable enough to overcome their reluctance have swung to the opposite end of the spectrum and become fanatics about technology. Many Kindred rogues have been discovered and dealt with because they were unable or unwilling to take modern methods of detection into account. Ancients who carefully examine every room in their haven with Auspex, searching for Obfuscated spies or animal scouts, haven't the first notion of how to detect an electronic bug. Elders who have finally been talked into "modernizing" by their childer allow the young ones to start filing their records in a database, unaware that archon-employed hackers are just waiting to break into the system and copy every file in sight. Archons have even taken to analyzing patterns of behavior among both Camarilla elders and outside enemies using statistical databases and logarithmic software, with a remarkable degree of success. Among those archons and justicars with contacts at the highest levels of government, an effort is currently under way to acquire steady access to satellite communications and surveillance capability, though these endeavors have so far found only limited success.

The Ancients' fear of technology leaves them susceptible to other tricks as well. The archon Kirsten Bellamy once obtained a complete confession of guilt from an elder diablerist recently awakened from torpor by convincing him that the device she held in her hand was able to read his thoughts and determine if he was lying to her. It was actually a Palm Pilot.

The archons have another, unspoken reason for their interest in mastering new technologies. The Sabbat is made up primarily of young vampires. If the archons are to serve as the front line of defense against the Black Hand, they'd better be familiar with the same techniques and equipment.

CRIME AND PUNISHMENT

Between their battles with the Sabbat and their political maneuvering, the fact that archons are also police and the enforcers of the social order is often

neglected. While investigation of the Kindred must often be conducted in secret, and while many miscreants must be brought down subtly and quietly, archons do have the power — and sometimes even the opportunity — to hand down a sentence and openly carry it out.

Despite the paranoid whispers of younger Kindred, archons do not consider every infraction to be a capital offense, and they are largely unconcerned with petty indiscretions. Once they have become involved, once the prince has proven that he and his sheriff aren't up to the task (or that they themselves are the problem), the archons aren't the sort to let violators off with a slap on the wrist.

When an archon has gathered sufficient evidence of a vampire's guilt, she has several options. The definition of "sufficient" changes based on the archon and on the status of the criminal in question, of course. Most Kindred of no real status are apprehended by the archon — often with the local sheriff in tow, so that the prince remains apprised of what's happening in her city — and punishment is administered immediately. Those who hold substantial influence in their domain are often abducted and taken elsewhere for sentencing, under the assumption that it's unsafe for an archon to deal with the Kindred on his home turf.

Although the Kindred do not hold trials as mortals use the term, some judicial decisions are above the archons' heads. When an archon cannot gather sufficient evidence to simply decide unilaterally on a course of action, or when the accused is a Kindred of particularly high status or influence, the matter is handed up to a justicar for a decision. On occasion the accused is so important or powerful that even a justicar is reluctant to make a judgment on her own. These matters are normally brought before a conclave of as many justicars and elders as are conveniently available. When matters reach this point, the accused is rarely acquitted, if only because the attendees are angry at having been inconvenienced. At the same time, the punishment meted out is often determined by the boons and favors the criminal can call due, rather than by the crime or the evidence presented. Archons hate it when matters progress to this point. An elder who has been dragged into the spotlight and accused of a crime (and survives) almost certainly develops eternal enmity for the archon responsible, and more than one archon has chosen to let a suspected criminal of sufficient status go free rather than face the consequences of an unfavorable verdict.

FALSE EVIDENCE

Archons who are convinced of a Kindred's guilt but are unable to find sufficient evidence to prove it are in a bit of a quandary. For most neonates and ancillae,

proof is largely unnecessary; if the archon declares her guilty, she's guilty. For those with a bit more status, however, an archon who acts without proof is asking for all sorts of trouble. Some archons, either convinced of the righteousness of their cause or working for their own benefit, are not above manufacturing such evidence when they can't find the real thing.

This evidence can take many forms. Incriminating items — perhaps the possessions of a deceased Kindred, a “message from the Sabbat” or a meticulous written record of the prince's schedule and Elysium security — can be planted in a suspect's haven. Witnesses can be coerced or bribed into making false claims. Sometimes their memories can even be altered to back those claims up, though this is an exceptionally risky proposition, especially as the memories will probably sort themselves out in the future. More than one witness has perished “accidentally” not long after giving altered testimony. Archons experienced a brief period of fascination with computer alteration of videotape, but this practice has faded as the Inner Circle and other elders become aware that such things are possible.

Many archons, convinced that they act for the greater good, plant such evidence to ensure the punishment of a Kindred they believe to be guilty. Some less scrupulous archons have been known to use similar techniques to dispose of those against whom they have a personal grudge, and a few have even collaborated with a lawbreaker to frame an innocent, in exchange for favors later on.

As with so many other archon infractions, the justicars and the Inner Circle officially decry this practice — but are willing to look the other way if it actually does some good.

SENTENCING

No formal process exists for determining which punishment fits which crime. As mentioned above, punishment is often determined by the status of the accused, rather than the infraction. That said, several punishments are commonly inflicted by the justicars and the archons, to varying degrees. Many of them are handed down together, such as Final Death after torture.

In the past, exile from Camarilla communities was a valid form of punishment, as few Kindred survived long wandering in Lupine-infested wilderness. This practice has been abandoned in the modern nights, however, as it has become nearly impossible to prevent an individual from entering even a specific city, let alone any Camarilla territory. It also had a nasty tendency to drive the exile over to the Sabbat.

Loss of Title and Status

While archons don't have the authority to strip a Kindred of his title outright, the justicars have been

known to do just that. Princes, primogen and others aren't assigned their position by the Camarilla, and there's theoretically no reason why one should step down just because she's been ordered to do so. However, once other Kindred learn that a prince is no longer supported by the Camarilla — that she has, in fact, been ordered to abdicate by the justicars themselves — she becomes fair game and can expect to be overthrown in uncommonly short order. Most of them choose to step down gracefully when ordered and save themselves the aggravation, not to mention possible bodily harm.

Loss of status is a simple matter. The mere fact that a Kindred is under investigation or sentencing by archons is often enough to inspire her allies to drop her like a live grenade. It is, in fact, almost impossible for a Kindred to suffer any form of sentencing without also suffering a loss of status.

Staking

Although normally used as a means of apprehension and transport rather than punishment, staking is occasionally the sentence mandated for a vampire's crimes. The closest equivalent the Kindred have to prison terms, it is usually reserved for those who must be removed from a given environment or situation, but who the justicars feel might be useful in the future. An elder whose bid for princedom nearly allowed a Sabbat Crusade to take the city, for instance, might be staked for several decades to allow the city to recover, then released when the justicars felt her knowledge and experience might prove useful in pacifying a similar situation elsewhere. Still, temporary incarceration or even paralysis means little to the undead, so staking serves punitive purposes only rarely.

Torture

Torture is not commonly used as a means of interrogation. Most archons are well aware that information obtained in this manner is often suspect and inaccurate, and they prefer the more reliable (and faster) methods provided by certain Disciplines. The Camarilla is unabashedly brutal when it comes to punishing transgressors, though, and often wreaks bloody and painful retribution on its renegades.

The Kindred, of course, can stand up to a great deal more damage and pain than mortals, so archons have become truly creative with their methods. Some favored techniques include, but are hardly limited, to:

- Slow cutting with blades heated to the point where they cause aggravated damage.
- Starvation nearly to the point of frenzy, followed by the delivery of blood heated to near boiling.
- Staking, followed by the application of swarms of stinging or biting insects.

• Staking, followed by the lighting of a nearby flame. The fire isn't close enough to burn, but the Kindred suffers severe emotional trauma as the Röttschreck is evoked despite the vampire's inability to move.

• Force-feeding of solid foods or other, even less appetizing substances.

Some particularly malicious archons have been known to blood-bond the criminal before inflicting other torments, taking sadistic glee in the added emotional pain as the victim is tormented by his "love."

Final Death

The ultimate punishment for any Kindred, sentences of Final Death are becoming more frequent as the Camarilla, panicked by the events of recent years, seeks to crush even the faintest embers of rebellion within its childer. Execution is often preceded by various tortures, and is normally carried out by staking a vampire and leaving her exposed for the sun (always under the watchful eyes of ghoulish servants to prevent any last-minute rescues on the part of the criminal's allies). Some Kindred deemed too dangerous to risk waiting until dawn are instead beheaded. Vampires are rarely executed by fire, as the risk of the flames burning out of control is one that most archons or other Kindred are unwilling to take. Those few who do prefer fire as a means of capital punishment often rely on incinerators and other confined sources of flame.

The Gulag

Camarilla urban legends speak of an underground bunker, or several such installations located throughout the world. Bomb shelters from the Cold War, subbasements of defunct corporations, Nosferatu-constructed chambers—the precise nature of the structure varies from location to location and rumor to rumor. If anyone knows the truth of these places, they aren't talking. They're probably dead, anyway.

These so-called Gulags are, quite literally, the prisons of the Damned. Archons supposedly need someplace to store the accused while a conclave is called and assembled, to place those who have been sentenced to years of stake-induced paralysis, to stash prisoners of war until they can be interrogated, to carry out the tortures that are so often part of the punishment for the most severe infractions. Here, in these underground dungeons, Kindred lie in rows, chained and staked, awaiting their sentencing, their torture or their execution.

These legends exaggerate, obviously. Certainly, not enough criminals await judgment or punishment at any given time to account for "rows" of Kindred. When they can be bothered to address the issue at all, archons deny the existence of the Gulags vigorously.



More often their response is limited to a nasty glare, occasionally followed by a few scribbled comments in a notebook.

Still the legend survives — and the archons *do* have to put the accused *somewhere*, don't they?

ASSASSINATION

Sometimes the system won't work. Some elders have too much pull to ever be sentenced and punished. Others are too well protected or too clever, leaving no evidence of wrongdoing behind. Still others pose so great a threat that they must be dealt with immediately, regardless of consequences.

Assassination of a Camarilla Kindred is not something archons undertake lightly, but they acknowledge that it is sometimes the only alternative. Justicars prefer to assign such duties to elder archons who have proven their loyalty, their understanding of the greater good and their ability to keep their mouths shut. If the target has been the subject of recent investigation, however, the investigating archon may be assigned the task of taking her out, due to her knowledge of the subject's habits and precautions.

Although most Kindred assume that archons occasionally take such actions, it would be bad form to leave any evidence to that effect. Because it is almost impossible to kill a powerful vampire without leaving some evidence — even if the body crumbles, some Kindred will inevitably notice the target's disappearance — archons prefer to arrange false evidence at the scene of a kill, suggesting that outside parties are responsible. The Sabbat make favored scapegoats, but the Setites, the Assamites, Lupines, hunters and even organized crime have all been credited with assassinations carried out by archons.

DISAVOWAL

Since justicars do not report their archons' identities or activities to any higher authority, it is impossible to link an archon to the justicar she claims to serve if the justicar disavows knowledge of the archon. Many justicars operate this way regularly, choosing new and therefore unknown archons for dangerous or ethically questionable tasks. Normally the archon agrees to cooperate, with full knowledge that he will be cut off if he's caught or discovered, because of the commensurate rewards promised him upon successful completion of the mission. On occasion, however, an archon will attempt to call her justicar for aid, or to have a skeptical prince contact the justicar to confirm the archon's identity, only to be shocked by a categorical denial. Kindred have gone to their Final Deaths claiming to be archons, despite the insistence of the justicar that she's "never met the deluded whelp." Justicars don't do this often — leaving your elite out to hang is not a good way

to build loyalty — but the option is there, should they need to exercise it. These "secret agents" are most often employed for internal assassinations, although their usefulness is not restricted to such matters.

WAR

Some Kindred would argue that external threats to the Camarilla are significantly more dangerous than those that come from within, despite the fact that the archons must deal with them far less frequently. Whether or not that's an accurate assessment is certainly debatable, but there can be no argument that the archons are often the only bastion against the Sabbat hordes (or other enemies, such as Lupines or even the independent clans).

For all that they are "the first line of defense," an archon's wartime duties are not limited to battling on the front lines. In fact, archons go toe-to-toe with Sabbat Crusaders relatively rarely. Any Lick with Feral Claws or a cheap shotgun can do that. No, archons are far more useful in roles other than foot soldier, and they have tasks that go above and beyond "Kill the first Kindred you see who doesn't look like a local."

COMMAND AND CONTROL

Although these duties occasionally fall to another elder, or even to a justicar, archons most frequently shoulder the burden of command during war. Whether coordinating the defense of a city or the taking of one, the authority of an archon is — hypothetically — absolute in these matters. Some princes have substantial battlefield experience, but on the whole very few Kindred possess the knowledge that archons must develop if they are to survive their chosen career. Many Licks were surprised to learn that Theo Bell, an archon, was made praetor during the taking of New York; they assumed one of the present justicars would lead so vital an operation. Even the justicars, though, make a practice of avoiding combat where possible — that's why they have archons in the first place — and thus do not develop the same martial and tactical skills (though those justicars who come from the ranks of archons are certainly likely to possess such abilities).

This position of command may or may not be a formal one. When the Camarilla launches one of its rare assaults on a Sabbat stronghold, an archon is almost certainly placed in command, formally and officially, by a justicar or by the Inner Circle. Such decrees are rarely challenged, as no preexisting power structure is in place. The praetor is responsible for coordinating all forces engaged in the war effort, from other archons and war coterie of younger Kindred to mortal police and city workers who have their own parts to play in a conflict far larger than they can be allowed to comprehend. The praetor or commander of

an operation rarely takes the field himself, at least at the beginning of the battle, precisely because of his responsibilities; few Kindred are indispensable in an operation of this sort, but the one who runs the show and has the best grasp of the strategy involved cannot be spared.

It would seem to make sense that an archon would be placed in charge of the defense of a city against the Sabbat as well. Archons' travels and experiences make them expert in, or at least familiar with, a wide range of Sabbat tactics, knowledge that can be applied to specific incursions. Even a prince whose domain sits on the edge of Black Hand territory likely has less experience in such matters. Yet more than one city has fallen because the archon and the prince couldn't get straight which of them was actually in command.

Princes who cry for help against the Sabbat, and are sufficiently fortunate (or strategically located) to receive it, are often startled that the archons don't immediately take to the streets and begin shooting. Some who were all too eager for outside aid suddenly balk when confronted by the necessity of giving up the least bit of their own authority. It isn't even that the prince feels she has more skill at tactics and strategy (though some do indeed feel that way), it's simply that she cannot get past her instinctive desire to hold tightly to the power she's accumulated and see the larger picture.

Some archons make the best of such situations and function as military advisors. If the prince is willing to accept good advice when he hears it, this can actually work, though it slows down the process by adding another link to the chain of command and the communication of orders. Archons serve as seconds-in-command under these circumstances, but they are expected to step in and take over as military commander should something happen to the prince. This can be problematic, since the archon doesn't necessarily have a solid understanding of the locals and the resources available to her. Archons prefer, then, to take command from the get-go, letting the prince advise them, rather than the other way around.

Things are clearer when the city is part of a larger coordinated defense, as was seen recently in the war on the East Coast. When the Camarilla has clearly taken a hand and mandated that a specific Kindred — justicar, archon or otherwise — is in command, most princes are willing, if not happy, to step aside. Even in these circumstances, some princes have been known to cause problems, giving their underlings orders that conflict with the archon's, and basically making royal pains of themselves.

Some archons attempt to get official word from their justicar, demanding that the locals relinquish

command, but this takes time that most besieged cities don't have.

Archons have developed several procedures for dealing with problem princes in these situations. One is simply to go over the protesting elder's head. Sheriffs, scourges and local Kindred are normally reluctant to take an outsider's orders, but those wise enough to realize they're about to be swarmed by the Sabbat unless something is done often choose to follow the archon now and let him deal with the consequences.

The second option is to pull out and let the prince deal with the incursion on her own, until it becomes very clear that she cannot do so. A prince who has to call for help *again* tends to be far more cooperative the second time around. The risk here is that the city will fall in the interim, so this approach is taken only with areas that are not tactically vital to the war effort.

The final option is to remove the prince entirely (see "War Crimes" below for more on how this might be accomplished). There's obviously no time to determine who the new prince is in the midst of a Crusade, and the archon can take over as prince *pro tempore* fairly easily.

Playing Defense

While the Camarilla's offensive tactics and battlefield procedures are already well documented in **Nights of Prophecy** and **Midnight Siege**, the archons have developed several additional strategies used in defending a city from Sabbat Crusades.

The Lure

This technique is the descendant of an ancient cavalry tactic, in which a portion of a force would stage a false retreat, drawing the enemy out and rendering him vulnerable to attacks from the flank. The archons have taken this to the next logical step.

When this operation is initiated, every local vampire is sent into hiding. Those who won't cooperate are staked and hidden away, or executed if time permits no other solution. Several Kindred flee the city via routes that are almost certainly under observation; if Nosferatu or other Kindred skilled at Obfuscate are present, these same vampires may flee the city multiple times, giving the impression of a mass exodus. It quickly begins to appear to Sabbat scouts that the Camarilla has abandoned the city, rather than go down fighting. If the archons and locals are fortunate, the Sabbat drops its guard as it moves in to claim its new domain, allowing the hidden Camarilla Kindred the element of surprise when they launch a coordinated strike some few nights later.

The lure is not a foolproof tactic; something can go wrong at almost every step along the way. It is a desperation tactic, one undertaken only when all other options are exhausted. It works more

often than not, but only just. The Sabbath might maintain a state of wariness as it moves in; the incoming force might prove too large for even a surprise assault; the Sabbath might reinforce its position faster than expected; a hidden Kindred might be spotted if she's forced to go out to feed. It's no wonder that princes hesitate to risk their domains in such a manner, and even archons are reluctant to undertake so risky an endeavor.

Salting the Earth

If the Camarilla is forced to abandon a city, they're going to ensure that the enemy gets as little use from it as possible. Archons who realize that a city is about to be lost sometimes make an effort to locate the nearest Lupine population. This isn't always easy, but a well-informed sheriff or scourge often knows such details. If werewolves are located, the departing archon launches a sudden strike against a few of them, wounding as many as possible with minimal loss of unlife. The archon then quickly flees the city, content in the knowledge that the Lupines will likely strike back against their hated enemies. Of course, the town "Leeches" are Sabbath now, but most werewolves can't tell the difference....

If the archons have information identifying specific Sabbath involved in the Crusade, they pass names and faces along to contacts the departing Kindred leave behind in city offices and the police. The Sabbath expects the Camarilla to use mortal authorities against them, but not when the Camarilla has already fled the city. A Sabbath vampire whose haven is raided by a SWAT team at two in the afternoon — in a city she thought was sect territory — is likely to be caught completely by surprise.

MILITARY INTELLIGENCE

Archons are rarely responsible for spying on the enemy. As described above and in Chapter One, the intelligence a captured archon could disclose to the Sabbath makes it dangerous to use them as spies; less knowledgeable Kindred are preferred. Still, some doppelgangers have sufficient skill to remain in Sabbath territory undetected, and several East Coast territories are occupied by hidden archons, chosen because of their ability not only to remain hidden, but also to battle their way free if they are discovered.

An archon's involvement with intelligence, therefore, is normally limited to extracting secrets from captured Sabbath, and working newly discovered information into her battle plans. Interrogations rarely take the form of torture, though it does happen occasionally. Archons prefer to drag the information out via the use of Disciplines, one of the few times they rely on such heavy-handed techniques. Auspex is particularly useful with its ability to detect lies, read objects or even minds. The uses of Dominate are obvious, and Presence is sometimes sufficient to command obedience as well. If time allows, archons sometimes force blood bonds on their prisoners. The Vaulderie may break blood bonds well enough, but it doesn't prevent new ones. Circumstances allow for this last technique only infrequently, however.

Some archons have learned to take advantage of the Vaulderie between packmates. While a Sabbath vampire rarely breaks quickly under torture, some with particularly strong Vinculi will talk if forced to observe the torment of a companion. This isn't universally reliable, as the Vinculum isn't necessarily stronger than a Sabbath vampire's loyalty to the sect, but it isn't unheard of either.

THE STRANGE CASE OF CHARLOTTE, NORTH CAROLINA

The archons Hamilton Cross and Tamara Nayibé are credited with helping prevent the fall of Charlotte during the recent Sabbath offensive, and they did it by making the Sabbath think they'd already won.

Despite the military coordination evident in the taking of the Eastern Seaboard, the Sabbath still operated predominantly as individual packs. When Charlotte was threatened by the outer edge of the Sabbath advance, Cross and Nayibé gambled that the packs were not in constant communication with their superiors. Mere nights before the Sabbath would have swarmed over Charlotte, the two archons, working with a reluctant prince, firebombed several buildings, including a large wing of the Museum of Art, arranged via the sheriff's contacts for the local gangs to go to war with one another and even dug up a dozen graves in cemeteries near the edge of town. The first Sabbath packs to arrive saw the state of the city and the evidence of "war," assumed another pack had reached the city first and decided to move on. By the time the Sabbath command heard of what happened and realized the mistake, the offensive had slowed and Charlotte had been reinforced sufficiently that taking the city wouldn't have been worth the effort.

