

BECKETT'S

JYHAD DIARY



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To all the **Vampire** writers and developers over the years, for crafting one hell of a metaplot. You're a tough act to follow.

Dedication

To baby Freya, who waited until her mother was done with redlines to be born. Welcome to the world, little one.

To baby Edwin, who loves his foil blanket.

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WHITE WOLF

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CARNA'S REBELLION

Through winding winds I trust this letter reaches you, where'er you tread these nights.

My beautiful Beckett,

You've never read my words before, yet my hope is you recall my person. Of all my years, the one in which your hands held mine remains my fondest. I was a poor Prince, in truth. Marseilles ill-suited me, yet I persevered for a time after you deserted me. The memory of us has kept me from sleep. You understand, I'm sure.

I hear — from time to time — of your search. Victor recently bemoaned this "amateur" named Beckett who, through fortune, had acquired a trinket my Clan had desperately sought: the Codex of the Edenic Groundskeepers. I could not suppress my smile. Astrid Thomas was demoted in status as a result of your acquisition. She will boil the blood behind those wonderful eyes of yours should she trace you.

I possess something better. Discovered in a locked chamber in the magical void of the Marquette University, I now find myself the owner of the original copy of Das Buch vom Grabkrieg, or the Book of the Grave-War as it's otherwise known. I've not revealed to Mortius I possess it; I fear he was keeping it hidden away.

Now it's our secret.

The Book tells much of the Gehenna phenomenon. I know you hunger for it as you read these words. You wish to taste it with your wonderful eyes.

I invite you here, to clutch my hand tightly as we read together. It's truly enlightening, my beautiful Beckett. This original text contains so much more than Mortius' translation. You will drink freedom from its pages. No longer bound to the wolf. You too can feed from the shadow-sleepers. Oh, my beautiful Beckett. The one true way is in my grasp, and I can take you there if you're willing to make the journey.

Come as soon as you're able. Do not treat with the other Tremere of this city.

Your beautiful Carna

Carna

Let no prevailing breeze dismay the course of this letter.

The Calleva Arms, Silchester, British Isles

Atop the ground where I made my rest, appearing unprotected and dropped there by chance, a letter sealed with a scarlet wax. I give credit to the gifts of the Tremere for reaching me.

The original Book of the Grave-War is a prize my rivals would kill to find. This is no exaggeration. Copies and translations float around – I hold one in my Oxford library – but the original? Milwaukee seems an unlikely spot for such a trophy, yet the Tremere Dr. Mortins initially translated the work and, before his disappearance, spent time in Milwaukee. The Book visits the portents of Gehenna, making detailed references to diablerie and waking Methuselahs. Given recent events, this Book is invaluable.

Milwaukee is not a city I would choose to visit. Nothing against Milwaukee per se, it's just the Rust Belt of America has become a hotbed of Camarilla-Sabbat conflict. I've not the inclination to act a stalking horse for either Sect, and am given to understand by Okulos that private airports in the Milwaukee area are being targeted by packs. Transit therefore requires a degree of discretion. I'll be flying directly into Milwaukee once my business here is concluded. Cesare will collect me as baggage. Ignominious, yet necessary.

The disappearance of Dr. Mortius has been felt. His investigative works are renowned. If you find evidence of his whereabouts, David will forget your little insult. - C

Irritatingly, Carna hasn't specified a time or place for our meeting. I'll start sniffing around the universities and any Masonic lodges. The Tremere lack imagination.

S. watching IL airports not gonna last long. Give it a year and they'll be swept up in the crusade-frenzy and from what I hear the suits and kings are all over Capitol Hill and Fort Meade, scrambling to turn the PATRIOT Act into their own little tool to catch old, cold fish and shovelheads.

D

Hunt the shadow-sleepers
Think not on fear or hate
Hunt them for blood
for Kindred's sake

From my translated copy of the Book of the Grave-War I find this reference to the shadow-sleepers. Mortius believed them to be torpid vampires of great age, according to his annotations.

General Mitchell Airport, Milwaukee, United States

Our plane landed in the early evening, timed in case of any "events." It would appear the Camarilla are paranoid about a Sabbat attack via Milwaukee's larger airports. Needless to say, the coffin of "Cesare's deceased brother" was opened as we made our way through security.

I was woken by a panicking Cesare to find we'd been sequestered in a security office. Cesare explained the "chief" was apparently on his way to see the both of us. I discreetly recorded our conversation, in case some manner of mind control was implemented. Cesare was sure the Homeland Security officer who opened my coffin stared at my body with an unusual intensity.

I have to tip my hat to the Camarilla – they're thorough.

Milwaukee's Kindred are notably successful in monitoring the arrival of newcomers to their city. The astonishing number of Lupines in the surrounding area pushes nearly all visitors to arrive by plane, creating a bottleneck through which ghouls keep track of visitors. –L

[RECORDING BEGINS]

Akawa: Who in fuck do you think you are, flying into Milwaukee without an invitation from the Prince?

Beckett: My name's Beckett. I'm an archeologist.

Akawa: Elaborate. Whose side are you on?

Beckett: In most cities they get Blue Bloods or Warlocks to do all the probing questions.

Akawa: Yeah, well, we're running short. Answer the question, please.

Beckett: I'm not of the Sabbat, if that's what you're getting at.

Akawa: But you're not Camarilla?

Beckett: Bright boy.

Akawa: Don't talk down to me, you limey prick. I know how to disguise my age. Did you say your name was Beckett?

Beckett: I did.

Akawa: [laughs] You were expected. Decker is going to love meeting you.

Beckett: I'm guessing I have cause to be concerned.

Akawa: Could say that. The Primogen council's dissolved.

Beckett: Completely? Would you happen to know where the Tremere Primogen is?

Akawa: Carna flew the nest. Left Milwaukee two weeks ago after bringing together a weird cult of Tremere from along the Lake Michigan shoreline. Chicago, Green Bay, even one from Manitowoc. Nobody



had any idea why the Warlock population suddenly shot up, but we figured they were to act as a weapon against the Sabbat packs who kept showing up. No such luck. They all left, and even the native Milwaukee Tremere vanished. But in her library? Hundreds of scraps of paper with your name scribbled over them.

Beckett: I see.

Akawa: Yeah? Word is Carna went Anarch somehow, which I didn't even know was possible for Tremere. Fleeing your home city just before it's about to get attacked? That's fucked up. Most of the non-Tremere Anarchs saw it as permission to run for the Anarch Free States. But I'm not about to just quit Milwaukee. I'd rather be Camarilla than tarred with that brush. This city's defense is falling to pieces because Carna decided she preferred the West Coast view.

Beckett: What's your name?

Akawa: Akawa. I was born on this land, Embraced on this land, and I'll die here to protect this land if I have to.

Beckett: I'd like to see your Prince.

Akawa: Thought you might say that.

[RECORDING ENDS]

Carna's hardly the first or last of the Camarilla to start sprouting Cainite heresy. In LA there's Hollis and the Bible-study group who see Kindred in every damn passage. In Florida there's this thing with full-immersion blood baptism going on since a year or so. Religion is the new revolution. It's getting harder to sell the fresh ones on the tower-hierarchy (or opposing it) every fucking year. They hear the stories, of Caine, of manifest destiny, of the Gehenna Crusade to reclaim the graves of the eldest. All this timed with first 9/11 and now Operation Iraqi Freedom and it's not that weird they feel the end times are rolling in on all fronts. Shit, I've seen even Ilyana praying to some version of the Dark Parent. They're not Sabbat by a long shot but the way some of these preachers rant they could have fooled me.

My take? Either we use the myths or we're used by them.

D

Miller Park Stadium, Milwaukee, United States

I'm told by Akawa the Brewers are in their final inning as we start the climb to Prince Decker's suite. I like the idea of baseball, but can't claim to understand it. I nod and smile as he tells me they've been performing well lately. Akawa has an air of fatalism about him, as if he's not going to see this team perform for much longer. Perhaps it's not just the Brewers in their final inning.

Akawa asks why I'm scribbling down notes as I go, so I tell him about my diary. He makes a noise like sucking air through his fangs. I'm told Decker is a hardliner, which is surprising for a Gangrel. I shouldn't write anything down in his presence.

[RECORDING BEGINS]

Decker: Carna invite you here thinking you'd arrive before she went and left our flank open?

Beckett: We knew each other a long time ago. The French Revolution hadn't even happened. Yes, she invited me.

Decker: Sit, for God's sake. You missed one of the Cardinals barehand it just now. It would've stung even me.

Beckett: I don't find much time to watch sports.

Decker: I've got to unwind a little before fixing for a big play. Twenty years back I would've been watching one of these games in the bleachers at the County Stadium, before going out with my boys to scalp a Lupine. Now it's all about Sabbat.

Beckett: Does Carna's disappearance have anything to do with the Sabbat baying at the door?

Parovich: It's clearly more than a coincidence.

Decker: We been over this. The Sabbat was getting frisky before Carna did her Houdini. Primogen always been overreaching. The Anarchs ain't known right from left. Seizing Praxis ensured stability. But then the Sabbat start striking us where we're weakest, again and again. One of the good old boys, a Malkavian named Jacob who's tight with Carna, keeps calling it a sign of Gehenna. "When Athens falls, the depths shall rise," is what he says, over and over.

Jacob and Esau. Two Malkavians who love and loathe each other like brothers. -A

Beckett: That's not a passage I've read or heard before tonight.

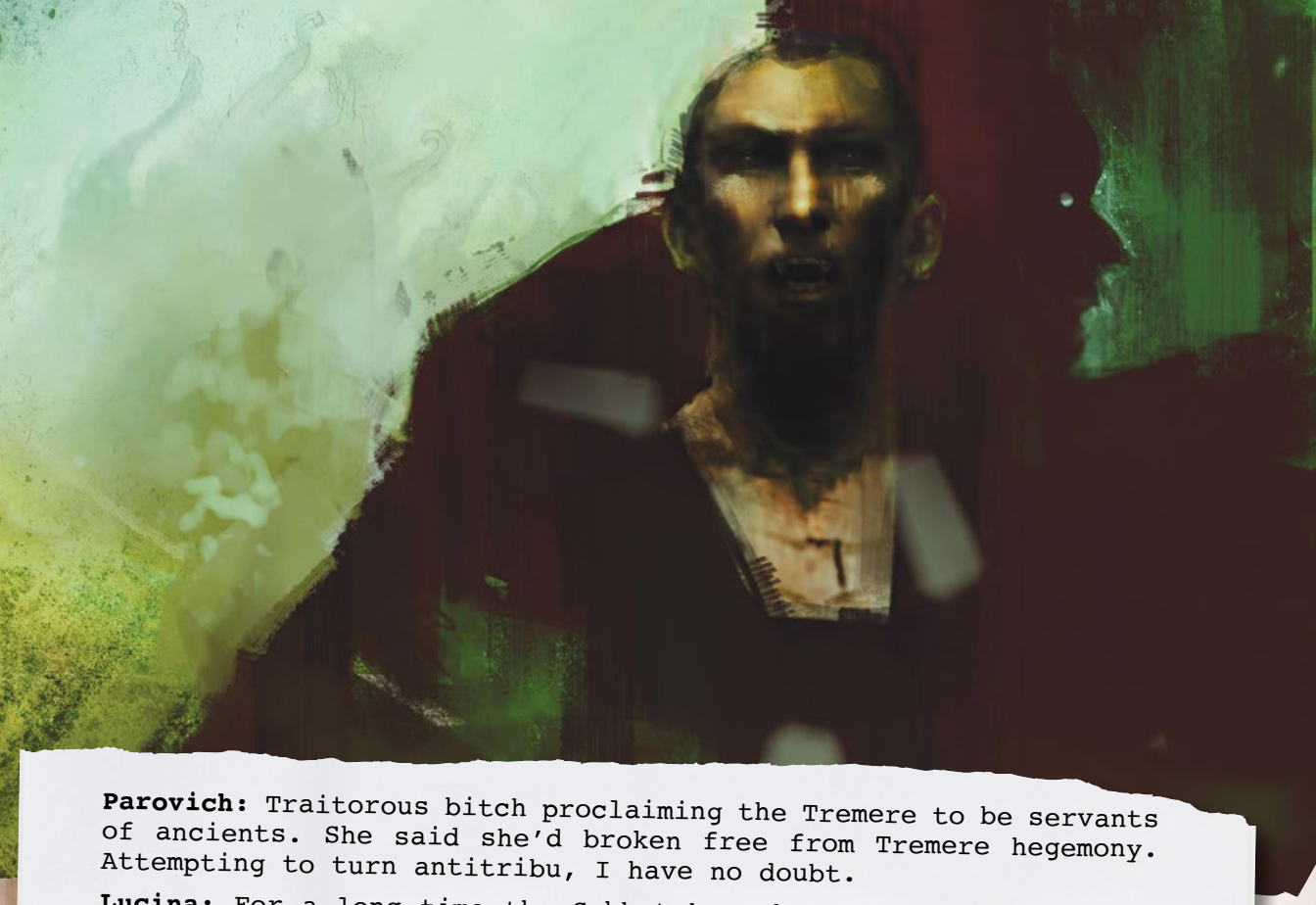
Decker: Jacob keeps talking Jyhad. Lays it mostly at the feet of Esau. I got to admit, I start to see the Jyhad in all of it. Jacob says you're another herald. It's not like I ain't heard of the trouble that follows you around. We do talk up our rogues. I got to admit I thought you'd be taller. You tell me: Why was that no account Carna writing your name just about every place she could?

Beckett: I gather from a letter she sent me a couple of months ago that I was important to her. Had she been acting strange — stranger than usual, in recent months?

Decker: Primogen come in two forms. Controllers and controlled. Parovich here has a cowboy's grip on the Nosferatu of Milwaukee. Carna's different. She always been on the wires of her Clan. That ain't so different from most Warlocks, I guess, but lately she got herself bowed up. Just ask the Primogen.

Beckett: This is the council?

Lucina: What's left of it. One destroyed, two went east, a fourth decided to start launching guerrilla attacks on the Sabbat after discovering they were marshaling in Fond du Lac. Of course, none of this happened until Carna decided to start talking revolution.



Parovich: Traitorous bitch proclaiming the Tremere to be servants of ancients. She said she'd broken free from Tremere hegemony. Attempting to turn antitribu, I have no doubt.

Lucina: For a long time the Sabbat have known where a number of us make our havens, and our most important kine resources. Their attacks have been nothing short of devastating. This behavior from Carna was enough for Jason to openly ask her whether her loyalty was to the Sabbat.

Parovich: Frankly my dear, there's no doubt in my mind that that's the case.

Lucina: Carna lashed out at Jason in response. They were at one another's throats until that ignorant peon Scott staked Carna.

Parovich: We should have ended her there.

Decker: She was out of kilter, but one of the first things you learn is not to piss off or on the Tremere. They deal with their own. So Edward Scott, our former Brujah Primogen, delivered her to Victor. He done lingered long enough to hear the screams after Victor extracted the stake. They weren't hers. Victor was screaming just long enough for Scott to know to hightail it. By the time he returned with a bunch of my Anubi in tow, Carna and her new arrivals were fixing to leave Milwaukee.

Beckett: Did nobody try to stop her?

Decker: The Anubi tangle with shapeshifters every week, and make good on their aims to defend Milwaukee from Sabbat, whenever they can. But these Warlocks? They just wanted out. Most of them hadn't been here for longer than a month. Carna told Scott they were forming a new family. House Carna was going to exodus their way to the promised land, away from Tremere reprisals. You should've seen Scott when a bunch of his Anarch buddies upped and followed.

Beckett: But what triggered this change in Carna? How would a Tremere break free from her Clan?

Decker: I can tell you're asking yourself as much as you're asking us. I guess she just grew tired of having her strings pulled, found a loophole. She ain't some fragile damsel needs saving. Carna discovered a way to pull herself out the Jyhad, and took it. Hell, if the Tremere weren't so damn useful in locating and screwing with Sabbat I'd be applauding her. You hear tell of Gangrel making moves to ditch the Ivory Tower?

Beckett: Of course, though I've heard mixed rumors surrounding the cause. You're not considering it?

Decker: Me? Milwaukee's a laughingstock as it is, to be the city where the Camarilla Prince is a Gangrel and it was the Tremere that done gone Anarch. Least I can do is go down with my boots on.

Beckett: With regret, I've got nothing to offer you in your war. I don't mean to stay here for longer than I need to, and it seems my reason for coming has rudely departed. I'm keen to meet this Jacob, however.

Decker: No bigger player of this game than him, and he's been around for more than a few centuries. You stop off at the Caroline Hall at Mount Mary's to rest out the day. Students ain't there while it's undergoing work, but Carna made a haven in the dorms. I'll see if I can reach Jacob and send him your way.

Beckett: I appreciate your hospitality. I assure you I'll cause no trouble.

[RAPTUROUS APPLAUSE FROM THE STADIUM]

Decker: The benches are clearing. As if this city don't have enough shit to deal with. You don't stick around to watch your own home run, morons! You run! You run!

[RECORDING ENDS]

No small feat, even for one as old as Carna. This must all be in the Book. -C

Mount Mary University, Milwaukee, United States

It becomes apparent Milwaukee is a city where the Kindred have been fending off enemies for so long, they've adopted a strange resoluteness vis-à-vis the Sabbat. They're on a war footing. In my experience Camarilla cities rarely possess this attitude. Perhaps it's symptomatic of having a Gangrel Prince.

I suspect this is one of many havens owned by Carna. With Decker so keen on the Masquerade, the bedchamber's been thoroughly scrubbed. Curiosity overtaking me, as it often does, I decided to have a brief wander for the last hour before sunrise.

The cleanup crew did a fine job with the dorm room, and even the library, but not the heretofore locked administrative offices. If a mortal had been on site, I've no doubt



The Book of the Grave-War

Throughout **Beckett's Jyhad Diary** are multiple references to the *Book of the Grave-War*. It's the tome responsible for setting Beckett on his journey, and though he often finds himself veering off course and exploring tangents, his path is ever dictated by his hunt for the Book. This pilgrimage is rarely obvious to him, yet unerringly he's drawn to the west coast, D.C., Berlin, and elsewhere in search of the Book.

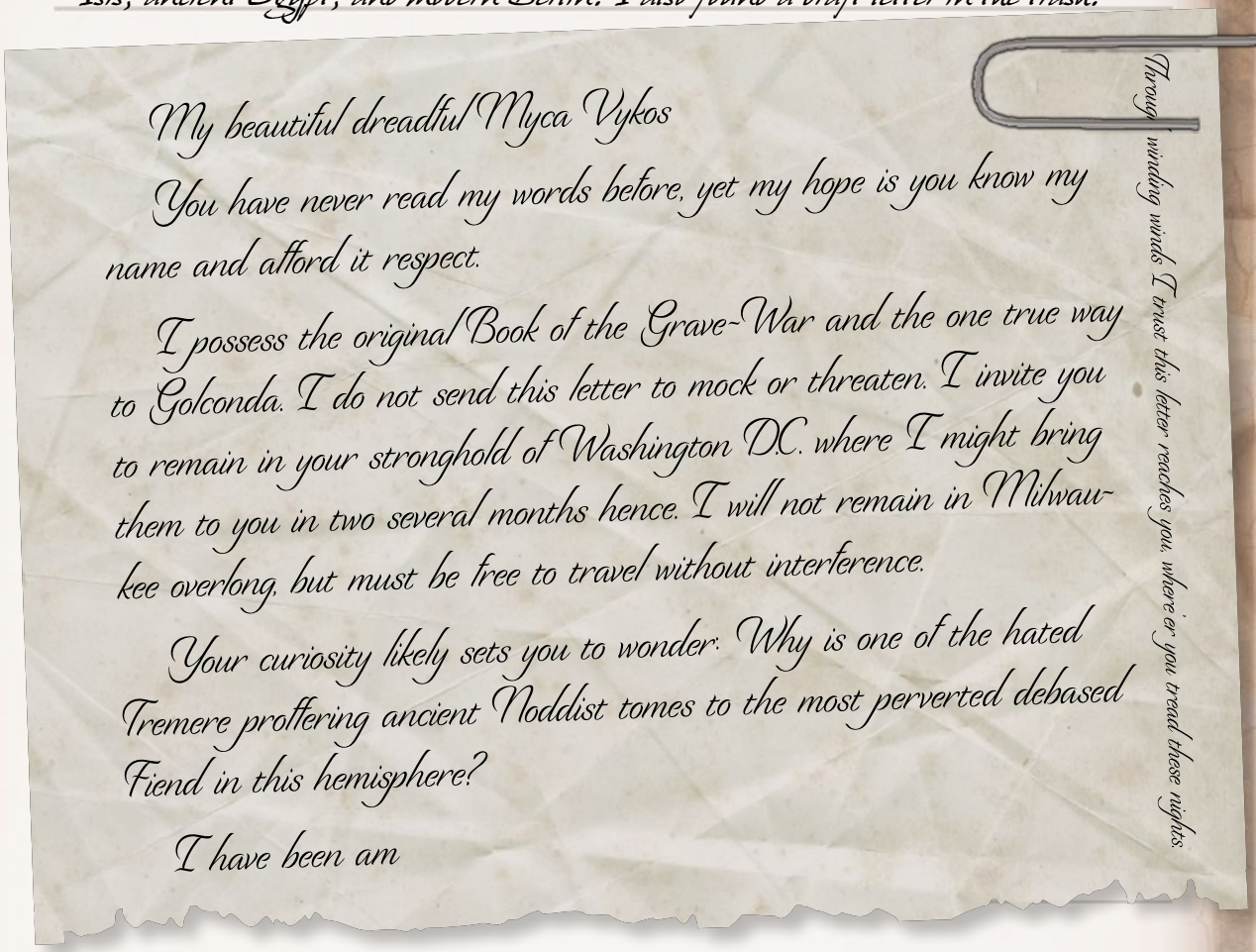
Beckett is enticed by the Book's fabled content. Clues to the breaking of blood bonds and Clan ties are said to be written within. Its advice on the subversion of Gehenna and the Jyhad greatly appeal to the Gangrel. Supposedly, those who read the Book in its entirety are freed from domination, with Carna as an example of a vampire completely enslaved to her Clan until she pored over the complete text.

When Beckett finally locates the Book — or a damaged version of it — in Berlin, he holds a powerful relic that acts as a beacon to other vampires. When it enters his ownership he at once becomes capable of emancipating Kindred far and wide, and the target of all who would see such freedom denied.

It would not be unfair to expect Beckett to rid himself of the Book soon after discovering it. If it entered the hands of a coterie of young vampires, the chronicle following would be unlike any other.

they would have been bewildered by the array of books and scattered paperwork. But I know the signs of research.

Carna's exploration into the Book of the Grave-War has seen her studying Cults of Isis, ancient Egypt, and modern Berlin. I also found a draft letter in the trash.



My beautiful dreadful Myca Vykos

You have never read my words before, yet my hope is you know my name and afford it respect.

I possess the original Book of the Grave-War and the one true way to Golconda. I do not send this letter to mock or threaten. I invite you to remain in your stronghold of Washington D.C. where I might bring them to you in two several months hence. I will not remain in Milwaukee overlong, but must be free to travel without interference.

Your curiosity likely sets you to wonder: Why is one of the hated Tremere proffering ancient Noddist tomes to the most perverted debased Fiend in this hemisphere?

I have been am

Through winding winds I trust this letter reaches you, where'er you tread these nights.

Mount Mary University, Milwaukee, United States

It's my belief Carna planned to double cross myself to Vykos, or vice versa. Vexingly, I do not know why. What I know from my encounter with Jacob (I woke to find him sitting at the foot of my bed) is that Vykos is one of the parties responsible for the attack on Milwaukee.

My suspicion is if Carna did send a finished letter to Vykos, she didn't expect it to start a war. She rallied her new troops and fled, with the Book of the Grave-War. This city is being attacked full bore by the Sabbat for something that's already slipped through their fingers.

Pathetic, really.

[RECORDING BEGINS]

Jacob: My boys handle technology for me. I struggle to keep up. Not like Esau. The bastard has a penchant for the sublime.

Beckett: I was hoping you might know something about Carna, and a book she unearthed.

Jacob: Oh, the delightful Carna. She's buggered off. Can't say it came as much of a shocker, but I miss her. She was a wonderful agent in the eternal game.

Beckett: Why were you not surprised by her departure? Everyone else in the city seems to have been caught unawares. Tremere turning to the Anarchs isn't commonplace.

Jacob: I don't think Carna is an Anarch. Not as such. Carna was used, passed around by her Clan, and frankly had enough. She enjoyed the little junkets I sent her on, before having to return to the kennel with that ghastly Victor, and the monstrous Mortius. You know, Mortius was in with Esau? I believe him consumed. Deserved it, the wretch.

Beckett: I hate to pull you back on point, but —

Jacob: Carna! Oh, she was a precious bird trapped in a smelly cage. Reminded me of a childe of mine. Once, I was pursuing activities out in the City of Angels. You know it? Yes. I met such a beauty. Despite my age, she was attracted to me! I never saw one so vivacious, yet such delicate depths, my lad. Such delicate depths. She called me "daddy". She's Baron of Santa Monica, now. Such a delight. Esau had to go and ruin it by Embracing her sister.

[LENGTHY PAUSE]

Jacob: Carna is a free spirit. She believes she's found the one true way, but she's hardly the Master of Ravens. Not too far from Anarch, though I doubt it's an organization representative of her views. I miss her, though. So many uses. A bishop on the board, as it were. But the game is changing. Now we're playing backgammon.

Beckett: You're quite effusive for a vampire of your purported age. I've met more than my share of ancient Kindred, but not many speak so openly of their manipulations or pawns.

Jacob: Don't mistake candor for weakness, my lad. I've spent a millennium playing with an open hand. Esau plays with his closed. He denies the Jyhad exists. We're both still extant, both still dogging one another. Jerusalem, Athens, Tunis, Milwaukee. Once we've done the full circuit and get back to Jerusalem, we might shake and make up.

Beckett: Decker quoted you on the subject of Gehenna. You see the coming war as one of its portents.

Jacob: Esau and I have witnessed Gehenna at least three times. Athens is mentioned in the Book, you know? When Athens falls, the depths shall rise. The Book says so. The Sabbat are knocking at the door. Don't you know how many Methuselahs are buried beneath Athens? I daresay I put a couple there myself—

Beckett: I have to interrupt. Two things. Athens isn't besieged by Sabbat. Milwaukee is. Secondly, if you've seen the original Book I'd be grateful to know where. Carna invited me here to view it, but with her gone —

Jacob: Foolish! Milwaukee was known as the German Athens! The spilling of sweet vitae in these streets will wake the Methuselahs, and up from the depths they'll come. I'm already planning on Phoenix. Don't tell Esau if you see him. I'd love to see his face when he realizes I've done a runner.

Beckett: For pity's sake, Jacob.

Jacob: Impatient, aren't you? You know, these Methuselahs aren't what you'd expect. They were here long before we arrived on our boats and upset the natives. It's going to be a brave new world for the Camarilla and the Sabbat. [laughs] But yes, the Book. I've seen it. Only read snippets. I'm not some wretched Noddist. I read enough. I believe she took it with her. Lovely Carna was so upset when you didn't arrive immediately. She studied it avidly. I saw the effect it had on her precious mind. She grew hungry. I wasn't going to stare at the thing and go mad.

Beckett: You're a Malkavian.

Jacob: [laughs] Anatole said you had a sense of humor! The boy flip flops between Esau and I, but he's a fun piece. There are things more insane than Malkavians, my lad. Haven't you met our cousins in the Sabbat? You're close to Aristotle, aren't you? And surprised I know so much? I play with an open hand. Keeps the enemy off guard. Esau hates it. One of our antitribu, as we've all taken to calling them, is supporting Vykos in the coming siege. Has something to do with King Distilleries in the docklands. Used them to house three Sabbat packs until I tipped off Decker and his Anubi.

Beckett: Do you know for a certainty Vykos is involved in the siege? I believe Carna was attempting communication with them.

Jacob: I know what my pieces relay. If they heard the Book is in Milwaukee... Well, there's your casus belli. That Book says a lot about Methuselahs waking up, where they'll do it, and the subsequent effects. Carna translated that part. But don't worry too much. We contract, we expand, and the clock keeps ticking. As long as you're out of Milwaukee within the night you should be fine.

Beckett: I'd intended on staying a while longer, to search the Tremere Chantry if possible. Where might Carna have gone?

Jacob: I wouldn't recommend it, my lad. The next Sabbat attack is aimed at the havens of the most influential vampires in this city and is due soon. Parovich has given them all the information they need, the loathsome toad. And anyway, the Cult of Isis — strange females — have already stripped the Chantry bare. I didn't even know they were pieces, but Esau may have been clever there. Carna, though? Go west, young man. Now be a chap and turn the recorder off.

[RECORDING ENDS]

Likely to be of avant-bloodlines so far divorced from the 13 Clans that the blood has split, but worth monitoring. -D

I swear to you, Beckett — I've never even spoken with Jacob or Esau, let alone discussed your sense of humor, or lack thereof. Don't underestimate this one due to his talkative nature. His tendrils run deep. -A

Reach out to Smiling Jack and try to find out whether the Free States [illegible] received a wave of Tremere. -L



I found a burial chamber near the Hiawatha National Forest four years ago, while chasing down a link to the reported Abomination making its haven in Manistique.

It was unlike anything I'd excavated before. At first I was sure it was some elaborate Native American sepulcher, for a chieftain, wise man, or matron figure. They're uncommon, but do exist. The artifacts within were intricate, and while not possessing real world value, were clearly crafted by master artisans.

I discovered dried blood in a number of vessels, but most important — cool, liquid blood in a vessel I'd compare to a kylix. I had a taste, and it was vitae. Old vitae. I fled from the tomb and resealed it to prevent myself from drinking more. No exaggeration.

The blood not being coagulated reeks of Tremere magic, yet this place clearly predates the Warlocks' entry into the Jyhad. I've never been able to find the tomb again, despite marking its location.

Your friend Jacob may not be lying. Methuselahs of unfamiliar Clans indeed!

Okulos

Milwaukee Intermodal Station, Milwaukee, United States

After the recording concluded, Jacob spoke on a number of topics. His interest in the dearth of magical energy at Marquette University rivals any Warlock. He believes it to be the catalyst for Carna's break from her Clan.

Over and over he mentioned the Jyhad as an active game, citing the game's champion to be Mithras, of London. I was quick to assure Jacob of the ancient Ventrue's demise. His hysterics followed me out the University.

I've sent Cesare on an errand. I don't know where Decker heads on his nights off, so I've had Cesare post a letter under the door to his executive suite at Miller Park. It explains my suspicion of Parovich as a traitor, the fullness of the coming Sabbat attack, and the scorched earth policies of this Cult of Isis. They're clearly in someone's employ.

I made it clear I wasn't going to participate in this coming war, and I'm not.

That said, turncoats never fail to bait me.

This is exactly what Jacob wanted you to do. You've become a piece on his board. -A

Carna

Tremere antitribu (House Carna?); #1419, Marseilles #1435. Childe of Bourdana.

Two centuries ago I encountered her in Marseilles. Carna was a troubled soul even then, but for many months we spoke of the destination of our kind. We held hands whenever we walked through the gardens of Bouc-Bel-Air, now named the Jardins d'Albertas. They were her place of privacy. I learned much from her within that peaceful location.



I'd no idea I'd left such a lasting impression on her. Our courtship extended only to discourse and light physical affection, but perhaps in our world that type of undemanding relationship is treasured.

Carna was removed from Praxis of Marseilles by her Clan, due to several public indiscretions with mortal men. She was appointed Regent of the Milwaukee Tremere, and Primogen to boot, although those with whom I've spoken say the political games of Kindred wearied her long ago.

Her discovery of Das Buch vom Grabkrieg within the University amplified her desire for release. Its talk of liberty through diablerie, and throwing off the chains of the elders, spoke to a part of Carna that since Embrace had been shackled and tormented. She practiced rituals detailed within the Book. She took lovers again, reveling in the joys of sex and intimacy. She opened her mind to the possibility of Golconda, despite the dangers of following that path.

The question of whether she committed diablerie, and how this allowed her to break free from her Clan, remains. For all intents and purposes, she could be considered voluntarily Caitiff – yet it is no small thing to throw off a Clan's curse.

Her behaviors since discovering the book are notably different from the unsure, deprived, and nigh-somnolent personality she possessed for years before. The magic in the Marquette University – or lack thereof – may play a larger part still in how her point of view has shifted so violently in recent times. Some of the madness of the writer is said to be in the ink of the original Book of the Grave-War. If so, perhaps such script could drive a reader to insanity. In truth, I can only speculate until I ask her myself.

A City on the Brink

Milwaukee is in a tenuous position. The Camarilla are weakened by the flight of the resident Anarchs, yet those Kindred who remain are stalwart in their defense of the city. The Sabbat's recent hostilities have been cripplingly precise, implying their access to insider information. The Lupines continue to harass all Kindred on the outskirts, never abating in a war Kindred fail to understand. Prophecy — if understood correctly — alludes to ancient vampires rising from the depths if the Sabbat's siege begins, spelling doom for Milwaukee and a new age for the waking Methuselahs.

At the center is Carna and the *Book of the Grave-War*. The former Regent of the Milwaukee Tremere appears to have broken the bond keeping her slavishly linked to her Clan. Other Kindred in the city argue it's only her mind that's broken. Long considered introverted and utterly controlled by her clanmates, Carna's successful rebellion sends shockwaves across Milwaukee.

The invitation received by Beckett to seek out the *Book of the Grave-War* lures him to Milwaukee, but when he arrives it's no longer there. Beckett finds evidence that the Warlock at least planned to write to the Tzimisce Vykos. What end the potential clash between he and Vykos serves is unknown to Beckett, but the attentions of the Fiend and an army of Sabbat are now focused on Milwaukee.

Manipulating all is the Malkavian known alternately as Jacob or Esau. This elder wages a war with himself using the inhabitants of Milwaukee and beyond as his agents, unaware his 1000-year foe is one of his multiple personalities. Even he doesn't know how much of the escalating conflict is as a result of his schemes, one half of the Malkavian blind to the moves of the other. Esau laughs that he placed the Book in the Marquette University to be found by Carna, but Jacob would never know, just as Esau will never know Jacob wrote it in the first place, under the supervision of a vampire more adept in manipulation and control than any other.

Following are chronicle threads stemming from these flashpoints in Milwaukee, and activities in which a coterie may wish to become involved.

- Unwilling to wait for the Sabbat to strike his haven, the Ventrue Hrothulf has vowed to take the fight to the Sabbat. He makes headway into penetrating their territory in Fond du Lac and Sheboygan, where he's discovered scores of vampires preying on the kine, awaiting the command to drive south into Milwaukee. Hrothulf now returns to Milwaukee to form a guerrilla army of his own.

- Recognizing the severity of Milwaukee's situation, Decker is reluctantly forced to put out a call for aid to his longtime mentor Inyanga, the Gangrel Primogen of Chicago. Decker lacks pull where Inyanga has the ear of many of her clanmates. He offers feeding rights and limited Embracing privileges to those who travel to Milwaukee to stand and fight the Sabbat. The offer is tempting to many neonates. Decker knows such a tactic could backfire, but he's coldly aware that a great number of these volunteers will perish when meeting the enemy.

- The few remaining free spirits in Milwaukee receive word from Edward Scott, former Brujah Primogen and "Black Prince" of the local Anarchs, that a rave is to be held in the Prince's suite at Miller Park. When the first coterie arrives early, they discover a letter on the floor, addressed to Decker and accusing Parovich of feeding information to the Sabbat. The Kindred, now bearing the letter, have a decision to make. This letter pinpoints exactly where the Sabbat are going to hit, and how they know to do so. The ultimate recipient of this information could change the fate of the city entirely, and Akawa — a former Anarch, now loyal to the Camarilla — is about to investigate who triggered the alarm on the executive suite.

- The packs in Fond du Lac are becoming restless. For months they've only been sent on hit-and-run raids of Milwaukee, before having to return via Lupine-infested towns and countryside. A month ago word travelled down via the Ducti that an invasion's in the cards, the Archbishop of Washington D.C. supposedly orchestrating the assault. One pack has the order to enter the city, and rapidly assassinate the Tremere before finding a book in the Chantry to be brought to the Archbishop. As the pack sets out to perform its task, a fellow Cainite suggests this entire war may just be a cover to acquire one stupid book. That Cainite promptly disappears.

- The Kindred of Milwaukee have always been subject to the attacks of Lupines who make this



land their territory. Only in recent years has it become apparent most of the blazing hostilities were caused by the previous, insane Prince. Decker has run with the wolves on more than one occasion. Decker seeks vampires, favoring Gangrel, to meet and treat with the werewolves of nearby Menomonee Falls. Decker knows the Lupines want the King Distilleries operations in the docklands terminated — he doesn't understand their hatred for the company — and is prepared to offer the werewolves the distilleries in exchange for them turning their attention to the attacking Sabbat. Such a mission to Lupine territory will require incredibly brave Kindred accompanying and backing the diplomatic queen of Milwaukee: the Toreador Primogen Lucina.

- An unknown vampire sits in the shadows, commanding the Bahari Cult of Isis to first cleanse the Tremere Chantry, before turning their attentions on fueling the war between Camarilla and Sabbat. This vampire hears the whispering voices of forgotten vampires in Lake Michigan. She knows the letting of potent blood will cause them to wake. Another portent of Gehenna will come to pass, and her mistress will be happy indeed.
- The Pyramid is troubled by talk of the travelling zoo of Tremere rebels known as House Carna. Representatives are being dispatched from as far away as Vienna on assorted missions. Some are to locate the missing native Tremere of Milwaukee, Mortius and Victor. Others are to discover the truth behind rumors that Carna broke free from her bond. More are sent to track Carna herself, and bring her back into the fold. Her cult consists of a sizeable number of followers. The Tremere don't want House Carna any larger.
- Via the machinations of Jacob/Esau, word spreads fast that the mysterious *Book of the Grave-War* was, or still is, in Milwaukee. Practiced Noddists and amateur scholars alike hurry to reach the city before it's consumed by war, prepared to risk their existences to find some clue as to its present whereabouts. The information it contains pertaining to Gehenna, and the secret of how to eradicate the blood bond without the vaulderie, entices a range of disparate visitors, who couldn't be visiting Milwaukee at a worse time.
- Carna's cult travels west in a convoy of motorhomes, supported by ghouls and loyal mortals. She has no clear destination in mind, but in-

tends to avoid all major Camarilla power centers until she reaches the Pacific coast. She knows her former clanmates are hunting her and the other members of her "House" down. In truth, she's desperate to force influential vampires to read the Book, as she's convinced herself that by accepting the enlightenment presented within, the power of Antediluvians and Methuselahs will be lessened. This is why she wanted Vykos — a vampire long known for their rejection of the Clan founders — to read the Book. All her ambitions have achieved so far is the spread of war. To any vampire who offers House Carna safe harbor, she'd gladly share the contents of the Book. Any who do so may realize freedom to be an addictive drug.

A Tangled Weave

The events taking place in Milwaukee provide as many openings to the opportunistic as they do chasms for the unfortunate. Little can stop the situation in the city from reaching a dreadful crescendo, but not everything is as it seems. Listed below are inspirations for twisting Milwaukee in more extreme ways.

- The *Book of the Grave-War* was never in Milwaukee. Carna has always been obsessed with Beckett after receiving his brief affections. She realized the only way to have him by her side was to lure him. She wrote to Vykos to get revenge on Beckett for his tardiness but, realizing the great peril she faced, fled in a blaze of destructive glory. Now she's confused, and followed by misled cultists who believe they're free of their bond to the Tremere. Instead, they're bound to Carna.
- The *Book of the Grave-War* emphasizes the role rebels will have to play in Gehenna. The idea of finally throwing off the shackles of her Clan appeals to a long-smothered part of Carna's being. Of the routes described in the Book, Carna seizes the opportunity to diablerize a vampire generationally close enough to Caine to destroy her blood bond. Through the coaxing of Jacob, her prey is a torpid vampire in the region of Lake Michigan. Who this vampire was is a mystery even to Carna, but the ingestion of the vampire's soul has contributed hugely to her growing mania.
- As Decker is attempting to rally the Camarilla with bitter resolve, word spreads; the Gangrel are leaving the Ivory Tower. His own clanmates abandon him to Milwaukee, the Anubi following the Anarchs in order to escape the sinking ship. The pragmatic, yet loyal to a fault, Prince is left with a skeleton crew of questionable trustworthiness. Whether he puts city before Clan becomes apparent on the night of the Sabbat offensive.
- The information Parovich has been feeding the Sabbat for half a century does not pay off, as he soon finds himself hunted by the Sword of Caine. The Sabbat has little use for betrayers. Parovich would trade anything for a secure exit from Milwaukee and has information and wealth aplenty.
- The prophecies are true. As Milwaukee falls to ruin, Lake Michigan ripples and vampires long dormant and mighty in age pour forth to take back their ancient land. Sects mean nothing to these monsters, some of whom fall to infighting while others form compacts, steadily Embracing a new era of childer. A great race ensues as Sect representatives travel to the Lake Michigan region to find out more about the new Kindred and, if possible, draw them to their banners. Most delegates find only the jaws of their devourers.
- Jacob approaches a coterie of vampires and bestows upon them the original *Book of the Grave-War*, telling them they can keep it, pass it on, or bury it for all the Malkavian cares. Whatever they do, they'll have played another role in the eternal Jyhad between the Malkavian's personalities, and repercussions will follow their actions as word spreads they held it even once.

A SPLIT CITY

Lucita (555-487-5555)

L:	I need your plane.	11:04
B:	Afraid I can't spare it at the moment.	11:06
L:	I'm afraid I already borrowed it.	11:07
B:	What?	11:07
B:	How? When were you in town? What?	11:07
L:	No time to chat. Landing in Montreal.	11:09
B:	You're leaving me dry, Lucita. In bloody Milwaukee. You owe me.	11:10
L:	You already owed me.	11:11
B:	Nonsense. What about that business with the Premascines beneath Venice?	11:11
L:	Puma Punku	11:11
B:	Fie.	11:13

Milwaukee Intermodal Station, Milwaukee, United States

As a rule, I'm wary of places that pull me in. Better to go to locations I loathe or that give me an active feeling of foreboding. That is a response I can trust.-O

Bereft of air transport, Cesare and I are forced to make travel arrangements through the Lupine-haunted wasteland between Milwaukee and Chicago. Travel in that space between is treacherous for Kindred, and most go by air. There was, however, an alternative via my intrepid Clan.

Prince Mark Decker of Milwaukee and Inyanga, elder and sometimes-Primogen of Chicago, operate a sort of underground shuttle service between the two cities. Survival, while not guaranteed, is generally agreed to increase exponentially.

I do know Carna's little coven was visited by Warlocks from across the Midwest, including Chicago. A trip to the Second City might afford me the opportunities to look into some loose ends regarding both the Book of the Grave-War and the Eye of Hazimel.

Chicago stands as a bastion of the Camarilla, but it shows the stress cracks of years of conflict. Conflict with the Anarchs. Conflict between its puissant elders. Even an open war with the Lupines many years ago, which brought Final Death to half the city's Kindred. It has regrown, in the years since, on its strong, twisted trunk. The gravity of the U.S.'s crossroads city has a way of pulling me in from time to time.

When love and hate turn strange
And magpies filch the hours
And Judas limbs betray
Know you are a figment
A shadow-sleeper's dream
Remember, remember
Dreams die when sleepers wake
Remember, remember
for Kindred's sake

An excerpt from my fragments of the Book of the Grave-War (translated by Dr. Mortius). Another reference to the shadow-sleepers. Frightful reading when you misplace your pen, only to find it in the pocket you checked a moment ago.

Truck Stop, Somewhere Between Milwaukee and Chicago, United States

Chicago proper was established in 1833, near Fort Dearborn. Maxwell, of Clan Brujah, became the city's first Prince a few years later. Then came the Great Chicago

Fire, Devil's Night, in 1871. Many Kindred perished, a disproportionate amount of them being Maxwell's supporters. Lodin, of Clan Ventrue, took the opportunity to seize praxis. He was known for his particularly violent clashes with the Anarchs. It was all going so well until he was torn apart, literally, in the war with the Lupines. In the years since, the city's powerful Primogen rule by committee. Though from what I gather, that's how they operated even when there was a Prince.

I mentally surveyed the city's history, as my chariot arrived in the form of an ancient police cruiser, relic of a bygone auction, no doubt, kept alive through mismatched, graverobbed parts. Out of the vehicle stepped Malcolm, a Clanmate. I understand he was a narcotics officer, of the kind who go deep undercover and do things that leave track marks on the soul. By the state of his pupils, and the tilt of his head, I deduced he recently supped on someone under the influence of several mind-altering substances. My driver.

At first, our journey brought us south along I-94. Malcolm made odd detours through burnt-out neighborhoods, and consulted vagrants, before weaving back to the freeway. All-night roadside shops blurred by, selling various combinations of cheese, sausage, and pornography.

Somewhere before the Illinois border, we tore away from the freeway. Malcolm called these twisted roads the "goblin roads." Through wetlands, forests, small towns, and cornfields. Our route became erratic. We doubled back in places. Malcolm performed odd rituals, like getting out of the car to offer blood and prayers to a roadside memorial, a lonely cross wrapped in barbed wire, dead Christmas lights, and withered flowers. He consulted neither map nor electronic device.

[RECORDING BEGINS]

[Sounds of an engine and the road]

Beckett: Would it be terribly rude of me to enquire about what you are on? Purely toxicological curiosity, I assure you.

Malcolm: Who?

Beckett: Pardon?

Malcolm: The question is: who am I on? Special blend. That worry you?

Beckett: Not nearly as much as it ought to. I see the interplay of chemicals and the Beast boiling in you. Yet you're steering it all with iron nerves. Remarkable self-control for someone under the influence.

Malcolm: Now you're sweet talking me. Back at you. Spooked out of your gourd and still keeping polite.

Beckett: What makes you think I'm…spooked?

Malcolm: Your fangs are showing.

Beckett: How embarrassing.

Malcolm: No shame. The goblin roads have that effect. Can practically hear Rod Serling monologue and grin, monologue and grin.

Beckett: What brought you to such a hazardous enterprise?

Malcolm: Needed something to do. A focus. Fresh air. [chuckles] Back when I first got my fangs, I was a real avenging angel. Renegade vampire cop bringing Chicago's drug syndicate to its knees. Ha! Was there ever anything so completely fucking 90s? Guess I was trying to live like my life never ended.

Beckett: What happened?

Malcolm: We all grow up. Realized the War on Drugs was bullshit. Who the fuck was I avenging? I was no killer of killers. I was a user of users. Still am. But now I drive.

Beckett: You're scared.

Malcolm: Terrified.

Beckett: But excited.

Malcolm: Yeah.

Beckett: I like to get into frightfully out of the way places too. Still, this is a hazardous environment, even for our pedigree.

Malcolm: A room is just a place where you hide from wolves. That's all any room is.

Beckett: Hmm?

Malcolm: Don't know. Read that somewhere. Out here it's just another flavor of fear. I've seen city horrors. Even as a breather. As a narc. Saw what happens when someone hides a stash of junk inside their living infant son, and the bag breaks. Then I died. I saw worse. Chicago dread clings to you. Seeps into the pores and marrow. Wraps around your head like cellophane. Everything's a fog. And the only time I noticed, really noticed, was when I was twisted on some user's juice. Freed my thoughts.

Beckett: Freed?

Malcolm: I get to asking myself, why do I suddenly hate that Lick? Had nothing to do with her a month ago. Why'd I suddenly stop hunting on that particular street? Why do I never look directly at that particular house? Then everything's melted wax. Then I notice, despite overcomplicated Casablanca plots choking the city, all the blood in the gutters is flowing in one, maybe two directions. Then the alley pavement turns to tongue meet, tasting my soles, and the sky is all eyes looking gigantically down.

We have numerous reports of unidentified preternatural activity going on in that area. The occasional Tremere monate hears the field to study this phenomenon. It never ends well.



Beckett: I see.

Malcolm: No. You don't. But it's polite of you to say so. Out here, on the goblin roads, my head's clear. Just the wolves and the weird and me. Sudden death in the briar patch, and I keep running. The Lupines can pull out all of your guts, but that's all they can take from you.

Beckett: I think— Wait. What was that?

[SOUND OF CAR BRAKING]

Malcolm: Fallen tree.

Beckett: Can you get around?

Malcolm: Shhh.

[SOUNDS OF WIND AND FROGS]

Beckett: Quiet, Cesare!

[UNIDENTIFIED SOUNDS]

Beckett: What is that? Whispering? Is that the bloody corn?

Malcolm: No.

Beckett: Drive.

Malcolm: Yeah.

Beckett: Drive!

[SOUNDS OF SCRAPING GRAVEL, SCREECHING TIRES, ROARING ENGINE]

[RECORDING ENDS]

On the Road, Illinois, United States

The road only gets weirder.

Malcolm drives. I jot down these notes as best I can. I compulsively look back, certain some Grimm boogeyman or black dog is in pursuit. Insane, really. I myself have played both the black dog and the boogeyman. This fear is...fascinating.

In this peculiar wilderness, there is an oasis for the dead.



Volo Bog, Illinois, United States

Malcolm dropped me off at the bog, before driving away with Cesare to refuel. Standing under the lone street light illuminating the nature preserve's tiny parking lot, I raised my head and sent out a call.

The light flickered under the impressive response of leathery wings. I spoke to the little ones, and they fluttered into the dark, to the bog's center. They returned a minute later. I shouldered my bag and proceeded.

The floating boardwalk swayed side to side with my weight. The motion, combined with the sloshing of water and the sound of boot to wood, reminded me of walking on the decks of old ships. The trail cut through the concentric rings of the bog's vegetative zones. Sphagnum moss formed a layer over the water, supporting plants and even trees. One could walk on that quaking surface, but one would never know when it might swallow one up.

At the center, the open water of the bog's mouth reflected the sky. In that obsidian mirror, I counted two sets of glowing eyes other than my own. Xaviar stared into the water, arms crossed. He glanced up at me with that pinched bat face.

Inyanga perched on the boardwalk railing, as perfectly balanced as a resplendent bird.

A sandhill crane called out, a positively Mesozoic sound. Fitting, I suppose, to announce the meeting of three old things. Vitae, like bog water, preserves the corpse indefinitely.

[RECORDING BEGINS]

[SOUNDS OF SLOSHING WATER]

Beckett: Former Justicar, I'm honored to receive an audience in your more…reclusive years.

Xaviar: [grunt]

Beckett: Mother Inyanga, always a pleasure.

Inyanga: Likewise, Beckett. I am pleased you made the journey from Milwaukee in safety.

Beckett: Thanks to you. Though I have to ask, are you aware that your driver is a high-functioning junkie?

Inyanga: I am. In fact, it was I who steered him to a particular mixture of plant extracts, to make his mental journey more… productive.

Xaviar: What do you want, Beckett?

Beckett: I was in the neighborhood, as it were, and thought I might skip through an ocean of Lupines and Midwestern weirdness for a chitchat and —

Xaviar: God's teeth, you prattle on like a hyena infatuated with its own cackling.

Beckett: Not an entirely inaccurate —

Xaviar: What *do* you want? I don't like this place.

Beckett: I thought it was an oasis.

Xaviar: Yes, the Lupines won't approach within miles of this spot. But why? What do they know? Thousands and thousands of years ago, a glacier buried something in the earth. Something very old traveled in a coffin of ice, something that suffocated all the fish and turned the plants into predators, and every time I come here I feel a wriggling in my guts. So bury your banter and get to it.

Beckett: I should like to talk to you about the Eye of Hazimel.

Xaviar: I've already told my story.

Beckett: I prefer firsthand data when I can get it.

Xaviar: I and a band of my clansmen were decimated by an Antediluvian's horror and —

[PAUSE]

Xaviar: I will rip that grin out of your face. You weren't there, tomb thief.

Beckett: My business is to piece together events I was not present for. All the evidence suggests a young Toreador sculptor named Leopold stumbled upon a very nasty artifact.

Xaviar: The earth vomited fire and chewed our corpses.

Beckett: I appreciate your position. Were I Justicar, I'd have told everyone I fought three Antediluvians if a Toreador neonate had thrashed me.

[Sounds of growls and sloshing water]

Inyanga: Xaviar!

[Growling and sloshing sounds cease]

Beckett: [choked] Easy…Xaviar. Don't want to rock the boardwalk.

Xaviar: [grunt]

Inyanga: It is in the smiling scholar's nature to be sardonic. As the crow must mock, and the skull must grin.

Xaviar: …yes.

Inyanga: And you should be clever enough to temper your smile when perching in a crocodile's mouth.

Beckett: Xaviar, I do not doubt that you and yours faced something truly powerful. But that does not an Antediluvian make. There are other terrors in the world. You've seen enough of it to know that.

Xaviar: Perhaps.

Beckett: Look about. Years later and the world still spins. We have not been devoured. Gehenna never occurred.

Inyanga: You all speak of Gehenna so singularly.

Beckett: Beg pardon?

Inyanga: Everything has its seasons and cycles. Death and birth. The world is always ending. There is always another Gehenna coming. The question is which ones can be endured, escaped, or reshaped.

Beckett: Shall we call that the Poly-Gehenna theory, then? Yes, I recall having heard something to that effect in the mythologies of the Laibon.

Xaviar and Inyanga: [simultaneously] Yes.

Beckett: Interesting.

Inyanga: What?

Beckett: We'll get back to that. Right now, I should be honored to have Xaviar's personal account of the Eye.

Xaviar: But you already have all the information.

Beckett: I came to the realization, long ago, that I would never have all the information…and I never got over it. I don't have the account in your words. Every tiny detail gives better context to the whole.

Xaviar: Very well. For the boon I owe Inyanga, I will tell you everything I can. But first, you will turn that off.

[RECORDING ENDS]

Graceland Cemetery, Chicago, United States

I catalogued more of the terrible nuance of Hazimel's gory orb. Xaviar also gave me the name of the only other survivor of that encounter, a Gangrel neonate by the name of Ramona. Inyanga joined Malcolm, Cesare, and I, and we made the remainder of the journey to Chicago without incident.

Cesare has taken lodgings in a hotel. Inyanga brought me to Graceland Cemetery. I will sleep the day away in the grave soil of Kate Warne (1833-1868), the first female private detective in the United States. I like to keep good company.

[RECORDING BEGINS]

Inyanga: Always prying. Always testing.

Beckett: Yes.

Inyanga: Even now.

Beckett: You're not actually a Gangrel, are you, Mother Inyanga?

Inyanga: And how is it you think you know this?

Beckett: I did not. Just a theory I'm testing. I know that in his younger days, Xaviar traveled Africa extensively.

Inyanga: Yes.

Beckett: He made acquaintances among the indigenous vampires. It is said he even learned some of their supernatural tricks.

Inyanga: I have heard the same.

Beckett: He must have had at least one mentor. You yourself have displayed strange abilities that you attribute to the mysticism of your mortal days. Also, with a single word, you calmed a creature as tempestuous as Xaviar. It's more than the simple fear we

might have for an elder; he respects you absolutely. I can tell the difference, because he fears the Eye of Hazimel absolutely. I think you and he have known each other a very long time.

Inyanga: Perhaps.

Beckett: When I said, "Laibon," his eyes darted straight to you.

Inyanga: [chuckles] Clever child.

[RECORDING ENDS]

I find it surprising that so many Laibon have lived, unknown, in a Camarilla domain for so long. Even more surprising that one should ascend to such prominence as a cuckoo within a surrogate Clan.-A

University of Chicago, Chicago, United States

Inyanga pointed me to one of the more affable of Chicago's elder monsters, Critias. He was teaching a class, and I was permitted to sit in as a visitor. I sit now, at a desk, penning this entry.

The lecture hall is mostly empty, save six Brujah and myself. Critias sits, mostly silent, behind a great desk, occasionally commenting or writing notes. His protégés, Dre and Damien, stand in as teachers tonight. Three neonates sit as students. There was a lesson in Ancient Greek, followed by history (both Kindred and kine). The class grew more active with lessons in debate. Critias joined in these. The man has a dizzying intellect for rhetoric.

[RECORDING BEGINS]

Brujah students: [in unison] *Enkrateia. Reie. Sophrosyne.*

Critias: *Entelechy.* I think we will adjourn here for the evening. Dre will give you your assignments. I will see you all next week.

Beckett: Thank you for letting me observe.

Critias: Thank you for honoring my request not to record it.

Beckett: I know better than to try pull a trick against a mind like yours.

Critias: Flattery, Beckett, will get you everywhere. Please sit.

Beckett: I hear you've become quite active in teaching the youth these nights. Tempering the iconoclast kids with philosopher ideals? Bearing the torch for Carthage?

I have heard of a sudden and synchronized resurgence of ancient Brujah teaching the clan's youth, across the globe. Some say they aim for a full-fledged Path of Enlightenment, silencing the Beast with disciplined intellect. -O

Critias: No, I used to bear a torch for Carthage. We all did. We raged and we mourned for something old, cracked, and dead. We buried it in the mausoleum of our heads and hearts. What stung us the most was the knowledge that it was broken. But revolutions turn in a full circle. Old becomes new. What?

Beckett: You are just the second elder to say as much in the same number of nights.

Critias: It is true. Old ideas can rejuvenate. Carthage, the ideal, is old and new again. It is something we no longer passively mourn, but actively live. There are new, vital minds being born in this new age. Old ideas run through young minds. That is true immortality. Carthage is the invisible structure that bridges our old minds to their dynamic youth.

Beckett: Idealism is not always my strong point, but I can respect erudition. But why the renewed pedagogy, Critias? Why now?

Critias: …do you not tire of the fighting? Do you not wish to build?

Beckett: Pardon?

Critias: …I apologize. My mind wandered. Yes.

Beckett: So is council rule by the Primogen part of your enlightened experiment?

Critias: More of a serendipitous opportunity, I would say. Better that than that disgrace of the Blood, Balthazar.

Beckett: I would have thought some brazen Ventrue would have risen to claim praxis of such a prized city. I heard Capone made a real run for it a few years back.

Critias: That brute?

Beckett: He has a famous name, among living and dead. He has a famous pedigree.

Critias: [sighs] Lodin's swollen brood is still unnaturally large. It's his contentious legacy. Ballard would have ascended were it not for recent scandals. Capone and Jackson are next in line, on the Ventrue side. But no, no I do not think Chicago needs a Prince. Definitely. Not.

Beckett: Didn't mean to strike a chord.

Critias: You know… In an enlightened age, a mind like yours would be most welcome, Beckett.

Beckett: Flattery, as a wise man once said, will get you anywhere.

Critias: You must teach a class here.

Beckett: Perhaps that could be arranged. I do have a favor to ask, though.

Critias: Yes?

Beckett: I need to consult the city's Tremere. I'd like to speak to Primogen Nicolai.

[RECORDING ENDS]



The Plutonian Shore Gallery, Chicago, United States

I entered the art gallery perhaps a touch underdressed, but my name earned me entrance, and a man with no neck led me through the gallery, to a private section in back. This room contained only a single painting, and a little boy in a dark suit. He stared at the painting with rather chilling eyes. A cursory glance of his aura showed the vibrant, innocent colors of a living child. However, I knew that the dead thing filling that suit was far from innocent. A Warlock trick? He held a moldering teddy bear in one hand.

[RECORDING BEGINS]

Beckett: Primogen Nicolai Antonescu, I presume.

Nicolai: Mr. Beckett.

Beckett: Nice teddy.

Nicolai: Is it? A ritual component.

Beckett: DuSable said I might find you here and have an audience.

Nicolai: DuSable had best not be sending emissaries to beseech my backing his praxis claim. Anyway. Yes. Will five minutes suffice?

Beckett: It will have to. I wanted to speak to you about Carna and Milwaukee. You see, I—

[Sound of stomping steps and a slamming door]

Man's voice: No. No! You've got to be shitting me. A fucking kid?

Nicolai: You do not belong here.

The Inner Council has made a habit of infantilizing Nicolai Antonescu. I do not. Allow a mind like that to enter the playground of centuries, with blood magic as its toy, and see what happens. -A

Man's voice: You snatched the last of the Yaanek Cycle paintings out from under me. I have all the others.

Nicolai: The rules of the auction did not dictate that they had to be sold as a set.

Man's voice: I'm not going home with an incomplete set because some spoiled brat with inheritance took a shine to the pretty picture. Do you know who I am?

Nicolai: Please do me the kindness of forgetting how to breathe.

[CHOKING SOUNDS]

Beckett: Is he…? Did you just…?

Nicolai: No. The body's involuntary functions are not so easily controlled. When he loses consciousness, he will begin breathing again. But my control is strong. He will likely wake up and forget again, and again, and again.

[CONTINUED CHOKING]

Beckett: Um. Should we move…

Nicolai: He is fine right there. You are not here regarding the contentious Princedom then. Continue.

Beckett: Yes, well…I want to talk about the Tremere of Milwaukee. Talk about Carna. The *Book of the Grave-War*. Dr. Mortius.

Nicolai: Do you know where he is? The doctor.

Beckett: I'm afraid I don't.

Nicolai: Pity.

[CONTINUED CHOKING]

Beckett: Quite. But I'm to understand that Carna acquired an original copy of the book in question. I also understand that, before she fled Milwaukee, she occasionally invited various Midwestern Tremere to meet in her chantry. Would you—

[SOUND OF A BODY COLLAPSING]

[CHOKING SOUNDS CEASE]

Beckett: … would you know anything about that? Did you attend? Have you seen the book? And I… I'm sorry. Is there something watching us from the skylight?

Nicolai: [whisper] Yes. Ublo-Satha. [much louder] Carna is now an Anarch and a traitor. I never entered Milwaukee, and I never attended those meetings. I'm afraid I can't help you, Mr. Beckett. You should leave now.

Milwaukee has always been off limits to most of my Clan. Only Tremere specifically sent to that city are authorized to go. -A



Beckett: If I could just ask —

Nicolai: Of course, my more impertinent childe, Erichtho, is little better than an Anarch herself. It would not surprise me if she had attended several of these sessions just to spite my wishes.

Beckett: Are you saying…?

Man's voice: [gasp] What… wha — [sounds of choking]

Beckett: Thank you, Primogen Antonescu. For your time.

[CONTINUED CHOKING]

[RECORDING ENDS]

Graceland Cemetery, Chicago, Illinois, United States

There exists a wickedness of such purity, one only ever finds it in serial killers and children. I have seen youths torture frogs with the same look on their faces as I saw on Nicolai's when he stared at the man who forgot how to breathe. It was disturbingly human.

More peculiar was the way Nicolai looked up at the winged horror at the skylight. Was that fear? I thought the Gargoyles were the timorous slaves of the Warlocks, not the other way around.

Ublo-Satha is one of the oldest Gargoyles still in our service. Cunning and dangerous. She has served as the personal bodyguard and agent of at least one Inner Council member. She actually volunteered to be sent to keep an eye on Nicolai's activity. -A

The rest of the night, I found myself looking fearfully up.

I dined at a city park.

Returning to the cemetery, I toured the gravestones to clear my head. I was staring at Allan Pinkerton's tomb when I became rather lost in thought. Then I felt that dreadful sensation, like losing one's keys. I found something in my pocket that had not been there a moment ago, a little wooden box. Inside the box, a scarab amulet of brass. I looked about the graveyard, with all the senses at my command, but found no one.

"Ublo-Satha?" I whispered.

The statue of a broken-winged angel failed to reply.

North Lincoln Avenue, Chicago, United States

Nicolai has a rebellious childe. Nicolai is curious about what Carna is up to, but is under the burden of too much stone monster oversight to risk a trip to Milwaukee. Nicolai orders his childe to go there? More likely, he would not have to, simply bait her, tell her not to go.

Erichtho has numerous contacts with mortal magi in America, and does well by Nicolai's protection. In fifty years, Ms. Graves might tire of rebellion and run her own chantry. -A

Contacting Erichtho proved easy enough, and she was surprisingly eager to meet, though she made sure it was in a public place. A British-style pub (how quaint) across the street from where John Dillinger was killed.

[RECORDING BEGINS]

Beckett: Do I smell defensive rituals on you, or are you just happy to see me?

Erichtho: I am certain, Beckett, that your powers of banter are the stuff of legend, but for tonight, let us keep things simple and swift.

Beckett: Very well. You know what I'm after?

Erichtho: Yes. I have been to Milwaukee. I attended Carna's gatherings. I saw her book. And there are many things I could tell you, but…

Beckett: But you would like a favor first.

Erichtho: Yes.

Beckett: How may I be of service?

Erichtho: There is a woman.

Beckett: A woman?

Erichtho: A young Toreador. She goes by the name of Portia. She… She has her hooks in Nicolai. He's completely enamored. Completely blind.

Beckett: And what do you want done?

Erichtho: I want to know what she's up to. I want her gone. I… What?

Beckett: [burst of laughter] I… I'm sorry. Apologies. [more laughter] I just… You're jealous.

Erichtho: I am no such thing! He is a 700 year old magus, not some foolish whelp. She lurks in the Chantry at all hours. She has access to parts of it no one outside the clan has, places I'm not permitted to go. DuSable doesn't seem to even notice her. And Ublo-Satha just keeps her distance and watches. It is not natural or right a neonate should have that sort of sway over an elder. Something is terribly wrong. She is just too…much.

Beckett: The Toreador have a knack for seeming to be more than they are. But point taken. Perhaps I can look into it... What do you think of this?

Erichtho: It's an amulet of brass. A beetle, perhaps a scarab. There is a mystical energy to it.

Beckett: My assessment as well. And the nature of the enchantment?

Erichtho: I would need more time and study to be sure, but at a guess, based on the feel and these markings…a protective charm. Protection from a malevolent influence or attention, perhaps.

Beckett: Thank you.

Erichtho: You will investigate Portia then? She must be stopped.

Beckett: My god. You truly are jealous. And I heard that your relationship with your sire was antagonistic. Did… Oh. Did Nicolai blood bo —

Erichtho: I said to keep it simple and swift, Beckett. Do as I have asked, and I will tell you everything you want to know. But if the words "blood bond" touch any other Kindred ear in Chicago,

I will summon something to come for you, something with a name not even you could pronounce.

[PAUSE]

Beckett: That…was the seventh most peculiar threat anyone has ever made against me. And effective.

[RECORDING ENDS]

Outside the Succubus Club, Chicago, United States

I find myself detestably entangled in a love triangle between a child-elder, an Anarch Warlock, and a young Toreador punching above her weight. It is, however, the most direct way to my goal. I know just where to find this Portia. I am about to enter the Succubus Club.

Wait. How did you just "know" where to look? Beckett, you do know about the current state of the original Succubus Club? -A

I put on the scarab amulet tonight. A hunch. A gut feeling. A muffled and distant scream in the back of the mind.

[RECORDING BEGINS]

[SILENCE]

Beckett: Portia, I presume.

Portia: How did you find me?

Beckett: Never mind that. I want to talk to you about a powerful undead magus.

Portia: Little Nicolai. What do you think of the Succubus tonight?

Beckett: I don't follow.

Portia: Describe it to me.

[SILENCE]

Beckett: A large, opulent night club. Industrial…that's the correct term, yes? Crowds of writhing people and…

[SILENCE]

Beckett: … and loud music…

[SILENCE]

Beckett: No… It's empty? Desolate. Boarded up.

Portia: Only us and the dust and rodent kind. Now tell me, how did you find me?

Beckett: I…I investigated… That is, I…no. I tracked —

Portia: You came because I called.

Beckett: You!

Portia: Shhh. You are disturbing the sepulcher. You do not want to cause me trouble, do you?

Beckett: No.

Portia: Take off your hat and glasses. You won't need them anymore.

Beckett: Yes.

Portia: What beautiful eyes. Now, take off those gloves. You won't need them anymore.

Beckett: Yes.

Portia: What beautiful nails you have. Hard as steel and so, so sharp. They would rend flesh and bone. I just want to…bite them off. Mmm…

[CRUNCH]

Portia: One.

[Crunch]

Portia: Two

[CRUNCH]

Portia: Three. Soon, you won't have any nails at all.

Beckett: [gasp] …yes.

Portia: What a pretty, pretty bauble you wear. Its eyes are glowing… Now, come downstairs with me. I'm going soon. East. But there are a few things left to attend to here.

Beckett: Yes.

[SOUNDS OF FEET WALKING DOWN STAIRS]

Portia: Turn that off, child. You won't need it anymore.

[RECORDING ENDS]

An Alley, Chicago, United States

Covered in blood. I ran. How far? On two feet or four? Who did I kill under the Red Fear?

The amulet did it. The scarab. Little teeth buried in my neck. Acid pain burning through my body. I came to and tore it from my throat. Regained my mind. Little ruby eyes glowed red with heat a few minutes more. Protection from malevolent influence, that's what Erichtho said. The bloody talisman called to the only thing

nasty enough to resist that kind of influence – the evil brother that lives in our breasts, chainsaw in hand, waiting to horribly protect us. The Beast.

Miraculously, my bag is still with me.

I'm flying out of here.

Cesare (555-919-1079)

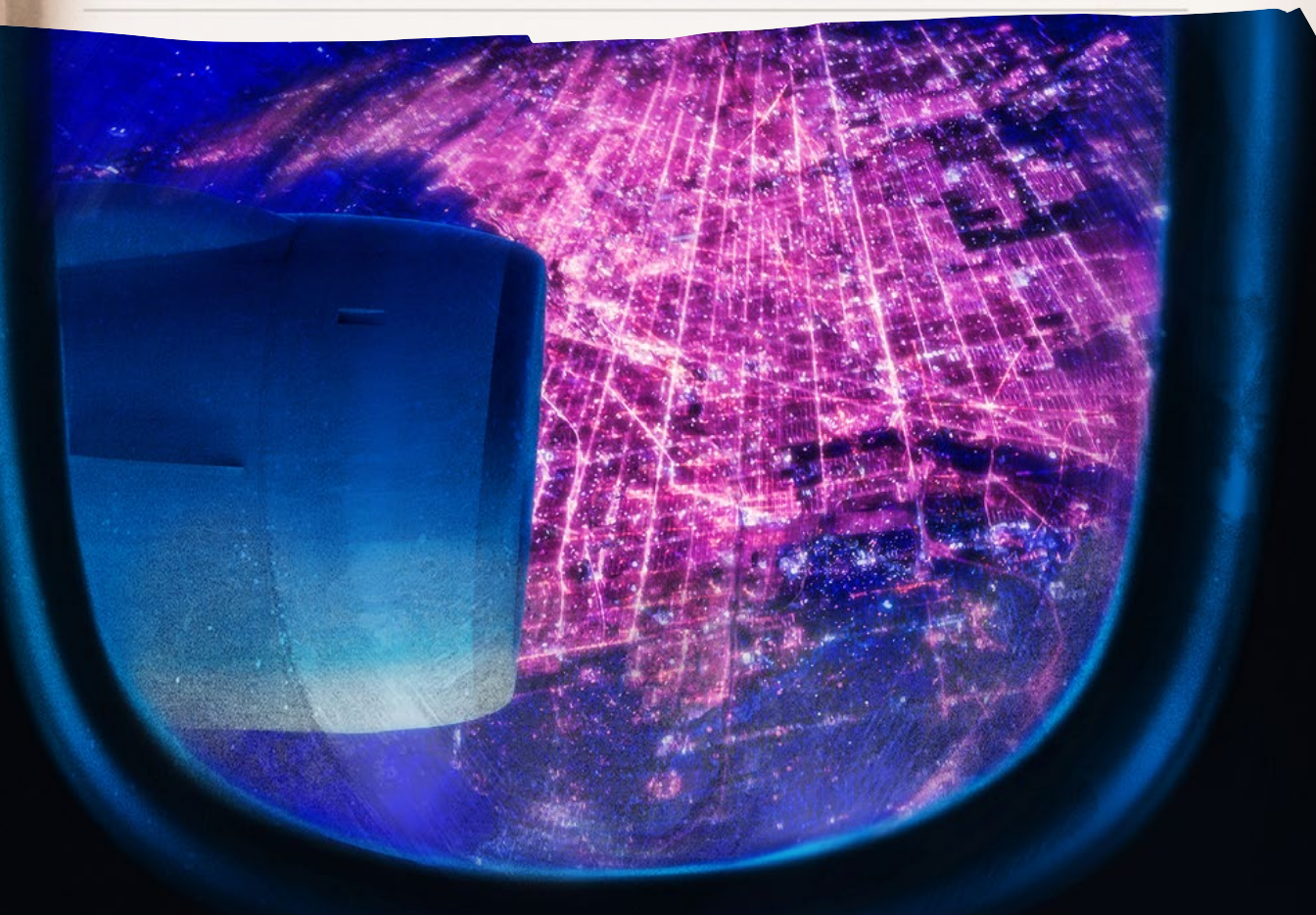
B:	Ready the plane. Leaving. Immediately.	12:14

Erichtho (555-224-9900)

B:	Regretfully, I must cancel our bargain. If I might offer some advice that won't be followed: leave Chicago. Leave now.	12:18

Above Midway Airport, Chicago, United States

In the air now. That doesn't mean we're safe. I'm paranoid that a sudden urge to leave the plane will take me. That my Judas fist will bash the window open, sending



me tumbling back to Chicago. Out that window, the city skyline looks like a row of tombstones for dead, titan gods, or maybe a jagged overbite gnawing on the sky.

Malcolm's disjointed words make more sense. I know why he runs those wild roads, risking Final Death to keep his mind. I think of how fearfully the reigning Tremere Regent looked at his Gargoyle servant. I think of Critias and how his voice changed when he said, "Do you not tire of the fighting?" How it sounded like someone else's words on his tongue.

What frightens me most is not brushing up against the power of the ancients, but that my intellect failed me. I knew of the two Methuselahs quietly warring in Chicago. On a previous trip, I even stood in the presence of one. They never entered my thoughts on this visit. I charged blindly in, unable to pick up the obvious clues screaming at me. My brain failed to warn me when I walked into that den.

The agony of the amulet and the savagery of the frenzy cleared my mind. I remember everything now.

Mr. Beckett said to write this down (well, he motioned me). Every time he tries to write down what happened in the Club, it all comes out as scribbles and nonsense. Tore the pages with his pen. He tried to record it on a tape, but just babbled gibberish and sweated blood. He smashed his computer and gave me a black eye, then apologized.-C

The Second City

Chicago is the quintessential Kindred metropolis, forefront in the campaign to retake the American South, and yet it has been without a Prince since the death of Lodin. Many contenders rose to claim the throne, but none gained traction in the decades since. Those in the know realize the reason is because Chicago hosts a particularly powerful group of elders amongst its Primogen. This Primogen council has always ruled the city. After Lodin's demise, they saw no reason to raise a puppet.

Chicago is a city of terrible possibilities. One can find just about everything here, in the multilayered, crosshatched conflicts playing out at any given time. The city contains one of the highest populations of undead in the New World, and a sizable group of potent elders. The Anarchs subvert from the outskirts, Sabbat packs seethe in the shadows, and Lupines stalk the streets. At the center of all these webs, two Methuselahs plot against each other. They do not control every drama of the city, but their actions send ripples that everyone eventually feels. In recent decades, Helena held the upper hand, having awoken from torpor and acclimated herself to the new age. Though his body is still, Menele's mind is not idle. He finally begins to stir.

The following are chronicle threads offer opportunities and snares for enterprising coteries.

- Inyanga, the Gangrel Primogen of Chicago, is actually a Laibon. The Laibon, in fact, have long colonized the rest of the world, often under the guise of Kindred or Cainites. Inyanga has aided in this diaspora. In this, she receives aid from Lucian, the Gangrel elder of Gary, Indiana. Lucian controls the shipyards and docks. He owns the Gary Export Company and, through this, he controls the passage of many vampires traveling to and from Chicago via the Atlantic. He's just opened the boxes containing a brand new coterie of Laibon, fresh to the New World, and ready to meet Inyanga.

- Khalid, the Nosferatu Primogen of Chicago, is one of the few Kindred independent of the games of Helena and Menele. He became aware that two Methuselahs control the city some time ago. Through his tremendous powers of Obfuscate, Khalid has kept his independence. It was years before Helena and Menele became aware of him and, by that time, each assumed the other controlled the Nosferatu. Recently, things came too close. In a fit of paranoia, Khalid vanished. He doesn't attend Primogen meetings. He's faded from view, and in some cases memory. He tries to subtly direct and guide vampires still independent of the Methuselahs. These wild cards usually include neonates, including a particular coterie creeping beneath the notice of the ancients.

- The Primogen may not seek a Prince, but several Kindred still vie for the position. Each aware of the Primogen's influence over Lodin's rule, the likely candidates have at times worked together, but more often apart, to shore up power independent from the council. Vampires such as the Ventrue Capone and Jackson, and the Tremere DuSable, seek a rule the Camarilla will endorse, so they may make a stronghold supported in full by the Ivory Tower. Other Kindred, namely the Ventrue Ballard, and the Brujah Balthazar and Maxwell, intend to grab power and mold it to their respective images and ideals. Balthazar was poised to stake a claim in the last decade, having spent years accumulating dirt on the city's other Kindred and persecuting his rivals in the unofficial role of Sheriff. When his childe Levesque rose from torpor and revealed Balthazar's schemes to Maxwell, "Sheriff" fell to the back of the line. Praxis remains up for grabs, though rumor has it the Primogen Annabelle contemplates stepping away from the council and ascending to the role herself.

- Since leaving the Camarilla, former Justicar Xaviar preaches word of the rising Antediluvians to any who listen. These days, he lies low in the Midwest, convincing Gangrel to abandon their meaningless Sects. In the northwest suburbs of Chicago, he's assembled a coterie of Gangrel from all banners. These disparate Outlanders must work together to battle the ancients and stem the coming season of Gehenna. Their first mission: deal with whatever is sleeping beneath the dark waters of Volo Bog.

The Goblin Roads

The space between Milwaukee and Chicago is treacherous for Kindred. Angry Lupines infest the wetlands and small towns. Stranger things crawl from the nooks and crannies, less definable supernatural beings and phenomena — the weird. There's

a group of Gangrel who take on the dangerous task of shuttling Kindred between the cities. They are led by Mark Decker and Inyanga. They are called the Psychopomps.

- The goblin roads take their toll on the Psychopomps, and their numbers dwindled. Decker and Inyanga command the Gangrel Malcolm to recruit and train a new coterie. He must teach the routes, the secrets of Kindred travel, and the more esoteric tidbits to help a roadtripping vampire survive the weird.

- Nicolai is sending Tremere neonates (and their coterie) into the field to study the odd supernatural phenomena occurring between Milwaukee and Chicago. The coterie must contact a Psychopomp and convince her to be their guide. Just what is "the weird"? This is an opportunity to introduce Kindred characters to packs of werewolves, covens of mages, changelings, wraiths, or any number of otherworldly beings.

Trouble in the Chantry

A microcosm of the Chicago Jyhad plays out within the chantry walls. Helena thoroughly controls Nicolai, which is the only reason he's not stood for the role of Clan Justicar. She doesn't realize Menele has his own pawn within Chicago's Tremere. Long ago, before Ublo-Satha became a Gargoyle, she was a vampire. She met an ancient Brujah who conditioned her mind so powerfully the dormant commands survived her transformation.

- The Tremere neonates of Chicago discover a horrible thing. Both their Regent and Gargoyle protector are under the sway of powerful, warring forces. What can they do? Do they side with Nicolai or Ublo-Satha? Do they keep quiet and hope for the best? If they go over Nicolai's head and contact the Inner Council, will they even be taken seriously? They must tread carefully.

- Erichtho is desperate. She knows something is terribly wrong with Portia, a supposed Toreador neonate. Portia has improbable influence over the smitten Nicolai, even sleeping at the chantry. Erichtho needs a coterie to investigate Portia and put a stop to her.

Brujah School

Menele is tired of the fighting. He is concerned about why he fights Helena, what influences them to carry on this eternal war. The ancient Brujah desires to give it all up and go back to his original pursuits of constructing an enlightened society, both of Kindred and kine. At his subtle urging, Brujah the world over have begun teaching the Path of Entelechy (an ancient Path of Enlightenment). Menele will wake soon, and everything must be ready.

- Critias, still unaware of the presence of his sire, believes the recent reinvigoration of his pedagogical drive came from his own thoughts. If Chicago is the new Carthage, he will include enlightened minds from all Clans. Critias will conduct an experiment, taking a hand-selected class of Kindred, of various Clans, and begin training them in the Path of Entelechy. Chicago's Ventrue take exception to this experiment, of course, and assemble a coterie to bring it to an end.

SHADOWS COALESCE

! This message was sent with High importance.

From: jjp@sunburst.cz

To: db reath@sunburst.co.ck

Cc:

Subject: FW: Your boy.

See to this immediately and do not return until it's resolved.

And change the damn domain name of your email. You are not based out of the Cook Islands.

JJP

From: guilrose@sunburst.eu

To: jjp@sunburst.cz

Cc:

Subject: Your boy.

Jaroslav

I interviewed your boy regarding the events in D.C. and he assured me that he, the blonde, and others had seen to the traitor's denouement.

New information has come to light, Jaroslav. Your boy is a liar. Witnesses have confirmed to one of my most reliable agents that the Roman is not only walking around — he's mustering support.

There are three possibilities. Your boy is an imbecile and doesn't know how to confirm a kill. Your boy was misled by underestimating his opponent. Your boy is in league with the Roman and covered his falsified demise.

Whichever possibility you choose, it becomes clear your boy must finish the task, or die trying. If word gets out that the Roman is still extant, it won't just be your boy meeting Madame Guillotine.

Beckett,

Your man isn't willing to turn over your location, so I'm trusting him to pass this and the email to you. Usually I wouldn't ask anything from you, but this is serious. Meet me at the Hard Times Café in Alexandria tomorrow night. I'll be waiting.

Bell.

Round Robin & Scotch Bar, Washington D.C., United States

I've been maintaining a low profile since arriving in D.C. Clearly not low enough. An Archon recognizing Cesare is troubling, to say the least.

The agents of the Jyhad here rarely fight in the streets, confining their conflicts to buildings – underground car parks being a favorite for ambushes. A naïve Kindred wouldn't even know a war still rages for this city. That is, until they wake to find a cadre of ghouls setting light to their haven.

Labyrinthine offices, dilapidated hotels, long-abandoned houses, and a vile Metro system in D.C. and the surrounding cities store the corpses of hundreds of drained mortals and dozens of sprays of oily ash. I find it telling how the murder rate remains so high, despite the best mortal security services operating within eyeshot of much of the violence. The Sects fighting over D.C. know well how to play out their conflicts and avoid all notice.

For that, both Camarilla and Sabbat are thankful to the destroyed Prince, Marcus Vitel. His control over what kine and Kindred choose to see and act upon was reputedly so well-orchestrated that, even after his death, the gears, triggers, plans, and pulleys he set up continue on unerringly. His megalomaniacal operation within the Jyhad is even now used by Princes and Archbishops the world over. Few come close to emulating his iron grip.

It's not hard to guess what the plotters hope to gain by messing with Vitel's system of influence. It's all about the kine. These first few years since the millennium have set mortals off on a crazed witch-hunt on a scale rivaling the Inquisition (fortunately targeting each other, rather than our kind this time around), and I assume every



Fiend and Blue Blood in the city is scrambling like crazy to make sure their enemies, and not their allies, get caught in the anti-terrorist dragnet. So far mostly innocents, careless monsters and idiots have been caught in the crossfire. But who knows what will happen as Vitel's subtle control crumbles.

So D.C. is far from hospitable at this time, but I'm not here for its comforts. Vykos is the Archbishop of this city, and despite rationality telling me to stay away, I know they – or their library – will hold valuable clues to my tracing the evidence of a cyclical Gehenna. While I don't intend to meet and treat with the Tzimisce, I'm not averse to a little breaking and entering, or a touch of theft.

Through tracking the activities of individual vampires high on the food chain in D.C., I've concluded Vykos is keeping a store of valuables in a bordello, of all places. I suspect it in some way appeals to whatever stands in for Vykos' sense of humor. The number of Sabbat who habitually patrol that area is more than I'm comfortable dealing with, so I intend to make an exchange with Bell.

[RECORDING BEGINS]

Beckett: The Hard Times Café. A little self-pitying, Theo.

Bell: Hardy-fucking-har. You wanted me to meet you in the DMV instead? I'm pretty well known in the capital, in case you've forgotten. Alexandria's about as close as I'm getting to D.C. again.

Beckett: It looks like Pascek and Guil want to throw you back into the belly of the beast. Who is it you're meant to have killed?

Bell: Vitel. The Roman. Prince of D.C., and about as Ventrue as your man Cesare. Who, by the way, freezes up as soon as someone mentions your name. He may be a good chauffeur or valet or whatever you use him for, but his poker face? Shit.

Beckett: It was pure coincidence the two of you even ran into each other.

Bell: Bull. I received an anonymous tip through room service that I had to book it to the diner I saw your man at. You know my hotel room went up in flames as soon as I left? Someone wanted us to run into one another.

Beckett: That's curious. I've been finding evidence of the Jyhad at play. Vampires and mortals being moved like pawns to fulfill the desires of agencies hidden just out of sight.

Bell: So what? That's not a mystery to be solved. We all got strings being tugged, except I can usually trace mine to Pascek or Don Cerro. I can't see either of them burning my ass or plucking it from the fire, but my take's always been that the puppeteer gets tangled in his own strings eventually, and decides to show his face to prove to you how clever he's been. Just as you're agreeing with his brilliance, you shoot the motherfucker.

Beckett: Indeed. I assume from Guil's email that Vitel's death was exaggerated.

Bell: Like hell! Pieterzoon saw the whole thing go down, but are they raking him over the coals? No, Guil's had her panties in a bunch ever since I talked back to her on the Vitel thing. We all saw him drop. I lost count of the rounds I shot into him, or how many times I hit him with that sword. Not that you'd know he was being killed. He was laughing all the while. He laughed as he flew around, breaking bodies and shattering bones with the darkness, like it was extending from his own damn limbs. He laughed as we cut him to pieces and set the remains on fire. But fuck, if he wasn't ash at the end of it.

Beckett: So this is a fool's errand. You're being sent on this mission so the Justicars can see you fail. Surely there are better ways of using your time.

Bell: Guil's even more vindictive than Hardestadt. She knows Vitel's gone, but wants to see me punished. Did she name the witnesses who saw him? Course not. They don't exist. But I'm not allowed to leave D.C. until I find evidence where there's none to be found. I've spent most of my time giving support to the few remaining Camarilla strongholds in the area. Tabitha and Bjorn do a good job, considering what they've been left with. There's a Tremere Chantry at the Octagon House and one of them is still calling himself Pontifex, but word is they got stung by Anarchs or Sabbat and lost a lot of their sorcerous materials. Since then they've closed shop.

Beckett: The war burns on for a lot of vampires in this city. The conflicts I've seen are short, bloody, and nothing in which I wish to involve myself. I was pursued through Arlington Cemetery by two packs in my first week here. It was only the timely appearance of the Potomac that stopped me becoming Sabbat grist.

Bell: Arlington's fucked. See, if we stayed in touch more you would have known that instead of having to take a dip.

Beckett: We'll have to exchange fax numbers. Are you just looking for a sympathetic ear?

Bell: Oh yeah. If I want sympathy, the first person I go to is Beckett. Fuck you. No. You don't have a stink on you that Sabbat will tear apart the city to trace. I do. As much as I don't believe this Vitel nonsense, you're in a far better place to find evidence of his existence. Or his death. You're good at digging around like a rat and finding nuggets of gold in a shitpile like D.C.

Beckett: I suppose that's a compliment.

Bell: It's not an insult. If you can do that for me, I can get out of here, and I'll owe you a favor. A big one.

Beckett: Done. On the basis you repay the favor straight away.

Bell: You've not done shit for me!

Beckett: Weigh this up. I need to get into a bordello on K Street, and —

Bell: Are you kidding me?

Beckett: Allow me to finish. I believe Vykos has something I want in that bordello.

Bell: Oh, this gets better and better.

Beckett: A book, or books, that will help me with my research.

Bell: Yep. That's the Beckett I know. The only guy who goes to a brothel for the book selection.

Beckett: I need muscle to do it, Bell. It's dead center in D.C., in spitting distance of the White House. Sabbat are crawling all over it. Vykos may even be there.

Bell: Your lucky night, then. Vykos skipped town a little while back and the way the shovelheads are talking, no one gave the creep permission, and they didn't say where they were going. Couldn't you just mist your way in, change into a bat?

Beckett: That was my initial intention, but Vykos is likely to have safeguards, including some of their infamous fleshcrafted monstrosities.

Bell: Stealth would still be the best option. Guns blazing on K Street will bring the attention of the Feds and who knows what else. Though I won't deny the appeal of an operation against the Archbishop.

Beckett: Does that mean you're in?

Bell: I'll need to assemble a team…but yeah. Why not?

[RECORDING ENDS]

METROPOLITAN POLICE DEPARTMENT REPORT, WASHINGTON D.C.

1. OFFENSE/INCIDENT		2. BUSINESS NAME/VICTIM (LAST, FIRST, MIDDLE)	3. CASE NUMBER	
		CAMELOT CLUB FOR GENTLEMEN	#9005122	
4. DATE WRITTEN	5. DISTRICT/POST	6. BUSINESS/VICTIM'S ADDRESS	7. ORIG DATE	8. MULTIPLE CLEAR-UP
		623 K STREET, WASHINGTON D.C.		

9. CHECK ONE OR MORE
☑ ORIGINAL ☐ FOLLOW-UP ☐ OFFENSE ☐ ARREST ☐ PROSECUTION ☐ SUPPLEMENT ☐ CONTINUATION

10 LIST IN NARRITIVE ALL RELATED CASE NUMBERS IF MULTIPLE CLEAR UP

PERSONS: WITNESS CONTALDO, CESARE

OFFENDERS:

UNIDENTIFIED BLACK ADULT MALE, GREEN CAP, SHOTGUN

UNIDENTIFIED WHITE ADULT FEMALE, "VIKINGS" LEATHER JACKET

623 K Street is a known gay dancing club, and disturbances have been reported by occupants of neighboring properties on several occasions (see cases #8997995, #9000164, and #9003612). I was on uniformed duty in an unmarked police cruiser, working from 7:00 PM-3:30 AM. At approximately 1:25 AM, I was operating my cruiser on 17th St NW. At that time, an AOC broadcast reported a possible break in and assault at 623 K Street. Due to my proximity, I responded.

When I arrived at 623 K Street ~~I requested backup immediately, as~~ nude and semi-nude males fled the property, and windows broke outwards, implying a significant disturbance inside. I exited my vehicle to hear screams from within the building. ~~Radioing again for backup,~~ I drew my firearm and switched on my strap torch, as no lights appeared to be on within the property. I took note of static witnesses, notably motorist Cesare Contaldo, who was watching the event.

[redacted]

I woke to find myself being carried out over the shoulder of an unidentified white female, my gun now missing. I was placed back inside my police cruiser as flames began to emerge from the door and windows of 623 K Street~~, overpowering the unnatural blackness within~~. The female subsequently fled on foot. I radioed for paramedics and fire department.

[redacted]

Witness Cesare Contaldo remained in his vehicle on the opposite side of the street to the property, and has confirmed his residence as the student houses near the Metro in College Park. Recommend detectives call upon him tomorrow to assist in identifying the two ~~other~~ offenders.

11. DISPOSITION
☑ OPEN ☐ SUSPENDED ☐ CLEARED BY EXCEPTION ☐ FALSE REPORT ☐ CLEARED BY ARREST

12. FIRST OFFICER	13. SECOND OFFICER	14. SUPERVISOR
SUSPENDED Banacek, Dale (464)		HEFFRON, RACHEL R. (207)

[RECORDING BEGINS]

Talley: Stop fumbling in your pocket. I could bar this doorway and watch you burn, or consume you with darkness in an instant. I think you've more to worry about than what's down your trousers.

Beckett: I don't know who you are —

Talley: I have what you're looking for, Beckett, but I want you to leave this room very slowly, so we can have a civilized discussion like gentlemen.

Bell: Talley!

[sound of two shotgun blasts]

Talley's a skilled bodyguard, but more proficient at assassinations. With Moncada dead, who's he working for? Is he targeting you, or Bell, and does he want you dead or alive?

Talley: Archon! It's been too long!

Beckett: Wait!

[sounds of violence ensue]

[RECORDING ENDS]

I.

Honest Tea Store Basement, Bethesda, United States

Our initial entrance into the bordello was discreet. I adopted an incorporeal form and entered via the air vent. The heavily disguised Bell, Garinson, and Manitelli entered as johns via the front door. Prester and Velvet patrolled outside. The area contained as many Sabbat as expected, so we had a cover story as a newly-arrived pack from Baltimore, should everything go bad.

Needless to say, everything went bad.

We were unaware of the Ventrue ban put in place on this Sabbat den, resulting in Manitelli receiving a lot of pressure to feed from prey outside his preference. The vampires in attendance quickly became suspicious at his refusal to drink. Some of them were recognizable Sabbat "personalities."

Bell and Garinson attempted sweet talk with the kine in an effort to find out where in the building Vykos kept their library. Nathaniel McCabe — a peculiarly fey vampire — heard the two mentioning books, and proceeded to engage Garinson at length on the subject of his studies.

Archon Bell sweet talking kine. More progressive than I gave him credit.

A.



Bell took the opportunity to slip away from the vampire.

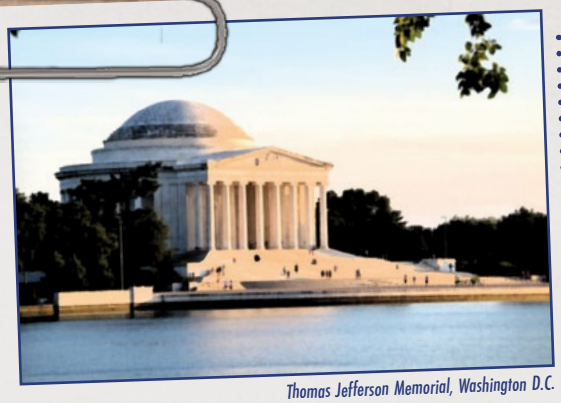
This left Bell and I to search the club as fast as we were able. Sure enough, I located two sealed doors. Where he was able to focus his strength in such a way as to take his door off its hinge without so much as a pop, mine opened with a piercing alarm. Manitelli's disguise was ripped loose simultaneously. Everyone in the dancing room bared fangs.

I doubt the packs in the fray were prepared for the tempestuous might of three frenzying Brujah, two proud Gangrel, and an embarrassed Ventrue.

By the time only Bell, Prester, and I stood in the club, I was prepared to take flight. Bell actually ordered me to find what I'd come here for, reminding me of our deal. I made haste to the attic, only to find a horrifying array of fleshcrafted sculptures, and what I believe to be a partially-constructed vozhd in a state of decomposition. A Thaumaturgical ward triggered as I entered Vykos' ground floor study, flames rapidly beginning to lick their way up the walls and across the small library. Gaps stood in the shelves from where Vykos had removed their true treasures, and the Fiend's cataloguing system bore no rhyme or reason I could readily understand. I snatched up five books and nearly dropped them when Talley showed up.

The conflict between Bell and Talley destroyed all chance of conversation. I attempted to mediate, and received a misfired blast of dragon's breath to my shoulder. I must really have strong words with Bell when he wakes up.

The books I claimed from Vykos' library were not entirely useless. One is an incomplete manuscript written in a Dacian language. According to Vykos' helpful notes, it's written by the elusive vampire Veddartha. Of greatest interest is its coverage of the upper limits of generational expansion.



Thomas Jefferson Memorial, Washington D.C.

The Thomas Jefferson Memorial is located in West Potamac Park. This Historic Shrine with its setting of Cherry Blossoms is one of the most beautiful sights in Springtime, and is visited by thousands each year.

PLACE STAMP HERE

POSTCARD

B.

We're less likely to start shooting one another here. Meet me in seven nights, if you can avoid getting killed between now and then. Bring Archon Bell. Tell him no shotguns allowed.

-T

Oak Hill Cemetery, Washington D.C., United States

I believe I've now experienced all the hospitality D.C. has to offer, and found it wanting.

I've rarely had cause to move around so much. Since our encounter at the club, I've been unable to shake the tail we gained from our devoted Sabbat hunters. McCabe's pack appeared every night. They're prepared to slaughter mortals without apology in efforts to reach us, even turning kine on to our resting places during the day. This city earns its epithet of "murder capital," even if it's the Sabbat forcing kine to do it on their behalf.

Evasion is only an issue due to Bell's injuries. Fortunately, the blood spilt in last night's foray was enough to bring Bell back to me. I was growing tired of transporting his body, not to mention I occasionally enjoy our banter.

With Bell recovering, I've explained to him I'm going to be meeting Talley. The declaration nearly drove Bell into a rage. He's agreed to accompany me in case the Sabbat are planning on ambushing me in public, grudgingly agreeing to leave his weapons at a nearby location. We've reached Bjorn and Tabitha, who've agreed to maintain a perimeter in case all hell breaks loose.

[RECORDING BEGINS]

Bell: There's the motherfucker.

Talley: What did you think of the police report? I don't know how they're going to find an adult black male in this city.

Bell: Fuck you. Just because there are people here, doesn't mean I won't break your neck.

Talley: Come, now. It'll be a case of your speed versus my hurling a mortal or two into your path. You look slightly overdone.

Beckett: You called us here, Talley. I'm hoping it wasn't simply to mock.

Talley: No, indeed. And my sincere apologies for the damage you both suffered. When I respond in self-defense, I tend to use more force than necessary. The fire didn't help me much, either.

Bell: Who's tugging your leash now Monçada's bit the big one? Polonia? Galbraith?

Talley: I'm working outside the Sects. There's another civil war brewing and the Crusade keeps growing. The Sabbat hierarchy's a mess and it's best not to throw in until you know who the front-runners are. Vykos would have a fit to know I'm in their city.

Bell: I thought you were on bodyguard duty for them.

Talley: They used my guardianship to arrange the assassination of one of my other charges, the Archbishop Borges, oaf that he was. The ever-charming Lucita saw to that. I'm not one for being used at cross purposes. Vykos doesn't receive my services these nights.

I've been in D.C. about as long as Bell has. My employer, the erstwhile Prince, wanted me to keep tabs on the Archon. Keeping him safe whilst keeping him distant.

Bell: Erstwhile Prince? You've got to be shitting me.

Talley: As minds become more developed, more enlightened, as new discoveries are made, new truths discovered, and manners and opinions change with the change of circumstances, institutions must advance also to keep pace with the times. Do you feel the Sects keep pace? Sejanus refuses to bend to the prophecies of Gehenna, or the Sects to which we belong. He wants freedom from the Jyhad for all who will call him patron.

[Silence followed by laughter from Bell]

Talley: Willingly making yourself a slave to the Camarilla is a greater joke.

Beckett: Talley, I appreciate you're claiming to be on Vitel's payroll, and you spin a fine Jefferson quote. However, you've yet to tell us why Bell has been under your protection, and what you have that could possibly interest me. My patience is wearing thin.

Vitel: Allow me to explain.

Bell: Motherfucker!

Beckett: For the purposes of the recording, Marcus Vitel just stepped from the shadow of Thomas fucking Jefferson's statue.

Talley: I assume introductions are unnecessary.

Bell: You're damn lucky I'm not armed right now, but so help me God I'm close, this close, to rushing your ass.

Vitel: And I would take great pleasure in picking you apart and leaving witnesses to tell the tale of the man who exploded. But no.

Beckett: A lot of people think you're dead. More so than currently.

Vitel: To the point. Bell, I've kept you around because as a weapon you're unparalleled. Beckett, you're an important player in the Jyhad. I intend to sweep the pieces off the board, but you're one who understands its fragments. You are to be my herald.

Bell: I'm not blowing up the Inner Circle on behalf of your insanity, Mr. Vitel.

Vitel: I prefer Lucius Sejanus these nights. I don't mean for you to be a physical weapon. You can't return to your masters without declaring my death, but clearly I'm not going to let you kill me. You'll remain in D.C. under my protection, taking over from Talley and waging war against Vykos' Sabbat. I'll fund you, support you, and I'll even bring in Cainites to your liking to form an army.

Once my streets are clean, you can then return to your Camarilla. Whatever the case, I'll reclaim my city. The bloodshed in D.C. is undesirable, yet nothing escapes me. Even that betrayer Vykos is unaware. The kine are stirring and Homeland Security is kicking up merry hell, but I still have the police, I still control CCTV and IP surveillance, and I still own agents in the city. I am this city. The Camarilla will have no option but to accept my rule. I would dare them to defy me. I will hold a city of vampires loyal to me, for the freedom I've brought to them.



Beckett: You're using the momentum of the Anarch resurgence to form another Free State.

Vitel: Not only free from the Sects, but the forever war. I was manipulated by my sire and Vykos. Their Crusade will never be mine. I'll fight the calling any way I can. I'll drink my fill of thick blood and stay free and in the end the Jyhad will be broken by me and others like me.

Bell: You're as insane as you were last century.

Vitel: And yet I hear the sound of reluctance. The realization that what I'm saying is true. All those allies you lost in the war. Who forced that war? I do not deny my duplicity. I attempted my own play. But I never asked for my city to be drenched in blood. I never desired chaos on my streets. I sought a route to freedom.

Bell: Instead you found yourself betrayed by your own Sect, found out by mine, and the shit you were full of turned to burning white phosphorous. Poor you.

Vitel: By the time you saw ashes hit the ground I was gone, disappeared into welcoming shadows. You harmed me severely. It took a great effort to bring forth a simulacrum of blood and shadow. I awoke from torpor quite involuntarily, but replenished.

Beckett: I'm not going to interfere in whatever you've got planned for this city. I'm not willing to be a pawn either. If that's all you have for me, then I'll be taking my leave.

Talley: What of the cyclical Gehenna, old boy?

Beckett: What do you know of it?

Talley: You weren't the only ones to pick through Vykos' library in recent weeks. Perhaps you've heard of the Shaal Fragment. A legendary missing piece of the *Book of Nod*.

Vitel: I know you've been seeking out the *Book of the Grave-War*. This Shaal Fragment makes reference to the importance of a text named *The Book of Chaos in the Underworld*. It's not exact, but the similarities are there.

Talley: Neither Sejanus nor myself are Noddists, Beckett. But even we wonder at the link between a fragment of a millennia-old bible for our kind, and a text that didn't even exist until eight centuries ago.

Bell: This sounds like grade-A bullshit to me, Beckett. You've got his voice recorded. Deal done. Let's leave.

Beckett: What do I have to do in return for a copy of this text?

Bell: Asshole!

Vitel: I'll finance your expeditions and you'll help me. You'll locate the full, original *Book of the Grave-War*. The Shaal Fragment speaks of multiple Gehennas. The book speaks of ways to subvert their occurrence. You'll smash the Gehenna Crusade with your research, and in doing so wither the grasp of Caine. Your curiosity compels you to seek the truth whether or not you wish it.

The Shaal Fragment says "The old forms shall wither on the vine, and declare the end times. Only the children of Enoch shall see the new age." My fate will not be decided by who my great-grandsire may have been.

The book says "The black ones will gain control of the greatest city on the earth and the ruler of a mighty city will fall, slain by his own madness." I fell, but was brought back. I defy the whims of prophecy.

I will not be controlled again.

Beckett: If that extract refers to you, then it would mean Gehenna's already arrived. You've already fallen.

Vitel: If Gehenna is a turning wheel —

**[Sounds of shouting,
followed swiftly by an explosion and screaming]**

[RECORDING ENDS]



Smithsonian Metro, Washington D.C., United States

McCabe's pack caught up with us at the memorial, and was swiftly ambushed by Bjorn. Then the darkness descended, snuffing out all light through to Maine Avenue. Even the smallest measure of Vitel's power bore horrifying results we could thankfully only hear.

Talley escorted Bell and I through the dark, suggesting we head for the Metro. He promised our backup team would remain safe, before passing me the translated Shaal Fragment. We parted company with his assurance that his hunt for vampires of a similar mind to Vitel would have the two of us crossing paths again. I can't say I relish the thought, polite as he may have been as he floated up and over a building.

The events of tonight have shaken me.

Vitel's correct in some ways. I see movements of the Jyhad, and evidence of Gehenna's arrival is all over the news. Towers fall. Tanks roll into Sumer and Ur. One by one we're called, Beckoned into the east by the Blood or the Sabbat's crazy "Gehenna Crusade." They become increasingly difficult to write off. Even his awakening, seemingly unquestioned by Vitel himself, bears echoes of rising Methuselahs the world over. He may wish to break the Jyhad, but what caused him to rise? Is Gehenna truly cyclical, as the Shaal Fragment states? What are the preventative steps?

Vitel's political ambitions are more of a concern to Bell. I can foresee the formation of an autocracy rather than a utopia, but if the inhabitants are free – within the confines of Vitel's rules – I can see it holding appeal to those who seek liberty and protection from the undead equivalent of a Mafia chieftain. That said, a sponsor with deep pockets isn't an offer I can refuse.

Bell sat next to me in a barely-controlled temper as we awaited our train. He's trapped between a rock and a hard place, but has confessed that burning the Sabbat out of D.C. may win him some points with Pascek and Guil. Until that time, he's as trapped here as Vitel.

My intent to discover the truths of our kind put me on the radar of every major player in the Jyhad. I don't believe I can escape their attention, so perhaps I should take inspiration from Vitel, who defies expectation with his actions.

Perhaps if I actively seek out these hidden masters of the Jyhad instead of allowing myself to be moved, I will defy theirs.

You think any of us babyteeth care for Vitel of his hollow sellout talk of freedom? He's a weakness in the system. A way out of the shadow of the Tower. You better believe we're gonna exploit it. But not like he thinks. Also: That sick fuck J.P and his cronies better stay away from messing with the alphabet soup, mkay?

D

And when She made preparation to return,
the world broke in two.[1]
The Childer of Caine on one side,
The Childer of Lilith on the other,[2]
And it was Gehenna.

They named her Shaal for her questions,[3]
Though her names were many and
maddening to hear.

The Childer's Childer recognized
opportunity in chaos.
Arikel sought unity,[4]
Ashur sought divinity,[5]
Loz sought war,[6]
Malakai sought peace.[7]

Malkav sought wisdom through bargain
with Ilyes,[8]
Who told his brother,
"Your wisdom shall come with centuries of
madness,
Allowed to purify into something whole,
The vitae of the mad will pour afresh in
years to come.
The old forms shall wither on the vine,
And declare the end times.
Only the children of Enoch,[9]
Shall see the new age."

The breaking of the world near complete,
The sacrifice of a generation prevented
Shaal's Gehenna.[10]
She would try again,
And again.[11]
Each time a new sacrifice,
More burdensome than the last.

Malkav's blood shall pour forth,
The *Book of Chaos in the Underworld*
written,[12]
To prevent Shaal's Gehenna.
Sargon's get will understand,
But they will not share their understanding.
The Brides of the Dragon will understand,[13]
But their fee will be high.

Her hatred is as the phases of the moon.
Gehenna follows the path of Her ire.

---

[1] *If She is "returning," who is She? The Crone, perhaps? Zillah?*

[2] *Not the first time I've seen a reference to the childer of Lilith. No reason the Clans may not have separate progenitors, ultimately.*

[3] *Shaal is "to ask" in Hebrew.*

[4] *Most Toreador I know of revel in disharmony. A shame they've fallen so far from the tree.*

[5] *Could this be a reference to Cappadocians?*

[6] *This name is unknown to me.*

[7] *As is this one. Loz and Malakai could be childer or grandchilder of Lilith, of course.*

[8] *Ilyes is one name I've seen given to the Brujah Antediluvian. Not a typical recourse for wisdom.*

[9] *Far too much ambiguity in this statement for my tastes.*

[10] *Could this be why the Second Generation fell?*

[11] *If this truly is a part of the Book of Nod, it's the only one to refer to multiple Gehenna events.*

[12] *A Malkavian is said to have penned the Book of the Grave-War. Was he compelled to do so by an elder of his bloodline?*

[13] *If the Dragon is Dracula (as was once assumed), a trip to his castle may be in order.*

A New Kingdom of Darkness

Washington, D.C. is a city few Kindred would visit by choice. The Sword of Caine's blade looms over the city, honed by the presence of Vykos. The Sabbat get away with egregious brutality on every occasion, resulting in vampires of the Camarilla having to operate in a way wholly different from any other city. The more the Kindred of D.C. find themselves acting monstrously to combat the enemy, the more their loyalty to the Traditions erodes.

The former Prince of D.C. was Marcus Vitel, a mortal named Lucius Sejanus who was Embraced into Clan Lasombra. Vitel went on to pose successfully as a Camarilla Ventrue during his reign, despite holding loyalties principally to himself and latterly the Sabbat. Vitel is believed to have assisted the Sabbat in their invasion of D.C. and many other cities on the U.S. East Coast through provision of sensitive Camarilla information. His expected reward for this service — full autonomy for his city from the Sects and the Jyhad — never came to pass, due to his betrayal by one side and execution by the other.

Except Vitel wasn't executed. Both Sects certainly believe Vitel met Final Death, but the Lasombra Methuselah was possessed of spectacular powers. Grievously wounded and sent to torpor, he was still capable of misleading his attackers via use of a shadow proxy.

Having recently awoken, Vitel is at once impressed his control over security and surveillance in the city hasn't waned, even in the face of recent upheavals in domestic security protocols. Conversely, he's aggrieved the whole city didn't collapse like a house of cards upon his falling. He lays the source of his ire upon the Jyhad and its manipulators, more than any Sect, though he reserves special enmity for Vykos and those loyal to the Fiend.

Since Vykos' departure, Vitel has been spurred into action. Recruiting the services of Sir Talley, a Sabbat Templar and Bishop, the former Prince intends to rebuild his city anew. Rather than imposing his autocratic notions of freedom on the existing vampires of D.C., he intends on using Talley to find other Cainites who desire liberty from the Jyhad, so he can drive the Sects out and establish his own sovereignty. Vampires known for their independent agendas are approached to act in an army where the reward is their own section of a private kingdom — as long as they're prepared to fight for it.

The Sects resist Vitel's ambitions. The Camarilla would rather have a Prince they can control in D.C. than an independent dictator such as Vitel. The Sabbat will happily start mass Embracing kine in the capital and surrounding cities to retain the capital. The presence of Bell likely signifies the Camarilla will attempt to take Vitel down again, this time permanently. Yet, Vitel thinks otherwise. This could be a symptom of his narcissism, or imply his access to deeper recesses of power than either Sect estimates. He believes independent thinkers — especially from among the Anarchs, Ravnos, and disenfranchised Assamites — will be quick to jump on the opportunity he presents — a refuge from the coming war.

Following are chronicle threads stemming from these flashpoints in D.C., and activities in which a coterie may wish to become involved.

- Vykos disappears to pursue their own agenda, leaving a power vacuum. The opening is a huge temptation for all politically-motivated Cainites inside the city, but a power grab must come fast. As soon as word reaches other Sabbat domains that the Archbishop is missing, Bishops from over the world make the pilgrimage to the "murder capital" to stake their claim. The diplomatic games ahead will lead to a capable Cainite taking command, or result in devastating Sabbat civil war. A competent pack could keep the peace, or support the vampire they believe most qualified to hold the Archbishopric. Such a pack could push one of their own for such a power play, or take advantage of the broiling chaos to settle historic grievances. McCabe is a dark horse candidate for Archbishop. The Kiasyd is forced to contend with an abundance of Lasombra who find his bloodline unsavory. He's secretly promised his supporters he'll enact laws providing more rights to packs consisting of Sabbat members of any bloodline other than the Keepers.
- The first vampires approached directly by agents of Vitel are Anarchs of the West Coast, delegates being invited to D.C. to help secure a new state free from the Jyhad. The Barons are divided in their responses, some seeing a rare occasion to put their stamp on the U.S. capital, while others recognize that Vitel intends for D.C. to be his own. None can deny the opportunity to seize D.C. is a tempting one. Several coteries make their way to the capital, maintaining a stealthy presence at first to survey, before deciding whether or not to get involved. If it comes to war, a number of those



same Anarchs are ready to bring down the tyrant Vitel as soon as he claims victory. They use the Old Post Office on 12th Street as their headquarters, as unusually it seems off limits to both Sabbat and Camarilla.

- The Camarilla presence in D.C. these nights is minimal. Those who remain are hardened to the Sabbat, having weathered years of ceaseless cruelty. These aren't posing, Elysium-based dilettante Kindred; they're a rare breed who exist in a city under occupation. Every movement is a risk, each feeding experience a danger. The Gangrel Tabitha Prester and the Brujah Bjorn Garinson stand with opposing views on Kindred politics and Marcus Vitel. Despite this, they jointly operate a murderous partisan movement based primarily out of the Watergate complex and National Arboretum. Kindred who aid the Bitter Resistance, as it's known, can expect little material reward. Instead, Camarilla vampires who've felt their Humanity waning are smuggling themselves into D.C. to use their Beast in a way that may safeguard mortals, by focusing it against the Sabbat.
- Marcus Vitel seeks liberty from the Jyhad for all Kindred prepared to serve D.C., unafraid of putting himself in the firing line of all who oppose him. This goal affords him respect from a number of quarters, including the more persecuted Clans and subjugated bloodlines. Word of a contingent of Setites making their way to D.C. to stand for Vitel raises eyebrows. Rumors of a wave of Gargoyles doing likewise forces an emergency meeting of the Justicars. What Smiling Jack has laughingly called "Galt's Gulch for disaffected vampires" provides sanctuary for all those with something to offer.
- Vitel uses go-betweens to hire assassins and saboteurs against the Sects operating in his city. When he meets a vampire in person, it's to command them towards a higher cause — the breaking of the Jyhad. These meetings are typically held at prominent monuments of the city. Vitel's fond of addressing at the Lincoln Memorial and sometimes arranges clandestine meetings atop the Washington Monument when he wants to make an impression. Those admitted to his inner circle are directed to find torpid vampires who fell in the Camarilla-Sabbat war, and arrange to have them brought to him. What he does with them from that point is unknown, but it's assumed he tests their loyalty before electing to destroy a vampire or retain their services. Rarely, he sends ranging coteries beyond D.C. with explicit instructions to recover or destroy vampires and

Noddist texts in some of the most obscure, and dangerous, locales.

- A mortal cop by the name of Dale Banacek witnessed the events at the Camelot Club, and was suspended for drunk and disorderly behavior soon after the incident. Despite being influenced by Talley into forgetting that night, Banacek found a copy of the original police report. Slowly, the officer is starting to doubt the truth behind his suspension. Banacek is watching the Club. He's making fastidious notes about the strange persons moving around the area by night. He doesn't know they're vampires — yet — but has spotted several recognizable individuals and linked multiple disappearances to the roving night crews on K Street. Dale's building a dossier, and intends to release it to the papers.
- The absence of Vykos leaves a number of strongholds in the city unattended by Cainites. Worse, uncontrolled and vicious fleshcrafted beasts roam in some of these buildings, waiting to either get hungry enough to escape or for some poor fool to break in. If the tales are true, there are many reasons to attempt entry on these strongholds. The one beneath Union Station is said to hold a copy of the *Encyclopedia Vampirica*.

Hollywood for Ugly People

Events in D.C. will affect the world. D.C. represents a threat to the status quo, if Vitel's plans come to fruition. It also represents hope for those who desire freedom from elder control — provided they're happy to settle for Vitel's dominance instead. These nefarious rumors could twist the plans of all parties involved if proven true.

- Madame Guil's defection to the Sabbat and Pascek's replacement coincide with Bell receiving word from new Justicar Manuela Cardoso Pinto that he's free to return to the fold. His curt response of "fuck you" doesn't go down well. Several Archons who saw him as a hero of the established order step down when they realize Bell's parted ways with the Camarilla, significantly weakening the Sect.
- Vitel is not Vitel. Bell was correct — he did execute the Prince. The being posing as Marcus Vitel is clearly an elder Lasombra possessed of great talent for Obtenebration, and nobody but Sir Talley knows the deceiver's identity. For his part, Talley remains quietly satisfied as he loyally serves.
- In a dangerous bet to wrest D.C. from the elusive Vitel, a coterie created specifically for the purpose is sent to the city to destabilize his rule. Their task is to feed information about Sabbat and independent vampires to carefully selected mortal intelligence operatives and policy-makers, exposing their enemies' economic transactions and covert paramilitary activities. Their hope is that by pointing mortal agencies towards Vitel's "Anarchs" and the Sabbat, the mortals will do their dirty-work. Not even D.C.'s emperor can survive a daytime interrogation. If his followers come under investigation they will have their room to maneuver severely curtailed. Going up against Vitel's system is no joke, and the coterie may find their plans explode in their hands as they play deadly games with mortal spies and counter-terrorist taskforces.
- The translation of the Shaal Fragment given to Beckett is incomplete. Vitel was selective in which parts he included, and which he did not. A section referring to the "rogue Gangrel who must sacrifice all wisdom" was deliberately excised, and is kept in Vitel's sanctum in the memorial chapel of Howard University.
- The Pontifex of Clan Tremere has been in seclusion with his clanmates since the Sabbat invasion. Their infamous Technomancy was due to be leveled at the occupying Sabbat, when the Warlocks lost access to records, contingencies, and decades of information. All of it's been stolen and deleted from their computers, their backups, and their backups of their backups, with only viruses and encoded insults left behind by the thieves. To date, the true position of the D.C. Tremere is known by few, but the Bitter Resistance are growing increasingly concerned about the lack of promised Tremere support.
- Vitel was woken by his sire. Sybil secrets herself wherever she chooses, and has been orchestrating Vitel's actions since his Embrace. For her, the events in D.C. are just another attempt to get access to America's nuclear launch codes. She believes the Antediluvians are coming, and Vitel is still the vampire in the best position to eliminate them.

THE WAR ACROSS DIXIE

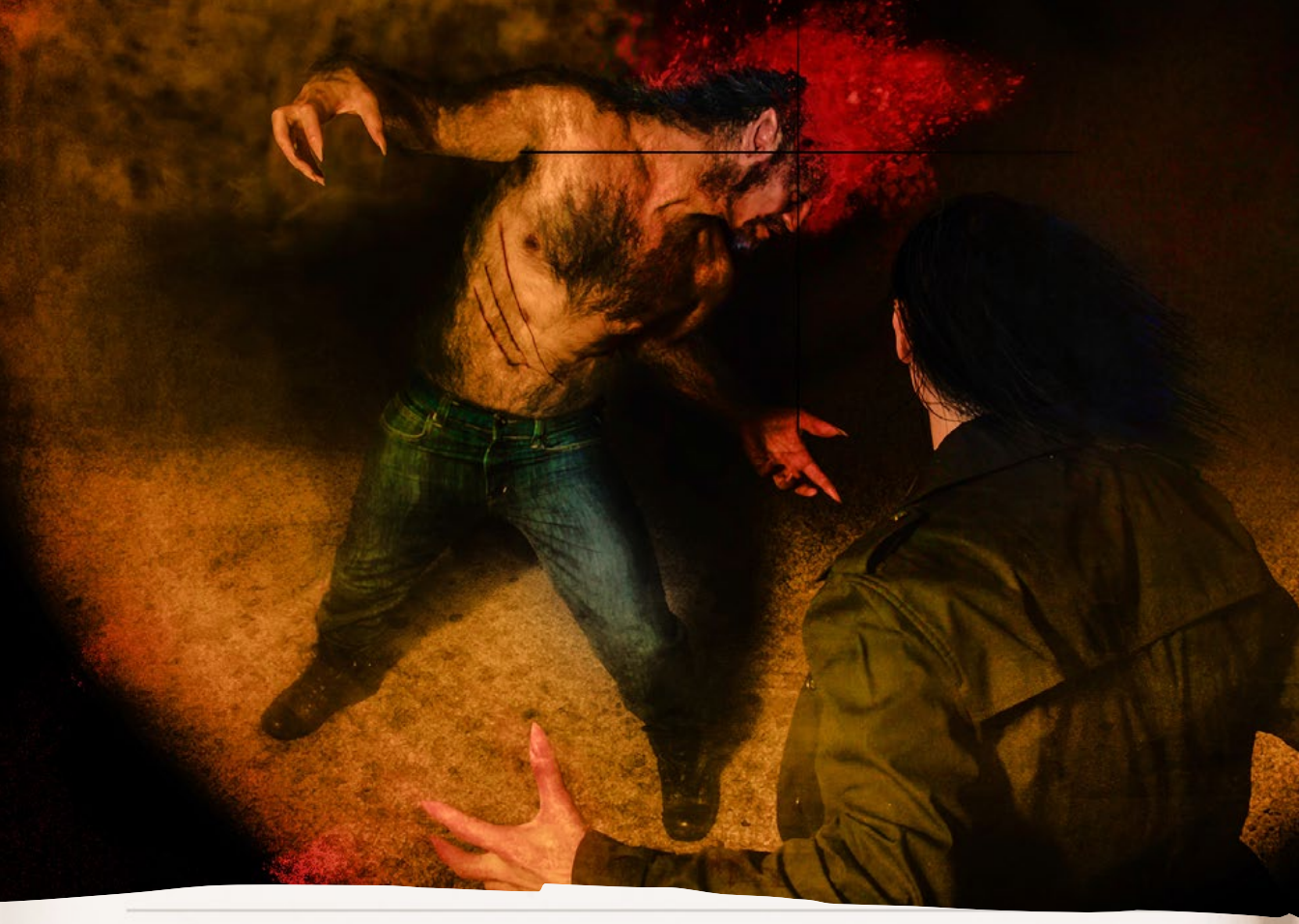
Huntsman's Lodge, Birmingham, United States

Despite my reputation, it's actually somewhat unusual for me to brush right up to the edge of Final Death. I often work towards my own capture, as interrogators tend to let words flow freely, but I don't consider myself intentionally self-destructive.

It's equally unusual for me to forgive betrayal. In the last hour, I've done both. I came to Birmingham to find Fatima Al-Faqadi who, for some inconceivable reason, was supposed to be here. Almost immediately, I was ambushed in Vulcan State Park by a trio of scabrous, blood-drooling Lupines working in the service of the local crusade-crazed Tzimisce bishop. Luckily, while she was in the middle of gloating over how she was going to torture me, her Lupine pets were eliminated or chased off by a sniper working for the Camarilla forces. The Sabbat didn't even have time to curse before three Camarilla vampires burst out of the brush to make short work of her.

I've heard of werewolves called "Black Spiral Dancers" occasionally making alliances with Sabbat war parties. Talk of "Gehenna is NOW" and the last war seems to appeal to them. One of the newly-elected Prisci is keen to foster good relations. -L

I was grateful for the rescue, at least until the sniper, "Randy," sheepishly admitted in a nigh-incomprehensible 'bama drawl that the Camarilla had deliberately leaked my presence in the city in order to draw the Lupines into a trap so he could wipe them out. I was not amused. He

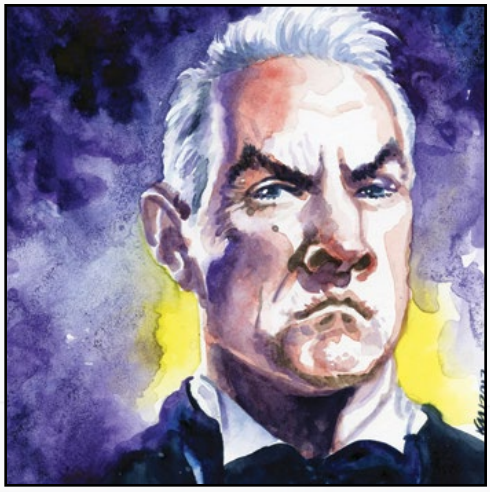


then escorted me to a debriefing with Alex Silverson, the Malkavian ex-Prince of Birmingham. Or I suppose I should strike the "ex" part of that. The trap was only part of a larger initiative which essentially wiped out the Sabbat of Birmingham. Well, what little of it there was – Birmingham was never as big a prize for the Sabbat as nearby Atlanta.

I am writing this from Silverson's "command center." Apparently as recompense for using me as bait, he invited me to observe his teleconference with what he describes as the "Camarilla War Council." Physically present are Silverson and myself, though he directed me to remain out of sight. Attending remotely are Meeks of Baton Rouge, Calbullarshi of New Orleans, Goldwin of Baltimore, Thatchett of Richmond, Del Monte of St. Louis, and Del Monte's sire, Jan Pieterzoon, with whom I have a somewhat unpleasant history.

Am unpleasant history? He left you staked and tied up – naked – underneath a skylight in an Amsterdam high rise, positioned so the sun would slowly burn you from the feet up! -O

ALEXANDER SILVERSON



Clan of the Moon; *1770. #1804, sire unknown

S. came to prominence in 1916, when he claimed the position of Malkavian Primogen of Birmingham, Alabama, USA. Became Prince of Birmingham in 1990 after his predecessor unwisely pledged to exterminate the Lupines of North Alabama, resulting in her destruction. The praxis of S. was marked by an extended detente with those same Lupines, lasting until the city fell to the Sabbat. S. briefly relocated to St. Louis, Missouri where he assumed a Primogen seat after helping to repel a Sabbat assault on that city. During this time, he performed certain unspecified services for Jan Pieterzoon for which he earned significant boons from Clan Ventrue. Some of these boons have been repaid with financial and tactical support in retaking Birmingham and the rest of the region from the Sabbat.

S. is considered remarkably lucid for a Malkavian. It's believed he cannot distinguish between his internal fantasies and reality. This weakness rarely interfered with his praxis. On one occasion, he responded to a question about how easily he resisted frenzying in response to bad news by saying "Why should I get upset over an annoying plot twist in a show I don't much care for?"

Cesare – Skip the beginning. I don't need a blow-by-blow of the Camarilla's Birmingham campaign. Pick up around the 1:15:30 mark. -B

[RECORDING BEGINS]

Silverson: And so that wraps up my report. If things had gone any better tonight, I'd be paranoid. As it is, my only concern's potential retaliation from Atlanta, because I don't expect Delgado to just let this slide. But if Jan comes through on his promises, I'm hopeful we can hold out against another siege and start making plans for the next campaign.

Pieterzoon: [laughing] Relax, Alex. You'll get your troops and your resources. Have you thought about your political structure yet?

Silverson: Yes, I've drawn up a list of Primogen and other appointees. I'll email it to you before dawn...I'm leaning towards Randall for Sheriff.

Pieterzoon: I think that's an excellent choice. I'll review the rest later. Lawrence? Antonio? You're up. What's the status of South Louisiana?

Meeks: Well —

Calbullarshi: [interrupting] So far, things are going splendidly. I cannot speak for Baton Rouge, though I'm sure Lawrence has things well in hand. But I do speak for Clan Tremere when I say we are gratified by the council's assistance in repopulating the city

with Kindred loyal to our aims and also that the council agrees that a city with such occult significance should properly be in Tremere hands.

Pieterzoon: You're quite welcome, Antonio. Lawrence, anything to add?

[PAUSE]

Meeks: No.

From: meek.batonrouge@schreckNET.nod

To: pete_jansen@schreckNET.nod

Subject: NOLA

Jan — The situation in New Orleans is getting out of hand. Calbullarshi is a complete fraud. He's totally incompetent as Prince, a position he only got by bluffing about his level of support from Clan Tremere. It's all bullshit! The Warlocks have marked Calbullarshi for death for numerous breaches of the Traditions! The only reason Calbullarshi's not already ash is because he's finagled his way into being Prince, and is too high profile to set on fire! And he's Regent of exactly two other Tremere, both of whom are his childer. The rest of the clan has apparently written off the city until such time as he's out of the picture.

Honestly, I'm starting to miss Prince Marcel. Amazing such a young Ventrue could hold onto the city throughout the Crusade only to snuff it along with his whole brood and half the city's Kindred during Katrina. Now, we're stuck with possibly the world's least competent Tremere in a city that's still in danger from the Sabbat and is crawling with Anarchs.

To refresh your memory, Jan, since you've ignored me the last four times I brought this up, NOLA is crawling with, well, you name it, we've got it, so long as "it" knows necromancy and at least nominally practices some variation of voodoo. I've seen Setites, Serpents of the Light, Samedi, "Children of Damballah," fucking faceless skull Giovanni, Anarchs from multiple Clans who follow Voodoo as a religion and *Wangateurs* (whatever the fuck that is — and do not make fun of their name when they can hear you). And except for a few minor skirmishes, they all seem to get along!

I know you've got a lot on your plate, Jan, but come on. We may be seeing a new Sect forming right before our eyes, one with the religious zealotry of the Sabbat, capable of raising the fucking dead! Thank God, the kine have a hardon for zombie movies right now. We've luckily been able to pass off various fucking zombie outbreaks as "cosplayers," but Calbullarshi obviously doesn't care. If the Camarilla can't send us some competent Tremere who know something about necromancy (or hell, anyone who knows some form of death magic), you're gonna lose New Orleans to a god-damned voodoo cult!

Meeks

I'd concede Calbullarshi's not exactly a paragon of our Clan, hence my freely sending this on to you. -D

Pieterzoon: Marianna, tell us about Richmond.

Thatchett: Our work is proceeding apace. The ghoul mercenaries we contracted have done yeoman's work in cleansing my father's domain of Sabbat filth. Even better, we received word the Bishop

of Richmond has recently left for Mexico City at the command of his own sire, while most of his powerful lieutenants have moved to Washington to fortify that city against the Anarchs and...the entity posing as Marcus Vitel.

Pieterzoon: Excellent work, Marianna. Your sire would be very proud of what you've accomplished.

Thatchett: My sire could rarely be roused to remember my name, Jan, but your sentiments are appreciated.

Look what I intercepted.-O

From: richard.hartine@hartinefamilystables.com

To: adele.hartine@hartinefamilystables.com

Subject: Expanding Operations

My dearest Sister-wife Adele,

We have reached agreement with the Ventrue Marianna Jessup, who now calls herself Marianna Thatchett in honor of her dead sire. She's provided us with a farm containing a large manor house, 50 acres of farmland, three large stables to use for indoctrination cells, and $200,000 for renovation purposes. In exchange, we're to provide her with the current and future service of our family's mercenaries to combat the Sabbat of Richmond, as well as a regular source of suitable vitae (taken from members of "white power" hate groups, ironic, given her African-American ancestry). Properly repurposed, we can accommodate as many as 100 at a time, and the house is large enough for multiple reeducation rooms, though I would recommend installing a drainage system in each to facilitate the removal of blood and other waste. In addition to this farm, I have already identified four others throughout rural Virginia, all large enough for our needs and suitably isolated.

We've already identified the havens of most of the Sabbat remaining in Richmond and can cull them at our leisure, but I believe we should hold off until we have won more concessions from Marianna. She still believes that we're but a small coterie of "free ghouls" who'll serve her in exchange for vitae. She has no idea of the true purpose to which her vitae will be turned. When the time is right, we'll show Marianna that which is contained within the Red Box of Loz and she will be bound.

Until then, I remain,

Your loving brother-husband, Ricardo Enrathi

Pieterzoon: Isaac, any new developments from Baltimore?

Goldwin: Good and bad. The withdrawal of several high-ranking Sabbat weakens Baltimore's defenses, but as we've been focusing our attention on Birmingham, the vacuum is filled with a marked increase in Anarchs. For the moment, we're encouraging them to fight one another in anticipation of taking out the weakened winner. However, Jan, the possibility of the Anarchs driving out the Sabbat and claiming Baltimore raises an issue I think the council should discuss.

Pieterzoon: Oh?

Goldwin: Yes. Specifically, what the hell is going on with Marcus Vitel?

Pieterzoon: Isaac, you know perfectly well Vitel met Final Death years ago. I personally witnessed it, as did Archon Bell.

Goldwin: And yet the whole eastern seaboard is rife with rumors Vitel survived and is scheming to retake Washington. And worse, to make it an Anarch state! It's going to be impossible to pry Baltimore out of Anarch hands if an elder that powerful has a bastion 50 miles down the road!

Pieterzoon: Isaac. The consensus of the Justicars is that Vitel is no more and that someone — probably Vykos — has a body double running around causing confusion. You do the Sabbat's work when you spread such baseless conspiracy theories.

Goldwin: That was uncalled for.

Purrell: Frankly, Jan, I agree. Isaac's target is one of the domains closest to D.C., and he is entitled to know if a piece as powerful as Vitel is still on the board. While there's consensus among the Justicars, it's not unanimous. You and I both know Guil thinks Vitel survives, and Pascek was concerned enough to send Theo Bell to Washington to investigate.

Pieterzoon: Isaac, I apologize for my intemperate words. I know you are committed to ending the Sabbat's rule, as am I. I will contact Archon Bell. If you have nothing else to add, why don't we move ahead to the next item on the agenda.

Goldwin: Nothing else at this time.

My Lord Vitel,

I write to inform you of the status of our current plans for Baltimore. My odious brother still thinks I am loyal to both him and the Camarilla. Though he acknowledges my "Anarch leanings," he still considers it a "phase" I'm going through. One would think the role I played in our sire's death would disabuse him of such notions, but his obsession with the Sabbat blinds him to other, closer dangers. He knows of my meetings with the Anarchs of Baltimore and believes I spy on his behalf.

Presently, Isaac contents himself with spying on the Baltimore Sabbat in preparation for some future siege. I should inform you that he knows of your continued existence but cannot persuade his allies of it. Also, I am told you've had dealings with Archon Theo Bell. You should know Isaac has a quite irrational hatred for Bell after the Archon insulted his manhood during a conclave. He's Garlotte's childe in a way I never could or would want to be. Anyway, I tell you this in case you have a mind to see either of them dead - the other would make an excellent scapegoat.

I am honored to serve both you and your vision.

Kat,

Anarch Baron of Baltimore

Pieterzoon: If that's all, I move to adjourn this meeting for now as the sun approaches for our East Coast participants. We'll pick up in two weeks' time. Good night, all. Alex, would you stay on, I had a few bookkeeping questions for you.

[A pause as the other video conference participants log off.]

Pieterzoon: Actually, Alex, I don't need anything else from you. But I would like a word with Mr. Beckett, who I believe is hiding over in the corner. I would appreciate it if you would confiscate his recorder. Plus any extra recording devices he may have on him. In fact, just to be on the safe side, strip search him...stop glaring, Beckett. It's not like it's the first time I've seen you naked.

Originally, I planned to simply write up a summary of my conversation with Pieterzoon, but I subsequently received a package from Alex Silverson containing what his letter described as part of a "screenplay" he'd been working on. To the best of my recollection, the scene described below perfectly describes the aforementioned conversation, albeit with Silverson's dramatic embellishments.

Interestingly, I did not actually call Pieterzoon a "sanctimonious Ventrue git." I distinctly remember thinking that, but I did not say it aloud. Also, at no point was Jan Pieterzoon at all flirtatious with me! -B

[INTERIOR SCENE. NIGHT. The protagonist **BECKETT** is angrily pulling his pants up after being subjected to a strip search between scenes. He continues getting dressed through the first part of the scene. The room is set up like a communications center, with a bank of TV screens. All are dark except the main screen which shows **JAN PIETERZOON**. **BECKETT** and **PIETERZOON** clearly have a history, and are antagonistic to one another in this scene, although the sexual tension and homoerotic subtext should be obvious to the audience.]

BECKETT: <obviously annoyed> Alright, Pieterzoon! What the hell's going on here?

PIETERZOON: <shrug> I needed to talk with you.

BECKETT: That's what bloody cell phones are for! Why did I have to get naked for it?

PIETERZOON: Nostalgia? <Pieterzoon smiles flirtatiously at that but quickly grows serious.> Seriously, Beckett. I needed to talk to you, but I also need a measure of deniability. And since you record every single conversation you have, I'd rather not worry about you as well as the NSA.

BECKETT glares silently for several seconds before curiosity gets the better of him.

BECKETT: Sanctimonious Ventrue git! Okay. You've got my attention.

PIETERZOON: Gladly. Beckett, you're notorious for being able to get into places you aren't wanted and then get out again in one piece, usually in possession of something that doesn't belong to you. I need something. If you can help Silverson get it for me, I can make any outstanding problems you

have with the Camarilla disappear. And believe me, Beckett, you do have problems with the Camarilla.

BECKETT: <Short bark of laughter> Pieterzoon, the last time we saw each other, you were trying to kill me in both the most painful and the most humiliating manner possible! Why should I trust you?

PIETERZOON: <waves hand as if to dismiss such trivial concerns> Beckett, Beckett. That was the past. And to be fair, you were spreading Noddist propaganda and disseminating Gehenna prophecies proscribed by the Camarilla. Hardestadt told me to make an example out of you, so I did. If it's any consolation to you, I was punished severely after your escape. It's what I deserve for trying for some sort of artistic death like some damnable Setite.

BECKETT: <rolls eyes> I weep for your suffering. What does Hardestadt say about me now?

PIETERZOON: We haven't spoken recently.

There is a pause here. It should be clear here that **PIETERZOON** is dropping a hint about something that he cannot say openly, and it takes **BECKETT** a few seconds to figure it out. His surprise should be obvious.

BECKETT: The bastard succumbed to torpor, so he's leaving his childe with the keys to the kingdom.

PIETERZOON: <deadpan> You might believe such wild stories, Beckett, but I couldn't possibly comment.



BECKETT: You want something recovered from a dangerous location. Where?

PIETERZOON: Atlanta. A mansion in Grant Park. Beyond that, I cannot tell you anything else at this time. In exchange for your assistance in this matter, I will ensure that, as much as possible, you will have unrestricted passage through Camarilla territories, though I cannot guarantee your safety if you continue to make enemies wherever you go, as is your habit. I will also do what I can to squelch rumors of your involvement with whomever is pretending to be Vitel and whom, I am told, is financing your travels these nights. As a final sweetener, Beckett, I can let you know where Fatima al-Faqadi is. It's why you're here, isn't it?"

BECKETT: <visibly angry at this> You spread the rumor she was here?

PIETERZOON: It was no rumor, Beckett. She was here. Now she's not. Silverson provided me with her itinerary.

BECKETT: <pause for several seconds while thinking through implications> So what changed, Pieterzoon, that you need me to do your dirty work for you. Beyond your sire taking a holiday?

PIETERZOON: Nothing's changed, Beckett. Everything I do is for the greater good of the Camarilla. Sometimes, that means brutally executing a seditious Noddist. Tonight, it means hiring one. In six months, I might be trying to kill you again. <smiling grimly but with a certain amount of bitterness> In fact, in six months, I might not even remember this conversation.

BECKETT: <blinks repeatedly as he absorbs the implications of that> Oh.

On the I-20, East of Birmingham, United States

Four nights after my conversation with Pieterzoon, I find myself travelling with Prince Alex Silverson of Birmingham, his newly appointed Sheriff (a.k.a. Randall "Randy" Hopkirk), a ghoul driver, and two additional cars providing support personnel.

Silverson's promised to reveal Fatima's location once we find what we're looking for, but no party in the vehicle seems willing to tell me what it is. Mr. Hopkirk is more talkative than his liege, especially when I speak with him on the topic of his infamous Thousand-Meter Club. "To be sure, I complimented his ability in taking down Lupines with a sniper rifle, though I rather think firing at game from a kilometer's distance is unsporting.

[RECORDING BEGINS]

Beckett: How did an Assamite warrior become the Sheriff of Birmingham?

Silverson: Randy has my complete confidence, Beckett.

Beckett: I'm sure. And that of Jan Pieterzoon, too.

Randall: Let's just say I needed a change of scenery, Beckett. Quite a few of us do. If you want to know more than that, then it's a good thing you're looking for Fatima.

Beckett: Your accent's gone.

Randall: I'm a century-old Assamite assassin, Beckett. I'm fluent in five languages. But now, I'm back home and trying to be discreet. And so, I've taken advantage of the cherished American myth that everyone with a thick Southern accent is mentally defective and can safely be ignored.

Beckett: Still, how long do you think an Assamite will last in this part of the world once people find out who you are?

Randall: Let me tell you something, Beckett. When I was nine, I made my profession of faith and joined the Lantern Hill Primitive Baptist Church. At 17, Daddy and Papaw took me to be initiated into the Loyal White Knights of the Ku Klux Klan. At 22, I got shipped off to fight the Nazis. And at 26, I was Embraced into the Children of Haqim, where I've spent the last 75 years surrounded by people who didn't much care for fundamentalist Christians, ignorant racist hillbillies, or small-minded American soldiers. If there's one thing I've learned to do in my unlife, Beckett, it's to adapt.

Silverson: Not just adapt, Randy, but thrive. I'm confident with the skills you bring us, we can cleanse the Sabbat from the South with a minimum amount of blood shed.

Beckett: You expect Randall Hopkirk to clear out the Sabbat nonviolently?

Silverson: Not bloodshed, Beckett. Blood. Shed. As in Kindred blood shed on the ground. We must minimize the blood shed lest the Southron Lords smell it.

Beckett: I'm sorry. I'm not familiar with —

Silverson: The Southron Lords, man. My sire warned me of them from the days when she first came to America. The New England colonies were first settled by Anarchs and Sabbat, with the Camarilla coming later. The Southern colonies, the ones where slavery flourished, well, they drew a different crowd. Elders on the cusp of becoming Methuselahs who saw in chattel slavery the means to acquire massive herds that hadn't been available in Europe since feudal times. Elders who slept for decades while their bloodbound childer and grandchilder fattened themselves on the slave population in preparation for the night Big Daddy or Mamaw would rise to slake their thirst. They slumber now, as they have since Appomattox, but the smell of our vitae sinking into the soil risks bringing them forth. "The South Will Rise Again," though not in the way most people think...I have no wish to die either a tyrant's slave or a cannibal's meal, of course. But whether it's possible to avert is not for me to say. I am too much a part of the game. As is Ran-

dy. As are you. And for that, Beckett, on behalf of my Clan, I am truly, truly sorry.

Beckett: Why?

Silverson: Because of where your journey leads. And because of what the Children of Malkav will do to you before your journey's done.

[RECORDING ENDS]

Six Flags Over Georgia, Atlanta, United States

The rest of the ride passed silently. Neither Silverson nor Hopkirk were interesting in conversing, and I was lost in my own thoughts, trying to focus on actual data instead of cryptic Malkavian doom warnings.

An Assamite with Hopkirk's reputation relocating to Alabama was remarkable enough, but apparently Fatima came with him? And Jan Pieterzoon knows about it and approves of the Assamite's presence? Is Hopkirk just a lone émigré or the first of a wave of defections? And what is going on with Pieterzoon? Has Hardestadt's absence given him that much room to operate? Is he hedging his bets by trying to forge alliances both within and without the Camarilla in order to get away from a sire who apparently maintains his loyalty through memory alteration? And what in God's name is hidden in the Sabbat stronghold of Atlanta that's important enough for such a daring insertion?

Don't be mistaken into expecting a flood of Assamites from the Levant. The Clan is spread as globally as any other. Fatima tells me of one Canadian Assamite elder found to have Embraced a minimum of 15 childer in five years. -L

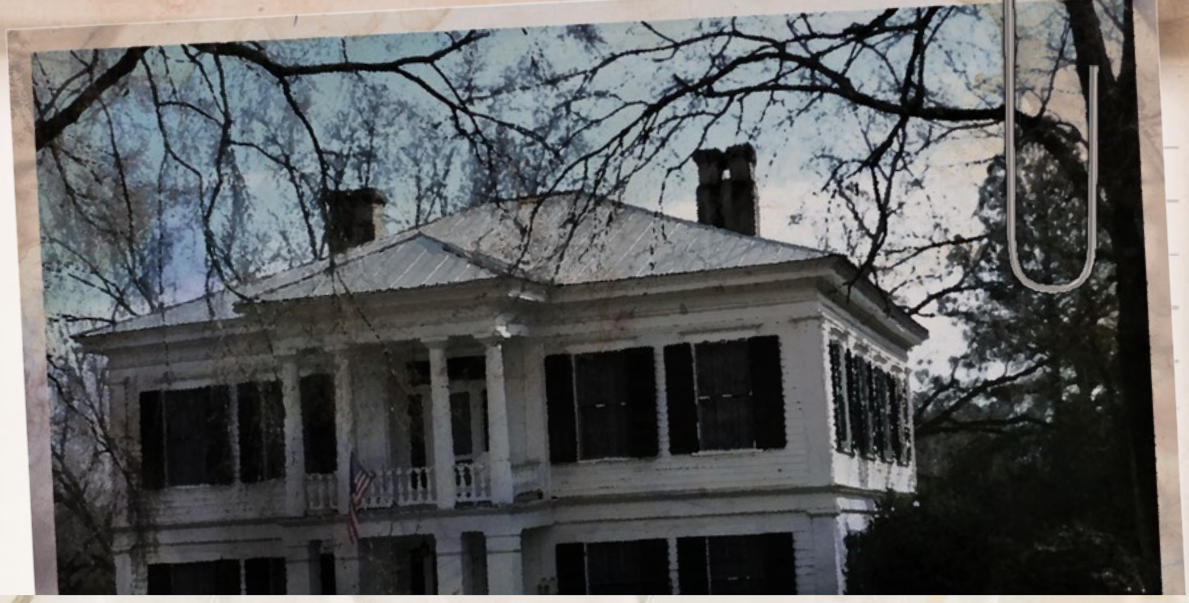
Briar Rose Mansion, Atlanta, United States

[RECORDING BEGINS]

Silverson: "She grew weary of her long existence," he said. "Her heart was broken when her city burned in 1916," he said. [snarl] Damn you, Benison! Damn you to hell!

Beckett: Silverson, who is this woman?

Silverson: She is my sire, Beckett. Her name is Bedelia. Now, please wait outside. It is...possible I am about to die. If so, you may consider your obligations to the Camarilla satisfied. You



Personal note: The following segment takes place in Atlanta in an antebellum home that I have since learned was a haven of the former Prince of Atlanta, Benison Hodge. Specifically, it starts up in a hidden chamber Silverson penetrated where we found a coffin containing a staked Kindred. Female, in late Victorian attire, relatively old at the time of Embrace. Present were Silverson, myself, and two of Silverson's mortal servants. -B

may find Fatima al-Faqadi in London through a diplomat at the Egyptian embassy named Fakkesh. Louis, Bradley. When I give the word, remove the stake together. I will feed her some of my own blood to awaken her first.

[A SOFT DRIPPING SOUND, FOLLOWED BY SCREAMS AND THE SOUND OF SOME FERAL ANIMAL SCREECHING IN FURY]

Bedelia: [hissing and incoherent babbling]

Silverson: Bedelia, please! It's me, Alexander!

Bedelia: Al. Alex. Alexander? You...you left me!

Silverson: I did, Auntie Bedelia. I was a bad son, unworthy of your kindness and affection. But I've learned the error of my ways. I'm back now.

Bedelia: Where. Where is Benison?

Silverson: I am sorry, Auntie Bedelia, I truly am. Benison died the Final Death many years ago.

Bedelia: [long incoherent moan] Oh, Lord! My poor, poor Benison. My poor baby boy. I knew something like this would happen! [loud weeping and sobbing] I knew he would come to a bad end when he married that Jezebel!

[SOUNDS OF GUNFIRE FROM OUTSIDE.]

Silverson: Again, I am sorry, Auntie. But the Sabbat draw near. We must get you out of here.