While the Sabbath know they were hoodwinked somewhere along the line, they may not have pieced together exactly what happened. Cross and Nayibé hope to be able to use the tactic again, should circumstances call for it.

WAR CRIMES

An archon's duties during war don't replace her other responsibilities. Even with battle raging in the next city, an archon must still keep the peace in this one, and the fact that the Sabbat are howling at the gates doesn't mean that the prince can get away with violating the Traditions (beyond a certain point, anyway). Some might think it would prove difficult, if not impossible, to carry on normally during war, but the archons have found ways to turn the chaos of the conflict to their advantage.

War is the perfect time to remove a dangerous Kindred from power. Archons have already accepted the occasional need to assassinate powerful elders, and they normally blame such activities on the Sabbat anyway. How much easier and more believable to do such a thing when everyone *knows* the Black Hand is in the area? Elders, primogen and even princes have "tragically fallen to the enemy" under unusual circumstances.

Archons also make use of the chaos to flush out Sabbat collaborators. Should an archon be aware that a city is on the verge of falling because of the efforts of an enemy agent, she may declare the city lost before the issue is actually decided. By staying in the shadows and spying on the elders as they're (supposedly) preparing to depart, the archon may be able to determine which of the elders is acting uncharacteristically or is clearly in communication with the enemy. Sometimes the archon calls off the evacuation once the traitor has been discovered, but since the elders are already in motion, many archons take the opportunity to begin preparations for the lure tactic described above.

AFTERMATH

When the smoke has cleared and the dust settled, the work is far from over even if the Camarilla maintained the domain. Odds are good that there's a substantial amount of Masquerade-repair going on, and the carnage probably left several gaps in the city's power structure. Many ambitious Kindred see this as the perfect time to make a grab for those empty positions, and it falls to the archons to see that they don't get out of hand.

Normally, of course, the archons could care less who makes a bid for what position, so long as they don't make waves doing so. In the aftermath of a Crusade, however, a domain is particularly unstable, and even the usual degree of intrigue and cold war might be enough to finish the job the Sabbat started. Rather than risk losing the city they've fought so hard to keep, many archons simply assign empty positions to surviving Kindred who seem suited for the job.

It's questionable as to whether an archon has the authority to do this even under wartime conditions,

let alone after the shooting has stopped. Most Kindred go along with the dictates, if only to keep things on an even keel while the archon remains in town. Once he's been called away to other duties, however, all bets are off. If the archon chose well and picked someone able to hold onto her new position, the assignment becomes permanent (or as permanent as such things ever are). If not, the new title is quickly wrested away by someone else. It matters little to the archon, so long as the process runs smoothly. Then again, that's their credo for everything, isn't it?

TEMPLARS AND INQUISITORS

A single military organization or police force such as the archons smacks highly of totalitarianism. It's all fine and dandy for the Camarilla to make use of such heavy-handed methods, but the Sabbat is a lot less regimented and allows for a lot more personal freedom — or at least it wants to look that way. The Sword of Caine, then, spreads these duties and responsibilities around, putting all the power in the hands of no one organization. Templars and Inquisitors, each with their own purpose and their own agenda, handle the distasteful duties of enforcing the laws of the Sabbat and ensuring that the sect remains free from infiltration by the Antediluvians' slaves and suck-ups.

As free as possible, anyway, which does not mean even remotely the same thing.

Although their stated purposes are quite different — the templars often serve the needs of specific archbishops or prisci, whereas the Inquisitors, in their crusade against heresy, ostensibly serve the sect as a whole — many of their tactics and techniques are quite similar. Where those procedures differ, those discrepancies are explained below. Any procedure that does not specify one or the other applies equally to both groups.

THE NAME GAME

It gets a little repetitive to constantly say "templars and Inquisitors do this" and "templars and Inquisitors do that." Thus, since "Caine's Anointed" has already been put forth as an alternate title for these agents of the Sabbat, we use the term "Anointed" to mean "templar and/or Inquisitor" whenever a concept, duty or strategy applies to both. Only when referring specifically to one or the other are specific titles used.



INTERNAL AFFAIRS

The Sabbat would have its enemies — and, indeed, its members — believe that the noble purpose of the sect and the freedoms it supposedly offers are enough to inspire near-universal loyalty among its members. They maintain that the Inquisition exists only to root out those who are corrupted by a greater, outside evil, and that those threats the templars guard against come almost solely from external agencies (such as the Camarilla) and the occasional rogue element among those Sabbat vampires too stupid to know better.

The truth is that the Sabbat is no less a hotbed of scheming and intrigue than the Camarilla, and the sect has its own share of traitors and renegades. The Anointed must to deal with enemies from within their own ranks no less frequently than the archons, and often at greater personal risk, for they have no justicars and no Inner Council to back them up. Those who keep order within the Sword of Caine learn very quickly to rely on their own strengths and abilities, since these, and nothing else, often stand between them and Final Death at the fangs of fellow Sabbat.

That said, the sorts of intrigues in which a templar is likely to find herself involved differ from those that require the attention of an Inquisitor. Most of the time, templars act under orders from or at least in the presumed best interests of a superior. A cardinal, a bishop, or other powerful Sabbat vampire may have his own cadre of templars (or paladins) at his beck and call. Should he suspect that one of his rivals plots against him, he may well assign one or more of those agents to look into it, but anything that does not concern his welfare directly is unlikely to draw the interest of his templars. Inquisitors, however, turn up whenever and wherever they feel the need. The slightest hint of heresy — a far broader term than most Sabbat realize — draws one of the Red Robes like the scent of blood. Inquisitors are all too happy to respond to almost any summons, even from the lowest of neonates, for heretics can pop up anywhere. Woe to the vampire who cries wolf, though. Some Inquisitors have been known to make examples of their petitioner, rather than the supposed heretic she thought was the target, and many others simply leave the accuser to the tender mercies of the accused.

PULLING RANK

Being made a templar and accepted into the service of a bishop or priscus is a great honor, and it may well imply the worth of the vampire so privileged, but it does not grant the bearer any particular authority. Templars do not, in fact, have any inherent rank of their own.

This is not the same as saying that templars have no status in the Sabbat. As the servants and representatives of a more powerful Cainite, templars can often inspire cooperation by throwing their patron's weight around. An order that is meaningless when coming from some uppity Lasombra or Ventrue *antitribu* carries a lot more weight when it comes — or seems to come — from a cardinal or archbishop, even if the deliverer of the order is that same uppity Lasombra or Ventrue *antitribu*. Thus, a templar's authority is inextricably tied with the authority of his patron. Tied, as well, is the perceived strength of the link between mentor and protégé. The last thing a templar ever wants is for his fellow Sabbat to get the impression that he is out of favor with his boss, since no one's going to give him the time of night if he can no longer hold the threat of the bishop's wrath over their heads.

This also means that what influence does filter down to the templar is often geographically limited. Where her superior holds sway, her own word carries substantial weight. Move outside of those territories in which her patron has influence, however, and few vampires will be impressed when they learn who she serves. Still, where the patron is powerful, the templar is powerful, and many of them make a practice of flaunting that authority, just so the other Licks in the area remember who's boss.

Paladins are in a similar situation, but their position is somewhat more secure. A templar may or may not speak with his bishop's voice, but a paladin, who normally has a much closer relationship with her boss, is rarely out of favor. Other Cainites — even many bishops and archbishops, depending on the rank of the paladin's patron — ignore the suggestions of a paladin at their peril.

Many templars have unives and pack relations outside of their patron's service, and nearly all of them have made a reputation for themselves before being called to serve an elder. Even those templars who cannot (or choose not to) rely on their liege's reputation often have their own rank or status. Ultimately, pulling rank is a viable option for templars only on particular occasions, and the wisest (and longest-surviving) among them learn quickly to find alternative methods of operation.

Then, of course, some templars serve the Inquisition directly. Their authority is nearly as great as that of the Inquisitors themselves.

Inquisitors wield rank like a weapon. Even the mightiest archbishop or eldest cardinal must respect the will of the Inquisition, at least under certain circumstances. While many templars prefer to work anonymously, Inquisitors frequently enter a region with pomp and circumstance, clad in full ceremonial

regalia and demanding cooperation. They get it more often than not, if for no other reason than that most Sabbat Cainites would gladly sacrifice their own right arm to the morning sun than draw down an accusation of heresy. Since any refusal to cooperate with an Inquisitor can result in just such a charge for all but the most highly connected Cainite, Inquisitors find they often have less need for more subtle tactics.

SOCIAL OBLIGATIONS

Should a ranking Cainite prove unable to attend (or simply uninterested in attending) a convocation or religious rite, it is sometimes acceptable for a templar or paladin to be sent in her place. It is not wise to do this sort of thing frequently, however, as failure to attend *ritae* on a regular basis starts drawing unwelcome attention. Many templars are just as happy to be attending these events — particularly those who truly believe in the Sabbat's para-religious mysticism — but beyond that, it is an excellent opportunity for the templar to reinforce her connection with her patron in the minds of other Sabbat, thus strengthening her own position (for as long as her patron remains in power, anyway). Even more importantly, many templars use the opportunity to dig into the activities of their patron's rivals, making connections and learning tidbits of information that might prove unavailable closer to home. Uncovering any deep, dark secrets in such a public setting is not particularly likely, but even typical scuttlebutt can often prove educational.

On the other hand, a templar attending such an event in her mentor's name makes herself a target to those who may bear a grudge against her boss but are unwilling to strike at him directly. Away from her liege's base of power, the templar rarely has access to substantial backup, and may find herself confronting adversaries and rivals she is largely unprepared for. Clever templars turn this to their advantage, ferreting out threats to their patrons that might not otherwise be apparent. The templar James McAllister, for instance, has developed a widespread reputation for getting soused off drunk juicebags at various social convocations, and often talks just a bit more than he should about his archbishop's activities. Because few of his patron's rivals survive their attempts to take advantage of this "inside information," no one has yet figured out that McAllister stages these little charades for the sole purpose of seeing who acts on his (false) "revelations."

Inquisitors, who frequently possess enough religious and ceremonial knowledge to conduct *ritae* themselves, often use religious festivals to root out suspected heathens. More than one Red Robe has been known to make accusations — and, on rare occasions, even hand down sentences — in the midst of a ritual, based on no evidence except that a

particular vampire proved ignorant of some specific precept of the Sabbat's religious rites and practices. It is, perhaps, an unfair method of determining heresy — but since when has that mattered?

UNDERCOVER OPERATIONS

Sometimes, even in a sect as openly brutal as the Sabbat, subtlety is the only way to get things done. Not every Cainite can be intimidated by the threat of an angry archbishop or the long arm of the Inquisition. The Anointed normally prefer to make their presence known, to do what needs to be done and let the survivors deal with the aftermath. At times, though, they find themselves forced to investigate suspects from behind the scenes. Even for the cleverest and most experienced among them, going undercover in a Sabbat pack or the retinue of an elder poses a laundry list of problems not faced by their counterparts in the Camarilla.

It's ironic that the first and often highest hurdle is the very same thing that holds the Sabbat together as a sect. The Vaulderie makes it extremely difficult for any outside agent to infiltrate a Sabbat pack; or rather, infiltration is relatively easy, but getting out may take some doing. Because Vinculi are so unpredictable, there's no guarantee that a templar who participates in the Vaulderie with a rival pack may not wind up more loyal to them than to his original patron. It is for this reason that few templars are willing to take such a risk, preferring violence and direct confrontation to sneaking about. Those templars forced into such a situation make a habit of returning to their master's side whenever possible, to strengthen their bonds of loyalty. This is also why Sabbat elders do not always assign their best agents to such jobs, as it is better to risk a pawn who remains ignorant of your schemes than one who's in on them with you, even if the latter might do a better job.

Frankly, most templars have no good way around the issue other than to hope that their stay with a suspect's pack is a brief one. Avoiding the Vaulderie draws attention, especially from a newcomer, and in the most paranoid of packs that alone can be enough to get an infiltrator "vanished." Some few templars may have either stolen or independently created the Sanguinary Expulsion ability developed by the Camarilla archons, but this is so rare among the Sabbat that it cannot yet be considered a viable tactic (see the Appendix).

If rumor is to be believed, the Inquisition has an easier time of it. Many Cainites whisper that the Red Robes possess a ritual that will shatter a Vinculum just as the Vaulderie shatters the blood bond. Most Sabbat vampires find this a frightening prospect, as it means no place is safe from the eyes and ears of the Inquisition.

THE RITUAL OF THE SEVERED HAND

The Inquisition does indeed have access to a thaumaturgical rite that will break the otherwise permanent Vinculum ties, but they are growing extremely reluctant to use it.

The Tremere Inquisitor Ferdinand d'Amico first invoked the Ritual of the Severed Hand in the late 1800s. Unfortunately, he was killed immediately afterward by the subject of the rite. The ritual itself became one of the most potent weapons in the Inquisition's arsenal, allowing them to place agents anywhere within the Sabbat without fear of divided loyalties.

While investigating the destruction of the Tremere *antitribu* in Mexico City, a templar and servant of the Inquisition named Wilmina Eddings came across an old journal of d'Amico's — and discovered, much to her horror, that the thaumaturge had not created the ritual, as the Inquisition had always believed, but had in fact merely discovered it in an old tome. Nowhere in his journal was there an indication of where that tome was now, or whence it might have come.

The Ritual of the Severed Hand has not been banned in light of Eddings' discovery, but its use has been severely curtailed until the Inquisition can investigate its origin. It is entirely possible that they have been using a ritual with roots in demonic Thaumaturgy or other, darker powers, and neither the urgency nor the irony of the situation is lost on the Inquisitors. Until a definitive answer is found one way or the other, the ritual sees use only in the most dire circumstances. For specifics of this ritual, see the Appendix.

Once a Sabbat Cainite has successfully gone undercover and dealt with the Vaulderie issue as well as circumstances permit, her next step depends largely on the purpose of her investigation. For a templar seeking intelligence on her mentor's rival, the task may be as straightforward as wait around, listen to what's going on, and then get the hell out. An Inquisitor seeking evidence of infernalism or collaboration with the sect's foes, however, must deal with all the same threats faced by deep-cover archons, and more besides. Since the Sabbat rarely engages in social penalties, punishing almost all serious infractions with torment or Final Death, most of the sect's rogues are more than happy to take the chance of killing a templar or even an Inquisitor if it means escaping judgment. Some Anointed prefer to make their presence known to the archbishop

or other ranking Cainite in an area before going undercover (assuming that the archbishop isn't one of the vampires being investigated, of course), simply to ensure that they have someone who can confirm their identity and possibly provide reinforcements should the need arise. More frequently, an infiltrator will be a single member of a pack of templars or Inquisitors (or both); one agent handles the investigation, calling for his companions when he either runs the quarry to ground or finds he suddenly needs help.

Because they indulge their inhuman urges, and are less concerned than Camarilla Licks about making a scene, Anointed working undercover rely on their Disciplines to a much greater extent than their archon counterparts. Not that they limit their activities to blatant displays of power — if nothing else, this is a bad idea because there's always someone with bigger claws or darker shadows than you have — but it's still considered an acceptable tactic.

Undercover Cainites use both supernatural and mundane methods, from Obtenebration to phone taps, to spy on their suspects, seeking the details of future plans and any evidence of treachery. An investigator in the Sabbat actually has an easier time of it, when it comes to evidence, than an archon. Infernalism, for instance, almost always leaves some form of physical evidence, whether it's a blackened altar, unheard of mystical ability, or even a "witch's mark." Collaboration with the Camarilla can be harder to prove, but it requires very little such proof to turn a suspect's packmates against her. Sometimes, particularly if a Vinculum is weak, the mere accusation is sufficient. At the very least, it's enough to justify calling in other Anointed and turning a quiet investigation into a louder — and much more violent — affair.

Because the Anointed have such strong reputations for both making their presence known and simply beating down any resistance to their investigation, many Sabbat don't think to look for undercover agents at all. Many Anointed have taken to arriving in a territory in force — thus drawing attention — while a single one of their number sneaks in the back way and begins poking around while everyone is distracted. Some Inquisitors even go so far as to dress one of their templars in the Inquisitor's hooded robes of office, allowing this "double" to stand in during ceremonies while the Inquisitor herself noses around.

HERETIC!

The image of the Inquisition held by the most Sabbat Cainites — that is, religious fanatics on an endless hunt for heresy — is actually the greatest advantage an Inquisitor has when engaging in an undercover investigation. It isn't that the above definition of the

Inquisition is false, so much as that most Cainites greatly underestimate the scope of the term heresy.

The Inquisition was initially founded to stamp out infernalism within the sect, but that is hardly the full extent of their purpose. The Sabbat maintains that they have a holy calling to stop the Antediluvians from consuming their progeny when Gehenna comes. By that logic, anyone who serves the cause of the third generation is a heretic, and falls under the jurisdiction of the Red Robes.

The Camarilla "Kindred" are all servants of the Antediluvians, at least in the eyes of the Sabbat. So are the Setites and the Giovanni.

Suddenly, heresy doesn't just mean consorting with demons. Put the right spin on it and it also means consorting with any vampire not of the Sabbat.

The Inquisition likes to downplay their involvement with anything beyond the bounds of infernalism. It makes the traitors feel safe, thinking that they aren't on the Red Robes' hit list. Many an Inquisitor has gleaned hours of amusement from the looks on the heretics' faces when they discover how wrong they are.

Some of them even keep the faces themselves....

YOU DON'T NEED TO SEE OUR IDENTIFICATION

The Sabbat takes a relatively informal approach to identifying its agents. For the most part, if you've got enough power that no one questions your claim to be a templar for the bishop, then you are, at least in their eyes, a templar for the bishop. Sometimes, though, particularly when dealing with other elders or Cainites of rank, the templar needs something a bit more substantive.

No sect-wide symbol or icon is used for identifying templars and paladins. Instead, many such agents carry the personal seal of the cardinal, priscus, archbishop, or whoever it is they serve. This can be anything from a signet ring to a tattoo to a signed paper stamped in wax, and its authority carries exactly as far as the elder's influence extends. Still, possession of such a seal suggests at the very least that the templar does indeed serve a more powerful patron, and should be acknowledged, if not obeyed outright.

These symbols and seals can be forged, of course, but this isn't as easy as it sounds. The would-be impersonator must have an original — or at least a close approximation — to work from, and most templars would suffer Final Death before surrendering their own. This is partially due to fanaticism, but a large part of it is simple fear of the mentor's wrath. Then, of course, the forger must decide if the gains of such a ruse offset the risks, as anyone caught with such a forged seal is turned over to the tender loving care of the Cainite whose

authority has been stolen. Sabbat elders can be very creative when it comes to expressing their displeasure.

Because they so rarely work undercover (or so it appears), and because they normally arrive amidst a great deal of pomp and circumstance, Inquisitors do not often have difficulty convincing others that they are who they say they are. Someone who shows up at a rite clad in red robes and severe hood, accompanied by four equally grim figures and a pair of knife-bristling templars, is either a genuine Inquisitor or an impostor with balls of cast titanium and a brain to match. The penalties for impersonating an Inquisitor make even those for impersonating a templar pale in comparison.

The Inquisitors do have other forms of identification, however. Many of them use specific code phrases, taken from the Sabbat's liturgy, to identify one another, if not to prove their identity to outsiders. Furthermore, the Iron Reliquary (see Chapter Two) is not merely useful for religious ceremony, but also serves as a badge of office. The reliquary is issued to each Inquisitor when he first assumes the office, and those that are recovered from Inquisitors slain in the line of duty are destroyed. The regent herself purportedly handles each and every one of these reliquaries before they are bestowed upon the new Inquisitor, which ensures that a close examination with certain gifts of Caine will eventually reveal the reliquary's connection with the regent, thus proving its authenticity.

PACKS

Anointed almost never work alone; it's simply too dangerous an undertaking. Even if a single agent is the best option for an investigation, he often has a pack camped just outside the immediate area, ready to ride to his rescue or to crash down on a suspect's head like a ton of bricks.

Similarly, paired templars are almost unheard of in the Sabbat. True, they might be more effective at conducting investigations than one agent alone. Even with the added magic and ritual of the Vaulderie to be considered, however, a two-way Vinculum is simply too similar to a shared blood bond for the elders of the Sword of Caine to be comfortable with the notion. Loyalty to an entire pack is one thing, but excessive loyalty to a single Cainite leads to bad decisions (such as putting the good of one's partner above the needs of the sect). Thus any such pairings are extremely short term, at most, and are exceedingly rare even then.

The Anointed operate primarily in packs, which vary in size and makeup depending on the abilities and the purposes of those involved.

Small Packs

Unlike the Camarilla, which seems to prefer that its archons operate in small groups, such packs are

actually in the minority where the Sword of Caine is concerned. Larger groups are more impressive and, in most combat situations, more effective.

Smaller packs are often drawn together for a specific purpose (which means they have not necessarily worked together previously), and are used primarily in situations where stealth is more important than ass-kicking. Should a sect elder or, for whatever reason, the Inquisition need to send agents into a Camarilla domain, the small pack is the favored option. The Sabbat may talk big, but it's not anxious to antagonize its rival sect until and unless it's prepared for military action. A small, stealthy pack has a much greater chance of getting in and out without drawing notice.

More frequently, small packs are assembled in circumstances where a larger force might be viewed as provocative. A bishop is wise to travel with bodyguards at all times, but when attending a meeting called by a cardinal or a priscus, the presence of an entire entourage can offend, implying a lack of faith in the host's security. A small pack of templars, while less effective than an entire platoon, can still fend off most potential threats.

Finally, these groups are used for assassinations and sabotage within the sect. A bishop cannot afford to get caught when trying to eliminate a rival. A small team is far more likely to be able to reach the target without being discovered.

As the examples above indicate, many small packs are expendable (of course, in the eyes of many elders, *all* young Sabbat are expendable...). What better way to avoid attention, after all, than to ensure that no one with knowledge of your involvement remains alive or undead to talk? Truly wily elders have planned the assassination of such agents well in advance, sometimes choosing their catspaws based in part on how easy they will be to remove after the fact. It is not a practice the Sabbat officially condones, but the sect does a lot of things regularly that it does not officially condone....

Large Packs

The Anointed appreciate the intimidation value of a large retinue. In a sect based largely on strength rather than supremacy of the eldest or most heavily connected, even the dreaded Inquisitors must be able to back up their claims of authority. The Inquisition traditionally operates in a seven-Cainite pack — one Inquisitor, four subordinates, and two templars — that is easily impressive (and frightening) enough to inspire cooperation.

Beyond the Inquisition, though, few sizable packs are made up entirely of templars. More frequently, a single templar is a member of a pack of "normal" Sabbat. The templar often serves as the pack's ductus or priest and directs his pack to his patron's benefit.

Most templar-led packs, though certainly not all of them, are fixed rather than nomadic in nature.

Templar-led packs are the primary line of defense when the Camarilla initiates one of its rare military offenses, and those that are nomadic are often responsible for seeing that the patron's interests are protected during Crusades as well. Whether they serve the Inquisition or some powerful elder, though, the purpose of large packs is almost always a martial one.

POWER PLAY

It is, of course, against Sabbat tradition for either an Inquisitor or an active templar to hold a position of rank above the pack level (though former templars may certainly do so). Bishops, archbishops, and higher offices have specific responsibilities that are simply not compatible with the duties of the nomadic Inquisitors or the subservient templars. So that means that Anointed have no vested interest in playing politics, right?

Uh-huh. Sure. Two kinds of Cainites actually believe that — the dead, and the soon-to-be-dead.

Some Anointed, like so many vampires, are simply determined to use any means at their disposal to advance their own schemes — but even those fanatically loyal to their duties and the sect often find reason to pull strings.

Those who serve a particularly powerful master often find it relatively easy to begin establishing a power base of their own. More than one templar has helped elevate an ally or a pawn to a position of power in a strong pack or a city's hierarchy by dropping his own patron's name in support of that candidate. For instance, no fewer than three archbishops, a priscus, and even a cardinal purportedly owe their current political success to a prominent paladin on the East Coast. Her carefully worded implications — phrased vaguely enough that no one could actually accuse her of making specific promises — suggested that her own mentor, Cardinal Kyle Strathcona, supported the candidates' bids for power. This phantom patron turned matters to their favor, and they, in exchange, owe her a sizable debt. So far, they have all been open to her requests and "suggestions," but should any of them balk in the future, she is quite prepared to weaken their political foundations by revealing that her patron never, in fact, gave a rat's ass about them one way or the other.

Of course, things need not be even that complex. Despite the sect's doctrine of "free will," most — well, many — young Sabbat vampires are smart enough to follow orders from high-ranked Cainites, and most of them aren't going to question the word of a known templar. Cooperation can be demanded from other Sabbat, all sorts of orders can be given in the master's name, and they'll likely be obeyed more often than not.



At least until the bishop finds out, of course.

Whether this power is gained through the abuse of a master's authority or the careful orchestration of false accusations, what is a vampire to do once he has it? While greed and ambition are no less prevalent in the Sabbat than in the Camarilla, some of the Anointed truly seek power for the good of the sect, or at least of their particular faction. Some templars use what influence they have to increase their patron's authority rather than their own. Inquisitors often use puppet figureheads as tools for crushing heresy that they themselves could not quash. Regardless of the terror inspired by the Red Robes, a local archbishop is certain to have resources the Inquisitor cannot access, and if you have such an authority in your pocket, you have access to a whole new range of tactics.

Sometimes an elder simply has too much military and political clout in her home city for the Anointed to easily take her out with a frontal assault, regardless of the size of the pack involved. Although they don't have the same experience with such matters as do the archons, the agents of the Sabbat often wield enough political might to start chipping away at an elder's base of power from below. The archbishop is too firmly ensconced in her haven? Take a page from those damn Camarilla Licks, and have it condemned. Have the bank freeze her assets. Put her own templars on the receiving end of a SWAT team. The Sabbat doesn't enjoy resorting to mortal tools, but the smart ones are willing to do it when the need arises.

Of course, the average templar doesn't have the same sort of connections among those mortal institutions as do his archon counterparts, but he has other ways to get things done. The Camarilla, with their rigid Masquerade, may not mind taking years to bribe and blackmail some juicebag in City Hall, but the Sabbat has better things to do. Break fingers until you get what you want! Dominate him until his eyes bleed! Kidnap his wife! Things will start to happen, guaranteed — and if there's a mess to clean up afterward, well, screw it. It's not your responsibility.

This alone won't be enough to knock an elder on her ass, but if you can keep up the pressure, it may weaken her enough that you and your pack can finally kick in the door and deal with the bitch.

Another favored tactic is to make your target's rivals do the job for you. The Inquisitor known as Navarrese enjoys sweeping into a pack's territory with his retinue and very obviously investigating someone other than his true suspect. He never directly accuses this catspaw, of course, since that might tarnish the Inquisition's infallible reputation, but it's quite evident who he's focusing on. This is often enough to throw the true suspect off her guard — but more importantly,

Navarrese suddenly has a very frightened vampire who knows the local layout and is absolutely desperate to clear his name. More than one such "suspect" has done a great deal of the Inquisitor's investigating for him, ultimately handing him on a silver platter everything he needs to convict the true offender.

OUTSIDE AGITATION

Even the Inquisition, with its *carte blanche* authority throughout the sect, has to at least pretend that it has a viable reason for sticking its nose into the affairs of high-ranking Cainites. Not even the Red Robes can just wander up to a cardinal or a priscus and yell "Heretic!" without some sort of evidence of wrongdoing.

Of course, some evidence hardly means real evidence, does it? Although they prefer not to do so, the Inquisition has been known to not only manufacture evidence, but even to instigate trouble in a particular elder's domain, all for the express purpose of making someone call them in so they have a legitimate reason for getting involved. Most Inquisitors won't actually convict or punish a Cainite on the grounds of evidence they themselves planted — they aren't looking for excuses to kill random sectmates — but they will hold the threat of investigation or even sentencing over an elder's head. More than one pack, and indeed more than one Sabbat city, is actually under the indirect influence of the Inquisition.

Even when they are not directly responsible for whatever trouble called them hence, Inquisitors rarely hesitate to take full advantage of any opportunity that arises. Many of the Red Robes make a practice of instigating veritable witch hunts, investigating everyone toward whom even the most improbable accusation is leveled, and in essence creating an atmosphere so rife with paranoia that the Cainites involved are literally frightened into cooperating. Not only does this often lead to the real heretic, as her packmates are only too happy to help discover her, but it gives the Inquisitor leverage over everyone involved. Charges against those guilty only by association can even be trumped up and then dropped in exchange for "future services." Even the regent herself might be startled — and more than a little alarmed — to learn how much secular influence the Inquisition actually holds.

AN EYE FOR AN EYE

Everything that paranoid Camarilla Licks whisper fearfully about the archons is true of the templars and the Inquisition. They have eyes everywhere, and they are actively looking for even the slightest infraction. The Sabbat has fewer precepts to break than the Camarilla, but it enforces those precepts with a draconian efficiency that even jaded elders shudder to contemplate.

GADGETS AND GIZMOS

The Sabbat, as a sect, has always been better than the Camarilla at keeping up with modern advancements in technology. The average age of the vampires in power, if not that of the sect's population as a whole, is substantially younger than their counterparts in the Ivory Tower. Even those Sabbat vampires who are truly ancient prove more open to new technologies, if only because they are exposed to them more frequently.

Despite this, it's downright amazing how shocked the younger Sabbat vees act when they discover that the templars and the Inquisitors make just as much use of modern gadgets.

It isn't so much the weaponry, since that's to be expected; these nights, a templar wielding a submachine gun is actually as common as one brandishing a gladius. But weapons aren't the issue here. More than one Cainite has gone to her Final Death at the hands of Inquisitors, convicted of conspiring with the hated Camarilla when the GPS locator planted in her Chevy clearly showed her spending a great deal of her time across the border. Others have been betrayed by phone taps, and a templar recently arranged the execution of an entire pack at the hands of the Inquisition after he hacked into one of their AOL accounts and discovered that they frequented several Satanist chat rooms. He also discovered that a large number of neonates really don't have the first clue what being undead really means, since a lot of them are still frightened at the thought of a polygraph test. Perhaps most importantly, modern communications allow for increased efficiency in both Crusades and defense against the Camarilla; the recent success the Sword of Caine enjoyed on the East Coast is proof of this.

On the other hand, the loss of New York has provided unequivocal evidence that the Camarilla is beginning to adapt to new technologies as well, and that this long-time advantage of the Sabbat may not be an advantage for much longer. At the behest of their masters, many templars have spearheaded new initiatives designed to grant the Sabbat first crack at emerging technologies, even going so far as to provide support and funding for — gasp! — mortal companies and inventors. It's distasteful, treating with mortals the way the Camarilla does, but as the Final Nights approach, the Sabbat realizes that the advancements of mankind, rather than the determination of the Cainites, could well determine whether it will stand victorious over the Camarilla and its ancient masters, or wind up as nothing more than a charred appetizer.

Vampires of such importance cannot, of course, be bothered hunting down every little violator. Ducti and other local or pack-level authorities are left to deal with minor infractions. Only when a crime is severe enough to threaten the interests of a particularly powerful elder, or even the sect as a whole, do the Anointed step in to make an example of the parties involved.

As with all other facets of the sect's policy, the Sabbat must maintain at least the appearance of individual rights and freedoms when it comes to its system of justice. Thus Anointed frequently hold open courts to decide on the guilt or innocence (and the sentencing) of accused transgressors. In the modern nights, these trials actually take a form very reminiscent of an American courtroom. At times the accusing Anointed acts as prosecutor and the accused (or, if she has some truly staunch allies, another vampire) acts as counsel, both arguing before an uninvolved elder or a second Anointed serving as judge. In other instances, the Anointed himself serves as judge, and it is entirely up to the defendant to prove her own innocence in the eyes of a hostile court.

Occasionally, no single individual is responsible for deciding guilt or innocence, or for sentencing. Although the accusing officer moderates the trial, the members of all attending packs vote to determine guilt. Suggestions for sentencing, in these instances, are often taken from the attendees as well, and then voted upon, and a certain amount of informal prestige is granted the Cainite who suggests the "winning" punishment.

The entire affair is little more than a show for the Cainite masses. The Anointed rarely publicly accuse a Cainite of severe crimes unless they are already certain of his guilt; the trial is intended to provide the *illusion* of impartial justice. That said, some few defendants have managed to prove themselves innocent, usually by managing to somehow discredit the witnesses or evidence called against them. The accusers resent being made to look like idiots, but better that than to render an unjust verdict and risk an uprising in protest. Very rarely, when they feel they can do it without tarnishing their own reputations, an Inquisitor or templar will deliberately stage a trial with a "not guilty" verdict, simply to display to the public the wisdom, justice and mercy of the courts.

At other times, a suspect is either too dangerous to be brought to trial, or a templar knows full well that she has insufficient evidence to prove the suspect's guilt in the eyes of the masses. Such vampires are usually assassinated without so much as a nod to *habeas corpus*. The Sword of Caine prefers to keep up appearances, but it is, if nothing else, pragmatic.

Trial by Ordeal

Although less common than it used to be, more than a few Anointed (and elders) still believe in trial by ordeal. A custom frequently practiced in the Dark and Middle Ages, and common well into the Colonial Era (such as in the Salem witch trials), trials by ordeal are extremely painful or even deadly. Supposedly only the guilty suffer, while the innocent are protected by divine intervention. Those Sabbat who still practice this tradition don't necessarily think that God will take a hand, but they honestly believe that some greater power — perhaps Caine himself — will intervene to save the falsely accused. Those who suffer injury or Final Death through the ordeal are judged to have been guilty; those who emerge unharmed are deemed innocent (use of Disciplines to escape or ward off damage is usually seen as an admission of guilt).

Obviously, most accused unfortunate enough to draw one of these fundamentalist Anointed as a judge suffer greatly and often die, but rumor is that some few of those tried do indeed seem to enjoy some sort of outside protection from the torments of the ordeal.

A few of the common trials by ordeal, though by no means all of them, follow.

- The touch of an Iron Reliquary or other metal implement heated red- or white-hot, or walking across a heated metal plate.

- Insertion of one of the offender's limbs into a furnace.

- Slow immersion in lye, acid or other caustic substances.

- Immersion in scalding water.

- Force-feeding of drugged or poisoned blood.

SENTENCING

Once guilt has been established, sentence is handed down by the Anointed. The accuser has a great deal of leeway in selecting the criminal's punishment, but certain traditions influence that decision. Treason to the sect is almost always punishable by Final Death — usually painful — and infernalists are usually "purified" brutally before execution. Beyond that, the judge can let her twisted imagination run wild.

Although some high-ranking Cainites can be stripped of their rank in punishment for some transgression, such loss of status is rarely the penalty for serious crimes. Normally it is the result of a failed power play against another elder. The Sabbat, by and large, only hands down two forms of punishment: torture and Final Death.

No one has yet found a practical limit to the preferred forms of torture engaged in by the Sword of Caine. Everything on the trial by ordeal list, almost every torture used by archons, and dozens more besides

ORDEAL, TAKE TWO

Sometimes, if the accused is a particularly respected or useful member of the sect, and if the accuser feels that he might still be useful to the Sabbat, a convict is given a fighting chance at his own execution. Rather than being burned, or strapped down and sliced apart, these "fortunate" Cainites are condemned to Final Death by such methods as should kill them — but that offer just the tiniest hope of survival. Walking the plank off a skyscraper is a favorite. Others are bled almost to frenzy, weighted down, and dumped in the center of an enormous body of water, and some are bound hand and foot and hurled into a room with a captive Lupine. This last is, for obvious reasons, not common, though it's quite the spectacle when it does happen, and many attending Sabbat videotape it for later reminiscing. Should the truly resourceful (or truly fortunate) vampire manage to survive, his sentence is considered commuted and he may return to his pack or his position — though he's going to have eyes watching over his shoulder for the rest of his unlife, and even a blink in the wrong direction results in instant execution, with no possibility of a second reprieve.

can be inflicted upon a convicted renegade. Final Death is often the result of such tortures; rarely is a subject granted a beheading or other quick end. Burning, slow dismemberment, consumption by animal ghouls — these are the fates bestowed upon those who betray the Sabbat.

WAR

In the Camarilla, the archons have to play a large part in the sect wars. In addition to the Ivory Tower's police, they're also the backbone of the military. Not so for the Anointed. A vast majority of Sabbat vampires are soldiers of one sort or another, so these specialists need not carry the burden of combat with the enemy. Martial operations are more properly the purview of the Black Hand, an organization with which neither the templars nor the Inquisition particularly get along.

This is not to say that the Anointed have no wartime duties, merely that they aren't the ones you might expect.

JUST ONE OF THE BOYS

Most templars who find themselves involved in war take the field as just another soldier. Since many of them serve their patrons only some of the time, they

may be part of a war pack that has nothing to do with their templar duties.

VESTED INTERESTS

More often than not, a templar involved in a Crusade or the defense of a city is less concerned with the success of the operation as a whole than he is with ensuring that his mentor's own interests are protected. Although they dislike admitting it, many Sabbat elders do indeed have their fingers deep in mortal institutions. A bishop with political ambitions might send her templars along on a Crusade to ensure that all the Camarilla bastards connected to City Hall are eliminated or driven out before they can make arrangements for their mortal pawns, thus leaving a ready-made network of puppets in place for the bishop to come in and exert his influence. When defending a city, templars might put up a particularly harsh defense around their patron's domain, buying her time to escape, even if it means sacrificing other territories to the Camarilla incursion.

Templars have even been known to arrange war-time "accidents" for fellow Sabbat who just happened to be a threat to the patron. A scheming up-and-comer with his eyes on the archbishop's position or the favored child of a powerful rival might be lost, victims of "greater-than-anticipated resistance by the Camarilla." Such battlefield assassinations are uncommon, as the templars don't want to risk the success of the entire Crusade by weakening their own soldiers, but when a victory starts to look likely, then such "problem solving" can be undertaken with a bit more impunity.

COUNTER-INTELLIGENCE

This is perhaps the most important duty of the Anointed — Inquisitors even more so than templars — during war. The Sabbat is aware of its own limitations. It knows that the Camarilla will defeat it time after time if they are allowed to shift the battle to a political field. Most Camarilla incursions are led not by archons with shotguns, but by pencil-pushing bureaucrats who begin condemning havens and dispatching trigger-happy police on "drug raids" against Sabbat strongholds. In order to do that, the Camarilla has to acquire inside knowledge of the city — and

that means spies and infiltrators. Servants of the Ivory Tower. Heretics.

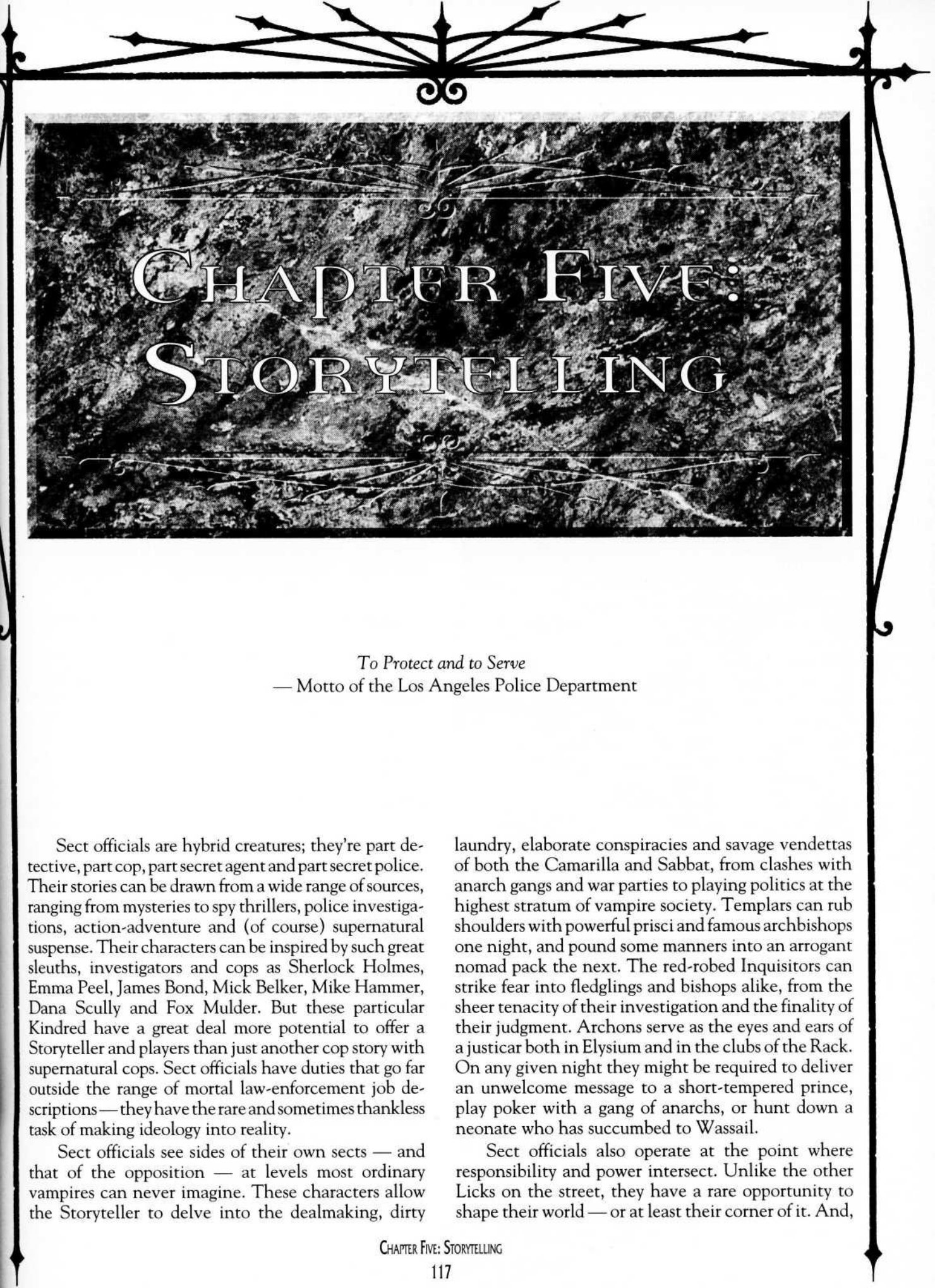
Cainites who think the Inquisition is tough under normal circumstances would be horrified at the lengths they'll go through to unmask Camarilla agents in times of war. The slightest hint of abnormal behavior, the merest accusation of impropriety, draws the Red Robes' attention, if not presence. Trials are rarely conducted during a Crusade or a defensive action — there simply isn't sufficient time — but more than one vampire, guilty or innocent, has found himself staked and stashed in a meat locker until after the conflict. Others have simply vanished.