Bedelia: Sabbat trash! Here? At Briar Rose? Unthinkable! Take me to the balcony!

Silverson: But Auntie —



Bedelia: You have only just returned to me and already you sass me?!?

Silverson: No, Auntie. This way.

Bedelia: Lemuel, Abner, Queenie, Eva, Little Paul! Hear me! Enemies are at the gate. [Sound of doorway opening. Gunfire grows louder.] There! There! [screaming] Enemies at the gate!

[THE GUNFIRE ABRUPTLY STOPS AND IS REPLACED BY SCREAMS, MANIACAL UNEARTHLY LAUGHTER AND THE SOUND OF FLESH BEING RIPPED APART. THEN, SILENCE.]

Beckett: Um, Miss Bedelia, er, ma'am. Sorry, I haven't introduced myself. My name is Beckett. If I may be so bold....what just happened?

Bedelia: I called upon the ghosts of Briar Rose to defend this house's honor, young man. And so they did.

Beckett: So, you are a necromancer, I take it?

[LOUD SLAP]

Bedelia: How dare you! I don't command the dead like some Giovanni dago! I ask the dead for things. And they do them for me. Because they love me, you see.

Beckett: Yes. Of course.

Silverson: Isn't she wonderful, Beckett? You know, I think my Aunt Bedelia might just be what the Camarilla needs right now. I can't wait until Pieterzoon hears about this.

[RECORDING ENDS]

Old Times There are not Forgotten

Years ago, the Sabbat marched across the American southeast with all the subtlety and determination of Sherman's March to the Sea. Nearly every Southern city of any importance fell to their crusade: Birmingham, Savannah, Atlanta, Charleston, Richmond, and, eventually, Washington and Baltimore, as the Crusade turned northward. Though hardly stable rulers, the Sabbat held their conquered territories for many years. But the Jyhad is inexorable, and the game ever changes.

The ringleader of this counterrevolutionary movement is Jan Pieterzoon, childe of the esteemed Ventrue Hardestadt. Over the last several years, Pieterzoon has struggled under conflicting orders from his sire, with the battle against the Sabbat often taking a backseat to Hardestadt's obsessive interest in suppressing Noddist lore and Gehenna conspiracy theories. At the moment, however, Pieterzoon has suffered a conveniently-timed crisis of faith. By happenstance, he's broken through some of the memory blocks placed upon him by Hardestadt.

More importantly, he's done so at a time when Hardestadt himself has left on unexplained business and is thus unaware of his favorite childe's sudden lack of faith. In short, Pieterzoon is presently fixated on retaking the South, not just for the benefit of the Camarilla, but also to create a base of supporters whose personal loyalty to him outweighs their sectarian loyalty to Hardestadt and the Inner Circle. Jan's authority to act in Hardestadt's stead during his absence provides a unique opportunity to direct the Camarilla towards actual preparation for Gehenna without taking the extreme (and potentially fatal) step of outright recognizing the Antediluvians' existence.

Part of that preparation involves creating a more positive relationship with Jan's old adversary Beckett. Pieterzoon allows Beckett considerable insight into his Southern U.S. operations before offering him significant boons in exchange for helping the newly-installed Prince of Birmingham rescue his sire, the Malkavian Bedelia, from the Sabbat citadel of Atlanta. If the rescue is successful, Pieterzoon has the gratitude of Prince Silverson and, more importantly, Bedelia, a powerful elder gifted with the unusual ability to see and influence ghosts without the aid of any formal training in necromancy.

Such a resource is particularly valuable in light of the growing problem of New Orleans, a destabilized but nominally Camarilla city ruled by a weak Prince backed by an emerging mini-sect of disparate Kindred united by their religious devotion to Vodou. Bedelia could counter the magic of the fledgling sect, and if she proves powerful and stable enough the Camarilla might well offer her the position of Prince of New Orleans outright. The trick is persuading her to exchange her beloved Atlanta for soggy, swampy New Orleans. If the elder has her druthers, she'll raise up an army of the Restless Dead and go to war against the Atlanta Sabbat, despite the near-certainty of her defeat and the likely collapse of the Masquerade.

The cities targeted by Pieterzoon's war council include:

- **Atlanta:** After Washington, D.C. and Montreal, the most important Sabbat-held city in North America. Archbishop Antonio Delgado is a protégé and supporter of Cardinal Francisco de Polonia, which may put him at odds with other Atlanta Bishops and Ducti who support different candidates. There are nearly 100 Sabbat in and around Atlanta, far more than the city can safely support. If the Sabbat Civil War breaks out here, it's unlikely the Masquerade will survive.
- **Baltimore:** Still Sabbat, but with a growing Anarch presence drawn to Baltimore by rumors of the ancient Prince Vitel returning from the dead as an Anarch sympathizer. Actually, he's not really "Anarch" so much as "neither Camarilla nor Sabbat, just do what Vitel says." In practice, it's unlikely Anarchs will accept Vitel the Tyrant any more than any other autocratic leader, but if he surrounds himself with enough of the trappings of democracy, he might draw the Anarchs of Baltimore to his banner. A plurality of Anarchs who've been caught between the Sabbat and Camarilla for years would be fine with Vitel so long as he can keep the city free of the Jyhad.
- **Birmingham:** Nominally Camarilla, but with a dangerously large Lupine presence, Birmingham has only just thrown off the yoke of the Sabbat. The city is four hours from Atlanta, however, and a war party could lay siege to Birmingham any night. Worse, the local Sabbat packs hold alliances with feral, psychotic, and unreasoning Lupines. On the other hand, Silverson has strong support from his city's Kindred, particularly

from his Sheriff, the Assamite Randy Hopkirk. Depending on how well Randy is accepted once his true Clan heritage is known, Birmingham may become a waystation for Assamite defectors fleeing their clan.

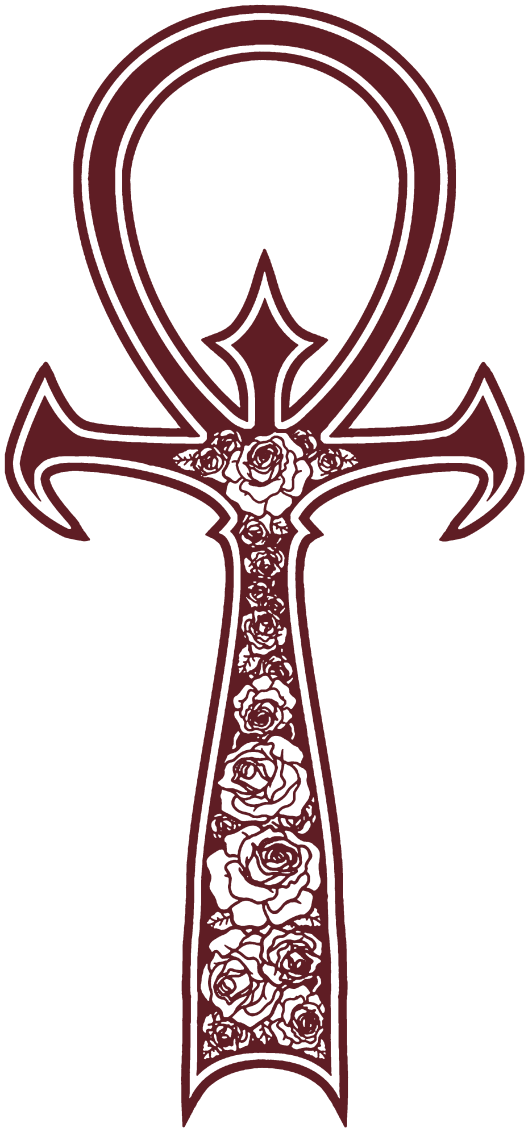
- **Richmond:** Also still firmly a Sabbat city, but perhaps not for much longer. The Sabbat leadership has largely abandoned Richmond in the wake of the brewing Sabbat Civil War, leaving the city in the hands of younger, inexperienced Sabbat who do little more than maintain the status quo. These ancillae have no idea they've been marked for death by ghouls employed by the Ventrue Marianna Thatchett to root out their havens during the day. Of course, Marianna herself has no idea these "free ghouls" are actually members of the Enrathi revenant family. They'll use her lust to take Richmond in order to wring concessions from her that will benefit their own twisted needs. Inbred, perverted, and blessed with potent mental powers, the Enrathi primarily want to use the Camarilla to finance their modern-day slavery operations, but many of them still serve the mysterious Tal'Mahe'Ra and that Sect's agenda.
- **New Orleans:** Ostensibly Camarilla, the Prince of New Orleans is a disgraced, largely self-taught Tremere marked for death by his own clan. His rule is nominal and, increasingly, true power devolves to an alliance of Vodouists from disparate Clans and Sects who wish to make New Orleans into a Mecca for Vodou.

Look Away, Look Away

In many ways, the American South is a backward cousin to the Camarilla. Isolated metropoli are surrounded by a sea of inhospitable rural areas filled with werewolves, were*gators*, and even stranger things. For every city hosting vampires, there are dozens of small towns, each with their own gothic secrets hidden away until they disgorge their horrors on unsuspecting communities. Still, even the South feels the fury of the Jyhad, as the Camarilla and Sabbat duel as much for pride as for genuine territorial advantage. Here are some ways the Southern Campaign could play out.

- **Fortress Atlanta:** As Washington falls to Marcus Vitel's vision for a new kind of Kindred domain and Pieterzoon's war council gradually picks off the smaller Sabbat territories, Atlanta rises to become the most prominent U.S. Sabbat domain. Packs surviving the conquest of their former territories withdraw to Atlanta, swelling its Cainite population to the point where the Camarilla cannot dislodge the Sabbat without a catastrophic Masquerade breach. And so, the Camarilla must instead wait, helplessly, for the inevitable Masquerade breach via the massive number of Sabbat refugees ensconced in a major U.S. city. Things take a turn for the worse when Francisco de Polonia realizes he doesn't have the support needed to be declared Regent, and so he flees to Atlanta, seizes control of the city, and simply declares himself Regent of "the True Sabbat" and Atlanta the new Sabbat capitol.
- **Assamite Integration:** Randy Hopkirk is but the first of many. Having proven himself both to the Kindred of Birmingham and to Pieterzoon's war council, he gains the status needed to sponsor more Assamites who wish to defect to the Camarilla. Eager for Assamite aid in retaking the Southern cities, the Kindred of the region set aside their longstanding fear of the Assamites and welcome the newcomers. Of particular interest to many in the Camarilla are the previously unknown Assamite sorcerers who provide serious competition to the Tremere thaumaturges. The Council of Seven is not amused, and Clan Tremere loudly opposes both the Assamite integration program and Pieterzoon's alliance. However, Pieterzoon brazenly positions himself as the Voice of Hardestadt on the matter, and backing for his cause swells. Things heat up when the trickle of Assamite defectors becomes a flood following the Schism. They explode when the Tremere Curse fails and the Camarilla Assamites must learn to cope with their emergent blood frenzy.
- **New Orleans, the Sunken Necropolis:** Lawrence Meeks' worst fears come to pass. Prince Calbullarshi falls, not to a Camarilla-led coup or even a Sabbat siege, but to a new vampiric Sect devoted to Vodou. New Orleans is now truly the City of the Dead, and the Masquerade groans and creaks under daily reports from terrified mortals who have encounters with the zombies who form the armies of the Necropolis. Perhaps the only obstacle to this dark outcome is to find a Camarilla candidate for Prince who can speak to the Vodouists in their own language, or perhaps one who can bypass them and speak directly to the dead.
- **Southron Lords:** The tales Bedelia shared with her childer are not fanciful Malkavian delusions but genuine accounts. The earliest Kindred to arrive in the pre-Revolutionary American South

were elder vampires accustomed to feeding on large peasant populations in pre-Enlightenment Europe. They saw the rise of American chattel slavery as a way to recreate the large feeding pools to which they were once accustomed. There were no more than a dozen or so, but then, that's about how many antebellum plantations had 1000 or more slaves working their fields. When the Civil War came, the Southron Lords entered torpor and left their childer to bear the brunt of Sherman's March and the long reconstruction following. After 150 years, some of the Southron Lords are now Methuselahs, and wanton bloodshed between the Camarilla and Sabbat threatens to wake these ancient worthies from their slumber. What tumult will the arisen Lords inflict on a region that left slavery behind, but for which the scars of America's Original Sin are still fresh?



LONDON CALLING

The Calleva Arms, Silchester, British Isles

I made contact with Fatima, but apparently, she's in London on "business" and cannot meet with me until she's done, which I assume means after the bodies hit the floor. Oh well, it's been a long time since I visited any of my old London haunts. Perhaps a visit to Boodle's is in order. One thing I've missed about Old Blighty is the unique charm of the English gentlemen's club. I wonder if Artie Basingstoke is in Boodle's tonight. He's always good for a bit of gossip.

[RECORDING BEGINS]

Basingstoke: I've told you, Beckett, don't call me "Artie."

Beckett: What do you have against me, Artie?

Basingstoke: You're a Gangrel and a reprobate. But I repeat myself. Now if you're quite done annoying me, my guest and I were having an engaging discussion about the impact of the now-defunct Lhiannan bloodline on the Christianization of Ireland.

Beckett: Yes, that *does* sound quite fascinating. I apologize for interrupting without introducing myself, Mr. —?

Other vampire: ... Gotsdam.

Beckett: Oh... I was under the impression you resided in Germany, Mr. Gotsdam.

Gotsdam: I have resided in London for some time now, Herr Beckett. Obviously, Aristotle's fucking encyclopedia needs updating.

Basingstoke: Don't encourage him, Gotsdam. It's more trouble than he's worth.

Gotsdam: No, no, mein Freund, I remember this one now. Bindusara mentioned him.



Beckett: Did he really?

Gotsdam: Oh yes, Herr Beckett. Answer the man's questions, Arthur. Herr Beckett has the claw marks of the ancients all over him. It will be interesting to see what attention falls on him once he learns a secret or two he cannot resist sharing.

Basingstoke: Oh, very well. What do you want to know, Beckett? Bearing in mind, of course, that I shan't tell you anything *truly* interesting unless I gain information of equal value in exchange.

Beckett: Start with the basics. I've been away from London for decades. What's the current political climate among the Kindred of London? I assume Anne Bowesley is still Prince?

Basingstoke: Hmph! In a blow against the patriarchy, Bowesley insists on being called "Lady Anne" or simply "the Queen of London." As I recall, she used such titles informally until she officially claimed praxis over London in her own right instead of merely as Mithras' regent and announced that henceforth she would be referred to as Her Highness, the Vampire Queen of London.

Beckett: What led her to make the change?

Basingstoke: Because she's simultaneously arrogant and insecure? Oh, you meant "why did she openly assume praxis?" Well, officially, she got tired of waiting for Mithras to show himself, but that seems unlikely. He'd previously gone walkabout for nearly a century before returning to violently reclaim praxis from his truculent seneschal — Lady Anne's sire, by the way — so 50 years doesn't seem like very long at all. There are, of course, rumors he actually did return from torpor but turned London over to Anne in favor of ascending to the Camarilla Inner Circle, the Ventrue Directorate, or even the Inconnu, depending on who you ask.

Beckett: I'd always heard Lady Anne was adept at keeping both Anarchs and Sabbat out of London.

Basingstoke: In the earlier years of her reign, yes, but her regime is ill-prepared for 21st-century Anarchs who use computer and phone hacking to destroy the reputations of her ghouls, to say nothing of Sabbat infiltrators who fit in easily among the Camarilla types they seek to destroy. The Sabbat who infest London tonight are primarily antitribu, and they are well-schooled in acting like normal members of their respective Clans in public, instead of the psychotics we've all come to expect from antitribu.

[RECORDING ENDS]

HACKERS STRIKE AGAIN!

CELLPHONE HACKING SCANDAL SNARES BANKING EXECUTIVES AND FINANCE MINISTERS IN PROSTITUTION/DRUGS SCANDAL

by Lawrence Sullivan, for The Flag

The ongoing Scotland Yard investigation into the illegal hacking of phones by News of the World has expanded to include an inquiry into whether several highly-placed civil servants in the Ministry of Finance have engaged in what one investigator referred to as "cocaine-fueled orgies with high-class prostitutes" paid for by executives at Wanklers Banking Group PLC. Voice mails and text messages obtained by The Flag outline how bank officials arranged for large quantities of cocaine and other illegal drugs to be provided for the officials' "entertainment" at the recent World Economic Summit. Allegedly, some of the incriminating voicemails indicate these illicit activities were provided in exchange for government officials ignoring or even actively concealing numerous banking irregularities that may have played in the recent near-collapse of several major British financial institutions, including Wanklers. The losses were so severe the Finance Ministry was forced to oversee a bank bailout in excess of £900 million.

From: mammon33@digitaldraculas.biz

To: hurricane_chicago@digitaldraculas.biz

Cc:

Subject: RE: link to Flag article

>> Hey, um, did we do this?

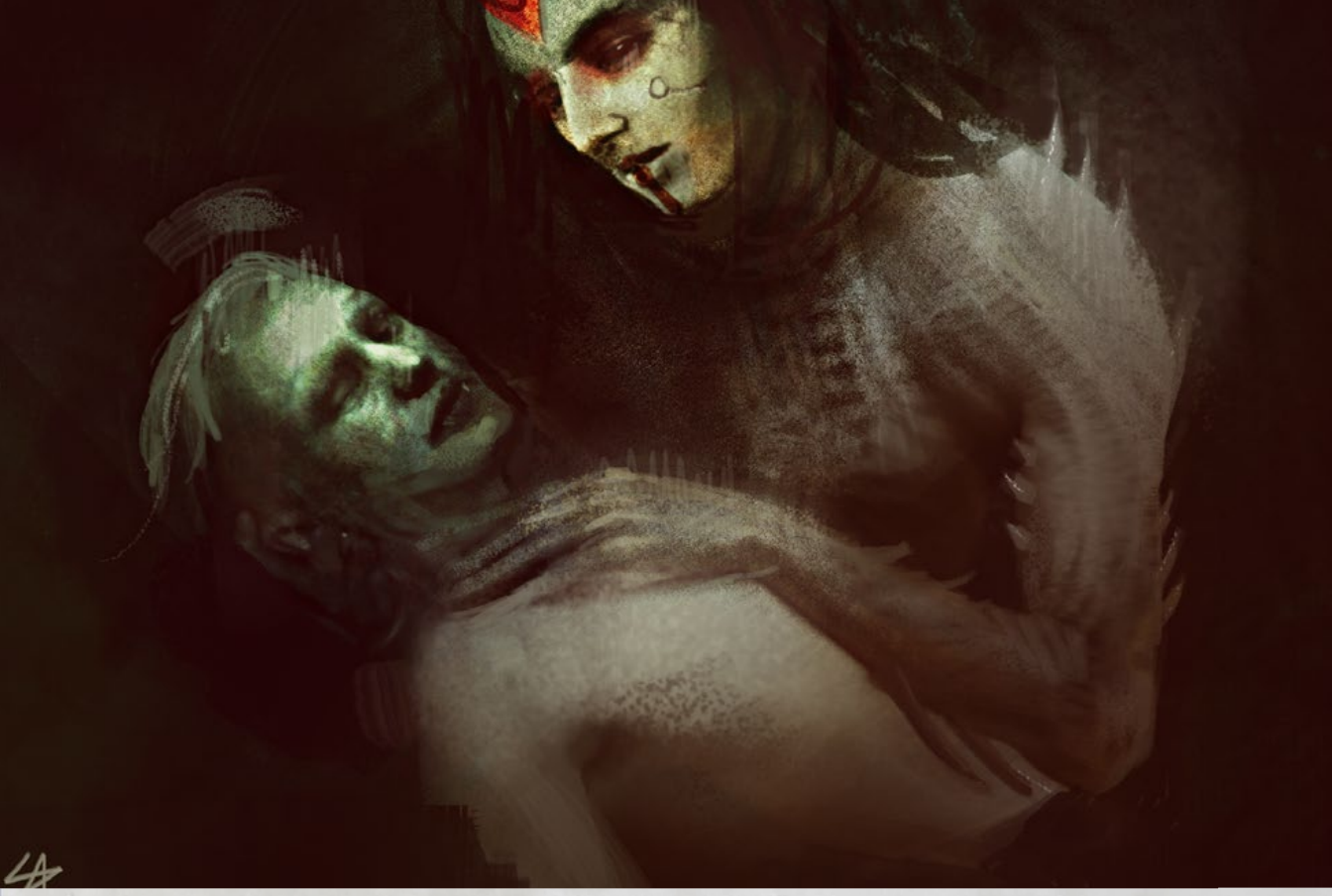
No, we didn't "do this." We inflicted some damage on Wanklers during Operation Grand Slam but haven't touched it since. Coven says Queen Bitch was using Wanklers as a slush fund to use against the Sabbat and someone found out and leaked it. He still doesn't know who the leaker was working for – Sabbat or Anarchs – but will keep us informed. Financially, the issue is serious. Lady Anne is already pulling so much money out of the British financial sector to pay for her counterrevolution that it's threatening to crash what little British recovery there has been. And now there's a sex scandal! I would advise divesting British banks, but I'm not sure there are any safe investments if this blows up.

[RECORDING BEGINS]

Beckett: Another round of drinks for you gents. So where are the Tremere in all this? If there's a problem with Sabbat infiltrating a Camarilla city, you'd think they'd have some sort of blood ritual to test for that.

Gotsdam: She wouldn't accept the results of any Tremere test, nor would she place herself in Tremere debt by asking for it. Save perhaps the Setites...and Giovanni...the Tremere were Prince Mithras' greatest rivals, and she is extremely paranoid about allowing them any beachheads in London beyond what Mithras himself was forced to allow over a millennium of political intrigue. The Tremere didn't do themselves any favors when one of the Regent's top lieutenants was caught in a serious Masquerade breach. She punished him rather harshly for it.

[RECORDING ENDS]



There is no such "Sabbat detecting" ritual. Don't you think the Camarilla would have us use it on every Kindred on a monthly basis if there were? -A

From: adriana.parkinson@wessexarchaeology.co.uk

To: aislingsturbridge@fiveboroughs.com

Cc:

Subject: See attachment

Attachments: <<pranking_the_Bitch.mp4>>

Aisling,

I need input from someone both brilliant, tech-savvy, and respected both inside and outside the Clan, and you're the only Tremere who fits all three. I'd like you review the attached video file labeled as "pranking_the_Bitch.mp4" and verify its authenticity. It appears to depict an unidentified vampire undergoing fleshcrafting by a Tzimisce so as to be made to resemble Jackson Montcrief of the London Chantry. It also purports to show the fleshcrafted vampire deliberately executing the Masquerade violation for which Montcrief was later brutally and wrongfully punished by Anne and her cronies. Give us proof this video is genuine that we can take to the Justicar and get some measure of justice for Montcrief, and I'll get you that alchemy treatise by Pliny the Elder you've been after.

[RECORDING BEGINS]

Beckett: All right, so we're binge drinking. Artie, you obviously think there's some elder behind Anne's Anarch and Sabbat problems. Who is it?

Basingstoke: Don't put words in my mouth, Beckett. Just because I believe in the Secret Masters doesn't mean I know who any of them are or, indeed, that I want to. Besides, I told you I wouldn't give you any big secrets unless you gave up something equivalent. All I've heard from you tonight has been stupid questions. But thank you for the drinks.

Beckett: You mentioned earlier Mithras might have taken a spot on the Inner Circle.

Basingstoke: I mentioned there were rumors. Piffle. I don't see Hardestadt stepping aside.

Beckett: [Pause] Sometimes it's not about stepping aside. Sometimes old people just need some time off.

Basingstoke: [Longer pause] That *is* news, if true. A resurgent Mithras might well be the obvious choice to take the place of Hardestadt. *And* it would explain why Pieterzoon has been so randy lately.

Beckett: "Jan Pieterzoon" and "randy" are words I don't want to hear in the same sentence.

Gotsdam: Nevertheless, he's been working his charms with gusto on our Lady Anne. He's the reason the Queen ransacked what little treasure the British Ventrue hold to finance global war against the Sabbat. Supposedly, Pieterzoon persuaded Anne that financing his splendid little war will give her enough status to move to the international stage. Perhaps even a Directorate position.

Basingstoke: I suppose that's enough for a name, Beckett — Coven. He's probably the most prominent Sabbat pack leader in London. Would likely be a Bishop if the city ever fell. Clan unknown.

Beckett: Not terribly helpful, Artie, old boy. I'm not inclined to look up a Sabbat pack leader for an interview, no matter how influential —

Basingstoke: — *As it happens*, Coven is also the internet handle used by one of the most prominent Anarchs in the city. I would call it a remarkable coincidence, if I actually believed in such things.

Beckett: That's more like it. Is he Sabbat manipulating Anarchs, or an incredibly reckless Anarch manipulating the Sabbat?

Basingstoke: Or someone quite beyond mere recklessness who seeks to manipulate both Sects to his own ends?

Beckett: How old is he?

Basingstoke: I am reliably informed that he was Embraced in the 1990s. Late 80s at the earliest.

Beckett: So, either an elder with an exceptional mask or a pawn of someone more powerful. Or a neonate punching far above his weight class. I'd like to meet Coven.

Basingstoke: I can make inquiries, but I would want something in exchange. You know how it is, old boy.

Beckett: Oh, *now* I'm old boy instead of Gangrel reprobate. What do you want?

Basingstoke: What I always want, Beckett. Information. I want to know what's *she's* doing in London.

Beckett: Fatima's a friend. Well, friend of a friend. I won't betray her, not even if she's here as an assassin.

Gotsdam: She is not here to kill. We already know she's acting as a bodyguard for an important personage. I invite you to contemplate what category of personage would *need* someone like al-Faqadi to act as a mere bodyguard, as well as who could afford to procure her services. I assure you we represent no threat to her charge. But knowledge of that charge's identity may be invaluable in preparing for future events.

Basingstoke: Quite so. The movements of any elder will disturb the course of anyone unfortunate enough to cross their path. Destiny and gravity often seem to work the same. We need to know what new pieces are on the board to know how to chart a new course around them.

Beckett: I'll see what I can do... Before I go, one last thing. Gotsdam, if I may ask, what *did* Bindusara say about me? And when?

Gotsdam: It was in 1906, lad, shortly after you left Britain. Bindusara was owed some kind of boon by Prince Mithras, and he took the opportunity to speak on your behalf and plead your case.

[RECORDING ENDS]

In a black cab of all things, London, British Isles

I left Boodle's pensive, confused, and poorer. The price of a pint of vitae's ridiculous in London.

When I left London in 1906, I wasn't under a blood hunt, but I was close. The idea that Bindusara, a figure whom I barely knew at that point, would stick his neck out for me before the most autocratic Ventrue Prince in the world? Unexpected. Meanwhile, I felt it strangely necessary to meet this mysterious "Coven," if only to satisfy my curiosity. I first realized things were going to get more complicated when Fatima showed up a night early, surprising me in my hotel room as I prepared for the evening.

According to Fatima, her charge, an Assamite elder named Tegyrius, met the elusive Coven during his stay in London. In fact, he surprised the two the previous

night at the compound where they were staying as honored guests of the Toreador Justicar! I honestly don't know what's more astonishing: Assamite elders being feted by a Justicar of any Clan, or the idea that anyone could get the drop on Fatima al-Faqadi. She said when she moved to attack the intruder, Coven barked out something to Tegyrius in a language she didn't recognize, and Tegyrius told her to stand down. He then took Coven away for a private conference, at the conclusion of which the elder announced he was leaving London. He told Fatima Coven wanted to meet with me and she was to deliver the invitation. She invited me to meet Tegyrius in two weeks in Amman, Jordan for an informative summit.

Soon, Cesare and I will head for our meeting with Coven at the offices of Syndexioi Ltd. in the London Shard. Syndexioi is a growing British firm specializing in cyber and physical security. The name is Greek for "those united by a handshake." Syndexioi's main London offices are on the 56th floor of the Shard, London's tallest skyscraper.

I'm such a tourist, even here.



[RECORDING BEGINS. MONTGOMERY COVEN'S ACCENT IS STRONGLY IDENTIFIABLE AS JAMAICAN — SOMETIMES. SPEECH IS TRANSCRIBED PHONETICALLY WHENEVER HE IS USING HIS JAMAICAN ACCENT AND TRANSCRIBED NORMALLY WHEN HE IS NOT.]

Beckett: For recording purposes, I am currently in the rather swanky waiting room of Syndexioi Ltd. I've been subjected to various tedious, but thankfully noninvasive, security checks to ensure I'm unarmed. The dozen or so Sabbat members glaring at me right now seem annoyed for some reason.

1st **Unidentified voice:** You're damned right we're *annoyed*, Beckett. Turn off the recorder.

Beckett: Sorry, we haven't been introduced. If you knew me, you'd know the recorder stays on. I'm a guest here, and your boss is well aware of my practices.

1st **Unidentified voice:** Coven's not my boss. He's the leader of his pack, as I am the leader of mine. He has no power beyond the respect other Sabbat give him, and for me that's not enough to let you *record our goddamned meetings!*

2nd **Unidentified voice (later identified as Monty Coven):** Gangrel's not here to record our meetings, Declan, man. He is here to meet with me, and what happens in private meetings is mah own business.

Beckett: Mr. Coven, I presume.

Coven: Indeed, Mr. Beckett. Montgomery Coven, at your service. Welcome to mah place of business. Please excuse Declan's hostility. He's a...Ventrue antitribu. So he's always got something ta prove.

Declan: I will not be mocked by a coward. A fucking traitor! Place of business? You ought to be in one of your Rasta hideouts, not in this fucking palace.

[SOUNDS OF CHAIRS BEING PUSHED BACK AND PEOPLE RISING QUICKLY.]

Coven: Shhh! Patience, mah friends. Let's hear what buggaman has to say. Why do yah call me names?

Declan: You're a coward because you flit around the city playing your games with the Bowesley bitch instead of just killing her already. You're a traitor to the Sabbat because you're more interested in building up your little mercenary company when we could take this city with an army of shovelheads.

Coven: [sound of sucking lower lip through fangs] Challenging me, bwoy? I knew ya were a claat, but not this big of one. Do ya challenge me to Monomacy?

[PAUSE]

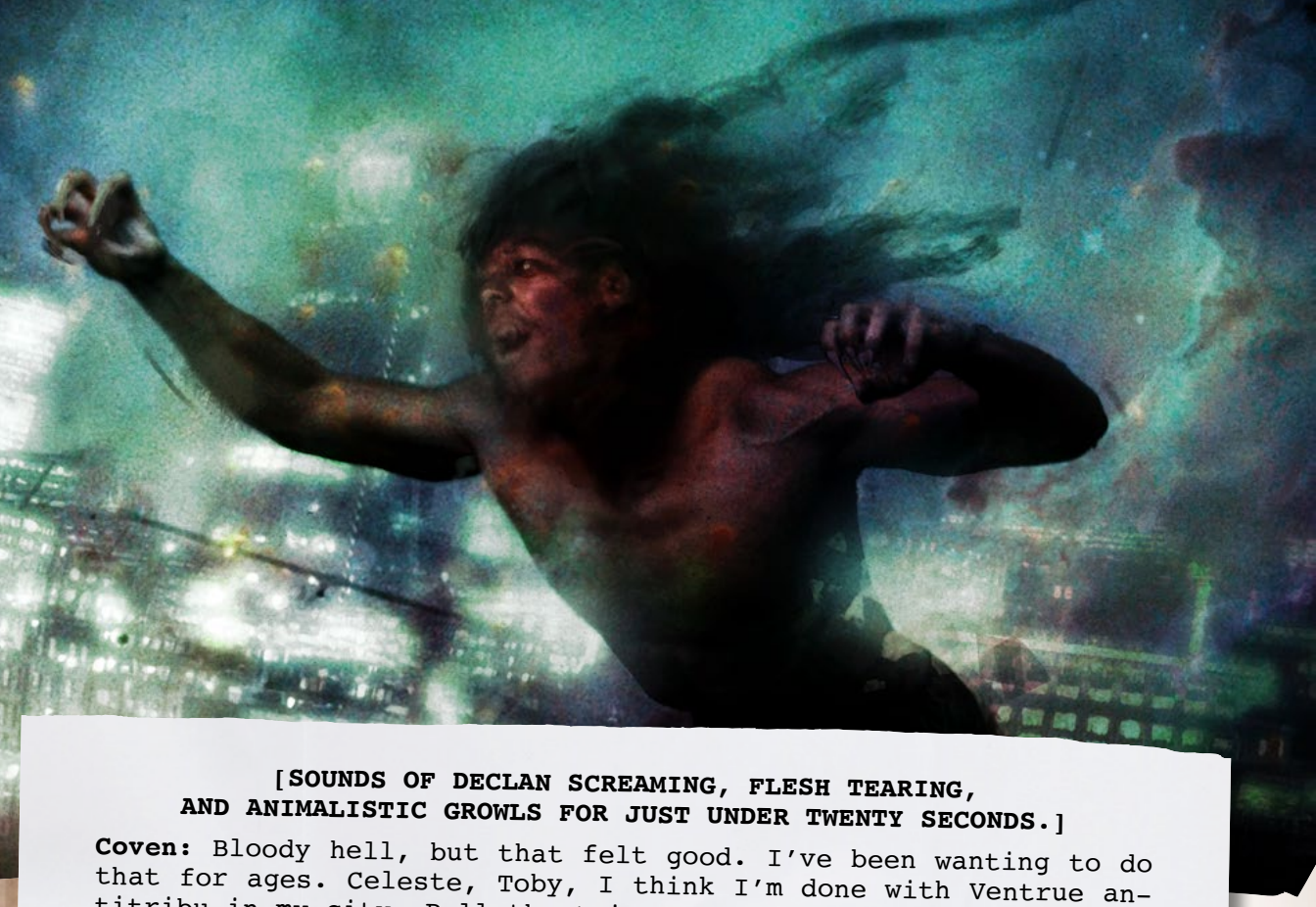
Declan: Yes. Yes, I do! A straightforward fight. The honor of the True Ventrue against the treachery of an Assamite risen above his station.

Coven: Hmm. Well, by tradition, Monomacy means that ya pick the time and place, but ah pick the circumstances, am ah right?

Declan: Fine. I say we have it three nights from now. 3 a.m. We find a nice open area out in St. James Park. No mortals around, but plenty of room for the Sabbat to come and watch you die. What conditions do you want?

Coven: Just one, bwoy. I declare either of us is allowed to make a sneak attack.

Declan: Sneak attack? What do you...



[SOUNDS OF DECLAN SCREAMING, FLESH TEARING, AND ANIMALISTIC GROWLS FOR JUST UNDER TWENTY SECONDS.]

Coven: Bloody hell, but that felt good. I've been wanting to do that for ages. Celeste, Toby, I think I'm done with Ventrue antitribu in my city. Pull the trigger on Declan's pack tonight. I want the Anarchs and the Sheriff both to know where their blasted havens are... Damn. I'll never get this outfit cleaned. Beckett, go on in my office and wait for me. I'll grab a quick shower and change clothes. [Muttering in the distance in a language Mr. Beckett identified as Avestan, but cannot translate]

[RECORDING ENDS]

Your Majesty,

The anonymous tip we received by way of the Nosferatu was accurate, and the operation was executed flawlessly. A large Sabbat pack numbering over a dozen was caught in our ambush and wiped out to the last. I regret none of the Sabbat filth survived the attack to be questioned, but they were Inquisition fanatics and fought to the last. A forensic analysis of their communal haven seems to indicate this was the last sizeable pack in London. Accordingly, it seems we can stop worrying about the Sabbat for a while and turn our attention back to whatever deviltry the Tremere are up to.

Your obedient servant,
Malcolm Entwhistle
Sheriff of London

Coven,
It's done.
Mal

The Haunch of Venison Hostelry, Salisbury, British Isles

Clearly, Coven is more than he appears. Though I feigned ignorance of his identity, Lucita mentioned to me there was a formidable Inquisition leader named Declan Whitacker who led a pack of Ventrue antitribu paladins in the London area. If that was the same Declan, then I just watched Monty Coven dismember him with ease, troubled only by the damage an explosive blood spray did to his seemingly-hodgepodge attire. Equally troubling was the complete disinterest of the other Sabbat members in the room, all of whom clearly have more loyalty to Coven than their Sect, if his casual order to betray a fellow pack to its destruction was any clue.

[Recording begins]

Coven: Mr. Beckett! I apologize for the delay. You know how it is with...personnel disputes.

Beckett: Indeed. Excuse my impertinence, but your accent has changed at least three times.

Coven: It does that. Despite the circumstances of my birth, I've a good ear for accents, and I know how inclined the typical Brit is to dismiss anyone not speaking proper English as a natural inferior, while simultaneously deferring to anyone who speaks as though he went to Oxbridge.

Beckett: Interesting. You know, you're the second exceptionally well-spoken Assamite I've spoken with recently who still uses the accent of his lower class upbringing to lead others into under-estimating him.

Coven: You use what tricks you can. To most white Brits, I'll always be a Wailer who should have stayed back in Kingston. Nowadays, Received Pronunciation is something I reserve only for the people I trust.

[pause]

Beckett: And you trust me? We've only just met.

Coven: Have I misjudged ya, Mr. Beckett? Will ya leave here to visit Her Majesty Queen Anne to tell her who ah am and what ah'm doin' and where ah can be found? [short laugh] Your discretion is well known, Beckett. I'm quite confident you will keep whatever you learn about me to yourself and your merry historians.

Beckett: Whether I reveal anything or not, it seems unlikely you can keep yourself concealed indefinitely. Queen Anne has a good reputation for, well, tracking down people like you and putting an end to you.

Coven: Anne Bowesley is no obstacle. If anything, she advances my endeavors. She strikes blindly at whatever target I place in front of her, even as she turns most of this city's Kindred against the Camarilla. She sits on her throne because I wish it. When I decide

to remove her, I will do it so effortlessly people like you will feel foolish you ever considered her a threat.

Beckett: "Kindred," you say? Most Sabbat prefer to call us "Cainites."

Coven: Words, Beckett, mere words. I've heard vampires called many things over my years, and met many older than "Caine." The conflict between Sabbat and Camarilla is illusory, a war of words between rival elders. One Sect is ruled by open fear of mortals and secret fear of Antediluvians. The other is ruled by open fear of Antediluvians and secret fear of mortals. Both fears are legitimate. Both are overblown. Pragmatic steps can protect us all from mortals and ancients alike. Gehenna can be survived. The Kindred can rule forever.

Beckett: That's...an interesting perspective. Tell me, Mr. Coven... why did you wish to meet with me? Surely not to discuss politics and philosophy.

Coven: Oh no, Mr. Beckett. I summoned you here to save your unlife! You were far too imprudent with your inquiries here in London. Inquiries about Fatima al-Faqadi and the one she protects. Inquiries about Lady Anne. Inquiries about *me*. You've raised red flags. Anne has already dispatched her agents to bring you in for questioning.

Beckett: Just for asking questions?

Coven: Don't be coy. You know as well as anyone how asking the wrong question can be a death sentence. Besides, in the last two days, you've met with Gotsdam and now with me. Gotsdam is sire to Dylan Bruce. I'm suspected of having recently met with Kemintiri. By the Transitive Property of Ventrue Paranoia, you are now two degrees of separation away from *two different Anathema*. Anne will have questions. If she doesn't like your answers, she will suck you dry and blame it on some imagined enemy of the state.

Beckett: Coven, I know Anne is a harsh Prince, but please don't think you can frighten me with baseless slander. Anne *might* have me killed, but I hardly think she's likely to commit diablerie on me.

[SILENCE]

Beckett: Has anyone ever told you, Mr. Coven, you have a very disturbing grin?

Coven: I'm still growing used to it myself.

Beckett: Never mind. So you summoned me to save me from Queen Anne. Why? We've never met before and I'm no ally of the Sabbat.

Coven: Not now, perhaps. But there is every chance your Lasombra friend may ascend to become Regent. Perhaps she'll be grateful if I save your life?

Beckett: Lucita as Regent? Galbraith might object.

Coven: Galbraith. [laughs] You see, Beckett, I like you. And by extension that means I like Lucita. I don't plan to be a friend to the next Regent, whoever he or she or it is. London is a great city, once the greatest in the world. It should not bow to the rule of someone who lives an ocean away.

Beckett: You want an independent city. That's becoming a trend.

Coven: You use what tricks you have. Whoever becomes Regent will be a polarizing figure. I've spent years weeding the London Sabbat

of anyone who lacks the wisdom to follow my lead. The prospect of a civil war will allow me room to purge the rest. Then, *whoever* takes the Regency, I will reject them for whatever heresies or scandals seem most plausible and then set myself up as Regent of a British Sabbat rebuilt for the 21st century. Rather than go to war in London and risk the Masquerade, the Camarilla will negotiate a peace with me. Or maybe I'll make London an Anarch Free State. Or perhaps I'll let the Inner Circle bribe me into keeping London as a Camarilla city but with guarantees I can run it my way without interference.

Beckett: The Camarilla...will negotiate peace...with an Assamite antitribu less than 30 years dead?

Coven: I've advantages making up for my relative youth, Mr. Beckett. For one, I know where a lot of bodies are buried. Literally as well as figuratively. Now come, let us collect your ghoul from down below and get you on your way. I have a private plane waiting to take you to France. [shudders] Unless ya don't believes me and wants to take ya chances with da mamby crab.

[PAUSE]

Beckett: I assume you mean Queen Anne. I'll err on the side of caution for the moment. I'll allow your people to conduct me out of the city. I was planning on leaving in a night or so anyway. But don't imagine for a minute that this means I trust you. To be brutally honest, I think you're as balmy as any Malkavian.

Coven: [laughter] Very droll. Give me six months. When I'm in charge, you come back and visit. As long as I rule here, you'll always have a place in London.

[RECORDING ENDS]

Libertatia, East Africa

My encounter with Coven was six months ago, and while he hasn't conquered London yet, it's clear he's only biding his time. Last night, I received a package from him through intermediaries. It held a flash drive with a half dozen video files taken from spy cameras. While rather fuzzy, the recordings seem to depict Queen Anne committing diablerie against a succession of bound Kindred. The package also contains information about her putative victims verifying their identities and dates they went missing, as well as details about the means by which she conceals the black marks of diablerie from discovery. Finally, there was one last document in the package, one marked for my personal files as "a memento of earlier times." It is a handwritten note on Victorian-era stationery. It raises more questions than it answers, some of which fill me with dread.

My dearest Bindusara,

In my dotage, I find I am quick to anger and slow to forgive. But your spirited words in defense of the Gangrel do not fall on deaf ears. Moreover, I am cognizant of the debt I owe you for the aid and advice you have given me over the centuries. If this is truly what you desire in recompense, then I shall grant the boon you request.

Henceforth, my enmity with the Gangrel Beckett is at an end. I swear now that as long as I claim praxis over this great city, Beckett shall always have a place in London.

Your brother in blood,

Mithras

Prince of London

Childe of Veddartha

Grand-childe of



This Sceptered Isle

The history of Britain's Kindred has been largely shaped by the history of Mithras, a Ventrue so old, powerful, and *godlike* his presence shapes the supernatural culture around him in ways even he could not anticipate. He never formally joined the Camarilla, largely due to antipathy towards "that impudent child Hardestadt," though he enforced the Traditions in his own domain centuries before the Sect's founding. Some Kindred historians maintain that had Mithras not entered torpor at an inconvenient moment in history, Mithraism might well have supplanted Christianity as the official religion of Rome, making Mithras the literal god-king of Europe. It was said of Mithras his mastery of mental dominance was so great he could command others from any distance if he met them even once, and knew their current location, while his sheer presence was so awe-inspiring any who met the Ventrue were convinced of his divinity.

With such powers at his disposal, it would seem impossible the Methuselah might ever fall, but even Mithras' powers did not render him indestructible. During the London Blitz, German bombers laid waste to his London haven with no idea they were forcing an ancient blood god into decades of torpor. He awoke when his haven was simultaneously breached by a Sabbat questing after his vitae and a werewolf pack directed to the location because of vague prophecies of some rising evil. The prophecy was self-fulfilling — the werewolves killed all but one of the Sabbat, but their spilt blood caused Mithras to arise and slay all of the werewolves. Then, weakened by injuries and lack of vitae, Mithras fell victim to the last surviving Sabbat member, an Assamite antitribu named Monty Coven.

Born to an impoverished Jamaican family, Monty grew up a poor black immigrant in a Hammersmith neighborhood teeming with racism and classism, a place offering nothing to people like Monty except prison or an early death. Then he found a worse option: that of the shovelhead. Perhaps the Vaulderie accompanying his creation rites was unusually weak, or perhaps Monty was stronger than anyone had thought, but he had no loyalty to the Sabbat, to his pack, or to anything except himself. When a bloody Methuselah fell practically at his feet, Monty saw an opportunity, and seized it.

The outcome was unexpected. The soul of Monty Coven looked into that of Mithras and saw a being of vast power weighed down by untold centuries of relentless ennui, while the soul of Mithras looked into that of Monty Coven and saw an angry young man filled with a longing to prove himself by any means necessary. By bizarre happenstance, the worst instincts of Mithras and Monty fit one another like a glove.

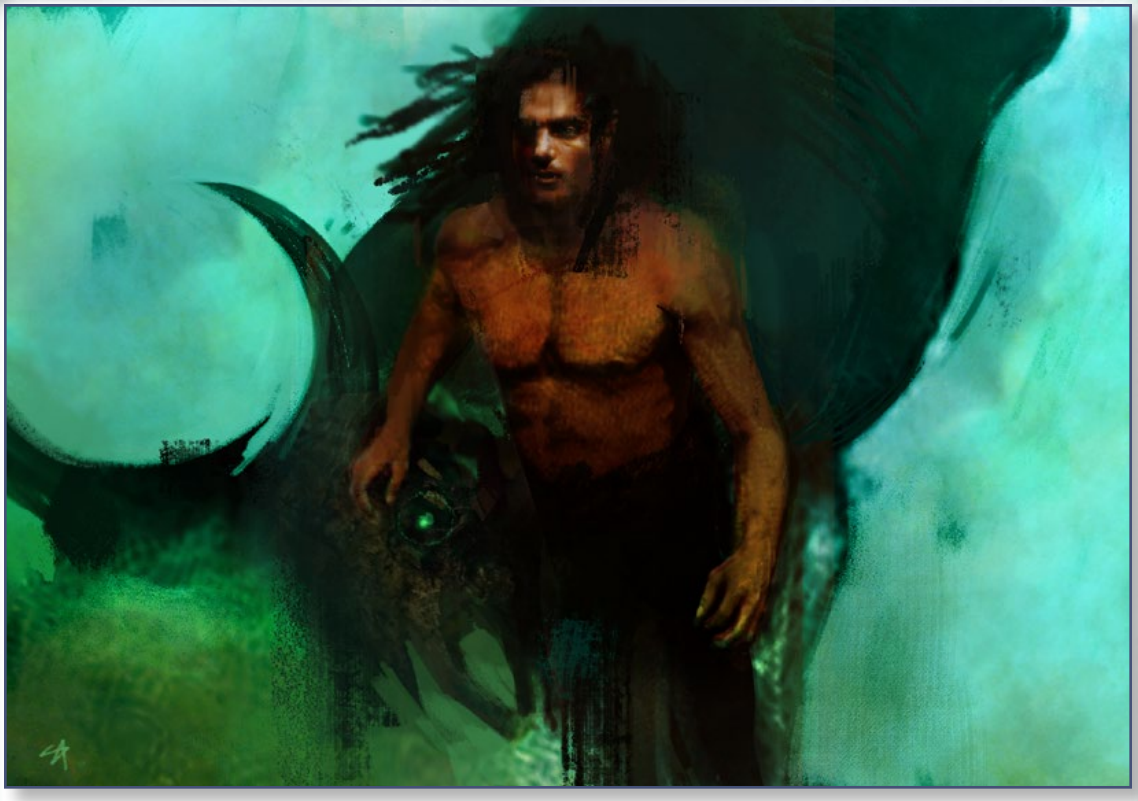
The result, so far at least, has been a gestalt personality more than the sum of its parts. Out of the ruins of Mithras's tomb walked Montgomery Coven, simultaneously old and young, a newborn blood god for a new millennium. Coven is a brash young man acutely aware of his minority status in a nation not always welcoming to immigrants. And yet, he carries himself now with the confidence of one who has what it means to be deified. Meanwhile, Mithras is a god who has fallen to Earth...now delighted at the prospect of having to climb his way up again.

For the first few years, Coven laid low, developing his new powers, while Mithras acclimatized to the new era. The knowledge Coven assimilated from Mithras gave him limited access to the ancient's accumulated wealth, to the remnants of his cult, and to a vast storehouse of occult lore, while the memories Mithras took from Monty gave him a new zest for unlife and fascination with the modern era. Coven has built a new company to mask his activities: Syndexioi, named after an ancient term for initiates into the Mithraic Mysteries. Many influential mortals descended from those who once worshipped Mithras investigated the new company out of curiosity and were drawn into the herd of their former god's heir.

Synexioi's growing reputation in the cyber-security industry also drew the attention of Anarchs belonging to the Red Question (see **V20 Anarchs Unbound**) who believe "Coven" is simply an Internet handle for a British Anarch seeking to undermine Camarilla hegemony. Apprised by his Red Question allies of the impending economic crash of 2007, Coven will make his own arrangements to enrich himself and his allies while bankrupting several prominent Ventrue. Simultaneously, he will pass word through proxies exposing several Sabbat packs active in the city. By 2010 now, there will be few Sabbat left in the world who know anything about his pre-diablerie existence.

Anne (with Coven's subtle assistance) is in the process of making London completely inhospitable for Sabbat and Anarchs alike, and Coven begins a practice of recruiting both Sabbat packs and Anarch cells to London, packs and cells chosen specifically for their ability to pass undetected as Camarilla members. Except for carefully-vetted licks on both sides, neither the Anarchs nor the Sabbat know they share a patron who doesn't truly care about either of their causes except as weapons to use against the Camarilla government.

Only three people have penetrated his carefully maintained anonymity. One is the Setite Methuselah Kemintiri,



who experienced a tempestuous relationship with Mithras in the 19th century. All of London's Kindred went on high alert when the Anathema came to town and started asking questions about a young Assamite named Coven. The two met on several occasions, but what they discussed is a mystery, as she disappeared after only a few weeks. Now, the name Coven is on the lips of every Kindred in London, which forces him to accelerate his timetable.

Lady Anne commits much of her personal power, wealth, and prestige to the Camarilla effort to drive the Sabbat out of North America and is mobilizing to oppose their burgeoning Crusade in the Middle East. She also sends many of her closest associates to the U.S. and the Levant as "advisors," even though the London Kindred outside of Clan Ventrue are as restive as at any time during her reign. Thus, the time is right for Coven to unleash his most dangerous weapon — knowledge. He possesses video evidence proving Anne's a diablerist. She does not suffer from Methuselah's Thirst. She doesn't feed deep to resist the Beckoning. She does not reduce her Generation by consuming those closer to Caine than herself (though she has done so twice in the past). She's simply addicted to the thrill of consuming Kindred souls. Coven knows this, because it was Mithras who inadvertently introduced her to this addiction. Briefly attracted to Anne when she was but an ancilla, he allowed her to commit diablerie twice as a reward for services to him but also out of the hope that if she came closer to him in power, she would be a suitable consort. It was Mithras who gave her the magical ring that hides the marks of her crimes. The revelation of her addiction to kinslaying repulses Mithras. Now, as Coven, he will do what he should have done 70 years ago, humiliating both the Camarilla and the London Ventrue, thus paving the way for his return to power.

The following are chronicle threads in which coteries and packs may wish to become involved:

Sabbat Investigation: As the Sabbat Civil War commences, Coven finishes culling London's Sabbat of those loyal to the Sect and its Gehenna rhetoric, while drawing in more disaffected Sabbat to the city to join his growing army. Eventually, *someone* is going to notice just how many packs suspected of disloyalty have up and moved to London, particularly after an entire pack of Inquisitors is betrayed and exterminated. Someone high up will want answers about what's going on in London, possibly enough to send in spies of their own who to infiltrate Coven's network.

Anarch Intrigues: The Red Question has questions of its own. A few years ago, the Red Question initiated "Operation Grandslam," the audacious scheme whereby the Red Question manipulated the massive global recession in order to blackmail the Camarilla into certain concessions to the Anarchs (and coincidentally, to make a boatload of money for the Red Question members). Now, someone is trying to replicate Operation Grandslam on a smaller scale by targeting various

major U.K. banks with scandals and liquidity problems, apparently with the goal of bankrupting London's Ventrue. Frustratingly for the Red Question, they don't know who's doing it and they don't know which banks are involved, which means they don't know how to protect themselves if these scandals explode into the Second Great Recession. The Anarchs have no idea Coven is the source of their problems (and, in fact, consider him an ally, as he provided valuable insider information in the run up to Operation Grandslam).

Tremere Entanglements: Coven successfully frames Jackson Montcrief for a significant Masquerade breach and provides the London chantry with clear evidence Montcrief was framed by the Sabbat. If the video is confirmed as legitimate, the Tremere will bring the matter to the Justicars and demand compensation, worsening the already poisonous relations between the London Ventrue and Tremere. Coteries on both sides will need to investigate the truth of the matter, before a different kind of civil war comes to London.

Assamite Activities: Marginally related to Coven's agenda is the appearance of Tegyrius, Vizier of Clan Assamite, in London on a diplomatic mission. With Tegyrius's recent activities (see Schism, p. 94), the future Prince Monty will welcome Schismatic Assamites to London, particularly Sorcerers to counterbalance the Tremere. That said, Tegyrius has no intention of endangering his fledgling conspiracy by getting involved in London's internal politics until the dust settles. Newly-arriving Assamites will find intrigues aplenty, as will the native Kindred of London, having to deal with the influx of arrivals.

Finally, the Revolution: It's time to end the reign of Lady Anne. Coven waits for the moment when her power is stretched to its utmost, at which point he'll reveal her enthusiasm for diablerie. If a coterie loyal to Anne does not prevent this, the revelation sends shockwaves through the Camarilla, to the point there's a serious push to add the Queen of London to the Red List. Whether she flees or is slain, Lady Anne's rule over London collapses, and with no clear line of succession, the city's most prominent Camarilla members go to war against one another. Coven stands aloof, hiding himself even as he sends Anarchs and Sabbat alike to remove his strongest rivals. When it's clear there can be no consensus on Prince of London, Coven removes those Anarchs and Sabbat not personally loyal to him and declares autonomy, daring the Camarilla to refuse his claim of praxis. For all his genius though, Monty is utterly unstable. Once the throne is claimed, both sides of his personality will be wresting for control.

The Once and Future King

The rise of Montgomery Coven as the new (old?) Prince of London is a storyline that might take years to fulfill. But what happens after? What complications might thwart this powerful young Kindred's ambitions?

Mithras Ascendant: It is rare indeed for an 11th Generation neonate to successfully consume a 4th Generation Methuselah. The gestalt is still very unstable, and Mithras might take over Coven completely. Indeed, Kemintiri seems bent on ensuring this outcome, convinced that *her* Mithras is still inside Coven only awaiting someone to free him to assume his former glory. Alastors and Camarilla officiaries will be seeking Kemintiri's trail, investigating the claims of Anne's diablerist predilections, or Coven's ascension. Any such group may stumble upon the truth of Coven's internal war, and conspire to ensure one personality emerges triumphant.

The Gestalt Kindred: But — *but* — if the gestalt holds, then Coven will eventually start to wonder whether the process can be replicated. Mithras had many childer, most of whom were disappointments. A few still exist but are so weighed down with age they still dress in clothes from the 17th century. What would happen if *those* vampires were consumed by Kindred who were much weaker in blood and yet far stronger in will? Would their knowledge and power also be preserved into new personalities that can adapt to the new era? And if such experiments bear fruit, would Coven begin searching for an 11th or 12th generation Kindred who is strong enough and vital enough to consume the soul of Kemintiri and bring his former lover into the new age?

The Return of the King: Ultimately, assuming he's not destroyed (or driven mad by his dueling minds), Coven will someday rule London. But what sort of rule will it be? Coven himself hasn't decided, as the international situation is too fluid. He has no love for the Sabbat, but one possibility is to position London as a safe zone for all who disagree with the new choice for Regent. He remembers the days of popes and antipopes, and he can envision the Sabbat splintering into multiple warring subsects. He can *also* envision London as a new Free State. If Coven learns of Marcus Vitel's plans for Washington, he might well seek out an alliance. The thought of *two* of the Western world's leading capitals falling to Anarchs would be an unimaginable disaster for the Camarilla. But privately, Coven suspects his best option is simply to sue for peace with the Camarilla. He would be willing to accept the trappings of a Camarilla domain if he's guaranteed the right to run that domain *his* way — with Coven as absolute monarch, his closest aids as barons, and everyone else free to act as they wished so long as they respected Traditions and Lex Talionis. He'll need advisors: capable Kindred with an independent streak. He'll also need agents, willing to serve in a brave new kingdom. This could be a new night for London, under Coven's very traditional Traditions.



From: beckettmnemosyne1@schreckNET.nod

To: c_da_man@gmail.com

Cc:

Subject: Reservations

Dear Cesare,

Between Vitel, Pieterzoon, and Fatima's mysterious patron, we finally have safe passage to Jordan, including a private sunproofed plane. Please make reservations for a five-night stay at the Amman Four Seasons. Ask for an "Ashirra Room," and it will come pre-sunproofed.

Sincerely,

Beckett

Amman Four Seasons Hotel, Amman, Jordan

Cesare rolls his eyes at my printing emails, chat logs and the like. I'll be damned if I entrust this diary's safety to a computer. How am I suppose to take it around with me?

In any case, travel into Amman was uneventful, as was check in at the hotel. Cesare somewhat passive-aggressively booked the room under the name "Smith, John." Per instructions from Fatima al-Faqadi, I will be meeting this evening at midnight with one Tegyrius, evidently a person of some importance within Clan Assamite. I'm interested to hear what he says, and Fatima assures me he is peaceable and not even a member of the Assamite Warrior Caste. I'm not expecting trouble.

VIOLENCE STRIKES FAMED JORDANIAN HOTEL

By Farhan Husni, Special Correspondent from Jordan

The famed Amman Four Seasons Hotel was the target of a mass shooting attack by unidentified militants last evening. Police reports indicate as many as 20 gunmen stormed the hotel just before midnight armed with automatic weapons, explosives, and, according to some reports, swords and machetes. Other witnesses reported some guests returned fire against the attackers. The Ministry of Justice has not yet released a statement regarding the attack, and reports are unclear on who, if anyone, took part in the counterattack. Unnamed sources within the Ministry who do not have authority to comment have said no terrorist organizations have taken credit for the attack.

Tegyrius' private jet, somewhere over the Mediterranean

I think Anatole and Okulos may be on to something. Every time I mention expecting everything to go easily and without incident, cue the explosions and screaming. I literally had my hand on the door knocker of Tegyrius' suite when a dozen armed men swarmed down the hall and opened fire on me. Most appeared to be mortals or ghouls, but I soon realized several of them were Assamite Warriors. Luckily, they were looking for Tegyrius but were not expecting either Fatima or myself. We made short work of the mortals, forced most of the vampires to flee, and even captured and staked one of them. Nevertheless, it was definitely a reason to check out of the Four Seasons ahead of schedule. Pity. I hadn't even seen the pool.

Tegyrius thanked me for my help and introduced himself as the Vizier of Clan Assamite. I was aware of a separate Assamite bloodline called Viziers, so I didn't understand why he was pretending to be the only one. It turns out that the leader of the Vizier bloodline is called the Vizier, which seems impractical, but perhaps there's a subtle distinction in Arabic that eludes my British ears. Anyway, Tegyrius invited Cesare and myself to join him, Fatima, and the staked attacker as they left Amman for...well, Tegyrius was a bit cagey on the destination, but my natural inclination to flee the scene of gunfire and explosions overcame my normal paranoia. He said one of his foreign contacts had already arranged suitable transportation.

We rendezvoused back at the Queen Alia International Airport and boarded Tegyrius's private jet, which appeared identical to the one my dear friend Jan

Pieterzoon provided for my trip into Amman. Same serial numbers and everything. Funny that. Presently, Tegyrius and Fatima are about to begin their interrogation of our prisoner. The first step involves Tegyrius feeding the man some of his blood, which has the surprising effect of intoxicating the assassin. A curious application of his Clan's most notorious gifts, of which I was unaware.

TRANSCRIBER'S NOTE: THE FOLLOWING INTERROGATION WAS TRANSLATED INTO ENGLISH FROM ARABIC.

[RECORDING BEGINS]

Tegyrius: Who are you and who do you serve?

Prisoner: I am Rashad Mardam-Bey. I serve Haqim, his faithful Shepherd, and the Web of Knives.

Tegyrius: Why did you attack us?

Prisoner: [laughs] Because the Caliph said to, you fool! You are unclean, a perversion of Haqim's vision for his childer. You lead the Viziers into weakness and treachery.

Tegyrius: He knows of my plans?

Prisoner: He knows you are unworthy of the Blood. That is all that matters.

Fatima: That is...good, I suppose. Better this was an act of personal bigotry towards you than a preemptive strike against the whole conspiracy.

Beckett: Conspiracy? What "conspiracy?"

Tegyrius: [to prisoner] How did you know where to find me?

Prisoner: The Caliph told us the Shepherd spoke to him and said the time of the Culling drew nigh. The Shepherd named you as one of his enemies and said where you might be found. But he did not mention the traitorous bitch would be on hand to save you. Perhaps the Shepherd wished to test her loyalties. [laughing] She failed.

[Silence for several seconds.]

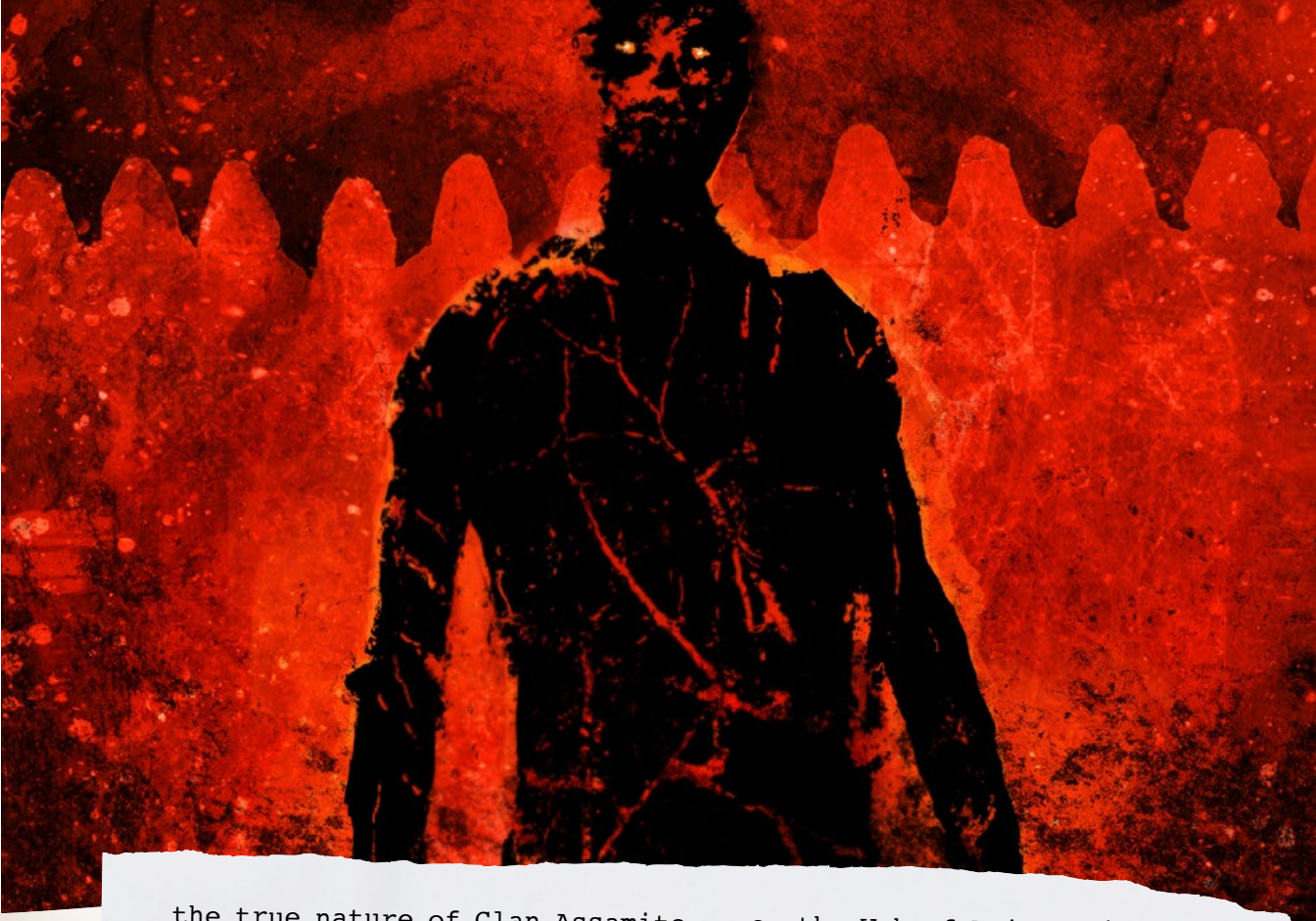
Tegyrius: The Shepherd...spoke...to Thetmes? The Shepherd is awake?

Prisoner: No, not yet. But soon. He speaks to the faithful in our daytime dreams. Those Warriors who are faithful to the false gods will be called to him first and tested. The vitae of those who reject Haqim's truth shall sustain him until the time of the Culling.

Fatima: [whispering] Merciful Allah.

Beckett: I'm sorry. I'm lost. Who's the Shepherd? And what's this Web of Knives? I've always thought it just a nickname for Warriors of your Clan. Yet now, it seems that it is only a subgroup plotting against the rest of you.

Fatima: The Web of Knives is, indeed, only a powerful movement within our larger Clan, Beckett. Yet circumstances beyond our control have allowed it to function as the public face of the Children of Haqim for nearly a thousand years. Soon, that will change, one way or the other. Either the rest of the Cainite race will know



the true nature of Clan Assamite... or the Web of Knives will kill the rest of us and make their lie into truth.

Beckett: And the Shepherd?

Tegyrius: An ancient of our Clan prophesied to rise and slake his thirst on those Assamites who do not swear allegiance to him.

Beckett: Not another one.

Fatima: Beckett, do not mock the Vizier!

Beckett: I'm sorry, but in the past few months, I've lost track of how many Kindred I've met who claim to predate Jesus Christ. I'm becoming a bit...blasé about it.

Tegyrius: Add another.

Beckett: Sorry?

Tegyrius: In life, I marched with Alexander the Great. I was already an elder during the purported time of Christ's ministry, though I never had opportunity to meet the man if he actually existed. I never met nor worshipped the Prophet of Islam either, but I followed his career with great interest while it lasted. So I hope you will appreciate what it means, Mr. Beckett, when I tell you that I am but a mote in the eye of the Black Shepherd of Haqim, who walked the very streets of Enoch itself and whose age is more than five times my own. And as for the Web of Knives — You! Assassin! Speak to this man. Tell him the story of Haqim as it was told to you by your masters!

Prisoner: Gladly, infidel. [laughs] The Most Holy Haqim was the chief warlord of the fabled city of En'esh, a loyal and faithful servant to his king and queen. When the foul Khayyin corrupted his beloved

rulers and Embraced them as the first of his childer, mighty Haqim struck them down with his righteous anger. He used the blood taken from the queen to Embrace himself and then took the blood of the king in diablerie so he would be strong enough to challenge Khayyin. But Khayyin Embraced childer who Embraced childer themselves, and there were too many for the Most Holy Haqim to fight on his own. So he fled to Alamut, where he fashioned a mighty army to wage war against the Damned Children of Khayyin. In time, though, the Children of Haqim grew fractious, with many who were too cowardly or too enamored with their books or their wealth to face the Damned Children of Khayyin in battle. Haqim left Alamut, but swore that one night, he would send his Black Shepherd to purge the Eagle's Nest of infidels, heretics and cowards — Like you, Tegyrius!

Tegyrius: Sleep. Fatima. Please sever this one's head and dump the remains over the Mediterranean.

Beckett: Does he really believe all that? That Haqim Embraced *himself* in order to fight against Caine? Do you?

Tegyrius: Yes, for him. No for myself. I suppose it is possible the creation myth celebrated by the Web of Knives is true. It was 12,000 years ago, and no written records survive. But I highly doubt it. The tale I was taught said Haqim was a warrior-scholar whose first childer were Viziers. Only later did he Embrace Warriors and then Sorcerers from the line of al-Ashrad. But the Web of Knives wholeheartedly believes the story this one just related. And at the command of Haqim's oldest surviving childe, they are ready to put all heretics to the flame. Congratulations, Mr. Beckett. You've just learned the darkest secret of Clan Assamite — that for over a millennium, the majority of our Clan has been held hostage to the whims of an insane and apocalyptic death cult.

[LENGTHY SILENCE]

Beckett: Good to know.

[RECORDING ENDS]

Palais-Royal, Paris, France

During the rest of our time before sunup, Tegyrius explained the history of the Web of Knives to me. According to him, the Clan founder was actually something of a recluse who moved his whole Clan to a hidden mountain fortress just to avoid the Jyhad. It didn't work, and eventually he grew frustrated and left because various factions of Assamites got too involved on both sides of mortal and immortal conflicts. Afterwards, the conservatives of the Warrior Caste, who outnumbered the other two castes combined and also had all the spiffy combat experience, seized control of the Clan, which is why, for most of the last millennium, less erudite Kindred assumed all Assamites were bloodthirsty warriors obsessed with diablerie. Indeed, according to Tegyrius and Fatima, even that was a fairly recent development. The blood addiction

plaguing Assamites in the Middle Ages (which still plagues antitribu today) was the result of a curse levied against the Warrior Caste by the Baali sometime in the 5th or 6th century. According to Tegyrius, anyway. Frankly, I think the Baali are too often cast as the mysterious boogiemen responsible for all the bad things.

We had a layover in Athens during the day which, mercifully, passed uneventfully. We took off after sunset, arrived at Charles De Gaulle International in Paris, and were met by a smug, smirking Jan Fucking Pieterzoon. After some typical Ventrue pleasantries, Pieterzoon invited the three of us into a stretch limo, which transported us to the Palais-Royal, just across the street from the Louvre. By day, the Palais-Royal holds government offices. Tonight, it hosts an emergency Camarilla confab of some sort. I am amazed Pieterzoon is allowing me within a mile, let alone inviting me inside. I wonder what Francois Villon will do when he sees me – kill me, seduce me, or both at the same time.

[RECORDING BEGINS]

Pieterzoon: Before we go in, let me make one thing clear, Beckett. I know you're carrying a recorder. And that's fine. To be honest, I want you to be able to review what's going to be discussed in this meeting because I'd like your thoughts later. Besides, most of the Kindred inside are too old to have any idea what a digital recorder is. So as long as you don't pull out parchment and a quill pen, no one will care. That said, there are a lot of very conservative Kindred inside, including the Princes of Paris, London, and Berlin. Don't be an ass!

Beckett: Fine. But Francois Villon had better not hit on me.

Pieterzoon: Villon is a Toreador and a Lombard. He hits on everyone. Luckily, there will be Kindred inside who are prettier than either of us, so as long as you don't make eye contact with him, you'll be fine.

Tegyrius: Thank you, Jan, for your kind words of introduction. I am pleased to have already met many of you, and I hope to meet the rest before this conference ends. I am a diplomat by training – astonishing, I know, for an Assamite – and I normally favor measured words and subtle nuance in the pursuit of successful negotiations. Unfortunately, sometimes events move far too quickly to allow for either nuance or discretion, and so here we are. Before I continue with my prepared remarks, there is a video recording I wish to share with you. The language is Arabic, but there is a voiceover translation in English. Mr. Pieterzoon has already had the translation reviewed, he will vouch for its accuracy. Miriam, please start the recording.

[BRIEF DELAY]

Taped Voice: He is coming. The Black Shepherd comes to cull the flock. The Hateful Spawn. The Herald of Destruction. As the Lord of Death culled his childer at Kaymakli, the Black Shepherd shall cull the Children at Alamut.

Visual description – the tape depicts an elderly Middle Eastern woman in a trance state who repeats the previous message several times before she begins to bleed from the eyes, lapses into convulsions, and quickly expires.-B

Tegyrius: Some explanation is in order. The woman in the video was a mortal seer devoted to the service of al-Ashrad, the Amr, or chief Sorcerer, of the Assamite Clan. Her reputation as a prophetess is acclaimed, her track record for accuracy unmatched. The names she used to describe the being who is "coming" – Black Shepherd, Hateful Spawn, Herald of Destruction – are all sobriquets applied over the millennia to a Fourth Generation childe of the founder of my Clan, a being known historically as Ur-Shulgi. Although Ur-Shulgi has not walked among the Children of Haqim in well over 2,000 years, there has never been any evidence of its destruction. If the records of my Clan are correct, Ur-Shulgi was Embraced during the Baali Wars of antiquity, and was active during the time of the Second City. The reference to the Lord of Death and Kaymakli refers to an alleged incident in the Middle Ages when the Cappadocian Antediluvian culled the majority of his Clan for failure to adhere to his own personal standards.



Various others: [Sounds of argument.]

1st voice (identified as Prince Wolff of Berlin): This is bloody preposterous. You brought us here to listen to vague prophecies about long-dead Methuselahs dating back to an age of myth? Antediluvians rising to judge their Clans? It's this hyperbole that made me abandon the Sabbat! Does Hardestadt know about your sudden interest in Noddist fantasy, Pieterzoon?

Pieterzoon: I am here tonight as the Voice of Hardestadt, Prince Wolff. Draw what conclusions from that you wish. Regardless, it is irrelevant to us whether or not this Ur-Shulgi truly dates back to the birth of our species, or even whether he exists at all. What matters to us is that the dominant political faction within the Assamite Clan believes that he exists, and worse, that he desires a pogrom against every Assamite who is opposed to genocide against all Kindred.

2nd voice (identified as Ian Carfax, Tremere Justicar): With all due respect to our esteemed guests, Pieterzoon, if the Assamites want to kill each other off over superstitious twaddle, I say let them. Even if the genocidal faction wins out, they present no danger to us so long as the Tremere Curse bars them from diablerie.

Fatima: Your respect is noted, Justicar Carfax. But know this: The Black Shepherd is no mere Methuselah. He is the progenitor of the Assamite Sorcerer Caste with an unparalleled mastery of blood magic. Are you so certain that your precious Tremere Curse cannot be broken by one such as him?

Carfax: Don't insult my intelligence, woman. The curse levied against the Assamites by my Clan has endured for more than six centuries! It is as far beyond the peasant magic of your Sorcerer Caste as your trickery is above a mortal street magician!

Fatima: [unintelligible curse]

Tegyrius: —Yes, yes, it was indeed a most impressive working of magic, your Clan's curse. I am not a practitioner of blood magic myself, but the Amr and I have discussed the matter at length over the centuries. If I remember his description properly, he said the Tremere probably used a ritually-prepared papyrus scroll marked with Egyptian glyphs of command and hierarchy, and black ink laced with the vitae of a slain Assamite elder when drafting that particular copy of the Treaty of Tyre. Then, you simply had our Eldest, who had authority to speak on behalf of us all, sign the treaty and thereby bind the entire Clan via a sympathetic blood link. The Amr speculated the ritual probably required at least one blood magician of the Fourth Generation to perform, more if they were less skilled, but he did marvel at the vitae requirements. Out of curiosity, Justicar Carfax, do your allies in the Camarilla know just how many of your own clanmates you ritually murdered in order to levy your curse against us?

[LENGTHY SILENCE]

Tegyrius: Believe, Tremere, if it pleases you to do so, that you and your kind know more of blood magic than one who mastered it before the rise of Sumer. But I tell you now — your Clan did nothing to mine that we did not permit.

3rd Voice (identified as Diana Iadanza, Toreador Justicar): Perhaps we're getting off track here. Even assuming that there is something to this prophecy, what is it that you want us to do about it? Destroy a Methuselah who slumbers in a hidden location, if he exists at all? Or simply go to war on your behalf against the extremist elements of your own Clan?

Tegyrius: Justicar Iadanza, the conflicts that tear at my Clan have been brewing for centuries. Long have the Viziers, the Sorcerers, and even the less doctrinaire Warriors chafed under the dominance of the Web of Knives. But it is only in recent nights their conduct towards us has become unconscionable. Continued subjugation to the Web of Knives is unacceptable, let alone to the Black Shepherd should he arise. Yet a conflict between our factions might lead to extinction and would certainly lead to the destruction of the Masquerade, which I assure you is as treasured by my people as it is by yours. Accordingly, the only solution I and my fellows can see is...separation.

Iadanza: What sort of separation?

Tegyrius: [Throat clearing] I, Tegyrius, childe of Anath, called goddess of war and love, grand-childe of Haqim the Hunter, speak now to this council on behalf of the Viziers of Clan Assamite, on behalf of the Sorcerers of Clan Assamite, and on behalf of those of the Warriors of Clan Assamite who reject the Web of Knives. Collectively, those who follow my banner make up more than one third of the entire world's Assamite population. And on behalf of those followers, I hereby request sanctuary from the Camarilla and recognition for my Clan as a member of your organization.

[SHOUTING AND OTHER CONFUSION]

[RECORDING ENDS]

Palais-Royal, Paris, France

Well, that put the bat among the pigeons! The meeting, which included numerous Princes and Justicars, descended into chaos after Tegyrius' request for Clan recognition. The entire Tremere contingent stormed out of the meeting. I thought Jan was going to have to start banging a shoe on the table like Khrushchev at the U.N. to get order.

Post-script: It is now several months since the meeting between Tegyrius and the Camarilla Council in Paris. The motion to recognize the Preservationist Assamites (as Tegyrius calls his little conspiracy, though Schismatics is perhaps a more popular term) is moving at a snail's pace, mainly due to Tremere intransigence. The Warlocks are telling all who listen that Assamites cannot be trusted and should never be allowed

into the Camarilla. It doesn't help that if the proposal goes through, the Amr will be the one to join the Inner Circle in a seat right next to Etrius, and Tegyrius will probably become the first Assamite Justicar (and be an older and more powerful Justicar than anyone else currently in the position). Unfortunately, my cautious enthusiasm for that prospect is tempered by the document I received a few days ago – another "screenplay" scene from Prince Alexander of Birmingham. He says he based the scene on a dream he had. It may well be Malkavian nonsense (no offense, Anatole, when you read this), but it is deeply troubling nonetheless.

You were wise to share this with us, especially with Lucita and Fatima. Forewarned is forearmed, as they say. I will meet with Alexander when I can, and with others of my Clan who have the Sight. Perhaps there are clues not contained in Silverson's manuscript that might warn us as to when these events might occur. -A



[INTERIOR SCENE. NIGHT. The scenery consists of a fairly large subterranean cavern illuminated by flickering torches. There are small recesses carved into all the walls full of dozens and dozens of black clay pots. One recess is conspicuously empty. Aside from background music, which should be appropriately creepy, the only sound is an adult male voice, obviously frightened, somewhat hysterically muttering "Allahu Akbar, Allahu Akbar" over and over again. Camera pans across to reveal the speaker as an older man (**HASSAN**) in Arabic dress on his knees in front of a clay pot that is light gray instead of black. As the camera focuses on **HASSAN**, a dark figure (the **MYSTERIOUS VILLAIN**) moves behind him and then around so that a shadow falls over the wounded man.]

CAPTION: The Secret Lair of [Mysterious Villain] somewhere in Jordan.

HASSAN: Allahu Akbar! Allahu Akbar!

MYSTERIOUS VILLAIN: [In an unintelligible language with English subtitles.] Your faith is commendable, Hassan, even if it is misplaced. You have chosen martyrdom. And so you shall have it.

HASSAN: Allahu Akbar! Allahu Akbar!

[**HASSAN**'s voice rises in mounting terror only to turn into a scream as some invisible force seizes control of his body, jerking his head backwards and stretching his arms out to the point they almost dislocate. The sound of breaking bones can be heard.]

MV: I commend your soul to Allah, if your god exists to receive it. Your blood, however, is mine.

[Suddenly, **HASSAN** his head forward and begins vomiting blood into the clay pot while **MV** laughs cruelly. As the vomiting continues, the pot slowly turns black. After about fifteen seconds of this, **HASSAN**'s emaciated corpse falls over and quickly dissolves into dust which blows away along with his clothes in a mysterious wind that picks up out of nowhere. **MV** picks up the now blackened pot and places it into the last recess before returning to the center of the room.]

MV: Now, let us see what these trembling wizards are made of.

[Camera resets to show **MV** from behind as he throws off his robes to reveal himself. In build, he looks like a young man, perhaps a teenager, but his skin is marked with orange-red veins the color of lava which give off a light that pulses in time with the music. The musical score now increases in intensity from prior "creepy music" to full on "Damien on a Rampage" frightening.]

MV: [An occult incantation in an unknown language. No subtitles. Only the following words are intelligible: Haqim. Tremere. Moloch. Shaitan. Ur-Shulgi.]

[As the incantation progresses, all the black pots begin to shatter, with the vitae contained within them flying through the air around **MV** to form a massive blood vortex. As the sound and fury reaches its apex, **MV**'s incantation ends and he begins laughing maniacally.]

[SCENE CHANGE. Interior scene. Night. **ALEX SILVERSON**'s hunting lodge near Birmingham, Alabama, where **RANDY HOPKIRK** is talking with his boss, the dashing Prince.]

CAPTION: Birmingham, Alabama

SILVERSON: So how are your new friends assimilating?

HOPKIRK: So far, so good. There's obviously a little friction. Several of them are pretty devout Muslims, and, no offense, but we have a lot of bigoted vampires here in BirminghAAHH! [Clutches head in sudden pain as if suffering a migraine.]

SILVERSON: Randy? Are you all right? [Sounds of disturbance coming from outside. **SILVERSON** goes to the door and steps outside, followed by an obviously distressed **HOPKIRK**.] What the hell...?

[SCENE CHANGE. INTERIOR SCENE. NIGHT. The front yard of **SILVERSON**'s hunting lodge. The Prince looks on aghast at the scene. Several Middle Eastern vampires are attacking his other supporters while in the grip of violent hunger frenzy. **SILVERSON** tenses as he hears a vicious growl behind him. He turns just in time to see the face of his Sheriff Randy **HOPKIRK** as it twists in to a mask of



fury and...desire? With an animalistic rage, **HOPKIRK** flings himself at his Prince, knocking him to the ground and then biting deeply into his neck as **SILVERSON** screams.]

[SCENE CHANGE: EXTERIOR establishing shot of a mountain range somewhere in the Middle East. NIGHT. Cut to INTERIOR scene. A large open area within a central chamber of the Assamite fortress of Alamut. In the center of the courtyard are several dozen vampires of different clans. Some have been staked. Others have been chained to poles driven into the ground. Surrounding them is an even larger number of Assamites (predominantly male, but with a few women) who stare vacantly at them while chanting in Arabic.]

CAPTION: The Secret Assamite Fortress of Alamut.

ASSAMITES: [Subtitled.] All praise to Haqim. All praise to the Shepherd. All praise to Haqim. All praise to....

[Abruptly, the Assamites go silent, and their faces are overcome with expressions of delirious joy. Then, all of the Assamites simultaneously frenzy and charge their helpless prisoners. Shouting and screaming off-camera as we pan away.]

[SCENE CHANGE. EXTERIOR shot to a private villa overlooking the Mediterranean. Cut to INTERIOR shot of a bedroom with double doors that open up to a balcony. The lights are off but the room is clearly illuminated by the full moon. **FATIMA AL-FAQADI** stands on the balcony looking out over the sea. **LUCITA DE ARAGON** enters the bedroom looking for her. The frightening music of the previous scenes fade away to something more tender and elegiac.]

CAPTION: The Spanish Villa of Lucita de Aragon

LUCITA: Fatima, there you are. I was calling for you...Fatima? What's wrong?

FATIMA: I am sorry, Lucita.

LUCITA: Sorry? Whatever for?

FATIMA: We tried so hard to fight against our fates, Lucita, but one might as well fight the tides. [**FATIMA** turns to face **LUCITA**. She has been weeping blood.] He is awake, Lucita. The Black Shepherd is awake. I feel his power. I hear his laughter on the wind. He has broken the curse. He has shattered it, and, Allah help me, your blood calls to me!

[**FATIMA** growls as frenzy overtakes her and she rushes **LUCITA**. The camera does not follow to show how the fight concludes. Instead, we cut back to EXTERIOR SHOT of the villa with a blood-red moon in the background. In the distance, there is a woman's scream, but it could be **FATIMA** or **LUCITA**. Then, we can hear in the distance **MV**'s mocking laughter as we FADE TO BLACK.]

[END screenplay script]



What Rough Beast...

As the Final Nights approach, each of the Clans struggle with the signs of Gehenna in their own way, but the Assamites perhaps the most. Known to the Camarilla for centuries as a Clan of bloodthirsty assassins, the Assamites have always been more complex than most knew, but their diversity has been hidden away for centuries due to the machinations of the warrior-led death cult known as the Web of Knives. That faction, which venerates a vision of Haqim as a blood god who desires the extermination of all other Kindred, has ruled the Clan of Silence for centuries, presenting an image of Clan Assamite as a family of assassins obsessed with diablerie. Of course, that image was itself the product of centuries spent under a blood-curse inflicted on them by the Baali during the nights of the Roman Empire, a blood-curse unwittingly neutralized by the Camarilla when the Tremere Clan placed all Assamites under a newer and more potent curse with the Treaty of Tyre. Denied the chance for regular diablerie, the Web of Knives turned to contract assassination in exchange for vitae, leaving the Viziers and the Sorcerers to their own devices.

This state of affairs continued until a seer predicted the rise of Ur-Shulgi, a Methuselah of unimaginable power who sought to lead a culling of the Assamites. Galvanized into action, Tegyrius, the leader of the Viziers, and the Amr fashioned a conspiracy of Viziers, Sorcerers, and moderate Warriors wishing to defect from the main Clan in the event of Ur-Shulgi's rise. During a Conclave held in Paris, Tegyrius reveals the prophecy concerning the rise of Ur-Shulgi and officially asks that his conspiracy be allowed to join the Camarilla. The motion is not immediately acted upon, but Jan Pieterzoon and others strongly support it, mainly out of a desire for a powerful Clan of warriors capable of replacing the disloyal Gangrel. The following plot threads spin out of these developments.

The Diaspora: While the Camarilla dithers, Assamite refugees stream into its domains. While many domains refuse to accept known Assamites, others are more openminded, particularly when the refugees can help defend domains against the Sabbat and other threats. Other Assamites are subtler, posing as Caitiff or as members of other Clans. Few western Kindred know anything at all about the Vizier and Sorcerer bloodlines, and the Viziers can easily pass as Toreador.

Magic by Other Means: The Tremere Inner Circle is livid at the prospect of a bloodline as magically puissant as the Assamite Sorcerers gaining admittance to the Camarilla and threatening their occult monopoly. Local chantries do whatever they can to make Assamite refugees feel unwelcome while Princes who disdain the Tremere welcome the newcomers as a magical counterweight. Kindred of any Clans not gifted at sorcery get caught in the middle.

Ancient Terrors: For aspiring Noddists, the prophecy concerning Ur-Shulgi (when it inevitably gets out) is both terrifying and emboldening. There are signs of rising elders all over the place, but Ur-Shulgi is a named and well-known Methuselah who supposedly dates back to the Second City. The revelation of his apparent existence sets off a flurry of research into the ancient horror's history. Rumors that Ur-Shulgi's Embrace somehow involved the Baali as well as Haqim further darken the reputation of the Assamites as a Clan, even as they stoke fears of a Baali resurgence among the Sabbat Inquisition and various Camarilla occultists.

Other Pathways: Not every Assamite goes Camarilla. Many Anarchs openly welcome Assamite refugees who agree to follow the rules of whatever barony accepts them. Monty Coven actively recruits Assamites to his banner in London as he prepares to take the city, not for the Sabbat but for himself. The Sabbat as a whole is divided on the question of what to do with the Schismatic Assamites, particularly as it seems that for every Schismatic Warrior who joins the Sabbat, another Assamite antitribu (usually an elder) abandons the Sect to return to their original Clan.

...Slouches Towards Alamut

If it is not prevented somehow, eventually Ur-Shulgi will rise fully to power. Possibly the most powerful Cainite below the level of an Antediluvian, Ur-Shulgi immediately purges all disloyal Assamites who have not already fled Alamut. He begins at the top, with Jamal, the current Eldest, whose de-

votion to Allah outstrips his loyalty to Haqim; the vampire is martyred for his faith. Others follow as the remaining leadership of Alamut is summoned to Ur-Shulgi's lair to either swear allegiance to Haqim (or at least, Haqim as depicted by the Web of Knives) or else surrender their vitae and their lives. The annihilation of the remaining moderate leadership only accelerates the departure of younger terrified Assamites from Alamut, even as it emboldens the hardliners. When Ur-Shulgi reclaims enough vitae from the disloyal elders of the Clan, he shatters the Tremere Curse before journeying to Alamut to seize direct control of the Children of Haqim.

And then? What complications might arise after such world-shaking events?

Unexpected Bloodlust: The immediate impact of the breaking of the Tremere Curse is the reactivation of the Assamite's older blood-curse: the addiction to Kindred vitae magically imposed on Assamite Warriors by the Baali, which currently afflicts only the Assamite antitribu. At the exact moment the Tremere Curse is broken, every Assamite Warrior in the world (and quite a few members of the other two castes) immediately feels the effects of the Baali Curse and, if in the presence of any other Kindred, likely frenzies. Though the effects on these Assamites last only a single scene, many Assamites who survive the initial effects have a difficult time adjusting to the blood addiction now a part of them. The Tremere point to these events as further proof of the inherent danger of allowing Assamites in their midst, conveniently ignoring the fact their new rivals among the Sorcerer Caste were hardly affected at all by the sudden blood rage.

Not-So-Unexpected Bloodlust: As Anatole notes, forewarned is forearmed. Tegyrius and his allies fully realize Ur-Shulgi seeks to break the Tremere Curse, and prophecies from several Malkavians suggest his rising is imminent. This sets off a flurry of investigation around the world, as the Schismatic Assamites and their allies search desperately for more information from seers, from ancient prophecies, and from any other source that might reveal when the Breaking will occur. If the Schismatic Warriors can be warned with some specificity of when the Tremere Curse will fade, they can avoid contact with other Kindred until they have gained some control over their newfound affliction.

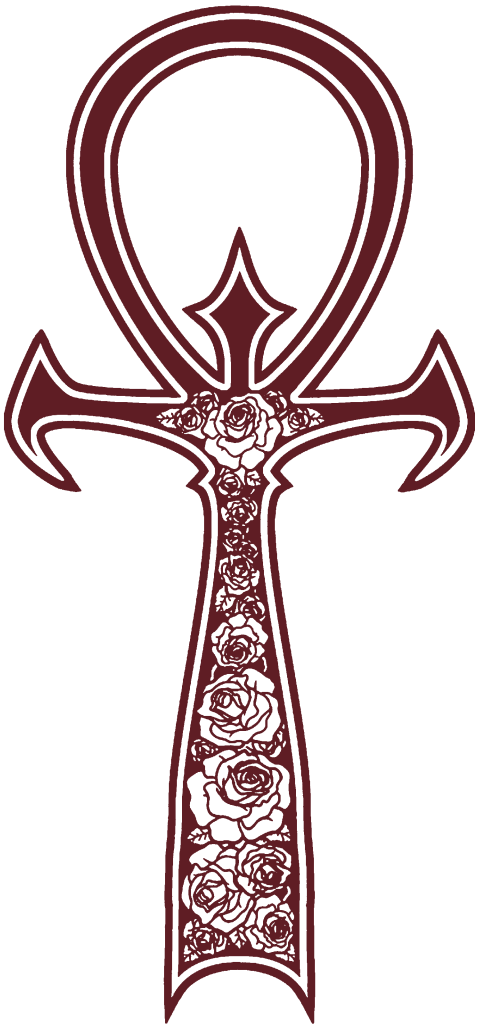
The Tremere Response: The breaking of the Tremere Curse is both humbling and infuriating to the Warlocks — one of Clan Tremere's signature achievements, undone practically overnight. The Council of Seven is divided over the event, which prevents a unified Clan response. One faction, led by Etrius, believes no Assamite can be trusted now the Curse is broken and the only option is to exterminate the Clan completely. The larger issues surrounding a Second City Methuselah who seems a match for the entire Council of Seven is eclipsed by Etrius' hysterical fear of diablerie. He is opposed by Meerlinda, who sees the breaking of the Curse as proof of blood magic in the world equaling or surpassing Thaumaturgy, and that the Assamite Sorcerers may be the key to mastering it. Accordingly, she covertly assists Jan Pieterzoon's efforts to assimilate the Schismatic Assamites into the Camarilla in the United States in exchange for access to Dur-An-Ki, the Clan's approach to blood magic.

The Ventrue Response: Of course, Pieterzoon has his own problems. For some time, he's abused his status as the "Voice of Hardestadt" to advance his own agenda: an aggressive response to an approaching Gehenna from the Camarilla, a Sect which officially doesn't acknowledge Gehenna's reality. But sponsoring the Assamites for inclusion in the Camarilla — in Hardestadt's name, no less — finally catches the attention of his peers, some of whom openly wonder whether Pieterzoon truly speaks for his sire in these matters. The Ventrue walks a razor's edge, particularly after the Breaking of the Curse, since his enemies likely try to hold him responsible for every negative consequence of accepting the Assamite refugees. Depending on how things play out, the Assamite Schism may eventually trigger a Camarilla Schism, with Jan Pieterzoon unwittingly creating a faction that is essentially a moderated Sabbat.

The Sabbat Response: With the Curse broken, there's no longer any real difference between Assamite Warriors and Assamite antitribu except ideology, and that doesn't trump blood. At Ur-Shulgi's summoning, almost the entire Assamite leadership of the Black Hand defects back to the parent Clan, in the process revealing that the Black Hand itself has been effectively controlled by a cult trying to bring about Gehenna for centuries. The revelation rocks the Sabbat and further complicates the approaching Fourth Civil War, as both the Gehenna crusaders and the more secular independent packs scramble to scramble to disassociate themselves from what was previously one of the Sect's most esteemed factions. Simultaneously, the Sabbat is inundated with new recruits — Schismatic Warriors who find their newfound bloodlust is much more acceptable among the Sabbat than the Camarilla and who have direct evidence that Gehenna is at hand.

The Other Curse: Sometimes, however, there is opportunity to be found within disaster. The Breaking of the Tremere Curse may allow the Baali Curse to reassert itself, but it also gives insight into how such curses could be broken in general. The Amr believes if he can forge a detente with the Tremere and persuade the Camarilla as a whole of the Baali danger, he can win support for removing the Baali Curse as well, curing the Warriors of their bloodlust and returning the Assamites to their original (and highly manageable) curse of unusually darkened skin. Such an endeavor would take years and send the Amr's agents into the foulest pits of degradation in the world in pursuit of Baali lore. The potential rewards might be incalculable, but so might be the risk of damnation.

The Black Shepherd: Trumping all political concerns is the sheer magnitude of the threat posed by Ur-Shulgi. Those who study the mystery of Ur-Shulgi (and who survive the experience) learn many frightening things about the Black Shepherd. Most notably, he cares nothing either for the Web of Knives or his sire, Haqim. Ur-Shulgi used the heart's blood of scores of disloyal Assamite elders to break the Tremere curse. To what ends will he put the untold thousands of Kindred who will die at the hands of the blood cult he now leads? Perhaps the answers lie in the lost libraries of the Viziers, hidden away before the founding of Alamut, or in the ruins of Chorazin, the cursed spot where Haqim Embraced his most fearsome childe. And perhaps resourceful characters can learn the truth about Ur-Shulgi before he burns the whole world in hellfire.





The New Asylum, Santa Monica, United States

Los Angeles is the same as I remember: The Anarchs are back in power after the Camarilla's failed attempt to install a Prince. The self-proclaimed "Free States," ranging from the Mexican border to San Francisco and stretching as far inland as San Diego, are still held up as a model of freedom and equality to Kindred across the world. Having visited before, I can attest they are not as "free" as they would like, as an ever-changing cast of Anarch leaders has carved the Free States into bite-sized territories they rule as Barons. Naturally, the Anarchs maintain that a Baron, unlike a Prince, is chosen and supported by his people, and can be taken down by them if he abuses his power. As the modern colloquialism says though, your mileage may vary on that.

I arrive in interesting times, as the Free States are once again beleaguered by the Camarilla. The Camarilla is, in turn, under attack from Wan Kuei pushing into San Francisco where Prince Vannevar still holds. I am eager to see what comes of this volatile mix.

[RECORDING BEGINS]

Beckett: Greetings, neonate.

Ramona: You wanna start over? I might be young, but I am no neonate. Not after what I've seen.

Beckett: Greetings, Kindred. I apologize if I offended so soon. Since you bring up your past experience, though, perhaps we could talk about —

RAMONA

Clan of the Beast; *1981. #1998, childe of Tanner

Hailing from the streets of Los Angeles, R. drifted from the city after her Embrace and abandonment by her sire. Traveling to the East Coast, she found herself a firsthand witness of the devastation wrought by the Eye of Hazimel. She made her way back to Los Angeles several years later.



Ramona: No. I agreed to tell you about the Anarch Free States. Nothing more.

Beckett: But you actually saw —

Ramona: [shouting] I said no! I don't want to talk about it! Not now, not ever!

[LONG PAUSE]

Beckett: Very well. Should you change your mind however, please contact me.

Ramona: I won't. You wanna talk about the Free States, or not?

Beckett: I suppose I do.

Ramona: Good. Where to start...I kept on the move after the attack. Followed Xaviar, then struck out on my own. I hear the Camarilla appointed this Leigh guy to replace Xaviar, but I'd be surprised if even half of us are behind him after the Cam left us to die. That was an eye opener, showed us what centuries of service gets you in the Camarilla: nada. Some Gangrel joined the Sabbat, seeing how fighting the ancients moved way up our list. Some of the first Gehenna Crusaders were Gangrel, couldn't even wait for US boots to hit the ground before they went east to hunt ancients. Not everyone has the stomach for that kind of gore tho. A few went rogue — I think Xaviar did. A lot of us ended up with the Anarchs; it's a happy medium between making your own choices and having a group at your back. I was one of the latter. Found my way back to L.A. Haven't decided if I'll stick around yet.

Beckett: Why is that?

Ramona: I get the appeal. I really do. Freedom and equality, no elders pushing you around. Rants where everyone can speak their mind. I got invited to one on my first night, made me feel like part of the group. Like people had my back, valued my opinion. But it's not *working*. We have gangs and Barons, and they're little more than thugs and wannabe Princes. No central leadership; everyone keeps looking to MacNeil, but he won't step up. He's as bad as any elder: HE thinks there should be no central structure, so WE don't get to have one regardless of whether we want it or



not. How is that any different from what the Cam does? It's still elders laying down the law.

Beckett: I see. And no one else is suited to lead?

Ramona: No one else's got the power. Rodriguez is popular, but he's taking the same bullshit stance MacNeil does and we lost Hollis to bible-studies. Garcia might have rallied the Unbound at one point, but —

Beckett: But?

Ramona: We agreed you'd owe me in exchange for the low down, right? Does that extend to taking me with you?

Beckett: I'm not looking for a protégé, Kindred.

Ramona: And I'm not looking for a mentor, old man. I just need a ride in case shit hits the fan.

Beckett: That I can do.

Ramona: Okay. Well, Garcia, word is he's been talking to those creatures from Asia. They have their eye on the West Coast and L.A. is a prime target. We're still standing, so I suppose his plans hit a snag. Maybe Martinez talked him out of it — for now.

Beckett: Then why remain? If you get a head start, you don't need me to "give you a ride."

Ramona: 'Cause I'm on foot and you have a plane. And — [sigh] I *like* it here. The Free States have issues — ensure personal freedom with one hand, maintain the Masquerade and present a united front to intruders with the other. It's hard. But it's better than any of the alternatives. Sometimes you have to take what you can get.

Beckett: Indeed.

Ramona: That's all I got for you right now. I can set you up with an account on IRC if you want – there's some interesting stuff going on in San Diego.

Beckett: IR what?

Ramona: I'll show you. And you'll take me with you?

Beckett: If the shit hits the fan, yes. Thank you, Kindred.

[RECORDING ENDS]

<RAMONES ADDED NEWBIE–B>

Da_Fangman:	Yo, Ramones, how you been? Chillin' in the big city?
Ramones:	Same ole. You?
Da_Fangman:	I see you added a friend. Is he good?
Ramones:	No, he's a Cam spy working for Tara. What do you think?
Da_Fangman:	Relax. Can't be too careful. You vouching?
Ramones:	Yeah, I'm vouching for him.
Da_Fangman:	Okay then. Welcome to the group, Newbie–B. Wassup?
Newbie-B:	Thank you for the welcome, Da_Fangman. I see this IRC is set to 'The Gaslamp'. That's a district in San Diego, if memory serves?
Da_Fangman:	Yeah. It's where most of us are at. Full of tourists. Easy feeding, easy hiding, hard to get a grip on. It's where we'll make our stand if Tara turns out to be a b*.
Newbie-B:	The Baron of San Diego?
Da_Fangman:	So far.
Newbie-B:	You think she has other designs? And you plan to stop her?
Da_Fangman:	You're direct.
Newbie-B:	I find it's the best way to get things done.

<DA_FANGMAN LOGGED OUT>

Newbie-B:	Did I say something?
Ramones:	You're unknown AND blunt. Ever consider giving people time to get to know you?
Newbie-B:	Yes, but that usually ends in violence.
Ramones:	No shit, you having such a winning personality and all. Lemme smooth things over. Check back later.

<RAMONES LOGGED OUT>

<NEWBIE-B LOGGED OUT>

You know I value your straightforwardness, Beckett. But sometimes you really do catch more flies with honey. -L

Ramona's such a bourgeois whiner begging for a boot in the face like that. Tons of duskborn, caitiff and other "trash" have done just fine without all that cult of personality bullshit. This is LA — we out-chaos the opposition. I bet she'd love tiny prince L back but is too chicken to say it out loud. Give the girl a cape. You'd been better off talking to someone keeping it real like Hollis or Alfonso.

D

REMEMBER:
Set IRC to #the_gaslamp
Login: Newbie-B
Password: Wolf89-B

Ocean View Hotel, Los Angeles, United States

I've checked in to a newly-renovated hotel and only now begin to suspect there's some weirdness to the place. Lots of footsteps at night, creaking floorboards, walls, and ceilings. A vase even shattered as I closed the door to my room. At least it's isolated, however.

I pursued a few leads of my own tonight. Rumor claims Carna and her childer made their way to the Free States, but I've yet to encounter them. Pity, I should like a word with her about Milwaukee. I tried to call on a local Tremere by name of Vendetta, but found no trace of her. I hope she is well. While I feel a pang of regret at the notion of her demise, I would also be saddened by the loss of her library. It seemed to be quite extensive. Pity she refused to share the location of her haven with me.

As for more cheerful news: I've set up a meeting with Victoria. She just came from San Francisco and is willing to meet as she passes through L.A. In exchange for information about Prince Vannevar's domain, she asked me to translate a Babylonian text for her. She should be arriving tomorrow, so I'll get started on that now.

I've also compiled a short list on the important players in the West Coast conflict. Anatole can cross reference them with Aristotle's Encyclopedia Vampirica and make amendments where necessary.

Consider it lost. Vendetta was anthrax. -A

You need to tread real careful with the LA witches B. The sick shit I hear going on in the hills (where the last cam-capes are holed up), they're more the marrow-sucking, divine with your entrails kind of batshit crazy. Shit I miss M and his stupid shades.

D

Jeremy MacNeil

Brujah; *1631, #1657. Childe of James.



MacNeil was born in the Scottish Highlands and, as an accomplished fighter, drew his sire's attention during a skirmish. While MacNeil's mortal clan no longer accepted him after his Embrace, he continued to fight on their behalf. He later became involved in the Irish struggle against the British as well. Repulsed by the bloodshed and convinced nothing would ever change, he later traveled to America where, despite being battle weary, he joined the Americans in the War of Independence.

MacNeil eventually found his way to Los Angeles. He tried to reason with the tyrannical Don Sebastian, only to be beaten to a bloody pulp by the Prince's ghouls for his efforts. After the experience, MacNeil rallied the local Kindred to him and led them in revolution. The victorious result was the Anarch Free States. Refusing to become another Prince, MacNeil lets the other Anarchs do as they please, though he claimed downtown L.A. as Elysium open to all Anarchs.

Aristotle's entry on MacNeil is far less impartial, shall we say. I wonder if MacNeil still has a headache.-A



Salvador Garcia



Brujah; *1869, #1892. Childe of Ferdinand.

Garcia joined the anarchist movement in Spain at the end of the 19th century, and was saved from a subsequent encounter with the Spanish police by his sire. Garcia fled to America after his sire met Final Death in the Spanish Civil War (1936–1939). Appalled that the "land of the free" had the same tyrants, he aided in the downfall of Prince Don Sebastian. He has been an ally and friend to Jeremy MacNeil ever since.

Garcia claims to have personally killed Don Sebastian, and this, along with him coauthoring the Status Perfectus and being the sole author of the Anarch Manifesto, makes him a star in the Anarch Free States.

Gloria Martinez



Brujah; *1951, #1972. Childe of Salvador Garcia.

Growing up on the streets of Whittier, Martinez is both smart and tough. She discovered the existence of Kindred on her own, and tracked Salvador Garcia to his haven where she gave him a choice: Embrace or kill her. Impressed by her bravado, Garcia chose the former. Garcia taught Martinez how to use the power inherent to her vitae to protect her community, and Martinez quickly rose to control Whittier's gangs. Despite being close to her sire initially, the two have drifted apart in recent years.

You forgot about the masked man in the car, whispering in Martinez' ear. -A

Armando Rodriguez



Brujah; *1922, #1949.

Rodriguez had to fend for himself from an early age. As a child in a near-starving family of nine, he quickly learned to hold down small jobs (many of them illicit) to aid his family. That did not save Rodriguez' younger brother though, who died when the local doctor refused to look at the child unless the family paid him. Nor did it stop his father from being fired after decades of faithful employment, or his mother selling herself to the same employer so she could feed her family. When Rodriguez was Embraced, he finally had the power to fight back and has defended the downtrodden since.

Rodriguez is a rising star in the Anarch Free States and many Unbound look to him for leadership. He's rumored to have been involved in the fall of the most recent nominal Camarilla Prince of L.A., LaCroix, aiding parties unknown in his destruction.

Tara Kearney



Brujah; *1794, #1822. Childe of Justin Davis.

When the call for revolution went out from the Anarch Free States, Tara was one of the first Kindred to offer assistance. Hailing from Texas, she brought a team of 13 Brujah to fight Don Sebastian. Once Los Angeles was secure, Tara and her crew moved on to San Diego. Tara proclaimed San Diego part of the Anarch Free States and set herself up as Baron.

Vannevar Thomas



Ventrue, *1729, #1781.

Vannevar was an aristocrat from Virginia who fought in the War of Independence. He was captured along with other rebels in 1781, when his sire saved his life.

Vannevar was sent to secure West America for the Camarilla in 1849. He became Prince of San Francisco in 1910. A solid grasp of combat tactics and prodigious use of spies have kept Vannevar in the saddle since, despite various attempts to overthrow him. He held against the Anarch Revolt when other Camarilla domains fell. Domestically, Vannevar has to deal with repeated (though small) incursions from the Eastern Kindred, as well as the ambitious Ventrue Jochen van Nuys.

Jiejie Li



Wan Kuei; *unknown, #unknown.

Ji leads the New Promise Mandarinate against San Francisco and Los Angeles, though she seems to be more of a diplomat than a warrior. Her diplomacy might be limited to navigating the politics of her own kind, however, as she is rumored to look down on Kindred.

[RECORDING BEGINS]

[LOUD MUSIC IN THE BACKGROUND]

Beckett: Victoria, it is good to see you. You look beautiful as always, and pink.

Victoria: You like?

Beckett: I can honestly say it's the loveliest color pink I have ever seen on hair.

Victoria: [Laughs] Very diplomatic.

Beckett: Shall we go somewhere more private?

[MUSIC FADES]

Victoria: Do you have what I asked for?

Beckett: I do. [Rustle of paper] That is a very interesting text. If I may ask —

Victoria: You may not. We have an agreement to talk about San Francisco.

Beckett: You know, I've encountered more people these nights who want to get straight to business. I had expected you to appreciate the finer art of conversation.

Victoria: You're trying to goad me into revealing more about this text.

Beckett: I see you will not be swayed by words alone. Perhaps we can negotiate for it later?

Victoria: Perhaps.

Beckett: For now, San Francisco. How did you find yourself there? Did you travel with this cacophonous lot?

Victoria: No. *They* traveled with *me*.

Beckett: Really? You are aware the Succubus Club has a reputation for embracing Kindred from all walks of life. Did you become Autarkis?

Victoria: [Laughs] Oh, not me. I'm as straight as they come. Camarilla girl through and through. Naturally.

Beckett: Naturally. You were welcome in San Francisco?

Victoria: We were not turned away.

Beckett: I was under the impression that Prince Vannevar is very strict?

Victoria: He is. He is also not the only Kindred in the city. Sebastian Melmoth arranged for my passage. He operates the Alexandrian in the bay, and wanted to do a joint listing to celebrate his club's 100th anniversary. He felt it would increase both our financial and social standings.

Beckett: Yet you're in Los Angeles now.

Victoria: The Succubus Club travels, you know that. That's why it works. We come in, throw the party of the century, and leave. It works for everyone. [Laughs] Well, except maybe the local authorities. [Sobering] And, in this case, our departure was very timely.

Beckett: It's official? San Francisco is under attack?

Victoria: Official? No. These so-called "Wan Kuei" are even better at smiling while they stab you in the back than some of our compatriots. Prince Vannevar is too much a coward to just declare war on the Camarilla's behalf either. So officially, they're talking. But I doubt it will last long.

Beckett: Do you think they can take San Francisco?

Victoria: I didn't stop to count their numbers or ask for war plans, Beckett. They call themselves the New Promise Mandarinate. Not sure why or what that means. But they're promising leniency on people who surrender. "A co-joint effort to build a better tomorrow, together," I believe the phrase was. They've already spoken to Sebastian, though don't tell him I know that. So yes, they seem to know what they're doing.

Beckett: Rumor has it Salvador Garcia is talking to them, too.

Victoria: *Merde.* Well, lucky me. I'm with a traveling group. I'd suggest you leave, too, but you're the foolhardy kind.

Beckett: That I am. Well, my dear, thank you for your insights. I hope we will talk again soon.

Victoria: [Laughs] About Babylonian texts, you mean. You may always call me, Beckett.

[Recording ends]

Victoria lets nothing "slip" that she doesn't want out.-A

VICTORIA ASH



Clan of the Rose; *1624 #1650. Childe of Maximillian

A ghoul to the French Maximillian, A. was Embraced after she saved her domitor's life. The two had a close relationship, but A. was unable to save Maximillian when his enemies cornered him again in England. After her sire's death, A. traveled Western Europe and North America extensively, and Embraced twice. Her first childe, Evan, met the sun. Her second childe, Lady Regina Blake (#1888), grew estranged from A.

A. rose to the position of Primogen in Atlanta and was even offered the position of Prince, which she declined for reasons unknown. Since then her life has followed an erratic path, until she gained control of the infamous traveling Succubus Club.

Da_Fangman:	Sorry 'bout earlier, Newbie-B. We're good now.
Newbie-B:	Thank you. No harm done.
Da_Fangman:	Can't be too careful. Anyways, on to Tara. What do we know?
Vampira:	She's been talking to a Campire. Arcon or something.
Newbie-B:	Archon.
Vampira:	You know her?

Newbie-B:	It's a title. Archons are the enforcers of the Camarilla.
Da_Fangman:	How do you know all this?
Newbie-B:	I pay attention.
Ramones:	Plus he has a brain. Are we gonna get into this again?
Da_Fangman:	No, we're good. Vampira, continue.
Vampira:	Tara's been talking to an *Archon*. Not posh, but I can tell her outfit costs. A blue blood maybe, or an artist.
Da_Fangman:	What did they discuss?
Vampira:	Not like I get invited to these things. They spent the better part of the night together though. Maybe Tara swings that way, but otherwise they got a LOT of business done.
Newbie-B:	Perhaps Tara is merely seeking reinforcements against the Wan Kuei.
Da_Fangman:	You a scholar or something?
Newbie-B:	I am.
Da_Fangman:	But you're not Cam?
Newbie-B:	Do you have a name for the Archon?
Vampira:	No. Why?
Newbie-B:	If you have a name, I can make inquiries.
Da_Fangman:	You sure you're not Cam?
Newbie-B:	I am not. But unlike you, I have learned the value of not needlessly alienating people who can help. Get me a name and I can make inquiries. Or not. Your choice.

<NEWBIE-B LOGGED OUT>

From: Victoria_Ash@sunburst.us

To: beckettmnemosyne1@schreckNET.nod

Subject: You're welcome

I asked around and there is indeed an Archon in San Diego. Two actually.

Cock Robin firstly, but that's to be expected. He's been pushing for the destruction of the Anarch Free States ever since Petrodon died.

The second is more surprising: Kirsten Bellamy. Perfect schoolgirl and much milder towards Anarchs.

The two make an interesting pair, don't you think? They're meeting at the Grande Colonial, top floor.

Warm regards,

Victoria.

COCK ROBIN



Clan of the Hidden; *unknown, #1757. Childe of Alonso Cristo Petrodon de Seville.

R. was a talented silversmith apprentice during his mortal years. He was Embraced by Petrodon and left to fend for himself as a fledgling — a period he survived thanks to his natural caution. He eventually found his way to Rhode Island, where he witnessed the rise of Nosferatu Prince Stanford Warwick. As Warwick's rule grew increasingly tyrannical, Kindred rose to rebel against him. R. was contacted by his sire and instructed to aid the rebellion. By 1990 Warwick was dead and Robin the sole survivor of the band of insurgents.

While R.'s actions against Warwick went unnoticed by most Kindred, the Inner Council paid attention. He was promoted to serve as Archon under Petrodon and, upon the latter's demise, further promoted to Justicar. He resigned as Justicar in recent times, and has returned to work as Archon for new Nosferatu Justicar Molly MacDonald.

[TRANSCRIBER'S NOTE: ARCHON ROBIN'S SPEECH IS PRECEDED BY CLICKING SOUNDS. THESE HAVE BEEN DENOTED IN MORSE CODE IN A SECOND DOCUMENT AND APPEAR TO MATCH WHAT WAS SAID.]

[Recording begins]

Robin: Why are you here, Kirsten?

Bellamy: A pleasant evening to you too, colleague. How have you been?

Robin: Cut the crap. We both know you'd rather eat rats than associate with me. Get to it.

Bellamy: I'm here to fix the mess you made. You were sent to monitor the Anarch Free States *and* its surrounding areas. Now we have these creatures from Asia knocking on our door. Seems like someone has been remiss.

Robin: I've told the Council the territory is too large to cover alone.

Bellamy: Nonsense. You've just been so busy playing with the Anarchs. Which is why they sent me.

Robin: To replace me?

Bellamy: No, strangely enough. They want you here as "an option." But you are to cease your activities and let me handle matters.

Robin: Handle them how?

Bellamy: I'm to sue for peace with the Anarchs. Convince them the foreigners are a threat to us all.

Robin: [Agitated] Peace? With those murderers? They have no coherence, no leader. Who are you going to sue for peace *with*? Do you plan to visit every Baron individually?



Bellamy: If that's what it takes.

Robin: I know about Tara.

Bellamy: Good. That means you've been paying attention to San Diego at least. Here are your new orders. [Rustle of paper] It's been cleared by Justicars Iadanza and MacDonald. Feel free to confirm with the latter. Just stay out of my way.

Robin: [Annoyed hiss]

[RECORDING ENDS]

To wit, the clicking sound is Archon Robin. The voice Cesare transcribed was likely his interpreter. Also, PLEASE don't make me an accomplice to illicit transcripts of conversations between Archons.-A

KIRSTEN BELLAMY



Clan of the Rose; *1765, #1789. Childe of Lucille.

B. was Embraced during the French Revolution by Lucille. Ambitious and loyal to the Camarilla, B. was chosen as Archon by Madame Guil. B. has an open attitude towards Anarchs, which served her well under her like-minded patron. New Toreador Justicar Diana Iadanza takes a much dimmer view on the Anarchs, and it remains to be seen how Bellamy's career will be affected by this.

Da_Fangman:	Tara is moving! Fuck it if she didn't bring Cammie backup. Treacherous little b*. Send help.
Ramones:	No can do. We're getting hit by the WK.
Da_Fangman:	Fuck. FUCK.

<RAMONES LOGGED OUT>

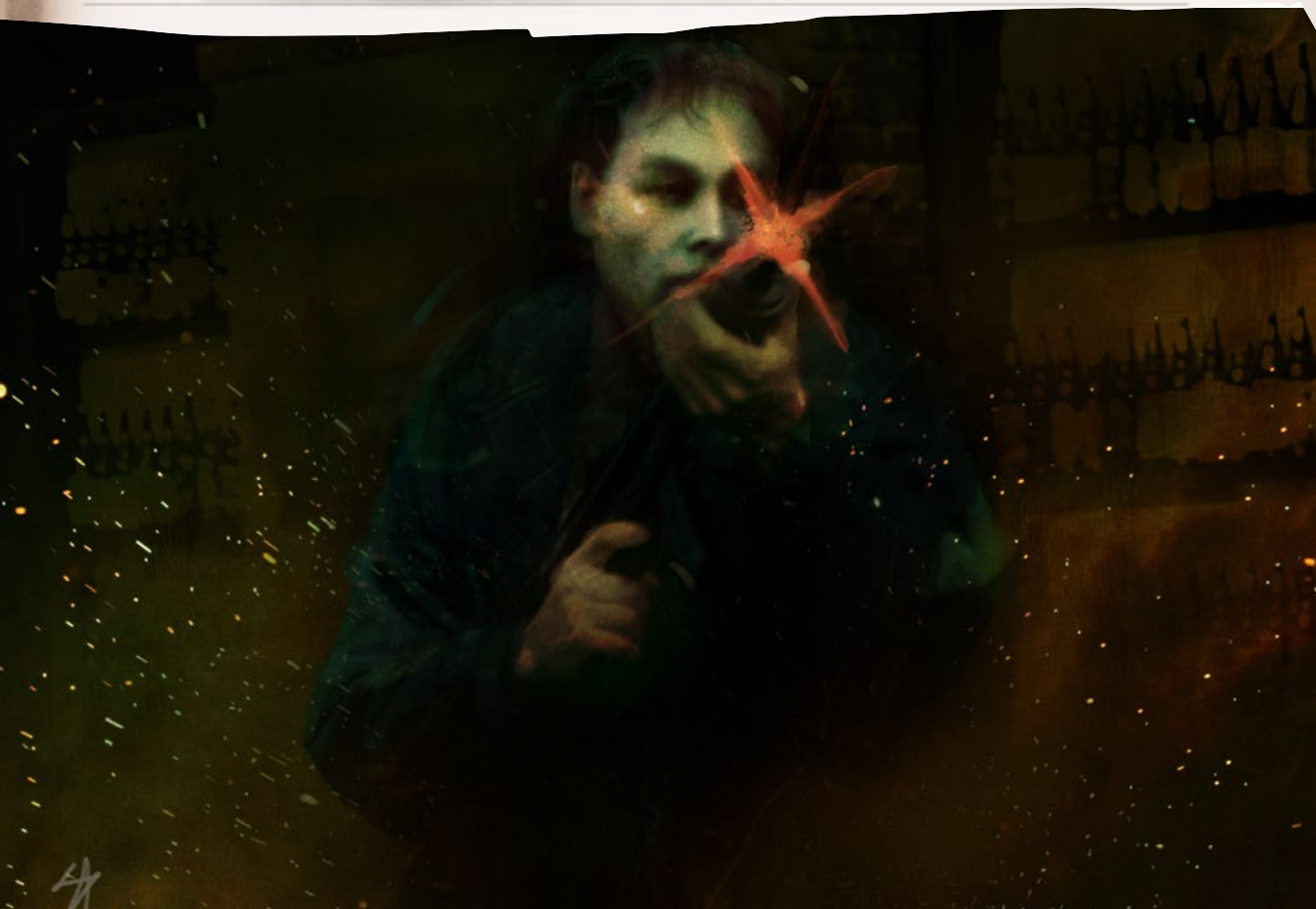
Explosions in Los Angeles



Explosions rocked the Los Angeles harbor this evening. Three container ships hailing from China and Japan are still ablaze, and the fire department is struggling to contain the fire. Police have issued no statement yet, but insiders fear this might be related to the domestic attack in 2004 that destroyed the Golden Temple in Los Angeles' Chinatown.

This story reflects a current event and will be updated as the story unfolds.

Related stories: Domestic terrorism in the United States



Gang Violence in San Francisco

A shootout, which started in Coit Tower on Telegraph Hill, spilled over into downtown San Francisco as rival gangs engaged in a car chase through the city streets. The violence came to a climax in the Charnelhouse dance club in Chinatown, where the Latino and Chinese gangs set cars on fire and threw explosive devices, described by witnesses as Molotov cocktails, at each other.

Police are investigating whether or not these events are linked to the explosions targeting Chinese ships in the Los Angeles harbor earlier this evening.

Related stories: Explosions in Los Angeles

Hallowbrook Hotel, Los Angeles, United States

Are there no decent hotels in L.A.? This one absolutely reeks of blood.

Los Angeles appears to be under attack, though it's impossible to tell by whom. Ramona called me to collect her boon. She wasn't amused when I pointed out that the deal was I take her with me, and I'm not going anywhere yet. I'm not meanspirited though, so I told Cesare to prep the plane for her regardless. She brought a friend with her, a young Ravnos by name of Irena, which was also not part of our agreement. Lest readers believe I am getting soft, rest assured: There is a scent about Ramona that implies many adventures to come. Being owed a boon by her will certainly prove worthwhile.

I myself remain in Los Angeles for now.



The Wild Bunch

Los Angeles is under attack. San Francisco has proven an implacable foe, San Diego slowly turns from the Free States, and strange, unknown vampires have launched their own offensive. The Anarch Free States aren't the only ones in trouble, though: Prince Vannevar of San Francisco faces the same onslaught of these "Wan Kuei," and Baron Tara's battle has just begun. In all the tumult, the sharks of the Sabbat smell easy prey.

The West Coast domains are going to fall like dominoes — that much is inevitable. Depending on how Kindred act however, they can influence *how* they fall. The West Coast has no shortage of interesting Kindred. Many important ones are detailed below, though Storytellers are encouraged to add their own or replace some of these with players' protagonists. For example, if a player character has a strong position in the Unbound, make her the emerging new leader.

Story hooks are provided for player characters allied with each faction:

Jeremy MacNeil, Disillusioned Leader

Although the nominal leader of the Anarch Free States, MacNeil is not a good horse to back. He won't move against his friend Garcia on hearsay, but he's not oblivious to the rumors surrounding him either. Nor is he blind to Tara's machinations. The truth is, he knows he *should* care about these things, but doesn't. Ever since the founding of the Free States, the Unbound have done nothing but turn on each other and vie for territory. In many ways, MacNeil feels they're as bad as the rulers he spent his life fighting against. He's tired of it all, but pride and loyalty won't allow him to admit the Free States were a failure. The war gives him a graceful "out" though. If the Anarch Free States fall, MacNeil is free to start his great experiment over elsewhere, without being seen as willingly abandoning the Unbound of the West Coast.

Unbound characters close to MacNeil can persuade him to stay and fight, or go out and fight in his name. As long as the other Unbound believe MacNeil is with them, they keep fighting and have a much better chance of holding Los Angeles — which gives them a bulwark to reclaim San Diego later. Conversely, if Los Angeles holds, characters can encourage MacNeil to leave, citing now as the time for a fresh start and new leadership; this creates a power vacuum for them to step into.

Salvador Garcia, Unbound Traitor

Garcia is tired of the Anarch Free States. He still believes in the ideology and, unlike MacNeil, has no intention of leaving and starting over. What he *does* want is a strong move in a new direction: united leadership, comradeship, equality. Since the Unbound can't get it together on those points, he has begun looking elsewhere — and he believes the Wan Kuei are best suited. He's been aiding their takeover in exchange for safety for "his people," and a say at the table.

Characters in Garcia's inner circle are aware of his plans, and can help to sabotage and distract the Unbound, or smuggle Wan Kuei in. Garcia is aware of MacNeil's ennui and hopes his friend will stay out of the fight, but if not, he moves to take MacNeil out — and the characters should definitely be part of this epic battle. Alternatively, the characters are with Garcia's El Hermandad gang, but unaware of his plans. When they find out about his treachery, they're in a perfect position to either blackmail or assassinate him.

Gloria Martinez, Sleeper Agent

Martinez is the wild card amongst the Unbound. Her meeting with Garcia all those years ago was no coincidence — she was unknowingly influenced into it by Justicar Petrodon. Petrodon was planning to use her, and other Dominated Unbound, as insiders once the Camarilla made its move against the Anarch Free States. Petrodon was killed several years ago, though, and the plan may have died with him. It's also possible that his childe and successor Cock Robin knows about it and continues where his sire left off. A third option, given the nature of Dominate, is that the Conditioning triggers itself under duress. If Petrodon's Conditioning still stands, Martinez moves to assassinate her sire, Garcia.

The characters, if they pay attention to behaviors around them, should catch on that something is wrong. In addition to stopping the assassination, maybe they don't want to kill their Dominated friend. This makes for an interesting dilemma (kill your friend, or let her kill a valued leader without whom Los Angeles falls), and could lead to some covert action (since other Unbound likely have no qualms about killing the hidden assassins).

A Masquerade of Assassins

Characters active in the Anarch Free States before Petrodon died (or even after, if Cock Robin took up the torch) could be unwitting assassins themselves. Players might relish "going dark" and trying to kill their targets, thus shaking up the game for everyone. The Storyteller should proceed with caution though. For every player who loves to be a sleeper agent, another won't appreciate having her character Conditioned. There's also the risk of players getting agitated when characters find themselves on opposite sides of the fence. Make sure everyone at the table enjoys the twist.

Armando Rodriguez, Unbound Leader

Like MacNeil, Rodriguez believes no man should lord over another, and that includes Barons. Unlike MacNeil, he acknowledges that the Free States will fall without leadership. Going against his own principles, Rodriguez reluctantly assumes the mantle of leadership for the duration of the war. With Rodriguez to unite them, the Anarchs have a powerful rallying point. The question is: Where do they strike? The Unbound don't have the numbers to stop the Wan Kuei, the incoming Camarilla, and Tara's coup all at once. And are those Sabbat war drums they hear in the distance?

Characters close to Rodriguez can point him to whichever foe they believe to be more dangerous. Once that decision is made, Rodriguez asks them to coordinate and lead the charge – Rodriguez is an excellent combatant, but he is no field tactician. Win or lose, Rodriguez is eager to lay down his crown once the war is over, and this is another decision player characters can sway to their own benefit.

Cock Robin, Archon bent on destroying the Free States

Archon Robin wants the Anarch Free States to fall. He believes the Unbound are responsible for the death of his sire Petrodon, and he hates them all. He cares more about their fall than he does about the safety of San Francisco. Robin encourages Prince Vannevar to abandon San Francisco and take Los Angeles as his new seat. He also pushes Tara to make her move, promising backup and resources if the Unbound strike back. Of course, he doesn't necessarily keep his word, but Tara's betrayal serves as a distraction in the meantime. Lastly, if Robin knows about the Conditioning of Martinez and other Anarchs, he makes every effort to trigger it.

Robin can't be everywhere at once, and characters close to him are tasked to persuade Vannevar, woo Tara, or trigger Martinez — whichever the characters believe is best suited to their skills, or whichever the players believe makes for the most interesting story.

Kirsten Bellamy, Archon seeking an Alliance

Archon Bellamy seeks an alliance with the Anarchs against the Wan Kuei: She'll help them secure Los Angeles, if they aid in San Francisco's defense. She argues Tara should make her own decision regarding San Diego, knowing full well which way the Baron is leaning. The latter requires some bargaining on her part though, as the Unbound know about Tara too.

Characters working with Bellamy can either be diplomats aiding in the negotiations, or combatants participating in the alliance's movements once the deal is done. Stalling the Wan Kuei is absolutely tantamount to Bellamy's efforts, and the characters can work as saboteurs to slow the invaders.

Vannevar Thomas, Prince of San Francisco

Prince Vannevar clings to San Francisco. He can't do it without the Camarilla though — even if he wins against the Wan Kuei, his domain will be easy pickings for the Anarchs or Sabbat afterward. He makes every effort to turn the Camarilla away from Tara, arguing those resources are better spent

on San Francisco. If all else fails though, Vannevar is adaptable. He would rather be a Prince under the New Promise Mandarinate, or in beleaguered Los Angeles, than no Prince at all.

Diplomatic characters working with Vannevar are sent to treat with Archons Robin and Bellamy, urging them to lend aid to San Francisco. Hedging his bets, Vannevar asks stealthy characters to fake an attack on San Francisco by "Tara," in an effort to stop Camarilla negotiations with her.

If all else fails, Vannevar considers an alliance with either the Wan Kuei in exchange for a position in the Mandarinate, or the Anarchs in exchange for a sizable portion of the city. He seeks advice from the characters on which is the better choice — something they can turn to their own benefit.

Tara Kearney, Baron-cum-Prince of San Diego

Tara is done playing in the kiddies' league. She's been Baron long enough and wants to be Prince now. To that end, she does what the Camarilla asks, whether it's harry Los Angeles, or lend aid to San Francisco. She's not stupid though. She knows the Wan Kuei attack drastically changed things, and San Diego isn't as big a prize to the Camarilla as San Francisco or Los Angeles. If she suspects a double cross, she stays put and remains Baron a little longer.

Characters working with Tara have her ear on whom she can and can't trust. Holding San Diego is Tara's primary concern, joining the Camarilla her second. Tara sends her people to assassinate any new Prince of L.A. She has ambitions — and there can be only one Prince. Duplicitous characters can try to pitch Vannevar and Tara against each other, leaving the position of Prince open for themselves.

Jiejie Li, Leader of the Wan Kuei

Li leads the New Promise Mandarinate's attack and not many Kindred characters find themselves on her side. Such a setup is possible, but requires preparation by the Storyteller to explain how Li got the characters in her corner. If they are allies with her though, Li doesn't hesitate to use them, sending them on near-suicide missions against high-profile targets. If the characters survive, the rewards are great. If they don't, then Li hasn't lost any of her own troops and the characters aren't around to complain anyway.

The Blood Settles

After several nights of warfare, the fate of the Anarch Free States is decided. Detailed below are a few ways it can end, depending on which side the characters chose and how successful they were. If they played their cards right, they should hold positions of prestige and power and Storytellers are encouraged to throw out the non-player characters entirely. Perhaps the characters replaced Garcia and they are the leading Kindred in the New Promise Mandarinate, or they double crossed Tara and one of them rules as Baron in San Diego.

The outcomes below are not mutually exclusive. It's very well possible to have *Eastern Neighbors* in San Francisco, while *Unlikely Bedfellows* holds Los Angeles and *Long Live Prince Tara* rules in San Diego.

The New Promise Mandarinate

With Garcia working from the inside, the New Promise Mandarinate takes Los Angeles. Garcia is granted a place in the new leadership, but only time can tell if this is a real position or merely token. Garcia claims he turned to the Wan Kuei to negotiate safety for the Anarchs *after* the battle was lost. Surviving Unbound, however, accuse him of betraying the cause and killing MacNeil, who disappears during the attacks.

A Prince in Los Angeles

Despite its ill-fated attempt at installing a Prince previously, the Camarilla never gave up on reclaiming Los Angeles. Turning loss into opportunity, it abandons San Francisco and utilizes the Camarilla refugees as an attack force. With Tara coming in from San Diego, the Camarilla has Los Angeles in a pincer. While the city does not fall to the Camarilla completely, it's close, and Vannevar or Tara is set up as the new Prince. The Camarilla cements its power, while remaining Anarchs choose between admitting defeat or engaging in high-risk guerrilla tactics.

Unlikely Bedfellows

The Camarilla comes to L.A., but as *allies* against the Wan Kuei. The Anarchs, realizing they cannot maintain a three-pronged war against the Camarilla, Wan Kuei, and inevitably-approaching Sabbat reluctantly accept. Several Anarch territories convert to the Camarilla, mostly by Barons willing to

try their hand at being Primogen. No one is happy with this arrangement, but it holds.

San Francisco on the Brink

San Francisco beats back the Wan Kuei, but the city is left weakened. Prince Vannevar was badly injured or killed in the battle. Jochen van Nuys steps into the vacuum, while several Unbound in Los Angeles feel that *now* is a good time to attack. Rodriguez isn't keen to attack San Francisco — he'd rather focus on rebuilding the Anarch Free States after the Wan Kuei invasion — but he won't stop anyone else from doing so.

Long Live Prince Tara

Tara is clever, ambitious, and she's been planning her coup for a long time. With Los Angeles under attack by the Wan Kuei, the Unbound can't spare resources to stop Tara. San Diego's Anarchs either flee or submit. A few hole up in the Gaslamp district, where they plan their revenge.

Eastern Neighbors

San Francisco falls to the Wan Kuei who, ironically, seem to make better neighbors than the Camarilla. The Eastern vampires open diplomatic relations with the Unbound and wish to send an ambassador to Los Angeles. Or maybe that's just their way of sending a scout party before an invasion.



THE BLOOD MATURES

And you will know these last times by the time of thin blood

which will mark vampires that cannot beget

you will know them by the Clanless

who will come to rule

you will know them by the Wild Ones

who will hunt us even in the strongest city

you will know them by the awakening of some of the eldest

the Crone will awaken and consume all.

From: volunteer4cashdn@magadon.com

To: beckettmnemosyne1@schreckNET.nod

Subject: Opportunities in Santa Monica

Attachments: MEvanis27.png

Most esteemed Dr. Beckett,

Let me congratulate you on your treatise. Your rational approach offers many valuable insights. If you'll allow me to get personal for a moment, I must confess it heartening to see someone study the "signs of Gehenna" as I do (for many still consider thin-blooded so) without succumbing to superstition. I applaud you, sir.

It was also wrong. But well written.-A

I call on you with a research opportunity for us both. Reliable sources tell me a young neonate by name of Maxim Evanis has Embraced progeny. However, I personally know Maxim and can attest she is of the 15th Generation. Her childe must then be the first of a new Generation! Unfortunately, I cannot abandon my work in North Carolina. Might I implore you to extend my invitation to Maxim and her childe? I'm sure they'll be eager to participate once they grasp the importance of my research. Indeed, Maxim has worked with me before and, though she left before her tests were complete, I found her an enthusiastic contributor.

I would not ask you to make such a trip without benefit to yourself. While Maxim was with me, I noted a crescent-shaped birthmark on her right hip. I also allowed one of my other research subjects to draw Maxim's birth chart, and she was born during a lunar eclipse. These signs combined, I hope, should pique your interest. If you are so inclined, they are found in Los Angeles. I believe you know where to look.

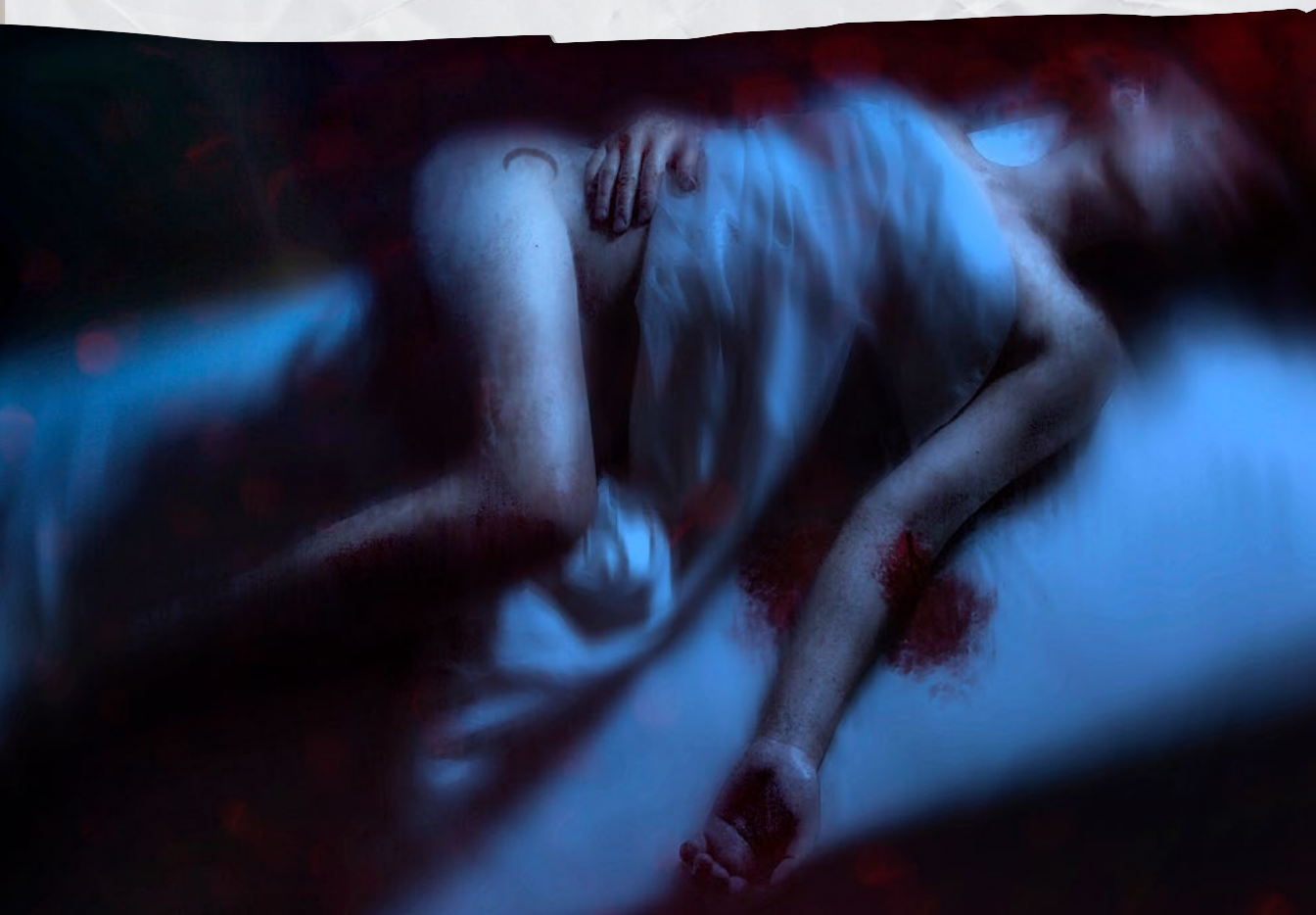
I have included a picture of Maxim's mark, as well as my last paper on thin-blooded.

Yours sincerely,

Dr. Douglas Netchurch

Thin Blood Syndrome Reexamined

Greetings and salutations, most esteemed patron. Greetings to you as well, esteemed sponsors and fellow scholars. Without you, I would not be able to dedicate my life to researching the Cainite condition. You hold in your hand the fruits of my labor: a renewed treatise on Thin Blood Syndrome.



A Review of Previous Findings

For those of you unfamiliar with my previous paper, I shall reiterate my findings. I am ever unafraid to evaluate my work, and will note where I now believe I was wrong.

While we call the condition "thin blooded," this is a misnomer. The blood of neonates and thin-blooded is no 'thinner' than that of elders. Indeed, the physical qualities remain the same. What seems to cause the weakening of blood is a less efficient use. Elders achieve more potent results with the same amount of blood. Additionally, I found that while an average neonate can use all of her blood, thin-blooded are unable to. A portion of their vitae remains unresponsive when called upon to fuel so-called "powers," heal wounds, or raise physical qualities. Their blood is not useless however, as I have found it diminishes upon rising: the "uncooperative" vitae is still used to fuel the reanimation of the body, but no more. This also accounts for the lifelike quality of "thin-blood" physiology, a distinct advantage when mingling with the fully living. In this respect these youngest kindred are best suited for maintaining the Masquerade on a personal level.

The thin-blooded I observed were also unable to create blood bonds, Embrace childer, create ghouls, or even maintain the ghoul I provided for them. It seems possible the Cainite strain is so diluted in these neonates that they are unable to pass it on. Unfortunately, I was forced to cut my research on this short, as continued failure began to take a toll on the emotional well-being of my subjects and my own ability to maintain the Masquerade.

Thin Blood Syndrome exhibits in higher Generations, rising from a minimal occurrence in the 12th to universality in the 15th. We find a similar increase, though never reaching universality, with the Caitiff condition. It would be erroneous to say one leads to the other however. Rather, I believe the thin-blooded and Caitiff conditions are symptoms of the same underlying cause: a too-large distance from the Clan founders.

Speciation

Patient Zero — or "Caine" — and his childer were "universal" Kindred, but we see different powers and weaknesses in the Third Generation. Furthermore, we see a similarly abrupt evolution in bloodlines. I believe Caitiff and thin-blooded are another such leap in our evolution. To wit, I mark these differences between the thin-blooded species and our own: minor resistance to sunlight (though not staking or other sources of damage, including fire,) a minor talent for prophecy, and a small aptitude in creating new powers. The latter in particular, has led me to believe we are dealing with renewed speciation. The Caitiff are the first step, as they lose their Clan characteristics. The thin-blooded are the next step: they gain *new* characteristics.

The Cainite Strain

I've not yet been able to pinpoint the source of our condition. Based on symptoms, I believe we are infected with a spiritual virus passed down through blood. Unlike living viruses, this spiritual strain is unable to mutate and is rendered weaker in each new host. We may have reached the end of the virus' viability in thin-blooded, as they cannot fully maintain the Cainite state.

Resumed Metabolism and Dhampirs

I have documented the growth of hair and nails, returned mortal perspiration and tears. I also found traces of white blood cells in one subject's vitae and original DNA in another's. To ensure this was not pre-Embrace blood, I fully exsanguinated both

Side Study: Our Natural State

The brief emergence of mortal metabolism in thin-blooded yields an interesting perspective on the Cainite condition. Traditional belief holds that Cainite bodies are dead while the virus reanimates us. If that were the case, however, the lapses in thin-blooded should result in them being dead for short moments. That they instead *resume* mortal functions, indicates our bodies are alive and the condition keeps them in a suspended state. However, the nature of the thin-blooded Embrace contradicts this. While a normal Embrace takes only moments, a thin-blooded might experience hours or days between receiving vitae and reanimating. During this time, she is effectively dead. I find this contradiction intriguing and have begun to document attempted thin-blooded Embraces. Unfortunately, research subjects are hard to come by as they themselves *cannot* Embrace and I have found only one sire who yields the desired result.

subjects. Studying their vitae immediately after, I found no traces of white blood cells or original DNA, yet both returned a month later.

Lastly, three subjects experienced the return of menstrual periods or virile seminal fluids, allowing them to theoretically conceive mortal children called Dhampirs. The infection of non-Kindred by the Cainite strain has been documented before, from gestated hosts (creating ghouls) to unborn embryos (creating Revenants.)

Given the interest my sponsors show in Dhampirs, I've studied this condition carefully. Using thin-blooded volunteers and purchased human hosts, I bred a single Dhampir. The child, whom I named Kadmon, is currently six years old. I shall test if his mutation breeds true when he reaches maturity. I already procured a mortal mate, and am currently securing a female Dhampir to test the viability of both pairings.

Thickening of the Blood

After allowing a group of volunteers to lower their Generation, they lost their increased resistance to sunlight, prophetic prophecies, and the ability to create new powers. However, they could now fully use their vitae, and create blood bonds, childer, and ghouls. In essence, they ceased being thin-blooded and became Cainites. Naturally, this method cannot be used to cure thin-blooded *en large*, but it does prove that a cure is possible.

I offer my lasting gratitude to my patron, who generously provided me with the legal means to run this experiment.

Are we talking Sect-sanctioned diablerie here?-A

What did you think the Blood Hunt is?-L

A gross oversimplification. Many other factors are needed to create a Revenant. So I'm told.-A

Dr. Beckett,

I encountered something remarkable during my research. It occurred with only one subject, a young woman named Matilde, so I haven't mentioned it in my paper. After all, a test population of one does not make for scientific results.

Matilde's sire was a confirmed Gangrel, but Matilde herself exhibited none of the characteristics. After feeding exclusively from animals for a week, she developed a way of communicating with them. The method, although less effective than your Clan's traditional method, exhibited qualities both raw and in line with the subject's personality. One night though, she displayed increasing signs of commonality with your Clan's powers. She's further developed in this way since, and has been unable — despite admonishments — to advance her own version. I feared she had made her way to the Cainite criminals provided by my patron, but tests show she is still of the 15th Generation. The only explanation I have is that her vitae spontaneously reasserted the markers of Clan Gangrel. In all my work, I've never encountered anything like this.

— Dr. Ketchurch

An Eye to the Future

I believe further experiments on the thin-blooded Embrace and their lapses of vitae shall help establish if the Cainite condition is naturally dead or alive. I'm also committed to finding Kadmon a suitable Dhampir mate.

As to the future of thin-blooded in our society, I remain convinced they have a place among us. Their new powers make valuable additions to our own, and their inability to create blood bonds makes them perfect vessels for elders with feeding restrictions. I emphatically do not believe them to be "portents of Gehenna" and implore anyone to treat them with kindness.

I would like to thank my patron, sponsors, and fellow scholars for their support. I also wish to pay homage to the thin-blooded volunteers who, after raising their Generation, had to be retired due to vitae-addiction. While they understood the necessity and agreed to it beforehand, their sacrifice remains great. Thank you, Thomas, Eugene, and Wendy. I attach their release statements as well as their last testaments.

I remain respectfully yours,

Dr. Douglas Ketchurch

Childe of Trimeggian

Childe of Addemar

Childe of Lamdiel

Childe of Malkav



El Cholo Mexican Restaurant, Santa Monica, United States

I've never found any truth to thin-blooded as harbingers of Gehenna. Indeed, if they pose any threat at all, it's because they're mercilessly abandoned by their sires. Nor can I take this moon marked business seriously. As a favor to Dr. Netchurch, and since I'm in Los Angeles anyway, I've made inquiries.

Calling upon old friends, I've confirmed a number of thin-blooded have a makeshift Elysium of sorts on Santa Monica pier. I'll make my way there now to speak to them.

ACACIA



Clan of the Moon (antitribu); *1985, #2005.

A. is a thin-blooded living under Jenna Cross' protection in Santa Monica. She appears to have the gift of prophecy. Though unable to trace her lineage, she claims to be a descendent of the Fifth Generation Addemar.

[RECORDING BEGINS]

Beckett: Hello, young Kindred. My name is —

Acacia: Beckett.

Beckett: I see my reputation precedes me. While I am not shy of my academic credentials, I am curious where you heard of me.

Acacia: I heard of you as a troublemaker.

Beckett: I'm not shy of that either. The question stands though.

Acacia: The voices told me.

Beckett: The...voices. You are of the Clan of the Moon?

Acacia: I don't know what that means.

Beckett: Are you of Clan Malkavian?

Acacia: I don't know what that means either. I am a descendant of Addemar.

Beckett: Clan Malkavian then. I am curious, if you don't know your Clan, how you know —

Acacia: I feel him. Addemar. Itching in my veins. Crawling behind my eyes. Laughing. Scratching.

Beckett: Fair enough. May I ask your name?

Acacia: Acacia. Like the whistling thorn.

Beckett: Acacia, I am here to inquire about—

Acacia: The childe. The girl that cannot be.

Beckett: Yes, about —

Acacia: Everything old must make way for the new. The third becomes the second, the second becomes the first. Fathers die so sons may live. We are all circles spiraling down to reign in hell.

Beckett: I —

Acacia: You are wrong. I am not of Clan Malkavian.

Beckett: If you are a descendant of Addemar, then —

Acacia: I am not of any Clan. Neither are you. The Dark Father was Clanless, but his grandchildren did not like that. They wanted something of their own. A pyramid scheme corrupting your brains. They failed with *us*. We hear them, but do not obey. We know the truth. You are not Gangrel, you merely *think* you are.

Beckett: I never told you I was of — Do you know where I can find the girl?

Acacia: No. Speak to Guinevere of the Cross. Or Izzy, if you're really, really late. [Rustle of paper]

Wrong, wrong, WRONG. She's in the pit with Him. With all of us.-A

Beckett: I will do that. Thank you for your ti — Why, thank you. This is a bloom of the acacia tree, is it not?

Acacia: To remember me by.

Beckett: I'm unlikely to forget.

[RECORDING ENDS]

OUTCAST SURVIVAL GUIDE

I hope you're one of us if you're reading this. Or you're some asshole standing over the ashes of a kid you just killed. Jerk. I'll assume you're another unwelcome addition to the family.

So what are you? You got this far, so you probably got the gist already. You're a vampire. Except your blood is too weak. You don't suffer from the exact same curse as your progenitor. They call that being a thin blood or Caitiff, and it's *bad*. **I say we're duskborn, babyteeth, and it's good. They're fucking dead inside. You're NOT.** You want to blend in with mainstream vampires lest they kill you. Here's where you start:

1) Call yourself "Kindred" when you're around other vampires.

2) Don't talk about how you were turned. Mainstreamers turn in seconds. For most of us it takes MUCH longer.

3) That also means your creator (call him your "sire" when dealing with others!) probably thought you were really dead and left. Don't tell them that either. Say your sire got killed or you got separated.

Vampires: The Basics

Yes

Inanimate during the day (find a safe resting place!).

Sunlight is deadly (see ^).

Killed by stakes, decapitation and fire.

Resistant to bullets, but NOT bulletproof.

Drink blood to survive (human or animal).

Sometimes

Immortal. Unless something kills you.

Some of us can turn into bats or fly.

Some of us lack a reflection.

Some crosses hurt. Most don't.

No

Not repulsed by garlic, running water, roses, etc.

Old/stale blood does not kill, but it is less nourishing.

Dealing with Humans

Between mortal hunters and secret government programs, staying with humans is bad for you. Also, that thirst and desire you feel bubbling inside? It doesn't distinguish between friend or foe. That's bad for *them*. And if you don't accidentally kill them, other Kindred will. Best thing you can do for your loved ones is pack up and leave.

Dealing with other Kindred

At best they'll use you for their own purposes and leave you. At worst, they'll hunt, kill, or eat you. Only trust those that have proven themselves trustworthy — they're out there, but be careful.

Group 1: The Camarilla

You'll find a lot of Camarilla-run cities in North America, so you need to know how to handle them. They're an archaic, but VERY dangerous, old boys' network. It's set up like a pyramid scheme — you report to someone above you, he reports to someone above him, and so on. That means lots of strings and little freedom.

They adhere to six Traditions passed down through the ages. Do not get caught breaking them.

1. Masquerade: Don't let humans know about Kindred. This one is good for everyone. Stick to it even if you're not in a Camarilla city.

Nice going with the pamphlet then, idiot.:-0



2. Domain: Don't encroach on another Kindred's domain. Since you likely don't know who lairs where, you're in trouble.

3. Progeny: Don't make new Kindred. Since your creator *did*, you're in trouble. And yeah, they visit the sins of the father upon the son.

4. Accounting: Creators are responsible for their children. Yours probably left you though.

5. Hospitality: Present yourself to the ruler of the domain you're in. Again, since you have no idea who that is, you're out of luck.

6. Destruction: Only elders (aka the high-ups in the pyramid) can call for the destruction of another Kindred. In your case they'll be happy to, since you broke traditions 2-5 just by existing.

Does that sound bad enough? When you break one of these rules, the Camarilla sends an assassin after you. His job is to find and kill you. If you broke the Masquerade by letting anyone know you're a Kindred, he'll kill them too.

However, you MIGHT be in the domain of someone who isn't a complete ass and lets you explain yourself. Be extremely polite. If they tell you their title, USE IT. Even if it's something stupid. If they don't, stick with "sir" and "ma'am." Learn the traditions by heart. Promise you'll obey and be useful.

Group 2: The Sabbat

Another big group is the Sabbat. You see a lot of them in middle and southern America, but they're pushing up north and talking big about some "crusade" in Iraq and Afghanistan. They're a bunch of bloodthirsty maniacs and worse than the Camarilla. They create new Kindred by "shovelheading": they turn you, knock you unconscious with a shovel, and bury you in a grave. If you dig yourself out in time, then congratulations: You join them and become a maniac too. If you don't: Just pray they kill you fast. Don't think you're good because

I've heard rumors of scourges working for a Justicar rather than Princes. They can pursue targets from one domain to another and kill with no accounting.-A

you've already *been* turned: Shovelheading serves as their initiation rite, too. On top of that, they're religious nuts who believe thin bloods and Caitiffs are a sign of the apocalypse.

So what to do if you encounter them? Run if you can realistically escape (and be ABSOLUTELY sure of this). Otherwise, play along, and then escape.

Group 3: The Anarchs

They're not as stuck up as the Camarilla and not as dangerous as the Sabbat. Most of them don't believe in the apocalypse and they're not Clan-obsessed. I'd not go around proclaiming to be a thin blood, but finding a group of Anarchs is as good as it gets.

Group 4: The Independents

Some Clans prefer to keep to their own. If you were one of them, they would have picked you up already. You're either cat's paw or food to them.

How to tell the difference?

You can't. Not until they're up close and personal, yelling at you for breaking Traditions or hitting you over the head with a shovel. Nothing is more dangerous to a Kindred than another Kindred. However, they're also your only hope of not spending the rest of eternity alone.

What's Next

You were told where to go by the person who gave you this. Fly low until you get here, blend in with mortals (don't *mingle*), run when you even *suspect* trouble and ABOVE ALL feed where no one else does. That means skip the easy prey (assume they're earmarked) and go for animals if you have to.

We'll find you when you get here.

Metro Local Line 70 Bus, Los Angeles, United States

Charming woman. I find the Clan of the Moon often possesses insights the rest of us lack. While talking to her was not exactly illuminating, it's given me food for thought.

Her reference to the old making way for the new seems to corroborate the theory of Gehenna being cyclical, similar to the poly-Gehenna theory Inyanga suggested in Chicago. Human civilization follows a pattern of rises and falls. Perhaps Gehenna is a natural mechanism to counter the static nature of our blood and the anachronism of elders, thus making way for our species to evolve.

The Book of Nod claims "our grandsires will break their fast on the first part of us." This could refer to a cyclical onslaught of torpor, or another event removing elders from the board. The concept of new Generations replacing the old, also fits nicely with Dr. Netchurch's observation of naturally-thickening blood. Perhaps the elder Generations were once thin-blooded themselves. I shall mull on this.

In the meantime, I endeavor to find Guinevere of the Cross.

JENNA CROSS



The Learned Clan; *1981, #2004. Childe of Smiling Jack.

C. came to the attention of Smiling Jack after she dropped out of Political Science at California State University. He made her his ghoul and Embraced her a year later, after an attack on C.'s life. Possibly due to the violent nature of her Embrace, she emerged as a thin-blooded. C. is rumored to bear a birthmark in the shape of a crescent moon.

[RECORDING BEGINS]

Jenna: Beckett? Jack told me about you.

Beckett: Smiling Jack. I wondered where I recognized your name from. You were his ghoul.

Jenna: And now his childe.

Beckett: His *childe…*? Apologies for my confusion. I was under the belief you were a thin-blooded.

Jenna: I am. What of it?

Beckett: An 11th Generation thin-blooded. May I inquire how that happened?

[PAUSE]

Jenna: I'll tell you. But I want something in return.

Beckett: I see you inherited Smiling Jack's directness. Tell me your story, and I'll decide if it's worth a boon.

Jenna: [Reluctantly] Fine. Jack and Damsel say you're good, so I'll take your word for it. After the stunt Jack pulled, people came gunning for him *and* everyone around him. They got me and — I saw things. A churning black ocean. I don't remember it fully. I *think* I was dead. Then Jack pulled me back, but it had been too long. The Embrace didn't take — not quite.

Beckett: Why are you not with Smiling Jack now?

Jenna: He needed to leave. I wanted to stay. There's a bunch of us here. A lot of thin-blooded go online, looking to find other vampires. I try to find them before the Camarilla does. Build a safe place together.

Beckett: That's commendable.

Jenna: Someone's gotta do it. But it's getting harder. The Anarchs are talking shop with the Cams and — and things are *changing* and they'll draw attention.

Beckett: Such as?

Jenna: [Hesitantly] Guy named Ted. He's a shovelhead, got left behind during a raid. Lost his reflection a few nights ago, but *he had it before.*

Beckett: You think he is Lasombra and his Clan mark has returned.

Jenna: [Silence]

Beckett: I heard of a thin-blooded who created a childe.

Jenna: Maxim. *I knew it.* You want to take her. She's under my protection, so back off.

Beckett: I have no intention of taking Maxim or her childe, I assure you.

Jenna: [Silence]

Beckett: I am interested in *talking* to Maxim and her progeny, so I might verify their state for myself. That is as far as it goes.

Jenna: [Silence]

Beckett: Jenna, you're going to have to trust *someone.* The boon you bargained for — were you were going to ask me to keep Maxim safe? Are people coming for her?

Jenna: You have no idea.

Told her to shut it about me and Jack, But no addresses. So good girl I guess. But yeah, that's why you didn't see me in LA this time around. I saw you though. Me and Alfonso were right behind you on that bus. Miss ya freaky-eyes!

D

When the snows consume the earth
and the sun gutters like a candle in the wind
then and only then will there be born a woman
the last daughter of Eve
and in her there will be decided the fate of all.
And you will not know this woman, except by the
mark of the moon on her
and she will face treachery, hatred, and pain
but in her is the last hope.

Weak Circulation

Kindred make little distinction between Caitiff, 14th Generation, 15th Generation and thin-blooded. Even the outcasts themselves rarely make the distinction — when you're perpetually hunted, you don't have time to work out the fine details of who's what. While Kindred don't keep track in game though, it is important to make the distinction out of game.

Caitiff are Clanless vampires. They have no Clan weakness or Disciplines, but instead choose their own three starting Disciplines. In theory any Generation can be Caitiff, but you find them in higher Generations more often than not.

Thin-blooded suffer from weakened vitae, which they cannot use as effectively as other vampires. Any Generation can be thin-blooded in theory, but the condition usually manifests in higher Generations. This weakness can be remedied, at the Storyteller's discretion, by raising your character's Generation through diablerie. In other cases, simply the passage of time allows the blood to stabilize and grow stronger — this is how a 13th Generation thin-blooded Dark Ages character becomes a regular 13th Generation in a modern campaign.

The **14th and 15th Generation** suffer from a similar vitae disability, which stems directly from their high Generation. All 15th Generation are considered thin-blooded.

You Are What You Eat

All Kindred, but thin-bloods in particular, find their powers alter with the kind of blood consumed. Feeding exclusively from unseen vagrants for a few nights might temporarily lower difficulty when attempting to Obfuscate, while conversely inhibiting Presence. Learning to change form into that of a bat comes naturally to many among the Gangrel, but a thin-blooded vampire who exclusively consumes the blood of flying mammals becomes one with their prey despite ancestry.

Merits and Flaws

The weakening of Caine's Curse leads to additional Flaws and Merits. The ones below all make great picks.

Flaws (V20 p.479-495): *Dulled Bite* (your character's fangs are as underdeveloped as her vitae), Flaws of healing (your character's vitae is unable to fully reanimate her body, leading to conditions such as *Flesh of the Corpse*, *Open Wound*, *Permanent Wound*, or *Smell of the Grave*), Flaws of the outcast (your character is a shame to Kindred society and might incur *Sire's Resentment*, or be *Hunted Like a Dog*) and Flaws of ignorance (everything your character knows about vampires comes from books and television, and she has internalized stereotypes such as: *Can't Cross Running Water*, *Conspicuous Consumption*, *Lunacy*, *Repelled by Crosses*, *Repulsed by Garlic*, *Stereotype*, or *Vulnerability to Silver*). Caitiff characters on the edge of being thin-blooded can take *Infertile Vitae* or *Slow Healing*.

Merits (V20 p.479-495): *Blush of Health*, *Calm Heart*, *Deceptive Aura*, *Early Riser*, *Eat Food*, *Inoffensive to Animals,* and *Light Sleeper* are all good Merits for a vampire closer to being human. *Medium* or *Oracular Ability* tie in to the thin-blooded proclivity for receiving visions. Lastly, thin-blooded can be *Seers*, which are detailed below.

Seers

Many thin-blooded receive prophecies about the Jyhad, even if it's involuntary or unwanted. Perhaps their weak vitae traps them in a state between life and unlife, where they see the machinations of elders. One thin-blooded Seer believes her ability stemmed from her delayed Embrace: She experienced the world free from the constraints of time while she was dead, and her prophecies are really flashes of memory.

This talent for prophecy does not endear the thin-blooded to other Kindred. A Seer faces persecution for knowing too much, or simply being scary. Many elders stem from the medieval period, and burning a witch is nothing to them.

Seer (4 pt. Merit)

You have flashes of insight that allow you to see patterns and portents of the Jyhad. Whilst other Kindred live their unlives in ignorant bliss, you feel the full weight of the Ancients bear down on you.

You see patterns in the lines of someone's face, currents of air, or dreams you have during the day. Whilst these patterns are ever present, they are couched in symbolism, and interpreting them requires a [Perception + Occult] roll. The difficulty of this roll varies from six to nine, depending on the complexity of the pattern. Seeing the immediate future is difficulty 7, whilst unraveling diffuse manipulations is difficulty 9. Close familiarity with the people involved, or a recurrence of the same pattern, lowers the difficulty by one. If the roll is successful,



the player asks the Storyteller a question about the omens observed. More successes yield more information (i.e. "That man is your enemy" versus "That man is your enemy, because he hates your sire"). Failure yields no information, while a botch yields perfectly believable yet false information.

This Merit grants insight into Cainite affairs only, though these are widespread indeed. Your Storyteller is encouraged to use this Merit to foreshadow events, reveal plot threads, or simply reiterate missed clues. Alternatively, you can ask the Storyteller if you see a pattern around a subject.

You must have the 15th Generation, 16th Generation, or Thin Blood Flaw to purchase and retain this Merit.

The 16th Generation

The 15th has long been the highest Generation of vampires, but the 16th is rising. Here is the Flaw to add the 16th Generation to your campaign.

16th Generation (5 pt. Flaw)

You were created no more than a year ago. Your vitae is so weak only four of your 10 blood points can be used for Disciplines, healing, or raising Attributes. For these functions, you must expend two blood points to obtain the effect a normal vampire would achieve with one. You may use the remaining six blood points for other purposes, and rising still costs a single blood point per night. You cannot create a blood bond or Cainite childe, nor can you create or sustain ghouls.

You are Clanless and do not suffer from a Clan weakness. You select three starting Disciplines freely, but cannot raise any Discipline above two dots. You are likely an outcast of Cainite society and cannot start play with the *Domain* or *Status* background.

Barely a vampire, sunlight only causes lethal damage to you and you can attempt to soak it with Stamina. Remaining awake during the day still presents the same difficulties as it does to other Cainites. You gain the effects (though not the actual Merits) of *Blush of Health* and *Eat Food*. You can conceive a Dhampir child.

Dhampirs

While exceedingly rare, thin-blooded can conceive mortal children. There's no percentage die or chart to consult on when this happens. When the Storyteller thinks it's dramatically appropriate *and* the player agrees that such a development enhances her character, the vampire conceives.

Dhampirs are born as fully mortal children. They're quieter than the average baby, and more prone to tantrums as a toddler, but they are human. How the parent handles their little surprise varies. If other Cainites learn of the child though, its life is soon forfeit: A Dhampir is hunted as Masquerade breach by the Camarilla, portent of Gehenna by the Sabbat, or rarity object by anyone. The child's best chance may lie with religious Kindred who view the conception as a sign from God, but who would certainly have their own plans.

The child's Cainite legacy begins to show during puberty, though the exact age varies. Her aging slows (but does not fully halt), she acquires Disciplines and becomes subject to the Beast. At this point, even Cainites who don't know about her heritage recognize her as not quite human. Dhampirs are physically the same as Revenants however, and all but the most knowledgeable Kindred would assume she is a masterless ghoul — which is a *little* safer than being recognized as a Dhampir.

The emotional aspect (*what am I?*), the quest for a lost Cainite parent, and the difficulties of navigating a society of sharks when you yourself are a goldfish, all make playing a Dhampir worthwhile. Not every campaign has room for Dhampirs, so the player should consult her Storyteller first.

Dhampir Character Creation and Special Rules

- Attributes: 6/4/3 plus starting dots.
- Abilities: 11/7/5, maximum is 3 dots before spending freebies.
- Disciplines: Potence 1. Spend 1 additional dot on a Discipline from this list: Animalism, Auspex, Celerity, Dominate, Fortitude, Obfuscate, Presence. Other Disciplines are subject to having an in-character teacher and Storyteller's permission. Dhampirs can never learn more than the first dot of any Discipline.
- Backgrounds: 5 as applicable to the character.
- Virtues: 7 plus starting dots.
- Freebie points: 18, plus a maximum of 7 more from flaws.
- Humanity: equal to [Conscience + Self-Control]
- Willpower: equal to [Courage]
- Blood pool: 10. The Dhampir regenerates 1 blood point per day. She can drink vitae to replenish more quickly, with all the usual effects (i.e. becoming blood bound or a ghoul). The Dhampir can spend all 10 points normally on Healing (1 blood point per bashing or lethal damage — being closer to a mortal than a vampire, she does not suffer aggravated damage), Disciplines, and raising Physical Attributes. A Dhampir does not need to spend blood to remain active.
- A Dhampir uses Stamina to soak bashing and lethal damage.
- The Dhampir can regenerate lost body parts with a successful Willpower roll (difficulty 8). The cost for this varies from 1 blood point for a finger to 3 blood points for a limb. If the roll fails, it cannot be reattempted and the body part is lost.
- The Dhampir suffers from Frenzy at -2 difficulty. She is not subject to Rötschrek.
- The Dhampir spends freebie and experience points like a vampire, with the exception of purchasing Disciplines. Disciplines cost 7 freebie points or 20 experience points per dot, and may never be raised higher than 1.
- A Dhampir is ultimately mortal rather than vampire. She has no Clan weakness, may not gain vampire-specific Merits or Flaws, and cannot create new Disciplines. Nor can she create blood bonds, ghouls, or childer. She can, however, conceive mortal children, eat food, and walk in sunlight.
- The Dhampir's vampiric heritage makes it impossible for her to become a changeling, demon, mage, mummy, werewolf, or their related kin. She can be blood bound to a vampire, though she does not become a ghoul. A Dhampir can become Imbued, but does not lose their Dhampir template.

Is she?

"Mark of the moon" isn't exactly clear cut. It might refer to a birthmark, or the phase of the moon during birth or Embrace. It could also mean she is a seer, a werewolf descendant, or a member of Clan Malkavian. This ambiguity hasn't stopped scores of Kindred looking for the Last Daughter though. So is Maxim the one?

The Hunt for the 16th Generation

When word gets out that a thin-blooded Embraced a 16th Generation, three factions converge on Santa Monica. The first is Jenna Cross, de facto leader and self-sworn protector of thin-blooded, possibly assisted by Jack and Damsel. Maxim and her childe were with Jenna for a while, but ran when Netchurch's first invitation (which wasn't Beckett) arrived. Jenna is loath to admit this though, as her ability to protect Maxim serves as a mark of her leadership.

The second party is Dr. Netchurch. While he genuinely believes his test subjects are volunteers, he subconsciously Dominates them into participating. Maxim has "worked" with Netchurch before and escaped when she broke his Conditioning. She has no intention of returning, but if she can negotiate limits to the tests, Netchurch does have the Camarilla backing to protect Maxim and her childe.

The third party is the most exotic: a group of Bahari known as the Daughters of Moira. The Bahari worship Lilith: Mother of Monsters and scorned mentor of Caine. They believe Lilith will destroy Caine and his get and, either out of ideology or self-preservation, have pledged themselves to her cause. They believe Maxim is the Last Daughter of Eve, and plan to convert both her and the "fate" embodied in her childe to the Dark Mother. Like Dr. Netchurch, they can offer protection, but their path is fraught with pain.

Perhaps Dr. Netchurch will send Kindred to extend a more forcible invitation after Beckett fails to deliver. Maybe a coterie of Lilith acolytes is eager to prove its worth by snatching the Last Daughter. Perhaps Anarchs striking a bargain with Jenna will seek out the Last Daughter — or set the Camarilla on her, so they can take over her territory. A clutch of thin-blooded would have a personal stake in this plot. They can stick together, or betray Maxim and her childe in exchange for protection from either the Camarilla — negotiated through Netchurch — or the Bahari.

THE SPARK OF CIVIL WAR

To Beckett of the Clan Gangrel

You are cordially invited to attend the Palle Grande festivities scheduled to begin in three weeks' time as my personal and honored guest. It is my hope that we may take the opportunity to converse on recent developments of mutual interest, most notably certain events that occurred (and some that did not occur) in the last decade and now compel us to act, as well as similar events from bygone days. Naturally, your safety in Mexico City is assured so long as your conduct is appropriate to the season's festivities.

Please respond to me by our mutual associate, Lucita y Aragon.

Yours sincerely,

Melinda Galbraith

Chico's Smoke Shop, Tucson, United States

And so I find myself with Lucita in Arizona for two reasons: 1) There's talk of Carna's trail branching abruptly and heading for Phoenix, and 2) Lucita brought my damn jet to Tucson, along with an invitation she received via Kyle Strathcona in Montreal. Sadly, I must abandon the trail for the time being, in favor of the invitation.

Every night, it seems, my standard for "impossible things" is adjusted. Lucita was actually amused to see me so flustered by the invitation. I mean, honestly. The Sabbat Regent personally invites me to Mexico City, the capitol of the Sabbat, to sit with her and gossip about Gehenna? It is quite easily the fifth strangest thing to have happened to me so far this century.

Nevertheless, Lucita says the invitation is genuine. And that both the Black Hand and the Sabbat Inquisition are none too happy about it, but they are also unwilling to challenge the Regent over her choice of party guests. Lucita was also a font of information about Melinda Galbraith, someone I suddenly realized I knew little about despite her status as one of the most notorious Kindred in the world. Good thing I have Anatole, his access to Aristotle's Encyclopedia Vampirica (which is steadily being destroyed), and a fax machine in this shop.

My biggest question, however, is why does Galbraith want to meet me?

The different factions of the Sabbat grapple with how to move forward when there is now substantial evidence that the Sect's precious Gehenna war has finally started. Hundreds of Cainites have already gone east to destroy the graves of the ancients in the shadow of the mortal war and we're only three years into this. Others claim the opposite — that the Sect's entire raison d'être is a lie and that the Crusade will be the end of us. It's understandable the Regent seeks out those with greater expertise than herself, and equally understandable she would seek expertise from outside the Sabbat rather than risk showing favoritism to one faction. -L

Lucita confirmed that Galbraith's known for her intense paranoia, which makes the engraved invitation even more suspicious. Granted, it's not paranoia if they're really out to get you, but it seems the Regent, not yet fully committed to the Gehenna Crusade, has greatly reduced her public appearances before the packs of Mexico City, and sends a Tzimisce body double to stand in for her during many of the functions she cannot avoid. The war-drunk Sabbat rabble doesn't know anything about it, of course, but among the Consistory and the other important personages within the Sect, it's perhaps the worst-kept secret in Mexico. According to Lucita, if her subterfuge actually became common knowledge, it might lead to a leadership challenge.

This is an opportunity I cannot ignore. Carna will have to wait, wherever she and that blasted book are now, though I feel the pull to seek it still. The Regent's archive in Mexico represents one of the largest known repositories of Gehenna lore in the world I have yet to access. Their growing Gehenna obsession could be based on sources I've not yet seen, or understood. As I said to Lucita, with her there beside me, and the protection of the Regent herself, what could possibly go wrong? For some reason, though, that comment made Lucita surprisingly angry with me.

MELINDA GALBRAITH



Clan of Night(?); *early 12th century. #late 12th century, sire unknown

G. came to power in 1933 after diablerizing the previous Regent, Gorchist. She is best known for her diplomatic skills, as she ended the Third Sabbat Civil War very quickly with the inspired, if controversial, decision to confer Clan status upon the Sabbat Caitiff, now known collectively as Panders. Since then, G. has spent the last 80 years or so balancing the various factions and orders of the Sabbat against one another, presumably with the foremost goal of preventing yet another civil war.

The Regent came over to the New World with your friend Helena, which would make her Toreador antitribu rather than a Keeper. Aristotle's merely written what most believe to be true.–L

EXPLOSION IN GRAN HOTEL CIUDAD DE MEXICO

NARCO-TERRORISM SUSPECTED.

By Angelo Juarez Hinojosa

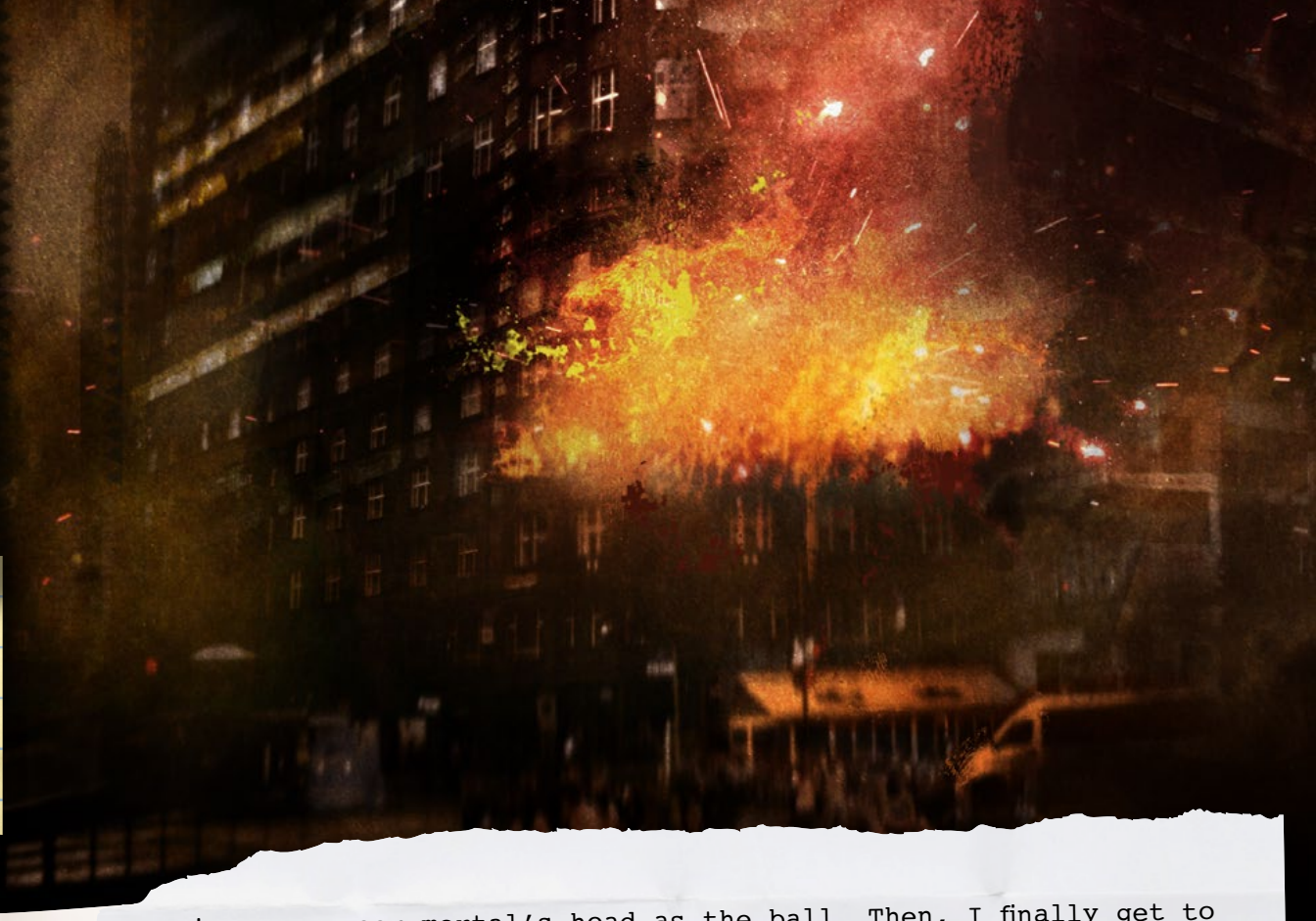
Mexico City first responders were summoned to the historic Gran Hotel Ciudad de Mexico last night in response to several explosions, which tore through the hotel's grand ballroom just before midnight. At press time, police estimated at least 20 people died in the explosion with several dozens more injured. Preliminary reports indicate the detonations were the result of multiple improvised explosive devices employing white phosphorus as an accelerant. The explosions, which authorities attribute to narco-terrorism, were centered on the third floor grand ballroom, which was the site of a private masquerade ball hosted by noted industrialist Jose Grimaldi as a political fundraiser. Mr. Grimaldi was widely expected to mount a campaign for the position of Mayor of Mexico City in the next general election, and it is believed his platform of aggressive legal action against the cartels prompted this attack.

[RECORDING BEGINS]

Beckett: Lucita, dear, the hotel where we were to meet the Regent? Would it happen to be that building up ahead that has just burst into flames?

Lucita: [Sigh] Yes, Beckett. I do believe so.

Beckett: Typical. Three nights in this wretched city, during which time I have to dance around five bonfires before leaping through them to prove my courage and *then* participate in a *futbol* match



using some poor mortal's head as the ball. Then, I finally get to dress up in a tuxedo — all for nothing!

Lucita: Honestly, I don't know which is more appalling — your sense of humor or sense of priorities. Cesare, take the next left and circle the block. Then get us to back to our hotel.

Cesare: Yes, ma'am.

Beckett: So, are we abandoning Mexico City?

Lucita: I'm not sure. If nothing else, I wish to go back to the hotel because that's where all my guns are, as well as more practical clothing. I do not know whether we will see battle, but I certainly don't wish to do so in a Prada gown.

[A CELLPHONE RINGS.]

Lucita: Why do I suspect we will regret you taking a call right now?

Beckett: Because you've been around me long enough. Which button do I press, again? [Ringing stops] This is Beckett.... Very well. We'll be there as soon as we can. Cesare, put the following address into the GPS: Musset 325, Colonia Polanco. It should be the Indian consulate.

[SILENCE]

Beckett: Well? Aren't you going to ask?

Lucita: I was too dumbstruck by preposterousness of what you just said. Why are we going to the Indian consulate?

Beckett: Let me answer your question with one of my own. What can you tell me about Vasantasena?



En route to the Embajada de la India, Mexico City, Mexico

The basics of Vasantasena's biography are well known. One of the founders of the Sabbat, Vasantasena was a Malkavian Embraced roughly 1,000 years ago. Both she and her sire, an ancient Brahmin named Unmada, claimed to be seers. Specifically, they spent centuries preaching that the reliance elders placed on the blood bond to keep their childer in line would lead to "a fiery apocalypse." The Anarch Revolt proved their visions correct, and when the victorious elders refused to show mercy to the Anarchs and then went on to curse the Assamites, Vasantasena disappeared into the night, taking with her scores of captured Anarchs who would form the core of the nascent Sabbat. According to Lucita, Vasantasena's role in the founding of the Sect is so great it compels the Sabbat Inquisition to overlook her twin heresies: She strongly opposes both the Vaulderie and the use of Paths of Enlightenment as a replacement for Humanitas. She also has a nasty

habit of pointing out all the ways in which various Sabbat leaders are "acting as tools of the Antediluvians," a habit which doesn't endear her to her peers.

We should take more of an interest in the Kindred of the Indian subcontinent. There are many Noddist secrets known only to the Daitya and the Danava, secrets we would be wise to explore, particularly with various Ravnos developments.-O

Lucita and I arrived at the Indian embassy just before 1 a.m. and were quickly shown to a private room on the third floor. The room was devoid of furnishings other than silk cushions arranged on the floor and a somewhat alarming number of candles, enough to disturb the Beast in both Lucita and myself. Vasantasena was quite beautiful and quite nude. Regrettably, the effect was spoiled by the scores of long thin needles piercing her flesh at odd angles. She sat, stiff-backed, on the floor in a lotus position. Or at least, I think it was a lotus position. Eastern mysticism isn't my strong suit.

THE SMOKING MIRROR

The Sabbat's tearing itself apart in Mexico City. Yes, it's a dream come true, but it's a bitch to report. Only two of my coterie — including myself — survived activities in the capital city. The "Cainites" there are quick to turn on or use any newcomers in their "civil" war, which is about as civil as a fight scene in a Polanski movie.

Black Hand fights Inquisition. Gehenna Crusaders destroy Moderates. Gehenna is now versus Gehenna is unknowable. Priests diablerize their Bishops. It's fantastic news for the Camarilla, if the Masquerade holds. But what I saw? Well, let's see how well the Masquerade sustains a shopping mall full of kine caught between vampires using shadows as swords, merged bodies as goons, and Sabbat in full war form — spines, spokes, tendrils and all. Let's hope the good old "they were special effects, right?" excuse works when this happens night after night.

For my coterie, the end didn't come quick. Bex — you know her as the Degenerate with a fetish for butterfly knives — had a hole punched clean through her face by one of their Keepers. Budd — our resident Blue Blood psychotic — was kidnapped, and has, I hear, turned up again as one of their Blood Brothers. Iz — the love of my unlife, and most beautiful Nosferatu you ever saw — and her childe Jody got their vitae and souls wrenched right from their frames by some Fiend controlling a pack of ghoul dogs, or wolves.

After all that, Emilia and I were on the ropes. Final Death seemed certain. A pack bore down on us and we kissed one another adios. Then another pack shows up, crescents burnt into their foreheads, and the two fight like we're not even there. We got the hell out of there and didn't look back.

Fuck Mexico City. Fuck the Sabbat.

— "Deadly Kiss" Araceli

[RECORDING BEGINS]

Vasantasena: *Aapka swaagat hai*, travelers. I thank you for the honor of your presence.

Beckett: No thanks are necessary, Honored Vasantasena. After all, you *did* say on the phone we would risk Final Death if we did not come at once. A difficult invitation to refuse.

Vasantasena: It was not intended to be a threat, Gangrel. Merely a warning. There are parties here in Mexico City seeking a scapegoat for this evening's tragedy. I foresaw no fewer than seven scenarios by which you would have been hounded to Final Death for Melinda's murder.

Beckett: Really? Me? Why would I want to kill the Regent when she invited me here?

Vasantasena: Ah, but the invitation provided an opportunity. And did you not come to Mexico City in the company of Monçada's childe, who now, through attrition, is poised to ascend to the rank of Dominion, or perhaps even a higher position?

Lucita: I have no interest in advancement, Vasantasena. I would likely not even have attended the Palle Grande but for the Regent's personal invitation.

Vasantasena: What you desire is irrelevant in the face of the illusions of the world. Those who would accuse you judge you by the standard of what *they* would have done in your place. The Sabbat has no Regent. It has but one true Seraph and another acting Seraph who was to be confirmed this very night but is now in torpor. It had one more, but he was the first to fall victim to the kine's war on "terror." Mark me, that name will become more and more accurate. For the Sword of Caine is terror incarnate, is it not? It has just lost a number of Dominions. Its High Inquisitor...well, we shall discuss her later. And finally, it has a notorious prodigal daughter who narrowly avoided the attack while in the company of an equally notorious Noddist scholar. Innocent or not, the story is better if you are guilty. For what it is worth, I did not foresee your entanglement in this particular web when I asked the Regent to send you the invitation. I humbly apologize for setting in motion events that may yet lead to your Final Deaths.

[BRIEF SILENCE]

Beckett: Well, um, I suppose I'm grateful for your being so forthright. Anyway, perhaps you could just clarify some things for us now that we're here. Most importantly, is it confirmed the Regent was destroyed in the attack?

Vasantasena: The Regent has met Final Death.

Beckett: And which Seraph was the one to —

Lucita: — Beckett, stop babbling and listen for once. Vasantasena, I notice you did not answer the question asked. Was the Regent destroyed in *tonight's* attack?

Vasantasena: No. She was not.

Lucita: But she *has* met Final Death. When?

Vasantasena: Sixteen years ago.

Beckett: That long ago…? Wait, the body double! You've had someone pretending to be Galbraith all this time. But how did she meet her end?

Vasantasena: Gangrel, I do not know who is responsible or even how it was achieved save through some form of foul Thaumaturgy. Melinda's remains were discovered by a Tzimisce named Sikorsky who was to design a ballgown for Melinda to wear in that year's Palle Grande. My personal suspicion is her death was connected to whatever annihilated the Tremere antitribu just a year before. I have my suspicions but will not speak the name aloud. Consult the Book of Ruth. Regardless, afraid of being scapegoated, Sikorsky audaciously attempted to pose as the Regent until it was possible for him to escape. His imposture actually lasted for several months before Jalan-Aajav and I independently realized the truth.

Beckett: His? No, never mind. Anyway, I take it the two of you conspired together to help this Tzimisce maintain the deception? Why?

Vasantasena: To preserve the Sect of course. After the towers burned we began preaching bloody Crusade, and a war needs a leader. A war in Enoch, the thin blood rising and a red star. We see the end times upon us. Again. We see that the judgment of Caine is at hand. We believed the end to be swift, the war over in months. And then...it wasn't. The unstoppable juggernaut rolls slowly, or was diverted from its course before it could crush us underneath. As it was in the past, so it is again. You know of what I speak.

Beckett: The Gehenna cycle.

Vasantasena: Yes. The turn of the wheel is inexorable. It cannot be stopped, but its course can be changed to delay the final moment when we are ground into nothingness, and They rise. As it is now, so it was before. As it was before, so it shall be in the future. The Children of Caine ever stand at the cusp of oblivion, though it is the karma of some to divert the juggernaut for a brief time, no more than a breath of eternity.

Beckett: Forgive me if this is impertinent — how many Gehennas have you witnessed?

Vasantasena: A fatuous question, for how can I have witnessed the end of all things and yet be here to answer for it? If you mean "how many times have I witnessed what I *thought* was Gehenna," I would answer "nine" over the course of the last millennium, though perhaps some were my imagination while there may have been others while I was in torpor or otherwise disengaged. This Gehenna war will be the tenth, and it has hardly yet begun. Before it's over the cradle of our race will burn.

Beckett: Hmm. And there are some whose "karma" is to avert Gehenna, at least for a time? Your Gehenna Crusaders?

Vasantasena: I will tell you a true secret, Beckett. It is not within your power or mine to stop the turning of the wheel. We are old and knowledgeable, but in our age and puissance, we have only ensnared ourselves in webs we cannot see and tied ourselves with puppet strings we cannot feel, let alone cut. If you would divert the juggernaut from its course, seek out those who are new to unlife but touched by destiny, and give them the tools to survive. Witness our childer in Akkad, teaching self-annihilation to the kine. New fire shattering ancient stone. Witness our crusading childer following the tracks of the American soldiers by night, disguised as them, holy as the land they tread. Or perhaps even those older than yourself who have avoided the Jyhad through an autarkis existence or simply through fool's luck. The juggernaut will crush you if you strive against it directly. But the sword is drawn. It can't be sheathed until the end of the end.

Lucita: [cough] Well, this is all fascinating, but I'm more interested in the here and now. Vasantasena, I...think I know who you suspect of the Regent's actual murder. But who was responsible for killing the body double tonight?

Vasantasena: I cannot say. But I believe I know where some answers may be found. It is time you spoke with your sister.

[RECORDING ENDS]

Driving through La Paz, Mexico

I had a number of questions for my good friend Lucita, but her attitude soured considerably after. So much so I was worried the wrong question might send her into frenzy. Particularly problematic in the close confines of a moving car. So instead of talking, I'm quietly making a journal entry and trying not to be annoying.

Lucita was not Monçada's only childe. When it became clear Lucita was not amenable to his particular charms, he Embraced another, a 15-year-old novitiate from a Spanish convent by the name of Maria Sandoza. With his patronage, her rise within the Sabbat was meteoric. She now holds the position of High Inquisitor. Normally, that would set off alarm bells, but Vasantasena indicated a meeting between us would be productive, and if she is not to be trusted, then we have bigger problems than the Inquisition.

I did finally break down and ask Lucita about Vasantasena's cryptic Bible reference. I received a cold stare in response and felt the shadows within our vehicle

encroach ever so slightly. Sadly, the Book of Ruth isn't in my hotel room's Gideon Bible, so it looks as if I'll be researching at a later point.

I wonder how that ties into Vasantasena's conspiracy theories about who killed Galbraith. The Malkavian believes the reason three of the four Seraphs have disappeared is that the Black Hand is hopelessly infiltrated with Gehenna cultists who all ran back to their Antediluvian masters like good little toadies during the opening salvoes of this Gehenna. I kept my mouth shut at the time, but personally, I think she sounds a bit like some Ventrue elder checking under the bed to see if the Secret Masters are hiding there.

And just like the Ventrue, you use the term "Secret Masters" as a dismissive placeholder for enemies you aren't clever enough to properly identify.-A

WAR IN THE STREETS!

GUNMEN IN LUCHADOR MASKS KILL CARTEL SOLDIERS

By Arellano Felix

MEXICO CITY — Gunmen in luchador costumes ambushed a Sortano cartel hideout in the center of Iztapalapa borough at midnight last night. Initial police statements indicate the fierce gunfight lasted just short of an hour, until the attackers fled in an unmarked van. Several independent witnesses describe a standoff only broken when, to the surprise of all involved, the lead gunman stripped down to his mask and underwear, announced his intention to "snap into them" and charged into the cartel's building. He then engaged the soldiers in a horrific display of physical brutality.

Our reporter on the scene says neither side in the battle ran short of ammunition, and many hits were seen being taken by all parties. Due to the lack of deaths confirmed by the police (five at time of reporting) compared to number of involved parties (at least 10 on the street alone) and ammunition spent, the gunmen are believed to have been wearing body armor or affected by a drug such as PCP. The volume of blood photographed in the street and hideout indicates far greater violence than accounted for by the presence of bodies. Police have yet to issue a detailed statement or make comparisons to the skulls discovered last week, also in luchador masks, but confidently cite cartel violence as the cause.

Sandoza's Compound, Texcoco, Mexico

We've reached our destination, a private compound about an hour outside Mexico City. I confess I was quite nervous. It was about 90 minutes before sunrise, and if we couldn't rely on Sandoza's hospitality, we'd have been digging into the dirt or hiding in the car boot.



I was understandably concerned by the sight of a half dozen heavily-armed soldiers standing out in front of the house. At their command, we exited the car and waited.

Within moments, a vampire with the face of an angelic 16-year-old girl came out of the house and approached us. The High Inquisitor ignored me completely in favor of Lucita, who stared back at her younger sibling impassively. When Sandoza came to within a few feet of Lucita, she stopped. And then, with startling speed, she shot forward and embraced my friend in a fierce hug!

Then she said – and I am quoting directly here – "Welcome home, my sister, my Regent. In our time of need, as the hellspawn of Nergal rise against us, you have come to take your rightful station. Together we will end this foolish crusade. Welcome home at last!"

In spite of the extreme danger of the situation, I suddenly had to suppress the impulse to laugh. Slowly and tentatively (as she likely had not been hugged in centuries), Lucita put her own hands around the other Lasombra while turning her head in my direction. Her expression was clear. "Tell no one of this," her glare shouted. "Absolutely no one!"

And yet, you not only wrote of it in your diary, you circulated it to me, to Anatole and to God knows who else. So, the High Inquisitor not only wants Moncada's prodigal daughter to become Regent, she already considers it a fait accompli. Congratulations, Beckett. Welcome to the Fourth Sabbat Civil War.-O

Beckett:

On the subject of the High Inquisitor's delusions, Nergal, if not a complete myth, was a Methuselah thought to be the progenitor of the Baali bloodline (or one of the progenitors — their creation myths are strange even by my standards). I'm told one of Sister Maria's hobbyhorses for the past few decades has been legends about Nergal, whom she believes to be the same entity that once posed as Huitzilopochtli and who fought the Black Hand in the time of Cortez.

Add that to your list of absurdly improbable suspects in this surreal political thriller you've wandered into.

Sincerely
Anatole

aLcAlA started the conversation

loschombos joined the conversation

aLcAlA:	So like I was saying they got a fucking wiretap going on our cells!!!
loschombos:	and how you know they don't tap this
aLcAlA:	I don't. But what the fuck we gonna do?? Inquisition gone wiped my pack clean out.
loschombos:	we gotta fight back
aLcAlA:	You think we ain't??
loschombos:	the black hand will clean this up
loschombos:	trust me
loschombos:	ive got a file on pretty much every cainite in the city and their haven
aLcAlA:	And if the Inquisition find your files??
	madremaya joined the conversation
aLcAlA:	Glad you made it! I thought you were dead for sure.
madremaya:	ACCESSING ON FONE
madremaya:	Beingpursed
madremaya:	chased
aLcAlA:	Where are you?? We can get to you if you tell us location.
aLcAlA:	?
aLcAlA:	madremaya??

loschombos: ever tried texting while being hunted by literal hellhounds

aLcAIA: This is fucked up. Sabbat's supposed to be all for one, one for all, yeah?

loschombos: just you and your pack brother against the world

madremaya: HELP

loschombos: we cant help unless you say where you are

madremaya: THEYLL DRINK MY FUCKING SOLE I NO IT

aLcAIA: Get yourself somewhere public! Hide behind the kine!

loschombos: it comes to this

loschombos: im tooling up

loschombos: any fangs not black hand showing at my hacienda will burn

madremaya: Im at el grito de dolor open UP

aLcAIA: Shit she's led them to my haven!

loschombos: buena suerte

loschombos left the conversation

aLcAIA left the conversation

madremaya timed out

The Center Does Not Hold

Even as it stretches from the Old World to the New like a mighty colossus, the Sabbat shudders and cracks, its members oblivious to just how vulnerable the Sect is to attack from without and within. Even as the Gehenna Crusade burns across the Levant and deathless insurgents set explosives to the oldest temples of the Middle East, the mighty Sword of Caine cuts all who would wield it. Sabbat members across the world work themselves into a frenzy of apocalyptic furor, certain Gehenna is at hand. To the Crusaders the end is now, but many others stand confused at the failure of the world to end in a sea of blood, as they have been told. The furor hasn't abated. Instead, Sabbat members look to their leaders and their compatriots to figure out what happened, what (if anything) went wrong, and why their leaders so completely misread the signs of Gehenna. Or why the end is a suddenly long war that may last a century or more. For perhaps the first time in the Sect's history, a significant number of Sabbat members question the nature of Gehenna and the Antediluvians. And, more importantly, they question whether the pervasive fear of Gehenna propagated by the Sabbat elders —especially by the Inquisition and the Black Hand — is simply just another way for the old to manipulate the young. More Sabbat have defected to the Anarchs in the last five years than in the previous four centuries.

The ones who stay true to the Crusade are the true Cainites, the fanatics, the preachers, the soldiers of blessed Caine. To them the loss of New York, and the mortal tragedy of 9/11 was the opening shot in a war that will last a hundred years. Bishops without scruples frame the attacks as "vengeance for the loss of our city" or "a strike against the ancient Tzimisce horror living under the city." They are liars, of course. The true conspiracy is nothing more than a group of bitter, suicidal young men. But to the preachers of Caine this was the beginning of the end. A chance to meet the Antediluvians on the field of battle, in their graves and temples, a holy carnage hidden from mortal sight by the atrocities of the American wars in the Middle East. The Gehenna Crusade starts in earnest with Operation Iraqi Freedom, an undertaking on such a scale that hundreds of U.S. and European Cainites could hide among the troops and civilian contractors. But in this war, no vampire takes a mortal side. It is as common for packs to join forces



with Baath party loyalist troops or join the Sunni insurgents that will one day capture north Iraq under black banners. So far, the Camarilla know little of the Crusade, but when they learn, can they afford not to meet the Cainites as they wage war for the land where Sumer and Enoch once stood? Such a confrontation is still years away when Beckett visits Mexico, and the Fourth Sabbat Civil War may well end with the defeat of the Crusaders.

Beckett and Lucita contemplate various rumors they've heard that might be relevant. Rumors suggesting the Black Hand might serve a Gehenna cult. That Clan Assamite might have been responsible both for the death of Galbraith as part of a scheme to break the Tremere-laid Assamite blood curse. That Jalan-Aajav or Elimelech, or some other ancient, is now making a power play to gain control of the Sect. Upon meeting Sandoza, both Kindred are startled when the legendarily ruthless High Inquisitor welcomes Lucita as a long-lost and beloved older sister, and even more so when Sandoza recognizes Lucita as Regent. She also reveals her own beliefs about the problems facing the Sect — she blames everything on the semi-mythical bloodline of demon-worshipping vampires known as the Baali, whose leader, Nergal, she believes rests in torpor somewhere beneath Mexico City. In essence, this is a second front in the Gehenna Crusade, one that the Sabbat Inquisition considers to be much more important than the war far away in the east.

Within hours, word of "the Regent's" assassination spreads to every Sabbat territory in the world, with nearly every Cardinal and most Archbishops descending on Mexico to press their own leadership claims. Reluctantly, Lucita allows herself to be placed among the contenders, with the backing of Vasantasena and Sandoza. The contest for Regent gives her the opportunity to continue the investigation into the murders of both Galbraith and her replacement. What she does not reveal to Beckett is that she is fascinated with the idea of ascending to a higher position within the Sabbat than her sire, and even more so by the possibility of shaping the Sabbat to be the antithesis of Monçada's dream.

The following are chronicle threads stemming from the Regent's demise and the Fourth Sabbat Civil War that may explode out of it, as well as activities in which a pack or coterie may wish to become involved.

The Last Seraph: Jalan-Aajav expresses no immediate preference for Regent and quietly takes to running both the Sabbat and the Black Hand as a caretaker until a consensus candidate emerges. The Seraph could probably claim the title of Regent himself with little difficulty, but he is more concerned with purging the Black Hand of traitors. A pack capable of showing both competence and loyalty to the First Seraph in these difficult times could gain a powerful patron. Alas, Jalan-Aajav's own position is rather precarious at the moment. Rumors abound regarding the three missing Seraphs — that Jalan-Aajav killed them to advance himself, that he killed them for betraying the Sect, or that they are not dead at all but faked Final Death as part of a scheme to overthrow the Regent. In shadowy meetings, enemies of the Last Seraph who have held their silence for centuries now whisper that perhaps the Black Hand has outlasted its usefulness and should be disbanded. Even worse, if it were known the last Seraph knew the truth about the real Regent's death and concealed it while propping up a pretender, the entire Sect might turn against the Black Hand, which might just be what the *True* Black Hand wants.

The Prince of Fiends: One reason for Lucita's reluctant foray into Sabbat politics is to prevent the ascension of any of her rivals. Among those rivals is Vykos, and while the currently absconded Tzimisce has not expressed any particular desire to become the new Regent, it has not stopped loyal followers from putting their name forth and doing whatever they can to undermine the other claimants. Radu Bistri, Cardinal of the Midwestern United States, is the only other Fiend actively pursuing the position, though he does have the fanatical support of the Salubri antitribu. For his part, Bistri considers himself a diplomat first and pursues the Regency mainly to put himself into the position of kingmaker. The conflict between those Tzimisce loyal to Vykos and those, both in and out of their Clan, who loathe the creature threatens constantly to spill into both Clan and Sect violence.

The Gehenna Crusader: Perhaps the strongest claimant is Francisco Domingo de Polonia, Cardinal of the Eastern Seaboard of the United States and Canada. While Polonia is praised for his role in the successful crusade that captured Atlanta, Washington D.C., and many of the formerly-Camarilla cities on the Eastern seaboard, he also lost status after he was forced to abandon New York to the Camarilla. He is the public face of the Gehenna Crusade and jumped at the chance to claim involvement in one of the greatest tragedies of modern history. Claiming to have infiltrated Islamist fundamentalists to engineer the strikes of 9/11, thus striking a telling blow against

Taken From The Front Page

The most terrifying possibility is that he is right, that Gehenna has truly come and will last for decades, even centuries. A chronicle set in the shadow of the wars in the Middle East is the perfect venue for a Storyteller who likes her stories ripped from the headlines and uncomfortably close to real-world issues of faith, terrorism and the price of war. Carnage that would shatter the Masquerade is hidden by the endless bombings, and constant guerilla warfare. Just remember that the Sabbat care nothing for the outcome of the mortal war. Their objectives are eschatological and not military. The targets are ancient cities, hidden graves and strongholds of the Ashirra, not military targets or civilians. It makes more sense infiltrating a group of Kurdish Peshmerga one week, a unit of private US military contractors the next and a Navy Seals Team the third than siding with a single Al-Qaeda or Daesh group for the duration.

A Crusade chronicle is a chance to tell war-stories from any number of perspectives, many of which are never represented in western news media. If you choose to feature the Crusade on-screen, rather than as a looming threat, be prepared to get out of the box to do your research and make sure players are fired up rather than put off by the idea of dealing with the war "over there" in a Storyteller game.

the Camarilla and the Ancients, is a desperate gamble. But it may yet prove to be exactly the kind of lie that changes history forever.

While even the inhumane Sabbat are taken aback by the massive loss of life in New York, the attack proves the unstoppable power of self-annihilating fanaticism. The fires rising from the rubble of the Camarilla's newest prize speaks louder than any words. The madness of the Crusade spreads. So far only the most blood-crazed of the Cainites have heeded the call, but as the new millennium marches on, the Gehenna-fanatics are positioned to drown out the rational voices of the Sect. Polonia knows that if either Vitel or the Camarilla pushes back successfully in North America, he may well take the blame for it. His only chance is feeding fire to the myth of Gehenna.

Of course, most Kindred who hear of Polonia's grand claims dismiss them. They know mortals can be horrible on their own, without a Lasombra's assistance.

The Dictator: Another strong claimant is Priscus Charles Delmare, who oversees the Sabbat's military activities throughout Central and South America. Formerly the Cardinal of South America, Charles VI (as he likes to be called) is both a brilliant politician and gifted military commander. He is also ruthless, manipulative, and willing to make and break deals with anyone in order to advance his own power. Amid the portents leading to the failed Gehenna Crusade, Charles saw opportunity and pushed for greater centralization of authority within the Sabbat. Once the Priscus learns of the current leadership crisis, he immediately relocates to Mexico City, bringing with him a retinue of many of South America's mightiest Sabbat elders to show off his connections and intimidate his rivals. Of course, by doing so he leaves numerous South American territories without strong leadership at a time when the Camarilla is organizing for counterrevolutions and native vampires are beginning to emerge from the shadows. His lust for power may doom the Latin front of the Gehenna Crusade to failure as forgotten entities rise to reclaim what was once theirs. If Delmare allies with the Inquisition, he may start a legitimate second front of the Crusade, but he will have to outwit Lucita and Sandoza to succeed.

The Revolutionary: Further complicating matters is the arrival of Charles' nemesis, Priscus Dominique Touraine, the unofficial leader of the Moderate faction. A longtime critic of the Code of Milan, Touraine also sees opportunity in the Regent's death, but instead of consolidating power, she

wants to roll back the abrogation of personal liberties imposed on the Sabbat by the more conservative factions in the past. She argues to any who will listen that the Sabbat should forego appointing a new Regent altogether and adopt a less centralized political structure, a position Ultra-Conservatives consider treasonous. Sabbat members from all factions risk being caught up in the diametrically-opposed political views of Touraine and Delmare.

The Inquisitor: Not everything in Mexico City is about the Regency. High Inquisitor Maria Sandoza supports her "older sister" as a candidate, but more importantly, she sees the potential for civil war as a chance to purge the Sabbat of diabolism and, in particular, to find and destroy the Baali Methuselah she believes is poisoning her Sect from within. A pack who discover evidence of infernalism will gain powerful boons from the Inquisitor, or be "rewarded" by being drafted into the Inquisition on a permanent basis.

Meanwhile, in Canada: Finally, though not on hand in Mexico City, Cardinal Kyle Strathcona of Montreal follows the events in Mexico City with a keen interest, and a growing dread. A disenchanted Moderate, Strathcona became convinced years ago that the Sabbat was becoming complacent and decadent. He concluded that what the Sect needed was a legitimate threat to worry about, such as the Camarilla invading Montreal. To that end, Strathcona has been quietly betraying the Sabbat for years, feeding information about Montreal to the Camarilla in the hope that when the enemy tries to take the city, it will galvanize the Sabbat out of its lethargy. To his horror, the Camarilla is finally poised to target Montreal, right as the attention of the entire Sabbat is focused on the leadership crisis and the Gehenna Crusade. That includes several of Strathcona's own supporters, who leave for Mexico in hopes of increasing their own political standing and influencing the new Sabbat leadership, possibly by killing fellow Sabbat with contrary views, if necessary. In the meantime, Montreal is now at risk of falling to the Camarilla, and it's entirely the Cardinal's own fault.

The Murder Investigation: The audacious murder of the Sabbat Regent is a mystery like no other. Who did it? And how? And why? Regardless of the pack's leanings, anyone who can answer these questions can demand extraordinary status from the rest of the Sabbat. But will the killers kill again to keep their secrets? Of course, the Regent who was killed wasn't really the Regent at all. Were the two killed by the same assailant? Or was Zachary Sikorsky slain by someone else with a grudge against the Regent who honestly didn't know who he was targeting?

Our World at War

The potential for a new Sabbat Civil War promises to be even more destructive than the last three. The Masquerade is far more fragile now than in the past, and the Camarilla much more aggressive in preserving it. Worse, the roots of the current crisis — infernalism, the Gehenna Crusade, corruption, infiltration by a Gehenna cult — threaten the foundations of the Sabbat like nothing else in its history. Here are some ways the civil war could play out.

The Inquisition Did It: Melinda Galbraith is slain by the Sabbat Inquisition. Maria Sandoza spent decades studying the Regent for signs of infernalism. She orders the Regent's assassination because Galbraith is about to awaken the Methuselah known as Nergal. She doesn't expose Galbraith because she fears the Sabbat will crumble if it were known the leader of the Sect was a pawn of such a monstrous creature. Instead, she allows Vasantasena and Jalan-Aajav their deception until she finds someone else who can serve as Regent and who she's certain will never turn to infernalism — the incorruptible Lucita.

The Assamites Did It: Large chunks of the Tremere antitribu are wiped out by an Assamite — specifically, the Methuselah Ur-Shulgi, who sacrifices the entire bloodline in preparation for breaking the blood curse on his Clan. Later, he, or an Assamite under his orders, kills Galbraith to cover up the earlier crime. Once it's clear the Assamites are no longer in thrall to the Tremere curse, most of the Assamite antitribu elders (including nearly all of those in the Black Hand) return to the parent Clan. At the same time, Assamites opposed to Ur-Shulgi's agenda flee Alamut's reach, many of them joining the same Sabbat their peers abandon.

The True Black Hand Did It: Elimelech kills Galbraith (and possibly the Spellbinders as well) in order to weaken the Sabbat on the eve of a Gehenna that doesn't happen. Consumed with eschatological fantasies, he and the other True Black Hand members abandon the Sabbat for their fortress in the Underworld and watch the once-mighty Sect topple, the Antediluvians' only true opponent destroying itself from within.

No One Did It: Confounding everyone's beliefs, Regent Galbraith fakes her own Final Death at the command of her master, Nergal. Her will

consumed by that of the ancient Baali, she spends a decade preparing dark rituals to awaken her master. She sets in motion the death of the false Regent and the other Sabbat luminaries in order to draw the most powerful members of the Sect to Mexico City. When she lights the fuse, those Sabbat elders turn on one another, and the scent of their spilt blood awakens the obscenity slumbering beneath the city.

The Counterrevolution: Regardless of who becomes Regent, the Sabbat is torn apart and vulnerable to its enemies. Sensing weakness, the Camarilla moves to reclaim cities across the Americas. In particular, Lady Anne of London is spendthrift in her desire to crush the Sabbat, oblivious to how much she weakens her own domain and leaves it open to being overthrown by a resurgent local Sabbat under the command of Monty Coven (see London Calling p.78).

The Aftermath: Eventually, *someone* becomes Regent, with that person's politics shaping the Sect for many years to come. Regent Lucita, the most reluctant of the potential candidates, will probably continue the status quo policies of her predecessor (minus the infernalism) but with greater support for the Inquisition and appropriate respect for the Loyalist views of her patron, Vasantasena. The Sect as a whole will focus more on averting Gehenna by any means necessary. Regent Polonia, would be more conservative, focusing on defeating the Antediluvians, facing them and their greatest servants on the battlefields of the Middle East and the streets of Chicago. If he wins, the Camarilla will be forced to intervene in the madness of mortal war, a theater where Polonia believes them to be at their weakest. Regent Charles Demare, on the other hand, would run the Sabbat as a junta with handpicked allies appointed to run the Black Hand and the Inquisition. While the Sabbat as an institution would be better organized, it would face a constant membership drain as younger, less powerful members (including most of the Panders) defect to the Anarch Movement. Demare's rival, Dominique Touraine, would probably never accept the title of Regent and would likely abolish much of the Sect's political structure. In many ways, a Loyalist-Moderate Sabbat would essentially be a more violent Anarch Movement, albeit one more gripped by fears of Gehenna. Only time will tell who emerges victorious, but however the dice fall, the consequences for the world of Cainites and mortals alike will be unimaginable.



HANDS OF DARKNESS

Temple of Eternal Whispers, Montreal, Canada

Out of the frying pan, into the fire. I finally departed Mexico City – for Montreal.

With the new Regent deliberations in full swing, Lucita received a summons from Cardinal Strathcona in Montreal – he wants an outsider to investigate a string of attacks in his domain. Lucita jumped on the invitation, which I'm sure had nothing to do with Sandoza advocating her as Regent. Either way, here I am. At least now I am certain Lucita owes me.

Angels greeted us at the airport: Raphael, who could only be a Leper, and a doll-like creature aptly named Cherubim. They escorted us to the Temple of Eternal Whispers, an eerie and beautiful mausoleum. Whispers echoed through the halls – no, I did not to stop to listen – as the angels took us to a domed chamber: impossibly large, with staircases spiraling up to two more levels, and stained-glass décor depicting Gehenna. I'd love to examine the latter more closely some time.

Archbishop Benezri personally welcomed us to Montreal, and even presented us with gifts: a Glock with a bone-handle for Lucita (a gaudy thing its new owner immediately took a shine to) and a copy of the 1961 Gideon "misprint" for myself, the one with extended addenda on Elimelech and Lazarus – either a bad Seer prank, or an attempt to break the Masquerade. The Camarilla spent considerable effort tracking down all copies, so I was quite pleased to finally get my hands on one. Lucita failed

to mention this gift-giving ceremony, but fortunately she brought something from both of us: a vellum parchment of Arcadian poetry. I shall have to ask Cesare how she managed to break into the plane's safe, exactly.

Lucita and I mingled afterward. I recorded two conversations, and make a note of one other; with a neonate by name of Julien. He was quite a fan of mine, following me around and pestering me with questions about my infamy. Lucita was rather amused with the situation, but she never saw his eyes: dark, mesmerizing orbs bearing a darkness far more ancient than a neonate's.

Revelation from the Archbishop

Beckett: Greetings, your Eminence.

Benezri: Greetings, wanderer. Please, call me Alfred.

Beckett: Alright, Alfred. Benezri, if I recall?

Benezri: Indeed. You have a fine memory, and — I suspect — a finer trove of knowledge. I should like to pick your brain sometime.

Beckett: I'd rather you not.

Benezri: [Laughter] I meant figuratively. I am not a Fiend.

Beckett: May I inquire after your lineage?

Benezri: I am a Pander.

Beckett: The Sabbat term for a Clanless?

Benezri: Sword of Caine, please. Sabbat is such a crass name. And not a Clanless — a Pander. The distinction matters.

Beckett: I'm afraid my trove of knowledge fails me, but I am keen to learn.

Benezri: We have cut ties with our sires, and the lineage from which they hail.

Beckett: How is that possible?

Benezri: By the genius of Joseph Pander — a Cainite smarter even than you.

Beckett: No doubt. And everyone is fine with this?

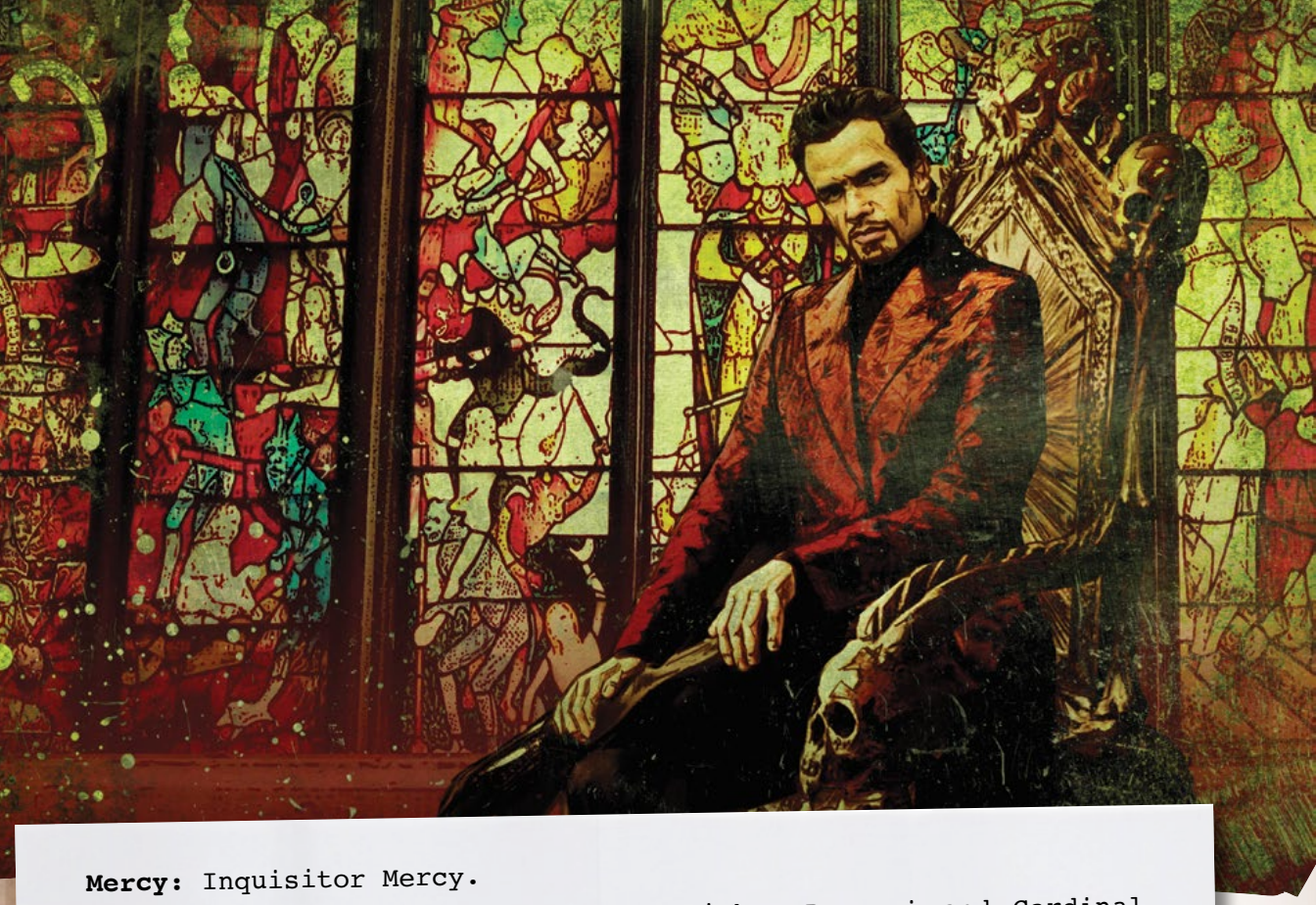
Benezri: They should celebrate it. We are what the Sword of Caine strives to be: free from the machinations of the Blood. Our inner crusade is over. Soon the outer one must begin in earnest.

Freedom is an illusion. -A

Communion With Mercy

Mercy: Rumor has it you're investigating the disappearances.

Beckett: No, my friend is. I am merely the ride. I didn't catch your name?



Mercy: Inquisitor Mercy.

Beckett: Inquisitor? I believe Archbishop Benezri and Cardinal Strathcona are, too?

Mercy: The Archbishop and Cardinals are of the Shepherds of Caine. I am a Talon. We are all Inquisitors in name, but they recently seem more interested in holding power than destroying the infernal. It's corpses like them that hold us back from the crusade.

Beckett: They don't mind you saying this?

Mercy: They haven't stopped me. But my relation with the Archbishop isn't the topic. I came to tell you the source of the disappearances is infernal, which makes it *my* jurisdiction.

Beckett: Can you explain how you came to this conclusion?

Mercy: Because it's *always* infernalists in this city. I finally destroyed Sangris and his ilk in 1998, and that should have been the end of it — but the Archbishop has lost sight of what matters. Now it returns.

Beckett: Sangris returns?

Mercy: No. I killed him — twice. The problems go back further. A presence rests under Montreal, and *it* is the power behind Sangris and — I am certain — the current threat.

Beckett: Do you have a name for this being?

Mercy: No. Demons are apt at hiding.

Beckett: Interesting theory. Thank y—

Mercy: I'm not done.

Beckett: Oh.

Mercy: You and your friend are welcome to run your own investigation, but don't interfere with mine. If we cross paths, my inquiries take precedence. If you mess with my work in any way, shape, or form, you will learn why my name is quite ironic. Clear?

Beckett: Crystal.

En Route to Unknown Location, Montreal, Canada

The night came to an end, for me at least, when the Sabbat flipped mortals over the railings above. They were hogtied, flesh cut in advance and bones broken in the fall. I heard the soft hisses of the Beast around me, though the Sabbat contained their hunger – I suspect they were waiting for approval from the Archbishop. Lucita insisted I leave, and I would have reminded her I have seen – and done – far worse, but something in her expression stopped me. Sometimes, pulling others back from the brink is the only humanity we have left. I acquiesced and departed under the guidance of a Frère Marc.

Sparing you violence. Maybe she can come back to us yet.-A

A Matter of Death

Beckett: Could I interview you while we drive?

Frère Marc: You are a scholar, *n'est pas*?

Beckett: I am a procurer of knowledge.

Frère Marc: If you answer mine, *tiguidou.*

Beckett: That seems fair. How many Kindred disappeared so far?

Frère Marc: You'd do well not to use that term here. We are not *Kindred* – we are Cainites. But to answer your question: four. One nomad meeting up with the Navigators, and the entire Rashan coven.

Beckett: Seems early for the Cardinal to call in outside help.

Frère Marc: [Scoffs] You traveled the world – do all people die the same? Do Asians, or First Nations, go to the same afterlife as Europeans?

Beckett: A complicated question. A man is a man – take apart an Asian and a European, and you find them the same. The afterlife though, ties in to more than just physicality. I suppose it matters if you believe in *one* god, or not. If you do, then all souls are judged on the same criteria: did they live well, were they baptized – whatever your one god finds important. However, if you believe Yama is as real a god as Jaweh, then perhaps Asian people *do* die differently. I have no clear-cut answer.

We should talk about souls someday, Beckett. -A

Frère Marc: Hm. *Drette-la.*

Beckett: This is a subway station.

Frère Marc: *Suivez moi.*

[Recording stops, then resumes.]

Beckett: Lovely accommodations.

Frère Marc: Don't be *malcommode.*

Beckett: In that case I humbly question the security of this… boiler room.

Frère Marc: *Fourer le chien,* you have the sole key.

Beckett: Of course I do.

Frère Marc: There are also broken tiles — you can squeeze in to the ground, eh?

Beckett: Lovely. You know, I have a plane waiting. I could sleep there.

Frère Marc: *J'ai-tu une poigner dans le dos?* The Archbishop demand you stay and *aidez* in the investigation.

Beckett: I see.

Frère Marc: He personally vouches for your safety.

Beckett: I feel so much better already.

St. James United Church, Montreal, Canada

The boiler room I slept in is part of the Underground City — a network of metro lines, government offices and shopping malls the Sabbat claim is wholly theirs. They are wrong. A dark being beckoned me as I rested. Curiosity might have gotten the better of me in my youth, but now I recognized the spider's lure. Even then, it took all my strength not to obey. I woke tired and on edge.

Frère Marc called on me (and Lucita) shortly after. A pack was under attack, and we should investigate. He gave us a location, St. James United Church, and keys to a station wagon. I'm glad Lucita, at some point over the centuries, learned to drive. That, however, was our only lucky break.

St. James, where I write this, lies abandoned and desecrated. The air is rife with the scent of blood, thick and rotten — according to Lucita, the Sabbat dump the bodies of their prey in the catacombs below. Worse than the stench though, are the mortals lumbering around. Homeless, teeth rotten from methamphetamine and arms riddled with needle holes. Disease and death surround them.

We found one surviving Sabbat, cowering in the nave. She was gibbering, clutching the many crucifixes around her neck, and cutting nails into her skin to carve a crescent moon. The only recognizable word she spoke was Dastur. We could have coaxed more out of her, but Mercy arrived with three other Sabbat. She claimed the survivor, and I was too drained from my daytime battle to resist her. Our one lead is gone.

On Dastur Anosh

Lucita: Don't act sullen, it doesn't become you. If you and Aristotle had interviewed me more, perhaps Dastur would be in that book of yours.

Beckett: It's not *my* book. But go ahead: What is Dastur?

Lucita: *Who.* Dastur Anosh was antitribu of the Saracens, and the first Seraph of the Black Hand.

Beckett: First Seraph. So a founding member?

Lucita: As far as anyone was, yes.

Beckett: Anything more specific?

Lucita: He was born during the age of Zoroaster, and led an enterprising existence. Nothing explains why his name pops up here. Maybe the Sabbat was invoking him for protection? "Dastur save me?"

Beckett: Would he?

Lucita: Maybe. He used to be pretty hands on. He's also dead though, so unlikely to help at this point.

Temple of Eternal Whispers, Montreal, Canada

Sabbat neonates are violent, blood thirsty, and travel in swarms. Their elders are far more dangerous – a Sabbat elder can take anything and keep going. They practice that in their rituals, slashing and burning their own bodies beyond the breaking point. Only the strongest survive. If this rumored crusade hits the ground I fear for the world.

The Archbishop invited us to witness the Litany of Blood, a remembrance ceremony, at the Temple. Lucita has that right, as Sabbat herself. I suspect someone sponsored my attendance, but I am not certain who.

Fire lined the room and I felt the Beast rise, but one Sabbat – a blind woman – hummed an oddly-soothing melody. The combined effect was intoxicating – like I was floating atop a churning ocean, feeling the waves lapping at me and knowing they could not pull me under.

You mean they couldn't pull you under <u>now</u>. Just wait.-A

Another woman recited the names of the fallen. At each name, Sabbat stepped forward and she inspected them like cattle, selecting the most eager. She carved the names, ancestry, and deeds of the slain into their skin with a white-hot knife. Twice, she needed more than one body, and the Sabbat leaped forward at this chance to honor their destroyed brethren.

When she finished writing, the true trial began. A third woman stepped forward – barely acknowledging the volunteers, she looked into the audience. I felt her emerald eyes burn into mine, as if saying "if they can endure, you must endure to watch." She stripped their skin with her hands. They never made a sound during the writing, but they screamed now, all of them, yet not a single one begged to stop.

Finally, pack members came to gather the volunteers. They whispered encouragement to them, but did not let them heal. Not until the women were done, gathering up the skin and sewing them into a vellum book, did the packs feed their wounded – affirming the bonds of Vaulderie and granting them the vitae to heal.

This would make me sick, if I still could be. Sabbat vitae are twisted, but undeniably powerful.-O



Ezekiel: Is this your first ritual?

Beckett: First, no. But the most extensive so far.

Ezekiel: Planning to see more?

Beckett: Perhaps. I'm afraid I missed your name.

Ezekiel: Ezekiel.

Beckett: The angel of vengeance?

Ezekiel: Not so vengeful. Not always. I probably won't punish you for hiding that recorder. I aim for those who betray the Sabbat.

Beckett: You're an Inquisitor, like Mercy?

Ezekiel: She and I are of a mind. How goes your investigation?

Beckett: Not well. Inquisitor Mercy may know more.

Ezekiel: Ah, she mentioned the Church. But neither here nor there — I wanted to speak about something else.

Beckett: Go ahead.

Ezekiel: Strange events visited Montreal recently: celestial bodies, dark visions, blood curses.

Beckett: Ah yes. It was a global thing, one might say.

Ezekiel: Does a man of your renown know what caused it?

Beckett: Nothing I can speak of with certainty.

Ezekiel: And without certainty?

Beckett: [Pause] An end time, of sorts, though averted or delayed. Or an end that has just begun.

Ezekiel: The effects passed everywhere?

Beckett: As far as anyone can tell, yes. Why?

Ezekiel: Curiosity is all.

Beckett: Curiosity.

Ezekiel: Yes. [With emphasis] Let us not speak of it again.

Underground City near Mont Royal Station, Montreal, Canada

I slept above ground this day, and that helped. Lucita has an equally-paltry room nearby, so at least I'm not singled out for being Autarkis. Tonight, we pick up the chase again. Lucita has a lead. I hesitantly admit I'm starting to enjoy myself. Being on the trail with her reminds me of simpler times.

We visited Heaven, a nightclub run by a Kindred named Rose. They have a dress code involving quite a few leather straps — Lucita helpfully acquired a change of clothes

I miss you, too.-A

for me. The location of Heaven is a guarded secret, and Lucita followed Sabbat code to get us there. I'm not quite sure how that process worked, but it involved driving aimlessly about (for three long hours), parking the car, and admiring graffiti which my companion likened to "poetry laid out in a cryptogram."

Whatever shall they think of next?

By Any Other Name

Beckett: Thank you for meeting with us, Rose.

The Rose: The Rose, please.

Beckett: Apologies, The Rose. Lovely club. Very leather chic.

The Rose: [Silence]

Beckett: You mentioned knowledge of the attacks?

The Rose: Are you familiar with the black crescent-moon tattoo?

Beckett: It's the symbol for a Sabbat fighting force, I believe?

The Rose: The Black Hand. Called so because the tattoo goes on the hand.

Beckett: This ties into the attacks?

The Rose: Three covens were attacked, and one lone nomad. All attacks involved members of the Black Hand.

I like this The Rose.-O

Beckett: No one else mentioned tattoos.

The Rose: I see people at their most vulnerable. I notice things.

Beckett: At their most vulnerable?

Lucita: Doesn't matter now, Beckett. The Rose, you mentioned knowing the next victim?

The Rose: I have one other client who carries the crescent: Marie Lebeau. She's new in town, and joined the Orphelins. You find them in an abandoned oil refinery in East End. My slave will give you the address.

Beckett: Client? Slave?

Lucita: Beckett, let's go! We have a lead!

East End, Montreal, Canada

Having spent time amongst the Sabbat, in Mexico City and Montreal, I realize violence isn't just a means to an end. It is a way of existence: They exult in it. So I asked Lucita to transcribe the event, in her own words.

The Monster's View

Gunshots rang as we approached the refinery — a desolate place still heavy with the stink of crude oil. Four bikes and one van were parked outside. I could tell you their number plates to the last digit. I can tell you how many birds circled the air, startled from their nests. Or that a mother cat was hiding under a grate with her kittens. But that isn't why you asked me to write this. You asked because you wanted the monster's view.

You want to know how it felt.

The cold, dark blood on my arms when I ripped that boy apart. I saw the terror in his eyes: he didn't ask for this, but then again none of us did. His mouth opened and closed, as if he forgot he didn't have to breathe, as I ripped his head off his shoulders. He was still soft inside — not like us, old and shriveled, but pliant. I bet he still had dirt behind his ears.

I'm not sure why I killed the second. Because she moved, I suppose. A dark blur against the back of the refinery signaling an incoming threat. Woefully slow — I hit her with each shot, moving my uzi quicker than she could ever run. All my shadow had to do then, was creep inside the bullet holes and her dead veins, and finish what was left.

What a perfect symphony we make. You playing defense, me playing offense. The Orphelins circling Marie as attackers kept coming at her. That's how we knew who she was. One vampire the clear target — marked for death by them, and for questioning by us.

I pulled the last attacker off her even as she turned to ashes. He clawed at my skin, digging his fingers into my flesh. I would have killed him for the Orphelins, but you told me no, we need him for questioning.

That was it for you. You were already back at the car, planning your next move. I asked the Orphelins about Marie — how long she had been a part of their coven, their family. I offered to come to her Litany, while you wrote in that journal you love more than any of us.

You wanted the monster's view, Beckett. You needn't have asked me.

Wolf Man:	That was unexpected.
Slay Queen:	I hope you're in a cab and not driving yourself? I'm still cleaning — I got a fire hose from the hallway.
Wolf Man:	Lucita!

Slay Queen:	He is flesh-ooze on the floor, Beckett. Literally.
Wolf Man:	Point taken.
Wolf Man:	Did you see anything like this before?
Slay Queen:	A vampire losing coalescence and coagulating into strange new forms, while screaming “OUT! OUT!” No, that one is new.
Wolf Man:	Any theories?
Slay Queen:	He *_pulled_* at me during the fight and my flesh felt… Like Vykos does?
Wolf Man:	He flesh crafted himself to Final Death?
Slay Queen:	Your guess is as good as mine.
Wolf Man:	We reach another dead end.
Slay Queen:	Maybe not. Remember he gushed blood from his eyes — all of them?
Wolf Man:	I doubt I shall ever forget.
Slay Queen:	Monçada told me a story that, loathe as I am to repeat anything of his, seems relevant: the Lost Tribe.
Wolf Man:	Doesn’t ring a bell.
Slay Queen:	The Lost Tribe was a group of Assamites who worshiped the petrified form of Zillah. She turned into stone watching the slaughter of her brothers. A *_weeping_* stone. Dastur was their leader.
Wolf Man:	A weeping stone.
Slay Queen:	Legends are often incredulous, Beckett, but that doesn’t mean they’re not true. You’re a nocturnal creature who turns into a wolf.
Wolf Man:	Only when occasion warrants it, but point again taken.
Slay Queen:	The Lost Tribe believed Zillah deserved vengeance on the killers. When the Anarch Revolt claimed to destroy two of them centuries later, the Lost Tribe merged with them. They became the elite of the Sabbat — the Manus Nigrum.
Wolf Man:	Someone following in the footsteps of Dastur and the Lost Tribe, is killing members of their *_own_* secret society? Why?
Slay Queen:	That’s the missing piece of the puzzle.
Wolf Man:	I’ve arrived at the Temple to talk to Beatrice L’Anjou, a Sabbat scholar. Perhaps you could call your doting sister? She must know more of the demon that Inquisitor Mercy mentioned.
Slay Queen:	Still cleaning — I think I need scrub brushes. I’ll call Sandoza after.

The Librarian

Beckett: Lucita forgot to mention you also performed the Litany of Blood.

Beatrice: I am the keeper of the Liber Defuctorum.

Beckett: And the woman who flayed them?

Beatrice: Molly 8, a member of my coven. Would you like to meet her?

Beckett: I'm sure she's fascinating, but I have little time.

Beatrice: Fair. Tell me why you are here?

Beckett: I seek knowledge of the Sabbat's earliest days. The Black Hand and the Lost Tribe.

Beatrice: [Pause] Where did you hear those names?

Beckett: Like you, I am a scholar of history. Anything you can tell me would be of value.

[SILENCE]

Beckett: It ties to the recent killings.

[More silence]

Beckett: I do believe Strathcona wanted me and my compatriot to get to the bottom of this.

Beatrice: [Tersely] The Lost Tribe is one of the founding factions of the Sabbat. While we are rightly called the Sword of *Caine*, we also fight for the Father's last remaining childe.

Beckett: Zillah the Wise.

Beatrice: Indeed.

Beckett: Does Zillah, or the Lost Tribe, have any enemies?

Beatrice: Other than the Ancients, the Camarilla, and all their lackeys?

Beckett: Yes, well, maybe closer to home? Perhaps another faction in the Black Hand?

Beatrice: [Pause] Come with me.

[RECORDING STOPS, THE CONTINUES]

Beckett: Oh, my. What a marvelous library. Is that the first book of the Marrakesh Codex? Might I–

Beatrice: Focus, please. See this symbol here?

Beckett: A crescent moon. The Black Hand?

Beatrice: Not of the Manus Nigrum. This symbol, a crescent moon against an eclipse, denotes the *Hand Without Sun*.

Beckett: I have never heard of them.

Beatrice: Because they are no more. The Hand Without Sun was an ancient cult that worshiped dead gods, the Ancients above all. They infiltrated all walks of Cainite power, including both Sects and the Black Hand. The first Seraph uncovered their influence and destroyed them.

Beckett: I see.

Beatrice: Does this aid your investigation?

Beckett: Quite. Did Inquisitor Mercy tell you the lone survivor called for Dastur?

Beatrice: The Inquisitor and I speak as little as possible. But this is very interesting. I shall seek her out.

Beckett: That information repays what you told me about the Hand Without Sun?

Beatrice: I suppose it does. Go then, and finish your investigation.

Called Sandoza:

* Infernal Presence - Earth (maybe disease) demon. Lives underground. Seduces Kindred and kine, its cult keeps popping up. Inquisition hides its existence so young Salubat don't seek it out to "prove their worth" and fall prey. Probably not our guy/gal/it.

* Attacks on Salubat - Global attacks targeting the Manus Nigrum. (Why the f did she not tell us this sooner?! GD1 sisters!)

* Inquisitor Mercy - Sandoza persuaded her to share her investigation with us. Main gist: church survivor is a Seer named Diana Perez. Does not remember the attack, or anything that can help other than the name "Dastur Anosh". Mercy believes her mind has been tampered with (no shit), but that Perez poses no further threat. Will likely release her at some point.

En Route to St. James United Church, Montreal, Canada

We catch a break on night three! Inquisitor Mercy, suddenly helpful after talking to the High Inquisitor, promised to keep us in the loop. She just called: Another attack is underway at St. James Church.





Nightmasters On Camera!

By Babaloo Smithers

Shock in Montreal, as a group of teenagers capture a group they dub "the Nightmasters" engaged in a battle on the streets of St. James! My editor believes this is just a viral video promoting an upcoming movie, but can we be sure?? Take a look at these highlights, and then check the video out yourself on our website!

HIGHLIGHTS

0:00 Female Nightmaster emerges from a rift, leading from "Nibiru" to Earth.

Nightmasters see through their hands — observe how she touches everything.

2:42 A Nightmaster of a rival tribe arrives and attacks!

2:43 The first Nightmaster summons servants from Nibiru to aid her.

6:07 Sword Battle!

8:02 More Nightmasters! Guy in trenchcoat (bad-a), plump chick in leather (eww), hot chick in leather (hot!).

8:17 Dual guns from hot Nightmaster!

8:32 The first Nightmaster disappears. Is that a rift to Nibiru? The second Nightmaster gives chase.

9:12 Ass-shot of the hot Nightmaster as they get in the car. Booyah!

Fifteen. Interesting detail.-O

FURTHER READING

Nightmasters Of Nibiru: Aliens Visit Earth

The Fifteen Tribes Of Nibiru

Civil War on Nibiru

ALSO BY BABALOO SMITHERS:

1. Jesus In Cereal In East End!
2. Giant Beaver In Lake Attacks!
3. Nightmasters: Friends or Foes?

Pierre-Elliott-Trudeau Airport, Montreal, Canada

We've gone a full night without attacks. The Archbishop invited me to celebrate this victory, but I declined – one Sabbat rite is enough. He suggested I keep silent about Dastur, the Lost Tribe, and the Hand Without Sun. As if I can't keep a secret.

I studied the video of the event. The Sabbat uphold no Masquerade, but Mercy visited the vlogger to speak about body shaming. I believe he will never make

that mistake again – or indeed, any other. Okulos was kind enough, after I reminded him of a boon he owes me, to run the first "nightmaster's" face through SchreckNET archives, and her name comes back as Samira Hamadi.

Unfortunately, that is the only thing Okulos was able to find – no lineage, Sect, or other identifying characteristics. Okulos isn't even sure it's her real name, rather than an alias. Whatever else, she is – a spirit thaumaturgist or necromancer – that "rift to Nibiru" was some manner of illusion, maybe a passageway to the Netherworld, or some Abyss-born gift. As for the second "nightmaster" – I didn't need Okulos to identify him. He wore a different form, but I recognized those eyes when he turned to the camera: dark, mesmerizing orbs that hold an ancient darkness.

Inquisitor Mercy released young Diana Perez, the survivor of the first attack. I had an opportunity to briefly speak with her, and while she still remembers nothing she mentioned visions of a "weeping woman". She now travels east to find this woman – an interesting development, and one that I'll keep an eye on.

I bade adieu to Lucita. Cardinal Strathcona and Archbishop Benezri both vowed to support her bid for Regency. She was quite displeased with how that turned out, but I found it rather amusing in an ironic way – I daresay it could not have gone better for Sandoza had she planned it.

This makes us even steven, Beckett. -O



Dark Montreal

Montreal is the spiritual heart of the Sabbat. Cainites here know the Sabbat is more than a foil to the Camarilla, more than a violent killing-machine that terrifies mortals: they are the Sword of Caine. They follow in the footsteps of the Dark Father, in his righteous anger. God thinks to elevate man above all others? The Sabbat grinds them under its heel. Antediluvians slay Caine's childer? The Sabbat will destroy them and salt the earth where they fall.

Most of the below plots deal with the conflict at the core of this chapter — the Black Hand versus the Tal'Mahe'Ra — but a few delve deeper into the nightly politics of Montreal. Whatever the Storyteller throws at the characters should be *possible* — don't send them after Dastur Anosh, unless, through clever planning, they can defeat him.

Darkness Divided

The Black Hand are the elite warriors and priests of the Sabbat. Some serve out of self-interest, believing Caine will spare them when he rises. Others serve because it's *right* — because the Antediluvians are bastards who need to put in their place, and Zillah deserves her vengeance. Dastur Anosh is of the latter camp. Childe and pupil to the Weeping Master, he drank the bloody tears of petrified Zillah and feels her torment nightly. When the cowardly Anarchs signed the Treaty of Thorns, Dastur joined his Lost Tribe to the remaining rebels and propelled them forward into the Sabbat.

Dastur wasn't alone in marrying his cause to the Sabbat. The Tal'Mahe'Ra, more ancient even than the Lost Tribe, worships the Antediluvians in the Underworld city of Enoch. The Tal'Mahe'Ra, or Hand Without Sun, realized the threat the Sabbat formed and sought to undermine the Sect through infiltration. For centuries the two cults miraculously avoided each other. Their goals were similar — infiltrate and use the Sabbat — and they even shared similar symbols: a crescent moon for the Lost Tribe, and a crescent moon against an eclipse for the Tal'Mahe'Ra. When Dastur finally uncovered the Tal'Mahe'Ra, their influence was near-complete and he had only one choice left: total transparency. Calling a meeting of the Sabbat elite, the Manus Nigrim, he laid out the entire history of the Lost Tribe. Knowing they held the blessing of Zillah herself, and how far their history reached, the Black Hand was invigorated. They rose as one to drive the Tal'Mahe'Ra out.

The Black Hand believed Dastur dead when he disappeared in 1766. They appointed four Seraphim to replace him, who continued to lead the Sabbat on its nightly path — as the Tal'Mahe'Ra slowly crept back in. Now though, the Seraphim returns. Using Montreal's neonates and ancillae as unwitting agents, Dastur hunts the Tal'Mahe'Ra. The Methuselah grants his agents the ability to see the crescent-eclipse tattoo, which Tal'Mahe'Ra sorcery normally obscures. They don't know what the tattoo means, but instinctively follow and observe the wearer. When the time is right, Dastur employs them to attack the target. The Rose is one of these agents: They're excellent at uncovering secrets, and their brand of Zoroastrian Catharism resonates with Dastur.

V20 The Black Hand holds more on the Tal'Mahe'Ra, and **V20 Children of the Revolution** yields an entry on Dastur Anosh.

- Dastur chooses the protagonists as agents, and they seek out and collect information on the Tal'Mahe'Ra without consciously realizing it. Every night, upon rising, they roll Willpower at difficulty 8 to break Dastur's hold. If one succeeds, he visits her in person — impressed by her resilience — and *asks* her to help. Even if they continue their task under Dastur's control, the Black Hand applauds them for uncovering (or destroying) a Tal'Mahe'Ra agent. The Black Hand invites the characters to their esteemed ranks, or the characters can follow the trail of the Lost Tribe and the Tal'Mahe'Ra further.
- The characters witness an attack and intervene — unknowingly saving a member of the Tal'Mahe'Ra. Fate, aided by Dastur Anosh, has a way of righting itself though, and the characters start on an investigation to uncover and right their mistake. The Black Hand rewards them on destroying the Tal'Mahe'Ra. Alternatively, the Tal'Mahe'Ra agent cuts a deal and invites them to his cult. The tribulations of Beckett and Lucita, above, can work as a template.
- The characters are a kamut — a special-ops Black Hand coven — and Cardinal Kyle Strathcona tasks them to investigate the attacks. This sets them on a parallel investigation to Beckett and Lucita. As elite members of the Sabbat, the characters have ample leeway to pursue leads and even their own interests.
- Dastur Anosh isn't the only prophet of Zillah. One of the characters, possibly a Malkavian or a devout Ductus, has visions of the Weeping Stone in its desolate valley in the Middle East. The Lost Tribe seeks her out, offering the character and her coven entry in the Lost Tribe. While this sto-

ry starts with one character receiving visions, all should hold their own place in the Lost Tribe.

- The characters are neither Black Hand, nor Sabbat. They are Tal'Mahe'Ra agents, come to investigate who is killing them, and why. Thrust together for this mission, they must work out their hierarchy and differences while on the trail of an ancient enemy — Dastur Anosh.

What Lies Below

Metathiax, a disease demon, lies bound under Mont Royal in Montreal. He calls Kindred and kine alike, subverting them to his will as seeks to drown the city in disease. Metathiax feeds on the recently Embraced, devouring them in their earthen graves before they can claw their way out — drastically cutting back on successful Creation Rites in Montreal.

- When a Montreal Cainite Embraces a mortal, roll a die. On a 1, Metathiax devours the childe. If the Creation Rite takes place on Mont Royal, roll two dice instead. Surviving Mont Royal confers a Status dot on sire and childe.

- If the protagonists begin as mortals, have them encounter the demon during their Creation Rite. This event goes beyond the single die role described above — the demon lures their soul into his hellish realm, where they must use their wits and courage to escape him. When (or if) the characters emerge from their grave, they carry a mark of the battle — the demon's talons raked across their flesh — and this immediately sets them above other neonates.

- Metathiax hates the First Nations above all, as the indigenous people of Montreal bound him. No one of the First Nations has survived the Embrace so far — a problem that intrigues and vexes Frère Marc. If one of the characters (Embraced out of Montreal) is of the First Nations, Frère Marc will offer her riches and favors to let him re-bury her. If she agrees, the demon comes after her in full force. Not a defenseless neonate though, she should have a fair chance to survive the ordeal and report back to Frère Marc.

- The demon prepares the bodies of stolen Embraces, rotten and mad with disease, to overrun the sewers. Soon they spill into the Underground City the Sabbat claims as its own. All covens must fight to stop the invasion.

A Game of Archbishops

Montreal has seen its share of Archbishops: Kyle Strathcona (now Cardinal of Canada), Veronique La Cruelle (fallen to Metathiax, unbeknownst to the Sabbat), Sangris the Serpent (Inquisitor Mercy killed him for consorting with Metathiax), Carolina Valez (stepped down voluntarily after striking a deal with Benezri), and finally Alfred Benezri. Now another Cainite seeks the title: Ezekiel, leader of 25:17 — a coven comprised exclusively of Black Hand members.

Ezekiel's ambitions come to a halt, temporarily at least, when he contracts a unique strain of Blood Rot via a Grimaldi revenant. The Serpent suspects either the strange events happening globally (which Beckett tentatively believes to be an averted or cyclical Gehenna), or Valez and Benezri. He's correct on the latter— Benezri's blood magic altered the curse once afflicting the Cainites of Berlin, and Valez delivered the infected ghoul to Ezekiel. The more potent variant spontaneously recurs even when Ezekiel finds a cure.

- Ezekiel believes he found a permanent cure for his disease in an ancient tome: Le Mystérie Rubix. The tome's current owner is a Vancouver Deceiver. Ezekiel hires the characters to retrieve it from the Ravnos. He doesn't want to start his reign at war with Independent Vancouver though, so discretion is key.

- Mercy, one of Ezekiel's allies, tires of him dragging his heels. Events with the Tal'Mahe'Ra prove the Sword of Caine grows weak, and she wants Ezekiel in charge immediately. She tasks the protagonists to ambush Archbishop Benezri and leave evidence implicating Ezekiel, to force his hand. The characters can't be *too* thorough — Benezri used to be Mercy's mentor. She wants him removed from power, but not dead.

The Camarilla Comes

Cardinal Strathcona has been feeding former Justicar di Zagreb information about Montreal for years, hoping to goad the Camarilla into attacking. This is not a trap for the Camarilla, nor is it a true betrayal of the Sabbat. Instead, the Cardinal fears the Sabbat has lost its way and no longer recognizes its glorious purpose. He hopes a serious threat to Montreal will sharpen the Sword of Caine again.

- The Camarilla sends the protagonists undercover. Pretending to be a nomadic pack, they must gather information and poison the Sabbat's members against each other. They need a good story though, as the Librarians coven in Montreal keeps detailed records of Sabbat affiliates.

- The characters work for Prince Siegfried of the Independent city Vancouver. Siegfried possesses the Spear of Bathel: a relic that shields the wielder from damage, while slaying any foe it even scratches. He wants the characters to — discreety — sell the weapon to the highest bidder in Montreal, and doesn't

Blood Rot

Blood Rot is a contagious disease that spreads through blood and vitae alike. In mortals, whose bodies constantly renew and replenish their blood, the disease expresses as a nasty flu — requiring either doctor's attention or a Stamina roll at difficulty 6 to shake. Cainites, whose vitae is inert and static, suffer far deadlier consequences.

Most Cainites contract Blood Rot after feeding from an infected vessel, though an enemy could infect them through rituals such as Engaging The Vessel of Transference (see **V20**, p.231). After this initial exposure, the Cainite rolls Stamina + Fortitude roll at difficulty 8 to avoid infection. If they fail, and contract the disease, they must make another Stamina + Fortitude roll at difficulty 7, weekly — failure means the disease rots their body, and they lose one dot from a physical trait (player's choice).

A level 4 adaptation of Purify Blood (see **V20 Rites of the Blood**, p.147) targets a creature's blood still inside her, to cure Blood Rot and its effects. Completely draining a creature of blood does the same (and likely causes death for a mortal, while risking torpor and Final Death for a vampire). Neither cure prevents against future infection.

care if this endeavor ends in a new Archbishop. This draws the attention of the Anathema Dylan Bruce, who enthusiastically seeks weapons bearing immense destructive power.

Darkness Resolved

The Tal'Mahe'Ra is an immediate threat to Montreal's Sabbat, but not the only one — war with the Camarilla looms, and Metathiax is a permanent danger. Depending on where the characters place their allegiance, and whether they're successful or not, the possible outcomes vary. The Storyteller can mix and match as she sees fit.

- Dastur kills the last Tal'Mahe'Ra in Montreal. The Sabbat celebrates for a week — by the end of it, mortals barricade their doors in the evening and cower until dawn. The Sabbat emboldens — when the Camarilla attacks, the Sword of Caine is in a strong position.
- The Tal'Mahe'Ra either destroys Dastur, or manages to evade him again. The Sect quietly sinks back into the Black Hand, sabotaging the Sabbat from the inside. When the Camarilla attacks, Montreal may fall.
- Metathiax grows fat on violence and spilled vitae. Blood Rot ravages the city — starting with sewer workers and the homeless at St. James Church, and quickly spreading to all parts of the city. The disease burns itself out in a couple of months if the Sabbat take care to avoid infected prey. If the Camarilla attacks now, Montreal is certain to fall. However, the Sword of Caine could lure the Camarilla in, let them remain for a month, and then drive them back out — taking the disease with them to their own cities.
- With Benezri as Archbishop, Montreal remains the spiritual heart of the Sabbat — a place to gather and exchange lore, and keep ancient traditions. The Sabbat is firmly entrenched in Montreal when the Camarilla attacks, repelling the attack even if they can't launch a counter-assault.
- Ezekiel, warrior of the Black Hand, favors a more militaristic approach as Archbishop. No longer content to play the proverbial anvil to Mexico City, Ezekiel sees Montreal as a hammer. He proposes a two-pronged attack on the American Camarilla. This attack is all-in, aiming to crush the American Camarilla before it can mount a counter-attack.
- If anyone uncovers Cardinal Strathcona's scheme, his nights as Cardinal are forfeit. Benezri, Ezekiel and Mercy are all well-placed to take his place, depending on where the players put their support. Strathcona's next move, assuming he escapes the Sabbat's wrath, is to find bodyguards and sanctuary. He might even feel forced to turn to the Anarchs for survival, and such a defection greatly undermines the Sabbat.

THE DEAD WALK

Marche de Fer, Port-au-Prince, Haiti

I try to keep up with the trends of the kine, but more and more their developments and innovations bewilder me. I had to be helped by a mortal to the website Okulos suggested. She could only see error messages on the screen, but immediately I spotted an invitation in the otherwise jejune internet diary entry Okulos asked me to review – an extract from the Shaal Fragment in my possession, accompanied by my name and a location. I don't recognize the name of the writer, but Port-au-Prince is a city I'm excited to be revisiting.

Haiti's a country contested by Followers of Set, Serpents of the Light, Samedi, and Lasombra antitribu. The turbulence is ever-present. The kine in Port-au-Prince are a people marred by poverty, stuck in a depressing position of constant civil unrest. Street violence is commonplace away from the few upscale districts. Rolling blackouts keep things interesting in this crowded port city, to say the least.

This former tourist hub no longer receives cruise liners packed with Americans; the crime levels put off all but the most adventurous travelers. The masses in this city therefore provide an adequate, if stagnant, herd for the vampires who prey upon them.

I visited the country during the slave revolt of 1803; I was a different vampire, more compelled to insult my hosts. I recall impressively offending the Setite commissioner Jean-François. I'll keep my head down, for experience has shown that Snakes harbor grudges.



These nights, the Samedi of Haiti are a great source of conjecture. Oddities find their way into the vogue of our kind until their destruction, it seems. For bloodlines lacking allies, extinction looms around every corner. They're outsiders, after all.

To interview an aged member of one of these groups is beyond tempting. Bloodline genesis is an intriguing field of research, and the Samedi are fascinating.

Without grandeur, I'm confident I can track the elusive Baron for an interview.

The last I heard, Jean-François spurned his Clan and joined the Black Hand. -L

From: eyeonyou@schreckNET.nod

To: beckettmnemosyne1@schreckNET.nod

Subject: **RE**: My email

You show the technological aptitude of a Luddite. Evidently the purpose of a password escapes you, as you've added it to the end of your email address.

Don't get in debt to Lucius Sejanus.-A

I'll change them both, and call Cesare to confirm your new details. He's booked in the Coconut Villa on Vitel's dime. We might as well use it until he ends up ash on the White House lawn.

Talk of Samedi presence is high on the NET. Refugee camp numbers increase along with — get this — "zombie sightings." I've attached a photo of one of these "zombies" for your amusement. Some Ivory Tower high-ups believe the Samedi are systematically eroding Haitian political stability, the economy, and general public health, just so their prey becomes more pliable and desperate.

Personally, I think the mortals are as much to blame as any Kindred.

It may have been the chief Samedi writing the blog entry. Maybe he wishes to discuss your Shaal Fragment. If so, I don't know how he found out you obtained it.

There's a code in the blog entry that implies you should meet at Le Palais National d'Haiti on Saturday evening.

Okulos

What do you suspect are at the bottom of those deep fissures? Wasn't this place an Elysium when the war started?-L

Beckett: The National Palace is a deathtrap. Severe cracks cut through the structure and deep into the earth. The Palace was hit by God knows what when this country got torn between Sects, Clans, and bloodlines. The way the air rushes down there, and the earth contracts and expands, make for eerie sounds. Some Serpents of the Light saw fit to destroy the Haitian president's former seat, among countless other things. No sign of the vampire who invited me.

Talley: I tend to use the names of mortal killers for aliases.

Beckett: For the purposes of the recording, a conceited Lasombra just poured from the shadows in a way not dissimilar to effluence from a sewage pipe.

Talley: Hardly fair, old boy.

Beckett: I'm here researching the Samedi bloodline, Talley. You may have invited me via an unnecessarily convoluted route, but my actions here serve my own purposes. I already passively do your master's bidding in my every action, compiling information on the Jyhad, which I'm willing to share with any Kindred — not just Vitel. The tabs you're keeping on me are starting to piss me off.

Talley: There are no tabs on you, Beckett. I'm not here at Sejanus' behest. But he does theorize that forging a bloodline prevents one from being beholden to a Clan founder. It's an interesting hypothesis, shared by your friend Aristotle. I brought you here because I thought it would be enlightening to test the theory. You're more likely than a known Sabbat button man to gain an audience with the Samedi anyhow.

Beckett: So now you're working for someone else. Your steadfast loyalties must win you many friends.

Talley: I take contracts from multiple sources. Haven't you seen the stories in the newspaper?



Beckett: I have, in my first week here. Nevertheless, I'd prefer to work without your company.

Talley: We'll both go in the same direction. Better we watch one another's backs in a country of hostile Cainites. The Cobras are attempting to rout spies working for their Setite cousins. You won't be exempt from their persecution, and they're among the most unpleasant Cainites with whom I've had the displeasure to associate. Recall that I worked as bodyguard for Vykos, to put that statement in its correct context.

Serpents of the Light are an awful breed. Fanatical in their devotion to Caine; He speaks to them both night and day.-A

Beckett: If I see so much as a flickering shadow, I'll be moving to rip your arms off.

Talley: I'll be on my best behavior. Consider this an exploratory expedition into the heart of darkness. The horror. The horror!

Beckett: For the purposes of the recording, the self-amused Keeper just disappeared. I'll be staking him by the time we're done in Haiti.

[RECORDING ENDS]

As a skilled bodyguard, Talley is unmatched. But would I trust him to not stab me in the back? Hardly.-L

CHILDREN GO MISSING FROM SOS CAMP

By Clément Duval

A group assumed to be representing The National Front for the Creation of Future Haiti abducted more than 100 children from an SOS camp near Croix-des-Bouquets. Heavily-armed militants arrived at night to steal supplies and kidnap the children. No ransom demands have been released.

The rebel group has killed and maimed thousands of people since its inception in 1993. The abducted children are predominantly Christians. The reasons for the kidnapping are unknown, but witnesses assured reporters and law enforcement that this group is responsible.

The militants have attacked schools before, but this is their first attempt on one of the SOS camps since freak natural disasters and the recent instances of mass urban violence broke out. It's alleged the group has taken the children into the hills north of Boucan-Carré.

PROMINENT HOUNGAN CLAIMS THE RETURN OF CHILDREN WITHIN A WEEK

By Laurent Ojeda

In an exclusive interview, respected Houngan Papa Emmanuel has declared Haiti's missing children will be returned within the week. We met Papa Emmanuel upon his boat, where he assured us he'd tracked the perpetrators and would see to mediating the victims' release.

In his decades of service to our country and faith, Papa Emmanuel has never before given us reason to doubt his devotion.

CHILDREN RETURNED TO SOS CAMP A NATION CELEBRATES

By Michele Girard

Haiti celebrates and mourns as 98 of the 110 missing children abducted from the Croix-des-Bouquets SOS camp have been returned physically unharmed.

All the children appear to have undergone a psychological trauma, as they've said little of their terrible ordeal. One girl said "the 12 others won't be coming back," but then became increasingly upset and was heard to scream about "the Bokor's zonbi."

The 98 brave children will be treated to the best care the Red Cross can provide.

Barbancourt Rum Distillery, Port-au-Prince, Haiti

Neither Talley nor I found joy in tracing the trail of the Baron in "traditional" vampire nightspots. Being in a country where the Kindred suspect everyone is a Setite means spying, asking extremely circumspect questions, and engaging with mortals in the patois of our kind.

We were fortunate to discover one of the Giovanni, who saw more benefit in assisting than selling us to the Lasombra antitribu on the coastline or the Serpents of the Light in the city.

Talley's lucky you didn't sell him out.
The number of antitribu he's responsible for murdering is obscene. -L

Stephanie de Horacio Pisanob explained every single Elysium of Port-au-Prince fell victim to the conflict between Haiti's Kindred players. The Baron hasn't visited the capital since. Apparently he blames the majority of the violence on signs of ancient vampires showing their displeasure. Stephanie believes he's not returned due to Cobras suspecting his alliance with the Setites. She's his only contact with the city. We've been told the Samedi these nights now prey on the widespread camps set up for displaced Haitians.

I've heard the Baron knows a thing or two about Serpentis. I doubt the Serpents of the Light taught him. -L

Stephanie provided coordinates of the domain of one of his childer, named Josette, and advised we head north, into the wild. She encouraged us to avoid vampiric werespiders and a bloodthirsty mortal militia.

Stephanie's stare convinced us of her seriousness. We paid her well with Vitel's money.

[RECORDING BEGINS ~ DISTORTED DUE TO HIGH VOLUME OF CAR ENGINE AND ROUGHNESS OF ROAD]

Talley: Firstly, don't mistake Sejanus for some Lasombra antitribu. He's definitely not [unclear].

Beckett: Do you take issue with the antitribu?

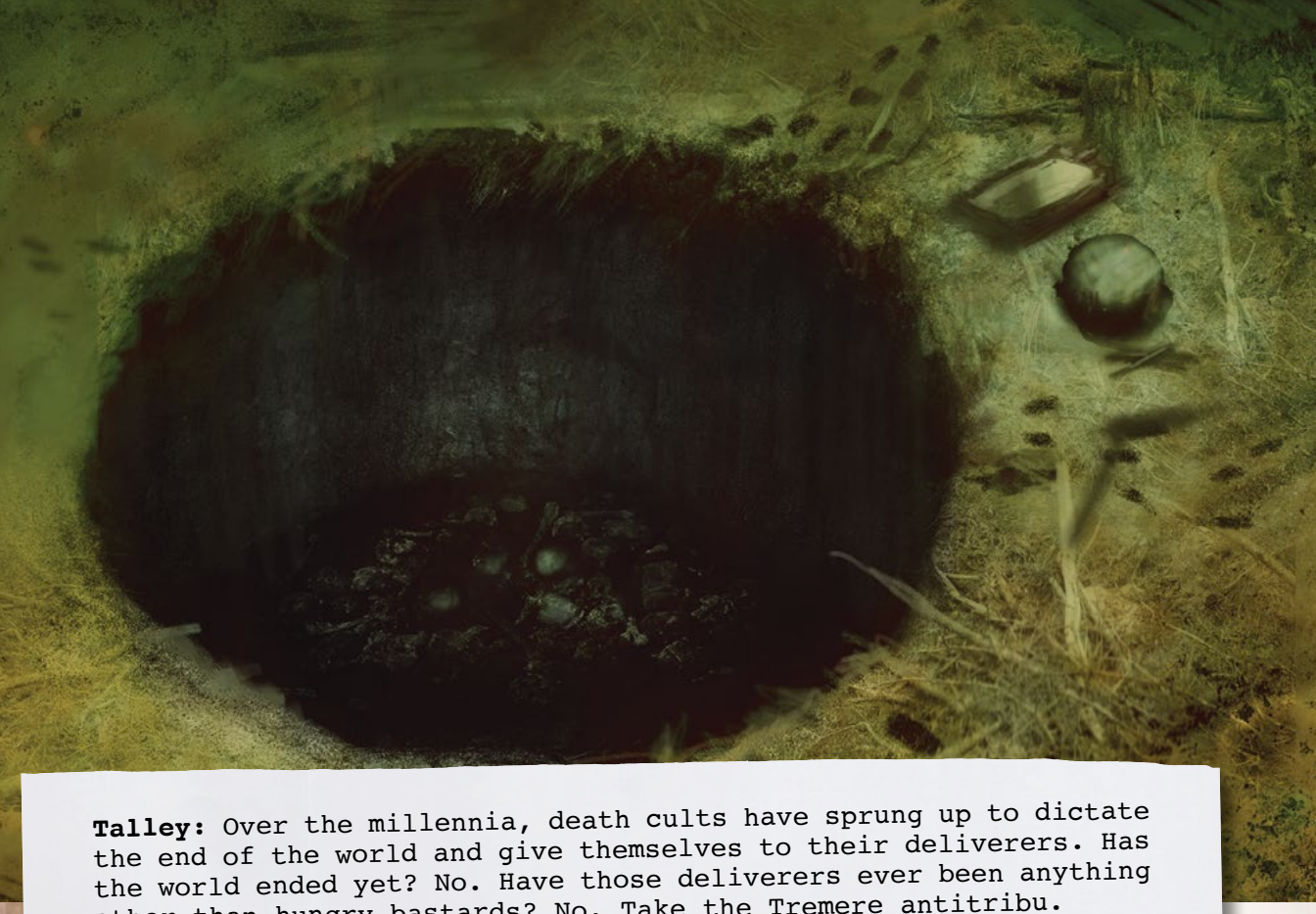
Talley: Certainly. They betrayed my Clan by not supporting the Sabbat in its time of need. The unruly Anarch Revolt scared them. My great-grandsire Boukephos was a childe of [unclear] had reason to fear diablerie it would be him. Yet he joined the Sabbat. He recognized the right of it. None of this one true [unclear]

Boukephos was destroyed in Philadelphia during the Camarilla-Sabbat War last century, I believe. As much a philosopher as he was a tyrant, it's in some ways unfortunate he fell to assassination. The Malkavian antitribu Abraham Wolff turned out to be an agent for the Camarilla. Such is the way of things when you let Lunatics get too close. -L

Beckett: Your loyalties to the Sabbat remain [unclear].

Talley: [unclear] scheme of things, the Sabbat are right. Vitel doesn't want to see it, but the Gehenna Crusaders could be right. They desire the elimination of the Antediluvians. Why would we not wish for the cutting of ties to such primordial monsters? But that's [unclear] collapses.

Beckett: How so?



Talley: Over the millennia, death cults have sprung up to dictate the end of the world and give themselves to their deliverers. Has the world ended yet? No. Have those deliverers ever been anything other than hungry bastards? No. Take the Tremere antitribu.

Beckett: [unclear].

[RECORDING ENDS]

Approximately 20km north of Boucan-Carré, Haiti

We deposited the 4x4, paying the militia handsomely for its safety upon our return. To say they regarded the two of us incredulously would be an understatement.

No sooner had we arrived than we witnessed two women with children being brutalized. Bloodshed is commonplace. Talley – being inured to such activity – found a healthy mortal from which to feed. I fought back the urge to break necks.

I recalled rumors of the Tonton Macoutes' reign of terror over these people. The names of the oppressors have changed. Their practices have not. I denied my Beast the desire to feed. These people have suffered enough, and likely continue to do so under the Serpents of the Light. I won't contribute.

Talley and I raided a Red Cross blood bank in Port-au-Prince before setting out. Cool box still on hand, I drank from the preserved stash.

Approximately 40km northwest of Boucan-Carré, Haiti

Refreshing as it is to see even Talley recoil, the stench of death in this place is horrifying. You can't swat the flies away fast enough. Our cameras have stopped functioning for a reason neither of us can determine, so I've taken to sketching the sights.

We passed through two abandoned villages with the dead ignominiously displayed in mass graves. We discovered a further commune containing another pit, this one empty. There were marks where it appears the inhabitants of the pit climbed free. At the side of each pit, a ceremonial drum and wide mirror with elaborate frame.

The Samedi I've known are more adept at destruction than reanimation. It reminds me more of the Iberian Cappadocians. -L

We've crossed the paths of no one living.

Somewhere between Cajou Brule and the Riviere Mourne Rouge, Haiti

We slept in the earth of a gulley, covered by a dense canopy of trees. As night fell, we woke to find skulls atop our burial spots, both of which were adorned with Vodou or Christian designs. The skulls had fangs. As we examined our grave decor, an ambush was launched.

Beacons or wards. You don't mark an area in such a way without good reason. -A

Talley was staked with devastating swiftness, our attackers clearly identifying him as the combatant to eliminate first. With at least a dozen attackers in the trees, my first instinct was to flee. I could take the form of mist, yet instead I fought. It's been a long time since I've bloodied by claws.

This is a diary account, and not some penny dreadful into which I'll pen heroics or the fulfilling taste of my attackers' warm blood. Any such lurid account would be quickly cut short, as I became transfixed by the gaze and scaled body of one Jean-François, now a Serpent of the Light, it would seem. Hypnotized, I was forced to

watch the Cobra take the huge form of his bloodline's epithet, jaw distending, fangs dripping acrid fluid as he approached. His retainers celebrated my impending doom.

That's when the zombies arrived.

Necromancy is a disgusting practice. Never before was I so grateful for its existence. From the tree line and the earth itself, the dead attacked Jean-François' retainers, some of the ghouls crumbling to dust when bony fingers encircled their limbs. These were animate corpses with vampires of the Samedi standing alongside.

Jean-François had trespassed. He slinked off as his militia fell, but I doubt this is the last time I'll see him.

[RECORDING BEGINS]

Josette: If he refuses to answer your questions, do not press him. Also, he prefers to speak in kreyòl, but will talk to you in French.

Talley: How can we express our gratitude for the rescue?

Josette: The Baron trades in favors.

Beckett: Wonderful. Beholden to another elder.

Josette: Bokor Samedi, our Baron and protector, I introduce the archeologist Beckett and the Hound, Sir Talley.

Beckett: We've travelled a long way to meet you, Baron.

Baron: Sit. We travel to an encampment near Martin, a settlement on the river. You have until we reach it to come to business. *Kreyol pale, kreyol komprann.*

Beckett: I'm chronicling the actions of Methuselahs, and veracity of the prophecies of Gehenna. You're a rarity, as a bloodline founder who can be interviewed.

Baron: [laughs] The Baron, yes, but the first of his line? Surely you'd do better seeking Marconius in Strasbourg. I understand he's quite accessible for Sabbat of high standing, even if he calls himself Prince.

Beckett: We're not both Sabbat.

Baron: You're not talking like Camarilla. Gehenna? Methuselahs? All myths, are they not?

Talley: I'm Sabbat, but Beckett here is a leaf on the breeze.

Josette: We heard from Stephanie you were coming, hence the wards on your rest sites. She's a rare flower in a garden of decay. [laughs]

Beckett: On the subject of decay, your appearance is not in keeping with the Baron Samedi so often described.

Baron: The top hat, cane, and so forth are obfuscation. When away from home, those I visit expect a show. If I were to apply makeup to this rotting visage, it would appear cracked and terrible. A fine suit would be ruined with leaking fluids. We know to disguise our nature in the courts of kings. *Santi bon koute che* [laughs]. But this is my home.

Beckett: To my original question, are you not the progenitor of the Samedi?

Baron: It's a grand claim to make before my houngan, mambo, and *zonbi*. For what do you require this confirmation?

Beckett: A theory holds that a bloodline is no longer snared by the strings of Clan founders. The branching of the blood destroys the Clan curse some ascribe to Caine. If true, when the original curse stops, and where the new one begins, along with how that new curse is formed, are intriguing quandaries.

Baron: *Mwen konprann*. What if the Samedi are merely an offshoot of the Nosferatu? Surely our curse is identical, albeit with the strength of Samedi vitae forcing a similarity in appearance throughout the line. Have you considered that, *zanmi*?

Beckett: I find your bloodline possesses less commonality with the Nosferatu than the Giovanni.

Talley: Or Cappadocians.

Josette: A word not often used. Have you heard of the *Infitiores*?

Have you noticed how he and Josette answer questions with questions? -A

Talley: It's suspected they became the Harbingers of Skulls, now members of the Sabbat.

Baron: And who suspects that? Why would Cappadocians threatened with entombment by fanatics of their own Clan do anything other than welcome House Giovanni's purge? *Byenveni*, Mr. Giovanni! *Pran tòch mwen*! [laughs] The Harbingers are cousins. You can tell by our shared countenance! [laughs] But they are not those who escaped the purge. At least, not in the way the *Infitiores* did so.

Beckett: According to legend, the *Infitiores* were advised to not attend what became known as the Feast of Folly. Are you confirming they are the root of the Samedi?

Baron: I confirm nothing, *zanmi*. The only one who could confirm is the Samedi *précurseur*, and she is old. She sleeps. She is the greatest of the Mambo. She foresees the coming of the tide, from Peru, Mexico, the rainforest, and the earth beneath us. She blessed this place and called on Bondye and the Lwa to protect us. The Pisanob and Sabbat will have more to worry about than shapeshifters and civil war [laughs]. She's keeping the tide beneath at bay.

Talley: To what tide do you refer?

Baron: The houngan tell of a time before the Conquistadors, before the natives of these islands and the mainland were enslaved. Native blood-drinkers, *zanmi*. The *Infitiores* show you do not just wipe away millennia of monsters in a couple of centuries. The Giovanni are just the latest in the line of *arogan ewopeyen*. Gehenna comes, but only to those who cannot embrace the new age. My people have sung this song for generations.

Rubbish. There are no more than 13 Clans. Caine didn't travel that widely. -L

The Song of the Samedi

The tide is rising

Oh-oh-ohh

The sleeping dead awake

Oh-oh-ohh

From the cracks in the earth

They'll be reborn

Pour the rum

And say the prayers

Oh-oh-ohh

Pour the rum

And say the prayers

Oh-oh-ohh

From Taino, Yanamamo, Tepanec, Inca, Huancas, Hoche, Canari

The tide will rise

The blade will fall

We pour the rum

And pray for everyone

Baron: Many know, but choose to forget. The Camarilla choose which Traditions to enforce. The Sabbat choose which prophecy to serve or denounce. *Ou we sa ou genyen, ou pa konn sa ou rete*. You know what you have, but you forget what is coming.

Beckett: On the subject of the bloodline's founding —

Baron: [shouting] *Ti moun fwonte grandi devan* Baron! Do not press me, Gangrel!

Beckett: I apologize.

Talley: If I may rephrase: We gather you are not the founder, and the mambo to which you refer is torpid. Can you direct us to her sire?

Josette: If the Mambo Asogwe had a sire, it could be said to be Lazarus, the father of many bloodlines, or Strohmann, the hateful one.

Talley: Strohmann's a powerful Nosferatu antitribu who claims Archbishopric of Berlin, despite it being a Camarilla domain. I could reach him.

Beckett: That leaves me with Lazarus, who, if rumor holds, was a subject of the Egyptian Setites. That's a lot of ground to cover.

Baron: [laughs] Think on this. If Lazarus had the power to deny his sire's wish, turning hundreds away from Kaymakli when the Antediluvian wished for his Clan to be corralled, did Lazarus not there and then make a bloodline no longer Cappadocian? The same could be said for those Lasombra who raged against the darkness, those Tzimisce who consumed their father. Strohmann is said to have played a part in the fall of the Hag. The river forks and the flow's forever altered. The proof is always in the blood. Papa Emmanuel — bring vessels from which these two can feed.

STROHMANN



Clan of the Hidden (antitribu); Ornbau *ca. 1245, Istanbul #1283, Childe of Alexius

S. was one of the first European vampires to captain a vessel to the New World, becoming known as a Cainite adept in moving vampires overseas. His covert sideline in escorting vampire refugees earned him a wealth in territory and boons, some members of Clans Salubri and Cappadocian parting with all worldly wealth to buy his services. S. also trafficked in humans, running a slave ship from Africa to the Caribbean. S. is known to have Embraced bound slaves, to see a fledgling turn and feed on the mortal fastened beside, thus replicating the Embrace repeatedly down a line. For unknown reasons, S. was forbidden from the North American continent by a near unheard of joint agreement by Cardinal Radu Bistri and Hardestadt in 1820. Since that time, S. has concentrated on marshaling Sabbat forces in Central Europe.

Beckett: So these are the infamous zombies. They're not as rotten as I suspected. They look like they've been subjected to mental conditioning.

Baron: *Zonbi* come in many forms. Some rot. They bring terror. Others serve. They are trapped behind their eyes as punishment. They also taste better.

Beckett: Samedi do not possess the gifts of mental domination. How do you produce such a placid response?

Baron: Vodou, *zanmi*. These *zonbi* are not the products of vampiric gifts, but the parting of body and soul. The Bokor such as I know well how to practice such arts.

Talley: Papa Emmanuel, eh? I read of your exploits. I assume you wear a kinder face when meeting the mortal press.

Emmanuel: Since the Serpents of the Light play for dominance in Haiti, we Samedi have been forced to war with them in our own way.

Talley: Your bloodline is at war with the Sabbat? You'll be crushed.

Emmanuel: Only the Cobras who overreach, Keeper. If they remain in Port-au-Prince, our conflict is done.

Beckett: If the tales are true, you've been creating armies of zombies to secure your domains, in Havana, Arequipa, Yucatán, New Orleans, and here. The Masquerade is failing wherever you send your decaying legion.

Baron: [laughs] Media loves our *zonbi*. They're masqueraded by popular culture. If the Camarilla deign to send a boy our way with a message of reproach, we will turn him grey and soulless, before returning him to his masters. The Camarilla have no place in our home.

Beckett: Were the empty villages, mass graves, and kidnappings the doing of the Samedi? Or did you rescue the children from the militia?

Talley: That appears to be Martin in the distance. It's been a pleasure, Baron.

Josette: He's about to —

[SOUNDS OF CRASHING AND SHOUTING FOLLOW]

[RECORDING ENDS]

Amani-y Beach, Saint-Marc, Haiti

Talley wasn't lying when he mentioned having a contract.

Our discussion was disrupted when he struck his target, Papa Emmanuel. I don't know if he was serving the Serpents of the Light, but he quickly decapitated the Samedi and immediately dove into the water.

I likewise jumped overboard as the barge capsized, becoming a mist before hitting the water. I could see the Baron falling to frenzy and didn't wish to become a target. I lingered, wanting to corner one of the Samedi who remained once the Baron had calmed.

It wasn't until near dawn that I was able to speak with Josette. I pled ignorance and innocence to Talley's actions. To her credit, she believed me, apparently having been a follower of my work for some time. She couldn't say the same for the Baron.

Recalling the Baron's preferred method of trade and knowing my precarious place in this country, now despised by Serpents of the Light and Samedi both, I offered any favor within my power.

The following night, Josette confirmed the Baron wanted me gone immediately, and I was escorted to the coast. For his time and the insult, he requested the entire content of Aristotle's research on the Samedi copied and sent to him, along with silence on the matter of our ever meeting.

Too bad for Aristotle. I'll head to his library and get what you need.-A

I agreed to both of these things and called Cesare. He will box me up and store me in the jet in advance of flight tomorrow. It occurs to me that the Baron didn't give me one straight answer. I seem to have made a friend in Josette, but I can see myself sifting through this enigmatic vampire's words as we cross the Atlantic.

B.

By the time you read this I'll have already struck. No hard feelings. I wasn't going to get close to Papa without the reputable Beckett by my side.

T-

Talley



Lasombra, ¶324, #1355. Childe of Lord Leopold Valdemar.

This vampire is well known for his prowess in the field of murder, and occasional guard-dog duty. His battles with Lucita are widely known, now numbering half a dozen. Their clashes could be compared to sport, as certainly the two seem to revel in them. Lucita denies she enjoys such collisions, but in truth few test her in a way similar to Sir Talley.

If de Laurent's notes are to be believed, the mortal Talley was in some fashion kin to werewolves, albeit to an aberrant and shunned Lupine group. This perhaps explains his predilection for hunting them on their own territory whenever he has the opportunity.

Talley told me of his time as a knight during the Hundred Years' War, his activities against the French continuing before and after Embrace. His association with his sire was a brief one, as he swiftly came under the stewardship of the renowned Boukephos. Talley's acts on the battlefield were much acclaimed during that tumultuous period, pursuing the agenda of his Clan under strict commands of his Methuselah mentor, swaying battles and even assassinating monarchs – or so he claims.

Talley's best known for his service to notable Archbishops of the Sabbat. While recently he's appeared distant from the Sword of Caine, he refuses to assist the Ivory Tower in any capacity, still upholding the ideals of the Sect he joined upon its founding, even if he displays antipathy towards many of the vampires who populate it. Though he may disrespect a word boss, Talley would never renege on a contract. His "honor" won't allow it.

When a long-term employer meets their end, Talley always seeks a strong new leader. That spot is currently filled by Marcus Vitel, putting Talley in a peculiar position given his Sabbat rank and status. I suspect he works for another beyond Vitel, as it's unlike Talley to hedge his bets with a wild card. The question of whom is one that Lucita's keen to see answered. In the meantime, he travels the world performing tasks, never claiming more reward or acclaim than is necessary, before moving on to his next target.

I can scarcely imagine one such as Talley ever settling for domain and powerbase, despite his impressive age and ability. It's a rare thing for a vampire as old as Talley to still be consumed by wanderlust, but my suspicion is that if he were to remain static, his truly cold colors would rise to the fore. If he has a philosophy beyond "just following orders," I've yet to witness it.

From: eyeonyou@schreckNET.nod
To: beckett@schreckNET.nod
Cc: h.ruhadze@bloodspot.eg
Subject: RE: Lazarus Cappadocius

I find your formalities charming.

No need to pull strings — I've already been contacted by a Setite who wants to meet you. It seems your activities in Haiti bloodied the nose of a prominent Cobra.

I've copied the Setite in on this email. You've met.

Okulos

From: beckett@schreckNET.nod
To: eyeonyou@schreckNET.nod
Subject: Lazarus Cappadocius

Dear Okulos,

We need to meet in Cairo. The bloodline trail leads to the Cappadocian known as Lazarus. I believe the Followers of Set are most likely to know of his whereabouts, if legends are true to history.

Correction: make that bloodline **trails**. No other vampires outside the Second Generation have so many bloodlines attributed to them. In his case the Samedi, Lamiae, and Harbingers of Skulls all potentially hold his blood.

Pull some strings to get me an audience with a Setite of note. I'm prepared to negotiate my research on the Eye of Hazimel, as a gift to assist in our parley. I know they're interested in it.

We can meet at Naguib Mahfouz. I'll be sure to drop in at 22:00 each night.

Sincerely,

Beckett

The Lazarus Temple, Saqqara, Egypt

I wonder what Marcus Vitel thinks when he checks his bank statement.

We've utilized an archeology crew, supplemented with Setite ghouls, and overseen by Hesha, Okulos, and myself, to excavate the reported temple of Lazarus. Hesha's assured me that while the contents of the temple would belong to his Clan, I'm permitted to photograph, sketch, and note whatever I happen to see. Okulos is doing likewise.

Setite records assert that Lazarus sought succor with the Snakes due to their connection to Duat. His expertise assisted their own, and the two held a cordial relationship even as he invited the pilgrimage of others from his Clan to settlements surrounding Saqqara.

His temple was destroyed in a conflict with other Cappadocians, who sought to steal one of his most treasured artifacts and claim renown in the sight of their Antediluvian. If they were successful in retrieving this Sargon Fragment, their Antediluvian's favor only persisted a short time. Cappadocius was destroyed two centuries later.

Hesha explained the temple was looted once in the 19th century by common thieves, as was another Cappadocian site in Luxor, after which they fell under the protection of the Setites, due to an accord held between the Clan and Lazarus, which appears no longer extant.

[RECORDING BEGINS]

Okulos: Mummified bodies. At least 30, by my count.

Beckett: There are more than 30 skulls.

Hesha: The dead are nothing compared to the relics in this chamber. Come, look at these wonders.

Beckett: Stop moving, both of you.

Hesha: What is it?

Okulos: Oh Christ.

Beckett: We're all going to want to back out of here very slowly.

Okulos: My leg is right up against one.

Beckett: Some of these "mummies" have stakes in them. If they're dislodged, and some of these are torpid, hungry, old vampires-

Hesha: I take your point. I'm heading back to the entrance. We'll formulate a plan —

Okulos: Oh Christ, it moved!

Beckett: Run!

[RECORDING ENDS]

Abo Regaila, Helwan, Egypt

The scene earlier was something from an old horror feature. The emaciated corpse shambled after us at speed. Hesha commanded one of the laborers to offer himself to the woken nightmare. We watched from a distance as the creature drained him dry and then moved on to the next man.

Two sacrifices later, the vampire was still more bone than flesh. Despite our tricks, we couldn't suppress its Beast or compel it. Hesha had his ghouls put it to the torch. By my calculation it must have been staked at least seven centuries ago. To remain paralyzed yet aware for that long would erode anything resembling sanity.

We shall return to the dig site tomorrow, Okulos with his flare gun. There's much to discover within, but I'm doubtful the residents will be giving us a guided tour.

Mr. Beckett,

An invitation and a warning.

I invite you to continue excavating my sire's temple, though you shan't find him within. He's awake and busy, and interested in your activities.

Do not steal from the temple. My sire's artifacts are intended for the Typhonic childer, and you are not one.

Do not make me hunt you.

Angelique
Childe of Lazarus
Childe of Cappadocius

Death's Grim Legion

Armies of corpses rise. Vampires familiar with the Baron's bloodline see his bony hand in these events, recognizing the rotting flesh of these zombies as that of the Samedi. Kindred see these incidents as evidence of Samedi aggression, and blatant disregard for the Traditions. The Baron claims differently. He makes clear the dead rise to protect Samedi territory from a greater threat, long buried and now stirring in surrounding lands.

The Camarilla laugh off the Baron's words. The Sabbat — with their dominance over the South American continent — pay close attention, as the ground beneath them starts to shake.

The Samedi are testament to the potency of vitae. A bloodline formed half a millennium ago, none can accurately pinpoint their genesis. They share similarities with Nosferatu through their horrifying countenance, but that's where the parallels conclude. The bloodline demonstrates how the splintering of a Clan can produce something no longer bound to the Antediluvians or whims of Methuselahs. The forging of paths not laid down by Caine or his grandchilder may be a way to circumvent the Jyhad, and stand removed from its influence.

Any reputable vampires who make the journey to the Baron's domain in Haiti may find an audience with him, as the Stiff wants conflicting information regarding his bloodline out in the world. He tells a different tale every time; part truth, part falsehood. In this way he restricts power over the Samedi. With each pilgrim making the journey, the bloodline's aura of mystery and fear grows.

The Kindred political situation in Haiti mirrors that of the kine population, in many ways. The spiritual center of Samedi Vodou has remained in place for centuries, at times supporting the kine, but typically acting as a parasite to their faith. The country moves back and forth between Setite and Sabbat dominance, usually enforced through vice, petty militias, and terror groups. The Serpents of the Light operate a secret police in Haiti against possible foes. In the neighboring Dominican Republic, a Setite named Sergio Bueno holds the title of Prince of Santo Domingo, with nominal backing from the Camarilla. Lasombra antitribu maintain a nomadic existence, offering mercenary aid to whoever on the island of Hispaniola can afford their assistance. Otherwise, they take what they want from whoever stands in their way. In the middle of it all, the downtrodden people of Haiti suffer under the rule of mortal corruption, shocking natural disasters, and inadequate health care.



Beckett discovering the Samedi link to Lazarus or Strohmann opens fissures that soon widen. An exploration into the Egyptian Lazarene tombs draws attention from the few active Cappadocians, including one named Angelique. The enigmatic entity known as the Capuchin also takes notice, rushing to the Giovanni to inform them of the archeologist's discovery. The Giovanni are forbidden entry into Saqqara by Cairo Prince Mukhtar Bey, triggering a situation involving subterfuge and bloody violence. Strohmann's connection to the Samedi is more obscure than that of Lazarus, but Talley's hunt for the Nosferatu antitribu in Berlin reopens old wounds the Creep would rather remained sealed.

Following are chronicles stemming from the events Beckett encounters in this chapter:

- Few question why Kindred were completely absent from the Americas before European colonization. The Baron tells one enquiring coterie the indigenous vampires foresaw the arrival of Europeans, and voluntarily took to torpor until the passing of Gehenna. He tells another they fought the arriving vampires and the conquistadors, their struggle scrubbed from the pages of history by Lasombra and Brujah scholars. The survivors roamed as solitary predators, but now ready themselves to drive the Sabbat from their continent. It sounds fantastical—but vampire domains in Arequipa, La Rinconada, and Ecatepec have all fallen suddenly silent in recent weeks. Scholars and Sects both wish to discover the reality of these tales, offering sizeable boons to those who can authenticate the Baron's claims.

- The sightings of shambling corpses in Central American locations are reaching fever pitch, with even the RED Network reporting on "zombie syndrome" being a real illness. Before blame can be placed on the Samedi, Archbishop Claudia of Tijuana sends the message across Sabbat and Camarilla cities alike that the Pisanob of Clan Giovanni are responsible for this plague of the undead. The repercussions are instant. The Pisanob are harried into unfamiliar domains, as their parent Clan seeks coteries to stop these rumors, discover which party is truly to blame, and whether the Harbingers of Skulls have some role to play. Caught in Haiti, Stephanie de Horacio Pisanob is looking for a quick way out of the country. She knows the truth behind the tales, but will only reveal it if she can be taken directly to the Mausoleum in Venice.

- Prince Sergio Bueno of Santo Domingo seeks a capable coterie for the task of recruiting the Lasombra antitribu of the Caribbean islands. The Magisters are notably hard to pin down given their near-constant persecution by Sabbat brethren, yet Bueno is adamant their assistance is required in routing the Serpents of the Light from Haiti. Outside the Dominican Republic, the Camarilla is unsure whether Bueno acts in the interests of his Sect or his Clan, so a secret counteroffer has been laid on the table by Justicars Lucinde and Iadanza for the coterie prepared to work for Prince Sergio. They're to ensure the Setite doesn't claim power in Haiti once the insurrection is complete. A competent Ventrue or Toreador must instead be placed in power.

- The Mambo of St. Mary and the Petwo are a mortal organization of Catholic Vodouists based in Port-au-Prince, critically aware of the existence of the Samedi since the return of the 98 kidnapped children. They see the Baron's activities as a subversion of their faith, dangerous and deserving of disintegration. The group possesses one member who holds True Faith, being Mambo Asogwe Garcelle. She leads her followers in an unquestioning pogrom of fire against the Samedi, who seek help in subduing these women without killing them. To the Vodouists among the Samedi, the organization is a holy one, albeit pointed in the wrong direction. Josette wishes to find a way into the group so it can be redirected towards the Serpents of the Light, but it's a tall order. The Mambo of St. Mary and the Petwo are dead set on extinguishing every one of the walking cadavers they find. The Baron suspects a vampire sponsors the group, although he's yet to discern who it might be.

- Despite the Setites' best efforts to keep the excavation of Lazarus' temple silent, word escapes via the inscrutable Capuchin, who, through unknown means, becomes aware immediately as the dig begins. Months of conflict ensue as the Setites declare the temple theirs, while the Giovanni maintain Lazarus is technically of their Clan and his haven belongs to them. The necromancers make increasingly violent attempts through various agents to disrupt the dig, until the mortal archeological crew become convinced of a "mummy's curse" on the excavation. The Clans reach a standoff; Mukhtar Bey commands both Clans issue representatives to his court to debate the matter. Accompanied by entourages of trusted vampires, the infamous Isabel Giovanni is sent by her Clan, while the Setites are represented by Hesha Ruhadze. The two groups

The Rising Tide

Bloodlines are an outstanding tool for diversifying a chronicle. While a few can clearly be attributed as offshoots from the lines of Caine, others — such as Baali, Lhiannan, the Legacies of the African continent, and even the Followers of Set — cite different progenitors entirely. Bloodlines are mere steps away from becoming as powerful as longlived Clans; the Tremere and Giovanni started as bloodlines, after all. The rising tide alluded to by Baron Samedi can introduce more blood with which to contaminate the waters:

- The Samedi aren't a bloodline. They've always been present on Hispaniola and the other Caribbean islands, merely adapting to fit in with the beliefs of the West African slaves as they arrived. While their peers on mainland Central and South America were driven to near extinction by the settlers, the Samedi persisted in small numbers for centuries. A Clan in their own right, the Samedi and their Baron await the time when their torpid companions on the continent begin to rise, and seek them out for centuries of accumulated wisdom.
- Strohmann made a habit of Embracing the most beautiful slaves on board his ship, delighting in watching their features warp and corrupt. One such victim was the first daughter of her lineage, titled Queen Mother by her family for her position in their Ghanaian Vodun faith. Following her Embrace, Strohmann beheld in horror as she rotted before him, spreading a fatal wasting sickness rapidly throughout the rest of his human cargo and crew. The Nosferatu antitribu staked and deposited her on one of the many islands within the Caribbean. Rumor holds that under the tutelage of the Cappadocian refugees he'd left there years before, she founded the Samedi bloodline.
- The Drowned Legacies of the South American continent are advised by the Baron on when and where to make their presence known. He speaks with the reptilian Cipactli, the bestial Karai Pyhare, and the wicked Kalku, among others. Vampire families long thought dead begin to reveal themselves to the Sabbat occupants of South America, shortly before brutally eliminating their occupiers and reclaiming their herds.
- There are no vampires indigenous to the South American continent or the Caribbean, but there are many Methuselahs of Clans predisposed to migration. Ancient Ravnos, Gangrel, and Followers of Set begin to stir from their long sleeps as the Sabbat spill copious volumes of blood above their resting places. When these vampires awake, they will be hungry, and unlike any other member of their Clan. Should they Embrace, an errant bloodline will almost certainly follow.
- The mummified vampires staked within Lazarus' temple are all elders of unknown Generation. With permission from Angelique to remove whatever he sees fit from the tomb, Hesha Ruhadze commences the delivery of torpid vampires to the Hierophants of his Clan. The Followers of Set frown on diablerie, but such raw power contained in prone vessels could be the fuel the Setites need. Drinking them dry, each diablerist becoming closer to Sutekh; some members of the Clan hypothesize this may be exactly what's required to wake up their Clan founder.

clash with words before the Prince of Cairo, as in Saqqara the Cappadocian Angelique begins to remove everything of value from the barely-guarded temple. As she departs with her loyal cohorts in tow, she leaves clues to implicate the Giovanni in the theft.

PLANTING THE EYE

From: eyeoneyou@schreckNET.nod

To: beckett@schreckNET.nod

Subject: RE: FW: We need to talk

Congratulations on mastering the art of forwarding. Your unlife will be enriched.

The failure doesn't appear to be your fault; the address seems to have been disabled entirely. Hesha would have to have done this himself, or someone with access to his account did it. If the former, I would say our friend has decided he doesn't want to be found just now. If the latter, I fear for his safety. Which it is I couldn't tell you.

If you intend to print this email chain, please at least black out my address. Vykos will send all manner of threats to every email named once they steal your journal. And they will steal it.

From: beckett@schreckNET.nod

To: eyeonyou@schreckNET.nod

Subject: FW: We need to talk

Dear Okulos,

I'm at a loss. What am I doing wrong here? The below address has worked for Hesha in the past but I'm getting some kind of "delivery failed" message.

Sincerely,

Beckett

! This message was sent with High importance

From: beckett@schreckNET.nod

To: h.ruhadze@bloodspot.eg

Subject: We need to talk

Dear Hesha,

It galls me to admit this, but I need your help. A relic of significance has fallen into my hands and, for lack of any better ideas, I need your assistance disposing of it. That's all I'm willing to

say via electronic mail, but if we can arrange a meeting, that would be superb. You decide the details; I'll be there. That should impress upon you just how serious this is.

Sincerely,

Beckett

Lucita (555-487-5555)

B:	Lucita, I need a favor. It's a big one.	12:47
L:	Go ahead and ask. No promises.	12:49
B:	Hesha has gone dark. Could be foul play.	12:49
B:	I was wondering if you could pop into Cairo, poke around a little? Talk to your Eclipsian friends maybe. I know he's been to Egypt recently…	12:50
L:	No can do, I'm a little tied up right now. But I'll poke Fatimah al-Lam'a, see if she can help.	12:50
B:	That'll do.	12:51
L:	Why not go yourself?	12:51
B:	I'm checking last known whereabouts. Can't be everywhere.	12:52

Shedd Aquarium, Chicago, United States

Back I come to this hole of a city, but thankfully only for a fleeting visit.

Chicago's been marginally less wasteful than Charleston. I was able to identify one known associate of Hesha who, with a little convincing, indicated a possible haven in Ann Arbor. On the surface, this seems unlikely, but it's the best lead I have at the moment.

I've never been to Ann Arbor, but I've heard the stories. The Sabbat situation in Detroit makes all of southeast Michigan unstable, and there's no small amount of Lupine activity as well. But local Camarilla around Ann Arbor and Toledo have proved amazingly resilient in holding the line. I hesitate even to call them Camarilla, as they are only nominally so. The ringleader of these Cainites is an Archon named Justin Stone. I guessed correctly that Theo could connect us; apparently Stone and I share a Clan, even, so perhaps that works to my advantage. I've had Cesare file the flight plan. It's not a long trip from Chicago to A2 (as the locals apparently call it). I hope this proves less of a red herring than the last two locations, but optimism isn't abundant.

[RECORDING BEGINS]

Lucita: Where are you?

Beckett: Somewhere over Lake Michigan right now. It transpires that I can work a speaker phone, despite Okulos' doubts. What do you know?

Lucita: Not much. Al-Lam'a did what she could, but Hesha's trail is cold. She has questions for you though.

Beckett: Oh?

Lucita: What do you know about what's going on with the Cappadocians?