Many Anointed make a practice of observing Camarilla tactics from afar, focusing on an entire city rather than on a single front. By making note of how and where the enemy strikes (or strikes back), analytically minded Anointed can determine what sorts of weak points the Camarilla is exploiting; and thus, by process of elimination, narrow down the field of possible infiltrators to those vampires who possess a knowledge of those areas.

PEACEKEEPING

Surprisingly, the duty of some templars consists primarily of *preventing* open conflict with the Camarilla. The Sabbat isn't stupid. The sect's leaders know well that the enemy sect is both larger and better organized than they. When the Sabbat fights a war for which it is unprepared, it loses — witness New York. The last thing the regent and the cardinals want is for a hotheaded pack to raise so much havoc in a Camarilla city that the sleeping giant awakens and retaliates. Some amount of trouble-making is expected, and even encouraged, but it can go too far. Some nomadic templars patrol the various cities that sit on the edge of Camarilla territory, eyes and ears open for any indication that one of the local packs is about to get out of control and go racing across the border to hurl Molotovs at Prince What's-his-name's Elysium. Should these templars decide that the risk of open war is too great for the time being, these packs are reined in — and, if necessary, slapped down hard. The Sabbat truly believes it can win this war, but only when it fights on its own schedule, and its own terms.





CHAPTER FIVE: STORYTELLING

To Protect and to Serve
— Motto of the Los Angeles Police Department

Sect officials are hybrid creatures; they're part detective, part cop, part secret agent and part secret police. Their stories can be drawn from a wide range of sources, ranging from mysteries to spy thrillers, police investigations, action-adventure and (of course) supernatural suspense. Their characters can be inspired by such great sleuths, investigators and cops as Sherlock Holmes, Emma Peel, James Bond, Mick Belker, Mike Hammer, Dana Scully and Fox Mulder. But these particular Kindred have a great deal more potential to offer a Storyteller and players than just another cop story with supernatural cops. Sect officials have duties that go far outside the range of mortal law-enforcement job descriptions — they have the rare and sometimes thankless task of making ideology into reality.

Sect officials see sides of their own sects — and that of the opposition — at levels most ordinary vampires can never imagine. These characters allow the Storyteller to delve into the dealmaking, dirty

laundry, elaborate conspiracies and savage vendettas of both the Camarilla and Sabbat, from clashes with anarch gangs and war parties to playing politics at the highest stratum of vampire society. Templars can rub shoulders with powerful prisci and famous archbishops one night, and pound some manners into an arrogant nomad pack the next. The red-robed Inquisitors can strike fear into fledglings and bishops alike, from the sheer tenacity of their investigation and the finality of their judgment. Archons serve as the eyes and ears of a justicar both in Elysium and in the clubs of the Rack. On any given night they might be required to deliver an unwelcome message to a short-tempered prince, play poker with a gang of anarchists, or hunt down a neonate who has succumbed to Wassail.

Sect officials also operate at the point where responsibility and power intersect. Unlike the other Licks on the street, they have a rare opportunity to shape their world — or at least their corner of it. And,

of course, they have the dilemmas, disappointments and frustrations that accompany such opportunity. Their stories deal not only with what their power is, but how they use it. Their power is not merely physical, though many are formidable indeed. It comes from their position, as the most visible and active representatives of their sects, to investigate, enforce and administer the traditions and edicts of their elders over their fellows, and to defend the sect's ideologies against its enemies, both inside the sect and without. And if it is true that absolute power corrupts absolutely, how the power and responsibilities these characters wield affects them and those around them can become the theme of a chronicle in itself. How far will they go to attain their goals, or succeed in the missions given them by their superiors? Does the end justify the means they use to achieve it?

CHRONICLE TYPES

Chronicles centered around sect officials can encompass a wide variety of story genres: action, mystery, conspiracy or political intrigue, in which the players' characters match wits, perseverance, and all the abilities at their disposal with adversaries within their own sect, or from the outside, while fulfilling their duty to their sect and to the leaders they serve. Underlying all of those elements is **Vampire**'s basic theme of personal horror: the despair, violence and futility that pervade the World of Darkness and the souls of the Damned, especially those of the Damned who have chosen a duty that requires them to defend their sect's beliefs, and risk their unives in service to their fellows. Their missions may bring them into conflict not only with the rogues and rebels of their own kind, but with their own Humanity, ethical Path, or personal loyalties; their dedication may drive them to fanaticism, despair, or to compromise their own values for the sake of accomplishing their goals.

At the center of every good story is a plot that drives the action — and at the core of the plot is a conflict that must be resolved, one way or another, in order for the story to come to a satisfactory close. In a **Vampire** chronicle, the conflict has two basic sources. It can be imposed on the characters by the unfolding plot, the events and actions of the Storyteller's characters with whom the players come into contact — and conflict — as they seek to carry out their duty to their sects. Or the conflict can come from within the characters themselves, as they struggle with contradictory loyalties to mentors, allies or packmates, idealism versus cynicism, their Humanity versus their Beasts. A good chronicle has elements of both, which deepens the drama of the players' stories. Events and interacting with other characters around them can force them

to make choices that reflect the struggles in their own souls. In responding to their inner conflicts, the players also shape events and relationships with those around them. The difference is one of approach and emphasis — do you as Storyteller start with the plot, and see how your players' characters react to the unfolding events? Or do you start with the players' characters, their goals, ambitions, and internal conflicts, and create a plot that brings those issues dramatically out into the open?

PLOT-DRIVEN CHRONICLES

The most common approach to a chronicle is driven by a Storyteller plot — the player characters become involved in a conflict that originates from outside events, or from the actions of Storyteller characters, rather than on their own initiative. Or perhaps the Storyteller has designed a particular storyline expressly for her players' characters. This doesn't mean that the characters' internal motivations should not be taken into consideration, or do not affect the story. This just means that the primary conflict in the story is initiated by outside forces, and the players are reacting to those forces based on their natures, loyalties and sense of duty.

The following section looks at different styles of plot-driven chronicles, but they are merely that — a style of approach, not an exclusive definition. Mysteries can include scenes with hard-hitting combat or moments of chilling suspense. Action stories frequently revolve around a mystery to be solved. Tales of espionage often occur against a backdrop of war, siege, and betrayals, and so contain elements of both mystery and action, as well as some unique to the espionage own genre. The Storyteller should feel free to use any combination that makes sense for her story, and suits the nature of the players' characters.

ACTION

Many sect officials are action-oriented Kindred to start with, unafraid to put themselves physically at risk in the line of duty. That risk can come directly from their adversaries in that story. It can come from other characters who oppose the characters' actions for reasons of their own that might or might not have anything to do with the goals of either side. It can also come from outside forces: the weather, a natural disaster, the dangers of the terrain or setting. To accomplish their goals, the players must overcome or cleverly avoid all these obstacles, usually relying on physical prowess, courage, cleverness, a well-thought-out plan of action, luck and occasionally superior abilities or firepower.

There's no such thing as a "random" encounter

As the Storyteller, the setting and all but the players' characters are under your control, and are your

YOUR MISSION, SHOULD YOU CHOOSE TO ACCEPT IT...

Sect officials can be brought into stories in a number of ways, but for a chronicle just starting out, or for players who prefer that the Storyteller provide the structure for the chronicle, a justicar or bishop frequently gives the players' characters a specific mission to accomplish. Of course, that doesn't mean their superior tells them — or even knows — the full story. Quite often the characters will discover that the situation they are being sent into is far more complicated than they expected. They may be required to do more than first requested, or even something different entirely, to fulfill the spirit (if not the exact instructions) of their assignment.

However, that is certainly not the only means the Storyteller can use to introduce a new story. Others — a prince, a member of the local primogen, a pack's ductus, or even a rank-and-file Kindred or Sabbat — may approach them with an intriguing story or a request for help. An old friend or ally might contact them with a plea for their aid, or to call in an old prestation debt. Or the players might just be in the wrong place at the right time, and stumble across something that arouses their interests, or be following up an unexplained thread from a previous story.

Look for a variety of ways to introduce new stories, including allowing your players to take the initiative and go from city to city actually looking for trouble. The presence of nosy strangers is rarely welcomed by those with something to hide, so sooner or later, trouble may well come looking for them.

tools to guide the story along. Therefore, nothing that occurs during the story will be totally arbitrary, nor should it be. Look for ways to use various events, encounters with other characters and descriptions of the setting as a means to advance the story. When the players enter a nightclub, the Storyteller characters they encounter there should potentially provide them with something — whether it's a bit of whispered gossip, an overheard conversation, a warning not to interfere in the primogen's business, or a cryptic note scrawled on a cocktail napkin — that will take the story a step further along. If it's too early in the story for them to encounter the Tremere who can explain the symbols carved into a discarded, bloody stake, then that Tremere might not be there that night. But the Gangrel who has seen those same symbols carved on a twisted tree in the cemetery



might be — and might also be willing to share his story, if the players don't piss him off first.

The story determines what happens next or at least might happen, depending on the actions of the players. Whether the players run afoul of a Lupine or “accidentally” run into the sheriff while scoping out the local Rack, the encounter should have some kind of story behind it, even if the players never learn what it is. Don't bring on a Lupine just because the players are passing through a stretch of non-urban countryside. Werewolves really do have other things to do than lie in wait for stray Kindred every night. So what is the creature doing, and why is it there? Did it know they were coming, and if so, how? Who was the sheriff talking to in the alleyway, and why did he go to such pains not to be seen with her? These events should not be meaningless — the players will likely assume there is some story significance behind anything that they encounter during a story, especially if your description makes it seem mysterious or dramatic. Don't disappoint your audience.

Of course, not everyone the players interact with will be vitally significant to the story, but look for ways to provide opportunities for the players to further their mission. If no such opportunity plausibly exists, then you should make that plain as well — “You hang out at the gazebo in the park for a couple of hours, but by three in the morning, you still have seen no sign of the Malkavian or his dog.”

Action Without Adversaries — Not all obstacles in an action-oriented story need to involve actual combat — crossing a ravine on a swiftly deteriorating rope bridge, escaping from a deadly trap, or outwitting a high-tech security system undetected can all provide high levels of risky obstacles to the players' goals. Try to vary the dilemmas the characters face by providing alternative challenges for them to overcome, some of which may well be even more dangerous than their adversaries.

Natural Disasters — anything from hurricanes, tornadoes, volcanoes, earthquakes, forest or brush fires, landslides, blizzards and avalanches can pose a significant threat to Kindred. Other man-made disasters, such as nuclear power plant disasters, toxic waste spills, or war zones can also serve a similar purpose — a setting that poses risks to the players' characters and forces them to deal with it almost as if it was another adversary to their mission. Make sure the particular disaster you choose is plausible for the time and place where the story is occurring. Do not neglect to give sufficient background and warnings (particularly with weather conditions) so that players should be prepared to deal with them, at least to some extent. To keep the situation from feeling too arbitrary, tie in the story's

objective in some way, so the story *needs* this particular occupancy or setting to make sense. The Sabbath, for example, often uses severe weather conditions as cover for raids into Camarilla territory. Characters might be stranded by impassable roads or flood conditions and seek emergency shelter in potentially hazardous territory, or be trapped in an isolated island resort with a few hundred mortal tourists and a rogue Kindred on a feeding binge.

Ideally, the players should find it necessary to brave the dangers of the disaster in order to accomplish their goals, not just hunker down until it blows over. However, the forced isolation scenario is a long-time staple of horror films in which the dangers on the outside trap the characters within a relatively small enclosed space, such as a castle or house, along with the monster of the night.

The Ticking Clock — For whatever story reason, whether it's the beginning of a Conclave three nights from now, a deadline imposed by a dangerous anarchy before he'll start draining hostages live on national television, or the deadly threat of impending dawn, the players only have a limited amount of time to accomplish their objectives. In this kind of story, anything that can serve to delay the players can serve as an obstacle — and require them to do some fast thinking, and perhaps daring improvisations — to keep going. While a combat can certainly delay them, look for other possibilities as well, such as a wild goose chase after irrelevant clues, being physically restrained either by the adversaries or even a well-meaning ally, or having a vitally important piece of evidence be lost or stolen, forcing the players to lose valuable time in getting it back. Remember that time is relative, and real time does not necessarily have any relation to time passage in the story. You as the Storyteller are responsible for keeping time moving at a good pace for the story, and making sure the players know how much time they've spent, and how little they have left. At the beginning of the story, time should pass more slowly, allowing players to plan their actions and make some initial progress — but as their deadline approaches, time should move faster and faster, giving the players a growing sense of urgency as they race the clock to their goal.

“Accidents” Can Happen — Almost every adventure movie has at least one “oh, *shit!*” moment — the falling jeep in the tree in *Jurassic Park*, the knocked-over lantern that sets a building ablaze while a fight is still ongoing, the car that won't start just when it's needed to get away before the bomb blows. Frequently, they occur because the story protagonists have miscalculated in some way, or failed to take something into

account in their plans. Sometimes it's just piss-poor luck. But suddenly the characters have an unexpected problem that must be overcome or escaped *right now*. This kind of complication intensifies the suspense and thrill in a story, particularly if the emergency occurs as a direct result of player actions.

Unfortunately, this kind of story twist is not something the Storyteller can usually plan in advance. You must simply keep an eye on the ongoing events and be prepared to improvise, should an appropriate opportunity arise. If the players overlook an obvious detail in their planning, neglect to prepare an adequate escape plan, or botch a critical success roll, you can have such events backfire on the players in interesting — and dramatic — ways. Note that such a complication should never seem totally arbitrary. It must be plausible for the situation, it should ideally arise as a direct result of players' actions, and must advance or enhance the storyline already in progress. It is far better to refrain from introducing such a twist at all than to throw in something that feels implausible, or like a case of Storyteller whimsy.

Avoiding Hack 'n' Slash — In an action-oriented storyline, it's far too easy to allow it to degrade into one combat scene after another, or for players to get carried away with the physical conflict and seek to solve all story obstacles with brute force. This is especially true with characters like archons or templars who are often formidable fighters in their own right, and carry a sect-backed mandate to fulfill their duties any way they see fit.

While an occasional rip-roaring, ass-kicking fight allows players to revel in their characters' badass fighting prowess, too many combat scenes tend to get old and boring. Limiting combat scenes heightens their excitement for the players — *finally, we're gonna get that bastard where it hurts!* — and allows the Storyteller to make the scene mean something in terms of the storyline. A combat scene should advance the story, not delay it.

The following are a few suggestions for Storytellers to not only limit superfluous combat scenes, but also make them meaningful to the story when they do occur.

Need for Secrecy — Have the players' characters acting undercover, with a good deal of importance placed on their not breaking their "cover," whatever that is. The last thing they want to do is attract attention to themselves. Archons in particular are often investigators as much as enforcers, and requiring them to conceal their presence and identities in order to find out the truth gives them an additional layer of Masquerade to uphold. If possible, reward them for acting to preserve their covers rather than breaking them by unnecessary or blatant violence, preferably

with in-story information or advantages that aid them in their mission.

Make It Hard to Find a Time-Wasting Fight — Players accustomed to bludgeoning their way through anyone standing in their path are also accustomed to easily finding opponents, and then spending a good deal of game time in actual combat. However, their opponents do not have to be as obliging. Smart adversaries avoid fights, especially those they aren't guaranteed to win. If the players' characters attack ordinary mortals, you can always gloss over the fight in a few sentences — "In a matter of minutes, your opponents are all dead or out of action, unconscious on the floor. Now you've got a mess on your hands, someone will surely know you've been here. What do you do now?" If the players attack another Kindred, have that Kindred flee rather than fight against overwhelming or uncertain odds, or call upon Disciplines to get away. Do not indulge the players on a profitless or time-wasting combat encounter. Save your efforts for when such an encounter advances the story.

A Good Fight Is a Reward — Many players simply enjoy a good fight for its own sake: the thrill of taking chances, pitting their strengths against an opponent, the uncertainty of its outcome. Pace such combat encounters as the story unfolds so that they function more as an in-story reward for players getting this far. Players also enjoy coming into such an encounter with the odds on their side. Reward them with small advantages such as an ambush that catches their opponents by surprise, or having their plan of attack actually work (at least to start) the way they think it will. Or have something they've done in a previous scene, such as successfully persuading a local Cainite to provide them with information, carefully planning their infiltration, or talking their way through the outer lines of defense rather than using brute force, add to their advantages when combat is actually joined.

Make a Combat Encounter Meaningful to the Story — Avoid using combat encounters (the dreaded and senseless "wandering monsters") as a means to fill time during a game session. Try to make any such encounter have a bearing on the story. Perhaps the local anarchy gang has been tipped off that the players are really a Sabbat infiltration pack (whether they are or not), or a lieutenant among the adversary's forces thinks that the nosy characters need a lesson about minding their own business and takes action on his own accord. Perhaps the players have come too close to the adversary's secret haven and the fight is a delaying tactic to cover his escape with the evidence. Whatever the real reason is behind the conflict, make sure you know it, and that it makes sense — preferably something that advances the story along. Just as a



movie director tells the viewer what clues are important by how they are presented in the film, train your players to realize that if they encountered serious resistance, there may be something going on here they need to discover.

Start With a Bang — You may want to have a good, rowdy fight at some point early in the story just to give your players an initial taste of excitement that will last them through a session or two where they spend most of their time on less violent pursuits. Just make sure that early fight is relevant to the long-term plot, and provides more than just a chance to bust heads. Whether they win or lose the fight is far less important than what else they get out of it in terms of the story. The players should have some questions afterward (“How the hell did he know we were here?” “What was in that truck they were trying to keep us from discovering?”), or some clues to follow, such as a prisoner to interrogate.

Training your players out of a hack ‘n’ slash mentality may take some time, but it’s worth it in terms of evolving more meaningful and varied kinds of stories. Do explain to them up front that you’re trying something different, and assure them that they *will* get to kick some teeth in when it is appropriate for the story, but not to expect every encounter to turn into a bloody fracas.

In fact, they should be looking for other means to accomplish their goals, using their Abilities, Backgrounds and wits as well as their less violent Disciplines. Be willing to reward players who go out on a limb with an innovative approach — consider giving an extra experience point to a player who comes up with non-aggressive approaches or clever solutions to a situation that occurs in a session. Or even play along with their ideas; if they come up with a non-violent or imaginative approach that isn’t in your game plan, see if there’s a way to adapt to it, so they will be encouraged by success to try such non-combative approaches in the future.

It’s Clobbering Time — When the time is right, however, an exciting combat scene can not only provide a satisfying climax for the players’ efforts and the build-up of suspense through the unfolding of the story, it can be a hell of a lot of fun. However, combat should contribute something in terms of the story, and the characters’ adversaries should not be acting foolishly or arbitrarily in allowing themselves to be drawn into a fight.

Vampires, whether Sabbat, Camarilla or avowed independent, should always look out for their own interests — especially when they’re putting their precious undead hides at risk by engaging in a direct confrontation. They should always have a good reason

for getting into a fight, and they should do so intelligently, with a strong instinct for self-preservation. If possible, they will seek to change the situation to their own advantage, choose a setting that is advantageous to them, or encourage the characters to separate so that they can be picked off one at a time. Play your Storyteller characters as if they plan to win, kick ass, and take prisoners. Don't let them stumble foolishly into players' hands, nor make mistakes that make comic-book villains look brilliant by comparison. While they may have flaws the players can exploit, those flaws should be plausible to their characters.

Remember that centuries-old Kindred didn't survive that long by taking needless risks or by fighting their own battles when they had animal, mortal or supernatural minions to do so for them. Any vampire adversary of status probably has a number of lieutenants (either Kindred or intelligent ghouls) and a small group of rank-and-file musclemen (usually ghouls, but possibly also a younger Kindred) who will be the players' characters' most common opponents in direct combat. A clever and competent lieutenant can provide a great deal of trouble for players, which allows the Storyteller to keep her elder mastermind scheming and plotting over a sequence of stories. A returning nemesis can provide significant story fodder and strong motivation for players to oppose him, as they develop an understanding of the full depravity of their enemy's schemes... and a serious grudge over the times he's slipped through their claws.

To add some additional danger and excitement to a combat, try an unusual setting — the steel beams of a skyscraper under construction 30 floors above the pavement, or a warehouse with overhead catwalks, or stacks of massive containers that form narrow, twisting canyons and potentially hazardous falling objects. Or an abandoned dump, filled with rusting hulks of automobiles, toxic pools, broken bottles and splintered furniture that provide impromptu stakes or dangerously combustible kindling.