Beckett: No more than her, I suspect. If she were to have a conversation with Angelique at some point, I'd be curious what came of it.

Lucita: I think that conversation may have already happened.

Beckett: Tell me.

Lucita: Fatimah was vague, but if I were to guess I think Angelique is girding for war against the Giovanni.

Beckett: So she must have soldiers. She has to know she wouldn't just be at war with them —

Lucita: She's not without allies. The Mla Watu have Cappadocian blood. And it may be she's swung certain Followers to her side.

Beckett: Hesha? I have it on good authority he was in a certain tomb not so very long ago —

Lucita: I don't know. But there are whispers. Rumors the Setites might try to call in their boon. If they were to use it on behalf of Angelique —

The life boon the Setites claim is owed them? Nonsense. I should know, I was there. -A

Beckett: That's a very big if, but yes, they could affect a sea-change among the 13. Look, if you can get any more from Fatimah —

Lucita: I know, I know.

[RECORDING ENDS]

Downtown Ann Arbor, United States

Stone wasn't entirely friendly and objected vehemently to being recorded. It seems Bell wasn't supposed to give out his location, but such is the way with an Archon scorned.

Stone denied knowledge of Hesha, but upon describing some of his tics and mannerisms — even that most mannered of Serpents possesses them — he named a

"Mr. Raymond" seen in Ann Arbor a month back. It took effort to wheedle the location out of Stone – he's a man of principles, it seems – but even without his help, I would have guessed eventually: A small walkup apartment next a tea shop called Uncommon Grounds. At least he didn't choose the Blue Nile.

He must have been certain of his anonymity, though. Or that no one would come looking for him here. Hesha isn't risk averse, but he isn't incautious either, and this place is just two sturdy doors away from the street, with no back exit. Would he have brought men with him? Maybe, but he took great pains to keep this place off the radar. Maybe it was his private little getaway?

Whatever it is, he has been here recently. It's well kept, as expected, but "lived" in. In fact, it looks as though he just stepped out for a breath of air. Or maybe some tea. A laptop remains, along with notes, journals, books, and even a collection of old, unlabeled cassettes. A goldmine of information, but is any of it useful? Hesha would be appalled at me pawing through all of this.

I'm going to enjoy it a great deal.

But the apartment is a mystery unto itself. It's as if Hesha disappeared into thin air (that's not actually impossible, so perhaps I shouldn't rule it out); he would never have left so much paper behind voluntarily. But there's no signs of struggle, no signs he attempted to conceal or destroy anything, which means he would have had to have been grabbed somewhere else. Whoever was behind it clearly didn't know about this place, or none of this would be here now.

Yet Hesha – I presume it was Hesha – had sufficient warning and foresight to delete his email account?

And he had the Eye of Hazimel on him the whole time?

None of this makes any sense.

On the 7th night of Isis Ascendant

I met with Jibade today. He's a sadistic little bastard, I'll give him that. Not that I'd expect otherwise from a Typhonist, but he wraps it in a bow of such extreme nihilism it's hard to believe he's as young as he says he is. He's not even a proper Follower of Set – former Toreador



antitribu, actually, cast adrift when Detroit's Bishops fell — but he'll go far so long as he doesn't burn himself out first.

I would have preferred a more low-key accomplice in this particular endeavor. Jibade's fighting ring affords him a degree of local celebrity, even among the kine. Its nearest analogy would be a dog-fighting operation, but with humans instead of canines. The Kindred lead the kine into the warehouse arena naked and on leashes, then goad them to tear each other apart. I gather from the bleating that these people are grabbed right off the street, and half the sport seems to be finding what it'll take, short of using our gifts, to turn them against each other. From the Plexiglas splashguard, I watched a woman crush a man's esophagus through repeated application of an elbow while her own eye bulged grotesquely from a fractured socket, and couldn't help but wonder how wildly away her plans had gone that night.

They dragged the dead man from the arena and offered him to the crowd — half those in attendance, most of them Sabbat striplings, were here for the free meal as much for the entertainment — while Jibade and I made our arrangements. The arena

would work well. Yes, it was restraint ready. No, screams and other noises were obviously not going to be a problem. And no, there wouldn't be any unexpected visitors — the locals know to keep their distance. He just laughed when I asked about local law enforcement.

It's hard not to feel a little pity for these Children of Damballah, isolated from the root of their Clan for so long they scarcely remember themselves. For them, Set is merely an afterthought. It's Damballah-Wedo and Aido-Wedo, the Serpent and the Rainbow, who hold the real power. They are like guides to the Children, on a path to godhood.

This isn't so unusual, to my ears. After all, who among us hasn't privately imagined our immortality in a more glorious fashion, only to be slapped down with the reminder that no, we are not, in fact, gods?

The Serpents got away with it, though, didn't they? They've wrought this great charade, convinced themselves of their own divinity, played the revisionists with the true history of Caine, and no one has said one word to them. Ironic, then, that the Children of Damballah should fall to their own kin, for the crime of creating personal mythology.

And talk about personal mythologies! The Cohort of Wepwawet have cast themselves as the sword of Set, the unyielding defenders of a gospel that doesn't actually exist. This Clan that practically staked (no pun intended) its reputation on the pursuit of selfenlightenment, and here are the Cohort to make sure it's the right kind of selfenlightenment. Ah well, every group has their extremists, I suppose.

They've so thoroughly trashed their own reputation in the last few decades, though, that they're in danger of failing right out of existence. Funny thing about the Followers...blood is blood, but ideology matters. The Cohort are badly in need of victories for their ideology. That's why I'm here, isn't it? To sing the songs of their conquests. Or is it to provide outside witness to their atrocities? Perhaps they're the same thing.

This morning I watched Miane flay a man until he forsook Damballah-Wedo and swore fidelity to Set and Set alone. Then she cut open his belly, filled him with scorpions, and left him for the dawn. Among them these last few days, I've heard whispers some of the Children are leaving for the Americas, and perhaps other places. For their sake, I hope this is true, as the Cohort's strength lies primarily in Africa these days.

Downtown Ann Arbor, United States

I always feel a little dirty rummaging through someone else's diaries, but when they belong to Hesha, I feel comfortable in the knowledge he would tear mine apart for a simple clue.

I found a revealing scrap of paper. It seems I'm not the only one to print out all my online content. Hesha made some manner of transaction with an isra442@bloodspot.eg, requesting a delivery of something to Jibade's warehouse. Given I've discovered other references to Jibade, I feel it necessary to contact this Isra.

All I need to do is find an internet connection, and work out how one connects to it.

On the 11th night of Isis Ascendant

What timeline? And tell me again why you continue to help this snake?

like to think of myself as a patient man, but it's a different matter when you're on a timeline. And the expenditure of resources has been quite wasteful.

Is it possible one could, in fact, assimilate so wholly the Eye into their own being that it would become <u>their</u> eye? To break the connection to Hazimel? To use it to look back upon their own lineage to its very roots? I was beginning to doubt. But with this most recent "experiment," I believe, for a moment or two, Hazimel's presence was suppressed. Perhaps even completely absent from the vessel.

For most, a few moments of clarity are all that will be needed. But most is not all. I need these Final pieces of the puzzle.

<MOMENTS OF SILENCE, THEN SUDDEN PROLONGED SCREAMING>

Hesha: The chains will only do so much. You have to hold him, Jibade.

Jibade: I've got him, just finish it.

<screaming continues a moment longer, then abates to sobbing.>

H: <chanting in an indecipherable language>

<THERE IS A LONG PERIOD OF SILENCE HERE, BROKEN ONLY BY SMALL TALK BETWEEN HESHA AND JIBADE, FOR ABOUT AN HOUR. PERIODICALLY HESHA WILL RESUME HIS CHANTING>

Man: I see…I see <trails off into a scream>

H: What do you see? Describe it to me.

M: He sees me. He's looking for his eye.

H: Hazimel?

M: He sees YOU. HE WANTS YOU.

<SOUNDS OF CHAINS THRASHING, THEN A STRUGGLE AND GRUNTING.>

J: Fucking A, when did he get so strong?

H: <chanting>

M: Khalil! Khalil! KHALIL!

<SILENCE FOR A FULL MINUTE>

H: What do you see now?

M: I see a great river. And a city. Masr. It has so many mosques.

H: Set thanks you for what you have done here, childe.

From: isra442@bloodspot.eg

To: beckett@schreckNET.nod

Subject: RE: Mr. Raymond sent me…

He hasn't, and I doubt very much he offered a reference without running it by me first, but that's okay…I know who you are, Mr. Beckett. Do you know Ollie's in Dearborn? Find it; I'll be there all night.

— Isra

• • • •

Beckett: I was hoping you could point me in the right direction.

Isra: Nope, I'm afraid not. In fact, no offense to Mr. Ruhadze, I hope he keeps his distance for a while. He's...stirred things up.

Beckett: Tell me about that.

Isra: Oh, that information is going to be classified, I'm afraid.

Beckett: Look, one of the two things is going on here: Either Hesha's decided to drop off the grid, in which case he's doing a really terrible job of covering his tracks, or he's in deep shit and needs someone with a shovel desperately. So I don't know what he did here, but if you owe him anything, you'd be paying up by filling me in.

[LONG PAUSE]

Isra: And you're authorized to deal on his behalf?

Beckett: You know I'm not, and you know it has to be this way.

Isra: Okay, it's like this. He asked me for vessels. Didn't really matter who, just someone Setite, someone "sturdy." We got lots of them around here.

Beckett: What was he doing with the vessels?

Isra: How the fuck would I know? I'm the girl who gets stuff.

[LONG PAUSE]

Beckett: Then tell me this — where can I find Jibade?

Isra: Hah, you really do like pressing your luck.

Beckett: You have no idea.

West on Michigan Ave., Dearborn, United States

Apparently Jibade's sadism is only exceeded by his masochism; I practically destroyed the brute getting the truth out of him. If it had gone on much longer, I probably would have wilted; I was getting tired of punching him in the face, and I was starting to doubt whether he knew anything. But no one suffers that much to not keep a secret; they make something up long before that. And finally, he let it slip. Inadvertent, I'm sure, because he didn't go that long to suddenly lose faith, but I'll take it.

Except I wish I hadn't.

Someone once told me if you don't like the answers, you should stop asking questions. It might have been Hesha, even. Why do I have the feeling this is all some grand plan of his? Maybe it's his way of proving to me that we really are just pawns in someone else's game.

Lucita (555-487-5555)

B:	I know where Hesha is.	1:22
B:	The Fire Court grabbed him.	1:22
L:	Shit. You sure?	1:23
B:	Yes. Unfortunately.	1:23
L:	They'll never let him leave, not with the Eye.	1:24
B:	No. That's why we need to go in and get him. In fact, I think he's counting on it.	1:25
L:	This isn't some tomb you're raiding. You're asking a lot.	1:25
B:	I know.	1:26
L:	I'll do what I can. As usual.	1:26
B:	Have al-Lam'a contact me directly. Cesare is working on getting us in the air, I'll be coming to her.	1:27

THE FIRE COURT

Location: Luxor; Dominant Clan: Followers of Set (Typhonists)

The child Methuselah Neferu is master of the F., a repository of knowledge both mundane and esoteric. It's said nearly anyone can find the answers they seek here, though they must be willing to pay the Serpents' price, which is never simple, nor obvious.

[RECORDING BEGINS]

Beckett: For the purposes of the tape then, as you four clearly believe I'm fooling around, the plan is for Fatimah to give herself to the Fire Court. She needs to pass our message to Hesha, that we'll wait for him in Luxor's Rack district. When he leaves the temple to feed, we'll smuggle him out of the area.

Okulos: Recorded or not, it's still insanity.

Lucita: It's suicide.

Fatimah: Your thoughts, dear Asima?

Asima: Our Monarch of the Light — Lady Fatimah — is respected by the Setites, and would be a prize to the Typhonists. She *can* gain access, and would likely be treated as a revered guest.

Beckett: I wish Cesare was as supportive as your ghoul.

Fatimah: Asima is a true gift. But what of bodyguards they may place on Ruhadze? I can easily secure my own escape. His may not be so simple.

Beckett: Lucita and I can hide in the Rack, as I said. If it comes to it, we'll eliminate any Setites holding Hesha.

Okulos: Getting rather blasé about the spilling of blood, friend.

Asima: And they will defend him. He's precious cargo. His Eye is precious cargo.

Beckett: Hesha and I have saved one another more times than I care to remember. His existence is worth the blood. That, and if he



holds the Eye of Hazimel, I'd wager his rescue would warrant his handing it to me as payment, and divulging some of the truth about Setite-Camarilla negotiations.

Lucita: Ah, the truth comes out.

Fatimah: I will carry out this task, as it serves me to see the inner workings of the Fire Court. Consider a not inconsequential Boon owed however, once this is resolved.

[RECORDING ENDS]

Al Azhar University, Cairo, Egypt

Grabbing Hesha was no overnight job. The Fire Court is a fortress; I've never set foot inside – my keen sense of personal welfare trumps my curiosity, or at least it has so far – but I am assured you do not just walk in and walk out with a valued guest tucked under your arm, even if you are Fatimah al-Lam'a, Lasombra badass. And it's not a politically inconsequential act either; there's an ever-tenuous balance between the Setites and everyone else in Egypt – including Camarilla, Ashirra, and the apparently-swelling ranks of Cappadocians – Fatimah sits in the very middle of

that web. In the past, upsetting that balance may have been less consequential, but if the fundamentalist arm of Set – which the Fire Court is very much a part of – is reasserting itself in northern Africa as a show of strength before pledging to the Ivory Tower, then they'll be spoiling for a fight. We had to be sure not to give them reason for one or, failing that, to frame someone else for what we were about to do.

First we had to put someone inside the Fire Court. That was the easy part, since access isn't so much prohibited as expensive. In a way we were trading her for Hesha, because we knew she wouldn't be coming back, not any time soon anyway.

She performed as needed and got the message to Hesha. The plan at that point was to take position along a narrow street in Luxor and wait. Hesha knew where help was, and it was his job to find us – hopefully with the Eye still in his possession. We had no idea how much a "guest" and how much a prisoner he was, how free he was to move about, or anything of that nature. We waited for nights, our rooftop and alleyway spotters constantly shifting so as not to become too familiar to the locals, some of whom were undoubtedly Fire Court retainers.

When Hesha finally did appear, I wasn't anywhere near the action. By the time I arrived on the scene, the retinue of Fire Court guards assigned to "protect" him was broken, most of them dead in the streets. I sent one to Final Death, just enough to get my claws dirty really, and then Fatimah swept us survivors away in a veil of shadows. The last thing I saw before the darkness was Hesha's smirking face.

We were in flight within the half hour. There hasn't been word yet on fallout. A deal had been struck for our Ashirra allies to take responsibility for the abduction and, with luck, the Typhonists are still trawling Luxor for clues to a nonexistent insurgency, their gaze safely turned away from Cairo. I've never had that kind of luck though.

I'm not sure which of us, Hesha or I, owe Fatimah the Boon. Probably both of us.

Why Did It Have to Be Snakes?

In these heady days of near-Gehenna and Methuselahs waking up everywhere, it's good to be a Follower of Set. It's only a matter of time now before Sutekh wakes up and brings everyone under his gracious rule. Or destroys the universe so that we can be gods. Or...well, there are really limitless possibilities depending on what you believe. The only thing they seem to have in common is they're never good for anyone who isn't a Follower of Set.

Hesha's Grand Plan

The Eye of Hazimel brings pain, misery, and madness to everyone it touches. You have to tear your own eye from its socket to make any use of it all, and then it proceeds to twist and torture your mind and body. Eventually you become the unwilling servant of its namesake. So why has Hesha spent more than a century pining over the thing, almost dying twice for it?

Power, yes. Under its auspices, Leopold destroyed an entire coterie of Gangrel singlehandedly. He very nearly killed Hesha, Theo, and Ramona, and that was at the nadir of his power. Visions, prophecy, Chimerstry, Vicissitude, the whereabouts of every vampire in Hazimel's lineage...these are all things it's been known to reveal.

Hesha is convinced that if a Setite could wrest the Eye's power from its originator, it could be directed back upon one's own line, potentially even to scry upon the resting place of its founder. It would, naturally, take an incredible will, or occult assistance, or both, to do so for very long, but with it, Hesha himself could find and usher in the return of Sutekh.

But before Sutekh can awaken, the other Antediluvians — the Aeons — must be dealt with. And this is where the Setites' strength reveals itself, for it is the one Clan where ideology prevails over blood. You can be sired by Ventrue, or Nosferatu, or Tzimisce, and still be a Setite. This was the wisdom of Maatkare, and Hesha has heard it. He will use his Clan's diversity, and the Eye, to discover the secrets of every other Clan and pave the way for Set. What is more, it will be easier to do this within the Camarilla, rather than without.

Assuming his theory about the Eye is correct, that is. And assuming he even has it in his possession.

The Rise of Setite Orthodoxy

Even as Hesha breaks with the orthodox arm of his Clan to forge his own path, its strength begins to coils beneath it.

Of them, the Cohort of Wepwawet is the most flagrant. Representing the sword arm of Set, this militant warrior cult has stood by Egypt through the ages, its fortunes tied forever to their homeland. When Egypt was strong, it was because of the Wepwawet, and when it was at the lowest — occupied and ruled over by outsiders — it's because the Wepwawet were weak. They believe, and not without evidence, that if they succeed, so too will Egypt, and therefore Set. The Cohort recently returned one by one to Egypt, gathering their strength for a new campaign. Now they are where they belong, and as they cast their gaze about, they find no shortage of enemies right there, in the lands they should have always been guarding. Their pogrom begins in Africa, and as the Cohort of Wepwawet claims its lost glory, they clear the path for Sutekh's return.

The Cohort aren't the only fundamentalist Typhons in Egypt, however. Above them, and benefitting from its rededicated focus, is the Fire Court. As her enemies are swept clean from the banks of the Nile, Neferu, the mistress of the Fire Court, directs her attentions to matters esoteric. And there's little more esoteric than the Eye of Hazimel. It goes without saying that with it, she might be able to reawaken Set. On this point, she and Hesha agree... they diverge merely on the timing, and who should have the honor.

Some claim this new groundswell of heterodoxy is the direct result of one or more Methuselahs waking. Wepwawet is a popular choice, and one can see why, given the Cohort's recent actions. But others whisper a different name — Nakhthorheb. Since he claimed he would only arise "when my Father calls me — not before," this may just be a case of wishful thinking.

Setite Lore Is Not Cainite Lore (and Sometimes It's Not Even Setite Lore)

Despite the sudden reemergence of hardline Theophidianism in Egypt, the Followers of Set are still, first and foremost, a Clan of diverse interests. So much so they do not even all agree Set is the pro-



genitor of their clan. Doctrine is less important than personal revelation, and they exist as much for the other Clans as they do for themselves. The point of the cults is evangelism. Their ultimate goal is to strip away petty, worldly concerns, by showing you just how trapped you are by them.

There's no doubt Gehenna is afoot and, with that, the Setites are stepping up their game. Part of that game is a very special ace in the hole that the Setite Hierophants have been holding for centuries, dating back to the destruction of Alamut, when they led the nascent Camarilla to the doorstep of the Assassins. It was the destruction of Alamut that paved the way for the Camarilla's existence, but the Followers of Set refused their invitation to join the Sect, instead demanding a life boon from the entire Sect, to be named later. Many times they've considered calling in that favor, but never did. Now, most of the Camarilla's current hierarchy is oblivious to its existence, but it's still out there, waiting to be named.

The Cappadocian Situation

For all of the ancient vampires rumored to be awake or waking in Egypt, the one stirring the most fear isn't a Setite. It's Lazarus, childe of Cappadocius, recently emerged from torpor after years wandering the Shadowlands. Here, in his adopted home of Egypt, his physical form remains safe thanks to the political machinations of Angelique, who secured a ban on the Necromancers from Mukhtar Bey, the Caitiff prince of Cairo. From the relative safety of Bey's decree, Lazarus and Angelique are free now to put their own plots in motion.

To once again move freely among the night, they have no choice but to destroy the Giovanni. Of course, they'd do so anyway, but survival is more noble a cause than revenge. Beckett, Hesha, and Okulos have been witness to one small sliver of their plan, as they participated in the excavation of the Lazarene tomb in Saqqara and observed the accidental reawakening of an elder vampire buried with Lazarus. Who these Kindred are exactly, and how much power they might wield, is unknown, but their mere existence gives Lazarus important leverage. It seems he's chosen to use it to cement the relationship between himself and his old allies, the Setites.

What does Lazarus get out of it? Perhaps the Setite elders will finally be motivated to call in the life boon owed by the Camarilla, dating back to the destruction of Alamut. If the Camarilla could be persuaded to turn a blind eye to the sudden depopulation of a certain clan, it wouldn't be a good time to be Giovanni.

Of course, they can always join the Followers of Set....

Detroit by Night

The Detroit of the World of Darkness, like it's real life counterpart, is a city on the margins, a footnote or asterisk in most peoples' minds. What the world sees is a town fallen to decay. The internet is jammed with timelapse photos of once-thriving neighborhoods overgrown and boarded up. Rusting hulks of cars dot yards and highways. Abandoned factories dominate the skyline. While that's only part of Detroit's truth, the postindustrial wasteland is an aesthetic especially well-suited to its traditional masters, the Sabbat.

But while the Sabbat may rule Detroit and, to some extent, its sister city of Windsor, there are other, equally-vital areas where their reach does not extend. Detroit itself holds fewer than a million people, while the greater metro area boasts another four million in total, stretching as far north as Port Huron and as far west as Ann Arbor. Some would even put its southern edges at Toledo, Ohio, and it's this "Detroit Triangle," something the kine refer to as the Great Lakes Megalopolis, that the Camarilla has identified as a place of interest.

Their chief enforcer is a Gangrel named Justin Stone. He calls himself the Archon of Ann Arbor, and while the title isn't officially recognized, he hasn't been censured for it either. Just 10th Generation and a relative nonplayer in larger Camarilla politics, he's nonetheless proven amazingly effective at holding the line along the I-94 corridor, providing safe egress between Ann Arbor and its environs. So effective, in fact, that Ann Arbor is considered "safe" for Camarilla travel. How exactly Stone has achieved this stirs considerable chatter; the most popular bit of gossip is that he's somehow struck a pact with the local Lupines. The fact that he insists on personally escorting visiting dignitaries whenever they must travel north of the city lends the rumor of his once being a driver of the goblin road a bit of credibility.

Ann Arbor is the farthest edge of the Detroit Metro area. Between it and the city proper lie any number of smaller suburbs, ranging from the predominantly white and well-to-do Bloomfield Hills, to struggling towns like Inkster and Pontiac. This is where the Sword of Caine does its most interesting business, and making the most of that business are the Followers of Set.

Forgotten like so much of the rest of Detroit is its enormous Arab-American population, and hidden among them are the Setite sectarians known as the Walid. Anything a person wants — any service, any vice, any information — the Walid can get. More importantly, they act as a vital artery between North America and their sourcelands in the Middle East and Africa, allowing for the easy movement of goods, individuals, and sometimes important relics. Just how many mummified vampires are bouncing around Detroit is anyone's guess, but there's at least one significant personage riding out his torpor somewhere in town.

The Serpents aren't alone, though. The Ashirra, who share a religion with the vast majority of the Arab-Americans of Detroit, maintain a significant presence here. The most significant outside of their sourcelands, in fact. Still, they shrewdly avoid clashing with the Setites.

In recent nights, stirrings of conflict between packs of Sabbat led to the murder of a visiting Cardinal and the destabilization of Detroit's Bishops, leaving a terrific power vacuum behind. Sabbat predictably surge forward to fill that space, potential heirs maneuvering to secure valued spots, while the Camarilla acts to prevent any kind of succession. Meanwhile, the Followers watch like a Cobra eyeing its prey.

Here are some possible chronicle threads emerging from this flashpoint.

- An ambitious coterie might enjoy the challenge of infiltrating the Fire Court and extracting Hesha. Of course, that's no simple task; it's one of the greatest repositories of occult knowledge in the world, and its membership prioritizes its defense above all else. They have the right to demand virtually any price of visitors and, presumably, they have the power to collect, as no one has ever not paid. Neferu, the master of the temple, is an ambitious, sociopathic Methuselah who may be dangerously close to locating the final resting place of her lord, Set. Depending on how the coterie wants to approach it, this could be an action-packed snatch and grab, or a long con of the highest order as they work to upset the Fire Court from the inside.

- A coterie may set its sights on the Fire Court, not to save Hesha, but to recover the Eye of Hazimel. It's not confirmed that Hesha escaped with it. If he didn't, Neferu has a powerful tool at her disposal and she wouldn't flinch at unleashing it to its fullest if she thinks for just one second it could advance her plan to resurrect Sutekh. Selfish vampires might be motivated in some other way; perhaps Hesha hires them, or maybe they

want the Eye for themselves. Of course, anyone who does make off with the Eye will immediately find themselves the target of Hesha's attentions, not to mention Hazimel's.

- The Sabbat Bishops of Detroit have been struck down and chaos ensues. If Detroit seemed like a postapocalyptic nightmare before, it's on the verge of actually becoming one now. Without so much as nominal leadership to keep them in line, packs rage across the city in an unrestrained orgy of violence. The Camarilla wants to insert a proper Prince, but first they have to bring it under their control, and for that they'll need soldiers and diplomats: the former for obvious reasons, and the latter to leverage Setite favor to their advantage. The Followers can play kingmakers here, but what will it cost?
- Hesha has a plan, but what happened between him and the Fire Court? Was he really kidnapped, or might he have gone willingly? Did they allow him to be recaptured? No one visits the Fire Court without paying a price; it's their law, and while they may differ in the details of their belief, both Hesha and Neferu are orthodox Setites. It's not impossible to believe Hesha is acting on their behalf, settling his part of whatever bargain was made that gave him access to their secret libraries. All of this could have been cleverly orchestrated to preserve the trust of Beckett and company. If that's true, then none of the clues found in his apartment can be trusted and no one knows at all what his real endgame is, or how the Eye of Hazimel actually figures into it. Will Hesha be the one who finally ushers in Gehenna?



THE FREEDOM OF LIBERTATIA

Libertatia, East Africa

Cesare and I arrived this night in – well, that's a tad tricky. I gave my word – Scout's honor and all – that I would not divulge the location of Libertatia to anyone. Since my friends read this, whether I invite them to or not, it might be better to omit the exact location.

Suffice it to say I am in Eastern Africa on the invitation of an old acquaintance. I marvel at the relationships we form over the ages. Had I met this gentleman, and I use the word in the broadest possible sense, during my mortal life, I would have condemned him. Now I find myself regarding him fondly. I would not go so far as to call him a friend, but he is a welcome addition to my circle. He wants to show me a "life away from the Jyhad, a refuge from that fucked up crusade," an alternative to the machinations of our elders. I am unconvinced such a thing is possible, though I can see why it might appeal. "Live free or die," I believe the colloquialism goes. A fervent need and passionate drive, however, do not reality make. I would not pass up an opportunity to interview Smiling Jack, though. He made me wait at the waterlogged docks while he sailed in on an incredibly rickety vessel, standing at the prow, complete with braided beard and pirate hat, while barking orders at a terrified crew. I do believe he would have waved a cutlass, if he felt it would impress me. Jack is ever the showman.





SMILING JACK



The Learned Clan (though I use the term very loosely); *1611, #1654. Childe of Mama Lion.

S. was a Caribbean pirate in his mortal days, if rumors can be believed. A renowned Anarch, he prefers being a mentor to taking a position of leadership. S. made his haven in Los Angeles for nearly two decades, and his popularity amongst the local Anarchs rivals that of Jeremy MacNeil. He left Los Angeles abruptly to return to unlife on the oceans.

[RECORDING BEGINS]

Cesare. I know all these transcriptions must be dreadfully dull for you, but that doesn't mean you should start adding accents and inflections. This is a historic record, not a penny dreadful. -B

Smiling Jack: Beckett my man, welcome to Libertatia! What do ya make of the place?

Beckett: It's a den of thieves and pirates. The latter quite literally so, given the Somalian ships I saw in the docks.

Smiling Jack: Ya had no problems gettin' here?

Beckett: None at all. The coin you gave me worked marvelously. I would have had to manhandle your guardians without it.

Smiling Jack: [Chuckle] They're a feisty bunch, no?

Beckett: If you would describe blood-addicted as feisty, yes.

Smiling Jack: [Laughs] Man, ya killin' me…! Ready for the grand tour?

In Cesare's defense, the old cove has an accent. He's an actual pirate.-O

Beckett: Is this a guided tour, or am I free to walk around?

Smiling Jack: We're all free, man. Some of 'em might feel free to get in yer way, but I'm sure ya can handle that.

Beckett: No doubt. I'd like to start by interviewing you.

Smiling Jack: Me? I ain't no scholar. But if ya really want ta. Never let it be said that Smilin' Jack was a bad host.

Beckett: Perhaps you can start by telling me what you are doing here? We last met in the Anarch Free States of Los Angeles.

Smiling Jack: Well, I was there and now I ain't. Can't stay in one place for too long, man. Gotta keep movin', stay flexible. Besides, this is my home! I grew up on these 'ere waters. Or at least, I did the interestin' bits of my growin' up here. [Laughs]

Beckett: So Los Angeles got a little too hot after that stunt, and you decided to bail. How very mature.

Smiling Jack: [Laughs] We're all very mature here. Some of us are more mature than others, lest ye forget.

Beckett: I have not forgotten that you are older than me, if that is what you are hinting at. Of course, age is not the only measure of a man. Lineage is also something to consider.

Smiling Jack: [Darkly] Are you disrespecting Mama Lion?

Beckett: Not at all. Merely pointing out that my purported lineage is *shorter* than yours. If you want to test if blood is a match for age, I'd be happy to oblige.

Smiling Jack: [Laughs] That's the spirit, man! I bark, you bark back. We'd tear the place up good though, and I ain't eager for collateral damage just yet. But maybe someday.

Beckett: With that out of the way, perhaps we can return to our interview. You left Los Angeles and came here. *Why?* There must be

dozens of Anarch domains eager to have you, and Camarilla domains not yet trembling at the mention of your name. Why not one of those?

Smiling Jack: I wasn't kiddin' when I said this was my home, man. But ultimately, it don't matter where I'm at. Freedom lives inside ya. Some of us forget that. They believe freedom is about carving out yer own domain. Ya don't need domain, ya just need ta be free. That's why the Anarch Free States can't die; it's carried right here. [Tapping sound] As long as one Anarch remains standing, freedom survives.

Smiling Jack just tapped his gut. Apparently that's where freedom lives. -B

Beckett: That's a fascinating ideology, but not entirely in tune with reality.

Smiling Jack: Oh yeah? How so?

Beckett: Our kind is manipulated by elders. You are here because of Mama Lion. I am here because of...factors. There is no reason to assume the Anarchs are exempt from this.

Smiling Jack: If what I want coincides with what Mama Lion wants, that's no reason not to do it. Even if she *is* manipulated by her sire and so forth. 'Cause that's what you mean, right? We're all just pawns in a game started thousands of years ago.

Beckett: If it *happily coincides* I might agree, but how do you know that? What if you only think you want freedom, because Mama Lion made you that way?

Smiling Jack: I want what I want. Does it matter *why* I want it?

Beckett: It does if the why goes against your true nature.

Smiling Jack: So I'm here because of Mama Lion and you're here because of Aristotle?

Beckett: Possibly. Some of us are more resistant than others, but —

Smiling Jack: [Laughs] I knew it. You're playing the "everyone but me" card. Sure, if that's what you gotta believe.

Beckett: Perhaps we should get back to the matter at hand. Libertatia and the Anarch cause. How does it aid the cause if you're holed up here? The pirates are charming, but surely this is not the best use of your qualities?

Smiling Jack: This place ain't as far removed from affairs as you might think. In miles, yeah. But in every way that counts? We keep other Anarch domains afloat. Manifestos, blackmail material, money — they're all just a click away.

Beckett: A message board and financial center rolled into one?

Smiling Jack: Hey, I'm not saying that, man. I'm just — *saying*.

Beckett: Yes, you're very subtle. I'll have a look around the domain now. Let me return that coin to you —

Smiling Jack: Nah, keep it. You're practically one of us anyway. If nothing else, it'll add to your collection of old stuff. It's authentic, ya know.

[RECORDING ENDS]

Libertatia, East Africa

Practically an Anarch? I doubt it. I sympathize with their hunger for freedom, but the Unbound are unreliable. The Anarch Movement does well when it's the underdog, yet collapses when in power. Even Los Angeles is not immune to that, as recent nights have shown. Still, I'll keep an open mind as I explore – perhaps the Anarchs have found an equilibrium here.

I have also examined the "authentic" pirate coin and sense magic coursing through it. I'll refrain from carrying it on me for obvious reasons – memories of that damn scarab – but look forward to dissecting the enchantment later and feeding it back to Aisling.

In the meantime, I have an appointment with an Anarch by name of Cécile. Apparently she is a Lasombra antitribu of respectable age, and has spent most of her Kindred years in Libertatia. She should be able to tell me more about the domain.

Cécile of Libertatia

Lasombra antitribu; *1816, #1832.

Cécile is an Anarch from Libertatia. Although Libertatia acknowledges no positions of leadership, Cécile is respected for her age and knowledge of the domain.

Cesare, do not send this to Anatole yet. I wish to learn more of her first. – Beckett.



[RECORDING BEGINS]

Beckett: Thank you for seeing me on such short notice. Shall I call you Cécile, or –

Cécile: Cécile is fine. We are all on a first-name basis here.

Beckett: Cécile, could you tell me about the origins of Libertatia?

Cécile: Do you mean *this* Libertatia, or Libertatia in general?

Beckett: I'm afraid I don't follow.

Cécile: Libertatia is a safe haven for those who seek freedom from oppression. This requires a certain amount of flexibility and willingness to explore new horizons.

Beckett: You're saying Libertatia moves.

Cécile: Indeed. It also exists in more than one location. When our enemies come, there isn't always time for an orderly retreat. We scatter like leaves on the wind and land where chance takes us.

Beckett: I know several Anarchs in Southern California. None of them would ever consider giving ground before the Sects.

Cécile: That is their choice. Perhaps they value other things more than freedom. Territory, herds, even friends and allies — all these are shackles that bind us. Only through a willingness to let go can we find true freedom.

Beckett: Smiling Jack mentioned something similar. How do you build a power base? Ensure your legacy for the ages?

Cécile: I do not seek power, only freedom. I build my legacy by not dying.

Beckett: When did Libertatia begin? I found records of it in a book from 1724 —

Cécile: Oh, much earlier. When the Guruhi declared Africa under their rule, perhaps.

Beckett: The Guruhi?

Cécile: The Guhuri spread from the Kingdom of Nri and style themselves sovereigns to all African vampires. In reality their rule is as contended as that of the Ventrue in the Camarilla — perhaps more symbolic and nominal than absolute. And they are not necessarily Kindred.

Beckett: I would like to know more about that.

Cécile: I am sure you would, but it is not my place to talk of such things. Do you wish to return to the topic of Libertatia?

Beckett: Very well. So Libertatia moves and exists in more than one place. How do you remain in touch?

Cécile: Sometimes with great effort, sometimes not at all. Recent decades have made it easier. The internet provides swift communication and, unlike a physical address, we can take a dotcom with us.

Beckett: You can be found on SchreckNET.

Cécile: Not *I* necessarily, but enough of us. It allows us to stay in touch, coordinate, reach out. We become stronger for it.

Beckett: You're not worried your online presence could draw unwanted attention?

Cécile: If it does, we —

Beckett: Move, I know. Sounds like a wonderful long-term plan.

Cécile: [Silence]

Beckett: Let us discuss how Libertatia is run. You acknowledge no laws, correct?

Cécile: *Almost* correct. I acknowledge no laws other than the ones I set for myself. If I wish to make a deal with another denizen, I do so without interference from Prince or Baron.

Beckett: And so does everyone else in Libertatia?

Cécile: Correct.

Beckett: How do you maintain the Masquerade? Make sure you're not overflowing with childer? Settle disputes of territory?

Cécile: We acknowledge everyone's innate freedom to make her own choices. Everything else flows from that.

Beckett: What if someone chooses to attack you?

Cécile: Then I might choose to destroy him. But matters rarely get so out of hand. Maintaining the Masquerade is something we are all agreed on. We wish to live free, after all, which requires both freedom *and* continued existence. Some of us live openly amongst herd and family, but they take care not to expose us to the larger public.

Beckett: Mistakes are easily made.

Cécile: And rectified. We have our ways.

Beckett: I heard rumors about a shadow tribunal, preventing Masquerade breaches.

[LENGTHY PAUSE]

Beckett: No comment?

Cécile: [Reluctantly] Such a shadow group would run counter to our ideals. It does not exist.

Beckett: I see. Very well. Tell me about maintaining a balance in Kindred population.

Cécile: Too many vampires threatens us all. It leads to feeding disputes and Masquerade breaches. We acknowledge this. Being *free* to Embrace when and whom you choose, does not mean we abandon prudence. I would venture we Embrace no more often than in your Camarilla domains.

Beckett: I do not hail from a Camarilla domain. I heard something about a Day of Departure?

Cécile: You have done your homework.

Beckett: I'm a smart boy. The Day of Departure?

Cécile: It is a joyous occasion. Our childer are sent into the world to find their own purpose and, if they so desire, spread our cause. It is an honor to be chosen for this, a testament to one's maturity and independence.

Beckett: And yet the childer are the ones sent away. If it's such a mark of maturity and independence, I would expect elders to be falling all over themselves to "depart." Did you ever do it?

[LENGTHY PAUSE]

Beckett: Thought not. Can you tell me a little about maintaining herds? The ratio of kine versus Kindred seems stretched.

Cécile: Libertatia sees pirates. Tourists. Herd moves in and out. And if they do not, we do. Many mortals live in the surrounding province. There is room enough if some of us are willing to strike out.

Beckett: And this "striking out," is that also something done by childer?

Cécile: [Testily] I think this interview is over.



Beckett: Am I asking embarrassing questions? I could —

Cécile: I said this interview is over. [Sound of something crashing] [Shaken] Leave.

[pause]

Beckett: Very well. I see you are not amenable to continue. Thank you for your time. You've given me a lot to think about.

[RECORDING ENDS]

Libertatia, East Africa

Illuminating. Libertatia's system of the self-regulating hand seems to work, but it comes at a cost. Shadow tribunals go against their ideals, indeed. More importantly, their system places an inappropriate amount of responsibility on neonates. Too many Kindred? The childer are sent off. Too few vessels? The childer can hunt in the country. I wonder what the fledglings make of that. Is it better to live free and exposed, or under the tutelage of a well-intentioned sire?

There is no denying that Libertatia thrives for it though – Okulos researched their online presence and it is very well-ingrained. I wonder how long before the Camarilla sits up and takes notice. Though I suppose when the Ivory Tower does, these Unbound will just "move."

I am intrigued by Cécile's brief mention – and refusal to talk – of the Gurubi. Possibly on that note, I am unconvinced Cécile is Lasombra. As she grew agitated, the shadow around her seemed to animate on its own accord – it even knocked over a vase towards the end of our discussion. I have never seen such a thing, not even with Lucita, whose mastery over shadows is matched only by her temper. Furthermore, my time observing Lucita has led me to deduce that such shadowplay requires a small expression of vitae from the practitioner. Whatever powers Cécile possesses, I do not believe her to be Lasombra.

Really, Beckett? Observing me? Also, I should like to meet this woman. -L

DOCTOR LAMAS

Clan of the Hidden; *1585, #1628.

L. was a sailor with Dutch admiral and privateer Piet Hein (1577-1629). After his Embrace, he abandoned privateering and turned to anthropology instead. His area of expertise is the Laibon of Africa, though it is sometimes difficult to distinguish between proven facts L. has unearthed and his personal theories. L. lives among the Anarchs in Libertatia.



[RECORDING BEGINS]

Beckett: Doctor Lamas, thank you for speaking with me.

Lamas: Not at all! I am honored to meet a scholar of your renown. And, of course, we are 'kindred' in our chosen field, if you'll excuse the pun. [Wet wheezing sound]

[LENGTHY PAUSE]

Lamas: Ahem, yes. You wished to consult my expertise on all matters wondrous and local.

Beckett: I wished to talk about the Laibon Clans of Africa.

Lamas: Yes, indeed. Well, they hail from Africa, as the colloquial term "African Kindred" implies, and they prefer to be called "Lineages" rather than "Clans." Considering such a broad term encompasses both bloodlines and Clans, we cannot vouch for their connection to the Dark Father.

Beckett: Is there anything you can vouch for?

Lamas: Yes, of course! The sun rises in the east and sets in the west. There, vouched for!

[LENGTHY PAUSE]

Lamas: [Wet wheezing sound] I can tell you're a man of little jokes. The Laibon lineages. The number of Laibon lineages is said to match 13, which would be interesting indeed, if it were true. Unfortunately, Western colonization and enslavement destroyed much of Africa's heritage, so it's all terribly murky.

Beckett: I see.

Lamas: Oh, don't be disheartened! We still have *some* tales and legends to go on. For example, a lineage of shadow-weavers used to live here on this very island! Of course, it's also rife with nasty Lasombra, so maybe those tales are of early antitribu. But we know they're here! The Laibon I mean, not the shadow-weavers. They prefer not to advertise themselves. Understandable, considering what usually happens when white man meets native. But I am willing to bet that they are all around us. Some may even have traveled to our original domains. Can you imagine! Black people in Amsterdam!

Beckett: Imagine indeed. You are aware, doctor, that black people have been in Amsterdam for some time now?

Lamas: Exactly! They are among us.

Beckett: Doctor, I —

Lamas: And then there are the Naglopers, whose story is most interesting indeed.

Beckett: The Naglopers.

Lamas: Yes. I speak a bit of Dutch. *Ik voer met Piet Hein, weet je.* I believe Nagloper derives from the words "*nacht,*" night, and "*loper,*" walker. So Nagloper means nightwalker.

Beckett: A very appropriate name then.

Lamas: And also *not* African. Clearly it is not their original name. It was given to them by us, later, in an attempt to rephrase an entire continent's worth of culture in terms that made sense to *us*. Which made me wonder — what is their original name? So I did some research. Comparing what we know of the Naglopers to African legends, I say they were the inspiration for the terrifying, tree-dwelling sasabonsam and asanbosam! Now, I found a claw of a sasabonsam — here! — as proof that they existed.

Beckett: So you have established that Nagloper is a nickname and they might have had a different nickname once?

Lamas: Or perhaps they ate the Bonsam! Or the Bonsam ate them!

Beckett: They ate the Naglopers and adopted their name? Unlikely, doctor. As is, I'm afraid, the rest of your tale.

Lamas: But —

Beckett: Are you aware that the Nagloper name is said to derive from the African *Khoikhoi* language?

Lamas: No, but —

Beckett: Do you speak *Khoikhoi*, doctor?

Lamas: Do you?

[pause]

Beckett: No.

Lamas: Ha!

Beckett: Thank you, doctor. You have given me something to consider.

[RECORDING ENDS]

Libertatia, East Africa

That was interesting. Still, the good doctor gave me food for thought. I had Cesare delve into the Khoikhoi language, and I'm afraid he did not find anything to either corroborate or dismiss Doctor Lamas' theory. I myself do not speak Khoikhoi, though I shall add it to my list. Perhaps a trip to South Africa is in order. I did find some Kindred stories dealing with Naglopers and, amazingly, one of them referenced the sasabonsam. The text was incomplete, but it made mention of a rising Ancient who devoured either the sasabonsam or the Naglopers. The latter seems unlikely since the Naglopers are clearly not extinct, but perhaps the sasabonsam are. A Laibon version of Gehenna, as it were, yet the other Laibon lineages do not seem to have suffered. Maybe this is Gehenna: the rising of a single elder whom, due to their age, must feast on their own vitae. The extinction of one Clan, made even more terrifying by virtue of not knowing which is next, elevated to a mythical end to all our kind. It certainly makes more sense than a biblical progenitor rising to lead us all to our doom.

I'll ponder this more at a later date. For now, Cesare and I are departing. My earlier fears about the Camarilla finding Libertatia have proven true — my contacts tell me a fleet led by the new Brujah Justicar is on its way. Since I have no wish to get embroiled in this conflict, I take my leave. I only hope I can continue my research on these sasabonsam elsewhere.

The Pursuit of Freedom

Captain Johnson described Libertatia in *A General History of the Pyrates*, published in 1724. These pirates were renowned for their love of freedom and even attacked slave ships with the express purpose of liberating slaves. The relationship between the mortal pirates and the Anarchs is not as well-documented. Stories among Kindred vary from them inspiring the mortals, to the other way around, or the groups forming an organic alliance, whilst the kine don't remember the relationship at all.

As Libertatians prefer to pack up and leave rather than engage in Sect wars, its location is ever-changing. Being truly free, the Unbound believe, includes being able to leave your possessions behind. Libertatia also exists in multiple places after departing Anarchs scattered in small coteries. Three Libertatian domains currently exist: Mombasa (detailed in **Anarchs Unbound** p.61), Toamasina, and an unnamed hub of tied-together ships off the coast of Somalia.

Unlife in Libertatia

Libertatia is effectively three separate domains and all of them are different. Some things hold true across the board though:

- Libertatia is home to antitribu of all clans, though some are more prevalent than others. Lasombra antitribu, traditionally a seafaring Clan, and Serpents of the Light, who make a point of opposing slavery, are especially prolific. By contrast, Libertatia sees few Ventrue and Tremere. The Toreador, having arrived with French colonists, maintain a large presence in Toamasina specifically.
- The Kindred of Libertatia don't much care about the Treaty of Tyre or the Status Perfectus, though they are committed to freedom. They just *are* Anarchs, rather than reading or talking about it. They do forward copies of Anarch manifestos to support other Kindred in their quest for freedom, and maintain an internet presence. Libertatia's apolitical attitude is slowly shifting, as new residents come from besieged Anarch domains (or are converted from the Camarilla and Sabbat) and demand heavier involvement with the revolution. This causes friction between established and new Libertatians.
- Every Libertatian is considered sovereign unto herself, entitled to maintain her own domain



and law. The outcome of this individual autonomy isn't as violent as one might expect, though tensions can run high. Established Libertatians hold large territories, but they genuinely leave room for newcomers to claim a nightclub, street, or small group of mortals. Whether the newcomer can also *keep* this domain depends on how competently she handles it. The Libertatians believe everyone should have equal *opportunity* to pursue her personal goals and freedom, but opportunity does not always translate to result. Wheeling and dealing thrives, and Libertatia is rich with opportunity for Kindred willing to get in the fray.

- Some Kindred in Libertatia make use of their freedom to live openly among mortals. Not all Anarchs think this is wise, but they grudgingly accept each other's right to live as they choose. Any Masquerade breaches are dealt with so decisively that they serve as a cautionary tale to others.
- Libertatian Kindred have no restrictions on creating progeny. They rely on common sense (and peer pressure) to keep the population in check. They have a biannual Day of Departure, when newly-created childer are released into the world if the populace grows too numerous. It's considered a great honor to be selected for departure, and any childe (or their sire) who refuses finds herself *swimming* to her new home.
- Pirates and tourists, combined with the mortal population of Toamasina itself, offer ample feeding opportunities. If vessels grow scarce, however, young Anarchs are expected to band together in nomadic coteries to feed.
- The Libertatian Kindred take freedom *very* seriously. They do not tolerate blood bonds and, by extension, ghouls. Kindred bringing ghouls to Libertatia are expected to release them, as are sires bringing blood-bound childer This means either killing them to keep the Masquerade (in the case of ghouls), subjecting them to the vaulderie, or sending them away until the bond breaks (or the abandoned thrall commits suicide in desperation). Libertatians are also apt at using Dominate, Presence, the forming of cults, or simple blackmail to sway mortals to their side.
- While Libertatia is open to all comers, the Anarchs are aware of the threat posed by Camarilla and Sabbat. Pirate ships guard Libertatia from unwanted visitors. Their crews are made up out of mortals (some in the know) and Anarchs. The latter are usually diablerie-addicted elders or veterans from Anarch wars, for whom defending the domain is a community-approved way to feed. "Genuine pirate coins," created with Thaumaturgy and near-impossible to copy, are given to Kindred who are expressly welcome in Libertatia. The use of these tokens is a point of contention in Libertatia, as it opposes the equal opportunity of all visitors to arrive safely. Proponents of the tokens point out that everyone has an equal chance to *gain* a coin — some Kindred merely capitalize on it better.
- The Laibon maintain a strong presence in Libertatia, though they don't go around proclaiming their Legacy. As most Anarchs consider themselves Clanless anyway, the Laibon fit in quietly. The Laibon use Libertatia's network to travel to domains — Anarch, Camarilla, and Sabbat — in Europe and America.

Nights in Toamasina

Toamasina is an excellent domain for Kindred. The port handles most of Madagascar's foreign trade, and the Anarchs set up a lucrative (and illegal) arms trade. The city is a popular tourist destination, which makes feeding easier. The Unbound further use the yearly rebuilding projects, necessitated by cyclones that plague the port from October to April, to fit the city to their specific needs: Toamasina is rife with forgotten sewers and underground pathways and buildings.

Toamasina's marshes and overcrowded population led to several epidemics during the colonial period — a problem the French, prompted by Cainites, solved by relocating the entire indigenous population in 1895. Toamasina still sees far fewer Laibon than the other two Libertatian domains today.

Below are plothooks specifically for Toamasina, the Libertatian domain Beckett visited.

- A Serpent of the Light named Ambon creates an office where Kindred can record their assets and wishes, to facilitate trades. This exists only in Ambon's head so far, but he's looking to expand into the digital realm. Vampires

established in Libertatia are hired to run the website, while Kindred in another domain may finally find that long-coveted artifact online. What happens when rumors claim Ambon is sending his list to a nearby Setite colony to aid in the corruption of his clients?

- Dark rumors insist a secret tribunal of elders deals with Masquerade breaches *before* they happen. An invitation to join this mysterious group is sent to one of the player's characters. Does she accept, or use this opportunity to blow the lid off the shadow elite? What if the message was a trap meant to prove she is "no real Anarch"?

- The humans of Toamasina have unknowingly begun to adapt to the Disciplines local Kindred use to control them. The last generation of mortals sees individuals who are either so weak-willed they are barely coherent, or so strong-willed they are immune to Disciplines. How do the Kindred react when they notice this trend? Expose it and risk that Disciplines will be abandoned in lieu of the more traditional blood bond? Or keep quiet until a new generation of slaves and untouchables emerges?

- A neonate Tzimisce antitribu named Nika Moravec leads a group nomadic of Kindred hunting in Toamasina's outlying domains. She does well for herself and has attracted a gathering of followers and allies. A drained and flesh-melted mortal is found on Nika's hunting ground one evening — a flagrant Masquerade breach. Is Nika reverting to the ways of her Clan? Or is someone, possibly an infiltrator from the Sabbat, setting her up? The player characters are either part of Nika's coterie, or sent to investigate the breach.

- A coin granting passage to Toamasina is given to a Toreador Anarch, but she is killed before she can use it. The coin is now for sale at an auction along with the rest of her estate. If the characters are Anarchs, they are sent to retrieve the coin before it falls into the wrong hands. Alternately, the characters *are* the wrong hands and eager to use the coin to infiltrate Libertatia for their Sect. Or, to kick off a Libertatia chronicle, an unsuspecting player character finds herself in possession of the coin with interested parties (both from Toamasina and its enemies) closing in.

- The rise of the digital age makes it easier for Kindred to stay in touch regardless of physical location and the three Libertatian domains are no exception to this. A call for help goes out as Mombasa comes under attack by the Camarilla, and the player characters are sent from Toamasina to help. This opens up a whole new playground for a Libertatian campaign.

The Price of Freedom

As Libertatians spread across the world following Days of Departure and cement their influence on the Anarch movement through the internet, they're drawing the attention of the Camarilla and Sabbat. Libertatia isn't the heart of the Anarch Movement, but its resources are a large part of its backbone. The Camarilla finally launches an attack on Toamasina in Madagascar.

The player characters can throw in their weight depending on their allegiance, and their involvement should tip the scales of the conflict.

- The Libertatians prepare for the attack by tapping into their arms trade. The player characters are sent to pick up as many weapons as possible — a tricky task, as the arms dealers are reluctant to hand over their merchandise at the drop of a hat. A band of Setite ghouls in particular refuses to cooperate. Is it a coincidence the retainers are stalling, or do the Setites have their own plans for Toamasina? If the latter, then merely beating back the Camarilla won't save the domain — the characters need to make sure Toamasina doesn't become another Setite fiefdom.

- The Libertatians have a lot of influence with local pirates, whom they call on to defend Toamasina. Their familiarity with local sea routes and the Lasombra's affinity for ships are offset by the small size of their vessels. The young Anarchs are determined to fight, but their elders propose to leave and start over instead. One coterie can sway the outcome of this stalemate. If they stay and fight, they *must* win or all is lost. If they leave, they must decide where to go: rally to Mombasa or the Somali colony, scatter to the winds and meet online later, or start a new domain from scratch? The latter is certainly the riskiest, but offers great opportunities to ambitious Cainites.

JUSTICAR CARDOSO PINTO



10th Generation Brujah, Embraced 1716 by Captain Charles Hayworth.

Cardoso Pinto hails from Brazil and has firsthand experience with the Sabbat. While she denounces their ideology, she readily uses Sabbat war tricks. Cardoso Pinto takes a hard stance against the Anarch movement and this, along with her experience and connections, endears her to the Inner Circle.

Cardoso Pinto's grandsire, María Acosta, was a rival of the infamous Mama Lion during the age of Caribbean piracy. She embraced British Naval Captain Hayworth to counter Mama Lion's influence, and their rivalry was passed down to her grandchilde. While the Justicar endeavors to treat all Anarchs equally badly, she tends to target domains housing Smiling Jack.

Cardoso Pinto is a short woman with dark skin, short cropped hair, and amber eyes. She rarely goes without weapons, her favorite being a machete, though she is a deadly unarmed combatant. She speaks several languages and enjoys reading poetry in its original tongue — a hobby she keeps to herself lest it diminishes her fearsome reputation. Lastly, as a skill passed to her by Acosta and Hayworth, the Justicar is well-versed in naval tactics.

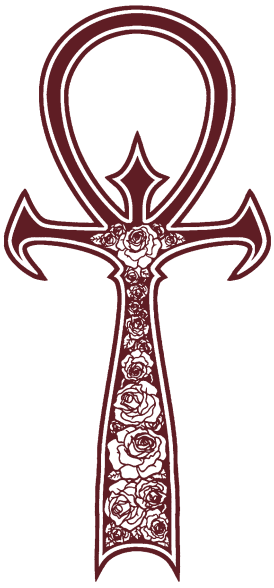
- The Libertatians capitalized on Toamasina's shark-infested waters by feeding the predators vitae. This makes the animals larger and more vicious, and adds another layer of defense to the domain. *Someone* needs to draw the sharks out of the harbor where they normally reside, and towards the Camarilla-controlled ships. Sinking some of the enemy vessels is a priority, since even bloodsharks can't eat through an armored hull. A pack could prove its bravery and mettle by volunteering for this task.
- Justicar Manuela Cardoso Pinto leads the Camarilla against Libertatia. In preparation for the attack, she asks a coterie to navigate international treatises to create a naval coalition against "piracy in African waters." Given this is a very specific niche, Cardoso Pinto is willing to employ Autarkis and Independent vampires, as long as they do not have a history of actively opposing the Camarilla.
- The Laibon of Africa have no stake in the Jyhad, nor do they have a significant presence in any Sect. If Cainites *must* claim Toamasina though, they prefer the devil they know and back the Anarchs. If the Laibon can deflect the Camarilla *and* get rid of the Anarchs, thus reclaiming Toamasina for the first time since 1895, they eagerly do so. Cécile, a Laibon masquerading as Lasombra antitribu, makes every effort to weaken and oust the Anarchs after the battle. She manipulates sympathetic Cainites, including the player characters, to aid her.

Libertatia in other Nights

The historical Libertatia — if it ever existed — dates back to the 18th Century, when a pirate who may himself have been fictional spoke of founding a radical commune against the principles of monarchy, slavery, and capitalism. The Kindred Libertatia potentially dates back farther, as Cécile noted in her conversation with Beckett. If such an endeavor did exist, it would be a legend through Anarch communities in earlier nights, slipping into the mortal world only after a privateer's domitor neglected to renew their bond after a long voyage at sea, and then as a fable.

The Anarch Revolt itself ended just as full-scale contact between Europe and Africa blossomed, burgeoned by sailing technologies and friendly contact began a century prior to the implementation of the Atlantic slave trade. In the aftermath of the Convention of Thorns, the newly-formed Sects had little tolerance for those who continued to refuse to toe the line. The rare few Anarchs who did not join with either the Camarilla or the Sabbat in the Treaty of Tyre would naturally desire a safe haven from both, running to locations such as the lands adjacent to the Canary Islands or those places south of Egypt.

If Libertatia existed before the Atlantic slave trade, before it was whispered in mortal ears, it would have taken much the same form as it does now — disparate and mobile settlements, largely dominated on the local level by the Laibon. The chief difference would be the historical Libertatia's political stance: if a safe haven in North or East Africa existed during the Anarch Revolt, it would be a constant hotbed of revolutionary activity, a place of safety and security from overbearing elders. Here, Anarchs from Romania and Italy and Spain could gather and share what they knew — including Kupala's sacred fire-flower and the secret of renouncing the blood oath. A sense of community and freedom in a time of oppression is without price, and Libertatia has always maintained that value cannot be measured in gold.



TRANSVAAL NIGHTS

Dear Beckett,

First, let us apologize. You wrote each of us with tact and formality, and we were impressed that you not only discovered our diverse identities, but navigated our differences and rivalries. You avoided basic forms of offense, and we were not unduly angered by your antique, naive honorifics. While we believe we adhered to the strict forms of our subsequent agreement, you must be surprised and even angered at the results.

Let us be clear: We didn't poison you — not really. You requested hospitality and, as we explained in communications, we offer sustenance to our guests — a custom common to us all, though so much else differs. We promised you would not be harmed and indeed, no harm has come to you. Sanaa used her particular mastery of blood and venom not to injure, but to put you in a certain receptive, suggestible, vision-seeking state. As you read this, the effects have doubtless passed, and you should only feel a slight lassitude of the flesh, barely distinguishable from the stillness that so often occupies our dead muscles. This is how we satisfied our second promise, to add our knowledge to yours about the blood drinkers of Africa, and our stories of endings and beginnings.

You didn't offer us much in return. If we may generalize about your people the way you've often done about us, you were typically European with your excessive shrewdness and closed hand. You talked of business arrangements and introductions into the courts of other lands: rewards we're capable of claiming for ourselves. No, we wanted knowledge for knowledge. Your Gehenna legends alarm us, and we would have your learned insights. We drugged you to remove your reticence, so you might honor yourself fully by providing recompense. To satisfy our promise we've provided recordings, notes, and transcripts, omitting only matters of absolute discretion.

It was necessary to restrain your companion, Okulos, but he's undamaged and easily revived in the usual fashion. Rest assured, the shipping container you'll wake up in won't be inspected as long as you exercise minimal discretion. The ship's crew will tolerate your attentions.

May our various gods bless you during your journey. Do not return to our territories uninvited.

With Respect,

Augustine Wong of the Ramanga

Rilwan, the Obayifo

Vanessa Soro of the Bonsam

Sanaa, of Sutekh

Ulwazi Mpande of the Ishologu

This is what happens when instead of taking a well-traveled ally such as myself, you drag along the friend you literally fetched out of a Turkish hole. -E

[RECORDING BEGINS]

Beckett: Thank you for receiving us. Formal encounters between our people are uncommon, but hardly exotic.

Sanaa: Throughout history, Europeans have been positively determined to visit us. Sometimes they've met us formally. Often not.

Beckett: I understand. Still, few of these meetings have brought together Kindred from such far-flung regions of the Ebony Kingdom.

Augustine: Hah! I read about that term in my ancestor's papers! He toured the continent some centuries ago with a French servant, and then went north to Europe. I hope we can return the hospitality he received. Please! Drink deep of the willing ones we prepared for you.

Ulwazi: Let's relieve some confusion. I have the lucky honor of hosting you, Beckett. And Okulos, of course. This "Ebony Kingdom" is a fiction, but perhaps it's a useful one. In truth, we have little in common besides the category you've placed us in, and of course, common historical power relations. But you brought us together. This is a rare occasion to learn from the blood-drinkers of many lands. Thank you. Drink with us.

Beckett: I sense a little cynicism, but I suppose it's warranted. Please forgive me for using archaic language but we must all agree



that this sort of meeting is unprecedented. As for your hospitality, you must have a custom about hiding our nature, and I don't want these people to suffer simply because they've heard too much while satisfying our thirsts.

Ulwazi: Don't worry. We will bewitch their memories where necessary. I know you're familiar with this art. Your Ventrue are masters of it.

Beckett: Excellent. We're hardly starving, but full veins help me master my concentration. I have so many questions. This isn't my first visit to Africa, but I've never met your learned Kindred before.

Sanaa: You should both drink.

Okulos: My attention is sufficient to the task already.

Ulwazi: My Egyptian friend is correct. We have hospitality traditions to observe. Only a token sip is required. You must also let your hosts introduce themselves. You know our names, of course, but we've come together to share stories. We should tell our stories to you. For example, you know that I am Ulwazi Mpande. It's easiest if you consider me seneschal of Pretoria and indeed, they call me this in certain contexts — Kindred from the European lines still use colonial terms. My line was once called Impundulu. Do you know this name?

Beckett: Yes. Old books from the Tremere — a Clan in our society — mention you.

Ulwazi: I know the Tremere. We were as interested in them as they were in us. Like them, we were bonded to a sect of witches who gave us birth and sustenance. But of course, breathing men and women can

only use magic with great difficulty, and as they master their arts, they develop certain superstitions. Magic lives outside of them; they have no intuition for its flow. I'm sure the Tremere were forced to wade through nonsense words and symbols to find the Art in their blood. Our witches believed that magic was only inherited, so of course they founded closed families and indulged all sorts of perversions to maintain power. But their spells forced us to only feed from their blood. They only taught magic within their families, so as their numbers dwindled, we starved. Like your Tremere, we freed ourselves from witch bondage. It was necessary. Otherwise, we would have starved when the last of them died. One of my ancestors devised the technique and changed our nature. We became the Ishologu, the dead outside the control of witches. Sometimes they call us Mla Watu in Swahili, but that's a bit crude. "Cannibal?" I think not.

Okulos: I don't think the Tremere suffered your problem.

Ulwazi: Of course they did. Perhaps they didn't require their teachers' blood, but things joined by witches remain joined, even if ordinary senses perceive it otherwise. All magicians know this — it's even in the English *Golden Bough*. You must cut the witches' cord, or tie yourself to something stronger that pulls harder. The latter is an inferior solution. I wonder what the Tremere did.

Rilwan: Well, you know my opinion. Their ancestors fled north because they couldn't support their kings with...our word is *xwetanu*.

Beckett: I'm afraid I don't know it. I recognize a word for "head."

Rilwan: Yes. Heads stand for sacrifice. Kings distribute the boons of sacrifice. It's the oldest custom. If the dead take too much and give nothing back, of course they'll get stronger, but sick. This is where your Antediluvians come from. They fled, afraid of losing their power, and started this blood hoarding tradition you Europeans have.

Beckett: It's an interesting theory. Where did Okulos go?

I wasn't treated to an exotic Getite blood potion, but someone who tasted of hashish and opiates, and then a repurposed, sharpened chair leg. Looking over these papers I feel like my preparatory research was useless. Where is the legend of Cagn, the cursed god? Their clans don't match other chronicles and reports.-O

Rilwan: It's the truth. I hear an edge in your voice. You want to cut away what I say because it insults your pride. But I am the oldest here. I have the biggest territory. You should listen.

Sanaa: Yes Ril, you're the big city vampire from Lagos with a million heads under you — but there are 16 million more who work for the others — Camarilla, the Night King, all of those. It's crazy. Nobody even knows who your ancestors are.

Rilwan: I have the luminous blood — I am one of Obayifo.

Beckett: I can't move. What have you done to me?

Vanessa: You're perfectly safe. So is Okulos. Sanaa, I have to admit I didn't think you could pull it off. There's so much nonsense about Egyptian sorcery floating around.

Sanaa: Oh ye of little faith! The venom puts his witch nature — that's your Blood, Beckett — to sleep. This is of course

our animating force, which is why he cannot move. But the thinking human in him is still awake, even free of our kind's obsessions, which should expand his consciousness. The visions should come shortly.

Beckett: Visions? That's why the stars are crashing.

Augustine: You know, we never really got a chance to introduce ourselves.

I know you didn't want me to tell Hesha about this quest, but a blood venom that reveals the Man, and brings visions? How could I not? It's fascinating to discover that when the Man escapes the Beast, he goes mad. Unfortunately, he just laughed that wonderful laugh of his and said they learned it from some Setite heretic named Khetamon. The name means nothing to me.-A

P.S. While it was appropriate for our host to introduce himself first, your sudden reaction to the potion in your blood prevented us from exercising the full measure of politeness. Most of us have traditions where we introduce ourselves and our lineages. Ah, yes: We do not belong to "Clans," and neither do you, really. A Clan is a family, after all. Europeans pretend at family, but we come from cultures where ancestry and birth often have deep consequences. Our kings and queens are born of women and breathe among their people. We don't sequester them in mansions for popular display like your British. You pine for lost family relationships, but we see our state as a form of initiation. Family is not enough; one must be introduced to his or her culture. Our lineages are societies sealed in bewitched blood.

Thus, in that context:

- Beckett, Augustine Wong greets you! I'm from Antananarivo in Madagascar, where I serve as one of the andriana, an aristocratic council similar to your "Primogen." In the old nights my lineage was called the Ramanga, but on the mainland we are often known as Xi Dundu: those of shadows. Your "Lasombra" are probably our descendants, though French members of that line had a great deal of difficulty understanding this. We are nobles who deal with blood and darkness, in parallel with the sunlit concerns of mortal rulers. And in case you're wondering about the name: I'm of Betsileo and Hakka ancestry, like many Malagasy.

- I am Rilwan, Beckett. I am older than the others, and I belong to no "lineage." I am an Obayifo, a blood-drinking witch. I took my powers from another. I reshaped my soul until I became accursed, and could see the luminous blood of my predecessor. I think this was the original tradition. It isn't right for a blood-witch to live on and on, until he becomes too monstrous for the living to approach. That is our role: to do evil on behalf of mortals, or deny them the urges of their hearts, so that nations prosper through the skilled application of murder and charmed hearts. I hunted and took my predecessor's blood, but only partly by force. He was wise, and knew it was time. As you heard, I serve a million people in Lagos, which a learned man like you would agree is the greatest city in Africa.

- Vanessa Soro here. I think I was the least in favor of our plan, if that makes any difference. I use my lineage's old name, the Bonsam, though there aren't many of us left — and there were never many. Like your Gangrel, we avoid cities, so we rarely initiate others. Rilwan told you that our eldest share their power, but that isn't exactly true. Those of my line came from gods: Anansi, Legba, Cagn. Tricksters. Tricksters do not suppress their appetites, but pursue them in the cleverest possible fashion. Tricksters are jealous. One of the gods grew hungry, woke up, and took back the blood it initiated our lineage with. Since then, we've named ourselves after the gods, perhaps to secure their mercy. In West Africa they might call me one of the Akunanse —but I don't like spiders and besides, I'm a Christian.
- Beckett, you know the Followers of Set, don't you? I'm Sanaa. Since I'm sure you and Okulos will blame me above the rest (this is my Clan's burden) you'll forgive me for not telling you more about myself. It's a pity. Every sorcerer likes mythology. We're as native to this continent as any other line — but then again, so are the "Brujah" and others who represent themselves as "first world" vampires.
- Unlike the others, I did get an opportunity to introduce myself, but I couldn't resist the opportunity to say more. Beckett, if you forgive us I will of course welcome you to Pretoria in the future, and will not abuse your trust again. I assure you, we did what we did not because of any secret customs among our kind, but to investigate the legends you brought with you. Despite the fact this council comes from many different lands, we all fear Northern talk of "Gehenna." Your monsters tend to ravage our shores.

The Laibon in Modern Nights

Africa is hardly a sequestered or exotic place, but, ironically, this has served to obscure the facts rather than lay them bare. European Kindred have dwelled here for a long time, but we followed the customs of the kine, and mostly kept among colonists and adventurers. These "expatriates" still live in major cities, pretending the colonial age never fell. I could have visited a pathetic court of them in Cape Town and watched them pretend to rule, but I wanted the truth about the Laibon, and what they could tell me about Gehenna.

Prior research posited that they were people of Caine like us, who wandered south after the fall of the Second City or later. The Laibon my predecessors encountered possessed a greater thinness in their blood, and spoke little of their elders. European Kindred took that as proof that our Curse (for they seem to possess the same nature as us) originated in the Fertile Crescent, and the Africans descended from a secondary migration, after the Cainite colonization of Europe. I believed it. My biases prevented

me from subjecting this theory to the same criticism I applied to so much else, even the Book of Nod. They tell a different story – several stories, in fact, which I will attempt to synthesize. They tried to make it clear to me in the first hours, before the poison hit.

Sensibly enough (and in line with everything we know about prehistory) they believe Kindred originated in Africa, though they disagree about why. I know some scholars were enamored with the legend of Caqn, the creator trickster who showered the world in blood. Some Laibon believe this, but most cleave to local and regional legends, with more than a few accepting the myth of Caine, for Abrahamic faiths have as strong a presence here as anywhere.

Naturally they believe our Clans descend from their "Legacies" or "lineages." In fact, "Clan" is a confusing term for African vampires because many of them hail from societies where the extended family is the center of social life. One's "Clan" is her mortal family! Instead, Laibon liken their lineages to secret societies and cults. Just as African kine have groups like Poro and Sande, their Kindred have Legacies. Mortal sects confirm their members as adults and protect them from evil. Vampires are that evil: witch-ancestors whose customs keep their instinctive malice under control. Thus, the Laibon have no single set of Traditions, no unified Masquerade. They have many Masquerades, where the practical need to remain hidden flows into deeper ethical and spiritual obligations. For instance, the Xi Dundu reveal themselves to select aristocrats, businessmen, and other powerful kine as part of their duty to attend to the impure, supernatural side of political power.

Not all Laibon follow the custom of lineage. Rilwan disparaged it and described himself as a "witch," for instance. When I consider him, I turn to the question of Laibon elders, and even Antediluvians. When it comes to the question of Generation among the Laibon, I believe the weak examples my predecessors discovered were servants of African elders who went into seclusion after the European invasions. Rilwan also spoke of rituals where strong elders weakened their vitae, and passed its power down to those of lesser Generation. He believed that European elders broke the rule and became great, sick monsters, defying the natural cycle of existence.

[RECORDING BEGINS]

Beckett: The Red Star. The Red Star. The Red Star!

Ulwazi: The sky's full of red stars, but I think you speak of this Anthelios from your letter of two years ago. Do you see it? We hoped the open sky would inspire you.



Beckett: Anti-sun. Our sun. The star of the damned. The eye of Caine, Caine, burning bright, across the forests of the night. What immortal hand? What immortal eye? These are the marks. God's warning, exalted in the sky! A hand darkly clutching the moon!

Vanessa: That doesn't sound like prophecy. It sounds like Blake.

Sanaa: The great oracles of antiquity had excellent editors.

Rilwan: It doesn't sound like prophecy because it's old news. We all remember. Astronomers said it was the dwarf planet, Ixion, made highly visible in some freak event—I'm no scientist and don't remember. I also don't care, because of course anyone touched by witchcraft could see it before the mortals did, shining a hundred times brighter.

Beckett: Caine closed his eye. I looked up, past the shattered pillars. Bones and dust everywhere. The dance of Gehenna. The full, perfect, and sufficient sacrifice the Dark Father wanted! And he closed his eye. He refused to judge us. We paid Abraham's price, but he did not bid us to stop before the knife fell!

Ulwazi: Nevertheless, we shouldn't take these signs lightly. There have been others. I saw the Great Daylight Comet in 1910 — though not in the *light*, of course. And, to my subtle vision, it shone as red as my dreams. And here in his notes, Beckett writes of the "darkening sky" eclipse from 800 years before. I always thought of these phenomena as the beating of a great heart, marking the cycles of time. But time rejects us. Our hearts are silent. Death steals the natural moisture from our flesh and replaces it with blood,

magic, and hunger. Perhaps Time gazes down in these moments and decides whether to return to us, and that is some form of judgment.

Vanessa: I believe in God. He sends signs to remind us of His presence and our obligations. Even though He cursed us, that doesn't give us license to sin. And I believe in an end of history. Even if stars and comets and great ages of night fall continuously, that doesn't mean the world obeys a cycle. Fewer than 100 years passed between the Great Comet and the Red Star. No, He is sending signs more frequently.

Sanaa: And next comes locusts, blood? As far as I can tell, Armageddon is a political parable about a spat between some early churches. Why should the *Book of Nod* be any different? Politics becomes legends, and legends spawn prophecies. Beckett believes this, not superstition.

Rilwan: That's what he tells himself, but listen to him now. He descends from bloated monsters, too unnatural to survive forever. His lineages bring it upon themselves, but of course Europeans always share their problems with us...generously.

Vanessa: Are we so free of sin? My ancestors are few; they were *eaten*. The European and Arabic texts predict the same thing will happen to their Clans.

Ulwazi: Fortunately, our kind predates these monsters. In the best case we step aside, they feast, and our lineages enforce the balanced way they've forgotten. But Sanaa, are Beckett's eyes supposed to be bleeding?

their "communion" three times and didn't contact the authorities after witnessing the corpse ritual, I had earned their trust.

"Now you're one of us," said Mark. "You've come at the right time, but of course they would know." He pointed his chin at the ancestors' house. It had taken months for them to even let me into the part of the community where I could look at it, so I was a bit shocked that he was so casual. I was also relieved. Many Fon are used to foreigners showing up, attaching themselves to the ritual culture long enough to enjoy the pomp and some token of belonging, and leaving. These people were even more cautious, with none of the easy welcome I'd come to enjoy in other Fon communities. When I looked on the house I felt a powerful sense of anticipation. It swallowed up my vision. "Tonight," Mark said. "It's an important occasion. As I said, you've come at the right time."

THE CYCLE OF BLOOD

The ancestors' house contained three corpses. They wore ancestor masks: distorted skulls of wood. This wasn't the typical practice. Some masks depict community forebears, but they aren't used this way. Mark led me past them to the other side of the single, great room and sat, pushing his hands forward, palm upwards: another unusual gesture. Fon prefer symmetry, but don't display their hands this way. In sitting I become the 13th man in the group. I glanced over and again noticed the scar patterns on their wrists, another thing that set them apart from their neighbors. I'd seen them on some people but assumed it was a family practice or even a fashion trend, but now I knew it must be universal for the men. I also understood why people in neighboring communities looked at my hands when I went to pick up supplies. They didn't like people from Mark's village.

The door opened; two men and one woman entered. They wore the same ancestor masks as the corpses. The woman spoke. This is what she said:

When the old world turned as dry as a corpse the Rainbow Snake uncoiled, and the old world was dust. The Creator wanted to make a new world and said, "Take me to where the still, dark waters wait for me." Rainbow Snake took the Creator there, and the Creator became two: the woman Mawu, and the man, Lisa. They were the sun and moon of the new world, and together they made the Earth, the third body. But it was too heavy for the still waters, and would have broken apart and sank, but together, the Creator Mawu-Lisa sent Rainbow Snake to catch the world in its coils, and it remains bound together. They made the spirits and all the inhabitants of the Earth, with greater beings helping to make the lesser.

The monkey Awe was one of these beings. He helped finish the world. Lower animals were primitive and simple then, like clay figures made by children. Awe could reshape them. He set beasts to eat the correct prey and gave fish fins to swim the waters. He climbed into high places and dug deep underground to shape the worms. He spoke to almost everyone and everything but not the man and woman, who had their own teachers. But Awe believed he knew better than the spirits, and better than Mawu-Lisa, who shone in the sky as sun and moon, far away.

He walked to the edge of the world. He mixed clay from the waters of night and the world's dust and out of them, fashioned his own man and woman. "Look, I have made my own man and woman. I haven't just shaped the raw life you made, but raised it from water and dust." When he looked upon them his false man and woman moved and spoke like humans, but they didn't have the Creator's breath of life. Awe's creations desired genuine life and stole it from real living beings. Without life, they would dry out, so they sucked blood from all the world's creatures, leaving them sick and dying.

So the Creator punished Awe. Mawu-Lisa placed the seed of Death in water, earth, and grass, and made Awe eat of it. Awe became like his foolish creations, always drying out and thirsty, because the Death seed sucked his moisture and breath away. Mawu-Lisa set the sun against him, and made the moon a warning, saying, "Now you must tend to your false creations. Do not let them grow too numerous, or drink too much from real people or animals, or I will turn the moon red to tell you that your time is done."

Awe's people learned to make false life, but they could not make bodies, so they rose the dead, and these children wanted blood as well. But Awe said, "You must also sustain them with your blood, because if you drink too deeply the moon will turn red with the Creator's sign and the world will end." That is why you are here.

She said it as a matter of fact, with no singing or other signs of ritual. Then the two masked men went among us, pulling pairs of hands underneath their masks. After a moment, the ones who offered their hands shuddered and fell. I wondered if it was religious ecstasy, but the matter of fact storytelling and lack of music made it unlikely. When one of the men came to me, I was not afraid, but impatient. I felt a sharp pain in one wrist, then the other, but a wonderful warmth followed. After visiting each of us, the masked men and the women shared the same act among themselves, and then, kneeling reverently, they placed their hands underneath the masks of the corpses.

The corpses sat up, and presented their wrists in return.

My mouth felt terribly dry. I was so thirsty now that even the rising dead drifted to the edge of my attention. Mark whispered to me, "After they take their blood from the ancestors they will return some to us, and your pain will go away." I knew then that I could never leave.

Naturally I've had the book edited to remove this. I de-
stroyed all copies of the original proof and dealt with the
people who saw it. Please accept this as a gift to further
your research.

Incidentally, this is hardly the universal myth of our kind.

—U.

Beckett: Shine black the sun! Shine blood the moon!

Augustine: "Gehenna is coming soon." I must say, this is a much different side to your personality than the rationalist I exchanged letters with. "I'm not inclined to take the old texts at face value," you said.

Beckett: I lied. I lie to everyone. I lie to the Beast. But I don't hear it now, jumping on every irrational impulse, waiting to deform it. I can be honest.

Ulwazi: Well we're vampires, so we're all liars.

Vanessa: Fellows, if I hear you correctly we're coming to certain ideas about this "Gehenna." Ulwazi, you believe this is a cycle, not some sort of "end times." Rilwan thinks this will just affect Europeans and maybe Arabs — their ancients don't share blood, and are bound to wake up insane. Correct?

Rilwan: Naturally the facts are more complicated, but unless you've been initiated as I was I don't even know where to begin.

Vanessa: That was as patronizing as I've learned to expect. Sanaa?

Sanaa: I believe some of it. Set is real. Your elders called themselves gods, and they weren't wrong. But gods don't always come to us in wrath. They possess knowledge. Set comforts foreigners and travelers in the deep desert. He leads us to secrets. Even the name "Gehenna" signifies a place of worship and sacrifice. Gods don't punish us for sacrifices. They have obligations.

Vanessa: Any god with obligations isn't truly God.

Sanaa: We won't settle that tonight. Perhaps we should review the signs of Gehenna: the Thin-Blooded, the rise of ancients, the re-



turn of Caine and Lilith, and the Last Daughter of Eve. Beckett's sources are all terribly Biblical. This should speak to your religious convictions, confused as they are.

Vanessa: I've been throughout the continent, including Egypt and Sudan, Setite. Your people love to cover bravado with fear and hate to say anything straightforward. This is your form of frightened babble and even though I accept it, it annoys me.

Beckett: We raised up Scourges in every city to defend the Masquerade, though of course they know the Thin-Blooded are a sign, a blasphemy, because the curse grows so weak it taints the kine, instead of stealing them from God's place in the sun.

Ulwazi: It appears that someone believes in God! I'm an agnostic, myself. These "Scourges" went out to exterminate weak vampires?

Beckett: Yes.

Ulwazi: Perhaps it worked! Nevertheless, this seems like a foolish solution. Why didn't you let them drink from the elders, to thicken young and thin ancient blood?

Beckett: That's...a crime among us.

Sanaa: They call it "diablerie."

Ulwazi: I know, I know. We don't like it either.

Rilwan: *Xwetanu*. They don't know those rituals. Ask yourself: How long have they hosted blood-drinkers in places like Europe and the Americas? 10,000 years? Five? It sounds impressive when you measure by Genesis, but we come from the beginning of all human time, and so do our vampires. Their elders don't know how to turn thin blood to thick, new to old and back again.

Sanaa: I heard the Assamites learned it from Ethiopians, to concentrate their blood.

Their ritual substitute for diablerie? Interesting. I have also heard rumors of African Kindred or Salubri who cycle blood between neonates and elders, though the implications here strike me as elaborate bragging. I've rarely traveled farther south than Algeria and Ashirra territory, however. Blood magic always flourishes just past the limits of our journeys, it seems. -L

Rilwan: Perhaps that can save them, but it is their values that are lacking. When elders refuse to give anything to their juniors, nothing can save them. When a father won't release his inheritance, his children starve, and he'll eventually look over a dusty field he's grown too old to till. Even immortals should fear this. Yet Caine, Lilith, and this "daughter of Eve" make a sort of sense. The world was made by male and female powers. Surely, the first of us were created man and woman. And if the last mortals of an age reveal themselves, they will be a son and daughter. Or twins, as in Dogon stories.

Beckett: So confident that you know! So confident the world turns on a neat wheel you can ride out of the end, to something new. Your gods exist. One Above watches them, and watches His damned children! Do you think it'll be a simple turning of the stars, another thousand years? No. He watches. He judges. This is not the end of Gehenna. This is a moment between the heartbeats of its tribulation!

Ulwazi: Oh, well. Get the stake.

This Most Ancient Blood

The "Kindred" of Africa, called *Laibon* after centuries of interaction with other vampires made a collective name necessary, pursue nightly survival in a region of unmatched political, cultural, and economic diversity. This makes some united "kingdom" of Laibon untenable. In fact, hundreds of African vampires don't call themselves Laibon, but count themselves members of the Clans that dominate Europe, or the Islamic Ashirra — and they're not any less African for it. Even Wan Kuei have visited Africa since the first Chinese vessels encountered the continent, and now stand behind their homeland's new investments there.

Laibon believe themselves to be the oldest blood drinkers, and live in a wide range of conditions, from enormous metropolises to isolated villages. Visiting one city or thumbing through a single elder's library won't sufficiently prepare outsiders for the experience, but not because of any sinister power within Africa itself. Fools can meet the sun in any land.

The Sects in Africa

The following Sects are active in Africa. They have become increasingly interconnected, and individual Laibon might be active in several as local politics demand.

The Asiman, or Western Laibon: Active throughout West Africa, the Asiman Sect united during the founding of the Kingdom of Dahomey, and includes vampires whose cultural allegiance revolves around the region's Vodun religion and initiatory societies. Asiman call themselves "Laibon" when dealing with Kindred from outside the continent, but use their native name or local slang in other contexts. Most belong to African lineages, though members of other Clans and bloodlines may join after demonstrating loyalty to Asiman ways.

The Ashirra: As the preeminent Sect in North Africa, the Ashirra brings together Kindred who uphold Islamic culture, though they're not automatically Muslims. The African Ashirra includes Laibon lineages and Cainite clans (particularly Assamites, Brujah, Lasombra and Nosferatu) in equal number, though, regardless of bloodline, most believe they descend from the First Murderer.

The Awareness: Many African Kindred belong to no Sect, or their sectarian association is just a matter of culture, not organization. By outside standards, the might be called "Anarchs." The Awareness is more active, organized into armed cells that advocate a secular Pan-African Kindred society.

The Camarilla: The Camarilla came with colonists and empire builders. Many courts remained after decolonization. At least half of Africa's Camarilla Kindred were Embraced from native populations, and although the European clans maintain power, they accept members from African lineages. Deep ties to political and business leaders keep some colonial courts influential, but in many cases they belong to powerless organizations known as *mugu* (West Africa, slang for "idiot") or *swak* (East Africa, slang for "cheap") courts. They can feed and maintain baseline wealth, but Laibon prevent them from expanding. Some cities support weak Camarilla outposts and Laibon societies side by side.

The Eastern Laibon: These indigenous users of the Laibon title reign over communities from Kenya to South Africa. Many believe in the myth of Cagn, a cursed trickster who created the undead. Eastern Laibon organize according to ancestral houses, Embracing mortals from specific bloodlines to occupy them. House members traditionally feed from and assist mortal descendants. This tradition has declined in modern times in favor of houses that satisfy specific social roles. Few members of the Cainite clans belong to the Eastern Laibon, who prefer outsiders to act as independent allies or join a Camarilla "swak" court. The Nkulu Zao Salubri bloodline are an exception. They are fully integrated into the Sect and considered a native lineage. Most of this small lineage believe Zao (Saulot) was Cagn's favorite son.

The Sabbat: Most of Africa's Sabbat are exiles from other continents who lay low to avoid their enemies. Occasionally, Western Sabbat mount efforts to establish a "Utopia" in supposedly lawless regions. They invariably discover that "lawlessness" is a matter of perspective, and poverty is no guarantee of disorder. The last major effort involved a four-pack mission to Somalia. Local Ashirra mailed their ashes to Mexico City, COD.

The Tal'Mahe'Ra: They have always been here. They've always been damn quiet about it, too, and perhaps reluctant to look *too* closely at local myths that challenge the very basis of their existence.

The Wan Kuei: They lurk in Asian settlements throughout Africa, but especially on the east coast, where Chinese investment provides people and resources for their use.

Lineages

The "Cainite" Clans have resided in Africa throughout recorded history, but the native Laibon lineages believe themselves to be far older. They were the first vampires, made from the first people. Nevertheless, vampires have changed over the millennia, and the Laibon are no different. Some of lineages known in the Middle Ages have twisted or even gone extinct. Others have arisen to take their place. Some lineages that European Kindred believed existed have proven to be conflations of several groups, single lines mistaken for many, or outright fabrications.

Laibon After the Long Night

The following lineages from **V20 Dark Ages** represent a minority of Laibon, but should be noted for having changed in modern nights, as follows:

- After expanding far beyond their homeland of Madagascar, the **Ramanga** came into conflict with vampires from the Songhai Empire about 350 years ago. The enemy Guruhi lineage didn't tolerate Ramanga "night aristocrats," and drove them into the Kuba Kingdom. There, the Ramanga became known as the **Xi Dundu**. Asiman from the lineage are still known by this name, while Eastern Laibon maintain the Ramanga name.
- Using necromantic blood sorcery, the **Impundulu** freed themselves from the sorcerers they were cursed to drink from. The freed lineage now calls itself the **Ishologu**, though others call them **Mla Watu**. Most of the lineage belongs to the Eastern Laibon, though some whisper that they also communicate with the Tal'Mahe'Ra and a sect of sorcerers called the Madzimbabwe. They display a great deal of curiosity about vampires they deem similar to themselves, such as the Giovanni and Samedi.
- The great **Bonsam** elder refused to enrich its lineage with gifts of blood and, in its madness, tried to devour its own line. Those who escaped decided to thicken their blood with transfusions from other lineages. In South Africa, they utilized blood from a Tzimisce explorer, founding the **Nagloper** lineage. West African Bonsam founded the **Akunanse** line with the help of an unknown source of ancient blood. Few of the original **Bonsam** remain, and vampires who adopt the name are either making a statement against the superstition and doom that follows the line, or are believed to be fools begging for their predecessor's curse. Lineages descended from the Bonsam often Embrace wily, hardy survivors.

Blood Between Us

According to some Laibon, the Antediluvians are elders who hoarded their potent blood. Struck with madness, slumber, and cannibalistic urges, they represent a threat not because of an ancient privilege, but their own greed. They say that in their own lineages, an ancient vampire may reduce her blood's potency by giving a portion of it to lesser Kindred. This strengthens the recipient's Generation without the need for diablerie, but weakens the donor. Yet this weakness is a blessing, because when blood grows too thick, it inspires excessive slumber and evil behavior. In any event, a ruler should always share the necessities of existence with subordinates.

That's the story, but the reality is up for debate. Shifting effective Generation is theoretically possible, as certain forms of Tremere and Assamite blood magic demonstrate, but the ability of an elder to grant it without diablerie would, if known, wreak tremendous changes in Cainite vampire culture. Elders would no longer be able to excuse their supremacy as an accident of fate, but a resource they could share. Gehenna legends rely on the irreversible potency of the Ancients. If that could be reversed, could Gehenna be permanently averted? Would it destroy the central pillar of Sabbat ideology, and even pave the way for the safe awakening of the Third Generation?

THE PRICE OF HOSPITALITY

I've mislaid my pen. Still, it's probably better, in this case, for a stream-of-consciousness style report, so here it is, recorded for Cesare — whose role I do not envy — to transcribe.

When I finally shook off the torpor, Dracula was waiting for me.

He was sitting in a chair pulled near my bed, an elbow on one knee, book in hand. As I stirred, he lowered the volume to peer at me, and I saw those green eyes for the first time. I've never seen eyes so alive.

A servant brought goblets for the both of us. Despite my thirst, and the fact that my body was still badly damaged, I hesitated before drinking.

Ahem. I'll try and do the accent. "No fear, Mr. Beckett; it's simple mortal vitae. Or perhaps you just dislike Romanian cuisine?"

My fears weren't completely assuaged, but I decided it best to indulge his hospitality. As it turns out, it was as he said, and I could feel my strength returning with each sip. He questioned me about my trip, and about the encounter at Tihuta. His eyes grew cold and distant when I described what greeted me beneath the soil. I pressed him on the subject, but it was as if he were somewhere else for that moment. Then the hardness drained from his face and we talked about easier things again. Finally, I asked him what was to become of me.

"You are free to go, Mr. Beckett. At your word, I will arrange for a guide to take you from this castle to a nearby village, and assist you with passage to Bistrita. Or wherever else you need to go." He paused, and then, "but I hope you will give me a chance to do more than that. I feel quite terrible about the treatment you've endured thus far in my country, and I extend to you from this moment all possible hospitality. You are welcome to stay, and free to do as you please here, though I do ask that you give the north wing a wide berth. The library, though, I think will interest you. In exchange, I may ask your assistance in completing a task that dogs me. Your expertise would be a boon. Regardless, I expect to hear your decision soon."

After that, he got up and walked to the door. The stories you hear — the pantherlike grace, his regal comportment, that beautifully dangerous mien — all true.

A short while later I realized he had left his book behind. Stoker's Dracula. First printing, signed by the author.

Charming.

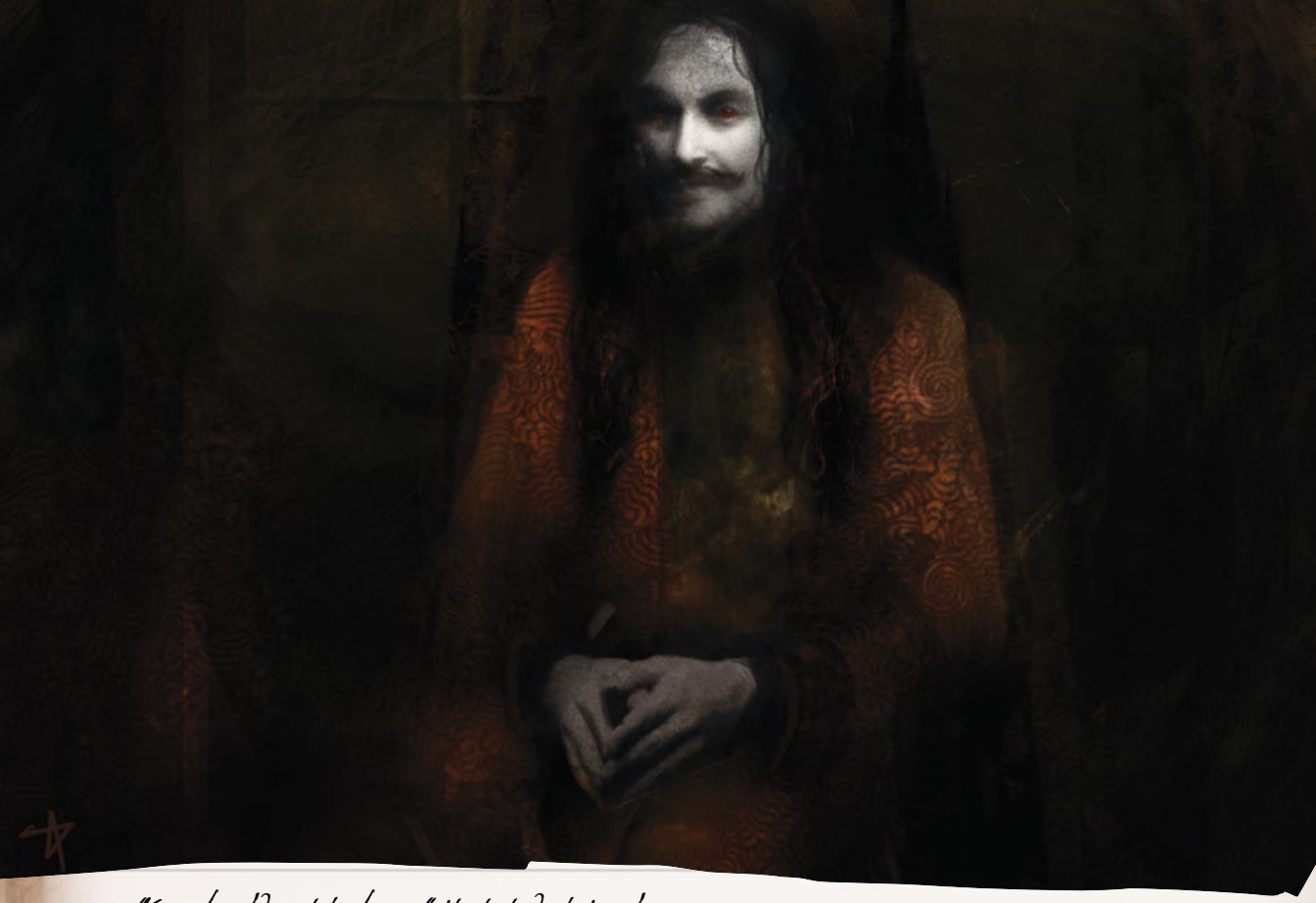
Castle Dracula, Transylvania, Romania

Cesare and I flew into Cluj-Napoca, then traveled to Bistrita by train. While I slept, he made the travel arrangements. That evening I made my way to Tihuta Pass with a contingent of well-paid laborers bearing pickaxes and crowbars. We passed by various tourist traps — and found ourselves followed by a pack of stray dogs, until the men chased them away — proceeding to where I knew the location of the old tower to be. There's little left now besides a few foundation stones to indicate anything of note, and no reason at all to suspect a buried chamber beneath. Or maybe the locals did suspect; it certainly took some effort to get them to put tools to those old rocks. When they finally did, it was an easy enough job; within the half hour they'd opened a small fissure in the ground. None of them followed me.

The chamber itself was little more than a deep depression in the ground. Once, shelves had lined these walls, and living those shelves had been — who knows? Fantastical grimoires and codices and who knows what else? Now they were gone, and with them whatever knowledge they held. I know for certain there had been a set of golden tablets among its collection, inscribed with a curious set of cuneiform glyphs. They formed a cypher which had, on numerous occasions, been used to decode various bits and bobs of Noddist lore. I've seen copies of the cypher — Anatole has one preserved among his own collection of papers, from the night he and Lucita first recovered the tablets from some ne'er-do-wells some 800 years ago. They'd helped keep avert a full-blown Gehenna that time. Heck, even I played my own small role in that sequence of events. It's one of the strongest bits of evidence I have that Gehenna is cyclical and preventable.

I don't know what I expected to find there.

The screaming caught me off guard. It was the villagers I'd left up top. A moment later, a shadow dropped into the room with me. It was one of the workers, but changed. Darkness obscured its face from even from my vision, and its eyes flickered with sickly light.



"You should not be here," it stated obviously.

It lunged at me, faster than should have been possible, bowling me over, teeth ripping at my exposed throat. I tore the front of its head off, but it had already done its damage. And I could hear the others above, edging near the lip of the pit. I'm no pushover, but seven on one gives me pause.

As I melded with the earth, I expected a familiar cool, damp, brown sensation. Instead, my vision swam with undulating folds of flesh, webs of purple capillaries, and orifices rimmed with gnashing fangs. I could feel it on me, its slickness against my face, and there was an expansion and contraction forcing me deeper and deeper, like I was being swallowed. Immediately, I let go of my hold on the earth and was forced back up into the cellar.

Only to find myself surrounded by Exorcist rejects. I showed my claws, but the only one intimidated in that scene was me.

From somewhere above came a roar, deafening in its sudden proximity, and the whole pit shook, thick clumps of wet soil sloughing off of the walls and ceiling. Suddenly several tons of the Danube crashed down on us, folding the demon-thing

nearest me like an accordion. There was one tiny moment of relief as I realized I wasn't going to have to fight these things after all, and then the river hit me, shattering every bone in my body.

Bride #2 (and #5?)

The Tzimisce Larescu and Toreador Gula I have never seen separately – and I mean that literally. For them, holding hands, and presumably other kinds of intimacy, means joining themselves together through Vicissitude, sometimes in barely recognizable arrangements. Overall, I've found them generally quite pleasant, and rather admire the zeal they have for one another.



To those danger seekers out there, here's an extract from our upcoming Time's Up Guide to Castle Dracula, by our roving expert — Miss Rozalia of Clan Toreador. For the rest of the 120-page guide, including a map, you're going to have to pay our monthly subscription fee, so get that cash ready!

It's not easy to find, but we surely recommend you try and make the trip to Castle Dracula. Miss Rozalia sets the scene:

Castle Dracula lies north of Bistrita. The city's not visible from the battlements, which otherwise provides a perfectly decent view of the valley to the south. A river cuts through here, not particularly wide, but fast, possibly a minor tributary of the Bistrita River. To the north, a steep rock wall rises, boxing the castle in. Though well maintained, it's obviously quite old, and I'm not entirely sure how it's remained hidden this long. Perhaps it hasn't; this countryside is filthy with old castles.

Still, this castle is unique. It's been added to over the centuries. Earlier this evening I found myself in a room whose construction suggests late Hunyadi. Wandering the halls infects me with a sense of loss. Mortals look ahead to their deaths and lament all the things they'll never do. I am the same, though my regret extends behind me. This place reminds me of all the greatness the world held, before I was....

Continued for subscribers only!

Castle Dracula, Transylvania, Romania

The mysterious north wing of the castle remains forbidden to me. Every night, sometimes twice, I find myself standing before its great black doors. It's not calculation on my part – I'm often surprised to realize where I am or how I got there. I recall this phenomenon from my mortal days – a loss of time while moving from point A to point B – but this was the first time my vampiric senses had been so deceived. It's old construction, whose architecture is purely utilitarian in nature. There are other places I don't go in the castle – the havens of the other residents ("other"? Am I denizen of Castle Dracula now?) – but they don't excite my imagination like this door does. Why? Because he told me not to? Is it a test? If so, do I pass by not entering, or is that my failure? What thing does it hide from me? No doubt some memory I never was to have, by virtue of having been born so late onto this earth.

This castle is lonely, but I'm far from alone. We've all heard of the "Brides of Dracula," though "brides" is an unusual word in some ways – they're men as well as women, and others who defy easy gender definitions. "Bride" isn't merely a term of custom or convenience; it's more an acknowledgement of Dracula's easy, profound masculinity. He's the only groom there can be.

There are seven Brides. I haven't learned all their names yet – some I've only glanced at from afar, or in passing. They seem wary of me, which I suppose is fair; I don't trust strangers either.

There are the mortal servants, too, responsible for the day-to-day governing of the castle and its affairs. There are perhaps a dozen who live in the castle itself, attending to the needs of their masters. Chief among these are Mihai, who runs the household, and Lacramioara, who commands the guards. Others arrive nightly, reporting to Lacramioara or, more seldomly, directly to Dracula or Caltuna; they are villagers and the like, servants of the castle but not residents.

Oh, and there are a pair of wolfhounds in a kennel adjoining the keep. Baileet says they're Caltuna's mortal brothers, fleshcrafted into dogs and kept alive for almost 1,000 years now. They hate her, I can see that in their eyes, yet she treats them with kindness I can only describe as terrible. I can't imagine what they did to deserve such a fate.

Dracula's library is a thing of wonder.

Among its stacks are any number of occult treasures. The expurgated Book of Nod, naturally, but bits and pieces of Noddist texts not otherwise easily come by.

Mostly things I've seen, or have had recounted to me, but also truly obscure stuff. Like a complete Incunabulum Kupalam, in pristine condition. Only a handful of those escaped Vienna unscathed. Older texts too, some of them translated, some in a cuneiform for which I need a cypher. The cypher itself, which I recognized as a copy of a copy of the original golden tablets that had once lain beneath the soil of Tihuta Pass. Various personal journals in a variety of handwritten scripts. And folders thick with correspondence. But, the one book I truly want, the Book of the Grave-War, is absent, and its loss dulled the thrill of this rare opportunity.

Bride #3

The Brujah Baileet, who shares my fondness for reading and scholarship. It may be that she's recently risen from torpor; there's a charmingly anachronistic quality about her word choices and she's full of questions about "current events." Without question, Baileet is the most gregarious of the lot. Unfortunately for me, she has more questions than answers.

I spoke with Mr. Renfield again today. This is never a pleasant experience, though I wouldn't precisely call him an unpleasant fellow. Indeed, he is impeccably mannered, his demeanor quite sanguine. His enthusiasm for the subject matter unmatched. Still, I loathe each moment. I sense in this man some shadow of myself, I suppose, and from it I recoil.

Still, he proves useful to me in at least one way. For despite Vlad's insouciance regarding matters of his unlife, an attitude I suspect is quite frowned upon among his kind, there is one question of mine about which he remains quite evasive: Why England? Why abandon his beloved homeland for this island across the sea? The answer he gives is simple, vague, and bordering on trite: He feels called to the cosmopolite. This, the creature who in his mortal life impaled 10,000 Turks for simply walking upon the soil that was his birthright.

Renfield has suggested, rather cryptically, another cause for this self-exile, though it took some prompting to free it from him. In truth, it seems no more plausible than the other. An enemy, he says, drove Vlad Tepes from his native Carpathia. But what enemy could do so? And what fate awaits Dracula now that his hoped-for allies in this 'Camarilla' have turned him away at the gate, forcing him to return to Castle Dracula? I wonder if I have not now become part of his grand retributive strike, my own fate hopelessly entangled with his own.

B.S.

And then the Dragon plundered Kupala's mantle
As he had been led to do
And wore it as his own
Ruling the land between the rivers
And every place he strode
As was His will
Yet it forever remained a bitter veil
Stolen and ill-fitting

Who does "His" refer to here, in this extract from the Incunabulum Kupalam?

Bride #4

One of my own Clan, though his name has been deliberately withheld from me. Baileet tells me he was once a Prince and ardent defender of Transylvania, before coming under the auspices of Vlad Tepes. Now he remains here, in hiding. Is this Mitru the Hunter, whom the Tremere blood-hunted for so long (and believed dead)?

Castle Dracula, Transylvania, Romania

As fascinating as this has been, it's getting me nowhere. I could spend the next two centuries sifting through notes, journals, and letters and still be no closer to understanding what the Shaal Fragment means. Baileet is too addled to be of much help, "Mitru" remains mysterious and elusive, and Caltuna distances herself with an aloof chilliness. But it occurs to me there might be a more direct avenue to my objectives.

If I am a Bride, let me embrace that.

And hope I remember how to seduce a man.

[RECORDING BEGINS]

Dracula: I know what you're up to, Mr. Beckett.

Beckett: And yet here I am.

Dracula: Yes, why are you here?

Beckett: I'm chasing a theory.

Dracula: And what would that be?

Beckett: That Gehenna isn't an inevitable thing. That we can avert it.

Dracula: There will always be another Gehenna to look for, Beckett. Our minds invent them. You should get off that particular wheel; it spins eternal.

[LONG PAUSE]

Dracula: It's interesting, don't you think, that as mortals we spent all our time fearing the inevitable end of our existences. And as immortals, it's just the same.

Beckett: So you don't fear Final Death? How about Kupala?

Dracula: Hah, you tread dangerous ground, scholar. But I like you Beckett. So ask your question, what is it you want to know?

Beckett: What's your plan?

Why did you ask this? That's not what you wanted to know! -A

Dracula: I'm going to destroy it. Or utterly subjugate it. And tonight we'll be receiving some guests who will provide a crucial piece of the puzzle.

[RECORDING ENDS]

Wait, is this pillow talk? Are we reading your postcoital conversation?

Bride #1

If there is a "first" among the Brides, it would be Caltuna. Though a great spirit of independence runs through the inhabitants here, the others clearly defer to Vlad, which is both prudent and appropriate. Caltuna, though, is different. Theirs is more a relationship of equals, which raises a number of questions. I don't care for the way she watches me, though. There's something there. Jealousy? I don't think so. But it's something.

Castle Dracula, Transylvania, Romania

On the surface of it, the notion of killing Kupala is unbelievable. But this is Dracula and there's plenty he's still not telling me.

Presuming Kupala even can be killed, it raises certain metaphysical questions. Some theorize Kupala is the font of Tzimisce power. An endlessly powerful demon bound to the Carpathians plus a Clan of Transylvanian vampires who insist their power derives from the land itself equals a not trivial connection. So what happens if you kill Kupala? Would its demise deprive Clan Tzimisce of the thing that makes it Tzimisce? I have to confess, thinking of this, then picturing Vykos, it would be worth it to see the look on their face.*



*And it doesn't seem out of the question, if at least one of the most recent stories proves correct. In that version of events, Dracula's own sword was used to sever the bonds binding the demon to Carpathia, allowing him to manifest a physical form for the first time in this world. The great thing about physical forms is that they can be destroyed.

HUNEDOARA COUNTY, Romania — A global task force of scientists and specialists forms in response to the earthquakes afflicting Romania in the last week. No cause has yet been identified for the ongoing tremors across the country. Reports identify more intense seismic activity in the regions of Deva and Cernavoda, though there appear to be no instances of surface fissures at this time.

The recent quakes have claimed 98 lives to date, a further 300 reported injured, and 43 individuals unaccounted for. Assessment of property and infrastructure damage continues, as buildings, including power stations, are rated for safety before operation may continue. Lifting the suspension of the cross-country railroad is now a priority for the government.

While Romanians await further tremors with trepidation, rescue efforts continue at the country's coal mines, where each worked mine was collapsed by the unforeseen quakes. Romanian officials have yet to officially comment on the incidents, but Harold & Harold Mining Company who own several interests in the country, is calling them "disasters of considerable proportions, potentially caused by terrorists." According to unconfirmed reports, communication with the trapped miners ceased three days ago.

It was previously believed the region was incapable of producing earthquakes above a 7.5 magnitude. Geologists are now reappraising their understanding of fault lines in Central and Eastern Europe.

Castle Dracula, Transylvania, Romania

Tonight I saw Vlad Tepes for the first time.

While taking my evening meal together with him and Baileet, Mihai arrived with several guests in tow. Lacramioara followed, too, her hand resting on the pommel of a dagger, and Caltuna arrived shortly thereafter, word of the new arrivals having spread quickly. I guessed the strangers were ghouls, but not of the distinct family bred here on the castle grounds. Mihai announced them by name, six total, a diplomatic envoy from Poenari Castle.

I recount the ensuing conversation as well as I can, though my Romanian leaves something to be desired.

Velken: Our lord sends her regards, Voivode.

Vlad: I expect she sent more than that, yes?

Velken: Um, yes.

**[AT THIS POINT,
VELKEN GLANCES NERVOUSLY TO HIS COMRADES IN ARMS.]**

Velken: With all due respect, she has chosen to decline your offer. She hopes you will under —

Vlad: Not to worry, I understand.

[There is a shift in Vlad's voice — lower, more deliberately measured.]

Vlad: But what of you, Velken? You've served for a very long time, perhaps you can provide me with the answer I need? Everyone penned up in that castle, surely you overhear things….

Velken: No, I haven't —

Vlad: Do you even know my question?

Velken: No, sir.

Vlad: I thought not. So let me ask you, and then you decide how you want to answer.

Caltuna: Do not do this, you will be inviting Poenari's wrath upon yourself.

**[VLAD TURNS UPON HER AND, FOR THE FIRST TIME,
CALTUNA ACTUALLY SEEMS VULNERABLE.]**

Vlad: To hell with our sire and his wrath. He's a prisoner in his own castle. If anyone should be concerned about wrath, it's them.

And then Vlad asked Velken his question. He could have easily mentally dominated the ghoul, but he didn't. He asked him four times, and each time Velken

refused to answer, one of his compatriots was seized and held while Lacramioara thrust a wooden stake into his rectum. The stake was raised, its end secured in a cylindrical impression carved into the floor for just this thing, and the screaming ghoul would begin the long, slow crawl down its length. One almost succeeded at pulling himself free, clawing the spike erupting from his bowels and dragging himself upward toward freedom; Lacramioara allowed him a moment of hope, waiting for him to reach the top, then grabbing his ankles and yanking him back to the floor. This Grand Guignolesque display went on for more than an hour, until every Cainite in the household had gathered for the spectacle. As blood poured from the broken bodies, Mihai would fill a pitcher, from which he freshened our goblets. I, for my part, did not partake. Neither did Caltuna.

Vlad wanted his answer, but he also took his time, reveling in the evolving tableau, taking long moments between askings to savor the details, and to let Velken simmer in his terror. After the fourth, Velken answered the question.

"In the Tatras, there's a Gargoyle eyrie. I don't know where exactly, except it's near Vysoka. The old Brujah is laired there and he has the shard."

Vlad's mercy was a swift death, beheading Velken with a sword Lacramioara produced from seemingly nowhere. The sixth ambassador was spared. Vlad offered him a room, a meal, and a night's rest, which he accepted with as much grace as possible, no doubt terrified of what it would mean to refuse. Once Mihai escorted him away and the bodies were removed, Vlad turned to me, his good humor restored.

"Have you ever seen an old Gargoyle eyrie? I think you'd like it very much."

Bride #6

I suspect there's a prisoner somewhere – perhaps the north wing? – but it's hard to know for sure. The screams may just be Larescu and Gula enjoying some new configuration of their body.

mrmysterio started the conversation

eyeonyou joined the conversation

mrmysterio:	I understand your master has paid a visit to the Count.
eyeonyou:	He's not my master. But yes. Beckett's taken a trip to the Castle.
mrmysterio:	This is why I like you, Okulos. You're obedient.
eyeonyou:	He's not my master.

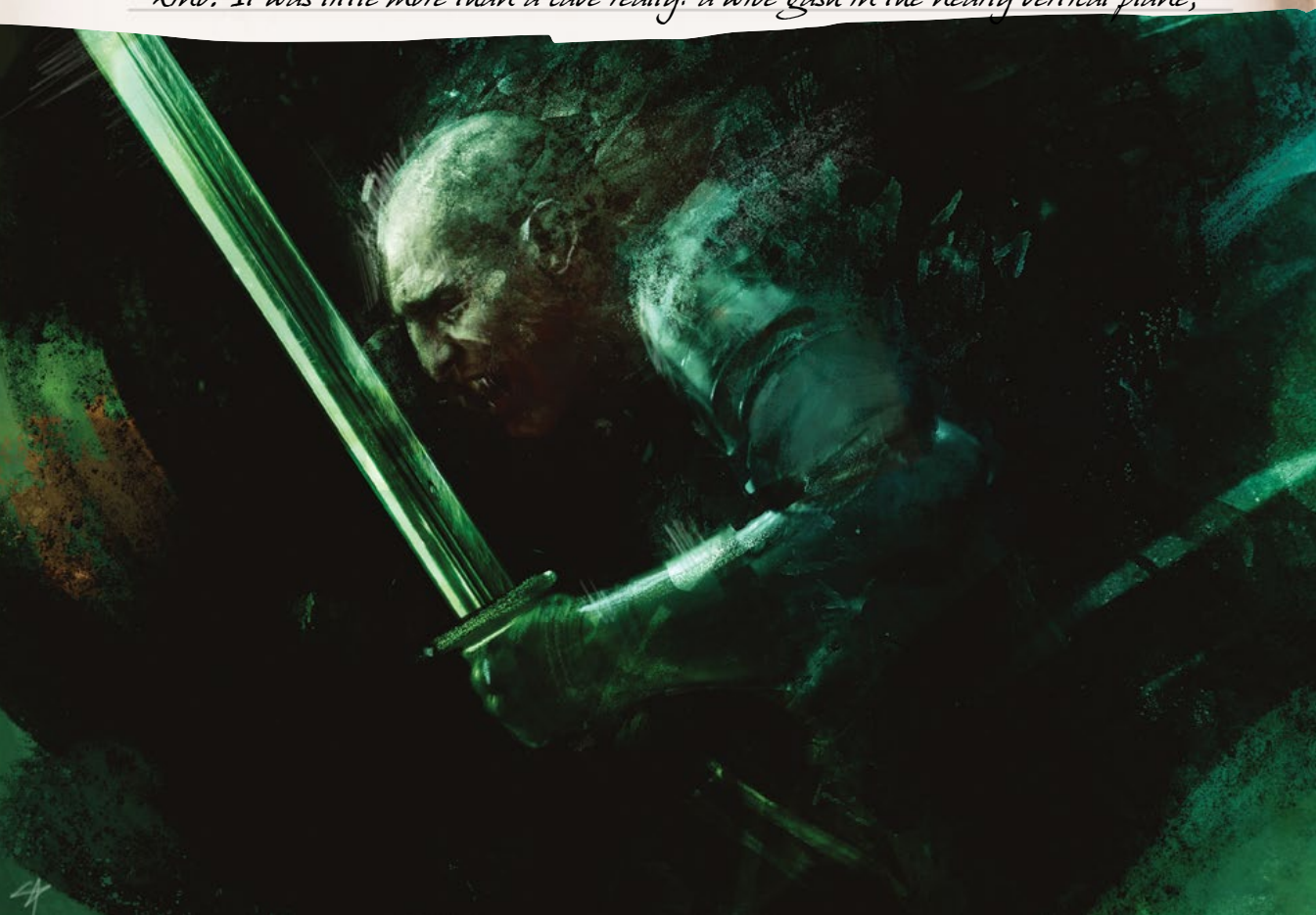
mrmysterio:	I didn't mean obedient to him.
eyeonyou:	Fuck you, pal. You're not my boss either. Just a Kindred with a bit of intel.
mrmysterio:	Of course.
eyeonyou:	Don't ever think differently. I'm autarkis.
mrmysterio:	We in the Inconnu look dimly on any vampire attempting to get close to Tepes.
eyeonyou:	Inconnu? Yeah, right. Inconnu aren't going to bring up their group in conversation.
mrmysterio:	Nevertheless, Tepes is on thin ice with us as it is. To avoid unnecessary steps, I suggest you call your *not-master* home.
eyeonyou:	Can't. Either he has no reception in Transylvania or he left his phone behind. Either way, he's out of reach.
mrmysterio:	Thank you for your time. We'll handle this.

mrmysterio left the conversation

eyeonyou left the conversation

Castle Dracula, Transylvania, Romania

We left our camp and ghouls behind as soon as the sun was down. It was a shockingly difficult climb, for me anyway. Near the summit was a shrine of some kind. It was little more than a cave really: a wide gash in the nearly vertical plane,



around which an ornate facade had been carved. Human faces leered at us from the stone, their bodies bending back into shadow. Most unsettling was the fact some of them looked strangely familiar.

A gargoyle eyrie. When a Tremere chantry would fall, its gargoyles would often find themselves masterless. Those few that survived would roost where they could, and sometimes carve the faces of their beloved masters into the stone to keep them company. These pitiable creatures were often capable of quite fine craftsmanship, or so I'm told. -A

The inside of the cave was much like its exterior. Its natural contour was apparent, but festooning its walls were more of those odd sculptures, gaping at us from every direction. Even from the floor beneath our feet.

We followed that corridor, treading upon those silent faces into a pitiless dark. Eventually we found ourselves at the brink of a sanctuary. Vlad called out to its inhabitant by name. Until then, I hoped for a diplomatic resolution, but that quickly died. I suspect Vlad knew all along.

He came at us out of the darkness, gnarled and carrying a greatsword, his gait somewhere between a lumber and a lope. His eyes were those of the Beast. Dominic – an ancient Brujah, and apparently our prey – had fallen to Wassail.

Vlad lunged, driving his spear into the wight's chest. The greatsword looped towards his head, but Vlad pressed in close, inside the arc of the blade, then spun away, yanking his spear free as he did so. Here was that pantherlike grace again, put to use; he worried the old Brujah with nicks and gashes, two or three to every swing Dominic managed, and always stepped away from the blow that would end him if only it were to connect. And so their dance went.

It was mesmerizing to see these two Inconnu like this, but I had my own job to do. I tore my eyes from the melee and scanned the recesses of the room, not sure where to begin. I started two or three times toward red herrings before I noticed an unusual contour along the northernmost wall. Low to the ground, a kind of hollow. A natural sepulcher. It was jammed with bones, animal and human alike, but as I pulled them from the hole my hands brushed something else. Cloth, wrapped around something hard. I grabbed it, tucking it into a jacket pocket, even as I felt Dominic's icy fingers seize the nape of my neck.

I squirmed, hoping to twist away as the cave tumbled around me. Instead, the ground rose up to crush me, and the world began to slide away. I grabbed for it, trying to hold it in place, but my fingers slipped on the faces of those cold, dead Tremere. Blood spilled from my fractured skull.

Then, one of those smiling faces split in half, revealing a chasm directly beneath us. One after another the disembodied heads slipped into the abyss – some of them whole, some merely leering half-faces now – tumbling, screaming quietly through empty mouths. And as those under my hands fell away, so did I. I scrabbled for purchase upon their foreheads and chins, but there was none. As the darkness enveloped me, I looked to one side, and there was one gray face looking back. So mutual and well timed was our fall that for a moment it seemed we were suspended in nothing, just the two of us. Old friends. The oldest. How very much like me it looked. Or perhaps it was I that was the reflection of it? Then it plummeted away, its descent suddenly so much faster than my own. I grabbed for it, perhaps even screaming my own name, but it was no use. I may have never been as alone as I was in that moment when the darkness consumed it.

A moment later, Dominic flew by, still grasping his sword. Then I was hoisted up into the world again, and although my eyes could not focus and my ears could not hear, I understood what had happened. Vlad had split the mountain in two. Koldunic Sorcery. This was the second time he'd saved me, and nearly killed me, with his magic.

We arrived back at the castle this evening.

Whatever it was we were after, I am no longer in possession of it. Vlad apprehended it from me almost immediately after leaving the eyrie. I was in no condition to resist and he offered no explanation.

My curiosity is strained and my questions go unanswered, though Vlad seems grimly satisfied with our venture. I'll save further questions for later. Right now I'm ready for a decent day's sleep and some proper nourishment, not necessarily in that order.

Mr. Beckett.

As you well know by now, you must leave. But first you must go to the northern passage. The one you have been forbidden to enter. There is no key, for there is no lock: he will simply know that you have trespassed, so you must go quickly. Do not become lost among the intersections: it is left, then right, then right again. There will be a darkly-lit sepulcher there, and in it you will find a tiny bundle laid atop the fragments of a geomantic sigil. This sigil you will know. I think. Take the bundle and go.

The [illegible] means, with the least chance of drawing his attention, is via the passage in the eastern hall. Look near the painting of St. Andrew's martyrdom: you will find a gap that leads to a corridor. Follow it to its termination. Once outside, you will need to go south until you make the town's limits. There you will find friends.

You may, at first, ask yourself how any of this could happen. How could someone such as yourself so easily be deceived? Try not to dwell upon these thoughts. There was little you could have done, and anyway, it was all for the best.

Do understand, though, he will be looking for you. That cannot be helped.

Goodbye, Mr. Beckett. I do hope our paths cross again someday.

– Caltuna

My private jet, flying to Greece

The last few hours have been a whirlwind. I'll paint with broad strokes here, as I don't have much time before sunup.

Caltuna came to me tonight. This in and of itself was unusual, but her demeanor was grave. She wordlessly handed me a note, then swiftly left me. It occurred to me later she might be leading me into a trap; after all, Caltuna had never shown much concern for my wellbeing before. Still, as I read the words upon that tiny piece of paper, I knew I would not disobey her.

Her instructions led me directly to a cloth-wrapped bundle. It was immediately obvious that what Vlad and I found upon the eyrie was here, and so much more, but there was no time then to appraise my find. The second half of her directions were clear.

I followed them, easily locating the passage leading under the castle's wall and to the goat trail at the edge of the mountain. From there I was in wolf form the rest of the way, sprinting through the forest, my nose pointed south, the bundle gripped in my

teeth. An hour before dawn I arrived at Bistrita. It was dark, but there were men – ghouls – there to greet me. Among them was Cesare. Dracula may be the lord and master of this land, but Caltuna isn't without her own influence, it would seem.

Inside the bundle were several shards of gleaming metal. I knew what they were without needing to be told: fragments of the Sword of Dracula. One of these we had brought back with us from the Tatras, when we encountered Dominic. The others he had recovered through some other means.

Caltuna. I have to appreciate her shrewdness. She recognized the inherent danger in Vlad's plan and found the patsy she needed in me. The Shaal Fragment said the Brides of the Dragon would understand, but also that their price would be high. It was right on both accounts. I understand, and now I am paying.

I have five pieces of Dracula's sword in my lap. Now, what the fuck am I supposed to do with them?

Bride #7

I suppose it's me.



Transylvania Now

Much of modern Cainite society regards Eastern Europe as a backwards backwater, a "once was" relegated to "has been" status, full of kooks and cranks and out-of-touch eccentrics. A retirement community for vampires. And in so doing, they ignore one very important fact: Men and vampires have always fought over this land. There is something here very much worth fighting over.

Several years ago, the Nosferatu Antediluvian supposedly leveraged the power of old Transylvania and brought the world right to the edge of catastrophe. What's come to be known as the "Transylvania Event" was a conspiracy 800 years in the making, cutting across many of the most iconic moments in Cainite history — including the birth of Dracula — and culminating in a dreadful decision for a small group of elders in Romania. As earthquakes shook the entire Carpathian region, the choice fell to them: release the Earthbound demon Kupala, or allow events to play out and face a natural disaster. They chose the former, cutting the bonds of Kupala with the Sword of Dracula, shattering it, and releasing the demon from its ages-long captivity.

The fallout for the Kindred was substantial. It's unknown how long Kupala lay beneath the Carpathians, his spirit diffuse, tainting the land of his imprisonment. But his release *changed* things in at least one dramatic way: rather than being vaguely disseminated over 1,000 miles of countryside, he became a singular presence, and while he may not exactly be mortal (or even flesh and blood), he was still real in a way he hadn't been before. Dracula believes this means he can be slain. And not just slain, but *drained*. But for that, he needs his sword. The sword destroyed freeing the monster.

Dracula

There's no Cainite with more cachet than Count Dracula. He has proven supremely capable of keeping his name on everyone's lips while simultaneously avoiding the retribution of both the Sabbat and the Camarilla. This is no small thing.

Then again, this is the mortal who dictated the terms of his own Embrace by capturing a pair of elders, Tabak and Lambach Ruthven, forcing the latter to Embrace him then diablerizing the former so he might be equal to his sire — if that's even how it happened. Dracula has at times been counted among the Old Clan, which would suggest an entirely different set of circumstances for his Embrace. When it comes to Count Dracula, you can never entirely trust what you read.

Which is exactly the point. Count Dracula isn't real; he's a fabrication of Vlad Tepes, a character to be played on the biggest stage of them all. But why?

Many among the Camarilla will tell you it's revenge for a foiled bid to force his way into London. A big "fuck you" in the form of a massive breach of the Masquerade. That's their egos talking, though, because while Vlad can certainly be petty, he's also shrewd. And the one thing he may do better than any other Cainite, the thing he did even as a mortal, is manipulate the minds and passions of mortals.

The term "kine" is no mistake. Most Cainites regard mortals as little more than meals with heartbeats. And it's not that Vlad has more regard for their lives, but he knows the power of the public. Even more, in them he sees the vampires of the future. Consider that every Cainite Embraced over the last century enters their unlife knowing Dracula isn't just a vampire but *the* vampire, and you begin to grasp the genius. No longer is he the pitiless warlord who burned Wallachia's beggars to death after inviting them to dinner; now he's the charming, alluring aristocrat who just wants to be loved. He's Bela Lugosi, Christopher Lee, Frank Langella, Leslie Nielsen, and Gary Oldman.

But always remember, Dracula is a lie. He's just a lie we all want to believe, and Vlad the Impaler knows it.

Inconnu, Inconnu, Everywhere Inconnu

Is there any place in the world with a greater concentration of ancient, independent vampires than Transylvania and its neighbor states? Dracula and his Brides. The Cathedral of Flesh. Dominic the Wight. On their own, any one of them is capable of changing the course of history. Collectively? Well, it's probably better they aren't a collective.

Beckett has stumbled onto one plot: Dracula's war with Kupala, the stakes being Transylvania and possibly the soul of all Tzimisce everywhere. There are countless others.

An Inconnu's presence is a game changer. Those with the power to pursue their desires without need of coteries, Sects, or other allies. Masquerades, An-

tediluvians, Gehenna...these are distant concerns to any given Inconnu.

Here are some dangling threads, Dracula's and otherwise, you might wish to pursue.

- Vlad is trying to piece together the Sword of Dracula to do battle with Kupala, but is that all? The blade was almost used once to subjugate the demon, and it later became instrumental in preventing Gehenna (while simultaneously freeing Kupala), so it's anyone's guess what it's capable of. In the wrong hands it could be catastrophic. But exactly whose hands would be the right ones? The Camarilla would pay a coterie well for the Sword's recovery, and then likely lock it up in a vault. The Sabbat would send a dozen packs into the mouth of Kupala itself if it meant gaining the Sword needed to destroy such an infernal presence.

- Dracula keeps tabs on his domain, and he's currently looking for worthy "helpers" to assist in reclaiming the stolen shards of his sword. Who can resist serving as scion to the Son of the Dragon? Or being one of his lovers? But there's more than meets the eye in the House of Dracula, and his brides play their own games. Caltuna, in particular. Is she trying to protect him from himself, or serve some kind of justice? Her links to the Inconnu may result in her needing a particularly discreet coterie for the purpose of manipulating Dracula. He needs to be made to look weak.

- Dracula and Caltuna apparently share a sire. Is it Lambach Ruthven, as Vlad and Lambach have maintained for more than five centuries? Or has someone else been pulling the strings all this time? Whoever they are, they apparently reside in Poenari Castle, and no doubt have their own goals (not to mention strong feelings about their progeny's current activities). This mysterious vampire would see Dracula and his brides destroyed, or brought to heel, which is no small task. Aristotle de Laurent, meanwhile, would love to find an intrepid bunch of neonates willing to storm the castle, and discover the identity of the resident for his compiled Encyclopedia Vampirica.

- Kupala isn't without its servants. The Cathedral of Flesh, various Earthbound demons and spirits, and Baali all move at its command. For a dark, disturbing chronicle, a group of Cainites across multiple domains may come under the sway of Kupala, and start spreading its foul agenda. Ultimately, they would all be commanded to bring death to the vampire that's done it the most harm: Vlad Tepes? It may be that another coterie is needed to protect the poster child of vampires, lest Kupala grow too powerful.

- More than 200 years ago, Dracula sent Mitru the Hunter on a suicide quest to Vienna to steal a copy of the *Incunabulum Kupalam*, and to poison the Tremere chantry while he was at it. The Gangrel was only partly successful, but it was enough to draw the permanent ire of the Tremere. They declared a bloodhunt and eventually he was slain. Allegedly. Is it possible that Mitru somehow survived? Is the Gangrel who skulks about Castle Dracula the same? Even if he isn't, what if the Tremere came to believe he was?



THE DEATH(S) OF BABA YAGA

The Calleva Arms, Silchester, British Isles

Ah, Russia. If a flat-out weirder place in Kindred history exists, I can't think of it. Contained for decades behind a "Shadow Curtain" (it sounds better in Russian), Mother Russia was suddenly blown open to outside influences when a mythological figure supposedly died in a remote mountain crevasse. Or in St. Petersburg. Or somewhere completely different.

But I'm getting ahead of myself. We all know the Bolsheviks toppled the Tsar and killed off the royal family, except maybe for Anastasia (put a pin in that, we'll come back to it), in the early part of the 20th century. That's all mortal history; you want to know that, Cesare tells me there's an online encyclopedia that's quite useful. For our purposes, though, another revolution was going on, and it actually started before the mortal one, for a change.

From what I've gathered, the Kindred Revolution (which doesn't have a catchy name like Red October or Bloody Sunday, sorry) began in 1900. The Brujah took issue with the Ventrue, Tzimisce (Old Clan, for the record), and the Toreador and their pompous, quasi-feudal method of running things, as Brujah are wont to do. The ruling Clans figured they had nothing to fear from the lower ranks, as the ruling Clans are wont to do. But the Brujah slipped their ideals into the mortals' revolutionary calling, or maybe they took their cues from the emerging Communist principles that Marx, Lenin, and Trotsky were tossing around. Who can say, really?

In any case, the Brujah, in addition to their usual strategy of "pound on it until it stops moving," employed a much cleverer strategy of "steal the grave dirt from the really old Tzimisce and watch them get weaker for a few months, then pound on them 'til they stop moving." I'm not entirely sure if they used similar methods of getting around the Ventrue and Toreador bigwigs, but in any event, before the Tsar's blood had cooled on the floor of Ipatiev House, the vampires who called the shots in Russia's largest cities were dust, ash, or dusty ash.

As a point of interest, the Brujah did, in fact, play on the feeding preferences of the Ventrue in some places. I don't remember what city it was — Omsk? — where women with green eyes just vanished in the space of a couple of nights. It's still rare as hell to find anyone with green eyes in Omsk.-A

From there, the Brujah formed a Council. They had long, long documents detailing rules and procedures, and lengthy treatises about how they were different from the dictatorial rule of Princes. And, in fairness, they were. I've seen rule by committee before, but it tends to be a kind of "I'm the Prince and all of you are my Primogen, and let's make a half-assed stab at checks and balances but really we'll all just scratch each other's backs as necessary" kind of thing. The Council, though, had a truly immense country to govern, and Stalin invading other countries and adding them to the USSR like some immense red amoeba wasn't helping matters any. So the Council expanded – it had to! – and in a lot of cases it would kill off older, established Princes, install younger and more passionate vampires as "local governors" (basically Princes, but don't use that word), and move along.

St. Petersburg was kind of an exception, and I was pretty unclear as to what happened there, which is one reason I made that city the first stop on my whirlwind tour into crazyland when I started looking into what happened to Baba Yaga.

The Little Grandmother

Baba Yaga commands a weird reverence in Russia. Some of the old fables paint her as this kindly, grandmother-like figure, but mostly she's a witch who flies around in a giant mortar-and-pestle and lives in a house with chicken legs. To mortals she is



a bedtime story, appearing on packages of sweets, in commercials, and on all kinds of toys. Kindred from Russia, on the other hand, tend to get really tight-lipped when I bring her up, except Brujah, who typically either stomp away or skip straight to red rage.

Before we go any further, though, it's important to know who and what Baba Yaga was, absolutely and conclusively. Ready?

I have no earthly idea. Well, that's not entirely true. I'm fairly certain she was a vampire, and if she was a vampire, she was probably Nosferatu, and if she was a Nosferatu, she was probably a direct childe of Absimiliard. To further confound matters, Anatole claims she was several vampires! The mysteries continue.

Most Russian fairy tales work like this: One thing nested inside another thing is nested inside another thing. I have no idea what the fascination for things in other things is, but it permeates the culture right down to the monsters.

From what I've gathered from the few Kindred willing to broach the subject, too many of which were less than sober, one version of the story goes like this:

Baba Yaga took over Russia after the Brujah took it over from the entrenched Kindred, but when I say she took it over, I don't mean she "ruled" it or "controlled" it like other Kindred tend to mean. She didn't tell vampires who they could and couldn't feed on; she didn't give permission for blood hunts and the like. I mean, she ruled Russia in the most overtly supernatural, Masquerade-breaking manner you could think of. She commanded six factions – armies – that managed various parts of her bizarre empire. Some of the "soldiers" in those armies were vampires. Some were Lupines, and some were spirits (not ghosts – although, hell, why not). She had an army composed entirely of wizards. And that's not even the weirdest one. The weirdest was the Army of Despair, and that one was made up of dragons.

No, I don't have pictures.

They don't photograph anyway. And I think they're all dead now. Or they will be. It's hard to know.

If the stories are to be believed, Baba Yaga had supernatural power at her disposal like nothing the world had seen before, and nothing seen since. She was supposedly massive, with iron claws, iron fangs, and a countenance that would put many Nosferatu to shame. I'm not being sarcastic, so that should give some sense of the gravity.

The Shadow Curtain

I don't have an exact date for when the Shadow Curtain fell. Most of the people I've interviewed about it say it coincided with the Iron Curtain, but that sounds like poetic license to me. What I do know is the Shadow Curtain was a metaphysical roach motel. Anyone with any supernatural ability whatsoever (and that includes ghouls and ghost servants, so suck it, Ambrogino) could enter the Curtain, but not leave, or else.

The logical next question is "or else what?" and I don't really have a good answer, because I was never stupid or unlucky enough to get stuck behind the Curtain. I'm reliably informed Kindred all over the world sent emissaries or assassins into Russia, and got nothing back but panicked letters. Whatever the Shadow Curtain was, whatever powered it, it worked. Some messages seemed to indicate Lupines, others spoke of mystical barriers or even plain bureaucracy: the victims being snared by good old Soviet

red tape until something caught up with them. Over time, the reputation of Russia spread. It was a prison for Kindred, or a trap. Getting sent to Russia was a fate worse than Detroit – it was uncertainty. I can't guess how many Kindred who just wanted the truth came to Russia and were subsumed. Hell, I had to be talked out of it once or twice.

Dirty secret that some Princes and other higher-ups don't want you to know: Russia was also a trap for a long time. Got a rival messing with your interests? Buy a few properties in Omsk and lure him there to investigate. Got a childe who isn't all you'd hoped? Send him to Moscow on an errand. Whatever the Shadow Curtain meant to Baba Yaga and the Russian Kindred, to those of us smart enough to stay on the other side, it was a useful and terrifying tool.

But it's gone now. Don't worry. I'm sure none of those Kindred sent to die there are still around. If they are, I'm sure they're not bitter or anything.

am frantic. I cannot leave. I cannot leave this wretched, cold, bloodless country. Everything is pale and dead, and yes, I am aware of what and who I am. I have no wish to have such a mirror held up to me by the very land around me.

But I cannot leave, Lucita. I grow ill whenever I try. I come to the borders and try to cross, only to feel impossibly, viscerally sick. I heave, I retch, but nothing comes, and yet I cannot walk. Once I tried driving, planning simply to accelerate enough to get across the border and then run. As I approached, though, my whole body began sweating blood, the car stalled, and my nerve failed me, leading me to turn back. Twice I have come close to violating the Masquerade just to see if a Justicar would come to punish me. Many more times than that, I've written to friends in nearby countries. No one answers.

Lucita, I have secured passage on a ship. I will not set down the name or berth here, for frankly I dare not hope it will work. But I am desperate. If I make it out, we can discuss this letter together.

Yours,

Selene

I had a friend who wound up on the wrong ship and disembarked in St. Petersburg in 1950 or so. She wrote me this letter, which didn't reach me until decades later (it went to a dead drop that I'd completely forgotten about until I got back to Venice one summer). -L

Selene was lucky. She died quickly.
The Little Grandmother had no particular interest in her. -A

Last thing to know about Baba Yaga: She's dead. But what killed her? That question is where the rabbit hole really begins, and I've sifted through the insanity, outright lies, spin, and obvious fabrications to come up with the best theories I could. I was left with three theories with some evidentiary support. Does the truth lie somewhere in between? Probably. Are we ever likely to know the truth? For the love of Caine, I hope not.

Before I went to Russia, I figured I should find someone who knew the terrain and had been there for a while. I finally hooked up with a Nosferatu named Angus. He said he was born in Scotland, but really, it's hard to know – he spoke flawless Russian and a few other languages, too. Anyway, Angus got stuck behind the Shadow Curtain for about 20 years, but never quite managed to get under Baba Yaga's thumb. He spent a lot of time dodging her influence, but got out when the Curtain fell. I met him when he was looking for his sire in Greece, and agreed that after we did a little digging in Russia I'd help him out.

It...didn't work out the way he'd have liked.

I dedicate this research to the memory of Angus.

You do know he was Okulos' childe, right? -L

On the One Claw: St. Petersburg

St. Petersburg is situated far enough north that, for several weeks in the summer, the sun doesn't set. This phenomenon is called the "white nights," and naturally it involves festivals and parties and all kinds of fun stuff the Blessed of Caine don't get to experience. As such, the White Nights all but require that local Kindred have a childe, a ghoul, or a friend far enough south they can escape the cities for a month. That also means the death rates of southern Russian cities go up, but since the fall of the Shadow Curtain, it's improved. Anyway, I've been to St. Petersburg a few times over the years, and once was during the period when the Brujah Council ran the country.

I mentioned before that, for the most part, the Council would kill off the existing Princes of larger cities and then replace them with young ideologues. In the case of St. Petersburg, the Prince of the city was a Ventrue named Anya Dyomin. When she became Prince, St. Petersburg had just been founded, and her sire (whose name I don't know) sent her there to keep her out of the way, but also to give her something to do for a few centuries. And then wham, St. Petersburg becomes this kind of "gateway to the West," and it's an important city, but by the time the elders in the rest of Russia figure this out, Anya's too entrenched to oust and she's got her own childe, and anyway it would be too awkward to admit "oh we just put you there to shut you up," so sure, she stays Prince. I'm sure they had a coronation or something, and I'm equally sure her sire gave her a "this is what I wanted all along" kind of speech. Sires do that kind of thing, I'm told.

Her childe was a kind of spineless little thing called Nikolai, who, with apologies to my friend Victoria, would probably have been better off being Embraced as a Toreador. I mean, not to say that Ventrue can't appreciate beauty, but Nikolai Miloradov was the kind of vampire who would see an old piece of architecture, squeal "Look! Stairs!" and then spend the next half hour telling you about the building and its history. He was young and beautiful when Anya Embraced him, and he told me that she "gave him immortality" because he loved the city and wanted to see it develop over the years.

That all sounds very fucking romantic, but you have to remember that when the Brujah came to town in 1920-something, they killed off Anya but left Nikolai in charge. More to the point, they left him to run things pretty much as Anya always did – he's the Prince, here are the Primogen, etc. Why?

Because the Brujah knew St. Petersburg was an easy point of ingress for other Kindred. They wanted the Camarilla from Europe to have Nikolai – this old world, somewhat foppish vampire – as their first point of contact. He was old enough to be an elder (St. Petersburg was founded in 1703, and Nikolai was Embraced less than a decade later), but he'd never really been away from the city and he had limited contact with other vampires. This is important because a) the Brujah knew which side of the bread was buttered; they figured anyone coming in from Europe would see Nikolai and figure, "oh, this is fine" and not worry about trying to take the rest of Russia and b) Baba Yaga did the same damn thing when she took over, she just didn't kill the existing Prince first.

Anyway, Nikolai might be smarter than us all, because he's still Prince of St. Petersburg. I met with him after I got word the Shadow Curtain was down and Russia was starting to open up again. I'd also heard his city was the safest – a lot of Baba Yaga's minions were still nominally in charge, but then Lupines were picking off any Kindred they could find, too, so the whole country was a war zone.

[RECORDING BEGINS]

Beckett: Thank you for taking the time to meet with me, Prince Nikolai.

Nikolai: The pleasure is mine, sir. What did you wish to ask me about?

Beckett: Well, I understand that for many years, you…answered to higher powers.

Nikolai: You are being polite. I was not given to understand that was typical of you.

Beckett: It's not.

Nikolai: Well, then. I shall save us some time. When I became Prince, I did so by capitulating to the revolutionary scum who slaughtered my sire, my grandsire, and my great-grandsire, in addition to who knows how many of my Clanmates across Russia. When I did so, when I signed their abominable treaty, the words echoing in my head were the last words my beloved sire spoke to me: "Outlive them."

Beckett: She quoted the *Book of Nod*?

Nikolai: "To rid yourself of an enemy, outlive him." Yes. So I did. There was no hope for Anya; to them, she was a symbol of the old ways, the things they wished to extinguish. Or perhaps they felt by killing her, they could more easily control me.

Beckett: What then?

Nikolai: I did as they asked. I ran St. Petersburg in much the same way Anya and I always did, keeping up appearances to visitors. Sometimes the Brujah would send dissidents and enemies to the city during the White Nights, because it was a simple way to get rid of them with fewer Kindred around. Beyond that, though, very little was asked of me.

Beckett: Until Baba Yaga.

[PAUSE]

Nikolai: Yes.

Beckett: And what did she ask?

[LENGTHY SILENCE]

Beckett: If this is too difficult –

Nikolai: If anything, it may be difficult for you. Baba Yaga did not "ask" anything. Baba Yaga never appeared before me in person, and yet, on the first night of each month I would wake in the evening with her blood on my lips. I followed her commands, but I never

heard her voice. I spent most of my time on my ship or on Vasilevksy Island. I didn't know I was doing her bidding, not until after the Curtain fell.

Beckett: And what happened when it fell?

Nikolai: Baba Yaga died in June, during the White Nights. Many of her servants — including Viktor, General of the Army of the Night, interred themselves here, near the water. Something dug them up and burned them in the sun. Baba Yaga was killed some months later.

"General of the Army of the Night?" I assume this sounds better in Russian. -L

Beckett: Where?

Nikolai: Beneath the city.

[RECORDING ENDS]

Warsaw Station closed, as a train station, many years ago. It's a museum now. Getting into the tunnels wasn't hard, but when I was down there, I found the remains of Baba Yaga.

I found a door, obviously disused, and ripped it open. Guards came, so I took care of them, and then went below. Normal-looking tunnels, old, unused train tracks, and then a section of the floor that the rats told me was weak.



Kicked it in, and fell maybe three or four metres. Whole room tasted of salt. I looked around and realized that all the rats had fled — never a good sign.

Walked down the corridor, and the salt taste got stronger. The tunnel ended — cave in?

Against that wall, I found...salt. Huge salt crystals, and inside them, bones. In the middle of it all, the skeletal remains of a vampire — based on the fangs on the skull. I'm not sure what happened or where the salt came from, but I took the skull and left.

I examined the skull Angus found, called in a few favors. It's from an old woman. Does that mean it's from Baba Yaga? I got my hands on police reports from the White Nights some years back, and, indeed, found evidence of a "mass grave with no bodies" near the waterfront. Might that be the slaughter of the "Army of the Night" Nikolai mentioned?

If that's the case, then it would make some degree of sense that Baba Yaga died along with them, or shortly thereafter. Doesn't explain the salt, but salt is widely regarded, the world over, as a curative and preventative measure against magic (like, say, from witches). On the other hand, salt doesn't play into Baba Yaga's legend at all — though it does figure in to another, kind of similar story about a "Salt Queen" from Poland called the Gutka. Similar legend? Baba Yaga making side trips to Poland? Unrelated vampire — or, worse, related vampire? Who knows?

Kindred in St. Petersburg are pretty convinced the skull we found in the tunnels is Baba Yaga, and they do not want to hear otherwise. It did raise the question of how she died, though, and so I sent Angus on and kept asking around.

A few nights later, I found a letter waiting for me at a bar the local Kindred favored as a watering hole and hunting ground, inviting me to Mikhailovsky Castle. The invitation might as well have said "THIS IS A TRAP, YOU WILL BE FLAYED" on it, but it also included, at the bottom, a quote I couldn't get out of my mind.

"Then shall the true Jyhad begin." I'd heard rumors, before, of a scroll, dating probably to the 11th century, passed on in a fever dream from a Nosferatu who immolated himself the next night.

Dr. Beckett

Mikhailovsky Castle is a site of wonder and mystery. We assure you the most gracious hospitality if you agree to the journey here. Please come alone. Tell no-one.

Regards

Marash

When the storm breaks, when the first of 13 falls, then shall the true Jyhad begin.

Supposedly, the scroll elaborated on the words of the Nosferatu Clan founder to his childer, and one of the few stories I'd heard about that I had any kind of corroboration for was that it mentioned a "true Jyhad." Trap or no, I figured I'd better give it a look.

I didn't even get into the castle, though. I saw the guy I was waiting for, and he did not smell right. He didn't smell dead, exactly, just weird, and when I started to approach him, I heard him whisper something under his breath. In Sumerian. It was an invocation, and the thing being invoked was "Bezariel."

I did talk to the guy, though. He called himself "Mikhail," but he looked up at the castle when he said it, like "ha ha I'm Saint Michael." He kept trying to get me to go inside, but I've been around enough of us to know when I'm being hustled. He did finally admit that he'd seen the scroll, but that a group of us (meaning Kindred) had removed it from the city some years back. He said he'd made notes on it and I could see them inside, and as much as it pained me, I tore myself away. I left town the next night to meet up with Angus.

I've since done a little digging, and the name "Bezariel" comes up in a couple of very unsavory places. Best translation I've found? "The Blood Angel."

Interlude: Sewer Rats of Russia

It's not openly spoken of in the modern nights, but if you speak to the right Rabble the right way at the right time, you'll hear that back in the days of the Council it was popular for Nosferatu in St. Petersburg to claim descent from the Hag. If genealogy is true, half of the warrens under the city are populated with those carrying her Blood. Like most of Russia, she had a fairly large presence in the minds of Russian Kindred, except a grand and terrible figure is notably more attractive to vampires. Whether or not she was one single vampire didn't seem to matter – for a mortal, it would be like claiming descent from Charlemagne.

Absolutely no Nosferatu today will acknowledge descent from Baba Yaga, though to find out why, Angus and I had to hike into the woods right near Ufalej, a town of about 30,000 people in southeastern Russia. We didn't even get the tip from a Nosferatu ourselves; a Ravnos who used to run in a coterie with a few Nosferatu told us about the graves. Two nights of travel by train in blacked-out cars took us to the town, and we had to wait another night to venture into the woods.

Lost track of Beckett after walking west from road about two kilometres. Found wolf spoor, but also evidence of human foot traffic. Beckett explained this meant Lupines, so disappeared. Kept walking, per plan. Found huge clearing in trees, probably 20 metres in diameter.

It took us a while to find what the Brujah was talking about – a stone entrance to a long barrow, carved deep with claws far larger and sharper than mine. Even years later and exposed to the elements, the scratches on the thing carried with them the scent of iron. A few simple tests indicated that it was merely sealed, rather than Thaumaturgically trapped. It took both of us a great deal of effort, but eventually the entrance yielded to brute force.

Like most long barrows of Russia, it was divided into chambers. Like most long barrows, it was a place for the dead rather than the living. Buried deep below the rich loam were dozens and dozens of mummified Kindred, paralyzed and torpid to the point of decay. Some looked mostly fresh, but several were but few scraps of decayed flesh, and one or two were ash-covered bones. Many showed disfigurements on their bones –

nodules, severe arthritis, asymmetrical development. Either those Kindred had been Embraced with severe deformities, or they were Nosferatu to a body.

Yet none save the fully-decayed seemed to have met Final Death. Angus and I prodded as much as we dared, but we found neither stake nor wound to explain the torpor of all the vampires in the barrow. They didn't respond to a few drops of blood spilled from my trusty flask. They didn't respond to anything.

We left and re-sealed it several hours before dawn – neither of us wanted to spend the day there – but it raised many more questions than it answered. Clearly, at least some of the barrows Nosferatu claimed descent from Baba Yaga, but who purged them? Their kin, eager to distance themselves from a tyrant, or the Hag herself? And what magic kept them torpid?

On the Other Claw: End of the Line

I'm more enamored of the other theory of Baba Yaga's end. It makes the least sense. But it's also the one I believe is true.

Before we start: what's missing from this theory is what killed Baba Yaga. This one's more about where and when it happened, and it's something I've (well, we, but Angus isn't around anymore) pieced together. Let's pick up where we left off – near Ufalej.

The town suffered an earthquake which roughly coincided with the Shadow Curtain falling. Correlation isn't causation, but this isn't a scientific inquiry and my name isn't Netchurch, so I'm willing to see that as "not a coincidence."

After our investigation of Ufalej, Angus and I decided to steer clear of the woods as much as possible. We headed instead into the mountains. Angus went up into the foothills, while I stayed around the base.

A week went by, then another, and then another. I figured Angus got lost or stuck or killed by werewolves, but I couldn't quite bring myself to leave him. Blood wasn't a problem. I was feeding off animals, but I realized that I didn't have to feed especially often. The blood of the deer and rabbits that I summoned was sustaining me just like human blood. I don't know why and I didn't think to bring a rabbit back with me, but it tasted almost like ghoul blood. I didn't see any other Kindred out there, though, and I was there more than a month. I must have killed two animals a night (even potent-blooded rabbits are still rabbits, they don't hold much), and who in the

world would waste that much of their blood making ghouls of all the rabbits in the woods at the food of the Urals?

I thought back to the Ravnos we met, who referred to the woods as being full of "[Baba Yaga's] beasts." At the time I assumed that meant vampires, because Granny sure did like to use vampires as servants and hunters. But what if they were literally beasts? A vampire as old and powerful as Baba Yaga could sure afford to feed her blood to a lot of animals, especially if we assume that, as a Nosferatu, she had some sway over animals already. So I started looking for weird wildlife. And...oh, boy. Here's a picture of a footprint.

That's a rabbit print. I didn't find the beast it belonged to – that I would have saved – but I found prints like that all over the place. Deer prints with toes, bear prints with back-facing claws (also a lot of weird wolf prints, but I discounted those because they might just as easily have been Lupines).

Slight digression here: We know ghouls can be bred into ghoul families, thanks to the sterling work of our friends the Fiends. And here we have a forest area with no Kindred, but a thriving ghoul animal population. My theory? Baba Yaga had ghoul animals, they escaped when she died, and bred their condition into the local species.

That was my month on the mountain, though. Angus...well.

I'm piecing this together from evidence I found after I decided to follow his trail as best I could and see if I could discern what happened to him. I found his starting point easily enough; it led up into the foothills. After that, though, it was like...well, like tracking a Nosferatu over uneven ground a month after the fact. I gave it a couple of nights, and then said "screw it" and started just looking around.



I found evidence of a dried-up stream. The bed led to a rockslide; it looked like the source of the water had come from inside the mountain, and when the rockslide hit it buried it. Judging by the growth of vegetation around the area, I figured the rockslide hit about the same time as the quakes in Ufalej, surprise, surprise. But still no sign of Angus.

I tried to find an opening into the mountain, and that took me the better part of a week. I found a lot of holes, sure, but they were either too small or too unstable, and I wasn't at all sure that I'd be able to get out again in the event of a cave in. I have no desire to get stuck in an ancient vampire's mystical hideout, even a dead elder's.

At this point I feel compelled to point out that everything seems to happen in cycles. -A

Finally, though, I found an aperture, but it wasn't naturally occurring. The rocks had been positioned in such a way that someone roughly human-sized could get in, but the rocks were far too heavy for a person to have moved them. I figured either Angus had gone into the mountain and gotten lost (or dead), or I'd missed him and he'd already headed back to town. Either way, I decided to chance a cave in and go into the mountain a ways, just to see if I could find him.

The scrawl on the walls started around the first bend. "Listen well these words, children of Absimiliard." And then it just continued, written in English – I transcribed it here as I was walking. I wandered through the tunnels, looking up at the writing, wondering who was screwing with me, but thinking, "well, Angus must have seen this, too."

And then I reached the end, in more than one sense. I found the end of the tunnel, another rockslide, blocking a much larger entrance to a cavern in the mountain. I found the end of the scrawled words. And I found the end of Angus.

LISTEN WELL TO THESE WORDS, CHILDREN OF ABSIMILIARD. YOU ARE THE FIRST AMONG THE UNSEEN. THE SHADOWS OF THE MIND PART AND CHANGE FOR YOU. CALL ON THESE SHADOWS. CALL ON THE STRENGTH OF THE HUNTER. CALL ON THE BEASTS, THE GREAT SERPENTS. WHEN THE STORM BREAKS, THEN THE FIRST OF 13 FALLS, THEN SHALL THE TRUE JYHAD BEGIN. THE FIRST TO DIE SHALL BE THE NOSFERATU. I CALL THE HUNT! I SOUND THE CRY FOR BLOOD! LET THE FIRST BE THE ONE WHO FLED, WHO USED THE LAND AND CALLED ON THE ONE BELOW TO ESCAPE! DRINK DEEP OF HER HEART'S BLOOD, AND CRUSH HER BODY.



His clothes were shredded and scattered, and his body, of course, was nothing but ash. Written on the wall was this:

Curse and damn you, Beckett, for bringing me here. Nowhere left to run. Nowhere to hide from the predator that lives in the shadows of the mind. We Nosferatu think we hide from sight? Our obfuscation is not that of the Malkavs or the Setites. Ours is hiding from the sight of mortals by becoming visible to nightmares.

Beckett, you bastard, if you find this, take this message to my Clan: They are coming. They are coming for us all.

Angus, childe of Okulos

Surrounding the shreds of clothes and the mounds of ash were 10 teeth, bigger than human but not quite as big as ours, made of iron. I picked one up, and felt it burn my flesh, and I remembered that mythology refers to Baba Yaga as having iron teeth. And then I got the hell out of there.

The Calleva Arms, Silchester, British Isles

Does my account of Russia seem disjointed? As if whole pieces were simply missing? It certainly does to me. The flow is off, and I cannot account for it in the safety of my temporary haven in Silchester.

Except that I can account for it, and that deeply worries me. I've felt the raw, ragged edges of a Ventrue's words in my mind, the faint itch of a powerfully hidden Kindred before. When I remember what I can of my time in Russia, I am inevitably drawn back to memories of my time with Kemintiri or Menele, and it discomfits me greatly. Even if Baba Yaga's true identity was, say, several elder Nosferatu taking advantage of a legend? They would still possess a terrifying facility to conceal their existences, and a demonstrable talent with certain Thaumaturgy Paths. If Baba Yaga did exist, the spider in the center of a truly massive web of power, an Antediluvian's childe wielding magics ancient and horrible...? I saw the eyes of Lupines in the dark forests of Russia, and they were utterly and completely terrified of something. Covering tracks would be well within her power.

I've had Cesare make a few inquiries since returning from Russia, and they seem to be stymied through disconcertingly familiar means. It wouldn't be the first time a Methuselah faked their Final Death to throw off the players in the Jyhad.

The Jyhad...I cannot say in these pages where I precisely decided the Jyhad was more than a fanciful tale concocted by neonates to explain why elders were so much smarter than they. I believed it to be nothing more than the many and varied machinations of powerful elders, stretching back to a handful of antecedents, but to deem this Jyhad would be to ascribe mythical movement to something that is ultimately somewhat mundane. To believe the Book of Nod and fragments of lore as anything more than allegory would be to acknowledge the eschatological bent within, and that simply would not do, not for the centuries of unlife under my belt.

I suspect I decided the Jyhad was real somewhere in Russia, but I very literally cannot remember where and when, and that drives me to bloody tears.

OKULOS



Nosferatu, Salisbury *1628 , Oxford #1665. Unknown sire.

Okulos was Embraced near the same location and year as myself. Indeed, it seems we share the same circumstances of Embrace, making me often wonder where I would be now if I had the Nosferatu sire, and he the Gangrel. Okulos witnessed the same mortal and Kindred politicking as I as a fledgling. Like myself, he was put off by the entire rigmarole. Further, discovering the Camarilla view of his thin blood and lack of sire, he became a determined autarkis.

As an antiquarian, Okulos is unsurpassed. If he spends long enough with an artifact, he finds all its secrets. Impressively, this gift does not come from any Kindred gift. He's spent every year under the night refining his skills. He claims to me he "eschews the supernatural in favor of mortal principles, as one night we'll find those gifts denied just as easily as they've been granted."

When we were younger, Okulos swooped in to deny me a prize more times than I can remember. It was one such event that led me to offer him partnership. Our philosophies didn't appear at odds, and both of us disliked the idea of reporting to anyone else, so we equitably agreed to work together.

Okulos embraces the technological age. He's fascinated by the internet as an information resource, and a way of exploring locations without the danger of actual proximity to potential curses, sleeping elders, and rival archeologists. For the latter part of the 20th century it was rare to see Okulos out in the field.

I pried Okulos away from the safety of his computer hive for the sake of a dangerous, yet valuable expedition. I accept responsibility for his becoming trapped within Kaymakli, and the tragic destruction of his childe. I did, however, endeavor to free him, and after four years he returned to my side. He now suffers from mental maladies a vampire could only acquire after being entombed in the largest mass grave of our kind. His temperament is more detached and acerbic now, his boldness taking a knock since Kaymakli. I'm confident it'll return. He still remains firmly apolitical, angering both Sabbat and Camarilla when they find him skulking on their territory.

Of late, Okulos has worked hard with Cesare on chronicling many of our findings so they're more accessible as a research resource. Anatole has sore misgivings about this, growing especially cold to Okulos since his freedom from Kaymakli. Anatole's mumbled to me about the risk of putting all my findings in one Okulos-shaped basket. I'm forced to respond that I owe Okulos my trust. After all, he waited for me in Kaymakli, and forgave me for the events leading to his becoming trapped there.

To Grandmother's House We Go



Following the death of Baba Yaga, the Shadow Curtain collapsed. Beckett is correct in stating that Baba Yaga had a vast network of supernatural agents — vampires, ghouls, and stranger things corrupted with her blood and magic — that suddenly found itself leaderless. Foreign Kindred were slow to enter Russia, though, since for decades doing so had been a one-way trip.

This means Russian Kindred (and vampires sent or tricked into Russia) have had time to consolidate power bases, make alliances and enmities, and otherwise get used to their freedom. Russia is a huge country, and it doesn't behave the way the rest of the world does, from a supernatural standpoint. Baba Yaga's shadow is still felt, and some beings don't even know she is gone. They keep doing what they believe is her bidding.

Not everything is mystery and magic, though. The Anarchs are slowly beginning to realize without Baba Yaga in power, they could reestablish the Council, but without the chokehold of Stalinism or Clan Brujah. A small but growing group of Anarchs sees Russia as the potential fulfillment of all that they have worked for. If they could unite this immense country in the cause of freedom for the Kindred, then their comrades in arms the world over would have a model, a symbol, and a home base.

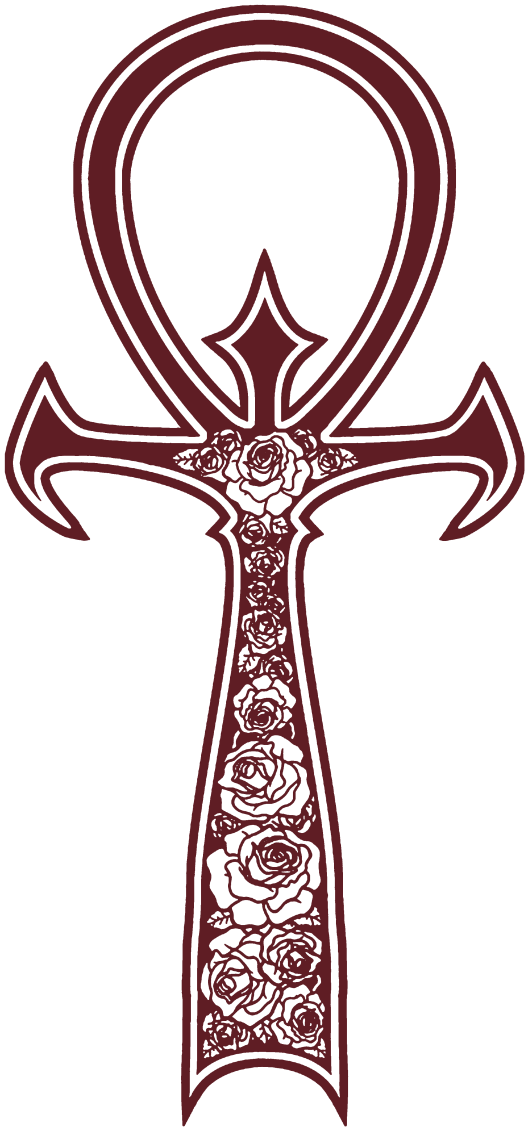
Hooked Flesh

Baba Yaga was thought to be a Fourth Generation Nosferatu who used magic and spiritual acumen to take over Russia. As Beckett mentions, she commanded armies of vampires, werewolves, mages, spirits, at least one demon, and horrible spirit-human hybrids called fomori.

For our purposes, the actual death of Baba Yaga isn't terribly important. The aftermath of her death lends itself to a number of interesting plot hooks, regardless of whether or not your chronicle is set in Russia.

- **The Curtain Falls:** Baba Yaga's Shadow Curtain kept a lot of Kindred isolated from the rest of the world for decades. Russia is a pretty big place to be "isolated," of course, but even so, her death allowed vampires who hadn't been able to escape the country the chance to get out. Native vampires probably wouldn't leave anyway; Kindred are notoriously averse to travel. But what about dignitaries, emissaries, and the like stranded in Russia when the Curtain rose? Might they now be attempting to conclude business begun when the Soviet Union was young? Likewise, what about vampires sent here by their sires as a means of disposal? Now that they can leave, they might return to their native lands for a long-overdue dose of revenge.
- **The True Jyhad:** A pack of Sabbat Noddists, having somehow obtained the text of the Words of Absimiliard (the text running at the top of this section), have decided the Jyhad can truly begin if they take the initiative and start killing Nosferatu. They start with the antitribu of their city, but then branch out and start hunting down individual vampires and torching underground nests.
- **The Blood Angel:** Bezariel is a powerful demon, bound into a dagger and hidden behind a false wall in Mikhailovsky Castle. It commands a cult prone to human sacrifice, run by three lesser demons (including Marash). Bezariel would be quite happy to ally with the Baali, should they find them — it knows more about vampires than many demons do, because of its long association with Baba Yaga.

- **The Cult of the Little Grandmother:** Blood bonds die hard. Usually they fade with the death of the regnant, but Baba Yaga was anything but "usual." A cult of vampires (and perhaps other creatures, depending on the Storyteller's desires) is trying to find Baba Yaga. They can't, but they might find a powerful Nosferatu pretending to be her, or some other opportunistic being happy to use zealots to her own ends.
- **The Lupines:** The influence of Baba Yaga gone, the Lupines go on the warpath. They dig ancient, torpid Kindred out of their tombs and burn them. They smash their way into Elysiums and slaughter all present. The ferocity and hatred with which they act is terrifying to Kindred, especially to those vampires who felt similarly oppressed by Baba Yaga. Can't they make common cause, or at least a truce, with these monsters?



THE FALL OF THE HOUSE

Ciudad Nezahualcoyotl, Mexico City, Mexico

When Lucita and I stayed at her compound, Maria Sandoza told us tales of Mexico City's more peculiar denizens. Always one for new avenues of discovery, my ears pricked when she mentioned a pack of Blood Brothers. This bloodline's often been connected to the Tremere antitribu – or Spellbinders, as Aristotle names them – and suffers decreasing numbers since the disappearance of its creators. I enquired with Maria as to the whereabouts of these Frankensteins, to which she informed me of a lucid one named Dr. Varona who would be happy to meet me.

Sadly, I didn't have the time back then to track down Dr. Varona, but a break from Russia is precisely what I needed right now.

Ut sementem feceris. Marcus.-L

[RECORDING BEGINS]

Dr. Varona: [laughs] Yes! Testing, testing. This is your voice recorder, I see. I lost my last one in a chest cavity. I'll make good use of yours though, trust me. I see it's almost full. It'll provide easy listening as I sleep the sleep of the righteous. How are you doing down there?

Difficult to talk with a spike straight through your heart, yes? I'm addressing you because I know you can hear while staked. I've done hundreds of tests.

[SOUNDS OF BANGING, RUSTLING, AND SHOUTING]

Dr. Varona: Madre always told me I kept an untidy bedroom.

I guess you didn't count on meeting a gestalt angel. We're all angels. We were told you were coming. So now you're here with me.

I'll be having words with Maria when next we meet. -L

[SOUNDS OF POWER TOOLS]

Dr. Varona: That's you opened up. Let's see what's going on in there. Not much. I've toe tagged you as Fulano de Tal. It doesn't really matter what I call you.

[sounds of Varona humming as a high-pitched power tool is activated]

Dr. Varona: The Blessed Choir aren't able to create children of our own. Not the natural way, with fangs and blood. God forbids it. But since madre went to Teotihuacan and never came back.... We've been forced to innovate.

[sound of a power saw followed by a wet thud]

Dr. Varona: Can you feel it, pendejo? That sound was your right foot being cut off just through the ankle. [laughs] Feet amuse me.

We went to the Universidad when we realized madre wasn't coming back. All Blood Brothers of Mexico City. We all tried to get in, and we lost a good number. It was a mess.

When we finally got inside and saw the remains of madre...Oh, I cried. We rent clothes and merged, and fell apart, and merged again. How could we have more brothers and sisters without madre to create them? As the other packs retreated, we Choirboys searched the libraries. I found several books about us. One was by Lorenzo Torquemada, a Toreador antitribu of Uruguay. He claims in his text to be the instigator behind our creation. I traced Torquemada's name to other works....



The Perverts have their fingers in many pies. And worse, besides. -L

[power tools in use again followed by another wet thud]

Dr. Varona: Through Torquemada I found an intriguing ritual. I've been practicing with countless bodies. Over and over. I've even got it right once or twice. I'm going to make you one of us, Fulano de Tal. I'll even let you pick your own name. The brothers of the Choir will engage with your stumps, share in your blood. We'll all take a part of you, and you'll take a piece of each of us. Now, let's move that spike an inch to the right —

[SOUND OF BECKETT ROARING AND THE CLATTER OF THE RECORDER ON THE GROUND, FOLLOWED BY SHOUTS, CLASHING METAL, AND SMACKS FOR SEVERAL MINUTES UNTIL THE SOUND CUTS OFF]

[RECORDING ENDS]

Cathedral of Jesus Senor de la Divina Misericordia, Mexico City, Mexico

As the transcript shows, Varona gave me a warm welcome. I've never had to flee while lacking a foot and an arm before, with my gray guts hanging out. It seems I'll be favoring my left side. Thankfully, I long ago trained myself into ambidexterity, even if I do prefer to write with the right.

It may have been worth losing limbs and organs if it means I'm able to discover the lost writings of House Goratrix.

I'm actually giddy with excitement as I write. I must contact Okulos.

The giddiness is the lack of balance that comes with being an amputee. -A

[RECORDING BEGINS]

Okulos: Why didn't you invite Sturbridge? Why are you always sending me into these damnable places? Make like mist if this temple collapses. You're still missing toes.

Beckett: Quiet. Do you hear that?

Okulos: Yes. The hum of machinery. Behind this wall.

Beckett: Push it.

Okulos: You push it. I'm not getting stuck again.

Beckett: Fine.

[THE GRINDING OF STONE]

Beckett: That's a big computer.

DR. VARONA



Blood Brother; *???, #???. Childe of Madre Deolinda.

Archon Vidal Jarbeaux confirms Varona rose to prominence as a surprisingly intellectual Blood Brother. Most of his bloodline are known for their destructive competence, but Varona is a creator.

Varona's circle — known as the Blessed Choir — move from city to city, drawing the ire of whichever Kindred cross their paths. Varona kidnaps vampires as frequently as he destroys them, and makes good on attempts to scare Camarilla vampires out of their domains. This free rein given to Varona by his masters speaks to his ingenuity. Varona acts as terrorist and urban legend.

The most common theory has Varona as an engineering professor at the Universidad del Norte in Barranquilla, Colombia, who went missing in the late 1980s. I've also heard tell of his being a serial killer who operated throughout Mexico in the 1990s, as well as a taxidermist from Bucaramanga. Both myself and Jarbeaux believe knowing his mortal roots could lead one to his actual haven instead of the temporary structures he moves between.

The Blessed Choir are suspected to be a circle of between five and seven members, but actual sightings of Varona's brethren are difficult to confirm. Varona's face is the only one widely known. Suspicions abound that he somehow "contains" his brothers within himself until they need to be hatched. I'm not easy to stake — but I felt at least eight hands gripping me as another impaled me. Certainly his enormous size and unnatural bulges beneath his coat imply additional limbs, horrible mutilation, or both.

Dr. Varona's confident he now knows how to recreate Blood Brothers through exchanges of vitae and limbs with other vampires. His focus has moved from experimenting on mortals exclusively to Kindred. This is notable, as it's not dissimilar to the Tremere's first experimentations in the creation of Gargoyles.

Jarbeaux tells me Diana Iadanza pushed for Varona's addition to the Red List, but was blocked by Ian Carfax.

Okulos: Those are servers. That's a supercomputer. Impressive isn't the word. Considering the Tremere penchant for information, I shouldn't be surprised. This is advanced materiel. Some of it's a few years old, but this kind of technology is built to last.

Beckett: You have a look around here. There's more downstairs.

Okulos: Shout if you need anything.

Beckett: Providing I'm not immediately immolated, I'll yell the safe word.

I could spend nights walking around here. Kidiaba tells me Goratrix made this place his haven when he migrated to the New World, moving Heaven and Earth — perhaps literally — to convert an inverted Aztec temple into his domain. Amazing to think what an older Methuselah is capable of, if a relatively young one can perform such a feat.

Ngoma? You must tell me the story of how you won over one of their number. -O

At Kidiaba's request, House Ngoma granted both Okulos and I pendants and bone rings designed to protect us. We both feel these gifts wavering in power each time we descend to a further level. I doubt they'll last the trek.

Before me is a circular sanctum with a vaulted ceiling, jarringly different from the other angular chambers. There are heaps of white ash, some humanoid in size, but lacking defined features. Rough count would put the number between 30 and 40. There are sigils across the floor and walls. Silver rings sit in the ash heaps.

A library — a real one with none of that computerized rubbish — floor to ceiling bookcases and cabinets. I imagine the Tremere antitribu hit this room first. Books have been thrown onto the floor with disregard to age and content. I'm eyeing any potential finds.

The content here mostly comprises historical texts. I've placed several in my satchel. Of greatest interest is a book labeled — crudely, I might add — as *The Book of the Grave-War*. It looks enciphered.

The pendant just dropped from around my neck, the metal corroding.

[RECORDING ENDS]

Teotihuacan Ruins, Mexico City, Mexico

Okulos wasn't idle in the computer room. While there was much beyond his ken on those servers, including codes of what he calls "technomancy," he did do something to check whether — in his words — "someone had backdoored the supercomputer." It transpires someone in Calgary has done so. Posing as a Tremere antitribu, Okulos made contact with this hacker. Apparently an Anarch Tremere, Hitman's group and House Goratrix had for years been exchanging intelligence on blood magic rituals for the locations of Camarilla havens.

Okulos was able to obtain some interesting files, one being incredibly clear footage of the ritual that turned some Tremere antitribu into pillars of ash. Around 20 are in shot in this recording, the one identifiable as Goratrix by the symbol on his face standing in their midst. They form a circle, and all but Goratrix and a clutch of companions who depart with him are immolated.

The most striking element of the recording for me wasn't the inferno — which I guessed at after finding the remains — but the eye that opened up in Goratrix's forehead.



An inventory of our acquisitions follows, titles translated to English where appropriate.

House Goratrix – A History

A propagandist piece, from what I can tell. The writer claims to be Goratrix himself. The book reads like a Tremere version of Mein Kampf. Very dry, lacquered with bitterness, and, according to the foreword, sent to every member of the bloodline. According to this book, Goratrix formed the idea of Clan Tremere's creation and had his position as right hand to Tremere stolen. This goes to Kidiaba.

The Fall of House Tremere

An interesting book reading not unlike the biblical Book of Revelations. Surprising for its accurate prophecies, including one that seems to predict "the rising of the Cyclops" around the time the Tremere antitribu fell silent.

The Book of the Grave-War (encoded copy)

I've worked to decode this text, but the code changes from line to line. The first page matches no text from the Book of the Grave-War Dr. Mortius translated. Possibly a fake.

The Sworn Book of Honorius

Another version of this book is known to me. It's a complex tome of Thaumaturgical principles including soul sanctuary, demon summoning, and blood manipulation. It reads like a telephone book, but would likely fetch a high price, as this version appears to be an original.

The One True Way to Golconda according to The Master of Ravens

A strange piece of philosophical screed on a topic that's never interested me. There's a section on Saulot that reads like dreadful pulp fiction, presenting him as a messianic figure.

Kholé Rubicon IX

The jackpot. This book is locked via ritual, spell, or the like. That can only mean its contents are worth accessing.

Brochure de Golconda (Illuminated)

I'd consider this brochure to be misplaced in the library of Goratrix, were it not handsomely illuminated in the old monastic style. It refers to the other Golconda piece I've picked up, acting as a flier of sorts. A curiosity piece.

Some books aren't meant to be opened. -A

From: aisling.sturbridge@fiveboroughs.com

To: beckett@schreckNET.nod

Subject: Enquiry

Beckett

Do you recall a *Brochure de Golconda* acquired and an associated text by someone naming himself The Master of Ravens?

I received a brochure of the same title this week. I do not know the sender or how they knew to send it to the Chantry of the Five Boroughs.

I've made enquiries, and myself and Goratrix are far from the only recipients. I trouble you with this because Sabine Lafitte, an apprentice of mine newly arrived from Minneapolis, spent three months in Milwaukee shortly before the House Carna incident. She swears the same brochure and *One True Way* book were constantly in Carna's possession. She sent Sabine to Minneapolis specifically because she attempted to steal a look at the text.

Could this *One True Way* book be the cause of Carna's ills, rather than the *Book of the Grave-War*? This Master of Ravens is clearly someone worth investigating. Check your copy of the *One True Way*. It may give some clue as to the author's location.

I cannot confirm the Malkavian ability to dement others via written words. -A

Keep me informed.

Aisling Sturbridge

B.

Enjoy your books, delivered by hand to your elected location. Rest assured; only one Dunsirn needed to die in order to allow for their acquisition. I murdered two to send a message.

T-

The Nandru Caves, Hunedoara, Romania

Romania is oft where my road doth lead. I will not be stopping in to visit Dracula, despite my curiosity as to Caltuna's wellbeing.

Tracking the brochure and The One True Way proved an ordeal. I'd traded both to Albertus Magnus, who had in turn sold them to Ambrogino Giovanni. Reaching out to Ambrogino was out of the question, so I made contact with my "sponsor" in D.C. I loathed doing so, but Vitel assured me – and I could hear the damn smile in his voice – that Talley would regain my books from Ambrogino.

In truth, I've been kicking myself ever since Aisling's email. How many times have I heard someone utter "the one true way" in the same breath as "Golconda"? Who is this Master of Ravens, and why does he target the Tremere?

Questions were stacked high, and I was expecting to devote years to researching their answers. Instead it took one night. In the afterword, the Master of Ravens invites those who wish to follow the One True Way to Hunedoara.

Scholars of Kindred history know the great battle the Ruthvens held with the Tremere in Hunedoara, but was this Master of Ravens involved?

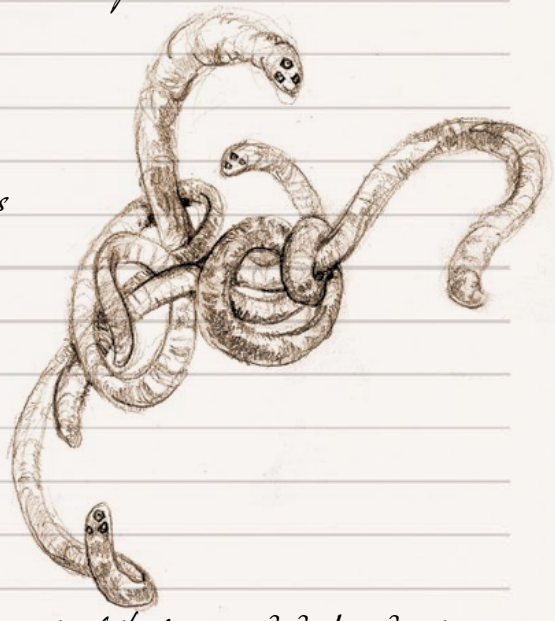
I've been in the city for a fortnight now, and found no Kindred. The mortals are surprisingly wary of me, despite this. I find myself needing to affect an appearance of healthiness and imitation of respiration to put these observant kine at ease. Anatole says a number of them are ghouls but, no matter who I follow, they lead to no masters. They must be acquiring vitae somewhere. Anatole has had similar limited success. We rest in different caves each day in case the citizens of Hunedoara are alert enough to burn a house or hotel in which we sleep.

Why have we been led here?

The visions visited upon me by the one naming herself Mahtiel of Hunedoara were so vivid as to imprint on my mind until I committed them to paper. Mahtiel – a torpid vampire's tortured soul – spoke of events to come I barely understand. My notes are attached to each illustration. Anatole is attempting to further decipher each.



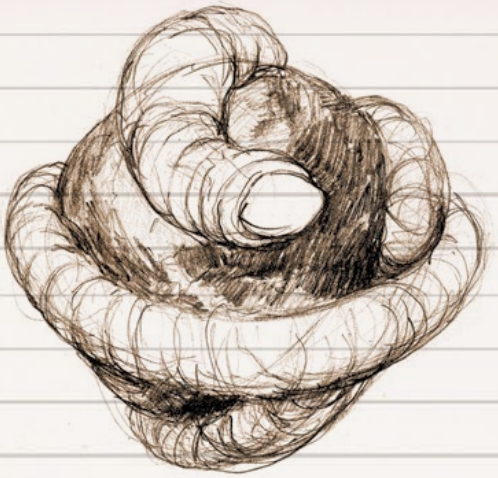
On the first day Mahtiel visited my dreams she described the Master of Ravens. She describes him as intolerably dangerous, but he may endeavor to protect the Tremere. Mahtiel believes any who follow his One True Way are bound to be split across a dozen more, losing themselves to him. He will ever be the lone set of footprints on his path.



Parasites infest the Jyhad, bearing the eyes of the Salubri. Mahtiel believes the progenitor worm is able to see through all its childer, and take command of those who taste them. Do the Salubri live on through the Tremere?



The events of the Universidad played out before me in slow motion. Goratrix slew his own with unmitigated zeal. Mahtiel believes this event to be one of the most cataclysmic events of the Jyhad, especially for what she calls the "nascent Clan Tremere" who are "being eaten from within."



Mahtiel states it is one of the Jyhad's true masters and manipulators, but is confused as to the worm's love for its own children. She suspects it will devour all and spare its children, but the vision did not imply any merciful intent.



I could feel the heat and taste the blood on the fifth day as Mahtiel walked me down this gleaming white path. She described the One True Way as not to be followed, but forged. She explained how every journey would be different. A simple slip onto the Master of Ravens' path would see a vampire consumed by fire. Allowing the worm to take control would be to give into the power of the Beast.



On the final day, Mahtiel revealed her guilt. She is hidden away somewhere, too locked up inside herself to reveal where, but for each year she remains another must die. So it has been for centuries. To free her from this plight, she says I must travel to the Pearl of the Orient and find the One Who Knows. The visions I experienced were – according to Mahtiel – not planted by her, but unlocked from within.

At heart I've long been a selfish creature, seeking only to further my knowledge of our existence, our purpose, and of late, the Jyhad. I do not do what I do to enrich Kindred society.

Mahtiel was truthful in saying my visions came from within. I will pursue this knotted path to meet the One Who Knows. I fear what's coming. It touches more than my precious knowledge. Steps must be taken. -B

From: aisling.sturbridge@fiveboroughs.com

To: beckett@schreckNET.nod

Subject: Pearl of the Orient

Attachment: OThrace.zip

Beckett

I'm not prone to exaggeration, but if there's the possibility of threat to my Clan, I need you to investigate it. If there is fact behind this supposition, then I need to warn those of my blood.

The Pearl of the Orient is an old name for Hong Kong. I attach the details of a rogue luminary of our Clan who may be able to assist you in your hunt for this "One Who Knows." It could even be he, for Thrace knows all that moves in Hong Kong.

Aisling Sturbridge

"There is no polite way to suggest to someone that they have devoted their life to a folly."

Daniel Dennett

Hong Kong Central Library, Hong Kong, People's Republic of China

Hong Kong is a fascinating city seemingly woven from steel and glass. It's truly a sight to behold for even a jaded old corpse. My traveling companion does not agree, but he's thankfully not at my side presently.

As is typical, my first stop in any city is the library. I only needed to spend minutes in the Small Business section to find records of Spartacus Logistics, the corporation owned by former Regent Oliver Thrace. Aisling has been truly generous in divulging Thrace's name and organization, although I gather there's little love lost between him and the Tremere back home.

[RECORDING BEGINS]

Beckett: [unclear] — here? I was expecting Oliver Thrace.

Schrekt: Oliver is indisposed.

Beckett: For the purposes of the tape, I'm now in the presence of Herr Karl Schrekt of Clan Tremere. I don't mind admitting his very presence unsettles me. He stares straight through me, bears the scars of a hundred battles, and is known to have investigated, interrogated, and put to Final Death countless terrifying creatures.

I fear for the continued existence of Oliver Thrace. -A

Schrekt: Quite the introduction. I do not mind your recording. It's a novelty to be interviewed, when typically I pose the questions, albeit in less comfortable surroundings. One correction though, Cuthbert. My kills are not countless. I remember every one.

Beckett: I haven't been referred to as Cuthbert for —

Schrekt: You think I do not know you? Such a prominent Kindred possessed of such overwhelming ego. Hardly surprising. I did not become four-time Justicar for my Thaumaturgic ability alone.

Beckett: I respect your prowess. Would the epithet "the One Who Knows" mean anything to you?

Schrekt: Perhaps.

Beckett: I assume you know the truth of your Clan's recent intrigues. Were you aware of the practitioner and reasoning behind the ritual that consumed most of the Tremere antitribu?

Schrekt: The English language ever finds a way to butcher a perfectly straightforward question. Allow me to be blunt. Every Tremere felt an altering of the blood in the nights before Goratrix's brood fell. A surge of power. Councilor Etrius and even that wrinkled old muschi LeDuc came forth to assure the elders it was merely a ritual of the Inner Council. [laughs] Tremere was waking, and calling some of us to him. Most specifically, the antitribu. Tremere consumed the antitribu of our Clan.

Beckett: I've a recording showing the perpetrator of the ritual to be Goratrix.

Schrekt: Tremere controls him by some means, but I do not yet have evidence to state exactly how. What I do know is the entity in Vienna posing as Tremere, is not Tremere.

Beckett: That's a disturbing revelation. Are you aware Goratrix bears the eye of the Salubri?

Schrekt: Demonspawn. I was not. It confirms some of the suspicions of my companions in E Division.

Beckett: Are you willing to share them?

Schrekt: I share nothing until I know it for a fact. This is fact: The worm in Vienna is not Tremere even if once it was. An albinoid invertebrate with three pitch-black eyes at one end.

Beckett: You've seen the white worm? It's Tremere?

Schrekt: I saw it and would have slain it had I not been ejected from the chamber. Etrius bathes it in vitae, which it absorbs through its skin. Where Tremere himself is, I cannot say, but he exerts thralldom over Goratrix while his physical form becomes monstrous. This worm — it possesses intelligence and crushing psychic will. I would see the Tremere destroy the abomination, but for Etrius' obsession with protecting it.

Sounds more like some fleshcrafting experiment gone wrong. Did the Tremere not originate as a bloodline of the Tzimisce? -A

Beckett: You would not be the only Tremere to forge a separate path at this time. The

Do not believe everything Vykos writes. -A

technomancy-wielding Anarchs, House Carna, whatever remains of the antitribu….

Schrekt: I am no leader of a splinter cell. I am loyal to Clan Tremere and the Camarilla. Councilor Meerlinda supports my aims. Through evidence and merciless force, I will assist in bringing this Clan back to its true aims and capability.

Beckett: Such elitist action will likely make enemies within your Clan.

Schrekt: Perhaps. My Clan has ever been controlled from on high. This worm sitting in Tremere's place; it conveys its will and the Clan follows. What if through the power of its vitae — which I assure you, is that of Tremere himself, even if his soul is absent — it commanded the Clan to join the Sabbat, or urged us to sacrifice ourselves? I am not on this Earth to form part of a buffet. Tremere consumed the power of the antitribu. This worm will attempt the same on the Clan's main body. That cannot be permitted.

Beckett: It would make sense Tremere — as an enemy of the Sabbat — used Goratrix to destroy the antitribu. But what consciousness now resides within Tremere's limbless body?

Schrekt would be familiar with limbless existence. Do you recall what Breidenstein did to him? -J

Schrekt: I do not speculate. But there's a reason we're in Hong Kong. While you and I chat, E Division are en route to the Bank of China Tower.

Beckett: I assume not to make a deposit.

Schrekt: Quite the opposite. A vampire makes his haven within one of the building's many vaults. He will be withdrawn and brought to me for questioning.

You see, I always check my sources. When fed information, I don't just blindly spread a swathe of destruction at my informant's behest as you do. Before I even examine a target, I scrutinize the request's source. Information pertaining to the Tremere worm in Vienna, Goratrix being manipulated by Tremere, House Carna's formation, even talk of a Salubri in the infamous Castle Hunedoara — it all came from this individual, and all proved correct. This information has festered while I've struggled to verify his identity. I need to know if I'm being used, and if so; why, before I act.

Beckett: Who is this Kindred?

Schrekt: The native vampires call him Tsang Kwong of the Wu Zao. Does the name mean anything to you?

Beckett: No.

Schrekt: Good. I'd hate to have to interrogate you, too.

Beckett: I will be taking my leave.

[RECORDING ENDS]

Major collision outside Bank of China Tower — Three confirmed fatalities



By Rita Li

Three people have been killed in a major accident on one of Hong Kong's busiest streets.

The incident occurred when an Ardus Enterprises truck collided with a stationary car on Garden Road.

The truck stopped for less than a minute after the collision occurred at 1:46 a.m. Saturday, the driver apparently exiting his vehicle to check on the status of the passengers in the car, before leading one to his truck and driving away at speed.

Lily Ng, who was travelling on Garden Road when traffic came to a standstill, described the scene as "carnage."

Police have issued an appeal for anyone who witnessed the collision and suspected kidnapping, or has any information about it to call their local precinct collision investigation unit.

B.

You're getting blasé about hiring people so you can avoid dirtying your paws.

I wish I could say I feel used, but in honesty you just increased the fee I'll be charging Sejanus.

I drove the garbage truck clean through the Tremere limousine, snatched up your quarry, and delivered him complete with stake to your hotel room.

Do not lose your morals for the sake of the prize at the end of the line, brother mine. -A

Oh, you can't see him? That's because he's currently hanging in your wardrobe with an orange in his mouth.

Until next time, old boy.

T-

[RECORDING BEGINS]

Beckett: I'm going to ask you several questions while you remain paralyzed. I hope you comprehend my words.

Firstly, I don't intend for you to come to further harm. If Schrekt had caught you, you would be tortured and killed. I will free you as soon as I have my answers.

Your intelligence on the activities of Clan Tremere is immense, and apparently accurate. I need you to tell me what Tremere plans to do with the body of Goratrix. I need you to tell me what lives in the invertebrate body of Tremere. Tell me the intentions of House Carna, and the source of its breaking from the Clan. How do I free Mahtiel from her locked-in state? Who is the Master of Ravens? Are you the One Who Knows?

I apologize if I seem harried. I fear Schrekt and his E Division could come to batter down my door. I fear a threat rising from within the Tremere. I fear the promise of Golconda has twisted minds. I fear whoever claims to know the path is making slaves of their adherents. I don't worry for the feelings of an ancient magus or who may battle over his soul as much as for those I know and actually care for. I have companions, friends, contacts from long ago, and spirits I've only recently touched — those who may be endangered by the schemes of beings too ancient and grotesque to give those I care about a second thought.

I fear I may be one of very few who can do something about what's happening — this interminable Jyhad — and I can't sit silent.

I'm going to fill your mouth with my blood, remove the stake from your heart, and you're going to give me answers.

[PAUSE]

Tsang: Thank you.

Beckett: I apologize for Talley needing to incapacitate you.

Tsang: Knowledge is power, Gangrel. What power do you have over me?

Beckett: You'll find yourself feeling weak. Talley drank from you. At this time, power is entirely in my hands.

Tsang: I am Tsang Kwong, once the One Who Knows. I watch and Master Zao-Lat sees all.

Beckett: Saulot is dead.

Tsang: Zao-Lat lives. Your white worm is merely a chrysalis. He is reborn, through blood of Tzimisce and Tremere both. His Hun in the body of a mortal youth, his P'o within the worm. It is as he planned.

Beckett: Tremere has been ousted from his own body —

Tsang: — and occupies that of his favored childe: Goratrix. The two have a sympathetic bond. As mortals they were lovers.

Beckett: I need to know the plans of Saulot and Tremere.

Tsang: They circle and align and await the appropriate time.

Tremere as Goratrix will restart his grand agenda with those loyal to him. He sponsors House Carna, for reasons even I do not know. Tremere, in hubris, believes he has the time to do this. You ask

how Carna broke from the Tremere. The answer is in the Book, but my belief is that she did not break free. Her followers are the ones who remain loyal. The rest of the Clan will suffer. House Carna will be dismissed as fringe, but are empowered in a way they do not realize.

Zao-Lat has been planning his move for centuries. He has what no other Antediluvian does. Access to the power of three great avatars. He can consume all, or turn all against his enemies. Zao-Lat is readying for birth. When born, he can drench our world in blood, turn Clan on Clan, and awaken the one they call Caine.

Beckett: Caine?

Tsang: Another new question. First, your Master of Ravens is a fanatical servant of Zao-Lat. I cannot pierce his true identity, or even if he is vampire. His power is provided by Zao-Lat.

Mahtiel is conflicted. Of my brethren, but not. She is the blade where I am the eagle. She is the slashing sword where I am the sighting eye. Her existence, and that of her peers, is intrinsically linked to the power of Zao-Lat and the promise of Golconda. It is a hollow promise. I have seen too much to believe otherwise. Yet she cannot accept Zao-Lat's betrayal of his childer. Oh, but his childer are many. There are more Clans than you know who could sport a third eye, Gangrel.

Beckett: Can she be freed?

Tsang: She can wake whenever she chooses, but her freedom would bring about a blood sacrifice unseen since Carthage. Zao-Lat can absolve this sacrifice, but in so doing she commits her soul to one who will use it without kindness.

Beckett: You don't sound as if you're a willing servant of Saulot.

Tsang: Zao-Lat is the destroyer. I despise him. But he pulls my strings. He wanted me to impart to Karl Schrekt all I conveyed. It creates disharmony in one of the few groups who can withstand him, and if his cocoon is struck his nativity is assured. He wants me to tell you all this. He then wants me to die.

Beckett: I won't let that happen. I will save you and Mahtiel from these intrigues.

Tsang: I do not believe you will be given the choice.

Beckett: No!

[THE SOUND OF SHATTERING GLASS]

[RECORDING ENDS]

I wish I knew who in my Clan I could approach with this record. Everything seems suddenly quite complicated. -A

Saulot the Cancer

Revelations abound and Beckett's left reeling as Tsang hurls himself from a 25th-story window. The words of Schrekt, Mahtiel, and Tsang are of the same choir, but they sing subtly different tunes. Sturbridge is left with the knowledge that her Clan may be eaten from within, but if this is the case, to who among the Tremere can she confide?

The Salubri and Tremere cycle is one of birth, death, and rebirth. Beckett fears the dance between the two Clans may result in Gehenna being brought forward, as both Clan founders throw every available resource at each other in their deadly ballet.

The few surviving Salubri begin receiving alarming visions, alternating between those of their founder drawing them to him in an embrace, and others in which his jaw distends wide enough to consume them all with a flick of his forked tongue.

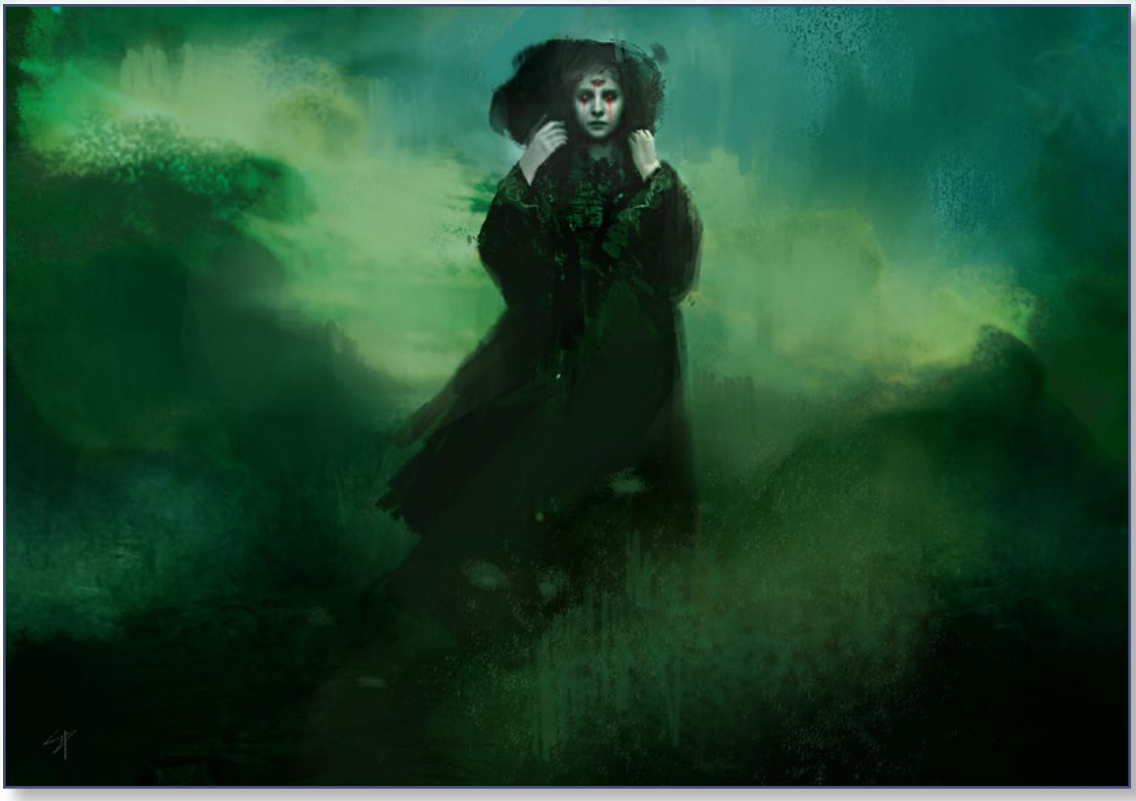
The Tremere — once the implacable pillar of the Camarilla — are starting to crumble. Members of the Inner Council begin to suspect each other of false loyalty, well-regarded elders such as Schrekt call for a hard line on those who may betray the blood, and more neonates recognize the offer of liberation through House Carna and the Anarchs. A strong center keeps the Clan together, but it resists a tide of devastating power. Pontifices, Lords, and Regents are called to Vienna to discuss the potential of a tighter grip on the Clan's young. This of course brings them into closer proximity of the white worm.

Both Clans face the possibility of renaissance or dissolution. For the Salubri, the latter has been a long time coming, which may explain why those Shepherds cling so tightly to Saulot, even as evidence points to their founder having vicious ambitions. In these nights, it may be the Tremere and Salubri are forced to the table of diplomacy, to combat the threats facing both parties from within.

Nobody claims such a meeting would be easy to arrange.

The fissures running through Usurpers and Cyclopes produce many chronicles:

- The Blood Brothers of Mexico City were created sterile and face extinction. The ritual of creating the bloodline may be formed anew, or at least bastardized through Dr. Varona's grisly experiments. He leads the Blessed Choir in orgies of vitae and flesh transfer, predominantly with unwilling recipients. It becomes a fear of Cainites from Mexico City to Bogotá that they may be seized for what Archon Vidal Jarbeaux calls "a macabre gang bang." Dr. Varona is running the risk of being added to the Camarilla's Red List, but by that point the secret of Blood Brother creation will be known. The Camarilla have sent coteries into Mexico and even enlisted Assamites tasked with removing Varona. Unfortunately, some of those coteries return to their masters stitched together. One Assamite claims to have destroyed Varona, but the Frankenstein's since reappeared, apparently unharmed. His Final Death is considered a top priority by the Camarilla in Central America.
- The Universidad del Tercer Círculo de la Serpiente Dorado ranks as one of the largest Chantries in the world, yet remains abandoned. Sabbat Cainites who have attempted entry without Thaumaturgical protection have fallen afoul of cruel traps and curses, but now that the Tremere from all factions have discovered the Sabbat are giving the location a wide berth, various expeditions are being planned by parties representing each bloc. The increased interest around the former Chantry of Goratrix leads to a race to see which Thaumaturges can claim the greatest prizes before the entire complex is stripped.
- An Anarch titling himself HitMan launches a black market of computer files, footage, and technomancy rituals from the safety of his Chantry, all apparently sourced from the Universidad while it was still running. The online bazaar draws blood magi from the Tremere and further afield, all seeking to discover what Goratrix had been practicing in his catacombs. The highest priced footage on sale is that of House Goratrix's apparent destruction, currently selling for C$4,013,760, with a month left before auction close. Less wealthy parties are more interested in finding HitMan himself, and forcing the footage from him by other means. He's curiously fallen silent in recent nights.



- Convinced the *Book of the Grave-War* recovered from House Goratrix's Chantry was a fake, Beckett sold it on to another Kindred named Bindusara, who subsequently reached out to Carna. He believes this book is in fact a supplement to the copy she holds. By combining the rambling texts from the original with the gibberish in Goratrix's version, Bindusara is convinced new insights can be discovered. He seeks vampires willing to treat with Carna in order to arrange payment or exchange for his copy, and act as bagmen for the deal. Sadly, she may have already lost her volume to a thief with a Beckett-shaped grudge.
- A Tremere is sent an illuminated *Brochure de Golconda*, inviting her to send off for *The One True Way to Golconda*. Curious, the Warlock orders the Master of Ravens' advertised product. It does not arrive. Instead, she receives a handwritten, unsigned letter urging her to leave the Chantry with haste. She shows her companions before discarding what she believes to be a fool's prank. The Tremere of the city are found as ash and blood the following night. The Prince demands the coterie finds the cause, and whether their companion is among the dead.
- Malkavians, Salubri, and Tremere receive visits from a ghostly, weeping Mahtiel no matter their proximity to Hunedoara. She begs their assistance to show the progenitor of her blood the way back to Golconda, even if that means slaying his current form. She claims he has been corrupted and divided, but if made whole once more may offer a path for all vampires to find redemption in the sight of God. Mahtiel guides all to Vienna, under promises that with the white worm's death they will be admitted to Hunedoara Castle to study the way to Golconda at her side. She does not know Saulot exists in the body of a servant within Hunedoara, who avidly watches all Mahtiel does in both material and astral form.
- Karl Schrekt is incensed by the loss of Tsang Kwong. He obsessively demands proof of the suspicions at hand — that the Tremere are subject to the manipulations of something other than Tremere himself, that Saulot lives still, and may be in league with Tremere, Goratrix, or both, and that his Clan is not irrevocably damaged. He's prepared to take brutal action against any who would dare to damage his Clan, and recruits Tremere with true loyalty to find his evidence. Such Warlocks can be from any

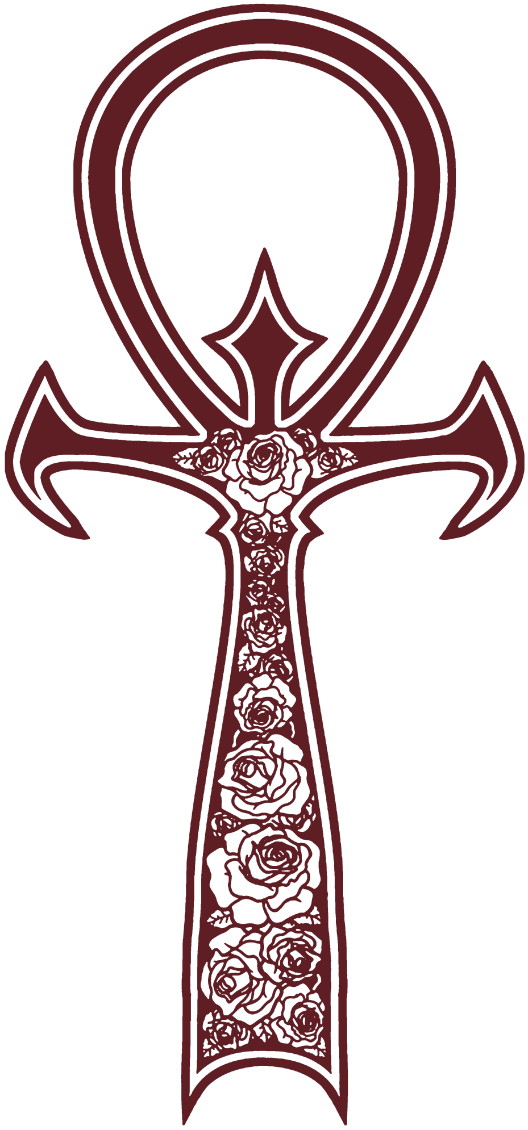
Hear My Words

It's not known how long Saulot's been in control of Tremere. Through his servants, Saulot has been beckoning vampires to follow the fabled routes to Golconda. He forged them millennia ago. There's evidence to assume any who accept him as messianic are dupes, and future slaves of the Antediluvian. Others still claim Golconda is attainable, but Saulot has subverted its noble aims. If Saulot and his followers are truly the ultimate in Machiavellian masterminds, here are some potential plots:

- The upper levels of the Pyramid journey to Vienna, but they do not return. The great white worm grows to enormous size as it consumes the Inner Council and leaves no survivors, spending a day in the sun surrounding the Chantry before splitting at dusk, and birthing the seemingly angelic form of Saulot. As he stands and his third eye opens, vampires possessing Auspex throughout Europe are driven to unstoppable Frenzy.
- In the form of Goratrix, Tremere makes his presence known to the Tremere of the West Coast. He speaks with authority and, looking into the eyes of his progeny, forces them to kneel at his feet as he blesses them with an increased potency of blood. Tremere urges a crusade against those in the grip of soul thieves, naming Warlocks both famous and unknown as servants of Saulot. Few can deny the power of his words, but members of House Carna somehow resist the call. Carna herself states she will never kneel to the Tremere again, and the crusade collapses to civil war before it even begins.
- The aforementioned crusade does commence, but it's House Carna who find themselves compelled to support Tremere. The rest of his Clan, for some reason, do not feel the pull, actually finding the Tremere bond flows up the Pyramid and to Vienna. This poses the question: If the Tremere are not bonded to their founder in these nights, who is it that manipulates their blood? Saulot — as the white worm — begins to wrack and writhe as Tzimisce vies for control.
- Vampires from all Clans wake one night to find a third eye opening up in their left hand. None know the reason behind the mutation, but can sense another presence within themselves. The Masquerade is sorely tested as Kindred struggle to cover these eyes that burn horribly when concealed. Saulot sees through any who have even once drank of Salubri or Tremere blood.
- The Master of Ravens announces his presence in Venice as the Inner Circle of the Camarilla make their convocation. He speaks with honeyed words on the matter of his One True Way, but is quickly driven underground. The Camarilla are appraised by many Kindred philosophers as savagely conservative in the wake of the Master of Ravens' enforced silence, as he offers an entirely believable route to salvation. A groundswell of support rises as a cult to surround him, Golconda adherents appearing in cities across the globe.

Sect, providing they're capable of bringing Clan Tremere back to its former greatness without any outside the Clan knowing of its weakness.

- Not all Tremere antitribu were at the Universidad when Tremere's ritual slaughtered the bloodline. Retreating to Lithuania, these antitribu strive to wake a torpid subfaction of their line known as the Telyavelic. The antitribu struggle to act in the Camarilla-dominated Vilnius and Kaunas, but seek to recruit sympathetic Sabbat with promises of tutelage in the arts of blood magic in exchange for assistance in their archeology.
- Tsang Kwong is not dead; his torpid remains were scooped up by parties unknown in Hong Kong. This turn of events was not predicted by Saulot, whose consciousness departed Tsang as he fell from the hotel window. If Tsang awakens, he will prove a devastating asset to use against Saulot's plans.



CARTHAGO DELENDA EST

From: k.wiese@bloodspot.eg

To: beckett@schreckNET.nod

Subject: Malta

In payment for the boon I owe you, I grant you safety and hospitality within the Sabbat demesne of Malta under the care of my Blood. It should be understood without unsubtlety, but revealing to anyone the provenance of this boon or anything you learn about me in that city will violate my hospitality and render the original boon null.

Reclaiming a boon as soon as you got a signal on your cellular telephone was brazen, even for you. You would have made the finest of Brujah, if we had permitted you to live beyond your first nights.

From: beckett@schreckNET.nod

To: k.wiese@bloodspot.eg

Subject: Boon Repayment

Dear Katherine,

My sincerest apologies for my quick exit, but I think we can all agree that succumbing to such abandon is sufficiently embarrassing to warrant the old Irish good-bye. I hope you and Christof are well, and that I can call upon you as friends in the future.

Whether or not I can, though, there's still the small matter of the boon you owe me. I'm en route to Italy in the belly of a small freighter, by way of Malta. I understand there is a small but embattled Sabbat presence there. In payment for the boon, please reach out to them and arrange hospitality for me. Understand that I would accept my chances landing anywhere else, but the Giovanni are somewhat unfond of me, and I fear I wouldn't last the night.

Sincerely,

Beckett

P.S. Sorry again about leaving you, and Aisling calling a Blood Hunt on you in New York.

You don't have to outrun the rampaging assassins of a Sect that might not exist, except that they're stabbing you in the face. You just have to outrun your friends. -A

Hotel Phoenicia, Malta, Republic of Malta

Bees. Why did it have to be bees?

A joke, of course. Bees never come out at night, even on the Isle of Honey, where I find myself in surprisingly-opulent surroundings. I must reconsider my opinion of Sabbat bolt-holes, because this one is shockingly pleasant. I have a private but deeply-held faith that, man or monster, everyone prefers to sleep on sheets of Egyptian cotton.

Still, I find myself with a strapping young ductus, his arms covered in tattoos of crawling bees and bloodied honeycombs. He calls himself Yellowjacket, and, due to his hospitality, I've refrained from telling him that yellowjackets are, in fact, wasps. At first glance, he appears to share few similarities with Katherine's other childe, but I do detect a certain distinctive attitude that's taciturn yet vocally maudlin.

Yellowjacket informs me I will remain his guest for the next four nights, until the new moon makes it safer to travel. I'm unsure of why that's the case, but it does give me ample time to collect my thoughts and notes.

The Learned Clan fell pretty far in the Sabbat. -L

From: aisling.sturbridge@fiveboroughs.com

To: beckett@schreckNET.nod

Subject: Art Exhibition

Beckett

You may be interested to know that Katherine Wiese has retained several paintings on loan from Athanasios. Of note, several medieval pieces by Kindred painters — I am told there is a copy of the Burning Monastery that may be original, as it caused one patron to frenzy by merely looking at it. She is in New York now, attempting to acquire investors for her galleries. I am well aware you consider art ancillary to your work, but the inevitable rumor has spread of several pieces containing Noddist significance. A simple working revealed Wiese herself as the source, but I believe her to be old enough to cover her tracks if she truly does not want to be found.

Aisling Sturbridge

"Freedom is what you do with what's been done to you."

Jean-Paul Sartre



[RECORDING BEGINS]

Beckett: Looking at the very image gives me no small amount of discomfort.

Katherine: Do you always record your subjects in so unsubtle a manner?

Beckett: It helps with my work. My apologies, I meant to be surreptitious.

Katherine: My senses were never so sharp as when I supped on the patrons of my gallery. I find myself given to introspection, yet few details escape my notice.

Beckett: I can relate.

Katherine: Can you, I wonder? You have the blush of mortality about you.

Beckett: I assure you, I'm well-traveled for my age.

Katherine: That's not what I mean. I speak of something those of us far enough removed from breath and beating hearts can feel. Do you…feel it?

Beckett: I beg your pardon?

Katherine: The call home. The roar of the ocean in my ears, the clash of blades.

Beckett: I read that the roar most mortals hear is just the blood in the ears.

Katherine: Our blood does not flow like that, Beckett. This roar drowns out all my thoughts, a susurrus rising as the tide when I focus upon it. Fine, another vulgar description: No matter whose blood I consume, no matter what new sensations rise from my sustenance, I cannot help but taste the salt on my tongue. It is a memory of a place I knew once, crushed by a foreign power.

Beckett: ...Carthage.

Katherine: Yes.

Beckett: My apologies. I did not know just how old you were.

Katherine: Few do. Keep it under your fine hat, once you have removed it while under my roof.

[A SLIGHT RUSTLING IS HEARD AFTER A PAUSE]

Beckett: Comments like that help disguise your age.

Katherine: A few choice phrases over the centuries are invaluable. One must strive to blend with the times. Some never truly learn this.

[HEAVY FOOTSTEPS, THEN A DEEPER, ROUGHER VOICE IS HEARD]

Christof: Is aught amiss, my lady?

Katherine: Nay, Christof. We were just speaking of you.

[RECORDING ENDS]

John F. Kennedy International Airport, Queens, New York

Wiese planted the Noddist rumor and aimed it at Aisling specifically to snare me, and I must say I am well-speared by her efforts. Katherine wanted my knowledge and expertise, and offered me a boon in recompense for my accompanying her on her journey to the ruins of Carthage.

To hear Katherine speak of it, she was Embraced in Carthage, but experienced an extended torpor when the city fell. She awoke centuries later, becoming the vital core of the Promethean movement. In Katherine's telling, something calls her back to the deep and ancient battlegrounds of our kind. I wonder how many more this call afflicts. If not unique to the Brujah, such calls may unify Clans, or rend others asunder.

Katherine's childe is himself something of a historical curiosity. A scant few hours after meeting me, he confided his archaic speech is not an affectation, but something of a second language. By his nearly-unbelievable account, the former would-be Crusader (having been born too late or too early, depending on your viewpoint) was rendered torpid a few years into his surprisingly-eventful career as Katherine's muscle. Upon his resurrection centuries later, he cut a swath through the vampire hunters that dug him

up, eventually crushing a key Tzimisce target on the eve of the Siege of New York. He finally told me his name: Christof.

Their storied reunion aside, Katherine tells me that she has been experiencing images of the Tophet pit, a ritual area where sacrifices occurred. Most mortal scholarship holds that the Carthaginians sacrificed children to the gods Tanit and Baal Hammon, while most Kindred scholarship holds the sacrifice was to...well, whomever the Baali worship down below. The normally unflappable Ms. Wiese flaps severely at the topic, and heatedly assures that this was not the case. She does admit long periods of torpor rendered her unfamiliar with the city's infernal taint. She has not visited the region since Antiquity.

While dealing with the infernal has become an infuriating pastime as of late, the thought of a Methuselah in my pocket is rather tantalizing. And Carthage's Tophet has something of an oversized importance in Kindred mythology.

Carthage was not the only place with a Tophet. Another, perhaps more famous to mortal eyes, was in Gehenna – the actual Gehenna, the valley, vilified by the Israelites. I believe the two are related. Carthage was a place of wicked infernalism and doom, purged by the heroic Patricians of Rome. So say the victors! My curiosity is piqued, and a boon is honey-sweet. I have accepted.

Even the fragments found at Erciyes record their accounts of Gehenna long after the Second City. The Tophet of Carthage perhaps inspired the Tophet of Gehenna, and I cannot help but wonder if the storied doom of the Kindred was birthed in that loathsome valley, a metaphor burning as bright and eternal as the sacrificial fires. The mere thought of perdition's flame sets my Blood on edge; small wonder, then, that we ascribe the name to the doom of our progenitors. In the end, every bane can be rendered down into fear: of the sun, of fire, of damnation, of sacrifice to gods dark and bloody.

Where else but in the sunny valley of Gehinnom do all these things meet?

"And he defiled Topheth, which is in the valley of the children of Hinnom, that no man might make his son or his daughter to pass through the fire to Moloch." 2 Kings 23. Thanks, Josiah! -A

CHRISTOF ROMUALD



Learned Clan; *1167? #1194?. Childe of Ecaterina the Wise.

Born the second son of a minor noble in Gallo-Angevin, joined a small knightly order lost to history. Embraced for his skill at vampire-hunting, C. was inducted into the Promethean Zealots by Ecaterina the Wise under the supervision of Dominic. Trained in lore of Carthage and Promethean wisdom. Led an alliance of Cappadocian Crusaders and Gangrel barbarians as third front in Tzimisce-Tremere War in Transylvania. Met Final Death pursuing the Cathedral of Flesh.

From: magnusal@sunburst.de

To: beckett@schreckNET.nod

Cc: aisling.sturbridge@fiveboroughs.com

Subject: RE: Trust but Verify: Katherine Wiese

For the love of Serpents and Sabbat, by the salty sands of Carthage, Katherine Wiese is a liar, a thief, and a diablerist — but no more so than the average of our kind, in bitter truth.

Christof is a known quantity to Kindred society, and the revelation of his sire allows him to be tracked back thusly. Aristotle catalogued him, as he was noteworthy enough to merit an Encyclopedia Vampirica entry, but neither of us updated it when Christof arose from torpor.

The Prometheans are well-known to me, yes, as are “Katherine” and Christof. The former is Ecaterina, self-styled “the Wise” in contrast to her grandsire, Dominic, a true son of Carthage in the city’s Final Nights. You might know Ecaterina as the former Bishop of New York and the slayer (and possible diablerist) of Regent Mirabilis, Regent Sturbridge’s predecessor. She disappeared some years before the Siege, which is conveniently when Old World “Katherine Wiese” came on the scene to throw her lot in with the Ivory Tower. The latter is a storied killer of Sabbat and counter-vampire hunter, most recently purging the remnants of Fiends and the Society of Leopold from New York in service to the Camarilla. They are hardly the first sire and childe to cross Sect lines, especially given that both predate the Sects.

Ecaterina firmly rejected both the noble Promethean principles of coexistence with humanity and the decisions at Thorns. I suspect she simply turned her coat when she awoke to a New York under Camarilla control, and made herself useful. Like many founding members of the Sabbat, her regret over her long-held choice led her to seize the first opportunity to change it.

Despite her dissemblance, I urge you to fulfill her boon request. I have attached a small media document containing the thaumaturgical keys to the ritual locks the ancient Roman vampires left on the archeological sites. My grandsire contacted me himself shortly before I received your message, whence he entrusted the keys to me and asked that I aid you, though he was oddly insistent that he did not know why. I can see the lines of the Jyhad moving before me, and they converge upon Carthage. As to the reasons, I know not.

Albertus Magnus

Childe of Procet

Childe of Critias

Childe of Menele

Childe of Troile

Tunis-Carthage International Airport, Tunis, Tunisia

I'm sitting in the cabin of my jet, thankful the shades are drawn. Actually, they can't be raised; I've seen too much of the skies as a bat to be sentimental about the sight of cities from the air, thank you. But it's dusk now, with just enough sunlight to sear my fair, tender skin to ash.

Cesare's urgings and a fresh pack of blood woke me, and while I'm normally cross with him for waking me before the sun sets, the local customs constabulary are about to board the plane. Sometime while we were in the air, Tunis suffered several car bomb explosions and gunfire was reported throughout the city, so unfortunately the airport's shut down. I suspect Cesare will be deported almost immediately. I was at first surprised they allowed him to land at all, but he revealed that he had some sensitive cargo destined for the Zoo de Tunis on board. Three guesses as to what my fast-talking servant came up with.

I'm just happy we keep import forms and a small cage as a matter of course. There's not much else to be happy about.

Terror in the Streets of Tunis



TUNIS, TUNISIA — Tunisian authorities warned of possible further attacks in the capital Tunis and banned both incoming flights and traffic in parts of the city following a series of deadly explosions and running gun battles resulting in 10 injuries and seven fatalities, the state news agency Tunis Afrique Presse (TAP) said on Wednesday.

The country is under a state of emergency after several cafes and warehouses in the capital city suffered nighttime attacks. Militant skirmishes with the Tunisian armed forces in remote areas occur with some regularity, but violence in the city is rare. This represents the first successful attack in several years. Local authorities confirmed five attacks occurred sometime between 3 a.m. and 4 a.m. local time.

Investigations were ongoing into a potential coordinated assault involving car bombs and attackers, without giving further details, according to a source within the Tunis Interior Ministry. TAP noted that most of the attacks were not in heavily-populated areas or tourist zones, instead focusing on structures closed during the evening.

Authorities have closed off access to the main avenue Habib Bourguiba and several other main streets, and cancelled all flights into and out of Tunis-Carthage International Airport, the agency reported.

"Orders have been given for intensive searches by the army in certain parts of the capital and to seal off entrances and exits to the city," TAP said. "We will find the perpetrators and bring them to justice."

Cathédrale Saint-Vincent-de-Paul

I'm squatting in the darkness of a stone cathedral as sirens threaten to illuminate my location. If I had more time here, I'd construct a better metaphor.

The Zoo de Tunis will be short one canis lupus lupus, I'm afraid. I received Albertus' e-mail and dossier on the ground, only after reclaiming my phone and belongings and fleeing from airport security. By the time I made it back to the tarmac, Cesare was already back in the air.

If I'm exempt from one of the curses of our kind, it's our tendency towards remorse and self-abuse. I'd been far too trusting of Katherine, taken in by her uncharacteristic show of vulnerability. "Surely by exposing her metaphorical neck, she was rendered incapable of dissembling!" It's entirely possible I was ensnared by her subtleties and her charms, honed to a razor's edge among art gallery harpies. I'm in the city, now, with a full night ahead. Albertus' carbon-copying Aisling on the e-mail outing Katherine meant putting myself into a vice either way: I might as well keep walking the path. A bat is far more capable of navigating the roadblocks and street lockdowns than any mortal, but I wonder if "Katherine" and Christof will actually keep to our agreed-upon meeting place: a third-story apartment building just off the heart of the city.

[RECORDING BEGINS]

Beckett: Christof, Ecaterina, guest.

Ecaterina: Stay your blade, my childe.

Christof: Many centuries of unlife hath I seen, and I shall never be used to the sight of an ignoble bird becoming a man.

Ecaterina: Childe, a bat is not a bird.

Christof: Oh, how can I go on existing, knowing mine whole life to be a lie most cruelly told?

Beckett: Sarcasm from a Crusader? Charming. Who's the staked fellow?

Ecaterina: You look upon the once Prince of Chester, a Baron of Avalon, now antitribu, holding fast against such stock such as your own sire, I presume.

Beckett: In that, he plainly did not succeed. What is Marcus Verus doing here?

[SIRENS CAN BE HEARD IN THE BACKGROUND, LOUDLY RISING AND THEN FALLING QUIET SHARPLY]

Christof: I am of a mind to ask him that very question. We encountered the Mithraist shortly after coming ashore. We strode proud upon the deep for some leagues, taken to the very limits of the shore on a small yacht owned by Salvatore Ragonese, one of my sire's grandchilder.

Beckett: One of the gentlemen vying for Baron of Pasadena? I know the name, but I did not know he was of your line, Ecaterina. For a mobbed-up ex-wrestler Anarch to be one of your brood must rankle, no? Yet I suppose it makes a peculiar sort of sense. Where else but in the Rabble do the noble principles of the Prometheans finally come to their tarnished resting place?

Christof: The common soldiers often staged mock fights to lighten the purses of peasants and noble alike; 'tis little different in Salvatore's case. In any event, on the matter at hand, the authorities are ill-suited to apprehending those who wander in with the surf.

Ecaterina: Do not think I will excuse your insolence much longer, Beckett. And do not think your repeated mentions of my name go unnoticed. Do you have anything substantive to say beyond febrile attempts at wit?

Beckett: No.

Christof: We were not in the city longer than an hour when the former Prince Verus came to us. He engaged us with some ferocity, yet had been sore wounded by his pursuers; 'twas the only way I could best him in battle. I hope you will not find me overly



prideful when I say I am a fearsome foe on the field, but his blood is potent and his skill difficult to match.

Beckett: I don't doubt it. Is that blade a kilij? It looks like a two-handed saber, but…

Christof: Indeed, 'tis of Turkish manufacture, but you will not find its like among mortal collectors or enthusiasts of the blade. Tis a sword modeled after the blade of the *voivode* among *voivodes*, made to bring about his end by his enemies, but in the end a mere shadow.

Beckett: I take it you mean the Son of the Dragon, not Rustovitch. Even the mere shadow of the blade of Dracula can have vast power.

Christof: Aye, I mean the count, and that is a sentiment oft shared by my friend and erstwhile Camarilla armorer, Michael LaRowe. He is somewhat fond of shadows himself. Do you know of the Impaler?

Beckett: I've seen the works of his spear quite intimately, yes. Actually, given his lineage, this is quite fortunate. Let me take a sample of his vitae, and then shall we unstake Verus and put him to the question?

"Both of you?" -L

[A FAINT SUCKING SOUND, THEN A GURGLED SCREAM]

Verus: My *hands*! My *feet*!

Christof: A regrettable necessity, your grace. Thy puissance was considerable.

Ecaterina: Do not attempt to make eye contact with us, Avalonian. We respect your rank and station, but you struck at us. Why?

Verus: The deeds of your childer will not buy you surcease from these insults and injuries, Sabbat whore. I can see blackness in your Blood. Both of you. Leave my Blood and soul intact at your own peril, for you have made an enemy this night.

Beckett: Enough. They defended themselves. They did not need to leave you just short of Final Death when they could have easily finished the job. The least you can do is answer their questions.

Verus: The least I can do is kill you all quickly, but I assure you I will do far more than the minimum required. I was responding to a cry of distress from one of my agents within the city. An old soldier, raised to glory in Mithras' light, cast into shadow by enemies dark and foul. He was my grandchilde and stalwart friend, yet his own childer and ghouls alike perished here.

Beckett: Your agents? Not of the Camarilla, as you are named antitribu. Yet from your words you harbor distaste for the Sabbat.

Verus: Worm, we are princes, blood of kings, reborn to tend Eden before Caine returns to it.

Christof: That holy garden is not for the likes of we.

Beckett: I believe I've heard of your kind before. Who attacked you, then? Sabbat?

Verus: No, not Sabbat, not as you know them. The hand within the glove. John Dee was the first to fall. He was not easily felled, but our assailants snapped him like a twig in a maelstrom. His eyes could see a Sewer Rat sobbing over a mirror, but he never saw them coming.

That's a John Dee, not the John Dee. Dr. Johannes Dee boni Bonisagus remains quaestor under Justicar Carfax. This John Dee is a Lunatic Knight of the Moon, which potentially indicates an ancient and shielded Camarilla lineage to explain their immunity to the Prank. A connection to the Royal Order of Edenic Groundskeepers seems apropos for the Knights.-A

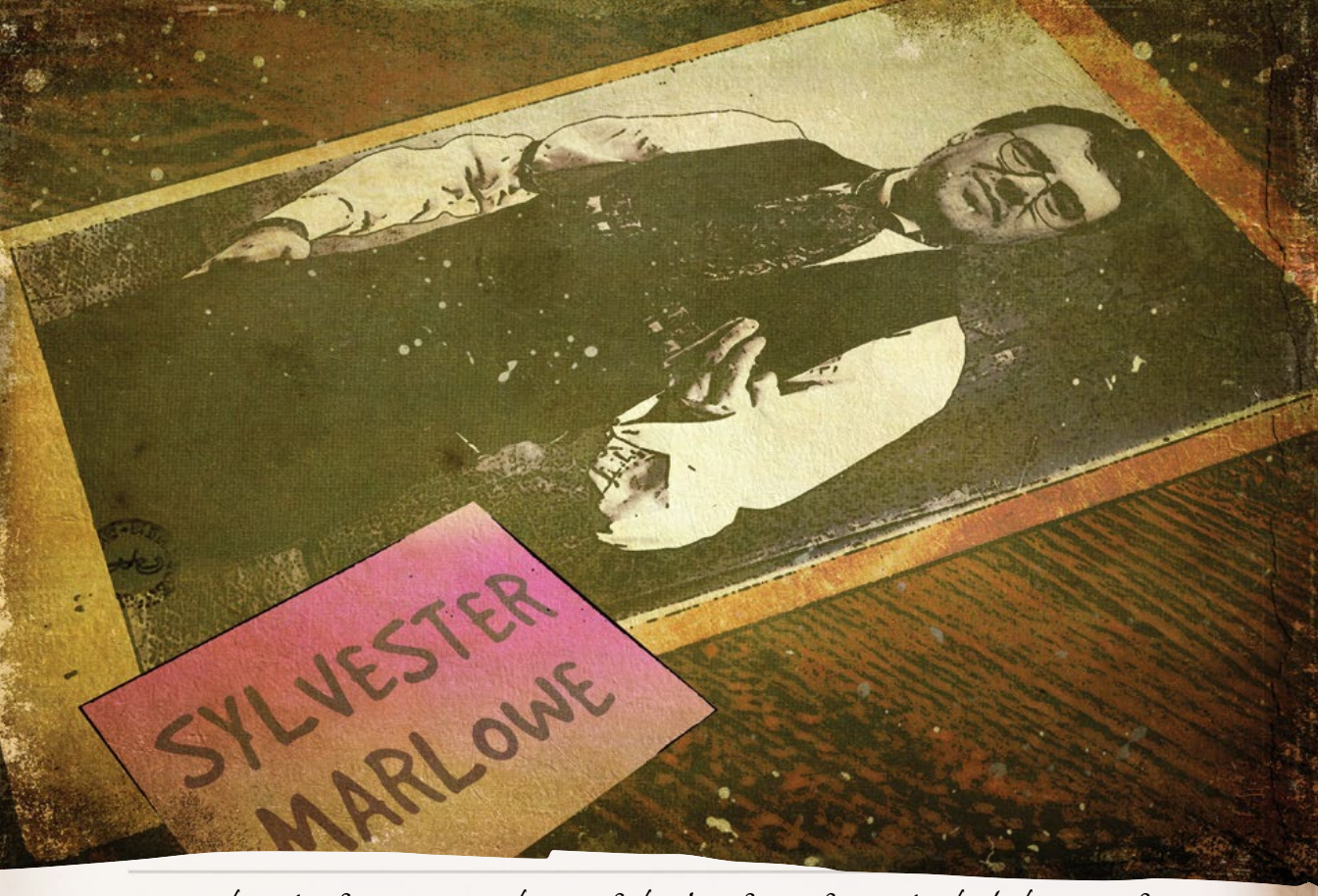
Villa Didon Hotel & Spa, Byrsa, Tunisia

Once Marcus Verus began talking, he was downright chatty, vacillating between useful data and colorful insults. Verus had kept a watchful eye on Carthage for reasons he did not fully elaborate. I wish I could have gazed upon his face when I mentioned the thaumaturgical locks on the Tophet, but I heeded Ecaterina's admonition against looking him in the eye. Besides, it's unlikely he survived since the Long Night without being able to gentle his features.

His coterie found themselves under attack the moment they set foot in Tunis. His night prior to our arrival was consumed by cordite and archaic weaponry, culminating in a harrowing dash through the dawn's rays to a mortal family whose will shattered before the elder. He spent the day huddling in their cellar, emerging injured and weak, falling to Christof's mighty blade. Ecaterina swears the Calling led her right to Marcus.

This has all the hallmarks of sectarian warfare, to be sure, but which Sects? I was about to ask Marcus about his affiliation with the Edenic Groundskeepers when the apartment we were in blew up. One moment I was looking at Verus, the next I was flat on my back, three stories down and in the middle of some poor sod's bleating car. A cloud of debris marked my exit, drifting slowly across the street from a shattered window. A rather dapper Kindred chap in a three-piece suit stood just out of the pool of illumination from the streetlight, his gold pocketwatch catching the luminescence. He snapped it shut with a click and smiled at me. "Right on time, Mistah Beckett!" he cried proudly, and vanished. He didn't fade from my mind's eye, he didn't cloak himself with shadows, he vanished.

Nobody is that fast.



Christof and Ecaterina both survived the blast, designed more for shock than incendiary damage. Had the Ticktock Man – something of a minor Jyhad sectarian power-player, and I'm convinced that's who it was, given him more or less announcing it to me with that bloody pocket watch – aimed to kill us, we'd be covered in white phosphorous and reduced to a fine ash. Verus apparently survived as well – Christof witnessed him hobbling away, broken limbs snapping back into place as he loped on his stumps. Say what you will about those Romans, and we Britons can say quite a bit, but it's quite difficult to keep them down. I should know.

Carthage Necropolis, Byrsa, Tunisia

We holed up in a nearby hotel, sleeping in the windowless bathroom with towels shoved under the door. Between Ecaterina's charm and Christof's inexplicable wads of cash, it was easy to find a place that suited our needs and wouldn't ask too many questions about foreigners. The next night, after savoring some of the local food, we came here, to the Necropolis.

It was Ecaterina who insisted the call emanated from his location. In part open-air, but otherwise secreted underground via long-sealed entrances, the Carthaginian Necropolis held all the allure of any other ancient dungeon surrounded by wards, curses, and death.



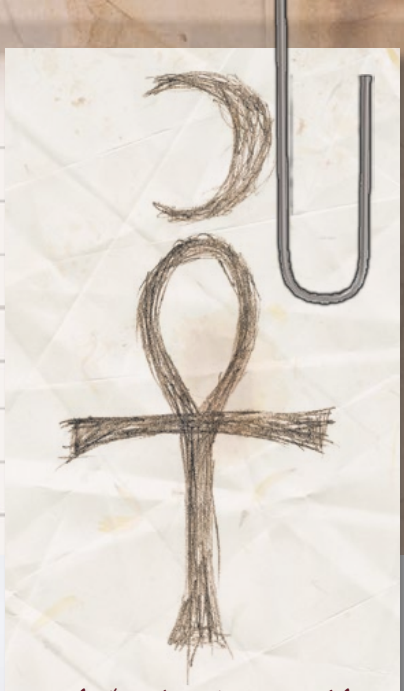
Kaymakli, the House Goratrix temple, the pit in Jerusalem... We Kindred hold domains of darkness in high regard, and yet never fail to make them our literal tombs.

Given most of the police presence was focused on the city, gaining admittance to the museum on our way to the Necropolis proper was accomplished without difficulty. Ecaterina was the first to notice an Employees Only door was wide open, leading to an extensive backroom. I smelled the blood long before I ever saw it. I was hungry.

We entered a warehouse-like room, divorced from the tourist trap, cultural-heritage focus-group museum proper. The corrugated steel gave it that charming impersonal touch, while the cold concrete of the floor reminded one of ancient stone, if one didn't know what ancient stone looked like. In the back of the museum, spotlights snaked between naked steel supports high overhead, casting dim light over the grisly pit in the center of the room. I could see the bones within, charred but still bloody, meat cooked to a poor temperature. Human meat, by the smell of it. The bones floated in a pool, bubbling and churning, spoiled blood weeping black smoke into the chilled, dry air of the warehouse. Beside the grisly pit sat a bronze statue as tall as two men, with arms like a slide. It was a massive, deformed visage of a woman's face, her mouth open in an

obscenely huge grimace wide enough to fit a small child. Still, I couldn't help but notice her slightly pronounced canines. The crown on her brow had a peculiar symbol.

One Kindred stood alongside the statue, his hand resting on the verdigris, eyes half-closed in a peculiar reverie. As we approached, he turned to us, expression blank. He was dressed in a suit much like the Ticktock Man's, more tailored to his lanky frame and dark features.



That's close to an ankh, the ever-popular Kindred symbol, but it's a representation of the goddess Tanit. Note the crescent over it. Kindred symbolism in the Cainite mythos tends towards the repetitive. Do we follow the mortals, or do they follow us? -A

[BEGIN RECORDING]

Al-Muntathir: And so return the childer of Carthage, two progeny of Troile, and one as old as I. Welcome home, Troile-get. I am Al-Muntathir, the Awaiting, and in this holy place, we will have peace between us while I wait.

Christof: Troile-get? Do you truly claim descent from Brujah himself?

Ecaterina: Do not listen to his lies, my childe. His heart is stone, but his words are poison.

Al-Muntathir: Come, now, Ecaterina. Must the antipathy between our castes lead inexorably to a violent end? I take no violent delight from it, at least.

Ecaterina: Castes? We have none. We are not the Judges or the Salubrious Ones. No divisions have riven our ranks. You are not of the Learned Clan. Even if your story was true, you are scion of a dead line.

Al-Muntathir: On the contrary on all counts. I am a scholar, and I carry the blood of the same progenitor as you. Mine is merely...from a slightly less tainted source. And our progenitor still exists.

Christof: Taint?! You dare to…

Beckett: Christof, please. You're proving his point, or do you not see how amused he is?

Al-Munthathir: I do not feel amusement any longer, Mr. Beckett, but I admit to a certain contentment at the way things are unfolding.

Christof: You are correct, Beckett. My apologies. I nearly lost myself to my anger.

Ecaterina: I normally disapprove, but in this case, I would have joined you, my childe. Beckett?

Al-Munthathir: Then you would have fought me, and perhaps one or the both of us would have perished, and where would that leave everyone? Without knowledge of Carthage. I have seen her in her greatest glory,

not the shards of pottery and crumbling steles the mortals grasp at.

Beckett: This should only take a moment. Please, keep talking.

Ecaterina: [tone noticeably softens] You were there? In Carthage? Truly?

Al-Muntathir: No, not truly. I am too young. Yet Brujah's gift allows me avenues that Troile's brood are forbidden. I can conjure images of the past, walk on ruined streets still intact. Were you not there, if one were to have asked you several centuries prior? Did one of my brood reach you, my dear, and fling your light into the future?

Ecaterina: Dominic told me enough about the city. He told me the Baali infected it, made pits like this. Places of sacrifice.

Beckett: More lies, Ecaterina?

Ecaterina: He is the one who speaks as if he were truly there... what was it like, Brujah-get? Carthage? Is...what we've seen true, if you're so ensconced in the river of time?

Al-Muntathir: How does one describe a city? How does one measure the days and nights over the course of centuries, with mortals living and loving among the dead? What is true in that city, and what becomes false over the passing of time?

Beckett: She's asking if the stories of human and Cainite sacrifice are true.

Al-Muntathir: Of course they are. Beyond the steles and the palm trees, under the heavy tread of the elephants, there was blood. Blood caked our walkways and cracked beneath our feet. Yet it is not what you imagine. Our children and childer alike were sacrificed in the name of freedom, not bondage to greater masters. Even if Himilcar, the Prince, was as weak as you believe him to be, he would not permit Carthage to be tainted by the inferno.

[There is a lengthy pause in the recording]

Al-Muntathir: The presence of the Baali was not the cause of corruption. It was a symptom of sin.

Beckett: Sin...? Via Desideratio! The Road of Desire!

Al-Muntathir: Yes. Your Prometheans, Ecaterina? They stumbled on something real, something vital, in their attempts to guide humanity, but they missed the truest lesson: when to let go. I am not surprised you and Dominic fixated on Carthage. Looking back into the past as I do, I am reminded more and more that Carthage was instead a vision of the future. Not Kindred and kine as they were, but as they could be. It was a place of hunger and the satisfaction of desire. Was it as you've seen? No. It was better. It was wonderful.

Ecaterina: Carthage was a pit like this, then. A place of depravity.

Al-Muntathir: It was this thing, yes, but it was also a place of true freedom. You see here? The statue?

Beckett: The goddess Tanit, I presume?

Al-Muntathir: So named by those who have visited. But I tell you, the visage is that of your companion's progenitor.

Ecaterina: This is...Troile?

Al-Muntathir: "Do not Embrace for love." The Dark Father's wisdom was ever-apparent. Yet in his creation of this place, our ultimate grandsire — Ilyes — was seduced by it in turn. Troile's true sire was Carthage — she was of the city, exalted from it in life, consecrated to it in death. The secret of purging the Blood of emotion was known to the Eldest, and none more so than our father. Some chose to inflict their wayward spirits on the mind, some on the flesh, others on the very Blood they gave to their childer. My great-great-grandsire chose differently. He chose the spirit, and this place.

Beckett: Carthage itself was a vessel for the progenitor's spirit, then? The city was a place for him to thrust his wayward desires and purge himself?

Al-Muntathir: Such crude words for so sublime a phenomenon. Such simple words for the complexities of the infinite. We childer could not replicate this feat, so we merely deaden what remains of our hearts. Yet a great part of us remains here, in this place, and so we look ever backward at it.

Beckett: I take it this is your explanation for the peculiar abilities of your bloodline?

Al-Muntathir: My Clan, you mean. We are awash in the remembrance of Carthage. It permeates our thoughts and the withered remnants of our souls, just as the corrupted emotions suffuse the Beasts of the Troile-get. Our eternal hearts remain here, in the dead past. But as a great author once said, the dead past is just another name for the living present, and Carthage still beats with a pulse.

[A pause.]

Al-Muntathir: In this place, we may feel whole once again. This was the gift of Brujah, and Troile's passion. Small wonder the Baali were drawn here. …what are you doing, exactly?

Beckett: I'm breaking the thaumaturgical blood-seals on these ruins, and it's already done. I'm familiar with the magic of the Bitter-Ender, and this was a very early and very crude example of the work of an admitted master. A few sigils with the Blood of another childe of Mithras, and the seals were broken. Do the Baali emerge from the Tophet-Well, here?

Al-Muntathir: Not spontaneously. No, they just sneak in, swim around a bit, and come out ominously. A disappointment to all. But then, this is not the true Tophet-Well: That lies beneath us. This is a replica, crudely constructed and supported by props such as Troile here.

Beckett: Alas.

Christof: These were the pagan sacrificial grounds…the entrance to the Necropolis must be nearby.

Al-Muntathir: But of course! It's accessible from the sub-levels of this basement. This building was built over the ruins, you know. I never could get down there without breaking into bloody sweats, but perhaps now…

[A SHARP SLICING SOUND IS HEARD, AND A DRY, HUMORLESS CHUCKLE. RECORDING ENDS]

Naturally, that's when everything went to hell.

Al-Muntathir's responses were odd. Many elders – the ones I've met and braved long enough to stare, that is – tend towards a curious degree of repetitive movement or a complete lack thereof. Once you've been divorced from humanity for thousands of years, even the littlest remembered details fade. Al-Muntathir was different. Too quick by half, almost jerking like a marionette. No matter how skilled the puppeteer, there remained bursts to his speed that betrayed his inhumanity right up until the moment his head popped off. His body crumpled naturally, at least before it disintegrated into dust, exploding upon the ground. And there stood the Ticktock Man, of course, replicating Troile's feat by slaying his sire.

Christof brandished that sword of his and leaped in, but while Christof was a blur, the Ticktock Man simply wasn't there a moment later. With surgical precision, he brought up a cruel-looking dagger and planted it firmly in the back of Christof's left knee. I spared a glance over at Ecaterina, only to see her disappear down through a large steel door in the ground she'd wrenched open with brute force. In a flash, the Ticktock Man was past me, coat fluttering behind him as he pursued Ecaterina. A good half-dozen ghouls – I told you I was hungry – came running in, but Christof waved me off. "Pursue and protect my sire, sir! I shall hold off these faithless villeins!"

The Necropolis reeked. It stank of old smoke and dried blood gone sour. I ran down rough-hewn halls, past bones stacked like cordwood, past steles of elephants and palm trees and men and vampires. "Ecaterina!" I called, yet my voice echoed oddly, ringing back loudly and then suddenly falling silent. I rounded a corner and found myself face-to-face with Christof – not the clean Kindred I saw moments ago, but a Cainite rougher than the stones around us, clad in armor and a white tabard. He saw me, snarled, and brought up a steel broadsword. I dodged him and continued running, heedless of the bitter French curses he spat at me.

The realization of Carthage's curse began dawning on me.

The Necropolis was not a large place; most of the burial chambers were sealed. When I rounded a final corner and came into the cavernous room with the ankh-carved

altar above a vast pit of shattered marble, I saw Ecaterina and the Ticktock Man, locked in combat. I saw the Ticktock Man take a dozen fatal blows, yet deliver the same back to a vampire centuries his elder, and I watched each fall a dozen times. I saw the shimmers in the air, as events were made and unmade and potentialities shattered. Withered vampires rotted to skeletons stuck out from the rubble of the collapsed ceiling, but I saw the still-vibrant figure there, shining with crimson light, hands outstretched to ward off a sudden attack that ended millennia ago. In the moment I looked on the figure, the figure looked upon me.

This domain. Every one of its sinners must remain trapped here, repeating iteration after iteration of Carthage's descent into depravity and self-destruction. None seem capable of moving on, least of all the horrified victim of patricide before me. Perhaps the first Antediluvian to fall.

We were entering the same accursed cycle. I questioned whether Carthage would have fallen without Patrician encouragement. I then realized I'd asked myself that question ten times before, and only now recalled.

Something slammed into my side, a stinking beast, all claws and teeth. I kicked it savagely, then caught the still-human eye of it. I'm not proud of it, but I ran, overtaken by fear – from the catacombs, out past victorious Christof in the museum. I didn't stop running until I was near the sea, and I bade the earth swallow me whole before the sun could take me.

I was starving the next night, pain and thirst hunching me over, but the compulsion passed. I tapped out a message to Ecaterina demanding repayment of the boon. I couldn't tell her that I saw myself in my first nights as a vampire, starved beyond reason and on the verge of losing the last vestiges of sanity all the time, much less tell her I suffered the indignity of getting flattened by my younger self. Is he trapped there now, I wonder? A prisoner alongside the incarcerated damned of that domain?

Perhaps there will be time in the future to mend fences with Ecaterina and Christof, but in the present, I want nothing more to do with Carthage.

The Cycle of Endings

What was Carthage?

Was it a city to rival Rome, the seat of a mighty trade empire? Was it a place where the Children of Seth and the Childer of Caine walked side-by-side in peace? Or was there some greater purpose at work, a place where a progenitor could vent his heart's desires into the spirits and workings of the city, stirring the hearts of the populace and sending them into orgiastic fugues?

It was all of these things, and more. Yet Carthage fell long before Rome came to bury it. The Baali, drawn to the sin of the city's existence, reveled in the passions unleased. Even as the city bred a movement, a Road, and a Clan that would all outlast it, it was dying.

The Prometheans

In the Dark Ages, one group of Brujah — and, on occasion, Healer and Warrior Salubri — styled themselves *Prometheans*, bringing the fires of peace and enlightenment to humanity in remembrance of Carthage. Led by Dominic and Ecaterina the Wise, they sought to bring humanity and Cainites together once again. Yet their title foreshadowed their downfall: Naming themselves after a Titan, they considered themselves ever the greater of mere mortality, and such a power structure could not last in a time of upheaval. As their neonates died or succumbed to the rebellion brimming in their blood, the elders of the movement joined the Sabbat. Yet their ideals did not vanish — in modern nights, translated Promethean texts are widely shared among the Anarchs, and the movement has discovered new heirs. These *Iapeteans* are small in number, and Rabble all, but they are quickly earning the Learned moniker of their forebears. They seek to create a New Carthage in truth if not name, and their dream grows night by night.

Survivors of Carthage

Few survive who truly remember Carthage. Ecaterina's lies aside, her grandsire Dominic has succumbed to Wassail. Yet those who still walk tell the tales of Carthage birthing herself anew:

- Smoke begins to coil in the sky, manifest even in the light of day, around the museum and the site of the ancient Tophet-Well. At night, the pitch-black smoke roils, catching the light of dozens of sacrificial fires lit upon the ground. Children and childer alike feed the flames. Are these horrid but ultimately meaningless sacrifices of Baali aspirants, or do the gods of Carthage taste blood for the first time in millennia, trickling down through the ash and salt?
- The Edenic Groundskeepers and the True Black Hand have devolved into sectarian warfare between two competing Gehenna cults, contending over the grave of an Antediluvian. The Groundskeepers were long ago suborned by the Tal'Mahe'Ra, but few have bothered to tell them that. In their throes, they may reach out to a talented coterie, promising ancient lore and vast power in return for outside aid.
- The Ticktock Man has a plan. Despite his youth, he's established himself as a power player in the Jyhad, competing with vampires who genuinely walked the sands of Carthage. How deep does his loyalty to the True Black Hand run, and is he above some side action and power plays of his own? This True Brujah desires access to his forebears, locked in place in the Carthaginian Necropolis. Whether he intends to awaken them, diablerize them, or ingratiate them with the Tal'Mahe'Ra, is to be seen. Few Kindred would recognize any of the potential outcomes as desirable.
- The Anarch Movement wishes to send representatives to Tunis, to see whether claiming old Carthage for the Sect is a possibility. As a symbol, Carthage would be a fantastic weapon for the strengthening Anarchs. As a resource, it may house the greatest supply of elders and Methuselahs hungry for violent rebellion. The Libertatian Anarchs approach Tunis with caution, and optimism. They may need to indulge in a violent coup to seize the domain before tackling the Necropolis, but they believe any wounds to conscience will heal.
- The protagonist coterie hears a bizarre rumor from a vampire just arrived in their city — she encountered each of them in Tunisia, and they were each in service to an infernal despot, spreading havoc from domain to domain. Yet, the coterie's never visited Tunisia. If the coterie investigate, they find her account to be truthful. Who are the vampires in Carthage, and could they be future

reflections of the coterie's actions? How can they stop something already written into history?

- • Stravinsky, a Tzimisce of renown who disappeared from his archbishopric of Mexico City in the mid-'90s, reappears in Algiers demanding to meet with a coterie of Ashirra. The dangerous Fiend wishes to pursue a compact with the Sect: If they agree to make a combined front with the Sword of Caine in North Africa, and pursue the destruction of the eldest Brujah torpid beneath Carthage, he will guarantee Sabbat respect for Ashirra sovereignty thereafter. The proposition raises many eyebrows, not least within the Sabbat. While some cardinals murmur agreement to the terms despite the lack of prior consultation, more wonder at where Stravinsky's been all this time, why he's now making power plays in North Africa, and whether this Tzimisce upstart requires shutting down before he steps above his station.
- As rumors leak from Tunis, the Camarilla are slow to react in any uniform way. Justicars and Archons whisper about a Masquerade breach on a colossal scale but do nothing about the shaky domain for fear of antagonizing the Brujah. That is, until a Ventrue claiming to be the Methuselah Orthia steps before the Inner Circle and declares Carthage as infernal once, and infernal still. She states she can directly order the entire Ventrue Clan via the "ephorate" if she so wishes, but would rather the Ivory Tower voluntarily commit to destroying every vampire in Tunis. Once done, the domain shall be declared forever forbidden to other Kindred. Coteries swiftly fall to deliberation. Who is this Orthia, and is she as powerful as she claims to be? Is she even the true Orthia, and does she have any sway over the Ventrue ephorate? Is it possible her concerns are valid, and the Camarilla must salt the Earth in Carthage, as Rome did once before? Most worryingly, might such an action force the Brujah from the Sect?
- The entity within the catacombs is indeed the Brujah progenitor — or perhaps his echo, still frozen with a simple application of Temporis, consciousness balancing on the razor's edge moment before Troile consumed his soul. In this paradox state of undeath between Final Death, Brujah roils, leaving the area riven with potentiality. In Carthage, things may be made and unmade, ancient mysteries of the past making themselves manifest through actors who have long since left the stage.





THE EYE OPENS

Temple de A-Ma, Macau, People's Republic of China

I'd not intended on returning to China so soon after my encounter with E Division and Tsang, but since coming into the possession of the infamous Eye of Hazimel via Hesha, I've been steered on strange paths.

The Eye does not look like the sort of thing capable of wreaking mass havoc and destruction, unleashing political chaos, and, broadly speaking, driving nearly every Kindred who has attempted to possess it stark, raving mad. Admittedly, by the time it came into my possession it was basically quiescent, a roughly spherical blob of stone wrapped in a protective casing of mingled ash and river mud, and the whole further encased in a fireproof, blastproof travel safe. I'd received pictures of the relic taken prior to its incarceration: In place of lashes or the representation thereof were inscriptions, origin unknown. Quite a bit of blood still clung to the thing in the photographs and I rather suspected it remained.

Despite the aforementioned dawning political chaos, I was substantially more concerned with the being generally thought to be its original owner: Hazimel, alleged by some to be an Antediluvian.

The widespread cross-cultural panic amongst Kindred of all origins when it appeared caused lines of communication to be opened that might otherwise have remained shut. One of the recipients of this unexpected largesse in intelligence was the Prince of Macau, one Véronique d'Orléans.



When I first met Véronique, she was an ambassador in the court of Prince Alexander of Paris, the designated diplomatic representative of Prince Julia Antasia, among several others, during the course of her tenure there. -A

Even then, in the 13th century, she was something of an outstanding oddity — a Brujah politician who played the game with a skill that many a Ventrue or Lasombra could but envy, her ruthless pragmatism occasionally "marred" by a devotion to humanist ideals that led her to champion the otherwise voiceless. -L

One of the single wealthiest city-states in the world, the Macau economy's built primarily on gambling and tourism. It's something of an East-meets-West cosmopolitan polyglot, and the people and Kindred who dwell there are much the same.

Véronique's domain had a front-row seat to the action when the emergence of the Eye, and a sudden shift in the slow-burning hostilities between the Ravnos of India and their apparently mortal enemies in China, shook the local political situation.

The Ravnos made it clear that the few rulers not of their own Clan were welcome to retain possession of the enclaves they already hold, but any attempt to expand will end any cordiality. This situation persisted for literal centuries – again, until the emergence of the Eye of Hazimel. Within weeks of its appearance, the Princes of Mumbai,

Karaikal, and Macau received formal diplomatic couriers from Chandraputra, the Ravnos raja of New Delhi, requesting an exchange of ambassadors to discuss recent events of great import. It was, I am informed, a gesture practically unprecedented, the Ravnos in their homeland being intensely insular. And, evidently, the Eye's emergence from millennia of obscurity was only one issue of mutual import – the other being the rise of forces inimical to all from within the borders of China.

"The asuratziyya." "The Ten Thousand Demons." References to these beings are scattered across the Kindred history of Asia. Where human [illegible] went, they followed: documents from the earliest years of contact survive in the possession of scholars and historians, and make reference to a race of beings bearing resemblance to Kindred in some ways and none at all in others. Others traveled down the Silk Road with the trade caravans for earlier. Facts, then and now, have always been thin on the ground and the Chinese interior deeply resistant – no Clan has ever exerted more than the barest influence there, though rumors hold of Cainite lines such as the Jiang Shi and Long Wang, sometimes called the Guo Long by westerners. The most cogent and applicable source of both information and mythology derives from the "Karavolanisha Vrana," an epic Ravnos poem, detailing the long war between my Clan and the asuratziyya, the origin of their conflict being a matter less of grubby earthly politics than a divinely-mandated struggle between balance and imbalance, virtue and depravity.

Khalil

Galaxy Macau Hotel, Macau, People's Republic of China

In India, the cradle of the Ravnos and their culture, they take their identity as heroes and the dharma it inculcates in them seriously. When their ambassadors arrived in the courts, they brought with them not only urgent requests for information concerning the Eye – and reassurances that the Eye's owner remained, in their words, safely in isolation – but also information pertaining to the rise of the asuratziyya after hundreds, if not thousands, of years of lassitude and isolation of their own. In

fact, the Ravnos ambassadors presented credible evidence of impending hostilities on the part of the asuratziyya. Chandraputra, who named himself chhatrapati of the Ravnos entire, requested permission to send several jati of warriors – kshatriya – to each city to help the endangered Princes secure their domains, and also requested their aid in beginning a formal dialogue on the matter with the Inner Circle of the Camarilla. This was, to put it mildly, also generally unprecedented.

Only one – d'Orléans – was willing to put her neck out in order to answer this request. I am given to know from Anatole that this is fairly typical of her, the lady being a woman of decision. She called in a few boons, and was rewarded by the Circle shaking loose an Archon to come to Macau to act as liaison and investigator. He had no sooner set foot there than the necessity of his presence was proved in a series of spectacularly brazen assaults on prominent western Kindred. The assault was repelled with the aid of the Ravnos kshatriya and the Archon and, very shortly thereafter, Macau became an armed camp.

My journals and files from that time deal particularly with the Eye of Hazimel itself, any linkages that might exist between it and sundry other signs of impending Gehenna, and my attempts to trace its origins, few of which bore any fruit.

All of the archeolinguist experts I consulted identified the inscriptions ringing the "lids" of the Eye as an extremely primitive variant of the Mohenjo-Daro written language – a language that went extinct near 2000 BCE, last used at the height of the Harappan civilization's influence over the Indus River Valley. The attempts at radiocarbon dating were inconclusive – contaminated, point in fact.

It became, at this point, somewhat necessary to investigate the theoretical source of the artifact in the field. Which made it necessary to inveigle my way into India. Which is how I find myself making presentation to Prince Veronique d'Orleans and making the acquaintance of Aimeric de Cabaret, Archon and the Camarilla's appointed ambassador to the court of Raja Chandraputra.

[RECORDING BEGINS]

Beckett: Good to finally meet you, ambassador, Lady Véronique. Might I present the Eye? Or at least, the safe containing the eye?

d'Orléans: Such a tiny thing to have caused such a bloody uproar.

Beckett: Indeed, though I rather suspect that's part of the point. Deceptively unassuming and all that, and highly sought-after regardless. Do we have a timeframe for any meeting with the *chhatrapati*?

de Cabaret: Not precisely. There seems to be a bit of...controversy within the court of the *chhatrapati* on this issue.

Beckett: Oh, dear.

de Cabaret: [snorts] In brief? They agree you do appear to possess the Eye. And they themselves assert possession, as it were, of the rest of Hazimel. The difficulty, it seems, lies between those of the *chhatrapati's* assorted advisors who think those two things need to be brought back together as swiftly as practicable and those who think they should be kept as far apart as mortally conceivable. In either case, you notice, they are united in their desire to be restored to possession of the Eye.

Beckett: Well. In principle I can agree with that — it is, after all, a relic of their blood. Dare I ask the origin of this...disagreement?

d'Orléans: Family melodrama, it seems. Evidently, Chandraputra was extremely proficient at alienating the majority of his broodmates, of whom Hazimel is alleged to be one. And not one of the ones who stayed on the *chhatrapati's* good side. At least a few of his advisors actively fear that reuniting Hazimel with all his body parts might yield a bloody coup.

Beckett: Given the mess just one bit of him made, I can see their point.

de Cabaret: Indeed. Unfortunately, until they make their minds up about it, we're in a holding pattern. But milady offers you sanctuary.

d'Orléans: Your holding pattern will see you established here at the Galaxy. It is principle Elysium for Macau, and the safest place for both you and the Eye. You're to familiarize yourself with the lay of the land and the Kindred of my domain, and go to ground if anything or anyone strikes you as amiss. The official envoy of the *chhatrapati* is expected in the next few weeks, a Charlatan named Shivaji. Expect him to pry information from you by saying nothing at great length. Room service will be provided. Don't feel too special. I ensure all guests to Macau who take the trouble to announce themselves are given a comfortable stay, for at least as long as they don't cause conflict.

Beckett: Cheeky, I know, but do I get a line of credit for the tables?

d'Orléans: If rumors of your being on Sejanus' payroll are true, you should have more than adequate money to burn.

[Recording ends]

Galaxy Macau Hotel, Macau, People's Republic of China

Ambassador Shivaji, the official envoy of the chhatrapati, sought me out rather than the other way around. We've had several pointless conversations on the Grand Resort Deck.

Shivaji's the sort of person selected for the role of "interacting with the outsiders" for a multitude of reasons. He's grandiloquent, wittily urbane, and quite probably expendable, being only one of what I was assured is a vast array of Chandraputra's great-grandchilder. He has not, to give him the credit he deserves, made any attempt to separate me from the Eye, and in between long stretches of polite nothings he actually imparts a substantial quantity of information about his great-grandsire's court, and the current situation in the interior, while we all wait for his elders to make up their minds. The chhatrapati, as it turns out, does not personally receive any non-Ravnos — no matter what their ambassadorial status or relative importance outside India, theoretically for spiritual reasons.

The psychic miasma of those who neither know nor follow the Mayaparisataya — commonly known to philosophical types as the Path of Paradox — is held to be spiritually defiling even to such highly-evolved beings as the chhatrapati, and so he deals with kindred from outside his own Clan only at great remove.–I

Chandraputra's personal circle of viziers are the executors of his will in the world. And are, also, apparently the gum in the works. They're split almost directly between hidebound conservative traditionalists — believe me, I never thought the night would come where I used that term when referring to Ravnos, but here it is — and violent reactionaries, with nary a compromise position between them.

[Recording begins]

Beckett: Any news on whether we'll soon be heading for New Delhi? I'm not a fan of sedentary existence, and even the flashing baubles of this casino are wearing thin.

Shivaji: You're not a fan of sedentary existence. I understand. These chips are courtesy of the *chhatrapati*.

Beckett: I truly appreciate the gesture. Is there any word though, on when we'll be leaving Macau?

Shivaji: I will pass on that you appreciate the gesture. You're keen to leave Macau. Is your haven not comfortable?

Beckett: I've no issue with the accommodation provided by Véronique. It's a rarity for me to remain so long above ground.

Shivaji: Do your travels not see you searching castles and monasteries?

Beckett: Repeatedly, but most of them aren't accessible via a front door. Many have secret tunnels, catacombs, and the like.

Shivaji: Was that how you accessed the Black Monastery?
Beckett: Yes, but— where did you hear about that?
Shivaji: I apologize, Mr. Beckett, I must run an errand.
[RECORDING ENDS]

DE CABARET, AIMERIC LE CHANSONNEUR



Clan of the Rose; *1167 #1194. Childe of Aurore.

In his mortal days a talented harpist, singer, and knight of Toulouse, after his Embrace d. found himself in the role of ambassador for the Courts of Love, playing a crucial role in the fall of Alexander. A vampire of many talents, d. acted as soldier and diplomat for Véronique d'Orléans, rumors holding the two became lovers. These tales led to his distancing himself from her court, becoming an Archon in 1835, primarily operating in East Asia.

Aimeric's permanently attached to E Division, tasked with investigating oddities of our world outside standard Kindred existence. The asuratsjyya certainly qualify for that designation, though how far outside no one yet knows; it's Aimeric's job, in addition to the diplomatic glad-handing, to find out and report back to the Inner Circle.

Gundicha Mandir, Puri, India

After several months of waiting, I'm finally invited to India. New Delhi remains off limits, leaving me the task of lurching around the east coast with a highly-guarded eyeball in tow. Aimeric's arranged several well-chaperoned trips to the courts of reasonably friendly local Princes, willing to grant us provisional access to several libraries compiled over the centuries, containing information on the asuratsjyya that was more practical than poetic.

While Aimeric wades through millennia of fact, fiction, and deeply entrenched cultural hatreds in search of Wan Kuei, I'm searching for information concerning the Eye. In this, I receive great assistance from Vasundhara, the court historian of Puri and the first brahmin Ravnos I've encountered during the course of my travels.



Meeting her was the best fortune I'd had since landing in Macau, for she considered the collection and preservation of her Clan's ancient knowledge to be the largest part of her personal svadharma. History's taught her one of the best ways to preserve knowledge is to disseminate it far and wide, to as many minds as possible – it being harder to erase an idea already known than to kill a single being or burn a single library.

Much of what is known, for a loose definition of the term "known," concerning Hazimel derives from both the Ravnos creation epic and its assorted offshoots, written at different times and according to different agendas across the centuries, none of which could be considered historically authoritative. Per my hostess/translator, for a significant amount of time it was fashionable among the poets of both the brahmin and kshtraiya of her Clan to curry favor with Chandraputra by vilifying his assorted broodmates in increasingly extravagant ways, a practice he did not discourage until his reorganization of the Clan's structure was complete and his personal pre-eminence firmly cemented. All of them had their defenders, of course, but only a few fragments of these documents survived to the present nights.

- He was born "far to the north," in what was universally agreed to be the early years of Zapathasura's long war against the asuratziyya.
- He is described, in more than one source, as being a "holy warrior," guardian of a goddess in flesh who is changeably described as his actual sister or someone as beloved to him as a sister would be.
- Hazimel's sister/goddess/ward is also a great enemy of the asuratziyya and the implication is that she incarnated specifically to protect her people from their atrocities. This is naturally not a safe thing to do, and Hazimel is kept rather busy defending her from all sorts of threats, while she goes about her duty of bringing light and hope and life to the righteous.
- The craftiest of the asuratziyya put their heads together and come up with a plan — not to destroy Hazimel, but to deceive him into destroying his sister/goddess/ward with his own hands, tricking him into believing that she is one of the asuratziyya.
- Hazimel goes utterly insane with grief, clawing out the eyes used to deceive him and flees blind, bloody, and craving his own death into the mountains beyond. He's found by Zapathasura, who recognizes in him one who has been profoundly wronged by the asuratziyya, and offers him sweet revenge.
- Hazimel accepts — in many cases, he arises from his Embrace now bearing the nazar, having compounded the initial evil act with something arguably far worse in the name of vengeance. From this point he is called, almost exclusively, The Rakshasa.
- One of Hazimel's siblings, Ravana, betrays the others in the name of power; Hazimel is particularly cited in more than one source as being the only one to see through his deceptions for his nazar — his own Evil Eye — cannot be tricked by lesser darkness. Ravana flees rather than face certain destruction and the two either clash repeatedly or else Ravana dies at Mohenjo-Daro.

Sri Krishna Chaitnya Mission, Puri, India

The long years of struggle wore away at Hazimel's courage, his will to fight withering away with the satisfaction of his desire for vengeance. Or he became jealous of Chandraputra's favor in their sire's eyes after Mohenjo-Daro. Vasundhara says he was the first to speak aloud against pursuing the fleeing asuratziyya back to their boltholes and destroying them once and for all. In some versions of this story, his sire is enraged by his wish to end the war. Zapathasura tears the nazar from his forehead, for

he would not leave such a powerful weapon in the possession of one not utterly devoted to his goals, and orders Hazimel should be imprisoned until he repents.

The Eye becomes an entity in the tales in its own right at that point. It seems enormously powerful but will truly obey only one master, and all others who attempt to wield it suffer in invariably unpleasant ways. Eventually, it is interred in various shrines and fortresses across the ages, honored as a dangerous relic of Zapathasura. The precise trail of its owners is spotty. Eventually, about the time of the Great Rebellion of 1857, it drops out of any historical documents.

Zettler. Varrick. Vegel. Leopold. Ruhadze. Beckett. Only the most recent names of those who tried to control this artifact and began to succumb to its powers. Don't open the box. -A

[RECORDING BEGINS]

Shivaji: — ing Gangrel.

Beckett: Watch your tongue, Ambassador.

Shivaji: Watch my tongue?

Beckett: Watch your tongue.

de Cabaret: Enough tongues. What's the issue, Shivaji? Why have you brought an entourage of *kshatriya* security types and several *brahmin* priest-scholars?

Shivaji: The impasse between the traditionalists and the reactionaries has been broken by the *chhatrapati* himself. He wishes for the Rakshasa to be reunited with his Eye.

Beckett: You seem in a state of high dudgeon regarding the whole affair.

Shivaji: If by that you imply my irritation, why yes. Once again, your powers of observation —

Beckett: When do we head for New Delhi?

Shivaji: Immediately.

de Cabaret: What's going on, Shivaji?

Shivaji: Those in disagreement with the revered *chhatrapati* are to leave India within the week, or else face the hunt. My childe among them. This is the Gangrel's doing.

Beckett: For the record, Ambassador Shivaji just spat blood on my shoes.

[RECORDING ENDS]

Unknown Location, India / Pakistan Border (or so Aimeric believes)

Indraja, the most senior of the three brahmin sent to advise Aimeric and me on the intricacies of dealing with prehistoric Ravnos, exuded the feeling he would rather be in Hell with a broken back than assigned to this particular duty. The sun rose and set twice before we reached our destination. We all sensed multiple changes in both temperature and altitude, the air becoming cooler and drier as we ascended.

As we approach, I shall narrate what I'm able into my recording device.

[RECORDING BEGINS]

Beckett: The entry corridor is long and narrow with a distinct downward grade. There are no steps. The security team have set down the safe in the colonnaded space outside the inner sanctum. A half-dozen robed renunciates, incanting softly, their hands held in some sort of mudra whose form I do not recognize, are filing in to join us, encircling the sanctum.

[chanting and pencil scratching for several minutes, ultimately punctuated by a dry roar from farther within the sanctum]

Indraja: Open the safe.

[the winding and clicking of the safe unlocking, the chanting rising in volume]

Beckett: The Eye is nearly vibrating as I hold it, the clay and ash seal binding it beginning to crack and flake away of its own accord. I'm folding my hands around it to keep from dropping it as Indraja leads me to the door of the sanctum and gestures for me to enter — his hands are crooked in a mudra I know wards against evil and ill fortune.

Indraja: Do not speak to yourself in his presence, Beckett.

Beckett: Uhh...fine. Indraja, I'm laying the Eye in the open cradle of his lowest pair of hands, and returning his bow. I'm now backing away the suggested number of paces.

[PAUSE]

Indraja: That gesture means halt.

Beckett: He's lifting the Eye, snapping the clay and ash seal with a flick of his talons.

Hazimel: [cries a low noise]

Beckett: [emits a similar noise, an octave or two higher]

Cesare: The eye is open and flaring forth a burst of unearthly crimson radiance, the earth shaking! Mr. Beckett has been driven to his knees, and outside the cave there's much consternation amongst the security team, the renunciates, and apparently the roof. The tremors are now dying away and the Eye's baleful glow fading, the ancient vampire's hand closing around Mr. Beckett's wrist, care-

fully avoiding scratching my employer's skin with his long claws. He's now helping Mr. Beckett to his feet. I cannot tell which of those arms is real and which is not. They all grip Mr. Beckett now. He presses his forehead to that of my employer!

[RECORDING ENDS]

Unknown Location, India / Pakistan Border

A brief intercession. When Hazimel brought his forehead to mine, a third eye appeared to open, and his mind touched mine. He could see everything of my life, and smiled. I could see everything of his, and began to scream.

I'm not proud.

[RECORDING BEGINS]

Beckett: Hazimel steps around puddles of burning oil from fallen lamps, as the renunciates who wear the mark of his Eye on their brows, the security team, and even Cesare sensibly fall to their knees and from there to their faces in full prostration. He keeps one set of arms around me, across my shoulders, back, and waist, and with the other he offers gestures of gratitude and benediction. We walk up the entry corridor still joined at the hip, and from the contact between us I feel him trembling slightly as a breath of fresh air reaches us, cool and smelling of rain. We step out into a rising breeze, clouds racing across the sky and obliterating both moon and stars, thunder rumbling in the distance, and Hazimel turns his face to the sky, his expression a mask of ecstasy and anguish.

Shivaji: The *chhatrapati* awaits your pleasure, Rakshasa!

Hazimel: [guttural noises]

Beckett: The Rakshasa has ignored his own Clanmate in favor of beckoning Aimeric to rise and approach him. The Archon is dazed as only one of his Clan can be.

de Cabaret: The asuratziyya are returned, Rakshasa. I have fought battles against them for over a century, as a devotee of the Camarilla. The Camarilla would have you join them as a figure of great power and weapon to use against the asuratziyya. They would use you and see you die, along with their enemies —

Beckett: [speaking over de Cabaret] Aimeric appears to be forced into speaking his mind. All of us now step into the night behind the Ravnos.

[RECORDING ENDS]

The Tombs, Rakhigarhi, India

The sun did not seem to rise – I know, pragmatically, that this could not be true. We walked for nights without end, renunciates bearing the mark of the Eye joining us with every passing hour. Hazimel continued on his path, a path that became more real to all of us as we traveled alongside a broad, swift-moving river that no longer existed, beneath high, fragrant trees that no longer stood, through the walls of a city fallen centuries before. Those walls rose up to enclose us, protectively, that which time and violence had ruined reforming as we walked and watched, roads and houses both humble and elaborate, culverts and reservoirs, foundries and granaries, and finally, as we came to the center, a temple, its bath full of fresh water and its braziers full of fresh ash. Hazimel bid us all to bathe, and we did, and to mark ourselves in bone ash and clay, which we did, and to clothe ourselves in crimson silk and golden adornments, which we did.

The ancient himself bathed alone and emerged from his ablutions freshly painted in ashes, his Eye closed, his hair twisted into a crown of braids adorned with ornaments



of gold and copper wire and polished garnets, naked but for his silken kilt. He seated himself among us and, finally, attended to Shivaji's demands. When the ambassador finished begging him to attend the summons of his brother, I heard his voice for only the second time.

"If my brother wishes to speak to me, he will come to me in Rakhigarhi and beg it as I have so often pled with him. On his knees."

And with those words, Ambassador Shivaji was dismissed.

Six nights passed. On each of those nights, more and more of those who would follow him arrived. He accepted all but a few into his service and the ones he turned away he sent forth without malice. He took counsel with all who came before him and when not speaking with them, he kept those of us he favored close to him, his questions endless and varied. By day, I felt him wandering through my dreams, touching my memories with feather-light fingers, learning from my travels and my studies and leaving pieces of his own knowledge and wisdom behind as gifts as he went.

[RECORDING BEGINS]

Shivaji: The *chhatrapati* seeks an audience with his brother, the Rakshasa of Rakshasas.

Hazimel: **Ha**The Rakshasa of Rakshasas is pleased to grant his honored brother's request.

Beckett: [quietly] Chandraputra has entered the sanctum, seething with the barely restrained fury of a righteous hero from the Vedas. He hasn't bowed — but, then, neither has Hazimel.

Chandraputra: You. I had thought the long years of your durance might have taught you some humility, Rakshasa. I see I was sorely mistaken.

Hazimel: Ah, brother. You wound me to the soul. Why would being imprisoned in a dark hole at the edge of the desert teach me humility? Time to meditate upon the essence of many things, but how to humble myself before the most magnificent of the lickspittles was not one of them.

Beckett: Rakshasa of Rakshasas, will you hear my counsel?

Hazimel: If my deliverer has counsel to offer, I will hear it.

Chandraputra: Your deliverer! I am your deliverer, you ungrateful —

Hazimel: You left the decision of whether I would be permitted to rise or condemned to rot in the hands of sycophants and only acted when it was clear their cowardice would not allow them to wash the choice from your hands. He restored me to myself — and I think had you not acted when you did, he would have acted without you. So, yes, I do name him my deliverer and I name him justly. Do you dispute that?

[PAUSE]

Hazimel: Speak.

Beckett: It is true that there is much that I will likely never understand. But I do know this: the *chhatrapati* may not be your friend, but he is your brother and your true enemies lie elsewhere. Quarrel between you can only give them comfort.

Chandraputra: Your deliverer is unusually wise for Gangrel.

Hazimel: I have found him so. He is wedded to truth, which is more than I can say for some. Why, *chhatrapati*, did you choose to end my durance after all these many, many long years? It cannot only be the asuratziyya, no matter how bold they may have become.

Chandraputra: No.

Beckett: [quietly] The *chhatrapati* has withdrawn a length of white silk, offering it to Hazimel, who steps forward to accept it. The Rakshasa unfolds the cloth, wrapped around a small object — and stops, as the tips of his fingers touch it, going impossibly still as only the truly ancient among us can, radiating — to the dismay of all — something close to horror. The *chhatrapati*, to give him the credit he deserves, looks as though his brother's pain gives him no comfort.

Chandraputra: He has also risen, and he calls his degenerate brood to him — and they come, from all the boltholes of the earth.

Hazimel: Where?

Chandraputra: [laughing] Would that I knew.

Hazimel: Our sister —

Chandraputra: Marizhavashti spoke against your imprisonment. She... will not answer me, but you — you I know that she loves still. I need her vision, Rakshasa — I need your thousand faces. Our people need you, even if you do not serve me gladly.

Hazimel: For our people, Chandraputra. I have much to do.

[RECORDING ENDS]

South Seattle College, Seattle, United States

For long moments after the chhatrapati left, Hazimel remained standing, utterly still, his clawtips idly caressing the object he held. Finally, he took a single ragged breath and rewrapped what he held and cradled it in two hands, gesturing for Aimeric and I to walk with him.

He told us softly he would be leaving and, with his departure, all around us would disappear. We were told to take his people to his brother; Aimeric was told to carry word of what we'd witnessed to the Camarilla. His hand slid up to bury itself in my hair.

The tip of one talon dug into the curve of my throat below the ear; blood welled beneath the point and trailed down my neck – he caught it on his tongue.

He told me we would meet again before the cycle turns.

Shivaji, speaking on behalf of the chhatrapati, made it clear that while my assistance was technically and formally appreciated, I should probably not let the sun rise and set on me too many times unless I wanted one of those risings to be unpleasant. I took the hint, and Cesare and I decamped to Macau and from there to Seattle. I was, frankly, having some difficulty keeping my head completely organized – my dreams were full of memories that weren't mine and I lived half in them and half out of them for weeks before the urgency of them, the need to record them, began to fade from obsession to merely strong desire. It was during the course of this, while doing some incidental research, that I discovered what Hazimel meant when he spoke of giving me a gift.

The Indus script – the unknowable written language of the ancient Harappan civilization – is no longer unknowable.

I'm pretty sure I want to kiss him.

Cultural Pride Outbreak in Rakhigarhi



by Rahul Swamy

RAKHIGARHI: Residents of the modern town of Rakhigarhi have suddenly begun excavating and attempting to rebuild the ancient, Harappan-era city of Rakhigarhi starting with its presumed temple center — the ruins of which underlay the site of their sleepy little hamlet.

No residents have been available for comment, but Minister Nehru puts the behavior down to an outbreak of local cultural pride and religious devotion. My own attempts to interview the citizens of Rakhigarhi have been met with stubborn resistance. Notably, no professional archeological team appears to be on site, posing the question of whether the residents may do more harm than good to the history beneath their feet.

In the Uttermost East

The unknown vampires of the East have been an enigma to the Kindred in general for the bulk of recorded history. Only one Clan — a Clan universally derided as untrustworthy — has had anything resembling regular contact with them, and this contact has been entirely hostile. The Camarilla sits on the cusp of becoming intensely involved in this situation, indeed — a Camarilla-aligned Prince, in fact a rather diplomatically-influential Brujah elder, rules the city of Macau, and attempts have already been made on her life. Véronique d'Orléans is calling in all the favors she can to rally assistance to her city.

Unfortunately for Véronique, the Camarilla cares little whether Macau, Mumbai, and Karaikal require assistance. Having just fought a major war against the Sabbat and endured years of internecine unrest based on impending Gehenna-tinged hysteria, many influential Princes and elders are thoroughly war-weary, desirous primarily of circling the wagons. Rumors of the Gehenna Crusade brewing in the shadow of the war in the Middle East doesn't make things better. Few are particularly interested in applying the resources necessary to secure domains that, more than a century after their foundation as footholds, still remain footholds that add no significant benefit to the Sect. The Ravnos are generally not perceived as desirable allies to court for any reason, due in large part to their reputation as autarkis provocateurs and troublemakers.

Unfortunately for the Camarilla, the threat of the asuratziyya is both real and imminent. Macau is already better defended than either of the other Camarilla domains in the region, Prince Véronique having come to separate terms with Chandraputra and accepting the assistance of the Ravnos *kshatriya*. The asuratziyya assault on the Camarilla in the region begins with Mumbai, under the guise of ratcheting tensions between the local Muslim and Hindu populations culminating in a series of spectacularly violent terrorist attacks. In the ensuing chaos, the city falls to the forces of the asuratziyya before any significant defense can be mustered, the loss only becoming apparent when the lone Camarilla survivor of the massacre reaches Macau.

E Division, however, does not disregard the reports sent to it by one of its most senior investigators and dispatches a full coterie of experienced Archons to Macau to assist in both the defense of the city and making determinations regarding the nature and origins of the asuratziyya.

Myths arise: the ancient childer of Zapathasura, the progenitor of the Ravnos, have begun rising in response to both the shift in the balances of power between their own Clan and the asuratziyya and possibly in reaction to other, less easily defined provocations. Chandraputra, the titular *chhatrapati* of the Ravnos *kshatriya*, has been awake for some years, pursuing a course of action that involves summoning as many of his descendants home as can heed his call and ordering the Embrace of more likely candidates to fill out the ranks ahead of the struggle he senses coming. Much to his horror, the traitor Ravana has also stirred from beneath the rock he crawled under centuries ago and it was this, as much as any other consideration, that led him to release Hazimel, Rakshasa of Rakshasas, immortal enemy of the Demon King, from his own imprisonment and restore his Eye to him. Ravana has also begun calling his brood to him and soon the nights in India will run red.

Marizhavashti Kali, the most enigmatic of Zapathasura's childer, departed from her homeland under a cloud of disgrace so deep her sire ordered that her name be stricken from the histories of the Clan. Seer, mystic, and wisewoman, she may hold the key to many things: thwarting Ravana before whatever schemes he gloats over come to pass, preempting the aggression of the asuratziyya before too much blood can be shed, granting insight into recent events that may or may not point at Gehenna either failing to occur or still lying in wait. Many seek her now, including her brother Hazimel, E Division of the Camarilla, and other interested parties — who may crave her wisdom, or to silence it forever.

Activities throughout Asia spawn multiple plots:

- The Ventrue Prince of Manila has fallen to assassination and the court has devolved into chaos. Pleading requests first reach the Kindred of Hong Kong, Macau, and Brunei, but having to deal with their own problems, little aid is offered. A hefty reward of territory, Embracing rights, and liquid wealth is offered by the one remaining Primogen — a Nosferatu named Cheskka — to anyone who might replace the Prince and enforce the Traditions. It's a tempting position, but fraught with danger. The assassins' identities are unknown, with suspects ranging from Wan Kuei, to Ravnos, to a coup within the Ivory Tower.

- In a brief show of coordination, Ravnos across the world are summoned to meetup points by ancillae and elders. Lines are drawn in the sand between faithful and heretics within the Clan, with those outside the Ravnos recognizing little difference. Indeed, one elder may name a group as loyal to the Path, while another decries them as rotten flesh requiring excision. Multiple small factions arise within the Clan, as it lacks direction beyond a cellular level, while Chandraputra rages at the chaos caused by this misinformation. The Clan splits due to these activities, brother fighting brother, all of it caused by the manipulations of Ravana and his loyal descendants.
- It comes as a surprise to all but E Division when the Wan Kuei begin a campaign of terror in the Middle East — in cities from Tehran to Medina. The Ashirra are stunned by the flagrant hostilities they'd until now avoided. E Division knew the attacks were coming, and even helped orchestrate some of them. They quietly observed, making note of all active asuratziyya agents. E Division will be using their Archons and unknowing dupes to burn out the attackers, while rallying the Ashirra against the Wan Kuei — who they style as a mutual enemy. Is there a link between these attacks and the rise of the Gehenna Crusade the conservative Sabbat priesthood is preaching? The possibility of a Sabbat — Wan Kuei may be too terrible for most Kindred to consider. But what if it's true?
- Spurred by the *chhatrapati*, Ravnos from all over the globe begin to fall in with the major Sects. In cities including Paris, Houston, and Cape Town, Ravnos Primogen are recognized. The Ravnos antitribu are bolstered in number, the Archbishops of Tegucigalpa and Jakarta being members of the bloodline. Chandraputra wishes to see his Clan protected by whatever means necessary, and he encourages all Clan members to foster relations with the Sect they find least incommodious.
- The hunt for Marizhavashti Kali takes coteries primarily consisting of Ravnos, but often aided by others, into the lion's den of central and eastern China. Tales place her near Chengdu in recent centuries, but many suspect she's moved on or been destroyed. Worrisome to the Ravnos elders are the rumors — likely spread by Ravana's get — that she's chosen to ally with the asuratziyya. Discerning her whereabouts is imperative for manifold groups. The recompense for securing her aid will be great, but stepping into asuratziyya territory is akin to putting one's head in a roaring furnace.
- Oliver Thrace, Tremere Regent of Hong Kong, has long been on the watchlist of his Clan. His proclamation that the Wan Kuei are to freely share his domain antagonizes his Clan, Sect, and the Ravnos who fear the precariousness of Kindred domains in Asia. Thrace needs to be talked back into the fold of the Ivory Tower and to use his current goodwill with the asuratziyya against them at a crucial point, but Thrace isn't easily turned. He believes the Camarilla have blundered, and that his course is truly the best one.



GIOVANNI CHRONICLES V

Beckett

What is Beckett? Is he scholar or savage? Antiquarian or troublemaker? Player or tool of the Jyhad?

None know his origins, his true identity, or why he commits the acts ascribed to him. Yet his acts are deemed great.

Why does Beckett do what he does?

The Capuchin knows. Beckett needs answers as the fledgling needs blood. His obsession will one night lead to his knowing too much.

That is the moment Beckett will know God, Caine, the Alpha and the Omega. He will know the truth of how our world begins and ends. He will not share these revelations for, like the Capuchin, he will know that by sharing, the end will begin.

Beckett knows the danger, but is compelled.

He must travel to the Black Monastery. There, Ambrogino Giovanni found his evidence of the end, and has been maddened ever since.

Would Beckett turn down this chance at a mystery?

Sincerely

The Capuchin

The Black Monastery, Jura Mountains, Switzerland

Okulos didn't at all appreciate our heading here. He's been reticent since the Capuchin's letter found its way to our Cairo lodgings, calling the expedition "a clear



idiot trap." One reason I brought him, Anatole, and Lucita along. If someone plans to ambush me in the Swiss Alps, I have the support of those I trust.

Since landing in Basel, Lucita's sure we've been followed. Despite her concerns, there's no trace of a stalker. We made introductions to Frankel, the eerily solo Kindred resident of Basel. In rather ominous fashion, the Nosferatu refused to grant us hospitality when we made our destination of the Black Monastery clear. Our subsequent journey to the monastery was eventful, driving on closed mountainside roads through a blizzard.

In all, everything leading to the Black Monastery has seemed quite portentous, to those who believe in omens.

The Black Monastery is an intact complex, the appearance of which reflects a chateau-turned-fortress in the Middle Ages. It overlooks an Alpine pass, sitting on a crag concealed in the shadow of a mountain. We could only drive so far, before having to hike two hours to reach its sealed gates. It's clear this fort's remained hidden for years.

Weather and time were the greatest impediment in our reaching the monastery. No sooner had we arrived than we were forced into sleep. The interior of the compound

is reachable via a tunnel, leading to a building with no windows, clearly designed for the resting of our kind. Lucita barred the tunnel door from the inside once we entered, before finally resting.

Roaming the halls of the monastery this evening has been as fascinating as searching any sunken tomb. It's a treasure pit, somehow undisturbed. Anatole was quick to mention "there may be a reason nobody comes to the Black Monastery," but even Okulos' caginess is dissipating as we study the old literature within, some in languages we can't identify. Much has been destroyed by damp, but a quantity remains.

Lucita's been drawn to the chapel, identifying tools necessary for archaic versions of Sabbat ritae. Anatole's discovery of a hidden chamber containing a werewolf subjected to taxidermy brightened his mood, until an hour later the silence we've all been experiencing was punctuated by bestial howls from the mountain. We've again sealed ourselves in, and Lucita's given us handguns with clips containing silver bullets.

Anatole was the first awake, rousing us all. Something was hammering the thick, black, iron doors from outside, making dust fall from the ceiling as the compound itself appeared to shake. None of us were keen to investigate the source. We heard no howling and only one point of impact, to my mind ruling out a pack of lupines.

An hour's passed and the banging's subsided. Unable to do much about it, we all return to our rest.

The doors appear to have been subject to an indefinable external force – less the hammer blow I saw in my mind than an immense pressure of equal dimensions to the doors. They won't stand another day, so we've requisitioned the stuffed werewolf's home. It's snug, but will do the job.

Searching the libraries and studies has revealed texts referencing all manner of significant tomes. While nothing here stands as the final piece to some unsolved puzzle, many of the works written by such luminaries as Mateusz Gryzbowsky assist a great deal in furthering our knowledge.

Lucita and Anatole have likewise discovered much regarding the former inhabitants' interest in the Paths of Enlightenment. It appears the Black Monastery was the

haven of several pioneering philosophers among our kind, experimenting in Paths now practiced in Sabbat circles.

Lord Mendel was the keeper of the library, and has extensively chronicled the timeline of the vampires here. The Warlock's journal abruptly ceases in 1896, wherein he writes about the familiar noises we heard during the day. He writes plainly as a Tremere not bound by Clan, and makes frequent references to having had ownership of the Book of the Grave-War. The fate of Lord Mendel is something to research further, along with his ties to Dr. Mortius.

Of interest to me – given the Capuchin's communication – is my discovery of a hidden cache of documents penned by Ambrogino Giovanni. Tightly bound, and hidden in a simple Old Testament, Ambrogino seems to have been in communication with something writing responses to his entreaties here at the Monastery. Many of these documents were unreadable, but one remains.

Caine be thy paragon thou shalt emulate or surpass, not worship.
No end be served when thou crawls and grovels at thy Dark Father's feet.
Thy hierarchy and elders' writ enforces frailty.
Caine is thy Father, yet Caine be elder, and due subject of thine rebellion.
As Caine rebelled, thou shalt rebel.
Understand thy form and role under God, embracing thy predatory role, for it be divine.
The predator doth not swallow pride and accept naught as elder deigns it so.
Weakness be imposed on thee.
For thee to surpass Caine, thou shalt study Caine and surpass all weakness.
The Path of Caine leadeth us to rightful divinity.
Strength be the core of all Cainites.
Thou must consume the weak to become strong.
The Amaranth be a single path, yet not thy single journey.
Let the snake, spider, and crocodile be roles that guide.
Eschew the fury of the wolf, lion, and bear.
The studious predator be thine model.

1662 - 1667

Among the departed were Ambrogino Giovanni and Marianna of the Clan of Death, not simultaneous, and both seemingly headed to London; Lady Melisande of the Clan of the Rose, subjected to experimentation by Lady Vadislava, and now a torpid stump within our chapel; a coterie of ancillae seeking Giovanni, not all of which confirmed names or Clans, now also headed to London.

Among the arrivals were the aforementioned Giovanni and pursuers; three score Carthusian monks and nuns; Dark Selina of the Learned Clan.

1899 -

Among the departed were Ambrogino Giovanni of the Clan of Death, known to be headed to the Carpathians; Lady Vadislava of the Clan of Shapers, known to be traveling with Giovanni; Julian Sanders; fellto his Beast for the final time, his existence extinguished by Giovanni.

One arrival being the Capuchin, seeming interested in Giovanni's studies before disappearing without graces.

The Monastery now haven to only three, and a low number of kine, Master Frazier volunteered to take his leave and find new minds in time for the next century.

Mendel

1794

The Book of the Grave-War makes plain the need for diablerie to survive the coming Gehenna. My communications with Vasantasena corroborate the book's belief, even though we're in agreement the consumption of souls will weaken the resolve of a vampire's humanity.

Vasantasena travels here to view the Book of the Grave-War. We intend to discuss how a soul can be consumed while humanity retained.

1803

The ritual is complete. When a mortal leaves the monastery, he finds it impossible to reenter. This location is now concealed entirely from mortal eyes, and the eyes of my Camarilla brethren, so Windham claims. His debt is now paid.

Vasantasena agrees with me a Cainite's best hope for victory over the Antediluvians is through humanity. Gryzbowsky argues for the eminence of the predator within.

Duality is sought by Vasantasena and I. We explore meditation as a method of suppressing the Beast until a time comes to unleash it.

1896

The noise in recent days and nights has disturbed our rest to an unparalleled degree, forcing the Lady Veridis to depart and investigate the source.

Veridis has always been stoic. As she begged for sanctuary from without, I realized the threat beyond must be terrible indeed. I attempted to save her, but her body was missing. The sound of her voice seems produced by the darkness itself as a lure.

I am greatly afeared. Despite being surrounded by the annals of Cainite research, and possessing Thaumaturgies unmatched in this land, I cannot cease the uncontrollable trembling of my soul as spectres rage outside. The book confirms Antediluvians rise to strike those who know how to eradicate their number. I have made of myself such a target.

Sacrifice of vitae call you to this place so draped in spirits of the dead.

I am here.

I seek the Sargon Fragment and apotheosis.

You shall not have it.

The Fragment survived Lazarus and Mallotte. You will reveal to me its location.

I shall not.

You will be bound and pained until its location is revealed.

I fear not your torture and invite you to bind me.

What do you desire in exchange for the location of the Sargon Fragment?

For you to bind and torture me, Ambrogino Bastard Son.

Reveal to me the location of the Sargon Fragment.

Sacrifice to me the heart blood of an immortal and you shall receive answers.

Despite our having mere hours before dawn, Okulos' recent discovery has us packing. Beneath a flagstone, he discovered a funerary urn. Upon removing it from its position, I witnessed the urn leap from his hands and shatter upon the stones. The scattered ash contained another bound document of Ambrogino's.

The exchange gets increasingly disturbing. Initially I assumed the writer on the other end some manner of spirit, but I'm beginning to suspect otherwise. Would Ambrogino so carelessly bind a powerful spirit to something as fragile as an urn? I am only guessing, but I assume he bound it here due to the monastery's invisibility before mortal eyes. But why not take it with him?

We're taking what we can. I'm prepared to dig deep into the frozen earth to give us a place to rest that isn't here, should the need present itself.

Sacrifice of endless life call you to this place so draped in spirits of the dead.

I taste the soul as it joins my ranks.

I seek the Sargon Fragment and apotheosis.

Augustus' Endless Night will bring forth Gehenna before your divinity can be reached.

The Khazar's Diary shows me the Endless Night will bring my divinity.

The Khazar's Diary lies.

What is the truth?

The deceiver Augustus Giovanni knows the Diary's lies and will hide his corpulent form in the Shadowlands to outwait Gehenna. He will be the sole ruler once annihilation is assured. He is treachery incarnate!

Give me proof the Endless Night will cause Gehenna.

For that you must seek one of the Cainites who conspired against me.

The members of the Conspiracy of Isaac were eliminated once their purpose was served.

At least one remains in the house within which it began.

How does the Conspiracy know of the Endless Night?

Claudius persuaded the Conspiracy to accede to my diablerie by convincing them the Endless Night was my construction! Lies! All Lies! My Divity Denied Me!

You will be bound to this place for as long as the urn of my sacrifice stands.

When it empties I shall be seeking you first, Ambrogino bastard son. Until then, any who make domain in this place shall be given one day and one night before I devour them.



From: magnusal@sunburst.de

To: beckett@schreckNET.nod

Cc: aisling.sturbridge@fiveboroughs.com;

Subject: RE: RE: RE: RE: RE: Conspiracy of Isaac

Babbling tongues cut out, electronic ears and eyes removed from all but we three, yes, I can tell you where the Conspiracy of Isaac met.

A town in the Carpathians housed the manse of one Claudius Giovanni. I know, for my once brother — Marchettus the Bold — was put to death by our grandsire for his involvement in the affair.

You will not find Stavlachia on any modern map, for it fell to Inquisition and then plague, which struck people and land. It has not been inhabited since. To my knowledge the buildings yet remain, though Marchettus spoke of the entire region being haunted by terrible demons. He was quite mad by the time his head was removed.

You may find it some 10km north of Neagra. I trust that whatever you discover, you will share only with myself, Aisling, and your boon companions. Do not print this, as I am given to understand you print every other damned piece of correspondence.

Albertus Magnus

Childe of Procet

Childe of Critias

Childe of Menele

Childe of Troile

. . . . . .

From: h.ruhadze@bloodspot.eg

To: beckett@schreckNET.nod

Cc: aisling.sturbridge@fiveboroughs.com; magnusal@sunburst.de; eyeonyou@schreckNET.nod

Subject: RE: RE: RE: RE: Conspiracy of Isaac

There are members of my line who also desire that information. We will pay highly for it.

Ruhadze Imports & Exports

From: beckett@schreckNET.nod

To: aisling.sturbridge@fiveboroughs.com;

Cc: h.ruhadze@bloodspot.eg; magnusal@sunburst.de; eyeonyou@schreckNET.nod

Subject: RE: RE: RE: Conspiracy of Isaac

Aisling — for once, it's not your Clan. Your persecution complex is not required.

Anyone else?

From: aisling.sturbridge@fiveboroughs.com

To: beckett@schreckNET.nod

Cc: h.ruhadze@bloodspot.eg; magnusal@sunburst.de; eyeonyou@schreckNET.nod

Subject: RE: Conspiracy of Isaac

Has Anatole accessed your email, Beckett? I'd prefer my Clan's name not being dragged through the muck.

Aisling Sturbridge

"That which can be asserted without evidence, can be dismissed without evidence."

Christopher Hitchens

From: beckett@schreckNET.nod

To: h.ruhadze@bloodspot.eg; magnusal@sunburst.de; aisling.sturbridge@fiveboroughs.com

Cc: eyeonyou@schreckNET.nod

Subject: Conspiracy of Isaac

Dear all,

I apologize for the mass electronic mail.

You all know me to not be one of Gehenna's many prophets. I would hope that in our dealings, you have found me to be trustworthy and not prone to exaggeration. I believe you to be the foremost experts in our shared field. We have Okulos to thank for collaborating our addresses.

In short: I need to find out where the Conspiracy of Isaac met to plan the destruction of the Cappadocians.

Why? I suspect — and it's a strong suspicion — one Clan is planning something that may hurry what our "oracles" are terming Gehenna. I cannot release my evidence for this reasoning, but ask sincerely that if you know where the Conspiracy met, you pass that information on.