Pacing and Suspense — Nothing kills the excitement generated by some fast action in the early scenes than a sense that the story isn't going anywhere, either because the players are spending all their time trying to come up with a perfect plan, have missed valuable clues, or are intent on a non-productive path of investigation. As the Storyteller, you need to keep a story's momentum going — not necessarily by nonstop action, but by making sure the players don't waste too much of their time on things that slow the pace down. Once they've found the vital clues in a scene, move them on to the next — using in-story action (such as another character's arrival, the approach of dawn, etc.) to get them going.

Or just gloss over the time, rather than make them play every last minute. ("You search the entire warehouse, but find no sign of any secret haven. In fact, you're not sure that the Sabbat have ever been in here....") The players need time to think and plan, perhaps even savor a small victory, but be prepared to spur them onward if things look bogged down. This is not to say that you should run the players through the story like rats in a maze. You should, however, be prepared to take action rather than allow your players to grow frustrated or bored.

A story is suspenseful when players expect something to happen. Sometimes they may know what that impending doom is, sometimes they don't, but they still anticipate something — most likely unpleasant — is about to occur. To create that anticipation, you need to provide just enough suggestion of what *might* happen to spark the players' imaginations. Whether that's the fear of being suddenly attacked from the shadows, having a trap sprung, or something horrible happening to a loved one or ally miles away, it is the expectation that creates the tension, that sense of impending doom.

In creating an atmosphere of suspense, less is more. The less the players truly know about what they're facing, the more suspense any small detail the Storyteller describes will generate. An unexplained noise from a floor above, a locked door with mysterious symbols painted on it in blood or a half-seen movement in the shadows of an alleyway will take on terrifying proportions, particularly if investigation cannot explain them. The players' imaginations will fill in whatever is unknown to a far greater degree of horror than anything the Storyteller can create.

MYSTERIES

Almost all your stories will have some element of mystery to them — Kindred are secretive creatures, and no few have secrets they would kill in order to protect. Discovering closely guarded secrets, however, is a sect official's job. Whether the mystery is a long-forgotten grudge that has only now broken forth into murder, a clandestine deal with enemies of the sect, or the theft of a priceless Noddist manuscript, it is the job of the archons and Anointed to unravel it, despite the opposition of those who want to prevent them from finding out the truth.

Murder most foul — "Murder," of course, refers only to the Final Death of a fellow Kindred or Cainite. The Sabbat doesn't care about the death of mortals in the least, and in the Camarilla, such deaths are only important if they endanger the Masquerade. Even the death of a Kindred's ghoul is considered merely a violation of domain — technically a property crime, not murder.

On the surface, a murder investigation may not sound like something an archon, templar or Inquisitor should be concerned with, and most local Kindred authority figures will probably feel the same way. However, no law or tradition prevents a sect official from investigating any suspicious Final Death she encounters or hears about, particularly if more than one such death has occurred. Even more importantly, the murder may be only the tip of an iceberg, and further investigation can lead to an even more serious and far-reaching plot that will demand all a sect official's wits and resources to uncover.

With murder, motivation is the key to the mystery. Almost anything can serve as motivation for murder, particularly among vampires, such as greed, hatred, vengeance, jealousy, fear of discovery or exposure, old grudges or brood feuds. The Storyteller must know the answers to all the questions a mystery poses.

Who — Who was the victim and who was directly responsible for his death? Was the killer acting on his own or was he a hired gun? Who helped the killer commit the crime, and why? Were there witnesses, and what did they see? Did the killer realize his act was witnessed, and what might he do about it? What do other Kindred (and ghouls, and mortals who might be potentially involved) know about what happened, about the victim, or about potential suspects?

What — What happened? How was the murder committed? Was the murder planned, a spur of the moment decision, or even an accident? What remains (if any) were found? What steps did the killers take to both carry it out and avoid getting caught, either in the act or later? Did they seek to hide all traces of the murder, plant false clues or frame a plausible, but innocent, party? What alibis will they present if asked? How well have they covered their tracks and what clues did they overlook?

Why — Most important, why kill this particular victim? What motivated the killer to commit murder? Why that particular night, or in that particular manner? What history existed between the victim and the killer, the victim and other Kindred in the city, the killer and other Kindred in the city? Was there an old grudge, feud, or previous trouble between them? Why should your players' characters care in the least about this?

You need to scatter the different pieces of your puzzle, decide which characters know what, and what it will take for them to part with anything they know to a bunch of investigative players' characters. You need to know what each of them thinks of each other, and have a good idea of all their old dark secrets and how they may or may not tie into this particular plot.

A CAVEAT FOR MORIARTY

Mysteries can be one of the most difficult of story genres to run in a storytelling game because while your players' *characters* may be experienced at ferreting out clues and divining what they mean, your *players* are most likely not. Solving a mystery ultimately comes down to how well your players, not their characters, can unravel your clues. Not all players will be persistent or intuitive enough to out-think your clever little plot, or recognize your "obvious" clues. You will have to balance giving too many clues (leading them to solve the mystery without any effort) and giving them too few (which can lead to frustration on the part of both players and Storyteller). It's usually better to have too many clues prepared than too few — you only have to give out as many as the players need. You should also be flexible with what lines of investigation the players choose to follow — it is far easier to adapt the story clues to their investigation than to attempt to persuade them they're on the wrong track. The exception to this is for "red herrings," the bits of information that look like important clues but are really distractions from the real thing. Don't let the players waste too much time on these — make sure they learn fairly quickly when they're pursuing a false lead, and let them get back to the clues that count. Real investigations are tedious, painstaking and full of minutiae — but your players are looking for entertainment, not the real-life work of a police detective. Cut out the unnecessary crap. Keep the story going, even if it means occasionally helping the players "discover" a clue or having a Storyteller character point out the significance of a piece of information.

Then you'll be in good shape to play along with the investigation, no matter what direction your players decide to start looking.

Conspiracy theories — For vampires, the World of Darkness teems with conspiracies. Whispered rumors tell of the mysterious Inconnu, secretive Methuselahs playing chess with Kindred unlikes, the dangerous agendas of the "other sect," or even one's own elders. As Storyteller, it is your job to ask yourself, what if the rumors are true?

Conspiracies are long-term mystery plotlines that are revealed little by little through a whole series of stories or events. In each story, which may not at first glance have any obvious connection to another, players uncover a few more of the underlying threads, or

find new connections they had not suspected before. Conspiracies unfold in layers — each layer reveals hints and clues that gradually peel away the layer beneath it. To the investigating archons or templars, it may seem as if just as they're getting close to the answer, they suddenly uncover evidence that not only proves their initial theory wrong, but may turn their investigation in another whole new direction. The further they progress, also, the more dangerous their investigation may become, as they work their way through the lower echelons up through the more secretive and powerful conspirators who may themselves not even realize the full complexity of the web of which they are part.

A really good conspiracy can form the basis for an entire chronicle, depending on how much effort the Storyteller wants to put into designing its intrigues. It may start very simply — a series of unexplained disappearances, a murder with no apparent motive, an attempted assassination of a prominent bishop or elder. But while the investigating players may solve the initial case (at least to the satisfaction of their superiors), some important questions should always be left unanswered, some oddities unexplained. This isn't a bad idea even if you *aren't* running a conspiracy. Never feel you have to allow your players to learn all the answers. Leave some loose ends untied for another story. With the next story, perhaps the unanswered questions have odd similarities, even though the two stories do not seem to be related. Gradually, the players should piece together the clues and realize that perhaps these mysterious coincidences aren't coincidences after all.

Whether the players choose to investigate the conspiracy further is, of course, up to them. The Storyteller can continue to use the same conspiracy to generate other stories whether the players ever learn more of its true nature or not. However, the Storyteller should look for ways to tie in the characters' internal motivations and goals into the conspiracy's web, so that they will be motivated to take more of the initiative — to seek the answers that are eluding them, even if their superiors are not interested in those answers, which may prove an interesting conundrum in itself.

Building the conspiracy proper is a time-consuming process, though it can be well worth the effort. Start with a general idea of the conspiracy's goals, and what it is trying to accomplish in the World of Darkness. Is it a Gehenna cult seeking to strengthen one sect or the other (or both) against the coming of the Antediluvians? A pair of Methuselahs waging a centuries-long game of chess with an entire city or even nation as their chessboard? A secret council of Sabbat and Camarilla elders who seek to abandon both sects

and develop a third, based on yet another philosophy of vampiric existence? Or a Ventrue elder who has allied with certain other Kindred of the city in order to discredit and eventually depose the Toreador prince? Once the conspiracy's primary goals are decided, then come up with a number of ways in which initial steps toward these goals can be accomplished. Look at broad, general approaches first, and then go to the most specific — these will become your story seeds. Think small and concise — the bishop skips a meeting without any of her templars and doesn't return until nearly dawn (or perhaps not until the following night), and one of her childer immediately assumes the worst.

You don't need to flesh out the entire conspiracy to start with. That can be developed more slowly, as long as you stay a few steps ahead of your players. Your players' speculations might even give you some ideas. Yes, the bishop may be consorting secretly with a Camarilla elder, but what if that Camarilla elder is really a Sabbat mole? Or is it the bishop who is the mole? Look for ways to surprise the troupe and turn their expectations 90 degrees, but keep the overall goals and general approaches in mind, even if they're not obvious to the players. Think of how much you want to reveal in any given story — don't give away too many goodies too soon, but don't be too stingy with them either. Sometimes it takes players a while to learn to connect the dots.

THE DIRTY BUSINESS OF POLITICAL INTRIGUES

Political intrigues are not a great deal different than a conspiracy, except for one important factor — this time, the players aren't investigating the conspiracy from the outside, they're part of it. Political intrigues have a goal, just as conspiracies do, whether it is to weaken the unity and cooperation in a Camarilla city before a siege, discredit a rival pack or topple a tyrannical prince. The players' characters may or may not have initiated the conspiracy (most likely not, unless they've risen to such levels that such scheming is acceptable to their superiors). They may, in fact, not realize the full scope of the conspiracy or its ultimate purpose — only their own assignment, which is but one step in a long process. Archons may be called in to help discredit an elder or prince who is no longer acting in the Camarilla's best interests or lay a trap for an unknown Sabbat agent among the primogen. Templars may be acting to further their patron's political goals, and Inquisitors may be seeking (or creating) evidence that will expose diabolical connections with a suspiciously successful bishop's rise to power.

However, by its very nature, political intrigue demands subtlety. The players must achieve their goals through negotiation, persuasion, or subtle trickery,

not violence. Violence and threats tend to put Kindred on the defensive, and make them far less susceptible to suggestions that further the players' intentions. Blackmail is also a threat, and useful only as a last resort, or when exposing the information the subject wants to protect was their intention all along. Archons or templars who tend to approach a problem with guns blazing will not likely be sent on more delicate matters of intrigue.

You knew the job was dangerous when you took it

There's a reason why many sect officials would rather fight Lupines than compete in the political arena. At least with the werewolves, you know who your enemies are. Serving the sect can mean making some hard decisions — which is more important, the good of the Camarilla or the archon's own conscience? Does the templar blindly obey her bishop's orders, even if she believes his agenda may ignite a conflict with the Camarilla that local packs are not prepared to deal with? How far will the players go to further their superiors' agendas when that agenda comes into conflict with their own plans, sense of honor, or outside loyalties? Will they carry out an assignment they believe to be totally unjust or based on inaccurate information, or will they try to do what they feel is right? As Storyteller, your job is to give the players

some difficult decisions to make, where there are no clear right and wrong answers, merely a choice of consequences. Their choices will not only determine how the story goes, but what consequences they will be dealing with in future stories as well.

Killing for the cause

Sect officials are sometimes called upon to commit the very crime they generally investigate — to kill another Kindred for the good of the sect. However, not even the Sabbat tolerates blatant murder of its own members. Such murders must be clandestine by their very nature, for if it were possible to simply accuse and condemn the target by normal means, assassination would not be necessary. Right?

Remember that the players' characters (even Assamites) are not automatically "hired guns." They are servants of their sect carrying out a mission of (presumed) political necessity. Whether they realize it or not, there should always be a strong story reason for such an assignment. The Storyteller should know all those reasons — and how the players' success or failure at their goals will affect the chronicle as a whole. Frequently, murder is only a cover-up for greater crimes, and the players should certainly discover there's more to this assignment than meets the eye. Does the true reason why they are being ordered to murder a



URBAN LEGENDS

Kindred do not have newspapers, radio or television stations to disseminate information among themselves. Such means of communication would be too easily intercepted, and become a breach of the Masquerade. Instead, Kindred rely on a far older means of getting their news: word of mouth. Stories of all kinds travel through both sects like wildfire, shared by traveling Gangrel, Nosferatu chatting on SchreckNET, Toreador and Ventruue gathered at Elysium, Sabbat packs gathered for *ritae*, Tremere apprentices bartering for secrets with their fellows, and anarchs seeking to prove how tough they are by what they've faced (or claim to have seen). Good tale-tellers can always find an audience, and the more bizarre, mysterious, gruesome, or entertaining the story is, the better, at least among the Damned. Veracity, of course, is often debatable, but to an audience of legendary undead, almost anything can sound possible, under the right circumstances.

Through the centuries, Kindred have always had their legends. Their history and Traditions are rooted in them, and the Sabbat, at least in theory, interprets those legends as dreadfully real. In the Final Nights, new legends have also arisen, appropriate to the modern era, that appear in Kindred stories again and again, with various mutations — urban legends that may even have a core of truth at their root, despite the tabloid nature of countless retellings.

While some such urban legends might be about places, such as mausoleums or the Cavern of Lost Souls, most tend to center around particular events, famous (or notorious) Kindred, or other supernatural creatures. Well-known stories of the Nosferatu biker pack known as the Skullriders, the infamous Thrill Kill Club, the exploits of anarch leader Salvador Garcia, or what exactly caused Xavier to turn his back on the Camarilla, all provide grist for the Kindred rumormill.

Storytellers are encouraged to create their own "urban legends" for their chronicles, both to add a touch of color and depth to their own World of Darkness, and to provide possible story seeds for an ambitious — or simply curious — archon or templar to investigate, should a legend tickle their curiosity. Modern legends might even contain a kernel of truth — though what passes for "truth" in the World of Darkness can often prove stranger and more twisted than any fiction.

fellow sect member matter to them, or are they content with the explanation they are given (assuming any duplicity exists)? What might they discover that leads them to doubt the righteousness of their purpose? If they begin to doubt that, will they carry out their mission or look deeper? A charge that seemed simple on the surface may turn out to be not simple at all, and demand that the players choose how they will react to what they learn.

ESPIONAGE

Only the most trusted servants of the sect (which, unfortunately, sometimes overlaps with being the most expendable) are sent on espionage missions. Spies put their very unives on the line, as the penalty for being caught is usually a painful Final Death. While most missions of espionage will be short forays, with specific objectives, they are usually part of a much larger intelligence-gathering campaign, possibly leading up to direct conflict or preventing the enemy from mounting the same. The Storyteller should have some idea of the big picture, even if the players do not, like what their mission means in terms of their elders' ongoing plans for war or defense, and just how expendable they really are.

More common espionage stories involve counter-espionage: thwarting the plans of agents of the opposing sect. These stories are rarely instigated by superiors. Usually one or more of the characters stumbles across something suspicious and reports it to the proper authorities (if they have sufficient evidence to be believed), or the characters act on it themselves. Note that the characters need only thwart the opposition's plans, not learn the whole story, capture the agents responsible, or expose an entire conspiracy. This kind of story can be an excellent opening to a much longer, complex chronicle, as the players do not necessarily have to be archons or templars to start, but may earn that honor as a result of their actions.

Undercover operations most often take place within the sect. Archons and Inquisitors, in particular, spend a good deal of their time covertly investigating their own sectmates. Depending on the degree of crime their fellows are trying to hide, such investigations can be hazardous indeed. The Storyteller must know how far the subject of the investigation will go to avoid discovery, and who among the Kindred will aid or hinder the characters in their goals. As enforcers for the sect, the characters must often do more than simply thwart the adversary's plans. They must also attempt to get sufficient proof of her wrongdoing to convince the local prince, bishop or their own patrons to bring her to face the sect's brand of justice.

The most dangerous assignment is the deep-cover mission. While in theory a mole may maintain his cover for years until he is ordered to take action, that

kind of mission is rarely given to a sect official, as their talents are needed elsewhere. However, such an official, particularly one who has developed a good alternate identity (see Chapter Three), may be sent on a short-term foray, to accomplish a specific task and return within a specific length of time. A sect official may also find herself improvising such an alternative identity, if she chooses to bluff her way out of a tight situation rather than risk a fight she doesn't think she can win.

Undercover operatives should face all the horrors and temptations of the "other side," testing all the values they themselves hold, as well as their loyalties to their own sect. Undercover Sabbat must hide their Vinculi and explain any diablerie veins in their auras, as well as learn to deal with the Camarilla's hierarchy and strict Masquerade. Undercover Camarilla must deal with the mixed feelings of loyalty that participating in Vaulderie brings and the superior attitude most

THE BEST-LAID PLANS...

Undercover missions are dangerous for a reason: they very rarely go according to plan. Many such agents never return. However, just because one or more players' characters is caught does not mean their story is over. Even an adversary of the same sect may not be driven to murder right away. In that case, it's as important to discover what the captive really knows, how much he has managed to report to his superiors, and to then divert attention away from the object of the mission before "destroying the evidence" the captive represents. Both the Camarilla and the Sabbat are just as eager to capture such spies and interrogate them, rather than kill them outright. This is, of course, one reason why undercover agents so rarely know the big picture surrounding their goals. Undercover agents are almost by definition considered expendable by their superiors.

However, this does not mean they are necessarily expendable to their associates, or that escape is impossible. Both archon and templar coterie have been known to go to great risks in order to rescue a captured comrade, and the Storyteller should certainly give a good rescue plan a decent chance of succeeding while making sure the captured characters endure a sufficiently horrifying period of captivity while awaiting rescue. Keep in mind that there may be unknown allies among the captors as well, who may act just enough to tilt the balance in favor of the players but never actually reveal themselves. In short, just because the players' mission fails doesn't mean the story is over — only that the ending has changed.

Sabbat have toward mortal life. Even if her mission is successful, will the returning archon or templar ever view the tenets of her own sect in quite the same way again? Or will she now come under suspicion for knowing too much?

CHARACTER-CENTERED CHRONICLES

Chronicles may draw upon the internal conflicts and goals of the players' characters themselves as the primary source of stories. In that case, the Storyteller creates outside events and interactions with other characters to bring those internal conflicts sharply into focus, or to directly challenge a player character's personal goals. Storytellers should also look for chances to provide internal character conflicts in conjunction with more conventional plot-driven storylines, to give the players more than simply the goals of their mission to be concerned about. A story should be about more than what characters do — it should also touch on why they are doing it and how their actions affect them and their fellow Kindred personally.

PLAYING THE ODDS

Surviving as a vampire is playing the odds. Surviving while holding on to the vestiges of one's own Humanity with the tips of one's claws is really playing the odds — and the Beast has stacked the deck. For some characters, though, it's the only game worth playing. Possibly they have some religious faith, held over from their mortal youth, or they cling to a particular code of ethics or honor. Perhaps they are trying to atone for deeds in their past, or just plain resent being made one of the Damned. For these characters, this underlying internal conflict provides an additional dimension for all they do, including their duties as a sect official. These characters have a lot to struggle with, and it's the Storyteller's job to see that struggle given form. Present these characters with choices that challenge their humanity (and Humanity) in the line of duty. A mortal has witnessed too much — should they kill her or go to the trouble of arranging a plausible cover story? Will she be missed? What if an altered memory resurfaces? Are there any other options? Many of these situations will have no clear right answer, when a character must choose between the lesser of two wrongs. How will the character justify his actions to his own conscience, Path or code of ethics? When does the good of the sect — or the will of certain elders — take precedence over his own sense of honor? Where does he draw the line and what might tempt him to cross it?

Even the Sabbat templar or Inquisitor who has abandoned Humanity for a Path must still struggle to advance on his chosen Path or at least maintain his position. In addition to the demands of his Path, he has also taken on a responsibility, whether that is to serve the interests of his patron or the interests of the whole Sabbat by ferreting out the infernal from their ranks. Will there be times when the demands of duty come into conflict with the principles of his Path, or his own sense of honor? While not every story will demand the same degree of hard decisions from a character, the Storyteller should look for opportunities for the character to define the limits of her honor by what choices she makes. Conflicts between loyalty to a packmate or fellow templar versus loyalty to the bishop; conflicts based on her mortal past and associations; even personal likes and dislikes within the local Sabbat community all provide challenging roleplaying opportunities for the player, and reveal the internal struggle within her character's soul.

Whether the player's character is striving for personal redemption or slowly coming to terms with his own damnation, the strength of his Humanity or commitment to a chosen Path is best revealed under duress. If a player has described her character as having a strong aversion to harming children, bring out that aversion by having her character face a particularly inhuman child-vampire, or have her antagonist hold a group of children hostage while demanding her character release a notorious prisoner from captivity. If another player says his character seeks to lower his generation by diablerie, make him the target of a dangerous would-be diablerist two generations higher, or allow him to diablerize a powerful elder suspiciously easy to overcome, whose soul now constantly fights him for control even as he attempts to carry out his duties. Unless such internal character aspects are brought out and tested in the course of a story at least once in a while, they are meaningless. Used properly, such characteristics add emotional depth to a character, define what "personal horror" means to her, and provide excellent opportunities for roleplaying.

I NEVER PROMISED YOU A ROSE GARDEN

A character without any sense of honor or personal ethics, however adapted to the needs of unlife, will probably not be selected as a sect official by either sect. The servants of the sect must have at least some sense of duty to their position and be proven trustworthy and competent, in order to be considered for the job. Note that this does not necessarily mean a candidate must follow the ethics of Humanity, only that a potential candidate for either position must have demonstrated his suitability for the job at hand, which at the very least, means they can follow orders and get

things done. They must also be deemed capable of loyalty to something greater than themselves, whether that is the Camarilla or Sabbat as a whole, or a particular bishop, cardinal or justicar.

In the World of Darkness, very few issues can be clearly delineated into black and white, right and wrong. Almost all ethical issues are in shades of gray, where there simply are no right answers, only degrees of wrong. Whether a character serves his sect out of a sense of personal loyalty to an individual, a belief in the validity of the sect's cause, or just for his own personal advancement and the perks that come with the job, he still makes decisions that reflect his personal ethics. The Storyteller should design a story to present choices to a character that challenge those ethics. Is he willing sacrifice a companion if it means finally luring an old enemy into a trap? How far will she go in pursuit of a goal? Whose safety, if anyone's, does he value over his own? Does she prefer a straight fight or to stake her quarry from behind? Does he shrink at risking his own unlife in an uncertain situation? Does the character have a dark secret she will try to protect at all costs? Does he have a secret ambition, vice, weakness, prey exclusion, someone he cares for above all others, or a particular enemy he wants above all to destroy, or a vendetta he would do anything to carry out?

While providing an interesting story, the Storyteller should look for ways of presenting the character with significant and difficult choices that reveal or test the character's values. These are significant in that the decision the character makes will affect the outcome of the story and difficult in that the character must choose between options that all carry consequences. While some may have a lesser or greater chance of success, none are guaranteed, and none are without some degree of risk, or a potential price to be paid. If the character chooses to sacrifice a comrade, it is entirely possible that the comrade will die, or (especially if the comrade is another player's character) if he survives, will know he was judged expendable. While surprises may happen due to circumstances outside the character's knowledge, to take away the consequences connected to his choice cheapens the significance of it. If a player puts a lot of thought and roleplaying effort into how her character faces such dilemmas, don't make her decision meaningless by a Storyteller *deus ex machina*. Paying a price for success is a time-honored convention of storytelling. The player characters must make the choice as to how high a price they are willing to pay.

It is up to the Storyteller to present these difficult choices and tailor them to be relevant to the character's own personality and values. For a well-established character, those choices may be obvious — an archon who deeply admires his sire might be reluctant to



believe his sire guilty of conspiring against the prince, or a templar's loyalty to her bishop may be severely tested when she learns that the bishop deliberately allowed two packs of Sabbat to walk into a Camarilla trap as a ploy to discredit a rival for the archbishopric of the city. For a newer character with less personal history to draw upon, such choices create that history, and help define what that character's values truly are.

A CHILLING SENSE OF HORROR

How does a Storyteller provide that necessary sense of personal horror in a chronicle? How does she reach players already jaded by excessive blood, gore and body counts, whose characters delight in running down old ladies on their motorcycles, or refer to mortals as "juicebags" and seem totally oblivious to any semblance of compassion?

Horror, in its most basic form, relies on three things: it's unexpected, it's frightening and it hits at gut level. Horror is at its most convincing when it presents an unexpected and frightening threat to something that matters to the character, either herself or someone else she cares about.

Horror plays hide-and-seek with player expectations. A Sabbat haven may be in an upscale suburb and appear perfectly normal and pristine, yet the players get an uneasy feeling as they explore it because it isn't what they expected. They begin to worry what is hidden behind every locked door, every unexplored room. Denying them their expectations only raises the level of suspense, until the real horror is discovered. As with building suspense, less is more — a mere suggestion of possibilities, such as the scent of old blood, begins to set up the expectation of things far worse to come. Horror can also rely on surprise, appearing when characters least expect it, or believe themselves to finally be safe. Or it can come from unforeseen sources, such as realizing that a trusted ally has betrayed them, or that they have just left the prince in the company of an assassin sent to kill her.

Horror is frightening. It preys on the characters' deepest fears, whether in regard to their own unives, the well-being of a companion or ally, their sense of honor, their status in the sect, or their mastery of their internal Beast. Most of all, horror often represents the unknown, which is one of the few things that can terrify even an elder. It's one thing to be familiar with what kind of enemy you face, but it's quite another when you cannot identify who or what seems to be hunting you, nor why. Horror can also come from within. The Beast is never far from the surface, struggling to claw through a vampire's veneer of Humanity or the ethics of her Path in order to indulge in unrestrained savagery. Frenzy is worrisome enough for a sect official, whose mission

may depend on him keeping his cool. But to lose control of one's own self through possession or as the target of another's Dominate or Presence not only risks the mission at hand, but is terrifying on a deeply personal level — can the victim ever again trust her own judgment once she realizes she has been so compromised?

Horror is threatening. If the character doesn't care, it is nearly impossible to horrify him. What do your players' characters care about? What do they seek most to defend? Their own existence, certainly, but what else? Their status, their position in the sect? Their reputation and honor? Their packmates or allies? The bishop or cardinal they serve? Their sect? Mortal family members, or their own hard-won blocks of city turf? Once you know what the characters will protect, you know what kinds of threats will move them to react. While some characters value very little above their own self-interest, still others put great store by their duty to a superior, or take pride in their reputations, whatever they may be. Some might go to great lengths to achieve a particular goal, whether it is to succeed at a given assignment or to carry out a vendetta against an old enemy or rival. Some will shrug off the Final Deaths of half their pack but nearly hit frenzy at any aspersion cast against their own courage. Some cling to the ideals of their sect as the only stable thing in the eternal night — but what will they do if those ideals are proven hollow or the leader they trusted betrays them?

Horror is also most effective when used in moderation, and in sharp contrast with its exact opposite: a sense of safety and security, of being in control. Gratuitous amounts of gore, blood, violence and macabre tortures tend to dull the effect such images have on those who experience them, whether player or player's character. After a while, such things become almost dull. The players no longer take any of it seriously. Atrocities committed on a dozen faceless mortals are meaningless to a Sabbat character, and even the most humane of Camarilla archons can become hardened to casual murder in time. However, when appearing in unexpected places or at a time and manner the players are not anticipating, when they feel secure, a single frightening or gruesome image makes a powerful impression indeed, particularly when it strikes at something far closer to home. Horror is strengthened by dramatic presentation, the building up of tension to a sharp peak, or the sudden and dramatic violation of the character's sense of security. Save your most shocking ammunition for when it will matter — don't waste too much time with incidents that the players' characters will consider mere window dressing. Lull your players into thinking they're safe

and in control and then show them that their characters aren't as safe as they thought.

The most powerful horror occurs offstage — and is made all the more fearsome by the players' own speculation. In many cases, the remaining evidence of an atrocity that has already occurred is far more powerful than witnessing the deed itself. This forces the players' imaginations to fill in the gaps, drawing them into the story, making them participants rather than simply an audience. The treasured necklace of a missing coterie member, left pinned to the wall of their communal haven by an unknown enemy, carries with it the combined threats to their comrade and the taunt that their own haven is no longer inviolable. A small pile of ash, accompanied by a bloody stake, discovered in a trusted ally's haven demands answers — was their ally the victim or the killer? The unexplained scent of fresh blood where none is expected spurs an almost frenzied search for its cause. The realization that instead of locking the wight out of the sewer complex, the characters have sealed it in with them raises the suspense — and the players' expectations — to a whole new level.

FOLLOW THE LEADER

Becoming an archon, templar or Inquisitor means more than the fact that your players have just earned themselves some sect status and authority, which, in most cases, they have. It also means that they have assumed a responsibility that they have agreed to consider over and above their own personal agendas (in theory, anyway). It means they have declared their loyalty to their sect, and to at least one superior representative of that sect: a justicar, bishop, archbishop, senior Inquisitor, whoever. And it means they have agreed to take that superior's orders, whether they necessarily agree with them or not. It does not mean their unives have become easier, only that the scale of their problems has changed (and those problems have likely increased in quantity).

MOTIVATIONS TO SERVE

Why do sect officials do what they do, risk their precious hides and unives in the service of the Camarilla or the Sabbat? Why have your players' characters taken on this duty, and what do they expect to get out of it? Even more importantly from the Storyteller's viewpoint, how can you present your characters with stories that challenge them, not only in their abilities to get the job done, but on a more intimate, personal level as well? How do you test their souls as well as their wits, and make each story meaningful as well as entertaining?

Sect Idealist — Some sect officials truly believe in the ideals of their sects. These characters have also accepted the party line regarding the evils of the

opposing sect, most likely based on hearsay or propaganda. But how long will their idealism last in the face of their leaders' hypocrisy, or when encountering equally idealistic members of the opposition? Can they trust or work with packmates or fellow archons whose ideals are not so high, or who serve for their own ends? How do their ideals lead them to approach their duties differently than their fellows?

Cynic — These archons and templars might call themselves pragmatic or realistic; others might call them pessimists. Perhaps they serve just as loyally, but their vision (or so they believe) is clear — they know their sect is wrong as often as it's right, and that their leaders always have their own agendas. If you have to break a few heads to get the job done, then so be it, the bastards probably deserved it anyway. But how far will they go in the pursuit of their duty to a sect they have lost some faith in? What keeps them going, even when the going gets rough, and the risks get high? What values do they still cherish and how far will they go to defend them?

Devotion to Duty — Some archons and templars take their responsibilities very seriously because their sense of duty and honor demands it. They might have been soldiers or held other positions of responsibility in their breathing days, or they believe that once they've given their word, no further questions need be asked. But when honor and duty come into conflict, how can they justify themselves? Is the end more important than the means to achieve it? What will they do when the obedience and loyalty they have long given their superiors comes into conflict with doing what they also know is just? Will they condemn and punish the innocent because that is what their duty demands?

Ass-Kisser — These characters have it all figured out. If you want to succeed, you need to know people at the top of the food chain. They're out to prove their value to the ones who matter and make themselves look good in the bargain. Some might seem to do remarkably well for themselves. But when the shit hits the fan, who can they call? Will they be able to pursue their own ambitions without pissing off everyone else around them? Or is a lesson in consequences going to hit them upside the head when they least expect it?

Bully — Screw the party line and the politics. These characters aren't in it for anything but themselves, and a chance to prove how tough they are at the expense of anyone not strong enough to stand up to them. But those who rely on bullying tactics will eventually find themselves facing someone who isn't so easily intimidated. What happens when they find themselves out of favor and on the streets alone, without backup? What goes around, eventually comes

around. How hard will they fall, and will they learn anything from the experience?

Vendetta — These characters pursue their duty with an eye out for the chance to get their revenge on whoever hurt or betrayed them in the past, or just plain pissed them off. Their desire for revenge is almost an obsession. It colors their judgment and strongly influences their actions where the target of their vendetta is concerned. Characters on a vendetta make very good patsies, as their drive for vengeance is so predictable, an adversary need only point them in the right direction and away they'll go. Will hatred and desire for vindication blind them to the truth, or cost them what remains of their morality? Will they disregard their responsibilities and honor in order to fulfill their desire for "satisfaction"?

Redemption — Some characters strive to redeem themselves by attempting to do something constructive and "good" with their unlives, or perhaps they seek to repay a debt by devoting their own unlives to serving that same sect. Whatever their reasons, they view their duty as far more than a job; it is also their means of expunging their pasts and earning grace for their souls. But how will they balance their desire to do the right thing with the shifting moralities and the harsh realities of the World of Darkness? How will they know what the "right thing" is and how far can they bend the precepts of their own code of ethics before it breaks and leaves them floundering?

Personal Loyalty — These characters give their devotion not to the sect, but to a particular leader, whether that individual is a justicar, bishop or Inquisitor. Loyalty may vary in degree, and is not necessarily blind, but it is the foundation upon which these characters base their service to their sect. If it comes down to a choice between their loyalties to their leader, their loyalty to their sect, or their own unlives, though, where will their allegiances truly lie?

Fanatic — These characters can scare even their own sectmates with their ardor for the cause. Their obsessive beliefs allow no room for questions or doubt, but they can easily be misdirected by clever antagonists into accepting what appears to fall within their beliefs as the apparent truth. Will they be able to see past their own blind spots and recognize the truth before rewriting it to match their expectations? Or will they be so blinded by their beliefs that they miss obvious warning signs of trouble, and end up as martyrs for their cause?

OF HUBRIS AND HYPOCRISY

Sect officials see both sides of their societies, the bold and righteous mask each sect presents to the vast majority of its members, and the underside, with all the

attendant treachery and ugliness. They see — and indeed, participate in — the charades their leaders must sometimes put on to maintain order among the rank and file. By virtue of their position, they can become privy to things that the ordinary Kindred never knows about and for the good of the sect must never discover. Both sects make compromises between their ideals and maintaining their own stability — neither welcomes actual change. The archons, templars and Inquisitors are the ones who must carry out those necessary compromises, to maintain order or at least the appearance of it on behalf of the sect's leaders. Whether that means enforcing a Masquerade the Sabbat archbishop would never admit publicly must be kept or methodically hunting down a Ventrue's rebellious child before she flees to the anarchs, there are clearly times when what the sect says and what its servants must do come into conflict. Sect officials are sometimes called to risk injury or Final Death to defend their sects' ideals, even though some of those ideals may well be lies. Nobody likes to think they're risking their necks for a lie. How then do your players' characters justify their positions, and the choices they make, to their untitled sectmates, to their superiors in the sect, and to themselves?

Cracks in the Ivory Tower

The Camarilla maintains that the Masquerade is all that stands between the Kindred as a race and certain extinction at the hands of mortals. The interpretation of the Masquerade and the Traditions rests solely in the hands of the elders, who freely bend the Masquerade and the Traditions as they please to suit their own goals, yet use the slightest infraction as a weapon to keep the young in line. The Ivory Tower is a refuge for the elder elite, built to defend their interests against the ambitions of their descendants. The justicars have become the ultimate practical authority, greater even than princes — at a justicar's word, a prince may well fall — and yet the justicars are elders themselves, with centuries of ambition and accumulated prestation debt to balance against the power of their office. The archons are the eyes, ears and word of the justicars and the Inner Council, independent agents authorized to investigate, interpret and enforce the Traditions. Yet they are for the most part the enforcers of the status quo, and the "crimes" they investigate most fervently are those that undermine the elder foundations of the sect. The Camarilla proclaims its rule of order, but status and clever use of political acumen can earn immunity from justice, while those on the fringes of Kindred society whose favor carries no prestation value often become convenient scapegoats when examples must be made.

Inside the Cult of Caine

The Sabbat claims freedom as the natural right of all Cainites, but the sect recognizes the need for certain constraints upon its members for its own survival. In theory, the sect values individualism and independence. In practice, however, it relies upon ideology, *ritae*, the Vaulderie and the threat of its greatest adversary to keep the sect from splintering into its component pacts and factions. The Sabbat thrives on its cult mentality, encouraging its members to believe themselves free from the chains of mortal ethics while enforcing its own code with ruthless efficiency. It claims to interact with mortals only as predators, yet maintains its own unspoken Masquerade for the same reasons the Camarilla does. Its leaders proclaim the rights of all Sabbat, yet use any means at their disposal to keep the rank and file in line and their ferocity pointed firmly at the Camarilla. The Inquisition's authority extends much further than the investigation of diabolism — they have become the witch-hunters of the Sword of Caine. No one is immune from their scrutiny. The templars act as the personal bodyguards, agents, and enforcers of the Sabbat leader they serve, supporting the status quo out of personal loyalties or pure self-interest.

The Code of Milan demands that all Sabbat put the good of the sect above all other loyalties, even their own unives. "The good of the Sabbat" has become the principle by which all actions are judged and justified. It's amazing how often what benefits the sect also benefits a clever or ambitious Cainite. Or more often, how a clever, ambitious Cainite can use the rhetoric of the sect to his own advantage. After all, if one is acting for the good of the Sabbat, any deceit, treachery, theft, cruelty, abuse or curtailment of the rights of one's fellow Sabbat can be justified, particularly by a templar, paladin or Red Robe acting in their "official" capacity.

Chinks in the armor

Both the Camarilla and the Sabbat claim ideals that they do not in fact follow, but the real hypocrisy of the sects can be found on more personal levels. Perhaps (that is, "hopefully") even your players' characters are not immune. How do they see themselves, and what they do to carry out their duties? How does what they do make them feel about themselves? What would they do or not do for the good of the sect? Given opportunity, will they be any less hypocritical in pursuit of their goals than the sects they serve, or whom they will really protect?

Many sect leaders present all they do in terms of how it benefits the sect, though they clearly benefit personally as well. Some raise creative self-justification to an art form, to the point where they may well honestly believe what they do is righteous and necessary, for the

good of the sect. Such hubris is hardly rare, even among mortal politicians, and it is probably even more common among the selfish undead. In time, the politician or the cop can identify so strongly with his office that it becomes impossible to separate out what is good for him personally and what is good for "the people" he claims to serve. Some may have started out with the best of intentions, but realized that to rise to where they could finally "do some good," they might have to cut a few corners and make a few deals along the way. But that kind of rationalization can be a deceptive path to tread. At what point do they turn their backs on their ideals? Or do they continue to use whatever means necessary to achieve their goals, because they still truly believe that they're serving a higher purpose?

As sect officials, your players' characters have made a commitment to uphold the sect, thrown their personal status, ego and deathless future in with the sect and its hierarchy. Just as cops stand together against outsiders who would put limits on their jurisdiction or powers of law enforcement, so too do the sect officials stand together to preserve their authority and prestige, even if they know some of their fellows are abusing the system. What places limits on one archon or Inquisitor places limits on them all, and no sect official wants that. Would your players' characters accept curtailment of their prerogatives as sect officials if it meant that a brutal and ruthless fellow-archon or templar would be reined in, or would they consider that too high a price to pay? Not that *they* would abuse their power — of course not — but they have to be able to fulfill their duties, right?

You might want to show your players how some of their fellow archons or Anointed have fallen, those who seem willing to use any means to achieve their ends, or abuse their power for their own advantage. But don't stop there. Provide them with opportunities to stretch their principles, or to commit small abuses of their power in order to achieve something that's important to them. Entangle them in ties of prestation or blackmail with someone they find contemptible. Let them see what they have become, and see whether they will be horrified... or full of self-justifying excuses.

Of course, your players may not be of such delicate sensibilities, but even so, they are bound to have things they think they will never do, whether that's run from a fight, betray a packmate, abuse an innocent, or kill for the sheer thrill of killing. Or there may be things they believe in, such as their value to their sect, the truth about how a companion met her Final Death, or their own incorruptible integrity. Whatever it is, test it. Give them a chance to give in a little in return for something they want, see how far even the strongest can learn to bend, and how they explain their actions

THE NO-WIN SCENARIO

The World of Darkness is a twisted reflection of our own, where greed, cruelty, selfishness and despair are far more prevalent than generosity, kindness and hope, particularly among the Damned. High ideals are tarnished with bitter pragmatism or rotted away from within by self-interest and hypocrisy. The demands of their duties (and the creative plot twists the Storyteller throws in their paths) often require sect officials to make difficult, soul-searching, or desperate choices between what they would like to do, and what they feel must be done in order to uphold their responsibilities to their superiors and their sect. They don't always succeed — sometimes their only choice for plugging a hole in the Masquerade may be to kill a mortal whose only crime was learning too much about the creature who destroyed his family. Sometimes their best efforts will not prevent the bishop they serve from falling prey to the treachery of her rival, leaving them not only without a patron to serve, but possibly in danger themselves as loose ends that need tying up.

That being said, no player likes to lose all the time, nor do they enjoy being faced with a situation where every move they make is doomed from the start. While it may be more realistic to have them fail more often than they succeed, even more in keeping with the mood of *Vampire* and the World of Darkness... well, let's face it — losing most of the time isn't much fun. Your players are apt to become frustrated, bored and look for other ways to spend their free time.

Try to maintain a balance in how often the players succeed in their story goals, and how often they do not. Success should never be a cakewalk. Perhaps they had to take extraordinary risks to rescue a prisoner from the Sabbat or lost someone valuable to them in the course of tracking down the source of a virulent blood-curse that had afflicted half the packs in the city. Success in a story can be partial, or it can come with a substantial price tag, but on average your players should succeed more often than they fail. The occasional failure then becomes memorable in a way that motivates them to move onward, and can provide future story seeds. Perhaps next time the Ventrue primogen won't be so lucky, or the anarchs so well-prepared.

Make them work for it, but don't make it impossible.

afterward. The whole point of hubris as a theme is how even the most despicable of deeds can become justified in the eyes of the doer, and that even the most noble or strong-willed of characters can stumble or fall.