Sincerely,

Beckett

The Giovanni Manse, Stavlachia, Romania

None of us were sure of what we'd find in the manse. Ambrogino's communication alluded to a member of the fabled Conspiracy of Isaac remaining here, but with no local kine from which to feed I doubted that would be the case. Additionally, Ambrogino's communications must have taken place over a century past. Much can change in that time.

We've been discussing at length the being with whom Ambrogino was conducting his exchange. Anatole immediately muttered "Cappadocius." Lucita shot him down. Okulos opined Ambrogino may just be insane, which we can't rule out. I've yet to find definitive proof of any Antediluvian's existence, but I concede that for the other party to hold any weight with Ambrogino, he must at least be an ancient spirit. Certainly it follows that the same spirit was responsible for battering the doors during our stay. Perhaps the fabled Capuchin was sending Ambrogino on a merry chase, just as he does with us.

The manse itself is a miserable place. Built in the Venetian style and seeming wholly out of place in this dreadful mountain range, the crumbling home of Claudius



is what I would gather to be the prototypical "haunted mansion." It would likely draw more attention were the Kindred of these parts more inclined towards the dark arts.

We split into pairs to search the manse. For my part, I turned on my recorder, not that the transcript reveals much.

[RECORDING BEGINS]

Beckett: The ceiling within this once-grand dining hall has caved badly, and if not for the support beams would likely fall at the slightest provocation. Make a mental note not to enter the rooms above this one without due care.

Anatole: Noted. What's this?

Beckett: Anatole has lifted from the rotten rug a metal collar, sized to fit a human.

Anatole: It still bears the stain of blood. I can see its former bearer before me. She's a sad beauty, and frightened. A Cainite feeds from a tap inserted through the hole in the collar, here.

Beckett: Interesting. The furniture hasn't fallen to woodworm too badly. The table is actually amazingly pre —

[LOUD CRACKLING]

Anatole: The table speaks!

[LOUD CRACKLING]

Anatole: O-ho! Rest your hands upon it, Beckett!

Beckett: I pick up nothing.

Anatole: You do not? The table speaks to me in the tongue of one Lord Leopold Valdemar, formerly of the Conspiracy of Isaac!

[LOUD CRACKLING]

Anatole: It's very unhappy, Beckett. You try being a haunted table in an empty house.

Beckett: Ask it — no, ask him; what does he know of the Endless Night?

Anatole: Lord Leopold Valdemar, I hear your words. Tell me what you know of the Endless Night and Gehenna.

[LOUD CRACKLING CONTINUES FOR IN EXCESS OF 10 MINUTES]

Anatole: I know I say it a lot, but Beckett — Gehenna is here.

[RECORDING ENDS]

As commanded, so shall I write. Beckett the skeptic requires I write what I recall of Valdemar's rant, as apparently my vocal impersonation of a 700-year-old Dane wasn't helpful.

Valdemar spent much of his time begging to be freed from his tortured imprisonment in the house. He claims his spirit is in fragments around the entire building, Ambrogino having split him thus to ensure his constant punishment. I didn't think to ask how this freedom could be attained, which was regrettable, thinking back on it.

He states he's being punished on behalf of the entire Conspiracy, the majority of whom have met Final Death. Valdemar says that for years Ambrogino's worked on supporting the Endless Night, which he believes will allow wraiths to pass freely from their world to ours, thus positioning the Giovanni as gods. What Ambrogino only came to realize, by questioning Valdemar's ghost, is that Uncle Auggie — the pointman for the Endless Night — actually plans for it to scour the world clean of all Cainites. Valdemar was told by Claudius and Augustus how this grand ritual would allow what he called "reapers" to claim all the spirits caught in situ — being Cainites — while Cappadocius and Japheth ascended to divinity as the survivors and perpetrators of this genocide. What poor old Valdemar and his fellow Conspiracy members didn't know was the Giovanni bloodline just needed the Cappadocians out the way so they could perform the ritual, or specifically: so Claudius and Augustus could perform the ritual.

My take: The Cappadocians weren't entirely innocent victims. Sure, the majority didn't care or know about any of this, but those in Cappadocius' circle knew he was a maniac happy to sacrifice his entire Clan if he felt it'd draw him closer to godhood. He planned for "divinity," even if it wasn't the kind of divinity Auggie and friends wanted with the Endless Night.

Understandably, Ambrogino felt snubbed by Valdemar's revelation and vented his ire. The Endless Night was apparently quite close in the 19th century. The wars of the 20th century have helped even further. The more violent deaths, the closer the Endless Night comes to taking place.

This isn't the Gehenna prophesied in the Book of Nod, but as Beckett points out — why should there be only one end? The Antediluvians rise and eat us all. Caine wakes up and destroys us all. Sutekh enslaves us all. God judges us all. Our ending is coming.

I'm going for a lie down.-A

[RECORDING BEGINS]

Lucita: Neither the Regent of the Sabbat, nor the Inner Circle of the Camarilla are going to act upon a penned exchange between one Necromancer and an unidentified correspondent, or the notations of a known Gehenna prophet. Your trail ends here.

Beckett: Gehenna is not preordained, but we know Ambrogino's ability. If he's taking this seriously, we should also.

Okulos: Lucita's right. What do you think either of the Sects are going to do with this information?

Beckett: Is it naive of me to think they'd investigate the Giovanni?

Lucita: The Promise of 1528 forbids the Camarilla from doing so. Convenient for the Giovanni to arrange such a contract.

Beckett: The Sabbat hold no such accord.

Lucita: The Sabbat can't take their eye off the Camarilla to throw the Black Hand at Venice on two flimsy pieces of evidence. Sejanus is too occupied with his own grandstanding. I'm sorry. Whether truth or not, you can't go to the Sects without expecting to be laughed down or betrayed to the Giovanni.

Beckett: I'm beginning to see the Capuchin's point about not being able to share this information.

Okulos: In his letter he said sharing would lead to the end of all. Perhaps if the Giovanni found out you knew, they'd hurry the ritual. Perhaps start it early. Do you think it beyond that family to set off a bomb if they thought their nights were numbered?

Beckett: Fuck it all.

Lucita: There's only one vampire who knows what we know.

Beckett: He's an egomaniacal psychopath.

Lucita: He's the only Giovanni who might discuss the true nature of his Clan.

[RECORDING ENDS]

Guggenheim Museum, Venice, Italy

I've achieved many things since our trip to Stavlachia. Meeting Ambrogino has not been one of them. Elusive in the extreme, my desperate curiosity had me contacting the Baron Samedi.

I received nothing from the Baron himself, and Cesare has not yet returned. Yet, this week I did receive the attached letter.

Beckett

The Capuchin is pleased by your hunt. It is as the Capuchin said it would be.

Ambrogino visits the Peggy Guggenheim Collection the last Sunday of every month, without fail.

Sincerely

The Capuchin

[RECORDING BEGINS]

Ambrogino: Answer my question, dog. You think this place devoid of spirits that could rip you to shreds?

Beckett: I came here seeking you. Not to be threatened.

Ambrogino: Do you intend to return what you stole from me?

Beckett: That was months ago, and has long since left my possession. It wasn't theft. I found it on the dead bodies of —

Ambrogino: Two of my retainers.

Beckett: I know of the Endless Night. The Capuchin told me I could meet with you here.

Ambrogino: The Capuchin does not speak for my whereabouts. The Endless Night! You know little, indeed.

Beckett: I know of your chat with Cappadocius and Leopold Valdemar.

[sound of glass smashing followed by an alarm]

Ambrogino: Back off, and silence the alarm! You will fix this frame once I am done!

Security: As you say, signor.

Ambrogino: I will snap your neck against this wall and have ghosts devour your soul!

Beckett: You ignore the claws I could be using right now to cut through your admittedly strong arms, Gino.

Ambrogino: You set that spectre upon me! For months I have been forced to watch my every move!

Beckett: Perhaps binding it to the monastery was a bad idea.

Ambrogino: I had my reasons for not banishing it. Tell me what you know!

Beckett: Put me down and we will talk. Put me down. Down. Thank you. I've come to the conclusion Augustus intends to demolish Kindred worldwide and bring about Gehenna.

Ambrogino: The Endless Night is not Gehenna.

Beckett: Cappadocius seemed to think so, if that was him writing to you.

Ambrogino: It was a piece of Cappadocius. The part that entered the Shadowlands millennia ago, when Cappadocius lost his true name. Well before Augustus devoured him. I elude it only by setting it upon others from my Clan.

Beckett: That's how you lose your tail? You must love your family. For how long does it last before this remnant of Cappadocius hunts you again?

Ambrogino: Weeks at the most, but I am strengthening my defenses. I will bind it yet. You tell me now your intent.

Beckett: My intent is to present this to the Camarilla Inner Circle or Sabbat Regent and direct them to your founder's actions. To do so I need a respected member of your Clan as support. Reluctantly, that brings me to you.

Ambrogino: Do you not think I've thought along those very lines already?

Beckett: Then which Sect meets your preference? Together, we can reveal Augustus' plan and leave it to the Sects to take action as they see fit.

Ambrogino: I did that half a century ago when I exhausted all other options. *Pota de Cristo*... I took it to their Inner Circle when they held their meeting in this city. Shortly after Cappadocius' destruction, another informant told them the Endless Night was the Antediluvian's scheme, now thwarted. This is why the Cappadocians were never invited to the Camarilla's table. The Camarilla was loud in its proclamations that we Giovanni were Devil-Kindred, but the Founders had already made their minds up. They knew Cappadocius was mad, and wanted him and his brood replaced with a more reliable, self-contained group. Exeunt Cappadocians. Enter Giovanni.

Only Camilla Banes of the Malkavians believed me, and a Malkavian hardly makes sturdy support. Even her own Clan voted against including the Cappadocians in the formative Camarilla five centuries before. I left in a rage and was fortunate Augustus never heard of the events. The Inner Circle has a leak directly to the Mausoleum, but thankfully, Augustus' long been within the Shadowlands. He is biding time for what we know will come to pass.

Beckett: And the Sabbat?

Ambrogino: You have heard of the Harbingers of Skulls?

Beckett: My knowledge of them is limited, but more seem to appear every year.

Ambrogino: Cappadocians hidden away in the Underworld long ago. I could not find an audience with any Cardinal. The Sabbat care only for Antediluvians. To their mind, ours was destroyed along with Lasombra and Tzimisce. The Capuchin arranged my meeting with one of these Harbingers. I knew him — this Gentleman — in the 13th century. His face changed but not his voice. Unlike others, he believed what I said. His request was for the location of each Giovanni actively pursuing the Endless Night ritual's completion. I still feed him this information to this night.

Beckett: You sell out your line to diablerists? I implore Augustus' destruction, but not your entire Clan!

Ambrogino: This is where we differ greatly, Beckett. You are shortsighted. I see opportunity. The Harbingers strike whomever I so choose. If another Necromancer possesses something I want, has angered me, or does — as I say — pursue the Endless Night? He can expect a visit from beyond the Shroud by hungry Lazarenes.

Beckett: Are you satisfied your method will stop the Endless Night from taking place?

Ambrogino: [laughs] No. But the Red Sign will help me survive it, should it come to pass.

Beckett: You've secured your own existence and to hell with the rest of us.

Ambrogino: Did you truly expect anything different? If you want to be assured of the Endless Night's failure, cross over to the Shadowlands and destroy Augustus. Of course, for that you'd need competent and trustworthy necromancers. I understand they're difficult to find.

[RECORDING ENDS]

An Endless Gehenna

The Mnemosyne seek truths as bees seek pollen and nectar. Aristotle de Laurent would have vampires believe that, like him, Beckett is one of these rare Mnemosyne. Possibly a bloodline, more likely a cult, the Mnemosyne are compelled to solve mysteries related to their kind. Beckett is lured into such a hunt by the Capuchin, his curiosity forcing him across Europe on a journey taking him into some of the murky depths of Clan Giovanni's past, and possible future.

The Black Monastery was a site of study and experiment. Used by pioneering Sabbat to analyze and codify the Paths of Enlightenment, the denizens of the monastery met with mixed success and frequent danger. The Sabbat who sequestered themselves within the monastery were often of disparate philosophies and temperaments, resulting in frequent bloodshed. The successes from the monastery were lauded by the Sword of Caine, until civil wars afflicting the Sect made philosophy a lesser focus. By the close of the 19th century, the Black Monastery was abandoned. No vampires visiting it after that point are known to have returned, possibly due to the presence of the powerful spectre of an Antediluvian believed to be devouring all who remained for longer than a night.

In 1444, the Conspiracy of Isaac met at Claudius Giovanni's manse in Stavlachia to plot the fall of the Cappadocians. As far as the vast majority of the conspirators were concerned, Cappadocius and his childer had to die to prevent Gehenna from taking place. As far as Claudius Giovanni and his sire were concerned, Cappadocius was obstructing Giovanni ambition. The Conspiracy successful in its motives, the next stage for Claudius was to begin removing the conspirators who still existed. The majority were handled at a dining extravaganza held at Claudius' manse, as the centennial celebration of the Cappadocian purge. Of those who escaped the trap, most remained plagued by spirits until mad. Only two made it out unscathed, their fates mysteries to all as they spend their nights hiding from the Giovanni who know what they know.

At the height of the Inquisition, members of the Red Order swept through Stavlachia and put innocent and guilty alike to the torch. Claudius retreated to Venice as plague hit the suffering population. Wild spirits of murdered Cappadocians sometimes rise to ravage the area. Even the Tzimisce Bishop of the surrounding region — Lady Zara Slatikov — sees the empty place as a tomb, advising those travelers she permits in her domain to afford it a wide berth.

In Giovanni domains, the Necromancers pursue the cause of the Endless Night with an unmatched dedication. If the ritual is completed, the world will become a plaything to the Giovanni. If others were to realize the



"Everything will be perfectly quiet..."

Should the Endless Night come to pass, Gehenna will have arrived in a form unpredicted by the majority of seers. Antediluvians do not rise, Caine does not emerge, the young do not devour the old — God does not sit in judgment. The world we know changes completely. When the Shroud ceases to exist, wraiths do not pour from a singular source. The Skinlands and Shadowlands merge; wraiths instantly possessing the living, structures crumbling beneath the weight of shadow architecture extant for millennia now made manifest, souls becoming the only currency, and Augustus Giovanni sitting dominant. This is an outcome few desire. Here are some ways it can play out:

- The Endless Night arrives exactly as Clan Giovanni intends. As wraiths appear in the Skinlands, the Clan stands ready to bind them all, forming an army with which to dominate the world entire. The first targets of the Giovanni are the pillars of the Sects, who become subject to unpitying torments until finally being put to Final Death, at which point their souls are bound. Other Kindred are forced to flee the suddenly godlike Giovanni. Several small resistance groups attempt to take down the Necromancers, but none stand a chance. Only when former enemies from all sides of the Jyhad come together do the remaining vampires gain a single hope. To survive, they must steal the knowledge of Necromancy from the Giovanni and beat them at their own game. To do so will require perilous feats and more time than any remaining vampire believes they have, but by destroying Augustus and his lieutenants, and repairing the Shroud, they may be able to return the world to a semblance of normality.
- Cappadocius was correct in his assessment of the Endless Night. The Shroud drops, and the wraiths — rapacious and merciless — commence freeing the souls from the living and the dead. The first to fall are the Giovanni, the wraiths swift to remember centuries of torture at their hands. The wave of death spreads, infecting living and undead alike. Spirits are liberated from bodies, most being consumed by Oblivion. Augustus is the only vampire immune to the plague, due to a deal struck with powerful wraiths in the Underworld. This Endless Night lives up to its name, representing a hopeless situation in which the struggles to endure are the sweetest, and most desperate. Kindred and kine alike thrash for survival, some burning out like stars, others trying every trick to maintain their existence. They watch all life crumble away before them, as every sanctuary falls to the Endless Night.
- The Endless Night releases the spirits of the dead, just as the Giovanni hope — but what follows is a great "fuck you" to the Venetians. The wraiths turn on their masters, revealing heretofore underplayed abilities in soul manipulation. The true masters of Necromancy are the ghosts. Now that there's no barrier between the land of the living and that of the dead, the dead feel it's time to play. The Giovanni collapse in the course of nights, few outside the Clan understanding what befalls the ever-introverted Clan. No army of wraiths takes over the world. The spirits prefer to observe and manipulate the living, using the resources, rites, artifacts, and information inherited from the now enslaved or destroyed Giovanni. The "Clan" that emerges is made almost entirely of puppets of the dead, only some of the minor families of the Clan avoiding notice.

Giovanni aspire to hold command over all life and death, it's likely the Necromancers would be met with severe reprisals. Not many know the motives of Augustus Giovanni or his *anziani*. Few would believe it without proof.

Ambrogino knows the Endless Night will signify a Gehenna of sorts. Despite his bravado he's far from keen on the ritual's completion. Carefully, he plans an escape route, perhaps recovering mortality via the mysterious

Red Sign, or fomenting dissent within his own Clan and recreating the Conspiracy of Isaac, with him in the role of Augustus, and Augustus as Cappadocius. Beckett, meanwhile, is left with the most damning information he could hold, and while he'll likely leak it to influential vampires, few will take it seriously.

Chronicles ooze from the cracks of Giovanni aspirations. Following are ideas you could utilize:

- A coterie of prominent Boston Giovanni disappears overnight and wraithly servants seem unwilling to trace them. Fellow Necromancers are forced to investigate the group's preferred haunts to discern their whereabouts. Within one haven the profane *Book of Coming Forth by Night* is recovered. No sooner do the Milliners discover the book, than word leaks of Harbingers of Skulls being sighted within Boston. A panic falls across the Giovanni as this bloodline picks off those who make contact with the book, said to include part of the Endless Night ritual. No response is sent from Venice when urgent aid is requested, leaving the Milliners to look outside their Clan for allies.

- For centuries, tales of the Black Monastery have tantalized philosophers from all Sects. The monastery is a nigh-mythical pilgrimage destination for any who wish to walk a Path of Enlightenment. Now the Ventrue antitribu Master Frazier wishes to charter an expedition to rediscover the monastery and its contents. Time and again he's searched the Alps, never to locate it. He knows it's hidden from the eyes of mortals, but seeks a coterie or pack of enterprising vampires who can locate the hidden complex. The reward on offer is to be the first vampires in over a century to read the secrets within its walls. Frazier knows of the dangerous number of lupines in the region, but does not make this clear to his charges. The monastery itself is now haunted by a multitude of hungry ghosts, left in the wake of the spectral Cappadocius rending a tear in the Shroud as it recently broke free. A Giovanni coterie in particular would benefit greatly through interrogating the spirits of the departed Sabbat philosophers who perished there.

- A mortal makes a foolhardy investment in the barren region of Stavlachia, intending on prospecting and opening a series of salt mines. When the mining crew unearths a mass grave, they casually throw the bones on the slag heap and continue their dig. The horde of spectres rising following this deed is unheard of, even in Venice. The entire province is swiftly befouled, the miners paying the price for their ignorance. Few remain sane enough to accurately report on the events following, but news reaches several Cainites with local interests. Zara Slatikov is convinced the land bears the effect of the demon known as Kupala, and wishes for a pack to see to its purification. Necromancers take notice when it's heard Claudius Giovanni once made his domain in Stavlachia. With a potential cache of his compiled knowledge there, and wraiths to be harvested, Venice sends forth childer to investigate. Meanwhile, the investor relays all he can to an immortal relative before being driven to psychological extremis by the spectres dogging his every step.

- One of the Camarilla Founders was the Malkavian Camilla Banes, who even now preaches adoration for "the martyr" Cappadocius. Her collected mental infirmities blind her to the Antediluvian being a delusional, unscrupulous, and vindictive cult leader. When she became aware the Giovanni hoodwinked the Camarilla — the Endless Night being their scheme rather than that of their forebears — she pledges vengeance for her beloved. Banes begins to engineer the systematic persecution of Giovanni within Camarilla domains, through orders passed to Malkavians within her expansive web. Some commands are filtered subtly, where others are blatant in their discrimination. As various Camarilla cities become pointedly cold toward the Giovanni, Banes doesn't realize or care she's gradually pushing the Clan to the welcoming arms of the Sabbat. Very few vampires are aware of the political stakes at play, but those who are face a series of dangerous choices. Some wish to discover who's perpetrating this campaign against the Necromancers, while others vigorously utilize the excuse to eliminate Giovanni enemies. The question of how the Inner Circle will react when they realize the Camarilla is being steered without their consent may soon be addressed. A coterie of Giovanni vampires may seek to reclaim their "good" name, and put down the Malkavian before she does permanent damage.

- The Sargon Fragment was destroyed in 1666, but Ambrogino Giovanni never stopped his quest for apotheosis. Giovanni's confident a reflection of the Sargon Fragment exists on the other side of the Shroud: a shadow copy of the Chaldean text purported to contain Cappadocius' ritual of the Anointing. He also knows Augustus and his small legion of bound childer, wraiths, and other monstrosities awaits him there, and is reluctant to make the journey himself. If he can find dupes willing to cross the Shroud and explore the shadow reflection of London, he will amply reward them with whatever is in his power to give. They won't be the first vampires he's sent on this insane mission. It could entail crossing paths with one of the most powerful Necromancers to have existed, in the form of a hungry, violent Uncle Auggie, whose own minions seek the same text.

THE WAY OF THREE EYES

Hoia-Baciu Forest, Transylvania, Romania

Writing a diary entry while being hunted through a forest, with only a horse to call company and dawn fast approaching, hardly seems a logical course.

If I fall here I want someone to understand why.

Here's the short version:

– The Salubri are active.

– Saulot has many forms.

– The Inconnu is real.

– Golconda actually works.

– Beware Hunedoara Castle.

– The Master of Ravens is a shitbag.

Here's the longer version. I hope with this compilation of journal entries and scraps from other sources, you'll piece together my journey and the destination. If it's all nonsense, however, leave the diary where you found it for someone more literate.

Beckett climbed the apartment block's stairwell as the strip lights above his head flickered unsettlingly. They cracked occasionally as a bug drawn to the glow found itself immolated in a flash of pain. This high-rise fell to disorder, mayhem, and ultimately abandonment mere nights before the archeologist's arrival. He hunted traces of the building's former occupants. Supposedly a coterie comprising one of the infamous Baali controlled the Johannesburg building, making every block resident a member of their herd. Such behavior

was common in this domain, long fought over between vampires of conflicting ideologies.

His experience taught him anything was possible — especially among Kindred — but rumors on the street were of a most revolting nature. Supposedly this Baali duped her entire coterie into making the kine in this building hosts to insects, sacrificing them in an orgy of mass consumption and bloodletting. Nobody knew what became of the coterie, as it was a delirious ghoul who told everyone the tale of the vampire with a nest of flies in her abdomen.

Beckett climbed over a barricade on the 25th floor, made from bedsteads and broken doors. The people in this building completely gave in to the manipulations of their Kindred wardens. Beckett muttered "Parasites…" as his booted feet hit the dried-blood stained linoleum on the obstacle's other side, thinking that nowhere else had a vampire's existence as bloodsucking extortionist been so pronounced as here. The coterie must have driven every mortal to the heights of paranoia and mania, and for what? A corralled food supply? Or was there another reason?

Beckett sniffed at some of the bodily fluids smeared up the wall. They were more recent than the other humors spilt about the floor and furnishings, and daubed into a vague pictograph. He stepped back and leaned on the stairwell railing, taking in the crude wall markings. Tilting his head to the left, a smug grin broke out across his face. "Etruscan. Why wouldn't it be?" Lowering his shades to blot out the dim red of his pupils, he continued his ascent into the dead structure. The code was a rite designed to draw the attention of some higher — or lower — power. Marked on the walls of the central floor, it enabled something demonic to inhabit the building from ground floor to rooftop.

At the 30th floor, the vampire antiquarian passed by a swimming pool in which bags of refuse, furniture, and even a couple of corpses floated. The water was an ill yellow color, and the rancid odor snaked into his dead nostrils. As he skirted the pool's exterior, he paused. A tiny motion rippled across the pool's surface. Tracing the minor wave back to its source, Beckett's eyes narrowed as he spied one of the bloated bodies' fingers twitching in the water. With a reluctant sigh, he reached out to the corpse with a long-handled net obtained from the wall. Pulling the form towards him, he realized the large body had a shaft of wood stuck through the center of its chest. His interest piqued, Beckett hauled the body onto the stained tiles surrounding the pool, and — with claws bared — pried free the impaling article.

Immediately, the body thrashed and screamed. Using a strength rarely exerted, Beckett pressed down on the form to prevent any further injury, as well as to protect himself from any frenzy-induced attack. Eventually the waterlogged figure slowed its movements, and in a two-toned, androgynous voice, spoke to the Gangrel. "I am damned. Now you are damned also. Welcome, my children."

Beckett contemplated his response as he studied the body. It was humanoid in a loose sense, though its features had been shaved off prior to staking, making any form of identification difficult. Practically a ball with stumps instead of limbs, and a mottled,

Are you sure you mean 'I'm a J.G. Ballard novel'? -Q

puckered head, it was possible this creature was once a Sewer Rat. Beckett stood as he came to a sudden realization. "If you're Kindred, you shouldn't have been floating."

As horror dawned on Beckett, the bulbous being's abdomen stretched and split. Its sphincter mouth gurgled with laughter like an emptying drain as hundreds of tiny frogspawn-like amoebas spilled from the creature's gut. This monster's unborn offspring had been keeping it afloat — a rolling incubator in the warm tower block's water. Beckett stepped back, nearly falling into the pool. As he tottered in place, waving his arms for balance, he felt the spawn latching onto his feet and making their way up his legs—

Okulos: Well? Carry on! What happened next?

Anatole: You continue, Lu. This tale is starting to bore me, and I'm tired of adding artistic embellishment.

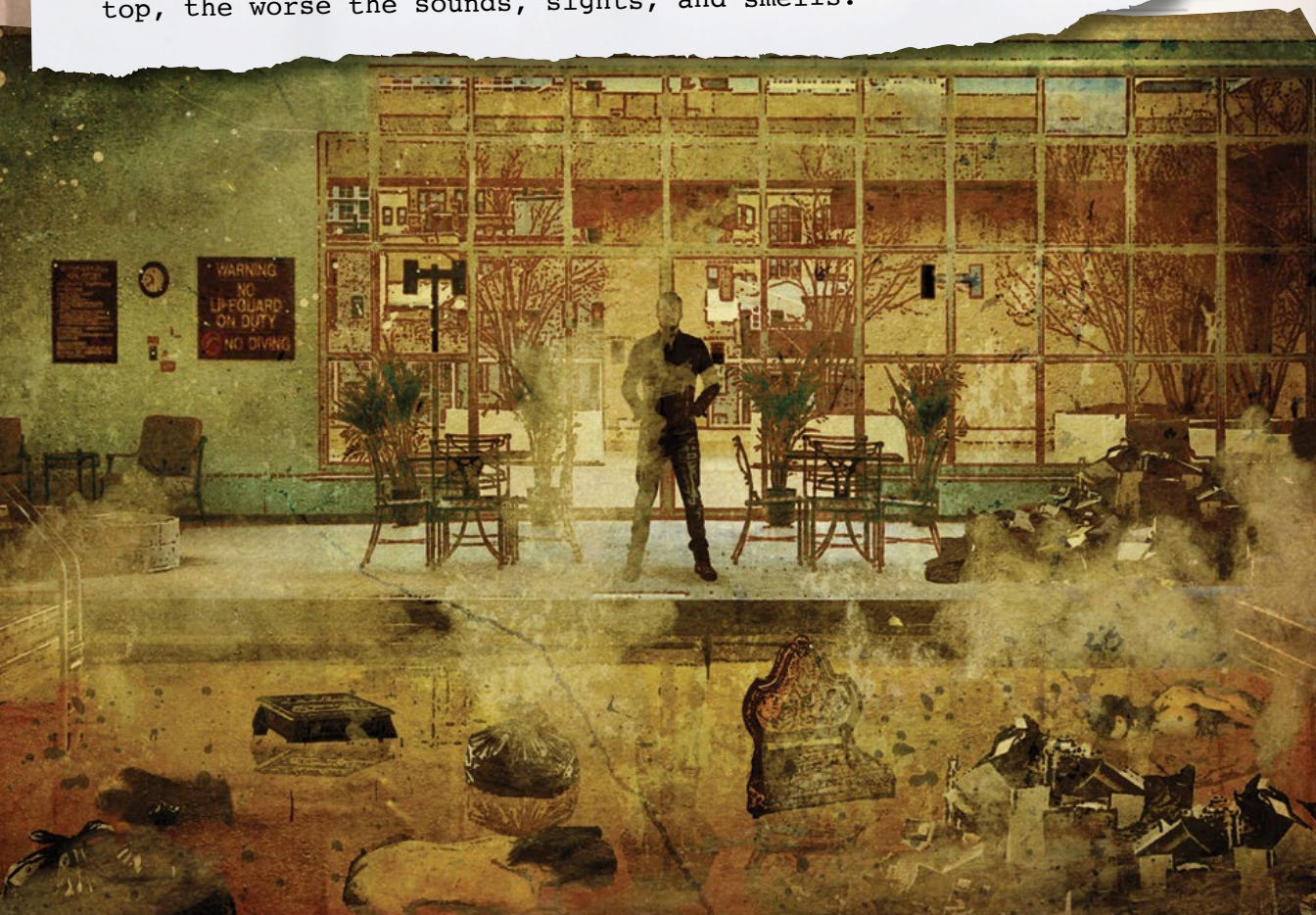
Lucita: Our hero screamed, fell backwards into the pool, swam as if his life depended on it — which it probably did — and removed his trousers before climbing up the diving board. I was making my way up the other side of the building when I heard his shrieks, and raced to his location. I found him in flagrante delicto with a flotation device.

Okulos: What of the corpulent corpse?

Lucita: Still cackling when I arrived, and attempting to pull itself to its stump-feet.

Okulos: This really happened?

Anatole: Every damn thing. If hell gets worse the further down one does, this place was an inversion. The closer I was to the rooftop, the worse the sounds, sights, and smells.



Lucita: When stumpy caught sight of me, it wrenched a grille from one of the water overflow drains, and threw itself inside. I blow-torched any offspring latched upon Beckett's legs. Most of them followed mother down the drain.

Anatole: The leg hair still hasn't grown back.

Okulos: I assume neither of you followed this thing into the sewer?

Lucita: He said that if you were there, he would have asked you to enter the drains, but no.

Okulos: A true friend.

Lucita: The remainder of our search turned up nothing living. Nothing sapient, anyway. Plenty of corpses — mortals, we believe — stuffed with hives of parasites. Obscene. All of it.

Anatole: Whether it was evidence of Baali activity in Johannesburg, or just a Nosferatu with entomomania, it was all kinds of wrong. There was only one course of action available to us.

Okulos: You burned down the building.

Rebekah: Actually, I did that.

Beckett: [far from the recorder] Are you lot talking about me?

[Recording ends]

REBEKAH



Clan of Kings; Jerusalem *9 BCE. Sidon #12 CE. Childe of Elihu.

A mortal of Judaea in what was a historically and religiously significant time, R. grew to experience the popular uprising of peasant Jews. She participated as a zealot and *sicarii* — dagger-woman — against her Roman oppressors. Embraced by a powerful Patrician, R. sought a route beyond the accumulation of influence, and now spends much of her eternal life searching for enlightenment beyond her current state. Using the death of her sire as impetus, she clings to the Golconda myth, claiming to have once achieved that lofty state. At this time, she is believed wayward from Golconda's path. R. supposedly claims membership in the Inconnu, though this is impossible to verify. R. is a suspected diablerist.

danceswithbats started the conversation

INABSENTIA joined the conversation

MasquedMuscle joined the conversation

danceswithbats: I met a Salubri.

INABSENTIA: bs

MasquedMuscle:	Nothing escapes the Warlocks. The house always wins.
danceswithbats:	I ain't lying!! There was one hiding out in Bath for centuries. Apparently it was an ancient sanctuary for them! The Winchester Warlocks never got to her.
INABSENTIA:	where is she now
danceswithbats:	She said she was hunting for her founder, but this is the weird part
danceswithbats:	The Salubri founder got ate by the Tremere founder
MasquedMuscle:	Maybe she is hunting down the chief Warlock. Is she old?
danceswithbats:	She had a ye olde way of talking but I didn't see her rip souls out of bodies or turn into mist so no idea
INABSENTIA:	what was her name
danceswithbats:	Bethany, but don't get any ideas. You're not making a snack of her!! She was cool.
INABSENTIA:	not why i was asking but ty for the trust
INABSENTIA:	master of ravens
INABSENTIA:	he wrote to me and says he wants to deliver the word of saulot to his children
INABSENTIA:	says hes summoning them to him in romania
INABSENTIA:	wondered if **@MasquedMuscle** knew about this being in bucharest
MasquedMuscle:	Romania is a big country. Many of us have heard of the Master of Ravens but I haven't heard this in particular. A saying in Elysium is "go to Hunedoara if you want an interesting life." Dracula and this Master both make havens there.
INABSENTIA:	well you might wanna tell your prince that a lot of salubri are about to arrive in hunewhatever
MasquedMuscle:	What did the two of you have to talk about anyway?
danceswithbats:	Loads! She's like an old school Christian, so we had a good chat about faith. She comes from this old belief that we're angels. It's really cool actually. I was sad to see her go.
God45 joined the conversation	
God45:	Good evening, all. What are we talking about?
MasquedMuscle:	Hi **@God45**. Apparently a congregation of Kindred is due in Hunedoara.

Crusade: Toronto

Dear readers, my fellow sensates of the unusual and sublime.

I participated in something wonderful tonight.

We burned every Zealot in Toronto.

The colors of the flames. They were marvelous.

The sounds of the screams. They were orgasmic.

We snuffed those juvenile Rabble, with their dreams of Cainite egalitarianism.

How did we finally crush those upstart fledglings?

A man came to my pack, my fellow sensates, with his pack Cold Blood.

He had three eyes.

The third dripped blood.

His face bore a perpetual scowl.

Hate fueled him.

He had studied Toronto's "Kindred" for years, and needed a pack to carry out his will.

We gladly served the man, acting as his blades and bullets.

We demolished their "Elysium" without mercy.

We staked every Zealot with precision, as he commanded.

We slaked our thirst on their vitae.

We covered their bodies in alcohol, and our benefactor appeared.

He struck his lighter and tossed it into the pyre.

Only as the flames reached the ceiling did he smile.

Only as the stakes burned up and the victims awoke did he laugh.

This Fury, he thanked us for our service.

I asked his name.

He declared he was Izrafel, Heaven's Herald.

For a crusader, he was utterly Zen, until he wasn't.

For a warrior, he was quite the learned scholar, until it came time to drop his books.

He wants the Sword of Caine to remember its faith.

His next stop is Ottawa.

Be prepared to follow this crusader's every word.

—Popinski

From: magnusal@sunburst.de

To: aisling.sturbridge@fiveboroughs.com

Subject: A Gift

Few of Saulot's line exist in these nights, but those extant act surreptitiously. They sneak among the Sects, they manipulate powerful enemies, they bend the ears of Red Listers. I have evidence at least one is within the Inconnu. They conspire towards your Clan's destruction.

I make my way to New York, and to you. I believe that to ensure your survival, you must meet with one of the more rational Salubri. They have at least two castes: Healer and Warrior. The Warriors cannot be broken.

I bring a Healer to you, staked and chained. Be warned, my dear. He wounded me grievously when I seized him, and when seeing what he had done, attempted to drain the soul from my body. I was too quick for him, but you must be quicker still. He will attempt to deceive you with talk of Golconda, of redemption for our kind.

Do not listen to his honeyed words. I hand him to your Clan because I would sooner believe a Warlock than a Souleater. Pry every truth from him. Torture him if you must. Destroy him with fire.

These infernalists must be eradicated, and your Clan is dragging its heels.

Albertus Magnus

Childe of Procet

Childe of Critias

Childe of Menele

Childe of Troile

Regio Train, Approaching Simeria Station, Romania

We are not approaching Hunedoara to tour the ancient battlefield. In recent months I sought answers to the Master of Ravens' identity and purpose. It was in Hunedoara I received visions of Saulot, Salubri, and Tremere in a state of some duress, as well as the pathway to Golconda. I would discover more of these revelations.

Rebekah was a pilgrim in Africa when we encountered her in Johannesburg. Though she sought meditative solitude, we persuaded her to accompany us on our hunt for elusive infernalists. I secretly hoped Rebekah would provide a little intelligence regarding Chicago's political state, what with the mental intrusion I suffered during my last extended visit to the Windy City.

Swiftly, a need to destroy any infernalists we met consumed her. She alluded to their deaths as possibly pushing her back onto "the path." I mentioned her quest sounded like the Master of Ravens' "One True Way." She started discussing Golconda openly, which led me to mention Hunedoara, and now we travel together in Romania.

[RECORDING BEGINS]

[SOME PORTIONS OF AUDIO GUESSED AT, DUE TO BACKGROUND TRAIN NOISE]

Beckett: So who's your tip for new Prince of Chicago?

Rebekah: Man, I honestly couldn't care less.

Beckett: It's your domain! You must have a vested interest.



Rebekah: I observed. That's all I ever did, you know? On behalf of the Inconnu.

Beckett: You rank as the first person to ever introduce themselves as "of the Inconnu," by the way. It's refreshing.

Rebekah: Formerly of the Inconnu. I was given the shove after falling from the path.

Beckett: You sound morose.

Rebekah: An eternity. It felt like a goddamned eternity, attempting to never stray, never fail. Now I've lost the path, and it's fucking hard to find it again.

Beckett: But you don't hold with the Master of Ravens' "One True Way."

Rebekah: Nah. He's a con-artist, or as my sire would say; "a charlatan and manipulator." He offers a path, but not mine. His path leads only to enslavement and damnation. The Baali — your buddy in Jo'burg included — were formed from following what they were *told* was the path to Golconda. It instead took them to hell.

Beckett: What do you hope to find in Hunedoara?

Rebekah: Back atcha.

Beckett: Sorry?

Rebekah: I'm not the only person on the overnight train. I assume you're not looking for Golconda.

Beckett: Ah, I see. No, not in a spiritual sense. But if there's truth to it, and the Inconnu, I would record such things.

Oh, they're everywhere. The problem is, nobody thinks to ask! -A

Rebekah: I can attest to the truth of both.

Beckett: I'm sorry, but you claim to have discovered Golconda but lost it. You claim to have held membership in the Inconnu but lost it. Either you're very careless, or the two aren't as soluble as their myths purport. If you've achieved enlightenment, you don't suddenly forget how. Wouldn't you have other contacts in the Inconnu who could tell you what you need to do to regain entry?

Rebekah: A lesser woman would slap the taste outta your mouth. The closest comparison I can give you is to a drug addiction, or recovering from it.

I'm not lesser, and I would still do it. I have, in fact, many times.–L

Beckett: Go on.

Rebekah: Well you know an alcoholic is always an alcoholic, whether they last had a drink yesterday, or half a century before. Once you realize you're susceptible to the addictive drive, you can never allow yourself to slip. Let's say you attend group sessions, you confront your problems, you talk about them openly, you lock away your demons. You're good, for as long as you remain in recovery. Then you take a drink just once because everyone around you is doing the same. The gates are flung wide, man. Hell comes pouring through, and off the wagon you fall. From what you've told me about Hunedoara and Mahtiel, there may be a group of recovering addicts like myself, who need to help one another back onto the path.

Beckett: So the Inconnu is like a cross between rehab and an Alcoholics Anonymous meeting, and Golconda is sobriety?

Rebekah: Why not, if it helps you understand. Nobody can walk the path alone, or at least, it's hard. The only one who succeeded was Saulot. He founded the virtuous path. He taught the 12-step program for vampires. Golconda seekers attempt to mirror his spirit, and the Inconnu attempt to mirror his motives. That's my understanding. Whatever his plans and testament, it's never stored in one place. A document can be corrupted with time. Take the Authorized King James Bible. Load of horseshit, because the unenlightened got to it.

Beckett: You use vulgar argot well, for someone Embraced two millennia ago.

Rebekah: The Inconnu hide in plain sight. We're better at it than the Camarilla. No elders prancing around in togas or wearing crowns. Part of the disguise is speaking the language.

Beckett: Can I draw out any of your thoughts on Chicago?

Rebekah: [sighs] Fine. The good money's on Maxwell, Kevin Jackson, or DuSable. You've got experience, widespread influence over the kine, and Sect backing across those three. I'd place Sir Walter and Capone as also-rans. The Kindred detest Nash, and Capone's hardly discreet. They do have the power to back one of the top three into the big chair, however. My dark horse pick would be Maldavis. She's gained a groundswell of support and seems capable of outthinking a lot of us Blue Bloods. Of course, she'd be angling for Baron instead of Prince, but she won't say no to praxis if it's on a plate.

Beckett: Doesn't narrow it down, particularly.

Rebekah: I'm not a damn bookie, prick. You want a name? Fine. Jackson as Prince, Capone or Sovereign as Ventrue Primogen. If the Council permit a Prince — and that's a big *if* — it'll be one they all know, one they can put in the firing line, and one they can control. They may be wrong in their estimations about how much control they'd have over him, but Kevin Jackson is the name on their lips. They also want a Blue Blood to measure against him in their Primogen enclave. The Council sure as fuck won't pick Ballard — I hear he worked with Erichtho to dig up a ton of dirt on the domain's Degenerates, Annabelle included. Strange bedfellows, but we live in strange times. His recent indecent exposure incidents, public to the kine, scuppered any and all of his chances for praxis.

I'd back Neally. He's been selling Gabbat information to the Camarilla for years. A number of Archons owe him. -O

Beckett: I'll be sure to place my bet when I get back to American soil.

From: aisling.sturbridge@fiveboroughs.com

To: beckett@schreckNET.nod

Subject: Hunedoara

Beckett

The Master of Ravens increases his contact with Tremere fledglings, attempting to lure them from the Pyramid. I am confident he is someone with inside information regarding my Clan.

You traveled to Hunedoara before, seeking him, but found no Kindred in that domain outside Dracula's castle. On Chantry maps, we have Hunedoara marked as a place of great magical importance, yet no Tremere are permitted to investigate the location.

All intelligence points to the Master of Ravens being a resident. He invites Kindred to this city, if they wish to follow his "One True Way." Maybe he is one of Hunedoara's Inconnu. If he works against them, it seems strange he sits directly on their doorstep. Perhaps his presence serves a purpose?

In any case, be wary. Dracula wants you back. I'm compelled to wonder about such a strong core of Kindred in one location. Are all of them connected? If so, why are they not destroying each other?

Aisling Sturbridge

"He that loves reading has everything within his reach."

William Godwin

Romania's Kindred

We all know about that rogue, Vlad Dracul, but what of the other vampires in Romania?

The old country is a dreadfully-gauche oddity of vampires. Home to a mixture of the oldest Camarilla Kindred, the most traditional of Sabbat Cainites, and a slew of elders too old to give a fig about sectarian politics. In the middle of the mix are the Blue Blood Securitate — a self-titled Anarch militia formed during the Ceaușescu regime. They routinely attempt to wrest Bucharest from the Tzimisce Prince. A Prince of the old form, you understand.

Strangest of all is the rumored Inconnu presence, and the regular missions sent forth from Vienna to rout them. None of these attempts have met with success, yet Warlocks schlep to Hunedoara every decade or so to find them.

On the subject of Hunedoara, it's believed the county will soon play host to a horde of foreign Kindred, invited by our friend the Master of Ravens. Ravens has been acting the part of trickster in Romania for years, so who knows what he has planned?

Whatever it is, I'm sure it'll act as passing entertainment for many a jaded vampire. Maybe you should join the party.

— MrMysterio

Hunedoara Castle Ruins, Hunedoara, Romania

Rebekah and I scoured the ruins of Hunedoara Castle, looking for a secret entrance to an underground haven, the ashes or torpid forms of Kindred, or any sign of habitation. We found none of these things, until just now.

Rebekah examined practically every mortal with whom we dealt. While she sensed something strange, she couldn't pinpoint a domitor's location. For all intents and purposes, it's as if Hunedoara City is absent of Kindred, despite a glut of ghouls.

And then "just now" happened. The castle ruins are a tourist attraction, but not typically in the middle of the night. We suddenly found ourselves among at least a dozen Kindred and their servants, all just arrived. When asked their purpose here, one of them, a tattooed male later identified as Matthew, smiled and said "Saulot is here."

That's when the Master of Ravens appeared and spoke from a crumbling parapet.

[RECORDING BEGINS]

Ravens: I beckoned, and you came. You made the perilous journey. Welcome, to Hunedoara.

[murmuring of approval and welcomes in return]

Ravens: I know some of you question your attendance. Some cannot fathom why they traveled here. In the spirit of honesty, I admit

I coaxed each of you, for I have a connection to each of you. I have that power. But I did not misuse it. I assure you of that.

Matthew: You told us Master Saulot was here. Are you he?

[CROWD MURMURING INCREASES IN VOLUME]

Ravens: By no means, Matthew, childe of Matthias. Saulot is here, but I am merely his herald. [pause] I see some consternation from the Warlocks in attendance…

Obaluaye: There are Usurpers here?!

[shouting, proclamations, and threats rage until the Master of Ravens speaks above them]

Ravens: Look upon me! Better. The Warlocks are to be your meal, children of Saulot! They are here, served to you so you might feast and reclaim your power!

[SCREAMS AND JOSTLING AS THE MASTER OF RAVENS' SERVANTS MAKE THEIR PRESENCE KNOWN]

Franckel: No! I came here with promises of Golconda!

Shinsegawa: You promised us freedom from the Pyramid.

Ravens: You will achieve the same freedom as the Cainites you destroyed all those centuries ago.

Shinsegawa: That wasn't us, asshole.

Varrick: My grandsire wasn't even Embraced when that happened!

Ravens: Sin is sin, Warlocks. You must accept the sins of your fathers to find the One True Way.



Master of Ravens is of my line. He's not as ancient as many think.-A

Matthew: No! We will not kill these children. Even if some of them hold responsibility for our ruined state, we are not their judges. Leave that to God.

Ravens: Saulot permits it.

Obaluaye: I see no Saulot here.

Ravens: He *is* here. Watching. Just in the shadows. Along with the rest of the Inconnu. Cowards.

Matthew: I can feel Master Saulot close by…

Varrick: Is that what I feel? Oh gods, no.

Izrafel: Why do we not visit retribution on these deserving Usurpers? Matthew, surely the Healers have suffered indignity long enough! Obaluaye, I am sure the Nkulu Zao would see the Clan restored! These bastards need to burn!

Obaluaye: It is a falsehood, brother. If Saulot existed, he would have preserved our Clan!

Ravens: You think I lie? There is an intact castle here, though none of you see it yet. It houses 12 vampires, all pursuing Golconda. You can only see them if they permit it. Saulot walks the corridors of the castle, giving advice to each one of them. They watch as you struggle to survive, and do nothing to assist. They save themselves and sacrifice the world. These are your masters. They control your Jyhad.

[Several vampires attempted to leave at this point, but found themselves bound within the castle site's confines]

Rebekah: The castle exists, as do its inhabitants.

Ravens: I did not invite you.

Malkavian? Hardly.
My sources confirm he is either Degenerate or Blue Blood.-L

Rebekah: I was of the Inconnu. I know my Hunedoara holds redemption.

Ravens: You followed the One True Way?

Rebekah: Stick your "Way" up your ass. Saulot knows Golconda, and you are right, he is here. You're a pretender. Saulot saves only those capable of being saved.

Shinsegawa: I am Anathema for a reason, and will show you why if you maintain these wards. Do not test me!

Matthew: Let them go! We will not kill for your entertainment, or to frustrate Master Saulot. We are better than that.

Ravens: A pity. I now give you the option, Warlocks. You have half a dozen Salubri in your presence. You may destroy them with impunity. My servants will even help you. Think of the acclaim you'll receive from Vienna. But act quickly. They may slaughter you, before you have the chance—

[SUDDEN SCREAMS AND SOUNDS OF VIOLENCE FOLLOWED BY INTERFERENCE AS BECKETT RUNS AND HIDES]

Beckett: For the benefit of the tape: This is chaos. The Warlocks took the initiative, as ever. Some Salubri likewise fight. A surprising number do nothing. None leave, when they might. Rebekah is trying to claw her way to the Master of Ravens. Is he attempting some blood sacrifice?

Ravens: No, Beckett.

Beckett: Jesus!

Ravens: That Master up there is an illusion. *I* am quite real!

[SOUNDS OF VIOLENCE ENSUE]

[RECORDING ENDS]

THE MASTER OF RAVENS



Clan unknown; *unknown, #unknown, Childe of Unknown

An intensely charismatic vampire with a cult in his thrall, M. harbors an obsessive jealousy toward the Inconnu, and would see it collapse. He believes Golconda to be a tool of manipulation, and that the "enlightened" become such due to their divesting personal responsibility for their actions. M. despises Saulot, having once drank the Antediluvian's vitae and recognizing the bond as a form of enslavement. M. is possibly the source of rumors that Saulot fathered the Baali and that the Salubri are diablerists by nature. His recent activities in Hunedoara speak to an attempt at mocking Saulot, Golconda, the Inconnu, and the vampires present. I am informed he attempted a ritual through the spillage of Salubri and Tremere vitae, which if successful, would lure members of the Inconnu from hiding.

Hunedoara (Ruthven) Castle, Hunedoara, Romania

Rebekah and Ravens were correct. The castle here is real, once you know of it. And Saulot – or some part of Saulot, maybe his most ardent disciple – is here too.

The 12 other occupants each pursue Golconda in their own way, following Saulot's guidance or striving on their own. They style themselves Inconnu, and possess reach beyond the shadow castle in which they dwell

As the Master of Ravens met my blows with equal ferocity – I suspect him a Deceiver or fellow Animal – I was plucked into the true castle by one of its

inhabitants, Abdalkutba of the Clan of the Hunt. He was short with words, but brought me immediately to Danika Ruthven and Cretheus, a Fiend and a Patrician, respectively.

They explained the Master of Ravens harbors one hell of a grudge against Saulot. Cret speaks glowingly of Saulot's wisdom, and uses his fellow resident Demetrius as evidence of Golconda's reality. As I spent time in the castle, I couldn't deny the lack of feeding taking place, the wisdom shared by each of its philosophical inhabitants, and the restraint when tempers might otherwise flare.

I also cannot deny the lack of friendship or courtesy. These Kindred detest one another. A great burden hangs over the group, the nature of which they would not describe.

Mahtiel visited me in a dream, as she did months before. Contrarily to Tsang, her family member in Hong Kong, she believes Saulot is the only hope for Kindred. She states earnestly his path to Golconda removes all aspects of our curse, in time. A life of purity is required – behaving more human than humans do. She showed me visions of what existence could be were even a dozen Princes adherents of Golconda. It was quite something. I awoke weeping.

At the foot of my bed sat a small boy. He bore a third eye in his forehead, and smiled upon me warmly. We exchanged no words, but I could see great sadness in his eyes. It was as if he'd already given up on me, and his own childer. He mourned our loss. Perhaps I'm too much a cynic for his Golconda. Was this Saulot, a manifestation, or some other, unintroduced Kindred?

I fell back to slumber as the third eye bathed me in a soothing glow. When I awoke again, sensitive digits had replaced my once jagged fingernails. The layers of fur across my body were gone, replaced with my natural hair. The only feature he declined to remove was the red tinge to my eyes.

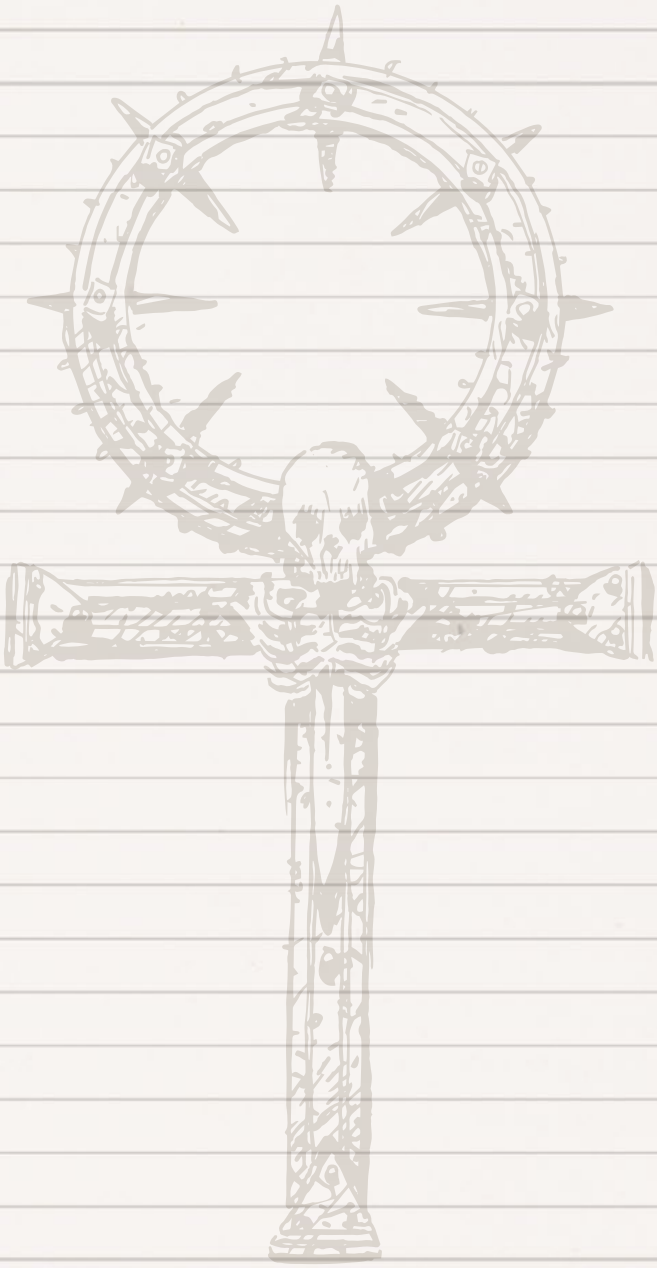
I felt like calling out to him in sarcastic thanks, but a voice in my head, possibly Mahtiel, said "don't push it."

As I went to join the 12 for their nightly debate, and present them with my dreams, Cretheus told me it was time to leave. A great ritual was soon to be enacted, and I could not remain. I protested, and he insisted. For the first time I saw the

hunger of our kind in each of their eyes. It was a terrifying sight – such placid, contemplative vampires, just a hair away from carnage.

As Abdalkutba escorted me to the gates, he gave me a horse. He told me to it would be best to ride immediately, as the Master of Ravens still waited without, along with his cult. They knew I would emerge, and when I did, the hunt would begin.

I stopped to write this entry. Now I ride.



The One True Way

Can one successfully follow the road of Golconda without membership and support from the Inconnu? If so, can one join the Inconnu without already having embraced Golconda? Did Saulot have such a riddle in mind when he first proposed Golconda as an alternative to the drives of the Blood?

The Master of Ravens believes Golconda a tool to manipulate, extort, and subjugate. He twists Golconda and the Inconnu to his own purposes, using its promise for each of those three objectives. As to who and what the Master of Ravens actually is, or what his goals may truly be, Kindred can only speculate. He expands his cult and sets bloodlines to war with one another, possibly for amusement, but more likely to strike out against the former master he so deeply resents.

Saulot. Is he a sinner, a saint, or something in between? It is impossible to decipher the motivations of a vampire so ancient as this Antediluvian, yet of all the Clan founders, none provoke so much intrigue. He draws disciples like prospectors to gold. Vampires still cling to his mystery, becoming experts in his bacchanalian range of crimes, or devotees to his holy legend. The Inconnu in Hunedoara Castle do not believe the tales of his inhabiting Tremere's body. He's right there with them after all, in the hidden castle.

Hunedoara's Inconnu are but 12 members of the most elusive Sect. Perhaps the Inconnu are the Jyhad's true masters. Their complex layers of secrecy entangle and destroy all who attempt to penetrate them. The Inconnu may seek Golconda for all enlightened vampires, and damn the rest. They may also seek to control all they survey. What is clear, is their reach is broader than initially suspected. Their Monitors haven in every major domain in the world, no matter the Sect in power.

Rebekah, once of Chicago, was one such Monitor. She fell from Golconda, and communication with other Inconnu agents abruptly ceased. Now she seeks to rejoin via the Inconnu of Hunedoara Castle. She may be beneath their interests, or they may be under orders to not offer her sanctuary. They only pulled Beckett to safety during the Master of Ravens' skirmish. If they turn away a vampire like Rebekah, what secrets might she offer the other Sects?

External forces ensnare the Salubri between them. As has ever been the case, the Unicorns serve as the Jyhad's sacrificial lamb. Saulot will not save them. The Master of Ravens will use them. The Inconnu know the Salubri each harbor the capacity for Golconda — perhaps more so than any other Clan. Though no vampires give the order, many Monitors reach out to the surviving Salubri and offer protection, and potential membership in their Sect, contingent on their turning the Furies from the Sword of Caine. The Clan must heal itself before the Inconnu will provide salvation.

If there is one true way to Golconda, it could be that of the Master of Ravens, or Saulot, or even one of the Inconnu in Hunedoara. Alternatively, the one true way may simply be realizing one's humanity does not need changing or discarding. A vampire may still feel loss, love, tragedy, and joy. Perhaps being capable of touching these most basic of human emotions is enough to put Kindred on the one true path: Humanity.

These conflicting forces spawn many chronicles:

- The Salubri antitribu grow impatient. Adonai speculates the Regent intentionally delays the long-awaited crusade against Warlocks and their vapid Camarilla lackeys. As word filters throughout the Warrior Salubri that their own Sect may be holding them back, packs containing Furies launch unsanctioned raids on Canadian and American Camarilla domains, approval be damned. The effective assaults terrify the Ivory Tower, and inspire zealotry among their allies. These activities draw undesired attention however. Following a successful crusade in Toronto, the Salubri moved out, and the Society of Leopold moves in to investigate the mess. The remaining Sabbat packs pay the price for the Furies' anger. Now the Regent wants a conservative pack of troubleshooters to "soothe the Furies' Beasts."
- The domain of Bath was once designated a sanctuary for the persecuted, but this mandate disappeared with Mithras' destruction. Few Tremere remember, but many Salubri hid within the safety of Bath's walls. A vampire familiar with the domain's ancient lore could stand to benefit, either by leading the Warlocks to the resting place of several torpid Salubri, or waking the Salubri and giving them forewarning of a potential purge. He entrusts this knowledge to a coterie of his friends one night, asking their advice on which prospect he should pursue.

- Many Salubri feel the Master of Ravens' summons to Romania, and few are capable of resisting. Unbeknownst to the Unicorns, the Master of Ravens' Tremere targets receive the same summons. Word leaks that Hunedoara is due to receive an army of vampires, spurring inquisitors to make their own journey to the castle ruins. Though the Salubri and Tremere arrive first, carnage awaits anyone who stays for longer than a single night. Opportunistic Kindred could act as saviors, or benefit from the deaths of enemies they urge to join the Romanian gathering. The Inconnu of Castle Hunedoara observe all activity beyond its borders, and mark the behavior of any Kindred involved in manipulating the Master of Ravens' arranged situation.

- A three-eyed vampire brazenly appears in Elysium pronouncing Golconda a reality. He offers tutelage to any Kindred who accept Saulot's word as truth. He brings peace to vampires succumbing to their Beasts. Monstrous vampires become meditative, and remorseful for former sins. As the Warlocks start to show an interest in this spiritual tutor, a bomb explodes in his haven. The Sheriff discovers several sets of ashes and quickly disperses them. The tutor's former protégés swiftly fall to uncontrollable rage and deplorable behavior. It's the Warlocks who request a coterie investigate the cause of the explosion and whether the tutor is actually dead. They believe they're being framed; the entire Golconda experiment an elaborate con.

- The Master of Ravens' cult of Golconda adherents disperses around the world, offering the One True Way to troubled Kindred. At first the Ravens meet with reluctance. Their leader's infamy brands the group troublemakers and malcontents. Yet, as their experiments in focusing the Beast on select targets and pursuits meet with success, more hopefuls show tentative interest. A new spiritual faction of Kindred develops, its true agenda — if different to the one they advertise — unknown to any but the Master of Ravens. For the first time since the Cainite Heresy, a belief system manifests in select domains. The Inconnu desire this burgeoning group destroyed before they inextricably dig their claws into Kindred society. They pay any who work against the Ravens highly, in information of their choice.

- Hunedoara's Inconnu loathe the Master of Ravens. He constantly undermines their agents and sows malevolent tales regarding Saulot and their attempts at Golconda. They have never been able to reach the Master of Ravens with their retainers, and they cannot leave Castle Hunedoara without subjecting themselves to a soul-destroying curse. Additionally, Saulot has commanded they must never destroy him. The 12 reach out to a capable coterie with all the information they have on the Master of Ravens, encouraging them to discover his true identity in order to track his whereabouts and uncover a weakness. They promise the coterie responsible membership among the Inconnu of the castle. Of course, they don't tell their charges the nature of the curse imprisoning them.

- Tower block invasions in Johannesburg are tragically commonplace, forcing mortal tenants to pay rent to extortionists in place of their evicted landlords. A number of Baali take inspiration from this initiative. They pursue their vile experiments and commit mass sacrifices of both Kindred and kine within these unusual prisons, knowing no Cainites will investigate if they believe gangs responsible. In Johannesburg and other domains, the Baali work towards some terrible destination, and it may be up to vampires of all Sects to obstruct the Devils before it's too late.

- Bethany of Ely, a Healer Salubri formerly of the Cainite Heresy and long torpid in the British Isles, snaps from the Master of Ravens' summons as she reaches Vienna. Realizing the imminent danger, she goes to ground, spying on the Usurpers as they serve the city Chantry. Bethany commences study of her founder, upon hearing rumors of his being in Vienna and Hunedoara simultaneously. The lore she discovers across Austria troubles her. According to ancient Koldunic records, Saulot split his personality in two, following Enoch's example of pouring all evil into one childe, so the original form may reach a level of untainted glory. Bethany fears revealing her presence, but desperately reaches out to a coterie to discover the truth of this legend. She believes that this tale — if true — may explain how a being as holy as Saulot may also be wicked enough to found the Baali. The founder may be his childe, the Master of Ravens.



eyeonyou started the conversation

beckett91 joined the conversation

eyeonyou:	Glad you made it. Are you comfortable with this?
beckett91:	Yes. You took me through it last week. Are there really 90 other Becketts using this system?
eyeonyou:	You're a notorious figure. It'd be a crap online cover identity if you weren't so famous. It's a little like when Charlie Chaplin entered a lookalike competition and lost.
beckett91:	Did the Toreador Embrace him?
eyeonyou:	Buster Keaton, I think.
beckett91:	Christ.
beckett91:	Do I have to pay for every word on this system? Is it "secure," as they say?
eyeonyou:	How do you even get dressed each night without my help?

oldgator joined the conversation

beckett91:	I confess I'm beginning to find trousers a real burden.
oldgator:	what have i walked in on
beckett91:	Calebros?
oldgator:	fucks sake why not just announce it with a loud hailer
eyeonyou:	Sorry, oldgator. He's a moron at times.
oldgator:	then maybe hes not the guy
eyeonyou:	He's your guy
beckett91:	I'm the guy
oldgator:	you are not the guy
beckett91:	You contacted us for a reason.
oldgator:	it was you or de laurent and im starting to reconsider
beckett91:	I know you prefer your politics Camarilla side up. When, where, and why do we meet?

oldgator: the why is one word
oldgator: NICTUKU
oldgator: in caps for emphasis
beckett91: You've got my attention.
eyeonyou: Is this for real?
oldgator: i dont throw words like that around lightly
oldgator: ive valuable intel for the recipient who might do something useful with it
beckett91: As I said, I'm the guy.
oldgator: youd better fucking be
oldgator: 39.3587° N, 74.4198° W, THREE NIGHTS
oldgator left the conversation
eyeonyou: Looks like he wants to meet you in Atlantic City.
beckett91: Good. I guess I shut this down by clicking the button on the screen.
eyeonyou: No, that's the monitor.
eyeonyou: Are you still there?
eyeonyou: Imbecile. I suppose I'm going to have to print this for you.
eyeonyou left the conversation
mrmysterio joined the conversation
mrmysterio left the conversation
beckett91 timed out

AFA Gallery by Invite Only



Ambassador Katherine Wiese has returned from her sojourn to Athens with a companion: Elias Athanasios, a Greek Deviant with a passion for history and the arts proving contagious amongst the intelligentsia of New York's court.

With Prince Hellene's permission, Athanasios has begun the process of creating a private, patrons-only gallery/museum of Kindred-created objects d'art, and their associated historical documentation, if any exists, from around the globe.

Attendance at the gallery is by invitation only, so get friendly with your local Harpy!

AC Cemetery, Atlantic City, United States

I knew of Calebros, former Prince Pro Tempore of New York City, long before I ever met him – mostly because the very fact of his existence sent a little susurrus of unease through the world wherever he went. The Camarilla, as an entity, has absolutely no bloody idea what to do with a being who, having scaled the chancy heights of power and achieved one of the pinnacles of Kindred political and social influence,

not only didn't want to keep it, but dropped it like it was radioactive and ran away screaming as soon as pragmatically possible. This is hardly standard behavior, but it was Calebros' behavior, and after his resignation from his deeply undesired official capacity he didn't even choose to idle about in the city. He didn't loom large over the prospects of his successor and make noises about prestation debts or boons or any other such. Instead, he got out of Dodge, as they say, and continued dodging until he came to land in his present position, which seems temporary at best.

I was, admittedly, somewhat surprised. Calebros has a general reputation for preferring no society but his own – one of the reasons he found sitting in the princely catbird seat so thoroughly intolerable – and in the year prior to initiating contact with me he had dropped more or less utterly off the radar. Given that he broke his radio silence specifically to request the pleasure of my company, I could hardly be churlish enough to refuse, no matter what the restrictions or security requirements involved. He did not, fortunately, object to my assorted recording devices, or the presence of Okulos. Okulos was more than a little impressed by the countermeasures, electronic and otherwise, he employed to maintain the security of his haven against external scrutiny.

[RECORDING BEGINS]

Calebros: Good of you to come – I admit, I wasn't really certain you would, no matter what I dangled under your nose.

Beckett: Oh, I could hardly refuse. I've a message to deliver, after all.

Calebros: Oh?

Beckett: Yes. "Fuck you very much, too." I'm afraid that he's still working on the capacity for genuinely witty comebacks.

[A CHILD'S STRANGLED SCREAMING]

As I was there, I can confirm there was no strangulation. What Cesare is mistaking for screaming in his transcript was Calebros' laughter.-O

Calebros: Yeah, well – what can you expect? The possession of actual sarcasm is a crime punishable by final death in the House of Hardestadt.

Beckett: Quite. But, our mutual friend aside –

Calebros: Yeah, I know. You've come a long way and I've dangled at you. How up are you on events in New York?

Beckett: Current events? I believe Hellene Panhard's Prince, though I understand it's one of those things that nobody likes. Aisling Sturbridge is still Regent of the Five — I've had some correspondence with her. Otherwise — thankfully, neither my monkeys nor my circus.

Calebros: Nothing about the warren?

Okulos: Nothing of recent vintage. They moved the SchreckNET server farm to one of the outer boroughs just before that storm, and part of the tunnels were flooded for some time, but —

Calebros: You might wanna start thinking about adopting some monkeys.

Beckett: I thought they weren't *your* monkeys any longer, either.

Calebros: I don't have to be Prince to actually give a fuck. I have a feeling that neither do you, strictly solo mercenary adventurer bullshit notwithstanding. Something's going on there. I'd like to know what it is. How bad it is. How bad it could be.

Beckett: But you're certain it's bad.

[nails down a chalkboard?]

Calebros: Let's put it this way: In my wildest and most hopeful imaginings it's just the onset of age-related psychotic paranoia. But I kinda doubt that it is. You're familiar with the circumstances surrounding New York coming back into the fold? And I'm not talking about the lies of the crusading Cainites and their fucked-up attempts to claim credit for the WTC attacks.

Beckett: I've read the official version of events monograph. And I've talked to Pieterzoon. And now I'm talking to you.



Calebros: Yeah. There was some shit that went down that never made it into the after-action reports, I'll tell ya that right now. Some of it I...we...well, okay, everybody in the warren thought was Clan business. Nosferatu business. Now I ain't so sure.

Okulos: The Nictuku?

Calebros: Late in the action, when all the shit hitting the fan was coming to an end and the mopping up was starting we found... something...down below. We thought it was one of them.

Beckett: One of the Nictuku.

NICTUKU

N. is a term the Nosferatu use only in whispered rumors. With the exception of three Kindred not blood bound to their sire, the N. are said to be Absimiliard's angry progeny. Legends depict them as abhorrent, demonic creatures whose name alone brings an icy chill to the blood of every member of the Clan of the Hidden due to the task their sire burdened them with. They were told to hunt down and destroy each and every Nosferatu descended from the one not bound *OR they're a bloodline of cannibals descended from Baba Yaga restricted to feeding only on vitae. Fact check, before publication.*



Calebros: Yeah. You know, when *you* say it, it sounds pretty fucking stupid.

Beckett: It's the accent.

Calebros: Sure it is.

[CATS SCREECHING]

Calebros: Anyway. Information has recently come into my possession that makes me seriously doubt that theory. Unfortunately, the alternative is much, much fucking worse.

Okulos: Worse... how?

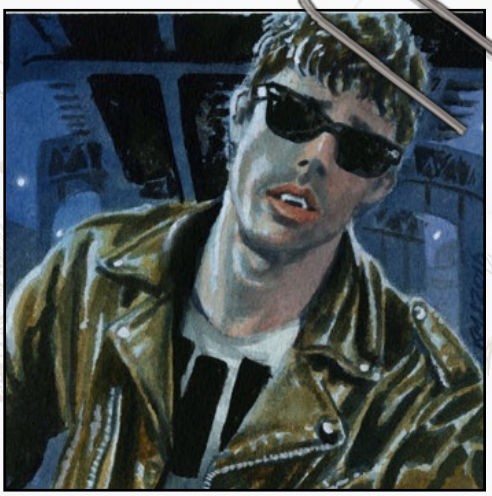
Calebros: Have you ever heard of Lambach Ruthven?

[RECORDING ENDS]

Dolphin Cove, Grand Cayman, Cayman Islands

Ruthven picked a perfect place to go to ground: three dollops of rock, the peaks of a suboceanic mountain ridge, floating in the middle of a warm turquoise sea, a

RUTHVEN, LAMBACH



Clan of Shapers; *ca. 1100 Childe of Tabak(?).

Sire of Dracula and suspected model for Polidori's "The Vampyre." Member of the Sabbat. One of the original Tzimisce rebels and a founding father of his Sect, R. is somehow a figure of contempt and ridicule within his own Clan. There are many vampires bearing the name R., making his genealogy difficult to trace. *Rumored destroyed during the siege of New York City, he actually emerged 1,000 miles away from the last place anyone saw him, on the islands of Prospero.*

place famous for its scuba diving, sea turtle conservation efforts, and selection of exotic offshore tax havens for the obnoxiously wealthy. Also for being the sole domain of the sort of lick who declares himself officially neutral in the ongoing scrimmages between the Sabbat and the Camarilla and has that neutrality respected, despite being literally surrounded by combatant territories, partly because he can enforce it quite efficiently and partly because he runs his domain as a safe haven for those seeking a little shelter from life's storms. I've washed up on those shores a time or two myself and I possess a standing invitation from the proprietor – I'm not going to say "Prince" because he doesn't consider himself one – to return whenever I might wish. That Ruthven ended up there too doesn't entirely surprise me. The proprietor – generally named Prospero for the sake of simplicity – has a habit of picking up strays. And Lambach Ruthven is most definitely a stray.

I am a good lad.

I spoke with the Eldest. Or father spoke to me. In me. Always in me. No matter how hard I swallow, grandfather won't go down.

He hungers and sewer workers won't cut it. I am a good lad, and brought him a bus full. Elderly. Watery blood. None will be missed. Group goes missing in Manhattan. Happens every night. ~ LR

The first (polite) phrase to come to mind when describing Lambach Ruthven is high strung. (Less polite? Twitchy.) The second? Without a doubt, melancholy. He possesses the fulsomely well-developed and self-preservatory sense of paranoia that all elders occupying positions of political significance develop, provided they're not actively suicidal, blended together with the sort of bone-deep sorrow you only encounter in those who've lived long enough to see everything they've tried to build fall apart around them – and they don't have either the will or the desire left to pick up the pieces.

For the record? I'm not entirely certain that Ruthven isn't actively suicidal.

We met at a little beachside restaurant on the largest of the three islands, where Cesare could have a meal that never saw the inside of an airport vending machine, at one of the outdoor tables with untouched frozen drinks melting in front of us and drunken American tourists strolling all about. I did not question his desire to meet somewhere so public, and he did not offer an explanation for it.

AFA Gallery "Brouhaha"



At the grand unveiling of Elias Athanasios' most recent exhibit — the spectacular dagger named The Crimson Sentinel — put-upon Sheriff Qadir al-Asmai made a remark that the legendary weapon might have been what was required to put Marcus Vitel of Washington, D.C. down once and for all.

This comment was heard passed from attendee to attendee until a version reached the willful ears of Katherine Wiese's childe. The Brujah claimed Qadir was intimating he'd not completed the job himself, as is widely reported, with a sword and the aid of Archon Theo Bell. A fight swiftly broke out, resulting in all Brujah now being forbidden to enter the AFA.

Elias is said to have found the antics amusing but, respecting the Tradition of Hospitality and laws of Elysium, enforced the terms of the Camarilla.

[RECORDING BEGINS]

Beckett: Thank you for agreeing to this meeting, Lord Ruthven.

Ruthven: You mistake me for another of my family. I am no Lord. But how could I refuse? You have made quite the name for yourself, Mr. Beckett – strolling across sectarian lines in your relentless search for truth. Even some of my own colleagues deign to respect your efforts.

Beckett: You'll forgive me if I find that reasonably gratifying.

Ruthven: Of course. But you did not travel all this way to engage in idle chatter, nor have I. Ask your questions...and I shall answer them.

Cousin Viorica visited on Damek's behalf. Wanted to know why my communication ceased. I showed her. The Eldest is fed. I am a good lad. ~ LR

Beckett: I have it on excellent authority you have direct and personal knowledge of an entity of unknown provenance residing in the sewers below New York City. Manhattan Island to be specific.

Ruthven: Not the sewers.

Beckett: You really just said that, didn't you?

Ruthven: [forced laughter] You expected denials? Prevarication? Evasions, perhaps?

Beckett: Honestly? Yes.

Ruthven: Why in the name of all the gods would I do that? I know what you are here for, Mr. Beckett. I know why you have come all this way and what you want of me. And, moreover, I know that, no matter what I say to you tonight, no matter what dark and terrible secrets pour past my lips, there is nothing that you or I or anyone can do with them.

Beckett: As you'd have it, then. Calebros and a handful of the other Nosferatu still residing in New York's warren think it's a Nictuku, or something close enough not to matter. He also suggested that you think it's something else — someone got lucky with some personal papers of yours and they found their way into his hands. I'd like to hear the story from your own lips.

Ruthven: [forced laughter] No...I think you do not truly wish to hear my story, Mr. Beckett. I have no interest in my story, and yet I cannot set it down. But, to answer the question I see in you...yes, it is precisely what you think it is.

Beckett: An...Antediluvian. You are seriously telling me that there is an Antediluvian sleeping in the sewers under New York.

Ruthven: Not in the sewers. And not sleeping. It has not truly slept, I think, for some hundreds of years. Its mind is relentlessly active, its soul — it has thousands of eyes to see through, after all, and thousands of hands through which to act. Whatever the Sabbat may claim, it did not burn when the towers fell.

Beckett: You sound...very certain.

Ruthven: I am very certain. My ancestor has...changed greatly over the centuries, Mr. Beckett, but it is consistent in one thing — it does not wish to be alone.

[RECORDING ENDS]

I'm not a slave I'm not a slave I'm not a slave I'm not a slave

That's what he's told me to tell myself. ~ LR

From: aisling.sturbridge@fiveboroughs.com

To: igiovanni@dunsirnbrothersinvestmentbank.co.uk

Bcc: beckett@schreckNET.nod

Subject: RE: NYC

Isabel

While saddened to hear of your cousin's misfortune, I can confirm nothing immediate of activities beneath New York. They're a mystery I pursue alongside others in the city, and I welcome you to travel here, so we can share thoughts in person.

Let's not be burdened by electronic communication. My haven is your haven, for as long as you have need of it.

Aisling Sturbridge

"From each according to his faculties; to each according to his needs."

Mikhail Bakunin

From: igiovanni@dunsirnbrothersinvestmentbank.co.uk

To: aisling.sturbridge@fiveboroughs.com

Subject: NYC

Sturbridge

I'm pleased by how comfortable Prince Hellene now sits upon her throne. The stability of your city is a boon to your Sect, as well as my Clan.

As someone respected in the Arts, perhaps you could be of service to one such as myself. I believe your line has pursued investigation into the possible existence of a hungry spirit or coterie of Wights beneath the city. I would like to hear of your findings, and on behalf of my Clan am prepared to share mine, openly.

You see, young Bartolomeo went missing not two months ago, and his grandsire is very anxious. Bartolomeo was due to commune with the underground spirit. When the ritual was due to take place, his *link* to us snapped.

Your assistance would be appreciated, and rewarded.

Isabel

Parts Unknown, New York City, United States

I elected to avoid the annoyance of New York court politics – including having to present myself and crave permission for what I was going to do with or without anyone's leave – by the expedient of flying into a municipal airport in Connecticut, just large enough to handle the plane, and driving south. In theory, much of the sectarian possession of the East Coast is still in some flux, and therefore dangerous for a lone traveler; in practice, the Sabbat is too busy with its own internal conflicts

to waste much effort monitoring every pissant airport in the northeast for Kindred traffic not their own and the Camarilla is too busy consolidating power in the major population centers to be overly concerned, either. Hesha kindly lent me the use of one of his safehouses in Jamaica Bay and from there I went about my operations.

My semi-planned act of katabasis began on the charming shores of Hart Island, one of the several dubiously inhabited islands ringing Manhattan proper. Currently it serves as the single largest publicly owned and funded Potter's Field in the United States, using inmates from the prison on Riker's Island to dig mass graves for the city's poor and indigent. No one lives on Hart Island because the dead literally reside thick underfoot, in some places as many as five layers deep.

Most of the earlier structures on the island have long since been torn down to make more room for burial grounds, which now cover the vast majority of its landmass, and are constantly hungry for more. Only one set of structures has thus far managed to escape the wrecking ball: The remains of the tuberculosis sanatorium cling tenaciously to existence, slowly falling into ruins amid copses of skeletal trees and vast fields of the dead. Per Ruthven this is not a failure of the legendary New Yorker efficiency in land usage – the Department of Corrections and the assorted governmental bodies tasked with overseeing the dispensation of Hart Island are generously compensated for leaving the sanatorium alone. It was from there, specifically from the subbasement levels already pierced with connecting tunnels linking the assorted buildings together, that I went down among the dead men, following Ruthven's pulsing crimson thread.

Bartolomeo went missing on Hart Island while attempting some ritual or other. We tend to avoid the activities of necromancers, thankfully.-A

Nosferatu disappear now, both Sabbat and Camarilla. Vitae all tastes the same to such an aged palate. Such a broad tongue. I heard one scream "Niktuku!" as she went in feetfirst.

Maybe she's right. The Eldest is as likely to be Absimiliard as anyone else.

I feel lucid. I'd take the opportunity for a stroll, but my right arm is stuck.
- LR



The descent began as Ruthven said it would – gradually, through abandoned hospital tunnels rank with mold, concrete walls slowly cracking from decades of unchecked seepage and the inevitable freeze-thaw wear of brutal northeastern winters. 100 yards, 200, a door hanging askew on rusted hinges and then down, the grade almost gentle, poured concrete at first giving way to dressed stone underfoot and vaulted arches above, growing damper and more nitre-frosted the further I went. Nitre. There's a word one doesn't get to use every day, but there it was, oozing down the walls, water dripping down from above in a manner just irregular enough to be intensely unnerving. I was, fairly certainly, under the floor of Long Island Sound, with tons of water pressing down from above, and I was intensely aware of it with every nerve and every sense, waiting for the sound of rock cracking and water rushing through a tightly confined space to lend some fresh Hell to my existence.

None came, for which I was then and now, profoundly grateful, because mucking my way through the ankle-deep mud that followed the dressed stone was aggravating enough. Also complicated by irregularities in the grading of the floor just under the

The Eldest craves exotic tastes. Jiang Shi from China. Impundulu from Mozambique. Cipactli of Colombia. I don't recognize these names, but great-grandfather knows them. He needs to absorb more.

I must go hunting. I can't go hunting. Somehow he lures them here. ~ LR

immediately visible surface that kept trying to slide my feet out from underneath me. At one point, I stumbled heavily, came down hard – and the object I stepped on shattered under my heel. A moment of excavation in the muck yielded a now-broken human skull, darkened with age. I was, by this point, far beyond the lichyards of Hart Island and no longer under the Sound, my sense of direction and the compass in my watch telling me I was somewhere below the northwestern most fringe of Manhattan Island and deep underground.

Ruthven lost an arm and I rather suspect a much more substantial portion of his mind, fleeing blindly into the dark in agony and horror after breaking free from the creature down below, becoming more and more lost as he went until something found him – that pulsing thread, part vein and part root, glowing with its own light. It led him to the path that exited in the ruins on Hart Island, the path that I was following now, and as I sat there kneeling in the dark, looking down at that broken skull, it occurred to me that I was walking in the footsteps of a man whose sanity was questionable at best and who believed with all that was still sane in him that he had spoken with his own Antediluvian here.

The tunnels I had walked up to this point were relatively narrow, just wide enough for two to walk abreast, if that. As I continued, they broadened significantly and any features of manmade manufacture vanished completely, dressed stone and vaulting giving way to earth and stone that looked as though they were rent rather than carved. Deeply rent, scoring through stone and softer (compacted) soil with equal depth. The passage widened to the point that the darkness seemed to overwhelm even my ability to see in the dark. My acuity of vision was insufficient to perceive more than a few hundred feet in either direction. I was…deeply reluctant to meld with the earth of this place and so I refrained from doing so – it wasn't as though sunlight finding its way down here was going to be an issue.

As I conclude this particular journal entry, I wonder, as I did in Jerusalem, the Black Monastery, and Mexico City, whether perhaps I've gone deeper than anyone – Kindred or kine – ever ought.

There's an air of Kaymakli to this place.

And how would you fucking know? -O

Athanasios Speaks!



Communicating to the city via the Harpies, Toreador en vogue Elias Athanasios has invited all Kindred of all Clans to attend his museum for one night only.

His particular emphasis on every Clan being invited has been interpreted to mean we may see Giovanni, Setites, and more exotic breeds appearing at the AFA — perhaps even a bold Sabbat returning to New York!

Needless to say, the Sheriff and Prince have both made it quite clear that if any Kindred make trouble during this gala evening, lives shall be forfeit.



The singing never stops, but sometimes it quiets. I see Cainites throughout this wretched city drawn to his song. He knows I write this, because I tell him, because I am a good lad, but the next time he sings to others, I shall take my leave. ~ LR

[RECORDING BEGINS]

Beckett: I wake to the knowledge that something had, very recently, been touching me. *Had* touched me, because the memory of it still tingles on my cheekbone with something close to warmth, but by the time my mind finished swimming up the last dark fathom of daylight torpidity whatever it was had gone.

That knowledge did not, in fact, stop me from scrabbling frantically about for my satchel — which was also gone. Before I settled in, I tucked my journal into the satchel and then placed the satchel firmly between my body and the inner surface of the stone outcropping where I rested. Now it's nowhere to be found. Since I don't do much tossing and turning in my sleep, that means only one thing: whatever encountered me took the satchel with it, a fact that does absolutely nothing to increase my sanguinity. It also leaves me with few options. My watch has a light in it sufficient to illuminate the face. My phone was in the satchel.

[NOISES OF FEEDBACK, THE SOUND OF HEAVY SLIDING MOVEMENT, AND A THUD]

Beckett: I'm running! I'm running back the way I came!

[SOUNDS SIMILAR TO A WHIP CRACKING, A SNAP, MR. BECKETT SCREAMING]

[RECORDING ENDS]

My pursuer caught me. The ensuing confrontation was humiliatingly brief. I clawed it — it caught my wrist and bent my arm unnaturally. I bit it — and its hand, its too-many-fingered hand with far too many joints, completely covered my face and twisted. It snarled — charnel is too mild a term to describe its utterly fetid breath — and both reason and base instinct agreed that I was about to die a hideous death. I struggled frantically for an instant more of existence, wrenching away from the thing and struggling mindlessly to flee.-B

[RECORDING BEGINS]

Beckett: A quiet voice cut through the sounds of mortal struggle, inhuman snarls and muffled sounds of pain alike. A hand rested on its shoulder, then in the middle of my chest, pulling us apart almost without effort. My assailant's weight vanished and I heard it land some significant distance away; it snarled, words this time, and my rescuer snarled back. Their quarrel was brief and to the point, and through the white-hot shrieking pain in my skull I heard it slither away as hideously as it had come. Pain and fear receded so quickly that they nearly took my consciousness with them. Everything becomes...*sensory* after that. I felt myself being lifted and carried at an enormous physical and mental remove, as though my mind were disconnected from my flesh. I couldn't even work up the energy necessary to be *worried* about that, which I suppose I should have considered rather terrifying, though at that instant I was merely relieved beyond rationality not to be feeling the wreckage of my jaw any longer. I felt something wonderfully soft enfold me — not bedding soft, but something that seemed to consist of elements of both cloth and water; I felt myself cradled and yet held almost buoyantly in place, floating but not unanchored.

I heard his voice and started to write.

[RECORDING ENDS]

I must follow the pulsing thread of crimson, contracting and expanding as though driven by the action of a beating heart. To and fro. To and fro. My only chance of escape. ~ LR

You must forgive my brother. They are all wildly overprotective of me, but Svyatogor is by far the worst. I will, I assure you, have words with him for the harm he has done you, a guest.

I feel careful, gentle hands sliding along my twisted arm. These notions regarding the proper treatment of guests exceeds even the Traditions' demands for civility. I know the name Svyatogor. Svyatogor of the Sacred Mountain, quasi-mythical folk hero of Kievan Rus, bogatyr. The seven guardians of the Eldest of the Tzimisce are, to my knowledge, also called bogatyri. My head feels light and an actual sensation of amusement from my host fills my body.

You do me too much honor, my guest. I fear also that you have traveled far for nothing. The Eldest is no longer here.

Deft and gentle hands are massaging my arm, realigning broken bones and untwisting mangled flesh, while my thoughts chase themselves in circles.

Such curiosity. I knew someone much like you, once – always seeking to know, to learn, to understand both himself and the world, even if the knowledge caused him pain. You know him, or what he has become, I think. Move your fingers, if you can. Yes. Good. You will want to close your eyes for the next part.

Neither you nor he are wholly unlike the Eldest, for that matter. The Eldest has also sought truth, sought knowledge – for a time, the Eldest was lost in itself with the seeking of an answer it could not find, riven as it was by the severance of its bonds to the earth. It is…no longer lost. And it has gone to take counsel with its own siblings, who are also no longer lost.

My lower jaw has been completely disconnected from the rest of my face for quite some time during the course of my spilling words onto my own skin. I do not need it to speak to this thing.

Goratrix's balls – this is your skin? -A

Some things it is not safe for you to know – you are my guest, not that of the Eldest, and some of its secrets it guards more fiercely than others. That it is awake and aware of itself again… is not truly a secret, not to those to whom that knowledge matters the most.

I feel the mandible click physically and audibly back into place as my host begins reconnecting muscle and tendon, knitting skin.

Almost done. Again, my most sincere regrets and apologies – you should rest and take refreshment. Move your jaw. I shall open your eyes.

[RECORDING BEGINS]

Beckett: We are, to my very great surprise, no longer underground. We must have traveled farther, much farther, than I can consciously recall. I feel as though I'm lying in something buoyantly bedlike –

[sloshing noise]

Beckett: I am. A bloody waterbed, point in fact.

Unnamed speaker: It came with the loft. You should eat something, Mr. Beckett.

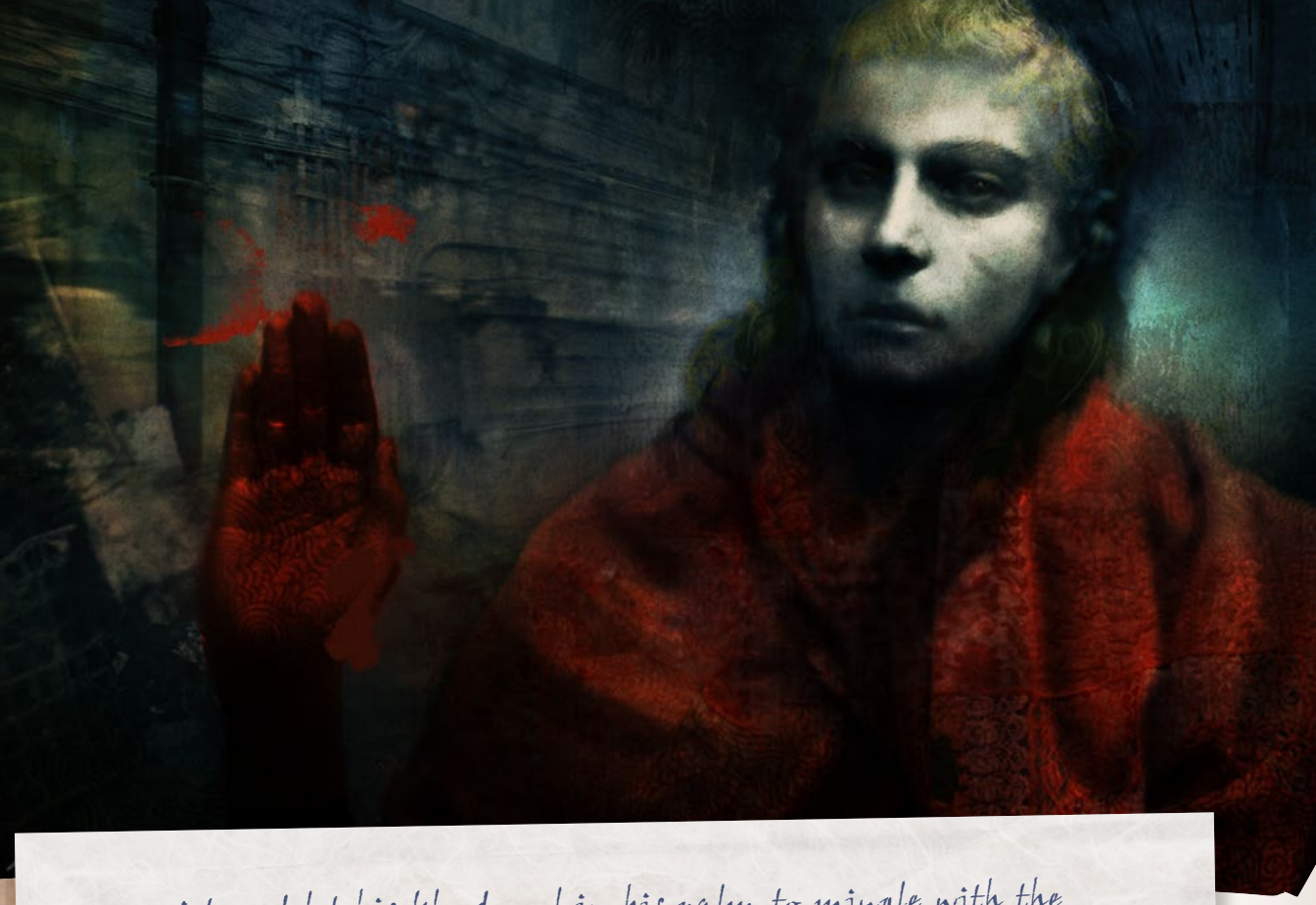
[RECORDING ENDS]

Sascha (or whatever you're calling yourself these nights)

Excuse my lack of honorifics. I neither respect nor fear you. Yet, my companion Beckett loathes you, and his encounter with one of your Clanmates requires I reach out to you.

Beckett dreamily spoke of a Tzimisce host who spoke in English, albeit with the sort of accent that makes teenagers swoon. He's described as looking like little more than a teenager— milk-white skin over fine, high-cheeked Slavic bones, coppery-blonde hair pulled back in a loose, curly queue. Perhaps this individual sounds familiar, even among your warped brood.

He abducted and vivisected Beckett, before reassembling him. Gloved to the elbows in our friend the Gangrel's blood, he slit open his



own wrist and let his blood pool in his palm to mingle with the vitae already present, before coaxing Beckett to recklessly drink. I understand you endured a similar experience some centuries back.

He knew Beckett's name. He introduced himself as Ilias.

When Beckett woke, he was laying in one of Hesha Ruhadze's lightproofed rooms. He'd been delivered, semi-torpid, to the safehouse by persons unknown two days previously, along with his personal belongings.

Also: A small box, carved of ivory, containing an object and a note was sat next to him. The object was a ring, also ivory, the band carved with a relief of three almost impossibly tiny and detailed skulls, perfect down to the fangs, wound together with a twist of copper and golden wire worked in the shape of a sheaf of grain. The note was from Ilias and read as follows:

When you see him again, give him my love.

I believe you and Beckett may seek common cause, or share a similar admirer. Reach out to the Gangrel. The two of you are pleasingly dangerous when working in concert.

Lucita de Aragón

Bronx Zoo, New York City, United States

A quick hypothetical, while I have presence of mind to write.

If – and a big if at that – the founders of Clans Malkavian, Tzimisce, and possibly Cappadocian and Salubri are up and around (in various forms) but aren't ushering in the end times, what are they doing? Are the other Antediluvians walking the Earth, with those like myself stepping across their trails? What's their agenda? Do they need to have one?

Ilias said the Eldest was no longer lost, and now seeks counsel from its siblings. What – if anything – is coming?



Bright Lights, Deep Shadows

New York City was, at the brink of the new millennium, a battleground between Kindred Sects. Home to millions of kine and hundreds of vampires, the city shook as their conflict took the form of economic espionage, political manipulation, and outright physical violence in and below the streets. In the end, the Camarilla succeeded in driving the Sabbat from the most ardently desired territory in the northeastern United States and, if the Camarilla rule was unsettled immediately afterwards, it has since solidified into a more or less stable configuration — though not everyone is entirely pleased by that shape. The attacks of 9/11 gave the Kindred of New York a terrible reminder of how closely linked their fates are to the lives of the city's kine. The first nights after the attacks saw former rivals close ranks and the conspiracy theories sprouted by young Sabbat about the attacks never gained any foothold among the kindred of Manhattan.

Hellene Panhard emerged into the political vacuum following Calebros' resignation as the sort of compromise candidate no one actively preferred as the new Prince but whom virtually no one disliked. Her status as a childe of New York's late, dubiously lamented Prince Michaela gave her a certain legitimacy when it came to claiming the role, and her stated goal of reconstruction was attractive to those weary of further conflict. Her ascension was not marked by an expected crackdown on the freedoms the Kindred of her new domain had come to enjoy during the course of the wild years of open conflict between the Camarilla and the Sabbat. Where Calebros enforced several laws of his own making to keep the peace, she released the city from these strictures in what some consider a reactionary move to win popularity.

The Anarchs of New York, who were deeply suspicious of Hellene at first, are finding her more tolerable to work with than a more inflexible autocrat. Spared some of the more obvious sources of friction by the new Prince's willingness to bend a bit to accommodate reality, New York's Kindred have, indeed, rebuilt a stable cultural edifice in which to pursue their individual and collective goals and influences.

With quarrels dying down, the attentions of many are drawn to the sublime. Kindred begin to establish galleries and host extravagant parties for their fellows — both native to New York and otherwise. Nearly all are by invite only, but Manhattan swiftly grows into the place to be for Camarilla neonates wishing to become known. A thriving vampire art, performance, and culture scene bursts forth, fueled by the mixture of ethnic backgrounds and creeds present in the Big Apple. Prince Hellene supports this movement entirely, recognizing only that humanity could be brought out with a little creativity.

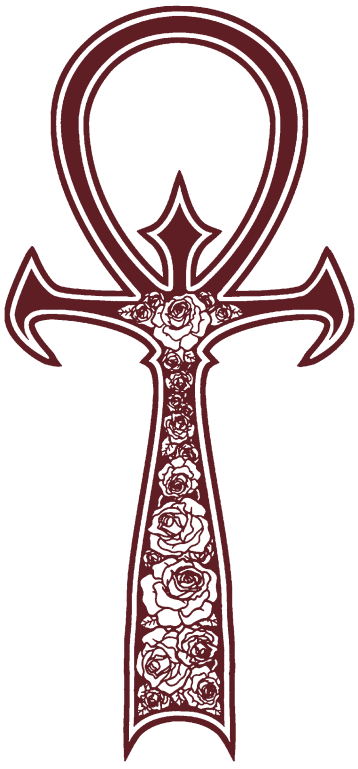
Scholars of the arcane are likewise drawn to New York, albeit for different reasons. Nosferatu of the city have long claimed the presence of the legendary Nictuku preying beneath the streets. Those vampires brave enough to go deeper than the sewers and subways rarely emerge. Mages, Giovanni, and Tremere are reaching a provisional accord on sharing findings obtained from the underground, as all can sense something dead, yet mentally present, somewhere within the earth.

Just as Tzimisce's tendrils once reached throughout New York, so do chronicle hooks:

- Beckett's discovery of the ancient Tzimisce Ilias, and strong evidence of the Eldest historically being present in New York, seemingly concludes many of the mysteries surrounding Kindred disappearances. Yet, Beckett confides his discoveries to few. The experience of being rent and reassembled by a fleshcrafting savant leaves him disturbed, and not a little traumatized. Further, the disappearances strangely increase in number after Beckett's reemergence. Kindred of occult persuasion seek the perpetrator for study. Those troubled with the rash of vanishings are set on destroying the cause once and for all.
- The outbreak of the Sabbat's most recent bloody internal quarrel, the rise of the Gehenna Crusade, and the collapse of the Anarch Free States in the west have caused a sudden, rather unexpected influx of Kindred refugees fleeing the violence of both conflicts and the attention of Crusader recruiters. Their presence in and around New York drives tensions between the court and the Anarchs higher than they have been in the best part of a decade — tensions that clever provocateurs could use to their advantage.
- One of Prince Hellene's most significant acts of reconstruction involves a substantial degree of outreach to the European elders without whom the reconquest of New York would have been

impossible. Taking a page from both Kindred history and modern realpolitik, she reinstituted the role of ambassador, and sent several of her more dynamic courtiers on goodwill missions. Ambassador Katherine Wiese returned with a companion named Elias Athanasios. Posing as a Toreador, "Elias" is now patron of an exclusive gallery containing Kindred artifacts and memorabilia. Some of these objects were wheedled from the private collections of politically and socially significant Kindred as donations to the cause of increased awareness of their shared past. Some are new creations of Kindred artists inspired by modern artistic modes and sensibilities. More than a few are actually artifacts of ritual power and significance belonging to traditions of Kindred blood magic predating Tremere thaumaturgical developments by thousands of years — a fact lost on neither Athanasios nor on the residents of the Chantry of the Five Boroughs.

- The Chantry of the Five Boroughs has not enjoyed quite the same degree of peace and stability experienced by the rest of the city. Regent Aisling Sturbridge sits atop the local pyramid, though not for want of trying by at least one of her theoretically-loyal subordinates. A good deal of her time has been devoted to discovering what has, until recently, been residing under Manhattan Island. For several years, the Chantry was aware of a powerful psychic presence in New York, though opinion was split as to its nature and origins. Some believed it wasn't a singular entity but rather some sort of "well of souls," multiple entities sharing a single, relatively-confined space somewhere below the Nosferatu warrens and well beyond the physical or psychic reach of any researchers. Others suspected that the presence was not an entity at all — citing the fragmented nature of the impressions received from it and the absence of readily-identified indicators of sapience — but possibly one of the many lost caches of Kindred lore known to be scattered throughout the world by generations of sectarian violence and social upheaval. Before any conclusions could be drawn, however, that psychic presence...dwindled, contracting in on itself and reorganizing rapidly before vanishing entirely. The Chantry has since devoted significant resources to the goal of locating the resting place of this presence and, if possible, its trail.



THE MADNESS OF JERUSALEM

! This message was sent with High importance.

From: eyeonyou@schreckNET.nod

To: beckett@schreckNET.nod

Subject: !!!GET OUT!!!

Astrid Thomas knows where you are.

Don't reply — just move!

Fortuna Del Mar, Tel Aviv-Yafo, Israel

I worried I'd lost this diary in my hurried escape. Truth be told, writing my thoughts helps keep me sane. Additionally, this diary falling into the wrong hands would draw an undesirable level of attention.

I grabbed what was to hand and sped to the private airstrip, only to arrive as my jet exploded. With Vitel's credit line temporarily halted, my routine mode of long-distance transport destroyed, and Cesare nowhere to be found – I genuinely hope he wasn't on board – I did what the best flight animals do and acted unpredictably. I jumped into the Adriatic, lashed myself to the hull of a departing ship, and rested, not knowing my destination. I only loosened my bonds to scale the portside and feed from a crew member occasionally, before sinking beneath the waves and binding myself again. It was a long journey.

If this was the work of Astrid, you can be assured the Pyramid will be extremely displeased at such an egregious display. -A

There's a positive to finding my ship in Tel Aviv-Yafo: knowing Anatole left for Jerusalem before my journey to Venice. He was – in his words – "called by his father." Anatole was calm, and before now I've never even questioned the whereabouts of his sire. If there's a safe haven to be had here, it's with one I trust. Anatole is unstable in the extreme, but I trust him like a brother.

Gerard Behar Center, Jerusalem, Israel

The Kindred of Jerusalem have attempted to make me welcome, but even they can't deny the grip of insanity afflicting this city. Kothar – a member of Clan Nosferatu I hold in truly high regard for his pacifism over the centuries – has attempted to calm his fellow vampires to no avail.

The Kindred political scene here is complex and steeped in cultural and religious grudges, traditions, and contests. They only amplify the enthusiastic madness among mortals and vampires alike. The ostensibly Camarilla vampires make war with the largely Islamic Ashirra Kindred one night, yet offer gifts and gestures of peace the next. The common Sabbat holds little sway here, but I'm told by Kothar the city is still a place of pilgrimage for the truly faithful of that Sect and a staging point for Gehenna Crusaders.

FORMER ORTHODOX EDUCATOR STABS STUDENT

By Yossi Arad

Following the stabbing of student Oskar Rothstein, a former lecturer at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem has been arrested. Police have yet to confirm how the suspect was traced, but the suspected perpetrator was hysterically preaching about the presence of "vampires" in Jerusalem, of which Rothstein was a "blood doll."

The attack, which left the 19-year-old Rothstein hospitalized, took place on campus grounds. Fellow students found Rothstein in the Humanities Faculty Building with grievous internal injuries, caused by a shaft of wood piercing his ribcage and left lung. The unconscious student remains at the Augusta Victoria Hospital, unable to be moved due to his critical condition.

This attack is the latest in the recent wave of violent attacks and spontaneous episodes of mental breakdowns being reported across Jerusalem, largely attributed to a cultural reaction to constant terrorist attacks launched by Hamas.

I doubt Moncada ever made the journey. -L

Anarchs are few and far between. This is not a city of new ideas. Each conflict is in answer to some centuries-old feud, or over feeding rights or restrictions in select territory long disputed. Were a fledgling or neonate to appear and attempt to Anarch about, you'd witness blood enemies turning to face the newcomer. They'd assist one another long enough to drive out the whelp before going back to exchanging blows.

Surprisingly, the mortal population is fewer than a million. The Kindred who make their domain here feed primarily from tourists. Between the Camarilla, Ashirra, and occasional Setite, the natives have decreed certain districts, buildings, and individuals of certain backgrounds forbidden to our kind.

Jerusalem is a city that, since its founding, has been an epicenter of faith, and arguably the best of humankind. Concurrently, it's ever been a city drenched in blood. I'm hard-pressed to name more than a handful of other cities so fought over by fanatics in the name of their faith.

I've yet to find evidence pointing to faith being "the best of humankind." -L

I've visited Jerusalem many a time, often without impediment. Visitors who observe the customs and pay respect to the natives are afforded protection. The rapid escalation in violence is new, coinciding with the arrival of at least 30 Malkavians in the last month – an alarming number of whom met Final Death by their own hand in places of religious importance, unrepentantly breaking the Masquerade.

Neither the Jerusalem Camarilla nor the Ashirra have a clue what's driving this, and the native Malkavians – the Bay't Majnoon – have all vanished.

I've been able to obtain information from various sources, pinpointing incidents mortal law enforcement may ignore due to their exclusively Kindred nature. By doing so, I've been able to identify the center of the collective insanity as an archeological dig site near Ketef Hinnom.

[RECORDING BEGINS]

00:00:00: I can immediately tell upon entering the excavation site it's an old dig, re-opened and worked on by amateurs. Entire sections of wall and earth have been crudely carved away and redeposited. Even a cursory glance reveals disregarded pottery shards within. My records show this place was of interest to noted archeologist Benjamin Mazar



DOME OF THE ROCK SUICIDE ATTEMPT

By Ayelet Amir

Reports of suicides from atop the Dome of the Rock are still being investigated. Footage of a couple jumping from the shrine has been shared on social media, but due to the quality of the footage, no identities have been released or confirmed.

With no bodies found, reports of a stunt perpetrated by noted street magician Dynamite have dominated the news, despite the magician currently performing in New York City. Witness Ben al-Khayal is quoted as saying, "It looked like the couple — a man and a woman, I believe — turned to dust before they hit the ground."

The Dome of the Rock is 114 feet above ground level at its highest point.

before he turned to other digs. Due to the abruptness of his decision to abandon this site, it would be remiss not to suspect Kindred involvement.

00:11:23: The dig itself more resembles a mine than the careful trench work you find practiced by reputable archeologists. I can't emphasize enough how little regard has been given to the history uncovered. There are three excavation tunnels, leading through into a central pit, the depth of which I've yet to ascertain. Again, this feels more akin to the digging of a gold mine than a tomb. There's no excavation machinery nearby. This place has been uncovered wholly by use of hand tools. I will spend some time noting what I can. Hesha would pay highly for many of these artifacts.

00:58:13: As I circle the pit I sense a change in air pressure, or some alternating low-pitch audio resonance bouncing around this chamber. I'm familiar with the effect such sounds can have on kine, inducing nausea and dizziness. It makes me want to crack my neck and shake it off vigorously. Most curious. There appears to be no method of entering the pit beyond scaling the sides. This is no simple task, as the sides are extremely smooth

rock. Footholds are few and far between. Why a ladder's not affixed to allow descent, I can't say. To be trapped down there, unable to climb out, would be as maddening as having to listen to this low "thrum." It's truly making my head pound. Concentration is growing difficult. I — [cuts off]

02:13:45: [partially transcribed due to whispering] [mid-sentence] — voices from the pit. Sounds of working. Tools chipping [unclear]. Voices aren't clear. Don't understand the language. Something in the darkness. Staring at my mind. Inside my head. [shrieking in tongues] Oh, God. [shrieking in tongues] No!

[RECORDING ENDS]

Craziness in Jerusalem

Anyone else heard of crazy shit going down in Israel?

I was stopping over on my way east. Plane landed like it was meant to in Ben Gurion and I'd a couple of hours to kill, so I took a walk around. You know what I saw?

Mordechai Laslo — a Malkavian rabbi from Jerusalem known for his cool-headed, if not bloody sociopathic, nature — stood on a soapbox in the concourse, raving about Gehenna!

I took a photo to prove it was him, but Jesus Christ — I got out as soon as I could. If the Camarilla catch on to his madness, they're going to kill it with fire.

JesusCampbell

St. Andrew's Church, Jerusalem, Israel

The faith permeating this area burns, but I use it as protection. None would seek me here. Malkav.

I cannot recall exactly what took place in the excavation site. I do know the effects of the Malkavian antitribu gifts used by Aristotle de Laurent and his Sabbat brethren however, and what afflicted me was similar, albeit extremely pronounced. Malkav.

Rest is required. I will stash my belongings. I will attempt to enter the pit again. I will not be denied answers. Malkav wants his sister back.

One of the phrases I uttered whilst rambling was 'Tal'Mahe'Ra." Familiar. Investigate.

Malkav wants his Malakai.

[RECORDING BEGINS]

00:00:00: The dig has continued. I recognize my own tools laying down by a freshly-excavated alcove. Did someone use them? Did I use them? I must revisit the pit.

01:12:35: The pit took longer to find. I know not how that could be. The tunnels were so short last night. Was it last night? It seems like longer? Who's there?

Anatole: You shouldn't be here.

Beckett: Anatole? Where is here? What's going on? Your voice —

Anatole: You shouldn't be here. You need to leave.

Beckett: But there's something down here! Someone down here! Something to be excavated! Please, Anatole! He's in my head! He's in my head and I can't stop the screams!

Anatole: You shouldn't be here. We feed from Him to awaken Her. He will destroy your soul. You must away from here.

Beckett: I don't know where I am. He's in my head.

Anatole: This is the fountainhead. The blood of the moon becomes one this night.

Beckett: Tal'Mahe'Ra.

Anatole: They will not enslave Him.

Beckett: Who are they? Who is He? Who am I?

Anatole: Behind you.

[RECORDING ENDS]

NEW ILLEGAL HALLUCINOGEN SUSPECTED IN "HYSTERIA ATTACKS"

By Caroline Azur

The increase in what is being dubbed as "Hysteria Attacks" is being attributed to the distribution of a new hallucinogenic drug among the students of the Hebrew University of Jerusalem.

The arson attacks in the southeast corner of the Student Village have been traced to several individuals now under arrest, who, while nameless until trial, are reported by individual members of the faculty as being known drug users. The University is currently under investigation.

The parents of 18-year-old Yehudit Damari of Netanya, who died in the arson attack, claim their daughter spoke to them in the days before her death regarding the increase in mania at the University. Bruno Damari states he believes a hallucinogen or psychotropic drug to have been added to the water supply of the University.

The Hebrew University of Jerusalem has declined to comment.

sleepingwiththe started the conversation

jjp joined the conversation

badjuju joined the conversation

sleepingwiththe:	Topic of the night is Jerusalem.
badjuju:	Don't go there man. I saw some of it. Fucking terrible stuff.

jjp:	The Masquerade is liable to fall to pieces. Mark my words — when this comes out in the wash, the Sabbat will have been behind it.
princess123 joined the conversation	
princess123:	they say gehenna starting down there
princess123:	LOL
badjuju:	Imbeciles are saying that. I suspect Setite shenanigans.
sleepingwiththe:	you always suspect Setites
mrmysterio joined the conversation	
mrmysterio:	hi all
princess123:	did any of u c the dome of teh rock suicide footage?
sleepingwiththe:	Yes. At a guess, they weathered the True Faith long enough to let it destroy them as they fell.
badjuju:	Fucking dumb place to kill yourself.
princess123:	drew a crowd tho and u could hear some people shouting fucking jump!!!
jjp:	The speaker was identified. One of the local Malkavians.
badjuju:	There's something in the air there. The whole Camarilla/Ashirra thing is heating up.
princess123:	some1 call the inquisition!!!
badjuju:	Next to the Vatican this is just about the worst place for the existence of our kind to become known.
sleepingwiththe:	Inquisition's a myth. It never happened. Just a tale elders tell.
jjp:	Ha.
badjuju:	Jerusalem's a hotbed. You can't walk down the street without feeling scorched.
jjp:	Scorched earth may be the way to deal with this. It's what I'll be putting to the new Justicars.
mrmysterio:	Someone will need to warn the Jerusalem Kindred.
sleepingwiththe:	that would defeat the object.
princess123:	@jjp the cam wouldn't just murder every vampire in a city
jjp:	They've done it before.
princess123:	fucking harsh
sleepingwiththe:	When a dog goes mad you put it down.
badjuju:	We've kept the Malkavians with us so far without drilling each one between the eyes.
sleepingwiththe:	The Malkavians haven't tried to set fire to our house before.
jjp:	@badjuju Get in touch with any dedicated Camarilla loyalists in Jerusalem and encourage them to take a vacation. To hell with the rest.
princess123:	jesus shit
sleepingwiththe:	You're not Justicar anymore. Do you have that pull?
princess123:	there's a former justicar here?! fml
princess123 left the conversation	
jjp:	Who invited princess123?
badjuju:	I did. My childe. Catty.

CURFEW REJECTED AS HYSTERIA ATTACKS SPREAD

By Ayelet Amir

The public have voiced their disapproval over curfew measures mooted by the Mayor of Jerusalem, suggested as a means to curb the so-called Hysteria Attacks now occurring throughout the capital city.

Pundits, governmental bodies, and law enforcement have proposed alternative causes for the Hysteria Attacks, but so far the investigative committee has yet to publish a definitive source for the incidents. For the sake of public safety, the curfew was to immediately take effect. The police and military have been unable to enforce curfew, due to the number of citizens and tourists in Jerusalem after nightfall, when the majority of these attacks occur.

At least one attack has taken place each night since the 10th. Of the latest victims, one was 28-year-old Yitzchok Podell, found on Gershon Agron Street. Three eyewitnesses reported discovering Podell hung upsidedown from a lamppost, exsanguinated. The other victim has yet to be identified. The female is reported to have immolated herself in view of the Church of the Holy Sepulchre.

Historical reports of mass hysteria in Jerusalem are included in today's magazine,

mrmysterio:	You don't do much to hide your monstrous natures, gentlemen.
mrmysterio left the conversation	
jjp:	And that one?
badjuju:	Not me.
sleepingwiththe:	Not me.
jjp:	And we don't know who mrmysterio is? @badjuju check with your childe in case he's a friend of hers. If he's not, contact the Hurricane.
jjp left the conversation	
badjuju:	When they're all ash, Jerusalem's going to be some prime real estate.
sleepingwiththe:	I've already carved up a map with where I want my feeding grounds and bar.
badjuju:	Now we've just got to wait.
badjuju left the conversation	
sleepingwiththe closed the conversation	

[RECORDING BEGINS]

Unknown Female #1: — drained you of most your vitae, so it's time you talked.

Beckett: He's in my head. He's laughing at you.

Unknown Female #1: You're bloody nuts, but you're no Malkavian. We'll free and worship Him. Don't think you'll stand in our fucking way, mate.

Unknown Female #2: You say too much, shakari.

Unknown Female #1: He's nuts! We'll burn his worthless arse soon. Tell us how we reach the bottom of the pit.

Beckett: If you find yourself falling —

Unknown Female #2: The insanity of the Malkavians spreads throughout their number like a disease. It's accentuated, worse than before, Brother Beckett. His madness infects not only his bloodline but also the land and people around it. Don't you understand that by freeing Him we will also free these kine?

Beckett: Tal'Mahe'Ra.

Unknown Female #2: Ah, so you know us.

Beckett: Malkav. Malakai. Arikel. Lilith. Children and mother. Mekhet is free and Malakai follows.

Unknown Male: I've tried to hypnotize this charlatan into a state of calm again and again but nothing doing. It never fails unless a mind's truly shattered.

Unknown Female #2: Or unless something more powerful is already in there, Rawi. Brother Beckett — Malkav — can you hear the words of us, your loyal servants? We seek to free you!

Beckett: I'm already free.

Unknown Female #1: We know where Malkav is. We don't need this wanker.

Serenna: I disagree.

[SOUND OF GUNFIRE AND SCREAMING]

[RECORDING ENDS]

South Jerusalem (at a guess), Israel

The previous entry in my diary is a mystery to me. I cannot recall anything recent.

This Serenna plucked me from the fire. She's not said whether she killed my wardens, but from the sounds on the recording it seems a couple of them met violent ends before I was dragged here.

She exposed me to her third eye. I've been fortunate enough to have encountered one of the Salubri before now, but I never expected to meet another. I could hear naught but screaming until she healed me and fed me some of her own vitae. I'd typically express reluctance to feed from another vampire, but my thirst consumed me.

Serenna explained herself to be a member of the Edenic Groundskeepers, a fringe cult monitoring the locations of suspected Antediluvians. The Ashirra of Jerusalem hired Serenna to locate what they suspected may be a founder of the infamous Baali.

Speaking for the lingering echoes in my mind, I can attest that a creature of great power resides within the pit.

Serenna was quiet but forceful in her questioning, and I could do little but answer her questions with my piecemeal fragments of memory. We've agreed to rest, and revisit the matter of the excavation tomorrow night.

Jaffa Gate, Jerusalem, Israel

Serenna and I awoke, fed, and began to converse. Partway through my tortured remembrances, Serenna's mobile telephone rang with a surprisingly gay tune. After answering, she urged we travel to the Jaffa Gate at speed.

Serenna tells me we await members of the Ashirra. Serenna is nominally a member of the Gaza Ashirra, but operates across Palestine and Israel. It's a dangerous enterprise.

The meeting is arranged for Serenna to relay her findings regarding the Baali.



[RECORDING BEGINS]

Serenna: This is Beckett, Abu Nijad.

Abu Nijad: Oh, yes. I know of Beckett. I thought him taller, however. As-salamm alaykum.

Beckett: And upon you, sir.

Abu Nijad: This meeting was not meant as clandestine, but I had not expected more than Serenna. Why are you here?

Beckett: Serenna rescued me from the....

Serenna: Beckett? What's the matter?

Abu Nijad: He appears struck dumb. [snaps fingers] Awake, archeologist!

Beckett: Oh, Caine! The voices, the screams, the madness!

Abu Nijad: He draws attention! Quick, bring him into the Tower of David! You know the entrance!

[APPROXIMATELY 15 MINUTES ELAPSE, DURING WHICH THE SOUND OF SHRIEKING IN TONGUES IS HEARD ON MULTIPLE OCCASIONS]

Beckett: What— what happened to me?

Abu Nijad: You are in a place of peace and faith. The faith may burn, but do not fear. It will keep you whole.

Serenna: You were again possessed by the voices from the pit.

Abu Nijad: The Baali! This animal carries their infection? He will destroy all chances of our pursuing the one true way!

Serenna: Do not draw your blade here, Abu Nijad. You know this is Elysium.

Abu Nijad: Astaghfirullah. I cannot allow him to exit this place.

Beckett: It is not Baali.

Abu Nijad: Do not speak to me, mad cur!

Beckett: Malkav. Malkavians. They are performing a ritual of some kind. Elders. I could see them. The Shaal Fragment says Malkav's blood shall pour forth. They drink from him. Malakai seeks peace. They move to her.

Abu Nijad: He speaks only riddles meant to deceive.

Serenna: No, it is similar to what my research has brought to light, my friend. It is not the Baali who make Jerusalem mad. It is the Bay't Majnoon and Malkav who is Ashur. I did not locate the site. Beckett did. I found the Tal'Mahe'Ra had interest in him and the epicenter of hysteria. They sought its protection — not destruction. They would not seek such for the Baali. We know this.

Abu Nijad: We do not know they exist, Serenna! They are myth!

Serenna: No more or less than the Baali. Do not lose your temper here, Abu Nijad. I beg of you.

[ONE MINUTE OF UNCLEAR NOISE]

Abu Nijad: It is well. It is good.

Serenna: Thank you for your restraint.

Beckett: I can see the Gehenna cycle. Snatches of it from the perspective of the Malkavians feeding.

Serenna: This will surely be Gehenna for the Lunatics, but not for the other Kindred of Jerusalem. We will deliver boiling pitch to the edge of the pit and coat everyone within, if that is what's necessary to silence this insanity.

Abu Nijad: I can summon all vampires of the city to this task, if Beckett will allow his ravings to be demonstrated before the council.

Beckett: No! No! It is too late.

Serenna: Speak, Beckett.

Beckett: Malkav is inside all his childer now. The voices dissipate. The ritual concludes. The voices subside. Ha! Are they leaving? I can feel their dissipation! [hysterical laughter, followed by a shark crack]

Serenna: Stop that.

[RECORDING ENDS]

Beckett:

I hope this letter reaches you via Kothar, while you convalesce. I would deliver it in person, but feel deeply ashamed for what befell you. I do not fear your ire, though I deserve it in full. I do fear being told face to face I've lost a brother.

I tipped Astrid off to your jet's location in Venice, and informed her you made your haven within, knowing you do not. I informed Okulos that Astrid was on to you. I foresaw the actions you would take. The signs, Beckett — they never lie to me. I saw visions of the wolf taking to sea, its path leading here. I had to draw you in unknowingly. My father can only plant the seed in the unknowing.

The seed will grow into enlightenment. You realize so little. The seed will germinate and help you understand. It will open your mind to the Cobweb. You will see the world for what it is.

The Malkavians are one. We sing the same song with a thousand voices. You alone from outside our blood shall know the lyrics.

Gehenna is coming, but by taking the vitae of our father and sharing it, we have forestalled it. If it runs in cycles, a new one now begins.

Sincerely,
Anatole

Oh, Beckett. I had no idea. Do not blame him. He is a victim to his curse, as are we all. -L

[RECORDING BEGINS]

Beckett: How did you survive the purge of your line?

Serenna: An oft-asked question, Beckett. You disappoint me.

Beckett: Yet I'd wager you rarely answer.

Serenna: As you are in my care while you recover, and the Ashirra have dictated you are not to leave Jerusalem until the voices with-

in you are entirely gone, I suppose I owe to you whatever would make you feel more whole.

Beckett: This is what nurse and patient scenes are made of, in blue motion pictures.

Serenna: [Laughs] For an addled wreck, you still possess a form of humor. It makes this task more tolerable.

Beckett: In answer to my question?

Serenna: In answer to your question, I was Embraced after the purge. There are seven Al-Amin known to the Ashirra. The Sect's founders agreed before the purge to safeguard that number. If legend speaks truly, the accord was met between Jamal of the Banu Haqim and Nahum ben Enosh of the Al-Amin. The accord still stands; I am one among seven. I am treated as royalty by the Ashirra for my precious status. I do not deny it chafes.

The Ashirra's reach is short, but where it holds sway, it cannot be penetrated by Usurpers. Banu Haqim and Bay't Mushakis are the leaders and counsel of the Ashirra in these nights. They would never allow Tremere to gain a foothold. As long as I remain in the domain of the Ashirra, my existence is secure.

Beckett: Are there truly only seven Salubri?

Serenna: There are more, but they are not safeguarded by this Sect. I cannot speak for them, or their number. Some practice diablerie upon their sires after decades of tutelage. Many follow the dream of Golconda.

Beckett: You are an Edenic Groundskeeper.

Serenna: I feel no shame for my affiliation with that group. The Sabbat would see the world drenched in blood to prevent Gehenna. The Royal Order pursues a path where only the Antediluvians see death. Repayment for all this.

Beckett: You point to your forehead as if it were a curse. You healed me of my affliction with that power.

Serenna: Only temporary. This eye is the eye of Saulot. His physical form may be gone, but he spies through each one of us who bears it. Had the Tremere been more thorough in their elimination of Saulot who is Ashur, we may have prevented Gehenna entirely.

Beckett: Ashur. You referred to Malkav by the same name. Is he not said to be the founder of the Baali?

Serenna: Ashur is a state of being, Beckett. When you succumb to the sins inside, by how are you known?

Beckett: Some call it becoming the Beast. Others call it ecstasy.

Serenna: Among the legends of the Ashirra, when the Antediluvians succumbed, they became Ashur. Each of them has been Ashur. One of them — at that point — formed the Baali line. That is what I hoped to find here. Instead I found you. You found the Bay't Majnoon performing a ritual. I believe they have taken Malkav into their minds, as the Al-Amin have taken Saulot into theirs.

Beckett: Anatole's letter states the same. Is Malkav destroyed?

Serenna: Once you are recovered, I intend to find out. If a body yet remains, he must be basked in the light of Jerusalem to see Final Death.

Beckett: And if Malkav now resides only in the minds of his childer?

Serenna: Then it's already too late. Rest, Beckett. I'll bring you another vessel.

[RECORDING ENDS]

SERENNA THE WHITE



Salubri (Healer?), Tabriz *1888, Golan Heights #1903. Childe of Red Solomon.

Serenna says with a wry smile that in life she was a precocious, rebellious young woman. A daughter to a privileged family, afforded a full education and greater liberties than many of her peers, Serenna fought and campaigned for Persia's women's movement. She confesses now that while her aims helped many, she was only acting against her parents, as many a child does. In Serenna's case, her actions resulted in her interacting with Tāj al-Saltanah, Nasir al-Din Shah's daughter, on the subject of emancipation. She got in a little deeper than intended.

Serenna drew the attentions of Red Solomon, who recognized in the young woman a desirable altruism. He lured Serenna away from Persia and "gifted" her the Embrace.

The Ashirra affords Serenna every luxury, but she recognizes a stifling grip, multiplied innumerable times due to the Ashirra's protection only extending as far as its borders. For decades she's been treated as near to royalty as a vampire may be, but behind every grandiose show of defense is the threat of Final Death should she leave the Ashirra. Solomon did not assist matters, as his protectiveness for his new childe manifested as an obsessive need to have her close by at all times.

Red Solomon supposedly falling afoul of "the Ticktock Man" — a Kindred assassin of infamous ability — Serenna pursued her own path for the latter half of the 20th century. Her ideals of freedom led her to research why we spend so much of our potentially-endless existences subverting one another's aims. Through her initiative, she reached out to a cult named the Royal Order of Edenic Groundskeepers. The Groundskeepers share her view that the Jyhad is the Antediluvians' province. She joined the Order to hunt them, becoming one of its most militant members.

Serenna continues serving the Ashirra while pursuing her goals. She loathes those who express worship and admiration for relics of the past, expressing that so often these devotees blind themselves to the crimes of their idols. She still strives for a new way, and truth for Kindred, although she's more comfortable with a gun in hand while in enemy territory than with a notepad and pen while in a museum. Her zeal in identifying the entity within the Hinnom pit — despite my warnings to the contrary — has her now quietly developing some of the abilities of the Malkavians, as well as finding herself afflicted with an at-times crippling mental affliction. Extended periods of painful hatred for herself often wrack Serenna, only the company of her loyal cats granting her a nepenthe.

Temple Mount, Jerusalem, Israel

It pains me greatly, but Serenna assures that without the burning faith I would fall to fits again. After a while I stopped recording that crazed speech. Much of it is ancient invective, much to my dismay.

I feel aggrieved by Anatole's betrayal. I've yet to decide what to do with our relationship from this point. He confesses to having lured me here, yet when we were in the pit he attempted to turn me away. Which was his true intention? When did he become so uncontrollable?

Every part of me wishes to revisit the pit. The voices urge likewise. This is what makes me determined not to do so. There are some things beyond me. I feel as if I've reached a precipice. There is so much I know. So much I do not. Some things are better left unknown.

The pit of Jerusalem, whether it contains Malkav, one of his childer, the founder of the Baali, or this elusive Malakai, is not a place I wish to experience again.

I recall the faces of those Tal'Mahe'Ra who sought to interrogate me, and worship the pit's inhabitant. I would know more of this group. They're mere vampires, no ancient gods. I'm prepared to be quite the painful tick on their hides.



Oasis of Madness

Beckett's experiences in Jerusalem change him. Prior to his descent into the pit, he would have boldly tackled any mystery. Curiosity, however, does cost. In Beckett's case, he partook in a ritual he can barely recall, for more nights than he realizes. This ritual may have seen him consume the vitae of an Antediluvian. That Antediluvian may reside in a corner of his mind forevermore.

Perhaps more than the trauma of mental invasion, Beckett reels from Anatole's betrayal. While not intending to harm Beckett, Anatole lead his friend to Jerusalem to sample Malkav's wisdom. Whether this was within Anatole's control, or as a result of Malkav's manipulations, Beckett's bond with Anatole — longer-lasting and stronger than any other relationship the Gangrel holds — has been irreversibly shaken.

Jerusalem is left to suffer the aftereffects. Beckett receives aid from the Salubri Serenna the White. Jerusalem does not. It boils up, affecting the movers and shakers in mortal and Kindred society. Simple disagreements between opposing sides heat up as paranoia and hatred seep into every crack of the city's ancient walls. Open war seems a certainty as this feeling infects neighboring towns and cities. Tensions between Israel, Jordan, and Palestine reach a fever pitch.

Secret societies such as the Tal'Mahe'Ra and the Royal Society of the Edenic Groundskeepers infiltrate the afflicted city, recognizing from their own lore the signs of a waking, or stirring, Antediluvian. The Groundskeepers — unknowing pawns of the True Black Hand — scout the location of the pit. The Tal'Mahe'Ra then send in their own agents to protect and venerate the powerful ancient within. Jerusalem becomes a focal point to the True Black Hand, despite rumors persisting that the sleeping ancient at the bottom of the pit is, in fact, a Baali who successfully misled all participants involved in the ritual.

The events in Jerusalem spawn many chronicle seeds:

- Kothar appeals to the Camarilla for Justicar and Archon presence in Jerusalem, to help maintain the Masquerade and bring to account the main perpetrators of the virulent insanity. Despite his political neutrality, Kothar believes the Camarilla is the only Sect strong enough to impose such law in the city. Jerusalem is in the public eye, so he banks on the Camarilla not denying his request. The Inner Circle is already planning on sending several scouting groups into Israel. They have to decide whether the Kindred of Jerusa-



Long intervals of horrible sanity

Malkav didn't suddenly appear. The people of Jerusalem and surrounding regions have long been subjects of infectious madness. Religious fanaticism, war, governmental decree, civilian persecution, and Malkav sleeping there for centuries — all have been conducive to a growing mania. Malkav's stirring worsens the situation. Neighbors who disliked one another before now wish to see one another dead. Patients in mental institutions begin to rave and then fall to uncontrollable bouts of depression. Suicide rates skyrocket. Religious fundamentalism grips those previously immune to such doctrine. If you desire a way to make things even worse, here are a few options:

- Malkav has never been torpid beneath Jerusalem. He was consumed by the Fourth Generation of his Clan over a millennium prior to tonight. The entity passing for Malkav is, as Serenna initially suspected, one of the Baali progenitors. It was never just Malkavians who visited its tomb, but they were in the majority. Appealing to the oracles and prophets of Gehenna, the Baali summoned the mad and enlightened, before draining them in an orgy of diablerie. When it rises, Jerusalem will be its first victim.
- The entity in the pit is Malkav, but he didn't summon any Malkavians to feed from him. They were sent by his vengeful sister Malakai, and her rotting mentor Mekhet. The two serve Lilith with absolute loyalty, and upon discovering the location of Malkav's body via agents in the True Black Hand, they arranged its excavation using the help of duped Malkavians. They desire Malkav's destruction so they can supplant his Clan as their own, each Malkavian a Manchurian Candidate.
- The only vampires to actually feed from Malkav were his own childer, who in turn fed their childer, and so on. The result was a revel of gore and lust, as the Clan became bonded entirely. No more will the Malkavians be seen as wild cards with nothing in common. They now share a greater bond with one another than do the Tremere or Giovanni, able to feel whenever a sire or childe is endangered, and in some rare instances capable of mental assistance when required. The Malkavians gradually become a hive mind. Surprisingly few Clans notice the difference.
- Malkav is highly intelligent, and possessed of an oracular ability unsurpassed. He knows — better than any vampire — the details of the past and the future. He sees a time when Caine's own childer will rise, and knows the Antediluvians will serve to feed their hungry sires. He has arranged his diablerie via the mouths of his own childer to ensure he alone will persist beyond the extermination of the Third Generation.
- The passing of Malkav's spirit into his Clan changes the Lunatics for the better. Malkav does not cure the Malkavian insanity, but increases their value to their respective Sects. Where once the Malkavians were seen only as burdens, now they act as advisors and reliable soothsayers. As Malkav's spirit spreads throughout the Malkavian Madness Network, he imposes his immense knowledge on his childer in snippets — only useful when they collaborate to form the entire picture. Princes and Archbishops backed by Malkavians find themselves ahead of the curve. At some point, however, those Malkavians will realize they no longer need to counsel. Together, they have the capacity to rule.

lem require purging, or if a Camarilla-appointed Prince will resolve Jerusalem's problems.

- The seeping madness has reached the Ashirra council of Jerusalem. Their numbers have always been small, so it comes as a surprise to the Camarilla when Ashirra from Amman and Damascus show up to Jerusalem Elysia. The Ashirra council, comprised primarily of Bay't Mushakis (Brujah), Banu Haqim (Assamites), and Bay't Mutasharid (Nosferatu) have become paranoid. They're convinced the other Sects intend to see all Islamic vampires driven from Israel. Bizarrely, the one council member to retain her composure is the Bay't Majnoon (Malkavian) Rana al Hayb. She has ever kept her Clan a secret, posing as one of the Bay't Mushakis. For some reason she was not called to the pit where her Clanmates performed the ritual. Rana feels she's the only one who can stabilize the Ashirra in Jerusalem before something terrible takes place. To do so, she may require the council members staked and therefore silenced until she knows how to remedy their affliction. How to do this without substantially weakening the Ashirra is something on which she requires counsel. Rana will only share her thoughts with those she feels she can trust.

- The psychosis taking its toll on Jerusalem is more than just the work of Malkavians and their Methuselahs. The Tremere have a part to play in how widespread the madness has become. The Salubri are being betrayed by one of the Jerusalem Ashirra for great Thaumaturgical gifts, the vampire informing the Tremere of Egypt about the pockets of insanity. Considering how their powers may be amplified, the Warlocks conclude that if Jerusalem were to tear itself apart, the Ashirra would be suitably weakened and less able to defend their Salubri wards. A coterie is dispatched to enact a ritual, successfully spreading the effects of Dementation further than before. With the city collapsing, that same coterie now hunts the extant Salubri of the region. The act would be flawlessly executed, were it not for Assamite and Setite Sorcerers who recognize the markings of Hermetic Thaumaturgy on some of Jerusalem's historic walls. Both groups are faced with many options when they realize the Tremere are in part to blame.

- Serenna the White is adamant in her aim to discover and slay the Antediluvian in the pit of Hinnom, but there's a problem. The excavation site has been mostly filled and covered once she concludes her care for Beckett, and the Malkavians have returned to their domains. She searches thoroughly for an entrance to the supposed resting place of Malkav, but finds only collapsed tunnels. The mortal crews she hires to begin excavation all develop derangements swiftly. Even she is not immune, finding the longer she's in proximity to the excavation site, the more voices she hears gibbering in her head. The Edenic Groundskeeper will not be swayed, and looks for a coterie of similar mindset. She even calls on the Sabbat with rumors of a torpid Antediluvian. Serenna is intent on exposing the ancient being beneath the earth to the rays of the sun and the full might of Jerusalem's True Faith.

- Many Malkavians summoned to the pit were driven to new heights of mania by the entity within. Some terminated their own existences as a way of silencing the screaming voices. Others among those truly disturbed Lunatics did not put themselves to Final Death, however. These Malkavians stalk the countries of Israel, Egypt, Jordan, and Saudi Arabia, as vectors of raw Dementation. They speak only in riddles and babble endlessly, reacting with violence against any in their path. Only one vampire who encountered these vessels of Dementation recorded their words, the most often-repeated ones being "Malakai, daughter of Lilith." Noddists and Bahari now seek these walking treasure troves in the hope that wisdom may be gained from their rambling.

- Many of the mortals killed during the hysteria attacks were from among the herd and retainers of Abu Nijad of the Bay't Mushakis. He's kept this truth quiet. Abu Nijad fears hunters may be empowered by a divinely gifted, enlightening truth. Abu Nijad believes this group of hunters possesses abilities beyond base knowledge of vampires, and they're based in the Hebrew University. He'll be sending neonates to the University to find whether this is the case, but it's unlikely he'll tell anyone his resources have become the target of kine aggression.



From: eyeonyou@schreckNET.nod

To: beckett@schreckNET.nod

Subject Fwd: Our mutual friend

I'm forwarding this on to you because you'll want to follow up on it. But I'm not happy about it.

If you go to Berlin, make arrangements with Wolff in advance. It will help.

And before you have to ask, no, I did not share my email address with Vykos. I have no idea how they got it.

P.S. Don't go, this is obviously a death trap.

• • • •

Somewhere Over Germany

Berlin.

Last time I was there it was two Princes deep. Then Gustav got the Blood Curse and the Justicar came in to do what should've been done a whole lot earlier: Gut the city's Kindred navel to nose. A lot of Kindred burned, and many more simply vanished.

Gustav's childe Wilhelm was functionally West Berlin's Prince, and in almost any other circumstance would have been in line to inherit undivided Berlin. But Wilhelm and his Primogen found themselves pruned, too, a casualty of their own rot. The whole False Caine debacle happening on their watch didn't help their case. Now Abraham Wolff, a complete outsider, is in charge. At least for the moment.

Need an example of the Camarilla pushed too far? I give you Berlin.

[RECORDING BEGINS]

Wolff: I trust you had a pleasant flight?

Ulfrike was waiting for me when I disembarked. With a sign. With my name on it. -L

Beckett: As these things go, it was. And I appreciate your help… it's next to impossible to find runway space at a major international airport on such short notice.

Wolff: Well, it helps to know someone...So you're in town looking for your progeny?

Beckett: Yes. Marie. It would be to everyone's benefit for me to locate her quickly.

Wolff: Yes, well, that's a curious thing. Because I don't know where she is, and that's mildly concerning to me. In fact, my people have been searching for her since receiving word of your arrival, fruitlessly. Maybe your sources are mistaken about her whereabouts?

Beckett: Possibly, though if it's not too much trouble, I'd like to give it a little time. I'm in no great hurry to be getting on that plane again anyway.

Wolff: Of course. You're free to make your inquiries, and I've cleared Ulfrike's schedule; she will facilitate your stay. The rules haven't changed much since my predecessors' abdication. Do avoid the Grunewald, though; I expect you know why.

[RECORDING ENDS]

Hasenheidge Park, Berlin, Germany

Well that didn't last long.

Ulfrike and I left Wolff's mansion, presumably to secure my lodgings, though I have no doubt those arrangements were already made. No, this VIP treatment was less about "facilitating" my needs and more about keeping tabs on me.

I was planning my escape when the car came to a halt. I looked up to find us parked across from the Kaiser Wilhelm Memorial.

I asked Ulfrike the meaning for our stop. She told me this is where "Caine presented himself," before quickly covering her embarrassment with caveats and qualifiers.

She was one of those. I hoped Wolff would have weeded out the amateur Noddists from his court.

Worse, she was giving me the tourist treatment.

I got out of the car and walked away. She tried to follow, but couldn't hope to keep up with me once I was on all fours.



Almost dawn now. If all else fails, I'll bury myself in Hasenheide Park for the day. I'm hoping Ulfrike's embarrassment over losing me is enough to forestall her going to Wolff; the last thing I need right now is a Prince pissed off at me. But the second-to-last thing I need is a starry-eyed Nod-quoter dogging my heels while I hunt Marie, so let's call it a calculated risk.

Strange dreams. I can barely recall them: the Reichstag, just bombed, being bombed actually; the hum of planes, whistling in the air, explosions all around me. I was pushing away the rubble, to get at something beneath, or maybe to get myself to safety, but the stones were corpses in my hands. Vampire corpses. Beneath them, something called my name. Then I woke up.

No goons were waiting for me when I crawled out of the ground, so that's a plus, but my journal is missing. There are only so many patches of dirt in Berlin to go to ground inconspicuously in, and had Ulfrike gone to Wolff, he'd have staked out all of them.

Where do I begin? Berlin is a different city now. The streets are the same, the landmarks mostly the same, but who do I know here?

The obvious choice is Ellison. He might be willing to help, but I can't risk my secrets with him. I have to give Wolff credit, keeping the Nosferatu on as Primogen was shrewd. Censure, exile, even Final Death were all options – after all, he was the sole Cainite to hold a position in the council of both Gustav and Wilhelm simultaneously – but mortal tourists were regarded with more kindness than Wolff the day he set foot in Berlin. A German expat ex-Sabbat raised in England? It's almost like the Camarilla was giving Germany the old two-finger salute by bringing him here. He needed a friend, he needed someone who knew the city, and he needed someone the others wouldn't dare challenge. That person could only be Ellison.

I'm sure he knows where Marie is. There's no way this bit of information has escaped him this long. So Wolff is either lying to me, or Ellison hasn't shared what he knows.

There's another I could go to: the creature that calls itself Rasputin. If it's even still around. That's a question I'd rather not have answered just now.

That leaves Anntoinette. She'll be tapped into the city's social scene and if she can't answer my questions, she may connect me with someone who can. I don't trust

her exactly, but Wilhelm's disenthronement cost her dearly, so I can't imagine she's a member of the Abraham Wolff Fan Club. That should work in my favor.

Odd – I just found my diary on the other side of the park.

La Lumière, Kreuzberg, Germany

Anntoinette fell from power, but not from grace. Now she owns a small cinema in Kreuzberg, and it suits her. Young, pretty people from all walks of life crowd the streets there until all hours, their sweat and perfume mixing with those of the hookah lounge next door. I can still smell it, in the folds of my clothes.

La Lumière has no marquee; it doesn't need one. The dim lobby's crowded with men and women discussing the relative merits of the night's offering, and beyond them are a series of red velvet ropes leading, presumably, to theater itself.

There Anntoinette stands, chatting with a pair of enthusiastic-looking patrons. Her eyes are on me and she smiles broadly as I write.

[RECORDING BEGINS]

Beckett: She sweeps across the room like an angel. Her red ballgown floor length, her makeup flawless. This dame don't walk. She glides.

Anntoinette: Picking up the noir atmosphere, Herr Beckett? [laughs]

Beckett: I'm almost disappointed in the lack of background jazz.

Anntoinette: Allow me to take you upstairs to my private screening room.

[SOUNDS OF WALKING AND LIGHT PLEASANTRIES]

Anntoinette: Narrate this silent movie for me.

Beckett: Ahem. The quality's quite bad – home movie bad – but the images are riveting. A man with dark eyes cradles a sickly woman – her flesh sallow and her eyes dull with cataracts. She weakly tries to bite him; she's starving, but she can't see her prey, or summon the strength to feed. Fortunately for her, she doesn't need to – the man slashes his own wrist and places it between her lips. She suckles like a newborn, and as she does, her eyes begin to clear.

Anntoinette: Do you know what this is?

Beckett: That's Owain.

Anntoinette: Yes. And me.

[LENGTHY SILENCE]

Beckett: Why are you showing me this?

Anntoinette: Things are different now, Beckett. I'm different now…I see a little of him in you, Beckett. A bit of the hero. And I want to help you.

Beckett: Do you know where Marie is?

Anntoinette: No, but I know someone who can find her.

Beckett: I already ruled out Ellison.

Anntoinette: Not Ellison. Strohmann.

Beckett: Make the meet.

Anntoinette: He's going to ask more than you're willing to give.

Beckett: Make it anyway.

Anntoinette: It's already made. You remember Septower Park, yes? The Soviet Memorial?

[RECORDING ENDS]

Sowohl Als Auch, Berlin, Germany

When Berlin was originally divided, it took me forever to come to think of it as two separate cities. Now that it's unified again, it's difficult for me not to think of it as East and West.

The Berlin Wall is nothing now, just cobblestones, but you can still feel its presence. For us, that's literally so. At Wilhelm's behest, Tremere elders enchanted the wall to inhibit free travel from side to side. Their fading magic proved more durable than the physical object itself. As I crossed the threshold, my fingertips tingled ever so slightly.

Berlin may be unified, but the eastern half is still playing catchup in many significant ways. Money churned into those neighborhoods to bring them up to Western standards, but that's a seam not easily hidden. The first thing you notice is the utilitarianism. Things here serve their purpose. The second is how so many of those things have outlived that purpose. Some of it was because the Wall came down – people and industry immigrated to the west, leaving behind shells of past existences. Other were just no longer needed, and so they remained, dying or dead. And some of it was war detritus. Bombed-out buildings and parks no one ever bothered to clear the rubble from.

Rubble, like in my dream.

It was some time before my coconspirators presented themselves. They were dragging out the evening on purpose, pushing me closer and closer to daybreak. Smart.

Finally, they arrived, a trio of young vampires. Wordlessly, they patted me down. A few moments later, a fourth emerged – a small, thin man with tiny wireframe spectacles adorning his pinched face. His fine leather oxfords didn't make a sound on the steps, and he never took his hands out of his pockets. He was clearly Nosferatu. I recorded the meeting, until its abrupt conclusion.

[RECORDING BEGINS]

Beckett: Strohmann?

Gunther: Oh no, Archbishop Strohmann doesn't attend to these meetings himself. My name's Gunther. You're looking for an unaffiliated Gangrel called Marie?

Beckett: You know where she is?

Gunther: An abandoned cigarette factory in Pankow. What was the street again?

Gunther's Goon #1: Hadlich Straße.

Beckett: Why the sudden altruism?

Gunther: You have in your possession, I believe, some maps of Berlin showing its undercity? These are things we are very interested in.

He meant the research I'd done years ago, into the burial site of a vampire named Eigermann. I didn't find him, but the collapsed tunnel I stumbled onto was curious in a number of ways – it's my working theory that it's the resting place of Melitta Wallenberg. That was a secret even Ellison didn't know, and I'd kept it from him on purpose, as I'm in exactly the opposite business of waking up old, hungry vampires.-B

[SOUNDS OF WALKING, MR. BECKETT IS GRABBED AT THIS POINT]

Gunther's Goon #2: You're going nowhere, Herr Beckett. We know you have the map.

Gunther's Goon #1: We've seen it!

Gunther's Goon #2: But we can't take it until you hand it over freely. We still want the map, Beckett, or we fuck you up.

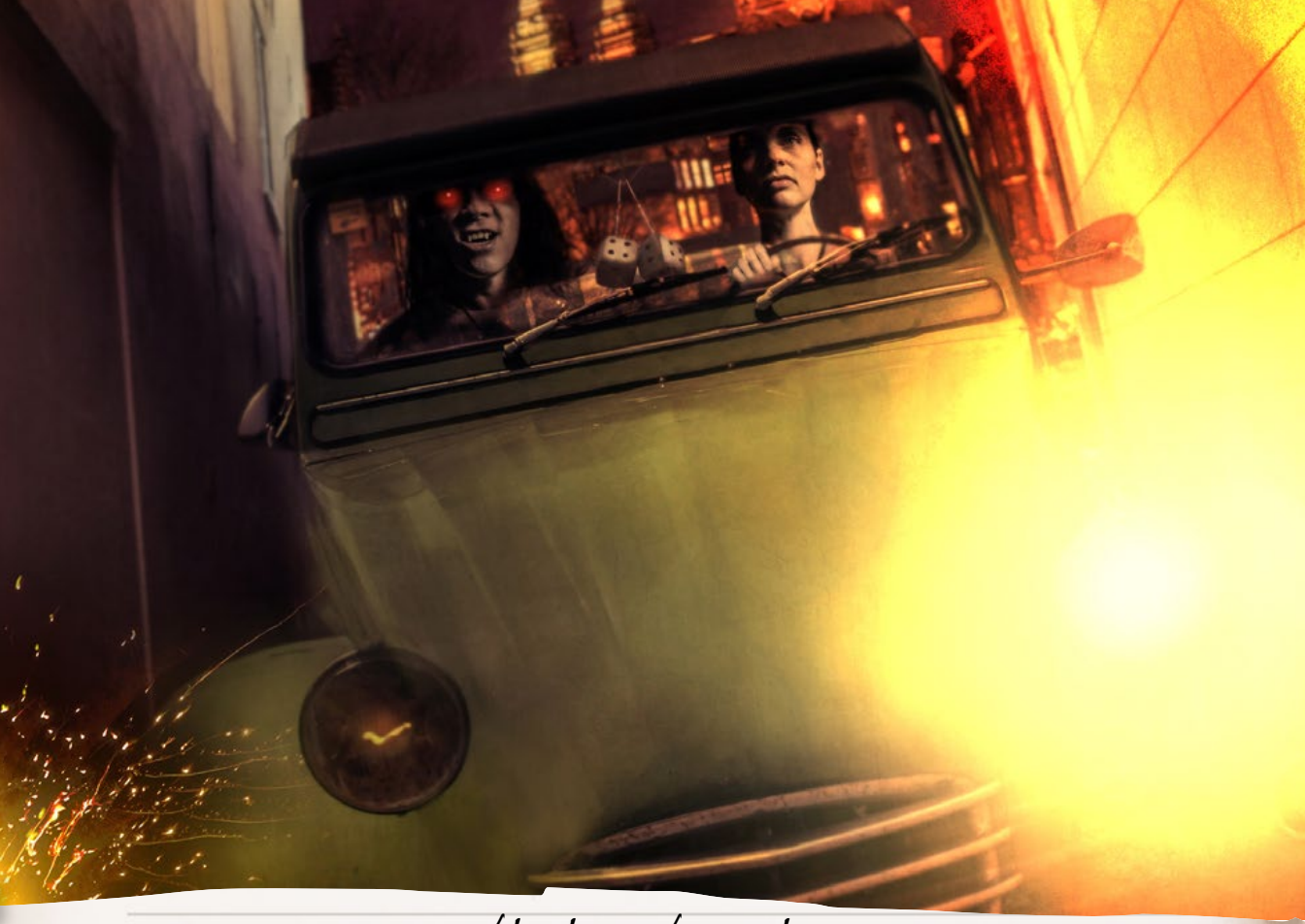
You still owe me for that charm.-A

[BURST OF AUTOMATIC GUNFIRE FOLLOWED BY SHOUTS, PERSISTING FOR AROUND A MINUTE]

I had to run towards the muzzle flashes to get out of there. No mean feat. One of my AK-armed saviors was Stefan Rutigar.-B

Rutigar: Anntoinette sends her regards.

[RECORDING ENDS]



Sowohl Als Auch, Berlin, Germany

A young woman grabbed my arm and pulled me into a parked car.

We weren't three blocks from the Memorial when we picked up a tail. I was beginning to entertain the notion of standing and fighting, insane as that was, but my driver was a more-than-competent wheelwoman, buying us space with a dramatic alley cutback that took the side mirrors off, and into a plaza never meant for cars. We bounced down a flight of stairs and were suddenly back on the street. Just as I relaxed again, we squealed to a halt, open road ahead and headlights looming behind.

She reached across me and flung open my door. "Go," she said, pushing me out of the car. Gunfire erupted around me, and I ran. A few moments later came the tingling in my fingers; I kept running until the sensation passed.

Once I'd crossed to the western side of the barrier, the gunfire stopped. I chanced a glance back, but the cars were already pulling away. No idea what became of my rescuer.

I'm sitting in an all-night café now, just about out of options. Maybe it's time I give Ulfrike a chance.

[RECORDING BEGINS]

Beckett: Ankla Hotep wasn't actually Caine, so why persist in treating it like it's worthy of actual scholarship?

Ulfrike: You don't believe in Caine at all, so why study him? Or Nod? Or any of this?

Beckett: Like any good lie, there's a kernel of truth there.

Ulfrike: It's no different for me. The reappearance of Caine is a legitimate phenomenon, with multiple documented instances —

One good thing about Ulfrike: She's more than a bit starstruck by me. Her incessant questions are maddening, but I need her, so I tolerate it as best I can.

However, on at least one point of trivia she proved my better; I've preserved that conversation elsewhere for future consideration. -B

Beckett: Yes, the False Caine of Carthage, everyone knows —

Ulfrike: Carthage, yes, but not *just* Carthage. You've heard of Cochem?

[LENGTHY SILENCE]

Ulfrike: You haven't! Oh my — It's okay, you shouldn't be embarrassed, it's obscure.

Beckett: Tell me?

Ulfrike: The village of Cochem, 1493. While the Convention of Thorns was in session, Caine appeared to a group of Kindred. They were all called there, from different places, led there by visions and dreams, and when they were through, they just went home, returned to their normal lives. They weren't supposed to speak of it, but there's apocrypha —

Beckett: So another False Caine.

Ulfrike: Probably, but the thing is, no one can prove he was False. I mean, we can barely prove it happened at all, but what if he was the real Caine?

Beckett: He wasn't.

Ulfrike: Do you know what he said? Or at least what he's said to have said? That 13 was the number he chose, and only with 13 could there be Salvation. He was talking about the Clans, Beckett, but he didn't say *which* 13, and we only know two that were there for sure — the Ventrue and Malkavians. I just keep thinking, the Cappadocians were still around in 1493.

Beckett: It wasn't Caine.

Ulfrike: You collect prophecies and omens; that's one you haven't heard yet. Now call me amateur again, why don't you?

[RECORDING ENDS]

Bródhan Museum, Berlin, Germany

My mind is on Marie. I know where she is now – presuming Gunther's information is authentic – but I wasn't any closer to obtaining the Book of the Grave-War. No, all I've managed to do is bait my own trap.

I briefly considered Stefan. He'd helped me once, maybe he would again? Ulfrike divested me of that hope almost immediately – the Bruja simply didn't have the resources to do what needed to be done. Wolff, on the other hand, did. I can't say that I'm love with the idea, but she's right, I don't see another way.

I, Abraham Wolff, Prince of Berlin, East and West,
Magnanimous and Merciful, do decree:

Your pathetic autarkis arse will put itself on the line. You go to the Circinus factory, meet with the Sabbat, collect your childe, and I'll arrange rescue for you and ambush on Strohmann at the appropriate time.

If you put Strohmann in this place for me, I see no reason to not aid you and your childe in this way. If you betray me, the Camarilla, Traditions, or Holy God up above — I will rain on you like a heavenly storm of furious buffalo.

Try me.

The Calleva Arms, Silchester, British Isles

The short version: I'm still alive. Ulfrike's plan worked, Wolff did come to the rescue, et cetera.

The long version:

There was a fence around the property, to discourage the homeless and urban explorers. I suspect it didn't discourage much of anyone, it certainly didn't me. The building itself was sealed, the front doors chained, and the windows boarded over. I could've entered anywhere, but this is Marie we're talking about, so I opted for a quiet approach. Finding an unsecured window on the perimeter, I slipped in.

The remains of a desk and the rusted shell of a filing cabinet occupied the center of the first room, piled in a heap. Beyond were a series of offices, a pair of restrooms



missing their doors, and the entrance to the factory floor. An orange light flickered against the walls, and there was smoke in the air. A worm of panic wriggled in my gut as I followed the smell.

Once there were machines there, a tremendous production line along which dozens of people worked. Now the cavernous room was empty save for the accumulated detritus of two decades of abandonment. And right in the middle was a barrel, spitting flames.

Marie was standing beside it – it must have taken enormous will, or hatred – holding the Book of the Grave-War over the fire.

She looked right at me and smiled, then let go of the book.

I took a deep breath, swallowed my fear, and sprinted towards the barrel. I kicked it hard, knocking it over and spilling its flaming contents across the floor. It took every ounce of will I had to reach into the conflagration and pull the book free. By the time I smothered the flames, my hands were briquettes and I was just barely holding the Beast in check.

Crouched on the floor, cradling the book like a madman, I found myself looking down the barrel of Marie's pistol. Behind her, Strohmann's men converged, their ambush sprung.

I put up a token resistance, but there really wasn't much point; I was outnumbered. My thoughts ran mostly to the Book, as it was the crucial piece; if it was left behind, this would all be for naught. So I clasped it tightly to my chest and held fast as they fought me for it. Pieces of my hands flaked away and had it lasted much longer they would have won, but Marie's wicked sense of irony and her overwhelming hatred finally came to the fore.

"If he wants it so bad, let him keep it."

And then she pounded a stake straight through it and into my heart, nailing the Book of the Grave-War to my chest. Not exactly what I was expecting, but it worked.

BRUCE, DYLAN



Clan of Kings (antitribu); *1925 #1944. Childe of Gotsdam.

A native of England at the time of the Blitz, B. first encountered the Kindred when his father uncovered an unnamed Cainite while excavating a bomb shelter. For a time, B. hunted Kindred, until he met and was Embraced by the barbarian Gotsdam. Convinced the Camarilla was responsible for the death of his family, he was swayed to the Sabbat, and eventually conscripted into the Black Hand. He's an infernalist of considerable power, and for his crimes against Clan Tremere was placed on the Red List.

Editor's Note: Translated (poorly) from German

I had an easier time convincing Beckett to take a stake to the heart than I did securing my own sire's cooperation. A strike against Strohmann should have been incentive enough…it would be a legitimate coup for him, and victories are something he needs right now. But I practically had to beg him. He hides it well, but I know that in his mind, he sees only enemies. How long until his suspicion falls on me as well?

It was a daytime raid executed by our ghouls and retainers in the Polizei. The GPS led them right to Beckett. Unfortunately, it was only a secondary lair; it may be we're able to find something leading us to Strohmann among the physical evidence seized, but I'm not counting on it. The book, such that it is, I promised to Beckett, but in truth, I can't guarantee Abraham will relinquish it.

Dear Ulfrike,

By the time you receive this, I'll already be in London. My apologies for keeping this information from you this long; it's less than you deserve by a large margin, but we both know I couldn't risk being detained with this information, and thus I hadn't even committed it to paper until now. I trust you will be able to disseminate it to Abraham in the least alarming way possible.

Thank you for your help. The next time I'm in Berlin, I owe you a conversation.

Sincerely,

Beckett

The Calleva Arms, Silchester, British Isles

Different Kindred have described the experience of being staked in different ways. Some retain no memory of it, while others lose time or fuzzily recollect events. I'm one of the unlucky ones who retains it all with perfect clarity.

When you're lying there paralyzed and Dylan Bruce walks in, perfect clarity is the last thing you want. I've conveyed the conversation here just as it happened.

Dylan: You've outdone yourself. I thought were you taking the piss when you said you had him. Strohmann must be pleased.

Gunther: Oh yes, I believe he will be.

Dylan: He doesn't know?

Gunther: My sire is very busy, why trouble him unnecessarily with rumors and gossip? He only wants what Beckett knows…would he not be more pleased to have it delivered without the fuss of having to extract it himself?

Dylan: Hah! What you mean is won't he be pleased with you if you're the one who delivers Melitta to him? You're more ambitious than I gave you credit for.

(Strohmann never even knew I was in Berlin — it was all part of some cockeyed power play on Gunther's part. Which explained why I was kept in some random basement somewhere, rather than a Sabbat stronghold. Good for me, bad for Wolff and his hopes of bringing down Strohmann.)

Dylan: [fingering the stake in my chest] What's with the book?

Gunther: It is already spoken for, I'm afraid.

(Dylan smoothed his mustache with thumb and forefinger. Gunther wasn't privy to the look in his eyes, but I was, and in that moment I could see the Nosferatu's life being weighed. Then it passed and Dylan smirked, turning away from me. If I could have exhaled, I would have.)

Dylan: This was fun, Gunther. You have quite a trophy there, don't fuck it up.

Gunther: I assure you, I have taken every precaution necessary.

Ich Bin Ein Berliner?

In 1992 the demolition of the Berlin Wall was complete. Even so, portions of it still exist. Slabs of granite painted with graffiti. Cobblestones marking its one-time course. Memorials to those who lost their lives along the infamous East Berlin death strip. Berlin moves on, but memories are like ghosts.

And vampires have the longest memories of all. The vast majority of its Kindred came to or were Embraced in the 20th century, and in just that century, Berlin's Cainites endured two wars, the rise and fall of the Third Reich, the Cold War, a pair of warring Princes, the false Ascension of Caine, and the Blood Curse.

In some ways, the kindest thing for Berlin would have been to raze it and start over, and that's very nearly what happened after Gustav succumbed to the Blood Curse. But it wasn't the Blood Curse that moved the Camarilla to take such stern action; it was the still-fresh memory of Ankla Hotep, the False Caine of Berlin.

Ankla Hotep was a Ravnos Methuselah trapped in torpor whose body was recovered by Nazi Cainites. Whatever they had planned for him fell by the wayside, though, as their own bunkers were bombed into oblivion shortly thereafter. Uncovered again in the early 90s, the Setite Methuselah Nefertiti and her thrall, Kleist, brainwashed the ancient Ravnos into believing he was Caine, making Berlin ground zero for the most audacious strike against the Camarilla in its 600-year history. Within days the city was flush with Cainites from everywhere in the world straining to get a glimpse of their would-be god. To make matters worse, the native Anarch population, an evolution of the Nazi Party calling themselves the Final Reich, leveraged the chaos to their advantage, moving to purge the "impure" elements from Berlin. The Camarilla acted: Justicar Karl Schrekt pierced the enchantment upon Ankla Hotep, exposing him as a False Caine, while his Archons scoured Berlin clean of its Anarch elements, including the Final Reich. Their justice didn't go far enough; the twin Princes were allowed to coexist and the wounds that begat Ankla Hotep festered.

A few years later, the Blood Curse arrived in Berlin. A disease particular to Kindred, it consumed them from within. Over half the city's Cainite population met their ends by the time the disease reached its apogee, including Prince Gustav Breidenstein. As bedlam reigned in the streets, the remaining Prince, Wilhelm Waldburg, called in the Justicars to maintain order. It cost Wilhelm dearly; citing his inability to rule a fully unified Berlin, he was dethroned and banished. In his place, Abraham Wolff, a Malkavian with no connection to Berlin whatsoever, was installed.

A former antitribu of the Sabbat, the first nights of Wolff's rule were anything but easy. Having suffered so much in the past decade, the city's Kindred were eager for change, but not the kind of change Wolff represented.

Certain observers suggest Wolff was never expected to succeed. In a city divided, a common enemy could galvanize Berlin's Cainites behind a single cause. And should he fail, it would rid the Camarilla of Wolff, to whom they were politically beholden. It's the sort of gossip favored by conspiracy theorists on internet forums, but it's infected Wolff's thoughts. With each passing year, his paranoia grows. He sees enemies everywhere now, and has begun taking "appropriate" action. But grip something too tightly and it will break; for Berlin, the cracks are already starting to show.

Cainites Never Come In From The Cold

In the canon of spy literature, Berlin reigns supreme. The warring ideologies of East and West found perfect symbolism in the divided city. But Berlin was far from a metaphor; its reality was that on the West side you could paint graffiti on the Wall, and on the East side you could be shot and killed for being within 100 yards of it. It was freedom versus authoritarianism, good versus evil (although which was which was highly subjective), all separated by a little more than 11 feet of concrete and a few hundred feet of ground.

German reunification officially took place in October of 1990. By 1992, the world's most visible symbol of the Cold War finally came down. While the Cold War may be over in the mortal world, it doesn't have to be that way for vampires.

The Wall was good at keeping humans apart, but concrete is less effective at restricting vampires. In an effort to secure West Berlin against his enemies, most especially his sire Gustav, Prince Wilhelm di-

rected the Tremere to devise a magical version of the Wall. It served as an alarm, alerting Wilhelm to any trespasses into his territory. It worked as expected, but the spell manifested an unexpected side effect: Gustav was attuned to it too, so both Princes benefited from it equally (whether this was an accident or a deliberate subverting of its intent by the Tremere is unknown). After the Wall came down, the enchantment has been slower to fade. Even after the two Princes were dead and ousted, it could be sensed.

Or perhaps that is just the weight of history, playing tricks on the Cainite imagination.

The West

Anntoinette weathered her fall from power as well as any of Berlin's great vampires. Once, she wielded as much influence as any that weren't Prince; after all, she was Wilhelm's lover. But when the Blood Curse ravaged Berlin, it very nearly claimed her. Nursed back to health by the near-mythical Owain ap Ieuan, she returned a changed woman. Gone was the pettiness, the vindictiveness, and the scheming. What abided was her love of the cinema, and she spends her nights pursuing those artistic visions. Her theater, La Lumière, is a popular nightspot for Kindred of West Berlin and an informal Elysium.

The Tremere Maxwell Ldescu, despite having been removed from the Primogen after Wilhelm's expulsion, remains an influential member of Cainite society. As Regent of the Berlin chantry, his services are often in demand. He has an appreciation for the work Wolff's done; West Berlin is free of the pervasive anarchist element characterizing Wilhelm's rule, and of that Maxwell approves. That Wolff's reign is increasingly authoritarian concerns him little, as he's able to operate above it.

Ellison, as always, is one of Berlin's most enigmatic figures. Childe and lover of the Methuselah Melitta Wallenberg, who remains entombed beneath the city to this day, Ellison plays a game longer and more convoluted than most imagine. For almost a century he's catalogued Berlin's secrets, a fact that granted the Nosferatu seats on both Primogen councils when the city was split between Gustav and Wilhelm. Ellison remains the one Primogen holdover, but with the arrival of competition in the form of the Nosferatu Archbishop Strohmann, Ellison's grip on the city is less than it once was.

The East

East Berlin, though still technically Camarilla, has been partially usurped by a self-appointed Archbishop named Strohmann. From his secret palace in the ruins of the former Iraqi Embassy, Strohmann actually likes the fading barrier reminding his Western foes that in the East, they're on foreign soil. In fact, he finds it hilarious. A Nosferatu antitribu, Strohmann claims to have had a hand in the Final Death of Baba Yaga. He may or may not be responsible for the entire Samedi bloodline. And while his true objectives in Berlin are obscured, it's occurred to him that while he's here, it couldn't hurt to locate and diablerize Melitta Wallenberg.

Stefan Rutigar is perpetually a day late and a Euro short. Formerly a member of Gustav's Primogen, but also a thrall to Wilhelm, who used him as a spy, Stefan was glad to see both of them ousted. Finally, he believed, his plans to build a Brujah army from the hostels of East Berlin would bear fruit. But, before he could seize control for himself, Wolff was appointed Prince in the West and Strohmann arrived to claim dominion in the East. The latter was particularly galling. Now, the would-be Anarchist Prince has become one of the most stalwart defenders of the Camarilla's territory.

The Others

Somewhere beneath the streets is a creature calling itself Rasputin. It once served Ellison, though its true master was always Baba Yaga. With her death, Rasputin is free to pursue its own agendas. What it truly is, and whether it's constrained to one side of the city or the other, is completely unknown.

Dylan Bruce isn't the only Red Lister whose presence is felt in East Berlin — Strohmann's made it known any are welcome (Ossian might be the exception), regardless of ties to the Sabbat — but he's easily its most frequent visitor. Having grown up in England at the time of the Blitz, his entire unlife is intimately connected to the city. Destroying the Sabbat traitor Wolff and handing Berlin over to Strohmann...well, it won't fill the gaping hole in his soul, but it'll be fun.

No fewer than three Methuselahs lie buried beneath Berlin, in tunnels sealed by war and time: Eigermann, Melitta Wallenberg, and Nefertiti. Eigermann is the city's first vampire, a Ventrue who's been subtly guiding its fortunes from torpor since the 12th century. Nefertiti is the most recent addition of the three; the impetus behind the False Caine debacle, she disappeared into the Berlin underground, choosing torpor over death. It's possible her thrall, Peter Kleist, joined her. He hasn't been seen since either.

There are several threads to explore in Berlin:

- Wolff's seat of his power is located in the west, while the greatest threats to his power reside in the east. To extend his reach, Abraham elects to form an Eastern Primogen, but getting a foothold and keeping it won't be easy, what with Strohmann and the Red Listers in town.
- The Red List isn't a Sect, not even close. But some of them may find common ground in their common enemy, and Strohmann has rolled out the red carpet with just this thought in mind. Certain Listers will be right at home amid the cloak and dagger, while others will find East Berlin a fertile place to cultivate personal agendas.
- For centuries, Berlin was ruled by Ventrue. Now, there's nary a Blue Blood in sight. It's enough to make Eigermann roll over in his grave, literally. The old Ventrue stirs, and as he does, all of Berlin's Kindred are haunted by images of destruction. Is it a sign of Gehenna? Is there a way to soothe Eigermann's discontent? Restoring a Ventrue Prince might be the only choice. Perhaps Wolff is only holding the seat temporarily before Wilhelm gets back in the good graces of the Camarilla. Or perhaps not.
- Mortal workers unearth a torpid vampire beneath the city streets. The creature is desiccated and starving; it makes short work of the kine, then flees into the subways. Nothing satiates its hunger, but worse, it is sick with the Blood Curse. Can it be found before the sickness spreads? For the infected, perhaps Anntoinette's vitae holds the key to their salvation.
- The barrier dividing the city is equal parts magic and spirit. It may be possible to finally exorcise it, symbolically reunifying Berlin for all Kindred. But it won't be easy, and there are those who don't want Berlin unified and history to disappear, starting with Strohmann.

DREAMS AND NIGHTMARES



Ordo Sanctissimae Michaela Trinitatis

Those of us with centuries under our belts or mentors generous enough to provide tutelage on nights gone by may recall the Trinity of Constantinople. Or Istanbul, if you'd rather.

Michael may be dead and gone, the Dracon disappeared inside himself, and Antonius who knows where, but word from a certain Master of Ravens is the Trinity are returned to Constantinople, albeit in different forms.

Word from the ground adds that those rogues Beckett and Vykos both endeavor to locate the truth of this tale. I doubt they'll be working together.

Cainites of Constantinople take note — you may wish to sleep away the next month or so while these two Noddists *par excellence* tear down your domain looking for clues. That is, if they don't kill each other or get obliterated by the new Trinity first.

— MrMysterio

From: h.ruhadze@bloodspot.eg

To: beckett@schreckNET.nod

Subject: RE: Urgent Evacuation Required

The situation in Istanbul being what it is, sadly — very sadly — my answer must be a no.

Fortunately for you, I understand your benefactor is anxious about your recent lack of communication. I'll pass the message on. A boon from the King of Washington, D.C. is probably worth a little more than some trinket from you.

From: beckett@schreckNET.nod

To: h.ruhadze@bloodspot.eg

Subject: Urgent Evacuation Required

Dear Hesha,

Okulos isn't answering. I need you to get a plane to Sultan Ahmet private airport in Turkey immediately, and I know you've got the resources to get it done.

A pain to get stuck in Turkey, isn't it? -O

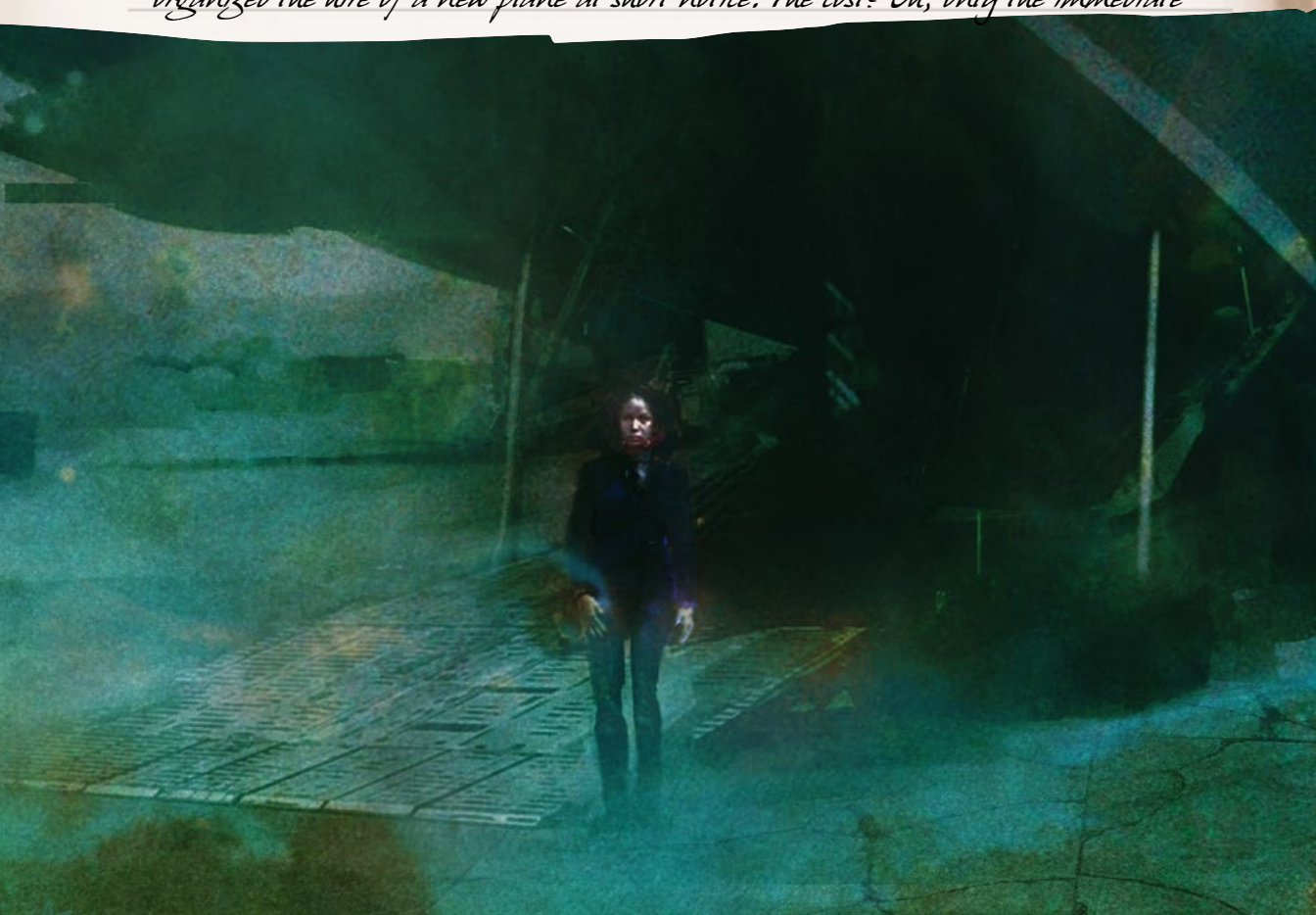
I'll owe you a huge favor. Huge. Email back.

Sincerely,

Beckett

Villa del Prospero, Cayman Brac, Cayman Islands

One of the most helpful things about my "patron's" interest in my continued existence is the superlative quality of the toys he's occasionally willing to give me. Vitel organized the hire of a new plane at short notice. The cost? Oh, only the immediate



scanning and sending of pages from my journal covering my tour of Jerusalem. Thankfully, most of that record is audio, but I can feel the tug of a summons on my soul. He wants more.

We flew to the Caymans via Portugal. A security detail comprising young men and women in night-superiority battle dress met us on the runway. They came complete with personal body armor, sidearms, and lightweight machine carbines. Prospero certainly knows how to make Kindred feel welcome.

They stayed a safe distance back as Cesare cycled down the engines, and approached as he lowered the stairs. I worked up the mental and physical wherewithal to rise from my bunk as the leader of the delegation stepped through the door, a bronze-skinned goddess in a midnight blue pantsuit, a subtle deformation of the lines of her jacket suggesting the presence of a shoulder holster. She greeted me by name in a mellifluous British-Caribe accent and with a handshake so precisely calibrated it immediately betrayed her as a ghoul experienced enough to know her own strength. She gave her own as Jacinth Asgarali and waved four of her companions forward to help me with my baggage. Of note, one such bag contained the torpid body of Sascha Vykos.

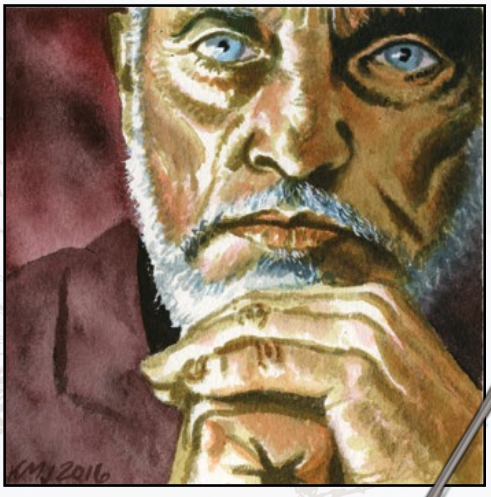
Despite the length of night still before us, I barely had the energy necessary to hold myself upright. I felt as though my body was a statue carved from solid lead, my neck too brittle to hold up the weight of my head. I came back to myself at Cesare's urgent summons – which is to say, shaking me hard enough to rattle my brain.

On good authority I'm told Prospero is an agent of the Inconnu. Somehow he protects among the most hunted and reviled Cainites. Look at how he's taken Ruthven under his wing. And you. -L

Prospero's villa is built into the side of the only genuine piece of high ground on the whole island, a spit of cavern-riddled limestone called "the Bluff," and is surrounded on three sides by dense forest that houses some sort of bird sanctuary and a sheer drop to the rocky beach on the fourth. Its uppermost story is built low and long, and the rest is mostly below ground, including the lightproofed "private quarters" of any Kindred guests who might be staying on his private island paradise. The list of people who have a standing invitation to drop in on him is short; fortunately, I am on it and have been for some years.

I recall your tale of meeting Prospero in a shellhole during the Battle of Verdun, saving one another's lives forced a bond to form, etc. etc. Funny how he gives and gives but never openly asks anything in return.

PROSPERO



The Learned Clan(?); *1151 #1179. Childe of Unknown sire.

An enigmatic Cainite of ill repute, P. somehow maintains the domain of the Cayman Islands with little visible conflict, despite attempts by the Serpents of the Light to remove his stewardship. P. became sole owner of his tropical islands in the nights before it became a hotspot for wealthy kine, supposedly due to his vast cache of pirate treasure and a herd formed from generations of investment bankers. A proponent of the ancient tradition of Elysium, he declares his islands free to all, providing they bear his invitation. P. controls all means of arrival by air and sea. Unsubstantiated rumors place Prospero as a Baali, a Salubri, or one of the Inconnu. His real name is a closely-guarded secret.

[RECORDING BEGINS]

Jacinth: Your man is dead on his feet, Mr. Beckett — I'm a little surprised he managed to land as well as he did in that weather.

Beckett: Nerves of steel and the promise of many, many frozen drinks with little paper umbrellas in them when we got here.

Jacinth: [laughs] Do you wish me to summon Raoul? He'll see your man —

Beckett: Cesare. His name is Cesare.

Jacinth: Cesare. Say the word and we'll see him settled comfortably.

Beckett: Please. He's had...a rough few days. And thank you.

Jacinth: You are quite welcome. The master is inbound from the big island — he should be here in no more than an hour. Make yourself to home.

[RECORDING ENDS]

Villa del Prospero, Cayman Brac, Cayman Islands

I am not entirely certain how long I waited — I opened the doors and went outside in the hope the bracing, storm-charged night wind might help clear my head, or at least help me focus. I took to attempting Book of the Grave-War translation for several

minutes, before being blinded by searing head pain. I drifted, my back pressed against the glass of the loggia doors, the rain lashing against the roof a weirdly-soothing counterpoint to the thunder echoing down the ridge.

The sound of the zipper on the body bag sliding jerked me back and I half turned to find my host gazing down at its contents with a profoundly bemused look on his face. He rose and straightened to his full, impressive height, all windswept dark auburn hair and eyes only a shade or so off the sea.

[RECORDING BEGINS]

Prospero: Could you explain to me, using small words and diagrams if necessary, how a sessile mass of Sascha Vykos in a body bag came to be lying on my sitting room futon? "Why" is obvious — you both look like you've been dragged through Hell. And you smell as though, at some point in the last 72 hours, you spent a considerable quantity of time in a sewer.

[PAUSE]

Prospero: Possibly a sewer that was on fire. You know what — you had better not sit on anything in those clothes. I cannot guarantee that my chief of staff won't murder you in your sleep if you ruin the upholstery.

Beckett: It's good to see you, too, Ameirin.

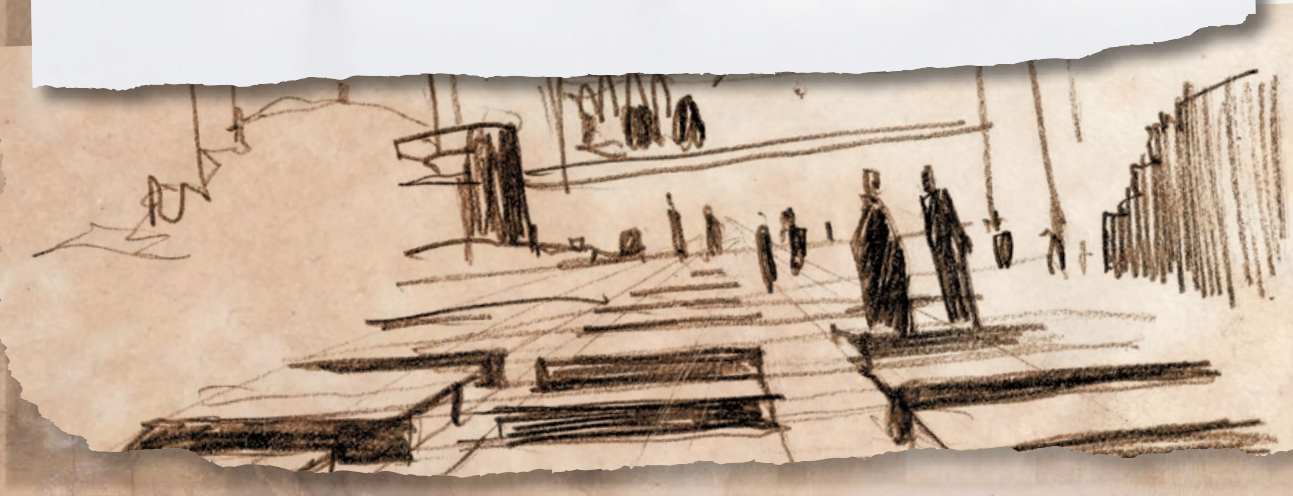
[sound of a heavy thud — I am assured this is when Mr. Beckett collapsed]

Prospero: Jacinth, please send a security team to remove the body bag's contents down to the guest quarters. Yes, leave him in the bag for now. Thank you. Raoul, I'm going to need the work case off the desk in my downstairs study and if you'd be so good as to put together a hospitality package and bring both up here to the sitting room, that would be excellent. Thank you.

[PAUSE]

Astarte's suppurating teats, Beckett, didn't I warn you to stay out of Constantinople?

[RECORDING ENDS]



Through winding winds I trust this letter reaches you, where'er you tread these nights.

Dearest Beckett, you insufferable ass,

When word reached me of your intention to travel to Constantinople, I could hardly refrain from writing to you with a word or two of advice. Sadly, you rarely leave a forwarding address. Your beloved Carna availed me of her services, however, so I trust this shall reach you.

There is nothing in Constantinople for you but blood — and not in a good way. The nights where the ever-embattled Mustafa sat the throne despite the aims of Sabbat Assamites are gone. There are greater powers at play, and they'll happily remove your skin, heart, and soul, in that order. Stay away from Constantinople.

I cannot trust this letter to be seen only by you, so I dare not write all I know of what's taking place. If I write Inconnu, Trinity, and Nykos, will that dissuade you, or entice you?

I already know the answer. I'll expect to see you within a week, in one form or another.

Prospero

Let no prevailing breeze dismay the course of this letter.

[RECORDING BEGINS]

Raoul: I cannot believe you put him on the couch.

Prospero: Don't tell me you haven't been itching to redecorate. Put it down on the end table. Is the rest in order?

Raoul: It will be in a moment. Milt is heating it up the old fashioned way.

Prospero: Good enough. Shoo for a bit — if I need you, I'll scream loudly and with great enthusiasm.

I entered at this point and can describe what followed. Prospero opened a case and extracted several items: a flat sort of mortar, a single edged knife made of shaped obsidian, its hilt wrapped in age-darkened leather, ink sticks, a bottle of water, a long-handled writing brush, and several long strips of some sort of paper. He poured water into the mortar and selected an ink stick, sweeping it carefully across the surface of the mortar until the ink reached the proper consistency. He took up the blade and, without ceremony, nicked his wrist, tilting it so that the blood ran off his fingertips into the mortar, mixed it into the ink with the tip of his knife, and licked the wound closed when he was finished. He fetched Mr. Beckett a throw pillow for his head, kneeling

down next to him and unbuttoning his shirt, laying it open as he went; halfway down, he stopped, and swore quietly under his breath in a language I've been unable to translate.

With the shirt completely open, the deep wound gouged into Mr. Beckett's chest became clearly visible, starting just below his right clavicle and slanting downward, terminating just above the left costal ribs. The wound itself was closed but was horribly discolored, with threads of greenish-black spreading out from it beneath the surface of Mr. Beckett's skin. Prospero laid a hand on it, fingers spread, and after a moment recoiled slightly. He took a few deep breaths but did nothing with them, instead spreading one of the strips of paper out on the floor next to Mr. Beckett, inking his brush, and swiftly inking three lines from edge to edge. He repeated this process with two more strips.

This is a deeply complex ritual. I contacted Vienna regarding its nature, and have been given warnings to not attempt it myself, and demands to identify the practitioner. -A

He took the first strip and laid it across Mr. Beckett's chest from side to side, the other two crossing from the shoulder to the opposite hip, and laid his hand over the point where they naturally crossed, his lips moving as he incanted almost silently. The paper strips writhed of their own accord, almost like a living thing, the writing itself flickering as though lit from within. On Mr. Beckett's chest, the threads of discoloration spasmed frantically, attempting to dig deeper even as they were being drawn like poison from a wound. Prospero's incanting grew gradually louder, his voice stronger and colder as he progressed. Finally, once the discoloration completely withdrew, he hooked his fingers through the nexus of the paper strips and peeled them away in one swift motion, twisting them around his fist and hissing three explosive sibilants. They crumbled to less than ash in an eyeblink and Mr. Beckett began to stir.

Prospero: You rock-chewing moron. Can you hear —

[MR. BECKETT ROARING IN PAIN AND ANGER]

[RECORDING ENDS]

Villa del Prospero, Cayman Brac, Cayman Islands

So, yes, it was an altogether uncivilized beginning to a reunion I had looked forward to for some time. Fortunately for me, Ameirin permitted neither his survival instincts nor his reflexes to atrophy since the last time I'd been in peril of clawing his face off. His implicitly-trusting chief of staff managed to get a freshly-warmed blood bag in range of my mouth. (Warmed by exposure to human body heat, not in a microwave. I love this place for several reasons, and that is only one of them.) It took four bags to pull me back off the edge and two more before Ameirin would risk asking one of his staff to feed me out of her own veins.

After he confirmed my clothes would all need to be burned, I fell to a true sleep of the dead for the first time in days. I woke the next evening to find my host already up, regarding me with the unfocused thousand-yard stare some people get when they're concentrating intently on things not generally visible to the naked eye.

[RECORDING BEGINS]

Prospero: I believe I got it all. How do you feel?

Beckett: Refreshed.

[PAUSE]

Beckett: "It?"

[DISTORTED PLAYBACK OF THE PREVIOUS NIGHT'S SURGERY/RITUAL — EVIDENTLY PROSPERO RECORDED IT WITH A CAMERA]

Prospero: That is what I mean by "it." Do you have any idea what that is?

Beckett: This is just a wild guess, mind you, but something I really did not want anywhere near me, much less inside my body?

Prospero: That, my dear Beckett, was the product of *maleficium* — that wound, however you received it, was infernally tainted. It would have eventually devoured your unlife and you do not seem even remotely surprised by this intelligence.

Beckett: I'm not completely surprised. After all, I was there when it was made, so —

Prospero: Really, Beckett? Really?

Beckett: Fine. How much do you know about the history of Constantinople? The Kindred history that is?

For the purposes of illustration, there was a horrible gangrenous mass of something pulsating underneath my skin. _B

Cesare almost seems jealous of someone else recording your activities. -L

The excised transcript hereabouts was removed by me when I got my hands on this journal. Why? It contained a little too much Narses and Gratiano material the Amici Noctis do not want recorded in some trifling diary. I present my abridged version:

The Cainite history of Constantinople is one of those things the academics and scholars of our kind never, ever get tired of talking about. Or writing about. That is because the Cainite history of Constantinople is a soap opera — possibly even a real opera, as it's got all the requisite characteristics: religiosity, pageantry, a vast and glorious city, high ideals, base treachery, and at the core of it all, an utterly doomed love triangle.

The most basic details are generally well known: during the long centuries of Rome's decline from preeminence, three old and powerful Cainites left that city and traveled to the Roman colony of Byzance, athwart the Bosphorus at the crossroads of East and West. It was their intent to make this place a worthy heir to the mythic cities of old — a repository of both Cainite and human art and culture, a home for both the flesh and the spirit of two deeply-intertwined peoples living side by side, a city as exalted by the divine as it was married to the world. Sculptors and artists, poets and wondermakers, power players and footsore refugees, all flocked to her walls, and for a time Constantinople was what its makers wanted it to be.

It was the only worthy successor, not only to Rome, but to Carthage, to the Second City, to even Enoch itself according to some, a place where the noble dead and the virtuous living inspired one another to new heights of perfection. It didn't last, because nothing ever does, and the Dream of Constantinople was too unstable at its establishment — broken at its base by Antonius the Gaul, Michael the Patriarch, and the Dracon, the three lovers whose entangled and conflicting natures both founded and undercut the very nature of the Dream.

In a nutshell: Antonius the Gaul, Ventrue, patrician, the sort of rock-ribbed control freak every neonate fears to discover is their grandsire, was desperately in love with Michael the Patriarch. The Dracon, Tzimisce, a mysterious, mystically inclined and free spirited type, was desperately in love with Michael the Patriarch. Michael the

Patriarch, architect of the city's grand Dream, was primarily in love with the idea of creating the perfect physical expression of Heaven on Earth, and himself.

Antonius and the Dracon were lovers. Or immortal enemies. Everybody agrees Michael more or less played them off against one another, theoretically to bring out the best in both of them, and mostly succeeded in nearly destroying his own best work in the process. For a period of time, the absolute pinnacle of Cainite civilization revolved around the collective personality disorders of a Methuselah love triangle, one that ended with the destruction of Antonius, the self-imposed exile of the Dracon, and the slow descent into madness of Michael himself.

Prospero — or Ameirin — knew all this, which doesn't surprise me.

As Michael was reaching the bottom rung of the sanity ladder, his Second Trinity was falling apart from the inside under the power of its own stresses, as the city was being sacked by the ravening forces of the Fourth Crusade. It was then Michael met his end at the hands of an enemy no one expected. According to several sources who survived the destruction of Constantinople, one of whom was Vykos, Michael the Patriarch was destroyed by a woman, a Baali priestess who hated him likely more than anyone else on Earth. No one was quite sure why, but she at least believed she had reasons.

Lucita

Prospero: Mary the Black. Also called Ma-Ri and Ma-Ri-Ah, depending on the sources you consult. Yes, I know the name. She was one of the vampires I tried to warn you away from, but your ears have ever been filled with impenetrable wax. Here, take his feet.

Beckett: Where are we going?

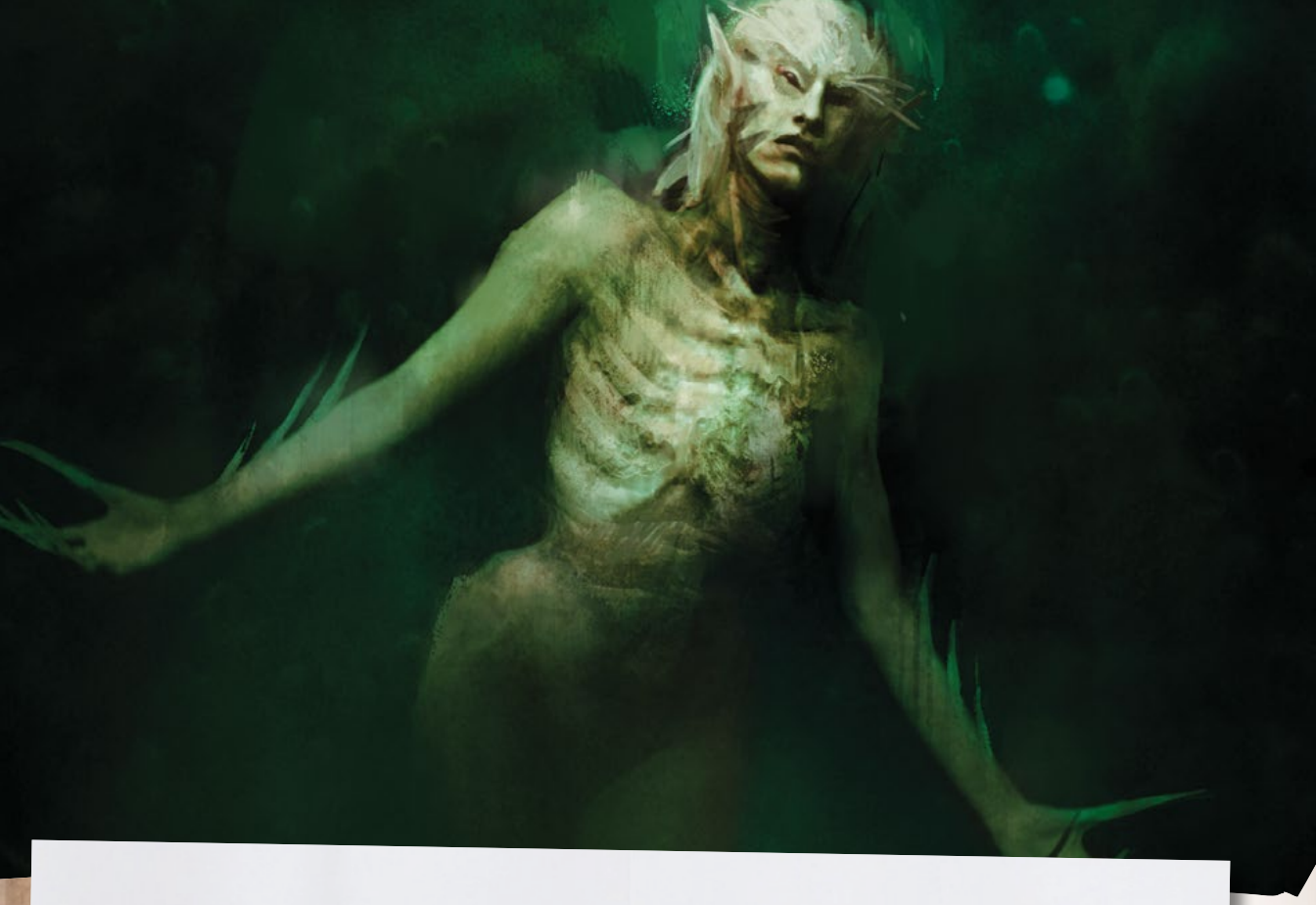
Prospero: Down to my workroom. If his injuries are as severe as yours, or worse, waking him up might get a bit tricky.

[SOUNDS OF STUMBLING WALKING FOR JUST OVER 10 MINUTES, FOLLOWED BY A THUD, AND THE UNZIPPING OF VYKOS' BODY BAG]

Beckett: They...didn't look like that when I put them in there.

[PAUSE]

Beckett: How did you even know who they were when you —



Prospero: Whatever's working on them is powerful enough to reshape them — or make them reshape themself — without conscious volition. That's pretty impressively bad. Because I've seen them this way before. I'm impressed you refer to Myca as "they," by the way.

Beckett: I referred to them as "it" once upon a time. I was corrected. You've met before this?

Prospero: Once or twice. Our areas of scholarly endeavor rarely coincide, but when they do, we've shared pertinent documentation. Just like you and I have.

[pause]

Prospero: Don't give me that look. It's true and you know it — you and they have more in common than either of you are willing to admit. Not in personality, mind you, but in the questing and seeking nature of your intellect. Both of you are on a Quixotic, existence-defining quest to find something that will make this terrible, wonderful world of ours make sense to you. They're not your enemy, Beckett — they are your shadow. And if you want to watch this, I'm afraid you're also going to assist. Kindly get the little box off the desk there and my lap board....

Vykos, at this point, was tall and slender, with long black hair and the idealized features of some sort of pagan god of antiquity. They also had a rather obvious injury to the chest, four long weals and one shorter weal burnt deep into the skin of their chest, just above the heart, in the rough shape of a hand. Just below that, the broken-off length of a stake jutted out of flesh and muscle, locked between the ribs. -B

Beckett: Well? Are they going to recover or should we put them out of their misery?

Prospero: Their injuries aren't infernally tainted — not like yours were. Someone cut you, yes? With a blade, not their hands?

Beckett: Yes — long knife, about yea wide, not sure that it was metal. It didn't feel like it.

Prospero: Bone, most likely. Something that would leave splinters of itself behind if the edge was even a bit ragged. But I digress — his wounds aren't cuts at all but burns.

Prospero extracted several lengths of prepared vellum from the box, a brush, three bottles of ink, and a blending dish. He added a dropper of each ink to the dish, stirred delicately to blend them, and began filling the vellum with fine, delicate lines of script. -B

Beckett: What language —

Prospero: You don't really want to know. The script is Asomtavruli.

Prospero sprinkled a bit of drying sand over the vellum and turned his attention to Vykos. Their form had shifted again, albeit slightly, growing fractionally more perfect. He extracted a length of knotted cord from the case, which he tied around Vykos' neck, positioning a particularly complex series of knots in the hollow of their throat. He wound a strip of vellum around Vykos' wrists and ankles and one around their forehead. -B

Prospero: You might want to stand back, in case this doesn't work

[terrible shrieking for just under a minute, gradually subsiding]

Vykos: Why did it have to be you?

Beckett: The inevitability of the universe, laughing at us both?

Prospero: Another thing you two have in common. You both hate being staked. And also being rescued.

Vykos: What have you done to us?

Prospero: Calm yourself. That sensation you're not feeling is all the pain you would be in were I not acting to protect your conscious mind from it. I can stop that, if you like.

[Vykos spitting untranslatable insults]

Prospero: I thought not. And, now that you're both awake and reasonably coherent, I'm afraid I'm really going to have to ask what brought you to my fair isle? Please tell me it involved a sewer not properly flushed out in centuries that was also on fire. I have quite a bit of money riding —

Beckett: — remember that stroll down Byzantine history lane we were just having upstairs?

Prospero: Oh yes — Though I confess myself slightly unclear how the destruction of Michael the Patriarch at the hands of Mary the Black relates to this. Unless you both fell afoul of the new Trinity I'm hearing about. Can you move your limbs without pain?

Vykos: Yes. For the most part.

Prospero: Good. Mary the Black disappears from what I know of infernalist history after a certain point — she murdered Michael, then fled. The last known sighting of her was in Damascus just before the Ashirra dropped the hammer on the Baali nest lairing there, cleaned the place out with sword and holy fire and all that. She was presumed —

Vykos: She was not destroyed.

Beckett: What they said. I saw her. We both saw her. We saw... both of them.

Prospero: Both? Oh... no.

Vykos: He lives in her. Michael lives in her. And they seem to have come to something of an accord. They are two faces of the incarnation of divinity Michael has always sought — *Ahura Mazda* and *Ahriman* in the union of accursed flesh and transcendent spirit. And they want — they desire more than anything — to make whole their...balance.

Beckett: I started hearing rumors about it months ago. A new Trinity setting up shop in Constantinople — trying to reclaim the glory that was, citing the failure of the world to end when everybody thought it was going to as a sign that all was not yet lost. I'd been keeping a weather eye on the situation because, well...I knew they wouldn't be able to leave it alone forever and we needed to... talk about some things.

Vykos: Is that what you call it? At least when we attempt to murder you we have the decency to name it for what it is, you—

Prospero: I am two seconds way from walking out that door, warding it, and letting you two hate fuck it out. I recommend the desk.

[HORRIFIED PAUSE]

Thank you for the extra color, Cesare.-A

Prospero: Back to the point, if you please.

Beckett: Long story short, I was right, Vykos turned up in Constantinople looking for the new Trinity, and myself. I went there for similar reasons, and, well —

Prospero: You saved their unlife.

Beckett: If you love me at all, please don't say it like that. It sounds so terrible and stupid and did I mention terrible when you say it like that?

Vykos: We were in the process of saving ourself when this idiot intervened —

Beckett: You were in the process of mentally submitting to your insane ex-boyfriend —

Vykos: Michael was not — was never — our lover —

Beckett: — who is, by the way, a permanent resident alien inside the equally insane skull of someone who clearly wants to burn the world down and might have the heft to do it, either all by herself or with help. You're welcome, by the way.

Prospero: They wanted you to be their *azhi dahaka*, did they not?

Vykos: Yes. How —

It's pleasing to hear the monster can genuinely be surprised.-A

Prospero: Who was the second in the new Trinity?

Beckett: I didn't get a good look — fast, small, strong. Stronger than you, I'm willing to say right now. The one who cut me.

Prospero: Because if *Ahura* and *Angra* are one being, there must be two others to craft the balance of a trinity — *Amesha Spenta* and *Azhi Dahaka*. And of those two, only one was a serpent. A dragon. Was there a pit already?

Beckett: There might have been. Michael's old haven — the echo of the Hagia Sophia, under the city — parts of it are still there. That's where I found them. They were —

Vykos: — they were making sacrifice when we arrived. It...may well be the beginnings of a Well of Sacrifice, if one not wholly... sanctified yet.

Wrong word choice, Fiend.-A

Prospero: Good. Because something just tried the outermost ward-boundary around the Sisters and it wasn't a particularly inept try.

Beckett: Fuck.

Vykos: You let them follow us here?

Beckett: I assure you, I didn't *let* the terrifying Baali Methuselah do anything. Ameirin —

Vykos: Ameirin...of the Inconnu? I.... We. You! You misled me all this time? Manipulator!

Beckett: There are bigger things to worry about right now!

Prospero: They saw nothing I didn't want them to see. And what they saw were pieces of a very expensive jet being pulled out of the sea, where it crashed last night.

Beckett: Damn it, Ameirin, that plane was an expensive loan!

Prospero: I did not actually have your bloody plane destroyed. I am, however, going to have to subject it to some fairly comprehensive ward refitting and the pair of you to an equally rigorous regime of ritual cleansing to keep you hidden — whether you choose to stay here or not. For the record: I advise staying here, at least for the time being, until you can come to a course of action, either singularly or together.

Vykos: Together? Have you lost your mind?

Beckett: I find it extremely uncomfortable to agree with you about anything, I'll have you know. And Vitel is calling me. It's all I can do to resist.

Vykos: Give Lucius my love. Aimerin…do not think I will forget this. We remember what the Inconnu did to Constantinople. And we still recall the taste of Thomas Feroux.

Prospero: You're both adorable. I can fashion a ritual to stave off Vitel's call, but let's be frank — the enemy rising right now is beyond either of you individually and is likely beyond both of you together. You will require assistance that either or both of you are unlikely to find outside these walls. I'm willing to locate that assistance — and to protect you both while we assemble it, but I will need you to cooperate, with me and with each other. Please.

[RECORDING ENDS]



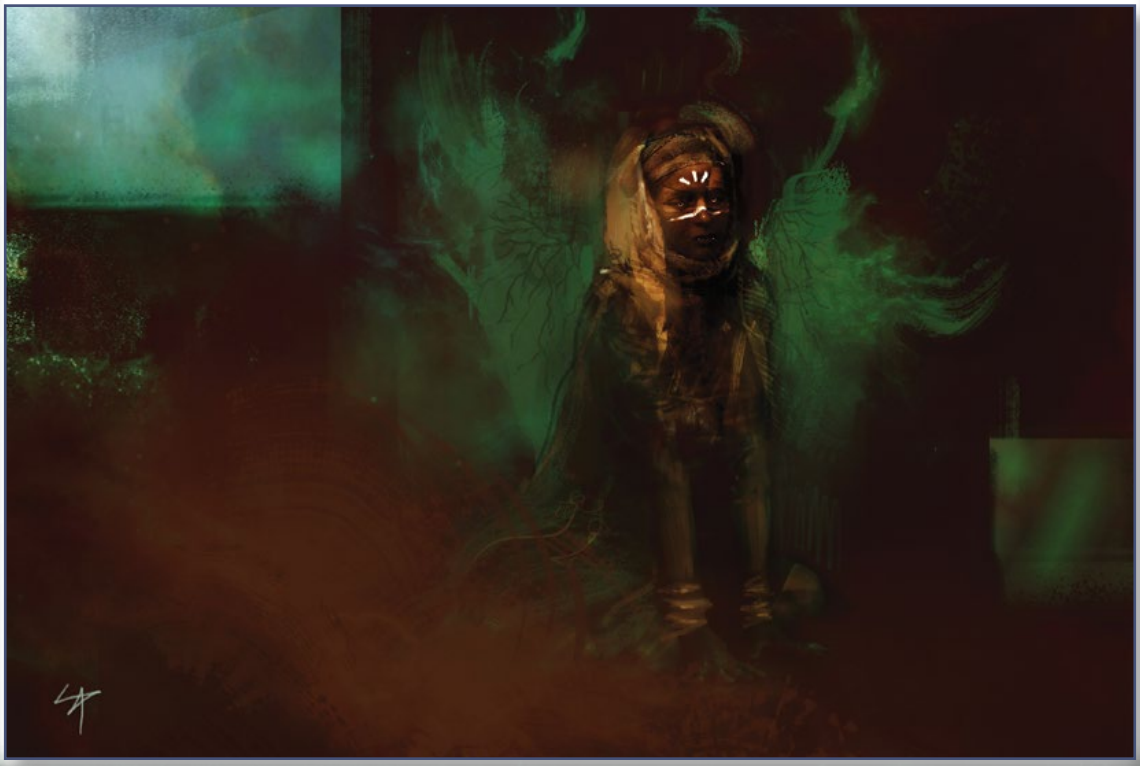
As Above, So Below

The last maps were updated with Istanbul in place of Constantinople in the 1960s. To many Kindred, the name never changed. Mustafa is Prince of Constantinople. The Dream originated in Constantinople. The new Trinity is present in Constantinople. The city is a timeless memorial to Kindred ambition and glory. The vampires making their haven in the capital call it by its historic name, and neonates are quickly taught. History has power in Constantinople. It reminds vampires of their potential.

The Dream of Constantinople was an ideal given physical form — a city perfect in the eyes of God and man, a place where what was holy came together with what was base, where a true perfection of heaven on Earth could be made by the efforts of all those who kept faith with its founding ideals. In the end, even the Dream's architects failed to hold to those ideals and so they passed on to other inheritors, who scattered to the four corners of the Earth. Some of those inheritors kept the Dream alive in word and deed, driven by divine vision and by the weight of wills not their own shaping their minds and souls into tools and weapons. Some of those inheritors failed in their duties, failed in their visions, lapsed into torpor, abandoned their efforts, or sought vengeance and self-destruction rather than the continuance of something greater.

Vykos was one of those inheritors — descendant of the Dracon, the "Holy Spirit" of the original Trinity. Vykos had their flesh, mind, and soul reshaped in an effort to rescue Michael from his descent into madness. They became the incubator of both Michael's Dream and the torpid essence of the Dracon. Both were forced upon Vykos, a truth the Tzimisce finally came to know. In the aftermath of an averted cycle of Gehenna, Vykos woke to two realizations. The first that the encysted embryo of the Dracon, grafted inextricably into their being by the Eldest centuries ago, was no longer within their body. Whether aborted or miscarried, they were free of the maniacally bitter and self-destructive metastases of their ancestor's consciousness. The second realization was that the Dream whose banner they carried so long was never more than a nightmare to them — a nightmare of violation, first by their sire, then by Michael, and finally by the Dracon.

Mary the Black and Michael the Patriarch are one — she drank his soul to complete her vengeance against him and, in so doing, she cursed herself with the burden of knowledge and a truth that scourged her soul. Her revenge was empty, for the man she loathed to the depths of her being had not aban-



doned her of his own will, but had been forced from her side and had never, in his heart of hearts, ceased to love her. In the depths of her own grief and madness, she sought death to blot out this knowledge... but instead, in the deep places of her own being, she found what was left of *him*, and together they became more than they could ever become alone. Istanbul remains a shining beacon of mortal faith above, a city sacred to many; now, below, in the remains of Michael's long-abandoned haven, Mary the Black forges a Well of Sacrifice that will make its underbelly a perfect reflection of hell on Earth, as well. Slowly but surely, she infects others in the city with fragments of their warped Dream, slowly making Constantinople a beacon for the infernal.

- An elder vampire named Zoe appears in the local court, claiming to be a survivor of Constantinople. Despite her apparent age and power, she begs alms from the local ruler, and sanctuary against those seeking to do her harm. She explains she witnessed the collapse of the Dream in the Dark Ages, saw the first Trinity implode, and the second scatter. Upon hearing of a third joining, she journeyed to Istanbul to bear witness, only to be horrified by what she encountered. Since that time, she's fled the protectorate of the new Trinity and its assassins. She's willing to share knowledge of what's taking place in Istanbul, but warns anyone that such knowledge could easily spell their doom.

- A book-thumping preacher bearing a voice rich with charm makes his presence known at Elysium. Calling himself Barbaro Lucchese, the white-clad orator offers word of the Dream come to life in Istanbul; Heaven may be found on Earth for vampires in that city. He spices his rhetoric with words such as Golconda, Nirvana, and transcendence. He intimates mortality may be regained by drinking of the well Michael built within Constantinople. The beaming speaker targets those struggling with their Humanity, offering to hunt for them and teach them better means of treating with prey. Most ignore him, but a few desperate Kindred follow. Some return, seemingly enlightened in the same way as Barbaro. Many vampires believe he's a manipulative Lunatic. He was actually Embraced as Tremere antitribu, but recent events pushed him to accept the succor of Mary's Well beneath the Hagia Sophia. He is now Baali, and is genuine in his desire to see others join him.

- In short order, the elusive Obertus ghouls and their Tzimisce masters start appearing in domains around the world. A group dedicated to research, the Children of the Dracon attempt deals with Tremere, Giovanni, Abyss Mystics, and sorcerers of other Clans for forbidden information and the location of infernal tomes, in an effort to please their sponsor. When asked who their master is, the revenants and Cainites make clear "He has returned" before offering their services in exchange for what they seek. The Obertus are polite and reserved, where the Cainites accompanying them are distressed and desperate. The Children of the Dracon are unhappy with the task set for them. If they trust the vampires with whom they speak, they confide that their actions risk defiling the sacred Library of the Forgotten in Constantinople. The Dracon commands they acquire all works of an infernal nature, though whether it's for his use, or simply to remove them from infernalists' hands, is a source of conjecture.

- Mustafa is still Prince of Constantinople, but the Ventrue's role is a charade. Alternating between being puppet to the Toreador of the Ashirra and to the new Trinity, the Prince finds himself increasingly stretched between powerful forces liable to tear him apart. He's surreptitiously sending out his few loyal servants to recruit outside agents, as he wants his strings cut. For anyone willing to accept the challenge, he's offering freedom to haven and feed anywhere in Constantinople. He may soon lack the influence to award even that.

- Speculation surrounds the identity and lineage of Prospero. He invites vampires of varying status to make temporary haven on his islands. He's extended sanctuary to Kindred ranging from the obscure to the despised. Ambrogino Giovanni, Strohmann, Count Germaine, and Dylan Bruce are known to have been present in the Caymans under Prospero's protection. What he gains from consorting with these types is unknown, but those familiar with Prospero believe it has something to do with his blood and a thirst for redemption. The vampire proclaims himself Brujah, yet somehow he practices arts known as Dark Thaumaturgy and Daimoinon, and his soul was forfeited long ago. There are Camarilla who would see him removed from the Caymans, mystics who would adore his trove of occult paraphernalia and intelligence, and Sabbat who desire his extinction as a wretched infernalist. Meanwhile, a coterie receives an invitation to attend Prospero's haven, as he proffers information to share, safe refuge, and gainful employment.

The Third Trinity

The Trinity is strengthening at a distressing rate, at least according to domains neighboring Constantinople. Vampires who seek hope in these modern nights recognize opportunity in the resurgence of Michael's Dream — perhaps a method of bringing out the best in mortals and vampires. Those who seek dominance of the kine may recall the blood sacrifices practiced as Michael's Dream fractured, and likewise travel to Constantinople to take advantage of the ready supply of mortal cultists and flagrant Kindred power on display. At the heart of this is the new Trinity. The direction Constantinople — and Kindred philosophy — heads in the near future may depend on who's steering the Dream.

- Mary the Black is one third of the Trinity. She's not abandoned her infernalism, even as Michael attempts to exert his will over her body. She intends to make Constantinople a literal gateway to Hell, recruiting to her side the Carthaginian Assamite Eshmunazar, and reaching out to the Red Lister Dylan Bruce to become the third party. She intends for the ancient Eshmunazar to act as darkness, while she and Michael play the role of balance. Dylan Bruce is to become Lucifer's light, before plunging the entire city — and possibly the world — into Hell. That is, if she can find him.
- Michael is conscious inside the form of Mary, waiting and watching as he subtly pushes her. He'll soon be ready to dispose of her, and usher in a Dream based on all he's learned in the past millennium. He forced Mary to burn the tumorous Dracon from Vykos' body, as he believes his former lover to be of similar mind after eight centuries of imprisonment. He nurtures the Dracon as the Tzimisce slowly heals, showing he can be the Father to the Dracon's Son. A new Holy Spirit is required, however. Michael makes entreaties to Cainite philosophers in efforts to find a vampire who was destroyed and rose again. Michael will rebuild his Dream in Constantinople, or wherever he discovers his Holy Spirit.
- The Trinity is a construct built by despairing vampires, who witnessed the passing of Gehenna and realized there was still the chance for redemption. The original Trinity are long gone, the second Trinity scattered or dead. The new Trinity is made of true believers — philosophers, scientists, and priests new to the night. Their vision is not yet corrupted by the past, but stands to be so by the predatory Mary. As the galvanized Trinity builds its base in Constantinople and starts reaching out to Kindred of similar mindsets, Mary and her Baali allies seek to plant the seeds of corruption. The Dream was brought low before, and she'll see it done again.

DEATH HAS MANY FACES

Biblioteca Nazionale Marciana, Venice, Italy

I sent the fire-damaged Book of the Grave-War to Bindusara for translation and repair. Of course, he asked that I perform a service in exchange for his restoration skills. I am to discover a little more about the Clan of Death, for the benefit of his written logs.

Rumor has it your "friend" Bindusara sold your Book of the Grave-War to Albertus Magnus.-A

So this is the cost. Plunged back into Venice, where the Necromancers do roam and the spirits morbidly play. My understanding is the Necromancers recently erected safeguards against marauding spectres. I cannot attest to their efficacy, but things seem deathly peaceful here.

My first instinct was to once again seek out Ambrogino, but two things stopped me. 1.) I know something hunts him. 2.) As much as he may think otherwise, Gino is not his family's mouthpiece.

Before I could sink into the canals to gain some sleep and ponder my approach to the Giovanni, a mute boy, eerily wan, passed me what I now understand to be a USB stick. I asked him who it was from, but he jumped in the waters, swam into the darkness, and disappeared.

Most peculiar.



Here at the library I plugged the stick into one of the computers and unlocked its contents.

You are brave to return after what you unleashed on A.G. If these photographs interest you, click on the chat.exe program.

LM1972 started the conversation

beckett91 joined the conversation

LM1972:	I wouldn't be here if I didn't think there is something to gain
beckett91:	Your family must be proud.
LM1972:	I heard you were a sarcastic type
beckett91:	Who would spread such lies?
LM1972:	So who did you recognize from the photos
beckett91:	Isabel, of course. And Dante Rosselini. Loathsome creature. Though I assume it's a regular occurrence for the Necromancers to have family gatherings, séances, orgies or the like.
LM1972:	You hold the Giovanni in low regard
beckett91:	Well, I don't hold them in *high* regard, shall we say.
LM1972:	This was more than a mere catch-up… The two other vampires were Izukanne of the Ghiberti and Mireya of the Pisanob… The Venetians respect both for their links to the Laibon and Sabbat, respectively… Dante's link is to blood magicians. Mine is to Anarchs… The Giovanni are planting agents throughout the Sects

We've suspected the Giovanni of this for a long time, of course, but the Promise forbids our taking action against their agents. -A

beckett91:	I am no sectarian, contrary to popular rumor.
LM1972:	You're not interested in a transcript from the meeting
beckett91:	I didn't say that. I would pay highly for that particular nugget.
LM1972:	Please. I've already checked every account in every name you've ever used… Your net worth is equal to the number of brain cells in an average Deceiver
beckett91:	I never offered cash. I can offer information in return, however.
LM1972:	I want a meeting with the Roman
beckett91:	I'm not his bloody lackey, and I wish people would stop acting like I have a direct line to D.C.
LM1972:	Can you make this happen or not
LM1972:	Still there??
beckett91:	Fine. I'll contact Vitel on your behalf. Let's meet.
LM1972:	The Dutch villa. Lagoon south. Tomorrow evening. I believe I'm being watched. Be careful

LM1972 closed chat

Ca' Zappa, Venice, Italy

What a fascinating building. This palatial villa sits alone on one of the many lagoon islands. If a vampire has not yet made this place a haven, they damn well should.

Lia's transcript came in two forms. Firstly, and briefly, a written record of the meeting abruptly cut off by jamming equipment. The second "transcript" from Lia Milliner became one of the more disturbing incidents in my life. She coaxed a spirit from the void, and commanded it to substantiality for my benefit. This wraith appeared to have words carved into it, and bore the mien of something familiar with pain. It began a recitation of events from the meeting. I do not mind admitting here that were my bowels capable of functioning, they may have caused an incident.

My recorder only picked up feedback, so from memory, the spirit stated the following:

– The Rosselini must befriend the Warlocks, Assamite Sorcerers, and elusive Nagaraja, offering much to each, and taking more in return. Isabel cited former Justicar di Zagreb as a way for the Rosselini to access the Pyramid. She has some sway over him.

– The Dunsirn are to maintain a stereotype as investors on par with the Blue Bloods, and bankroll Camarilla power-players. Apparently they were the Clan's pilot scheme and have been largely successful, for a group of debauched cannibals – the wraith's words, not mine. Isabel does not trust the Dunsirn in charge. Euan Dunsirn is creditor to many Camarilla Kindred debts, despite his vulgar habits. They watch him and his family for any shifts in loyalty.

– The Pisanob must make overtures towards the Sabbat as mercenaries and counsel. Mireya objected to this, citing the "new Harbinger presence" as making such a mission suicide for her line. Isabel assured that her family would not simply sacrifice the Pisanob.

Ha! Good luck, Mireya. -I

– The Giovanni proper, along with the Putanesca, are to shepherd ties with the Keepers in the shared fields of regional and religious matters, along with organized crime.

– The Milliners will offer financial support to the Anarch Movement and burgeoning libertarian bases such as D.C.

– The Ghiberti will become subjects to the Laibon, despite their centuries of enmity.

– Paolo Sardenzo will handle the other minor families not in attendance, delegating tasks as necessary. He must meet them for sit-downs face-to-face either here, or in what the wraith calls "the Shadowlands." The Giovanni distrust their online security, due to a recent hack. They believe the Anarch Movement responsible for recent rumors surrounding the Endless Night. Ahem.

– Dante raised the question of whether this breaches the infamous "Promise" agreed between Giovanni and Camarilla, assuring their non-involvement in the Jyhad. The anziani apparently believe not, or care not. As long as the Giovanni families participate in no wars, they are exempt. They may form allegiances where they choose but engage in no political actions. The intent is to place a Giovanni in every domain of note, and for that Necromancer to be indispensable to the current ruling Kindred.

– The anziani commanded that Isabel herself attend a summit with the Cappadocians in neutral Alexandria. Lia doesn't seem aware of this statement's weight. Isabel is unsure how to reach out to the Cappadocians, let alone the Samedi,

Harbingers, and Impundulu. Her mission is to ascertain from this group of undead the location of an artifact known as the True Vessel.

When the wraith departed I felt the need to collapse from exhaustion. Lia seemed similarly drained, but as the wraith shot her an enraged look, she quickly regained control. Necromancy is clearly a constant battle between vampire and ghost.

I will be contacting a Serpent to whom I owe a big favor. A meeting in Alexandria between multiple generations of Necromancers is something about which he will wish to be aware, and I want to sit in the peanut gallery.

[RECORDING BEGINS]

Lia: —is an investment… A great one, not without risk. We will be silent partners in every territorial dispute, important witnesses to each war, and silent financiers behind every Sect-ordained project. As an example: Chicago finally has a new Prince, and makes a haven in his Cabrini-Green high-rise — the last one remaining in the city. We bought the property last year. One of the most powerful Princes in the western world pays us rent.

Izukanne: And the warzones. We are the vultures and coyotes. We will not fight in their battles, but we scour every haven and every battlefield. We harvest the dead and become richer than the victors, in the only currency that matters. Though I suspect we will struggle to ingratiate with the Laibon, given historical disputes.

Dante: They need to get over themselves. They bond the kine too. Have you ever encountered their Impundulu? They make a culture of enslavement!

Izukanne: Hm. A change in direction. Where once we appeared — and indeed were — a distinct bloc of Kindred, now we shall appear disparate, dispersed between Sects and Autarkis. All a ruse, of course.

Isabel: Indeed. Loyalty will remain to the family before any new allegiances truly form. Our dispersal is an illusion. Consider that most Kindred do not even know the names "Milliner" or "Dunsirn." Few enough recognize the name "Giovanni," but they shall. We will be on every pair or lips. They will think us desperate — some internal schism rocking us.

Dante: I believe it is quite clear what we must do, cousin mine. The proposal's delivery though? Oh… That may be more than a mere trifle.

Isabel: Mireya? What are your thoughts?

[LONG PAUSE]

Mireya: I understand completely.

[LONG PAUSE]

Dante: Are you grinding your teeth?

Mireya: [shouted] You hang us out to dry! We become your sacrificial lambs. Again! And for what? *Mierda*! Pochtli will not stand for this!

Isabel: Do not raise your voice to me, Pisanob. Remember your place, and that of your family.

Izukanne: The place of our families is made quite clear. *Waan fahmay, signorina.*

Lia: I do not believe Francis will be happy with this plan, Isabel.

Isabel: To you it is *signorina*, or some other honorific. If Francis gave a damn, he should have attended this meeting himself, instead of sending me an ounce of afterbirth in an ill-fitted suit.

Dante: [laughs]

Lia: At least the Milliners are present. I see the Dunsirn, Della Passaglia, and Li Weng chairs empty, and no Putanesca in attendance.

Isabel: These orders came from the *anziani* via Diego, in clear terms. The Putanesca were not invited. The Li Weng sent humble apologies, and the Dunsirn have already been briefed.

Izukanne: And the Della Passaglia?

Isabel: Let's move on. Before I forget—

[RECORDING ENDS]

Mireya Diaz y de Hierro



*Giovanni; *1913, #1929. Child of Pochtli.*

De Hierro grew up in United States-occupied Nicaragua. At an early age she acted as a guerrilla fighter and terror to the occupying armies, skilled in crafting traps and desecrating corpses to put fear into American soldiers' hearts. She was infamously caught removing the internal organs from a U.S. army lieutenant as he lay in a state of semi-sedation – aware of what was going on, but physically helpless. Pochtli liberated her from a prison cell shortly before her scheduled execution.

Mireya is a renowned independent vampire of Central America. Despite her fearsome reputation, she mediated relations between Sabbat and Giovanni across Nicaragua and Honduras. She is quick to remind Sabbat vampires that her Clan destroyed their founder too.

Something my Clan, and the Fiends, choose to forget.-L

The Lazarenes' appearance shattered this burgeoning relationship. Recent nights saw Mireya attempt a conclave between Harbingers and Pisanob, which resulted in a bloody rout of the Giovanni bloodline. De Hierro's whereabouts are unknown.

The Harbingers informed Aristotle that the massacre was "a permitted and encouraged sacrifice."

Isabel Giovanni

Giovanni; *1659, #1714.
Suspected childe of Fortunato.

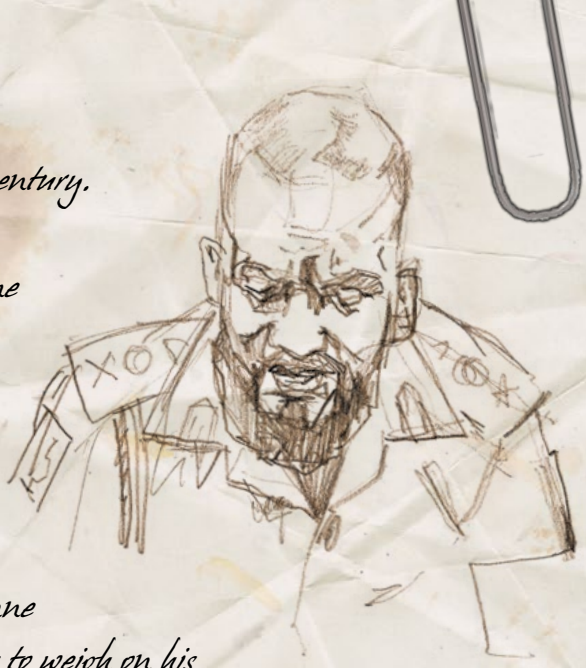


Isabel hails from ignoble beginnings; she emerged as a product of incest, practiced all that is taboo during her formative years, and became a ghoul to the anziani of her Clan within three decades of life. It took nearly as long for her to gain the Embrace from Fortunato. Her necromantic abilities surpassed all ghouls within the Clan, but her sire stated her gender delayed her Embrace. She developed a loathing for the male-dominated Giovanni culture, and for over a century fought for recognition. She finally gained it when she exposed the 19th-century Tremere plot to steal Giovanni texts and rituals.

Giovanni rarely remains within Venice or attends the Mausoleum. The Clan sets her to diplomatic engagements with the Camarilla, alternating between the role of emissary and spy. She is said to respect the Sect more than her own Clan, for at least within the Ivory Tower a hard-nosed Kindred can climb the ladder. Rumors of an intimate relationship between Isabel and the former Tremere Justicar Anastasz di Zagreb are unfounded, but they do the rounds every decade or so. They accompany tales of her only drinking from decapitated heads, carrying innumerable diseases in her bite, and actually being of the Lamiae.

Isabel is <u>not</u> Anastasz's type. Of that I'm quite confident.-A

Izukanne



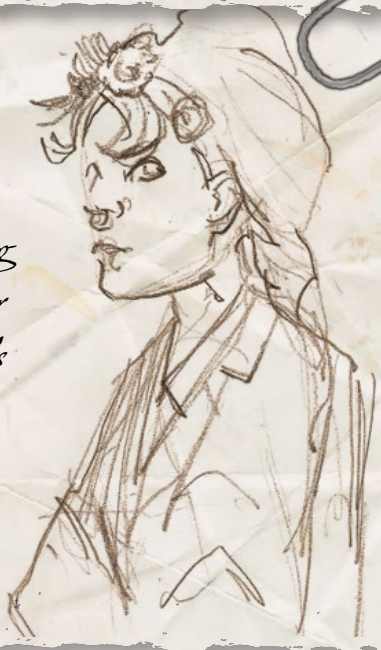
Giovanni; *unknown, †early 18th century.
Childe of Magno di Giovani.

I know little of the Ghiberti Izukanne beyond his reputation for necromantic enslavement and longtime war with the Laibon of Nigeria. Izukanne played an integral role in trafficking West African slaves for the Dutch, earning the eternal enmity of his people. Izukanne does not allow the matter of mortal ethics to weigh on his conscience, and according to my sources is a firm adherent to the Path of Death and the Soul.

I hear Izukanne blood bonded Strohmann, the "Archbishop" of Berlin.

Izukanne's infamy in modern nights revolves around his mastery of the Cenotaph Path, and personal possession of over 100 wraith "fetters." He replaced one of his eyeballs with an ivory sphere – the fetter of a Dutch slaver named Constantijn Quaeckernaeck. With it, he can apparently discern whether a target is easily dominated into subservience.

Lia Milliner



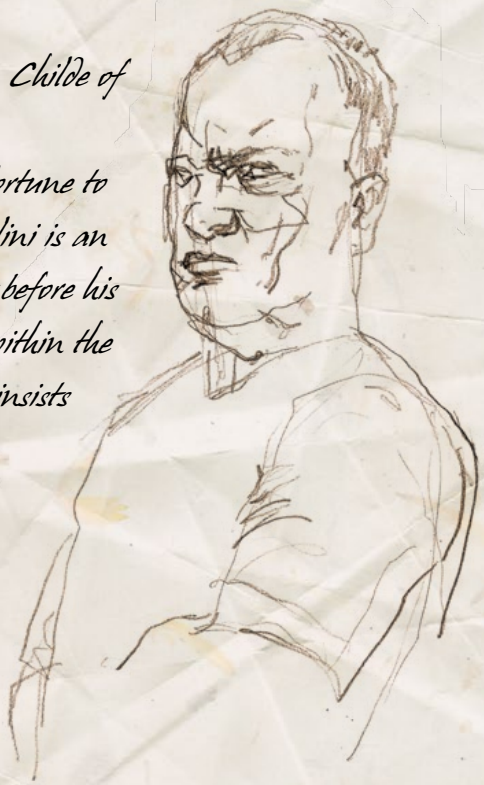
Giovanni; Boston *1972, Hartford †1996.
Childe of Albert Dunsirn.

Lia entered into the world of finance after graduating from college, pursuing a path similar to many among her family. It is said the Milliners disown any child who fails to break a million dollars by the time they turn 21. Lia was one such disappointment. As her mother prepared to send her packing, Lia revealed her true calling – a deep understanding of where to hide the proceeds of illegal

transactions. Among the most cunning money launderers, Lia conceals transactions from her haven in Hartford, Connecticut for any vampires prepared to pay her fee.

Lia is young but canny enough to realize her Clan favors necromantic skill over financial knowhow, no matter how much money she hides. My contacts tell me she's tentatively reached out to a group known as the Mla Watu for tutelage.

Dante Rosselini



Giovanni; *unknown, †early 14th century. Childe of Regina Giovanni.

One of the scariest bastards I've had the misfortune to encounter. I hope to kill him some night. Rosselini is an old vampire, and claims to have been a revenant before his Embrace. I cannot verify that revenants exist within the ranks of Giovanni ghouls, but Dante Rosselini insists otherwise.

Dante accompanies every proclamation with a laugh and a grin. He takes sadistic pleasure from every jibe and wound. If his autobiographical account is true, he was a mortal inquisitor tasked with the interrogation and destruction of wraiths, ultimately receiving the Embrace. He alludes to knowing the so-called necromantic Path of Woe.

My limited understanding of the Rosselini / Rossellini places them as not merely a bloodline of the Giovanni. They're farther reaching than one might assume. -L

There are no lengths to which he will not go, to torment a victim. Every vessel from which he feeds he attempts to summon again, to feed from again. He never allows a spirit in his control to die. He calls them his "children." Rosselini summoned and tortured the soul of one Emma Blake, just to discover the location of my London haven. He blackmailed me for quarter of a century following, for reasons I will not state here. I understand he holds Emma's spirit still, in perpetual agony.

From: h.ruhadze@bloodspot.eg

To: beckett@schreckNET.nod

Subject: Thin ice

I am en route, archeologist. I am not a violent individual, but if you are wasting my time, I will do to you what Set did to Osiris, before I water my garden with your genitals.

Ruhadze Imports & Exports

P.S. Do not push me.

From: beckett@schreckNET.nod

To: h.ruhadze@bloodspot.eg

Subject: Proposition

Dear Hesha,

I know we have not spoken since the incident with the Eye, and my cutting off your hands to acquire it. I hope we can agree that bygones should be bygones. You can call off your attack snakes now.

I owe you a major boon. I believe we have fine cause to meet, as I can now repay you in spades. Seriously — this is big.

I am currently in Venice, staying at the Hotel Gabrielli. Cesare booked a room under the name Mr. T. Doom for you.

Sincerely,

Beckett

P.S. I have always wondered about your Clan's snake fetish and would love for you to enlighten me. Wasn't Set an ass?

I believe the serpent imagery stems from their roles as corruptors, from a purely Abrahamic standpoint. Speak with a Setite older than 2000 years (they exist) and they roll their eyes at talk of snakes. -A

Ponte di Rialto, Venice, Italy

Hesha and I held an energized conversation in my hotel room. By its end, I wasn't sure if he wanted to kiss me or kill me.

I showed him my diary entry regarding Isabel's upcoming meeting. As the Setites appear to have a direct line to the fallen Clan of Death, we agreed he should approach her with the offer to broker and mediate the meeting, thereby receiving her payment and gratitude.

He felt this was only minor repayment for his recent loss, so I provided the contact information for Josette – one of the Samedi I encountered in Haiti. Isabel will no

doubt demand to know how Hesha found out about her need to communicate with the Stiffs, but I leave that for him to resolve.

My own request to attend the upcoming meeting was far from courteous. I believe he was prepared to meet my eyes and tell me to jump from the window, into the canal. I hastily made a deal with him to invite me as independent chronicler and archivist. I will give him a copy of the Book of the Grave-War as payment.

My blurting this request out surprised me. It felt like the book wanted me to make the offer. In any case, he smiled that smile of his, and agreed.

He also slipped me a piece of paper.

Archeologist

The walls have ears in this domain. Spirits infest every place a vampire might hide. Know this — the Giovanni will be aware of what we have just discussed, but they will not know the following:

After the meeting concludes, Isabel will be staked, and you will assist in this. She repeatedly flouts the borders the Followers of Set impose against her clan. If you do not assist in her capture, you will be harried from Egypt and never again be permitted to return.

Alexandria Opera House Basement, Alexandria, Egypt

This is one of my more peculiar meeting arrangements. As we ready to sit around a dusty table with a wobbly leg, surrounded by an array of antique instruments, an opera belts out at full force above our heads. A single, unshaded lightbulb illuminates this room, for heaven's sake. It might as well be an interrogation chamber.

A male in an elaborate sun mask awaited my appearance. He introduced himself in Farsi as Khurshid of the Lazarenes. We cycled through a few dialects and languages, partly to test one another, partly to have something to talk about other than the eerie silence. As a sidenote, I often play language games with elders to put them at ease. It's a fun pasttime.



I am writing now to pass the time and avoid the Harbinger staring at me from the corner. I did ask how Isabel reached him regarding this summit. I could hear the sneer in his voice.

Apparently the Capuchin asked him to attend...

[RECORDING BEGINS — OPERATIC BELLOWING IN THE BACKGROUND]

Khurshid: Something that small can pick up my voice?

Beckett: It can. Or my man tells me it can. He performs all manner of technological tricks.

[A DOOR OPENS. SEVERAL SETS OF FOOTSTEPS.]

Khurshid: I am gladdened to not be the only vampire caught in the wrong century.

Hesha: Somehow Beckett survives night after night without ever learning anything. Child of Anubis — it is my honor.

Khurshid: Your Clan's hospitality honors me. This would be Isabel Giovanni and…?

Isabel: I am. And this lady is Josette, of the Samedi.

Khurshid: Fascinating how the curse has barely stained your skin, Isabel, while Josette is like a corpse left in humidity after a week. I mean no offense.

Josette: I take none. *Sa fè lontan*, Beckett. Why do you wear a mask?

[CHAIR LEGS SCRAPE ACROSS THE FLOOR]

Khurshid: It implies rank within my line, though I confess that being among you, it is superfluous. I shall remove it.

Beckett: Ugh.

Hesha: Beckett… Khurshid, please accept my Clan's apologies for the archeologist's behavior. It is *not* appropriate.

Beckett: Did you just kick me beneath the table? Or is Isabel jousting with my inner thigh?

Isabel: How do you get anything from your interviews, Animal? How do your guests tolerate you?

Seconded. You're an oaf. -O

Beckett: I suspect my habits are infinitely more acceptable than what you reputedly bring to a dinner party, my dear.

Hesha: Let us end this conversation before it starts. The Hierophants ordain that this meeting proceed in peace. Representatives of the Giovanni, Harbingers of Skulls, Impundulu, Samedi, and Cappadocians attend to resolve matters of ancient dispute. Isabel represents the Giovanni. Josette the Samedi. Khurshid the Harbingers of Skulls. The Impundulu send formal apologies for their non-attendance, along with curses upon each attendee. Shall I read them?

Isabel: [grunts]

Hesha: Who here speaks for Clan Cappadocian?

[FEEDBACK AND DISTORTION FOR 10 SECONDS]

Beckett: Blimey. I assume your Clan hasn't always been capable of crossing over like that?

Hesha: Excuse our secretary. If he offends you, childe of Lazarus, I will personally see to his destruction.

Khurshid: It is a blessing to be in your company.

Angelique: Harbingers are cowards who hid behind the veil as *they* slew the rest of us. Your line is not fit to adopt the title "Lazarene."

This is an interesting perspective, not without merit. -I

Isabel: I think enough time has passed—

Khurshid: Cowards? Father betrayed us! He entombed us!

Angelique: You fled the Venetians. You abandoned your Clan.

Khurshid: What a pretty tale you have been told. Even now, Father positions his children against one another.

Josette: I am no child of "Father," "Lazarus," or the Giovanni. My line remains separate. As far as I am concerned, our only mutual connection is to the loa, and our preoccupation for death magic.

Isabel: And yet the Baron does meddle in Giovanni affairs.

Josette: The Baron does as he chooses. He is not beholden to you, nor I to him.

Hesha: Peace. Please.

Angelique: I am holding back from ripping the Venetian's head from her shoulders. I *am* maintaining the peace.

Beckett: Isabel likes that kind of thing. Argh!

Hesha: Last warning.

Isabel: I swear to Dispater I will skin you, Animal. You have no place here.

Beckett: Apologies. I know there is much to argue and recriminate over in this room, and I feel it important to focus on other things.

Josette: The Samedi bear no grudges. Is there food?

Khurshid: Is your line not made up of those who sailed west to escape the purge?

Josette: That is a frequently-voiced theory.

Angelique: You are saying it is inaccurate? Then why are you here?

Josette: I am here because I was invited here. As the dead respond to warm invitation, so do the *sèvitè*.

Isabel: Can we all agree to not attack one another?

Khurshid: No.

Isabel: Pardon?

Khurshid: The Gangrel voted against Cappadocian admission to the forming Camarilla. Their vote was integral to the Clan of Death's survival.

Beckett: On behalf of my Clan—

Hesha: You do not have any authority to speak for the Clan of Beasts. Do you want it to get back to the Inner Circle that you're apologizing for the Convention of Thorns?

Beckett: Possibly not.

[RECORDING ENDS]

Bibliotheca Alexandrina, Alexandria, Egypt

A brief interval in recordings. These members of the Clan of Death bickered for over two hours, nearly coming to blows half a dozen times. You would be excused for thinking them fledglings.

Of note from the arguments:

– Khurshid maintains the Harbingers of Skulls comprise vampires who entered the Shadowlands prior even to Augustus Giovanni's Embrace. Angelique argues otherwise.

– Josette finds this entire rigmarole amusing, and keeps her opinions behind laughter. She exchanges frequent knowing glances with Hesha.

– Angelique hates – and I mean hates – the Giovanni. She implies an alliance with the Serpents aimed at crippling the Venetians.

– Isabel continues to attempt peaceful discourse, but grows exasperated and is drawn into the arguments. She is constantly cut off before she can utter the words "True" and "Vessel."

– Hesha passively takes in every word. I know that look. He's studying every party at the table like a snake waiting to strike, if you excuse the weak poetry of that statement.

[RECORDING RECOMMENCES]

Angelique: –sorely testing. I think by looking around this room, Animal and Serpent notwithstanding, we can all agree the Clan of Death survives into these nights in many forms.

Josette: You say Clan. I say Clans.

Angelique: Perhaps. The Giovanni purge was not nearly as effective as Claudius purported.

Isabel: And yet the Clan of Death in these nights is named Giovanni.

Khurshid: And before it was named Cappadocian, it was named something else. You believe ours is the only Clan to go through iterations? Brujah, Toreador, Lasombra… All are modern epithets. Death lingers over us all. We can each agree on that.

Angelique: We have all worked towards unraveling its mystery and furthering eschatological study. Whether as priests, philosophers, morticians, or necromancers, dabbling with the body, the spirit, or the raw stuff of plague and oblivion, we all represent the same force. Entropy is our destination.

Isabel: With that said, as we all now appear on the same page, my Clan requires something to further said entropy. Have any of you heard of the True Vessel?

Josette: [laughs]

Khurshid: Oh yes. It is somewhere safe.

Angelique: Away from your Clan.

Isabel: You know its location?

Josette: [continues laughing]

Khurshid: You Venetians. Your obsession for total power. Pathetic.

Isabel: The *anziani* commanded that I discover its location. That one of your lines must know the truth. What can I offer for its retrieval?

Angelique: Since Augustus' Embrace, I do not know the quantity of spilled Cappadocian blood. However, if you can guarantee the Giovanni will suffer in kind, I will give you its location.

Isabel: I am not giving up my family for sacrifice.

Khurshid: There are many among the Giovanni who are not Giovanni.

Isabel: Precious assets and beloved cousins. Consenting to a slaughter is not the reason I came here.

Khurshid: Pochtli escaped the Shadowlands early, and did not attempt to save his kin, the rest of us. Blood for blood. Give up the Visanob.

Isabel: I cannot authorize the destruction of one of our families.

Khurshid: Your precious *anziani* would not have sent you here if you lacked authority.

Angelique: The location of Augustus' tomb in the Mausoleum. I wish to spend a few minutes at his side. You Venetians stole our Antediluvian. Allow me to discuss this with your patriarch.

Josette: Ambrogino's copy of the *Anexhexeton*. Deliver it to Port-au-Prince and you will have your True Vessel's location.

Isabel: I will not. I am many things, but I am no traitor to family. I will not send a family loyal to the Giovanni to their doom, I will not cast my founder to the dogs, and I will not steal Ambrogino's life's work. The Giovanni are strong because we are a family. Medici. Borgia. Giovanni. We took our power from the Cappadocians because we are united. Combined, you could easily overpower our small family, but look at you. Sabbat thugs, hired mercenaries, and a fallen Clan barely numbering double digits. You are each pathetic. I doubt any of you know the location of the True Vessel. If you possessed it, you might have acted upon it.

[FEEDBACK AND DISTORTION FOR OVER A MINUTE]

Beckett: Where did Angelique go?

Khurshid: I see an open tear in the Shroud. I believe Angelique is encouraging any number of spectres to enter this realm. Oh… There are creatures worse than spectres advancing on the rift.

Josette: Outside of my realm of expertise, sadly. *Bonswa*, gentlemen.

[FOOTSTEPS HASTILY RETREAT FOLLOWED BY A LOUD CRACK]

Josette: The door is warded against our passage!

Angelique: [distorted] *You should be familiar with these creatures from your recent pilgrimage, Khurshid. Introduce Isabel.*

Innumerable Voices: [repeated and jumbled, the word "neverborn" is identifiable]

[howling voices interrupt the recording routinely from this point]

Beckett: [unclear] stupid place to host a meeting.

Khurshid: [unclear] into the Shadowlands!

Isabel: My wraith servitors will defend [unclear] price.

Khurshid: I require no defense.

Josette: The price?

Isabel: The True Vessel.

Khurshid: Samedi…

Josette: The Dream [unclear] Cairo. The Setites have held [unclear] years!

Isabel: What.

Hesha: Don't give me that [unclear].

[RECORDING ENDS]

KHURSHID, WEARER OF THE SUN MASK



Clan of Death; Persia *early 7th century. Persia #late-7h century, childe of Malenchaenos.

K. was a Persian warlord in life as well as death, making for a peculiar necromancer among his scholarly brethren. His abilities both on the battlefield and in courtroom diplomacy are renowned. He compelled the Clan of the Hidden to wage a century-long civil war for his personal, necromantic benefit. K. was believed entombed in Kaymakli during the Feast of Folly, but a Harbinger of Skulls has appeared in modern nights claiming the ancient strategist's identity.



Avoid Alexandria!

On my way back from Israel I stopped off in Cairo to catch up with a couple of ecstatics. So I'm getting my groove on when they tell me Alexandria's a no-go zone, blasted by some necromancer or other, and crawling with the ghosts of every blood doll gone wrong.

The grapevine names Isabel Giovanni as responsible, as she was in the area and has since disappeared. The Mausoleum disagrees, and points its finger at uppity Impundulu.

In either case, it looks like the Ashirra-Laibon-Setite co-op governing that domain are putting down a blanket ban on necromancers, which is a problem, as they need necromancers to fix the fucking great hole these spirits are passing through!

With all this talk of mortal hunters responding to breaches like this, Alexandria had best sort its shit out.

—JesusCampbell

Bibliotheca Alexandrina, Alexandria, Egypt

We escaped through the Shadowlands, in an experience I can only describe as dreadful. Isabel and Khurshid manipulated and sundered the spirits of the dead to both my wonder and terror, while commanding other ghosts to attack their kin. Though, it must be said, the entities clawing at us and attempting to pour inside our bodies resembled something other than ectoplasmic spirits.

Neverborn. This is not a term with which I am familiar. Interestingly, Josette seemed capable of decaying their tumorous flesh to dust as easily as she might a mortal, implying they are native to the land of the dead. A scary thought.

Similar creatures dwell in the Abyss, and yes, they are scary.
Umbriferous men. -L

No sooner were we in Alexandria's library – my present location – than we all oddly began to compliment Hesha for his grace in escaping unharmed. He reinforced the effect with a hypnotic stare at Isabel, at which point I felt compelled to jam a chair leg through her heart.

It took multiple attempts. Hesha's ambient brilliance admittedly distracted me, for whatever reason. Thankfully, Khurshid and Josette assisted in snaring Isabel as she attempted to flee, despite her breaking Josette's ribs with a powerful blow.

Hesha stuffed Isabel into a large suitcase and informed us she was on a one-way trip to Cairo's Dream Court. This is where she wanted to go, but I assume not in such an economical mode of transportation.

The entire event unsettled Josette, and she disappeared into the shadows. This just left me with Khurshid, sans mask. He stared at me for a while longer, eyeballs bulging from a parched, yellow skull, before strangely clapping me on the shoulder like an old friend.

"Fret not," he told me, leaning in. "Isabel and I have just communed, mind to mind. In exchange for her rescue, we Lazarenes will have our vengeance on the Pisanob. In time, we will retrieve her." Clearly her loyalty to family only extends so far.

He squeezed my arm with those bony fingers, and pulled a blank death mask from his inside jacket pocket. The last thing he said to me, was "Forget the disagreement between Angelique and I. It is deliberate that we confuse the Venetians and appear

disorganized. Roger de Camden has a brilliant mind. He once advised Mithras. He now advises Monty Coven, of course, as well as all of us."

With that, he turned on his heel and left.

From: h.ruhadze@bloodspot.eg

To: beckett@schreckNET.nod

Subject: RE: I, Giovanni

Perceptive as ever, and thank you for the warning. Sadly, this email reply is several months late. The Lazarenes have yet to launch their rescue mission, but when they do, we will be ready.

Honestly though, I couldn't give a fig for the True Vessel. My Clan took on its stewardship to hold power over the Giovanni, and so we retain it. It is difficult to move safely, so it remains in the Dream Court for now. Soon it will move out of reach.

As for Isabel, the diary entries you showed me regarding Giovanni interests with the Camarilla, Sabbat, et al took my attention. This is why she is now my guest, at least until she is liberated. I will put her on to explain:

Hello, Beckett

Every Follower of Set desires closer relations with the Camarilla. Much closer.

Let me tell you a story. Once upon a time, before the Followers of Set were the Snake Clan, we were the Clan of Faith. Few remember this. Once, we worshiped more than one god. Echidna, Jörmungandr, Typhon, Kali, etc. etc. Sutekh prevailed. What the Camarilla lacks at this crucial time is belief. Faith shared spreads harmony among its adherents.

Portents fill the sky. At this time when Ur-Shulgi rises, the Blood thins, and the Red Star appears in the sky, the vampires of the Ivory Tower must look inwards and find faith. We are their only hope. As the Clan of Faith once soothed the souls of the Second City, so shall it do so for the Camarilla.

Minor families will cease their infiltration of the Sect, as I will inform an Archon of their activities as soon as I am free. This will win favor for our Clan. We Followers of Set will subsequently accept the invitation of 1497.

Every night I dream you will also join my new family.

Nitocris, Once Was Isabel G.

Charming, if a little evangelical, wouldn't you agree?

I have ever been a rationalist, lucid in my reverence for my Clan's founder, balanced in my pursuit of mysteries on his behalf. Isabel seems to share this rationalism, and within these few months decided of her own free will to dedicate her life to Set. Her own family mistreated her terribly.

I doubt you will grieve the loss of Isabel. I sincerely hope you will be pleased to welcome the new born Nitocris, in her place.

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Roger de Camden

Cappadocian; *unknown, London #226. Childe of Constancia.

De Camden is a vampire of many names, going by aliases including Becket(!), Sir Thomas, and Lord Camden, among others. It is unlikely "Roger" is his birth name. De Camden was largely responsible for the strong bond between Clans Ventrue and Cappadocian, at least until the Anarch Revolt. He personally petitioned for Cappadocian admission to the Camarilla during the Convention of Thorns. The Ventrue voted in favor, but made no effort to convince their fellows to do the same.



As chamberlain to London's Prince Mithras, de Camden was unsurpassed. Mithras' reign was never as strong as when de Camden handled administration between the British Isles' fiefdoms. Mithras rewarded de Camden's good service with genuine friendship, and almost constant protection. Ultimately, Roger's fate caught up with him in the 16th century, at the hands of ambitious Giovanni. He left a suicide note, implying foreknowledge of his death.

That would be the end of the tale, were it not for the recent reappearance of a vampire naming himself de Camden. How the Giovanni failed to destroy him, I cannot say, but it may have something to do with de Camden's proficiency for necromantic magic. Note that while hundreds of Cappadocian neonates fell, it is the elders who reappear in these nights. Perhaps the destroyed vampire in his tomb was merely an effigy, or one of his aliases.

De Camden's current agenda is unknown to me, though I understand he now formally advises the Lazarenes and Monty Coven. He apparently shepherds



coteries of young vampires proficient in necromancy – Giovanni among them – to unlock ancient eschatological mysteries. He also mentors them in the Road of Bones.

It is worth noting de Camden does not suffer the Harbinger of Skulls' facial vacancy. De Camden bears the deathly pallor of his Clan on his taut skin, and wears a ceremonial skull-shaped mask, perhaps in solidarity with his kin. His high whisper is often discernible only to those with heightened senses.

The Door to Duat Opens

Kindred society treats the Giovanni and Followers of Set as outsiders. This plays, in part, to their desires. The Necromancers seek isolation to pursue their own dark plots, and the Promise of 1528 forbids their becoming involved in the Jyhad. The Sects would look dimly on the Endless Night. The Serpents' dogma puts them at odds with the Camarilla, who they consider servants of Set's ancient enemies. The Sabbat would see every Antediluvian destroyed, and therefore naturally fall in opposition to the Setites.

Not every Necromancer pursues the Endless Night. Not every Serpent worships at Sutekh's feet. Neither Clan is so homogenous as to fanatically follow their Methuselahs' ambitions without question. The younger members of the Clans, including influential types such as Isabel Giovanni and Hesha Ruhadze, encourage their neonates and fledglings to other aims.

The emergence of the Cappadocians, Samedi, and Harbingers of Skulls muddies death's waters. The Cappadocians claim allegiance with the Setites, and Baron Samedi may well be responsible for passing the True Vessel to the Snake Clan. Even the Lazarenes, with their Sabbat allegiance, claim respect for the Serpents. The Giovanni infiltration into the Sects may have come at the correct time, as they might soon face a concerted offensive from their Serpent-supported ancestors.

The Clan of Death

While stereotypes paint them as inbred Italians, Clan Giovanni actually holds near a dozen smaller families within its ranks. The *anziani* choose each for a reason. Sires are just as careful in selecting a new Milliner, St. John, or Rothstein for the family as they are a full-blooded Giovanni. Where Augustus' immediate brood might focus on the Endless Night, power over life and death, godhood, or century-long power plays; the ancillae, neonates, and fledglings make entrepreneurial steps in their own specialist areas. They are rarely aware of their elders' true aims, so they pioneer initiatives in necromancy, politics, finance, crime, and the arts.

Isabel seeks to salve the disparity with an initiative of her own. She detests the Clan's obsession with pleasing "daddy" in exchange for a smile, or scraps from the table. Isabel approaches the *anziani* with the proposal to disperse the Clan from their traditional power blocs. She explains to them how the Clan could work together to manipulate the Sects, blackmailing Princes and bankrupting troublesome Barons. The elders consider her proposal for years before agreeing to it, with conditions. One major family must test the scheme, and the Promise of 1528 must stand. Isabel selects the Dunsirn, and proceeds with her plans. If they succeed it will be *she* receiving the recognition, and the often-overlooked families will finally receive their due rewards.

As Isabel attempts her political games, the subject of the True Vessel emerges. Said to contain Cappadocius' blood, Ambrogino and other Necromancers murmur that Augustus never completed his diablerie due to his failure to seize the True Vessel. The Cappadocian Constancia hid the vitae following Augustus' Embrace. Isabel's meeting with her peers is a success in the sense that she discovers the True Vessel's location, but a failure in that she cannot take this intelligence back to Venice due to her imprisonment in Cairo.

A much larger Clan of Death exists than previously supposed. Whether connected by blood or necromancy, the many-faced Clan of Death pulls in multiple directions to reach the same destination. Rather than work in concert, the different lines argue and fester over ancient grudges, threatening destruction to all as vengeful Cappadocians tear open rifts to the Shadowlands. The Giovanni experience a rare period of popularity. They are the only vampires capable of healing such tears.

The Clan of Faith

Isabel's emailed diatribe to Beckett is a coded message begging for rescue, but the words within it are correct. The Setites were once the Clan of Faith. Throughout millennia of existence the Clan whittled down its various factions, churches, and rivals. Few Serpents exist in these nights who do not follow Set. The Setite message is alluring. It is simply: "Freedom." Isabel has long been beholden to the *anziani*, and freedom has an addictive flavor.

The vampire cult straddles the line between Sabbat and Camarilla. Though the Hierophants despise the "Aeons" — as they know the Antediluvians — and would happily see them destroyed, they worship their founder. This dichotomy pushes pioneering Setites of Cairo's Dream Court into the Camarilla's arms. They reason it is easier to destroy the Aeons

from the inside of the Camarilla, than work with the Sabbat and risk strengthening a Sect dedicated to the destruction of their god. The Dream Court claims to have received instruction directly from Nakhthorheb, the first son of Set. As yet, the other Hierophants have not opposed the motion.

Gods and Aeons are but one reason for Orthodox Serpents entering the Ivory Tower. The changing world compels the others. The promise of a new mortal Inquisition and a strengthening Clan Assamite alarm the Snake Clan's Hierophants. To gain allies at a time when they are in short supply, to secure their own bloodline, and to bolster the strength of their church, the Camarilla seems the safest option. The Dream Court reaches out to its Camarilla contacts to arrange a grand assembly where it will finally accept the Camarilla's invitation to join, becoming the eighth pillar, and a power of faith in the otherwise secular Camarilla.

Whether that invitation still stands, and how the other Setite Courts will react, is another matter entirely.

The following chronicle hooks exploit tensions and ambitions with the Clan of Death, and the Serpents' motives:

- Isabel's decree filters to a coterie comprising members of multiple Giovanni families. Such a coterie would be well-placed in a large domain consisting of multiple Sects and Clans. The rewards from the *anziani* will be huge, if through their actions they can make the Clan an integral part of the city's framework. The mission is threefold: They must own the titular ruler through emotional, financial, or magical subjugation; they must encourage and steer local wars to the benefit of Giovanni necromancy, and all valuable havens, resources, and retainers must enter the Clan's ownership. These clandestine objectives must not breach the Promise of 1528.

- Following a successful summit between Giovanni, Putanesca, and Lasombra vampires in Sicily, the Keepers offer several fledglings to the Venetians, for guardianship and tutelage in the dark arts. In exchange, the Lasombra will educate new Giovanni Embraces in the *ritae*, and study of the Abyss. The parties agree to not make overt attempts at converting the wards in their "care." The Giovanni command Putanesca within the Cosa Nostra to secure financial and criminal network bonds between the two Clans.

- As the Rosselini attempt breaking bread with the Warlocks, the Dunsirn Camarilla presence captures their attention. Already embedded, the Scottish family seem a little too at home in the Ivory Tower. The Rosselini are not financial experts, but the Ventrue and Toreador positions appear stronger under Dunsirn stewardship, throwing into doubt their loyalty to the Giovanni. The Rosselini must act carefully. They could improve their position with the Tremere by outing their cousins' backers, but this would upset the Venetians. They could alternatively voice their doubts to the Giovanni and potentially rise to the status of major family. Of course, their assessment of the Dunsirn may be incorrect.

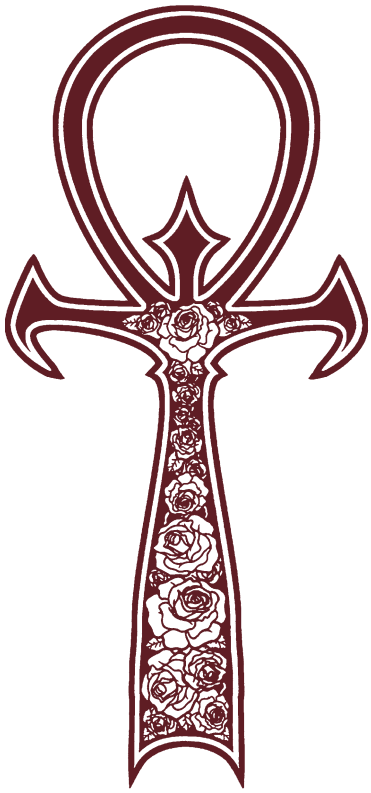
- The Pisanob suffer horribly in Central America, forced to pursue a campaign of guerrilla resistance against Lazarene Sabbat incursions. They find lines of communication with the Venetian Giovanni abruptly cut. Discovering Enzo Giovanni in Mexico City, Pochtli seizes the initiative and orders his coteries to take steps necessary for their survival — whether that entails holding Enzo hostage in exchange for aid from the old country, contacting the Samedi in Haiti for alliance, or throwing in with the pockets of Anarchs or Camarilla throughout Mexico. There is even talk of the Pisanob offering their services to the Sabbat in exchange for amnesty. While some Giovanni declare them traitors, others consider whether this is a clever move. The Pisanob may plot to ingratiate with the Sword of Caine on behalf of the Clan of Death.

- Talk of the True Vessel ignites Giovanni interests around the world. Various tales surround the lost blood of Cappadocius. One fact agreed upon is that the *anziani* will highly reward the Necromancer who returns the Vessel to the family. Some claim drinking the vitae held in the earthenware jar will bring a vampire closer to Caine, with none of diablerie's ill effects. Others state that it contains a fragment of Augustus' soul, and that command of the Clan rests within. The Setites of the Dream Court hold the vitae, but retrieving it will not be as simple as breaking into the Cairo temple. Deals are required. Blood for blood. What can a coterie offer the Setites in exchange for the True Vessel?

- The Serpents kidnap Isabel and steadily attempt to open her mind to Set's worship. Achieving this feat will grant the Setites an important agent

within the Necromancers. It will also destroy the credibility of her plans involving the other Necromancer families. Once the Giovanni discover her predicament, they will cease all deep cover operations for fear of exposure. The vampires following her agenda must move swiftly to rescue or kill her before she reveals all to the Setites. Meanwhile, a Setite coterie is responsible for introducing Isabel to their faith via an indoctrination campaign. They genuinely believe in their cause, and feel Isabel will make a fine Serpent.

- The Setites send a delegate to the Camarilla Justicars meeting in Venice. Strangely, the emissary vanishes en route. The disappearance troubles the Serpents, who fear the Necromancers have snatched their man. The messenger was due to convey the Hierophants' desire to meet the Justicars in Cairo, but the information cannot be allowed into Giovanni hands. A coterie for hire, or loyal Setites, may volunteer to convey the message themselves, or trace the vanished cultist. As Setite agents infiltrate Venice, tensions between the two Clans rise.
- The Camarilla arrange a grand assembly between Hierophants and Justicars, during which attendees will discuss subjects such as the Traditions, Paths of Enlightenment, and the permissibility of blood cults within the Camarilla. This Kindred diplomatic mission requires guards, counsel from all kinds of vampires, catering, and utmost secrecy. A coterie working for the gathering stands to receive grand rewards. A coterie working to disrupt the assembly will need to practice discretion, as the Kindred guards are under orders to kill any intruders, living or undead.
- In cities across the globe, fledgling Cappadocians, Harbingers of Skulls, and Samedi appear in increasing number, their sires retaining contact but never remaining in the same domains. These new Clan of Death members retain independence from the Sects, acting as mercenaries and establishing powerbases for their own lines. Progressively, the many faces of the Clan of Death begin working together. Divorced from the grudges their ancestors feel for the Giovanni, some even begin working *with* the Venetians.



A BRIEF HISTORY OF BECKETT

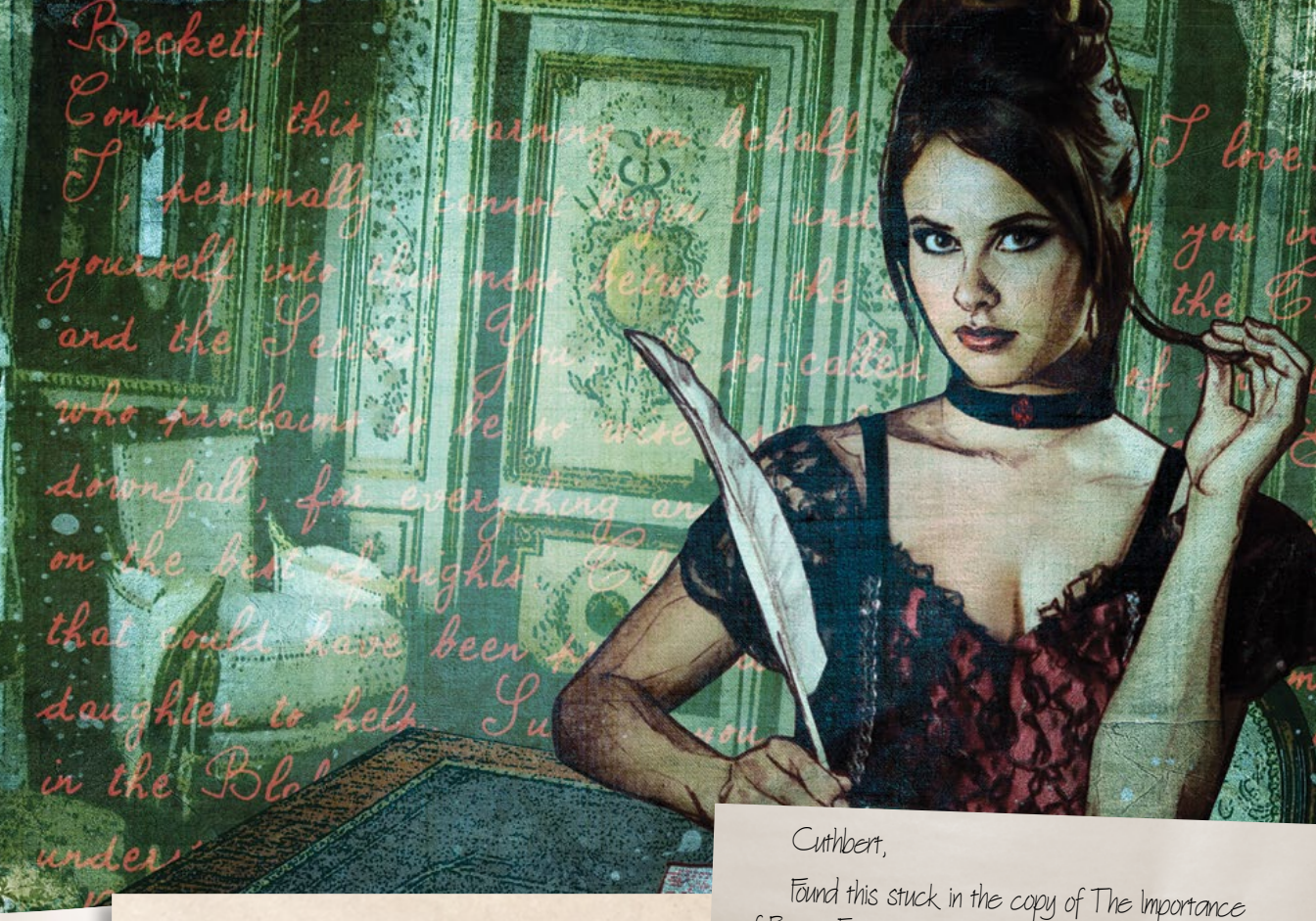
My love, my unlife,

I write this letter of my own free will, using words you never could. I am certain that I was, at first, another curiosity or a puzzle for you to figure out. I have no illusions about who I was when we first met, nor do I hold resentment that your intentions were not pure. This time we have spent together, though, has been a dark gift that has given me a deeper resolve. My strength comes from your Beast, my darling. That which you hate so much has made the decision to remove myself as Kemintiri's pawn that much easier. Do not seek vengeance my beloved, for this choice was mine to make and it was, perhaps, the only one I've made that was worth the cost.

I take comfort knowing that you will mourn me when you are ready. No doubt, you will bury your claws in your books, searching for the answer to an unrelated question, licking old wounds. Do not be distracted by your grief or the howls of your Beast, my love. We both know why you keep running, why you are drawn to mysteries that can never be solved. Set aside your thirst for knowledge of our kind, my love, and free yourself. It is time to face the truth about your sire.

Eternally yours,

Emma



Cuthbert,

Found this stuck in the copy of The Importance of Being Earnest that Emma borrowed.

Aristotle

WIDOW PRONOUNCED DEAD AFTER JUMPING INTO THAMES

On September the 23rd, 1888, Beloved Mother, Treasured Daughter, and Widow Lady Emma Blake did die by drowning in the dead of night. Constable Wright reported that the widow was spotted struggling with a mysterious cloaked figure near the Halfpenny Bridge, and jumped into the Thames to escape her attacker. Constable Wright witnessed Lady Blake struggling to remain afloat, and watched her sink beneath the surface of the chilly water. A search was conducted and abandoned two weeks later at the family's request.

A period of mourning will begin following Lady Blake's funeral to be held this Saturday. Services to be provided by Jay's London General Mourning Warehouse, Regent Street, London.

One Sea-Side Grave

Written by Christina Rossetti

Unmindful of the roses,
Unmindful of the thorn,
A reaper tired reposes
Among his gathered corn:
So might I, till the morn!

Cold as the cold Decembers,
Past as the days that set,
While only one remembers
And all the rest forget, –
But one remembers yet.

Beckett,

Consider this a warning on behalf of the one I love. I, personally, cannot begin to understand why you inserted yourself into this mess between the Ducheskis, the Tremere, and the Setites. You, the so-called seeker of knowledge who proclaims to be so wise, should have predicted Emma's downfall, for everything and everyone you touch turns to ash on the best of nights. This? This is an unspeakable disaster that could have been prevented had you allowed Emma's daughter to help. Surely, you did not expect to be the sun in the Blake family's world? Or did your sick lust to better understand the nature of our biology drive you to depravity?

No matter, I suspect, for you will simply fade back into the wilderness and wander as you have always done, while the rest of us remain behind to clean up your mess. It is with grave and terrible concern that I write this letter to you now, for you absolutely must relinquish Lady Blake's personal possessions to my care immediately. Keep the inkwell and pen if you must as a keepsake, but return her cameo, sleeping gown, slippers, and other personal effects, which includes five years' worth of letters from Lord Edward Bainbridge, immediately. If you do not comply with this request by tomorrow night, I will be forced to take up this matter with the Prince.

Signed,

Victoria

Victoria,

I was not aware that petty and injurious statements were your stock and trade these nights, as I believed you to be otherwise occupied with scandals of your own. However, in case you need a reminder, I would appreciate it if you would refrain from commenting on my personal affairs.

If I am the sun, then you most certainly are the moon – full and worshipped only by Malkav's childer. Surely, you recall the saying "Pride goeth before the fall," do you not? Such a lady of your caliber must find the taste of young blood so sweet, that tired bones no longer suffice.

I will return the personal effects I deem appropriate, out of respect for Emma's blood relatives. Hail the Prince and his lackeys if you must. It has been a long while since I have stretched my legs, and I could use the exercise.

Signed,

B.

My dear ingénue,

I wish I could fulfill your request to visit my library in Oxford, but I am afraid I have bad news. Recently, I invited Diana Iadanza and Myrsus ibn Shrbel to conduct a thorough check of its inventory and my security system. Much to my surprise Myrsus has proved to be quite useful for his knowledge of the occult and am delighted that his expertise on apocrypha is unmatched. Unfortunately, my fears that the Jocastian wench used ghouls to continue her incessant daylight raids have turned out to be true. One of my students, a Toreador neonate named Evelyn Yermakova, was even been attacked during a recent visit.

It is with deep regret I must inform you several valuable texts have, indeed, been stolen and replaced by expert forgeries. Of greater concern, however, is the fact that the copies may look authentic, but upon closer inspection the texts are incomplete and key passages from my most prized books have either been removed or rewritten.

So you understand the scope of the damage that has been done, I have managed to confirm the following information:

- The Book of Going Forth by Night (fragments). Intact. I am removing these fragments to a more secure location. I cannot risk their discovery.
• The Journals of Petaniqua (Vol. I-XI). Intact. I am certain that this fact alone absolves the Sabbat from any wrongdoing in this matter. I have since realized it is too risky to keep all the journals collected in one place.

- Kaymakli Fragment. Missing completely. Odder still, is that a copy of The Book of Nod was shelved in its place.

- The Book of the Abyss. The book is genuine, but there is a fresh round of notes in the margins written in blood by a different hand. The comments are insightful and relay which passages are relevant to Josians. Fascinating. There is a name, too, Ihsan of Clan Lasombra. He is said to be more Abyss than flesh.

- The Teachings of Marcus Verus. This has been replaced by a complete translation presented in the dead language of Nabatean.

- Gospels of Irad & Adah. The Gospel of Irad is intact, but the Gospel of Adah is a clever forgery.

I cannot stress what this means to my fellow Mnemosyne, my Clan, and to myself. If word was to reach certain ears, our work would be invalidated and worse - I may be falsely accused of aiding Ayisha Jocastian in some disastrous plot. Worse, each book that has been affected differently may very well be its own mystery, and this could have unforeseen consequences for years to come.

I beg you. Please help me rebuild and restore the books in my library as you have assisted me in the past. My suspicion is that I am not the only bibliophile that is being targeted, and the missing texts may have been stolen in broad daylight.

Your adopted sire and mentor,

Aristotle

Master and Guest

by Mary Coleridge

There came a man across the moor,
Fell and foul of face was he.
He left the path by the cross-roads three,
And stood in the shadow of the door.

I asked him in to bed and board.
I never hated any man so.
He said he could not say me No.
He sat in the seat of my own dear lord.

"Now sit you by my side!" he said,
"Else may I neither eat nor drink.
You would not have me starve, I think."
He ate the offerings of the dead.

"I'll light you to your bed," quoth I.
"My bed is yours – but light the way!"
I might not turn aside nor stay;
I showed him where we twain did lie.

The cock was trumpeting the morn.
He said: "Sweet love, a long farewell!
You have kissed a citizen of Hell,
And a soul was doomed when you were born.

"Mourn, mourn no longer for your dear!
Him may you never meet above.
The gifts that Love hath given to Love,
Love gives away again to Fear."

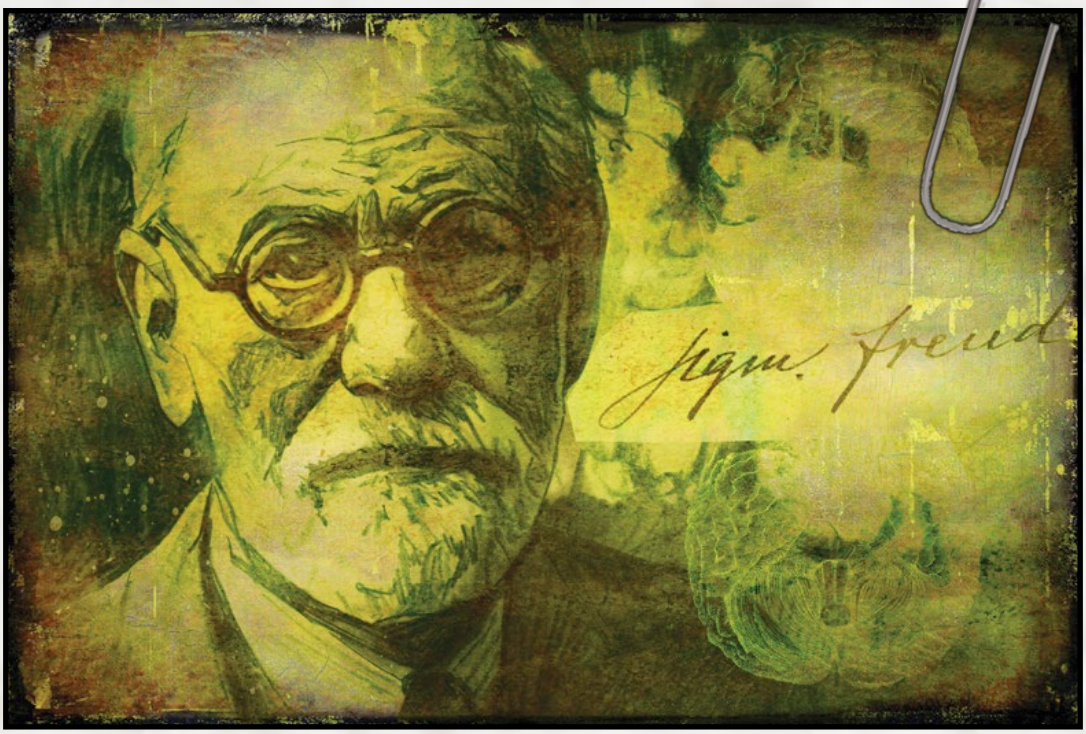
Oh my dark, sweet Mary Elizabeth. I wish I could thank you for the time you spent with me after Emma died, but not even the Giovanni have the power to contact you now. You thought yourself damned by my interest. I confess that I believed you to be a gift from Vykos. My enemies know me well, and I suspected he had formed Emma's look-alike to destroy me. I was wrong, and I suffered greatly for it. I blame my mistake on Vykos, though. Not you.

PSYCHOLOGY and MESMERISM

The Secret Connection between Sigmund Freud and Vampires

THE PSYCHOSEXUAL DEVELOPMENT OF THE VAMPIRE

Stage	Age Range	Erogenous zone	Consequences of psychologic fixation
Oral	Embrace–10 years	Mouth	Orally aggressive: Uncontrollable appetite. Orally passive: Toying with prey. Oral stage fixation can be managed with help from one's maker.
Anal	10–50 years	Bowel	Anal retentive: Takes time to stalk victims, and obsesses about victim's identity. Closes wound. Anal expulsive: Drinks from whichever human is closest regardless of risk. Does not close wound.
Phallic	50–90 years	Genitalia	Oedipus complex manifests as the desire to murder one's maker.
Latency	90–200	Dormant sexual feelings	Dissatisfaction with drinking blood if fixation occurs at this stage.
Genital	200–Torpor	Sexual interests mature	Frigidity, impotence, inability to drink blood from humans or animals.



Avid site user and fellow true believer Cuthbert29 recently sent us this article proposing that Freud's psychosexual mental development is not a template that is uniquely applied to humans. In fact, any creature who possesses self-awareness and verifiable personality traits could also be subject to the pitfalls of underdevelopment at any stage, as is the case with the vampire. But, as the vampire does not take pleasure or procreate as humans do, Cuthbert proposed that their development can be measured from the date their maker (or sire as he calls them) remade their physiology, and that is what impacts how much pleasure they'll take from drinking blood.

The following definitions are straight from our inbox for your reading pleasure. Be sure to add your thoughts in the comments below!

ORAL STAGE

Unlike a human that is born, a fledgling vampire does not emerge from the safety of a mother's womb. Any human, regardless of condition, can become a vampire. Thus, a vampire's psychosexual development begins from the moment of their "birth" up to a period of 10 years to account for adjustment in physical, emotional, and psychological ways. Fangs become the primary method by which the fledgling vampire explores this new world, and blood is the only thing that can satisfy their thirst.

This period is no doubt crucial in the psychosexual development of the vampire, for if they are not properly nurtured and taught how to satisfy their thirst, they will seek gratification by drinking greater and greater quantities of blood. This may result in unsatisfactory behavior from the sire's point-of-view, and exacerbate the relationship if the fledgling vampire does not take direction well. Whatever states the id, ego, and superego were in prior to becoming a vampire, now evolves and is at odds with the vampire's overwhelming desire to drink blood.

Like a human child, the id is prominent and overactive at this stage. The vampire's every move is to drink blood and fulfill their thirst. The ego is subdued as it comes to grips with the pain caused by not giving into its thirst, and evolves as the vampire tests the limits of their physical body in their new environment. This is partly why the sire's role is crucial in the development of the fledgling vampire, for the absence of the maker prolongs their development and causes undue suffering.

Testing limits is not as effective as being guided by a more experienced hand. In this case, structuring a relationship based on feedings may, in fact, help the fledgling vampire adjust better than giving them free rein. Otherwise, the same characteristics of a human child stuck at this stage through over- or under- stimulation could manifest and prevent the vampire from maturing to understand their place socially, physically, and philosophically. Indeed, it is possible that some vampires never abandon this stage, regardless of the years they possess, and this is what leads to infantile or rash behavior that may result in a malformed psyche.

Thus, it is recommended that the best way to help a fledgling vampire mature, would be to consider them helpless to acclimate them to their new unlife.

ANAL STAGE

Though, physiologically-speaking, psychosexual development does not utilize the same body parts in vampires as it does in humans, the process is still the same. In the anal stage, which may span from 10 to 50 years, the bowels represent feeling sated after a feeding. If the oral stage means that the fledgling vampire is not typically discriminate in the frequency and identity of their feedings, then the anal stage represents how the vampire responds before and after the act of drinking blood.

The presence of a sire is not necessary at this stage, but their proximity can be helpful when considering the advances of the modern age. If the vampire wants to survive as a predator among their innumerous prey, they must employ careful tactics to ensure that their feedings remain unremarked. This, unfortunately, is where the Id (immediate gratification) and the ego (delayed gratification) clash, leading to a battle between the two that temporarily takes over the vampire's consciousness.

This is where the value of the sire's teachings come into play, as they translate neatly into the parent-child relationship. To resolve the conflict between the Id and the ego, the fledgling vampire should be taught how to obey to reasonable requests designed to teach them self-control. Unfortunately, if the sire is ineffective and does not care about proper training, either through abandonment, falling into depravity, or encouraging engorgement, this may yield to an overactive Id which will eventually subsume the entire ego.

PHALLIC STAGE

From 50 to 90 years, a vampire's physical desires are not based on feeding alone and may expand upon the sharing of blood between vampires to maximize pleasure. Though some fledgling vampires may develop this curiosity early, this psychosexual stage is based on the premise of consent. After all, gender at this point does not mean the same thing as it does for humans, and it is only after the vampire has acclimated to feeding properly that any form of sexual desire enters their mind.

Of course, there may be false positives for the fledgling vampire is often deemed to be insatiable, even arrogant in their eagerness to explore the boundaries of their thirst and their bodies. The phallic stage, however, cannot begin until after the vampire has mastered the art of feeding.

During this stage, the fledgling is also becoming more aware of the powers they possess and may want to add more to enhance their physiologies. This, too, can bring a kind of pleasure as the vampire grows more and more powerful. In general, however, the zeal for more powers usually exacerbates the conflict between the ego and the Id, allowing the Id to surface more frequently.

As the vampire's desires continue to increase, however, they become acutely aware of their existence and how they were made. Questions may form about the origin of the vampire. If unanswered, the roots of resentment may take hold, and the Id could spur the vampire to turn on his sire. Here, the Oedipus complex does not represent a son murdering the father, as gender is less meaningful to the vampire, but the spirit of this psychosis certainly applies.

LATENCY STAGE

At 90 to 200 years of age, the vampire achieves stability as the three prior stages are balanced. The ability to reach this stage, however, hinges upon the knowledge of their sire's identity. If the sire remains anonymous, the phallic stage may extend for months, if not years, as the vampire seeks their sire for an eventual confrontation to address their abandonment issues.

Latency is achieved when feeding becomes routine and necessary for survival, and the vampire's ego is able to keep their id at bay. The vampire is now able to be more discerning in their forms of gratification, and will turn their attention to other means of filling their nights than simply feeding on blood. These methods of preoccupying their time further solidify the methods by which the vampire is able to balance their feedings with their desires. Typically, grudges and other long-term forms of dissatisfaction will appear during this stage, which may manifest in the inability to procure satisfaction from a routine feeding and lead to ennui.

GENITAL STAGE

Following a period of 200 years, the vampire becomes detached from their sire and, if fully developed, has dealt with the issues preventing them from feeling sated or from their id taking over their personality. If not, the vampire is at risk of remaining unfilled and their instincts, or id, will drive their actions more often than their forethought. The risks associated with an inability to become fully developed by achieving this stage may lead to an early forced isolation, or torpor. In more severe cases, the vampire feeds to survive and derives no pleasure from it, whether their source be human or animal.

From: beckett@schreckNET.nod

To: geoffrey.leigh@schreckNET.nod

Subject: Re: Hilarious

You are right. It is hilarious if the Inner Council thinks I would drop everything and help them capture any vampire operating in plain sight. I'd rather watch you try to make the attempt on live television. Good luck with that. Besides, the last time I "helped" the IC they accused me of betraying Aristotle to win a petty squabble. That isn't the sort of thing that can be forgiven easily, and they have yet to approach me about making amends.

From: geoffrey.leigh@schreckNET.nod

To: beckett@schreckNET.nod

Subject: Hilarious

I'm guessing that there are few left who would dare to call you "Cuthbert," but after that little stunt you pulled that name's been coming up a lot. Calling the Beast an id? Seriously?

Anyway, I'm assuming you knew that Molly McDonald ordered the Nosferatu to monitor all the conspiracy websites anyway, so you must be as arrogant as our clanmates say you are. You did manage to churn up some fresh mentions about Karen Anatos in the comments, though. I don't suppose I could interest you in hunting the Anathema? We could use a vampire with your talents, and your involvement could strengthen your political ties to the other Clans.

[RECORDING BEGINS]

Beckett: Thank you for meeting with me.

Atieno: How could I refuse such an invitation, brother?

Beckett: Our father, he…

Atieno: You know you can see him any time that you want.

Beckett: We both know that isn't true.

Atieno: [long pause] And you still seek blame. Have you not found peace in your books?

Beckett: If Aristotle could hear me now, he would…

Atieno: Aristotle is not our father.

Beckett: I know that.

Atieno: Then why call me? Why record this conversation? What is so important, that you force me to travel half a world away.

Beckett: You are being hunted.

Atieno: I am always being hunted. By who? That Setite bitch?

Beckett: No, by my childe.

Atieno: You have a childe? You who swore never to introduce another human into this unlife? Who is he?

Beckett: She. Her name is…Marie.

Atieno: Marie who?

Beckett: [long pause] She's a vampire hunter, Atieno. From Berlin.

Atieno: I'm listening.

Beckett: [sigh] During World War II, I traveled to Germany.

Atieno: Alone?

Beckett: Yes, I was to meet Baumgarten outside of the city during the end of the war. He had a list of occult tomes circulated among rare book dealers for acquisition, and I wanted it.

Atieno: I'm assuming this Marie did, too. How did you find out she was a hunter?

Beckett: She staked Baumgarten through the heart, and set fire to the list he was carrying.

Atieno: Now, I understand. She wounded your pride, so you sought to teach her a lesson by turning her into what she hated the most.

Beckett: [long pause] Yes, that's correct.

Atieno: And now she is trying to punish you.

Beckett: Yes.

Atieno: I understand why you are concerned but you forget, brother, I am older than you. Vampire hunters do not scare us, especially babies like this Marie.

Beckett: This one should.

[RECORDING ENDS]

Short_Snout:	You think you can pull this off?
Ramones:	Obviously.
Short_Snout:	She's online now. I'm ready if you are.
Ramones:	I suppose we should talk payment.
Short_Snout:	Too early to collect. Need to get her off your ass first.
Ramones:	Okay, I'm adding her now. Just stick to the script we rehearsed.

<Ramones added Bauhaus_999>

Short_Snout:	Welcome Bauhaus_999! Excited to hear what you got for us!
Bauhaus_999:	Glad you're ready to join the hunt.
Ramones:	I'm in. Just a little nervous. Vampires are so strong.
Bauhaus_999:	They can be, but they have their weak points like the rest of us. Sunlight, stake to the heart, decapitation.
Short_Snout:	Yikes. That sounds dangerous. You'll teach us how to do all that?
Bauhaus_999:	So eager. You do know I vet all my hunters, right?
Ramones:	I have nothing to hide.
Bauhaus_999:	I'll be judge of that. Doesn't matter, I have your IP addresses now. Hrmm… This is interesting, are you connected to the SchreckNET?

<Short_Snout logs out>

Ramones:	I told you, I have nothing to hide.
Bauhaus_999:	So, you're a ghoul.
Ramones:	Something like that. Guess the jig is up. *Marie.*
Bauhaus_999:	Guess so, asshole.

<**Ramones** logged out>

< **Bauhaus**_999 logged out>

Aristotle,

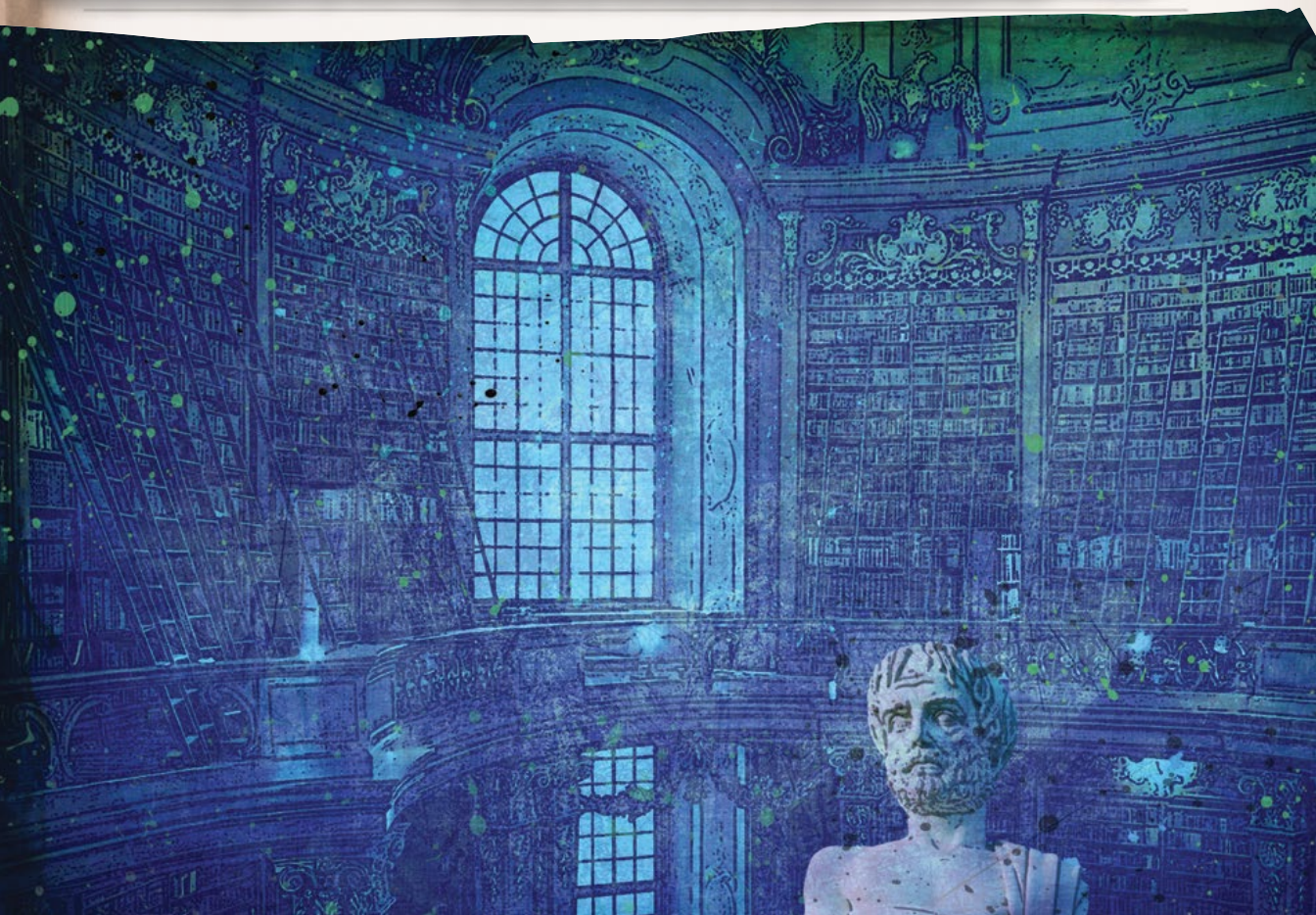
I apologize for not using your preferred method of communication, but I fear you are being watched and I am not certain if Vykos has finally caught up with me or if one of my other enemies has. I've taken your advice and have asked Cesare to keep a close eye on The Calleva Arms. If anyone dares to question the patrons there, all they'll find are false trails and the roots of my vengeance.

Signed,

Beckett

Rome. 1983. The city of the dead, filled with ghosts — holy, morbid, ancient shades. An empty house, bereft of faith, but filled with ceremonial objects and the book of my friend's deepest desire. Oh Beckett, you know your mind, but not your heart. It is not Nod you seek or the answers to the riddles of our existence, our purpose. You do not want power, either. Not really. You want what no one else has achieved — to evolve into something else, some higher power. That is the real reason we are here, to plunder the bowels of the Vatican searching for your beloved rare books and fragments. We are not here at Aristotle's bequest, despite your proclamations of loyalty. You should not be embarrassed that your boundless curiosity about the whereabouts of the Sargon Fragment has gotten the better of you. I think we all want to talk to God, we the Children of Caine. I am not sure you would be the vampire I would choose for the deed, given your faith. But, if anyone could do it in these dark times, you could. Should it be, though? Perhaps this weighty responsibility does not fall on your shoulders. Remember: "But you, Daniel, shut up the words and seal the book, until the time of the end. Many shall run to and from, and knowledge shall increase."

Angele. The one vampire I could never lie to. I miss him.-B



The Knowledge of Boundless Time

Books, fragments, and scrolls have been collected and examined by the Mnemosyne, the Tremere and Setite Clans, and many others. Even in the modern era, many vampires believe the keys to holding the ultimate power lie in ancient texts. Knowledge of deep-seated grudges, thaumaturgical rituals, forbidden lore, and untold havens can tip the scales for those vampires who know how to translate and use it. To unravel the riddles of the past, however, one must first determine what it is they are looking for.

Following the reproduction and distribution of *The Book of Nod*, Aristotle de Laurent discovered his library was compromised. He is not the only one whose assets have been targeted, however, and there is more than one Anathema to blame for those losses. The Anathema, which include Christopher Barrow, Kemintiri, Ayisha Jocastian, and Francisca Santos Dos Rodrigues are desperate to find forgotten tomes to further increase their power.

Whether a coterie plans to restore the library of Aristotle de Laurent or intercept a deal to purchase a copy of *The Book of Darkness*, there are untold benefits for a willing coterie who seeks to take advantage of hidden knowledge.

The following plot hooks offer players options to explore a storyline involving rare and forbidden texts.

- Despite the security measures Aristotle de Laurent has deployed, his library has repeatedly been broken into and, in his mind, will take decades to restore. Ever since the Malkavian discovered his library had been compromised, he has gone to extraordinary lengths to protect its remaining contents, and has even researched thaumaturgical methods to ward off thieves and forgers. As time passes, Aristotle is becoming increasingly paranoid and has stopped tutoring his students. His clanmates believe he has moved his collection several times, and may be keeping the rarest gems with him in one or more of his havens.

  Aristotle is open to help, but he is not at all trusting. In exchange for favors from his brethren, the Mnemosyne, Aristotle will test interested scholars by giving them ancient tablets to authenticate. If the players can impress Aristotle, he will give them a list of books, scrolls and tablets to recover with the added warning that some of the titles may, in fact, be fake. If pressed, Aristotle will admit he was betrayed by a former student named Evelyn, who turned out to be Ayisha Jocastian. Now, he cannot afford to be too careful.

- **Thwart the Mass Publication of the Kaymakli Fragment:** The Anathema Ayisha Jocastian is determined to reproduce and distribute forbidden tomes in addition to *The Book of Nod*. After successfully breaking in to Aristotle's library, she has come to possess an authentic copy of the Kaymakli Fragment which, according to rumor, had been recovered by Beckett and his allies in the ruins of an ancient Cappadocian city. The disk is inscribed with prophecies about the end of the world which, to many vampires, could be passed off as an elaborate hoax. To the Camarilla and to Noddists, however, its distribution could lead to other discoveries including the revival of Lilith-obsessed cults.

  Other vampires, such as the Setite scholar Nenet are concerned that the Kaymalki Fragment is more than just a disk. They believe that it could, in fact, be a key that could unlock a mysterious crypt that some vampires fear could contain the last surviving lamia.

- **Race to Find the Lost Nominis Inferni:** In the thirteenth century, Tremere himself translated a Sanskrit document called the Naaman'h rakshasa to pen the *Nominis Inferni*. The specific contents of the book have since been lost, but the tome is rumored to contain information about demonology, including several rituals to thaumaturgically bind the spirit of a demon to a runic tattoo, and a definitive list of lesser and greater demons. Last seen during the Inquisition, as the rise of infernalism continues to be a concern for modern factions, books such as the *Nominis Inferni* are treated as both a potential threat and possible means of luring Anathema such as Valerius Maior out into the open.

  This tome, in particular, is a high-profile target for acquisition and it is rumored Dylan Bruce is commandeering ghouls to find it. Additionally, Clan Tremere is interested in acquiring a piece of their history, while Manuela Cardoso Pinto is desperate to obtain more information about infernalists to help the Josian cause. To find the

clues leading to its potential location, interested parties could use the journals of Stromburg, Ardan Lane, or Kyle Strathcona, or they could infiltrate occult bookstores and, in the process, chip away at Christopher Barrow's empire.