ALTERNATIVE CHRONICLES

Chronicles built around sect officials offer a wide range of possibilities — while you may just allow all the players to be part of an archon coterie or group of templars attached to a particular bishop, here are some variations on the theme for you and your players to consider.

ARCHON AND TEMPLAR PRELUDES

Whether your players' characters are long-running characters who have been recruited by a justicar or bishop to their new duties or have been specifically created with these roles in mind, how and why they accepted their new positions may be worth exploring as a story in itself. There are no universal requirements in either sect for these official positions. Each justicar, bishop or senior Inquisitor makes his decisions based on his own set of criteria and current needs, not unlike the way a sire selects a childe. Who that justicar, bishop, cardinal or senior Inquisitor is, what his motivations and current plans might be, or his reasons for recruiting the players' characters, is up to you, the Storyteller. Were the characters recruited as a group, or individually at different times? Is it just one or two of

the coterie who are actually archons, with the others as their servires and allies, or does the coterie represent all the templars that the archbishop of that city has at her command? Were the characters a local coterie that got drawn into a plot of interest to a justicar because they were in the wrong place at the right time or discovered something they weren't supposed to know about? Playing out a "recruiting story" gives established characters a reason for accepting their new roles as sect officials. Such a story also allows new characters a chance to get established and familiar to both the players and the Storyteller, and starts creating the detailed character background needed for future storylines.

A good introductory story can set the tone and mood for many future stories to come. Does the archbishop have a trial period for templar candidates where they must prove their competence or worthiness? Does the justicar choose the characters because they're already involved in something that he's very interested in, or is he simply looking to fill out a roster of useful agents? Do the Inquisitors have formal initiations and oaths, or tests the candidate must pass in order to prove her loyalty to the sect and ability to resist infernal temptation? Does an older, experienced archon or templar take an interest in one or more of the characters and serve as a mentor to them, providing advice or hints that help them learn the ropes? Or is



there another who is jealous or suspicious of the new recruits, and becomes their rival and chief annoyance as they are trying to prove themselves?

THE DIVERSIFIED COTERIE

While sect officials occasionally work together in coterie, this is not the usual case. Most archons tend to work on their own, or in pairs or trios. A particular bishop's templars are rarely all on duty simultaneously, nor are they necessarily from the same pack, or even on good terms with each other. But if you have a group of five or more players, what do you do with them all?

Consider broadening the coterie's assets and abilities by diversification — perhaps one or two of them can be the archons, while others can be their servires, who support them but have concerns and priorities of their own as well. Others might even be their ghouls. Particularly in the Camarilla, ghouls are useful associates to have, due to their more contemporary mix of skills (such as computer programming or familiarity with modern pop culture), and the fact that they can act in daylight when Kindred cannot. Kindred who act as part of a group like this have the advantage of anonymity. They can do things an archon cannot, either because the archon is too well known, or must put in an appearance at Elysium that night. But while the archon is at Elysium keeping the Toreador primogen busy, the members of her coterie can be searching the Toreador's haven for blackmail evidence.

An Inquisitor coterie usually consists of a mix of Inquisitors and templars, but might also include a few Cainites who are not visibly associated with the Inquisitors, who aid in undercover investigations. These additional agents might have useful skills, education or contacts that allow them to go where the Inquisitors or templars cannot. Perhaps one is a Nosferatu, whose contacts with other Cainites can provide valuable information to the Inquisitors. Perhaps another one has been a member of a number of war parties, and thus has old war comrades scattered in packs throughout the northeastern states with whom he can share blood, swap war stories, and also hear rumors of great interest to the Inquisition about the local Licks.

Templars not only serve the bishop but are members of packs and must also frequently interact with the templars of other Sabbat leaders. Consider a chronicle where the players are templars serving three different Sabbat leaders, either in the same city or involved in a siege. For the good of the sect, the templars must interact, possibly working together on a delicate matter that concerns them all equally, though their masters may not necessarily agree. Or have only one or two of your players' characters actually be templars, and have the others be their old pack members, who can get involved in their business as it suits them. This is a good

approach if you have certain players who cannot attend game sessions regularly — if they're there, they will have something to do, if not, the chronicle doesn't stall.

Whatever the mix of characters you have to work with, make sure that each one has some interesting and unique abilities and backgrounds that make them an asset to the coterie as a whole, and satisfy the player's desire to be unique and cool. This also means you should tailor the story around the different abilities of all the characters, not just the archons or templars. Make sure each character has something to contribute to the coterie's success, and sufficient "screen time" during a game session to feel as if they're important to the story. Look for ways to make a given story or mission personally important to at least one character in the coterie, or feature something from their background. Does a character know a foreign language or have a specialization in biosciences or finance? Find a way to make those skills useful by interpreting clues for their comrades. Does the character have contacts or even childer in another city? Allow her to use those contacts to find a safe haven or to arrange a meeting with the elusive Malkavian primogen. Was the character a cop in mortal life? Give him an edge in talking his way through the local precinct station to find the police report from a suspicious fire eight years ago.

BOTH SIDES OF THE FENCE

If you have a mature group of players who enjoy both Camarilla and Sabbat chronicles, consider asking them to create characters for two different coterie who operate in roughly the same area. One coterie will be Camarilla archons (and their supporting servires and allies), and one of Sabbat Anointed, either a mix of Inquisitors and templars, or just templars. Alternate between the two coterie, playing the Camarilla characters one session, and the Sabbat ones the next. Depending on the storyline each is following, they may even come into conflict with each other, with the Storyteller playing the other sect's characters (at least until the players realize who they're facing).

This kind of chronicle can be made even more interesting by providing a storyline that is broader than sect politics — a mystery that is of vital interest to both sides, and originates from sources unknown to either. This could be anything from the threat of a really major (live on 60 Minutes!) shattering of the Masquerade to a particularly dangerous and crafty Cainite lost to Wassail, or to a mysterious blood-borne epidemic that appears to be designed to wipe vampires from the face of the earth. Will the characters become enemies or uneasy allies with their opposite numbers? Can either coterie overcome their own distrust and antipathy of the other side and the objections of their elders, who find it easier to blame their traditional

enemies than find out the truth? Perhaps some members of one coterie have a history with their opposite numbers, such as previous altercations or an alliance that predates the sects. Maybe a character on one side is related by blood to one on the other. Look for ways to play upon the real conflicts between the sects as well as reasons they might need to communicate, if not cooperate, in the face of a greater threat than either can face alone. Even a good conflict can be a lot more satisfying when the characters on the opposing side have personalities and history of their own.

ONE ON ONE

A chronicle based around a sect official also provides a great opportunity for only one player and the Storyteller, played either face-to-face as a regular tabletop story, or even over the Internet. Having only a single player-protagonist allows the Storyteller to focus on the background, ambitions, and motivations of that player character as she seeks to fulfill her duties to her sect as well as deal with how those duties affect her personally. Having a single character also opens up different kinds of stories not feasible with a coterie, particularly long-term undercover investigations or high-risk missions (see Chapter Four for more ideas). A single player character also has far more opportunity to be developed in greater depth over the course of the chronicle, without having to balance the desires and needs of multiple players and characters. That character becomes in effect the star of her own show.

Another use for a one-on-one chronicle is to fill in backstory: to play out scenes or incidents that occurred in a character's past, in order to create a more richly detailed history for him. That history can then be used by the Storyteller as reference for making future stories more personal for that character. Playing through parts of a character's backstory, rather than simply highlighting it in a paragraph of background description, makes it more real to both the player and the Storyteller. That rooftop pursuit of a Gangrel turncoat in Detroit or that grueling night of interrogation and torture at the hands of a Tremere Quaestor suddenly becomes far more than a paragraph on a page — it becomes a memory that means something to both the player character and the Storyteller. Note that if you are playing out an incident in a character's backstory, the character may appear to be at extreme risk, but she will never actually meet Final Death, since it's pretty obvious that no matter what *else* happened to her, she did survive the incident.

SECT OFFICIALS AS ADVERSARIES

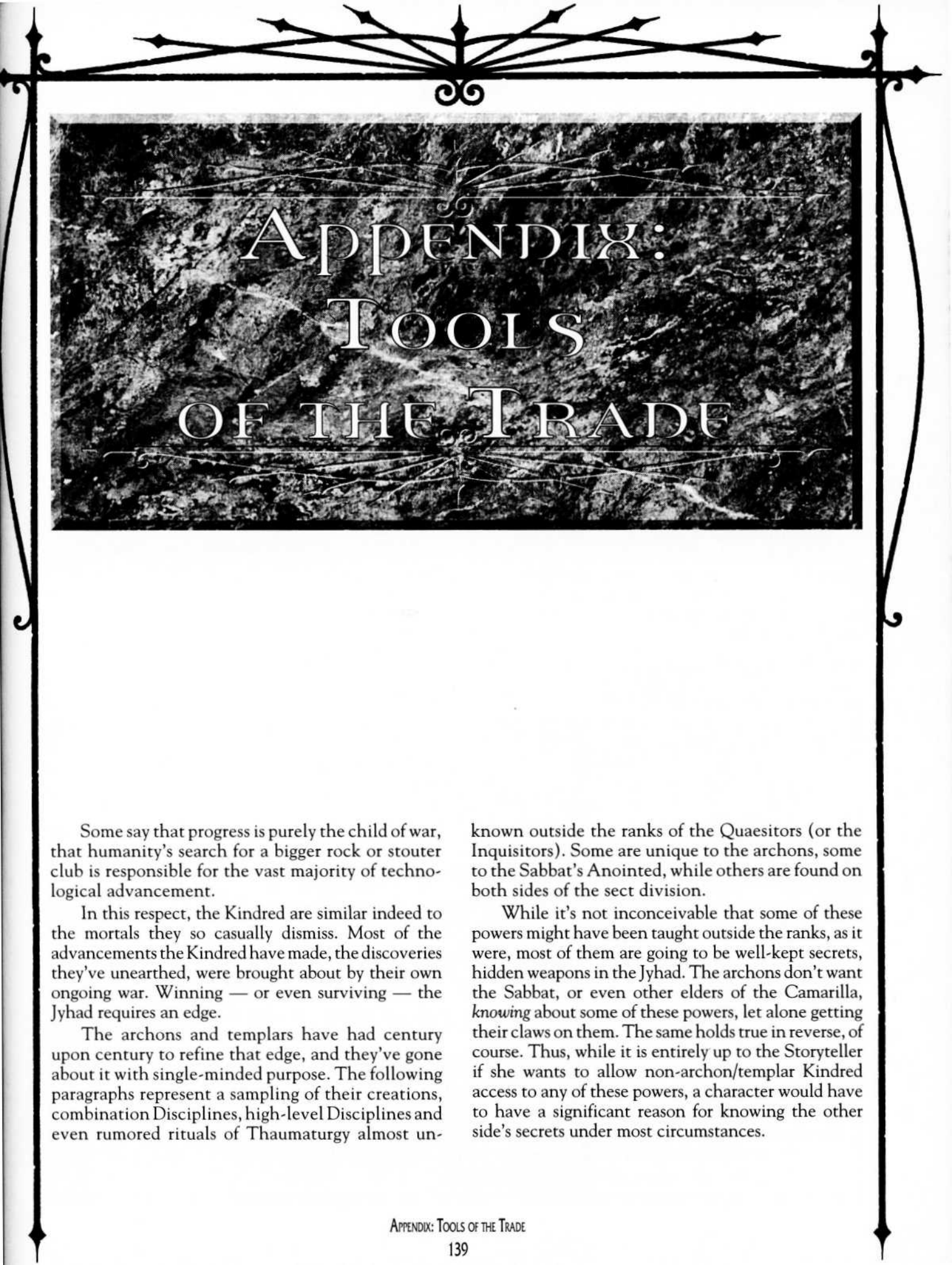
While most of this book assumes the players' characters are sect officials, that need not always be the case. Depending on the needs of your chronicle, archons,

Inquisitors and templars also make formidable and persistent adversaries for your players. Whether the characters are in fact guilty of a crime deserving such attention is not necessarily relevant, only that they are *under suspicion* of being so, and find themselves suddenly put on the defensive by powerful agents of their own sect. If they are innocent (at least of the current charges), they may be forced to turn investigator themselves in order to not only clear their own names, but bring the real culprits to the attention of the proper authorities. If they are guilty, the investigation of an archon or Inquisitor into their affairs is a perfectly plausible consequence for the Storyteller to introduce. The investigating official need not be infallible, of course, but the players should have to work hard to get themselves off the hook, especially if they truly deserve it.

Even if your players' characters are sect officials, another archon, templar or Inquisitor can prove to be a plausible and difficult adversary. Templars of different Sabbat leaders often come into conflict, especially if the leaders they serve are also rivals in some way, and rivalries between templars serving the same leader are not unknown. And while archons are less likely to have rivalries as deadly as those between templars, they aren't necessarily all going to see eye to eye on various issues. They may even come into conflict unknowingly, as a result of the poor communications between the different justicars, or because they are acting independently without contact from their patron. Or the players' primary adversary in a story may turn out to be an official of the opposing sect, who has all the contacts, agents and abilities described elsewhere in this book as appropriate for them.

As with any other adversary, a sect official should not be easy to simply beat up, intimidate, or take out of action. He should either be of sufficient age and experience to make him more than a match for even two or three of the coterie together (but perhaps not all of them at once, if he's stupid enough to take on those odds), or he should have sufficient political or social connections that the players cannot use brute force or intimidation against him without suffering embarrassing repercussions ("Really, losing your temper like that, and at the prince's reception! I can't take you *anywhere*, can I?"). These repercussions may come from their own superiors and from the local Kindred rumor mill ("I daresay he must be good for *something*, but how many Ming vases does one usually need broken in a single evening?"). And of course, if the players are not sect officials themselves, annoying one is never a good way to guarantee a long and trouble-free eternity — a vampire can hold a grudge for a very, very long time indeed.





APPENDIX: TOOLS OF THE TRADE

Some say that progress is purely the child of war, that humanity's search for a bigger rock or stouter club is responsible for the vast majority of technological advancement.

In this respect, the Kindred are similar indeed to the mortals they so casually dismiss. Most of the advancements the Kindred have made, the discoveries they've unearthed, were brought about by their own ongoing war. Winning — or even surviving — the Jyhad requires an edge.

The archons and templars have had century upon century to refine that edge, and they've gone about it with single-minded purpose. The following paragraphs represent a sampling of their creations, combination Disciplines, high-level Disciplines and even rumored rituals of Thaumaturgy almost un-

known outside the ranks of the Quaesitors (or the Inquisitors). Some are unique to the archons, some to the Sabbat's Anointed, while others are found on both sides of the sect division.

While it's not inconceivable that some of these powers might have been taught outside the ranks, as it were, most of them are going to be well-kept secrets, hidden weapons in the Jyhad. The archons don't want the Sabbat, or even other elders of the Camarilla, *knowing* about some of these powers, let alone getting their claws on them. The same holds true in reverse, of course. Thus, while it is entirely up to the Storyteller if she wants to allow non-archon/templar Kindred access to any of these powers, a character would have to have a significant reason for knowing the other side's secrets under most circumstances.

COMBINATION DISCIPLINES

QUICKEN SIGHT (AUSPEX •, CELERITY ••)

The hand is not quicker than the eye when the eye belongs to an archon or templar with this power. Quicken Sight allows the character to see fast-moving objects in detail that even Heightened Senses alone cannot reveal. A character with this power can focus on and follow a single card while the deck is shuffled, track the single loaded chamber in a game of Russian roulette, read the headlines on a newspaper as he drives past the newsstand at 60 mph or even pick out subliminal images in film.

System: The player spends one blood point to activate this power, which lasts for a scene. Any time the character wishes to see, follow or examine something that is moving too quickly for normal observation, the player must make a Wits + Alertness roll (difficulty based on how quickly the item is moving, but normally 6 or 7). Even one success allows the character to observe the item, though more successes bring greater detail and clarity.

This power costs 9 experience points to learn.

IRON FAÇADE (FORTITUDE •, OBFUSCATE •••)

Battles are often won not by the strength or weaponry of the combatants, but in the psychology of war. The appearance of invulnerability is often sufficient to unsettle or even rout a superior foe. With this power, the Kindred creates just such an appearance, seeming to shrug off heavy or even near-crippling blows like so much water. This power is most commonly found among archons, but its use among templars is not unknown.

System: The player rolls Manipulation + Subterfuge (difficulty 6). If successful, the character appears to be unwounded and functioning at full capacity regardless of how badly injured he actually is. This power does not actually heal wounds or reduce dice-pool penalties; it simply appears to do so, making it impossible for the enemy to judge the character's true state. The power lasts for a scene, or until the character reaches the Incapacitated health level. A vampire with Auspex can see through this power if her Auspex exceeds the character's Obfuscate.

This power costs 10 experience points to learn.

NAME OF THE FALLEN (AUSPEX •••, THAUMATURGY •)

Name of the Fallen could likely be made to function with Necromancy in place of Thaumaturgy at the Storyteller's discretion. Because few archons or templars have access to this Discipline, however, this is not a standard technique.

System: The player must spend a blood point and roll Perception + Empathy; the difficulty depends on whether the subject was mortal or vampire, as well as on the length of time since he died. The character must have in her possession at least a small piece of the corpse, though something as tiny as a finger bone or even the ashes of a Kindred who has suffered Final Death will suffice. If the roll fails, that character may not try to identify that particular subject again unless she can find a new sample of the body. If the roll indicates a botch, the character receives false information. The knowledge granted by this power appears instantly; the character falls into no "trance" such as that experienced when using Spirit's Touch.

This power costs 10 experience points to learn.

The Kindred with this power may identify a deceased person, Kindred or kine, simply by handling a piece of the corpse.

NAME OF THE FALLEN

Time since death	Difficulty if Kindred	Difficulty if kine
Less than 24 hours	4	4
One day to one week	6	4
Less than one month	7	6
Less than six months	8	6
Less than one year	10	6
Less than ten years	10*	7
Less than one century	10**	8
Greater than one century	NA	10

* Discerning the origin of a corpse-portion this old requires three successes.

** Discerning the origin of a corpse-portion this old requires five successes.

RANDOM PATTERNS (AUSPEX ••, DEMENTATION ••)

Developed by Malkavian templars but slowly increasing in usage among archons as well, Random Patterns allows the character to anticipate an opponent's next move in time to counter it. Blows can be blocked or avoided before they're even thrown, pursuit can be cut off and bluffs can be called. The power doesn't allow the character to see into the future per se, so much as it reads the patterns in the chaos and random chance that surround the target and allows the Kindred to determine his next move based on previous actions and lines of probability.

System: The player spends a blood point and rolls Perception + Empathy (or Awareness, if you're using that optional Talent), against a difficulty of 5 to 7, determined by the Storyteller's assessment of how predictable the opponent is based on his nature. For instance, a character with a Nature of Curmudgeon or Perfectionist is probably fairly predictable and thus difficulty 5, while a Nature of Deviant or Monster is probably less predictable and thus difficulty 7. The difficulty can be further modified by derangements. If the roll succeeds, the character adds a number of automatic successes to his next action equal to the number of successes on the Random Patterns roll. This action must be a contested or combat-related

roll against the target. For example, the bonus could be applied to pursuit, melee or dodge, but not to the activation of a Discipline.

This power costs 14 experience points to learn.

FLESH OF WIND AND WATER (CELERITY ••, VICISSITUDE ••••)

Under normal conditions, a Tzimisce (or other user of Vicissitude) who seeks to reshape his own form must take the time to mold his features and limbs into the desired shape. This makes it difficult to adapt to changing situations, such as the chaos of combat or the need for sudden disguise. Flesh of Wind and Water (so named because of the rippling effect seen in the flesh as it operates) allows the Tzimisce to make those alterations allowed by the first three levels of Vicissitude almost instantly (each use of the power takes but a single turn), without the need to physically sculpt the alterations. This power can be used on the Cainite wielding the power only; if he wishes to alter someone else, he must do so at the normal rate and with the normal methods. This power is unknown outside of the Sabbat.

System: The player spends two blood points each time this power is invoked, and must make all standard rolls required for the use of Vicissitude. He may use only a single Vicissitude power per use of Flesh of Wind



and Water. Thus, if he wanted to use both Fleshcraft and Bonecraft on himself, he would have to use Flesh of Wind and Water twice, requiring a total of four blood points, two rolls and two turns.

This power costs 16 experience points to learn.

MORTAL TERROR (ANIMALISM ●●●, PRESENCE ●●)

While the power of Quell the Beast is certainly useful if you're trying to soothe or quiet someone, sometimes you need something a bit more dramatic. Mortal Terror focuses the power of Dread Gaze directly on another Kindred's Beast, bypassing the conscious mind entirely. This can potentially drive a vampire into immediate Rötschreck. This power is available to both archons and templars.

System: The character must either touch her target or make eye contact, and the player must succeed in a contested roll (Charisma + Intimidation vs. the target's Willpower, both difficulty 7). If the character accumulates more successes than the victim has dots of Courage, the power takes effect and Rötschreck overwhelms the victim. The victim may begin making Courage rolls in an attempt to fight off Rötschreck starting the next turn. Until he accumulates five successes, he will continue to flee from the character by the fastest and most direct route.

Invoking this power spuriously is dangerous. Should the character botch the roll to invoke the power, the victim must immediately roll Self-Control to resist frenzy, rather than Rötschreck.

This power costs 18 experience points to learn.

SANGUINARY EXPULSION (FORTITUDE ●●, PROTEAN ●●● OR THAUMATURGY ●●●)

Developed by elder archons as a counter against the terrors (true and imagined) of the Vaulderie, this power allows a vampire to ingest small amounts of blood without absorbing them into her system. This not only prevents the formation of blood bonds and Vinculum, but also protects against blood-borne poisons, drugs and diseases. The unpleasant aftereffects of this power make most archons reluctant to utilize it, but it beats letting the Sabbat or some arrogant elder compromise your loyalties.

System: The player rolls Stamina + Fortitude, (difficulty 5 + the number of blood points consumed, maximum 9). If she fails, the blood is consumed normally and all effects occur as normal. If the roll succeeds, the character is able to hold the blood internally without absorbing it, and may vomit it back up later. This prevents any blood bonds, Vinculi, poisons or other abnormal properties of the blood from affecting the character. On the other

hand, the character may not spend even a single blood point until the tainted blood is regurgitated; if she does so for any reason (including waking up in the evening), the power ends instantly and the blood is absorbed as normal. Although it doesn't cost a blood point to activate the power, an additional blood point (above and beyond the number consumed) is vomited back up and lost when the tainted blood is purged.

This power costs 15 experience points to learn.

ANTICIPATORY VISAGE (AUSPEX ●●●●, OBFUSCATE ●●●)

This power was first developed by an investigative archon who was frustrated by his inability to sneak into the gathering of a Gehenna cult because he didn't know as whom to disguise himself. Anticipatory Visage allows the Kindred to appear as whomever the target most expects to see in a given circumstance. The character herself has no control over who she appears to be, and may not even be immediately aware of what form she's taken. This power has, to date, been used by archons alone.

System: The player spends a blood point and makes a Manipulation + Performance roll (difficulty 6). If successful, the character immediately takes the form (per Mask of a Thousand Faces) of the individual the target most expected. If faced with more than one person, the character must select one individual as the target and hope that the others expect to see the same person. The character is not immediately aware of the form she has taken, and may have difficulty carrying the ruse further than the initial contact. While this power provides the form of the expected individual, it does not provide any knowledge of her personality or memories; the character must be exceedingly careful not to give herself away through suspicious behavior. A vampire with Auspex can see through this power if her Auspex exceeds the character's Obfuscate.

This power costs 24 experience points to learn.

ANTICIPATORY LOCUTION (AUSPEX ●●●●, OBFUSCATE ●●●, ANTICIPATORY VISAGE)

A refinement to Anticipatory Visage, this power was created in an attempt to mitigate the difficulties involved in passing yourself off as someone when you don't know who you're supposed to be. When Anticipatory Locution is active, the target not only sees whom he expects to see but also hears what he expects them to say. This works for short phrases only, not entire conversations, so an archon can still trip himself up quite easily if he's not careful. Still, Anticipatory Locution is good



for covering small gaffes or for getting around code words and passwords.

System: This power does not require the expenditure of blood, as it is considered active when the user has succeeded in invoking Anticipatory Visage. Any time the character utters a short answer to a question (no more than a single moderate sentence or so), the player may make a roll of Manipulation + Subterfuge (difficulty 7). If successful, the target hears the answer he would have expected from whoever he believes the character to be. This power breaks down in long conversation or under in-depth questioning, and it can be seen (heard) through with Auspex if the Kindred's Auspex is greater than the character's Obfuscate.

This power costs 20 experience points to learn.

INSTANTANEOUS TRANSFORMATION
(CELERITY ••, PROTEAN •••••
OR OBTENEBRATION •••••)

Almost exclusive to the templars (a handful archons have learned this power, but they are exceptionally rare), Instantaneous Transformation allows the character to undergo a shifting of shape (either Tenebrous Form, Shape of the Beast or Mist Form) in a single turn for the normal expenditure of blood.

System: The character must roll Stamina + Survival (difficulty 7) and spend the normal cost associated with the shift (one blood point for Shape of the Beast or Mist Form, three for Tenebrous Form). If the roll is successful, the change takes only a single turn, rather than the three normally demanded. Failure indicates that the shift takes the standard three turns, and a botch means that the blood was spent but the power does not take effect.

If the character wishes to use this power for both Obtenebration and Protean, she must buy it twice, once for each Discipline. This power could conceivably be purchased with other shapeshifting Disciplines (such as Serpents) at the Storyteller's prerogative.

This power costs 24 experience points to learn.

MIND'S EYE
(AUSPEX •••••, DOMINATE •••)

With this power, an archon or templar can actually experience a memory belonging to someone else. Sight, sound, scent and other details — all are potentially just as intense as they were for the subject when they first occurred. While Mind's Eye can be used on a cooperative subject who simply wishes to provide the most accurate report possible, it is often used as a form of interrogation and intelligence gathering.

System: The character must make eye contact with the subject (unless she possesses a power that

allows her to use Dominate with touch or at a distance, in which case she may use these other techniques instead), and the player must spend a blood point. If the subject is cooperating, or is an unwilling mortal or Kindred of higher generation than the character, the character need merely make a Perception + Subterfuge roll, difficulty 6. If the subject is both unwilling and a Kindred of equal or lower generation, she may resist with an opposed Willpower roll, difficulty 6; successes on this roll subtract from the character's own. The character may attempt to locate a specific memory in one of two ways. She may either search by time ("Let me see what was happening to you yesterday at midnight") or by event ("I'm going to find out what you said to him at your last meeting!") A botch instead allows the subject to see one of the character's memories (chosen randomly by the Storyteller) and renders that subject immune to any further uses of Mind's Eye by that specific character for the remainder of the scene.

The clarity of the memories experienced depends on the successes rolled and the time elapsed since the events actually occurred. The elapsed time indicated on the table below is for clear, accurate memories only; the character can actually experience memories of one category older, but with a substantial loss of detail and accuracy (Storyteller's call as to what is correct and what is not).

Successes	Age of memories available
1	Within the last hour
2	Within the last day
3	Within the last week
4	Within the last month
5	Within the last year

This power costs 25 experience points to learn.

HIGH-LEVEL DISCIPLINES

CIPHER (AUSPEX ●●●●●●)

The character can understand any written material, even in a language with which she is unfamiliar or scribed in code. Only words with some supernatural nature — such as a Malkavian's Scrawl (see **Clanbook: Malkavian**) or Thaumaturgical runes — are not always subject to this effect.

System: Cipher requires the expenditure of a blood point and a roll of Intelligence + Linguistics (difficulty 6). Each success allows the character to read a specific language or decipher a specific code

for an entire scene. Thus, a character who speaks neither French nor Russian could, if he rolled two successes, read both French and Russian for one scene; alternatively, he could read one work written in French and encoded (one success for the language, one for the code). Multiple attempts may be made on a single written work, but each new attempt requires a blood point. A botch results in a false translation.

If the character is attempting to read supernatural writing, compare his total level of Auspex to the level of the writer's relevant Discipline at the time the words were written. If, for instance, the character is trying to read a Malkavian's Scrawl, compare his Auspex to the Malkavian's Obfuscate. If the Auspex is higher, the words can be read; if the Obfuscate is equal or greater, they cannot.

DISCERN THE AURA (AUSPEX ●●●●●●)

A more wide-reaching if less precise enhancement of Aura Sight, Discern the Aura allows the Kindred to glance over a group of individuals and pick out all those who show a specific color, emotion or state of being in their auras. The character could, for instance, glance around a room, an auditorium or even at passers-by on the street and pick out everyone who is angry, or frightened or even Kindred.

System: The player rolls Perception + Empathy (difficulty 8) and may choose to spend a blood point or not, as she prefers. The character can then identify a number of people with the specific color in their aura up to her number of successes (or up to ten times her number of successes, if she chose to spend a blood point). The power lasts until the number is reached, or until the end of the scene, whichever occurs first.

Each use of the power can locate only one hue. If the character wishes to find all Kindred (every pale aura) in the crowd, and then wishes to find everyone in the crowd who is currently frightened, that would require two uses of the power. This power can sometimes penetrate Obfuscate, per the standard rules.

CHAIN OF COMMAND (DOMINATE ●●●●●●)

Sometimes a single thrall isn't sufficient to accomplish a given task. Chain of Command allows the character to implant a suggestion (much like those allowed by Mesmerize, except even more complex). For instance, the subject could be commanded to follow an individual and report who she speaks to, or to travel from Mexico City to Houston and deliver intelligence from an undercover archon to the prince

there. Chain of Command does more than this, however. Should the thrall prove unable to complete his assigned task, Chain of Command grants him the power to pass the compulsion along to someone else. This person could, in turn, pass the compulsion along to a third agent, and even a fourth, until the objective is completed.

System: The player spends one blood point, one Willpower point and rolls Manipulation + Leadership (difficulty equal to the target's permanent Willpower) when implanting the suggestion in the first thrall. Keep track of the character's total successes. Should the thrall encounter an impediment or circumstance that she honestly believes will prevent her from fulfilling the objective — perhaps she is injured and unable to leave the hospital, is recognized by the individual she's tailing, cannot afford travel to her destination, or the like — she will attempt to pass the compulsion on to another individual whom she judges capable of continuing the assignment. Should the thrall believe herself to be dying, she will choose whoever is most convenient. If the character who implanted the original suggestion possesses the power of Obedience, the compulsion can be passed by touch; otherwise it requires eye contact. The compulsion can be passed only to an individual with a Willpower equal to or less than that of the current thrall (and only to Kindred of higher generation than the character). The thrall does not make a roll to determine success; rather, take the original character's successes and subtract one. Subtract two if the second thrall passes along the compulsion, three if the third thrall passes it along, and so forth. Chain of Command lasts either until the task is complete, a thrall is killed without the chance to pass the compulsion on, the character chooses to end it or the number of successes drops to zero.

STRINGS OF THE MARIONETTE (DOMINATE ●●●●●●●●)

With this power, the Kindred's ability to command the minds of others is so great that she may even overcome the paralysis imposed by staking, or the languor of torpor. The subject cannot move as swiftly as normal, has reduced mental capacity, and cannot access any Disciplines that require conscious effort to activate. Within these parameters, however, the subject can be forced to take any actions the character desires.

System: The character must first physically touch the subject; the player then rolls Manipulation + Leadership, with a difficulty equal to the

target's Willpower + 1 (the added difficulty is to overcome the paralysis or torpor). The character maintains control for a number of scenes equal to the successes rolled.

The subject of this power is limited in the actions he can perform while staked or torpid. In addition to the restriction on Disciplines, the subject loses one from all dice pools involving physical actions; all other dice pools are reduced by half (round down).

GEMINI'S MIRROR (OBFUSCATE ●●●●●●●●)

Legend speaks of strange Disciplines, mastered only by the most annuated Kindred, that allow the undead to split themselves in two. Gemini's Mirror doesn't have that level of power, but it does allow the character to *appear* to be in two places at once — or to move away invisibly while leaving an illusory double behind.

System: The character spends two blood points and rolls Manipulation + Subterfuge, difficulty 7. A mirror image of the character appears several feet from the character. The character may then move away, invoke other Disciplines or take any other action. The image can take any actions the character desires, though controlling both the image and himself in the same turn requires him to split his dice pools. The image remains visible even if the character hides his true self with Obfuscate or other Disciplines. It lasts for the scene, or until the character moves more than 100 feet away from it.

MASK OF JANUS (OBFUSCATE ●●●●●●●●)

Mask of Janus allows the character to assume the physical appearance of another individual, in much the same manner as Mask of a Thousand Faces. When a character assumes someone's form using Mask of Janus, however, the target's appearance also changes — to match that of the character invoking the power. Unlike Mask of a Thousand Faces, Mask of Janus can be used only to duplicate someone exactly. It cannot be used to create a new or unique image.

System: The player spends a blood point and rolls Manipulation + Performance (difficulty 7). The target must be visible to the character, though the reverse need not be true. This power works even over live or closed-circuit television. The victim can resist with a Willpower roll if she is of equal or lower generation than the character. Compare the character's net successes to the chart for Mask of a Thousand Faces to determine her degree of success. This power lasts until the next sunrise.



THAUMATURGY RITUALS

THE VERDANT BLADE (LEVEL FIVE RITUAL)

Archons sometimes have to take Kindred either for judgment or (more likely) for questioning. Carrying a heavy wooden stake is fairly conspicuous, though, and it lets your target know that you don't want him dead. Several Quaesitors developed the Verdant Blade in the 1800s. Its use is limited largely to that group, though a few other archons have learned it. The ritual temporarily enchants any sharp object — a sword or large knife, a bone, a piton or tent spike — to paralyze Kindred staked with it as though it were wooden. The weapon or item must be placed in a vat or tub along with a freshly cut tree branch, several ounces of sap and a gallon of water. When the ritual is complete, the weapon will paralyze a vampire when driven into its heart. This effect works only once; once the weapon is removed, it must be enchanted again if the caster wishes to use it to stake another Kindred.

System: The caster must expend a blood point when making his Intelligence + Occult roll, and must spill a second blood point into the vat with the items

described above. The chanting that follows takes 25 minutes. If the roll is botched, the weapon is not enchanted and will shatter on impact. The item or weapon must still be large enough to use as a stake (a large knife or a sword will work, but a pen will not). The ritual does not make the actual staking process any easier, and the weapon is not considered enchanted in any other respect.

IMPEDE THE GIFTS OF CAINE (LEVEL SEVEN RITUAL)

Developed for use by Quaesitors facing superior numbers of Kindred, Impede the Gifts of Caine allows the thaumaturge to temporarily dampen the use of Disciplines in her immediate area. The focus of the ritual can be any item between the size of a baseball and that of a small suitcase, though it must be of relatively sturdy construction. The item must be bathed in six points worth of vitae that must come from at least two different thaumaturges (though only one need know the ritual). Discipline use in this area is substantially more difficult. The effect lasts for as long as the device is active.

System: Casting the ritual costs a blood point in addition to those in which the focus must be submerged, and requires a full hour of casting. The item is set briefly aflame (if the ritual succeeds, the

damage to the item fades), and must be extinguished by the bare hand of the thaumaturge (causing one level of aggravated damage, as well as a Courage roll to avoid Rötschreck). When activated, the device creates an area of power one hundred feet in diameter, centered on the item. Once active, the difficulty of all rolls to invoke or use Disciplines in the area of the device is increased by the number of successes the caster achieved on her casting roll. Disciplines that do not require rolls to activate are unaffected. This power cannot raise difficulties higher than 10. Kindred of a lower generation than the caster remain unaffected, but the caster herself is affected if she steps inside the area. The item functions until "turned off" or until dawn. In either case, once deactivated it becomes nonmagical and cannot be reused.

THE SEVERED HAND (LEVEL SEVEN RITUAL)

Known only to a very select few among the Sabbat Inquisitors, the Ritual of the Severed Hand is employed in the breaking of Vinculi. Inquisitors use it to recover spies and agents they have inserted into Sabbat packs suspected of heresy. Because of the ritual's questionable origins, it is rarely used in the modern nights, and

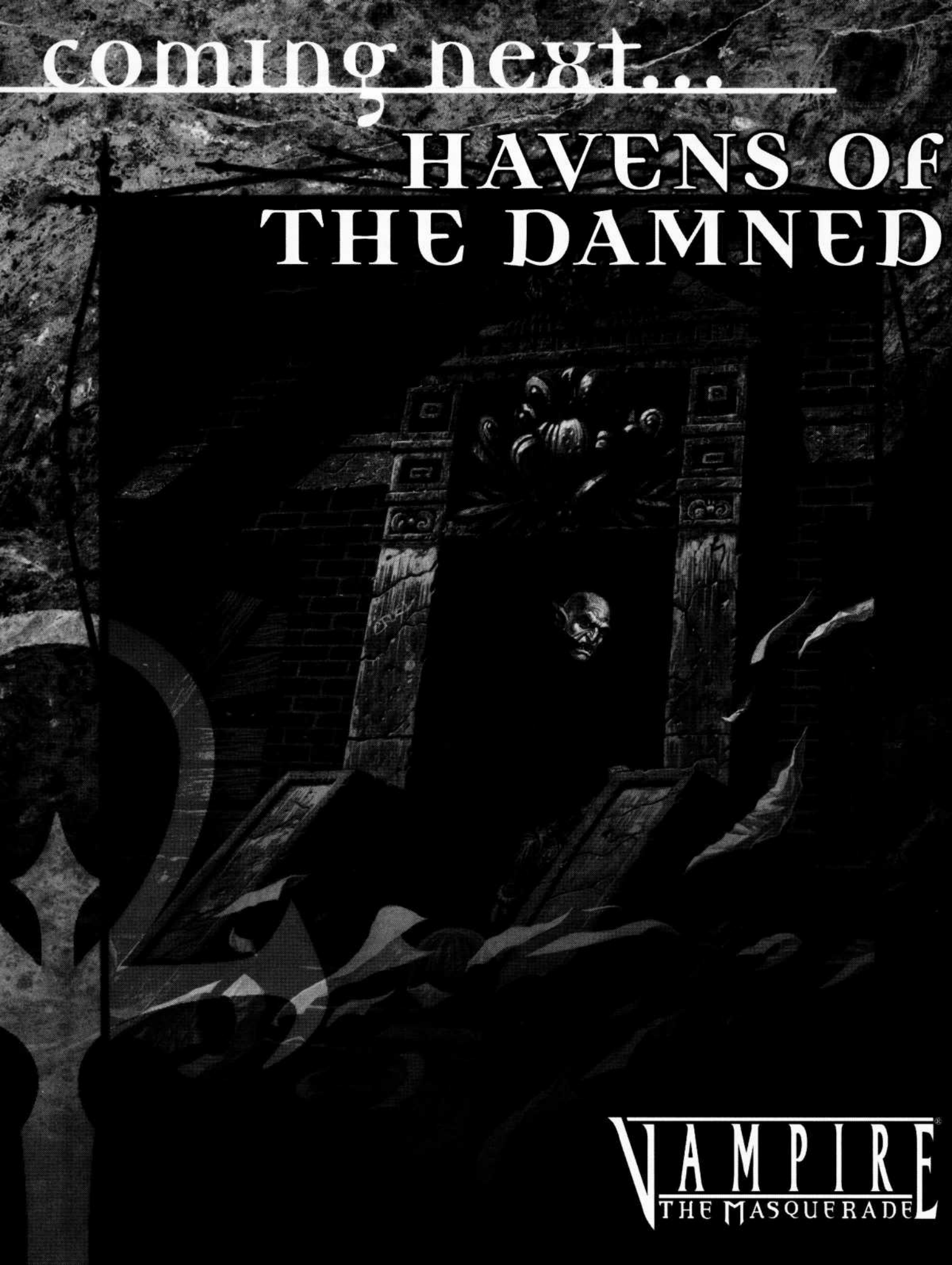
some Inquisitors have even suggested destroying all known copies of the formula, lest it fall into the hands of the Camarilla.

System: The ritual requires the subject to stand relatively motionless, though this can be arranged with restraints or staking, and need not be voluntary. The caster proceeds to anoint the subject with an alchemical mixture that must be prepared in advance; this must contain two points of the caster's blood, powdered human bone, a variety of crushed herbs, and the ashes of a vampire slain by fire or sunlight. Symbolically, if not in actual fact, the ritual forces the blood "contaminated" by the Vinculum into a single one of the subject's extremities—a hand is most common, though a foot might be selected instead. At the completion of the ritual, this extremity must be severed. This causes three health levels of aggravated damage which may be healed in the standard fashion. Once done, the subject is freed of any and all Vinculum ties.

The ritual requires that another blood point be spend during the casting, and it requires five full hours to invoke; the subject must be relatively motionless or restrained for the entire duration. Should the casting roll indicate a botch, the subject's Vinculi are actually increased by 1.

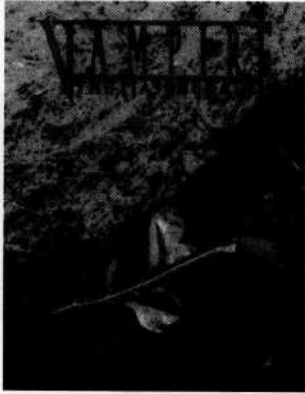
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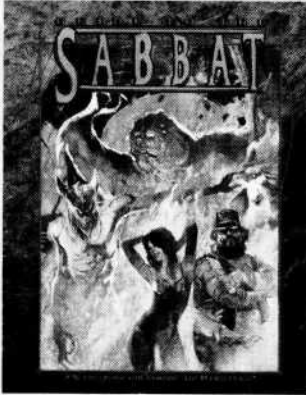


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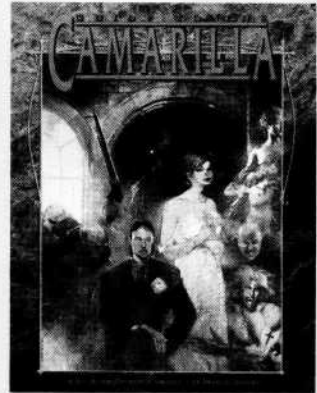
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