- **Recover Petaniqua's Journals:** The recent discovery of Petaniqua's journals has left both the Camarilla and the Sabbat in uproar. Juliet Parr, the Malkavian Justicar, is anxious to recover the entire set to unlock Petaniqua's darkest secrets and unravel her involvement in the formation of the Sabbat and its Inquisition. Presently, Petaniqua is the only vampire who knows how many journals there are, and where they might be. Even she does not suspect, however, that Aristotle de Laurent has recovered several volumes of her most private thoughts. Following the break-in of his library, however, Aristotle has scattered those volumes in several secure locations around the globe.

  The news that a high-ranking member of the Sabbat and, in the eyes of the Camarilla, an Anathema has lost her journals is beginning to have unforeseen ripple effects. Even the Anarchs are curious to find out what secrets Petaniqua has been hiding. Now, all eyes are turning to scholars, collectors, and opportunists to recover the journals and sell them to the highest bidder.

- **Forge an Alliance with the Arcane Historical Society**: For scholars and historians, there is no greater calling than the pursuit of knowledge. Often, however, vampires employ the use of ghouls to varying effects, for the mystical nature of the blood bond is hard to break. Ghouls also offer an advantage for bibliophiles, for they can access library records and run errands during the day. Some vampires, like Beckett, however, have grave concerns about creating ghouls and using them to fulfill a singular purpose such as the acquisition of rare books. The nature of the blood, combined with the complexities of how the Sects and clans regard ghouls, presents a challenge that can be overcome by tapping into larger organizations, such as the Arcane Historical Society.

  The Arcane Historical Society, which is run by independent ghouls, has not been around long enough to acquire any texts of real value. Despite this, their ability to work in daylight means that the group has the potential to become a valuable asset in the search for forbidding texts. To utilize their resources, vampires would have to set aside whatever philosophical and political reservations they have about working with independent ghouls and figure out how best to ally with them. To do so, however, draws the vampires deeper into ghoul-centric problems and that alone carries no shortage of headaches.

- **Neutralize the Society of Leopold:** The largest vampire hunting organization, the Society of Leopold, whipped into a frenzy after the *Testament of Leopold* was found stolen. All vampires are considered guilty of this deed, as Leopold's words are the foundation the organization was built upon. Though the society will not stop hunting vampires, they may offer a temporary ceasefire if their most prized possession is returned and offered as a bargaining chip.

  Beckett's once-greatest enemy, Jan Pieterzoon the childe of Hardestadt, has other ideas however, for he feels that this welcome news is a clear sign the Camarilla should take down the Society of Leopold once and for all. Other, more scholarly vampires, believe that the group should be infiltrated and dismantled from the inside. Until the testament is returned, the vampire hunters cannot recruit or initiate new members, and this gives vampires the opportunity to send Bond ghouls to join in their stead. Once the society falls, another group, more zealous than the last, will rise from its ashes.

Unraveling Blood Ties

Though ghouls, revenants, and dhampirs may fall beneath the notice of many vampires and are regarded as tools, there are some vampires within the Tremere and Tzimisce Clans who believe they are crucial to the survival of the modern vampire. Beckett, however, is often sympathetic to the plight of the ghoul, and whether he feels impotent to rescue them or fascinated by their unique physiology, the Gangrel spends many long nights drawing family trees and retracing blood ties.

The shocking discovery of the Keskinen revenant family deeply affects the members of Clan

Malkavian. So many vampires were not aware that revenants could be created or manipulated by anyone but the Tzimisce, and the knowledge that a single Malkavian could wield such magics frightens them. Secretly, Clan elders request all Malkavians to report what they know about Louhi and his ilk. Unfortunately, Aristotle de Laurent is so preoccupied with his compromised texts that he beginsto isolate himself from Clan politics. To assist his adopted sire, Beckett offers to collect and deliver information about the family.

For players, unraveling the connections between ghouls, families, dhampirs, and flesh-crafted phenomena such as the vozhd and the szlatcha will give them information that *can* be exploited *and* sold. Unraveling the ties binding individual family members to their promised sires is useful information to leverage and keep in mind. Though revenant families are well-guarded and produce their own vitae, they can be compromised through careful manipulation.

In addition to fulfilling favors on behalf of Aristotle and a genuine curiosity about revenants, the following storylines involving Beckett and ghouls may be explored:

- Secure an Interview with Dr. Netchurch: Never to be outdone, Beckett believes himself intellectually superior to other vampires. Dr. Douglas Netchurch is a puzzle Beckett wants to unlock, for the Gangrel is not sure how or why the Malkavian scientist was able to unlock the secrets of revenant family creation. Though Beckett won't admit it, he has tried repeatedly to arrange a meeting but the scientist and his assistant, Dr. Nancy Reage, have been avoiding him. Beckett would not only like to know why, he has more than a passing interest in the specifics of their activities.

- Find Marie's Spies: Always on the move, Beckett expects to run into his fair share of enemies. What he does not anticipate, however, is the fact that his enemies are targeting all those associated with jim. Marie, a former vampire hunter, is a formidable foe who knows how to hurt Beckett more deeply than any other vampire. Beckett knows this and is unable to think clearly because of the guilt he feels after siring her. He needs help but, true to form, the Gangrel is too proud to ask for it. Savvy opportunists, on the other hand, could take advantage of the opportunity and take down a vampire hunter in the process.

- Draw a Web of Vykos' Enemies and Allies: Though it's rumored that Beckett and Sascha Vykos may have temporarily ended their long-standing bitter feud, the Gangrel believes that the Fiend is planning something sinister, and thinks he still could be hurt by one of Vykos' fleshcrafted creations, revenants, or ghouls that he caught spying on him recently. Beckett, however, believes that a direct attack would be futile and would put a stop to their truce. In his mind, the way to ensure his safety is by infiltrating Vykos's allies and by identifying other enemies with whom he can partner. Though Beckett has spent several decades compiling information on Vykos, he has not abandoned his other intellectual pursuits to plan for an attack and deal with his enemy once and for all. Regardless of what a coterie decides to do next, dealing with Vykos' progeny will attract the attention of outsiders, like Harold Zettler and Lord Aludian Thex, who would shepherd Vykos' created monstrosities to the service of the massive, corruptive company known as Pentex.

- **Hunt for Beckett's Sire:** The identity of Beckett's sire has been a source of rumor, conjecture, and worry for many vampires. Knowing who Beckett's sire is may confirm whether or not the Gangrel committed diablerie, what his generation is, and fill gaps in Clan-and-Sect related mysteries that have remained unsolved for centuries. Though many vampires are not sure where to begin, others have postured that Geoffrey Leigh, the current Gangrel Justicar, would explain why Beckett has kept quiet — if the rumors are true that he does know who his sire is. Elijah, on the other hand, has also been brought up as a possible candidate as a means of explaining Beckett's hatred for Xavier. Many vampires, however, think that it's highly likely Beckett's sire might be a vampire like Cassandra Darby, who roams the wilds and stays out of politics altogether.

THE DROWNING OF RASPUTIN

Lazienki Park, Warsaw, Poland

Following a tip-off from House Carna, my hunt for the remainder of the Telyavelic line took me on a search throughout Poland. Supposedly, some of their number came here from Lithuania during the 19th century. Over the past weeks, I discovered and catalogued castles, barrows, and cemeteries, all once within the domain of rival Fiends, Telyavelic, and Patricians. I understand Jurgen the Swordbearer once claimed Ksiaz Castle, and for a time it played the role of communal haven to the Camarilla's Inner Circle.

The one thing I didn't find was evidence of the Shepherds. Were I the type to believe conspiracy theories, I would suggest someone erased their existence from the history books of our kind. I met with an old friend, the Ravnos Hoster, to discuss the matter of my quarry and any other mysteries within this domain.

He informed me Vykos was recently here.

The Fiend came alone, and was uncharacteristically courteous. Less tentacle and mouth than usual. That didn't stop them from peeling layers off the Tremere and Ventrue Primogen in a hunt for the Telyavelic Tremere. I hear the Primogen are not ash, but their status is difficult to ascertain when one's head is inside the other. Hoster's childe, "Mister Nobody," attempted to confront Vykos despite his lack of martial ability, and subsequently found himself turned inside out. A real pity. He

was tolerable for a Deceiver, and schooled me on computer hacking once upon a time, though I took in none of what he said.

Vykos didn't find what they were after, but they did discover who burned the last counted Telyavelic in Warsaw.

Rasputin.

GRIGORI RASPUTIN



Clan of the Hidden(?); Pokrovskoe *1869. #unknown, sire unknown.

R. was born the son of peasants in an insignificant Russian village. That is the single fact we can attribute to this individual. Everything else, including when (and if!) he was Embraced and by whom, is a subject of conjecture. Alternately described as a member of the Clan of the Hidden, the Snake Clan, or the Clan of the Moon, R. also has the dubious honor of being a ghost and a shapeshifter. I am reliably informed he is an oft-used identity for Archons and Justicars. It is possible there never was a single R. or that the actual R. died, as is commonly believed, in 1916.

Plan B Pub, Warsaw, Poland

Rasputin is one of these individuals who appears from time to time, throws everything into misrule, and then disappears promptly after. Not a few Princes blame Tradition breaches on Rasputin, when their own childer are responsible. Some Archbishops cite Rasputin as the cause for the Third Sabbat Civil War! I even blamed him for the Puma Punku incident, as it happens.

Based on findings during my hunt for Baba Yaga's trail, the answers accumulated in Berlin, and my discoveries in Warsaw, I am confident Rasputin is a vampire with a complex agenda. His diverse array of powers for a relatively-youthful vampire imply he is an Outcast. This ties into rumors of his being a childe of the legendary Stone Man. His ability to survive in the most hostile domains, pass back and forth across the Shadow Curtain, apparent skill in dismantling Kindred societies, and reputation for destroying other vampires, implies he receives an unparalleled level of sanctuary within a Sect.

Monçada believed Rasputin is the Antediluvians' direct servant. -L

My chief guess at Rasputin's sponsor is the Camarilla. He hunts other Kindred, is used as an alias by their higher-ups, and generally runs around with impunity. Yet, he never makes the Red List. Blood hunts have been called on the mad monk, but these are localized affairs. This theory falls down when one considers his status as clanless, his occasional targeting of Camarilla vampires, and Masquerade-breaching infamy.

Perhaps Rasputin receives backing from one of the more obscure groups of Kindred, such as the Inconnu, or Tal'Mahe'Ra, but I doubt he lives up to the messianic agenda of either. He is a walking Gehenna prophet however, enthusiastic to see its arrival.

There is too much precision and not enough chaos to classify Rasputin as a simple lunatic with a streak of luck. There is more to him, and I will discover the truth.

B.

In answer to the question you fired off to D.C., no, Emperor Lucius Sejanus does not know Vykos' location. Shame on you for asking. If Sejanus did know their location, he would hunt the creature down himself.

We ought to hang out more, old boy. Shall I come to Poland?

T-

Karai Pyhare

The Night Men are among the more diversely-spread Drowned Legacies, inhabiting domains ranging from Peru to Argentina. They recognize a forthcoming descendant named Tunchi, who gifted them the powers to imitate the sounds of any creature; walk without making a sound or leaving a trace; and contort their way through impossibly-small spaces. Tunchi has not yet been born. When he is, he will reclaim his power. The Night Men habitually seduce their victims, believing sexual activity a vital part of feeding. Karai Pyhare spawn more dhampirs than any other line. Their territory often extends to tourist hotspots, nightclubs, and bars, though the Night Men tend to dress poorly for these scenes, wearing unusually heavy clothing. Upon exposing a substantial portion of their bodies, the Night Men lose their resolve, succumbing to Rötschreck until they find a suitably-enclosed space.

Lucita (555-487-5555)

B:	I need Vykos' current location.	22:25
L:	Am I their babysitter?	22:30
B:	Can you find them?	22:39
L:	Maybe. This constitutes a big damn favor. I'll make some calls.	22:41
L:	Sounds like Vykos doesn't want you to find them. They left a voicemail for you. I'm sending it as an audio file. Just click "yes" when it asks you to download.	23:16
L:	vm12.mp3	23:19

[RECORDING BEGINS]

Vykos: We are currently out-of-reach. If Beckett has found this number, congratulations! We will murder half-a-dozen ghouls for their failure in keeping this line secure, as a thank you to you, and ask you kindly to leave us alone. Your stalkerish behavior is making you look like the dangerous one.

[RECORDING ENDS]

eyeonyou started the conversation

misternobody joined the conversation

eyeonyou:	I received an email from the Fiend of Fiends a few months back, and I want to be able to track the device it came from.
misternobody:	ok so not a small thing
eyeonyou:	Add to that the email it came from was encrypted.
misternobody:	arent you a whiz with these things?
eyeonyou:	I could handle the cipher. Frankly I'd rather not get my software dirty chasing this one.
misternobody:	this will cost
eyeonyou:	I took a lot of data from that House Goratrix temple if you're interested.
misternobody:	nah that's out there already courtesy of hitman
misternobody:	i heard your friend becker was out talking to the libertatian kindred
misternobody:	if you have electronic files of his transcripts send them to me
misternobody:	lots of buyers for that kinda material
eyeonyou:	I'll check with him, but I doubt it'll be a yes.
eyeonyou:	Okay, so it's a yes.
misternobody:	sweet! just ping me the email
eyeonyou:	Will do.
eyeonyou:	Remember this. If Beckett ever tells you something is confidential, that you're his ally, or under his protection, remember how quickly he sells people out for a scrap of a mystery.
eyeonyou:	Just so I know… how did you survive Vykos' attack?
misternobody:	i didn't. I'm a ghost in the machine now
eyeonyou:	Really.

nisternobody: you don't believe me

eyeonyou: I've seen some weird shit. You could be telling the truth. If you're not, keep your head down anyway. If Vykos finds out you survived, they will come calling.

eyeonyou closed chat

Praia de Copacabana, Rio de Janeiro, Brazil

Upon arriving in Rio, my intent was to introduce myself to the local Lasombra-Toreador council and ask politely if they had seen a bearded Russian, about yea high, in recent months. The audience I found was aggressive enough to make me depart at speed. They were measuring me up with their eyes.

Apparently the Rio Kindred participate in a ritual hunt of all new arrivals. To them, it's a form of carnival. Determined not to join the ranks of the hunted, I elected to sleep deep in the sandbanks rather than make my way into the built-up areas. The Kindred and ghoul population here is vast and the city a labyrinthine metropolis. I am not nearly familiar enough to take my chances on the streets.



This is one of few domains in the world where the Camarilla and Sabbat coexist harmoniously. I believe this is due to the Rio's population. The Sabbat can be monsters in the favela while the Camarilla lord it over the nightclubs, beaches, and hotels.

How stereotypical. It is in fact the other way around in Rio. We Keepers dance in high society, while the Degenerates dwell among the teeming masses. -L

I have a permanent trace on Vykos' mobile telephone device, so long as they haven't gifted it to another party. According to the little map thing, they have been in a club named "The Week" for three nights, so I may have to attend this little discotheque.

[RECORDING BEGINS — POUNDING DANCE MUSIC RENDERS MUCH OF THE RECORDING UNCLEAR]

Beckett: —for a man. I guess.

Dancer: *Como*?

Beckett: [shouted over music] I. Am. Looking. For. A. Man!

Dancer: [unclear] right place! *Demorou*!

Beckett: No. No! Not like— for [unclear] sake.

Dancer: *Foi mal*! [unclear] were a bear!

Beckett: I wasn't clear. I am looking [unclear] defies description. [unclear] to say they're trans. Eastern European, maybe. Both handsome and beautiful. Soft-skinned. Shoulder-length [unclear] just guessing, really. The bastard could look however they [unclear].

Lostundo

The Drinkers predominantly make their domains in the forested areas of Colombia and Ecuador, though they claim hidden positions of influence in cartels and law enforcement agencies in recent nights, trafficking their own number throughout the world within caches of cocaine. Lostundo are skilled manipulators, known for luring kine away from the safety of their homes and into an unlit hell beyond the treeline. Known for their siren calls and ability to take on the traits and appearances of those from whom they feed, the Lostundo are widely feared. One could be anywhere, impersonating anyone. They cannot use any of their undead abilities while in the home or haven of another, unless they consume the homeowner's blood. If they consume it all, a Lostundo alters themself to completely resemble their victim.

Dancer: [unclear] *não me fodas a cabeça…*

Beckett: I get that a lot. Thank you anyway!

Dancer: *Vai te fuder*!

Beckett: Nice chap. Excuse me! Barman!

Vykos: Stop harassing the kine, Beckett.

Beckett: [unclear] you, you [unclear] in the [unclear] sideways. I trace you all the way to Brazil, and you know I'm coming?

Vykos: If someone tracks us, we track [unclear] with me to the restroom. We give you our word no violence [unclear].

[LOUD MUSIC LASTING A MINUTE BEFORE A DOOR SLAMS]

Beckett: You haven't altered your appearance since Prospero's.

Vykos: This feels like new skin. It has been a long time since we wore it last.

Beckett: I suppose I anticipated that with your… surgery… you would lose the entire gestalt thing.

Vykos: Even as a mortal, we knew we were more than the sum of our genitalia.

Beckett: I hear de Corazon has it framed somewhere.

Vykos: Better he than the Usurpers. Who knows what they would do with it? That action… All those years ago… Was vulgar and short-sighted.

[door slams]

Intruder: *Com licença*!

Beckett: I—

Vykos: *Vamos trepar*?

[UNIDENTIFIED NOISES, WHICH THIS HUMBLE TRANSCRIBER BELIEVES ARE KISSES AND GROANS OF PLEASURE]

Intruder: *Desculpe*!

[DOOR SLAMS]

Beckett: Ah! Get off me! How many tongues do you have, exactly?

Vykos: It got rid of him. Get up and lean against the door. We need to discuss a certain Russian.

Beckett: Yes, well… Rasputin. You were also tracing the Shepherds?

Vykos: We believe they know the secret to killing Kupala and freeing our Clan. They have a history with such entities. Rasputin was hunting them down, even going so far as to unearth them to destroy them. Our presence in Poland led to his flight.

Beckett: Well you and I together are a force to be reckoned with, I'm sure.

Vykos: *Our* as in *Vykos*. Do not delude yourself with a sense of self-importance.

Beckett: You are a thoroughly unpleasant entity. So you tracked Rasputin here?

Vykos: We did, though he went to ground in Caracas.

Beckett: If Rasputin is in Venezuela, why are you in Brazil? Why not draw him to you? I know you know some Kindred with that particular gift.

Vykos: Something strange is going on in domains as far north as Mexico City. At first we assumed mortal hunters were forcing Cainites into hiding, or annihilating them in their domains, but the telltale signs of haven-to-haven warfare are absent. Mexico City has heard nothing of kine scourging the vampires of South America. We contemplated whether the domains are simply emptying due to a mass torpor event stemming from a blood curse, but questioned why such an event would be isolated to a continent. We dismissed both theories. In any case, there's something on this continent making Cainites disappear.

A surprising number of South American Kindred appeared in Europe recently.

[BANGING ON DOOR]

Beckett: It's in use! There doesn't appear to be any dearth of Kindred in Rio.

Vykos: Which is why we are here. If something is targeting weak domains, we would rather stay in a strong one. We attempted to summon Rasputin, but—

Beckett: You are hiding? Disconcerting. Do you think Rasputin has something to do with the lack of vampires?

Vykos: Even if he is uninvolved, he clearly knows the continent. We have tracked him around South America for over a month, and something seems compelled to protect or conceal him no matter where he appears. We have been attacked by mortals, ghouls, and even some Cainites. They are all quick to announce they die for Rasputin, even under lengthy questioning.

Beckett: Questioning?

Vykos: Do you want us to paint a picture?

Beckett: How have you been able to keep track of him if he's hopping from city to city?

Vykos: We nearly incapacitated him when first we arrived in Lima. He escaped, but left much of his vitae behind. We can track those whose blood we possess. More important though, are the notes he leaves in each domain. They show fear. He appears to wish to leave a testament for a brotherhood to which he claims membership, though we have found each missive before they arrive. Sometimes we wait for one of their messengers to collect the monk's telegrams, just so we can sate on his allies. It passes the time. Whatever terrifies him gives us pause, however.

Beckett: If you're too afraid, I will travel to Caracas myself to "question" him. I'm sure I can charm my way past his bodyguards.

Vykos: Trying to provoke us, Beckett?

Beckett: Not at all. You stay here at your club and dance the night away as if it's the Dark Ages and Constantinople is still in bloom. Give me Rasputin's location, and I'll find him.

[LONG PAUSE]

Beckett: You're not dancing.

Vykos: We are contemplating the most painful way of removing your spine.

[LONG PAUSE]

Beckett: As I know you're waiting to be asked: Vykos, will you accompany me to Caracas?

Vykos: On the condition that we get some alone time with Rasputin.

Beckett: Are you ever truly alone, when you have me?

[RECORDING ENDS]

Brothers,

Lima is not as I knew it. The Shining Path Brutes were the dominant power when last I departed, but many among their number are now missing. The Sabbat seems unsettled, as if there is an enemy within, commencing an eradication of the unworthy. The paranoia is palpable. It tastes sweet, my brothers.

The Brujah antitribu once held Lima in a tight grip. The kine never walked the streets of Lima alone at night. -L



Cipactli

The Hungry are a gluttonous line of vampires known for their reptilian behavior. Their coldly analytical, unblinking stares, requirement for sleeping in water, and merciless greed, all push the other Drowned Legacies to hold them in low esteem. Cipactli claim to be the eldest surviving vampire line native to South and Central America, citing their physical toughness as reason for their survival. The Hungry religiously favor the form of the crocodile, making ghouls of such creatures. In Cipactli legend, divine mandate assures their prominence from Mexico to Venezuela. They consider themselves the wardens of men, raising families and villages to great size before indulging in ritual bouts of mass sacrifice, in which they consume every mortal in their "farm." The Hungry extend this rite to high-rise apartment blocks in recent nights. Cipactli declare the Tlacique a separate, respected family, while the Followers of Set are thieves who stole their ancestral Discipline. Cipactli possess Serpentis, with the crocodile replacing the snake theme.

I performed as decreed in Lithuania and Poland, purging the line of Telyavel, driving our kind further into obscurantism. Yet, my chaperones were not here upon my arrival! If you read this, know I moved on to the safehouse in Arequipa, to await your counsel.

The Fiend known as Vykos is on my trail. They took exception to my European actions. I am confident I can lure them into a trap. There are many loyal to our brotherhood.

G.R.

Brothers,

I attempt to find respite here, in Medellín, though I doubt Vykos will gift me time. They are playing with me. On my heels at every turn, yet never close enough to deliver the killing blow. Perhaps they intend for me to lead them to you? Though I desire your sanctuary and counsel, I know you will only offer salvation and reveal yourselves to me when the time is right.

As with Lima, there is something unhealthy to Medellín. I expected the ensuing Serpent and Necromancer war, but instead, there is an unpleasant

calm. Has the dispute over vampire presence within the Office of Envigado concluded? I do not know. I do know I attempted to meet with my cartel associates and found faces I knew, but no recognition from them! They denied knowledge of my arrangements! They are scum and a shallow reflection of Escobar's former glories.

G.R.

Plaza de Altamira, Caracas, Venezuela

Rasputin's offhand references to strange events throughout the continent trouble me. He retreats to South America to meet with his sponsors, but each sanctuary he visits is empty. Before he meets with anyone who might know what's going on, Vykos harries him away, acquiring the paper trail.

Rasputin's trail led to the Caracas docks, where we hoped to find answers. Instead, we found coteries blatantly warring over territory, using their undead gifts in full view of terrified mortals. When we intervened, it transpired they were not competing for ownership, but to see which of them was responsible for maintaining the docks for the absent Warlock Prince Marcello while the others fled, hopefully to return one night with backup. They are all deathly afraid of a line they call "the Hungry," who apparently devoured Xavier de Cincao, a member of the Tremere Inner Council, within his own chantry.

One of them kindly answered some questions.

[RECORDING BEGINS]

Beckett: Rasputin. We know he's nearby.

Noely: *No hablo Ingles*, asshole.

Vykos: That last word sounded "Ingles" to us. Just tell us where he is and we will not harm you.

Noely: Harm me? *Señor*, I have faced down a Sabbat pack solo!

Beckett: [laughs]

Noely: Why the fuck is he staring at me like that? Why is his skin is rippling?

Beckett: It's "their," not "his." Vykos, you can stop. Stop now. Stop.

Kalku

The Puppeteers make slaves of their prey, which accounts for most other vampires across Argentina and Chile. Feeding only when they must, Kalku encourage a healthy feeding stock while subjugating their fellow predators. The Puppeteers concentrate on the realm of undead politics and faith, and are ruthless in dealing with interloper Kindred. Some suspect the Puppeteers practice a form of Thaumaturgy, but their control over the Blood is a power unique to their line. Capable of manipulating blood or vitae in a creature's body by dancing their fingers or flicking their wrist, they push victims into actions as if the sufferers were marionettes. The greatest Puppeteers claim they pull spirits from bodies of the wicked with their skill. Kalku are particularly vulnerable to attacks from mortals, explaining their desire to remain on good terms with the kine.

Noely: Vykos? *Mierda, mierda, mierda*!

Vykos: Talk or we will pull the words from your voicebox.

Noely: Listen, *chicos*, there's no need for bloodshed. We can talk. Just move me away from the fire. Your buddy with the beard is in a yacht called Lizzie Dane, just offshore. He's shaken up. Same reason we all are, except he's met them. The Drowned. That's what they're calling themselves. A freaky bunch of vampires bodysnatching Kindred, killing Kindred, making Kindred disappear… They're coming out the woodwork and they're *loco*. They killed de Cincao! Most of us are going to split, head out to Costa Rica or someplace safe. Are you going to let me go?

[RECORDING ENDS]

Brothers,

Have I disappointed the ancients in some way? Why do you not rescue me from this Fiend with a scent up their nose, or the other raging insanity? São Paulo should not be like this. Asunción was worse. Rosario used to have a tiny population of vampires, but now it's a rolling massacre of Cainites!

Are they Cainites? I witnessed a vampire compelling a mortal to pick up a gun and pull the trigger in a crowded shopping mall. He did not need to lock eyes, speak a word, or so much as touch the target — he just twisted his hand and made the motion. The mortal mirrored the movement. I recalled the works of Bela Lugosi. It is no power with which I am familiar.

In Asunción, as I waited for you to arrive at the Godoi Museum, I spotted a vampire walking up the walls like a spider! The thing was brazenly stalking me! Every vampire I once knew in that city is in hiding or dead, my brothers. We lose our network of contacts swiftly!

I will not be remaining in São Paulo. Vykos still hunts me, and I believe these creatures do as well. Where did they come from? Even my bodyguard retinues across Brazil and Argentina are unsure and afraid, advising I depart immediately.

G.K.

The Smoking Mirror?

Hey, did you hear the one about the Magister in Guatemala? His name was "Aludian Thex." Yeah, I know, probably a pseudonym. He was some hotshot at Circinus Cigarettes, from what I heard.

Thex was visiting the Archbishop, Xipe Totec, with some trafficking deal. Totec has a court lined with mirrors, as he's all Fiend, and has a real historic beef with the Night Clan. Especially the antitribu. Doesn't trust them, and wants to know who's what at a glance.

To everyone's surprise, the deal goes well. Totec provides Thex with a street address full of desperate Guatemalans who won't be missed. Hell, they want to go to the States anyway. Thex provides Totec with the pickup point for barrels of buried cash. So Totec puts aside his grudge, signs a deal in vitae, all is well.

As Thex leaves, he spots something odd. He can see himself in one of Totec's mirrors. A polished shard of obsidian. Thex stares, stunned. Totec is equally shocked. He loses his temper. Has he been misled?

That's when Thex notices the man looking back isn't him. The room fills with smoke. Out from the mirror, the reflection grabs the Magister and pulls him to what I'm now going to call **Mirror World**™. Xipe Totec destroyed every one of his mirrors and won't talk on the subject. He claimed the barrels of cash though.

Maybe there's now a new, nicer version of Thex with a beard, running around.

Kcintim

Brothers,

I stopped in every safehouse in every domain, and left a message for you in each. Not one message has brought you to me. Perhaps it is time we considered a more modern form of communication.

This will be my final attempt. I only assume you have abandoned me, or some ill fate has befallen our brotherhood. I pray that it is the former, and I may one night make amends.

My stalkers reveal themselves now. Vykos keeps a steady distance, but these vampires calling themselves by names I do not recognize, want me safe. They tell me I am the only vampire who travels their entire domain, and therefore the finest witness to all they intend. They tell me I am under their protection, and when their actions complete, I am to become their herald. These vampires claim they drowned, but all corpses float to the surface. Some are ancient, some are young. Many predate the European arrival in this land. How can this be?

I do not wish to be their servant. I am your brother. I am ever loyal. Please do not forsake me. I did not choose these companions. They watch me even now, and during the day, their ghouls do the same.

You may find this humorous, but I have no wish to die. I have maintained this face for so long. I have no desire to lose it, after enduring, and surviving. I'm not sure they would let me die if I attempted to extinguish my life, anyhow. They are in my head and in my body. I attempt to bring the attentions of other vampires on them, but they already know. They see my new protectors over my shoulder and in my eyes. They fear me more, and what I might do in my desperation.

I am not ready to die, yet I refuse to become their slave. Please pass over and replace me. I need the rest. I need an escape.

G.R.

[RECORDING BEGINS]

Rasputin: The Way… Never saw my letters?

Beckett: Not unless they've been sneaking into my diary during the day.

Rasputin: You enjoy my suffering.

Unhudo

The Dry Corpses once dwelt deep in the Amazon, trailing peoples as they lived along the river, hiding in trees and their canopies whenever the mortals grew desperate and fought back against their predators. In these nights, Unhudo still spiritually cling to Brazil, while they spread rapidly into the rest of South America. Unhudo make a practice of resting in the shade, lying as if truly dead. As an inquisitive mortal investigates, the Dry Corpse grips the curious victim with devastating strength. The vampire then practices its unique power to walk up walls and upside-down through canopies, dragging their prey behind. Dry Corpses hold no shame for their territorial preferences, enjoying feeding from the superstitious and ill-educated, and often dwelling within the lower classes. As the vitae in her system drops, an Unhudo increasingly resembles a body mummified by intense heat.

Beckett: It is rare I enjoy seeing anyone reduced to the status of a vagrant. However, for you I will make an exception. I find you detestable.

Vykos: We would like alone time with the monk.

Beckett: In a minute. Your pogrom of the Shepherds. Why do it?

Rasputin: The Way desires all errant lines extinguished. Aberrations tell tales beyond the singular truth. Only the true descendants of the Second Generation will remain.

Beckett: You burn libraries, kill ancients, and reduce memories to ash for "the singular truth?"

Rasputin: [laughs] I see I have struck a nerve! Do I interfere with your precious quest? What about my suffering?

Beckett: Listen to me, you sniveling wretch. I consort with creatures who define and exceed the parameters of the word "monster." Immortals like you are the ones I cannot stand. You destroy access to knowledge. Without history to tell us where we come from, we are subject to the whims of cults such as your own. Bloodlines will be forgotten. History will be rewritten. All because you serve elders with a vendetta against reality. So in short: Bollocks to your suffering.

Vykos: Beckett…

Beckett: No. Whether serving the Camarilla, this "Way," or the bloody flower people, mindless servitude to destructive ends is unforgivable. These drowned vampires are welcome to you.

Vykos: He may know of any Telyavelic survivors.

Beckett: Look at him. All he's good for is the vitae in his body.

Rasputin: When did the two of you switch places?

Vykos: We can extract that vitae, you know.

Rasputin: I believe the Drowned Legacies will stop you. They have plans for me.

Beckett: I am leaving.

Rasputin: [shouts] You must know them, Beckett! They know all of us. I thought them drowned in time; torpid for centuries. I was wrong. They drowned in blood. The blood of their people, the blood of our Cainites. We fattened them up with our slaughter. They did not sleep, not all of them. They are not some bloodline who waited out the millennia to reappear. They have always been here, always active.

I incorrectly assumed them a homogenous group, but they have as many faces and thoughts as we. I half expected savage vampires marked in tribal paint, when first told of them. They look like us. They have looked like us since we arrived. They never relinquished their land.

We practice our Masquerade, hiding from the kine. They successfully disguised their presence within our domains, hiding from us! There is little to mark them different from any Rabble, Blue Blood, or Lunatic. How could we tell?

They have their own societies, their own orders, their own beliefs. Caine is but one of many myths to them. They pointed out to me; "when Kindred on the other side of the world name themselves Mithras and Sutekh, how is Caine your eldest?"

Vykos: You thought them to be painted vampires with bones through noses? That they would be of singular mind and cause? [scoffs]

Rasputin: I was wrong. My brotherhood, I know their haven to be somewhere in the Peruvian Andes, but that is all I know. If I could reach it free of these Legacies' eyes… If the Way know these Legacies exist… How can one wage war with a continent?

Titlacauan

The Nuevo gain their epithet not because of age, but due to an ardent faith in their founders. Titlacauan do not ascribe to the idea of a single progenitor, citing a family of vampires as responsible for birthing their eldest members. Titlacauan favor mirror surfaces. As the Lasombra use shadows, the Nuevo possess gifts allowing them to peer through reflections, and ultimately pass between them. Titlacauan regularly masquerade within Central and South American high society, infiltrating big business, the upper end of criminal organizations, and celebrity circles. Titlacauan flit through the night like little birds, eschewing stealth for speed and grace. Nuevo often act as detectives for the other lines, subordinated, yet independent. Their curse links to their Willpower. As a Nuevo grows close to frenzy, a trail of salty smoke oozes from her shoulders, and head.



Beckett: Perhaps your cult has ever been comprised of these Legacies and they use your fanaticism as a means to an end. In any case, there is much I would know, but you are not the one to tell the tale.

Rasputin: Wait! Please. Take me from this place. Keep me safe.

Vykos: Your mental tricks will not work on us. Cross your new owners? We would not be so foolish.

Rasputin: Brothers, I am ready! [shrieks]

[SOUNDS OF VIOLENCE ENSUE]

[RECORDING ENDS]

Panteon Nacional de Venezuela, Caracas, Venezuela

Grigori struck viciously, in a way only a desperate man can. I allowed the Blood to take over. I hold no shame for lashing out at such a slave to destruction. A pathetic individual.

Vykos staked him before I could rip him to shreds. They told me they roped a knot around his head before dumping him in the sea. I am sure the Drowned Legacies will fish him from the depths.

What does it mean that there are further families of vampires throughout South America? I am unsure. I have never bought the Caine lie, yet it is an easy genesis point. Perhaps too easy. Much as some cling to superstition before science proves such belief folly, maybe we have all made that same mistake. I do not know.

Vykos is adamant these Drowned Legacies are bloodlines, so far removed from their progenitor Clans they might as well be independent. Who's to say when the first vampire walked the Earth, and whether they reached the continent on which we stand? Would it be so far-fetched to believe them Clans with as much – or as little – autonomy as those we already know?



Drowned in Vitae

Are the Drowned Legacies Cainites? They claim to be Kindred, at the very least, though few vampires can testify to the veracity of their being so.

According to the Drowned Legacies, they control Kindred affairs in South America, and have done so for generations. Their secret rule allowed them to largely avoid Camarilla and Sabbat purges, where open defiance would have led to their destruction, as it did their indigenous forebears. In these nights, few Drowned ancillae or neonates come from the stock of native peoples. Fewer still would trace their origins to Caine, or review the Book of Nod as anything other than pulp fiction. They have their own histories, their own lineages, and their own traditions. Yet, the predominance of Catholic faith in South America causes a pocket of flared interest among some Drowned, who attempt to link up their history with that of the 13 Clans. This pocket grows with each passing night.

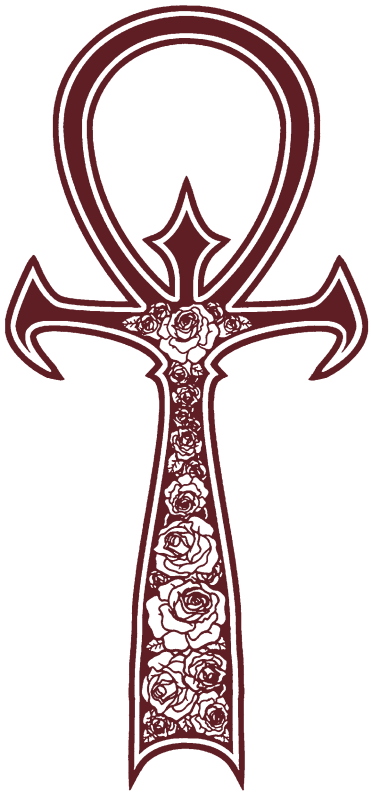
Since Cortés and Pizarro staked their claims, the Legacies started Embracing the invading Spanish and Portuguese. South America's vampire culture rejected clinging to a feeding and breeding stock ravaged by European disease and war. They adapted with the times where many of their kine failed. In some cases they vowed to avenge their ancestors. In more, they were content to merge into the nascent Camarilla and Sabbat, learn what they could of the Sects, and ultimately operate beyond either organization's control. The ease with which a vampire could claim lineage to the Brujah, Toreador, Ravnos, or Setites surprised the Legacies, cementing their long-term subterfuge.

As these nights crest, the Drowned Legacies finally assert their open dominance. They take advantage of their long-time subterfuge throughout South America, and the mortal pogroms at play in the most egregious domains. From within their cocoon, the masters of concealment emerge as victors. They barely need shed further blood. The Drowned have been saturated in it for over five centuries.

- The Telyavelic Tremere were once a Warlock bloodline spread throughout Central and Eastern Europe. Their links to paganism and the demon god Telyavel led to an Inquisition-led fall, but history highlights the difficulty in exterminating vampire lines. The Shepherds' expertise in handling spirits, elementals, and the magic of the earth intrigues Vykos and other enterprising Cainites. If one of the Shepherds remained in these nights, what assistance might they lend to a vampire in matters infernal? Whether for good or ill, the Kindred who discovers hoarded Telyavelic knowledge, or a surviving member of the bloodline, will gain a rare and valuable commodity.
- La Rinconada in the Peruvian Andes is the highest permanent settlement in the world. It is also home to a stronghold of elders. This cabal believes all predators — not just Cainites — must reestablish themselves as gods among men, as once they were in the First City. They enlist powerful vampires to carry out their bidding. They erase displeasing history, eliminate abhorrent bloodlines, and target anyone who would harm the Antediluvians or their guardians. As a faction, they are highly dangerous. As a once-impermeable organization, they now falter. An ancient vampire named Supay asserts control over the cult, and they obey, believing his claims of being Sutekh's first childe. Supay is actually an ancient member of the Cipactli, and steers this group to fulfil his own ambitions of removing all Serpents from the continent.
- Neonates among the Drowned Legacies enjoy their brief period of ascension into the spotlight, but quickly tire of their ancestors' cries of entitlement to rule and demands for blood sacrifice. A wave of these young South American Kindred question whether they even *are* Kindred as the rest of the world's vampires recognize the term. This movement of questioners must surreptitiously investigate the true past of their lines, and unpick the myth from the reality. Strands of evidence lead back to Caine, and the 13 Clans, while others point to a shifting form of Blood that only now makes them emulate vampires. Some of these vampires — who name themselves the Cultura — believe their Blood will inevitably push them to adapt and mirror another form of paranormal creature.
- How do you fight an enemy you do not understand? As a coterie or pack steadfast in your refusal to relinquish territory, you watch as your domain steadily drowns. The Legacies replace former allies and associates, sometimes in appearance as well as role. The so-called Ravnos

Sheriff unveils her true Legacy line as one of the Lostundo. How long do you hold on before conceding defeat, or submerging into the Drowned society and accepting whatever role they have in mind for your kind?

- Mictlantecuhtli was a legendary Methuselah who for centuries slept in troubled torpor beneath the Yucatan Peninsula. Local Kindred tell the tale of how his resting place was disturbed, a coterie of foreign neonates supposedly diablerizing the ancient vampire. That would be the end of the tale, were his bloodline not now in question. Long believed to be Gangrel, Mictlantecuhtli may in fact be one of the Drowned. The idea appeals to Aristotle de Laurent, who wishes to track the coterie responsible for Mictlantecuhtli's diablerie, and analyze their vitae thaumaturgically. Drowned vampires ranging farther afield than their home hunt the same coterie, for different reasons. The most worrisome possibility for the Drowned Legacies is that Mictlantecuhtli *was* a Gangrel. If a vampire native to the Yucatan is of the 13 Clans, does that simply make them aberrant bloodlines? The Quito Union of Kalku and Unhudo dispatches a coterie to discover the truth of Mictlantecuhtli's history, funding an expedition to his temple haven.
- Rasputin exists in multiple forms. Perhaps one of the chameleonic Drowned Legacies, or something other than a simple vampire, he has counterparts existing within most realms of the supernatural. The Drowned Legacies place high importance on such an auspicious being, so intelligent, yet utterly gutless. Rasputin travels far and wide, raving about the danger the Drowned pose, ever twitching and looking over his shoulder for his new masters. He begs assistance from any Kindred who will listen, imploring them to make contact with one of his "brothers" in another realm, dimension, or stage of life. He believes that if he makes contact with another Rasputin, he can avoid slavery, and offers to repay any coterie that assists him with much of the impressive lore he's acquired in the last century. An enterprising coterie may seek to discover the truth behind Rasputin's being, though the truth is more terrible than any might suspect.





Martyrs' Square, Tripoli, Libya

Albertus Magnus travels the world procuring and selling Kindred relics, from opulent valuables to rustic trinkets. Many have no real worth, except to a dedicated buyer. I recall attending one of his events, in which one of the draft copies of the Anarchs' Status Perfectus sold for little under a grand, while one of Victoria Ash's love letters sold for 10 times that amount. We vampires can be foolish creatures.

I was unaware of tonight's auction, until Serenna reached out to me via the elusive Mister Nobody, who I'd assumed dead. She tells me the famous Sword of Nul is chief among tonight's lots. I won't be able to afford the reserve, even were I to take Vitel's accounts into the red, but I would like to discover who's buying the legendary weapon. For Mister Nobody's part, he asked that I place a bid on lot seven: A hard-drive stolen from a known Anarch nicknamed 'The Hurricane.' I told him I'd see what I could do.

TRIPOLI LOT HOT LISTINGS

☐ **Lot 3: The Ravnos-Salubri-Danava Accord**

A 13th century text penned by Ankhesenaten of the Clan of Serpents, covering the historic political imbroglio of Mangaluru (and India, more broadly).

☐ **Lot 13: Samuel Haight's Indianapolis Colts Cap**

Headwear once worn by the notorious Samuel Haight. May still contain skin cells and trace DNA.

☐ **Lot 14: Das Buch vom Grabkrieg (Incomplete)**

This copy of the *Book of the Grave-War* is fire-damaged and missing its second half.



☐ **Lot 16: The Poetry of Helena**

A complete work in original Greek, penned by the legendary Helena, of the Clan of the Rose.

☐ **Lot 20: The Sword of Nul**

Legendary bronze short-sword said to house the spirit of a "demon." Donated to the auction by an anonymous benefactor.

☐ **Lot 23: Prince Lodin's Penthouse**

Property in Chicago once owned by the former Prince of that same domain.

From: aisling.sturbridge@fiveboroughs.com

To: beckett@schreckNET.nod

Subject: RE: Auction Win

Beckett

The reason nobody bought it is an individual named Dylan Bruce. You briefly met him in Berlin. He made a lot of noise last year about tracking the sword, killing anyone who kept it from him, and chewing on their soul awhile.

Just because he didn't bid doesn't mean he's not on your tail. He's the sort to wait out an auction, not spend a penny, and then murder the winner. That's you, Beckett.

My advice is to make a loud proclamation to every vampire you encounter that you dropped the sword in the Mediterranean, and hope Bruce doesn't take exception. He's a tempestuous individual.

Good luck in surviving the next few nights.

Aisling Sturbridge

"Freedom is what you do with what's been done to you."

Jean-Paul Sartre

From: beckett@schreckNET.nod

To: aisling.sturbridge@fiveboroughs.com

Subject: Auction Win

Dear Aisling,

You won't believe this, but I was able to win the Sword of Nul at an auction in Tripoli. I'm sure the name of the weapon is familiar.

It was as if none of the other bidders — and I recognized several, including Bindusara, and someone I assumed was Vykos from the way they kept glaring at me — would dare put money down, so the sword is mine for a meager 8000 Libyan Dinar.

I need a safe place to store the sword before I can study it. Do you have anywhere I can use?

Sincerely,

Beckett

[RECORDING BEGINS]

Serenna: —that damn recorder and get down!

[the sound of gunfire]

Beckett: I want to leave a recorded testament!

[explosives sound for half a minute]

Serenna: Run!

[gunfire and the frantic pounding of boots on tarmac]

Beckett: We are under attack. I thought it was Bruce at first, but it appears the Tal'Mahe'Ra objected to our activities in Jerusalem. I am amazed they—

Serenna: What?!

Beckett: I'm talking to the recorder!

Serenna: Idiot!

Beckett: Thank you for the critique! To continue: I am amazed they traced us all the way to Benghazi. It's not that I doubt they have the ability — it's simply that I wonder at why they think we're worth the effort. I believe Tripoli's Prince — Ahmed ibn Zayyat — must be a member, as he was the only individual to whom I confirmed our route plan.

[AN EXPLOSION CUTS NOISE FOR THE FOLLOWING MINUTE, RENDERING MR. BECKETT'S VOICE UNCLEAR]

Beckett: [unclear] the pit of [unclear] it's not like I remember [unclear] Ashirra have abandoned this domain since the airstrikes commenced [unclear]

Serenna: [unclear] your big bloody head! It's not just because of [unclear] there's a change going on.

[GUNFIRE]

Serenna: Your boat is there!

Beckett: Are you sure you won't follow?

Serenna: I can't. My Ashirra protection only extends so far. Stay below deck until you reach Italy. I will divert their attentions as you sail away.

Beckett: Farewell, my… friend.

[ANOTHER HAIL OF GUNFIRE]

[RECORDING ENDS]

Who are these dratted vampires?

The Middle East and North Africa blaze into relevance just as I set up my new haven in Tunis! The Ashirra consolidate power in their strongest domains, while stinking Anarch cells spring up in war-torn cities, enlisting disenfranchised, abandoned Kindred! What a pain in the arse.

I'm informed Benghazi, Tripoli, and Algiers all lean firmly in the Anarch Movement's direction these nights. Fear not, dear reader! This is not some grand triumph for the Anarch whelps. Even as they lay claim to these North African domains, other Kindred appear from the darkness with guns, bombs, and worse — weapons designed to belch flame and destroy any vampires outright. Initially I suspected another strike from well-armed kine, a case of mistaken identity like the ones we've seen numerous times in the US after the beginning of this "war on terror," but the attackers are definitely vampires. They only launch their assaults at night, the abilities they display are known to us.

Though some are not, dear reader. Some are not.

Why does this righteous group seek to cleanse the vampires in North Africa? Are they riding on the back of mortal conflict, or is there something else at play? Why are the words "True Black Hand" on so many lips? Is our glorious Sabbat Crusade involved? Is it finally time? These devastating tactics ring similar to those used by the Sword of Caine in other domains. Yet, we Sabbat only appear in small numbers throughout the African continent. Maybe we're finally establishing a foothold for a largescale assault, given recent losses in North America, and nobody told me! To have the notorious Ahmed ibn Zayyat on our side? Be beating, my still heart.

You want to know my guess? Of course you do. You're reading my blog. There's *something* in this part of the world. An old *something* about to wake up, maybe. Whoever these gunmen are, they seek to protect the rising monster, and drive away all possible opposition.

Or maybe I've been reading the Book of Nod a little too much recently. Still, it's got to be good for something! My copy is thumbed more than a… No, I promised I wouldn't make those remarks on here any more.

Who else is ready for a Gehenna party? I'll provide the liquid refreshment!

— Dr. G. Pangbourne. Nosferatu antitribu, Gynecologist, Chronicler, and Devoted Brother. Examination Rooms in Bath, Marseilles, and Tunis.

PANGBOURNE

Clan of the Hidden (antitribu); *unknown, #ca. 1750, childe of Brother Kanker

A well-travelled vampire, known for the medical operations he performs in public view of congregated Sabbat (in emulation of the 19th century surgical style), P. ranks as a voluntary member of the Sabbat as of the 20th century. P. threw off the Camarilla's yoke after Anne Bowesley declared his practices uncivilized. P. obsesses over delivering the first vampire baby. He methodically arranges carnal trysts between thin-blooded vampires, ghouls, and kine, mixing the participants as it suits him to fulfil his objective. His ties to a plague-spreading brotherhood of Cainites are unsubstantiated.



The Christian Catacombs, Rome, Italy

My exit from Benghazi was hasty and emotional. I must reluctantly admit I'm forming something of an emotional attachment to Serenna the White. Never let it be said that a vampire is incapable of human emotion.

The audience I found in Naples did not match my expectations. Naples was a Camarilla stronghold the last the last time I arrived. This time, a host of ghouls naming itself the Sacrament of Caine awaited me.

This particular faction of ghouls fervently believe in the ways of the mythological First City, and claim Kindred numbers ought be reduced in modern nights to make way for an elite line of surviving vampires. They have little time for Warlocks, Necromancers, and other Clans known for usurpation proclivities.

As the Prince of Naples was a Tremere the last time I checked, I hesitated to ask about her fate. These ghouls are bloodthirsty in more than one way. I suspect they would have staked me and drank slowly from my body had I not come out fighting, declaring with angry pride "I'm of the Clan of the Beast, damn it!" Steadily, these ghouls kneeled before me as if I were a god.

I took the first train from Naples to Rome, where despite the overbearing ambient faith, several vampires still make havens. Maginardo – the Sewer Rat with a face like a smashed mosaic – is always a good source, if one keeps him on track.

[RECORDING BEGINS]

Beckett: What's going on in Naples?

Maginardo: Ahh, Beckett. Do not trouble yourself with Napoli. Surely you did not come to the catacombs to discuss politics? Look at these tombs. Look at the fresco! Is it not delightful? So much preserved…

Beckett: Well I like to know which domains are safe, and which are not. I dropped the Sword of Nul into the Mediterranean, by the way. In case anyone asks.

Maginardo: I rarely leave Roma, especially now there's so much rebuilding to do in the wake of Camilla's rather cataclysmic meeting with Lados. Heh. There's a vampire we weren't expecting to wake. He's apparently gunning for Camilla after an old Carthaginian put him on the scent. *Ammazza!*

Camilla's gained a track record for surviving everything thrown at him. He's one of few modern practitioners of the Road of Sin. Perhaps there's something to it. -L

Beckett: Lovely. And Naples?

Maginardo: *Scusi.* I've heard, of course. Word travels. Napoli's Kindred are mostly silent now. I understand there was a rebellion. They have fire in the vitae, down in Napoli.

Beckett: Anarchs?

Maginardo: Ghouls. Something got into them. A fresh perspective, perhaps? I understand this Sacrament of Caine group exists in Berlino, too. They're not the only ones. Revenant families show more… how do you say… independent thought? That would be it. Heh. Troubling. Still, imagine being caretaker of this place! Though the True Faith subsides here now…

Beckett: These ghouls subdued their masters?

Maginardo: Maybe something helped them. I don't know. I do know the Anarch Free Press hosted a series of stories about domains such as Perth, Liverpool, and beautiful Atene accepting Barons in the place of Princes. A whole number of those Princes just… poof… abandoned… how you say… their thrones? Heh.

Beckett: I had no idea you knew how to get online. I only became aware of the Freep last month, and still can't log in.

Maginardo: Oh, my son, I do not do it myself. This is what ghouls and mortal retainers are for. Mine are all metro workers and janitors, but they know far more about these things than I.

Beckett: So Anarch offensives take place across the world, while ghouls rise up and cripple their masters. Maybe these are the final nights of the established order. You should watch those ghouls in your service, my friend.

Maginardo: And you should watch your man, Cesare. You keep him separate from other ghouls, but he's a smart one.

Cesare: Mr. Beckett, I'm sorry to interrupt.

Maginardo: [laughs] See?

Cesare: A bizarre humanoid passed me this sealed note for you. He must have been over two meters tall. Skin icy and blue.

Maginardo: It seems your man met one of our resident Weirdlings, Beckett. The times are changing. If the Sabbat have spies in this part of the city, I must now depart. *Bella!*

[RECORDING ENDS]



To: *C. Beckett, Esq.*

We cordially invite you to attend our upcoming Versailles-themed ball, held in decadent Hotel Château de Pourtalès, Strasbourg.

We expect you to represent the *Mnemosyne* at this lavish event, and abide by the rules of Prince Marconius' domain.

Please see the reverse for date, time, and local havens should you wish to arrive early.

Sincerely, in anticipation,

Theresia the Songbird, Daughter of Cacophony

Chateau de Pourtalès, Strasbourg, France

Typically, when one dreads a party, one ought to decline the invitation. In the case of this invite, there was no option to R.S.V.P.

So I hired a costume and fully intended to discuss the Jyhad's murky depths with this cabal of freaks. I make a powdered wig look surprisingly good with shades.

This party is a study in contrasts. It is a mix of grace and horror. Every guest recognizes this, yet none of us mention it, smiles fixed on our faces.

Theresia's ghouls announced my name and "bloodline" as I arrived. I stifled my shudder as the words "of the Mnemosyne." Aristotle has much to answer for. Several Kindred were already in attendance by the time I arrived. Following me I heard a Lazarene, two Weirdlings, and even one of the Ahrimanes announced. The latter turned a few heads. No conversation rises above a hushed whisper here, unless it's one of the ghouls proclaiming a new arrival.

Fascinating how the strangest among us cling together, despite all urges to snipe at the lowest orders.-O

We all grin, bow, kiss hands, and listen to the string quartet playing away as it fills the ballroom with sweet music. A couple dances, and from what I can tell, one of them is of the Samedi. He leaves a trail on the floor, but we all politely step over it without calling attention to the mess.

The grandeur and pomp of our outfits is not lost on me, given the hideousness of some of the guests here. I swear a Gargoyle trudges the halls beyond, plucking up the courage to enter while wearing a custom gem-studded frock coat and stunningly-designed waistcoat. The Kiasyd somehow carry their regality off. If anything, the costumes make them appear normal.

Khurshid of the Harbingers introduced me to a wickedly-handsome courtier named Kiriyama, of the Baali. Not a one of the other guests seems to care we have an infernalist here. To his credit, he doesn't appear to be summoning devils or committing ritual sacrifice in the corner. I spy no Salubri, though they may be concealed. We do not wear badges or forehead tattoos with our bloodlines listed upon them.



The Daughters of Cacophony regularly break into songs or poems, and each of us stops to listen, lightly applauding upon conclusion. Their talents are phantasmaggrical, for want of a better word. When listening, it puts this entire surreal scene in perspective. For a brief time, we are all on the same wavelength.

This vast coterie of outsiders and outcasts interacts as if they rule the world, or command the Jyhad. I recognize one of the Daitya from my recent trip to India. She acts as attaché to the Camarilla in Mangaluru. Here she rubs shoulders and shares quiet laughs with a pack of Blood Brothers, all identical, except for the placement of their beauty spots.

We discuss matters of philosophy, study, and entertainment, as well as the Jyhad. "Archbishops to avoid," "Archons to fear," and "safe havens for outsiders" are common topics of conversation. "Princes to manipulate," "exciting new bloodlines," and "refinement of Disciplines" are also popular. Talk turns to Gehenna from time to time, though few dwell on it. The subject of the world's end seems to matter little to vampires who suffer the risk of extinguishment every night. Of greater interest are methods of accumulating greater power and how to share it among other outcasts.

The scholars among us compare notes on the last-known locations of texts such as the Book of the Grave-War, the Erciyes Fragments, and Iontius' Anatomy of the Blood. One vampire, Le Dinh Tho of the Nagaraja, is a hunter of Kindred antiques. He spoke to me briefly about the Sword of Nul before passing me a small catalogue.

This event is in a sense cathartic. It is refreshing to attend a Kindred event where we are not planning on screwing one another over political influence and resources. These vampires clearly will themselves above the politicking of nightly life. No doubt they will return to it tomorrow, but for now, they are free to mingle with fellow outcasts.

For all the enlightened discourse, music, and vista-expanding bloodlines on display, one can hardly avoid the Kiasyd jamming a sharpened silver straw into the pale skin of a prostrate child; the Samedi sloughing his flesh off on a chair, or the dismissiveness with which most bloodlines treat the Gargoyles, Frankensteins, and supposed Lhiannan, along with the frankly-dissecting stare of a vampire we all assume to be True Brujah."

A Lhiannan? Is this the Sul I've heard so much about recently? -A

I admit his unwavering, murderous look perturbs me like nothing else.

I did enquire as to the host's identity. Apparently, Mr. Stoneman is happy I've attended, but will not meet with me at this time, which I confess is frustrating.

[RECORDING BEGINS]

Isanwayen: This is quite the gala, my Lady.

Macoute: The best one yet.

Beckett: This is not the first? The Sword of Nul, by the way, is in the Med.

Theresia: Pardon?

Isanwayen: No! Not at all. How long have we been doing this, Songbird?

Theresia: Well I've been to around a dozen, and Louis XIV was on the throne when I started… Hit me once more. Stand.

Isanwayen: My first was around a century prior. Hit me.

Beckett: Fascinating. What started these galas?

Khurshid: I would guess it was the existence of "Low Clans." I was never of them, but there has ever existed a social strata beneath the ruling Cainites. Low Clans, bloodlines, clanless, thin-bloods… There is always a persecuted minority. When I was younger, there were tales of secret meetings between representatives of all outsiders. It kept the rulers in check.

Macoute: We are not different because we choose to be.

Theresia: And even if we were, it would not make us second-class. The contents in one's vitae are about as relevant as the life of a… an insignificant thing. Or they should be. I have known more noble Sewer Rats than Blue Bloods, and Weirdlings with greater character than any Keeper.

Isanwayen: You are too kind, Theresia.

Theresia: You deserve it, my sapphire-skinned darling.

Beckett: So this is a social club for the persecuted? Do you achieve anything with your gossip and frivolity?

Macoute: Do not diminish the importance of this convocation!

Theresia: It is fine, Macoute. Really. Beckett — we achieve more than you know. We invited you to chronicle our successes.

Beckett: List them to me. Another card, Isanwayen?

Isanwayen: Hmm. One more. [pause] And it's a bust.

Theresia: Oh, lots of small things. Most beneath your notice. This little gathering holds key responsibility for the Blood Curse that hit Berlin, for instance.

Beckett: A bold claim. No proof. Are you in, Macoute?

Macoute: *Oui*. Hit.

Beckett: And what grand project are you working on right now?

Theresia: The Society of Leopold.

Beckett: Bollocks.

Theresia: Vulgar Kindred draw the attention of mortals. Why, it almost behooves conscientious vampires such as us to scourge the land of those who might endanger the rest.

Beckett: You claim responsibility for the Society?

Theresia: Heavens, no! The kine are not stupid. They can connect the dots as easily as anyone. But someone has to show them the dots. We give them the tools, they do the work. Hunting in the States is going to become… difficult. The Sword of Caine is going to have a particularly hard time. Montreal, Miami, Mexico City — the Society will target those cities first, and realize our intelligence is correct. That's when we approach the bargaining table with both Kindred and kine, and arrange… better living standards for we poor, weird, freak outcasts.

Isanwayen: Occasionally the dead skin must be scrubbed from the body, eh, Macoute?

[MUCH LAUGHTER]

Beckett: I… I don't believe it.

Khurshid: Pfeh. Give it a few centuries and you become accustomed to loss. We are all on borrowed time, friend Beckett.

Beckett: You would bring the sun's rays down upon Kindred, irrespective of their humanity, their choices to be vampires, all so you can gain higher station?

Theresia: Not within the existing structure. We shall remake the structure! What more is there? Antediluvians? Please. Caine? Ha. The Jyhad? This *is* the Jyhad. We are beholden to no masters. The bloodlines shall ride the hunters' wave, and stand upon the shore as the waters wash our oppressors away. The Stone Man has guided this course since… Well, I don't know how long. We are not some united Sect waiting to topple the Camarilla. We are merely the downtrodden, waiting to take our places, individually, among the ranks of royalty. The old way — the alpha way — fades. We are the omega.

Beckett: I could reach out to the Justicars, the Cardinals of the Sabbat, the bloody Inconnu and tell them all this! Give me one reason why I should not.

Macoute: You do not make history, *mon amie*. You are its chronicler.

Isanwayen: Beckett is an observer. The Abyss forbid he actually involves himself in the Jyhad.

Stone Man is dangerous. An impossibly old Caitiff, possibly the first, and maybe even at the level of an Antediluvian. It seems unlike him to organize extravagant soirées. -L

Beckett: I think on this occasion I might make an exception!

Theresia: Beckett, Beckett, Beckett… Calm. This is all a joke. All of it is a lie. A grand fiction! Whenever a vampire attends their first gala we give them a good scare, something to shake them to their core. Perhaps we present "evidence" of Gehenna's approach,

or claim we have their mortal family rotating on spits in the next room. We like to test the moral and spiritual fiber of our guests. Congratulations!

[LONG PAUSE]

Beckett: For what?

Theresia: You passed! After all, we're just a simple "social club for the persecuted." And few vampires are as frequently persecuted as you. No, we achieve nothing, and seek nothing. We just live night to night, throwing these parties, wishing for existences forever denied to us. Trust me; there is nothing more to us than that…

Macoute: Now deal me another card, *mon frère*. I think the Stone Man will see you another night. You are not yet ready for him.

[RECORDING ENDS]

THERESIA THE SONGBIRD



Daughter of Cacophony; *unknown, #ca. 1650, childe of Sayshila

T. stands with renown in the domain of Prague, where she represents Autarkis and regularly acts as peacemaker between warring Sects and inter-Clan feuds. Her Solomonic status is widely suspected as a cover as she pursues the hidden, yet purported aims of her bloodline. T. has entertained in the courts of Princes and Archbishops since her Embrace. Her confidantes insist she harbors deep resentment for her historic use as a minstrel to bigoted boors. T. may be Ishtarri, contrary to popular opinion.

Orangerie, Strasbourg, France

Once the card game concluded and I escaped my hosts, Kiriyama approached me. I couldn't take my stare away from the earwigs and millipedes visible in his mouth.

He told me I was not to worry, and that neither the Lilin witches nor the Molochim will allow this cabal to succeed. He squeezed my arm in a way I think was supposed to be reassuring. I suspect there may now be lice in my jacket.

Kiriyama departed alongside the staring True Brujah. "The infernal and the coldblooded in cahoots; what an awful thought.

Do the attendees truly lead a conspiracy? Theresia's words were hypnotic, so I struggle to perceive truth from elaborate fiction. The Lilin and Molochim are new Sects, at least to me. Who do they represent? I suppose that whomever they may be,

if they destabilize the Society of Leopold, we can be grateful. This conglomerate of outcasts may simply pine for greater influence, and contentedly take credit for every upheaval in our history whether truly involved or not.

The Stone Man. If I could trace him, perhaps the situation's reality might become evident.

It should be noted the party did not conclude quietly. Soon after Kiriyama's farewells, a coterie burst into the chateau without invitation or warning. My first instinct was that these Kindred were aligned with the Baali, and he must have had them on stand-by, but far from it: These vampires were Alastors.

Few guests attempted to flee. It seems despite the danger these Camarilla stalwarts posed, Theresia and her entourage were more perturbed by the idea of their party's ruin. Isanwayen stepped forward, still adorned in long coat and tall bleached wig.

[RECORDING BEGINS]

Isanwayen: Who in all the hells are you to disturb our soirée? Answer now, or be met with the wrath of over a dozen incredibly-agitated guests.

Von Streslau: [in a broad Austrian accent, toned down in translation] Catriona, look at this freak. He thinks he can intimidate me, Sigismund von Streslau, of the House and Clan of Tremere!

Pedersen: I can see him. And he can hear you.

Edwin: Cool it. We are here on behalf of the only Sect worth a damn, and we're here on a mission. You all heard of Kemintiri?

Theresia: What does she have to do with our gala?

Edwin: I will take that as a "yes, sir." The queen bitch is one of you. That's our problem. We're the Bounty Hunters; a fucking effective group of Alastors, if you pardon my French. You mighta' heard of us.

Jackie: We are in France, you know, Edwin.

Pedersen: We've good intelligence she intended to make an exchange of information at this meeting. We're not interested in fighting any of you — though believe me, we could, and we would win. We just want Kemintiri.

Jackie: On a silver plate, if you got one handy.

Theresia: Do you honestly think we would invite someone on the Red List to this event?

Jackie: Seems to me something of everything else is here, so why not one of the Kindred's "most wanted?"

Christine: Listen, we don't want to kill her. We just want to speak with her, and—

Edwin: —let's not lie to them, childe. We want to kill her.

Christine: But only if we have to.

Jackie: Which we do.

Isanwayen: I don't care if you want to kill Kemintiri; you're here without invitation in a most exclusive ball, and I will ask you only once to leave. Do not make me make you.

Von Streslau: [accent still thick] I have never before been spoken to by such a strange Kindred. What is he, I wonder?

Pedersen: Why not ask him?

Von Streslau: [accented] Why yes. You there. Blue fellow. What are you?

[HISSES AND SHOUTS RECORDED AS KINDRED POSTURE AND THREATEN ONE ANOTHER, SEVERAL ATTENDEES ATTEMPTING TO COERCE PEACE]

Jackie: Kemintiri is the greatest threat to our society! Why defend her?

Is she Inconnu? If not, she's not the greatest threat.-A

Theresia: We don't know where she is!

Edwin: Maybe you're lying. Sigismund can tell us once he gets in your head.

[much murmuring and occasional raised voices]

Beckett: [clears throat] I just looked inside this catalogue passed to me by one Le Dinh Tho.

Macoute: *Oui*. An honored guest.

Beckett: Well there's a letter inside addressed to me. It's not from Le Dinh Tho. It seems Kemintiri slipped me a note. Not that I asked her to do so.

Pedersen: Christine, you look upstairs. Jackie, you search this floor. Sigismund and I will erect a ward to ensure nobody may leave.

[alarmed sounds from the assembled guests]

Theresia: Stop this. Stop! Le Dinh Tho left early, claiming business elsewhere in Strasbourg. I was sorry to see him… her leave, but made no effort to obstruct. The Nagaraja have peculiar customs, and I wasn't going to stand in the way of one of them.

Edwin: So she's gone.

Theresia: Yes. How were we to know?

Edwin: Shit. Well, sorry to ruin your party. [pause] Perform the search anyways. I'm gonna take this Beckett fella for questioning.

Beckett: And if I refuse?

[PAUSE]

Edwin: I don't recommend trying.

[RECORDING ENDS]

The Bounty Hunters

T.B.H. is one of the more infamous coteries of Alastors. The gang comprises a strange brew of Camarilla loyalists, renowned power grabbers, suspected defectors, and is a walking, talking Masquerade breach waiting to happen. Sometimes it seems the Justicars like to throw a group of misshapes together and see what holds.

Edwin's reputation as a fanatical scourge carries far. Clad like a man in black from an old Western, he terrorizes Caitiff and thin-bloods alike. Anarchs say buzzards and crows start circling before Edwin enters a domain. I understand he was briefly Prince of Pasadena until Jeremy MacNeil swore to kill him personally. Edwin's mantra of "Sect first, Clan second, coterie third" earns him few friends, though Geoffrey Leigh takes pride in his childe's ruthlessness. He took down his first Anathema in the 1980s, and specifically hungers for Count Germaine's death.

The Warlock Gottfried von Streslau Embraced Catriona Pedersen in the midst of the second world war. Though she's the youngest of the coterie, Catriona is renowned as a Clan prodigy. Vienna celebrates her thaumaturgical expertise. A sibling rivalry exists between her and the disgustingly wealthy Sigismund von Streslau. Supposedly he was one of the Warlocks' last Embraces from House Tremere, and a disappointing one at that. His air of pomposity and macho swagger betrays a Tremere who reputedly has little blood magic ability. His skill is in crushing his enemies' wills. Sigismund harbors a heavy chip on his shoulder, both towards Catriona – a young upstart in his eyes – and his mortal family, whose ancestral Ruritanian castle acts as the coterie's European haven and whose members act as his servants.

They are not my noblest cousins.

Rumors are rife of Sigismund diablerizing his sire and Catriona being far more than she seems. -A

Claiming to be from the humble business of advertising, Jackie Lacey perpetually spins stories about himself and the world at large, all while chain-smoking cigarette after cigarette. He compels others to believe him. A proud Degenerate and excellent talker, Lacey spent over a decade undercover in a Sabbat pack, partaking in the vaulderie, yet retaining his cast-iron loyalty to the Camarilla. His actions brought down the rising Sabbat threat in Ireland, at great cost to his humanity. These nights, Jackie's coterie is all that stand between him and the Archon Theo Bell, who wishes to expose Lacey's

adoption of the Sabbat's cause. Monty Coven informed me that Lacey recently performed a firewalk in his presence. Perhaps Jackie's truly ready to defect, or willingly practices the most violent Sabbat ritae for a devastating sting operation.

The final puzzle piece is the vampire calling herself Christine Daaé, of the Clan of the Rose. She fully believes she is the character from Leroux's The Phantom of the Opera. Christine is unusual in the Alastor ranks, due to her public persona among mortals. She constantly reinvents herself in the field of music and performance arts, posing as famous mortal singers and dancers. Maybe she is the true celebrity in each case, while her ghoul servants stand in for her during Anathema hunts. She currently performs as an outlandish singer known for bizarre outfits and outrageous stage stunts. Why the Justicars permit this – or whether they realize the danger – I am unsure. T.B.H. protects her and uses her as a mascot, group conscience, and public face. She supplies her tour buses for travel and groupies for feeding purposes.

I hear Christine convinced the coterie to spare Karen Anatos once.-O

T.B.H. has eliminated several Anathema, including the incredibly brief addition of Haruka – that Masquerade-breaching Lunatic who went around dressed as a Japanese schoolgirl in bloody Stockholm. She wasn't hard to find, and holds the record for briefest time on the Red List. Despite apparent disharmony, their effectiveness as a team of killers is not in doubt. The trophies awarded to them are a subject of debate in Camarilla courts, with rumors ranging from the group being permitted diablerists to their all being promised political titles in Europe.

T.B.H. affects the Jyhad in a direct way.

[RECORDING BEGINS]

Beckett: Do you mind if I record this?

Edwin: Shit, I should be recording you, unless *you* got designs on interrogating *me* after I'm done doing the same to you.

Beckett: I promise interrogation will not be necessary. Kemintiri is no friend of mine. If she were, would I have pointed out the note?

Edwin: Hm. Pass it here.

Beckett: I've not read it yet. Sword of Nul, Mediterranean, by the way.

Edwin: What? Read it aloud, for your tape.

Beckett: Fine.

"Beckett. I possess a few of your fascinating journals. Such a trove of information. You damage the Sects with these accounts. You could annihilate a Clan, if you so wished. Think of what I could do with this treasure trove. Trust me: I'm keeping your assorted documents safe.

I admire your dedication, foolishly single-minded though it may be. I likewise seek knowledge of the forbidden, as you well know. You will assist me, knowing what I possess. You know the danger I pose.

For decades I've financed excavations throughout North Africa, attempting to discover relics leading to various truths. I spent last year posing as Mukhtar Bey's high priest, so Egypt might become more accessible. Sadly, the recent Cappadocian-Setite collusion now prevents my subterfuge. Anubis' children are on the lookout for concealed Kindred. The Serpents employ them to seek my servants in particular.

This is where you come in. You are an archeologist. You are friendly with the Serpents. They hold you in high regard, for some reason. You must dig at latitude 26.507133, longitude 27.661469. Do not use mortals for his purpose, for they will die. Do not use ghouls for this purpose, for they will be driven insane. There are great enchantments at this site. Deep within the earth you will find a sarcophagus made of a stone not native to Egypt. Do not open it.

Smuggle the coffin to Castel d'Ombro. Once there, we will know. We will take the coffin from you, and you will have my word that I will return your records without a single copy made.

[NEARLY A MINUTE OF SILENCE]

Edwin: Sounds like she got some dirt on you, brother.

Beckett: Fuck.

Edwin: I don't see why we can't work together on this. Let's both get a bite of the snake.

Beckett: Why should I involve a bunch of Kindred hitmen?

Edwin: Did you know you're in the pool for potential Red Listers?

Beckett: What? Why?

Edwin: Oh, I don't know. Going from domain to domain, causing havoc. This diary alone would be cause enough. Anatos got on the List for less. Believe me when I say you're not every Justicar's buddy. Involving my crew in a little sting might push you out of the candidate pool a-ways.

[RECORDING ENDS]

Potential Red List Candidates

Marcus Vitel: +Threat to the Camarilla +Embarrassment to the Camarilla +Lacking powerful allies at this time -Keeps Sabbat in check in D.C. -Unsure of his true identity -Could become useful asset. Trophy Clan: Toreador. Status: Dormant, due to the freezing of Madame Guil's nominations.

Beckett: +Compiling diary of Masquerade-breaching information +Regularly embarrasses Camarilla hierarchy +Diary holds suspected harmful secrets +Unreliable asset -Politically insignificant -Is a threat to our enemies -Has friends in high places. Trophy Clan: Ventrue. Status: Under review, pending his performance as an asset in the field.

Lizette Cordoba: +Too influential in mortal politics, specifically the Occupy Movement +Her followers dissolved all assets held by New York Rabble and Animals +Openly consorts with Caitiff -May be under the influence of a Camarilla vampire -Young, and therefore hopefully malleable -Influence could be put to good use. Trophy Clan: Brujah. Status: Rejected. A problem for a Prince, not the Alastors.

Stoneman: +Caitiff rabble-rouser +Suspected organizer of the bloodlines collective +Prone to immensely destructive fits of frenzy -As powerful as some of our long-standing Listers -His death may cause a full-scale rebellion -We cannot confirm his responsibility for most of the acts attributed to him. Trophy Clan: Gangrel. Status: Under review, pending investigation into his connections. If substantial, an Archon mission may be more appropriate.

Dr. Sandeep D'Souza: +Arcanum Chancellor +Selling Sect information to the Society of Leopold +Suspected to be mortal -Only a mortal -May be more useful if we leak Sabbat information to him -Protected by an entire organization. Trophy Clan: Malkavian. Status: Rejected. Attacking the Arcanum will draw attention.

Carna: +Splintered a fraction of Clan Tremere from its source +Responsible for the Milwaukee Chantry's destruction +Holds / held a potent Noddist artifact named the Book of the Grave-War -Poses no immediate threat to the Traditions -Given current fractures in the Warlock Clan, may be among the more reliable members. Trophy Clan: Tremere. Status: Dormant. It's suspected someone may have destroyed Carna after she departed Milwaukee.

The Master of Ravens: +Golconda fraud +Controls and subjugates our neonates and fledglings +Started a battle that led to the destruction of numerous young Warlocks -Suspected links to the Inconnu -Old, powerful vampire with a cult following. Trophy Clan: Tremere. Status: Rejected. Denied by the Inner Circle.

Dante Rosselini: +Reported to have enslaved former Justicar Petrodon's spirit +Member of a minor Giovanni family -Potential risk of breaching the Promise -Few Alastors are capable of tackling such an old Necromancer -His vengeance for a failed attempt will be devastating. Trophy Clan: Nosferatu. Status: Dormant. The Justicars currently examine the wording of the Promise of 1528.

Gwenllian ferch Arwyn: +Seeks to revive the Kindred cult of Mithras +Recently awoken, and therefore lacking her full breadth of powers +Spreading the falsehood that Mithras joined the Sabbat +Responsible for Jackdaw, Malkavian Prince of Bath's murder -Problem may be localized to the British Isles -Out-of-touch and liable to fall back to torpor -Queen Anne may seek to enlist her as warlord. Trophy Clan: Ventrue. Status: Under review, awaiting evidence that her activities will affect more than a single Camarilla domain.

Lucita (555-487-5555)

B:	How do I get in to Castel d'Ombro?	00:30
L:	It's Keepers-only. You would not be welcome. I promise you, if you were there, it would not be at your request, and your stay far from pleasant.	01:15
B:	Do I need to contact Talley?	01:20
L:	You can if you like. He'll give the same answer, I assure you.	01:28
B:	Some friend you are. How am I supposed to meet Kemintiri there, in that case?	02:28
L:	Don't you dare bring that Serpent to my Clan's ancestral fortress.	02:40
B:	I don't think she's waiting for an invitation.	02:44

From: h.ruhadze@bloodspot.eg

To: beckett@schreckNET.nod

Subject: RE: Permission to dig

The New Valley Governorate is a territory once prized by the so-called Children of Osiris, but our "Elois" friends recently helped drive them out. I would be curious as to what you think you will find.

Ruhadze Imports & Exports

From: beckett@schreckNET.nod

To: h.ruhadze@bloodspot.eg

Subject: Permission to dig

Dear Hesha,

Unusual request, given our recent history, but how would I go about gaining permission to organize an archeological dig in Qesm Al Wahat Ad Dakhlah?

Sincerely,

Beckett

The Dig Site, Abu Mingar, Egypt

My path often leads me to this nation. I'm sure there's some relevance to it being a spiritual home of death cults, and our being undead. We seem to place great importance on Egypt.

I've been on edge ever since I discovered Kemintiri's letter. I've not heard from her in over a century, but she is impossible to forget. When I consider her capacity for disguise, I wonder at how many people recorded within my diary were actually Kemintiri. It's too disturbing a thought.

In any case, my diaries are in her hands, along with my clippings, print-outs, and transcripts. There's an unencumbered, freeing sensation, but for the most part it's unpleasant. I think the greatest indignity is in knowing that few knew my diary's location. I must suspect Lucita, Aisling, Okulos, or Cesare of treachery. I suppose Anatole may be responsible, but I've heard nothing from him since Jerusalem.

It is for this reason I have called upon my companions for this dig. Kemintiri's attempt at blackmail threatens each of them, and feasibly, any of them might be her agent.

[RECORDING BEGINS]

[THE SOUNDS OF AN ENGINE ROARING IN THE BACKGROUND, AND OCCASIONAL STRIKE OF METAL INTO SAND]

Theo: No way the Cam's gonna get even more shit on me from this fool's diary. Do you know how difficult it was for me to get out of D.C. for this trip?

Talley: Chin up, old boy! It's like work detail. Nice to get some fresh air.

Theo: You know I've been waiting for us two to get away from Vitel together, just so I can rip out your larynx.

Beckett: Less talk, more dig.

Vykos: This is your fault. You wrote and recorded everything. Everything. Why did we not stop you? Why did we not smash your recorder to pieces and burn every page of your diary?

Beckett: History, Vykos. Every single one of you knows, on some level, that one night we will be gone. Someone must record the history. First-hand accounts from manipulators of the Jyhad, or the manipulated, in some cases. Others can learn from us, others can—

Lucita: —shut up! I've read your bloody diary and let me tell you something: It would contain a lot more history if you didn't dedicate so many pages to idle ramblings, and interrupt every interview with sarcastic remarks.

Vykos: We could have set ghouls to this task. Or kine. So what if there's a curse on this area? We cannot detect one.

Beckett: Unbelievably, there may be some powers more powerful than yourself. And I know you're curious as to what we'll uncover. Is it such a burden to do your own archeology for a change, instead of stealing someone else's findings?

Khalil: You told me you held evidence that would see me hunted in every domain, but still will not confirm what this evidence is. Well, Animal, now seems a good time.

Beckett: In front of everyone? Really? Oh, by the way, the Sword—

Lucita: They know. We all know.

Hesha: Had I known Ravana would be accompanying us, I'd have denied permission for this dig.

Khalil: Still bitter about your love-childe?

Hesha: Silence.

Okulos: There is something delightful about this situation.

Bell: Says the Sewer Rat in the deck chair.

Okulos: Dig? With *my* arms? No. There is something delightful here. Kindred—

Vykos: Cainites.

Okulos: If you must. Cainites of Camarilla, Sabbat, Anarch, and Independent backgrounds, all brought down to this level. Irrespective of age, stature, or patronage. Kemintiri's blackmail's leveled each of you.

Ramona: I will thank her with a kiss. I might even bite her lower lip. That bitch could be here right now.

[SOUNDS OF DIGGING ABRUPTLY CEASE]

Khalil: And what makes you say that?

Ramona: Nothing! I was idly mentioning she could be one of us, for all we know.

Vykos: We would be able to sense her. Serpents carry a unique odor.

Talley: Probably masked by Ruhadze's own scent.

Hesha: How long must I contend with other Kindred stereotyping the childer of Sutekh, hm? When will it end?

Fatima: Perhaps when your Clan does something noble, or selfless?

Hesha: My *Clan* seeks freedom for all, from the Aeons and Beckett's damn Jyhad!

Fatima: And enslavement to Set.

Lucita: Leave him be.

Fatima: Oh, hush. He knows.

Bell: Why am I not just smashing the earth open?

Beckett: No! We do not know how delicate this sarcophagus might be, or what's contained within. We must use care.

Bell: Why not drink some blood and dig at speed then?

Fatima: The Philosopher King speaks wisely. We could make short work here.

Bell: Philosopher King…

Fatima's sense of humor hasn't faded.-A

Lucita: Bell doesn't realize how broad an area we are digging. It would take more blood than we have in ready vessels. Better to do this cautiously.

Aisling: I see you're still at work. Isabel… Nitocris and I secured the perimeter again. Nobody will be slipping by without triggering my flames or her small army.

Talley: And if a mortal just walks on through after their evening at work concludes?

Aisling: I… I'll be back. We may need to amend the wards.

Vykos: Digging a pit as a Usurper looks on. The indignity. I see Serenna is not with us.

Beckett: Robust as she is, she's unprepared to risk losing the Ashirra's protection and share a Warlock's company for an extended period. Understandable, even when the Warlock is Aisling.

Vykos: Every one of them has the capacity for betrayal. History has shown us this.

Talley: Which one of us does not? The herds are prepared. Do not mob them. Do not drain them dry, please. Refugee camps are easy to procure from, but eventually someone starts noticing the missing.

Bell: We're feeding on displaced refugees?

Talley: Surely better that than not.



Bell: You are a cold motherfucker.

Ramona: Well, I've worked up a—

Beckett: What's the matter?

Ramona: I just hit some*thing* with my pick. Let me clear the dirt with my hands. Help me, Khalil.

Khalil: Help yourself, girl.

Bell: Get out of the way, asshole.

Hesha: Stop! There are words on the sarcophagus lid. Hieroglyphs older than Egypt…

[LONG PAUSE]

Lucita: Well?

Vykos: Oh. Heh. [laughs]

Beckett: What is it?

Vykos: We would suggest a vinculum at this point, to ensure no betrayals ensue.

Okulos: Stuff that up your many orifices.

Beckett: Tell us what it says, Vykos. We're all in this together.

Hesha: Enosch. Or Enoch. Supposedly, if your stories of Caine and his descendants are true, this sarcophagus either contains the remains of one of the Second Generation, or was buried in the first home of Caine outside Eden.

[RECORDING ENDS]

Shali Ghadi, Siwa Oasis, Egypt

Our find caused a heated debate. Khalil and Vykos proposed opening the sarcophagus. Hesha entered a stunned silence. Theo, Talley, and Fatima insisted the box remain shut, and be reinterred. Ramona quietly departed the scene, at speed. Lucita awaited my thoughts. We all needed to decide before Aisling and Isabel returned to the pit. Stereotype or not, their Clans both have histories of eating the contents of ancient sarcophagi.

I was convinced Vykos or one of the others would attempt to steal the sarcophagus, based on its possible content, but also the power-hungry fear of what waited inside. For the meanwhile, we formed a pact. Supposedly I am the only individual trusted and fool enough to open the box at the break of dawn, which is our agreed timetable to uncover its contents. Kemintiri be damned. If there's an ancient within, she will not greet it with her fangs. I will give it the chance to engage in discourse, or greet the sun, or rend me limb from limb. Preferably not the latter option, as I am prepared to sink beneath the desert sands as soon as things go awry.

It was Okulos who proposed we go through with Kemintiri's delivery request, with a caveat or two. "Bombs in coffins are so passé," he said. "Stuff a few Alastors inside though..."

I called Edwin shortly thereafter. Whatever the coffin contains now, will not be what it contains when Kemintiri receives it.

But maybe she expects this betrayal. How could she not? I wonder at the game she's playing, and how my compulsion to unearth relics such as this makes me her pawn. Maybe whatever occurs, she wants to happen to me, while she watches from a distance and marks another victory against her enemies.

I intercepted this. It's hot. ElVampiroMysterio is an Anarch power player. MrMysterio may or may not be Inconnu.-O

MrMysterio started the conversation

ElVampiroMysterio joined the conversation

ElVampiroMysterio:	WTF's going on, Mr? Am I hearing a member of the 2nd Generation's been unearthed??
MrMysterio:	It could be Sutekh.
ElVampiroMysterio:	As in the Ante?

MrMysterio:	Or the Second Generation vampire.
ElVampiroMysterio:	You're gonna have to explain.
MrMysterio:	The Setites always said they were cut from a different cloth than other Cainites. In a manner of speaking, they may be right. The Jyhad's changing.
ElVampiroMysterio:	Wait wait wait. My source tells me the coffin said "Enosch" on it. Not "Set."
MrMysterio:	Look at it this way — the sarcophagus was in Egypt, Sutekh's body is unaccounted for, even within the Inconnu's extensive records, and most crucially, I know who tipped off Kemintiri as to the gravesite.
MrMysterio:	Ever heard of Nasch the Circassian? Particularly old Blue Blood. One of yours. My sources tell me a whole bunch of Red Listers kidnapped him months ago.
ElVampiroMysterio:	BS. Yeah, I know of Nasch in the Movement, but nobody's reported him missing.
MrMysterio:	If you think the Red Listers are incapable of putting a replacement in his role, or even posing as him, you underestimate them. I hear Germaine put the knife to him.
ElVampiroMysterio:	So they took Nasch and tortured the location out of him?
MrMysterio:	No. Nasch didn't break. He did reveal that he gave the location to one Giangaleazzo several centuries before, however.
ElVampiroMysterio:	Our friend in Milan.
MrMysterio:	Ayisha Jocastian and Petaniqua spent a long time hidden in Giangaleazzo's palace, watching the Archbishop / Prince / whatever he is, dripping nightmares in his ear, coaxing the truth from him during daytime murmurings.
MrMysterio:	Or so I'm told.
ElVampiroMysterio:	This is big. So Sutekh was sleeping in Enosch's tomb, or Sutekh IS Enosch, AND he's now free from the ground AND a cabal of Red Listers intend to do what with him?
MrMysterio:	What would you be tempted to do if delivered a torpid potential member of the Second Generation?
ElVampiroMysterio:	Oh shit. I see what you mean about the Jyhad changing. What can we do??
MrMysterio:	What we always do, my friend. We sit back, watch the fireworks, and rake through the ashes. Stay close.

MrMysterio closed chat

Castel d'Ombro, Sicily, Italy

Lucita tells me gaining access to Castel d'Ombro took the pulling of several strings. Of our other companions, only Talley was permitted to join us. He declined, making excuses and for the first time seeming unnerved. That troubles me perhaps more than what we'll find inside.

Montano owed me a favor. He agreed to appear in Madrid. You've never seen the Mediterranean's Lasombra all flock to one location so quickly. Permission became a non-issue. -L

Castel d'Ombro is a crumbling ruin. Lucita explains it has always been thus, at least aesthetically. Once, the fortress was the Clan of Night's throne, and home to their founder and his childer. It fell into disuse in recent centuries, when the Amici Noctis spread its operations to Madrid. Despite this, Lucita insists there is a vestigial root of the Clan here. She's unsure if it's a hidden stronghold of the Clan's Abyss Mystics, or something worse. She mentioned Boukephos' oubliettes, once housed beneath the castle and never cleared of their Kindred inhabitants. Some volunteered for incarceration so they may study the Abyss. Sicily is a bastion of Keepers, but few make havens in proximity to this castle. Only the Methuselah Ihsan is known for making his haven within the castle, though Lucita told me "the stalking shadow" (as he's known) spends his present nights with the Tlacique, or attempting to excavate fellow Keepers buried beneath Mesopotamian ruins.

We trek into the castle, and into the dungeons beneath, searching the length and breadth for Kemintiri. Between us we have the strength to carry the great black sarcophagus, but it's not conducive to quick movement.



As we explore, we find traces of habitation and movement. No records remain here, or telltale open coffins absent of their vampire owners, but there are footprints in the dust, fresh air in rooms that should feel cloying and uncomfortable, and even a stubbed-out cigarette. Lucita isn't convinced the Anathema are responsible for these disturbances, citing the lure this place has on local Kindred. Apparently, vampires – mostly Keepers – feel a call back home, and descend into the castle, never to return.

[RECORDING BEGINS]

Beckett: Testing. 1-2-3.

Lucita: You will one night find that device forced somewhere unpleasant.

Beckett: So everyone tells me. And yet, the information stored on my various devices will one day break the Jyhad completely.

Lucita: How do you propose that might happen?

Beckett: Well, I'm no anarchist, but I'm sick to death of elders and Methuselahs treating our long lives like eternal puppet shows. When I annotated the Book of Nod I released it to a select few. It was Ayisha Jocastian who unleashed it on the world. I detested her for it, but eventually I recognized a form of wisdom. Once the diary is complete, I will get this information to the Kindred who would benefit from it: Those who want to be free from the Jyhad.

Lucita: When will it be complete? You could go on forever.

Beckett: Oh, I doubt that will happen. The knives are being sharpened behind my back. I know there's change afoot. Okulos and Cesare know to disseminate all this once I meet Final Death.

Lucita: There's personal material in there, Beckett. On you, me, people we care about. And anyway—

[a loud smash as the sarcophagus crashes to the ground]

Lucita: If you care so much about this information getting out, why do you want the diary back from Kemintiri? Isn't she threatening to release it?

Dylan: Yeah, why do you care so much about your bloody diary, you little twat? And where's my fucking sword?

[sound of recorder being dropped]

[RECORDING ENDS]

I could never abandon my friends, you understand. I may maintain a distance, I may lurk in the shadows, but I could never abandon them.

Dylan struck Beckett hard, with a fist wreathed in black flame. First he smashed my friend into the stomach, buckling him, before following with an uppercut straight to the chin. We all heard Beckett's neck snap back. He concertinaed to the floor slowly, as Kemintiri emerged, along with vampires I identified as Petaniqua, Valerius Maior, and Alex Swift.

Lucita, my dear sweet Lucita, attempted to hold this cavalcade of Anathema away from Beckett. You know she is a terror to behold in combat. I have seen her destroy so, so many foes. As she manipulated the darkness, which appeared to shift in the castle without her aid, Swift rushed forward and Maior turned the tentacles back on her. I swear a reek of the infernal emanated from both he and Bruce. Something gave them the edge over my lovely Lucita. Something that could only be from Hell.

Kemintiri, Petaniqua, and Bruce approached the sarcophagus. The three incanted some ritual — necromantic, some manner of black thaumaturgy, I cannot say — and then shifted the lid.

I did nothing to stop them. I needed to protect my friends. The sarcophagus' contents were not my concern. Indeed, as the Bounty Hunters burst from the coffin and engaged the Anathema, I was immediately behind Valerius. A swift stake to Maior, and a skullcrushing blow to Swift, and I had both Lucita and Beckett over my shoulders, carrying them towards the night above.

The sounds of war resounded behind me. The sounds of war and something primordial. There is something alert and hungry beneath Castel d'Ombro. I suspect the spilling of potent Cainite vitae helped rouse something the Keepers maintained in the Abyss. While Kemintiri may survive the Alastors, I suspect — or at least, hope — she won't survive that.

So what was I doing all that time? Was I shepherding my unknowing allies? Exploring Castel d'Ombro in advance of their arrival?

Kemintiri did hold Beckett's diaries, but no longer. They are now with me. I think he knew that, you know. I think he sensed they were safe, and just wanted to deliver long-awaited death to the Anathema.

Beckett acts the sardonic buffoon, always caught off-guard. He willingly throws himself into these traps, willingly faces certain defeat. This drive of his is not self-destructive as it is for me; it is exploratory. He must know the face of the Jyhad.

Well, he knows it, now.

Note that Beckett states nowhere what he discovered inside the sarcophagus. Perhaps its inhabitant — if indeed it was occupied — wiped itself from Beckett's memory. Maybe Beckett feels inclined to protect the vampire. Or, maybe Beckett is afraid of what he might invoke by writing or speaking the creature's name.

I, of course, know what Beckett saw. Beckett knows now that the Antediluvians are puppets as weak as any other vampire, only appearing powerful because they wish to be seen as such.

Kemintiri expected the coffin to contain Sutekh, not Enosch. She was as surprised as Hesha when she saw the writing on the lid. -L

Perception is reality, after all. In this reality, in these nights, the most powerful vampires are the fledglings Embraced yesterday. They have as much or as little to fear from Antediluvians as we do from meteorites and the next ice age. They control our future.

The Jyhad is changing, as so many say. It is inverting. Wake up, and see the world turned upside-down. The cycle renews. The alpha becomes the omega. I could go on.

I think this time I shall.

Anatole

The End

The Omega reveals to Beckett a series of potential conclusions. These ends are not Gehenna, in its many incarnations. They are ends of the old, and heralds of the new.

The True Black Hand stretches its fingers across Northern Africa as it exerts open influence for the first time in millennia. Few seem to recognize these vampires or why they act as they do. They conflate the Sect with the Sabbat due to its merciless violence, but fail to recognize the Tal'Mahe'Ra's reverence for the eldest vampires in opposition to the Sabbat's hatred of the same. As the Hand closes around a portion of the world, the landscape changes forever.

A gala of bloodlines cavorts and revels as if celebrating a new year. Perhaps they celebrate a new night. The Stone Man's guests wish to forge for themselves a place in the new order. Once the Society of Leopold blazes a fissure through Kindred society, Kiasyd, Samedi, Daughters of Cacophony, and even Baali may be standing ready to take the place of the fallen. The new faction does not comprise every member of each bloodline, but takes representatives from each freakish line of outcasts. As they open their eyes to the possibilities before them, the bloodlines seize power long denied them.

Both Anarchs and ghouls assert dominance over weakly-held domains throughout the World of Darkness. Not relying merely on violence, the Anarchs insinuate their way into leadership through politics. Though some Kindred expect the Anarchs to inspire fledglings with hope for egalitarianism among vampires, several practice forms of fascism and autocracy after their coups' successes. The ghouls meanwhile usher in new regimes, unlike anything seen before. Though ghoul rebellions occur on a small scale, vampires with multiple servitors start taking steps to cull the free thinkers, or subject them to tighter bonds.

The Anathema act as one, at least for a time. Kemintiri reaches out to the Red Listers and orchestrates the intended group diablerie of an Antediluvian, or something stronger still. Kemintiri's ritual requires the Amaranth to take place in Castel d'Ombro, where the Lasombra Antediluvian supposedly met his end. She does not advertise the reasons why. The blood spilt following the failed bid awakens something in the castle's bowels, as fearsome Anathema take on five mighty Alastors. If they survive each other, they may not survive what resides in Castel d'Ombro.

The Omega may be the end of Kindred existence as Beckett knows it. It may also be a shuddering step forward into an uncertain future:

- Albertus Magnus' auctions rise to prominence as the traveling Kindred market draws in vampires of all Sects. Many attend simply to see what prizes are on offer, while others bid obscene amounts of cash, property, favors, and rank in exchange for heirlooms and artifacts. At the auction house, the attendees all observe the neutrality treaty and fight in common defense of the auction, no matter the vampires at their side or the attackers' agenda. When Magnus hosts his auction in the pack's domain, he requires trustworthy contacts to scout out a safe location for the auction and another for storing his wares. He also requires tight security, as one of the lots at auction — a vial of something called "Giant's Blood" is liable to draw assaults from multiple quarters. The vitae apparently lowers the Generation of any vampire who drinks it, permanently, without leaving the mark of diablerie.
- Lisbon's Kindred steadily fall prey to assassinations. As the survivors realize their tenuous position, paranoia sets in. Who are the silent killers? Assumptions first turn to the Assamites, but the domain's Children of Haqim highlight their own casualties. Anarchs are second to receive the blame, due to their resurgence in local fiefdoms, though no vampire has yet stepped forward to claim the title of Baron. As the remaining Cainites convene to discuss how best to trace the killers, a ghoul stumbles into the meeting and utters the words "Tal'Mahe'Ra" before dying. As vampires desperately research the elusive Sect, the true perpetrators celebrate their elaborate distraction technique, and plan the city's takeover.
- The Fiends created the Grimaldi revenant family centuries ago. As counterpoint to other degenerate ghouls, the Grimaldi have always made efforts to appear respectable and socially capable. As Tzimisce actively throw revenants into the breach of conflicts they cannot survive, some Grimaldi ghouls decide to exercise the breadth of their power and independent thought. A trio appear in the coterie's favored Elysium, determined to exercise their liberties. Their leader explains to the coterie they seek an audience with the most powerful Ventrue in the city under

What's in the box?

The contents of the Enosch Sarcophagus are left deliberately vague. Some chronicles will have room for an active member of the Second Generation. Others will utilize an awakened Sutekh. If the sarcophagus is empty, perhaps it contains only ash, or a message from its last inhabitant. Here are some possibilities:

- Beckett awakens Ynoch, who, to his surprise, is serene and rational. Millennia ago, Ynoch poured all corruption into the Antediluvian known as Tzimisce, resulting in his childe housing two Beasts. Ynoch explains to Beckett that each of the Third Generation are weaker than they claim. The Jyhad is a huge ruse, perpetuated by vampires too infantile to exert their will by force or through visible dictates. He assures Beckett the Jyhad is simply a construct, and once vampires who seek freedom from it accept this fact, all strings will sever. Ynoch disappears soon after waking, intent on confronting the Inner Circle of the Camarilla and remolding the Sect into something more appropriate for tonight's vampires.
- Enosch is staked within the coffin. Once Beckett removes the wooden dagger in Enosch's heart, the ancient monster howls and pursues a blood frenzy throughout Libya, Egypt, Israel, and Syria. The beast is a barreling force of destruction, born of murder. Wherever he travels, war follows in his wake. Every mortal who dies feeds his insatiable hunger, but he destroys no vampires. Blood supplies thin dramatically. As reality dawns on the Kindred, the eldest — irrespective of Clan and Sect — come together to plan a stop to Enosch's rampage. Supposedly he slowed his massacre in Saudi Arabia, falling prey to the Keening. The Tal'Mahe'Ra seek to supplicate Enosch, return him to sanity, and benefit from the wisdom they pray still exists within him. They claim the Keening is the perpetual scream of Enosch's sister, Zillah, trapped beneath Mecca.
- The sarcophagus contains naught but ash, but even bloody soot serves a purpose. Beckett lists Enoch's ashes at one of Albertus Magnus' auctions, drawing attention from blood magicians the world over. Only once the ashes are bought, and a war breaks out immediately after, does the buyer discover the ashes in fact belong to what seems to be a thin-blooded fledgling. Confusion reigns as it appears potency of the blood is as cyclical as Gehenna.
- Sutekh emerges from the sarcophagus, declaring all of North Africa his Clan's domain. The Ashirra, Assamites, and Tal'Mahe'Ra provide an aggressive response. The Antediluvian commands his Clan to go to war. It takes little time for the Hierophants to observe their Clan's rapid destruction in service to a lethargic, hungry god, unwilling to raise a finger in their defense. Rapidly, the Followers of Set dissolve into cells of branching faiths, mirroring the Clan's original existence in the times of Typhon, Echidna, Kali, and Glycon. They openly adopt the name *Mesu Bedshet*, as the Children of Rebellion. Vampires somehow forget Sutekh's existence. He happily slinks into the darkness, taking on the role of puppet master alongside his siblings.

flag of truce. Before the meeting can take place, a gang of revenants loyal to the Sabbat ambushes the coterie and their charges. If the defectors survive and meet with the Ventrue, the Tzimisce may ultimately lose a major weapon in their arsenal. Alternatively, it's possible the revenants intend to slay the Ventrue and take her head to their masters, in order to court greater favor. The Grimaldi may be attempting a coup of their own, intending on destroying the Blue Blood in charge, before

turning their eyes to the domain's other influential Kindred.

- A vampire within the players' coterie receives an invitation to one of the Stone Man's outcast galas. However, the vampire never considered himself a member of a bloodline until the invitation arrived. The invitation requests the guest brings a "plus one" to a 1920s-America-themed party. As the two vampires receive introductions to a most exclusive society, the Baali Kiriyama and his silent True Brujah accomplice approach the remainder of the coterie with an offer: If the invited parties smuggle a bomb into the bloodlines gala, they will offer an unusual reward — the Final Death of any one vampire in the world, no matter their importance or power, with no evidence linking the death to the coterie.
- The Bounty Hunters swing into Paris, formally introduce themselves to Prince Villon, and promise they intend to pursue no violence within the domain. Nobody believes them, of course. The Sheriff assigns the coterie to keep tabs on the Alastors, and ensure any chaos remains contained. The domain's aspiring Baron meanwhile panics, reaching out to the same coterie with a plea for assistance. He has an Anathema under his care, who in his opinion truly did not deserve their position on the Red List. He pledges to support the coterie in all future actions if they will help smuggle the Anathema from the domain. When the coterie discovers the Anathema's identity, they may have second thoughts.
- Throughout Sabbat domains, word spreads about the Sect's own Red List. Initially cause for humor, the idea of a Sabbat Most Wanted swiftly catches on. Regent Galbraith (or her replacement) declares 13 Cainites deserving of the most terrible deaths, with high-profile sanctioned diableries and Archbishoprics offered to the vampires who track and kill these Maledicted. Some Cainites on the list also appear on the Camarilla's, Kemintiri chief among them. Few of the Maledicted are Camarilla power-players. The Sect reasons such individuals will fall when the Sword of Caine triumphs within the Jyhad.
- Through what appears to be a clerical error, a member of the coterie is named as Anathema. Her companions are presented with a choice: Slay their ally for the Camarilla's rewards, or attempt to ride out the tide and protect their friend while clearing her name. Meanwhile, the true Anathema runs free, and the inquisitor responsible for the misinformation campaign lines up his dominoes, intent on destroying the incorrectly-castigated vampire's life.
- The Keepers of Madrid and Sicily reach out to clanmates, begging their urgent return to the Clan's powerbases. According to the Cardinals, the Lasombra must retake Castel d'Ombro "before the Omega event." The invited Keepers feel the summons and can do little to resist it, though they each sense an approaching end. The most learned Keepers recall tales of the Cappadocians once being led to a central location, where the majority were sacrificed to strengthen the Clan. Talk fast turns to what took Castel d'Ombro from Clan Lasombra. Are the Anathema still within its dungeons? Is a primordial entity rising from the Abyss in the form of the Lasombra Antediluvian? Has a supremely powerful vampire traveled to Castel d'Ombro simply to reacquire his empty sarcophagus, and subsequently formed a base of operations directly atop the Abyss?



Hagia Sophia, Istanbul, Turkey

These are my honest accounts. Some I survived. Some I did not. Some dangers I embraced, others I attempted – and failed – to flee. They may not be in the correct order, or even understandable at times, but they exist as my experiences of the Jyhad. I hope my writing goes some way to helping you. Perhaps you will read my words and wish to experience what I've felt, or see what I've seen. Maybe they'll drive you to hide beneath a rock. But let me state this clearly: you ought never fear the Jyhad.

I end this volume with an elegy, of sorts.

An Antediluvian spoke within my mind just the other night. It told me:

"Our greatest Curse is to live forever, and never feel the urgency of mortality. This is why the Jyhad exists. Without hate for each other, jealousy for what we each possess, and petty grudges to keep us awake at night, we would sleep for eternity."

That same night, a fledgling said the same thing, or words to that effect.

I replied to both with a laugh and a reassurance. We do not need to vie against one another to find purpose. Enemies are no essential part of a vampire's makeup, no more than pervasive danger is for a mortal. We convince ourselves that we must compete and sabotage one another to give our existences meaning, but this is the true Jyhad, our being manipulated into thinking so.

We're none of us so different. Whether dead for 10,000 years or merely one night, we all possess a capacity for growth, whether through learning, exploration, philosophy,

alchemy of the blood, religion, or even remaining true to our inner humanity. I've seen and experienced much in my last few decades, some of it the definition of evil, yet some enough to inspire and give one hope.

Anatole is one of my firmest friends. He's existed for nigh on a millennium, and still cares for my wellbeing, even when his condition forces him to act against me. Lucita, Fatima, Talley, and Theo are all warriors, and all are capable of causing huge harm to me and others. Yet, they're all capable of humor, acts of largesse and introspection, and they dedicate themselves to causes greater than their personal wellbeing. Okulos, Aisling, and Hesha are scholars to whom I owe and dedicate huge respect. They give meaning to their lives through study, betterment, and understanding.

I do not use the word "lives" in error. We are vampires, and we may be biologically dead, but we also live. Through my extensive journeying I discover the way to remove oneself from the Jyhad is to move – mentally, physically, socially. Stay alert, stay awake, absorb the life around you, and give some back.

I've met Princes and thin-bloods. I've stood in presence of Methuselahs and Kindred of dead Clans. I've searched tombs and boardrooms. I've listened to the righteous anger of tyrants and the tragic pleading of fledglings.

I have walked the night wearing shades, spilt sweet blood in the height of passion, used my claws like daggers, and felt the love of a cold body turned warm. Our blood does not flow, but our vitae burns with a desire to experience. We are outsiders, outcasts, misanthropes, monsters, and creatures of the night, yet we persist, and there is little we cannot accomplish.

You who read this need to know that the Jyhad – our eternal struggle – is what you make of it. You can be a beast, you can be an angel with fangs, and you can be so much more besides.

Fear not the strings of puppet masters. Dwell not upon who controls your fate. We must all face tomorrow. Do so with open eyes and an open heart, and embrace our future.

Never falter. Do not break. There is always another sunset.

Your faithful author,

Beckett

ON METAPLOT

"Should the whole frame of nature round him break,
in ruin and confusion hurled, he, unconcerned,
would hear the mighty crack, and stand secure amidst a falling world."
— Joseph Addison, translation of Horace, Odes

"We're natural liars."
— Beckett

Kindred tell stories about themselves, about their sires and grandsires, about the World of Darkness. Even if the Curse of Caine did not condemn them to an eternity at one another's throats, they would lie and war, trapped in sectarian conflict over what it means to be a vampire. But condemned they are, and Gehenna approaches regardless.

The escalating storyline and myriad plots that bind **Vampire** together in an official continuity — the *metaplot* – remains one of the most compelling and well-remembered aspects of the game. Metaplot provided a rich story, contextualizing the game within the larger World of Darkness and making that world feel true and real around the characters. Yet verisimilitude comes with a price, for lack of player agency means the players' story isn't entirely their own.

Vampire: The Masquerade 20th Anniversary Edition takes a "metaplot agnostic" stance on content, dating itself to modern nights and choosing to focus on the essence of a **Vampire** game rather than the storylines that bound the **Vampire**-focused World of Darkness together. The events of this volume officially conclude during 2005, as the Gehenna craze and the Camarilla — Sabbat war is winding down. As a Storyteller you will no doubt choose to let these events play out whenever it suits you. Beckett's investigative work and personal experiences form a piecemeal collection of setpieces that allows incorporation of **Vampire**'s metaplot elements, and elements of a changing World of Darkness, according to an individual Storyteller's taste. Yet Kindred narration is ever unreliable, and Beckett's approach to flashpoint events favors the disruptive over the experiential. What's read in **Beckett's Jyhad Diary** may not be the whole truth, or even true at all.

Theme: A Larger World

No man is an island, and no vampire is without lineage. Each Kindred is a link in a great, bloody chain, stretching back into the dusk of time and bound by prestation and historicity. The Clans stride in darkness, working a thousand myriad schemes, leaving the night wrought in grand mosaics of pink, red, and black. The greater World of Darkness that surrounds the characters should be the ocean at night — black and deep, with shapes moving under rippling waters.

Mood: On the Brink, In Motion

Events outside the chronicle give a sense of movement, of culmination, of being on the edge while the whole world is tipping over. Much of **Vampire**'s metaplot serves to instill momentum towards an imminent Gehenna, ramping up the feeling of immediacy and fatalism in the Final Nights. A rank neonate, or even seasoned ancillae, cannot stop the machinations of powerful elders that began centuries before Christianity got *real big*. By situating themselves at catalysts – flashpoints – emblematic of

Case Study: The Justicars

The 41st meeting of the Camarilla's Inner Circle mentioned in **Dread Names, Red List** provides one of the clearer examples of setting moving along with time. Justicars are elected every 13 years, and this conclave saw the election of justicars like Manuela Cardoso Pinto of Clan Brujah and Juliet Parr of Clan Malkavian (and, optionally if the Storyteller permits, the Assamite Kasim Bayar). This reflects a cyclical series of elections held within the setting of **Vampire**, dependent on certain plotlines within the World of Darkness. Yet it properly keeps that World in sync with the real one.

the larger conflict, they can make a difference. And maybe, with a little luck on their side, they can alter the outcome.

Myth, Progression, Metaplot

Before discussing metaplot's place at the table, it's necessary to discuss what metaplot is composed of. In general, only those events which could conceivably affect player characters, or alter the story at the table, fall under the heading of "metaplot," but this encompasses several distinct phenomena. The flashpoints in **Beckett's Jyhad Diary** are meant to touch on three of these: setting progression, setting background, and actual metaplot proper.

Progression – The March of Nights

Time marches on. While the World of Darkness is not the real world, it shares a setting with a world that's clearly parallel to ours, albeit with Antediluvians. If the World of Darkness is defined as *our* world save for the influence of monsters malignant and dark in the shadows, it *must* change in response to events. The stories of others will progress without us, and so the World of Darkness moves even without the player characters. Traumatic flashpoints that deform and warp mortal society are events the Kindred must follow, warping in turn.

Real-world events are less impactful on a **Vampire** setting than the progression of technology and culture. A vampire Embraced in 1991 lived and died before the public advent of cellphones and the Internet. **Vampire: The Masquerade 20th Anniversary Edition** takes this a step further, noting that mastery of modern technology gives neonates a distinct edge against elders who don't quite grasp the power and versatility. A Malkavian elder can drive a huge group of mortals into a display of frenzied invectives against an unwary target, while a Malkavian neonate can do the same with a well-placed hashtag on an app. Even mortals born in the waning years of the last century have difficulty adapting to the rapid pace of new technologies, and they're not going night to night in a secret society of ravening blood fiends. Vampires are left behind in an ever-changing World of Darkness. An Assamite awakening in modern Aleppo, in the midst of the Syrian civil war, would see a city all but abandoned and suffering under near-constant warfare.

Background and Mythology – Fait Accompli

Information that doesn't truly advance the overarching storylines of a game, but instead fills in the spaces of a game's setting, falls under the purview of background. Related to metaplot but distinct, background differs from chronicles where past events or historical actions tie into active plots within the modern day, or where historical events are for player characters to experience. The in-character sentiments, histories, letters, and setting artifacts of **Lore of the Clans** are background events, mythology for the players to enjoy. When a Toreador speaks of Arikel falling in love with Absimiliard or the great city of Ubar, these are details that enhance the setting of modern nights. So too do they enhance the ancient settings in **V20 Dark Ages**, which details a starting point for the player characters to transform to their liking, but may also provide setting details for the Modern Nights in turn.

Case Study: Lord Jürgen von Verden

Consider this: a blond, militant Ventrue of the Sixth Generation, with a feeding obsession revolving around soldiers, possessed of a visionary mindset, an autocratic bearing, and a hidden drive for personal survival. Are we speaking of Lord Jürgen von Verden, or Hardestadt the Younger? While Lord Jürgen supposedly met Final Death, Hardestadt the Elder refusing to toss away the blood of his failure of a childe, and instead ordering (or Dominating) the wayward ancilla into assuming an alternate identity is totally within character.

While this has deep implications for any characters who survive from the Dark Ages to modern nights (or poor Jan Pieterzoon, who suffers under the same fate as his potential sire, as Beckett discovers), it ultimately matters little for those vampires who stick to one timeline or the other. The truth of the matter died when Hardestadt fell to Tyler's fangs — while it greatly enhances the irony if his broken puppet realizes Hardestadt's Dream, the Camarilla won't fall because of it.

Expanding a setting's mythology and background doesn't proscribe the setting's future, but it does shed light on the setting's past and legendaria. Only when a book builds upon events or occurrences in a book prior does the metaplot move forward. The machinations of sect warrior Dastur Anosh, as detailed in **Children of the Revolution** and **The Black Hand,** isn't metaplot proper even when it describes his survival and war against the Tal'Mahe'Ra. Nor are Djuhah and Izhim ur-Baal, Sabbat luminaries who secretly hold high rank within the Black Hand, an example of anything other than an exciting background link. While Kaymakli features heavily into the background of the Harbingers of Skulls and their interaction with the Tal'Mahe'Ra, the actual story of Kaymakli and the Feast of Folly is myth, not metaplot.

This doesn't mean these events are meaningless or that they don't contribute to story. History isn't merely context, but an active and malignant threat. Learning what came before may be all that keeps vampires undead for one more night; what happened in Carthage thousands of years ago may be just as important as what happened in a neonate's favorite bar last evening. The secrets of the past haunt the present World of Darkness, even if they don't always progress the story.

Metaplot Proper – The Path of Story

The overarching storyline that binds together events in the official continuity, and major story events that change the world or simply move signature and important characters from city to city, are part of the metaplot. Simply put, metaplot reflects the actions and agency of characters and events other than that of the player characters or the Storyteller's chronicle at the table or in the live-action parlor. If the flashpoints in **Beckett's Jyhad Diary** take place independently of the player characters in a Storyteller's home chronicle, these plots — along with setting progression, such as events that occur on a set timeline — will progress with or without their actions, potentially to the point where it impacts a chronicle. The entire American East Coast will tremble when Vitel attempts to regain praxis, and if Pieterzoon misjudges his targets, every city in the American South and Midwest will become an entrenched, permanent battleground.

Vampire's metaplot covered four broad aspects, signified by flashpoint events:

- **Movements of the elders:** Elders manipulate their Clans, the Setites, Giovanni, and Assamites falling in line behind their ancestors' whims, while Saulot's victory over Tremere becomes complete. In the struggle, the Tremere antitribu of House Goratrix meet Final Death, while Tzimisce slithers and crafts the Cathedral of Flesh anew under New York. Jerusalem sings again with the chorus of the many who are one within Malkav's curse.
- **War of the Sects:** The Camarilla prepares to take back the American South, while the former Prince of D.C. gears up to take back his throne. The Anarch Free States arise across the world en-

Case Study: The Book of the Grave-War

Of singular importance to Beckett is the text detailing how the rising of elders heralds Gehenna, how even the dead blood of Antediluvians can be worth warring over. Beckett pursues the book over various cities, slowly learning about its nature and the various forces it involves. This pursuit pushes him, albeit reluctantly, into the machinations of the Jyhad. He touches upon the major beats of the **Vampire** setting, his curiosity compelling him even when the book's arc is resolved.

This plot to acquire the book is driven by signature characters, one that alters — however slightly — the nature of the **Vampire** setting.

tire. A prominent Sabbat archbishop abandons the Dream of a long-dead Toreador, whose madness infected an entire Sect of vampires.

- **Machinations of the Independent Clans:** While the Setites work to raise Set in fulfillment of their faith, the Giovanni attempt to rip down the Shroud to cause the Endless Night. Artifacts such as the Sargon Fragment and the *Book of the Grave-War* achieve a singular importance. Meanwhile, the Ravnos Clan battles their *asuratziyya*, "countless demons," on the Indian front. Their war will lead to the rising of their progenitors.
- **Signs of Gehenna:** The time of the thin-blooded arises, while Noddists in the Sects search for the woman with the crescent sign. The signs in the *Book of Nod* come due. Conspiracies bloom in the midnight garden, flowering and opening to the red star in the sky.

Storytelling Metaplot

The metaplot of **Vampire** continues to be well-loved, yet controversial. Part of the overarching theme of **Vampire** is powerlessness in the face of dominant forces, but this is understandably hard to rectify with player agency being the chief element in a tabletop roleplaying game.

The construction of **Beckett's Jyhad Diary** means to allow player characters and Storytellers to experience and influence the larger beats of the overarching **Vampire** metaplot, integrating those events into home chronicles through flashpoints. While treating Beckett as a surrogate or template protagonist is the preferred mode of integration, this is far from the only approach to integrating metaplot into a home chronicle.

Integrating Metaplot

We recommend to the Storyteller three different methods of integration: passive, reactive, and proactive.

Background (Passive)

In a worldwide setting, swaths of the metaplot, while impactful, simply fail to reach the player characters. Even with the huge ripples made by things such the possible rise of the Black Shepherd Ur-Shulgi, described in **Lore of the Clans**, the World of Darkness is a *very* big pond, and characters in Los Angeles simply might not *care*.

At this level of integration, metaplot helps to establish the characters as living in a vast and ever-changing World of Darkness. Similar to our world, it never truly sleeps, and events move on without us; thus, these changes help to enrich the verisimilitude of the setting, but preserve the agency of characters on the local scale. It's best used for characters and chronicles locked to a single domain or generally focused on a single line of stories.

When working in background, the Storyteller should integrate metaplot with the exposition of supporting characters, or with the occasional visiting guest star who comes to town with news of Nod and the war of the sects.

Indirect (Reactive)

Kindred in Libertatia don't care about New York all that much. They *would* care about the Sab-

Lock Khalil in the Closet

If you don't much care about metaplot cohesion, feel free to use your chronicle's protagonists in the role of the signature characters, reducing them to a null role or nonexistence. Protagonists have positions of authority and power, and a colorful history within the Kindred community; consequently, they're at the head of events, rather than accompanying others along with it or reacting to them. Situate the player characters in Xaviar's place — perhaps not on the Inner Circle, but as leaders of Clan Gangrel's gradual exodus from the Camarilla. Allow them to follow in Beckett's footsteps in this book, or replace him entirely.

When it comes down to it, the metaplot serves a number of purposes for the setting and the World of Darkness. But if it doesn't serve your game? Discard it.

bat's growing civil war causing their domain to be flooded with shovelheads and refugees. Using the sweeping, broad metaplot in this manner threatens to overwhelm whatever local struggles and plotlines the Storyteller has constructed. If the game takes place in the former Anarch Free States, with Smiling Jack mentoring the player characters, the formation of the new Free States can threaten to upend the night-by-night struggle of Anarch ideals with a newly-galvanized society. Why struggle to recreate what's lost when it exists elsewhere?

The secret to making this work is to *let it*. Let the tidal wave hit, and let the characters and their plotlines reorganize in the chaos. It's best to view this phenomenon as chapters in a chronicle: large, changing story arcs that upset the status quo and leave the situation unbalanced. Beckett's analysis of Washington, D.C., for example, leaves it ripe for player characters to assume power if they manage to find a way to deal with Vitel's machinations.

The Storyteller should telegraph the plot beforehand (to the players, if not the characters), and work their past successes or failures into the larger contextual element. No wave comes out of nowhere — one can see the swell long before the crest. If the characters argued with Smiling Jack about MacNeil's failure to take a leadership role in the Anarch community out of a misplaced sense of true anarchy, or they saw a number of Kindred leaving together for parts unknown, the revelation of Libertatia will be less surprising. While the *characters* seem shocked about the change, the players should be able to contextualize it within the larger story of **Vampire**, and consider it to be a new, organic chapter in an older story.

Direct (Proactive)

The final method of using metaplot in a game is the direct method: rather than altering the player's game with the integration of metaplot, use them as agents to further its occurrence. If the players are archons under Theo Bell, they'll take part in his attempt to engineer the *final* Final Death of Vitel (and may even take a Lure of the Flames to the face). If they're knights under Queen Anne of London, she tasks them with leading the Camarilla vanguard in the Battle of Savannah.

While it's fine to let the characters be pawns of their elders (these are **Vampire** themes, after all), try to avoid nullifying player agency. At the direct, proactive level of metaplot integration, the players have a tremendous amount of ability to change how events go down. If preserving the setting is of importance to the Storyteller, borrow a tool from the reactive toolbox: stress to the players and characters the conflux of events of which they are the head, and make it clear history has its eyes upon them.

Storytelling the Signatures

Beckett can be a hard vampire to pin down, and so can his voice. Signature characters have a certain voice and personality, and if you don't master that, it can be difficult to use them properly. However, there are many sound reasons to do so: Besides the aforementioned reason to integrate the metaplot or galvanizing a story arc, signature characters are *fun* to brush shoulders with due to their heroism or infamy,

and for giving the protagonists an influential friend or powerful enemy. Verisimilitude may demand it; if your chronicle takes place in the Succubus Club in Chicago, it gets difficult to ignore Victoria Ash's presence without excising her from your chronicle.

Therefore, we offer the following advice to Storytellers:

Keep the tone consistent. Once you decide on a voice and characteristics for the signature character, stick to it. Don't try to master a regional accent unless you're dead certain you can do it, since it'll ruin a first impression. Instead, play up the mannerisms so the character is readily identifiable.

Make them allies and companions. During character creation, if you know you'll be using signature characters, prepare a set of questions for the players. "How does your character know Beckett? When did they work together previously? (Or, if the player wants to be antagonistic, "Why does your character want to kill him?") Let the players define the answer, whether it's "He was Dominated into trying to kill the guy once, but they're cool now," or, "For that bullshit Beckett pulled in Prague." On that note....

Don't set them up in an antagonistic role. Not unless you want either the protagonists or signatures to die horribly. Theo can be an ally, while Beckett comes to town needing aid with some regional task. Admittedly, combat is fun, but Theo and Talley don't die easily. If a coterie goes in prepared with sound reason and preparation to deal with the fallout, go ahead and let the players kill them. If they do kill Talley, Vitel will be spectacularly upset.

Don't sweat the details, but don't resist revealing them either. Most elders play things close to the vest, like all vampires, but a secret only the Storyteller knows is no fun at the table. Beckett's pillow talk with Dracula might be a little too intimate for a game, but his comment about remembering how to seduce a man to get information makes clear that character's priorities. Use history and setting like a spice, and the character will seem more real.

Vampire Editions and Metaplot

Divided into four editions, the tone and content of **Vampire**'s metaplot generally corresponds to the four distinct core rulebooks that have been created over the past 25 years. When using book content from a specific edition, the Storyteller should adjust the tone to match whichever edition they prefer. Background mythology and setting progression alter the details of books from these editions, even as metaplot proper moves them forward. The alteration of the Assamite's curse or the Great Prank of the Malkavians' are both metaplot changes that result in mechanical alterations, even though characters do not necessarily understand what's occurring in the context of their world.

The Becoming (Vampire First Edition)

Grounded in the real world, the lonely struggle for morality dominates the focus.

Intensely focused on the city scale, the first edition of **Vampire** was centered on Humanity and the Riddle — "monsters we are lest monsters we become." The elders of the Dark Ages were like ancient gods, while neonates were only a handful of years old. Everything was scaled around newly-Embraced Kindred as protagonists: making a ghoul was only possible with permission from a nigh-omnipotent Prince. This is the age of the lone vampire trying to find some meaning in an increasingly-dark world, where respect and civility are more important than conspiracy. The Masquerade isn't even the First Tradition in this age — it's the Fifth, and includes "Secrecy" as well as "the Masquerade."

Only seven Clans (interchangeably called "bloodlines") exist, and the Camarilla was the default "Kindred" although Anarchs and a demonic, insane Sabbat (sometimes called the Black Hand) lick at the edges of society. "Caitiff" is the same as "outcast" — mindless scum who suck blood from rats.

Themes: The struggle for morality, transgressive sexuality, extremes between the ages of Kindred, loneliness, **Vampire** setting linked to the real world.

Books: Chicago by Night 1e, Children of the Inquisition, Mummy, Storyteller's Handbook to the Sabbat

Gothic-Punk (Vampire Second Edition)

Vampires are part of an eternal and secret war between the young and the old.

Technology fades into the background as **Vampire** experiences a creative flowering. Here, the Gothic-Punk world is ascendant in the themes and mood, with corrupt institutions and the war between the ages assuming a central position in the text. The sexuality of the previous edition changes to a romantic sensuality.

Protagonists (like the players themselves) are a little more sophisticated about this secret world, able to effect change in and of themselves. Elders are now fallible, and neonates are dangerous elements. Even powerful Princes, like Marcus Vitel, have great flaws and secret masters who know more than they. As even the most sophisticated, black-draped goth princess is rebelling against something, so too are the most powerful members of Kindred society pawns of their hidden elders. At this point, referencing other games, such as **Werewolf: The Apocalypse**, comes in vogue.

There are 13 Clans rather than seven, though those outside the Ivory Tower are still viewed as "other" and aren't preferred for player characters. Bloodlines such as the Salubri, distinct from the Clans, portray a rich genealogy stretching back to the Dark Ages (and the setting of **Vampire: the Dark Ages**).

Humanity poses far more danger to the Kindred than a far-off Gehenna, and the Masquerade becomes a chief means of self-preservation rather than an ostentatious display of conspiratorial power. Conspiracies such as the Inconnu (who never have their motives adequately explained, outside the Golconda seekers of Hunedoara) and the True Black Hand (who are obliterated at the end of the edition) stride into the darkness, hinting at an even more secret world than the one in which the player characters exist. Conspiracy and secrecy move to a central emphasis; the Masquerade is not just about pretending to be human, but also about fitting into the crush of humanity as a whole. Violent outbreaks are hidden under false reports and mistaken identities by the Camarilla, while the Sabbat plays at breaking them (but never musters the courage to; by the end of the edition and into **Revised**, they will largely agree with the motives and aims of the Masquerade).

Themes: Sensuality over sexuality, balance between ultra-modern and ancient, Clan and Sect as community, long-term, large-scale conspiracies.

Books: Dirty Secrets of the Black Hand, **D.C. by Night**, **Giovanni Chronicles**, **Under a Blood Red Moon**, **Chicago by Night 2e**, **The Book of Nod**.

Signs of Gehenna (Vampire Revised Edition)

The end is near, and all of the Damned fear what is about to come.

In this age, the global war between Sects assumes paramount importance, eclipsing the hidden movements of the Antediluvians just beneath the surface. Even the vaunted elders of prior editions, like Ruthven, are merely pawns before their godlike progenitors. Saulot, held up in the prior edition as a gentle symbol of vampiric innocence, is revealed to have played the long game. Elders aren't merely wicked and cruel; they're revenging themselves for the crimes of your thousand-year-old grandsire. Their grand retaliations are petty movements on the great board of Jyhad, the scale of which is continental in scope.

All things come to an end, both explicitly with the coming of Gehenna and implicitly by ending the comfortable stability of the previous age. The expanding mythology reveals long-held truths are mere stories, losing their sacred power. The Camarilla and Sabbat exist on a roughly equal Cold War footing, with the former offering unchanging stability in a crumbling society, and the latter offering a violent fanaticism with the certitude of victory over the hated progenitors. Midnight sieges and crusades become *de riguer*. Anarchs come very close to being a "third Sect," sacrificing their unity and clarity of purpose for vague notions of individuality and personal freedom. In this, they are derided both in-text and without, as the California Free States are obliterated by a foreign society eager to establish itself as a power.

The four Independent Clans are now distinct political factions with a little pull on their own, but with enough power to sway things between Camarilla and Sabbat on a regular basis. They are noteworthy wild cards in the Jyhad.

The Masquerade is fraying around the edges. With everything falling apart, there isn't a monolithic conspiracy that can protect everyone from everything. Things get out more often, and the corners of the World of Darkness fray, as a group of mages destroy the Ravnos Antediluvian after days of concentrated assault.

The Blood weakens. Diablerie runs rampant. Widespread mistrust spreads throughout society, down to the coterie level. Gehenna comes.

Chief themes: Biblical apocalypse, the shattering of the status quo, sexuality is largely derided or merely wasting time, the alienness of the undead, existential angst, ancient wars and the global Jyhad.

Books: The Transylvania Chronicles, Mexico City by Night, Time of Thin Blood, Nights of Prophecy, Lair of the Hidden, The Red Sign, Gehenna

Modern Nights (Vampire 20th Anniversary Edition)

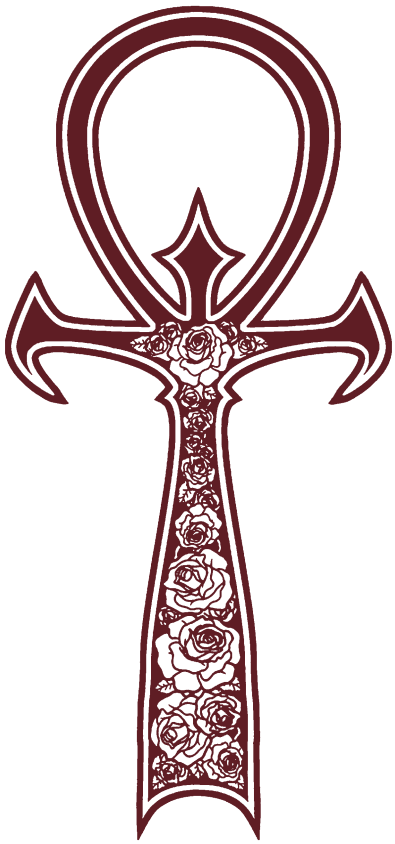
Sexy, deadly vampires toy with mortals as part of their personal, elaborate schemes.

V20 is, fittingly, a blend of the previous three editions. It leans heavily on setting progression (to update over a decade's worth of cultural progress) and mythology (tying together loose ends of the previous three editions, or occasionally creating them anew), but deliberately eschews metaplot proper. The metaplot is intentionally locked at a place somewhere around that of the second edition, with a radically different tone. Finally, **Vampire** refocuses to a single setting, largely exercising mentions of games such as **Werewolf** or **Mage**. Accordingly, things have changed.

And all things must change, as our society is fundamentally different with portable technology and widespread Internet. Instead of the vampire hacker lurking in his basement, vampires embrace the idea of "technology as fashion," integrating it into their sensual and sexual excesses. The Masquerade isn't protected by monolithic Sects, but by individual Kindred. With silence all but impossible, vampires hide in plain sight, spinning stories and gaslighting with Presence and Dominate to hide. The Masquerade isn't a Sheriff knocking on your door, but a social media smear campaign.

Chief themes: Technology as fashion, bottom-up conspiracy, the illusion of status quo, vampires as apex sexual creatures, evolution rather than revolution.

Books: Children of the Revolution, Anarchs Unbound, Dread Names, Red List, Lore of the Clans



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Daniel Haddon
Daniel Peterson
Daniel the Old
Danny Lilly
Darkshifter
Darran MacMaghnusa
Dave 'Akydi' Bruno
David "Clément de Montboissier" Santiago et Batro le Malkav
David 'dj' Coleman
David Doucey
David Lapp
David Pomerleau
David Tveraas
David Weidendorf
David Zibert
Derek Grimm
Dominic Parent
Dr. Pérez Gómez

Dr.Bang
Drew "Industrial Scribe" Scarr
Durante Giovanni
Dustin Earl
EGWM
Eidan Rodriguez, Noddist Scholar
Elena, Queen of Sicily
Elethayn
Elke Fassbinder and her fellow unconventional archons
Elyser
Eric M. Ortiz
Eric Nathaniel M Henson
Erich Dobler
Erik Bergesen
Erin Hawley
Ervè Aimaro
Esben Andersen
Evan Lazarus
F.A. Nosic
Familie Schienhammer
Fetch
Fortuona Giovanni
François Labelle
Frankie Mundens
Fraser Imrie
Fredrik "Frippe" Nilsson
Gabriel Thomas
Gareth 'Volesus' Bell
George Erik Jern
Görkem Ekiz
Greg Moritz
Gregory Allan Fudge
Guido Giacomo della Palude (Gangrel)
Gywn Lewarch
Harald Hellerud
Haroon Alsaif
Helder Lavigne
Henrik Augustsson
Henry Lopez
Hiryo, Kitsune Legend
Holger Schrenk
Hunter Crawford & Margarete Strawn
Ian A. A. Watson
Ian Hamilton
Ian Sargeant
Ian Smith
Ilena Rasmussen
ipsi
Irene Grayle
J. H. Frank
Jacob Bieber
James Lucky
Jami and Drake
Jan-Willem Kaagman
Jared Koon
Jared Wadsworth
Jaron Kaplan-Parr
Jason Freston
Jason Jurusz Giovanni
Jason Westbrook
Jeff Dieterle
Jeffrey 'Taihunsu' Pritchett
Jen Jenkins
Jen Kuiper
Jennifer Fuss
Jerad "Slayer" Sayler
Jesse Goble
Jim Dowell
Joe McNamara
Johan Eklund
Johan Liljeqvist
Johan Staaf
Johannes-Wilhelm Rosenau
John "Oz" Oswald
John A MacDonald
John P Weatherman
Johnny Peralta
Jon 'Reginald Verity' Brotherhood
Jonathan A. Cohen
Jonci Aguillard
Joonas Teurokoski
Jörg Fick
Josaphat Niebler
Joseph Colton
Josie Wicker
Juan Eduardo Sosa
Julien St-Laurent
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Karavolos
Karina Baranova
Karoly Kopataki
Kate Gryn
Ken Carlson
Ken Sandy Brandon + Baby
Kerry Birmingham
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Kevin Wine
Khadija Hussain
Kieran Carder
Kjell Kenneth Moens
Kolja Wagner
Kristoff Miyazivka
Kristopher Deters
Krzysztof Zajkowski
Kylan Day
Lady K
Lars Haymaker
Layne "Yolanda" Delp
LeAnn "Ellyham" LaFollette
LEDOUX Romain
Lewis Davies
Liam Eyers
Lilly & Teddy
Luca Sacchini
Lucas van Toren
Luke Brewer
Luke Parsons
Majdi Badri
Maltry
Mandavar der Suchende
Mara & Vendetta
Marc Collins
Marcus Maniakes
Martin Terrier
Martin Wagner
Mary Elizabeth
Mason Jones
Matt Carman
Matthew and Natasha Gibbons
Matthew Fitz-Ranulf
Matthew Lynn
Matthew Roberts
Matthew Wasiak
Maxime Barbe
Maynard Caine
Meghan Fitzgerald
Menno Rieff
Michael Bach Kristensen
Michael Blackett
Michael Patrick Foight
Michael V. Roberts
Miguel-Luis Farach de Alicante
Mike "Aldous" Torrey
Mike Ruch
Mikey Chan
Natali Gerany
Nathan "Why No Salubri" Patten
Nathanielstarr
Nejlah Al-Rahab, Country Gangrel Antitribu
Nicholas Guidotti
Nicholas Klein
Nicolas Lapointe
Nicole Porter
Nigel D Nos
Nistine
Nyk Huntington
Ole Kadasch
Oubliette
Parangon
Patrick Walters
Paul Leone
Penz Strizer
Pete and Lynn

Peter D. Clark III
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Piotr Piegat
Pratap Gajjala
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Quasi
R. B. LeMoyne
Rain & Aidenn
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Raphael Bourdot
Raul Bonaventure of Tremere
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Rhea Shelley
Riccardo Zampieri
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Richard B Brookes
Richard Chilton
Richard Cornman
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Richter "TM"
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Robdog
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Samantha "Sam" Murphy
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SaxMan_DBA
Scott "Arkhem" Gomoll
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Seven
Shadowhop, Lasombra Bishop of Tucson
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Shelby Mehl
Shimon Klein
Sigismund Von Strauslau
Simon Andrews
Simon K.
Skafte
Somalucard
Sondre Øverås
Stalks-the-Reef
Steeve Gagne
Stefan Breuker
Stefan Vik
Stéphane "Je ne suis pas goth" Zuckerman
Steve "The Bard" Latour
Steve Burnett
Steve Roark
Steven Fader
Steven Sauer
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Stuart Armstrong
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The Scything Talons Pack
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Trevor Stamper
Tristan Valentine
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Tyler Wirth
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Vegard Kivle
Vermidas
Vic Smith
Vincent "Victorien Loyola" Mora
Vincent Nees
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Vladimir Crostjov
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Warren P Nelson
Weston Harpre
Willard Nations
William Ables
Wolfgang Neckel
Yann Arseneau
Zach Diamond
Ziv p

Adrien "Tydesson" Lochon
Aethereal.Flux
Alvaro "Sixaola" Madrigal
Anders Holmström
Andrea Migone
Andrew DiNovo
Andrew Moore
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Brynjar Sigurðsson
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Joe Huntzinger
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Kaze
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Kirill Ivanovich Korolev
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Lifestealer
Livia von Sucro
Lloyd Rasmussen
Lori Krell
Maestro, of Clan Nosferatu
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Marcus and Leslie Arena
Nikika Giovanni
Patrick Wedding
Pedro Reis
Per "BloodHowl" Nyrud Kaas
Peter Dean
Preston Lee Bobo
Rob Hall

Scott E. Vigil
Scott Mullock
"Sebastián "Snow" Costas
Martin "Abraxas" Insaurralde"
Shane Rose
Shannon Clements
Steven Lau
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Vladimir "Sugar" Caine
Voivode Therak
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Erika Eby
Ernest LaFountain
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Josh Heath
Karl Fiebiger
Kevin "Messy Eye Knows" Warmerdam
Lark Cunningham
Louis
Lucius the Betrayer
LVB
Maricris Buzzell
Mario Powierski
Matthew McGuire
Max Windhowler, 7Th Generation Gangrel
Mekhet Zaeid
Michael "Rook" Streatfield
Michael Murr
Mitchell Roggeveen
Mr.Poke
Nathan Bjerke
Oumaru
Paul Jonathan Tio
Paul Voran
Phillip Bailey
Pieta Delaney
Raine Vartiainen
Rayne Darkholme
René Berthold
Robert Applegate
Robert Black
Roberto Hiroshi Kina Filho
Robin "Freebeard" Nair
Ross Justin Pollock
Ross Kilpatrick
Rotamus Prime
Shawn "Sutekh" Glass
Stefan Beate
Stefan Unteregger
Sylvain "OgGy" TANGUY
Talis Darkmoore
Talshea
Terence Co
Tetsuo
TheAIY
Thiago Fazolari Meyer
Thomas S. Jason
Tim-Oliver Cramer
To Lucy
Torben Lindqvist
Viktor Kamenov
Vilesh Darothar
Voivode Nem'seth Cszar'Descu waelcyrge
Wes C.
Zack Taylor
Екатерина Андреевна Николаева

A. Simard
Alan Thagard
Alaric the Black
Alexandra Markusson
Amber Sbriglio of Clan Malkavian
Andrew Hauptman
Andrew Waterfall
Angelborn
Anthony Jennings
Arkhane Asylum
Ashley Williams
Azrael Von Braunschweig
Barone Enrico De Casa Visconti
Blake Deakins
Bob Stauffer
'Bookmark' Ana Silva
Brianne M. Sifert
Buddy Richards
Callista
Carlos "ChecaWolf" Checa Barambio
Chris "Diablerist" Hitchcock
Chris Daher
Chris Smith
Christian "SaintxJoker" Beltran
Christophe des Brumes
Colin R. Jones
Daniel K. Lundsby
Daniel Ley
Danielle Oremus
Daoine Sidhe Bishop
Darin Kerr
Darling_Rose
David "JustDave" Talboy
David Bresson
David Rose Fraser
Dawid "Dievas" Wojcieszynski
Devin Callaster
Doug Atkinson
Douglas Keegan.
Dr. Donald A. Turner

Eric Grab for Jonathan Hammer
Eric Haste
Eric Pensman
Evan "JabberWokky" and Sarah Edwards
Firefly
fmadmonk
Frédéri "Volk Kommissar Friedrich" POCHARD
Gabriela Mizerija
Grant Gillett
Greg Coyle (Street Rat)
Greta Rosenkranz Wolfslayer, The Darkheart and Angel's Bane
Gustavo "Brujah" Mattioni
Harrison Outram
Heinrich Krebs
Homer
J. W. Bennett
Jacob Hendricks
Jasmine Jensen
Jason & Amy Berteotti
Jason Geis
Jay Page
JAYSON "the14thguest" TURNER
Jean "Sunoki" Felsky
Jeremy Brown
Joan Anonical Sartori
John Doe
John R. Trapasso
John Snee
Jordan Evans-Kaplan
JP "C2C" Kopf
Juan Iago Cortez
Justin 'Romero' Castro
Karrie "Bernadette" White
Kate Fitzpatrick
Katerina Horton
Kees D. van den Berg
Kevin Case
Kevin LeBlanc
Lauren Morlock
LeviathanVII -Greg D-
Lolita Houston
Marc
Marco Klomfas
Marcos "Vrykos" Cavalheiro
Mark Bussey
Mark Lazure
Martin Brown
Mathieu Guittard
Matthew Dawkins
Matthew Sanderson
Matthias Pettersson
Mehmet Ortaç
Michael "Dane's Head" Brosens
Michael Lenzo
Michel Foisy
Michelle Flamm
Nicolas Villatte
Noble Thayer Graves, Noddist Scholar
Noskavian
Olivier Jobin
Oswald "Aspen Jones" Duarte
Paul Ashton
Peter "Pitrel" Werner Dorow
Peter Ilegems
Peter Merkel
peter peretti
Phil Lowe
Philipp Leito a.k.a. Assanias
Rafael Brasilio Grotti da Silva
Randall Crawf
Robert Biskin
Roberta Radons
Roberto Salles
Robin E Burns
Ron Hills
Rosmpoglou Konstantinos
Sam Damon
Scion & Deimos
Scott Hiers
Sebastian N. Behrndtz
Shan "Shanathan" Morris
Shawn P
Shawn Pace
Shea Anderson
Sing to luna
Skadi
Stephen Akoimentai
Stuart Park
Sune Sejberg Nielsen
Tawiscara Blackwing
Terrence Bey
Thomas Tipps
Tifereth
Timothy & Mitzi Gousie
Tom Depoorter (Hellen Hunt Jackson)
Tom Hansberger
Tristan J. Ciceran
Troppe
Troy Lenze
Tyberius
Umberto Giovanni
Vaggelis Deavon Anagnostopoulos
Viktor Klundt ;-)
Vincent C. Regar
Vincent Normandy
Wolfram Hart
Yodo
Zachary Thomas Tyler, Taifa Gangrel ashipu
Zhupans

- Julián Navarro - Ishcar
Aaron Jacob Kelly & Eleanor Mae Kelly
Adam Caverly, Azkhariel
Ahnen Christian - Brother of Nod - Scourge of the BAALI, Drakir - Brother of Nod - Demented Game Master
Audrait Heili, Iliria Manson
Carlos "Chepe" Fernández de Córdoba, Algernon "Stoef" Schockaert
Daniel "Illuminos" Persson and Adam "Boman" Persson
Heath Withrow, Shannon Withrow
Ivo de Mooij & Lord Byron de Bris
Jason Robinson / Rachel Rogers
Kim-Christian Nielsen
Mark Austin Fleming, Kevin Miller
Mark Meyer, Tracy Phillips Meyer
Martin van Beek, Roland van der Slagt
Matthew Payton
Michael Randall, MallNinjaMax
Mikkel Lund & Andreas "ESSO" Jensen
Nicholas D. Dragisic , Tim Prisching
René van den Berg, Sander Burger
Ricochet, Sonia
Safar al-Ladid ur Ba'al, Nymeres Martel
Stephen Joseph Ellis, Lynn Yin
Titus Julius Nanimus, Leliel Thorn
Trevor Lee, William Schebler

Andrew Tolputt
Brennan "Brenntron" Willingham
Chris "Logris" Spiller
Conor Sven Madison
Damien Cassius
David Futterrer
David Robert Simpson
Fabio Abilio
He-Zin Kwon
Martin Woelke
Micah Ceithaml
Michael Mullin

Nathan Wilhelm Alexander de la Mer
Prof Dwight Polis
Robert Wyatt
Severin Talwar
The Lady Arachne
Timo Rönz
Zachary Coin
Zack Norwig

Adam Whitcomb
Alexander Kratochwill
Annimeer
Bill Shaffer
Brian R. Pitt
Darksheer
Diego O.Batista
Felix Shafir
Francesca Vecchio
Grace "Meg's Daughter" Fisher
Jessica Lilith Darke
Joseph Lunder
Matt "DevilBoy" Murray
Matthias "MacMace" Wendler
Mike Shema
Stephan M. Pfalzer

Bernardo Cantu, Alfredo Padilla, Javier Ramirez, Ernesto Yip, Juan Mattei.
Trollune; Charles Trécourt; Louis Trécourt; Yannick Peyrède; Spirit of Chantelouve

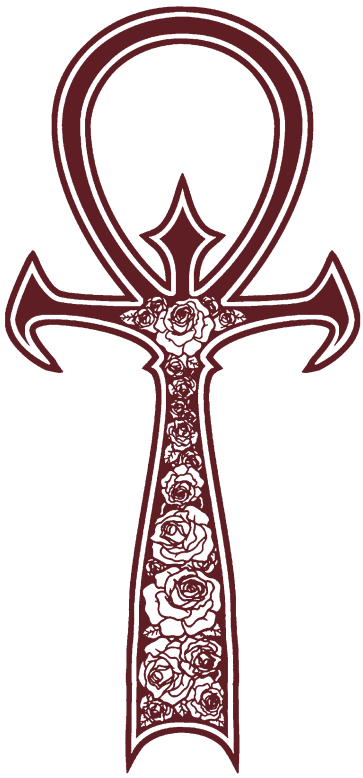
Albin AmWurten, Desmond Dorian, Diego de Astorga, Karam Tariq, Piers de Millau
Dmitri Vance, Scott Skidmore, Jack Sutherland, Ariel McCutchen, Jesse Christy

ACQUAINTANCE OF BECKETT

Alexus Comnenus
Andrew Cummings
Andy "Andreas Rayne" Dodd
Bednar
Daniel Shorman
Donnie "Lord Aludian" Roos, Jr.
Remy de Lioncourt
Simone "Samira Hammadi" Lohmeier
Suguru Oikawa

Brad Whitcomb
James Blackwater / Monty-Carbonari
Ophelia Gray
Patricia Heron
Samuel "Salem" Williams
Walter Palmetto-Tannenbaum

Tabiah Njeri



Beckett's Jyhad Diary

It's ever been a loaded word among vampires. Jyhad is in force everywhere from lofty, perfumed Elysium to cloying, smoke-filled blood feasts. Jyhad's the eternal game played by elders, Methuselahs, and worse — it's the agenda of beings so utterly beyond humanity, one such as yourself could scarcely understand its movements.

Luckily for you, you've picked up a copy of my diary. With my help you may just take a step on the first rung of understanding. Information worth having is information you must earn through blood, and oh, how I've bled for what's contained within these pages.

— Beckett

Beckett's Jyhad Diary serves as the definitive book of setting and plot for Vampire: The Masquerade, containing 30 chapters spanning different geographical regions, encountering vampires of every clan, profiling obscure and profound segments of the mythology, and providing countless story hooks on every page.

Masterfully written by the likes of Neall Raemonn Price, Joshua Alan Doetsch, Matthew McFarland, Myranda Sarro, Steffie de Vaan, Malcolm Sheppard, Alan Alexander, Renee Knipe, and Matthew Dawkins, Beckett's Jyhad Diary is as fascinating to read as to use for your game Chronicles.

